

File name: Guest House

Audio length: 2:39 minutes

Meg: So we're standing in some ruins, but they're a bit far away from the actual literal ruins. Kat, what got ruined right here?

Kat: So we're standing in what would have been the guest house.

Meg: And who were the guests?

Kat: The guests were patrons or people passing through. The abbey was positioned on an important route between Pontefract and Clitheroe, so was probably visited by lords who were looking at their estates, as well as merchants, or benefactors, or religious officials. Pottery fragments found during excavations of the area came from as far away as Farnborough in Hampshire.

Meg: And do we know anyone by name?

Kat: So sometimes we know the names of visitors because if they were here on business they might have signed a deed or a grant, and some of these have survived. My favourite story of a named guest is Brother Roger, of Sheffield. He was an ex-templar - so all the templars who repented were imprisoned in religious houses. And Kirkstall was one of 24 Yorkshire monasteries to receive a former templar.

Meg: What's a templar Kat? I feel like I just think of that old guy in Indiana Jones.

Kat: Well that's true yes. It means that he was previously part of a Catholic military order known as the Knights Templar. So the monks of Kirkstall received Brother Roger in 1313, and they were supposed to

keep him in shackles and under guard, but within a very short space of time Roger had escaped. And the monks received a very stern letter from the Archbishop insinuating that they'd turned a blind eye and basically allowed him to escape. And that may have been because the monks had received no financial compensation to look after Brother Roger, so maybe they did just let him go.

Meg: That's got all the makings of a Hollywood blockbuster.

Kat: It really does.

Meg: Right so what did they use this space for then?

Kat: So the monks abided by something called Caritas, which was receiving a guest as if they were Christ. Hospitality was seen as a Christian duty. So guests were really supposed to live in a simple way here, just like the monks, but they basically never did. This was where there was a bit of a clash between monastic life and the expectations of wealthier visitors. So if you look in the main hall, the hearth was at the centre of this space, which mimics the lifestyle of elite families who would feast and entertain in the heart of the house. And during excavations, a tuning peg from a musical instrument was discovered, so we know that musicians probably played here. And the animal bones found here suggest that guests were feasting on a much wider variety of meat. So beef and mutton certainly, but also sometimes venison, or rabbit, or pigeon. So there were two very different ways of life going on at the abbey in close proximity.