

File name: Warming House

Audio length: 1:44 minutes

Meg: Gosh, I've got such a warm feeling all of a sudden Kat.

Kat: That, Meg, is because we're now in the warming house. This is where there would be a fire burning at least between November and Easter.

Meg: So the monks would be in here basically all the time?

Kat: I bet they wish they were but unfortunately not. Each monk would only be allowed 15 minutes per day. You can see the remains of the fireplace on the floor – that one is from the 1400s and replaced an earlier hearth. They may have also used the fire for other tasks like preparing parchment ink, greasing shoes and carrying out bloodletting.

Meg: Hang on, so they'd be bloodletting monks and also cooking in here?

Kat: Not together at the same time! The kitchen and refectory, where the food was, is behind us.

Meg: And what kind of stuff did the monks eat?

Kat: So in the early years it would have been really simple – boiled vegetables and bread washed down with water, ale or wine. In 1439 the Pope decreed that eating meat was allowed on certain days of the week – it was already permitted on the abbots table and in the infirmary by then anyway. Meat had to be cooked in a different kitchen and served in a separate refectory. So they'd eat mainly beef, but also small numbers of sheep, pig and deer, and molluscs.

Meg: So how do we know that? How do we know that's what they were eating?

Kat: So all of this area has been excavated, and we can see from animal bones that were found during the excavations what kind of food they ate. There was a massive pile of animal bones discovered by the meat kitchen, so we know exactly what animals they were eating.

Meg: And aside from the bones, what else did they find? Did they find anything good?

Kat: Well the beautiful tiles to the left were uncovered during these excavations, and these are original. And through to the kitchen area you can see a big round vat which would have been used for brewing beer.