

File name: Infirmary

Audio length: 1:41 minutes

Meg: So Pat, we're now in the infirmary. And that means... we're probably not feeling too good?

Pat: Absolutely – or, we're here for a bloodletting treatment. Monks were bled at least four times a year as it was believed to restore balance to the body and soul, and it made you have a more beautiful voice...

Meg: No thank you, not for me. But this is where monks would come when they were sick?

Pat: Yep so the monks had their sick beds along the aisles and central hall, which you can still see the remains of today. The infirmary was one of the few areas of the abbey to be allowed a fire, and its own kitchen and pantry, to prepare meals for the sick.

Meg: I would have literally pretended to be sick all the time.

Pat: Sounds alright, doesn't it? You'd have been cared for by the infirmarer, who would have known a great deal about herbal medicine – and used herbs grown in the nearby botanical garden.

Meg: Which we still do today! In a way.

Pat: Yes indeed, we've tried to reflect that tradition by growing the sorts of herbs and plants the monks would have used like sage, lemon balm, comfrey, rosemary for example. And this area has raised beds, which are tended to by the hugely helpful community group Hyde Park

Source. Of course, the groups have a bit of free reign in what they grow, and we don't practice bloodletting any more.

Meg: Thank goodness. And is there anything else important that we should know about the space? Has anything been excavated here?

Pat: So this was the part of the abbey that was quarried the most after the dissolution, which is when the abbey closed. You can probably tell. The stone from here was actually used to repair Leeds Bridge in the 16th century. And also, behind the tree is the Abbot's lodgings, which was supposed to be modest but you can see is literally three stories high.