# Henry VIII’s Kitchens Audio Tour

# Hampton Court Palace

## Overview

Discover Henry VIII’s Kitchens and what it takes to feed a Tudor court. Join Chief Curator Tracy Borman.

## Stop 0 Start of Tour

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

You’re about to explore Henry VIII’s Kitchens where, in 1538, cooks and staff busily prepared lavish feasts for the court.

Your tour begins in Base Court. There’s an image of the starting point on your screen.

When you’re ready to begin, play the next track.

## Stop 1 Introduction in Base Court

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

My name’s Tracy Borman and I’m the joint Chief Curator here at Historic Royal Palaces. And I’m also a Tudor historian, so it’s a particular pleasure to be taking you through my favourite part of the palace, Henry VIII’s kitchens – the most magnificent in the world. They occupied over a third of the palace in their heyday and found employment for about two hundred staff. Today, we’ll be introducing you to the colourful cast of characters who served in the kitchens in 1538, when the palace was filled with courtiers and ambassadors enjoying lavish feasts. And they certainly had their work cut out, because they had to serve up two meals a day to about 450 people. So this was food production on a truly staggering scale.

As you explore today, do feel free to touch, smell and listen to everything around you so that you truly immerse yourself in the world of Henry VIII’s kitchens.

So look out for the sign that says ‘Henry VIII’s Kitchens’, go through the archway close by and turn right along the corridor and walk all the way to the end.

## Stop 2 Master Carpenter’s Court

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

If you walk into the centre of this courtyard, you’re standing at the very beginning of Henry’s kitchens, which would have covered a vast area of the palace.

Carts and wagons rolled into Master Carpenter’s Court every single day to deliver goods and supplies to the kitchens. The space was large enough to allow a cart to turn around, while hundreds of staff bustled in and out of the doors on all sides. It would have been an absolute hive of activity as goods arrived, not just from all over the country, but even from overseas.

And as the goods arrived here they would have been sent to various parts of the kitchen, because the kitchen was divided into lots of different departments, which all had a very specific function.

So, it would have been a veritable riot of different colours and smells as poultry, spices, herbs and particularly sugar, much beloved of the sweet-toothed Tudors, started to arrive here on an hourly basis throughout the day, every single day.

If you’d like to know more about how food was sourced for the king’s court, select the option on your screen. Otherwise, walk through the large archway next to the cart and through into the next courtyard.

## Stop 2a The Purveyors

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

The task of buying the food for Henry’s kitchens fell to the court purveyors. Piers Capper and John Edlyn were purveyors of beef, for example; and George Hill’s job was to buy the fresh fish. At the start of each month, they were given a precise sum of money to spend.

Richard Fitch manages the live cookery interpretation here at Hampton Court Palace.

### Richard Fitch

The purveyors would go out into the local area to source the required ingredients, taking with them a list of the animals, goods and services required; they would arrange purchases with local merchants and determine a date for those merchants to deliver the goods to the back gate of Hampton Court, upon inspection of which they would then arrange to be paid.

The court purveyors were expected to obtain their goods and services from throughout the country, but human nature being what it is, they did their job as quickly as they could get away with it and ended up draining the local economy wherever the court was based.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Walk through the large archway next to the cart and through into the next courtyard.

## Stop 3 The Counting House

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

You’re now in the administrative heart of the Tudor kitchens.

Henry VIII’s household was run by the officials known as the Board of the Green Cloth. From the medieval period right through to the present day, the Board of the Green Cloth has been responsible for governing the royal household. In 1538, the Board was overseen by the king’s chief minister, Thomas Cromwell.

Henry VIII’s household was divided into departments; each department was led by a sergeant, with a team of yeomen working under him. It was state of the art bureaucracy and the Board of the Green Cloth managed every single penny from inside the Counting House. As you stand here, imagine the clerks, carrying white sticks as a symbol of their authority, looking down from their windows and checking everything that came into this courtyard on a daily basis.

The other officials you’d have seen here were the yeoman porters. Their job was to keep watch on the large gate at the far end of the courtyard. Richard Fitch

### Richard Fitch

Just as with any large modern organisation, Henry VIII’s court were keen on security. And the porters, John Herde and Gryffyth Nycolles, were tasked with restricting access to the court, and also stopping any pilfering or theft of goods leaving the court.

Based in their office in this area they might be sat down in inclement weather, or striding around, making sure everyone knew who was in charge.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

So head back under the archway now and through the open doorway straight ahead of you; and as you enter the Boiling House, do listen in, because you might just be able to hear a meeting of the Board of the Green Cloth.

## Stop 4 Boiling House

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Here in the Boiling House a single pot was used to boil hundreds of joints of meat every single day. And this helped to speed up the process of cooking because the meat was then taken to be roasted, which of course gave it its flavour. There was a variety of cuts of meat - beef and mutton, for example - that were used daily at court. And the choicer cuts of meat such as venison were reserved for the king’s table.

Staff wages were topped up with pieces of meat that were cut off during the preparation process, which was quite a nice perk for those who worked in the kitchens.

The fireplace that you can see was used to heat the enormous pot that boiled up all of that meat. So why not take a short walk up those stairs next to it and have a look at the pot itself.

Once you’ve seen the pot, head through the right-hand doorway and straight ahead into Fish Court. Or select the option on your screen to hear how well Henry VIII’s staff were paid from Richard Fitch.

## Stop 4a Paying the Household

### Richard Fitch

People are often surprised to find out that the staff in Henry’s kitchen were extremely well paid, especially compared to people outside of the palace. So John Dale, the master cook for the household, received forty pounds eight shillings per annum, which was around fifteen times more than the person at the bottom end of the food chain within the kitchen, one of the children and scourers.

When you consider that this money was essentially pocket money, it’s a much larger sum than it first appears. Staff are fed, boarded and clothed at the king’s expense.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Head through the right-hand doorway and straight ahead into Fish Court.

## Stop 5 Fish Court

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Walk along Fish Court, and as you do, look left and right, because behind each door would have been a storeroom. They would have kept wet fish and dried foods in here. But the Tudors didn’t store things for very long because they consumed such vast quantities every day.

The food for Henry VIII’s kitchens was supplied by merchants from the local area and beyond – sometimes even from across the world. Everything was recorded in the accounts – from regular contracts to one-off purchases.

### Richard Fitch

Thomas Hewyt of Hythe was contracted to supply sea fish wherever the court was in residence. He was asked to supply plaice, turbot, halibut, pilchards, and even porpoises. At the other end of the scale, James Hubert was given twenty shillings just for supplying some oranges once.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

The Yeoman of the Larder distributed supplies every day to the relevant departments, including the great roasting kitchen, which is where you’re heading now, through the doorway, straight in front of you.

## Stop 6 Great Kitchen 1

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

This is the first of three rooms in the Great Kitchen, and it was used for roasting large joints of beef. The master cook was the best in his trade, but conditions in here were tough. If you walk into the centre of the room, you’ll see two of the six fireplaces that would have made this space ‘a veritable hell’, as one of Henry’s courtiers described it. You have to imagine the intensity of the heat as the hundreds of staff were preparing food for the household beyond. Well, this kitchen supplied the main household and the courtiers. Henry VIII and his queens had their own private kitchens.

Before moving into the next room, take a moment to explore this extraordinary space and imagine what it would have been like in Henry VIII’s time with the different smells and the heat and the sounds of the busy kitchen staff preparing the meals.

You’ll see all around the room a wide variety of different utensils. Please do feel free to pick them up and imagine that you yourself are working in Henry’s kitchens.

Walk through the doorway into the next room, or, to hear more about the building itself, select the option on your screen.

## Stop 6a Architectural History

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Dan Jackson is the Curator of Historic Buildings for Hampton Court Palace.

### Dan Jackson

So we’re now standing in the oldest part of the palace. There have been kitchens on this site since as early as the fifteenth century, maybe even a little bit earlier than that. The current building that you’re seeing here is the product of Cardinal Wolsey.

When Henry VIII took over the palace in the 1520s, he needed to provide much more food for a lot more people, and so he extended the kitchens out to the west and the current space we’re standing in is part of his extension.

So this kitchen’s been in use for over five hundred years and, as you might imagine, that means there are lot of different eras of kitchen technology evident in this space. As you look around you’ll see everything from the original sixteenth century brick hearths to a nice seventeenth century bread oven; and even in this room you can see a very beautiful iron Victorian range.

## Stop 7 Great Kitchen 2

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

After the meat had been roasted, skilled cooks would have set to work with sweet herbs, spices and flavourings to add a touch of lavishness to the meal.

These sumptuous spices were not for everyone though. The Tudors had very specific diets based on social status. So at the bottom of the scale you would expect to eat a single course, comprising three different dishes. But, if you were the king, you would eat two courses of forty dishes. It’s all about choice and variety, the higher up the social scale you get. And consumption was extraordinarily high at court, particularly when Henry was entertaining.

The court diet was extremely rich in meat, it wasn’t restricted to the seasons because meat was available all year round, unlike the diets of ordinary people. But even though they ate a lot of meat, it didn’t get monotonous, because it was flavoured in so many different ways – which is why the herbs and spices were so important. The Tudors were very, very good at making flavoursome sauces for their meat.

Before you move through into the next space, take a look at the table which is laden with different seasonal herbs and spices, some of which are grown here at Hampton Court. To hear from one of our garden team, select the option on your screen.

## Stop 7a The Kitchen Gardens

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Hampton Court’s orchards and gardens played a small but vital part in supplying Henry VIII’s vast catering enterprise.

Vicki Cooke is Keeper of the Kitchen Garden here at Hampton Court.

### Vicki Cooke

The Tudors were particularly fond of fruit and Henry did introduce quite a few fruit trees and fruit cultivation techniques.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

The specific role of Henry’s gardens was to supply his table with luxuries.

### Vicki Cooke

They would have probably provided the more exotic fruits, the things that you couldn’t necessarily have grown outside the walls of the palace or imported easily from the countryside. So it would have been quite specialist, what was grown here.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Food is still grown here at Hampton Court, just as it was in 1538.

### Vicki Cooke

I work with a team of gardeners and we maintain a one-acre (4000 m2) walled kitchen garden growing a variety of historic fruit and vegetable crops.

The kitchen garden is open year round and there’s always a variety of new things to see, so why don’t you come and visit us and chat to us about the things that we’re growing.

## Stop 8 Great Kitchen 3

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

We usually keep a roaring fire blazing in this room. If this single fire seems hot to you, imagine the scene in 1538, when six fires were burning 1.3 million logs per year.

Keeping the team of cooks working was an important task. The kitchens were very much a male-dominated space. John Dale, the Master Cook, managed the household and was responsible for feeding, cleaning and clothing it.

Clothing allowances were provided to make sure that those working in the kitchens were suitably attired, because when they weren’t cooking, they were expected to be on view in the main court, doing cleaning duties, so they had to be looking their best.

Once the meat had been roasted on the enormous fire, it would be delivered to the serving hatches, and from there it would be taken to the hungry courtiers beyond.

You can leave this space through either of the doors at the far end, but before you go, why not go and talk to one of our staff here and ask them any questions you might have about life in the Tudor kitchens. Or select the option on your screen to hear from Richard Fitch about our Historic Kitchens team.

## Stop 8a The Historic Kitchens Team

### Richard Fitch

Since 1992 we’ve worked in this kitchen attempting to re-create as best we can the life of one of the cooks that used to work here under Henry VIII.

Over the years we’ve tried many techniques and recipes in this space and one of the most popular ones is roasting in front of the fire. It’s a hot and sweaty job in the summer, but on a cold winter’s day, it’s just the spot everyone wants to be.

Most of the year you’ll be able to find one of the kitchen’s interpretation team cooking in this room.

## Stop 9 Serving Passage

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

This serving passage was like a school canteen where staff queued up and chatted as they waited to collect their food and take it upstairs to eat. If you look on both sides you’ll see hatches along the corridor where they served different foodstuffs.

If you look in the hatch closest to the cloisters, you’ll see that this is where the pewter was stored and cleaned. And it’s also where the table linen was stored.

You may also see the office of the Clerk of the Kitchen, Michael Wentworth, and he kept a watchful eye on the ingredients that were used in the cooking to make sure that none of them had been pilfered.

Let’s follow the servers’ journey. Leave the serving place through the two archways at the end and turn left. Or, to find out about washing the court linen, select the option on your screen.

## Stop 9a Laundry

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

One of the most important departments in the king’s household was the office of the laundry. This team was responsible for washing the court linen, from underclothes to table napkins.

Eleri Lynn, Curator of Historic Dress at Historic Royal Palaces.

### Eleri Lynn

We have records that show that a number of the launderers were men, but we also know that the laundry was one of the only offices of the court where women were regularly and permanently employed.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

The king himself had his own personal laundress, responsible solely for the royal linen.

### Eleri Lynn

The most well-known was Ann or Agnes Harris, who was the king’s personal laundress, and she was quite well rewarded: she was given a property and orchard at Millbank, just off the Thames, right in the heart of London, as a reward for her services. So we know that that was quite a privileged position within the court.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Leave the serving place through the two archways at the end and turn left.

## Stop 10 North Cloister

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Along this cloister, if you look left and right, you’ll see numerous doorways and staircases, and this is where the servants would have been taking the food to a number of different rooms up above, such as the Great Hall.

Some staircases, however, headed down, such as the one close to you, which goes down to the wine cellar. Let’s go there now.

## Stop 11 Wine Cellar

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Have a wander round this large cellar. It’s one of several cellars at Hampton Court Palace where Henry VIII’s drink was stored. This one was used for storing his large barrels of wine.

At the great feasts held here at the palace, the court would have drunk vast quantities of beer, ale and wine. The wine tended to be imported from France and other parts of Europe, while beer and ale were brewed locally in London and the south-east and delivered here to Hampton Court. The Sergeant of the Cellar was a prestigious role: Henry VIII was very fond of wine so he got to know the Sergeant of the Cellar very well indeed!

You’ve now reached the end of your tour of the Tudor Kitchens – but the journey doesn’t stop here.

Before you move on, to debunk some myths about Tudor drinking habits, select the option on your screen.

## Stop 11a Water at Hampton Court Palace

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

We often think that the Tudors drank only wine and beer, and didn’t touch water. But this is a myth – as Dan Jackson explains:

### Dan Jackson

The reason we have this myth that everybody in the sixteenth century is drinking wine and beer but not drinking the water is partly down to the fact that people are paying for wine and beer, so it turns up in all your accounts, and it’s very easy to see. Most of the time people aren’t paying for water. Once you’ve built the big lead pipe to get the water to the palace, there’s no real cost involved in actually drinking that water any more, and so it’s much more difficult to see in the historical evidence.

But it’s absolutely a myth that nobody drank water in this period. Water was essential, as it is today, to daily life.

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

Water was piped to the palace from a local spring 3 miles (5 km) away.

### Dan Jackson

So you have pipes coming to the kitchens to provide drinking water and cooking water, and also to the private apartments in the palace, so that the bathrooms – particularly in the king’s royal apartments – would have hot, fresh running water whenever the king required it.

## Stop 12 End of Tour

### Narrator (Tracy Borman)

So you’ve explored the hustle and bustle of Henry VIII’s enormous ‘household’. If you haven’t already, why not head back to Base Court, and from there you can explore Henry VIII’s magnificent state apartments where the most sumptuous of the food and wine was consumed. Or, if Henry’s kitchens have left you feeling peckish, why not continue down the corridor into the Privy Kitchen café.

Please don’t forget to hand back your guide when you’ve finished.

Thank you for listening.

## [End of Tour]