

Food from 400 – 500 years ago

Food eaten during the Tudor period and the early Stuart period (the time of the visit of King James I to Houghton Tower) would have been very similar.

There were no fridges or freezers 400 years ago, so many foods had to be eaten fresh when they were available.

Meat

- Three quarters of the Tudor diet was made up of meat.
- Whilst richer people would have eaten roasted and boiled meat, the poorer people would have had much small amounts in 'pottage' - a type of stew.
- Meat was available all year around because the animals kept for food could be killed when they were needed.
- Some meat, such as deer or pheasant, was hung in a cold room for a few days to improve the flavour. Large houses like Houghton Tower would have had a room especially for this.
- Fish could be caught by those who lived close to the sea or a river.
- Some meat and fish was preserved using salt.

Fruit and vegetables

- Fruit and vegetables are much more seasonal and could only be grown and harvested in the right season. Therefore, some things were not available all year around.
- Fruit eaten included pears, apples, plums and cherries.
- Some fruits were preserved in syrup so that they could be kept for longer without going bad.
- Some foods that we eat often, were not available 400 years ago. For example, potatoes were only introduced to Britain in that late 1500s during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Foods that were new to Britain would only have been available for rich people to begin with.

Drinks

- Water was usually unfit to drink as it wasn't filtered and treated as tap water is today.
- Most people would drink a very weak ale known as 'small ale' whilst richer people would also drink wine. Houghton Tower had a brewhouse where the ale would have been brewed.
- Tea and coffee were introduced to Britain later in the 1600s.

General

- Bread was eaten at every meal. Rich people ate 'manchet' bread which was made from a fine flour. The bread eaten by poorer people would have been coarser.
- Most people would use honey to sweeten their food.
- Being able to serve certain more exotic foods brought from other countries was a sign of high status. For example, using sugar and spices from countries such as China and India was a sign that you were rich.
- Middle classes would have similar food to richer people but they would not have as much.