



Daily life at Hussey Tower

Daily life for the people living at Hussey Tower in about 1500 would have been very different to the lives of ordinary people at that time. Hussey Tower was built to accommodate an expensive and lavish lifestyle, with room for large numbers of servants and guests.



Early Tudor Kitchens at Hampton Court Palace

Food and diet

The kitchens at Hussey Tower would have been very busy places. Large amounts of food would have been needed to feed all the people in the household and the many visitors. The food all had to be prepared and cooked by hand from the raw ingredients. Cooking was done over open fires or in ovens heated by fires and a large workforce would have been needed to keep up with the work.

The workforce would have been almost exclusively men. Wealthy people tended to eat a lot of meat and only a few vegetables. Meat was considered to be a luxury item so eating a lot of it helped to demonstrate your wealth. However, with no



Late medieval feast (Lord Burgh's Retinue)



fridges or freezers it was difficult to keep food fresh. It was also difficult to keep animals through the winter so meat was often preserved by salting or drying it.

The ordinary people of Boston would have eaten much less meat. Their diet would have been based mainly on bread and vegetables supplemented by meat, often from animals that they were able to rear or trap themselves, such as chickens and rabbits. Even in towns people often used the land behind their homes to grow vegetables or to keep a few animals.

Many of the foods that we eat regularly today would not have been available in 1500. Although the Tudor period was a time of great exploration, potatoes and tomatoes did not arrive in England until the mid 1500s, and sugar did not become popular until that time either. Even then it was mainly eaten by wealthy people who began to suffer from toothache and bad teeth as a result of having more of it in their diet. Turkeys were not brought to England until the 1520s.



Wealthy man's clothes

People mainly drank a weak brew of ale because their water supply was not clean enough to drink without being processed. Richer people would also have drunk wine. Tea and coffee were not heard of in England until much later in the century.

People ate with knives or spoons or with their fingers. They often helped themselves out of big communal bowls of food on the table, so it was important to have clean hands when you sat down to a meal. Forks were not used in England until much later.

Clothes

People displayed their rank or position in society in the way they dressed, and it was much easier then to tell whether a person was rich or poor by the clothes that they wore. During the later medieval and early Tudor periods there was an increase in the proportion of people in the middle of society – people who were quite well off but who were not



members of the aristocracy. This would have been especially noticeable in a town like Boston where there were many merchants who had become wealthy through trading. These people could often afford to buy expensive clothes, but in order to try to 'keep them in their place' laws were passed that set out what colour and types of clothing certain ranks of people were allowed to wear. People were not allowed to dress above their position in society. These laws were called *sumptuary laws*. Sumptuary laws also extended to other luxury items such as some household goods and furnishings.



**Lord Hussey's house and grounds.
View from the east (CGI)**

Lord Hussey's garden

Apart from the vegetables and herbs that were grown for food and for medicinal purposes, rich Tudor people had gardens that were laid out in formal compartments, often fenced with low rails or lattice.

Raised beds were often used in the early part of the period. Later in the Tudor period knot gardens made from low clipped hedges became more and more popular as new ideas arrived from Europe.

Many of the plants that we grow in our gardens today had not arrived in Britain in the early Tudor period. Sunflowers, snapdragons, daffodils, hyacinths, lilac and marigolds were all introduced later in the 16th century, so the gardens at Hussey Tower would have been planted with native species and plants that had already been introduced during medieval times. Here is a list of some of the plants that could have been found there:



Hollyhocks and foxgloves



Hollyhocks
 Pot Marigolds
 Autumn flowering crocus
 Saffron crocus
 Lily of the Valley
 Wallflowers
 White and purple foxgloves
 Sweet Williams
 Snowdrops

Sweet bay
 Lavender
 Ox-eye daisies
 Honeysuckle
 White lupins
 Poppies
 White rose
 Sweet violets
 Rosemary Heartsease

There may even have been some carnations, which were very new, having only been introduced in about 1475.

Sports and pastimes

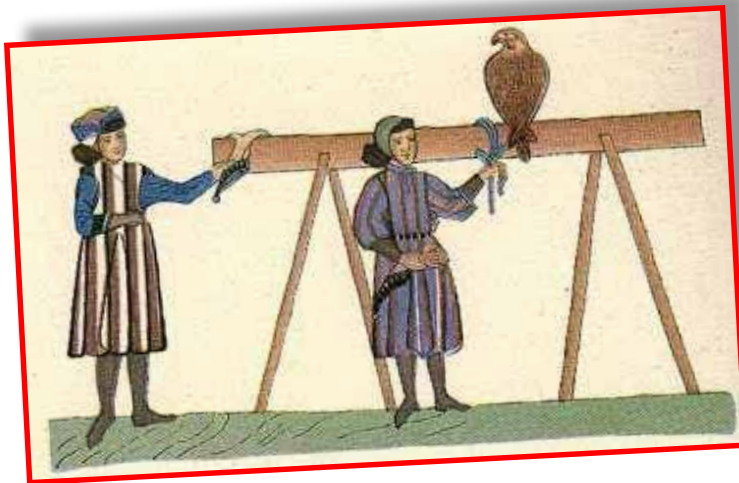
Poorer people were expected to spend most of their time working and had very little spare time to themselves, but wealthy people were able to take part in many sports and games. Some of these, such as cards, dice and skittles are still widely played today but some such as

bear-baiting, where a bear was chained up and then had to defend itself against attack by dogs, would now be considered cruel and unacceptable.

In the early 1500s football was becoming very popular. Football then was much rougher and had far fewer rules than the game that is played today. For instance, the football pitch covered a huge area, there was no limit to the number of people who could play in a team, and you were allowed to jump on your opponents to stop them getting the ball or scoring a goal.



Deer hunting with dogs



Training hawks

Rich people enjoyed hunting and hawking. Whereas poor people would have hunted small animals such as rabbits for food as a necessity, rich people would have gone out hunting for large animals such as deer for the pleasure of the sport (although their servants would have prepared and cooked the deer for eating afterwards).

Falconry and hawking, or hunting with birds of prey, were also very popular pastimes. People went out hawking with dogs to retrieve the prey that was caught. Just as the clothes that you were allowed to wear were regulated by sumptuary laws, the type of falcon or hawk that you could keep was also closely controlled according to how important you were. Many people trained and looked after their own birds but the wealthiest employed falconers to do the work for them. Master falconers were important and highly paid people.

Music and dancing were important pastimes for everyone. Stringed instruments such as the lute and the harp were popular, as well as wind instruments like the flute and recorder. Percussion instruments including drums and tambourines were also often used.

Education

In the late medieval and early Tudor periods the great majority of children would not have had any formal education and very few people would have been able to read and write. Books were very rare and expensive items when Hussey Tower was built in the mid 1400s. At that time each book had to be written and illustrated by hand, a task that was usually carried out in monasteries. Writing was done with quill pens and ink.

After 1476 this gradually began to change with the introduction of the printing press. William Caxton set up the first printing press in England at Westminster. The Canterbury Tales, written by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end



(courtesy of Boston Guildhall)



Quill pen

of the 14th century is one of his most famous books. Even with this invention producing a book was still a time consuming business and books remained an expensive item that only wealthier people could afford. For girls especially, going to school was usually out of the question, with those from wealthy families being taught at home. Boys were slightly better provided for. In Lincolnshire several grammar schools were in existence by the end of the 15th century. Tattershall College dates from about 1460 and was founded to educate the choristers of Ralph, Lord Cromwell's church and the sons of his estate tenants. Wainfleet School near Skegness was built in 1484 to prepare boys for Magdalen College, Oxford. These schools concentrated on teaching reading, writing and Latin. Boston's own grammar school, whose playing fields lie to the north of Hussey Tower, was not built until 1567. Boys from wealthy families were often sent to live in another household to be brought up and to learn how to lead a household.

If poorer children had an education it would more likely have been as an apprentice to a trade that would have prepared them to earn their own living. In towns like Boston boys would have been apprenticed to a 'master' who would have received payment for taking and training them. A boy would usually have worked for his keep only. After 7 years he would have been qualified to work as a paid assistant but he would still be a long way from being accepted as a master craftsman. For the poorest children there was often no educational provision at all.

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