

Mary Arden's Farm

Mary Arden's House and Palmer's Farmhouse

Mary Arden's Farmhouse dates back to the early 1500s (dated by the original beams in the building) and was built by Robert Arden, who lived there with his first wife and 8 daughters, of whom Mary was the youngest. His second wife, Agnes, inherited the farm after his death. Next door, Palmer's Farm was built in 1569-90. Both farmhouses had extensions built after the original construction. Adam Palmer was a neighbour to the Arden family and was a witness to Robert Arden's will. Both men were farmers. Tudor farming was commonly 'strip' farming. Strips of land owned or leased by a farmer would be located around the district and not clustered together into fields near the farmhouse as is common today. Both houses are of a timber frame and 'wattle and daub' construction. Palmer's Farm is a 'living history' environment where 'Tudors' go about their daily tasks, as they would have done in Shakespeare's time. Objects and furniture found in Palmer's Farm are similar to items mentioned in Adam Palmer's will. Life on farms was dominated by daylight hours so timings would vary depending on the time of year (and therefore the amount of daylight available). Tudors were a superstitious people and there are a number of items in the home that were typically used to protect the house and its inhabitants from things supernatural.

Palmer's Farmhouse

The Entrance/Passageway

Background

This was a general entryway to the property and separated the kitchen from the main part of the house. Everyday items would have been stored here and what you see on any particular visit may vary depending on what the farmhands and housemaids are using at the time. Typically you may see herbs and flowers being dried, besom brooms, straw hats, tubs and containers.

Room Highlights

- 1 Fairy door (at the bottom of the right hand side doorframe leading to the garden). This was thought to allow the house fairies to go in and out of the house.
- 2 Horn lamp (hanging from the middle of a beam). Glass was very expensive so cow horns were boiled until the layers opened up (like an onion). Individual strips would then be used in place of where glass would now go.

The Kitchen

Background

The Tudor kitchen was a busy place. The working day went around the hours of daylight. Mistress would be up to prepare breakfast, which, in a farmhouse, may have consisted of porridge or eggs and bacon. The main meal was in the middle of the day and would have been made for the family and all of the housemaids and farm workers, including those who did not live in but were 'day labourers'. Bread was a staple and this meal would have included pottage (a type of savoury soup or stew) and a main course ('remove') such as roast meat, meatballs, fishcakes, links (sausages) or pasties. There would also have been a dessert (or a 'subtlety'). The master would ensure that all of the workers had enough to eat so that people wanted to come and work for him. Supper would be similar to a modern ploughman's lunch. Nowadays, a Tudor meal is prepared daily in the kitchen from 10am – 1pm, and the meal is eaten in the hall.

Room Highlights

- 1 Spice chest on the left hand table – this would have been locked and was a sign of wealth.
- 2 Bread arks – used for storage of flour and grains. The lids could have been turned upside down and used for mixing/kneading.
- 3 Wide basket on the floor – would have contained the vegetables to be used that week.
- 4 Two large wicker baskets containing kindling and wood for the fire so it was close at hand.
- 5 Salt box (on the right hand wall of the fireplace).
- 6 Curfew (in the fireplace on the right hand side) – this was used to cover the fire after the nightly bell was rung. Fires had to be dampened down and covered in the evening to prevent fires breaking out and burning houses down.
- 7 A dried female toad hanging in the window – was thought to protect against the plague.
- 8 Around the fireplace – various water bottles, spoons, pots, jugs and gingerbread moulds (some may be being used if cooking is taking place in the kitchen).

The Hall

Background

Dinner for everybody living or working at the farm that day would be served at the 'board' (or table) in the middle of the day. Benches were typically used as chairs did not come into general use until later times or were used mainly by the wealthy. The family would also have gathered here in the evening or when guests visited.

Depending on the time of your visit, the board may be set for the midday meal, which is served daily at 1pm.

Room Highlights

- 1 Gossip stool – two people would sit on each end to exchange secrets. They also had room to do mending or spinning without getting in each other's way.
- 2 Remains of a Yule log (on a shelf on the right hand side of the fireplace). The Yule log was the large log brought into a house to burn and was so big it would burn from Christmas Eve right through the 12 days of Christmas.
- 3 Pewter plates on the mantle-piece – may be in use during the midday meal.
- 4 Tudor money pot – the only way to get the money out was to break the top off.
- 5 Horn lamp – made using strips of horn instead of glass (which was very expensive).
- 6 Exposed 'wattle and daub' panel on the dividing wall near the Parlour.

The Parlour

Background

A room not often used unless the occasional overnight guest was staying. The bed would have been the 'best' or most expensive bed in the house and having one was a sign of a family's wealth. If guests were here, the Master and his wife would have joined them in the Parlour to eat. This room may also have been used by the Master for conducting business-related matters.

Room Highlights

- 1 Four-poster bed with curtains to provide privacy.
- 2 The 'rope tightener' (known as a 'bed bug') – tool used to tighten the bed ropes under the mattress so the ropes didn't sag and give you a bad night's sleep. Tightening the ropes was a two-person job.
- 3 Large chest (or press) which would have been used for storage.
- 4 A 'Turkey' rug or carpet. These were very expensive possessions in Tudor times and would have been draped over tables or chests, or hung on walls. They were **not** used on the floor.

The Dairy / Buttery

Background

An extension to the original building, this would have been on a cool side on the building. Butter and cheese would have been made here and milk would have been stored here after the milkmaids had finished the milking.

Room Highlights

- 1 Milk churns in room and passageway.
- 2 Dried nettles hanging in the doorway – these were thought to protect the house from 'house trolls'.
- 3 Depending on the day of your visit, there may be some cheese being made according to the traditional methods used in Tudor times.

The Master Bedroom

Background

Used by the Master and Mistress, who slept in a wooden-framed bed. Young children would have slept in the bedroom with their parents until the age of about 5. It is thought that this room may have been part of the original structure (although the first floor did not extend for the whole of the ground floor) and was accessed by a 'tower stair' (no longer there), which was at the corner of the dairy.

Room Highlights

- 1 Bed with truckle that pulls out from the end – dates from the period.
- 2 Cradle for babies.
- 3 Piss pot – to be used at night and emptied by a servant in the morning.
- 4 Cupboard or press for storing clothes and linen.

The House Steward's Bedroom

Background

As the most important servant in the house, and one who would have had the relatively unusual skill for the time of being able to write as well as read, the House Steward would have warranted his own bedroom containing a

wooden bed. His mattress would probably have been stuffed with straw or wool. The steward would probably have shared his bed with the eldest son of the Master.

Room Highlights

- 1 Wooden bed (as befits an important servant in the household).
- 2 Long table set up for the steward to do his work.
- 3 Ink pots and quills.
- 4 Documents showing the style of writing that was used in the 16th century.

The Boys' Bedroom

Background

This would have been near to the house steward so that he could keep an eye on them. As beds were expensive, the males would have slept on the floor, with their pallets (or mattresses) being stuffed with straw or wool.

Room Highlights

- 1 Straw pallets (or mattresses) on the floor – **the children are welcome to lie on these to see what it would have been like.**

The Girls' and Female Servants' Bedroom

Background

The single females of the house would have slept away from the males. A housemaid would have had the task of putting her pallet and pillow in front of the door at night to prevent anybody from getting into the room.

Room Highlights

- 1 Straw pallets on the floor – these would have been used by the daughters and female house servants (who would have lived at the house).
- 2 Piss pot – for use at night.
- 3 Fireplace at the far end (probably a later addition to the house) – shown with blankets drying in front of it.
- 4 Wool ready to be carded (the process by which the wool is made ready for spinning). This type of task may have been carried out in the bedroom as it could be done between other jobs and wouldn't get in the way.
- 5 Herbs would have been hung from the beams to dry. They may also have been to keep pests away from the textiles.
- 6 Dried rowan leaves tied with a red ribbon. Tudors believed that these would ward off witches.

Mary Arden's House

Background

The house dates from 1514 and has been significantly altered over time, including the brickwork added to the outside. Research has shown that the original building was made up of three rooms and was a single-storey construction, with a sleeping shelf or half floor in the parlour. This would have been where the daughters and live-in maids slept. Access would have been by a ladder that would have been removed at night and the parents would have slept downstairs in the parlour. The main living room in the house was also used as a dining room and kitchen. It had an open fire for cooking and heating. As there was no ceiling, smoke rose up to the rafters and out through the thatched roof. Some of the rafters still show evidence of smoke staining.

House Highlights

- 1 Model showing how the original house is thought to have looked.
- 2 Victorian range used for cooking.
- 3 Exposed wattle and daub in the upstairs room furthest from the door.
- 4 In the back kitchen, Victorian 'copper' for heating water for laundry.

Find out more about the Primary education courses offered at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/for-schools



Be part of Shakespeare Week and register at www.shakespeareweek.org



This resource was created by Gemma McGlinchey for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Learning Department www.shakespeare.org.uk