

Factsheet

Royal Kitchens at Kew

The Royal Kitchens at Kew will open to the public for the very first time, on 18 May 2012, following a £1.7m conservation and interpretation project by independent charity Historic Royal Palaces. Untouched since the time of King George III, these historic kitchens, which have been carefully conserved and restored, reveal a fascinating insight into Georgian culinary life. A visit to the kitchens will follow four themes, from procurement and people through to the preparation and presentation of the food produced.

Procurement

- Vast amounts of meat were purchased, over 5,000 lbs a month, including offal- tails, breasts, necks, sweetbreads, lambs' testicles, pigs' ears and feet, tripe, liver and calves' heads. Meat was cheap, beef and mutton at 4 ½d per lb, pork and veal at 6d
- Poultry features in second place to meat. Turkeys, pullets and chickens were relatively expensive, turkeys at 6 shillings each and chickens at 2 shillings. Pheasants, partridge, grouse and other game were shot, often sent to the king by lords from their estates. Additionally little songbirds such as blackbirds, larks and starlings and wading birds were also shot and eaten.
- The most expensive food was fish. Fish from both sea and river were served regularly, with skate, cod and salmon the most popular. Salmon and cod both cost 2 shillings a pound, Turbots and Dorey were the most expensive, costing up to £1 10 shillings each. Oysters, shrimps, crayfish, prawns, crabs and lobster were also delivered.
- Fruit and vegetables were normally eaten in season, although apples and pears and root vegetables were stored and some fruit and vegetables forced. Much was grown on the estate at Kew and the king's farm in Richmond.
- Bread was made in the bake house but pies, tarts and gateaux were often bought in. A small jelly cost 6d but a large one might cost 8 shillings and sixpence and a blancmange 3 shillings.
- In contrast to the food, little was spent on alcoholic drink. The King and Queen were abstemious and the allowance to the household was not great.

- We know little about the purveyors of food. Ann Winckles made a business from supplying jelly and blancmange. Elizabeth Wilson brought in oysters. Louis Ramus delivered eggs, cheese and bacon. Vegetables were purchased from a man named Savage Bear. He brought broccoli, turnips, horseradish, watercress, asparagus, chestnuts and French beans, apples, shallots, onions, potatoes, sauerkraut and mushrooms.

1s (shilling) = 12d (pence). £1 = 20 shillings.
[£1 in 1789 represents approx. £60 today]

People

- The Royal Kitchens at Kew were staffed by a master cook and an assistant, 2 yeomen, a groom, a turnbroach, a master scourer and his assistant, 2 boys and a child. They were assisted by a porter and a door keeper, with two coal porters and three men employed in the silver scullery.
- The purchase, storage and distribution of food was administered by William Gorton, the Clerk of the Kitchen.
- The master cook during this period was William Wybrow who, with Gorton, made up the week's menus. Wybrow had started work as *third child of the kitchen* in the last years of George II's reign.
- The menus were written by Gorton and his assistant, Samuel Wharton, the Third Clerk of the Kitchen. They were responsible for apportioning the allowance of food which they had purchased in accordance with the instructions from the Board of the Green Cloth, an archaic department of the Lord Steward's Office, which supervised the domestic expenses for the royal household.

Preparation

- The menus were written in culinary French, a form of which is still used today.
- Menus were listed by tables, for King George and Queen Charlotte, the princesses, the Queen's ladies, dressers and servants, the equerries, pages, grooms, footmen servants; including those of Dr Willis, and kitchen staff. They were all served dinner and in many cases supper by the royal kitchens.
- Leftover food was probably re-used in made-up dishes for the following day.
- Vegetables were served at every meal. Vegetables which we eat raw, such as celery, lettuce and cucumbers were mostly served stewed.

- Italian dishes were becoming popular. Parmesan cheese was on the monthly order together with macaroni and vermicelli, which seems mainly to have been used in soup.
- Most dishes were served with a sauce made with butter- over 700lbs of butter being used at Kew in a month, which might be flavoured with anchovies, oysters or shrimps. Meat might be served with a pudding made from suet.

Presentation

- Covered dishes of food were taken from the kitchen by liveried servants who would arrange them all on the table for the diners to help themselves.
- There could be as many as 8 different foods on the table at any one time and a diner depended on his neighbours' to pass him what he fancied. This was called *service à la française*. Then the first dishes would be taken away and replaced with another set of dishes, called a 'remove'. There was a mixture of savoury and sweet dishes in most removes, though the second remove was usually a substantial meat or fish dish and its accompaniments.
- For the royal family, dinner began with soup. They had seven other dishes on the table during this first course or remove, the equerries had an extra four. For the second remove a dish of fish or meat was served. The third remove consisted of perhaps poultry, cream tarts, fruit dishes, jellies and vegetables. For those entitled to supper there would be poultry, eggs, seafood, tarts and blancmange, most of which might be served cold, although the royal family always had warm chicken broth.