

Cutlery and crockery





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Knife in leather sheath

This steel knife, in its leather sheath, was an essential piece of equipment for all Tudor people aged 5 and over. Knives were used by everybody, for all sorts of things, e.g whittling sticks, cutting rope, cutting meat.

When people went to a meal in somebody else's home they were expected to take their own knife and spoon. The host wouldn't be expected to provide cutlery for everyone to use.



How do we know about knives in leather sheaths?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, and finds made during archaeological excavations. There are several examples in the Museum of London's online collection.



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Apostle spoon

This pewter spoon has the figure of St John the Evangelist on the 'knop' (top of the handle). People believed St John protected them from poisoning, and he was also the patron saint of artists (who were often poisoned by the pigment in their paint).

Silver spoons were fashionable personal items for rich Tudors, and usually given as christening gifts. Apostle spoons were especially popular as Tudor people were very religious, and until 1536 the Catholic church was the only church in Britain. People prayed daily, and believed in praying to patron saints for protection, and to bring good fortune on certain aspects of life.

Pewter is a metal alloy, roughly 90% tin, mixed with other metals. Tudor pewter contained up to 10% lead, and rich people who used pewter spoons all the time were being slowly poisoned by their spoons.

Symptoms of lead poisoning include irritability, confusion, and starting to have fits. Severe lead poisoning can kill people. Modern pewter does not contain lead.



How do we know about apostle spoons?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, like wills, and finds made during archaeological excavations. There are several examples in the British Museum's online collection.



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Beaker & spoon

This beaker and spoon are made from horn. Horn was the Tudor equivalent of plastic, and was very useful as it is light, hard wearing, and difficult to break. It was commonly used to make household objects and jewellery, and very thin sheets were used in lanterns and windows, as they kept the wind out but let light in.

This plain beaker is of the kind used by poorer people, a rich man's horn beaker would have had a silver rim and base, and perhaps have carved decoration.

The Tudors used horn from cows, rams and deer. Animal horn is partly gelatine, and becomes very malleable once it has been softened in boiling water. Once soft, it can be flattened, separated into layers, moulded to shape, and trimmed. It is polished after becoming hard again.

Tudor drinking vessels were made from silver, pewter, glass, earthenware, wood, leather and horn. Spoons were made from silver, pewter, wood, bone, and horn.



How do we know about horn beakers and spoons?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, and finds made during archaeological excavations.



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Wooden trencher

This wooden platter is an early type of plate. The word trencher comes from the old French word 'tranchier', meaning 'to cut'.

Trenchers were originally pieces of 4 day old bread, cut into a square shape, upon which food could be placed before being eaten. The bread trenchers were put on wood (low status people) or silver platters (high status people), and the name trencher began to be used for the platter.

The bread trencher could be eaten with sauce as part of the meal, but the trenchers were usually collected at the end of the meal and were given away as 'alms' (gifts) to the poor. Rich people showed how rich and important they were by being able to afford to give food away.

This wooden trencher is made from oak, which has no smell or taste to spoil the food. It has two hollows carved into the surface, which stop food falling or dripping off the edges; the large one held food and the smaller one held salt, which was still an expensive seasoning in Tudor times.



How do we know about wooden trenchers?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, and finds made during archaeological excavations.



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Tankard

This leather tankard has a wider base than top, which makes it hard to knock over. Leather tankards like this were used on ships, in inns and taverns and other places where there was a high risk of drinking vessels being knocked over, or while travelling. They don't break if dropped, and are easy to repair if they spring a leak.

Poor people also used things which were hard to break in their homes, and which could be repaired, as they had little or no money to replace things.

Leather containers for liquid were usually waterproofed with pitch made from pine or birch resin, or beeswax. This leather tankard is lined with 'brewers pitch', a waterproof substance made from pine resin.



How do we know about leather tankards?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, finds made during archaeological excavations, and examples found on Henry VIII's flagship, Mary Rose ship. This tankard is a copy of one found on the Mary Rose.



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Silver drinking beaker

This silver drinking beaker or cup would have been used by rich people, maybe at the top table in a Tudor Hall, or maybe whilst travelling, as glass is too fragile for travelling with. It was used for drinking wine, mead, or stronger drinks, as the beaker is too small for ale or beer.



How do we know about silver beakers?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, finds made during archaeological excavations. This beaker is similar to the *The Cassel Beaker*, which can be seen in the V & A, London.



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Costrel

This sturdy leather bottle or flask was used to carry liquids when travelling, working or on the battlefield. It has a carrying cord; and a wooden stopper, attached by a linen cord, to stop it getting lost.

Leather flasks were made by cutting two pieces of leather to shape, soaking them, then clamping each piece of wet leather in a two part mould and leaving to dry overnight. The edges of the shaped leather were pierced, and sewn together using linen thread made waterproof by being soaked in beeswax. A mixture of melted beeswax and pine pitch was used to coat the insides, as it gave a flexible, waterproof coating. The wooden stopper was carved from birch or maple.



How do we know about costrels?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, finds made during archaeological excavations, and examples found on Henry VIII's flagship, *Mary Rose*. This costrel is a copy of one found on the *Mary Rose*.

