

## WHILTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

On 13<sup>th</sup> January we shared a **Tudor meal**, imagining that it might have been eaten in the farmhouse of Richard Botterill. Richard was a Whilton farmer. He may have held the farm which once stood opposite the Plough. The Botterill family prospered in Elizabethan England and by 1597 their farmhouse had two storeys. This means that they probably now had a chimney with a cooking hearth and a bread oven beside it. In earlier times there were ovens in very large houses and castles, but ordinary people made do without or used the communal oven, known in Whilton as the Common Bakehouse, which was probably at Whilton Forge.

*The pies disappeared quickly*



Richard's wife and servants may well have cooked pies in their Whilton oven. Before the days of casseroles, the strong hot water crust acted as a cooking vessel for the meat and was known as a "coffin."

We tried a number of different pies, holding chicken, beef, ham and pork, and a mixture of meats, such as the Tudors loved. These were accompanied with bread and some green salad leaves. Farming communities and poorer people often had a healthier diet than the very wealthy Tudors, who had a meat-rich diet with very few vegetables and fruits.

Our desserts were more luxurious, reflecting some of the novelties of Elizabethan times. The old dessert of junket or "curds and whey" was going out and the new fashion was for syllabub. Elizabethan syllabub started as a drink. A mixture of alcohol, sugar and flavouring was left overnight and then the warm new milk of a cow was poured into it. Deciding that this would be difficult to achieve and not to modern tastes, we opted for a later development of syllabub. In this whipped cream was added instead of milk, resulting in a dessert to eat with a spoon. We enjoyed lemon syllabub and another flavoured with ale, whisky and nutmeg.

Our second dessert would have been high in import and labour costs. "Marchpane" was made from imported almonds, sugar and rose water. Jordan almonds were reckoned to be the best, but both they and the sugar had to be pounded and ground down. The resulting almond milk helped to bind the mixture and rose water, probably from the Ottoman Empire, was added too. We ate modern marzipan instead, cut into dainty Tudor shapes and coloured green and pink, as was their custom. The addition of gold leaf decoration was only for royal or noble gatherings.

