

Secret Cottage – Inglenook Fireplaces

It's been cold recently, but we're fortunate here at Secret Cottage as we have three real fires to keep us warm! We bring our Cotswold Day-Trip guests back here to experience them during their tour.

Our visitors love to sit around the roaring flames and they frequently ask about the history of fireplaces.

Many of our guests have never seen a working fireplace before, except in books or films, so they love the opportunity to experience this special warmth first hand.

And it's amazing how different the heat from an open fire is. It doesn't get stuffy like electric or gas heating and you get a comfort as well as the heat. Not to mention something beautiful to look at.

The earliest fireplaces weren't much more than a garden bonfire – with just a pile of logs on a central hearth in the middle of a house! There was no chimney and the smoke just escaped through a vent in the roof – if you were lucky! If the wind blew in the wrong direction you'd end up with a house full of smoke which would leave you with streaming eyes, black clothes and a stinging throat.

The word 'inglenook' means chimney corner and these came into being in the mid-late 16th century. The ingelnook was the heart of the home where people would gather to keep warm – it was still the only form of heating in a building and this fireplace would be used to do all the cooking too. This was true right up until the 19th century when cast iron cooking ranges were available for some. However, the poorest people still relied on fireplaces for everything...

Nowadays fireplaces are wonderful features that we love to sit in front of, and often they are a luxury in addition to central heating, but back then the houses were draughty without insulation – and many without glass in the windows – so homes still remained bitterly cold and damp. People would make do with what they could find; hanging material or wooden shutters in draughty areas and the fire would be kept in 24 hours a day.

An inglenook fireplace usually had standing room inside the alcove or even seating, so people could get as close to the fire as possible – it was a matter of survival for many.

There are three fireplaces at Secret Cottage, two are inglenooks and you can experience the warmth that they generate when taking our Cotswold Day-Trip guided tour. Nothing is better than a Traditional English Cotswold Cream Tea when sitting next to the fire on a winters afternoon.