



Legend has it that the original York Hams were smoked with wood shavings left from the construction of The Minster. It's a nice tale but probably nothing more than that. There almost certainly is a link to St. Mary's Abbey in medieval times however. The monks produced vast quantities of Ale which was the drink of choice especially when water might well make you ill at the least, or kill you in extreme cases. The bi-products of brewing were large amounts of spent grain, which are ideal pig fodder. The local availability of large white pigs probably went hand in hand with this food source.

Although York Ham doesn't have *protected designation of origin status* there is a distinct difference from the inferior modern ham pressed from reformed Pork. Firstly it is not technically a Ham but rather a Gammon. The difference is that Ham is cured with the bone removed, whereas Gammon is cured with the bone in. The base ingredients for a York Ham are a good sized leg of Pork, Salt with Sugar and Saltpetre. The York ham is traditionally a dry cured Gammon from a Large White pig. It is slightly saltier and firmer textured than the hams we are probably used to today. They were laid on a bed of salt in the cellar on the stone slabs where it is cool and dry. November 11th ? St Martins Day, was traditionally the first day of curing, as the weather is cooler, the pigs have been foraging and are now fat, and the flies are no longer an issue, so there was a good chance that ham and bacon would cure well. After a number of days in the salt, being turned and massaged regularly, they would then be hung up to dry for a minimum of 2 months. The longer the ageing process, the more the flavour changed and developed.

Smoked or not? This was probably down to personal choice of the person curing the meat. Smoking certainly assists with meat preservation. But a well cured York Ham will keep unrefrigerated for longer than required without the need to smoke it. The breadcrumbs? Almost certainly a later addition intended to please the eye rather than enhance the flavour. But there is a phrase ?You eat with your eyes?...