

# Keeping

# Clean



**How often do you have a shower or a bath? Everyone in this country now has a supply of clean, safe water to their house. It is easy for us to keep clean and to make sure that the food we eat is clean and safe to eat. Five hundred years ago it was much more difficult.**

## Where did people get water from?

Not even the richest people had taps with water in their homes. Most castles had their own wells from which servants would haul up buckets of water. People living in the country fetched their water from a shared well or simply from rivers. The water in these wells was often dirty or polluted. In the towns there were shared wells. Today dirty water flows away down a drain. In those days people in the country simply tipped the water on the ground outside. In towns dirty water was tipped out into the street.

## How did people wash?

Water for washing was heated up in a pot over the fire. The hot water was poured into a jug. People washed by pouring water over their hands into a basin. Most people would wash in cold water and in summer people washed in streams or lochs. It was very unusual for someone to have a complete bath!

In those days soap was a luxury item, and most people did not use it. It was made from animal fat and then perfumed. Even richer people did not wash often or use soap. Instead, they would hide their body smell with perfume.

## What kind of toilets were there?

Most people in Scotland lived in the country. They had no toilets of any sort and would just go outside. Many farms had a shared manure heap – for human and animal dung – which was dug into the fields as fertilizer. In towns there might be a ‘dry’ toilet or privy, without any water for flushing. Some had wooden seats placed over a pit which would be dug out when it was too full.

Many castles had stone privies – holes where you could go to the toilet. The waste dropped down into the ditch or else built up until it had to be dug out. Yuck! People used to keep their clothes in the same room as the privy because they thought that the smell would keep the moths away from their clothes.

Instead of toilet paper, people used moss or leaves. Later on, in busy towns like Edinburgh, there would be a signal



given at night. Then people would tip all their waste from the day out of their windows into the street. They would shout a warning cry of “Gardy-loo!”. This comes from the French phrase “Gardez-l’eau!” which means “Look out for the water!” In 1687, Edinburgh council had to hire twenty-two horse carts every night to take away all the rubbish which was thrown into the streets.

### Did people brush their teeth?

If people brushed their teeth at all, they used a twig called a ‘chewing stick’. This was simply a twig which people chewed to remove the remains of food. The other end of the stick was used like a toothpick today. There were no dentists and the only cure for toothache was either to chew certain plants or to have your tooth pulled out!

