

Tudor Cleansing and Tudor Clothes

The Tudors cared about their appearance. People carried mirrors made of glass or steel. They also carried combs and used tweezers, ear scoops and bone manicure sets. It is a myth that the Tudors were dirty and rarely washed. However, it was difficult for ordinary people to have a bath because it was hard to heat a large amount of water at one time. In the summer, people sometimes had a bath in the local river. Otherwise they heated a cauldron of water and had a strip wash or they could have a 'dry wash' by rubbing themselves with clean linen. Many Tudors made their own soap which they scented with plants like lavender and rose. They also used artichokes for deodorant.

In the 16th century bathrooms were very rare but Henry VIII had a bathroom in Hampton Court Palace. It had a simple boiler for hot water.

Women who could afford it would hang a container of sweet smelling spices on their belt. This was called a pomander and it disguised the horrid smells in the streets. It is a myth that in Tudor times people were very dirty and smelly. Most people tried to keep themselves clean but it was difficult to keep free of vermin. On the wreck of the Mary Rose many lice combs were found. A bone ear scoop and a bone manicure set were also found.

For rich Tudors fashion was important and their clothes were very elaborate. For the poor clothes had to be hardwearing and practical. All classes wore wool. However, it varied in quality and while the rich wore fine quality wool, the poor wore coarse wool. Linen was used to make shirts and underwear but only the rich could afford cotton and silk. Rich Tudors also embroidered their clothes with silk, gold or silver thread. Rich Tudor women wore silk stockings.

In the 16th century men wore short trouser-like garments called breeches. They also wore tight fitting jackets called doublets. Another jacket called a jerkin was worn over the doublet. Over the jerkin rich men wore a gown or later in the 16th century a cloak or cape.

Instead of a doublet many workingmen wore a loose tunic which was easier to work in. Some working men wore a leather jerkin called a buff-jerkin. Men also wore stockings or woollen socks which were called hose.

Women wore a kind of petticoat called a smock or shift or chemise made of linen or wool and a wool dress over it. A woman's dress was made of two parts; a bodice or corset like garment and a skirt. Sleeves were held on with laces and could be detached. Working women wore a linen apron.

In the late 16th century many women wore a frame made of whale bone or wood under their dress called a farthingale. If they could not afford a farthingale women wore a padded roll around their waist called a bum roll. In the 16th century women did not wear knickers. However men sometimes wore linen shorts.

In the 16th century everyone wore hats. Poor women often wore a linen cap called a coif. After 1572 by law all men except nobles had to wear a woollen cap on Sundays. This law was passed to make plenty of work for the wool cap makers.

In the 16th century buttons were usually for decoration. Clothes were held together with laces or pins. Furs in Tudor times included cat, rabbit, beaver, bear, badger and polecat.

The Tudors used mostly vegetable dyes such as madder for red, woad for blue or walnut for brown. However, you have to use a chemical called a mordant to 'fix' the dye. The mordant changed the colour of the dye e.g. a plant called weld was used with alum for yellow but if used with iron or tin it produced shades of green. The most expensive dyes were bright red, purple and indigo. Poor people often wore brown, yellow or blue. In the 16th century, scarlet was not a colour it was the name of a fine, expensive wool.