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The People News

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How Things Used To Be

The following was sent to The People News by a reader. The author is unknown.

The next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be. Here are some interesting facts about the 1500s.

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May, and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Hence the custom today of carrying a bouquet when getting married.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the sons and men, then the women and finally, the

children. Last of all, the babies. By then, the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Houses had thatched roofs, thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to keep warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip off the roof. Hence the saying "It's raining cats and dogs."

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds

came into existence.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying, "dirt poor."

The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on the floor to help keep their footing.

As the winter wore on, they added more thresh until when you opened the door, it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entranceway. Hence the saying, a "thresh hold."

(Getting quite an education, aren't you?)

In those days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to go cold overnight, and then start over the next day.

Sometimes, stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while, hence the rhyme:

"Pease porridge hot,
 pease porridge cold.
 Pease porridge in the pot
 nine days old.
 Some like it hot,
 some like it cold.
 Some like it in the pot
 nine days old."

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of

wealth that a man could "bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

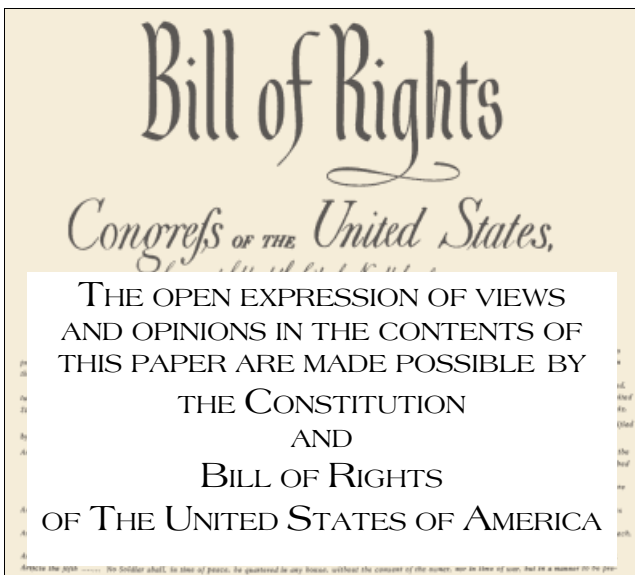
Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "upper crust."

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would some time's knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a "wake."

England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a "bone-house" and re-use the grave.

When re-opening these coffins, 1 out of about 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the "graveyard shift") to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be "saved by the bell," or was considered a "dead ringer."

And that's the truth..., now, whoever said that history was boring? Educate someone; share these facts with a friend.



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