

Clean and tidy



Clean and tidy Castile soap

Castile soap — A mild creamy white bar soap. Castile soap is made by simmering olive oil, lye and seashore plants at 100C for about an hour, stirring constantly. It ages well, becoming harder with time. Once made, it takes 3 weeks to become hard enough to cut into bars and lift from the mould, but it ages and keeps well.

Castile soap has been in use since the Medieval period and was traded by pedlars through most parts of Europe at that time. It was much better quality than the soft soap made in Britain, which was made from animal tallow (rendered fat) and lye, and which was used in the making of textiles to degrease cloth.



How do we know about castile soap?

Descriptions in medieval manuscripts and medical papers.



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Wooden comb

Wooden comb — medieval combs were generally made from wood, bone or ivory. The fine teeth were used to clean the hair; remove lice and their nits, and the wider teeth were used to groom and style hair.



How do we know about wooden combs?

Medieval manuscripts, including the Luttrell Psalter, contain illustrations of ladies combing their hair with wooden combs. Fragments of wooden comb have been found during archaeological digs.

Clean and tidy Chatelaine set

Chatelaine set — this set of small personal hygiene tools includes the main tools people would use to look after themselves — a toothpick, a nail file, tweezers, and an ear scoop.

Toothpick — people cleaned their teeth and gums and freshened their breath by picking food from between teeth using toothpicks.

Nail file — people filed their nails by rubbing the file back and forth, the nail file shaves small slivers of nail off rather than wearing the nail away as modern nail files do.

Tweezers — for removing hairs and splinters.

Ear scoop — for removing ear wax.



How do we know about chatelaine sets?

They have been found during archaeological digs in many locations in Britain.

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Linen & wool

Linen & wool — as well as removing particles of food using toothpicks, people cleaned their teeth by rubbing them with wool or linen cloths, then rinsing with water or wine, and chewing herbs. Some people may also have cleaned their teeth using willow or hazel sticks with chewed ends.



How do we know about teeth cleaning cloths?

Medieval records and books describe how people cleaned their teeth. Gerald of Wales made notes about Welsh people cleaning their teeth using hazel sticks.

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Bronze mirror in carved bone case

Bronze mirror in carved bone case — polished bronze mirrors had been used in Britain from at least 300BC, and silver mirrors were also used in medieval times. This mirror was clearly made for a rich person, with its fine carving, and sliding wood cover protecting the bronze mirror.

The Romans and earlier civilisations in other parts of the world had used glass backed with metal to make mirrors, but this technology appears to have been lost or forgotten by much of the world during the early medieval period. The European manufacture and use of mirrors made of glass with a metallic backing started again in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, in Venice and Nuremburg, and eventually spread through Europe. As noble people travelled extensively, and merchants and pedlars also brought goods in to Britain, it is entirely possible that very rich people may have been using glass mirrors brought for some time, possibly even from as early as the C12th, before they began being manufactured in Britain in the C17th.



How do we know about bronze mirrors in carved cases?

Examples of this type of mirror have been found during archaeological excavations, as well as illustrations in medieval manuscripts. This replica is based on several medieval examples.