



Cleanliness At All Times

Rural Hygiene

Special Exhibition

18 August – 28 November 2021



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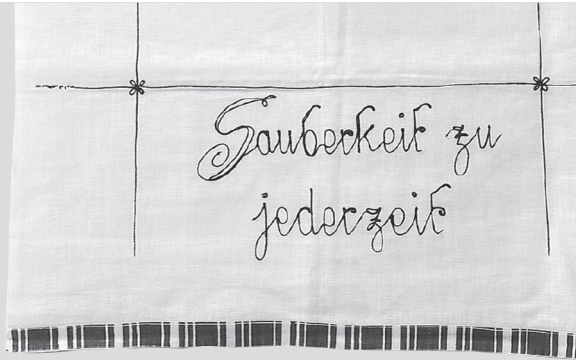
Rural Hygiene

Cleanliness At All Times

The decorative towel “Sauberkeit zu jederzeit” (Cleanliness at all times) that gives this exhibition its name is now more than one hundred years old, its slogan aimed at housewives in charge of household and family hygiene. The fact that they were to enjoy education to this end was an achievement of the 19th century.

Hygiene was a guiding concept of the industrial age, rapid urban growth and the economisation of agriculture. All were called to action: (male) heads of households, entrepreneurs, senior workers, employees and farmers. The political class and public administrations had to ensure that every citizen was provided with clean water, doctors, midwives and an education.

The plea reached every village, hamlet and even the remotest farms: “Cleanliness At All Times!” This exhibition looks at the things which require cleanliness alongside the tools and equipment which served and continue to serve this purpose. Some hygiene utensils are universal and remain practical to this day, such as brushes and brooms, soap and razors, while some objects are only found now in museums, such as carpet beaters and washboards.



What is clean?

What is the purpose of hygiene? Health and wellbeing. The idea that cleanliness, or the semblance of cleanliness, should also serve appearances and convey an impression is a recent one. The true measure of any civilisation can be found in its standards of hygiene. The body, garments and dwellings (bed, table, floor) must be clean, as well as the car and the family dog. Food is clean, germ-free and unspoilt. Animal pests are kept at bay, while healthy livestock is valuable. A pure exterior, or a “white waistcoat”, enhances one’s public reputation.

How is hygiene achieved? With hard work, and in particular the hard, domestic graft performed by women. This is promoted in a lasting way with structural, social and personal strategies and through public provision.

It took the invention, trial, improvement and implementation of tools such as brooms and brushes, products such as soap and sand and mechanisms such as a fixed dung heap on the farm and urban sewer systems.

Society ultimately agrees on the meaning of “clean”, however. It changes over time and depending on individual circumstances. The fresh aroma of a cigarette and the fug of its cold stubs were once an integral part of pub culture. Are the blackened, resined hands of a woodcutter dirtier than the filed and buffed nails of a stockbroker? What about the runny nose of a much-loved child? One thing is certain: cleanliness is relative.



Rural Pharmacies

A History of Pharmacy Hygiene

Targeted hygiene measures became hugely important for pharmacies in around 1900. Pharmacy hygiene involves the entire operation which, in the first half of the 20th century, was characterised by the gradual transition from medicines produced on site and testing raw materials to supplying finished medicinal products (specialities).

Hygienic Operations

One of the most important procedures in rural pharmacies was sterilisation. Drying cabinets and pressure cookers were some of the tools used for heat sterilisation. Special filtering candles made of diatomaceous earth made it possible to sterilise eyewashes. Novelties included ampoules for storing vaccines in a sterile environment, initially produced in pharmacies only.

Antiseptic and Disinfectant

Pharmacies also stocked and dispensed a range of antiseptics, disinfectants and sterile healthcare items made by the pharmacists themselves or supplied as finished products.

Healthcare Products

Dressings underwent a sterilisation procedure, with disinfectants such as salicylic acid and iodoform sometimes added. The silk threads used during surgery also had to be sterilised.

Sidelines

Pharmacies, and particularly rural pharmacies, had a comprehensive sideline to secure the pharmacist's income, which included cleaning agents such as soft and hard soaps and various toilet soaps.



On Health and Beauty

Personal Hygiene in Rural Areas

If the reports of public health officials in the 19th century are to be believed, older people rarely came into contact with water. Children and young people bathed for pleasure in streams and rivers; the theory that noxious vapours could enter the body through open pores during baths had been gradually abandoned. Instead, people increasingly believed that sweat could drive unhealthy substances from the body, making it necessary to open the pores.

Consequently, personal hygiene took on greater significance in the countryside, and children learned about the new requirements at school. The necessity of personal hygiene was conveyed to adults at agricultural colleges.

Personal hygiene was a time-consuming exercise. It was necessary to fetch and then dispose of the water, wash towels and cloths and prepare soap using tallow.

Personal hygiene became easier when bathrooms began appearing in houses. Hot water was available from the tap and dirty water could be poured down the drain. The bathroom became a place of comfort, where health and beauty could be maintained. New products conveyed the idea to consumers that they were responsible for their own health and beauty.

These days, dermatologists warn against exaggerated hygiene. The body should develop its own defences, which is only possible if it comes into contact with germs and bacteria.



Monday is Washday

The Washing Place

Clean water for laundry was fetched from a water pump or deep well. The water was carried in wooden or tin buckets – by hand over short distances or hung on a yoke on the washerwomen's shoulders for longer distances.

Cold water does not remove dirt as well as warm water does and hot water kills vermin and germs in the wash, which is why water is heated to wash textiles. For a long time, this procedure was performed using metal cauldrons over open fires or ranges. Industrial laundry cauldrons were used in the decades before electric washing machines were introduced. Some time before that, many parishes built washing places at public wells. Laundry was soaked in cold water and then brushed on the stone benches. The rest of the work, involving hot water, was done in private. Tubs, basins and baskets were used to transport the wet laundry back to the washing place or to a body of water to be rinsed.

The laundry was steeped in ash lye to soak, which meant pure, soot-free wood ash being boiled in water. The resulting light potash lye dissolves dirt and grease. Soap was produced using beef tallow. This boiling procedure involving caustic soda, splitting with sodium chloride, drying and forming was not usually carried out at home. Toilet soaps and those extracted from inferior animal fats were sold by the bar. In times of need, soap was made by boiling the fat out of animal bones.



It's Always Washday

The Laundry Room and Machines

It was the dream of every rural housewife to have a laundry room with a cauldron, tubs and washbasin. It was almost a luxury to have running water as well. Washday was hard work even then, but the time, carrying and lifting requirements were reduced considerably. A strong physical burden was placed upon the women with the constant carrying and lifting, the lye on their hands, damp conditions and scalding. They sought outside help for large washing loads, where possible. Retired women and daughters were expected to lend a hand and female day labourers were called in.

The laundry room was furnished with solid flooring which allowed spills to drain away, walls which could be wiped down, a solid ceiling which did not absorb any of the moisture rising from the cauldron and basins and removable wooden floor grating which could be dried standing up. Laundry cauldrons were heated over wood fires. There was a wooden washbasin at a large window and basins to contain the washboard, for soaking and for rinsing. Clean water was piped straight into the laundry, with a drying green set up just in front.

Washing and drying equipment made laundry easier and wearing clean clothes increasingly became the standard. Monday used to be the customary washday, taking up several hours and creating a public spectacle. These days, we "put on a wash" on various days of the week in our own homes.



Hair Salons

Irmengard Stöckle sat her master barber examination in 1961. She cut men's hair and shaved them. Like many barbers, she contracted a serious case of hepatitis B and was ill for several months despite all of the hygiene measures, such as disinfecting the blades.



Edible At All Times

Food Preservation and Hygiene

Households produced part of their own sustenance well into the 20th century. Large quantities of fresh food were only available to them at certain times, such as when animals were slaughtered or during the harvest. These items were also provisions for the rest of the year.

If left untreated, fresh food can only be kept and eaten for a short period of time. It begins to spoil after this, going off and becoming inedible. This spoiling process was prevented using simple preservation methods. Food was desiccated or put into airtight storage, so it remained edible for several months.

Modern notions of hygiene changed the preserving methods. People recognised that mould and bacteria were responsible for food spoiling, so these were killed off using new processes such as heat sterilisation. Progress in the area of refrigeration and freezing technology allowed food to be kept fresh for longer periods, rendering old preservation methods obsolete.

One important part of food hygiene and preservation was and continues to be keeping storage pests at bay. Insects and rodents eat away at food and contaminate it with germs, constituting a hazard to human health. To prevent this, food is stored in secured spaces or containers and traps and poison are used against vermin.



The Kitchen

A Daily Dose of Smoke Inhalation

Kitchens were some of the most neglected rooms in farmhouses and the unhealthiest places to work until the mid-20th century. Well into the 19th century, cooking was done on open hearths in the summer and in jamb stoves during the winter. Both methods saw the room filling with smoke from the wood fire before it exited through an open flue.

The closed flue, or “Russian” chimney, was a decisive innovation which had taken hold everywhere by the beginning of the 20th century. Range cookers with removable hob rings and water tankers were now used for cooking.

Everything that was needed for day-to-day cooking and washing up, such as pots, bowls, pans, jugs, bottles, cups, was stored on open shelves. People washed themselves in the kitchen as well, since this was usually the location of the only water source in the house. As the kitchen was the only heatable room in the house, along with the parlour, it was also where the kitchen table stood and the day’s meals were eaten. Kitchen furniture as we understand it today did not reach rural households until the 1960s.

Schools of home economics provided the pivotal impetus in rural areas. The female pupils usually came from farming households and were taught subjects including work and inventory management, healthcare and personal hygiene. One of the main training components was instruction in matters of food and cooking hygiene.



Preserving – Changing – Keeping Clean

How Clothing Was Handled



The work we can now do with fully automatic washing machines and detergents once meant hard labour for women in rural areas, but that was not the only reason that laundry was done as little as possible. Brushing, wringing and boiling the fabric with lye reduced the lifespan of clothing considerably.

Textiles were expensive, even the underwear and work clothing made of linen and hemp. In around 1600, six men’s shirts had approximately the same value as a cow. There was a glaring lack of clothing in the 19th century, especially affecting the poor, and this situation had an impact on their hygiene situation.

It was impossible to wash many items of clothing due to the material and design. This was especially the case for garments worn on Sundays and festivals, which required gentle treatment and care. Aprons and overalls kept superficial grime at bay, while washable underclothes absorbed any contamination from the body. Depending on the occasion or work involved, it was also vital to change clothes and only don the designated attire.

These rules of preserving, changing and keeping clean shaped the way in which people dealt with clothing well into the 20th century. It changed when laundry became an activity which could be carried out at any time and as often as required. Today, low-maintenance and low-priced textiles fill our wardrobes and make it possible to change into clean clothes several times a day. The ways in which we deal with clothing and our attitudes to sartorial hygiene have transformed radically.

Beds: A Burning Issue

The Hygiene of Sleep

The optimum and healthiest configuration of the bedroom has been the subject of medical discussion since the 18th century. Ideally, it was to be spacious, kept at a moderate temperature and free of draughts, damp and foul-smelling odours. Bedding was to be aired every day, washed regularly and the straw mattress changed several times a year. These ideals by no means corresponded to the actual condition of rural bedchambers, well into the 19th century. It was rarely possible to adhere to the cleaning intervals that were required to prevent vermin from infiltrating the bedding. It was common for rooms to be used for various functions, so several people slept in them, clothes and objects of value were kept there and they were used to store food. Farmhands and maids often slept in the stables or simplest of chambers. A chamber pot could be found in almost every bedroom, however. This meant that nobody had to venture out to the stable, dung heap or outhouse at night. From the late 19th century onwards, chambers were often equipped with washstands and at least a washbowl and water jug as well. It was now possible to wash in the morning and evening out of sight of most of the rest of the household. The walls of bedchambers were decorated with religious imagery, such as the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus or Maria and guardian angels, encouraging personal devotion and a “clean soul”.

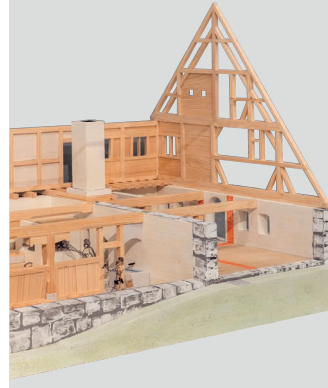


The Wendelstein Bathhouse

at the Franconian Open Air Museum, Bad Windsheim

The architectural style of this historic bathhouse has been a subject of discussion for building researchers since the 1980s.

Although bathhouses began as an urban phenomenon, it has become increasingly evident that they were also common in the rural areas of southern Germany; in fact, they were a standard feature in many market towns and villages.



The bathhouse from Wendelstein, a market town south of Nuremberg, was built in 1450 and is one of the best-preserved late mediaeval bathhouses in Germany. It is being reconstructed [until 2022] at the Franconian Open Air Museum in Bad Windsheim.

Its sturdy ground floor once housed the bathing areas and the upper and attic floors were let to tenants as apartments. Some of the barber-surgeons who ran the bathhouses even lodged there at times.

The typical spatial design of late mediaeval and early modern bathhouses can be seen on the ground floor. The chamber to the immediate right of the entrance is where bathers disrobed and was heated by a tiled oven. The furnace chamber was the bathhouse’s heating system.

It was where the tiled oven in the changing room and the bathing furnace in the bathing area were fired and a large cauldron of water was heated for bathtubs, among other functions.

The actual bathing area, which takes up the entire rear section of the ground floor, is dominated by the large bathing furnace. It is thought that the bathing area was partitioned, like other bathing areas in southern Germany, in this case with timber frame. It is possible that there was a separate area for bathtubs and that the area around the furnace was used for sweating.

*Wolher ins Bad Reich vnde Arm (Come in and Bathe, Rich and Poor!)
Late mediaeval and early modern public bathhouses*

When the barber-surgeon's cry sounded and the late mediaeval townspeople and villagers saw a bathing cap or brush hanging on a bathhouse beam, they knew that the bathing area had been cleaned, the furnace heated and everything was ready for bathing day. They poured in to take a sweat bath, a bathtub or undergo wet cupping.

Like mills and inns, bathhouses were privileged establishments. Only those with an official permit to run a bathhouse were allowed to do so, which entailed certain rights and obligations for barber-surgeons. They had to hold a certain number of bathing days per week,



supported by bath servants and maids. There was competition from privately-run baths, both in a civic and rural context.

Public bathhouses were important social meeting points, but primarily places of hygiene in terms of the ancient definition, which included comprehensive healthcare as well as cleanliness and personal grooming. Understanding of health and sickness in those days was shaped by the theory of humours. In simple terms, balancing the body's four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile) meant good health. Thus, the sweat baths and medicinal bleeding of wet cupping helped to divert superfluous humours.

The number of bathhouse bathing days began to decrease gradually from the 16th century onwards. Fear of contagions and the rising price of wood were just some of the many reasons for this development. Barber-surgeons were to retain their vital role as trained healers for a while to come, however, with skills such as bleeding, pulling teeth and taking care of wounds and fractures.

Always On Call

Rural Midwifery

Midwives were responsible for home births in rural areas and called in when a baby was about to be born. As it was sometimes vital that they be contacted quickly, midwives' houses were often some of the first in the village to have a telephone. The alternative would have been for a messenger, such as the expectant father or a child, to pick them up on foot or with a cart and take them to the house of the woman in labour. In many communities, they were also the first women to have a motorised vehicle – usually a moped. They always carried a midwife's bag, holding all the necessary implements within reach.

Births usually took place in the bedroom and mothers only withdrew to the heated parlour during very cold winters. Female neighbours and relatives were often on hand to help. Midwives organised the hot water and towels used to sterilise the instruments and clean their hands. They attended the birth, provided primary care to the mother and baby and helped with breastfeeding. Afterwards, they came for regular post-natal appointments to monitor the new mothers' recovery and the newborns' development. They also advised the parents in hygiene and sexual matters. Rural midwives remained important confidantes even after childbirth, particularly when it came to gynaecological disorders and childcare.





What a Pigsty!

Human Notes on Animal Hygiene

Animals are naturally clean, but “animal hygiene” is a human invention. The term emerged as part of the curriculum at the veterinary colleges that were opened at the end of the 19th century.

Humans had turned free-roaming animals into dependent livestock, and they had hygiene requirements. The most natural manifestations of living things became the responsibility of humans, who had to dispose of the excrement produced when livestock are kept in stables. In the wild, they wore down their hooves grazing and kept their coats clean and free of parasites; now they needed a helping hand from humans.



Once non-perishable and kept fresh for young animals, milk became a foodstuff for humans and therefore a risky object of food hygiene. Dead animals, which predators and micro-organisms once disposed of without a trace, even became the primary object of human nutrition. This brought with it enormous interest in the health of the animal being consumed and the hygiene of the slaughter.

Livestock is “capital” for farmers, making up an important part of their assets and a vital factor of production. While ailing livestock meant economic loss, a pandemic would cause economic catastrophe and serious health problems for the humans living in close quarters to the livestock. The carcass disposal itself was to become a hygiene challenge for civilisation, providing a living for its very own profession.

From the Privy to Waste Collection

When Did Waste Become Rubbish?

All living things, including plants, leave behind material which is no longer needed for sustenance. Most of it is transformed organically over the course of the seasons, but what remains? What is accumulated? What requires disposal?

When people migrate, there is no need to worry about where to leave excrement or food residues. As soon as they settle and their groups grow, however, it becomes necessary to find methods of keeping the environment clean. Household and stable waste was usually a sought-after, beneficial material. Residues re-entered the energy cycle when tasks such as mucking out, preparing food, sweeping and washing were performed.

Blessed was the town-dweller who could build his domicile and privy above a stream or possessed cultivated land nearby where he could spread manure. Where this was not an option, latrines were built or dried-up wells were filled. The remains found at sites such as these provide a good glimpse of people's habits in those days.

Far more waste, noxious substances and recyclable material remain today. The rubber industry was a forerunner of today's polymer chemistry.

The invention and industrial production of synthetic materials led to a huge accumulation of irreversible residues in the 20th century. Old methods of composting no longer worked. Many plastics were simply burned in furnaces until people became aware of the new toxins released via incineration.



Glentleiten Open Air Museum

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