

**LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME
SEGMENTS POETRY WORKSHOP
MAY 2021 : ABLUTIONS**

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Here is a transcript of the workshop with the activities and images. Scroll down and you will have the information I gave during the session at your fingertips. You might like to grab a cuppa!



EXERCISE ONE: Warm-up writing exercise – Knock! Knock! Who’s there?

SLIDE 1: Front doors

Choose a door from the images. Write a stream of consciousness piece of the thoughts that spring to mind from looking at that door. You might want to describe the dwelling that has that door or describe who lives there: A lone person? A family? Names? Any pets? Habits? Learning the drums? Slamming the front door early in the morning? Playing football in the garden? Hobbies? Anything else?

EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this exercise is ABLUTIONS

Make notes on your thoughts, feelings, memories, anything you find interesting that are evoked by the items and your associations with the theme in general.

We will be using some items from The Butcher Row House Museum in Ledbury as the inspiration for writing. The Museum holds a Boot Bath and other ablution items.

Most of the images and a lot of this information can be found on the website of JMI Bathroom and Kitchen Centre, Bristol:

<https://www.jmibathrooms.co.uk/the-history-of-bathrooms-and-toilets/>

Introduction

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bathroom>

A bathroom or washroom is a room, typically in a home or other residential building, that contains either a bathtub or a shower (or both). The inclusion of a wash basin is common. In some parts of the world, a toilet is typically included in the bathroom; in others, the toilet is typically given a dedicated room separate from the one allocated for personal hygiene activities.

Ancient Baths

Baths are recorded as being in use in three major continents as early as 3000 BC: cold baths in Asia, and steam baths in Europe and North America. Communal baths set apart from living quarters were a common feature of early settlements. Washing was religiously associated with purification, and often required before entry to sacred spaces.



SLIDE 2: Ancient bathing room in Mohenjo-Daro
By 2800 BC, bathing rooms with brick baths, served by drains, had been introduced to some houses in Mohenjo-Daro, which is located in modern-day Pakistan. Ceramic bathtubs and plumbing were introduced to Greek islands by 1700 BC, with alabaster tubs and separate hot and cold water supplies found from 1500 BC. The ancient Greeks introduced communal shower rooms served by pumped water.



SLIDE 3: Public Roman baths
The ancient Romans constructed thermal baths both for public use (such as the ones conserved at Bath) and for the private homes of the wealthy. Public bathing was valued as a social activity, but was kept strictly single-sex, with men and women bathing separately. Public Roman baths often featured hot, warm and cold rooms, with some also containing steam rooms.

Medieval Baths



SLIDE 4: Hammans
By medieval times, the practice of public bathing had largely disappeared in the West, but continued to thrive in the Middle East, where Roman-style public bath-houses were known as 'hammans'. One of the earliest surviving hammans, dating from the 12th century, is situated in modern-day Syria; but Baghdad alone is said to have housed tens of thousands of bathhouses in its prime.



SLIDE 5: Modern Japanese family bathing in a hot spring
In medieval Japan, natural hot springs, rock baths and clay oven baths were used for therapeutic purposes, a tradition that continues to this day.

In the late middle-ages, Roman-style public baths were reintroduced to Europe by crusaders and other travellers to the Middle East who had discovered some of those there.



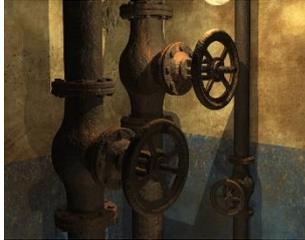
SLIDE 6: The Bankside Stews
Public steam baths known as 'stews' were popular as a social meeting place in medieval England, after 'stewhouses' (more formally known as 'bagnios') were first established on the south bank of the River Thames in the mid-late 12th century. Mixed-sex bathing was commonplace at them. Eating facilities were sometimes provided. In the 15th century, Henry VI ordered the closure of England's stewhouses after they had become used as brothels. Public uproar caused him to change heart, but he only allowed twelve to reopen.

Renaissance Baths

The waves of bubonic plague that blighted Europe repeatedly during the Middle Ages contributed to suspicion that bathing might expose the body to disease, and this fear culminated in England's remaining public bath-houses being closed by Royal decree of King Henry VIII in 1546.

By the late 16th century, public bathing was consequently no longer widely practised in England. It also declined in other western countries from the 16th-18th centuries.

18th Century Developments in Bathrooms



SLIDE 7: Examples of old water supply piping

In the 18th century, the first public water supply networks were installed in London by private companies. They served limited areas of the city, allowing the wealthy to access fresh water on tap. Washbasins were installed in bedrooms and used as part of people's dressing routines, but mainly for washing the head and feet. This was often done in social company.



SLIDE 8: Mineral water spring (overseas example)

18th century doctors sometimes prescribed bathing in mineral water springs. A hospital was opened at Bath in 1742, based around the concept of the therapeutic use of the local spring water.



SLIDE 9: Well-worn vintage example of a clawfoot tub

The clawfoot tub, a classic style of free-standing bath-tub, was designed in Holland in the mid-18th century, and gradually became popular in Britain, being especially commonly found in the late 19th century.

Londoner William Feetham patented the first modern shower in 1767, based on a hand-pump mechanism filling an overhead tank, whose contents were then released by the pull of a chain; but the system was limited by its recycling of dirty water and its use of cold water. More advanced systems using nozzles to distribute the water were gradually phased in from the 1810s to the 1840s, but still worked on the principle of recycling dirty rinse water.

19th century and Victorian Bathrooms

The modern water tap operated by a screwing action was patented by Guest and Chrimess of Rotherham in 1845.



SLIDE 10: Example of a Victorian public bath house

From the mid-19th century, public bath houses were re-established in Britain. By 1915, all English towns would have at least one bath house.



SLIDE 11: *The Silent Highwayman*: Death rows on the Thames, claiming the lives of victims who have not paid to have the river cleaned up, during the Great Stink (*Punch Magazine*)

The Great Stink in Central London in July and August 1858, during which the hot weather exacerbated the smell of untreated human waste and industrial effluent that was present on the banks of the River Thames, prompted action from local and national administrators who had been considering possible solutions for the problem. The problem had been mounting for some years, with an ageing and inadequate sewer system that emptied directly into the Thames. The miasma from the effluent was thought to transmit contagious diseases, and three outbreaks of cholera before the Great Stink were blamed on the ongoing problems with the river.



SLIDE 12: Old sewer

Civil engineer Joseph Bazalgette was commissioned to install sewers in the city. His engineering works were carried out from 1859 to 1865, constructing sewers that fed into the Thames Estuary downstream of London, significantly reducing river pollution in the city itself. Universal fresh water piping was also installed in London after this time.

Once fresh-water plumbing became widely available, showers became linked into it, and stopped recycling dirty rinse water as the earlier ones had done.



SLIDE 13: Soap dish & soap (held at The Butcher Row House Museum, Ledbury)

Advances in the scientific understanding of infectious disease such as the first discovery of a germ by Louis Pasteur in the 1860s, with viruses first being identified in the 1890s, engendered an improved understanding of the relationship between health and hygiene, furthering the demand for modern bathroom technology and plumbing. The use of soap to clean the body became regarded as necessary.

SLIDE 14: Block of Lifebuoy soap & block of Sunlight soap in original packaging; Port Sunlight leaflet (front); Port Sunlight leaflet (back) - all items held at The Butcher Row House Museum, Ledbury



Port Sunlight is a village and suburb in the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral, Merseyside. It is located between Lower Bebington and New Ferry, on the Wirral Peninsula. Port Sunlight was built by Lever Brothers to accommodate workers in its soap factory (now part of Unilever); work commenced in 1888. The name is derived from Lever Brothers' most popular brand of cleaning agent, Sunlight. Port Sunlight contains 900 Grade II listed buildings, and was declared a conservation area in 1978.

It was common practice, especially in poorer households, for a single tub of bath-water to be shared by all members of the same family. Plumbing remained largely restricted to cold water until the late 19th century, with individual pots of water being heated up for use in baths. In upper-class households, this task was performed by servants.

In 1868, the gas-powered instant water heater was introduced by Benjamin Maughan in London, and was used in bathrooms for showers, sinks and bathtubs, but lacked a flue to remove gas. It was superseded in 1889 by Norwegian engineer Edwin Ruud's introduction of the gas-powered hot water storage tank.

Modern porcelain enamelled cast iron bathtubs were introduced in the 1880s by Scottish-born David Buick in Detroit, and soon became popular. Prior to this, thinly painted cast iron, tin and copper designs had proliferated.

Early-mid 20th century bathrooms

The practice of permanent chlorination of the water supply to treat it for infectious agents was introduced in Lincoln in 1905. Free-standing bathtubs would remain standard until the mid-late 20th century, when built-in ones finally superseded them.

The Ledbury Boot Bath



SLIDES 15-17: The Ledbury Boot Bath, housed in The Butcher Row House Museum, Ledbury
The boot bath was originally a dark sage green colour with the date and inscription: "For the use of the poor of Ledbury."

It was always housed in St. Katherine's Chapel and from there taken out and trundled from door to door when the occupant came out and climbed in. At the next house some water was let out and some fresh water added. It was habitually used like this especially at the Almshouse. Work commenced on the restoration of the Chapel but no provision was made to protect the bath. When restoration was well underway it was obvious that to take the bath out of the building was its only salvation. This was done and it was placed in the garden of the Almshouse, where it remained for over two years, protected only by a plastic sheet.

The late Mr Hankins, then living there, in his anxiety to save it, painted it black. Thus the lettering was obliterated and the date lost. No record was kept of it. It was believed to be 1786.



SLIDE 18: Sally Crabtree performing poetry and songs in the Boot Bath at Ledbury Poetry Festival 2018

SLIDE 19: Boot bath at Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk

One of our volunteers noticed a boot bath like this one in Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk. It was green and still had its trolley and appeared only to have been used indoors. In Malvern Museum another such bath can be seen. That makes three that we know of. Have you seen any others? If so, please tell us where. Thank you.

SLIDE 20: Wash Hand Basin and Ewer (held at The Butchers Row House Museum, Ledbury)

Now look at the following poems:

Bath - Amy Lowell

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42993/bath-56d221a8c0d0c>

Turkish Bath - Julia Darling

<https://diamondtwig.co.uk/poems/turkish.html>

Bubble Bath - Gareth Lancaster

https://fizzyfunnyfuzzy.com/poem/bubble_bath

EXERCISE THREE: Ablution Poetry

Write a personification poem from the point of view of a bath. Write your poem imagining the bath is 'alive' and has the same attributes as a human being. What would it say? Think about its function, where it is situated, what it senses of the world around it etc. Memories? What does it think/dream about? Where would it like to be?

Write a poem inspired by the theme that evokes a personal memory for you, maybe involving another person or a personal story.

Write a poem inspired by the history or a story we have looked at today. Think about your response to it and why you felt that way.

Use a form and/or style we've looked at in the example poems eg: a prose poem full of imagery (*Bath* - Amy Lowell) / pared down lines - maybe using "can I suggest" as the opening words (*Turkish Bath* - Julia Darling) / a rhyming comic poem (*Bubble Bath* - Gareth Lancaster)

And, of course, you may write a poem about the theme in your own way and in your own style!

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