

# THE STORY OF SEWERS



Have you ever wondered what happens to your poo once it is flushed down the toilet?

Wessex Water takes the dirty water from nearly three million people and cleans it up, before it is returned into rivers and seas. But it hasn't always been like this.

## STONE AGE AND BRONZE AGE

During this time Britain was very different from the way it looks today. Much of the country was covered in woodland and there were no big cities. There were some settlements in the Wessex region where tribes created hill-top villages, like Maiden Castle near Dorchester. When you needed a poo, you would have found a quiet spot in the woods or put it in holes in the ground. Some



indoor loos have been excavated at Skara Brae in the Orkney Islands of Scotland where there was an important settlement - it would have been very cold in winter!

## ROMAN TIMES

The Romans invaded Britain in 43AD and didn't like living on hilltops. They built forts and towns across England and Wales, including Bath, where they used hot water from underground to create the baths that gave the city its name. Wessex Water now has its head offices in Bath. The Romans diverted streams to create channels of flowing water and built seats with holes over them. Their waste was then washed away to rivers.



## ANGLO SAXONS AND VIKINGS

In 410AD, the Romans left Britain as their empire became smaller. For hundreds of years, England was ruled by Anglo Saxons - the name England derives from 'Angles land'. In the North East, Vikings attacked and took control of much of the country. These peoples were not used to using toilets like the Romans and returned to chucking their waste into rivers or holes in the ground.

## THE NORMANS

In 1066, England was invaded by William of Normandy, from northern France. We now call him William the Conqueror, and he immediately started building castles from where he could control the land. The first ones were wooden but were then replaced by stone castles that included toilets known as 'garderober' for the important people. At Corfe Castle in Dorset, the castle is now in ruins, you can still see the holes where the poo dropped into ditches. Peasants would then load the waste on to carts and take it away. To keep the holes clear, children were used to climb in and scrape away the mess!



Human waste dropped out of these holes.

There was no toilet paper, but they did have sponges on sticks to clean their bottoms!

## TUDOR TIMES

During the Tudor period (1485 - 1603), London and other towns were growing larger. 'Privies' were built on Old London Bridge, which houses shared, and the waste dropped straight into the River Thames. Other houses had chamber pots, which were emptied into the many streams that flowed into the Thames. Sir John Harrington, from Somerset, was godson to Queen Elizabeth I and he invented a 'water closet' which flushed away the Queen's waste!

Many people, however, had to use 'jakes' which were smelly, little sheds containing a wooden seat above a pit. Men with large cloaks and buckets would walk the streets and for a penny, they would let you use their buckets and take away your poo! This started the tradition of 'Spending a penny'.

## THE VICTORIAN ERA

The Victorians really changed the way sewage was dealt with. London and the River Thames was so polluted that many people were dying of diseases like cholera and typhoid and in the warm summer of 1858, the smell was unbearable and became known as the Great Stink. Victorian engineers built large brick tunnels under cities like Liverpool and

London and these took the human waste to treatment works so the water could be cleaned before going into the river. Thomas Crapper became famous for producing flushing toilets which wealthy people had installed in their homes.



## MODERN TIMES

The Victorian sewers made a big difference to public health and many of them are still in use today. However, rivers were still very polluted by human or factory waste and fish could not survive in these waters. In the last 50 years, advances in technology and stricter laws have resulted in water companies like Wessex Water improving the health of rivers and sea, allowing fish and other wildlife to return and making our bathing waters safe.

As cities have grown even larger, huge super sewers are being built to take toilet waste to be treated. As Bristol grows, Wessex Water have built a massive new sewer under the M5 motorway. In London, a new super sewer is being constructed by Thames Water under the city, river and underground train lines.

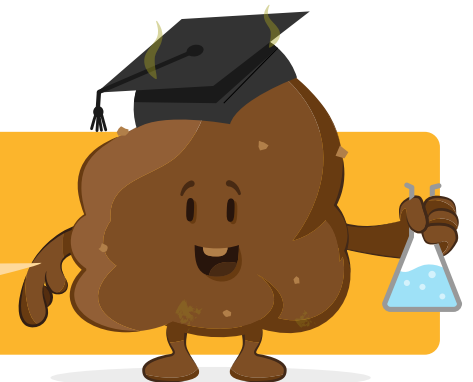
All that human waste has to go somewhere, so Wessex Water removes it from the water and recycles it into a fertiliser that farmers can use to help their crops grow. All the smelly gas can also be recycled and used to generate electricity or as a fuel.

So next time you are sat on the toilet, you might want to be grateful for companies like Wessex Water who deal with all that dirty water and think that your poo could end up helping a farmer!



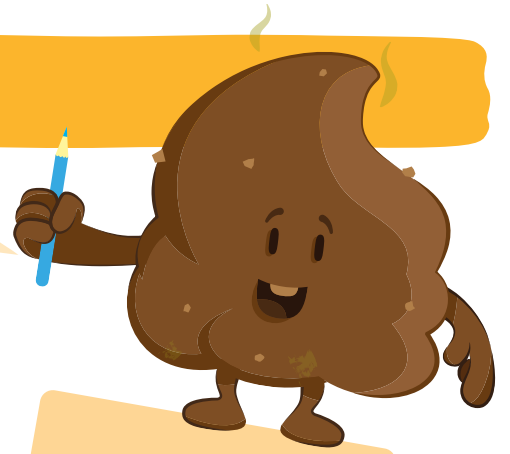
## PROFESSOR PLOP'S AMAZING FACT

The Adi tribe in the Himalayas have special pigs that live underneath their loos and feed on their poo!



# CHALLENGE

Match the facts with the dates



Garderoles built in castles

1861

1596

Sir John Harrington patents the flushing toilet

1st Century

The Great Stink

Thomas Crapper becomes a sanitary engineer

1973

Water Act creates 10 water companies to treat sewage and water

Romans use a sponge on a stick

12th Century

1858

Date

Fact