

# Teeth & Dentistry in Tudor Times



**The care of teeth in Tudor times was completely different to that of today!**

Unfortunately, many suffered severe toothache purely through not cleaning their teeth properly and eating too much sugar.

One particular person famous for having rotten teeth is Queen Elizabeth. She constantly ate sugary foods throughout the day and as a result suffered from bad teeth. She was known for having a “black smile” and many saw this as a status symbol. Others, who were obviously not as rich as the Queen, would blacken their teeth to make people think they were rich too!

## **TOOTH CLEANING**

Some Tudors did take care of their teeth by cleaning them. Teeth were cleaned with water, salt, rosemary or even cuttlefish, rubbed on with cloths, twigs or sponges. Some would use the splayed out end of a twig. Rosemary was often used for its antiseptic properties and people used vinegar as a mouthwash!

## **DENTAL TREATMENT**

Once decay had set in, many had to seek the services of the barber-surgeon. This was someone who would treat all ailments of the body which included removing rotten teeth, cutting hair and even amputating limbs! Teeth were yanked out and if you were rich they were replaced with false teeth made of ivory and bone. The barber-surgeon would visit the rich people in their homes and treat them there. Unfortunately, many of these patients died or became very ill due to infection or they bled to death because the barber-surgeon had no training and instruments used in the surgical procedures were not sterilised properly.

Those who were poor and could not afford to pay for the barber-surgeon, had to visit the local market. There they would find a stall where someone would offer to relieve them of their pain. This was usually a man with tools! Like the barber-surgeon, he had no training and would use carpentry tools to pull teeth out. Obviously there wasn't any pain killers or local anaesthetic to numb the pain like we have today so it was a very painful and frightening experience.

So that passers by would not be put off from visiting his stall, the stall holder would pay someone to sing loudly or play loud music to drown out the cries of pain coming from his customers!

For minor toothache the Tudors would make a paste of rosemary and cloves which they would apply to the tooth, a little bit like a filling. Perhaps the Tudors knew more about teeth than we first thought as cloves are still used in dentistry today. Many filling and lining materials contain oil of cloves as it soothes the nerves of teeth!



**Extracted Tooth**



**Tudor Market**