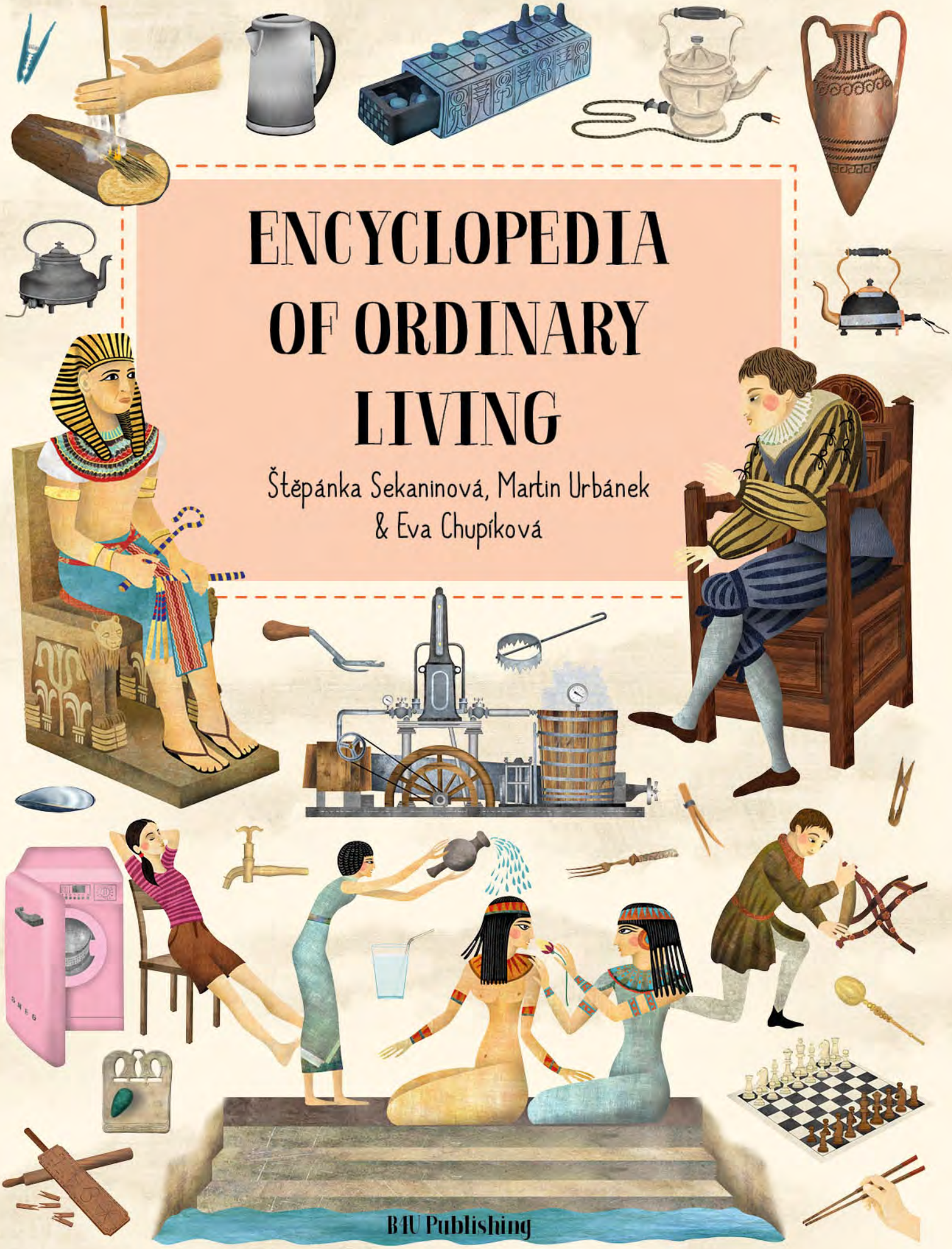
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ORDINARY LIVING

Štěpánka Sekaninová, Martin Urbánek
& Eva Chupíková



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PREHISTORY
3,000,000 BCE–3500 AD

MESOPOTAMIA
c. 3100 BCE–539 BCE

ANCIENT EGYPT
The end of the 4th millenium BCE–332 AD

ANCIENT GREECE
c. 1200 BCE–6th century AD

ANTIQUITY
8th century BCE–476 AD

ANCIENT ROME
753 BCE–6th century AD

EARLY MIDDLE AGES
6th–11th century

HIGH MIDDLE AGES
11th–14th century

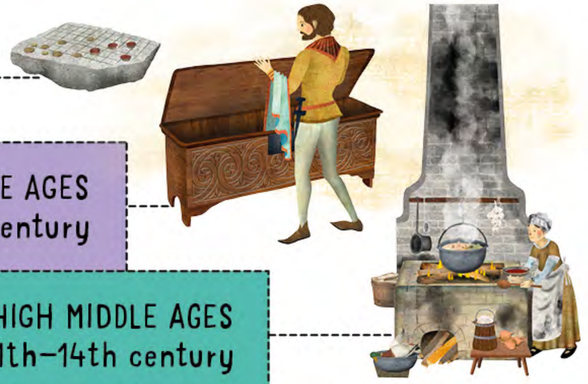
LATE MIDDLE AGES
13rd–15th century

RENAISSANCE
14th–16th century

EARLY MODERN PERIOD
The end of the 15th century–1648

MODERN PERIOD
1648–1918

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY
1918 ...



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Albatros

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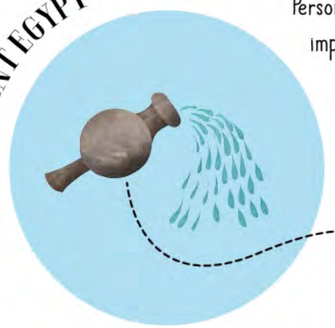
BATHROOM

After several days on the road, you are dusty and bedraggled; basically, you are dreadfully dirty. But what's the problem? Just hop into the bathroom and step into the shower, or else fill the tub and add bath foam or special fragrant salts. You will be spanking clean and as fresh as a daisy before you know it. But people didn't always have a bathroom for their immediate use at home, as we do know.

ANCIENT EGYPT



Personal hygiene was important to the Egyptians.

Ceramic vessel

Washing in the open air

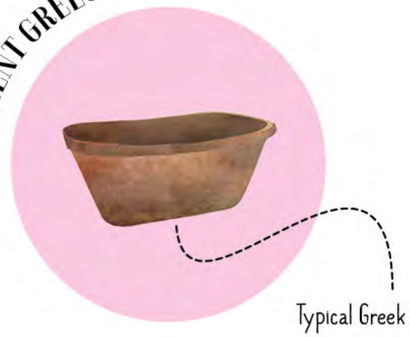
So, how did our ancestors wash? Well, they used the provisions of nature. They ducked themselves in a cold river, pool or stream, or the sea if it was nearby. The luckiest among them enjoyed a refreshing shower in a sparkling waterfall. All this to a soundtrack of birdsong and the murmur of the forest, and with a warm breeze brushing their cheeks. Pretty romantic, you must admit ...

The good old bathtub

Egyptian nobility had bathtubs in their palaces, which they would use several times a day. **Warm water supplemented with goat's or ass's milk and scented with herbs** was great for the skin. Rituals connected with bathing were the order of the day. Egyptians would bathe before retiring for the night, and even before meals, in the belief that the cleaner they were, the closer they were to the gods. When there was no time for a bath, a shower would do.

The Egyptians bathed daily.

ANCIENT GREECE



Typical Greek bathtub made of stone or clay

Greek bathrooms

The ancient Greeks, too, knew that **cleanliness was next to godliness**. Whereas the poorest of the poor filled pots with water for performance of their personal hygiene, the wealthy had special rooms in their palaces for bathing and washing, containing **clay bathtubs and an ingenious system of drainage**. We might say that these were the first proper bathrooms.

Natural sources

Public baths were fed from the natural source of numerous hot springs. If there didn't happen to be such a spring in the vicinity, no problem: the Romans used aqueducts to transport warm saltwater from distant places to their baths.

Hurray for the baths!

The Romans' approach to cleanliness was similar to that of the Greeks. So it will come as no surprise to learn that **public baths** were very popular in ancient Rome. For people of the upper classes, regular visits to the baths were practically an obligation. A communal bath was an important social occasion. Men bathed separately from women, of course.

The Greeks bathed regularly.

ANCIENT ROME

The stove for water heating

The slaves were responsible for water heating

Timeline →

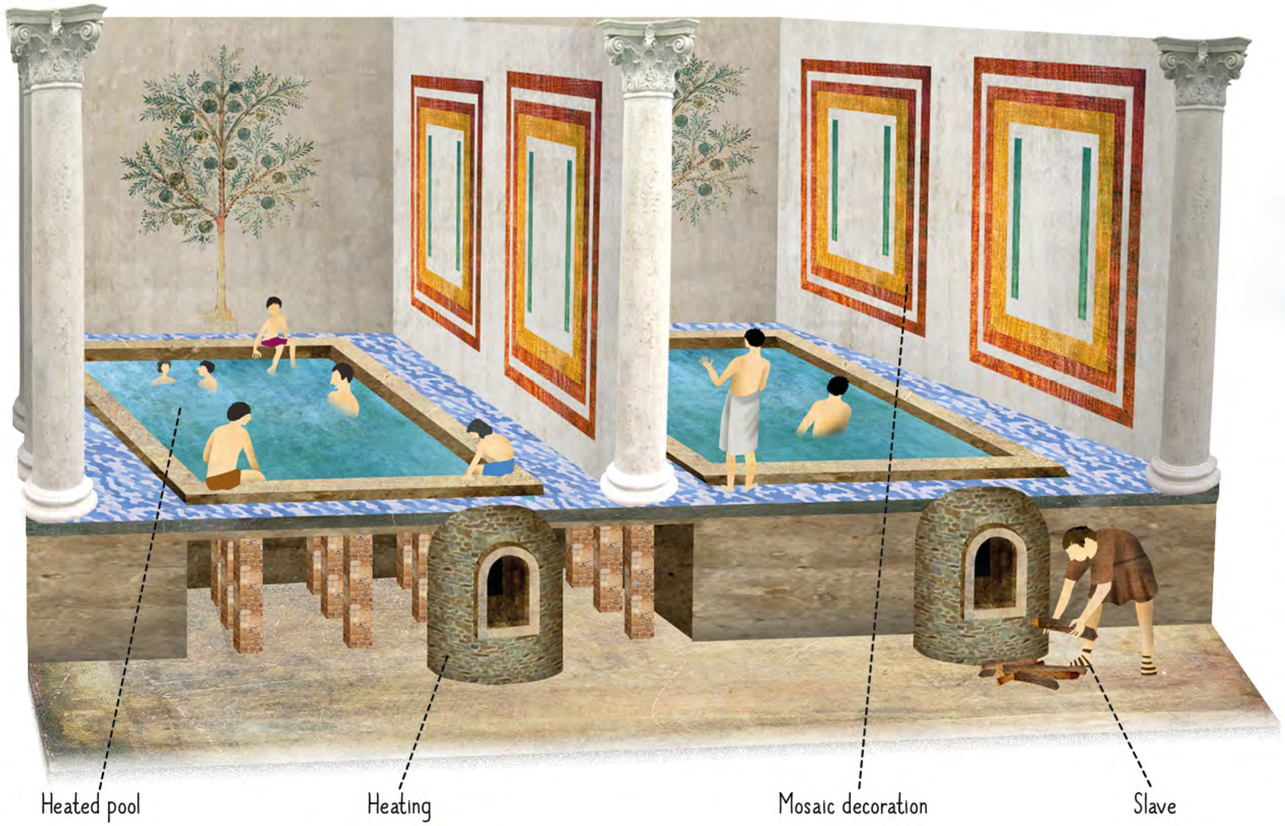
PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT EGYPT	ANCIENT GREECE	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE EAST	MIDDLE AGES	16TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY

Palace bathroom

Although no ancient Roman would have admitted it in public, archaeologists have found that many of the wealthy had bathing pools and bathtubs with a hot-water supply in their palaces. This doesn't mean, however, that these people gave up bathing in public in favour of home bathing. As we said, **public bathing was a social must**.

Bathing in the Middle East

Although the popularity and operation of public baths in ancient Rome eventually waned to nothing, the practice was copied in the Middle East and continued to flourish there. In ancient Baghdad alone, there were around **60,000 public washrooms**.

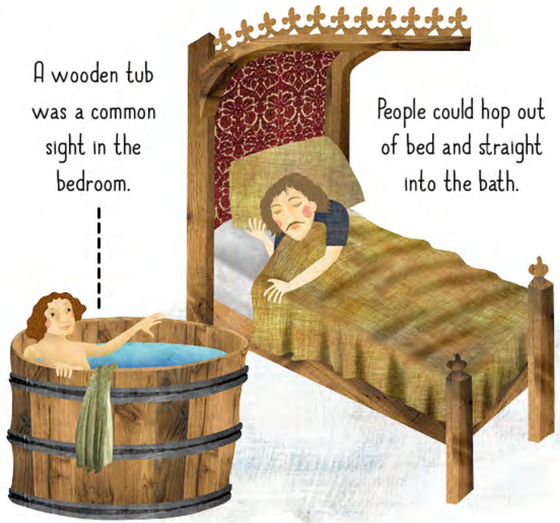


Dinner in the bath

If you were thinking that the Middle Ages were a time of dirt, think again! In the early Middle Ages there were **public washrooms** which admitted bathers for a small fee. They would discuss matters of the day there; sometimes they would even take **lunch** or **dinner**. Whereas in ancient times men bathed separate from women, in the Middle Ages everyone bathed together.

Home bathing

What were private bathrooms like in the Middle Ages? Well, that's just it—there weren't any. Home bathing was done in the bedroom. It was enough to bring in a large wooden tub and fill it with water—which was perfection if you wished to hop into bed nice and clean!



Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT EGYPT	ANCIENT GREECE	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE EAST	MIDDLE AGES	16TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY

Perfume instead of water

Owing to the ban on public bathing and fear of the plague, in the Middle Ages people lost their taste for washing and for building home bathrooms. They believed that **clean underwear kept the body clean**, and so women did an awful lot of laundry. To improve their personal smell, they smeared perfumed oils on themselves.

Hygiene was replaced by clean linen.

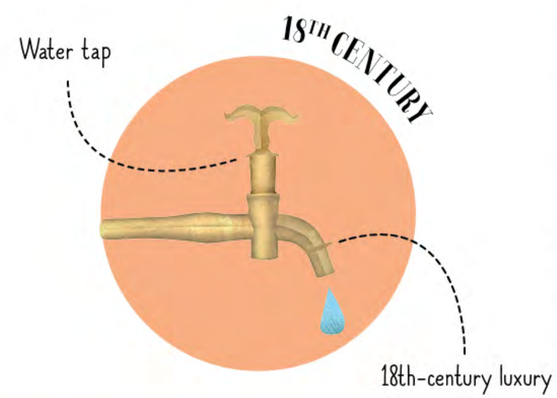
Prototype of the shower. Mr Feetham's idea was made real by French physician François Merry Delabost.

Long live the shower!

You may wish to make a note of the year 1767. For this was when an Englishman called **William Feetham** invented the world's first mechanical shower. Water was pumped into a tank suspended from the ceiling. Then all you had to do was pull on a chain for a stream of water to fall on your head and gush over your body, a cue for you to burst into song. In the history of personal hygiene, this was a giant stride indeed!

The miracle of the tap

The custom of keeping one's body away from water persisted through the 17th century and into the 18th. Then came the first **sewerage systems** in big cities, providing the wealthy with a **supply of fresh water** to their homes. Turn on the tap and hurray—running water to wash with!

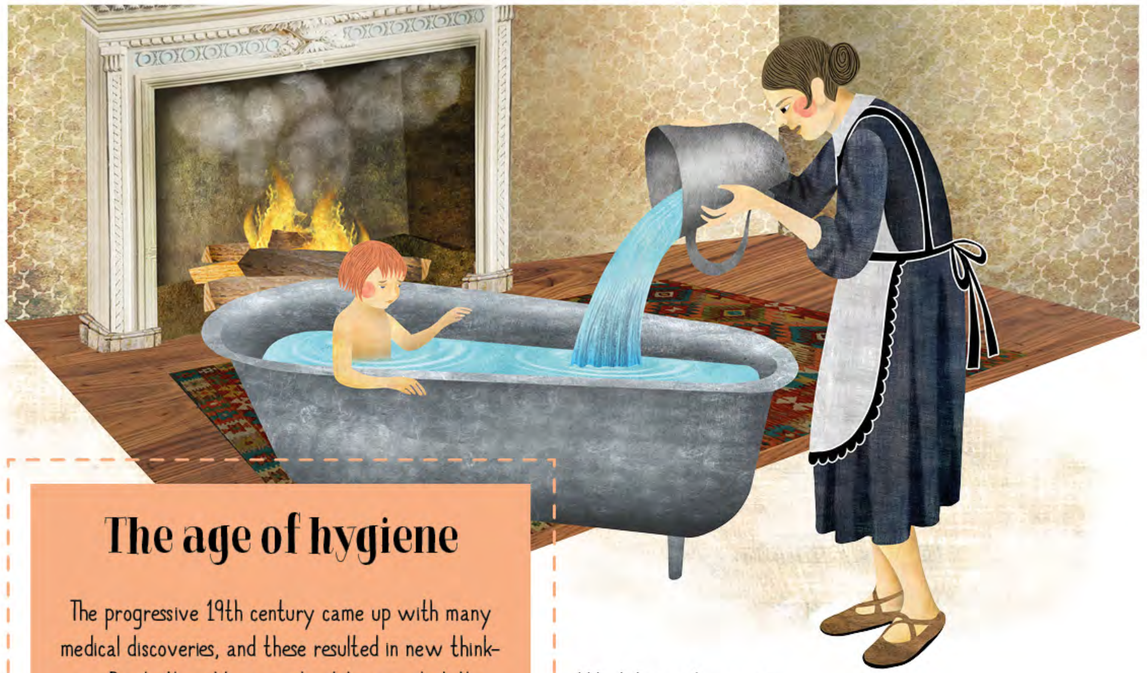


To the bathroom or the bedroom?

All the things we perform in the bathroom today were done in the 18th-century **bedroom**. Hands and feet would be washed in a basin on a stand in a corner of the same room in which make-up was applied and hair combed and brushed at a dressing table. All this could be done in the presence of friends and miscellaneous visitors—for what is privacy after all?

Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT EGYPT	ANCIENT GREECE	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE EAST	MIDDLE AGES	16TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY

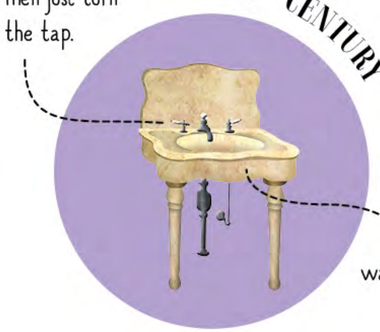


The age of hygiene

The progressive 19th century came up with many medical discoveries, and these resulted in new thinking. People thought again about hygiene, but this time in terms of disease prevention. Those who could afford it began to prioritize improvements to their home bathrooms. Plumbing was developed that brought water straight to their bathtubs and washbasins, heated on its way in gas or electric heaters. Wooden tubs gave way to copper ones.

Want to wash in warm water? Then just turn on the tap.

19TH CENTURY



How the poor washed

Despite their toil-filled days, poor people did find time to wash. But the luxurious private bathrooms were not for them. In the tenement buildings in which the poor lived, toilets and bathtubs were shared. Each time they took a bath, each member of a family had to make do with the same water as the others. The less than wealthy could also use public baths, where they would wash under one of a line of showers.

We have a bathroom too!

By the early 20th century, even homes rented by working-class families had their own bathing and toilet facilities. But these fell well short of the bathrooms of today. Before the 1960s, many families had to use an **outside toilet in a shed in the yard**. When they wished to bathe, they had to make do with a portable tub placed in front of the fire.

20TH CENTURY

Look how lovely it is!

In the years between the First and the Second World War, slowly but surely the importance of the bathroom continued to grow. The bathroom **became the house-wife's pride and joy** with much the same status as her kitchen. Look at this lovely room I can relax in each evening! she seemed to be saying to her visitors. Look at the gleaming bathtub, and those tiles! And while those visitors envied her, they would dream of an even lovelier bathroom.

Our own modern century

We have seen that a bathroom of one's own was beyond the wildest dreams of most of our ancestors. Today, we can enjoy bathrooms with underfloor heating, lights that switch on and off automatically, shower heads with various water-jet options, anti-fog mirrors, you name it. So while we bathe in luxury unimaginable just a few years ago, let us remember that in the beginning—in prehistoric times—was a waterfall ...

Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT EGYPT	ANCIENT GREECE	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE EAST	MIDDLE AGES	16TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY

WASHING MACHINE

It often stands in the bathroom, and when it is in operation, it purrs. What is it? A washing machine, of course! A special machine that at the touch of a button turns dirty laundry into beautiful, clean, fragrant laundry. Our ancestors had a tougher time of things, however: for them, doing the laundry was hard labour. Let us take a look at how they did it.

A pair of ancient Egyptians wringing out the laundry.

Prehistoric washing laundry.

Prehistoric laundry

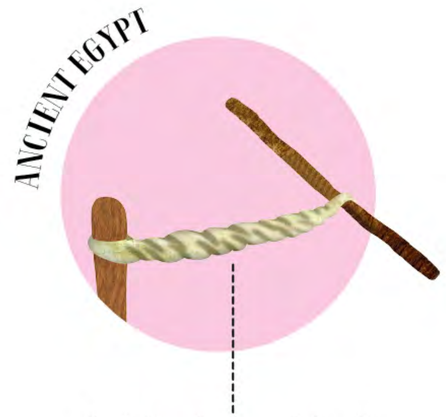
Soon after humans took to wrapping themselves in animal skins, they were faced with a need to keep their primitive clothing clean. How did they do it? Well, they headed to the nearest **stream**, whose fresh water washed away all the dirt. They had to hold tight to their coat to make sure it wasn't washed away with the dirt.

Feet are the perfect tool

Believe it or not, many ancient Egyptians **used their feet** to do the laundry. That's no joke! Indeed, the hieroglyph meaning 'doing laundry' shows two feet in water. People have **a lot of power in their legs**, so stamping on clothes is a great way of getting dirt out of them.

Force of well-trained arms

Legs weren't the only limbs called into action, of course. The laundry was **twisted** and **beaten** by the hands and arms, too. As this work required greater strength, it was performed only by men. At regular intervals, the men would put the laundry of the whole village in special baskets, carry it to the water and toss it in. To ensure that all dirt was got out, it is said that they made use of a substance called **natron**. Whereas smaller items were washed in **tubs** made for that purpose, bed linen was carried to the **Nile**. In those days, the river was home to a great many crocodiles.



Twisted laundry required strength.

Fullone uses his feet

Fullone washes laundry

Doing the laundry with urine?

The Romans had special places for doing laundry, known as **fullonicae**, providing work for strongmen known as fullones. **Fullones** would wash whatever they were given to wash. First, they would soak the laundry in a large vat, in which **bleach**, **lye** and **urine** (yes, urine!) were added to the water. Second, they would rinse the laundry by stamping on it. Finally, they would sluice out the **cleaning agents** prior to rinsing the laundry in clean water.

Urine collection vessel

Let's use urine!

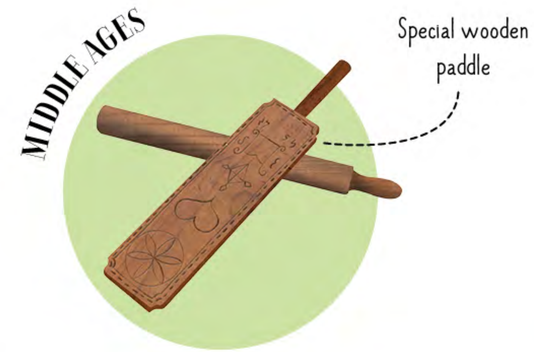
Urine contains **ammonia**, an important ingredient for the washing of laundry. As a result, there was a constant need for a great amount of it. But how was it delivered to the fullonicae? Quite simply, as it happens. The fullones would leave empty jars in the streets near their places of work. When someone came upon one of these jars at a moment of need, he or she could donate their water to the laundry. Long live clean, snow-white laundry!

Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT EGYPT	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE AGES	17TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY

A big wash

In the Middle Ages, doing the laundry was an **extremely laborious** activity which could take several days to complete. It would take 15 hours just to soak the laundry; this was done in lye, which the laundresses had to keep warm. Only after this stage could the washing proper begin, with the **beating out of the dirt** with a special wooden **paddle**. This was followed by wringing and drying. It is hard to imagine that women looked forward to the event of doing the laundry.



Spinning drum

It is 1691, women are still doing their laundry on the riverbank or in a wooden tub, unaware that the day when all the effort will be removed from this activity is approaching. One of the first steps was taken by an Englishman **John Tyzack**, inventor and designer of the first washing machine. In fact, it was an **ordinary drum, set spinning by a hand crank**. This basic principle persists to the present day. It was a while before this invention could be enjoyed by housewives, however. At first, it was used in textile factories only—for the washing of fabrics made dirty in the production process.

A washboard at last!

In the mid-18th century the **washboard** first saw the light of day, bringing much relief to laundresses. Even so, they had to toil over the board, and the work still made their hands sore and bruised. A washboard could be made from one of many various materials, including porcelain, stone, glass, clay, wood and metal. Advances in technology delivered the **mechanical washboard**, which with the assistance of the laundress would wash laundry in a rocking motion. The great disadvantage of washboards was the friction they generated, which wore out the washing very quickly.

Timeline →

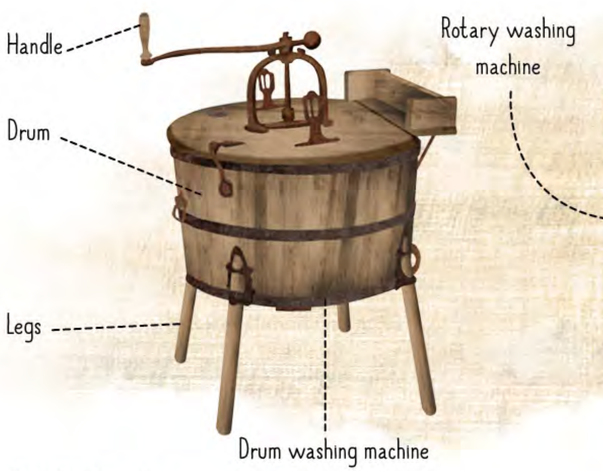
PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT EGYPT	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE AGES	17TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY

Machine with washboard

Believe it or not, the ordinary washboard inspired the next step on the road to our modern way of doing laundry. An Englishman called **Stendler** invented something that made the housewife's day a little easier—a **wooden laundry machine with a washboard**. While the laundresses rejoiced, the laundry suffered, just as it did with manually operated washboards.

Century of invention

In 1851, **James King** came up with something completely new—the **drum washing machine**. To get the drum moving, the operator only had to turn the handle. Just a few years later, in 1858, **Hamilton Smith** invented the **rotary washing machine**. Both these machines were hand-operated. Once the wash was done, the laundress had no choice but to unload the wet laundry and wring it out, a laborious task in itself.

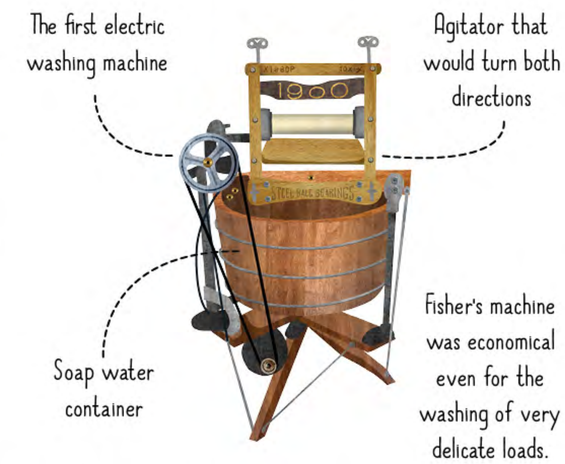


Hurray for electricity!

The 20th century was still getting into its stride when, in 1906, the American Alva Fisher invented the first **electric washing machine**. Hurrah! By the end of that year, a significant improvement was made to it: the **water was heated in the machine itself**. That sounds pretty normal to us, doesn't it? In those days, however, it was a revolution! The first electric washing machine was a harbinger of the automatic washing machine, which first saw the light of day in 1951.

The world's first manufacturer of washing machines

In 1874, American **William Blackstone** produced a **'high speed rotary washing machine'** with the comfort of his own dear wife very much in his mind. Over time, this machine would find its way into many American homes. Although it washed like a dream, it had one great drawback: the water it used had to be heated in a separate container on the stove.



Washers that dry

See how far we have come from the river, the wooden washtub, the paddle and the rough-and-ready washboard! These days, the super-modern washing machine in our home can select **how much water it needs** depending on laundry load, **heat water to a specified temperature** to suit particular fabrics, and **gently wring out water**; some washing machines **work as driers**, too.

Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT EGYPT	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE AGES	17TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY

ADDITIONS TO BATHROOM

Clothes peg

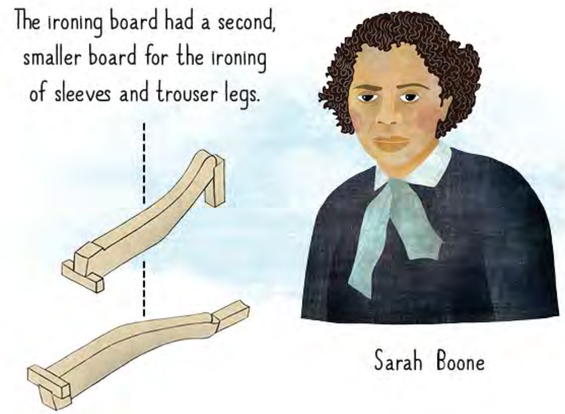
When we hang washing, we secure it to the line with a clothes peg to stop it flying away. Such an ordinary thing, you might think. The first pegs were—you've guessed it—wooden. They were made of a single piece of elastic wood in the shape of a 'V' or a 'U'. The homeland of these oldest pegs is England, their makers members of the **Christian Quaker movement**, whose devotions included small-scale handicrafts. In 1774, after a long period of persecution, the Quakers left England for America, where they continued to produce their clothes pegs.

Solon E. Moore

Let us stay with America and the clothes peg. Having benefited from the simple Quaker clothes peg, from 1832 American housewives made use of a peg with a wooden screw. Twenty years after that, **David M. Smith** from Vermont invented a **peg whose two pieces were joined by a spring**—an invention that in 1887 was improved by **Solon E. Moore** to create the peg we know today. His pegs would keep the washing on the line in the strongest wind, plus they were easy to mass-produce. Thanks to Mr. Moore, the world's first peg-making factory was established.

Ironing board

Valiant **Viking women** probably used one of the **first ironing boards**. It was a pretty simple affair; laundry was placed on a flat piece of bone and pressed with heated stones. Not at all complicated, but effective nonetheless. Later, women would iron on the kitchen table, or on a board placed on two chairs. In 1858, a **W. Vandenburg** and a **J. Harvey** patented an ironing table for the **pressing of sleeves and shirts**.

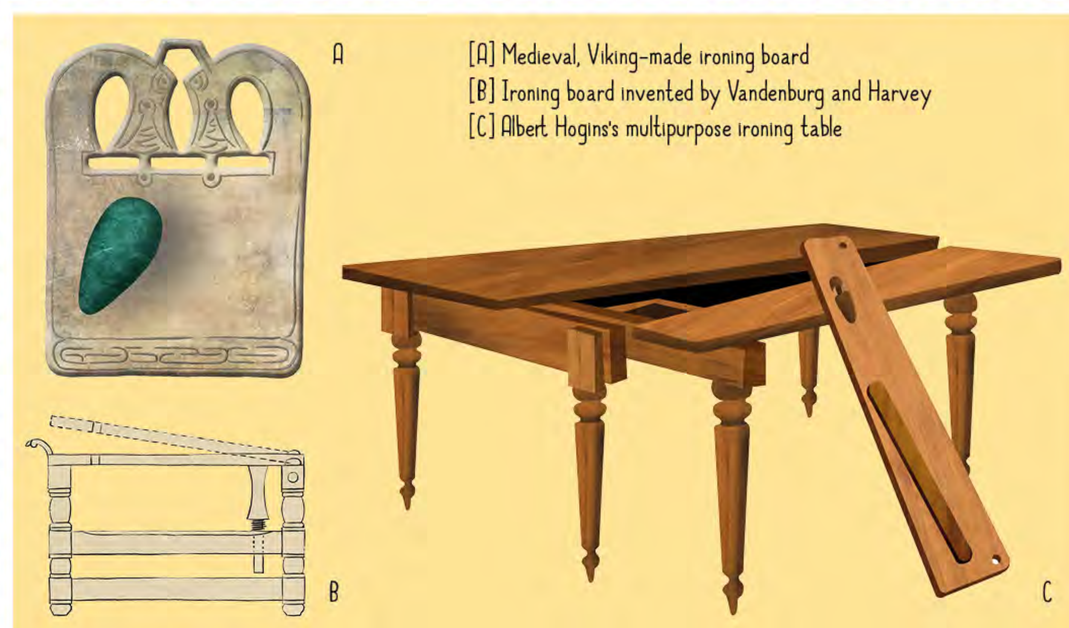


Which board is best?

Before long, there were several kinds of ironing board to choose from. In 1875, Canadian John B. Porter came up with the first **foldable**, **portable board**, with a detachable part for the pressing of sleeves and trouser legs. Four years later, American Albert Hogins invented the **multipurpose ironing board**, which was equipped with a special drawer for the storage of blankets.

And the winner is ... a woman!

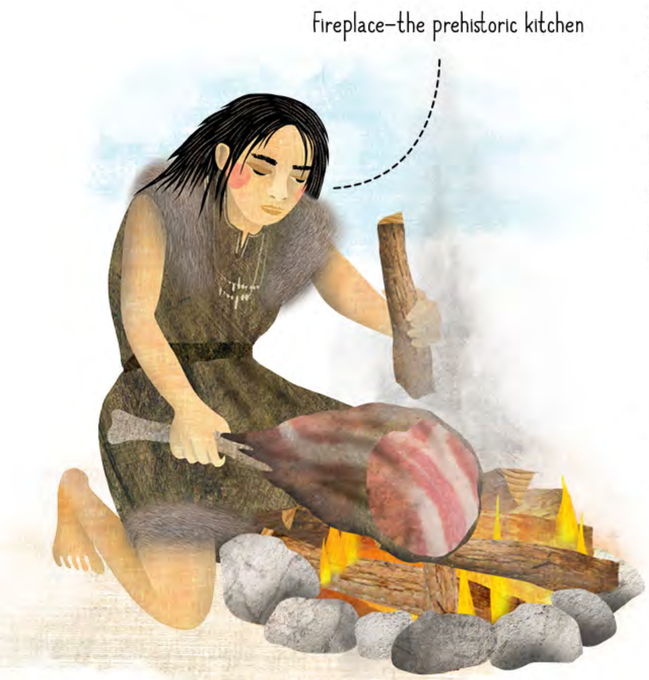
The competition for best ironing board was won by **Sarah Boone**. In 1892, she obtained a patent for a board which was narrow and slightly curved, so facilitating easy pressing of more difficult-to-iron women's garments. The narrowness made it a snug fit for a sleeve or trouser leg, which could then be pressed smooth on both sides. Let us say, then, that Sarah Boone is a gold medallist.

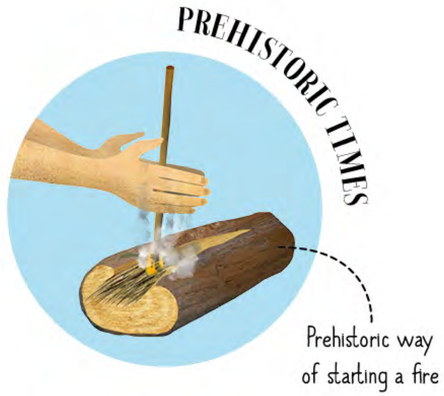


[A] Medieval, Viking-made ironing board
[B] Ironing board invented by Vandenburg and Harvey
[C] Albert Hogins's multipurpose ironing table

KITCHEN

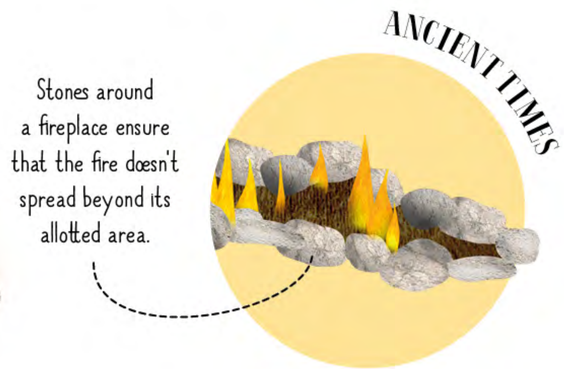
Large or small, the kitchen is at the heart of every home. In the kitchen, parents dance merrily around the cooker, working magic. While the pots and pans bubble contentedly, treats and delicacies take shape. Once the abracadabra work is done, the house or flat is filled with delicious smells. It is then that Mum, Dad and their lively little ones sit down at the table and tuck in. As they eat, the cutlery clinks, the food vanishes from the plates, and the kitchen is filled with pleasure and story-telling. These are every-day stories, of what has happened in the lives of Mum, Dad and the kids on this ordinary day.





Cooking in prehistory

How lucky we are to have this fire, which, with a little care and attention, will serve us all year round! Prehistoric women might have said this as they checked that the mammoth roast was done right. It needs a little longer, they might have said then, as they patiently returned it to the fire. When their husbands came in from the hunt shortly afterwards, the meal was ready to serve. The very first kitchen was quite simply a fire **ring in a cave**, either taking pride of place at the centre or hidden in a corner.



An ancient rarity

The homemakers of ancient Greece had their kitchen in the **middle of the yard**, where everyone could admire it. Not only was the cooking done there, so, too, was the eating. In antiquity, the kitchen was surrounded on all sides by the house's other rooms. The reason for this was purely practical: first, it was easy to reach for all who lived there; second, the heat produced by the cooking **kept every space in the house**—from the master bedroom to the guest rooms—**nice and warm**. But if you are thinking that every house had a kitchen, you are very much mistaken. Not everyone could afford such luxury. There were large kitchens on the edges of Greek cities for use by the general public.

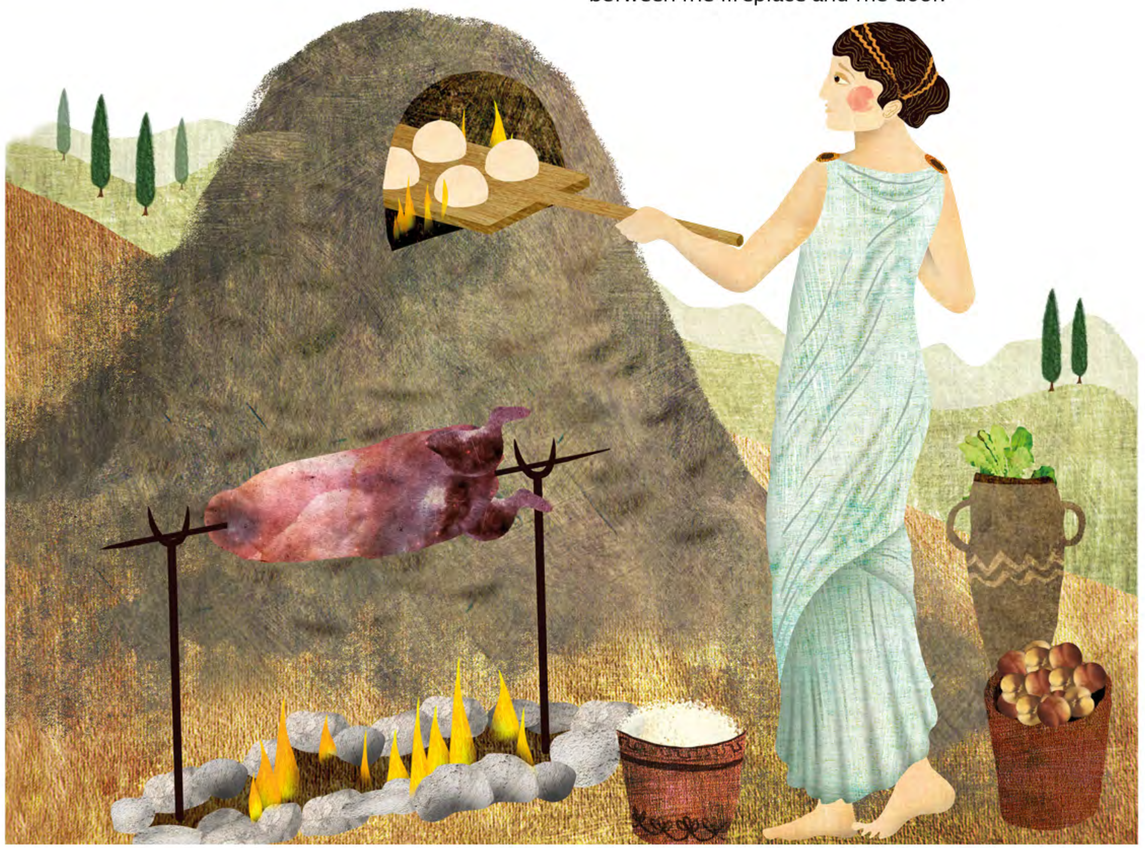
Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES | ANTIQUITY | EARLY MIDDLE AGES | LATE MIDDLE AGES

In the Ancient Ages, public kitchens were built beyond town centres for a simple reason: our ancestors were loath to pollute their surroundings with smoke from the ovens. Public kitchens relied heavily on slaves, whose job it was to handle the heavy copper utensils.

Black kitchens

How smoky it is in here! Guess which period we find ourselves in? That's right, this kitchen is in the early Middle Ages. It has an **open fireplace and a hole in the ceiling where we might expect a chimney**. This explains the smoke-stained walls, and why we might call this a **'black kitchen'**. In the manor houses of the time, this grimy room was kept out of sight. In the dwellings of ordinary people, who were crammed into a single room, the kitchen took up a small space between the fireplace and the door.



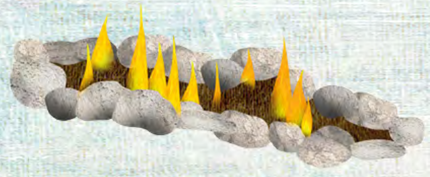
A chimney in the house made things much nicer for the cook, as it kept the kitchen clean and cosy. In the 19th century or thereabouts, the kitchen gained a stove, to which were later added a refrigerator, a water supply and a waste pipe. From the mid-20th century on, kitchens underwent rapid modernization. Kitchens of today have very little in common with the open fires and smoke-stained walls of yesteryear!

Hurray for the chimney!

In the later Middle Ages, people put a **chimney** in their roof. This allowed them to enclose their fires in an **oven** or a **furnace** in the corner of the room. The kitchen of a noble family was a presentable room with a separate dining room. But what of ordinary, poor people? Well, the neediest among them would be cooking over an open fireplace in a 'black' kitchen space for centuries yet; for them, chimneys were the stuff of dreams.

Timeline →

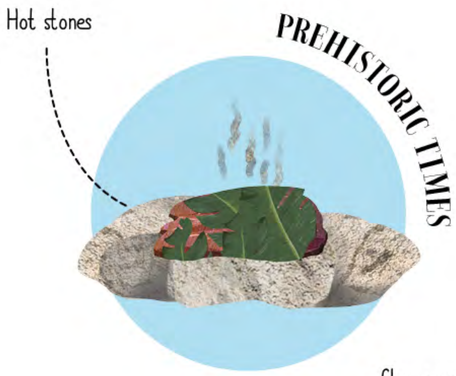
PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANTIQUITY	EARLY MIDDLE AGES	LATE MIDDLE AGES

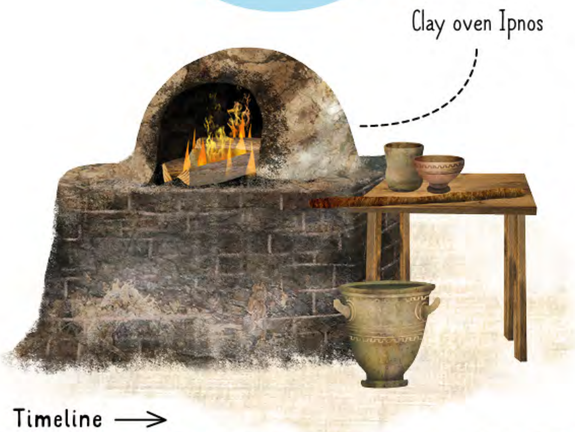


COOKER

The prehistoric cooker was basically a **fireplace**. It was set either in a slight depression in the ground or within a ring of stones. Initially, the only function of such a fireplace in the heart of a cave was to provide heat. It was first used to heat food around 100 BCE. Before long, prehistoric humans came up with more sophisticated uses for fire as they learned to tame it for their needs. For instance, they would lay slices of meat wrapped in **green leaves** in the **fireplace depression** on a layer of hot stones—to delicious effect.

Meat was laid on heated stones, at the edge. The roast soon smelled delicious.





Fire at the heart of the home

The oven, cooker, stove—whatever you wish to call it—remained as an arrangement of stones around a **fireplace** for a long time. It was given pride of place at the centre of the dwelling. Cooking pots were laid on stones. The cook had all she needed near at hand. Such a stove may appear primitive at first glance, but it was used to boil, bake, fry and smoke food. What more could a cook ask for!

Baking in ancient times

Human development continued in leaps and bounds, and progress was reflected in kitchen appliances. Take a look for yourself at ancient Greece, where modern women prepared meals in **Ipnos** clay ovens, which were heated with wood. The **portable oven** was another innovation from ancient Greece (from the 17th century BCE).

Inspired by the Greeks

The ancient Romans drew inspiration from Greece when equipping their kitchens. Some of the solid ovens they built from stone, brick and ceramics have survived to the present.

The ruins of Bakery in the Roman city in Pompeii

Timeline →

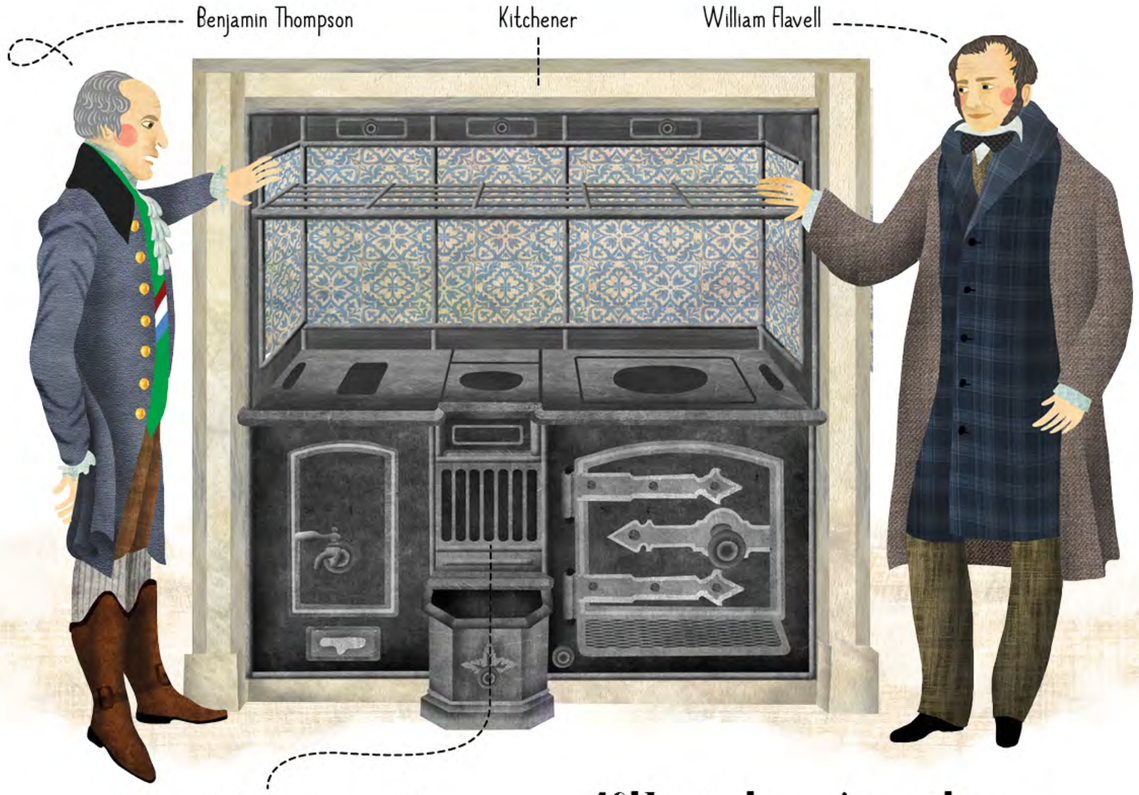
PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT GREECE	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE AGES	15TH – 16TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	PRESENT DAY

The good old cauldron

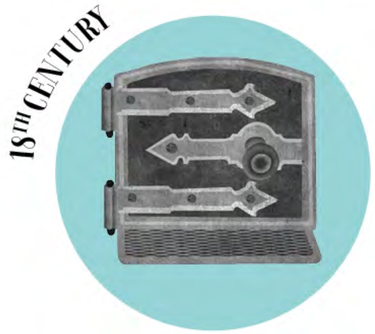
In the Middle Ages, all cooking was done on an **open kitchen fire**. Pots with lids were placed on a trivet in the fireplace. If there was no trivet, a **cauldron** on legs was used instead. Alternatively, pots were suspended over the fire and the cooking could go on like that till the cows came home. If the weather was nice, everyone was glad to move operations to the outdoor fireplace. You can imagine that food prepared in the open air to the sound of birdsong tasted a hundred times better. In the Middle Ages, an oven was used for breadmaking only.

On top of the Russian stove

The so-called 'Russian stove' became popular in households in the 15th and 16th centuries. Not only was **cooking** done in it, but it also **provided heat for the whole room**; and those who so wished could **sleep** on top of it. There's nothing better than being lovely and warm at night.



The improved, Rumford fireplace, with a single source of fire at its centre.



18th century inventors

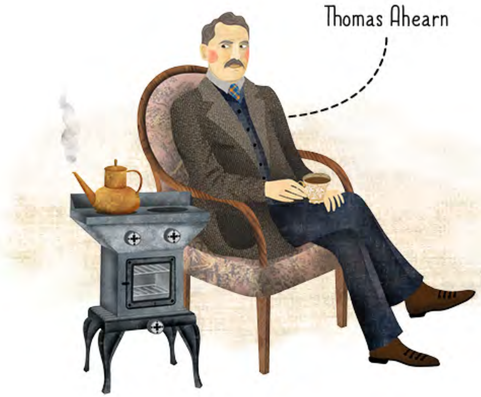
For a long time, stoves and ovens remained much as they were. In the 18th century, however, a certain Count Rumford invented the kitchen range and potato soup too! Rumford—whose birth name was **Benjamin Thompson**—improved the cast-iron stove to such a degree that a single source of fire was able to **heat several pots at once**, all the while **keeping the room warm**. The cook could regulate the temperature under each pot and pan as she chose. There was a drawback to Rumford's invention, however: it took up so much space that only those with a large kitchen could install it.

Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT GREECE	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE AGES	15TH – 16TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	PRESENT DAY

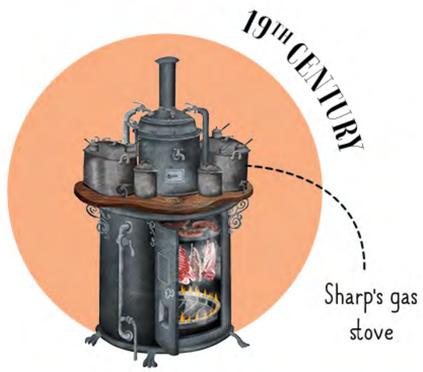
Century of steam

Count Rumford's invention surely did much to inspire **William Flavel**. In 1830, Flavel launched the super-modern **Kitchener** range. Made of cast iron, it fed on solid fuel. Like Rumford's range, the Kitchener could boil, bake, fry and heat from a single source, all at once. Flavel's range was smaller than Rumford's, however, allowing keepers of smaller kitchens to dance merrily around the room while they worked.



Long live natural gas!

The name of **James Sharp** is one you will wish to remember. James Sharp was a factory owner who loved his wife very much—so much, in fact, that he invented a gas stove in her honour. Rather than continue to hear her complaints about how black coal dirtied her hands, he took the matter into his own, so to speak. From 1825 on, Mrs Sharp cooked happily on her husband's invention, her hands now white as snow. But many of her contemporaries were less impressed with it. Not only was gas an explosion hazard, but by the standards of the time it was terribly expensive.



Tamed lightning

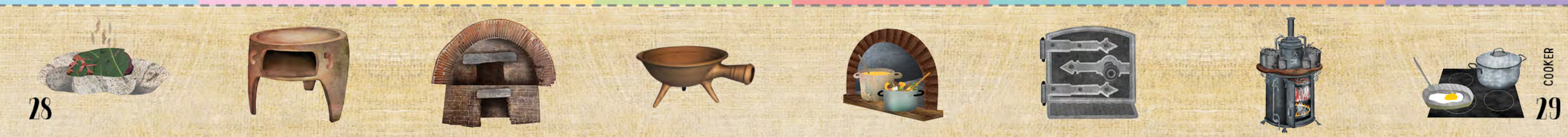
After Canadian Thomas Ahearn presented his new electric cooker to the world in 1883, excitable journalists wrote that the supper was prepared by tamed lightning. Just a few years later, in 1908, this appliance underwent a few minor adjustments at the hands of Emil Rathenau; soon after that, it became a feature in most forward-thinking households.

A modern kitchen

In our own ultramodern age, gleaming cookers show off their perfection. Those who prefer gas can delight in an **all-gas cooker.** Those who can't make up their minds may choose a **combo cooker**, with gas-powered hobs and an electric oven. Fans and lovers of electricity can opt for an **all-electric cooker.** I wonder what housewives of ancient and medieval times would have made of all this choice ...

Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT GREECE	ANCIENT ROME	MIDDLE AGES	15TH–16TH CENTURY	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	PRESENT DAY

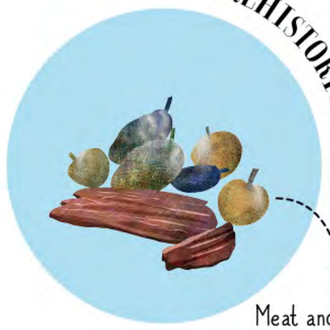


REFRIGERATOR

We keep yogurt, cheese, milk, fruit juice, eggs, ice cream, together with other good things to eat and drink that need to be kept cold, in a well-ordered refrigerator. A fridge is a kind of magic box which is, it is fair to say, an integral part of every single kitchen today. How else could we keep our groceries fresh? How else could we keep them from spoiling? It may seem to us an ordinary thing, but a fridge is a great invention that we couldn't do without. So how did people keep food chilled in the dim and distant past?

Chilled supplies were important on days when food was scarce.

PREHISTORIC TIMES



Meat and fruit were stored in teh cold caves.

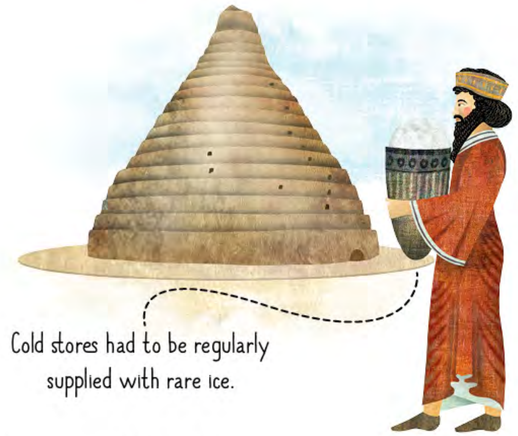
Where with meat?

Our earliest ancestors had to work hard for the food they ate. They **hunted, dug up** roots, **gathered** wild fruit and chomped nuts. Fortune didn't always smile on them: times of plenty alternated with times of hunger. They learned to deal with this by creating stores for winter **in imitation** of their animal friends. Stored nuts will last a long time. But what about meat? This was a recurring problem for prehistoric humans, which they may have solved by chance. Stored at the very back of the cave, which was its **coldest part**, a mammoth rump would last longer than if stored closer to the fire.

ANCIENT PERSIA

Ancient cooling pits

By antiquity, people knew more about keeping food cool, and they behaved accordingly. The ancient Persians built the first cold stores, special **chambers dug into the ground** which they filled with ice and snow delivered for the purpose. The longer these remained in their frozen state, the longer the food packed along with them was preserved. In the middle of the desert in the scorching Persian summer, you can imagine the benefits of this. The cooling system used was more than simple. Channels in these ancient refrigerators **held water from thawed snow and ice**, which evaporated to **keep the fridge's contents cool.**



Cold stores had to be regularly supplied with rare ice.

The ancient Greeks and Romans, too, were quick to understand the benefits of keeping food cool. They kept imported ice in boxes which they stored in pits lined with wood and straw for insulation. Used in this way, the ice thawed very slowly.

Ice and wells

The ancient Chinese, too, used ice to chill their food. They kept the ice in special containers, which were at first **ceramic** and later of **copper**. And where did the ancient Chinese go for their ice? Well, every December, as regularly as clockwork, a special unit of eighty soldiers set out for snowy climes, where they chopped away at and gathered as much ice as they could carry. Unlike the wealthy ruling classes, poorer folk could not afford a neat 'fridge'. They kept their food stores chilled in **wells**, in baskets lowered to the bottom on ropes. Hardly rocket science, but very effective.

ANCIENT CHINA

Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT PERSIA	ANCIENT CHINA	MIDDLE AGES	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY	PRESENT DAY

The advantage of the cellar

In the Middle Ages, food was kept cool in extensive **cellars and large underground rooms**. Stores were packed in ice and snow gathered in the winter months for use in spring and summer. As for special rooms lined with ice all year round, these were no longer as popular as they had been in ancient times, not least because they were expensive to maintain; only a rich man could engage a caravan of merchants to travel great distances for ice, a precious, scarce commodity. Cellars **deep in the ground** were a simpler, far cheaper solution.

So what did people who weren't rich do when they wished to keep milk and meat fresh for future use? Some built a special wooden shed close to the site of a spring, storing food in the cold water, so keeping it fresh and unspoiled for longer.

Ice pits

It was enough to find a spot on a riverbank which didn't get much sunlight, dig a pit there, and line the pit with sawdust and ice. Meat and other perishable food tended to do very well down there. At a castle, such an icehouse would take the form of an extensive cellar. Wealthy townspeople of this period enjoyed the use of luxury freezers, special boxes which would be filled with ice by tradesmen known as 'icemen'.

MIDDLE AGES

Ice supplies for storage food.

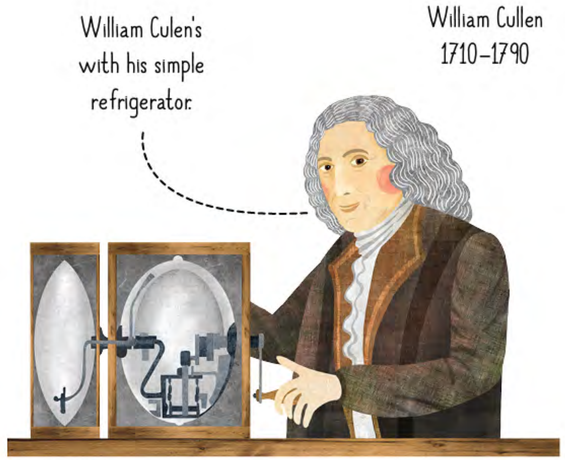
Timeline →

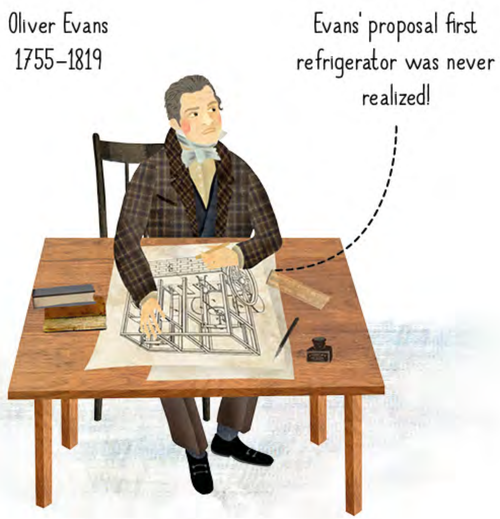
PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT PERSIA	ANCIENT CHINA	MIDDLE AGES	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY	PRESENT DAY

REFRIGERATOR

First artificial freezing in the world

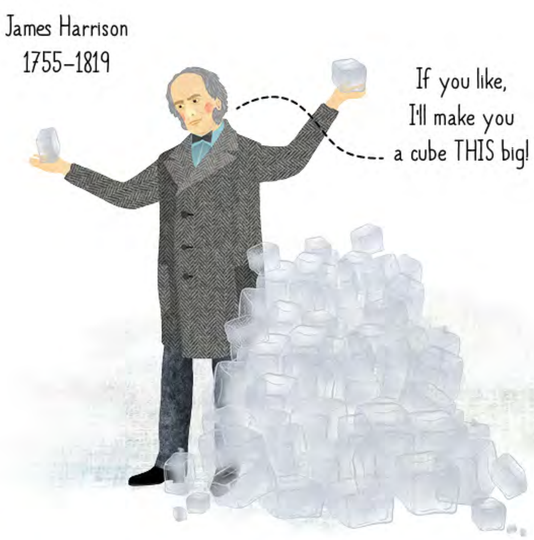
In the early 18th century, Scottish physician and chemist **William Cullen**, a well-travelled man of the enlightenment, determined to figure out how to freeze food without the need to import expensive ice from high mountains. He finally came up with a special appliance which was **cooled** to form **crystals** of artificial **ice** by the turning of a crank. The simple refrigerator was composed of a pump that compressed diethyl ether, a colourless, flammable liquid with a low boiling point.

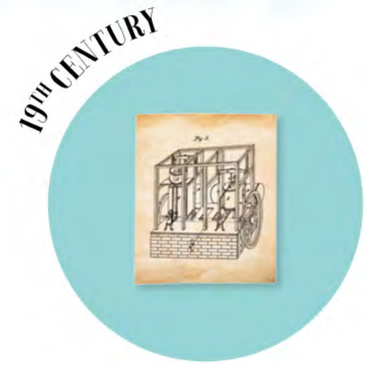




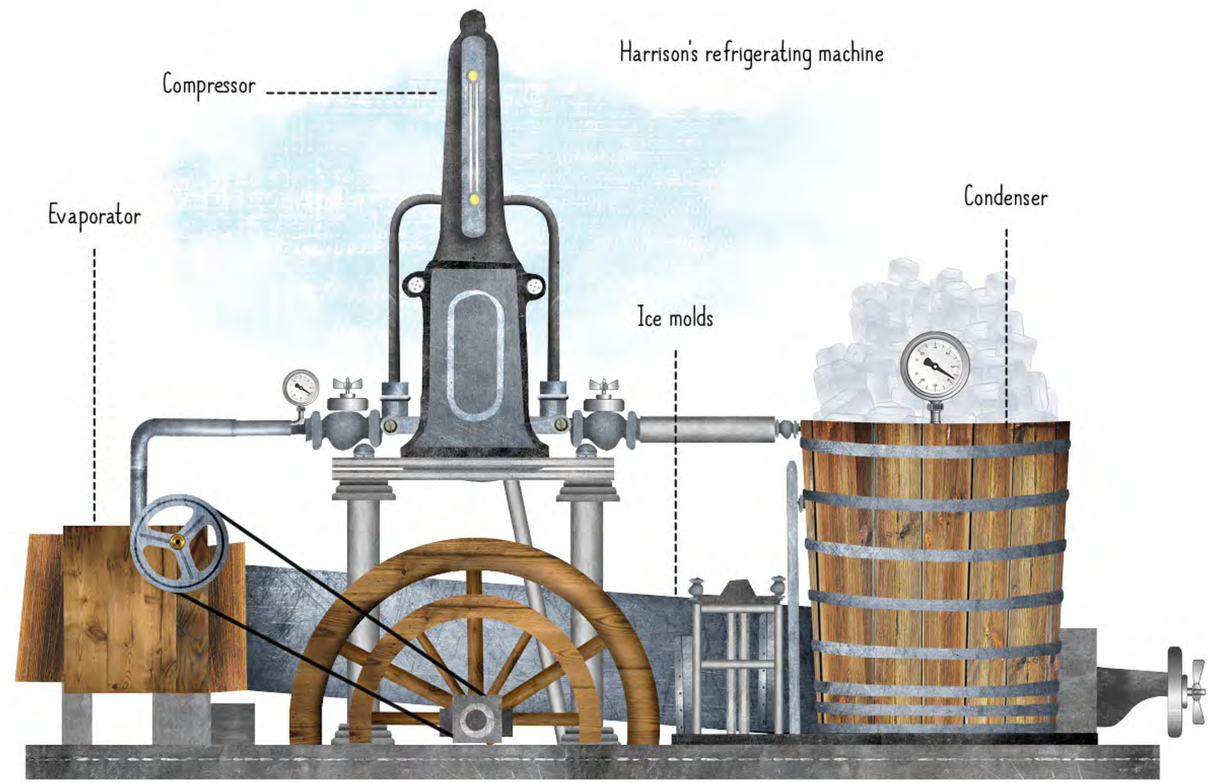
First refrigerator

What a useful thing a proper refrigerator would be! said the American **Oliver Evans** in 1805. And he set about designing the world's very first. Unfortunately, Evans's fridge never saw the light of day. It wasn't until fifty years later that the first fridge was produced, by **James Harrison**. That incredible ice machine could produce almost **three tons of ice a day**—so hats off to Mr Harrison! It had one serious drawback, however: it was so large and bulky that to place it in a kitchen was unthinkable. It could be installed only in a factory hall.





The Scot James Harrison's inventions didn't end with the refrigerator—far from it. Another dream he realized was installation of a cold room for storage of meat on a ship. Unfortunately, the idea didn't work out: the ice melted on the voyage, and all meat supplies were ruined. In their early days, the refrigerator and the deepfreeze didn't always have it easy.



Timeline →

PREHISTORIC TIMES	ANCIENT PERSIA	ANCIENT CHINA	MIDDLE AGES	18TH CENTURY	19TH CENTURY	20TH CENTURY	PRESENT DAY

Written by Štěpánka Sekaninová & Martin Urbánek
Illustrated by Eva Chupíková

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