

Beauty through the ages

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Teeth whitening and anti-wrinkle treatments were as sought after in Renaissance times as they are today, a historian claims.

Jill Burke an expert in art history at the University says women in the [Renaissance](#) used make-up and a range of [beauty](#) secrets to improve their appearance.

Dr Burke is researching a number of popular beauty regimes used by renaissance women which show that some things never go out of fashion - a smooth face and hands, a hair free body, white teeth and fresh breath, and bright lips and cheeks.

Dr Burke joined art historians, literature and [herbal medicine](#) experts at a study day in Edinburgh to look at the culture of cosmetics in Renaissance times and to make up some cosmetics recipes.

Researchers have found that women in the 15th -17th centuries used a number of recipes collected by a renaissance beauty expert called Caterina Sforza in her “Book of Experiments”.

Many of these were later published in “Books of Secrets” a series of manuals with advice on general health, beauty and homemaking. According to Dr Burke advice from the manuals were passed across the generations.

Many of the tips focused on how to disguise bad complexions caused by diseases of the time like smallpox.

Advice included the use of white lead for an opaque white complexion, red sandalwood for blusher and lipstick and the use of oats, lemon juice and egg white for face masks.

Other recipes advocated the use of quick lime and arsenic for hair removal and fresh walnut peelings for hair and skin dyes.

Although the cosmetics were mainly used by women, researchers say that the men of the time used hair and beard dyes, as well as cures for baldness.

"This conference will increase understanding of the kinds of materials that may have been available in renaissance homes and how ideas of beauty have developed over time," said Dr Jill Burke.

Provided by University of Edinburgh

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