

SEA BATHING

Do you know what this is?

It's a bathing machine. The illustration shows a bathing machine used by King George III in 1789. You can see a full-size model by the King's Statue on Weymouth seafront.

It wasn't just the king who used a bathing machine. 200 years ago, everyone had to use one to go in the sea.

It was against the law not to!



WHAT WAS A BATHING MACHINE?

A bathing machine was like a little beach hut on wheels where you could get changed. A horse pulled the machine out into deep water where you got ready for your dip.

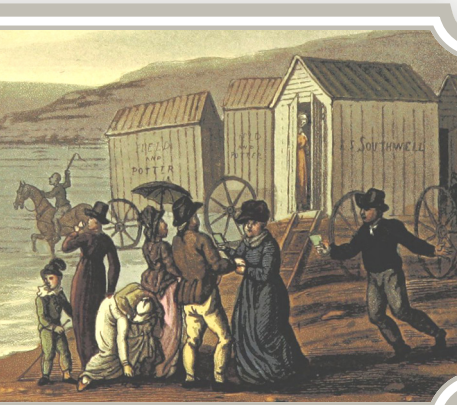


There were no swimming costumes back then. Ladies wore long, heavy petticoats called flannels that covered up most of their body, but men wore much less—often nothing at all!

It's not surprising that they kept the men's and ladies' bathing machines away from each other.

Some machines had an umbrella. This was an awning that was fixed over the door facing the sea, which could be lowered to make a little tent that enclosed an area of water, so you could go in the sea with no one watching.

Are you wondering how anyone could swim in such a small area? But most people didn't actually swim. They bathed or were dipped into the water by an attendant—a bit like having a bath in the sea.



WHEN DID YOU GO FOR A DIP?

You had to go sea bathing first thing in the morning, between 6am and noon, and you weren't allowed to have any breakfast before you went.

After your dip, you were supposed to go horse riding or

walking to warm up before you ate. Even if the weather was hot, you couldn't take another dip later in the day. That was strictly against the rules, as doctors thought it could make you feel depressed.

HOW MUCH DID A BATHING MACHINE COST?

In 1816, it cost about a shilling or 12 pence to hire a bathing machine. If you wanted to hire someone to help you bathe, that cost another 6 pence. That might not sound a lot, but it would cost about the same as a ticket to a theme park today.

There were over 40 bathing machines lined up on the sand every morning for people to hire.



WHY DID PEOPLE GO IN THE SEA?

Tourists started coming to Weymouth over 250 years ago when it became fashionable to visit the seaside. Lots of people came because of their health. Doctors believed

that seawater was good for you and could help make you better if you had stomach ache, or bad skin, or... well, almost anything. *They wanted you to drink it too!*

GEORGE III GOES SEA BATHING

George III suffered from an illness which sometimes made him act very oddly. People did not understand mental illness back then and called him Mad King George.

In 1788, he was so ill that people thought he would have to stop being king. However, George got better, and the next summer, he came to Weymouth for a holiday to bathe in the sea. He stayed in the house that is now The Gloucester hotel, not far from The Gresham.

When he went sea bathing for the first time, a funny thing happened. He climbed down the steps of his bathing machine. As they dipped his head under the water, the door of the next bathing machine burst open, and a band started playing God Save the King!

