



## Customs & Mannerisms

Customs and mannerisms in Queen Elizabeth's time were dedicated by fashion, flirtation, survival, superstition and mannerisms of the time.

### **Men Greeting Men**

As they mucked about on the street, people would often run into acquaintances. If they were upperclass men, they might grasp each other's right wrist with their right hand. This not only was a form of greeting, but it also served two other purposes: to occupy the others hand thus rendering him unable to draw or attack and to check to see if he had any weapons up his sleeve. The custom of patting each other on the back further protected the men from any undisclosed weapons. If they were peasants passing on the street, they might simply nod at each other and call out "God ye good den" or "God go with you." The important thing to remember was that no matter what the class, people would expect to be treated according to their stature or station in life. Therefore, one had to be very careful not to offend one's betters. However, calling a peasant lord might ensure that he would try his utmost to help you along. The rule of the day was speak well, speak long, but don't say anything important.

### **Women Greeting Women**

Women greeted other women with the latest craze from the Continent-the "French Kiss". Women would face each other and lightly grasp each other by the shoulders. Then they would kiss in the air on either side of the woman's cheek three times. One would never actually touch the other's cheeks, for reasons of courtesy as well as fear of contracting an illness. As always, compliments and flattery were a part of any good greeting.

### **Men Greeting Women, and Vice Versa**

When a gentleman would greet a lady, it was very important to make a good impression. Therefore, he would bow to her in Renaissance style. He would

present his right leg forward and put his left leg behind. Then he would bend his back (left) leg, and bend at the hips, keeping his right leg straight. He would sweep his arms open as he bowed, making sure to keep his head raised, maintaining eye contact with the lady. The proper response to this bow would be for the lady to curtsy. First she would place her left leg slightly behind her. Then she would lightly grab her skirts and bend at the knees, keeping her body straight. She would raise her skirts only high enough to keep them off the ground. It was not considered proper for a lady to show her ankles or legs. She, to would keep eye contact with the gentleman. An especially dashing or romantically inclined man might then proceed to attempt to kiss the lady's hand. He would offer his hand, palm facing down. If the lady welcomed the kiss, she would place her fingers lightly on top of his hand, then the gentleman would ever so lightly kiss the lady's middle finger, between the first and second knuckle, making sure to maintain eye contact.

### **Making a Leg**

The calf of a man's leg was a very important focal point in Renaissance fashion. Men took every opportunity to show off this physical attribute. Men wore stockings and short pants. They would often stand and "present" their leg forward, turning the foot outward so as to show off their calf. This practice was called "making a leg". If a man was especially proud of his calves, he might stand with a foot on a chair, table or rock, so his calf would be that much more prominent.

### **Escorting**

It was considered a great scandal to show affection in public. However, gentlemen frequently escorted ladies whenever they were out walking in public. As with everything, there was a proper way for this to be done. Men and women would never walk around holding hands, palm to palm, as they do today. This was considered quite scandalous. First of all, they believed the germs that could be spread by rubbing palms with someone could prove fatal. Secondly, if one was willing to risk such a health hazard, they must surely be quite intimate with that person, and such a bold and public display of affection was not considered respectful of each other's reputation. Therefore, the proper way to be escorted would be for the man to offer his right hand, palm facing downward, then the lady would lightly place left hand on top of his. Then, side by side, the lady on the right, they would proceed wherever they were going. It was very important for the lady to be on the right side. A gentleman always carried his sword on his left side,

because he was right-handed (see “Men greeting Men” previous). If the lady was on the left side and the gentleman was forced to draw his sword to protect the lady, he would slice her in two. Also, it would show disrespect to her for the lady to be on the left because that might mean that the gentleman did not think enough of her to defend her honor. A simple saying to help remember this rule is; “A lady on the left is no lady at all.”

### **Food & Drink**

People of this day knew nothing about sanitation (they’d never heard of germs, nobody had ever seen one!) The water was dangerously polluted, so most people drank a very low alcohol brew called “small beer”. Much milk was consumed, especially skimmed and buttermilk-cream was needed for other things. Ale was consumed on special occasions and only the royalty and the very wealthy drank wine.

In this time, people thought that the proper foods for humans were meat, bread, dairy, eggs, and a few varieties of fruit. Meats were preserved with salt, sugar or spices, but meat, which we would consider spoiled, would be gratefully eaten. Usually, meat came from elderly animals and was tough, so no one expected the best cuts. In spite of these drawbacks, they learned to use herbs, spices and slow-stewing methods. But only the very rich could afford meat regularly in their diets and they considered vegetables, which grew from the Earth, to be beneath them.

Many were even suspected of producing ill humors. Peasants couldn’t afford to be picky. Their diets consisted mainly of vegetables, plus lots of eggs and cheese, which they referred to as “white meat”.

In spite of economic differences, peasants were the better nourished of the two classes.

### **The Fork**

Another new trend from France was the use of the fork as an eating utensil. The fork was fairly common among the nobility but was not very widespread among the peasant class. Peasants continue to eat with their fingers, as they feared the forks tines were some sign from the devil (perhaps they were afraid to put the devil’s pitchfork in their mouths).

### **Education**

Common people of this time were usually illiterate, so there was a need for someone who could read and assist in matters of business. The church was about the only non-noble group who routinely educated their people so most villages were provided with a clerk (or Clark) to fulfill this function.

### **Renaissance Men & Women**

Both men and women provided functions in the society of the day. While the culture was essentially male-dominated, a woman carried the clout of a “dowry”, or the goods, lands, money she brought to the marriage. These she controlled herself, to benefit the household. The dowry was also an insurance policy against ill treatment, for if she were mistreated, she could leave and take the property with her and leave her husband much poorer! Besides managing the household, one of the woman’s duties was to provide as many free farm laborers, in the form of children, as possible. Between a high infant mortality rate and unreliable birth control, she usually managed to oblige. Boys were always easier because girls had to be provided with dowries and that could get expensive!

### **Evil spirits/Good Luck Charms**

Both peasants and nobles alike firmly believed in evil spirits and the power of good luck charms to ward them off. People often sewed tiny bells or coin-like metal disks (known as bezants) to their clothing in the belief that the noise would scare away evil.

### **Witches/Possessions**

People readily believed in witches and in possession by evil spirits. There were various signs that one could use to ward off the evil that emanated from such evil persons. One sign was to make the sign of the cross when passing by an evil person. Another was to cross your fingers (making a small cross) and point them at the person they passed. This is most likely where the custom of crossing one’s fingers for good luck comes from.