

HAVE YOU TRIED A

badgers' hair toothbrush?

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This personal hygiene set contains everything a wealthy gentleman or woman of the early nineteenth century needed to look after their teeth at home. It reflects the improvement in people's personal hygiene that had begun in the previous century, partly owing to the advice of doctors and the newly emerging profession of dentists.

Toothbrushes had begun to be mass produced at the end of the eighteenth century, using bone for the handles, but for those who could afford a personal hygiene set handles were made from more expensive materials such as silver gilt and mother-of-pearl **1**. The owner of such a brush would not have wanted to throw it away once the bristles were worn out so replacement pads of bristles were also available **2**. They were made from natural fibres such as horse hair, pigs' hair or, more expensively, badgers' hair, set into bone or ivory. Toothbrushes were still a novelty so instruction on their use was needed. In 1810, John Fuller, a London dentist, explained: *'Violence should never be used...[teeth] should first be brushed gently across, then upwards and downwards, so as to make the hairs of the brush pass between them.'*

This hygiene set has a double toothpowder box **3**, a design that first appeared in the 1780s. Perhaps the two compartments were for different types of powder. Sadly the dentifrice chosen to go into this box may have done more harm than good. Thomas Berdmore (c.1740 to 1785), dentist to George III, brushed a single tooth held in a vice with one of the popular powders of the day. Within an hour, he claimed, he had worn away the enamel.

This set also contains two scalers with differing ends **4**. Just as with some oral hygiene sets today, patients were expected to remove tartar themselves. Another tool in the set is a combined earwax scoop and

toothpick with three blades safely stored inside the mother-of-pearl handle **5**. The frequent references throughout history to toothpicks and their users, from Nero to Elizabeth I, shows they were popular long before the fashion for toothbrushes took hold. The Talmud recommends a splinter of wood and the Ancient Greeks used wooden toothpicks and quills and straws.

Tongue scrapers, too, have often been an essential item in a person's toilet set. They came in many different designs including the simplest of all designs, a strip of silver or

silver gilt that the user had to bend into a bow between thumb and index finger **6**.

All these items are contained within a beautiful velvet-lined leather case complete with mirror **7** to help with the oral hygiene regime. It is probable this set was never used because the instruments are inlaid with brass shields **8** ready to be inscribed with a crest or monogram of the user but are unadorned.

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