

Northwich u3a – September 2024 meeting



This month's speaker was Matthew Lepp who introduced us all to 'Tiger Muffin Soaps'. Matthew, in partnership with his sister, has been making soaps since 2002. Initially, they made only 5 soaps but now they make over 30 and also make bubble bath, shower gel, bath bombs and hand cream. The name 'Tiger Muffin' came from nicknames that their mother bestowed on them as children and Matthew claimed that he was 'Muffin'!

Matthew's first demonstration was soap making. He used a 'soap base', heated it to melt it and then added a little water, a fragrance and a colour. The mixture was poured into moulds and sprayed with alcohol (to remove the bubbles and make it attractive). Hey presto – we had pink, sweet pea soap!

A very amusing and interesting history of cleanliness followed. Intriguingly, people have been making soap for about 2,800 years. Archeologists have found soap works in the East. These works used goats' fat but unfortunately, although the soap they made was good for washing clothes and surfaces, it was not kind to skin and was far too strong, burning and blistering the skin. The Egyptians, Romans and Greeks used the same method but kept their bodies clean by covering themselves in oil and scraping it off (and using a handful of sand if particularly dirty!). Around 1066 in Castile, Spain, there was a change in the way soap was made. The innovation was olive oil and this meant that the softer soap could be used on skin. In the UK in the Middle Ages, the peasants used soapwort which grows near fresh water and can be crushed to form a lather. Interestingly, they also used conkers – the white part rubbed under water will also lather!

Also in the Middle Ages, lots of people headed to local bath houses called 'stews', where they would sit for however long they wished while 'stovers' would give them a haircut, a shave or lance their boils! Opinions about bathing changed over the years and it is recorded that Queen Elizabeth I bathed annually as it was thought that sitting in water was not a good pastime! Also, Mary, Queen of Scots bathed regularly in white wine as she thought that it was good for her skin.

Matthew's next demonstration was to make a bath bomb. He mixed bicarbonate of soda with citric acid, sweet almond oil, fragrance and colour and created a blue, lavender bath bomb.

The first industrial scale manufacture of soap was by William Colgate in New York, 1806. William Proctor and James Gamble and B.J. Johnson were also US soap manufacturers. In 1807, in the UK, Pears was founded in London, though there were many soap manufacturers in the North West, for example, Lever Brothers in Port Sunlight and several in Liverpool, Runcorn, Widnes, Warrington and Manchester.

Matthew's final demonstration was making shower gel. He mixed liquid crystal with boiled, cooled water, fragrance and colour. Then it was thickened with a little salt before being bottled.

This was an extremely entertaining presentation with Matthew giving us a constant stream of facts, anecdotes, history and jokes and we all enjoyed it immensely!

Our next meeting will be at Owley Wood Recreation Club, Weaverham on 16th October at 2pm. This will be the AGM followed by Neil Smith's 'Have Guitar will Travel'! Come and join us! For more information about Northwich u3a and its activities, please see the website.