

# What were medieval towns like? How clean were medieval towns?

Medieval towns were small, dirty and smelly places. Parliament passed laws to clean up the towns. But people did not take much notice of these new laws. They still threw their waste into the streets. The sources below help us to understand what towns were like in medieval times:



## Source **A**

Ebgate Lane used to be a public path until Thomas White built toilets on the first floor of the houses. The filth from these toilets fell onto the heads of the passers-by.

**From Court records of 1321**

## Source **B**

The streets and lanes must be cleared of objects such as dung. Each person must clean away the filth from the front of his house.

**From the White Book of London in 1419. It was a book of rules to clean up the streets.**

## Source **C**

The floors of the houses are made of clay covered with straw. Under this there are layers of dirt which have never been cleaned. The dirt is a mixture of beer, Grease, bones and the body waste of men and animals.

**Written by a foreign visitor to London in the early 1500s.**

## TASKS

1. In Source A, why was it risky for people to walk along the lane next to the houses?
2. The houses and streets in Source B and C were very different from our houses and streets. Write down two things about them which were different:
3. Source C was written a long time after Source B. How do we know from Source C that the rules in Source B did not work?
4. There was a lot of disease in medieval towns. Why do you think disease spread so quickly?