

9th June 2021

Boots

“Boots – boots – boots – boots – movin’ up and down again.”

Rudyard Kipling, Boots

Outside the wedding chapel of Carberry Tower, a mansion in Midlothian now run as a wedding venue, stands something which was common in the 18th and 19th centuries when Carberry was built and restored. When the grounds of the estate were given to farming rather than the formal gardens of recent times, the workers would have been on foot, or on horse-drawn farm-carts, and what is now a smart chapel would once have been a stable-block. So, outside the door is a solidly built boot-scraper. In fact, there are four of them, sufficient for a several labourers or farming gentry to scrape the mud from their riding or working boots before they went anywhere else. And these *fancy* boot-scrappers have handrails for support.

Many of the houses in the post-Victorian street where I once lived still had a boot-scraper built into the wall by the gate. No one wants a coachman or a house-owner taking dirt from the streets into a fine home.

I have a friend who had a new light-coloured carpet laid in her front room. She was *desperate* to make sure it stayed clean. So everyone who visited had to take their shoes off before they set foot in the room. No boot-scrappers, but the fearsome instructions of our host did the same job.

The 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* contains these words as a prayer from Psalm 19 – often used by a preacher as a preface to a sermon:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart: be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord: my strength, and my redeemer.

Not “boot-scraping”, cleaning off mud from the streets and fields. But proper preparation, nonetheless, making sure that words and hearts are clean for the House of God. But why confine such cleanliness to churches or acts of worship? Doesn’t *everywhere* we enter require of us the same kind of preparation? Leave the messy parts of yourself outside. Scrape off what might tarnish the beauty and welcome of the place you are about to go into. That way you’ll not take your mud and dirt from one place to another, and ruin a pristine carpet – or anything else, for that matter.

A prayer for today

*Are my words, and my meditations, and my prayers clean enough?
Or do I need to pause for a bit of scraping before I move on? Amen*