

# Inspector Rex's History Snippet #14

## Groom of the Stool

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groom\\_of\\_the\\_Stool](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groom_of_the_Stool)

The **Groom of the Stool** (formally styled: "Groom of the King's [Close Stool](#)") was the most intimate of an [English monarch's](#) [courtiers](#), responsible for assisting the king in [excretion](#) and [ablution](#).

The physical intimacy of the role naturally led to his becoming a man in whom much confidence was placed by his royal master and with whom many royal secrets were shared as a matter of course. This secret information—while it would never have been revealed, for it would have led to the discredit of his honour—in turn led to his becoming feared and respected and therefore powerful within the royal court in his own right. The office developed gradually over decades and centuries into one of administration of the royal finances, and under [Henry VII](#), the Groom of the Stool became a powerful official involved in setting national fiscal policy, under the "chamber system".

Later, the office was renamed **Groom of the Stole**. The Tudor historian [David Starkey](#) classes this change as classic [Victorianism](#): "When the Victorians came to look at this office, they spelt it s-t-o-l-e, and imagined all kinds of fictions about elaborate robes draped around the neck of the monarch at the coronation;" however, the change is in fact seen as early as the 17th century.

### Origins

The Groom of the Stool was a male servant in the household of the English monarch who was responsible for assisting the king in his toileting needs. *It is a matter of some debate as to whether the duties involved cleaning the king's bottom*, but the groom is known to have been responsible for supplying a bowl, water and towels and also for monitoring the king's diet and bowel movements and liaising with the Royal Doctor about the king's health.<sup>[5]</sup> The appellation "Groom of the Close Stool" derived from the [item of furniture used as a toilet](#). It also appears as "Grom of the Stole" as the word "Groom" comes from the [Old Low Franconian](#) word "Grom".

### Comments by Inspector Rex

It may have been helpful if they had toilet paper in those days!

Grooms of the Stool were highly rated – they were all knighted. Some examples

*Grooms of the Stool under Henry VIII (1509–1547)*

1509–1526: [Sir William Compton](#)

1526–1536: [Sir Henry Norris](#)

1536–1546: Sir Thomas Heneage

1546–1547: [Sir Anthony Denny](#)

Were they all men – during a Queen's reign?

*Neither Mary I nor Elizabeth I appointed a Groom of the Stole.*

*Grooms of the Stole to [Queen Anne](#) (1702–1714)*

1702–1711: [Sarah Churchill, Countess of Marlborough](#) (later Duchess of Marlborough)

1711–1714: [Elizabeth Seymour, Duchess of Somerset](#)

This answers the above question.

The office again fell into abeyance with the accession of [Queen Victoria](#), though her husband, [Prince Albert](#), and their son, [Edward, Prince of Wales](#) employed similar courtiers; but when Edward, prince of Wales, acceded to the throne as King Edward VII in 1901, he discontinued the office.