Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

GHANA G89

Ghana is a west Africa country, which was a British colony from 1821 to 1957. Ghana is a country rich in natural resources such as silver, petroleum, salt, timber, limestone and gold. In fact, when Ghana was a British colony, it was called the Gold Coast.

Ghana also has an Atlantic coastline that stretches for 539 kms (335 miles), where today the biggest industry is fishing, but during colonial times the trading of slaves took place along this stretch of coast.

The British colonisation of modern day Ghana wasn't easy. They came up against the Ashanti people, who controlled most of the region and still make up about 15 per cent of the Ghanaian population today. They wanted to defend their right to their land and resources. Four fierce wars were fought between the two until the Ashanti were defeated and all of the Gold Coast became a British colony.

Tray

Palm leaves have been stripped down to make the tray. The palm leaf is used throughout Africa and Asia. It is weaved to make baskets, fans and mats. It takes a great deal of skill to be able to manipulate the palms into such a tight binding round the rim.



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Gourd bottle, scoops and bowl



The gourd is actually a plant! There are many different varieties of gourd - all of them related to melons, pumpkins, and squashes. The bottle gourd (Lagenaria siceraria), also often called a calabash, is one of the most useful plants in West Africa. It is one of the few plants cultivated in both the New and Old worlds in prehistoric times. Botanists believe the plant may have originated in Africa and then floated across the seas to South America.

Young bottle gourd fruits of certain varieties are eaten as a boiled vegetable. The best are slightly sweet, tender, and free of bitterness. Other varieties are bitter and may contain poisonous substances, although they can still have a use in medicine. As well as providing food their skins can be dried out to make into containers. There are different ways of doing this. One technique is to fill the partially cleaned gourds with clean, dry sand, and cover them with sand in a container. This is heated over a fire for several days, drying out the gourds. Patterns may be cut into the gourds before they are dried, or the shells may be forced into desired shapes, as is the case with this example. Well-treated gourds become durable containers, some of which are very large and are able to hold a large amount of dry or liquid material. The dry hard shells have been used for bottles, milk pots, churns, bowls, ladles, spoons, work baskets, floats, pipes, musical instruments … almost anything you can imagine.





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Pottery Lamp



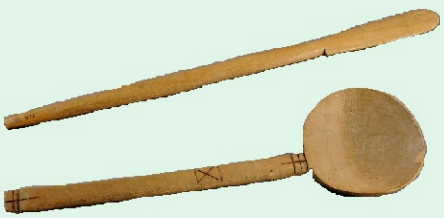
Pottery oil lamps were widespread in Greek, Roman and other societies of the classical world. They were found in China and among the ancient cultures of South America. Similar ones were used in England in some places until the nineteenth century. In England they were known as crusie lamps.

They all work on the same principle. The body holds the oil and a wick is fed out over the lip. The oil could come from a variety of sources. It could be derived from animals - fish oil or fat trimmings - or from a plant source. The wicks could be made from twisted cloth or plant fibre. They were often rather smoky and the wicks had a tendency to draw up oil quicker than it burned, allowing the surplus to spill over the sides of the lamp onto anything that rested beneath them. Such lamps also required constant attention as the wicks were free floating and often fell below the surface of the fat and had to be picked back out with a pickwick.

Wooden spoon, stirring stick and pestle



Cooking in Ghana often involves preparing large pots of food called foofoo. It is one of the region's basic dishes. Foofoo is made by boiling the cassava bush root and then pounding the mixture with a giant wooden mortar and pestle. It is then heated over a fire and stirred with a large stick. When it is thick it can be served up with the spoon and then shaped into a ball. It is usually topped with a fiery sauce.



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Oil lamp

This lamp has been made by recycling two Portuguese sardine tins. They have been soldered together so there is plenty of room for keeping the fish oil. A funnel makes it easier to pour the fish oil into the tins. There is also the wick holder from where the light would shine. On one side there is a small clip. This would be where the oil lamp would have been hung within a room.



Stove

Can you guess how the stove works? It's a bit like a barbeque. Charcoal would be placed in the funnel and then a grill on top to cover it. When the charcoal has turned to ash it falls through the grate and collects underneath. A pot, full of stew, might then be placed on the grill. Stew is one of Ghana's staple meals. They are thick and full of flavour, spiced with curry, ginger, garlic, onions or chilli pepper.



Like the oil lamp, this has been made by recycling bits of metal. These stoves are not produced in factories. They are built by local people with material they had to hand.

Bowl

This bowl has been made from clay and is quite heavy. The bottom has four legs for it to rest on the ground. The spiral design inside the bowl was made before firing.

