Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

VICTORIAN HOME LIFE H11/J

Biscuit Tin



Biscuits became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century among those who could afford them. People would buy them from their baker or grocer, who would dish them out from large containers and put them into paper bags. Tins were originally created for practical reasons- the airtight storage of biscuits so that they could be transported to distant customers and stay oven-fresh and unbroken. Decorated tins soon became as prized as the contents they were produced to contain and tins like this one would be produced for Christmas and other festive occasions. This tin design, 'Italian', which shows an orange picker meeting some Italian ladies, was produced in 1894. It has an indented base, possibly so that the tin could also be used as an ashtray when empty of biscuits.

This tin would have contained biscuits made by Huntley & Palmers. Huntley & Palmers started life in 1822 as a small bakery in London Street, Reading. In 1846 the firm opened a large factory on Kings Road in Reading and by 1900 this business was the largest biscuit manufacturer in the world.

Napkin Holder



This napkin holder has been finely carved out of ebony wood and the words 'Boer Camp Ceylon 1902' carved into it. Items like these were made by Boer prisoners of war, who had been shipped out of South Africa by the British to camps in other areas of the British Empire. 5,000 such prisoners were transported in this way to Ceylon, an island off the South Indian coast (now Sri Lanka). Perhaps this was crafted as a souvenir for a British audience and exchanged with or sold to British captors by a Boer prisoner.

Trivet



Trivets were intended to support hot objects and prevent them from scorching surfaces. Trivets like this one were made for placing hot irons on. Although irons were essentially the same shape as today's irons, most Victorian ones were heated by being placed on a hot stovetop, or by the fire. Regulating the heat of the iron would have been difficult and women were probably keen to test the heat of the iron with a finger, to ensure that it wouldn't scorch the fabric.

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Pepper Pots



These two pepper pots are made of pewter, an alloy made from mixing the metals tin and lead. Both tops can be unscrewed to allow refilling. One of them is stamped with a makers mark and if you look closely you will see it reads 'Atkin Brothers, Sheffield'. The Victorians used salt and pepper to flavour their food in the same way we do today.

Pocket Flask



This small flask designed to fit into a pocket is made of pewter and glass. It would have been used to contain alcohol. The pewter base detaches from the bottle and can be used as cup to pour the liquid into. The wicker-basket work around the top may be to provide grip and prevent the bottle from slipping through the fingers.

Jubilee Medal



This medal made of metal was produced to mark the fiftieth year of Queen Victoria's reign, her Golden Jubilee in 1887. She was the longest reigning British monarch and both her Golden Jubilee (fifty years) and Diamond Jubilee (sixty years) were marked with great celebrations. Medals like this one were given to schoolchildren to commemorate the occasion. The reverse side is decorated with Reading's Coat of Arms, which features a Queen's head surrounded by four maidens. The name of the Mayor of Reading at the time of the Golden Jubilee, Arthur Hill, is also inscribed on it.

Queen Victoria Enamel Cup



This enamel cup was made to commemorate the sixtieth year of Queen Victoria's reign, her Diamond Jubilee. It is decorated with an image of the Queen in 1837, when she came to the throne and that of one in 1897, the year of her Diamond Jubilee. Rather like today, companies produced special commemorative souvenirs of important events and anniversaries for people to collect.