Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

VICTORIAN HOME LIFE H11/K

Doulton's Improved Foot Warmer



Despite the name, a foot-warmer was used not simply to keep the feet warm, it is what today we would call a hot water bottle. It would be filled with hot water and put in bed to keep your feet warm - or any other bit that was feeling chilly! Many of these stoneware bottles have a similar shape with a carrying handle at one end. Identical examples to this one exist, but with the name and logo of the shop which sold it printed on the end near the carry knob. This one probably dates from before 1900. The Doulton company was granted the Royal Warrant in 1901 and started to use the word Royal in its title. Its absence in this case suggests it was made before this date.

Pewter Pepper Pots



Pewter is essentially tin, but to be worked it has to be mixed with other metals, usually lead. It was known and used as far back as Roman times. As a metal it is easily worked and relatively cheap. It can be made into a variety of everyday vessels which have the advantage of being less liable to break than their pottery equivalent and they also have a silver-like appearance. Pewter plates, cups, candlesticks, bowls and other items were made in great numbers in Britain from the seventeenth century onwards.

Less grand than silver pepper pots, these examples may have graced a middle-class household's dining table. The earliest known examples of pepper pots date from the latter part of the seventeenth century. At that date the pepper pots were very plain with simple cylindrical bodies. Later shapes changed with the prevailing fashion. Often they came in pairs, although the examples in this box were clearly not made to go together. Their style is, if anything, characteristic of pots made in the Georgian period. One puzzle with these examples is that it is difficult to see how the pepper would have been put into them!

Pewter Cup



By the late nineteenth century pewter was being used less often for everyday items such as plates and cups. Good quality china was available to more people. Pewter, though, was still purchased for special events, as it is today. Cups like this are sold nowadays as christening gifts and it possible that this example was used for this purpose, or as an ornament, rather than as a practical drinking vessel.

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Milk Can



In the nineteenth century milk was often transported into towns by rail and delivered to homes by milkmen using small horse-drawn carts or handcarts. In the early years of the Victorian era the carts carried a churn and the milk was ladled into whatever pot was brought out to the milkman by the householder. Later an increasing emphasis was laid on dairy hygiene. Good hygiene became a selling point for a successful dairy. Up-to-date dairymen adopted a system in which their carts were supplied with a set of graduated cans - 1 gallon, 1 quart, 1 pint … down to a gill (a quarter of a pint). This example holds one pint. Milk was taken from the storage churn not from the top, but from a brass tap at the base. The can was put under the tap and filled up. The lid could be closed to stop soot and other urban muck from spoiling the milk and the can could then be carried to the house door.

This example comes from the heart of London. The stamped print on the lid and side tells us that it belonged to the dairy of J. Howell, of 46 (?) Cheval Place, Knightsbridge. Griffin is a Welsh name and many dairies seemed to have been owned by Welshmen, perhaps because of the dairying tradition in parts of Wales. In some urban areas in the early Victorian era, particularly London, cows were kept permanently in a cow yard and fed on a mixture of hay and vegetable left-overs from the surrounding houses. As the railways improved this practice died out.

This can was made by Hanamada, an otherwise obscure firm. Another stamp on the tin indicates that it was sold to Howell's Dairy from the Dairy Supply Company, Museum Street, London. This was a branch of the Express Dairy Company Limited, which was founded in 1892. The Dairy Supply Company was formed as a separate enterprise to sell dairy equipment such as milk churns, ceramic weights and cans. The imposing building of the Dairy Supply Company, with its fancy terracotta panels and brickwork, is still standing on the site.



A milk cart cart in the early twentieth century - note the milk cans, which are similar to the smaller example in this box.

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Butter Pats

This is another dairy tool. Pats were used in the process of making butter. In the Victorian era butter was made on the farm or in the dairy. Cream was separated from raw milk and was placed in a butter churn to be made into butter. To change cream into butter required a great deal of hard work as the cream had to be beaten or agitated until it thickened and changed to a pale yellow colour.

This could be done using a plunger, a pole with a disc on the bottom with holes in through which the cream is forced as the pole is raised up and down. This needed strong arms. Later butter churns were invented which were turned using a crank-handle. Gradually, after a lot of swashing about the cream thickens and turns into butter.

After the butter had been churned it was washed. All the excess water had to be removed. This was achieved by rolling out the butter, literally squeezing out the water. This also helped to improve the texture and flavour of the butter. All the wooden implements used were made from a wood that would not taint the food in any way. Sycamore and oak were ideal, as they are both dense, with close grain and therefore wouldn't easily absorb the food. They also lack a strong odour that could be passed onto the food.

Once the butter had been rolled out and any excess water removed it was shaped with butter pats. The wooden pats in this box are probably made of sycamore. The pats were used to shape the butter into blocks, which would then be taken to market and sold. The pats were also known as butter beaters or scotch hands.



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Queen Victoria Tobacco Box

When Queen Victoria died at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, on 22 January 1901 her reign had lasted almost 64 years, the longest in British history. During this period the country experienced tremendous political and social changes, not the least of which was the growth of the British Empire to an unequalled size. Her image came to symbolise an era of success and power even in her own lifetime and was used at times of celebration on countless objects, from cups to medals. Her Golden Jubilee (1887), celebrating fifty years on the throne, and then her Diamond Jubilee (1897), for her sixtieth anniversary as queen, saw great displays and public ceremonies.

This tin dates from just before the queen's death. Britain was embroiled in the Second Boer War, which lasted from 11 October 1899 until 31 May 1902. The war was one of the more inglorious episodes in British history. It began when the British tried to force the Boers (the slang name for settlers of Dutch origin in south Africa) to grant British gold prospectors equal political rights in the Orange Free State. In the war that followed the British army was generally routed by the ragtag Boers, but won in the end due to greater man-power and munitions. Boer women and children were rounded up and imprisoned in concentration camps. A report after the war concluded that 27,927 Boers (of whom 22,074 were children under 16) and 14,154 black Africans had died of starvation, disease and exposure in the concentration camps. At the beginning of the war there was much jingoistic enthusiasm for the war among British people, but this latter changed as the war dragged on and the misery it created became widely known.

This tin was sent by the government as a gift to encourage the troops. It probably contained cigarettes and tobacco, which were widely smoked by men at the time. Similar tins were sent to troops fighting in the First World War a few years later. The facsimile handwritten message from the queen, "I wish you a happy New Year - Victoria", is designed to create a sense that this is a personal gift from her royal highness Queen Victoria. The letters **VRI** stand for **V**ictoria **R**egina **I**mperatrix, or Victoria Queen and Empress.

