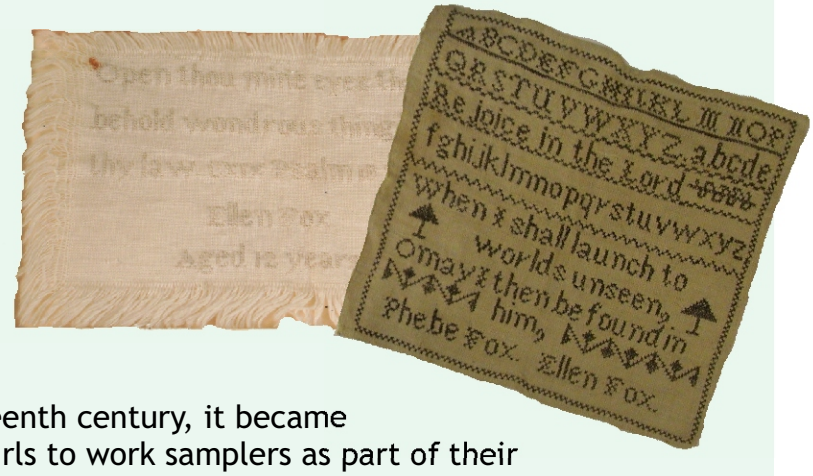
Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

Pastimes, 1860-1960 H152/A

Sampler by Ellen Fox



The term sampler comes from the Latin exemplum meaning 'an example to be followed, a pattern, a model or example'. The first known dated English sampler was made in 1598. From the mid-eighteenth century, it became more common for young girls to work samplers as part of their education, of which needlework formed a major part. These samplers began to follow a common pattern, with decorative borders, alphabets, motifs such as animals, flowers and houses, and they usually also contained some sort of verse. The finished sampler could be hung by proud parents on the parlour wall.

This very small and simple example, by Ellen Fox, probably dates from the second half of the nineteenth century. It features a verse from the bible: 'Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law' (Psalm 119, verse 18). Reading Museum has two other samplers made by Ellen. One of them, made when she was fifteen, tells us that she lived in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. She also made a sampler with her sister Phebe, which also features a Christian devotional thought: 'Rejoice in the Lord' and 'When I shall launch to worlds unseen,/O may I then be found in Him.' (See image above)

Spur



This spur is of uncertain date. It was found at Ockwell's Manor, near Bray, Berkshire - a site from which many objects have been recovered from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. This spur is likely to date from the latter part of this period. Nowadays spiked spurs like this one are no longer used, as they are thought to be cruel, but for centuries such spurs were considered a normal part of a rider's outfit. Spurs were fastened over a boot using a leather strap or straps, which would be fastened onto the catches that can be seen on the end of the arms. Horse riding was an everyday activity, but the use of spurs was most appropriate when speed was required, particularly leisure activities such as horse racing and fox hunting.

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Whip and 3 Tops



This is a modern set of whip-and-tops. The tops are made of wood and the whip also has a leather thong. The aim is to keep the top spinning round as quickly as possible, so that it doesn't fall over, by flicking it with the whip.

Whip-and-tops have been popular for hundreds of years, and can be seen in medieval illustrations. They were still found in school playgrounds until the 1970s.
Originally these simple toys would have been made at home, but this particular set was commercially made.



Ticket for Rome Olympics

Watching sport has been popular since ancient times. The Greeks first introduced the Olympic Games in around 770 BC, and the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896.This ticket is from the 1960 Olympics held in Rome. It is for a football match (*calcio* is the Italian word for football) at the Stadio Flaminio, which had been built in 1959 especially for the games. That year, Yugoslavia won the football gold medal, Denmark the silver and Italy the bronze. The 1960 games were otherwise notable as the venue for Cassius Clay's first worldwide appearance as a great boxer - he won the Olympic light heavyweight crown. The 1960 Olympic Games were the first Olympics to be fully covered by television.

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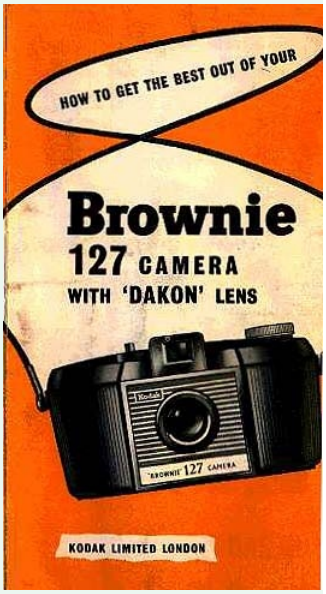
Kodak Brownie 127



The Box Brownie camera dates from 1900. It took 8 shots on a roll of 120 film. Before the introduction of the Box Brownie photography was an expensive hobby which was largely confined to the wealthier classes in society. The Box Brownie was a camera that almost anyone could afford - it cost 5 shillings. It was the first camera to use a roll of film and it introduced the concept of the snapshot - a casual photograph taken without any particular pre-arrangement, often of everyday events or sightseeing excursions. The camera was named after the popular cartoon characters depicted by Palmer Cox, a Canadian artist, who produced a series of humourous verse cartoons about mischievous but kind-hearted Brownies.



The Box Brownie went through a series of improvements over the decades. The 1936 version had an aluminium body and the 1940s version was made of folded steel. This Kodak Brownie 127 camera was first made in 1952 and it was discontinued in 1959. In that period millions of them were made - a million had been produced by August 1954. The Brownie 127 was manufactured in the UK and between May 1953 and Sept 1954. 263,000 of these cameras were even exported to America. It is made of Bakelite. It used a 127 film and gave 12 exposures per film It was very popular - cheap to buy and easy to use. The case is made of canvas, and contains two instruction leaflets. Although this version is different from the first version of 1900 it continued the tradition of providing a camera that was cheap and very simple to use.



Middle & Bottom: The cover and some pages from the Kodak Brownie 127 instruction booklet.

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Ice Skates



It is thought that ice-skating originated in prehistoric times. Early skates were shaped from animal bones and later waxed wood. Once metal skates were introduced it became easier to manoeuvre on the ice and speed and figure-skating became possible. The first known club was the Edinburgh Skating Club, formed around 1740. The first artificial ice rink was built in 1876 in Chelsea, London, and was called the Glaciarium. By the end of the nineteenth century ice skating was popular in many countries, both for leisure and for sport. Figure skating became an Olympic sport in 1908, ice hockey in 1920, speed skating in 1924, and ice dancing in 1976.

This elegant pair of skates, which must have been owned by a well-off lady, probably date from the Edwardian period. They are neatly made from fine leather, by Lilley and Skinner. This firm of shoe makers began business in the late nineteenth century. They soon had outlets in many of Britain's biggest towns, the most prominent of which was their shop in Oxford Street, London. The name became so familiar that the phrase 'Lilley and Skinner' became cockney rhyming slang for dinner. The firm is still trading. The shoes were not necessarily sold with the well constructed wood, brass and steel skates. The steel blades were made by W. Roberts and Co., Sheffield.

Safety Cycling Map



The Safety Cycling Map of England was published in 1885-1889. It cost 1 shilling (5p) and covers a large area of England, so it doesn't really show much detail. But it does point out 'the best cycling roads', 'dangerous hills' and 'unrideable hills'! Off-road riding would have been very uncomfortable - early bikes would not have had gears, good brakes or suspension and pneumatic tyres were not introduced until 1888.

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Phonograph Roll



Thomas Edison, the American inventor, took out a patent for the phonograph on 19 February 1878. This first ever device for recording and playing music used a tinfoil cylinder and had two needles - one for recording and one for playback. When you spoke, or sang, or played music into the mouthpiece, the sound vibrations of your voice would be indented onto the cylinder by the recording needle. This cylinder phonograph created a sensation and brought Edison international fame.

Over the next few decades the technology for playing music was gradually improved. This box contained a cylinder record made from an early variety of plastic patented by the Edison company called 'Blue Amberol'. In contrast to the early tin foil cylinders this kind was able to withstand hundreds, possibly over a thousand, playings, with only moderate increase in surface noise if played on well-maintained machines with a stylus in good condition. Blue Amberols had a maximum playing time of just over 4 minutes.

This box contained a recording of a song called 'If I Must Say Farewell, Kate, Let Me Kiss Your Lips Good-bye', by the American tenor Manuel Romain (? - 1926). Romain was a popular singer in the first two decades of the twentieth century, who specialised in similar sentimental ballads, with titles such as 'What Might Have Been', 'Mammy's Little Coal Black Rose' and 'The Trail Of The Lonesome Pine'. It was recorded in January 1913, around which time the recording industry was moving from using to cylinders to the more familiar discs - a technology which, in turn, was superseded at the end of the twentieth century by digital formats.

Racing Horse Plates



Horse racing has been a popular sport for thousands of years. Modern racing developed in the twelfth century when English knights returned from the Crusades with fast Arab horses. Private wagers became popular amongst the wealthy, and in 1750 the Jockey Club was established in Newmarket which regulates rules of racing and the breeding of racehorses.

The shoes used on racing horses are called plates. They made of a light metal alloy, often aluminium, so that they don't slow the horse down. This set were made by A. J. Pledger & Company of Stamford, Lincolnshire. They began business as farriers in 1899 and are still trading.