Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

NINETEENTH CENTURY PASTIMES H152/B

Sport and leisure pursuits became extremely popular in the nineteenth century. Traditional sports like football, cricket and boxing had been played for centuries, but were now given proper rules for the first time. Organised matches drew large crowds and watching sport became a hobby, first locally and later at international level, such as in the Olympic Games.

Libraries, art galleries and museums opened and landscaped parks were created. Great inventions meant that toys and books could be produced on a larger scale and were cheaper to buy.

The objects in this box show the variety of pastimes enjoyed by people living in the nineteenth century.

Roller skates



These roller skates are thought to date from about 1900. They are made of steel and have become quite rusty. A boot has been fastened onto the base. Inside the boot you can find the mark of Lilley and Skinners Ltd - a shoe company established in London in 1835.



The skates don't have any toe stops like modern skates and would have been very difficult to steer! They are also very heavy - just think how strong your leg muscles would be after skating with these!

Many people think that roller-skating first became popular during the 1970s and 1980s but it was actually during the Victorian Period that the craze first began. In 1857 huge public rinks were opened in Covent Garden, London, and people could be seen in the streets using skating as an alternative form of transport. Rinks opened all over the country. The pictures on the right show the band and skaters at the Palace Skating Rink in Cumbria.

Some people couldn't afford to buy a pair of skates, but it was possible to buy one on its own. It was common to see children wheeling around on one skate and pushing with the other foot, more like a skateboard. They would always hope that they would get the other one next Christmas or birthday!

Reading Borough Council

Heritage Lottery Fund

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Container for a phonograph roll

How many times a day do you hear a recorded piece of music? Perhaps on the radio, on the television, in a shop, on your personal music player or computer - everywhere! But if you wanted to listen to music 150 years ago, you would have needed to play an instrument or watch a live performance. In the second half of the nineteenth century this began to change. The invention of the phonograph meant that people could listen to pre-recorded pieces of music and spoken word whenever they wanted.



In 1877 American inventor Thomas Alva Edison unveiled his phonograph, which recorded and replayed sound. The picture on the right shows Edison with his invention. People were amazed to hear sound played back from a machine. Edison took the phonograph to a magazine called *Scientific American* who reported that:

Mr. Thomas A. Edison recently came into this office, placed a little machine on our desk, turned a crank, and the machine inquired as to our health, asked how we liked the phonograph, informed us that it was very well, and bid us a cordial good night!

The user of the phonograph spoke into a funnel and the vibrations were recorded with a needle onto a cylinder, which was bought separately. Then the user turned a key, which rotated the cylinder to play back the sounds through the funnel.



At first, Edison used a cylinder made from tinfoil to record the sounds, but by 1886 the cylinders were wax coated. The cylinders were called 'records' because that is exactly what they did! At first, a recording could only be replayed a couple of times before it wore out. The owner could either take it back to the shop and partially exchange it for a new one, or have the top layer shaved away so that a new recording could be made. By the turn of the century, Edison had created a cylinder called Amberol, which was made from celluloid and could withstand hundreds of playings. The cylinders were still quite fragile to transport and were sold in containers lined with a soft, furry material to protect them - like the Edison Amberol record container from 1910, which is in the box.

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Magic Lantern

It is hard to imagine what the entertainment world was like before the invention of film and television. The magic lantern was a kind of slide projector, which was extremely popular during the late nineteenth century. This popularity lasted until the First World War when moving film was introduced.



The magic lantern worked by projecting images on to a wall. An oil or gas flame burned inside the lantern and a chimney took away the smoke. A mirror reflected the light on to two lenses - one focused the light on the slide and the other magnified the projected image. There are labels on the picture on the right to show all these parts. The picture is of a lantern in working order. Compare it to the one in the box.



Magic lanterns could be used in the home or for public showings, which attracted huge crowds. One of the most popular slide series was *The Rat Swallower*, which used several slides in front of the main picture - each with a rat on it. These extra slides were moved about to give the appearance of rats jumping into the mouth of a sleeping man! This might sound quite simple and basic to us, but at the time a showing of *The Rat Swallower* would quite literally bring the house down! The account of a projectionist who showed the slides to an audience in his village hall demonstrates how amazed and excited an audience could be. He reported that people were jumping and shouting so much that the floor shook and the screen fell over, knocking the slides out of the lantern!

Training Spurs



These strange objects were worn on a rider's boots and used to 'spur' the horse along with a kick of the rider's heels.

This sounds very unkind to the poor horse, but expert riders used the gentlest touch to train the horse. They found that the horse would learn to relax its stomach muscles and move more freely - better for running and jumping in style.

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Copy of Olympic medal



This is a copy of the silver medal won by Ann Packer in the 1964 Olympic games, which were held in Tokyo. She came second in the 400 metres with a new European record time of 52.2 seconds. She also won gold in the 800 metres the same year.

The first Olympic Games took place in Olympia, Greece, in 776 BC. They took place every four years until AD 393, when the Christian Emperor Theodosius I cancelled them. He thought the games were rooted in Paganism rather than Christianity.



The games were revived in 1896 in Athens. 14 nations took part including a team of ten men from Great Britain. The first British gold medal was won by weightlifter Launceston Elliot. In the same year Irishman John Pius Boland won the men's singles tennis title - although he had only gone as a spectator but was entered in the competition at the last minute by his friend! The picture on the right shows John Pius Boland.

The games have taken place every four years since then, apart from during the First and Second World Wars.

Powder flask



Early guns had to be loaded with lead shot (the bullets) and gunpowder. This would be ignited by a spark from the trigger and would fire the shot towards the target.

The powder flask kept the gunpowder safe and dry. The small clip works a spring opening inside the neck, so that small amounts could be measured out carefully.

Guns were originally loaded from the muzzle (front end). Later on breech-loading (back end) models were developed, and cartridges were invented. These contained the bullet and its gunpowder and shooting became much safer.

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Gaming counters

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many coin-like objects were made and used as counters for games and gambling. Most common were George III 'spade' type, two of which can be seen in the display box. These pieces are made of brass.

The third metal counter is called a jetton or reckoning counter. They were used to help add up accounts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but were used later as counters for games. This one has an orb on one side and a circle of crowns on the other, which means that it was made in Nuremburg in Germany. The lettering around the edges most probably spells out a German motto, but it is very faded now and difficult to read.

There are two counters made of bone. Bone was a cheap alternative to ivory and was often used for making counters.

A popular Victorian game involving counters was tiddlywinks. It was invented by Joseph Assheton Fincher in 1888 and is still much loved today. A large disc is used to flick smaller discs (the winks) into a pot in the centre of a board.

