Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

NINETEENTH CENTURY FOOD AND DRINK H166/B

Horn Beaker

This beaker has been carved out of horn. Horn beakers were popular in the nineteenth century as they had the advantage of being light, washable and inexpensive to buy. Horn was often used in the past to make cups, spoons and other domestic items. The gelatine in animal horns makes it soft and easy to cut when heated. Horn can be softened in boiling water, flattened, separated into sheets and then formed into the desired shape. Decorative scenes and patterns can be scratched onto the surface using a hot needle.



Bone Spoon

This spoon has been finely worked out of bone. Bone spoons are still thought preferable to metal ones today for eating caviar and boiled eggs, as it is thought metal can taint the taste of the food.



Child's Knife and Fork

This knife and fork would probably have belonged to a child, although they do not appear to be from the same set. They are smaller than those an adult would use and would fit a child's hand more sensibly. The words 'for a good child' are stamped on the blade of the knife to encourage good behaviour at the dinner table. The handles on both are made of bone that has been finely polished to make it look like ivory. During the Victorian era tableware became increasingly popular and pieces were invented for nearly every task you can think of. The dinner service of a wealthy family could include well over a hundred pieces, with some so specialised as a baked potato fork and another exclusively for eating terrapins.



Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

NINETEENTH CENTURY FOOD AND DRINK H166/B

Knife With Ebony Handle

This knife is stamped on the blade with the name of the manufacturers. It was made by Joseph Rodgers & Sons of Sheffield. They are today one of the best-known producers of quality cutlery in Sheffield, and one of the oldest in the world. They were appointed cutlers to His Majesty King George IV in 1821 and proudly display their royal appointment on their knife blades. Sheffield is famous as an industrial city, and during the nineteenth century it was capital of the world for steel, cutlery and tool making. In 1869 Joseph Rodgers were producing 1200 dozen penknives, 3000 dozen table knives, 80 dozen razors and 600 dozen scissors.



Jelly Mould

Jellies and other gelatine-based foods are not very fashionable today. In the past however, jellies and creams were often the crowning glories of the table. Moulds were produced in elaborate shapes or had patterns and shapes inside them, such as fruits, flowers and even animals, which would make the jelly set in their shape. To remove the jelly you plunged the mould into hot water for a few seconds and then turned the mould upside down onto a plate. Jelly moulds could also be used for making creams and ices, steaming puddings, baking cakes and poaching sweet and savoury dishes.



Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

NINETEENTH CENTURY FOOD AND DRINK H166/B

Ticket For Reform Bill Dinner



This is a framed ticket to a public dinner at Reading to celebrate the passing of the 1832 Reform Act. The Reform Act enabled more middle class men to have the right to vote and have a say in the running of the government. Prior to this, power in the government had rested largely with upper class males. Since it was seen by many to make the government more democratic, the passing of the Bill was received with great joy among the middle classes and celebrations were held, including public dinners and other events, all over the country. Henry Burstow, in his Reminiscences of Horsham, gives an account of one such dinner held at Horsham:

'By about 3.30 p.m. the whole company, nearly 3000 people, were seated at 62 tables, loaded with cold roast and boiled beef and mutton, vegetables, hot plum pudding, and beer. A special platform was erected for the chairman, T. Sanctuary, Esq., late High Sheriff of Sussex, and his supporters. At the sound of a bugle grace was said before and after the dinner. There were all kinds of sports and amusements, races, &c., until about 6 o'clock in the evening, when, unfortunately, it came on to rain hard, and my brother then carried me home on his back. The day closed with a brilliant display of fireworks; rockets, candles, vertical wheels, mines, balloons, Bengal lights, jacks-in-boxes, maroons, tourbillions, &c., &c. About 4,000 people altogether were present at the Cricket Field. In the evening there was a grand ball at the Kings Head Hotel.'