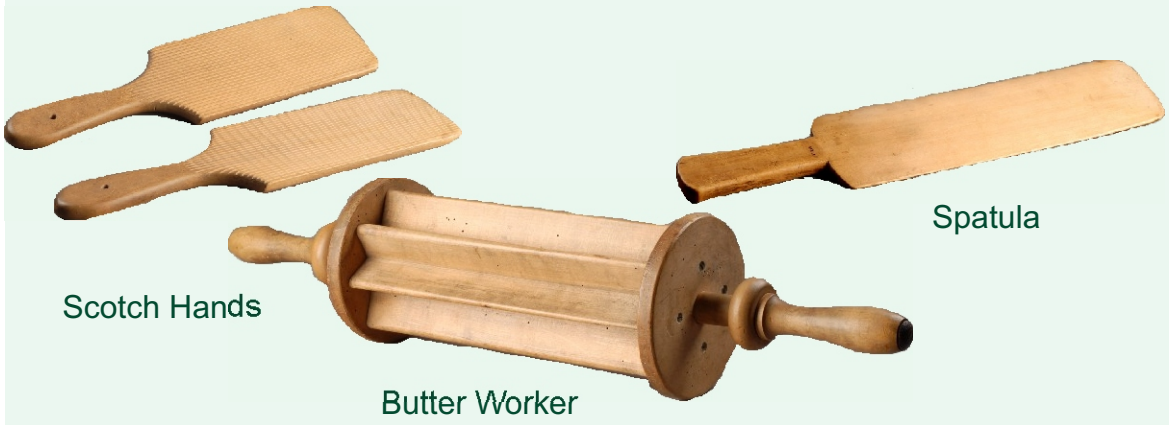
# Hands On Learning
## *with Reading Museum Service*

## NINETEENTH CENTURY DAIRY EQUIPMENT H213

The items in this box represent some of the many pieces of equipment that were used to make butter in a Victorian dairy.




In the nineteenth century more and more farmers became dairy farmers. This was because wages got better for lots of workers as the Victorian Period progressed and they could afford to buy more milk, cheese, butter and meat. Also, corn wasn't making enough money. Bad weather in the 1870s made for poor harvests and, with large steam ships bringing in more and more imported grain, many farmers started meat and dairy farming to make a living.

Another reason for the growth of dairy farming was that railways helped the distribution of milk and dairy products. Because milk goes bad quickly, it had to be sold as soon as possible. Lots of people lived in growing towns and cities - like Reading - and they wanted to buy fresh milk. Unfortunately they lived far away from the dairy farms. Trains could carry milk to these people quickly so they could buy milk.

The Victorian period saw some changes on the farm in the way butter was produced, but the basic procedures remained much as they had centuries previously.



The first job was to milk the cows. This was done twice a day, early in the morning and again at lunchtime. The milkmaid would sit on a stool facing the cow's tail and place a bucket just forward of the udder. She would take two teats and squeeze them in sequence from the top down, using her upper finger to make a seal and moving the milk downwards. This action copied the sucking movement of the calf's tongue and mouth. Gradually the bucket would fill up - on average a cow would produce 17-25 pints (10-15 litres) per day.



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The milk was then left to stand in several large setting pans. Gradually the cream rose to the top and formed a thick layer. The dairymaid could then scoop the cream from the rest of the milk, leaving skimmed milk behind. The cream would be put into cool storage jars until there was enough to make butter with - this might take place every two or three days.

Milk has lots of fatty globules floating in it. Each globule has a skin which prevents them joining together in a single mass. Butter is made by agitating the liquid to damage the separating membranes just enough to allow the fats to join together.

The traditional tool for sloshing the cream about to create a large lump of butter is called a churn. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the traditional churn was shaped like a tall thin barrel (right). At the top end there was a long plunger or dasher, which had to be thumped vigorously up and down by hand to make the cream coagulate into butter. This was hard work and it could take an hour before the butter was formed.





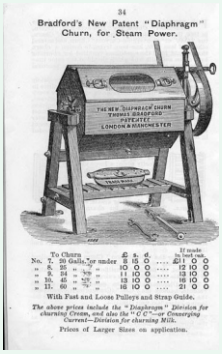
*Top Right: This scene depicts the interior of an early nineteenth century dairy. Around the room are the various utensils required during the butter making process. Two types of churn can be seen, the barrel churn to the right of the picture, and a plunger churn near the dairymaid. A shoulder yoke hangs by the open door, whilst above are several cream storage jars. The dairymaid herself is pouring milk into the setting pans, from which cream will be collected the following morning.*

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In the course of the nineteenth century hand cranked churns began to become more common. Barrel churns rolled on their long central axis, while end-over-end churns rotated in a way that flung the milk from one end to the other (see pictures on right). Both kinds of churn increased the speed at which butter formed, though they still needed a good deal of muscle power. Summer milk contains more fat than winter milk and turns to butter more quickly, but the temperature needs to be kept low.




The dairymaid then had to strain off the butter through butter muslin (fine cloth). The liquid that seeped out of the lump of butter was called buttermilk and was often fed to the older calves and to the pigs to fatten them up. Then the butter had to be washed in lots of clean water.

Finally the butter had to be squeezed using a roller (called a 'Butter Worker') like the one in this box. The lump of butter was put on a shallow wooden trough, mounted on a sloping stand (below). The roller was then run up and down over it. This was done to squeeze out every last trace of buttermilk, which would drain away through a hole in the lowest part of the trough. This had to be done because if any drop of buttermilk was left behind they started to ferment and the butter turned rancid. This rolling also firmed up the lump of golden butter.



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At this point finely powdered salt was mixed into butter. This was done both for taste and to help preserve the butter. Traditionally, butter was tightly packed into barrels, with a layer of salt dividing each layer of butter, but the speed with which trains could transport butter led to the gradual decline of this method of storage.



The Scotch hands and spatula in this box would probably have been used after the butter had been squeezed and firmed up with the butter worker. They would be used to separate, pick up and shape the raw butter into rectangular blocks. Like the butter worker they are made out of sycamore wood, which has a close grain and was easy to wash and scrub clean. Farmers were well aware that clean milk and butter had a longer life. Sometimes the finished portions of butter were stamped with a decorative stamp (right) to give them an attractive appearance.



*Above: A nineteenth century photograph of two dairymaids standing beside a trough with a spiral-shaped butter worker. To the left stands a large barrel churn.*