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

## VICTORIAN HOME LIFE H256

### Nightgown



Nightwear for men and women was almost always made of cotton or linen. This nightgown is trimmed with broderie anglaise, a style of open embroidery, where small holes with stitched edges make up a decorative pattern. This style of embroidery became popular from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

### Invalid Cup



This ceramic cup is known as an invalid cup. These cups were used throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century for feeding sick people who were too weak to feed themselves. Liquid could be gently poured into the persons mouth by the long spout.

### Nail Buffer



The nail buffer probably would have formed part of a vanity set - grooming kits that ladies often kept on their dressing tables. It would have been rubbed over the surface of the fingernail to make it shiny. It is made of chamois leather and ebony, a tropical hardwood.

### Glove Stretcher



Gloves were extremely fashionable during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and were often worn inside as well as outside. It was important to keep them both clean and in shape. At the time there were no stretchy materials like Lycra, and gloves were often made of materials like leather and worn skin-tight. Glove stretchers like this example could be used to stretch the finger of each glove so that they could be put on more easily. This glove stretcher is made from ebony.

Glove powder was often sprinkled inside the glove to help the tight leather slide over the skin.

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### Collar Box



In the Victorian and Edwardian Periods shirt collars were usually detachable - they were fastened to the shirt by two metal studs. Having a false collar allowed the shirt to be washed without the special washing method that a starched collar required. When travelling a gentleman's set of collars could be carried in a box like this, which kept them safe from being crumpled.




*Left: An American advert for detachable collars from 1900.*

### Clothes Brush



Like the glove stretcher, this item is made from fashionable ebony. Ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*) is a tropical hardwood that can be highly polished and was much valued in the Victorian Period. Unfortunately, over exploitation has meant that the species is now rapidly disappearing from its native habitats in India and Sri Lanka.

### Grape Scissors



The Victorians loved having many kinds of plates and fancy cutlery to suit every occasion. This scissors would have been used at the end of a meal to snip off a small cluster of grapes from a larger bunch. The sharp side of the blade would cut the stem, while the flatter section would grip the stem so that you could transfer the grapes to your plate.

Mrs Beeton (1836-65), the celebrated Victorian writer on household management, wrote: 'The grape possesses several rare qualities: it is nourishing and fattening, and its prolonged use has often overcome the most obstinate cases of constipation. The skins and pips of grapes should not be eaten.

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### Curling Tongs



This scissor like device with two rounded prongs would have been used to create curls in hair. The tongs would be heated, clamped onto a section of hair which was then rolled around the tong. Curling tongs of a similar design were used from the sixteenth century onwards. The design was revolutionised in 1872, by a French hairdresser, Marcel Grateau, who developed a heated iron that imitated the natural curl of the hair. The 'Marcel wave' as it became known, reached the height of its popularity in the early twentieth century. They would be heated over a stove, before being applied to the hair and you would use a wet finger or a piece of newspaper to gauge the temperature. Curling tongs often severely damaged hair, scorching it and drying it out. The illustrations below show some of the stages that were involved in creating a turn-of-the century 'Marcel wave'.



Fig. 93
MAKING FIRST WAVE IN RIGHT SIDE LOCK



Fig. 99
PINNING UP THE SIDE HAIR



Fig. 95
WAVING THE SECOND STRAND



Fig. 100
THE COMPLETED COIFFURE

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### Knife and Fork



The large and heavy knife is typical of the style favoured during the Victorian Period. It is stamped on the blade with the name of the manufacturers, 'Rodgers' of Sheffield. Rodgers are still one of the best-known producers of quality cutlery in Sheffield and are one of the oldest cutlery manufacturers in the world. They were appointed cutlers to His Majesty King George IV in 1821 and proudly displayed their royal appointment on their knife blades. This example is stamped with the initials 'V' and 'R' on either side of the crown. This stands for the Latin words Victoria Regina and indicates that it was made during Victoria's reign. From the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century Sheffield was capital of the world for steel, cutlery and tool making.

The fork is smaller than the knife and is from a separate set. Like the knife it has a bone handle, but it is decorated with fancier metalwork decoration.

### Pillow Case



This would have been used for a small pillow. The owner's initials - 'E.A.' - have been embroidered onto the decorative panel. Women of all classes were expected to be able to sew and embroider.