Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

VICTORIAN HOME LIFE H256/B

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.

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.

Dressing Table Runner



This mat would have been placed on top of a dressing table or a chest of drawers. It was intended to protect the surface and to decorate the room, giving it a clean, fresh appearance.

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

VICTORIAN HOME LIFE H256/B

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 to these 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 RIG



Fig. 99
PINNING UP THE SIDE HAIR



Fig. 95
WAVING THE SECOND STRAND



Fig. 100
THE COMPLETED COIFFURE

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

VICTORIAN HOME LIFE H256/B

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.

Shoe Trees



Shoes were expensive items of costume and had to be looked after with care. Shoe trees were inserted into shoes and could be adjusted to keep the shoe in good shape whilst it was not being worn.

Carpet Stretcher



Tools like this are still used by professional carpet layers to stretch a carpet tight before fastening it down. The spiked end is dug into the edge of the carpet and the rounded wooden end is then pushed with the knee to stretch it into place. It could be used by a diligent housewife to re-fasten old carpets that had worked loose. It takes quite a bit of muscle power to use it. The illustration on the left shows an American advert from the 1890s that purports to show a new, easier version of this traditional tool.

