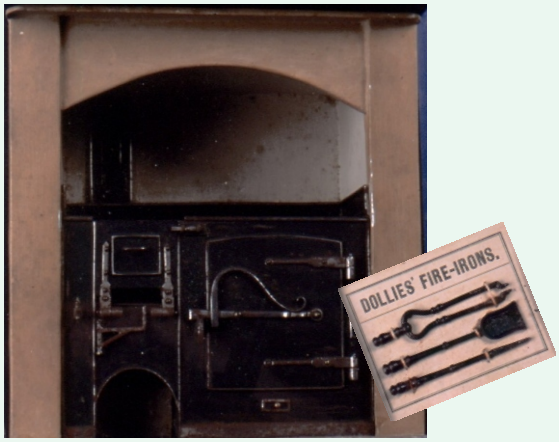
READING MUSEUM SERVICE

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

NINETEENTH CENTURY TOYS H308C





The illustration on the left shows a kitchen in the late Medieval Period. The sight of a person cooking over an open fire would have been familiar for thousands of years. It continued being a familiar sight into the twentieth century, although during the course of the nineteenth century cast iron kitchen ranges became widespread. Heat was still provided by an open fire, but the ability of iron to conduct heat was used to warm several things at once and to heat ovens from all sides instead of just from the bottom.

In the nineteenth century many working class houses had a small oven built into the side of the living room fire. They could be used to bake small items and a kettle could be warmed on top. Pans could be placed directly on the coals in the grate. A photograph of a fireplace like this being cleaned can be seen on page 2. Usually the living room would be the only room in the house that was heated. The photograph on the right shows a coal miner bathing in the warmth in front of such a fire in the 1930s. He is discretely shielded from his studious daughters by a clothes-horse!



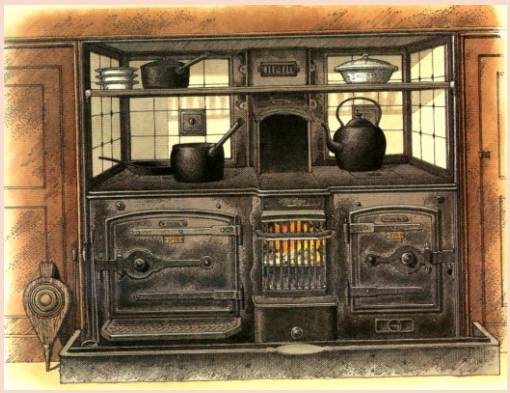
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The kitchen range represented by the model in this box is a much grander affair. It would not have been found in a living room, but was designed solely for cooking. It has a raised grate for holding coals. The heat created in this grate was used for a variety of purposes. To the left of the grate there is a tank for warming water. A tap for drawing off the hot water can be seen at the front.





Heat was also deflected downwards and could be used for keeping kettles hot and possibly for roasting. A bracket can be seen immediately below the grate. This could be swung out and kettles hung from it to keep warm. It is possible that a clockwork bottle jack could be hung from it. Heat could be reflected out of the arched opening at the bottom and used to roast slowly turning meat. A bottle jack with chicken and sausages can be seen on the left.

Most of the range is taken up by a large oven. There are sliding damper handles below and to the right of the oven door to control the flow of hot gas around all the sides of the oven. In theory it was possible to control the fire using sliding dampers to open or close the flues, but in practice much depended on how good the chimney was - and the weather! If the heat in the oven was not even then the food tended to be burnt on one side and underdone on the other The top surface of the oven could be used to heat pans and kettles.



Cooking with a range like this was time consuming compared with a modern oven. Coals had to be brought and the fire allowed to burn before it was ready for use. It was difficult to control the temperature. Afterwards the ashes had to be cleaned out and the stove itself buffed with black lead. Black lead was a bit like shoe polish and had to be regularly applied to keep the range a smart black colour. A maid can be seen preparing a living room fire-range in the photograph on the right.

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NINETEENTH CENTURY TOYS H308C

The first European dolls' houses date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Until the twentieth century they remained luxury items, used only by the children of rich parents who could afford to pay a carpenter to make one. Only in the twentieth century, when they began to be mass produced, did they become widespread.



The doll's house on the right was made in 1890 for a little girl called Amy Miles. It contains some of the latest domestic technology of the time in miniature, a billiard room, a separate nursery and a schoolroom. It presumably reflects the social class of the little girl for whom it was made. It is now on display in the Museum of Childhood, London.

The photographs below show the kitchens of several other dolls' houses from the period.







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NINETEENTH CENTURY TOYS H308C

The miniature kitchen range in this box is thought to date from the nineteenth century. It may have been made in Germany, which was the centre of European toy manufacturing during this period. It could have fitted into a grand doll's house or, if you couldn't afford such an expensive toy, it could have been used on its own.



An indication that such toys were popular is suggested by the fact that in 1926 the Reading biscuit firm of Huntley & Palmers produced a biscuit tin in the shape of a kitchen range (right). Such fancy tins were often produced for sale at Christmas. The contents could be eaten and then the tin used to play with afterwards. Other novelty tins from this period included one in the shape of a pram and another in the shape of a toy farm (below). Even though it would have been cheaper to acquire a toy kitchen stove in this way, such biscuit tins were still relatively expensive. In the 1920s many working class families would not have been able afford such luxury food, even at Christmas.



