Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

EDWARDIAN LADY H323

Button Hook



A button hook was an essential part of the dressing table equipment of the Victorian and Edwardian lady. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dresses, gloves, boots and shoes were often fastened by long rows of small buttons. Fastening them all up could take quite a while and be difficult, particularly if the buttonholes were quite small and tight. A buttonhook made the process easier. The hook was pushed through the buttonhole and latched around the button. The button could then be tugged through the buttonhole. Such a device was particularly useful to help put on shoes and boots.

This button hook was probably given away free as a form of advertising. The words 'THE WOOD-MILNE RUBBER HEEL PADS/DOUBLE COMFORT AND LIFE OF BOOTS' are stamped on the metal handle. The Wood-Milne Rubber Company was based in Leyland, Lancashire. They claimed to be the first company to produce rubber accessories for footwear. However, they not only made rubber heels, but also pneumatic tyres and inner tubes for motor cars and motor cycles, solid band tyres for motor vehicles, belts for motor cycles, foot pumps for motor tyres and golf balls. In 1924, Wood Milne Ltd. was acquired by an American company, which in 1934 became the British Tyre and Rubber Co.





Above: A metal sign advertising Wood-milne rubber heels. Left: A cardboard advertising sign for Wood-Milne shoe polish. The lady is wearing smart Edwardian clothes, including a typical pair of buttoned boots.

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Purse



An unaccompanied young lady might wish to carry a small amount of money with her. This little purse could only accommodate small coins such as sixpenny bits (useful for tipping). It is made of electro-plated silver.

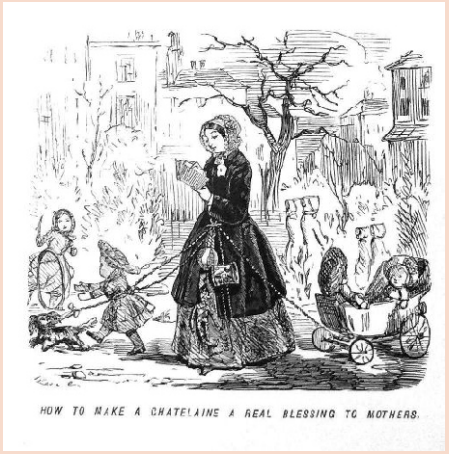
This example originally belonged on a chatelaine - a nineteenth century variation of the chains which medieval women wore around their waist and on which keys were hung. Such chatelaines became all the rage in the mid-nineteenth century, although most of them didn't actually include keys. Instead they might consist of a set of chains attached to a small magnifying glass, a pair of scissors, a pencil, a tape measure inside a ball, an ivory thimble, a pen-knife, even small bottles of smelling salts. Often these items seem to have been added for show and were not very practical.



An example of a chatelaine, with an identical small purse to this one, can be seen on the left. This example also has a seal box, a pencil and a retractable glove hook.

Chatelaines originally became popular because there was a revival of interest in all things medieval in the Victorian period. This was reflected in everything from architectural styles to clothes. The Victorian building which houses the Museum of Reading was built in the 1880s and is in a Victorian neo-Gothic style which was meant to suggest the decorations on a medieval cathedral.

Chatelaines went out of fashion in 1860s, but made a come-back in the 1890s when the Princess of Wales is said to have worn one. The two cartoons make fun of the fashion for wearing chatelaines. They appeared in the humourous magazine *Punch* in the 1840s.





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Lorgnette



Spectacles have been known in Europe since the Medieval Period. The earliest type consisted of two lenses fastened with a rivet which were pinched onto the nose. The picture on the left shows a medieval comic statue of a nun from the church of St Martin, Salisbury, wearing 'rivet spectacles'.

In eighteenth century France scissor spectacles were popular. They were called binocles-ciseaux - scissor glasses in English. This type of spectacles were riveted together, but had a handle rather than being clamped onto the nose. Scissor glasses often had a ring in the end of the handle so that they could be worn on a ribbon or gold chain around the neck. A very fine French pair can be seen on the left.



In England quizzing glasses (or quizzers - a selection can be seen on the right) were popular. These were single lenses, rather like a monocle, but they were not squeezed into the eye but held with a short handle. As with scissor glasses they were often attached to a waistcoat with a ribbon or chain. They had the advantage that they did not hide the mouth when being used, but were of limited effectiveness being a single lens.



The lorgnette combines the virtues of the scissor glasses with those of the quizzer. There are two lenses and the handle is held at the side, rather than in front of the mouth. They were invented in 1825 by an English optician called Robert Bate and remained popular with certain people into the Edwardian period. Some young people wore small pendant lorgnettes. When elbow length gloves became fashionable for evening wear small, slim glove lorgnettes appeared. Dowager duchesses favoured lorgnettes with long tortoiseshell handles - perhaps the most famous user being Lady Worplestone, otherwise known as Bertie Wooster's Aunt Agatha.

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Calling Card Case



Today people often have business cards for use at work. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was common for middle and upper-class people to have their own calling card. Really posh people might visit the house of someone they had not met and leave their card. If the person they had visited wanted to make their acquaintance they might send their own card as a sign that a personal meeting was welcome.

Less exalted people would use their cards in a more informal way exchanging them, like business men today, as a way of giving their name and address to new acquaintances. Some cards were plain, others decorated with a picture (right). Sometimes cards were printed to announce specific events. The card on the left announces that a couple are having an 'At Home' on 18 November 1871.





People carried their cards in a variety of cases. Some were very showy. The card case on the right is made of tortoiseshell, like the one in this box, but it also has a mother-of-pearl inlay etched with the owners name. The example on the left has been opened to show the space where cards were stored and two coin holders similar to that in the little purse in this box.





People sometimes kept the cards they had been given in a box (left). Often the cards which had been received were put on a display stand which was kept on a mantlepiece or other prominent place (right). Doing this allowed you to let others know how socially active you were and how many people wanted to make themselves known to you.



