

# Sustainable Living

**A Queensland Museum Loans  
Resource Folder**

**that complements the**

***Sustainable Living* kit**

# WASHBOARDS

In the olden days washing was very hard work, which took place once a week, usually on Mondays. Babies' nappies had to be washed daily. Until the 1920s all linen was white, which meant that any marks or stains had to be 'blued' and starched. There was a product available, called 'Ricketts Blue Bags', which would be placed into the rinse water so as to avoid a yellowing of the linen.

Sheets were soaked over night. Next day a fire was lit under the copper boiler and the sheets boiled. They would then be lifted out with the copper stick and put through the wringer into the 'blue'. After being put back through the wringer, they were hung out on a line held up with a prop. The washboard was used for stubborn dirt, particularly in work clothes. The clothes would be rubbed vigorously up and down the board on the ridges. This method of washing lasted well into the 20th century despite the invention of washing machines. Many remote areas did not have electricity until the 1960s.

The added difficulty of washing was the heavy work associated with carting water from the creek, dam or well, back to the house. As water was precious, soapy water that remained after the wash, was used to clean the inside of the home. Rinse water went on the garden. Everyone shared the weekly bath, often in the large washtub or copper.

To save carrying the tub back up to the house, many women preferred to wash down at the creek.

## ACTIVITIES

*Look at the washboard*

- How was it used?
- Why are there ridges on the board?
- What problems do you think would arise with its use?

Describe what it was like having to wash all the clothes using this routine. How would you feel when finally the washing machine was invented and you could afford to buy one?

# CANDLE HOLDER

The origin of candles is unknown. The ancient Egyptians and the Romans used candles. The candle was the most common form of lighting in Western European cities by the mid 1700s. Candles were held in the hand, in candlesticks, and some were used in chandeliers. Portable candleholders were commonly in use in Australian homes in the 1800s.

Up until 1850, candles were very expensive in Australia and often were not available in stores. Before 1850, most home lighting was achieved by placing a strip of rolled up rag into an old pannikin, cup, or tin full of dipping. After 1850 the price of candles was reduced and they were readily available throughout Australia. Candleholders were popular as they protected furniture from hot wax. The dish around the candle stem collected the hot wax that could be reused later. When carrying the candleholder, the dish also protected the hand from the hot wax.

This candleholder is made of enamel-plated metal.

Up to 1840, matches were not available so cumbersome wax or sulfur sticks were used. It was very important to keep embers constantly alight in the open fire to avoid having to relight the fire. Later tapers made of wax and firelighters soaked in kerosene were also used.

## ACTIVITIES

- What are the differences between a candlestick and a portable candleholder?
- What is "dripping"? Make a simple candle using dripping and a cloth wick.
- Now place the candle provided in the holder and light it. What is the candle made of? What advantages does this method of lighting have compared to the simple candle?

Compare torches with candles held in candleholders.

# EMBROIDERED CLOTHS

The arrival of women in any home, no matter how poor the family, always meant a higher standard of living by way of increased cleanliness and neatness. Women always tried to make even the smallest cottages comfortable to live in. Whether rich or poor, most women would enjoy the opportunity to create both functional and beautiful decorations for the home. When essential sewing, such as darning socks, had been completed, it was time to take up a small piece of embroidery, lace making, appliqué or quilting. This was completed, slowly and patiently, by candlelight or an oil or 'kero' lamp. Embroidery always had a great appeal to many groups of women, as it needed few tools.

Historically the skills were taught within the family or in primary schools. Articles to make or embroider had been available in kits since the 1850s. Fancy work, the opposite of plain sewing, enjoyed great popularity in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Companies such as Semco, issued ready to be embroidered printed linen doilies with accompanying diagrams and colour instructions, although many colours were substituted with the person's own choice of colour. Functional pieces were used in the kitchen, such as butter covers or milk jug covers. These would have small beads sewn on to the bottom to give the piece weight, and avoid being blown off when a door or window was opened.

Doilies and other such pieces are considered valuable because of their attractiveness and the time and effort put into making them.

## ACTIVITIES

- Why was embroidery a popular pastime?
- Why do some pieces have beads?
- Who taught girls to embroider?
- If you were given a piece of embroidery by your Grandmother or Great Grandmother what would you do with it? How would you feel about owning such a piece?
- Look closely at the embroidery in the kit. What types of stitches have been used? Draw some of the 'motifs' (flowers, words etc.) you can see. Colour them with the same colours.
- Where were these pieces used in the home?

# CLOTHES HANGER

The clothes hanger is made of wood and steel wire, which would have been readily available. It was easy to make. The wood was cut into the desired (right) shape and a piece of fencing wire was bent to form the hook. The artwork on the coat hanger is known as pyrography (or pokerwork). Pokerwork was very popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Designs were burnt into the surface of the wood using hot pieces of wire. Designs were also created by using wood cutting tools. The wood was painted with watercolours, and/or Indian ink, and usually coated with several layers of lacquer. Coat hangers were often decorated with Australian floral patterns.

## ACTIVITIES

- Use the hanger from this kit. Look at the pictures of hangers on this sheet. The real hanger is different from every one of the illustrations. Discuss the differences.
- Is it similar to the modern types of coat hanger? Which do you prefer?
- Why is it painted?
- Make a similar coat hanger from wood and fencing wire.
- Use some wood working (cutting) tools to decorate it with your own designs.
- Trace around this hanger.
- Draw some different designs on your tracing and colour them in.
- List some of the materials that coat hangers are made from today.

# COOKING POTS

The cooking pot is made from cast iron, as many were in the 'olden days'. Cast iron was a suitable material for the pots because it heats up fairly quickly and retains the heat for some time. Soot from the fire would cover the cast iron and give the pot its black appearance. This was considered good because dark colours absorb heat more readily. The pots were used for cooking in a variety of situations, such as on an open fire and wood-burning stove.

The long handle is essential for cooking on open fires to keep the flame of the fire at a distance, and to avoid burning one's hand. One problem with cast iron cooking pots was that they rusted very easily. People tried to avoid this problem by hanging the pots above their stove (stoves were kept alight 24 hours per day). This kept the pots at a constant temperature, dry, and free from the moisture that would rust them. Cast iron pots and other such cooking vessels were cleaned with chain pot cleaners. The chains would scrub off any baked on dirt and they worked in much the same way as the soap-filled steel pads we have today.

## ACTIVITIES

- Why is the pot handle so long?
- Estimate its weight. Compare it with a modern saucepan. Why is the pot so heavy?
- Look for the brand name and number on the pot. How many pints does it hold? How many millilitres is this? Fill the pot with water and measure the amount.

# CURLING TONGS

Solid metal curling tongs were used to curl or crimp hair. They were placed on a fire or stove top to heat and when hot enough, were used on hair. Working the tongs was no easy task. The user needed to wear either a mitt or wrap the tongs' handles in a rag, to avoid burning one's hand. The tongs were opened and the ends of one's hair were grasped, and the tongs closed over the hair. This is very much like using kitchen tongs to pick up food. Once the tongs had some hair in them they could then be wound around the remaining length of hair.

The user had to be very careful. If a pair of tongs was too hot they could permanently damage hair or burn necks or hands. For this reason, it was best if two people were attending to the task.

Ladies around the turn of the century and in later times, would envy others with curly hair, so curling tongs were a relatively simple and inexpensive way of keeping up with fashion trends.

## ACTIVITIES

- Hold the curling tongs in your hands and open and close them. Can you imagine what it would be like to use these to curl someone's hair? Write a paragraph on how it would feel.
- How is hair curled today? Why wasn't this method used 80 years ago?
- Why did women want to change their appearance?

## FLAT IRON

The flat iron was used in much the same way as Mrs. Potts iron, in that it was heated on top of the stove.

Scalds were very common because users would have to pay particular attention to how hot the handle was. A mitt was necessary to be able to hold the iron. The handle could not be taken off.

During the times between ironing each item, the iron rested on a stand.

Notice that the base shape of the iron is quite like the shape of the irons that are used today.

Before use, the iron base needed to be wiped clean and then rubbed with beeswax as soot from the stovetop or fire could easily ruin a clean wash.

### ACTIVITIES

- How was the iron heated?
- Why would you need to wear a mitt when using this iron?
- Why was a stand needed for the iron?
- Can you think of a good way to cool the iron quickly?
- Look for a size number on the flat iron in this kit. What size is it?
- Estimate its weight. Why is it heavy?
- How is it similar to our electric irons?
- When were the first flat irons used?



# BUTTON HOOK

Women and young girls generally wore boots that were either front laced or side buttoned, particularly in the period from the 1870s to the early years of the 20th century. Buttonhooks were needed to do up the buttons on buttoned boots and were used by poking the metal hook through the buttonhole, grabbing the button and pulling it through with the hook.

## ACTIVITIES

- How do you fasten your shoes?
- How many other ways can you think of for doing up shoes?
- Why did they use buttonhooks rather than their fingers to button their boots?

# ORANGE SQUEEZER

Today you may still find orange squeezers such as this one, although the material used to make recent squeezers would be plastic, not glass. Glass seemed to be a popular material used in the 1900s but now it is too costly because of the materials and time involved in moulding glass. The Squeezer is a very simple device only requiring the orange to be halved and then pushed and twisted onto the squeezer. The little notches around the base are able to catch any seeds from the orange. The juice was poured easily into a glass from the 'lip' of the squeezer. Today's alternatives (processors or juicers) have a few advantages although many would argue that in the time it takes to put together and then dismantle and clean a processor, you could have used the squeezer several times.

## ACTIVITIES

Compare the Orange Squeezer with what is used today.

- How was this squeezer used? Try it.
- Why do you think there has been no change in the basic design?
- List the advantages and disadvantages of this squeezer.

# KEROSENE TIN

The kerosene tin was used widely throughout Australia for many different purposes.

Kerosene was commonly sold in 4-gallon tins (18.18 litres) as many people used a lot of kerosene each year. Kerosene was used in lamps before electricity was available. The kerosene lamp gave off far more light than candles or oil lamps that were used before the kerosene lamp was invented. Kerosene was also used to power some early refrigerators and many of the first farm tractors.

Each family would have had many empty kerosene tins, which would have been recycled because the tins could be used for many different purposes. During the 1920s and 1930s in the period known as the Great Depression, kerosene tins reached their height in popularity. The tins could be used as buckets, drawers, stoves, billies, troughs, bins and could be cut up to make many different useful objects. Sometimes the tins were cut open and flattened so that the tin could be used to cover the roof and walls of a building in order to keep out the wind and rain. (Entire houses could be made of flattened petrol cans and most of the furnishings for the house could be made from the boxes). They became shiny tin chimneys like scales of a reptile. The most common use for the kerosene tins was to carry, hold, and/or store things. Tins could be cut in different ways to make useful containers and utensils. The ways of recycling kerosene tins were only limited by the degree of imagination (and ingenuity) of their owners.

The tins held 4 gallons. When filled with water they weighed 40 pounds. When no scales were available, they could be used as a 'rule of thumb' when weighing things.

It was the universal practice in the first homes of selectors and settlers throughout Australia as well as battlers late into this century that boxes, produce bags, kerosene and petrol tins, and crates would be kept, reused and remade. Commonly spoken of as the Australian tradition of "making do", it was also a matter of pride - of putting everything to good use, and of thrifty handling of the resources provided.

## ACTIVITIES

- Find the 'kero' tin in this kit. Is it the whole 4-gallon container? How has it been changed? What could have been its use?
- List some other possible uses of empty kerosene tins.
- Draw some of the different things you could make from kerosene tins.
- Explain why kerosene tins were widely used to make useful objects. .

# BUTTER PATS

Butter pats or butter hands are small wooden bats with deeply grooved blades. One butter pat is held in each hand. The butter pats are used to divide and shape the butter into square or rectangular blocks. The pat and slap of the butter hands against the butter was a commonly heard sound in the dairy, in olden days.

If you tried to use your hands instead of the butter pats, the butter would melt next to your warm fingers.

## ACTIVITIES

- Why are these wooden tools called 'butter pats'?
- How were they used?
- Why were they made in this shape?
- Why are butter pats no longer used?
- Mould play-dough using these pats.
- Discuss how butter is made and bought today.
- Where is butter sold?
- List some of the alternatives to butter that are available today.
- Why did many people make their own butter in the past?

## CLOTHES PEGS

Drying clothes and linen was a tiresome business. If there was enough space outside, the washing was pegged on a line and left to dry in the wind. Pegs were invented to keep the washing on the line, to avoid being blown onto the dirt or grass.

Pegs were made of wood. Two small straight pieces were bound together by wire at one -end. Pegs were pushed on to the washing, over the line, where they were held firmly. If the washing was too bulky, such as work trousers, the pegs would break apart. It was for this reason that the 'Solid Wood Cut Peg' was invented.

The Solid Wood Cut Peg was not flexible enough, so the Spring Peg evolved. To this day we use spring pegs but now they are made of plastic.

Early Queensland settlers sometimes used the nut of one of the of the *Grevillea* trees as a peg. It became known as the bushman's clothes peg.

## ACTIVITIES

Use the pegs. Set up a typical washing scene such as in the picture on the front of this sheet. Use the three types of pegs. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of the pegs.

- A lot of children would make little dolls from the Turned Wood Cut pegs. Try making something from the new spring peg.
- Debate the topic: "That wooden pegs are more environmentally friendly tools than coloured, plastic pegs".

# PETROL IRON

The Petrol Iron should have been the answer to ironing problems, and seemed like a convenient and easy way to beat the ironing day blues.



As the advertisement says, all you had to do was 'strike a match' and you had a hot iron for as long as the petrol lasted.

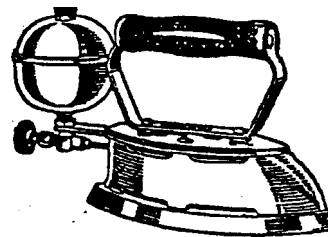
The problems with this iron are numerous. Petrol is a highly flammable liquid and when ignited proves to be extremely dangerous. Petrol irons frequently exploded.

The iron itself is very heavy and with the added weight of the petrol tank, this iron would have proved tiring for the user.

Fumes from the petrol are strong and could be smelt on the clothes after being ironed. In fact the whole process of ironing with the Petrol Iron was risky for a number of reasons: petrol could ignite; there was the possibility of leaking petrol inside one's home; and, the high cost of running the iron.

## No. 8 IRON

An instant-lighting Iron that is an absolute boon on ironing days. All you do is strike a match, turn a valve, and it's ready for any class of ironing. Heat easily regulated, hot, medium or low, and the point stays hot even in heavy, wet work. Carries Coleman Guarantee, and two hour' ironing costs only 1d. Complete with stand, wrench, filling can, pump and instruction chart.



PRICE, **38/6**

## ACTIVITIES

- Do you think the petrol iron would have been popular in olden days? Why?
- List some good and bad points of this iron.
- There are many different irons on this sheet. Count them. How many pictures of petrol irons are there?
- Pick up the petrol iron from the kit. How does it differ from our electric irons?

# MRS POTTS IRON

Ironing was a laborious chore but one which had to be done, as appearances were very important. It was necessary to appear clean and fresh, in spite of general poverty.

Mrs Potts irons were considered very convenient as they came in sets of 3 with one handle that could be interchanged. No. 1 weighed four pounds, No. 2 five pounds and No. 3 six pounds. This meant that as one iron was being used the other two sat on the fire heating. As the iron being used cooled, the handle was taken off and changed with one on the fire. The process was repeated until the ironing was completed.

The iron would need to be cleaned underneath before use, as smoke or soot would come through from the wood fire.

The handle was made of walnut, which didn't get hot. People were able to buy extra handles to use as replacements when one wore out. It was said that Mrs Potts irons made ironing easy, as the iron was double pointed so you could iron either way. In their day, they were the 'deluxe' iron and a forerunner to the small, compact, and easily used irons of today. They had great style and elegance for their time.

## ACTIVITIES

- Examine the iron from the kit. Remove the handle. In which year was it patented? (Look for the year on the iron). What is the patent number?
- How was the iron heated?
- Why is the iron so heavy when compared to irons of today?
- Why does the iron have a wooden handle?
- Where would the iron have been put when the ironing was been finished? How different would this be to ironing today?
- Why was it the 'deluxe' iron?

# ROLLING PIN

The wooden rolling pin was found in many 19th century households throughout Australia. It was used in pastry making. It enabled the pastry to be rolled flat and refolded many times in order to make puff pastry. Butter and eggs were mixed with fine flour and the resulting paste was divided into pieces.

These pieces were buttered, refolded and rolled 5-6 times using the rolling pin.

Early rolling pins were usually made of sycamore wood, which does not colour or flavour food. Some rolling pins were grooved/ridged so that the pins could be used to crush oatmeal or salt.

Porcelain rolling pins were also common although they were much more expensive than the wooden rolling pins. They could be filled with water to provide extra weight and keep the pastry cool whilst rolling. Nailsea glass rolling pins were very popular. Hot, molten glass was rolled in coloured enamel chips, reheated and then re-blown to create marvellous coloured patterns. Made near English ports, they were often given as 'love tokens' by departing mariners. Many held salt and were hung by the fire so that the salt kept dry. However they cost a great deal of money and were easily broken as they were made of glass.

The wooden rolling pin is still sold in shops today because it is unbreakable and relatively inexpensive.

Plastic rolling pins are more common than wooden rolling pins these days as the plastic ones are cheaper. The plastic pins are unbreakable, easily cleaned and are hollow.

## ACTIVITIES

- Compare the wooden rolling pin with other rolling pins available today.
- List the similarities and differences - or what is the same and what is different about the old and new types of rolling pins.
- Cooking activity - Use the rolling pin to make shortbread/pastry in the classroom.
- List the resources needed: the ingredients in the recipe; and the equipment required to make the shortbread or pastry.



# LONG SPOON

You may find long spoons in your kitchen today but they are probably not as long and are made of plastic or pine wood.

Long spoons were popular in the 1900s because stews or soups would be made in very large pots, so it was necessary to have the long spoon to stir these.

Some cooking pots were used over an open fire. The long handles kept the cook's hand away from the fire.

## ACTIVITIES

- Are long-handled spoons used today?
- Why were they popular in the past?
- Why is the spoon made of steel and not wood?

# COLLECTION OF TINS

Tin containers were very popular in the 'Olden Days'. They were good for preserving food, medicines and tobacco because they were hygienic and airtight. Even today, some people prefer to store such things as Christmas cakes in tin containers because they are kept fresh.

As printing on tins became more widely used, competition in appearance became very strong, resulting in very decorative and colourful containers. Brand names were made particularly familiar by signs displayed inside stores and outdoor advertisements displayed on walls and roofs. When plastic was introduced, tins became rapidly less popular. This was mainly due to the cost of producing tins compared to plastic, the weight and bulk of tin, and also the fact that people were increasingly giving preference to fresh food rather than tinned goods.

Today, tin containers are fairly rare and are usually kept as ornamental pieces although if you search Dad's garage you may find some full of nails or fishing tackle!

## ACTIVITIES

- How many tins are in the kit? List the things that were kept in these tins.
- Look at their shapes. Is there a connection between the shape and what it held?
- Now compare their sizes. Is there a connection between the size and what it contained?  
Why do you think they stored tobacco in tins instead of the pouches they use today?
- Can you think of anything that is stored in tins today?  
Make an advertisement for one of the products that was stored in a tin.