

THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY (INC.)

HISTORY IN A SUITCASE

SMALL TIN WASHBOARD



A modern washing machine has an agitator action which helps release dirt from clothes. In earlier days this agitation had to be done by hand. A washboard was used to rub the clothes with water and soap over an uneven surface, usually glass. Each piece of clothing had to be individually scrubbed on the board. This item is a smaller version of the washboard which was normally used, and the glass has been replaced by tin (to make it safer – broken glass is dangerous). Washing clothes in times gone by was a lot more hands on compared to today.

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INKSTAND, INK POT AND PENS



Today we rarely use a pen and ink; writing today uses a biro. Try using the pens with the ink provided and compare to the biro in the kit. Before these pens were produced, we used a bird's large feather; the end was shaped into a quill. One problem with ink is that it takes a while to dry, so you had to be careful not to smudge your writing. Left-handed writers were at a disadvantage!

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FLAT IRON



Why is an iron called an iron? Because it was made of solid iron! It's heavy, so don't drop it!

After washing and drying, clothes usually need to be ironed. Modern clothes are drip-dry: no need to iron because there are no creases. But in times past, ironing was necessary. A heavy metal iron was used. Modern irons use electricity to heat them (and can supply steam); this wasn't available in those days. So this iron was placed on a hot stove (usually wood- or coal-fired) and heated up before ironing. And beware: the handle often got hot too! Some irons had a top enclosure, to hold and burn coal or kerosene! Sounds dangerous!!

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SLATE



Slate is a naturally occurring stone that can easily be split into flat sheets. It is used a lot in Europe as roof tiles. But it is very useful as a writing or drawing pad. Try using the chalk to write or draw on this classroom slate. And the chalk can easily be wiped away. Is the slate as useful as paper? Could we use a biro on the slate?

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MINCER



Sausages have always been popular, but how do you make the filling which goes into the sausage skin? Take cuts of meat and put them through this mincer. It was useful for mincing poorer quality meat. And if you wanted a flavour (like a herb or spice) in the sausage you could add this whilst mincing. Be careful not to put your fingers in the mincer!

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CANDLES AND HURRICANE LAMP



How did we see in the dark before electricity and batteries were invented? We burned candles; note the date on the box is 1894! Then lamps became available; they burned whale oil but then changed to kerosene (from coal or oil shale) which was cheaper, brighter and cleaner. Why was it called a hurricane lamp? Because strong winds wouldn't blow out the flame! Obviously we had to carry these lamps around with us. Don't break the glass!

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SCALES



When we buy groceries in a shop we often need to weigh them to determine the price. In days gone by this spring balance was used for weighing. The heavier the weight the longer the spring stretched. All due to gravity! You can still see such scales used today, but they are not very accurate. Try weighing a few things and see which is the heaviest.

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CLOTHES



On the left is a child's bib front apron. This was the normal dress at home; it protected the clothes underneath and kept them clean. Only the bib needed washing frequently. On the right is a lady's mop hat, commonly used for everyday work. Notice both items are white and made of hard-wearing material. Very few coloured clothes were available in times gone past.

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BED WARMING PAN



On a cold winter's night we turn on our electric blanket or fill a hot water bottle to warm the bed before we get into it. These were not available in olden days. So we had to use a bed warming pan! This is a small copy of a pan; the real one is about 5 times bigger. Heat up water, then pour it into the pan. Place the pan between the sheets and move it around to warm the bed. But remove the pan before getting into bed!!

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BOX CAMERA



The box camera was first sold in 1888. It is a metal box with a lens in one end and film at the other. The lens could not be focussed and the photographic film was not very sensitive, so the camera could only be used in bright daylight and the subject had to stand still. Open up the back and look inside. The film, after taking photos, had to be treated with chemicals to make negatives which were then printed onto photographic paper. A long and messy process! How lucky are we now with cameras in mobile phones and tablets. And we can easily send the photo to anyone anywhere instantly. In olden days we had to post the photo print to our friends; this could take months if they were in another country!