

Contents and information for teachers

Home life within living memory



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This collection is designed to show how life at home has changed over the past 70 years or so by looking at household artefacts. Some items are toy copies simply because the real equivalent would be too large to include!

We have categorized the artefacts in terms of the room in which they would usually be used because some teachers may not have experience of some of these items. NOTE many things remained largely unchanged between the 1930s and 1950s due to the Depression in the 1930s and WW2 and its aftermath in the 1940s.

Using this collection

After exploring the items together we suggest you turn the home corner into a home from the past using items from the collection. You should also tell pupils they need to do the chores in role as people from the past would have done. A list of things they might do should be displayed to prompt them. Interviewing adults (staff/parents/governors etc) about their home life and experiences of some of the items will be very beneficial and develop many of children's historical skills. Some items are paired so children can compare, say, an iron from 70 years ago with one from 50 years ago.

The kitchen

1950s apron



1930s and 1970s electric toasters



1950-60s Tea caddy and aluminium teapot



Washing equipment



By the late 1950s /early 1960s even with the advent of electric washing machines and twin-tubs (washer and spinner side by side in one very large rectangular metal box) the family wash could take up most of the day.

Monday was make-shift dinner because mum had been doing the washing all day – often rissoles and chips in our house. Rissoles were minced up leftover meat and veg from the Sunday roast made into patties bound with egg, coated in flour and fried.

Irons and ironing



1950s-60 food whisk and aluminium jelly mould



The whisk has a very satisfying action.



Sitting room

NOTE: people would not have called it a lounge until roughly the 1970s.

Brass companion set - poker missing



With many post war homes still heated by only open fires up to the 60s Another big task everyday was emptying the ash from beneath the fire grate and disposing of it in the dustbin, without setting it alight because the ash was still hot! Next the hearth and fire surround had to be swept to remove and dust and ash (using the dustpan and brush for the companion set). The coal scuttle or bucket would be refilled if this wasn't done the night before. Often this meant a trip down the garden to the coal house or bunker

– no fun in the rain! In winter the fire might be 'banked up' at night in the hope that it would still be alight come the morning and therefore easier to getting burning well just by adding a bit more coal and stirring it gently with a poker – woe betide anyone who threw too much coal on or stirred the fire too harshly and put the meagre fire out rather than got it burning well! Coal was delivered by coalmen weekly or fortnightly.

Cleaning rugs and carpets

Just like washing clothes, cleaning carpets barely moved on until the 1950s. Although vacuum cleaners were invented in the nineteenth century, initially they were huge horse drawn mechanisms that required an operator. Also before the 1960s most floors were not usually carpeted, so there was little need for much more than a carpet beater, like the one included or a manual carpet sweeper or



'Eubank' (from the maker's name, just like 'Hoover' for vacuum cleaner).

Our toy vacuum cleaner is probably from the 1990s.

Kleen-eze floor and furniture polish tin

With hard floors rather than carpets and wooden furniture rather than laminate, polishing with wax based polishes to protect surfaces from drips and spills and make them shine was a big household job. Kleen-eze was established in 1923. Their brushes and cleaning products were sold via their shops and also door to door by travelling salesmen.



Pupils could ask visiting adults whether they remember door-to-door salesmen and what items they sold.

Biscuit barrel

With limited incomes, biscuits really were a special treat for many and were often kept on the sideboard in something like this splendid object.



Bedrooms

Aluminium hot water bottle 1950s

Bedrooms were often unheated, even though some may have had fireplaces, these were often left unlit due to the expense. So hot water bottles of various types and materials were popular.

Rubber ones largely replaced the ceramic and aluminium ones in the 1960s. The use of hot water bottles largely died out when houses began being built with central heating systems, or householders began to install them in older houses.



Enamel potty

These were found under many children's beds (and some adult's) because the upstairs of many homes was very cold with no heating, so a trip along the landing (or worse, out into the garden in the days of an outside privy) was not welcome. Having one of these under the bed meant only leaving the warmth of the bed for a few moments.



Rag rug



Bedrooms would have been sparsely furnished with just the essentials. Often the floors would just have a small rug next to the bed, just to step onto when getting out of bed. Items like this rag rug could be homemade to save money, using strips of cloth cut from worn out clothes etc and a piece of sacking (hessian). A pointed puller (rag-rug puller) was used to hook the strips of fabric through the hessian.

Kits comprising a base mesh, cut woollen strands and pullers were available from the 60s. Today such items are making a comeback, but rather than as bare essentials, they are handmade as special decorative items. Perhaps some of the children's parents now make craft items for their homes and could demonstrate some of them.

Illustrations:

We include some illustrations of larger items that are not part of the collection, including a cooker, radio and earlier vacuum cleaner, so pupils can see what they were like.

