



Victorian Kitchen – pre and post visit learning experiences

Iron Innovations in the 20th Century

Many new designs for irons began to appear during the 19th and early 20th centuries using fuels such as paraffin, methylated spirits, gas or petrol.

Electric irons began to make an appearance by the beginning of the 20th century but were not commonly in use until the 1920's when electricity was connected to most homes. The real revolution though, was the thermostatic control of the 1930s.

Next came the steam iron and from then on it became more a matter of marketing form over function. This was reflected in some of the American brands of the 1950s, for example: Mary Proctor Never-Lift, Sunny Suzy, the glass Pyrex Silver Streak (pictured below), the Universal Stroke Saver and the Steam-O-Matic, as well as the first cordless iron.



Read the information above and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each invention.

Design an advertisement for one of the irons described.



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Inventions

Mrs Potts' Sad Irons

During its first fifty years, the U.S. Patent Office granted more than 10,000 patents. Only two dozen of these were issued to women. One was to Mary Florence Potts of Ottumwa, for her improved sad iron. Her new iron was designed to stay hot longer; it was filled with a Plaster of Paris which is a non heat conducting material and had a wooden handle.

Mrs Potts made further improvements and on April 4th 1871 she received a second patent. The new design stayed hot even longer, distributed the heat more evenly, but best of all had a detachable handle. This enabled the handle to be taken from the iron which had been returned to the stove, and attached to the next iron to be used. The iron was a hit at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. It was subsequently sold in sets of three irons and one handle.

Mary Potts' picture and name were used in advertising the irons which were still being made in the early 1950s. Sadly though, as is often the case, the invention made more money for the manufacturer than the inventor.



Read through the extract above. Think about some of the reasons why Mary Potts' invention did not make her a wealthy woman.



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Advertising

Look at the advertisement below:



Discuss the effectiveness of this advertisement. Sample questions:

- What do you think Coleman's starch is used for?
- How is it used?
- What parts of the advertisement lead you to suppose that this is an excellent product?

Design a poster advertising a current laundry product of your choice.



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Care and Maintenance

In Victorian times kitchen equipment was often made of cast iron. Great care needed to be taken to prevent it from rusting. Here is an account of how to look after your iron.

..It is well to wash the irons thoroughly with hot water, soda and a brush and dry thoroughly. On no account must an iron be black leaded. Never allow them to stand flat on a stove when the fire is going out as damp collects and rusts them. If you once allow them to get rusty the surface is never so smooth again.



Slug iron 1877

How do you think a range oven was maintained? What about cooking equipment, wash tubs and clothes lines?

Related Research Topics

- Investigate the development of ironing boards and design one for a specific purpose e.g. traveling.
- Irons cause many household fires and have done in the past as well. List safety requirements needed for safe use and maintenance of irons today.
- Find out how other laundry equipment has changed over time e.g. washing machines, clothes dryers, clothes baskets, clothes lines, pegs, drying racks.
- Find out about commercial laundries in early Auckland.