



Any Old Irons, an exhibition at Highwic

## Pre and Post Visit Learning Experiences

### Before Electricity

Brainstorm to assess students' knowledge of kitchen and laundry equipment before electricity was connected to Auckland homes. Collect pictures and stories and search for information on the web. Interview people who were born in the 1940's or earlier, to find out how technology has changed since they were young.


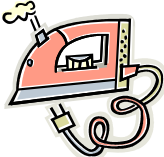


Sample questions:

- How was butter and meat stored before refrigeration?
- How was the cooking done and who did it?
- How was your washing and ironing done when you were a child?
- Where did your water come from and how was it heated?
- How were clothes dried and aired?

Record information learnt under headings and record questions for further inquiry. Discuss the changes that have been made in kitchen and laundry technology since the 1940s or earlier.

### Comparisons

Make a pictorial comparison chart showing examples of kitchen and laundry equipment before electricity and after electricity e.g.

Before electricity	After Electricity
	
	

Invite students to comment on changes caused by electricity in the home under headings such as time, effort, life impact and technological impact.



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### **Iron Innovations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

*Many new designs for irons began to appear during the 20<sup>th</sup> century using fuels such as kerosene, Methylated spirits or petroleum. The fuel was held in a container attached to the rear of the iron.*

*Electric irons began to make an appearance by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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: 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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### Comparing Fabrics

Write the equivalent fabric used today on the right side of this list.

<b>Victorian Times</b>	<b>Today</b>
Woollen underwear	
Silk gown with lace edgings, insertions and tucks and full length sleeves and skirt.	
Cotton petticoats	
Muslin cloths	
Linen sheets	
Double damask tablecloths	
Flannel or woollen jackets or waistcoats	
Starched cotton collars	
Lace curtains	

Find examples of the fabrics used in Victorian times. Test each material to find out how heat resistant it is. Compare with today's fabrics.



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### Selecting the Best Materials

The following is a list of materials used to construct irons over the centuries. Read the list then decide on the advantages and disadvantages of each material. Find more examples by looking on the web.

1. [Laundry - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
2. [History of ironing and irons - flat-irons, sad-irons, mangles](#)

1600s - No heating just pressure on damp cloth	Whole iron	Soapstone
1700s and 1800s – Charcoal irons	Main body of the iron Fixed handle	Brass Wood
1800s - Oriental pan irons heated with charcoal	Whole iron	Cast iron
1900s – Electric irons	Base Main iron body Handle	Steel Enamel Bakelite
1800s and 1900s – Irons heated on a coal range	Main iron body Detachable handle	Cast iron Wood
1900s – Heated with an electric “shoe”.	Whole iron	Pyrex, glass



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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 4<sup>th</sup> 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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### **The Role of the Laundry Maid**

Extract from “*The Country House Servant*” Pamela A. Sambrook, Sutton Publishing Ltd in Association with the National Trust UK, 1999

*When dry, the wash was re-sorted, this time into ten piles, according to the method of finishing.*

*Needing starching, damping and ironing:*

1. *Neckerchiefs, muslins and collars*
2. *White gowns and white frocks*
3. *Coloured gowns and frocks*
4. *Shirts*

*Damping, folding and mangling*

5. *Cotton stockings, shifts, pinafores, sheets, pillow cases, chamber towels, table linen, glass cloths, knife cloths, kitchen cloths*

*Ironing*

6. *Flannel and woollen clothing*

*Damping, folding and ironing*

7. *Petticoats, shifts*
8. *Cotton waistcoats*
9. *Nightcaps, drawers*
10. *Handkerchiefs*

Read through the list above then make a similar list of sorting needs for dry laundry in a typical household today. Write some summary statements comparing laundry needs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



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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.