

From the Collection - Sugar Nippers

by Coal Creek Curatorial Officer - 10 February 2009



This issue I have featured a pair of sugar nippers which are hanging in the General Store window. Thanks to Ian Lester for putting me onto a great book, Liz is now able to tell visitors what they are and what they were used for. Sugar nippers are used for breaking lumps of sugar off the block.



Further research has revealed that from Medieval times to the 19th century, refined sugar was sold in solid form, often in cones, blocks or loaves. This hand coloured lithograph shows a man making sugar into cones c1845.

Conical sugar molds of pottery or wood were used by pouring hot sugar syrup into them and cooling them until solid. The cone had a heavy string or cord up through the long axis like a wick, so that the sugar should be conveniently hung up. It was always wrapped in blue paper. The blue paper was re-used to dye small linens a medium indigo blue.

Nippers were used at the table to break off a chunk for use in coffee or tea. If granulated sugar was needed, the chunks

would have to be crushed with a mortar and pestle. Up till late Victorian times household sugar remained very little changed and sugar loaves were still common and continued so until well into the twentieth century. Sugar nippers can vary in size and design but all serve the same purpose.