TOP TREASURE

Find this at

DIMBOLA
MUSEUM & GALLERIES

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Questions

- What do you think it is?
- Can you describe it?
- What do you think it is made from?
- How big do you think it is?
- What do you think it was used for?

FACT FILE

Plate Camera

What is it?

A camera for making photographs on glass plates.

It is at Dimbola, the home and workplace of famous Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron.

How old is it?

It was probably made around 1880.

What is it made from?

The case is wood, the lens is glass, the focus mechanism is brass and the bellows are cloth.

Other facts

In the 1860s when Cameron was working, photography was new and exciting but it involved a lot of difficult work. Plates of glass had to be coated with chemicals which were dangerous and dirty. The plate was then put into the camera and exposed to the light. After this it had to be treated with more chemicals before a print could be made on paper. This long process meant that there were many more failures than successes. The size and weight of early cameras also made them difficult to transport. Cameron created her photographs in and around her home at Dimbola.

Significance

Photography was first invented in the 1820s and the method Cameron used, called wet collodion, was developed in the 1850s. At first photography was used to record how things looked and because the photographic plate had to be exposed for a long time, it was important the subject did not move. This is one reason why lots of people in old photographs look very serious – they had to concentrate on staying still!

Why don't you?

- Search online to find out more about the history of photography and how it has changed since Cameron was working in the 1860s. Visit: tiny.cc/photo-history and create a fact file about the most important moments in the development of photography.
- Learn more about how cameras work and have a go at making a pin hole camera: tiny.cc/pin-hole-camera

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