

THE MYSTERY OF HISTORY — DECEMBER 6, 2021

WHAT'S IT?



Fig. 1 These views are of two different but nearly identical artifacts. PHOTO: © 2019 Norman J. Frisch

ARTIFACT 21-06

SPECIFICATIONS:

Material: Cast iron body with eyebolts.

Ball circumference = 26.67 cm (10 1/2 in), diameter = 8.48 cm (3.34 in)

Slot height = 9.53 mm (3/8 in), depth = 38.1 mm (1 1/2 in);

Eye bolt diameter = 7.94 mm (5/16 in)

Weight: left artifact = 1.941 kg (4.28 lb); right artifact = 1.886 kg (4.16 lb)

CLUES & QUESTIONS:

Have you seen the 1995 movie classic “Babe”? There is a scene in the movie where the ingenious farmer Hoggett creates a contraption that cleverly makes a normally two-handed job into a one-handed operation. The arti-

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Fig. 2: Closer view to show detail. PHOTO: © 2020 Norm Frisch

facts here would have cut farmer Hoggett's workload in half. If you are able to discover the answers to the questions that follow, you'll be on your way to solving the riddle of the two balls artifacts! How many moving parts are there in the artifacts? For their size they're relatively heavy—why? You could describe these artifacts using a double entendre, “groovy”, a term that has two different meanings. What might the two different meanings be? Please be sure to provide your creative ideas as to what these artifacts could also be used for—it is fun for us to read you're always interesting thoughts!

PS If you have not seen the movie “Babe”, do yourself a favor and watch the fantastic family friendly flick!

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WHAT'S IT?**ARTIFACT 21-06****ANSWER:**

Many weapons developed over the centuries have been repurposed for practical/beneficial uses after their war time use is up. In 1900 there were few planes dotting the sky, but by the end of the Second World War, there were not only planes, but jets—conflicts accelerated technological advancements. The entity with the best technology had an advantage over their opponents. The technology that enabled jets to fly was soon adapted for commercial use and now those original war machines have been turned into “air buses” transporting people around the world in hours instead of days or months. So what do hypersonic jets have to with our four pound artifacts?

The two slotted cannonballs are the evolutionary result of 12th century Chinese “fire lances”. After they invented gunpowder, inventive souls started experimenting with it for a variety of purposes. They soon learned that packing a tube with gunpowder and putting projectiles in front of it gave them a formidable technological advantage in warfare—we do not know how many digits/appendages were lost during the initial testing phase, but one can imagine that getting the proportions right involved a few casualties. By the 14th century Europe was introduced to the process of iron casting. The British adapted this technology to create stronger iron “tubes” and superior

projectiles. The new iron tubes and iron projectiles gave them a huge advantage in warfare. They were used on ships and artillery for land wars. Often times the cannonballs would be heated up until they were red hot and fired at enemy targets to cause physical destruction along with the possibility of causing fires. After various battles that involved using cannonballs ceased, there were surpluses of the four pound smashers available for an alternative use. An inset groove and an eye bolt proved to be perfect as counterweights for gate openers and closers of all description! Combined with various types of gate latches, the “automatic” securing of gates kept livestock within certain boundaries and acted as a safeguard for children that may have left gates opened on their excited way to play . . . hard to believe, but I may have been one of those children!

Elegant, simple, functional engineering existed long before humans started developing into cyborgs. Being inventive is one of our greatest human traits . . . if you have repurposed/adapted an object different from its intended use, let us know, we would love to hear about it!

BTW, the video below provides an excellent exemplar involving the use of cannonball counterweights. Happy gating!

<https://youtu.be/h4J9A9vmvqA>

GUESSES:***Seymour Library In-person Responses***

Becca, “prehistoric jingle bells.”

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WHAT'S IT?

BACKGROUND

“WHAT’S IT?” has been a feature of the BCM website since its inception in 2007. In 2017 Brockport Community Museum board member Archer “Buck” Noble, a Brockport Central School District teacher (now retired) developed “The Mystery of History” school project that encouraged fourth and fifth grade students to use observational and investigative techniques to help determine the type and use of different historic artifacts.

That project was introduced to the general public during a Brockport Community Museum outreach presence at the 2017 Brockport Sidewalk Sale. That success led to this collaboration between the Brockport Community Museum, Seymour Library and Brockport Central School District.

GET INVOLVED

- **Take your best guess** regarding the current artifact.
- **Do you have an artifact** you would like to know more about? Open your query to a larger audience.
- **Have a suggestion** about how we can improve this project?

If so...

Leave your contact information in “Ye old prediction box” near the exhibit display.

CREDITS

Museum project committee

Archer “Buck” Noble

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