



**Chertsey Museum Education Service**  
Runnymede Borough Museum

# *All About ....* **VICTORIAN TOYS**



Chertsey Museum, The Cedars, 33 Windsor Street, Chertsey, KT16 8AT  
Tel: 01932 565764  
[www.chertseymuseum.org.uk](http://www.chertseymuseum.org.uk)



## General Information

Toys have been around from the earliest times and there are several examples of toys from very ancient civilisations still in existence. Many of these remind us of similar toys which are still played with today:

In Medieval times, toys such as kites, toy soldiers, hobby horses and push and pull-along animals were given to children to play with. The simplest toys were made from wood and bone, but the children from wealthy families were also given toys made from bronze, glass and even silver. During the 16th century, Germany led the way in the manufacture of toys. Woodcarving was a traditional countryside craft and, among the cities, Nuremberg became a centre for toy making. By the 18th century, German toys were being exported to America, England, Italy and Russia.

In the 19th century, Victorian children had far fewer toys than today's children. Toys such as rocking horses, dolls' houses and Noah's Arks were only for the wealthy, and many toys such as expensively dressed dolls were so expensive and precious that their young owners were never allowed to play with them.

In 1900 the average wage was £1 a week (the equivalent of £74.39 today) , and a four-roomed doll's house cost £1. 12s. 6d (the equivalent of £120.88 today), so most toys were far beyond the means of ordinary working people. Children from poor families were sent out to work at a very young age and so had very little time for playing, and even those from better-off homes were expected to keep busy helping at home. Playing was normally regarded as a waste of time.

At the beginning of the 19th century, even in the houses of the rich, most toys were judged for their educational value alone - dolls and dolls' houses were designed to teach girls the basic facts about household management and 'dissected puzzles' and card games were given to children to promote their factual learning.

Attitudes changed gradually as the century progressed and this, together with the spread of industrialisation, meant that an increasing number of families were able to afford the new toys coming on to the market. Mass produced, and therefore cheaper, tin toys flooded in from Germany and mechanical toys, clockwork railways and lead soldiers became increasingly popular. Machine-made paper, photography and new printing processes also brought new items into the toy shops. There was a whole new range of books and magazines specially written for children and brightly coloured scraps for sticking into special albums were manufactured. In the second half of the 19th century, toys were more commonly made from metal rather than wood and America increasingly became the centre for toy manufacture.

## Lead Toys

Miniature people and animal toys have been around since the earliest civilisations, but were first made as ornaments rather than toys. However, since medieval times, both children and adults have played with toys soldiers and assembled complex battle scenes.

Lead toy soldiers and other figures were very popular. They were first made in moulds in Germany during the 18th Century. Lead was used as it was a cheap and widely available metal, and people were not aware of it being a poisonous metal. Later tin was used which is not as soft and breakable as lead.



The first soldiers were less than a millimetre thick, but were cheaper than the solid metal figures. The flat figures would have had a base attached to them to enable them to stand up. The height of the figures was always 3cm for standing figures, and 4cm for those on horse back. This was probably to enable the toys to become compatible. Often the figures were sold unpainted at a lower cost, widening the market as well as adding another element of fun to the toys.

In 1893 British toy maker William Britain invented a new way of making toy soldiers. These were hollow, rounded figures. They were lighter and a worker could make 300 figures an hour from a hand-held mould.

While you could buy forts/farms to place your toys in to play with, most people would have made their own area as a base for the toys. Soldiers were very popular, as well as sailors, farmers, animals and carts. These toys were for boys to play with, as like dolls for girls, boys would one day grow up and work in those professions.

## Happy Families

Card games and board games were often played in the evening by families as entertainment. Very few people could afford to buy such things, but they could easily be made at home.

In the 18th century instructional and question and answer cards, many of which were on a range of rather obscure subjects, were considered an excellent way of learning through play, but, as with the jigsaws of this period, the cards were hardly entertaining in content! By the middle of the 19th century, however, packs of cards were being produced that were purely for pleasure. Colour printing also made these products far more attractive and they became extremely popular with children of all ages.



Popular card games included those of a geographical nature and 'conversation cards,' which involved having to talk to the group.

The cards in this box are copies of hand drawn and coloured cards made in the 1860's by children of the Broadwood family of Lye house near Capel in Surrey. Bertha Broadwood, the eldest of the children, wrote on the envelope in which the cards were found: "they were made by us because Lady Maud Bence Jones objected to her children playing-at cards."

The happy families game aims to encourage the idea of a happy family life, with husband, wife, daughter and son. The cards also reflect the simplicity of people's roles within society, both within the family and also within their town or village — a very different scene to family and job roles today.

## Automata

There were no batteries, so toys had to move either by pushing or pulling, clockwork movement or elastic bands.

This is a copy of a Victorian toy, whose figures revolve at different speeds as the handle is turned. Such toys are called 'automata'.

This toy is not as complex as a wind-up-toy with internal workings. It has very basic workings similar to those of a wind-up toy and these can be seen working as the handle is turned. Such a basic toy could have easily have been made at home.



## Spinning Tops

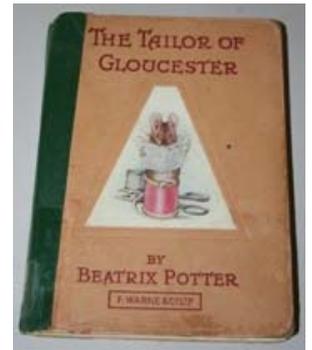


Spinning tops have been a popular children's toy since ancient times. They could be simple wooden or pottery tops or much more elaborate and decorated tops made from metal or other precious materials.

Poor children could easily turn what would seem like rubbish into a spinning top, whereas rich children may have had elaborate metal spinning tops that may even have 'hummed'. Tops based on the Victorian metal spinning tops are still available in toy shops today, although they are often made of plastic.

## Children's Books

In early Victorian times books were mainly used for instruction and moral lessons. However, during the Victorian era legislation was introduced which limited the number of hours children could work and introduced compulsory education for children.



These changes meant that many more children could read and had the time to do so. This change, along with other changes in social attitudes towards children, meant that story books, rhymes and fairy tales became popular. As a result, the children's literature became a growth industry.

## Cut-Out Pictures for Scrap Books

Scrap book cut-outs were popular in the Victorian era. Again, without television, radio or computers, this was another way in which children amused themselves. The improvements in colour printing and embossing meant that it was possible to produce these commercial "scraps" far more effectively. And from around 1860 the colourful embossed scraps began to be exported in vast quantities from Germany and France.



There were no guidelines on where to cut, so some cut right up against the person in the image. Sometimes scraps were taken from Christmas cards, and these were all taken and put into a large book which would have the person's name and date on it, sometimes with tissue separating the pages.

The greatest production of scraps was between 1875 and 1900, the subject being chubby and beautifully dressed children, romantic scenes and special occasions (including mourning).

## Jumping Jack

Jointed figures have been popular for centuries and were usually made out of cardboard or thin wood. They were popular with children in Victorian times and used in toy theatres to act out a play or pantomime that they may have attended. This figure is from the earliest traditional English pantomimes performed in the first half of the last century. In those days the most exciting part of the show was the 'Harlequinade' where, as part of the plot, the hero and heroine were always transformed into Harlequin (this character) and Columbine, and the villain and his henchman into Pantaloon and the Clown.



Toy theatres are thought to have developed out of the centuries old interest in making and collecting sheets of figures, which in the 18th century inspired publishers to print theatrical characters as souvenirs. Adults and children cut out these figures which inevitably led to simple scenes being created to display them on.

These simple scenes soon developed into sophisticated toy theatres, many bought from George Pollock's shop in Hoxton, and given to children at Christmas to perform at home. This was the real theatre in miniature. They included wings, backdrops, trapdoors, bridges and fairies floating on clouds. Several were adapted from productions that had been staged in the London theatres.

## Zoetrope

Optical toys, such as the zoetrope, were very popular in the Victorian Period. A zoetrope gives the illusion of the cartoons and images actually moving inside the metal (or wooden) container. Different strips could be purchased and placed inside zoetrope. The user would then spin the zoetrope and view the strip through the slits on the sides.

Peep shows and magic lanterns were around for three or four centuries before they became toys specifically meant for children in the 1900s.



Experimentation with a variety of simple methods of simulating movement led to the development of the cinematograph, and a wide range of optical toys were invented which had an array of complex names such as the Thaumatrope, the Praxinoscope and the Phenakistoscope, and of course the still popular kaleidoscope.

## Cup and Ball



Cups and balls have been around since the 15th century. They were common in Victorian school playgrounds and are still used today.

The game was simple but the idea was to work on the hand-eye co-ordination of the child. The hope was that the more they played with the toy, the better their co-ordination would become.

## Wooden Pop Gun

This replica toy is one example of the type of pop guns that were bought or made for Victorian children.

Another example would have been the type where a flag popped out, instead of a cork. Pop guns would have been mainly for boys.



## Swing Toy

This is another example of a wooden toy that displays a simple mechanical movement. To get it to work, the two long pieces of wood are squeezed together. This forces the toy to swing into the air and look like it is moving on its own.

This is an example of a very basic design that results in a moving toy.



## Teddy bears

Toy bears of a realistic nature were popular in the 19th century, long before the arrival of the 'Teddy'. These bears appeared fierce, and scary often with sharp teeth and glaring eyes. Bears were a part of the folklore of many countries—for example in Russia, where it was called 'Mishka', and in England, where it was called 'Bruin'.

It was not until 1903 that the Teddy we know today first appeared. The President of the United States of America, 'Teddy' Roosevelt, was depicted in a cartoon with a bear, which he had refused to shoot, at his feet.



The founder of the Ideal Toy Corporation of America, Morris Michtom, used this drawing to produce a range of bears with button eyes which he called 'Teddy's Bears'. They were an immediate success and were produced in large quantities for sale in his shops.

In the same year, Margaret Steiff, a German toy manufacturer, also saw the cartoon, and started to produce a jointed doll-like figure with a bear's head. Its success was overwhelming, and demand for the Teddy bear throughout the world took off.

## Dolls

Dolls have been around for thousands of years. Wooden dolls from Egypt, terracotta dolls from Greece and even rag dolls from Roman times have all survived and can be seen today. In Victorian times dolls were made from a variety of materials such as rags, wood, papier mache, wax and porcelain. The latter were generally not intended for playing with but were dressed in fabulously detailed clothes of the period and were designed to be looked at rather than touched. Wax dolls were also produced - the cheaper ones were generally made from papier mache and coated with a thin veneer of wax. This process enabled the manufacturer to produce a doll with more realistic features at a more reasonable price. Many dolls were of a composite nature - porcelain heads could be combined with papier mache bodies, or 'bisque' (unglazed china) heads with leather bodies. Dolls were popular for both boys and girls to play with.



In the loan box is an example of an early wooden doll, which has the basic features of the doll (please handle with care). The clothes would have been made out of any left over material or rags. Girls would have all had a knowledge of sewing, and a pastime would be making the clothes for their dolls (please see the doll's clothes). There is also an example of an early plastic doll from around the 1950s (please handle with care).

Doll's houses have been in existence for at least 500 years, but it was during the 19th century that their manufacture increased dramatically as the ever widening middle classes were anxious to provide their children with good toys. The interiors were highly decorated and the furniture was made out of wood or tin. Bathrooms occasionally appeared in Victorian doll's houses, although they were not a regular feature until the 20th century. Model shops were also manufactured in Victorian times, but were not as popular as doll's houses.

## Dominoes

Games such as chess, draughts and knucklebones all have ancient origins and were the main table games played by children until the 18th century. The 19th century is particularly associated with table games of the parlour variety which were played by all members of the family.



Charades, fortune-telling games and an array of question and answer games were played with great enthusiasm. As the century progressed and children were permitted to take part in rowdier pastimes, games became more physical and noisy play was actually encouraged! Many of these games are now lost, but table skittles, in a variety of forms, is one that has survived.

Dominoes were used to help children learn numbers, as the more they would play the better they could become at maths. Some dominoes were very elaborate, and were kept in valuable boxes. These are basic wooden dominoes.

## Golly

One of the most popular soft toys of this time was the golly (or golliwog to give it its original name), first made in the 1870s. Despite its sometimes quite frightening features, it remained a favourite for many decades until the 1960s when attitudes changed and it was decided that it embodied the worst aspects of racial prejudice. At this point, its manufacture ceased.



The Museum is aware of the sensitivities surrounding this toy. However, it is also important to teach children how attitudes towards those with different skin colours and ethnic backgrounds has changed over time, as long as these issues are addressed in a sensitive, careful manner.