

Childhood Toys, Games and Pastimes

As an only child in the lives of many adults, I had plenty of toys. I tended to keep my toys rather than pass them on or dispose of them. Many survived to be played with by my children and grandchildren. Until I was six, my father painted an annual picture of my favourite toys and these were also listed in my 'Baby Book'.

None of the presents that I received when I was born were toys, perhaps suggesting that, at this time, tiny babies were not considered to need toys. My Baby Book records my favourite toys in my first year as including a rubber doll that had been mum's; I think this perished and was disposed of. There was also a pink lamb teether and the coloured plastic scoops that came with the dried 'Cow and Gate' baby



Gee-Gee Push



Baby Toys



Stacking-cups

milk. I had Betty doll for my first Christmas, together with some cuddly toys and 'gee-gee push' a walker with a horse's head. Stacking pots were a first birthday present and I had 'Lovely Boy' teddy bear and a red wooden trolley full of alphabet bricks when I was two. Jane, a Rosebud doll, complete



Alphabet Bricks



Sally-Ann

with a pram, was a second birthday present. Sally-Ann, a walking, talking doll that was nearly as large as I was, arrived when I was three, followed by Mary, Mirabelle, a baby doll who was one I did part with and Christine a teenaged doll. Last to join the family was Jilly, another baby doll. All the dolls had many clothes made my mum, granny and later by me. I also had Dina, a large rag doll that mum



Jane Mary and Jilly



Me with Dina, Mary, Sally-Ann, Jane, ? and Fairy in the pram 1960



Me on the Trike with Dad, Mary, Fifi and Sally-Ann 1960

made for me; she also made Lizzie Golly. I had two crocheted poodles, one white, Fifi and one black, that I think had been made by mum and granny. Dina and the poodles did not survive but I still have all the others. My favourite 'Teddy' was a Pekinese shaped nightdress case called Honey, that I didn't have until I was about nine.



Honey



Christine

I did play with some of mum's toys including Gladly (the cross-eyed bear), a large china doll called Peter and a smaller equivalent. Mum's big teddy had been buried after it got glass embedded in it during the Blitz, so I didn't inherit that. There was also a doll made from Bakelite who had a gender reassignment from 'Fairy' to 'Mickey', or maybe it was the other

way round. In either case Fairy had to be ceremoniously buried as he/she become very brittle and mum was worried about a potential fire risk. A less attractive doll was the one with green hair that reminded me of the much-hated parsley sauce, that I really couldn't stomach when it was served for school dinners. I had a dolls' pram and later a push chair. Mirabelle came with a carrycot, which may have been home made. Gonks were another cuddly toy craze; perhaps popularised by the television series *Play School* (1964) they consisted of a combined body and head and four limbs. In the 1960s, trolls became a fashion and these ugly 'dolls' came in various sizes, including ones that could be slotted on the ends of pencils. I had several of these pencil top trolls, which had a very distinctive smell, two middle sized ones and a large, clothed one called Anet. The naming was important. I took a wide variety of toys to bed with me at each night, at one stage these include a tennis ball sized yellow plastic ball with raised dots on the surface, named 'Pimples'. Each one had to be bade 'goodnight'. These items had a series of rhyming names and Anet was named to rhyme with Janet. If you are wondering what rhymed with Pimples, it was a small doll called Dimples.

By the time I was about eight, teenaged dolls were in fashion. I had two Sindys, one dark and one fair, Sindy's little sister Patch, Sindy's boyfriend Paul and Tressy whose hair was suppose to grow when you pressed a button in her tummy and pulled and then be wound back in with a key but it wasn't very successful. I also had a few cheap imitation Sindys. I had no desire for the American equivalent, which was Barbie. I had numerous bought and home-made clothes for these dolls and some accessories, including a wardrobe, dressing table, dining set and horse and trap. Mum knitted each new Sindy, or Sindy substitute, an identically styled outfit in different colours, consisting of a skirt, jumper and hat. My next door neighbour, Bridget and I played for hours with these dolls. I can still remember our hysterical giggles on one occasion when she dropped Sindy's umbrella in her cup of tea.

Dad made me wooden toys during quiet spells at work. The best of these were 'Noddy Ceteras', painted, hardboard Noddy characters and houses and toadstools for them to live in. There was a wooden train, a doll with

jointed arms and legs, a dog, a rabbit and a monkey strung between two supports. When these were squeezed the monkey did somersaults. He also made me a base for my many plastic zoo and farm animals. As I got older, I concentrated on collecting horses and playing stables. Also home-made was a dolls' house, constructed by my Uncle Percy. I was especially excited when he later built a two story extension. The house even had battery powered lights, which I think dad may have installed. Some of the furniture was home-made too, for example mum made the three piece suites and dad made the dust bin and coal bin. It was almost unheard of for my toys to be passed on, let alone without consultation, so the departure of this dolls' house was unusual. I don't know why it was given away and replaced by a much less impressive shop bought alternative but it was. The only other toy whose exodus I don't remember approving was a large green-line, single-decker bus that I had when I was quite small. It was about two feet long and it was just possible to negotiate the windows in order to get small dolls to sit on the seats. I did have a dinky/matchbox car collection and there was no suggestion that this was



Some Wooden Toys made by Dad



Floral Garden

inappropriate for a girl. Dad made me a roadway by sticking a cardboard road layout onto two large sheets of hardboard.

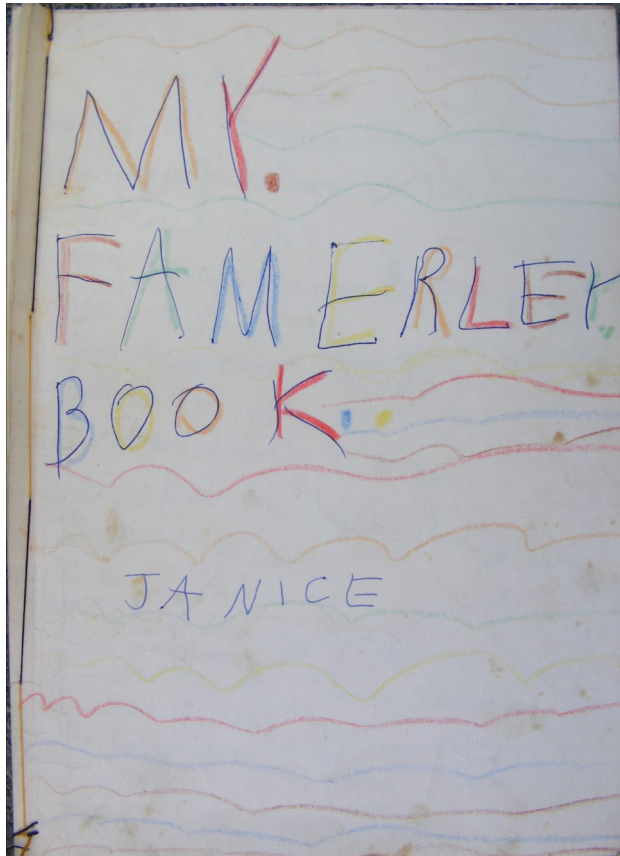
I inherited my mum's lead 'floral garden' and when Britain's bought out a plastic version I bought many sets. Flowers, vegetables, trees, grass and paths could all be purchased in sets and then arranged in complicated layouts; this was a firm favourite. It was frequently combined with the 101 dalmation and Disney sets that I collected from Woolworths.

Other items that I inherited were a series of small coloured balls that could be arranged in patterns in punched cards, which stopped the balls moving. I also had a bagatelle set, I believe this too may have been made by Uncle Percy. I had my dad's lead soldiers and my maternal grandfather's glass marbles and wooden solitaire boards. I loved jigsaws and inherited several wooden ones from mum as well as having my own. I was particularly fond of one where you put together a house and then the four rooms could be put in four spaces interchangeably. I also had several shaped 'jig-maps'.



Wooden Jigsaws

I played many imaginative games. From the age of about six I compiled 'famerley books'. Lists of scores of imaginary brothers and sisters, complete with dates of birth and pictures. Most of these were multiple births of some kind. I also played schools and pretended that our two story house was actually several stories high. I drew plans designating a purpose for each room on each floor. I had a large dressing up box, enhanced by saris and jewellery provided by 'Auntie Dilly'. I also had an extensive toy shop with tiny packets, some of which had been made by mum by cutting out coloured adverts and sticking them to hand made cardboard boxes. I played farms in the garden and built dens when on holiday in Norfolk and utilising Bridget's Anderson Shelter.



A 'Famerley' Book

I was given my large trike when I was five and I loved it. It took me a long time to abandon it for my two wheeled bike, when I was nine. I have already mentioned my Bayko construction set, which occupied many hours. Other firm favourites were Fuzzy felts. Again, mum made me additional 'felts' by sticking pictures onto felt shapes. There were also 'sticky shapes', small pre-cut adhesive shapes in bright colours. These came in small boxes and could be licked and stuck down in order to create patterns. You could also get six inch squares, which could be used to cut out shapes of your own. My



My Trike

Granny taught me to knit and I had rainbow wool sets as well as 'Knitting Nancy' French knitting and 'Pom-pom Pets', plastic semicircles that could be fixed together to facilitate the making of woolly pom-poms.

The modelling material, Plasticine was never very satisfactory as it took a great deal of work to get it soft enough to manipulate but it was a regular stocking filler; it also

had a pervading smell. Crayons and paints were popular and felt pens came in when I was about eleven. We all wanted '12+1' pens. Thirteen different coloured biro inserts were housed in one large plastic 'pen'. The different colours could be moved so that whichever one was required was in the middle space and could be used. The pen was however uncomfortably fat. I liked colouring books and 'Magic' books. There were two sorts. You either scribbled on a blank page with pencil to make the picture visible or you painted water on, which made a rather runny-coloured picture appear.

We played a lot of board games and from the age of about ten there was usually a new board game each Christmas. Monopoly, Careers, Buccaneer and Totopoly were early acquisitions; the latter was second hand. In order to encourage me to eat we often played cards during dinner; usually Canasta. We also frequently played patience, referring to a large book, which explained numerous different versions of patience.

At the very end of the 1960s, television advertising began to establish the Christmas 'cult' toy. The pattern drawing 'Spirograph' and the electronic 'Stylophone' promoted by Rolf Harris came into this category and I had both. Topical board games were also heavily advertised at Christmas time and as I came out of childhood there were the early signs of peer pressure creating 'must have' toys. The only things that I can



Fuzzy-Felts

remember craving but not having were a Pelham puppet and an Amanda Jane doll. These were things that I had seen on display in the local department store.

I inherited and added to, my paternal grandfather's extensive stamp collection. Apart from collecting and purchasing stamps of my own, at intervals, mum would supplement my collection by handing over a selection from my grandfather's collection. I was ill in bed when the 1966 special world cup winners stamp was issued. I was sticking stamps in in bed and somehow that stamp got lost, never to be found.

I-spy books were fun, small, themed books inviting children to spot such things as dogs, cars, trees or street furniture. There was also an I-Spy Club, headed by Big-Chief I-Spy, which was run in conjunction with this series of books. Membership wallets were available and a column in the Daily Mail newspaper supported this. I had several letters from Big Chief I-spy.

Books and Comics

Books were always a huge part of my life and I could read reasonably fluently by the time I was three. I preferred to own books rather than borrow them and re-read them many many times. It was not unusual to work my way through half a dozen books a day in the school holidays.

The many picture books that are available today for very tiny children were not seen as necessary when I was a toddler. I don't remember nursery rhyme books, although rhymes were regularly recited by Mum and Granny. I had an alphabet book that I embellished with scribbles. When I was about two mum made a Dictaphone recording (which no longer survives) of me reading it. When I got to 'S' I said



A Selection of Books

'oh I made a mess of that one!'. Favourite books when I was under seven, included a series of cardboard covered books such as *Doll House Tea Party* and *The Magic Key*. There were others in the series but these were read most often. There was also a series of small square soft-covered books that I believe were called 'Pixie' books. I think I started collecting these on holiday. A hard covered series of a similar size (about four inches square) included tales of anthropomorphic animals. Two other books that I particularly remember from when I was very small are one about a family of terrapins, which ended when the lonely baby turtle found a friend, 'Little Terra's happy now he's found Terrapy'. The companion book was about a fairy. Another series of hard backs with yellow spines included traditional tales, such as *The Elves and the Shoemaker* or *Rapunzel* and other stories, for example one about Hushwing the Owl. Another favourite from this era was the story of 'Raggedy Anne'. I also liked the Mary Mouse books, that were shaped like a cheque book. *Swallows and Selina* was a school prize that I liked, although the fact that one of the fledgling swallows died was faintly disturbing.

As I got older, I became an Enid Blyton fan. I was already familiar with the Noddy books, illustrated by Beek. I remember how excited I was to be given one from the holidaymakers' library when I was on holiday at Colwell Bay Holiday Club. I had several collections of Enid Blyton's stories in a hard back series with yellow covers but my absolute favourites in this format were the full length stories *The Treasure Seekers* and *The Boy Next Door*. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that I read these two scores of times. I can remember sunny school holidays lying in the garden reading these books. My collection of Armada books grew rapidly and included several Blyton series. I was never particularly keen on the Secret Seven or Famous Five series; I was a Five Find-Outers fan. I also liked the Secret series and the Adventure series (Castle/Ship/Circus etc. of Adventure). The St Clare's and Mallory Towers school stories made me pester to be allowed to go to boarding school. How this would have worked with my food preferences I did not consider. What did disconcert me about Enid Blyton was that none of these 'gangs' marooned in strange places ever made provision for any kind of toilet!

I also liked pony books by Ruby Ferguson and the Pullen-Thompson sisters, Monica Edward's Punchbowl Farm series and books by Malcolm Saville. Later I became a devotee of Elinor M Brent Dyer's Chalet School series. 'Better' authors were published by Puffin, cost slightly more and were never so appealing to me. Initially all the spines of the Armada books were in two colours with a third colour for the printing. I was able to name the colour combination for each individual book and sadly, I could probably still remember most of them! By the time I was about eleven or twelve I had discovered historical novels. This was inspired by watching the film of Anya Seton's *Dragonwyck* on television. I worked my way through all of her books, *Devil Water* being my favourite. I also enjoyed Jean Plaidy and much of my knowledge of historical chronology came from her books.

For comics I had Enid Blyton's *Sunny Stories* magazine when I was very small; the first issue was in 1959 and I had these from that year. I particularly remember the rebus in each edition 'Reading is fun with Amanda the Panda'. Later I had *Bunty*, *Judy* and *June and School Friend*, which were printed on newspaper. It was always very exciting when an issue had a free gift, such as a metal ring or a bangle. The best part of *Bunty* was the cut out doll on the back page of each issue. For ages the doll always looked the same, with her looped up plaits, so the clothes were the same shape and interchangeable. Later she became more modern and was a different shape and with a different blonde hair style each week. I often stuck the clothes and dolls on the back of a cornflake packet to make them more durable. There were also 'Nora and Tilly' cut out dolls who came in *Woman and Home* magazine. In 1963, *Diana* was a new comic on glossy paper and I had this from the first issue, which I still have. I also purchased American comic books at Clapham Junction station when I went to visit my grandparents.

Most of these comics had annuals and an annual was always a sure fire success as a Christmas present. Rupert Bear was a cartoon in the *Daily Express* and I would cut out and keep his adventures, pasting them into a large ledger, covered with wrapping paper; I still have this. Rupert annuals were also popular. Later I also cut out the Fred Basset and 'Love

is' cartoons from the *Daily Mail*. Then I became obsessed with Schultz's Peanuts cartoons and had many books containing collections of these. As a teenager, I had *Jackie* magazine and the pop newspapers *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* (NME). The latter were purchased because it was trendy rather than because I actually read much of them.

Children's Television

I watched television from a young age but not extensively. The television was turned on and then turned off when we had finished watching what we wanted. I remember a number of programmes from my childhood. I have put the year that they were first screened in brackets after the titles. Daily, *Watch with Mother* was a must. *Picture Book* (1955) was on a Monday, *Andy Pandy* (1952) on Tuesday, *Bill and Ben the Flowerpot Men* (1953) on Wednesday, *Rag, Tag and Bobtail* (1953) to be replaced by *Tales from the Riverbank* (1960) on Thursday. The one I liked best was Friday's *The Woodentops* (1955). This featured Sam who helped Daddy Woodentop, Mrs Scrubbit who helped Mummy Woodentop and the 'biggest spotty dog you ever did see'. I particularly remember an episode that included a song 'What shall we have for dinner today? Sawdust and hay, sawdust and hay.' Other children's programmes that have stuck in the mind are the story telling *Jackanory* (1965) programme, *Animal Magic* (1962) with Johnny Morris, *Blue Peter* (1958) hosted, in my era, by Valerie Singleton and Christopher Trace, which always included a craft demonstration. This was impossible to replicate and required copious use of sticky-backed plastic and discarded washing-up liquid bottles. Later, this gave rise to the phrase 'Here's one I made earlier'. My absolute favourite was *Crackerjack* (1955). Peter Glaze and Leslie Crowther were the hosts, together with Eamonn Andrews. 'It's Friday, it's five to five, it's *Crackerjack*'. I was a great fan of Leslie Crowther, whose autograph I had. Amongst other items was the 'Double or Drop' game in which children won prizes for correctly answering general knowledge questions. You could carry on answering questions as long as you could hold all your winnings. To make things more difficult a wrong answer meant that you were awarded a cabbage that you also had to hold. You were eliminated if you dropped anything or gained a third cabbage. *Twizzle*

(1957) was another programme for young children, it was about a boy whose arms and legs could extend. Then there were the adventures of *Lassie* (1954) the collie. Another favourite programme, which no one else can remember, was called *The Terrible Ten* about the adventures of ten children; I think it was Australian in origin.

Adult Television

As a young teenager the Friday ritual was *Crackerjack* followed by the American series *The Banana Splits*. *The Monkees*, featuring the pop group of the same name was also popular. Once at Parkfields, we normally ate our tea in front of the television watching the news, the magazine programme *Nationwide* (1969) and a quiz such as *Ask the Family* (1967) with Robert Robinson. Other popular quizzes were *Call my Bluff* (1965), *Sale of the Century* (1971), *Take your Pick* (1955) and *What's my Line* (1951) where contestants had to guess a person's occupation from a mime. Favourite series of the time included the dramas *Colditz* (1972), *Family at War* (1970), *The Forsyte Saga* (1967) and *Upstairs Downstairs* (1971). I think *The Forsyte Saga* was probably screened on a Sunday afternoon as my friend was usually with us when we watched. The American series *The Waltons* (1972) and *The Little House on the Prairie* (1974) were also favourites. Crime series were *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955), *Z Cars* (1962) and later *Softly Softly* (1966) with Stratford Johns. The only soaps, although we didn't call them that, at this time were *Coronation Street* (1960) and *Crossroads* (1964); we occasionally watched the latter. Comedies included *On the Buses* (1969), *The Likely Lads* (1964) and *The Liver Birds* (1969). Then came the cult 'modern' comedy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969). A long standing favourite was the game show *It's a Knockout* (1966) and its international equivalent *Jeux Sans Frontier* (1965). We didn't watch much sport, although Wimbledon and the Horse of the Year Show were musts, as was any Olympic coverage. The annual screening of Crufts was also watched avidly. Entertainment shows included *Come Dancing* (1949), now reinvented with an added celebrity element as *Strictly Come Dancing*, *The Billy Cotton Band Show* (1956), *The Black and White Minstrels* (1958) and the annual New Year's Eve extravaganza, *The*

White Heather Club (1958), hosted by Andy Stuart. There were also entertainment shows, frequently screened on a Saturday night and often fodder for Christmas Specials. These included those featuring Morcombe and Wise (1967), mum's favourite Val Doonican (1970) in his rocking chair, *The Two Ronnies* (1971) and Cilla Black (1968). In the early 1970s, I watched many films on television.

We rarely listened to the radio until I started listening to pop programmes when I was ten or eleven. Initially, this was the Saturday morning request programme. I can remember that the Seekers' *The Carnival is Over*, which was in the charts for many weeks, was featured on this programme during the time I was listening in. Later, I listened to the top forty on a Friday afternoon as mentioned above and also to Radio Luxembourg and Radio Caroline because it was the 'in' thing to do. When I had a reel to reel tape recorder for Christmas in 1967, I used to record my favourite pop songs from the weekly chart show. This was fraught with difficulty as one had to press record and stop at the optimum moments. Apart from the need for the dog not to bark and the phone not to ring, the beginning and end of each track was usually drowned out by the disc jockey. When transistor radios arrived I would sit in the garden listening to pop music through the ear piece for as long as the battery lasted.