

## Frederick's Games Box

This games box was part of my childhood. With its 'secret' hidden compartments, it held a fascination for me. You lift the lid and open the doors to reveal ebony and ivory chess pieces, each standing on its own spike. The lid holds the board for draughts or chess, with a backgammon board on the



reverse. There is a cribbage scoring board, although I have never been able to play crib. This lifts up to reveal a set of ivory dominoes. The draughts counters sit neatly in a row in front of the cribbage board with the dice at either side. The top tray lifts out to reveal compartments that now contain counters but probably originally held playing cards. Below that again are more compartments with two dice shakers.



The box is in need of some minor restoration. A little of the veneer has lifted from the edges, the hinges are broken and the felt has come off the bottom. Getting this done is on the very long 'to do' list.



**Frederick Herbert Smith**

I was always told that this belonged to my grandfather Frederick Herbert Smith.

He died when I was a toddler but from all accounts, he was a very serious man, who was not very comfortable in social situations. He certainly played chess and I know his wife and daughter, my grandmother and mother, loved to play cards.

These boxes seemed to be popular and several, almost identical, or very similar, 'games compendiums' are advertised on the websites of various

auction houses. Complete with their cards and in better condition, they seem to sell for considerable sums. They are universally described as 'Victorian', with dates ranging from the 1860s to 1880s. Frederick wasn't born until 1894. I suspect he was a precocious child but

he is unlikely to have acquired this during the Victorian era. It seems that, although I have entitled this 'Frederick's Games Box', it would have belonged to his parents before him. Given the likely date it would have pre-dated their 1892 marriage. If it was

manufactured in the 1860s then it may even have belonged to

the previous generation. In nineteenth century society, I feel this would have been a man's possession, rather than a woman's. Herbert Havet



**Frederick's parents Catherine Smith née Seear and Herbert Havet Smith**



**William Joseph  
Smith**

wasn't born until 1866. It is of course possible that either Herbert Havet or Frederick acquired the box second-hand but could it have been purchased by Herbert's father William Joseph Smith? The box is not mentioned in any family wills, to help us trace its path. If it was first owned by Herbert Havet, then it is logical that it ended up in my possession, as I am his only great-grandchild; Frederick was his only surviving child and both my mother and I are only children. If however it began with William Joseph, he had five children who survived him, of which Herbert Havet was the youngest and the second son. William Joseph died before Frederick was born, so it would not have been left directly to him. Perhaps it passed first to William's widow, Eliza. In any case, it seems certain that Frederick was not its first custodian.