

Old Toys



General Information

There is evidence that toys have been played with all over the world since early times. There are several examples of toys from very ancient civilisations that are still in existence.

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 intricately dressed dolls were so expensive and precious that their young owners were never allowed to play with them.

In the 1900s, the cost of toys meant that most 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 onto 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 brought a whole new range of books and magazines, specially written for children too. In the second half of the 19th century, toys were more commonly made from metal rather than wood.

Children's Book



Children's Book

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

Soft Toy Monkey



Soft Toy Monkey

Prior to the late 1800s soft toys were homemade and individualistic, often stuffed with cloth, sawdust or straw.

However, in 1880 the German Steiff company used new technology to develop upholstery to make their stuffed toys.

Our monkey has been very well looked after as he from the 1930s - so please be careful with him.

Doll with Miniature Cup & Saucer



Doll with Miniature Cup & Saucer

Dolls have been around for thousands of years and used all over the world. In Victorian times dolls were made from a variety of materials such as rags, wood, papier-mâché, wax and porcelain. They weren't actually intended for playing with, but were made as ornaments, dressed in fabulously detailed clothes of the period.

Many dolls were made up of different materials - a porcelain head could be combined with a papier mache body, or a china head with a leather body. Therefore, if you accidentally broke your doll's head you could go to a doll hospital and get it replaced.

As toys got cheaper, dolls became more of a toy item than an ornament. Dolls were often bought for girls to help them learn the skills of motherhood.

In our loans box we have a doll very much like the type of ornamental dolls the early Victorians would have had, she even has her own tea cup and saucer. Her body is soft, but her hands and head are made from china.

Spinning Tops



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. Tops based on the Victorian metal spinning tops are still available in toy shops today, although they are often made of plastic.

In our loans box we have three different spinning tops.

The colourful one is very modern, but is still made from wood.

The lighter coloured top is from a whip and top set, although it is missing its whip. The whip would be wound around the top of the spinning top and pulled away quickly to make the spinning top spin.

The darker coloured one is the oldest and it is missing the stick at the top which would have been used to spin it.

Glass Bottle and Marbles



Glass Bottle and Marbles

No one really knows where marbles originated from. They have been found in ancient civilisations all over the world. The first marbles were simply stones that had been polished smooth by a running river. Next, people made them by hand from clay, this was done up until 1884 when they were first mass produced in America. Then, in 1915, marbles were made out of glass.

In our loans box we have 10 marbles, two 'Kings' and 8 smaller ones. There are many different games you can play with marbles and no one set of rules.

In the loans box we also have a Victorian fizzy drinks bottle. The glass ball inside it is the stopper; when it is full the liquid pushes the glass ball to the top. For poorer Victorian children, who couldn't afford to buy marbles, a good way to get some was to smash open these bottles and get the glass ball out – but please don't do this to our bottle.

Cup and Ball



Cup and Ball

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

The idea of the game is to get the ball into the cup using one hand – not as easy as it looks. It was good for children’s hand-eye co-ordination. The hope was that the more they played with the toy, the better their co-ordination would become.

In our loans box there is a replica toy we bought from our own shop, but it is still of the same design as it would have been in the Victorian era.

Toy Soldier



Toy Soldier

Miniature people and animal toys have been around since the earliest civilisations, but were made as ornaments rather than as toys. However, since medieval times, both children and adults have played with toy 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, and people were not aware of it being a poisonous metal. Later tin was used which is not as soft and breakable as lead. 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 our loans box we have a lead toy soldier. He is in a display box because lead is now known to be a poisonous metal.

Pop Gun



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.

This one makes a wonderful 'pop' noise, why not have a go?

Jacob's Ladder Game



Jacob's Ladder Game

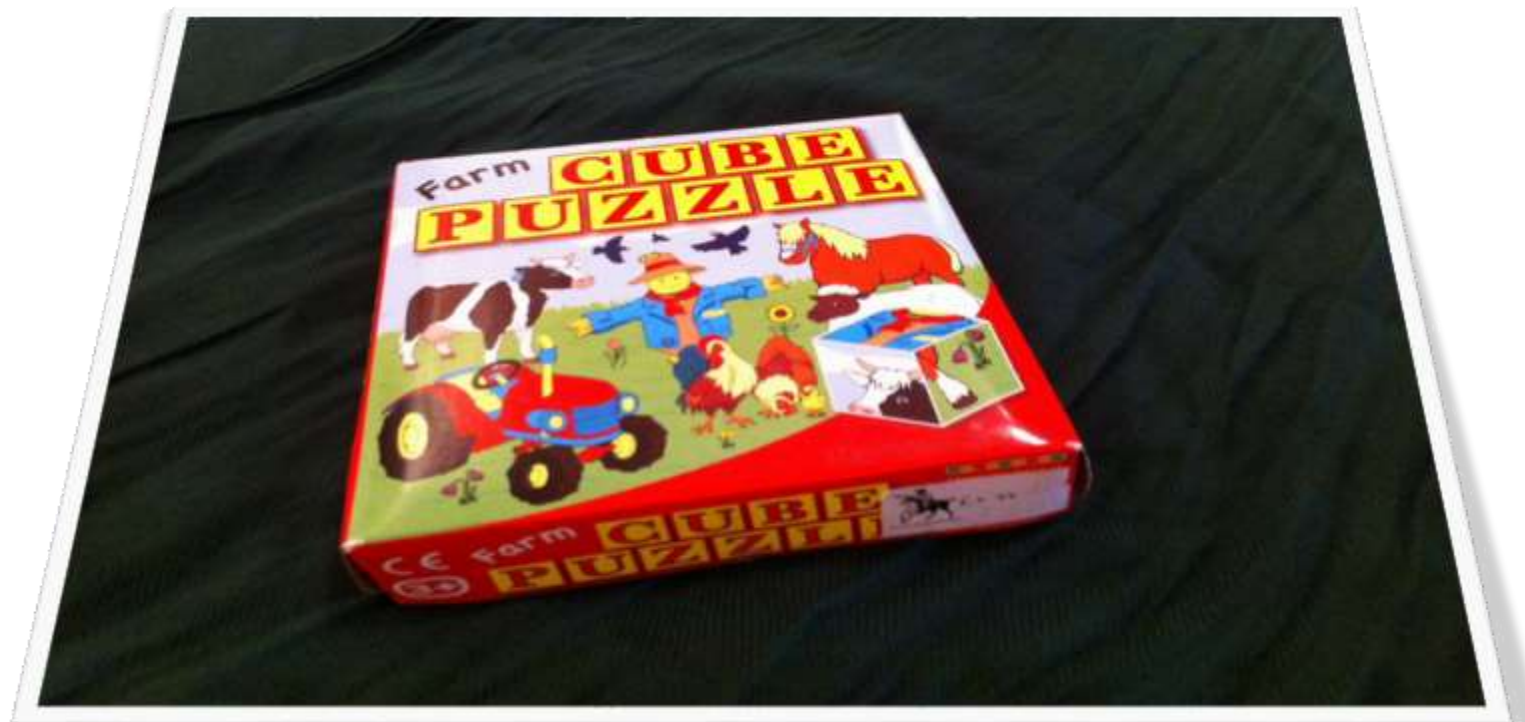
A Jacob's Ladder is a folk toy which dates back to the Pilgrim times in America. It is thought to have originated from a similar Chinese falling-block toy.

When used it creates a visual illusion as the blocks appear to cascade down the string. However, this is actually the result of one block flipping over after another.

Its name comes from the biblical reference in Genesis 28:12 of the ladder to heaven, and because of its connections, Puritan children were allowed to use it as a Sunday toy.

Victorians were very interested in magic and illusions so toys and games of this sort became very popular in this era.

Cube Puzzle Game

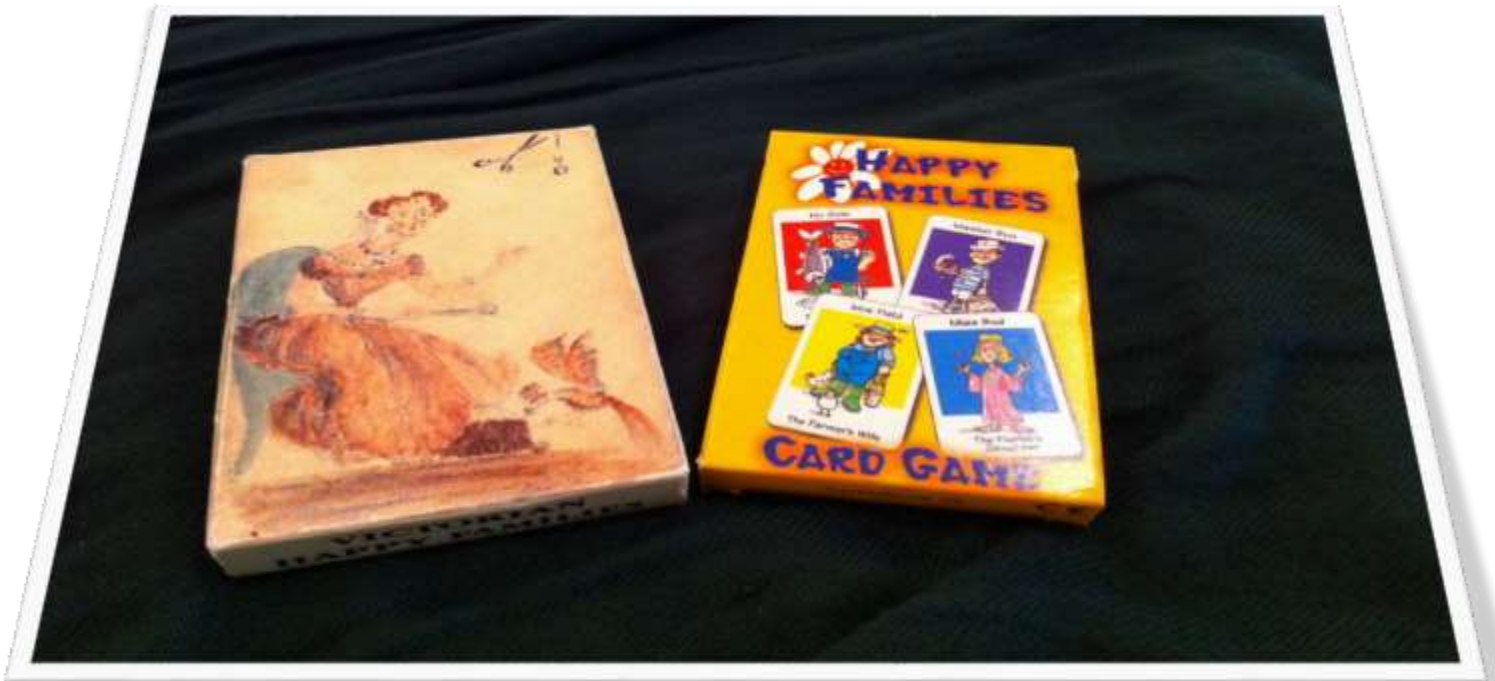


Cube Puzzle Game

This is a modern version of a type of puzzle that Victorian children would have played with. As each block has 6 sides it means you can have six different puzzles in one game.

Some Victorian children might also have used alphabet blocks, which were blocks with letters on them. These could help them to learn to read and spell.

Happy Families Cards



Happy Families Cards

Card games and board games were often played in the evening by families for entertainment. As not many people could afford to buy cards, they often made their own at home. In the 18th century quiz cards became a popular game because they were considered an excellent way of learning through play, but the subjects 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.

There are two packs of cards in our loans box. The first ones (Victorian Happy Families) 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 second pack are a modern replica pack of the traditional 'Happy Families' game. The 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 within their town or village — a very different scene to family and job roles today.

A is for Army



A

*for the ARMY; give it three cheers—
The great British Army that every one fears!
Horsemen and foot, they pass on in review;
Without our brave ARMY, oh, what should we do?*

A is for Army

This is a picture of a page from a Victorian children's alphabet picture book. Just like today, children had books to help them remember the alphabet.

The army men in the picture are dressed the same as the lead soldier – very different to how modern army men dress today.

Victorian Toy Shop



Victorian Toy Shop

This is a photograph of a Victorian toy shop in Camberley. It was owned by Mr Howard and you can see all the different types of toys displayed in the window. Have a look to see what toys you can spot.

This is the type of shop you could have gone to buy your dolls or to get them repaired.

Denis and his Teddy



Denis and his Teddy

This is a photograph of a little boy called Denis. He was a child in the Victorian era. He is dressed in a sailor's outfit because it was the fashion of the time.

Can you guess Denis's favourite toy? - Yes his Teddy.

Having the Teddy in the photograph shows how important he was to Denis.

Denis must have been a wealthy child to have such a grand teddy bear.

What is your favourite toy? Do you take it out with you or does it stay safe at home?

Before 1903, toy bears looked more realistic, with sharp teeth and glaring eyes. However, in 1903 an American company, having seen a cartoon of the then president Teddy Roosevelt with his bear, developed a range of bears with button eyes – they were named 'Teddy Bears'.

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 the demand for the Teddy Bear took off across the world.

Activity Idea

Write a poem about one of our toys

Why not write an acrostic poem about one of the object in our loans box. An acrostic poem takes a word, and then uses each letter in this word to start a line of poetry.

- Write the name of the object vertically on the left hand side of the page.
- Start each line with a word that begins with the letter on that line.
- Each line should describe the chosen object.
- These poems do not need to rhyme, or line length, so you can relax and have fun writing.

Why not then write a poem about *your* favourite toy in the same way.

Activity Idea

Make a cup and ball toy

Why not make your own Victorian cup and ball toy by following these easy steps.

- Get a **paper cup** and make a small hole in the centre of the bottom.
- Get a piece of **string** (you can measure the length against our cup and ball toy). The longer the string the harder the game.
- Thread one end of the string through the hole in the cup and tie a knot so that the string cannot be pulled through.
- Get a **small pebble** and tie the other end of the string around the pebble (it doesn't need to be too secure).
- Get a **square of tin foil** and wrap it around the pebble making it into a ball. Make sure the string is securely fixed at this point.
- Then decorate your cup – you could use paints, pencil crayon, glue, glitter, paper – whatever you like.

There you have your very own cup and ball – have a go.