

# LIVING IN THE PAST. TOYS

Toys are amazing! The best toys can engage a child's senses, spark their imaginations and encourage them to interact with others. Playing with toys is considered to be important when it comes to growing up and learning about the world around us.

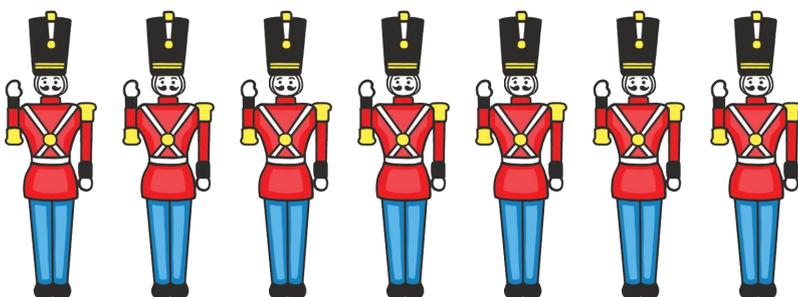
Toys have always been a part of a child's life. They have been around from the earliest times and there are still examples from ancient civilisations that you can find in museums today. Many of these toys remind us of similar toys we play with today. Among the earliest known toys are stone and small clay balls or marbles. A toy might have been a stone or a stick, which still would have served to entertain a child. Medieval toys were made of wood and included yo-yos, cup and ball toys and tops, all of which were still being played with throughout history, in Victorian times and today.

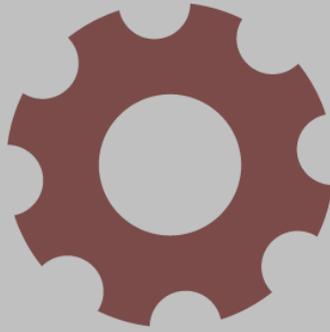
**Did you know?** Marbles have been found buried in Egypt as far back as 4000 BC.

Toys have changed over the centuries in the materials that they are made of or the way they look. Dolls found in ancient Rome do not look like the dolls we can buy today, but children will still play with them in the same way.

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. Some wealthier families were also able to give their children toys made from bronze, glass and even silver.

**Did you know?** One of the oldest toys in Britain was found near Stonehenge, it's a carving of an animal. Archaeologists think it's about 2,000 years old!





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In 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.

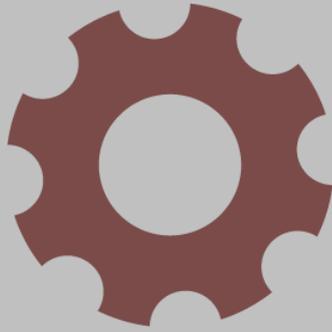


**Did you know?** At any point in history, whether you're looking at the Iron Age Celts or the World War II era, children played with toys. The toys may have looked different depending on what materials were available to make things from. Children have also played with the same sort of toys, although the toys appearance has changed, and modernised with advances in technology.

Moving forward to the beginning of the 19th century, even in wealthier homes, most toys were played with for their educational value and to prepare for adult life. Dolls and dolls' houses were designed to teach girls the basic facts about running their own home and were considered good for teaching domestic skills. Girls were also encouraged to make clothes for their dolls and soft furnishings for their dolls' houses in order to practise sewing. Boys were often given toys that were intended to foster scientific enquiry, hence the zoetrope was a popular boy's toy. Boys would also play with toy soldiers, guns, animals and trains. Puzzles and card games were given to children to help with fact based learning.

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 valuable and precious that their young owners were never allowed to play with them. Young children from poor families were sent out to work so did not have much time for play, and even those from wealthier homes were expected to help out at home. Playing was not seen as being of any value and normally regarded as a waste of time.



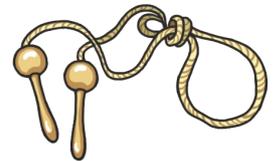


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**Did you know?** There was a dolls' hospital in Manchester. People could take their broken dolls there and have them repaired. In Tameside you could go to a stall on Ashton market and leave your broken doll with the stall holder. They would take the doll to the dolls' hospital, in Piccadilly and get your doll repaired, and you would return later to collect. Often little girls would pack a small suitcase of belongings for their doll and its stay in hospital.

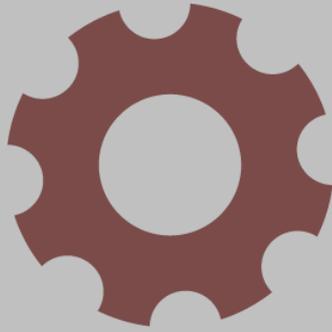
**Did you know?** In 1900 the average wage was £1 a week, the equivalent of £123.72 today. In 1900 a dolls' house cost approximately £1. 12s. 6d, the equivalent of approximately £200.00 today! Most toys were far beyond the means of ordinary working people.

**Did you know?** 20 shillings equals £1.00



During Victorian times there was no electricity in the home, no video games or computers to entertain children. Poor Victorian children did not get new toys mothers would make dolls for the girls and toys were whittled out of wood for the boys. A tightly wadded piece of cloth could serve as a ball to kick around in the streets. Poor Victorian children would rarely have more than one toy and it was usually handmade or handed down through the generations. This toy would be so important to the child and they would guard it with their life! Poorer families continued to buy toys, when they could from street sellers, although more and more of these were driven into open or covered markets by the end of the 19th century. Street sellers sold cheap toys for a penny or less. At the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign these were predominantly wooden and included dolls, dolls' furniture, horses, carts, skipping ropes, spinning and humming tops. The latter half of the century saw an increase in the production of cheap tin toys, some of them mechanical. Many of these were made in Birmingham, often using cheap child labour.

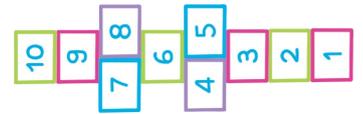




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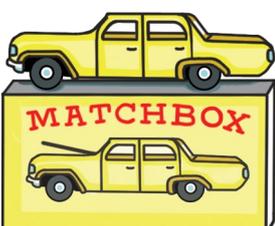
## Games

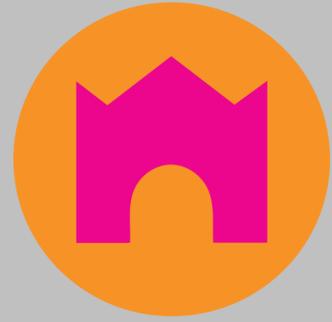
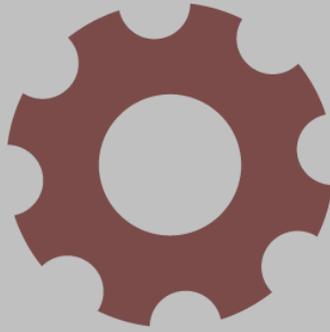
For the poor families, play took place in the streets, using their imagination and whatever props were available. Mud could be shaped into pies, bridges and tunnels. Boys' caps and tin cans were used in innumerable games including tin-can copper, or kick-can policeman. There was also a demand from middle class families for indoor games that could be played on wet days. Hence the 19th century saw an increase in the popularity of games such as Happy Families and Snakes and Ladders. Many of these games were designed to be both entertaining and educational, teaching a geographical, historical or moral lesson.



**Did you know?** The first children's playground was built in a park in Manchester in 1859. The golden age of toy development was at the turn of the 20th century. Wages were rising steadily in the Western world, allowing working-class families to afford toys for their children. The Industrial Revolution made way for use of new materials and mass production was able to provide the supply to meet this rising demand. Intellectual emphasis was also increasingly being placed on the importance of a wholesome and happy childhood for the future development of children.

As we move towards the end of the Victorian era we start to see that the thinking towards toys begins to change. Toys were able to be produced at a cheaper cost, therefore accessible to more children. Cheaper tin toys were imported 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 world of books and magazines too, specially written for children. 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.





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Some toys move when you press a button, pull a cord or turn a handle. Moving toys don't have to have batteries or electricity to make them move, though some toys are designed with levers, wheels and hinges so they move when you push a button or turn a handle, and some toys just need a bit of a tug with some string.

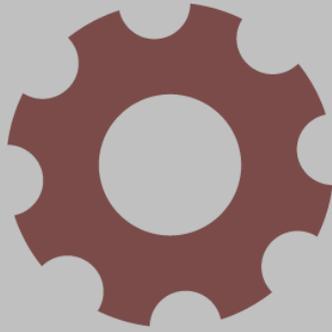
Many new toys were invented in the 20th century. Plasticine was invented in 1897 by William Harbutt and was first made commercially in 1900. Also in 1900 Frank Hornby invented a toy called Meccano. Other popular toys were tin cars and in the 1920s train sets became very popular. Soft toys also became common in the early 20th century including teddy bears. During World War II most toy factories were turned over to war production. Some new types of toys were created through accidental innovation. After trying to create a replacement for synthetic rubber, the American Earl L. Warrick inadvertently invented "nutty putty". Later, Peter Hodgson recognised the potential as a childhood plaything and packaged it as Silly Putty. Similarly, Play-Doh was originally created as wallpaper cleaner. In 1943 Richard James was experimenting with springs as part of his military research when he saw one come loose and fall to the floor. He was intrigued by the way it flopped around on the floor. He spent two years fine-tuning the design to find the best gauge of steel and coil; the result was the Slinky, which went on to sell very successfully in stores throughout the United States.

After the Second World War as society became more affluent and materials such as plastics were invented, toys became cheaper and more readily accessible.

In the 1950s a Danish company invented the popular plastic construction toy Lego. Mr Potato Head was invented in 1952. The skateboard was invented in 1958. Barbie dolls were invented in 1959 and Action Man went on sale in Britain in 1966.

So many toys are now being invented to meet every child's needs, the market is vast and children simply cannot get enough of them.





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At the end of the 20th century computer games became very popular. Today there are computerised dolls that can recognise and identify objects, the voice of their owner, and choose among hundreds of pre-programmed phrases with which to respond. The materials that toys are made from have changed, what toys can do has changed, but the fact that children play with toys has not.

**Can you imagine what toys will be like in the future?**

**Did you know?** Teddy bears were made in the early 1900s, and are named after the American president Teddy Roosevelt.

**Did you know?** The famous war-time Prime Minister Winston Churchill is known to have had a collection of over 1500 soldiers that he regularly played with!

**See if you can guess whether a toy is old or modern just by looking at it.** How can you tell? You could think about what the toy is made of? Is it plastic? Has it been handmade or made by a machine? Is it painted? How does it work?

An older toy might be made from metal or wood. It might show characters from a popular children's TV show or be dressed in a way that isn't how we dress today.

Toys changed a lot after the **television** was invented. Toys would be made based on shows that children liked to watch, which still happens today.

