

1930s



By the beginning of the 1930s trade with Germany had resumed, albeit reluctantly, on both sides. The atmosphere was one of economic gloom with high levels of unemployment in Britain and the Great Depression in the United States. It is probably not surprising therefore that one of the most successful board games of all time is based on property ownership.

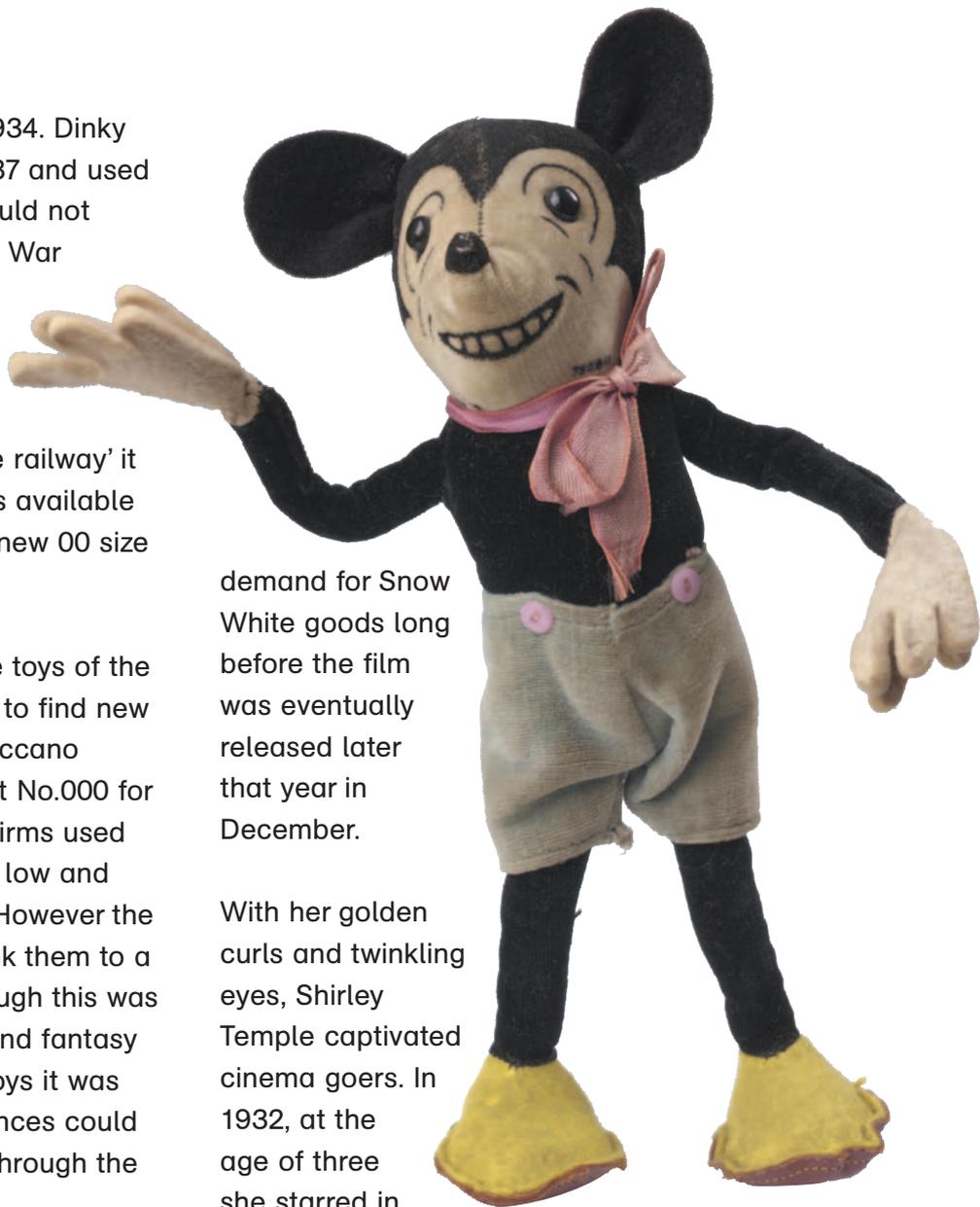
Monopoly was introduced into Britain in 1936 from the US, where the game was first published in 1935 by Parker Brothers. They bought the rights to the game from Charles Darrow, who claimed to have invented it, after being bombarded with orders when the first printing of five thousand copies, by F.A.O. Schwarz of New York, had run out. By the end of February 1935 Parker Bros. were sending out 20,000 sets per week. Darrow had based it on earlier versions of a land-owning game that had been around since about 1900. In particular, Monopoly is very similar to The Landlord's Game, which was patented in 1904 by Lizzie Magie. The street names in the original Monopoly came from Atlantic City in New Jersey, where Charles Darrow spent his holidays. The game's popularity has never abated and even today most people are acquainted with the game and its rules.

In Britain, Hornby produced another toy which was to become a classic. Originally issued as Modelled Miniatures in 1931, they

were renamed Dinky Toys in 1934. Dinky Toys stopped using lead in 1937 and used an alloy instead which they could not perfect until the Second World War was over. They also added the Hornby-Dublo system, which was intended to be used where space was limited. Described as 'the perfect table railway' it was launched in 1938 and was available in clockwork and electric in a new 00 size gauge.

Trains remained the must-have toys of the 1930s, but toy companies had to find new ways to sell their products. Meccano introduced its simplest ever set No.000 for the under fives in 1932; other firms used cheap materials to keep costs low and sought out new retail outlets. However the best way to sell toys was to link them to a film or a celebrity name. Although this was not the first time that heroes and fantasy characters were used to sell toys it was the first time that young audiences could be reached in large numbers through the radio and cinema.

Following the success of the first talking cartoon, Steamboat Willie (1928), which featured Mickey Mouse, Dean's Rag Book Co. produced the world's first Mickey Mouse soft toy in 1930. Dean's was the first company to persuade Walt Disney to market a toy based on the famous cartoon character. Fisher-Price, a US toy manufacturer whose history begins in New York in 1930, and Ohio Art, also American, founded in 1907 by a dentist, featured Mickey and his friend Minnie Mouse on their teaset, tin toys, spades and sandpails. In 1937 Walt Disney took the step of licensing Snow White's image before the film was shown thus ensuring a



demand for Snow White goods long before the film was eventually released later that year in December.

With her golden curls and twinkling eyes, Shirley Temple captivated cinema goers. In 1932, at the age of three she starred in her first movie, War Babies. Between 1936-1938 all the films she starred in were box office hits. By the age of 8 she was the biggest box office draw in the world. Everyone wanted something with her picture on. She is probably best remembered for singing 'On the Good Ship Lollipop' in the movie Bright Eyes. Shirley

Pictures opposite page top to bottom

- Monopoly board game made by John Waddington Ltd., 1936
- Wooden yo-yo made in the US by Cheerio, 1930s
- Minibrix Kit No.C, 1930s
- Flying Scotsman train set made by Hornby, about 1928

Above

Mickey Mouse soft toy, about 1930

Temple was the doll that mothers and daughters could share and which allowed them to escape from the narrow environs of their lives into the glamorous world of the young screen idol.

Gary Cross in his book *Kids' Stuff* points out that the new toys for boys were now becoming based not on the toy weaponry and construction kits that helped to prepare them for their adult lives, but on the new male fantasy figures who were strong independent men fighting the cause of good against evil. Amongst these are the familiar names of Buck Rogers, Superman, Dick Tracy and Popeye, to name a few of the forerunners of the 1960s Action Man. Whilst character merchandising was helping to keep the toy industry afloat on both sides of the Atlantic, serious thought was also being given to the design of



developmental toys. Progress in this area came about as the result of the new educational thinking concerning children's intellectual and physical needs.

Firms such as Abbatt Toys, Lines Bros. and Kiddicraft amongst others promoted the importance of well-designed educational toys which would help children to learn through play. Artists and child psychologists had been involved in toy design since the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1930s Abbatt Toys and Lines Bros. were two of the firms which employed artists to design toys. Paul and Marjorie Abbatt pioneered commercially produced, purpose designed, educational toys making them available to families and schools, firstly through a mail order service run from their home in Tavistock

Square in London and later in the child friendly shop that Ernö Goldfinger, the architect and close friend of the Abbatts, designed for them at Wimpole Street which opened in 1936. The Abbatts had originally intended to open a school and had travelled extensively in search of new ideas in education. They returned with such a vast range of ideas for new toys that they found themselves in business selling them to friends. Inspired by the new ideas and having seen the work of Professor Cizek in Vienna, Milan Morgenstern's designs for toys for children with special needs, the work of the MacMillan sisters, and Dartington Hall they also designed their own toys devising the 'right toy for the right age'. From the late 1930s Hamleys sold Abbatt's products under the heading Modern Toys for Modern Young Minds.

Hilary Page founded Kiddicraft in 1932. He himself designed toys and wrote several books and magazines such as Nursery World and Playtime in the First Five Years. In the early years he produced wooden toys with educational principles in mind, as did Lines Bros. He also imported toys from abroad such as Russian pyramid rings, a shape sorting toy that he later copied in plastic. He experimented throughout the 1930s with plastics assessing their suitability as a material for toy production. He made an important contribution to the manufacture of toys for babies by designing a complete range of 'Sensible' toys in plastic under the name Bri-Plax which he produced in 1940. Plastics were very much an experimental material in toy making at the time and the new company was set up to make them in case they failed. In the event, war broke out in 1939, progress was halted until after the war was over in 1945 and Kiddicraft took over the production.

Charles Bird Plimpton set up the firm of Plimpton Engineering Ltd. in 1933 to manufacture a new construction kit called Bayko. This was made of Bakelite, a material which had been in use for some 25 years, and steel rods. The rods were inserted into a perforated base and the building elements could then be slid up and down the rods to make houses and other buildings.

Rubber with moulded press studs was used for the first time in 1930 for the production of Minibrix interlocking bricks. They were made by the Premo Rubber Company of Petersfield, Hampshire which made rubber heels for shoes. Two series of bricks were available, the Tudor and the Modern.



The instruction books contained details of real buildings to construct and make up into realistic models. In the soft toy making industry,

Nylon, invented in the US by W.H. Carothers and destined to change the way that soft toys were made, was used for the first time in 1938. This was followed by the introduction of polyester in 1941, invented in Britain by J.R. Whinfield and J.T. Dickson.

The 1930s was one of the seminal decades of the 20th century as it was a time of experimentation with new ideas and new materials which were to be put to full use after the end of the Second World War (1939-1945).

Left

Billie and his Seven Barrels and Mumbo Jumbo baby's rattle, 1950s

Above

Shirley Temple doll made in the US by Ideal, 1934