

Some key toy manufacturers

Britain

Abbatt Toys

Paul and Marjorie Abbatt were pioneers of innovative educational toys in the 1930s. They set up in business in 1932 selling toys to friends and by mail order from their flat in Tavistock Square, London. Demand was such that in 1936 they opened a child friendly shop at 94 Wimpole Street, designed by their friend the architect Ernö Goldfinger. The Abbatts were his main clients at the time and he designed toys and nursery equipment for them. They were concerned with the play needs of children in general, introducing a range of toys for children with physical disabilities devised by Milan Morgenstern. In 1951 they were instrumental in setting up the Children's Play Activities Trust Ltd. to promote excellence in toy design and manufacture. After Paul Abbatt died in 1971 the business was bought by the Educational Supply Association.

William Britain Ltd.

Britains Ltd. was founded by William Britain in London in 1840. At first Britains made tin and clockwork toys and from the 1890s they made model soldiers. It also opened an office in Paris, France in 1905. The company made munitions for both world wars. In 1954 Herald miniatures, makers of unbreakable plastic toys, became a subsidiary of Britains. In 1966 Britains ceased to manufacture its metal soldiers. It was purchased by Ertl Co. in 1997.

The Chad Valley Co. Ltd.

The Chad Valley trademark was first registered in 1897 when the original company of Johnson Brothers added games to its stationery range. Various toys were gradually added to its repertoire including the introduction of teddy bears and soft toys in 1915-16. In 1920 the Wrekin Toy Works was opened in Wellington, Shropshire and the company renamed The Chad Valley Co. Ltd. The company was awarded a Royal Warrant in 1938. It expanded considerably, acquiring other companies such as H.G. Stone, maker of Chiltern Toys, before being taken over itself by Palitoy in 1978. In 1988 the Chad Valley trademark was bought by Woolworths.

Dean's Rag Book Co. Ltd.

Dean's Rag Book Co. Ltd. was founded in 1903 in London. The company initially made cut-out doll sheets, kites, blow-up toys and rag dolls as well as rag books. During the First World War it started to make teddy bears. Deans has undergone various name changes and

factory locations as well as changes of ownership. In 1980 the company moved all its production to Ponytpool in Wales from where it continues to operate under the name The Dean's Company (1903).

G.&J. Lines

Founded by George and Joseph Lines, possibly in the 1870s, it was housed in the Caledonian Road, London where it steadily grew as the company became successful. It made wooden toys, baby carriages and wooden horses. Many of its toys were supplied to Gamages Department Store in Holborn, London. The Thistle trademark was introduced in 1910. In 1913 it moved to a new location in Thistle Works, Tottenham Down Lane, London and rebuilt the factory. G.&J. Lines continued until the death of Joseph Lines in 1931.

Hornby

Hornby was founded in Liverpool, England, in 1901 by Frank Hornby, initially making Meccano sets. In 1907 he established Meccano Ltd. Hornby Dublo trains were introduced in 1938, but production was halted for the Second World War (1939-1945). Tri-ang Railways, owned by Lines Brothers, and Hornby Dublo merged to become Tri-ang Hornby in 1965. Part of Hornby Dublo was purchased by G.&R. Wrenn Ltd. a division of Lines Bros. in 1967. Tri-ang Wrenn was launched following the merge. Tri-ang was sold in 1971 and in 1972 Tri-ang Hornby was renamed Hornby Railways. Hornby Railways became an independent company named Hornby Hobbies Ltd. in 1980. In 1995, all Hornby manufacturing was moved to China.

Kiddicraft

Founded by Hilary Page in 1932 at Purley, Surrey. He initially produced toys from wood, but experimented with plastics. He introduced a range of 'Sensible' toys for babies using plastic in 1939, initially under the name Bri-Plax and later as Kiddicraft. Hestair acquired Kiddicraft in 1977 which resulted in a total restructure of the company. In 1980 John and Elizabeth Newson, leading experts in child psychology, acted as professional advisors to Kiddicraft. The company moved to larger premises in Bristol in 1984. Fisher-Price took over Kiddicraft in 1989, merging with Mattel in 1993.

Lines Bros.

In 1919, William, Arthur, and Walter Lines, three of four sons of Joseph Lines, established Lines Bros. Ltd. as a separate business from G.&J. Lines. In 1924, Tri-ang Toys was registered. In 1931 they took over the famous store Hamleys. Lines made Pedigree dolls and soft toys in 1948. In 1964, Lines Bros. bought Meccano Ltd. In 1965, Tri-ang and Hornby Dublo were consolidated to form Tri-ang-Hornby Railways. In 1971 the company ceased business. Canterbury Bears took over the teddy bear range. A new company, Mulholland & Bailie, took over Pedigree production. Hasbro bought the rights to Cindy from Pedigree in 1985.

Meccano

Meccano was founded by Frank Hornby and David Elliot in Liverpool, as 'Mechanics Made Easy' to make tinplate construction sets. In 1908, Hornby bought out Mr. Elliot and changed

the name of the company and sets to 'Meccano Ltd.' The company went into receivership in 1979. In 1990, Meccano France purchased the rights to 'Erector' and started selling 'Erector Meccano' in the US.

Merrythought Ltd.

Merrythought Ltd. began as a spinning mill established in Yorkshire, England, by W.G. Holmes and G.H. Laxton in 1919. Holmes and Laxton bought Dyson Hall & Co. Ltd., a mohair-plush weaving factory, in the 1920s. In 1930, Merrythought Ltd. was founded and registered as a trademark. Between 1940 and 1943 the company began making textile items for the armed forces and hospitals, but reinstated toy production in 1946. They joined Tide-Rider Inc. in 1982 to export goods to the US.

Palitoy

The company was founded in 1919 as the Cascelloid Company by Alfred Pallett near Leicester, to produce celluloid and fancy goods. Their first toy was a windmill in 1920 that was sold at Woolworths. The first doll followed five years later. They introduced Plastex, a non-breakable bouncy form of plastic in the early 1930s. Cascelloid was bought in 1931 by British Xylonite. The word 'Palitoy' was trademarked in 1935 for the toy division of British Xylonite. Toy production slowed due to the outbreak of war in 1939. In 1941, injection moulding was developed by British Xylonite and was used for Palitoy toys. In the late 1940s, toy production recovered. Palitoy was sold to General Mills in 1968. It became the Palitoy Company in 1980 when Palitoy, Denys Fisher, and Chad Valley broke away from General Mills. Alfred Pallett died in 1982 and in 1986, the company ceased trading. Factory, toy moulds and copyrights were all bought by Hasbro.

J.W. Spears Ltd. (Spears Games)

Spears was founded by Jacob Wolf Spears in 1878, trading in both Britain and Germany. The family emigrated to England and set up an import company that dealt in fancy goods and toys, whilst retaining the original factory in Germany. Later, Jacob's sons joined the family business and it became J.W. Spears & Sons. During the 1930s Richard Spears built up the British side of the business as it had become too expensive to import goods from Germany. Spears is responsible for many famous board games such as Scrabble and ran a famous campaign 'Our games don't need plugs'. The company was sold to Mattel in the early 1990s.

John Waddington Ltd.

The company was founded in Britain during the nineteenth century by John Waddington and Wilson Barrett. It started life as a small printing firm producing posters and programmes for theatre productions as well as other things. It later began printing playing cards and board games for which it became renowned. Some of its most notable games include Sorry, Subbuteo, Monopoly and Cluedo. The company is now owned by Hasbro.

Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Ltd.

Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Ltd. was founded in 1941 in Crickhowell, Wales. They made soft toys from unrationed bits of material. In 1945, business started under the name of Wendy

Boston (Crickhowell) Ltd. but the name changed in 1960 to Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Ltd. In 1968, Denys Fisher Toys bought the firm and production stopped in 1976.

United States

Fisher-Price, Inc.

Fisher-Price was founded in 1930 in East Aurora, New York by three entrepreneurs; Herman Fisher, formerly involved in marketing games, Irving Price, a retired variety chain store operative and Helen Schelle, owner and operator of a toy store in central New York. In November 1993 Fisher-Price, Inc. and Mattel, Inc. merged. In 1997 Fisher-Price became the umbrella brand for all Mattel's pre-school lines.

Hasbro

Hasbro was founded by Henry and Helal Hassenfeld as Hassenfeld Brothers in 1923 in Providence, Rhode Island. It first sold textile remnants and then later sold school supplies. Henry's sons, Harold and Merrill, joined the company in the 1930s when the company began manufacturing children's toys. In 1952, Mr. Potato Head, the first toy to be advertised on television, was introduced. The first action figure, G.I. Joe (Action Man in Britain), was launched in 1964. The company became Hasbro Industries, a publicly traded company in 1968. They purchased Romper Room in 1969. In the 1980s, Hasbro acquired Milton Bradley, Playskool, and Selchow and Richter. It also established the Hasbro Charitable Trust and Hasbro Children's Foundation in 1983. In 1985 the company changed its name to Hasbro, Inc. Hasbro International was formed in 1990. It purchased the Tonka Corporation, which included Kenner Products and Parker Brothers in 1991. Hasbro Children's Hospital opened in 1994 in Rhode Island. The company also purchased rights to Waddington Games that year and Larami Company in 1995. Hasbro Interactive was launched in 1996. In 1997 they purchased Russ Berrie and Company and merged with Tiger Electronics, Avalon Hill, and Galoob the following year. In 2000, Hasbro became master toy licensee for all Disney films.

Louis Marx

Brothers Louis and David Marx founded the Louis Marx Company in New York in 1919. They believed in the policies of 'Give the customer more toy for less money' and 'Quality is not negotiable'. These ideas made them very popular with the general public. They became one of the only companies with rising profits in the 1930s and were the largest toy manufacturer by 1950. The Louis Marx Company made toy soldiers, toy dinosaurs, toy guns, tinsplate buildings, and toy trains along with the Big Wheel, which grew into one of the most popular toys of the 1970s. Marx sold the company to the Quaker Oats Company in 1972. Quaker also owned Fisher Price but ended up selling Marx to Dunbee-Combex, a British company. Dunbee-Combex became Dunbee-Combex-Marx in 1975. Dunbee-Combex-Marx filed for bankruptcy in 1980. Other companies own the rights to some Marx toys, including toy trains and the Big Wheel, which are still in production.

Mattel

Ruth and Elliott Handler and Harold Matson launched Mattel from a garage workshop in Southern California in 1952. Initially it made picture frames and dolls' house furniture. In 1959 it launched Barbie. It acquired a number of companies along the way including Fisher-Price in 1993, J.W. Spear & Sons in 1994, Tyco Toys in 1997 and Bluebird Toys Plc in 1998. Mattel celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2002.

Milton Bradley (MB Games)

Milton Bradley began making lithographs in 1860 in Springfield, Massachusetts. One of the first was a lithograph with Abraham Lincoln without a beard. It was popular until consumers found out that Lincoln had grown a beard. In trying to find a way to keep his business successful, Bradley began selling a game he invented called 'The Checkered Game of Life'. The company became the number one producer of games and puzzles. Hasbro, Inc. bought Milton Bradley and its subsidiary, Playskool, Inc. in September 1984.

Europe

Brio Toys

The company was started by Ivar Bengtsson in 1884 in Osby, Sweden and was named after his two sons. BRIO is known for its stacking toy clown, the Labyrinth game, wooden railways and other quality toys. Today, it also makes Bob the Builder and Curious George toys. Dag and Bengt Ivarsson, grandchildren of Ivar, are now the main owners of BRIO.

Gebrüder Bing

Gebrüder Bing was founded in 1863 in Nuremberg, Germany, by Ignaz and Adolph Bing to sell toys and kitchenware. It later specialised in tin and mechanical toys including trains, boats and cars. Bing tried to challenge Steiff's monopoly on teddy bears, which led to acrimony. Bing introduced clockwork mechanisms into the bears. In 1895, the company changed its name to Nuernberger Metall und Lackierwarenfabrik vorm, Bing AG, which translates to Nuremberg Metal and Enamelware Works. The name changed again in 1919, this time to Bing Werke, or, in English, Bing Works. In 1932, departments of the company were sold off to Karl Bub who took over the train production while the Fleischmann firm took over the toy boat industry.

Lego

In 1932 Ole Kirk Christiansen, carpenter and joiner, founded a carpentry business at Billund, Denmark, making ladders, ironing boards and wooden toys. The toys were particularly successful and the company adopted the name LEGO in 1934. Lego means 'play well' from the Danish words 'Leg Godt'. In 1947 it bought a plastic injection-moulding machine and made Automatic Binding Blocks in 1949 which were a forerunner of Lego. The company launched the Lego system in 1955. The stud and tube coupling system was patented in 1958. Duplo followed in 1969, then Lego Technic and Lego Scala Planet in 1998. Lego won

toy of the year three times in the 1970s and was acclaimed the Toy of the Century by the British Toy and Hobby Association in 2000.

Schuco

Schuco was originally founded as Schreyer & Company in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1912 by Heinrich Muller and, former Bing employee, Heinrich Schreyer. It made clockwork and mechanical toys and bears. Between 1914 and 1918, the factory closed due to both partners being drafted during the war. The firm began again in 1918 and in 1921 the 'Schuco' company name was trademarked. During the Second World War the company operated by making telephone equipment. From 1946 to 1949, Schuco made toys again on a small scale. In 1947, Adolf and Eric Kahn imported rights to Schuco products for the US and Canada. The company was sold to Dunbee-Combex-Marx in 1976.

Margarete Steiff

In 1877, Margarete Steiff founded a felt mail order company to make underskirts and children's clothes. In 1880, animal toys were introduced to the range of products. Richard Steiff, a nephew, joined the company in 1897 and experimented with jointed bear design between 1902 and 1905. The company became famous for its teddy bears and its trademark of the button-in-ear. Steiff continue to produce high quality soft toys and now also make a huge range of replica bears based on its early classics.

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