



Toy Time (1950s Welfare Hall)

Guidelines for Supervising Teachers

Preparing for Your Visit: It is strongly recommended that supervising staff should arrange a pre-visit to familiarise themselves with facilities at the Museum. Free tickets are available on request in order to assist with planning and risk assessments. A Hazard Identification Sheet will also be provided in order to help you with your risk assessment.

Practicalities:

- **Where to Go and How to Get There:** The activity takes place in the 1950s Welfare hall, located between Pockerley Tram stop and the Edwardian Town. Please make your own way there where you will be met by a member of staff. There is a bus stop outside the Welfare Hall, or alternatively you can walk from the Entrance or from the Edwardian Town.
- **Arriving on Time:** If your school has the first session of the day (10:30 start) it is advisable to walk straight to the 1950s Welfare Hall from the Main Entrance. In the event of a late arrival every effort will be made to accommodate the full time of the activity, however, due to other bookings this may not always be possible.
- **What to Bring/Wear:** Pupils will need appropriate clothing. Please remember Beamish is an open air museum and the weather may be inclement.
- **Toilets:** there are public toilets within the Welfare Hall.
- **Health and Safety Information:** A Hazard Identification Sheet will be provided with your booking in order to advise you of any possible risks or hazards. The whole group will be briefed on the activities and health and safety at the start of the session.

- **Access:** An access bus is available to take anyone with access needs to the Welfare Hall. If there is anyone in your group with access needs please contact the bookings officer on bookings@beamish.org.uk or telephone 0191 370 4026 and she will be able to advise you.

Outline of Activity: In this activity pupils learn, through hands on experience, about the different toys and games which would have been played with in the Victorian era, the Edwardian era and the 1950s. Although the activities will be co-ordinated by a member of museum staff, some of the groups will be supervised by adults from your school.

Children will be given different original and replica toys to play with, with groups swapping over to ensure each group experiences as many toys and games as possible. Pupils will also make a thaumatrope. A thaumatrope is a toy whereby a picture is drawn on one side of a piece of card, and another picture is drawn on the other side. Held by two pieces of string at either side of the card, the card is turned over several times, and when it is released the two drawings will appear together, tricking the eye. Drawings were commonly a bird in a cage, or a goldfish in a bowl, but the children will be encouraged to make their own, and think of their own ideas.

At the end of the session a discussion will take place about the similarities and differences between contemporary toys and historical toys. Pupils then depart to continue their visit taking anything they have made with them.

Objectives of Activity:

- To explore toys and games which were played in the Victorian era, the Edwardian era, and the 1950s.
- To understand the similarities and differences between the toys and games children play with now and those children would have played with in the past.

Background to Activity:

Many Victorians did not have a lot of free time but there were periods of rest and entertainment. All sorts of shows and entertainments travelled the country. There were animal shows with dancing bears, elephants and camels. Actors also travelled the country and performed in tents and church halls. Another form of theatrical entertainment was provided by the music halls. Shows at music halls tended to be full of songs and dancing. Magic Lantern shows also toured the country with the showmen giving shows in wealthy family homes, schools or village halls. Home entertainment usually took the form of singing around the piano when the family gathered together on Sunday evenings. Everyone would have their 'party piece' to say or sing. Both adults and children would also make silhouettes for display or as part of shadow puppetry. The cheapest puppets were called penny-puppets and were made out of card and paper held in place and made moveable by split pins or simple joints. Either string or long wooden poles were used to provide movement to the puppets' limbs. Their shadows were cast onto a white sheet using a candle or a gas lamp. Coloured sheets could also be used to give background effects such as night scenes, mists or to reproduce changing seasons.

Toys from the 1950s

The post-war decade of the 1950s was a time of great change for Britain, with people moving from post-war austerity and reconstruction to increased wealth and the start of mass consumerism. Whilst children continued to play with popular toys from Victorian and Edwardian eras, (and use handed-down or home-made toys), new materials and technological advances had a huge impact on the toy market.

A vast array of new toys and products were linked to popular children's TV shows, many of which featured marionettes and puppets. Popular characters were soon turned into toys and games, heavily marketed through TV commercials. Muffin the Mule, Bill and Ben, and Andy Pandy were popular pocket money purchases.

American TV shows with 'wild west' themes inspired 'cowboy' toys and costumes. As the space race took off in the late 1950s, rockets, space guns, and science fiction characters such as Dan Dare became popular. Comics and Annuals based on TV shows were firm favourites.

New materials – plastics – allowed for the design of new toys which could be mass produced at cheaper prices. Cheaper prices allowed for more frequent purchases. In the past, if a doll was broken, it might be taken to a ‘doll’s hospital’ to be mended (a new arm might be replaced or a wig might be glued back on). Dolls hospitals were popular and were found in many toy shops. With the increased use of new plastics during the 50s, dolls became more robust however, and if broken, they were cheaper to replace. As a result, the practise of taking a doll to be mended at a doll’s hospital soon died out.

Traditional gender roles continued to influence toy design, the continuing expectation was that girls would play with dolls and home-making toys whilst boys would play with guns, cars and other sporty items.

As immigration increased throughout the 1950s, new influences were seen in toy design, for example, dolls representing a wider range of ethnic groups were produced and became popular.

Ideas for Pre and Post Visit:

- **Pre:** Pupils could explore the toys they have and choose their favourite toys, explaining why. They could be encouraged to think about what toys children played with in the past and how they think these will be similar or different to their own.
- **Post:** Pupils could pick their favourite toy they played with whilst at Beamish, drawing them and explaining why. They could compare this toy to their favourite toy from today. They could also think about what toys will be like in the future and draw/design this toy.

Contact Us: If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us at the Museum.

Telephone **Simon Woolley** on 0191 370 4011 or Email at education@beamish.org.uk