

Welcome to Throwback Thursday: Toy Talk – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Thursday 2 April 2020

Welcome to Throwback Thursday: Toy Talk – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive. Today we are getting you to talk about toys ... what's your favourite toy from childhood? Maybe it was one of these?

Were you a fan of Meccano? Do you know its connection with Muswell Hill?

The traditional Meccano set was a model construction system made of metal. It was formed of lots and lots of parts - plates, brackets, girders, rods, wheels and gears. A bit like Lego today, bits could be left out for someone to tread on in bare feet

It was devised to help us think about the principles of mechanical engineering. So, whilst playing with Meccano, it was more than just playing with a toy or being imaginatively creative building models. It was showing us how we could make and build mechanical things – it made us think about how things were constructed and how they functioned. It is still fun today!

The connection with Muswell Hill goes back in time to a young boy's passion for Meccano. Hubert Lansley was a boy from Barnet who loved his Meccano. Building things from Meccano inspired him to publish his own little magazine on the subject. Just after the First World War, Lansley's little magazine was seen by Ellison Hawks, the editor of Meccano Magazine. In 1923, he gave the 16-year-old Lansley a job. He was to be an expert writer for the magazine, talking about his Meccano model building. He wrote well, had great original ideas and kept his teenage readers and their young minds wanting more in the next magazine edition. Lansley made the job his own and many years later, succeeded Hawks as the actual editor.

In 1926, aged 19, Lansley married his fiancée, Violet Wright. By age 23, in 1930, Lansley rather surprisingly left his Meccano magazine job to establish his own Meccano shop - with support from his employer - based not far from his family home in Barnet. His shop was in Muswell Hill and he worked there with his wife.

Kynaston Edwin Jas. greengro. 12 Royal par. T N
Tudor 3904
Lane Nellie (Mrs.), beer retlr. 3 St. James' la
Langton Edwd. Wm. watch & clock mkr. 3 Prince's par.
T N Tudor 6050
Lansley Hubert, toy dlr. 9 Firs par. Fortis Green rd.
T N Tudor 2640
Lauchlan Gladys E. (Mrs.) M.A. kindergarten, 24
Curzon rd
Leighton Mdme. milliner, 2 & 3 Victoria par. T N
Tudor 1391
Lennard David, dyer & cleaner, 11 Grand par. Fortis
Green rd. T N Tudor 4241

This 1933 Kelly's directory shows Hubert Lansley operating as a toy dealer from 9 Firs Parade in Fortis Green Road in Muswell Hill.

You can read more about Hubert Lansley from the [Hornsey Historical Society](#) which has published an account of ‘ “Meccano Man” of Fortis Green Road’ by David Harrison in their Bulletin No. 39 (1998).

We sadly don’t have a photograph of Lansley’s Meccano shop itself in our collection at Bruce Castle, so we will have to imagine the pilgrimage of youngsters to this shop window in Muswell Hill, spending pocket money on the next most sought-after Meccano piece.

You might remember other toy shops or specialist shops selling toys in the borough. ‘The Shunting Yard’ (below) at 121 Lordship Lane opposite Bruce Castle Museum in Tottenham springs to mind – a small shop with lots in it and, until recent times, was certainly a destination for those wanting to just peer in through the window or build their next train set model.



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Looking further back, others might recall the delightfully named Doll's Hospital in Tottenham on the corner of West Green Road and Lawrence Road, seen here c.1950.



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Can you name our teddy bear?

This charming little teddy bear was made in Tottenham. He is a very special Chiltern teddy bear, and dates from either the very late 1950s or 1960s. Most of these teddy bears have the label 'Chiltern Hygienic Toy. Made in England'.

He gets that name from the Chiltern Toy Works that was opened by Josef Eisenmann in 1908 – not in Tottenham, but in Chesham, which was surrounded by the Chiltern Hills in Buckinghamshire. But how did this little fellow get to be made in Tottenham?



The Eisemann brothers – Josef and Gabriel - had originally founded Eisemann and Co in 1881. They exported German fancy goods and toys. But they had a base in the UK, at 45 Whitecross Street, London, which was managed by Josef. The Chiltern factory started off by only manufacturing dolls. By 1915 the first Chiltern bear was made. In 1920 the company went into partnership with Harry Stone and a new firm was created, **H. G. Stone and Co Ltd**.

The company was so successful that they opened a second factory in 1921 in Southey Road, near Grove Road, in Tottenham. They are listed in local directories in the Archive at Bruce Castle. The company continued to use the Chiltern trademark. In 1929 The Chiltern Works were constructed in Bernard Road, South Tottenham and the Grove Road factory closed. A new bear was introduced - 'Silky Teddy' - their first artificial silk bear.

H.G. Stone and Co were often listed as an exhibitor at the British Industries Fair. In 1947 they were manufacturers of "Chiltern" Toys, "Hugmee" Teddy Bears and Plush Animals. "Panurge Pets" and animals on Wheels, Sheepskin Toys and Cuddly Dolls. The Chiltern name continued into the 1960s before merging with other well-known toy manufacturers.

Teddies at the Castle



The *Bruce Castle Teddy Bear Toy Box* seen in the picture, is one of the Education Team's most loved resources when children come to the museum for workshops. You can imagine the crescendo of sound and excitement when the children find out what they have come to see!

During our popular *Toys* session, children have a chance to meet the museum teddy bears. They are allowed to carefully handle them to feel the difference between wood wool stuffing - fine slivers of wood - and polyester wadding. They can also test how jointed limbs work in old bears, as well as listen to the wonderfully-distinctive sound of the growler. By getting hands-on and experiencing these toys up close, very young children can find out how materials

and design have changed through time. They can then consolidate this learning by exploring and sorting a range of wooden, metal and plastic toys.

However, the teddies don't just come out for our fun Toy workshops. In recent years the museum has seen more pre-school and reception children making visits for our *Teddy Bear Tea Party* session. They can do role-play and explore basic mathematical concepts of size, weight, and capacity. The teddy bears get busy sorting copper kettles, frying pans, and wooden spoons in Bruce Castle's Old Kitchen.

We even get the Teddy Bear Toy Box out at the weekends with a celebratory teddy bear picnic on the lawn in front of the museum each summer. Although it looks like this year's picnic may not be able to go ahead as planned, we hope to be able to get the Bruce Castle Teddy Bears back out to see you very soon!

Fun things to do or think about

Some younger readers (and maybe some grown-ups too!), might like to try our **Toys wordsearch** (PDF attached). Just print off and have a go!

And, from the safety of our own homes, we can also participate in the growing (safe) trend in some areas of the borough during this period of social isolation. The '[*Great Bear Hunt*](#)' – inspired by the lovely book of the same name by Haringey's own Michael Rosen – has seen some households putting a teddy bear in their windows for passers-by to see. Windows show a drawing of a favourite teddy bear, whilst others display a real one! For little ones possibly going on their one short walk out with their carer (**all observing the safe 2-metre social distancing, of course**), are being encouraged to look for bears.

Coming soon..... new online gallery

As the lockdown continues, we have been inundated with messages of thanks from readers of our daily post and have been busy thinking of more ways to connect with the community until the museum can re-open.

Over the coming weeks we will be creating an online exhibition space on the Bruce Castle Museum webpages on the council's website. It will be for everyone – whatever your age - to take inspiration from our collections, share your mementoes and exhibit some of your own artistic responses.

To link in with today's *Throwback Thursday*, we want to hear about your **favourite childhood toys** – so whether it's a much loved teddy bear, or long forgotten toy, now is the time to get it out, dust it off and share its story.

You can email us a photo, tell us your memories, or ask younger family members to draw us a picture of what they have been playing with this week - **we want to hear from people of all ages**.

We will then curate a selection of responses and display them in our online gallery alongside some of the Bruce Castle collections. (We will add new themes as time goes on.)

So, why not take part?

Just send in your toy-related photos, memories or pictures to museum.services@haringey.gov.uk and we'll keep you posted as the gallery progresses.

Also, maybe you can think up a name for Bruce Castle's very own Chiltern teddy bear? As the teddy bear is on display in the museum, we will make sure the best name is put on display with it.

You can email your suggestions to museum.services@haringey.gov.uk. Think imaginatively and try and connect the name to Haringey's own heritage. We will choose and announce the new name of our Chiltern teddy bear after the long Easter weekend.

So lots to think and talk about, share and do.

Until the next post. Keep well and stay safe.

Best wishes

From all at Bruce Castle

Deborah Hedgecock, Curator Haringey Council

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