



Estrid Faurholt was another well-known Danish doll collector. Her vast collection was bought by Lego and now can be seen in the museum at Legoland, Jutland. This English Queen Anne period jointed wooden doll dates from 1690 and is worth a small fortune!



A harpsichord-playing automaton doll in the Arts et Metiers Museum in Paris. Such figures are rare and expensive!



A bisque-headed German Schoneau & Hoffmeister clockwork walking doll, showing the clockwork mechanism.

A world of doll collecting

by Jack Tempest

Collecting dolls became a leading interest in the years following the end of the Second World War. It was a hobby that took hold in America and then, as a result of numerous transatlantic visitors searching for examples in Europe, spread to Britain. Collecting fever was, by the 1970-80s at its highest. The value of old dolls escalated to heights that even set the London auction houses taking part in the action by arranging specialist doll sales. The prices of rare, early examples, in excellent states of preservation, are now in the thousands of pounds range. There are even high values, in the hundreds of pounds, attached to many of the early, but relatively modern, but scarce 'Barbie' dolls!

The most sought after doll examples are the ones that combine age and beauty, top quality figures that have survived the years in tip-top condition. Some of the finest well-dressed bisque examples came from France. The 'Parisians', quality dolls used to model the latest Paris fashions, are especially sought after. Germany was also responsible for many fine dolls and became skilled in the production of quality bisque and porcelain dolls. Examples dressed in original clothing have extra appeal.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century German imports of all kinds to the UK, not just dolls and toys, were seriously threatening our economy. An attempt to create a British doll industry when imports from Germany ended with the onset of the 1914-18 World War, proved a failure. The dolls' heads produced in the Staffordshire Potteries unfortunately never attained comparable quality with the Continental products. Goss, the company noted for introducing quality commemorative china ornaments, was responsible for the best of these porcelain dolls from the Potteries. To most collectors, the Goss products are the best of the British products. The best of all British dolls, however, were the wax figures made by Italian families living in London in the nineteenth century. These products were appreciated worldwide, the finest of the range being the work of the Montenari family. Mme Augusta Montenari exhibited examples at the Great Exhibition of 1851, held in London's Crystal Palace. These dolls are considered by many to be the first character dolls ever produced and were very well received. Montenari dolls were also exhibited in Paris in 1855. They influenced Continental doll makers to produce wax dolls in competition.

Germany manufactured cheap wax dolls and flooded the market with them. Wax dolls may be made from moulded wax, or wax over papier-mâché heads, with straw-filled bodies. Possibly they would have wax or composition hands and feet. The run-of-the-mill wax dolls tend to be less popular with collectors than are china dolls. China dolls are made from clay which, after moulding, is subsequently glazed and fired. Unglazed china produces the bisque heads and 'stone-bisque' is a coarser variation. Parian pottery is a marble-like unglazed china and some of the best dolls in this material originated from the famous Dresden factories noted for their high quality ornaments.

Dolls have been produced from a variety of materials besides ceramics, ranging from papier-mâché to rubber. Rag-dolls were inexpensive and, in many cases quite appealing items. Often they were home made! Other soft popular dolls included the extremely popular teddy bear, considered to be the first cuddly doll to be accepted by boys! Today there are plastic 'GI Joes' and 'Action Man' that are often described as 'dolls for boys'. They are far from cuddly and perhaps best described as large toy soldiers, which they mainly were!

Wooden dolls have been with us for years. The first prehistoric dolls were wooden or baked from clay. In Germany dolls were made by peasant labour in wooded areas such as the Erzgebirge, Oberammergau, and Sonneberg. Many were simple products; others beautifully carved examples that appeared in the late eighteenth century. Britain was responsible for some accurately detailed painted wooden dolls at this time. Simple cheap Dutch Dolls were made in the Thuringian district of Germany. They entered the UK from Holland and may have received the 'Dutch' appellation for that reason. Or maybe 'Dutch' was an Anglicised version of 'Deutsch'? They were also known as 'peg dolls'. One Continental family, named Schoenhut, settled in the USA and started up a successful wooden doll business there which existed from 1911 to 1924. Schoenhut's business became famous not only for their dolls, but for Humpty Dumpty Circus figures they introduced. The firm also issued a patent indoor golf game with wooden competitors.

For many years the flammable material known as celluloid was used to manufacture dolls, often the whole body would be moulded from this fiery material. Celluloid was banned for manufacturing use after the Second World War and replaced by the modern vinyl plastic. The more modern figures, such as the famous Barbie and Sindy dolls, are moulded from non-flammable vinyl. Celluloid was used widely in the 1920-30s. Doll and toy makers around the world used celluloid and the Rheinische Gummi und Celluloid Fabrik company of Germany was one of the most prolific producers. Their speciality had been in rubber products ('Gummi' is the German for rubber) and their dolls are invariably marked with a turtle trademark. Quite collectable, too!

Portrait dolls had their ceramic heads moulded in the likeness of popular personalities of the time, such as Queen Victoria, Adelina Patti, and Jenny Lind. Later, in the 1930s Shirley Temple and other famous Hollywood film stars were eventually

produced in doll form. Mechanical dolls that can walk, and phonograph dolls that can talk, are especially collectable, taking the collector into the realms of expensive automata!

Today, antique dolls in first-class condition are not too easy to find but time marches on and later examples, such as the composition dolls made up to the 1950s now attract attention. Doll fairs nowadays display excellent modern products by doll artists. They may be excellent reproductions of the earlier French and German products, or even original 'artist dolls'. They attract a good following, sell well, and have saved the doll fairs from disappearance!

Doll collecting is an internationally popular hobby and doll figures, ranging from common holiday souvenirs representing figures in national dress, to antique example, and even modern 'artist dolls' are all popular collectables.



A selection of 'Dutch' wooden dolls displayed in Thirlstane Castle, Lauder, Scotland.



Some of the ceramic dolls in the Siesby Museum Copenhagen collection now dispersed since the death of Fro Siesby, the Danish owner.



These Swiss articulated metal dolls have lost their felt clothing. Their composition heads were available as representations of cartoon characters and prominent personages. The firm of Bucherer made them in the 1920s. Their joints are of the ball-and-socket type, easily detachable.



Doll making skills were adapted, and taught, by enthusiasts as antique dolls became harder to come across! This student is working on painting a bisque head she has made.



This 1920s wooden doll, seen in the Museum of Childhood on the Isle of Skye, is an American-made wooden Schoenhut product.



A 19th century wax doll on display in Glamis Castle, Scotland.