



The German toy-maker's Issmayer produced this mechanical waiter in the 1880-90s. Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.



This ingenious 'La Madelon' Martin toy, made in 1913, allows the pile of plates to fall on the floor and 'La Madelon' to tumble backwards in surprise! Courtesy of Frederic Marchand of France.



A Parisian 'Street Sweeper', a 1900s mechanical figure from the Paris toy company of Fernand Martin. Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.

Novelty tin-plate toys by Jack Tempest

Early tin-plate toys are amongst the best of the small collectibles available today. These are the examples made mainly around the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries produced by skilled German toy makers. Tin toys may still be bought today though these are nowadays mainly imported from European and Asiatic sources. These are generally of inferior quality, even though they may have been copied from their much older counterparts. Generally Western countries ban playthings made from tin-plate metal because they may have dangerously sharp edges that may injure youngsters at play. The official attitude is vague, but it seems that imported examples may be overlooked providing they are sold only to collectors of adult age.

Whether or not these toys will ever achieve the value that is now generally paid for early tin toys remains to be seen! The older toys that have survived in good condition have certainly appreciated in value since they first became collectors' items in the early post-Second World War years. They appear to have the ability to retain their high values as time goes by although they are thin on the ground and now difficult to find at the absolute bargain prices they could be found at two or three decades ago. The number of price-guides made available across recent years and TV programmes have been responsible.

In prewar years, and earlier, there was little interest in toy collecting, not only in Britain but in any country. Toys simply existed as playthings for children and no one would have dreamed of collecting them - well, almost no one. In those days only the wealthy collected and their money was reserved for the purpose of acquiring early paintings, desirable antiques, and other high quality by-gones. The big auctioneers of the time would never imagine that one day in the future they would be arranging sales of by-gone toys and old dolls! Well, times do change!

Tin-plate toys, so called because they were pressed from tin-plated sheet iron, arrived on the scene with the coming of mass-production methods introduced during the Industrial Revolution. Production was speeded up as methods were discovered to cut out what we now refer to as 'labour intensive' processes. Skilled metalworkers, artists, and hand-painters were steadily replaced by mechanical improvements. The invention of chromolithography was a big step forward that led to the speedier application of colour decoration to complete the toy being produced.

Collectors bear all these changes in mind and choose their additions to their collections accordingly. There are many factors in the specific attraction in choosing toys including ingenuity, accuracy, novelty appeal, general



This mechanical toy by Ernst Paul Lehmann of Germany appeared in the early 1900s. It was popular, featuring a clown trying to control the erratic behaviour of 'The Stubborn Mule'! (the name of the toy) Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.

appearance and, of course, condition. There is, for instance, a special appeal for some in the fact that a toy had been finished off painted by hand. Then again, early lithography offered more superior colouring and general appeal than later, particularly more modern examples!

In general, serious collectors are happier with early toys, usually the figural examples from Germany, a country that was internationally renowned for the skilled production of metal toys. Toys from this era are now officially real 'antiques', having been in existence for 100 years or so - or they soon will be! Of course, toys were also manufactured in the form of railway trains, motor vehicles, airships, and aeroplanes. Many collect tin toys in general but the novelty figural examples are of special appeal. They

came from the companies of Hans Eberle, Gunthermann, Issmayer, Johann Phillip Meier, Ernst Lehmann, Distler, Bing, Frans Primus Wunderlich, and others.

The firm of Fernand Martin of Paris also was noted for its production of novelty toy figures that were just as ingenious and attractive as the German examples. Martin toys were based upon everyday figures seen in and around the streets of Paris towards the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries. A large collection of Martin toys may be seen in the Arts & Métiers Museum in Paris. Monsieur Martin always sent the museum one of the latest toy he produced.

Most of the German toy makers were based in the Bavarian city of Nuremberg, long known for the production of various novelties.

The toy industry took hold there, taking advantage of its skilled population. Small manufacturers could produce their toys efficiently, but weren't able to tackle the distribution of their products. The firm of Bing acted as national and international agents for many local companies and Moses Kohnstam formed a successful business in the nearby town of Fürth, to distribute locally produced playthings. Trading under the name of 'Moko' Kohnstam was responsible for many German toys finding customers in the UK. In fact business within Britain developed so well that Moko eventually opened an office in London.

Amongst the mass of novelty toys 'Made in Germany', were the many tin-plate 'Penny Toys' that are now highly sought after, some collectors specialising only in finding

examples of these miniature playthings. They were designed to be sold by street hawkers and 'chapmen' who worked the fairgrounds. Their makers included Johann Phillip Meier whose company specialised in the production of 'Penny Toys'. Many of these toys, the Meier examples in particular, were beautifully turned out and attractively lithographed. Often they would offer some simple, but ingenious, action. The nursemaid with baby in pushchair penny toy, illustrated, gives the illusion that her legs are moving as she walks along. This was a popular Meier product. Also issued, by various makers were acrobatic animals, rocking horses, boats on wheels, sewing machines, and airships with whirling propellers. Good examples of these toys can realise very high prices today!



A novelty German-made Monkey Motorist, by Distler, dating from 1920. Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.



Some tin toys were quite complicated. This example revolves from the rising heat provided from lighted candles. It was made in Germany in the 1850-60s. Earlier German wooden 'Christmas Toys' were designed on similar principles with the candle heat rising to turn an overhead propeller. The propeller on this rare toy is missing. Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.



A typically well produced lithographed 'Penny Toy' from the 1900s, made in Germany by Meier. Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.



An unusual clockwork 'Steam Hammer' toy from Germany, maker uncertain, but manufactured in the region of one hundred years ago! Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.



A closer look at the mounted children and the organ-grinder at the base of the toy. Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.



A wind-up 'Sweeping Lady' made by Gunthermann, Germany, at the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries. Courtesy of Lourens Bas of Holland.