



Dolls have existed since ancient times but the earliest most widely collected are wooden examples from around the 1800s onwards.



A typical Edwardian nursery scene with display of books, toys and small tea set.



Traditional boys toys include items such as this wooden fort complete with soldiers on guard; model trains continue in popularity, top names being Marklin, Bing, Bassett-Lowke and Hornby.



Wooden Noah's Arks date from as early as c1600. Menageries and farmyard groups also make collectable subjects. See below.



Nursery Antiques Includes Price Guide

by Judith Clarke

A hankering after childhood is something that affects many collectors and probably none more than those passionate about nursery antiques. The nostalgic and historical charms are obvious and items can be as diverse as toys and games, christening rattles or typical nursery furniture such as high chairs, school desks, cradles and even prams.



Mother-of-pearl handle on turn of the century Punch silver rattle with bells and teething ring. Silver Humpty Dumpty bookmark.

The baby's rattle, thought of by many as the first 'toy' a child ever gets its hands on, is a highly collectable object, convenient in size, value and display potential. Through the ages the different parts of rattles have been fashioned out of gold, ivory, silver, coral, mother of pearl and bone. They sometimes come complete with bells, whistles and ornate decoration and teething sticks and rings are either to be found on the rattles themselves or form part of this popular collecting category. Novelty rattles in the shape of animals or other famous characters are very popular but the most valuable remain the highly sought after and more restrained in style Georgian examples. A typical example of the kind of price commanded by later Victorian, examples would be around the £300 - £400 bracket for one in silver with a coral end, decoration in the form of hanging rattles and a whistle end.

Providing the ultimate finishing touch and both a decorative and possible functional item would be an antique cradle. Whether Georgian, Victorian or from the early twentieth century they have been made from various materials such as mahogany, walnut, wicker, canework, pine, oak and willow and in various styles such as hooded, on rockers or swinging. £400 - £500 should secure a nicer older example.

Only the dullest nursery would have been without a variety of toys for the youngsters to while away their time. The more traditional include such favourites as wooden hoops, diabalos, spinning tops, blocks, alphabet bricks and jigsaw puzzles. For the luckiest children there might also be a skilfully carved wooden Noah's Ark with all its paired animals, Noah and family. Many were made in Germany and today fine examples, sometimes replete with many tens of figures, can command prices in the region of £1,000 and more. Likewise no nursery worth its salt would have been without a dolls house. The earliest miniature or 'doll' houses date from the seventeenth century and are museum pieces; the dolls house as a



The complete nursery scene with high chair, cradle, rocking horse, abacus, fort and alphabetical sampler.



Typical nursery fittings and equipment of yesteryear with all manner of items for children to learn from, and scaled down toys and books to while away the hours.

plaything for children didn't develop until much later. Those from the latter half of the nineteenth century can fetch several hundred pounds each unfurnished and sometimes higher prices than this. Original dolls house furnishings are highly sought after. Miniature items were made from silver, different woods, pewter, tin, copper, china, brass and papier-mache. Upholstery was in silk or velvet. When houses have been refurbished with period contents this adds to their monetary value.

Other toys might have included bagatelle games, toy theatres and their various stage backgrounds and props, marbles, cards, puppets and marionettes. Rocking horses date from around 1650 and were popularised in the Victorian era. Even nowadays they retain their value as both status symbols and as antique items and are a requisite item for the wealthy household. Whether on rockers or stands if in good original or fully restored condition some of the older examples can easily command a couple of thousand pounds.

From a collectable point of view toys and playthings have a universal appeal that definitely doesn't stop at childhood. Most collectors firmly side with their sexes on this matter. In the sale rooms and antique shops it's often the female domain of dolls, teddy bears, doll houses and rocking horses versus the male dominated bastions of toy soldiers, forts and trains.

Games perhaps provide the common ground between these polarised collecting interests as do certain childhood books. Certainly as the Victorian era progressed books became less moralistic and religious in tone and a larger emphasis was placed on fun and imagination. There are hundreds of fantasy and fairy tales dating from this period onwards and their illustrations, often by very prominent artists, make them highly collectable today. Among the most desirable are names like Kate Greenaway, Arthur Rackham, Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, Kay Nielsen and Edmund Dulac. Most essential for nursery education were the kind of books for younger children; in particular the proliferation of ABCs and early learners with publishers Warne, Deans and Raphael Tuck dominating many popular titles.

Collecting nursery china has been very much

to the fore lately and among the most currently prized are Mabel Lucie Attwell items produced for Shelley making even a child's potty a sound investment at £300 - £400. Nursery ceramics were often well used and well loved. Typical kinds of items include miniature tea sets or the kinds of bowls, mugs and plates featuring well known characters, cuddly animals or nursery rhymes.

Pieces often have great visual and nostalgic appeal and when associated with a famous character or illustrator can be worth anywhere from £50 to as much as several hundred for a piece such as a very early Mickey Mouse mug. A couple of years ago a Grimwade's Peter Rabbit boxed china tea set c1920 decorated with versions of Beatrix Potter's illustrations took £2,800 at auction against an estimate of £300-400.

Desirable dolls in the nursery at the beginning of the twentieth century might have included those by the French firm of Jumeau, famous for their appealing and finely modelled bebe dolls; and character dolls by Simon & Halbig, Armand Marseille and Heubach. Pursued most keenly in the auction houses are exquisite bisque headed dolls from the nineteenth century. However being made of unglazed china makes them very susceptible to damage.

Though the nursery is now virtually obsolete it can be a pleasurable pastime collecting objects associated with infancy and early childhood. Some items can be rather expensive, such as original rocking horses and the actual cribs, cots and cradles to be found in the nursery of yesteryear. However, there are many other items which are much more affordable and make a delightful themed collection.



Antique boy dolls were made in far fewer numbers than their female counterparts.



A collection of toys and games can make a very colourful display and bring back lots of memories.

If inspired to learn more you can visit Bygones Museum in Torquay, Devon with its Victorian street, life-size shops and rooms of yesteryear, including a nursery. Many of the photos here are of items in the museum which is open all year round. Most well known is the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood which houses a collection of toys, dolls and dolls' houses, childrens' costumes and nursery antiques. Free admission. Cambridge Heath Rd. London E2. Tel: 020 8983 5200.