

Knowsley Archives Presents:

PLAYTIME ISN'T OVER!

Toys and Games Throughout the
Decades



Exhibition Catalogue

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About The Exhibition

The Exhibition, '*Playtime Isn't Over: Toys and Games Throughout The Decades*' featured historical artefacts from Knowsley Archives that are typically shown as part of School talks and visits.

Previously, these items were not normally seen by or displayed to the general public.

The Exhibition ran from Monday 14th July 2025 until Monday 15th September 2025. It also ran in conjunction with the travelling Retro Games Exhibition called, '*Gaming Together*', held at Kirkby Library during the Summer Holidays in 2025.

Highlighted were popular toys and games, spanning from the beginning of the 20th Century in 1900 to the end in 2000. It was located at Knowsley Archives Service at The ARK (Archive Resource for Knowsley) in The Kirkby Centre.



A Brief History of Toys and Games

For thousands of years, games have been a fundamental part of any culture from around the world and have always been one of the most longstanding forms of social interaction between people.

As most board, dice or even card games can include elements of uncertainty of the outcome, an agreement of rules, competitiveness, and chance, this can then create cultural and social bonds between generations and communities. These pastimes can continue to live and evolve for thousands of years, just from being taught to future generations.

From an archaeological perspective, the origins of board games can be linked to the ancient Near East, in modern day geography this is located within the Middle East.

One of the earliest forms of board games can be dated as far back as 2620 BCE, called Senet. This was popular amongst the Ancient Egyptians during the First Dynasty and was even discovered years later within the tomb of Tutankhamun. However, of the oldest and playable board game is, The Royal Game of Ur, which is a two-player race and war game that is similar to how Backgammon is played. This game can be dated back to 2400 BC

As this game is no longer played in modern times and since there have been no rules or how to guides passed down through centuries. It has been up to renowned historians such as H. J. R. Murray and Robert Charles Bell to understand how to play this unusually shaped board and what path the counters will take during each players turn.



However, the most commonly played rules for the Royal Game of Ur were reconstructed by Professor Irving Finkle, who also designed a simplified version of how to play the game. This version can be played online against another player or a robot.

Both historians have left their mark on the history of games, with Bell giving origins into many board game and dividing them into four main categories such as, Mancala games, War games, Positional games and Race games. The legacy left from Murray was a published book that served as an extensive record into the game of Chess from its origins to its development across Europe, titled *A History of Chess*.

Moving into the 19th Century, toys and games began to serve as a more educational purpose to children and to assist them in their gender roles at that time. They also served the purpose of helping children think about what they would want to be when they grow older and began the journey into adult working life. Such toys for young girls would involve teaching them domestic skills such as tea sets or even a toy sewing machines. Yet, for young boys, their toys would be items such like trucks, cars or even Military themed with toy soldiers.

During the span of the 20th century, toys and games continued to adapt at a rapid pace. From the beginning decades of the century, with the focus still being on primarily wooden based toys and parlour games, it was due to the events of the Two World Wars, that change began. The need for different types of material to be used for the War efforts, families across the UK adapted to the change and created toys, games and even soft teddies with everyday household items and basic crafting and sewing.

After the end of the War, toys and games began their journey towards mass production with such material as plastic for both gender-based toys, such as dolls for girls and soldiers for boys.



From the mid to late 20th Century, aspiring inventors, designers and manufacturers began to formulate the market with the latest and greatest 'must-haves', that would be at the top of almost any children's Christmas list. However, with this also began the slow introduction into what was mass production, over consumerism and the need to own the latest toy or game.

Now in the 21st Century, toys and games are ever changing and adapting. Whilst there are still toys and games that try to hold an educational aspect to them. Many are still attempting to still teach them about their roles in adult and domestic life, they are no longer bound to one gender but are aimed at both girls and boys. However, most modern toys and games now hold either a fantasy or mythical element to them, as the need to help a child create an imaginative world exceeds the need to teach them about everyday life and what to expect in adulthood.

However, the reoccurring issue with some of the modern toys and games, is that they are not as durable as their predecessors which had been made out of solid materials such as wood. As some can be made out of easily breakable material, it poses a risk that they are not 'built to last'. Sadly, a large majority of the toys and games that end up being purchased as they are part of a current trend, that they will simply end up in landfill, unable to be passed down through generations.

As we progress further into the 21st Century, many adults of all ages from all decades are finding fond memories through what toy or game that was popular when they were a child. Even going as far as purchasing 'vintage' or modern remakes for their own children or grandchildren to fully appreciate or enjoy what they did at that age.

Whether these fond toys and game will continue to withstand time and environmental factors, it is apparent that even their memory and how they made a child feel, will keep them alive for generations to come.



Space A



Photograph of Exhibition Space A

Space A

Hoopla or Quoits



The difference between the two games is that Hoopla can normally be played at fairgrounds with the chance to win a prize. While Quoits is usually played at home for fun and minor competition amongst friends and family.

There is a third version of the game called Deck Quoits, normally played on a ship. However, this version is more informal, and the centre point can either be a raised wooden peg or a marked circle.

Material: Wood and Rope

Date: 19th & 20th Century

Passengers playing Deck Quoits on board the liner *Franconia* at Liverpool, June 1923.



Space A



Rubik's Cube

Whilst it gained momentous popularity in the 1980s, the Rubik's Cube was originally known as the Magic Cube when it was first made in 1974. During the cubes rebrand in the early 1980s, it was named after its creator, Erno Rubik, a Hungarian design teacher.

The main appeal for the cube was its convenience, with being enjoyed in the comfort of home, on the school yard with friends, or on the go.

According to their website, the Rubik's cube has 43,252,003,274,489,856,000 ways of arranging the squares. In 2024, over five hundred million cubes have been sold across the world, making it not only the bestselling toy but the bestselling puzzle game.

Material: Plastic and Cardboard

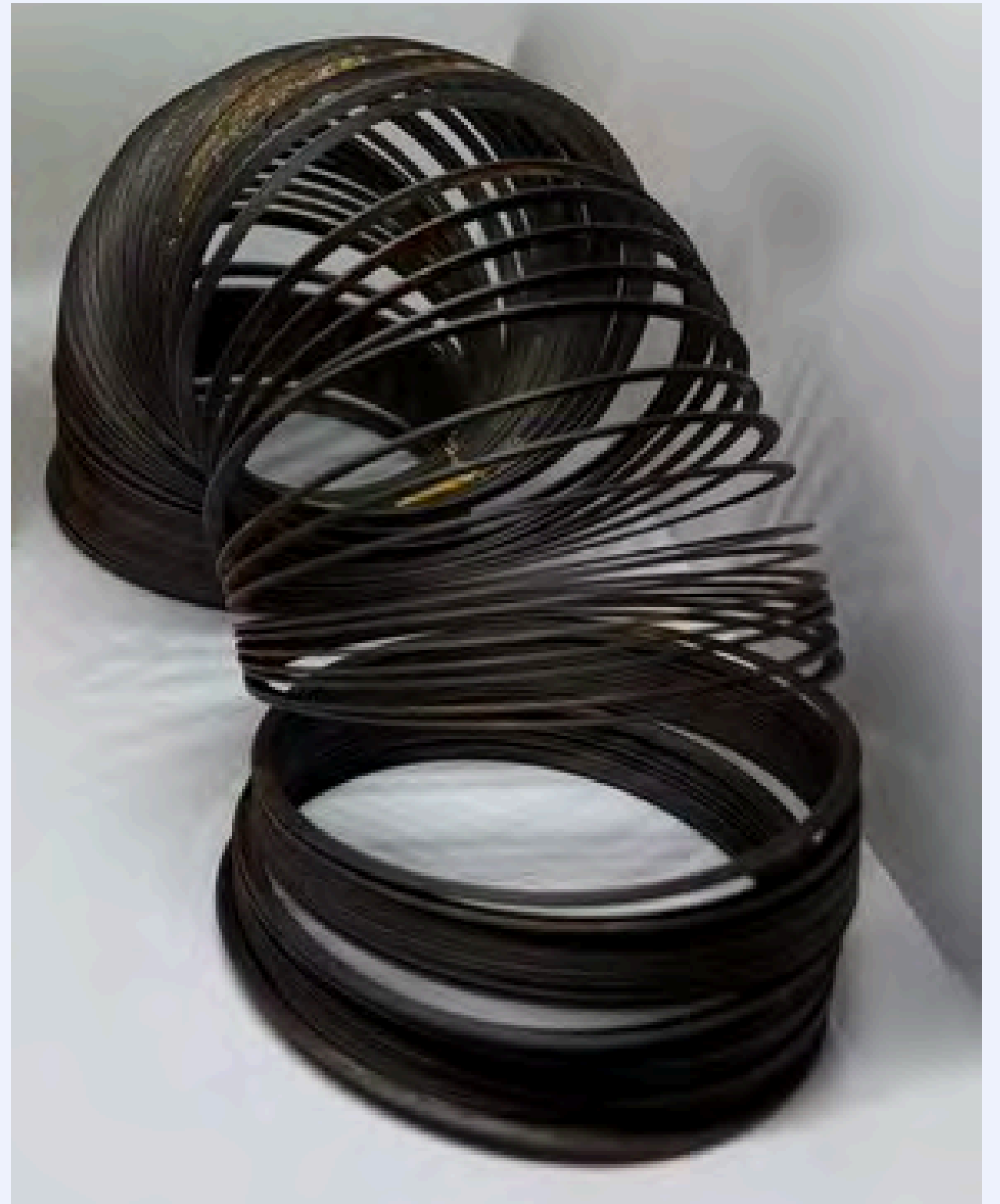
Date: 1980s

Space A

Slinky

Whilst the Slinky was first sold and demonstrated in 1945, it had been tried and tested to the point of perfection in the years prior by a husband and wife, Richard and Betty James. After their separation, Betty would take charge of the distribution of slinky from the 1960s until 1998.

Unlike most games or toys that require multiple players, this simple spring toy can be enjoyed by just one person, by either juggling it from hand to hand or watching it walk of its own accord downstairs. Though it can be used with a friend, and two can be raced next to each downstairs to see who has the quickest slinky.



The Slinky, whilst appearing a simple past time, holds physical and mathematical properties, primarily the law of elasticity called Hooke's Law.

In simpler terms, this law is where the applied force equals a constant need to extend or compress a spring is directly proportional to the distance the spring is stretched or compressed, as long as the spring's elastic limit is not exceeded. The Slinky on its downward journey on stairs or even a slope transfers motion, force and energy along its length.

Material: Cardboard Box and Steel

Date: 1945

Space A

Doll



Dolls have played different roles throughout history, from playing a fundamental role in magic and spiritual rituals to being used as depictions for deities.

In Ancient Greece it was customary for young girls to dedicate their dolls to the Greek Goddess Artemis when they get married. However, if they died before marriage, then their dolls would be buried with them.

In modern times, they again play different roles as being a form of companionship for children and a collector's items for adults.

In the early 19th Century, Dolls were made out of different types of material such as porcelain, cloth and sometimes leather. These kinds of dolls were known as a China doll or Bisque dolls, where the head would be glazed porcelain and the body would be a type of fabric. These dolls were normally dressed in finery and made to represent adults, though towards the end of the 19th Century there began a rise of childlike and new-born baby dolls.

The 1950s saw a rise in mass production of baby like dolls, and unlike their predecessors, the porcelain dolls, instead of having long locks of hair, instead there was moulded plastic in the shape of hair. The durability of the plastic, made the doll perfect for a out-and-about companion for young girls, ready for any adventure.

Date: 19th Century and onwards

Materials: Mixed Plastics



Space A



Tic-Tac-Toe

Also Known as Noughts and Crosses. It is believed that this game has evolved from another game that originates back to Ancient Rome, called Terni Lapilli. This operated on a similar three by three grid, however in archaeological findings there was never any markings within the grid, suggesting that the game was played with moveable pieces, just like this peg version.

Material: Wood

Date: Early 1900

Space B



Photograph of Exhibition Space B

Cabinet One - 1900 to 1930s



Cup and Ball

Whilst the main objective of the game appears easy, simply get the ball into the cup, mastering the game can be quite challenging.

The game was created around the 14th Century and has been evolving ever since. However, in the 16th Century, the game became extremely popular in France where it was known as Bilboquet.

Material: Wood and String

Date: 19th Century

Cabinet One - 1900 to 1930s

Wooden Bandalore (Yo-Yo)

During the 17th and 18th Century, Bandalore was the original term for describing what we know as a Yo-Yo. Unlike some of the more complex tricks that would become popular years later, originally the art of the game was rather simple. The trick was to send it flying through the air, unravelling most of the string and at the precise time, making a sudden movement to jerk the Bandalore back and neatly recoiling the string.



Material: Wood and String

Date: 17th to 19th Century

The Yo-Yo became popular during the 1920s and 1930s in America, after a Filipino businessman opened a Yo-Yo manufacturing company, years after previously making Yo-Yos by hand for local children.



The Yo-Yo itself can be dated back to the time of Ancient Greece and has appeared in many vase paintings. Whilst some of them were primarily made of wood, there are records that suggest they were also made out of a type of metal and terracotta.

Boy playing with a terracotta yo-yo -
440 BC

Cabinet One - 1900 to 1930s

Diabolo



Historically known as 'The Devil on two Sticks', until the early 20th Century, Diabolo was originally derived from the Chinese Yo-Yo and saw a peak in popularity during the 19th Century. After a more modern version of the game was pioneered in the 20th Century, only then was the name changed to what we now know as Diabolo.

Material: Wood, Metal and String

Date: 19th and early 20th Century

Popularity for the game decreased rapidly after 1910 due to cartoons in newspapers mocking public figures of the time, playing with the toy.

The most basic and fundamental trick was simply called Toss, and this involved tossing the Diabolo in the air and the user doing a turn in place or even a skip over the string whilst the diabolo is still in the air.

Those who were skilled in the game could spin multiple Diablos' on a single string.

Australian Swimmer, Annette Kellerman, playing with a Diabolo, 1907



Cabinet One - 1900 to 1930s



Table Skittles

A game that was popular in pubs and in the comfort of the home, made from salvaged items. The pins, which have been repurposed multiple times are beehive textile spools, that previously would have been used in mills and factories. They would later be repurposed once again to be used as light pulls. Other adaptations of Table Skittles are more like a Turnball style of game, with the ball being attached to a swing and the pins slotted into place on a circle base. Each player takes turns in taking a swing with the ball to knock the pins down.

Material: Wood and Metal

Date: 19th Century and onwards

Cabinet Two - 1940s

Conkers



Originally derived from a game called 'Conquerors' but instead of seeds, conch shells or hazelnuts were used. The use of seeds from a horse chestnut tree gained popularity in the mid-19th Century.

Material: Seed from a Horse Chestnut Tree and String

Date: Mid 19th Century to present day

The rules of the game are very simple involving two players, one has their conker dangle on the full length of the string whilst their opponent takes a swing with their conker. Each player continues taking turns until one breaks, therefore declaring a winner and a loser. The points system for the game is rather remarkable and can be described as, *'Initially the conker is a 'none-er', and its first win makes it a 'one-er'. If it wins again, it scores a point of one for itself, as the winner, and also takes its opponents score to add to its own. For example, if a 'six-er' beats a 'three-er', it scores one for the win, and takes the three from the beaten opponent. So, the victorious conker is now a 'ten-er'.*

Though as simple as the game concept may be, there is always room cheating to obtain the strongest conker in a game, such efforts as baking the conkers, soaking them in vinegar. A few would even use nail varnish or glue to harden the surface.

Whilst the game may have core popularity amongst friends in the school playground, there are multiple tournaments held in the UK.

However, the biggest event is the World Conker Championships and is held once a year in Northamptonshire though features very strict rules. For example, the conkers and laces are supplied by the organisations, drawn from a blind bag and cannot be tampered with.



Cabinet Two - 1940s



Playing Cards

Playing Cards are one of the most versatile form of pastimes varying from being used in casinos and amongst Magicians to educational use. Whilst there are many different uses for playing cards such as card stacking, card performing act or even card throwing. However, they are most used for card games such as Go Fish, Rummy, Slapjack, Scabby Queen, and Egyptian Ratscrews.

It is believed that the reverse side is adorned with patterns to make it more difficult for a player to read another player's card. The most common type of deck that we use in the UK is the French Suited standard 52 Card Deck.

Material: Card or Heavy Paper

Date: 14th and 15th Century

Cabinet Two - 1940s



Pick Up Sticks

This game of dexterity and daintiness goes by many different names, Pick-A-Stick, Fiddlesticks and Jack Straws, but has been an enjoyable past time for centuries.

Material: Wood and Metal

Date: 20th Century

Whilst more modern versions of the sticks are coloured plastic or a more varnished wood with colouring markings on the end, they used to be made from all kinds of different materials. Previously during Victorian times, when upper-class families would play Pick Up Sticks, these sticks would have been made from ivory or bone. In earlier centuries, bamboo, straw, or even yarrow would have been used for the sticks.

To play, at least two players are needed, and the rules are that the youngest player goes first before following a clockwise direction to the next player. Setting up the game requires a more elaborate arrangement, with one player holding the sticks in one hand, making sure they are all standing vertical and a couple of centimetres up in the air.

The player will then release them, letting the sticks fall and once they have all landed, then the game can begin. Each player has to move a stick without touching or moving any of the other sticks, if they do, then their turn ends, and they must let go of the stick they were trying to reach



Cabinet Three - 1950s

Green Soldiers



These plastic figures first became popular during the late 1930s, though production began to slow in the early 1940s. After the end of the Second World War, these figures were in production again.

Normally wearing modern military uniforms and featured 20th Century weapons, these figures were sold at a low price in packs or buckets in discount stores and supermarkets. The figures were, at first, green in colour to represent the United States Army uniform.

During the Vietnam War, the overall sale of military toys faced a decline due to the disfavour of the war.

In recent years, these little green Army Men have been found by beach combers on shorelines across Britain and the rest of the world. One can wonder how they got there, it is presumed that children take them on a day out on the beach and re-enact battles in the sand.

Although these toys would eventually become less popular due to different trends reappearing, there would be a surge in popularity again in the 1990s after the release of the Disney movie, *Toy Story*. The film featured what was known as the *Bucket o' Soldiers*, or also known as the *Green Army Men*, and these were available to buy as part of the films merchandise.

Material: Plastic

Date: 1950s

Cabinet Three - 1950s



Whip and Top

This toy has gone by many names throughout the mid-20th Century. Many know it as the Whip and Top, or Whipping Top, though it was also known as a Whip and Peerie. It also gained the name Window Breakers, as if you were too enthusiastic when whipping them, they would shoot into different directions and cause accidents.

Typically, it was played in the street with friends, rather than in the confined space of the living room. Although accidents could happen, if you were to miss the top and accidentally whip your leg, it would be rather painful. To get the full benefit out of playing with the Whip and Top, securing hours of fun, it required plenty of practice and patience.

It was common amongst children to draw different designs and patterns on the top with chalk, so that when it was spinning, their designs would come to life

Material: Wood and String

Date: 20th Century

Cabinet Three - 1950s

Skipping Rope

Also known as Jump Rope. Whilst skipping has been prominent throughout the centuries, it was most enjoyed during the 1950s.

It was a pastime that could be enjoyed by just the one child skipping on their own, or three friends skipping together, or even as a large group of children taking turns skipping and chanting rhymes.



If two friends wanted to skip together, one end of the rope would be tied to a tree or a railing, therefore creating the illusion of a third person holding the rope.

One of the more notable skipping games played amongst groups is Double Dutch, though another skipping rope is needed for this. Whilst there are skipping championships around the world, there is also a yearly competition for the National Double Dutch Leagues.

Some of the techniques that can be done when skipping are the Criss-Cross, Side-Swing, Boxer-Jump, the Toad and the Side Swing.



This was another pastime that was strictly for the playground or out on the street with friends, and not in the house

Material: Wood and Rope

Date: 16th Century and Onwards

Cabinet Three - 1950s



Dominos

The simple game of strategy and calculation, Dominoes has been present since the 12th Century where it was mainly popular within China.

Earlier versions of the game would have been made out of ivory, bone or wood, as this type of material was readily available at the time.

During the 18th Century, its popularity spread across Europe, though the number of tiles changed to 28, whereas previously in China there had been 32 tiles in a game. During this time, the game became popular in the UK, and it is suspected that this was because it was introduced by French prisoners of war.

Popular to play with your family at home, but also amongst friends in pubs. During the 1950s, there was a rise in people playing Dominoes in pubs, as it was deemed to be a sociable past time, either between two people or a group of friends. The most popular game to play in pubs was called, Fives and Threes. There are multiple different types and variations of games to play with Dominoes, such as The Block Game, Chicken foot, Cyprus and Draw Game.

Rather like playing card games such as poker, Dominoes can be played at a professional level, with many competitions held in the UK and around the world.

Material: Wood and Cardboard

Date: 12th Century and onwards

Cabinet Four - 1960s

Marbles

It is believed that marbles arrived in Britain during the medieval era, although there have been archaeological discoveries that link stone and clay marbles as early as 2500 BCE. They were firstly popular in South Asia before becoming popular in the 16th Century in Germany. The term Marbles is believed to be originated from the area of Nuremberg, with the town council limited the playing with marbles to a small field outside the town.



One of the most popular marble games in the UK is called, Ring Tar, which dates back to the 18th Century, and it is similar to how billiards is played. For this game, at least two players are needed, an equal number of marbles per person and the Tar is normally a marble that is larger than the rest. Making a circle with chalk, each player will then place their marbles within the circle. Taking turns, each player uses the Tar to knock their opponents marbles out of the marked ring. The one left with the most marbles wins.

There are over thirty different games to be played with marbles, some just using the marbles and others having additional components such as marble painting or marble maze.

Since 1932, there has been the British and World Marbles Championship held in Tinsley Green, West Sussex.

Material: Glass

Date: 16th Century and onwards

Cabinet Four - 1960s



Hot Wheels

Originally created in the late 1960s in America to compete with the leading toy car brand at that time, Matchbox. As Matchbox cars was more focused on the reproduction of smaller scale of vehicles of that time, Hot Wheels leaned into the creation of outlandish and more extravagant cars. Popularity for the cars grew from the late 1960s and continued into the 1970s and 1980s.

Though in the meantime, Matchbox continued to be the more dominate toy car manufacturer since the 1950s, though did eventually become overshadowed by Hot Wheels into the 1970s and 1980s due to the company struggling financially. Ironically, the companies would later merge after being purchased by Mattel in the 1990s.

Material: Alloy, Plastic and Rubber

Date: Mid 20th Century and onwards.



Cabinet Four - 1960s



Snake

The durability of the wooden and bendy snake has been a past time fiddle toy for many decades. Its simple design of segments of wood fused to a leather strip, creating the snake's spine, ensuring similar movement to that of a real snake.

In modern times, these snakes are located within the gift shop of a zoo or even a museum, ready to teach another generation the fluid and bendy movement of the snake.

Material: Wood and Leather

Date: 20th Century

Space C



Photograph of Exhibition Space C

Cabinet Five - 1970s



Spirograph

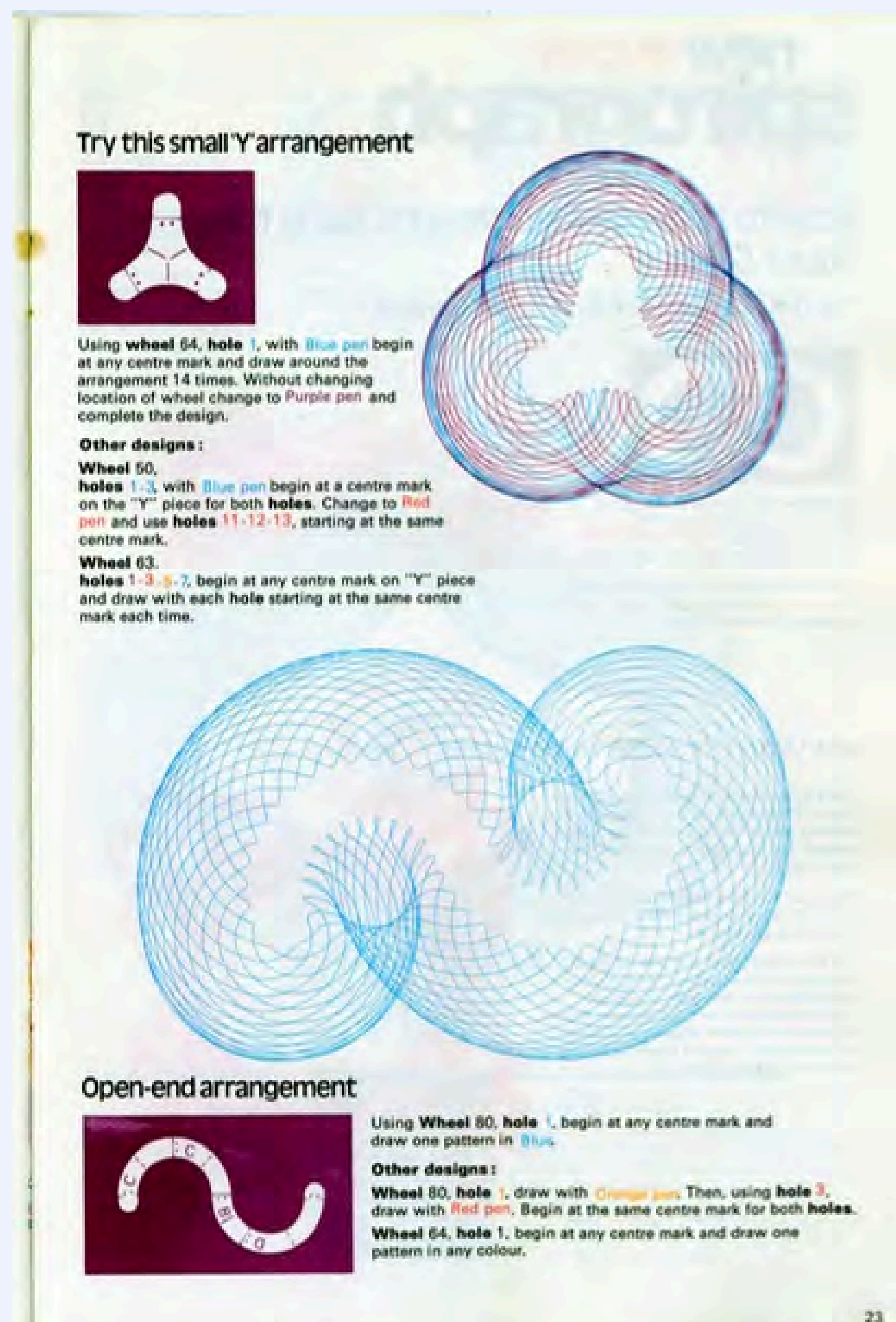
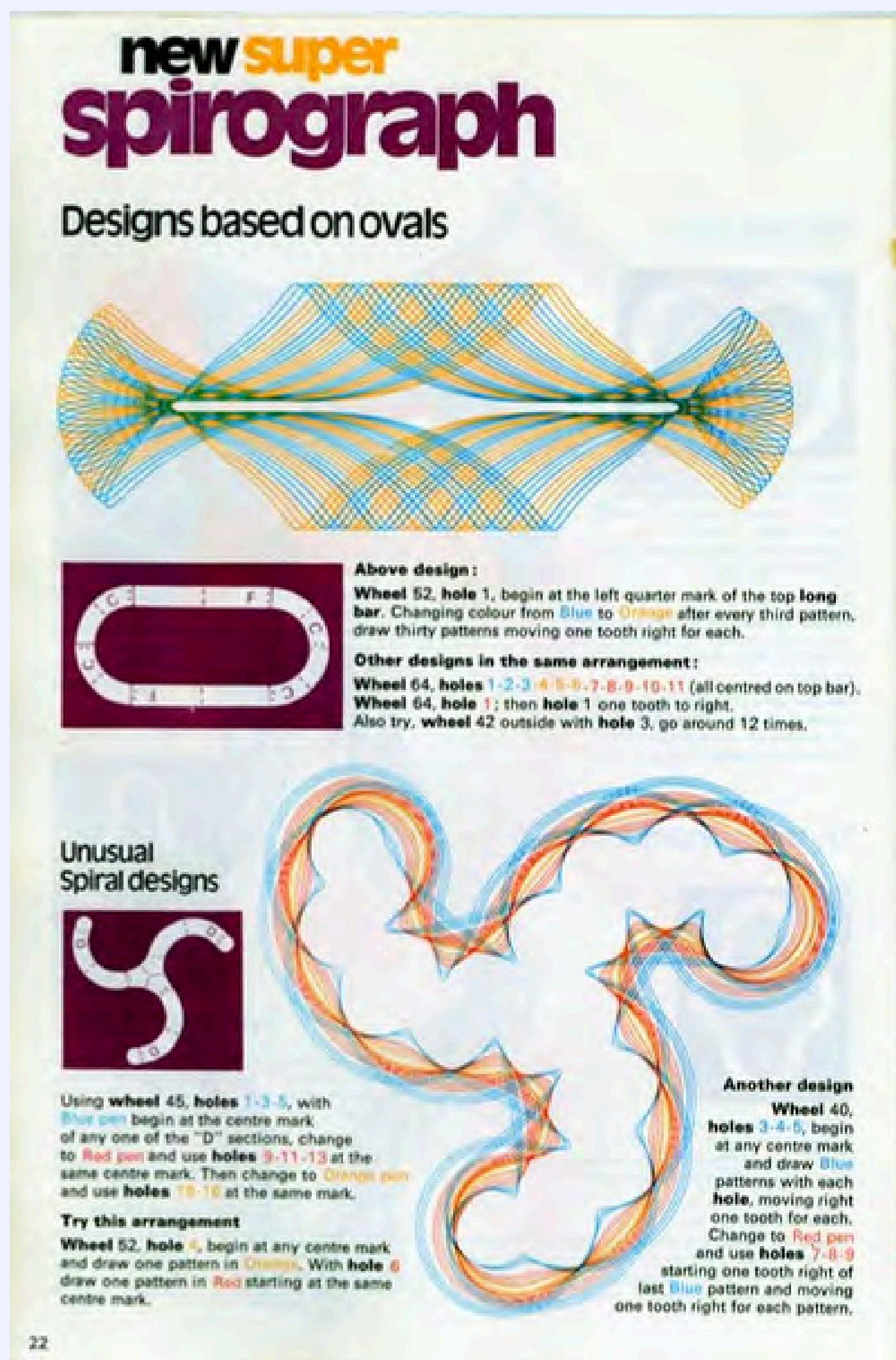
Spirograph was developed by a British engineer, Denys Fisher in the 1960s, and after winning Toy of the Year in 1967, the geometric drawing toy began to soar in popularity. To draw a shape, you need to select one of the smaller wheels to be placed within a larger wheel. Then you place your pen or pencil into the small holes of the smaller wheel and begin to draw whilst the smaller wheel moves around the inner circumference of the larger wheel.

Though the Spirograph can be dated back to the late 19th Century, after it was invented by a mathematician, Bruno Abdank-Abakanowicz, that was to be used for calculating an area bordered by curvatures.

Material: Plastic

Date: 1965 and onwards

Cabinet Five - 1970s



Spirograph Instruction Booklet

A booklet that lists the various shapes and designs and how to draw them.

Date: 1970s



Knowsley Council

Cabinet Five - 1970s

Kaleidoscopes



The Kaleidoscope was invented by a Scottish inventor, David Brewster in early 18th Century, and he derived the name from three Greek Words. The words, Kalos, which can mean beautiful or beauty, Eidos which means form or shape and Skopeō which can mean to look at or to observe.

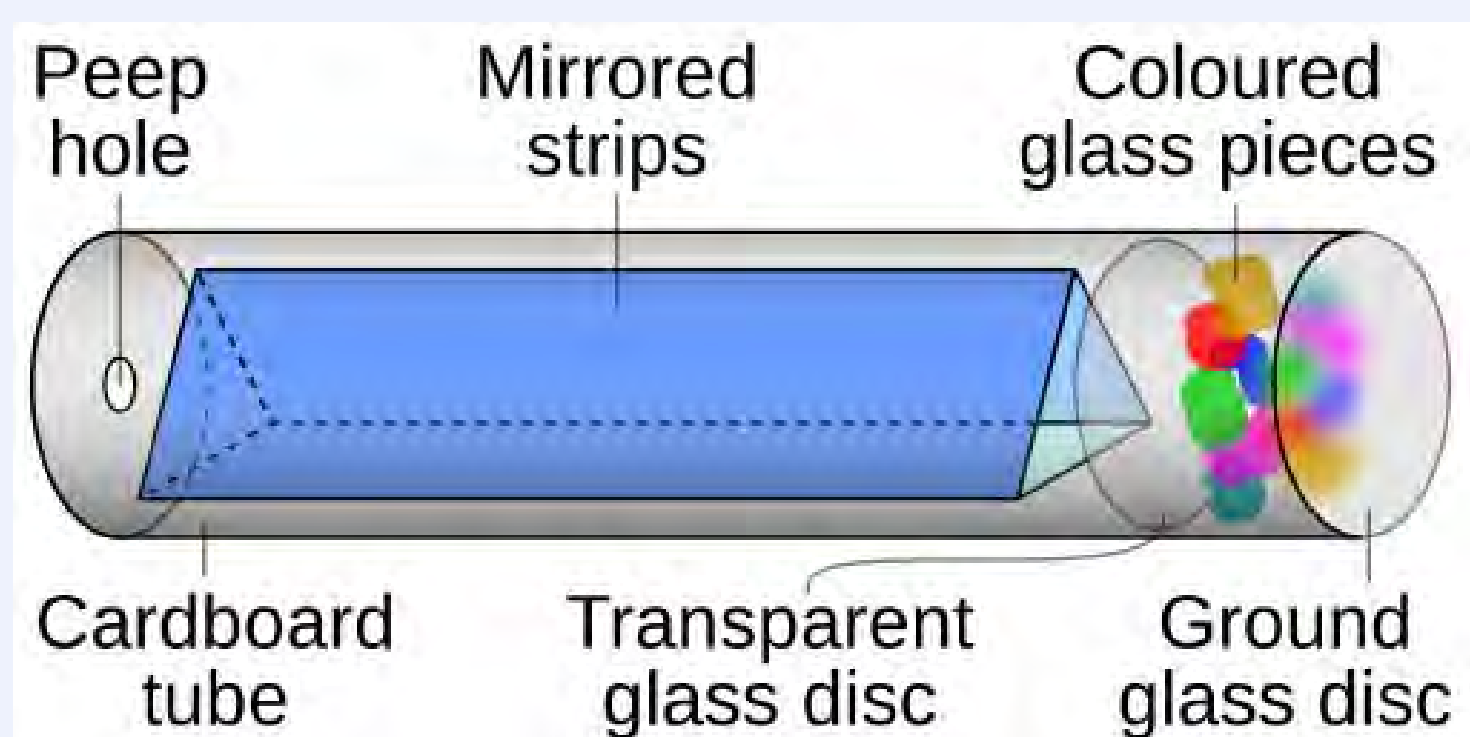
The Kaleidoscope gained popularity in America in the late 19th Century, after it was revitalised by a man named Charles Bush who then went on to mass produce the toy.

The device consists of mirrors or mirrored strips within the tube, at the top there is a disk of coloured plastic or glass. The viewer can then look through the small hole at the bottom, holding the Kaleidoscope towards the light, rotating the tube around and creating striking visuals with the loose plastic or glass against the mirrors.

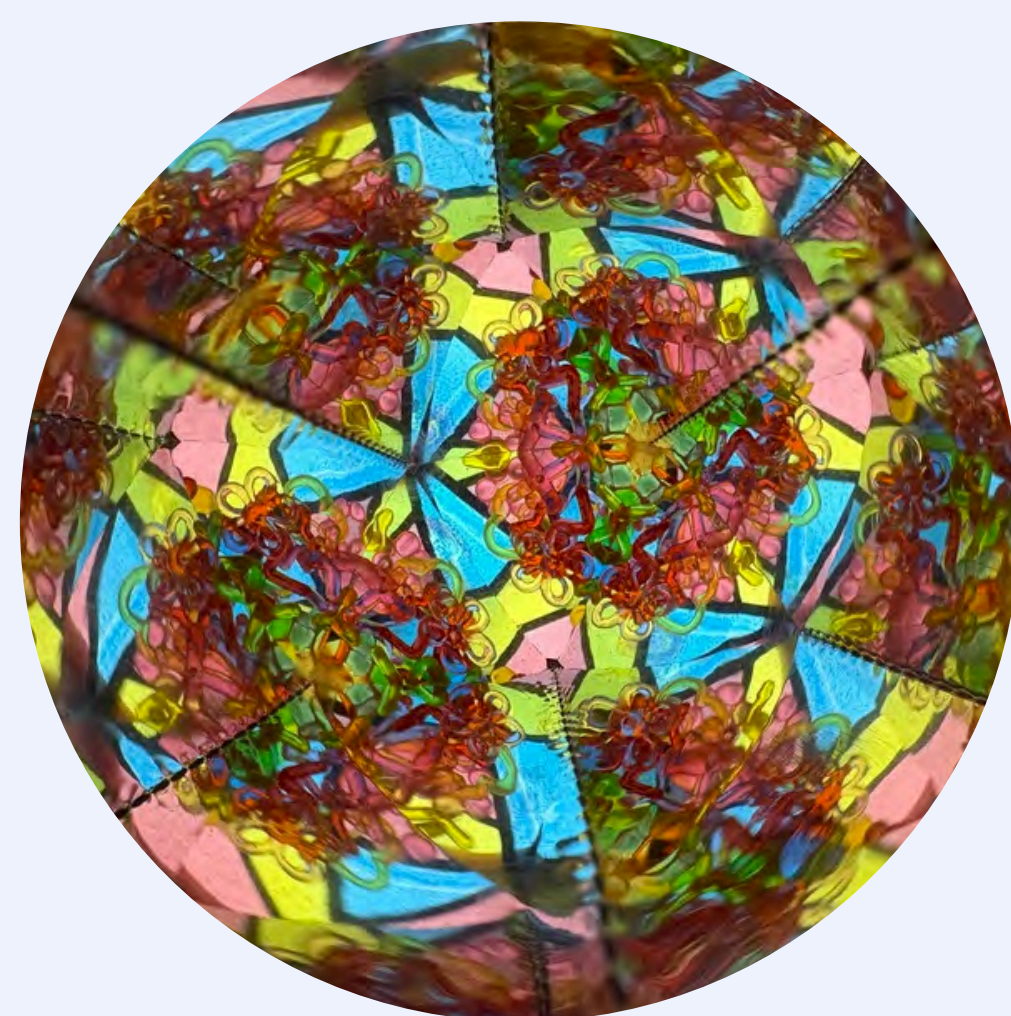
Popularity for the toy peaked in the Victorian age amongst upper class families as it was seen to be an amusing form of family entertainment used in the most formal room of the house, the parlour.

Material: Card and Plastic

Date: 19th Century and onwards



How a Kaleidoscope works



A peek Inside our Kaleidoscopes

Cabinet Five – 1970s

Barbie Doll



The Barbie doll was a creation made by Ruth Handler, co-founder of the toy company, Mattel, naming Barbie after her daughter, Barbara.

The Doll first started to gain immense popularity in America in the late 1950s, however, in Britain, a similar fashion doll was created to rival Barbie called Sindy.

Whilst Sindy was popular in the UK, she failed to gain momentum in America, even after she was remodelled to look more American.

Due to the remodelling, Mattel would then go on to take legal action, stating Copyright infringement, which was only resolved on the agreement to change Sindy's appearance once again.

After a few changes to her appearance such as a more softened face and a friendly smile, Barbie was released in the UK in 1971 where she gained a soaring popularity amongst young girls in the UK. Barbies' popularity continued to rise with ever adapting appearance and fashion, leading into the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

Material: PVC Plastic, Nylon and Polyester

Date: 1950s and onwards

Cabinet Five - 1970s



Playmobil

Originally launched as Playpeople for a brief time in 1974, Playmobil was first launched in Germany by an inventor, Hans Beck. In the early stages of development, Beck conducted research with children into how to develop a toy that they would find not too complex, but with the right amount of flexibility that would not get in the way of their imagination.

After its success across Europe, it launched in the UK in the late 1970s and continued to gain popularity amongst children. Almost immediately, Playmobil produced themed sets, complete with a mixture of imaginative play with pirates and knights to role-playing with sets based on everyday life such as farming, construction and emergency services.

Material: Plastic

Date: 1974

Cabinet Six - 1980s



Walkman

Whilst the Walkman is not in the normal category of a toy or a game, there are many reasons for this. During its release in the early 1980s it had a huge cultural influence, with the decade being known as the Walkman Decade. Whilst it was enjoyed by adults and teenagers, the appeal also reached towards children, and it was at the top of their Christmas list.

Originally sold in Japan in the late 1970s, it reached the rest of the world in the very early 1980s. The Walkman revolutionised how people listened to music, with the new feature of personal headphones. It created a more personal experience listening to their favourite artists.

Material: Mixed Plastic

Date: 1980s

Cabinet Six - 1980s



Yo-Yo

Given the popularity of the Yo-Yo in the early 20th Century, the popularity of the toy began to decline in the late 1950s. However, after the introduction of the more modern and plastic Yo-Yo, popularity began to increase.

Due to the change in design, such as a ball-bearing axle, this then created the ability to spin the Yo-Yo even more and complete challenging tricks.

Although whilst this can be deemed to be the modern era for Yo-Yos, it wasn't until the 1990s that saw an even greater development in designs and different tricks.

Material: Plastic and String

Date: 1980s and onwards

Cabinet Six - 1980s



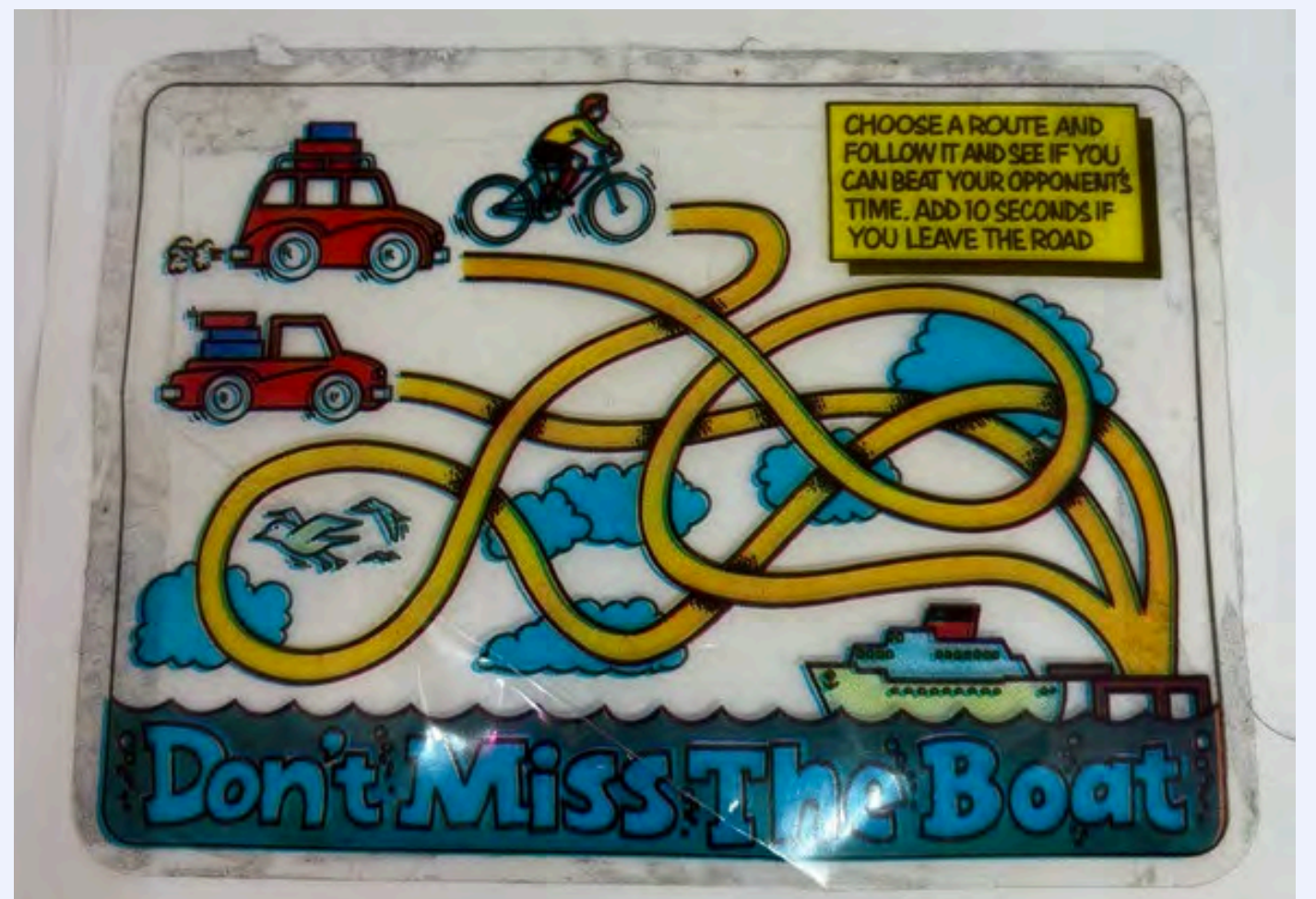
Etch-A-Sketch

Although the Etch-A-Sketch was invented in the 1960s by a French inventor and technician, André Cassagnes. Whilst it was popular in the 1960s, it continued its success into the 1970s and 1980s. It offered a unique and captivating way to create doodles or more detailed drawings. The mechanics of the toy are rather complex.

The two dials operate different directions, one for left to right and the other for up and down. The inside of the screen is coated in a thin layer of aluminium powder. When these dials are controlled, a stylus scrapes away the aluminium powder and creates a dark line that is used for the drawing process.

Material: Mixed Plastic and Aluminium powder

Date: 1960s and onwards



Cabinet Seven - 1990s



Pokémon

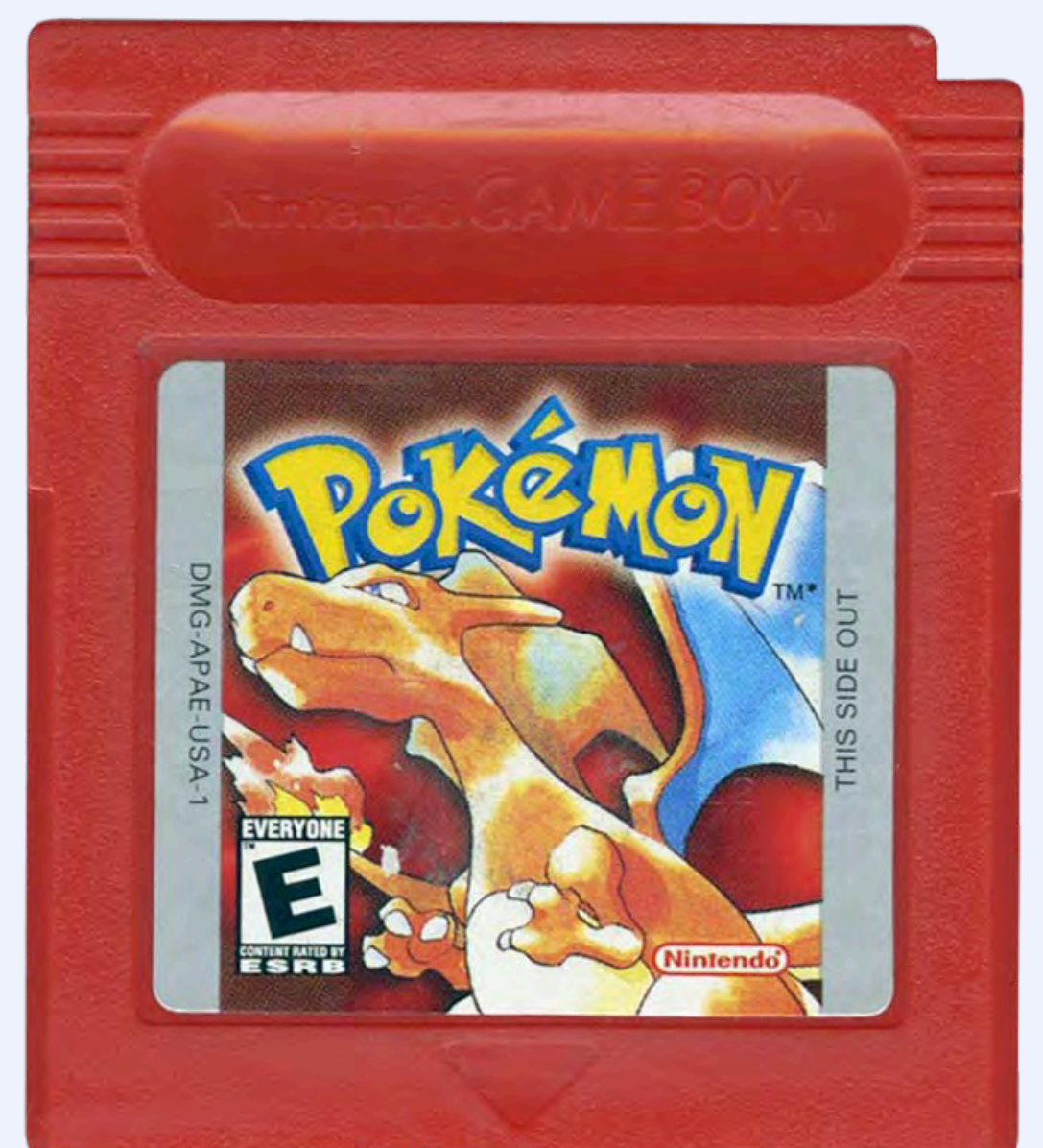
This time period of the 1990s, has been referred to a *Pokémonia*, due to the sudden worldwide movement regarding the franchise, and this only began to subside in the early 2000s. However, by then Pokémon had become a fixture in popular culture.

Pokémon was first released on the Game Boy in Japan in 1996, and then later would be the Pokémon Trading Cards, anime series and then films.

In the late 1990s, the Pokémon Trading Card Game became so popular that it was banned in some primary schools across Liverpool due to children losing focus in their schoolwork and focusing on Pokémon battles during lunchtime.

Material: Mixed Plastics and Card

Date: 1996



Cabinet Seven - 1990s



Barbie Dolls from McDonalds Happy Meals

The fast-food chain McDonalds first started its iconic Happy Meals in 1979, the original toys inside was an McDoodle stencil, a puzzle and a spinning top. Later the Happy Meal would occasionally become themed to promote an upcoming family film or television series. One of the first notable promotions was during the 1970s, when the Star Trek film was released and featured in the Happy Meal was a comic strip and games, with multiple meals needing to be purchased to complete the set.

In the 1990s, some of the notable franchise to participate in Happy Meal toys was Hot Wheels, Teenie Beanie Babies, My Little Pony, Barbie and many popular Disney Movies out at that time.

Material: Mixed Plastics, Nylon and Polyester

Date: 1997



Cabinet Seven - 1990s



Polly Pocket with House

Polly Pocket was first launched in the year of 1989, although it wasn't until the mid-1990s that the toys popularity reached its peak. In 1993, the toy was on the top of many Christmas lists and by 1994, it is estimated that nearly 75% of young girls in Britain owned a Polly Pocket.

However, due to a decline in sales Polly Pocket was rebranded, and her size was increased from under 1 inch tall to nearly 4 inches taller. Also included, was new changeable rubber plastic clothing that could be attached and removed. This received mixed reviews as many found this to be too fiddly and missed the 'original Polly'.

Material: Mixed Plastics

Date: 1990s

Cabinet Seven - 1990s



Beanie Babies

Beanie Babies were first launched in 1993 at a Toy Fair in New York, by Harold Ty Warner who also founded Ty corporation.

At first due to their limited availability, Beanie Babies were initially sold in small or independent businesses and specialised gift shops.

The reason for the sudden influx in 1995, was Ty began to be retiring certain animals. However, this has been deemed to be an example of artificial scarcity, therefore creating more demand.

This approach was also combined with Ty limiting the distribution of the teddies to shops, with them selling 36 of any one teddy to these small businesses at a time. This is how the Beanie Baby frenzy began.

As the 1990s came to an end and the 2000s began, Beanie Babies began to rapidly decline in popularity and only in 2008 they reappeared and were now called Beanie Babies 2.0.

Material: Synthetic plush and polyester fibre

Date: 1990s



In Las Vegas in 1999, a recently divorced couple were ordered by a judge to divide up their Beanie Baby collection, one by one in the court room.

Cabinet Eight - 2000s



PlayStation Two

After the success of the PlayStation One in the mid-1990s, the PlayStation Two shortly followed in the beginning of the 2000s. There were mixed criticisms at first due to the price of the console, marked at £299.

Though the console gained immense popularity in 2004 after a slimline and more affordable version of the console was released alongside an exclusive game, Grand Theft Auto: Vice City.

Even after the release of the PlayStation Three, the second console remained a firm favourite amongst gamers and continued to sell well until it was discontinued in late 2013.

Overall, there were 10,987 different games available to play on the console.

Some of the most popular ones being, The Sims, Metal Gear Solid Series, Final Fantasy Series, Guitar Hero, Grand Theft Auto Series and Pro Evolution Soccer.

However, the best-selling PlayStation Two game was Grand Theft Auto San Andreas, which overall sold 17.33 million units.

Material: Plastic and Metal

Date: 2000 - 2004



Cabinet Eight - 2000s



Scooby Strings

In the mid-2000s, a new trend began to form within primary and secondary schools across the Britain, Scooby Strings. These strings went by many different names and spellings such as, Scoubis, Scoobies, Scoubidou, Skoobies and Scooby Doos.

The trend had originally formed in France before coming to the UK, but it is believed to have originated from Chinese knotting and the technique is commonly used for making ropework.

The strings could come in many different colours and variations such as glitter and neon, and through the process of weaving and knotting could become keychains to attached onto bags and keys. Not only were they creative pastime, but it was the peak of friendship if you made each other friendship bracelets with the Scooby Strings, featuring each other's favourite colours.

Material: Plastic String

Date: 2000s

Cabinet Eight - 2000s



Star Wars Figures

At the end of the 1990s, the Star Wars franchise experienced a huge revitalization in popularity during the beginning of the release of the prequel trilogy.

The first film being released in 1999, the second and third films would then later be released in 2002 and 2005.

The prequels brought in a brand-new generation of fans into the Star Wars universe, whilst also at the same time providing further backstories for fans of the original trilogy.

Due to this, there was an influx of merchandise and action figures, not just for the new prequels but for the original films.

During the release of the original films, the action figures that accompanied them were often rigid or even had the lightsabres fused into the hands. Whereas these newly released figures provided to be more flexible with better movements and detachable weapons.

Material: Mixed Plastics

Date: 2000

Cabinet Eight - 2000s

Nintendo DS & 3DS

Although it wasn't a direct successor from the Game Boy Advance that dominated the 1990s and early 2000s, the DS instead offered a new and exciting experience with a handheld portable gaming device.



The Nintendo DS would later be succeeded by the Nintendo 3DS, which offered the use of turning gameplay into three-dimensional viewing with the flick of a switch.



The last game for the Nintendo DS was released in 2014, however some of the best-selling games for the DS were, Super Mario Bros, Nintendogs, Pokémon (Diamond, Pearl, HeartGold and Soul Silver) and Animal Crossing: Wild World.

Material: Mixed Plastics and Metal

Date: 2000s

Credits

Exhibition Space - Knowsley Archives Service at The ARK (Archive Resource for Knowsley) The Kirkby Centre – First Floor, Norwich Way, Kirkby, L32 8XY

Curated by - The team at Knowsley Archives Services

Knowsley Archives Service, based in The ARK: Archive Resource for Knowsley, is home to a wide range of resources that describe the heritage of the people and communities that make up the Borough of Knowsley.

Our Mission Statement is:

- To collect, preserve and organise archive materials relating to the people and places of Knowsley, creating a collective memory for the borough that is accessible for research and consultation, either physically or online through digital content and finding aids
- To encourage learning through engagement, offering support to individuals and groups as they explore the collections, enabling our communities to develop a sense of pride and place
- To promote Knowsley's rich heritage, sharing an understanding of the history of the communities that make up the borough of Knowsley

Knowsley Archives Service was awarded Accredited Archive Status by The National Archives in November 2017 and was retained in 2024

