

## Experience Life in Victorian Times

### Toys and Games of the past

In the past children were treated as small adults: they were dressed like adults, had to behave like adults and poorer children also had to work long hours just like adults. This left little time for playing, unless you were wealthy.

Toys have existed as long as people. In Ancient Egypt balls, spinning tops and dolls have been found in tombs. Children also played with hobby horses, toy soldiers, knuckle bones, spinning tops and marbles.

Until the middle ages most toys were home-made. Ordinary children made toys from wood, cloth and bone. They played with kites, hoops and dolls. In medieval times, toy makers began to appear at markets and fairs, but most were still too expensive to buy. Children from very rich families could be given toys made out of silver, bronze and glass.

It wasn't until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that people's opinion of children started to change. Slowly people realized that children were not just small adults and that they could learn from playing. During Queen Victoria's reign new laws were passed to let children from poorer families work less, this gave them the opportunity to attend school and play more.

The increased demand for toys led to their mass production in small factories. Toys evolved quickly and wooden toys were painted in bright colours. The use of expensive metal for toy making revolutionised toy designs. Metal was stronger than wood and much more flexible to use. Tin trains, small lead soldiers, toy cooking ranges and wind-up moving toys became the most sought after for wealthy families.

Families who found the new range of toys too expensive continued to use their imaginations to create a game from nothing or whatever was available. Making dolls from old shoes or pegs and pieces of rag; playing games using pebbles or sticks, these were all common amongst the poorest families.

The development of different plastics in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century changed toys forever. Plastics were easy to use and cheap to manufacture. The toy market saw a huge increase in toys being produced in plastic from the 1950s onwards. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the continuing development of computers has led to serious health concerns because children's play has become too static and less mobile.

We have the Victorians to thank for the modern concept of childhood. Today there are toys for children of all ages, from newborn babies to 100 year old centenarians.

