



BOYS' TOYS

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Sitting on the rostrum conducting auctions of collectors' items has sparked various thoughts about human nature. I often think about the types of people who collect things, and have noticed particularly the dominance of the male species in the toy trade. Clearly dolls and teddy bears appeal to the ladies, but by far the majority of auction room buyers for other toys are men. It has been said that the only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys, so do we men feel the need to revert to our childhood rather more, using old toys to escape from the wicked modern world?

Even for toys, difficult times have continued in the last few months. In my previous piece in July last year I mentioned a desirable Chad Valley wooden jigsaw made for the Great Western Railway which had been unsold against a very realistic reserve of £80 despite previously selling regularly in the £100-£150 range. I can now complete the story since the puzzle, 'Locomotives Old and New', was re-offered early in November and sold for just £46. A very significant reduction in value over a period of not much more than eighteen months.

Another field I have previously

discussed is Pelham Puppets (July/August 2001), and we have seen some very patchy results here too. The story seems to be fairly general – the very best will sell, and sell well, but the middling or mediocre will often not move unless the price is very low. Few dealers seem prepared to buy run-of-the-mill items for stock, which would have found a ready home with them in more confident times. Without the dealers, values have inevitably fallen. The exceptions tend to be where two collectors are competing against each other, not against the trade. As you might imagine, this makes preparing estimates fiendishly difficult, and whilst I suspect many readers might not sympathise too much with the poor auctioneer, it really does seem to be a case of 'Heads you win, tails I lose'!

Having said all that, traditional boys' toys are generally still selling well and in a few cases, forging ahead. I will mention particularly Hornby tinplate 0-gauge model railways and early post-war Dinky toys.

Hornby 0-gauge has been collectable for very many years with pre-

war examples always selling well. Post-war products were not so good and, although not entirely snubbed, have been very much the poor relations. Recently, we have seen high prices for locomotives in Southern Railway livery but I have also been struck by the prices now being realised for buildings and other accessories. The No.2E 'Margate' station shown in the illustration (figure 1) dating from around 1936 sold for £368 (boxed) and other recent prices include £529 for a boxed No.2 Engine Shed, £299 for 'Windsor' Station, £138 for a Wayside Station and £483 for a Goods Platform (complete with crane). All these dated from the late 1920s or possibly 1930, i.e. from the most collectable period, and all were boxed. Another interesting result was £598 for a small group of boxed accessory sets including Gradient Posts and Mile Posts, Watchman's Huts, Notice Boards and Station Name Boards. At practically £100 per set, these can no longer be ignored.

Dinky toys have also been collectable for many years, with their values

Above. Figure 1. A selection of Hornby 0-gauge tinplate model railway items. Early versions of buildings and accessories are selling well at present.

being steadily tracked by John Ramsay in his excellent *British Diecast Model Toys Catalogue*, now in its tenth edition. This has revealed considerable increases over the years, particularly for the desirable mint and boxed examples (figure 2). What is often forgotten, however, is that the earlier Dinkys were not sold in individual boxes but supplied in cardboard trade boxes, usually containing six models. Incidentally, these boxes are themselves very collectable, and an odd lot of three trade boxes with two set boxes and two aircraft boxes, all empty, made £253 in November, and this is not unusual.

Cars from the early post-war period are proving particularly popular, despite the absence of individual boxes, and we have seen significant increases in values. Back in 2001 a small collection of 21 of these cars (figure 3) sold for an average of just under £39 each. Last year a very similar collection of 26 cars sold for an average of just over £74 each. An

increase of 89% in little more than two years must be considered a pretty good investment, even better than the exceptional house price inflation over the same period. Dinky toys are much more fun too!

One nice aspect of collectors' items in general, and toys in particular, is that there are various backwaters which are worth exploring. One field I have not mentioned previously is toy ships, although as far as diecasts are concerned the choice is not wide. Dinky made some ships in the 1930s and these are popular, but most were discontinued after the war and few others were made. Neither Corgi nor Matchbox, the other two major makers of diecasts, produced any ship models, leaving the field open for Tri-ang.

In 1958 Tri-ang introduced a range of small waterline models known as 'Minic' ships, to a scale of 1:1200, with one inch representing 100 feet. The first models were of famous ocean liners, including RMS *Queen*

Mary, RMS *Queen Elizabeth*, SS *United States*, SS *France*, SS *Nieuw Amsterdam* and RMS *Canberra*. Naval ships were soon included with battleships, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, minesweepers and submarines. Smaller merchant vessels were also made and the ships were supplemented with accessories such as breakwaters, quays, piers, wharfs, sheds, cranes, warehouses, and even sheets of sea in blue plastic. Some of the more interesting items included a model of the Statue of Liberty, a whale, a helicopter (reputed to be made by fitting rotor blades to the whale!), and a lifeboat set consisting of a boathouse, slipway and a tiny blue lifeboat which is frequently missing (probably due to extremely rough seas caused by passing vacuum cleaners). The range had a relatively short life, being discontinued in 1964, although some models were reintroduced in 1976 using the Hornby name and manufactured in Hong Kong.



Figure 2. A typical group of boxed Dinky toys, still bugely popular with collectors with models and boxes in such good condition. Foden lorries are always sought after.



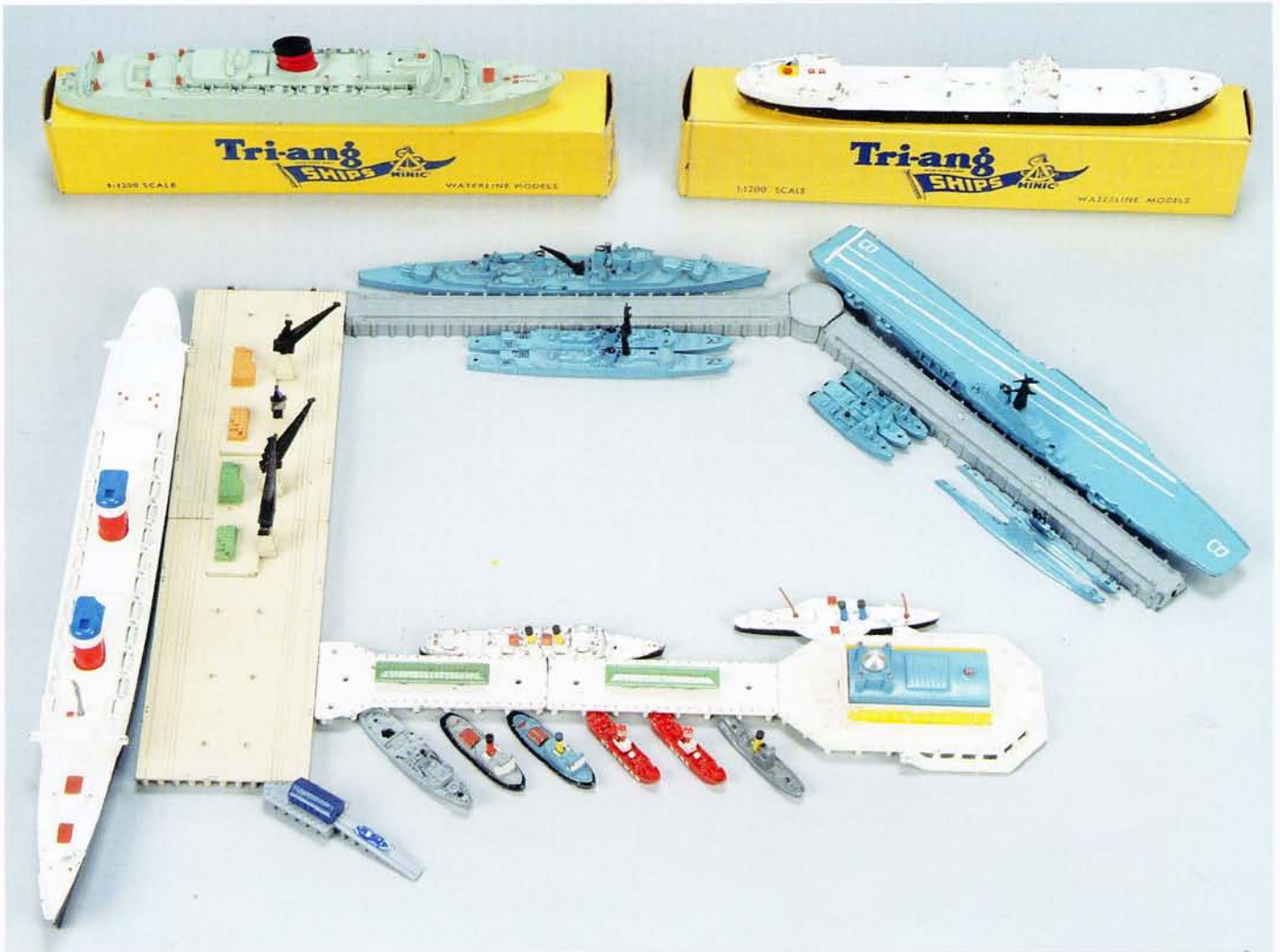
The liners tend to be worth around £30 or so, provided they are boxed and in very good condition. RMS *Franconia* and RMS *Carmania* carry a significant premium but naval ships are generally less desirable. Some liners were issued in presentation sets which can retail at up to £100 each if absolutely mint. The two examples shown here (figure 6) sold at auction with a few other items and made £96, which was on the cheap side. The other illustration (figure 5) shows various ships and a range of accessories, most of which are of low value. Exceptions include the wharf section for tankers, which is scarce, and the lifeboat set which should make at least £40 provided the lifeboat is present. Playworn examples are of relatively little value so condition is extremely important.

A final group of boys' toys worthy of mention is lead figures, typified by the output of the famous Britains factory. Lead soldiers have always attracted interest and can still generate exceptional prices for rarities. However, the associated civilian figures also fare well and we have seen some excellent results in recent months. The illustration (figure 4) shows a few desirable items including three of the Mickey Mouse figures from a set of six issued in 1938 (a rare boxed set of six fetched £5,280 back in 1998), an attractive Costermonger set by F.G. Taylor which sold for £81 despite being unboxed, and a moulded composition cardboard country cottage by Britains. This latter is not of robust construction, thus an uncommon survivor and very desirable. This example was part of a

Figure 3. Four groups of early post-war Dinky toys. (Top to bottom) The 30 and 40 series; the 38 series of sports cars; the 36 series; the 39 series of American cars.

Figure 4. A selection of lead toys including three Britains Mickey Mouse figures (one with Mickey's head on Minnie's body), a Britains moulded cardboard country cottage made for use with the lead garden range, and a Costermonger's set by F.G. Taylor & Sons.





Above. Figure 5. A Tri-ang Minic harbour scene including various merchant and naval ships, tugs, lightships and the lifeboat set complete with rare lifeboat. Two typical individually boxed ships are in the background; most accessories were supplied in trade boxes.

Below. Figure 6. Two Tri-ang Minic presentation sets featuring the SS United States (left) and RMS Queen Elizabeth (right).



collection of Britains lead garden items which made a substantial £575. All civilian lead toys seem to be selling well, particularly garden and less-common farm models. It is only the zoo animals which remain unloved.

So how can we summarise the year for boys' toys? Generally prices have held up and a few fields have fared extremely well. Playworn examples are still selling but it is the exceptional pieces which still forge ahead with high prices. If your old toys are gathering dust in a cupboard, unlike other areas of the antiques trade it is not a bad time to sell. There are still plenty of good buyers out there.

All illustrations courtesy of Dreweatt Neate.

Dick Henrywood has organised sales of collectors' items for the auctioneers Dreweatt Neate of Newbury for the last six years.

