

CHESHAM'S TOYS

A brief history of local manufacture

**By
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KEF's Local History
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Chesham is generally known for its historical production of boots, brushes and beer. However in the first half of the twentieth century toy making became established locally and the products, especially "Chiltern Toys", developed a good reputation. Although manufacturing in the town ended in 1960 many of the products still survive and are now sought after collectors pieces.

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Chesham's Toys

Toys have been made in Chesham for many years. Typically the woodware manufacturers produced hoops, spades, cricket bats etc as well as their range of household goods. However in 1910, a new entrant, Selfridge & Co. Ltd, commenced specialist toy manufacture in the three storey building in Severall's Avenue previously used by George Barnes & Sons Ltd for boot manufacturing. They made mainly wooden toys under the name of "The Happy Day Toy Company". Today the site is occupied by Nashleigh Court.



Manufacture continued for eight years until production changed to making silk stockings under the name of "The Marie Antionette Hosiery Co." still in the ownership of Selfridge.

Meantime another toy manufacturer was established in Chesham. It's roots go back to Germany in the 1880's when the firm of Eisenmann & Co was founded by Josef Eisenmann. It was an export agency dealing largely in fancy goods and toys. In 1908 Josef's son-in-law Leon Rees approached the English soft toy manufacturers J.K.Farnell & Co and persuaded them to begin making teddy bears. In 1913, Josef set up his own factory at 101 Bellingdon Road in a factory later used by Beechwood Brushes Ltd. Initial work was the production of dolls for the *London Evening Standard*. Subsequently manufacturing changed to other toys. Their first bear, "The Master Teddy" was made in 1915. He was a funny looking creature with googly eyes, dressed cotton body and a red tongue. Only his head and paws were made from mohair.

When Josef died in 1919, Leon inherited the business and he decided to go into partnership with Harry Stone, an old friend from Farnell's. They formed H.G.Stone & Co and moved to larger premises in Water-side and "Chiltern Toys" was born. In 1921 the company opened a second factory at Tottenham, N.London and The House of Rees was formed comprising L.Rees & Co, which became the parent company, H.G.Stone & Co and the Amersham Woodware and Sports Works. This latter company took over 101 Bellingdon Road for use as a warehouse and from its factory at the junction of Moor Road and Amersham Road (New Road) made a large range of wooden toys and sports goods.

The range of wheeled toys included items such as dolls push chairs, enamelled in bright colours with rubber tyres, pedal cars with bucket seat and nickel plated fittings, pole carts and wheelbarrows with rubber wheels and stuffed animals on wheels..

Wooden toys included dolls houses and castles, dolls house furniture, train sets, blackboards and easels and a folding playpen in polished beech with coloured beads. Among the sports goods were table tennis sets, cricket bats and tennis rackets. At one time this factory employed 120 workers.



A wooden dolls house from the Amersham Works



A push-along mohair donkey from the Amersham Works.

In 1923 Chiltern Toys introduced their most famous design of teddy bear, the “Hugmee” and in 1925 the firm took over another range of soft toys called “Panurge Pets”.

The business went from strength to strength . In 1929 another new factory, aptly named Chiltern Works, was opened in South Tottenham. To celebrate the firm introduced yet another newcomer to its range, “Silky Teddy” their first artificial silk plush bear. In 1931 they introduced a range of “Chubby” bears complete with voice box and also “Cubby” bears made of fawn plush. In December 1932 the company was registered for the first time as a private limited company. Sadly, Harry Stone died in 1934.

During the 1930’s the design of bears evolved, shaved muzzles got longer and bears came in a variety of colours including pink and blue. These proved to be very popular. Another new idea in this period was bears that made growling noises and Chiltern were not slow to offer bears with squeakers and bellows style music boxes.



The 1940's saw the arrival of the flat-faced Hugmee. This variety was unshaven, had a black shield-shaped nose and rexine pawpads on which two claws were stiched.





Raw materials being delivered to the Waterside factory



The assembly room at the Waterside factory

The Waterside factory was almost entirely staffed by single young ladies. In those days it was not deemed acceptable to work once you were married.



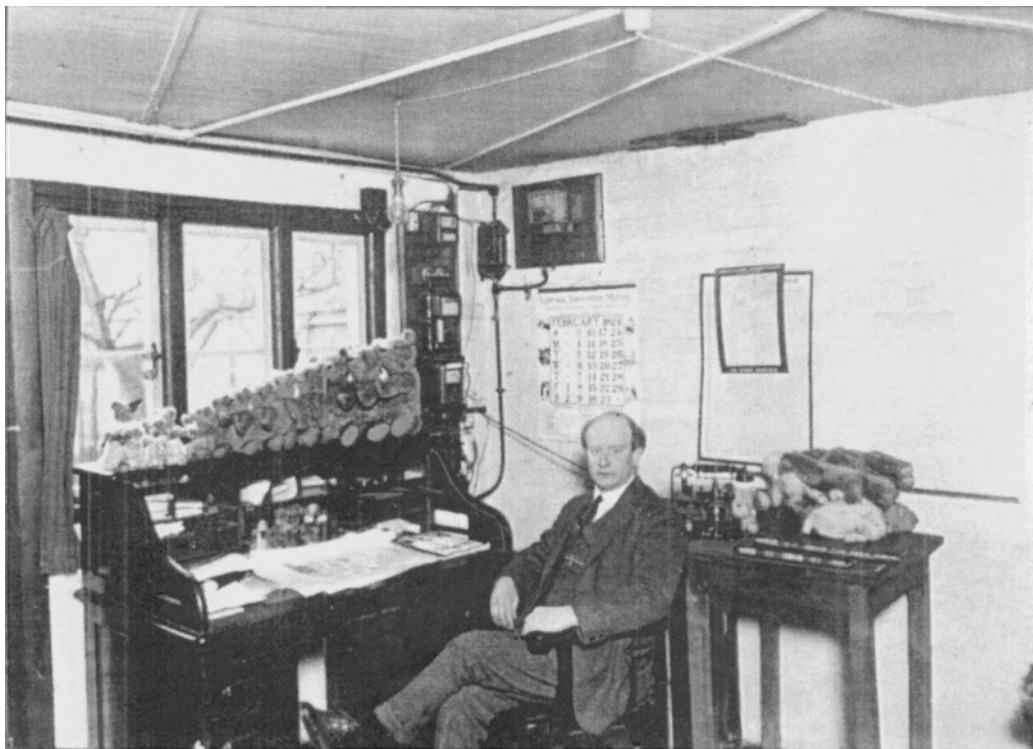
A good friendly atmosphere developed and not only did they hold regular social outings they formed girls football and cricket teams.



Chiltern Toy Works Football Team 1936



A Chiltern bear money box with Mr Clapp, factory manager 1924



Mr Clapp in his office 1924

Many fine novelty bears were made in the Chiltern Toy factory, notably a Skater bear and the Tingaling range, that have musical chimes in them and tinkle when shaken.

vertically stitched, oblong nose; inverted-Y-shaped mouth

woven fabric, pill-box hat, originally blue but now faded

brown, glass eyes

all-in-one, long-sleeved blue mohair plush "sweater"

artificial-silk plush stuffed with wood-wool and kapok

pads on feet only

LATE 1930s–50s SKATER Height: 40cm (16in) 

This artificial-silk-plush bear, with all-in-one, long-sleeved, blue, mohair-plush sweater, originally had a white, mohair-plush muff to match the hood. The model was illustrated in a 1937 toy-trade journal but is known to have been made after World War II as well. This bear is unmarked, but others exist with a printed Chiltern label on the foot.

amber and black, glass eyes, sewn in and finished off at back of head

short-clipped mohair plush on fronts of ears

black, shield-shaped, vertically stitched nose

separate section of clipped mohair plush forms muzzle

dark brown, shiny, Rexine pads

beige mohair plush; wood-wool and kapok stuffing in body and limbs; wood-wool in head

foot-pads reinforced with card

1953 TING-A-LING BRUIN BEAR Height: 29cm (11½in) 

This fully jointed teddy bear contains a mechanism (now inoperative) that was common in 1950s toys – a cardboard tube fitted with an internal metal ring of metal teeth arranged around its inner circumference. A metal clapper suspended from the top of the tube strikes each tooth when the toy is shaken or tipped up, making the teddy bear tinkle musically.

At the outset of World War II toy making ceased in Chesham as the Waterside factory was required for war work but some toys were made at the Tottenham works throughout.

To meet the demand for Chiltern Toys after "VE-day" work was transferred from Waterside to the Amersham Works, the factory in Moor Road, and a new large factory was built near Pontypool in Wales. This was completed in 1947. The Amersham Works continued to make teddy bears and some wooden toys. Sadly production ceased in 1960 when all work was transferred to Wales and Chesham lost another industry through which it had made its mark on the world.

Leon Rees the driving force behind the Chiltern Toy Company died in 1963 and in 1964 Chiltern was taken over by a large group. In 1967 it became a subsidiary of Chad valley and bears manufactured during this short period can be found with both names on their labels, before The Chiltern Toy Company disappeared for good.

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