



HELLO *Girls & Boys!*



A NEW ZEALAND TOY STORY
DAVID VEART



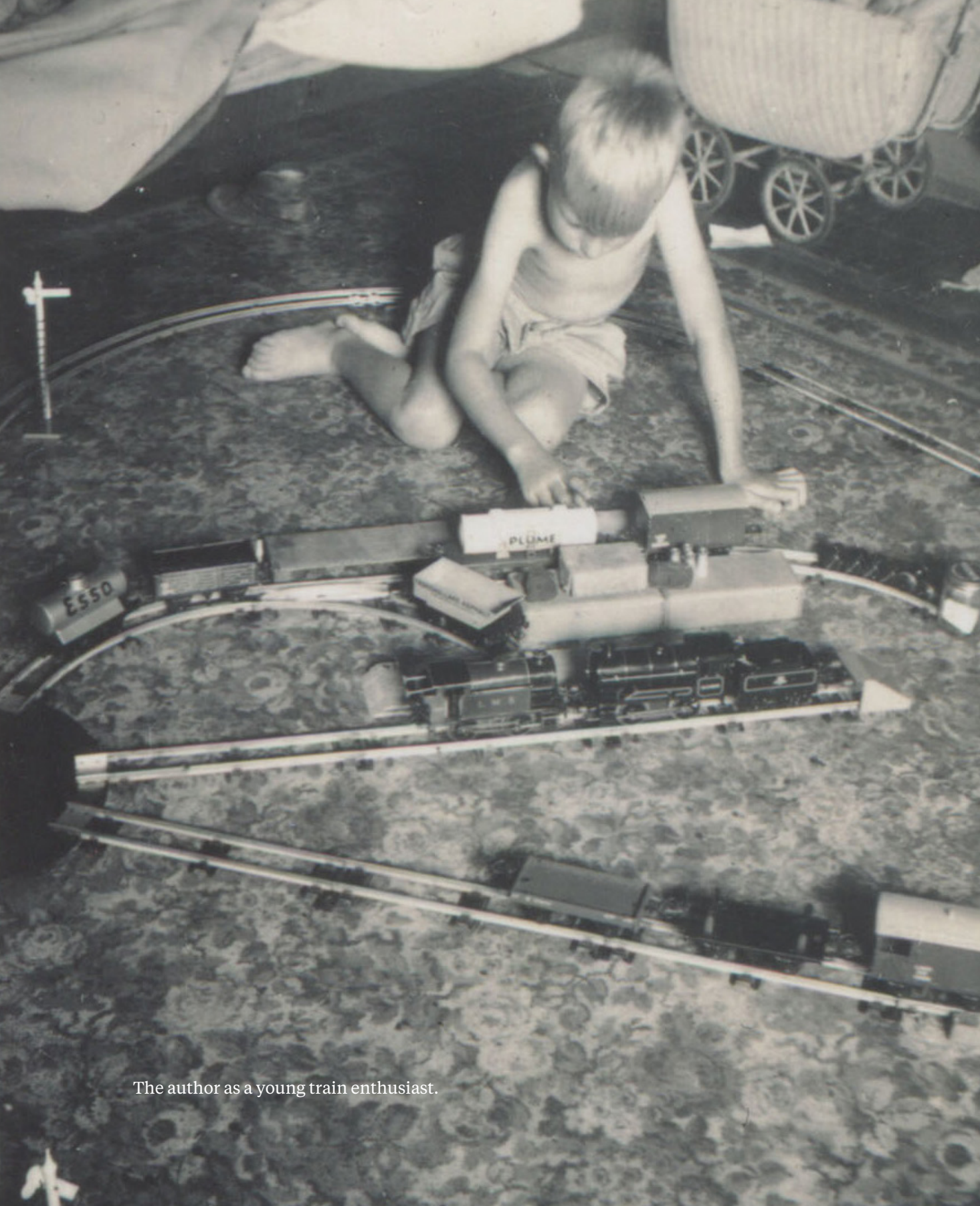
A SERIOUSLY FUN NEW ZEALAND TOY STORY!

Knucklebones and double happys, golliwogs and tin canoes, marbles and Meccano, Tonka trucks and Buzzy Bees: *Hello Girls and Boys!* tells the story of New Zealanders and their toys from Māori voyagers to twenty-first-century gamers.

Digging through a few centuries of pocket knives and plasticine (and using his skills in archaeology and oral history), David Veart takes us deep into the childhoods of Aotearoa – under the eye of mum or running wild at the end of the orchard, with a doll in the hand or an arrow in the ear, memorising the rail lines of Britain or heading down to Newmarket to pick up a Modelair kitset. The book tells the big story of how two peoples made their fun on the far side of the ocean: Māori and Pākehā learning knucklebones from each other, young Aucklanders establishing the largest Meccano club in the world, Fun Ho! and Torro, Lincoln and Luvme making toys right here, the author's father firing nails at a nearby glasshouse with a giant shanghai – just for fun.

Extensively illustrated, *Hello Boys and Girls!* covers the crazes and collecting, playtimes and preoccupations of big and little New Zealand kids for generations.

Trained as an anthropologist, David Veart worked as a Department of Conservation historian and archaeologist for more than 25 years. Veart is the author of two award-winning books, *First Catch Your Weka: A Story of New Zealand Cooking* (AUP, 2008) and *Digging up the Past: Archaeology for the Young and Curious* (AUP, 2011). He is the proud owner of a fire-belching 'Mighty Atom' toy steam train, among many other toys.



The author as a young train enthusiast.

SAILING AND RIDING: TOY BOATS & HORSES

Even apparently tame toys became dangerous in a new wild and watery country. Until a generation ago most New Zealanders arrived in the country by sea, whether on a waka, a sailing ship or a P&O steamer, so toy boats became an obvious and popular toy, made, bought and sailed throughout the nineteenth century.

Some of the most attractive images of children and toys from this period show toy boats, often in floods or what looks like open water, a practice that sometimes had tragic consequences. Drowning was known as the New Zealand way of death: lots of water, few bridges and even fewer people who could swim. The history of playing with toy boats in New Zealand is also the history of drowning: 'Drowned in Swamp', 'Drowned in Tank', 'Boy Drowned'.⁶⁹

As well as unsupervised, and at times dangerous play, organised model yacht racing was popular from the 1890s on, with a surge in the 1920s and 1930s when children's clubs were popular. Newspaper coverage of these model regattas was as extensive as that given to the real thing, with results reported and photographs published.⁷⁰

The enthusiasm for toy boats was such that they appear to be one of the first toys made in any quantity in New Zealand, both by backyard enthusiasts and larger companies. In 1939, when the government was creating a list of local toy makers, a Mr Bruce in Epsom, Auckland reported he was making toy yachts in two sizes and had so far sold 250.⁷¹ Much later, in 1967, at the height of an export drive, major toy maker Lincoln Toys shipped 600 fully rigged toy yachts to Britain,⁷² a reverse of the usual direction of toy traffic.

Today model yacht racing remains popular, with the added attraction that radio control makes sailing more hands on. Over 20 model yacht clubs

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A boy with an obviously
homemade but impressive
schooner-brig. As in many
nineteenth-century photo-
graphs, the child is in the
water with the boat, a prac-
tice that may have accounted
for the large number of
drownings associated with
toy boats during the early
years of Pākehā settlement.
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Later, commercially made
boats became available.
Tinplate 'Hornby' boats such
as this one were popular in
the 1930s.
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are spread across New Zealand,⁷³ and there are active model power boat enthusiasts racing boats that look like miniature projectiles, although, as with many of the traditional toys, the participants are now mostly adults rather than children.

For most nineteenth-century children, toys were either something you made yourself or a rare bought treat. But imported luxury toys were available to a lucky few children and among the most prestigious was the rocking horse. To possess one placed you firmly in the equestrian classes.

As early as August 1856, one retailer in Auckland's *Daily Southern Cross* was offering '3 cases rocking horses and children's carriages [prams]',⁷⁴ and this popular toy was advertised consistently right through at least until the end of the Second World War. At the end of 1945 the Vivian Street Mart in Wellington had 'Rocking Horses, big size, all dowells [sic], no nails; will carry a man. See these before buying, 59s 6d.'⁷⁵

Toy horses have, however, changed their place in children's play as the real animals' role within society has changed. In the beginning horses were the cars, trains and trucks of the world and the toys showed them in this way. Instead of having toy trains, wealthy children had toy stage-coaches. Horses provided private transport as well and children acted this



out, riding elaborate rocking horses or, for those without means, mounting ‘hobbies’, which were often nothing more than a stick.

During the nineteenth century, in Britain at least, toy horses were seen as being boys’ toys in much the same way that cars and trucks are now. The presence of a rocking horse is sometimes used to identify the gender of children in nineteenth-century photographs, a time when boys were dressed the same as girls in early childhood.⁷⁶ From photographs of New Zealand children it appears that although most of those with rocking horses are boys, there are girl riders as well, often sitting side-saddle, but occasionally astride. In a rough country where even nuns rode this way,⁷⁷ some of the old restrictions had to go.

Most of the photographed rocking horses seem to be imported examples with three-dimensional bodies, real hide covering and

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This beautiful rocking horse
once belonged to a farming
family in South Auckland.
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During the nineteenth century rocking horses were seen as boys' toys in much the same way as toy trucks and cars are today. In the first of these images little Miss Bland perches on her rocking horse – was it a photographer's prop? – whereas Noel Do sits astride his wooden steed. Superior rocking horses like his were usually British imports. Miss Bland's mount looks like a locally made example..

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bentwood rockers made by English companies such as Lines Bros. Like dolls' houses, the prestige and expense of rocking horses meant that plenty of parents were ready to have a go at making their own, so images of rustic homemade horses are also common. Rocking horses remain a popular toy. My father-in-law, a modernist architect, made his grandchildren slightly scary rocking horses that looked more like the horse in Picasso's *Guernica* than *My Friend Flicka*.

The idea that horse toys are almost exclusively the domain of boys has, of course, long gone. We will meet My Little Pony in a century's time.



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Norah Wellings was originally the doll designer for British toy company Chad Valley Dolls but left to set up her own company, the Victoria Toy Works, in the late 1920s. One of her most popular lines were sailor dolls, which were sold as souvenirs on the many passenger ships of the era. In a country where most people arrived by ship these dolls are relatively common in New Zealand. This doll was a souvenir of the P&O Liner SS Iberia. Launched in 1954 it was one of the unluckiest ships afloat, suffering collisions, frequent breakdowns and fuel leaks. She was scrapped in 1974.

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FORTUNE-TELLING TOYS

You cannot be wild all the time. In the nineteenth century, the wild children also played more gentle games that used nature as a source of ‘found toys’: making daisy chains or playing the flower game with pansies or violets, where colours of petals became colours of dresses. Children also played fortune telling with grasses, pulling off the ears of rye grass in ‘tinker, tailor’ games. This extended to predictions on wedding dresses – ‘silk, satin, cotton rags’, wedding day transport – ‘horse carriage, wheelbarrow, cart’, or even things as mundane as which toilet cubicle to use.⁶⁰ Some fortune telling was as simple as the way you walked to school – ‘Stand on a crack and you’ll marry a rat’ – whereas others were complex randomised fortune-telling toys. Although such games were played mostly by girls, boys do not seem to have been excluded.

The most common constructed fortune-telling toy, almost always made by girls, were the folded paper florets that were gradually unfolded as random numbers and colours are chosen to reveal a fortune at the centre of the device. Under the name ‘salt cellars’, these dated from an early origami paper folding book published in 1928,⁶¹ and remain popular today, one of those simple ideas parents pass on to their children.

Some of these devices, however, were more complex. One of New Zealand’s most extraordinary private collections contains a homemade nineteenth-century ‘Fortune Telling Mouse’. It works like this. The players spin the mouse, which is balanced on a pivot. It then points to one of a circle of face powder boxes containing slips of paper written in a fine hand with such prophetic gems as ‘As yet you have done no great good, it is time to begin if you wish to be loved and regretted’ or ‘You have done many fine actions which I will not mention in order not to tax your modesty’.



5.
It is to make
all those around
you happy

ON TRACK: HORNBY TRAINS

Hornby trains had their origin in the efforts of the British government during the First World War to encourage British manufacturers to replace German toys. Hornby stepped up and by 1915 was making small tinprinted trains³³ and in 1916 had a toy train game catalogued under the brand name Raylo, although the fact that the locomotives were originally made in Germany was not dwelt on in wartime.³⁴ Eventually, after this false start, Hornby 'British and guaranteed' trains were launched on the world market in 1920. By Christmas 1922, Kirkaldie & Stains was advertising Hornby train sets at 37s 6d.³⁵ There were also cheaper Hornby trains, large numbers of which were imported into New Zealand.

So desirable were Hornby train sets that they were used in local promotional campaigns. In 1929, 120 Player's cigarette coupons or 'slides' were exchangeable for a Hornby train set, complete with 'Locomotive, Tender, Pullman and Circular Rails'.³⁶ The tobacco-toy combination was not a problem when most of the fathers in Meccano advertising were shown smoking a pipe.

Hornby set up the 'Hornby Railway Company, a real railway company with boy directors and officials' under the direction of his son, Roland. Application forms for the company were included in all train sets and boys

The Hornby railway system was made up of many components, most of which could be bought separately, so that there was a continuing market once the initial purchase had been made. Here giant pieces of Hornby luggage share space with a very British figure, 'The Cooksman', the local agent of the global Thomas Cook travel empire whose uniformed figure was a feature of many stations as he waited for his customers.

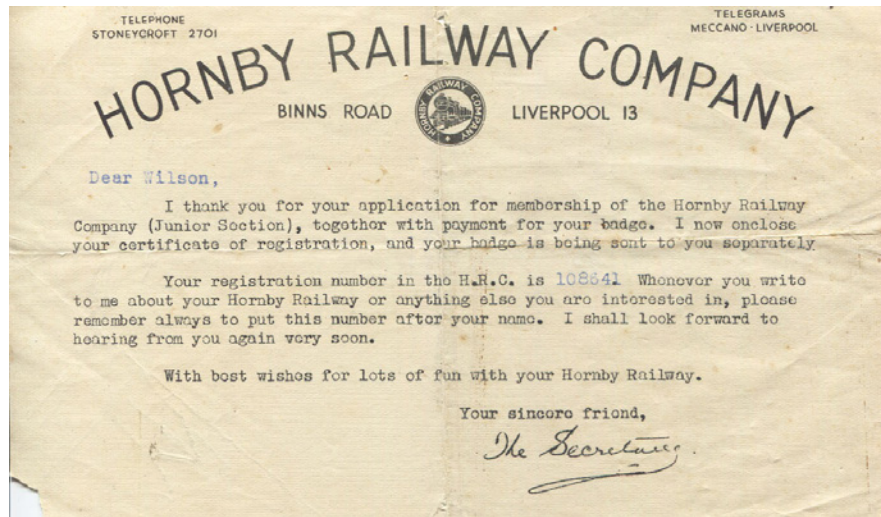


were invited to send their completed forms to Hornby's Liverpool headquarters. In return they received an official certificate of membership and a colourful enamel badge, the design of which required the boy to own a jacket with a suitably buttonholed lapel; another element of the strong middle-class identification in Hornby's products.

The idea behind the Railway Company was that boys ran their toy trains in the manner of a full-sized railway which, of course, also sold many more tinsplate locomotives, wagons, signals and station buildings, complete down to tiny suitcases and milk churns. The selection was so vast you could never hope to complete your Hornby railway. Branches of the company were formed throughout New Zealand and their doings were recorded in *Meccano Magazine*: the January 1930 edition showed the extensive outdoor model railway of the Nelson branch, with a large number of locomotives and rolling stock. Unlike in cold, damp Britain – Hornby literature warned of leaving your rails outside overnight – the Nelson railway could be run outdoors for much of the year. As with the

A Hornby locomotive from the late 1920s in the very popular red of the London Midland and Scottish Railway Company. It is not a model of any real loco and sports a shiny brass dome, something real British locos had not used since the nineteenth century. Unlike some later Hornby locos, it is a toy with no pretension to being a 'model'. The red boxes in which Hornby equipment was packed became part of the mystique of the brand.





The Hornby Railway Company, 'with boy directors and officials', was popular in New Zealand.

Meccano clubs, boys had worked out that combining resources allowed a more complicated level of play.

One of the clever elements of the Hornby railway system was that it included a social hierarchy of toy railway equipment based on cost. There were elaborate, almost scale models of British main line locomotives and rolling stock, priced to appeal to wealthy middle-class buyers, cheaper tin printed equipment for the less well off and an even cheaper 'British Express' range, not branded as Hornby at all, which was sold in chain stores such as Woolworths.³⁷ In New Zealand in 1936, Hornby train sets were advertised for sale between 9s 3d and 135s,³⁸ about \$100 and \$400 respectively in modern financial terms.³⁹

The Anglocentric element of Frank Hornby's toys varied. Meccano had a universal appeal; Dinky toy cars and commercial vehicles were based on English and American prototypes, but then so were our real cars. Hornby trains, though, were British in outline and boys all over the world, from India to New Zealand, became involved in the minutiae of the British rail system, the signalling and the colour and positioning of the warning



lights on locomotives and guard's vans, for which Hornby supplied tiny moveable lamps.

Our knowledge of this distant and very foreign railway system, lamps and all, was so great that New Zealand boys frequently won the railway competitions in *Meccano Magazine*. In 1934 D. J. White of Dunedin, New Zealand matched 48 scrambled British locomotive names with their corresponding registration numbers and won the overseas division of the competition against entrants from Melbourne, Calcutta and Capetown.⁴⁰ It is a tribute to the strength of the Hornby brand in this country that, during the 1930s, the company made special runs of some of the more expensive locomotives and rolling stock lettered 'NZR' for New Zealand Railways.⁴¹ We were one of only a few countries that had such specially painted and transferred products.

On the box lids giant expresses steamed out of huge stations while inside was a little four-wheeled loco, two wagons and a circle of track. Imagination filled the gap.



It was not all Hornby. Here a large 'live steam' Bowman locomotive attempts to look a bit like the famous Flying Scotsman, despite not much resembling the original. Bowman steam toys, large, powerful and relatively cheap, were given away in New Zealand in coupon schemes used to promote cigarettes.

Despite the local content, however, Meccano paid little attention to the fact that New Zealand was in another hemisphere. International promotions of the toys were based on northern hemisphere seasons and when the local agent complained that there was little point in promoting toy trains in New Zealand when everyone was at the beach, head office imperiously stated that this was not relevant and its advertising agency knew best.⁴²

After the Second World War, the NZR option was removed and New Zealand children like me again played trains with British companies and, after Britain nationalised the railway system, British Railways. And the trains from Home seemed much grander and far more romantic. They had the *Flying Scotsman* and the *Golden Arrow*; we called the Auckland to Wellington Limited Express 'The Rattler'.

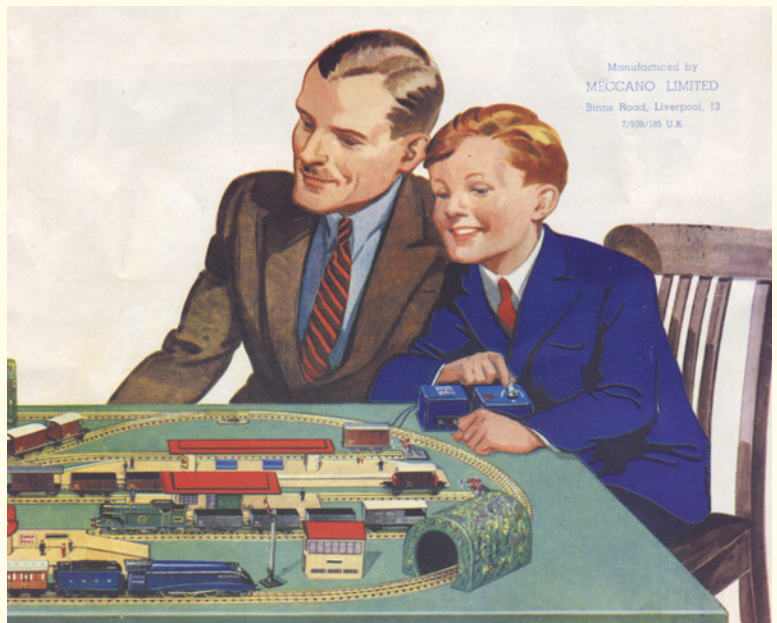
Hornby's toys emphasised the connection to empire. Imperial unity, imaginary or not, could be seen in the inclusive nature of the *Meccano Magazine* competitions and in the faces of the carefully posed and jacketed boys staring out from the grainy black and white photographs – Chinese, Sikhs and Egyptians as well as Anglo-Saxons from the dominions. Technology and speed were going to weld this widespread empire together and New Zealand was seen as modern and progressive. Local Meccano boys were not affected by colonial cringe.

FATHERS AND SONS

Occasional female faces appeared in *Meccano Magazine*, usually as secretaries of Meccano Clubs, but these were toys for boys. In most of the advertising material only boys were shown, often in their specially patterned Jaeger Meccano jerseys.³² A strong element of Meccano and Hornby advertising between the 1930s and 1960s was the portrayal of fathers with their sons, either playing with the toys together or with the father, usually smoking a pipe, benevolently admiring the boy's work, or even putting an arm around his son's shoulders.

This was not the remote Edwardian paterfamilias; this was the birth of 'Dad'. The technical and 'educational' values associated with Frank Hornby's toys allowed fathers to relax into the intimacy portrayed in these images. This was men's business, and New Zealand fathers and sons were included.

The clothing worn is usually formal, Dad in his work suit, boy in school blazer or uniform. Both have arrived home from work or school and made straight for the trains or the Meccano. Part of the story is also hinted at by the use of the phrase, 'Your Hobby for a Lifetime'. The train and Meccano sets passed from one generation to the next. This hobby was also a licence for fathers to play with, and buy, toys.



WAR AND THE CONSOLATION OF TOYS

He is a funny-looking little doll made from khaki wool, knitted, bunched and tied. He wears an officer's cap and has the strangely feminine shape of First World War officers, with their tight belts, flaring jodhpurs and putteed legs. He also wears a wristwatch, as many officers did. He lives in Te Papa now, but he was made by Dorothy Broad as an aide-memoire of her fiancé, Captain Thomas Wyville Rutherford MC, who had died of influenza in Mesopotamia on 19 October 1918 aged 28.⁷⁷ Dorothy also made other general soldier dolls – using chicken wishbones to form the legs – and these were sold to raise money for patriotic purposes.

Another war, another toy. It looks like a typical family photograph: a happy little girl sits holding a lanky, slightly grumpy-looking soft puppet of Pinocchio. What makes him different is that he is wearing a crumpled version of a New Zealand soldier's lemon squeezer hat. The little girl's name is Carolyn and she is the fourth generation in her family to hold the old toy.

Charlie Christison had had a rotten war. His brother Tom had been killed in North Africa in April 1943 while going to the aid of a fellow soldier wounded by a mine. Charlie was in a tent nearby and heard the explosions. Later, he was in a military hospital in Italy recovering from a bout of jaundice. To keep himself occupied in his convalescence he made a stuffed toy to send home to New Zealand to his niece Evelyn, his youngest sister's daughter. Later Charlie made another family toy, a dog, out of an army greatcoat.

One last war toy. The tiny settlement of Ngapara is about 25 kilometres inland from Oamaru. At the end of the Second World War, when everyone else was celebrating, the children of the district were in isolation to keep them safe from the polio epidemic sweeping the country. To cheer them up, the women from the local RSA made all the girls a doll each in patriotic red,

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This First World War doll, made by Dorothy Broad, contains many elements to help this representation, the watch, the badges and the clever construction of the uniform from khaki wool, which was sold for women to knit 'comforts' for the troops.
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AUCKLAND
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PRESS



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240 x 195 mm, 344pp approx, colour illus, hardback

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ISBN: 9781869408213

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Published: November 2014

