

Toys and Games

My experience has been that games for me when growing up were mainly physical – so they were really sports rather than games. My father played football until he was over 40, and that was always my inspiration. Sadly, I sustained a bad knee injury playing football for Axminster Town when I was 36, so had to bow out then. I continued to play tennis, but was not very good at that. I still play table tennis. We have a table in our garden, and when lockdown is over, I hope to rejoin the village table tennis sessions.

As to board games, I played chess, having been in the school team once. I also enjoy Scrabble, playing it with my wife and next door neighbour. I can also play it on computer, which introduces me to players in different parts of the world.

As a child, we used to play games out in the streets. There were not many cars in those days, even in London where I grew up! When one came along, we just stepped aside to let it pass. We played “Kingy”, which involved the thrower trying to throw a ball to hit the others in a confined area. As each one was hit, they had to stand down, until the last person was left. When he or she was finally hit, that person became the next thrower. “Queeny” involved a ball, which the thrower threw over their back, and the rest of the players formed a group behind the thrower. The one who caught the ball hid it behind his or her back, and everyone else put their arms behind their back. They all then chanted a question asking the thrower, (who would turn round), “Who’s got the ball”. I seem to remember the thrower had a limited number of guesses.

I cannot remember what happened thereafter.

“Knock down Ginger” was a disreputable game, involving knocking on people’s doors and running away. I also, to my shame, played at “confusing the milkman”. This involved (in the days when milk was commonly delivered to the door) spotting where someone had left a note in the milk bottle – usually to say no milk tomorrow, or an extra pint - sneaking up, taking the note out, and putting in someone else’s bottle. I am heartily ashamed of this when I think of the distress it must have caused.

I had a bicycle, and I remember celebrating the coronation in 1953 with a street party, at which one of the events was a slow bicycle race. I got off to a flying start – which, of course, was quite the wrong approach, and crossing the line first, I was straight away eliminated. I did have a brief spell when I made model aeroplanes and flew them at the local park. They were made of paper and balsa wood. Some were gliders, which had to be launched correctly (taking account of the prevailing wind). There were also ones with a propeller powered by a long elastic band which had to be twisted for an interminably long time, just to give a few moments of powered flight. We always had to be careful to twist in the proper direction, or the propeller would propel the plane backwards!

Other little toys were yoyos, and a “Slinky” which was a metal coil which could “walk” downstairs if started properly at the top. It was fragile, and if it got tangled, was almost impossible to rescue.

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