

# Old toys show plus side to losing your marbles

July 11 2013

---

A collection of long lost toys, just unearthed by a team of archaeologists at The University of Manchester, have shone new light on the commercialisation of childhood by the late Victorians.

The Whitworth Park Community Archaeology Project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is one of the first projects to expose and explore the rich history of everyday life in public parks between the 1890s and 1950s.

Among the finds are beautifully preserved fragments of a child's tea set, a toy pistol, a miniature lead soldier, and ceramic "Jacks" game pieces - all early examples of commercially produced toys from the late 19th and very early 20th centuries.

Then team also excavated glass balls, removed from "cod bottles" for playing with, alongside mass produced marbles, presumably used by better-off children

According to the University's Professor Sian Jones, who leads the project, some of the finds are very early examples of marble [mass production](#), which started around the turn of the twentieth century.

Akron, Ohio was the location of early mass production at around that time, she says, though handmade clay marbles were produced from the mid-1700s and glass marbles from the mid-nineteenth century.

World War I and the invention of marble producing machinery in America effectively ended the handmade marble industry she says.

Also found by the team: two attractive clay pipes, one inscribed with the phrase "for auld lang syne" and the other with an Irish Harp and the word "Erin", possibly owned by someone from the Irish community living in the area at the time.

Ruth Colton, a University of Manchester researcher from the team with expertise on childhood and parks said: "Mass production of toys began following the industrial revolution and toys gradually became cheaper and more widespread.

"Many of the early toys were educational, such as toy blocks and wooden numbers.

"But following educational reforms in the second half of the nineteenth century, manufacturers increasingly recognised children as a potential market for [toys](#) - and these finds reflect that.

"Toy manufacture in Britain produced wooden or porcelain dolls, toy trains and model boats, although these were mainly available only to middle class children."

She added: "Better-off members of the working class were able to buy marbles, toy soldiers, spinning tops, skipping ropes, "Jacks" (also known as knucklebones or five stones) and coloured pick up sticks, while meccano and plasticine became widely available in the early twentieth century.

"But poorer children were still exposed to advertising and the displays in the windows of toy shops, such as one just outside Whitworth Park.

"So these poorer children made their own toy boats, dolls and other games, though they also competed with other children for marbles as well as "recycling" the glass balls from "cod bottles" to play with."

Professor Sian Jones said: "Historical sources provide information on the development of public parks and the ideas behind them - but there's little record of what ordinary people got up to in parks and this is why this project is so unique.

"One person's rubbish is another person's treasure: something dropped by the edge of the lake over a hundred years ago gives archaeologists a huge amount of important - and often forgotten - detail about what life was like in those times.

"So the work not only shines a welcome light on the lives of children, but on other intimate items of daily life, such as buttons, parts of shoes and even gentleman's pipes.

"The artefacts provide a visceral connection to past lives and shed light on the important cultural heritage of public parks."

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Old toys show plus side to losing your marbles (2013, July 11) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-07-toys-side-marbles.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--