



talking in the library—talking toys—talking history

In May, the East Midlands Oral History Archive, in partnership with the Leicester City Library Services, held a joint event during Local History Week at the City's Lending Library. Year 5 children from Sparkenhoe Community Primary School were invited to listen to childhood memories of toys and games, dating from the early twentieth century to the 1970's. The children were played a variety of oral history extracts, and were interested to learn that modern day versions of Hide-and-

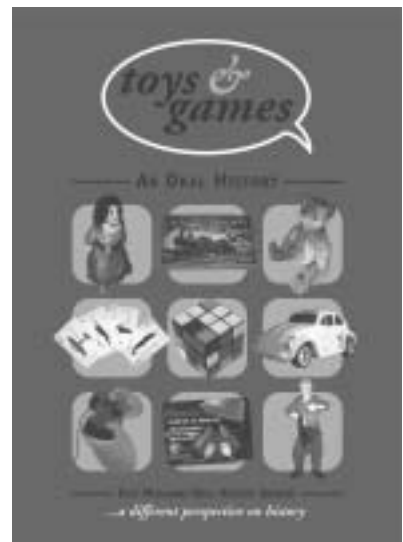
Seek, and the popular playground game Free Pod, have their roots in the unusual sounding games of Tin-A-Lurkey, Foggy Hounds, and Poddy-1-2-3 from the past. They were also able to draw comparisons between the mischievous pastime of the 1920's, called 'Spirit Rapping', where children would gently tap a needle threaded onto a piece of cotton against the outside of a window in order to confuse the adults inside, with the present day game of 'Knock-Door-Run.'

The children then turned their hands to mastering traditional toys, such as Cup-and-Ball, Snobs, Dominoes, and Jacks, with great enthusiasm and success. The children were able to compare old favourites with their more modern counterparts, such as Tic-Tac-Toe with Connect 4, and Pick-Up-Sticks with Kerplunk. Books available from the library were also displayed to help the children learn more about the toys and games played by their parents and grandparents, as well as those played by children in other parts of the world.



Toys and Games: an Oral History

The East Midlands Oral History Archive is pleased to announce the launch of its new resource for teachers, called *Toys and Games: an Oral History*. The pack comprises a CD and support materials, for use at Key Stages 1 and 2, and is intended to help children think about the toys and games that their parents and grandparents played with when they were children. The accounts contained on the CD range from the early twentieth century to the present day, and cover a wealth of childhood memories, including tales of mischief and adventurous play, from the days when toys were a luxury, to crazes like Action Man, hula hoops and computer games. The pack is free to primary schools in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, and will be posted to all schools by August 2002. If the pack does not arrive or if you require further copies (priced at £7 + £1 postage) contact the East Midlands Oral History Archive on (0116) 252 5065 or emoha@le.ac.uk.



Find out more...

talking history

Primary School
Edition

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Get in touch with the East Midlands Oral History Archive by contacting Sarah Ferrier, our Education Officer, on (0116) 252 5065, by email at sif17@le.ac.uk or by writing to:

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You can also find out more by visiting our website at:

<http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/>

On our website you can also find information about the work of EMOHA and links to other local and national education and history sites.



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Sarah Ferrier



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Never work with children, elderly people and expensive equipment!

An oral history project at Billesdon Primary School, Leicestershire.



Mel Vlaeminke
Tutor for History

A couple of years ago, I undertook an oral history project with Year 5 pupils investigating the immediate locality of their school. They were the nine pupils not included in their classmates' residential week – some by choice, but others not – so motivation and morale were critical issues. I wanted them to have participated in something as memorable, engaging and fun as the rest of the class in London. This influenced my rather ambitious decision to use video as well as audio recorders.

Initially the children undertook a hasty book-based investigation of life in the 1930's. Then, with some prompting, they devised a series of questions they wished to put to an older person. This was a rowdy process, but I think it's essential the children have 'ownership' of the interviews, as well as the opportunity to develop important historical skills by posing questions.

The drafts were refined into 20 questions, which were in fact used with all the witnesses we interviewed. The project was based around the contribution of one key witness (GH), who had lived opposite the school from the age of two, attended it, and had also maintained a 50-year friendship with an Italian Prisoner of War held at the Billesdon POW Camp. I talked to GH in advance and from his 70 years' worth of memories, identified three areas of interest – Growing Up (home, family, toys, etc.), Going to School and The Impact of War. Three children worked on each topic and led that part of the interview. Our star witness came four times altogether; five other older residents came once each. This was more than planned – and more than the children's concentration and best behaviour could stand – but as word of the project spread, one invited witness brought a friend and one child volunteered her grandfather. It was difficult to decline!

The project ran over two weeks and incorporated a walk exploring around the school and the village with camera and disposable cameras in hand; examination of documents such as the school log book, and the recording of extracts; construction of a model village; writing diaries; and mounting a display. I felt that giving the spoken words a physical reality was vital, and it was certainly a joy to witness the children's excitement at the thrill of first-time historical discovery.

I found the two weeks of the project highly stimulating and very tiring! There were some difficulties along the way. Most of the children found it hard to adjust their questioning or formulate secondary questions, so that opportunities were missed and concentration flagged on occasion – which is difficult to manage when the camera is running and visitors are present. Our visitors mostly performed well, though there were some unexpected sensitivities; for example an innocent opening question 'Did you have any brothers and sister?' reduced one visitor to tears as she recalled the death of her little brother 60 years earlier. For me, editing the tapes was a nightmare; eventually about six hours' material became a 45 minute video, but it took far too many hours to be done on a regular basis.

My memories of the project are, however, positive. The biggest reward was the enthusiastic acclaim of school staff, local people, parents and especially the children – 'the best thing we've ever done at school', said one. We were fortunate to have an excellent key witness – knowledgeable, reasonably concise and good with children; the fact that he no longer lived in the village made the project (and some emotional reunions) especially rewarding for him too. My own substantial prior knowledge of the village and the children helped, and the decision to film the project did pay off – the children loved using the camera and seeing themselves on film, and were proud to have something to show off to their returning classmates and teachers. A bonus was the involvement of more and more family members, culminating in a mass outing to explore the site of the Prisoner of War Camp. GH's oral testimony remains the only source of information about this significant local feature, which satisfied the local historian as well as the teacher in me.

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