

CHAD VALLEY TOY COMPANY A SHORT HISTORY

1860. Joseph and Alfred Johnson set up a stationery business on George Street, in Birmingham city centre.

1897. Joseph Johnson and his son Alfred J. Johnson move the company to a newly-erected factory in Harborne, close to the Chad Brook. The firm trade initially as Johnson Bros. (Harborne) Ltd., making stationers' sundries and cardboard games.

1904. Joseph Johnson dies, and his eldest son Alfred J. Johnson succeeds him as Chairman and Managing Director. Until the outbreak of the First World War, the company continue to widen their range of cardboard games and simple toys, many being of an educational nature.

1914. With the outbreak of the war, all imports of toys and games cease, giving a boost to the British toy trade. The company continue to expand their range of products in spite of wartime restrictions, making their first soft toys (teddy bears).

1919. With the ending of the war, the firm needs more production space, and acquires the Harborne Village Institute, which becomes their printing works, providing

box covers for their toys and games.

1920. The Wrekin Toy Works is opened at Wellington (Salop), and soft toy production transferred there. The three factories are merged into one firm, Chad Valley Co. Ltd., named after the local brook. Alfred J. Johnson remains Chairman and Managing Director. During the 1920s the company continues to expand, the Wellington factory introducing a range of fabric dolls, and being considerably enlarged. Part of the original Harborne factory is rebuilt and enlarged into a four-storey building – one of the first in Birmingham to use reinforced concrete and large metal windows.

1928. A new factory is begun in Harborne, adjoining the main works, rising by 1932 to six storeys.

1931. Chad Valley acquire Peacock & Co. Ltd., of London, long-established manufacturers of wooden toys.

1936. Following the death of Alfred J. Johnson, Sir James Curtis become Chairman.

1938. Chad Valley are granted the Royal Warrant of Appointment - "Toymakers to Her Majesty the Queen" - at this time a rare honour for a toy manufacturer.

1939. During the Second World War the company handles many Government contracts, including instrument and gun cases, hospital tables and tent poles, auto-pilots and charts. One factory is retained by the Government for toy

manufacture, specialising in jigsaws for military hospitals and board games for the Forces generally.

1945. With the ending of the war, Chad Valley factories quickly return to toys, adding metal toys to their range. In the immediate post-war years, several metal producing businesses are acquired, including A.S. Cartwright Ltd., manufacturers of aluminium hollow-ware.

1946. Rubber toys are introduced at the Wellington factory, using a process devised just before the war. The need for more space leads to the acquisition of a second Wellington factory, Waterloo Works. Major F.R.B. Whitehouse becomes Chairman of the company.

1950. Chad Valley ceases to be a private family business, becoming a public company, with Major Whitehouse first Chairman of the new Chad Valley Group.

1951. The company acquire Hall & Lane Ltd., of Birmingham, makers of tin boxes and allied products, including domestic hardware, and a large range of metal toys – buckets and spades, money boxes, globes and pop-guns. The Chad Valley range now consists of nearly 1,000 different articles.

1954. The company acquire Roberts Bros. (Gloucester) Ltd., manufacturers of “Glevum” toys and games. These products are now made in Harborne – at an additional factory, Wee-Kin Works, on the banks of the Chad.

1956. A.F. Hall becomes Chairman, following the retirement of Major Whitehouse.

1958. The Acme Stopper & Box Co. Ltd. is taken over by Chad Valley.

1960. The company now has seven factories, employs over 1,000 people, and is probably at the peak of its manufacturing history. The centenary is marked by a special souvenir catalogue, and a celebration at the factory attended by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress. A range of plastic and vinyl products are now introduced, as is much character merchandising – from cinema, television and children's books.

1967. H.G. Stone & Co. Ltd. (Chiltern Toys) is the final firm to be taken over. Chad Valley begin to feel the force of foreign competition and recession.

1971. John Bentley, of Barclay Securities, purchases the company for £600,000. A millionaire at 31, he has a reputation for thoroughly streamlining companies, and re-styling and re-packaging their products.

1972. The new sales catalogue offers 250 items, nearly half of them brand new, the remainder modernised and re-packaged. The main Harborne factory is to close, and boxed game production transferred to the Hall & Lane factory in central Birmingham. Approximately half of the 200 Harborne employees are transferred to the Hall & Lane works and a new head office and warehouse at Garretts

Green; the rest are made redundant. Three out of the nine factories are closed.

1973. John Bentley moves on, having sold Chad Valley for £1,800,000.

1975. Following further takeovers and restructuring, only two of the Chad Valley factories remain open. The Harborne factory is demolished.

1978. The company is taken over by the Leicester-based firm of Palitoy.

1979. The closure of the Hall & Lane works ends Chad Valley's links with Birmingham, whose factories are considered poorly adapted to the production of the new, increasingly popular plastic toys.

1988. Woolworths acquire the trade name Chad Valley, the toys still being manufactured elsewhere.