



# A collection that only its creator would love!!

By Daniel Agnew

As a child of the 1970s I grew up with fairly awful soft toys and bears, I still have my rubber faced monkey and a Rod Hull's Emu puppet (now one eyed). So when I first became aware of old bears, I soon realised that there was something wrong with the UK and international toy industry, and what was right with the bears from the previous 70 years!

My collecting started small in the late 1970s aided by my antique dealing mother and grew within the boundaries of pocket money and a little light wheeling and dealing!

From a childhood collection of some 20-30 old bears and animals, with the aid of a fairly steady income for almost the last 30 years, the collection has somewhat snowballed and has become a little odd to say the least. Perhaps it's not surprising, as someone who has probably handled the best bears and soft toys in the world, it has to be something quirky/different/unusual that tempts me.

I also love things I've never seen before, or something so

weird I wonder why anyone made it! I love labels, especially delicate paper labels. I'm sure there is a book in all this weirdness, but perhaps I would be the only person buying it.

My main interest these days is early English companies, during the first two decades of the 20th century, we mainly imported toys from Germany; but slowly through the horrors of the Great War, we stopped buying German and started making our own toys. Often not very well, I suspect child labour had a hand in some of these wonky creations, but this is part of their charm. From my records, during the 1st World War and through the 1920s I have noted over 70 British soft toy/bear manufacturers, most of these are unrecorded and their products unknown.

Selecting the things to show as examples of my taste here wasn't easy, so I chose a random selection of the nearest things to hand, I hope you enjoy a brief tour of my mind!

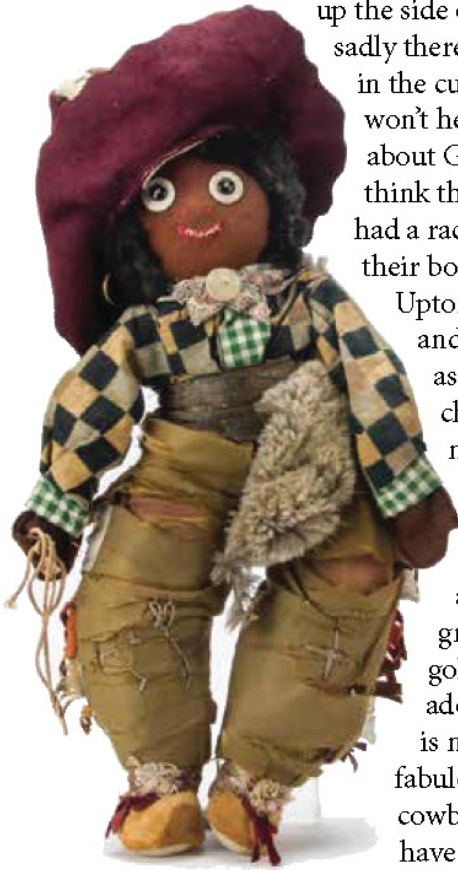


**1. Mournful Mike!** Hysterical seated donkey with googly eyes and felt tongue, has his original card swing

tag reading  
'Mournful  
Mike - Patent  
478696 & Reg.  
Design Applied  
For' - no mak-  
er, but I know this

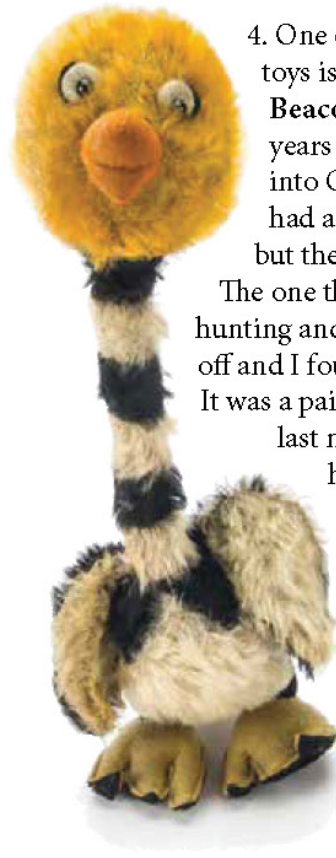
is Chiltern from the 1920s. I also have a similar Chiltern Hopeful Horace donkey - who knows what these are all about!!!

2. **Golliwogs** are another love of mine; in my previous home I had them all sitting up the side of the stairs, sadly there is not room in the current house. I won't hear anything bad about Golliwogs, I don't think they originally had a racial bit of fluff in their body, Florence K. Upton created them and described him as a Gnome like character, he is not meant to be a human. I have spoken to many a person who grew up with a golliwog and they adored them. This is my latest one, a fabulous early British cowboy golly. If you have a golly with a protruding nose, rather than a flat face, it means it's early. This one is made by a small manufacturer around 1910.



er than a flat face, it means it's early. This one is made by a small manufacturer around 1910.

3. **Auntie**, from **Pip, Squeak and Wilfred** - I love the first third of the century British comic strip characters, they are fairly unique in their unusualness. Pip the dog, Squeak the penguin and Wilfred rabbit are still remembered by some today, but a fourth character was Squeak's aunt...and here she is, this 1930s example is a 'candy' container, so has an internal cardboard cone for sweets.



4. One of my all time favourite toys is this extraordinary **Belisha Beacon duck**. I hunted for 10-15 years for this chap, one came into Christie's once and I quickly had a photograph taken of it, but they didn't leave it for sale. The one that got away, years of eBay hunting and asking dealers, finally paid off and I found him one day on eBay. It was a painful 7 day wait, I put my last minute huge bid in and got him for a fraction of what I bid! I guess beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This makes perfect sense when you think about it; when the Belisha Beacon was introduced, you would want children to follow the crossing duckling-like!

5. I have many bears, but this is my most recent and a mystery. I'm fairly certain he is English, but I have no idea of the maker or what he is trying to be. My best guess so far is a **Sportsman Bear**, possibly a rugby player, I think his eyes are wrong, they were probably glass, but as for maker? Chiltern, Farnell, smaller company? An exciting mystery! He does need a little visit to Dot Bird!





6. A rare bird indeed, a **Squawk-a-boo bird** designed by illustrator Chloe Preston, well known for her Peek-a-boo and Chubbies children and animals, she designed toys for Farnell too.

This is a particularly large example being 12 1/2in. (32cm.) high and a fabulous strong red colour, I have his pale

blue twin too!

7. **Peché Melba**, a dessert named after Australian soprano Dame Nellie Melba in 1893 by Chef Escoffier at the Savoy London, so how this Chiltern dog was given this name in the 1920s is a slight mystery, until you discover in his creases a lovely peach coloured velvet! Often confused with Bonzo the dog, many companies and illustrators tried to create rivals to the most popular of all comic dogs!



8. It, the original scary clown, long before Stephen King came along and scared the heebie-jeebies out of you, is a four side headed clown which was made around the 1920s, in stunning condition and again has his original card label.



'He you know was Jacky, She you know was Kit, But the talk of the town Is the Baby Clown, Who

everyone calls "IT" – by an unknown maker with initials B & H London, all a complete mystery – please help if anyone can shed light on him!!



My collection grows almost daily, it is my dream to have it all on display in one place, but this is a long way off. I do have a small selection on display at the Brighton Toy and Model Museum under the Brighton railway station – [www.brightontoymuseum.co.uk](http://www.brightontoymuseum.co.uk) for more details, I think my current plan is to do something on-line, but I'm not certain how that would work.

Perhaps this should be a general enquiry, if anyone has a brilliant idea where I could lend the collection, for a short or long period I'd be very interested to hear from you!

