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ith the acquisition of the renowned Opie Collection in 1988, the Bodleian Library became a centre for the study of children's literature. Less well known are the children's games, both single-sheet and three-dimensional, found among the 680 subject sections of the John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera. Taking its cue from an Oxford Digital Library project, this exhibition draws both on these games and on the excellent collection of writing sheets, many of which are now digitized and available online (www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/johnson).

In addition to illuminating childhood in earlier times, games give fascinating insights into the social history of their time, both in images and words. Suspending our knowledge of subsequent events, we enjoy a privileged peep-show of an age with different assumptions, with a different world view.

Comic Metamorphoses

Comic metamorphoses (pictures, dissected in various ways, which could then be mixed up with comic effect) enjoyed a long period of popularity in the first six decades of the 19th century. The examples in the exhibition range from delicate cards to substantial wooden blocks in luxurious boxes, many of which were produced in Germany for the international market. While most showed humans (in various fancy and national costumes) and animals, *Neue Wagen-Metamorphosen* (item 1) uses images of different types of transport.



A different form of metamorphosis was the superimposition onto a figure (or a head, frequently androgynous) of a variety of exotic costumes (harlequin's, Turk's, knight's, etc). *Taffetas d'Angleterre* (item 6), a manuscript item, achieves the same effect by an ingenious overlaying of four costumes on a face from a single folded sheet.

Paper Dolls and Protean Figures

Playing with paper dolls and their dresses could be an end in itself, an educational pursuit, or a means of involving a child in a story. The dressing of paper or cardboard figures in different clothes (items 12, 16, and 17) was a pastime which lasted for many years. Costumes of different nationalities were very popular (items 8–11), and taught something of the lives of others when used as a prompt for further information. The moral tale of Little Fanny (items 13–15) was fixed in the mind of the child to whom it was being told by the simple process of moving Fanny's head from doll to doll following the story.



Scientific Pursuits and Mathematical Puzzles



Many aids were produced to facilitate an understanding of astronomy. Hold-to-light cards were particularly valuable in showing the solar system or how the constellations related to their names. *Urania's mirror* (item 20) is a particularly fine example.

The tangram, a square cut into seven pieces of five different geometrical shapes (items 24 and 25), is believed to be an ancient Chinese puzzle, although it was not recorded in print in China until 1813. The tangram became very popular in 19th-century Europe, when trade with China opened up.

The magic square, also Chinese in origin, came to Europe much earlier. This type of magic square (item 26), where the numbers in each column, row, and diagonal add up to 34, was depicted in 1514 by Dürer in his print *Melancholia*.

Mechanical addition (item 23), and its companion, *Mechanical multiplication* (not shown), are forms of mechanical calculators.

Elegant and Instructive Games

Georgian and early Victorian board games were invaluable instructional aids, in areas such as geography, history, and morality. Many were race games, played with a spinner and teetotum rather than dice, which were associated with gambling. Georgian games were typically mounted on linen and sold in slip-cases, with accompanying booklets which described in detail geographical phenomena, towns, or historical events. Often such commentaries were not limited to the purely factual, but indulged in glosses such as: 'Cambridge, a disagreeable town', 'Oxford, a pleasant city' or 'Hertford, large and dull' (item 44).

Later, when regular schooling covered basic subjects, many games became more recreational, while still developing skills in the young. Strategy games (items 38, 40, 41), often modelled on the game of 'Fox and geese', were popular with boys. Many late 19th-century boxed games were produced in Germany, which was the centre for chromolithographic printing.



Toy Theatre

Toy or miniature theatres (item 45) first appeared at the beginning of the 19th century. They were made of wood and the scenes and characters were printed, 'penny plain and tuppence coloured', on sheets of paper from which they would be cut out and mounted on card. The scenery was slotted into the theatre and the characters were attached to wire 'slides' which were operated from the wings by the children playing the game, using the book of words for stage directions and actors' lines. Lighting was achieved by wicks in the footlights dipped in colza oil. Boucicault's *The Corsican brothers* was first produced in 1852; almost immediately it was 'miniaturized'. A selection of sheets for four other toy theatre plays, all published by Benjamin Pollock, is also displayed (items 46–49).



Jigsaws and Dissected Puzzles

Dissected puzzles (the term for puzzles before the use of the jig-saw to cut the pieces) often combined the use of spatial skills to assemble the picture with a didactic message: sometimes, as in *Whole length portraits of the Kings and Queens of England* (item 53) the puzzle could hardly be made up without knowledge of the chronology of English monarchs. Here also the facts are supplemented by comments, often caustic, on the kings or queens (among whom is Oliver Cromwell!): 'Edward 4 ... Profligate and cruel', 'James I ... Learned but weak'.

Early puzzles were often dissected maps. The re-use of a plate or, as here, lithographic stones, can be seen in *Roarem Castle* (items 57 and 56), where the game was re-published as a jigsaw game, complete with its spinner, teetotum, counters, etc. The cutting of such puzzles (a separate skill) would have been outsourced, as evidenced by the disappearance of the Standing imprint from the *Roarem Castle* jigsaw. Variants on the standard dissected puzzle were the block puzzle (item 55) and the double-sided puzzle (item 58).



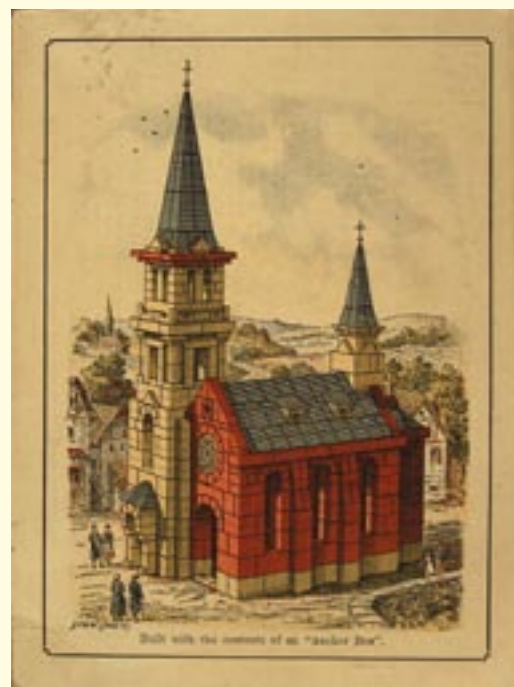
Alphabets are Fun

In the 16th century the notion that learning the ABC could be linked to play was embodied in the hornbook (item 72), a bat-shaped piece of wood on which was fixed a slip of paper bearing the alphabet, vowels, and syllables, the invocation to the Trinity, and the Lord's Prayer. When not hitting things with his hornbook, its owner could con his letters. Although they must have been produced in their thousands, few survive today: this example is the earliest known and is apparently unique. By the late 18th century hornbooks had been replaced by battledores (items 61–67), vestigially bat-shaped objects, made of card, usually folded twice, with the alphabet as centrepiece and often illustrations and other text. The splendidly coloured example (item 65) was an expensive luxury toy. The endeavour to make learning fun stretched the ingenuity of publishers and toy manufacturers alike. Picture books, panoramas, cards, wooden blocks and discs, dominoes, all were employed in the worthy task of teaching the alphabet.



The Little Builder

Early construction toys usually involved modelling in paper or cardboard or with wooden blocks. Once again many games are German in origin. In the *Neues Architect Verwandlung-spiel* (item 84), 160 right-angled triangles could be made into mosaics. The development of building blocks, bricks, and stones in the late 19th century (items 85, 86, 88, 89) resulted in a surge of architectural toys (which later led to BRIO® and LEGO®). The accompanying booklets show simplified German neo-Gothic architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



Parlour Games

Before the days of television and personal computers, parlour games were a favourite way of spending time on dark evenings and rainy days. Games incurring forfeits (items 94 and 95) were especially popular in the early 19th century, as were ever more complex word games (items 96–98), which demanded that the players remember longer and longer pieces of text, or again incur forfeits. Some scientific experiments (items 99–101) seem astonishingly risky to our safety-conscious eyes, but were undoubtedly successful in teaching chemistry and physics to the young.



Brush, Pen, and Pencil

Writing and drawing gave rise to a large number of aids and materials. 'School pieces' or writing blanks (items 102–107) were sheets with printed borders and a blank centre, given to children from c.1720–1860, usually at Christmas, to fill in and show how their handwriting had improved during the year. The vignette 'Shewing his friends his schoolpiece' in *The progress of education* (item 102) shows the presentation of such a writing sheet.

Other aids to drawing and composition included the *Myriorama* (or *Polyorama* or *Choriorama*) of the 1820s (items 125–129). Related to metamorphoses, these usually consisted of 12, 16, 18, or 24 strips which could be put together in any combination to form a landscape. The 16 strips of John Clark's *Myriorama* (item 128), for example, could be combined in 20,922,789,888,000 ways.

There were many books on the art of drawing or watercolour, notably here *The progress of a water-coloured drawing* (124) which shows the gradual build-up of washes to create a watercolour.

Materials shown include exercise books (filled with children's work), drawing slates (with patterns), paint boxes, quills, nibs, and a portable ink pot.



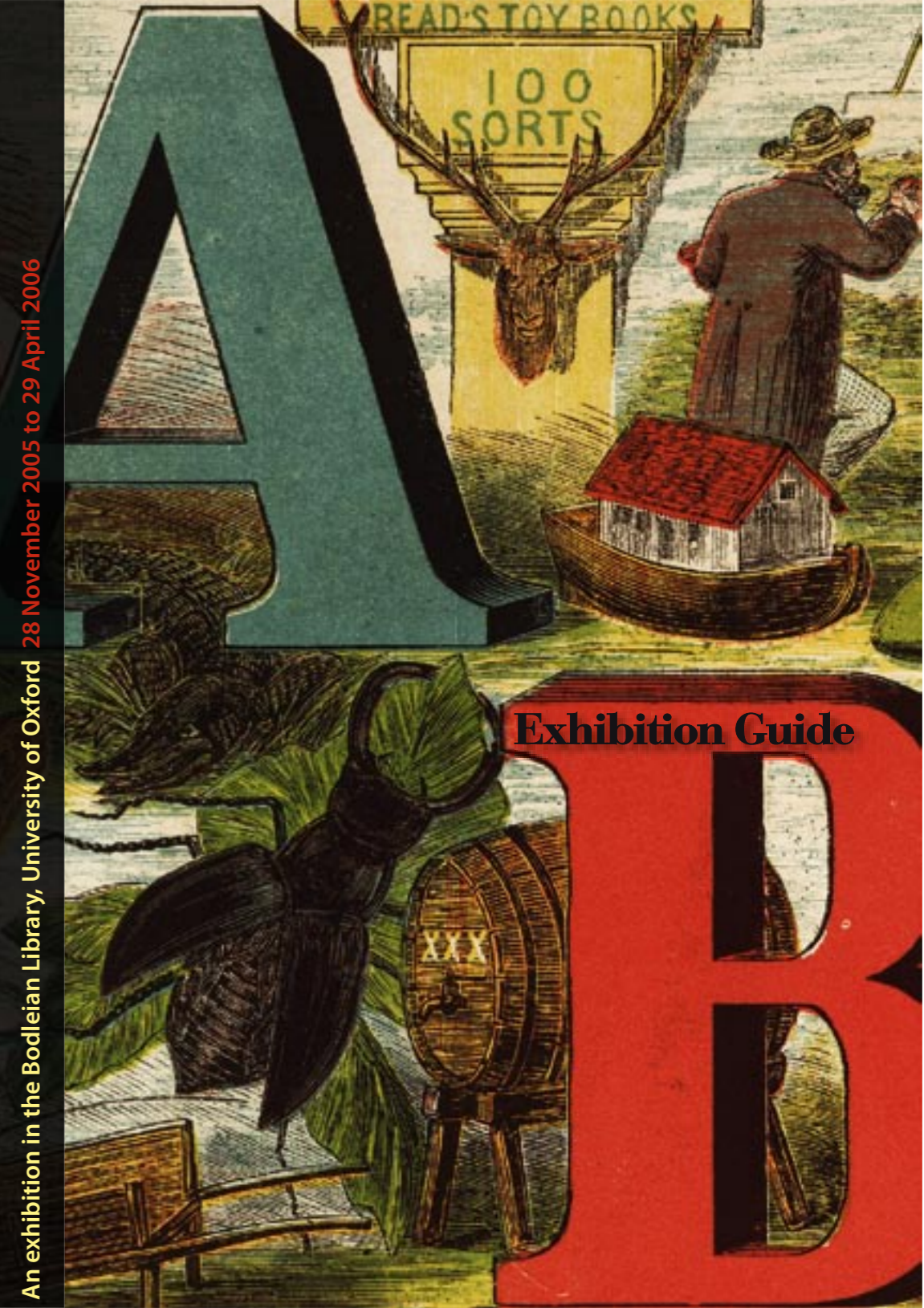
Outdoor Games

The illustrations in this section show a variety of games played by children, from the almost balletic activities of *School boys' diversions* (item 131), depicting six games from 'Hare and hounds' to 'The devil on two sticks' to the intensity with which the little girl holds her battledore and looks at the shuttlecock in *Original poems* (item 135). The *Boy's own book* and *Girl's own book* (items 133 and 134) are comprehensive compendiums of children's sports and pastimes. The wooden blocks (item 132) can be made up to form six different pictures according to the accompanying patterns. In *Female gymnastics* (item 130) the fashion for physical exercise is shown on a set of wooden pieces; the game also included dancing routines, another popular pursuit for young people in the mid-19th century.



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Children's Games & Pastimes