

Arbur? Goody Toys? Rollee? Agasee & Brooks? If you've never heard of the above diecast manufacturers, you're in good company. However, thanks to Robert's detective work, light has now been shed on these makers – and others besides.

I first met Robert at one of the Sandown toy fairs, a good few years ago now. Before that, I had had some correspondence with him on obscure makes and models, so actually meeting up with the accountant (yes, he has a daytime job!) was an occasion. Robert, rather like myself, is one of those collectors who is fascinated by the obscure and the esoteric, and the UK, blessed as it has been by so many minor diecast makers, has proved to be a fertile hunting ground for him. Or should that read "infertile" – because here we are concerned with models and makers which have seemingly slipped through the commercial net and have become virtually anonymous.

EARLY DAYS

Robert tells me that he collected diecast toys from a very early age, perhaps because one of his first picture books was a 1959 Matchbox catalogue, which his mother covered with sticky-back plastic so that he wouldn't rip the pages apart!

"I had a lot of Matchbox and Corgi toys as a child, most of which were very well played with. Two significant events launched me into the collecting world – in the 1970s, I was given Maurice Hammond's book on the Matchbox 1-75 Series, and for the first time, I realised there were variations of wheel types (metal, grey plastic, black plastic and so on); and so I started cataloguing my collection. Then, in 1978, I joined the U.K. Matchbox club, and again their magazines showed me things that I had never seen before, such as the first Matchbox Service Station and the early Lesney toys."

Robert was inspired to find out more about these toys, and as a Matchbox collector, that drive was directed towards looking at all the small variations of the models, so that during the 1980s, he wrote a lot of articles on the 1-75 Series for the U.K. Matchbox and M.I.C.A. magazines.

"Meanwhile, I had started collecting the small-scale Benbros and Morestone ranges that competed with Matchbox, and it did not take long before I became interested in their larger models, too. Unlike Matchbox, there was not much documented history of the smaller makers. When I started working in London in 1981, I was able to contact some of the toy manufacturers and people who had been involved in the industry, and I began writing on the subject, firstly about

Benbros (in *Modellers' World* in 1983), and then with my book on Budgie, Morestone and Modern Products (published in 1988). Further articles followed in the (then) new magazine *Model Collector*, and later in *Diecast Collector* and the short-lived *Classic Toys*."

He relates that a great source of information for him was the toy trade magazines such as *Games & Toys*, which were available in the Newspaper Library (now in the British Library at St. Pancras), and more recently, he has been helped by the British Telephone Directory archives, which are on the website ancestry.co.uk.

THE LONDON LINK

As has been mentioned many times in this magazine, London figured prominently in terms of post-war diecast output.

"I was fascinated that so many of the early post-war diecast toys came from the familiar streets of north London – which was attributable firstly to the influence of Britain's lead soldiers and the smaller companies who copied them (such as Johillco, T&B, Charbens and Crescent); and then to D.C.M.T., whose diecasting

machines enabled some of those old companies and a host of new ones to venture into the diecast toy business in the 1940s. Many of these companies gave up toy production in 1951 when there was a ban (because of the Korean War) on the use of zinc, brass and copper in toy manufacture."

ACROSS THE POND

On to 2001, which was a special year for Robert: he discovered eBay.

"So I started collecting American slush-cast vehicles, mostly from the 1920s and 1930s, which we hardly ever see for sale in the UK. I also built up a small collection of Tootsietoys. I had always admired Clint Seeley's articles on Tootsietoys in *Model Cars* magazine, back in 1971. I bought something on eBay from Gail Seeley (Clint's widow), and we struck up a correspondence, and I was able to identify many "unknown" toys for her before she listed them for sale. I conceived the idea of putting Clint's Tootsietoy history online, as I thought it was so much better than the more recent books on the subject, and as it was unknown to most collectors who had



Diecast devotee

Alwyn Brice profiles Robert Newson, a collector who might well be termed a diecast archaeologist.

FACING PAGE Thanks to its covering of sticky-backed plastic, Robert's 1959 Matchbox catalogue survived handling by childish fingers, apart from losing the cover. Shown with a complete example of the catalogue that he acquired some years later!

not seen the original articles in *Model Cars*. My tootsietoys.info website went live in 2005 and has been updated and expanded regularly, though it is still very much based on Clint's original work."

INTO PRINT

From articles to books was a logical step for Robert.

"After that, my biggest project was the two-volume coffee table book entitled *Farming in Miniature*, in collaboration with Peter Wade-Martins and Adrian Little, and which was based on Peter's fabulous collection of British farm toys, which he has since donated to the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading. As an urban child, much of my knowledge about farming came from the pages of the Corgi and Matchbox catalogues, so I thought it was ironic to find myself writing a book about farming! But that was actually a theme of the book – that farm toys evoked nostalgia among an urban population for the rural past of our grandparents. It certainly broadened my knowledge of the many toy manufacturers who specialised in farm subjects."

Robert's main outlet for articles is now a website: robertnewson.co.uk. Online publishing allows for easy updating, not to mention correction of errors.

"One article that I still find particularly pleasing is about Goody Toys, a British manufacturer which produced four cars in the late 1930s and about whom nothing was known until around 2016/17. Then, various pieces of information came my way and fell into place, allowing me to put together their history.

"Currently, I am looking for information and examples of heavy cast lead vehicles. Although often thought to be pre-war, many actually date from the 1940s and were made from scrap lead, which was readily available as bomb sites were cleared. Identification is usually impossible, but there are some catalogues of moulds that were sold for home-casting or with which to start a small business; so that the toy can be identified, even if the manufacturer cannot."

Clearly, Robert can be said to be digging up the past... in more ways than one. But happily for those passionate about the obscure, the story isn't over yet.

"I am still collecting and have plenty more stuff in my mind to publish – when time permits!" ■



1

1. Robert's collection consists mostly of cast metal toys, but there are a few tinplate examples. Pictured are a van, saloon car, and aeroplane in the style of German Penny Toys, but made in England, probably by Louis Goldberg of Birmingham, circa 1930.

2. Goody Toys were produced for the wholesaler Bell (Toys & Games) for sale in boxed sets, such as this one. Also in the sets were Johillco petrol pumps and other accessories. This is the Goody Toys Ford saloon.



2



3



4

3. Johillco produced some of the earliest British cast metal toy cars, including many that were copied from Tootsietoys and introduced in 1932. The individual models are not rare, but boxed sets such as this one are very scarce. The name "B.L. & Co. Ltd." on the box lid is that of the wholesaler Bedington, Liddiatt & Co. Ltd.

4. Scale Models Ltd. produced three very nice "Scamold" diecast racing cars from their workshop at Brooklands race course, from around 1939 to 1949 (with a wartime break). Shown left to right in the back row are the diecast Alta, Maserati and ERA. Less well known is the series of solid lead models that preceded the Scamold diecasts and were produced by Scamold's founder, Cyril Tappenden, around 1937-38. Pictured left to right (in the front row) are the lead Maserati, Bugatti, MG and Auto-Union; there were also ERA and Austin models.



5

5. A long-standing theme of Robert's collection is the large number of diecast vehicles produced by small manufacturers in the immediate post-war years. Here are (from back to front in the photo) the single-deck bus by Sundaw, "Newmarket Horse Box" by Teeny Toy, "Ovaltine" articulated van and "Vaux" brewery lorry, both by Timpo, and the Agasee breakdown lorry.