

SEPTEMBER 21st 1936

Death of Frank Hornby

The genius who created Meccano, Hornby model railways and Dinky toys and died a millionaire at the age of 73 was born in Liverpool in 1863. Frank Hornby's father worked in the wholesale provision trade, the family straddled the divide between upper working class and lower middle class and Frank spoke with a Scouse accent all his life. He disliked school, often played truant and left at 16. Years later he recalled that he had read *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles over and over again and it inspired him, but for the moment he made little progress and after various clerking jobs he became a bookkeeper at a Liverpool meat importing firm run by a man named David Elliott.

By the late 1890s Hornby was married with two small sons. He made toys for his boys at home in his garden shed, building metal models of bridges, cranes and lorries. An inspired moment came when he thought of making them out of identical parts that could be fastened together with screws and nuts to assemble whichever model was wanted. The separate parts were metal strips half an inch wide with holes for the fastenings at regular half-inch intervals. They came in three standard lengths. The only tools a boy needed to assemble the

Instructions from a Meccano set, 1937.



models were spanners and a screwdriver.

Early in 1901 Hornby took out a patent after borrowing £5 from his boss for the fee. David Elliott saw the possibilities and backed Hornby. They set up a separate business and in 1902 the first 'Mechanics Made Easy' sets went on sale at 7s 6d (equivalent to £30 or more today), each with an instruction leaflet explaining how to make 12 models. They began to sell and in 1906 the enterprise made a profit for the first time.

The toys were educational as well as enjoyable and the business went from strength to strength. The 'Meccano' trademark was registered in 1907 and in 1908 Meccano Ltd itself was formed. Elliot was a sleeping partner, leaving Hornby in command. Meccano sets

were exported to numerous countries and offices were opened in Paris, Berlin, Barcelona and the United States. Hornby had never imagined for a moment that girls would be interested in Meccano and the product was aimed entirely at boys.

In later developments the firm introduced the monthly *Meccano Magazine* in 1916, Hornby clockwork model trains in 1920 (by 1930 they were outselling Meccano) and Dinky Toy cars, lorries and buses in 1933. A rich man in his later years, Hornby owned a grand mansion in Maghull outside Liverpool. He was also Conservative MP for Everton in the 1930s, but his greatest impact was on the generations of children who loved his toys.

SEPTEMBER 14th 1911

Pyotr Stolypin assassinated in Kiev

To mark the centenary of the liberation of Russia's serfs a monument to Tsar Alexander II was unveiled in Kiev. Tsar Nicholas II attended, along with his prime minister Pyotr Stolypin, and the festivities included a performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* at the Kiev opera. A young man named Dmitri Bogrov, who had been an agent of the secret police for several years, told them there was a plan to assassinate Stolypin in the opera house and the police allowed him into the building that evening although they knew he had a revolver.

Stolypin sat in the stalls, where during the second interval Bogrov shot him twice, in the arm and then in the chest. When the prime minister, who had refused to wear a bulletproof vest,

Pyotr Stolypin, photographed c. 1910.



opened his jacket, his waistcoat was soaked in blood. After saying he was proud to die for the tsar and making the sign of the cross towards Nicholas he was taken to hospital, where he died four days later on September 18th at the age of 49. Bogrov was hanged on September 24th. The behaviour of the police created a suspicion that they

had been involved in Stolypin's murder. The investigation into the assassination was stopped on Tsar Nicholas' orders for reasons that remain unknown.

As prime minister since 1906 Stolypin had tried to turn the Russian peasantry into prosperous independent small farmers who would be grateful and loyal to the imperial regime. Each peasant household farmed separate strips of land within the domain of the local commune. Stolypin's measures enabled them to consolidate their plots into individual holdings and break free of the commune's grip. He did this largely regardless of the Duma, or Russian parliament, which he convened and dismissed as it suited him. He also ruthlessly suppressed opposition and had so many accused rebels hanged that the noose acquired the nickname of 'Stolypin's necktie'. His methods aroused fierce opposition and only a minority of the Russian peasantry took advantage of the opportunities he offered them.