**ENGLISH CLOTH DOLLS**

English dolls are not the most prominent in the history of dolls.  However, there are several manufacturers of note, and no study of cloth dolls would be complete without them.

This section of my webpage will provide a brief history of the most prominent English cloth dolls.

I am particularly drawn to them because of my family history.  I hope you will take time to read this history, as it has a lot to say about how wars affect people for generations and often in unanticipated ways.

At my former school, we had an assembly to honor Veterans Day.  Teenagers often view history as a dead subject with no connection to their own world.  To counteract that, the Social Studies teacher organizing the event asked all the teachers to send photos and stories of anyone in their family who had served in any war.  It was a wonderful, eye-opening, and extremely moving experience for everyone involved.  The students were absolutely silent as they began to see the connection to the teachers they see day in and day out.

I hope you will take the time to read my part of the event.

[**Mason-Hedworth Family Veterans Day Slideshow**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/uploads/9/3/4/5/9345192/mason-hedworth_slideshow.pptx)

**SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH DOLLS**

The vast majority of antique doll history is taken up with the study of French and German dolls of all eras, constriction, and materials.  England tends to be briefly mentioned in the overall study of dolls.  However, English dolls are fun to study, and in some cases such as wax dolls, wooden dolls, and rag/cloth dolls, the contribution of British doll makers is quite significant.

**WAX DOLLS**

To quote Olive Thorne in an article titled "Playthings" for Saint Nicholas, 1879:

England is scarcely behind Japan in a variety of playthings.  To begin with the best known and widest spread  of all toys- the doll.  England makes the most beautiful wax dolls in the      world….they have real hair, set in the scalp, and not a paltry wig; they have glass eyes, each of which is made separately, and is a work of art. There are sixteen manufacturers of dolls in London alone.

Many wonderful wax dolls in elaborate costume can be seen at the Victoria and Albert museum.  They are national treasures and give us much insight into the fashions, hair styles and society of the day.

In "The British Toy Business: A History since 1700", Kenneth Brown lists 56 wax modellers existing in Britain in 1851.  By 1871 there are none listed.  These figures must be incomplete, as the London based Mononari’s received an award for their wax dolls in 1878.

**WOODEN DOLLS**

There is an engraving in the Library of Congress of the first wooden doll brought to this country .  Settlers with the Sir Walter Raleigh Expedition brought these dolls for Native American children ca. 1607. A doll reputed to have been brought by William Penn is of a type known as Queen Anne.

Many beautiful wooden “babies” were sold at fairs, where there were stalls filled with toys, sweets and dolls…..worse than the candy rack at Wegmans’ checkout booths!

Peg wooden dolls were popular starting  in the late 18th century & into the 19th century.  The dolls were made in Germany but very popular with English children.  These dolls were popular in the 19th century and several charming books by English authors are available featuring peg-wooden dolls.  For example:

[The adventures of Two Dutch Dolls & a Golliwog by Bertha Upton](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16770/16770-h/16770-h.htm)

[Racketty-Packetty House by Frances Hodgson Burnett](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/8574)

[Kate Greenaway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate_Greenaway) has also written about her enchantment with these dolls as a child.  She owned a family of pegwoodens.  Princess Victoria was also very fond of her little family, and ultimately donated them to the Bristish museum.

Wooden dolls were popular exports to the colonies. During the 1760's, Walter Shee advertised “Dutch and Manchester [England] Pretties”in the PA Gazetteer. (Brown)

**CLOTH DOLLS**

The Playthings article mentioned above also says:

London doll special is the rag baby , and a very pretty thing it is, just beginning to come over to our babies. The head is wax, covered with very thin muslin, which gives it a particularly soft and babyish look, and makes it strong enough for a live baby to play with.

Factory conditions were not the best during this period, and legislation passed to protect some factory workers does not appear to have extended to workers in doll manufacturers, based on the claim of one unhappy customer that a four-foot doll in the Lowther Arcade had its intestines half eaten, the doll being more alive than dead. (Brown, citing The Times 23 November 1901

Cloth dolls came into their own at the beginning of WWI, when England was cut off from German exports.  Sometimes deprivation is the mother of invention, and several English manufacturers flourished.

**INTERNET DOLL RESEARCH**

[**English Cloth Dolls**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/english-cloth-dolls.html)**|**[**History**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/history.html)**|**[**Internet Doll Research**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/internet-doll-research.html)**|**[**Chad Valley**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/chad-valley.html)**|**[**Dean's Rag Book Co.**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/deans-rag-book-company.html)**|**[**Farnell**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/farnell-alpha.html)**|**[**Harwin**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/harwin.html)**|**

[**Liberty of London**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/liberty-of-london.html)**|**[**Norah Wellings**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/norah-wellings.html)**|**[**More Information**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/more-information.html)**|**[**Works Cited**](http://wanderingbooknut.weebly.com/works-cited.html)



[](http://www.thestrong.org/online-collections/)

Be sure to research [Strong's Online Collection](http://www.thestrong.org/online-collections/) for information about countless dolls and toys.

[](http://207.67.203.71/S90001/OPAC/Search/AdvancedSearch.aspx)

Searching for more detailed information?  Locate books on your topic at the [Strong Library](http://207.67.203.71/S90001/OPAC/Search/AdvancedSearch.aspx)!

[](http://books.google.com/)

Google and Bing search engines are NOT the end all and be all of internet research.  Google provides amazing access to books and scholarly articles.  Google Books and Google Scholar provide access in the following ways:

* Full Text - The full text is indexed.  You can read the entire book online and even download it to your ereader.  It also provides links to online stores to purchase the print edition, and best of all - a link to where you can find it in a library to save your wallet.
* Preview - The full text is indexed, and a percentage of the book is available to read online, but not download.  Also, links are provided  to purchase the book and find in a library.
* No preview available - the text is indexed. Also, links are provided  to purchase the book and find in a library.

Let's see what happens when we search for a certain published author amongst our doll club members!  [GOOGLE BOOKS](http://books.google.com/).

[](http://scholar.google.com/)

Right now, this is of somewhat limited use for doll research.  If the doll publications would get on the bandwagon and allow their contents to be indexed, it would be a different story.  You will find some pretty esoteric stuff here - and much of it is limited to articles that can be purchased - at a great price.  No handy links to finding articles in a library are provided...but keep in mind that you can always get your local public librarian on the hunt for you to borrow articles for free, or perhaps a small fee, via interlibrary loan.

It is particularly interesting to explore for patent registrations, which include the diagrams as well as information.

Lets's search for "cloth dolls" on [GOOGLE SCHOLAR](http://scholar.google.com/).

[](http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page)

This amazing project has been around almost from the beginning of the internet as we know it.  They run on donations, so they can't compete with the Google Behemoth - but they are persistent.  And a smaller database can sometimes make serendipitous finds easier to come by.

Their ebooks are downloadable in a multitude of formats and all are free.

Let's search for dolls and see what we find.  [PROJECT GUTENBERG](http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page)

The two best I found for this project were:

* [RACKETTY-PACKETTY HOUSE As told by Queen Crosspatch By Frances Hodgson Burnett](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/8574)

[The Adventure of Two Dutch Dolls and a 'Golliwogg', by Bertha Upton](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16770/16770-h/16770-h.htm)

**CHAD VALLEY DOLLS**

[**MORE PICTURES**](http://krunchd.com/032ec)

**NOTE:  When you click on the above link, you will go to a webpage with an article and/or a picture.  At the top of the page, you will see arrows to press to take you to the next website.  There should be between 3 and 10 websites.**

**HISTORY**

Chad Valley began making cloth cloth child dolls in the mid 1920’s.  Arguably, their most beautiful and famous dolls were the dolls made in the likeness of Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret Rose in the 1930s.

The company was opened by the Johnson brothers, Joseph and Alfred as a printing company 1n 1849, although another one of my sources sets the dat at 1823.  They named their business Chad Valley in 1897 when they opened their new factory next to a stream called Chad, near the city of Birmingham. A facility in Wellington was devoted to soft toys and dolls. They made their fist doll in 1917.  Their first dolls were made of stockinet material at a range of quality and price.  Dolls with faces made of pressed felt were introduced in 1924.  The dolls were marked with a hang tag reading “CHAD VALLEY/HEGIENIC/FABRIC TOYS.  Lost hang tags can make it somewhat tricky to id the dolls.  They were widely exported throughout the Bristish Commonwealth and the U.S.  Louis Wolf was the distributer in the United States.  Their toys were of excellent quality.

They hired a well-known illustrator named Mabel Lucie Atwell, who designed for the Bambina line of dolls. As well as concentrating on good artistic design for the dolls they also developed marketing ideas:

“One marketing idea used by Chad in the 1920’s was to sell dolls in ‘bye-bye boxes’ which were boxes shaped like beds with a drawer underneath to hold the doll’s belongings.” (Early)

Most dolls were girl dolls, though the Atwell line was evenly divided.  They also made dolls modeled after characters popular with English children, such as Red Riding Hood and the ubiquitous Golliwog.  Most dolls seem to be between 12-18 inches.  Most of the clothing was marked with a sewn-in tag.  Clothing was made in a variety of qualities, depending on the expense of the doll.  Fake fur and felt applique were often used.

The company received the Royal Warrant of Appointment, "Toymakers to Her Majesty the Queen" in 1938. (Fawdry)

Although the war and early post WWII years were kind to the company – they ran into financial difficulty in the 50’s when the firm ended as a private family business and became a public company instead. Profits reached their highest in 1951 at 117,793 pounds.(equivalent to about $500,000 dollars in 1950’s dollars and perhaps as much as 10 times as much in todays dollars).  The company changed hands several times and finally "the brand name was bought by Woolworths in 1988 and remained in use until that company's closure due to insolvency. Home Retail Group, the parent company of retailers Homebase and Argos, purchased the brand for £5 million on 20 January 2009.[2][dead link] The Chad Valley brand is now available exclusively at Argos." (Chad Valley, Wikipedia)

**Links to Information on Google Books**

These are links to information that can be read by searching Google Books.  Google Books allows you to search books in their vast database.  It also provides links to purchasing the books and/or finding them in a library.

* [Dolls](http://books.google.com/books?id=nuzAlJiqWecC&pg=PA7&dq=chad+valley+dolls&hl=en&sa=X&ei=tsirUa3ZMdGj4APutICADg&ved=0CE4Q6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=chad%20valley%20dolls&f=false) by Caroline Goodfellow
* [Warman's Companion Collectible](http://books.google.com/books?id=TfOTiyQpEKUC&pg=PA71&dq=chad+valley&hl=en&sa=X&ei=icqrUZ2BHJi24APBzoCIDg&ved=0CDwQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=chad%20valley&f=false) - Great picture of one of my favorites - Princess Elizabeth.

**General Links to History of Chad Valley Dolls**

[Toys for Toffs](http://www.woolworthsmuseum.co.uk/Toys-EarlyCV.html)

[Chad Valley Toy Company: A Short History](http://www.moorpool.com/moorpool.ra/history/Chad%20Valley%20Toys%20A%20Short%20Story.pdf)

[Chad Valley  Beefeater](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/museum/collections/online/Detlobjps.cfm?ObjectID=25424)

**DEAN'S RAG BOOK CO.**

[**MORE PICTURES**](http://krunchd.com/e0e7a)

**NOTE:  When you click on the above link, you will go to a webpage with an article and/or a picture.  At the top of the page, you will see arrows to press to take you to the next website.  There should be between 3 and 10 websites.**

**History**

Dean’s Rag Book Company opened in 1903 in London and have been in continuous operation since making cloth toys and dolls.  The company was established as a manufacturer of lithographed cloth books, toys and dolls.  They were among the first companies to print books for children whose purpose was more for fun than education. The first book they made was titled "The Life of Bold A.B. on his Ship in the Rolling C".  Pollocks Dictionary of English Dolls states:

**The colours were fast, the product certified as hygienic.  The pages could be washed without damage, and sucked with impunity: perfect, in fact, for children who, in the words of the rag book's originator, "wear their food and eat their clothes".**

The first dolls were printed on cloth to be cut out and sewn at home.  They soon began to make completed dolls that they advertised as being hygienic, indestructible and washable.   A certification from the English Institute of hygiene is printed on their bodies. Some dolls were called Knockabout dolls, another way to promote their indestructibility.  Seems as if children have been hard on their toys throughout all ages.  One of their baby dolls, from 1924 was large enough to wear real baby clothes.

Another innovation was the introduction of story dolls based on nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and Shakespeare.  Other characters were Pierette, Sambo and many others. They also made a wonderful series of Alice in Wonderland dolls, which included several of the main characters.  In 1920, the company brought out a series called Goo Goo Dolls. I have to wonder if there is any connection with that name to the 80's rock group of the same name.  "The trio picked their name from a True Detective ad for a toy called a Goo Goo Doll". (Goo Goo Dolls, Wikipedia)

With WWI, along came patriotic dolls such as soldiers and sailors and more. “True to Life Dolls” appeared in the 1920’s and were the first molded, pressed three-dimensional dolls. (Judd)  There is a discrepancy in the research as Pollock's gives the date as 1913.

Dean's Rag Book Co. hired many well-known artists of the times to design their dolls, such as Hilda Cowham, a children's book illustrator and a cartoonist named John Harsall. Many Dean's dolls have hand painted eyes and have floppy cloth bodies that made them especially popular for very young children. Many types of fabrics were used over time, such as cotton, felt and velvet.

E. I. Horseman distributed their dolls in the United States.  It is speculated that the Dean's Rag Book dolls might have been part of Horsman's Babyland line.

The first Mickey Mouse soft toy was designed and released by Dean's in 1930.  During the next decade, they also produced Donald Duck, Pluto and other character dolls.

During the 70s and 80s, Dean's continued to market character and historical dolls, reproducing some of their original dolls, and also making Charles and Diana Royal Engagment osuvenirs.

The Dean's Rag Book company is still in existence, but is now exclusively producing teddy bears.  From the company website:

**Times were difficult for Dean's after the war during the period of austerity and in 1956 ......  By now, Teddy Bears were a major part of the Dean's collection and many of the toys were produced by Gwentoys....  The two companies merged in 1972 and the headquarters were moved to Pontypool ....until 2005.** **By the time the current owners of Dean's, Neil and Barbara Miller acquired the company in 1988, toy manufacture had been taken over  by the Far East and from the eary 90s, Dean's concentrated on making collectable bears in the UK....Dean's relocated to the wilds of Herefordshire in 2005 from where the business is now run.**

**LINKS**

[DEAN'S RAG BOOK COMPANY (1903) LTD.,  P.O. BOX 217, HEREFORD.  HR1  9AB.   Tel 01981 240966 A SHORT HISTORY](http://www.deansbears.co.uk/index.php?route=information/information&information_id=4)

[Victoria & Albert Museum of ChildhooD - DEAN'S RAG BOOK DOLL](http://www.museumofchildhood.org.uk/collections/dolls/deans-rag-book-doll/)

**FARNELL DOLLS**

[**MORE PICTURES**](http://krunchd.com/4a7bce)

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**HISTORY**

J.K.Farnell & company also manufactured cloth dolls during the heyday of the 20s and 30s.  They were founded in 1871 by Agnes Farnell, and used the trademark “Alpha Toys”.  They are more commonly known for teddy bears than dolls. “They were originally silk merchants and went into soft toy production in 1897.” (Brown)

In the early days, they used natural skins to make their soft toys, but by 1925 they artist Chloe Preston used modern fabric for dolls and toys.

Their ***Alpha Cherub*** dolls and ***Joy Day*** dolls can easily be confused with Norah Wellings of Chad Valley.  They were marked with labels sewn to their feet - but these labels often disappear with time and use.  I know, as a child, I hated labels and would carefully remove them all.  Dolls are real people, after all, and should NOT be labeled!!

J.K. Farnell Company produced a Peter Pan doll and contributed the proceeds to Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children as part of the J.M. Barrie bequest. (Pollocks)

They also produced wonderful portrait dolls.  Of particular note, is the one that was made of King Edward VIII, which was released only briefly and quickly withdrawn when he abdicated for the throne.  Because it is so rare, it is also expensive.  The portrait doll for King George VI, father of Queen Elizabeth II, is equally beautiful, but more common and less expensive.

The company went out of business in 1968.

**LINKS**

[J. K. Farnell: Company History](http://www.luckybears.com/encyclopaedia_farnell.asp)

[J. K. Farnell & Co. (Herlocher, 200)](http://books.google.com/books?id=x80YGsu6jvgC&pg=PA152&lpg=PA152&dq=j.k.farnell+dolls&source=bl&ots=be52oqNaXR&sig=GVZV-agHcVHuUspNTYXC8c4Ega0&hl=en&sa=X&ei=9q66UcXWCPij4APGyYHgAw&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=j.k.farnell%20dolls&f=false)

**HARWIN DOLLS**

[**MORE PICTURES**](http://krunchd.com/e154)

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**HISTORY**

The Harwin Company began making soft toys in 1915.  The sales manager had been recruited from THE premier soft toy company of the era (and even today) - The Steiff company.

The English firm was able to disregard patent laws during WWI and created Steiff look-a-lies from 1915-1921.  They created a wide variety of character dolls, such as Brownies, Pierrot, Boy Scouts, Bo Peep, and many more.

They also produced patriotic dolls, such as Tipperary Tommy, Sailor and French Soldier.  In 1917 they came out with a doll called the "Bluestocking Kid".  Each doll was printed with different educational rhymes.  Miss Dorothy Harwin designed a series of dolls called "Dots Dolls" with some cute (and not so cute) names.  How do you feel about a doll named "Peggy Pimples?"  But - there were other names like Tinkles and Wobbler that made up for it a little!

**LIBERTY OF LONDON**

[**MORE PICTURES**](http://krunchd.com/08413)

**NOTE:  When you click on the above link, you will go to a webpage with an article and/or a picture.  At the top of the page, you will see arrows to press to take you to the next website.  There should be between 3 and 10 websites.**

**HISTORY**

This has definitely been the most difficult company to research.

If you ever visited England in the sixties, it would have been hard not to encounter one of their dolls.  They have done a very brisk business in souvenir dolls for many years of that decade.  I saw them when I visited my family thereat that time.  They concentrated heavily on historical figures, with some literary characters as well.  The article in the book  *Cloth Dolls from Ancient to Modern: A Collector's Guide*, by Linda Edward) states that "the company made dolls from 1906 through the 30s and on".    What does "on" mean?  I would assume it meant that it might still be in operation.  Who knows?

In any case, their "Art Dolls" were "made by artists hired by Liberty to use up company’s fabric remnants.  A design patent was taken out on these dolls in 1920." (Edward)

The most famous of their dolls were the series of dolls created for the coronation of King George VI.  Other historical and literary figures include Sir Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare and Dickens.  Faces were needle-sculpted and were hand painted. The bodies have armatures and hair made of fine wool.

One of my sources (Judd) indicates that they made dolls from the 1930s through the 1950s - but that does not fit with my recollection of seeing the dolls in souvenir shops.

**Dianne Culver writes on her blog:**

**Liberty of London Cloth Dolls**

**Produced from the 1930s to the 1960s. These hand-crafted cloth dolls, along with accessories, depict the history of Great Britain from the caveman through Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation.” The dolls consist of history-making men and women, including royalty, political reformers, military notables, innovators in the arts, and contributors to natural and physical sciences. These hand-painted soft sculptured dolls are  costumed in authentic period clothing. The dolls were hand-sewn by two sisters, Ada and Kathleen Peat, from their Brighton, England home for the Liberty of London Department Store.**

**Further research has been difficult.  Little can be found on the web about the total number of dolls in the collection. (Culver)**

Interestingly, available information says that Liberty of London Company started out as a fabric shop.  There is currently a v[ery high-end fabric shop in London that is called Liberty & Co](http://www.liberty.co.uk/).  I can find no information to verify a connection to the doll company. But there are some curious clues.  Liberty of London (the doll company) was established in 1873 as a fabric manufacturer, and was listed as a doll distributor from 1906 and onward.(Edward)  *Pollocks Dictionary of English Cloth Dolls* does not list Liberty of London under that title.  However, they DO list a Liberty & Co., Ltd.  To add to the confusion, this name is also used in the Edward article about Liberty of London.   The Pollocks article lists the Liberty Co as going into business making dolls and toys in 1906 - the same year that Edward lists Liberty of London's foray into doll making.  The Liberty Co. is listed in Pollocks as going out of business in 1980, whereas the Fawcett article states the 1960s.  To deepen the mystery a bit further....Pollocks lists the address of the Liberty company as Regent Street, and the  current high end fabric shop is located on Regent Street.  Hmmmmm.

**NORAH WELLINGS**

[**MORE PICTURES**](http://krunchd.com/aa66)

**NOTE:  When you click on the above link, you will go to a webpage with an article and/or a picture.  At the top of the page, you will see arrows to press to take you to the next website.  There should be between 3 and 10 websites.**

**HISTORY**

These are probably the best-known English dolls here in the United States.  They were exported in great quantity and were sold on the Cunard & Canada Steam ship lines and also the Pacific Railway Co.  Hence the British sailor can be easily found at antique shows.

Norah Wellings worked as a designer for Chad Valley early in her career before starting her own company in 1926, along with her brother Leonard.  Her dolls sold all over the world - but especially in those countries who were, or formerly were, in the British Empire.

The dolls were of outstanding quality in construction and fabric and were often given to royalty as gifts. The company received a patent for making felt doll heads with a buckram backing inside. A combination of plastic wood and plaster was used to secure the eyes.  She also made dolls with velveteen faces with painted features.

According to *Pollocks Dictionary of English Cloth Dolls*:

**"In *Norah Wellings-A Personal Recollection* Peggy Nisbet says 'Her dolls were her life, into which she put much of herself, and she felt they were her family.  This may be why her own creations seemed to have more character than other not dissimilar dolls produced by larger manufacturers of the same period."**

The company made ethnic and fantasy dolls, and their black dolls have wonderful character faces.  She made a line of sweet little "Pixie People", which are little fairy-like characters in flower costumes.  Norah's doll clothing is always very well detailed.

Norah was named "Dollmaker of the Commonwealth of Nations during WWII.  During the war she made many dolls representing branches of the armed service, such as her RAF (Royal Air Force) flyer doll.

The company continued in operation throughout and after WWII.  Norah Wellings closed the company in 1960, following the death of her brother.

**MORE INFORMATION**

**OTHER COMPANIES/DISTRIBUTERS**

**B. ALTMAN**

The New York department store ordered dolls from all over the world to sell in this stores.  The tags on the dolls read: "made in (name of country) for B. Altman & Company" .  They are known to have imported unmarked Norah Wellings' dolls and added their own tags, which complicates identifying some Wellings dolls.

**LINKS**

[Dolls and Soft Toys](http://www3.hants.gov.uk/childhood-collections/toys/history-toys/dolls-soft-toys.htm)

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