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# All on board!

What can we learn from old board games?

Key Stages 2-3 | Victorians 1850-1901, Early 20th Century 1901-1918

Lesson resource



# Introduction

Many board games, not on sale today, were devised in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and some of their designs are held at The National Archives. The board games used in this lesson are very interesting as historical sources as they can reveal something about the society that made them. How did people in the past like to have fun? Were their games very different from ours?

Board games were highly valued as a form of entertainment for Victorian or Edwardian children as they were not too physical or noisy, allowing them to be 'seen and not heard'. They could be played at home with the whole family or a group of children under the watchful eye of a parent or governess. They offered a change from the usual 'parlour games' that the Victorians favoured such as 'Charades' or 'Pin the tail on the donkey'.

Use this lesson to find out if the design of a board game can tell us anything about life in the past.

## Suitable for:

KS 2 - 3

## Time period:

Victorians 1850-1901, Early 20th Century 1901-1918

## Connections to the Curriculum:

### Key stage 2:

Changes in an aspect of social history, such as crime and punishment from the Anglo-Saxons to the present or leisure and entertainment in the 20th Century

### Key stage 3:

Ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901

# Contents

Teachers' notes	Page 3
Background	Page 5
Tasks	Page 6
Source 1	Page 9
Source 2	Page 10
Source 3a	Page 11
Source 3b	Page 12
Source 4	Page 13
Source 5	Page 14
Source 6	Page 15
Source 7	Page 16

## Teachers' notes

Old board games are perhaps not typical historical sources. However, they are examples of our material culture that can help pupils understand past societies by allowing them to examine the objects which have been generated by those societies. Appreciation of material culture also widens pupils' perception of the sheer range of historical sources we can engage with when trying to find out about the past.

This lesson could be used as part of a study following with the National Curriculum Key stage 2 theme on the history of leisure and entertainment.

We have included some games with their box lid designs. In some cases, only the board design exists in other cases only its box lid. In later case, we do not know how a game would have been played! This true of the game shown here, 'Sugar and Salt: Across the Mountains to Klondyke, a side-splitting game for all ages' (1898). You could ask your pupils what they think this game could be about. What does Klondyke refer to? How would the game be played? How and why would people find it funny? Perhaps we can only conclude that the game is based on the Klondike Gold Rush 1896-1899, the biggest Gold Rush in Canadian history. Gold was found in the Yukon River in North West Canada on the Alaskan border, causing a rush of over 100,000 miners looking for gold. Maybe this game was a race to cross the mountains to find gold, with hazards and wins on the way- sugar and salt!

The wide selection of games used in this lesson means that pupils could be broken up into small groups or pairs to work on one game, then report back to the class on their particular game. Some games are less complex than others and so this could also allow for differentiation.

## Extension ideas

- Compare the board games in this lesson to other board games in the past such as Tudor Backgammon, Nine Men's Morris or Chess for the Anglo Saxons (see the link included here for the British Museum).
- Design a class board game based on a race to a particular destination for players using local route near you (a walk to school, or park, part of your town or historic site). According to what square you land on your journey could face hazards, an instruction to move backwards e.g. stuck in traffic or there is something blocking the route. Instructions to move forward could feature on a square, e.g. an offer of a lift from a friend.
- Find out about Victorian and Edwardian toys and games, for example: spillikins, 'Ring Taw' marble game, dolls and doll's houses, zoetrope, hoops, spinning tops and jack-in-the boxes. Compare these toys and games to those of today. What are the similarities and differences?

## Sources

- Box lid for a game called 'The Little Teacher, 1908, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/275 f225
- Board for a board game called 'Royal Coronation: The game for all true Britons', 1901 Catalogue ref: COPY 1/180 f247

## Teachers' notes

- (a) Box lid for a game called 'Ups and Downs of Life: A capital game for young and Old', 1899, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/146 f17
- (b) Board for a game called 'Ups and Downs of Life: A capital game for young and Old', 1899, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/146 f15
- Owbridge's Scout Equipment game, 1912, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/321 f343
- The Merry Anglers' Board game, 1904, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/218 f309
- Noah's Ark board game, 1908 Catalogue ref: COPY 1/270 f153
- Railway Bookshop game, 1908 Catalogue ref: COPY 1/274 f141

## Background

According to the Guardian newspaper in April 2020, 'sales of board games and jigsaw puzzles soared 240%' in the first week of lockdown against covid-19. Clearly, they offered a great way for families to spend time together at home.

Similarly, Victorians and Edwardians enjoyed board games and were familiar with games like chess, backgammon and draughts. Another traditional board game, Ludo, which originated from India in the 6th century known as pachisi, came to Britain in 1891, patented by Alfred Collier. A form of 'Monopoly' called the 'Landlord's Game' was invented in 1903, and later became 'Monopoly' when copyrighted by Parker Brothers in 1935 then Hasbro in 1991.

Family and marriage were highly valued by the Victorians, and board games based on the end goal of marriage were not unusual. For example, in a board game called 'Maricout' (1882) players had to move around the board facing a range of setbacks during courtship. It emphasised Victorian values rewarding players who landed on squares holding specific virtues, including honesty and humility and highlighted the importance of acquiring wealth and status in society- epitomised by the acquisition of carriages and servants. Another game called 'The New Game of Married First or Wedding Bells' (1904) followed a similar approach.

Edwardian board games were often educational and covered topics like history, science or geography. There were games based on the life of Dick Turpin: 'The Game of Dick Turpin's ride to York' (1904), or the 'Game of Scouts' (1909), the 'Boer War Game' (1900) or even one called the 'Game of Lord Gordon-Kitchener' (1900). There was a somewhat tasteless game about the Titanic entitled: 'The new game across the Atlantic, from Liverpool to New York without touching icebergs' (1912).

Some games signalled moral values such as good behaviour, for example 'The Little Teacher game' (1908) and the importance of work. The game of 'Temperanzo' (1909) was designed to warn against the perils of drink and the importance of taking the pledge for adults. Children could play at shops with 'The Play Town Post Office game' (1909) or with 'the Railway Bookstall game' (1908). Other games were based upon nursery rhymes or fairy tales where the winner triumphed over evil characters during the course of the game, the 'Enchanted Forest' (1911).

New printing techniques meant companies could produce a wide range of board games fairly cheaply. The games were often very colourful and highly illustrated to make them appear more attractive to children. Sometimes instructions were printed on the board itself. The designs often involved a race with other players along a circuit or path in some shape or form. Counters or buttons were used to move along the board.

The number of moves was determined by teetotum or spinning top marked with letters or numbers to show the result of each spin. Dice were not often favoured as they were associated with gambling. Some games incorporated hazards or rewards, like in 'Snakes and Ladders' when players were sent backwards or forwards. In more sophisticated games, the players picked up cards which aided or impeded their progress in terms of 'disasters' or 'windfalls' according to the theme of the game.

# Tasks

## Look at Source 1

Box lid for a game called 'The Little Teacher', 1908, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/275 f225

- What is this game called?
- How does the picture tell you what the game is about?
- From looking at the picture, how were children taught at that time? Is this different from how you learn in school?
- What other information does the picture give us about life in 1908?
- We do not have a board design for this game. Can you suggest how this game could be played?
- Do you think this game would be popular with children and parents or guardians? Explain why.

## Look at Source 2

Board for a board game called 'Royal Coronation: The game for all true Britons', 1901 Catalogue ref: COPY 1/180 f247

Queen Victoria died in 1901 after a reign of 64 years. Her eldest son, Edward, was crowned as King Edward VII at the age of 59. His wife Alexandra also became Queen. A coronation is a special ceremony when a king or queen received the crown. They were also given the orb (a globe with a cross on it) and a sceptre (a staff or wand) held in the hand. All these objects represented the power and authority of the new king or queen.

- Can you describe the picture in the centre of the board?
- Look at the pictures around the edges of the board. Make a list of all the places you see.
- Why do you think these places are included? [CLUE: Check again the name of the board game, discuss with a friend or helper]
- Why do you think the game has the British flag pictured on the board?
- How do you think this game was played?
- Why do you think it was called 'Royal Coronation: The game for all true Britons'?
- Why do you think this game was made? [Clue: Find out the meaning of the word souvenir].

## Look at Source 3a

Box lid for a game called 'Ups and Downs of Life: A capital game for young and Old', 1899, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/146 f17

- What is the name of this game?
- What can you see in the picture?
- How does the picture help you understand what the game is about?
- Who is meant to play this game?
- How does the picture try to persuade you to want to play it?

# Tasks

## Look at Source 3b

Board for a game called 'Ups and Downs of Life: A capital game for young and Old', 1899, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/146 f15

- Look at the board, how do you think you would play this game?
- What do you think the rules could be?
- What can we learn about the following in Victorian times?
- fun and entertainment
- travel and transport
- marriage
- school punishment
- clothing
- What does the game suggest is the main 'up' or goal of life?
- What are some of the 'downs'?
- Do you think these 'ups' and 'downs' are similar or different for us today?
- Discuss with a friend or helper what other sources would help you to find more about Victorian entertainment and leisure.

## Look at Source 4

Owbridge's Scout Equipment game, 1912, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/321 f343

This is a different sort of game. It is interesting because it was made by a company that sold cough syrup. The makers have included their name in the title of the game. The game is based on the scouts' organisation which started five years before.

- This game includes instructions. Can you make them into a simple list that explains the rules?
- Can you explain how Owbridge is trying to sell or advertise their lung syrup (cough/cold mixture) in the game?
- Why do you think they chose to show their product in this game?
- What does this game tell us about life in the 1900s?
- If you made a similar game based on clothing or a uniform what would you choose?

## Look at Source 5

The Merry Anglers' Board game, 1904, Catalogue ref: COPY 1/218 f309

- What is this game called?
- Can you work out the meaning of the word 'angler'?
- How many different types of fish can you see on the board?
- Look at the bottom left-hand corner of the board, now can you work how this game was played?
- What school subjects could this game be trying to teach children who might have played it?
- What do you think of the design of the game?
- Do you think people would play this game today?

# Tasks

## Look at Source 6

Noah's Ark board game, 1908 Catalogue ref: COPY 1/270 f153

- Have you heard about the story of Noah's Ark? Try and find out or ask your teacher/helper.
- Look at the board for this game, how do you think it would be played?
- Why do you think this game is based on the story of Noah's Ark?
- Do you think that people would play this game today?

## Look at Source 7

Railway Bookshop game, 1908 Catalogue ref: COPY 1/274 f141

This is the lid of a children's game, which is not a board game.

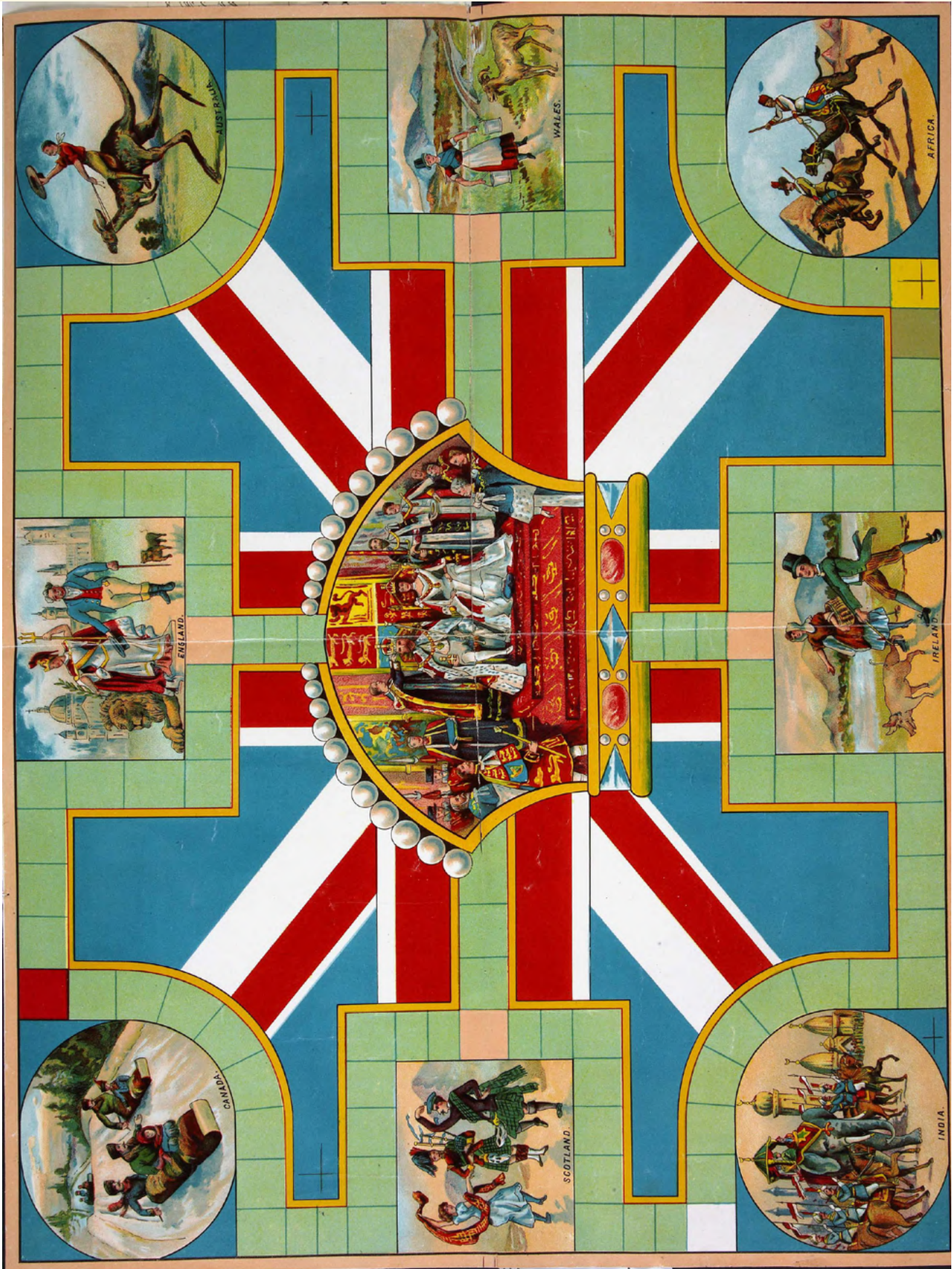
- What is this game called?
- How can you work out what is inside the box?
- How would children play this game?
- Does this game reveal anything about what people enjoyed reading or were interested in?
- Is the game trying to teach children anything?
- Would children play this sort of game today?

Source 1: Box lid for a game called 'The Little Teacher', 1908.

Catalogue Ref: COPY 1/275 f225



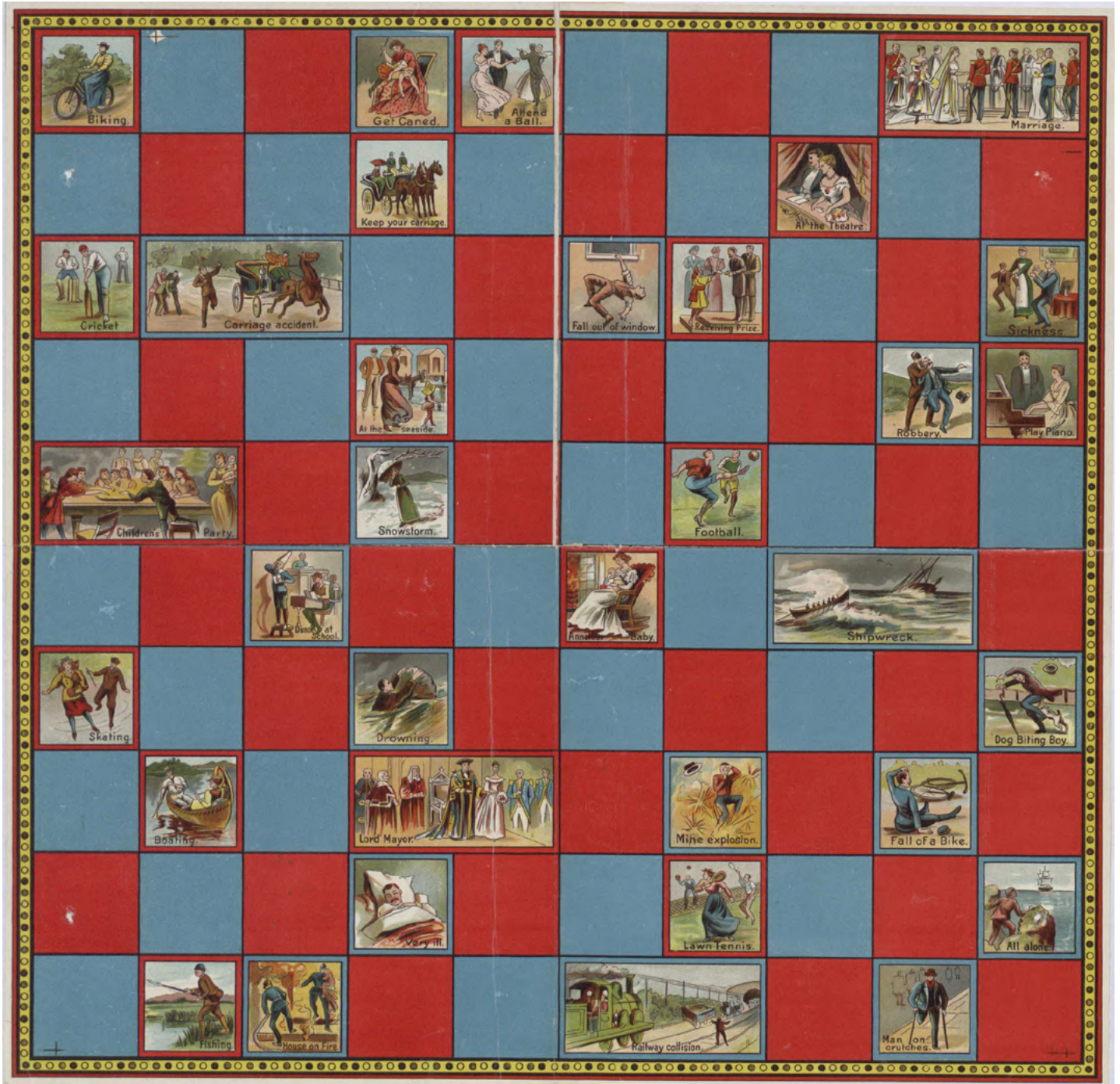
Source 2: Board for a board game called 'Royal Coronation: The game for all true Britons', 1901. Catalogue Ref: COPY 1/180 f247



Source 3a: Box lid for a game called 'Ups and Downs of Life: A capital game for young and Old', 1899. Catalogue Ref: COPY 1/146 f17



Source 3b: Board for a game called 'Ups and Downs of Life: A capital game for young and Old', 1899. Catalogue Ref: COPY 1/146 f15









# Source 7: Railway Bookshop game, 1908.

Catalogue Ref: COPY 1/274 f141

**THE RAILWAY BOOKSHOP**

THE CHILDREN'S NEW GAME OF SHOP

COMPLETE WITH MODEL COPIES OF THE PRINCIPAL

NEWSPAPERS  
MAGAZINES  
WEEKLY PAPERS  
NOVELS  
MONEY BILLS  
SHOW BILLS  
POT OF STICKPHAST'S FOR BILLPOSTING

**1/-**

Illustration details: A bookshop stall with shelves of books. Visible titles include 'PEARSON'S SEVEN YEARS A SHOWMAN', 'PEARSON'S GANDER'S SAUCE', 'SCOUT', 'HOME NOTES', 'ROYAL', 'M.A.P.', 'THE NOVEL', 'PEARSON'S WEEKLY', 'STORY OF MY LIFE BY PETER PAN', 'SUDDEN DEATH OF COCK ROBIN', 'JAM IS INHURIOUS', 'SCENE IN THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT', 'DAILY EXPRESS', 'STANDARD', 'ROYAL', 'PEARSON'S', 'M.A.P.', 'HOME NOTES', 'NOVEL', 'PEARSON'S', 'STORY OF MY LIFE BY PETER PAN', 'SUDDEN DEATH OF COCK ROBIN', 'JAM IS INHURIOUS', 'SCENE IN THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT', 'DAILY EXPRESS', 'STANDARD'. A bottle of 'STICKPHAST'S' is on the counter.



## Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

## Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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