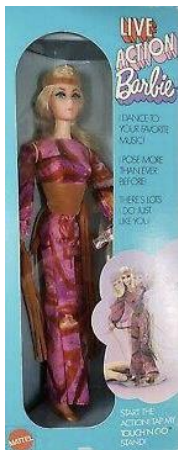


## GROWING UP IN THE 70'S

The oscillating economic circumstances of the 70's did no favour to children. As the screw turned on domestic budgets so the whims of children dropped down the priority list. Treats of all descriptions became less frequent and less generous and, for many, pocket money dried up. Gifts at Christmas and Birthdays were less indulgent, and outings and holidays were less frequent. Similarly, budgetary constraints in Education and industrial unrest amongst teachers hit Schools. Working to Rule meant the abandonment of extra-curricular activities. Sport, Drama and Hobby Clubs were all cancelled at the height of demonstrations, many never to return as the good will of teachers was so damaged by their demoralising fight for recognition in pay and status that they withdrew permanently. For many children, particularly the non-academic, this robbed them of their chance to shine. Budgetary restraint also hit the charitable organisations that provided for the welfare and nurture of youth, and rising costs of private tuition in piano, dancing, gymnastics, singing etc. subdued take up. It is possible to argue that children were amongst the biggest losers in the economic upheavals of the time?

Most children, however, would hardly have known the difference. Their world remained one of highly interactive relationships with friends and family out in the world, not closeted indoors. Entertainment was with each other – no internet, cell phones, computers or video games! There was no over-protection by parents, no tracking their every movement to ensure their safety, no undue worry about sun-burn, or hygiene, or diet, or getting hurt. Children were still given the scope to be children. Life was less complicated and less cluttered by choice, diversion or fear.

By the 70's the power of the media to determine choices continued to grow. Television advertising sharpened awareness of what was available and the appetite for certain toys grew, not quite to the 'craze' levels of today, but certainly significantly enough. Developments in plastics brought realistic skin tones and flexibility to dolls and 'Barbie', 'Sindy', 'Wonder Woman', 'Action Man', and the 'Six Million Dollar Man' all became popular play-things of the time for both sexes offering a wide range of costumes and peripherals to broaden their imaginative scope.



The versatility of plastic also lent itself to a wide range of applications in toys from Lego Building blocks to Girls World – a pro-

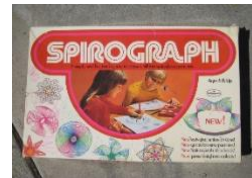


active toy for hair and make-up styling. Popular soft toys were also inspired by television characters like Paddington Bear and Roger de Courcey's boggle-eyed 'Nookie Bear'. The boy's favourite model cars followed suit with special edition die-cast



creations of James Bond's Aston Martin, the Batmobile, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, and cars made famous by TV characters like Starsky and Hutch and Kojak. The TV also helped launch many new indoor games

like Connect 4, Game of Life, Trouble, Stay Alive and Mastermind along with new gadgets like



the Spirograph. Etch-a-Sketch, Stickle Bricks and the most revolutionary of all – the beginnings of computer games.

The compulsion for collecting things continued to be a hobby for many children in the 70's. Boys especially were seduced by images of footballers and their teams which were published in small cheap packs and could be assembled in albums. The challenge of completing the sets and of swapping cards to achieve the 'goal' was compelling. Their appetite included other objects issued free



with products. One which caught the imagination was 'Smurfs', small rubberised cartoon characters made famous in the film of the same name. They were issued by BP Petrol and were

highly sought after by some children. Perhaps the most compelling craze of the decade, however, was the Rubic Cube introduced in 1974 which achieved a momentum of its own, not only in solving the puzzle but also of completing it in the fastest possible time.





Outside, the Space Hopper and the Pogo Stick were popular, but play continued to be dominated by knock-about football and the many imaginative activities echoing adult life and adventure. The most significant craze of the late 70's was the Skateboard with all the challenges it presented. Over 1 million were sold in 1977 alone. The most yearned-for item was, however, the Raleigh 'Chopper'.



Its unique design became a cultural icon – a must-have item for those that could afford it. In 1970 it cost £34. 19 shillings – over £500 in today's money. Not surprisingly a good many children learned to cope with envy!



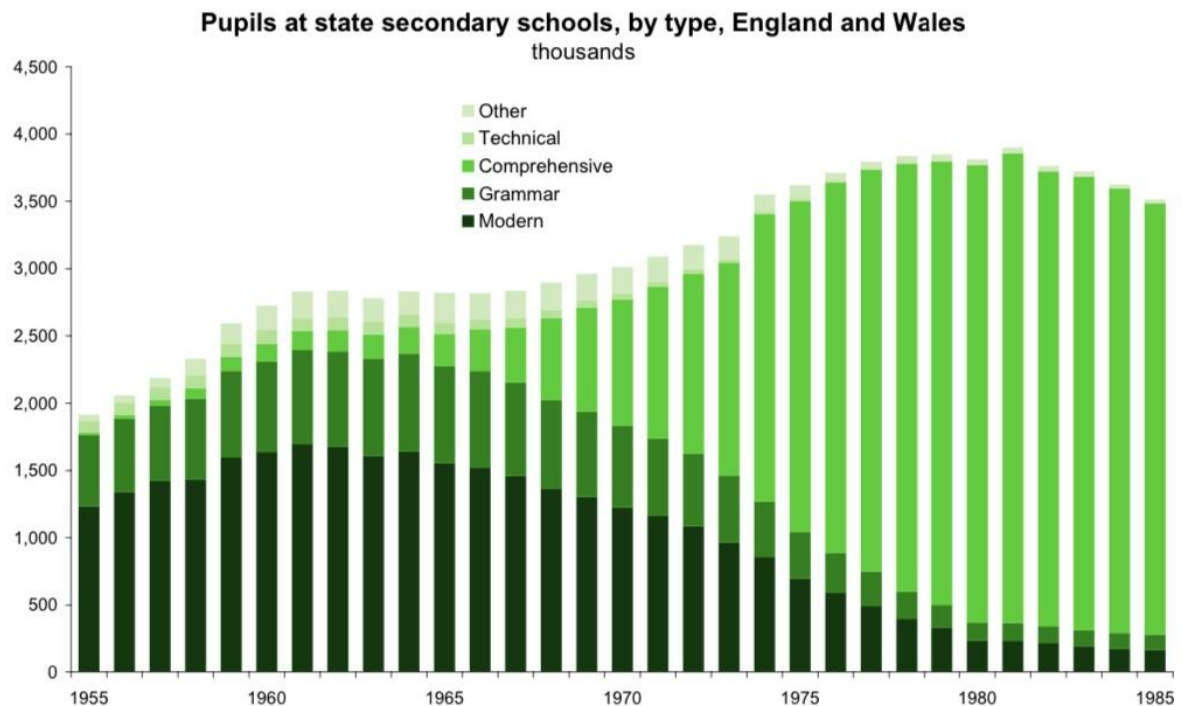
Young teens were, of course, much into music and fashion. By the 70's most had a transistor radio and a record player in their bedroom. Girls, much taken with pop idols, spent hours there, often with their friends, mooning over posters, experimenting with make-up and hair styles and exchanging gossip about their male acquaintances. Boys were more outward looking, hanging out with friends on the street or local recreation ground and focussing upon football, their bikes and courting mischief. Common ground was still to be found in Coffee Bars, around the local chip shop, at the swimming pool, sports field, and local disco's and dances. Television did not have such an appeal to them, neither did spending too much time with their parents.

At home things were changing. The challenge to maintain sufficient income drove increasing numbers of mothers out to work. The increasing pressures on time and money impacted on home life often to the detriment of children. They were left more to their own devices. Home cooked meals around the table were super ceded by 'faster' foods on trays in front of the television. Viewing and relaxation time increased and became more precious. Teenagers in particular, always more restless and problematic, were given much more freedom to go out and stay out later. Out of sight they emulated the adults. They puffed on cigarettes, experimented with alcohol and flirted. They wrestled with conscience, struggled with relationships, and slowly learned who they were.

Teenagers were also confronted by changes at School. Secondary Modern and Comprehensive schools in particular faced a perfect storm during the early years of the 70's. In 1972 the School leaving age was raised from 15 to 16. Not long afterwards the second phase of the 'Baby-Boomers' hit, raising school population at a time of severe budgetary restraint and staffing difficulties. Whilst the raising of the school leaving age (ROSLA) had been anticipated and the necessary infrastructure of additional classrooms had largely been put in place, there was little vision of what should be taught and to what purpose. Generally, pupils were just absorbed into existing C.S.E. courses. C.S.E. had been designed for the top 70% by ability. It competed with G.C.E. (intended for the top 25%) for recognition and status and had become increasingly academic. It did not therefore provide an answer to the needs of large numbers of lower ability pupils who would have profited by a more practical and vocational education. Their situation worsened still further when, in the mid-70's, youth unemployment became a real issue. As more young people applied for fewer jobs examination attainment became the chief criteria for selection stranding low achievers still further. ROSLA also created acute staffing difficulties. There became an immediate need for about a 12% increase in teaching staff. This could only be achieved by recruiting probationary teachers or by inducing ex-professionals to re-join the fold. Both were ill-prepared to face the challenges of disenchanted 14 to 16 year-olds. As the 70's progressed so the second phase baby-boomers came into the system along with increasing numbers of immigrants. The challenge of keeping up with the demand for school accommodation was intense, made worse by the need to replace old Victorian and Edwardian edifices which were inadequate and expensive to heat and maintain. New buildings and temporary porta-cabin classrooms proliferated as many Secondary schools doubled in size from an average of about 650 to 1200 in just a few years. As a result, they became more impersonal places. Bureaucracy overtook personal relationships much to the disadvantage of a contingent of pupils who now found they could journey through schooling without being noticed. Staffing difficulties became even more acute with some schools having to trawl the Commonwealth to find worthy teachers. All of this came at a time of severe budgetary restraint. At the height of the inflationary difficulties the net value of a school's income dropped by about 10% between budget setting and the start of the fiscal year and had dropped by 30% by the end of it. Many schools pleaded for donations to school funds and demanded that parents should fully equip their children for their work at school. Finance for curriculum development and classroom equipment froze. It became a challenge to maintain the status quo.

Nationally the process of Comprehensivisation was complete by 1976. A small number of Authorities held out against the process and retained both Grammar Schools and the 11+ selection system, most notably Kent. By this time two further issues began to gather concern. The first was the levelling down of standards in Comprehensive Schools. In 1976 Prime Minister James Callaghan expressed concern in a speech that "On my journeys I hear complaints from Industry that new recruits from schools do not have the basic tools to do the job that is required". It initiated a 'Back to Basics' crusade to raise standards. Secondly, the problems of youth unemployment brought the need to keep young people gainfully employed in education rather than to clutter the dole queues. There was therefore a surge of interest in post-16 education, both in school and at the local Technical College. As a result

academic ambition heightened and the uptake of University places for school leavers rose substantially from about 4% in 1960 to 14% by 1979.



At School level pupil experience evolved but slowly. In Primary Schools the empirical ideologies of Plowden infiltrated the curriculum slowly but surely. The ranks of blackboard-facing desks were ousted by islands of co-operating children and the practical elements of learning increased. Parental involvement was now more warmly welcomed and they were often invited to listen to children read and help generally with school activities. In Secondary Schools the rational subject based curriculum held sway for the core subjects. Streamed classes subject to instruction, with teacher plus blackboard (perhaps now an over-head projector) at the front, directing an abundance of note-taking and setting personalised tasks and essays was still the norm. Cracks, however, were beginning to rupture tradition. New subjects were appearing demanding more pupil interaction like Social Studies, Personal, Social and Health Education, Careers and more creative methods in Geography, History and Religious Studies. Things were, of course, different in the practical subjects. Physical Education, Woodwork, Metalwork, Domestic Science, Needlework, Technical Drawing and Art etc. were now more commonly taught in mixed ability groups, though they remained strictly aligned to gender. No girls would be found in Woodwork or Metalwork, no boys in Domestic Science or Needlework. Whole-School policies on uniform and discipline remained largely unchanged. Uniform was compulsory and corporal punishment remained the ultimate deterrent. Parental contact was more formalised and bureaucratic with annual parent's evenings and, more frequently, letters to the parents of troubled or disaffected pupils.

Changes in the ethos of education is evident in the architectural style of school buildings.

Pre-War Primary School



1970's Primary School



Pre-War Secondary School



1970's Secondary School



Solid, well-built, designed to make a  
Statement, Expensive, Permanent  
Contained, enclosed, private.  
Standard classrooms, limited specialist  
Accommodation.  
School Yards and Playground

Prefabricated, cheap, designed for  
utility and practicality. Short life.  
Open, light, public  
Specialist accommodation a-plenty  
Extensive playing fields

There is no doubt that the opportunities for children had broadened considerably. The potential for learning across a much extended curriculum had been achieved in buildings less intimidating and more amenable to their needs. However, the optimism and opportunities of the 1960's had given way to a much more sober outlook in the 1970's . Children faced a much less certain future.