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A MARKETING CRITIQUE

ON THE INDUSTRY OF

CHILDRENS FASHIONS

A MARKETING CRITIQUE ON THE

INDUSTRY OF CHILDRENS FASHIONS

(related to the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1980s)

by

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INTRODUCTION

Within this thesis I plan to examine the reasons why certain brands of childrens clothes have been so successful. My aim is to show how good marketing and media influence can be instrumental to the success of childrens fashions, having established their inherent good design.

I have aimed to illustrate this point during the first Section of the thesis through the study of Ladybird clothing; this study also shows how important an attractive trademark is to childrens fashions and how the successful marketing of a brand requires many other talents.

The second Section discusses how Ladybird were responsible for changing the sizing system for children, thereby illustrating how a successful and well-known brand name can help effect change successfully.

During the third Section I have set out to show how the media can influence the design of childrens fashions through the study of the '50s and '60s particularly. Children are very vulnerable to the media; images that are presold by the media make the marketing and selling of childrens fashions much easier.

The use of character merchandise is also very important in the promotion of childrens clothes. Accordingly, the last Section takes a look at how the success of character merchandise related garments is really the product of massive marketing and advertising techniques, which is particularly relevant and applicable to the trend towards leisurewear in childrens garments in the 1980s.

SECTION 1

Case Study of the Successful Marketing of a Childrens Fashion Brand

The harmonious blending of certain characteristics, namely style, simplicity and practicality with superior albeit competitively priced fabrics has given Ladybird an image of quality, which is renowned worldwide to this day. Everyone can recall their favourite garments. As a child, I had two, a rich scarlet dressing gown and a printed short sleeved dress. The former had a Noddy motif and the latter had a yoke piece and complementary collar trimmed with a tiny corded lace. Both of these were Ladybird designs.

A very high quality fabric, a very attractive design, combined with the ability to maintain a good appearance after many washings have contributed to Ladybird's special appeal. A Ladybird garment had character, it had the magic mix which attracted both mother and child. Ladybird was one of the leading if not the most successful and popular brands of children's clothes in the world, certainly in the 1950s and '60s. Part of their secret lay in the balance they achieved within their range of garments; few manufacturers of childrenswear have been able to equal

their success. Their success made me curious as to how it was achieved, mainly because of my own interest in the area of children's clothing, understanding to some extent the complexities involved. It remains an area with which many manufacturers toy but few achieve success, because of the necessary gradings for various styles and ages.

How did Ladybird manage to succeed where other manufacturers in Britain failed? The history of Ladybird and the Passold family is a lengthy and complex one. However, few companies could have had such an interesting and humorous story, and humour seems to be an essential ingredient in all businesses. The strength of Passold Ltd. has been attributed to the entrepreneurial spirit of Eric Passold, the eldest of the Passold brothers and founder member of Ladybird childrenswear. However, Ladybird was not founded without experience and a vast knowledge of the area it would supply. Eric Passold founded Ladybird halfway through his life with many advantages; he was well accustomed to knitted, stretch and specialist fabrics, he had secured contracts with the right business and had a knowledgeable experience of the pitfalls of the trade.

His early years in the clothing trade were necessary to the eventual success of Ladybird and are worthwhile mentioning at this stage. Eric Passold was born into the clothing trade in 1906, his ancestors had all been involved in the knitting trade. The knitting craft was

supposedly handed down through the family as was "the luck of the Ladybird". The story of how the Ladybird eventually found its way to Eric Passold is unusual and adds to the appeal of Ladybird clothing.

The Ladybird Legend

The tradition of the Ladybird began with the legend that a Ladybird appeared to Johann Adam Passold, the young son of a master weaver in the 18th Century.¹ In his dream the secret of frame knitting was revealed to him.² As the legend goes, the Passolds were destined to become knitters in Fleissen in Germany. The Ladybird story found its way through generations of Passolds. Eric Passold had a passion for motorbikes in his youth, and found the thrills of the sport irresistible and often raced, which worried both his father and grandmother. One day she explained her anxiety over his biking escapades and subsequently opened her hand and showed him a little Ladybird. She claimed to believe in its protection as had many Passolds before, and sewed it on his jacket as it was made of glass and enamel. The Ladybird was reputed to have brought the Passold family luck for more than a hundred years. Although Eric Passold regarded the story as superstitious nonsense, he liked the Ladybird and kept it sewn on his jacket where many thought it was real and tried to pick it up. The popular image of the Ladybird wasn't used by him until



Eric W. Passold, Chairman of Passold Ltd
(Cost Effectiveness, Childrens Clothing Industry,
Ladybird, A Story of Private Enterprise, 1968)

many years later when it captured hearts nationwide.

His career began when he attended a textile college where he trained really as a textile engineer as did his brother Rolf. His background really lay in textile engineering and not essentially in garment design. This inevitably had a major influence on his Ladybird garments as his choice of cloth was always very necessary to his garments.

The personal attributes he contributed to the success of his company were as I have previously mentioned, his enterprising mind, a strong traditional work ethic that is common to most Germans and an economic mind, e.g., his factory contained a recycling system and waste was unheard of. He had a brilliant mix of qualities that helped build the Ladybird concept which, as he admits himself, was initially built on flair and imagination. Subsequently other necessary factors were combined to create a successful business. He also had the necessary ability to cope with the failures of his business and to survive them.

Both Passold brothers worked as a team together but in different factories. As they already had one factory in Fleissen in Germany they purchased a second factory in Langley, Berkshire, in England, in the late 1930s, and set up production situated beside many modern factories, never thinking that they themselves would one day have one of

the most efficient factory systems in the world. While Rolf managed the factory in Fleissen, Eric took charge of the site at Langley, although it's difficult to comprehend how such a venture succeeded as communications in the 40s would not have been as efficient as they are now. However, it succeeded, through good management and constant communication, and I would imagine that one factory acted as a safeguard against the other. In the Fleissen factory knitted sweaters produced their basic source of income.³ However the Passold brothers were always quick to realise that new ideas had to be kept flowing into their system. In any business it is important to have an insight into developing new market trends for your products and Passold Ltd. anticipated the need to shift the emphasis from a somewhat ailing underwear market to a new venture which would focus on novel ideas for fabric. They discovered that a new market existed for dressing gowns, and as they had the expertise to produce the fabric for this garment, this market proved to be one which remained with them into their Ladybird days.

The Passolds had a particular aptitude for cloth manufacture which gave them the key to success where other manufacturers had failed. Even today the German fabric manufacturers produce some of the best fabrics and surface finishes on fabrics. Eric Passold decided to experiment with ripple cloth for their dressing gown range. For Passold Ltd. this new venture proved to be worthwhile.

Although new machinery had to be purchased, the actual product/garment was easy to produce. Although the ripple cloth business was a relatively new venture for them, Eric Passold was prepared to take the gamble whereas his brother was always reluctant to agree to any proposition that involved spending money. The production of their ripple cloth progressed well after many failures with different machines. The problem was finally solved by experiment and invention and by accordingly making appropriate modifications to the original machine to achieve the perfect result. The market in Britain was open to this new fabric as other manufacturers of dressing gowns were previously placing their orders abroad. Accordingly it came as a great relief for British industry to know that there would now be a manufacturer producing such a product in Britain.

Initially the Passolds worked slowly in order to capture the fabric market first. When they had succeeded with the fabric they planned to employ an experienced designer-cutter in order to manufacture the dressing gowns as well. In this way both sewing and fabric departments would be working in unison, a very modern approach. However it was very difficult to find a good designer or forewoman capable of doing what they wanted her to do, someone capable of designing, cutting and sewing a few attractive garments simple enough for mass production. No one was prepared to work for the type of salary Rolf would have

approved for what he felt was such a non productive person. When a suitable forewoman was finally employed, she did the initial cutting and sewing of a garment. Having a forewoman such as this meant that the sampling of new concepts in garments was a far easier procedure.

When sportswear garments began to come into vogue on the Continent the Passolds foresaw the trends as Rolf managed their German plant in Fleissen. The Passolds were the inventors of the sports shirt, but more significant for childrenswear, their t-shirt was a major development for comfortable leisure-wear. It was Eric Passold who brought back the idea of the t-shirt from North America where it was commonly worn. It eventually was to become one of the most important garments in a child's wardrobe. Retailers in Britain took time to adjust to it since its stark white crew neck and short sleeves were for all the world like a vest. As the t-shirt became popular, variations of it began to be manufactured by various companies. Ladybird began the rage for t-shirts before developing the idea of printing a design or character on them. This was a very novel idea at the time. Although the original t-shirt was not essentially a fashion garment, its attraction lay in the fact that it was simple, washable, unisex and inexpensive. Sportswear garments suited the fabrics they produced and were relatively simple to make up.

However, although the Passolds were always prepared to adapt to changing trends it was difficult to cope with the constant change indigenous to the fashion trade. Their biggest success to date was their unique ripple cloth which changed Langley's fortunes and laid the foundations for Ladybird childrens clothing.

The childrens-wear sector was very definitely one of Ladybird's strengths and many of the chain stores began to realise it and placed large orders with them. This was how Ladybird built such a strong business link with Marks and Spencers and Woolworths. Woolworths was very well established at the time, while Marks and Spencers were merely beginning to expand. Ladybird was making the initial move towards fashion garments, and obtained a large order for 360,000 bathing suits from Woolworths. However, they learnt one valuable lesson from this order as the garment was never pre-tested; luckily fortune shined and not one bathing suit was returned by any customers. It's difficult to believe, as the garment in question had to have its shoulder strap cut to enable it to be easily fitted by the child. Despite setbacks all problems were reconcilable, and Ladybird went on to become one of the largest suppliers of knitwear garments to the main stores.

LADYBIRD SLUMBERWEAR



19/24 (24) Slumberwear
 Cotton Napsleeve. Bagless sleeves.
 Elasticated cuffs. 'Ladybird' bottom.
 Same Red (Also in Light Blue, Lemon, 24" and 27" only)
 Each in Polythene bag
 Length: 24" 27" 30"
 Age: 11-2 2-1 3-4
 27-8 29-11 31-11 each
 Length: 33" 36" 39"
 Age: 4-5 5-6 6-7
 35-11 38-11 42-11 each

19/24 (24) Slumberwear
 Cotton Napsleeve. Bagless sleeves.
 Elasticated cuffs. 'Ladybird' bottom.
 Same Red (Also in Light Blue, Lemon, 24" and 27" only)
 Each in Polythene bag
 Length: 24" 27" 30"
 Age: 11-2 2-1 3-4
 27-8 29-11 31-11 each
 Length: 33" 36" 39"
 Age: 4-5 5-6 6-7
 35-11 38-11 42-11 each

19/24 (24) Slumberwear
 Cotton Napsleeve. Bagless sleeves.
 Elasticated cuffs. 'Ladybird' bottom.
 Same Red (Also in Light Blue, Lemon, 24" and 27" only)
 Each in Polythene bag
 Length: 24" 27" 30"
 Age: 11-2 2-1 3-4
 27-8 29-11 31-11 each
 Length: 33" 36" 39"
 Age: 4-5 5-6 6-7
 35-11 38-11 42-11 each

LADYBIRD DRESSING GOWNS



19/25 (27) Dressing Gown
 with Peter Pan Collar
 Cotton Napsleeve. Bagless sleeves.
 Elasticated cuffs. 'Ladybird' bottom.
 Same Red (Also in Light Blue, Lemon, 24" and 27" only)
 Each in Polythene bag
 Length: 24" 27" 30"
 Age: 11-2 2-1 3-4
 27-8 29-11 31-11 each
 Length: 33" 36" 39"
 Age: 4-5 5-6 6-7
 35-11 38-11 42-11 each

19/26 Dressing Gown
 Allacrylic. Band-reinforced. Machine washable. Quilted collar and cuffs.
 'Ladybird' bottom. Royal blue.
 Each in Polythene bag
 Length: 24" 27" 30"
 Age: 11-2 2-1 3-4
 27-8 29-11 31-11 each
 Length: 33" 36" 39"
 Age: 4-5 5-6 6-7
 35-11 38-11 42-11 each

The classic Ladybird dressing gown

Selling to such stores as Woolworths gave them great scope for the development of new merchandise which would utilise their best points, i.e., their ability to produce their own fabrics and their mass production mentality. Their link with Woolworths continued intermittently over the years;⁴ when Woolworths succeeded in fighting off a take-over bid in 1986 from Dixons they collaborated with Ladybird to sell their merchandise in their stores. In business it is often said that all doors should be kept open as far as possible and this is one principle that Eric Passold always kept in mind.

However although their initial business venture with Woolworths proved valuable to them, Ladybird were quick to foresee the future potential of Marks & Spencer. The particular relevance of M & S to Ladybird was that they concentrated more on textiles, they were very quality-conscious and their prices were quite high. Woolworths' business differed in that it was built on price and an endless variety of unrelated merchandise. Where previously, the Marks & Spencers chain had been frowned upon, doing business with such a fast growing chain store had now become respectable, and the Passolds endeavoured to supply all the merchandise they could to them. The most useful products the Passolds' enterprise had held for M & S was ripple cloth which they could use for childrens dressing gowns. After initial ordering, the Passolds eventually became Marks & Spencers' only supplier of

ripple cloth dressing gowns, even though their traditional policy was to have 3 suppliers for every product.⁵

Having investigated other areas of childrenswear the Passolds discovered a market for interlock childrens underwear and decided to invest in new interlock machinery designed to knit tubular widths of fabric, even though there were many other manufacturers of interlock fabric. Marks & Spencers realised that Passolds were reliable suppliers and were satisfied to place orders for childrens underwear with them in addition to their standard range of dressing gowns. The Passolds company was developing just as quickly as the Marks & Spencers family enterprise was changing from a chain store into a national institution. However, Marks & Spencers and Woolworths were not the only recipients of the Passolds' products. The Passolds also supplied merchandise to up and coming stores such as Littlewoods, Debenhams and Universal Stores. Doing business with Marks & Spencers had not hampered or confined the Passolds in any way. Instead it had helped them to get additional business. This gave them the necessary background support to begin developing a good export trade.

Clearly they had gathered vast experience of the clothing trade, and of childrenswear in particular. The time was right to look to other areas for expansion within their business. Eric Passold had always been intrigued by the



13/21 (5/31) Summer Pyjamas
 Cotton - BRL-NYLON Vandy
 design top, plain trousers. Blue.
 Cow. Packed 1-dor solid.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 13/11 14/11 each
 15/11 16/11 each



15/21 Summer Pyjamas,
 Button Shoulder
 Cotton - BRL-NYLON. Short
 sleeves. "Moose" design. Blue.
 Flare. Packed 1-dor solid.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 12/11 13/11 14/11 each



15/21 Summer Pyjamas,
 Round Neck
 Cotton - BRL-NYLON. Short
 sleeves. "Moose" design. Blue.
 Flare. Packed 1-dor solid.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 15/11 16/11 17/11 each



11/40 Summer Pyjamas
 Cotton - 100% Cotton.
 short-sleeved. "Moose" design.
 Flare. Packed 1-dor solid.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 21/11 22/11 each
 23/11 24/11 each



11/40 Summer Pyjamas
 Cotton - 100% Cotton.
 short-sleeved. "Moose" design.
 Flare. Packed 1-dor solid.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 21/11 22/11 each
 23/11 24/11 each



11/40 Summer Pyjamas
 Cotton - 100% Cotton.
 short-sleeved. "Moose" design.
 Flare. Packed 1-dor solid.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 21/11 22/11 each
 23/11 24/11 each



14/10 (2/25) Pyjamas
 Cotton, flume-lined. Machine wash-
 able. Elasticated ribbing. "Puppy-
 check" design. Blue, Gold, Pink.
 Packed 1-dor solid, each in Poly-
 theme bag. Patent U.K. 784,694.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 10/6 18/6 19/11 each



14/11 Pyjamas, Button
 Shoulder
 Cotton, flume-lined. Machine wash-
 able. "Puppy-check" design. Blue,
 Gold, Pink. Packed 1-dor solid,
 each in Polytheme bag.
 Patent U.K. 784,694.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 10/6 18/6 19/11 each



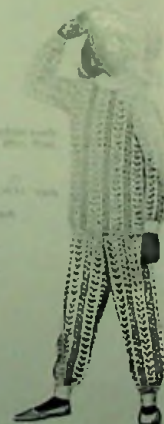
14/12 Pyjamas, Button
 Shoulder
 Cotton, flume-lined. Machine wash-
 able. "Puppy-check" design. Blue,
 Gold, Pink. Packed 1-dor solid,
 each in Polytheme bag.
 Patent U.K. 784,694.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 10/6 18/6 19/11 each



17/10 (13/25) Pyjamas
 Cotton, flume-lined. Machine wash-
 able. "Puppy-check" design. Blue,
 Gold, Pink. Packed 1-dor solid,
 each in Polytheme bag.
 Patent U.K. 784,694.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 22/6 24/11 27/6 29/11 each



17/10 Pyjamas
 Cotton, flume-lined. Machine wash-
 able. "Puppy-check" design. Blue,
 Gold, Pink. Packed 1-dor solid,
 each in Polytheme bag.
 Patent U.K. 784,694.
 Age 1 2 3 4
 22/6 24/11 27/6 29/11 each



Ladybird nightwear



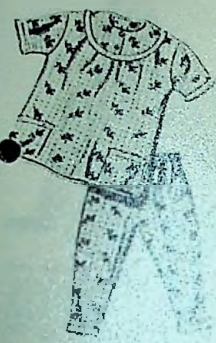
13/21 (1/11) Summer Pyjamas
Cotton / BRILNYLON 'Vanity'
design top, plain trousers Blue
Flame Packed 1-dot solid
Age: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
12/11 13/11 14/11 each



13/22 Summer Pyjamas
Button Shoulder
Cotton / BRILNYLON Short
sleeved 'Mosaic' design Blue
Flame Packed 1-dot solid
Age: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
12/11 13/11 14/11 each



13/23 Summer Pyjamas
Round Neck
Cotton / BRILNYLON Short
sleeved 'Mosaic' design Blue
Flame Packed 1-dot solid
Age: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
12/11 13/11 14/11 each



13/24 Summer Pyjamas
Cotton / BRILNYLON Short
sleeved 'Mosaic' design Blue
Flame Packed 1-dot solid
Age: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
12/11 13/11 14/11 each



13/25 Summer Pyjamas
Cotton / BRILNYLON Short
sleeved 'Mosaic' design Blue
Flame Packed 1-dot solid
Age: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
12/11 13/11 14/11 each



13/26 Summer Pyjamas
Cotton / BRILNYLON Short
sleeved 'Mosaic' design Blue
Flame Packed 1-dot solid
Age: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
12/11 13/11 14/11 each



16/10 (2/25) Pyjamas
Cotton, fleece-lined. Machine wash-
able. Elasticated ribbing. 'Puppy-
check' design. Blue, Gold, Pink.
Packed 1-dot solid, each in Poly-
thene bag. Patent U.K. 789-694.
Age: 2 4 6
16/6 18/6 19/11 each



**16/12 Pyjamas, Button
Shoulder**
Cotton, fleece-lined. Machine wash-
able. 'Guards' design top, plain
trousers. Blue, Gold, Packed 1-dot
solid, each in Polythene bag.
Patent U.K. 789-694.
Age: 2 4 6
16/6 18/6 19/11 each



**16/14 Pyjamas, Button
Shoulder**
Cotton, fleece-lined. Machine wa-
shable. 'Rabbit' design. Ge-
ometric. Packed 1-dot solid.
Patent U.K. 789-694.
Age: 2 4 6
16/6 18/6 19/11 each



17/10 (12/25) Pyjamas
Cotton, fleece-lined. Machine wash-
able. 'Puppycheck' design. Blue,
Gold, Packed 1-dot solid.
Patent U.K. 789-694.
Age: 8 10 12 14
22/6 24/11 27/6 29/11 each



17/11 Pyjamas
Cotton, fleece-lined. Machine wash-
able. 'Mosaic' design. Blue, Pink.
Packed 1-dot solid, each in Poly-
thene bag. Patent U.K. 789-694.
Age: 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40 42 44 46 48 50 52 54 56 58 60 62 64 66 68 70 72 74 76 78 80 82 84 86 88 90 92 94 96 98 100
27/6 29/11 each



Up to this point they had been pleased to see their own garments in shop windows, but at the same time a little sad that the public did not realise who had actually produced them. The public only recognised the labels of the stores that sold them. Although there was no visible reason for complaint within the Passold factories, they recognised that the prosperity of Passold Ltd. had been relying too much on that of Marks & Spencers and Woolworths. They were quick to realise that they were in a very vulnerable position and recognised that it was the right time to explore new areas.

Ladybird began to do this gradually without discarding the standard orders that were their mainstay. A decision was made to allocate no more than half their future production to chain stores, the type of business they had depended on, and to reduce the risk factor by selling the other half of their merchandise to such department stores as Selfridges, as well as other smaller speciality shops.

The Development of a Good Trade Mark

There were other well known brand names competing for the same market that Ladybird was aiming for in the early 1940s. These trade marks were backed by extensive advertising projects and enjoyed the goodwill of their customers. The variety of brands on offer included

Meridian, Vedonis, Wolsey, Cherals, Chilprufe and Bairnsweat.

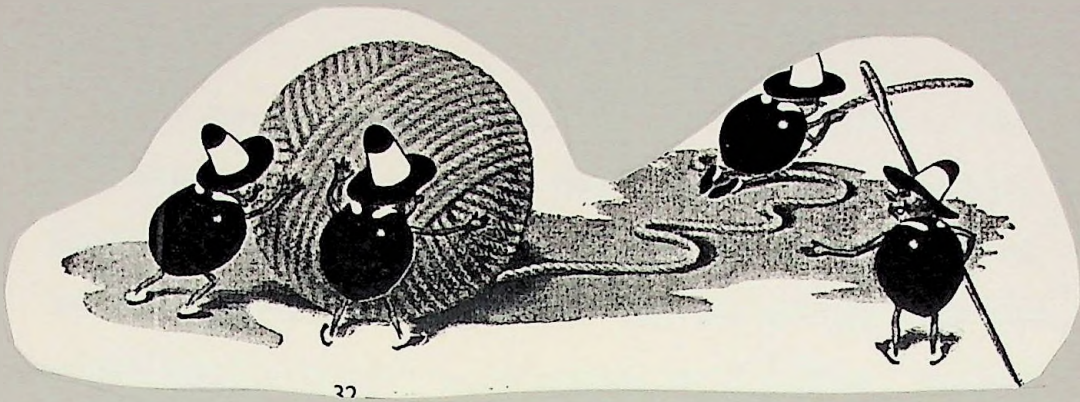
Recognising the need for an attractive trade mark, Eric Passold set about designing one. He believed it needed to be striking and distinctive, but also had to be relatively inexpensive to design. It needed to be popular with mothers and children alike. He was very conscious of the image of a trade mark when designing the Ladybird label. He also realised the importance of attracting media coverage to promote trade marks and their product. He understood that appealing to children was very important, because of this he intended that the Ladybird label would represent more than a garment but become a novelty within a garment for a child. The trade mark had to be a combination of a word and a picture, colourful and simple to weave as a label. It also needed to be internationally acceptable so that it could be used for export when the time was appropriate. After many efforts and ideas for labels had been submitted to the Patent Office, it was discovered that none of them was original. Ladybird was Eric Passold's first choice but sadly this was one of several owned by another company. However, fortune smiled when he wrote to the company in question informing them of his query with regard to the Ladybird name, and as they were not using it they sold the Ladybird name for a registration fee to Passolds.

"It was a momentous event in the history
of our firm"

Eric Passold.⁷

Eric Passold realised the enormous marketing potential of the Ladybird title not only as a trade mark but also as a concept around which many childrens stories could be written, and consequently familiarise both parents and children with the trade mark in question. To give him inspiration Eric Passold kept a colony of Ladybirds in a large jar. He also made a series of sketched studies of Ladybirds in their natural habitat and in imaginative situations. This led to the creation of many Ladybird adventure stories which would prove to be a great advertising prop for Ladybird garments in the future. Rolf, Eric's brother, was not as confident about this new venture and hoped that it would soon be forgotten before too much money was spent on it. Fortunately Eric Passold persevered, strongly convinced that some day Ladybird would be the hero of the childrenswear world.

The market Ladybird was aimed at required well-designed and attractive clothing produced en masse. Their new area of trade would be aimed at the department stores which were different from the chain stores. They realised that their merchandise would have to change to some degree as it would have to offer something extra other than the garments already selling in chain store outlets. After



The famous Ladybird label

initial investigations, Eric Passold decided that their dressing gowns seemed the best garment to commence with. Speciality shops and department stores and mail order houses needed much higher gross profit margins and consequently needed merchandise of a higher quality than that which was on sale in Marks & Spencers. Keeping the original garment and the original ripple cloth, a quilted satin collar and cuffs were added, although this created problems concerning colour matching and high price points. They toyed with new machinery to produce the quilted satin more economically, however they didn't have the necessary nylon yarns and other materials which would have produced splendid results years later. However it is fair to state that Ladybird were technologically advanced during the period in question. *ie.*

As the Ladybird trade mark was now established, the main challenge was to make it popular. Fairy tales were written about a small boy's dressing gown and a tiny Ladybird prince to enhance the trade mark and were illustrated by a well known illustrator of childrens books, Walter Trier. Over 20,000 books were published as a result of this effort. Eric Passold wasn't totally satisfied with Trier's interpretation of the Ladybird and he interviewed many artists before finding a suitable characterization.⁸

Advertisements in the trade press were very important to a new venture such as Ladybird. At the time a "Miss Guppy"

was editor of the Childrens Outfitter which was only a black and white magazine. Miss Guppy was eager to respond to Eric Passold's offer of top-class advertisements, total colour pictures of childrens clothes, flowers and Ladybirds painted by top artists, as they would make an enormous difference to the image of her magazine. As this was a novel method of advertising it attracted the attention of publishers of other journals and it also succeeded in amusing hard-headed advertising managers by incorporating drawings of Ladybirds with the illustrated garments. After a while many of the major textile magazines were selling space to Ladybird, which was about to become one the leading manufacturers in childrenswear.

The appropriate designer was required to ensure that Ladybird's garments were well designed initially. A dozen machinists and a designer were recruited and set to work on a range of exclusive childrens clothes to be sold to the high class stores in the West End. The need for a designer had been superfluous up to this point for the Passolds, but it is interesting to note how they could choose the right time to appoint one. This is still relevant to many clothing firms, particularly those involved in the childrens market; a designer is not always necessary in the initial stages, that is, not until a basic line has already been proven. The first successful garment is often the result of a business person's efforts rather than a designer's, possibly because the former's

foremost desire is to make a profit. This is how both companies I have worked with began, on a business person's initiative and eye for a garment that has a definite market potential. However, to establish a brand of quality, a company needs to incorporate style and good design in their garments.

As Ladybird produce began to expand Eric Passold felt that an office based in London would handle the growth of new orders and attract new buyers.⁹ It transpired however that the demand for Ladybird merchandise was becoming so large that buyers were coming to the Langley plant to place their orders regardless of its distance from major cities. As the London base was unnecessary it was sold at a profit and the money was invested in textile machinery.

Ladybird established a strong export trade, and profits by the mid 1960s had exceeded £1 million per annum.¹⁰ Their profits would actually have exceeded this sum by £40,000 had they ceased to export and concentrated their efforts totally on the home market. Despite these figures Ladybird continued to push overseas sales as far as possible. The British government was imposing restrictions on private enterprise and Eric Passold believed that it was destroying enterprise and promoting a climate of jealousy and resentment that "begrudged private enterprise a fair reward for extra achievement". -Eric Passold.¹¹

The Significance of Manufacturing and Production Technology

Behind the success of Ladybird lay a powerful and modern factory. It was very much independent of outside contractors, it recycled waste material, spun its own yarn, knitted, dyed, printed and finished the fabric and also completed the garments all under one roof. This independence gave Ladybird an advantage over its competitors.

When compared to other companies their staff worked far harder, they had a higher production rate and used more modern techniques. They improved the quality of their goods through constant analysis, better planning and more automation and reduced the cost of production at the same time. Such efficiency not only increased their profits, it also stimulated demand and benefitted the consumer. Profits made were constantly invested in new machinery, and because the Passold brothers were by training textile engineers they were always very aware of new technological advances. Eric Passold was a genius with machinery and often constructed a machine from various machines to achieve the mechanism he required. One such piece of ingenuity was the Pegg Passold dryer which was initially modelled from a Mecanno set which Eric Passold often used to work out his ideas. In his own words "technical supremacy is ephemeral".¹²

Both the Passold brothers searched worldwide for new manufacturing techniques which would guarantee that they stayed ahead of their competitors. They often adopted practices they saw in non-textile factories and in one instance they even implemented agricultural machinery to cut and spin nylon staple for their specialised fabric. The youngest Passold brother Ingo took a very special interest in the latest methods of knitting and heat setting synthetic fabrics. Through imagination, experience and a thorough understanding of the particular requirements of Ladybird, they succeeded as a team to make all components work together. Importing machinery was always very difficult as an import licence was needed and to get one it had to be proved that no equivalent machine could be got in Britain. Ladybird more often than not managed to prove their case, not always disclosing what use they might have in mind for their machines.¹³ Eric Passold realised the importance of constantly updating their machinery as he firmly believed that it was because of Ladybird's unorthodox method of production (the fact that the cloth and garment was completed under one roof) and machinery used that enabled them to produce such unusual merchandise for the home market and for export to eight different markets.

Politics definitely had an effect on their activities even if they preferred to ignore it. There was a general trend against private enterprise and Eric Passold felt that the

enterprising businessman would not be able to apply his ingenuity and dynamism to the best extent in building a more prosperous Britain. The Passolds, as I have already said, were entrepreneurs, pioneers and individualists but the society of the time wasn't interested in accomodating individuals, merely maintaining stability. This eventually had a certain influence on many of their decisions.

Their sales were growing rapidly in Canada and the Passolds made plans to build a factory there.¹⁴ The project had to be shelved initially as problems arose with the Bank of England concerning foreign exchange. Ladybird continued to supply all customers in the United Kingdom from Langley.¹⁵ A sales office and a warehouse for Ladybird merchandise was established at Toronto under the management of their younger brother Ingo. It took time for Ladybird to prosper initially in Canada, the biggest disadvantage being that Canada wasn't a country in which a knitting mill could make profit easily. After initial losses their annual sales in Canada began to make a profit.¹⁶

The personal aim of Eric Passold was to build the best manufacturing organization of its kind in Britain and one which would be a model of efficiency and more profitable than its competitors.¹⁷ He was determined to prove that private enterprise was worthwhile and wanted to do with childrens clothes what Ford had done with cars. However if

Ladybird was to expand to such a degree he knew that they would need to make greater profits. Expansion required larger industrial units and a wider marketing approach. Eric Passold realised that such a marketing strategy required a personal input as a well-known face had more appeal to the public than an organization that was impersonal. So it was to this end that his photograph often appeared in the press. He achieved his aim when Ladybird succeeded in dominating the childrenswear market in Britain, their exports reached new records and the number employed exceeded 4,000 and profits exceeded the one million pound mark.¹⁸

New Company Approach to Fashion

The 1960s saw the turning point for Ladybird merchandise. A stronger fashion emphasis began to appear in some ranges. This was the result of Eric stepping into the role of an adviser to Rolf, as he felt the time had come to leave the bulk of the work to someone else. Eric envisaged Ladybird continuing its concentration on their established merchandise to which Ladybird owed its success and good name and which they were able to produce better than other manufacturers. With the development of new machinery and processes he imagined the Ladybird product would improve and become more unique. He intended that Ladybird merchandise would be totally unique because of its

specialist machinery.

Rolf saw Ladybird's future in a different light, and decided to gear it more in the direction of fashion trends. He initiated the change by including into the Ladybird range a growing number of garments which he had to have manufactured outside the Ladybird factories. The disadvantages involved with this were that Ladybird were producing merchandise no longer exclusive to them which could be made countrywide by any manufacturer with a designer who had the required flair for style. Rolf concentrated on the complexities of fashion products with the help of a large computer while Eric endeavoured to align their selling methods to the changing character of their trade. They had no problem selling their new garments as long as Ladybird had an established team of agents as well as the brand.

Rolf had been very accurate in anticipating the right moment for change within the Ladybird system. As he was the younger of the two he may have been more aware of progression towards a more fashionable element in childrens clothes. Although when Ladybird was in the conceptual stage, it was Rolf who was reluctant to support it, he had obviously learned since that time that enterprise sometimes calls for dramatic change. As a result of the changes instigated by Rolf as Managing Director, Ladybird's range of products now covered every

kind of children's garment, from babies clothes to girls dresses, socks and underwear to bathing costumes and raincoats.¹⁹

The Passolds wanted to ensure that the public could buy Ladybird's produce everywhere at the same lowest price possible. To achieve this they began to map out a plan for a nationwide chain of childrenswear shops and fixed the retailers' mark-up at 45% to 50%,²⁰ which gave a fair return. However it was difficult to keep such a low percentage as some large organizations began developing their own trade marks at the expense of the manufacturers' brands. It was Eric Passold who foresaw a trade mark war looming in the distance and was determined to protect the Ladybird brand. Even though the trade mark was too well established to be in danger from such large enterprises he realised how vital it was to their business. The Passolds also recognised that if it were taken over by a distributor's mark, Ladybird would "lose their link with the public, its goodwill and their independence".²¹ Realising that they had to look to the future to avoid such a disaster they began to investigate the possibility of merging with another company.

By 1963 Ladybird had grown into a group of companies, they included Chilprufe, famous makers of top quality childrens underwear, the Belfast Collar Company and Templeton & Sons of Glasgow. Passold Ltd. now contained two trade marks,

Ladybird and Chilprufe as well as its subsidiaries. By the mid 60s Ladybird had become a household name. Ladybird had also become one of the leading and best known labels in childrenswear worldwide.

In 1965/66 a merger between Coats Paton and Baldwin was agreed.²² Coats Paton owned the Scotch Wool shops and Eric Passold saw in them the opportunity of supplying the public direct with Ladybird garments if they became Ladybird childrenswear shops. It was primarily for this reason that Coats Paton were chosen rather than Courtaulds. However the conversion of Scotch Wool to Ladybird was never made, much to the disappointment of Eric Passold. What also disappointed him most about the merger was the lack of imagination of the Coats employees. Although they realised that Ladybird had been created by flair they felt that "flair was too intangible, too elusive for Coats Paton Baldwin", and planned to replace it by skilful administration.²³ Eric Passold remained adamant that Ladybird could not function as successfully without a great deal of imagination. Following initial problems, both companies combined their skills to make the merger work. Ladybird continued to grow and prosper, which is evident in the report on their annual sales. Passold Ltd. is still registered under the List of British childrenswear manufacturers. In 1986 they were supplying to Woolworths and were also supplying Boots stores.

In concluding this section it is fair to say that Ladybird were so successful because they incorporated a variety of skills into their childrenswear ranges. These included the production of their own fabrics and garments, a high efficiency rate in terms of production and a very business like and economic attitude. Most of all they had the necessary flair and imagination required to produce novel yet practical ideas for the design of childrens garments as well as their promotion.

Although I have contacted many British stores, I could find none presently stocking the Ladybird brand. Neither Boots nor Harrods sell their garments in their baby or childrens sections. It is possible that they have either ceased manufacturing childrens clothes in Britain and manufacture in another country for economic reasons, or they no longer use the Ladybird brand.

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SECTION 2

The Sizing of Childrens Garments

British Standards Institution (B.S.I.)

The sizing of childrens garments had always been very confusing. Until 1965 size labels had offered a nomenclature that embraced age, height and girth, which was a confusing list of numbers and letters. There was rarely a connecting link between the various garments of underwear and outerwear to assist the customer. Universal standards were definitely needed to make it easier for potential buyers.¹

The British Standards Institution (B.S.I.) staged many conferences in response to the obvious inadequacies of the existing sizing system which I shall discuss again. Before these meetings arose extensive research had been previously carried out by the U.S. Government which had involved measuring over 147,000 youngsters. The results of this survey were published in 'Body Measurements of American Boys and Girls for Garment and Pattern Construction'. The system proposed in this book linked height and girth, however it was many years before the United Kingdom was to see its equivalent. The B.S.I. decided to put the American information to use, partly

because it would prove too expensive for the B.S.I. to carry out their own investigations in schools in Britain.² However a small survey had been done by Berlei Foundations and its findings proved similar to those in the American survey. Comparisons can be seen in the charts of the difference (if any) between American and British children.

It wasn't until 1965 that the suggestion of height being the leading factor in childrens sizing was taken seriously. Before Ladybird even began to introduce their system of sizing, another firm, Sharp Perrin & Co. Ltd., who were well established in the childrenswear section, had developed their own system. This was based on age and was used as a guide for their customers and by a number of manufacturers and chain stores.³ Age however had proved unreliable as a guide because children can vary enormously within the one age sector. Sharp Perrin & Co. divided their information into 3 groups, offering data on outerwear measured by length, outerwear measured by girth and underwear and nightwear as one.⁴ They failed however to develop information on garments for older girls where fashion changes made sizing difficult.

Ladybird's Influence on Changes in the Sizing System

when This system was widely used until Ladybird declared that they believed height was the key element to the sizing of childrens clothes. Ladybird had made a study of various systems in use in other countries and height was shown to be the most significant factor. They were not alone in their dissatisfaction with the standard system of sizing by age; many retailers also found it hopeless due to the major impact of stretch fabrics and the spreading influence of fashion (i.e. stretch fabrics needed a different approach when it came to pattern shapes).

The Continental system operated via the metric system, and in 1965 it was not yet in use in Britain so adjustments were needed. Size steps also had to be adjusted to allow for British stature. A sizing system based on height, as Ladybird proposed, would mean that height steps would have to be carefully graded according to the child's growth steps.⁵ Such a proposal would probably have had little effect had it not been made by Ladybird. Their brand name was universally recognised and renowned for its advanced ideas and promotion. Their system proposed 2-inch height intervals for the infant stage which finishes at age 5; thereafter 5-inch height rises were used. This system was similar to that being used in Switzerland for ages 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14.

A large number of garments were included under the 5-inch rise system which did not allow for variations.⁶ Therefore extra sizes at 6cm intervals had to be introduced. It would have been impossible to make provisions for all the slight differences in childrens figures, as reference to height alone did not allow for individual variations in girth. For example if a child was slim for his/her age, a size below the accurate height measurement was tried.

The system of nomenclature caused minor headaches for Ladybird as their labels had to be changed, however it didn't affect the process of pattern cutting and grading. To ensure the success of their scheme Ladybird did three things:

- 1: They provided shops with wall charts showing height measurement which facilitated accurate visible measurement for mothers who might not be familiar with their child's heights. Also it was hoped that this system would allow mothers to know their child's height and in turn enable them to shop without the child.

- 2: To publicise their system further, Ladybird decided to provide a paper version of the height measurements and received 60,000 applications for it.

3: They also distributed a colourful explanatory booklet to all their retail outlets.⁷

Because of the size of Ladybird's operation it had the means to ensure that consumers were aware of what was happening through massive advertising programmes. This new system was regarded as so revolutionary at the time that it made headline news worldwide. However because it was such a revolutionary answer to an age old problem many chain stores were reluctant to invest their money where success wasn't yet proven.

There is no doubt that Ladybird's system would have succeeded sooner if it had received the full support of the B.S.I. It has been suggested that if the B.S.I. had been more open to working alongside an outside company such as Ladybird, they would have had the necessary awareness of production and distribution problems. Nevertheless Ladybird had little difficulty in establishing their new system (sizing by height) as the company had such a large production output. As soon as the system proved successful many producers began to adapt it to suit their own systems. Those heavily dependent on their export trade and specialist stores such as the developing Mothercare shops saw its advantages and were among the many to use it.⁸

The B.S.I. could not ignore the fact that Ladybird's method of sizing was heavily influencing industry. However it wasn't until four years after the Ladybird system began that the B.S.I. circulated draft proposals for a revised system for childrenswear, including infant boys and girls, and girls over five years.

Initially it seemed that the proposals would be effective as they linked age, height and weight, but the B.S.I. and the N.C.W.A. could not agree on the system's basis (age or height). The N.C.W.A. felt that the public were too familiar with age as a sizing symbol to accept a sudden change to size by height. It was eventually agreed that the age figure would serve as a size number which at least would have some significance and avoid the possibility of misinterpretation. It was recommended that groups of garments would be labelled, i.e. size/weight, size height or size/weight body/waist measurement.⁹ However despite many efforts a final decision on the basis for all sizing, age or height, was continually postponed and major retail groups and chain stores had grown impatient with the delay.

As height was by now the main system in use by many manufacturers they decided to notify their retailers that they were switching to height-related systems regardless of the B.S.I. All credit for the success of this new system can clearly be attributed to Ladybird. With regard

to the B.S.I. and the N.C.W.A., it wasn't until 1970 that B.S.3728¹⁹⁷⁰ was published officially suggesting that age was the basis for the sizing system linked to height and weight.¹⁰ They did agree that sizing by height was the best system. However it was their opinion that such a system must be easily understood by the public and factory staff and most important it would demand the full support of industry.

It is worthwhile mentioning however that no one method of sizing is ever infallible, no human body will match all requirements specified to a given age or height, they can only serve as a guide. This I realise myself from developing blocks and patterns for children to an accurate height particularly, often when fitted, adjustments still have to be made. I have found height serves as a better guideline than age but that the corresponding changes in girth are not always in proportion. As growth in the stature of children, girls more than boys, is fairly consistent throughout childhood, the principle of sizing by height would seem the best system to date. According to a book on sizing by Philip Runick, one of the most common mistakes to be found in childrens sizing is "the division of sizes according to age". "Sizing by age may be useful as a rough guide from the consumer's viewpoint, but if used as the basis for a sizing system it leads to many complications."¹¹ Some might question the equal importance of girth in relation to height for sizing. However it has

been observed that childrens clothes are worn much looser,
so in practice garment fitting for the girth is less
important than for height.

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SECTION 3

Media and the design of childrens clothing in the 1950s and '60s

Eric Passold has been quick to recognise the success of marketing techniques used to promote the Walt Disney characters for instance, and the potential of character merchandise during the 1950s and '60s. The Ladybird character itself is a shining example. The association of merchandise with characters likely to appeal to children continued and grew although it was clear that no extra inducement was necessary to sell such goods, they literally couldn't be produced quick enough. The most powerful and successful in terms of sales appeal were Walt Disney characters. The craze for Walt Disney's cartoons began in March 1940 with Pinocchio, however many more cartoons and films followed in the '50s and '60s featuring various different characters. These included 'Gulliver's Travels' and again Pinocchio which featured 12 different characters which were offered to manufacturers for use under licence.¹ Retailers began to display Disney merchandise in their shop windows following the large success of such films which provided "Label lure" on childrens clothing. In fact long before a film was shown licensing arrangements would have been made with producers

and manufacturers of various suitable childrens garments. There were many characters who became extremely popular with children during the '50s and '60s, the more obvious included Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Davy Crockett, Dan Dare and Mary Poppins.

"Just William" became the hero of younger boys in the '50s when the B.B.C. began a series based on the Richmal Crompton books. Subsequently a firm producing man-made fibres signed up the child star Dennis Gilmore to promote boys casual wear. The image he portrayed was ideal for casual but hardwearing clothes. His wicked grin and general boldness ideally conveyed their boy-resistant toughness.

The style of childrens clothing was changing rapidly during the '50s as various media personalities began to influence childrens attitudes and eventually effect a move towards more fashion-conscious clothing for children. The question in the minds of most manufacturers of childrens clothes in the late '50s was whether or not to follow this strong lean towards fashion. The answer lay with what the market required, i.e., what the consumer wanted and young girls particularly were no longer happy to wear styles similar to their younger sisters.² Instead they wanted similar versions of what film stars were wearing.



The influence of adult fashion on childrens clothes
in the 1960s

Brigitte Bardot was one such star, who was responsible for making gingham such a popular material for dresses with a matching scarf. The young girls preferred the demure black and white to the sugar almond pinks or blues and greens also worn by women. The main change in girls dress in the '50s was this swing away from formality to a casual look - polo-neck jumpers and jeans were worn outside school hours; skirts followed the trend towards the fuller skirt. By 1953 the silhouette for younger girls was the full circular skirt with a close fitting bodice.³

The '50s paved the way for the great changes that the '60s would bring in the attitudes towards childrenswear. In reality it was children who were changing and inevitably this would soon be reflected in their dress. In a sense we could draw one conclusion at this stage that fashion and media are closely linked. Since children were providing such a large market for childrens clothing they became prime targets for the media. Idolisation of film stars or characters proved the vulnerability of children to the influence of media. Marketing and selling the dress and image of the stars commercially to youngsters was easy as in a sense it was presold by the media. This also applies to character-related merchandise for childrens garments.

The Beatles obviously had a major influence on childrens styles, more particularly on boys' than on girls' clothing. Although there was no true equivalent for girls

to have such a dramatic influence on girls' clothing, the Beatles trends were followed and adapted by other female stars to suit their own clothes. These feminine versions in turn influenced the girls' clothing section. During the '60s it was more the young designers who revolutionised childrens clothing rather than larger firms. It was very difficult for them to produce very fashionable childrens clothing en masse and make it profitable at the same time. This situation gave young designers their opportunity and they turned London into an international centre for childrenswear.

The 1960s

The film "Baby Doll" had a similar phenomenal effect on girls' clothes, as it did on young womens styles at the beginning of 1960. The empire line, already popular for girls, fitted in well with the emerging baby doll styles.⁴ Party dresses for girls suited this style well but most affected was the area of nightwear, as it brought a frivolous air into a previously mundane and neglected area.

It is necessary to mention here that new synthetic fabric mixes were responsible for successfully achieving the fresh and light appearance of the baby doll image in nightwear particularly. Brushed synthetics appeared dainty



The baby-doll influence on nightwear in the 1960s

when frills and trimmings were added which previously had been placed on heavy brushed interlocks. On these fabrics frills lost their effect and appeared heavy. Nylon quilting inspired many new designs for dressing gowns through from infants to teens. Nylon had the advantages over wool of being easily washable by hand or machine, and quick drying, both allowing full freedom of design. When fabrics such as brushed nylon and nylon candlewick were invented they gave designers further scope without the worry of weight or washability. Brushed nylon had the added advantage of enabling nightwear to be equally dainty in winter and summer thus continuing the pretty baby doll style, i.e., the shorter 3/4-length sleeves and the pedal pusher length in pyjama bottoms.⁵

In the same way that casual wear had taken the place of formal clothing, co-ordination began replacing separates in the 1960s. Synthetic fabrics and synthetic fabric mixes were responsible for the success of co-ordinated clothing for children, mainly because of their wash and wear abilities. The stability of man-made fabrics aided the advance of fast dyes which in turn helped promote proper colour matching. As both heavy and light clothing manufacturers had moved closer together, working uniformly on both coats and dresses, this brought about what designers called 'the total look'.

This look of co-ordinated garments reached the height of its popularity during the Autumn of 1966 and brought with it a vast amount of vivid colours and new design concepts.⁶ The image included long jumpers to the hips worn with tights and colour co-ordinated skirts and jackets. The skinny rib sweaters were worn with hipster skirts. French polos were worn with long trousers with permanent centre creases. The success of colour co-ordination within the total look gave no indication of the amount of research built into the dyeing and blending of natural and synthetic fibres of various weights and finishes required for co-ordinated garments.

However the one snag involving co-ordination is the price factor, as few mothers are prepared to pay the cost of a total outfit. Nevertheless the young designers of the '60s were received well by the media who gave their work vast coverage. Although difficulties arose when their styles were put into production, it was those same designers who eventually revolutionised the junior clothing scene.

There are two female designers worth mentioning who had a dramatic influence on subteens and teenagers clothing from 1965 on in Britain. They were Cathy McGowan and Kiki Byrne. Cathy McGowan was in her early '20s and her dress and image were typical of the 1960s. She was another TV idol of the time, a presenter on a music pop programme called 'Ready, Steady, Go.' As most of her outfits were her

own designs she decided to market them under her own label for 8-15 year olds.⁷ The styles were very contemporary and fashionable, almost radical. They were very popular with the subteens and consequently many were copied. Cathy McGowan had the advantage of the power of the media behind her ideas and a weekly stage to display her ideas. The other successful designer for this age group was Kiki Byrne who had the backing of Cathy McGowan's manufacturer. Although her collections were very daring, she succeeded in including the appropriate amount of styling without detracting from the youth of the wearer.

When we look at examples of childrens clothing in the '60s there is no doubt about the influence of adult fashion trends on their styles. Fashion was continually reaching a younger age bracket. The '60s was an era that was particularly influential on young people and attitudes changed as television screens had the power to broadcast to a waiting audience of adults and children.

Brand Names in the 1960s

Brand names began to change as dramatically as childrens styles had in the late '60s. Trade names were reflecting this change in the childrens scene. They had become more direct and catchy and adult. Some prime examples were "Mark One", "His Nibbs", "Rave", "Kinky", "Gear", "Date

Setters" and "Minitogs", which incidentally was being used again in 1986 by Marks and Spencers for a childrens range of Walt Disney related garments.

The names of boutiques changed to more modern ones such as Kids Agogo, Guys and Dolls, Small Fry, Kids Togs etc.⁸ The image of a trade name is always relevant to the marketing potential of a garment, as I have already discussed with regard to Ladbybird. However, the image of children changed during the '60s, in fact they were now referred to as kids rather than children. The '60s was probably the ideal decade for adult styling to be adapted for children as the general image then was often stark and had a simplicity of line necessary for the scale of childrens garments.

Although there is little evidence of Walt Disney having had quite as large a following in the '60s as they did in the '40s and '50s, it is difficult to ascertain their success in the decade in relation to childrenswear, although they did have a sizeable portion of the market. When the film "Mary Poppins" was released in the mid '60s, the expert Walt Disney marketing team produced a range of merchandise tying up with the film's characters.⁹ However the 1980s has witnessed the modernisation of the Disney range of characters, now featured on a variety of popular products, particularly on childrens garments.

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SECTION 4

The 1980s, a changing lifestyle and its relevance to character merchandise.

Because of the changing lifestyles of the 1980s, sportswear/leisurewear has become the preferred dress particularly for children. The very nature of leisurewear fabrics and the design of leisurewear itself lends itself particularly well to the inclusion of character merchandise by designers in industry. The Walt Disney company is a good example of the use of character designs for leisurewear. In fact they anticipated the trend by producing some new bold graphics prints suitable for both t-shirting and sweatshirting and other new sportswear fabrics. These designs as well as some great new Disney characters have given Walt Disney new avenues to explore particularly within the areas of childrenswear. Many Irish chain stores sell Disney-related garments in their childrens departments. They include various sweatshirt styles, reversible and padded, t-shirts and nightwear.

As the Disney characters are licensed, companies must buy the licence to use the characters they require for their particular garment. Because of the price involved, Disney garments are nearly always mass produced to make full use

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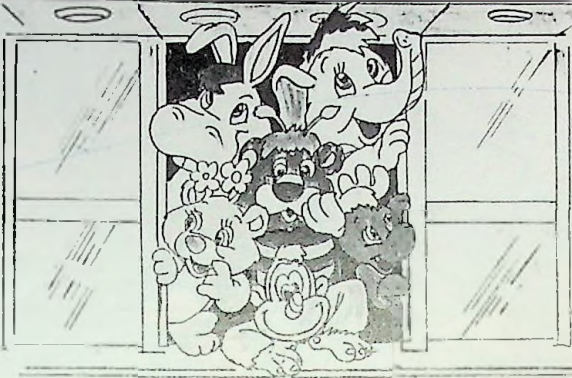
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The use of Disney characters for childrens leisurewear

of the licence. Until very recently this meant that Disney garments were relegated to the lower end of the market, however although this has previously been the case, Walt Disney characters are appearing regularly in prestigious childrens and adult boutiques. Following in the footsteps of the Mickey and Co boutiques in New York, they have now opened in Harvey Nicholls and Harrods, featuring more upmarket items.¹ Similar boutiques have apparently been planned for location throughout the U.K. and Ireland.

The strength of Walt Disney is that they are continually investigating new characters as well as updating their classic characters. Their films influence every child who sees them and will naturally want to wear the garment associated with the character in question. When one considers that such character merchandise is licensed by the Disney company to companies worldwide, one begins to understand the huge effect a successful brand name can have on garments through the use of media, films and massive advertising promotions.

The business of character merchandising is a fascinating process in the 1980s. There are certain personalities that enjoy tremendous popularity and instant recognition. "Licensing means that you are dealing with what is legally defined as a property".² This means that the character belongs to someone else and as a licensee you are only licensing it from them. It is really up to the company to



The appeal of Disney characters for childrens nightwear

make it work once they have chosen the character, and that requires a combination of skills, creative execution and timing.

In 1987 it has become increasingly evident to Walt Disney that the consumer is more demanding with regard to their choice of character on a garment.³ Children particularly want a realistic and true representation of their favourite hero. Basically a child will not want a Mickey Mouse sweatshirt unless the character is portrayed exactly as he or she has seen it on television or cinema. This is very true as while I was working with Babygro, one of their designers was working on a Disney garment and explained that this was why any character representation must be so accurate. This is why any artwork completed on Disney characters by licensed Disney companies must be sent to Walt Disney headquarters to be drawn exactly. In Ireland the holders of the franchise for Walt Disney also have to send all Disney-related artwork to Disney headquarters. The main artwork is done in their studio in Dublin, however.

A fresh look has been brought to traditional characters through exciting new artwork as the fashion swing within the industry is back to the traditional characters with proven appeal. The Walt Disney company believes in bringing its properties to as wide a cross section of the public as possible. To achieve this the company manages

massive promotional support for each, through extensive media coverage - newspaper and other competitions, airship displays, character appearances, in-store activities, Christmas grottoes and tie-ins with major organisations.

Over the last 3 years the apparel area has offered the Disney company a great challenge. Ranges of existing designs using animation to its fullest advantage gave Mickey and Co a modern new feel. The children's area was of particular interest and garments that had not been seen in the U.K. before, such as the reversible padded sweatshirt, were introduced. Similar designs were adapted from adult styles to be used for childrens clothes, taking Disney into the high fashion market. In this way the days of the minute, indelible character head on a child's t-shirt had gone and Marks & Spencers were quick to realise this.⁴ They anticipated the growing popularity of strong design. In the childrens departments they recognised that fun and bright design was the key to character merchandise and co-ordinated stories of leisurewear and nightwear took over.



The appeal of Disney characters for childrens nightwears

The Inclusion of Walt Disney-Based Childrens Ranges in Major Stores

It was in 1986 that the Marks & Spencers chain decided to increase its commitment to Walt Disney characters as previous Walt Disney based ranges had sold well for them. In Spring of 1986 Marks & Spencers introduced Walt Disney characters into their exclusive ranges of clothing and accessories for children, including the regular sweatshirt and t-shirt as well as nightwear and dresses. 1986 saw major promotion of Disney-related garments in all their stores stocking childrenswear and they proved very successful.

One of M & S spokespeople Ania Nicholson, reporting on the success of the promotion, stated that

"Disney characters are proving very popular with children - in fact children are nagging their parents to buy them and M & S are just responding to that demand."⁵

The characters featured in these ranges for 3-12 year olds were Mickey and Minnie, newly formed characters from Walt Disney. The mass appeal of Walt Disney characters suits the volume needed by M & S to maintain price points and this benefits Walt Disney by increasing their popularity and demand for their characters.

Marks & Spencers were not the only store to promote Walt Disney ranges; Mothercare, the specialist childrens and mothers shops, also did likewise. In the Summer of 1986 they launched an extensive range of childrens summer clothing, featuring the updated Mickey Mouse. This was their first major commitment to Disney; the range included sweatshirts, trousers, jackets, cardigans, hats, shoes, shorts and t-shirts and was titled Mickey Togs. The previous year Mothercare launched an Autumn/Winter range under the label of Minitogs which had been very successful for them.

According to Mothercare's Marketing Director Tony Maynard, their link with Disney is highly relevant because Disney characters are universally known and they appeal to a wide age band.⁶ Because of this, Mothercare see the Disney connection as a way of drawing in older children as their image is traditionally associated with the very young child. In 1981 a range of childrens clothing was introduced to Mothercare outlets under the official brand name of "Mouse gear". The range was very well co-ordinated to create greater impact and appeal. (It is interesting to note that Mothercare outlets are available to 78% of adult shoppers and a quarter of these shop there, making it by far the most important childrenswear outlet, and more popular than any other specialist clothing outlet in the U.K. except Burtons).



Minitogs - the range introduced by Mothercare in
 Autumn/Winter 1985



Example of Walt Disney-related character merchandise
(Mothercare Catalogue Autumn/Winter 1985)

DASH is another company involved with Walt Disney in the U.K. A relatively new company, they have followed the trend towards childrens 'weekend leisurewear', a product of the '80s. 'Totally Minnie' is the character they have chosen to suit their product range. They claim to have selected Disney for the same reasons as many companies do, because of their characters' appeal, but also because of the vast marketing strategies of the Disney organisation.⁷

Walt Disney's Methods of Advertising

The Walt Disney company have many ways of advertising, some of which I have already mentioned briefly. A parallel can be drawn between the importance they attach to novel advertising and that of Ladybird clothing. Both used vast promotions to advertise their products but more important they both realised the need to attract the attention of the children themselves.

The Disney company do this through the Disney Magazine, a full colour comic aimed at children aged from 5-12 years; its popularity is obvious because of the vast quantities that sell. Such a magazine serves two purposes, it promotes Disney garments as well as selling a magazine. In this way they are promoting fun and games in their magazines as well as their garments. Ladybird used a similar marketing technique which I have mentioned in the



Mr Men and Little Miss - the first direct character
merchandise used by Babygro

first chapter. They promoted their label through adventure stories and books for children to create an image for their product. They also produced a product range catalogue to be dispersed to companies who bought from them. Both companies used a novel approach to the advertising of childrens clothing and are prime examples of how media coverage can effect the success and popularity of childrens clothes.

It is no surprise then that both companies have now joined together to publish a series of childrens books called Disney Delights. Seven titles have been launched already. The books are produced in the traditional Ladybird format and are selling extremely well. Both companies concerned realise the potential for two such well known trade names. Brian Coton of Ladybird believes the two companies make a perfect match.

"The combination of Disney and Ladybird is a very good one and to have the Disney name on the cover sells itself."

Babygro is another company which has become involved with character merchandise in recent times. The chosen characters were Mr. Men and Little Miss, introduced in 1987 into exclusive ranges of childrenswear. This was Babygro's first involvement with direct character merchandise. Although Babygro is renowned for babywear it has now entered the older childrens market, offering

apparel suitable for birth through to age 14 years. This now gives the company greater flexibility in focusing licensed character merchandise in the varying market sectors.

Mr. Eric Peacock, chairman of the company, said of the move:

"Babygro has been keeping a close watch on the growth of opportunities in the field of licensed character products. A major consideration has been the high consumer awareness and recall levels identified in our continuous attitude surveys."⁸

However, as manufacturers, Babygro have produced individual garments and ranges on a contract basis for large retail outlets, similar to Ladybird. These include Marks & Spencers, Boots and Dunnes Stores amongst others. Whilst working as a student for Babygro in Kirkaldy, Fife, Scotland, they were already using the Disney characters for the production of individual garments for such stores. In this way the licence was given to the retail outlet and not the manufacturer, in this case Babygro.

Whilst working for Babygro, there was great interest in co-ordinating their ranges with other products such as toys, books and games. The idea of developing the concept of a co-ordinating nursery was also being discussed.

Recently, there has been a general trend amongst childrens clothing stores particularly as well as manufacturers to extend and co-ordinate their garments with other products. This is particularly relevant to character-related merchandise such as Disney products.

Boots stores have recently developed a new business venture called Childrens World around this theme. The concept is specifically aimed at customers shopping for children with children. This store is designed to offer a total package providing everything for children under one roof and in a comfortable setting. All departments within the store stock co-ordinating merchandise to create a theme, this includes shoes, clothing, books, toys, games, childrens bedroom and nursery furniture and accessories with emphasis on colour combination and breadth of choice. Mothercare stores offer a similar service as that offered by Boots, often featuring particular Disney characters on products as well as on their garments for children.

In this year alone, 1988, two major events will influence the childrens clothing industry in Ireland, one historical and another sports-related. These of course are the Dublin Millenium and the Olympics. The former has already created a market for two manufacturers that I have worked with. Both of these have used Millenium-related symbols, one through the medium of print and the other through embroidery within their sports and leisurewear ranges for

children as well as adults. The latter has always excited designers to create existing childrens ranges around this theme. Because of this, sportswear for the young market this Spring (1988) will mean extensive business. The themes predicted include the Olympic and American Baseball themes dominating with motifs and logos in the bold colours of the flag. As a large percentage of children are followers of sport and sport heroes, Olympic based ranges should sell well.

In the 1980s the emerging trends have and still are actually placing a strong emphasis on leisurewear. The appearance has become more informal, fabrics are more colourful and lighter and separates can be mixed and matched.⁹ I believe these points are all relevant to childrenswear as sportswear/activitywear is proving to be one of the most visibly expanding areas of the clothing industry in the 1980s.

"Sportswear is a good example of an area of clothing satisfying the aspirational fantasies of consumers".¹⁰

Evidence shows that in general it is not the better off but the worse off who buy the top brands of leisurewear. The quality of a sportswear fabric, even a sweatshirting fabric, will affect the appearance and price of a fashionable leisure suit. Sportswear fabrics although they are plain in comparison to high class fabrics also have



Example of upmarket sportswear

varying levels of quality in their fabric content. This change in lifestyle is the result of a number of economic and social shifts. Customers are no longer as concerned about durability in clothing, and warmer working, school and home environments have placed less emphasis on warmth in clothing. Thus fabrics for childrens garments can be much lighter and also man-made.



Sports-related leisurewear for children

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe it is correct to say, as illustrated in Sections 1, 2 and 3, that clearly marketing, advertising and the general influence of the media are all vital to the overall success of childrens fashions. Many other talents are also required for the success of a business, as the study of Ladybird in the first Section has shown.

In the 1980s marketing and promotion are recognised as being possibly more important than they were in the early days of Ladybird. Ladybird were obviously ahead of their time, and are a model business for other companies in the area of childrens clothes.

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