

MEMBERS' FORUM

Forum No 15.

HOW GAMES ARE MADE

Gareth Williams

I recently obtained a copy of "The Strand Magazine", for June 1895, because of an article titled "How Games are Made". The article concentrates on the workshop of F.H.Ayers situated at Aldersgate, in the City of London. It must have been one of the largest companies in the country making equipment necessary for the games of the time i.e. cricket, bowls, tennis, football, archery, croquet, billiards and chess.

Here is the report on the manufacture of chess sets:

"Perhaps, the most important branch of work carried on in the immense turners' shop is the making of chess, which is shown in our photograph. Sets of chess are made of box-wood, rose wood, ebony, bone and animal and vegetable ivory; they range in price up to £20, and are sent to all classes in every part of the world, from Oriental monarchs to lonely Canadian settlers. In the manufacture of chess and draughts, twenty men are regularly employed; and I stayed for a few moments to watch one of these who was carving heads. The first tool he used was a circular saw; and with this he cut little bits from a big piece of rough ebony. He then mounted a toothed wheel 1.5" in diameter, set it revolving swiftly, and held one of the bits of ebony to it. Gradually one could see that by deft manipulation the familiar head was growing under the turner's hand; another and smaller wheel was presently mounted, so on until the last circular saw had no greater diameter than the head of an average pin. There were seventeen changes of tools, but the entire process took only no more than a quarter of an hour. An expert man can produce four dozen heads per day. Lest any of my readers should marvel at the mention of vegetable ivory, I hasten to explain that it is a sort of solid Brazil nut, which is bought in sacks by the ton."

The article then continues, dealing with playing cards. There is also an interesting comment on ivory, most of which was being used for making billiard balls. Some ivory came from Asia, but the greater part came from Africa. It states "In fact, a large quantity of what is nominally East Indian is really African, for it is sent from Zanzibar and Mozambique to Bombay, and then shipped to England. Some comes from Burma, Siam, Ceylon, Sumatra and Java. My informant reckons that fifty years hence there will be practically no ivory at all, the present annual mortality of African elephants, for ivory export, being about 65,000".

The "informant" would probably have been correct in his forecast if it had not been for the discovery of synthetic plastics which has replaced the use of ivory in the production of many objects, such as snooker and billiard balls.

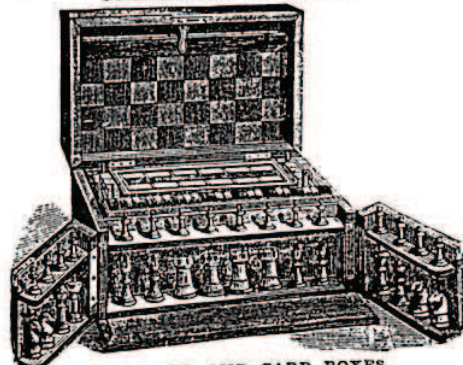


MAKING CHESS-MEN.

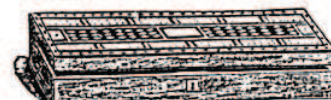
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ALL SPORTS & GAMES.

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