A yellow teddy bear is the central focus of the image, sitting upright against a solid black background. The bear has a soft, plush texture and is looking directly forward. Its arms are slightly out to the sides, and its legs are spread apart. The bear's eyes are small and dark, and its nose is a simple black dot. The overall appearance is that of a classic, well-loved stuffed toy.

**WENDY BOSTON
AND
THE BEARS**

**The History of the
Toy Industry in
Abergavenny & Crickhowell**

*By Alison Newsam and Liz Davies
with the Introduction and Afterword by
Charlotte Cory*



<https://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk/>

First edition published 1998

Copies of the 1998 paper edition of *Wendy Boston and the Bears* are held in the Gwent Archives collection, Monlife Heritage collections and the Monmouthshire Libraries collection.

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This 2026 digital edition of *Wendy Boston and the Bears* contains all the original text of the 1998 edition, which has now been rearranged into chapters. There are some additions made by Abergavenny Local History Society where more information has become available and alternative images have been used where it feels appropriate, including a number of colour images. Charlotte Cory suggested she update her original introduction and you'll find her new contribution added as an Afterword.

In August 2025 Alison Newsam asked Abergavenny Local History Society for advice on how best to get the original *Wendy Boston and the Bears* reprinted. This led to a meeting that then led, with the help of a number of other people and organisations, to Abergavenny Local History Society updating the book and re-publishing it as this e-book.

Abergavenny Museum (Monlife Heritage) gave our researcher generous access to the Wendy Boston scrapbooks in their collection and provided additional images. Wendy Boston toys feature in the 2026 *Toys Collected* exhibition at Abergavenny Museum. Crickhowell District Archive Centre provided information about and images of the Crickhowell factory.

Everyone Abergavenny Local History Society approached for help went out of their way to provide information and memories. When Wendy Boston toys were mentioned on social media and elsewhere, it was apparent that many people still possess, and love, their Wendy Boston toys. Even so long after the demise of the business, the mere mention of Wendy Boston toys can bring a smile to people's faces and memories of childhood happiness.



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Introduction

by Charlotte Cory

Wendy Boston



On my first birthday in September 1957, I was given a huge cardboard box with a cellophane lid. Inside was a bright yellow teddy bear as big as myself with a huge sky blue bow at his chin and an inexorable grin stitched across his face. For years Edward went everywhere with me, dragged round unceremoniously by the blue ribbon about his neck. It was the fiercest, deepest attachment of my life. I loved him to pieces – literally.

Edward Bear did not stand up well to the wear and tear. He was not a traditional teddy bear and like the one my older sister possessed, made of hardwearing mohair, stiffly stuffed, with jointed limbs and a mechanised growl. Edward was modern. One of the new breed of washable, nylon plush, hundred per cent ‘Playsafe’ toys with unbreakable plastic eyes and polyurethane foam rubber filling, manufactured by Wendy Boston Ltd.

It was the age of Dr Spock. For the first time in history, it occurred to manufacturers to make toys for children to *play* with! No matter how much jam a child might throw at a bear – so the Wendy Boston company’s publicity declared – it could be shoved in a washing machine, put through a mangle and always come out right as rain. Except that Edward didn’t. It was clear to my dotting infant eyes, that every time he emerged from his ablutions, he wasn’t quite the same. His unbreakable plastic eyes did not break, but they gradually lost their sheen. His fluffy bright yellow nylon fur compacted and seemed a little less bright, a little less yellow each time.

“But he’s a Wendy Boston bear!” my mother would cry, sweeping aside my protest as she pegged him up by his ears, out of reach, on the washing line. To her, he was part of the New World order that was set to liberate us all: the space race, sliced bread, Sellotape, President Kennedy, disposable nappies and drip-dry Bri-nylon sheets that did not need ironing but gave out electrostatic sparks every time you turned over.

Eventually, even my mother had to concede that Edward Bear was in a bad way. She knitted him some clothes (from a pattern we stole from a *Woman’s Realm* in a doctor’s waiting room) but alas, the smart green acrylic suit could not hide all the patching. His foam rubber innards went liquid and peculiar and in the end I put Edward Bear in a drawer and forgot about him. When my elder sister went off to college, she took her handsome bear with her to sit on her bed – rather like John Betjeman’s Archibald or Sebastian Flyte’s Aloysius in Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*. When I left home, Edward stayed hidden away in his drawer to be returned to me years later in a plastic bag when my parents moved and cleared out their house.



Middle age takes people by surprise – but the thing that surprised me most about my fortieth birthday was realising that dear old Edward would be forty the following year. I got him out and dusted him down and wondered again who Wendy Boston had been.

Who was the woman behind the name I have known all my life? You can get the basic facts about Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Ltd from most books about teddy bears – that the company was founded in 1945 in South Wales by Ken and Wendy Williams (née Boston) and based in Crickhowell and nearby Abergavenny and that at one time it accounted for over a quarter of the UK's soft toy exports. Eventually they were bought out by another toy manufacturer, and closed down in 1976. The books all repeat the same information. Not one of them gives any indication of who Wendy was, or what happened to her. Certainly there are no pictures of her, and none of the museums I contacted were any wiser. Companies House could not supply any current addresses and since Williams is rather a common surname in Welsh telephone directories, I did not feel I could start ringing round asking for Ken and Wendy. When I telephoned the obituaries section of *The Daily Telegraph*, I was delighted to discover that Wendy Williams, née Boston, had never had an obituary. As she was once a household name, I assumed this meant she must still be alive. I pictured her living in a whitewashed cottage half way up a Welsh mountain – and suddenly it became imperative that I should find her. I wanted to take Edward there on his fortieth birthday – to thank her for making him, I suppose, and to beg her to put an expert stitch or two back into his inexorable grin. Being a writer, I thought I would write it up. *The Daily Telegraph* thought this a splendid idea and offered to place an advertisement in their Announcements page.

The announcement appeared in early April 1997, and for two weeks I heard nothing. Then a lady wrote from Abergavenny, saying that her late husband had been a Customs and Excise officer who had had dealings with Wendy Boston. She suggested I contact Abergavenny library. I picked up the phone straight away. The librarian who answered the telephone - whom I now know to be Alison Newsam, the writer of this book - went very quiet. Then she said, "Actually, someone brought four enormous scrapbooks in last week. They look like the factory records. Lots of press cuttings and photographs of toys, many stuck in with decomposing Sellotape." I was hurtling down the motorway towards Abergavenny before Alison had put down the telephone.

It turned out that after Wendy died in 1972, her husband had indeed moved away but before he went, he handed her meticulously kept scrapbooks to a neighbour, probably feeling they should remain in the area. For over twenty years, the books containing every press cutting, advertisement, brochure and interesting piece of correspondence pertaining to Wendy Boston Ltd reposed in his neighbour's garage. When she in turn died, three years back, the severe slump in the housing market meant that it had taken until that spring for her children to sell the place. Luckily her daughter, Jean Cary-Elwes also felt that the scrapbooks belonged in the area. She

asked Mr and Mrs Clifford Othen, who now lived in the Williams's bungalow, to find a suitable home for them. Mr Othen took them down to Crickhowell library but it happened to be shut that day so he drove to Abergavenny and handed them over to Alison. Thus, despite the quarter of a century since Wendy Boston died, the books ended up in Abergavenny library within days of my advertisement appearing in the paper! If I had searched at any time in the past, I would have drawn a complete blank. As it was, I suddenly had everything I could possibly want to know at my fingertips. It was as if Wendy Boston herself had known I would come along and had carefully preserved everything. I wish she had not used Sellotape!

The quickest glance at the scrapbooks confirms what an extraordinary enterprise Wendy Boston's was. The sheer scale of the firm's output was breathtaking. I knew about the teddy bears but there were dogs of every description, dolls, cats, gollywogs, rabbits. Wendy Williams, née Boston, had designed every one of the toys that had poured in their millions all over the world, bringing much needed employment (particularly for women) to an industrial black spot and foreign currency into the country in those austere post-war years. It was extraordinary that so much enterprise was now all but forgotten.

Crickhowell and Abergavenny are small friendly places. Word spread. Liz Davies at the *Abergavenny Chronicle* published a piece about my search and all summer long the telephone never stopped ringing. Within the area, of course, the enterprise was not forgotten. People could have told the teddy bear books and encyclopaedias everything they could want to know. But nobody had asked them. It was interesting to see an example of an oral tradition in action – no one at the library, museum or Chronicle had heard of the firm because they tend to be incomers, but the memory of the factory was still very much alive in the town. Also, no one in the town particularly realised how interesting the subject might be to the world at large or realised that what they all knew so well had generally been forgotten.

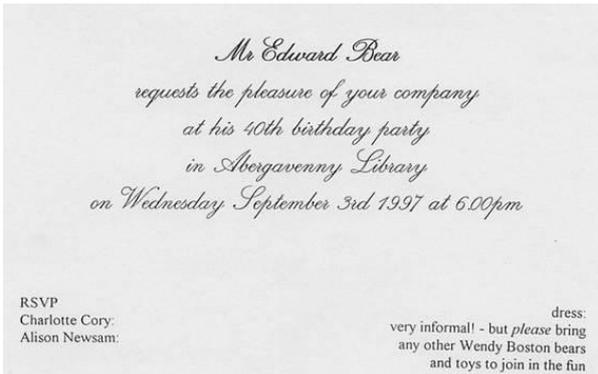
The story of Wendy Boston Ltd is the story in this book. It is a story replicated in many businesses throughout Britain as the country's industries struggled to recover from the ravages of war. Because rationing was still in force, most of the toys they made in the early days had to be exported – rather like Eastern Block countries making things for foreign markets to bring in much needed currencies although the people making the items are denied the very luxuries they manufacture. What made Wendy Boston's special as a toy company was the way they were very quick to use new fabrics and technologies as they appeared. She understood the design possibilities created by nylon, polyurethane etc. and was among the first to use them while Ken Williams was very innovative in his approach to marketing. Nowadays the importance of continually pushing products before the purchasing public is taken very much for granted. The reason my mother called out "But he's a Wendy Boston bear!" was that she had been subjected to Ken Williams's constant barrage of advertising!

Ken and Wendy Williams clearly enjoyed an extraordinary partnership, his business and advertising skills complementing her design talents. I had great difficulty finding out anything about them before they arrived in South Wales. I could only hope that when the article was published, someone might come forward and fill the gaps. I knew Mr Williams had been invalided out of the RAF but the RAF could not supply me with any address for next of kin. It was a fascinating experience talking to

people who had known them and even after all this time I got a fairly clear picture. A childless couple famous for their toys - he drank heavily, she chain-smoked. "You'll find no-one with a word to say against her", I was told early on, and this was true. Wendy inspired great affection in those who knew her. Shy, modest with a wry sense of humour, she obviously lived for her work and her dogs. "I can see her now," a neighbour spoke fondly, "coming up that hill in her blue Morris Traveller, a woolly hat on her head and her two poodles, Ivy and Harvey, bouncing round in the back."

One afternoon at the end of June, following a tip-off, Edward and I made our way to Llangenny churchyard, halfway up a hill between Crickhowell and Abergavenny. The sun shone, a brook babbled, a blackbird sang and there, below a white-washed cottage, stood her lichen covered tombstone. Nora Wendy Williams, née Boston, Jan 1909 – Sept 1972. It was a lovely place to find her.

On September 3rd 1997, Edward Bear celebrated his 40th birthday in Abergavenny library. It seemed the perfect excuse to get together everyone who had helped while researching my article. We were truly celebrating 50 years since the company built its factory in Abergavenny, and marking 25 years since Wendy died.



There were people there who had not seen each other in decades. Mrs Stella Davies who as 19 year old Stella Huxley was photographed fifty years ago being instructed by Wendy Boston and then, as Mrs Stella Stockham managed the factory for eighteen years, sat at a treadle machine making bears. She offered to mend Edward. A couple of stitches in his nose? I shook my head. I felt very ungrateful – but I had suddenly realised that I liked my battered old teddy just like he is! Graham Preece, the Mayor of Abergavenny – laughing that he would now always be known as the Mayor of Toytown – cut the cake (shaped like a mangle) and, as we all sang 'Happy Birthday', there was a general feeling that although Wendy Boston never got the obituary she deserved, she would have enjoyed the celebration far more.



That might have been the end of the story. The article was scheduled to appear on September 20th but Princess Diana's tragic death meant that newspaper schedules went out of the window. *The Telegraph* actually printed it on the first Saturday in December as a pre-Christmas story.

By chance Wendy Boston's niece, Petrina, was driving along and saw a neighbour and stopped and gave him a lift. He thanked her by leaving his copy of *The Telegraph* in her car. I like to imagine her casually flicking open the article about her aunt.... She rang the paper first thing on Monday morning. That afternoon we had a wonderful long conversation on the telephone. Just before Christmas we met up.

Petrina Hughes, née Boston, looks rather like her aunt and clearly has the same creative genes. Apart from making toys herself, she is a superb photographer. She had kept many of the toys Wendy made for her – including prototypes of toys that were too difficult to make on an industrial scale but were admirable presents for a small niece. She showed me the press photograph of Wendy in her early twenties taken when she won an advertising award (shown at the top of Page 3) and a wedding portrait of Wendy and Ken (dated 12th September 1936) that is shown here.



WELL KNOWN in Birmingham advertising circles, Miss Wendy Boston, of Wylde Green was married at St Martin's, Bull Ring, on Saturday, to Mr. Kenneth Brook Williams of Manchester. *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 14 September 1936

Petrina's father, Guy Boston, was Wendy's older brother. They were brought up in Acocks Green in Birmingham. Their father Ernest came from a family of coal merchants – grandfather Boston lived at Hamstead Hall, a splendid Georgian mansion, and owned Hamstead Colliery, by Handforth Wood. Their mother, Nora, had been born Jenkins and her family owned the Jenkins silver factory in Birmingham. Petrina remembers her aunt as “tremendous fun to be with”. She used to love her coming to visit because she was always so funny – and “completely potty about animals and dogs”.

Charlotte Cory
April 1998, Manchester

Charlotte Cory is a novelist – author of *The Unforgiving*, *The Laughter of Fools* and *The Guest*, all published by Faber and Faber. She broadcasts and writes regularly for *The Daily Telegraph*. Some of this introduction appeared in an article published in *The Daily Telegraph* in December 1997.





The Birth of This Book

This compilation is a mixture of personal memories and what has been gathered from four scrapbooks. The scrapbooks were given to Abergavenny Library for safe keeping when a garden shed was cleared. This coincided with the search by the author Charlotte Cory to find information on Wendy Boston bears. The result was a party held in honour of Wendy Boston and her Bears which took place at the Abergavenny Library and to which those who had worked at the Abergavenny and Crickhowell factories were invited. Liz Davies and Alison Newsam then proceeded to put together the memoirs which appear in italics and information available and this is the result.

The scrapbooks consist of adverts, newspaper cuttings and some black and white photographs stuck to pages with Sellotape and glue. The condition of the books is fragile and to some extent this small history has tried to be as comprehensive so that further use of the books is limited to research and restoration. What is particularly striking is that the scrapbooks represent the rise and fall of the business by charting its progress year after year through the examples of newspaper cuttings, some letters and general publicity.

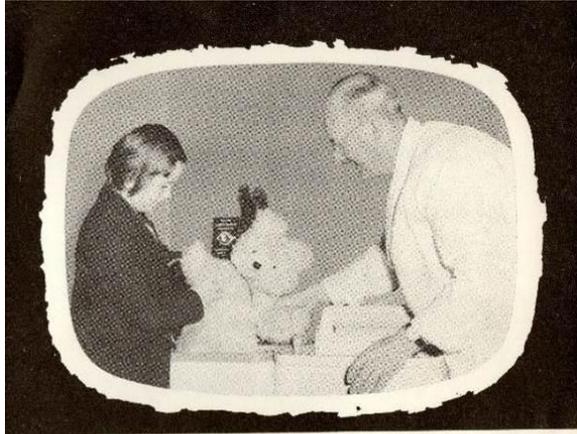
Wendy Boston probably kept the scrapbooks and there has been a lot of work and care in the keeping of memories and records of the business. It also reflects the achievement of Wendy and her husband Ken Williams, although particularly showing the energy that Ken gave to the venture. This is in part because he is the one that appears in the press photographs and is representing the firm at conferences, trade meetings and in the social milieu of the Toy Trade.

The scrapbooks also give a clear indication of the success of the business. From what was clearly an amateur (but nevertheless gifted) start the small parochial firm became an international one and made its mark on toy making in Britain. This is evident from the records that state in which magazines/newspapers the publicity was placed and the way in which Ken Williams became chairman of the Toy Traders Association and very much involved with the idea of 'Safe play'. He is referred to as 'Mr Play Safe' in an early article. From one employee the firm grows to incorporate employees on a worldwide scale. Due to the increase in overseas trade the firm opens 'accounts' in, for example, South Africa, Fiji and Canada. This has been noted in the year by year 'snapshots' taken from the scrapbooks.

The scrapbooks also highlight how successful the marketing strategy that the Williamses used was. Not only toy trade magazines and fairs are used but also more unusual ways are used to market the company. The firm employed a public relations firm called 'Leedex Ltd' to conduct most of the marketing but there are also other examples that are interesting. For example, the company sponsored local and national 'good causes' and the press reacted well to these events. Sponsorship was given to Abergavenny groups and firms.

The Wendy Boston bears were taken on a British Lions Rugby Tour to Australia and featured at the birth of Prince Edward. Various royals were given gifts of replica pets – Lady Munnings was given a replica of her dog. The newspapers lapped this up.

The firm not only advertised the company in newspapers, but Wendy Boston bears also featured on radio and television. Wendy Boston was heard on 'Down your Way' (BBC Home Service, later Radio 4) and puppets such as Pinky and Perky and Basil Brush were on the television.



... out of the spin-dryer

Wendy Boston toys were chosen for television from the hundreds on show at the recent London exhibition of the British Toy Manufacturers Association. They were presented on two genuine news programmes—not as 'commercials'—because completely washable toys as delightful as these were considered of very special interest to viewers.

Soft, cuddly Wendy Boston toys make wonderful gifts—children adore them and mothers appreciate their absolute safety (they are the only toys with screwed-in nylon eyes—guaranteed never to come out). See them in good stores and toyshops everywhere.

Demonstrations of washing Wendy Boston Playsafe toys have now been shown on BBC Woman's Hour; BBC Town and Around; Independent Television News, and twice on Swedish Television News.

These toys were TELEVISION NEWS



Through the wringer

The complete washability of Wendy Boston toys was once again convincingly demonstrated on Television News recently by Mr. Ken Williams, Managing Director of Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Ltd.

Both BBC and ITA showed film of Mr. Williams actually washing Wendy Boston toys and putting them through both the wringer and spin dryer of a Hoover machine. Both commentaries remarked on the wonderful way in which the toys stood up to this kind of treatment.

The way the firm managed their employees was also 'newsworthy'. Ken Williams had established a paternalistic style of management and this included rewarding the workers who had kept 'good time' and had worked productively, with trips to London or with spending money. These 'good time league' girls were photographed with celebrities in London theatres and again made the name of Wendy Boston prominent in the news.

Not only did the employees make the news, so did the methods used to encourage retailers to sell the Wendy Boston toys. The firm ran a competition for the retailer who could name the nine selling points of a Wendy Boston toy. The prize was a holiday in San Remo during which maximum publicity was gained whereby the prize winner visited an orphanage to deliver bears to the children.

Bears made excellent gifts for any child and sick children also made good publicity so several huge bears were made for hospitals. However, these gifts were probably not only for the success of the company – they had a lot to do with the ethos of giving children quality toys that were safe and provided lots of 'cuddles'. Wendy and Ken Williams were also fond of children.

The Childless Couple

According to Mrs Foulkes, one of the tragedies of the company was that the couple whose name was known by many children, had none of their own.

“I’ve always felt that if Ken and Wendy had had children the company would still be going today” she said sadly. “It seemed that there was no-one to train to take over when they retired, and after Wendy died it seemed as if Ken lost interest in the business.”

The scrapbooks also give a sense of the age in which the company flourished. The adverts, the wording and the design of the publicity all illustrate the Britain of the 1950s and 60s. This has hopefully been conveyed in the selection of photographs and prints that form part of this book. The books also give an indication of the effective partnership between Wendy and Ken.

Perhaps part of the secret of the success of this unconventional couple was their great ability to work together although apart for much of the time. While Wendy remained in Crickhowell, visiting Abergavenny only a few times a week, Ken made his base at Abergavenny.

They also track the decline of the business which came when Wendy became ill. Both partners must have been enthusiastic and proud of their company. Some of this is reflected in the scrapbooks which are now kept at Abergavenny Museum.

WENDY BOSTON

“PLAY SAFE” TOYS

These toys are claimed to be the safest playthings in the world. They have the following exclusive features: they are all washable; they have patent screwed-in eyes; they are guaranteed to contain neither glass nor wire; each toy is individually boxed so as to arrive “factory fresh.”



No. 84 Striped Pantomime Cat, made entirely from printed velvet. This is the softest soft toy ever made and a great favourite. Price 37/-



No. 10 “Mascotty” (Trade Mark) the tiny 4” lucky Scots dog in black, white or Aberdeen grey. Price 10/- (or 15/- on wheels).



PANDAS

Great favourites in thick, warm black and white wool with the softest and lightest of bodies

9” No. 30	22/-
12” No. 31	28/-
15” No. 32	36/-
18” No. 35	52/-
25” No. 33	£5



TEDDY BEARS

These Teddies are incredibly light and soft. The range consists of

6” No. 20	12/-
12” No. 21	28/-
14” No. 22	36/-
20” No. 23	58/-

and all are available in either gold, honey or white.



Below is a new Nylon Sitting Kitten. Made in three colours: black, white or grey. No. 85 22/-



On the left is No. 90, the 12” nylon Gollywog with the printed rayon face. 25/-

NIGHTDRESS OR PYJAMA CASES

No. 530 Terrier	62/-
No. 600 Spaniel: Black; Black/White, & Liver/White	72/-





1940-54: The Birth of a Business

November 13th 1940 an air raid on Birmingham destroyed shops, private dwellings etc. Amongst the homeless were Ken and Wendy Williams. Ken had just been invalided out of the RAF. He had worked in advertising and journalism in a pre-war job and Wendy was a commercial designer. She had been a student at Lawnside, then Malvern Technical College and School of Art. She was employed by Cadbury's doing the major part of Cadbury's Easter and Christmas lists for several years. (She worked from 6th January 1930 until 1st September 1933 in the Advertising Office there). Their address at this time was Camden House, Sutton Road, Wylde Green. Ken Williams was also Director of the Birmingham Press Club some years before the War.

They moved to the country, Ken taking up odd jobs, including keeping a pub, buying and managing a chain of retail shops, running the stores in a Ministry of Aircraft Production (MAP) factory. He was also often in hospital and whilst in for a stay, his wife started making soft toys out of blankets and other odds and ends. Mr. Williams took her toys to a big department store in Cardiff and sold over £100 worth and that was the start of Wendy Boston soft toys which in 1945 was registered under the name of Wendy Boston (Crickhowell) Ltd.

1945

The business owned a rented 'lock-up' shop in Crickhowell with one girl as employee. They later moved to the Club Room at the Britannia Inn (High Street, Crickhowell) with sixteen staff.

1949

In May, Wendy Boston Toys was listed in the 1949 British Industries Fair catalogue as manufacturers of the 'Wendy Boston' range of Soft Toys, Animals, Dogs, Teddys, Gollywogs: and world pioneers of welded Plastic washable Toys and Bath Toys. Trade Marks and Names : "Mascotty", "Pixiebell", "Gillywag".

Mrs Pat Davies

Mrs Pat Davies began her career with Wendy Boston working alongside the designer in the Crickhowell factory.

She remembers Wendy as a remarkable, kind and gentle person, who was easy to work with although not practical in any way. *"She was a lovely person but definitely very arty and a bit airy fairy"* she recalled.

"I remember on one occasion she went away for a few days and left me in charge of her goldfish – she was mad on animals of all kinds. When I went to feed them I found that their tank was absolutely filthy and the water was almost

The advertisement features three teddy bears: a large yellow one labeled 'softer', a black and white panda one labeled 'safer', and a small white one with a red plaid harness. Below them is a small inset photo of a woman in an apron washing a toy in a machine, labeled 'cleaner'. At the bottom, there is a yellow sign that says 'WENDY BOSTON' and the slogan 'PLAY SAFE TOYS'. The address 'Wendy Boston, Queen Street, Abergavenny, Mon., England' is printed at the very bottom.

Not many years ago Teddy Bears had glass eyes, held in by bits of wire. Some still do, but not Wendy Boston's, for she has harnessed the wonders of modern engineering to make her Teddy Bears softer, safer, and cleaner.

The eyes are moulded and locked in position with nylon nuts and bolts.* The skins are nearly all nylon too, and the fillings are spongy plastic foam.

There are over a hundred toys in the Wendy Boston range, and every one of them is guaranteed to be as washable as the Teddy Bear shown going through the wringer in the small picture. Write for further details.

*English, American and Australian Patents applied for.

WENDY BOSTON
PLAY SAFE TOYS
Wendy Boston, Queen Street, Abergavenny, Mon., England

green and my husband and I decided to clean the tank – which we did. Sadly when she got back one of the fish had died and she was furious and announced that it had been the shock of having clean water that had killed her fish.”

Wendy’s anger was a rare occurrence however, and for most part, she and Mrs. Davies worked closely together on the design and making of the toys.

“She did have some funny ideas though” said Mrs Davies. “I used to take an egg to work for my lunch and would sometimes boil it in the kettle. This made her very annoyed as she swore that eating an egg boiled in a kettle would give me warts.”

“Part of my job in addition to making toys was also taking her two big dogs for a walk when she was too busy to leave work. There were some off parts of my job, for example I remember once having to leave work to help set up the stalls for Crickhowell Cricket Club fete – cricket was very important to Mr Williams.”

Mrs Davies also recalled that Wendy’s interest in the business lay solely with the design and making of the toys and that she was more than content to leave the administration in the capable hands of her husband and Lorna John.

Wendy Boston’s designs were usually modelled on life, for example her popular king penguin design some 3 ft 6 in high, which was a perfect replica of the real thing. Most of her designs began as drawings which she made into paper patterns. She would then perfect her design and personally make up a prototype which she would cost in the most economical fashion before passing on to her husband who would then decide on a selling price.

While Ken developed the advertising campaign, Lorna John then took over the production ensuring that there was enough material in stock to produce as many of the toys as Ken could sell.

The Importance of Lorna John

During the years that the factory thrived in Abergavenny Ken’s right-hand woman was Mrs Lorna John. Then in her eighties, Mrs John was still living in Abergavenny in the 1990s and vividly remembered her years with Wendy Boston.

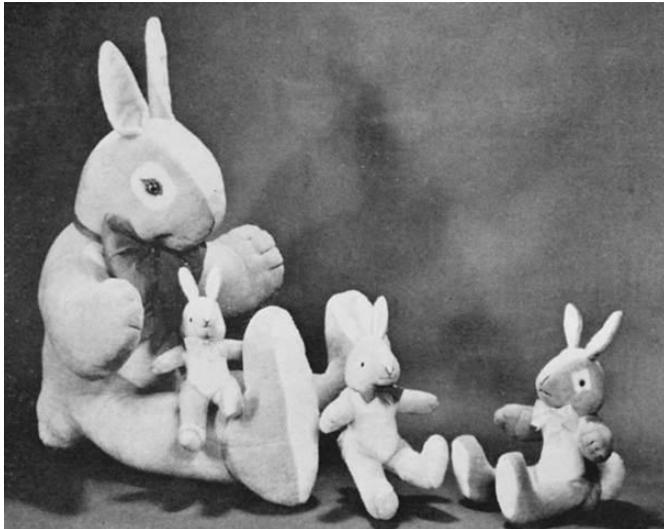
All those who worked in the factory recall Mrs John as one of the driving forces behind the business. Mrs. Foulkes once again worked closely with Mrs John, with their friendship lasting for many years.



“Mrs John was Ken Williams’s assistant. She had been offered the job at the factory as she was a family friend of Ken and Wendy and they convinced her that she was perfect to help run their Abergavenny factory” said Mrs Foulkes.

“She was responsible for all the ordering of materials and all the deliveries of toys that left the factory. She was a genius with figures and knew exactly what was in the factory, how many toys it would make, and when she had to reorder. Hers was a vital job because if the machinists ran out of just one thing the whole factory could come to a standstill” said Mrs. Foulkes.

“She always worked very closely with Ken and each year they would travel up to the famous Harrogate Toy Fair to set up a stall, which brought a lot of business to the factory.”



I AM
ARISTOCRATIC
AND
FASHIONABLE
WITH MY
REAL
COLLAR AND
CLIP-ON
LEAD.
WHEN I AM
DIRTY I
CAN BE
WASHED LIKE ANY OTHER
POODLE, BECAUSE I AM ONE
OF THE WENDY BOSTON
WASHABLE



WENDY BOSTON **PLAY SAFE TOYS**
WITH SCREWED-IN EYES

Free Booklet from 15, Queen St. ABERGAVENNY

THE shop, whose address is shown below, has given us their written guarantee that they will always keep in stock at least one of each of the Toys illustrated in the “Play Safe” booklet.

Messrs. Hamleys Ltd.,
Regent Street,
London.

We shall esteem it a great favour if you will post this card back to us please stating whether you were ableor unable.....to obtain what you wanted.

(NO POSTAGE REQUIRED)



1955-57 Expansion, Innovations and Setbacks

1955

February 1955 saw Wendy Boston Soft Toys represented at the Brighton Toy Fair and success seemed imminent until disaster struck on 28th March 1955 when a fire destroyed the Abergavenny factory. Three large export orders for America and Rhodesia were lost and necessitated the move to a new factory.

In her article for The Nursery World titled 'Made in the Mountains' (20 October 1955), Janet Hall gave some of the background of the Wendy Boston business.

'Talking to Mr. Williams is a refreshing experience, for he became a toy-maker almost by accident and is a firm believer that being a jack-of-all-trades can eventually help a man (or woman) to be master of one. A successful journalist and publicity man before the war, he and his commercial-artist wife moved to Wales after their home in Birmingham had been destroyed by bombs. A variety of jobs followed for Mr. Williams but recurrent illness meant frequent hospital treatment and proved a constant strain on financial resources.

During one of her husband's stays in hospital, Mrs. Williams began making toys from any oddments of material available in those austere days – even from blankets. Besides helping to pass the time, she thought they would make nice Christmas gifts but when Mr. Williams saw the result of her industry, he put all the toys into a hamper and took them into Cardiff. Not only were they bought by a big store, but the buyer asked for more. That was sufficient encouragement for the Williamses to put all their remaining capital into a toy-making business.

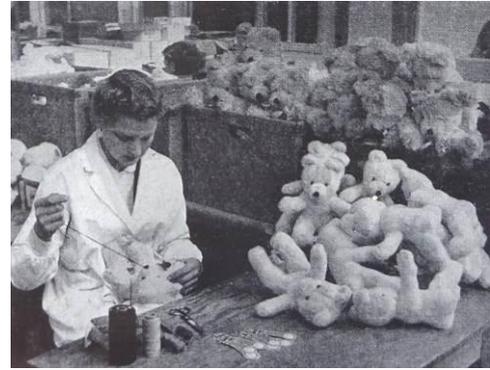
Coming as they did into the toy trade without any preconceived ideas whatever, both husband and wife had a fresh approach and were ready to improve upon old methods or do away with them altogether. One of their biggest triumphs is the invention and patenting of a new method for making and fixing eyes. At one time made of glass and simply stabbed into the toy on the end of a long pin, the eyes were a very real danger to children if they should be pulled out and broken. Eyes for all their toys are now made in unbreakable plastic and mounted on a screw. This is pushed through the material and anchored with a small nut, then the threads of the screw are carefully smoothed so that it is impossible for the nut to come off. Another thing they were not happy about was the use of wire to keep the shape of the toy, as so often it pierced the outer covering. So now they have a 'top secret' method of keeping the legs rigid that is absolutely safe however roughly the toy is treated.'

Janet Hall also described some of the production process:

'Amongst the most valued of the team of workers are the machinists, and I didn't envy them their task as I watched them skilfully and rapidly stitching together the intricately-shaped pieces. It costs £100 and takes 12 months to train a girl to stitch toys, and previous experience of machining clothes is

very little help as seams on toys are so much shorter and one error could ruin the shape of the finished article. That is why Mr. Williams prefers to employ girls straight from school and he maintains that he can tell within a week whether they will prove to be good machinists. "If she survives getting a needle through her finger, and carries on with her work after it has been dressed, she'll be a good machinist. If she goes home to Mother, she won't" says Mr. Williams, in a matter-of-fact tone.

Once fitted together, the limp toy cases without any identity as yet for the onlooker, are inspected to make sure that the seams are perfect and that feet and heads point the right way, then they are turned right side out and the seams fluffed out with a wire brush. The eyes are secured and noses and paws embroidered and teddies, golliwogs, dogs and the rest, all begin to take shape. Then they must be stuffed.



Wood wool and cotton are used for heads and legs, kapok for the main part – and the stuffing must be done skilfully, for all the toys of the same type must be the same weight to avoid difficulty when they are sent to retailers overseas. Plastic sponge is used to stuff the washable toys. Bows, tongues and other important accessories are all stitched firmly into place so that they cannot be detached and the dogs are given their leads. A final check-up to make sure that the toys are perfect, evenly stuffed and the correct weight, and they are ready to be transported to shops in the British Isles and all over the world.'

Ken Williams was elected to the council of British Toy Manufacturers Association, and in an article from 'Nursery World', October 20th 1955 by Janet Hall he is called "Mr Play Safe".



Fire at Abergavenny

Another vivid memory for Mrs Foulkes and many of the workers at Wendy Boston's Abergavenny factory was the fire which brought the factory to a standstill in 1955.

"I was walking to work as I did every morning, when a woman stopped me and asked me where I was going" said Mrs Foulkes. "To work of course" I told her. 'You'll have a job', she said. Walking around the corner I could see what she meant. The whole building was smoking and blackened. My first thought was for the stock records which were kept in a metal filing cabinet in my office. I saw one of the firemen who although bemused, gave me a helmet and a pair of boots to wear and took me into the building to retrieve the books. I did not realise at the time how important they were going to be but of course they were vital for Ken Williams and Lorna John when they were making the insurance claim. Because of the stock books which had survived the fire they knew exactly what we had lost on that morning. We later learned that the fire had been caused by a faulty plug on one of the machines."

The fire, which almost destroyed more than £7,000 of material alone and caused damage in excess of £18,000 had started during the early morning and was discovered by workers Brenda Llewellyn and Gillian Jenkins who rushed to the nearby Sargeant's print works and called the fire brigade.

More than three hours after the blaze had started firemen were still playing their hoses on the smoking bales of material to ensure that no further fires began. Despite the severity of the blaze, in less than a month the factory was re-opened, this time in new premises nearby.

"Apparently one of the firemen rescued a huge teddy bear from the factory which Ken later gave to Abergavenny Fire Brigade and was kept as a brigade mascot for many years" said Mrs Foulkes.

[See photo on page 42]

Reprinted from the "South Wales Argus," Monday, March 28, 1955.

£20,000 Damage to Toy Factory at Abergavenny



Damage estimated provisionally at £20,000 was caused on Monday morning to the main factory of Wendy Boston Ltd., a toy manufacturing firm at Abergavenny. Three large export orders of toys due to be shipped that morning to Australia, America and Rhodesia were destroyed.

The two-storey building in Queen Street was completely gutted, and hundreds of bales of material were destroyed.

Miss Brenda Llewellyn, of 17 Biorange Road, Abergavenny, an employee at the factory, discovered the fire a few minutes after arriving at work.

She tried to reach a telephone, but was beaten back by the blaze. Miss Gillian Llewellyn, of Highfield Crescent, Abergavenny, a colleague, then ran out and raised the alarm, and Abergavenny fire brigade under Station-officer J. Francis arrived at 7.25.

Mr. Ken B. Williams, managing director, told the South Wales Argus that Miss Llewellyn was suffering from shock.

"She displayed a wonderful spirit," he said, "and kept repeating, 'If only I could have reached the phone I could have saved the place,' but he added, 'I doubt if that could have been possible.'"

Mr. Williams said that the fire was a tremendous blow to the firm, who have only one other factory—a small one at Crickhowell.

"This was our main factory," he explained, "and employed about thirty people."

Queen Street was littered with burning and smouldering bales of cloth and paper which had been removed from the building and were continually sprayed with water by the firemen.

By that time Mr. Cyril Thomas chief fire officer for the county, had taken charge.

It is understood that an early attempt to extinguish the blaze was made by employees of Seargent Brothers Ltd., a neighbouring printing firm. They used portable fire extinguishers.

They were driven back by the heat and thick pungent smoke which enveloped everything. One bystander who witnessed the fire almost from the start commented: "I could never have believed that such a blaze could have developed so quickly."

"South Wales Argus" photographs. The scene outside the Wendy Boston toy factory at Abergavenny on Monday morning. The picture shows salvage operations by firemen and workmen.

The Factories

In her article 'Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys' Doris Shellard wrote:

'The company started in a very small way in a room at the back of a little shop where Webbs now stands. As the company expanded, they moved to a large room at the back of The Britannia. In 1950 there were about twenty ladies employed, cutting by hand, machining and then sewing up and finishing the toys.....

About the same time a branch was started in Abergavenny. Most of the finishers moved to the Drill Hall (now the Scout Hut). Wendy had her own studio at last!'

The Drill Hall provided more space for the increasing workforce.



The firm also expanded to premises in Queen Street Abergavenny, which were in the process of being moved when hit by the 1955 fire. The new factory site, also in Queen Street, was larger than ever and split into three long bays.

"In the middle were the offices with their glass walls looking out over the factory floor" said Mrs Foulkes. "Then on one side were the machinists, and on the other side the packing bays. Eventually we also had an area for filling and finishing as the factory was always expanding. The storage area was above. From his office Ken could watch everything that was going on.

I started work at 9.00 and worked until 6.00pm, and the girls started earlier at around 8.00. The factory closed early on a Friday which was also pay day. Again the girls were paid weekly, and the office staff were paid monthly."

Mrs Phillips also had vivid memories of life in the factory.

"I remember that Wendy did all the designing and we did the making. I remember that Shirley and Sheila James and many others operated the one press, and Margaret Leacock and I worked the other. We cut out all the toys and then passed them on to be sewn.

The new girls were taught the ropes by Mrs Husband who showed the new employees how to machine and finish, and how to sew the bears' noses and paws. Putting the eyes in was a specialist's job."

Mrs Davies recalled that one of Ken Williams's incentive bonus schemes involved factory workers taking a voucher for each job they completed.

"For instance, if you sewed up a bear, you would go and rip a voucher off a big sheet. At the end of the week the vouchers would be taken and counted and each one over a certain number would mean you had a bonus" she explained.

Clive Rowley remembers the factory well, from when he was a lad.

"On hot days, when we were on our way past the back of it, we used to see the women who used to have the back door open to let cooler air in."



In 1961 a third factory was added at Tiryberth, Hengoed. This factory was 'put on the map' when the Basil Brush toys were produced there. Sadly, it was also known for the labour problems that the company experienced there in 1962, although there are no reports of the problems having recurred.



Ken Williams and the Discovery of Foam

Mair Foulkes, stock controller, 1949-1961

Mair Foulkes vividly remembers the day that Ken Williams discovered the foam filling that was to revolutionise the manufacture of toys at Wendy Boston Ltd and change the face of toy making in Britain.

“He had been to Woolworths and he burst into my office carrying this small piece of foam. ‘Look at this Mair’ he said. ‘This has definite potential.’” she recalls him telling her.

“He could tell me straight away that he could make use of this foam in the manufacture of toys” she explained. “He immediately set to work, and began adopting the foam for its best use in Wendy’s designs.”

Mrs Foulkes recalls that the early foam was cut into strips which were used to stuff the teddy bears. Eventually Ken’s endless experimenting led him to realise that it could be put to best use if cut into small ‘chunks’.

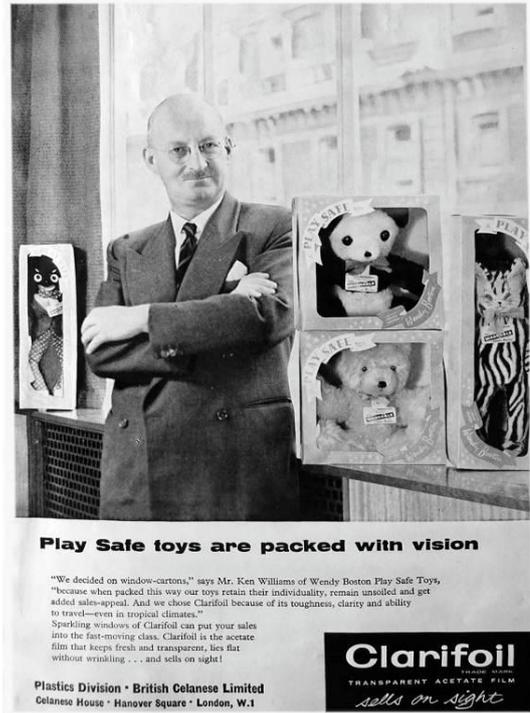
“He worked for weeks with the foam, talking to the manufacturers, and discussing its uses in toy making” says Mrs Foulkes. “We made and washed hundreds of bears and Ken was happy that he had created a 100 per cent washable teddy bear, which he then set about marketing.”

Like many of the women who found work in Wendy Boston’s factory, or as out-workers during the post war years, Mrs Foulkes has vivid memories of both Ken and Wendy. As many remember, the factory created employment for women who had been called into the breach during the war years, and now found themselves out of work with the return of their men folk. Wendy Boston’s largely female staff allowed these women, who had gained a taste for employment during the war to continue their working lives during the 1940s and 1950s.

“I started working in Abergavenny in 1949, two years after the company had opened the factory in the town” she explained.

As a stock controller most of Mrs Foulkes’s dealings were with Ken, while Wendy for the most part remained at the Drill Hall site in Crickhowell.

“Wendy tended to work mainly in Crickhowell where she designed the toys, while Ken worked in Abergavenny on the marketing and advertising side of the business” said Mrs Foulkes. He was, she recalled, an innovative and imaginative businessman.



“When he realised what marvellous potential there was in foam filling he jumped in and immediately spotted a gap in the market for the product he planned to make. Before he realised the uses of foam we had filled the toys with kapok, which meant that they could definitely not be washed. In using foam, Ken developed a toy that children could play with, and safely wash” said Mrs Foulkes.

“He was also a forerunner in the ideas of toys that were 100 percent safe for children to play with. Before Ken, the eyes of teddy bears were made with dangerous wire fastenings, but Ken developed a plastic moulded eye which was completely safe and could not hurt a child if it came off.” she recalled.

Mrs Foulkes’s contact with the factory, with Wendy Boston and Ken Williams came to an end after she left the toy factory after more than twelve years.

“I lost contact with the factory and with many of the people who worked there after that, although I did remain friendly with Mrs John and with some of the other girls, some of whom I still see regularly” said Mrs Foulkes.

“I would not have missed my time at the factory for anything but I am glad that I wasn’t around at the end to see the business fail.” she added.

1956

During February this year Wendy Boston toys were again represented at the Brighton Toy Fair.

Lady Munnings’s Pekinese, ‘Black Knight’

In March Lady Violet Munnings (wife of Sir Alfred James Munnings the official war artist for the Canadian cavalry brigade and painter of many equestrian portraits) had a replica of her Pekinese ‘Black Knight’ who had died the previous year made for her by Wendy Boston. Mrs Davies remembered:

“Another of the firm’s special projects revolved around the favourite dog of Lady Munnings, wife of the famous artist. Black Knight had been her favourite Peke and upon its death his distraught owner had him stuffed and the result accompanied her to many formal banquets where naturally enough it aroused considerable interest.”

As time progressed Lady Munnings was persuaded by those who doubted the wisdom of carrying a stuffed dog on formal occasions,



to contact Wendy Boston and ask her to make a replica of Black Knight. A visit to Crickhowell followed and stuffed dog and owner were reluctantly parted. After careful study Wendy produced an exact copy of the dog which was sent on to a delighted Lady Munnings.

"I remember that the dog was made of the finest fur fabric available and was very expensive." said Mrs. Davies.

A second Black Knight replica was made at about this time and given by Queen Elizabeth to Princess Anne.

In May a *Daily Mirror* article reported on the 'Timekeeping League' and its success at the factory.

Later in the year the 'Goodtime League' girls went on a trip to London and there is a note to Ken Williams from the factory workers for Christmas '56 showing their appreciation as it is headed "To Dad from the Family".

1957

An article on packaging by Ken Williams and his use of the innovative 'Clarifoil' clear plastic covering was published. He became chair of the Breconshire County Cricket Club and chair of the Conservative Association and took up posts as fixture secretary and as part of the selection committee of the Moseley Rugby Football Club. (This is later reiterated by William Tribe who remembered his keen interest in both sports.)

But he is washable isn't he, Mummy?

Yes he certainly is—
guaranteed washable—
like all Wendy Boston toys.
They are charming,
cuddly designs in Nylon
fabric, containing neither
glass nor wires—
completely safe toys.
Toys that bring
peace of mind
to parents!

Over 100 to
choose from—
write for
free booklet



PLAY SAFE TOYS

24 Queen St., Abergavenny, Mon.

1958-68 Mixed Fortunes

Incentives to Work

Whilst devoting much of his time to advertising and running the business, Ken Williams also worked hard to create incentives to help increase productivity. In its heyday during the late 50's Wendy Boston was struggling to produce the toys demanded by foreign and home markets.

At one point the firm captured some 25% of the UK's soft toy exports and demand was so high that at times the factory simply sold out of toys and customers had to be told that no more export orders could be taken.

In order to increase the output from an already stretched but fiercely loyal staff, Ken Williams devised all sorts of incentives including productivity bonuses calculated with a series of tickets handed out on completion of work and additional incentives like trips to London theatres and makeovers at leading beauty salons.

One of the recipients of these 'awards' was Mrs Dorothy Roberts (née Phillips) who started work for the company in the early 1960's. She remembers clearly one such trip to London which she made with five other Wendy Boston colleagues.

"I started to work for Wendy Boston in either 1962 or 1963 and remember that they were a very good family firm to work for." said Mrs Roberts. "In the mid-60s they introduced a scheme to reward good time keeping and as a result of this, six of us were invited to go up to London for a make-over and hair-do. We set off, but were late arriving in London because of a rail strike, and found that we had missed our make-over. Although this was disappointing we stayed at the Regent Palace Hotel and after dinner we were taken to the Garrick Theatre where we saw a play, and later met the actor Brian Rix, and presented him with a hamper of Wendy Boston toys. Despite having missed our make-over it was still a weekend to remember."

Good Time Girls Meet Brian Rix

Six girls from the Wendy Boston Teddy Bear factory in South Wales won a trip to London at the firm's expense for winning the Goodtime League in which points are awarded for time keeping and bonus earnings over the average. They travelled from Newport on Friday, lunched on the train, spent the afternoon having a "face do" at Max Factor's in Bond Street, then a meal at their hotel and on to the Garrick to see Brian Rix in "Uproar in the House".

They had Saturday morning to themselves, and travelled back to Wales on the midday train. The lucky ladies were: Beryl Cross — Finishing; Marion Howells — Filling Inspector; Joyce Pope — Machine Inspector; Claudia Elyned Davies — Final Inspector; Margaret Elizabeth Leacock and Dorothy Phillips both of Cutting and Sorting.



Mrs Pat Davies remembers another of Ken Williams's schemes to keep people working.

"He decided that it would help if he played Rock 'n' Roll through loudspeakers all day." said Mrs Davies. *"It was the era of Elvis and Bill Haley and the idea was good except that when you had to make a phone call you could hardly hear yourself speak. Whenever I think of the factory now I can hear Bill Haley singing 'Rock Around the Clock'."* she added.

"We were very lucky with staff. Lots were local, but a lot also came down from Brynmawr as well, and when it snowed they would walk to work, so I suppose Ken Williams's schemes must have worked."

1958

In March the Wendy Boston company was represented at the New York International Toy Fair.

An advertisement was placed requiring agents in: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Holland, Norway, Switzerland, USA, British Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Uruguay, Brazil, Panama, Argentina, Venezuela, Hawaii and Madeira.

The Abergavenny Camera Club received sponsorship from the company.

In December a *Reader's Digest* article appeared:

"Treasure Hunt in Toytown by Alex Barrie reports that growth of the toy industry is due to laymen with good ideas and courage to try them. Nearly 200 different types of toys are now made and sales exceed £100,000 a year and take care of nearly 12% of the British soft toy industry. This is because amateurs have a fresh approach to the business and often see opportunities missed by trained toy designers. To Wendy Boston – a young Birmingham housewife who made soft toys for amusement – safety and hygiene seemed prime considerations. Ken Williams or 'Mr Playsafe' as he is known now employs 70-80 personnel and has an overseas trade of $\frac{1}{8}$ of total UK export.'

The 'good time league' continued to reward employees as nineteen girls earn £70 by being on time for six months.

1959

In February Wendy Boston was represented in Persil Home Washing Bureau demonstrations for housewives in Edinburgh. The Wendy Boston company had created much publicity with Persil and Hoover in demonstrating the washability of their toys and putting toys through the mangle at exhibitions and shows. Thus they attended shows such as the Edinburgh one, offering Teddy Bear prizes and also gaining publicity.

The Wendy Boston firm managing board in 1959 consists of Ken and Mrs Williams, Mrs H D Butcher and Mr C A Collier.

The Weekly Wage Run

As suggested by many of those who knew Wendy Boston she was not always the most practical of people and her main contribution to the business lay with her faultless design skills and her ability to judge exactly what appealed to a child's mind.

However, her one major contribution to the business side of Wendy Boston lay in her insistence on operating the weekly wage run which she handled in typical 'Wendy Boston' style. The weekly ritual began on a Friday morning when company accountant, Mr Collier, left the Drill Hall for the short walk to the firm's bank where he would collect the wages. Returning to the factory he would calculate the wage bill and divide the money into individual envelopes – factory floor workers were weekly paid and office staff monthly.

The wages were then handed over to Wendy Boston who, in inimitable style, would transport them to Abergavenny.

“She firmly believed that she would not be robbed if she looked like an ordinary housewife.” said Mrs Davies, who was frequently called upon to deputise for her employer in the wage run.

“She would put on a coat and load all the money into a shopping basket then pile groceries on top to make it look more realistic” recalls Mrs Davies. *“She'd then get on the bus in Crickhowell and ride all the way to Abergavenny with the entire wage packet for the whole factory in her shopping basket. I suppose her theory must have been right because in all the time she did it no-one ever suspected that she was anything other than a housewife returning home after a shopping trip.”*

FREE Competition

WIN AN 8-DAY HOLIDAY FOR TWO
ON THE
ITALIAN RIVIERA
Air Travel and Luxury Hotel paid for by
Wendy Boston Soft Toys.



2nd. PRIZE: STEAM IRON
3rd. PRIZE: 6 MONTHS' SUPPLY OF PERSIL

ENTER NOW

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO is to put nine selling points for Wendy Boston Play Safe Toys in order of importance. Also, in 6 words, say why it is best to wash Wendy Boston Toys in Persil.

RULES

1. Only those engaged in the retailing of soft toys are eligible.
2. The winning entry will be that nearest to the order agreed by the three judges - Mr. W. M. Butler of Bon Marche, Liverpool; Mr. H. Richard Simmons, Editor of "Games and Toys"; and Mr. Fred Gronback of London, Editor "Perambulator Gazette".
3. In the case of a tie the reason for washing in Persil will be taken into consideration.
4. There is no restriction on the number of entries you may send in, provided they are on an official Entry Form obtainable from our February trade press advertisements or from any of our representatives or direct from Wendy Boston, 39, Queen Street, Abergavenny, Mon.
5. Closing date April 30th, 1959.
6. Winners will be notified in May. The judges' decision will be final.

ENTRY FORM

Post before April 29th to: Wendy Boston (Crickhowell) Ltd., 39 Queen St., Abergavenny, Mon.
Place the following sales points in order of importance

<p>A. ALL WENDY BOSTON toys have been tested for washability at the Persil Home Washing Bureau.</p> <p>B. have guaranteed safe screw-locked nylon and plastic eyes.</p> <p>C. are filled with plastic sponge.</p> <p>D. are guaranteed to contain neither glass, nor wire, nor metal.</p>	<p>E. have stitched bows, and arms and legs which will never pull off.</p> <p>F. are individually packed to arrive uncrushed.</p> <p>G. in boxes marked with number, colour and price.</p> <p>H. are advertised all the year round.</p> <p>I. Wendy Boston were the first firm in the world to make Nylon skinned, foam filled, washable Teddy Bears.</p>
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(PLEASE USE BLOCK LETTERS)

WENDY BOSTON TOYS ARE BEST WASHED IN PERSIL BECAUSE:

NAME:

HOME ADDRESS:

WHERE EMPLOYED SELLING TOYS:

PLACE THE POINTS IN THE FOLLOWING ORDER:

AFT2764716.159

A competition for trades people who sold Wendy Boston toys was launched in which they needed to name the nine winning selling points of Wendy Boston Toys, in order of importance. These were 'washability'; screw locked nylon and plastic eyes; no glass, wire and metal construction; stitched bows, arms and legs that cannot be pulled off; advertising all year round; filled with plastic sponge; nylon skinned; foam filled washable Teddy Bears (pioneered by Wendy Boston); individually packed. The prize was a holiday to San Remo.

In May 1959 Miss C Greenwood of The Central Baby Linen Shop in Todmorden won the San Remo trip (the competition was organised by the Leedex Ltd public relations firm for Wendy Boston Ltd). As a publicity 'stunt' she took Teddy Bears to an orphanage (The tour was probably organised by the Wendy Boston Italian agent).

In April, thirty one British Lions players and five cuddly Welsh Wendy Boston toy lions went to Melbourne – taken by the British Lions Rugby Touring Teams on their tour of Australia and New Zealand. One was team mascot and the others were for the two Commonwealth Prime Ministers and two for the opposing test team captains.

From May 29th to June 14th Wendy Boston was represented at the British Trade Fair in Lisbon. Later in 1959 a 5ft high Teddy Bear was stolen from the National Society of Children's Nurseries. Then in August, the radio programme 'Down your Way', presented by Franklin Englemann, visited Abergavenny and Wendy chooses Record No. 8. 'The Floral Dance'.

In October six Welsh Wendy Boston employees visited ATV'S Wood Green TV Theatre to meet Bernard Breslaw. This is as a reward for their punctuality and good time keeping and organised by the firm.

New accounts were opened in Sweden, Switzerland and the Middle East. A query was raised as to why the Wendy Boston toys have 'Made in England' on the labels when the toys were made in Wales. The explanation was that the customs authorities abroad don't accept this designation.

In December directors, executives and staff were inoculated against influenza costing the firm half a guinea per person. This was reported in the *'Games and Toys'* journal as 'Wendy Boston fights flu'; *'continuing the tradition of employee welfare and looking after the interest of the workers in the best possible way'*.

1960

By 1960 employment was at peak level for toy manufacturers in South Wales. A 'Sheltered workshop scheme' was started in Summer 1960. The work was done by patients at Maindiff Court, Abergavenny. The output was 18 dozen toys per week.

Outworkers and Occupational Therapy

Manufacturing enough toys to meet customers' demands was always a problem for the company, and numerous solutions were suggested. One of the most successful was the use of outworkers. For many years workers had been taking work home with them, and this was seen as a way of increasing production without having to employ extra staff. Work was undertaken on a piecemeal basis, with bears or pieces of bears, either delivered to outworkers' homes, or collected from the factory. This meant that women who could not go out to work could still earn money, and was of undoubted benefit to the factory. One of the most popular outworker's jobs was finishing the bears, which involved sewing on the noses – again to the specific Wendy Boston design – sewing up the fronts and giving the bears a brush. The bears were then returned to the factory where they would be inspected and packed in individual boxes and eventually shipped to their worldwide customers.

In another inspired piece of thinking which placed him before his time, Ken Williams joined forces with a local psychiatric hospital working alongside the Occupational Therapy Department where patients acted as 'outworkers' making Wendy Boston toys for a weekly wage. This was collected each Friday by Maindiff Court worker

Mrs. Jane Parker who recalls travelling to the Queen Street factory each week to collect the wages from Mrs Stella Stockham who managed the factory for the Williamses for more than 18 years.

Ken Williams continued to register his interest in 'Playsafe' toys as the 'Danger at Play' report was submitted to the Junior Chamber of Commerce International at Rio de Janeiro by the Portsmouth chamber including the British Toy Manufacturers Association (of which Ken Williams is a member). The name of the company was changed to Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Ltd from the original Wendy Boston (Crickhowell) and record numbers of orders were shown in their books for February.

Also in February Wendy Boston provided a 12-inch nylon fur teddy bear for every baby born within 5 minutes of the royal birth (that of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor) and midwives who read *The Times* personal column were invited to phone the Wendy Boston factory to claim on behalf of the babies.

PERSONAL
“WHATSOEVER thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; . . .”—Ecclesiastes ix, 10.
MR. JOE PEARL and David, husband and son of the late Sarah Pearl, wish to thank ministers, family, friends, for their many visits and letters of condolences.
ST. GODRIC'S SECRETARIAL COLLEGE Summer Ball at the May Fair Hotel on the 11th June, 1960, for old and present students, their parents and friends.
MARLBURIAN Club Day and Annual General Meeting, Marlborough, Saturday, 12th March, 1960.—Full information in the Bulletin.
TROUT FISHING, dry fly only. Wiltshire reach of Hampshire Avon; well stocked annually; one vacancy at £40 p.a.; entrance fee £10.—Write Box D.382, The Times, E.C.4.
GERMAN INSTITUTE.—The Lecture by Fabian von SCHLABENDORFF arranged for to-day has had to be cancelled because of sudden illness.
THE NEW ROYAL BABY will receive many gifts but every baby in the land born within five minutes of the Royal birth will be given a soft cuddly toy to mark this joyful coincidence if Matrons of Maternity Hospitals, or Certified Midwives, will telephone Abergavenny 473 to claim the present on the child's behalf.
SUNDAY at 8.25 p.m. in the Home Service. Programme Consultant Psychiatrist sneaks on behalf

During the 1960s the illustrated sales booklet was published in eight different languages in addition to English: German, French, Italian, Spanish, Norwegian, Portuguese, Swedish and Dutch.

In March the Wendy Boston firm reported the inability to find labour: they needed 100 women to work in its factory. Wendy Boston Playsafe Ltd claimed 18% of all soft toys made in the UK. A French firm was asked to manufacture the nylon toys whilst the firm reported that : 'If we had sufficient labour we could export 250,000 toys every year'.



In March 1960, Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Ltd were represented at the Toy Fair at the Queen's Hotel, Montreal, Canada; and in April the firm was represented at the Melbourne Toy Fair. But following the Brussels 33rd International Fair in May, the firm is unable to respond to the demand of the export market and

cannot take any more orders this year. Wendy Boston already exported to Sweden, Australia, France, Italy, Fiji, Canada, Malta, Belgium, Cyprus and Rhodesia.

This little Parisienne has chic

THE French are unsurpassed for their light touch, their articles of delicate fantasy (*articles de Paris*, as they call them), and their lifelike dolls which are so graceful and daintily dressed that they captivate even the grown-ups.

Now a touch of Parisian chic has been brought to British nurseries by Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Limited, Abergavenny, Wales.

A new, beautifully dressed, and splendidly packaged, lightweight unbreakable doll, specially made for Wendy Boston by Clodrey Polyflex of Paris, raises the standard of lifelike dolls even higher.

This doll marks a departure by Wendy Boston from the field of soft toys and dolls, in which they are already well known for the quality and variety of their products.

So Parisienne in form and dress are these dolls, which are available in two sizes (one 15" high, the other slightly shorter), that the imagination is not strained to envisage them as the most elegant dolls yet to be seen in any nursery.

The choice of sophisticated hair styles alone contrive to make this a very individual doll, whether the hair be long or short – brunette, black, blonde or red.



In June the new doll was produced in France by the firm Clodrey Polyflex of Paris – and marketed as being ‘unbreakable’ being made of neither glass nor wire. The doll also came with a ‘Mama’ cry and hair that could be shampooed. Also in June, South African distributors were appointed in Johannesburg.

In July Wendy Boston was the first manufacturer to occupy a new stockroom in a West End Showroom at 1-2 Hanover Street, London. The showroom cost an average of £1,500. This was instead of the expense that would be incurred should a single firm occupy an expensive showroom on its own in the heart of London. Then during November the firm was represented at a Helsinki department store show of British Toys.

Throughout the scrapbooks the many changes in logos and advertising are interesting – as is the change from children being featured in adverts to adult models in the 1960s.

In the soft toy trade the name Wendy Boston is synonymous with the very highest quality. One in every five soft toys exported from Great Britain in 1960-61 bore this famous mark. In response to numerous requests from the Motor trade, we are introducing a series of branded mascot animals specially designed to lie flat on the back ledges of cars, without obstructing the view. The eyes of these animals are made from moulded nylon, screw-locked in place for ever with a nylon nut. They are guaranteed never to come out. Filled with plastic foam, and made from specially dyed nylon fur fabrics, every animal sold is guaranteed to be completely washable.

WENDY BOSTON · CAR MASCOTS · WENDY BOSTON · CAR MASCOTS



1961

In January, Wendy Boston Playsafe Ltd. started a new production unit at the Tiryberth site at Hengoed. The new factory was converted from the old Lewis' Girl's School building and opened in 1961 with 12,000 square feet of production space employing 150 people. A second factory was planned at Hengoed for 1963.

Also in January the firm was represented at the 34th International Fair in Brussels and again in February at the British Toy Fair. At this time one fifth of Great Britain's overseas sales of soft toys were made by Wendy Boston. The Duchess of Gloucester visited the Wendy Boston stand at the Mother and Baby Exhibition at Central Hall, Westminster on 20th July.

1962

Trade Union officials helped to solve the factory discipline problem which resulted in a strike at Hengoed. The 'Voice of Welsh Industry' journal reported that the BBC TV comedy 'The Rag Trade' is to blame for copy cat strike action.

A Work's manager post with a salary of £1,000 was advertised in December to impose discipline on 50 Welsh factory girls. 'At no stage in the production of Wendy Boston's 100 separate models is the question of cost allowed to interfere with the achievement of the finest product.'

An anonymous article titled 'Surmounting Female Labour Problems' was published in The Voice of Welsh Industry in December 1962 which says:

'The Voice of Welsh Industry does not preach pessimism, but it should not be accused of 'rocking the boat' for revealing the acute problems posed for the small firm in Wales by slow, intractable female workers, especially girls in their teens.'

The article included a number of forceful comments from Ken Williams, criticising the attitudes of his factory workers. Wendy Boston is also quoted as saying,

"Our machinists have to be skilled and enthusiastic because we insist on perfection in our product. But too few girls these days seem to take a pride in their craft. In Lancashire, for example, the girls have been brought up in families used to factory work and getting up on time. ... But I just can't get into the minds of some of the girls I meet today."

But the article ends with mention of the repair service offered to damaged bears returned to the factory for repair which were returned the next day with a note saying

"Teddy has been in hospital, but he is feeling a lot better now."

Toymakers did a Rag Trade act

By Our Industrial Editor
TRADE union officials have helped a Welsh firm of soft toy manufacturers to improve factory discipline among girls employed in their works.

In an article published in the Voice of Welsh Industry, Mr. Ken B. Williams, managing director of Wendy Boston Playsafe Toys Ltd., who have factories at Abergavenny, Hengoed and Crickhowell, complained about the irresponsible actions of some of the girls employed by the firm.

One girl, blowing a whistle like Miriam Karlin in television's Rag Trade comedy series, caused a strike at the firm's pilot factory in Hengoed, according to the article.

Mr. Williams also criticised some girls for absenting themselves for the silliest of excuses or no excuse at all.

Impressed

But when I spoke to Mr. Williams last night he was much happier.

"Since the article was written things have improved considerably because the friendliest relations have been established with the district officer of the Transport and General Workers' Union," he said.

"The union officials have given straightforward warnings to the girls to behave with a greater sense of responsibility, and that has worked. I have been very impressed during the past few weeks with the actions of the trade union officials."

One in five of the soft toys exported from Britain come from the firm's factories.

1963

During 1963 the sales force was rearranged and in January Wendy Boston was represented at the 10th British Toy Fair.

One of the Wendy Boston teddy bears was pictured with Billy Fury and Mrs Albert Finney (née June Bronhill) a musical comedy star and her new baby.

A 5ft Bear was displayed at the Design Centre Haymarket Xmas Toy Exhibition with 'Miss Wendy Boston' (Kathleen Mansfield) dressed in Welsh costume, as its 'minder'.

1964

In January the firm was represented at the 11th Nursery Goods Exhibition. And in May baby Prince Edward (now Duke of Edinburgh) received a Wendy Boston Teddy Bear in Welsh costume.

1965

In 1965 27% of the firm's production went into the export of soft toys. 250 people were employed in the firm's two factories. Exports were expanded to include Aden, Rhodesia, Finland and Norway.

At the Brighton Toy Fair in January a Wendy Boston soft doll was shown.



During May the Wendy Boston firm was represented at the first ever Welsh Toy show at Sophia Gardens Pavilion Cardiff.

The World Wildlife Fund commissioned Wendy Boston to create a giant panda Li-Li and baby Ming-ming.

1966

In January the Wendy Boston firm attended the Brighton Toy Fair again.

At this time 100,000 Wendy Boston teddies were being made each year, which was a significant proportion of the two million soft toys that Britain was producing.

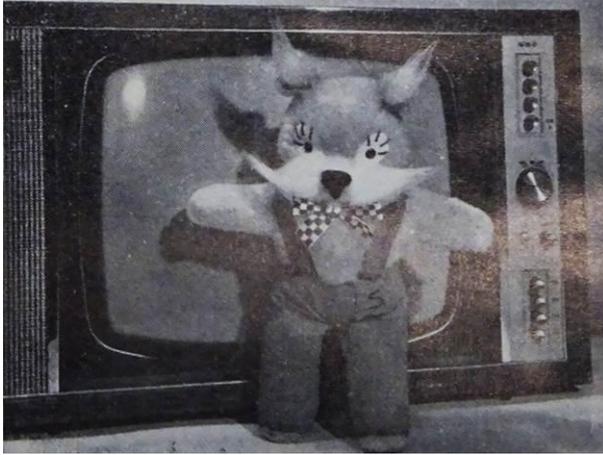
The Sooty Bear toy was introduced in December.

1967

During 1967 a Giant Teddy was given to the NSPCC West London Hospital, Hammersmith.

Some of the Wendy Boston Girls in the 'good time league' met Brian Rix in the Garrick Theatre, London.

Prices for toys were reduced by 14% as export success reduced home prices.



Wendy Boston produced a 'Snoo' toy. Snoo helped with the storytelling in the new daily children's Rediffusion TV programme 'Playtime'. Snoo received about 200 letters a day from fans.

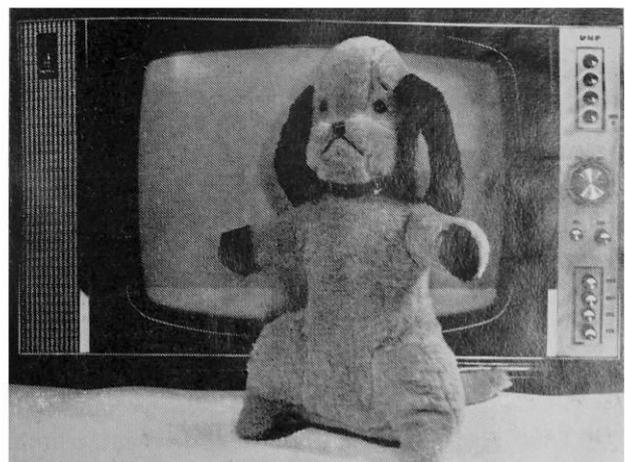
1968

Wendy Boston's 'Basil Brush' famously appeared in the BBC's 'Nixon Line' programme.



In July 1968 *The Southern Rhodesia (United Nations Sanctions) Order* came into operation. This meant that the export of goods to Rhodesia was banned, and that included toys. This was disastrous for Wendy Boston as previously the firm had exported 8,000 toys to Rhodesia each year. Kenneth Williams was incensed when he discovered that Pinky and Perky was showing on Rhodesian television despite the export ban and his anger was reported in the press. Wendy Boston had to reduce staff levels by half because of the lost Rhodesian orders.

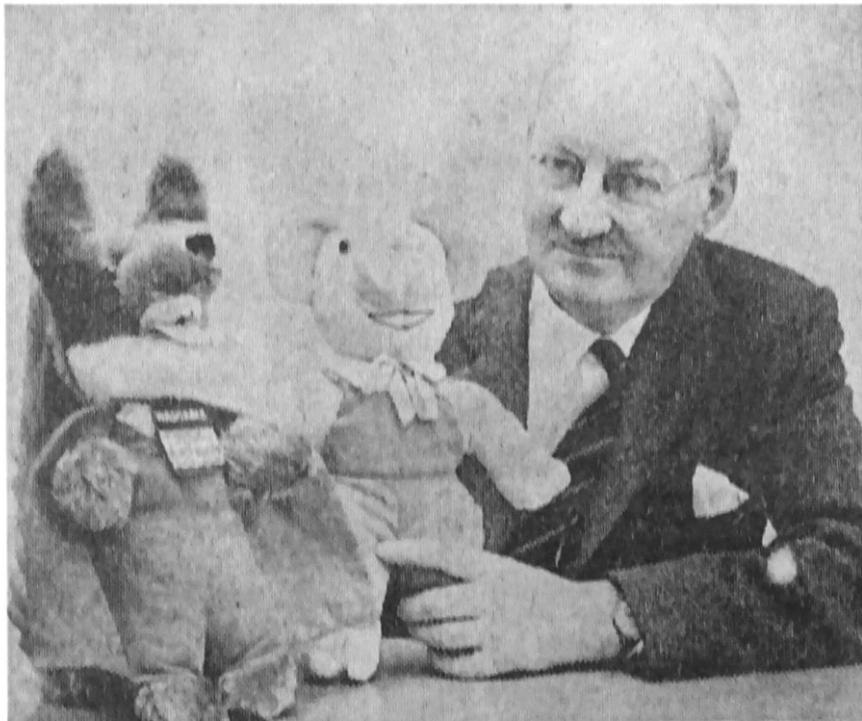
Later in the year the toy 'Sweep' (of Sooty and Sweep fame) was produced.



The Final Years

Ill-health meant that Wendy Boston had to step back from her duties in the business. Then Ken Williams was forced by the pressure of cheaper foreign imports to sell the Wendy Boston factory. It was taken over in 1968 by Denys Fisher Toys Ltd, a Yorkshire based firm (subsequently Palitoy). Wendy Boston died in 1972, leaving Ken Williams devastated. The problems must have continued as production stopped and the factory closed in 1976.

The closure must have affected the whole town and would have meant a reduced income for many Abergavenny families but all the former factory workers appear to have retained only happy memories of the Wendy Boston years.





And to Conclude: Some Personal Views

From those who worked with Ken and Wendy Williams:

Like many of those who worked with Ken Williams, and knew him, Mrs Foulkes is the first to admit that he could be a difficult character.

“He was volatile and didn’t suffer fools gladly, but I got on well with him for most of the time.” she recalled. “We worked in quite small offices with only glass partitions between them and I don’t think I would have stuck it out for 12 years if we hadn’t managed to get on pretty well.” she said.

“He was what I would call an old-fashioned employer. We worked together for 12 years and I never called him anything other than Mr Williams. It was the same with Mrs John. She always called me Mrs Foulkes and I always called her Mrs John, and even though she had been a friend of the Williamses before working for them, she always called them Mr and Mrs Williams in front of me and all the staff.”

Mrs Foukes also remembered however, that Ken Williams was not always as popular with his workforce, many of whom felt he was difficult and aloof.

“In many ways they were right.” said Mrs Foulkes. “He was what I call an old-fashioned manager. He paid the wages but wasn’t interested in small talk with the staff. He came into work and went straight to the office, unless there was a problem, so sadly many of the workers didn’t really get to know him.”

Colleague Pat Davies, who worked at Wendy Boston’s Crickhowell factory, remembered much the same about her employer.

“He seemed to find it difficult to associate with the girls who worked in the factory. He was a man in his mid-forties and most of them were young girls. I don’t think he had any idea of how to cope with them.”

“The people who worked with him in the offices had a much different view.” said Mrs Foulkes. “They saw the other side of him – the nicer, more generous side. I always felt that if you went to him with a problem he would do anything he could to help.” she added.

Mrs Foulkes also recalled that he was a man who could be somewhat eccentric at times.

“He would often go off to lunch at one o’clock and not get back for hours. I remember one day he arrived in work with a small printing press which he had big plans for. ‘Have a go on this’ he said to me. He seemed to spend a lot of time messing around with it, but it can’t have been one of his more successful ideas because I don’t remember what happened to it.”

Well known as a man who ‘enjoyed a drink’, Ken Williams was also a keen supporter of rugby and cricket, and many connected with these sports in Abergavenny and Crickhowell remember his support and patronage for his local clubs. Although few

knew his background, Mrs John and Mrs Foulkes both believe that it lay in journalism, as he had a passionate love of words and frequently wrote articles to go alongside his ground-breaking advertising campaigns.

From Julie Jones: whose mother worked at the Tiryberth factory and who donated her Wendy Boston toys to Abergavenny Museum in 2026



“All the toys in my collection were manufactured at the Tiryberth factory in the 1960s where my lovely mam, June Owen worked for at least 10 years. She worked at the end of the production line and after the toys were filled with the washable foam filling, she had the job of sewing the aperture using the magic invisible stitching so that the finished

toy had a perfect seamless look. As a small child I recall having a tour of the factory which seemed quite surreal being surrounded by hundreds of beautiful soft toys in various stages of manufacture. I know my mam had a happy experience working at Wendy Boston’s and my birthdays were always brighter when I received a special soft toy gift to add to my growing collection.

I know my mother was very happy working at the factory and to be honest I can never ever remember her talking about any industrial action whatsoever. I’m guessing this may have happened (if indeed it did) after the factory was sold off to the Denys Fisher company. I think it was after this takeover that my mother left Wendy Boston’s. Sadly my mam had a very difficult personal life around that time: I know she left Wendy Boston’s during a really difficult time, but returned briefly during the late sixties or early seventies. But I can definitely vouch for her having a very happy time working there, for sure.

I recall the name Ken Williams and got the impression he was very much on the scene at the Tiryberth factory as the top boss and a fair and good boss. I think my mother was one of two ladies who worked at Wendy Boston’s from the little mining village of Tiryberth. My mother’s name when she worked there was June Pope and the other lady who actually was a relative on my father’s side was Joyce Pope. She was a disabled lady. I’m guessing it would have been difficult to get employment in the sixties if you were disabled so good on Wendy Boston’s for giving disabled people an opportunity . Both my mam and Joyce sadly passed away over sixteen years ago and I can’t recall anyone else who worked there. I think several ladies were from Cefn Hengoed, Ystrad Mynach.

I have no photographs [from that time] unfortunately. I can actually recall the brochure showing all the toys but I don’t have one sadly. I can remember the excitement when the Basil Brush toy was unveiled at the factory and I’m

sure that was one of the factors that put the little Tiryberth factory well and truly on the map as he was certainly a very popular character on children's TV, I recall. The Tiryberth factory was well and truly on the map once it began production of the talking Basil Brush toy!

I'm sorry I can't give any more information. It's a long time ago so my memories are limited but the joy the toys gave me and the excitement I felt when I was given a new one to add to my collection is still very special to me and for that reason I am totally over the moon that my collection will be preserved in time in a very special location. It's a great honour to think of them actually in Abergavenny Museum."

From Mary Arthur:

who as a child featured in many of the Wendy Boston advertisements

Mary Arthur (née Tribe) looked back in 2025 to the time when she and her older brother John and younger brother Raglan were photographed by their father William Tribe with a wide range of Wendy Boston toys. Some of the photos were sent on catalogues and in advertisements to many countries in the world.

"I wish I had clearer memories of Aunty Wendy and Uncle Ken.



I remember the bright lights in Dad's studio as we posed with the cuddly toys. There is a photo of Raglan with 'Big Ted' and us all with the stripey cats similar to the one in the book. Raglan loved his 'cuddlies' and whereas John and I only adopted one or two which we had as favourites (in John's case Mr Williams the lion and for me a stripey cat) Raglan could hardly be seen in his cot/bed it was so full of creatures! His favourites were Big Ted and Blue Ted."

From Family friends:

Personal memories from William and Anna Tribe as told to Alison Newsam in 1997

Although many people came into contact with the Williamses via their business, the couple generally had few friends.

One of their closest relationships began in 1955 shortly after the disastrous fire when former press photographer William Tribe decided to offer his services to the factory as a photographer.

Mr Tribe who lived with his wife Anna in Raglan, remembered his first contact with the couple. “I phoned him and asked if he wanted any photographs taken. He said that he did, so I went to the factory and took some. He must have liked them because he asked me to take more and more and I became the official company photographer. We also became close friends of Ken and Wendy spending many happy evenings with them and even going on holiday together.”



Both Mr and Mrs Tribe remember them as a happy and devoted couple. “He absolutely adored her” said Mrs Tribe. “When it became obvious that she was seriously ill he worried about her tremendously but wanted her to be able to retain her independence. She was a great walker and loved to walk her two dogs along the canal in Llangattock. He didn’t want to stop her doing this but he did insist that when she went out she left a note telling him what time she had left and what direction she was walking in just in case she was taken ill.”

“He worried about her constantly” she added. “I remember once going out for a walk with her and we got to the door but had to rush back to leave a note for Ken. ‘He’s such a worrier.’ I remember her saying”, said Mrs Tribe.

Mr Tribe believed that it was their insistence on keeping their professional lives separate that led some to believe that they were not particularly close. “They were not demonstrative in public but then why should they be?” said Mr Tribe. “There was no need for them to go around the factory holding hands. I think they consciously kept apart at work but that did not mean that they were not a devoted and close couple” he said. Mr Tribe remembered Wendy Boston as a ‘brilliant designer’ and a fun and delightful person. “She really was a very nice person.”

“She knew exactly what children would like and was years ahead of her time with her use of psychology in her designing. She used to parade her toys in front of children – more often than not our three children - to see what appealed to them and what caught their fancy”, he said. “If we brought a new toy in to be photographed with our children we developed a sort of psychology which we used. If we could see that the children were a bit unsure of the toy we would let them look at it and get used to it then take it away. When they were re-introduced to it a few days later they would be completely happy with it and we could get the photographs we wanted.”

Mr and Mrs Tribe recall that Ken and Wendy liked children and agreed that the great sadness of their lives was their own lack of family. They also remember that Ken Williams’s fondness for children was demonstrated by the unpublicised work he did for children’s charities.

“Our three children were very fond of them and in fact had a much-loved Wendy Boston lion which they christened Mr Williams after Ken. This has obviously stuck in their memories as on a recent visit they spotted the lion and immediately said: ‘It’s Mr Williams!’ ” said Mrs Tribe. She also recalled one occasion when Ken Williams had arrived at their family home as she and her three children were in the middle of a boisterous game of ‘Monopoly’. “Raglan was only about three years old at the time and I was half playing for him and half for myself when Ken arrived at the door. Walking in and seeing us playing our game he began to roar with laughter, announcing that he had never seen such a young child playing the game.”



The closeness of the two families is demonstrated in a family photograph taken during a holiday on the Isle of Wight which shows Wendy, Mrs Tribe and the three children happily sitting outside the Tribe’s island home during a summer break. In idyllic style Ken Williams and William Tribe enjoyed days of perfect sailing, something which Wendy was more than happy to avoid. “She was not a natural sailor and as such preferred to stay on dry land”, said Mrs Tribe, who is herself a direct descendant of England’s most famous sailor, Horatio Lord Nelson.

Her husband in contrast was keen, if not a proficient sailor, taking every opportunity given to take Mr Tribe on weekend sailing trips on the Solent. “He was not a dreadfully good sailor and usually left the real work to me although he did occasionally take the tiller. He loved the feeling of freedom he got from sailing and being in the open air. I always had the feeling that he was not particularly happy in business and would have been happier not to have had the factory. At heart he was a marketing man and a businessman. He was always happy to do anything that anyone wanted - he was happy to go along with people. Ken was a nice man. He was also very reserved and didn’t find it easy to let his hair down which is why some thought that he was unfriendly.” Although the pair lived and worked in Abergavenny and Crickhowell for many years they did not have many friends in the area and Mr Tribe recalls that Ken’s two closest friends both came from Cardiff. “Ken was a great cricketer and made many friends in this way with the two most memorable characters being Geoff Ashe and Wyndham Lewis who both came from Cardiff. Geoff Ashe was an optician and Lewis had inherited a chain of cinemas from his father which he promptly turned into bingo halls and made a fortune on. They were great characters and close friends of Ken’s.”

Mr Tribe also recalled a holiday taken by him and Ken Williams in Spain. “We had both been working hard and decided that we needed a break so we booked a package holiday in Majorca and stayed in a hotel in Magaluf. I remember we spent our days swimming and eating and drinking. On the way back by train we had a 24-hour stay in Barcelona which we spent sight-seeing.

Ken was the sort of man who was happy to go along with anyone. He could be brusque particularly with those who didn’t know him. We were friends with them for many years and had some good times together.”

Mr Tribe was also keen to dismiss the belief that Ken Williams was a great and over-indulgent drinker. "He enjoyed a drink - a gin and tonic and wine with dinner but I never recall him being a great drinker. I think that it was only after Wendy's death, which devastated him, that he began to look more to drink." said Mr Tribe. "The one thing I do remember about him where alcohol was concerned is that he hated it passionately when pubs insisted on putting ice and lemon in his gin and tonic. He would really lose his temper on that. He believed that he should be asked if he wanted ice and lemon in his drink and that it should not be taken for granted."

Although Mr Tribe's professional contact with the business had ended before it was sold he remembers the feeling of sadness at the news that Ken Williams had been forced to sell out. "His biggest mistake was moving to Hengoed and over-stretching the business", he said. "I remember that real sadness came when, after Wendy's death, Ken himself became ill. I believe he had an ulcer and on one occasion collapsed, causing a dreadful drama. He was out of commission for some time and handed the business over to a series of managers. In their haste to compete with the much cheaper imports now beginning to arrive on toy shop shelves, for the first time ever, the Wendy Boston quality control began to overlook things and also, for the first time ever, toys started coming back. That really was the last straw.



The thing to remember with Wendy Boston Toys and to an extent with Ken and Wendy themselves is that they belonged to the tail end of another age. Their toys were expensive and were a bit exclusive.... this was the age before high tech toys and cheap Eastern imports. Yes, some people may remember Ken as being aloof but he didn't come from an age when managers sat down with workers and talked about their problems. He sometimes went out into the factory floor, commented, criticised and, if it was due, I'm sure, praised. But he was not a production man, he left that to Mrs John and to Stella Davies whose job it was."

When it comes to Wendy Boston and Ken Williams, contradictions abound. Some recall Ken Williams as an aloof drinker with little time for his employees or his wife, whilst others remember an 'old-fashioned manager' a brilliant marketing mind and devoted and loving husband.

Where the truth lies is shrouded in the mists of time, but one thing that cannot be disputed is that she was a design genius and he was a marketing man par excellence and that between them they created one of the country's leading businesses and provided toys that could be loved by a generation of children.

Afterword

Wendy Boston – years on

A reflection by Charlotte Cory

Re-reading my 1998 Introduction to this wonderful book about Wendy Boston and her teddy bear factory I have been forcibly struck by the inexorable passage of time. When we are young – of the age, say, to treasure a teddy bear – we never imagine we will ever grow old. It's something that happens to other people. But hey-ho! I did the original research for the article in the *Daily Telegraph* (that inspired this book) tracking down Wendy Boston in 1997, 40 years after I had received Edward Bear on my first birthday. I still owned him back then but he was in a seriously battered state. As I said in the last sentence of that first paragraph, I had literally loved him to bits...

It is now 2026, already (and again, astonishingly) another 29 years on from then. Wendy Boston had died in 1972, some 25 years before I researched the article and oddly, the company Wendy Boston Ltd was founded in 1945, 27 years before that. Time passes.

My memories of the tea-party in Abergavenny on September 3rd, 1997 are strong. It was only a few days after Princess Diana had died in a car crash in Paris. The country (in fact, the world) was in shock and I was not even sure that we should be celebrating but the arrangements had been made. The tea party went ahead. The very affable, delightfully un-pompous Mayor of the town cut the mangle-shaped cake and joked that he would now be known as the Mayor of Toytown. I cheekily mimicked Larry the Lamb's "Mr Mayrrrrrrr" and he laughed. My old Headmistress had retired to a village just outside Crickhowell and attended the party bursting with pride and amusement. It was wonderful for me to see her again and I stayed the night with her. The experience was very redemptive. We were able to talk about the past – 21 years after I had left school. It felt a very long time back then. She was still laughing about how I had pinned a fake Betjeman poem on the spike outside her office with a suggestion that she read it out in school prayers. This she did on Armistice Day 1972 and had found it hilarious when I told her I had written it. Other teachers, including my form teacher, had not been so forgiving. I had been given a pasting for 'making fun' of the Headmistress. Madeleine McLauchlan luckily had a great sense of humour and enjoyed recounting the misdemeanour to anyone who would listen that evening. She had told me to send the poem to the then Poet Laureate, John Betjeman himself, and he had written back very sniffily about the dishonesty of passing work off as his. I had been 15 at the time. Ho hum! It's now over 50 years ago. I keep his huffy reply framed on my wall.

My other strong memories were of Doris Shellard and her sister Stella Davies who had known and worked for Wendy Boston. They were so full of warmth and delighted that Wendy Boston was finally getting the attention she deserved and spent the evening happily sharing memories. If only we had had a video camera!

So, Nora Wendy Williams, née Boston lived from 1909 – 1972. She had been 63 when she died. 6 years younger than me now. Time goes on. It is good to have been instrumental in preserving a little bit of history. In 1997 I had wondered idly who

Wendy Boston had been. A bit of scurrying round and the question was answered. The project was then taken forward by the librarian, Alison Newsam and Abergavenny-based journalist, Liz Davies, in the form of this book I remember Alison was expecting her first child at the time, a child who will now be pushing thirty!

I find I have a photograph of me aged 3 dragging Edward Bear by his sky-blue ribbon. I have photographs of the tea party. I no longer have Edward because he eventually disintegrated completely (I should have accepted Stella Davies's offer to patch him with a few stitches) but I have since acquired a splendid replacement. On eBay! It's the way things are done these days. Oddly, I now live in France. Oddly, I am currently working on *another* teddy bear story – concerning a bear that had been kept in the local photographic studio and was photographed with members of the local Résistance during and after the 39-45 war. The story of this *ours en peluche* is a massive story for French history but little to do with Wendy Boston (except in my head – not forgetting how her husband had been in the RAF and although we know nothing about his past, it was the RAF who bravely flew over Occupied France dropping supplies for local Free France groups and parachuted into the little town where I live just after D-Day...)

50 years on from when the company was founded, 25 since Wendy had died, we celebrated her that unforgettable evening in Abergavenny. And now, nearly another 29 years on again.... Time indeed passes, but the vision of her 'coming up that hill in her blue Morris Traveller, a woolly hat on her head and her two poodles, Ivy and Harvey bouncing round in the back' lives on forever.



Charlotte Cory
Sancerre, January 2026

Appendix i – List of agents and publications

To give an idea of the broad range of publicity that Ken Williams generated in his sales technique the following list of agents and the titles of newspapers and magazines featured in the scrapbooks is an indication of the international and national influence that Wendy Boston Ltd once held.

Agents were employed in the following countries:

The UK (Scotland, Wales and Ireland – agents given geographical areas to work within), Italy, Brussels, Denmark, Germany, France, Spain, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, South Africa, The Middle East, Portugal, Australia, Canada. The Falklands (and possibly more as exports were also sent to Malta, Cyprus and Fiji amongst other countries).

Adverts appeared within the following:

Scottish Home and Country, Home and Country, Bristol Evening World, Yorkshire Life (illustrated) Bath and Wells Chronicle, Homes and Gardens, Belfast Newsletter, Western Evening Herald, Yorkshire Post, Home Safety Bulletin, South African Merchandising, Housewife, Woman's Companion, South Wales Argus, The Abergavenny Chronicle, Blackburn Evening Telegraph, Housewife, Nursery World, Women's Own, Packaging, The Retailer, Plastics Trade Press, Nursing World, Good Housekeeping, Parents, Mother, British Toys, House Safety Bulletin, Punch, Bristol Evening Post, Bournemouth Evening Echo, Edinburgh Evening Post, Games and Toys, Manchester Evening Chronicle, The Lady, Pram Gazette, Coventry Evening Telegraph, Hull Daily News, Galloway News, Shrewsbury Chronicle, Cow and Gate, Regimental magazines, Toy Trader and Exporter, Perambulator Gazette and Nursery Trader, Games and Toys Yearbook, Vogue Export, Daily Mail, Everybody's, Yorkshire News, Weekly Welcome, Woman, House Beautiful, South Wales Echo, Garage and Motor Agent, Voice of Welsh Industry, Toys and Fancy Goods, Glasgow Evening Citizens, Family Doctor, Sunderland Echo, Brighton Herald, Sheffield Star, Bournemouth Daily Echo, the Beacon (C of E publication), Australian Sportsgoods Retailers, Fiji Times, Husmodern (Sweden), Hoover News, Central African Merchant, Pretoria News, Titbits, Le Soir, World Wildlife News (and more).

Some of these magazines seem 'a strange place to advertise teddy bears'. Ken Williams being on the board of the British Toy Committee wrote several articles for trade magazines including articles on 'employment difficulties', safety of children's toys, etc. The range of products too meant that when the car mascots were produced they were advertised in the car trade magazines. Although I would imagine Ken Williams was the leader in his own publicity (never missing a chance to demonstrate the range of toys the firm produced) he also had a very effective publicity agent in Leedex Ltd.

Within the scrapbooks there are also Trade Fair reviews and publications in which Wendy Boston Ltd and the directors feature, including Brussels Trade Fair, Brighton, Harrogate, Welsh Trade Fair etc.

Appendix ii – Contributors of memories

For the 1998 edition:

William and Anna Tribe who contributed many memories

The following ladies who gave memories to Liz Davies, or gave other help:

Mair Foulkes

Lorna John

Stella Davies (née Huxley)

Pat Davies

Dorothy Roberts (née Phillips)

Jane Parker

and many more

For the 2026 edition:

Mary Arthur (née Tribe)

Julie Jones

Acknowledgements

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Mr and Mrs Clifford Othen (who found the books and gave them to Abergavenny library)

Jonathan Newsam (who typed and checked much of the work and gave time and encouragement)

Mrs Stella Davies

Petrina and Campbell Hughes (Wendy Boston's niece and her husband)

Ann Amphlett (Wendy Boston's cousin's daughter)

Frank Olding (Curator of Abergavenny Museum)

Cadburys (for supplying staff information)

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Mary Arthur (née Tribe)

Julie Jones

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Doris Shellard and others, Crickhowell District Archive Centre

Bianca Emberson, Christina Maciejewski, Sue Smith and other members of Abergavenny Local History Society Research Group

We are grateful to many contributors to the Facebook page *Abergavenny Voice* who provided lots of memories and photographs but proved difficult to contact to obtain permission to use their information.

Image Credits

1998 - Malcolm Lewis took the photo below

2026

Most of the images used in this book were scanned or photographed from the original Wendy Boston scrapbooks in Abergavenny Museum, or are from the Monlife Collections.

★ The Cover images of 'Little Ted' were provided by her owner, Nichola G. Lewis

★ Mary Arthur provided the replacement colour photos used in William and Anna Tribe's memories and also some additional photos of herself and her siblings with bears.

★ Charlotte Cory provided the photographs of Edward Bear's 40th Birthday Party invitation and of the one showing Alison Newsom and herself at the party in the Library (the Mayor and Frank Olding in the background) shown in the Introduction. She also provided the photo of herself plus bear in the Afterword.



Frank Olding, Curator of Abergavenny Museum being presented with a giant Teddy Bear by Abergavenny Fire Service members

All the information in this book is as correct as possible but the book is by no means a comprehensive history – perhaps this will come later.



