

US Meccano, 1929 – 1936

by Kendrick Bisset

The third chapter of Meccano in the United States starts with the purchase of Meccano Co., Inc., by A. C. Gilbert of Erector fame. Based on testimony in customs tariff cases from 1938-39, the purchase was apparently in January of 1929. Transcribed excerpts from these cases are in the Appendix. This purchase, of course, led to many and quite complex changes in Meccano in the US. By January 1930, Gilbert formed the Meccano Company of America, Incorporated as a Maryland corporation, the same state where the A. C. Gilbert corporation was registered. It appears that a year elapsed from the time Gilbert bought the Meccano Co., Inc. and the time the new Meccano Company of America obtained the American patents and copyrights. The 1929 0-40 and 50-70 manual copyrights were in the name of Meccano Co., Inc., while the 1930 Manual of Instructions Sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 were in the name of Meccano Co. of America.

The major question is: why did Gilbert buy the Meccano Company? An obvious and simple answer is to eliminate competition, but I suspect there may have been more. Previously, Gilbert had become involved with other companies apparently to test out new ideas. Examples are the Kelmet Company, ‘producers’ of the 1922 Steel Engineering system which led to the 1924 “New Erector”; and Noble Manufacturing of Trumodel fame which provided a number of advanced parts in the Erector system after 1927. Perhaps Gilbert was looking for an outlet for the ship building parts, to see if they would sell well. That assumes that the design of the ship parts had been at least well underway in January 1929.

Some interesting threads can be seen throughout the Gilbert-Meccano period. There are at least four major Meccano constructional product lines: Meccano (ship building, in the largest outfits); Wide Beam (or Broad Beam); Morecraft; and

Blue and Gold Meccano. Each lasted a relatively short period: up to six years for Ship Building; three for Wide Beam (within the Ship Building time); two years for Morecraft; and finally two years for Blue and Gold. Morecraft is quite different from Meccano, so it will be very briefly covered. The “Gilbert” Blue and Gold has many subtly odd parts, and so will be covered in its own 1937 – 1938 chapter. Each line introduced a number of new parts, which required new tooling to manufacture. There were about fifteen new parts for the ship building models, and about a dozen for the Wide Beam outfits (a few of these used in the smaller outfits are not cataloged). The Meccano Morecraft system introduced about fifteen new parts, many requiring some rather fancy bending. The Blue and Gold outfits included a number of parts made in England, as well as many parts from US Meccano.

From 1930, Gilbert applied the Meccano name to a wide variety of products, many unrelated to metal construction toys. Some of these products were sold with Gilbert labels as well as Meccano labels. Some items seem to be uncatalogued, both the construction toys and other items. A spreadsheet of 1930s Gilbert-Meccano items is a handy summary of the range and years that I have found. This discussion will concentrate on the metal construction toys. The term “Gilbert-Meccano” has become common use among collectors to designate the Meccano construction toys produced by Gilbert, and is often abbreviated “G-M”. This should not be confused with Meccano Erector; the Meccano company bought the rights to the Erector name in 1990, and sold (and still sell) Meccano outfits in the US under the Erector name and logo.

The first change was to the outfit numbers and associated manuals. In 1929, the outfit numbers became 0 (00), 10 (1), 20 (1x), 30 (2x), 40 (3x), 50 (4x), 60 (5x) and 70 (6x), with the equivalent 1928 numbers in parentheses. The earlier ‘x’ suffix indicated that the outfit contained an

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electric motor. A No. 5 Special outfit was added in 1929 (only) with two-inch wheels with tires, two 12-1/2 inch strips, and a shortened electric motor added to a No. 0 outfit. Accessory outfits were 0a (for both the 0 and 5 Special outfits), 10a (for the 10 and 20 outfits), 20a, 30a, 40a, 50a and 60a.

The second change was eliminating the contents of outfits lists in the manuals. Thus, the equivalence in contents suggested above cannot be directly confirmed, but based on the models in the manuals which could be built with each outfit, the correspondence is very close. The outfit and manual changes are detailed in the Appendix, as they are too complex to discuss within the overall story.

Another change was to packaging, replacing the mottled marbled paper covering the boxes with plain green paper, and painting the formerly stained wood boxes green. This change was not absolute; I have a 1929 4x set in a green painted wood box, and a 1930 60a set in a brown stained wood box – the latter box may well have been old stock. Erector set wood boxes at the time were painted red.

In 1930, outfit numbers again changed, to 1, 3, 5, 110, 115, 125, and 150. Outfits 1, 3 and 5 seem to contain pretty much the same parts as the 1929 0, 10, and 20. The re-use of the number 5 in 1930 may lead to confusion with the 1929 No. 5 Special, and the earlier 5 and 5x. There are advertising leaflets which list both the 1929 and the 1930 outfits, Gilbert numbers D804 and D825. These yield a dizzying list of outfits: 0, 1, 3, 5, 5 Special, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 110, 115, 125 and 150, as well as accessory outfits 0A, 20A, 30A, 40A, 50A, and 60A. The 5 and 5 Special are unrelated; the former had parts similar to a 1928 No. 1x, while the latter was similar to a 1928 No. 00.

In discussing the outfit numbers, I have used “1928”, “1929”, and “1930” to describe the numbering sequences. These are used to simplify the discussion, but in fact (as mentioned above) two sequences were sold and advertised together.

By 1930, neither H. Hudson Dobson nor James P. Porteus, former officers of Meccano Company, Inc., were associated with Meccano or Gilbert. The 1930 census lists the former as President of Fleuron Pottery, in Tonawanda, New York. That same year census lists J. P. Porteus as a self employed chemist, living in Elizabeth, New Jersey. James P. Porteus is listed in the 1940 census as a food products salesman, living in Cranford Township, New Jersey, having lived there since at least 1935. Cranford is about five miles west of Elizabeth. Later events show that H. Hudson Dobson rejoined Meccano, in the form of the Meccano Company of America, but more on that later, under 1937 – 1938 Blue and Gold outfits.

It is hard to believe that Frank Hornby had much control over the new US Meccano organizations, but he did make three more trips to the US. He arrived on:

13 May 1929;

16 September 1929;

14 January 1930, apparently his last trip to the US.

Frank Hornby won a seat in Parliament in the election held 27 October 1931. He declined to run in the election held 14 November 1935. He apparently had a reservation on the Samaria departing from Liverpool on 21 September 1935, bound for New York. That entry in the ship's register is crossed out, indicating that he was not aboard. Frank Hornby died 21 September, 1936.

The Products

As suggested above, the Meccano name came to be applied to many different items. We will discuss only the metal construction toys here. The 1930 line of such toys is described above. The parts in the 1929 range were still Meccano parts, but the contents of the 1930 range started to change. Strips, angle girders, flanged plates, and a few other parts were still the same as the Elizabeth Meccano parts, but many other parts were replaced by equivalent Erector parts. Examples of replaced parts are the Bush Wheel, 1" pulley, axles, and braced girders. Part numbers continued to use Meccano numbers, even in instances where the Meccano part was replaced by an Erector part. The angle girders (Meccano Nos. 8 through 9, including suffix letters) are different from the equivalent similar Erector parts. The latter have all slotted holes, while the Meccano parts have slotted holes in one side, and round holes in the other. Meccano outfits included Meccano angle girders, not the Erector equivalent. That is, except for the longer Meccano 7a (18-1/2") angle girder, where the Erector part is actually the Meccano part, but numbered MB for Erector sales. The Meccano angle girder part 7 (24-1/2") was apparently not sold as an Erector part, and Gilbert only included them in the 125 and 150 (25 and 50) Meccano outfits. As a side note, Gilbert did include MB (Meccano 7a) 18-1/2" angle girders in some of the later Erector outfits. At some point, the boxes were re-designed, and the long girders would no longer fit. A new MB was produced, but only 17-1/2" long, and still of the Meccano design with round and slotted holes. A list of the replaced parts is included in the Appendix.

Gilbert added a number of parts to the larger outfits which were neither Meccano nor Erector parts. The most obvious are the wide array of ship building parts, which Gilbert numbered in the 172 series, with suffix letters a through l (A – L). The Pilot House Top, part 172l (172L, to be clear),

appears to be the radiator used on some early Gilbert tin toy trucks and cars. Another new part was the large flanged plate, 16-1/2 inch by 5-1/2 inch, part 52b, following the Meccano numbering scheme. The ship's funnel, part 138a, looks at first glance to be much like the Meccano part, but it is a new part, too.

The 150 outfit was quite large, including an impressive array of expensive parts. These include the Geared Roller Bearing (Meccano No. 167; no Erector number); Curved Beam Girder ("Meccano" 100b, Erector DV; 56 of them!); Eccentric Triple Throw (Meccano 130, no Erector number); Circular Girder and Circular Strip (Meccano 143 and 145; no Erector numbers); and a number of smaller items. One wonders if Gilbert was trying to get rid of odd parts in this outfit. The Geared Roller Bearing (GRB) was introduced in 1928. Apparently these were made in England and sent to the US before the Gilbert purchase; the parts inspected are stamped "Made in England". The 150 outfit seems to be the only outfit to contain the GRB, either in the US or the rest of the world.

By 1931, the 1929 outfits were no longer advertised, so only the 1, 3, 5, 110, 115, 125 and 150 outfits remained. No accessory outfits are listed, which was also typical of Erector outfits. The 115, 125 and 150 outfits included the ship building parts. In 1932, the '100' was dropped, so the outfits were 1, 3, 5, 10, and 15, apparently with no change in contents. The 125 and 150 outfits seem to have been dropped, and the 15 was the only outfit with ship building parts.

Meccano Brik [sic] was introduced in 1932, based on Brik parts being included in 1932 Meccano outfits. It is not clear that Meccano Brik outfits were sold separately in 1932 or 1933, but such sets are catalogued in 1934 through 1938. Brik parts were not included in the No. 1 or No. 3 Meccano outfits. The "briks" were made of a molded stone material, perhaps similar to the old

Anker (Anchor) Blocks. The same parts were also sold as Erector Brik. Brik is only mentioned here because it was included in metal Meccano outfits, where it was illustrated for such things as bridge and crane foundations.

In 1933, Gilbert introduced a new series of parts with strips 3/4 inch wide and three rows of holes. Collectors call these Wide Beam (or Broad Beam) parts, though Gilbert just called them “Strips”, while the normal Meccano strips were called “Beams”. These parts required new tooling. Meccano Ltd. had introduced the “X” series of Meccano in England in 1932, seemingly in response to the cheaper “Trix” system. The G-M system used similar width strips as Meccano X, but with fewer holes. Outfits 1, 3 and 5 became wide beam exclusively, while outfits 10 and 15 had both wide beam and conventional Meccano parts. Smaller uncatalogued outfits were also sold; numbers 1000, 1020, 1025, 1026 and 1050 are known. These were in boxes except the 1026 outfit was in a manila envelope with the contents, including the proper count, pictured on the outside. The contents of the 1026 outfit were the same as the boxed No. 1025 outfit. In 1934, snap rivets replaced nuts and bolts in the smaller outfits. After only three years, the entire line, both conventional Meccano and Wide Beam, came to an end (at least for a while). The last year these outfits were cataloged was 1935.

1935 – 1936 Morecraft

In 1935, before the Meccano outfits disappeared, a new type of metal construction toy appeared. Terry Bryan Morehouse patented a “Connection for Structural Members” US Patent 2,042,353, awarded 26 May 1936. The patent suggests its use in furniture and in toys. Mr. Morehouse and A. C. Gilbert apparently came to an agreement to make a toy construction system based on the patent, and apparently before it was awarded (the patent was filed 5 November 1934). The new system was called Meccano Morecraft. The primary elements are connectors with slots in projecting arms, and

angle ‘girders’ with sprung tabs fitting in the slots. The connections require no additional parts, and are surprisingly rigid. The lengths of the angles are carefully chosen to allow construction of forty-five degree right triangles. Additional parts, such as strips, pulleys, axles, nuts and bolts, gears, and even motors expand the opportunities for models. There were a series of outfits: Beginner, Craftsman, Designer, Designer Special, Engineer, and Fellow. The larger outfits had metal drawers in a cardboard case. Instruction manuals were included, and, in the larger outfits, “blueprints” for the larger models.

Meccano Morecraft only lasted two years as a Gilbert product. In 1937, the system became Modern Morecraft, made by the Skipper Toy Company. Parts were very similar, but most of the Erector parts were replaced. Plain strips, which were Erector narrow strips with 1/4 inch hole spacing, became narrow strips with 1/3 inch hole spacing. T. B. Morehouse’s patent was not assigned to the Gilbert company, so production of the main parts could continue at the new company. Perhaps Mr. Morehouse also retained the tooling when he left the Gilbert company. Production appears to have continued after World War II, at least for a short time.

1937 Boltless Builder

In 1937, Gilbert apparently wanted to further explore metal construction toys which do not use nuts and bolts to connect the parts. A system called Meccano Boltless Builder was tried in that year, perhaps to replace Meccano Morecraft. A very few outfits and parts are known, some in unfinished boxes. These were not cataloged, but a card backdrop was produced, with a copyright date of 1937. James E. McLoughlin filed a patent on 4 November 1936, and No. 2,112,247 was awarded 29 March 1938, assigned to A. C. Gilbert Company. This system used metal parts with dimples which fitted into holes to keep the parts assembled. Based on the one outfit I have, these

connections are not very secure. That may explain the scarcity of this system. Perhaps the idea was abandoned when conventional Meccano was re-introduced.

APPENDIX 1

While these hearings occurred after the period of this section, they offer a history of the changes at the beginning of this period.

From “Treasury Decisions Under Customs and Other Laws Vol. 73 January – June 1938”:

Excerpts from Stone & Downer Corp. v. United States
No. 4203, Decided December 30, 1937:

...It appears from the testimony of plaintiff’s witness Dobson that this merchandise was purchased in England from Meccano, Ltd., of Great Britain, by his company, Meccano Co. of America, Inc., and that the price paid therefor was the invoice value of the merchandise and no more.

It appears that the company to whom the British company formerly sold was called Meccano Co., Inc., in New York, and that such concern was owned by the British company, and was its exclusive American agent; that ultimately the American concern was bought out by A. C. Gilbert Co., Inc., of New Haven, and today “owns the Meccano Co. that imports British merchandise”; that A. C. Gilbert Co., Inc., “is the concern that makes the competitive toys called ‘Erector sets’”; that finally the American company became Meccano Co. of America, Inc., the plaintiff in this case.

On cross-examination it was disclosed that the witness had been in the employ of the British company for sixteen years; that the British company did not sell at its cost plus 10 per centum to its subsidiary in this country; that in January of 1929 the Meccano, Ltd., of London was separated from its subsidiary, Meccano Co., Inc., of the United States.

...

[Sixteen years was presumably ending around 1929, so starting around 1913. This would match H. Hudson Dobson’s arrival in the US of 30 August 1913, but would ignore the time he spent in military service during WW I. Later, Dobson mentioned familiarity with Meccano products for 26 years in testimony in 1939, again supporting his start in 1913.]

Excerpts from United States v. Stone & Downer Corp.

No. 4516, Decided June 17, 1938:

...

This is sustained by an affidavit in evidence as Exhibit 1, made by Mr. Hewitt, secretary of Meccano, Ltd., of Liverpool, England, as follows:

...All sales of said products for exportation to the United States are made to Meccano Company of America, Inc., which company exclusively owns the trade-mark in the United States together with the exclusive right to sell Meccano products in the United States, having purchased said right and trade-mark in January, 1930.

From “United States Customs Court Reports Volume 2 January – June 1939”:

Excerpts from United States v. Stone & Downer Corp.

No. 4352, Decided February 8, 1939:

...

The importer also offered in evidence the testimony of Henry Hudson Dobson, who had previously testified in the original case and was recalled. He testified that at the time of the importation of the instant merchandise he was the agent in the United States for Meccano, Ltd., of Liverpool, the exporter herein; that as such agent he was, and for the past twenty-six years had been, thoroughly familiar with the merchandise made by said Meccano, Ltd., and that it was an important part of his duty to familiarize himself with competing merchandise; that when he was in England during the Spring of 1937 he had made an exhaustive study of the whole toy industry of Great Britain at the British Industries Fair, which was an annual event usually held during the last two weeks in February.

APPENDIX 2: 1928 – 1930 Transition

Meccano Outfits 1928 – 1930

The transition of US Meccano from 1928 through 1930 is a tricky story to untangle. Among other details, apparently in 1929 both “1929” and “1930” outfits were advertised and sold together. Combined with possible left over dealers’ stock from 1928, the picture is murky.

1928

In 1928 the US Meccano Company made a change in the outfit numbering from previous years. The sequence had been 00, 0, 1, 1x, 2, 2x, 3, 3x, 4, 5, and 6. The “x” outfits contained the same parts as the corresponding numbered outfit, with the addition of an electric motor. Sets 4, 5, and 6 also contained electric motors. Perhaps to reduce confusion, an “x” was added to the three larger outfit numbers in 1928, so all outfits with a motor had an “x”. The 2 and 3 outfits were dropped, as was the 0 outfit. Thus the sequence in 1928 became 00, 1, 1x, 2x, 3x, 4x, 5x, and 6x. Of course, they could not eliminate all confusion – they had to add outfit 2x Special. This outfit is the 2x with the newly introduced rubber ‘tyres’ added for the 3” pulleys. The 00 outfit seems to have had similar contents to the English 0 outfit, so it would seem better to say that the 0 outfit was renamed 00. Accessory (“a”) outfits were available to expand an outfit to the next larger size, as in previous years.

There appear to have been four manuals used in 1928. Two main manuals covered outfits 00 to 3x, and 4x to 6x, following the pattern established in 1918. There was also a supplementary manual for outfits 00 and 1; this supplement did not have a cover. The fourth manual seems to have been the 1927 00 manual; I have not seen a 1928 #00 manual. The manuals followed past practice in separating models based on the outfit required to

build them, and identifying the outfit at the top of the page. However, the model numbering scheme was revised (as it was in England at this time, too) to include a decimal point between the outfit number and the model number. Thus, the 43rd model for the number 2 outfit, for example, became model 2.43. In previous years, the model number used the outfit number as the first digit, so the example model would be 243 (without the decimal). The 1928 American manual contains many more models for outfits 00 and 1 than the English equivalent; other models are in a different arrangement. The supplementary manual contained additional models for outfits 00 and 1. The number of models advertised in the catalog matches the total number of models in the main manual plus the supplementary manual. The model numbers included in each manual are summarized in the table.

1929

In 1929 the outfit numbers were changed to (mostly) double digits. The new sequence was 0, 5 Special, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 and 70 (in order of outfit size, not price). Most of these were very similar to the 1928 outfits; the major difference was the addition of the Dunlop rubber tires (yes, the US manuals used the American spelling) in all of the outfits except 0 and 10. All outfits except (again) 0 and 10 had electric motors, and it is interesting that the motors illustrated in the catalog are mostly different from those used up to this time. Outfit 5 Special had the 3” long (actually 3 1/8”) version of the earlier motors. It appears that this was the only year and outfit which used this motor in the US, based on catalog illustrations of the various outfits. The motor did appear after 1929 in the rest of the Meccano world; it was advertised in the English Meccano Magazine for October 1930. The larger 1929 US outfits (30 and up) had a motor 2 1/2” high, instead of the 2” height used on previous US motors (and the 3” long motor, too). The 20 outfit used the same motor as in previous years, 2” high, and

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with the reversing switch. The No. 20 box is only 2 ¼" high, so the larger motor would not fit properly. The outfits generally followed the contents of previous years, with the 20 equaling the old 1x, through 70 equal to the old 6x, except for the addition of the tires for the 3" pulleys in the new 20 through 70 outfits. The new 0 had the same parts as the old 00, and the 10 had the same parts as the 1 (and no tires). The new 5 Special was an enlarged 00, with the addition of two 12 ½" strips [part number 1], two 4 ½" axles [15a], four 2" pulleys [20a], four 2" tires [142a], one 1 ½" x ½" double angle strip [48], and the motor.

The parts in these outfits appear, from the samples examined, to be true Meccano parts. Axles are 0.160" diameter (Gilbert used 0.156" diameter), and screws use the #7-32 threads. (British production used 5/32" Whitworth threads, and Gilbert used #6-32 for setscrews or #8-32 for regular nuts and bolts.)

The manual story becomes quite complicated. At first, reprints of the 1928 manuals were used, with labels pasted over the outfit listing on the covers. "0 to 40" was pasted over the "00 to 3x", and "50 to 70" was pasted over the "4x to 6x". The inside pages were modified, apparently by printing new sheets for the four outside leafs (that is, pages 1 through 8 and 105 through 112) in the 0 to 40 manual. This allowed a new page 1, reading "Very Important! CHANGES IN THIS MANUAL The new 1929 Meccano Outfits, including many new and better parts...", and including a listing of the models made with each outfit. This "conversion" table was needed because the old outfit numbers were still listed at the top of each page, along with the old model numbers indicating the old outfit numbers. In addition, the new pages removed the contents of outfits table, which had been part of the Meccano manuals since at least 1909. The 1928 00/1 supplement continued in use, based on the model numbers listed in the "conversion" tables. Two

new supplements were issued: one for the new Number 10 outfit and one for the Number 5 Special outfit. The Number 10 supplement started with model 1.214; this seems to be an error, because that number is in the 00/1 supplementary manual. The Number 5 Special supplement contains six (unnumbered) pages in an unusual format. It appears to be a single sheet 6 ¾" high by 27 ¾" long, folded in thirds to become 9 ¼" long, close to the usual manual size. This supplement also seems to contain an error. The highest number for Outfit 00 in the 00/1 supplement from 1928 (still in use in early 1929) is 00.472, but the 5 Special supplement starts with 00.474; number 00.473 was not used. Notice that the model numbering scheme was continued from the 1928 system; this numbering continued in all the new 1929 manuals.

Later in 1929, new "main" manuals were printed. The 0 to 40 manual (print reference O-112925) contained the same models as the 1928 00 to 3x, the 1928 00/1 Supplement, as well as the 1929 No. 10 Supplement. These models were arranged in the same fashion on each page as the "source" manuals, and generally used the same model numbers. A few changes in model numbers were made. The old "1" prefix models were renumbered into the "0" series, and in the process the overlapping 1.214 number was corrected. In the 1928 manual, ten of the "1" prefix models (1.185x - 1.194x) used the electric motor and had an "x" suffix. These models could only be built with the 1x outfit, and were originally at the end of the "1" series. With the addition of the models in the 00/1 and No. 10 supplements, these "x" models were in the middle of the "1" sequence, which ran from 1.1 through 1.264 (1.214 being used for two different models) for the three manuals. For the new 1929 manual, these "x" models were removed from the sequence and became the only "1" prefix models (1.1 - 1.10). The new "0" series was rearranged to a continuous sequence from 0.1 through 0.255. The new 1929 0 to 40 manual includes a conversion

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table to show which models could be built with each outfit; this table is on the last page (136, but unnumbered). Each model page has “See last page of this manual for list of models built with your outfit” printed across the top in place of the outfit numbers. The conversion table lists the models in the Number 5 Special Supplement; this supplement continued in use throughout the life of the outfit.

The 1929 version of the 50 – 70 (old 4x – 6x) manual is uncommon, but copies have been seen; the 1928 version may well have continued in use, with the 50 – 70 sticker over the 4x – 6x on the cover.

1930

In 1930, Gilbert rearranged the Meccano outfit numbering scheme again, and made a significant change in the outfits themselves. The outfit numbers now became 1, 3, 5 (do not confuse this Number 5 with the 1929 Number 5 Special!), 110, 115, 125, and 150. This range is described in Bean and Sternagle’s Gilbert Erector Sets, Volume One on pages 40, 41, and 117 through 121. Most (if not all) of the parts in these outfits were made in the US, probably in New Haven. While many seem to be Meccano parts, the threads, axle holes, axles, and other features match Erector standards, not Meccano. I consider these outfits to be true Gilbert-Meccano, while the 1929 outfits are transitional between “true” Meccano and the 1930 outfits. The larger 1930 (and later) outfits were the only ones ever to include the shipbuilding parts. The contents of these outfits, documented by Bill Bean in the AC Gilbert Historical Society Newsletter Volume 7 No.1, generally do not seem to relate to the preceding Meccano outfits. Outfits 1, 3, and 5 seem to be based on the 1929 outfits 0, 10 and 20 respectively. The manuals (see below) show the same models for these outfits as the older manuals. Examination of two No. 5 outfits (one apparently from 1930, and one of later vintage

with the Meccano Brik) shows that this outfit matches the 1929 (and 1928) contents quite closely. Exceptions are the addition of the following parts: one 26c, 12 tooth gear; two 27c, 36 tooth gear; and one 32c, worm. It appears that the eight spring clips were replaced by part 59a, formed collars, and that the axle rods became three 4” and perhaps four 2”, but these last changes are not completely clear from my data.

The manual situation became perhaps even more complicated after Gilbert rearranged the outfits. The 1929 manual (ref O-112925 for 0 to 40) continued in use. With the completely new outfit number arrangement, the “conversion table” in the manual was now quite out of date. To give an indication of the models which could be built, a rubber stamp was used on the cover. I have seen two of these: in the 1930 No. 5 outfit mentioned above, the stamp reads “THIS OUTFIT BUILDS ALL THE MODELS UP TO PAGE 94”; another in John Drury’s collection reads “THIS OUTFIT BUILDS ALL MODELS UP TO PAGE 11x” [last digit unclear]. Page 94 is the first of the 2.x models; page 110 is the last page of the 2.x models. In addition, a “supplement” manual was issued to illustrate the E2A motor and its use. This supplement, titled “Standard Gearing”, became part of the later Gilbert-Meccano manuals (see below). It has “Copyright 1930 The Meccano Co. of America, Inc., New Haven Conn. U. S. A.” on the front. The Meccano parts list and prices may have been part of this supplement, too. The supplement can be seen in the illustrations of the outfits in Sears and other ads.

At some point, a new manual was prepared. This was apparently printed in sections, so that a manual specific for the particular outfit could be assembled. The author’s later No. 5 outfit contains one of these Gilbert Meccano manuals. The cover carries code M 1363; the inside “title page” has M 1351 on the front of the first section of No. 1 outfit models; no number on the second section of outfit 1 models; no numbers on the two

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outfit 3 sections; no number on the “Standard Gearing” section; no number on the outfit 5 section; M1417 on Sec. 3A for No 5 with Meccano Brik; and M1274 on the illustration and prices of Meccano separate parts. All of the outfit 1 and 3 models are taken directly from the earlier 1928 (and 1929) models for outfits 00 (0) and 1 (10) respectively. The outfit 5 models are adapted from the 1x (or 1929’s No 20) models, to use the Gilbert E2A motor and gears.

Incidentally, my early Number 5 Outfit box is as illustrated in Bean and Sternagle on page 117; my later box is very similar but with “THE MECCANO COMPANY OF AMERICA, INC. - NEW HAVEN, CONN.” instead of “MECCANO CO. OF AMERICA - FIFTH AVE. BLD’G - NEW YORK CITY”.

Copyrights

Gilbert bought the Meccano Company, Inc. (of New York) in January, 1929. It apparently took some time to form the Meccano Company of America, Inc., a subsidiary of the A. C. Gilbert company. The trademarks, copyrights, and patents were apparently transferred from Meccano Ltd. (the British company) and the Meccano Company, Inc. to the Meccano Company of America, Inc. in January, 1930. The copyrights of the “1929” manuals (0 – 40 and 50 – 70) were issued to the Meccano Company, Inc.; the copyrights of the “1930” manual sections 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were issued to the Meccano Company of America.

Summary

The following table summarizes the stages described above, specifically as relating to the smaller outfits. It appears that the 4x, 5x, and 6x outfits of 1928 became the 50, 60, and 70 outfits (respectively) of 1929, and that these larger outfits had little or no relationship to the later Gilbert Meccano production. The table shows the outfits available in 1928, 1929, and 1930, and the manuals and models associated with each throughout the period. The years listed should be considered approximate; it is not clear exactly when the “double digit” outfits were introduced. From the references, we know only that they were available by October of 1929 (the “1029” in the print reference), but were presumably introduced earlier that year. Note that the 1928 00/1 Supplement was used in 1929 until the “real” 1929 manual was available (presumably in November, based on the print reference). The number of models listed with each outfit is the quantity advertised in the brochures. This number helps to verify the model numbers in the manuals associated with each of the outfits. The numbers in parentheses under the manuals are reference numbers for my manual collection, and indicate the approximate year and the particular manual within that year.

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1928		Early 1929			Late 1929		1930		Later	
Outfits (no. of models)	1928 00 – 3x Manual O-0628/ 50 (28.1)	1928 00 / 1 Supple- ment (28.3)	“1928” 0 – 40 (sticker) Manual O-0628/ 50 (29.1)	No. 10 Supple -ment (29.2)	Outfits (no. of models)	No. 5 Special Supple- ment (29.4)	1929 0 – 40 Manual O- 112925 (29.5)	Outfits	Gilbert Meccano Manual	
00 (472)	00.1 - 00.310	00.311 - 00.472	00.1 - 00.310		0 (472)		00.1 - 00.472	1	[00.175 - 00.302]	
					5 Spec. (496)	00.474 - 00.496				
1 (676)	1.1 - 1.184	1.195 - 1.214	1.1 - 1.184	1.214 - 1.264	10 (727)		0.1 - 0.255	3	see text	
1x (686)	1.185x - 1.194x		1.185x - 1.194x		20 (737)		1.1 - 1.10	5	see text	
2x (734)	2.1 - 2.48		2.1 - 2.48		30 (785)		2.1 - 2.48			
2x Spec.										
3x (785)	3.1 - 3.51		3.1 - 3.51		40 (836)		3.1 - 3.51			
	1928 4x-6x Manual O-0528/ 6.5 (28.2)		“1928” 50-70 (sticker) Manual O-0528/ 6.5 (29.3)				1929 50-70 Manual no ref. (29.8)	110, 115, 125, 150	No relation to earlier outfits	
4x (842)	4.1 - 4.57		4.1 - 4.57		50 (893)		4.1 - 4.57			
5x (885)	5.1 - 5.43		5.1 - 5.43		60 (936)		5.1 - 5.43			
6x (932)	6.1 - 6.46		6.1 - 6.46		70 (983)		6.1 - 6.46			

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