



Driving Test published by J & L Randall Ltd., 1955.

The game includes various items of plastic street furniture including a Belisha beacon and the three zebra crossings. Zebra crossings were introduced in Britain in 1951, the same year that the Belisha beacon obtained a flashing light which had previously been just a yellow ball.

Eden Valley Museum Collection

Driving Test

A traditional board game

Despite the ongoing attraction of digital gaming, it seems that board games are having a resurgence. No longer novelty items to just dust off at Christmas, board games are becoming increasingly popular as people of all ages seek to reduce their screen time and look for alternative spaces to socialise. In recent years, board games have reached a new audience in form of 'board game cafes' where people can indulge in the latest board games, whilst sipping coffee with friends in a fashionable interior. Children benefit from playing traditional board games too. They learn to take turns, stick to the rules and share the task of setting the game up with their friends.

The board game shown here is called *Driving Test* and was played

in the 1960s by a local headmistress and her family from Edenbridge. It is one of several vintage board games which can be found at Eden Valley Museum in Kent.

Driving Test was invented by British toy manufacturer, J & L Randall Limited in 1955. At the time, it was less commonplace to own a car so a game such as this was probably quite fun for children to play, especially if their parents didn't drive! Like *Driving Test*, learner drivers in the grown-up world of the 1950s could practice unaccompanied. In 1950, the pass rate for driving tests was only fifty per cent, although a new edition of the High Way Code published in 1954 may have improved matters. By the 1960s, there was more traffic on the road so teaching children about road safety was ever more important.

Apart from *Driving Test*, there were similar board games for children to play, including a racing car game by Bell Toys and Games inspired by the Oulton Park Circuit in Cheshire. J and L Randall followed suit with their own version, *Grand Prix* in the late 1950s. Players took turns in all these games but they didn't have to roll dice. In *Driving Test*, players operated a gear stick to 'drive' plastic vehicles around a map. The action was enabled by a strip of metal fixed to each vehicle which attracted a magnet on a moveable trellis underneath the board. The arrangement was slightly unreliable, hence a quirky line in the instructions which advises 'dusting the map with talcum powder' if vehicles stall.

During the 1960s, the British Government commissioned graphic designers, Jock Kinneir and Margaret Calvert to create a new road signage system to make driving safer. Existing signage was too small, mainly consisted of text and the symbols were not always very helpful. The sign for 'school' was a flaming torch, an example of which once stood outside Oddfellows Hall in Edenbridge High Street. Margaret Calvert's new sign for school, still in use today, sensibly depicts a red triangle with two children, inspired by an image of herself as a child.