



**Duration**

01:11:58

**Reference**

OH6

**Subjects**

Classic Toys / Toymaking / Automata

**Recording date**

9 June 2015

**Recording location**

Interviewee's home, Woodbridge, Suffolk

**Interviewee**

Fuller, Ron (RF – speaker, male)

**Interviewer**

Lin, Gloria (GL – speaker, female)

**Synopsis**

His playful character and innate love for toys have brought Ron Fuller (b. 1936) much success since he became a toymaker in 1972. This 2015 First Decade interview provides an insight into Fuller's mind as he discusses his beginnings, inspirations and urges to experiment with mechanics and produce unique, intricate and often humorous toys. He reflects on his time with the Crafts Council, as well as his keen interest in folk toys from the Appalachian Mountains, which led him there in 1982 on a Crafts Council-funded tour of the United States. He describes in detail his making process and the origins of some of his best works. These include his egg-laying hen, currently in the Victoria and Albert Museum of Childhood, and coin-activated donation boxes, which became popular in museums and galleries in the 1970s and 1980s (and are still used in many today). In this interview Fuller evokes strong feelings of nostalgia for his childhood and the excitement that came with playtime.

**Recording**

**00:00** RF asks GL about the Crafts Council (CC). He mentions that his work was originally in the Design Centre and talks about receiving a bursary when the CC first opened.

**01:24** RF talks about his first CC exhibition at Haymarket, 'Playtime'; various works and publications that he produced during the 70s; and a school workshop he led in which children made 'elastic-band guns', which was publicised on television. 'I stood next to a wall, with a camera behind me and they [the school children] all shot me with the elastic-band guns [...] that was the final shot.'





**04:30** RF mentions his time on the CC Purchasing Committee as the toymaker representative.

**06:14** RF describes the type of toys he was making at the time: a wooden aeroplane, a ship and submarine, guns.

**08:22** RF discusses his interest in remote-controlled/mechanical/automated toys; he reminisces about making a toy helicopter as a teenager.

**10:40** RF mentions studying folk toys; he states that much of his work is influenced by toymakers in the Appalachian Mountains. He talks about his visit to the US in 1982–83, during which time he exhibited work at a Lazarus department store as part of a month-long show dedicated to British craft organised by the CC.

**13:33** RF mentions the 1982 CC exhibition *The Maker's Eye*.

**14:17** GL asks about the toymaking process. RF responds by describing his early work, such as his egg-laying hen, now in the V&A Museum of Childhood. He talks about his making process and selling his work in the 60s and 70s.

**19:59** GL highlights drawings by RF in the CC archives. RF expresses the importance of making notes to remember designs.

**20:59** RF talks about museums' interest in his work. He describes his coin-activated pieces, such as circus donation boxes, three of which went to Madame Tussauds, among other attractions.

**27:17** RF recalls his early workshop in 1968 and setting up his cooperative craft shop near Southwold ([www.craftco.co.uk/ron.html](http://www.craftco.co.uk/ron.html)). He discusses the success of his shop.

**32:03** GL asks how RF's style changed from the 70s to the 80s. RF talks about his changing style and techniques: 'I built up my style through copying other people, really – or as Stravinsky says – you shouldn't say that, you should say that you stole other people's ideas as opposed to copied them, so I stole quite a few ideas from other toymakers.'

**35:26** RF talks about his favourite automata pieces in Norwich and Stafford: 'I've got a little figure which taps the glass case, you see, as people walk past, so it attracts attention.' He discusses his pieces at Great Yarmouth.



**39:08** RF mentions that his son helps him build sometimes.

**39:50** RF and GL talk about the First Decade project and changes in the CC.

**41:37** RF talks about his wife and teaching experience at Central St Martins (1970–72) and the RCA. He talks about work of his that the CC holds.

**44:13** RF mentions First Decade maker Howard Raybould's articulated fish. He cites previous toymakers that influenced him.

**46:32** RF talks about his apprentice, Eleanor Glover, who gained a CC apprenticeship. He mentions First Decade maker Sam Smith.

**48:39** GL asks about other influences. RF talks about his interest in mechanical making and automata. He discusses the types of wood he uses.

**51:09** RF talks about the functionality of his toys. 'I get quite a lot of feedback from people now that say they've handed their toy onto their children, and sometimes I get asked to remake a toy for a family because it's been played with so much that it's fallen to bits.'

**53:16** GL asks about changes since the 70s and 80s. RF talks about toys being made on 3D printers, contemporary automata makers and his own studio work.

**59:44** RF talks about how his designs are getting more abstract and the sense of humour that runs through his work: '...it's nice to make kids laugh, really, it's much better than making them cry! [laughs] You [...] try and amuse them [laughs].'

**01:01:31** [GL and RF look at folk toys] RF shows GL a Flipper-Dinger 'This is a Flipper Dinger... You've got to sort of, as you blow, this comes up you see and you've got to try and hook it on like that. [blowing sounds] Usually you run out of breath before it happens.'