

## Book Review

By  
Jim Gamble

Shire Library (formerly Shire Publications) is a well established publishing house that over the last four decades or more has put out over eight hundred titles covering a diverse range of subjects from Edwardian Water Closets and Egyptian Myths to 1920's Britain and Walking Sticks. The latest released to join this long list is: **MECCANO** by **Roger Marriott**. Their series of low priced paperback books usually run to around sixty pages (Meccano it seems requires a full eighty pages!) and offer moderately brief, but concise information on the given subject. The Meccano edition does exactly that.



MECCANO

ROGER MARRIOTT

SHIRE LIBRARY

I had known for some time that Roger had taken on this project and I certainly did not envy him the task of condensing such long and convoluted history, including copious illustrations, into an eighty page, small format book. However, I must congratulate him on the result of his labours. I found the writing style and obvious erudition a pleasure to read, the unfolding chronicle of the development and continuity of the system throughout the years works well and makes for an interesting story. Roger has been able to hold a delicate balance of information. He has not dwelt over long on any particular or fascinating part of the firm's history, of which there are many. This would have been a trap so easy to fall into - all Meccano historians have their own personal enthusiasms concerning one or more of the diverse and wonderful products of company. Notwithstanding this, there are certainly very good references and illustrations to the obvious prime 'offshoots' of system - Elektron, Kemex, Aeroplane and Motor Car constructor Outfits etc. Roger, however, adheres closely to the story of the development Meccano constructional system within the

framework of the firm's financial fortunes and the final demise of Meccano Ltd. in late 1979.

Any points noted in the text that might possibly give rise to the slightest of dissent or debate, I decided were of an extreme pedantic nature. What perhaps should have been brought to the fore was the plethora of highly sophisticated literature that supported the whole enterprise. I can never bring to mind any other toy manufacturer that produced material even approaching the quality of that produced by Meccano Ltd. That, along with their very distinctive 'house style' I feel was a highly significant factor in the firm's success. Given the restrictions on space there were inevitably a few omissions that might be thought worthy of literally a few lines of recognition e.g. The Hornby System of Mechanical Demonstration, Crystal Receiving Sets. Hornby Speed Boats, Dinky Builder, Bayko etc. Probably a simple listing of full range of products put out over the years would have been quite sufficient to cover this.

I was interested and to see the illustration selected for the cover. Not the usual Blocksetting Crane, which in reality is now so dated that anyone under the age of fifty would probably not have a clue as to what it represents! The illustration used, although still over forty years old, does show easily recognisable model subjects and also in a colour scheme that would connect in the memory of likely purchasers of the book.

It is really quite difficult for us enthusiasts to view such a publication as this with any objectivity. If you try and imagine that, other than the usual childhood contact, you had no particular knowledge of Meccano and you were to pick up and read - or even just look at the pictures (there are a hundred excellent colour illustrations!). I think you, or anyone, with a modicum of interest would be astounded at the whole wonderful business.