

Equally apparent in the 1920s was the company's continued emphasis on advertising, another key element in pre-war growth. The 1929 Dealers' Catalogue, for instance, provided design suggestions for nine different window displays and offered free advertising material to support each one. The company was generally reluctant to show at toy trade fairs on the grounds that they rarely produced sales although Hornby, like most of the leading toy manufacturers, was a staunch supporter of the British Industries Fair, initiated by the Board of Trade during the war to encourage indigenous manufacturing. At constant prices, Meccano's total outlay on advertising rose thirty-fold in the course of the 1920s. Apart from the burgeoning national press, the expanding range of children's comics also provided a significant outlet, since a survey of London children in 1933 showed that almost a third were reading six publications a week. Altogether, Meccano publicity was carried in papers and comics with a combined annual circulation of 75,000,000. Most of this was handled by the W. S. Crawford agency but the company's advertising budget also supported a new specialist publicity department created mainly by Ellison Hawks, formerly a clerk with the Commercial Union in Leeds and a successful writer of popular science books. He joined the company in 1921 and by 1930 had built up a team of fifty responsible for a steady flow of catalogues and other material for retailers and consumers alike. Their most important contribution, however, was to develop the *Meccano Magazine*, a task which

A display case, constructed in the Liverpool factory and used by Meccano toy shop proprietors. It was designed to display the company's accessories to good effect: note, for instance, the ship's funnel towards the front of the display. Frank Hornby always supported his selected retail outlets with high-quality promotional materials.

BY COURTESY OF J. GAMBLE



A clockwork Hornby 0 gauge locomotive from the 1920s in Great Western livery.

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fell mainly to Hubert Lansley. As a schoolboy, Lansley had been so enamoured of Meccano that he had produced by hand his own magazine, the *Meccano Engineer and Electrician*, which achieved an astonishing circulation of some 1,500.<sup>31</sup> After a spell with an horticultural company, he joined Hawks's department late in 1923, building models and ultimately writing almost everything that appeared in *Meccano Magazine*, including the column which appeared under Hornby's own name. Over the course of the 1920s both the price and size of the magazine increased. Originally a free, four-page publication, a charge was levied from 1920. By 1932 it was selling 70,000 copies of every eighty-page issue at a price of 6d. and was available in a variety of different languages. The editor received on average of 200 letters a day from readers.

With separate sections devoted to engineering construction, to railway sets, and, for a while, to radio, the magazine also included material of general interest, often concerning the various empire countries to which so much of the company's export effort was directed, or introducing readers to a forthcoming product. The purpose was educational in the broadest sense, the tone very much that of the self-improvement characteristic of