

CORK PROFILE



BY BRIAN HAYES CURTIN

Lars Edman Toy maker

Children have been playing with metal soldiers since the 1700s, but the Cork company that produces them is still thriving in 2013.

A toy that was played with by children in eighteenth century Germany is essentially the same as that being produced in the Prince August factory in Kilnamartyra, near Macroom.

However, the Prince August factory produces far more than toy soldiers. They have made over 600 Tolkien figures, as well as other ranges of fantasy characters and collectors' pieces. The company also makes historically accurate pieces from different historical periods from the Napoleonic period to the Battle of the Boyne and the Romans.

Lars Edman came to Cork in 1976 from Sweden and founded the Prince August company in county Cork that year. He bought the former Cork Shoe Company at an auction, when no one else bid for the property.

He has stayed there since, producing figures that are exported all over the world. Today the company employs ten people.

They export around 70 or 75 per cent of their stock and Lars believes they are now the "oldest manufacturing company in the Macroom area, which is a sign of the times".

"We are 37 years in

business and are quite unique in Ireland today." Their customers are "anyone from seven to 77", Lars says. He says that their figures are quite in vogue again. "For parents, there is quite a movement away from computer games, where there is no interaction."

One of the interesting things about Prince August products is how you can cast your own figures. You simply buy a mould, the metal and a small pan that the metal is melted in. Within minutes you can cast your own figure.

100 years ago, toy soldiers dominated toy markets, Lars explains. However in the 50s, plastic took over completely.

Lars' father set up a factory in Sweden in 1958, when the product was already becoming an anachronism. Lars joined the company in 1969 and decamped to Cork in 1976.

"There is a strong tradition in Sweden to cast your own figures, and it's a tradition that stays in families. There is no such tradition in Ireland or the UK," according to the Swede.

He thinks that Prince August is the only factory of its type in Europe, although there are a few in the US. "It's not a big market, it's a niche market," he says. "The internet is a lifesaver."

In September they launched a new website



PROFILE

Name

Lars Edman

Occupation

Managing Director
Prince August

Location

Kilnamartyra

Favourite thing about Cork

The fantastic walks you can take

Least favourite thing about Cork

Politics!

and sales have doubled since then, he reveals.

Since 1988 they have had a licence to make figures from JRR Tolkien's 'The Hobbit' and 'The Lord of the Rings'.

He says that over the years, they have made more than 600 Tolkien figures, including some that are barely described by the author, so their designer has to use some creative licence!

After 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy was released

a few years ago, the "interest went up and up" but after the market became flooded with so many licensed products, interest dropped somewhat. He is expecting some bump in sales from the release of 'The Hobbit' trilogy, however.

After divorcing his first wife, who returned to Sweden, Lars married a local girl years ago and they have three children.