



THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

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Preparations are well under way for the Conference. Although we regret to announce that the pioneering collector of Australian children's folklore, Dr Dorothy Howard, is unable to attend due to ill-health, we are delighted to have as an international guest Professor Kenneth Goldstein. Kenny Goldstein is Chairman of the Graduate School of Folklore and Folklife Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and one of the United States' most noted folklorists. He will address the Conference and take part in a number of sessions.

Some aspects of the programme which will interest Newsletter readers are the two sessions on Children's Folklore and one on Folklore in an educational environment.

In addition, many of Australia's best known folklorists will be present, from Darwin, Townsville, Perth, Alice Springs, Sydney and the rest: Ron Edwards, Danny Spooner, Shirley Andrews, Warren Fahey, Wendy Lowenstein, Alan Scott, Phyl Lobl, Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all ...

As well as individual papers, the Conference will include a forum on Cultural Preservation and Cultural Change, and an important workshop on the Preservation and archiving of collected materials.

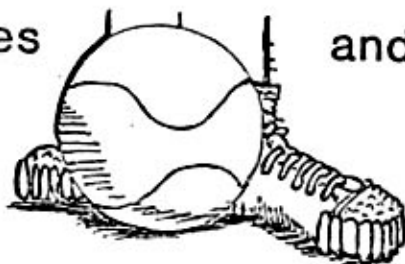
Please note: all subscribers to the ACF Newsletter are eligible for concessional registration for the Conference. See you there!

Gwenda Davey
June Factor

Rebound:

Replies

and



correspondence

More Conkers

I enjoyed the article on 'conkers' but fear that the dreadful error in the first sentence, although written in jest may come to be taken in earnest if not corrected at once. The name 'conker' has nothing whatever to do with William the Conqueror, indeed, as the horse chestnut tree is not native to the British Isles I doubt if many were growing there in Norman times. I have an impression that the game was originally played with hazel nuts but I cannot remember where I got this idea. Hazel is a native of the British Isles and grows freely. In Oxfordshire 'conk' was a slang term for the head, or a blow on the head, and this seems a more likely derivation. Flora Thompson called Fringford in Oxfordshire

Candleford Green because of the white candles of blossom on the horse chestnut trees around the village green in spring. White blossoming trees give good conkers, pink ones are sterile. Girls used to collect conkers and stick pins in them - four for legs, four for the back with a bit of knitting wool wrapped around and you had a dollies chair.

On page 2 re green being an unlucky colour, I have come across this superstition in Yorkshire also. Green is the fairies' colour and if you wear it they have power over you. A dropped knife means a stranger is coming to the house.

I have just remembered that the nearest equivalent to conkers I have seen from a native Australian tree are the flat black beans about 1½ (3cm) across which grow in pods on a tree in the rain forest. I do not know the name of the tree. These beans may be found at places like Mission Beach in North Queensland, I think they are transported by water. Children call them 'Burny beans' because if you rub them on your clothing they can get so hot from friction that they burn the skin of an unsuspecting victim.

(Katheen Hunt
North Balwyn)

Elastics

I read the article in the National Times about children's games, in which you were quoted as saying that "elastics" was a 1970's game.

I first played elastics in 1961, and was introduced to it by an American girl, new to our school at Manly N.S.W., whom I had been assigned to look after. She came, I think, from California.

School populations were very stable in those days, and we were very proud of our new girl and new game, and we certainly played it long after the girl went back to America. I have always thought that this was the origin of the game in Australia, and that I was the first Australian girl to play it.

(from Rosemary St.John
Forest Lodge, N.S.W.)



More on circle games

I picked up a Woman's Day of July '82 the other day and read an article on Games Children Play. It's two years old and your book or second book has probably been published. I remember having sung in a N.Z. playground the current game and if you do not know it here is Green Gravels.

Green gravels, green gravels
The grass is so green
The fairest young lady
That ever was seen
We'll dress you in silk
And bath you in milk
Then tell Janet
To turn round her head.

(various girls were picked out by name from the circle who held hands and skipped round then stopped for whoever to turn round, back to circle.)

Another was if I can recall it:

See what a pretty little girl of mine
She cost me many a bottle of wine
A bottle of wine or a guinea or two
See what my pretty girl can do.
On the carpet she shall kneel
Till the grass grows round her heel
And choose the very one you love so sweet.

(Here the centre girl chose someone in circle and the two twirled round then the climax!)

Now you're married we wish you joy
Every year a girl and boy
Loving each other like sister and brother
I pray you both to kiss together.
0000000h!

These rhymes of course are back to 1905 or '10 on and were popular hopping-round and skipping in circle playtime fun. I'm one of the lucky old girls who can still remember all sorts of old time things and still enjoy travelling around.

(from Grace Hodges
Baxter, Vic.,)

Autograph books

Another rhyme that has come to mind that used to appear in autograph books is:

"Adam and Eve and Pinch-me-tight
Went down to the river to bathe,
Adam and Eve were drowned
Who do you think was saved?

I also remember the superstition that a horseshoe had to be held with the points upwards otherwise the luck fell out.

For Weather Dites:

- Thunder: 1. God's motor car.
2. Moving furniture in Heaven.

(from Mary Small
Glen Waverley, Vic.,)



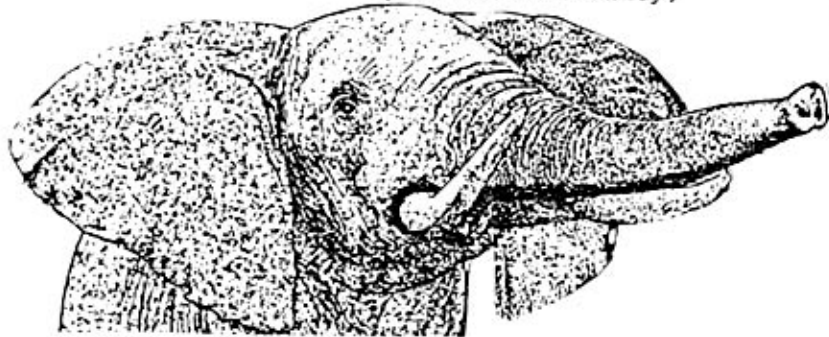
Sneezes

One for sorrow,
Two for joy,
Three for disappointment,
Four to meet your boy,
Five a letter,
Six something better,
Seven a miss,
Eight a kiss,
Nine a carriage,
Ten a marriage.

The number of times a person sneezed was counted.

c. 1943 Brookvale, N.S.W.

(from Barbara Wiley)



RHYMES I KNOW

Dear June, I would like to give you a letter with rhymes. I have a title for the book: Allright vegemite.

Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's off to school we go,
we raise our blades and hand grenades
Hi Ho, Hi Ho, Hi Ho, Hi Ho.

Apple pie, cherry pie, I smell Tom Thumb.
Tom Thumb in the woods making friends with
Robin Hood. Robin Hood in the cellar
making love with Cinderella dressed in
yella. This is how she turns around.

Glory Glory hallelujah
Teacher hit me with the ruler
I socked her in the eye with a
four-n-twenty pie.
And the sauce came marching by.

10 nails in your back

"10 nails in your back
Blood running down your back
(fingers on upper back)
Spiders running up your arm
Spiders running down your arm
(fingers creeping on forearm)
Feel a little breeze (blow)
Feel a little squeeze (pinch)
Now feel the chill." (spoken very mysteriously)

- 5 upper primary aged girls lying on towels at pool, Ashburton, Melbourne, January 1984. Girls sat on each others backs to chant this, whilst doing actions on the back of the girl lying down. Intonation very important for the dramatic qualities. Game became a mass of rolling, giggling bodies as excitement rose to a pitch.

(from Anne Shute,
McKinnon, Vic.,)

by Emily Howie

One bright day in the middle of the night,
two dead men got up to fight.
Back to Back they faced each other.
Drew their swords and shot each other.
A deaf policeman heard the noise and came
to arrest the boys. If you don't believe
this poem is true, ask the blind man.
He saw it too.

No more teachers, no more books
No more teachers' dirty looks
When the teacher rings the bell
Grab your bags and run like HELL.

Jingle bells
Batman smells, Robin flew away
Wonder Woman lost her bosoms
Flying TAA. Hah.

Jingle bells, Jingle bells
Jingle all the way
Father Christmas lost his whiskers
Flying TAA. Hah.

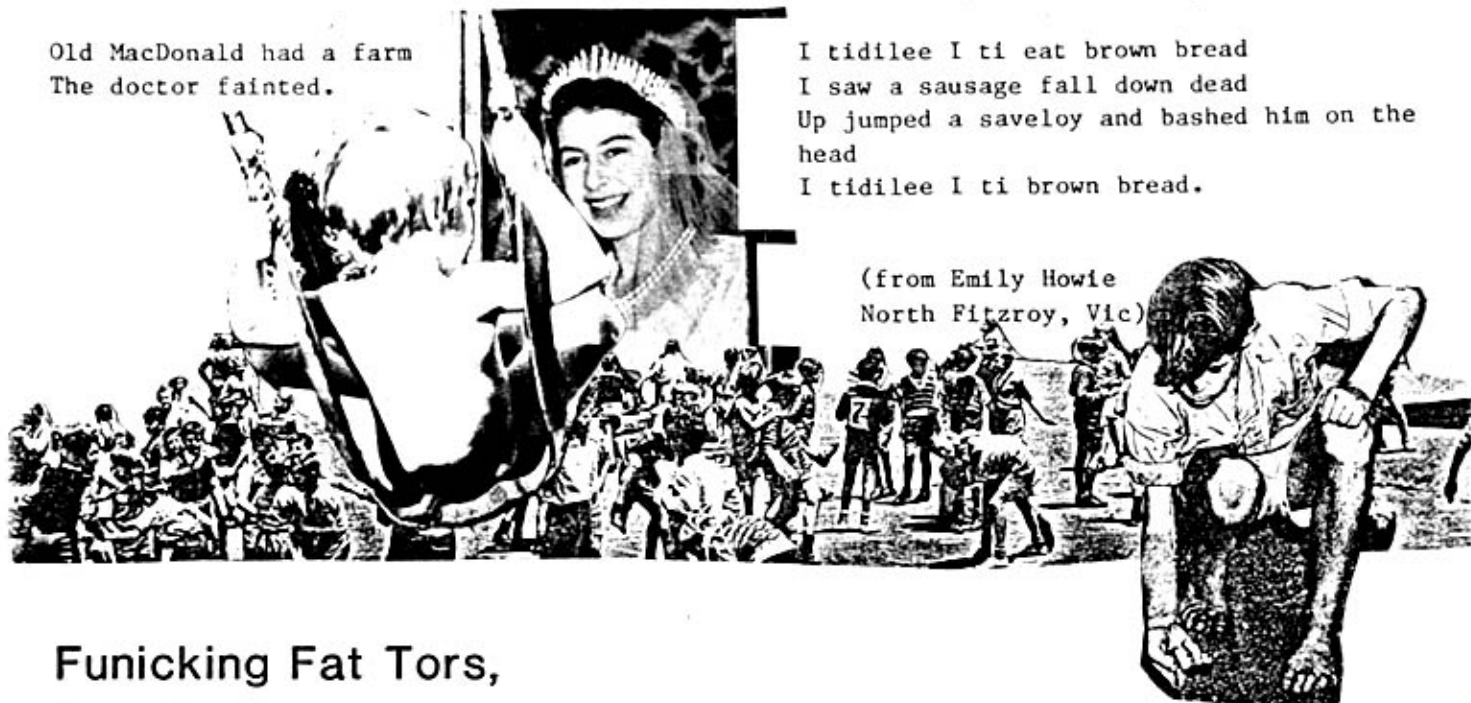
God save our gracious Queen
Give her a jelly bean
Cause she's stuck in the washing machine.

Old MacDonald had a farm
The doctor fainted.

Hickory dickory dock three mice ran up the
clock. The clock struck one and the other
two got away with minor injuries.

I tidilee I ti eat brown bread
I saw a sausage fall down dead
Up jumped a saveloy and bashed him on the
head
I tidilee I ti brown bread.

(from Emily Howie
North Fitzroy, Vic)



Funicking Fat Tors, Egg Cups and Weak Horses

From Nuggets or Nothing, magazine of the
Korong (Vic.) Historical Society; repro-
duced with permission. Article by Peter
Sutherland (born 1911).

Back to Barty - he was once giving us
some Shakespeare, the seven ages of man.
Buckley Haase whispered, "Barty's in the
3rd age" apropos of the fact that he was
then courting Alice Smith. Barty heard and
flashed "You'll be a whining schoolboy
next!" I saw Barty upset by us kids only
once. Gordon Foster had turned up one
morning wearing a spotless white linen
coat, quite new. While Barty was carefully
writing sometimes on the blackboard and
taking some time to do it, some villain
sitting behind Gordon quietly and accurate-
ly flicked ink spots onto the back of the
coat, absolutely ruining it. When all this
was discovered, all that Barty could think
of was to send poor Gordon home. The
culprit got it in the end, however.

School isn't all lessons, and we had
plenty of playtime, particularly between
morning and afternoon school, as many of
the kids bought lunch to school and that
was soon over. The boys and girls had
separate playgrounds; there was rarely any
mixing, very occasionally wet weather would
drive both groups into the shelter shed,
and some kind of party game would develop.
But that was a rarity. Usually the smaller
boys potted about, quarrelling desul-
torily, or playing an odd game or two of
"cards" or marbles. The cards were
cigarette cards which came one to a packet
then, you acquired them from friendly
cigarette smoking elders. They were put
out by the manufacturers in sets of 50; war
scenes, prominent soldiers and the like, in
those days; and I remember one very beauti-
ful set of alpine flowers which Ernie
Bartrop had collected and which he distri-
buted as minor prizes. To play cards you
and your opponent took it in turns to flick
a card against a wall; whoever got closest
to the wall was allowed to collect them
all, arrange them according to his secret
system, and then toss them in the air,
winning all which landed face up. It was

cheating to bend the cards to favour then landing the right way up. The keen card players of course collected sets, and there was much swopping as you sought to complete a set. Marbles or "alleys" was a game of skill and played more by the older boys. There were two games - "Big Ring" and "Fat", with their own rules and language. In the former, the alleys at stake were teed up in the centre of a ring about five feet in diameter, and the idea was to win them by knocking them out of the ring with your 'tor' which was flicked by the thumb from outside the ring. It wasn't done to "funick" - assist the tor with an arm movement - you had to keep your wrist still. The favoured tor was of agate - "real agate". A good "real" was highly prized; it was supposed to "stick", that is, stay in the centre after knocking out the first alley, enabling you to clean up the whole stake. The staple alley was the glassie or bottler, (the ball used in the self-sealing soda-water bottles of that time) worth 2; coloured glassies and porcelain alleys were worth 4 and 6 depending on size; and there were huge glass "dobs" used in the Fat game. These figures may not be quite right. A good player would think nothing of swapping alleys worth 120 for a "real"; he figures he could win them back soon enough. In Fat, the alleys at stake were teed up in a small bow-shaped area, and you started from a mark about ten paces away by "sipping" your tor up as close as possible and then knocking the stake alleys out. If your tor went "fat" - stayed within the bow, you had to retreat to "half fat", a mark about five paces away, and shoot from there. There were various intricacies - the "dob" came into it somewhere and could be used to scatter as many alleys as possible from half-fat; and you could pursue the scattered alleys with your tor, securing the right to remove minor obstructions with the cry "everys", or forbid it to your opponent by anticipating him with "faint everys!" You played in turn, of course; and if you scored you were able to continue. The winner of a game was first in the next

game; second place was secured by the cry "second sippy 'oist"; and third place by "the one!" I am afraid I've forgotten many of the details; a few old timers together could no doubt resurrect them.

There was some cricket played by the older boys, if somebody had brought a bat and a ball. It was a real backyard cricket, up against a fence, with no worry about a smooth pitch. If you got hold of the bat, you batted until you were caught, or deemed bowled, or l.b.w. ("leg!"). The catcher got the bat in the first case, the bowler otherwise. Whoever grabbed the ball was the next bowler.

Footy was more popular, but we didn't always have a ball to play with. Every now and then we managed to collect enough 3d's and 6d's to be able to go down to Barclay's and buy the ball sitting tantalizing in the window; and it was a great day when the brand new ball appeared and was solemnly booted up the playground by the reigning footy champion. Barty could be lured out to bless the ball by punting it an enormous distance up, to squeals of admiration from some of the girls. It was usually kick-to-kick in the playground, with every now and then a pick-up game in Chapel Street, at the top, between two pairs of gum-trees as goals. The school took its footy seriously and most seasons matches were played against Inglewood, Bridgewater, or the Vale. Of my age, the champs I remember were Oggie Jackson, Mucker Sheard, and Gordon Crisp. Mickey Crisp, the town's number 1 champ, was a few years older than us. There was occasional "Ups" versus "Downs" matches at both cricket and footy, played on the senior grounds (Market Square and Racecourse); Chapel Street was the divide.



Back to the playground at school. There were some other less formal games played. "Sides" was played a lot. There were two teams, and each would take it in turns to attack a certain pepper-tree defended by one of the opposite side. Again my memory is vague, but I think the attackers won if one of them was able to tag the tree before being tagged by the defender. It sounds a bit simple, but it was a very good game as I recall; attacking required good tactics, and defence sharp reflexes. Then there was "Weak Horses", played by two teams of 5 or 6 boys each. The team down first would form a kind of multi-legged horse; there would be an anchor man in front standing against the fence, the others would be bent over each holding the boy in front of him by the waist. The other team would run up in turn and take a flying leap over the horse's tail and land astride with as big a thump as possible. This went on until they were all mounted, and the horse then had to endure a count of ten before being allowed to buck the riders off. If the horse collapsed before this (with cries of "weak horse!") its components had to go down again, otherwise it was their turn to become riders.

Then there was "Egg Cup". This was for up to six players, and required a tennis ball. A row of "nests", one for each player, was formed up against the fence, with a curved boundary line scratched in the ground about six feet from the nests. The nests could be up-ended hats or caps, or just scooped out of the ground. The starting player had the ball and was allowed to patrol within the boundary; the others had to stay outside it. He would drop the ball in a nest and make a bolt for it; if it was your nest you had to jump up, pick up the ball, and try to hit someone with it. If you succeeded, your victim was rewarded with an "egg" (a stone) in his nest; if you missed you got the egg. Each player was allowed three turns; on one of these he was allowed to drop the ball in his own nest, pick it up, and brand someone

he had his eye on. If anyone got three eggs, he was then "stinking", and had to retire from the game, which went on until there was a winner.

Finally, there was a good deal of running and jumping. When running was "in", a favourite contest was round-the-block, two contestants starting at the school corner and running in opposite directions. The finishes were often exciting because you could not see how the other boy was doing. Alas, older boys often deceived their juniors by offering them a big start, setting them going, and then only pretending to start themselves. But the big athletics day was, of course, the Bloomfield Picnic - a highlight of the school year. I can support to the full the enthusiasm expressed in the "Nuggets or Nothing", Volume 5, article on Edward Bloomfield. In our day the school formed up and marched down Chapel Street, and along High Street to the old Market Square, drum beating and a couple of flags waving. It was a three event championship then; the prize was the gold medal, and I think about £1 cash; and there were cash prizes down the line for all the events.

(Thanks also to Jenny Pitts and Wendy Lowenstein.)



Playground Games: Glenferrie Primary School

By Victoria Smith, 7 years.

1. Hopscotch - the game is painted on the ground. We use a stone.
2. Mothers and babies - like mothers and fathers but without a father. Only girls like this game, and no girls like to be the fathers.
3. Chasey - children run around the school chasing each other. One person is "it". They decide "it" by saying a rhyme.

"Ig dig dog shit
You are not it"

The last person left is "it".

Other less common rhymes are:

"Mary fell down the drain;
How many miles (feet or inches) did she fall?"

- one word per person clockwise around a circle; last person gives a number which is counted out around the circle. The person on that number is not "it".

"Einey, meiney, miney, mo
Catch a tigger by his toe
If he hollows let him go,
Einey, meiney, miney, mo."

(N.B. Victoria's 11 year old brother says that in his day the word "nigger" was still used, at the same state school.)

"It" counts to 10 on the spot without closing her eyes or turning around. Then "it" needs to tag someone. The person tagged is then "it".

4. Hide and Seek - "It" is found out using the same way as chasey. The other people hide. "It" has to close their eyes and count to 100 (if they know how; otherwise they just count to 10, 10 times). Then they search. The last person found is "it" next time. When people are found they tell where the others are, or help to look for them.
5. Footy - Mostly boys, but occasionally girls play. They just kick the ball from end to end. There are no goals.
6. Cricket is just played normally. More girls play cricket than play footy.
7. Star Wars - People use small figures and move them. We make up our own games. Usually they are wars. Usually Luke's side wins. The person who brings Luke, has him on their side. Mostly boys play.
8. Races - Get a stick for each end. Anyone in the running mood plays - boys and girls from any class. The kids just get together to play it; nobody organizes it. A kid who is not doing anything is asked to decide the winner. Sometimes if someone has a lolly or anything (piece of biscuit or something), they give it to the winner.
9. Helicopter, helicopter - A long rope is swung overhead by one person while the other players chant:

"Helicopter, helicopter come down to the ground."

The players in a circle have to jump over the rope as it comes down to the ground level. People drop out for a rest, or if they miss jumping the rope.





10. Follow the leader - Choose a leader using the above rhymes. People follow the leader's actions.

11. Statues - One person, chosen with the above rhymes, sings (whilst not looking at the players) - sometimes a song, or just la, la, la. When they stop singing, everyone has to be a statue. Anyone moving goes out. The last person left wins. They become "it".

I get a little embarrassed if I have to sing.

12. Monkey bars - My favourite game is to swing on the monkey bars. I usually do this with Jill.



Playground Games in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney

A recent survey at a primary school led to the discovery that Year 5 children, aged about 10 to 11, were playing eleven games during recess time.

They managed without any specific supervision, though the teacher on playground duty was occasionally called to settle disputes. These were caused mostly when there were collisions with other pupils who were rushing around aimlessly.

The activities were:

BLACK CAT, a chasing game, beginning with two players touching each other at arm's length.

ELASTICS, a skipping game related to what is often called French Skipping.

HANDBALL, played on painted or chalked courts, mostly with doubles as in tennis.

TIP FOOTBALL, a less violent variation of Rugby but now and again leading to more physical conflict.

SKIPPING, using a long rope, not often accompanied by the traditional chanting of rhymes.

SOCCER, using bins instead of posts.

HAND CRICKET, played with a tennis ball, also using bins, this time to replace stumps.

POISON IVY, played with a basketball thrown high against a wall, and an opponent jumping over the ball in a straddle as it bounces back.

HOP-SCOTCH, on a painted or chalked court, using a flat stone in the style of so many great-great-grandparents.

FLY, a game in which participants leap over a succession of small sticks placed at intervals in increasing stages of difficulty.

EGG, with a tennis ball hurled against a wall, regarding skill in catching and tactics.

Compiling the survey helped in the development of spoken and written communication. The action was recorded on super-8 film without rehearsal and during a normal school playtime.

Observations have shown that conflicts in playgrounds increase when children do not involve themselves in group activities such as those listed.

David Bateson,
Bondi, N.S.W.



Finally...

Not last night but the night before,
24 robbers came knocking at the door.
I went downstairs to let them in,
They knocked me down with a rolling
pin.
Now the rolling pin was made of glass.
It fell down and cut my arse.
I went upstairs to fix it later
I burnt my dick on a radiator.
I went downstairs to cool it off
Some little bastard shot it off.

(from Frances Sutherland,
Collected Princes Hill,
May 1984. Two girls
about 10 years.)

SPECIAL OFFER

Ian Turner's book *Room for Manoeuvre*, his writings on politics, Australian society, sport and play, has been called by a leading Australian publisher "The book I would most have liked to have published." The book sums up the life and work of one of the most influential teachers and thinkers in the Australia of the past thirty years. A free copy will be sent to every new subscriber to *Overland*.

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