



**Play and Folklore: 30 years young**

**Growing up in the Fifties: fun and games**

**Quandonging**

**Childhood on Cummeragunja**

**The state of play**

**More about music for children in the Torres Strait**

**Rules of the D.P.C - a girls' club**

**The 'Cat and Mouse'**

**Mystery folk toy**



## From the Editors

### ***Play and Folklore* no. 55**

This issue of *Play and Folklore* marks an important anniversary: it is 30 years since it was first published under its original name, the *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*. In all these years it has been sustained by the support and enthusiasm of its writers and readers and by the talents and generosity of those who have assisted in its production. Thirty years on, we are encouraged by the growing international awareness of the significance of children's own culture – their folklore, centred on play. We hope this publication has made some contribution to that progressive change.

June Factor, Gwenda Beed Davey and Judy McKinty

### ***Play and Folklore***

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## Play and Folklore: 30 years young

### June Factor

With this issue of *Play and Folklore* we celebrate 30 years of publication.<sup>1</sup> Reason enough to rejoice that commitment, perseverance and a decent dollop of irreverence have made it possible to bring out two issues a year (mostly) since September 1981. Surely a modest success, particularly in a country where children's folklore and play have been largely ignored by both academia and government.

These days, *Play and Folklore* is published on the internet by a major Australian cultural institution, Museum Victoria. But in the beginning it was put together in the two small offices of its founding (and continuing) editors, Gwenda Davey and June Factor.<sup>2</sup> We were both academics at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Melbourne: Gwenda a psychologist, June a teacher of literature and creative writing. With a common interest in folklore, we had already established the Australian Children's Folklore Collection (ACFC), a major archive of children's lore and language (now also housed at Museum Victoria), and were researching and publishing in the field. It was time, we thought, to reach out into the community of scholars and interested citizens – time to publish a newsletter/magazine/journal.

In those early years, before widespread use of computers, scanners and other time-saving equipment, the text was prepared on a typewriter, the illustrations drawn or copied, then everything laboriously cut, pasted and finally photocopied, stapled and posted to subscribers. The 'technical' work was undertaken by a quiet young enthusiast, Don Oliver (now himself an academic) – unpaid, of course. For editors and helpers alike, it has always been a labour of love.

From the beginning, *Play and Folklore* has had an Australian focus and a global perspective. While the majority of our contributors have been Australian, over the years we have published a significant number of contributions from overseas scholars – well-known figures such as Dorothy Howard, Brian Sutton-Smith, Jean-Pierre Rossie and Andy Arleo, but also younger scholars seeking an outlet for early and original research. And regardless of the nationality of the writer, we have welcomed material that enlarged our understanding of the environments – social and cultural – in which children play, and the myriad commonalities and differences that are characteristic of children's playlore across the world.



The folklore of childhood is everywhere created in particular social and cultural contexts. Australia is a land of immigrants, and from our very first issue we published material about the multicultural play traditions that are the invisible luggage and the generous gift of immigrant children. For many of our readers much of this material came as a surprise, as did the articles about the range and variety of Aboriginal children's play. We published writing about children's playful language use, the changes over generations and centuries of play materials, and the liberty to play – this last a contentious topic in many countries. In *Play and Folklore* there are individual recollections of particular playways in poor and rich communities alongside theoretical essays on aspects of childlore. There are book reviews and lively debates. And there are rediscovered treasures: Sir Joseph Verco's remarkably detailed and evocative account of boys' games at an Adelaide school in the 1860s; Dr Percival Cole's careful study of Sydney children's collecting habits in the early 20th century; favourite rhymes published by Dame Mary Gilmore in her column in the Sydney Worker in 1914. We have never been at a loss for material.

By 1989 both editors had moved to other tertiary institutions. The Australian Children's Folklore Collection and *Play and Folklore* travelled with June Factor to the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne; the ACFC was housed in the university's archives, conveniently next door to the Centre. By that time the publication had attracted a number of talented local writers interested in childhood lore and language, including Warren Fahey, Hazel Hall, Cathy Hope, James Lambert, Bill Scott, Kel Watkins and Edel Wignell. A few years later we set up an editorial board of three experienced researchers and writers – John Evans, Judy McKinty and Heather Russell – whose knowledge, commitment and wisdom undoubtedly enriched the publication.

It was thanks to the enthusiasm and persistence of Maryanne McCubbin, a curator at Museum Victoria, that in 1999 the Museum became the new home of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, followed in 2001 by *Play and Folklore*. Carolyn

McLennan, a Project Assistant at the Museum, became the capable and enthusiastic design and production manager of the publication until 2009, when Senior Curator Deborah Tout-Smith took over the role. At the hand-over of the ACFC, June Factor signed an agreement with the Director of the Museum which ensured the continuing integrity of the archive and the establishment of a Reference Committee to guide its development. At the public ceremony that accompanied the signing, the Director spoke of the importance to his institution, and to the wider culture, of preserving 'childhood memories and ongoing playground traditions... if we are to retain a truly rounded sense of our society and its changes and development over time.' For Museum Victoria, he said, 'the greatest significance is that it brings to our existing collection something which has been largely missed in the past, and that is a direct and personal voice of children.'<sup>3</sup>

*Play and Folklore* continues to be one of the ways in which the personal voices of children can be heard, but it was not until 2002 that it was launched on the internet and became a publication of interest around the world. The children's rhyme we used to inaugurate the first issue, back in 1981, still rings true:

*Tic tac toe,  
Here we go,  
Where we land  
We do not know!*



#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Until issue no. 32, 1997, the publication was called the *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*

<sup>2</sup> In 2010 Judy McKinty joined Gwenda Davey and June Factor on the editorial team

<sup>3</sup> *Play and Folklore* No. 36, July 1999, p.1



## Growing up in the fifties: fun and games

### Peter McKenna

Peter McKenna is one of Australian football's favourite sons. He is probably most famous for his years as a Collingwood player (1965-75): he played 180 games and kicked 838 goals. He also played 11 games for Carlton, kicking 36 goals. He later worked as a football commentator for Channel 7 in Melbourne for 20 years.

They say they were the good old days, and having grown up in Melbourne's West Heidelberg in the 1950s in a happy, stable and loving family environment I must agree that it was a wonderful time in which to spend my youth.

Sometimes West Heidelberg is regarded as a rough and tough suburb but where I grew up it was a Housing Commission area, consisting mainly of young Australian families. It was a close-knit neighbourhood with a wonderful sense of community spirit.

I was fortunate to live one hundred metres from a soccer ground and we little Aussie boys would descend on that ground after school and kick a football around until dark. Often Mum would have to come over and drag me reluctantly home for dinner. Eventually the adult men who played on that ground asked us if we wanted to play competitive soccer. We enthusiastically agreed and I played soccer from the age of eight until I was thirteen.

After dinner, the local boys and girls would often meet at a large gum tree, where we would play a game we called 'Releavo'. The idea of the game was that one person would go 'he'. This person stood in front of the tree, closed his eyes and counted to one hundred. All the other kids would hide and



ABOVE Peter McKenna as he appeared on a 1973 Scanlen's football card  
From the Collection of the Melbourne Cricket Club Library,  
courtesy Trevor Ruddell, Assistant Librarian, Melbourne Cricket Club

TOP RIGHT Football made from newspaper and string  
Source – Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria



the person at the tree would have to try to find and catch everyone who was hiding. This went on night after night, no fear of the dark or of any danger. A simple game but great fun and we loved it.

The girls played Hopscotch on the footpath, and sometimes if you were the only boy around you would join in. If you were with a group of boys you wouldn't join in though, as Hopscotch was regarded as a 'girl's game'.

Another huge pastime was Marbles. We would gather around a dirt area, draw a circle and fire in turn to knock marbles out of the circle. It was really big-time to have ball-bearing marbles and 'blood reals' (a blood-coloured marble).

Football and cricket in the street were also very popular. Often the football was made out of rolled-up socks or newspaper tied with string and somehow formed into the shape of a football.

In 1956 I was 10 years old and there was great excitement when the Olympic Games came to Melbourne and the Olympic Village was built in West Heidelberg. I remember very well walking up to the shopping strip at the Village with my autograph book and getting the signatures of all the famous athletes. All so exciting!

Making your own kite and heading for the park to fly it was also thrilling, especially as you watched it sailing into the distance attached to the long string. On a windy, warm day this was a particularly enjoyable pursuit.

Another popular pastime was the construction of your own billycart. It was every local boy's dream to have one with ball-bearing wheels. Then you would head for the steepest hill you could find and tear down it as if you were emulating the racing-car drivers.

Saturdays we often went to the Ivanhoe Picture Theatre, usually to see a cowboy movie. We would all cheer for Hopalong Cassidy and boo the bad men and the Indians. (We were completely ignorant of American history and the plight of the American Indians.) Another highlight of this excursion was the various sweets we could buy: Fantalets, Jersey Toffees, liquorice blocks and, of course, the various mouth-watering ice-creams. This was all heavenly bliss for a young boy.

We were friendly kids and we loved to socialise with the people in the neighbourhood. At exactly 28 minutes past five on most afternoons, my mates and I would call on Mrs Briggs who owned the local cake shop, knowing that she would give us the



## Growing up in the Fifties: fun and games

leftovers. We especially loved the vanilla slices and 'matches'. Mrs Briggs always appeared delighted to see us and managed to look surprised that we had dropped in to say 'hello' right on closing time.

I began at Parade College, a Christian Brothers' School, in Grade 3. The Junior School was in Alphington and I loved the fact that the school had a great House System. I was so proud of my House, colour blue and named Hughes after Brother Hughes, one of the original founders of the school. In fact, I implored my mother to buy all my clothes in the colour blue. It is still my favourite colour.

We were fortunate to have a great oval at the school, which we boys put to use every lunch-time playing football with a tennis ball. Another game we played was British Bulldog, a very rough tackling game which didn't suit my gentle demeanour!

Another highlight of my Junior School days was getting off the tram at Alphington Station and going to the local milk bar to buy half a loaf of hot bread. My mates and I would then drag out the hot, soft insides and hop into this delicacy with great vigour. Naturally we had half a loaf each. What a great breakfast!

After my soccer days in West Heidelberg my friends and I were very fortunate that a young priest, Father Kevin Mogg, came to our local parish, Saint Pius X. He formed a youth club and we entered the YCW football competition and became known as the strongest football club in the YCW competition. We were all indebted to Father Kevin for what he did for us as kids. He married many of us and is still a great personal friend.

I was one of the ordinary football players when I was 12 to 14, but gained confidence when I entered the Under-15s and was coached by a great man, a professional runner named Keith Webster. He told me he was going to play me as a key Forward, and I was over the moon that he had taken this interest in me. My football improved out of sight and this was the beginning of my path to the thrill of eventually making it at Collingwood.

There is no doubt that if you grow up in a loving family and in an area where people really care for each other, then you are extremely lucky. I feel very privileged to have grown up in West Heidelberg at that time.

## Congratulations!

*Play and Folklore* offers its heartiest congratulations to Warren Fahey, who in 2010 was awarded the Australia Council Don Banks Music Award for outstanding achievement and contributions to Australian music.

Warren Fahey is a legend in Australian folklore circles – and elsewhere. He is a researcher, writer, performer, music publisher – and regular contributor to *Play and Folklore*. He founded Larrikin Records and Folkways Music, and in 2009 produced a 10 CD collection of Australian folk songs.

It's a great tribute to Warren, and gratifying that the Award now includes folk music as well as classical music and jazz.





## ‘Quandonging’

**Bernard Datson, Peter Ellis & Glenda Datson**

Peter Ellis has provided information about an outback Australian game played with native fruit. The game description was written by his brother-in-law, Bernard Datson of Baranduda, Victoria. Bernie is formerly from Broken Hill. The notes on the Quandong come from Peter and his sister, Glenda Datson. Our thanks to Peter and his family for their contribution to this special edition of *Play and Folklore*.

### QUANDONG KINGS

**Bernard Datson**

*Broken Hill, New South Wales, circa 1954 –  
about the time of the Royal visit.*

This was a game fairly common among boys. It involved having a quandong stone and getting ‘the old man’ to drill a hole through it, so that a piece of string could be passed through and knotted on one side. The quandong stone could then be swung around.

If boys so equipped met or had a suitably appreciative audience, one would challenge another.

A penny would be tossed (heads or tails); the loser would place his quandong on the ground. The other boy would swing his quandong and bring it down to hit and hopefully smash his opponent’s quandong.

The boys took turns until no one won or a player’s quandong was smashed. The victor would then call his quandong ‘quandong one’. If he won another contest it was then called ‘quandong two’. If he lost a third contest to a novice, that person could then be ‘quandong three’ as he inherited the wins of his defeated opponent. The excitement and thrill of the game was exponential on the rare occasions of someone reaching ‘quandong six’ or more.

So desirable was the esteem a successful player could muster that one boy got his old man to prepare a fake – an apricot stone! No one played with him.

This game is similar to one in England where chestnuts are used and called ‘Conkers’.

Editor’s note: The American folklorist Dorothy Howard, who visited Australia in 1954-55 to collect children’s traditional play customs, also discovered that this game was played in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, from about 1914 to 1922, using quandongs strung on a wire.



Quandong stones  
Photographer – J. McKinty

## NOTES ON THE QUANDONG

Peter Ellis and Glenda Datson

The Quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*) is a small semi-parasitic tree that is widespread throughout inland Australia, including outback scrubland areas like Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill. Somewhat resembling the Weeping Pittosporum (*Pittosporum phyllarioides*) in general appearance, the Quandong can be detected by its brighter light-green foliage that makes it stand out in the bush.

It grafts its roots onto neighbouring trees and grasses in its formative years, but it does not kill the host. This is thought to boost water and nutrient supply, particularly in times of drought.

The fruit of the Quandong has a thin outer layer that has a tart, ‘peachy’ flavour and is much sought-after for jams and preserves, and even ‘quandong pie’. The tree around Broken Hill has larger fruits, about the size of an apricot, whereas at other locations it can be a smaller, cherry size. The very hard internal stone or kernel, the size of a small marble, is round with pin-head indentations, and finds applications in bush crafts as stud buttons and Indigenous necklaces. Outback children often utilised quandong kernels for playing Chinese Checkers.



Quandongs are sought as ‘bush tucker’ by Indigenous peoples, the flesh a ready source of vitamin C, whilst the oil from the kernel has medicinal applications for skin ailments, etc.

The nearest locality of the trees to Melbourne is in the box-ironbark stands of the Kamarooka Forest at the northern edge of the Whipstick Scrub near Bendigo, and in similar locations at Tarnagulla, St. Arnaud, Wedderburn and Wychitella, as well as the granites out of Charlton. There is also a bitter, non-edible Quandong known as the ‘Ming’, *Santalum Murrayanum*.

‘*S. acuminatum* is widespread inland on sandy loams, clay soils and rocky ridges as a component of tall mallee, low open-forest and pine belah woodland.’

Leon Costermans, *Native Trees and Shrubs of South-eastern Australia* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1983)



Quandong tree with ripe fruit  
Photographer – J. McKinty



## Childhood on Cummeragunja

### Sandy Atkinson

Uncle John 'Sandy' Atkinson AM is a well-known and respected Elder of the Koorie Aboriginal community. In October 1988, Gwenda Davey interviewed him about his childhood on Cummeragunja, an Aboriginal mission established beside the Murray River on the Victoria/New South Wales border.

The interview was conducted for the Children's Museum at Museum Victoria, and a short extract was used as one of the stories for the 'Talking Chair' in the You're IT! exhibition of children's play. This is an edited extract from the original interview. Our thanks to Sandy Atkinson for checking the interview transcript before publication.

**SA** I was born at Cummeragunja on the 9th of March, 1932. My father and his father were also born at Cummeragunja, and I lived there all of my childhood life and left when I was about 17 years old. Life on Cummeragunja was pretty happy from a kid's point of view. We had two thousand acres of grounds to wander around in, including the biggest red-gum forest in the world, which we used to go and play in.

As a young boy, myself and all the other boys on Cummeragunja, we had plenty to keep us occupied. In them days when you didn't have any BMX bikes and things you had to make your own fun, and so

Sandy Atkinson. Photo taken for the Aboriginal Children's Play Project, July 1997  
Photographer – J. McKinty  
Source – Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria



our games were usually games that we created ourselves. In the summer there'd be lots of games that were associated with the river. My people lived along the Murray River from the year nought, and so in the summertime we played along the rivers, and not only did we swim but we learned to be good divers, because growing up, I guess you had to prove yourself, and just like all the little rat packs that you might have in life, ours were no different. By the time any kid got to about 12 years old, his one aim was to swim solo across the Murray River, so that was a great part of one's initiation, I guess, for the rat pack – and we'll call them that, I think, because that's a good and fitting name for them – and we would, while we were swimming, play a game such as throwing bricks into the water and diving to find them.

The other game that we used to play was Mud Switches. Now when I was growing up, World War II was on of course, and we used to hear about the War and so on, so we used to 'war' with each other across the Murray River. If you can imagine getting a nice, supple piece of sucker – red-gum sucker – and skinning it of all the leaves and limbs that are on it, and what we'd do is get clay – we knew where there was nice bits of clay along the riverbank – we'd get them, and put 'em on the ends, and punch holes in the mud too, and as you 'switched' it, it would travel a long way, and as it travelled the holes that we'd put in would create a whistle, so it'd maybe sound like a bullet whistling through the air, or a bomb if you like. That was a very popular game.

We never played games where anyone would get hurt – although those [clay pellets] would have hurt very badly if they were to hit you, naturally enough, because most of the kids on the Mission were really super at throwing stones at anything at all. They could hit anything once they threw at it. I mean, that was a part of what we learned – it was an everyday occurrence where you were able to throw at things and hit them. So the mud switches, as we call them, were very popular, and you could hit anything you liked with them. So I suppose that was one of the things that you'd have to learn, to dodge all the mud that was coming at you...

A lot of games that we played at that time may very well have been associated with survival, because we would go after ducks and swans... Long before I was born my people would go through the forest, and when the swans and ducks would nest they would get plenty of eggs to eat...

So we continued as kids too, every year when the floodwaters came, only we made our canoes out of sheets of iron. We'd go to the local tip and get sheets of iron, and [put] pieces of wood in each end and nail it, and we'd get clay and plug up all the holes, and we'd be able to sail – and we'd sail through the forest and get swan eggs and so on... Swan egging, and emu egging as it was called, was a very traditional sort of thing. It was all regarded maybe as fun, but it was also regarded as a survival part of it too.

**GD Were you actually taught to do that by older people, or did you more or less learn through other kids?**

**SA** Oh no, absolutely, by older people. I mean it might, from a kid's point of view, look like it's a play thing, but it's very dangerous – I mean if you're miles and miles out in flood waters and it's snake-infested and every other thing, you really have to be aware of the dangers and so on...

I was thinking about it the other day. Even if people, adult people, weren't friendly to each other – and that was no big deal because, in an Aboriginal clan system, one lot lived that way and another lot lived down there – even though they may be cautious of each other, [that] has got absolutely nothing to do with the caring and sharing of kids.





# Play and Folklore

## **GD So they would still be caring towards the other clan's children?**

**SA** Oh yes, absolutely, yes. Kids, Aboriginal kids, they have a special caring for 'em. Now I realise that way back in traditional times it worked well, but it sort of doesn't work too well nowadays, because when we're living in a culture that's very different to ours, it tends not to work as well. My example of that is from nought up to certain ages kids are allowed to run free. I don't care for that sort of system myself, where the kids are allowed to run free, not in this society, but what that was all about was that kids were allowed to run free from nought to 12 or 13, and then once they went through their initiation, that was the first step towards responsibility, and they never was radical again, because they couldn't afford to be.

## **GD Were there any special individuals, special people that you can actually remember, who taught you particular things...like getting the swan eggs, or perhaps building a canoe?**

**SA** Oh, I guess that the main people would be my father and grandfather, but everybody seemed to teach each other to do things such as that, because in them days, everybody had that one thing in common where there was a matter of survival.

## **GD Were you ever short of food?**

**SA** Oh yes, you were always short of food, and that's why you continued to go out hunting and catching food. I would guess that Aboriginal people would have thanked whoever it was who brought the rabbit – the rabbit brought an extra food, and in our country where we lived, there were sand-hills which made perfect conditions for rabbits. So that was a fun sort of game too, for kids. Nowadays they call 'em clubs that they threw at them – in our land we call them 'boondies', and we were able to knock 'em with 'boondies' and get a feed.

## **GD Did you play the sort of European games that kids play – games like Marbles for instance. Did you ever play Marbles?**

**SA** Oh yes, yes. Marbles was very popular on the Mission, and popular with not only the kids but a lot of adults too. It was a big deal, you know, and I suppose they had no money but they could barter with marbles and things, anything like that, that come into there... Nobody had any money in them days – even in my day there was a lot of this bartering, you know?

The other game that we played is probably interesting – that's because we lived, again, on the Murray River, and because we were living in an era where the paddle boats were still running up and down the river, and they were pulling barges that carried logs to the mills. These stories nowadays often make me feel as though I am a hundred years old, because as a boy we still had lots of bullock teams, and the wagons, they must have looked like Fred Flintstone's trolley, you know, with great big wooden wheels cut from the logs, solid wood – and they carted the logs from out in the bush up to the riverbanks. [They] were loaded onto the barges, and then pulled down the river to the mills at Echuca. So that was a game we loved to play – each year, in the spring to summer, they would start carting in, though in the rest of the year they would be carting the logs out and building up their stacks. We knew all about their movements, so when they came down we'd go up and meet them and swim out, because we knew most of the old boys that worked on the barges [from when] they were bullockies – or teamsters as they are called – so we were pretty sweet with them and we used to swim and use the barges as springboards or diving boards as they floated down past our mission, but once they got near the Bunyip hole nobody would get in the water – everybody would be out of there, 'til we passed that point.



**GD Tell me about the Bunyip hole.**

**SA** The Bunyip hole? I suspect every Aboriginal community that lived near water had a Bunyip hole, and I suspect now, looking back, as a man, that maybe these Bunyip stories were the greatest things to keep kids from swimming in deep holes. That was a very, very deep hole and many, many white people got drowned in there in my time. Opposite there, of all things, was a magnificent sand-beach, which we wouldn't swim near because it was near the Bunyip hole. But anyway, this Bunyip hole, there's supposed to be a Bunyip there and I would say that everybody in my age group would never have swam there, I'm very sure of that, because none of us ever swam near that Bunyip hole.

We also had another place which wasn't far from the Mission, which was a very deep hole, and which a great big Murray cod lived in, so nobody was actually allowed to swim near there either because one time that big Murray cod tipped over a boat with a couple of fellas in, so they reckoned that he might eat you, so we never ever went there. Now, as a kid, we used to watch that fish. None of us really would have known how big he was, but in the summertime in the beautiful still, hot summer's evenings, just before it got dark, the whole mission used to walk down to the edge of the [river] banks and watch him play...

**GD What did you call it?**

**SA** Oh we'd just call him a big cod. But the other thing that I was going to tell you about [was] the paddleboats. We made small paddle boats out of tin and bits of wood, and what we did was we could make the shape of the boat and put blocks on it and make it its own funnels and things. And we also made barges too, but to pull, so that we got the logs and so on, and the paddle wheels. We used to get the empty cotton reels and put little bits of tin across them to act as the paddles, and as you pulled them along the little wheels spun, and so that was a good game too.

**GD There were other things that I think you made weren't there, or that perhaps adults or other people made for you, like the pull-along train made out of milk tins, that you've told us about?**

**SA** Yes that was a great game. We got all the milk and jam tins there were in them old days, or treacle tins. On the Mission we had plenty of black treacle, and that come in tins, and the old golden – treacle, was it?

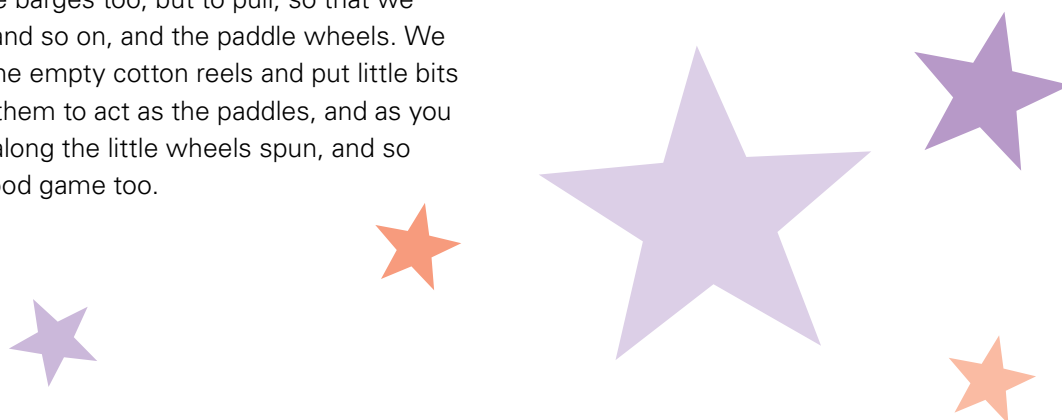
**GD Golden syrup.**

**SA** Golden syrup, yes. We'd get all those tins and put wire through them and make them into a roller type and we'd get a big tin, and keep getting smaller ones 'til we had a great long train type of thing. That made good games, because everyone could make roads and follow 'em, and so on.

Another game that we played was making tin lights out of those same tins, when we'd cut them out big and put a handle on them, and burn rubber inside of them, and that made a light as you were walking at night.

**GD I wanted to ask you some more about the Bunyips. I want to know, what did you think a Bunyip looked like?**

**SA** We didn't really know what a Bunyip looked like. I guess you always thought it must be something really bad, because I think we all took it for granted that what the old people told us was right, and I don't remember anybody questioning any of the old ones... I really don't remember us having any questions about being told: 'Be careful, don't go there, as that's the Bunyip's hole'.



**GD You mentioned that the adults played Marbles too. Did adults play with the kids, or did the adults just play with each other, separately?**

**SA** Both...everybody was a potential victim [because of not] being able to beat them [the adults]. I suppose you always wanted to – if you can beat the best you were always regarded as good. We were talking before of people who were special – we always had somebody who was the best stone thrower and who was the straightest shot. We forgot about shanghais! Shanghais were a pretty important part of our life when I was a kid, because once we got out of school we knew where we could go – off straight home and pick up our shanghai.

**GD And what would you do with them?**

**SA** Oh, kill birds and rabbits. By that time we'd go and scrounge around some of the old tips and find the cast-iron and stuff like that and break it up into nice little pellets – that was very good. They were very dangerous too, I think, the shanghais, but of course if you used them in the areas where they were safe, they were okay.

**GD What about any particular game when anything special happened. Can you remember anything?**

**SA** Well we had a man who was very good with the mud switches. Now he was also good with a shanghai too, so nobody tried to beat him because they knew he was too good. I mean, if you were playing war games you hoped that you were on his side, because he never missed anything, he was so good.

**GD So the adults would join in with the war games, would they?**

**SA** Oh yes.

**GD And the mud switches, everybody played?**

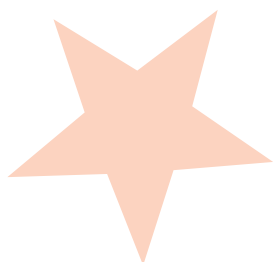
**SA** Yes, yes, everybody'd have a game, yes. The kids were the best of course, because they done it more often – it was the important part of their game.

**GD Was it only boys, or did girls join in that?**

**SA** Mainly only boys. See, in them days the girls weren't allowed very much to play with the boys on a mission. We were very clanny, and in the Aboriginal clan system at that time you knew which boy or girl you would marry, and families would make sure you followed the right line, so you didn't have that much association with the girls – only at school, of course, but once you'd get outside the school yard you wouldn't be seen playing too much with the girls.

**GD Can you tell me about football?**

**SA** Yes football, in my time was very much the same as this modern football, but getting back to earlier times of Aboriginals, I do know that they made footballs from possum skins or any animal skin at all that they can make a round ball out of. We were told that mainly their game was pretty much the same as a game of ball – 'Keeping-off' would be a better name for it. But the only football they used to talk about in my time was the Aussie rules type of football. We had a very good team at Cummeragunja.







## The state of play

**Steve Roud**

Steve Roud is a distinguished British folklore scholar and the author of a number of publications on English folklore. His most recent book, *The Lore of the Playground: One Hundred Years of Children's Games, Rhymes and Traditions* (Random House, 2010), offers a substantial contribution to our understanding of contemporary children's play in the UK.

This article was written shortly after the book's publication, and was first published in *The Guardian* on 30 October, 2010.

**"Children are forgetting how to play. To realise this one has only to watch the pupils in recreation time with their disappointed amusements, their unrelated racings and shoutings, their perfunctory attempts at leapfrog and kindred sports".**

This bleak assessment of the state of play in Britain would not seem out of place in any modern newspaper, but these words come from a magazine article dating from 1903 and the same complaint has been made over and over again for at least 100 years. In every generation the plaintive cry has gone up 'Children don't play properly any more!' and the only thing that changes is the reason given for this sad state of affairs. Around 1900 it was penny dreadfuls, urbanisation and compulsory schooling that were at fault. Between the wars it was the baleful influence of the cinema and the wireless. In

the 1960s and 1970s it was television. Then it was video games, and now iPods and computers. But, whatever the reason, the pessimists have always been vocal in their condemnation of the current crop of children, and have always assumed that their own time was the golden age of childhood and play.

But the fact that every generation for more than 100 years has been convinced that things have deteriorated must give us pause for thought. Perhaps if it wasn't true then, it might not be true now? Is the problem in the eye of the beholder rather than the children themselves?

I have been told so often that children do not play any more that I began to see this notion not just as a particularly long-lasting cultural cliché, but more like a virus that infects each generation in turn. It is not like most forms of cultural pessimism, which only come on with advancing age, because 18-year-olds can be heard saying it as well as 60-year-olds.

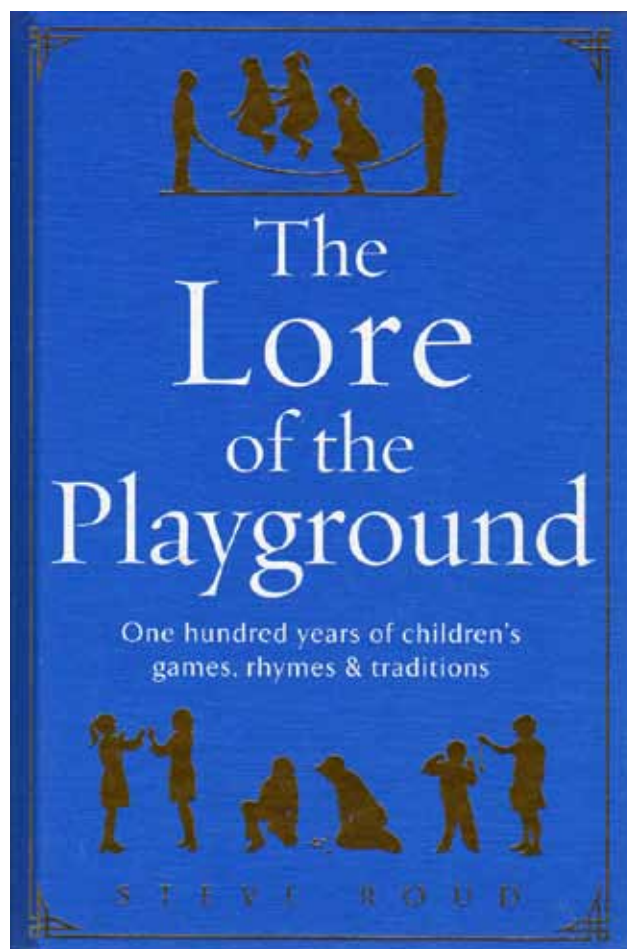
Most people suffer from a relatively mild form of the condition, but there is also an extreme form of the infection, particularly rife in certain newspapers

and other sections of the media, which periodically surfaces as a full-blown moral panic. These panics are useful because they allow the cultural doomsayers to castigate many of their favourite bêtes noires, such as modern teaching methods, the nanny state, and that most potent of current scares – health and safety. A characteristic symptom of this condition is the trotting out of the cliché of the moment – that children are forced to wear safety goggles to play Conkers.

The fact is that children in the playground are playing as much as ever, in ways similar to those of the past, but adults do not recognise what they see. It seems that as soon as we leave junior school we begin to lose the ability to distinguish between ‘just running about’ and vigorous play, and we forget that we, too, were sometimes bored and at other times frenetically busy.

Far from witnessing symptoms of the ‘death of childhood’, what I found in playgrounds across the country was a vibrant underground culture, with games, rhymes, jokes, rituals and an impressive degree of variation, imagination and invention, in which I recognised many elements from my own childhood 50 years ago, combined with others that seem brand new.

Nor did I find pupils covering and repressed by excessive rules and official bans. Most schools nowadays certainly have playground rules that emphasise respect and courtesy to others, as well as demonstrating zero tolerance for intimidation and bullying. Today’s children are far more aware of others’ rights and needs than we were in my day, but this doesn’t stop them enjoying themselves. The banning of games is infinitely rarer than the pessimists would have us believe, and anyway is nothing new. The game British Bulldog was banned in my junior playground in the mid-1950s, exactly as today, and I remember being forbidden to bring acorns to school because someone got hit in the eye with one.



Modern children are constantly devising new variations on old themes – and some become a permanent part of the group’s expanding repertoire. While some games pass out of the active repertoire, others are added, and a few seem to go on for ever. It is great fun to interview 11-year-olds, just about to transfer to secondary school, about the games they played in earlier years. They often display a charmingly condescending view of their younger selves and already begin to show signs of a world-weary nostalgia.

A good example of change is the old chasing game of Stuck in the Mud, which is still played in virtually every playground in the land, as it was half a century ago, and probably more. Chasing games with characters are also legion. Cowboys and Indians are less popular than before because there are fewer TV programmes and

films that feature them, but Cops and Robbers still hold their own, as well as various aliens and zombies, witches and fairies or super-heroes. In the chasing game Jurassic Park you have to know which sort of dinosaur you are up against because everyone knows, for example, that the Tyrannosaurus rex can't see you if you stand perfectly still.

In addition to games, playground rituals still continue but take on new forms. In my day, you linked little fingers to make up after a falling-out, but modern children use the same gesture to make a 'pinky promise' or its stronger equivalent, a 'pinky swear'. The rhyme 'One potato, two potato' is still known in most playgrounds, although not usually for choosing who will be 'It' but rather as a game in which fists are placed on top of each other. One of the commonest choosing rhymes nowadays is 'Coconut, coconut, coconut crack', which follows the same pattern as 'One potato', and another, which counts out the players' feet, is 'Black shoe, black shoe, change your black shoe'. But counting-out rhymes from previous years, such as 'Eeny meeny miny mo', 'Ibbie obble black bobble' and 'Ippa dippa dation', can still be heard. Some of the rhymes have changed, but the principles of counting-out go on down the generations.

Some changes only become apparent as the result of a national survey – for example, what appears to be the gradual weakening of regional variation. This is partly because the games that preserved much of the local dialect usage, such as Fivestones and Marbles, have either lost popularity or disappeared, but also because of the homogenising effect of the 24/7 mass media.

This can be clearly seen in some of the language-based traditions, such as the 'truce term', which is the word and gesture that children use to gain temporary respite during a game. These used to be markedly regional – 'fainites' in London and the south-east, 'barley' in the Midlands and Scotland, 'kings and crosses' in East Anglia, 'skinch' in the north-east, and so on. But in many schools across the country, the local word is being replaced by the rather colourless 'time out'.

Adults in the 1960s and 1970s often lamented the loss of the hoops and tops of the pre-war period, while today's pensioners remember with fondness cigarette cards and marbles. 'Fag cards' have been replaced by commercially produced card-sets featuring football stars, cars, super-heroes, and spin-offs from TV and cinema, which cater for the same childhood need for collecting and swapping.

'Two-balls' has virtually disappeared, but Skipping still holds its own, and Elastics (otherwise known as 'French skipping') comes and goes with each generation. Conkers seem to be losing their hold on children's imagination, but not all change is negative. Since the 1960s, for example, clapping games and rhymes have become extremely popular, and these are fast developing into complex dance/song routines in which girls, especially, practise their linguistic and physical dexterity at the same time.

But the real change in the last 50 years has been in the context of play, and the biggest and most obvious alteration has been in the decline of street play. Up to the 1970s, it was quite common to see children of all ages playing in the street, not only in urban working-class areas but also in quiet villages.

Again, the pessimists would have us believe that this has been deliberate policy, as if each local council has employed anti-play officers who roam the streets to prevent children enjoying themselves. But the reality is that this was inevitable given the sweeping changes that society has undergone in the period. Not only have many old urban communities been broken up by slum-clearance schemes, but car ownership has rocketed in the same period. This brings the obvious danger from traffic, but also parked vehicles clog up the playing area, and owners are understandably wary of children playing on and around their cars.

Another contributing factor is that modern parents are more aware of 'stranger danger'. Although the perception of danger certainly outweighs the number of incidents, the danger is real enough that parents who took no notice would be deemed irresponsible.

What has been lost with the demise of street play is one of the main opportunities for unsupervised self-regulated play, which is what makes the school playground even more important, and we, as a society, should therefore make efforts to ensure that children continue to get the full benefit that it offers.

Above all, we must strenuously resist the temptation to replace free-form playtime with organised sport, because it is not simply physical exercise that matters. The next step is to provide an interesting environment. For many games, children don't appreciate big featureless expanses; they like nooks and crannies, drain covers, drainpipes, doorways, steps, shapes and lines painted on the floor, all of which can be incorporated into their games. Most junior schools have boxes of equipment such as balls and skipping ropes, and children should be encouraged to experiment with them. Sometimes it will be a matter of intervention. Football, for example, often monopolises a huge amount of space, and squeezes out other games.

It is pointless trying to put the clock back to a mythical time when children roamed free and happy without adult supervision and intervention. The days when parents simply sent their children out to play all day are not only gone for ever but also were not the 'good old days' the pessimists would have us believe. They were also the days of gratuitous cruelty and bullying among children, which marred many a young life. Like most apparent dilemmas in modern society, the answer is simply one of balance. The adults' job is to provide a safe environment and the opportunity for play – the children will do the rest.

This article was originally published by Guardian News & Media Ltd and is reprinted in *Play and Folklore* with permission.

## Publication

In March 2007, a bi-lingual conference on the cultures of childhood (*Cultures Enfantines*) was held at the University of Nantes in France. Speakers at the conference came from a number of countries and included the three editors of *Play and Folklore*. Now the work of all the contributors has been made

available to the wider scholarly community in a substantial volume, *Cultures enfantine: Universalité et diversité*. Published by Presses Universitaires de Rennes, the book includes a thoughtful introduction by its editors, Andy Arleo and Julie Delalande.



# More about music for children in the Torres Strait

**Gwenda Beed Davey**

Issue no. 52 of *Play and Folklore* (2009) described the remarkable recordings of Torres Strait Island music made in the ten years from 1999 by Karl Neuenfeldt, Will Kepa and Nigel Pegrum. In particular, *Play and Folklore* described sound and video recordings of music and dance for children in a number of islands, Saibai, Moa, Badu, Warraber, Iama and Mabuiyag, and some mainland communities in Northern Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Now the *Play and Folklore* editors are pleased to have received a new CD and DVD (2010) recorded on Erub (Darnley Island) in the Torres Strait, entitled *Erub Era Kodo Mer: Traditional and Contemporary Music and Dance from Erub (Darnley Island) Torres Strait*. The CD was produced by Will Kepa, Karl Neuenfeldt and Nigel Pegrum, and the DVD filmed and edited by Brett Charles. The recording and filming projects are initiatives of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, an Australian Government Statutory Authority established in 1994.

## CD CONTENTS

- Traditional Christian Language Hymns – Erub (Darnley Island) All Saints Choir
- Contemporary Songs
- Contemporary Christian Kores – Soloist
- Contemporary Christian Kores – Group – Erub (Darnley Island) All Saints Choir
- Erub Love Songs
- Children's Songs – Tagai State College, Erub Campus

The children's song titles are *Paret Amili*, *Zorom Zorom Baziarda*, *Au Sasmir Sasmir Omaskerr* and *Kiraro*. Notes in the accompanying booklet explain that 'songs for children are a popular form of entertainment – and importantly are also used in education. Erub's primary school teaches not only songs and dances but also cultural values and facts about the natural environment. The songs are in Erub Mer, the Erub dialect of the Meriam Mir language'.

*Paret Amili* is about sweeping the fallen leaves into tidy heaps.

*Zorom Zorom Baziarda* is about the stars 'brilliantly shining forth'.

*Au Sasmir Sasmir Omaskerr* is about 'a bunch of very noisy kids singing together'.

*Kiraro A Tambara Kaimeg Ei* is about a number of animals: *Kiraro* (Christmas Beetle), *Pem* (grasshopper), *Guai* (green tree frog), and numerous ants, caterpillars, insects, goanna and snake. 'Oh dear me, what next will I see?'



## DVD CONTENTS

The DVD includes dances and interviews.

Chapter 1 *Erub Arts and Culture*. Interviews.

Chapter 2 *The Coming of the Light*. Interviews.

Chapter 3 *Erub Dances*. Plus interviews.

Chapter 4 *Erub Gardening*. Interview.

Chapter 5 *Erub Fish Traps*. Interviews.

Chapter 6 *Erubian Music*. Interviews.

This latest recording in the series contains a wider range of cultural information than previous recordings which focused primarily on music and dance.

The *Coming of the Light* refers to the landing of the first Christian missionaries in 1871, and the annual reenactment is filmed here. Both gardening and tending fish traps have historical roots on Erub, and are also filmed in this DVD. Like music and dance, these cultural practices are highly valued on Erub.

*Play and Folklore* thanks Dr Karl Neuenfeldt for these recordings. Copies of the discs can be obtained from Karl Neuenfeldt at Central Queensland University: [k.neuenfeldt@cqu.edu.au](mailto:k.neuenfeldt@cqu.edu.au).



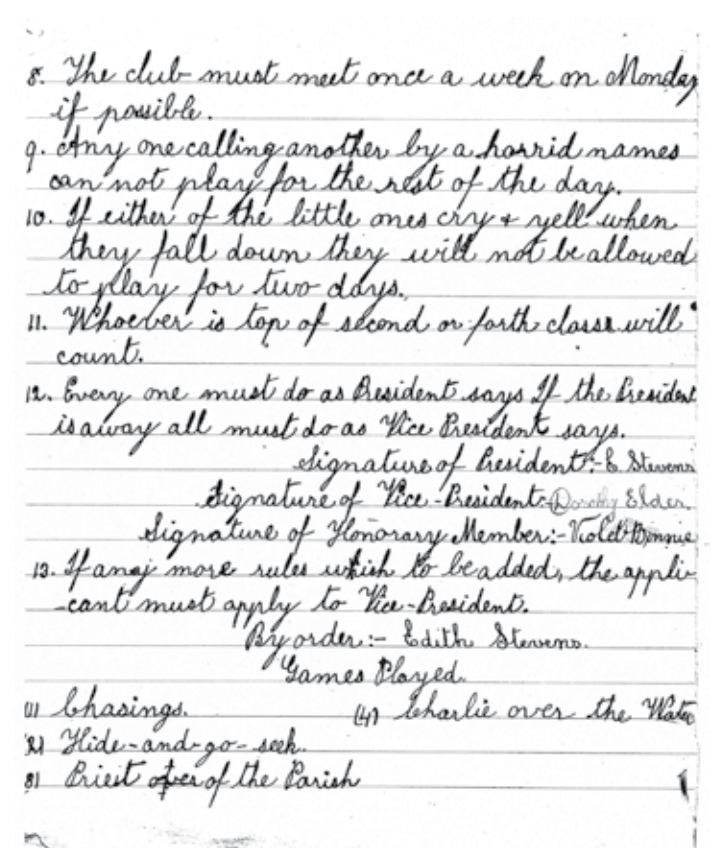
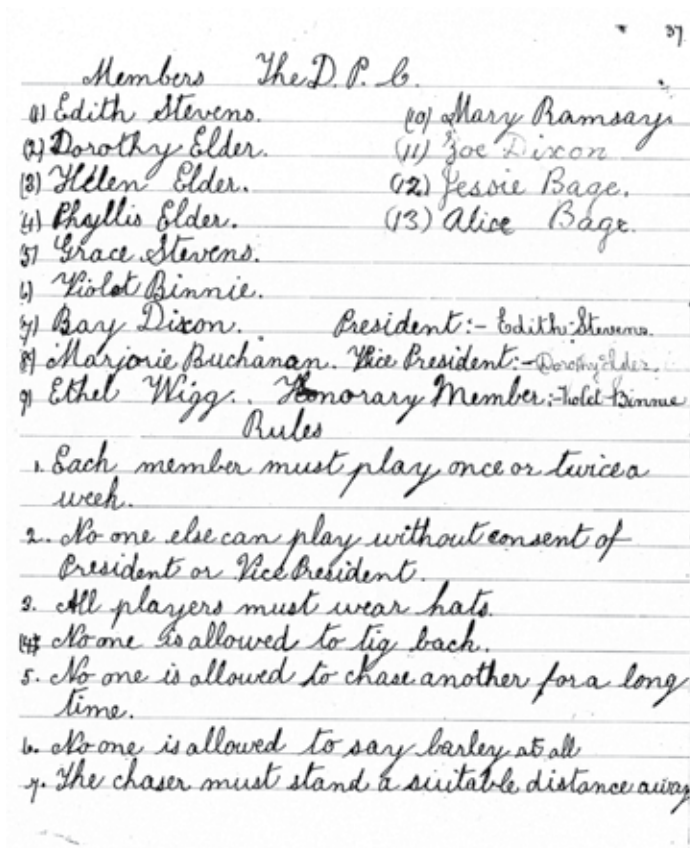


## Rules of the D.P.C. - a girls' club

The D.P.C. was a secret club formed by a group of girls in Melbourne in the early 1900s.<sup>1</sup> One of its members was Jessie Bage, who kept her hand-written copy of the club's rules into adulthood and donated the document, as part of her personal papers, to the archives of her old school, Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School (MGGS).

The club itself is not unusual – belonging to a secret club is a familiar childhood experience – but it is very unusual to find such a carefully detailed record of the activities of the club. The document gives us a picture of a group of girls of different ages (there

is a reference to 'the little ones'), their favourite games and the way they organised their play and ran their club. There is no mention of where the club meetings took place – not all the names on the list are girls who attended MGGS.





Jessie Bage was born in 1890. During World War I she served as a nurse in the VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment), working in hospitals in England and France. On her return, she became the first woman appointed to the Royal Melbourne Hospital Management Committee, and for her service with a number of social welfare associations she was appointed an Officer to the Order of the British Empire in 1956. Her sister Alice, also a member of the D.P.C., was born in 1893 and died in 1957. Jessie Bage died in 1980.

Our thanks to Helen Moylan, Archivist, Melbourne Girls Grammar School, for her assistance.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The meaning of 'D.P.C.' is unknown.

## REFERENCES

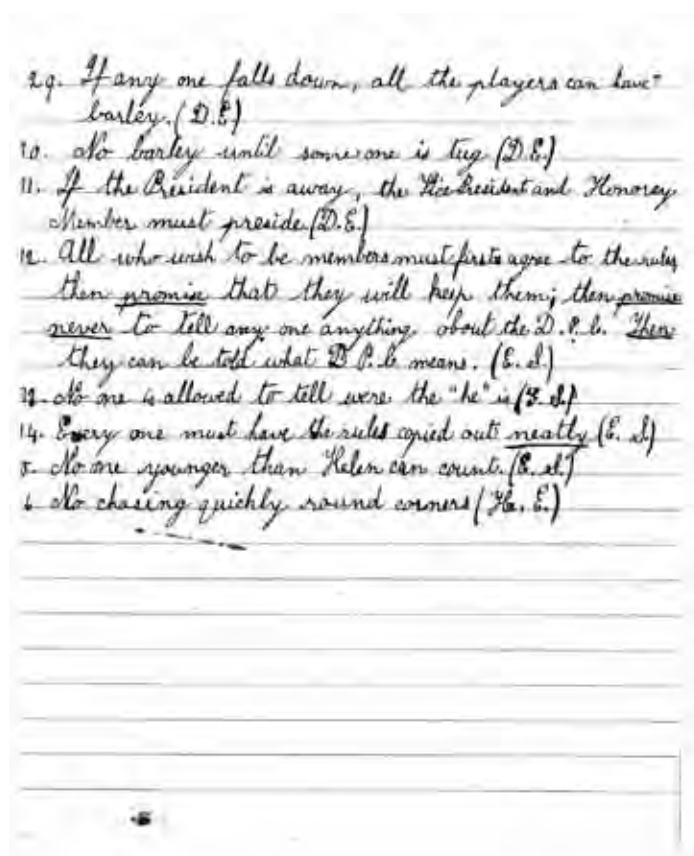
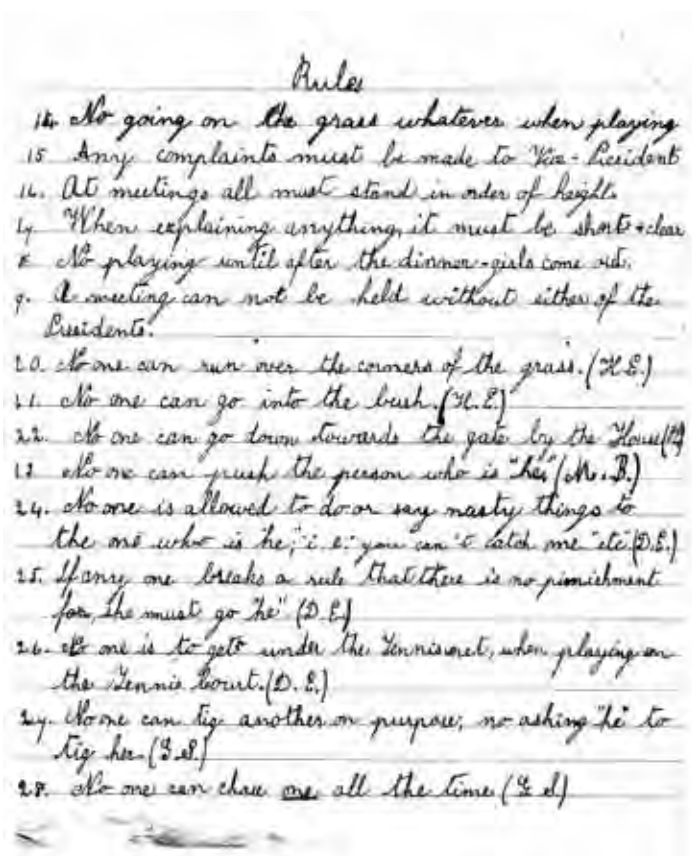
The D.P.C., 33/9/54, MGGS Archives

Australian Women's Archives Project: Australian Women's Register

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0557b.htm>

Robert Bage Family Tree

<http://www.johnbage.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/Robert%20Bage%20Family%20Tree.htm>





## The 'Cat and Mouse'

**Judy McKinty**

During a playground survey<sup>1</sup> at Princes Hill Primary School in one of Melbourne's inner suburbs I discovered a strange piece of playing equipment that seemed to be a remnant from an earlier time. Its original purpose is still a mystery – perhaps it was meant to be used exactly as it is being used now, for play. The children who have played there over the years have helped to maintain one of the most enduring playground traditions at the school.

The 'Cat and Mouse' is a wood-and-metal structure near the entrance gate at the front of the school. It is a unique feature of the school and has a special place in the cultural landscape of the playground. While other play areas have undergone significant transformation, the 'Cat and Mouse' remains happily untouched.



The 'Cat and Mouse' was designed and built to last. Recently I asked the children if anyone in their families might know anything about it, and a message was delivered by a Grade One girl that it was there when her grandfather was at the school – 'and he's seventy-seven!' If correct, this information traces its history back as far as the 1940s – remarkable longevity for such a plain and solid structure, when most if not all of the playing equipment from that period has been removed from parks and schoolyards and replaced by modern, brightly-painted metal-and-plastic units. The sturdy, grey metal rails have been polished by children running their hands along, or climbing, sitting, hanging and swinging on them, and the ground around the brick paving has been scuffed by countless running feet.



At first glance, there seems to be no real purpose for the shape of the construction, but when I talked to the children an unusual play tradition was revealed. They call it the 'Cat and Mouse' after the chasing game they play there. The game seems to have been associated with the structure since the 1980s.

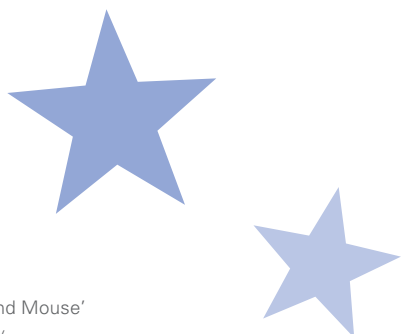
The children learn the rules of the game in Prep Grade, when they start school. Their 'buddies' in Grades Five or Six explain it to them as part of their school orientation. This is how the tradition has been kept alive at the school and passed down through generations of children – the younger children learning directly from the older children and passing it on in turn, sometimes with variations. In common with much traditional playlore, this game has been passed on without adult knowledge or involvement – it is a part of the children's own play culture.

The rules of the game relate directly to the shape of the structure, and a nearby tree is also utilised. Here is how the rules were explained to me by a girl in Grade Two:

- First, do 'Dip Dip' to see who goes 'It'. 'It' is the cat and everyone else is a mouse.
- The cat has to chase the mice and try to tag them, and whoever is tagged becomes the cat.
- There are four 'holes'.

From the right:

- The first is the bob-down hole. If the cat's going to get you, you quickly bob down in there and you're safe.
- Next is the cat hole. It's only for the cat to rest. If a mouse goes in there they turn into a cat. (They take the cat's place as 'It'.)
- Next is the mouse hole - for mice only. You can stay in there for ten seconds.
- The next is the 'free' way. Anyone can run through it.
- In the corner is the dungeon (on the left, with a barrier across it). When you're caught they bring you to the dungeon, and there's a key, usually a stick or twig, that can unlock the dungeon. The cat hides the key and the mice try to find it to set everyone free.
- The gaps in the fence mean you can run through there to get away from the cat, but the cat can run through too.



ABOVE The 'holes'

FAR LEFT The 'Cat and Mouse'  
Photographer – J. McKinty



## The 'Cat and Mouse'



A Grade Four girl had similar rules for the 'holes', with the substitution of a 'freeze' hole ('You can't move – if the cat sees you move, you're the cat'), and a mouse hole instead of the dungeon. Additional rules were:

- The cat is not allowed on the seats, but can catch the mice from the ground – but the cat can go on the section of the seat where there is no rail.
- The tree is 'time out' to catch your breath. Touch the tree and say 'Time out!'

No doubt there are other variations at different levels in the school. At one stage some Grade Prep and Grade One children sought out an older girl because they couldn't agree which version of the rules was the 'right' one. Playground arbitration in action!

The 'Cat and Mouse' is, as far as I know, unique. It is an example of the strong relationship that can develop between play and place, and an indication of the rich play and learning experiences that can emerge when children feel a sense of ownership of their playground and are able to play freely among themselves. It is a valuable and irreplaceable play resource at the school, and has a strong presence among the school's traditions.

If there was a National Register for the preservation of historically significant play equipment, this would be a fine example to add to the list.

Thanks to Marion Turnbull, Princes Hill Primary School archivist, for her collaboration in researching the history of the 'Cat and Mouse'.

ABOVE Playing 'Cat and Mouse'  
Photographer – J. McKinty

<sup>i</sup> Judy McKinty, *Tradition & Change: A playground survey of Princes Hill Primary School* (December 2010)



## Mystery folk toy

This doll was recently discovered in a secondhand shop in Melbourne. It is 29cm (11 ½ inches) tall, dressed in a three-piece suit with hand-stitched decoration and little metal bells to fasten the vest. The body is very roughly made from flat pieces of wood, but the head has been carefully carved. We are intrigued by the musical instrument the doll is carrying - it has been fashioned from wood and has six bamboo pipes, each with a small hole burned into it. We think the musical instrument might help us to identify where this doll may have originated.

Can you help us?

If you can identify the doll or the musical instrument it carries, we would be very pleased to hear from you. Please email to [judy@pixeltech.com.au](mailto:judy@pixeltech.com.au) and we will print the information in the next issue of *Play and Folklore*.



The mystery folk toy  
Photographer – J. McKinty



