

## The Australian Children's Folklore Collection - A new home and a new beginning

*This issue of **Play and Folklore** reports on the donation of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection (ACFC) to Museum Victoria, on 18 May, 1999. Since the first issue of the **Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter** (*Play & Folklore's* previous title) in September, 1981, the ACFC has been a rich source of material for this publication. Rhymes, descriptions of games, student research papers and material from the Dorothy Howard Collection have all appeared in the pages of the newsletter, so readers will be familiar with some of the contents of the Collection.*

The following article consists of extracts from speeches given at the handing over of the Collection by its founder and director, Dr. June Factor, to Dr. George MacDonald, CEO of Museum Victoria, at a ceremony held in the playground of the Carlton Primary School, Melbourne.

### GEORGE MacDONALD

I'm sure we all have a favourite nursery rhyme from our school period, whether it was 'Jack and Jill' or 'Mary had a little lamb'....or 'Captain Cook chased a chook'. I must say that wasn't one I was familiar with in Canada.

To have these childhood memories and ongoing playground traditions recorded and preserved for future generations is really essential if we are to retain a truly rounded sense of our society and its changes and development over time, so I am very pleased to say that Australia's major public collection of this material - the Australian Children's Folklore Collection - has now found a very appreciative home in Museum Victoria.

It is also very appropriate that we are celebrating this event today, on International Museums Day, which carries the theme this year of 'The Pleasures of Discovery'.

Now this collection is indeed unique and full of fascinating discoveries...it really is a treasure trove that up until now has not been part of a major museum collection anywhere in Australia. There is no other like it in this country, and there are very few such collections of children's traditional folklore anywhere in the world.

While the Collection predominantly represents the sub-cultures of children in Australia, including indigenous children and the many thousands of immigrant children who have arrived in Australia since European settlement, it also contains an interesting variety of material from other parts of the world.

For Museum Victoria, the greatest significance is that it brings to our existing collection something which has been largely missing in the past, and that is a direct and personal voice of children.

Children, of course, form a large part of our community, but they are often not given a direct say or presence in our cultural institutions.

Museum Victoria will draw on the Australian Children's Folklore Collection in numerous ways for future programs at our physical museums, and also in the outreach services which we will be putting on the World Wide Web.

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When Melbourne Museum opens next year, that is the middle of 2000, many of these children's rhymes will feature in a soundscape that is being prepared that will help to bring to life a recreated school playground in one of our major social history galleries.

The Children's Museum will also use the Collection as part of its ongoing presentation of exhibitions and daily activities for young children and their carers.

This collection is also useful to us because of the diversity of its content and the quality and depth of research that has gone into it, and I extend my personal congratulations to Dr June Factor for her vision and her commitment in building this remarkable collection over the past 25 years.

I am also delighted that the nature of the agreement we are about to sign, while it covers the donation of this collection to the Museum, also embraces our mutual desire for June to have a continuing and very close involvement in the Collection's ongoing development and research.

## **JUNE FACTOR**

This collection originated without any planning or foresight on my part. Back in the 1970s, when I was teaching literature at the Institute of Early Childhood Development here in Melbourne, I discovered that many of my students were very romantic about childhood. To get these students to remember what it

was like to be a child, I encouraged them to spend time in school playgrounds like this - to watch and listen, to record and then give to me the material they collected.

But very quickly, what had been a means to an end became an end in itself, and I became fascinated by what those students were bringing in. I became more and more interested in children's play lives, in what children do when no one tells them to do anything.

I discovered that the lore and language of the young which we call folklore exists everywhere - in 'the uncovered schoolroom' as one old Scotsman referred to the playground, in yards, streets, parks, beaches, paddocks and lanes all over the world - and children inherit their play traditions from each other, and sometimes from beloved adults. Then they go ahead and adapt and make nonsense of the Mary Had a Little Lambs - I can't remember the original anymore. The one I remember is:

*Mary had a little lamb,  
Her father shot it dead.  
And now it goes to school with her  
Between two chunks of bread.*

They show enormous imagination, tremendous collaboration, and of course we who are now growing older all carry a kind of tattered passport to that world because we were all once children.

I discovered that what I thought had been just an idiosyncratic interest was in fact the passion of many

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*Dr. June Factor, Dr. George MacDonald, and the  
Museum's Program Director - Australian Society, Dr. Richard Gillespie at the hand-over.*

**Photo: Courtesy of UniNEWS.**



scholars around the world. I was inspired by people like Iona and Peter Opie - the great English antiquarians of folklore - by a remarkable American folklorist, Dorothy Howard, whose collecting here in the mid-50s is one of the great treasures of this collection, and in the 70s I was welcomed by our own pioneers, Ian Turner and Wendy Lowenstein.

My colleague and good friend, Gwenda Davey, became a partner in the enterprise very early - in building the Collection - and to this day has remained an active participant, a great adviser and continues to co-edit the biannual publication which we put out, called *Play and Folklore*.

Now I pass over the custodianship of this very precious cargo to the Museum. Once upon a time Museums were status institutions, representing the grandeur of the nation's state. They were full of things that were ancient and grand, or curious and odd in some other way. You went into them and spoke in whispers, and you were lucky if you could make sense of the labels - and suspicious guards watched your every move.

Now, thankfully, a great deal of that has changed, and I think it goes a long way beyond the fact that there are now things to push and pull in museums - or as they are better known, interactives. Groups that were once barely visible, unless they were long dead, now have a place and a voice in museums. The most obvious examples that come to mind are indigenous communities, women and immigrants - and, of course, all over the developed world, museums for children have sprung up because they got tired of waiting for the grand museums to incorporate the young in their oddly-titled 'mission statements' - other than, of course, as bait to bring in adults.

Here in Victoria, the Museum recognised its responsibilities to children perhaps earlier than most of the major museums in this country. They established a children's museum in the mid-1980s, and it did incorporate the vernacular of childhood, particularly in its long-running exhibition of children's traditional

playways, 'You're IT!'. All of that, I thought, was a good omen.

So I pass over the archive - and I think that now the Museum faces a challenge. It bears the very considerable responsibility of ensuring that scholars, and its hundreds of thousands of Australian and overseas visitors, have the opportunity to explore the worlds and traditions of children as well as those of the stones and bones of the 'olden days'. It seems to me that just as no self-respecting museum would dream of operating without skilled specialists in indigenous cultures, or archaeology, or anthropology or any of those disciplines, now I think historians of childhood and folklorists need to join that list.

To symbolise the transfer of the custodianship, I want to give George MacDonald something - it's a shanghai. It has many names - a slingshot, a dinger - I think in Australia there are about 10 different names that children use. I actually found this on the steps of the old IECD one Sunday when I popped in to get a book. The local children used the car park to play in on weekends, and obviously somebody had dropped their shanghai - left it for *me*, I thought. So I picked it up and added it to the Collection. I think it's a good thing to represent the passing over.

The Curators of the Museum have threatened me with a fate worse than death should I actually attempt to use it because of its state of delicacy. Of course children wouldn't be anything near as precious - they simply would have got another bit of elastic and stuck it on. Or if it had broken they would have gone and got another twig. Children can make much from very little.

But I want to symbolically send the Collection from the past to the future through the shanghai. I hope its journey is safe and I hope the Museum is able to not only cherish and look after it but to actually build on it - to make it something special so that people all over the world will say, "We have to come to the Museum of Victoria. They have the most remarkable collection on childhood."

Know someone who would enjoy  
*Play and Folklore?*  
SUBSCRIPTION FORM ENCLOSED

# PRESERVING THE PLEASURES OF CHILDREN AT PLAY

**Christina Buckridge**

*Australia's leading children's folklorist, Dr. June Factor, quickly solved the puzzle about a 'shanghai' for Canadian Dr. George MacDonald this week - she had one on hand to show him.*

Dr. MacDonald, the CEO of the Museum of Victoria and newly-arrived from Canada, mentioned his unfamiliarity with the term 'shanghai' when he accepted Dr. Factor's donation of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection (ACFC) for the Museum of Victoria.



***Shanghai -  
symbolically  
sending the  
ACFC from the  
past to the future.***

Dr. Factor explained that she had found the home-made shanghai one Sunday some years ago, left behind by children who had been playing in the carpark near her office.

Founder and director of the ACFC, Dr. Factor is acknowledged as Australia's leading children's folklorist. Now a Senior Fellow in the University's Australian Centre, she believes that the new Melbourne Museum in the Carlton Gardens will be a good home for the Collection. "I want it to be used for the pleasure and enlightenment of the young and also for those who are no longer young, but who enjoy remembering what it was like to be a child."

The ACFC consists of more than 10,000 card files of children's games, rhymes, riddles, jokes, superstitions and other kinds of childhood folklore, together with photographs, audio and video tapes, play artefacts and a number of specialist collections of children's lore.

The Collection grew from research begun in 1970 when Dr. Factor wanted her literature students at the then Institute of Early Childhood Development to remember what it was like to be a child. She encouraged them to spend time in the playground, listening to and recording the

children's play lives. "I became fascinated with what they were bringing in," she admitted.

The ACFC was officially established as a children's folklore archive in 1979 and has been housed in the University Archives since 1985.

Dr. MacDonald describes the ACFC as a major collection, full of fascinating discoveries. "There is no other collection like it in Australia and few others in the world," he said. "It gives the Museum of Victoria a direct and personal voice of children."

Dr. Factor will have a continuing, close involvement with the Collection, which stretches back into the last century, and she hopes the Museum of Victoria will continue to build on it.

The site of the hand-over ceremony this week was particularly fitting - the playground of the Carlton Primary School with children skipping and playing games of marbles and knucklebones on the wet bitumen.

***Clifton Hill  
Primary School  
students Tessa  
and Melanie,  
performing  
clapping rhymes.***



And when the speeches were over and the hand-over documents signed, Clifton Hill Primary School students, Melanie and Tessa, performed a series of age-old schoolyard rhymes. The adults standing around in the rain-spattered playground forgot the cold and discomfort in their sheer delight, recalling their own past schoolyard play lives.

*(This article was first published in UniNEWS, the University of Melbourne's weekly newsletter, 24 May, 1999. Reproduced with permission.)*



# FUN AND GAMES IN MUSEUM VICTORIA

*Judy McKinty and Julie Stevens*

On May 18, 1999, in a typical Melbourne schoolyard on a typical Melbourne Autumn day, a very atypical museum collection found a home in one of Victoria's major collecting institutions, Museum Victoria. The Australian Children's Folklore Collection (ACFC) has been built up over more than twenty years of research and collecting by the donor, Dr. June Factor and many adult and child contributors. It is a truly remarkable collection of contemporary children's folklore, described by Museum Victoria as "unique", and having "particularly high intellectual value". Folklorists, and those who study childhood would argue that the Collection is also high in social and cultural values, given that children's folklore is part of the 'sub-culture' of childhood, which reflects and parodies the norms and attitudes of the adult world in which it is immersed.



*Julie Stevens cataloguing children's playthings for Museum Victoria*

## THE COLLECTION

Like many contemporary collections, the ACFC has its roots in the past. Its contents reach back as far as the 1870s with material gathered by the eminent American folklorist, Dr. Dorothy Howard, who visited Australia in the 1950s to conduct her pioneering research into the play traditions of Australian children. The Dorothy Howard Collection - original material from her research which she later donated to the ACFC - is one of its most important sub-collections, representing the most comprehensive research ever undertaken into children's play and folklore in Australia.

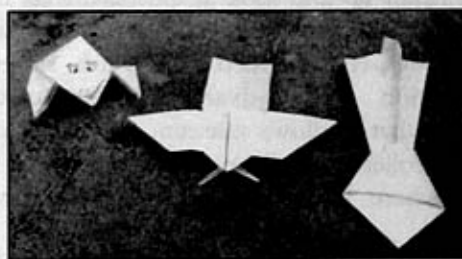
The ACFC has come from an archival background, with its beginnings in the collection of children's verbal lore and language. Housed for the past ten years in the University of Melbourne Archives, it has over 10,000 card files, photographs, audio and video tapes - research material which would be the core of an archive, but which does not slip comfortably into an

object-based museum collection. On the whole, the Museum tends not to collect archives, but to refer them to the State Library or the Public Records Office. This makes the ACFC an unusual acquisition.

At Museum Victoria, the ACFC has been placed notionally within the existing childhood collection. The childhood collection is part of the museum's Social History Collection, which has its own system of classifying objects. As this is the first time the Museum has dealt with a collection which has as its main focus the oral, material and physical play traditions of children - a folklore collection - the cataloguing of the ACFC has been a challenge, to the Museum as well as the cataloguers.

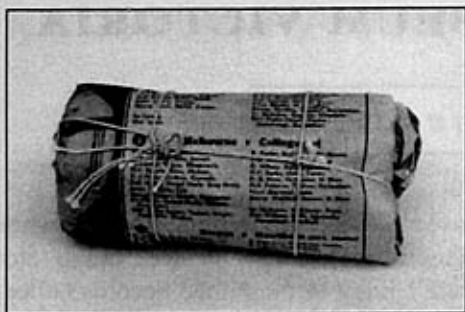
## PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

It may help to take one element of the ACFC - the playthings - as an example. The ACFC contains hundreds of playthings, which one might well expect to fit the existing classifications for a childhood collection. The reality is that many of them don't, because some of the things children choose to play with are not the manufactured dolls, toy cars and mechanical models so sought after by adult collectors, which are aesthetically pleasing and, for many people, represent 'childhood'.



*Paper toys*

Many of the objects in the ACFC are better defined as 'playthings' rather than 'toys'. They come from many countries; some of them are home-made and others could only be classed as 'ephemera' - paper planes, fortune-tellers, and natural materials such as sticks, stones and seeds. This type of plaything is usually ignored by collecting institutions, and considered to be of little value or not fitting in with the usual perception



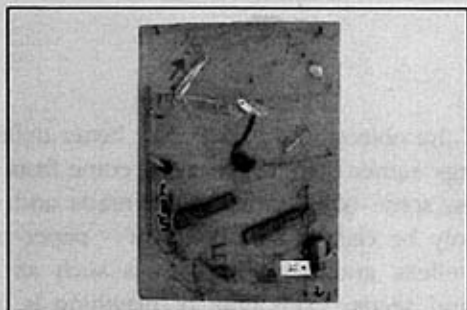
*Paper football*

of childhood as history, as demonstrated in museums and historic houses throughout the country. Yet, when placed alongside the great body of research material in the ACFC they gain a new meaning, and offer new ways of interpreting both past and present through the eyes of those acutely perceptive and fearless social critics - children.

Museum Victoria has acquired a collection which does not fit comfortably into conventional notions of a childhood collection, because some of the objects in the ACFC are so unusual that they defy classification under the existing headings. Like children's play itself, this collection is rebellious, subversive and refuses to be bound by adult perceptions and values. It is a living collection, made up of contributions from adults and children all over Australia, and it has changed physically as it has aged.

#### **ACCESSING THE COLLECTION**

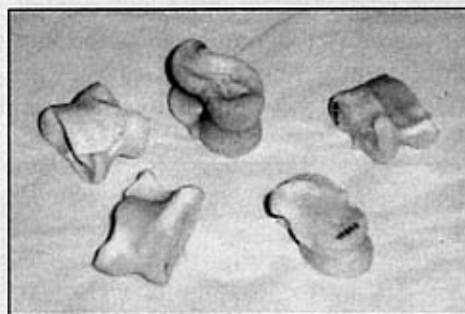
To find out what kinds of objects are in the Collection, you can either go and look at the playthings in their storage shelves, use the Social History database, or search through colour-coded index cards, stored with the Collection. The advantage of an electronic database is that it allows museum personnel to have access to collection information quickly and easily from anywhere in the museum, without having to



*Home-made pinball*

actually go and look at the objects in the first instance. This decreases the need to handle objects and thereby increases their lifespan. It is also an important tool for collection management, allowing staff to track and locate objects, making them easier to find.

The purpose of the Social History database is twofold. It must provide the collection management team with practical information (What is the object's classification? What does it look like? Where is it located?), and it must provide curatorial staff with information about the object's context and history (How old is it? Who owned it? How was it used? What can it tell us about a specific time and place?). Each individual object acquired by Museum Victoria is catalogued in great detail to satisfy these requirements.



*Sheep's knucklebones*

#### **CLASSIFYING THE OBJECTS OF CHILDHOOD**

Objects are first given primary, secondary and tertiary classifications, which are decided by the physical object and not by its use. For example, a swap card would be classified as DOCUMENT / Card / swap-card, while a pair of children's shoes would be COSTUME / Children's Footwear / shoes. For the majority of objects acquired by the Museum, this is fairly straightforward. It becomes more of a challenge when the object is a child's imaginary farm set composed entirely of sticks and small cones. Its use as a farm set cannot be used to classify it.

The paper playthings in the ACFC also do not fit into existing classifications. Paper ephemera collected by museums are usually things like theatre programs, cigarette packets and other relics of adult pastimes which can be used as historical evidence. The ephemera of childhood is transient, like childhood itself, and belongs only to childhood - we do not usually bring our paper planes and fortune tellers with us into adulthood as we do our favourite teddy bears or dolls. These passing childhood amusements offer no brand name or manufacturer's mark, and no date



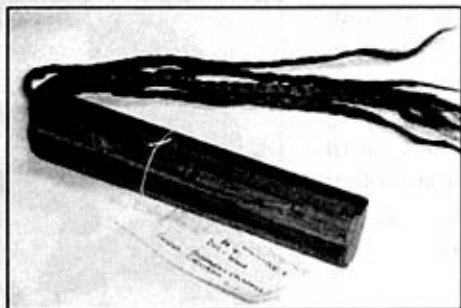
for the database. There is no definitive example showing "this is how it was done", and there are as many versions as there are makers, in the present as in the past. It is precisely this refusal of children's play to be relegated to history or to stand still and be classified which presents some of the challenges in trying to incorporate it into the Museum's database.

Once classified, the object is described in terms of shape, colour and size, measured, and checked for defects and irregularities. All known information regarding its maker, use, owner and history is recorded and its cultural significance to the museum collection is documented. This was difficult for many ACFC objects, because, like the discarded slingshot found and added to the Collection by June Factor, the history of them is not known. They are seen as valuable within the general context of children's play, but do not have specific stories to relate about their use or history. Also, some of the objects have been made by adults as examples of childhood playthings from, say, the 1920s, and this poses problems because such objects are not regarded by the Museum as authentic.

To compensate for this, an important field in terms of the ACFC has been 'cross references'. This is where broad categories relating to the object are recorded, and again it has been a challenge to fit certain ACFC objects into the existing categories. Terms such as 'Toys' and 'Games' were already listed in this field, but it was necessary to add terms like 'Play', 'Playthings - natural materials', 'Recycling' and 'Folklore-Children's' in an effort to more accurately reflect the use and relationships of these objects. 'Making Do' was one of the existing categories that proved very useful for many of the handmade objects in the ACFC.

#### ABORIGINAL PLAYTHINGS

There are also issues to do with material which spans more than one collection area, such as objects relating to the play traditions of Aboriginal children. When we



*Libertian bush-child's doll*



*Japanese tops*

started, the only classification in the Social History database was ABORIGINAL CONTACT - Relics. Objects in the ACFC include tin rollers, a boomerang, a mud switch, spears and a bullroarer, all made since the late 1980s. The spears in the collection were made two years ago by a 13-year-old boy and his grandfather, and demonstrate the way these particular Aboriginal traditions have been passed down from adult to child, to become part of the child's own traditions and memories. To call the objects relics would be to distort their meanings and values, to place them in a historical rather than a contemporary context, and see them as belonging to an adult's rather than a child's world. The problem was addressed by adding the classification 'Toys' to the database, so the classification now reads ABORIGINAL CONTACT - Toys - tin rollers, etc. Although not ideal, it goes some way towards meeting the needs of the Collection.

#### DIFFERENCES IN APPROACH

The different approaches of the folklorist and the collecting institution have become particularly obvious when dealing with groups of objects. Take, for example, a set of tiny hand-made dishes and other crockery, donated to the ACFC by Dorothy Howard. These miniature plates, cups, jugs etc. were collected by Dorothy Howard during her sociological study of the life of a 12-year-old Mexican boy, 'Pedro of Tonalá'. They were made by three generations of Pedro's family, and were donated to the ACFC as a set.

When it came time to catalogue them, the set was separated into several different groups, each with a separate number, because the dishes had different patterns and finishes, and as such, by the Museum's definition, they did not constitute a 'set'. By separating objects in this way, their story becomes dislocated. If they are also physically separated, it may no longer be possible to simply lift the lid of a box, marvel at the size and diverse patterning of the dishes, and appreciate this Mexican family's craftsmanship. Only part of the story will be revealed. The folklorist would have kept the set intact, as it was collected and later donated, thereby keeping its story also intact. The appearance of the object would have been secondary to its context.

## SOLUTIONS

So what has been done to ensure that the playthings in the ACFC retain their connection to the context in which they were collected - the play traditions of childhood?

The first thing was to make sure that the classifications and other listings in the database reflect the nature of the Collection as much as possible. The issue here was about whether a contemporary collection, which is still growing, could be made to fit into an existing history database, or whether the database could be expanded to accommodate new ideas and new perspectives. The challenges associated with integrating the Collection into the database prompted a review of the existing classifications, and the addition of new listings specifically relevant to the playthings in the ACFC.

The second thing was to make sure the entry for each object included a Statement of Cultural Significance, which is really about the reason it was collected, and how it relates to children's play traditions. The more people who understand the nature of the collection, the better its interpretation and use within the institution.

Lastly, in an attempt to reveal the fundamental nature of play for children the world over, as embodied in their play objects, we have made sure that related playthings are stored together to enable comparison - for instance all the different types of jacks have been placed in the one drawer, so it is possible to see the range of physical and cultural differences and similarities at a glance.

## THE FUTURE

The central issue in this matter, however, is the institutional perception of childhood. Is it regarded as primarily a part of history, or is it seen as a living culture, growing and changing and with its own traditions? The answer to this question will determine the future interpretive use of the material in the ACFC.

One answer will lead to dynamic programs about the play traditions of children the world over, another will relegate them to the playgrounds of the past.

*Judy McKinty and Julie Stevens have just completed the cataloguing of ACFC objects into Museum Victoria's database.*

# Tin Toys - Outback Style

**Geordie Dowell**

Tin rollers, as an improvised toy are 'still the go' amongst the Aboriginal children of the Warman community (Turkey Creek) in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia. The photograph shows one such toy composed of a *Sunshine Powdered Milk* tin filled with sand and pulled by nylon fishing line, made by Danielle Dowell, aged 11 (1998).

The tradition of the tin roller has a long history in the Kimberley, where they were a common form of toy on the local cattle stations. Manufactured toys were virtually non-existent in this isolated area; certainly that was the case for Aboriginal children. As milk for station personnel was always provided in the powdered form, the tins were easily commandeered for play artefacts by the children.

Danielle's mother, Ethel McClelland, who is of Aboriginal descent, was born and raised on Mabel Downs Station, south of Turkey Creek, and passed the tradition to her children. At Warman, the tin roller is a valuable addition to the cyclic nature of children's play.

The pattern of play with the roller is without any set pattern and they take their turn in popularity along with marbles and other folkloric games and toys.



(Source: Bruce Dowell)



## **Fish Trout You're Out: Children's folklore collections in the National Library.**

***Gwenda Beed Davey***

1960 was the foundation year for the National Library of Australia, finally an institution independent of its predecessor, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library. 1960 also saw the establishment of the Library's Oral History Section, now one of the world's great archives of sound recordings. One of the Oral History Section's first acquisitions was the John Meredith Collection of field recordings of Australian folklore, made by John Meredith in the 1950s. Meredith's first collections included songs, instrumental music, recitations and children's games.

Children's games are one of the world's most ancient and most persistent of folkloric traditions, and a rich source of social history. There are more than eighty games depicted in the 1560 work of the great Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel, a painting known to the world today simply as 'Children's Games'. Almost all of Bruegel's games are still played today, games such as knucklebones, marbles, hide and seek, as are hundreds of others, and many of them are documented in the National Library's collections of sound recordings.

Besides the John Meredith Collection, mostly recorded in New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania, there are about ten other major collections of children's folklore in the National Library's Oral History archives, collections recorded from the 1950s onwards. Wendy Lowenstein's collection includes recordings made in some remote areas of Western Australia, during a lengthy round-Australia collecting trip which had some sponsorship from AKAI, one of the pioneering manufacturers of tape recorders. Other individual collectors' names spring to mind, names such as Norm O'Connor, Alan Scott, Helen O'Shea, Chris Sullivan and Barry York. Helen O'Shea's collection contributed the counting-out rhyme *Fish Trout You're Out* which I have used as the title for this article. There are also my own collections, and the Australian Children's Folklore Collection. Some oral history projects such as the Christmas Island Project and the New South Wales Bicentenary Project include interesting material on children's games, particularly adults' recollections of their childhood play, recollections which go back to the early years of this century. There is rich material

on childhood play in other, sometimes surprising, places among the National Library's sound recordings.

Barry York interviewed the late Ted Bull, stalwart of the Maritime Union of Australia and its predecessors, and Ted Bull's recollections included many about children's games. One game still played today was Saddle-Me-Nag (also known as Buck Buck), which is shown in Pieter Bruegel's painting. It is, however, even more ancient than 1560, and has been documented in the Emperor Nero's Rome. Ted Bull explained Saddle-Me-Nag thus:

*...one boy would put his hands out against the wall and stoop down so his back was there. And the others would run, and jump on his back. Now of course he could only carry two at the most, you know, so then you'd put another one down...you'd have sometimes five or six fellows you know all down, and you used to run and try to jump as far as you could and land on them of course and the horse would collapse and that was Saddle-Me Nag.*



Ted Bull's childhood games were played in Newry Street, Carlton, around 1924. He also described some marbles games such as 'bunny hole'. He preferred the term 'alleys' to 'marbles', and described himself as a 'very good player', with 'a fast knuckle'. Ted Bull described some of the different size marbles; *bots or botts*, which came out of soda water bottles, *agates*, *stonks* ('they were the pits - a hundred a penny!'), *bimmers*, a 'nice coloured alley', and *reals*. *Reals* were 'the real silk - you cherished the reals - and seldom parted with them.'

Alan Scott recorded children's skipping and clapping games at Graceville State School in Queensland in 1988. Despite the passage of about fifty years since the heyday of the child actor, Shirley Temple, the Graceville children were still using this rhyme to accompany a hand-clapping routine:

*Shirley Temple is a star,  
S-T-A-R.  
She can do the rumple (sic)  
She can do the splits;  
She can do anything  
Just like this.  
Firecracker, firecracker  
Boom boom boom,  
Firecracker, firecracker  
Boom boom boom.  
Boys have the muscles,  
Girls have the brains,  
Girls have the sexy legs,  
And they win the games.  
Yea!*

Clearly 'girl power' wasn't just invented by the Spice Girls! The reference to Shirley Temple doing 'the rumple' (possibly a mis-hearing of 'rhumba') is only one of many variants of Shirley Temple's accomplishments in this particular rhyme.

Some recordings indicate changes which have occurred in children's games during this century. Mr Bernie Johnston was born in 1906, and was interviewed for the New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Collection. Although skipping is usually thought of as a girls' activity today, Mr Johnston spoke of doing 'a lot of skipping' during his childhood in the Sydney suburb of Surry Hills:

*We'd cross a long rope across the street and I used to have a dozen kids skipping down there. Even Mrs Munro came out, seventeen stone, and she had no shoes on. She'd come out and skip.*

Hoops are one of the few games shown in Bruegel's 1560 painting which are missing from today's repertoire of children's traditional games, although according to Mrs Gladys Reardon/Timbs, they were popular in the years before the First World War. Mrs

Timbs was born in 1905, and was also interviewed for the NSW Bicentennial Project. Her childhood was spent in Woolarah:

*In the winter time we had to get out and bowl the hoop if you were cold. Well you'd bowl the hoop round Holdworth Street and up around Ocean Street and down into Jersey Road and up, up*

*Holdworth Street, you'd be hot as Hades because that would warm you up...every winter you had to go up to this newsagent, at the corner of Queens Street and Holdworth Street, and hold your arm out and they'd measure the hoop - it had to come up to your armpits - well by the time next winter, you'd need a size larger, see, because you'd been growing so much.*

Not all children's folklore is children's own playground lore; there is also an important dimension of folklore FOR children, which includes nursery rhymes, games and other lore which adults tell to children. John Meredith recorded two delightful baby games from Elsie Walsh of Nyngan, NSW, in June 1985. The rather mysterious words are as follows:

*Jabey jeebey jibbijiboy  
Jibbiji dooby poorey;  
Hikey pikey crikey sikey  
Chilli go wallaby doorey.  
Whoof!*

and

*Hoopla, hoopla,  
Catch the bevy ho;  
Tickle him round the mouthie,  
Tickle him round the toe.  
Tickle him round the chin chop,  
Creepy crawly so.  
Ho the roguey rascal,  
Ho the babby ho.*





These rhymes provide a great deal of fuel for speculation! Was *Jabey Jeebey* one of the pseudo-Aboriginal rhymes popular in earlier generations, and does *Hoopla, Hoopla* have a touch of Scottish ancestry about it? We can indeed, only wonder. The rhymes certainly provide evidence of the value of sound recordings in enabling us to trace the longevity of some items. Mrs Walsh learned *Jabey Jeebey* from her father, Philip Lawler, who in turn learned it from his mother; this trace places the item well back into the nineteenth century.

Even more ancient is the cumulative song *Old Tremone*, sung by Simon McDonald. Norm O'Connor recorded this outstanding traditional singer in the 1960s, at Creswick in Victoria:

*Where are you going? said Old Tremone,  
Where are you going? said Andrew Roan,  
Where are you going? Said Brother-we-Three,  
I'm going to the fair, said Cricket-a-Wee.*

The long, enigmatic song describes the buying, killing and eating of a pig, and the unwillingness of the first three characters to participate in any of the action, except eating. But in the last verse they get their come-uppance. The question is who will eat the pig, and the answers are as follows:

*I will, said Old Tremone,  
I will, said Andrew Roan,  
I will, said Brother-we-Three,  
Not a bit will you get, said Cricket-a-Wee,  
I'll eat him myself, said Cricket-a-Wee.*

Although presented by Simon McDonald as a children's song, there is a strong echo of the mediaeval symbolism of songs from the period of Wat Tyler and the Peasants' Revolt in England, songs such as *The Cutty Wren*. That song also interrogates its characters, such as 'John the Red Nose', but in this case there is no lack of willingness to 'kill the Cutty Wren'.

The Australian Children's Folklore Collection includes many items of folklore for children in languages other than English. Italian, Greek, Spanish, Dutch, Turkish, Macedonian and Arabic are only some of the languages. Many of these recordings were made in the 1970s. One informant, Mrs Sonia Orzeszko, came to Australia from Chile, and recorded nursery rhymes in Spanish, including *Arroz con Leche* (Rice and Milk), which I have freely adapted into English:

*Rice and milk,  
I'm going to call  
On my senorita  
From Portugal.  
I'll kiss her once,*

*I'll kiss her twice,  
And feed her nothing  
But milk and rice.*

I played one of Sonia Orzeszko's recordings to some English-language students at the University of Barcelona during a recent visit, and the songs 'brought the house down'. The students were overcome with amusement and delight to hear these ancient rhymes 'from their grandparents' days'. Once again, the value of the Library's sound recordings is demonstrated. The 'Barcelona phenomenon' is a classic example of traditional culture being preserved in a new country by immigrants, when it may have faded in its country of origin.

Children's games provide substantial evidence about both continuity and change in cultural traditions and Australian social history. And despite the voices of the Cassandras, who insist that children 'don't play the way they used to', and that television and computers have killed the old games, children's traditional play is still alive and well in Australian school playgrounds. Children can adapt themselves to both technology and tradition!

*(This article was first published in National Library News, September 1998. Reproduced with permission.)*



*Dorothy Howard, the pioneering American children's folklorist, is best known in this country for her remarkable 10 months researching Australian children's playlore in 1954-55. In 1944, while lecturing at the State Teachers College in Frostburg Maryland, she encouraged her students to collect the 'folk rhymes and jingles' of Maryland children. The following comes from the Introduction she wrote to the students' collection:*

Most teachers are oblivious of children's folk playlife and of the accompanying oral literature. Yet those same teachers once as children played their parts in passing on down from one generation to another dozens and perhaps hundreds of rhymes.

Where did the jingles come from? Nobody knows. Evidence says they came from many parts of the world. Parents, grandparents and great, great grandparents brought many of them here. Each generation of children adds to, changes and discards before passing on down the long line, the jingles they have found good and useful.

How do children use rhymes? For bouncing the ball, for skipping the rope, for counting out, for telling fortunes and for charms. They use autograph album rhymes for giving advice, for pronouncing blessings, vows and entreaties, and for pronouncing bits of wisdom. They use rhymes for taunting, for satire and parody, riddles, catches and tongue-twisters. And they have rhymes for taboo subject matter, for ridiculous character sketches, for narratives (vestiges of the ballad), for action games, for learning the ABCs and numbers and for many uncatalogued and obscure purposes difficult to analyze.

Why collect children's rhymes? Teachers do not need to concern themselves with fostering the rhyming tradition among children. The children have taken care of that matter for a long time. But teachers need to know more about children. Here is valuable information. What are the verse patterns of children's folk literature? What are the literary and poetic qualities of the verse? What is the subject matter of children's own play literature and what are the psychological implications in this material?

The answers to these questions have not been sought for thoroughly. The answers cannot be found in books. They will be found by teachers who study children.

## Marbles stand test of time

**David Brehaut**

*Way back when I was at primary school, marbles season was as much part of the school year as Maths and English. Well, almost!*

*A year would not go by without a marble season.*

*I still have a couple of tins of marbles - dating back to the late 1960s and early 1970s - at home as a reminder of the days when each play-time and lunch break were taken up with a game of marbles.*

*A lot has happened in education since those days, but some things stay the same.*

*Marbles has certainly survived the test of time at Ballarat's Urquhart Street Primary School.*

*Each year pupils go a little bit further than an informal game around the yard. They get serious, organising tournaments.*

*They still have a good time though, and like all games - this is what marbles is all about.*

*(This article was first published in the Ballarat Courier, August, 1998. Reproduced with permission.)*



*Grade Five pupil Gail Mackay, 10, plays the ageless game of marbles at Urquhart Street Primary School.*

*Photo: Courtesy of Ballarat Courier*



# THE OLD SCHOOL YARD: I REMEMBER IT WELL

John Evans

I think it was back in 1981 when singer song-writer Cat Stevens came up with a catchy tune about 'the old school yard'. I was never much of a Cat Stevens fan I have to admit, but this is a song which comes to mind every time I visit a school and see children playing. Even the word 'yard' is interesting because it has been a longstanding term for the playground (the school yard), and today teachers still refer to 'yard duty' when they contemplate their turn at playground supervision.

One of the first tasks I have often set for students doing the course 'Children at Play' with me at Deakin, has been to recall something about the playground of the school they went to as youngsters. The 'students' are mostly practising teachers, some with many years experience. Their primary school days are often well behind them, so their initial reaction to the task is one of 'how on earth am I going to be able to think back to my school days?

Invariably they underestimate their powers of recollection. The readings they are given when they enrol in the course help to jog their memory, and soon they are recalling stories in surprisingly vivid detail and at great length. We know that the passage of time can play tricks with our memories, and there is a tendency to romanticise a little about times past. Nonetheless the stories, I think, not only make interesting reading but they tell us a lot about the significance of the playground in the lives of children:

## **'THE TOILET'**

*At my school we only had the one 'can toilet' and it was quite some distance from the classrooms for obvious reasons. When we had to go everyone just lined up. There was no particular order. Sometimes we let the younger children go first, but there was no gender separation. I was always frightened of snakes, so it was nice to have a few people around just in case.*

## **'YARD DUTY'**

*We didn't have anyone on duty because the teacher went home to the residence for lunch and we were left to our own devices. We were supposed to get him if*

*there was a problem but no-one ever did. Even when there was a snake to be killed we didn't get the teacher, because he was from the city and one of the bigger boys could do a better job. We hung them (the snakes) from the fence and kept a tally on the chalkboard.*

## **'THE BEST TIME'**

*I remember being bullied and teased. I remember boys not liking girls and vice-versa, and I even remember getting into a bit of trouble. But most of all I remember playtime and home time as the best times and the only times when we could talk as much as we wanted without getting into trouble.*

## **'STARTING SCHOOL'**

*When I started school my grandmother would come and stay all day every day and wait for me to come out to play. When I came out to recess she would be waiting there under the shelter, doing her knitting. That extra security was a comfort to me, seeing a familiar face instead of having to play alone or try to be accepted into a game. As time wore on, my grandmother was getting a little bit older and she was getting tired staying at school all day by herself. I had also become a bit more independent and could venture out into that 'sea' by myself.*

## **'LITTLE HOUSES'**

*Another of our favourite play-time activities was down among the pine trees. We would sweep away the pine needles until it was bare dirt, then we would make a floor plan of a house in intricate detail. There would be specific rooms, all sectioned off with sticks and stones or pebbles as walls. These would be 'furnished' with wood, branches and old utensils we found or brought from home. We would then take on certain family roles and play-act and role play for weeks on end.*

## **'FAVOURITE GAMES'**

*The treasured part of the girls' playground was the cement area. Here girls played square hopscotch. You needed to be quick after lunch to get the prime squares*

because the cement, in some places, was on a slant. I remember taking ages to talk mum into buying black leather sneakers for me so that I could have better control of the 'tor'.

#### **'MAKING FRIENDS AND GAINING RESPECT'**

The playground for me was a place of escape, because it took me away from a classroom situation where I was initially an outcast because of my inability to communicate in English with my peers and teachers. I felt as though I had the plague because of my lack of knowledge in the language area. In the playground, however, I was able to gain respect because I was athletic and could play most organised games. Language, or my lack of it, didn't matter out there because I was a good player and people wanted me on their team.

Almost without exception the comment made by students is that they are surprised about how much they can remember, and how much more they remember about what they did in the playground than the classroom. What clearly emerges is that the playground shaped their lives in lasting and significant ways. As one teacher wrote;

*If my childhood experiences are anything to go by then the classroom had very little to offer in my overall education as a person. It was our games at playtime*

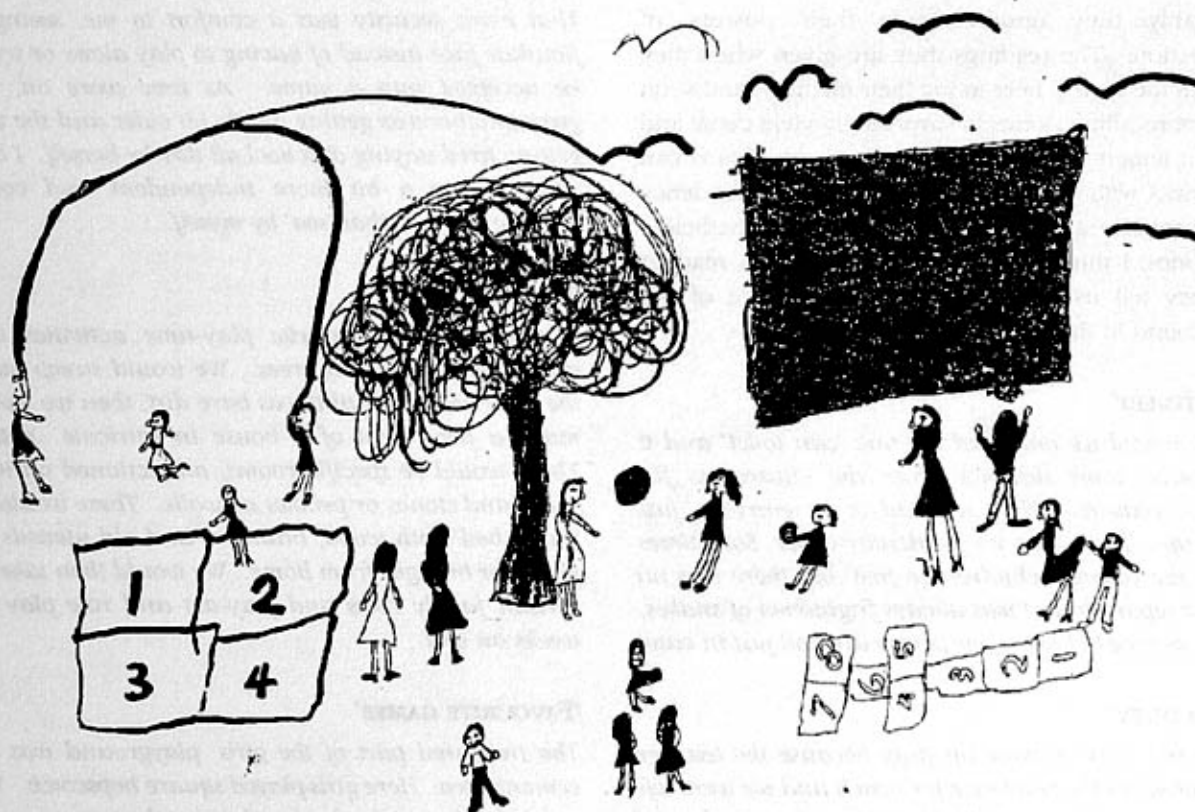
*that counted. Their structure and ever-changing rules opened our eyes to the way society worked, to the way people behaved and to the way people gained popularity and power. Our games did a lot to shape me personally because it was through them that I learnt to understand my own and other people's limitations. It was where I learnt the art of negotiation and compromise and the value of fair play, qualities that have stood me well throughout my life so far.*

Hodgkin (1985, p.20) once wrote that 'play and the playful practice of skills is where education starts'. The 'old school yard' may look different today but each time children run out to play they encounter new and interesting experiences which are likely to stay with them for a lifetime.

#### **REFERENCES**

Hodgkin, R. (1985) *Playing and Exploring: Education Through the Discovery of Order*. Methuen, London.

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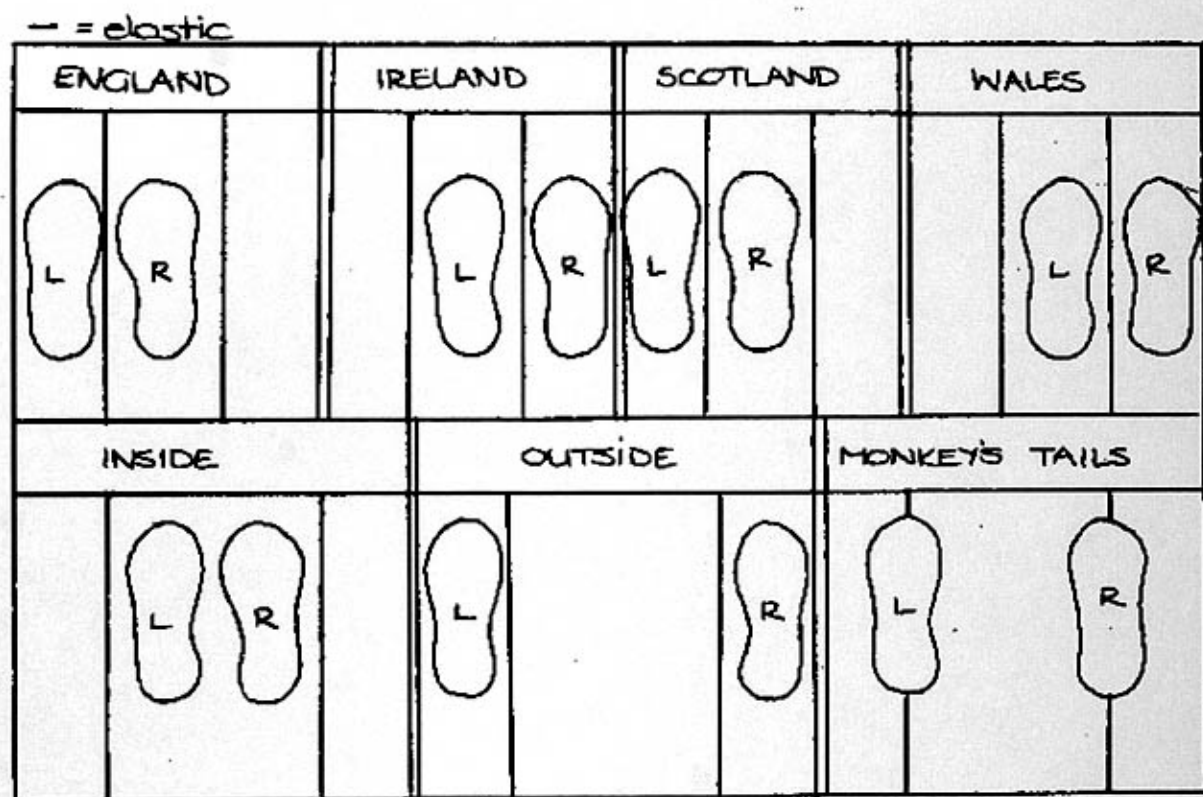
# ELASTICS

*This is one of hundreds of games (and rhymes, riddles, jokes, etc.) sent to June Factor since the publication of Far Out Brussel Sprout in 1983. Unfortunately, the contributor forgot to give her name and address.*

A piece of elastic is wrapped around two people's ankles as they stand about a metre and a half apart. Another person starts with a leg on each side of the elastic and jumps the elastic while singing this song:

**England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Inside, Outside, Monkey's tails.**

On each word they jump differently. I will try to draw some pictures to explain.








When the person has finished at the ankles, the elastic is moved up to the knees, then the waist, then the shoulders, then the neck. At the knees and waist, the person in the middle is allowed to kick one leg at a time over the elastic to get to where they want to go. At the shoulders and the neck, the person is allowed to use their 'pinky' finger to hold the elastic down so that they can get over it (this is called 'pinkies'). My friend and I always played elastics like this, but some people may have had different rules.

# ELASTICS

The story of the elastic is a story of the history of the rubber tree. The first elastic was made in 1839 by Charles Goodyear. He discovered that when you mix rubber with sulfur and heat it, it becomes elastic. This process is called vulcanization. Today, we use many different types of elastic materials, but the principle is the same.

## English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Greek, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Indonesian, Malaysian, Singaporean, Australian, New Zealand, South African, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, Bhutanese, Tibetan, Mongolian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Indonesian, Malaysian, Singaporean, Australian, New Zealand, South African, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, Bhutanese, Tibetan, Mongolian

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ENGLISH	GERMAN	ITALIAN	SPANISH
			
FRANCAIS	PORTUGAL	RUSSIAN	CHINESE
			



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