

A School Day - 1941

It is 8.30am. A No. 13 tram grinds its way up Woolwich Street; the tram is packed and swaying. Kids are milling about the fly-wired double doors of Gibney's shop which slap irregularly as the morning spenders come and go. Inside, home made ice blocks (small '12d, large 1d) are dispensed in Peter's rectangular cups. The small fry agonise over the assorted lollies tray closely advised by apparently disinterested friends. A group of boys finger their 'lackey' band held cards of cricketers, kings of England, movie stars, railway engines, ocean liners, racing cars and other series. Cricketer cards are the most prized. They feature Australian and English cricketers and one card comes with each greaseproof wrapped 2¹/₂" x 1¹/₂" thin sheet of chewing gum, the latter lightly dusted with peppermint powder. (The cards hold the smell of the chewing gum long after the gum itself has been stuck under a desk or spat, under teacher supervision, into a bin).

Across Northwood street, against the wall of 'Cross' room, pairs of boys pink cards to see who gets closest to the wall - Pascomi milk tops are banned as pinkers. The winner nominates his 'one-ups', 'two-ups' or 'three-ups' and arranges the proffered cards (always tender your most tattered cards) with mystic precision. He pitches the stack against the wall calling 'flicks' or 'backs' as they flutter down and he claims those which lie the way he called.

Over in the corner, where the wash from the gravel yard means a smoother playing surface, games of alleys rage. Boys crouch, 'knuckle down screw tight', and shoot with incredible dexterity in games of 'Fish', 'Little Ring' or 'Big Ring'. A tor, its value inflated by its owner's skill, is solemnly swapped for a beginner's treasure in a brand new bag.

Through the big gate by the lunch shed - redolent with the smell of stale fish paste, vegemite, cold meat and tomato sauce, beetroot and sardine sandwiches piled in the bin when lunch time cricket starts -come the Wembley boys on their bikes.

The noise in the yard is building. New arrivals augment the supply of would-be bowlers on the concrete pitch by the pepper tree (green berries for pea shooters). 'Macca' MacDonald can be relied on for some bodyline when he isn't setting a new mark, sticking his knife in even higher in the leaning trunk of the old jarrah tree which stands in the black sand which is the playground beyond the cricket pitch.

The shutters of the pavilion room are still down, not to be raised until the threat of hook shots from Gillies, Stringer or Keith (don't call me 'Bubba') MacLean is removed by the tolling bell.

(Ah, the pavilion room, Standard 4 and Mrs Guilfoyle. How we tried her with our attempted recitals of Silver by Walter de la Mare.

"Slowly, silently now the moon walks the night",

the voices always rose on 'walks' and she always reacted with satisfying annoyance. We did better with Abou ben Adem

"Abou ben Adem, may his tribe increase Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace And saw within the moonlight of his room Making it rich and like a lily in bloom

An angel writing in a book of gold

Exceeding peace

This was at least a stogy and Abou came out of it quite well.)

