

Account of Purley on Thames

Mrs Macrae Remembers

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FROM MY HIST. Y. NOTEBOOK

18. More from Mrs. Macrae: Children's Toys and Games

"Christmas is coming, the geese are getting fat;
Please to put a penny in the old man's hat;
If not a penny, a ha'penny will do,
And if not a ha'penny, then God Bless You!"

In her reminiscences recently, Mrs. Macrae did not mention the above Nursery Rhyme, but I felt that it was appropriate for this month of December. She did, however, relate the following:

"We didn't have many toys in those days - not like they do now. We all wore black stockings and we made our own dolls out of them when they wore out. You made the head and body and then the legs, and then you dressed it up - the bigger the better, because perhaps it took baby clothes.

The boys had iron hoops with a piece of hooked iron to push it along. But the girls had wooden hoops that went out of shape, and when you hit your hoop with a piece of wood, it bounded along in funny bumps. It was very painful when the boys pushed, or trolled, their hoops into your legs because they were very ... well, they hurt a lot!

We all had little wooden tops, but the girls were not quite so good at getting them to go. You wound a string round lots and lots of times, and then, with a sudden jerk, like getting a fish out of the river, you let the top go and it spun round and round all the lovely colours that you had crayoned on the top became most beautiful and like great big circles.

Our dresses didn't have a lot of pockets, but we wore a separate pocket under the front of our skirt. It was tied round your waist with a tape. We made our own pockets: they were oval in shape and had a split which had to be hemmed ever so carefully. Everything was quite safe inside and nothing dropped out. A pocket was very important because that was where you kept your treasures, it was your own personal place.

There might be an apple which you had picked up; or a sweet
sweet that somebody had sucked and given to you to finish
off; or a few cigarette cards that you were going to swap
with somebody for something else. Then there was the
Saturday ha'penny that you got from your Dad - if you
hadn't spent it, that went in your pocket. And always
there were the five-stones because that was the game you
played EVERY day.

We played marbles or five-stones at the side of the road
on the way to school because of course there were no
motor cars. We collected the five small stones ourselves
and the game had a lot of different actions which had
names. In one, you threw a stone in the air and
collected the others while that one was coming down -
quite clever that was and you got quite good at it;

We sang a lot in the school playground, lots and lots of
lovely songs. We used to love it when the big girls
helped with the little ones, and if you happened to be a
little girl and the big girls came out and they called
your name - oh, it was so beautiful, even if you did get
knocked about dreadfully, it was such an honour to be
called.

The little ones played "Ring-a-roses" to start with in
the playground. And then there was "Poor Sally is a
weeping, on a bright summer's day" and "The farmer's in
his den". Of course there was always "Oranges and Lemons"
and the one about "I sent a letter to my love, and on the
way I dropped it; One of you has picked it up, and put
it in your pocket. It isn't you; it isn't you: but IT IS
YOU!" And then you tear round the place.

And then there was the one where you lined up in two lines
and there was a wolf somewhere that was going to spring
out on you! They're calling you and they're saying "Come
home! Come home!" And you say "I'm afraid." What of?"
"The wolf!" "The wolf has gone to Devonshire, and won't be
home for many a year. Come home! Come home!" You make
a dash across the playground and of course this
wretched wolf would spring out and have you!

Mrs Macrae concluded by saying: "I don't know whether
they still play all these games?" Only you children
can answer that.