

20th Century Sparks!

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Games

Before the advent of television and computers, children would entertain themselves with all sorts of made-up games that still exist in some form or other today.

On this page you can explore recollections of two games called 'Release' and 'Alleys'. You can also explore other street games children used to play in Brighton and Hove throughout the year in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter - Seasonal games.



boys playing marbles
www.streetplay.com/the/games/marbles/

'Release'

To the deafening roar of 'REE-LEESE', Bertie's mates were freed and the defenders scattered. If it had only been the defenders who were scattered, no doubt Release would have endured as a game. But Bertie did not discriminate, and following the scattering of several innocent pedestrians, and the loss of one old lady's half pint of stout-in-a-jug, and under the threat of 'I'm goin' ter get a bobby up to you lot,' the game's popularity waned. We kids were a law-abiding lot, but there were few among us without some unpunished mischief on our conscience. And the grown-ups knew that the threat of a 'copper' usually had the desired effect. Bear Road was not on a regular beat (perhaps the climb up the hill did not appeal to the force), so when we did see a policeman we made ourselves scarce.

'Grandmother' then said 'yes' or 'no'. But I don't think it mattered a lot what she said, as the inevitable outcome was a lot of screaming, scratching, and pulling hair, which they all seemed to enjoy very much. It all proved to us lads what a daft lot girls were.

'Ree-leese' as we called it, was the noisiest and most rowdy game of all. It was like Tin Can Copper without the tin, and played between two teams. I cannot say 'equal' teams, because it was a foregone conclusion that the team with Bertie Mellors in it would come off best (I can't say it would win, because here was another of those games which 'broke-up' rather than arriving at a win-or-lose conclusion). One team scattered and hid, and the others set out to find them and bring them all back to 'prison' - an area formed by the lamppost, fire-call and back wall. Any prisoners incarcerated therein could be released by one of their team-mates dashing across the prison area and shouting 'REE-LEESE'.

Bertie was an oversize lad, weighing, I suppose, something in the region of twelve stones, and sporting an enormous size in boots. The sight and sound of this great mass thundering down the hill was something terrifying. The Brighton Belle leaving Clayton tunnel had less impact on the atmosphere than Bertie in full flight.

Sid Manville - Everything Seems Smaller



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Games - continued

'Alleys'

Another game which was extremely popular was 'alleys', these alleys were, of course, glass marbles, multi-coloured and much to be coveted. I recall the so-called 'blood alleys' as being the favourite, and these were white with swirls of red through them. We would bring out our alley bags, which we would have coaxed our mothers to make (these were of any piece of highly patterned cloth and with the mouth capable of being closed with a drawstring) and into King Street we would troop. Up and down the gutters we would play, each youngster trying to win as many alleys as possible. Much shouting and cries of pleasure, or dismay, dependant on how one was treated by lady luck.

Occasionally an alley would pop onto the pavement and then invariably roll down into somebody's 'area'. These 'areas' were spaces, perhaps extending from the front of a house into the pavement by about a foot, and were covered with a grating, their purpose was to allow light into the basement room. Many cries of dismay followed this event, until someone, who was in favour with his mother at that time, was persuaded to return home and beg the use of the clothes prop and a piece of soap. A quick hoist of the prop upwards and the alley would be retrieved. Dash home with the prop and off would go the game again.

Victor Henry Cox - *Backyard Brighton*

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Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter - Seasonal games

We used to play games according to the season...

At Easter it was skipping and hoops...

In those days scaffolding was tied together with very thick rope, if any of us had a dad in the building trade he used to bring us home two pieces of rope. It took at least five of us to play the Easter skipping game, we would cross the ropes with one girl at each end, two would stand on the opposite pavements, and two in the road. There was not much traffic about in those days; it was an event to see a car down our road. On the odd occasion when one did come down, it didn't go very fast, and we could always hear the horse and carts coming, and get out of their way in time.



boys playing marbles
<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/conker/conkers-and-ghosts/marbles.htm>

We used to run in when the ropes were being turned and the others used to chant a rhyme, at the end of the rhyme we had to run out. If you happened to catch your foot in the rope as it turned, it gave you a nasty bruise across the back of your legs.

At Whitsun it was top and whip and marbles. The boys used to play marbles in the gutters, which were quite clean as the road sweeper used to come round every morning and sweep the gutters, and after him would come the water cart, even in the small side streets.

We always had new sandals at Whitsun...

They were leather tops with crepe soles. They cost two and eleven pence a pair, and were always bought half a size too big, as they had to last us all summer. It meant we had to have a sock in them when they were new. If we did wear them out before August we had to make do with a shilling pair of plimsols.

Before we went back to school after the August holiday we would have a new pair of black lace-up shoes that had to last us all winter. They were leather soles and uppers, and if they wore out the boot repairer would repair them in two hours unless he was very busy, then you might have to wait; but you always got them back the same day as you took them. He used to charge two and sixpence to repair a pair of men's boots or shoes, two shillings for ladies and one-and-six for children, and an extra threepence for boys. If they had what we used to call horse shoes on the heels (that was a piece of steel shaped like a horse shoe set into the heel) it saved the boys wearing the heels down so quickly. I used to envy the boys because they used to strike their heels on the pavement and make sparks.



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Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter - Seasonal games - continued

We used to get six weeks holiday from school each year:

One week at Easter, one week at Christmas and four weeks in August, an odd half day in mid-term and one day on May Day. Not having a May pole we used to sling ropes over the arm of the lamp posts and dance round them. Most of our amuse-ments were home-made, for example four wheelers for the boys, consisted of a wooden soap box, a plank of wood, a piece of rope and four wheels off an old pram. The only ready-made amusements were the swings and slides on the Level. As soon as you were eight you joined the cubs if you were a boy or the brownies if you were a girl. You didn't have any choice, you were told to go by your parents and you went. You never thought of disobeying them.

L .Scarborough - Backyard Brighton

Other Seasons

Some games seemed to create their own season. Someone would produce a top and a whip, and for a few weeks it was the top season. This might be followed by the marble season. From the depths of a cupboard, or from some dark recess in the loft, a marble board was produced. This was a board with semi-circular holes cut out along one edge. Each hole was given a value. The board was propped up against a convenient door sill, each competitor given X number of marbles, and the one with the highest score was the winner.

Cigarette cards or 'tabs' were another doorstep game. Each player flipped his card, and when it fell on another card, that card became his.

Yet another game was hoops. Girls had wooden hoops, boys had steel hoops which we controlled with a hook, or as it was known, a skeeler. Sometimes the steel hoops would break and we would take them to Dodsons, the blacksmiths just to the north of the Bear Inn at the bottom of Bear Road, for repairs.

Don Carter - Just One Large Family