

Formidable!: Beatrice Yell

Drawing himself up to his full height of six feet, our father would twirl the waxed ends of his moustache and declare 'formidable' in an atrocious French accent. His eyes would twinkle, a sure sign he'd found another new and exciting challenge.

A few years later, when I'd escaped to London, I shared a shabby flat with three other Aussie girls. ...We were in an enclave of identical two storey red brick houses, all a little the worse for wear after the privations of the war. The citizens had expected to be invaded by Hitler after the bombings so many areas had experienced. The façade was formidable; even the constant drizzle was so very different to my family home, set in untouched bushland where I'd played in the sunshine with my siblings.

Fran, one of the girls in the flat, played tennis and hoped to qualify for Wimbledon. When she did, Fran gave each of us a ticket and begged us to come and watch her match.

Wimbledon was a fortress even then; there was security, but it wasn't overwhelming. Nothing like it is today, of course. Naturally I wanted to go into the players-only café and rub shoulders with the well-known names I'd followed from afar. So, I squared my shoulders at the barrier, which bore a large sign 'Players Only,' took a deep breath and remembered my father's catch-cry, 'formidable!'

Dressed in a white blouse pleated skirt and Dunlop Volley sandshoes, with a headband on my fair hair I fronted up to the café with one of Fran's tennis racquets tucked under my arm. One look was sufficient and I was waved inside and breezed into the café.

Whew! It was wonderful to see fellow-Australians Rod Laver and John Newcombe amid a host of international players relaxing and chatting informally before their matches. Just to sip a cool drink was a special event for me that day.

After this, we watched Fran play, but she and her partner lost their doubles match. As our Wimbledon tickets gave us entry to all the courts, we spent the day sitting in the centre court, seeing some great tennis.

Next day a work colleague asked me, 'Hello, how did you survive your day at Wimbledon?'

'Well it really was exciting, but the security was formidable!'

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