

Days Out



**Train
rides, trips to the seaside and
cycling all the way to London!**

Produced by Great Fen staff and volunteers, with the help of Ramsey Rural Museum, as part of the Great Fen oral history project.

Train rides and trips to the seaside

John Edwards, who lives in Ramsey St Mary's, said: "The train used to come by here, until 1964, when Beeching closed it down. I could get to Mablethorpe or London, changing at Holme station."

Lola Carter remembers trips to the seaside: "When we used to go to Sunday school we got a seat free. We'd get on at the station at St Mary's and go once a year to places like Mablethorpe and Skegness, take most of the food with us and have a day at the beach."



A day out at the seaside, courtesy of Des Cox

"Skeggy"

Tony Redhead remembers Skegness with particular fondness. He said: "We had two trips a year to Skeggy. We used to go in the paddles, play with balls, sail little boats go in the sea. One of the trips was paid for by a farmer called Starling, who used to show all the prize horses."



Tony Redhead boating at Skegness - "or Skeggy"
- on a club excursion during The War.

The Festival of Britain



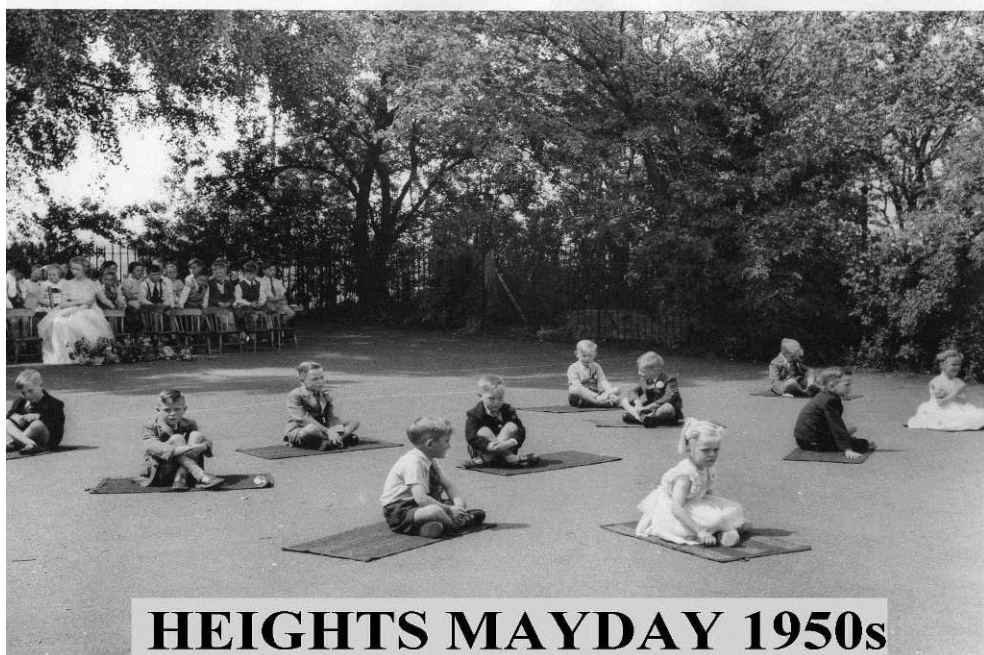
Des Cox remembers catching a train at Ramsey St Mary's to the station at Holme, where he got a train to London to see the Festival of Britain in 1951.

He said: "We hadn't seen anything like it before. It was all about modern technology."

Maydays and fetes

Outings were a rarity, so many looked close to home for days out.

Lola Carter said: "We had fetes. We used to dress up and that...because of course you had to make your own amusement."



Photos courtesy of Barry Metson

Fen Skating

Skating has always been a popular pastime in the Fens. John Driver's grandfather, Asa Clarke, was the proud owner of a pair of Norwegian skates, which gave him a very good "skating action".



Photo: John Driver's grandfather Asa Clarke taking part in a skating competition on Whittlesea Wash in the 1930s. Photo courtesy of John Driver.

Asa Clarke is recorded in a BBC radio broadcast from 1943, describing even earlier skating in the Fens.

John said: "Before Holme Fen was drained, a lot of it was under water in the winter. My grandfather often skated over it."

"In the old days they used to catch pike on skates. They could see the fish under the ice and they skated after it till it was exhausted and then they used to break the ice and catch it."

John Edwards learned to skate after the great flood of 1947 when the water froze. He said:

"My friends had some old skates hanging up in a barn so they gave them to me. We would skate from the bottom of Chapel Road right to the bridge by Speed the Plough Farm, then we'd turn round and go back.

"The water was fairly high and the ice was about a foot thick - you couldn't jump on it and make it crack. At first my friends could whizz by me. They said, 'Get your balance, just put your balance on one foot then on the other, once you get your balance you're away!'"

Motorbikes

John Driver's grandfather, Asa Clarke, had a motorbike. John said: "You needed to pedal it to start it. It was difficult and when he went into Yaxley children used to come out and say, "Can I start your bike for you Mr Clarke?"



When they were first married David and Ivy Baker used to enjoy riding a motorbike round the fens - they even used it to go shopping in Peterborough.

David said: I was a teenager it was more common to have a motorbike than a car. There were six or seven motorbikes in Holme village and only one car. The first bike I got was an Ariel, 350 Ariel and the next one was an A-10 VSA.

Cars

Cars were so scarce they were sometimes viewed as an important status symbol!

Tony Redhead's claim to fame was having the first ever mini in Whittlesey, "It was a blue mini and it cost me £537, which was a lot of money then. I don't know how we saved all that money up. You couldn't get hold of cars in them days. I was proud to be seen on Whittlesey Market Hill with that.

"I went all the way to Ilfracombe in Devon with it, twice."

Fishing

Fishing has always been a popular past time in the fens. Tony said: "I caught this pike – I called my Uncle Monty – and we got this pike out, and it fed three of us - three families for three suppers. We only had seven pound scales, so we cut his head off from his gills and his head weighed three and a half pound!

"And it got all over the Holme villages and everywhere that I'd got this pike!"

[illegible]

More 'days out' memories in the making...

A big part of the plans for the future of the Great Fen include new off-road cycling, walking and horse-riding routes. These will link from local towns and villages, into and around the Great Fen.

There are already regular Great Fen rambles and walks, family events and school visits.

Maybe these children will tell stories about their days out in the fens in years to come!

Top: Signs of Spring, 2011, by Shabana Shaffick-Richardson

Middle: Family event, 2008

Bottom: Dens in the Fens, 2009



Our sincere thanks to Des Cox, Lola Carter, John Edwards, John Driver, Tony Redhead and David and Ivy Baker for sharing their stories and memories.

Local Memories project

If you have a story, photos or objects that you'd like to share with us, please do get in touch:

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You may also be interested in some of our other Local Memories booklets, including:

- Four generations on the Fen:

The Masons at Woodwalton Fen

- Family Life in the Fens

The story of the Kemps and the Keightleys

- Fireballs and Flying Fortresses

The story of 457th Bomb Group

- Childhood and School Days

The recollections of people who grew up in the Fens

- Conington and its Lost Castle

Remembered by Reg and Wendy Hubbard