

Family life in the Fens



The story of the Kemps and the Keightleys

In memory of Angeline Keightley and Mike Keightley

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

Photos courtesy of the Keightleys



Family life, past and present

Angie Keightley (née Kemp) lived in this bungalow on New Decoy Farm from her birth in 1936 until she got married in 1959.

Eight members of the family lived in the bungalow, with girls in one bed, the boys in another and Granddad in the front room.



Angie's wedding to Malcolm Keightley, left to right: Mike Keightley brother of the groom and best man, Malcolm Keightley, Angeline Keightley the bride (née Kemp), Angie's father and mother Harold and Annie Kemp.

Left to right: Mike, Angeline and Malcolm Keightley, visiting the bungalow in 2009.



Going to the toilet was an adventure!

In some ways, life was harder than it is today. Angie and her siblings started work on the land at the age of 15.

She said: **"It was hard work picking sugar beet on your hands and knees, but you could make a lot of money."**

The Kemps did without a lot of things that we take for granted today, like fridges and washing machines.

Photo: Annie Kemp, Angie and Alan's mother



Alan said: **"On washing day mother would start washing at 7am and still be working at four in the afternoon. We didn't have a car until 1954."**

Every Friday the family took it in turns to use a galvanised tin bath, sharing the water that was heated over a fire, and there was only an outdoor toilet.

Angie said: **"When we were children we wouldn't go out there alone after dark – someone had to come with us! There was no flush toilet and Dad used to dig a hole in the garden and empty it."**



Fun and Games

But if life was harder, it was also healthier. The children's favourite games were cricket and football and on school days used a walk a mile through the birch woods of Holme Fen to catch the bus to school, **"We used to walk or cycle everywhere. I think it did us good."**



The family spent a lot of time together, playing Scrabble and Ludo in the lounge and watching Patrick Moore's Sky at Night on their black and white TV.



There was only one channel in those days and the TV was powered by a generator in the shed as there was no mains electricity to the bungalow.

Aeroplanes, chewing gum and ankle socks

The War had a big impact on the family's life and they have fond memories of Christmas parties at the American air base in Conington, where they were given presents like juicy fruit chewing gum, dolls and ankle socks.



When the American bombers flew out on a raid, the children would count them as they went and again as they returned.

Once they had to crawl under a crashed plane to get to Sunday school.



Fenland Feasts

Unlike most people today, Angie's family didn't buy their food in supermarkets.

Alan said: "Dad used to catch pigeons and rabbits and mum would make jam from the blackcurrant bush in the garden. You got extra sugar rations for jam!"

There was even a Fenland version of the Cornish pasty.

Angie said: "**Mum used to put corned beef in one end and jam in the other and tie it up in a pudding bag. You had your main course and dessert in one!**"

In memory of Angeline Keightley and Mike Keightley.

Our sincere thanks to all the Kemps and the Keightleys for sharing their memories and photos with us.

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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- Four generations on the Fen:

The Masons at Woodwalton Fen

- Fireballs and Flying Fortresses

The story of 457th Bomb Group

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Remembered by Reg and Wendy Hubbard

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