

Four generations on Woodwalton Fen



The story of the Mason family

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

Photos courtesy of Nancy and Andy Mason and the Wildlife Trust

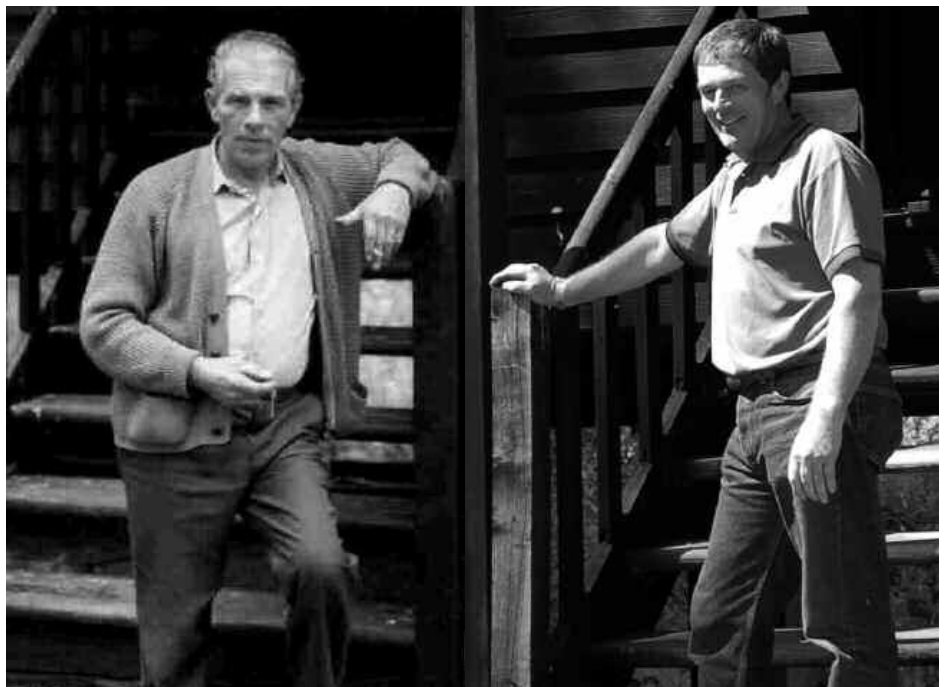
Four generations on the Fen

Andy Mason grew up on Woodwalton Fen and as a child he hardly ever left it, apart from a shopping trip to Ramsey every Friday.

He said: **"It was great growing up on the fen - like our own private playground really."**

Andy is the third generation of Masons to work on the Fen; he drove his first tractor at the age of 10 and 36 years later still does the traditional work of looking after grazing cattle, clearing reeds and cutting the rides.

From left to right: George "Grandad" Mason, Gordon Mason, and Andy Mason



But in other ways Andy's job is very different from how it was in the time of his father Gordon and grandfather George.

He said: **"There's more management work now and in those days there were no machines so they had to use scythes and dig out the dykes by hand."**



Stan and Gordon Mason, March 1962

Where in the Fen could you stay for just £1 a day?

As well as working on the land, Andy's parents Nancy and Gordon had a guest room for people visiting and working on the Fen.

Nancy said: "It was £1 a day for bed, food and board. We had a lot of titled people and conservationists from the British Museum and Cambridge University. It was never dull."

Photo: Andy Mason with mum, Nancy.



Royal visits

Andy said, "I met Prince Charles twice on the Fen – once in 1989 and then a couple of years ago."



The Rothschild Bungalow

Andy's favourite place on the Fen is the balcony of the Rothschild Bungalow, "I love it here. You can stand on this balcony and it feels like you're the only person in the world, with just the birds singing and the reeds rustling."



Rothschild Bungalow courtesy of www.woodwalton-fen.net

It's a place that Nancy also loves, "It's a beautiful place. I know I'm probably biased because I've been associated with it for all these years, but there's not another one in the world like it."

The Great Fen

Andy said: "I know Father would have been very supportive. They talked about joining the two Nature Reserves together years ago.

"As for Grandfather, he was obviously a lover of the fen and a keen naturalist, so I imagine he would have been all for it."

Andy said: "**I like knowing that the work I do today will still be here tomorrow and for generations to come.**"



Gordon Mason by the old boathouse (top right)

Gordon Mason feeding cattle at Woodwalton Fen (bottom right)



The fourth generation

Paul Mason, Andy's son, has been doing contract work both at Woodwalton Fen and out on the Great Fen land.



Paul at work at Darlow's Farm

He's recently created new grass ramps at Woodwalton Fen to open up a trail for all terrain wheelchair users.

Among many other projects, he has also created new parking facilities for a Great Fen Information Point with bog oak around the edges.

Our sincere thanks to all the Masons for sharing their memories and photos.

Local Memories project

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

Great Fen team
at the Wildlife Trust Countryside Centre, Chapel
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You may also be interested in some of our other Local Memories booklets, including:

Family Life in the Fens

The story of the Kemps and the Keightleys

Childhood and School Days

Growing up in the Fens

Days Out

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