Text display panel 3

Tales from the River

Places people bathed, swam, played, fished, had fun

Where did people go?

The places people go to swim, play, fish, or enjoy the rivers and water in all

sorts of ways have always been those to which they went as a matter of

course and to which they have access, often associated with road bridges

and fords, byways, footpaths and bridleways, places of baptism, ferries,

staunches, weirs and locks, mills and old ponds. And they went to local

places, with most villages and towns having their own swimming holes

and places with names and stories.

Brandon Bridge, possibly early c20th, https://bdlhs.org/2022-programme/

Cock-up bridge, Burwell, possibly 1940s?

Some memories...

[in photo of the ford above] “...my father would have been aboutsix, his brother was about

four years old or so... my father’s on the right, his brother is on the left…

”I think all children get drawn to water sometimes. I think it's more of a worry for the parents

but they all gathered and played in those parts and that was where you had to cross so it was

wading across and I think we all still do and have done.

[And]"…there's what they call the Hilborough Ford, which is just on the bend and…they can

go and play in there and then there's another one which is really the remnants of the mill

pond at Ickburgh…it’s a lot easier to get into …for younger children.”

Fabian Eagle, interviewed by Imogen Radford March 2022

Ford at Houghton Lane, North Pickenham, about1934. Thanks to Swaffham Museum

‘The Sea Side at Lakenheath’, Daphne Austin, 2019, by

permission of the Lakenheath Heritage Group,

http://lakenheath.onesuffolk.net/lakenheath-heritage/

Some memories...

“I remember the water mill from 1948/9

when the structure was in poor condition,

my parents allowed me and my sisters to

swim in the pool race providing we did not

enter the building . My father was Head

Keeper on the Didlington Estate and I also

used to swim with another keepers son

Gerald Dye, both in the river and of course

at the mill. Our fishing expeditions in the

river were unmitigated failures equipped

with a bent pin, dough and string."

Maurice Jay 27 August 2019

Village heritage and art

“The village pond, which was next to where

the War Memorial now is at the bottom of Mill

Road, was turned into a beach for the children

and this made national news in a feature

article in the Daily Mirror, July 16th 1942. In

2019 the Heritage Group asked Daphne

Austin to interpret the scene as an art work…”

1942, timeline, PART 6 1935-1948AD,

http://lakenheath.onesuffolk.net/lakenheath\_heritage/

RIGHT: Northwold Mill, Pippa Miller's copy of

Claude Messent's 1938 original, map and quote,

http://www.norfolkmills.co.uk/Watermills/northwold.html

BELOW: Soldiers at the park, Fornham St Genevieve,

August 1915. Picture by Walter Burrell, Collection at

Suffolk Archives, Bury St Edmunds

Some memories...

“I swam at Santon Downham…I have

known it as a swimming hole most of my life,

since coming here as a miserable little army

cadet on a school field camp when I was

about fourteen. It was high summer and the

rough, woollen, khaki uniforms were

prickling us all crazy in the heat. So were the

thick socks and heavy boots. Someone must

have taken pity on us because we were piled

into the back of a truck and bumped along

endless sandy tracks until we reached this

mirage of a river, stripped off, and felt its

welcome embrace like all our mothers

soothing and kissing us cool.”

Roger Deakin, Waterlog, 1999, p196

Project area rivers & other waters

Within the project area – the Brecks and the fen edge – the main rivers

are the Wissey, the Little Ouse, and the Lark and their tributaries, and

other waters include Lodes, drains, washes, meres, flooded quarries and

lakes, springs, wells, ponds and historic pools (private and public).

Tales from the River is part of

The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers

Landscape Partnership Scheme

(BFER, https://brecks.org/bfer/),

supported by the National

Lottery Heritage Fund

(https://www.heritagefund.

org.uk/). For more see also

https://tinyurl.com/OSBprojTR

'Turfpool', W. G. Clarke, In Breckland Wilds, 1925

IN LITTLE OUSE VALLEY

“…from Thetford to Wilton Bridge, a

distance of 13 miles. Navigation on this

swiftly flowing stream is rendered possible

by staunches, which serve the same purpose

as locks…Down stream from Thetford the

staunches are the 1st or Thetford; 2nd or

Thetford Middle; 3rd or Turfpool; 4th or

Croxton; 5th or Santon; 6th or Brandon; 7th

or Sheepwash…[describes how they work]

In the river below each staunch is a deep

pool or ‘staunch hole’, usually a favourite

place for fishing and bathing.”

W. G. Clarke, In Breckland Wilds, 1925, p97 Brandon, OS map, 1:25,000 1937-51

Some memories...

[In Brandon] “There was certain main areas

by the river that we all went to swim… One

...was at the stanch… Because that used to

have a very very sandy bottom there in the

summer… And you could go there

sometimes in the school summer time in the

50s and there might be anywhere from 9,

10, perhaps on an odd occasion 15 families

down there… The mothers used to take the

children down there to give them

something to do in that summer holiday

period, ‘cause back then, in the 50s, there

weren’t many on 'em going away

anywhere.”

Bunny Huns, interviewed by Imogen

Radford and John Bowes March 2022