

"FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND"

Seaside Memories of the 1920s, 30s and 40s



**A book of stories and photos
An Age Exchange Publication**

"FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND"

Seaside Memories of the 1920s, 30s and 40s

**Compiled and edited by
Pam Schweitzer and Frank Bechtel
from writings and tape-recordings
by older people at
Age Exchange Reminiscence Centre**



The Pier at Shanklin, 1926.

Photo donated by Grace Evans

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Ventnor 1929

Photo donated by Grace Evans

Thirteen Years Running

We went to Birchington thirteen years running, so as I was only three when we first went, I cannot remember too far back. We had this old car and it was terrible for going up hills. My mother was always the driver - she was a terrible driver, she wouldn't let anyone pass her. My father never drove, and we always used to sit in the back of the car thinking "Is it going to go? Is it going to get up the hill?" And of course it would stop and we all had to get out and push. It was a nightmare.



*Uncle Harold, Mother, Father, Beryl, Barbara and Ray.
Birchington 1926. Photo donated by Barbara McKenzie*

We stayed above the Post Office in Acol, which was about two miles from the sea, and we stayed there for eleven years, then for the last two years we graduated to a rented bungalow, what bliss! And finally the "piece de resistance", a hotel for our last year there, as the war broke out.

The thing I remember most was my green and white knitted swimsuit (hand knitted by my mother). I hated it because when it was wet it sagged and stretched. Ray, my sister, had the same swimsuit, but hers had been unpicked and re-knitted, so it was very bumpy. My eldest sister, Beryl, also had the same swimsuit.

We had lots of friends at Birchington, so we were never bored. We played loads of different games, a complicated rock game, and it was quite difficult to jump from these. There was also a place we called 'The Dip' which was a very large grassy hole, and you had to run up and down. It doesn't sound much now, but I remember it being very exciting.

We also shrimped at low tide, in pools with lots of green weed. There were also services on the beach and we sang lots of hymns. I loved that! I can still see the Minister's face. He had a very large dimple in his chin. My mother said that meant character, and I still look at people's chins.

Our old car had curtains all round and that's where we changed into our swimming gear. It's also where we sat when it rained, which it very often did. We had to be out of our lodgings first thing in the morning, and not return until the evening.

Two things stick in my mind when staying at Acol. One was a terrible row my parents had about money, or rather the lack of it. They always wanted the best for us which they could not really afford. The other was when Harry Lauder sang in the middle of this village, and when he saw my sister Beryl, he asked to be excused as he liked the look of her. I thought this to be very flattering.



Girls on the beach in Birchington. Please note back row second from left - knitted baggy bathing suit. Barbara middle row on right. Photo donated by Barbara McKenzie

Another exciting thing was walking to Reculver - it was about four miles, and you had to be at least eight to be allowed to go. It was a cliff walk and sometimes quite tricky. We used to sing marching songs to keep us going and always had Smiths Crisps with salt in blue paper. There was supposed to be a woman or a baby who was washed up in the tower at Reculver - spooky. When we got back, we were absolutely exhausted.

My father always wore a trilby hat and, at that time, the News Chronicle was running a competition about Mr Lobby Ludd. The public had to go up to someone who was Lobby Ludd (he always wore a trilby hat) and say "You are Mr Lobby Ludd and I claim the News Chronicle prize". My father got accosted many times a day. I think he felt quite important!



A crowd at Ramsgate looking for Lobby Ludd, 1930. Photo donated by Eileen O'Sullivan

One family of friends, called the Gelder's, had a double decker bus as their home by the sea. It had a double mattress in the driver's cab. They were a very "back to nature" family and Mrs Gelder used to wash in front of us. She had such enormous bosoms, she sort of threw them over her shoulders to dry herself! I can remember watching fascinated (we never saw our parents naked). Mr Gelder was totally bald. He wore a wig but took it off

when he went swimming, and put on a bathing cap that had a strap under the chin!

There was also a big open car that sold ice creams by the slip-way and, near that, a miniature golf course with all those funny obstacles to get the ball through.

I can also remember a nasty girl who tore out lumps of my hair (I can't remember why), and another incredibly frightening time, when my sisters and I and some friends became trapped in a cave by a gang of boys and girls. They were above us on the cliff, throwing down broken bottles and bits of rock, so that we couldn't come out. We were terrified. My eldest sister crawled out and found my mother and she chased them for a long way, and finally caught them. I thought her very brave. One of those girls is a very famous film star now, and it goes without saying that none of my sisters or I will watch any of her films!

We went to Westgate for a talent contest and I recited 'Sea Fever' - I didn't win.

We loved being in the rented bungalow, and had wonderful crispy rolls and we all used to say "Crispy rolls, not for lunch, not for tea, not for dinner, BUT FOR BREAKFAST!". There was also gorgeous fish in crispy batter.

I can remember my first kiss. I was thirteen, his name was Billy Levy, and he always wore riding boots. I thought he was really something. He kissed me on the cliffs but he slipped over and fell, so it was a bit of an anticlimax.

My sister Ray and I had our last summer at Birchington at the St Valerie Hotel. She was eighteen and I was sixteen. Our parents let us stay on another week as we had met some very nice French boys called the de Baviens (sons of the French Ambassador to London). We couldn't believe that we were allowed to stay on our own. We had a lovely time, but war was coming and so my parents came and fetched us home.

My mother bought damsons on the way back and made damson jam (lots of pips) which got put away indefinitely with all the emergency stores. She was always prepared for the arrival of the Germans - we would not starve!

Wonderful memories, very little money, but much happiness.

Barbara McKenzie

West Of Land's End

The seaside featured very early in my life, due to the fact that my father who had been a naval man, had transferred to H.M. Coastguard Service by the time I was born.

At that time, in the early 1920's he was stationed on the Isles of Scilly. Firstly on St. Agnes, where I was born, then later to the main island, St. Mary's and lastly to Bryner. So I was surrounded by sea, rocks and sand for the first few years of my life.

These islands are some 27 miles west south west of Lands End and can be reached by the sea, aboard the Scillonian Ferry which crosses from Penzance daily, often in very rough seas. In later years small aircraft and helicopters provided a quicker and more frequent service.

Depending on the time of year, one can find the hillsides covered with golden gorse or purple with heather. There are barren rocks on which the seabirds love to gather and low rocks where seals rest, beaches of glistening white sand, strewn with many coloured shells and seaweeds, clusters of palm trees growing alongside stone hedges brightly coloured with local flora. All this as a backdrop to the daffodil fields. One of the main sources of income for the islands is the flower industry. The daffodils and narcissus are picked in tight buds, bunched and sent quickly to market in order to get a long flowering life from the blooms.

The climate is mild most of the year, although in winter gales frequently lash the rugged western coasts open to the Atlantic. Hell Bay on the island of Bryher provides some spectacular sights on a rough day.

When the Bishop Rock lighthouse was operational and only relieved by boat, it was often impossible to reach the keepers for three or four weeks at a time because of the heavy seas at the base of the tower. Later when a helipad was built on the top, relief was more regular.

Many a famous ship had been wrecked in years gone by, on the dangerous rocks around the islands. These incidents have been a source of great excitement to the islanders. Now a lifeboat is moored continuously, ready for any emergency.

After leaving the peaceful Scillies, we moved to mainland Cornwall. Again, there were beautiful beaches, a rugged coastline and spectacular scenery and wildlife. I was older then and able to visit the beach frequently in summer, often after school for a swim. We used to undress and leave our clothes in the caves while we swam or dabbled in the pools. The huge waves, rolling in across the beach, were a wonderful sight and we loved being carried towards the shore on them. Sometimes my mother would bring our teas to us on the beach, maybe a hot pasty, always welcome. As children we were allowed to roam the cliff walks. We'd take food and hike for hours on end. We were always safe.

All this ended when we moved to London. When the summer came I longed for the seaside, but my visits were a great disappointment as I was introduced to the nearest coastal resorts of Kent, Sussex and Essex. Many with rough pebbles for a beach, funfairs and loud music. What a contrast.

Later, more exotic areas around the world, all too commercialised in spite of their many attractions. Not for me, I still get more pleasure from my early memories of Cornwall and the Scillies.

“Up To My Knees”

My earliest memory of going to the seaside was when I was six years old - 1936. My Grandmother's sister lived in a fisherman's cottage in Eastbourne, and I was sent there during school holidays. I remember it, apart from all the others, because I nearly drowned in the sea. I was out of my depth and I remember that the water was round my ears. Next was the pebbles digging in my back when I was pulled out. I've never got out of my depth in water since - up to my knees - that's it!

Around 1947, I was going to evening classes for further education - English, typing, shorthand - and every year the class had an opportunity to go away to Cliftonville, Margate. They booked a bed, breakfast and evening meal guest house, and there were several other schools included from around the London area, so the guest house was full of teenagers.



Audience preparing for a concert on the promenade, Bournemouth.

Photo donated by R. Billington



*Joan at Butlins Beauty Competition,
Clacton 1948.*

Photo donated by Joan Pearce

It was really well organ-oil. That was the real purpose of the holiday, to come back home ised... dances, treasure as brown as possible. Sometimes, the sand was so hot it was hunts, sandcastle com-uncomfortable, and when the wind blew it was worse as the sand petitions (yes, at that used to stick to the oil. We used to listen to the band which age!), rambles, and a played near the pier and at the end of the pier, there were very good sing song round the good shows in the Winter Gardens.

fire on the beach. Some

of us were tempted to My Grandmother was a very bad traveller on coaches (travel have a 30 minute boat sickness), so every year she hired a chauffeur driven limousine ride out to sea, then back to take her to the seaside, usually Eastbourne. She always took again (no lighthouse at me on the limousine ride. The driver always treated her like a Margate). I was really duchess, very attentive, blankets round the knees when she sat quite glad when we on the pier, getting the ice-cream, holding out his arm so that turned back, although it she could go and listen to the music at the end of the pier. I wasn't a smooth ride. All always played the penny machines, ate the rock and collected my friends who jumped shells. It was a lovely day for her and me.

off the boat when we

reached the shore, land-When I was eighteen onwards, we tried holiday camps because ed in about two inches of at that age I was bored with just sitting with my parents on the water. I jumped off the beach. So, with my friends we went to Butlins at Clacton and other side and to my hor-really enjoyed it...lots to do, and new friends. We went into every ror, the water covered my competition and won a few - no...not the beauty contests, even head. Some kind person though we went in for that too, but that was not our choosing; had dug a hole when the every girl under the age of thirty was put into a reluctant line up tide was out and I just and then a process of elimination took place - very embarrass-happened to land in it! ing- I came sixth!

Hilarious to everyone but me of course. I thought I was drowning again.

Joan Pearce

On the last night we went into Margate to the big funfair in Dreamland and watched the fireworks. Many a sad farewell at the end of the holiday and a promise to meet again. We never did.

Seaside memories with my parents are vague. Windy, wet days started to go to Rothbury Hall, which was in Blackwall Lane. sitting in shelters come to mind and, when the sun did shine, my Each year, an outing took us to the seaside. This was just before parents used to follow the sun around in deckchairs to get the war. Rochester Way was a by-pass and it usually took about brown. My mother made up a sun tan concoction of vinegar and four hours to get to Margate. No motorways in those days!

Beans And One Arm Bandits

I always went to Sunday School when we lived on the Isle of Dogs. We moved to Greenwich when I was ten years of age and I

started to go to Rothbury Hall, which was in Blackwall Lane. Each year, an outing took us to the seaside. This was just before parents used to follow the sun around in deckchairs to get the war. Rochester Way was a by-pass and it usually took about brown. My mother made up a sun tan concoction of vinegar and four hours to get to Margate. No motorways in those days!

My mum would pack lots of sandwiches, fish paste or jam and bottles of water or lemonade made up with crystals. You never went into a cafe to eat. We spent most of the time on the beach.

When I left school and was going to work, friends and I would go to the seaside, usually Southend, then we would have some money to spend. But there was so much entertainment you could not make up your mind what to spend your hard-earned pennies on. Many of us have used a one-armed bandit in our lives, at one penny for a go, hoping to get the jackpot. Now I look at today's machines and think I need an A Level certificate to understand the workings. Even so, I don't think I could afford to play.



Beano, destination Margate.

Photo donated by Lil Murrell

Factories held an outing each year, called a beano. Destination Margate or Southend. As there were no conveniences on the way, a stop would be made at a suitable place for the "necessary". Also, this was the time for the drinks to come out, mainly beer and lemonade. Lunch would be in a restaurant and on the way home a stop would be made at a pub. The coaches left the park fairly early, at about 5.30 to 6.00pm.

Each week you paid into a kitty for the cost of the outing.

Since those days I have been to the coast many times over most of the British Isles. The fairground does not interest me now, but what a joy to walk along the prom on a lovely sunny evening and watch the tide as the sun sets.

At Easter time I was with friends walking along the front at Broadstairs and we watched tiny tots on the beach and commented on the way they were dressed in their modern clothes, very different from our younger days when children either went into the sea "in the nuddy" or their undies. It didn't seem to matter if you did not have a change of clothing because on a nice sunny day the things would dry by the time you went home.

As my brother lives a few miles from Southend, I get to visit often and, in the summer, I like to go into Southend for a few hours on my own and quite often walk the length of the pier but come back on the train. Sadly the pier is no longer there, but there is planning to re-build.

Lil Murrell

Winkleton - On - Sea

I had a book when I was very small showing a girl and boy with bucket and spade and holding a piece of sea weed. Up above them was a blue sky and seagulls and ahead, small waves lapping a sandy beach. The fictitious town was called Winkleton- On- Sea. That was all I knew of the seaside but I kept that picture in my mind, and still do today. It was somewhere very magical to me.

My very first visit to the sea was very different. I was nearly 13 years old and it was on a Sunday School day outing to Southend. We dressed ourselves up in the latest fashion. I remember, I had a white linen suit and a wrap over skirt. We travelled by tram to Woolwich, then across the ferry to North Woolwich Pier to catch

the 'Golden Eagle' steamer. Quite a crowd of us went, including some parents and younger brothers and sisters. To my immediate friends and myself, the trip down the Thames Estuary was highlighted by the music playing on board so we could dance all the way there and back.

I remember my disappointment on seeing the beach...it was dark brown mud and the day was cloudy. However, we took our swimsuits (I could swim okay but always at the local baths) and bobbed up and down in the shallow water, coming out covered in the mud. My mother had packed me the usual egg sandwiches to lunch on and then we rushed to the Kursaal with our pennies, spending money. We couldn't afford many rides but I remember how excited we were. For days afterwards I could actually say "I've been to the seaside."

At dusk, we alighted at North Woolwich and trekked back via ferry and tram to Eltham.

Joyce Milan

Holiday Romance



In 1937, when I was 16, my friend Rene and I went to stay at a Guest House in Clacton belonging to my two aunts. We were allowed to stay as our auntie's were keeping an eye on us. We travelled by coach from New Cross. Our excitement was immense and Auntie met us at Clacton.

It was quite a large house and tastefully furnished yet modest.

Seaside romances.

Photo donated by Ralph Billington

Both my aunts had been in service since they were girls, to a barrister and, when he died, he left them enough money to purchase the house and most of the contents therein. One thing that caused us lots of amusement was the large dinner gong in the hall that was struck to announce meal times, and my friend always had her foot in the hand basin washing her feet when it struck. We used to laugh so much as we were both always very hungry and panic ensued to get down as soon as possible in case other guests ate our share. Every morning we walked to the beach and swam. It was freezing cold but we loved it.

We met two boys there and each day they waited for us....our first holiday romance! We loved the pier and kept winning little celluloid dolls with coloured feathers for skirts and hats. We had dozens of them displayed in our bedroom.

We had, between us, bought one yard of 36" material, navy blue silk with white spots, cut it across diagonally and made ourselves identical suntops, tying two ends at the back and



Joyce and Rene causing a stir on the promenade in Clacton 1937.

Photo donated by Joyce Milan

one piece around our neck. We wore these with shorts, and which was cheaper caused quite a stir on the promenade, as very few people walked than the regular one, about with bare legs in those days. We also had sun dresses and out we always did. white sandals, both the same.

Evenings, we visited one of the first Butlins Holiday Camps near by for the dancing. It was a great holiday, full of laughs and fun. We had many more holidays away together, but that first one was the most exciting.

Joyce Milan

Sunday Excursions

Oh how we enjoyed them! Great excitement ran through the house when Dad would say to Mum "How do you fancy a day at Broadstairs on Sunday if the good weather holds?" My brother and I would hold our breath waiting for Mum's reply... "Yes, alright. We'll take a picnic." On the Saturday previous to our outing she would spend all day making a delicious meaty pie to take with us and eat cold with tomatoes and lettuce. Then she would cook lots of little fancy cakes and finally, make a few jam sandwiches, in case we children got hungry on the return journey. There was also a bag of fruit to eat on the way and some sweets. Plastic was unheard of in those days, so greaseproof paper and brown paper bags were used to wrap everything and then placed in a capacious shopping basket.

Sunday morning would arrive bright and sunny and we youngsters would awake to find clean clothes laid out neatly at the ends of our beds, plus newly whitened shoes. Mum and Dad were always up before us with everything ready, including towels, swimwear and coats in case it turned cold.

Off we would all walk to the bus stop to wait for the right one to come along to take us to Bromley South Station. We fidgeted and fretted in case we didn't get there in time for the excursion train

We made our way to the platform where right always overcame me. The great, noisy, steaming monster which came rushing through the billowing smoke and steam. Once it stopped however, all was well and we hastened to find seats because these

rains were popular and often very crowded. I always liked to sit facing the engine, so that I could see where we were going, much to the despair of my mother who knew that I would end up covered in smuts. What a long time the journey seemed to take, even though my father would suggest that I started looking for the sea long before we were anywhere near it!

At last we hissed into the Broadstairs station and joined the crowds walking down the hill towards the sandy beach. Deckchairs were hired for the grown-ups, but we had to sit on towels on the sand...not that it mattered, we were too busy donning our swimming costumes, collecting our buckets and spades and rushing to and from the water to complete our castles and fill up our moats.

Dad would go up to the nearest cafe and return with a tray complete with a full teapot, hot water, milk and sugar, plus cups and saucers to accompany our picnic. How good it tasted in the lovely salty air, despite the sand blowing everywhere!

Soon the shadows would begin to lengthen and preparations made to depart. We were told to dress ourselves properly again, including shoes and socks. The latter always causing trouble as



Sure to be the winner of the sandcastle competition!

Photo donated by R. Billington

I refused to put socks on sandy feet, and generally resulting in me running into the sea to wash them and being carried back by my father in a fireman's lift.

Lena Richardson

Hollywood Hotel

In the 1930s, our family enjoyed a comfortable standard of life. My father had a steady job as an accountant with a very large engineering firm in Deptford and had been able to afford the mortgage on a very roomy semi-detached house in Mottingham. Another enjoyable benefit was being able to afford a two-week holiday each year.

Several times we went to Broadstairs on the Kent coast. My recollections of these were happy and exciting. The sun always seemed to shine upon us. For me, the holiday started as soon as we waited, large suitcases standing beside us, on the edge of the footpath on the A20 near Mottingham station. I remember excitedly looking in the direction of London in an attempt to spot the coach as it appeared rounding the curve of the road. It was always an East Kent Company vehicle, painted in dark red with gold lettering on the sides. A distinctive feature on these coaches was the horns. They were a sort of bugle "fan-fare", multi-toned style, used only by this company.

The ride to the coast was fun at the start but later in the morning it seemed like forever. The journey through Chatham was particularly arduous. No motorways in those days! Eventually we would get our first glimpse of the sea, usually as we drove along the Thanet Way. This was always a great thrill. Then we would usually stop in Margate, to unload a few passengers before going on to Broadstairs.

It was our custom to stay at a very pleasant hotel named "Hollywood", which was in fact two very large houses joined



Coach outing to Margate.

Photo donated by Irene King

together. A flight of steps led up to each of the doorways and across the front, was a long white wooden verandah connecting the two entrances, providing a covered walk-way (or run-way for children) to move from one house to the other. A similar corridor connected the two back entrances.

The hotel was run by a Mrs. Whitlock, a charming and friendly lady, who maintained a very orderly and efficient establishment, without it becoming rigid or impersonal. The atmosphere was always very relaxed and children were welcome. I remember the waitresses looking very smart in their brown and yellow uniforms, with spotless white aprons and lace caps, one in particular, Winnie, was there for several years. Many guests returned each year usually for the same fortnight, in our case mid-June. We made a number of friends and met up again in subsequent holidays.

Then came the first day on the beach! It was a short walk from the hotel to the sea front where we were presented with a choice...

The main bay was a horse-shoe shaped cliff-lined beach. A high frequently, managed to succeed. Whenever we passed the chalk cliff at the southern end gradually sloped down to almost level at the north end. There, the horse-shoe was completed by a concrete and wooden jetty. Small boats clustered in bunches near the jetty, stranded on the sand each time the tide went out. The other option was the Luisa Bay, a smaller bay on the south side of the cliff promontory at the extreme end of the main beach. This was a cosy little bay of fine sand - ideal for children. We usually made for this one. It was accessed by a long sloping ramp pathway, ideal for prams and wheelchairs. This bay was entirely enclosed landwards by very high chalk cliffs, in which was cut a large, deep cave. I spent many hours playing in that cave but I was always mindful of the fact that the incoming tide could trap me inside if I was not watchful.

A short bus journey took us to the north foreland, where it was possible to go on conducted tours of the lighthouse. This involved climbing innumerable stairs, round and round inside the tower, up to the lantern room and viewing platform which was exhausting but very rewarding. The descent was a little more arduous, as it required the visitor to look downwards and the stairway had no handrail in those days, only a rope secured to the outside wall. We clung to this, moving hand over hand, careful to keep one hand in contact with the rope. In spite of these hazards, it was always a worthwhile visit and one that I made several times.

During our 1938 holiday at Broadstairs, one day at Broadstairs, one climb over the rocks. It was amazing the variety of sea life that became trapped in the pools in these rocks. I spent many hours catching all manner of creatures, putting them in a bucket, only to be told that I could not take them home with me and having to tip them back into the sea.

During our 1938 holiday at Broadstairs, one day at Broadstairs, one climb over the rocks. It was amazing the variety of sea life that became trapped in the pools in these rocks. I spent many hours catching all manner of creatures, putting them in a bucket, only to be told that I could not take them home with me and having to tip them back into the sea.



Ralph on his fathers shoulders, with his mother at Broadstairs.

Photo donated by Ralph Gooding

boarded the steamer 'Royal Daffodil' and set off for Calais. Thas long since gone. The cave has been filled in and the entrance excitement was intense. I was actually going to a foreign country:concreted over. However, Bleak House is still there and boats still a thing unheard of in those days. Nobody that I knew had evecluster together under the lee of the jetty, but the place seemed been out of the British Isles except for service in World War Onso much smaller when I visited it as an adult in later years.

The journey across the Channel was uneventful as the 'Daffodi ploughed its way through very calm water and it was not long before Calais came into view. We slid quietly into the harbour and as we made fast alongside the quay, several small boys appeared, running up to the ship and shouting. People began throwing pennies on to the quay and the boys began scrambling for them. This was the regular custom for visiting ships.

We disembarked and, for the first time in my life, I was standing on foreign soil. It was a strange sensation, so utterly new. I seemed like a completely different world! We wandered around seeing the sights and buying a few souvenirs, just soaking up the atmosphere. My father spoke quite good French, as a result of spending four years in France during the First World War. I purchased a small model boat, with a French sailor in it, only to find on closer examination when I got it home, that it had been made in Germany! However, the events of that time remain vivid, and the memories pleasant. Sadly, whilst attempting to evacuate British soldiers from France in 1940, the 'Royal Daffodil' became a victim of the Luftwaffe in the very same location.

There was a dramatic sequel to our French adventure, one which I must emphasize we had no influence or connection with whatsoever. The very next day, the English newspapers splashed banner headlines, "French financial disaster!" "Franc crashes!" "Bankruptcy looms in France" "French government in crisis" The guests, back in the Hollywood Hotel, gave us a lot of good humoured comments and joked about "what happens when the Goodling Family goes to France".

Many years have passed since those halcyon days in Broadstairs. Hollywood Hotel was later entirely gutted by fire and is now only a memory, but still a very happy one. Uncle Ma

Ralph Gooding



*Valerie on the beach.
Photo donated by Anne Durrant*

Cowboys And Indians On Canvey Island

in the summer of 1930 my brother Michael and I spent a very happy and carefree two week holiday in a bungalow called 'Ringarooma' on Canvey Island. My Uncle Dick, Aunt Flo and three cousins had recently moved there from a flat in East Ham. My uncle had very poor health and it was hoped that the clean air would help him back to good health. He'd been gassed and wounded in the First World War.

Aunt Flo cooked by Calor gas and there was no indoor lavatory. That was half way down a very large garden in a 'tarted up' shed

with a special bucket under a wide wooden seat. Floss, thdried and dressed, and we would go to one of the little shops brown and white family dog, usually accompanied us kids downwhere he'd buy sixpenny chocolate coconut squares. They tast- to the loo and if he was sitting outside, that meant that someed delicious and we'd try to make them last as long as possible. body was in residence!

Another cousin, Brenda, joined us and Cecil's very best friend Tommy Stevens also arrived, so we were quite crowded, with bodies everywhere at night. Grace was fifteen years old and worked in the local baker's shop, so she was very seldom with us. Cecil and Tommy were thirteen, Eileen, Brenda and myself ten, and Michael, the youngest, eight years old.

In those days, Canvey was an entirely different place, mostly fields, very few shops and a long lane which led down to the sea wall. At the end of this lane were a few open fronted small huts which served as shops, selling sweets, fruit and small buckets and spades. On the other side of the wall was the water and a very pebbly stretch of beach. When the tide came in you had to move up onto the slanting part of the wall and get as comfortable as was possible! We all had our 'paddlers', rubber pull-on slippers, when we were in our swimming suits. The stones were deadly on the feet!



Photo donated by Anne Durrant

My uncle was very kind and happy with children. Every morning he'd put a record on the gramophone, to wake us, and shouting out "Wakey, Wakey!" he would bring us all mugs of tea and teddy bear biscuits. After breakfast, we'd all troo down to the beach with my uncle. We were never allowed in the water without an adult as he said that the tides were treacherous. When we finished messing around in the water, we go

Uncle would then go off to do same jobs. He was trying to get a small odd-job business off the ground. As Cecil had a watch, and was the eldest, he would be in charge and had to get us back in time for midday dinner. After dinner, we'd either go over the fields to play, or stay in the garden and make up plays or practice songs for a concert we were going to perform for the grownups later on.

Brenda had a pair of Beach Pyjamas her mother had made her, and she loved to prance around in them, showing off her dancing skills. She'd had some lessons and she really fancied herself. Eileen and I were dead jealous of those pajamas and retaliated by "taking the mickey".

As there was a piano in the front room I was supposed to do an hour's practice every day but I never did. Aunt Flo always had a headache when this was mentioned and said that I should be out in the fresh air! I was in total agreement. The only playing I did was from some old sheet music of popular pieces that we had decided on for our concert. The others would have to stay in the garden singing, whilst I played with the windows wide open because, according to my aunt, "the place wouldn't be fit to be seen if we were charging in and out all day!".

If we were going to be out all day for an adventure, she would cut up loads of sandwiches, all in separate bags to avoid arguments and we had bottles of lemonade made with powder and a penny each for sweets.

I well remember one of these trails, when Cecil decided we'd go to the Benfleet Hills and play Indians. Off we set for the long trek across swampy fields. Cecil led the way, carrying a long stick, with which he did a lot of pointing out of duck boards which we had to walk across. Michael, being the youngest, brought up the rear, carrying most of the food and moaning all the time. Now



Photo donated by Anne Durrant

there is often volunteered to get up early and go into the back fields for mushrooms. We would come back with a couple of basket loads. The mushrooms were fresh with the morning dew and Aunt Flo of water sepafried them with bacon and eggs from Uncle Dick's chickens.

rating Canvey
from Benfleet Friday was exciting. Morning and evening, Uncle Mac's Minstrels but in 193(performed on a small stage in one of the fields, this side of the there was n sea wall. At night they had a talent contest. It used to get crowd-bridge, only ed in the evening with all the kids sitting cross-legged in front of man, taking the stage, and the grown-ups sat in decks chairs further back for you over for which they paid three pence. In the afternoon, my cousins had penny in a littldared me to enter the Talent Competition and knowing that I'd rowing bo never live it down if I refused, I had no alternative but to agree. when the tide was dead scared to take anything difficult, so took an easy was in. W piece, "Puss in Boots" in the key of G, with only one F sharp (#). arrived at this was all 'poshed up' with socks, my Sunday dress and hair well

backwater and, to our delight, the tide was out so we spent our brushed. I started the piece and to my horror discovered the F # pennies on refreshing Walls' fruit ices. We'd already traipsed was broken! I kept thumping it and the more I thumped, the good three miles, and ice creams in hand, we proceeded on to the more everybody laughed. I was mad and went to get up but hills of Benfleet!

We had a good time playing cowboys and indians. We ate all our tinue playing and everytime the F # appeared in the piece, I was food and I had a fight with Cecil because he kept on bullying to hold up the stick and the audience would shout out, "F poor old Mike. Brenda and Eileen had a scrap. Eileen accuse SHARP!", which they did! I had enough sense to carry on as it Brenda of being sappy over Tommy Stevens and mucking things made a good comedy scene, but my pride was very dented. up. Eventually, we realised it was getting late and the tide would Anyway, I got the coveted prize, a white and red glass bowl on an be in. We raced back to the Benfleet side of the water and found aluminium stem. Mum used it for years as a sugar basin!

the tide well in and us with no money. We took off our shoes. We girls had to tuck our skirts into our knickers and wade into that At the end of the two weeks, Mum and Dad, with my baby broth- water, which was nearly waist high. We were soaked er Ted, and Brenda's mum and dad all came down for the through. Then, we had the long trek across the fields. When w Saturday ready to take us children back on the Sunday. I forget eventually arrived back home my aunt and uncle were frantic who collected Tommy Stevens. We performed our little concert with worry. From what they said in later years, it was getting on the Saturday afternoon and the grown-ups thought it was for eight o'clock in the evening and we were a very sorry looking very good. Dad never asked whether I practiced every day, for crew, damp, dirty and dead tired. which I was very thankful. He and my uncle had had a few beers, so I suppose he was feeling very mellow.

After that escapade we had to promise to stay round about. Aunt Flo said we'd be the death of her! To get into her "good books" we

Olive Smith

“Chuck Out Your Mouldies!”

As a child, I lived in a poor area quite near the Surrey Docks and there were very few families who had any sort of holidays at all. My father had a regular job in the Docks, so we were lucky enough to have a week's holiday at the seaside each year. There were no paid holidays at all in those days, so my mother took us children away on her own.

We usually went to Ramsgate, and we stayed in an ordinary house on a “Bed & Attendance” basis. This meant that my mother went shopping each morning and bought food for the day which the landlady cooked for us. We played on the beach, while my mother went to the shops. We had a great time, playing with our buckets and spades. We built sandcastles with moats around them, ran down to the sea, filled a bucket and ran back to fill the moat. This was a wasted effort of course, but it didn't stop us trying.

Another favourite pastime was “bunking in” the Concert Party enclosure. Two of my brothers would push me under the bottom of the tent, and would then keep an eye on the rest of the children, while I entered the talent competition, an important part of the show. I'm sure everybody knew that I had “bunked in” but didn't know that then. I was full of confidence and loved being up on the stage where I would sing and dance my heart out. Maybe the other performers weren't that good, but I always seemed to win the box of sweets that was the first prize.

When the show was over, my brothers were waiting to pounce on me and grab their share of the sweets. Once, I won a box of skittles and my mother was so pleased and proud that she took me to have my photo taken holding these skittles. That photo had pride of place in our ‘Front Room’ at home.

All too soon, our holiday was over and we were heading for the station and the train home. It must have been a nightmare journey for our mum. There were five of us then and, at seven years old, I was the eldest. We'd had a lovely time at Ramsgate, and our

Dad and our Nan & Grandad were very pleased to see us all again, safely home at last.

The only other holiday at the seaside, for most of the people who lived near us, was going on a “Beano”. These outings were arranged by the local pub, and a sum of money was paid in each week until the cost of the outing was paid up. The men would go on a Sunday and, when the great day arrived, they would meet outside the pub at about eight o'clock in the morning. The coach was loaded with crates of beer and sandwiches. The men were



Men from the Crown and Anchor pub, Bermondsey, before going on a beano to Margate, July 1925.

Photo donated by Eileen O'Sullivan

dressed in their best suits and downed a few pints before boarding, having posed for a group photograph first with a glass in their hands. That was traditional, as was the children crowding round the char-a-banc, as the coach was called, and shouting “Chuck out your mouldies!”. The windows would be opened and showers of coppers were thrown out. Sometimes there were sixpences or threepenny bits among the coins and there would be a mad scramble to scoop up as many coins as we could.

Southend was always the choice for a day's outing, as it was only about thirty miles from London.

After some years of men's beanos, women decided to have one and the same procedure was followed, by paying into the local pub "kitty" and going off on a Monday. They had hats specially made, not "Kiss me quick" efforts but copies of the latest fashion. The first thing the "mums" did was to make sure all the kids were looked after, promising the tearful ones lovely presents they were good. The "mouldies" would be thrown out, and the char-a-banc would go off with the ladies singing at the top of their voices. They would spend a blissful day at Southend, thinking how lucky they were, for one day in a year, when they were free to do whatever they wanted to.

How these holidays were appreciated, even though it was only one day a year when people saw the sea.

Kathleen As

A Day To Make Your Hair Curl

My first clear memory of the seaside was when I was thirteen. My aunt and uncle took me and my cousin David, who was about six, to Southend for the day. It was a lovely summer's day, and I was wearing a little blue flower-print dress, buttoned up at the front, with short puff sleeves. We walked along the street, proudly carrying our new tin buckets and spades that Uncle Albert had bought cheaply at East Lane Market. They weren't very much to look at, but they made the same sandcastles as everyone else's!

We left from Greenwich Pier, on a big ship called the Golden Eagle, which we thought was very posh. I remember the most horrible smell coming up from the River Thames as we pulled away and the propellers churned up the murky water. Funny that only a few miles along the river at Southend, I thought that the sea was the most perfect water I'd ever seen!

We children were both very excited, and Aunt Nell was nervous, not realising that the ship was already moving. David wanted to explore the ship and, with firm instructions to me not to let go of his hand, we started off. In one room, there was music playing, and with David's head on my tummy, we danced around the deck like the grown-ups dancing around the room. David begged me to let him look over the side and I did so, grasping both of his hands tightly and hoping that Aunt Nell wouldn't see us!

When we got to Southend, we had what seemed like a very long walk from the harbour to the beach. We could hardly see the sand because so many people had had the same idea as us. It was one of the first occasions that people had been allowed onto the beach since the war.

There was a Punch and Judy show and games for the children but we were only interested in building sandcastles and going into the sea. We didn't have proper swimming costumes but David was happy enough in a spare pair of pants and I went in my vest and knickers. Many other children were wearing the same kind of clothes, or none at all! Aunt Nell did her knitting and watched us. Uncle Albert read his paper and dozed. I remember he had a white hanky, with the four corners knotted and dangling over his head and we laughed at how funny he looked. We had our picnic on the beach but the sand seemed to get in all the sandwiches and the cold drinks were warm! Uncle Albert brought us an ice-cream and later on a lolly in the shape of a triangle from a man selling them from a tricycle on the promenade.



Uncle Albert, Auntie Nell, Aunt Flo and us at Southend.

Photo donated by Kitty Finch



*Children on the beach waiting for the Punch and Judy show.
Photo donated by Anne Durrant*

We were worn out when we got home, and fell asleep almost immediately, but we had had a lovely time and I have never forgotten it. My fondest memory of that day was of the sun being so hot that Uncle Albert's straight hair went curly and, from that day on, he never lost the curl from the front of his head, even though the rest of it went bald!

Kitty Finc

New Boots For Dad

When I was young, we couldn't afford to go on holiday so had to make do with a trip to the coast once or perhaps twice a year. The uncle and aunt we lived with were rather better off than we were, and they went to Margate for a week's holiday every year, always staying at the same house.

One year, my parents decided to visit them during their holiday, and we set out to catch a train early in the morning. This in itself was a bit of excitement. Although we were going to the coast, my sister and I were dressed in our best frocks, with long white lacy socks and black buttoned shoes. Mum had packed sandwiches and fru

it for a picnic, so that she wouldn't have to spend any more money than was absolutely necessary. We met up with my uncle and aunt outside their beach hut.

While the adults chatted, we played on the beach with our two cousins and, for some reason, had our photographs taken by Uncle Harry. I've still got the snap and our hands and knees look filthy! We ate our picnic lunch, then, during the afternoon we decided to paddle, and my sister and I soon had our shoes and socks off and our rocks tucked into our knickers. We dashed into the water, followed by Dad, who had rolled up the legs of his trousers and had his boots tied together and hanging round his neck.

We thought this was just great fun and were rushing about screeching and splashing, when Lily slipped and fell over. As Dad bent down to help her up, his boots fell off his neck and dropped into the sea! This was a disaster! He couldn't wear them like that, so he had to borrow a pair of slippers from Uncle Harry, then buy a cheap pair of boots to wear home. Although they only cost about £1, it was more than we had to spare, so Uncle Harry lent the difference, to enable Dad to have a dry pair of boots to travel home in. Lily had fallen at the edge of the water, so she only got her knickers wet. This problem was solved by borrowing a pair from one of the cousins and keeping them up with a safety pin.

Needless to say, this episode completely spoiled the day for Mum and Dad, and although they were able to laugh about it later, at the time it wasn't funny because every penny had to be counted, and money spent on new boots meant going without something else.



*Snap taken by Uncle Harry showing our dirty knees.
Photo donated by Dorothy Barton
(pictured on the right)*

Dorothy Barton

Blown Home Again

When I was about eight years old, I was sent to a convalescent home near Brighton for several months, because doctors had said that I was unlikely to survive another winter in London.

We had been given a list of things to take but were not allowed toys, dolls or teddybears, which was a bit upsetting. My parents took me to the London terminus where we met up with several other children, all going to the same place. After tearful goodbyes on my part, we were put into the carriage nearest to the Guards van.

The Guard locked both doors of the carriage, so we couldn't get out, and we set off. I don't remember seeing any of the countryside we passed through because I sat in a corner, next to another little girl, where we held hands and both cried softly all the way there!

Upon arrival, we were met by nurses and put into cars for the short journey to the home. We were taken upstairs to a large dormitory where we were all to sleep, boys on one side, girls on the other. When we went to bed that night, a row of large china chamber pots were put down the middle of the room because we were forbidden to leave the dormitory during the night. However, I was rather a shy and reserved child, and couldn't bring myself to use a chamber pot with so many people around, so, if I had to get up during the night, I crept out to the bathroom in the dark.

The following morning we were taken downstairs into the kitchen where we had to put our outdoor clothes on. The nurses checked that we were all warmly dressed. I was lucky because my Yorkshire grandmother was an expert knitter and had made me several jumpers, a hat, gloves and long socks for my winter stay beside the sea. I also had a full length coat. Several of the boys were very badly equipped, some having only shorts and a jumper, with no coats. The nurses and the cook rummaged about in a large wooden chest to find various bits and pieces they could put on those children who needed the extra warmth.

Woollen shawls and scarves were wrapped round children and safety-pinned on until the grown-ups were satisfied that everyone would be warm enough. Then the cook took a large wide scarf from the chest, wrapped it round me, over my coat, pinning it at the back, and tutting all the time, saying that a puff of wind would blow me away.

How right she was! We went out of the back door into what seemed to be a howling gale. Several of the smaller ones, including me, were sent staggering. It was October and the sea breezes were fairly rough to children who were not used to them so, at first, we only stayed out for a short time and didn't walk very far but, as we got more used to it, I enjoyed going for a walk battling against the wind and being blown 'home' again. Most days, we walked on the pavement which was raised higher than the beach, although we were never allowed to go down on to the beach itself.

I'd only seen the sea a few times, on the occasional day trips we'd made to Margate, and I didn't even know there were such things as tides, so it was surprising to notice how the sea changed from day to day, and how far it stretched into the distance. Sometimes, the sea was high up, near the pavement, and we'd run along giggling as the spray blew over us but at other times, particularly if the weather was rough and extra windy, we walked somewhere else, away from the sea. When we asked why, we were told that it was high tide and the sea was washing over the road, so it was dangerous for us to go there. On days like that, mixed with the sound of the wind, we could hear the crash of the sea as it hurled itself against the sea wall. Our walk was short and I was relieved to be back indoors out of the reach of what sounded like a monster! A few days later and it was back to the routine sea walks again, the "monster" now calmer and less frightening.

After our walk we had to sit in the kitchen, without our socks and shoes on. The nurses inspected our feet and put ointment on chilblains, which some children had so badly that they bled. We

were then given a mug of hot milky cocoa before going upstairs to do schoolwork. This pattern continued all the time I was there.

I was told that I would be going home, in February, after my birthday. My parents met me at London Bridge station and were amazed at my chubby cheeks and rosy face, Although I was glad to be home again, after being in a kind of institution for five months, it took a while to settle down into a family again.

Dorothy Barton

Covered In Sand



Esta: My father wanted a picture of me in the sea. As I would not oblige he gave me a little push. This was the result.

Scarborough.

Photo donated by Esta Finlay

You can imagine how the sand stuck to our skin, and it was difficult to remove afterwards.

Esta Finlay

My early memories of the seaside are candyfloss, ice cream, cockles and winkles, seagulls and the lovely aroma of the sea. Such a change from the traffic fumes.

We were not very well off. Dad worked in the Woolwich Arsenal and he always managed to take us all away for a week to Margate, which was heaven and seemed a long way away, not a day-trip like it is today.

We went by train and spent a week in a boarding house. We had to be out all day, whatever the weather was like. I remember it was near "Dreamland", the funfair.

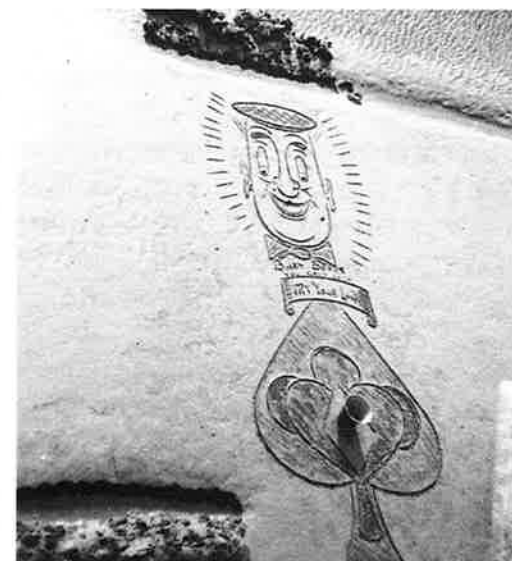
Our swimming costumes were either knitted or home-made. The trouble with knitted costumes was that they stretched in the water and the dye came out.

We used to spend all day on the beach. There were clever artists making drawings in the sand. Also, there would be a concert on the pier. My father-in-law used to be in a group called "Laughter Parade". At ten years old, I remember singing on the pier, "Zipp-a-dee-doo-daa" and winning five shillings.

In the evening we would go around Dreamland and have a laugh - Aah yes, I remember it well!

Irene King

"Dreamland"



Picture in the sand. Unknown artist, Margate.

Photo donated by Irene King

Chips Before Bedtime

Southend is where we were going. My mother would get up very early and prepare the food to take with us. Various sandwiches, cheese, fishpaste, breakfast sausage and, for me, liver sausage. No-one else liked liver sausage and one sister only liked jam sandwiches and always got in a sticky mess. We didn't take any drink, we bought Tizer and lemonade when we got to Southend.

We went by train to Fenchurch Street. The train was very full, but we did manage to get several seats between us, even sitting on someone's lap. The walk from the station to the beach was a long way but was made pleasant by the fact there were lots of ships and my mother let two of my younger sisters have a tin bucket and a wooden spade each.

The beach was crowded by the time we got there, so we walked along to Westcliff and found somewhere to have our picnic. We'd already got the drink, which was quite heavy, and the idea was that the sooner we ate the food, the less we would have to carry.

If you went to the seaside, you had to have a paddle. You tucked your dress into your knickers and made a big fuss when you felt the water because it was so cold. There would always be a towel to dry your feet but it was awful trying to get your socks on afterwards because your feet would be damp and cold.

For fourpence you could go for a ride on a boat. I went with one of my sisters. You walked from the beach on a plank of wood and waited for the boat to fill up. Sometimes it was so rocky by the time you started the trip, you felt quite ill and wished you hadn't come.

We usually had an ice-cream during the day. Most of the time was spent on the beach. It wasn't even nice sand, quite muddy in fact. Mum had a deck chair and we all sat round her. There



Trip with a motor boat, Birchington 1924.

Photo donated by Barbara McKenzie

was a photographer who came along the beach. He took a group photograph and fiddled around with some solution and in about twenty minutes, you had your photograph. It cost sixpence and was just black and white.

During the afternoon we had tea. You went to a kiosk and had a pot of tea, milk, sugar and cup and saucers on a tray. You had to leave half a crown deposit which was given back when you returned the tray and crockery - an excellent idea, really.

We didn't stay late at Southend. The children were getting tired and a bit tiresome and it took several hours to get home, but we did have chips before we went to bed, and of course our cocoa.

Lost At Sea

The first time I saw the sea was at Margate. It was the first stop on our journey to Ramsgate and they dropped some people off there first. As we approached the sea, I saw this blue line. The sea and the sky seemed to be as one, and I can remember looking at and saying, "Oooh, there's the sea!". Everybody was looking. It was such a big event! I was seven years old and it was the first time I ever saw the sea.

We used to go to Ramsgate on a coach called "The Grey Green". The nearest point to catch it was at New Cross station. Usually, it left about half past eight. By a quarter to nine, as we were going over towards Greenwich, my mother would say: "Ooh, isn't that lovely!" and, "Is there something to eat?".

We would go to Ramsgate for a week, so it was not just a daytrip. Just me and my mum. We stayed at a Bed and Breakfast. The further it was from the sea, the cheaper would be the B&B. I think it was about half a crown a night for both of us. The arrangement was that the landlady would bring you the breakfast in the room you slept in, so there was no dining room.



Lovely ice cream at a seaside cafe.
Photo donated by Irene King

My mother and me would meet my cousins on the beach. They also stayed in Ramsgate. So, in the morning, when we didn't finish our breakfast, 'cause we had to leave our room, my mum packed up the bits and she used to say, "We have paid for it, haven't we?" Never more than a couple of

hours and I would have something to eat again! At half past twelve we had lunch, in a cafe not far from the sea front. I can remember it was 1s 6d for adults and 9d for a meal for children.

We had liver and bacon, meat pie or cottage pie. All that, even in the summer time.

When it was raining, we used to go to the big amusement park at Ramsgate, which is still there but it's much larger now, with all the new computer games in it. On the beach, we met my Mother's sister and her children who also had their holidays in Ramsgate, although they stayed somewhere else. We did all those things you normally do at the seaside, like building sand-castles and so on.

Because we stayed in a B&B we wouldn't go back to the lodging till the evening. You had all your food out, all day. We wouldn't be allowed to go back into the lodging place till ten o' clock at night, so you had to carry everything with you for the whole day: raincoats, beach-balls, water-wings, spades ..just all the things you would probably need during the day.

We never had a bathroom. The landlady used to bring a bowl with hot water in the morning so you could wash in your room. The dirty water was put in a bucket that stood at the bedside. Because the weather at the seaside is so variable there were lots of days when we had to use the raincoats my mother always carried with her. Of course they were not made from plastic - they



Dressed warmly for the beach.
Photo donated by Ralph Billington

were like the fishermen's type of things , waterproof - you'd carry that with you all the day if you were unsure about the weather.

When the sun was shining I put my knitted swimming costume on - that costume shrunk when you got into the water. Mostly it shrunk at the top and you'd be pulling it over to cover yourself. And then it dropped at the bottom where it got heavy with the water.

Another year we went to Yarmouth. I remember there were boys with carts on wheels waiting at the station. They took you wherever you wanted to go to - you just had to give them a little extra money. I remember we had a very cheap accommodation near the gas works.

I can also remember a daytrip to Southend with my husband's family with the steamer - really big occasion! The steamer was quite a big one with at least three to four hundred people on different decks - it took us not much more than two hours to get to Southend. There was a band on the deck playing music.

We had taken one of my husband's nephews with us, together with his three sisters so we were six of us altogether. And we had had a nice day in Southend and were queuing up to get back onto the boat. There was quite a crush to get on the steamer because you had to use your return ticket and everybody seemed to be in a hurry. We got separated into two groups and each group thought the others had got Tony - the nephew - with them. Tony was about five years old! So we all got on the boat and eventually we met up and somebody asked: "Where is Tony?", and the others answered "Why- isn't he with you?". Poor Tony was left back at Southend! And they couldn't turn the boat back. So they phoned to Southend when we landed. By then people in Southend discovered that there was a little boy lost and crying for his mummy. Finally the police brought him back home by car.

Eileen O'Sullivan

Early Memories of Seaside Holidays

One of my earliest memories of the seaside is having a photograph taken on the beach at Broadstairs with my mother and father - round about 1922/23. I remember how uncomfortable I was feeling because the elastic around my legs in the waterproof paddling knickers was wet and sandy.

We used to go to Broadstairs for a fortnight every year. About fourteen days before we went, it was customary and pack the large trunk which was collected by Carter Patterson. A large piece of cardboard was put in the window of the front room. The van just seemed to miraculously call for the luggage. We then went by train to Broadstairs and stayed in a small house with a landlady called Mrs Read. My mother used to do the shopping. Mrs Read used to cook for us. Sometimes she cooked the shrimps which I caught in a net in the sea. They were rather small and brown when cooked but quite tasty.

This house had no bathroom and I remember having a large washstand with a large jug and basin to wash in. This I hated, but my mother always took some lovely smelling purple soap called I think "Erasmic" that was a real treat.

The days were idyllic if the weather was warm and were spent building sandpies and castles, paddling, watching Punch and Judy shows, buying and eating the various coloured comics which sometimes had free gifts like flags for the sandcastles, eating delicious ice creams.



*Family on the beach, 1935.
Photo donated by Harry Fells*

In the evening we went to listen to the music on the Bandstand or to a show at the end of the jetty, a small pier which is I believe still there.

I remember the endearing Uncle Mac and his friends who blacked their faces and were known as the "Minstrels". Sometimes also we enjoyed watching Gwen Lewis who I think must have been a comedienne.

On other nights we had long walks through the cornfields. This walk started at the lychgate by the churchyard to Ramsgate or Margate. On the way we passed near a brickworks and I remember the unpleasant smell, but the good part was when we arrived at the "Captain Digby" - a public house on the cliff top for a glass of ginger beer and you could see the smugglers' caves in the sea below us.

Sometimes my grandmother and aunt would come and join us for a few days. The worst part was packing up the trunk again to return home.

Cynthia Stanton

Holiday In Yarmouth



Harry with friends set off for a bicycle holiday to Yarmouth, 1939.

Photo donated by Harry Fells

With our long kipper ties and beret myself and family friends set off on a weeks cycling holiday to Yarmouth to stay with my friend's aunt.

As we were cycling all night and it was rather cold, we were tired and decided to stop for a rest, so when we saw a

haystack this was ideal, so we settled for the rest of the night.

We were woken very suddenly with a lot of shouting also some painful prodding from two farmers with pitchforks, who thought we were German paratroopers as, unbeknown to us, the war had been declared that very day. Seeing our berets, they thought they were already being invaded by the Germans but when they heard our cockney voices they soon calmed down and we all enjoyed a good laugh.

My sister and I spent many a happy annual holiday at Honeysuckle Cottage at Dumpton Park.

Instead of going round the main road on the bus to Ramsgate beach, there was a shorter and more exciting journey on the open top miniature railway that cut through the cliffs right on to the promenade at the fairground which was called Merry England.

The caves were dark and the rocks were cut out into small illuminated caverns, depicting picturesque cartoons, Fairy Tales, Ghosts and all spooky characters which to us kids were eerie and exciting.

Although my sister and I ventured in the sea for a swim, the furthest our mother and grandmother got was to tuck their dresses in their knicker legs and paddle and woe betide us if we splashed them as we were sent straight back to the beach with a clip round the ear.



Strolling along the promenade, Yarmouth 1939.

Photo donated by Harry Fells

Harry Fells

A Day To Remember

He had asked my father and we had bought the ring during our lunch hour. Then we suddenly decided to celebrate our engagement the next day.

Usually we were both responsible and conscientious young people but I phoned his office pretending I was his sister and he phoned my office pretending he was my father, each saying the other was unable to come in that day. We met on our usual train, changed at Stratford and gleefully took off for Southend-on-Sea.

Although only some thirty-five miles from home I'd never been there as a child and the war years had stopped any jaunts that I might have made. Now it was 1946 and the Kursaal was up and working and I was really excited at the thought of going to a fun-fair. We walked from the station to the seafront and then along, marvelling at how far the tide had gone out and how long the pier had been and, at last, there was the famous Kursaal.



*A romantic day
on the Pier*

*Photo donated by
Ralph Billington*

We tried all the familiar sideshows and roundabouts, watched the Wall of Death and rode through the Tunnel of Love. Was it love? I remember the darkness, skeletons, eerie laughter and strange unknown things brushing my face and soon we were in the sunshine again.

Then came the thing I had looked forward to, though half feared. We were on the roller coaster. We cranked and creaked slowly upwards and then, at the top I saw what we were to go down. I shut my eyes and opened my mouth and screamed and screamed such as I had never done before. I do not know how long I went on but at

last I became aware of a hand stroking mine and a voice saying "It's all right Barbie, it's all over, we've stopped". Gingerly I opened my eyes. Yes, it had stopped and everyone else had left the car. We then left the Kursaal.

There was another treat to come. Feeling guilty, like naughty kids, we sat on the front and had fish and chips, eating with our fingers.

We finished our day with a little boat trip, caught the train back and arrived home as if nothing had happened.

I decided I looked a bit flushed and windswept and told my parents of my adventures.

Barbara Rowland

Sand, Sea And Landladies

As a child there were no memories or trips or any holidays at the seaside. My parents could not afford to take a family of six on holiday in the thirties. My first trip to the sea was the Sunday School outing on the pleasure steamer down the Thames to Southend. I think we gathered more pleasure dancing to the band on the boat rather than trying to find enough water to swim with the tide out and the water nearly a mile away. The mud was enough to put even the hardiest of swimmers off.

On a later occasion I enjoyed a visit to Clacton, my first real holiday, with my friend Joyce. As teenagers we were allowed to go alone simply because we stayed at her aunts' guest house. This was a fortnight of great fun with small events that I can still recall some with laughter, others with embarrassment at our behaviour with her good natured aunts. Freedom was the word we used to go haywire, but looking back it was the novelty of the situation and no harm became of our first ever holiday without parental control. We felt that sitting on the beach was too boring although we enjoyed an early morning swim hoping to see the small group of boys we had met the day before at a charity event. We also toured the Butlins Pleasure Ground and had our picture



*Rene and Joyce,
Clacton, 1937.*

Photo donated by Joyce Milan.

taken together in the Happy Snaps booth. This in the year 1937 was also a novelty.

Memories of more seaside holiday fun came after the war years when with our two children we visited Ventnor on the Isle of Wight. Staying at yet another Guest House with a landlady and her family was an experience of a different kind. We used to take her children with us to the beach, going back to lunch (which in those years was dinner) only to find the potatoes half cooked and the meat in the meat pudding as tough as old boots! Our dear landlady was a coffee morning get-together socialite and not used to visitors at all. In spite of the lack of culinary arts they were indeed a lovely family and we enjoyed our stay.

The next two holidays were spent in Broadstairs firstly just our family and the next with friends with their two children. Two incidents remain in my mind and still bring a smile even after five decades. We had a family room with the youngest daughter, aged two years, in a cot. One night we heard the flapping of wings and putting on the light saw what we thought was a bird that landed on the top of the wardrobe. As we put the light out so it flew around and around. Neither my husband nor myself felt very brave in the middle of the night and so the next time it settled he took the chamber pot from under the baby's cot and inverted it, peace at last! Next morning the husband of our landlady took a sheet of glass and slid it underneath the homemade trap. We were amazed and gazed with awe at a very large bat! The poor creature probably was as scared of us in the light as we were by its fluttering around in the dark.

On the other occasion we were playing cricket on the beach with our friends doing an energetic run for the ball I lost the top of my swim suit (hardly a bikini at that time). Everyone had a good laugh except my dear husband who called out, "Well, cover yourself up then." It was a good thing that I had a pair of hands!

Deckchair attendants, shops selling buckets and spades, fancy hats and rock novelties were to be avoided during the week when possible, since it took all our spare cash to reach the venue and pay our way for Bed and Board at the Guest House. Our children made their fun by making rock pools and enjoying the occasional cornet

even though the sand was an added extra for free! Most families nowadays seem to take it for granted that holidays mean a trip on a plane, a luxury hotel with all the trimmings. I wonder if they get the same thrill as we did when packing the battered suitcases the night before, making certain the knitted woollen swimming costumes were there and not forgetting to set the ancient Two Bell Alarm Clock to be sure not to miss the Excursion Train.

Many years later these memories are recalled with snaps and laughs with the family. As soon as they became teenagers they were anxious to join their friends on holidays abroad and we became Darby and Joan to holiday alone again.



*Irene with her children at Broadstairs
wearing the Two Piece Bathing Suit that
became topless, 1949.*

Photograph donated by Irene Swanton

Irene Swanton

A Beano To Southend 1949

I worked for a firm named Molins Machine Company in Deptford in the photographic section of the Blue Print Department, photographing and printing drawings for the Drawing Department. Molins has now closed down and the buildings were demolished.

The Blue Print Department and the Drawing Office Department decided we would have a Beano to Southend. I decided I would go with a friend of mine I worked with, as I had never been to Southend before. We collected money for months beforehand for this one day out.

The day duly arrived, it must have been a Saturday because we worked all the week. It was pouring with rain and I was a bit disappointed. We couldn't wear pretty dresses. It was raincoats, stout shoes and umbrellas.

We all gathered at the gates of Molins waiting for the two coaches to arrive. I remember thinking that I would be soaked through before we started off. The coaches arrived and crates of beer were put into the boots of the coaches. I wondered who was going to drink that lot, but I soon found out it didn't last long. Half way to Southend we stopped at a pub for a toilet stop and more beer. Then we all piled back on to the coaches full of good cheer, and the rest of the journey we sang all the way.

I didn't get a very good impression of Southend. Maybe it was because it was still pouring with rain and so we didn't see the beach.

I remember the fish and chip shops, "Kiss Me Quick Hats" and sticks of rock, it all seemed a bit tatty to me. Hoards of people were making their way to the Kursaal Fun Fair. My friend and I met up with three boys from the Drawing Office and we all stayed together all day.



Penny with friends at the Kursaal in Southend, 1949.

Photo donated by Penny Cheesman

What a fun day we had! It didn't matter any more that it was raining. We went on everything to ride, the bumper cars, the caterpillar, the Wall of Death, the Ghost Train, we bought a pretty hat, ice cream, cups of tea and hot dogs, fish & chips and had a photo taken.

All too soon the day was over and we had to be back on the coaches. I think all the coaches had to be out of Southend at six o'clock so they were all leaving at the same time heading back to London. We were still singing on the way back, some looking a bit the worse for wear, too much beer I'm afraid, but everyone had a good day out. We couldn't wait for the next one. I think I went on our annual beano for the next three years, until I left Molins Machine Company to have my son Martin.

Penny Cheesman

Family Days Out

As a child, family holiday times were precious to us because, like Saturday afternoons, Dad was home with us and although we could not afford to go away - and most families were in the same situation - we had family 'days out', one more usually being spent at the seaside. That usually meant Southend-on-Sea where we travelled on the bus as it was the nearest seaside place to where we lived. We loved it there.

We had joyous times. Mum packed a picnic and we sat on the beach for most of the day. My brother and myself each had a bucket and spade and Dad would help us build sandcastle. We were allowed a 'Rossi' ice-cream during the afternoon and a bag of chips and nowhere else did they taste as good!!

Other visits to the seaside were via the yearly Sunday-School outings to Maldon, Walton-on-the-Naze or Dovercourt. There were boat rides, swings and swingboats close to the beach area and the coaches were parked nearby so that nobody should get lost. The beach kiosks provided everything needed if our parents had not brought it themselves - buckets and spades, fishing nets (for catching tiny fish), sunhats, sunglasses, saucy postcards and, of course, teas etc..



A choice of bathing costumes at Ventnor, 1929.

Photo donated by G. Evans

When on Sunday-School outings, tea would be provided by the local Tea-Rooms whose responsibility it was to provide the best sandwiches and cream cakes. As well as our holiday with Dad, we looked forward to that outing all year!! Happy memories!!

Jayne Matthews

Don't Miss The Train!

My first visit to the seaside was when I was fifteen years old. This was in 1946. Before the war we were never taken because our parents couldn't afford it. Then the war started and nobody was allowed to go.

It was Sunday. We were up bright and early and it was a lovely sunny day. An excursion train was going to Southend which was cheap fare. My parents, two young brothers and me set off for the station. When we got there crowds of people were already waiting for the train. We never got a seat, stood up all the way, but it was very exciting.

We reached our destination and everyone was walking fast so that they could get a place on the beach. The lovely smell of the sea and food cooking in all the cafes. We couldn't get a place on the beach so we sat on the wall. We had fish and chips and a bottle of lemonade and then we walked around.



Family outing.

Picture donated by Anne Durrant

There was a large building called the Kursaal. It had turnstiles at the entrance. Admission was 2d. There was machines everywhere and you put in your penny. People were shouting "Come and play darts for a prize!" "Throw the balls" "Roll your pennies in to the squares!" "Shoot arrows, shoot guns" "Have your fortunes told here!". At the end there was a large fairground. I loved the music, the records.

I couldn't afford to buy any. We then stopped at a jellied eel stall. My Mum and Dad loved them but the rest of us had cockles. It took ages to get served. There were crowds of people eating and lots of people wore funny hats with 'Kiss me Quick' on them. There was a big hut with tables and chairs outside. Everyone was singing and a man was playing a piano accordion. Some people were dancing to 'Knees up Mother Brown'. It was like one big party. There was so much to do and see. In the evening, we had to make our way back to the station. If we missed the excursion train we would have to pay full fare. Everyone was hurrying along. The train home was packed. I'll never forget it. I had a wonderful day.

Hilda Kennedy

Peace In Cliftonville

After the war ended in Europe there was much rejoicing and thanksgiving, and relief too, that we could now go about our daily routines without fear of an air-raid, bombing, etc... Despite all the continued shortages, life was gradually getting back to normal.

All through the war we were forbidden to go to the seaside in the south east of England, unless you had a legitimate reason for going, to work or visit relatives. That's when a pass was issued, and as neither of these applied to our family we hadn't seen the sea for over six years.

I loved being near the sea. During my younger years, before the war, our whole family would go to Canvey Island, several times during the spring and summer to clean, decorate and keep an eye on the two bungalows that my Grandmother owned. They were of wooden construction, very basic, with a toilet at the bottom of the gardens, so they needed regular maintenance and attention.

One day I can remember asking my Mother how soon it would be before we could have another holiday by the sea. She said she had no idea. It was only a few days later that my Father came home from work to tell us he had booked a week in August, down at Cliftonville, near Margate. Dad didn't get very good wages, so our only luxury was one week at the seaside each year. I was really pleased and excited. My brother, who was born three months after the war started, couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. He had never seen the sea, so it must have meant nothing to him.

The day came for us to travel to Cliftonville. I can't remember much about the journey, except it seemed to take for ever on the coach, but it was soon forgotten at the first exciting glimpse of the sea. Unfortunately, due to lack of money, we had to stay in a boarding house quite a way from the seafront, but after dinner we went straight to the beach, and I think my socks and shoes were off before I even got onto the sand. It was a lovely feeling, after all these years, to be walking on wet sand again with it squelching between my toes. In those days, most of the guest and boarding houses did full board - breakfast, dinner and tea,



Fun at Margate.

Photo donated by R Billington

and there never seemed to be enough time in between meals to spend on the beach.

While we were in Cliftonville, the war with Japan ended. Because of all the excitement and street parties after the war with Germany was over, this seemed to me a bit of an anti-climax, although I am sure those families with husbands, sons and brothers fighting out there were over the moon about it, and very relieved. I suppose, to us teenagers, it was so far away and didn't have such an impact on our lives.

Sometime after tea that day all of us at the boarding house decided to go for a walk down to the beach. It was a lovely warm evening and too nice to stay indoors. As we neared the seafront, we could hear a lot of shouting and singing. We also smelt burning, so we presumed someone, somewhere, had lit a bonfire to celebrate. We hurried towards the sounds and smell. This was no ordinary bonfire. Some soldiers who were stationed nearby had decided to have some fun and, to our horror, we saw they were burning deckchairs. They had piled them up quite high and they were well alight by the time we arrived. I believe they would have burnt the lot if the police hadn't arrived when they did, putting a stop to everything. The local council estimated the soldiers had burnt about two hundred deckchairs, so for the rest of the week

they were in short supply. I cannot remember what happened to the soldiers, or if they were reprimanded, but to me it was quite exciting and I felt they had only done what many of us would have... had we the nerve.

The rest of the holiday was uneventful, nevertheless enjoyable, because I was near the sea again.

Iris Gooding



Donkey rides on the beach.
Photo donated by Anne Durrant

All Set for Cornwall

After the war, my husband came out of the Navy and worked, for the first time, in Civvy Street. We had two children and a super new council house. I was working in the office of a local scientific engineering company and we had a car. So, the next step up was to have a holiday. Money was scarce, but it was agreed that if I payed, we would have a holiday.

When I lived in Plymouth, as a Navy wife, I could see Cornwall across the Torpoint ferry, but we could never afford the fare, so going to Cornwall became a must for me.

I made enquiries at work, found a friend had a brother that worked for Benjamin Edgerton, the tent-makers. He could hire a tent for us, and another senior colleague had a sister who would loan us a petrol-powered stove.

At that time, around 1953, you could purchase a brand new van, without windows, free of purchase tax. So, we sold the car, a 1929 Chrysler coupe and bought an Austin A 30 van, silver grey.

We set about cutting out windows and fitting glass. We searched the scrap yards and found a front passenger seat and bench seat for the kids to fit behind, and these we covered with tan leather cloth. My husband worked hard on this, and we sprayed maroon panels on the sides, and after massive packing of pots, pans, clothes, food, cutlery, etc. Hooray!! We were all set for Cornwall.



The Chrysler coupe.
Photo donated by Joyce Milan



Cooking with the pressure cooker, 1953.

Photo donated by Joyce Milan

We set off at 3.45a.m. on a beautiful June morning. My dear old mum was at her window to wave us off as we went. As we approached Bromley, I remembered we had left the teapot behind, it being the last thing we used, so we had to turn round and go back for it. About 8 o'clock, well beyond Basingstoke, we stopped at the roadside, pumped up the stove, and put on the frying pan. The stove exploded, and singed my husband's hair and eyebrows!! However, it did not prevent us cooking the sausages, with tomatoes and new-laid eggs purchased at a nearby farm. How we did enjoy that meal!!

Due to traffic jams through Honiton, Devon, we were forced to take a detour and as we were weary, the children getting fidgety, we found a farmhouse with B&B sign. We shared one room, the children top to toe in a single bed and we had to use a candle to find our way to bed as there was no electricity.

In the morning, the children refused to use the open pit lavatory at the end of the garden, so we had to get up early, get the van started and drive them four miles to a freshly scrubbed public toilet!! Then, back to breakfast! The table was laden with fresh food - a wonderful breakfast. The farmer took the children around on the tractor, to feed the animals. We only stayed one night, but planned to return again, which we did the following year, for three days. My children still talk fondly of these memories.

When we reached Cornwall the next day, we found a camp site on a cliff top overlooking a beautiful bay, golden sand and turquoise sea, called Pentewan Sands.

Being very green in the art of camping, we found ourselves in difficulties. Firstly, the tent was too small. It could only accommodate my daughter and me. My son and husband had to sleep in the back of the van. They were warm and cosy and slept well, but Joy and I froze all night. We had overlooked taking a ground sheet, so the damp rose up into our clothes, but as soon as the sun rose, we felt the warmth. To sit on a little cross-leg stool drinking my early morning tea and looking at the view was heavenly. We made a larder out of an upturned orange box, with hooks to hang our cups and pans. Having taken the pressure cooker, we had lovely evening meals in the open air - steak, loads of fresh vegetables and bread. These we ate at the end of each day - days which we had spent swimming and lying in the sun.

One day, we went on a boat trip, fishing for mackerel. Well, on those coasts, the mackerel practically jump into the boat. We caught fifteen, and were grateful to the fisherman for taking nine



Joyce in front of the tent on a cliff top overlooking Pentewan Sands, 1953.

Photo donated by Joyce Milan

of them. The other six we prepared at the camp and fried in the pan. Then we discovered that none of us liked them! Not knowing what to do with the fish, we dumped it in the middle of the field and were kept awake all night by the seagulls shrieking with delight as they attacked it. We all swore never to eat mackerel again.

One of our big treats was to buy a fresh lobster for 12 shillings from fishing boats on Mevegissey harbour, which we cooked in the pressure cooker.

The days were delightful and the nights dreadful, but we stuck it out for two weeks.

It only cost us ten shillings for a site to camp for a week. We visited Jamaica Inn on Bodmin Moor, saw prisoners marching into the prison on Dartmoor and discovered lots of little coves which we often had all to ourselves.

When we packed up to return home, we were all very tanned and healthy. We drove up to our house with a bunch of heather picked on the moors stuck on the bonnet, just to show off!!

We returned to the same spot each June for the next five years, but not in a tent!!

They were building new bungalows with the same great view, so we were lucky to be the first to book one in the best position, which we felt was ours each year, complete with luxury bedrooms, bathroom, lounge and kitchen.

I passed Pentewen Sands in 1980 and could not believe what I saw. The field was packed with caravans! When we went in the 1950's, there were no others anywhere near us.

Joyce Milan



Sleeping off the fish and chips.

Photo donated by Anne Durrant

The Seaside At War

My uncle, who was an architect and surveyor, decided to purchase some coastal land in order to build some bungalows to sell or rent to holiday makers at the seaside. The area he chose was Littlestone, an undeveloped area on the seaward fringe of Romney Marshes, where building plots were offered for sale in the 1930's for £100 each. He purchased two in the early '30s and built bungalows there. We had the pleasure of spending a few weekends in one of them...and then the war came.

My uncle was involved in special secret war work at Dungeness and so it was convenient for him to move down and live in one of them. The south-east area of England was designated a 'defence area'. It was divided into zones and the general public were not allowed to enter these zones from outside or move from one zone to another without official permission. Permits were granted to workers in the zones or for civilians to visit relatives.

The area between Dungeness and New Romney was designated a military zone - all civilians except those working on military

projects were moved out. My uncle was allowed to stay because of his work for the M.O.D. Soldiers were moved into some of the houses and the army took over the running of the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. Landmines were laid on the beaches and sand dunes, and steel barriers were erected all along the beaches at about mid-tide level.

In 1944 we managed to get permission to visit my uncle and aunt for a few days. Their bungalow was only about 50 yards from the beach. In front of the bungalow was a road, then some sand dunes and then the beach. We were told where it was safe to walk. Barbed wire and landmines made most of the area inaccessible but a few paths marked by white tapes were safe. A small area of the beach was safe to allow access to the sea for amphibious military vehicles and sea rescue boats.

There were only twelve civilian families in Littlestone and plenty of soldiers. As there were no buses or civilian transport of any sort, we were allowed to flag down military vehicles and they would give us a lift to New Romney or Greatstone. One pub survived in the area, The Jolly Fisherman, also a general store which serviced army units and the few civilians. My aunt supplemented her rations with eggs from chickens kept in her garden and from two ducks named 'Gert' and 'Daisy' these being the names of a comedienne duo of the period.

My cousin had made friends with a member of the Royal Observer Corps which had an observation post on the sand dunes in front of their bungalow. He allowed us into his post and showed us how he reported and plotted aircraft which he sighted in the area. To do this he used a table with a map of the area marked out with numbered squares and a sighting device which indicated which square the aircraft was in. He would identify the type of aircraft, the square it was in, the number of the aircraft and the height and direction of flight. All this information was relayed to the R.A.F. Intelligence Headquarters at Ashford. He explained all this speaking with a very strong country accent. He said that each square on the map represented a 'moyle'. My cousin naively

asked "What's a moyle?" before realising it was a mile!

The observer's name was Monty Upton, one of three brothers born and raised in the area. His brother, Freddie was coxwain of the Deal and Walmer Lifeboat, a man of great bravery who had rescued hundreds of people from the sea, including many air-men who had crashed into the English Channel.

Sometimes we saw soldiers exercising with D.U.K.W. vehicles (Known affectionately as ducks.) We saw a wide variety of military vehicles operating in the area.



*Happy pre-war memories.
Photo donated by Ralph Billington*

The advance of the Allied Forces into France had greatly reduced the frequency of flying bombs launched against this country but air activity continued and Allied aircraft still operated from this country against targets in Western Europe. One day, we were with Monty Upton in his post and we saw an American bomber, a Flying Fortress flying over the sea and losing height rapidly. The crew were firing yellow flares. Monty told us, "He is in serious trouble" and reported his position immediately. Perhaps another job for his brother Freddie?

It was a memorable few days at the seaside at that time, more like a scene from a science fiction movie, quite strange but in a way relaxing as we watched the sea and heard the waves breaking on to the beach. It seemed to take the mind away from reality. My cousin and I would sit on the beach in the 'safe' area and look out and over the barriers and the barbed wire and by drawing on our pre-war memories try to imagine what it would look like after the war was over.

We walked along the road past empty bungalows with windows boarded up, a few occupied with soldiers, all needing a coat of paint. It was like a ghost town and it was only safe to walk on the road or on pathways lined with white tape. All other areas could be mined. At night, it was impossible to go out because of the blackout. Only those who experienced the blackout could realise how black the blackout was....no lights permitted other than on moving vehicles and those very dim indeed.

Littlestone recovered from the war eventually. Sadly, for a year or two, an occasional accident occurred when someone stepped on a landmine which had been overlooked in the post war clear up operation. However, today it is an attractive situation with long stretches of sandy beaches and life returned to normal. The scene today seems a hundred years away from Littlestone at war.

Ralph Gooding



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