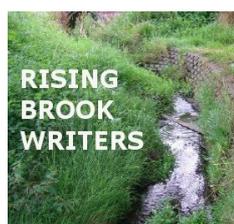


## Rising brook writers 2009 – 2010 Project

Funded by heritage Lottery fund  
&  
Staffordshire county council  
Arts and Museum service

Rising brook writers' touring workshop  
programme Creating opportunities  
in self-expression for the over 50s



**Staffordshire**  
County Council

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To book a visit by Rising Brook Writers' Community Workshop Team to participate in our exciting touring programmes, please use our main websites' contact pages

## "OH! I DO LIKE TO BE BESIDE THE SEASIDE!"

Everyone delights to spend their summer's holiday  
 Down beside the side of the silvery sea  
 I'm no exception to the rule  
 In fact, if I'd my way  
 I'd reside by the side of the silvery sea.  
 But when you're just the common or garden Smith or Jones or Brown  
 At bus'ness up in town  
 You've got to settle down.  
 You save up all the money you can till summer comes around  
 Then away you go  
 To a spot you know  
 Where the cockle shells are found.

CHORUS: Oh! I do like to be beside the seaside  
 I do like to be beside the sea!  
 I do like to stroll upon the Prom, Prom, Prom!  
 Where the brass bands play:  
 "Tiddely-om-pom-pom!"  
 So just let me be beside the seaside  
 I'll be beside myself with glee  
 And there's lots of girls beside,  
 I should like to be beside  
 Beside the seaside!  
 Beside the sea!

Timothy went to Blackpool for a day last Eastertide  
 to see what he could see beside the sea  
 as soon as he reached the station there the first thing he espied  
 was a wine lodge doors stood open invitingly.  
 To quench his thirst he toddled inside  
 and called out for a wine which grew to eight or nine  
 till his nose began to shine! said he what people see in the sea  
 I plainly fail to see,  
 so he caught the train back home again and to his wife said he.

(Repeat chorus)

## STAFFORD REMEMBERS:

This themed anthology is a collection of personal reminiscences as told by local people to our research team. Rising Brook Writers (RBW) believe senior citizens are a valuable social history resource and as such should be greatly treasured because their collective memory reveals a fascinating slice of living history surviving in vivid detail. RBW participants are, in the main, retired folk who enjoy creative writing for the pleasure of self-expression. This the second in the Stafford Remembers series is the result of a touring community outreach workshop programme led by education consultant John Price.

The guidelines of the Oral History Society have been followed in the production of the project material which was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Staffordshire County Council Arts and Museum Service, and the Your Library Service.

RBW was formed in 2005 at Rising Brook Branch Library, Stafford. RBW are members of Stafford District Arts Council and Stafford District Voluntary Services.



Stafford Pageant 1930s

# THE NINE ORGANISATIONS TAKING PART:

HOLMCROFT PHOENIX OVER 50s  
ACTIVITIES CLUB

STONE AGE CONCERN  
BROMFIELD COURT

ST FRANCIS DAY OPPORTUNITIES  
MEIR HEATH

STAFFORD ASSOCIATION OF WIDOWS

NHS RETIREMENT FELLOWSHIP

MONDAY AND FRIDAY REGENERATION GROUPS  
- RISING BROOK CENTRE

ECCLESHALL DAY CENTRE

RISING BROOK WRITERS  
LIBRARY AND ONLINE WORKSHOPS

**Morecambe in September . . .  
a personal reminiscence from  
Project Workshop Leader John Price**

The first family holidays I remember were always to Rhyl in the first week of August. Until I was six, that is, when shortly after the arrival of my baby brother, Mum and Dad announced we would be going to stay with friends in Morecambe in September.

Nobody I knew had their summer holidays in September but Dad said we could have an Indian summer. I'd never heard of one of those but when we arrived at Morecambe station in a monsoon I realised that an Indian summer probably had more connection with Mahatma Gandhi than Hopalong Cassidy. As the comedian at the Winter Gardens said during what was almost the only dry two hours we had, 'It's forecast to only rain twice this week: Sunday to Wednesday and Thursday to Saturday.'

We never got on the beach because the gale force winds threatened to blow hats, deck chairs and the baby several yards inland. Waves regularly breaking into the middle of the road also made the sea-side of the promenade out of bounds.

The shops even ran out of Pakamacs, those unflattering raincoats that you could fold up and keep in your pocket, unless you were in Morecambe in September 1948, when you could easily drown before you'd finished the job. I did get some amusement as we squelched between shops seeking shelter, by seeing how many inside-out umbrellas I could spot in an hour.

One tea time there was a break in hostilities and Dad suggested we go to Happy Mount Park to see the much-talked about illuminations set among the trees and flowerbeds. We joined the queue waiting for the gates to open but only got a hundred yards inside when the heavens opened again. There was no way to turn back, we just had to snake our way through the park and get wet.

There's a limit to how enthusiastic you can be over a flashing scene from a Popeye cartoon with your underwear sticking to you at every step.

The only laugh came from Mum wearing a pair of coloured shoes, quite a new thing after the austere war years, and ending the night with purple dye up to her ankles.

Finally, thankfully, my holiday in Morecambe in September came to an end. I never really did find out what an Indian summer was - unless Hopalong Cassidy once met a Native American called Purple Feet.

**Anne Williamson:  
Holmcroft Phoenix Over-50s Activities Club**

**1940s: A holiday in the Shropshire countryside**

Happy are the memories of the summer holidays we would spend with my mother's sister in a house situated in the countryside. Water had to be carried from a pump situated in the lane. All cooking was done on a large range which had ovens either side. The house was lit by paraffin lamps and the toilet was a brick building outside with a bucket covered with a large wooden seat with a hole in it. Of course this had to be frequently emptied into a large hole in the ground at the top of the garden.

My trick of the day would frequently be to use the door to get into the toilet, lock it on the inside and then crawl out through the gap below the door. I would then go with my sister across the lane to my cousin's farm to play. Some time later I would hear my Auntie and Mother shouting 'ANNE! ANNE!' I knew for sure that I was in dead trouble as no one else was small enough to get through the gap under the door. But I continued to do it.

Those carefree days were wonderful, meeting up with our many relatives. The novelty of having no utilities was great for us children, but looking back I certainly could not live like that now. Happy Memories!

**Jean Down: Holmcroft Phoenix Over-50s Activities Club**

I grew up at Forest Hill in London and my family's summer holiday was usually a week at Eastbourne in a small guest house. Mother often had to take me and my two younger sisters on the train as my father, a London bus driver, didn't always get his holidays during August. We had many happy days on the beach, paddling and swimming, and on walks up to the Wish Tower and the Lifeboat House as well as into the town on rainy days to look around the shops.

At the outbreak of World War II, all the South Coast beaches were closed off to the public with anti-invasion devices and barbed wire hurriedly erected. My summer holidays were then spent at home. When I was eleven years old I was evacuated from London to Dorking in Surrey. Whenever Mum and Dad could get away at the weekends they would pick up my sisters from where they were staying and come on the bus to see me. There were plenty of places where we could walk and play and also government-sponsored schemes called 'Holidays at Home' that provided entertainment and sports in the local parks and concert venues.

One of my treasured memories is from just after the end of the War on Boxing Day in 1945 when my father woke me and my sisters. 'Come on, it's a lovely day,' he said, 'we're going down to Brighton.' Dad had an old

Austin Seven motor car and enough petrol coupons for the trip. My mother packed up the remains of the Christmas dinner with bread for sandwiches while Dad checked the picnic box, primus stove and kettle, making sure we had bottles of water to make the tea.

When we arrived we were so excited to see the sea again. Some of the beach had been cleared of barbed wire so we could sit on the sands and eat our lunch in the sunshine. It was a truly memorable day, the first time we had been able to see the sea after six horrible years of war.

### **Alma Price: Holmcroft Phoenix Over-50s Activities Club**

During the war I was living with my grandmother in South Walls in Stafford. We didn't usually go on holiday because my mother was working and my father was in the Navy. When he came home he didn't want to go anywhere.

I did go to Sunday School at St Chad's schoolrooms, though, and the highlight of our year was going on the bus for an outing to Trentham. I thought it was a wonderful place to go with the miniature railway and the big open-air swimming pool. The people who organised the outing gave us all a sandwich, a little cake and a drink. We reached the pool by going on the little train. It was such a novelty for us being outdoors in a swimming pool compared to the brine baths we were used to. There was always a mad scramble to get ourselves changed because more often than not it was cold and the boys were usually too close to us. I had a bathing costume that my mother had knitted for me. To my horror when I jumped into the water, it just dropped right down as it got wet. I was so embarrassed. I only ever wore it once for that reason.

Occasionally my aunts took me for a day out to the seaside, usually on the train although once we went on a charabanc which was fun as everyone knew each other. I also remember going on holiday once during the war with mum and dad. We went to Blackpool when I was about six or seven. After going into Woolworths for something to eat we walked up to the front and there was a beautiful little blue bag in a shop and I played up because I wanted this bag. When I got it, it still didn't shut me up and my dad said, 'If she doesn't shut up, I'm not going to bring her again.' And I don't think he ever did.

### **Richard Smith: Holmcroft Phoenix Over-50s Activities Club**

I was born in Stafford in 1937. Every year from the end of the war I used to go with my mother and father to visit my grandmother in a little town called Southborough between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells in Kent.

The journey was always predictable. We would go on the same day, always taking the same train to Euston: four hours with no toilets. Then we'd take the underground and finally the bus to Southborough. We would walk

up Meadow Road to number 78 where my grandmother lived, calling at number 32 on the way to see one of her brothers.

At number 78, my uncles in their youth had a little shed at the back of the house where they sewed cricket balls. They bought in the casings and the core and sat and hand-stitched the balls. The lady across the road also sewed cricket balls. It was the cottage industry in Tunbridge Wells in those days but the art has long gone.

The holiday itself also followed an entirely predictable pattern because we did the same things every year. We would visit Southborough Common, where my father played cricket when he was a lad, and visit a little pub set in the woods. We would go to the seaside at Brighton and Hastings on the electric trains. For some reason my mother never went with us on trips but my father and I would walk on the sands. I remember Brighton had the first electric railway on the beach and some of the tank traps were still there. Very strange structures they were with the reinforcing bars made at BRC in Stafford. We also went to Tunbridge Wells at least twice and we'd visit The Pantiles where the spa was. The locals thought the spring water was magic water but although you could have it with orange juice, I thought it was quite horrible. I never drank any. That's probably allowed me to live for such a long time.

I slept in the same room at my grandmother's and she had a book on soldiers with a foldout picture of a battalion of guards. Every year I opened that book and looked at that picture. I always thought Southborough was a magical place because the soil was a golden sandy colour. The garden was the same layout every year. Runner beans were growing in exactly the same place the last time I went as they were when I was a little lad. Everything was the same and if anybody had altered it, it would have spoiled the holiday.

My father died in 1953 and after that there were no more trips to Southborough. My first holiday on my own was to Blankenberge on the Belgium coast. I stayed at the Hotel Miramar on the sea front. It was the first time I'd been out of the country and in those days you were only allowed to take a certain amount of money with you. When I came back, I went back to Southborough and stopped in the hotel overlooking the Southborough Common. I remember thinking in all the years I'd been coming to Southborough I'd never been inside and now I actually had a room there. I thought I'd finally grown up.

### **Rosemary Henderson: Holmcroft Phoenix Over-50s Activities Club**

Planning a holiday with my boyfriend Duncan was how we came to get married. I went home one Christmas and my mother said, 'You're not going on holiday with that b\*\*\*\*r unless you're married to him.' That was the thing in those days.

We got married in 1956, lived in Blackpool and went on holiday to Jersey. It was the first time we'd flown anywhere. There were four of us: Duncan and I and our friends, Gordon and Brenda. One night Brenda and I went up to bed. We'd had plenty to drink because drink was very cheap in Jersey. I got into bed and then Duncan came in looking very much the worse for wear. 'What's the matter with you?' I asked.

'I've had three Corpse Reviver cocktails,' he said, 'and I don't feel any better at all.' He dropped everything except his black socks on the floor and got into bed. About two minutes later he stood up. This was before the days of en-suite bathrooms and he ran around the bed and out of the door. I went to the door and couldn't stop laughing. All I could see was a pair of black socks and two white cheeks running down the corridor.

Many years later, Duncan and I were on holiday to Aberystwyth with out two sons, Ian and Mark. While Mark and I went horse riding, Duncan and Ian went fishing. When we met them on the quayside, Ian came running up with a string of mackerel. 'Look,' he said, 'I've caught five mackerel.' Duncan came up after him looking a bit abashed, 'Look,' he said, 'I've lost my false teeth.'

After that we spent a holiday in Dubrovnik on the Adriatic coast. We went out in a canoe and I didn't realise that Duncan couldn't swim very well. He tipped the canoe up and everyone else thought we were standing on the bottom when in fact we were in 15 feet of water. He lost his glasses that time. I told him there must be a shark swimming around somewhere with false teeth and a pair of glasses.

On another seaside holiday the four of us had been camping in Boulogne in Northern France. We'd been living on instant meals because we didn't know whether we'd have enough money for the local food. It was the last morning of our holiday and I was cooking egg and chips, which is a very tasty dish after you've lived on instant meals for three weeks.

Then Duncan lost his comb. Well, we'd all taken his comb: we'd pinched it; we'd hidden it; we'd done everything with this blasted comb. We were all fed up to the back teeth with him – until he reached for the salt and squirted Fairy Liquid on his egg.

## **Elizabeth Whitehouse: Rising Brook Writers**

I was born in January 1942, in a snow storm which my father had battled through to come and see me. My father was in the RAF stationed at a camp in Hednesford near Cannock. The war eventually took him away to such places as North Africa and Italy, for the four years he remained over seas the only contact he had with my mother was by letter. He was an engineer who worked on damaged aeroplanes repairing them for further action. He also played the cornet in the RAF band and a trumpet in a dance band when he was in Morocco. My mother raised me on her own whilst dad was away

fighting for King and country, although we did live with my grandparents in a tiny terraced house in Hednesford.

During the war years the local weekly dance hall was one of the big events of young people's lives. Mom and Dad met at the local dance to the tune of 'Roll out the Barrel', not very romantic but their song all the same. Due to the closeness of the RAF camp, there were always more men than women at the dances, which always made my mother's eyes shine when she related her war time stories to me. My grandmother babysat so my mom and her sister could go dancing, that was if my mom could get me to sleep before she went, apparently I would always play up on those nights!

My father was Scottish, coming from Motherwell a small town just outside Glasgow. During the years he was away my mother often took me to visit my father's sister Aunty Jean and her husband Uncle Peter. Obviously I cannot remember my early visits. The steam train journeys my mother made with me were long and quite traumatic but she loved staying in Scotland; it was a big adventure for her and seemed to make her feel closer to my father by being with his family. When my father returned from the war, mother and I were at Aunty Jean's house. I was now four years old, a baby no longer. I was climbing a tree when he first saw me again. Apparently the first matter he had to attend to on my behalf was taking me to the toilet, mother thought it was about time he took over as she had been doing it for four years.

I grew to love my visits to Scotland. I remember the Scottish bands playing along with the return of the troops, the streets full of cheering people. The thrilling sound of the bagpipes and the wonderful sight of the uniforms and kilts. Most of all though, Aunty Jean always had the most wonderful food; there did not seem to be any shortages in Scotland like there were at home. In later years when we talked about the shortages and rationing mom told me Aunty Jean had saved and done without between our visits just make sure we were fed well.

Scotland was the only place I visited for holidays with my Mom and Dad. I did not mind, I have lots of fond memories, sleeping in a space in the wall which was made into a huge bed. My sister Chris and I thought it was a great treat.

Riding with Uncle Peter on his horse and cart when he was delivering his supplies of beer and pop, the great dray horses causing sparks to fly from their hooves as they clumped along the roads. Playing with the boys from the street in the back yard, throwing stones down the washing house chimneys and hearing them plop in the soot. Catching bumble bees in empty jam jars, chasing butterflies and best of all, having to bath in the wash house cauldron in the soapy water left over from boiling the washing.

My happy memories of my childhood holidays in Scotland are too numerous to relate in this short piece, what memories I have will never go away.

## Edith Holland: Rising Brook Writers

### Summer 1948

I had an Aunt living in the Isle of Man and this year Jack took our little girl over there to see the T.T. cycle races and to be cared for and have a lovely time by the sea. Her shorts and tops were all home-made as were other children's too. The donkeys had not returned but the rock pools gave endless fun.

### Summer 1949

Now with two children our holidays were more conventional. We took a farmhouse at Clynnog Fawr near Caernarvon in North Wales. We sent on ahead by rail a cot, high chair and cycles, still leaving us with what all five of us might need for two weeks. It was late August and the farm was alive every daylight hour with the business of 'harvest', all new experiences for us, as was the final flourish of their efforts when Mrs Roberts made a huge pile of pancakes for everyone and even for us as well. The nearest beach was in Trefor, a two mile walk, but empty for our children's games. My mother was sharing our holiday and was so helpful, drying off wet children after a paddle, and organising the food.

We had travelled there by train from West Bromwich to Pwllheli then by local 'bus. Imagine five of us and all we needed for two weeks piling in the 'bus, but it was all part of how holidays were done then.

## Edith Holland: Rising Brook Writers

I was a child in the 1920s and 30s, so have a memory of a day at the sea-side. I had a younger brother and one Sunday our Dad took us to Weston-super-Mare for a day out. We went by train from Snow Hill station in Birmingham

No doubt we had sandwiches packed to take and a towel for after paddling. What a disappointment. We didn't see the sea. As everyone now knows when the tide goes out at Weston it stays out for hours.

I will digress a little to tell of the social conditions at this time. My father was a carpenter and paid holidays had not been introduced then and a day at the sea-side was a rare treat. However once I had the chance of a day trip to Rhyl. I remember that Mom was with me and some school friends. I would be eight or nine years old. I wonder now who paid for that outing. Perhaps the school, or the local Labour Party, as there was a strong support for doing things for under-privileged children then.

Into the 1930s and the building industry had recovered a bit from the slump and unrest of the 1920s strikes. My brother and I were told that if we

saved our pocket money all the year we could go on a week's holiday in the summer. Our older brother and sister were now in work and gave us a penny or so each week. We needed to save 12/6d (62 pence) each to cover the trip to Ramsey in the Isle of Man. That was the train fare and boat trip right to Ramsey pier, where we stayed in a boarding house on the promenade with a Mrs MacDonald.

Our room was at the top of the house which we thought was exciting and, though we had to share it with Mom and Dad, looking for the sea standing on the bed seemed quite natural and part of the fun.

The Isle of Man was chosen because we had relatives there and could share some time with them too.

The beach at Ramsey harbour was ideal for children. One end was rock pools and places to scramble about searching for little crabs and anything moving in the rock pools right as far as Maughold Head where I think there was a light-house.

We witnessed an hilarious incident on the sands with a folding deck-chair which was intended for a woman to use. Yes, it was the usual farce of setting it up and making a mess of it. The woman was furious when she went down bump on the sand. We were shooed away to laugh. It was so funny to us and is remembered now in the family.

Another day an unfortunate girl came running from the sea clutching her bathing suit and desperately knotting the shoulder straps as she ran up the beach to hide her blushes behind a towel. One more victim of the hand-knit swimsuit.

### **Janet Lawton: Stafford Association of Widows**

During the war I lived in Burton-upon-Trent and my auntie and uncle used to keep a pub in Church Gate in Leicester. I remember vividly visiting them because nobody else I knew had a fridge. They had a fridge in the pub - with ice cream in it. I used to love visiting them!

Just after the war they sold the pub and moved to a boarding house in Brighton. My auntie was my mother's sister so we used to go down there quite a lot for holidays. In fact I can't remember going anywhere else. Most mornings we would go out for a cup of tea before breakfast and watch the fish being brought in. We did go on the beach but it was all pebbles so we had to keep our shoes on and couldn't build sand castles. Occasionally we visited other places but didn't tour around a lot because we hadn't got a car.

The boarding house was along a side street off the front near Marine Parade. Funnily enough it was called Leicester House, although I don't know whether my auntie and uncle named it or it was already called that when they bought it. There were three floors so there were lots of other guests there as well as us. Auntie and uncle lived in the basement and, although we had all our meals with the rest of the boarders, we were able to go down into the basement to join them at other times. My auntie was a good cook

and I never remember food being scarce although there must still have been rationing. One of the early Sainsbury stores was at the top of the street. It was only small but my auntie got all her things from there and we used to get stuff we didn't have at home.

On one holiday we met a young comedian called Norman Wisdom at the boarding house. He was just starting out and lodged there whenever he was appearing in Brighton. A funny man off stage as well as on, he used to do some of the jokes from his act in the living room.

We went to see his show and my father told him that if he ever came to Derby we'd come and see him there. Modestly, Norman said, 'Oh, I won't be there yet,' but it was only about six months before he appeared at the theatre in Derby. We went to see him and met him again backstage after the show. I don't think any of us imagined we'd be watching Sir Norman Wisdom on television fifty-odd years later.

### **Mary Hadley: Stafford Association of Widows**

I was born in 1918 in Tipton in the Black Country. My mother died when I was six months old and my father was left with five boys and two girls. An aunt took my older sister to Australia and I didn't see her again until I was fourteen when she came over to visit. I went to live with my father's brother and his wife, who lived across the way. I was reared by them and always looked on them as my mother and father.

From the age of about five, my parents used to take me to Blackpool. Usually we went twice a year: in the summer and in the autumn for the illuminations. We kept a grocer's shop which we closed down for the week. We would get on the train with our big cane basket that had a leather strap round it to hold it together. Our rooms in the boarding house had just one toilet on the landing and a washbasin in the bedroom with hot water available each morning. In those days you always provided your own food. You were given a portion of the sideboard where you kept your butter and milk, and all the perishable food like meat and vegetables was kept in the kitchen. You'd give the landlady what you wanted for each meal and she would cook it for you.

Blackpool was famous for the Tower Circus which was always a very popular show with holidaymakers. We'd go there to see the wild animals and clowns, and to the Ballroom where the Tower organ played the music for dancing – proper dancing, not like the dancing people do today. But we spent most of our holiday on the sands where I enjoyed the donkey rides. I wore rubber knickers that you pulled up with a bib to keep your bottom half dry. Some people wore the old-fashioned bathing costumes that nearly came down to their knees and big rubber hats that covered their ears. Bathing machines, like chalets, were wheeled down to the shore so you could change in them.

Blackpool was a much better place than it is now. It was lovely and

clean and we did have nice summers.

### **Helen Downen: Stafford Association of Widows**

I grew up in the early 1960s, in a family of four girls. We didn't have a great deal of money so we couldn't afford to go on lots of holidays. Since my father came from Scotland, we would usually troop up to Glasgow and stay with my auntie for a week.

In pre-motorway days it was a heck of a journey on the coach, stopping at all the bus stations on the way. My auntie lived in an old tenement building. Her flat was quite small when it came to accommodating me and my sisters, Mum and Dad as well as my auntie and cousin. At the back of the tenement building was one big open space with outside loos and washing lines that became our playground. Underneath the flat was a bakery with the smell of fresh bread all the time and an ice cream shop so we could have pokey-hats (ice cream cones) whenever we liked. There were two pubs on the street corners opposite: one frequented by Rangers supporters and the other by Celtic supporters so it was always a very colourful scene. I suppose some people might have thought it quite a scary place but I loved it. I always felt secure because I'd got my family there.

Although for me Glasgow was a wonderful place to visit and to watch people, what I really loved were the couple of day trips we had each year to the seaside. I would be about six or seven and Dad was a keen supporter of the local Labour Club that organized the trips, usually to Rhyl. I loved the whole atmosphere of getting ready, gathering together and trooping down to the coach. Everyone would be in such a happy mood. Lots of crates were piled in the front of the coach; a few full of Pepsi and Coke for the children and lots full of beer for the grown-ups. The thing I looked forward to most, though, was the little brown envelope we all got with two-and-sixpence (12.5 pence) in it. It was my money that I could spend as I liked.

Once we arrived, we usually camped ourselves on the sands. Mum would have brought the sandwiches and a big rug to sit on. We would change into our swimming costumes or just strip down to our knickers so we could paddle in the sea. Nobody took offence at things like that in those days. My cousins would be on the trip as well so we were all allowed to amble off to the penny arcades and come back later to meet up with Mum and Dad again.

I remember sometimes we wore our coats, hats and gloves because the weather wasn't too good but we just spent more time in the arcades or in a friendly pub. I enjoyed it no matter what the weather was like. We didn't have a lot of money to spend but we'd keep ourselves amused. I can't ever remember feeling bored; there was always something you could do.

## Beryl Talbot: Stafford Association of Widows

In 1948, when I was fifteen, I went camping for a week with the Girl Guides. We went to Mundesley-on-Sea on the north Norfolk coast. We teamed up with the Baptist Guides so about 36 of us caught the train from Stafford to Norwich. A local train took us on to Mundesley-on-Sea and then we walked from the station to the field where we were camping.

The tents were already up when we arrived. They were rather big tents; each big enough for six girls. We had to put all our bags and cases in our tents but not before we'd knocked four pegs into the ground and stacked the cases on top so they weren't sitting on the grass. Then we all went down to the local farm, each with a sack. In the barn, we filled the sacks with straw to go under our groundsheets so they were a bit softer to lie on.

Some of our food was already in the camp for us but during the week, we did get other things from the farm. We made stews, salads and jacket potatoes, and had cornflakes and toast in the mornings.

Mundesley-on-Sea was a lovely place. We had some good times on the beach and a wonderful day in Norwich. The train we caught at the little station stopped at every village on the way. We went round the castle and saw all the sights, and there was a wonderful market with a sweet stall. We also went to the local church. As we walked down there together, everyone stood aside to let us go in. We felt very proud.

Each night we had a campfire and part of one of the songs we sang was:

Long, long worm a-crawling  
Across the roof of our tent,  
And the cold, cold water's waiting  
For us to take our morning dip,  
And when I return, I find that worm  
Right on my pillow slip.

It was a fabulous holiday – except for one night. There was a terrific thunderstorm that lit up the tent. We were all frightened but one of the girls was terrified. She happened to be sleeping by the cases which had got metal locks on and she was scared stiff the lightening would strike them. She wanted to change places with someone else but no-one would let her. We all spent an uncomfortable night but next morning we woke up to gorgeous sunshine, went down to the beach and the thunderstorm was forgotten.

## **Shirley Gumbley: Stafford Association of Widows**

In the early 1940s I was living in Birmingham and we always went on holiday during the holiday fortnight that the Austin Motor Works used to have. My Dad worked there and it was always the same fortnight. I was about five or six when we first went to Llandudno. I had a brother who was ten years older than me but he didn't come with us. During the worst of the war he was evacuated to Gloucester with the school but I stayed at home. When he came back it was soon time for him to join the Navy so he wasn't at home a lot in my childhood. It was like being an only child really.

Lots of people went away at the same time, of course, but not necessarily to the same place. We used to go with my cousin's family. We'd get on the train and sit in the corridor on our suitcases all the way to Llandudno. We stayed in a guest house just off the Front where the food was always good.

In the mornings my Dad and I used to wake up very early. We'd go out before breakfast and find a coffee house which was down underground in a cellar. We used to play on the beach where we'd paddle, make sandcastles and bury Dad. All the things children do today. We also went on boat trips from the pier through the Menai Straits. They used to run big paddle steamers and we'd stand and watch the paddles go round. There were kiosks on the pier, things like Punch and Judy, but not all the rides they have now because all the boats used to go from the pier.

We liked going up the Great Orme on the tram. I remember sitting with my cousin in the gorse bushes up on the top and having my photograph taken. There were no cable cars up the Great Orme in those days and Happy Valley used to be a theatre. We went to a lot of shows there. One that comes to mind was a hypnotist. My father, not wanting me to go into a trance, hid me under the seat and said, 'Don't listen to him. Whatever you do, don't listen to him.'

We always enjoyed Llandudno. In fact, when my husband and I got married we spent our honeymoon there but we didn't stay at the same hotel because they knew us. We stayed somewhere else instead.

## **Eunice Coates: Stafford Association of Widows**

When I was in my teens, my boyfriend - who later became my husband - and I used to go to the seaside with another courting couple who were our friends. None of us had got cars so we used to go on Harper's coach trips. We went every bank holiday: Easter Monday, Whit Monday and August Bank Holiday, which was then the first Monday in August. In those days you went dressed up for the day out; you didn't go in jeans and flip-flops and things like that. On one occasion I had a very nice blue two-piece suit with a slim calf-length skirt that I was very proud of. It did restrict walking, though, and it wasn't exactly the right gear for sitting on a deck chair on the beach. My

boyfriend wore a jacket and trousers with a shirt and tie. Inevitably you carried a Pakamac, a popular foldaway raincoat, because you couldn't rely on the weather.

Many years later in the early 1960s, after we were married and had children of our own, we lived in Cannock and my sister and her family lived in Hednesford. We often went on big family outings. One was the workingmen's club outing from Cannock to Blackpool. There were a lot of us besides all the other members. As well as me and my husband and our older child - the younger one was still a baby and stayed home with my mum - my sister, her husband and three children, my brother, who wasn't married then, and various uncles and aunts all went along. We weren't all members of the workingmen's club but one of my uncles was.

We went on a big long train. They'd load beer and crisps before we set off and there was always a money gift for children. You always took sandwiches with you because you couldn't afford to buy food out in those days, not when you'd got little ones. Once at Blackpool, we didn't all stay together but my family stayed with my sister's family because the children were much of the same age. On the beach there was plenty of space and we organised a game of rounders. My little girl had her dress tucked in her knickers and the boys were in short trousers.

All the children were in their bare feet. Suddenly one of the boys who was about four years old, screamed out and the next thing I knew there was blood everywhere. He'd trodden on some glass on the sands and cut his foot. We went to find a first-aid station because it was a bad cut and with all the bandages we couldn't get his shoe on. We had to carry him around until we went back home so we were rather limited as to what we could do. It put a damper on the rest of the day.

### **Kathleen McCabe: Regeneration Group (Rising Brook Baptist Church Centre)**

I was brought up by my mother's sister and her husband because times were pretty hard in the 1920s. I had a sister and brother and my father worked on the railways so there wasn't an awful lot of money about. I went to stay with my aunt and uncle in Chapel Terrace in Stafford where I've lived all my life, apart from the twelve years I was in the army.

I met my late husband in the army where we were both sergeant majors in Hull during the blitz. We got married in 1952 and I came out of the army about then. When he finished his time we came back to Stafford to Chapel Terrace. We used to go to Blackpool every year for our holidays because we liked it so much. We'd go for a week or a fortnight and we stayed in the same hotel up on the North Shore for years. It was a lovely hotel and we met some nice people from all over the North and South of England. We'd go and sit on the beach, walk along the promenade, go to the

theatre and I remember often going dancing and seeing the circus in the Tower.

We had a car by then so we went to Blackpool in that but before the war my first family holidays with my aunt and uncle were to Brighton on the South Coast when we went on a coach or on the train. We would spend the holiday on the beach and just doing the normal things, nothing outstanding. There just wasn't the money in those days.

One of the things we did look forward to every summer before the war was the Stafford Pageant. It took place in about June and was always on a Saturday. The Stafford Town Band, which was a very good band, played and marched in the procession with youngsters from the Scouts and other groups marching and playing instruments as well.

Various firms such as Lotus and English Electric as well as shops in the town would decorate floats representing something of what they did. They would have their names on the floats to advertise their businesses. There was always a pageant queen and a lady from the corner of Chapel Terrace wore a swimsuit and rode side-saddle on a white horse as Lady Godiva. She would be in her thirties I would think and had beautiful, long hair right down on her shoulders.

The procession started in the south of Stafford and worked its way up through the town. It used to come into Gaol Square where a wagon would be selling ice cream cones. Sometimes we'd go up on the Foregate where the old hospital used to be, to follow the floats on to the common where there would be a fair. The town used to be absolutely packed with people. It was brilliant.

**Simon Heath:**

**Regeneration Group (Rising Brook Baptist Church Centre)**

I can remember going to the seaside when I was still at school and in my teens. I used to go to Llandudno, and sometimes Rhyl, with my parents. We went by car for a fortnight during the summer holidays. To me it was a chance to get away and to do something different.

In Llandudno we used to stay in a guest house about half a mile down the road from the front. The guest houses on the front were always quite expensive. It always seemed that we had the odd day when the sun shined and other days when you could guarantee it was going to rain. When it rained we stayed in the house and watched television, played a few quizzes or read a bit. Then we'd plan for the next day when we hoped it wasn't going to rain. If the weather was nice I liked to go to the fair where there was the big dipper, or to the beach with the donkeys, the boats and the seagulls that were everywhere.

We had breakfast in the guest house and I remember we used to take some food with us and cook it in the house. When we bought food out it was basically junk food but, being a former professional chef who many years

later worked in the catering industry and won several awards, I always think the thing about food is that it's all about the day you're having. If you're having a good day the food can be poor but it still tastes good.

### **Irene Harrison: Friday Regeneration Group (Rising Brook Baptist Church Centre)**

I spent the first few years of my life in an orphanage but then I was adopted and went to live with my new parents in Stafford. My first trips to the seaside were in the early 1950s and I have some wonderful memories of holidays in Skegness.

One year we stayed at Butlin's Holiday Camp and I saw a Punch and Judy show for the first time. I saw a lot of children sitting on the sands in front of what looked like a tent. There were little puppets in the window of the tent so I stayed to watch. One of the puppets was dressed in a police uniform and he was hitting another puppet on the head with a stick. Then there were different puppets talking and fighting with a crocodile snapping at them. When a woman puppet appeared carrying a little baby, she threw it into the audience and I caught it. I didn't think it was frightening. It was very funny. The best part was sneaking behind the tent afterwards and seeing how it was done. Behind the curtain there were pieces of wood with strings attached that the man pulled to move the puppets. I thought it was amazing how he did the different voices.

On another holiday I went to a circus and the ring master asked if anyone would like to ride a horse. I put my hand up and they sat me on the horse - backwards. When I sat the right way and the horse trotted off, I didn't realise I was slipping off. I looked above me and saw two ropes attached to my back. I couldn't see the men across the ring pulling on the other ends of the ropes.

The ringmaster said, 'Now you're flying.'

I wasn't flying at all, I was doing my best to sit on the horse but I kept slipping off and as I slipped off I found my face on the horse's backside with my legs up in the air. First I was on one side of the horse, then I turned round and I was on the other side. The more I tried to stay on, the more I kept flying off.

Another year we stayed at a big caravan park and I became friends with a lad called Jimmy. Each day we met along a little path as I walked with my mother and father. One day he said, 'Can I have a talk with you?'

Mother said, 'Carry on, Irene.' The next day Jimmy was there again, walking behind me.

'Can I have a date with you?' he asked.

Before I could answer, mother intervened, 'Take no notice of him, Irene.'

On the last day of the holiday, Jimmy whispered, 'Can you give me your name and address so I can write to you?' I quite liked him by now but

mother said, 'Take no notice, Irene. He's only after one thing.'

'What's that, Mum?' I asked.

'All boys are just after one thing,' she replied.

I didn't know what she was talking about and kept walking along the path. I never heard anything from Jimmy after that but I still remember him. He was six and I was five.

**Liz Hawley:**

**Regeneration Group (Rising Brook Baptist Church Centre)**

I used to live in the countryside at Oulton near Stone where my dad was the local undertaker. He produced hand-made coffins with timber and would French-polish them in our builder's yard with my brother helping him. They were beautiful when he'd finished.

Down the road from where we lived there was a man who had a taxi and every now and again he used to take us to the seaside.

One time, when I was very young, ages ago now, he took me to Blackpool with my brother for the day and while I was there I got myself lost. They'd taken me in a taxi so I thought I'd better get a taxi back. I asked a Blackpool taxi driver to take me home. He said, 'Where's home?' I told him and he drove me all the way back to Oulton. I thought it was such a brainwave to get myself back home in a taxi but my sister wasn't too happy. She had to pay for it.

**Dorothy Jenkinson:**

**Regeneration Group (Rising Brook Baptist Church Centre)**

In the late 1930s when I was in service as second housemaid with a family in Stafford I went on holiday with a girl friend to North Wales. We stayed in a small, pleasant hotel with a very nice landlady who looked after us well. One day we decided to go on a mystery boat trip. It was a beautiful morning when about twenty of us got on the boat and set off out to sea.

We were enjoying the cruise but as we started to head back, the sky darkened and the wind got up. We joked about how dark it would be when we got back to the hotel. Then the boat stopped. The crew were rushing about but nobody told us what was happening. The boat turned around and went back where we'd come from. Eventually, they dropped us on the sands far away from where we were heading and told us a smaller boat would pick us up.

We waited on the sands for the boat for quite a time. I didn't feel the cold, you don't when you're young, but we were a bit wet with all the sea splashing about. Everyone was tired and one or two girls were crying. Neither my friend nor I were frightened, though, to us it was just a lark. When we did get back there were lots of boats about and a great deal of palaver going on. Only then did we find out that a big boat had had an

accident out at sea and they wanted us off our boat so they could go and help rescue the passengers.

It was after two in the morning when we finally got to our hotel, only to find it was locked up and we couldn't get in. We knocked and knocked at the front door but nobody answered. We went round the back where, fortunately for us, there was a night watchman. Without him we'd have been out all night because all the other hotels were closed as well. The night watchman gave us a drink and some food and then took us to a house where the lady put us up for the night.

We were so tired that we overslept the next morning. After we'd had a good breakfast we went back to our hotel where everyone was still in the dining room. 'Here come the dirty stop outs,' they said. They laughed when we told them we'd been shipwrecked. We were tormented all day because they thought we'd been out on the tiles.

### **Sydney Wells: Regeneration Group (Rising Brook Baptist Church Centre)**

In the late 1940s and early 1950s I was in my teens and still at school studying science. I lived in Wellingborough in Northamptonshire with my parents and younger brother. My dad was an inspector on the railways and got concessionary travel so we had some kind of holiday every year.

When Dad got into a more senior position he had a 'foreign pass' that entitled him to free travel, not only with the company he worked for but also with any of the other railway companies in this country and on the continent. I didn't go on the continent with him but at one stage Mum and Dad went to Austria and didn't pay anything for their travel.

We went on family holidays to different places but we used to go to Rhyl a lot because it wasn't too far from home and you didn't have to mess about changing trains. We would stay at the Co-op holiday camp just outside Rhyl for a week. There were no buses to fetch you from the railway station. You had to make your way on foot and it was quite a walk to the camp especially when you had a big case or tin trunk with you.

The camp was right on the coast but it was a long way down to the sea across pebbles and what seemed like miles and miles of sand. There were 60-80 wooden huts, or chalets as they grandly called them, each with a primus stove. There were no communal meals; it was all 'home-cooking' because Mum cooked it. Since the camp was run by Coventry Co-op there was a shop, like a small Co-op, that sold milk and bread; all the things you couldn't do without. It saved having to go into Rhyl.

In the camp there were fancy dress parties where you had to make your own outfits and they put on their own entertainment. One year they did a shadowgraph show called 'The Operation'. We had sand castle competitions as well with prizes which, as you can imagine at the seaside, were always sticks of rock. A chap who did a certain amount of organizing

put on walks to the local beauty spots.

I remember my grandma knitted some new maroon trunks for me. They were alright while they were dry but when they were wet they weren't such a good fit. I never actually lost them, although on occasions I might have lost a bit of dignity.

### **Gill Simmons: Rising Brook Writers**

Every Spring we would start looking forward to 'The Trip To The Seaside'. We were mostly miners' kids. I remember outings arranged by 'the Labour Club' and 'the Nest'. Each club member got to take his kids to the seaside in the Summer. Every child got 'spends', pop, crisps (Smiths' with a little blue twist) and a bag of sweets for the journey.

When the buses arrived it was a real bun fight. We'd all be scrambling up the narrow twisty stairs to the top deck. Buses were provided by Harper's Green Bus Company, garaged at Heath Hayes. Grown-ups stayed below with the pop and beer crates.

Quick head count – full to the gunwales – off we set. Through Cannock up the Watling Street off to Rhyl, or, Blackpool. What a noisy clamour. Kids swapping seats, gossip, squabbles, bossy older sisters and bumptious brothers. All high spirits.

Half way stop at a country pub. Then out came the sarnies packed by mums. We all rolled out at the beach full of energy and plans. Sand castles or big dippers? Candy floss or fish and chips?

Paddle in the sea perhaps, no more than feet. Full immersion not an option. We loved the seaside but that much water was alien. Not to be trusted. Five o'clock: back to the buses. Little ones flaked out. But time for the sing-song. Got to do the sing-song. Can't be called a day out at the seaside without the sing-song.

A halfway pee break. Pubs are busy now so the 'No coaches allowed' signs go out. So on a quiet stretch of road boys pee on one side and girls on the other. Except the mums, they stay put and 'hang on till home'.

### **Ada Moss: St Francis Day Opportunities (Meir Heath)**

In the early 1950s when I was a little girl I went on a day trip to Rhyl from our chapel. I was living at Halmerend in Stoke-on-Trent at the time and I'd be about ten or eleven. I went with my two cousins. I was the eldest one and they were much younger than me. My parents didn't go but I didn't bother all that much. I was just pleased I was going on the trip and wondering what it would be like.

We went on a coach from chapel and it seemed to be ever such a long way. We took sandwiches, a drink of pop and some biscuits with us and on the way we stopped to go you-know-where and to have a cup of tea.

I'd never seen the sea before. I remember being a bit nervous when I saw so much water and wondered if we'd be able to get back home again. We went on the sands, making sand castles and looking at the sea shells. Then we took our shoes and socks off and paddled in the edge of the sea.

The water was lovely and blue but I kept my dress and coat on because, although it was a fine day, it was cold and windy. I had my photograph taken with my cousins while we were in the sea but it's ages ago and I haven't got the photograph now.

We had a walk around until it was time to go home again and bought some rock to take back with us for the people who didn't go. I only remember going on the trip the once but I had a lovely time.

### **Eric Bettany: St Francis Day Opportunities (Meir Heath)**

In the 1930s when I was about ten, I was sent to Rhyl Homes for a holiday. I lived in Anchor Place in Longton with my parents and I was the youngest of five children. My dad worked in the pits at first but he got out and became a bricklayer. He was pretty good at that. The doctor said I was a bit weak, although I never thought of myself as weak at the time, and he got me into Rhyl Homes for a fortnight.

A bus picked me up from school and then picked others up before setting off for North Wales. Rhyl Homes, or the Stoke-on-Trent Children's Holiday and Convalescent Home to give it its proper name, was a big house behind the prom. When I got there, I didn't know anyone. They put me on my own upstairs but I didn't want that. I wanted to be with the rest and eventually they sent another lad up who'd also come from Longton.

It was a decent place with nice grounds where you could walk or play football but I was never a football man. We'd never had a ball anyway, just rolled-up newspaper. We got our meals provided and the food was really good. It was much better than I was used to. The people in charge were very decent and tried to do their best for us. Sometimes they'd organize games for those who were capable of joining in and if you could help out they got you helping them.

I didn't have any chores to do so I'd just walk out and go around Rhyl with some of the others. We'd look around the shops. We never went on the donkeys. They said we might catch things but we couldn't afford it anyway. In the evenings I'd read a bit and then go to bed. My father and mother came once to see how I was going on. I remember telling them I'd be glad to get home but I did enjoy it there.

I went to Rhyl several times afterwards but I never went back to the house. I'd got more money then so there were other things I could do. Going to Rhyl Homes certainly did me good, though, and opened my eyes a bit, mixing with other people. I was one of the lucky ones, being able to go there for a holiday.

### **Jean Roberts: St Francis Day Opportunities (Meir Heath)**

When I was young we always used to go to Blackpool for our holidays. In those days most folks couldn't afford holidays but we could because my dad's sister lived there. We went every year up to when I was about eighteen and working. It was the only way we could get a holiday. My father was a dustman and my mother worked on the pots so they weren't getting great wages. It wasn't just us; the whole of our family went to my auntie's house for holidays but not all together.

I was living in Stoke-on-Trent then and we went on the train from Longton station. It was always very crowded and you had to queue for the tickets before you went. They used to put a notice in *The Sentinel* when the tickets were going to be on sale so you went down to the station and joined the queue. The journey on the train was always quite cosy.

My auntie lived in a house just past the Pleasure Beach. You had to go up a bank and over the railway bridge then over the other side and along to Auntie Gerties'. There would be Mum, Dad, my sister and me.

We always had a great time but my auntie never had any children and she was very strict with us – even when I was grown up and working. We daren't put a foot wrong when we were at Auntie Gertie's. She'd had a big seat made for outside her front door so she could sit in the sunshine. It was like those seats you see in the parks and that's as far as we dared go. We were all right if we sat there: we weren't getting into any trouble. We lapped up the sunshine sitting on that seat, not being used to a lot of sunshine in the Potteries. I always remember the weather as being sunny but I suppose that's a bit of wishful thinking.

We were only allowed to visit the Pleasure Beach and go on the rides if Mother and Dad were with us. Although I didn't like heights and wasn't very adventurous, I did go on the Big Dipper. My sister was a lot younger than me and after she was born we spent more time on the beach. She liked to be on the beach and, of course, sister had to be with her along with Dad who liked the beach as well.

I can remember walking up the front to the Tower and going in and watching them dancing in the evening, although we couldn't go very often because we hadn't got the money. Neither my sister nor I could dance but my mother wasn't very good on her feet so we used to go and watch so she could sit down. She loved that because she had all the family around her for company.

### **Joan Lane: St Francis Day Opportunities (Meir Heath)**

I lived in Longton in Stoke-on-Trent in the 1920s and we always went to Blackpool for our holidays. We used to go on the train from Normacot station and I think we changed at either Longton or Stoke. I was always frightened when the train came into the station and I used to hide behind

my dad while the engine passed us. My dad was a colour mixer in the pottery industry. He was in charge of producing the colours for all the pottery factories owned by the company he worked for. It was a very precise job. I said to him once that I couldn't remember him with anything but white hair. He said, 'Well, you wouldn't. It was the sight of you that turned me white.'

At Blackpool we always stayed in a boarding house somewhere on the front. There would be Mum, Dad and the three youngest of us nine children with Granny, my mother's mother, and a cousin of my mother's, whom we were very fond of, went with us occasionally. We slept three in a bed. In the room there was a ewer and basin and half of us washed in the same water. I remember we always had to go downstairs and ask for a jug of hot water that Dad could use for shaving. We took much of our own food and gave it to the landlady to cook. If you wanted bacon, meat or fish you had to take it with you but the landlady always provided the vegetables and charged you accordingly.

When we played on the sands, Granny was quite happy if you just put her in one of those shelters they have at the seaside so she could see what was going on. As a special treat we'd have rides on the donkeys or spend a bit of time at the Pleasure Beach. My brother, who was older than me, went on the chair-a-planes once and when he came off I've never seen anyone so white. He said it made him feel sick. We'd probably go to the Tower once while we were there because it was expensive. My parent's hadn't got a terrific lot of money but they always made sure we had a treat. I had wonderful parents and I've got very happy memories of my seaside holidays.

### **Stephanie Spiers: Rising Brook Writers A Conway Caravan Park late 1950s:**

Sheep noisily grazing under the window and seagulls squabbling on the tin roof are seaside holiday memories I can clearly recall. My parents usually borrowed an ancient Austin A40 and hired a tiny caravan from a friend for seven whole days semi-camping in North Wales as our annual jaunt to the seaside.

Always in Spring or Autumn, always when the gales off the Irish Sea were building up or not yet abating. The shoreline camp site was a higgledy-piggledy mess of vans spread out over the dunes, sandwiched between the sea and the main coastal railway line which hugged the base of a sheer black mountain. There was one toilet block for the whole site, no showers and water had to be fetched from stand pipes. There was no electric light and the cramped caravan was lit by smelly gas lamps. Food was cooked on a gas ring and milk kept in a bucket of water under the van. Still the sand was golden and went on for miles, as did the wafts of jellyfish brought in on the tide and deposited in opaque purple streaks across the jetsam line

which patterned the beach and had to be jumped over in order to go for a paddle.

### **C M Hewitt: Rising Brook Writers**

For many years my family holidayed in Blackpool.

Things were different back then. Not hotels or guest houses, they were far too posh and expensive for us. The 'class system' limited what you could do so the 'working class' just had boarding houses.

Unlike hotels, where you could stay in all day, you left after breakfast and didn't go back until teatime, about 5.30 pm, when you had your dinner. You took your own meat ration with you; it was just the vegetables that the landlady supplied.

The beach, made famous by Mr Holloway's monologue, was a long walk for me. It must have been about a mile to the front but, once there, you could dig forever. Alongside burying dad, building motor boats and sand castles on a daily basis took up most of the time. Walks on one of the piers looking at the shops was always interesting because I wondered why they sold all those odd things. My proper dinnertime, I didn't eat much and that worried Mum to death, was something like a small part of the packet of sandwiches or fish and chips Mum or Dad had, or, for a treat, we went to the Woolworth's cafe. This was on the third floor of the, now long defunct, Woolworth's seafront shop; and those stairs were a tough climb for a skeletal youngster of questionable health.

I did like visiting the Pleasure Beach to have a go on those rides it was thought 'suitable' for a child of my age to go on and just walking around it was fun. The excitement seemed to be in the air and you could catch it in your hands. The Ice Rink, on the few times we went in, was always cold and I did not like that!

My fascination with the trams has stayed with me from that time. It was a marvel to be riding on them: I'd have stayed on a tram all day if I could, clanging along from Star Gate to Fleetwood was, and still is, a magic carpet ride!

### **Fred Wells: Eccleshall Day Centre**

When I was a little boy living in London before the War I never went to the seaside. The nearest I got was the River Thames. I remember going camping at Runnymede where the Magna Carta was signed and a gang of us would often go and see the University Boat Race at Putney because I didn't live very far from there.

Even in those days the Boat Race was quite a big thing. At Putney you could watch them bringing the boats out and putting them in the water for the start of the race. Sometimes the water would be very choppy. I often

wondered whether they regretted getting in the boats. The rowers wore tight trousers called drainpipes. You didn't often see anybody in shorts. It used to draw a lot of people on to the towpath in all sorts of coloured clothes. Some of the ladies wore big hats and there were people entertaining the crowd.

One chap used to be in a leather straight-jacket. They put long chains around him and he would get out of them. He had a leather mask with steel over his mouth and to get out of the chains he would throw himself on to the ground. He'd wriggle about and get the chains off, then he'd come round with the hat.

It was a big day out and very enjoyable. We'd go out early in the morning and not get back until half past five or six o'clock.

Sometimes when we got home there would be gang fights. One gang would go after another gang. They'd start arguing and that's how the fights happened. They'd have dustbin lids, broomsticks and all sorts of things to hit you with. Once when we were fighting I was pushed through a window of a corner shop. I went through the window and landed in the sitting room. I got up and ran out straight through the shop. Nobody shouted at me or anything. They were bad times: one gang against another.

### **John Weaver: Eccleshall Day Centre**

I came from a very poor family and from about ten years of age I was really on my own. I did meet some very kind people, though, who treated me as well as any parents could have done. One lady who befriended me had a little car and she took me to the seaside for the first time when I was about ten or twelve but I don't remember where it was.

For ordinary folk like me, going to the seaside was a wonderful experience. I was amazed at all the water and there were people with their shoes off walking in it. It was magic just looking out to sea. You could see for miles, not just as far as the back of somebody's toilet across the way.

When I first saw the sea, the tide was out and I just kept walking. I can hear them shouting me now because I was going too far. The first time I went paddling. I kept my shoes and socks on and I got into trouble for that. Then I lost a sock. I had to go and find it. It was criminal to lose a sock. You didn't buy socks and shoes every day of the week when I was a lad and if your shoes needed mending you put the Daily Mirror inside.

I've often dreamt about that first visit to the seaside. My parents may have been as poor as church mice. I couldn't do anything about that but I remember the people who were kind to me. I think that's why I get on so well with youngsters. I know how I was treated and I know how to treat them.

## Nora Thompkinson: Eccleshall Day Centre

When I was a child I very often went to Blackpool during the school holidays. I had an aunt and uncle who had a flat in a big house in Squire's Gate and I would visit them. I remember going when I was fourteen and staying for three weeks. My aunt took me all over the place. We went to St Anne's and to Stanley Park where they had lovely gardens, as well as riding in an open carriage along the part of the front they now call the Golden Mile.

My uncle worked at the Tower Ballroom. He was the doorman and wore a uniform. I went with my aunt to the tea dances there. I suppose we got in for free. The Tower Ballroom looked huge to a child and the organ came up from below the floor. At the tea dances small tables were around the room and you had afternoon tea. The music was playing all the time so you could get up and dance if you wanted to. We were there in the school holidays so there were always lots of people dancing. We went to the circus and up to the top of the Tower in the lift. It seemed tremendous at the time and the view was lovely from up there.

On another holiday, just before the war started, we went to the Isle of Man. I was about twelve then. Mother was terrified of crossing the water. As a precaution she took her teeth out and refused to sit on a deckchair. How exactly carrying her teeth in her handbag and sitting on the floor would protect from her from a disaster at sea I never quite understood. We stayed in a boarding house in Douglas but also went to Peel and other places around the coast. We visited a factory where they showed us how they put the three legs of the Isle of Man into the sticks of rock. There were yards and yards of it arranged so the white rock had pink rock inside to make up the legs. I remember the smell of sugar being very sickly. They also had the most wonderful ice creams. They were about a shilling (5 pence) so were quite dear but they were made from fresh cream and much better than the stuff we had at home.

I used to watch the fishing boats bringing their catches into Douglas. There was such a lot of fresh fish and the smells were wonderful.

It was a very unsettling time, though, not knowing whether there would be a war or not, and there was an awful lot of talk about Hitler. People in the boarding house were always acting the fool and I've got a photograph of them standing on the front steps doing the 'Heil Hitler' salute.

While we were there we went to visit the cemetery in Douglas where my great grandmother was buried. She came from Liverpool but it was her wish to be buried in the Isle of Man because she'd got a lot of childhood memories of the place. She went on holiday to Douglas against her doctor's orders and my mother went with her to the station, carrying two hat boxes because Granny loved her big hats. Mum saw her on to the train to Liverpool but she died a few weeks after she arrived in Douglas. We found her grave and Mum told us about her granny and the things they used to do together.

It was a special holiday.

### **Gwen Hall: Eccleshall Day Centre**

I was teaching domestic science at a school in Birmingham at the outbreak of World War II when I was evacuated with the children. It was not a holiday for me as I stayed with them for the whole time because we couldn't leave them without somebody they knew.

The children and the school were given a week's notice of the evacuation through the radio. We knew we were going and what time we were going but we didn't know where we were going. Two days before the war started everyone met at the school and marched through Birmingham. They all had their name and their parents' address pinned on their coats and a stamped card to send back to their parents saying where they were staying. They carried their gas mask and a suitcase or bag of some sort. I remember thinking they didn't exactly look like little soldiers. It was only when we got to the train that we discovered we weren't going to the seaside but to a village in Gloucestershire.

When we arrived there were a lot of people waiting to get first pick of the children. The billeting officer had gone through the village a week or so before asking people if there was any reason why they couldn't take children or whether they had to take a girl or a boy because they had to share a room. About half the children were taken away by people who lived outside the village. That left about thirty ten to fourteen year-olds including some of the not quite so smart children. We walked down the main street dropping them off, two boys or two girls or one of each according to what people could take. We got to the end of the road and the billeting officer said there was another house but she didn't really want to take anybody there. That sounded ominous but eventually the last two boys got taken in. One of them got his parents to come and take him home almost immediately but the other stayed and I heard many years later that he lived in the village for the rest of his life.

Children being children, they weren't much upset by all of this. They were excited. Gradually, however, the numbers eventually dwindled to, I would say, nearly a half. Some went home because they were lonely and their parents wanted them back, others went back for family events and never returned. Those who stayed shared the village school, the older ones went in the morning and the younger ones that I looked after went in the afternoon. It all went quite smoothly really. It's hard to imagine anything like that happening today but in 1939 it had to be done.

### **Alma Barker: Stone Bromfield Court**

We didn't have proper summer holidays when I was growing up. Apart from there being a war on, our parents just couldn't afford holidays. It took them all their time to feed and clothe us. Once a year, though, we did go on an outing to the seaside with the local working men's club.

I lived in Hanley in Stoke-on-Trent and my dad and his friends were members of Bucknall Working Men's Club. This was an ex-service-men's club and throughout the year part of their subscriptions and the money from raffles that the committee ran, went in the pot for the children of the members to go on an outing. We always went to somewhere not too far away like Morecambe or Rhyl which were thriving places in those days. I'd be about twelve or thirteen when I first went and you went until you got to an age when you didn't want to go with your mum and dad, round about when you started work.

My first trips were by train. We were all given a number so we all knew which carriage we were in. All the kids were kept together with parents in another part of the train. In later years they advanced from the train to coaches with sometimes as many as 30 or 40 coaches lined up waiting for all the local clubs. We'd be given the number of our coach but it didn't matter where you sat. We didn't dress up, we just went in our everyday clothes but your mum and dad always saw you were decently turned out for the simple fact they'd be seen with you.

These trips were the highlight of our year. You just seemed to laugh all the way with your friends. When we were about half way there we each got a bottle of pop and a bag of crisps and before we got off the train we were all given half-a-crown (12½ pence). That was our spending money. When we got there our parents usually asked where we wanted to go and just tagged along. We spent most of the day messing about on the sands. We'd only got half a crown which had to last all day and if you went on the roll-a-penny stalls at the fun fair it was soon gone. You never won at roll-a-penny.

We always came back very tired, having spent our half a crown and having had a jolly good time. Eventually these outings were phased out. I don't know how long they carried on when I left school because I wasn't part of it then but when I was part of it, it was a real treat.

### **Alma Forth: Stone Bromfield Court**

The first real holiday I remember was going to Torquay just after the War when I'd be about eighteen. I went by car with Mum and Dad and my two sisters and we stayed at the top of the cliffs in a boarding house.

I'd never been on holiday during the War because my father was an ambulance driver. He drove a lorry that served as a makeshift ambulance. Before the War he had a garage at Dresden in Stoke-on-Trent and he used to have a small charabanc and run trips to places like Llandudno, Rhyl,

Colwyn Bay and Southport Flower Show. People would call at the garage and book with him. Occasionally I went along but they were only day trips to the seaside.

I started at Thistley Hough School in Penkull in 1939. I should have started on September 6th but with war being declared on September 3rd we alternated mornings and afternoons with children from Longton High School until the November when they moved to another site. I was at school until I was sixteen when I went to work at the telegraph office in Hanley Post Office.

During the August holidays the children at Thistley Hough School who were fourteen and over went to work at Knightwich Manor Farm near Worcester because so many of the farm workers were in the forces. For the first fortnight they would pick Worcester Pearmain apples, damsons and damascenes, which are similar to damsons. In the second fortnight they would stook corn and in the third fortnight they picked potatoes.

I went for the first or second fortnight. Stooking corn was an uncomfortable job; all your arms got scratched picking up the stooks. We stayed in a big hut and slept on straw palliasses and they fed us wonderfully well. We took sandwiches out with us for lunch and we had a proper evening meal when we got back. We started about 8 o'clock in the morning and they took us to the fields on a dray if we had a long way to go. In the evenings we used to go into the hut and probably have a singsong. We had a brilliant time; a summer holiday with a difference.

### **Janet Stevens: Stone Bromfield Court**

My early memories of seaside holidays are of South Devon. I lived in what is now Warley in the West Midlands and to get to the sea we were reliant on the Great Western Railway so we always headed off to Torquay, Paignton, Goodrington or Brixham. Warley was an industrial area and everybody had their holidays in the same two weeks. We would go from the local station usually for a week every year and there would be fifteen or more coaches full of holidaymakers.

I was one of four children and the family would stay in a boarding house or sometimes in a caravan. When we were there we didn't go visiting many places because we just couldn't afford it. We would spend our time on the beach playing games and making sand castles. My father didn't just make castles; he would entertain us by making a crocodile or a car using bits and pieces off the sands. All the seaside places had theatres and we would usually go to an afternoon show. Our moment of glory was when we entered a talent competition on Teignmouth pier. My little sister and I had just started dancing lessons so she tap-danced and I did the poem, 'Three little kittens lost their mittens'. I presume the other acts weren't very good because between us we won five shillings (25 pence) that went towards the ice creams for the rest of the holiday.

When I was fifteen or sixteen we started to go to Dunster Beach in Somerset. With my father now having a car, Dunster was a shorter distance from home than South Devon. They had chalets there like little sheds on the beach that you could rent. I think they were built for people needing convalescence at the end of the War. My mother was one of eight so lots of family members would go on holiday together and we'd rent four of these chalets at a time. It was a wonderful atmosphere. We would play rounders on the beach and there was a little pitch 'n' putt golf course and tennis courts. One of us would book the tennis courts and, although none of us could play properly, about eight of us would take our old rackets and play at different times. One night we'd all arrange to have fish and chips and then go to North Hill in Minehead to see the sunset that it was famous for. Some of the same people were there year after year and we'd often sit and sing around a barbeque while someone played the guitar. It was all self-made fun.

This went on for a few years and some of the family still go there although the prices now are more than you'd pay for a foreign holiday. We often wished we'd bought a chalet between us. They sell for about £70,000 these days. Whenever I get down there I have all these memories and I feel it's such a lovely place to be.

### **Ivy Deere: Stone Bromfield Court**

Prior to the War I lived in Longton in Stoke-on-Trent where my father was a builder and contractor. He was employed to buy up all the iron railings and chop them up for the war effort. He also built tanks and exported them abroad as well as building roads at Swynnerton where all the ammunition was made.

We had a caravan, which we kept on a campsite in North Wales, and we used to go there on holiday. The five of us: Mum, Dad, me, my sister and my brother, who was only tiny then, drove from Longton in our car. It took a long time to get to the seaside in those days. In the car we'd play 'I spy with my little eye' and count the cows in fields or the road signs, anything to keep us amused. On the way we stopped in Tarvin at The Headless Woman pub. My sister and I were always scared to go there because we were expecting to see a woman walking about without her head. There were lots of ghost stories about the place, based on a true event apparently.

At the caravan we had a little oil stove to cook on and a wash stand that had a bowl of water on it. I remember the latrines left a lot to be desired. We took most of our food with us and bought anything else we needed from the village shop or a local farmer.

On the beach there were some peculiar sights in the 1930s. Men from the Potteries often wore white handkerchiefs on the heads, tied with a knot at each corner. They looked really comical but it was sensible in a way as it kept the sun from their bald heads. Some of them wore all-in-one

swimming costumes with long sleeves and the ladies wore knickerbocker outfits with little hats like shower caps. The beaches also had bathing huts that were pushed down to the edge of the water so people could change in them. Lots of people wore 'Kiss-Me-Quick' hats and bought 'Ninety-Nine' ice creams from a man riding around on a pedal cycle with a square tub on the front saying, 'Stop me and buy one'. There were funny postcards, too, that made fun of large ladies but only in the nicest way. There was nothing nasty about it.

They were happy times.

### **Ellen Allcock: NHS Retirement Fellowship**

My first holiday was just after the war when I'd be about six, maybe seven. It was a big event going on holiday to the seaside with mum and dad and my eldest brother. It was a lovely day as we set out very early in the morning on the three-mile walk from Short Heath to the nearest railway station at Willenhall in the West Midlands. On the train I was fascinated by the puffing smoke, the steam and the hissing. At the seaside it was a big adventure. I hadn't seen the sea before or the sands but everything was there that I'd dreamed of.

My mum had knitted me my swimming costume and I couldn't wait to get it on. First we had to get settled into the digs but the next day was a beautiful day and I was ready to go out in my swimsuit. As usual my brother Derek was put in charge of me, while Mum and Dad sat in the deckchairs resting.

Derek was a proper Dennis the Menace who hated looking after his younger sister. On the beach, I was happily playing in the sand with my bucket and spade and sitting in the little rock pools. I didn't know that Derek had wandered off and left me all by myself. I wasn't frightened. I thought it was wonderful sitting there splashing about in the water, getting thoroughly dirty.

Then there was a commotion on the beach: people were shouting and running up and down. All of a sudden my mum appeared and yanked me out of the water. When Mum and Dad had asked Derek where I was he said he didn't know and panic set in. Everyone was looking for this little girl in a knitted swimsuit that by now was all wet and down by my ankles. I hadn't got a clue that the commotion was about me. Mum asked what I was doing there. 'Playing,' I said.

I was the one who got into trouble because I'd wandered off - when I hadn't. Derek, who'd left me, got away scot-free.

Some years later when I was about twelve we went on holiday to Rhyl. We stayed at a boarding house not far from the Front and the landlady had a son Keith, who was about my age. Keith went to the station when the trains came in with a truck that he put people's cases on. He'd take the cases to where they were staying for a few shillings which helped his mum

who was a single parent. My dad liked Keith so whenever Keith wasn't working at the railway station he came out with us. Dad gave us pocket money but Keith knew how to make a bit extra.

One day we wanted to go to the fun fair and we hadn't got much money so Keith said, 'I know how we can get more money. We can collect all the pop bottles.'

So we went from one end of Rhyl to the other collecting pop bottles. Keith knew which shops sold White's pop and which sold Tizer so we trundled along with bottles galore and we'd get the deposits back on them. At the end of the day we had more money than when we started out - and we were doing the council a good turn keeping the beach tidy. It was a brilliant idea so we did it day after day and we got lots of money to spend at the fun fair. We'd go on all the rides and eat as much sticky stuff as we possibly could.

Keith and I stayed friends for many years. I don't know what's happened to him now but he was brilliant at making money.

### **Pauline Pittard: NHS Retirement Fellowship**

In the early 1950s we lived on a farm at Whitgreave and I went on a day trip to the seaside with the local branch of the Women's Institute that my mother went to. I got on the coach with my mum and sister early in the morning and set off to Rhyl in North Wales. It seemed like hours and hours on that coach but when we got there we all spilled out on to the sea front looking at the sea. It was the first time I'd ever seen the sea and I thought it was absolutely enchanting.

We had some lunch and a walk along the sea front and then we decided to go and have a paddle. I went with my sister out towards the sea and we thought we'd paddle just up and down on the same part of the beach. Little did we know that we were walking quite a distance up the beach and when we came out we couldn't find our mum anywhere. We raced up and down the sands looking but couldn't see her. In desperation we walked up to the sea wall and we found her along there. We said, 'We lost you,' but she said, 'No, you didn't. I could see where you were all the time.' For me, only four or five years old, it seemed like hours but it must have been all of twenty minutes before we found her.

After we'd been consoled and had a sweet, we had a ride on the donkeys and I've got a picture of me sitting on one of them. It seemed ever so high up when you're a little tiny person. I thought they went such a long way up and down the beach but we eventually returned to Mum.

I can't really remember the journey back home. We must have been that tired we slept all the way.

## Irene Maiden: NHS Retirement Fellowship

In 1955 when I was about twenty one I had just qualified and for the first time I had some money. I went on holiday with a friend to Butlin's in Pwllheli. I'd never gone away before without any other members of my family.

The holiday camp was all brand spanking new and very regimented. When we got off the coach, we stood in a great long queue to register. It was like being in the army.

My outstanding memory is that the chalets smelt like public urinals because they were cleaned with such strong disinfectant. In our chalet there were just two beds, a sink and nothing else; no wardrobe, no rails, no nothing. You had to keep your clothes in your suitcase. It was like being in a garden shed really but we thought it was wonderful.

There were several sittings for meals and we all sat at one great big long table like a Sunday school party. The food was just average, nothing outstanding and you just had what they put in front of you, no choices. I remember the tannoy kept blasting out Unchained Melody by Jimmy Young, which was the big hit at the time, and the redcoats were always telling us, 'Smile, smile.' It really upset them to see someone not smiling which annoyed me because I'm not one for grinning all the time.

## Roz Taylor: NHS Retirement Fellowship

At the beginning of the sixties, I lived in Birmingham and I was about sixteen when we went on our first family holiday. I had four younger brothers and sisters and we all went to Anglesey during the last week in July, which was the first week of the fortnight everyone had off work.

It was a very long journey and the traffic was unbelievable, nose-to-tail all the way. We went up the A5 through Betws-y-Coed and got lost. There was a terrible rainstorm and going through the mountains you had to be very careful of the rock falls. We all pulled over to the side of the road while it was raining heavily because you just couldn't see where you were going and there were some rocks falling. My dad said, 'I know a short cut.'

We drove off the main road and went about five miles down a farm track, just two ruts and a grassy bit in the middle. We couldn't turn the car around so we had to keep going until we got to the end and then go all the way back to rejoin the main road. That was Dad's short cut.

We stayed at an old lighthouse down a long track. It was very high up, one of the highest points on Anglesey from where you could see all the way to the Isle of Man. They had built a new lighthouse nearer the coast so this one was redundant and was turned into a holiday bungalow. The front of one room had really thick glass where the light used to be but the rest of it was just like a normal bungalow.

The old lighthouse was surrounded by farmland and there were some young bullocks in the next field to where we were. Rawhide was popular on the television and one of my brothers decided he was going to be a cowboy for the afternoon. He thought he would round up all the bullocks but he got a bit scared when one turned and looked at him. He ran and scaled the gate and never went back into the field again.

In Anglesey, Dad's driving was still a problem. He decided he was going to take us to Rhosneigr where he was stationed when he was in the army. On the way there was a huge traffic island and we had to turn off the road but Dad just kept going round and round the island saying, 'There's the sea, there's the sea.'

I said, 'No, Dad, there are clouds in that sea.' We never actually found the sea or got to Rhosneigr.

On another day we went to Red Wharf Bay and saw the Red Arrows. They had just come into being and were practising over the Bay. What we didn't know was that where Dad had parked the car on the sands, the tide had started coming in and was surrounding us. I ended up chasing my shoes as they went floating off on the tide.

### **Margaret Hoyle: NHS Retirement Fellowship**

I grew up in Cumbria near Carlisle where my parents were farmers. In the 1960s my seaside holidays were usually spent in Blackpool. I used to go with my auntie and uncle and my cousin, their only daughter who was a similar age to me. We would go for a week at the end of July or the beginning of August, just after the schools had closed. We went on the bus from Carlisle to Blackpool. It must have taken two or three hours.

Once we arrived, we'd get sorted out at the boarding house on the North Shore where we were staying before going to the beach. Blackpool was lovely but always very busy. When you walked down the street there were loads of people but there was plenty of space on the beach. We would have a paddle in the sea, get dried off and then, towards the end of the afternoon, the big bonus for a ten or eleven year-old at Blackpool - having a ride on the donkeys. Being from a farming family I was used to animals and trotting along the beach and back again on a donkey was just great. I think it cost about a shilling (5 pence) but my auntie and uncle would pay for it. We went on the donkeys most days because they realised how much we enjoyed it.

Although we'd always spend lots of time on the beach I don't swim and never wanted to learn after falling into the sea on one holiday. I was walking along the rocks and slipped off into the water. I was petrified and it made me very wary of the sea after that. For me it was always the donkeys that made my seaside holidays.

## Maureen Leese: NHS Retirement Fellowship

Just after the war when I'd be no more than ten, I was living at Meir in the Potteries. In those days we couldn't afford to go to the seaside every year but I do remember going on holiday to Prestatyn with my auntie, my mother and the family. When we got there we discovered we weren't staying in a caravan but in two huts. One hut with a table and chairs was where we had our meals and the other hut was where we slept.

During the day, I used to walk with my brother and sister along what seemed to me a very long road to the beach. We got friendly with the lady who looked after the donkeys on the sands and she used to leave us in charge. She would give my brother the bag for the money and she would go off for goodness knows how long. My brother and sister used to collect the money, walk the donkeys up and down the beach and take care of them. We loved the donkeys. It was wonderful how they always knew how far to go, when to turn around and when to stop.

We could go any day, any time and the lady would just leave us with the donkeys. Then when she came back she'd always bring us some raspberry buns. They were just like rock buns with raspberry jam on them. I thought it was marvellous being paid in raspberry buns for just playing around while my brother and sister did the work.

## Judy Davies: Rising Brook Writers

Bob was in a hurry to set off, waiting impatiently in the car revving the engine while I debated whether to risk a bikini or stick to the safer option of shorts and a one piece. Safety prevailed. I jumped in and we sped off for the coast.

'I hope it's not stony there - I meant to bring my pumps.'

'Oh, you won't need anything else. It's just sea and sand, lots of it. You'll love it, I do!'

With the sun beating down we both looked forward to a nice cool dip. Having already changed into my swim suit I avoided the struggle of disrobing under a towel, and I could make my way into the water quickly when we arrived, thus avoiding exposure to the scenario where Bob sings the stripper song while gyrating out of his boxers. Friends for many years we had a close but uncomplicated relationship. I thought of him as another brother, boisterous, funny and solid.

Parking at the edge of the dunes we ambled along the sands barefoot seeking a spot to settle. Our peace was suddenly shattered as a helicopter came into sight speeding above us only to hover some distance ahead over a group of people who seemed to be squatting down around something on the sand. As we approached I saw there was a casualty lying in their midst. We rushed forwards and then something made me stop.

'They've got no clothes on. Look, Bob, bare bums, in a ring,' I suggested.

'What are you on about?' my grinning companion replied. 'Oooh I see what you mean!' he added as we made our way towards where the young men had moved apart to allow the crew to do its job.

'Well I'm an idiot aren't I? You tinker! You've brought me to a nudist beach!'

Until that moment I had been so preoccupied I had failed to notice that dotted about in the dunes were various naked specimens each unfazed by the experience. Further on now, surrounded by all sorts, Bob suggested we join the throng. Meanwhile, averting my eyes as he dropped his shorts, I was exposed to the spectacle of the masses of wobbly flesh around us. All sorts of shapes and sizes were on display, bounding and bouncing around, now lunging towards the sea, now bending carelessly to pick up a tennis ball and now transfixed in wonder at the beauty of it all. And there was more than plenty to wonder at.

And it was hot, very hot. As I grew hotter and more red-faced I decided to strip off. In the general spectrum of things I was not that bad and anyway no-one seemed to take much notice. It no longer mattered. Out of the corner of his eye I noticed Bob glanced furtively as I struggled to peel off casually before running, at full bounce headlong into the water to cover my confusion in its cool depths. It felt really luscious to slide and roll through the waves, free as nature intended, or rather as Bob had intended. I would have my revenge.

'You can fetch the ice creams,' I shouted as he made to join me. I watched his small hairy bum ride off on gangling, fuzzy legs along the beach.

Then, there appeared from nowhere the strangest sight. Beneath a beach umbrella strode a plump little man sporting a 'Kiss-Me-Quick' bowler hat. He carried a rolled newspaper under his arm and strode out regally leading a Yorkshire terrier whose tiny legs were dwarfed by his master's chubby, pink hams. As he passed by I had just sat down on my towel so my eye was level with his distended belly overhanging the cutest little spout that flopped along proudly in spite of everything.

Well, that just about summed it up for me. There comes a time when you just gotta let it all hang out!

### **Peter Shilston: Rising Brook Writers Memories of visiting my grandmother**

I never knew my father's parents, who died before I was born, and my mother's father is only a very shadowy figure, since he died when I was five; so the only grandparent I remember is my mother's mother.

Her name was Mary Anne Midgley but all her friends called her Polly

and to us she was simply 'Nana': she never even signed letters any other way. Her home was at Keighley in Yorkshire and I don't think she ever left there except to see us. She and her husband, Thomas, had a house which they had bought freehold just after the first world war: something which must have been most unusual then.

It was a small terraced house, two rooms upstairs and two downstairs, with an attic and cellar, a very small yard-cum-garden at front and rear, and an outside lavatory: being built of stone it was likely to last forever, but is the sort of house nobody wants nowadays. My father explained to her how it would be easy to get a grant for an indoor lavatory, but she always ignored him: I suppose she considered it an unnecessary frivolity. Similarly we had a gas fire installed for her in the front room (the parlour, to which only the most important of visitors were admitted), but she hardly ever used it, preferring to live in the kitchen and fetch coal for the kitchen fire up from the coal-hole in the cellar. Beyond the coal-hole and the outdoor lavatory ran a little cobbled street, with washing lines strung out across it. I always thought this a self-defeating exercise by the housewives, because on the other side was the railway and when we visited her, back in the days of steam trains, we contrived to get dirty without even venturing out of the house, so it couldn't have done the washing much good either.

Apart from us, Nana only had one blood relative: her sister, Aunt Maria, who lived with her husband, Uncle Percy, nearby in Haworth. They were childless and we were always given to understand that we would eventually be their heirs. But when Aunt Maria died, Uncle Percy, who was well over seventy and extremely deaf, promptly remarried. Nana never forgave him for this, and they never spoke again. Thomas Midgley, by contrast, had numerous relatives around Keighley plus at least one who had mysteriously 'gone to the bad' and was never mentioned. They all seemed to be much better off than him. My father said that Thomas was, unjustly, he thought, considered the stupid one of the family. Most of these Midgleys were in the Yorkshire wool business; a sure sign of which was a tendency to feel people's lapels and say, 'You didn't get that at Burton's, did you?'

I have a photograph of Thomas and Nana early in their married life, both looking highly respectable. They bought good quality furniture for their house, some of which I still have, along with the piccolo that Thomas played in the town orchestra, and part of his collection of books: the Sherlock Holmes stories, Alexander Dumas, Walter Scott and Thackeray; all with his names stamped inside. It goes almost without saying that they were pillars of the local Labour Party in its early days. Nana said that she had known Philip Snowden, one of the earliest Labour MPs and the first-ever Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, and that Ramsay MacDonald himself had stayed at their house; but unfortunately by the time I was old enough to be interested in such things, Nana's memories were getting confused, and my mother believed the MacDonald story was imaginary.

Nana was also a lifelong vegetarian, with an interest in fringe

medicine, which must have been very unusual for those days. Clearly she and Thomas could be classified as serious-minded working-class intellectuals: a category probably hardly existing amongst young people today.

I remember Nana as seeming very old and deaf, and frail-looking, but fiercely independent and hating being patronised. We used to drive out to see her, arriving around mid-day. 'What have you come for?' was often her opening question. 'We've come to make you lunch!' my mother would announce brightly. 'I've had mine!' Nana would reply; quite often adding, 'Your hair's a mess!', or even, 'Tha's getting to be a gurt fat podge!' Because of the wool connection, I always had to be well-dressed for these visits; otherwise I would be told I looked like a 'top o' the town kid'. This meant nothing to me until my mother explained that in Keighley the top of the town was where the Irish lived, and they were certainly not considered to be respectable! She could remember a time when the Irish children came barefoot to school, and the babies slept in orange-crates. The need for working-class respectability also led, I was told, to the only doubts Nana had about my father as a prospective son-in-law; namely, 'He drinks!' This referred to the fact that he occasionally had a glass of beer at a local pub on Saturday lunchtime, when he finished work. The problem here wasn't teetotalism, Nana cooked up some lethal homebrew in her cellar, but the pub: pubs were also most definitely not respectable places.

She had a very strong Yorkshire accent, and naturally identified strongly with her county. Just about the last thing I remember upsetting her was when Brian Close was sacked from the England cricket captaincy. 'They've only done it 'cos he's working class and Yorkshire!' she exclaimed. She didn't actually say, 'southern MCC \*\*\*\*\*,' but I'm sure that was the gist of what she thought.

She had plenty of friends in and around her street, few of whom I remember meeting. This once created a problem: when we visited her for her 80th birthday, and her neighbours were invited round, my mother was put in charge of handing out the drinks. Nana gave her a bottle of standard sherry, saying, 'This is for my friends' and another of Harvey's Bristol Cream, 'And this is for my SPECIAL friends!' and left my mother to decide for herself which category any visitors might fit into. She compromised by giving everyone Harvey's until it ran out.

My parents had hoped that when my sister and I left home, Nana would come and live with them. But she always refused to do so and eventually she died in her own home, which was what she wanted.

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