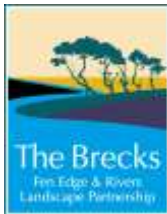


Tales from the River Healing Waters (Outdoor Swimming)

Bathing in the Brecks: Outdoor Swimming past, present and future



Imogen Radford
@OSBrecks



1 first slide:

(Imogen Radford) Thanks for inviting me to speak at such a wonderful celebration –

about the two projects –

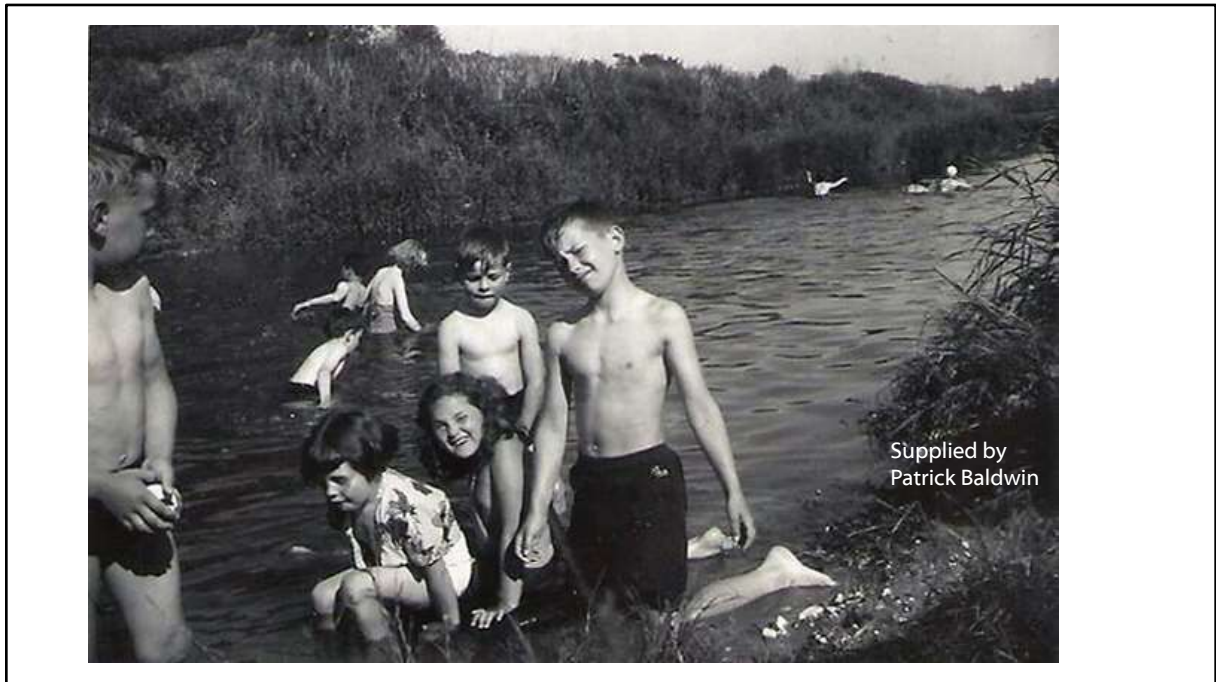
Tales from the River and Healing Waters (Outdoor Swimming) –

why developed and how linked –

This is what I call the two together –

Bathing in the Brecks: outdoor swimming past, present and future

I will outline the aims, achievements, impact. But first...



2 Children playing in a river – supplied by Patrick Baldwin, on the right aged 10 in 1957

Put your hands up

- who remembers going swimming or playing in the rivers when you were children?
- who has gone swimming outdoors later on, or still does?
- ...or did you go fishing, boating, or walk by the river or do other activities?

[Almost everyone has some memory]

I remember every summers as a child playing in the river, swimming through water lilies, having adventures, cooling off in hot summers... – and it was always hot!

•aims

- achievements
- impact
- conclusion

Then I rediscovered outdoor swimming as an adult in 2012 and wherever I went swimming in rivers in summer I'd always see young people and families splashing and playing in traditional swim spots
And outdoor swimming is seeing a big increase in numbers and coverage
People often have stories about swimming when they were young –
though for many this is in the past and some say they wouldn't do it now



4 Children and families in the river at St Helens

As swimmer and as volunteer for The Outdoor Swimming Society Inland Access Group I see issues across the country

- concerns from authorities and parents
- access to places is a problem – too few places so can be very crowded in summer
- disapproval – not everyone is responsible
- panic and fears about safety – often not in proportion to actual risk

We've had decades of people being discouraged from swimming outdoors

- so several generations not getting the chance
- to learn naturally from an early age, from parents, how to swim safely outdoors
- many have lost knowledge and confidence to take part
- children spending less time outdoors, not allowed to learn about risks
- fewer get the chance to swim outdoors so don't get to enjoy this fun healthy activity



5 Children in the river at Knettishall

the moment I heard about projects about the rivers of the Brecks –

over seven years ago at a conference like this

– I wanted to include outdoor swimming –

- to get outdoor swimming better understood and celebrated
- to reclaim our cultural heritage of swimming
- to get people involved in enjoying water safely
so I put forward my ideas (with backing of Outdoor Swimming Society)
which we then developed into the two projects

The main aims:

- to involve people in collecting and presenting the history of swimming and other watery recreation
- to give people knowledge and skills to assess risks
- revive confidence to swim outdoors and enjoy it knowing how to be safe
- access to more swim places in the Brecks
- to involve landowners and authorities from the start and allay their concerns
- and map past, present and future swim places

•aims

•achievements

(summary)

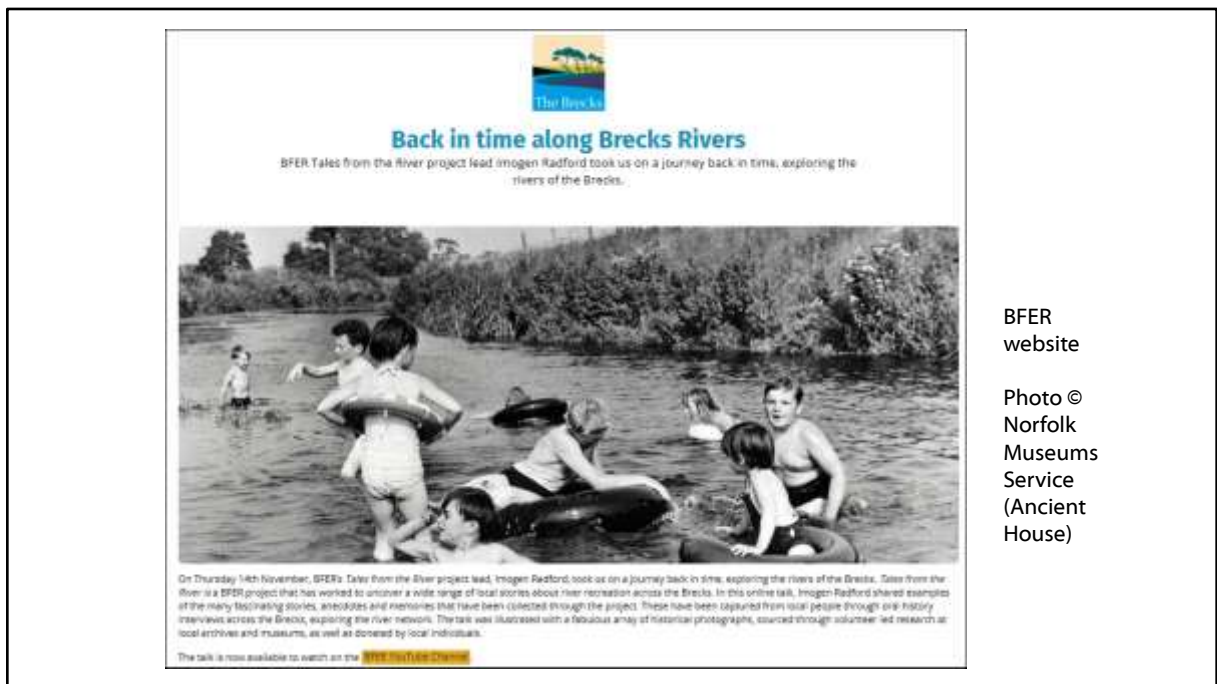
•impact

•conclusion

6 heading slide

Achievements (both projects, summary):

Gathered lots of stories, images and information about fun and recreation in, on and by the rivers and other waters of the Brecks



BFER
website

Photo ©
Norfolk
Museums
Service
(Ancient
House)

7 BFER article about online talk – image of children swimming in the river

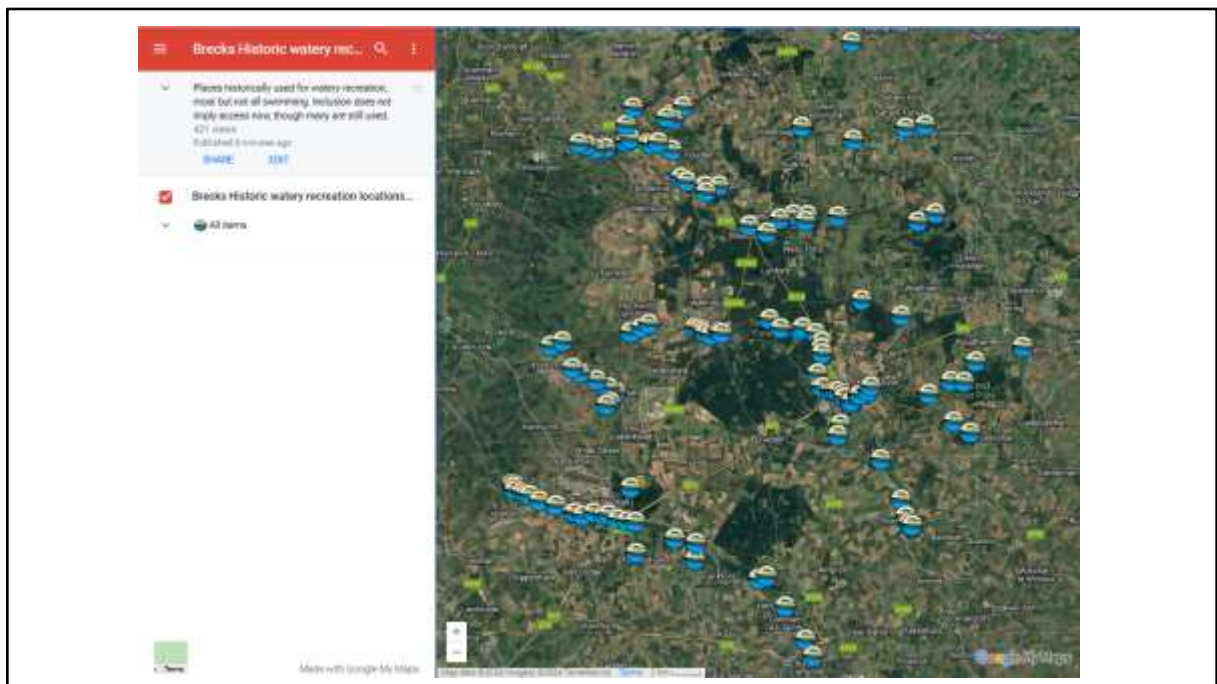
Achievements (both projects, summary):

- Gathered lots of stories, images and information about fun and recreation in, on and by the rivers and other waters of the Brecks
- a body of work being shared online and archived so that it is available for the future
- 10 decades of memories, plus research going further back in time
- involving over 750 people in giving or collecting information or taking part in events



8 Family swim intro at Lynford including volunteers

outdoor swimming events involved over 700 participants –
186 of them children,
including people with additional needs
– and 140 volunteers –
Gave people skills and knowledge and experience



9 Screenshot of Google map of historic swim spots with BFER icons

Mapped places for swimming and other watery recreation –
 – this map shows 130 historically used places each with links for more info
 – other maps and surveys of those used now and potential places

Discussed outdoor swimming with landowners, councils, health professionals



10 Film showing with Lileth on screen and her dad watching with her

Main things created :

- a film
- an exhibition
- an online talk
- 6 interpretation panels around the Brecks
- swim safety materials and
- a new legacy website



11 Exhibition at Thetford Library

- aims
- **achievements**
(some numbers and detail)
- impact
- conclusion

12 [heading slide]

Achievements: More numbers and specifics

Tales from the River Collected:

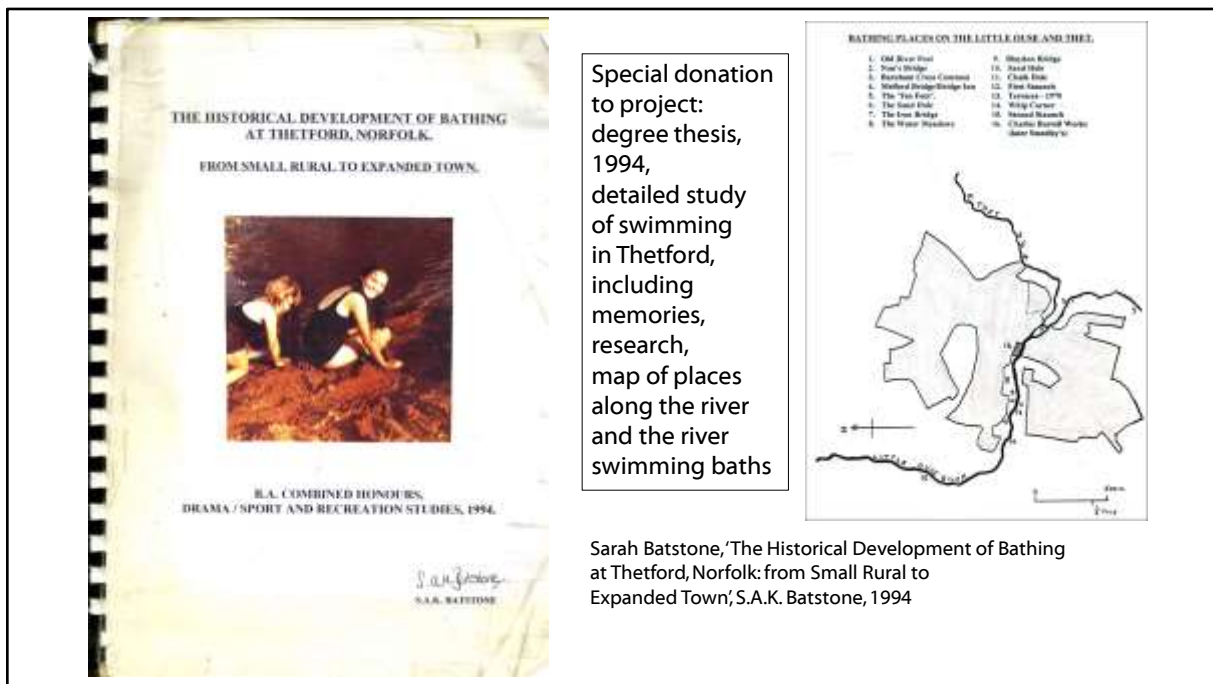
- 30 oral history interviews, oldest aged 99
(one woman remembered 90 years ago paddling in the ponds on Thompson Common, not pingos then!)

Alexis ice skating,
1963, still from
cine film by
Jeff Waterfall



13 cine film still with Alexis ice skating

- several cine films



14 thesis cover and map

- important donation – study of bathing in Thetford in the 20th century and earlier, with maps and memories and info – thanks to the author's family



15 research training Santon Downham 2021

Activities:

- volunteer training and experience in research and oral history interviewing
- volunteers – 16 adult and about 9 young people



16. young historians preparing animation at Ancient House Museum

- young historians research, filmmaking and creating exhibition
- film launch, on YouTube
- exhibition showings at 12 venues



17 drop-in session at Oxborough Village Hall

- display panels, map to put stickers on – prompted discussion at events and drop-in sessions

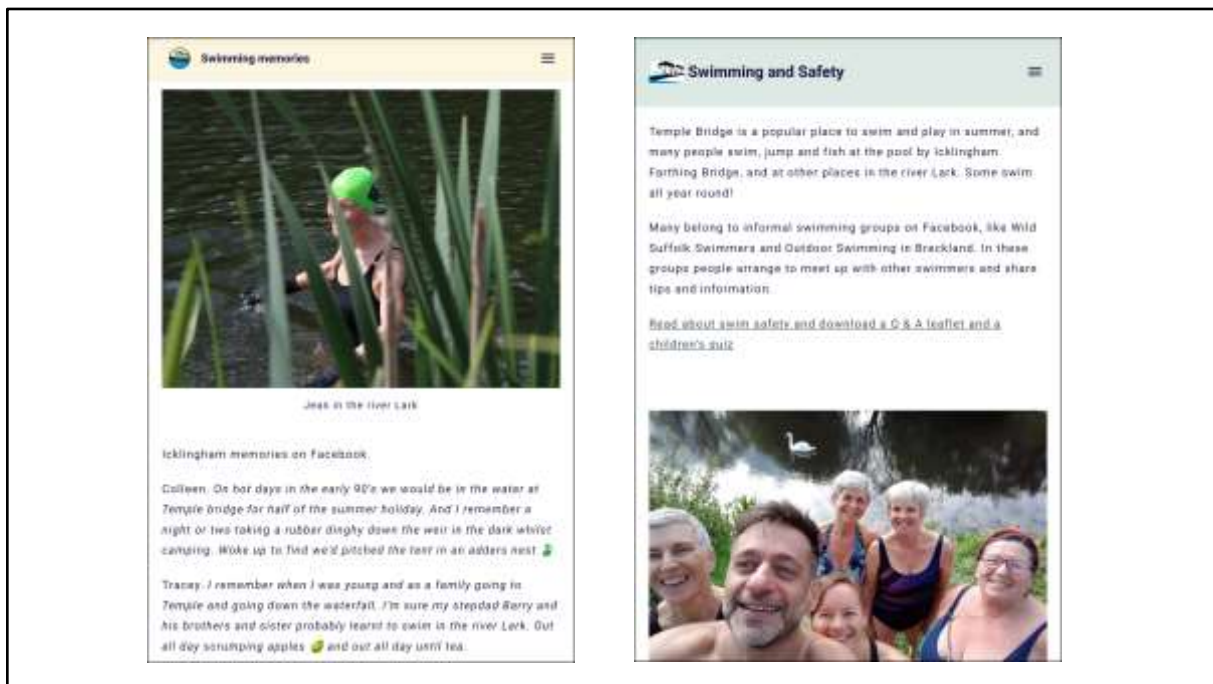


18 Brandon Beaver Scouts, ages 6-8, at storytelling workshop

- storytelling workshops, for children and adults, and at events
- 12 talks – across the Brecks in online talk on YouTube, local focus in other talks

material used to:

- prepare 11 river history walks, delivered by volunteers from this project
- inform other projects including Soundscapes, Industrious Rivers



19 two screenshots from Info Point, swimming memories and swimming safety

- Info Point at Cavenham Heath/Temple Bridge – off-line web content, QR code smart phones
- create new legacy website sharing the material from both projects



20 volunteer and some of participants at Mildenhall swim intro

Healing Waters

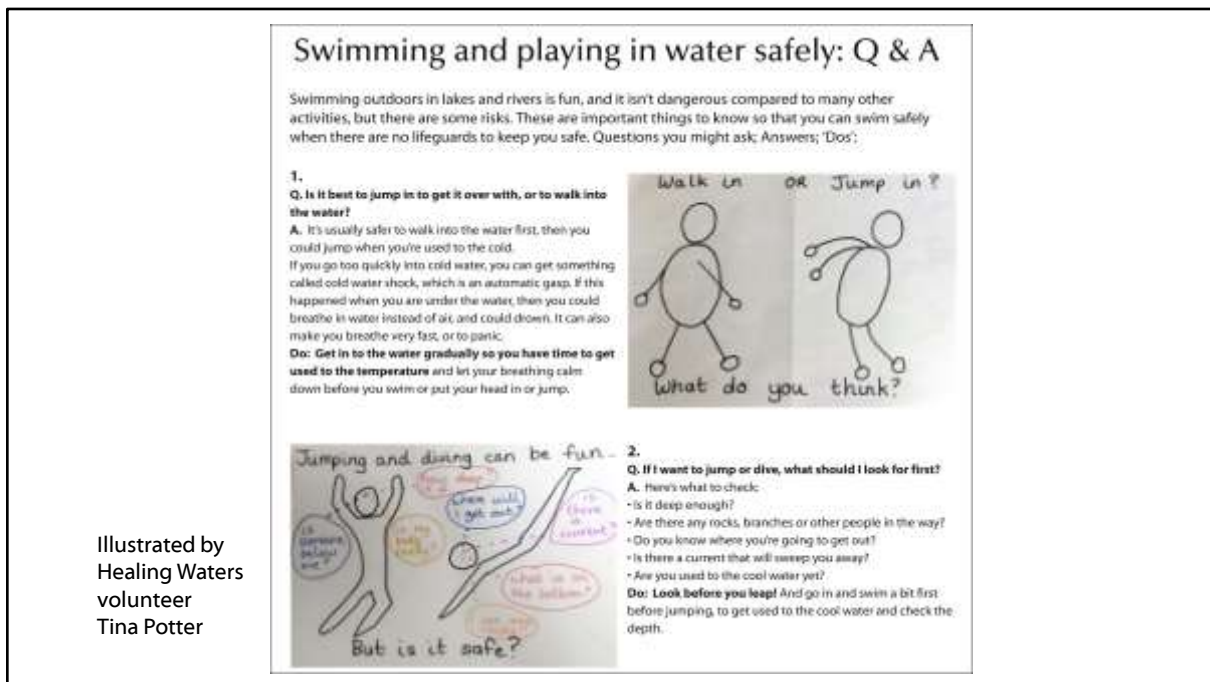
Activities:

- 11 outdoor swimming intro sessions, swim walk, lifesaving, coaching and swim event



21 open water lifeguard training at Thorpe Woodlands

- plus open water lifeguarding qualification and first aid for swimmers
- footpath surveying training and river survey (mapped areas surveyed)
- engaged about 65 landowners and local authorities –
- landowner workshop March 2020 and
- liaising with landowners
- talked to lots of people at stalls at events and talks



22 first part of safety leaflet with illustrations also used in safety briefings, devised Tina Potter

Created:

- Interactive safety briefing for swim intro events
- children's quiz on water safety
- swim safety leaflet and webpages

- aims
- achievements
- impact**
- conclusion

23 [heading slide]

Impact: during the projects and into the future:

Tales from the River

- People enjoyed gathering information, telling us their memories, and hearing stories about the rivers



24 storytelling session at Thompson Festival, Lynn Whitehead with rapt children and parents

- and learnt – children fascinated by things that were different in the past
- volunteers and those in workshops gained skills and experience – quote:

“I've always had a great love for the Brecks and volunteering through the project has helped me connect with it at a much deeper level. Gathering spoken word memories helped me view it through the eyes and words of others and was a real delight.”



Rowing on the river, about 1900
Violet Parrott, Celia Rissbrook,
Marguerite (Daisy) Rissbrook

Mary Baldwin (nee
Chapman), 1947

Supplied by Patrick Baldwin



*25 three ladies in a boat 1900 in best dresses and hats,
fashionable swimming costume on Santon staunch 1947*

- people's eyes lit up when sharing or listening to memories of fun activities, particularly from when young or remembered fondly, or less fondly (having to learn to swim in cold water!)



26 film showing at Thetford Library, river swimming baths on screen and oral history interviewees in audience

- the film, exhibition, talks and guided walks brought this history more to life

Quote about the film launch:

“That was a really lovely event, so well-attended and supported, with all the interactions and sense of community it stimulated. The film was very engaging and informative, and clearly loved by all. The children were a joy, their enthusiasm was obvious, as was the pride and admiration shown by the children’s families and friends.”

- brought together communities, groups and individuals
- pride in community traditions, in town or village, or across the Fen Edge or the Brecks



27 people talking at Methwold History Group meeting

Volunteer: "I have enjoyed being involved in the project very much, taking part in events and activities, especially meeting others and playing a part in the resulting discussions and exchanges of information that so often follow."

- collaborations for example with local historians – such as the Fen Edge history societies

Plans for more guided and self-guided walks and swim walks, talks, and interpretation panels



28 family swim intro session at Lynford

Impact: Healing Waters (outdoor swimming)

- We gave people the chance to try out swimming in a safe and supported setting and all enjoyed the experience

"We've just been outdoor SEN swimming, and it was cold but brilliant. We often find [our daughter] is the most high needs child with behaviours that challenge, but everyone here was so understanding and helpful. Water is her happy place and knowing a place like this exists, especially during the summer months, is going to be awesome."

- they were given information on safety, given skills and confidence and self-reliance

"Now I have braved it and loved it, I hope to try other places now." "We had the best time ever and can't wait to get back in the lake, now we know how to safely."



29 volunteer doing briefing to adults at swim intro, Lynford

- volunteers also gained confidence and skills while supporting participants

“It was lovely to have a chance to share some of my experience and the volunteering opportunity also raised my self-esteem and wellbeing.”

many involved in the events have gone on to do more:

- swim regularly and at different places and to develop their swimming
- enjoy the benefits to health, well-being and more
- appreciate the landscape more fully with a new perspective on it
- engage more in environmental activities



30 swimmers, March 2020 International Women's Day

- join the vibrant and supportive swim community
- share knowledge, spreading understanding of safety
- actively encourage and support others to swim outdoors and build communities

When Ian volunteered for the first time at an swim event he said that it was out of his comfort zone. But now he's running a men's swim group in the area. And he shared his experience of outdoor swimming with health practitioners to help them do social prescribing.

Ellen – "I wouldn't have my swim community if I hadn't had the opportunity to go on the very first event arranged by the project in 2020 so it's only right that I help make it possible for others to do the same." Started local swim group with over 2000 members, supports many to get started. And she has been key volunteer at every single event since!



Supplied by David Ebbs

31 lifeguards – including four we trained – at events including at Euston

- some use their qualification in open water lifeguarding, others run related businesses



32 landowner workshop March 2020, Santon Downham, whole room, intro by Nick Dickson

Landowners, councils, health practitioners have

- heard from swimmers about the benefits, responsibility
- learnt about issues – liability, safety, access



c. BFER

33 landowner workshop outdoors at Lynford

- hopefully helped to allay concerns
- hope will continue liaising with swimmers in the future

- aims
- achievements
- impact
- conclusion**

34 [heading slide]

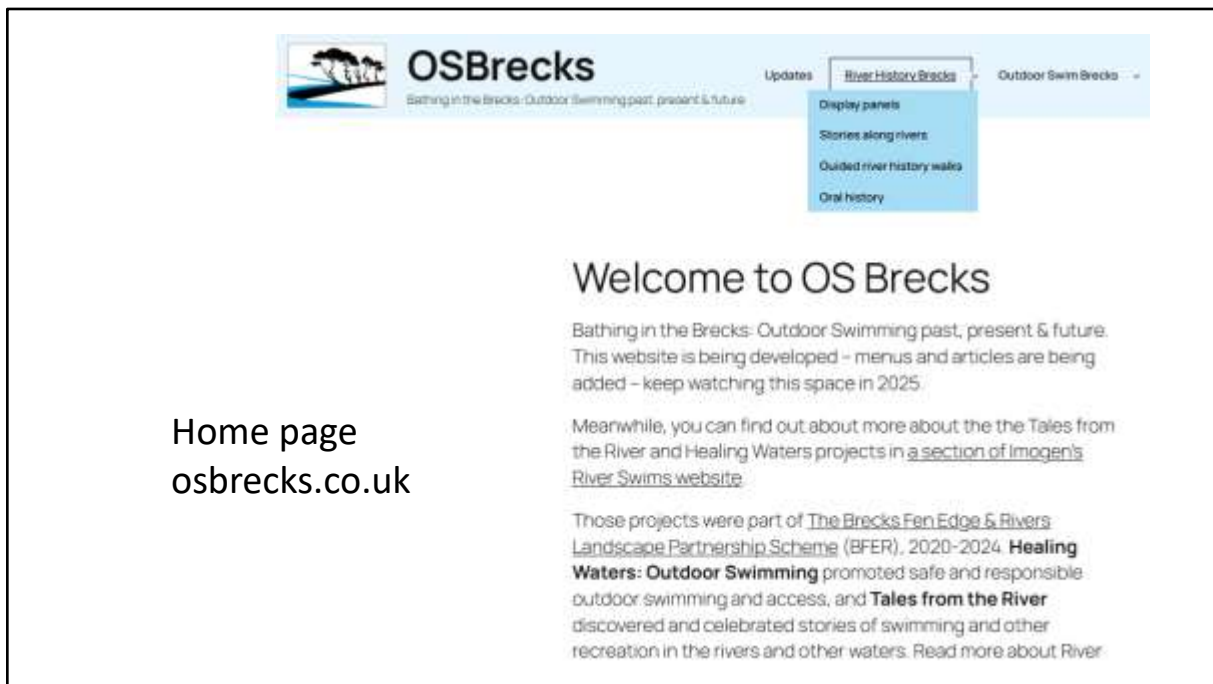
Conclusion – have we met the aims?

- We have created a history of swimming and other recreation about the rivers and waters of the Brecks and Fen Edge



35 display panels with Info Point at Temple Bridge, and at Mildenhall

- and will have made this available for people to enjoy and learn from into the future



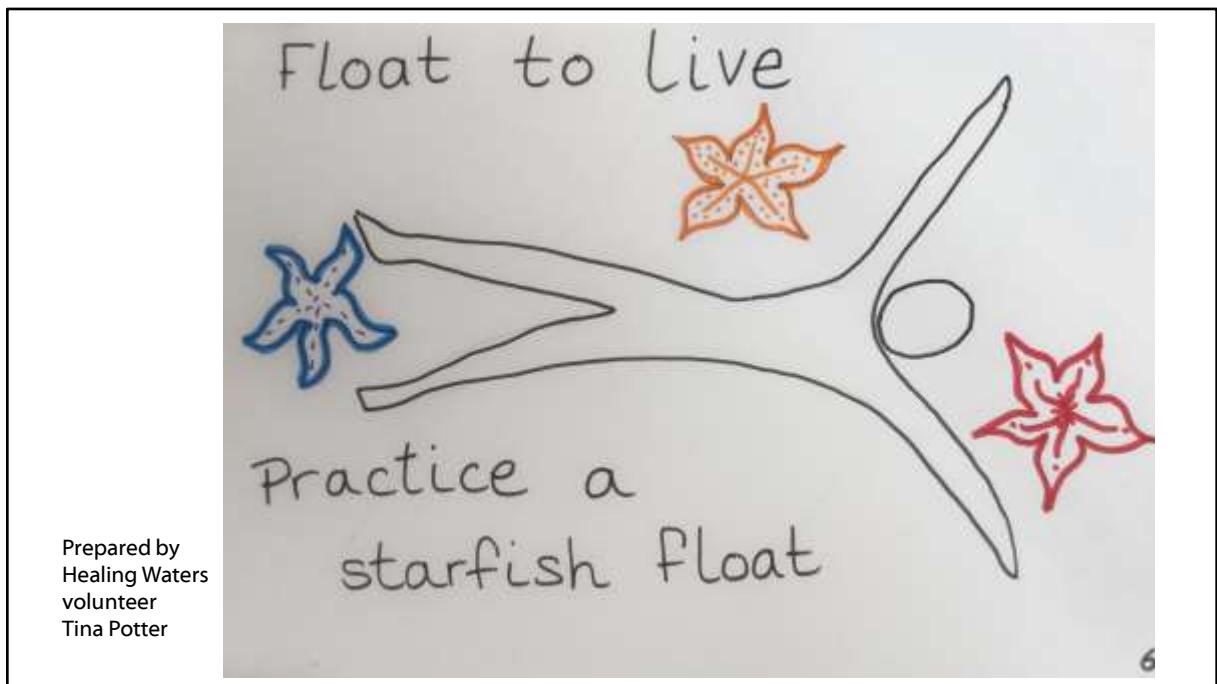
Home page
osbrecks.co.uk

36 website homepage screenshot OSBrecks.co.uk



37 reception year children listening to a story told by Lynn Whitehead, Thompson School

- We've involved lots of people of all ages in the process of gathering, sharing, presenting and enjoying this material throughout the project



38 float to live starfish float prompt card, used in interactive briefing devised by Tina Potter

- We've given a large number of people skills and knowledge – and confidence – to enjoy outdoor swimming safely



39 practising the starfish float on the sand before getting in the water, Lynford intro session for families

- We've mapped and discussed swim places and issues with landowners, and hopefully increased understanding – even if we have not formally recognised more swim places



40 swimmers standing in the water at intro session at Lynford

- We've celebrated swimming and other watery recreation across the generations
- encouraged people to immerse in the water and the landscape
- to take responsibility for themselves – and to care about the rivers and other waters
- making a greater connection between people and the history and landscape of the Brecks.