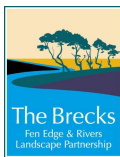


Tales from the River

Imogen Radford

One of 24 projects about the
Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers
supported by National Lottery Heritage Fund



Diving off Burwell cock up bridge

First slide

I will show images and talk

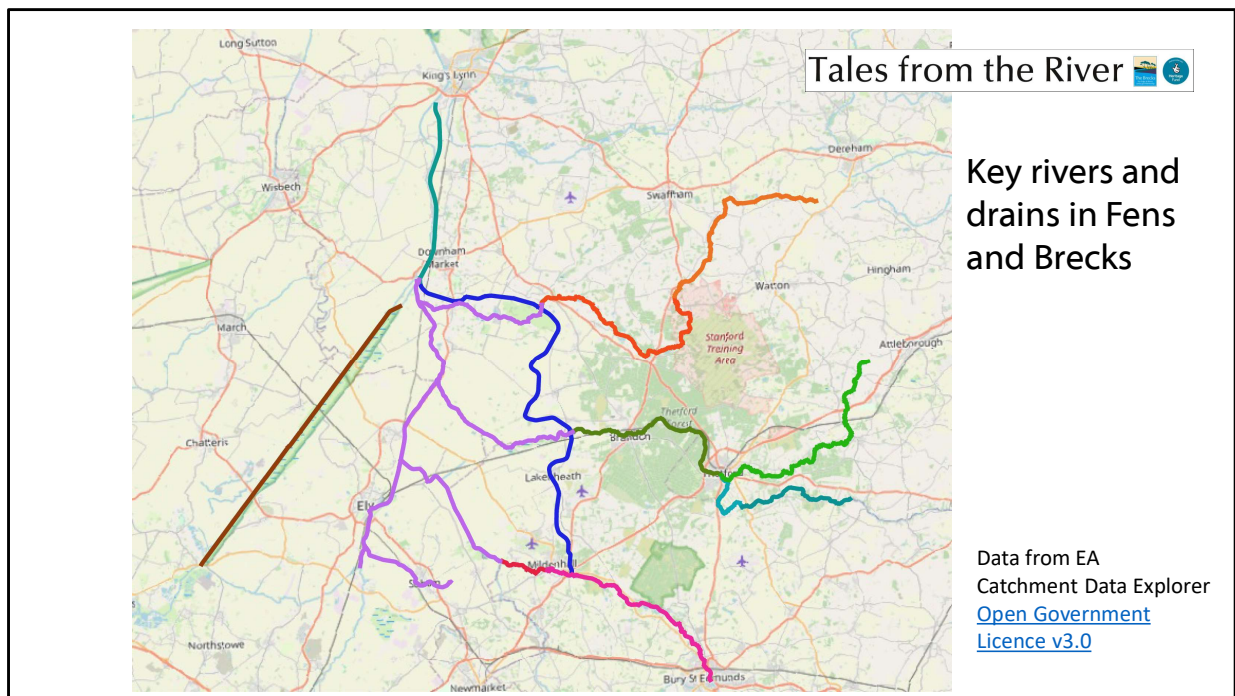
about the project – what we've been gathering and what it tells us
about the types of places for recreation and for trade, industry and travel
then we will take a trip along each of the three main rivers and other waterways to
illustrate how people used rivers for fun and work

Image of boys/men diving off a fen bridge

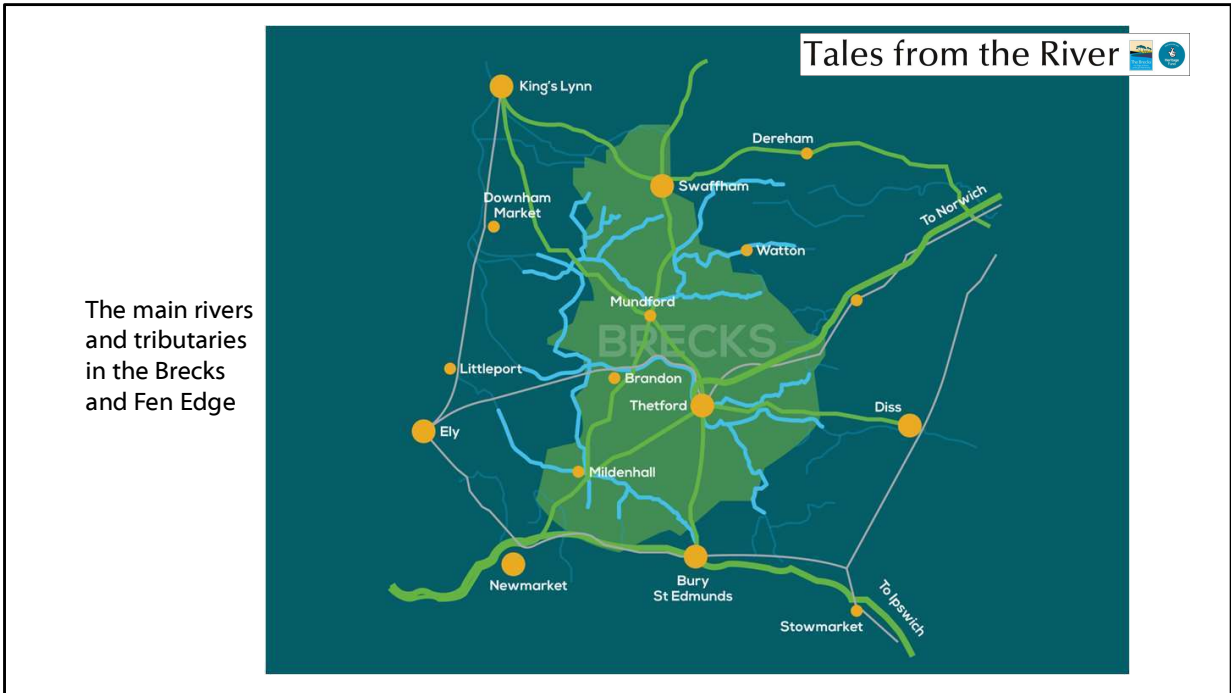
Wooden 'cock up' bridges allowed space underneath for barges to travel.

A cock horse would be used for towing or 'haling' boats on the Lodes, or hitched in front of
a shaft horse to give an extra pull along the fen droves.

As in the nursery rhyme, 'Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross'



3
 Map of the key drains and rivers for the fen edge and Brecks, showing their positions
 Will come back to this one later when I talk about the Cut Off Channel



- 4
- this map shows the rivers snaking across the Brecks
 - in a landscape that is forest, heath and farmland – the rivers matter especially
 - long used for transport and moving heavy things – stones to Thetford Priory, later flints, coal, corn, sugar beet
 - often the reason why towns or villages grew up where they are
 - now more for recreation and appreciation of wildlife

Places for
river
recreation:
fords,
bridges,
ferries,
staunches,
mills,
quarries...



Middle Staunch (?) From the collection of the late Alan H. Faulkner

8

main focus of project –stories and photos of recreation – also of trade and industry

This image shows some fishermen at Middle Staunch

How rivers used for trade and industry more fully covered by the Industrious Rivers project,
extensive study is available to download from the Breckland Society website

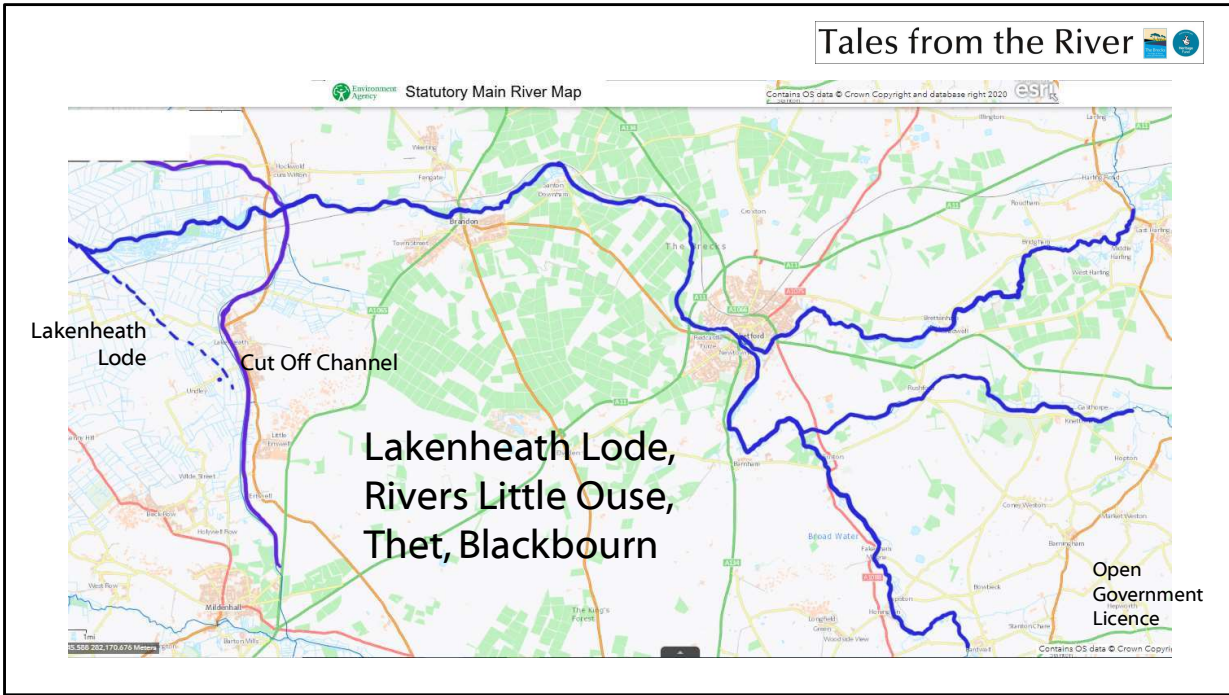
The places that people went

for travel – ferries, bridges, fords

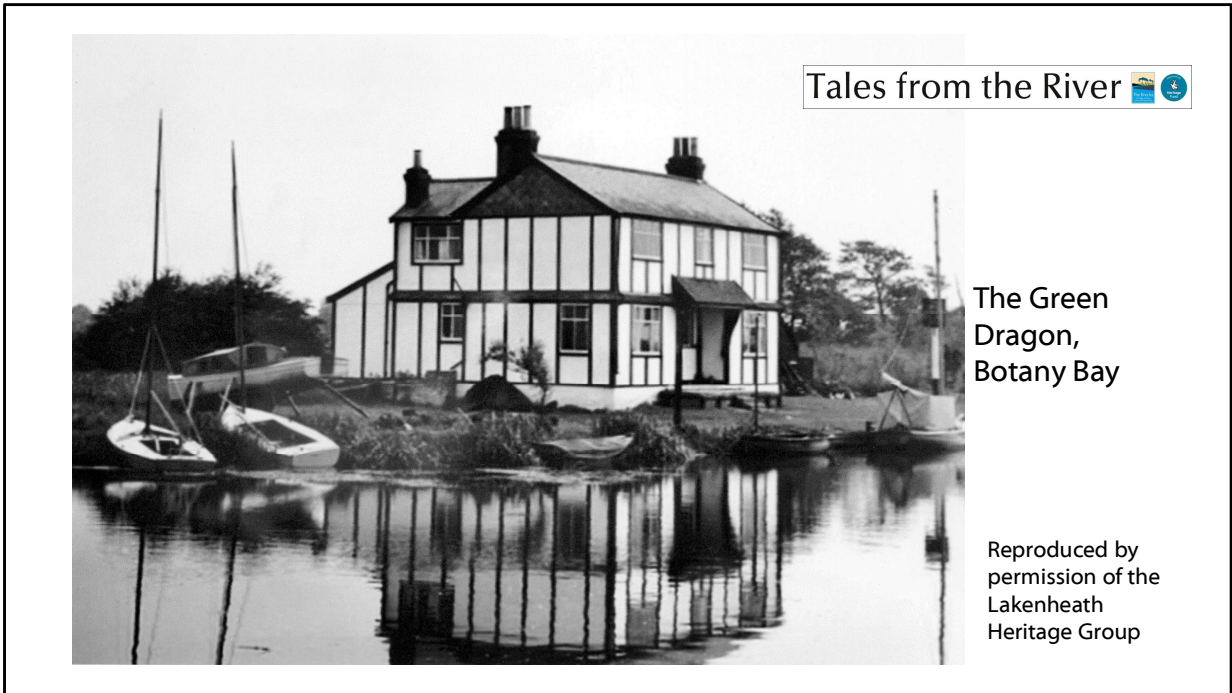
navigation – staunches, locks

industry such as mills, quarries

– also places that they went and still go for leisure activities



32
Cut Off Channel, Lakenheath Lode, Little Ouse and Thet – Map



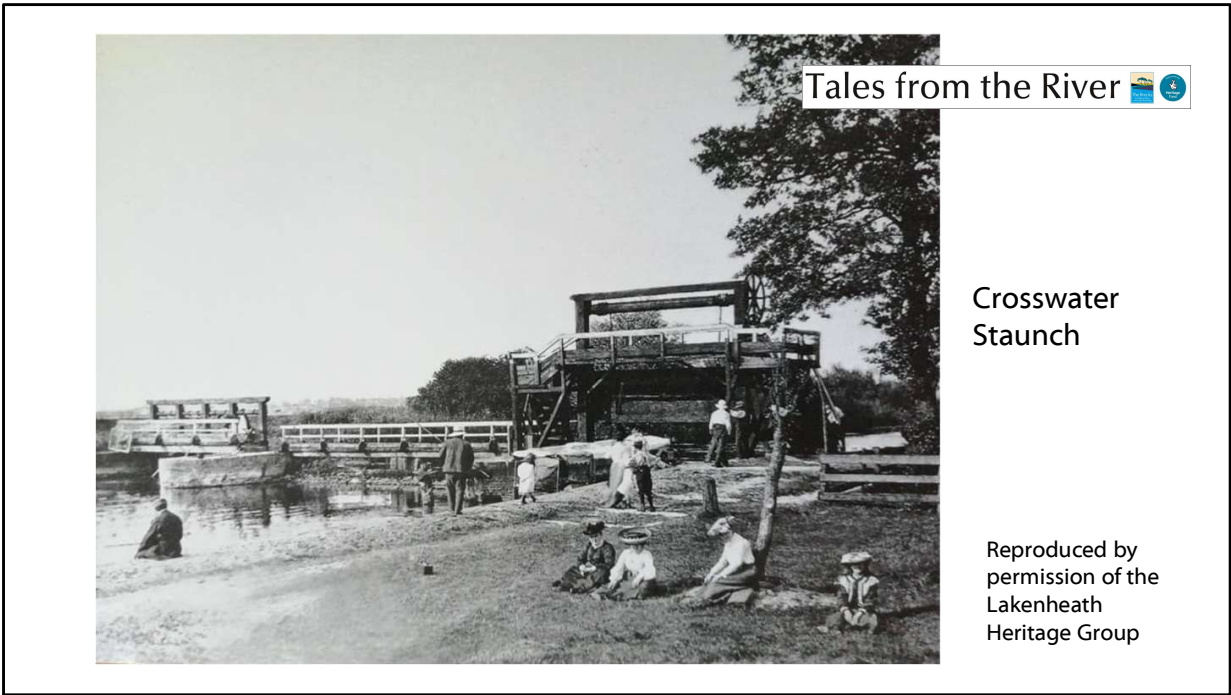
37

Green Dragon

The Lakenheath Lode joins the Little Ouse at Botany Bay – so named as it was very remote and inaccessible – at the far end of what today is the RSPB Lakenheath Fen.

Until the 50s or 60s there was a pub here, the Green Dragon, apparently “And you could always get a pint there, it didn't close”, used by boatmen, rail maintenance workers and families would come from Lakenheath on nice days for picnics.

After the footbridge on the staunch went there was a chain ferry, which you pulled across the river, to get to farms on the other side or to cut short your journey.



38
Crosswater staunch, in place and usable till 1917
a popular place to visit and cross the river

Tales from the River 



Swim and boat at the New Bridge, 1930s

Supplied by Patrick Baldwin



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

39

going upstream on the Little Ouse, under Wilton Bridge, past Hockwold Lode, to the new railway bridge, a popular place for swimming and fishing

image: Swimming at the New Bridge, 1930s

Earlier boating with members of the same family about 1900



Swimming at The Leeches Meadow,
about 1957

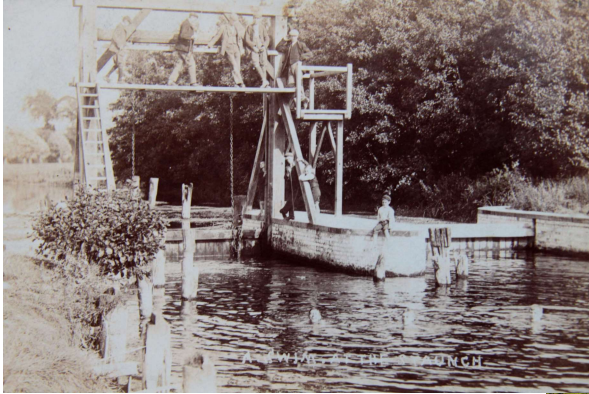
Supplied by Patrick Baldwin

Brandon Staunch, 1978
Supplied by John Basham



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Several swim spots along the river,
(depending on whether you lived in Town Street or Brandon Ferry)
Osier Holt (later called Ouja Halt or The Luger), near the earlier river crossing
The Leeches, Brandon Staunch, 1978



Staunches

'A Swim at the Staunch', 1900s (Middle Staunch?)
From Brandon and Local History Society

Brandon Staunch, 1978
Supplied by John Basham



41

'Staunches' installed in the 18th century – at the height of navigation on the rivers - allowed a gate to be winched to control the water levels so lighters could pass through upstream or downstream. They varied in design, some had enormous wheels – four times the size of the largest cartwheel – that a man would turn by walking on them like a hamster wheel in a cage!

"In the river below each staunch is a deep pool or 'staunch hole', usually a favourite place for fishing and bathing." - W.G. Clarke *In Breckland Wilds* (1925)

'A Swim at the Staunch', 1900s (location unknown – Middle?)

Brandon Staunch, 1978 – a favourite place for climbing and jumping



Brandon Bridge with lighters, late 1890s

From the collection of the late Alan H. Faulkner

Tales from the River 



Mary Chapman and Eleanor Ridsdale,
1943 at Brandon Bridge,
with temporary bridge

Supplied by Patrick Baldwin

42

Brandon Bridge with lighters, late 1890s

Originally called Brandon Ferry, the town grew up at a crossing place for travellers including pilgrims to Walsingham. Maltings were an important riverside industry but were demolished to build the current bridge in 1954.

Two friends with their new dinghy, 1943 at Brandon Bridge, looking upstream from below the bridge, you can see the temporary Bailey bridge put in for the tanks to cross, as the old bridge was too narrow, also the maltings buildings



Boating, upstream
of Brandon Bridge,
1900s

From the collection of
the late Alan H. Faulkner

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a scene with several sorts of boats, above Brandon Bridge, view of old maltings buildings



Mary Baldwin (nee Chapman)
on Santon Downham Staunch, 1947

Supplied by Patrick Baldwin

Fisons Works at Two Mile Bottom, early 20th century



© Norfolk Museums Service (Ancient House)

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Santon Downham Staunch, 1947 – then as now popular place for picnics and swimming

Fisons at Two Mile Bottom, early 20th century

the factory kept navigation going until 1929 – it had stopped going as far as Thetford by the early 1920s

Two Mile Bottom common was a very popular destination a short cycle ride or drive from Thetford, for swimming, camping. There was a spring so you didn't need to take a bottle of water with you. Some would go to Turfpool staunch just upstream which was more fun because the current was stronger because of the structure.



Town Bridge from
the Haling Path,
with lighters,
about 1910


© Norfolk Museums Service
(Ancient House)

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Thetford

“There was a navigable river in the town, which above the bridge branched into many brooks and streams. This made us all expert boatmen, swimmers, and fishers.” Roger North, 17th-century attorney general, on his time at Thetford Grammar School

Town Bridge from the Haling Path, with lighters, about 1910

Tales from the River 

Thanks

To you for listening

To our oral history interviewees

and all who told us their stories

and let us use their photos

and to experts on navigation etc.

More info:

osbrecks.co.uk

brecks.org

brecksoc.org.uk

Looking upstream to Brandon Bridge, 1950s

Supplied by George Palik



CONCLUSION

The Tales from the River, along with the Industrious Rivers project, researched and collected memories of fun swimming, fishing, boating in the rivers, and of sites of industries, trade and navigation.

What we gathered paints a vibrant picture of how important these rivers were in people's lives – still are but in a different way.

image – 1954 new Brandon Bridge, one of the Maltings buildings (appears as a whole page image in an article in forthcoming Journal of Breckland Studies 5 (Breckland Society website)

Thanks:

To you for listening: To our oral history interviewees and

all who told us their stories and lent us their photos

and to experts on navigation and other aspects of the rivers

More information:

on BFER <https://brecks.org/>

and legacy website following on from the projects osbrecks.co.uk

and see also Breckland Society website.