

- Speaker 1 This is Anna Rustad conducting an interview for the Hello Campus Project at the BFI on Monday 12th of June 20, 23. What is your name?
- Speaker 2 My name is Peter Daniel.
- Speaker 1 Please tell us about the roots of the British.
- Speaker 2 So the roots, if you think of the or even about the idea of a camp. It's military. So normally camps with soldiers. What starts to change is when you thinking about civilians using camps. One of those earlier parts, if you look at the South African war, sometimes known as the Boer War, the idea of the concentration camp where you actually have to deal with lots of civilians and you've got to feed them and deal with them.
- Speaker 2 So that's really the turn of the 19th century, beginning of the 20th century. If you look at other elements of kind of the build tools, holiday camps, you can look at things like the scout movement in the first few years of the 20th century. So there's that. There's also other things to do with the beginnings of the Territorial Army.
- Speaker 2 So where young men who would get two weeks holiday a year to do the kind of military training would go down to a coastal area for a camp. So those kind of elements were always there. But then it's groups of people that particularly groups amongst nonconformists, temperance movements, who saw their kind of a task in life to improve the working classes.
- Speaker 2 So one of the first them is a man called Cunningham, who set up a camp on the Isle of Wight. So these were the things where they were for men only. And it was the concepts of getting down to out of the kind of smoky city the sort of industrial areas, and getting a healthy place where to some extent they could kind of put across their ideas of how the country should be run.
- Speaker 2 So after Cunningham camps, you've got Fletcher Dodd, who Caister had camps, which once again was to get people away from the cities into the countryside, but was also to try and enthuse them about socialist ideas. So there's a lot of that at the beginning of before we get onto the heyday of the holiday camps between the two wars, when it when they actually start off.
- Speaker 1 Could you tell us a little bit how that relates the unions and so on?
- Speaker 2 Trade unions obviously set up for the interest of the workers. So to begin with, they totally focused on increasing wages. But once that had some success and so particularly before the First World War Union membership was increasing. They were increasingly able to improve wage bargaining. They were looking at how can we improve the lot of the working classes?
- Speaker 2 Well, it had to be holidays, because in that period before the Second World War, really right the way up to 1936 when the holiday pay comes in. No one has paid holiday. A big change in 1871. You get the bank holiday act. So people have kind of opportunities to get short little holidays. But the unions became involved in thinking, well, if we're campaigning to have paid holiday, the workers need somewhere to go that they can actually afford.
- Speaker 2 So unions like now go organized Croyde Bay in Devon, a centre where their members could actually get a holiday that they could afford.

- Speaker 1 And could you tell us things about the 1938 holiday which pay out?
- Speaker 2 So prior to 1938, there was no paid holiday. So if there was any kind of holiday, it would be probably in some middle class professions. Most working class people didn't have that. So that was a huge thing that by statute through parliament, the people could actually have that. That had the 1871 bank holiday act so that the show holidays.
- Speaker 2 But this allowed them a week off with pay which allowed them to to go away for the first time. So really, that was a huge part in developing the kind of the development of the holiday camps and almost coincided with the rise of probably one of the biggest figure figures in that. Billy Butlin.
- Speaker 1 How did the holiday habits change from the 1920s to the 1960s?
- Speaker 2 So if you look at the period immediately after the first World War, there was still that kind of idea of trying to improve the working classes. So a lot of the camps were still under canvas and some of them had little wooden huts, but they're fairly primitive and there was a very strong kind of communal ethos of doing things together.
- Speaker 2 And even organizing the holidays themselves. There was also the ideas of kind of political instruction. So you would have socialist holiday camps like Fletcher Dodd had at Caister. And then as you got towards that period where you had the Paid Holidays Act in 1938 and Billy Butland comes along you developing holidays, the focus more on entertainment and moving away from that kind of instructional ideas of the earlier days beforehand.
- Speaker 1 Could you tell us about boarding houses and how popular those days?
- Speaker 2 So boarding house is quite interesting. One of the they say we believe that one of the things that inspired integrate holiday camps is that he went to a boarding house, I think it was in Barry Island and it was such an appalling experience. I know this from personal experience. My dad used to go to boarding houses just after the Second World War, and obviously you had your breakfast and then they threw you out until lunchtime and then you could come back for your dinner.
- Speaker 2 But you had to kind of you had no base to go to. So for a family, it was an appalling thing because it rained, as it often does in the UK. How did you entertain your kids? So bottling saw that experience and saw these miserable families tramps in around Barry Island and thought, there's an opportunity here to do something to create something better for ordinary people, better than the landlady and the landlord became kind of a running joke, like they're strict rules and that they're almost kind of like little mini Hitlers ruling by a lot of iron.
- Speaker 2 People on holiday don't want that. They probably had that from work. They wanted a better experience.
- Speaker 1 Thank you. And could you talk about hop picking here?
- Speaker 2 So a lot of the experiences and the ideas that came around in those early holiday camps had roots much further back into the 19th century. Hop Picking was something that, particularly in South London, was something that many generations went through because there wasn't enough people in the countryside to bring in the harvest so they

could bring these temporary workers that were living in London that could have literally a paid holiday.

Speaker 2 They could go to Ken for a week, pick the hops, be paid for doing so, and find accommodation and have that break that they wouldn't have otherwise. It's a whole generations went hop picking. But I think the thing that runs through it is that the communal idea I know my own from my own family came from Fulham and they loved those holidays.

Speaker 2 My mum told me about memories of, you know, sitting around campfires, singing songs, doing games together. You can see through that the development of Butlins and Ponteland, Pontins, those same kinds of ideas, even other things that you get. I mean, my family were just amongst Barrow boys, so, you know, they always had their little donkey and they'd had their donkey derbies, those kinds of ideas, their little races.

Speaker 2 Well, that's something that Billy Butlin's took into the holiday camps. So they kind of borrowed ideas from those things. So they no, nothing was completely new. I probably said people like Billy Barton, Fred Ponting and Magpies, they stole good ideas that were already there.

Speaker 1 And what led to the changes with Hop picking became becoming less so.

Speaker 2 And if you look at hop picking over that period of time when it was, you needed lots of workers because to actually not damage the hops, it was better to handpick them. But then with the improvements in machinery and mechanization, they were able to do that and they no longer needed all these people. So that really starts kicking in just after the second war.

Speaker 2 So really by the mid 1950s, days of hop picking were over.

Speaker 1 Thank you. Who were the main people who visited the camps?

Speaker 2 So it's quite it's not about looking at who visited the camps to begin with. So in the very early days of the Cunningham camp and Fletcher Dodd camps, they're actually targeted. So Cunningham was actually targeted working class boys from Liverpool to begin with at the Isle of Man, the case, the camps and the socialist camps, also the working class.

Speaker 2 But when you get into the big the camps that developed with Billy Butlin from when he begins in 36 and Warners, they're actually looking at the middle classes. So in that period before the Second World War, holiday comes off in the middle classes after the Second World War, things gradually change. So by the time you get to the year into the 1950s, certainly by the time you get to 1960s, it's a working class experience.

Speaker 1 In what ways did holiday camps represent continuity in the British cultural experience?

Speaker 2 I think when you look at holiday camps and I think as I said before, that people like Billy Butlin, Fred Ponting were magpies, they stole ideas from the past. So if you look at even on the entertainment sides, you've got the blue codes, but really the blue codes represent variety acts that was so popular in the musical, those kinds of things that had been so popular in the 19th century when working people could escape from often grim lives by going to somewhere that was much nicer than their already ordinary experience, where they were somewhere beautiful, but they could enjoy the communal activities, sing songs, pint of beer.

Speaker 2 It was it was those things that you realized that that those things were would be certainly advantageous for the development of holiday camps if you could transplant that into a setting where people could experience that every night over the course of a week's holiday.

Speaker 1 In what ways did the camps represent a change to British culture?

Speaker 2 So I think if you look at the very beginnings of the holiday camps in the early 1900s, when you've got Cunningham's camp and Fletcher Dodd and they are targeting small groups of young, often young people, young men. And it was at that time there was no because there's no paid holiday, there's no opportunity for ordinary families to have an annual week down by the seaside that paid holiday acts of 1938 changes things, and it brings in the big operators like Billy Butlin that can actually provide that.

Speaker 2 And it's a big cultural change that ordinary people had the opportunity for a week's holiday in a setting down by the sea. So at the beginning of the 20th century that doesn't exist. And so those holiday camps provided affordable holidays for ordinary people. And that's a big cultural change that the seaside holiday, it's only really been a day trip before something on bank holidays.

Speaker 2 Now it became something that everyone could aspire to a whole week away. And also the the communal activities that took place there reflected the society that people were living in. It's the period of kind of the welfare state. Everything was done communal, communally, and holiday camps reflected society.

Speaker 1 Tell us a little about the heyday of holiday camps.

Speaker 2 Right. So the big holiday camps beginning just before the Second World War. So they coincide with that holiday with pay acts in 1938. So we have Warner's, I think from 1934. Bellybutton begins in 36 and Fred Pont in 1946. So they kind of show on either side of the Second World War. So the heyday really comes in when income starts to improve.

Speaker 2 You can look at some things like rationing ends in 1954. So people and MacMillan's saying, you've never had it so good. So basically people have got a bit more income and they looking they're being cooped up during the Second World War have not had the chance to go on holidays. And so the heyday, you can see it probably from the mid 1950s through to the end of the 1960s, because by the time you get to the end of the sixties and into the seventies, people are starting looking at holidays abroad, The cheap package holidays in Spain.

Speaker 1 What factors led to the decline of the holiday camp?

Speaker 2 So there are a variety of factors that looked towards the demise of the holiday camp as an idea and the holiday Can was born out of a different Britain. The communal Britain where people did things together. And you can look at when the time when they really started to close holiday camps in the 1980s and you get into the eighties there's the famous quote from Mrs. Thatcher There's no such thing as society.

Speaker 2 The welfare state, which has risen after the Second World War with the Labour government in that time, was all about trying to pay for things. They had nationalized industries, doing things, community that fitted with the whole ethos of kind of holiday

camps and there's kind of a mental switch when we get to the 1980s where the holiday camp is a little bit passé.

Speaker 2 It's not quiet. It's almost something that lower class people do. People are much more aspirational, so they're looking for that holiday abroad. So the holidays abroad we start to pick up from the late 1960s and through the 1970s and become a certainly more common thing. The holiday can idea looks kind of second best. There's also the idea, because of the communal nature.

Speaker 2 And if you look at something like Billy Butlin, there was a certain kind of regimentation about holiday camps, the kind of loudspeakers and even the idea of a camp, if you think of the word camp, you can think of some pretty bad ideas of concentration camps, and there's a kind of a military side of it, and people wanted a little bit more individualism, freedom and battling became rather than being like a brand.

Speaker 2 That was a real positive. The whole concept of the idea of Butlin's and Pontins was become a toxic brand. What's so interesting now is that basically they buried those brands, so they tried to rebrand. You'd get South Coast World or Fun Coast. Well, they come up with anything but use the word camp or mentioned the word Butlins or Pontins.

Speaker 2 But more recently, they're actually there's a nostalgia back for that communal ethos of the holiday camps, and they rebranded them again. So we've kind of gone back on ourself a little bit now. They've returned to a little bit more popularity.

Speaker 1 Of the holidays now that can trace their cultural history to the holiday camp.

Speaker 2 Yeah, So I think if you look at Centre Parcs still got those activities where you are trying to entertain the kids and keep them busy on a site that's containing them. You don't have to leave Centre Parcs don't have to go and visit the nearby town on the beach. You can do everything on a site and you're catered for.

Speaker 2 But it's different in that. Whereas the holiday camps always tried to pitch themselves to what an ordinary working man could pay within a week, Centre Parcs are in some respects turning to what was before the Second World War when Billy Barton's pitching towards the middle classes. This is pitch in towards the middle class because an ordinary working class family cannot afford a week at Centre Parcs.

Speaker 2 I mean, it's much, much more expensive.

Speaker 1 Were holiday camps a British phenomenon or are there other similar examples around the world.

Speaker 2 So it's very kind of tempting to think it's a peculiarly British experience. And certainly because of that communal idea, it's not something that really took off in the United States. So if you look in America in the 1950s, Billy Butlin thought he could take Butlin's and transport it into the States. But their whole mentality is about the individual.

Speaker 2 It's not about doing things communally, but the communal idea was very attractive to other people in the 20th century. So let's begin with probably the most notorious. It's the Nazis. So you have the Hitler Youth and they have camps where they went way over and indoctrinated. But even for the why, the people that were living in Germany

through the Nazi period, you had the strength through Jewish camps, Kraftwerk, Freud, that where people had a seaside holiday and break.

Speaker 2 And it's not just the Nazis because if you look at if I did that wanted to try and encourage communal ideas and even start to move on towards kind of a military ethos under communism, Stalin ran camps and the idea these camps were a healthy break away from the city. And so interesting looking at some of the writing about that that time and they wanted to encourage healthy Soviet citizens because they said your own health, you don't own it, the state owns it, your productivity belongs to the USSR.

Speaker 2 So you need to have a week to recover. And I think it's really funny when you make a comparison between those camps and the belly button camps in Skegness and now our holiday is all about doing this communally, but drinking a shed load of beer, eaten loads of chips and horrible food, everything that's not for your health. The Soviet and the Nazi in their time improved.

Speaker 2 Create the master race that would spread communism and the Nazi ideology across Europe that that's where it's massively different. But those ideas, you can find them in Europe and even today with them even going to kind of North Korea, they have organized holidays and camps and those things are kind of still there today, but they've got a little bit of that kind of Fletcher Dodds kind of world to indoctrinate people or teach them about socialism or teach them about political ideas.

Speaker 2 So you can still find them in other parts of the world.