



The Seaside

The Beaches

For local people, the beaches were their playground.

In these two extracts Margaret Ward recalls a tidal wave hitting Rottingdean beach, and laments the arrival of the concrete groynes which eventually took away the sandy beaches of the 20s. Whilst Alan Hayes reports back from the 1950s that playing on the beaches was still very much an obsession.

The tidal wave

On summer days we spent a good deal of our time on the beach, swimming, prawning and winkling. Mother used to meet us from school and we would have a picnic tea down there. There was once a tidal wave. The tide was very low at the time, and as the sky grew darker, forming a straight line above, the wave came right up to the foot of the cliff and up the slipway to the main road. Everyone ran and left their possessions on the beach. Thankfully, no-one was drowned. It was an eerie sight. I must have been about thirteen years of age at the time and was very apprehensive for a long while after.

Margaret Ward - One camp chair in the living room

When the sand went

In times gone by Rottingdean had a lovely sandy beach until in the 1930s when the undercliff walk was built from Brighton to Saltdean and the huge concrete groynes took the place of the lovely old wooden groynes. Since then nearly all our sand has disappeared.

Margaret Ward - Memories of Rottingdean

Growing up in the 1950s - It was called beach fever!

I was born in Ship Street and my playground was the beach and I used to be down there after school and before school. And at one time I kept a note of which boats were on the beach, which motorboats, and that was when I was just in senior school, so that would have been eleven, so my interest was there.

I used to go angling on the groyne, and on the Pier, when I was a little kid. And I was always on the beach, you know, there was a lot going on in the fifties, then, pleasure-boating and, well a certain amount of fishing although most of it was done from the harbours then. And it was my playground, you could cross the road then when you were ten, anyway, if not before. It was basically interest and something to do. There's an old saying, it was called 'beach fever'. Several lads were affected by it. Your holiday you spent on the beach, every evening you were down on the beach.

Alan Hayes - Catching Stories

20th Century Sparks!

The Seaside

The Beaches - continued



wooden groynes of Brighton beach at low tide
www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk



Baby whale ashore near Palace Pier, 1935
Brighton & Hove in Pictures