

# *Heysham Head*

## **Childhood Memories by Kath Gregson**

My thoughts on Heysham Head are it was good clean fun, a family place of enjoyment. You felt safe and free there, roaming about the woodland and also an access to the beach was provided with a man at the door who stamped your hand so you could get back in. The letters HH were stamped on the top of your hand in purple ink.

Travelling from the beach was quite a steep hill. Half way up was the Marionette Show. The kids loved it. My brother and I used to sit there and watch very intently. In fact all the kids sat very quietly watching the performance. They had the same routine every day. We knew it off by heart. Before the performance they sold programmes, and the lady with the blonde hair and glasses went round between the deck chairs. We used to mock this person as she had a rather squeaky voice. She would call out Yorkshire Bob in Fairyland at the top of her voice, and of course this amused the kids a lot.

On the programmes was a picture of Yorkshire Bob. He was the main theme for the show. There were two puppeteers, the husband and wife. She was the lady who

sold the programmes. They had many puppets, which were all very different. A few I can recall were 'Pinky and Perky', Yorkshire Bob, a disjuncting skeleton, and Punch and Judy.



**Pinky and Perky**

Travelling along about the same level was the children's playground. There was the big roundabout. We spun it round very fast and then jumped on. It must hold about twenty children, all with happy smiling faces. Nearby was the seesaw, only supposed to be two at a time, but sometimes we had

four on the ride. Next came the old fashioned Swing Boats. There were four sets of six, and almost most of the time they were fully occupied. Sometimes we had to queue, as they always seemed to me the most popular ride. It was very exciting swinging very high. When you pulled on the rope you thought you were flying.

Further on still was the open-air dance floor facing the sea. At the former were four poles to which a big funnel loudspeaker was clipped, and the music was belted out for the dancers. It was very popular with the adults, and also the children dancing away.

Sometimes nearby they had sports events which I ran in, and also my brother. We

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practised and won many prizes. Usually it was about half-a-crown. That was a lot then to us kids. They had a Mother's race and my mother won many times. In fact we were a very competitive family, going up to Heysham Head almost every day in the school holidays.

Going further up the slope to the top of the hill was the cage of the Russian Brown Bear. We called him 'Teddy'. He walked up and down the cage. I liked him, but always thought he stank a lot.

My father was the village plumber and sometimes worked at Heysham Head on various jobs. Once he had to run a water pipe inside the bear's cage, and I don't think he was too pleased about working so near the bear. The pipe ran into a small tank so Teddy could take a bath. I have seen him rolling around in the water. Also there was a chain hanging from the top of the cage with an iron ball attached, and the bear played with it.

Going on from the bear through the arch doorway, turning left, were several mesh cages, one of which contained a peacock. He span his feathers out quite often, and I very much liked him. The colours of his plumage were beautiful alongside other birds and rabbits, doves, pigeons, budgies.

At the end of the cages which contained the birds was the slot machine arcade. You put in a penny, and the ball spun around. I was quite lucky and won several pennies.

This suited me a lot and I got very excited. I can remember two more machines which were very old, in fact pre-Victorian. I used to put in a penny and there were pictures of ladies. I thought these were very naughty ladies undressing and bathing. They would be a great collector's item today.

Further on down some steps were more penny machines. There must have been about a hundred or so. One of my favourite machines was the Band machine. It contained a big drum, cymbals, brushes, trumpet and organ. It played loudly and you would think someone was in the machine playing it, but of course there wasn't. It was fully automated. I stood there and watched the performance many times. It was one of my favourite things in Heysham Head.

Going into the next room there were long distorting mirrors. Some made you look fat, others made you skinny and tall. There were made on the curve to make the distortion. I laughed at this. A lot of the kids made funny faces and made it funnier than ever.

Next came the parrots on stands. There were about six and we called out Pretty Polly, and sometimes they talked back. They were beautiful colours and there were two white ones. Coming out of the further entrance were all the rabbits in the hutches. There must have been about a dozen or so. They were grey, brown, black and white. The children liked these. Also, they

sometimes let the rabbits out and they ran about wild and it was very difficult, I suppose, to get them back now I think about it, but didn't then.

Opposite the rabbit hutches was another dance floor. It was a replica of the other one. It was elevated about 14 ins so the rabbits ran underneath and had a great time. I can remember sliding on the dance floor and getting spalls in my legs from ankle to thigh, and my mother used a needle to get these out every day for many days. I did scream as it hurt very badly. I learnt my lesson on the dance floor. I didn't do it again.

Coming down from the dance floor travelling along the gravel path you reached the Old Manor House. They used the front entrance for a tea room. You could get jugs of tea to take out for about two shillings. I remember the old paved floor inside.

Many people from the Village worked in Heysham Head. It was a good source of employment.

From the Manor House down the wide steps with iron ornamental flower troughs either side was the Rose Garden where Concert parties were held. Bands from Yorkshire and Lancashire played on Sunday afternoons. My grandfather went every Sunday, with his best suit on and a carnation, which he grew himself, in his buttonhole. The Concert Party was on every day. There were singers. One I recall was Pat, a young girl about fourteen. She could sing and dance and play the accordion. She was very talented, and a good personality. She wore a lovely pink checked dress with a bow in her hair. Her father and mother were singers too and played the accordion and piano.



Part of the Rose Garden at Heysham Head

(from a 1933 holiday brochure)

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There was another act called 'Windy Lyle'. She was a ventriloquist dressed in an RAF uniform. The dummy was too. Also there was a clairvoyant who was blindfolded on stage, and her accomplice went around the audience getting articles off the public and she would identify them. I never did fathom how they did it, being a child at the time.

Uncle Bill Mann was another entertainer. He used to whistle to the tune 'If I were a Blackbird'. Also he ran the Children's Talent competition at 5 o'clock every evening, in which my brother and I sang at various times. The competition was very strong. I recall a boy with a voice like angel, like a choir-boy, singing 'Jerusalem' at the top of his voice. He also had a caliper on his leg. He won every time. He stole the show. It was so moving to hear such a voice clear as a bell singing such a song. The adults were in tears.

A bit more about the Rose garden itself. It was very beautiful. Roses everywhere. Apple trees were growing up the side of the walls with blossom in spring. There were alcoves with seating from which you could watch the concert. There were wooden chairs and benches throughout the area. There were several statues and sculptured

pots of original design, which all added to the Victorian atmosphere of the beautiful garden. What a gem.

Above the Rose garden up the hill was the circus. It had two performances a day. It was run by 'Gandys'; a family concern. On show was a black pony. It had five legs. I have never seen anything like it since.

In the show were clowns, horses, dogs, trapeze acts, tightrope walkers, magicians, and sometimes they had children to join in the fun.

Another family-run circus was the one by the 'Ross' family, and at this present time a member of the family still resides in the area.

Over the years, people still ask about Heysham Head. They have told their children, and now their grandchildren, about it, and they are more curious than ever about what went on in those days. The thing is you could afford to spend a whole day up there with children, and it would not cost the earth. I think it was about sixpence each, and once up there everything was free, other than food or drinks. It is a great pity we have lost such a venue as this. It was irreplaceable and a great loss to the town as a whole.