



ELY

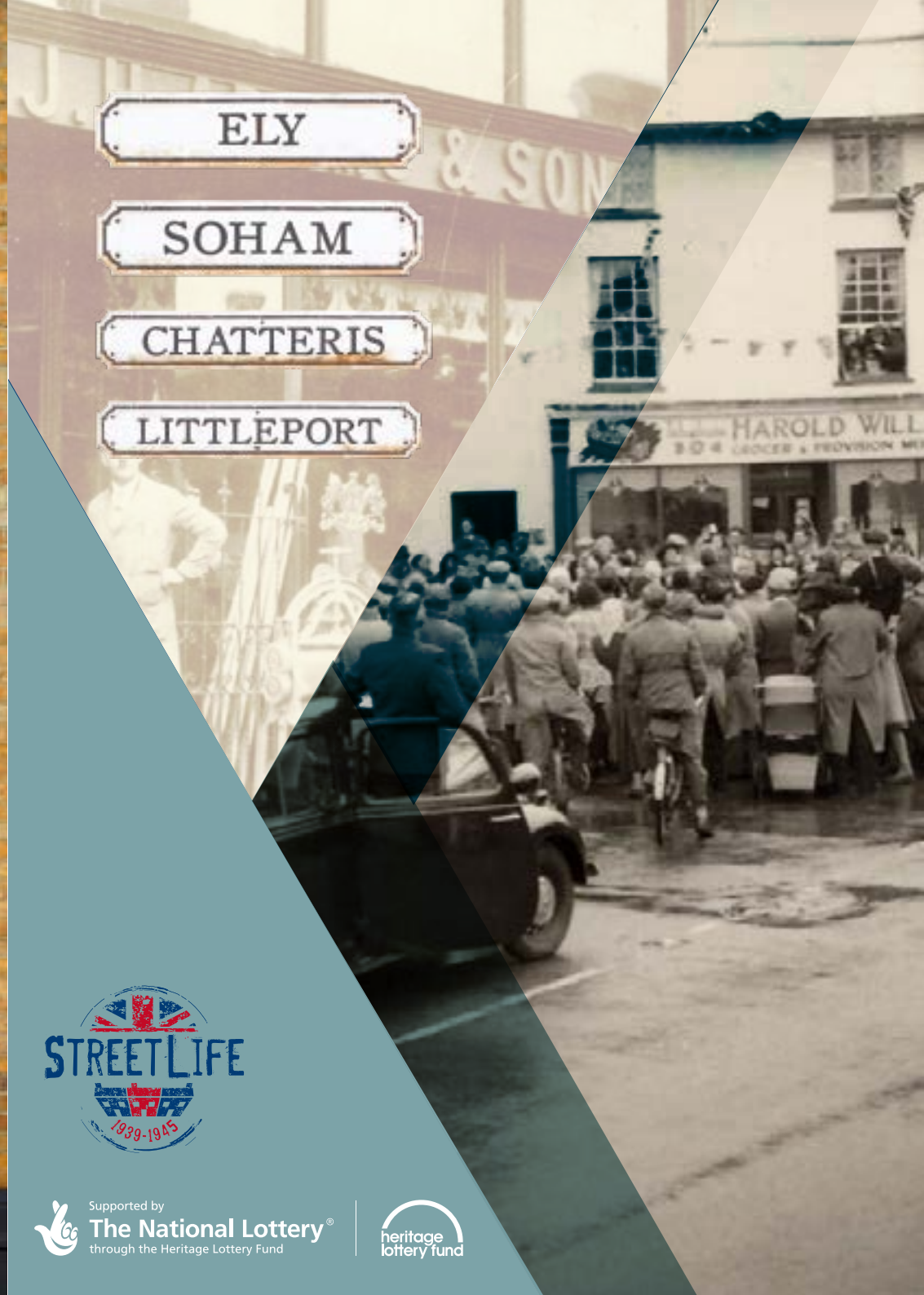
SOHAM

CHATTERIS

LITTLEPORT



Supported by
The National Lottery
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



Project Volunteers

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Project Team

Project Manager - Hetti Wood
Community Engagement
Coordinator - Emma Sharp
Historical Advisor - Mike Rouse

Thanks

Adams Heritage Centre Littleport
Camsight
Chatteris Parish Church
Cromwell Care Home, Huntingdon
Ely Museum
Fancy Pants Costume Hire
Field Theatre Group
Julia Davis at Ely Markets
Littleport Society
Mike Petty
Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership
Pamela Blakeman
Rackham CofE Primary School
Soham Village College
Soham Museum and Community Archive
St Andrew's Church, Soham
St Andrew's Primary School, Soham
The Brook Entertainment Centre and staff
The Shade Primary School
Tracey Harding at East Cambs District Council
Tricolor Heritage
Viva Arts and Community Group
4160 Tuesdays London, Perfumery

Interviewee List

Anthony Hull
Betty Staines
Betty Wheeler
Clive Benny
Don Buckingham
Doris Russell
Ella Thurmott
Freda Aspinall
Grace Meeks
Jack Watson
Joan Carpenter
John Childs
John Martin
John Warren
Ken Howard
Marjorie Miller
Mary Ames
Maudie Manning
Maureen Scott
Pamela Blakeman
Peggy Gibbon



Street Life 1939-1945, generously supported and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.



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Streetlife was a two-year community heritage project in 2015 to 2017 that involved many local people in many different ways. Volunteers carried out research, oral history interviews, photography, fieldwork and were involved in tour participation to record and present the history of selected towns in East Cambridgeshire. The project focused on the towns of Chatteris, Ely, Littleport and Soham during the Second World War to encourage people to look more closely at their built environment to discover great stories

and to connect with people from the past. We discovered how daily and family life continued as the community coped with rationing and the impact of the war as well as how local buildings have changed use over time or disappeared entirely. The project captured memories, stories and information that otherwise might have been lost as well as giving local people an understanding of their local heritage and what the community used to be like over 70 years ago.

Thank you



**THE SECOND WORLD WAR
IN THE AREA**



RAF Mepal, airfield.
Opened April 1943
as a satellite of RAF
Waterbeach, No.3
Group Bomber
Command.

West Fen Militia
POW Camp for
Italian and German
prisoners.

RAF Witchford,
Bomber Command
airfield, open
1943 - 46.



RAF Hospital, Ely

Barton Fields POW
Camp. Later used for
civilian housing.

Soham Mere - site
of dummy (decoy)
airfield

RAF Airfields	
Roads	
Rivers	
Railways	



CHATTERIS

During the Second World War in this area, most people lived in small gas-lit places. There were few cars and even fewer bright lights. Towns were grey brick, dull, quite isolated working settlements with most people employed within easy reach of their homes, often in agriculture or crafts and industries related to the rich soil of the Fens.

A town, population of around 5,000 during the war, very much the centre of a rich agricultural area. Many people were employed on the land

and Chatteris was famous for its carrots and providing services for the agricultural industry. The long main road ran through the town and many fine domestic buildings gave an indication of its wealth from farming. There was a railway station on the St Ives to March line. In 1939 the Cromwell School opened. The town became nationally known when Chatteris lad, Eric 'Boy' Boon, also known as 'The Fen Tiger' won the British Boxing Lightweight title in 1939, a title he held until 1943.

- 1) Barnes then and Barnes now
- 2) Aspinalls then and now
- 3) Cash Clothing then and Cash Clothing now
- 4) White Lion then and White Lion now
- 5) H.C.Reynolds Butcher then and The Bramley House now



George Hotel now

Mr Carter used to bring our milk in a big, I don't know what they were called...And he'd have 4 different containers - half a pint, pint, 2 pint, 3, and you'd watch him do that. Then the baker used to come round from Bonnets, right down London Road
(A Chatteris resident)



Cash and Clothing then



Cash and Clothing now



Aspinalls then



Aspinalls now

CHATTERIS

Well, we didn't get much to eat. You grew what you could and 'course it was an advantage if you'd got a bit of a garden. Food was severely rationed, because we couldn't get it across the sea you see, could you? That was the difficulty I think. You were likely to get food bombed if it was coming by boat. They hadn't any protection 'ad they?

Grace Meeks of Chatteris



Barnes then



There were 2 or 3 shoe shops in the high street

(A Chatteris resident)

"There was a big shop called Lovell and Wards which sold groceries and provisions, also clothing, also furniture."

Doris Russel

...there was no end of public houses, but a lot of them... it's like my Grandmother and Grandfather's - you'd go in, in the passage, the tap room was on the left hand side and the living room was on the right.

(A Chatteris resident)



Barnes now

"You can't buy much in Chatteris nowadays but in those days whatever you wanted in the way of men's or women's clothing or shoes, or groceries, provisions, whatever, you could buy in Chatteris."

(A Chatteris resident)

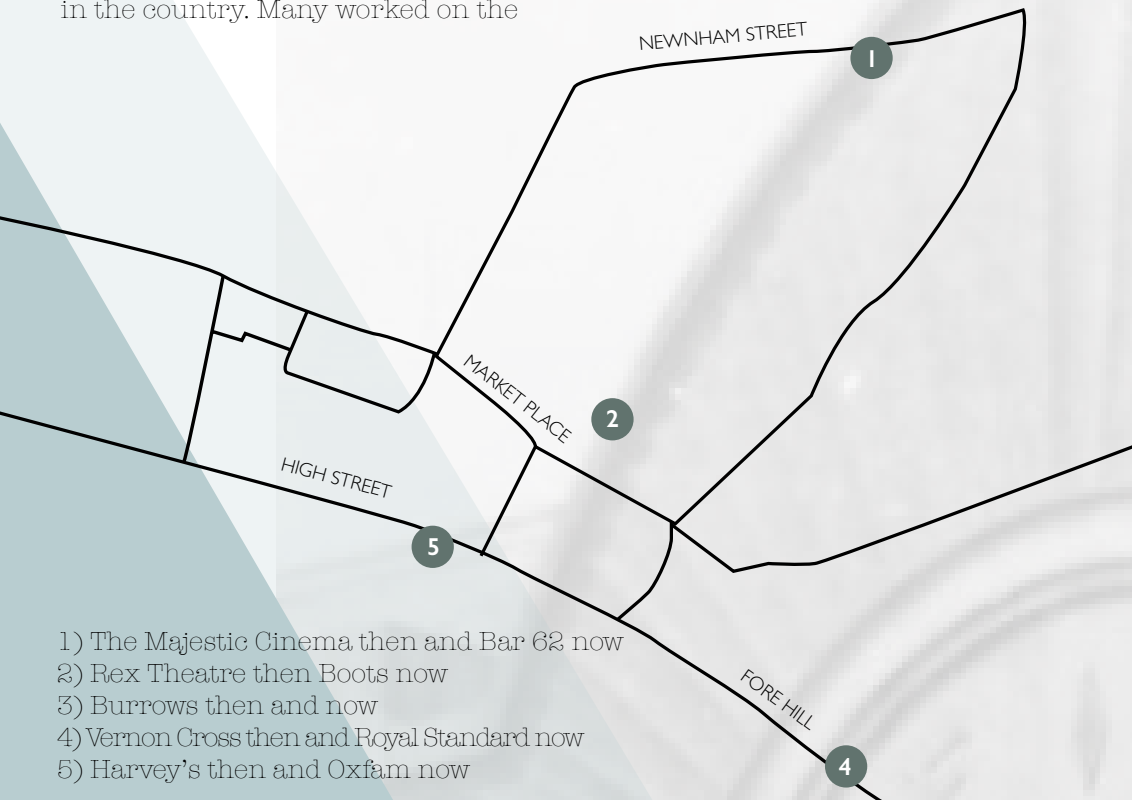


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Ely had a population of less than 9,000 and was, as now, dominated by the Cathedral. It was the epitome of a small market town with many shops and pubs, and was surrounded by some of the richest agricultural land in the country. Many worked on the

land and the largest employers were the brewery and the Beet Sugar Factory. Tuesday was early closing day and only the churches were busy on a Sunday. Thursday market day was the day it really came alive, when the Corn Exchange on the Market Place and the cattle market brought many visitors. There were three cinemas and the fair came to the town in May and October. There was a busy railway station, but the river was almost dead apart from its popularity with fishermen. On the northern edge of the town a new RAF Hospital was being built.



- 1) The Majestic Cinema then and Bar 62 now
- 2) Rex Theatre then Boots now
- 3) Burrows then and now
- 4) Vernon Cross then and Royal Standard now
- 5) Harvey's then and Oxfam now

"We came up into town to shop but things were (also) delivered by the Co-op... there was a Co-op shop on the corner of Victoria Street and Broad Street...that is where we got most of our groceries. Mother went shopping once a week... and it was delivered by a boy on a bicycle."

Ella Thurmott

"I used to go to The Rex. The Public Rooms had some quite interesting films sometimes, but The Rex was the main one"

Marjorie Miller



Rex Theatre then



"And one thing I do remember, at Ely High School, digging up the playground to make an air raid shelter just in 1938 I suppose."

John Martin



Burrows now



Burrows then

ELY

"No such luxury as a bathroom in those days. We used to go and bath at The Bell Hotel. You paid a shilling and you could go and use a bathroom and have a bath."

Betty Staines



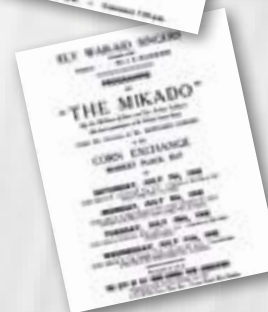
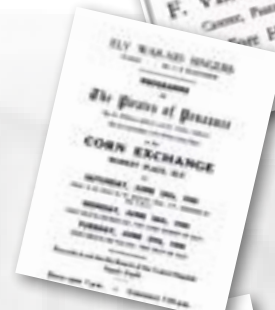
Harvey's then



Harvey's now

"..my mother moved into Newnham Street, took over the licence of a small pub, because that was the first time because of the war that women were allowed to hold a licence 'cos all the men had been sent abroad to war. So that's when they first allowed a woman to hold a licence. But she took it on because it meant a home where we could all live and it was our home."

Betty Staines



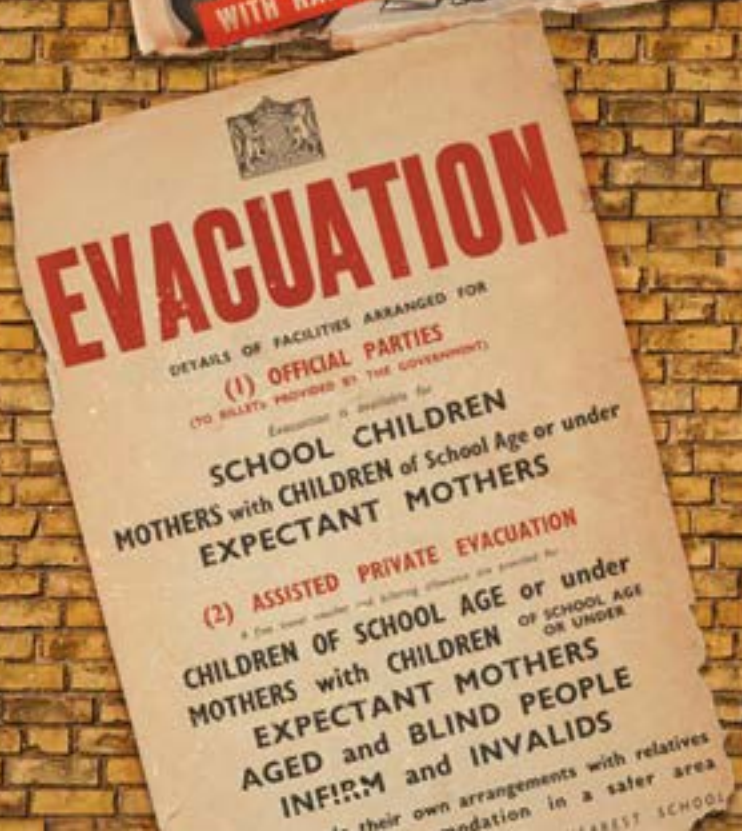
Vernon Cross then and Royal Standard now

"I used to keep rabbits and I used to sell them in Ely Market. I was very excited because they supplemented my pocket money."

John Martin

"There were shops down Broad Street, it was a much busier place than it is now....there was a sweet shop and grocers, fish shop, florists, milliners, butchers"

Pamela Blakeman



LITTLEPORT

During the Second World War in this area, most people lived in small gas-lit places. There were few cars and even fewer bright lights. Towns were grey brick, dull, quite isolated working settlements with most people employed within easy reach of their homes, often in agriculture or crafts and industries related to the rich soil of the Fens.

Littleport, population of around 4,500 at the time, although lying alongside the River Ouse was no longer a port. Despite being on the A10, traditionally

it was quite an inaccessible settlement only really opened up by the main railway line from London to Kings Lynn in 1845. The village served the surrounding agricultural area with Hope Brothers, a shirt maker, being the major employer. The village still nursed long memories of the notorious Bread Riots of 1816 when a Littleport mob marched on Ely demanding better pay to buy flour and subsequently five men from the town were hanged in Ely.

- 1) Rumbles Fish Bar then and now
- 2) Adams then and now
- 3) Old Butchers
- 4) Cutlack's Brewery Granby Street
- 5) Littleport Library
- 6) The Regal Cinema on Hempfield Road



"Littleport...I do not remember it changing a lot from before the war to after."

John Martin

"The great excitement was about once a week, a boy bicycled down with ice-cream. Came from the shop in Littleport, Butcher's ice-cream."

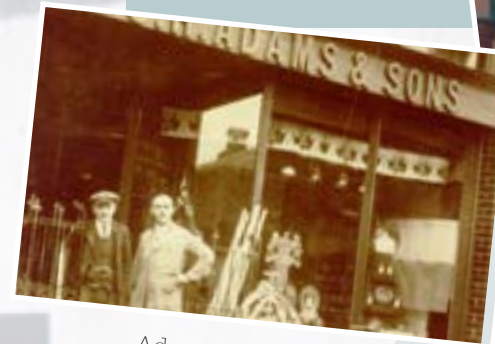
John Martin



Regal Street cinema

"Regal - that was built in 1936. We used to have outings from school, we went, I remember going and seeing Captain Scott and one of Shakespeare's plays as well."

John Martin



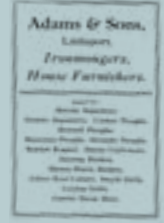
Adams then



Adams now

"The biggest change is the fact that everybody was either directly or certainly indirectly involved in farming. I mean, my family, we were employing 100 men."

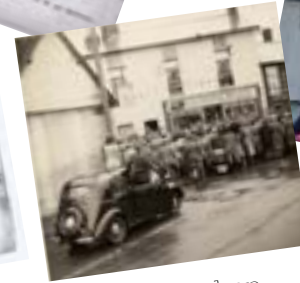
John Martin



LITTLEPORT

"One of the things we used to take, we did not have mains electricity so our radio which we relied on a lot during the war for the news, we had acid accumulators. And we used to take them to Mr Gotobed to be charged up. And of course there was Adams's shop, which the farm, our farm workshop was nearly next door and so our farm staff were forever trotting in and out of Adams's and we had a weekly account book which was held there."

John Martin



Rumbles then



Rumbles now



Black Horse then



The Swan (formerly Black Horse)



"We sold milk every day to people on Black Horse Drove. They used to come up with their cans and indeed the farm in Littleport where we had a dairy herd sold a lot of milk retail there. We also took churns of milk into the RAF Hospital in Ely."

John Martin



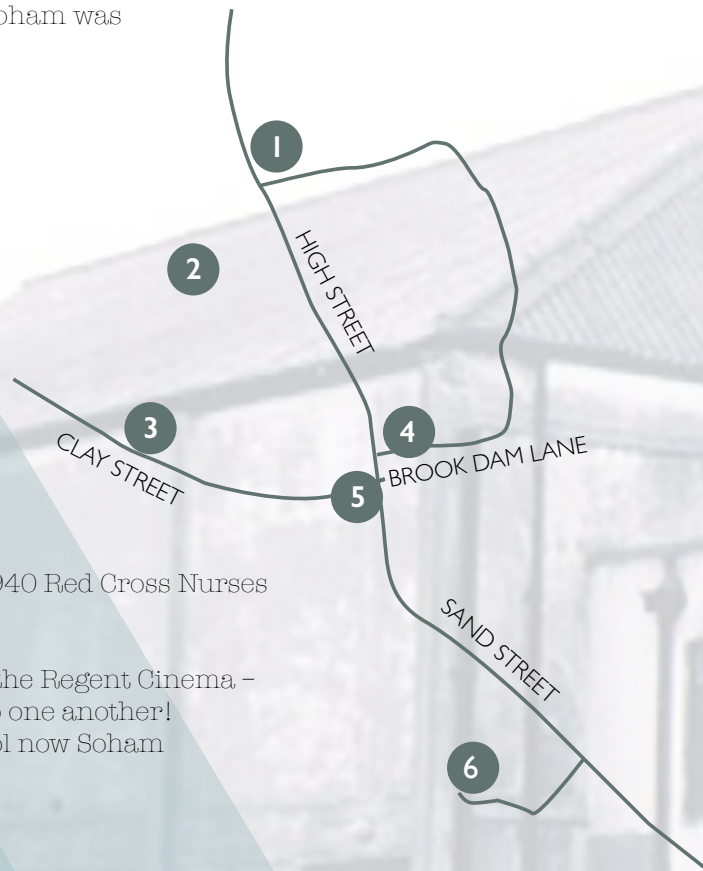
Littleport town hall now

SOHAM

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Soham, with its population of less than 5,000, was well known for its grammar school for boys. Best described as a long and straggling village along the A142, Soham was

a confident, hard working, practical place. Its principal industry was agriculture with many employed at Clark & Butcher's Mill. Soham had a railway station which became the focus of a wartime story of heroism and miraculous escape when on 2 June 1944 a rail truck laden with bombs for the military caught fire and blew up. The bravery of driver Benjamin Gimbert and fireman James Nightall in detaching the truck from 44 other bomb-filled trucks saved Soham from total disaster.



- 1) Fullers Bakery
- 2) St Andrew's Church - 1940 Red Cross Nurses
- 3) Clay Street School
- 4) Old Post Office
- 5) The Regal Cinema and the Regent Cinema - within walking distance to one another!
- 6) Soham Grammar School now Soham Village College

"Hilda Pearson used to bring the bread round, basket on her arm. Mr Mott used to go round with his van, I used to go round with him. In those days I knew everybody from The Shade end to the Downfield end. Now I know about a dozen I suppose. And the butchers of course, they used to come round. Everything was delivered to your door, really. Unless you wanted to be up the street, course."

Maudie Manning

"..and when The Regent was built oh yes, I can remember queueing from there in Clay Street round over to The Ship, in the queue for 'Gone With the Wind'."

Peggy Gibbon



The Regal Cinema



The Regent Cinema

"Watkins...we use to go there for everything...from a pair of socks to a hat. (There were) two or three dance halls that I use to frequent very often...the dance halls were always popular - I loved it."

Maudie Manning



Soham Grammar School then



Soham Village College now

SOHAM

"We had three bakers in Soham... my sister's wedding cake was from Fuller's Bakery...it had to be chocolate as there was no rations for icing."

Peggy Gibbon

"Everybody grew their own in those days, nearly everybody had allotments or a garden, definitely. I mean, I grow my own now."

Maudie Manning



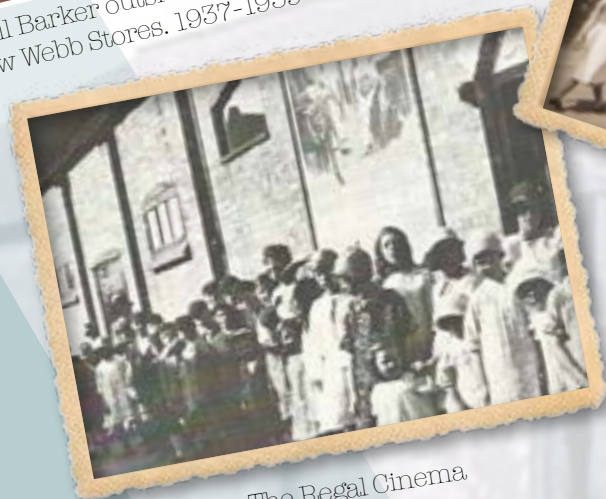
Cyril Barker outside his shop, now Webb Stores. 1937-1939



Webb Stores now



St Andrew's Church - 1940 Red Cross Nurses



The Regal Cinema



STREETLIFE ON TOUR

We had up to

400

people visiting us
a day.

We toured across Cambridgeshire at Chatteris, Ely, Littleport and Soham throughout the summer of 2016 and the spring of 2017. Not only did we hold our own events at each town but we visited local schools, fetes and fairs, organisations, societies, public events and more! At some of our events we had over 400 people visiting us a day and the feedback was fantastic.



LEARNING RESOURCES

The StreetLife tour visited many local schools and a suite of related learning resources were developed to be an important part of the project's legacy. The resources were developed so that some of its themes and stories could be used to support cross-curricular learning at Primary level. The resources were developed in consultation with local teachers and presented in a user friendly way to make it as easy as possible for teachers to use them with their pupils.

The resources are grouped into five topics: **Rationing; A Wartime**

Childhood; Potato Pete Project; Women at War; Doing Our Bit.

The resources can be used to support learning in: **History, English, Computing, Art & Design, Geography, Dancing, Drawing / Making, Music** and can be downloaded from: www.hlfstreetlife.org/learning-resources

If you would like any other information about the project, please email vivayouth@hotmail.co.uk or telephone **01353 722228**



YOUR LOCAL HERITAGE

Adams Heritage Centre Littleport

Email: adamsheritagecentre@outlook.com
17 Main St, Littleport, Cb6 1PH
Telephone: 07518 604066

Cambridgeshire Community Archive Network

Website: www.ccan.co.uk

Chatteris Museum

Telephone: 01354 696319
Website: www.chatterismuseum.org.uk
14 Church Lane, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire PE16 6JA

Ely Museum

Telephone: 01353 666655
Email: admin@elymuseum.org.uk
Website: www.elymuseum.org.uk
The Old Gaol, Market Street, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4LS

Littleport Society

Website: www.littleportsociety.org.uk

Mike Petty - Cambridgeshire Researcher, Lecturer & Historian
www.mikepetty.org.uk

Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership

www.ousewashes.org.uk

Prickwillow Museum

Telephone: 01353 688360
Website: www.prickwillowmuseum.com
Prickwillow Museum, Main Street, Prickwillow, Ely,
Cambridgeshire, CB7 4UN

Soham Museum and Community Archive

Telephone: 01353 723472
Website: www.museum.soham.org
Soham Museum, 7 Churchgate Street, Soham, CB7 5DS.

Viva Arts and Community Group

Telephone: 01353 722 228
Email: vivayouth@hotmail.co.uk
Website: www.viva-group.org.uk
7 Churchgate Street, Soham, CB7 5DS