

The image is of ferryman, Mark Wright, who used to operate the ferry from Meadow Lane across the river Thames before the original Donnington Bridge was built in 1937 (at first a footbridge). The ferry was probably operating from the footpath which still exists next to Ferry House on Meadow Lane, that footpath being marked on maps from 1900 as "Oxford Corporation Ferry". What a lovely way to travel to Longbridge swimming place if it was put back in service again, once Longbridges was refurbished. (Photo from Natasha Fiket, Mark Wright's grand daughter)

The Fields, Spring 2000

The Kidneys in the 1920s

The Long Bridges bathing place was reached from our house by crossing the Iffley Road, walking down Fairacres Road, turning right into Parker Street and Warwick Street, then left down Bedford Street which led to Meadow Lane and a cinder track, at the bottom of which lay the free ferry across the Thames. The fields surrounding this track flooded during the winter months but the soggy earth was greatly appreciated by the animals which inhabited a nearby pig farm. (Later an orchard was cut through, giving access from Fairacres Road to Meadow Lane, which considerably shortened the journey).

Near to the ferry lay two small islands, the Great and Little Kidneys – the 'Ketneys' in the 14th century – separated from the mainland by a backwater. These islands were a favoured spot for campers and for most of the summer the banks would be lined with bell tents, each in its roped enclosure, and identified from its neighbour by an inscribed name, such as 'Krushen Villa' or 'Seldom Inn'.

The only means of crossing the river between Folly Bridge and Iffley Lock was by private craft or by the ferry. The ferryboat was besieged by a seething, pushing queue of children in the heat of a summer afternoon, so the ferryman needed all his wits to control both them and his craft; but Tom Rose knew well how to handle both children and boats....

Extract from *Pride of the Morning*, by Phyl Surman (Oxfordshire Books, 1992). Copies of this really interesting and well-written local history, by someone born in Howard Street in 1917, are available at a discount from the Inner Bookshop, Sylvesters and Gibbons Bakery.

Clearly there is a long tradition of unofficial camping in the fields, although modern campers tend to be less tidy and their habits.

Another explanation of the name Kidneys is current: that the area was an artificial kidney - shaped basin where, before the coming of the railway, coal barges unloaded. The basin was later infilled, but being lined with clay, the land continues to retain moisture, which accounts of the waterlogged nature of the allotments

Which explanation is correct?