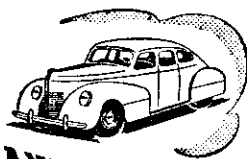


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## ENGLISH HOLIDAY

(continued from previous page)

busy with buckets and spades while mother and granny sat near by—on the deck-chairs.

I think the English must be champion deck-chair sitters. Wherever you go there seem to be deck-chairs. The number I saw at Bognor was nothing to the rows and rows of them I saw later in the season at Southend. They provide, I think, two comments—on the English climate, and on the English character. The climate does not always indulge in long spells of summer sunshine. As often as not it is too damp or too cold to sit on the ground. It is a tribute to the quiet patience of the people that I have not seen anyone in difficulties over setting up a deck-chair!

### Southend to Dunkirk

Southend is considered to be the Londoners' own particular playground. You can get there in under three hours—by train, by bus, or more romantically by river boat. You can choose between a trim up-to-date pleasure steamer, or a waddling paddle boat that has been churning its way up and down the Thames since last century. I watched one of these squat ships come to the Southend pier one morning with its crowd of eager holiday-makers, its crew as brisk as any on a battleship, and its captain with as much gold braid and dignity as if he were the master of the Queen Mary. Such a craft as this has every reason to surround itself with dignity and pride. Once it chugged its way with that amazing armada of little ships across the calm and miraculous sea to Dunkirk.

My own particular jaunt to Southend was made by train. I caught what has been referred to as the "Southend Saturday trippers' train" with only a minute to spare and for half my journey stood in a crowded corridor. Eventually I got a seat wedged between a newspaper with a man behind it and a restless, small boy who extracted sticky sweets at intervals from his pocket and clutched a model yacht in hot grubby hands. Long before he was near the sea he began to erect the mast and unfurl the sails of his little vessel.

In Southend it was Carnival Week. The railway stations and the high street were decked with flags; the pavements were crowded; the shops were doing more than a brisk trade in paper hats and balloons, buckets and spades and shrimping nets, ice-creams, prawns, novelties engraved with "A Present from Southend," toffee-apples (no points) and peppermint rock in large pink and white sticks. When I bit into a piece (just for the experience) I found the name Southend running right through it. I wondered how a toffee-maker in New Zealand would get on supplying similar sticks to a vendor at Paekakariki or Taumarunui!

### Grand Procession

Somehow or other I managed to get through the crowds to the top of the cliffs overlooking the bay. Southend was a favourite spot of the late James Agate, well-known to many as critic and compiler of the diaries he entitled *Ego*. I, too, was enchanted with what I saw and found it as he had once described it: "Blazing sun, a spot of wind, the sea

a blue mirror with myriads of little boats as in a canvas by Canaletto." On this Saturday afternoon even the gasometers at one end assumed a sweeter aspect. The highlight of the day was the Grand Procession along the sea-front. I made my way down the shaded sloping paths to get a closer view. Everything you could wish for was there—decorated vehicles and bicycles, clowns and gipsies, marching bands, orchestras on lorries, horses, army trucks, a beauty queen (Miss Southend, 1947), the sea scouts and the fire brigade. Along the route everybody was watching, smiling, good-humoured and orderly. I was impressed by these crowds, by their orderliness, their quiet unhurried enjoyment of the open air. Though infinitely greater than any similar crowd at Timaru or Napier at the height of the New Zealand summer season, they seemed to me much quieter—almost docile, in fact. At the end of the pier on Sunday it was just the same. They were there in thousands, to the eye a well-dressed crowd (even if they were wearing their one and only Sunday best), perhaps just a bit self-conscious in their funny paper hats, strolling in the sea air. Sunday is probably the only day in the week that these Londoners do not have to bustle and exert themselves—until the time comes to go home.

It was at the end of the pier that I found the deck-chairs—more than I had ever seen before stretching in lines like Wordsworth's familiar daffodils. The occupants of most of them could not possibly see the sea. However, with the warm sun upon them the majority of them dozed anyway. My view of Southend in the morning was rather a shock after Saturday afternoon's vision. The pier—the longest of its kind—extends for a mile and a third. It has to, since the tide goes out almost as far revealing acres of mud. In the morning the tide was out. Yet even the mud had its interest. From half-way along the pier I looked down at an artist making pictures in it—pictures in mud of Westminster Abbey and the Queen Mary. Fishermen were digging for sand-worms for bait; others were looking for winkles; people were wandering everywhere. And I knew that when the sand pictures and the mud were covered over, the scene would be beautiful again. Shakespeare might have been describing Southend when he wrote these lines in *The Tempest*:

The approaching tide  
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore  
That now lies foul and muddy.

### Top Trumpeter

HARRY JAMES, American trumpeter (his playing of *Flight of the Bumblebee* sets him apart among non-swing listeners), was born in Albany, Georgia, in 1916. His father, a circus bandmaster, and an accomplished cornet-player, taught him much about the affinity between the tongue, the lip and the mouth-piece. By the time he was 16, James had been introduced to the public by Ben Pollack and then he joined Benny Goodman's Orchestra. After playing for Goodman for nearly three years James formed his own swing band which, in 1941, was rivalling America's most popular dance combinations. Harry James's band will be featured in a special programme from 22B on Wednesday, December 17, at 8.30 p.m.