

WELCOME

to

Buttlin's

FILEY

FIELDSTUDY 14



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76 45.75 75  
11.45  
so smile, smile, smile!



FIELDSTUDY 14



# IMPRESSIONS GALLERY



Presents

## PHOTOGRAPHS of BUTLIN'S FILEY

BY

DANIEL MEADOWS and MARTIN PARR

NOV 4 ~ DEC 24

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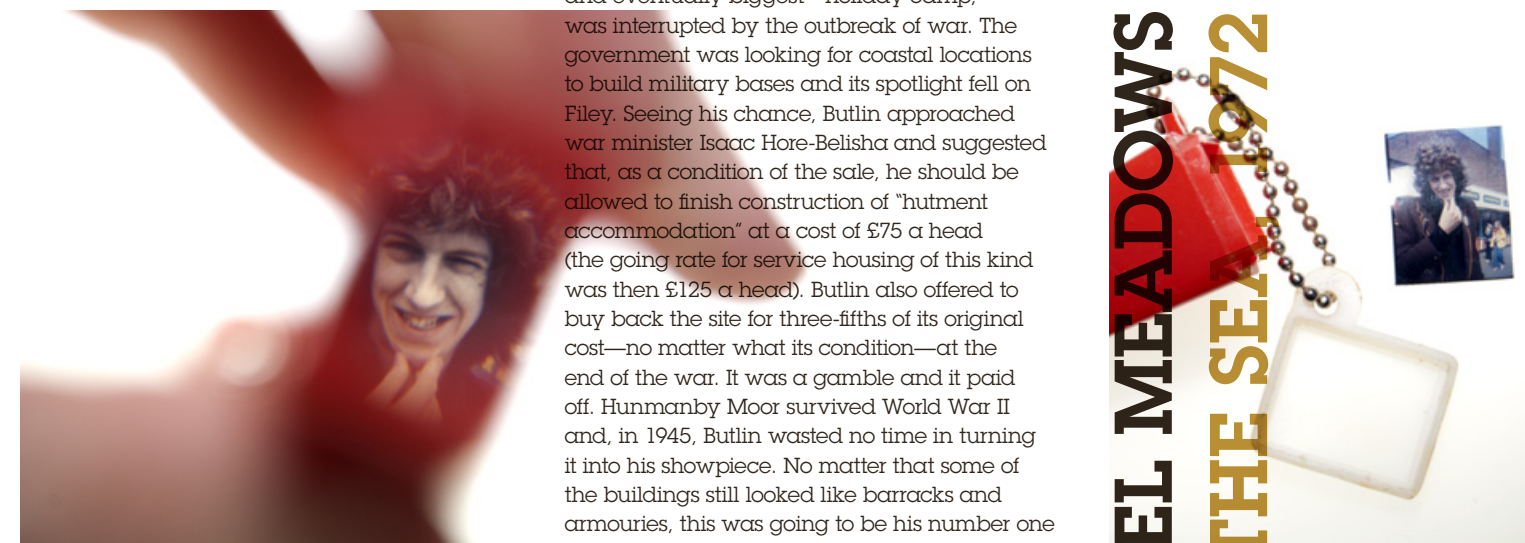
10 am - 6.30 pm

Admission Free

At the beginning of this story a crowded bus, on its way to "Farleigh" camp in Yorkshire, bumps along the coast road between Scarborough and Bridlington. The year is 1947. On board a suited man with a thin moustache and greased black hair cadges a cigarette from a young brunette, neat in coat and gloves. "Have you ever been in this part of the world before?" he asks. "No, have you?" "Yes," he says. "I was stationed here when I was on ops." He is Squadron Leader Hardwick (played by Dennis Price) and, it turns out, an impostor. Not a war hero at all but a murderer on the run. The film, a B movie in black & white made for the Rank Organisation by Gainsborough Pictures, stars Flora Robson and Jack (later *Dixon of Dock Green*) Warner. It is called *Holiday Camp*. Few now remember the film and today the camp is a spoiled and derelict site. Once RAF Hunmanby Moor, it is better known in the memory of its many campers, as Butlin's Filey.

William "Billy" Butlin (1899-1980) purchased the first 120 acres of the 400 acre site, with its six mile long flank of wide beach running north from Flamborough Head, in the summer of 1939 but construction of this, his third—and eventually biggest—holiday camp, was interrupted by the outbreak of war. The government was looking for coastal locations to build military bases and its spotlight fell on Filey. Seeing his chance, Butlin approached war minister Isaac Hore-Belisha and suggested that, as a condition of the sale, he should be allowed to finish construction of "hutment accommodation" at a cost of £75 a head (the going rate for service housing of this kind was then £125 a head). Butlin also offered to buy back the site for three-fifths of its original cost—no matter what its condition—at the end of the war. It was a gamble and it paid off. Hunmanby Moor survived World War II and, in 1945, Butlin wasted no time in turning it into his showpiece. No matter that some of the buildings still looked like barracks and armouries, this was going to be his number one dream camp, the "biggest in the world". And soon it was, catering eventually for as many as 11,000 visitors a week. At peak, in the mid 'sixties, Butlin had ten such camps including the *crème de la crème*, Butlin's Bahamas.

Butlin provided holidays on an industrial scale to a workforce newly benefiting from the holidays-with-pay act of 1938. "A week's holiday for a week's pay" was his slogan. Each camp offered something unique and memorable. Filey had a main line railway station, a road train to deliver you to your chalet, and a chairlift. Other attractions included swimming pools (indoors and out), a boating lake, a miniature railway,



DANIEL MEADOWS  
BUTLIN'S BY THE SEA 1972









a huge theatre, ballroom, sports fields, vast flower beds, a giant fountain—even a giant—and “the longest bar in the world”. There was child care and organised entertainment for all ages, including talent, beauty, bonny baby and glamorous granny contests, with tub racing, It's A Knockout and donkey derby thrown in. There were review and redcoat shows, also wrestling, bingo, dancing, discotheque and roller skating. Even cabaret. I saw the comedian Bob Monkhouse perform at Filey.

I went there for the months of July and August in 1972. I was studying photography at Manchester Polytechnic and, when the summer term ended, Martin Parr and I—both of us twenty years old—joined Butlin's Photographic Services as official “walkie” photographers. We needed paid employment to see us through the summer but we also wanted an opportunity to make a collaborative work of social documentation. We used two different cameras: theirs for the paid job, ours for the documentary. There was a Leica M1, mine a Pentax Spotmatic. Parr and I collaborated on two projects while we were students: *Butlin's by the Sea* was exhibited as the opening show at the new Impressions Gallery of Photography in York (November 1972); *June Street*, a study of families living in a street of terraced houses in Salford, was shown on BBC Television's *Look North* (23 May 1973).

With a grim decade at boarding school and a vile stay on an RAF base as a cadet fresh in the memory, I can't say that I was looking forward to a whole summer spent at Butlin's and, when I arrived to find that inmates were tribally assigned to dining rooms (Kent, York, Windsor) and that the gridlike streets were strung with tannoy loudspeakers and patrolled by uniformed security men, my heart sank.

As a theatre and cinema goer with an excitable imagination, my head was full of the many recent class satires I'd seen or read that were based in holiday or military camps and by the seaside: Arnold Wesker's *Chips with Everything* (1962), Joe Orton's *The Erpingham Camp* (1966), Richard Attenborough's *Oh! What A Lovely War* (1969) and “Yowsai Yowsai Yowsai” Sydney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses Don't They?* (1969). Fact or fiction, Butlin's had me spooked.

In *Holiday Camp* it had Miss Harman (Esther Harman, a middle-aged spinster played by Flora Robson) spooked too. But, after a conversation with the blind camp announcer (played by Esmond Knight) she began to lighten up. Looking down from the clock tower on a huge parade of happy campers laughing and singing as they march along, the blind man asks: “Do you see what I see?” “What do you see?” says Esther. “One of the strangest sights of the twentieth century. A great mass of people all fighting for the one thing that you can't get by fighting for it, happiness. When I first came here I thought I couldn't stand it. The

noise, the crowd, the frantic search for pleasure. Then I saw it wasn't really a crowd at all, just separate individuals, each one of them with a different set of problems and worries, hopes and fears, each one of them tired and dispirited, eager for peace and yet frightened to be alone.”

We see what we expect to see. Photographers, though, can picture only what they notice and one of the things I noticed, during that glam rock summer of teeny boppers and popcorn, was the constantly unrolling, informal but never-the-less deadly serious, teenage fashion parade. It was something that happened on the edge. It happened in spite of the talent shows and the Miss She contest. And it happened in colour. Colour photography at that time was expensive, the materials were difficult to handle and the film was “slow” (that is, compared with monochrome, it was less sensitive to light) which made freezing action difficult. Serious documentarists avoided colour, quipping that that black & white was the colour of photography. So, when I put that first precious



Butlin's Photographic Services, Filey, 1972: the team. Daniel Meadows (hand on hip) and Martin Parr (Rolleiflex round his neck) are in the back row, to the right.









roll of colour transparency into my Pentax and reached out to all those kids with Alice Cooper, Bowie, Slade, Gary Glitter and Marc Bolan playing in their heads—the starmen, rocket men, metal gurus and rockin' robins of that teenage parade—I was doing something which, with the exception of serious pioneers like Charlie Meecham and Peter Mitchell, few of my generation of British documentarists had embraced.

And, in 1972, I too thought little of my colour pictures. For the Impressions exhibition I had just a handful of them printed small and I mounted them on panels in groups of four. After the show was broken up, I salvaged my colour prints and stored them safely but the transparencies were forgotten and, in time, invaded by fungus at the bottom of a cardboard box. If it hadn't been for this PARC research project, that's where those pictures would have stayed. But here they are, now digitally repaired and restored.

One thing that's important to do when you edit a picture story is to make sure that the images you choose match your recollection of the events photographed. But it's something I can't do with this set. Not altogether. Perhaps it was my inexperience. Perhaps it was the

"Yowsa! Yowsa!" of all those stage fictions still playing in my imagination but one of the things I recall from that summer was an underlying current of casual violence and I never photographed it. Maybe I should just forget about it but I can't. With their mums and dads away on package holidays, many teenagers were at Filey unchaperoned and, on the big wakes holidays and during Glasgow fair (the last two weeks of July), rival tribes of youths would skirmish. I have a vivid memory of leaving a matinée performance early one day and stepping out of the theatre straight into the immediate aftermath of what must have been quite a battle. In the flower bed at my feet lay a collapsed youth, a sharpened steel comb sticking out of him. I legged it to the first aid post, alerted the ambulance crew and, in minutes, we were screaming to the scene. But when we got there the lad was gone. Was this some kind of a practical joke? The medics were furious. Why was I wasting their time? If it happened, mister photographer, where's the picture? Where indeed?

What there is no doubt about is that the holiday camp business did take a bad hit from package tour companies and, in that year of 1972, Butlin's was sold to the Rank Organisation, owners (oh irony!) of that other *Holiday Camp*, the movie. The business was shaken but the story lived on. For, even when Filey did eventually close, at the end of its thirty-eighth season in 1983, Butlin's had once again been reinvented as fiction, not this time as Farleigh Camp in a B movie for the big screen, but as Maplin's, a hit sit-com for the small one, the BBC's cheery and nostalgic *Hi-De-Hi!*

The Butlin's brand (owned since 2000 by Bourne Leisure) continues. In 2011 it is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The three remaining camps—Bognor Regis, Minehead and Skegness—are restyled as "resorts" and, it seems, thrive. So, campers, never say die and remember the redcoat motto: "The sun always shines and Butlin's, so smile, smile, smile!"

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*Oh! What A Lovely War*, 1969. Directed by Richard Attenborough. UK: Paramount.  
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This edition of Fieldstudy explores the series of colour photographs made by Daniel Meadows at Butlin's Holiday Camp, Filey in 1972.

Daniel Meadows and Martin Parr became Butlin's 'walkies' for the summer season of 1972. The Photography and the Archive Research Centre has invited Meadows to select photographs from the colour work which he made as a personal project during his stay at the camp, and to write about his experiences. This issue of Fieldstudy is the fifth of personal edits by photographers. Previous participants include Roma Tearne, Alison Marchant, Wiebke Leister and Marjolaine Ryley.

Daniel Meadows was a member of a grouping of young British photographers in the 1970s who were interested in the 'ordinary' and fascinated by working class culture. Excluded from mainstream photojournalism, they used new funding opportunities to explore the possibilities of photography, and created powerful networks.

In 1973, Meadows began a journey across England in the Free Photographic Omnibus, setting up free portrait studios and making documentary photographs. His projects from the 70s and 80s include *June Street*, with Martin Parr, the Greame Street free portrait studio in Manchester's Moss Side and his 1980s' study of suburbia in the south of England.

*Daniel Meadows: Edited Photographs from the 70s and 80s*, by Val Williams, will be published by Photoworks on 30 September 2011. The text places Meadows' work within a cultural and social context, as well as examining the history of the new British photography.

This exhibition and the accompanying publication, is the product of PARC's research into British photography of 1970s and 1980s at the University of the Arts London, preceded by a research project, *The New British Photography, 1968-1981*, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The project has been funded and supported by a partnership with the National Media Museum; Fotogallery, Wales; Birmingham Library and Archive Services and Photoworks.

A touring exhibition of Meadows' work, *Daniel Meadows: Early Photographic Works*, curated by Val Williams, will be at the National Media Museum, Bradford from 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2011 until 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2012 before travelling to Fotogallery, Wales, Birmingham Library and Archive Services and the London College of Communication.

The Daniel Meadows research project is led by Val Williams and managed by Brigitte Lardinois with Wendy Short.

The UAL Photography and the Archive Research Centre was designated by the University of the Arts London in 2003 and is based at the London College of Communication. The Centre commissions new and innovative research into photography and culture and organises seminars, study days, symposia and conferences, both within the UAL and externally. The Centre has a core group of members including Tom Hunter, Alistair O'Neill, Patrick Sutherland, Wiebke Leister, Jennifer Pollard, David Moore, Paul Lowe and Sara Davidmann. Centre staff and members supervise a group of PhD students. The Journal of Photography & Culture is co-hosted by the Centre and PARC also leads the online *Directory of Photographic Collections in the UK*.

PARC's interests span the history and culture of photography, with particular emphasis on post-war British photography, the documentation of war and conflict, the photography of fashion and style, the visualization of the counterculture, and photographers as filmmakers.

PARC is currently working in partnership with the University of Sunderland; Street Level Photoworks; Wolverhampton Art Gallery; the Photographers' Gallery; the National Media Museum; Fotogallery, Wales; Birmingham Library and Archive Services; British Telecom; the Imperial War Museum; the University of Plymouth; the University of the Creative Arts; Berg Publishing and Photoworks. For more information about PARC's work, including its forthcoming conferences at the National Media Museum and the Imperial War Museum, the 'Writing Photography' series at the Photographers Gallery, the NAM project and the monthly research seminars at the London College of Communication visit: [www.photographyresearchcentre.co.uk](http://www.photographyresearchcentre.co.uk). Information about PARC's research can also be found at: [ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk](http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk). and on its Facebook group page.

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