

# Fairground & circus

## passing places

Fairs originally were occasions when people could meet and trade and were not just for amusement. Some are ancient, sited on old trade routes that date back to pre Roman times. The Norman kings began the process of granting charters for fairs. The charter for King's Lynn Fair was granted by King John in 1204. The charter holder was allowed to collect taxes on goods sold at the fair. Many fairs still have official, formal opening ceremonies. Some fairs concentrated on one trade, for example Nottingham for geese, while others were for hiring 'mops' or casual labour.



Maddie and Swaley Howell at Southend Carnival  
Image: Jane Hastler

Gary Hastler  
Image: Jane Hastler

Travelling performers quickly attached themselves to the fairs so that they grew into celebrations of travelling theatre, music, bear baiting, fortune telling, as well as including circus type acts such as jugglers. Employers and shopkeepers began to see fairs as a riotous distraction or too much of a competition to their own trade and so some were closed down. London's great Bartholomew Fair (started by Rahere, a monk and one time jester to Henry I) was closed down in 1841. By this time the fair had developed to include swing boats and carousels. This sophistication continued, so that to-day's fairs are characterised by highly complicated, often computer driven, mechanised rides.



Image: Mr Green

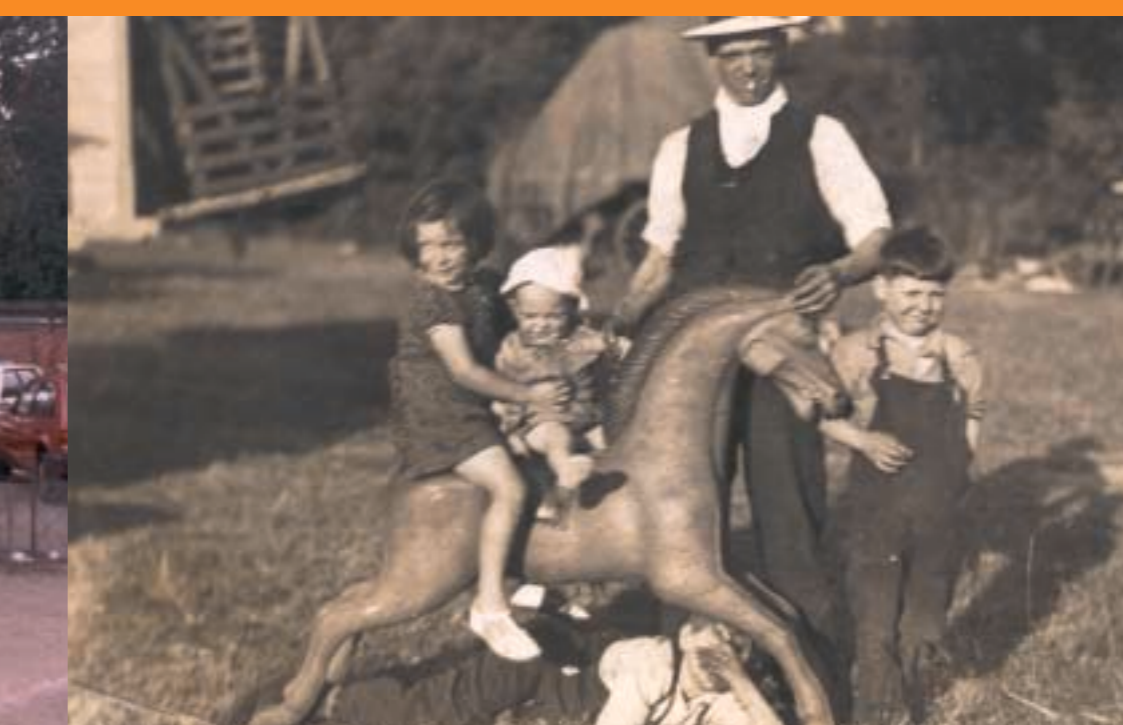
Fairground art  
Image: Mr Green

Hussey Family at The Olympia London late 1880s  
Image: Mr Green

Left - right Mrs Renee Manning (seated) Janie Howard, Sam Manning & Mr Cooper enjoying a well earned cup of tea  
Image: Jane Hastler

Fair at Hampstead Heath  
Image: Jane Hastler

The birth of the modern circus is associated with ex-army Captain Philip Astley, who performed equestrian skills in public in London in 1769. Circuses, such as Smarts, Chipperfields and Roberts Brothers, developed after the Second World War into huge, successful international touring businesses. However the late twentieth century saw a change in the public's interests and needs. Television showed people all they wanted to know about wild animals, sometimes Animal Rights protesters targeted circuses and so most circuses now concentrate on either human skills or, remembering circus roots, horse acts.



Left to right: Joey Manning, Swaley Howell, Stanley Elliot and Nobbie Clark. Image: Jane Hastler

Fairground ride made from Second World War bomb shells  
Image: Jane Hastler

Swaley Howell's stall  
Image: Jane Hastler

to come.....  
Image: Mr Green

The venues for both fairs and circuses can vary from plush indoor arenas like the Wembley Arena, to the local, sometimes muddy park. Hertfordshire has a long tradition of both visiting fairs and circuses and of large 'overwintering' Showmen's yards.