

ESSEX PAST

The newsletter of the VCH Essex Appeal Fund

NO.16

FEBRUARY 2012

Report from the Chairman

Well! The most traumatic year in the modern history of VCH Essex is now behind us and a degree of stability accomplished. The principal achievements of the Appeal Fund since the loss of Essex County Council grant have been the major fund-raising project, the reorganisation of our relationship with the Institute of Historical Research (the owners of the VCH) and the establishment of a new working partnership with our editors.

Aimed at what we first thought to be an overly-ambitious target of £50,000, the fund-raising project is now close to realisation. Of course, any close reading of the public would have seen that general, local and family history are abiding interests of many more people than the political mind realises; and so it has proved in Essex in spite of the unfavourable economic environment for charities.

Our gratitude, however, to all those who gave support for the future of VCH Essex and the success of our fund-raising, so far, does not blind us to the need to continue the process. The £50,000 target was a minimum needed to ensure our survival until the completion of Volume XII; and that at very reduced funding to our editors. It is a work in progress!

Elsewhere in the Newsletter is a report on the Seminar held to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of VCH Essex; an event which also launched to fund-raising appeal. Our hopes that it would coincide

with the publication of Volume XI, however, were not to be realised and, for reasons well outside our control, the volume has yet to be published although long-completed textually. We have now every reason to expect its publication in the early Spring.

Volume XII, as the editors report in the Newsletter, is about to be recommenced. The speed of progress will be dependent upon the funding we can provide; hence the need to continue to look for additional sources of funding.

The work of the Newport, Clacton and Southend volunteer projects has been noted as bringing a new and exciting dimension to the writing of the VCH Essex. Indeed, with the reduced funding now available to our editors, their work assumes a greater salience than in earlier years. For this reason, it has been decided to encourage representation of these groups on the Appeal Fund committee. It is hoped that this will also enhance the sense of the “collective” and to spread awareness of the VCH Essex more widely across the County.

The Appeal Fund now has, of course, full financial and managerial responsibility for the project and will be asking its AGM in March to agree to a change of title to *VCH Essex Trust*, in acknowledgement of its return to the function which its predecessors had for most of the first 50 years of its existence.

All in all, the Appeal Fund is confident that, initial funding having been secured, we can now concentrate fully on the task of writing Essex history. Perhaps, too, by the time Volume XII has been completed, the economic climate may have sufficiently improved for public funding once more be available to assist (although we may be more wary in the future as to who controls VCH Essex).

Finally, the Appeal Fund is profoundly grateful to our editors, Drs. Chris Thornton and Herbert Eiden, without whose forbearance and tenacity VCH Essex would not have survived its Diamond Jubilee year.

GEOFFREY HARE
Chairman, VCH Essex Appeal Fund



PLEASE JOIN US FOR A VERY GOOD EVENING

On **Tuesday 20 March 2012**, our 18th AGM will be held in the splendid Woolmarket at Horndon-on-the-Hill. Come at **7 for 7.30** to look at this historic building, to learn all the latest VCH Essex news, and to hear

DEANNA WALKER talking on
 ‘A Weekend in the Dunton Plotlands’

Advance notice of a conference **“The Hearth Tax in Essex”**

Hearth Tax returns are invaluable for family, house and local history research on the 17th century. This conference coincides with the publication of an edition of the Essex Hearth Tax returns by the British Records Society, supported by the Essex Society for Archaeology and History. Speakers include national experts on the Hearth Tax, Essex history and Essex surnames, including Professor Henry French and Professor David Hey.

Essex Record Office, Saturday 14th July, 10a.m. – 3.45p.m.

Tickets: £20, includes buffet lunch and refreshments.

This conference is organized by the Friends of Historic Essex and British Academy Hearth Tax Project (Roehampton University). The full programme, arranged by our VCH Editor, will be available shortly.

For further details and a booking form please contact
 Dr Chris Thornton, 75 Victoria Road, Maldon, Essex, CM9 5HE;
 telephone: 01621 856827; email: c.c.thornton@btinternet.com.

The Appeal's Finances 2010-2011

During the present financial year which ended on 30 September 2011 the Appeal raised a total of £37,293 (2010: £16,333). The Fund continues to be extremely grateful to its many supporters. We are especially appreciative of a further £3,000 grant from the Essex Heritage Trust and the sum of £2,500 received from an anonymous Trust who has pledged a similar amount on an annual basis.

As the fiscal year was drawing to a close the Committee formulated plans for a Diamond Jubilee Appeal under the direction of Sir Alex Jarratt, our Vice-Chairman. A target of £50,000 was calculated on the basis that this new funding, together with existing reserves, would be sufficient to ensure the completion of Volume XII together with such other important areas of operation as encouraging and managing the work of volunteers. A new appeal leaflet was produced and widely distributed. We are extremely grateful to Lord Petre, our President and Lord Lieutenant, who played a significant part in supporting the successful launch of the Jubilee Appeal which took place at the Essex Record Office on Saturday, 8th October.

My fellow Trustees and I have been overwhelmed by your response. The Appeal got off to a flying start with a most unexpected and generous donation of £10,000 from a loyal supporter who wishes to remain anonymous. A considerable number of donations (some of a significant size) quickly followed to the extent that by the end of the calendar year a total of £39,439 had been received. This represents a remarkable achievement and clearly demonstrates the affection and important with which the Essex VCH. is held.

In addition to the above it had proved possible, by the end of the financial year, to claim a further £3,965 from H M Customs and

Revenue. Thankfully, many of our donors had realised the importance of signing Gift Aid declarations. This made it possible for an additional 20p to be claimed for every £1.00 donated.

At the time of my last report we were bracing ourselves for the outcome of the public spending review. In the event, as has been widely reported, the Essex County Council took the highly disappointing decision to withdraw funding from the Essex VCH. This clearly left the Appeal Fund and the editorial staff in a most unfortunate and precarious position. The Committee concluded that it was essential for work to continue on researching and producing the “red volumes” resulting in the employment of Chris Thornton (Editor) and Herbert Eiden (Assistant Editor) on a self-employed basis.

The year-end accounts show a modest decrease in expenditure to £18,601 (2010: £19,002) having made a final payment to the Institute of Historical Research of £5,051 (2010: £18,909) to settle all outstanding commitments (principally a contribution towards the salaries of the Editor and Assistant Editor) previously agreed by the Appeal Fund. A sum of £13,500 was paid to the self-employed contractors for work wholly necessary to ensure the completion of volume XI.

The Fund balance at the year-end stood at £53,044 (2010: £34,352) which increased further to £88,944 at 31st December 2011. Attention will now be focused on safely investing these funds to combat historically low interest rates and pernicious inflation.

I hope that I may meet you at our forthcoming AGM (*see page 3*) and, as always, I thank you for your valued and much appreciated support.

H MARTIN STUCHFIELD
Hon Treasurer
VCH Essex Appeal Fund

Editors' Report Spring 2012

Since the last issue the VCH Essex editors have mainly been engaged with the final stages of Volume XI and, despite various last-minute problems, we are glad to say that the volume's publication is now imminent. That being so, since the New Year we have turned our thoughts to the forthcoming work on Volume XII. The first stage will be a comprehensive review of the VCH Essex checklists, work that will have begun by the time of the AGM in March. The VCH reorganized its websites last year and the county sites now all have a slightly different address. Once the editors have been trained by the central VCH on the new software they will be able to maintain the site more regularly with updates and news items on the project's progress. The site's new address is: www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/Essex

The plan of VCH volume XII has been agreed in outline and is reproduced below. It deals with the history of the same area as Volume XI, but prior to the foundation of the seaside resorts, as well as some adjacent parishes such as Thorpe-le-Soken and St Osyth. The focus will therefore mainly be rural, but with some interesting general themes including important medieval ecclesiastical estates, coastal erosion and the trade in agricultural produce to supply London.

Volume Introduction (General Themes)

- Great Clacton
- Little Clacton
- Frinton
- Great Holland
- Little Holland
- St Osyth
- Kirby-le-Soken
- Thorpe-le-Soken
- Walton-le-Soken

Some research and a little drafting of text has already been conducted for this volume by Janet Cooper and Chris Thornton and we therefore have a bit of a 'head start'. It is intended that the first of the parishes to be covered by our research will be three 'Soken' parishes, Walton, Kirby-le-Soken and Thorpe-le-Soken (by Chris Thornton) and Great and Little Holland (by Herbert Eiden). A collaborative meeting has already taken place with members of the Frinton & Walton Heritage Trust, who have kindly offered access to resources in their archives and links to local historians (and Local History Recorders) in the neighbourhood.

The county's volunteer groups are also pressing ahead with their various projects. The Newport Local History Group has continued research on that parish, with some texts now in first draft and a project to examine and tree-ring date historic timber-framed houses in Newport in preparation. The Clacton VCH Group has continued its work with ECC military archaeologist Fred Nash, surveying parishes in Tendring Hundred for surviving evidence of military defences. One surprise find has been a pillbox at Walton-on-the-Naze that dates from the First World War, perhaps a unique survival in the county.

At the ERO conference on 'Local History: Our History' which was held on 19 November 2011, Chris Thornton and Andrew Senter spoke about VCH research.

The VCH editors are contributing a number of forthcoming talks that may be of interest to Appeal Fund members. By the time this newsletter is published Herbert Eiden will have presented a paper on 8th February to the Friends of Harlow Museum on "Witchcraft in East Anglia, 1560-1680". On Saturday March 3rd Chris Thornton is talking to the Essex branch of the Historical Association about "Paycocke's House, Coggeshall" (Methodist Church, Rainsford Road, Chelmsford, 2.30p.m.).

A fortnight later, Chris, Herbert and Andrew Senter will contribute to an afternoon conference in Southend run by the University of Essex on the theme of "Showcasing Southend Local History" (details available from the Department of History at Essex University).

CHRIS THORNTON, *Editor*
HERBERT EIDEN, *Assistant Editor*

John S Appleby FRHistS, FRMetS, 1925 - 2011

By the time this newsletter appears, we feel sure that most of our readers will have learned of the death of John Appleby and have read several splendid obituaries of this much loved and admired historian of Essex. John Appleby's life covered a truly amazing breadth of experience, but rather than repeating here his many achievements, we want simply to record our appreciation of him as a greatly valued member of the Appeal Fund committee. This photograph encapsulates the man: always immaculately turned out, splendidly upright in stance, with a gentle smile and twinkling eye - but a shrewd eye too that missed nothing. His knowledge seemed endless, his memory superb and his information of continuing value to the Appeal to the very end of his life. John Appleby was a true gentleman in every sense, and his fellow trustees on the VCH Essex Appeal committee will miss him greatly.



VCH Essex 60th Anniversary Seminar

The VCH Essex series was revived by a local committee in association with the University of London in 1951, when Ray Powell was appointed first editor for the county. Sixty years later, on 8 October 2011, many VCH supporters assembled at the Essex Record Office for a special event to mark the project's Diamond Jubilee, to celebrate its achievements and to look forward to the future. Everyone was welcomed to the ERO by Cllr Jeremy Lucas (ECC Cabinet member for Heritage, Culture and the Arts), and the seminar was then opened by The Lord Petre, Lord Lieutenant of Essex and trustee of the VCH Essex Appeal Fund. The Appeal Fund's Chairman, Geoffrey Hare, and Vice-Chairman, Sir Alex Jarratt acted as the seminar's chairmen for the morning and afternoon session respectively. The two sessions were separated by a magnificent buffet lunch (including celebratory cake!) and the launch of a new fundraising drive to raise £50,000 introduced by Sir Alex.

In the morning session Drs Chris Thornton, Herbert Eiden and James Bettley each gave papers linked to the recent VCH research theme on the Essex seaside. Dr Bettley's paper on "Walton's Clock Tower, and other seaside might have beens" ranged widely along the Essex coastline and was hugely informative and entertaining. The afternoon was devoted to three papers that addressed wider historical themes and projects in Essex. Professor James Raven of the University of Essex provided a riveting introduction to the importance of the Harsnett Library. Dr Jane Pearson and Maria Rayner, also from the University of Essex, then described the fascinating history of Colchester Lock Hospital (1869–86). Finally, the vernacular architectural expert Brenda Watkin explained the objectives and findings of the ambitious "Discovering Coggeshall Project" (funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund). All the papers were very stimulating and enthusiastically received.



Herbert Eiden, Shirley Durgan, Janet Cooper and Chris Thornton – and the cake

A number of Essex societies also very kindly provided promotional displays and bookstalls in the ERO foyer, showcasing their contributions to local history in Essex. These included the Essex Society for Family History, The Essex Society for Archaeology and History, The Friends of Historic Essex, the Essex Historic Buildings Group and the Clacton VCH Group.

We are very grateful to Lynn Marston for helping to organise the day and for laying on delicious food and drink. Special thanks from the VCH are due to the committee members of the Friends of Historic Essex who ably delivered the refreshments, washed up the dishes and helped tidy up – making the day run very smoothly for everyone. Overall about 70 delegates attended, an impressive total given the relatively short notice with which the event was launched. It was good to see many old friends and colleagues present, including the former county editor, Dr Janet Cooper, and assistant editor, Shirley Durgan. Some press coverage was obtained with an article appearing in the *Essex Chronicle*. The event encouraged the thought that more such seminars on Essex history should be held in the future.

The Queen's Jubilee

Her Majesty the Queen has graciously agreed to a rededication of the Victoria County Histories in celebration of her Diamond Jubilee. The series will continue to be called the *Victoria County History* in memory of Queen Victoria who gave the History its title, and from 2012 onwards, each volume will also carry a dedication to Queen Elizabeth II.

The central VCH will be publishing a book to commemorate the event, to be launched at the Marc Fitch lecture on 25 June. The book will be both an e-book and a print-on-demand volume. It will cover the origins and aims of the VCH, its changing history, its editors and contributors, how it is organised now - including volunteers - together with a list of volumes published since the year 2000 and to appear up to 2015. Above all, the centrepiece of the volume will be short essays on each county, each given a double-page spread with illustrations. Chris Thornton and Herbert Eiden have already sent an excellent contribution on Essex. We hope soon to be able to give our supporters more information about the price of the publication at our AGM, together with details on how to obtain copies in your preferred format.

The aim of producing such a volume is to appeal to new supporters, including those who would like to make a financial donation, or to volunteer, or to help start up VCH research in counties not currently active.

And a local celebration for the Clacton Group

Congratulations to the VCH Essex Clacton Group, which will be ten years old in 2012. The Appeal rejoices at this anniversary too, for the ten years' of work by the Clacton members indicate both the Group's ongoing commitment to local history, and our editors' success in fostering long-term volunteer research which can do so much to help progress on completing the Essex VCH.

What is the VCH?

Begun in 1899, and named by her permission after Queen Victoria, the *Victoria History of the Counties of England* aimed to give to 'each English- man a history of his native land'.

For each county a set of volumes was planned to cover everything from the landscape and natural history to the development of towns and villages through prehistory to the industrial age and beyond to the present day. 14 of these county sets are now complete and work continues in a further 13 counties – including Essex.

The VCH is without doubt the greatest publishing project in English local history, and has become an institution, renowned for its scholarly integrity. No other project has covered the history of England with such closeness or with such a wide-ranging eye, encompassing archaeological, ecclesiastical, architectural, political and other sources.

You can find out about publication and progress of the Essex project at www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/Essex. The VCH volumes are available in main libraries and an increasing number of them can be read online at www.british-history.ac.uk. You can also order them from the publishers, Boydell & Brewer Ltd (www.boydell.co.uk) or telephone: 01394 610600.

HOW TO GIVE

If you would like to support the *Victoria County History of Essex*, we would be happy to send you a leaflet about the great work, together with a donation and gift aid form. Or you can simply send us a cheque, made payable to *VCH Essex (Appeal)*, with a gift aid declaration if appropriate.

The address for donations is that of the Hon Treasurer:
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Stratford St Mary, Suffolk, CO7 6JX. Tel: 01206 337239;
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For information (and additional copies of this issue) please contact the Hon Secretary, Patricia Herrmann, West Bowers Hall, Woodham Walter, Maldon, Essex CM9 6R; tel 01245222562

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