

# ESSEX PAST

The newsletter of the VCH Essex Trust

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Monks Barn, High Street, Newport. Dating from the 15th century, it is one of the finest houses in Newport. See *The Newport Project*, page 7.

*Photograph © by David Evans*

## Letter from the Chairman

This report covers our activities during the fifteen months from 1 October 2012 to 31 December 2013

### REVIEW

**Finance** The period under review has been a significant one for the Trust. As previously reported, the highly successful Diamond Jubilee Appeal, together with existing funds, placed the Trust on a sound financial footing. This already satisfactory situation was further augmented by an unexpected legacy of almost £90,000 resulting in a near doubling of the Trust's balance to £186,982 even after taking into account increased payments to the Editor. This development has ensured the future of Volume XII (St. Osyth to the Naze: North Essex Coastal Parishes). Indeed, it is hoped that it will prove possible to increase activity with a view to publishing this volume towards the end of 2016 or beginning of 2017. Of course, increased resources bring increased responsibility. The Committee has invested the sum of £100,000 in a Fixed Interest Bond representing a secure charity investment – albeit a struggle to obtain an acceptable rate of return with the base rate at a record low since March 2009. A reserve of £50,000 has also been established in order to ring-fence funds to guarantee that sufficient resources are available to commence the research relating to Volume XIII (Harwich and Dovercourt). The Trustees continue to be most grateful to its loyal supporters whose contributions are still very much required in the task of safeguarding the future of the VCH in Essex.

**Volume XII** The Editor, Chris Thornton (in the temporary absence of Herbert Eiden (Assistant Editor)) has worked tirelessly on researching primary sources at the Essex Record Office (including census returns, coastal maps and manorial and parish records). He has also drafted sections of the Introduction and Economic History and Social History relating to the parishes of Kirby-le-Soken, Thorpe-le-Soken and Walton-le-Soken.

Original leases, surveys and accounts of the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's have also been examined at the Guildhall Library. Typical research has focused on analysing baptism and burial records as well as additional information on parish charities and schools. By way of further background, detailed analysis has been undertaken on Poor Law statistics for the whole of the Tendring Hundred [see page 10]. It is pleasing to report that Herbert Eiden will be able to resume his rôle as Assistant Editor from May 2014 with particular emphasis on drafting entries for the parishes of Great and Little Holland and much else besides. It is also extremely encouraging that Shirley Durgan and Jenepher Hawkins have volunteered to assist with researching and writing sections relating to the history of the important parish of St. Osyth.

**Volunteer Groups** The two volunteer groups continue to be active. The Clacton Group, comprising some twenty enthusiastic volunteers, meets on a monthly basis to progress work on the Holland Haven project which has recently attracted Heritage Lottery funding. Tim Underwood represents the Clacton Group on the Trust's committee.

The work of the Newport Group under the direction of Anthony Tuck (also a member of the Trust's committee) has continued unabated, and is fully described in his article on page 7. The Trustees have agreed to provide the necessary funding for publication of the book, whilst retaining the proceeds of sales, and any surplus resulting.

**Personalia** Geoffrey Hare retired as Chairman at the 2013 AGM. His service originated in the late 1980s as a representative of the Essex County Council on the former Essex Victoria County History Committee. He succeeded the late Geoffrey Clements as Treasurer in 1992 and went on to skilfully guide the Appeal Fund through extremely difficult and turbulent times eventually overseeing the smooth transition to the present Trust status. It is extremely pleasing that Geoffrey remains a member of the Committee thus enabling the Trustees to benefit from his

considerable experience and wise counsel. Following election as Chairman it became necessary to recruit a new Treasurer. Bill Abbott, a retired actuary who is involved in a number of charitable activities, has proved to be a significant addition following his election at the last AGM

### OUTLOOK

The ensuing year is one full of optimism. The Trust is experiencing a degree of financial security that has hitherto proved elusive; Herbert Eiden will join our industrious Editor imminently; the volunteer groups are producing tangible results; and the Trustees are able to commence planning beyond publication of the impending volume. The future looks bright with your Trustees continuing to strive for delivery without the merest hint of complacency. Much remains to be accomplished and I look forward to reporting further at the forthcoming AGM.

H. MARTIN STUCHFIELD  
*Chairman*

### COME TO OUR AGM

We have changed the day to a Saturday, and will hold the meeting at 2 pm in the afternoon—both changes made to encourage more of you to attend since your journey can be made in daylight. The venue is the Coopers' and Coborn School on St Mary's Lane, Upminster, a venue that we hope will bring VCH supporters from 'old Essex' too. After the formal business, our speaker will be the much-loved and highly respected Essex historian

**Dr Jennifer Ward MA PhD FRHistS**, who will talk on  
*London over the Border in the later Middle Ages*

**VCH Essex Trust AGM 5 April 2014 at 2pm**

## VCH Editor's Report

My work for the VCH was delayed for part of the spring and early summer of 2013 when I was unable to work due to ill health, but I am now fully recovered and have subsequently made good progress. Most of my time has been spent completing the collection of primary research material for the three parishes of Kirby-le-Soken, Thorpe-le-Soken and Walton-le-Soken, although I have also assembled material relating to early estates and settlement for the whole area to be covered by Volume XII. This work is now being written up with the intention of completing a first draft of the three Soken parishes by the start of May 2014. Herbert Eiden has continued his work for the German Historical Institute during this period, but may be able to re-join the VCH starting in the same month.

Meanwhile, I am very pleased to report that my former colleague Shirley Durgan and a member of Essex Record Office staff, Jenny Hawkins, have volunteered to support the VCH project by researching and writing the Social and Religious History sections of the history of St Osyth. An initial meeting has been held and basic information and searching lists and aids passed on to Shirley and Jenny. During 2014-15 I will work closely with them to complete the history of St Osyth.

Since last Easter I have also been heavily involved with our two volunteer projects in Newport and Clacton (see separate reports in this issue). For Newport I have continued to assist Professor Anthony Tuck with the arrangement and editing of the paperback history of the parish to be published by the VCH later this year. I have been meeting with the volunteers of the Clacton VCH Group about once a month to help with their HLF-funded project. We have worked through a series of documentary sources that throw light on the history of the Tendring Coast and Holland Haven/Gunfleet estuary in particular. This has already brought to light historical and landscape evidence that will contribute significantly to sections for VCH Volume XII.

During 2013, the Getty Foundation agreed to fund the appointment to central VCH staff of Dr Adam Chapman as an Editor and Training Coordinator for Volunteers. I have had good discussions with him about Essex volunteers and look forward to working with him.



Members of the Clacton Group at the ERO with the Editor and Adam Chapman

We have also continued to support and contribute to historical projects and initiatives throughout the county. I have attended events with displays, such as the ERO Open Day last September, and given talks on VCH related research, most recently to the Maldon Society this January.

Alongside Neil Wiffen of the ERO, I am editing the journal of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History for 2013, while the Society seeks a new permanent Hon. Editor. Both Herbert Eiden and I are members of the editorial panel of the new Essex Publications series to be launched by the University of Hertfordshire Press, and I am currently liaising with Tony Doe and the Trustees and Friends of the Plume Library to establish a project to publish a series of collected papers on the Life and Legacies of Dr Thomas Plume (1630–1704). I have also helped ERO staff prepare the forthcoming conference (Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> March) “The **Fighting Essex** Soldier: War Recruitment and Remembrance in the Fourteenth Century”. Herbert is contributing a paper to this conference on ‘Military Aspects of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381’, and later in March he is giving a lecture to the Newport Local History group on the subject of the 1381 rising.

CHRIS THORNTON  
*Editor, VCH Essex*

## The Newport VCH Project

The Newport VCH Project, which is now nearing completion, began in 2010 as an initiative from VCH Central Office and its then Director, Professor John Beckett. The original intention was to produce a parish history of Newport according to VCH guidelines and conventions, but to publish it on the Internet. However, the parallel development by Central Office of the series of stand-alone parish histories, known as "shorts", led to an agreement that the Newport history should appear in this form as well.

Research for the project was completed by the end of 2013, and with the help and advice of Chris Thornton the editing of the various parts of the work is now under way. Publication is provisionally planned for the end of 2014. As the Chairman mentions in his Letter, the cost of publication will be underwritten by the Essex VCH Trust, to whom the contributors are very grateful.

The work is being undertaken by a group of five volunteers, all of whom live or have lived in the Newport area, with the material on the history of the built environment of Newport being contributed by Dr James Bettley. Shirley Durgan has undertaken some research for the project in the Essex Record Office.

It is a substantial project: the published volume is likely to be about 250 pages, with both black and white and colour images. The size of the village, and its particularly rich documentation, probably justify a work on this scale, for Newport has always had some of the features of a small town. It lies on an important route from London to East Anglia, and it could perhaps be described as a "thoroughfare village". It may have originated as a royal centre in the 10th century during the West Saxon kings' reconquest of the Danelaw. It had a market until the mid-12th century, and again later, and served as a local centre for the

surrounding villages. In the 12th century it had a small Jewish community. Its inhabitants were engaged in various crafts and small industries as well as agriculture, for it has never been a purely agricultural community. The village was also a judicial centre: some Petty Sessions were held there from time to time until the 19th century, and the House of Correction served to house minor offenders from the surrounding area. The 18th century building, replacing an earlier one, still survives and has been converted into apartments.

The founding in 1588 of Newport Free Grammar School (which still exists as a local authority comprehensive school) also made Newport a place of more than local significance. The founder, Joyce Frankland, was the widow of a wealthy London merchant, and London connections - not least London money - have always been important for the village. The coming of the railway in 1845 made it possible for pupils to travel, as they still do, from a wide area of north west Essex. The railway also brought some local industry to the village in the form a gas works and maltings, both sited immediately beside the railway.

However, agriculture was always the main occupation of the inhabitants, and the owners of the Shortgrove estate, just to the north of the village, were the major landowners. From the 18th century, however, the owners of Quendon Hall also acquired substantial holdings of property in the village, and by the mid-19th century they and the owners of Shortgrove were the leading figures in village society. Even here, however, Newport's links with the outside world, particularly London, were apparent. In the Edwardian era both Sir Carl Meyer at Shortgrove and Sir William Foot-Mitchell at Quendon belonged to the new plutocracy rather than the old landowning class, and both were important figures in the London financial world.

Between 1930 and 1980 the village was transformed. The two estates sold the freeholds of much of their property in the village, often to sitting tenants, and a village of tenants became, in great part, a village of owner-occupiers. In the 1970s and 1980s the population increased rapidly as extensive residential building took place on land to the west of the High Street: in 1971 the population was 1262, and by 1991 it had reached 1981. The village could not provide employment for such large numbers, and the improvement in communications both by road and by rail in the last decades of the 20th century led to most people finding employment outside the village, including a substantial contingent who commute to London.

Even though the village has seen much modern residential development, it still has a wealth of timber-framed buildings, including, especially, Monks Barn, illustrated on the front of this newsletter. Alongside the main VCH project, therefore, there has also been a smaller project to date by dendro-chronological analysis six of these timber-framed buildings, including Monks Barn. This work should be complete by early March, in time for the results to be incorporated in the section on the building history of Newport.

ANTHONY TUCK  
*Convenor of the Newport VCH Group*

#### A NOTE TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS

You may have wondered why you have received this mailing by old-fashioned mail, when last year we asked you to provide your email addresses, so that we could use that modern method of communication. Many of you preferred 'snail mail', so we shall joyfully continue to use it, at least for AGM papers.

## The Old Poor Law in the Sokenes

The parish records of Kirby-le-Soken and Thorpe-le-Soken are particularly full of material on the operation of the Old Poor Law. A full overview has been prepared for VCH Essex Vol. XII for each parish, but I thought Trust supporters might like to read some of the interesting details in advance. The poor rates of the two parishes were relatively high, although rather less than some larger communities in Tendring Hundred such as Harwich and St Osyth. The costs per head of population were especially high in Kirby, which had a less diverse economy and probably fewer employment prospects than Thorpe. Local peaks of expenditure were reached 1801-02 and again towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars and their immediate aftermath (1810-20). At Kirby regular Speenhamland flour allowances appear to have been introduced in 1809, while at Thorpe, as well as direct relief, the surveyors provided employment by putting poor labourers to work on the parish roads.

Overseers' records for both parishes in the later 18th century record the policing and administration of the Old Poor and Settlement laws, and the expense of providing weekly out-door relief, clothing, shoes, fuel, medical, midwifery, nursing and funerals for the poor. At Kirby relief appears to have been conducted in a fairly liberal manner. Between April and October 1818, for example, £26 8s. 3d. was spent on the provision of boots and shoes (probably to over 50 paupers), and in 1823 sets of pauper clothing included leather jackets, waistcoats, breeches, and duffle coats. A bill among the overseers' papers records the purchase of balls, marbles, a musical box and an accordion from a Colchester toyshop – could these have been destined to entertain pauper children at Kirby workhouse? Good medical care was also provided. In 1809-10 a surgeon was paid a salary of £12 12s. for providing medical care to the poor; his extra charges included inoculating a family with

smallpox. In 1816 the Kirby overseers authorised the purchase, packaging and carriage to Kirby of a wooden leg for a pauper at a total cost of £2 9s. This, however, was no ordinary appliance: it was purchased from William Sheldrake of The Strand, London, "Collar Maker to her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales; Truss Maker to the Middlesex Hospital; Artificial Leg Maker to the King's German Legion; by appointment of His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief The Duke of Cambridge".

Overseers also took great care to provide for pauper children, perhaps hoping to reduce both current and future costs to their parishes. At Thorpe the parish officers arranged for pauper children to be 'put out' to local families. In 1767 there were 14 such children who were kept in sufficient food, drink, clothing, washing and lodging at a total cost of £30 a year. Numbers appear to have declined thereafter, and only eight children were 'put out' by 1770-1, and five by 1771-2. Another way of dealing with the problem was through apprenticeships. At Kirby between 1687 and 1835 some 40 such apprenticeships have left records. At first most were arranged locally, with boys being apprenticed to Kirby farmers in husbandry and girls in housewifery, but other masters included a Colchester bay and say weaver in 1690, a Great Clacton blacksmith in the same year, an Ipswich fisherman in 1702, a Kirby blacksmith in 1743, a Brightlingsea oyster dredger in 1758, and a Great Holland shoemaker in 1766. From about 1770 male paupers were usually apprenticed between the ages of 13 and 18 for periods of between five and seven years to fishermen at Harwich and other ports. A similar pattern pertained at Thorpe.

For long periods, at both Kirby and Thorpe, the overseers preferred to 'farm' their poor for a fixed sum, rather than be responsible for the day-to-day management of their parish workhouses. In 1774 Thorpe built a new workhouse and the very next year they 'farmed' their poor to Thomas Bragg for £208 a year. Bragg was to provide sufficient food, drink, clothing, fuel and all other necessaries, excepting medical bills. Any children that were 'put out' or

apprenticed were to leave the workhouse clothed at Bragg's expense. Evidently the initial lease underestimated the costs, as later workhouse masters were usually paid more. A new agreement was reached with Bragg in 1781, when he, or his wife, was also obliged to attend church with the poor every sabbath "in decent order", and to pay the costs of carrying paupers or "great Belly'd women" to their future place of settlement (probably when they were successfully married off). He was, however, excused the costs of maintaining bastards in the year they became chargeable to the parish. Similar arrangements pertained at Kirby, where in 1781 the poor were 'farmed' to Daniel Cornelius of Great Bromley, a woolcomber, and his wife, for £252 10s. a year for three years. Cornelius had to provide a "good and wholesome" diet, their clothing, and medical and nursing care. He was also to cause the poor to attend divine service and to do his best to maintain their morals, and was to have the expense of removing all vagrants from the parish. In return he received the workhouse, the beds and bedding therein, and the use of seven other tenements occupied by paupers; all of which he had to keep in repair. In both parishes any disputes between the 'farmers' and the paupers were to be settled by the vestry.

A little is known about the parish workhouses themselves and how they operated. To use the example of Thorpe workhouse, this was situated at the west end of Thorpe Street, on its south side, adjacent to the site of the former French Huguenot chapel. In 1812 it had 13 rooms described with their beds and other contents: a Governor's chamber (two beds), an adjacent small room (one bed), a 'long' bed room (six beds), a Governor's 'keeping' (living) room, three closets, a buttery, a brew house, a spinning room (with nine spinning wheels) where the poor probably also lived and ate, a 'sick room', and chambers over the sick room (one bed) and over the brew house (four beds). Between 1813 and 1815 an average of 23 paupers lived there

(compared to 84 supported outside of it). Paupers' own furniture was seized and sold by the parish officers if they were removed to the workhouse: in 1824 when one woman entered the workhouse her household goods were sold for £18 10s. The poor also had to work and their day was presumably regulated by the workhouse clock repaired in 1823. The spinning wheels were evidently kept busy with the overseers spending £5 13s. 7d. for 100lb of wool in 1813 and £2 2s. for spinning yarn in 1820. The overseers' accounts also record the provision of many small necessaries for the workhouse and its inhabitants, especially fuel and victuals but also 28lbs of soap in August 1818 and flour and suet for Christmas puddings in 1827.

Shortly after the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834, and the creation of Tendring Hundred Poor Law Union, the parish workhouses in both Thorpe and Kirby were sold. They survived into the later 20th century, apparently converted into cottages, with Thorpe's finally being demolished in 1951 and Kirby's c.1969.

CHRIS THORNTON

### Essex Publications

A panel of Essex historians, including the VCH Essex Trust's Chairman, Martin Stuchfield, and our two VCH researchers, Chris Thornton and Herbert Eiden, have planned and launched a new Local History publishing initiative "Essex Publications". This new series aims to publish important scholarly studies on the historic county of Essex in an attractive and well-illustrated format. Books in the series will include individual monographs, collected studies and conference proceedings. They may encompass material on the whole county of Essex or on specific areas or places, but the content and analysis will always address topics of wider historical interest and debate. The series will be published by The University of Hertfordshire Press and the first volume, a new history of Essex during WW2 by Paul Rusiecki and supported by the Historical Association (Essex Branch), should

appear in May 2015. Further contributions to the series are sought, and potential authors are invited to complete a standard book proposal form and submit it to the Editorial Panel through UH Press. Informal approaches are also most welcome and should be addressed in the first instance to Dr Chris Thornton: [c.c.thornton@btinternet.com](mailto:c.c.thornton@btinternet.com)

For more details of the series:

<http://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/our-structure/subsidiary-companies/uh-press/essex-publications>

### CLACTON VCH GROUP

The Clacton VCH Group, in addition to its current Holland Haven Research Project, will be holding a 'Local History Day 2014' on Saturday 4th October 2014, at St. James Church Hall, (next to the West Cliff Theatre) Tower Road, Clacton on Sea, 10am - 4.30pm.

This event will include the launch of a new Holland on Sea book, written by one of the Group members and titled *Holland on Sea, a record of the 20th century*. That century witnessed the remarkable transformation of an ancient but small farming village of Little Holland, with a population of just 78 into the large residential community of Holland on Sea today. Its story, told chronologically in a series of illustrations, and complemented with a year by year record of its progress, will it is hoped provide a much needed record of this place.

Additionally, the event will include contributions from local history societies, family history, a living history group, and of course the Essex VCH. There will also be refreshments, and entry will be free, but donations towards the hall hire will be welcome.

The Clacton VCH Group will be delighted to welcome you to our exhibition at Clacton on Sea.

ROGER KENNELL  
*Chairman, Clacton VCH Group*

## JOHN BOYES (1914-2013)

John Boyes, who served for a number of years on the Victoria County History of Essex Editorial Committee, and later on the Appeals Committee, died on 6 May 2013, at the age of 98.

Born in Guildford, Surrey, in November 1914, he worked in public health on leaving school and later served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in the Second World War. Subsequent to demobilisation, he became a factory inspector and worked in Manchester and Tyneside before settling in Chingford with his family in 1956. Here, he joined Chingford Historical Society, of which he became Chairman and President in due course, and took a keen interest in local history in general.

A childhood visit to a canal, with his father, stimulated his interest in waterways and, with Robert Russell, he wrote *The Canals of Eastern England* as part of a series on British canals edited by Charles Hadfield. He campaigned to keep the Conway Suspension Bridge.

A founder-member of Essex Archaeological & Historical Congress in 1964, he was President (1980-84), wrote its history and continued to attend its meetings until a year or two ago. He was, in addition, President of the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society and of the Lee & Stort Rivers Committee and a member of the Essex Society for Archaeology & History from 1980.

He gave many lectures and wrote articles for numerous publications. In 1999 he was made a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

John was also a Methodist lay preacher from 1954, and helped to train other lay preachers. He was a stalwart of North Chingford Methodist Church, where his funeral was held on 29 May of last year. John married Marjorie Tuck, who predeceased him, and is survived by three sons, four grandchildren and one great grandchild.

STAN NEWENS, June 2013

## 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 Englishman 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](http://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](http://www.british-history.ac.uk). You can also order them from the publishers, Boydell & Brewer Ltd ([www.boydell.co.uk](http://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 form for both donation and gift aid.

Or you can simply send us a cheque, made payable to *VCH Essex*, with a gift aid declaration if appropriate.

The address for donations is that of the Hon Treasurer:  
W M Abbott, MA FIA, 13 Sovereign Crescent, Lexden Road,  
Colchester, CO3 3UZ.

Mr Abbott's e-mail address is: [bill.abbott@btinternet.com](mailto:bill.abbott@btinternet.com)

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