

ESSEX PAST

The newsletter of the VCH Essex Trust

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From John Speed's map of Essex (1610) showing Tendring Hundred with the places studied in the VCH Essex Vol XII and also Harwich for Vol XIII

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to this Spring issue of *Essex Past*. It heralds a momentous year for the Trust in its need to obtain new funding for its future programme: initially Volume XIII on the historically-important port of Harwich.

Before venturing further into the process by which our fund-raising will be developed, it is surely desirable to note the vital role which the Victoria County History fulfils in the history of England. No other history project has ever attempted, let alone succeeded, in tying the detailed history of place, of locality, with its linkage and relevance to the regional and national story of which it is a part. This will be most clearly exemplified in the Harwich volume on which work has begun. It is at once a principal access to the Dutch/Flemish/North French regions with which we have been connected since medieval times, the home port of the *Mayflower*, the port for which Pepys and Deane were MPs, the home of the Harwich Force in World War I and which hosted the surrender of the U-boats in 1918. Again the home of the 'little ships' from 1939-45, it became one of the ports from which the now-legendary boat train services to the Continent ran, initiating tourism. Volume XIII, therefore, will be an important volume both for the Trust and for British history.

To turn to the finances necessary to underpin the Trust's work, it was clear from the second half of 2018 that it became imperative for the raising of sufficient additional funding to carry us through the process of seeking support from major charitable and other funding sources, particularly as the application processes can often be lengthy. Our appeal to regular supporters and indications of our needs to other bodies, was gratifyingly successful. By year end we had received around £16,000, sufficient to achieve our first target. We are immensely grateful to all those who responded so generously.

The Trust has now set about the task of raising further funds with an appeal commencing at our AGM, appropriately in Harwich on the 27th April, to assure the completion of the Harwich volume.

Although these are 'hard times' as public funding ever declines and even public libraries become dependent on volunteers, our achievements since the Trust's first major appeal in 2011 gives us confidence. Predominantly funded since the 1950s, first by Essex local councils and the London Essex Boroughs and latterly by Essex County Council, the loss of their support led to the recreation of the Essex VCH as an independent Trust. The 2011 appeal yielded resources sufficient to enable it to complete the two substantial parts of Volume XII, the commencement of work on Volume XIII and two authoritative short histories of Newport and of 19th century Harwich. Good progress is also being made on the history of 19th and 20th century Southend.

Whilst publishing issues are likely to delay the appearance of Volume XII, at our AGM in April we hope to be able to announce the date of publication of the Harwich Short.

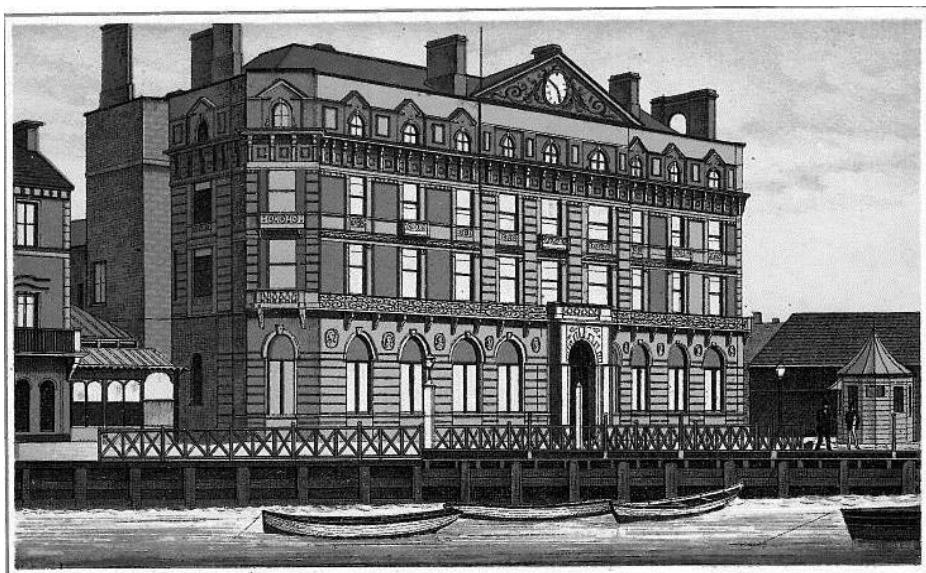
So, although 2019 is likely to be a year of trepidation, the Trust has 'form'. It is, therefore, with confidence and, indeed, some excitement, that the Trust approaches its tasks which it will, as the year progresses, widely share with all those interested in the history of our county.

GEOFFREY HARE
Chairman

& please come to our AGM on **Saturday 27 April 2019**,
2.30 at the 1912 Centre in Harwich, when
Professor Alison Rowlands will tell us all about
Notorious Witches in the County of Essex

FROM THE EDITOR

Since the last newsletter the VCH Editors have been engaged in a variety of tasks, mainly bringing our publications closer to fruition. VCH Volume XII – St Osyth to the Naze (part 1) has been typeset and is now being proof-read. Many thanks are due to all the contributors to the volume for helping the Editors and for their forbearance while the volume is going through the press. Andrew Senter's VCH Short *Harwich, Dovercourt and Parkes*ton in the Nineteenth Century has been typeset and proof-read and the index has now been compiled. We hope to see these two publications during 2019. Public book launches for both volumes are being planned, details of which will be circulated when they are finalised.



GREAT EASTERN HOTEL, HARWICH.

The Hotel opened in 1865 and still dominates part of Harwich's waterfront.

From: *An Album of Ipswich, Harwich and Dovercourt Views*
(Charles Reynolds & Co., London, n.d.)



CLIFF TOWN PARADE.

View of the Cliff Town Estate, developed in the early 1860s.

From: *Dowsett's New Album of Southend Views* (n.d.).

The limited finances available to the Trust, combined with the need to see Volume XII through the press, has meant that the Editors have only conducted a small amount of new research this year towards Volume XIII. Most of the published calendars of medieval and Tudor primary sources have now been searched. Work on the extensive collection of medieval court and account rolls for Harwich and Dovercourt is in progress. All Tudor wills for Harwich and Dovercourt and a range of the lay subsidy returns for the same period have been noted or transcribed and analysed. In 2019 we will continue to investigate sources at the ERO, TNA and other archives including those of Harwich Town Council.

The VCH Southend Group, under the direction of Ken Crowe, has continued to research and accumulate draft sections for its planned VCH Short on modern Southend. They currently hope to have completed their first draft by the end of 2019 or early in 2020. Among the shorter essays already prepared is one by Jenny Butler on the creation of the Cliff Town Estate. This was an attractive development with many of the houses having a fine sea view, the foundation stone being laid on 3rd October 1859.

The VCH Essex Trust has agreed to make a grant of £750 to the Clacton Group to help fund their next project. Two further grant applications totalling £750 are being submitted to other funding bodies. Assuming they are successful, the project will involve Clacton VCH Group members being trained to read and interpret a sample from the Port Books (Customs Accounts) relating to trading activities of the port of Harwich from 1565 onwards. These accounts are contained within the records of the 'Head' Port of Ipswich. The books, held at TNA, record the names and sizes of ships, their masters, ports of origin and destination, the names of merchants involved and their cargoes. A sample of the books will be photographed at TNA and members will then work from print-outs of these. The information extracted will create a database from which the coastal and overseas trade of Harwich merchants and shipowners can be understood and thus will contribute to VCH Volume XIII.

CHRIS THORNTON
County Editor, VCH Essex



Why is ECC Chairman Cllr John Jowers talking at Great Oakley?
See pages 14-15 for more news of the VCH Essex Clacton Group

THE TRUST'S FINANCES

I was delighted with the warm welcome I received at the last AGM, this being my first experience of anything to do with history, although I am pleased to confirm to being both born in and still living and working in Essex.

This is a substantial Trust with an apparently healthy level of reserves at £63,369. I am pleased to say at the end of the year this has increased to £68,767 and will be higher with an outstanding gift aid claim made recently for £2,974. Nevertheless, I feel that this handsome total can lull us into a false sense of security.

Currently the individual supporters of the Trust make regular small donations amounting to just under £7,000 (including gift aid recovery) per annum, and this has been enhanced by generous one-off gifts. There are, however, ongoing running expenses of the Trust which primarily relate to the cost of work by our contributing Editors. It would, therefore, be better if the Trust had more funds in reserve to provide a back-up for the expected completion costs for both parts of Volume XII and for Volume XIII in the future.

Previous budgets prepared have indicated that the Trust's costs are expected to amount to £165,000 for each volume, so you can see that careful financial management by our Trustees is paramount.

I am now aware that recent delays to publication dates have been a great disappointment, although I appreciate that academic work is not often completed within the deadlines I usually encounter! I sincerely hope that you - generous readers - will not be tempted to reduce your financial support to our important publications.

Perhaps you will know others in your communities who have never heard of the Essex VCH, like me just twelve months ago, and you can introduce them to such a valuable activity in our County. There will be an essential push for more sources of funding and new innovative ways to raise money for the Trust in the future. Please contact me or one of the other Trustees if you can help in any way.

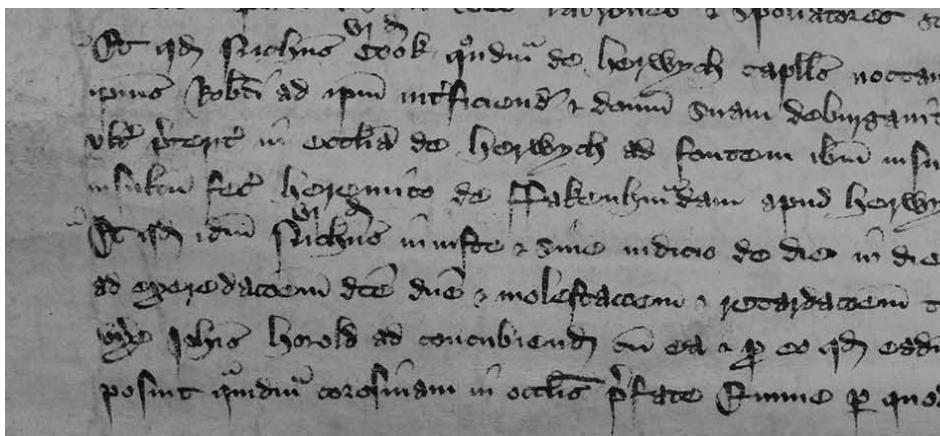
LOUISA TIPPETT
VCH Essex Hon Treasurer

A Rogue Cleric, or 'Normal' Level of Late Medieval Violence?

In September last year I gave a paper at the one-day 'Manorial Documents Register' conference at the National Archives in London. My topic was the crucial importance of manorial court rolls, account rolls, terriers and rentals for our VCH research. Without a good set of manorial documents we would struggle with information on manorial descent, the parish's economy and social composition, to name but a few topics.

At the end of my paper I presented examples from our current research on Harwich and Dovercourt in the medieval and early modern period. Although one manor, 'Dovercourt cum Harwich', there were separate court sittings for the two communities by the end of the fourteenth century. Besides holding a court baron (dealing with manorial business only, i.e. admissions and surrenders of copyhold land) the lords of the manor also exercised the right to have a Court Leet (dealing with other matters such as policing, minor civil pleas, maintenance of roads etc.). The court and leet in Harwich were held once a year, consecutively on the same day, on the feast of St Barnabas the Apostle (11 June).

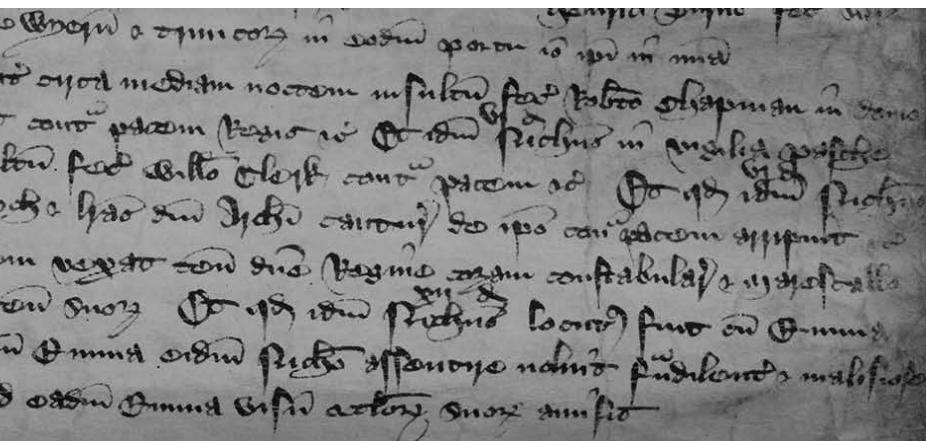
The leet proceedings for the bustling port are a particularly rich



source for the study of the social character and cohesion of the community. This is evident in a grim yet fascinating entry, dated 11 June 1407, listing several misdemeanours of the cleric Nicholas Cook (ERO, D/B 4/38/4; translated from the original Latin below):

'And [the chief pledges say] that Nicholas Cook, once of Harwich, chaplain, assaulted Robert Chapman about the middle of the night in the house of the said Robert with the intent to kill him and he burgled his house against the peace of the king [amerced] (6d). And the same Nicholas assaulted William Clerk on the eve of Easter last at the font in the church of Harwich (6d). And that the same Nicholas assaulted the hermit of Fakenhamdam [Hempton Priory, Norfolk; Augustinian canons] at Harwich and seizing from him letters of the Archbishop of Canterbury (6d). And that the same Nicholas unjustly and without reason harassed the tenants of the Queen day by day before the constables and the marshal to the disinheritance of the said lady and the molestation and obstruction of her tenants (6d).'

It is unclear which constables and which marshal are referred to here. Cook might have denounced inhabitants of Harwich before the town's constables or he may have sued tenants of the manor in the royal household court of the Marshalsea, but this is speculation at this stage of the research. However, his most chilling crime is reported in the final entry -



‘And that the same Nicholas spoke with Emma, wife of John Horold, to sleep with her, and when the said Emma did not want to assent to the said Nicholas, he deviously and maliciously put a certain corrosive in her eyes so that the said Emma lost her eye sight (12d).’

This case certainly deserves closer attention than can be given here. It is the first historical example I came across of what has sadly become the quite ‘modern’ crime of acid attack. Future research will show if this level of violence against women was out of the ordinary, or if late medieval society, at least in Harwich, was accustomed to this sort of brutality. Does the relatively low fine of 12 pence for this offence point to the latter?

HERBERT EIDEN
Assistant Editor VCH Essex

‘Essex on the edge’

Make haste to book now for this one-day conference at the **Essex Record Office on Saturday 18 May 2019**

The event has been designed to showcase current research and help raise funding for the VCH in Essex. It is jointly organised by the Victoria County History of Essex, the Friends of Historic Essex, and the Essex Record Office. It will include entirely new research undertaken for the next volume of the Victoria County History (volume XIII) on Harwich.

Using rich archival documentation, two of our speakers will tell us about life and migration in this thriving port town in the Medieval and Tudor periods. Two further talks will assess aspects of the impact on the county of two significant military and religious changes, the beginning of the Hundred Years’ War in the early 14th century and the Dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century.

The conference will take place from 10am until 3 pm and will include a light lunch, all for a modest fee of £30. For fuller details (and booking through EventBrite), see: <http://essexrecordoffice.co.uk/events/essex-on-the-edge/>

Edward I, Harwich and town planning

The succession crisis that followed the death of Alexander III, King of Scots, in 1287, and his grand-daughter Margaret 'The Maid of Norway' shortly afterwards, allowed Edward I to involve himself in the Scottish succession. He was appointed adjudicator between rival claimants, effectively becoming 'Kingmaker', but also used this process as the opportunity to assert feudal overlordship over the Scottish crown. Edward's heavy-handed treatment of the Scots led to rebellion and in 1295, after Edward demanded Scottish support in his dispute with France, the Scots signed a treaty of mutual aid with France (known as the 'Auld Alliance') and launched an unsuccessful attack on Carlisle. Edward retaliated by invading Scotland and on 30 March 1296 his army besieged, sacked and burned the then Scottish royal burgh of Berwick on Tweed, the out-of-control soldiers slaughtering much of the town's population. While the Scots ultimately retained their independence, Berwick has remained ever since the northern-most town in England (just 2½ miles from the Scottish border).

What, you may well ask, do these northern events have to do with the history of Essex? Berwick was utterly devastated by the assault and afterwards Edward I determined that, on the model of his planted towns in Wales, a new, fortified, Berwick – garrisoned and populated by loyal settlers – would be constructed as part of his strategy for controlling Scotland both politically and economically. In 1967 Maurice Beresford in his seminal work *New Towns of the Middle Ages* described how Edward started this process by calling a colloquium of town planning (what Beresford called a "little Parliament of Town Planners") which met at the Essex port town of Harwich in 1297. The topic had first been raised at a stormy Parliament held at Bury St Edmunds in the autumn of the preceding year. Subsequently, the King sent out letters summoning selected men from London and 20 other towns, with the precise instructions to discuss the setting out of a new town at Berwick. Only a couple of the men came from planned towns themselves, but prominent among those present were Thomas Alard, a leading

merchant of New Winchelsea (planted in Edward's lifetime), and Henry le Waleys a prominent London alderman and Mayor (1273–4, 1281–4, 1298–99). Le Waleys had recently returned from a mission to Gascony where between 1263 and 1297 more than 70 new towns ('bastides') had been planted within the lands controlled by the England crown.

No records survive of the colloquium at Harwich, but a smaller working party was afterwards sent north to execute the project. Beresford notes that it is possible that more of old Berwick actually survived the siege than the chronicler's descriptions would allow, because the town's plan is far less geometrical than others set out *de novo*. It had evidently been constructed by 1302 when a charter was granted to the new community. The venue for the planning meeting, at Harwich, may have been serendipitous, as the King's letter had summoned the men to meet wherever the King happened to be. Very probably Edward was in Harwich in January 1297 preparing for his war against France, perhaps staying in the house or 'castle' of the Earls of Norfolk that was located in the north-east part of the town (later the site of the Naval Yard). Relations may have been strained between the King and his host, Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk and Marshal of England, as at the Salisbury Parliament in March 1297 Roger objected to a royal summons of military service in Gascony arguing that the military obligation only extended to service alongside the King; if the King intended to sail to Flanders, he could not send his subjects to Gascony.

Nevertheless, it is not without interest that the 1297 colloquium met at a planned town rather than an ancient or organic one, Harwich being one of only four in Essex recognised by Beresford (the others being Chelmsford, Pleshey and Witham). Harwich was not recorded in Domesday Book (1086), but was probably founded in the subsequent century as there was a chapel (annexed to Dovercourt) at Harwich by 1177 presumably indicating the establishment of a separate trading or fishing settlement.

Although VCH research on Harwich is only now getting underway, our current understanding is that the origins of the town probably date to the early 13th century, being an initiative by the the Earls of Norfolk to exploit its situation as a port with a safe natural harbour at the mouth of the Stour and Orwell estuaries. The town was first mentioned in 1229, a charter granted in 1238 and a weekly market in 1253. The 13th century was probably a period of rapid growth, as evidenced both by documentary references and by a rapid rise in of stratified deposits identified by archaeological watching briefs.

The present grid street plan is still largely that of the late medieval town. There were three main north-south thoroughfares, West Street, Church Street and Kings Head Street, sub-divided into rectangular blocks by a series of east-west lanes. While the pattern is certainly medieval in origin, its precise date remains less certain. Some re-planning has been suggested at the start of the 14th century, around the time of the colloquium, as excavations and watching briefs have revealed that at that time demolished buildings were covered by a thick layer of beach sand raising the settlement's level by half a metre. It remains to be seen whether the context of this archaeologically attested change can be identified, and perhaps more precisely dated, using documentary sources.

Sources:

D. Andrews, B. Milton and H. Walker, 'Harwich: its archaeological potential as revealed in excavations at George Street and Church Street', *Essex Archaeology and History*, 21 (1990), pp. 57–91.

M. Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages* (1967)

Essex CC, *Harwich Historic Town Project Report* (1999)

Essex CC/Tendring DC, *Origins of Harwich* (n.d.)

L.T. Weaver, *The Harwich Story* (1975)

CHRIS THORNTON

Clacton VCH Group

ANOTHER PROJECT COMPLETED

The Clacton VCH Group has during the sixteen years of its existence been project led, and the group has now completed its fifth project.

It may be of interest to readers to see the full list of our completed projects:

Clacton at War. How this major seaside resort coped during the Second World War when the town became a Restricted Military Place.

Defending the Coast. Recording the World War Two anti-invasion defences of Clacton on Sea, Holland on Sea, and Jaywick.

Defending the Coast. Extending the survey and recording work from Harwich to Brightlingsea.

When Ships came to Holland Haven. Researching the former medieval trading estuary of the Gunfleet, and its subsequent landscape reclamation.

Discovering 'Dad's Army'. The Tendring district during World War Two, and the Home Guard, their organization, and recording the locations that they defended.

Each project has produced a range of legacies including publications, reports, exhibitions, information panels, presentations, and guided walks including those for local schools. The site survey results have been entered into the Essex Heritage Environment Record. The Holland Haven research has been uploaded onto the VCH Explore website, being then the first content for the county of Essex.

The recently completed *Discovering 'Dad's Army'* project, followed the established pattern of a combination of research and site survey work. Photographic evidence was also compiled and oral history recordings made, although the number of former Home Guard members is inevitably rapidly diminishing.

Apart from the EHER survey results, and the oral histories destined for the Essex Record Office Sound Archive, there were two public events. These were held in June 2018, the first being an exhibition, talks and display by re-enactors held at Great Oakley All Saints Primary School.

Later in the day, Home Guard re-enactors led a procession through the village to the finely surviving pill box. Tendring Brass was playing, and over eighty villagers were assembled who broke out into spontaneous applause as the soldiers' boots crunched along the roadside path.

Short presentations followed by the Chairman of the Clacton VCH Group, then Fred Nash, mentor to the group, and finally Mr John Jowers, Chairman of Essex County Council. Cllr Jowers then unveiled this impressive information board on the pill box, comprising information about the Great Oakley defences as well as additional recognition of the role of the Essex Home Guard.

The Clacton VCH Group invites the reader, when in the Tendring District, to view this finely crafted information board, being further evidence of the group's most recent achievements.

ROGER KENNELL
Clacton VCH Group



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. 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 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:
Miss Louisa Tippett, ACA, BSc, 121 Colchester Road, West Bergholt, Colchester, Essex CO6 3JX; or she can be contacted by email at: louisa@whittles.co.uk

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