

# ESSEX PAST

The newsletter of the VCH Essex Trust

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*Volunteers and VCH Essex at Ingatestone Hall on 9th April 2022*

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to the Spring 2023 issue of Essex Past, edited by Amanda Flather, who has taken up the reigns from Patricia Herrmann. I'm sure that we, both Trustees and supporters, would like to express our deep gratitude to Patricia who, this year, will also be retiring as a Trustee at the forthcoming AGM, after 27 years with the Essex VCH committee. There are also other changes to announce. Chris Thornton, who has been our Editor since 2003 will be (partially) retiring in April, and Herbert Eiden, who was our Assistant Editor, will be taking over from Chris. Herbert, as many of you will know, has been discovering the 'People of 1381' over the past few years, and will continue on this project until September; in the meantime, Chris and Herbert will be working together between April and September.

I have to announce, very sadly, the loss of another of our Trustees, Nick Rowlands, who died in July last year. We shall all miss his very gentle humour, his erudition and great common-sense approach to our dealings. On a happier note, we shall be proposing up to three new Trustees for your consideration at the forthcoming AGM.

We had a very successful launch for VCH Essex Vol. XII (part 2) in October at the Essex Record Office (at which event Chris Thornton was presented with the VCH Outstanding Contribution Award), attended by about 60 people. We also took the opportunity then to announce the launch of our new fund-raising appeal, which will continue at least throughout this year. Although our funds are fairly steady at the moment, they will need considerably augmenting to allow us to complete the current Red Book and think about the future. There will be a number of fund-raising events this year, one of which will be a half-day conference at Galleywood Heritage Centre on September 23, to mark the 120th anniversary of the appearance of the first Essex 'Red Book'. The theme of this conference is, not surprisingly, Essex in Domesday. More details about the programme for the day can be found at the end of the newsletter.

Work on our current Red Book, Harwich, is progressing very well, the Medieval section being almost completed. Andrew Senter has completed work on Georgian Harwich and has almost completed the Victorian section, with a grant from Essex Heritage Trust, for which we are very grateful. The first full draft of the Southend 'Short' was submitted to VCH Central shortly before Christmas, and the Southend team is now working through suggested amendments and improvements. The Clacton group continue to thrive, and are engaged on their new project researching the history of the Holland River and adjoining parishes.

Another of our Trustees, Johanna Dale, is working on a new website for the VCH Essex Trust. It is early days of development, but when up and running, you will be able to find all the latest information, events and draft texts for the latest VCH Essex volumes. We'll keep you posted. And, finally, an enormous 'thank you', to all of you, our loyal supporters.

**KEN CROWE**

## From the Editor

A major landmark since the 2022 issue of *Essex Past* has been the publication of VCH Essex Vol. XII (part 2) on the Soken parishes. I was pleased to see so many supporters and friends at the launch of the volume at the Essex Record Office in October 2022, when many copies of the book were purchased. This publication finally completed the programme of work which we embarked upon nearly 20 years ago, and that has resulted in three 'red books'. Within the pages of Vols XI and XII (the latter in two parts), is a comprehensive history of the fascinating Tendring coastline from St Osyth to the Naze at Walton, and covering a vast range of evidence and topics from prehistoric hunter-gatherers to modern seaside tourism.

So, from the editor a big thank you to all the people who have helped along the way with research, management, advice and funding. Very special mentions go to the trustees and members of the VCH Essex Trust, to the Clacton VCH Group, to the other local societies and individuals who have assisted or contributed to the volumes and above all to my former and present colleagues Janet Cooper, Shirley Durgan, Herbert Eiden and Andrew Senter.

As noted by the Chairman in his report, I have decided to take early retirement this year and pass the reins over to my colleagues Dr Herbert Eiden (as editor) and Dr Andrew Senter (as assistant). I have worked for the VCH since 1992, so the project and its continuance are immensely important to me. Fortunately, I know I am leaving the project in very safe hands. I am also looking forward to continuing to support and contribute to the VCH in Essex in the future (I am committed to completing work on Medieval and Tudor Harwich and Dovercourt for the VCH over 2023–24).

To add a few more details on our progress this year, work has continued throughout the year on research and writing texts for the next volume, VCH Essex XIII – Harwich and Dovercourt. As well as my own work on the earlier periods, Andrew has been revising the 19th-century history of those places first published in his VCH 'Short' and extending the time-frame of that chapter to 1914. Also, particularly notable has been the completion of the draft VCH histories covering the period 1714 to 1814 by Andrew, which are now available to read on the central VCH website:

<https://www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history/county-histories-progress/essex-vol-xiii-harwich-and-dovercourt>

The work of our volunteer groups had continued in different ways. The original print run of the Newport 'Short' paperback having sold out, a further 50 copies have been printed, funded by the VCH Essex Trust. This excellent book is therefore still available (please contact the VCH office or VCH Trust secretary).

Having received the comments of a peer reviewer and the VCH central office, I have assisted the Southend volunteer group to complete the editing and preparation of their 'Short' which we hope will finally appear later this year. I have also been working on the analysis and writing-up of the Clacton VCH Group's Port Books Project, the results of which should soon be ready for dissemination and ultimately publication. The group's current project on the history and landscape along the Holland River continues with monthly research and discussion meetings taking place at Tendring Village Hall led by their Chairman Roger Kennell.

### **CHRIS THORNTON**



*Southend Group discussing research*

## **Volunteers and VCH Essex: Ingatestone Hall, 9 April 2022**

The VCH Essex Chairman has asked me to summarise a talk I presented last year at the above event for VCH volunteers, which may be of interest to the wider membership. VCH Essex has always used voluntary help, with the main series of VCH red books demonstrating that many articles were contributed by people outside the editorial team. But, in recent years the work of our volunteers has expanded to the extent that Essex may now be the leading VCH county in the scope, numbers, funding and success of our volunteer programme. Of course, the key context to the expansion of volunteering has been the progressive decline of VCH funding since the early 1990s; we quickly realised that the reduction of staff meant that the VCH series could not continue without voluntary support.

### **Trustees**

Our volunteering journey really starts with the VCH Essex Appeal Fund, forerunner of the VCH Essex Trust, established in 1994 when it was realised that local authority funding was in terminal decline. Since 2011 the Trust's responsibilities have expanded enormously, taking on the fundraising and local management of the whole project. During this period there have usually been a dozen or so trustees at any one time (overall, about 20 people have undertaken this role for the Trust). I haven't calculated the Trust's total expenditure on supporting the project since 2011, but it must be approaching a quarter of a million pounds.

### **Individual Volunteers**

Individual contributors, with appropriate research interests and skills, now make ever more important contributions to articles in the Red Book series. For example, in Volume XII (part 1), published in 2020, a host of volunteer researchers and authors contributed to the account of St Osyth - a historically significant place. Shirley Durgan and Jenepher Hawkins tackled sections on St Osyth Poor Relief and Education, Alison Rowlands on Witchcraft, and Sean O'Dell several sections on modern history (camping, caravan parks and seaside holidays). Another substantial section on the Built Environment was prepared by David Andrews and Brenda & Elphin Watkin, respectively on the Priory and the Vernacular buildings. Collaborating with local buildings researchers is especially important now that the central VCH no longer has its own architectural team. Also critical are local contacts made during research, whether individual local historians or perhaps a parish's active Local History Recorder who can all provide significant and often otherwise unrecorded material. This brings home the point that VCH Essex really is a large-scale Community project.

### **Volunteer Groups**

In terms of their numbers, energy and output our Volunteer Groups have been another tremendously fruitful development, with our county perhaps unique in having three such Groups based around (1) Clacton, (2) Newport and (3) Southend.

(1) Clacton VCH Group was the very first such VCH Group nationally, set up in 2002 with initial funding from the central VCH and from the VCH Essex Appeal Fund. When the Clacton Group was founded, with Shirley Durgan as its first mentor, its remit was to “enable local people to compile some of their own history for themselves, using valuable local knowledge and contacts, in collaboration with VCH Essex”. And that has been truly fulfilled. Over 20 years later the Group is still active, with three of the original members Roger Kennell, Colin Preen and Hazel Beckham, and many more new ones. For two decades it has completed a continuous series of projects, extending out from the initial focus on Clacton in WW2 to encompass the Tendring Hundred WW2 defences, the lost estuary of the Gunfleet, the overseas trade of Tudor Harwich and most recently the history of the Holland Brook. Their influence on VCH work has been profound, as I have been able to draw upon the Group’s projects and knowledge in the red books; for example, in Vol. XI about the seaside resorts in wartime, and in Vol. XII about the Gunfleet/Holland Haven, the threats from coastal erosion and coastal industries such as the Copperas trade. The same will be true for our forthcoming red book on Harwich and Dovercourt.

(2) Essex wasn’t included in the HLF project “England’s Past for Everyone”, but one of its legacies was the development of VCH publishing in paperback, otherwise known as “VCH Shorts”. We were therefore very fortunate in that five highly qualified and talented historians, Professor Anthony Tuck, Bernard Nurse, Ben Cowell, Gillian Williamson and David Evans, came forward to produce a paperback history of Newport in north-west Essex. Again, there was much help and input from the local community, not least the residents who allowed surveys and dendrochronology on their houses and examination of their house deeds. James Bettley contributed the buildings surveys, Shirley Durgan some advice on economic history and I provided some editing and style guidance, while the VCH Essex Trust financed the publication. The Group’s resulting book, a model village local history, was only the third VCH Short to be published nationally (2015). Now virtually sold out, a decision has now been made to reprint it. I would especially highlight the quality and range of images in the book including the effective use of colour. While buildings are important in encapsulating the character of a place, and more easily illustrated, it was a really positive development to see more social history, portraits of significant inhabitants and illustrations of subjects like leisure activities.

(3) Which brings us to our final group, The Southend VCH Group, established a few years ago under the leadership of VCH Trust’s Ken Crowe. This is an exciting development, as it tackles the rise of the largest conurbation in Essex and an iconic seaside resort, where both “East London was let loose” but where residents and middle and upper-class holidaymakers were also accommodated through social zoning. A series of specialist articles has been prepared by the contributors, Ken, Jenny Butler, Ed Simpson, Judith Williams and Ian Yearsley. Progress has been rapid, even though the review process and the new limit of 30,000 words or so has meant replanning; everything looks in schedule for publication later this year. So, another volunteering success! I am sure that it will be a

sell-out, like our previous paperbacks on Newport and Harwich, and produce some very welcome income for the VCH Essex Trust.

### **Conclusions**

To conclude, the VCH Essex volunteers, through their hard work and dedication, their research, publications and events, have tremendously broadened the scope of the VCH project. In doing so they have also helped to boost the profile of the VCH Essex Trust and helped to secure the future of the VCH main red book series. As we all know, a research-led series of historical reference books is not an easy sell to funders these days, but the Trust has been able to demonstrate the continuing relevance of VCH partly through the contributions of our volunteers. Their projects have also pointed the way forward for how to spread VCH activity across different areas of the county, utilising the model of volunteer Groups and paperback Shorts. On personal note, too, I also want to record how working alongside our volunteers has been a very enjoyable and enriching experience - answering their probing but always enthusiastic questions and helping to solve problems has likely made me a better historian and communicator (well, at least I can hope!). So, to the Trustees and to the voluntary researchers and authors I offer my heartfelt congratulations on their success.

**CHRIS THORNTON**

## Report from the Clacton VCH Group



*The Clacton VCH Group cataloguing its resources.*

The year 2022 marked the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Clacton VCH Group. A brochure was produced for our members to record the range of projects and outcomes which the group had successfully achieved during that time. The brochure also noted project mentors, and the sources of grants which had been successfully gained to enable project completion with public information boards, exhibitions and several publications. The Covid-19 virus and the subsequent pandemic then considerably slowed, but not stopped, the work of the group. During April 2022 the group staged a Tendring Hundred Day Workshop to which invitations were sent to various history-oriented bodies. This event proved to be a great success and raised the awareness of the Clacton VCH Group and the work that it was undertaking.

July 2022, and a new project, self-funded by the group got underway. During 2014 to 2015 a project titled 'When Ships Came to Holland Haven' researching the lost port of the Gunfleet Estuary was completed with among other outcomes, a modest Project Report was produced. Our new project is currently extending the research of the Gunfleet to the upper reaches of Holland Brook which fed into the Gunfleet, but now by a sluice to release

the waters of the brook, the former estuary having now been reclaimed. The group are optimistically aiming for the Spring of 2024 to hold an exhibition and launch a publication concerning the Holland Brook Story. This publication we believe, will be the first such research project about the brook, and what a story we are uncovering using original sources and landscape history. A trading estuary and river, its placenames, the tributaries, the Level Commissioners huge early 18th century sea-wall construction feat across the old estuary, and to storms, floods, smuggling and shipwrecks. Also, to be included, is the story of the 'Monster from the Deep' to the strategic defence installations from the Napoleonic era to the Second World War. Here also the Duke of Connaught umpired the great 1904 Essex Manoeuvres. The range of topics being uncovered belies the story of the little-known Holland Brook in the north-east of the county of Essex.

**ROGER KENNELL. Clacton VCH Group.**



*Roger Kennell (2000): The new sluice at Holland Haven built in 1937 to drain the Tendring Level, fol*  
*Roger Kennell (2000): The new sluice at Holland Haven built in 1937 to drain the Tendring Level, following severe storm damage to the previous sluice.*

# Commuters and Developers and the Growth of Southend, c. 1860-1910.

This short article is based on research undertaken for the forthcoming VCH Short, 'Southend: Victorian Town and Resort'.



*Thumbnail\_IMG\_5946 Southend Ordnance Survey Map detail from the 2nd Ed 25 inch map, Essex sheet LXXVIII, showing the area around Westcliff station.*

The fifty-year period covered by this article saw the population of Southend grow from 3,427 (1861 census) to 62,713 (1911 census). J.K Walton was quite certain that the surge in development at the town at the turn of the century was fuelled in large part by London commuters. (J.K. Walton, 'The Demand for Working-Class seaside Holidays' in HER 34(2), 1981, 249-268, at p. 251). In order to assess the accuracy of Walter's statement it will be instructive to examine the stated ambitions of developers in the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th, together with the policies of the rail companies during this period. Then it will be necessary to look at the reality of the situation as seen by correspondents to the local press and the statistics, where we have them.

Following the completion of the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway (LT & SR) in 1856, the head of the consortium who built the line, Sir Morton Peto, commissioned the

building contractors Lucas Bros. of Lowestoft and London, to erect a housing estate (Cliff Town) adjacent to the Southend Station. Peto offered reduced season ticket fares to those taking the houses. The trains, however, did not run at times convenient to most potential commuters taking about 90 minutes to reach London (all trains ran via Tilbury at this time).

In the 1880s the building plots on the Lucas Estate (Joseph Lucas, builder of London) and Kilworth Estate (executors of Edward Kilworth, local landowner) were advertised in the local and East London press. The problem remained that the existing inadequate train service from Southend made it impossible for City men to commute daily from Southend (S. Stand. 10 May 1887). Thomas Dowsett, a prominent local businessman and Southend Local Board member stated his opinion that if an earlier express train were available, there would be very little property empty in Southend. (S. Stand. 7 Aug. 1885).

In 1888 the 'direct' route to London, via Laindon, was opened, cutting journey times between Southend and London to just under the hour, but not enough trains travelled via this shorter route to make the daily commute viable for most. In 1889 the Great Eastern Railway (GER) line to Southend was opened, and competition between the two companies resulted in more direct trains on the LT & SR line, while the GER offered both excursion and residential express trains.

As a result of the agricultural depression large amounts of cheap land came on the market in the late 19th century, much of which in south Essex was bought up by The Land Co. (68 Cheapside, London), established by Frederick Ramuz. As with developers at Clacton (VCH Essex XI, 61-2), he realised that collaboration with the rail companies was essential if his advertised intention of attracting City men and their families to his planned estates was to bear fruit. He chartered special trains from London and offered free lunches for prospective purchasers of his building plots at auctions held in marquees on the site. In his advertising Ramuz never failed to stress the proximity of railway stations. In 1890 A.H. Brassey purchased the southern portion (40 a.) of the Hamlet Estate (the Hamlet Court Estate; ERO, D/DS 386/1) and, even before development began, he offered the land and £1,000 for the building of a new station (Hamlet Station) to serve the proposed estate. This was agreed to after the other major landowner in this area, the Maldon Property Purchase Co. offered more land and an additional £500. (TNA, RAIL 437/7). William Lloyd-Wise, a Southend resident and County Councillor, wrote in 1893 that he had no doubt that, when the new station was built, the Hamlet Estate and the other estates around the town would rapidly develop. (Chelm. Chron. 23 June 1893). The new station (re-named Westcliff station) opened in 1894, the LT & SR Co. promising that the 9 o'clock morning express to London would stop at Westcliff as would the 5.15 pm down express to Southend. The building (or suggestions for) railway stations in advance of development was not unique to Westcliff. In 1891 Charles Woosnam, wine and spirit merchant and one of the first Southend Local Board members, unsuccessfully applied to the LT & SR Co. for a station

in Brewery Road, Southend, 'for the development of the Beaumont Estate' (TNA, RAIL 437/7). To the east of Southend, the local landowner, Col. Burges, gave funds and land for the building of a station in advance of the development of Thorpe Bay. The success of these new estates was seen to depend on attracting a large body of commuters.

Let us now look at some statistics. In 1851 just over half of the heads of households in Prittlewell (including Southend) had been born in the parish or in the immediate vicinity. Just 6.7 per cent had been born in London. In 1871 12.7 per cent of the heads of households had been born in London, rising to just over a third by 1901. Arthur Stride, manager of the LT & SR line to Southend stated that in 1881 there were just 101 season ticket holders in Southend. By 1891 this figure had grown to 447 (S. Stand. 15 Oct. 1891). In 1893 Alfred Henry Wynne, an accountant living in St John's Road, Westcliff, requested, on behalf of 240 of his fellow daily commuters, that several carriages be reserved for season ticket holders from Southend (S. Stand. 1 June 1893). In the following year the Southend Season Ticket Holders Association was formed. By 1906 there were 1,500 daily commuters using the LT & SR line, and about 4,000 by 1908. By 1912 there were about 7,000 season ticket holders in the Borough of Southend. Purvis calculated that just over a quarter of the population of Southend was part of a household supported by a commuter, or who were commuters themselves. (K. Purvis, 'Southend-on-Sea 1891-1911: The Emergence of a Commuter Town?' Open Un. M.A. Dissertation, 2020; <http://oro.open.ac.uk>; accessed 25 May 2021).

Therefore, it does appear that commuting traffic was a major factor in the enormous growth in the population of Southend at the end of the 19th and into the early 20th century, and that collaboration between developers and the rail companies was an essential element. Other questions remain, of course, such as the proportion of daily to weekly commuters. But one of the most interesting aspects, and something that perhaps would repay further research, is the building of railway stations in advance of, and to encourage, housing development. In the case of the LT & SR Co. this occurred only where the financial risk to the railway company was strictly limited. Was this a feature of developer/railway company collaboration elsewhere?

## NEWS FROM CENTRAL VCH

### New VCH Architectural Editor: Dr Ruth Slatter

From May 2023 Dr Ruth Slatter will be Lecturer in Historic Environment & Knowledge Exchange Manager at the Institute of Historical Research. As part of this role she will be the VCH's architectural editor. Ruth is an interdisciplinary historian with a background in historical geography and art and design history. Her research explores how people have used, experienced, and been affected by the historic built environment.

Most of her research has focused on people's experiences of faith spaces and international exhibitions since the early nineteenth century. In particular, she has spent a lot of time exploring the architectural design and material culture of British Methodism and the long overlooked 1862 International Exhibition hosted in London.

Ruth is always seeking ways to co-produce histories of the built environment with contemporary communities. Most recently, she has been working with Methodist Women in Britain and their crowd-sourced archive in Epworth Old Rectory to explore women's everyday experiences of Methodist spaces since 1945.

Ruth is also exploring how creative methods can be used to co-produce knowledge with people from the past. Right now, she is making creative interactions with the art of the Methodist and Pre-Raphaelite James Smetham to explore his everyday experiences of nineteenth-century Stoke Newington. Ruth is really excited to be joining the VCH community and hopes she can meet and talk to many of you at the VCH gathering in May.

### **Our next 'VCH Day' will be at Senate House, University of London, on Wednesday 10 May, 2023**

The first proper VCH community get-together since the Covid pandemic. We will confirm the full programme soon, but it will begin with a buffet lunch. Afternoon sessions will include general VCH news and updates, presentation of VCH Outstanding Contribution Awards, an interactive session on fundraising and income generation, and a short talk from our new Architectural Editor, Dr Ruth Slatter, with an opportunity to tell her what kind of support and training you need.

The day will conclude with a public lecture in Chancellor's Hall from Andrew Rumsey, Bishop of Ramsbury and Lead for Church Buildings and Cathedrals in the Church of England. Andrew is a brilliant speaker and the author of several books, including *Parish: an Anglican theology of place* and his recent work *English Grounds: a pastoral journal*, described as 'a total delight' by Simon Jenkins. He'll be speaking on 'Another Country: how the English parish shaped a nation', followed by a drinks reception. You'll need to book your (free) place for the lecture in addition to your place at VCH Day.

You can reserve your place at the lecture here. We will ask for bookings for VCH Day (for planning and catering purposes) soon. IHR Study Opportunities Some of you may

have already seen details of our new IHR / University of London MA History Place & Community, which may be of interest. The programme can be taken full-time or part-time, with plans to offer individual module ‘micro-credentials’ from 2024. The MA launches October 2023 and is mostly delivered online, with intensive ‘conference-style’ teaching days at the beginning and end of each term. Modules which may be of interest to the VCH community include ‘Historic Places: Landscapes, Buildings and Significance’, ‘Place and Policy’, ‘Layers of London: Deep Mapping London’s History’, and of course the extended final project. All modules offer the opportunity to apply skills and approaches to the student’s own area of research interest.

You can find further details of the course, and bursaries available, on our website. You may also be interested in the 2023 IHR London Summer School, this year on the theme of ‘Secret London’. Book before the end of February using the code SECRET10 for 10% off fees.

## Brewers and Bakers at Harwich in the Later Middle Ages



*Medieval ale-wife outside her premises displaying the Alehouse's sign*

Regulating the food supply was an important consideration for medieval town governments, as urban populations could be vulnerable to shortages and market manipulation. The town's court leet was the tribunal where offenders against trading rules could be brought to justice, for example in cases of victuallers forestalling (buying up goods to manipulate the market) goods such as fish, or butchers selling insanitary meat 'to the abhorrence of the community'.

Amongst the best material in quantity and quality relates to the brewing of ale and the baking of bread, as well as the selling of those commodities, staple elements of the medieval diet. Each court leet listed the amercements made under the Assizes of Bread and Ale, consumer legislation intended to regulate measures, prices and qualities of produce. For example, in the period 1383 and 1392 between 21 and 31 brewers were fined each year for not bringing their measures to be checked at the court leet or for using the wrong measures. In one year the 24 people fined were specifically ordered to use 'Suffolk measures' to be inspected and sealed. The following short article gives only a summary of the evidence available.

It appears that the court fined all producers and sellers of ale and bread a small amount annually, indicating a licencing system. In 1382 all 27 of the brewers recorded breaking the assize were women, although another male brewer had his fine condoned. That ale brewing and marketing offences were fined under the same heading is demonstrated in some years, for example in 1385 when 29 women and two men were fined for 'brewing and selling'. Occasionally, in the late 14th century and early 15th century, separate fines were recorded for a small number of gannokers (ale-wives), and then from 1412 separate fines for a larger number were recorded annually. Sellers increased until by the later 15th century there were often as many marketing ale in the town as brewing it. Bakers also appeared regularly in the court leet records, subject to similar controls. In 1392, for example, five bakers were fined for not bringing their weights to the leet. In the later the 15th century some bakers were fined who used 'the common oven', which would have been provided by the town government, possibly an attempt to improve urban fire safety. Some of the bakers amerced came from outside of the town, such as the three 'foreign' bakers in 1384 from Ramsey, Oakley and Thorpe (all places in Tendring hundred). Those fined under the assize of bread for baking or regrating bread (technically a form

of forestalling, but seemingly applied to retailing here) were often recorded separately, but in some years were combined under a single entry. Some of the sellers of ale were undoubtedly involved in general provisioning, perhaps in alehouses or inns; for example, the 11 sellers in 1442 and 15 sellers in 1475 were said to be sellers of ale and other victuals. When names in the court rolls have been checked the gannokers of ale and regrators of bread were often the same people.

The existence of an almost continuous series of court rolls from 1382 to 1485 allows the tabulation of trends in brewing and baking. The greatest number of brewers (42) was recorded in 1407 when there were also 10 regrators of ale, while average numbers of brewers and sellers of ale reached a peak in the 1420s. The pattern of individual brewing of ale largely by women continued through the last quarter of the 14th century and into the earlier 15th century, pointing to mainly small scale 'household' industry all through this period. The number of bakers peaked slightly earlier in 1392 when there were five regular and 10 occasional bakers and six regrators of bread, and numbers again remained high into the 1420s. The numbers of brewers fell in the 1430s to apparently stabilise at a new lower level for the next two decades but fell again over the 1470s and 1480s, with only 11 brewers of ale being fine by 1485. There was also lower activity in the baking trade between the 1430s and 1480s.

These findings roughly match those at Colchester where Richard Britnell found economic and demographic resilience until the early 15th century, perhaps because of rising income levels and migration, followed by a decline. Fewer brewers and bakers at Harwich from the 1430s must indicate that population and demand had reduced there too, as plague caused cumulative population loss. Yet, it also seems probable that there was structural change in the industry, for as the number of producers declined so the number of sellers of those goods, or of general victuals, increased. Particularly high numbers of sellers of ale were recorded between the 1460s and 1485; over 20 sellers were recorded in 1461, 1462, 1482 and 1484, probably years which witnessed periods of naval activity in the port of Harwich/Orwell.

The advent of beer brewing may have also changed the pattern of victualling. The first case of beer brewing was recorded in 1417 when two men were amerced 3s. 4d. each for brewing and selling beer. The fine imposed for beer brewing was much higher than for ale, possibly because those involved were foreigners. There were usually only two or three beer brewers fined throughout the 15th century, some of them English, but many of clearly Dutch origin. One of them Gylbrygh or Gisbryth Byrbrewere (active 1423–44), was also fined for being a common forestaller of malt in the port. Although at least one beer brewer was female (Caterina Berbrewere, 1483), almost all were men and probably producing at a much larger scale than the mostly female ale brewers. In 1462 and 1463 two Dutch brewers John Clayton and Peter Johnson were fined for brewing and selling at excessive price wort or gruit beer, a form of herb flavoured beer popular before the advent of hops;

in the former year the court also passed an ordinance controlling its sale. Among Clayson's later customers was Sir John Howard to whom he sold barrels of beer in September 1463 and October 1465 for provisioning his ships, as did 'Persce beerbrewer' (otherwise Piers/Peers). In 1466 Piers sold another barrel of beer to Howard for his household. Piers, identified as John Peers in tax returns, was probably identical to Peter Johnson in the court records who was fined alongside Clayson for beer brewing at Harwich between 1456 and 1485; confusion over his name may have arisen from his origins – he probably first appeared in 1455 as 'Peter Ducheman'. Clayson and Piers, both also innkeepers, again supplied Howard with beer in March 1481 when he was at Harwich fitting out a fleet of 15 vessels destined for Scotland: Clayson provided him with 20 pipes and Piers 30 pipes (if identical to wine measurements, a pipe = 126 gallons = 1008 pints, so the combined total would be 50,400 pints). In the 1484 alien tax subsidy Clayson and Piers were noted as beer brewers having respectively two and four servants each, perhaps also Dutch migrants employed in their breweries.

Sources:

Harwich Court rolls, 1382–1485: ERO, D/B 4/38/3–10.

R.H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300–1525* (Cambridge, 1986)

A. Crawford, intro., *The Household Books of John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, 1462–1471, 1481–1483* (Stroud, 1992)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_brewery\\_cask\\_units](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_brewery_cask_units)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_wine\\_cask\\_units](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_wine_cask_units)

**CHRIS THORNTON**

## Nonconformism in Harwich in the 18th century

Nonconformist religion was practised in Harwich throughout the 18th century. However, the detailed records of the Religious Society of Friends (or Quakers) apart, we know this mainly from the traces of evidence regarding registered places of worship and the comments of the Church of England vicar recorded in various visitations later in the century.

A meeting house in Watergate Street was granted a licence by the Harwich Corporation in 1706 but it is not clear which was the denomination in question. It is possible this was for the Congregational or Independent church, which in the second half of the century was the most prominent of the dissenting sects in the town. Revd Thomas Gibson mentions a ‘Presbyterian’ meeting house in the visitation of 1766 but also notes that this had not been not been used for ‘several years’ and that the congregation attended his church. This could be the same meeting house that was licensed for the ‘Protestant Dissenters commonly called Independents’ in the west of Harwich in 1778. The house of James Boyden was also registered as a place of worship for dissenters in 1788 and it seems likely that this was used by Independents. Revd Nevill Maud was the minister for 20 years until his death in 1799, at which time there were only six members. A new chapel was built on the Bathside in 1799, opening a year later, and the church seemed to prosper in the early years of the 19th century as Revd William Whinfield of the Church of England estimated there to be between 500 and 600 Independents in Harwich in the visitation of 1810. Revd William Hordle served for 50 years as Congregational minister from 1800.

Methodist preachers visited Harwich c.1778 according to Revd Gibson, who also notes that they were ‘soon got rid of’. However, John Wesley himself passed through Harwich on several occasions, including in 1783 and 1786. He gave a sermon on board the Besborough packet on the outward journey to the Continent in the latter year. Local meetings took place in a private house in 1790, but by 1810 the Methodists had their own licensed chapel. In 1795 there were 193 local members and up to 100 in 1810. The Harwich Methodist Missionary Society was formed in 1815.

The Quakers were present in small numbers in Harwich throughout most of the 18th century. This was in spite of several local members having had goods confiscated in 1670 having contravened the Conventicle Act of the same year, which proscribed certain religious assemblies outside the Church of England’s auspices. A house in Newhaven Lane was converted to a meeting house c.1694 and a licence to worship there was granted by the Harwich Corporation in 1709. The Harwich meeting was reported to be in a ‘Low State’ in 1764 and by 1781 meetings for worship had become irregular. In 1785 the meeting house was being used as a warehouse and two years later it was replaced by a new meeting house on the same site. However, numbers remained too low to sustain the meeting and the last Quaker was said to be Samuel King, who died in 1790. The meeting house was sold in 1800 but some Quaker public meetings were held in Harwich in the early 19th century.

The shortcomings of a paucity of evidence aside, Nonconformism is likely to have been a marginal presence in Harwich in the first half of the 18th century. Subsequently, Harwich was part of the evangelical revival across Essex, particularly among Congregationalists in places such as Steeple Bumpstead and Braintree. The challenge to the dominance of the Established Church in Harwich gained ground in the 1790s among both Congregationalists and Methodists and c.1814 they were joined by the Strict and Particular Baptists, who were recorded as meeting in private houses in Harwich.

**ANDREW SENTER**

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

## Annual General Meeting: The Victoria County History of Essex Trust

**Date and Time:** Saturday 24th June 2023, 2pm. for 2.30 start.

**Venue:** Tendring Village Hall, Tendring, Clacton-on-Sea CO16 0BG

**Keynote Speaker:** Dr Christopher Thornton: “[It] may almost be kept against the whole world”: The fort at East Mersea from Henry VIII to the Napoleonic Wars.



*The Mersea blockhouse on John Speed's county map of Essex, 1610 (ERO, MAP/CM/8/1)*

# **EXPLORING ESSEX HISTORY IN THE 11TH CENTURY AND BEYOND**

**An event to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the publication of  
VCH Essex Volume I (1903)**

**Date and time:** Saturday 23rd September 2023, 1.00pm to 5.00 pm.

**Venue:** Galleywood Heritage Centre, Galleywood, The Common  
(off Margaretting Road), Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 8TR.

## **Provisional Programme:**

(1) Philip Morgan (translator and editor, Phillimore Domesday)  
“Essex in Domesday Book”

(2) Neil Wiffen (Essex Record Office)  
“Broomfield, Essex, and neighbourhood in 1086: A bluffer’s guide to using Domesday Book for your parish history”

Afternoon Tea

(3) Philip Wise (Colchester & Ipswich Museums)  
“‘1066 and All That’: A hoard of 11th-century coins from Braintree, Essex”

(4) Chris Thornton (VCH Essex) and Clacton VCH Group  
“Harwich’s overseas trade long before Brexit: Evidence from the Port Books in the reign of Elizabeth I”

## **Booking:**

Conference tickets will be £15 (incl. tea), with booking via EventBrite.

Please check from June onwards and book.

Should you encounter difficulty with online booking,  
please contact Chris Thornton: [c.c.thornton@btinternet.com](mailto:c.c.thornton@btinternet.com).

## 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](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 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:

Miss Louisa Tippett, ACA, BSc, 121 Colchester Road, West Bergholt, Colchester, Essex CO6 8JX; or she can be contacted by email at: [louisa@whittles.co.uk](mailto:louisa@whittles.co.uk)

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*For information (and additional copies of this issue) please contact the Hon Secretary, Sarah Manning -Press. Email: [sarah.manning-press@virginmedia.com](mailto:sarah.manning-press@virginmedia.com)*

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## Note

