

# NEWSLETTER

SUMMER • 2020



**The Essex Society  
for Archaeology & History**

FORMERLY THE ESSEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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**Copy for the next issue should be sent to the editor at the above address by no later than 15th July 2020**

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Society or its officers.

The illustration on the front cover of a unique Anglo-Saxon gold ring found by a metal detectorist in Uttlesford in 2011 is reproduced with kind permission of the Saffron Walden Museum.



## From the President

I trust you are all keeping well at this difficult and worrying time, the ongoing pandemic has unfortunately, as with so much else in our lives, disrupted the normal activities of our Society. A number of our planned events have had to be postponed; information on changed arrangements is provided elsewhere in this newsletter and I look forward to seeing you at Society events later in the year.

The first event in this year's programme was to have been a visit to Miss Wilmott's garden which is now managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust for its wildlife value. The site is also of considerable historic interest associated with two great horticultural figures John Evelyn and Miss Wilmott herself. That coincidence of natural and historic value is a common feature of many, indeed perhaps most, historic landscapes which are generally also important for nature conservation. The need to develop integrated approaches to the management of the natural and historic environments, and the success in doing so locally, has been noted elsewhere in our publications (Murphy *et al* 2012, 148 and 152). Over the last 25 years policy development concerning planning and land management issues has encouraged such approaches. It is therefore unfortunate that the current draft Environment Bill not only fails to recognise the need for an integrated approach but specifically excludes the historic environment (Morel and Bankes Price 2019, 442-3).

Miss Wilmott's garden in the south-west of Brentwood District lies close to the modern boundaries of the administrative county of Essex, Thurrock

Unitary Authority and Greater London. Our Society's interests cross all those boundaries as our focus is on all areas that lay within the historic county of Essex. With that in mind, readers may have heard that last summer London was confirmed as the world's first National Park City <http://www.nationalparkcity.london> a reminder of just how much green space there is within the vast boundaries of Greater London. Something demonstrated by the photograph, which appeared in several papers in March, of a fine herd of deer complete with splendid antlers, taking advantage of the pandemic lockdown to occupy the front lawns of a housing estate in Harold Hill. It is worth recalling the extent and variety of historic landscapes in that part of the historic county which has long been part of Greater London, and some of the highlights amongst them are noted below.

The Corporation of London manages the remains of the gardens of Wanstead House; these seem quite substantial but are only a very small part of the immense 18th century garden which once dominated this part of the Roding valley. The surviving fragment of Hainault Forest straddles the boundary between Greater London and the modern administrative County. Rainham Marsh, which similarly straddles the modern administrative boundaries, between Thurrock Unitary Authority and Greater London, is an astonishing survival of an historic marshland landscape. Fifty years ago it was thought it would inevitably be '...surrendered to industrial or housing development' (Essex Record Office 1970), but thanks, initially to happenstance, and latterly to the

concerted efforts of a range of organisations, it survived, and is now in the hands of the RSPB. Bedfords Park comprises the remains of the park and gardens associated with a mansion which, like so many others, was demolished in the mid-20th century. The Park is now managed by Havering District Council in partnership with the Essex Wildlife Trust. To the south that partnership also manages the Ingrebourne valley reserves, where, along with historic landscape features, there are the remains of RAF Hornchurch an airfield which played a prominent role in both World Wars. Some of you may have seen the fine photograph of the sunrise in the Ingrebourne valley in the spring issue of *Essex Wildlife*, the magazine of the Essex Wildlife Trust.

These areas are not only important in terms of historic landscape and other above ground features but also have very significant and extensive archaeological remains. To the west of the Ingrebourne, the valley of the Beam contains the Beam Valley washlands, an essential part of local flood risk management the washlands now form a park and nature reserve. Excavation in advance of groundworks required to create the washlands revealed extensive archaeological remains as reported in our *Transactions* (Biddulph *et al* 2010; Champness *et al* 2015). Excavations in the Ingrebourne valley have revealed a remarkable Late Bronze Age landscape. The published report on the excavations is, of course, available in our Library (Guttmann and Last 2000). That work and the recent excavation of the Havering hoard must make Havering one of the most significant areas for the

study of the Late Bronze Age within the bounds of the historic county.

**Nigel Brown**

Sources:

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Champness, C., Donnelly, M., Ford, B.M. and Haggart, A., 'Life at the floodplain edge: Terminal Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic flint scatters and early prehistoric archaeology along the Beam River Valley, Dagenham', *Essex Archaeol. Hist.*, 6 (4th Series, 2015), pp.5-41.

Essex Record Office, *Essex and the Sea*, Essex County Council (Chelmsford, 1970)

Guttmann, E. and Last, J., 'A Late Bronze age Landscape at South Hornchurch, *Essex Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, 66 (2000), pp.319-60

Morel, H. and Banks Price, V., 'Pathways to Engagement: the Natural and Historic Environment in England', *The Historic Environment: Policy and Practice*, 10, nos.3-4 (2019), pp.41-51.

Murphy, P., Heppell, E. and Brown, N., 'The archaeology of the Essex coast', *Essex Archaeol. Hist.*, 3 (4th series, 2012), pp.141-54.

## Programme update

Due to the ongoing pandemic the visits to Miss Wilmott's Garden, the Warner Textile Archive, the Morant Lecture Colchester Museum and Epping Ongar



Railway have been cancelled, it is hoped to include them in the 2021 programme.

The Society's AGM, due to be held on 27th June, has been postponed and will now be held on Saturday, 17th October. The time and venue will be the same; the Society's Library at the University of Essex, meet at 12.15pm at the University of Essex Albert Sloman Library. Following the formal business there will be an opportunity to hear short talks from researchers who have used our Library in the course of their work.

Please note whilst we anticipate that the Society's Library will be open in time for our AGM in October, because of the pandemic it is currently closed and will remain so until further notice.

**Nigel Brown**

## Website, Newsletter and Twitter account

As some of you will already be aware Zoe Quinn, who for some years has edited the Society's newsletter, more recently took on management of our website and subsequently also assumed responsibility for our Twitter account, resigned from all three roles in late February.

In order to keep these important aspects of the Society's activities running, myself and a group of fellow Council members (Bill Abbott, Howard Brooks, Adrian Corder-Birch and Martin Stuchfield) made arrangements to ensure continuity of the newsletter and website.

For the time being Adrian Corder-Birch will edit the Newsletter with support from Martin Stuchfield and me.

We hope this interim measure will operate effectively, until new arrangements for a digital newsletter are put in place later this year. This will be ready for electronic distribution from early 2021 to coincide with the Society assuming responsibility for the production of Essex Journal. We have arranged for the company of Brown and Brown (no relation) to assume management of the Society's website. The company successfully maintains websites for a number of organisations and will provide stability for our website. There is no long-term commitment for the Society since the arrangement is renewable annually.

The effects of the current pandemic has emphasised the need for a reliable regularly appearing newsletter, something, which over the last couple of years we have not been able to achieve. Accordingly the regular appearance of the newsletter will be a priority. It is also apparent that a swift means of communication with the Society's membership is needed and to this end we have created a database of 236 from a total of 287 individual members. **It would be very greatly appreciated if you would kindly email our Membership Secretary, Martin Stuchfield at [martinstuchfield@pentlowhall.uk](mailto:martinstuchfield@pentlowhall.uk) to confirm your email address please.**

Unfortunately it has not been possible to identify anyone to operate the Society's Twitter account, if any of you would like to take on that role please contact our secretary Howard Brooks [essexarchaeology@hotmail.com](mailto:essexarchaeology@hotmail.com)

**Nigel Brown**

## Thank you to Zoe Quinn

As you may have noticed from the last newsletter, Zoe has resigned as editor and I should like to take this opportunity of thanking her for editing our newsletters during the last six years. Her first newsletter as editor appeared as long ago as autumn 2014 since when she has edited nearly twenty issues. During that time colour photographs have been introduced and a variety of different illustrations on the covers.

My position as Zoe's successor is purely temporary, we will be seeking an editor for a restructured newsletter. As you will read in the President's report, it is the intention of ESAH to phase out newsletters in their present form. In future newsletters will be sent by email to members at regular intervals so members receive news in a timely fashion. Longer articles relating to archaeology and history, will in future appear in the Shorter Notes section of *Essex Archaeology and History* or in the *Essex Journal*, which will be published by ESAH from spring 2021. Although the newsletter will be changing, ESAH Officers and Council hope that it will continue to be interesting to members, hopefully with the added benefit of receiving news more quickly.

**Adrian Corder-Birch**

## Essex Journal

I am delighted to report that *Essex Journal* will receive its second national award in two years. Our hardworking editor, Neil Wiffen, will be presented with an award for his article, 'Supplying the army: the contribution of Essex to provisioning the forces of Edward III,

c.1337' which appeared in the Spring 2019 issue of *Essex Journal*. Neil's article was placed second in the 2020 British Association of Local History Research and Publications Awards 'long article' section. He researched and wrote an excellent article and I should like to congratulate him upon his success.

You will be aware from previous newsletters that Neil intends to stand down as editor of *Essex Journal* at the end of 2020, when ESAH will assume responsibility for publishing. Good progress is continuing with arrangements for the absorption of *Essex Journal* into ESAH, but we need to find a new editor with effect from the spring 2021 issue. If you are interested in the position of editor and would like more details please email Neil at [editor@essexjournal.co.uk](mailto:editor@essexjournal.co.uk) or [neilwiffen@hotmail.com](mailto:neilwiffen@hotmail.com) who will be pleased to provide more information.

**Adrian Corder-Birch**  
Chairman of the Editorial Board

## British Association of Local History Award for ESAH newsletter

A couple of months after learning of the award to Neil Wiffen and *Essex Journal*, BALH announced another award for an Essex publication. This was in an entirely different category and was for our newsletters. The main credit for our newsletters, during the last six years, lies with Zoe and our Assistant Editor, Michael Leach. Unfortunately the news was received after Zoe had left us and therefore our President passed the invitation to Michael who has been a





major contributor to our newsletters for many years. The awards for Neil and Michael should have been presented in London on 6th June, but as with so many events it has been deferred. We are therefore hoping that Michael and Neil will be able to attend the BALH AGM and the Awards Ceremony, when it is eventually re-arranged.

**Adrian Corder-Birch**

## **We welcome as new members**

D.R. Broad of Chelmsford; Duncan Breckels of Mistley; Beth Chappell of Clacton-on-Sea; Tony Collins of Fryerning; Simon Coxall of Chelmsford; John Gair of Leigh-on-Sea; Charlotte Hampson of Chelmsford; Gregory Leary of Sawbridgeworth; Veronica Minns of East Tilbury; Tim Murphy of Chelmsford; Ian Porter of Billericay; Linda Ransom of Writtle; Martin Rose of Saffron Walden; Robert Sier of Chelmsford; Janet Sullivan of Clacton-on-Sea; Margaret Whittaker of South Woodford; and Allen County Public Library of Indiana, U.S.A.

## **Hugh Peskett (1932-2020)**

Hugh Peskett, known as the “Sherlock Holmes of the family tree” was a native of Essex having been born at Ilford on 26th April 1932. During the early 20th century two generations of the Peskett family were dairymen at Cranbrook Road, Ilford. Hugh had a particular expertise in Scottish heraldry and became editor in chief of *Burke's Peerage*. His Essex research

included the ancestry of Presidents, George H.W. and George W. Bush. Their Essex ancestors were John Bush, a landowner of Messing, whose son Reynold Bush, travelled from Essex to Massachusetts in 1631. Hugh also traced the Scottish and Irish ancestry of President Reagan. Sadly, Hugh Peskett died on 24th February 2020, aged 87 years.

**Adrian Corder-Birch**

Source:

*The Daily Telegraph* (14th March 2020).

## **Back to the Future: the impact of science across Essex**

Over the centuries science has had a massive impact on the residents of Essex. On 7th March 2020, the Essex Record Office arranged and hosted a one day Conference titled: ‘Back to the Future: the impact of science across Essex’. This is a report of the conference, which celebrated some of the developments in technology that have transformed lives in the past and how we live today. Archivist, Neil Wiffen introduced Martin Astell, the Essex Record Office Manager, who welcomed about fifty delegates. There were seven talks through the day by six speakers (one gave two talks) and without exception they were excellent, educational, with some humour and delegates learnt a large amount of new information about the history of science in Essex.

The first talk was by Peter Wynn, about the history and science of gas manufacture in Essex. He outlined different types of manufacture from coal

to water gas, producer gas, petroleum by products, liquefied, natural gas to North Sea gas. It was interesting to learn that Colchester (1817) and Chelmsford (1819) were among early locations for the supply of gas in the UK and that the UK was world leader. By the 1870s Beckton Gas Works, which was located in the historic county of Essex, was the largest gas works in the world. Gas was initially supplied for factories and street lighting before extending to domestic use.

Nigel Brown, President of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History, introduced the second speaker, Dr. Zoe Outram, Historic England Science Advisor (for the East of England). Her subject was Scientific Techniques used in Archaeology, which have advanced enormously in recent years. This was a fascinating talk and it was amazing what information can be gleaned from very small artefacts. The three areas covered were (1) How to find an archaeological site; (2) How old it is (dating); and (3) What we learn about people from human remains. There was a particular emphasis on Essex sites and examples given included: Audley End, Beeleigh Abbey, the Roman town of Great Chesterford, Butt Road Colchester, Langford, the Mersea Island cremation and Mucking.

Following a break Dr. Dave Crease from Norfolk outlined the history and science of brewing from early times until the present. His talk included beer, cider and wine, both fermented and distilled products. With beer, he explained the process from malted barley, with the addition of hops, yeast and water to the finished product. His talk was well illustrated and humorous. As it was the last talk of

the morning, delegates were invited to sample some of his beer with their lunch.

Following a good buffet arranged by the Record Office, Peter Wynn gave his second talk, which was about Public Health in Essex, particularly the pioneering work in the county of Dr. John Clough Thresh (1850-1932). He was particularly involved with water supply and improvements in water purification and also patented a disinfectant. He contributed articles for learned journals such as *The Lancet* and in 1897 wrote about a Spring and Water Fountain at Mount Hill, Halstead and how water had been contaminated from an Infectious Diseases Hospital further up the hill. Dr. Thresh wrote a number of text books, some running into several editions and a few posthumously.

The next talk by Ian Vance was about the Standard Telecommunication Laboratories (STL) in Harlow and the development of fibre optics. Ian commenced his talk with the history of early methods of the transmission of information such as the telegraph in the 1830s and the telephone patented in 1876. Today there is still an ever increasing demand for telephone connections. The STL laboratory at Harlow was extremely large and was the birthplace of fibre optics. One of the principal pioneers was Sir Charles Kao, a Nobel Prize winner whose work is remembered with a blue plaque the town.

Following a short break, John Miners, chairman of Halstead and District Local History Society, spoke about the development of textiles in Essex, including wool, bay and says, cloth, linen, jute, silk and artificial textiles. The particular emphasis was





upon the Courtauld Textile Empire from its small beginnings at Peabmarsh with Braintree, Bocking, Halstead, Chelmsford and Earls Colne; to many large textile mills across the UK and factories worldwide. The Courtauld family provided significant industrial housing for their employees together with many community buildings including hospitals, nurse's homes, town and village halls, almshouses and churches.

The final speaker was Tony Crosby, chairman of Essex Industrial Archaeology Group, who gave a well-illustrated talk about industrial archaeology in Chelmsford. He included a large variety of industries associated with Chelmsford, which linked in with the earlier talks. These included milling, maltings, textiles, gas works, water supply and industrial housing. One important point reiterated by speakers was that Marconi invented the wireless, not the radio and that Chelmsford City Council need to revise signs and publicity in this respect.

In his conclusion, Adrian Corder-Birch, Immediate Past President of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History and Vice-Chairman of the Essex Industrial Archaeology Group, observed that many speakers had drawn information and illustrations from the Essex Record Office, which shows the importance of the archives. He thanked all the speakers and delegates and particularly thanked Martin Astell, Neil Wiffen, Ed Harris and other members of staff for their hard work in arranging a brilliant day. Finally, on behalf of the Record Office, Martin Astell also thanked the speakers and the delegates.

**Adrian Corder-Birch**

## The Essex Place-Names Project

Volunteers have added further place- and field-names to the database held at Essex County Council Heritage Place Services section, the website hosted by Essex University's Department of History. Amongst these additions in 2019 have been place- and personal names from the 1592 Survey of Chelmsford and the 1752 Survey of Saffron Walden, Feets of Fine, and Essex churches. The database now holds over 209,000 entries. Amongst references to the database have been the English Place-name Society based at Nottingham University and current archaeology journal.

The Essex Place-names Research Project started in 1995 with the support of David Buckley (Essex County Council), Ken Hall (Essex Record Office), Ray Powell (ESAH), Janet Cooper (VCH) and Kevin Schurer (Essex University). Over 200 volunteers have contributed records. Other than these, sponsors have included Essex Heritage Trust, Friends of Historic Essex, Council for British Archaeology and the Heritage Awards for All fund.

The Project has held over a dozen conferences, some in association with the Record Office, and invited from outside the county keynote speakers including Drs. Margaret Gelling, David Hall, Della Hooke, Edward Martin, Susan Oosthuizen, David Parsons, Stephen Rippon and Tom Williamson. Volunteers have given talks and lectures to History and Archaeology Societies throughout Essex, and to the Society for Name Studies in Britain & Ireland at Bristol University. The Project has prompted books and journal articles.

Overseas communications have been made with researchers in Australia, Canada, USA, Holland and Germany.

The website ([www.essex.ac.uk/history/esah/essexplacenames](http://www.essex.ac.uk/history/esah/essexplacenames)) remains a free searchable resource for historians, philologists, archaeologists, family historians and linguists.

**James Kemble**

## Early falconry

Those of you who subscribe to *Salon* (the Society of Antiquaries newsletter) will have seen in issue 444 of 10th March 2020 an article on a unique Anglo-Saxon gold ring found by a metal detectorist in Uttlesford in 2011 and acquired by Saffron Walden Museum. 2014. You can see the ring on the Saffron Walden museum website <https://saffronwaldenmuseum.swmuseumsoc.org.uk/treasure20/> where it is displayed in a photo gallery with other recent finds. The ring is dated on stylistic grounds to AD 580 – 650, and one interpretation of its striking design is that it relates to falconry. The magnificently decorated purse lid from the Sutton Hoo burial might also reflect an interest in falconry; it has at its centre a pair of raptors, possibly goshawks, gripping their duck prey (*Cocker and Mabey*, 2005, p.127).



*Anglo-Saxon gold ring.*

There is an even earlier archaeological find from Essex that has been interpreted as possible evidence of Falconry. A sparrowhawk bone was recovered during the excavation of a Roman Villa at Great Holts, Boreham. The specialist report on the animal bone from Great Holts (*Albarella*, 2003, pp.198-200) points out that such finds are generally interpreted as representing tame birds used for hawking. Sparrowhawk remains are unlikely to be present on archaeological sites for other reasons since they don't scavenge and are too small and tough to be sought after for meat or feathers. Falconry, though known in the middle-east, from the 8th century BC, was not widely practised in the Roman World. The Great Holts report, available in our Library, discusses the likelihood of its occasional practice in the Roman Empire and of the Great Holts find representing such an instance.

**Nigel Brown**

### Sources:

Albarella, U., 'Animal bone' in Germany, M., *Excavations at Great Holts Farm, Boreham, Essex* (1992-4) E. Anglian Archaeol., 105 (2003), pp.19-200.  
Cocker, M. and Mabey, R., *Birds Britannica* (Chatto and Windus, London, 2005).

## Audley End seen by a Yorkshire antiquary

On two occasions Ralph Thoresby, antiquary and historian of Leeds, travelled past Audley End on his journey from Yorkshire to London on business. On a misty morning at the



end of September 1680, he noted '...we past by the greatest house in England, viz. Audley End, a vast building, or rather town walled in; it is adorned with so many cupolas and turrets above, walks and trees below, as render it a most admirably pleasant seat: thence we came to Saffron Walden in Essex, where grows that costly flower, which teaches them to rise early; for they must either be up before the sun to take the seeds, or they lose the prize.'

I think by 'seeds' Thoresby must have meant the stigma, the female part of the flower which, when collected and kiln dried, was used in cooking, in dying and in medicine. Unusually for him, Philip Miller says nothing about the propagation of the saffron crocus, other than noting that it was planted in July, flowered in October, and that it did not set seed in this country. Another source noted that, after the third crop, the corms were taken up and divided before replanting.

Thoresby's second glimpse of Audley End was in July 1714 on a day-long journey by coach from London to Cambridge. By this date, the first stage of the partial demolition of the house, overseen by Sir John Vanbrugh, had been completed. Thoresby 'had a view of Audley End (much of which is now taken down, but formerly reputed the greatest house in England) and of Saffron Walden; the people were planting that valuable crocus ...'. He regretted not having time to stop at 'the ingenious Mr Winstanley's house' at nearby Littlebury to view the model of the famous Eddystone lighthouse.

Thoresby's diary provides much detail about the *modus operandi* of an early 18th century antiquary but nothing else directly relevant to Essex

through which he passed briefly on his occasional journeys between Yorkshire and London.

**Michael Leach**

Sources:

Hunter, Joseph (ed.), *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby*, 2 vols. (London, 1830).

Miller, Philip, *Abridgement of the Gardeners Dictionary* (London, 1771).

Thomas, Andrew, *Cyclopaedia of Domestic Medicine and Surgery* (Glasgow, 1842).

## Little Leighs estate map of 1735

Recently the Friends of Historic Essex have generously funded the purchase of this colourful plan of a modest 27 acre property called Great Childs, belonging to the Rev. Thomas Forbes, rector of Little Leighs. The cartouche names the surveyor as John Waite, and states that the estate straddled the parish boundary between Little Leighs and Much (Great) Waltham. The plan itself shows that it lay south of the road to Little Green, making it possible to accurately locate the site. (TL 703174).

Little is known about Forbes before his arrival at Little Leighs. He probably obtained his M.A. degree at Aberdeen in June 1694, was ordained deacon the same day by the bishop of London and appointed schoolmaster at Monoux's school, Walthamstow a fortnight later. He was ordained priest in June 1695. We do know that he was instituted rector of Little Leighs in August 1701, and that he died and was buried there nearly half a century later in January 1750.

The house belonging to Forbes's estate lay immediately to the north of the Littlely Green road, just inside the parish boundary of Great Waltham. Immediately to its north and east the plan clearly shows the pale of Leez park, together with a narrow strip of woodland, marked 'The Old Wilderness'. This is of great interest and raises a number of questions. Wildernesses were a feature of high status gardens, introduced from France and Italy during the late 16th and 17th centuries. They consisted of long straight intersecting alleys between high hedges, with the sectors between planted with shrubs and trees graded in height. Often eyecatchers – such as urns, statues and bowers – were placed at suitable points. They were part of the formal garden, usually on the periphery, and were intended to provide shady places for exercise and entertainment. When formal gardens fell out of fashion in the course of the 18th century, most wildernesses were removed, or considerably modified to form 'natural' woodland or shrubberies accessed by irregular unhedged paths.

Nothing is known about the formal gardens at Leez. The priory had been acquired at the dissolution by that unscrupulous parvenue, Richard Rich (1500-68). He demolished most of the monastic fabric to build a grand mansion round two courtyards and, at the same time, he acquired Littlely Park which lay to the south. This medieval deer park provided Rich with an instant cachet of respectable ancestry, as well as an opportunity to make a new, more convenient and much grander access to his mansion from the south. The Old Wilderness, which is shown on Forbes's estate plan, is just inside the pale on the eastern edge of Littlely Park.

To those of puritan conviction, the most important resident of Leez was Mary Rich, countess of Warwick (1625-78), the wife of the 4th Earl, one of Richard Rich's descendants. Her diary reveals a daily cycle of prayer and meditation, with many references to 'the wilderness' to which she retreated to escape from the distractions of domestic life at Leez. On receiving news of the Great Fire of London in September 1666, for example, she 'went out into the wilderness to meditate and to endeavour by meditation to put my soul into their soul's stead, that were spoiled by all, and had not a house to lie in'.

It is generally accepted that Mary Rich's wilderness was not in Littlely Park but in the old monastic park, immediately to the north of the mansion, accessed by a bridge over the River Ter. This appears to be confirmed by first edition 6" OS map of 1875 which shows a square enclosure in this position, marked 'The Wilderness'. What then was 'The Old Wilderness' shown on Forbes's plan but not shown on the OS map? Due to its relatively modest status, it is most unlikely that Littlely Park would have had a wilderness before its acquisition by Rich in the 1530s. 'The Old Wilderness' is almost a kilometre from the mansion of Leez, seemingly an unlikely place to construct one. As already mentioned, nothing is known about the formal gardens that Rich planted round his new mansion, though it is tempting to suggest that there was once an extensive formal landscape extending from the house to the later site of Forbes's dwelling, of which 'The Old Wilderness' was the only fragment remaining in 1735. If such a garden had existed, both it and the mansion



would have come dramatically into view on reaching the summit at the northern end of the causewayed drive that Rich had constructed through Littleley Park. It would have provided a setting worthy of the self-made Tudor billionaire, though it must be emphasized that there is no archive evidence to support this speculation. After a long decline, the majority of the mansion was demolished in 1753, though most of Littleley Park (including the area occupied by the Old Wilderness) had remained paled and stocked with deer until that date. Subsequently it was disparked, and divided up into named fields. It has been farmed for at least a century and a half, and any trace of the formal garden that might once have existed will have been long destroyed.

Forbes died in 1750 and left his property of 27 acres and 35 perches (which he called Good Childs) to his 'legitimate or illegitimate' grandson. Most of his fields were amalgamated in the 20th century to form a large orchard, but the footpath which divided his property is still a right of way and it still follows the parish boundary between Little Leighs and Great Waltham.

The Friends of Historic Essex is a registered charity which regularly purchases documents for deposit in Essex Record Office. You can support them in this vital work by joining the Friends – <http://friendsofhistoricessex.org/membership>. If you wish to make a donation, or leave a legacy, please contact the chairman, Dr. Chris Thornton at [c.c.thornton@btinternet.com](mailto:c.c.thornton@btinternet.com).

**Michael Leach**

Sources:

Anon (ed.) *Memoir of Lady Warwick &*

*her Diary* (London, 1847).

Clark, R. 'Wildernesses and Shrubberies' in *Journal of Jane Austen Society*, 36, no.1 (2015).

Fell Smith, *Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick 1625-1678* (London, c.1901).

Hunter, J., 'Littleley Park, Great Waltham' in *Essex Trans.*, 25, 3rd series (1994), pp.119-124.

Leach, M., Leez Priory entry in Chelmsford Inventory (unpublished Essex Gardens Trust MS).

Thomas Forbes's estate map 1735, ERO D/DU 3263.

Will of Thomas Forbes 1750, ERO D/ABW 96/3/7, *Essex Review*, IV, (1895), p.156.

Church of England Clergy database accessed March 2020.

Sketch plan of Littleley Park 1753 (?or later), ERO D/DGh E14.

## Eastern Counties Coal Boring & Development Association Ltd

Coal mines in Essex may seem fantastical, but the discovery of the Kent coalfield late in the 19th century raised the possibility of similar finds under East Anglia and resulted in the establishment of this company in 1891. Essex's harbours and long seaboard provided the ideal means of transporting the potential finds to markets elsewhere, and the discovery of coal was seen as a welcome solution to the agricultural and economic depression from which the county was suffering. The possibility of the county's verdant countryside being despoiled by slag heaps was optimistically disregarded on the grounds that any mines would be

too deep to cause much surface disfigurement.

A bored well at Harwich in 1859 had reached a depth of 1098 feet and, though it had not found coal, it had shown geological features associated with coal bearing strata, not unlike those found in the northern French and Belgian coalfields. There was further encouragement from the results of a more recent artesian well boring at Culford, Suffolk, which had showed similar geology at 650 feet, and the company (whose registered office was at 4 Trinity Chambers, Colchester) issued a prospectus in May 1893 seeking to raise £10,000 in £1 shares to finance exploratory drilling. There does not seem to have been a great deal of public enthusiasm for the project, and it was not until September 1894 that a little over half of this target had been reached. Nevertheless, two months later, it was agreed to accept a tender from a firm in Whitehaven, Cumberland, to start boring at Stutton on the north bank of the Stour near Harwich. A year later, in November 1895, the drilling had passed through Lower Carboniferous rock without finding any recognisable fossils and, on the advice of geologists, the bore was abandoned at 1525 feet. Though it was considered that there was a possibility of coal further down, recovering it at that depth would have been uneconomic. It was decided to bore instead on a new site at Weeley in Essex. This was taken down to 1179 feet and completed by the end of 1896, again without finding any evidence of coal. A core from this drilling, inscribed 'Weeley, 1150 feet' is preserved at Colchester Natural History Museum.

Neither of the trial borings produced any evidence of coal deposits and, though a final bore at Great Wakering was suggested, the funds had been exhausted and it never undertaken. At an EGM at Ipswich Town Hall on 3rd June 1898 it was agreed to wind up the company. The project had undoubtedly been driven by some enthusiastic geologists but the public had been cautious about investing, and though the *Essex County Standard* reported the early meetings in detail, it carried no further reports after the negative outcome of the Stutton bore at the end of 1895. Subsequently only very brief coverage of the company's activities was given by the *Ipswich Journal* and in the *Essex Review*, as well as by an eclectic range of remote regional papers.

**Michael Leach**

Sources:

ERO D/F 177/1, papers relating to Eastern Counties Coal Boring Syndicate Ltd (1891-5).

Essex County Standard (21st January 1893, 6th May 1893, 9th May 1894, 23rd June 1894, 1st September 1894, 3rd November 1894, 23rd November 1895).

Essex Field Club website: [www.essexfieldclub.org.uk](http://www.essexfieldclub.org.uk).

*Essex Review*, I (1891), p.9; III (1893), p.2; V (1895), p.6; VI (1896), p.2.

*Ipswich Journal* (26th December 1896, 10th June 1898).

*London Gazette* (28th June 1898), p.3941.

Whitaker, W., Thresh, J.C. & Mill, H.R., *The Water Supply of Essex*, (1916).





## Harwich harbour

At a meeting of the British Association at Ipswich in September 1895, the general manager of the Great Eastern Railway spoke about the growth of Harwich harbour. The port suffered a rapid decline after the declaration of peace in 1815. By the early 1850s it was receiving about 12 sailing ships a day, but not a single steam-powered vessel. From 1863 the Great Eastern Railway established a thrice weekly steam ferry service to Rotterdam, increased to daily crossings a decade later. By the end of the century, steam boat tonnage had increased massively and - surprisingly - sailing ship tonnage had also doubled.

However the capacity of the harbour was limited by shoals, principally the 'Gristle' and the 'Glutton', both of which were only covered by about 14 feet of water at low tide. There was a narrow channel between the 'Gristle' and another shoal called the 'Guard' but this had only about 20 feet of water at the best. There were no leading lights, so this channel could not be navigated at night, and during the day it was often clogged with anchored vessels. Great Eastern steamers frequently touched the bottom, and larger Royal Navy ships were unable to access the port at all. Smaller warships could only get in and out at half-tide, and this was a serious concern as Harwich was the only fortified harbour capable of providing protection to naval vessels between London and the Humber. Also the shoals were prone to unpredictable shifting, and in 1784 the 'Gristle' had become visible above water, exposing what was claimed to be the foundations of a fort.

A local mariner informs me that the 'Gristle' and the 'Guard' still exist, but the 'Glutton' has completely vanished and the new channel to Felixstowe container port is regularly kept dredged to a depth of 60 feet at low water.

**Michael Leach**

Source:

'Notes of the Quarter' in *Essex Review*, V (1896), pp.5-6.

## Duels: the responsibilities of attending medical men

After making a passing acquaintance with the duelling vicar of Essex (Henry Bate Dudley), I had assumed that, by the 19th century, legal action had replaced duels as a way of resolving slanders, insults and other matters of honour. It was surprising, therefore, to find guidelines in the British Medical Journal of 1898 for medical men attending duels. Doubtless medical women, though few in number at that date, would have declined any such involvement. Etiquette demanded that the doctor should be conveyed to the encounter in the carriage of the principal and his second. On arrival at the scene, the two doctors should meet 'in a fraternal spirit'. The doctor's first professional duty was to 'render his principal's sword as far as possible aseptic' though the note confirmed that nothing could be done if pistols were the chosen weapon. Once the duel had commenced, he had a responsibility to stop the duel if his principal had been injured sufficiently to set him at a disadvantage against his opponent.

On the question of the doctor's position if there was a fatal outcome, the note was clear that he could only be cited as a witness, and that the main legal responsibility fell onto the victim's second, shared to some extent with the successful combatant. Indeed, provided that the doctor was 'not bound by ties of friendship' he was entitled to claim a considerable fee, not only for his time but for the possibility of 'annoyances without number that may ensue'.

According to Wikipedia, the last two fatal duels were fought in England in the 1840s. Both survivors were prosecuted. One (Lord Cadogan) was acquitted on a legal technicality the other (a French émigré) was convicted of manslaughter and served 7 months in prison. Essex can claim a fatal duel at Galleywood Common on 24th April 1806 and fought between two members of the 6th Regiment of Foot which was quartered in Chelmsford barracks. The coroner returned a verdict of wilful murder against the victor (who was the regimental surgeon) and both seconds. Though one second was arrested, the other, together with the surgeon, absconded.

**Michael Leach**

Sources:

*British Medical Journal*, I (1898), p.511.  
*Essex Review*, IX (1900), p.43.

## Gestingthorpe Choir

Congratulations to Andrew Craig, chairman of Gestingthorpe History Group, upon an amazing discovery, which has created enormous interest in the art world.

*Gestingthorpe Choir* is the title of a painting, believed to date back to the second quarter of the 18th century. It is a particularly large canvas 8ft wide by 4ft high and features a group of eight men, the majority sitting around a table holding musical instruments. It was described in the book *Notes on the Parish of Gestingthorpe* by Alfred Patchett (1905).

The names of the majority of those featured were painted over the heads of the individuals in the painting and were recorded in the book as follows: *John Low, (?) Godbolt, W. Low, L. or J. Hale, T. Elliston and D. Wending*. The dog was called *Busy* and the man holding a bowl, top left, is believed to be Joseph Rippingale, a Gestingthorpe potter, which leaves one man unidentified. If the young man was Joseph Rippingale it would date the painting closer to 1750 or later, because Joseph was baptised in Gestingthorpe on 6th December 1730. However his father was also named Joseph so perhaps he is featured?

The Elliston family were prominent in Gestingthorpe throughout the 18th century owning Over Hall and its large estate, which included Moat Farm, until it was sold off by a later owner in 1869. The picture is thought to represent a musical party held at the Moat, where the painting hung until 1903 when it was sold. The Moat was owned by Charles Hammond Branwhite from May 1869 until his death on 23rd September 1886 when it was bequeathed to his widow, Mary Bentall Branwhite. Following her death on 3rd January 1903 the contents of the farmhouse were sold at auction by Henry Joshua Cheffins, auctioneer of 7 Hill Street, Saffron Walden. There were 840 lots, including the painting



and the sale took two days on 27th and 28th February 1903. Moat Farm was sold to Frank Nott, whose descendants still farm the land.

The painting eventually came into the ownership of Philip Mould, the well-known art dealer, who is one of the experts on *The Antiques Road Show* and joint presenter with Fiona Bruce of *Fake or Fortune*. Apparently he purchased it at a New York sale about 30 years ago and thought it was the work of an unknown American artist. Following the current lockdown Andrew Craig noticed the painting during a virtual tour of Philip Mould's private collection in response to *Art in Isolation*. The re-identification of this interesting and valuable painting is one

of the most successful results to arise from the Coronavirus isolation.

**Adrian Corder-Birch**

**Sources:**

*Chelmsford Chronicle* (6th March 1903). Alfred Patchett, edited by C. Deedes, M.A., and Rev. C. T. Bromwich, *Notes on the Parish of Gestingthorpe, Essex* (1905), p.27 and p.62.

Alfred Hills, M.A., *The Gestingthorpe Pot Works, Essex Review*, LIII (1944), pp.37-45.

*The Daily Telegraph* (4th and 9th April 2020).

Bendor Grosvenor, *The Gestingthorpe Choir: Re-identified, Art History News* (5th April 2020).



*The Gestingthorpe Choir.*  
(photo: © *The Daily Telegraph*)

## Essex's Palenque or Stonehenge?

One of my favourite no-mud walks is along the sea front from Harwich to Dovercourt, especially as this can be combined with fish and chips at the Pier Restaurant (other eating options also available) and its views of a busy harbour area.

On my last walk I got distracted by an A-Board which said "Beacon Hill Fort; Entry Free". So we dived into the undergrowth and soon came across the entrance to the fortifications. I recalled that when we went many years ago with our young children, they would somehow manage to get into the fort and it was just a great adventure playground for them. It had some of the elements of Palenque, the Mayan city in Mexico, with its buildings emerging from a layer of vegetation

which had covered it. Brambles and a Second World War fort are, however, not as exotic as a tropical forest and temples.

We were greeted by the owners who said that the fort now had the same listed status as Stonehenge.

There are trails to follow which allowed us to wander in to most of the buildings, with many interiors being covered in graffiti. There is also a small exhibition of the archaeological finds to date.

The fort was decommissioned in 1956 and all artillery removed. By the late 1960s, its military presence consisted of one soldier for 24 hours, one day a year. Hence the ease of access by my children until it was more securely fenced off. The site was sold in the 1970s and there were plans by the owners to build a hotel on the site. This was resisted by local residents



*Beacon Hill Fort, Harwich.*



and eventually bought by the present owners, Barry Sharp and Paul Valentine. They, with help from volunteers, have undertaken considerable work which allows visitors to safely roam the site. I believe that the formation of a charitable trust is a 'work in progress'.

Early histories of Harwich mention a blockhouse dating back from Henry VIII in 1543. In the invasion scares of the 1790s a new battery of three guns was built as part of the Essex coastal defence system before the Martello Towers. This was rebuilt further back in 1810-12 as the cliff was disappearing. This was replaced by a five gun battery in 1839 as concern over the French grew. With the redesign of the Redoubt and the introduction of rifled artillery in the 1870s, the battery fell into neglect.

The rapid advances of gun design and the improvement in propellant in the 1880s required a complete rethink and redesign of harbour defences. Ranges increased from 2,000 to 3,000 yards and more. Warships became bigger and faster and the destroyer was invented to cope with torpedo boats. Harbour defence became Coastal defence with heavy guns to hit the larger warships out at sea and quick firing guns to stop ships entering the port. So in 1888 the decision was made to build Beacon Hill Fort within its present boundaries. Work was finished in 1890 and encounters most of what can be seen today, with fresh artillery introduced in 1910 and 1941, when its twin 6-pounder guns had a range of 7 miles.

More information on the fort and its visiting hours can be found at [www.beacohillfort.org.uk](http://www.beacohillfort.org.uk). It should be remembered that there is much more to see in historic Harwich, especially in a

year which celebrates the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower ([www.historicharwich.co.uk](http://www.historicharwich.co.uk)).

**Bill Abbott**

## Essex seen from elsewhere

- a) The church of St. Mary, Stebbing, is another to enter the controversial ring of re-ordering, and facing difficult decisions about making parish churches more flexible for community use by removing pews and creating problems about making good the disrupted floor surfaces. Here it is proposed to replace the present variegated colours and undulations with an even finish of hand-made Sussex tiles. It is sad that the visual pleasure given by the patina of wear and adaptation of floor surfaces over many generations is so little valued.
- b) The Scout Association should be receiving £2.25M for establishing a new museum at Gilwell Park, Essex to display some of the 250,000 items in their collections.
- c) Cholleys Farm, Orsett Road, Horndon-on-the-Hill – an application for demolition of a listed farmhouse and the erection of a replacement detached residential dwelling. This Grade II listed building consists of two parallel ranges, both timber-framed. The northern range is of 16th century origin, the other of early 19th century date. It has been unoccupied for several decades, and has inevitably suffered from damage from leaking roofs





*St Mary's church, Stebbing, c.1900.*





and valley gutters, as well as from vandalism. A structural survey undertaken eighteen months ago found that, though it was in an advanced state of dilapidation, it was not beyond rescue, and that between 50 and 60% of the original fabric could be retained by careful repair. However there was extensive rot in the structural timber frame parts of which, had collapsed or were exposed to the elements. At this point the local authority served the owner with an urgent works notice, but the repairs were never carried out. In October 2019, an application for listed building consent for complete demolition of the building was made, arguing that all the features that had qualified it for listing had been lost. The application was supported by a more recent structural survey, which provided very little detail but concluded that the building was beyond repair, as well as being a danger to the public. Unlike the first survey, it was not carried out by a conservation-accredited professional.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings is very keen to see this building preserved. It has suggested that the local authority should carry out the repairs required by the urgent works order served on the owner. It has offered to work with the local authority to organise a separate independent survey of the fabric at no cost to the owner. It has also offered the services of an experienced conservation builder to assess the risks to the public, as well as those to contractors who might undertake repairs.

It is to be hoped that this approach will lead to the rescue of this building, and prevent its destruction through continued neglect, compounded by vandalism and the ever-present risk of arson. Details of the planning application (unresolved at the time of writing) can be seen on Thurrock Council planning department website, reference 19/01515/LBC.

**Michael Leach**

Sources:

*S.P.A.B. Magazine* (Spring 2020).

*Ancient Monuments Society Newsletter* (Spring 2020).

## **A brownfield nature reserve at Canvey Wick**

This has been described as Britain's first 'brownfield' nature reserve though doubtless there are rival claimants to this title on other abandoned industrial land. Earmarked in the 1970s as the site for a new oil refinery, construction ceased at an early stage due to international developments, and the site was abandoned to nature.

Being on very poor sandy soil, it was not rapidly swamped by coarse vegetation but allowed the growth of a slow succession of wild flowers and grasses. The large circular tarmac bases intended for oil tanks absorb heat from sunlight, and create a microclimate for warmth loving insects such as the shrill carder bee. The site is now a rich mosaic of mini habitats, with patches of birch and willow scrub, brambles, reed beds, long grass, and earth banks, and is as rich in invertebrate life as such official nature reserves as Dungeness,

Minsmere and Wicken Fen, and infinitely more ecologically diverse than the agri-desert created by much lowland farming. Given the chance, nature's ability to reclaim land – and even exploit man-made mess – is deeply reassuring.

More information on nature's takeover of brownfield sites can be found in Stephen Moss's book, *The Accidental Countryside: Hidden Havens for Britain's Wildlife*.

**Michael Leach**

Source:  
*The Observer* (15 March 2020).

## Roman racehorses at Colchester

As our 2020 Morant Lunch is planned to take place at Colchester's Roman Circus House, a recent article titled, *Roman racehorses at Colchester* may be of interest. It has been published in *Current Archaeology*, issue 360 (March 2020), pp.44-8. The article looks at the only known Roman chariot racetrack in the UK and the horses which may have competed at Colchester's Roman circus. The article by Philip Crummy of Colchester Archaeological Trust is extremely interesting, informative and very well illustrated.



*West Canvey Marsh.*  
(photo: © Alamy)

## MEMBERSHIP

Subscriptions are due on 1st January each year as follows:

Single Member – £25

Family Membership – £30

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Institutions – £25

Associate Institutions – £15

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Enquiries about delayed or missing publications and about the supply of recent back numbers should be addressed to the Secretary.

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## THE SOCIETY'S PUBLICATION AND RESEARCH FUND (PRF)

This Endowment Fund supports the publication of articles in the *Transactions* of the Society as well as Occasional Papers. It is also available to support research consistent with the Society's objectives. As an endowment fund, only the interest earned from it can be used to provide such support. The amount of the Fund is in excess of £50,000 and we continue to seek further donations into this.

Donations for this Fund, or to the Society's General Fund where the capital can also be used in support of the Society's objectives, are welcome.

Donations should be made payable to the 'Essex Society for Archaeology and History' and could attract Gift Aid.

Please address enquiries to the Hon. Treasurer, Bill Abbott at 13 Sovereign Crescent, Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3UZ or bill.abbott@btinternet.com.

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## DATA PROTECTION ACT

In order to run the Society it is necessary to keep paper and electronic records of members' names and addresses. It is the Society's policy to keep members' names, addresses, telephone numbers and subscription status only. This information is disclosed to no one, inside or outside the Society, other than those officers and members of Council who need it in order to run the organisation.

Members do have the right to refuse to allow any information about them to be stored on computer, and they should let me know if this is their wish. However, we hope that this note will reassure members that the very limited information held about them is secure and will not be used for any purpose other than the efficient running of the Society. Anyone requiring further details can contact me, or the Newsletter Editor.

Howard Brooks

## **PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2020**

### **Sunday, 20th September**

Walking tour of Colchester's Victorian red-light district.

### **Sunday, 11th October**

Annual Morant Lunch. This event to celebrate the county's famous historian will be held at Colchester's Roman Circus House.

### **Saturday, 17th October**

Annual General Meeting, Albert Sloman Library, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester to be followed by presentations and a visit to the ESAH Library.

### **Saturday, 7th November**

Annual Symposium at Chelmsford. This event involves talks by three archaeologists and three historians.

### **Saturday, 14th November**

EIAG Annual meeting at Chelmsford including a talk.

Further details of all events and availability are available from either Howard Brooks (Hon. Secretary) at 13 Greenacres, Mile End, Colchester, Essex CO4 5DX – [essexarchaeology@hotmail.com](mailto:essexarchaeology@hotmail.com) or Jane Pearson (Hon. Programme Secretary) at Cob Cottage, The Street, Great Tey, Colchester, Essex CO6 1JS – [drjanepearson@hotmail.com](mailto:drjanepearson@hotmail.com). All events to be booked at least 10 days prior to the event. Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope for each event, for maps and other instructions if you do not want these by email. Cheques should be made payable to the *Essex Society for Archaeology and History*.

**The visits on the Society's programme are open to members and associate members only. The Society can accept no liability for loss or injury sustained by members attending any of its programmed events. Members are asked to take care when visiting old buildings or sites and to alert others to any obvious risks. Please respect the privacy of those who invite us into their homes.**

### **Reminder**

It is very important that the Society can keep in communication with you regularly. Quite apart from the present crisis, but also in the future, when printed newsletters cease and digital news will be distributed electronically from early next year. **If you have an email address will you please remember to email it to our Membership Secretary, Martin Stuchfield at [martinstuchfield@pentlowhall.uk](mailto:martinstuchfield@pentlowhall.uk).**