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Newsletter

Essex Society for Archaeology and History



In this issue

From the President

Wanted - Your Society needs you!

Library & Archive Committee update

The Reverend Mr Giles Firmin, Vicar of Shalford, Essex, 1651-1662.

Wanstead Park Grotto

The Cichociemni at Audley End

Recent projects at the St Giles ruins in Maldon

Essex seen from elsewhere

Domestication of Chickens

Saffron - its cultivation re-evaluated?

The Reverend Stephen Gosson, Rector of Great Wigborough, 1591-1600

The ruins of all witches: Life & Death in the New World

Cherry Gardens in Essex

Symposium

Programme of Meetings 2022

Membership

Editor: Victoria Rathmill

Email: victoriarathmill@outlook.com

Assistant Editor: Michael Leach

Copy for the next issue should be sent to the editor at the above address by no later than 16th February 2023.

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 is St Giles Leper Hospital Remains, Maldon. The chapel was founded to provide services to those suffering from leprosy and became a general hospital for the poor and infirm. The remains of St Giles represents the only standing Scheduled Ancient Monument in Maldon with most of the existing structure dating to the 12th Century and containing Roman brickwork.

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From the President

Nick Wickenden

As I write, people are returning to a more normal way of life (despite an increase in milder COVID variants) and there are plenty of summer events taking place. In September the annual Heritage Open Days are taking place (go to www.heritageopendays.org.uk) with a theme for 2022 of 'outstanding inventions'. A search on 'Essex' reveals a host of sites and museums that will be open to the public between 9th and 18th September, sites that are either not normally open, or where admission charges are waived. Please note, however, many places require pre-booking.

In Colchester, places include St Giles Church (now a Masonic Centre) where the executed Royalists Charles Lucas and George Lisle were buried; Holy Trinity Church, currently empty but a social history museum of bygones (wonderful term) when I first came to Essex; and Charles Gray's summer house in the Castle Park where you can actually get married if you're looking for a smaller venue ! Gray built this in 1731 at the end of his promenade walk from his house, now HollyTrees. It is in the shape of a Roman temple, as Gray half believed that the Castle, a wedding present from his mother-in-law, was actually a Roman building.



In Chelmsford, I run tours of Pleshey Castle; and Hylands, the Cathedral and Galleywood Heritage Centre are all open. There is a walk from the Little Baddow History Centre in JA Baker Country (renowned author of the Peregrine).

In Braintree, the Museum and the Warner textiles archive will be open. The Society is of course having its own visit there on 14 September. In Harlow, the Norman Harlowbury Chapel and the Gibberd Garden are open, as are virtually all the historic locations in Harwich.

These are but a few of what is on offer, and there also talks (such as the history of the County Cricket Club) and tours, many with an invention theme, such as Hoffmanns in Chelmsford, and some costumed !

As far as the Society is concerned, it is good to see the events programme running again. The Website is now host to the Essex Placenames database. We are resuming the Annual Symposium this year, for so long one of the events in Congress' annual calendar. It will be at Christchurch in Chelmsford on Saturday 5th November and will feature both historical and archaeological talks on local subjects, so I hope to see as many of you there as possible.

Our new ten year strategy was adopted at the AGM in June, and is now available on the website. Your Council, and its committees will now be looking at implementing some 45 actions arising from it.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Philip Crummy, who has notched up no fewer than 50 years as Director of Colchester Archaeological Trust, a worthy candidate if they are looking for a new statue on the Town Hall ! Colchester, of course, is soon to be a City, when the Letters Patent is eventually delivered in person by a member of the Royal Family. Who would have thought that in the space of 10 years, the three largest towns in the county would all have become cities. Direct city status benefits are not very tangible, although there is a noticeable buzz and new pride in Chelmsford since 2012, despite an initial scepticism. Let us hope the same can come to Southend and Colchester, at least in terms of filling empty shops on the High Street.

WANTED! Your Society needs you!

The Society is looking to recruit a person/people for two important roles.

Firstly a social media editor to take the Society into the 21st Century!

We already have an excellent web presence, but desperately need a person/people who can take on our Twitter account, and manage a Facebook page - primarily to try to recruit younger members.

Secondly, we are looking for someone who can be an Apprentice to our Treasurer, Bill Abbott, with an ultimate aim of taking over as the Society's Treasurer. Bill currently not only manages day to day income and expenditure in areas such as our publications and events, but also manages a (fairly risk averse) portfolio of investments.

Please contact the Secretary Howard Brooks or President Nick Wickenden if interested.

Many Thanks!

Library & Archive Committee Update:

Unfortunately access to our Library has not been possible during the pandemic and, although the University Library has now reopened, access to the Society's Library is still limited. Members of the Society can visit our library at the University of Essex on Tuesdays and Thursdays 9-12 and 2-4pm. Before arrival please email libline@essex.ac.uk so a librarian knows you're coming. At the main reception please present your University of Essex library membership card for renewal. You'll need proof of identity with a photograph (such as a passport or driving licence). If you haven't got a card, staff will be happy to issue one.

Although the Library has been closed we have continued to add new books and below is a list of books recently acquired for our Library. It is intended that such lists will be a regular feature of the newsletter, though not usually quite so long as this list reflects a bit of a pandemic related backlog in acquisition.

As you'll see the range of books listed reflects the extent and diversity of the Society's interests, some books are donated (often as review copies), others are selected for purchase by the Library & Archive Committee. The committee meets three times per year and is a friendly group which oversees the development and maintenance of the Library and liaises with Essex University where our Library is housed. The Committee is currently looking for additional members, if you are interested in joining please contact Paul Sealey, the Committee Secretary at: paulrsealey@gmail.com

Recent Library Acquisitions:

Tripp, C.J., 2018. *Thurrock's Deeper Past: A Confluence of Time. The Archaeology of the Borough of Thurrock, Essex, from the Last Ice Age to the Establishment of the English Kingdoms* (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Limited) [An accessible popular account of the archaeology of Thurrock District from the Palaeolithic to the early Saxon period.]

Gerloff, S., 2010. *Atlantic Cauldrons and Buckets of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages in Western Europe with a Review of Comparable Vessels from Central Europe and Italy* (Prähistorische Bronzefunde Part 2 Vol.18) (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur) [A major work of reference for these remarkable and significant vessels, it includes detailed publication of important evidence from Essex, including the Colchester Sheepen cauldron and the Hatfield Broad Oak bucket.]

Newton, A.A.S., 2020. *The Chadwell St Mary Ringwork: A Late Bronze Age and Anglo-Saxon Settlement in Southern Essex* (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 654) (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports) [A full account of a major excavation in advance of gravel extraction which included a Late Bronze Age circular enclosure, rather like those at Mucking to the east. The extent of the excavation gives a good idea of the enclosure's wider setting and the site produced significant finds assemblages. The excavation also revealed a dispersed Saxon settlement of sunken featured and post built, buildings, providing another example of the growing body of evidence for the scale and variety of settlement of the early Saxon period in south Essex. This book will be reviewed in a future volume of Essex Archaeology and History]

Webley, L., Adams, S. and Brück, J. 2020. *The Social Context of Technology: Non-ferrous Metalworking in Later Prehistoric Britain and Ireland* (Prehistoric Society Research Paper 11) (London: Prehistoric Society) [This book provides a comprehensive survey of non-ferrous (mostly copper and bronze) working in Britain and Ireland from the earliest appearance of metal working around 2,500BC down to the 1st century AD. It pays particular attention to the find contexts and addresses the organisation and social context of metal working. It incorporates a range of evidence from Essex and will be major work of reference for many years.]

Sills, J., 2020. *Divided Kingdoms: The Iron Age Gold Coinage of Southern England* (Aylsham: Chris Rudd Ltd) [A monumental study of the gold coins of southern England from c. 50 BC until the Roman conquest; Essex receives extensive and detailed coverage, with many distribution maps.]

Harding, A.F., 2021. *Salt: White Gold in Early Europe* (Cambridge Elements in the Archaeology of Europe) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) [The major salt-making industry of coastal Essex in the late Iron Age and Roman periods is placed in its wider context]

Smith, A., Allen, M., Brindle, T. and Fulford, M.G., 2016. *New Visions of the Countryside of Roman Britain. Vol.1. The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* (Britannia Monograph 29) (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies) [this, and the following two entries, are a trilogy dealing with the countryside of Roman Britain, with extensive coverage of Essex]

Allen, M., Lodwick, L., Brindle, T., Fulford, M.G. and Smith, A., 2017. *New Visions of the Countryside of Roman Britain. Vol.2. The Rural Economy of Roman Britain* (Britannia Monograph 30) (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies)

Smith, A., Allen, M., Brindle, T., Fulford, M.G., Lodwick, L. and Rohnbogner, A., 2018. *New Visions of the Countryside of Roman Britain. Vol.3. Life and Death in the Countryside of Roman Britain* (Britannia Monograph 31) (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies)

Bland, R.F., Chadwick, A., Ghey, E., Haselgrove, C.C., Mattingly, D.J., Rogers, A. and Taylor, J., 2020. *Iron Age and Roman Coin Hoards in Britain* (Oxford: Oxbow Books) [this lavishly illustrated book is an immensely stimulating examination of the entire coin hoard phenomenon in the Iron Age and Roman periods, with exciting new ways of looking at the evidence; a review will appear in a future volume of Essex Archaeology and History]

Blackmore, L., Blair, I., Hirst, S.M. and Scull, C., 2019. *The Prittlewell Princely Burial. Excavations at Priory Crescent, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, 2003* (Museum of London Archaeology Monograph 73) (London: Museum of London Archaeology) [This book deals with one of the most significant archaeological discoveries made in Essex in recent years; the elaborately furnished Saxon chamber tomb excavated at Prittlewell in Southend. It is a scholarly and thorough account of a grave of international significance, and was reviewed, along with its companion volume listed below, in volume 10 (fourth series) of Essex Archaeology and History]

Hirst, S.M. and Scull, C., 2019. *The Anglo-Saxon Princely Burial at Prittlewell, Southend-on-Sea* (London: Museum of London Archaeology) [a brief popular guide to the grave, a useful introduction to the former entry]

Mirrington, A.D., 2019. *Transformations of Identity and Society in Anglo-Saxon Essex. A Case Study of an Early Medieval North Atlantic Community* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press) [This book, the publication of a 2013 doctoral thesis, provides an overview of the archaeological evidence for Essex in the Anglo-Saxon period and was reviewed in vol. 56 no 1 of Essex Journal]

Andrews, D.D. (ed.) 2020. *Cressing Temple: A Templar and Hospitaller Manor in Essex and its Buildings* (Essex County Council and Essex Historic Buildings Group) [A revised and enlarged version of the volume originally published in 1993. It provides an up to date account of one of the key medieval sites in Essex which is of national and indeed international importance. It got something of a rave review during 2021 in vol 65 of the journal *Medieval Archaeology* (our Library has a full run of *Medieval Archaeology*) and will be reviewed in a future volume of Essex Archaeology and History]

Pearson, D. 2021, *Book Ownership in Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) [A recent review in the *London Review of Books* says that this book gives '...a superlative tour of just about everything we might want to know about the early modern culture of book buying, borrowing, listing, shelving, storing and displaying' so its highly appropriate for Library acquisition. More particularly it deals the great Essex Library of Dr Thomas Plume and has a case study tracing the journey of a book by the prominent Essex divine Thomas Hooker, as it moved around a Lake District village]

Doe, R.A. and Thornton, C.C. (eds), 2020. *Dr Thomas Plume, 1630-1704. His Life and Legacies in Essex, Kent and Cambridge* (Hertford: University of Hertfordshire Press) [the Plume library at Maldon is still – thankfully – with us. This book will be reviewed in a future volume of Essex Archaeology and History]

Williamson, T. and Barnes, G., 2021. *The Orchards of Eastern England: History, Ecology and Place* (Hertford: University of Hertfordshire Press) [the region covered is East Anglia and Essex, along with some neighbouring counties]

Gorman, M., 2021. *Saving the People's Forest: Open Spaces, Enclosure and Popular Protest in Mid-Victorian London* (Hertford: University of Hertfordshire Press) [deals with the campaign to preserve Epping Forest it was reviewed in vol. 56 no 1 of EssexJournal]

Pearson, J. and Rayner M.J., 2018. *Prostitution in Victorian Colchester: Controlling the Uncontrollable* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press) [This is an interesting and well-received study of a neglected phenomenon, and was reviewed in volume 10 (fourth series) of Essex Archaeology and History]

Thornton, C.C. and Eiden, H. (eds), 2020. *A History of the County of Essex XII: St Osyth to the Naze: North-east Coastal Parishes. Part 1: St Osyth, Great and Little Clacton, Frinton, Great Holland and Little Holland* (The Victoria History of the Counties of England) (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer) [a major and definitive study]

Senter, A. (ed.), 2019. *Harwich, Dovercourt and Parkeston in the 19th Century* (Victoria County History Shorts Series) (London: Institute of Historical Research) [unlike traditional volumes in the Victoria County History series, this is one of the so-called 'shorts series' but it is none the worse for that, and is written with the authority and thoroughness one has come to expect from the VCH]

Wiffen, N., 2019. *'And the Bishop Expressed his Approval': A Brief Architectural history of Broomfield Church to Chancellor's Restoration of 1868-71* (Broomfield: The Parochial Church Council of St Mary with St Leonard at Broomfield) [a thorough study of the architecture of Broomfield Church, it was reviewed in the Winter 2020 edition of the Newsletter]

Broad, D.R., 2019. *A Short History of St John the Evangelist, Moulsham, Chelmsford, and Its Clergy* (Tolworth: Grosvenor House Publishing Ltd) [a useful contribution to local and ecclesiastical history which was reviewed in the Winter 2020 edition of the Newsletter]

Debenham, C., 2018. *The Man Who Painted Colchester and Sudbury* (Leavenheath: Karl Debenham) [a selection of some of the contemporary paintings of Colchester by Charles Debenham]

White, L., 2018. *Compelling Stories from the Avenue of Remembrance* (Colchester: Lexden Historical Group) [details of the men and women commemorated on the bronze plaques in the 1914-18 war memorial at Colchester known as the Avenue of Remembrance]

Darley, G. 2021. *Excellent Essex: In Praise of England's Most Misunderstood County* (London: Old Street Publishing) [a lively and impassioned plea that seeks to rehabilitate the reputation of Essex, addressed to those who – unlike us – are unaware of the charms of the county]

The Reverend Mr Giles Firmin, Vicar of Shalford, Essex from 1651-1662.

By Michael Leach

Firmin lived an eventful life, though the various historical accounts do not agree about some of the details, doubtless confused by the identical names of father and son. A useful and well researched pamphlet was published in 1866 in the New England Historical and Genealogical Register, the author having had access to earliest New England records of the 1630s. He also made good use of the autobiographical information which is interspersed amongst some of Firmin's numerous theological publications.

Giles Firmin (?1613-1697) was the son of Giles Firmin (?1590-1634), a Sudbury apothecary. In 1629, aged about 16, he was admitted to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, noted for its particular strong puritan leanings. At some point he had come under the influence of John Rogers, the Dedham lecturer, described as 'one of the most awakening preachers of the age'. He had been nicknamed 'Roaring Rogers' for his imitations from the pulpit of the tormented cries of the damned in Hell. Not surprisingly, he came to Bishop Laud's attention due to this dramatic behaviour, and for failing to conform with liturgical requirements. Firmin himself commented that he 'never saw [Rogers] wear a surplice' – something which Laud would have regarded as unacceptable. Laud was also critical of what he termed 'his wild note', later put in context by Firmin who wrote 'this was true, though such actions and speeches in other men would have been ridiculous, yet in him, being a man so holy, grave and reverent, they went off with as much awe upon a very great and reverend auditory.'

A list drawn up by John Winthrop indicated that a Mr Firmin was expected to arrive in New England in the spring of 1630, but presumably this was the father who was chosen deacon of the Boston church in the autumn of 1633. The son had certainly crossed the Atlantic by the end of 1632 but he may have returned to his home country in 1634, the year of his father's death which he noted had occurred when he 'was far distant from him'. The authors of *Alumni Cantabrigienses* went further and stated (without references) that he spent the next four years studying medicine in England before re-crossing the Atlantic. But this is not borne out by Firmin himself, who wrote 'being broken from my study ... from eighteen years to twenty eight, and what time I could get in them years I spent in study and practise of Physick in that Wilderness...'

He was certainly in Boston, Mass., in March 1638 when he witnessed the misogynistic expulsion of the outspoken Anne Hutchinson from the First Church. As a woman, she had deeply offended her male elders by assuming a self-appointed religious leadership role. They were also strongly opposed to her supposed antinomian heresies but it is not clear what role Firmin played in her persecution. Anne Hutchinson's offence was to claim that her own divine revelations were the ultimate arbiter of her faith, rather than what was set out in the Bible, or determined by the church elders. This was a challenge that the local church hierarchy could not and would not tolerate. Her banishment to a more tolerant New World community ended a few years later when she was massacred in a native American uprising.

Around the time of this event, Firmin was ordained deacon by the Presbyterian practice of the laying on of hands by the elders of the congregation. He was granted 100 (or 120) acres of land at Ipswich, Mass., on condition that he remained there for 3 years. Farming would have supplemented what he could earn through his ministry, and his skills as a doctor or apothecary. Perhaps his improved income also enabled him to marry Susanna, daughter of the prominent divine, Nathaniel Ward, of Ipswich, Massachusetts (formerly rector of Stondon Massey and later of Shenfield, both in Essex). This marriage, as well as that of his father) linked him with the family of the governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, with whom he corresponded for practical and spiritual advice.

For unknown reasons, he re-crossed the Atlantic in the late autumn of 1644, leaving his family behind, taking passage in a substantial 400 tonner, the *Seaforth*, which had a good reputation for seaworthiness. He is said to have preached a sermon during the voyage, an event for which he was later to be criticised. Nearing home in December, the ship ran aground off the Spanish coast at night and rapidly broke up, with the loss of some sixteen passengers and crew. The survivors, who reached the shore in their night clothes clinging to the ship's wreckage, were plundered by local opportunists, but were later rescued, clothed and housed by better intentioned individuals. Curiously, though John Winthrop described this disaster in some detail, and named a number of the drowned, he made no mention of Firmin's survival. Most of those rescued completed their journey to England in another ship, but Firmin's eye-witness descriptions of Spain suggest that he delayed his home-coming, and took the opportunity to travel.

However, he was back in England by July 1645 when (possibly after being appointed to the town's lectureship) he preached a sermon in Colchester. Judging from contemporary letters, he used this opportunity to try to calm the dispute which was then raging between the Presbyterians and the independents, concerning which group should be responsible for ecclesiastical discipline following the abolition of the episcopacy. Firmin, while trying to tread the middle ground, found himself accused of supporting the independent cause which, on account of its rejection of all forms of centralised authority, was deeply mistrusted by Parliament. He felt obliged to publish a rebuttal, and to affirm his Presbyterian credentials. A year later he was still in Colchester, and in a letter to Governor Winthrop he reported that he was uneasy about both the town and his own situation, writing that 'Providence hath placed mee in one of the worst places in the kingdome for opinions'. He was clearly uncertain about what course he should take and his movements over the next six years are uncertain, but raise the possibility that he could have been caught up in the 1648 siege of Colchester.

In 1651 or 1652 he was appointed to the parish of Shalford in north Essex by the Committee for Plundered Ministers and, on his insistence, was ordained in that church by several of his fellow Presbyterian ministers. Ten years later he was ejected by the Act of Uniformity for his lack of episcopal ordination, as well as for his refusal to comply with the Book of Common Prayer. He is then said to have retired to Ridgewell to earn his living by resuming the practice of medicine (though his name is absent from the Essex hearth tax returns of 1670). Another ten years passed before the 1672 Act of Toleration allowed him to licence a house at Ridgewell for religious meetings and he practised both callings there for the next 25 years up to his death in 1697. He was eloquently commemorated by Calamy as "a man of excellent Parts and a General Scholar; for besides his Skill in Physick and Chyrurgery, and other Sciences subservient both to them and Divinity, he was eminent for the Oriental Tongues, well read in the Fathers, Schoolmen, and Church History, and the Controversies with Papists, Socinians, Arminians &c." Richard Baxter in his *Apology* of 1654 wrote of him as possessed of 'Candour, Ingenuitie, Moderation, Love and Peace.' He was the author of well over a dozen religious publications, many in defence of the Presbyterian cause but incidentally providing useful biographical material about himself and contemporary clergy.

Sources:

- Davids, T, 1863 *Annals of Evangelical Nonconformity*, London
Dean, J W, 1866 'A Brief Memoir of Rev. Giles Firmin' in *New England Historical & Genealogical Register* (for January 1866)
Dunn, R S, et al. (eds) 1996 *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*, Harvard University Press
Ferguson, C, Thornton, C, Wareham, A, 2021 *Essex Hearth Tax: Michaelmas 1670*, Brit. Record Soc.
Forbes, A B (ed), 1947 *The Winthrop Papers: 1645-9*, Massachusetts Historical Society
Matthews, A G, 1934 *Calamy Revised*, Clarendon Press, Oxford
Smith, H, 1933 *The Ecclesiastical History of Essex*, Colchester
Venn, J & J A, 1922 *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, ii, pt. 1, Cambridge

Wanstead Park Grotto

By Michael Leach

The huge Palladian palace was begun in 1715, funded by a vast fortune gained from the slave sugar plantations in the West Indies trade, and a highly lucrative directorship of the East India Company. Just over a century later, the mansion was demolished down to, and including, the foundations after the spectacular frittering of another large inherited fortune which obliged its then owner and his wife to flee the country to avoid their creditors. The park had already been deformed from its early eighteenth century geometric layout and was returned to agricultural use. Half a century later, the remains were acquired by the City of London as public open space, including a few of the subsidiary buildings which had survived. One of these was the grotto built in 1761-2 on the edge of what had been an axial canal. This building had a boathouse at water level, with sumptuous domed and mirrored chamber above, used by its owners for feasting and seductions, after the picturesque arrival of the guests by boat. Substantial damage by fire in 1884, followed by neglect and further vandalism, have now reduced its splendour to a partially collapsed and fenced-off shell.

Over the last two decades there have been 12 major reports to establish a management plan for the ruin, with suggestions ranging from rescue and rebuilding, to managed decline. A lack of funding, and an inability to agree on how to manage its future, have prevented any decisions being reached. But finally the City of London in partnership with the Heritage of London Trust (the latter led by its energetic director) have agreed to commit to a major reconstruction project which should start in 2022.

There will always be disagreements about the historical ethics of a major restoration of a very decayed building, particularly where detailed plans and images may not have survived. There are justified concerns about the result being an inappropriate or bogus pastiche. However, a well-thought-out imaginative reconstruction seems an excellent plan here, as a visual reminder of the spectacular vanished 'palace' which once stood to its west. Enough of the parkland, of which it was a significant part, is still recognisable, including the now deformed canal. In addition, the City of London and the Trust have 'past form' in this sort of work, being currently involved in the restoration of Alexander Pope's grotto at Twickenham, so the work should be in good hands.

Sources

The Financial Times, 10 December 2021

Cherry, B., O'Brien, C., Pevsner, N., 2005. *Buildings of England: London 5 East*. Yale University Press

The cichociemni at Audley End

By Michael Leach

For many years a series of pencilled names on the wall of a storage cupboard at Audley End have been a mystery. Recent research by an English Heritage historian, aided by two Polish researchers, has provided insights into a neglected aspect of the house during World War II when it was known as Station 43, and used for training Polish resistance operatives who were to be returned to the German occupied areas of Poland, and other European countries. They were known as the 'cichociemni' – the silent unseen – and received a three month fitness training at Audley End, as well as instruction in the necessary skills of subversion, sabotage and intelligence gathering. They were also provided with the essential false identities, back stories and the appropriate documentation.

With the assistance of the Polish researchers, the story of six of these operatives – and their subsequent careers – has been pieced together, and is the subject of a new exhibition which can now be seen by visitors to the mansion. It is one of the sad ironies of politics and warfare that a number of the cichociemni were hunted down and imprisoned by the post-war Soviet regime in Poland.

Sources

the Observer, 1 May 2022

Recent projects at the St Giles ruins in Maldon

By Dr Johanna Dale

The medieval hospital in Maldon was founded in the reign of Henry II (1154-89) to care for people of the town suffering from leprosy. Although there were around ten hospitals in Essex in the medieval period, only ruins of a chapel at Maldon and a much-altered chapel at Ilford survive. The site at Maldon is therefore of great historical and archaeological importance as is recognised by the fact it is protected as a scheduled ancient monument. Once open to the public, recurrent episodes of anti-social behaviour and graffiti have led to the site being off limits except on occasional open days.

As a medieval historian living in Maldon District, I wanted to help rectify this situation and make this interesting and attractive site more accessible to the public once more. Through a series of small grants from University College London, I have been working with Maldon Town Council, who care for the site, to raise its profile and hopefully increase its value as a community asset.

In 2019 funding from UCL's Centre for Critical Heritage Studies enabled me to develop a heritage walking route, which links the hospital to other sites in the town and surrounding countryside. It is a pervasive misconception that people with leprosy were completely excluded from medieval society, and the walk demonstrates the ways in which the hospital was part of the networks of local life. You can access a digital version of the route on Google Maps, leaflets are available from the Maldon Tourist Information Point, and an interpretation board is soon to be installed in the centre of the town.



Last autumn I was awarded, with environmental policy specialist Dr Carla Washbourne of UCL's department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy, a grant of £5000 for a project at the site through a scheme called UCL Grand Challenges. The aim of this scheme is to bring academics from different departments together to try to address real world problems and we were awarded funding under the health and well-being strand. We have been working with Maldon Town Council and the community group 'Maldon in Bloom' to install raised medicinal herb beds at the site, re-activating its medical heritage and improving it as a community space. Through engaging with the stories, spaces and practices of medical heritage as well as using opportunities for being active in green space the aim is to promote community health and wellbeing.

As the site is a protected scheduled ancient monument, Historic England requested a geophysical survey before works commenced. At this point, Dr Kris Lockyear of UCL Institute of Archaeology, founder of the Community Archaeology Geophysics Group, stepped in to help. Kris, along with volunteer Mike Smith, travelled to Maldon to undertake the survey over 2 days and on 9th July the site was open to the public while the survey was taking place. Around 70 visitors joined us throughout the day and asked lots of questions about the medieval hospital and the geophysical survey techniques and equipment. From speaking to local residents, we also learned lots about former uses of the site and local people's ideas for how it could be used in the future.

The site will be open again as part of the [Heritage Open Day](#) events in September (please check online for details) when we also hope to be able to share the results of the geophysical survey. It would be great to see members of ESAH there!

Essex seen from elsewhere

By Michael Leach

1) The future of the closed 1842 United Reformed Chapel at Castle Hedingham (architect James Fenton) has been mentioned before in this newsletter. The original proposal for conversion into three residences (with the removal of all internal fittings) has been abandoned after opposition. The present plan is for a single unit only, with retention of almost all the fittings, apart from the organ and a couple of small box pews.

i2) Saints Peter & Paul, Birch. This huge rural church by S. S. Teulon of 1849-50 has been mentioned in several previous issues of this Newsletter. Having stood disused for nearly four decades, and resisted three earlier attempts to demolish it, its final hope of transformation into a dwelling has been abandoned, and the fourth plan for its demolition has been published. Attempts to find a home for its east window by Mary Lowndes continue, but most of the other glass has long since been smashed.

iii) St Nicholas, Little Wigborough. This late C15 church was repaired after the 1884 Essex earthquake. Now it is trouble again with serious structural cracks (perhaps the result of the severe weather conditions of 2017/8, rather than the earthquake) and is permanently closed, and seeking a new use and user. Amongst its less usual contents is part of a Zeppelin which came down in the vicinity in 1916.

Sources

Heritage Now, Spring 2002

Friends of Friendless Churches Newsletter, May 2022

Domestication of Chickens

By Michael Leach

All modern birds are derived from the red jungle fowl native to SE Asia. Recent research in France suggests that the earliest evidence of their domestication dates from between 1650 and 1250 BC in Thailand, where large numbers of chicken bones have been found in human settlement sites, where they are also associated with human interments. No osteological evidence has been found to suggest that they were being eaten, and it may be that the birds were merely attracted by the large amounts of grain that these communities were cultivating and that, initially at least, they were not seen as a source of food in their own right.

Sources

New Scientist, 11 June 2022, p. 12

Saffron – its cultivation re-evaluated?

By Michael Leach

Most readers will associate Saffron Walden with the history of growing and harvesting the stamens of *Crocus sativus* to yield the reddish yellow spice, now best known for colouring rice and saffron cake and its high cost (gram for gram, more valuable than gold). Traditionally, but on no tangible evidence, it was introduced to this country by King Edward III, an attribution uncritically copied from one source to another for at least 500 years. However, it is certain that it was being grown in Saffron Walden by 1444/5 when it was mentioned as a tithable crop in an agreement made between the vicar and the abbot of Walden. The second edition of William Harrison's *Description of England* (1587) provides considerable detail about the cultivation and economics of this crop. As Harrison was living in nearby Radwinter, he was in a good position to be well informed. Placename evidence suggests that its growth was (or had been) more widespread over a number of parishes in northwest Essex, though of course a saffron field name may not necessarily indicate its earlier use for the cultivation of the crocus.

Camden's note (which was not amended in the Gibson edition) in *Britannia* indicates that saffron was also grown in Cambridgeshire, and this is confirmed by recent research in Cambridge college archives (not yet published). Medieval academics enjoyed displaying college wealth by what seems to have been an ostentatious use of this very costly spice. It was grown in college gardens, and some tenants of college lands paid part of their rent in saffron – presumably from their own cultivation of the crocus. Debts between colleges were sometimes settled by payment in this commodity.

It is slightly surprising that the researchers claim that it was seventeenth century puritanism which fatally weakened the demand for saffron, rather than changes in taste or fashion. Apart from its culinary use, it was used for dyeing cloth, and was thought to have disinfectant properties, as well as being a plague preventative. According to Gibson's *Flora of Essex* (1862) its cultivation had ceased about a century earlier at Saffron Walden, though he noted that a few plants appeared spontaneously in newly trenched ground there in 1843. In 1974, Jermyn listed it as extinct in Essex.

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The Reverent Stephen Gosson, rector of Great Wigborough, 1591-1600

By Michael Leach

All too often, lists of Essex parish incumbents, particularly from the sixteenth century, are just lists, and it is unusual to be able to find even a fragment of biographical detail. Great Wigborough's rector, largely due to his controversial writing as an anti-theatre polemicist, is one exception, though much what is known about him dates from before his arrival at this Essex parish.

The son of a skilled joiner who had emigrated from the Low Countries to Canterbury, he was born in about 1554. A scholarship to the cathedral school in about 1568 enabled him to proceed to Corpus Christi College, Oxford in 1572. Several of his college contemporaries were later to become eminent figures in the Elizabethan church. It may have been financial difficulties that forced him to leave the university before completing the necessary requirements to qualify for his degree, and that obliged him to move to London in an attempt to establish himself a writer of pastoral verses and plays, and to find work as an actor. He appears to have met little success in any of these careers, and only a few poems – and none of his plays in verse – have survived.

The 1570s were a controversial time to be involved in the theatre. There were increasingly virulent attacks on public performances by actors and musicians who, unless members of a noble household, were regarded by new parliamentary legislation as 'masterless men', and accordingly classed as 'roges, vacaboundes and sturdie beggars'. In 1575 the City of London expelled all players within its jurisdiction, necessitating their relocation to newly-constructed theatres on the South Bank of the Thames, an area notorious at that time for its brothels or 'stewes'. This hostility appears to have been driven by the rapid growth in that period of commercial theatres. With their large audiences, and their considerable popular appeal, they were seen as promoters of unwelcome frivolity, base criminality and lascivious opportunities. This was a moral rather than a puritan reaction, and allowed Gosson, wearing the virtuous crown of a 'reformed actor', his first success with his attack on the stage, *The Schoole of Abuse*. This was probably a commissioned work, published as a large print run in the summer of 1579, in the form of a polemic against the abuses which arose from public performances, though not (at this point) music, poetry and the theatre in their own right.

To the modern reader, it is a very dense text, littered with paragraph-long cascades of references to Classical writers, and loaded with rhetorical questions. But its impact seems to have been considerable, and Gosson, after receiving considerable obloquy and even death threats, was forced to retreat to an unknown location in the country where he found employment as a tutor. Here he spent many months studying Plato, and working on a sequel to his first polemic which used a passage from Deuteronomy to extend his attack to cross-dressing (normal practice on the Elizabethan stage where female parts were always played by young men). It also addressed what he claimed to be the sin of deceit, necessarily employed by actors in the performance of their parts. Though not mentioned in his polemic, a minor earthquake in London in 1580, widely seen as a mark of God's displeasure at these sinful activities, seemed to vindicate Gosson's conclusions.

In April 1584, his career took an unexplained turn with his registration at the English College in Rome, a Jesuit seminary established in 1579 to train priests for the clandestine and dangerous mission to England. It is not clear whether this was no more than the expected hospitality available to any casual English visitor to Rome (normally limited to an eight day stay), or whether he had been deliberately placed in the seminary itself as an agent of the Elizabethan spymaster general, Thomas Walsingham, who had informants in every major European city. His departure two months later, on the grounds of poor eyesight, suggests that, if he was indeed acting in this capacity, his true purpose had either been fulfilled, or had been unmasked by the college authorities.

There is no record of his ordination but this must have occurred soon after his return to England and before he was appointed sequentially to lectureships at St Martins, Ludgate, in the City of London, and then (in February 1585) at Stepney, the latter paying him a generous £30 a year for a mid-week lecture, two Sunday sermons, and responsibility for catechising the children. In October 1586 he was appointed vicar of Sandridge in Hertfordshire, a living worth what was then the enormous sum of £80 per annum. Here he was recorded as compliant with all the requirements of the Book of Common Prayer and, in spite of his earlier anti-theatre polemics, it seems clear that he was no radical puritan. A decade later he delivered a sermon which vigorously attacked 'the new Presbyterie' as 'full of barcking libells to disgrace the persons of the best men, and the labours of the best learned in the Church of England'. He complained that this resulted in 'God's altar invironed with a company of proud Mules, striking at it with their heeles, the altar it selfe battered by violence and beaten downe, holy things troden down and trampled with foule feete ... all these miseries springing from a wrangling humour of the Presbyterie, that hath broght religion into contempt.'

He must have had the backing of influential friends or patrons as, by December 1691, he was presented to the living of Great Wigborough, near Colchester, which was temporarily in the gift of the queen due to the attainder of the parish's patron. According to Newcourt, the well-endowed living was worth £18-17s - 4d per annum, and came with 90 acres of glebe, as well as the tithes accruing from 183 acres of lands in nearby parishes. He only farmed part of the glebe, leasing out the remainder. This resulted in the lapsing of certain rights of way, necessitating a law suit by Gosson's successor in 1608 to re-establish them. No contemporary parish documents have survived to provide any insight into his ministry at Great Wigborough, Essex, apart from a note that he had transcribed the parish's loose paper sheets of births, marriages and burials into a permanent register, as required by the 1598 law. It may be assumed, from the evidence already cited, that he was no supporter of presbyterian reforms!

During the time that he was rector of the parish, a 'mucky-mouthed' satire on the vanities of women's clothing entitled *Pleasant Quippes for Vpstart Newfangled Gentlewomen*, was published anonymously in 1595. This was reprinted in 1841 by J P Collier, a literary editor who was an authority on Elizabethan literature but was later unmasked as a prodigious forger. Collier attributed the authorship to Gosson on the evidence of an inscription, allegedly in his hand, which Collier claimed to have found on the first leaf of one of the very few surviving copies. However, a more recent examination by Ringler (who was familiar with Gosson's hand) strongly suggested that the signature was just another of Collier's many forgeries. In addition, the vulgarity of the text seems quite out of character with Gosson's normal style of writing, and Collier's attribution can probably now be dismissed. The work was reprinted again by Charles Clark's Great Totham Press in 1847, naming Gosson as the author (presumably on Collier's authority). Clark's publication also included a sermon entitled *The Trumpet of War* which Gosson - increasingly in demand in London as a preacher - certainly had delivered in 1598 at St Paul's Cross. This set out the Biblical justifications for a war with Spain, and the individual's responsibilities to support it.

In 1600, his final career move took him back to London to the extremely wealthy parish of St Botolph, Bishopgate where, according to Newcourt, the tithes alone were worth £200 a year, But these were problematical to collect from city workshops and required the tireless (and inevitably unpopular) pursuit of his defaulting parishioners. On a more positive note, he worked for several years with the former actor and founder of Dulwich College, Edward Alleyn, to establish and administer a charity in his parish. He died, and was buried in the chancel of his City church in 1625, alongside his wife Elizabeth who had predeceased him. He left bequests to various friends and relative, to the curate, clerk and sexton of St Botolphs, and to the poor of the various parishes in which he had lectured, or been beneficed. The poor of Great Wigborough were to receive 40 shillings.

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The Ruin of all Witches: Life & Death in the New World

By Michael Leach

This is the title of a new book by Malcolm Gaskell, a narrative account based on a combination of historical research and imaginative reconstruction. Its main focus is the witch trials of the 1640s in Massachusetts, but also concerns William Pynchon who had grown up in a well-connected family at Springfield near Chelmsford. He was educated in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, though he does not appear to have attended university. In 1630, seeking religious freedom, he set sail for the New World in the *Ambrose*, part of the Winthrop fleet, initially settling in the area between Boston and Dorchester and served the Massachusetts Bay Company as treasurer. He was active in the fur trade with the native Americans and the writer wonders how equitable these dealings were, quoting the diplomat Sir Edward Hoby's chilling observation that it was lawful for a Christian to take away anything from infidels.'

Six years on, Pynchon moved 100 miles west to establish a remote community, which he named Springfield after his former English home, and where he quickly established a dominance in the fur trade, as well as in the affairs of the town. There were many accusations of witchcraft in the new settlement with some of Pynchon's servants claiming to be victims, and it is difficult to imagine that Pynchon, who had been appointed a magistrate, was not involved in the resulting persecutions. Pynchon himself was to be the cause of a bitter religious controversy. In 1650, his book, printed in London and entitled *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption*, challenged (amongst other matters) orthodox Calvinist teaching by arguing that Jesus did not die to redeem the sins of mankind, and that he did not suffer the torments of Hell after his crucifixion.

In the storm that followed, the public hangman was ordered to burn all copies of the book, and Pynchon was obliged to publicly recant his heretical views. He and his wife returned to England in 1652, initially lodging in Hackney with relatives until he was able to acquire an estate in Wraybury, Buckinghamshire, where he continued to publish religious writings till his death in 1662.

The recently published book only touches lightly on Pynchon but provides a considerable amount of detail about the persecution of witches in New England.

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Cherry gardens in Essex

By Michael Leach

Then unto London I did me hye,
Of all the land it beareth the pryse:
“Hot pescodes” one began to crye,
“Straberry rype” and “cherryes on the ryse”
(John Lydgate of Bury, c.1370-c.1451)

There is nothing new about street food, even the sale of fruit and nuts in theatres was noted by a visitor to London in 1596. What is less clear is where the capital obtained its supplies of cherries from, and how such a delicate fruit was conveyed undamaged into the metropolis when roads were so bad. Even in 1828, the cart of a Cambridge apple grower took two days to reach London, and had to be accompanied by another cart carrying faggots which were used to ease the passage of the first over the potholes, in order to limit the damage to the fruit that it was carrying.

A partial answer is provided by Pehr Kalm, the Swedish botanist who visited England in 1748 and noticed the extensive cherry orchards close to the Thames between Gravesend and Rochester in Kent, well placed for transporting their crop into London by water. By 1800 the north Kent parishes of Erith and Plumstead across the Thames from Essex were famous for their cherry orchards. The importance of water transport was noted by a 1695 advertisement for premises in Kent which included ‘a large Cherry-Garden’ with the added advantage was that it was ten miles from London, and a mile and a half from the River Thames, clearly conveniently placed for the London trade. Cherries were known to fetch a better price in London if growers caught the first tide of the day.

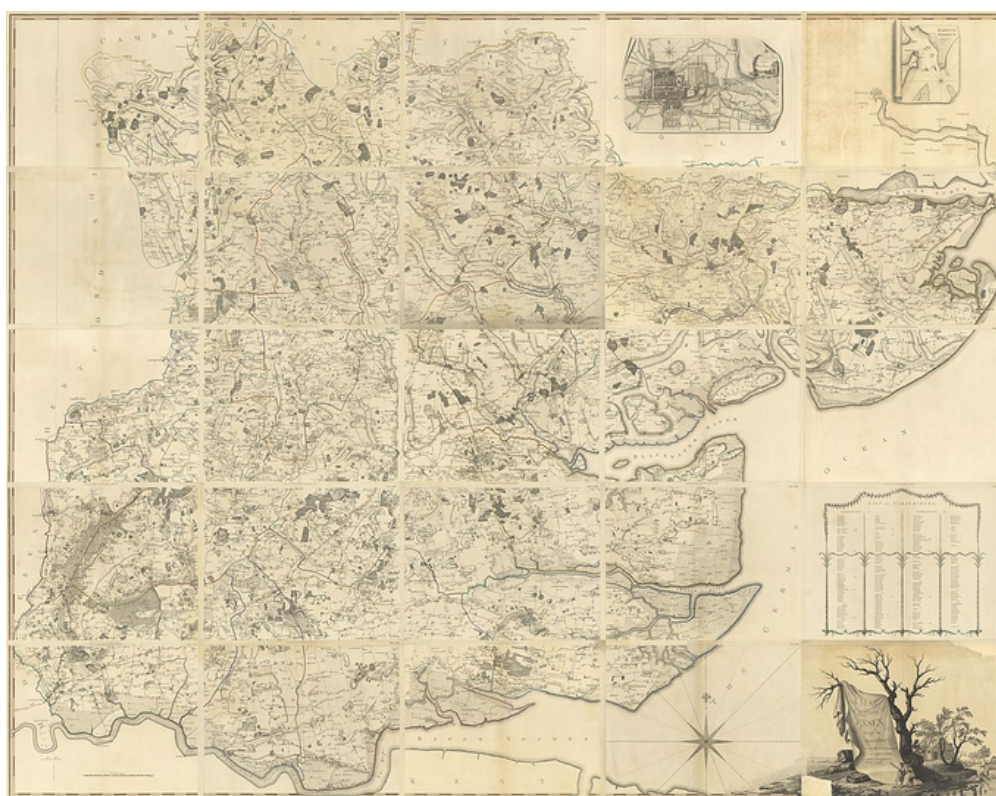
Kalm enquired why there were very few cherry orchards on the Essex side of the Thames and was told that Kent cherries had a more agreeable flavour. Kent’s dominance seems to have been established by the end of the sixteenth century when it was noted that the county ‘be growing great plenty of this fruite’. In the 1650s Hartlib noted that a 30 acre cherry orchard in Sittingbourne produced a £1000 worth of fruit in one season. A more usual yield was £10 – 15 per acre. The economics of cherry growing for the London market are hard to establish, but in 1737 a mixed orchard of hops, cherries and walnuts in Cobham, Kent, yielded 827 sieves of cherries, a sieve being between 48 and 50 pounds in weight. The whole crop - about 400 cwt - was sold for £93. Expenses came to about £40 for picking, just over £9 for water carriage and nearly £3–5s for the fruit merchant’s commission – leaving a profit of just over £40.

So where does Essex fit into the history of growing cherries for the London market, rather than solely for domestic or local consumption? Archive sources show that Essex’s orchards were usually known as ‘cherry gardens’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (as they were in Kent). Though it is said that the spreading habit of cherry trees meant that they were better cultivated on their own, the limited evidence from sales advertisements in eighteenth century newspapers shows that they often formed part of a mixed orchard, sometimes even combined with hop growing. At the turn of the nineteenth century, one acre of an average Maidstone orchard accommodated 800 hop hills, 200 filberts, and 40 apple and cherry trees. The hops were expected to be productive for a dozen years, the filberts for 30 years, after which the apple and cherry trees had grown sufficiently to need the whole acre. The growth of the young trees was said to benefit from painting their stems with a mixture of night soil and lime.

Somewhat similar mixed planting is found in Essex in 1779 on a small farm at Wethersfield which had a six acre cherry garden and orchard, two acres of which were planted with hops. In 1775, a much larger farm at Burnham (variously called Shipwright or Cherry Garden) had ten acres of mixed orchard, comprising a ‘Plantation of exceedingly fine Cherry, Apple and Walnut Trees.’ At least part of this was still marked as an orchard on the six inch Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1938.

Though a number of these 'gardens' can be found in deeds in the Essex Record Office, their acreages, though rarely given, were usually small, suggesting that they were intended for local demand rather distant markets. One of the largest is the six acres cherry garden at Wix Hall in 1713, not far from the River Stour. This could have supplied either Colchester or London by river and sea. Two acres at Moulsham in 1687 might also have been for the London market, though there would have been no convenient water transport at that date. There were a few smaller gardens round Chelmsford, probably also for the local market. Chapman and Andre's map of 1777 clearly delineates much large areas of 'cherry gardens' at Southminster, Burnham, Mucking and Rainham. Three decades later, though Arthur Young had very little to say about orchards, he noted that cherries were extensively grown in 'Burnham, Southminster &c'. He observed that these orchards were undergrazed by cattle who were fitted with a circling to prevent them from raising their heads sufficiently to crop the overhanging branches. In Kent, undergrazing was more usually done by sheep who would not have been able to browse on the fruit trees.

A much broader picture emerges from 'cherry' field names in the tithe assessments of the late 1830s and early 1840s recorded by the Essex Place-Names Project, though some caution is needed before concluding that such field names necessarily reflect its former usage, as they may have originated from a previous owner's name, or some other source. Cherrydown Farm near Chingford, for example, derives its name from 'cirice', the Old English word for church. The EPNP database contains some 40 fields named 'cherry garden' or 'cherry orchard', largely in the southern half of the county. Some of the larger ones were sited within reasonably easy reach of water transport, an obvious convenience for access to London or other markets. These include Great Waltham (29 acres), South Ockendon (21 acres), Mucking (17 acres), Hatfield Peverel (16 acres) and North Ockendon (14 acres). Most of the rest were of a few acres only. However, for the purposes of this research it is unfortunate that the tithe commissioners in Essex rarely recorded 'orchard' in their designation of land use, almost invariably listing them as 'arable' or 'pasture'. Yet many of the 'cherry' field names are shown as orchards two decades later on the six inch Ordnance Survey maps of the 1860s. It has to be concluded that the land use recorded by the Essex commissioners in the 1840s cannot be relied on for identifying orchards, and may only reflected the undergrazing, or its alternative use for arable crops. It could certainly not be used to claim that fruit growing had been abandoned in the county. Though Robert Baker of Writtle, in his prize-winning essay on Essex agriculture of 1845, makes no mention of orchards or of cherry growing, his principal concern was arable farming and, to a lesser extent, livestock. He did include some other marginal Essex crops such as bullimong, caraway, coriander and teazels but fruit growing may have been of little or no interest to him.



Map of Essex 1777 - Chapman and Andre

Though the importance of Essex in supplying the London fruit market is not clear, North Kent cherry growers maintained their dominance well into the nineteenth century, doubtless aided by the advantages of water transport. However, there must have been other factors too, as several remote inland areas had specialised in cherry cultivation from the early eighteenth century – such as west Hertfordshire, Stowmarket and Sudbury. It is far from clear how these inland crops were transported and marketed. They did, however, benefit the poor whose labour was required at a convenient point between the hay and the grain harvests. This might not have been a pleasant task, as the bucolic idyll of a cherry orchard has to be modified by Pehr Kalm's account of the growers' attempts to control avian pests which involved the shooting of 'hosts of jackdaws, rooks, crows and magpies to frighten away their comrades ... from these suspended, half rotted, and stinking birds it was not difficult to know from a distance when some cherry orchard was in the neighbourhood.'

Of the four 'cherry gardens' shown by Chapman and André's map of 1777, those at Southminster and Burnham were still marked as orchards on the six inch OS maps surveyed in 1938, though the former had been much reduced in size by the building of a malthouse and the town's gasworks. Those near Rainham (actually in a detached part of Hornchurch parish) and at Mucking do not appear on the first survey of 1863, so presumably had been grubbed up by that date. The productive life of a commercial cherry tree was said to be about 30 years. Even though replanting could have taken place, it is unlikely that these surviving orchards were still growing cherries as, by the twentieth century, the high cost of picking, as well as problems with birds, canker, viral diseases and damage from late frosts, had led most growers to abandon this fruit. The majority of the cherries eaten in Britain are now imported.

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Martin Astell - Registers, Residents, Radio-recent projects at the Essex Records Office

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Names and Addresses

Secretary

Howard Brooks

13 Greenacres, Mile End,

Colchester, Essex,

CO4 5DX

howard000brooks@gmail.com

Membership Secretary

Martin Stuchfield

Pentlow Hall, Pentlow

Essex, CO10 7SP

martinstuchfield@pentlowhall.uk

Librarian

Jane Pearson

Cob Cottage, The Street

Great Tey, Colchester

Essex, CO6 1JS

drjanepearson@hotmail.com

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