

# Essex JOURNAL

A REVIEW OF LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Autumn 2007



## **"Women at War"**

*The Provision of Childcare in Second World War Chelmsford*

## **New Light on Prehistoric Warfare in Essex**

*An Iron Age Warrior Burial from Kelvedon*

## **Family History Plus**

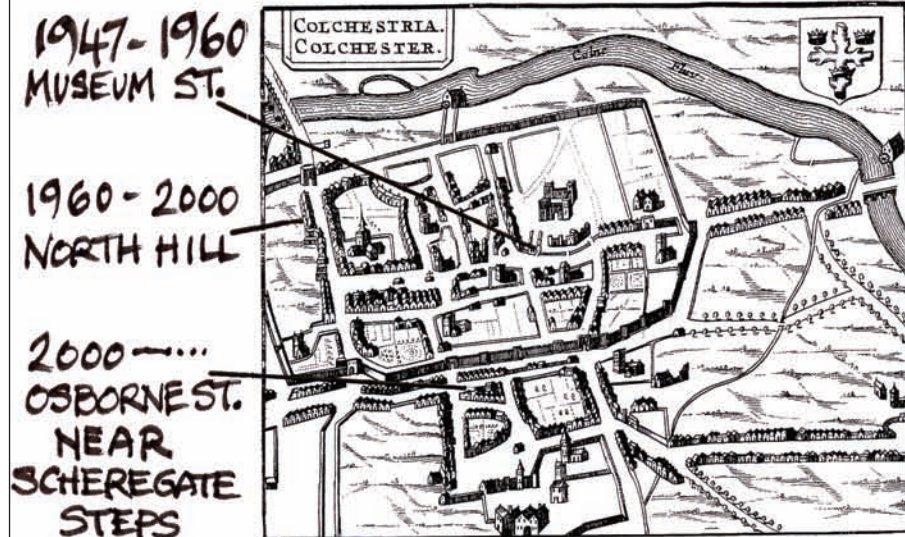
*or "Corroborative detail intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative"*

## **Archives in the 'Information Age'**

## **Evidence of Baptismal Practices**

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#### Notes to contributors

Contributions are welcome and should be sent in a Word format to the Hon. Editor at the email listed above. General correspondence can either be emailed or posted to: 30 Main Road, Broomfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 7EE. He is more than happy to discuss any proposed articles as he does not guarantee that material unsolicited material will be published. Contributors are requested to limit their articles to 2,500/4,000 words, other than by prior agreement with the Editor. Style notes are available.

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Cover illustration: A representation of adult baptism on the font in Althorne Church (Reproduced by courtesy of Christopher Starr).

Well, after much planning, many meetings and lots of hard work we're finally here! However, whilst it is with great pleasure that I accepted the honorary editorship of the *Essex Journal* it is very much tinged with sadness after the untimely death of Michael Beale. As well as having to follow Michael, I feel much apprehension having to continue the great tradition of the *Journal*, as well as that of the *Essex Review*. That said, my task has been made immeasurably easier for the very splendid assistance that I have received from the Editorial Board. While many have given greatly of their time and energy to keep the *Journal* alive I must make special mention of support and assistance, given with great good humour and friendship, which I have had from Maureen Scollan, Geraldine Willden and Martin Stuchfield. The tasks that have faced me have been made immeasurably easier knowing that they were on hand whenever I needed them. On a more practical note I must also acknowledge the great debt of gratitude that the *Essex Journal* owes to the Friends of Historic Essex for their financial support. If this had not been forthcoming the five days Desk Top Publishing training which I undertook in London would not have been possible, nor would I have the computer on which I have edited and laid out these pages.

While the *Journal* is not suffering from a lack of articles to publish we are still under severe financial strain. By bringing production of the *Journal* in-house we aim to save something in the region of £1,000 per issue, which will help us to survive. However, we still need to grow our readership and I would like to ask all of you to help us. Perhaps you might consider taking out a year's subscription for family or friends; after all what is £10 a year in this day and age?

Once we know our future is secure we can then increase the size of each issue, as there are lots of articles awaiting publication, and then we can introduce colour and finally increase the number of issues per year. 2008 will continue as this year, with the beginning of our improvements being introduced, hopefully, in 2009. There is a future for the *Journal* if we all pull together and you have the assurance of my time and energy.

You will by now have realised that the look of the *Journal* has changed significantly, for the best I think. You'll also notice that I have introduced a questionnaire to round off the *Journal*, which will feature a different historian in each issue. The Editorial Board thought that

it would be appropriate that I feature in this my first issue. After this you'll hopefully see much less of me! (The EJ 20 Questions? picture on page 67 was taken when I was at the Corporation Road nursery, which features in one of the articles.)



The other major change that I have introduced is filling many of the pages with articles and cutting out the listings pages. I felt that much of that information can be found in other newsletters, websites and notice boards, and that I want to make sure that as much historical research as possible is brought to a wider audience. Please let me know what you think. The cover illustration of this first new look issue is particularly significant, referring not only to Chris Starr's article but also to this new start for the *Journal* as well as my own baptism of fire.

As mentioned above please do let me know what you think of the 'new look'. Nothing is cast in stone and the *Essex Journal* will need to evolve in the future. I'd like to introduce a letters page and perhaps a 'Note and Queries' page. So if you have any burning historical questions that you'd like answering please send them in and I'll see if I can make space for them.

One last thing from me, I noticed the other day that there is a new health gym in Chelmsford that is called 'The Workhouse'! It would be interesting to know the degree of irony that was involved in choosing the name – not much I assume! I wonder what our ancestors would make of our lardy, pampered bodies and the ends we go to stay in shape? I bet they'd have given their right arms to live in such privileged times as we do now.

Well cheerio from me until the spring and I hope that you enjoy reading the articles as much as I have editing them.

Neil

PS Oh I musn't forget to thank my partner, Sarah Honour, for all her support and proof reading as well as putting up with all the time I've spent on the computer. Apologies to our son Thomas for all the toy railways I've not had a chance to build!

# Obituary – Michael Beale, MA (1928-2007)

Sad as we are at the death of Michael Beale, we can but reflect with gratitude on a life replete with the riches of his personal achievements and endeavours. Much of all that was dedicated to the county of Essex, on the life and history of which he was an outstanding authority. Throughout his life he relished everything relevant to the county and was one of its most sincere and faithful champions. For more years than one can readily remember, Michael was a highly respected and much admired friend and colleague to many of those who have been devoted to Essex and its historic tradition. Yet that was but one dimension of his rewarding life.

Michael was born at Upminster, not now I suppose recognisably typical of the county, but from where Michael inherited his love of Essex. He was then educated in some of the best human stables – Brentwood School and Jesus College at Cambridge, and like so many of his generation completed his education in the British Army with a spell of National Service in the Intelligence Corps. He then entered the Civil Service in 1952 and during his career served in the Civil Aviation Department and the Department of Trade and Industry. This latter position included a three-year secondment in Singapore representing British shipping in the Far East, a Trade Department role carried out under the auspices of the Foreign Office in consulates and embassies overseas. Michael distinguished himself in all of these areas of his life and thoroughly earned the accolades that came his way. He retired from the Civil Service in 1985.

In contemplating the excellence of what Michael did, what illuminates all of that for me was how his academic and administrative attributes were buttressed by a consistently high sense of duty and a tenacious loyalty to his responsibilities and the causes in which he believed. Working together for many years with the Friends of Historic Essex I never once had cause to doubt that all he undertook would be delivered on time and in perfect order. He served as Secretary and eventually as Chairman, roles that I know he cherished. Similarly, in his long and demanding stint as Editor of the *Essex Journal* he left an indelible imprint of his personality. One also realises that his major influence in recent years on *Essex Journal* serves to epitomise much of what he did for the county and its historic institutions. But, naturally, much else of what he did was equally valuable if less

conspicuous. Those who worked closely with him know that only too well.

To comprehend and enjoy the flavours of Michael's incisive perceptions and robust support of that which is best in Essex life and history, the obvious thing is to read his pungent and elegantly crafted editorials. Taken together, they constitute the essence of his scholarship and his conspicuous ability to identify and promote important issues of principle and practical consequences. Michael's assiduous and disciplined approach to research and authorship is apparent in all he wrote. It is perhaps to be seen at its best in the brilliant essay he contributed to the 1996 tribute volume, *Essex: 'full of profitable things'*. Michael's chosen topic was the 1851 Religious Census in Essex and what he revealed was an important insight into an aspect of Victorian social history, the evidence for which had long been hidden in the recesses of the then Public Record Office and virtually neglected by historians. It was one of his strengths to find novel pathways and interesting interpretations into obscure historical territory.

Michael's was also an effective presence in local church life serving as Lay Reader at St. Michael's and St. Lawrence at Great Waltham. All of this though did not preclude his wider role in various social and organisational activities in the county. In all of these areas he has left the hallmarks of his character. That is impressive enough and most of us have benefited in one way or another from what he did. But in regretting the loss to Essex history we think also of his family in their greater loss. Jean, whom he married in 1958, supported him ably and nobly in all he did. For Michael, aside from his manifest commitment to the many formal responsibilities he willingly assumed, it was his family that mattered most. He was devoted to them and in their sadness his friends will hope that they will find at least some consolation in contemplating the excellence of his achievements and appreciating the profound respect in which he was held by those who knew him. They, his family, and others in their turn, will have memories to cherish – and an enduring sense of gratitude to Michael and for his life.



Kenneth Neale

## “Women at War”: The Provision of Childcare in Second World War Chelmsford

By Jo Alexander

We take it for granted today that childcare will be available to mothers who want to work, indeed returning to work is actively encouraged by politicians. Therefore it is surprising to learn that during the Second World War, industry's need for women to play a vital role in the war effort did not necessarily prompt the various bodies required to initiate childcare schemes to act decisively. Despite the fact that many of those women were mothers, local and national authorities often dragged their heels about providing any form of childcare. This article uses evidence primarily from oral history tapes to discover how easy it was for mothers to play their part in helping the war effort on the home front at a time of acute national crisis. It will also consider how far such women were obstructed from playing as full a role as they may otherwise have chosen.

**“...the matter be deferred to the next meeting.”**

The oral history tapes used as the raw material for this article were recorded in 1995 by Jane Ronaldson, an undergraduate at Middlesex University. The interviews were undertaken in order to produce a piece of work on women's experiences during the Second World War, and the tapes have been deposited at the Essex Record Office

(ERO) as an addition to the Essex Sound Archive.<sup>1</sup> The interviews are unedited and are between sixty and one hundred and twenty minutes long. All the interviews were conducted with women from Essex living in Chelmsford during the Second World War, and were conducted essentially to gain information on experiences and emotions, for which oral history is particularly useful. It appears that there was no attempt to gain evidence to prove any one specific point. There are no 'official' records of individual childcare arrangements, however common, and while the information gained cannot be verified, other than by carrying out further interviews, there is no reason to disbelieve the information given by the respondents.

This article is based on the taped interviews with a small sub sample of the respondents to Ronaldson's questions: Mrs Doris Martin, Mrs Sybil Olive, Mrs Jean Roberts and Mrs Ivy Sagers. They had all moved to Chelmsford as a direct result of the war but were exempt from war work, either because of family commitments or employment in a reserved occupation, yet they all chose to do some kind of “...directly involved work.”<sup>2</sup> They were all married and had children by the end of the war.

Although this article is based on only four interviews, the educational standards of the four women were wide ranging, for example, from a university-educated teacher to a school leaver with no qualifications, so each woman's experiences were sufficiently different to provide varying viewpoints on some of the

topics discussed. Personal politics varied too: one of the respondents was extremely politically active, setting up women's branches of the trade unions and even standing for election to Parliament as the Communist Party's candidate. While these factors do not diminish credibility they may need to be considered in any wider analysis.

In order to use these testimonies to learn about childcare during the Second World War the interviews need to be considered as a whole. Together they provide a clear picture of the situation in Chelmsford with regard to women with families who might have wished to undertake war work. While there are shared experiences and common attitudes, each of the respondents reacted differently, but it is the commonalities that give value to such a collection of personal testimonies. There appears to be no hidden agenda in the making of these tapes on the part of the interviewer, or the respondents. The information relating to childcare is given in response to general questioning about war work; as such it is an unwitting, but valuable and unbiased, source.

Chelmsford was the home to several industries that were vital to the war effort, namely Hoffman's, Marconi and Crompton Parkinson. All three needed female labour to replace the male employees who had joined the armed forces, as well as to fulfil the increased demand for the goods they produced. To make up the shortfall many women were brought into the area to undertake war work and were sent to their places of work by the Labour Exchange. At this



## “Women at War”

point the issue of childcare was raised neither by the Labour Exchange, nor the employers: any arrangements were left to individual women. Being a parent was not considered a hindrance to working, rather it was not considered at all. During the early part of the war only one of the women interviewed, Mrs Roberts, had any children.<sup>3</sup> There were no organised official childcare facilities in Chelmsford accessible to her; job-sharing was one solution. Marconi, the employer in this instance, found this acceptable, and allowed woman to ‘swap’ during the lunch break. “I worked from half seven until around one, while my friend looked after my two children. In the afternoon she worked and I looked after hers...”<sup>4</sup> Mrs Roberts suggests she was one of many that job-shared in order to work, as many married women wanted to do their ‘patriotic duty’ and help with the war effort. This was not the only solution to childcare problems, as other women relied on friends, relatives and neighbours to look after their children.<sup>5</sup> This was both for paid and for voluntary work. Mrs Saggars, single at the start of the war, was often called upon to look after the daughter of her landlady, in order that she could fulfil her duties as a warden.<sup>6</sup> Mrs Saggars did not question her babysitting duties, but accepted them as a part of her lodging arrangements. None of the respondents comment on any problems with this informal care, in fact Mrs Roberts suggests employers were extremely flexible and accommodated such arrangements with little difficulty.

The necessity for informal childcare is shown within the minutes of Chelmsford Borough Council, where there was reluctance amongst the councillors to discuss the need for childcare provision in the first years of the war. Typically it was consigned to the end of each meeting, where it was “...resolved...that the matter be deferred to the next meeting.”<sup>7</sup> As the Councillors were unwilling to enable women with children to work, such women had little option but to make their own arrangements. When the provision of nurseries was discussed it was suggested that there was no demand for places at all. If the tapes had not been available there would

be no reason to doubt the council minutes.

At this time the Women’s Voluntary Service set up a day nursery in temporary buildings in the grounds of Friars Infant School, Chelmsford, which initially was the only nursery for the children of women war workers. The nursery was housed in two rooms and catered for children aged between two and five years.<sup>8</sup> The respondents appear to have been unaware of its existence. Penny Summerfield, who has worked extensively on government policy towards childcare during the Second World War, suggests that this was not uncommon nationally; many nurseries were unpublicised and as a result

### A DEPUTATION OF WOMEN URGE “NURSERIES NOW”

CHELMSFORD Town Council on Wednesday received a deputation comprising Mrs. Norton, Mrs. Roberts, Mr. and Mrs. Whitehead, and Mrs. Slade, on the questions of the establishment of day nurseries in the town and the provision of meals at schools.

The Mayor, CR. SIDNEY C. TAYLOR, presided.

MRS. NORTON said that they hoped the Council would make public as soon as possible what the nurseries were to be built of, and where. They now heard that the nurseries would not be near the factories, but they felt that arrangements should be made for transporting the children to and from the nurseries. Arrangements to this effect could be made with the W.V.S., and it should be possible to get petrol for this purpose from the Ministry concerned. The general opinion was that the nurseries should be open all day. There must be a specially trained staff for the nurseries. Voluntary nurseries had been a complete failure.

Day nurseries were essential for the war effort; everybody who could should be working. “Let the mothers of Chelmsford know they can go out to work and leave their children in proper care.”

CR. A. E. HODGE said the Ministry insisted that the Council should get on with three sets of nurseries, and they were getting on with it quite satisfactorily. The Corporation Road site would house 60 children. The huts would be pre-fabricated on concrete foundations, and would provide for two classes—1 to 3 years, and 3 to 5 years. The huts were of a Ministry standard, and everything that could be done for the comfort, convenience, and control of the children would be included. The Ministry laid down that the staffs must be trained, and there had already been nine applications for the posts of matron and assistant matron. In the next few days they would make the necessary appointments.

There was full equipment for the first centre, which would be opened, it was expected, in

ten weeks’ time. The other site would be in London Road—near the A.A. offices—and not near the Crompton Parkinson Works, as was at first suggested. If it was necessary to collect the children, the Council would give favourable consideration to anything which was within their powers.

MRS. ROBERTS spoke upon provision for children over 5, stating that, whatever their ages, the children of mothers on war work must not be allowed to suffer. She spoke of the necessity of providing the children with hot meals, of adequate supervision of the children during the dinner hours, and other matters.

THE DEPUTY-MAYOR, ALD. F. FOX, as Chairman of the Education Committee, said there was really nothing fresh in the matters raised. With regard to the provision of meals, it must be realised that this was a tremendous undertaking, and it would be seen that the Council had already made move in this direction. All the points raised would be considered, and some decision arrived at. “I make no promise that they will be favourably considered,” he said. “All I can say is that the question will be decided upon by the Committee, under the auspices of the Government.” Mrs. Roberts also spoke on the question of shopping hours as affecting war workers. She suggested that the shops remain open an hour later one evening; also staggered dinner hours of opening. “We urge the Council to give a lead in this matter,” she urged. “Provide every possible facility to encourage women to take up war work.”

THE MAYOR: If the Chamber of Commerce like to send us an application for the shops to open one hour later on a Friday night, I do not think that for one moment the Council would go against those wishes. The Mayor added that they had been working on the lines generally suggested by the deputation for some considerable time. He congratulated the speakers on the able way in which they had put their case.

The deputation thanked the Council for their courtesy and withdrew.

Fig.1. The Essex Chronicle, 27th March 1942, p.7.

(Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Chronicle and the Essex Record Office).

# “Women at War”

underused.<sup>9</sup> There are no known surviving records from this nursery so the extent to which places were taken up is unknown. The only mention of this nursery in the Chelmsford Borough Council minutes is in respect of its closure just before the opening of the official war nurseries in August 1942.<sup>10</sup>

Summerfield has detailed the conflicts between the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Board of Education (BOE) and the Ministry of Labour and National Service (MOL).<sup>11</sup> Her findings show responsibility for childcare was divided between the MOH day nurseries, and the BOE nursery schools.<sup>12</sup> If a demand was made for a nursery in any particular area the MOL could intervene, assess the level of need from information provided by employers, and ensure that provision was made. In reality little use

was made of this system and there was reluctance, on the part of the MOH, to encourage mothers to leave their children in order to undertake war work.<sup>13</sup> This did not directly affect the provision of nurseries in Chelmsford, as at this time Chelmsford Borough Council was itself reluctant to acknowledge any need for nurseries to be provided.

It has been shown that it was possible for mothers to choose to work in spite of the lack of nursery places and only when these informal arrangements became impractical was the lack of a nursery considered. This had very different effects on the respondents. Two of the women, Mrs Saggars, a worker at Crompton Parkinson, and Mrs Martin, a nurse at the temporary maternity hospital in Danbury, both left work following the births of their children, because

“...it was what you did...”<sup>14</sup> This suggests that leaving work to stay at home and raise children was the normal course of events for married women during the war, despite the pressure to volunteer for war

“...we called ourselves ‘Women at War’...”

work. They had already volunteered and ‘done their bit’ for the war effort. Neither expressed any disappointment at leaving work nor did they blame a lack of childcare facilities. Staying in employment appears not to have been considered an option.

However Mrs Roberts and Mrs Olive joined a group to actively campaign for a nursery to be opened for the children of war workers; Mrs Roberts, in her interview remembers, laughingly, that “...we called ourselves ‘Women at War’...”<sup>15</sup> This group had three aims: nurseries for war workers’ children, school meals and out of school care for older children. This shows that

women in Chelmsford were prepared to take direct action in order to improve their situation. ‘Women at War’ was not unique. Summerfield describes demonstrations for the provision of nurseries occurring in many parts of the country. The London Women’s

## LEAVE BABY HERE

### FIRST WAR NURSERY AT CHELMSFORD

By JUNELLA CHAPPELLE

**I**F Mrs. Smith lives anywhere near Corporation Road, and wants to do war work, she can go now, and be confident that she is leaving Smith, junior, in good hands: because the first of Chelmsford’s war-time nurseries, the one in Corporation Road, was opened last Saturday by the Mayor, Councillor Sidney Taylor, and inspected by him and other members of the Town Council.

The nursery is roughly in the shape of the letter H. Each vertical stroke comprises two nurseries, joined in the centre by the matron’s room, the kitchen, and a room for the staff, which can be used as an isolation room, should the need arise. The architect who designed it was Mr. E. P. Archer. The building is of prefabricated material supplied by the Ministry of Health, and the minimum of timber has been used.

The children will be split up among the nurseries according to their age, one for the “noughts up to one year,” as Councillor A. E. Hodge, chairman of the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, put it, one for the one to two year olds, one for the two to three year olds, and the last for the three to five year olds.

#### STORY BOOK PICTURES

The first nursery is equipped with cots for the babies to sleep in. In the second, more cots, and a play pen, and a miniature table with miniature chairs, and plenty of toys. Around the walls, pictures from books are pinned up at a level for the children’s eyes, but out of reach of their hands.

The next one, for the two to three year olds, was prepared for a meal when I saw it. Again the tiny tables and chairs; this time, on the back of each chair hung a large bib, and on the table lay small bakelite plates and mugs, red, blue, yellow and green.

The last one for the children whose next move will be to school, has plenty of “first” books and pictures lying about, in addition to the toys. This one has been decorated by a local man in his spare time with large floppy-eared rabbits up to various antics.

Each nursery has a closed-in stove for heating, surrounded and covered by a very efficient-looking guard; and French doors leading out on to sun terraces which are wide enough to take day beds. There is a cot for every child to ensure he gets the right amount of rest.

The 1s. a day charge for each child will cover everything, including meals, which for the time being at least will be cooked on the premises.

#### SHINING SAUCEPANS

The ladies of the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee crowded enviously around the shining new saucepans and frying pans, and then wondered what was going to be cooked in frying pans for children under five.

The children have a special size in knives and forks, too, and each one will have his own toothbrush, mug and face flannel, and his own hook to hang them on.

For the babies there is even a weighing machine so that mothers will be able to see for themselves the progress their children are making.

Outside, there is an air raid shelter, and a sandpit, and later there may be some grass.

The nursery is going to be overstaffed rather than understaffed, and the nurses on Saturday were gaily dressed in pink and blue overalls under their white aprons.

This one opens next Monday to receive children at seven a.m., and will remain open until seven p.m., and those mothers who are still doubtful can see for themselves beforehand just what they are handing their children over to.

This nursery will hold eighty children. The other two, one in London Road and the other in Waterloo Lane, will hold eighty more as soon as they are finished. They are for the children of not only the mothers doing actual war work, but any mothers who are working now or want to work and have nowhere to leave their children.

Fig.2. The *Essex Chronicle*,  
7th August 1942, p.3.  
(Reproduced by courtesy  
of the *Essex Chronicle*  
and the Essex Record Office).



## “Women at War”

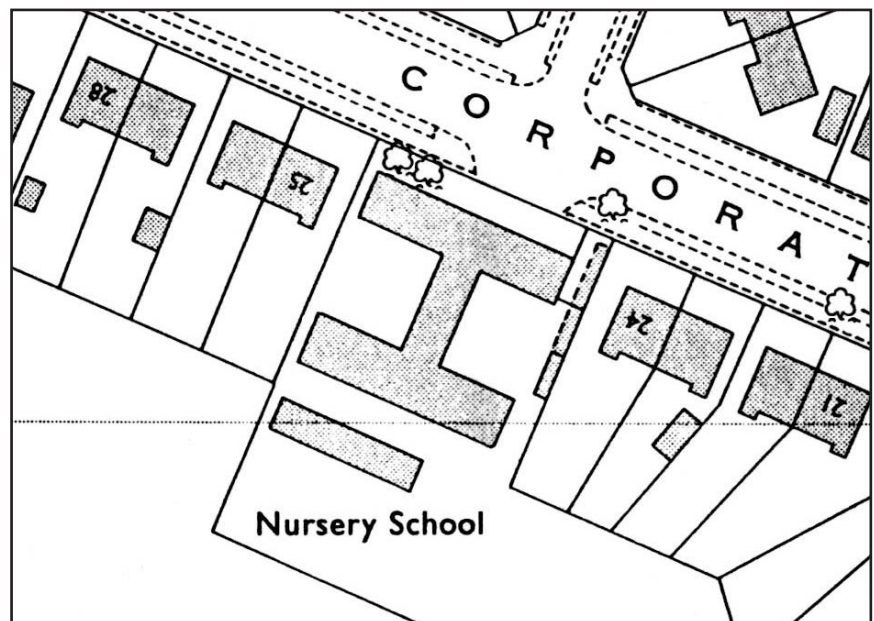
Parliament produced a pamphlet detailing how to go about getting a war nursery opened. One idea included sending deputations to local government, as they had to the MOL, MOH and BOE. The pamphlet also included ‘success stories’ and a great deal of propaganda.<sup>16</sup> Summerfield suggests that the real success of groups such as these was in showing the MOL the true demand for war nurseries, and causing it to act.<sup>17</sup> Mrs Roberts and Mrs Olive could be described as untypical as both had strong opinions. Mrs Olive was a member of the Communist Party. She had started women’s branches of the Transport and General Workers Union in each of her places of work, and been the union representative. She remained politically active throughout her life.<sup>18</sup> Mrs Roberts had been a teacher prior to her marriage, when she was forced to leave the profession. She felt that nurseries were essential for two reasons, firstly to allow mothers to work and secondly “...for the children, for their benefit.”<sup>19</sup>

Both Chelmsford Borough Council minutes and the Essex Chronicle (Fig.1) contain detailed reports of the ‘deputation of women’ that addressed the Council on behalf of married women wishing to undertake war work; Mrs Roberts was one of the speakers.<sup>20</sup> Chelmsford Borough Council was in the process of setting up war nurseries at the time when the deputation was received. The minutes show that a letter from the MOL had been received by the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee that effectively forced them

to agree to open nurseries in order to allow mothers to take up war work.<sup>21</sup> The War Nurseries Sub-Committee was set up and the process of providing childcare was started. This was probably as a direct result of the MOL letter that had been sent to all local authorities in areas of essential industry, which was instrumental in changing the policies of many town councils.<sup>22</sup>

interviews with other members of ‘Women at War’ would be useful.

Two nursery schools were finally opened in August 1942 by the Mayor of Chelmsford; one was in Corporation Road (Map 1) with the other in London Road. A day nursery was also opened in Waterloo Lane. The nursery schools operated during school hours and the day nursery from seven am to seven pm.



Map 1. Map showing the layout of the Corporation Road nursery.  
OS Sheet TL7007NW, 1:1250, 1949.

(Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office).

It is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the ‘Women at War’ group in influencing Chelmsford Borough Council’s eventual decision to provide nurseries. The respondents do not detail any conflict, nor do they provide much information on the actions of the group as a whole, which has no surviving records. The deputation of women was made to the War Nurseries Sub-Committee after preparations for the nurseries had already been made. There is no evidence to show whether this was coincidental, or political, and further

Any child in the appropriate age group was eligible for the nursery schools which cost one shilling per child each day, a national rate set by the MOL.<sup>23</sup> Mrs Roberts states her wage as £1 5s 8d for a full week’s work,<sup>24</sup> so her nursery bill for two children would have taken more than half her wages. However Mrs Olive comments that the nurseries were “...better during the war than now, it was all state provided, you had to pay a small fee...”<sup>25</sup> This might suggest that the respondents were motivated to undertake war work for patriotic reasons

rather than financial necessity.

The nurseries were prefabricated buildings issued by the MOH, and specifically designed for the purpose. Chelmsford Borough Council employed an architect to adapt them for the selected sites, and parents were invited to examine the facilities prior to the nurseries being opened.<sup>26</sup>

## “...a waste of money...”

The *Essex Chronicle* carried heavy advertising for the nurseries, together with an article (Fig.2) on the Corporation Road nursery with detailed descriptions of the facilities available, opening hours, the staff and those eligible for places.<sup>27</sup>

Both Mrs Roberts and Mrs Olive used the nurseries when they were opened and were therefore able to carry on with their jobs. It has been suggested that there was some stigma attached to the use of nurseries, which had previously been used as a form of intervention in cases where children were at risk.<sup>28</sup> This question is not raised in the taped interviews, but does warrant further investigation, as two of the respondents chose not to use the nurseries and left work completely following the births of their children. It could be argued that Mrs Olive and Mrs Roberts were exceptional and that their take-up of places was due to their political beliefs. However, in a letter from the Regional Welfare Officer of the MOL it is suggested that the opening of nurseries in the town could result “...in the gradual increase in the number of women who were willing to take up War-Work.”<sup>29</sup>

Chelmsford Borough Council received further letters from ‘Women at War’ and the MOL requesting after school play schemes and school holiday opening for the nurseries. Once again no action was taken and the committee, “Resolved to recommend that these schemes be deferred.”<sup>30</sup>

The Essex County Ministry of Health Reports 1939-1945 shows that twelve of the day nurseries opened in Essex came under their direct jurisdiction.<sup>31</sup> The nurseries established in Chelmsford are not mentioned in these reports; they remained under the direct control of the Maternity and Child Welfare committee, via the War Time Nurseries Sub-Committee, of Chelmsford Borough Council. This raises a further point of interest, not pursued in this article, as all those controlled by the Essex County Ministry of Health had been closed down by the end of the war; while those in Chelmsford remain open to the present day. In this, Essex followed the national trend, as nationwide over two thirds of nurseries opened during the war were closed by 1950.<sup>32</sup> For the respondents this had little effect, as once the war had ended they all left work and became full time wives and mothers. The reasons for this are not discussed; all four appear to have accepted their return to the home as the norm. However when asked if the war had changed the position of women in society they all said no, and one, Mrs Olive, suggested that this had come about much later in the 1970s.<sup>33</sup> This again echoes the national trend, as Summerfield argues “...the implementation of

official policy during the war did little to alter but rather reinforced the unequal position of women in society.”<sup>34</sup>

This is another example of where further interviews with the women in the sample would be useful as they did return to work later in life, once their children were grown up. They do not discuss whether this was through choice or necessity and whether they would have gone back sooner had this been accepted as the norm. It appears that social convention was as important to the respondents as it was to the policy makers. Mrs Olive suggests the general feeling amongst women was that it was “...wrong to go out to work...” once it was no longer an essential part of the war effort.<sup>35</sup> She also describes being told to go home and look after her children – by another woman – whilst out campaigning for election to parliament as the Communist Party candidate.<sup>36</sup>

Chelmsford Borough Council Minutes show how some of the councillors were continuously opposed to the idea of war nurseries. Unable to stop them opening, attempts were made to undermine the role they played. Alderman Fox, the deputy Mayor, went as far as publicly calling the nurseries “...a waste of money...”<sup>37</sup> citing poor attendance figures<sup>38</sup> as a reason for closure. However reasons for poor attendance, such as inappropriate opening hours or poor advertising were not discussed, yet Mrs Roberts and Mrs Olive both mention school holiday closures as a problem.<sup>39</sup>

In 1947, responsibility for running the three nurseries



was passed to Essex County Council. Mrs Roberts also became chairman of the Board of Governors for the Corporation Road and London Road nursery schools in 1947, and remained actively involved until her retirement. All three nurseries remain open although they have all moved in to new purpose built accommodation and have been renamed. The last to move, during the 1990s, was the London Road Nursery.

To conclude, Chelmsford followed national patterns in the wartime provision of childcare for women workers. As a town with factories carrying out essential wartime production, every available worker was needed; yet appearing to conform to social norms almost outweighed this in importance. The local authority was reluctant to provide childcare, yet the town's own labour exchange had actively recruited women with children.<sup>40</sup> This reflected the conflict between the MOH and the MOL described in Summerfield's work. The personal experiences of the respondents adds another dimension to the facts that can be gained from other sources. Without the testimonies of the women in the taped interviews there would be no information about informal childcare arrangements in Chelmsford during the war, yet this kind of care played a significant part in mobilising the workforce, which in turn enabled the factories to keep up production levels. The eventual establishment of three nurseries empowered women and gave them the ability to choose whether or not to stay at home with their children. Using

personal accounts, such as these interviews, shows the human side to events and gives those affected a chance to have their experiences acknowledged, and recorded for future reference.

Completing this article has suggested further areas for research. Firstly, the reason for keeping the nurseries open is not discussed in the Chelmsford Borough Council minutes. The deputy Mayor's complaints are noted, but the issue is not debated. Is this due to a proven need or lack of decisive action? The second area of interest is the use of the nurseries in the years following the war. The Governors' minutes show there were waiting lists of eighty-one children for Corporation Road Nursery and fifty-four for London Road Nursery by 1947, the date of the first entry.<sup>41</sup> But there is no indication as to whether the mothers of the children attending the nurseries were working, or if the nursery had become a form of pre-school education. Another possible area for research is an investigation of how the workforce in Chelmsford factories were affected by the provision of childcare, and the effects on production.

It has been shown in this article that women were determined to 'do their bit' in war work and find ways round their childcare problems. However, providing adequate official childcare facilities ultimately had limited effect, as Chelmsford Borough Council was reluctant to change its policies, in spite of the exceptional circumstances of war; and the people of Chelmsford – from the respondents to local councillors – were also

reluctant to change their value systems. At a national and local level, therefore, it appears that the small amounts of change that were forced through were resisted at every point.

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13. Summerfield suggests individuals within the Ministries allowed their personal feelings on the issue to affect their actions, and delay the change in policy that forced many local authorities to act. This appears to be due to a wide held belief that nurseries were only to be used if a particular child's welfare was at risk from being at home with its mother. Summerfield pp. 67-70.

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## Acknowledgements

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## New Light on Prehistoric Warfare in Essex: An Iron Age Warrior Burial from Kelvedon

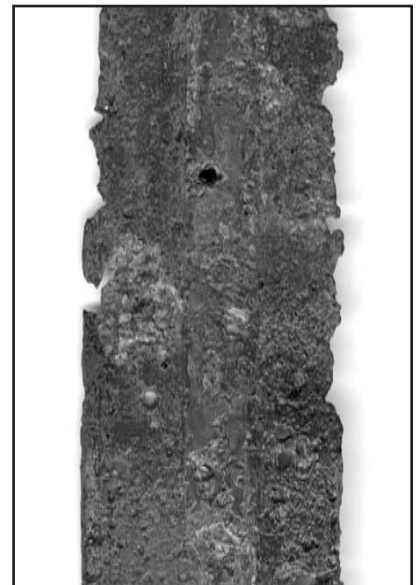
By Paul R. Sealey

We live in a world that has been shaped by war. Despite this, prehistorians have until recently been in denial about this aspect of our fractured humanity. To some extent this was a reaction against the traumas of the 1939-45 war: scholarship created an prehistoric past in which fighting was discreetly relegated to the sidelines. Evidence to the contrary was either ignored or dismissed as a regrettable aberration from a Golden Age norm.<sup>1</sup> But the climate of opinion is now experiencing a radical overhaul of the significance of prehistoric warfare. So far from conflict being seen as an aberration it is now recognised that fighting in early societies was the normal state of affairs. It was against this intellectual background that a project was undertaken at Colchester Museum to bring into the public domain knowledge of a late Iron Age warrior burial from the county.<sup>2</sup>

**...lowered into the hole in the bucket of the digger...**

Once in a while a chance archaeological discovery is made that makes a significant addition to knowledge. So it was in February 1982 when David Bunting was digging a pit for gravel to repair tracks on his farm at Kelvedon. When the mechanical digger

disturbed a rusty sword and a complete pot, he turned for help to a retired policeman, Jim Bennett, whose hobby was archaeology. Bennett excavated the grave with some care: an eyewitness of the discovery described to the author how he worked with a brush and trowel. Before long, the grave pit had flooded with ground water but despite the danger, Bennett had himself lowered



**Plate 1. Part of the scabbard plate showing the decorative tin strip in the centre (Author's collection).**

into the hole in the bucket of the digger to complete the work. The findspot lies on a hillside south of the river Blackwater overlooking Kelvedon. Beneath modern Kelvedon there was an important late Iron Age village and that was presumably where the warrior had his home.

Apart from Yorkshire, warrior burials are rare in Iron Age Britain and Kelvedon is the first from Essex. Many counties have none at all and there cannot be more than twenty-five in England outside Yorkshire; it is the rarity of these graves that makes Kelvedon a find of national importance.



# Kelvedon Warrior

## The grave goods

Our warrior was buried with four weapons: a sword, spear, shield and, apparently, a dagger. The iron sword is a long and slender weapon with straight parallel sides. Swords like this developed in Gaul and were eventually adopted in Britain. It had been made from five separate rods of iron welded together by the blacksmith; such a technique is known as piling. Its scabbard was made of two overlapping plates of bronze, which subsequently came apart. Running along the outside of one of the plates was a narrow band of tin; we know that it was not solder for a missing attachment because the surface is unreacted tin (Plate 1). No other Iron Age scabbard is decorated with such a tin strip, so the Kelvedon scabbard is unique. A short length of iron blade with a tang is all that survives of another weapon. It might have been another sword but is more likely to have been a dagger. An iron spear blade from the grave has a distinctive waisted profile. Inside the socket there are traces of ash wood from the shaft. Ash is a strong and resilient wood, well capable of withstanding sudden jolting shocks of the kind a spear shaft would suffer. A small pointed terminal called a ferrule was also present; it fitted on the end of the spear shaft. A fragment of the iron boss is all that is left of the shield; the rest would have been made from some perishable organic material such as wood.

The other finds from the grave included an elegant bronze bowl with a flat base and steep sides imported from Roman Italy (Fig.1). Bowls like this are found across wide



Plate 2. Tankard handle (Author's collection).

areas of northern Europe, but they were rare vessels and would have been cherished by their owners. A wooden tankard is represented by u-shaped bronze binding that fitted around the rim and a fine moulded bronze handle (Plate 2), reminiscent of those on some contemporary mirrors. Tankards were used for a native drink, sometimes called Celtic beer. A set of iron fittings had come from a large plank-built structure; it was not a coffin, and its function is unclear but similar fittings have been reported from some other Iron Age graves. Kelvedon is remarkable for being one of the very few Iron Age warrior burials with pottery, in this case two elegant wheel-thrown vessels called pedestal urns (Fig.2).

## Funerary rites

No traces of a body were found with the material at Kelvedon. The explanation lies in the local soil conditions. Excavation of Roman graves at Kelvedon village showed that acidic ground water had destroyed human bodies in their entirety and it is possible that the same had happened with the warrior burial.<sup>3</sup> As no trace of a body had survived, we cannot know if the Kelvedon warrior had

been inhumed or cremated. But we do know that at the funeral the sword was taken out of its scabbard and bent, so too was the spear. This ritual killing of weapons in both graves and hoards is widely attested in Iron Age Europe. At some stage in the proceedings at the funeral the sword blade had been wrapped in linen. As the sword blade rusted in the ground, the corrosion products formed around the cloth and preserved an impression that was clear enough for the textile to be identified. This treatment of the sword is most unusual and the only parallels come from Iron Age warrior burials on Guernsey in the Channel Islands. There, one sword in its scabbard had been wrapped in linen, and another had apparently been placed in the linen folds of the shroud around the corpse.

## The date of the grave

The Kelvedon warrior burial is remarkable because it is only the third warrior burial in Britain to have been found with pottery grave goods. Pottery like the Kelvedon urns used to be called 'Belgic' but the term has now fallen out of favour. But whatever we call it, such pottery was not found in Britain until c.75 BC when it

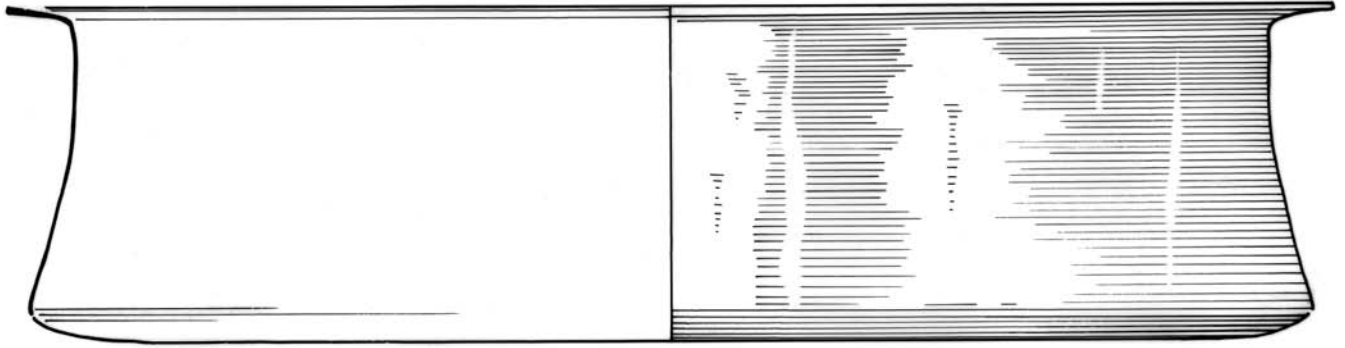


Fig.1. Roman bronze bowl (Author's collection).

first appeared in graves. All the other evidence for the date of the grave converges on the 1st century BC. We know that the production of native mirrors in south-east Britain came to a close by the end of the century.<sup>4</sup> Bearing in mind the links between the tankard handle and mirror art, the tankard itself is unlikely to be any later. The imported bronze bowl is also a first century BC type. Such is the wealth of the grave that the absence of imported Roman tablewares is significant. As these imports did not get underway until c.25 BC, it seems reasonable to place the Kelvedon warrior burial in the period c.75–25.

## The style of fighting represented by Kelvedon

The Kelvedon warrior was armed to the teeth with a sword, spear and shield.

## ...armed to the teeth...

German-speaking prehistorians use the grand term *Dreierausrüstung* for these three items of weaponry. Together they first appeared on the mainland of Europe in the 3rd century BC. The four graves (including Kelvedon) from Iron Age Britain with sword, shield and spear are all

much later, and no earlier than c.75 BC. It is clear that there was a significant time lag between the introduction of this style of fighting on the European mainland and its adoption in Britain.

Having only two hands and armed as he was with a sword, shield and spear, and possibly a dagger as well, it is not immediately obvious how the Kelvedon warrior would have conducted himself on the battlefield. But the likelihood must be that the spear was discharged first, as a javelin (i.e. thrown); the sword and shield came into their own when hand-to-hand combat was joined. We have further clues from the first-hand testimony of Julius Caesar who invaded Britain in 55 and 54 BC and left a precious account of warfare here in his commentaries on the Gallic Wars.<sup>5</sup> Caesar was impressed by the effectiveness of the chariot warfare he encountered. At the start of an engagement the chariots sped towards the enemy and the warrior conveyed thus discharged his javelin; he then dismounted to engage his opponents, with his charioteer ready nearby for a swift retreat if necessary. The technique worked and caused Caesar and his legions much discomfort. If indeed the Kelvedon warrior

fought with a chariot, there was no hint of it in the grave. Although warriors were sometimes buried with their chariots in the Iron Age, the rite was confined to northern Britain. It is unlikely that the Kelvedon warrior fought on horseback because contemporary coins have no images of men armed with a panoply of sword, spear and shield on a horse.

## The social standing and career of the warrior

Most of the fighting companions of the Kelvedon warrior were only equipped with a spear, or sometimes a spear and shield.<sup>6</sup> We know this because weapon assemblages in hoards, graves and other contexts help us gauge the sword to spear ratio in a war band of the period. The best estimate currently available for the ratio of spear warriors to swordsmen suggests there were at least five spear fighters for every swordsman. Some of these spear warriors were rank and file fighters; others were mounted on horseback and belonged to the tribal elites, to judge by the number of images depicting such warriors on coins. In other words, the Kelvedon fighter was exceptional and should not be regarded as a typical



# Kelvedon Warrior

Iron Age combatant. He was better equipped than most of his contemporaries; the Roman bowl and bronze tankard in the grave make it even clearer that he was elite.

The form of the spear blade at Kelvedon is not typical of those found in Britain in the Iron Age, but it does have many parallels across the Channel in Gaul. Likewise the shield boss is a mainland European type; the sword is ultimately Gaulish in inspiration as well. It looks as if the armourer who provided at least some of the weaponry used by the Kelvedon warrior was a Gaul. It is unlikely that a Gaulish armourer would have settled in Iron Age Britain and a simpler explanation is that the warrior had acquired these foreign weapons for himself in Gaul. We know that the Britons lent military assistance to the Gauls and the Belgae in their wars against Caesar between 58 and 51 BC.<sup>7</sup> There is a real possibility that the Kelvedon warrior was one of these mercenaries. If not, he might have been a Gaul who fled to Britain in the aftermath

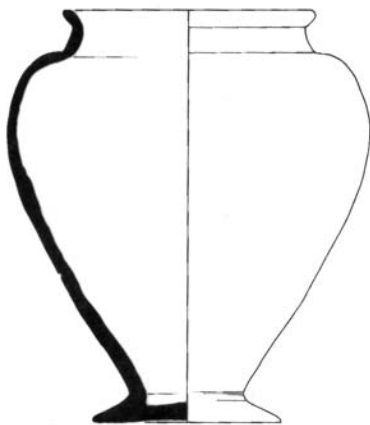


Fig.2. Pedestal urn  
(Author's collection).

of the war rather than submit to Roman rule in his homeland.

## The Kelvedon project

Bearing in mind the importance of the Kelvedon warrior burial, it is gratifying to write that the tangled story of its discovery and subsequent history had a happy ending.

### ...an act of conspicuous generosity...

After its discovery the finds were dispersed among the family and friends of the excavator, Jim Bennett. His death in 1996 made it still more difficult to make progress. But soon after the discovery, Bennett told Chris Going about the finds: it was Chris who arranged for the conservation of the finds at Harlow Museum by the late Richard Bartlett, and commissioned scientific analyses of the bronze finds by Dr J.P. Northover at Oxford University. At the time Chris intended to publish the finds but a career change made that impossible. In 1999 he transferred some of the finds to Colchester Museum. There a project was set up to assemble the rest of the grave goods, resolve questions of ownership and produce a published report. After much detective work the family of Jim Bennett was traced: his sons Paul and Robert had legal title to the grave goods but generously lent them to the Museum for study and exhibition. Some years later, 2007, Robert and Paul donated the finds in an act of conspicuous generosity, the very year in which the definitive report on the grave appeared. It is heartening to know that an Essex find of national importance is now housed in a public museum

service in perpetuity. The Kelvedon warrior burial will play a prominent part in the redisplay of the archaeology galleries in the castle museum at Colchester.

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## Acknowledgements

There is a citation in full in my report, *A Late Iron Age Warrior Burial from Kelvedon, Essex*, of all the many wonderful people who helped the Kelvedon project reach a happy conclusion.

## The Author

Dr Paul R. Sealey has served as a museum archaeologist at Colchester for thirty years. He was elected to the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1995. His interests lie in Bronze Age metalwork, prehistoric pottery and the Iron Age in general, as well as Roman Colchester. At present he is working on a survey of the Iron Age of the county for the 2008 conference on the archaeology of Essex.

**Family History Plus  
or  
'Corroborative detail  
intended to give  
artistic verisimilitude  
to an  
otherwise bald and  
unconvincing narrative'**

By Pat Lewis

Discussions between professional and amateur historians, on the best way to record the history of England concluded that evaluating a combination of local, social and family history research achieved the clearest results.<sup>1</sup> However, local history societies in the last few years have been overshadowed by the popularity of family history societies. As a result collaboration between the two may not be occurring as much as would be beneficial. The internet is also changing the way historical research is conducted, and as the media

...219  
member societies  
representing 300,000  
members...

has turned its attention to genealogy, family history societies have never been more popular, and personal involvement in research has increased dramatically. The Federation of Family History Societies now has over 219 member societies representing 300,000 members and record offices have never been busier. I believe it would be to the mutual advantage of local, social and family historians, to combine their efforts and this article will look at some of the themes confronting

historians and suggests that we pigeon hole ourselves at our peril.

After World War Two, family historians were interested in the basic family tree and tended to avoid details of the lives of their forbears such as illegitimacy, criminal involvement of any kind, the workhouse, nonconformity and military service. However these subjects can give to succeeding generations valuable detail regarding the way of life of past communities. The effects of these attitudes can be seen in Australia where settlers who were transported from this country were seen, in the past, as a social slur on the family tree. Today the rise of interest in history in general, together with the increased availability of every type of record, has made those who arrived on the convict ships, and especially on the First Fleet, to be spoken of with great pride. Indeed, recently, the National Archives in collaboration with the website *Ancestry* successfully launched, to much media coverage, a web-based searchable database of all those who set sail from the United Kingdom between 1787 and 1868.<sup>2</sup>

Many might have found history at school a very dry subject, only discovering later in life a passion for the subject. In many instances this has occurred when researching their own family tree. Discovering that a member of the family had entered a workhouse often means the whole subject takes on a very different and personal complexion. Why was that person in the workhouse? Are there any records? What were conditions like, for

example the food, clothing and medical provisions and what happened to the rest of the family? A visit to a site or to the actual building, either parish or union workhouse, that may still be standing, becomes important and the interest generated can lead to a study of the Poor Law from Elizabethan times onward. One case I know of eventually led to a university degree. Having branched out, family historians, who might originally have only looked for names to add to their family tree, find a greater satisfaction from their broader research.

As an example of a family historian who believes that "you can't have one without the other" I embraced family, local, and social history. It has always seemed the logical path to take to obtain a rounded picture of the family at any given date. Some years ago when I was researching the history of Fordham in Essex, I used only primary and secondary sources, not the internet. This is an approach over which many family historians are now divided. In the last few years the information available on the Internet has grown immensely. It is possible to contact others on the same trail and exchange information with relations and contacts worldwide. Other family historians feel that not everyone has or wishes to have a computer. They consider that computers should only be used as a tool that provides information which needs to be checked at the source. It is important to remember, for example, when using the International Genealogical Index of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints that

although the information can be useful, not every diocese and parish is covered.<sup>3</sup> Directories, census returns, parish register transcripts, indeed any transcript, may inadvertently contain incorrect information. A family tree cannot be completed from the internet alone, it needs to be confirmed from the primary source because any error can lead to an erroneous path that can take years to correct. Even then, the Administrator of the Federation of Family History Societies advises caution with both approaches. "Archives can be full of mistakes... Seeing a document does not necessarily mean we should believe it. The same is true for Internet sites and their content: we need to exercise judgment when deciding which are reliable."<sup>4</sup> Both paths need to be carefully considered.

The mass media, in all its forms, has recently jumped on the bandwagon and generally demonstrates the importance of family, local and social history research. This is not without its faults as television in particular has given an optimistic idea of how long it takes to obtain the necessary knowledge and then to satisfactorily travel back in time, from the known to the unknown. This can be especially difficult for beginners without the guidance of a professional researcher. The BBC television series 'Who Do You Think You Are?' has been very popular and is a fantastic example of this new approach, and series 4 has just started. Indeed, interest in family history generated by the media is

still growing at an exceptional rate. This year a spin off, which was presented at Olympia, in London, over three days, was 'Who Do You Think You Are – The National History Show' that included family, local and social history.

In the 2006 Marc Fitch Lecture, 'Local History, Family History and the VCH: New Directions for the Twenty-First Century',<sup>5</sup> Professor John Beckett pointed out that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the descent of families, as can be seen in county histories of the time,<sup>6</sup> was mainly directed to that of the great, the good and the wealthy. By the nineteenth century the interest had become centered in the membership of county archaeology and antiquarian societies. Since then local history research has expanded to include those from all walks of life. Scholars have studied in depth every aspect of the lives of the poor and the very rich but only recently have moved to research those in between; Richard Church defined them as the lower middle class.<sup>7</sup> Today the public, inquiring into their own history, need and want to research all classes of society and families

progressing from 'rags to riches' over time, both up and down the social ladder. They want to reveal as clear a picture as possible of their forebears and the study of the local and social conditions at the time can provide reasons for their actions and movements. To be aware of this is the way forward.

By 1974 the Essex Society for Family History and the Federation of Family History Societies had been established at a time when the public in general viewed the study of genealogy as the province of

## Archives can be full of mistakes...

the College of Arms, scholars and professional genealogists. In 1977 "Roots" written in America by Alec Haley burst onto television screens and was watched in the United Kingdom by 20 million viewers and in America by 130 million viewers. Although it is not a work of reference this family saga uncovered forcefully, through the use of genealogy, the reality of slavery. Nevertheless it had an enormous effect on

millions of people who then understood that it was possible to trace a family of any race, any class and in any clime. Inevitably the interest in family history started to grow and has become a popular leisure pursuit in this country, second only to gardening. The rise in interest resulted in the publication of numerous guides and books covering a wide selection of historical information

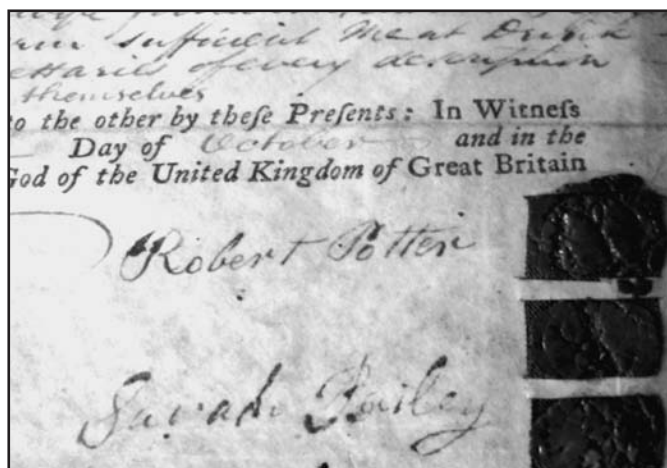


Plate 1. Signature of Robert Potter, 1812  
(Author's collection).



# Family History Plus

by bodies such as The National Archives and the Society of Genealogists. There is also published material from local societies and private individuals on a wealth of subjects, many arising from classes such as those run by the Workers Educational Association.

Dr. F.G. Emmison, former Essex County Archivist and the first President of the Essex Society for Family History, highlighted a combined approach in 1989. He explained, "I am aware that I am addressing an audience largely with three somewhat different interests – Social History, Local history and Family History. These of course overlap – like faith, hope and charity – but which is the 'greatest' I would not dare to declare!" He gave his support to the idea that interests should amalgamate to provide a picture of Essex that is as profound as possible.<sup>8</sup> In his 1989 essay, 'In The Beginning There Was Genealogy', John Rayment elucidates his view that family history, in its role as an extension to and an elaboration of genealogy, is an indispensable tool for the proper study of local history. "Family history is about people and places,



**Plate 2. Portrait of Robert Potter aged about 28 in c.1825**  
(Author's collection).

local history is about places and people, where is the difference?"<sup>9</sup> One of our most respected institutions, the Victoria

County History of the Counties of England, with its international reputation, is demonstrating this joined up approach to undertaking research by working in partnership with The British Association for Local History, The Historical Association and The Federation of Family History Societies.

On a personal level my own family history research in Fordham has benefited enormously from combining it with social and local history. The first time I visited Fordham the parish registers were still kept in the parish church (Fig.1) and they provided, as well as the basic details of baptisms, marriages and burials, information which developed my understanding of the incumbents' actions and attitudes to the congregation, the parishioners and to religious changes over time.<sup>10</sup> My interest started when I saw notes written in the registers by some of the rectors. One case in 1628 referred to a John Potter, the surname I was looking for, and involved several detailed cases in the Church Courts,<sup>11</sup> over which the Archdeacon of Colchester held jurisdiction. It ended at Lambeth Palace in London where the records of the Court of Appeal for the Province of Canterbury, The Court of Arches, are kept. Many details had been brought to light but unfortunately the trail ended there as the particular records for 1628 were burnt in the Great Fire of London in 1666. It is unusual to be able to find indications of how ordinary parishioners in any parish thought about the religious changes from the reformation onwards, let alone the actions of this particular one, who was

possibly a relation. So whilst I had started out on a family history trail I found myself researching local and social history as well.

I do know that my great, great, grandfather Robert Potter was baptised in 1797 at All Saints Church, Fordham, and died in London in 1877. (Plates 1&2) In 1812 Robert Potter was apprenticed to a firm of printers, booksellers and stationers, Robert Swinborne and William Walter of 15 High Street, Colchester, and I have in my possession his indentures, which are signed by him. He was literate and so the next question was to find out which school he had attended. The only school in the parish at the time was at The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Chapel in Plummer's Road; there were no others in the parish until 1810. I had contacts with the Pastor, the Trustees and the keeper of their archives at The Cheshunt Foundation, Westminster College, Cambridge, and was able to borrow some of their private archives relating to the Connexion Chapel in Fordham.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately there are no records of the school still in existence, even at the Essex Record Office, and I still do not know for certain where he was educated. Contacts with the present Fordham All Saints Church of England Primary School then led to an enquiry into every kind of educational enterprise in the parish up to c.1900.<sup>13</sup>

Local interest in the history of the parish grew and culminated in the formation of the Fordham Local History Society, which has been contacted, by people worldwide who are keen to

know about the parish and the people who had lived there from family, local and social history viewpoints. The Essex Society for Family History became involved and recorded both the church and chapel monumental inscriptions, copies of which have now been deposited both in the Essex Record Office and the parish.<sup>14</sup> Gathering this information relies on volunteers working in the field, collating and preparing the results for publication and the aim is to cover, in time,

## ...deafness in later life was occasioned to...

every parish in Essex. It is vital to record this information before stones are removed, broken up, crumble away or are made redundant. Inscriptions may contain information that is difficult to find elsewhere such as the burial places of family members who left the parish and have been buried in other parts of the country, even abroad. There is one stone in the churchyard erected in 1856, to the memory of Henry Johnson, who had fought at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. It was still readable in 1984 but by the year 2000 was completely illegible.<sup>15</sup> Fortunately, a member of the Fordham Local History Society had recorded the stone in the 1980s before it disappeared for good. It mentioned the name of Henry Johnson's regiment, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Guards (the Scots Guards), and where he was stationed during the battle. His deafness in later life was occasioned to a violent cold or the guns of battle, whilst his

wounds were treated in Ostend for three months and then in London for seven months before he returned to Fordham. This information contributes to family and military history as well as to other areas of research.<sup>16</sup> The names on the two War Memorials, the Parish Memorial outside the Post Office in Moat Road and the Connexion Memorial, which is now in the Chelmsford and Essex Museum in Moulsham Street, Chelmsford, are being researched in depth in both service and civilian records. In many places these tasks are neglected and forgotten but the results show how valuable they are to everyone.

Another fascinating area of research that I had never considered exploring, until I stumbled over it, was that of the friendly society which met from 1805 to 1844 in the vestry of the Connexion Chapel in Fordham.<sup>17</sup> I learnt that local and county friendly societies were formed in the area before larger affiliated societies first appeared in Essex in 1845. One county society, the Aldham and United Parishes Insurance Society, was formed in 1827 and continued in existence until 1953. Aldham is adjacent to 'my' parish, Fordham, and by 1848 covered 23 parishes in the area. Their annual reports give the name in every parish of each insuring member, men and women, with details of their contributions and how they were used. These details include a list of those men and women who had taken out extra cover to provide a child with money when it was needed for an apprenticeship or to start their own business. Did these children take up

their legacies and if so were they successful? The information also provides a view of the position of women in the area.<sup>18</sup>

Comparing the 1848 report of this Essex county friendly society with the nearest census, taken in 1851, for the parish of Aldham, of the joining or insuring members approximately 70% were agricultural labourers, 10% other labourers and 20% artisans and other occupations. A picture emerges of the members who were conversant with their financial state and expectations in light of the effect of the 1834 Poor Law (Amendment) Act. They may also have feared the 1832 Act for Regulating the Schools of Anatomy that allowed any unclaimed body of a pauper dying in the workhouse to be sent for dissection. This meant that the body would not receive the respectable burial that was so important to them; thus, if possible, they might save to pay for a burial to take place. So, we can demonstrate that if they were able to they provided personally for themselves and their family.<sup>19</sup> On a lighter note, traditionally the men of the Aldham and United Parishes Insurance Society insisted that a feast should always follow the annual church sermon, even though at other times strong drink was actively discouraged in these

## ...a violent cold or the guns of battle...

county societies. However the female members of the society were not allowed to attend – I wonder why? What wonderful grist for the mills of family, local and social historians!



**Fig.1. The Nave and Chancel of All Saints Church, Fordham**  
(Reproduced by courtesy of John Kay).

Whilst tracing a family member of a masonic lodge in Colchester, Angel Lodge No. 51, I learnt that after the Seditious Societies Act of 1799 until 1967 the names and addresses of freemasons, with their occupations and lodge meeting details, had to be recorded by Quarter Sessions. After the Criminal Law Act of 1967 such returns were no longer required.<sup>20</sup> In the eighteenth century members wearing regalia had appeared and performed on the stage at the theatre in Colchester.<sup>21</sup> Members of lodges wearing regalia had regularly walked in procession to ceremonies and were involved in public activities. With the advent of World War Two lodges in England and Wales considered that, for safety, processions in public were not advisable. Until then local people came out to enjoy the show, they knew the freemasons' names and exactly who they all

were, and the same happened at funerals. All these events were reported with names, details, and in time, photographs in the newspapers.<sup>22</sup> In the past I had been led to understand that freemasons in this country, under The United Grand Lodge of England (which included Wales), belonged to a secret society. However, these interesting images of freemasons, which sprung from my initial simple family history research, demonstrate that it was hardly a secret society!

As one question lead to another, though, I realize that there is nothing new in this world. What one generation might think of as unique is based on what has gone before. My research has suggested that freemasons, friendly societies and trade unions share a similarity with a church guild of 1389, the Fraternity of the SS Fabian

and Sebastian in the parish of St. Botolph without Aldersgate, London.<sup>23</sup> All had regalia and a set of rules as well as installation ceremonies where oaths would be sworn. Brothers of all these associations had to attend the funerals of other members, some on pain of a fine if they did not. All had annual ceremonies and feasts when they processed along the roads many with bands playing and banners flying. Echoes of these celebrations still take place today.

When reviewing the situation it has emerged that, with the interest in every facet of history that is growing all the time, most interested parties concerned are or will be co-operating with each other to share their research for mutual advantage. What a wonderful hobby we have to enjoy: visiting places, meeting many people, some of whom may be related; researching archives and starting new ventures, delving into wills and reconstructing past lives. I have mentioned a few of the interesting journeys I unknowingly set out on the day I first visited Fordham. For everyone researching both giving and receiving information can present the fuller picture we are all seeking. However beware, for if you go seeking more than just a list of names for your family tree there are many rewarding lines of investigation that you will get drawn down and never have enough time to pursue them all – good luck though, and enjoy!

(Well, did you recognize the title? The Mikado written by W.S. Gilbert, Pooh-Bah in Act 11. First performed in London in 1885, and the sentiments are still particularly apt.)



# Archives in the 'Information Age'

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## Archives in the 'Information Age'

By David Humphreys

Many of us are familiar with the parchment and paper documents held at the Essex Record Office in Chelmsford, which record events and decisions that stretch back over the last millennia, and have been fortunate enough to use them during the course of our research. Indeed, we might all take it for granted that if these records have survived damp, rats, fire or carelessness, then they will be available for consultation whenever we wish to view them. However, it is worth taking a moment to consider the prospect that will greet future historians who wish to study our times. I come into contact with this subject on a daily basis in my role as Records Manager for Essex County Council. It is my job to ensure that the Authority's front-line services have routine access to their closed records and to provide managed storage. As one the country's largest Authorities, the volume of records and the

diversity of functions we deliver make this a challenging role. We hold some seventy thousand boxes of records, chronicling the activities of the Authority from its elected members to those staff who provide our services. These millions of documents form the corporate memory and with careful structuring and indexing they can be tapped into and utilised over time. It is from amongst these records that we will eventually select the archives of the future. This article will look at the challenges that we face today and the inspiration that we can take from examining the surprisingly sophisticated ways that some ancient civilisations stored their own complex records.

...millions of documents form the corporate memory...

The challenges of maintaining an effective records system in the large modern organisation can be daunting. In general, the paper file is managed well but the great challenge facing all records professionals today is that posed by electronic records. The last twenty-five years have seen the growth of new technology and prompted a radical shift in the way we create and store records. Initially these tools were glorified type-writers, storage was minimal and the intent usually was to create 'electronically' but to print off and store as paper in the familiar and reassuring filing system. However, as technology has developed to keep pace with the myriad of demands to innovate, records have

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become more complex and do not necessarily lend themselves well to printed format. Storage space on computers has grown and consequently, the busy worker has found great benefit from being able to create and to store on computer.

Unfortunately this means that there are now as many filing systems in an organisation as there are users, private storage meaning no central control over standards and limited ability to pool this knowledge. Some of these problems are due to the sheer volume of information, but a significant aspect is human behaviour rather than an issue with technology itself. The irony is that it has never been easier to create records, never been faster to communicate information over distances, but also never been more difficult

## ...ninety-seven billion e-mails...

for an organisation to 'know' all of its knowledge.

The numbers we deal with in the world of information technology on a global scale are hard to comprehend. World computer storage capacity stands at approximately 161 exabytes<sup>1</sup>, roughly translated this means that the world's computers can store the equivalent of over 53 quadrillion (53 followed by 15 zeros) sheets of printed text on paper (3000 characters per page). It is estimated that the internet now holds nearly thirty billion pages<sup>2</sup> – all searchable in fractions of a second through powerful and closely-guarded 'trade-secret' algorithms. In the year 2000, the internet contained an estimated eight thousand terabytes

of information<sup>3</sup> (2 trillion – 12 zeros – of our imaginary pages of text) and no measurement has been undertaken since. The explosion in the use of video and images since then would make the year 2000 measurement at least half of the true current figure. Data can travel from point A to point B anywhere in the world in less than half a second.<sup>4</sup>

E-mail, however, presents the greatest challenge. In the modern office it is the means of communication that has to some extent replaced the office memo and the traditional letter of correspondence. These were recognisable record types which, until recently, would normally have found their way onto relevant paper files. Now e-mails tend to be casually deleted or are allowed to pile up in a morass of unsorted and unstructured clutter. Important information becomes hard to locate and to use and share, and is essentially lost. Add to this the fact that e-mail is also replacing the phone call and so this year it is predicted that the world will send ninety-seven billion e-mails<sup>5</sup> (300 billion of our text pages). For some time now, and it is a growing issue of importance, concerns have been raised over what has been termed 'information overload'<sup>6</sup> – a term coined back in 1970 on the brink of the dawn of the information age. Complaints are commonplace from staff having to cope with too many e-mails to allow them time to manage them effectively, and companies are actively promoting 'no-email' days believing that old-fashion communicating actually boosts productivity. Terms such as 'information flood',

'information pollution' and 'attention theft' are in common usage. Worryingly, it is predicted that this year for the first time, the amount of so-called junk email – 50 billion sales and marketing material e-mails – will outnumber 'person-to-person' e-mails, so the task of sorting the wheat from the chaff is to become increasingly difficult.<sup>7</sup>

The challenge of sifting through the mass of data and salvaging the important records for posterity is arduous. Take as an extreme example, the office of the President of the United States. The volume and complexity of data may be abnormally high, but thanks to the system of setting up Presidential libraries once the incumbent leaves office, we can measure the problem accurately. Bill Clinton's library in Arkansas currently employs 11 archivists sifting through a staggering 76.8 million pages of paper documents, nearly 2 million photographs and 20 million e-mails – all amassed in an eight year period.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Clinton only ever sent two e-mails during his period in office, and one of those was a test to see if the system actually worked. As a rough estimate for comparison, 4 million pages of documents would enter Essex County Council's closed record storage every year, just under half of President Clinton's rate of production. We send something like 7 million e-mails a year, and receive a similar amount – all of which are potential business records held in 2.5 terabytes of storage.<sup>9</sup>

The longevity of electronic records is the subject of much debate. There are three issues here. Firstly what is called software obsolescence: the

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notion that software used to create and to view records will no longer be available in the future as new improved versions come on the market. Secondly, hardware obsolescence: already we find computers being supplied without the means to read older media such as floppy disk drives. Logic dictates that compact disc drives and USB ports will someday become obsolete too, meaning that any data stored on such media may become useless. Thirdly, media degradation: for as long as mankind had committed thoughts to writing, there has been a slow process of deterioration of the media. Although the rate of degradation differs markedly, the same principle applies to a Chinese oracle bone inscription, ink on a sheet of papyrus, parchment or paper and the modern print-out, digital disk or memory card; no media can be guaranteed as 'time-proof'. The irony is that the longer we have been creating records throughout history, the more transient media we seem to invent for the purpose. We can still view a forty-thousand year old cave painting and although we might not be able to fully interpret it, it is still legible. On the other hand, NASA scientists in the last decade were aghast as they discovered that some of their digitally-stored data gathered from the Viking probes to Mars in the 1970s was degrading and impairing their ability to use it.

This is not to say that there was ever a Golden Age of record-keeping in the past. The Greeks and Romans mainly wrote on papyrus, parchment and wax-covered

wooden leaves – all highly perishable in the wrong conditions, which means that we have limited examples of original documents of the time to enable us to study their record-keeping practices in detail. Often we have to rely on surviving copies of texts usually preserved through the dedication of Islamic scholars and the Christian scriptorium. The dry conditions of Egypt have allowed a slightly greater survival of papyrus documents which, accompanied by the wealth of hieroglyphic



**Plate 1. Cuneiform tablet: 2000BC, Nuplar, Mesopotamia, Ref. BC RF/174/5 (Reproduced by courtesy of Archives, Royal Holloway, University of London).**

inscriptions on important monuments, allow us to piece together over three thousand years of history. However, the original records we have unearthed from the Mesopotamian region provide us with a far greater insight into how their society was administered than the other 'great' civilisations of antiquity.

There are a number of reasons why these records have

survived so well, chief among them being the medium on which they were set down – the clay tablet. Clay was a cheap and seemingly limitless resource for a region where other media like wood was scarce. Use of leather scrolls, papyrus, wood and ivory boards with or without wax was also known. For writing to be committed to clay, the smooth flowing curves of our modern script would have been difficult and time consuming. From the earliest times, simple lines and wedge-shaped impressions, usually representative of objects or simple numbering were developed as the most efficient way of recording on clay. Over time, these marks became more and more complex and 'abstracted' from the original symbols. Cuneiform, the name given to this writing style which represented numerous languages over the Mesopotamian period – Sumerian, Akkadian, Kassite, Hurrian, Assyrian, Hittite to name a few – was formed by impressing the wedge-shaped stylus firmly into the clay surface, creating an indentation which could be erased by wetting, but once dried, proved to leave an enduring mark. (Plate 1) The climate too aided the survival of such records: many of the old centres of the various civilisations were lost over time as conquests came and went. The desert overcame the ruins and preserved the tablets in dry conditions. In some cases, where conquest was violent and fire ravaged the palaces where tablets were stored, the firing of the clay actually served to improve its longevity – an act which would have destroyed any record committed to



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combustible material as we know only too well from the loss of an institution like the library at Alexandria in 640 AD, where possibly hundreds of thousands of papyrus and parchment scrolls were destroyed.

Take for example a well excavated site in modern Syria. Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra) was a powerful port and inland trade centre, destroyed in the 1100s BC but flourishing for some five thousand years before that. Tens of thousands of clay tablets were discovered in the palace, the temple and uniquely for the period, in two private libraries. The palace site contained 90 rooms, and from the well preserved remains, a quarter of these rooms could be identified as having administrative functions.<sup>10</sup>

There was a busy central hub where an oven could fire up to one hundred clay tablets at a time, some tablets still positioned there when they were abandoned mid-process during the attack. Here records were translated into any one of four languages, showing the cosmopolitan nature of an administration handling trade over a wide area. The tablets were oven-baked and then decisions made as to which of the local palace repositories they would be sent to. There was a room which appears to have been uniquely given-over to classifying tablets by 'pisan dub ba' (basket of tablets) tags; essentially labels identifying the contents of containers and their place within a quantified series. Eight rooms were occupied by the legal and property records – a resource which brought together the land ownership and conveyancing information for the entire kingdom. There

were rooms dedicated to records of financial receipt and for trade and diplomatic relations with Palestine, Egypt and the Hittite empire. We have the opportunity at such a site, and there have been many similar sites, to not only see original day-to-day records of how an administration worked, but to see them in the environment in which they were used and stored, enabling us to reconstruct information flows and processes, and to identify collections and therefore place records within a context. Indeed, organisation of records was so good at Mari, modern Iraq, that when it was conquered by Hammurabi in the seventeenth century BC the Babylonian king could send in a team of 'Archivists' much like accountants for a modern receivership audit to examine the records and ensure a smooth transition of power.<sup>11</sup>

We have nothing comparable to Ugarit in other ancient civilisations, although there is abundant evidence of highly respected officials charged with responsibility for overseeing burgeoning bureaucracies to support complex administrations governing vast territories. Without such skills these great cultures could not have flourished. Egypt under the fifth dynasty (over five thousand years ago) had a particularly evolved reliance on the written document, aided by its highly centralised and autocratic system of rule. The Vizier (prime minister) was the chief administrator heading such departments as the House of the Royal Writings (Chancery), the House of the Sealed Writings (where documents were registered)

and the House of the Archives ('per a') where scribes drew up indexes of documents lodged there, entering details of deeds, tax rolls, census lists and statistics in the relevant register, enabling future search and retrieval.<sup>12</sup> These duties would have remained largely unchanged throughout the long and, when compared to Mesopotamia, generally



**Plate 2. Oxyrhyncus Papyri (no.91), n.d. (Reproduced by courtesy of Archives, Royal Holloway, University of London).**

peaceful history of pharaonic Egypt. This should have made the conditions for survival of many more records good, yet sadly this is not the case. (Plate 2).

The survival of original Greek records is even rarer and our knowledge of its institutions poor. The Athenian Metrôon is the best-known record establishment, located in the temple to Demeter, the remains of which are still visible in the Agora today. We know from surviving references that it contained such records as the laws and decrees of the city's assembly, minutes of that body and the

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Council (who used the building before it became a temple), foreign relations material, financial records of the city administration, public trial records, state contracts, lists of citizens eligible for military service, measures and weights, and the official copies of the canon of Greek dramas such as the works of Euripides and Sophocles.<sup>13</sup> Under the direction of an official called a Grammateus (secretary), the office supported the work of the Athenian democracy, but citizens could also ask to view holdings. The system of storage and retrieval was so successful that in 151 BC a council decree was produced 150 years after it was made. Even more impressive, a visiting Roman could consult the records of the trial of Socrates some seven hundred years after the event.<sup>14</sup> The dual function of the building as records storage and place of worship must have given the Metrôon an air of sanctity and respect, which should have protected records from unauthorised access or incidental damage, yet evidence survives of laws being enacted to impose severe sanctions on anyone who stole or amended documents stored there. There were even the strange cases of a rule against anyone entering who had been eating garlic, and the wonderful story of Diogenes having become homeless and being able to set up temporary residence in a large storage jar in the building – presumably one which should have been used to hold the wooden tablet or papyrus records.<sup>15</sup> The Greek attitude towards record keeping was obviously one of respect, as Aristotle named the 'archives' office as one of the most important

institutions of his ideal state, citing a need for supporting the work of the judiciary in particular.<sup>16</sup> However, virtually nothing has survived from any of the main city states of mainland Greece nor of its sister-cities on the Ionian coast, many of which would have come into contact with much older Mesopotamian practices.

As we look back on the records that we hold from such distant times, it is natural to marvel that so much has survived, considering the threats of human and natural disaster that they have had the misfortune to endure. Yet when we come to comprehend the expanse of time, the longevity of the various civilisations, the complexity of their activities and the administration that would have been required to support them, we can begin to develop a sense of loss for all those records that have not survived. The tragedy is that a large proportion of these lost treasures may have easily survived were it not for the want of better safeguarding from use of poor media, storage in the wrong conditions, poor arrangement and general lack of care. These are lessons that unfortunately we still need to learn today. We could walk through the ruins of Ugarit and reconstruct virtually an entire machinery of government after it had been buried for nearly three thousand years. If our modern activities were ceased by some unforeseen cause, the archaeologists three thousand years hence may have nothing to illuminate our deeds other than hundreds of small screens adorning desks, staring back at them blankly and with an empty silence. Hmm, can someone pass the clay please?

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Fig.1. Detail of the brass to Sir Thomas Greville, chrysome child, 1492, in Stanford Rivers Church. (Reproduced by courtesy of Martin Stuchfield).



## EVIDENCE OF BAPTISMAL PRACTICES IN MEDIEVAL ESSEX FOUND IN PROOF OF AGE INQUESTS<sup>1</sup>

By Christopher Starr

From an Essex historian's perspective, the records of

*inquisitions post mortem* provide a rich source of information about those who held land from the king. The county *escheator*<sup>2</sup> together with a panel of local jurors held these inquests and their tasks included determining what land the deceased held and by what tenure, what rights of profits were due to the king as well as details of the heir. Where necessary, a separate but associated proof of age inquest was held to determine the age of the heir and whether he or she could obtain this inheritance immediately or be put in wardship. Of particular interest in the proof of age inquest accounts is the minute, sometimes comic, detail provided by witnesses regarding the rite and customs of baptism. These details illuminate an aspect of medieval life which, although important, is not often found in other contemporary sources.<sup>3</sup>

To obtain *seisin*<sup>4</sup> of an estate inherited during his or her minority, a feudal heir or heiress was required to prove that he had attained the age of twenty-one, or that she had

attained the age of sixteen or in the case of a married woman, fourteen. The usual process by which such proof was accomplished in the late medieval period (the earliest known proof of age inquest took place c.1270) was the issue at the heir's request of a writ of *de etate probande*<sup>5</sup> to the *escheator* for the county where the heir lived. The earliest such inquest relating to Essex is for Thomas Filiol of Hatfield Peverel in 1289.<sup>6</sup>

The writ required the *escheator* to summon a local jury to hear witnesses give sworn testimony and thereby determine the age of the heir. The evidence was generally oral although documents were occasionally produced by witnesses to corroborate their testimony. Witnesses stated their recollection of the day of the heir's birth, often by reference to other events which had occurred at or about the same time such as their own marriage, the death of their wife or child, a serious accident to themselves, or a notable fire or flood in the locality. In 1369 a witness verified Thomas de Enfield's date of birth and baptism at Little Laver and said, "...that his own son was baptised in the same church and on the same day as the heir."<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes witnesses referred to dated documents as proof of the heir's age: one man recalled the birth of Thomas Wodeham of North Shoebury (1300) "by the date of the charter of enfeoffment he recollects what time had elapsed."<sup>8</sup>

Many other details in proof of age documents can also be of interest to local historians, particularly when they provide corroborative evidence for known events such as the



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construction of a church: the inquest for John de Markshall of Markshall (1362) refers to “the church of Finchingfield” being rebuilt.<sup>9</sup> The inquest for Walter Fitz Walter of Henham (1366) refers to a witness who “built the church of West Lee” and that for Humphrey de Bohun of Rochford (1363) has a witness who recalls when “the church of Shopland was newly built.”<sup>10</sup>

Much of the testimony given by proof of age witnesses appears suspect or contradictory.<sup>11</sup> In some cases the evidence at one inquest was virtually identical to that given at another, for example the inquests of John de Harleston of Wimbish (1425) and Thomas de Legh of Shelley (1426).<sup>12</sup> Despite this, and the fact that the inquest documents had quickly assumed a set pattern or formula after their inception in the reign of Henry III, there is much credible evidence to be gleaned from them. Whether actually true or false in relation to particular heirs, details in descriptions of birth, baptism, christening and so on must at least have seemed credible, and acceptable, as evidence. If we therefore take the evidence at face value we can learn much about the circumstances surrounding baptism in the medieval period but we should be cautious about relating it to particular individuals.

Generally a midwife was present during labour, perhaps a neighbour or two as well. Then as now, the father might also be present and even those who were not could well be aware that the mother was in labour; “at the time of the birth of the said heir he was in a garden where he heard the cries and groans of the mother

of the said heir labouring in childbirth”, Alice de Southchurch of Southchurch (1329).<sup>13</sup> If the mother died in childbirth, a midwife could christen the child.<sup>14</sup>

There are descriptions of newborn children whose appearance was out of the ordinary thus: “Margery his wife taken with great weakness bore a son scarcely a thumb in length, who nevertheless lived until he was baptised and then died.” On one occasion a witness hints at some ancient scandal surrounding the conception of the heir: “Conan, the said heir’s father was of such tender age when the said heir’s mother was pregnant that it was commonly said he could not have begotten a child, and after the heir’s birth there was much talk about it in the county.”

As soon as the birth occurred the mother began to receive gifts: it might be “a gallon of sweet wine”, “a doe” or “a lamb”. When the mother had good reason to do so, she might also give gifts: “he visited Isabel, the mother, in her childbed, and she gave him a silk purse that he might bear witness and remember the age of her daughter.” The child too was likely to receive gifts in its cradle, sometimes only a day or two after the birth, such gifts were commonly jewellery; “he gave to the said heir, lying in [her] cradle, a gold ring in which a precious stone was set which he greatly valued.”

The announcement of the birth could be undertaken by a variety of people in a variety of places: “they were present at a feast when the birth of the said heir was announced”, Alice de Southchurch of Southchurch (1329); “when

the said Margaret was born, he was in the hall of Lyes and when Petronilla... was delivered, her midwives came into the hall, and announced the birth”, Margaret de Bovill of Great Leighs (1328). If the father was not present at the birth he was likely to hear of it from a servant: “he was in the service of... the father, and announced to him her birth...” The father might seize the moment to fix the date of the heir’s birth in people’s mind: “the birth of the said Robert was announced specially by his father to them and many others of the country, that they might remember it.” Gifts to the individuals who announced the birth were commonly made: “2s and a gold ring” or “a great pair of gloves.

The baptism rapidly

**“...he was in a garden when he heard the cries and groans...”**

followed the birth of the child – sometimes within hours, normally on the same day irrespective of the time of year, “she was born at... and baptised in the church of Walsall in the feast of Epiphany”; John le Chamberlain of Danbury (1307) was “born at Danbury... and baptised on the morrow in the church.”<sup>15</sup> This urgent need for baptism to take place was recognised by the Church, which allowed this sacrament when all other divine offices were suspended in a particular church. Baptism was significant in a religious sense and also in symbolic terms as the ceremony at which the child was recognised as his father’s heir.<sup>16</sup> Many of

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**Plate 1. The font in Springfield Church (Author's collection).**

the Essex fonts to which the inquests refer are still in existence; a particularly fine example is at Springfield where on the feast of St Scholastica 1339, Abel, son of John Hunte, was baptised and who later proved his age at an inquest held in the village in 1360.<sup>17</sup> (Plate 1) Although the baptism ceremony is usually the focus of testimony given at proof of age inquests, there is often much other precise detail, for example regarding the location of the heir's birth: Margaret de Bovill of Great Leighs (1328) "was born at Lyes, in the large chamber in the upper part of the hall."<sup>18</sup>

A sense of urgency is conveyed by the inquest documents which recorded many a hurried summons to potential godparents: the witness for John de Heveningham of Little Wakering (1335) was sent by the heir's father "for one Philip de Virley, to lift the said heir from the sacred font."<sup>19</sup> Such summonses could end with disastrous consequences: John de Enfield of Little Laver (1369) produced a witness

who "as he rode for John's godfather he fell into a pit and broke his arm."<sup>20</sup> Not only had the godparents to be in attendance but a priest too, and if an appropriate priest was not available a substitute had to be found. Sometimes the need to summon a priest was so urgent that he could be called whilst performing other solemn duties: "the parson was doing funeral rites when a man came to where the body lay and called the parson in a loud voice to baptise the son."

The priest and godparents having been named, the child was brought to church, in one case "in the arms of various women being carried from the chamber to the hall and thence to the church with unlit torches." A man could also carry the child though this seems to have been uncommon; a male witness for John Newland of Writtle (1411) recalled carrying the heir to his baptism.<sup>21</sup> The child would have been carried well wrapped up to the church; the wrapping varied considerably, such as "fine cloth" and "swaddling cloth", we also

hear of "Bartholomew lying there wrapped in a silken cloth" and of a woman carrying a child to church "wrapped in white cloth." A white robe or chrisom was put on the child at baptism and used as its shroud if it died within a month. If the child survived, the robe was returned when the mother came to be churched. There are a number of monumental brasses in Essex churches which depict children who died in early infancy, dressed in their swaddling bands.<sup>22</sup> (Fig.1)

Fetching the priest for the baptism was not without an element of danger: "he went after the chaplain to baptise the said Thomas, and the chaplain hit him on the head with a stick, so that he was ill for a long time afterwards." Children were not always baptised in the parish church: Thomas Baynard (1359) was born at Great Codham Hall, the house of Sir John Coggeshall in the parish of Wethersfield "and was baptised in the church [Codham] of the same place and a note of his birth was made in the missal of the said John de Coggeshall."<sup>23</sup>

The preliminaries of the baptism were carried out at the church door, usually within the porch: a witness for John de Latchingdon of Mayland (1332) "saw the same heir at the door of the church under the hands of a priest."<sup>24</sup> The remainder of the ceremony would be at the font itself, perhaps in a baptistery: Walter Howse of Thorpe le Soken (1424) was "baptised in the church baptistery there."<sup>25</sup> For the newborn child the church would have been a potentially dangerous environment, especially in winter: "when the aforesaid

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Emma was baptised it was said that the aisle was badly destroyed and could not be rebuilt before the winter and it would be very cold for those who were in the church.”

Attempts were made to prepare the church: “the font...[was] washed for the honour of the said John’s body...and water was fetched to the font. Various steps were taken for the comfort of the child (who would have been naked when baptised): he “ran in the afternoon to the house of Thomas Arwe, smith, to heat

**“...the water in the font was heated...”**

an iron rod with which the water in the font was heated for the baptism”, Ivo Harlston of Cambridge (1399), grandson of Sir John de Wauton of Wimbish.

In view of the hurried nature of baptisms they had to be fitted in with the other business of the church: they might take place after a funeral; the witness for Christine Sumpter of Colchester (1427) recalled the heir’s baptism as “his wife died and was buried in the churchyard...that day.”<sup>26</sup>

A witness for John de Latchingdon of Mayland (1332) remembered that “on that day he came to the church of Mayland to seek the clerk to make him a charter of a cottage.”; another witness said that “when the said Elizabeth was baptised he [the witness] with others, was at a certain reconciliation...in the church”, Elizabeth le Bret of Rainham (1342).<sup>27</sup> Other casual witnesses to a baptism would include the “great multitude of people” at

Laxton “about the raising of the belfry of the church...when the said John was baptised”; those who were “with several others practising archery beside the churchyard” and the witness who “was at the church for a cockfight.”

Godparents, of whom there were two godparents of the same sex as the child and one of the opposite sex, received a good deal of attention in witness testimony and there seems to have been considerable anxiety to secure the services of particular godparents: “her godfather was John Pod and her godmothers Christine, late wife of John Godeston and Mary, late wife of Simon Fordham” Christine Sumpter of Colchester (1427). The child usually took the name of one or more of its godparents. Godparents were invariably relatives or friends of the parents, but occasionally godparents appear to have been chosen for their rank or title: Robert de Vere of Earls Colne (1382) had “Simon de Sudbury, bishop of London, Robert Ufford, earl of Suffolk, and Alice late the wife of Andrew de Bures, knight [who] lifted him from the sacred font.”<sup>28</sup> Not every potential godparent accepted the invitation: one witness who was asked to be a godfather “excused himself for a secret reason” which he told the father. Other godparents carried out their duties in trying circumstances: one godfather “had an illness called ‘le collyk’ and could hardly act.” Some godparents received a gift at the time of the baptism: “he agreed and was godfather, and the said Thomas gave him two cartloads of wood to bear witness.” Godparents gave gifts to those

who were particularly helpful: a witness for Maurice Bruyn of South Ockendon (1407) received 10 shillings “for his good services to the godfathers and godmother.”<sup>29</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of the testimony given at proof of age inquests is the minute detail of the baptismal ceremony they sometimes provide: “he saw the said Robert baptised with great solemnity, the priest sprinkled the holy water excessively in the face and in his eyes from the sacred font, wherefore he was angry for a long time with the aforesaid priest.” Water for baptism was kept in the bowl of the font ready for use: to prevent the possible use of the water for sacrilegious purposes, a lid was secured over the bowl by means of a padlock and hasp. A surviving example of this arrangement can be seen in Orsett church.

Candles were lit and held during the baptism: “when the said Isabel was baptised he held a candle by the font”; another witness “brought fire to light the candle.” One man described how he had “held the blessed candle” and another recalled placing “a candle at the north door of the church at the time of the baptism.” A witness for John del Chamber of Epping (1411) said he “brought a wax candle to burn before the image of the Virgin Mary at the time of the baptism.”<sup>30</sup>

Torches seem to have played an important part in the ceremony: “at the request of the father they held wax torches beside the font all the time of the baptism”; “he saw four men carrying four torches with him to the church and returning from the church to the manor with the four



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torches alight.” A witness for Maurice Bruyn “carried a torch from the manor to the church for the baptism and held it by the font.”

Consecrated oil (chrism) is sometimes mentioned: “he was clerk in the church and took the chrism from the altar to the font.” A book and salt were important components of the ritual: “he was present at the baptism and held the book before the chaplain together with the salt”; he “heard mass in the church and held the book for the priest at the baptism.” Thomas de Legh of Shelley (1426) had a witness who “was the parish clerk of the church and held the Bible before the priest when Thomas was baptised.”

Similarly, basins, ewers and towels were required by godparents and Thomas de Legh’s witnesses described how they “carried a basin and ewer before Thomas when he was carried to the church for baptism” and “gave water to Thomas’s godfathers and godmother to wash their hands immediately after Thomas was baptised.” The priest also washed his hands: he “held the bowl for the vicar to wash his hands after the baptism.” Bread and wine were sent to the church for consumption after the baptism: a witness had “delivered bread and wine and sent it for the baptism...”; another “carried two bottles of wine to the church for the people there to drink...”; they “saw a servant of the father carrying some pots of wine called ‘bastard’ to the church and drank it there.” Over indulgence was not unknown on these occasions; four witnesses recalled, “they were present at the baptism and drank wine, which was

brought to the church and such was the effect that they could hardly walk out of the church.”

Once baptised the child might be placed on the high altar whilst the gospel were read: “he saw the said Edward lying on the altar in the said church after receiving his baptism.” Godparents might give thanks at this time for the birth of the heir: “the godfather gave a gold noble before the figure of St Cuthbert in the church immediately after the baptism.” After the ceremony the godparents and sometimes the midwife carried the child home: he “met the godparents and certain relations of the said Robert, carrying him from his baptism.” A witness for Joan de Welles of Great Sampford (1351) met one “Margery Kellehog, midwife of Agnes, mother of the said Joan, coming with the said Joan from the church after the baptism.”<sup>31</sup> The godparents might well be accompanied by a crowd of well-wishers after the baptism: the child was “carried back with solemnity and the joy of the neighbourhood.” On one recorded occasion the godparents and their friends “threw pence everywhere” after the baptism so that the witness was able to collect “half a mark of the said pence” on the ground “and that was his first chattel.”

Witnesses recalled that life went on as normal outside the church at the time of the baptism, one said “he was playing football at Little Laver with his fellows immediately after Thomas’s baptism and broke his left shin”, Thomas Enfield of Little Laver (1424).<sup>32</sup> The completion

of the baptismal ceremonies could be marked with a celebratory meal, the “parker of Tanfield, took rabbits in the warren of Richmond for the dinner of there who were present at the baptism.” Others celebrated on a smaller scale: “the father...came to his house in the twilight of the evening following the birth [and baptism] and brought a goose for dinner.”

Proof of age inquests make frequent reference to nurses: he “saw the nurse suckling the said Richard”. The baby invariably slept in the nurse’s room: “he saw the said Elizabeth lying in her cradle in the nurse’s chamber.” A witness for Ralph Jocelyn of Willingale Doe (1298) recalled the date of the heir’s birth “because he has a daughter...who was born nearly two years before the said Ralph...and the nurse



**Plate 2. The font in Willingale Doe church (Author’s collection).**

who suckled her went from his house to suckle the said Ralph.”<sup>33</sup> (Plate 2) Thomas de Legh’s father “sent for Joan, wife of John Spencer, to be Thomas’s wet-nurse, the day

that Thomas was baptised”; “...the second day after the baptism, Maurice [Bruyn] was put to nurse at Aveley” and the witness was “sent to the same place...to see how Maurice was kept and nursed, and he received a gold ring for his trouble.”

About four weeks after the child's birth the mother was churching: “he [the witness] came to Cudlington a month after when Margaret mother of the said Hugh was purified.” Churching cost the family money, in one case the father's rent collector recalled delivering “money to the steward of his household for the churching of the mother.” Special clothes were ordered for the churching: “on Sunday after the said John's birth he was sent to Ypres to buy whole clothes for the robes of the said Nicholas and Rose his wife, mother of the said John, against the purification of the said Rose.” A feast followed the churching, and guests could receive written instructions: one man “was asked by letter” by the child's father “to be present at the churching feast.” Sometimes instructions were less formal: “when Joan...was purified...he [the witness] was present and dined there with other neighbours.” Failure to be invited could lead to resentment: “on the day that the said Maud purified herself the said Robert made a feast to all his neighbours, but did not invite him, at which he was angry.”

Mention is frequently made of records of the date of birth of heirs kept usually by the priest, in books belonging to the parish church. “He entered the date of birth in the book of Antiphons of the church”; the vicar baptised the heir

“and wrote the day of his birth in a certain psalter”; a witness for John de Burgo of Great Oakley (1349) said “the name of the said John was entered in the missal of the said church on the day he was born.”<sup>34</sup>

Robert de Pekenham of Dunton (1399) had a witness who “knew his age by inspection of a book of martyrs in the church in which the birth was noted.”<sup>35</sup> Where such documents existed they would have provided incontrovertible evidence for the proof of age inquest.<sup>36</sup>

We can see that proof of age inquests provide a surprising amount of descriptive data on the rite of baptism in Essex and elsewhere during the late middle ages. Baptisms often appear to have been hastily crammed into people's crowded daily lives as well as into the life of the parish church. The church and churchyard seem to have been dynamic places with simultaneous activity taking place involving different sections of the village community. The inquests connect us intimately to aspects of the lives of our ancestors that, in so many respects, are surprisingly similar to ours. Further analysis of these records would undoubtedly reveal much more about life in medieval Essex.

## References

Examples of proof of age inquests are taken from the first twenty-three volumes of the *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*. In order to avoid an excessive number of endnotes, references are only quoted in respect of Essex inquests; references to the other inquests mentioned in this article are available either from the author or the editor.

1. Evidence of baptismal practices contained in proof of age inquests was discussed in Cooper, W.D., ‘Proof of age of Sussex families, temp. Edw.II to Edw.IV’ *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 12, (1860), pp.23–44. Two papers by Hodgson, J.C., ‘Proof of age of heirs to estates in Northumberland in the reigns of Henry IV., Henry V., and Henry VI.’ *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 22 (1900), pp.116–30 and 24 (1903), pp.126–7 also recognise that proof of age inquests “...cast side lights upon the ecclesiastical and civil customs of the period”, p.116.
2. *Escheator*: The royal official responsible for holding inquests on the deaths of tenants-in-chief to determine who should inherit the property and taking custody of any lands coming into the king's custody because of the minority of heirs or the vacancy of a bishopric or monastery. Escheators also conducted inquests into the alienation of lands held of the king and lands granted to the church without royal permission. <http://www.netserf.org/Glossary/e.cfm>
3. The medieval proof of age inquests are being published in the *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem* series, which is still in progress. (Hereafter *IPM*.)
4. *Seisin*: – Possession of feudal property.
5. *de etate probande*: – Proof of age.
6. Walker, S.S., ‘Proof of age of feudal heirs in medieval England’, *Medieval Studies*, 35, (1973), pp. 306–23 discusses proof of age by writ *de etate probande*. See also Bedell, J., ‘Memory and proof of age in England 1272–1327’, *Past & Present*, 162, (1999), pp.3–27.
7. *IPM* 12, p.363.
8. *IPM* 3, pp.497–8.
9. *IPM* 11, p.301.
10. *IPM* 12, pp 71–2 and *IPM* 11, pp.414–5. See also Poos, L.R., *A Rural Society after the Black Death 1350–1525*, (Cambridge, 1991), pp.136–7 and 189–195 for a further analysis of the interpretation of proof of age inquests in a local history context.
11. The credibility and reliability of these records is questioned by

- Fowler, R.C., 'Legal proofs of age', *English History Review*, 22, (1907), pp.101-3; Martin, M.T., 'Legal proofs of age', *English History Review*, 22, (1907), pp.526-27; Niles, P. 'Baptism and the naming of children in late medieval England', *Medieval Prosopography*, 3/1, (1982), pp.95-107; Rosenthal, J.T., 'Heirs' ages and family succession in Yorkshire, 1399-1422', *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 56, (1984), pp.87-94; and Parkin, K., ed., 'General introduction to the New Series', *IPM* 22, pp.30-42.
12. *IPM* 22, pp.496-7 and *IPM* 22, pp.609-10.
13. *IPM* 7, pp.187-188.
14. Baptism could be performed if the child was only half born: "Hed and necke and no more." In the most extreme cases the midwife was empowered to cut the mother open: "For to undo hyre with a kynf And for to save the chyldes lyf." Myrk, J., 'Instructions for Parish Priests', *Early English Text Society*, 30, (1867-8), p.2.
15. *IPM* 5, pp.36-7.
16. Baptism was an ordinary everyday event in the medieval period and there are few contemporary descriptions of it other than those contained in proof of age inquests and liturgical books. An exception is a document of c.1482 included in the Stonor papers which sets out the names and responsibilities of those taking part in a baptism ceremony. Carpenter, C., ed., *Kingford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1453*, (Cambridge, 1996), p.467.
17. *IPM* 10, pp.546-7. For a description of the surviving medieval fonts of Essex see Paul, W.N., *Essex Fonts and Font Covers*, (Baldock, 1986).
18. *IPM* 7, pp.135-136.
19. *IPM* 7, pp.488-9.
20. *IPM* 12, p.363.
21. *IPM* 19, p.365.
22. Essex brasses depicting children who died in infancy may be seen at Aveley, Stanford Rivers and Great Chesterford.
23. *IPM* 10, pp.428-9.
24. *IPM* 7, pp.342-3.
25. *IPM* 22, pp.328-9.
26. *IPM* 22, pp.735-7.

27. *IPM* 8, pp.273-4.
28. *IPM* 15, pp.349-50.
29. *IPM* 19, pp.115-6.
30. *IPM* 19, pp.321-2.
31. *IPM* 9, pp.449-450.
32. *IPM* 22, pp.327-8.
33. *IPM* 3, pp.323-4.
34. *IPM* 9, p.247.
35. *IPM* 18, p.98.
36. A rare Essex survival is the antiphoner from Springfield church, now in the Cambridge University Library as MS.Add.2602, which contains brief genealogical notes of members of the Duke family and other local gentry. See also *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, Old Series, 5, (1873), pp.246-7 and New Series, 18, (1925-8), pp.225-7.

## Acknowledgement and dedication

I greatly benefited from a discussion about proof of age inquests with Harold Fox, Professor of Social and Landscape History, who died shortly after his retirement from Leicester University this year and to whose memory I dedicate this article.

## The Author

Dr Christopher Starr, a former Army officer, is a freelance historian whose *Medieval Mercenary: Sir John Hawkwood of Essex* will be published by the Essex Record Office in 2007. He is currently working on a biography of the Reverend Philip Morant and has recently become the honorary editor of the *Transactions of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History*.

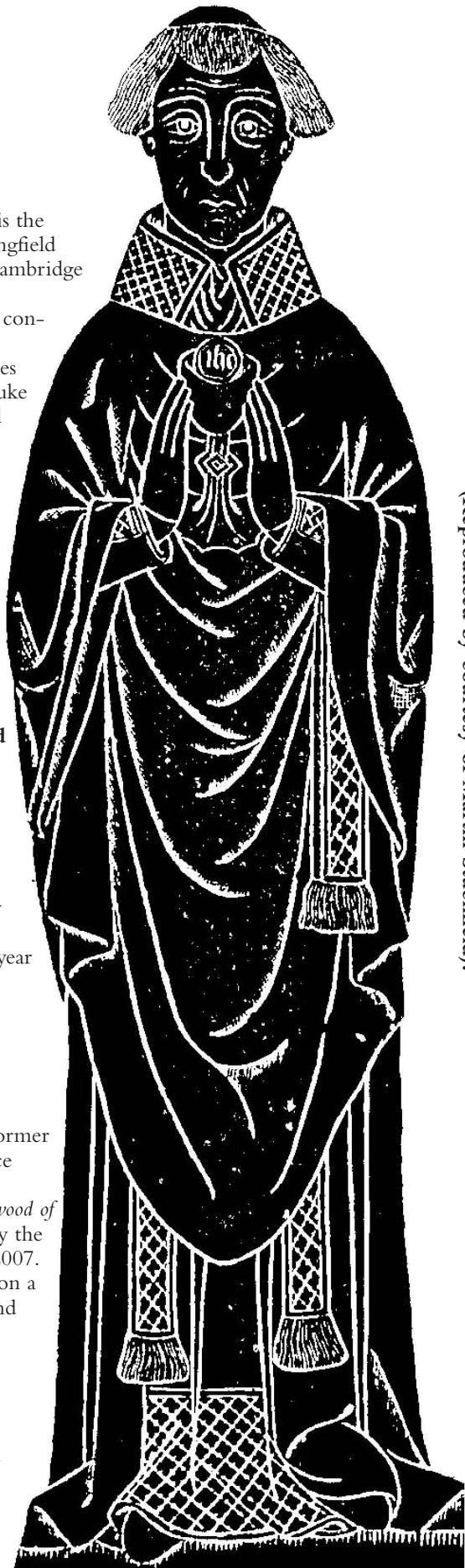
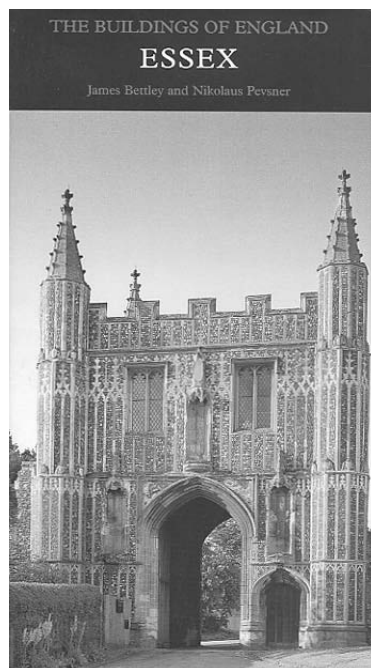


Fig.2. Detail of the brass possibly of John Kekilpenny, rector 1461-1466, in Laindon-cum-Basilidon Church. (Reproduced by courtesy of Martin Stuchfield).



James Bettley & Nikolaus Pevsner,  
***The Buildings of England; Essex***, Yale  
 University Press, 2007, pp.xx & 939. ISBN  
 0300116144



It is splendid to see the publication of this latest, and much anticipated, volume in the *Buildings of England* series, particularly as I have witnessed at first hand some of the lengths to which James Bettley has gone to trawl through the archival evidence held at the Essex Record Office. I only hope that James didn't mind too much

that whenever I issued documents to him over the past five or so years I asked him, probably on every visit, how things were going; I can only conclude that they were going well!

A comprehensive *Introduction*, 84 pages, refreshes the memory regarding *Topography* and *Geology* as well as containing concise and interesting sections by Nigel Brown, James Kemble and David Andrews on *The Prehistory of Essex*, *Roman Essex* and *Timber-Framed Buildings, c.1200-1700* respectively. A further eight sections bring the story from *The Middle Ages to Essex Since 1914*, and a list of *County Surveyors and Architects*, are all on hand to provide the broader picture in anticipation of the detail of the parish entries. It is particularly gratifying to see a small section on *Warfare and Defence* with its mention of pillboxes and airfields, subjects which have only recently, but quite rightly, been the subject of serious recording and study. A very useful seven-page section on *Further Reading* completes these first 84 pages.

I suppose that anyone picking up this volume will head straight to what is familiar and I have been no different. Broomfield is covered, as I expected, succinctly but thoughtfully. I will look again at the library though; a building which, apart from the warmth of welcome from the staff, scarcely warranted, in my opinion, a second glance in its squat, boxy boringness;

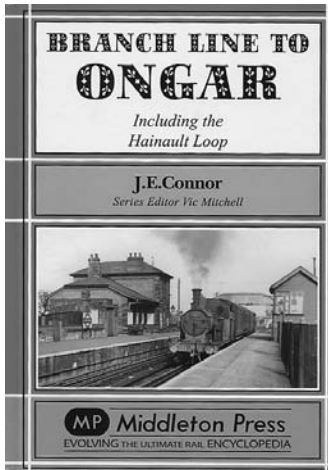
"A very neat design by the County Architect's Dept...intended as a prototype for a standard library in rural areas. Flat-roofed, with continuous clerestory, but the walls and fascia have traditional weatherboarding." (p.182.)

As for Chelmsford, my home town, well what could be said of it? I thought the local authority knocked down anything of worth many years ago. In fact its entry, following the format of entries for larger towns, has sections on major buildings as well as a perambulation (A word I fear that is not used enough in this day and age!) complemented by maps and runs to a full 24 pages. I particularly appreciated the perambulation, with many an irreverent comment, my favourite regarding the glory that is my local High Street: "...the dispiriting commercial architecture reaches a nadir with the MEADOWS SHOPPING CENTRE." (p.215). I'm sure that we can all appreciate such one-liners, and I look forward to discovering more examples as I consult the book in years to come, but this book is much, much more than just a series of quips.

I found the *Glossary* both useful and interesting, especially the diagrams. I assume that it is generic to the series, but this does not detract from it. The indices, one of *Architects, Artists and Patrons* and the other of *Places* are a very welcome addition and a book of this magnitude needs them. The 123 colour illustrations, bound together in the middle of the volume, are very well reproduced and offer a varied and interesting selection of images. The maps are more than adequate but some of the black and white illustrations are small and seem rather cramped. This is a minor point in such a book where space was always going to be at a premium and which in this new edition is already nearly twice as long as its predecessor.

I come to this book with no baggage from the original Pevsner. I have found much of interest, I am more than happy to have a copy on my bookshelf and am sure that I will dip in to it on many occasions in years to come. (I'm not sure I want to imagine the sort of person who would sit down and read it from cover to cover!) And anyway how could anyone not appreciate and enjoy this book when James states that "Grandeur in Essex is more commonly found in barns..." (p.3.) Now that's my sort of county and my sort of book and one of which Yale and James Bettley should be rightly proud.

Neil Wiffen



J.E. Connor, ***Branch Line to Ongar***, Middleton Press, 2007, pp.x & [86] ISBN 1906008055

Enthusiasts of railway history are well catered for by publishers of illustrated books. Many of these should also appeal to the general reader. Railways after all still play a huge part in the lives of countless commuters, many of whom would greatly enjoy an

insight into the history of the lines over which they travel daily.

One of the major series is published by the Middleton Press, and this, the latest volume product to come our way, maintains its tradition. It is deliberately aimed at collectors, whom, the publishers hope, will want to acquire the whole set. The cover indeed proclaims that the firm is "Evolving the ultimate rail encyclopedia". However the volume stands up perfectly well by itself as a one-off purchase.

The title is perhaps a little misleading. Those with a little knowledge of Essex railways, or who harbour a romantic image of the branch line as a purely rural phenomenon, might be misled into assuming that it is just about the outlier of the London Underground system that until quite recently ran from Epping to Chipping Ongar. This is indeed covered, not omitting the present incarnation of part of it as a preservation line. However the book actually describes and illustrates the whole line from Stratford, through Loughton and Epping to Ongar and also the loop from Woodford Junction to Seven Kings, ending with a brief look at the purely underground line from Leytonstone to Newbury Park. Most of this mileage is still open to passenger traffic today.

In common with the rest of the series the book consists mainly of photographs and plans, with lengthy and informative captions. The emphasis is on the stations along the lines, and their buildings and track layout. This is not a book for enthusiasts of rolling stock, although these will find some pictures to interest them. Some of the structures shown survive very little changed until today or until very recent times, but some have long since altered out of recognition.

Two facts are powerfully brought home. These lines were built for steam, and for full

passenger and goods traffic. The subsequent piece by piece transformation to passenger only electric "underground" lines has not entirely obliterated traces of the earlier state. Central Line stock, built to the small dimensions of the deep tube system still looks incongruous running through stations built for quite a different sort of train. The photographs enable us to see what the first travellers on these lines saw.

Secondly, although the early photographs have been chosen for what they show of the stations, enough of their surroundings are visible to show that for most of their length they ran through what was still open countryside. Suburban development followed, although it never reached the furthest reaches of the line. In many ways this branch, and others like it, created urban South East Essex as it is today.

Richard Harris

Peter Relph, ***Four Forest Years***, P.R.Books, 2006, pp.200 & [20] ISBN 0953024024

The poet John Clare (1793–1864) lived at Dr. Matthew Allen's Asylum at High Beech, in the middle of Epping Forest, from June 1837 to July, 1841. It was hoped that he would recover from his deteriorating mental condition, but he never did and, within months of returning home to Northamptonshire, he was certified and spent the remaining 23 years of his life in St. Andrew's County Lunatic Asylum, Northampton.

Peter Ralph, clerk, merchant seaman, bricklayer, teacher and poet, lives in Loughton and is totally addicted to the beauties of Epping Forest and its past. Since discovering John Clare's poetry he has been utterly captivated by it – above all, that which he wrote at High Beech.

He has, therefore, produced a book which identifies every identifiable feature in the Forest mentioned in the poems, which interprets Clare's moods and meanings; and which finds a resonance in the poet's words in the stresses and strains of life today.

The work is beautifully illustrated with photographs of the district and by the author's own poems, which are inspired by the Forest and reflect his own feelings.

The result is a book of intense interest for students and lovers of both John Clare and Epping Forest. High Beech was also the home of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and, later, the novelist Arthur Morrison, who is buried in the churchyard. Pete Ralph has added to the literary as well as the topographical history of the area.

Stan Newens

# EJ 20 Questions? Neil Wiffen

Neil Wiffen, 35, was born and brought up in Chelmsford, the son of a market gardener. He moved to Norwich in 1990 to undertake his first degree at UEA. After gaining a BA (Hons) in History he worked for Norfolk Library Service until 1999 when he moved back to Essex. Since 2000 he has worked at the ERO. He completed an MA in Local and Regional History at the University of Essex in 2006. He currently lives in Broomfield with his partner and young son; they are expecting their second child in November.



**1. What is your favourite historical period?**

Either the Second World War or the Hundred Years War. I'm always amazed by the human race and its ability to devise horrible ways of killing people.

**2. Tell us what Essex means to you?** Dry soil in summer.

**3. What historical mystery would you most like to know?** Who killed JFK just so we could all stop wondering!

**4. My favourite history book is...** Well with my anorack on it has to be B-26 Marauder at War by Roger Freeman.

**5. What is your favourite place in Essex?** My garden on a sunny day.

**6. How do you relax?** Sleeping or gardening – almost impossible to combine – perhaps I should dream about gardening!

**“...sausages without mustard.”**

**7. What are you researching at the moment?** I go through phases but at the moment I'm working up some more research on the 19th century agricultural depression as I'm thinking of turning my MA into a PhD.

**8. My earliest memory is...** Well one of them is falling out of my pushchair on Broomfield parade. I couldn't wait for whatever my Mum had got me, a comic I think, so I stood up and leaned over the back of the pushchair and THUD!

**9. What is your favourite song/piece of music and why?** Well it could be either versions of 'Visions of Johanna' or 'She's your lover now' by Bob Dylan – both very fast. They're alternative versions recorded during the 'Blonde on Blonde' sessions which never made it on to the final album. However it was worth the wait when they were finally released 30 years later. Alternatively 'The Fox In The Snow' or 'The Boy With The Arab Strap' by Bell and Sebastien are great.

**10. If you could travel back in time which event would you change?** November 22nd 1963 to make sure that whoever shot JFK made himself known – it would have made GCSE History a lot easier in the long run!

**11. Which 4 people from the past would you invite to dinner?** My grandparents – be great to chat.

**12. What is your favourite food?** So many choices. Sometimes it's pizza and sometimes it's lasagne or bruschetta. My partner makes a great crème brûlée that beats the socks off any shop made stuff.

**13. The history book I am currently reading is...** Asterix and the Falling Sky!

**14. What is your favourite quote from history?** "War without fire is like sausages without mustard" – Henry 5<sup>th</sup>.

**15. Favourite historical film?** The Last of the Mohicans.

**16. What is your favourite building in Essex?** As a child I loved, and still do, stories of knights and castles. The best castle in Essex is at Hedingham and I've had lots of visits there.

**17. What past event would you like to have seen?** B-26 Marauders taking off and landing from Boreham airfield.

**18. How would you like to be remembered?** As someone who liked good food and beer.

**19. Who inspires you to read or write or research history?** Gloria Harris of Gt. Baddow and Noel Beer of Rayleigh. Gloria is the most assiduous researcher and on hand for lots of advice and Noel, who has published so many booklets on Rayleigh, is always around for a chat and a chance to bounce ideas off!

**20. Most memorable historical date?** 6th June 1944.



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