

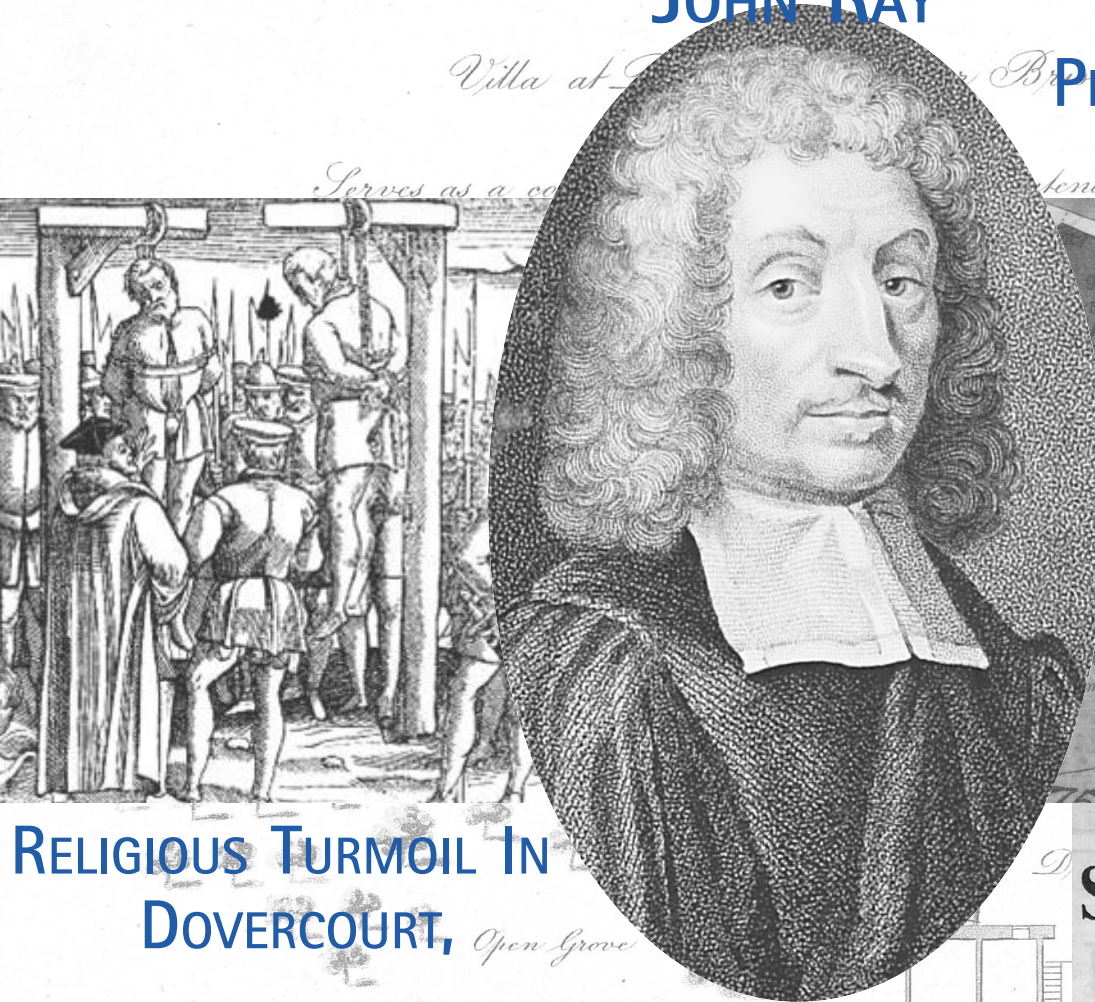
Essex JOURNAL

A REVIEW OF LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Spring 2009

DAVID GRICE DISCUSSES THE LAST ILLNESSES OF JOHN RAY

PLUS, HOWE STREET
HOUSE HISTORY,



RELIGIOUS TURMOIL IN
DOVERCOURT,

AN ARGUMENTATIVE CLERIC IN GREAT BURSTEAD,

BERYL BOARD ON REPTON IN STOW MARIES,



A
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IN
S. Lawrence-Jewry CHURCH
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BY
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the Bishops Head in S. Paul's Church-
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AND REMEMBERING NANCY EDWARDS

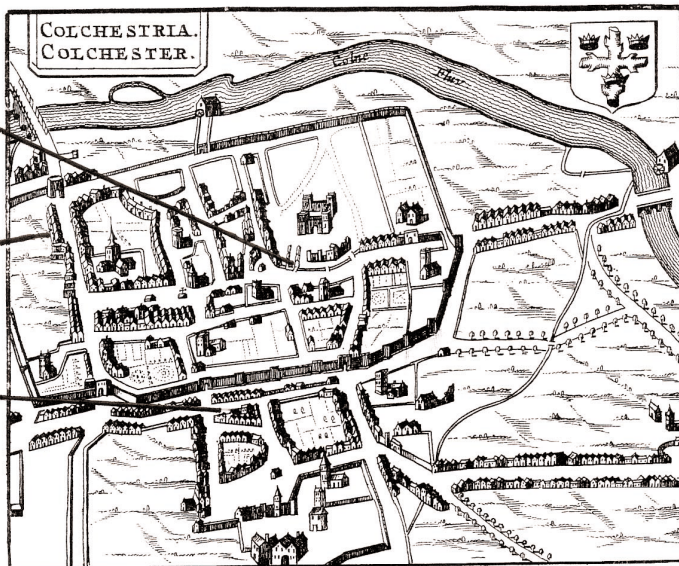
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Background - Perspective and plan of Brentry Hill, Gloucestershire, (Gloucestershire Archives, A174/12); the execution of Debnam, Marshe and King from J. Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, (J. Ashdown-Hill); John Ray, 1627-1705, (ERO, I/Pb 18/8/6); 1910 Finance Act Survey map, (TNA, IR 127/3/38); the title page of Joseph Bedle's sermon, (ERO, LIB/SER/2/16); Nancy Edwards (née Briggs), c.1950, (H. Martin Stuchfield).

Welcome to the Spring 2009 issue of the *Essex Journal*. In my last editorial I discussed the dire economic situation that we found ourselves in and that as historians, I suggested, we had an advantage in that we could take a longer, more balanced view of events. Well, we'll certainly need all the inspiration we can summon up from history at the moment. Writing this the day after the 2009 budget was announced I am trying to understand what all the billions of pounds of debt will mean for us in the future. It is only a few years since we finally paid off the debt we owed the United States for money to fight World War Two. I am proud that even I contributed with some of my tax towards settling this historic obligation. I'm not so sure that I'll feel quite the same way about helping to pay off these new billions though. Anyway, interesting times will no doubt lay ahead for future historians to mull over.

Interesting times indeed, were recounted with the death, in February, of Susan Hibbert who is believed to be the last British witness to the signing of the German surrender to the allies in 1945. Events such as this are really pivotal; they mark a turning point where direct human experience finally passes into history. One way we can make sure that we do not forget what has gone before when all those who witnessed past events have died, is through well researched academic history. I hope the *Essex Journal* makes some small contribution towards this goal, and in this issue I am very pleased to bring to you five fantastic articles that aim to do just that.

John Ashdown-Hill, in his article on the Dovercourt Rood, certainly surprised me. I like to think I have a fair knowledge of the history of Essex but I had never heard of this, once famous, shrine. That, though, is the joy of editing the *Essex Journal* as I read much more widely than I would otherwise. I hope you feel the same too.

As historians we all realise that we can never know the full story, but Michael Leach has discovered much about the argumentative Joseph Bedle. I would just love to know, though, what the 'four long and disgraceful words' were that Bedle used! Where would the fun be though if we got the full story all the time?

As much as we might moan about a visit to see the doctor I always try and remember how lucky we are to have a national health service free at the point of delivery. David Grice's article on John Ray really brings home how awful life must have been for our ancestors struggling with ill health of every description. No booking an appointment with the Doctor or downing a few pills: nothing but long-term suffering.

Following on from this tale of weeping sores, Beryl Board suggests that Stow Maries Rectory had a very important architect indeed – Humphry Repton. I think that the point is conclusively made and if

accepted adds to the Repton inventory in Essex. David Williams, however, discovers no one famous connected with the Old Post Office in Howe Street. What he does discover though is far more interesting than the incorrect

estate agent's details that he started off with.

I think he demonstrates that house history can be very rewarding and accessible for all to try.

Back in February this year Martin Stuchfield gave the address at the funeral of Nancy Edwards after a tragic accident robbed us all of a very talented historian. For *Essex Journal* he has kindly contributed an obituary to honour a much missed friend.

Rounding off this issue, Stan Newens shares his answer to the *EJ20 Questions?* feature. The introduction of this has been, I feel, a resounding success. Stan, following on from Lord Petre and Nancy Edwards, has allowed us a privileged look at the life of another well known Essex historian.

Congratulations to Mr D. Painter of Romsey and Mr P. Heath of Halstead who correctly identified Beauchamp Roding as the parish with the ford on the winding river. A copy of James Kemble's *Essex Place-Names* has been sent to each of them.

Whilst writing, I would like to take this opportunity of publicly thanking *The Augustine Courtauld Trust* for their recent grant which greatly supports the work of *Essex Journal*.

I also wish to express our sympathy to the family of Lady Mollie Butler who died in February this year at the age of 101. She was the widow of Augustine Courtauld and later married RAB Butler (as he then was) later Lord Butler of Saffron Walden.

One last thing, please support the *Essex Journal* by renewing subscriptions on time. We have managed, through hard work, to hold the subscription at £10 for the last 20 years and believe that it represents excellent value. Subscription reminders are sent out each year in the autumn issue but please consider taking out a standing order with your bank to pay us automatically every year. This will greatly ease our workload and help us to continue to be a success in these times of austerity! Reminders for subscriptions still outstanding are enclosed with this issue. Please send payment promptly to the Membership Secretary, Jenepher Hawkins (contact details on contents page).

Neil



Copped Hall

Copped Hall, near Epping, is well known for the ruined Georgian house and gardens now being restored by the Copped Hall Trust. Not so well known is the existence of an earlier house at the north end of the gardens, a home to Mary Tudor and, later, to the earls of Middlesex, which was pulled down in the mid-eighteenth century. For seven years now the West Essex Archaeological Group (WEAG) has been investigating and recording its remains. Five steps of a spiral staircase were revealed last August. Alongside the routine digs carried out by the Group, week long training digs for beginners and field schools for the more experienced have been held. The work is led by professional archaeologists, with strong support from the WEAG volunteers.

In 2009 there will be a training dig from August 10th to 14th, and a field school from August 17th to 21st. For more information see www.weag.org.uk or contact: -

Mrs Pauline Dalton, Roseleigh, Epping Road, Epping, CM16 5HW (phone 01992 813 725) or email pmd2@ukonline.co.uk.



Spiral staircase found in the north-west corner of the building.



Training Dig students working on the the west wing. (Both illustrations Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project).

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The Shrine of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt

by
John Ashdown-Hill

Pilgrimage to holy places was a significant feature of Christianity before the Reformation, and the eastern counties of England had a number of local pilgrimage centres. Suffolk possessed several small shrines of the Virgin Mary, together with the great shrine of St Edmund, King and Martyr, at Bury St Edmunds. Norfolk had Walsingham, and a number of lesser shrines. Curiously, however, medieval Essex had few recorded pilgrimage centres. Coincidentally, two of these were focussed on miracle-working crucifixes: the shrines of the Holy Cross at Waltham Abbey, and of the Holy Rood at Dovercourt, the subject of this article.¹

Origin and appearance of the Dovercourt Shrine

Nothing is known for certain of the origin of the Dovercourt shrine, but at the time of its destruction in the sixteenth century its rood was described as old, dry wood. It probably dated from about the fourteenth century.² Dovercourt church was not in any way remarkable in possessing a rood. Most late

medieval churches had roods and roodscreens. Such a screen was a formal and symbolic means of dividing the nave (which was for the people) from the chancel (where the clergy sang the Divine Office, and where priests offered the holy sacrifice of the Mass). Roodscreens vary greatly in complexity, but they all have a dado which runs across the chancel arch, with a doorway in the middle. Above the dado, the screen is of openwork tracery. Larger churches, in particular, often had a gallery above the tracery, called the rood loft.

This was accessible by means of a spiral staircase, built into the wall by the chancel arch. This loft was used for singing, to house the small medieval church organs³ and also for the proclamation of the gospel. Always, on top of the rood screen, facing into the nave, was the central focus of a late medieval church, the rood itself. This was a great crucifix, often flanked by statues of the Virgin and St John. The rood at Dovercourt was remarkable only in that for some reason it came to be regarded a very special and holy object.

The present appearance of the east end of All Saints Church, Dovercourt reflects its changing history. It is uncertain whether there was a medieval chancel arch. If there was, its appearance and materials are unknown. The existing rounded softwood chancel arch was erected in the seventeenth century. It is supported by a large beam, with Jacobean carving on its western side (facing the nave) and with typically Jacobean brackets. But despite its present appearance this beam is not Jacobean. It is linked to medieval uprights at the sides and is, in fact, the great medieval rood beam on which the Holy Rood of Dovercourt once stood. Underneath the rood beam and between its medieval jambs there is now a modern rood screen,⁴ which gives some idea of the general appearance of its ancient predecessor.⁵

The medieval rood beam's upper side carries a series of small mortices running along the beam towards both its eastern and western edges. These probably originally held a decorative frieze, or cornice. In the centre of the upper surface of the rood beam a large central mortice is preserved (Plate 1). This is the slot which once held the miracle-working Holy Rood of Dovercourt. There is some damage to the eastern side of this mortice, which could have been caused by the removal of the Holy Rood in the sixteenth century.⁶ The Dovercourt rood was mounted on the rear (eastern) cross beam of the rood loft, so the priest would have officiated from in front of the crucifix.⁷ Surviving medieval English pilgrim badges suggest the likely appearance of the Dovercourt crucifix, which was made of wood, and must have been quite a large object, probably at least six feet in height. One such badge was found at Bodiam Castle in Sussex and

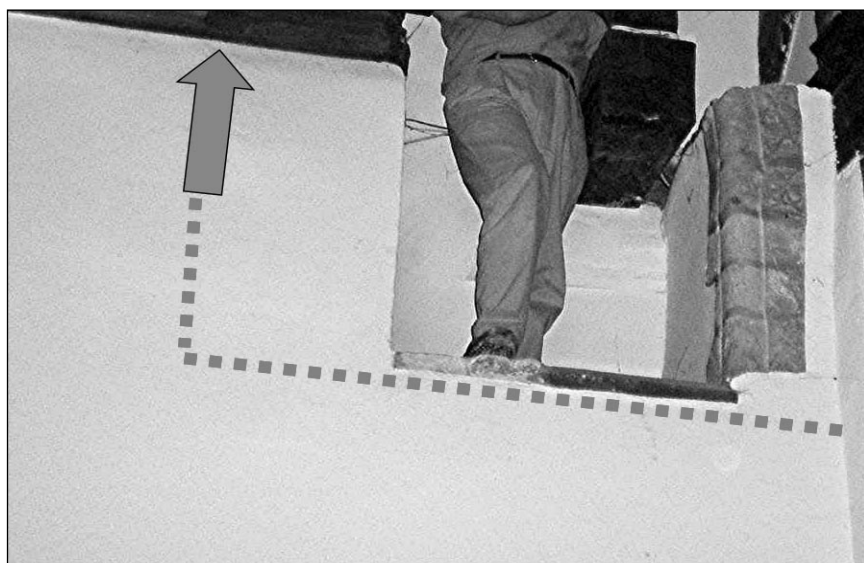


Plate 1. The upper surface of the medieval rood beam, showing the central mortice, into which the Holy Rood of Dovercourt was slotted. The smaller mortice towards the edge of the beam is one of a series which once held a decorative frieze. (This and subsequent illustrations author's collection).

The Shrine of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt

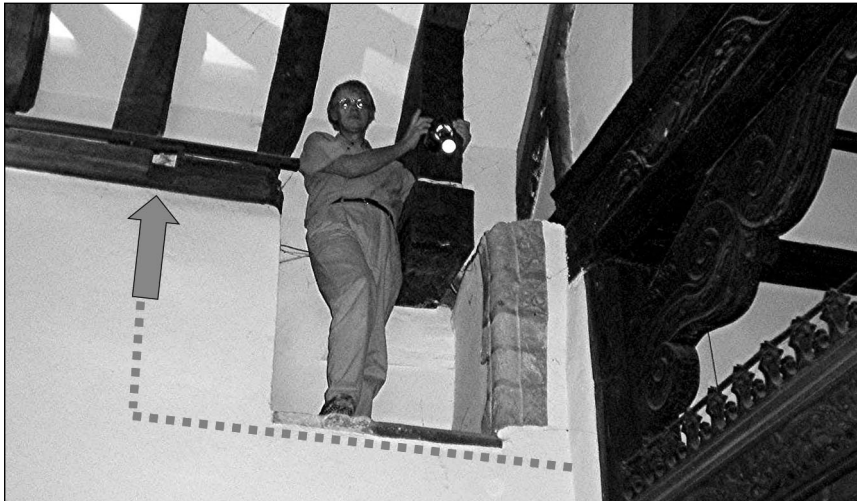


Plate 2. The author standing in the upper doorway of the rood stair. The dotted lines indicate the position and extent of the missing rood loft. The arrow points to the dovetail joint where the front rail of the rood loft was once attached.

another on the Thames foreshore in London.⁸

In the northern wall of the nave, the rood stair, with its upper and lower doorways, is preserved substantially intact (Plates 2 & 3). This narrow staircase provided the only access to the rood loft, the original width of which is indicated by dovetail cuttings in the beams which run along the top of the north and south walls of the nave. These show where the narrow front rail of the rood loft was once attached. Obviously it would have been impossible to have a continuous stream of pilgrims passing up and down this one small spiral staircase, so the main centre of pilgrim activity must have been elsewhere in the church. Recently discovered evidence shows that pilgrim devotion was centred in a chapel which stood directly in front of the rood screen. There pilgrims could pray to the Holy Rood, making offerings of candles, money and other votives. This chapel was on the south side of the nave, and its surviving *piscina*⁹ indicates that its altar was against the south wall. The chapel and its altar lay directly beneath the rood loft. The direct association of this chapel with the cult of the Holy Rood was not previously known, but it is revealed by the will of Richard Strowgth, vicar of Dovercourt, who died in 1531.¹⁰ Strowgth requested burial in one

of two possible locations,¹¹ his first preference being to be buried in Dovercourt church, 'in the chapel before the image of the rood'. His remains may therefore lie concealed beneath the nineteenth-century raised wooden flooring, just in front of the modern pulpit.¹² Richard Strowgth's is not the only local late medieval will to mention the Holy Rood of Dovercourt. The will of Agnes Smyth left one mark¹³ to endow a votive light to burn before the Dovercourt Rood. She also left five marks¹⁴ towards the repair of the highway between 'The Cross House' and John Smyth's residence. 'The Cross House' may have been connected with the shrine, providing accommodation for pilgrims, and it was, perhaps, the original of the later Cross Inn, which was formerly located towards the western end of the Green at Dovercourt.

Another very interesting will is that of Henry Browne, curate of Dovercourt.¹⁵ This will was written on 1st August 1532, and it provides important evidence of the date of the Dovercourt shrine's destruction. Browne refers indirectly to the shrine, which at first sight seems curious, since according to an account published in 1563, the Holy Rood was destroyed in February 1532 (and thus before Browne's will was written). However, the medieval

calendar year in England differed from the modern calendar year, beginning not on 1st January but on Lady Day (25th March). It therefore seems that 'February 1532' really means what would now be called February 1533. Henry Browne's will certainly implies that the shrine of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt was still functioning in August 1532. Browne asked to be buried in the 'church of All Hallowes in Dovercourt aforesaid, in the mydaly, before the light beam'.¹⁶ Browne also wanted masses of the five wounds of Christ to be celebrated in the church on the day of his burial. Such masses would have been particularly appropriate in a church which housed a rood shrine.

The shrine's reputation

The Holy Rood of Dovercourt is said to have been oracular.¹⁷ The only source for this information is an Elizabethan comedy, *Grim, the Collier of Croydon*, which contains the following lines:

'Have you not heard,
my lords, the wondrous fame
Of holy Dunstan, Abbot of
Glastonbury?
What miracles he hath
achiev'd of late;
And how the rood of
Dovercourt did speak,
Confirming his opinion
to be true.'¹⁸

This text has usually been accepted at face value, and it may indeed be true that the Holy Rood of Dovercourt was reputed to speak. However, there is an alternative possibility. This play was written in a Protestant England, more than 30 years after the Dovercourt shrine was destroyed. Its words may have been a deliberate attempt to discredit and ridicule what was then seen as a fallen popish idol.

Dovercourt is reported to have become a very popular pilgrimage centre. It is difficult to tell how widely its fame spread, but its mention in an Elizabethan play indicates that the shrine was

The Shrine of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt



Plate 3. The rood stair at Dovercourt church, by means of which the priests gained access to the rood loft. It must also have been used by the men who destroyed the Holy Rood in 1533.

familiar to Londoners, even many years after its destruction.

It is clear that people in Dedham, East Bergholt and Hadleigh knew all about it. Yet not all of the surviving wills from Dovercourt itself mention the Rood, while no surviving will from either Harwich or Ramsey refers to it. Nevertheless the shrine is reported to have generated an annual income for All Saints Church of not less than £10.¹⁹ Assuming the average pilgrim offering to have been in the region of 1d. or 2d.,²⁰ this implies that some 2000 pilgrims visited the Dovercourt shrine annually. The real total may well have been higher.²¹

The image at Dovercourt was reported to be of such power that the door of the church in which it stood was open at all hours to all comers, and no human hand could close it. The story of this ever-open door is confirmed (if rationalised) by the Protestant writer, John Foxe, in his *Book of Martyrs*.²² This essentially hostile witness tells us that the crowd

thronging to Dovercourt church was so great 'that no man could shut the door'. Moreover, the confusion of this daily throng of pilgrims became proverbial, giving rise to a now obsolete term, which can be found in old dictionaries: a *Dovercot* or a *Dovercourt*, meaning a confused gabble, or a Babel.²³

The shrine's appeal was not only to the lower classes. After the Norman Conquest, Dovercourt church passed under the patronage of the de Vere family (earls of Oxford) whose seat was at Hedingham Castle. In fact, the name 'Dovercourt' seems to be a corruption of 'De Vere Court'.²⁴ It is not impossible that the later de Veres patronised the Holy Rood. It is also possible that the Mowbray family, dukes of Norfolk (who later held the manor of Dovercourt and owned a large palace in Harwich) patronised the shrine. Unfortunately the household accounts of both the de Veres and the Mowbrays are lost, but we do have specific evidence of patronage on the

part of at least one very high ranking aristocrat indeed, towards the end of the fifteenth century. The man in question was the royally descended Sir John, Lord Howard, cousin, and eventual heir of the Mowbray dukes of Norfolk, and founder of the Howard dynasty of dukes of Norfolk.²⁵ John Howard was to be the great grandfather of queens Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, and the great great grandfather of Elizabeth I.²⁶ The fifteenth-century Howard household accounts are far from complete, but surviving entries show that John Howard himself made an offering of 8d. at the Dovercourt shrine on 27th August 1463.²⁷ This is the earliest direct evidence found so far of veneration of the Dovercourt Rood. Eighteen years later, on 5th May 1481, Howard's second wife, Margaret Chedworth, made an offering of 4d. to the Holy Rood of Dovercourt.²⁸

There may well have been other visits and gifts from the Howard family of which no record now survives.²⁹ John Howard himself was very frequently in Harwich and Dovercourt, where he owned property.³⁰

It is from the Howard accounts that we learn that it was customary to robe the Dovercourt image. This practice was funded by Lord Howard, for on 25th February 1482 his steward, Thomas Dalamar, recorded that 'I took Hew Wryte, for dressing of the rood at Dovercourt 21s., with xxx sterys of gold, prise viijd. a piece'.³¹ Confirmation that it was the normal practice for this crucifix to be robed comes also from the later report of the shrine's destruction. What exactly Lord Howard provided in the way of garments for the image is a matter for speculation, but we know from other entries in his household accounts from the same period, that 21s. would have purchased about two yards of velvet. Presumably a garment was to be made which was to be spangled with small stars cut

The Shrine of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt

from sheet gold. This suggests a garment that would hang freely from the image. Pilgrimage cult images were often vested in copes, but in the case of the Dovercourt Rood this seems unlikely. The Christ on the crucifix would naturally have both arms outstretched, and a cope hung over such a figure would hang down at the back, showing only the lining. This would be rather pointless. Perhaps we should therefore picture the Christ of the Dovercourt Rood as vested in a tunic, dalmatic or chasuble. The outstretched arms of the image would allow such a garment to hang spread out in front of the figure (displaying its gold stars to full advantage). The lead pilgrim badges found at Bodiam Castle in Sussex and in London show roods whose Christ appears to be wearing a dalmatic, and they may suggest the appearance of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt. One can deduce from the amount of fabric which may have been used that the finished garment for the Dovercourt Rood would have been at least a yard in length, front and back, which tends to confirm that the image on the Dovercourt crucifix was not less than four feet in height.

The Holy Rood of Dovercourt was also supplied with shoes, for 'slippers' are mentioned in reports of the rood's destruction. Other cult images were (and are) provided with 'half-shoes' made of silver: sheet metal uppers, made to fit over the top of the feet (the lower part of the feet being attached to the statue base). Such metal shoes have a practical purpose, protecting the feet of the image from wear as they are caressed and kissed by the stream of pilgrims. Probably the Dovercourt 'slippers' were silver half-shoes of this kind, since the feet of the image would have been attached to the cross at the back. Its wearing of shoes implies that the Dovercourt image depicted the feet of

Christ side by side (as shown on the pilgrim badges from both Bodiam Castle and London), and not one nailed on top of the other, as is perhaps more usual in representations of Christ crucified.³²

The destruction of the shrine

We know little about the beginnings of the shrine at Dovercourt, and we have little information relating to its day by day functioning. A similar rood shrine, at Boxley Abbey in Kent delivered messages to its devotees by eye movements of the image, and we know from the report of Henry VIII's commissioners, who destroyed this Kentish shrine, that this was a sham, the eye-movements being controlled by levers. Ironically, at Dovercourt, too, one of our best sources of information on the Holy Rood is the account of its destruction. However, in the case of Dovercourt, there are no reports of any subterfuge, so presumably nothing suspicious was found. The account of the destruction of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt was published, some 30 years after the event, in 1563, by John Foxe in his *Book of Martyrs*. Foxe derived his information from a letter written by Robert Gardner, the only one of the four perpetrators of the rood's destruction to escape subsequent hanging. As early as 1527 there were Protestant reformers at Hadleigh, in neighbouring Suffolk, preaching the views of Luther. One of these outspoken critics of Catholic practices was Thomas Rose (curate of Hadleigh) and it seems to have been in part Rose's preaching which incited Gardner and three of his friends to burn the Holy Rood of Dovercourt.

The account of the rood's destruction is interesting. It requires careful examination, however, because it has too often simply been accepted at face value. In fact, it contains some inconsistencies. Foxe begins by telling us that in the 1530s 'ther was an Idoll, named the roode of Douercourte, whereunto there

was much and great resort of people, for at that time there was a great rumor blowen abroad amonges the ignoraunte sort, that the power of the Idol of Douercourt was so great, that no man had power to shutt the churche dore where he stode'.³³ This could be taken to imply that the cult of the rood was itself relatively new. However, we have already proved that the Dovercourt rood had been an object of veneration since at least 1463, and probably for much longer. It is, nevertheless, possible that the story that the church door could not be closed was a more recent addition to the cult.

According to Robert Gardner's narrative as published by Foxe, the attitude of himself and the other three men who were to burn the rood was somewhat equivocal. We are told that the story of the door which could not be closed 'was a great mervel unto many men, but specially unto these men whose names here folow. Robert King of Dedham, Robert Debnam of East Bergholt, Nicolas Marsh of Dedham, and Robert Gardner of Dedham'. These four probably quite young men³⁴ seem to have been intrigued by the rood's miraculous reputation which they perhaps wanted to put to the test.³⁵ The overall question of their motivation is interesting. Foxe suggests (as one would expect, of course, given his own religious views) that they were moved chiefly by righteous indignation against the rood, which they considered a blasphemous idol. However, his published account also contains hints that monetary gain may have been a factor.

Whatever their precise motives, the four men set off to walk from Dedham to Dovercourt on a fine, frosty, moonlit night in the February of (probably) 1533. They made good speed to Dovercourt, where they duly found the church door open. Foxe denies that there was anything miraculous in this, saying that it was simply because

The Shrine of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt

ignorant folk were afraid to try to close the door. The four men — or some of them — must then have made their way up into the rood loft by means of the rood stairs normally used by the priest. They can hardly have brought the crucifix down this way, however, for it would have been far too large. It seems more likely that a couple of them simply lowered it to their companions standing in the nave or chancel. They then carried off the rood, and after taking it a quarter of a mile from the shrine without it offering any sign of miraculous resistance, they struck a light with a flint and set fire to the crucifix, using the candles they had taken from the shrine chapel to help fuel the blaze. Before burning the rood, they removed its garment and shoes. The shoes, which may have been made of silver, they kept. The garment they sent to Thomas Rose, in Hadleigh, who later burnt it.³⁶



Robert King, Robert Debnam, and Nicholas Marshe hanged for taking down the Rood of Dovercourt.

Plate 4. The engraving published by John Foxe in 1563, showing (inaccurately) the execution of Debnam, Marshe and King, with the Holy Rood burning beside the gallows.

For this night's work, the four destroyers of the rood soon found themselves in trouble. King Henry VIII had not yet progressed so far in his religious thought as to have started burning images. Interestingly, Foxe acknowledges that the four men were accused not of any religious crime, but of felony, and although he numbered them among his martyrs it is clear that in the eyes of the government, at

least, their crime was theft, not heresy. The subsequent manner of their execution reflected this fact.³⁷ One of the four, Robert Gardner, escaped, but the other three were apprehended, and they were hanged during the summer; their bodies being left swinging in chains as an example to others. However, the three men were not hanged together, as Foxe depicted in his published illustration (Plate 4), but separately, and in different locations. Foxe's published engraving also includes our only specific representation of the Dovercourt rood, which is shown in flames beside the gallows. The rood is clearly depicted as a large object, bearing an almost life-sized image of Christ. This is probably correct — though in other respects there is no particular reason to suppose that this engraving of the rood (made 30 years after it was burnt) accurately illustrates its appearance.

The places of execution were carefully chosen. Robert King was hanged at Burchet, or Birch Wood, just outside his home town of Dedham, perhaps at the crossroads where the road from Dedham joined the main road. Here lots of people would see his body. Robert Debnam, who came from East Bergholt, was not hanged there, but at nearby Cattawade Causeway, where his body was much more likely to be seen swinging in its chains by wayfarers using the main road and crossing the river Stour. As for Nicolas Marshe (who, like King, came from Dedham) he was hanged at Dovercourt, the actual scene of the crime.

Certain features of the account of the Dovercourt rood's destruction merit further comment. First we notice that the destruction took place at night. Of course, nefarious activities are commonly perpetrated under cover of darkness, but in this case possibly the fact that the shrine at Dovercourt was apparently much frequented by pilgrims during daylight hours made a night visit advisable. Secondly, it seems that no attack of any kind was apprehended,

because not only was the church open and accessible, but also there was no guard or night watchman on duty. There is no mention of saws or cutting. If the Dovercourt crucifix had needed to be violently detached from its location by means such as sawing, this would surely have been reported, since the four attackers were supposedly interested in discovering whether the image could defend itself. It therefore seems probable that the crucifix was simply slotted into the mortice cut into the rood beam. Probably (as is usual with such large crucifixes) it was also supported by ropes or chains, linking the arms of the cross to the roof, or to the chancel arch. One may also note in passing the fact that the four men carried the rood on their shoulders when they had left the church. This supports the view that it was quite a large and heavy object.

Another very interesting point which has already been mentioned is that no subterfuge in respect of the Dovercourt rood was denounced by its destroyers. It is probably safe to assume, therefore, that no evidence of subterfuge was discovered by them. Had they, for example, found a place where a human being who would act as the prophetic voice of the image could be concealed, or any evidence of levers or pulleys for manipulating the image so as to make parts of it move, this would surely have been reported. The inference to be drawn from this lack of evidence would seem to be that no peculiarities came to light, and that the Holy Rood of Dovercourt was simply a straightforward wooden image of Christ crucified, which revealed no suspicious features even when subjected to a close and hostile examination.

At this late date it is clearly impossible to evaluate the miraculous reputation of the Dovercourt crucifix. However, the story of this shrine and its

The Shrine of the Holy Rood of Dovercourt

pilgrims is a fascinating addition to the picture of medieval Essex. Hitherto the Dovercourt story had been largely forgotten. Now the discovery of new documentary and physical evidence of the shrine's existence allow us to recapture something of the lost glamour and excitement which must have surrounded the Holy Rood of Dovercourt in its heyday, turning Dovercourt church into a medieval Mecca.

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1. Some shrines dedicated to the Holy Cross (or Holy Rood) possessed a reliquary cross or crucifix, containing a fragment of the True Cross, but neither of the Essex shrines was of this kind.
2. It was the crucifix which surmounted the rood screen in the parish church, and rood screens only became general in English churches in the fourteenth century. The church roof was altered to accommodate it. One can still see where the easternmost cross beam of the nave roof was cut away, in order not to obstruct the view of the new rood.
3. In size, these were closer to a piano accordion than to a modern church organ.
4. Inserted in the 1920s.
5. The modern dado is slightly taller than its medieval precursor.
6. Since there is only a single large central mortice, the Dovercourt crucifix must have stood alone, without flanking images of the Virgin and St John.
7. This may not always have been the case. No authentic medieval English rood loft survives intact, but on the restored rood loft at Eye in Suffolk, for example, the crucifix is mounted on the front (western) beam.
8. The two badges are of different designs, but both depict a similar, very simple cross and *corpus* or effigy of the crucified Christ, the latter robed in a vestment resembling a dalmatic (see below). Either or both of these badges could conceivably relate to the Dovercourt shrine.
9. A *piscina* is a built-in wash basin, beside an altar, where the priest could wash his hands before consecrating the bread and wine when celebrating mass.
10. The National Archives, PROB 11/24, will of Rychard Strowght or Strought, Priest Vicar of Dovercourt, Essex, 20/10/1531.
11. The final choice was to be left to the discretion of his executors.
12. The note on the list of incumbents at the back of the church which suggests that Strowght left Dovercourt in 1531 for another appointment seems erroneous, for his will was both made and proved in 1531, and explicitly names Strowght as vicar of Dovercourt at the time.
13. Essex Record Office (ERO), D/ACR 2/199, will of Agnes Smyth, widow of Dovercourt, 1526. A mark was worth 13s.4d., or two gold angels.
14. £3.6s.8d., or ten gold angels.
15. ERO, D/ACR 2/252, will of Henry Browne, 1532.
16. The 'light beam' was the front beam of the rood loft, where candles were lit in honour of the Rood.
17. It is reputed to have spoken to its pilgrims.
18. *Grim, the collier of Croydon, or the Devil and his dame, with the Devil and Saint Dunstan*, (1662). [Attributed to John Tatham].
19. L.T. Weaver, *Harwich Papers*, (Harwich, 1994), p.26. Unfortunately Weaver gives no clear source for this information.
20. John Howard (later duke of Norfolk) offered 8d., and on another occasion his wife gave 4d. (see below), but they were very wealthy people.
21. Some of the pilgrims would have come in family groups, and not every member of the family will have made an individual offering. Also some pilgrims may only have given 1/2d. or 1/4d.
22. J. Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, (London, 1563), book 3, p.495. Both this and the subsequent early editions of Foxe's text are available online at <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/transcript.html>.
23. This word still appears in the *Oxford English Dialect Dictionary* as an 'Essexism'. It is defined there as meaning 'a great noise' and its existence with that meaning has been documented back to at least 1678.
24. Spellings of the place name based upon 'de Vere' occur in the Patent Rolls series.
25. His descendants still hold the Norfolk title today.
26. Despite this, since the Reformation Howard's descendants have remained conspicuous for their devotion to Catholicism.
27. British Library, Add. MS 46349, f. 47v.
28. Society of Antiquaries of London (SoA), MS 76, f. 55v.
29. The Howard accounts for the 1470s are lost.
30. He rebuilt a tower in Harwich in the 1460s (probably the tower at the south eastern corner of the town walls which served as a lighthouse), and as admiral of the northern seas he was in charge of constructing a navy for Edward IV, the ships being fitted out at Harwich and Dovercourt.
31. SoA, MS 76, f. 115r.
32. The illustrations in Phaidon Press's book *Crucifixion*, (London, 2000), indicate that until the fourteenth century it was usual for figures of the crucified Christ to be shown with the two feet side by side. Thereafter it became normal for the feet to be depicted crossed one on top of the other, transfixed by a single nail.
33. Foxe, book 3, p.495.
34. Gardner was apparently still living in the 1560s.
35. This idea of testing a miraculous image recalls reports from Continental shrines, where cult images were reputedly sometimes beaten if they failed to produce the required miracle.
36. This may have been either simply to destroy it, or as a means of salvaging any gold ornaments which were sewn onto the fabric.
37. Hanging, not burning.

Acknowledgements

I should like at this point to thank all those who helped me in various ways in my research, particularly Rev Erwin Lammens, Vicar of Dovercourt; Mrs Janet Heath, Dovercourt PCC secretary; the late Mr Roland Baxter, author of *A Guide to All Saints' Church*, and Mr and Mrs Elphin and Brenda Watkin for their expert examination of the surviving woodwork at Dovercourt.

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A seventeenth century parochial dispute:

defamation and its consequences

by

Michael Leach

**'I am disgraced, impeached and baffled here,
Pierced to the soul by slander's venom'd spear,
The which no balm can cure but his heart blood
Which breathed this poison.'**

(Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Act 1, Scene 1)

After the evening service on 7th January 1677/8, the Rev Joseph Bedle, vicar of Great Burstead, Mr Neale, Mr and Mrs Knightley and others were guests in the house of John Pratt, a clothier of Billericay. This small social gathering was interrupted by the arrival of Samuel Thresher who, apparently without provocation, began 'railing and abusing' the clergyman, telling him that he was 'a bastard a sonne of a whore & a bitch and a Develish person in a Pulpett [who] can talk more at a Pulpett than I at a Table & you was as drunk as I am.'¹

It is far from clear what provoked this tirade, or why Thresher chose to confront the vicar in Pratt's house in front of witnesses. The consequences, however, were more predictable, as in English law any threat to an individual's reputation was an offence in both secular and church law. From the mid sixteenth century onwards, there was a steady rise in the number of suits for defamation brought to both civil and ecclesiastical courts.² In Bedle's case, obtaining redress through the church courts was appropriate, as the words were an attack on his integrity and his competence as a clergyman. For unknown reasons, he chose to use the highest ecclesiastical court in the province, the Court of Arches. It was also the most expensive route for an individual to defend his reputation. The majority of cases heard in this court were referred from lower courts, and generally plaintiffs could only go directly to the Court of Arches

by obtaining a 'letter of request' from their bishop. However subjects of the diocese of London were entitled to have their cases heard without a letter of request, so there may have been nothing unusual about Bedle's course of action. At this period, the court was held in Doctors' Commons, newly rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1666. The personal appearance of litigants was unusual, and the court reached its decision through the consideration of witness statements. Like other church courts, its sentencing powers were limited to imposing penances, and to awarding legal costs (which could be substantial) against the guilty party. The surviving court papers include an *Interrogatoria*, or list of questions that were to be put to the witnesses.³ The depositions, and the answers to the *Interrogatoria*, have also

survived and provide details of both the quarrel and the legal processes which arose from it. The two witnesses were John Pratt, the Billericay clothier in whose house the verbal assault had taken place, and James Neale, a London leather seller, who had been present in Pratt's house on that winter evening. The latter was Bedle's brother-in-law.

In order to establish defamation, three criteria had to be met.⁴ Firstly the victim had to have been of good reputation before the offending words were spoken, and both witnesses duly testified to this in their depositions, describing him as 'a learned & grave person and worthy of Honour and esteeme'. Secondly, it was necessary to show that the individual's character had been damaged. To this end, the depositions described the insults

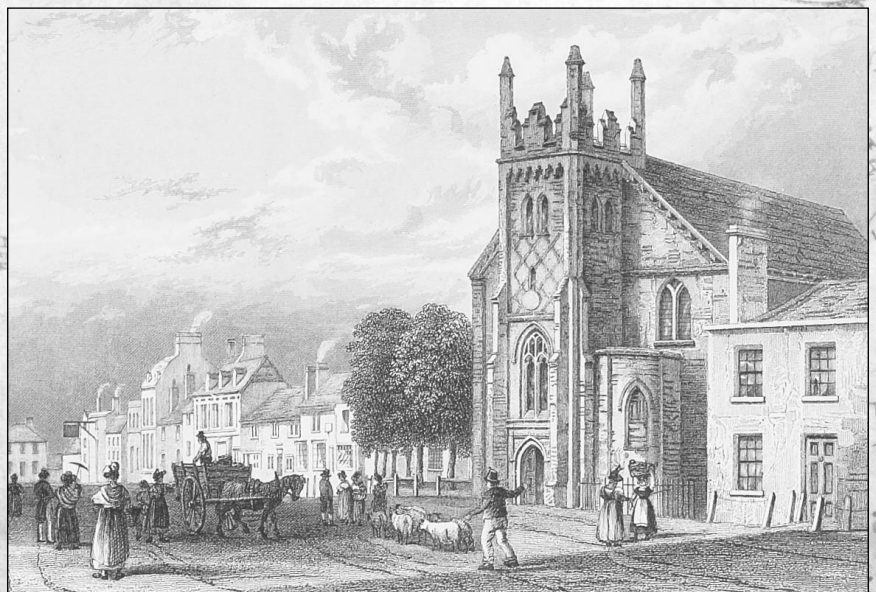


Plate 1. Billericay chapel from Wright's *History of Essex*, published in 1835. The body of the chapel was rebuilt c.1780, but the tower had not been altered since Bedle's time. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, I/Mb 34/1/1).

A seventeenth century parochial dispute

in detail, indicating that no provocation had been given, and stating that Thresher's intention was to 'diffame vilify & abuse the credit and reputation' of the vicar. However the evidence also suggested that Thresher was drunk, an extenuating circumstance which would have made it easier for him to defend his action on the grounds that the insults were 'words of passion', rather than a cool and calculated attack on Bedle's reputation. Thirdly, the insults should have been heard by a number of people; the greater the number, the greater was the offence. In this case, of course, only the few people in the room had heard the tirade.

The *Interrogatoria*, presumably drawn up by Thresher's advocate, put probing questions to the witnesses, aimed at undermining Bedle's standing in the eyes of the court. These revealed that Thresher and Bedle had previously been 'intimate acquaintances and very loving friends' and that Thresher had 'done and bin ready to do several civilities and good offices to Mr Bedle'. Only a few days before the incident, they had shared a bottle of wine at Thresher's house. Moreover (and perhaps more damaging to his reputation) it was suggested that Bedle 'did very much frequent publick drinking houses...till Eleaven or ten o'clock at night', though one witness said that he had never seen him 'distempered in drink'. It was also revealed that Thresher had written a letter of apology after the incident to say that 'he was sorry for it with all his heart and earnestly desired and intreated a continuation of friendship between them'. Bedle, however, had refused to be reconciled and said 'he would not putt up with it because he knew yt...Mr Thresher unwithstanding the promise of better behaviour would continue to abuse him'.

Though there were an increasing number of defamation cases during the seventeenth century, the majority were settled

out of court before the legal processes had been completed. This was partly because of the high cost of litigation, but also because there were strong social pressures to settle such matters by mediation. Litigation was seen as a breach of proper neighbourly relations, and it was usual for a prominent parishioner to act as an intermediary to settle such disputes. During this period, clergy were expected to act as arbitrators in disputes between parishioners, rather than to bring suits for defamation. The diary of his Essex contemporary, Ralph Josselin, vicar of Earls Colne, contains many references to the role of arbitrator and, after one such incident, Josselin noted that the parties 'had found my endeavours acceptable to them all, and above all I know 'tis an acceptable service to god to continue peace and concord amongst brethren.'⁵ Perhaps for this reason it is unusual to find clergymen bringing suits for defamation to the Court of Arches. Examination of the first 100 entries in Houston's *Index of Cases in the Court of Arches* reveals only four cases initiated by clergymen, two of which were Bedle's actions. Reaching an agreement by mediation, as well as being a Christian duty, avoided the humiliation of a public apology or substantial costs, which could lead to continuing resentment and to further conflict in the community.⁶ It is clear from one of the witness statements that Bedle's two legal advisors at Doctor's Commons had tried to persuade him to be reconciled with Thresher, but that these attempts had been rebuffed. Bedle had responded 'very angrily and passionately' and had said that 'he would spend fifty pounds to be revenged of him'. In his reply he had also used 'four long and disgracefull words' which were mentioned, but not detailed, in the deposition. Unfortunately the outcome of this case is not clear, but the exposure of his drinking habits, as well as his adamant

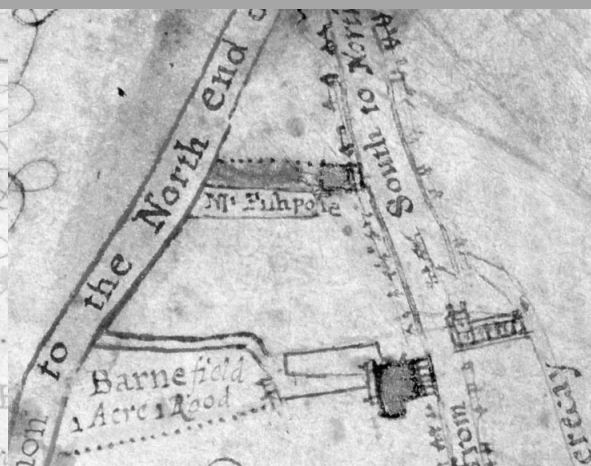


Plate 2. Detail of a plan of Billericay in 1681 by John Coffyn showing the side elevation of the chapel. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, D/DQt 159).

refusal to consider reconciliation, must have been damaging to his case.

As already indicated, there is no indication of the underlying cause of this quarrel. Thresher was a self made man who had had a variety of occupations (webster in 1675, innholder in 1678, and yeoman in 1691). By the time of his death in 1702, he was described as a gentleman and he left substantial cash bequests of over £3000, as well as 270 acres of land in Little Wakering.⁷ He was a churchwarden from 1682 to 1684, and an overseer of the poor in 1689; he doubtless filled other parish offices at different times. He also appears to have been no stranger to aggressive confrontations. He was found guilty (on his own admission) of an assault in 1675,⁸ and was presented at the March 1688 Assizes on a charge that he had 'moved and stirred up divers seditious differences... amongst his neighbours'.⁹ The witness in the latter case was Bedle himself (who may well have initiated the complaint), a situation that probably resulted in the next confrontation between the two men a few months later. In July 1688, Thresher accompanied by a relative committed a 'riotous assault' against the vicar who was on his way to take a service in the Billericay chapel but the charge was 'respired by pardon' at the Quarter Sessions.¹⁰ In May 1689, their relationship would have

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been further strained; Thresher, with the other two overseers of the poor, were presented by Bedle at the Archdeacon's Court for the non-payment of £2 2s.0d. in fees, due to him and the clerk, for the burial of eight paupers between September 1688 and March 1688/9. There were clearly considerable difficulties in settling this matter, as it made a regular appearance in the church court records for the next 14 months before it was resolved (Plate 3).¹¹ In 1691 Thresher probably overreached his authority as bailiff of the hundred by seizing £18 from Charles Eaton of Barling without authority, and, as a result, he was removed from the post.¹²

The case against Thresher was not the first that Bedle had taken to the Court of Arches. In 1674 the Act Book noted that Bedle brought a case for defamation against George Dyer¹³ (about whom nothing else is known). The matter appears to have been dropped, or settled out of court, as there are no further details in the records. It may be that Bedle was particularly sensitive about his reputation, and impetuous about seeking redress. There is little

doubt that he was also ambitious; in 1676 he was appointed Royal chaplain to Charles II, a post usually rewarded (in due course) with a deanery or a bishopric. The duties were onerous, and no doubt involved considerable expense in the purchase of suitable clothing, as well as the provision of a curate to run the parish in his absence. Royal chaplains were required to attend court daily for a whole month each year, to preach sermons in the Royal chapels and to officiate at the regular Friday ritual of touching for the King's evil which had been enthusiastically reinstated by Charles II at the Restoration. In the event of the king becoming ill, the chaplains were expected to pray for his recovery, 24 hours a day in rotation.¹⁴

Another potential opportunity for promotion arose when Bedle was chosen to preach a sermon at the city church of St Lawrence Jewry on 5th November 1678; this was seen at the time as an opportunity to impress those in the congregation who held the strings of patronage (Plate 4). Most of the sermon was devoted to a vigorous denigration of the perfidy of the Gunpowder Plotters, but it is tempting to think that, in his opening words, he may also have been using this opportunity to put the dispute with Thresher behind him, and to redeem his damaged reputation. He began his sermon by stating:

'It is in the interest of mankind to be just and good; righteousness hath a reward, it delivers us from death; a good man shall be satisfied with himself, though the world does not much regard him, or reward him; though he hath hatred for his goodwill, and is persecuted because he is just and good; yet his inward peace and soul contentment shall plentifully recompense him.'¹⁵

Nevertheless he was to be disappointed and no advancement came his way. It is not possible to know if he was unlucky to be overlooked, or if he lacked the necessary influential patron, or if his reputation had suffered permanent damage from the case in the Court of Arches. In 1680, perhaps realising that he had little chance of promotion, he adopted a different (and not unusual) way of supplementing his rather meagre income of £60 a year from the parish of Great Burstead. He obtained a dispensation from the archbishop of Canterbury¹⁶ to be admitted to a second Essex living (Chipping Ongar) which was worth £40 a year. The absence of his characteristic hand from the Ongar parish registers, and other evidence which shows a succession of curates here, indicate that he was largely an absentee rector. After paying for the Ongar curate (perhaps £20 a year at that time) his annual income would have been increased by about the same amount to total about £80. At the Restoration, £50 a year was considered inadequate for an incumbent, though many had to manage on less.¹⁷ Bedle was therefore better off than some, but (unlike his contemporary, Ralph Josselin of Earls Colne) he does not appear to have had any other means of supplementing his stipend (such as teaching), and his annual month-long stint in London as Royal chaplain, as well as his various litigations, would have been a significant drain on his resources. He died in November 1692 and his will suggests that he owned no property. He was only able to leave meagre cash bequests of 10 shillings each to his wife, daughter and younger son, with any residue going to his older son.¹⁸

It is impossible to know exactly why the vicar and his parishioner had repeatedly fallen out with each other. Thresher was no stranger to direct confrontation, and Bedle was perhaps over-ready to seek legal redress

Plate 3. A note in the handwriting of Joseph Bedle listing the fees for pauper burials due to him and his clerk. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, D/AEV 14).

Date	Name	Fees
Great Burstead	Overseers for the poore	
Summ. Thresher	from April. 1688, to April	
James Kicken	1689	
Summ. will fees	A child of Jeffery Smiths be- coming by y ^e tried w th the 14th.	1-0
	for the buriall fee	2-0
	The Clerks	2-7
Sept. 20th	A child of Arthur Hogg	7-7
Nov. 25th	J. Wilson an aged man	2-0
	my fees	3-7
	Clerks fees	0-6
	Carrying the hearse	0-7
	How the Knell	6-2
4 Dec. 13	John Bolt a child	7-7
20th	A child of J. Jeffries	7-7
Feb. 20th	John Clark an aged man	6-2
Mar. 19th	Thom. Emerson	6-2
21st	Richard Hunt	6-2
	Sume	2-2

A seventeenth century parochial dispute

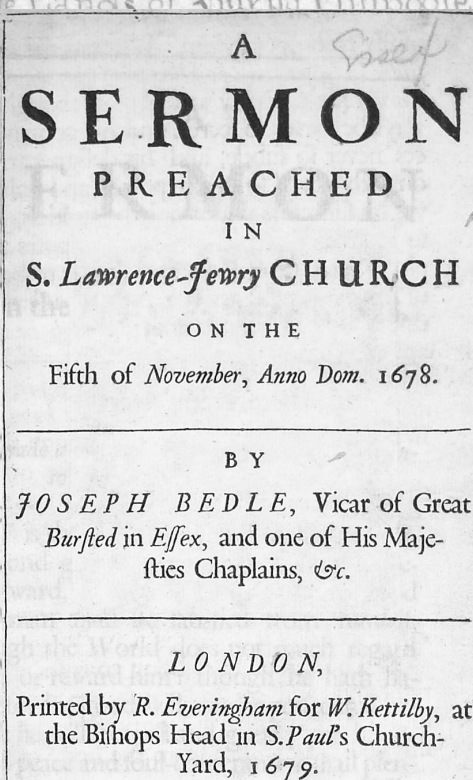


Plate 4. The title page of Bedle's London sermon. This is one of only two copies known to have survived. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, LIB/SER/2/16).

for personal insults. Shortly before his death, he was involved in another dispute in the Court of Arches, this time with his churchwardens at Chipping Ongar over their sequestration of his tithes. Both men appear to have been ambitious but, while Thresher clearly flourished, Bedle was frustrated in his hopes for preferment in the Church of England, something he might reasonably have expected through his role as Royal chaplain. There is also another area where they might have come into conflict; the great tithes of Great Burstead parish were inappropriate to Lord Petre but, in 1650, it was noted that 'his lordship hath for many years lett to the Incumbent some part of the great Tythes att the Rent of thirtye pounds per Ann.'¹⁹ Samuel Thresher died in February 1702/3 and his will, made the previous year, shows that he was 'farming' the Great Burstead tithe, the lease of which he bequeathed to his son.²⁰ It is likely, therefore, that he and Bedle had had business dealings over the

tithes and, knowing something of their characters, it is more than possible that this could have led to friction between the two men.

The surviving records give some insight into the life of a seventeenth century Essex clergyman, and his attempts to obtain redress for defamation of character through the church courts. These attempts may have been seen as ill advised by his contemporaries; in the interests of community harmony, clergy were expected to be arbitrators in disputes, rather than complainants. The adverse publicity may also have lost him the opportunity of the preferment which Bedle could have reasonably expected as a holder of the post of Royal chaplain. The surviving evidence, such as it is, suggests that both men may have been ambitious and confrontational characters, and that there were unfortunate opportunities for friction between the vicar and his parishioner (such as payment of fees, and the farming of the tithes). It is also perhaps a reminder that legal action was as risky and unpredictable a remedy for personal quarrels in the seventeenth century as it is today.

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Acknowledgements

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The Illnesses of John Ray

by
David Grice

When Louis Pasteur in France and Robert Koch in Germany finally confirmed that bacteria were the cause of disease, John Ray had lain in his grave in Black Notley churchyard for more than 150 years. From 1687 until his death in January 1705, the Essex naturalist had endured worsening ill-health through severely ulcerated legs, which all the curious remedies recommended by his Braintree doctor Benjamin Allen, his friends from the Royal Society and eminent members of the Royal College of Physicians had failed to soothe, let alone cure. Ray suffered almost constant pain and infuriating inconvenience, as the malady gradually sapped the remarkable energy which beforehand he had shared in equal measure with his innate intellect. This article will consider Ray's illness, his own diagnosis of it and if, from his correspondence, we are able to attempt to identify what he was suffering from.

During his lifetime Ray raised botany and zoology, particularly, to the dignity of science. His enquiring mind placed him at the cutting edge of scientific discovery as England, in the seventeenth century, emerged from an age of ignorance and superstition. In common with his more widely recognised contemporaries such as Sir Isaac Newton and Lord Robert Boyle, Ray was a man of genius far ahead of his time. Such was the intensity of his fascination with natural phenomena that even his own personal and painful medical condition was closely observed, almost to the point of hypochondria, and in doing so he seems to have stumbled on the germ of a theory which was later to be 'rediscovered' by the Gloucestershire doctor Edward Jenner, before Pasteur and Koch developed this earlier work. These men were to change totally the course of

medical research by proving that bacteria, and not God's wrath, were responsible for disease. They were the men who led the way in using inoculation to prevent and cure such prevalent infections as smallpox, tuberculosis (TB) and cholera, against which there had been no protection and which for generations had caused untold millions of deaths.



Plate 1. John Ray, 1627-1705.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the
Essex Record Office,
I/Pb 18/8/6).

Ray's observation also predated the findings of the English physician Benjamin Marten as being the first to pronounce on the possible source of TB in 1720. In fact Ray had first speculated on cause and effect during the summer of 1697. On July 12th that year he despatched one of many letters to his friend and fellow naturalist Sir Hans Sloane.¹ In his letter to Sloane, Ray wrote: 'I am now come to the suspicion that these tumours are owing to insects making their burrows under the cuticula [dead skin at the base of the toenail or fingernail] their juice mixing with the serum of the blood causes an ebullition, and excites the tumours, pustules, inflammation and itching. But I

propose this only as conjecture' (Plate 2).² The following year in a further letter to Sloane dated June 28th 1698, he reported that 'round every sore there are small red tumuscula, flat and bigger near the sores which I conjecture to be the nests or swarms of those insects'.³

It is remarkable that 23 years later Dr Marten, in his publication *A New Theory on Consumption*, suggested, much to the ridicule of the medical establishment, that TB could be caused by 'wonderfully minute living creatures', which once they had gained a foothold in body, could generate the lesions and the symptoms of the disease.⁴ Having been the author of seminal works on the scientific classification of plants, animals, reptiles, birds and fish, Ray had by that time turned his attention to insects, a lengthy study which culminated in the publication of his *Methodus Insectorum* in August 1704. So during the summers of 1697 and 1698, when live specimens were at their most numerous in the countryside around his Dewlands home (Plate 3) in Black Notley, a village to the south of Braintree, Ray's mind was much focused on the insect world, a range of research which encompassed a wide spectrum of interest, from butterflies to garden worms. Yet having being described by Sir James Smith, the founder of the Linnean Society, as 'our immortal naturalist, the most accurate in observation...the most faithful in description',⁵ and by one of his biographers, Charles Raven, as 'supreme in description' and as having 'remarkable insight and accuracy of notes',⁶ Ray did not report seeing any actual insect infestation in the areas of his feet and legs, yet surmised that some form of living creatures had somehow made their way inside his body and whose 'juice' within his blood was causing his skin complaint.

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On the basis of such compelling evidence could this, in fact, have been the first time, in 1697, that anyone had recognised that disease was caused by microscopic organisms: in short, the presence and effect of bacteria? Twenty-three years later Dr Marten was to come to the same conclusion, but Ray had already taken the 'discovery' a stage further. Not content with this radical and original observation, he was also quick to identify a possible method of dealing with the source of the problem, hinting at the shape of things to come, particularly in the eventual findings of Pasteur. Ray had regularly swallowed flowers of sulphur, and remarked in that same 1697 letter to Sloane that 'taken into the blood it may be heated to that degree as to emit a fume sufficient to kill the insects lodged in the tumours'.⁷ It was not until the 1850s that Pasteur concluded that microbes caused putrefaction in liquids such as beer, milk, wine and vinegar, and proved that they could be killed by heating the contaminated liquids. It is interesting to note that the Italian republic of Lucca proclaimed in 1699 that the names of those who had died of TB must be notified to the authorities, their bodies and belongings burned, and disinfectant measures taken in order to avoid harm to human health.

Ray's fellow members of the Royal Society, Robert Hooke and the Dutch immigrant Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, were pioneers in microscopic analysis. Hooke was reputedly the first scientist to use a microscope for academic study in the early 1660s, the period when Ray was elected to the Royal Society, and Van Leeuwenhoek is credited as being the first to observe and study microscopic organisms. In 1678 Van Leeuwenhoek, working in London, wrote to the Royal Society with a report that, through his microscope, he had discovered *kleijne diertgens* (little animals).⁸ These would prove to be bacteria as well as protozoa, minute invertebrates such as

amoeba. Hooke, who in 1662 had been appointed the Society's Curator of Experiments with responsibility for demonstrating experiments to its weekly meetings, was asked by its members to confirm the Dutchman's findings. He did so, and paved the way for a wider acceptance of the discoveries. Ray knew Hooke well, sharing a fascination for the study of fossils. On March 15th 1675, Ray was in Hooke's company in London during his itinerant years before choosing an almost reclusive, scholarly life at Black Notley on the death of his mother, coincidentally on March 15th 1679. Although isolated physically by 1697, then as a virtual invalid at Dewlands, Ray was able to keep in touch with the onrush of scientific development through a continuing exchange of correspondence with his Royal Society colleagues and through the frequent visits to London of his friend and fellow botanist, Samuel Dale, a physician who lived nearby at Bocking End in Braintree.

So Ray was fully aware of the work being undertaken by Hooke and Van Leeuwenhoek. We are given an insight into Ray's knowledge of their work when in his *Wisdom of God* he referred to:

'those minute Machines endued with Life and Motion, I mean, the Bodies of those Animalcula, not long since discovered in Pepper-water, by Mr. Leuenhoek, of Delft in Holland, (whose observations were confirmed and improved by our Learned and Worthy Country-man, Dr Robert Hook) who tells us, That some of his friends did affirm, That they had seen 10000, other 30000, others 45000 little living Creatures, in a Quantity of Water no bigger than a Grain of Millet'.⁹

But since Ray's daily study at that time was focused on insects, and since insects to him and his contemporaries were then the

smallest known living organisms, it is not surprising that he deduced that the microscopic entities affecting his legs might, in fact, be insects, rather than simply Van Leeuwenhoek's *kleijne diertgens* or Marten's 'wonderfully minute living creatures'. What they did have in common was that they were invisible to the naked eye. Ray would have been wrong in that assumption, of course, but by associating invisible 'insects' as the cause of his illness, Ray had touched on a theory which would not be proven correct until the experimental work undertaken by Pasteur and Koch and their research teams in the late 1800s. After being vilified in public for years by the medical sceptics, these men were finally and irrefutably able to link bacteria – Ray's 'insects' – to disease. As Ray himself would have put it, this is proposed only as conjecture, but taken at face value it would appear that an intriguing secret has lain hidden in John Ray's letters for more than 300 years.

As Charles Raven revealed in his biography, Ray did not pursue this radical line of investigation, even though he had earlier dabbled in human physiology. In 1694 he had written an essay on respiration,¹⁰ which, according to Raven, through hints in Ray's letters, contained an attempt to deal with oxygenation and the blood stream. But after sending copies to several scientific friends for their views in 1696, Ray decided in October 1697 to suppress his findings – three months after that intriguing 'insects' letter to Sloane – because he felt it might further offend Martin Lister, his touchy friend and fellow naturalist. Lister's conclusions on the subject were apparently at variance with those of Ray, and Ray did not want become embroiled in controversy because he believed that he had earlier upset his friend by, of all things, acknowledging that Dr Edward Hulse, and not Lister, was the first man to observe the spinning and structure of spiders' webs! In fact

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Ray was probably wrong to support Hulse: Lister is now generally credited with the actual initial observations on spiders swinging on their gossamer threads, but, importantly in the academic world, Hulse was first to publish. So Ray devoted himself instead to his plant and insect research, the essay on the circulation of the blood was never published and the tangible evidence of his thoughts on the theory eventually became lost to the academic world.

But what was the disease which caused Ray to spend his final years of study in constant pain? Reference to Ray's medical problems were scattered piecemeal throughout Raven's biography but apparently no-one had attempted to compile and analyse the symptoms detailed within Ray's copious correspondence. To rectify this oversight I sifted through Raven's biography to place Ray's symptoms in chronological order to see if it were possible to attempt a diagnosis of his illness in the light of modern medical knowledge.

The view of Edmund Calamy, a leading Presbyterian minister in London, was that his friend was consumptive, but Raven surmised that Ray was unlikely to have had permanent TB since anyone so afflicted could hardly have undertaken his many arduous journeys of discovery on horseback across the length and breadth of Britain and into southern Europe.¹¹ In effect, though, both men were correct: Ray almost certainly did contract TB, but while affecting his lungs intermittently, it was to manifest itself dramatically elsewhere.

In 1650, when a minor Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, he reported to Lister¹² that his lungs had been affected and that the cure may not be complete; TB was suggested as a contributory factor. On September 13th 1667, Ray was taken seriously ill on his

return to Black Notley from an arduous tour of the West Country. Lister expressed grave concern about Ray's health in a letter dated September 21st and Ray did indicate at that time that he feared his lungs had been permanently affected.¹³ However, his burden of broken health only began in earnest at the age of 63 in 1690. On March 6th that year he was taken 'by violent cough and fever attendant thereupon' and was described as being desperately ill for several days.¹⁴ Indeed he was at death's door. The Braintree doctor Benjamin Allen treated Ray for 'peripneumonia', but again there was no mention of him being consumptive. The long and bitter winter of 1692-93 brought a fresh outbreak of leg sores, and his troubles were catalogued in his letters. On March 22nd 1693, he told his friend Edward Lhywd, the keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford: 'I have been this winter so afflicted with exulcerated pernios upon the back side of the small of both my legs... You would not imagine that ulcers of which so little account is made should be so painful and vexatious, they giving me very little respite from pain night or day.'¹⁵ In the April he mentions the sores to Sloane, but hoped the warm weather would heal them. A variety of cures were prescribed by friends that autumn but, after a brief respite, when the weather turned 'cold and frosty they [the sores] fell off itching and spread again and are now to be as bad as before'.¹⁶ In a letter dated November 26th 1693, Lhywd was told by Ray: 'I have little hopes of getting them healed and dried up this winter, if ever. The cold doth affect and greatly exasperate them, causing them to run abundantly.'¹⁷ For a few months early in 1694 the sores did dry up, only to break out afresh. In May 1697

they were 'almost wholly dry and healed' but a week of hot weather 'altered the nature of them and turned them into a kind of herpes or tetter which hath spread very much and encompassed my legs'.¹⁸ By 1698 they were 'spreading and increasing and growing very deep and running extremely, being also so painful that they do very much hinder my rest; sometimes the heat and itching is so violent that they force me to quit my bed...round every sore there are small red tumuscula, flat and bigger near the sores...I intend to have the issues cut which I hope will deliver me from this misery, else *vita minime vitalis esset* [Life means very little without life's force]'.¹⁹ In 1699 Ray told Sloane: 'Alas, my glass is almost out and I am so afflicted with pains, that I have no heart to proceed any further. Indeed I could do very little all last summer, and I must *alii lampada tradere* [hand on the torch to others]'. Ray later told Sloane that he spent most of each morning dressing his sores.²⁰ Sloane was told by Ray in 1700: 'I have little or no absolute intermission of pain' and later added, 'I am now much worse, being by the sharpness of my pains reduced to that weakness that I can scarce stand alone...and despair even of life itself'.²¹ In 1701 he told Lhywd: 'I am sadly afflicted with pain which renders me listless and indisposed to any business, and disables me with intention to prosecute any study.'²² During 1702 and 1703 he was more or less confined to his house, his legs bandaged or kept in 'strait stockings'.²³

By January 1704 a visitor reported Ray to be 'very old and infirm in body though his parts are vivid'²⁴ and, in the February, Ray said: 'One of my small sores began to run with extraordinary rage as no man could believe...and so continued for five days and

Plate 2 (Facing Page). John Ray's letter to Sir Hans Sloane of July 12th 1697 in which he outlines his radical 'suspicion that these tumours are owing to insects making their burrows under the cuticula...But I propose this only as conjecture, though I could bring probable arguments to confirm it.'

At the close Ray also explains his theory that sulphur fumes could 'destroy the insects'.

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Your great kindness expressed as well by the speedy return of Answer to my last, as in the solicitousness & concern in your Letter discovered for my health & relief, doe exact & move naturally excite in me futable affections of love & gratitude. But I thank God, the case is not so ill with me, as my Letter my Letter might give you just reason to suspect. My hopes for so I will call them, though they are not quite kill'd, as the Vulgar phrase it, & it may be not without reason, yet are they well qualified, the heat & itching ^{much, allay'd} though I cannot say the spreading quite stop'd. I take inwardly flower of Sulphur, half a dram ^{at once} ~~inwardly~~, w^{ch} keeps my body soluble & gives me a stool or two: outwardly I use a decoction of Elecampans, Dock-root and Chalk in whey, twice a day bathing the affected places therewith. I doe not constantly take Sulphur but intermit once in two days & sometimes more. Mercury I dare not be bold with. I have formerly taken Mercurius dulcis inwardly. hora somni, After taking it I slept about two hours, & then waked, sleeping no more all night, in the morning it began to purge me, & so continued for y^e most part of the day: And lest I should take non causam pro causa, I reiterated the experiment 3 times, with the best prepared Mercury & always with the like effect. the emplastrum de ravis I also applied with no better success. For two years after I had good reason to think that the Mercury was not quite out of my body. And yet found no effect of drying or healing my sores. I am now come to a suspicion that these tumors are owing to insects making their burrowes under the cuticula; their juice mingling with the Serum of the blood causes an ebullition, & excites the tumors, pustules, inflammation & itching. But this I propose only as a conjecture, though I could bring probable arguments to confirm it.

Your advice about letting blood I approve of, & had it been given earlier in y^e year I should have taken it. My blood is hot, & adust when I have been let blood, w^{ch} hath not been often, it was always of a dark or blackish colour. I hope the Method I am in will in time quite cure me, though I doe not much delight in Sulphur, nor in any strong medicine. You would not think what effects opium hath more had upon me in stead of pacifying & stopping the ebullition

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Plate 3. Dewlands, the residence of John Ray, Black Notley.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office, I/Mb 256/1/1).

nights together, till it had reduced me to that weakness that I was unable to rise up from my chair...all this while a fever attended me which at last abated in a plentiful sweat...Since this another sad accident has befallen me. A part of the skin of one of my insteps by degrees turned black and now is with the flesh under it rotted and corrupted...yet it runs a copious gleet [pus or mucus]. In the June 'the sores seem to be in a fair way to healing' but there was another outbreak and the discharge continued 'notwithstanding all my physic'. In the November he claimed: 'The History of Insects must rest if I continue thus ill, and I see no likelihood of amendment unless I outlive this winter.'²⁵

On January 7th 1705, in his last letter to Sloane, Ray wrote: 'These are to take a final leave of you as of this world. I look upon myself as a dying man'.²⁶ At the age of 77, on Wednesday, January 17th 1705 at 10am, John Ray died at Dewlands after enduring years of unsuccessful and, at times, bizarre treatment such as 'a decoction of sassafras, sarsa [sarsaparilla] and china [the root of Smilax china, a plant closely related to sarsa] with some sage and hypericon [an oil prepared from St John's Wort], and shavings of hartshorn [for ammonia] but without guaiacum [lignum vitae]...Hollyhock leaves boiled

in May-butter...a plaster of frogs and mercury...a salve made up of two parts of diapalma [ointment of palm-oil, zinc sulphate and lead monoxide] and one of basilicon [an ointment prepared from sweet basil]'.²⁷

It is not surprising that the medical minds at work on Ray's case were at a loss, since the conclusion has to be that the probable disease from which he suffered was first described only in 1861. A full examination of the patient has not been possible at a distance of more than 300 years, but from the reported symptoms, Ray would appear to have been a victim of Erythema Induratum (Nodular Vasculitis), which is also known as Bazin's Disease, named after its discoverer, the nineteenth century French doctor Pierre Antoine Ernest Bazin (Plate 4). The disease is now a rare skin complaint in Britain but is more common in the developing world. It leads to recurrent crops of painful ulcerating nodules, usually at the backs of the calves and on the lower legs near the ankles. Outbreaks appear to be brought on, or made worse, by cold. The ulcers tend to persist for long periods and drain serous fluid, which is clear or straw-coloured and sometimes blood-stained. On healing they form atrophic [loss of tissue] scars. There seems to be a connection to TB, with 50% of modern cases

having a proven past history of *mycobacterium tuberculosis* infection. This previous infection tends to have left the patient with a moderate to high immunity to TB, which results in a hypersensitivity reaction: the immune system overreacts to proteins in the skin similar to those in the TB bacteria. Ray's description of the leg ulcers that tormented him for 18 years seems to fit well with this description of Bazin's Disease.²⁸ His repeated correlation of cold weather causing outbreaks and warmth leading to healing is particularly appealing. The fact that at the age of approximately 22 he had a major episode of illness affecting his lungs where TB was suspected, yet then lived on to the age of 77, supports the proposal that, if he did in fact contract TB in 1650, he may well have formed a strong



Plate 4. Symptoms of Bazin's disease. (Reproduced by kind permission of the Scottish Dermatological Society).

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immune response to the disease which could then have led later in life to a hypersensitivity reaction.

Other possible causes should also be considered such as venous or arterial ulceration. Venous ulcerations usually occur when there is poor drainage of the blood back towards the heart, often due to varicose veins. Often precipitated by an injury, a break in the skin heals poorly and after an ulcer forms it tends to enlarge. This type of ulceration would almost certainly have been commonplace in the seventeenth century and is unlikely to have gone unrecognised by Ray himself or his doctors. It is interesting to note, however, that in the later stages of his illness he describes the onset of oedema, the excessive accumulation of serous fluid in the intercellular space of the tissue. This may have been due to the damage caused by his ulcers to lymphatic drainage, leading to a form of chronic venous drainage insufficiency. Arterial ulceration occurs as the result of a poor blood supply caused by furred-up arteries. In the same way that a poor blood supply to the heart causes a heart attack, a poor blood supply to the limbs causes tissue to die off. This type of ulcer tends to affect the feet and heels, and have a defined punched-out appearance. As with all arterial disease, these ulcers are associated with the smoking of tobacco and Ray did enjoy a pipe or two. However the presence of ulceration due to arterial disease tends to be a symptom of an advanced stage, and is likely to be associated with angina and severe pain in the legs on exercise. This pain would be made much worse with bed rest. Overall these symptoms fit poorly with those described by Ray, and it is also highly unlikely that anyone could survive for 18 years after the onset of such ulcers in the absence of modern treatments. So we must return to the initial diagnosis that it is most likely that Ray did suffer from Bazin's Disease.

Today Bazin's Disease is curable but requires a regime of standard TB treatment of between six to

nine months involving drugs with high antibacterial activity and the capacity to inhibit the development of resistance: isoniazid, rifampin, streptomycin and ethambutol. Since antibiotics and steroids were not available during Ray's lifetime, the chances of him finding a cure were equally nonexistent. Ironically the now-demolished Black Notley Hospital was first built as an isolation unit on land overlooking Dewlands, the house in which Ray lived and died. Dewlands was destroyed by fire in 1900 and the hospital was opened in 1904 to isolate patients with smallpox.²⁹ The first sanatorium in Essex for the treatment of TB was established on the same site – for women only – in 1912, four years after the first TB vaccine had been developed by the French scientists Albert Calmette and Alphonse Guérin.

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The Author

David Grice was born in Tamworth but now lives on the Braintree-Black Notley border. He served as the Essex county councillor for Braintree West division for 12 years. Closely associated with Braintree District Museum, he developed an interest in the history of north Essex, particularly covering the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He recently retired after 45 years in sports journalism, including 13 years as sports editor of a national broadsheet Sunday newspaper.

The Rectory House, Stow Maries:

a Repton design?¹

by

Beryl Board

In 1797 William Payne, a Bristol merchant, bought a field on Brentry Hill, north of Bristol, on which to build a new house. Payne was in partnership with Thomas Daniel and John Scandrett Harford in an iron merchandising company. Daniel lived at Henbury and in 1795 Harford commissioned John Nash to build a new house at Blaise Castle and Humphry Repton to design a garden there. Payne's site on Brentry Hill provided extensive views westward to the river Severn and overlooked Henbury and the woods of Blaise Castle. Payne commissioned Humphry Repton, assisted by his son John Adey Repton, to design his house. No 'Red Book' survives to date the commission but a view and plans of the house were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1802 and in his *Theory and Practice* Repton presented Brentry House as an example of a small villa designed with compactness and economy, without sacrificing the beauty of the prospect to the west (Plate 1). The house faced south with the kitchen and kitchen court on the east. The prospect was enjoyed from the eating room and drawing room. The house was finished in 1802. When Payne sold the house in 1807 it had gardens, enclosed in brick fruit walls 14 feet high, melon-ground, hothouses, shrubberies, coach-houses, stabling for ten horses, and 65 acres of land in a ring fence, surrounding the mansion house. The new owner was John Cave, a banker, who enlarged the house and the estate. It continued as a gentleman's residence, with further enlargement and alteration, until the late 1890s. From that time it was used as a reformatory for inebriates, then a colony, and later a hospital until its closure in 2000. It was converted into 12 residential apartments as Repton Hall in 2003.²

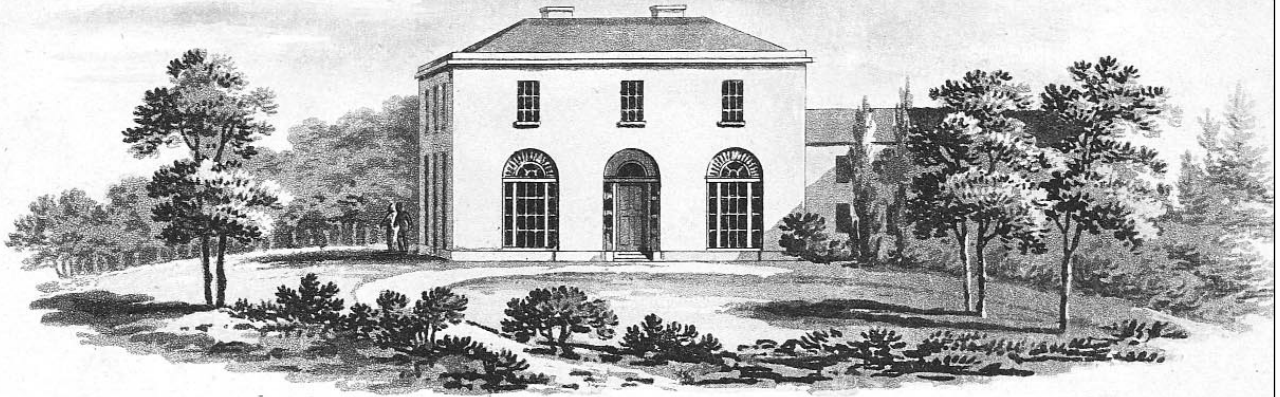
Before Brentry House was completed, another house had been built to a similar design at Stow Maries in Essex for George Henry Storie (1766–1833), rector and patron of the parish church there. His father, Thomas Storie of Springfield Lodge, Camberwell in Surrey, had bought the advowson of Stow Maries in 1792. When Thomas died in 1794 George Henry inherited the advowson and, on his own presentation, was instituted as rector in 1795.³ He may already have formulated plans to replace the existing rectory house, for in July 1796 he married Elizabeth Jekyll Chalmers, the youngest daughter of Colonel James Chalmers of Chelsea, to whom he had been engaged for many months. Shortly before the marriage Chalmers wrote to John Saunders of New Brunswick, another son-in-law, 'Eliza my daughter will be married to Mr. Storie a man of considerable fortune and the church...he has a valuable Rectorship in Essex in his own right and he has considerable property in the funds...and is the proprietor of a sugar estate in Tobago.' He also commented, 'He seems to have his family's love of money.'⁴ Chalmers was acquainted with Thomas Storie as the executor of the will of his brother John Chalmers, who had owned an estate in Jamaica. Thomas was said to have possessed £50,000. It is clear from James Chalmers's comments that the Storie family lived in style and had fashionable tastes. He mentioned his daughter's accomplishment in copying a portrait of her mother-in-law by George Engleheart, who exhibited at the Royal Academy 1773–1812, and was miniature-painter to the king in 1790.

In August 1796 Eliza wrote from Park Place, Camberwell, to her sister Arianna Saunders, 'my husband has a living in Essex of

value. He intends to live on his nearby estate not in the parsonage.'⁵ The parsonage stood on glebe land east of the church, between that and the lane. The site can be identified from a complaint from the parish to Quarter Sessions in 1606 of the state of ditches and trees along 20 rods of the highway from the parsonage to the village street. A map of 1777 shows a building on that site. The glebe land was consecrated for burials in 1918. The tax returns of 1662 and 1671 recorded six hearths at the rectory compared with seven each at the farmhouses at Wellinditch and Hogwells.⁶ By 1684 the house was in disrepair, the roof wanting tiling and repairing, the parlour needing flooring, and the hall ceiling mending. The archdeacon required the rector, Stephen Brewer, to repair the house and to 'rough cast it or put a case of deal about the house.'⁷ Brewer died in 1687 and his immediate successor, John Ingram (d.1694), seems to have lived at Great Baddow.⁸ Richard Clarke, rector 1694–1720, was unmarried and, although resident, seems to have let part of the house to Brewer's dependents. His successors and their curates usually served other parishes and lived elsewhere.⁹

It is clear from his young wife's comment that Storie did not find the old house on its cramped site a suitable residence for a man of his tastes and intended to live in a new house on another site that Eliza called 'his estate.' His father-in-law, wrote of him, 'My good son Storie has many qualities but in these are not included the temperance of a hermit.'¹⁰ His son, John George, stated in reply to the archdeacon's survey of 1832 that his father 'built the house and made the place about the year 1799 at an expense of two thousand pounds and subsequent alterations and repairs cost him two thousand more.'¹¹

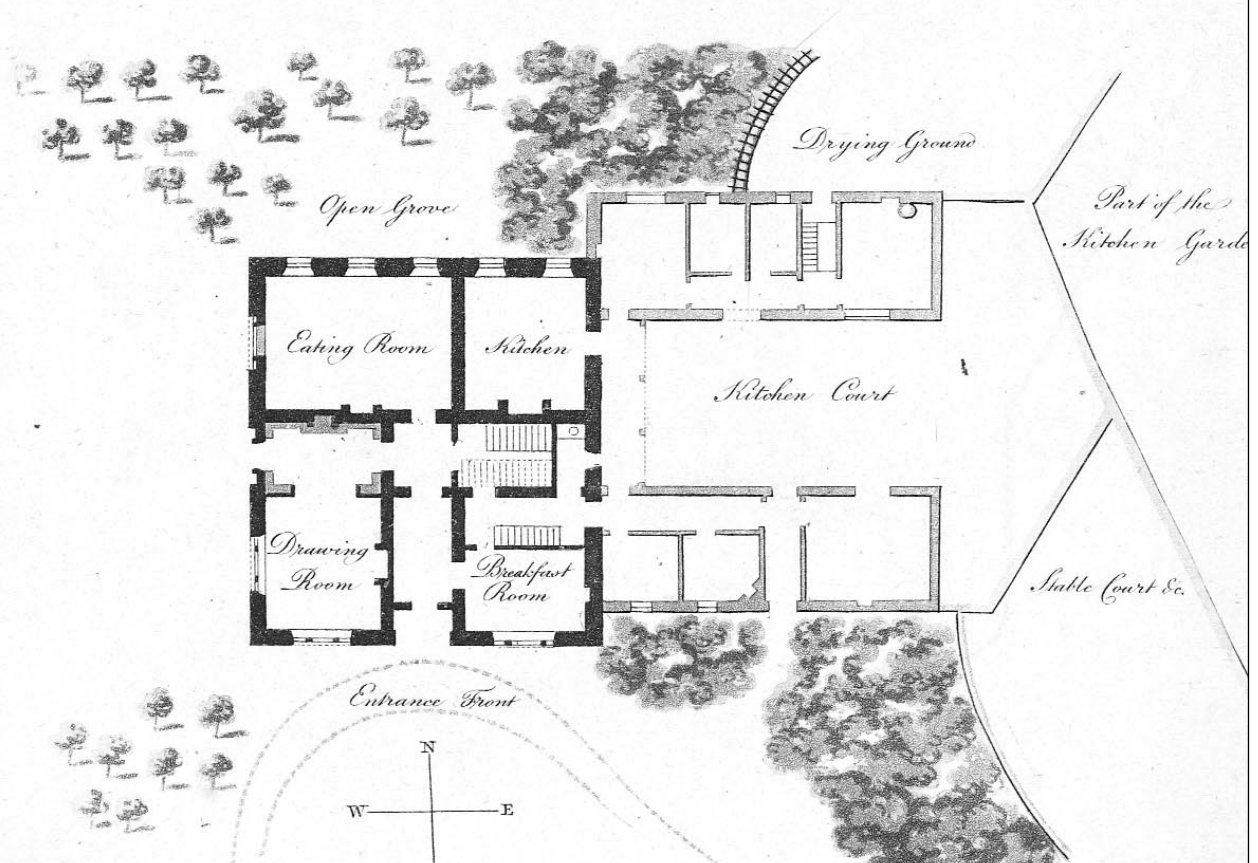
The Rectory House, Stow Maries



Villa at Brentry Hill, near Bristol.

Serves as a contrast to the remarks on extending the front of a building, and is inserted here as a specimen of oeconomy with compactness, adapted to its situation character and uses.

Plate 1. Perspective and plan of Brentry Hill, Gloucestershire, from H. Repton, *Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, (London, 1803), facing p.186. (Reproduced by courtesy of Gloucestershire Archives, A174/12).



The Rectory House, Stow Maries



Plate 2. Stow Maries rectory house c.1925, showing the southern extension.
The pitched roof conceals the original low, hipped roof.
(Author's collection).

In June 1800 James Chalmers referred in a letter to Storie's 'perpetual advowson at Stow where he has built a lodge, which...has already cost them upwards of £1,500 sterling' and in October 1801 he recorded a visit with his wife and unmarried daughter to 'Mr. Storie's rectory at Stow Maries where he resides for a few months in the summer and on which he has expended upwards of £3,000 sterling'.¹²

Storie's rectory house was built on glebe land south of the church, fronting Church Lane on the east. It is built of yellow stock bricks on red brick foundations.¹³ The principal rooms, the dining and drawing rooms, face south where the slope of the hill provides a prospect over the Crouch valley. Its façade of three bays has ground floor windows with semi-circular tympanums, infilled with brick. The timbers of the original low, hipped roof survive under the later pitched roof with a central apex.¹⁴

A terrier of 1818 records:

'A Parsonage House bricked and slated, with a garding on the West, a lawn on the south side, and at the north side of the house is a yard with some small Buildings adjoining to the house for the Serveants to performe their domestic Purposes

and also a small Cottage contiguous and bricked and tiled. At the North side of the yard is a good barn Stable Coach House and granary over the coach house and stable all contiguous and boarded and tiled.'¹⁵

The plan on the tithe award map of 1839 shows the parallel ranges of buildings on the north side of the house.¹⁶ The internal arrangement of the ground floor corresponds to that in Repton's plan of the Brentry house, except that by the 1920s or earlier the room marked 'Kitchen' on the plan had become a library and the kitchen was in the eastern single storey range. Coincidentally the new owner of the Brentry house made the same change in 1825.¹⁷

After Edward Smyth succeeded John George Storie as rector in 1823 the house was occupied by Harvey Atkyns Browne, who died in 1867 having served 12 years as curate and 32 as rector. All Browne's successors were resident. In 1868 James Coling, who had bought the advowson in 1857, was instituted as rector on his own presentation.¹⁸ Soon after his arrival in the parish the church was restored and a National school was built on glebe land north of the church and it is likely that Coling

commissioned the two-storey extension on the south-east corner of the house. The extension, which may have necessitated the change to the roof, and the surviving yellow brick coach house were completed by 1873.¹⁹ The foundations are red brick mixed with lime mortar, unlike the foundations of the main house.

The eastern single-storey range on the north side of the house has a low, slated roof. As it is contiguous with the frontage of the house it is most likely to be of yellow stock bricks. The western range, of red brick, may have been 'the small cottage contiguous and bricked and tiled' listed in the terrier of 1818. Part of it, demolished in the 1950s, contained a descending brick stair and a cavity at its foot had been filled in.²⁰ There remains a small brick extension with a gabled, tiled roof. In the 1960s the house had a circular carriage sweep, a lawn on the south side and a neglected pear orchard adjoining the southern paddock on its west side. There was a greenhouse and kitchen garden on the north-west side.²¹

Repton's view and plan of Brentry House show a remarkable similarity to the rectory house in Stow Maries. The siting of the rectory house, which faces east, and the arrangement of its

The Rectory House, Stow Maries

principal rooms and offices conforms to the principles stated by Repton in *Theory and Practice*.²² The materials of the two houses are different; Brentry House was built of the local Bath stone and the tympanums of the windows are of fluted stone; the rectory house, for lack of local stone, was of stock brick. It is not known when the brick was painted. The use of yellow stocks for the coach house suggests that the main house was still unpainted brick in the 1870s. The original roof was the same as that of Brentry. The interior arrangement was similar and the range of buildings on the north side of the rectory would have comprised a kitchen court like that on the plan of Brentry. Such landscaping as can be seen in the perspective is similar to that of the rectory house.

If the resemblance of the rectory house to Brentry House is accepted as being due to more than coincidence, an explanation for it should be sought. The Storie family and Thomas Daniel derived their wealth from sugar plantations in the West Indies and James Chalmers was an active planter in the West Indies and in America. They may have been acquainted through the Bristol trade and Daniel may have known Chalmers as the author of *Plain Truth*, a vigorous attack on Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, which advocated American independence. Chalmers produced a second edition of his attack on Paine in August 1796.²³ There is, however, no evidence in the surviving letters of Chalmers and his family of an association with William Payne or his partners that might explain the apparent duplication of Repton's design.

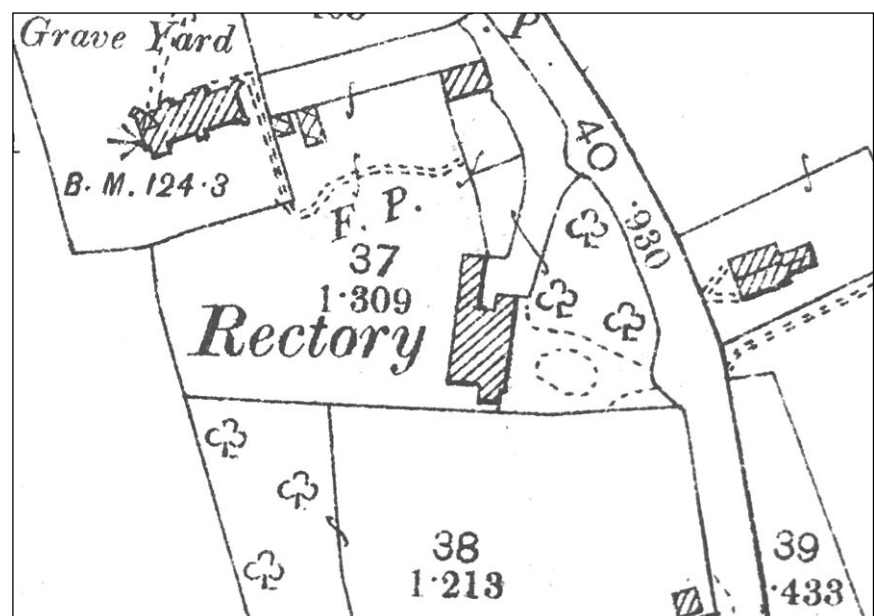
An acquaintance who may have suggested that Repton be asked to design Storie's new rectory house was Sir William Smyth who had employed Repton at Hill Hall, Theydon Mount, Essex, in 1791.²⁴ The Stories' family home was in Camberwell, Surrey, where the Smyth family were landowners and patrons of St. Giles's church.²⁵

The association of the two families was evident in 1823 when John George Storie, rector of Stow Maries, and Edward Smyth, vicar of Camberwell exchanged their livings.²⁶

At the time of Storie's marriage to Chalmers's daughter, a house with Repton connections was being built for General the Hon. Frederick St. John not far from the family homes of Storie in Camberwell and Chalmers in Chelsea, and it may have attracted Storie's attention when he had a similar venture in mind. In 1795 St. John commissioned John Nash to build a small villa on a site by the Thames between Richmond and Kingston. Nash consulted Repton on the siting of the house and a Red Book was produced in March 1796. The illustration of the house, known as Point Pleasant, in Peacock's *Polite Repository* of 1797 shows a square house, its façade of three bays having a central portico and tripartite windows with semi-circular tympanums. It had an open-fronted corner room with a balcony over. The house was burnt down in 1907.²⁷ John Adey Repton was working for John Nash when Point Pleasant was built and he may have contributed more to the design of the house than was acknowl-

edged. At the time Humphry referred to the house as 'a new and unexampled plan of my ingenious friend'.²⁸ In 1802, however, after his rift with Nash, he wrote in *Theory and Practice*, acknowledging the assistance of his son in the architectural department at Brentry, 'His name has hitherto been little known as an architect because it was suppressed in many works begun in that of another person, to whom I freely, unreservedly and confidentially gave my advice and assistance, while my son aided, with his architectural knowledge and his pencil, to form plans and designs, from which we have derived neither fame nor profit.'²⁹ John Adey's partnership with his father was publicly announced in April 1800, but by 1799 he had moved out of Nash's office, perhaps a sign of growing independence or dissatisfaction with the terms of his employment. It is said that by that time 'Nash had become too flashy an architect to produce much in the restrained Neo-classical style of his earliest work', a style that Humphry Repton recommended for smaller country houses.³⁰

If Storie had shown an interest in the building of Point Pleasant in connection with his own project, he is likely to have



Map 1. Extract from 2nd ed 25 inch OS map, LXII-5, 1896, showing Stow Maries rectory house in Church Lane. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office).

The Rectory House, Stow Maries

met John Adey Repton. The building of the rectory c.1799 coincides with Repton's move from Nash's office, and the financial uncertainty caused by the French wars would have made attractive the prospect of a commission from a rich young man for a small villa in Humphry Repton's home county. In the period between Payne's purchase of the field 1797 and the completion of Brentry House in 1802, the plans may have been used for Storie's rectory house, which was built c.1799 and completed by 1800. The plans exhibited in 1802 by John Adey, and the perspective and plan published by Repton in *Theory and Practice* in 1803 are of Brentry House. Although that 'mansion house' resembled the rectory house, the use of stone in its construction, its location, near to Blaise Castle, its extensive landscaped grounds, outbuildings and picturesque views provided a prestigious example for exhibition and publication.³¹

This attempt to explain the tantalizing resemblance of Brentry House and Stow Maries rectory house is based on circumstantial evidence and conjecture and does not solve the mystery. It is, however, justified by the following observation: 'In spite of the wealth of information on Repton, there remain large areas of uncertainty... For many sites, probability replaces firm evidence of Repton's involvement.'³²

References

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9. ERO, D/ABR 18/62A, Clarke's will; GL, MSS. 9550, 9556, 9557, Bishop of London's registers.
10. Saunders family papers.
11. ERO, D/AEM 2/6, return of money spent on Glebe Houses and offices since 1750.
12. Saunders family papers.
13. Information from Mr John Cambridge, who was employed in underpinning the house.
14. The original roof timbers were seen by Mr A.C. Edwards and the present author in July 1979.
15. ERO, D/P 391/3, Stow Maries St Mary and St Margaret, terrier of parsonage house and glebe lands
16. ERO, D/CT 338B, tithe map.
17. Information from Miss Mabel Bardwell and Mrs Joan Parks, local residents; Carpenter, p.10.
18. Memorial plaque in church; ERO, D/CP 17/42, diocesan deeds; clergy list in church.
19. ERO, D/P 391/5/2, churchwardens' accounts; The National Archives, ED 21/5375, school file; map, 1st ed. 6 inch OS, LXII,

1881, surveyed 1873.

20. ERO, D/P 391/3; information from Mr John Cambridge, who was employed in underpinning the extension and demolishing the western range.
21. Author's knowledge.
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23. Carpenter, p.5; Saunders family papers; M.C. New, *Maryland Loyalists in the American Revolution*, (Centreville, Maryland, 1996), pp.18-27.
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26. GL, MS.9532 A/2, ff.194, 226, 229, Bishop of London's register.
27. Carter *et al*, pp.52, 73, 162; M. Mansbridge, *John Nash*, (Oxford, 1991), p.69.
28. Carter *et al*, pp.73, 129.
29. Stroud, p.112; Repton, p.186.
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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mr Ian Chalmers for lending me his copy of the microfiche of the Saunders family papers and his notes on the Chalmers and Storie families; to Mrs Norma Knight for alerting me to changes at Brentry House; and to Dr James Bettley for his interest and encouragement.

The Author

Beryl Board was recruited to the staff of the Victoria County History of Essex by W.R. Powell in 1969. She contributed to four volumes of the *History* and the *Essex Bibliography Supplement* and became senior assistant editor. After retiring in 1992 she edited the second supplement of the *Essex Bibliography* and wrote two papers in *Essex Archaeology and History*. She indexed *The Battle of Maldon Fiction and Fact*, Harvey Benham's *Essex Gold* and John Hunter's *The Essex Landscape*.

The Old Post Office, Howe Street:

the story of a house - and a lot more!¹

by

David Williams

Recent years have seen a huge upsurge in interest in family history, created by TV programmes such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* and the wide availability of information on the internet. House history has not yet become quite as popular, and this article will try to demonstrate that researching the history of a house can be equally absorbing.

How old?

Like many people, I started by simply trying to find out how old my house was. I bought the property, now known as The Old Post Office, Howe Street (Plate 1), a hamlet in the parish of Great Waltham, in 1988. It stands on a large, roughly triangular plot, with roads on all three sides and its attractions included the timber frame which was partly visible inside, the pargeted exterior, the large cellar with a well and the general air of indeterminate antiquity that lingered around the property. The estate agents had claimed that the property was 'in parts' 200 years old. Once I had semi-retired in 2002 I decided to put this to the test having recently taken a first step in this area by researching the history of my late parents' house. But that was a very different kind of property, on a town estate developed from the late 1880s. Because all the houses were connected from the start to mains drainage and the town gas supply, the applications by the developer to make these connections were still held by the local record office and so were the plans, which even had the mayor's signature of approval on them. I was able to establish to within a few weeks when the property was first occupied.

It was a very different story with my rural property. If it was indeed 200 years old, there would be no way of proving that from local authority records, and no point in looking for evidence

of connections to non-existent mains services. Here I had some invaluable help from a very experienced local historian and neighbour, Alan Maddock, who had just completed his exhaustive analysis of house occupancy in Howe Street in Queen Victoria's reign, *Victorian Hamlet*.² By studying the Great Waltham Tithe Award map of 1840,³ and then the 1875 and 1895 Ordnance Survey 25-inch maps of the parish,⁴ Alan had blown a large hole in the estate agents' claims for a construction date in the 1780s. Quite simply, in 1839 and 1875, there was nothing, except a field, on the map where our property should have been; but in 1895, there appeared a house of approximately the right shape, in the right position, and labeled the Post Office. The property had included a small shop and sub-post office when we acquired it (we later turned this area into living accommodation), and local people had told us that the post office had been there for many years. So without doing any real research at all, I had to face the likelihood that my house was about 100 years younger than the estate agents' fantasies, and must

have been built sometime between 1875 and 1896.

Alan's work had also provided a lead to the next vital piece of evidence: a legal 'abstract of title', of 1920, for the plot on which my house was built.⁵ From this I was able to discover that most of the triangular site my house was to be built on had been sold by John Hasler, farmer, to George Milbank. It went on to record what Milbank had subsequently built on the site: eight cottages, and a 'dwellinghouse boot maker's shop and buildings' in the occupation of Mr Gowers. And it referred to the triangular plot as 'Coleman Quarter otherwise Legores or Legus field.' Those names were to echo through my researches until they reached the early sixteenth century. The name Gowers reminded me that in my own conveyance, in 1988, the earliest transaction recorded had been a sale in 1914 by George Milbank to William Gowers. This sent me off to look at local directories for the 1890s,⁶ from which I learned that George Milbank was a builder and William Gowers was listed first as a boot maker and then, by the end of that decade, as a sub-postmaster as well.⁷



Plate 1. The Old Post Office, Howe Street, as it looks today.
(Author's collection).

The Old Post Office, Howe Street

Could I use this information to pinpoint when the property was built? The sale of the plot from Hasler to Milbank had taken place in February 1884, and the abstract recorded that the property occupied by Gowers had already been built by then. That took me to the Great Waltham rating records. Rating at that period was administered by the parochial officers and the money raised supported provision for the poor and sick. The officers who kept the records were local men and did not need to record the extensive detail about properties that an external bureaucrat would require. Thus, apart from the largest properties and farms with distinctive names, most of the rated properties were not identified by name, and were simply grouped in long lists under their respective landlords.

By comparing successive rating lists—which were produced and updated in April and October each year I was able to identify with reasonable certainty when the new house occupied by William Gowers made its first appearance: in April 1883.⁸ That date fitted with the range of dates implied by the OS maps (between 1875 and 1895) and the legal abstract (before February 1884), and indicated that the construction was completed some time between October 1882 and April 1883. So the estate agents' 'blurb' was inaccurate by the small matter of almost a century. I could have drawn a line under the matter there, but I had already discovered enough to excite my curiosity. John Hasler, George Milbank, William Gowers: who were they, and what sort of lives did they lead apart from their connections with my property? Who had owned the triangular plot before Hasler, and what could I find out about them? This much wider study was to absorb me for the next two years, and involved a wide range of sources, which I will summarise working backwards in time.

Censuses, parish registers, estate records, occupational records and local reminiscences

William Gowers, the first occupier (as a tenant until 1914 and as owner until about 1930) came from a family whose roots had been deeply embedded in the parish since the start of the nineteenth century at least, and probably much earlier. The Great Waltham parish registers are densely packed with Gowers baptisms, marriages and burials.⁹ This William was born in the parish in 1847, the son of John Gowers, shoemaker, and his wife Lydia, nee Boreham. Census returns from 1851 gave Lydia's birthplace as Wepstead in Suffolk.¹⁰ What had brought her to Essex? The domestic account books of the Tufnell family of Langleys, the 'squires' of the parish since the 1730s, showed that Lydia had been employed at Langleys as a laundry maid since 1829, earning 14 guineas a year: the accounts show her signing for her wages until she left in 1839, soon after her marriage.¹¹ The 1881 census returns suggest that when William was married, in 1873, to Emma Brown, they lived at Minnow End, on the road between Great Waltham and Chelmsford and close to the eastern gates of the Langleys estate, where Emma's father, Thomas, was a coachman.¹² By 1882–83 when they seem to have moved to their newly-built house in Howe Street, they already had four children and three more followed after the move. As well as making and repairing boots and shoes, William became a gentlemen's outfitter and later a sub-postmaster as well.¹³

Records at the British Postal Museum and Archive in London established that he was appointed early in 1893 at a salary of £7, and that by the end of 1893 the postal service at Howe Street had 'improved', as well as providing much more information about the conditions and regulations within which William worked.¹⁴ His brother-in-law, Arthur Brown,

was already sub-postmaster in Great Waltham village and may have suggested this new step; I was able to speak to Arthur's grandson, Charles, who recalled how there were so many people called Gowers in the parish that their letters were sometimes mixed up by the postmen.¹⁵ William died in 1936, aged 88, but still has distant relatives in the parish, several of whom helped me with my research. By tracing his children's careers forward through the civil registration system I was lucky enough to find one of his grandsons, Bernard Beard, then living in Buckinghamshire, who remembered visiting my house as a boy with his mother, William's third daughter Florence.¹⁶ Florence and her two youngest sisters, Grace and Daisy, became elementary school teachers, and I was able to trace parts of their careers through the school managers' minutes and teachers' log books of their early schools at Great Waltham and Writtle.¹⁷ When William, now widowed, left Howe Street on retirement round about 1930, he went to live with Grace and Daisy, who had now taken jobs at Hoddesdon in Hertfordshire.

My property then remained in the Gowers family for over 30 years after William's death, and from the late 1930s to the mid-1960s it was let to the Stephens family who ran it as a general store. Eric and George Stephens, whose parents ran the business, still lived in the village and gave me enormous help in reconstructing how the interior of the house looked in those days, before it was extended by my immediate predecessors in the 1970s. They were also generous in their recollections of village life in their childhood, which was probably much more like that of the era of William Gowers than it is today: almost all the menfolk worked in the parish, whereas today almost nobody does, and an extensive network of relations provided help and social support in time of need.

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Rating records, village records and the 1910 Finance Act

George Milbank, born in 1848, succeeded to a building business previously run by his father, Joseph, in the 1860s. According to the census returns Joseph, like his son, was born in Great Waltham but his ancestry is obscure; I was able to trace the family forward to the present day when George's great grandson, John, has built a very substantial business on the foundations laid by Joseph and George, and the belief in the family is that Joseph and his ancestors had been building in and around the parish since the mid-eighteenth century. In any event, the rating records showed that George soon acquired a number of rented properties as well as the triangular site known as the Legus field on which my property was built. The school managers' records showed that his firm did much building work on the schools at Ford End and Great Waltham,¹⁸ and the parish magazines from the 1890s record how he was responsible for building the Hulton Hall (now the village hall) and the church almshouses as well as general restoration work in the church.¹⁹

From the papers of the Inland Revenue's valuers in connection with the Finance Act of 1910, which introduced a short-lived property tax, I established that William Gowers had purchased the property in 1914 from Milbank as a sitting tenant.²⁰ The valuers described my property as built by Milbank and his men: 'Timber, brick nogged [infilled], rough cast and slated house & shop in good condition'. They valued it at £351, though Gowers was able to buy it for only £300. This survey also provided an invaluable snapshot of the other properties in the parish and is of enormous importance to house historians (Plate 2 & Map 1).

George's great grandson had told me that George and his sons had been stalwarts of Great Waltham Cricket Club. That led me to the excellent collection of photographs and scorebooks in

1911		226	
Reference No.		Map No. X.111.4. A	
Situation <i>Howe Street, Gt. Waltham</i>			
Description <i>House, garden, & garden</i>			
Extent <i>1/2 10/10</i>			
Gross Value	{ Land £	Rateable Value	{ Land £
	{ Buildings £ 13		{ Buildings £ 11
Gross Annual Value, Schedule A, £			
Occupier <i>W. Gowers</i>			
Owner <i>G. Milbank Gt. Waltham</i>			
Interest of Owner <i>Freehold</i>			
Superior interests			
Subordinate interests			
Occupier's tenancy, Term <i>Year</i> from			
How determinable			
Actual (or Estimated) Rent, £ 15			
Any other Consideration paid			
Outgoings—Land Tax, £			
Tithe, £			
Other Outgoings			
Who pays (a) Rates and Taxes (b) Insurance (c) Occupier			
Who is liable for repairs (d) Owner			
Fixed Charges, Easements, Common Rights and Restrictions			
Former Sales. Dates <i>V. 4156 3.2.14 7.3.00</i>			
Interest			
Consideration			
Subsequent Expenditure			
Owner's Estimate. Gross Value			
Full Site Value			
Total Value			
Assessable Site Value			
Site Value Deductions claimed			
Roads and Sewers. Dates of Expenditure			
Amounts			

Reference No.	
Particulars, description, and notes made on inspection	
<i>Left Timber, brick nogged, rough cast, slated house & shop in good condition, contains 4 beds, shop, workshop, sitting rooms, cellar. Timber & iron shed (benches). Timber slated stable, catched & concrete. Brick slated wash-house & W.C. Pump in yard. Good sized garden.</i>	
Charges, Easements and Restrictions affecting market value of Fee Simple	
Valuation.—Market Value of Fee Simple in possession of whole property in its present condition	
<i>Rep e</i>	<i>North Rut 20</i>
<i>4/6</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>24</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>24</i>	<i>350</i>
Deduct Market Value of Site under similar circumstances, but if divested of structures, timber, fruit trees, and other things growing on the land	
<i>R. 10/6 @ 8/100</i>	<i>20</i>
Difference Balance, being portion of market value attributable to structures, timber, &c.	
<i>330</i>	<i>330</i>
Divided as follows:—	
Buildings and Structures	£ 328
Machinery	£
Timber	£
Fruit Trees	£ 2
Other things growing on land	£
Market Value of Fee Simple of Whole in its present condition (as before)	
<i>350</i>	<i>350</i>
Add for Additional Value represented by any of the following for which any deduction may have been made when arriving at Market Value:—	
Charges (excluding Land Tax)	<i>2. 9. 4</i>
Restrictions	<i>1</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
GROSS VALUE...£	
<i>351</i>	<i>351</i>

Plate 2. The 1910 Finance Act Field Book entries for the Post Office. (Reproduced by courtesy of The National Archives, I/R 58/20452).

the custody of the club today.²¹ Arthur and Christopher, two of George's sons who succeeded him in the business when he died in 1920, both did stints as captain and Arthur was said to have scored 65 for the club on his 65th birthday! The club's accounts showed that George provided horse-drawn transport to away fixtures at places such as Pleshey, Writtle and Felsted, where in 1891 Great Waltham bowled the home side out for just six runs.²² So from varied sources a picture emerged of a family heavily involved in their community at work and play, as they continued to be until the building business moved to Earl's Colne in 1985.

Work done by other researchers

John Hasler, the farmer who sold the triangular plot to George Milbank in 1884, having acquired it in 1876 from John Copland, was, like William Gowers, a member of a huge family, but through the *Essex Society for Family History* I was able to contact other family members who had done some work on the Hasler family tree. From this and my own work on parish registers

I established that John was born in Great Waltham around 1822, the son of Thomas Hasler who farmed at Appletrees, near the junction of the Dunmow and Felsted roads. John succeeded his father there and later also acquired the tenancy of a larger farm, Baileys, at Chatham Green. It was while he was there that he also acquired 'my' site: presumably he either farmed it himself or let it to another farmer, because from here backwards in time the triangular site was simply farmland, probably arable. Hasler later moved to farm at Willingale Spain before retiring to Broomfield, where he died in 1910.

Business records, printed sources and chapel records

The earliest transaction recorded on the abstract mentioned earlier was a sale of the triangular 'Legus field' site to John Hasler by John Copland, a lawyer of Chelmsford. Copland was by far the easiest previous owner to research, because in his day he must have been one of the wealthiest and most influential men in the town.²³ John was born in Chelmsford in 1802, the eldest

The Old Post Office, Howe Street

son of John Copland senior, a solicitor who had set up in practice in Crane Court (off the High Street, approximately where the NatWest Bank building stands today) three years earlier. By the 1820s John senior had taken John junior and his brother Edward into partnership: all three were heavily involved in the promotion of the *Chelmsford Company*, which developed the former Mildmay estate in the 1840s, including the New London Road area. The firm also dealt with the Eastern Counties Railway Company's purchases of land for its new line from London to Norwich. These activities made the family fortune and when the younger John took over the firm on his father's death in 1845, he soon moved into the imposing house, Thornwoods, which still stands in New London Road. A triangular plot of somewhat less than four acres in Howe Street must have been a very small part of John Copland's property interests. He had acquired it in 1853 and presumably let it throughout his ownership of it; John Hasler, to whom he sold it, seems to have been one of his clients.

Manorial rolls, landowners' records and bankruptcy papers

When John Copland acquired 'my' site it was part of the copyhold lands of the Manor of Walthambury. From here backwards my primary sources were the extensive Court Books and Rolls of this Manor.²⁴ The Court records often allowed me to jump back a generation at a time, since when a son succeeded to his father's holdings the clerks usually repeated the details and dates of the father's own 'admission' many years before. John Copland's acquisition was from Samuel Adams, a miller and farmer who was the third member of his family to hold the plot. Like his father, Samuel senior, and grandfather, Timothy, he lived at Howe Street Mill on the Chelmer, but seems to have incurred very substantial debts in the 1830s and 1840s.

Chasing the story of his finances led me to the records of Guy's Hospital, who were his landlords for much of his land; these told a sorry tale of rent arrears, bad harvests and compromises with creditors. It was one

of these that forced Adams to sell the Legus field to Copland in 1853: the sale moneys went straight to those who had advanced a mortgage on the land. Samuel senior (who died in 1833) had acquired the freehold of the Mill from Guy's in a land swap in 1817; looking at the Hospital's financial records in the London Metropolitan Archives, and the reports of their local agent at the Essex Record Office, gave a fascinating insight into the agricultural conditions of the first half of the nineteenth century. They led me to the record of Samuel's eventual bankruptcy in 1863, at The National Archives. I was even able to find Samuel's name in the local paper's report of an impassioned meeting of farmers at Chelmsford in 1845, protesting against the proposed repeal of the Corn Laws which they saw as the ruin of all of them.

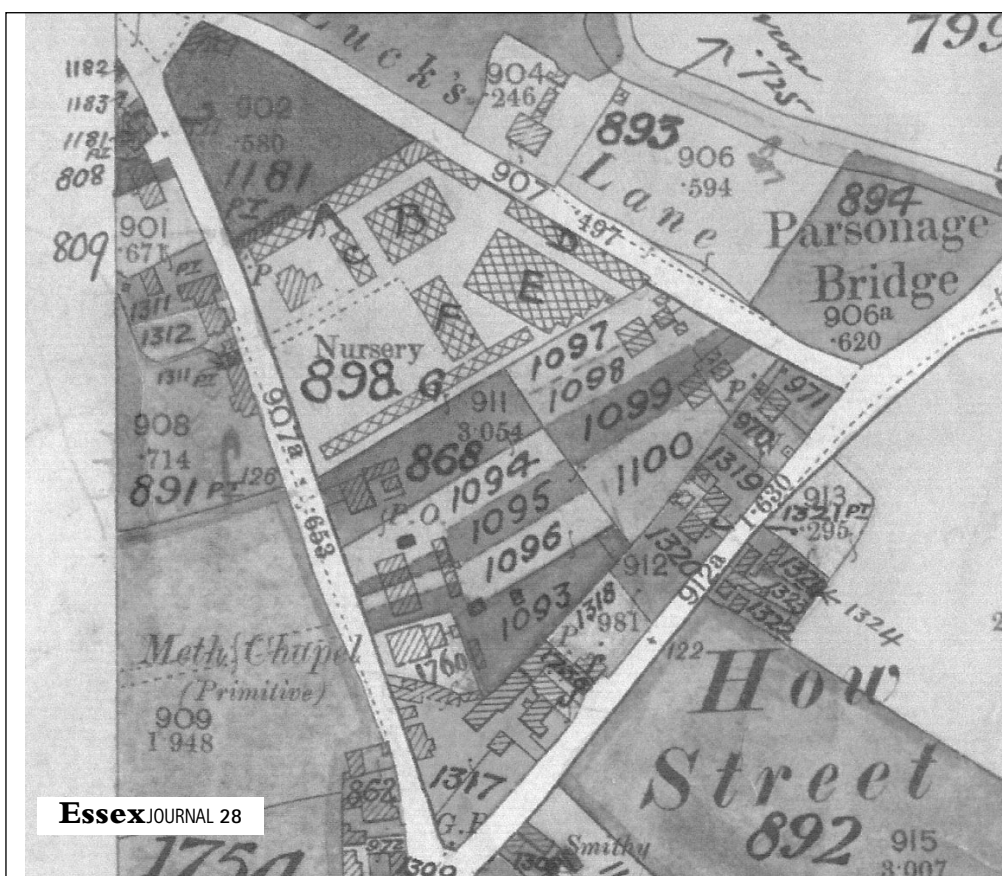
Wills and manorial surveys

Returning to the manorial records, they showed that it was Timothy Adams who acquired the Legus field in 1778 from the Tufnells of Langleys. Samuel Tufnell, the builder of the modern Langleys, acquired it in 1731 from Joseph Whaples, the third in a line of landowners who also held Fitzandrews Farm, still functioning in Howe Street today. Before the Whaples owners came over a century of ownership by yet another vast local family, the Sorrells, which took me back to 1604 and the death of a widow called Olive Grygges. She had previously been married to Thomas Grygges, before that to William Sorrell and before that to John Everard, a tangle which was only straightened out by studying Thomas's Will.²⁵ She left the property to Thomas Sorrell, her son by her second marriage. Many of these owners figured in successive surveys of the Manor, giving snapshots of the landowners and tenants and sometimes allowing me to trace the names of fields and farms still in use today. The earliest to

Map. 1. The 1910 Finance Act Survey map of the Legus Field.

Plot number 868 is the Post Office, marked 'PO'.

(Reproduced by courtesy of The National Archives, IR 127/3/38).



The Old Post Office, Howe Street

survive, from 1563, shows Thomas Grygges holding the Legus land by virtue of his wife Olive. Before Olive and Thomas the picture becomes much harder to discern clearly because of gaps in the manorial record. However, the repeated use of the names Colmans and Legus (or variants) enabled me to be reasonably sure that I was looking at the right areas. Finally, I came to the following business recorded on the 14th February 1519:

'To this Court comes John Leugore of Broomfield son and heir of John Leugore of Waltham ploughwright and seeks to be admitted to one tenement with a garden lying in Howstrete....called Colmans and to one quarter of land called Colmans quarter.'²⁶

The use of the general name 'Colmans quarter' for the area where the triangular plot was situated, and the later use of the more specific 'Legus' or variants such as 'Legores' or 'Lewgors', repeated again and again down to the legal abstract of the 1920s, gave me some confidence that I had reached the end of the search for the family who gave this plot of land its name, although definitive proof would be impossible.

Along the way I had encountered a fascinating collection of owners and tenants, often learning more about their lives than the mere facts of their ownership. A scan of the Great Waltham Parish Overseers' accounts for the 1820s, to see if William Gowers's parents had received relief, led to the discovery that his father was charged with manslaughter (but later acquitted) after a Christmas Eve fracas outside the village pub. A review of the parish registers in search of the earliest Adams entries also revealed that in the 1720s Joseph Whaples fathered no less than four illegitimate children, possibly with four different mothers. The Will of Thomas Grygges (1576) showed that he not only endowed a schoolmaster to teach the children of the

village, but also, intriguingly, left the then enormous sum of £20 to a teenage servant girl. I can certainly recommend this kind of study to anyone with a touch of curiosity about the past and a generous helping of persistence.

References

1. My detailed research is set out in *Four Acres More or Less-the Story of the Old Post Office, Howe Street, Great Waltham, Essex*, published in 2007, in which source references to the above conclusions can be found. A copy is held at the ERO and further copies can be obtained from the author at: The Old Post Office, Howe Street, Great Waltham, Chelmsford, CM3 1BG, price £5.
2. A. Maddock, *Victorian Hamlet: Howe Street in Great Waltham, 1837-1901*, (Gt. Waltham, 2004).
3. Essex Record Office (ERO), D/CT 379B, Great Waltham Tithe Map, 1840.
4. ERO, 1st & 2nd Ed 25" OS Maps, sheet no. 43-4.
5. Abstract of title, 1920, in private hands. These extremely useful documents summarise the conveyancing history of a property down to the date of the transaction for which they were drafted. A neighbour whose house was also built on the same plot had inherited the abstract from a previous owner and kindly made it available. Many properties were carved out of larger plots when first built, raising the possibility that your neighbours may have some evidence of previous ownerships and construction dates which you lack.
6. e.g. *Kelly's Directory of Essex*, (London, 1894), pp.360-361.
7. *Kelly's Directory of Essex*, (London 1898), p.391.
8. ERO, D/P 121/11/10, Great Waltham St Mary & St Lawrence, Overseers Rates, 1882-85.
9. ERO, D/P 121/1/, various registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials.
10. The National Archives (TNA), HO 107/1776, p.25, 1851.
11. ERO, D/DTu 301, servants' wages paid at Langleys, 1825-41.
12. TNA, RG 11/1765, p.9, 1881.
13. *Kelly's Directory of Essex*, (London, 1902), p.429-430.
14. British Postal Museum & Archive, POST 68 & 92.
15. Conversation with Charles Brown, 12/03/07.
16. One of the greatest pleasures of my research was to entertain Bernard and his wife Joan to lunch in his grandfather's old house; sadly, they have both died since my work was completed, but through Bernard I could hear echoes of the old man's voice and character that would otherwise have been lost.
17. ERO, E/MM 129/1, managers' minutes: Great Waltham Church of England Primary School, 1875-1902; E/B 22/1, managers' minutes, Writtle School Board, 1888-1913.
18. ERO, E/MM 129/1.
19. Great Waltham Parish Magazine, 1912. Copy in ERO Library, PB/W4.
20. TNA, IR 58/20452, f.226, Board of Inland Revenue: Valuation Office: Field Books, Broomfield (Gt. Waltham) Assessment No. 801-900 & IR 127/3/38, map, both 1910.
21. Great Waltham Cricket Club (GWCC), scorebooks & photographs in possession of the club secretary.
22. GWCC, account book in possession of the club secretary.
23. Many of his family papers and a vast collection of his law firm's outgoing letters have been preserved, and there are abundant references to him in Hilda Grieve's history of Chelmsford, *The Sleepers and the Shadows*, vol. II, (Chelmsford, 1994).
24. See ERO, various D/DTu, manor of Great Waltham alias Walthambury court rolls.
25. ERO, D/AER 13/180, will of Thomas Grygges, yeoman, 1576.
26. ERO, D/Dhh/M151, f.40, court roll, manor of Great Waltham alias Waltham Bury, 1509-1546.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the assistance given to me by Mr Alan Maddock, Mr and Mrs Ron and Ann Bedford, Mr Philip Burton of Great Waltham Cricket Club, the late Mr Eric Stephens, the late Mr Bernard Beard, and the immensely helpful staff of the Essex Record Office without whom my study would have been impossible.

The Author

David Williams is a recently retired taxation adviser who researches a variety of local historical topics.

Nancy Raymonde Edwards (née Briggs), M.A., F.S.A. (1929-2009)

The tragic death of Nancy Briggs has deprived the county of an outstanding scholar and a keen supporter of the *Essex Journal*.

Nancy was born on 1st June 1929 at Winchester, the only child of Major-General Raymond Briggs, C.B., D.S.O. of Liverpool and Helen Kenworthy of New Orleans. She read history at St Anne's College, Oxford and, following training as an archivist at the Bodleian Library, came to Essex in 1953 as Assistant Supervisor at the Essex Record Office (ERO). Here she joined the staff of the redoubtable Dr F.G. Emmison (County Archivist 1938-69). Emmison crafted a formidable team that propelled the ERO to an unrivalled position. One prominent member of staff was the late Hilda Grieve with whom Nancy enjoyed an excellent relationship and whom she succeeded as Senior Assistant Archivist and Supervisor of the Search Room in 1967 upon the appointment of the former as the Deputy Editor of the Essex Victoria County History. Many exciting initiatives were introduced during this evolutionary post-war period – pre-eminent was the pioneering work of Arthur Charles 'Gus' Edwards who had joined the education staff at Chelmsford in 1949. Gus organised a series of highly successful exhibitions at Ingatestone Hall over a 15 year period which literally enthused and inspired thousands of visitors. An integral part of these annual exhibitions were the accompanying booklets which became best-sellers. Nancy was responsible for two such publications – *Leisure and Pleasure in Essex* and *Georgian Essex* which appeared in 1960 and 1963 respectively. Nancy increasingly collaborated with Gus and in the process formed a very close relationship which culminated in the surprise announcement of their engagement following the death in 1975 of his first wife, Dorothy. The marriage, which followed in 1978, formally brought together two much loved and widely known personalities. A substantial and unexpected legacy facilitated Nancy's premature retirement from the ERO in 1987 and the opportunity to fully share the last few years of Gus's life until his peaceful passing in 1992 at the age of 86 (*Essex Journal*, 27, II, (1992), p.34).

In addition to Gus Edwards, the most inspirational person in Nancy's life was the late Sir Howard Colvin, the renowned British architectural historian. It was Colvin who contributed the foreword and provided valuable support which enabled Nancy to publish the definitive biography of the Georgian architect John Johnson (1732-1814), under the aegis of the ERO. Johnson was commissioned by private owners to build country houses such as Terling Place, Hatfield Place and, Nancy's favourite Essex building, Bradwell Lodge. As County Surveyor of Essex he was commissioned to design and build Chelmsford's new Shire Hall. Nancy's book was published in 1991 to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the first public assembly held in the new Shire Hall in October 1791. Colvin, until his death in December 2007, provided significant encouragement in the preparation of her *magnum opus* – an erudite work on the country houses of Essex to be published by Phillimore as part of their English Country Houses Series. Nancy had devoted many years to painstakingly researching the major and minor houses and gardens

of Essex with completion to have coincided with her 80th birthday in June of this year.

Nancy was a committed member of the Editorial Committee of the Essex Victoria County History from 1978 until its demise in 2000. During her association she contributed an account of the now demolished Belhus mansion, the home of the Barrett-Lennard family at Aveley, to the architectural section of volume VIII which was published in 1986. She remained a staunch supporter of the V.C.H. Appeal Fund until her untimely death.

The work and activities of the Historical Association also claimed her attentions, especially at the local level where from 1998 to 2004 she served as Chairman of the Essex Branch. Nancy was a long standing member of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History having served for numerous periods on their Council. She remained a prominent member of both the Library and Programme Committees where her knowledge proved invaluable.

Other societies and organisations with which Nancy was associated included the Essex Gardens Trust, Friends of Essex Churches, Friends of Hylands House (Chelmsford), Friends of Valentines Mansion (Ilford), the Society of Architectural Historians and the Georgian Group.

Nancy derived a life-long interest and enjoyment from the study of monumental brasses. Whilst up at Oxford she was appointed to the Editorial Committee of the Brass-Rubbing Section of the Oxford University Archaeological Society. Nancy was subsequently introduced to the Monumental Brass Society which she joined in 1950. Regular contributions to the Society's *Transactions*, almost exclusively on topics related to Essex, soon brought her to prominence and election to the Executive Council. For her outstanding contribution to the Society she was rewarded with a Vice-Presidency in 1974 and election as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London the following year.

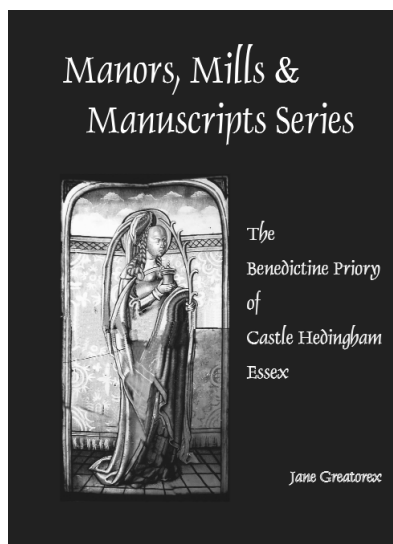
Nancy was also a keen supporter of the *Essex Journal* from its inception in 1966 contributing articles on 'Lord Dacre and Morant's History of Essex', (*Essex Journal*, 2, I, (1967), pp.6-12) and 'Braxted Lodge', (*Essex Journal*, 5, III, (1970), pp.97-102). As it ultimately transpired, it was exceedingly fortuitous that Nancy accepted the invitation from the present editor to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Lieutenant as an 'EJ 20 Questions?' respondent (*Essex Journal*, 43, II, (2008), p.67). Her typically incisive answers provided a unique insight. Nancy was a remarkable lady who was uncomplaining and courteous. She possessed a wonderful sense of humour and enjoyed being unpredictable on occasions. She always maintained and demanded the highest possible standards. However, to the uninitiated she could appear somewhat aloof and quite reserved to the point of being almost shy. Those who won her confidence were richly rewarded with a wonderfully lively personality. She fell victim to a road accident within a few hundred yards of her home in Chelmsford on Friday, 23rd January. On that fateful morning the country lost an eminent architectural historian, our beloved county of Essex lost an outstanding scholar and antiquary and we all lost a very dear friend.

H. Martin Stuchfield

Book Reviews

Jane Greatedorex, **The Benedictine Priory of Castle Hedingham Essex**, 2008, pp.84. ISBN 978-0-9518543-8-9, £12.99 plus p&tp.

Available from: hickorype@operamail.com and from Mr Charles Bird, Maplecroft Cottage, Sudbury Road, Castle Hedingham, Essex CO9 3AG.



This is the first known publication devoted to the Benedictine Priory at Castle Hedingham and therefore fills an important gap in our history. It is the ninth book in the author's *Manors, Mills and Manuscripts* series of publications. The Benedictine Priory was founded and endowed by Aubrey de Vere, 1st Earl of Oxford, in memory of Eupheme one of his three wives, in c.1194. The first known prioress was

Lucy possibly their daughter? She was followed by another 14 known prioresses, who, are detailed in this book. During the 340 odd years of its existence many members of the de Vere family were benefactors of the Priory. It was dissolved in 1536 and later became part of Nunnery Farm. It had always been a comparatively small foundation and the author describes the buildings, which probably stood there and the materials used in their construction. The book also contains references to Colne Priory at Earls Colne, where many of the de Vere family were buried and to Coggeshall Abbey and its mill, the subject of an earlier publication by this author.

The Priory was conveniently situated near the River Colne, which powered its nearby water mill. Unfortunately no trace of either remains but the appropriately named Nunnery Farm stands in the vicinity of the former Priory. Nunnery Farm remained in the ownership of successive owners of Hedingham Castle until it was sold off, with other properties, in 1896. This ancient site was therefore closely associated with the Castle and its owners for over 700 years. The author's particular knowledge of the working of water mills has helped her to interpret various maps, the course of the river, its channels and surviving features in the landscape. She has very helpfully recorded details of other properties amounting to 250 acres, particularly in the Hedinghams, which belonged to the Priory and provided it with income, as did the water mill.

Quite apart from Hedingham Castle, the author has also recorded other relevant information from the Saxon, Norman and Medieval periods. In particular Crouch Green, on the opposite side of the River Colne, from the Priory, has also been researched including the carved stone shaft, which once stood at this ancient meeting place and is now incorporated into the village war memorial.

This is an A4 size book, perfect bound, with a colour cover and good-sized print. For a book, which is largely

devoted to the Norman and Medieval period, it is well illustrated, containing about 50 illustrations. These are good, well selected and relevant to the text but a few illustrations are rather small. There is a very large and comprehensive bibliography and sources for further reading extending to five pages. In addition there are references to sources in the ERO, TNA, Lambeth Palace Library, The British Library and many other Libraries. There are some very helpful footnotes throughout the book, a detailed list of illustrations but no index.

However there is no doubt that the author has carried out extensive research in an enormous number of documents and publications. This has resulted in an important and valuable addition to the history of Castle Hedingham and the illustrious de Vere family. In this respect, the author's forthcoming title *John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford: Renaissance Earl* is eagerly awaited.

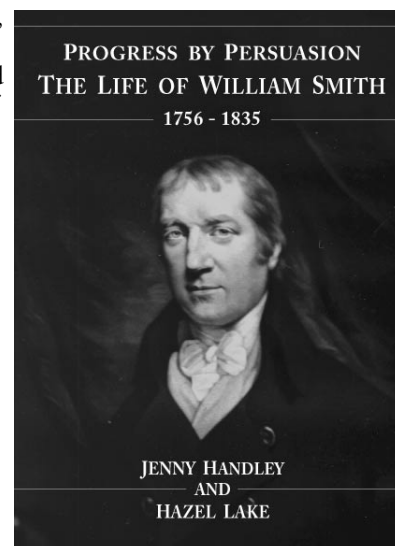
Adrian Corder-Birch

Jenny Handley & Hazel Lake, **Progress by Persuasion: the life of William Smith, 1756-1835**, 2007, pp.xi & 432. ISBN 978-0-9527599-1-1, £15.

During the course of 2007, numerous events and publications were organised to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807. Quite rightly, the name of William Wilberforce was everywhere lauded for the immense contribution that he made to the campaign to achieve this and the final abolition of slavery in British territories in 1833.

In the process, however, the names of other abolitionists received less than due credit for their input and some have been completely overlooked. In the case of the contribution from Essex, the part played by Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, who took over from Wilberforce, has been remembered, but that of William Smith of Parndon House, Parndon, appears to have been totally forgotten. In these circumstances, the appearance of a comprehensive biography by Jenny Handley and Hazel Lake, of Harlow, is greatly to be welcomed. The authors have made an exhaustive search of all conceivable sources of information and made use of a number of scattered and sometimes fragmentary diaries kept by family members which their labours have brought to light.

William Smith (1756-1835) was born into a well-connected non-conformist family whose wealth had been derived from a prosperous grocery business. Leaving this to be run by his cousins, he devoted himself to progressive political causes and served as a Member of Parliament, apart from interludes caused by electoral defeat, from 1784 until 1830. Despite the fact that his entry into the unreformed House of Commons necessitated recourse to bribery, he became a lifelong



Book Reviews

campaigner for moderate Parliamentary reform. He also worked consistently for the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts, which prevented most nonconformists holding public office, and for Catholic emancipation to remove all legislative restraints on Catholics. He, personally, was a Unitarian. In addition, William Smith dedicated himself to the cause of the abolition of slavery and played a key role, in association with Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson and others, in continuous campaigns from the 1790s to 1833, to achieve abolition.

Parndon House, Parndon, in what is today Harlow, was William Smith's country mansion. For much of the year it was home to his wife and 10 children as well as a place where he could entertain prominent personalities and plan his political work. William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, Thomas Malthus, Robert Owen, the poets S. T. Coleridge and Mrs. Anne Barbour, and author Sydney Smith, were among the guests who stayed with him – some on numerous occasions. Not only William Smith himself, but also numerous descendants or their spouses played prominent roles in British history. Florence Nightingale, of nursing fame, Barbara Bodichon, campaigner for women's rights and a founder of Girton College, Cambridge, the well-known Liberal family of Bonham Carter, and the poet Arthur Clough, were linked to the Smith family.

This book provides a wealth of information on Smith and his extensive progeny. To supplement the background, there are 11 family trees, over 20 pages of biographical notes on connected personalities, summaries of key contemporary events at home and abroad, and over 100 illustrations. This is a most valuable contribution to both Essex local and national political history. The authors are to be congratulated on a detailed study of an important if much neglected political reformer and his circle.

Stan Newens.

Eric Ravilious: The Story of High Street,
The Mainstone Press, 2008, pp.288.
ISBN 978-0-9552777-2-6, £160.

High Street was published in 1938 by Country Life Books. It was primarily a children's book about shops with the text being written by Jim Richards and the accompanying illustrations by Eric Ravilious. The 24 shops that

Ravilious chose were real – many were from London but several were from Castle and Sible Hedingham,

Halstead and the surrounding area.

Eric Ravilious, (1903-1942)

lived in Great Bardfield from

1932 to 1934, in Castle

Hedingham from 1934 to

1941 and in Shalford from

1941 to 1942. He served

in the Royal Observer

Corps at the Castle

Hedingham post from

September to December 1939.

In December 1939 he was offered a

position as an Official War Artist by the Admiralty and given the honorary rank of Captain. On 2nd September 1942 he went on an air-sea rescue mission near Iceland, which failed to return. He was reported as missing, presumed dead and his name is recorded on the Castle Hedingham War Memorial. There is an increasing interest in the paintings, woodcuts and designs of Ravilious and some of his work is exhibited at the Fry Art Gallery in Saffron Walden.

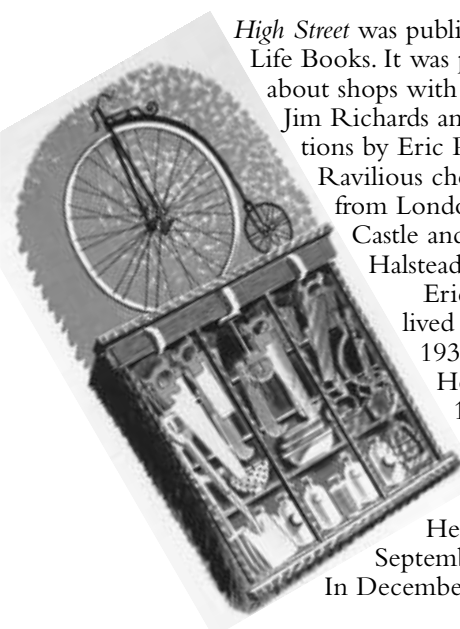
Over the last year or so research has discovered the true identity of some of the Essex shops illustrated in *High Street*. The family butcher's shop, named J. Hart, was actually Mark Newman's butchers shop in Swan Street, Sible Hedingham. The hardware shop was Bennett Smith's shop in Falcon Square, Castle Hedingham. The illustration shows a penny-farthing bicycle above the shop, which was not actually there. A preliminary drawing and some research reveals that a cycle shop owned by W.C. Green at 98 North Street, Sudbury had this bicycle above it and Ravilious added it to Bennett Smith's hardware shop. (The same as the white horse on the saddler's shop).

The saddler and harness maker was George Cox's shop in St. James Street, Castle Hedingham, which was opposite Bank House, where Ravilious lived and worked from 1934 to 1941. The name 'E. Smith' (no relation to Bennett Smith) is the name of the previous owner before George Cox took over the business. He was owner when Eric Ravilious did the painting but Cox traded under his predecessors name for whom he was previously employed. The illustration of the saddler's shop is interesting because it features a white horse above it. This white horse was not in Castle Hedingham but actually located on the White Horse Hotel in North Street, Sudbury. The

Castle Hedingham shop front and the Sudbury white horse were joined together to form one of many splendid illustrations in *High Street*.

Mainstone Press have produced a new limited edition of 750 copies of *High Street* which also includes two essays examining the making of the book as well as the quest to identify the 24 shops illustrated. It is printed on good quality paper and is a delight to read.

Adrian Corder-Birch



EJ 20 Questions? Stan Newens

Arthur Stanley Newens, BA, was born into a working class family in Bethnal Green in 1930, but moved to North Weald in 1939. Educated at state schools, University College London and Westminster Training College, he opposed the Korean War, and spent four years at the coalface in North Staffordshire, leading a strike of seven pits in 1955. Returning to Essex, he taught in Hackney but served as Labour MP for Epping (1964–70), for Harlow (1974–83); and as Labour Member of the European Parliament for London Central (1984–99). A Director then President of the London Co-operative Society, and Chairman then President of Liberation (formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom); President of the Essex Society for Archaeology & History (2005–2008), Chair of Harlow Civic Society, etc., he is a lecturer and author on Essex, East London and political subjects. He is married to Sandra, with five children and four grandchildren.

1. What is your favourite historical period?

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

2. Tell us what Essex means to you? Attractive green countryside stretching from sea-lapped beaches in the east to Epping Forest and the Stort Valley in the west, dotted with picturesque historic towns, villages and solitary buildings, embodying a rich heritage from centuries past.

3. What historical mystery would you most like to know? Closest to home, the male ancestry of my paternal great grandfather, born out of wedlock; but, on a broader plane, the origin of the Slavs.

4. My favourite history book is... E.P. Thompson – *The Making of the English Working Class*; Anthony Wagner – *Pedigree and Progress*.

5. What is your favourite place in Essex? Colchester.

6. How do you relax? Watching a good film, browsing in my library at home, or listening to Dixieland jazz.

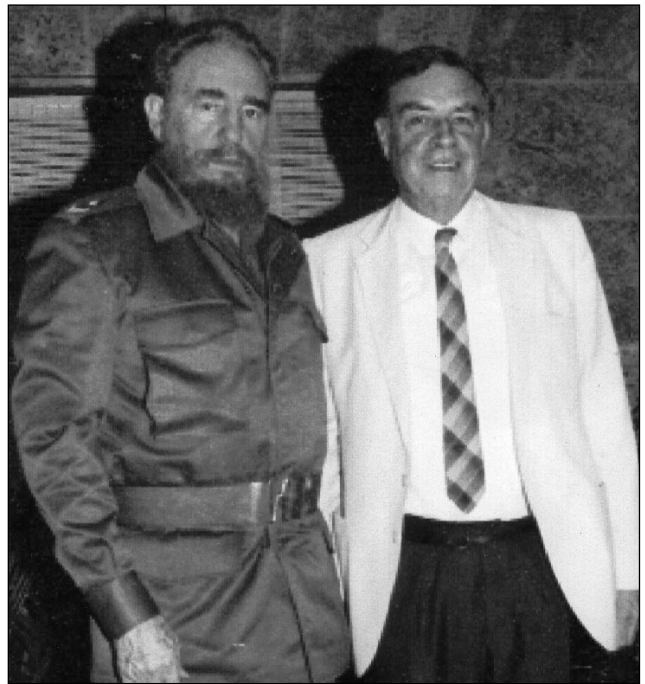
7. What are you researching at the moment? Amongst other things, the history of Harlow.

8. My earliest memory is... the sight of an airship over Bethnal Green. In the rush to see it, my head was banged on a wall, which fixed it in my memory!

9. What is your favourite song/piece of music and why? Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* ballet – sheer magic.

10. If you could travel back in time which event would you change? The outbreak of World War I – an unnecessary conflict which led to immense suffering, many millions of deaths and, in due course, to Hitler, fascism, and World War II, with its own deaths and suffering.

11. Which four people from the past would you invite to dinner? John Lilburne, seventeenth century Leveller; Tom Paine, author of *The Rights of Man*; Robert Owen, the utopian socialist and co-operator; James Keir Hardie, founder of the Labour Party.



Stan Newens & Fidel Castro, c.1994 (Photograph courtesy of S. Newens)

12. What is your favourite food? Salads.

13. The history book I am currently reading is... I never stick to one at a time, but am struggling, with my poor German, to read Essex VCH Deputy Editor Herbert Eiden's fascinating thesis on the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, *In der Knechtschaft werdet ihr verharren*.

14. What is your favourite quote from history?

John Ball, in 1381: 'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?'

15. Favourite historical film? BBC TV series *I, Claudius* from Robert Graves' books.

16. What is your favourite building in Essex? Audley End for grandeur; Thaxted Guildhall as an epitome of traditional Essex.

17. What past event would you like to have seen? The triumph of the Dockers' Tanner Strike, in 1889.

'When Adam delved
and Eve span,
who was then the
gentleman?'

18. How would you like to be remembered?

As a good family man who opposed abuses of human rights and worked for a better society at home and abroad.

19. Who inspires you to read or write or research history? Initially my teachers at Buckhurst Hill County High School, Edward Wigley and Peter Sillis; but also great historians like Edward Gibbon, George Grote, Samuel Rawson Gardiner and Winston Churchill.

20. Most memorable historical date? 1945: the election of the first Labour Government with an absolute majority, which transformed society in Britain.



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