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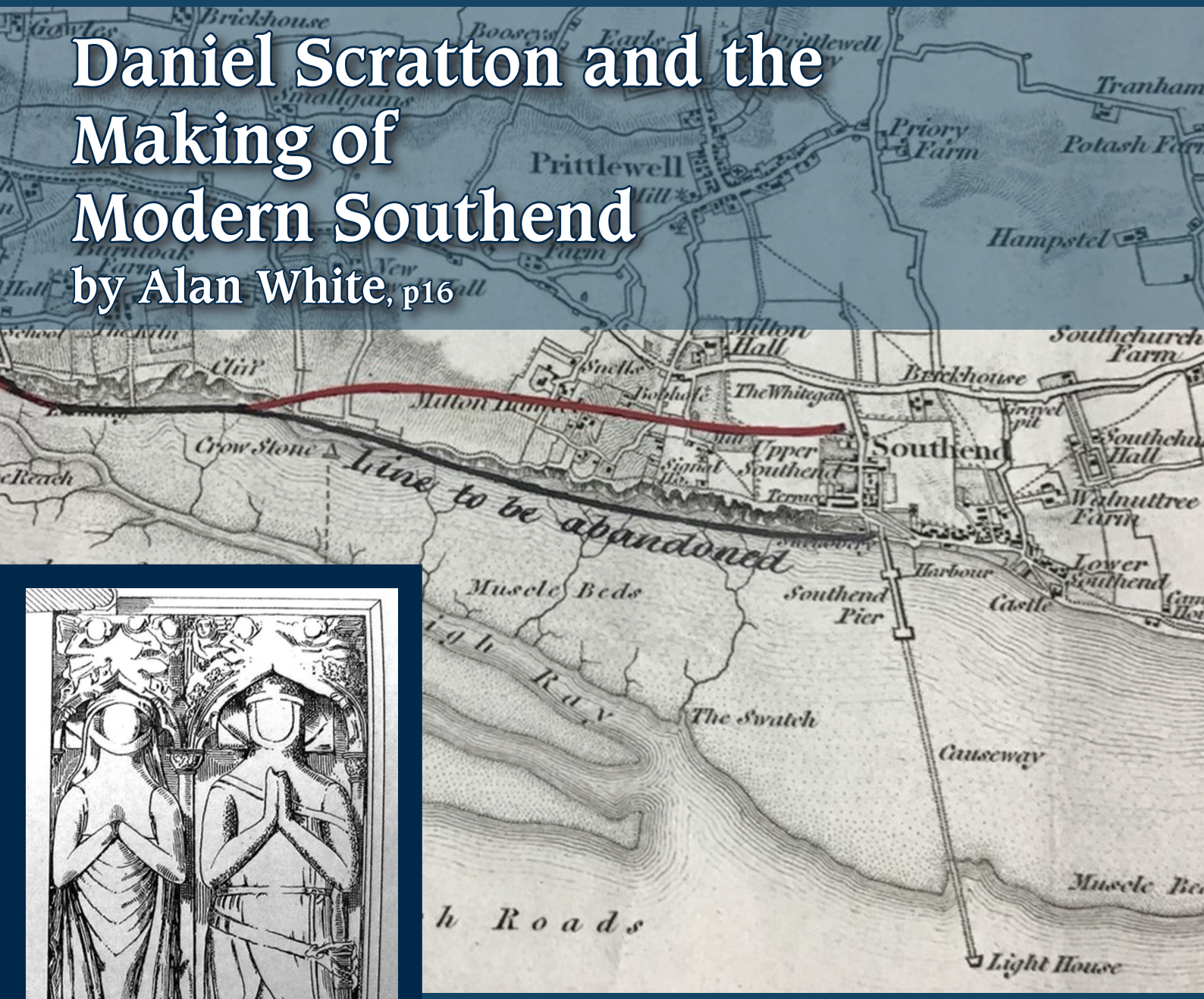
Daniel Scratton and the Making of Modern Southend

by Alan White, p16



The Medieval Bourchier Family of Stanstead Hall

Rebecca Batley, p11

Also in this issue:

- Frinton Wireless Telegraphy School: the world's first wireless school
- A Late Witch Persecution in Essex
- Book Reviews

Welcome to the Spring 2025 issue of the *Essex Journal*

We are once again fortunate to have the opportunity to offer a range of fine articles spanning the centuries. Following last issue's informative and quite surprising article on the hush-hush direction-finding technology deployed at Ford End during the Second World War to help track down enemy submarines, Michael Kirwan returns with another illuminating item concerning the very early uses of wireless telegraphy before the First World War, which rapidly became the information superhighway of its day. The shortage of trained engineers and operators was acutely felt, resulting in the establishment of a unique training establishment on the Frinton coast to meet this need. The fortuitous siting of Marconi's production facility at Chelmsford meant that Essex led the world in the new technology – for a while at least.

Not quite so ground-breaking was our reputation during the great 17th century hysteria regarding witches and their nefarious nocturnal practices. The eastern counties were the breeding ground for much of the persecution during this unhappy phase, although it was to be found across most of Europe in one guise or another at this time and was exported to the Colonies in due course. Yet even as the frenzy subsided and calmer minds began to prevail at a national level in the middle years of the century, it seems that a certain amount of ad hoc bullying and impromptu violence persisted in isolated pockets – such as the village of Coggeshall, where as late as 1699 a form of witch 'trial' took place. Michael Leach guides us through the events leading up to the public commotion and the allegations made against a bemused old widow who, from the account of the Revd Boys, appears to have been confused and not legally competent. While it is often assumed that the famous Trials at Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692–3 took place among volatile Colonials while England had already learnt not to rush to judgement in such matters, this was apparently not the whole story.

The de Bourchier family were important landholders in the Halstead area in the 14th century, although their fame in modern times has been eclipsed by the names Neville and Tweed, among others. Their home of Stanstead Hall was at one time dominant in the local landscape and, once the family started to acquire status as well as wealth, a number of improvements were undertaken to bring the building up-to-date in line with current thinking regarding the qualities possessed by a desirable residence. A licence to crenellate was awarded to Robert in 1341, which entitled the owner to convert his dwelling from a domestic settlement into a partly-military one – a small-scale castle or fortified manor house, which was very much the fashionable thing at this time. 'This time' was the outset of the Hundred Years War, of course, so the raising and provisioning of armies were topics very much on the public mind. Rebecca Batley leads us through the de Bouchiers' tenure, their rise to authority and royal patronage. One claim to fame attributed to Robert was that while on the Continent he became the first to die of bubonic plague in 1348, making him possibly the first ever Englishman to meet his end in that way.

The modern face of Southend-on-Sea – one of our newest cities – was largely shaped in the 18th and 19th centuries when the fashion for seaside bathing took hold and the arrival of the railways' mass-transit system made this pastime available to ever larger numbers of people. The result was that originally minor and unimportant landowners who happened to hold parcels of land at key locations were able to influence the development of the towns which sprang up around them. One such was Daniel Scratton, who influenced the esablishment and routing of the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway to an incredible extent. The railway was initially considered a 'pleasure line' conveying holidaymakers, and a freight line serving the docks of East London. Scratton saw the potential for making huge profits buying up agricultural land and funding the building of luxury accommodation for the discerning gentry. Yet life in the developing conurbation did not agree with the country gentleman as well as he anticipated, as Alan White explains in his entertaining tale of a bold venture that outstripped the originator's ability to control it.

The Book Reviews section features two offerings – both very recent and concerning rather different subjects: a detailed study of 18th century Charity Schools and an appraisal of the uniquely rich architectural heritage to be found in our churches.

The In Brief feature continues to draw attention to significant finds made in our area, and in this issue to a re-evaluation of the significance of the contents of the Prittlewell and Broomfield barrows.

Stephen Pollington, Honorary Editor

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Notes to contributors

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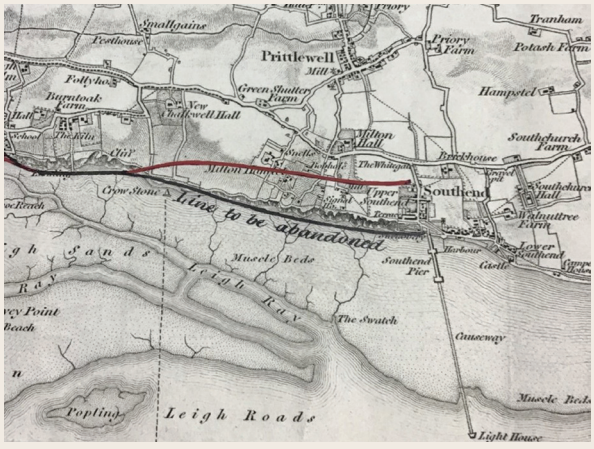
Cover illustration below:
Proposed route of the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway, with diversion inland at Chalkwell



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Cover image left:
The tomb of John de Bourchier and Helen of Colchester

Frinton Wireless Telegraphy School: the world's first wireless school

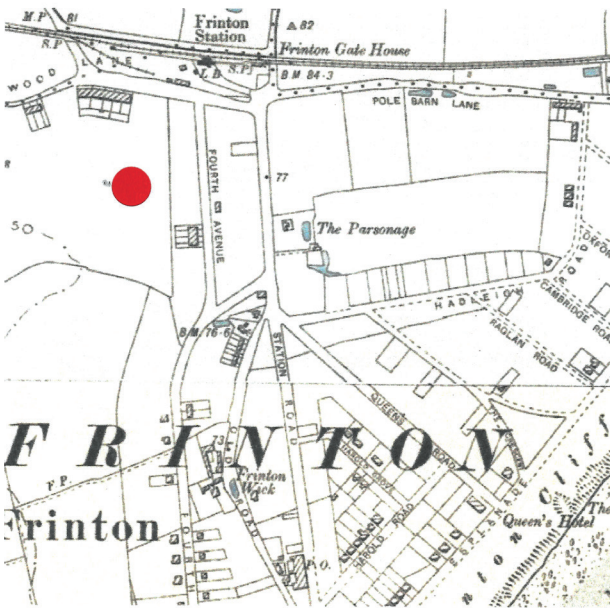
Michael Kirwan

In the 1890s rapid progress was being made in wireless telegraphy. Throughout 1900 and 1901 Guglielmo Marconi succeeded in extending the distance of his wireless telegraphy transmissions culminating in sending the first trans-Atlantic message from Poldhu in Cornwall to Signal Hill, St John's Newfoundland on 12 December 1901. Consequently, there was an urgent need for trained engineers in wireless telegraphy for the testing and setting up of new wireless stations.

In a letter written in 1901 by Mr E.A.N. Pochin, Marconi Engineer, he stated:

> *the natural position for a school is in proximity to the works* [at Chelmsford] *so that the assistants may have constant employment in testing and adjusting the instruments as they are made. In this connection the proposed station would offer great advantages, and to illustrate my meaning I would suggest as an important drill that they should convey instruments from the works to the signalling station: erect them and establish communication as in actual practice. This done they would be responsible for packing up the apparatus and returning it safely to the works.*

As the Marconi factory was in Chelmsford it was decided to build the school on the Essex coast. It was extremely difficult to find suitable premises.



Location of the wireless school

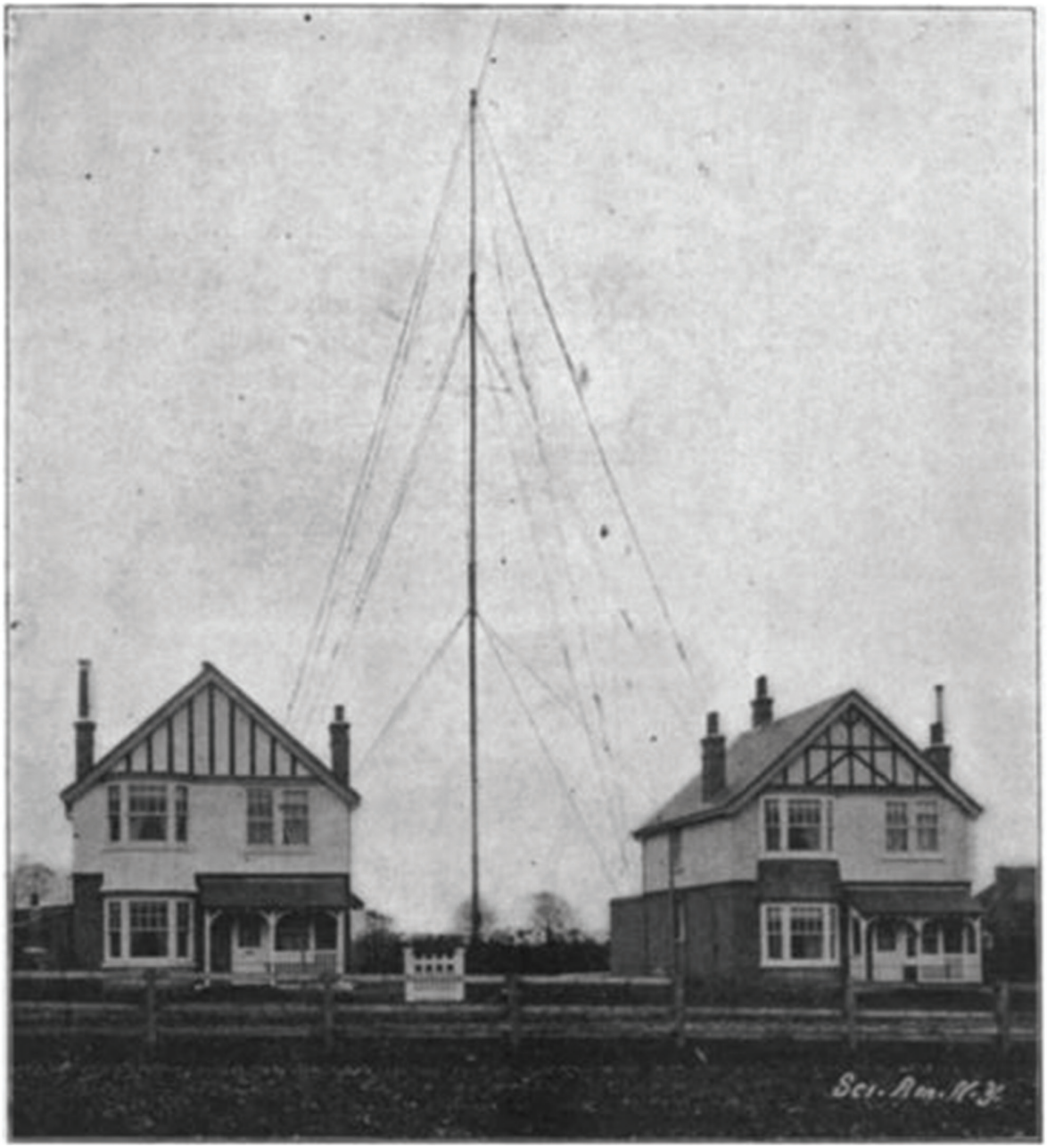
Dovercourt was looked at and the Walton-on-the-Naze area. Subsequently two houses were purchased 2 miles south of Walton in Frinton-on-Sea half a mile inland on Upper Third Avenue. A 180ft mast was erected between the back gardens of the two houses to support the transmitting aerial which consisted of 20 wires 180ft in length forming a double conical figure round the mast. A similar receiving aerial was set up in Withernsea.

The first intake of students had previously studied at the City and Guilds Institute, Finsbury, London and had an elementary knowledge of the theory of electricity.

The first engineer in charge was Thomas Bowden, whose experience with the Marconi Company dated back to 1898 when he had accompanied Guglielmo Marconi to the America's Cup trials in New York.

On the 4th January 1902 an article appeared in the British weekly magazine *Tit-Bits* describing the school.

> *The Marconi Company have opened, at Frinton-on-Sea, in Essex a school for teaching of wireless telegraphy, the only institution of its king in Great Britain, if not in the world. Hitherto the company have trained their men at their works in Chelmsford, but the demand for competent technical assistants has been so great that the company decided to open a college for tuition in the Marconi system of telegraphy.*
>
> *The school really consists of two villa residents, the only exterior indication that it is a telegraphy college being its tall pole. It is a very conspicuous feature on the landscape, being no less than 165 feet in height. It is erected in the centre of the garden, and made firm by a number of wire cables. At the time of the writer's visit the students numbered six in charge of the principal, Mr. T. Bowden, undoubtedly a very clever telegraphist and electrician.*
>
> *The object of the school is not only to teach the would be operator how to send and receive messages on the wireless system, but also to impart technical*

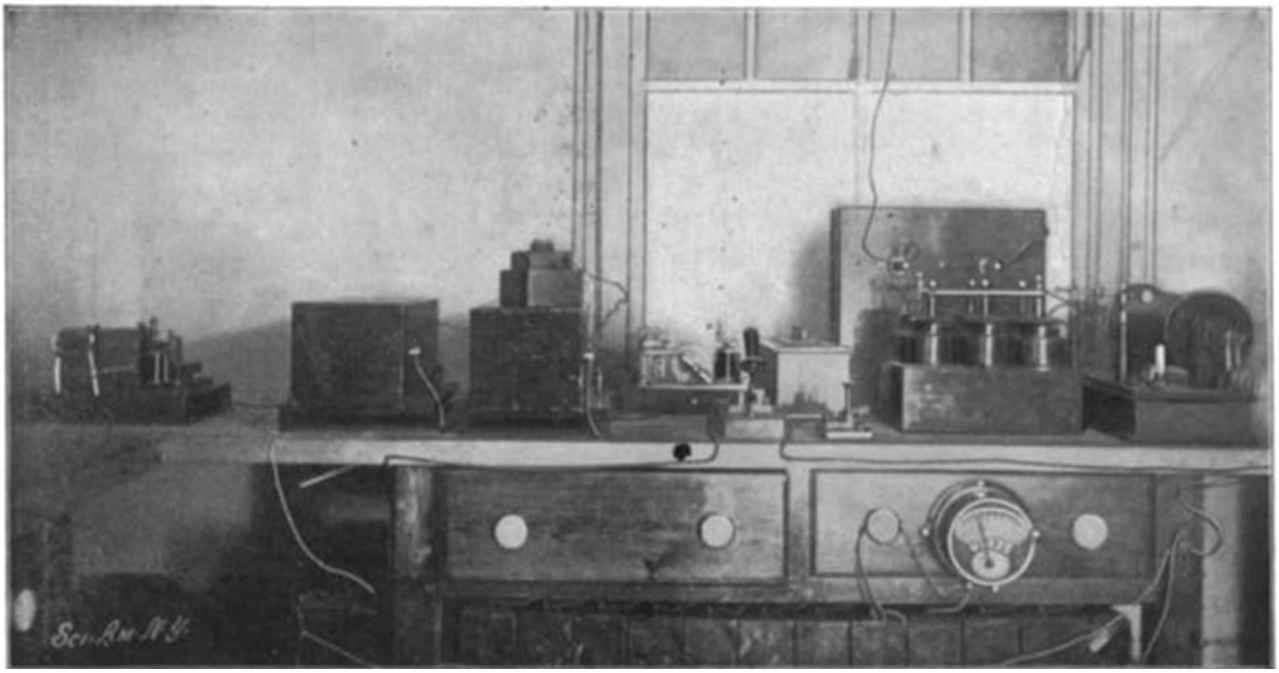


The mast on Walton seafront (Image © Scientific American)

knowledge of the instruments used. Indeed, after passing a course of instruction at the school the students would not only be capable of taking entire charge of an instrument on board a vessel, but of working and equipping a station anywhere. As all messages are sent by the Morse key the first thing the pupil has to do is to learn the new alphabet, and the first week is invariably spent in learning Morse until he can read and write it just as well as he can his conventional alphabet.

Then follows a course in instruction in the various instruments, their object and mechanism being fully explained. The pupils are also taught how to repair the machines, make new parts, and keep them in proper working order. The pupil is expected to be thoroughly acquainted with the system in the course of a month, though some remain in the school for a period of eight weeks. By this time they would be fully competent to go abroad and build stations on their own initiative in distant parts of the world. After a scholar has thoroughly mastered the new alphabet and the technique of his instruments he is put in charge of the Frinton station, and while in that position is absolutely responsible for all messages received and answered. He has also to make out a daily report to the London office and reply to all inquiries.

As already stated, the institution consists of two houses, the upper portions of which are used as bedrooms. There is a spacious dining-room, while the students have a parlour to themselves, equipped with a piano and quite a small library of technical books. The school is unique in that pupils are paid a small premium by the company though the writer was assured by Major Flood Page, managing director of the Marconi company, that this arrangement will



The original Instrument Room in use (Image © Scientific American)

not endure. Work commences at nine o'clock in the morning and continues until 5.30 in the afternoon.

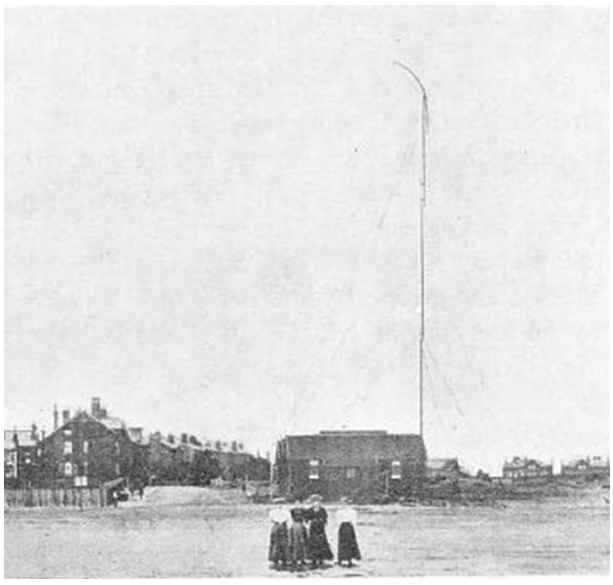
The instrument room proper is the kitchen, and here the writer was initiated into the mysteries of wireless telegraphy. There is nothing probably more wonderful to the lay mind than the fact that messages can be sent from one place to another, several miles distant, without any connection between them. From Frinton-on-sea communication may be enjoyed with the company's stations at North Foreland, forty miles distant, or at La Panne, on the Belgian coast, a distance of eighty miles as the crow flies, right across the North Sea.

To demonstrate the success of the wireless system the principal of the school kindly sent messages to their station at North Foreland. Placing his hand on the instrument he sent our message on the Morse system. Br-r-r-rp ! Br-r-r-rp ! Br-r-r-rp ! went the machine, as the sparks flew out. Instantly, after the operator had finished the receiver was set in motion, and click! click! came back the answer. We had sent them a complimentary message to North Foreland, and their reply was as follows: "Staff at North foreland much appreciate complimentary message and send greetings to all readers of good old Tit-Bits." The tape on which this message was printed was over two yards long. North Foreland station was forty miles away, right across the sea, and yet all our dispatches were instantly acknowledged.

The school at Frinton has been opened about two months. When the huge pole was first erected the country people watched it with the greatest interest. What astonished everyone was the fact that when telegrams were sent and received nothing could be seen in the way of electric sparks from the elevated spar. A yokel once vouchsafed the information to a companion that he could always tell when "they chaps were sending 'telegrams by the movements of the spar," while a waiter gravely told a lady that the poles were always erected close to the sea because the messages were sent over the waves!

In January 1901 a demonstration was given to the Colonial Premiers who were in London for the Coronation of King Edward VII. For this the pleasure steamer *Koh-I-Noor* was chartered and fitted with wireless telegraphy on a journey from London Bridge to Margate. As the vessel steamed down the River Thames continuous communication was effected with the Marconi stations at Southend, Frinton, Chelmsford, Dovercourt, North Foreland and La Panne near Ostende.

In 1903 the Marconi Company established a school in Seaforth Sands, Liverpool, exclusively for training marine wireless operators. The school comprised a room



The Seaforth Sands training school for marine wireless operators

about 40ft by 20ft, fitted with fifteen transmitting and receiving sets. The transmitting station was made of a ship-type buzzer, with a couple of 'Q' type cells, and an aerial hanging from the roof made up of from 6–8ft of No. 20 bare copper wire. The receiving station comprised one of the earlier types of coherer receivers with a Morse inker, and the speed of transmission to which one had to accustom oneself was from six to eight words per minute; not an easy matter if an operator had been used to land-line service working in the region of twenty-five to thirty words per minute.

In 1904 Frinton school closed and was transferred to the Hall Street works in Chelmsford. The mast was taken down but the large concrete base was not removed until the 1940s. Pieces of the extensive aerial mat of stranded wires are still being found in the garden today. For a time, all the students were absorbed directly in the factory personnel of the general research, development and testing areas.

Several of the students went on to fill higher positions in the company and its associated organisations at home and abroad, and the names of these are on the Marconi Veterans' Roll. The training school was re-established as a separate department in October 1911 at the Bloomfield Research Station in North Chelmsford under R.G. Kindersley.

Today the houses have not changed much, apart from the loss of a chimney and some mock Tudor cladding. The addition of more houses both behind and in front has reduced the size of the original site somewhat. Today the area is aptly named *Marconia*.

In 1988 an official plaque, provided by Tendring District Council, was unveiled by Sir Robert Telford, Life President of the Marconi Company, in the presence of the Chairman of the Council and Mr and Mrs Dudley Ward, the then occupants. The plaque was subsequently affixed to the house to commemorate its historical significance.

The Wireless School location today (Image: author © Google 2025)

The Wireless School was not situated on the sea front, but some half-a-mile inland on Upper Third Avenue, which remains to this day as a quiet private residence.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Bodleian Library for their assistance with the Marconi collection of records. MS202. Also, sincere thanks to Tim Warner who did a lot of research on Frinton and was happy to share it with me. He wrote *Marconi's Hall street works* and *Marconi on the Isle of Wight* (https://marconibooks.co.uk/).

Reference

Tit-Bits – British weekly magazine. *A school for Wireless Telegraphy*. 4th January 1902. Bodleian Library MS202.

A Late Witch Persecution in Essex

Michael Leach

The contemporary account

The seventeenth century diary of a Coggeshall woolcomber, Joseph Bufton (1650–1718), makes a brief reference to an incident in the town in July 1699. This involved putting the 'widow Comon' (sic) into the river on three separate occasions to see if she would sink or swim, as she was suspected to be a witch. On each occasion she did not sink, seen as proof of her guilt from her rejection by the baptismal medium. Bufton provided no further details, other than noting that when she was buried just after Christmas five months later, she 'was accounted a witch'.[1]

Though this incident has generated many short notices of varying accuracy, it is worth further examination as it was unusual in two ways. Firstly, the legal prosecution of witches was rare by the end of the seventeenth century. Secondly, an account of the Coggeshall event was recorded by the town's vicar, the Rev. James Boys (1650–1725), in considerable detail and, though written out a decade later, its author stated that it was compiled from contemporaneous notes made when he had interviewed the suspected witch. The manuscript, as well as the notes from which it was made, are now lost, but a full transcript was published in 1910.[2]

Boys had visited and questioned the unfortunate woman on at least four occasions. Initially he showed sympathy for her recent widowhood, the loss of some of her possessions, and her state of health, even ordering some medication for her from the apothecary. His interrogation, however, gradually convinced him that she was indeed a witch. Little is known about Boys but it is reasonable to assume that his account was an accurate record of the events, at least as he had perceived them. Some measure of the man is provided by a letter, written about an unrelated matter two decades later, in which he noted that historians needed to be very accurate about what they transmit to posterity. For this reason it is worth examining the details of his description of the widow's persecution.[3]

'Boys began to feel that there was 'some hopes of a confession' but when he offered to take the imps from her and burn them, she became silent.'

At eight o'clock on the morning of Sunday, 4 June 1699, Boys was asked to visit the widow Coman (spelt thus here, as well as in the parish register) who was suffering from 'unease and melancholy' following her husband's accidental drowning in a well. He found her at home in 'great disorder of mind', together with a group of concerned neighbours. Aware of her local reputation as a witch, he asked her if she believed in God. She replied that she did but, on being asked the same question about Christ, said she did not know him, though she had just met the devil, recognisable by his 'goggle eyes and rough skin'. On being told that the vicar's arrival was imminent, the devil had left hurriedly for Colchester, and Boys, turning to the others in the room, asked them to note the devil's need to avoid the proximity of a man of God.[4]

The widow then launched into a complaint about the theft of a kettle, and some sheets and pillow beers, and Boys expressed his concern about this aggravation of her penury and undertook to get them back for her if she answered his questions. Boys asked her about her baptismal contract with God but she refused to answer, only commenting that 'butter was eight pence a pound and cheese a groat a pound'. Under pressure, she eventually agreed that she had made a contract with the devil, and had used pins and a wax chicken to make Mr Cox lame.[5] At this point, Boys began to wonder if she might indeed be a witch, and 'importuned her to show me this chicken'. Her response was to repeat her comment on the price of butter and cheese. After some further exchanges about the nature of the devil, Boys got her to follow him in reciting the Lord's Prayer but on two attempts failed to get past the 'forgive them that trespass against us' passage. He then promised that he himself would pray for her, but this offer was greeted with hysterical laughter. Having promised to return later, he then departed, leaving her in the care of neighbours.[6]

He returned later that day after his afternoon sermon, and noted that her eye was 'sharp and glaring' and her conversation lacked focus. He wondered if she had a 'brain fever' requiring treatment and ordered a 'clyster' (an enema or suppository) and some laudanum from the apothecary. She failed to retain the former (a common problem in the elderly!) but slept well on the tincture of opium.[7]

She seemed much better when Boys returned the next morning, accompanied by Mr Cox, the supposed victim of her witchcraft and 'discoursed as sensibly as any other'. However, when pressed in the presence of Mr Cox, she denied everything she had said on the previous day about the devil, and claimed her late husband was responsible for killing a neighbour's chicken some years before.

After further pressure she conceded that the wax chicken pricked with pins, and used in her spell to harm Mr Cox, might be hidden in her yard, but it was too late in the day to go looking for it. Boys asked her to recite the Lord's Prayer, and she stumbled in the same place as before but, to the surprise of all those assembled, produced her own surprisingly fluent prayer:

> *O Lord God Almighty, have mercy upon my soul, create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit that I may speak no evil, and do no evil actions, but may live in Thy fear, and keep all Thy commandments, all my life in Jesus Christ.*

On being urged to confess, she refused but spoke 'Philosophycally' about three earths and three worlds and declined a request to undo the spell that had harmed Mr Cox, saying that God would not let her do so. She promised to look for the chicken the next day, and to send it to Mr Boys when it had been found.[8]

On Monday, Boys had to travel to Colchester. When he returned home, he was visited by Mr Cox who wanted to know if the chicken had been found. No message had been received, so they agreed to meet at the widow's cottage on Wednesday at nine o'clock in the morning. Soon after, he was visited by the two women who had been looking after the widow. They had become very concerned about her when she had become 'very hot and uneasy' in her bed. After close questioning (and her initial denials) she had admitted that she was suckling imps at her 'fundament' (i.e. her anus). She also said that she had 'taken a Lease not to go to Church for five years, and that the time was out next Sunday, and that then she would go to Church'. Boys asked the carers to return to keep a close eye on her, and to persuade her to repeat what she had said when he next visited.[9]

On Wednesday he met up with Mr Cox and 'Uncle Bufton' for a quick prayer to commit them to God's grace and protection and then proceeded to the cottage with two other men. The widow appeared well and vehemently denied all that she had told her carers the day before. Under continued pressure, Boys began to feel that there was 'some hopes of a confession' but when he offered to take the imps from her and burn them, she became silent. By now a 'multitude of people' had assembled, and she was carried out into the yard for a search of the woodstack which revealed some old clothes, but no sign of the wax chicken. She 'shrieked piteously' and was then taken to her bedroom by two women, and searched. When this had been completed, Boys went

into her room, demanded her confession and asked her to renounce the devil and his imps. When she refused, Boys forced her to put her hand on Mr Cox's lame leg and to pray for his recovery – she refused to do this too, and raised the unrelated matter of a silver bodkin which had not been returned to her. Boys promised to retrieve this if she would relieve Mr Cox's suffering, but she again refused.[10]

Boys and Cox then left the room, and the latter asked if he could obtain some blood from the widow in an attempt to nullify her enchantment. Boys had qualms about this, feeling that it would be improper for him to seek the devil's help, but he agreed that Cox himself could make the attempt. He did so, scratching her arm and soaking up some blood on his handkerchief (which he later took home to burn, noting that 'it had not the usual smell of burnt linnen'). Meanwhile, with growing impatience, the widow demanded to see Boys again, and promised to give him an imp to burn, but then changed her mind. There were further unsuccessful attempts to make her repeat the Lord's Prayer and the Creed accurately. While sitting by her bedside, Boys noticed she was 'very red, in a great sweat and very uneasy' and she confirmed that she was suckling one of her imps, but refused to let Boys see it. Being unable to get her to make a confession, Boys left and did not visit her again.[11]

'... the assembled mob, led by James Haines, took control and threw her into the river several times, as a result of which she died 'soon after'.'

At this point the assembled mob, led by James Haines, took control and threw her into the river several times, as a result of which she died 'soon after'. There is something adrift with the report here, as she did not die until the end of that year. Be that as it may, after her death Boys stepped in again and requested Mrs Becke, the midwife, to examine her corpse 'in the presence of some sober women.' She found that her 'fundament was open like a mousehole' with 'two long bigges ... with nipples' which bled when pressed. They were instructed to watch the body overnight, but about midnight they left the room for some refreshments. On returning they found that the sheets had been disturbed and stained with blood, and that they appeared to have been trampled by some small animals. It was assumed to be the imps returning for their last meal. She was buried 'in an ignominious manner' on the north side of the churchyard on 27 December 1699. As with her presumed husband's death the year before, the parish register entry provides no further information about her, or the cause of her death.[12]

Discussion

Though the 1640s and 1650s were a very busy time for arraigning and executing supposed witches, there was a very striking decline in indictments at the Assizes or Quarter Sessions after the 1660 Restoration. In the last four decades of the seventeenth century in Essex, those accused of 'bewitchment' at the Assizes were usually acquitted (even where a supposed death had resulted), and those who were committed to prison, or to a house of correction, were generally also guilty of minor crimes such as theft. Evidence from the surviving archives, as well the outcome of the mere handful of known prosecutions, is very patchy, so it is difficult to produce accurate figures. But there can be little doubt that the appetite for prosecution had waned very considerably, and that it continued to do so. Parliament, always slow to catch up with public sentiments, finally passed the Witchcraft Act in 1735, making it a crime to claim that anyone had magical powers, or had practised witchcraft.[13]

Boys's account suggests that, though legal prosecution for witchcraft was very unusual by this date, accusations by rumour and gossip were not. Boys had already been aware of widow Coman's reputation before Mr Cox's affliction and, though initially sympathetic about her ill health, her bereavement and her loss of possessions, he became convinced that she was a witch, leading to his leading questions about witchcraft practices, and his persistent pressure for a confession, for a denunciation of the devil, and for demands to surrender her imps to him. What is more, his interrogation was a very public event, taking place in the presence of a 'multitude' of townspeople – doubtless hostile or suspicious – who had crowded into her cottage. When his pressure to obtain a confession failed, those assembled (perhaps increasingly frustrated by this failure, as well as the woman's refusal to reverse the 'malevolent spell') resorted to mob rule, and took her off to the river for immersion on three separate occasions.[14]

Conclusion

From a modern perspective, the widow involved was elderly, in poor health and probably confused by the crowds and the aggressive line of questioning. When the woodpile in her yard was searched for the wax chicken, she had to be helped out by two women, and then became hysterical. Her tangential answers to some of Boys's questions may have been evasion, or simply the result of her confused state of mind. Boys himself thought at one point that she might have been suffering from 'brain fever'. It is clear that considerable pressure was put on her to confess, and the presence of so many other people crowded into her cottage must have been intimidating. Boys, when he left her in the hands of the mob after abandoning his attempts to extract a confession or recantation, must have been convinced of her guilt.

The investigation of this unfortunate woman as a witch follows the familiar pattern of identifying a harm inflicted by bewitchment, a search for the method of inflicting this (the pin-pricked wax chicken), a diagnostic failure to recite the Lord's Prayer accurately, a quest for the imps or 'familiars', and an examination of her body for evidence that she had suckled them with her own blood – though the use of her anus for this purpose seems unusual.

It is significant that in spite of her 'conviction' by public opinion, there is no record that this resulted in an indictment, and she lived for nearly six months after her ordeal. It raises the question of how much unrecorded bullying and victimisation of solitary eccentric women took place in this period. In the absence of legal

prosecution, and the paucity of surviving letters and diaries from this period, it is possible that this form of rough justice was commonplace, even though it has left little or no trace in written records. It is pure chance that this single document survived to reveal so much detail about this incident in Coggeshall in 1699.

Endnotes

1 Dale 1863, 268; Cutts 1865, 126; Beaumont 1890, 29, 251.

2 Gilbert 1910, 211–18; Dale,1863, 179.

3 Gilbert 1910, 211–12; letter of 2/3/1716 from James Boys to William Holman, ERO D/Y 1/1/30/1.

Her husband may have been the William Coman who was buried at Coggeshall on 23 July 1698.

4 William Coman had been buried at Coggeshall just under a year earlier on 23 July 1698, without additional comment in the register; Gilbert 1910, 212.

5 It appears from part of Bufton's diary (now Brotherton Library MS 10, 72) that William Cox (perhaps the victim in question) was related by marriage to Joseph Bufton the diarist. Bufton's sister Rebekah married Samuel Sparhawke in 1699, and Samuel's sister Mary had married William Cox (1666–1713) a few years earlier in 1694.

6 Gilbert 1910, 212.

7 Gilbert 1910, 213.

8 Gilbert 1910, 214. The prayer may have been rendered into a Biblical format by Boys when he noted it down, or possibly when he edited it on writing out his fair copy over a decade later. Some of the short phrases are identical to those which can be found amongst verses 1–10 of Psalm 51 of the King James Version, but there are a number of additions, possibly taken from Psalm 34, 13–14, or Ecclesiastes 12, 13, or other sources as yet unidentified. This might suggest that the prayer was indeed extemporised by the widow, using partially remembered texts from different parts of the King James Bible, or perhaps from the 1662 revised version of the Book of Common Prayer. Boys was the author of *Texts of Scriptures freed from Vulgar Mistakes* (1725, Ipswich), though this work was concerned with personal misinterpretations of particular texts, rather than Biblical mistranslations. However, it still suggests that Boys put an emphasis on accuracy and careful reading. The author is very grateful to the Reverend Stephen Hudson for identifying these passages.

9 Gilbert 1910, 214.

10 Gilbert 1910, 214–5. The silver bodkin, worth half a crown, was at 'Pudneys', probably a relative. No more is heard about the bodkin, perhaps because the widow did not keep her side of the bargain.

11 Gilbert 1910, 215–6.

12 Gilbert 1910, 216; Coggeshall St James burial register, ERO D/P 36. According to Charnock, bigge (meaning a nipple) was a word introduced by George Gifford in his 1593 treatise *A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes*. The midwife noted that the 'two bigges' did not resemble 'piles or emrods', though this would be the most likely explanation.

13 http://www.witchtrials.co.uk/years.html, accessed 08/03/2025. For post 1660 Essex indictments see ERO ASS 35/107/1/15; ASS 35/111/3/4, 5 & 8; Q/SR 402/128; TNA 171/4, 5 & 8; TNA 418/163. Significantly, the four who were accused of bringing about a death by bewitchment were all acquitted.

14 Gilbert 1910, 216; Cutts 1865, 126.

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The Medieval Bourchier Family of Stanstead Hall

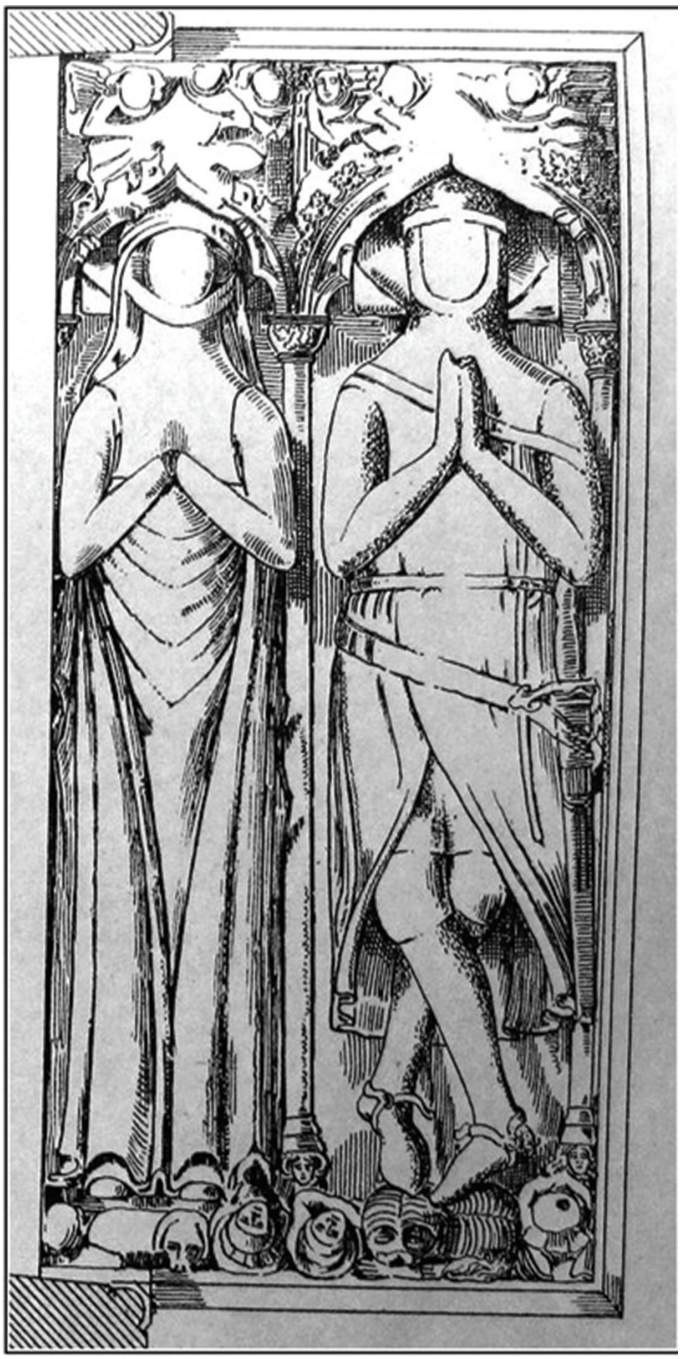
Rebecca Batley

Seldom visited and largely hidden from view, a granite double effigy of a man and woman in early fourteenth century dress can today still be seen in St Andrew's church, Halstead. These are the images of John de Bourchier and his wife Helen of Colchester, owners of Stanstead Hall.[1] Adjacent to it is another monument: the final resting place of the couple's eldest son, Robert de Bourchier, whose fame would far eclipse that of his parents, but whose life also remained entwined with his Essex birthplace.[2]

The origins of the Bourchier family are unclear, as is the spelling of the name, which is variously given in surviving medieval documents as 'de Bourchier', 'Boucher', and 'Boussier'. It had long been claimed that they were of French origin, and that the family came into England along with so many others, with William the Conqueror and that it is taken from the French word *boursier* meaning 'keeper of the purse'. There is however no firm evidence for this; instead, it is suggested that the family was in fact English in origin and that the name was latinised by Latin-speaking scribes to de Brugo Caro from the French term *le Bourg Cher* meaning (men) from a stronghold or a castle.[3]

When the eighteenth century antiquarian the Reverend Philip Morant was tracing the history of Stanstead Hall he claimed that the first intersection between the hall and the Bourchier family occurred in the 1300s and that John de Bourchier was the Essex-born son of Sir Robert de Burser and his wife Emma.[4] This implies that the family was of knightly or noble rank by then, and John then married Helen of Colchester who was the last heiress of the family Montchesny and held the hall for most of the period between the Norman Conquest and the fourteenth century. Helen of Colchester was the daughter of Walter de Colchester and his wife Joan, but Walter himself inherited the Muchesny lands in right of his wife Joan who was the heiress, having herself been born at Stanstead Hall in 1259, the daughter of Roger de Muchesney and his wife, Agatha. Unfortunately, it does not appear to be possible to independently verify his account, as Morant does not give sources for his claims, or the ones he does cite appear to have been lost.

The scenario does however seem likely as marriage was the primary way by which people, and gentry families as a whole, could achieve social advancement during the late medieval period.

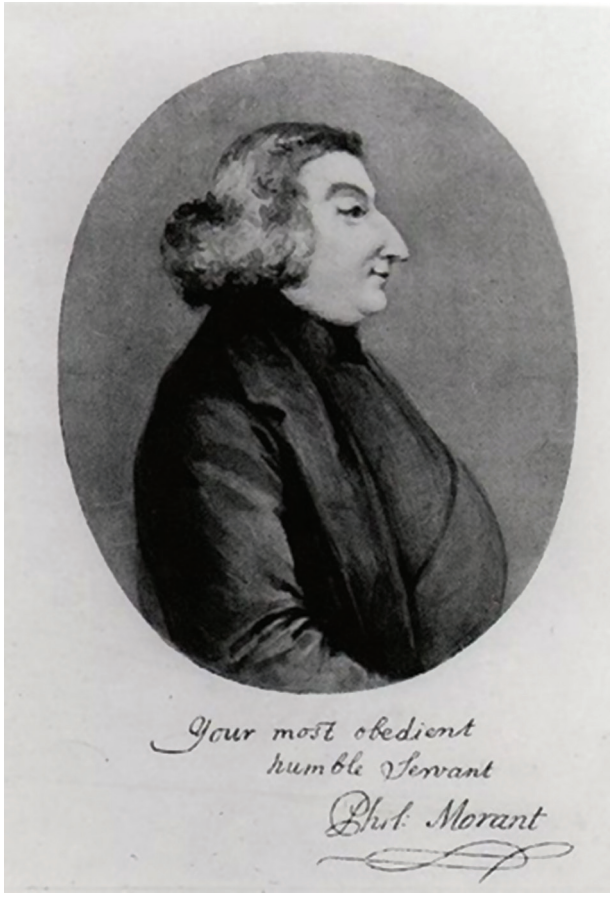


The tomb of John de Bourchier and Helen of Colchester in St Andrews Church Halstead. Credit: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_de_Bourchier

John de Bourchier, Justice of the Common Pleas

With family money and education behind him, John de Bourchier embarked on a legal career. In late medieval England this was one of the primary means of advancement open to the sons of local gentry: it was one which John took full advantage of. Morant records that he was sent by Robert de Vere, sixth Earl of Oxford, to represent him in the parliament of 1306, whilst Foss agrees stating that he was an 'attorney of the Earl of Oxford to appear in his place at Parliament,' although he places his first appearance earlier, on the 31st May 1300.[5] This connection with the de Veres was cemented in 1309 when Robert de Vere granted him the Manor of Bourhalle.[6] He was offered a knighthood soon afterwards, but was permitted to postpone taking up this honour in 1312, since it was in fact expensive and taxing for men who had no great family fortune behind them. He bought land near Halstead adjoining his Stanstead estate at this time, which would have been a drain on his available funds. He would assume the knighthood in 1315, by which time his financial situation had presumably improved.[7]

Morant claims that he was a Justice of the Assizes for Kent, Surrey and Sussex from 1314–15 and that by 1319 he was a Conservator of the Peace, but again he cites no evidence for this. John de Bourchier next appears solidly in the historic record in 1321 when he was appointed as a Justice of the Common Pleas on the 31st May.[8] The Court of Common Pleas was a common-law court which covered 'common pleas'; that is, actions between subject and subject (rather than those concerning the monarch).



The Reverend Philip Morant (Author's collection)

The *curia regis*, which was originally the only court, was a royal one which followed the king and was made up of his courtiers and advisors; it was described by historian J. H. Baker as a descendant of the Saxon *witenagemot*.[9] This court was divided into two branches, the *coram rege* or 'kings' bench' and the *de banco*, the common bench for pleas. Recent research has suggested that, rather than being born directly out of the *curia regis*, it arose from the Exchequer of Pleas after that emerged from the *curia regis* at a fairly early date. The exact date that these bodies were created is unclear but most historians now agree that the Court of Common Pleas was in existence prior to Magna Carta (i.e. 1215).[10]

The Court on which John de Bourchier sat was held in Westminster Hall, and concerned itself with every legal matter which did not directly involve the king. As Justice of the Common Pleas, he became involved in some interesting cases, notably one concerning charges brought against 'certain persons' for attempting to illegally enter manors held by Hugh le Deespensers, primarily in Brecknock and Glamorganshire. He was also involved in a case which became notorious, in which people were accused of conspiring to fabricate evidence for miracles having taken place at the site in Bristol where Henry de Montfort and Henry de Wylyngton had been hanged. In February 1326 he was also involved in passing judgement on a case brought by the Bishop of London and the Dean of St Pauls against people who were illegally poaching fish from a manor in Walton in direct violation of the King's law. The Chapter of St Pauls claimed the right to all fish on their estates, bar the tongue, which was reserved for the king should he wish it.[11] John de Bouchier must have impressed his peers, for on the 24th March 1327 he was confirmed in his office by the new King, Edward III.[12] John died in 1329, soon after Ascension Day – traditionally celebrated on the fortieth day of Easter and which commemorated the bodily Ascension of Jesus into heaven. Rigg, writing in the early twentieth century, stated that John was buried alongside Helen in Stanstead church but today it is more widely believed that he lies in Halstead church.[13]

Robert de Bourchier

Together John and Helen had at least one son, Robert, who followed his father's example and began his career in the service of the de Vere family. According to tradition, he was born at Stanstead Hall and by the time of his father's death he had served as a justice of *oyer et terminer* (a commission issued to judges authorising them to hear and determine criminal cases at the assizes) although there is no evidence that he had received legal training. Upon his father's death he inherited lands and estates in which he was confirmed in 1330 by the King.[14]

Many of his early years seem to have been spent in military exploits rather than educational ones. The first record of his mustering for war can be found in 1324. Later in the company of the Earl of Gloucester, Hugh Audley, he fought alongside the King in France. Gloucester paid the enormous sum of one hundred pounds fourteen shillings to retain his services and Lord Campbell claims that he was a particular favourite of Edward III.[15] He saw action at the raid on Cazand in 1337, which was an early skirmish in the Hundred Years War that saw a Flemish force destroyed and Guy of Flanders

The effigy of Sir Robert de Bourchier in St Andrews Church, Halstead (Photo: the author)

captured. According to Lord Campbell he also saw 'the discomfiture of all Edward's mighty preparations for the conquest of France' and criticised the ministers back in England for their supposed misconduct in procuring the necessary 'supplies and levies'.[16] The following year he joined the King's expedition to Flanders, where he is listed in the Earl of Northampton's retinue.

Knight of the Shire

In between periods of military service Robert de Bourchier represented Essex as a knight of the shire in the Parliaments of 1329, 1330, 1332, and 1339. Morant claims that he was appointed by the King as Chief Justice of Ireland, but it is not possible to substantiate this claim.[17] If he was offered such a position, he never took it up.

What is certain is that on the 14th December 1340 the King made Robert the first ever secular Chancellor of England when he was given possession of the Great Seal – it was clear that he was riding high in Edward's favour. He was put in position after the previous Chancellor, Robert de Stratford, was accused of failing to adequately support the King in France. He and his brother, John de Stratford, had previously held the Seal between them.

Robert was regarded as a 'shrewd and stout knight' with great energy and 'he was thought a fit instrument to carry it [punishment of Stratford and other ministers] into effect … and the Great Seal was delivered to him.'[18] To this end, Bourchier framed a proclamation delivered under the Great Seal which charged the ex-Chancellor with 'having intercepted supplies granted to the king' and 'either having appropriated them to himself or having diverted them from their legitimate purpose.' This charge was to be read out in 'all churches and chapels.'[19] Stratford loudly proclaimed his innocence and, in order to prevent him speaking in his own defence at the April Parliament of 1341, 'the king and his military Chancellor resorted to the unconstitutional step of withholding from him a writ of summons, thinking that he might thus be prevented from appearing in the House.'[20] The plan failed, most sided with Stratford, and Bourchier became increasingly unpopular. He was nevertheless regarded as the King's personal choice, implying they had a warm personal and working relationship. Nothing suggests that Bourchier ever did anything but carry out his king's orders. He spent his time 'occupied by the King's political business particularly in the management of his diplomacy … being at this time very onerous.'[21]

Robert de Bourchier was regarded as an inexperienced Chancellor. Ecclesiastical members of the court, who had opposed his elevation initially on the basis that the post should be held by a churchman, claimed that he was 'neglecting his (religious) duties' and there developed 'great agitation in favour of a plan for restraining the prerogative of the crown in the appointment of its officers.'[22] The King was forced to bow to pressure and a compromise was reached, but when Bourchier was called upon to swear to observe the statute 'he refused … as contrary to his former oath of allegiance and to the laws of the realm.' This was the view of Parliament, but it was not entirely the case for it appears the King himself had 'entered into secret protest' against it: once again Bourchier was probably acting out of support for his king. This is implied by the fact that King Edward went on to reverse the decision, claiming he had 'by force been suffered to pass it into law.'[23] Serious trouble was brewing between those loyal to the King and Bouchier and those who supported John de Stratford's faction. It was feared that this would lead to a violent outbreak, so to avoid this Robert resigned from office. Edward had 'avoided the danger by sacrificing the Chancellor' though, despite this, Robert remained high in the King's favour.

Licence to Crenellate

Edward III granted in 1341, the fifteenth year of his reign, to 'Robertus Bourghchier' a royal licence to crenellate Stanstead Hall.[24] A 1553 survey described it as a 'quadrangular building of brick, enclosing a court and surrounded by a moat forty four holes in circumferences.' We know that Robert added the moat just prior to the building's crenellation. The gatehouse

was situated on the southern side and was two storeys high, flanked with large projecting turrets by 1553; as no other licence appears to exist for the towers' crenellation, it seems likely that the gatehouse was built by Robert de Bourchier. As for the interior with which the de Bourchier owners would have been familiar, that consisted of five ground-floor rooms on the east side of the court with six above, each having two fireplaces. There was a large and well-maintained chapel on the north side of the court and the building was, by 1553, surrounded by four miles of parkland enclosing 87 acres of land stretching down towards and reaching the bridge in Halstead. The park contained 500 deer, forty horses and twelve cows, 3,620 oaks and 100 ash trees. The majority of oaks are noted to have been over 100 years old, implying they were present during Robert de Bourchier's time.[25]

It was a suitable residence for a close associate of kings. Robert de Bourchier had married, sometime before 1329, Margaret Prayers, the daughter and heiress of Thomas Prayers of Sible Hedingham and his wife, Anne of Essex, a daughter of Hugh of Essex. She brought to her marriage a considerable inheritance which included the manors at Great Maldon, which now came into the possession of the de Bourchier family.[26] The two families (Prayers and de Bourchier) knew each other well and in 1320 the manor of Langford, in the possession of Sir John de Prayers, was 'fettled by fine' to John de Bouchier and his heirs, although Prayers 'received £40 a year during his lifetime.'[27] In addition Robert bought or otherwise acquired more lands.[28] Together, Robert and Margaret had at least two children, the eldest of whom, John, was born at the Prayers manor at Great Maldon in 1329. He was followed by a second son, William, sometime afterwards.

The year after his resignation, Robert de Bourchier commanded a contingent of the King's men in Brittany and his brother John, according to Froissart, captured Pierre Portbeuf at the siege of Dinan.[29] In 1346 Robert mustered men and was present and fought at the Battle of Crecy,[30] following which he was at the siege of Calais. He was probably accompanied by his son, John, on this expedition; John's name is missing from the records but later tradition maintains that he was there.

> *'Robert was, according to contemporary accounts ... possibly the first ever Englishman to die of plague.'*

Edward's faith in his ex-Chancellor can also be seen in the fact that he sent him on various ambassadorial errands at this time. On the 8th July for example he was given letters of attorney alongside John de Liston. We also get a glimpse of the men in his retinue – men such as William de Enefeld who was in Bourchier's retinue and received a writ of exoneration on the 6th July.[31] Upon his return to England, Bouchier was summoned for parliament in November 1348 'by personal writ' and became Lord Bourchier. He was summoned again in March 1349, shortly after which he was charged with accompanying the King's daughter, Joan, to Castille. In 1345 she had been betrothed to Peter, the son of Alfonso XI of Castille

The tomb of Margaret and Sir Robert de Bourchier (Photo: the author)

and his wife Maria of Portugal, and she now travelled to meet him. The party set off under Robert's care; it was heavily armed and bore Joan's extensive trousseau. Their journey took them through France and they lodged at Bordeaux. At this time the 'Black Death', bubonic plague, had not yet reached England but Bordeaux was in the grip of it. In the words of historian Norman Cantor it 'simply did not occur to the princess and her upscale advisors to get out of town' – instead they lodged at the royal chateau overlooking the river and at the very heart of the plague-ridden city.[32] With terrifying predictability the plague took hold and Robert was, according to contemporary accounts, the first to die of the disease on or around the 18th May 1348, making him possibly the first ever Englishman to die of plague. Princess Joan followed him to the grave on the 2nd September in what proved to be a personal and political disaster.

The de Bourchier family however would go on to even greater things. Robert's son John inherited his father's

lands and titles and forged an impressive military career which would endure until his death in 1398.

Bourchier Estates

We know the extent of the Bouchier estates by 1384 when Richard II granted them to 'John de Bourchier chevalier (son Robert de Bouchier) and his heirs forever.' The text reads:

> *Free warren in all his demesne lands in his manors of 'Halstede', 'Stanstede'* [in Halstead], *'Manhale'* [in Saffron Walden], *'Chesterfords', 'Breyng'* [in Ashdon], *'parva Fordam'* [in Aldham], *'Merkes'* [in Braintree], *'Messyngge'* [Messing], *'Rewenhale'* [Rivenhall], *'Tholeshunte Guynes'* [Tollesbury], *'Tholeshunte Tregos'* [Tolleshunt D' Arcy], *'Tholeshunte Chilvaler'* [Tolleshunt Knights], *'Langeford'* [Langford], *'Mauduytes'* [in Terling], *'parva Malden et magna Maldon', 'Retyngdone'* [Rettendon], *'Lachindon'* [Latchingdon], *'Asshelham'* [Asheldham], *'Ledetes'* [Leggats in Tillingham], *'Knypso'* [in Mayland], *'Pachynghalle'* [in Broomfield], *'Wodhalle'* [in Broomfield], *'Grenstede'* [Greensted-juxta-Ongar], *'Morton'* [Moreton], *'parva Laufare'* [Little Laver], *'Wyfenho'* [Wivenhoe], *'Oueseye'* [Osea Island in Great Totham], *and 'Mereseye'* [Mersea], *so long as those lands are not within the boundaries of our forest, so that none shall hunt in them without leave of the said John and his heirs under penalty of £10.*
>
> *Witnesses: W:* [William Courtenay] *archbishop of Canterbury, R:* [Robert Braybrooke] *bishop of London, W:* [William of Wykeham] *bishop of Winchester, John King of Castile and Leon and duke of Lancaster, Edmund earl of Cambridge, my uncles, Richard earl of Arundel, Hugh earl of Stafford, Michael de la Pole our chancellor, Hugh de Segrave our treasurer, John de Monte Acuto steward of our household.*
>
> *Given at Westminster. Scribe, Muskham.*
>
> *By bill of privy seal and by fine of 20 shillings.*
>
> *Given under the Great Seal of King Richard II.*[33]

All of which was enough to ensure that the Bourchier name would live on in Essex and on the national stage for centuries to come.

About the Author

Rebecca Batley is an Essex-based archaeologist and historian, who has written numerous articles for publications such as *New Scientist*, *American Naval History*, *Medieval History*, *Medieval Warfare*, *Ancient History*, *NILE*, *Gay and Lesbian Review*, *The Pilgrim*, *Mental Floss*, *Reverb*, *American History*, *LGBTQ Nation*, *Catholic Herald*, and the *Manchester Mill*. She works for the Museum of London and is currently writing a book on Anne Neville, to be published this year.

Endnotes

1 Image of the tomb of John de Bourchier and Helen of Colchester as sketched before 1890 and published in: Chancellor, Frederick, 1890, *The Ancient Sepulchral Monuments of Essex*, Chelmsford. The tomb can still be viewed in St Andrews Church, Halstead, today.

2 Photographic image of the tomb of Robert de Bourchier. The tomb can be viewed in St Andrews Church Halstead today.

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18 Campbell pg. 224.

19 Ibid. pg. 224.

20 Ibid. pg. 225.

21 Ibid. pg. 227.

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27 Ibid. pg. 380.

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30 Wrottesley, G. 1898, Crecy and Calais from the Public Records, London. pg. 6.

31 *The Complete Peerage* revised and edited by Gibbs, V., Doubleday. H.A. et al. 13 Volumes 1910–1959, Volume II No. 246 and Wrottesley 1898 which details Bourchiers activities in 1346–7 see pages 6, 29, 31, 131, 141 etc.

32 Cantor, N.F. 2001, *In the Wake of the Plague*, Perennial: New York pg. 47.

33 ERO D/DVZ 2.

DANIEL SCRATTON AND THE MAKING OF MODERN SOUTHEND

Alan White

Introduction

In September 1842 Daniel Scratton, aged only twenty-three, inherited his father's estate in the Southend area and with it the lordship of the manors of Milton and Prittlewell. At a stroke he became the largest and most influential landowner in the district – 'the most prominent man for miles around.'[1] Scratton's landholdings in south-east Essex ran to more than 2,000 acres.[2]

At the point that Scratton became a landed proprietor Britain's 'railway mania' was approaching its height. With the major inter-city routes either built or under construction, railway promoters were busily seeking opportunities elsewhere. It was against this background that several railway companies expressed an interest in building a line from London to Southend – even though the latter at the time was, in *Punch* magazine's disparaging phrase, 'a mere shrimp of a sea-town'.[3] Southend's inhabitants nevertheless appear to have been confident that they would be better connected to the wider world sooner rather than later. 'It is quite impossible that Southend can remain long without a railway to it', declared one local businessman in 1846.[4] The changes which beckoned had implications for everyone living in mid-nineteenth century Southend, but few, if any, had more at stake than Daniel Scratton. His responses to the arrival and impact of the railway were to have a significant bearing on the town's long-term growth and development.

Daniel Scratton

Daniel Scratton – 'Dan' to his intimates, 'the Squire' to others – was a tall, straight-backed man whose life revolved around what Lord Macaulay called 'rural business and pleasures'.[5] He was a countryman to his fingertips: 'He loved the country, country pursuits and every variety of bird and animal life on it.'[6] Throughout his adult life, oblivious to changes in fashion, he appeared in public wearing a white neck-cloth, riding breeches and a top hat. In his younger days his chief passion in life was foxhunting: he hunted four days a week, kept a pack of foxhounds at his home, Prittlewell Priory – taking them around the county in a custom-built four-horse carriage (a 'hound-van') he drove himself – and became Master of the Essex Union hunt. His exploits in the hunting-field ensured that he was known throughout Essex and not only in its south-eastern corner.

In politics Scratton was a Tory, but for the most part wore his Toryism lightly, avoiding strident partisanship. On the most divisive issue in Tory politics in the 1840s, however – the future of the Corn Laws, which protected British grain producers against foreign competition – his views were stern and unbending. Convinced that repeal of the Corn Laws would spell ruin for British agriculture, he sided with the hard-line protectionists against the pragmatists headed by Peel.

In many ways, then, Scratton was an archetypal mid-nineteenth century country gentleman. He was, however, a more accomplished and rounded character than his addiction to field sports might suggest. Educated at Exeter College, Oxford and (briefly) Lincoln's Inn, he oversaw the management of his estates with notable briskness and efficiency. He also inherited a family tradition of charitable giving which he continued in full measure. As a landowner he was a moderniser, encouraging his tenants to adopt the latest farming methods. Nor was he an aloof figure, remote from the local community: his wife was the daughter of a Foulness blacksmith.

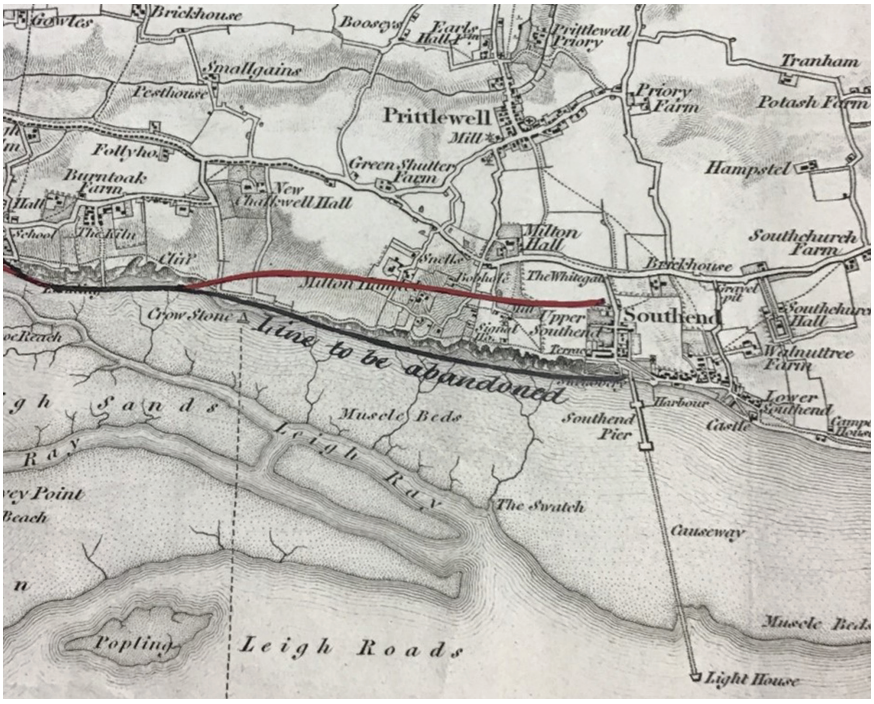
The London, Tilbury & Southend Railway

In 1852 two railway companies, the Eastern Counties and the London & Blackwall, previously rivals, received parliamentary approval to build, as a joint enterprise, a line linking London and Southend via Tilbury. Soon afterwards a contract for the construction works was awarded to a second consortium, this one headed by Sir Samuel Morton Peto and Thomas Brassey, two of the best-known railway contractors of the day. An unusual feature of this arrangement was that Peto and Brassey agreed to lease the completed London, Tilbury and Southend (LT&S) line from its owners for twenty-one years, guaranteeing investors an annual 6% return on their capital. Any surplus remaining after the payment of this dividend was to be split equally between shareholders on one hand and Peto and his associates on the other.[7]

This leasing arrangement was almost certainly a product of the fertile mind of Sir Samuel Morton Peto. Lauded for his railway-building feats around the world

he may have been, but he also had a reputation for sharp practice in financial matters. The terms of the LT&S lease certainly raised many eyebrows. One critic subsequently more or less accused him of fraud, suggesting that he had built the line to Southend for much less than the contracted sum, aware all along that he could do so, and then pocketed the surplus.[8]

In private Peto was sceptical about some aspects of the LT&S project. In particular, he had doubts about the financial viability of the Tilbury–Southend section of the proposed route. His own preference would have been for a line out of London ending at Tilbury, but the Eastern Counties Railway Company, intent on keeping competitors out of its East Anglian domain, insisted on the extension to Southend. Once he took charge of the new line as lessee, though, Peto resisted any temptation to write the Tilbury–Southend link off as a lost cause: instead he sought ways of making it earn its keep.



Originally the proposed route of the railway would have skirted the cliffs and run along the shoreline. The diversion inland at Chalkwell is indicated in red.

Scratton, Peto and Brassey, 1852–56

Railway-building schemes inevitably gave rise to disputes between railway promoters and those whose land they planned to cross. When high-status landowners were involved, railway companies generally preferred to settle such disputes through give-and-take negotiation as opposed to making use of the powers of compulsory purchase they were able to acquire: it was not in their interest to alienate weighty local figures. Daniel Scratton was certainly consequential enough to qualify for this kind of careful handling: the only way into Southend from the west lay across his land.

At the personal level Scratton had no objection to railways. In 1847 he appeared as a witness before an Admiralty-commissioned inquiry into the potential impact of railway-building on the Thames shoreline and said not a word to the detriment of either railways or railway companies.[9] As a public figure, however, a pillar of the local community, he had obligations to his fellow townspeople – with the interests of those closest to him in rank and status perhaps being a matter of especial concern.

In the mid-nineteenth century a disproportionate number of Southend's most affluent and influential citizens lived on Royal Terrace. Perched on a cliff overlooking the Pier (opened 1830) it had been built in the early 1790s as part of an unsuccessful bid to transform Southend into a fashionable resort. The Terrace's residents viewed the coming of the railway with something less than unbridled enthusiasm: they welcomed the prospect of better links with the outside world, but did not want track or trains in or near their backyard – that is, close to either Royal Terrace or The Shrubbery, the cliffside pleasure garden reserved for their use.[10] This put them squarely at odds with Messrs. Peto and Brassey, whose plans for the LT&S railway included a station sited beneath The Shrubbery and close to Southend Pier, from which rail passengers would have ready access to Thames pleasure steamers.

It is inconceivable that Daniel Scratton was unaware of the strength of feeling on Royal Terrace. He was the Terrace's freeholder; he owned The Shrubbery and adjoining fields; and one of the Terrace's residents, living at No. 11, was his widowed mother. The record shows that he was engaged in negotiations with Peto and Brassey in 1852, and there can be little doubt that in the course of them he fought the residents' corner.[11] These exchanges led to an agreement which saw Peto and Brassey making significant concessions. The terms of the agreement were enshrined in the London, Tilbury and Southend Extension Railway Act 1852, the piece of legislation which authorised the building of the line. Besides a general prohibition on railway operations causing any 'nuisance' to the residents of Royal Terrace, the Act contained a number of further stipulations: no buildings were to be erected which obstructed the residents' sea views, and no engine shed was to be built, or locomotive allowed to let off steam, within half a mile of the Terrace.[12]

At some point in 1853, however, Peto and Brassey backpedalled, apparently deciding that the arrangements to which they had previously agreed were unworkable. They now proposed a change to their original route which involved relocating the Southend terminus away from the seafront to a new site, also on land owned by Daniel Scratton, half a mile or so inland and to the west of Southend's High Street.

It may be that this revised plan did not arise solely out of a willingness to defer to the wishes of Scratton and the residents of Royal Terrace: the cost of building a

mile-long viaduct or embankment to enable the railway to hug the shoreline between Chalkwell and Southend may also have been a factor. The new route, however, came with a hefty price tag of its own: it involved a second round of negotiations with Daniel Scratton, the passage of another Act of Parliament, and the digging-out of a lengthy cutting on the approach to the relocated station. But, crucially from the point of view of Peto and Brassey, it did not arouse fierce local opposition. Southend station (renamed Southend Central in 1889) duly opened for business in March 1856.

The relocation of the station away from the seafront had a consequence Scratton could not have foreseen. In the early 1880s the LT&S line was extended eastwards out to Shoebury, requiring a bridge to be built across Southend High Street. Many of Southend's leading citizens were appalled, claiming that the bridge would leave the town centre 'irretrievably ruined'.[13] In place of a bridge they demanded a tunnel. But the railway company stood firm: the cost of a tunnel, it insisted, would be prohibitive.

Cliff Town

In its early years the LT&S railway was not the commuter line it later became, and nor was it a freight line of any consequence. Its directors, acknowledging its heavy dependence on seasonal holiday traffic, referred to it as 'a pleasure line'.[14] It made a modest operating profit, but not enough to allow Peto and Brassey to cover the cost of their guaranteed 6% annual dividend to shareholders.

Peto and Brassey came up with a variety of schemes to cut their losses – among them an unsuccessful bid to renegotiate the terms of LT&S lease – but the most imaginative was a plan to build three hundred houses on land to be leased from Daniel Scratton. Cliff Town, as its promoters called it, was to occupy a forty-acre site lying immediately to the west of Royal Terrace and overlooking the estuary. Peto and Brassey viewed Cliff Town as a worthwhile venture in its own right, but their primary aim was to kick-start a house-building boom in Southend. Where they led, they believed, other investors would follow, Southend would grow, and the LT&S railway would prosper. One of Peto's business associates, Horatio Love, chairman of the Eastern Counties Railway, radiated confidence: 'In a short time Southend will be very considerably enlarged ... It will enjoy its fair share of residential population and a consequent increase in traffic over the line.'[15]

Negotiations over the Cliff Town lease appear to have begun in late 1856 or early 1857, but it was not until May 1859 that agreement was finally reached.[16] One reason for the time lag was the number of conditions which Daniel Scratton wished to attach to the lease (another was money). The most onerous of these related to the appearance and quality of the homes and other buildings to be erected. Scratton had his own vision of Southend's future – wide streets, green spaces, well-appointed houses – and he was at pains to ensure that Cliff Town was developed in accordance with his upmarket preferences. The terms of the lease gave him the final say over all aspects of the project: the plans and specifications for all construction work had to be submitted to him for his 'approval, inspection and satisfaction'.[17] Further stipulations required the lessees to use high-quality building materials and to ensure that the exteriors of buildings were properly maintained. That Scratton felt it necessary to impose these conditions suggests that he was all too aware of Peto's reputation for corner-cutting.

Thanks in no small measure to Daniel Scratton, Cliff Town was (and remains) architecturally impressive. But it did not prove to be an effective catalyst for growth. In the event fewer than half of the planned three hundred houses were built. The project stalled after Peto was caught up in the collapse of the Overend Gurney banking house in 1866 and went bankrupt.

Scratton's vision of Southend, with open spaces and broad vistas over the Estuary.

In 1870, on the death of Thomas Brassey, the 99-year Cliff Town lease passed into the hands of his second son, Henry Arthur Brassey, Liberal MP for Sandwich. Soon afterwards Brassey Jr bought out the freehold of Cliff Town from Daniel Scratton for £16,600, making himself Southend's largest single owner of 'house property'.[18] He was, however, an absentee landlord with no interest in reviving the Cliff Town project.[19]

Scratton's Departure From Southend

In May 1866 Daniel Scratton spoke at the opening of a new Corn Exchange in Rochford. He struck a personal note, revealing the depth of his attachment to the local area: 'There is no place I am so fond of as this, where I have lived since my boyhood … nothing would induce me to leave it.'[20] Something must have happened to change his mind, because a little over two years later he informed William Gregson, his solicitor, that he was planning to move to Devon.[21] In 1869 he bought an estate at Ogwell near Newton Abbot and put the entirety of his land and property in the Southend area up for auction.

Although it has been suggested that his wife did not like the area, nothing in Scratton's family or private life accounts for his abrupt departure from Southend. He was happily married, there were no children to look out for, and he and his wife were in good health. One of Scratton's obituarists thought the explanation was simple: Scratton, he surmised, left Southend because the countryman in him found life in a growing town disagreeable.[22] There is, however, circumstantial evidence which suggests that there was rather more to it than that.

In 1866 Scratton found himself at the centre of a bitter local political dispute. Its origins lay in the danger to public health posed by the failure of Southend's sewage disposal and street cleaning provision to keep pace with its growing population. To remedy matters, Scratton and his allies called for the establishment of a ratepayer-elected Local Board armed with powers to address a range of public health issues, an option available to localities since the passage of the 1848 Public Health Act.[23] This proposal, however, encountered bitter opposition when it was put to a meeting of Southend ratepayers in April 1866.

The leader of the opposition was James Heygate, a forthright and combative member of an extended family with long-standing property interests in the Southend area. In contrast to Scratton's paternalistic brand of Toryism, Heygate was a staunch believer in *laissez-faire* who claimed that a Local Board, once established, would 'meddle with anything and everything'.[24] Heygate, it appears, was persuasive: the ratepayers' meeting voted to reject the Local Board scheme. Members of the Scratton camp, unwilling to accept defeat, responded by demanding a ballot of all Southend ratepayers, as they were legally entitled to do. The earlier vote was duly overturned, though only by the narrowest of margins (203–196). But it was Heygate who had the last word: when elections to the new Local Board were held in August 1866, he topped the poll and was subsequently appointed its chairman. He remained in post until his death in 1873.

The Local Board dispute was about men as well as measures. It became highly personalised. The *Southend Standard* later recalled that 'rival clansmen' shouted 'Scratton' and 'Heygate' at each other in the streets.[25] For Scratton, it must have been a bruising, even humiliating, experience. He achieved his preferred outcome but signally failed to build a consensus behind it. His primacy in the locality was no longer undisputed and there was little prospect, given Southend's continuing expansion, of it ever being re-established. In these circumstances escape to the rolling hills of south Devon must have had its appeal.

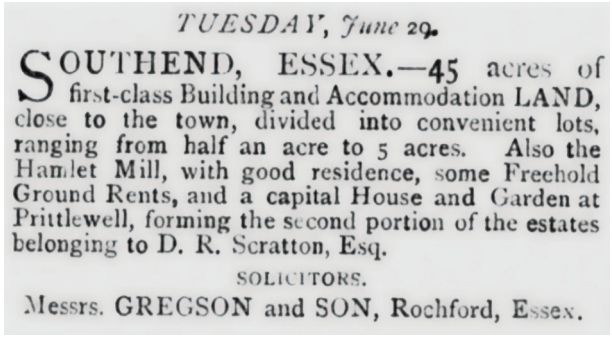
It seems likely that Daniel Scratton's departure from Southend also owed something to his anxieties about the long-term viability of arable farming in Essex. What he saw around him in the later 1860s was an increasingly hard-pressed farming community, one unprotected against foreign competition since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and forced by economic circumstances to run ever faster in order to stand still. 'The low price of corn during long periods', he told a Rochford audience in 1868, 'has caused farmers to make exertions to grow more to compensate for the deficiency of price.'[26] When Scratton moved to Devon he switched, significantly, from arable to grazing livestock farming, keeping a herd of Shorthorn cattle and a flock of Shropshire sheep. In this he showed himself to be prescient: the late nineteenth-century 'great depression' in agriculture saw cereal producers in Essex suffering acutely, Devon's livestock farmers much less so. 'Mr Scratton is well out of Essex' remarked an old acquaintance in 1897.[27]

Sell-Off, 1869

Daniel Scratton's Southend estate was sold off in three parts. The first, consisting of houses, shops, and small building plots in and around the High Street, went up for sale at London's Auction Mart in April 1869. The second, forty-five acres of building land to the west of the High Street, divided into twenty-four lots, followed in June. The sell-off was completed in July when Scratton's home, Prittlewell Priory, and nearly 2,000 acres of farmland in outlying areas, some of it tenanted, went under the hammer. All told one hundred and ten separate lots were offered at the three auctions: together they realised just over £114,000.[28]

Some of the purchasers at the auctions were wealthy Londoners attracted by the agricultural land on sale. But most of the buyers were local people, among them a number of leaseholders on Royal Terrace who took the opportunity to acquire the freehold of their homes. More significant from the point of view of Southend's long-term development, however, were the locals who purchased building plots around the High Street and in the area immediately to the west of it (nowadays Southend's Milton district). Two names stand out: James Scott (1806–82) and Thomas Dowsett (1837–1906). Both were self-made men: Scott started out as a carpenter and became a successful builder, Dowsett was a hairdresser turned retailer who then diversified into estate agency and property development. Both men, moreover, were Liberal in politics and Nonconformist in religion. Theirs was a world far removed from that of Daniel Scratton.[29]

James Scott bought sixteen lots at the 1869 auctions for a total of £12,370, Dowsett thirteen for £12,420. The two quickly set about getting a return on their investment. For the most part their *modus operandi* was to sell on the land they had acquired in the shape of smaller building plots, though in some cases they built houses themselves on a speculative basis. Within twenty years, as a result of their endeavours and those of smaller-scale developers, virtually all of the land described in the 1869 auction catalogues as suitable for 'building and accommodation' had been built over.[30] In the absence of strict planning regulations, the villas and terraces which sprang up on what had been open fields came in a variety of shapes and sizes, giving the area an ambience very different from that of Cliff Town, its neighbour to the south.



TUESDAY, June 29.

SOUTHEND, ESSEX.—45 acres of first-class Building and Accommodation LAND, close to the town, divided into convenient lots, ranging from half an acre to 5 acres. Also the Hamlet Mill, with good residence, some Freehold Ground Rents, and a capital House and Garden at Prittlewell, forming the second portion of the estates belonging to D. R. Scratton, Esq.

SOLICITORS.

Messrs. GREGSON and SON, Rochford, Essex.

Newspaper advertisement for the sale of Scratton's properties in Southend

Conclusion

Daniel Scratton died on his Devon estate in 1902. He lived long enough to see Southend grow into a town of 30,000 people. In all likelihood it would have grown into a sizeable town regardless of his interventions in the 1850s and 1860s. The 'pull' factors which underpinned its growth – proximity to London, good transport links, fresh air (by London standards), relatively cheap land – would no doubt have had their effect irrespective of what any one individual did or did not do. But without Scratton Southend might not have grown in the manner or at the pace that it did. It was Scratton who was instrumental in routing the railway away from the shoreline; Scratton who shaped Southend's evolving townscape by imposing design controls on the Cliff Town development; and Scratton who opened the door to sharp-eyed property developers when he sold off his estate in its entirety.

The 1869 sell-off was a particularly important milestone in Southend's history. In 1891 William Gregson, Scratton's solicitor, giving evidence to a Privy Council inquiry into the town's petition to be incorporated as a borough, argued that it marked the beginning of what he called 'the modern development of Southend'. 'The sale', he added, by way of explanation, 'threw an immense quantity of freehold land upon the market, and from that time can be recognised the progress of the town at a rapid rate.'[31] As for Daniel Scratton, he visited Southend from time to time in the latter part of his life to attend to his residual interests in the town, but apparently never regretted his decision to leave it.[32]

Endnotes

1 *East and South Devon Advertiser*, 22 March 1902.

2 Bateman, 1883: 434.

3 Burrows, 1909: 194. Southend and district were certainly sparsely populated in the 1840s and 1850s. Figures based on the 1851 Census published in the *Chelmsford Chronicle* in 1853 suggested that the population of Southend itself was 1,141. The population of Rochford Hundred (the area bounded by the Crouch to the north, the Thames to the south and, broadly, the line of the present-day A130 to the west) was just under 15,000. See 'Population of Essex', *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 23 September 1853.

4 *Essex Herald*, 1 September 1846.

5 Lord Macaulay, 1848: 240.

6 *Western Times*, 12 February 1902.

7 See Kay, 1996, chs. 1–2.

8 See anon., 'Petovia: being a review of the scheme for a railway between Pitsea and Colchester', London, 1857: 21–24.

9 *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 26 February 1847.

10 See *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 23 June 1847.

11 See William Gregson to Daniel Scratton, 27 August 1852, Essex Record Office (ERO) D/DGs A10.

12 The London, Tilbury and Southend Extension Railway Act 1852 (15 & 16 Vict. Cap. 84), clauses 60–64.

13 *Southend Standard*, 24 February 1882.

14 *Essex Standard*, 29 August 1860. In the first five years of its operation, freight traffic accounted for only 12.2% of the LT&S line's revenue. See Tony Sheward 2022: 4–9.

15 *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 26 August 1859.

16 See 'Account of Messrs. Comport and Gregson with Daniel Scratton' (1851–58), ERO D/DGs A10, and 'Receipted account of Messrs. Beadel and Co [surveyors] to Daniel Scratton', ERO D/Dgs A11.

17 'Articles of agreement', 26 May 1859, ERO TS 236/1.

18 *Southend Standard*, 21 May 1891. For the terms of purchase of the freehold, see 'Conveyance of Cliff Town estate', 15 January 1872, ERO TS 236/2.

19 *Southend Standard*, 2 February 1883.

20 *Essex Herald*, 29 May 1866.

21 Daniel Scratton to William Gregson, 10 October 1868, ERO D/DGs E72.

22 *Western Times*, 28 February 1902.

23 The 1848 Public Health Act provided for the establishment of Local Boards of Health; the 1858 Local Government Act renamed them Local Boards and gave them additional powers.

24 *Essex Weekly News*, 27 April 1866.

25 *Southend Standard*, 31 October 1907.

26 *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 10 July 1868.

27 Temple Soares to William Gregson, 13 October 1897, ERO D/DGs E47.

28 ERO D/DGs E44 (1869 sales catalogues, including maps showing individual lots, names of purchasers and prices paid).

[29] See *Southend Standard*, 17 February 1882 (Scott obituary) and 1 February 1906 (Dowsett obituary).

[30] *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 21 May 1869.

[31] *Southend Standard*, 15 October 1891.

[32] Temple Soares to William Gregson, 13 October 1897, ERO D/DGs E47.

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IN BRIEF

Prittlewell Prince – Adventures in the East?

The exact identity of the early East Saxon magnate whose remains were interred in a chamber burial at Prittlewell has never been established beyond dispute, but a recent article by Helen Gittos in *The English Historical Review* opened up some interesting possibilities regarding the sources of the wealth entombed with him in the early 7th century. In common with the amazing treasures in the contemporary barrow at Sutton Hoo (Mound 1) and the finds from mounds at Broomfield, Taplow and elsewhere, the likely origins of the items have long been recognised to be disparate: some surely of local production (wooden articles, some weapons, gaming boards and counters, the garnet-and-gold jewellery), some from Merovingian Francia (e.g. the Sutton Hoo coins), from the Byzantine world (e.g. the Sutton Hoo spoons and silver tableware, Broomfield and Prittlewell bronze flagons) and from Scandinavia (e.g. the Sutton Hoo armour). These 'outsourced' items are usually considered to be diplomatic gifts of the kinds which circulated among leading families in the early medieval world and which oiled the wheels of international relations among powerful potential allies and enemies.

The eastern Mediterranean material (tableware, ewers, hanging bowls, spoons) has proved crucial, since Gittos links these items to historical events. Specifically, in the year 575, the Byzantine world was under threat from the east, the Sasanians of Persia; the military command under Justin II undertook a major recruiting campaign on both sides of the Alps to reinforce the Empire's cavalry units. Estimates of the numbers of horsemen involved vary greatly (ranging from the reductive modern view at 12,000 to the contemporary assessment of 150,000), but all agree that the recruitment was a success and the huge numbers of troops, called 'Tiberiani', were generously rewarded for their service. The men – drawn from the Goths, Lombards, Saxons and elsewhere – served until the war against the Sasanians ended in 591, whereupon their units were disbanded. They had fought in Armenia and as far as the Caspian Sea, and their military equipment was influenced by Byzantine and Sasanian (Persian) wargear.

Much of the bronze tableware and feasting equipment was of a type which was short-lived and apparently had barely been used when it was interred in the period *c*.590–620 in eastern England, which suggests that it had been only recently manufactured and brought to these shores from the regions of Syria and Armenia where it was likely made. Some other items are linked (by Gittos) to the practice of horsemanship and the care of the mounts on which the cavalry depended. The case is made for many young princes in Britain as well as Francia (Germany and eastern France), Scandinavia, Lombard Italy and elsewhere having been attracted by the promise of wealth and adventure, and having taken up service in a military campaign which lasted around 15 years (although they need not all have served for all that time). Discharged at around the age of 30–35 with a good haul of treasure and much valuable military experience, on their return to northern Europe they were subsequently the natural leaders and rulers of their home societies.

Gittos's paper has met with much approval, and it certainly does present the case in a detailed and well-argued manner. There is one flaw that I can detect: on returning after war-service, it was the custom for a youth to publicly present his hard-earnt treasures to the king or leader of his group as a diplomatic gift with which he could secure preferment; this behaviour is shown for example in the poem *Beowulf* where the hero publicly endows King Hygelac with the gifts he won in Denmark, and is then ennobled with authority and estates from which he could draw a good income to sustain him and any future family. The men whose barrows held these great treasures therefore need not have been the same ones as headed off to serve and risk their lives on so great an adventure, but rather the stay-at-homes who held society together while their fellows were away winning their reputations through exotic exploits.

Helen Gittos, 'Sutton Hoo and Syria: The Anglo-Saxons Who Served in the Byzantine Army?' *The English Historical Review* vol. 139, issue 601, December 2024.

Open access: https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceae213

The Editor

Medieval Seal Matrix

PAS reference: ESS-35ACC2, dated to 1200–1300 AD and discovered near Wimbish. A lead-alloy vesica-shaped matrix with an engraved obverse and a pierced lug to the reverse. The central motif is a fleur-de-lis surrounded by a legend running retrograde and reading '+ S'. ELESIIAS. VXOR. ADE'. This possibly translates from medieval Latin as 'Seal of Alicia, wife of Ad[am]'. Malcolm Jones also notes: 'the clear contraction mark over VXOR is presumably because the word should be in the genitive case – VXORIS = "of the wife (of)"'.

Very Late Roman Brooch

PAS reference: ESS-F36C34, datable to *c*.400–450 AD and found at Radwinter. An incomplete copper-alloy brooch of 'Supporting-Arm' type. The flared top of the bow merges with the head, with its transversely ridged and grooved upper surface. From each end of the head projects a perforated lug, which held in place the spring and pin mechanism. This type of bow brooch is associated with the very end of Roman 'factory' production in Britain, and the form is linked to the *foederati* (or *læti*) military presence which at this time was growing in importance. How this find relates to the early 5th century cemetery at Great Chesterford requires further study.

Roman Military Strap Mount

PAS reference: ESS-49B879, datable to the range 120–300 AD, found in the parish of Abbess Beauchamp and Berners Roding. It is S-shaped in plan and D-shaped in cross-section with an openwork design of two opposing 'trumpet shapes' with a rectangular ridge joining them, decorated with two grooves. The trumpet-ends conform to the direction of the junction leaving two rectangular slots between, one on each side. The reverse of the object has two integral rivets, each with a large circular head and short shank. The style of the artefact is typical of the Roman military, and the trumpet motifs may have been introduced into the manufacturer's repertoire following the absorption of legions of Gallic origin; the trumpet and comma motif are typical of La Tène artwork generally.

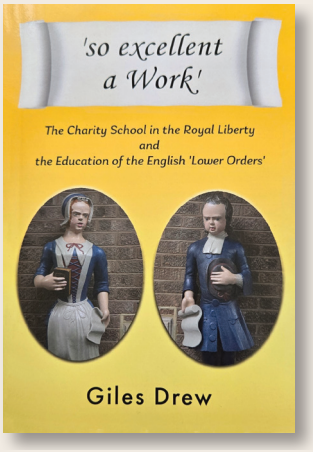
Potin

PAS reference: PUBLIC-34D4D0 dating to *c*.60–45 BC, found at Hatfield Peverel. This cast bronze potin (early coin) was struck for the Kent region – the Cantiaci tribe – with quite a large part of the casting sprue still attached, a common feature of this form. It is of Chris Rudd's 'Nipples' type, Holman's type G3/6-1a.

The British potin was an early experimental type of coinage which is unusual in not containing any precious metal at all. They appear at the end of the 2nd century BC. They circulated mainly in Kent and were based on coins issued at *Massalia* (now Marseille, France). Their presence in southern Britain indicates the growth of an at least partly-monetised economy here in the century before the Claudian invasion.

Book Reviews

Giles Drew



So Excellent A Work:

The Charity School in the Royal Liberty and the Education of the English 'Lower Orders'

New Generation Publishing, 2023, 391 pp, card covers, monochrome illustrations, maps. ISBN 978-1-80369-884-7. £25

The modern state education system is nothing if not controversial. Newspaper and television news programmes can always fill an empty slot featuring some new survey which has determined that our children are being failed by the teachers, the other pupils and their parents, the administrative staff, the directors of education and the providers of content. It is easy to overlook the fact that any form of mass education at all is a new development.

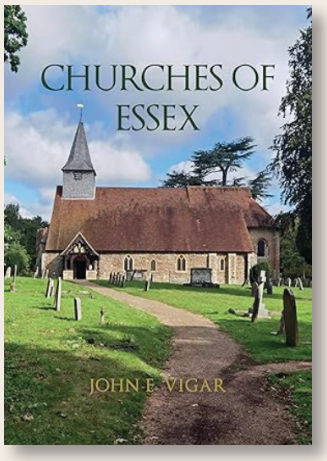
At the beginning of the 18th century, every parish in England and Wales was urged to establish a school for the poor funded by charitable donations and overseen by some local worthies of good standing – almost always with one eye firmly on the 'improvement' of the morals of the children on Christian principles. The turmoil of the English Civil War resulted in a large population of destitute or heavily impoverished 'paupers' who lacked the means to support themselves or their dependants. While these people provided a ready source of cheap labour, which suited some of the landowning and entrepreneurial classes, they were supported at public expense by the parish where they were born. They often had large families – also the responsibility of the parish – and the children were a burden until they could be apprenticed, put to work or into service at the age of twelve. One solution to this problem was to provide workhouses and training schools in order to keep the children under instruction, and thus not available to cause a nuisance on the streets. A foundation – The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge – formalised the approach to be adopted, which went beyond the initial idea of preparing youngsters for the hardships of their future lives in labour. With a heavy emphasis on bibical instruction, developing the ability to read was a primary target, confined to Protestants. One such school was created in Essex in the Royal Liberty of Havering by a group of ten benefactors: the Charity School for Boys and Girls at Romford was founded in 1710.

Giles Drew tackles the wider subject of charity schools and the specifics of the Romford case with clarity and firmness of purpose: I am sure it must have been tempting to produce a general history of the development of state education and to tack on a chapter or two concerning the Romford schools as an illustration; especially since at the time of his writing the present work, the only previous study was published in 1938. Instead, Drew has chosen to show the process by which the school came into existence and takes the tale forward to 1834, a crucial date when the original school building was deemed unsuitable and a purpose-built new school opened in Market Square. The tale is not straightforward, mainly because the times were fraught with new ideas and priorities, and violently divergent ideas about the purpose of education for the populace as a whole (exclusively religious or largely secular?).

The book is weighty and the treatment is thorough, with extensive citing of sources and selective quotations from them. If it has a fault, this lies in the illustrations which are not as sharp as might be expected and this is not helped by the cream-tinted paper on which they are printed. The text itself is lively, clear and mercifully free from too much jargon. I have no doubt that anyone curious about the place of education in modern social history would learn a lot from this book.

Heather Godfrey

John E. Vigar



Churches of Essex

Amberley Publishing, 2025, 96 pp, card covers, colour. ISBN 978-1-3981-2301-4 £15.99

Any treatment of 'Churches of Essex' can only hope to be a selection of the best and most important measured by any criterion: the oldest, the best preserved, the most architecturally important, the largest, the smallest…. In this slim but beautifully produced volume, Vigar presents his choice of the most historically important ones – the oldest timber-framed church in England, the best example of Arts and Crafts architecture, the most notable furnishings and monumental brasses, the most significant surviving medieval wall-paintings, and so on. The choices are always subjective but never uninformed or arbitrary: both the humble (St Peter on the Wall, Bradwell) and the flamboyant (St Mary the Virgin, Ardleigh) are included. Each church depicts a snapshot of the lives and preoccupations of the men and women who designed and financed these buildings.

Steve Pollington

Daniel Robert Scratton (1819–1902), of Prittlewell Priory, Essex by Stephen Pearce (1819–1904)

With kind permission of Southend Museums