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Newsletter

Essex Society for Archaeology and History



In this issue

AGM at Prittlewell Priory, Southend-on-Sea

Help with ESAH Programme Committee

Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick

Philip Morant's portrait and the mysterious Mr Head

Heritage Open Days in Colchester

Call for papers: Essex Archaeology Conference

Ash Diebeck

Essex Industrial Archaeology Group (EIAG) Annual Meeting

ESAH Events for 2025

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Copy for the next issue should be sent to the editor at the above address by no later than 28th February 2026.

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

The illustration on the front cover: Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick.

Attributed to Edmund Ashfield

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AGM – Prittlewell Priory

Saturday 28th June

We held our AGM at Prittlewell Priory this year.



Members and Council at Prittlewell Priory for the 2025 AGM

Prittlewell Priory was founded by the Cluniac Order as a cell to the Priory of St Pancras at Lewes, East Sussex. It was one of the lesser monasteries, housing not more than eighteen monks. After the Dissolution of 1536 much of the building was destroyed. What remained was much altered during the 18th century. Alterations were made again in the early 20th century, when the refectory was restored and partly rebuilt.

Following the meeting, we had an excellent site tour from Dr Sarah Ives, a specialist in WW2 American Poetry, who nonetheless was equally knowledgeable on the history of the Priory. Prittlewell Priory is an excellent venue – a visit is recommended (if you haven't already been).



Members scrutinise the Dissolution notice from 1536

Help with ESAH Programme Committee

Membership of the Society is a commitment to supporting research into the history and heritage of the historic county of Essex which also brings with it certain benefits, one of which is the annual programme. Quarterly meetings were a feature of the Society's activities from the time of its foundation. These were enterprising events, with up to 100 people, penetrating rural areas with horse and carriage and the help of a more extensive railway system than we enjoy today. The 150th anniversary of the Society was celebrated in 2002 with a reception at Spains Hall, Finchingfield.



Society members at Spains Hall, 2002

In more recent times, there have been about seven meetings a year, with visit to houses and places often normally inaccessible, plus the Morant lecture and lunch. The pandemic interrupted this routine. The lunch has been abandoned, and the lecture for the moment replaced by the archaeological and historical Symposium, an event inherited on the demise of Essex Congress. The committee that runs the programme has dwindled and urgently needs new members. The committee normally meets 2-3 times a year.

If you feel you can contribute with ideas for visits and help with their organisation, please contact Hon Secretary.

Social Media...help!

We are looking for someone to help with our Social Media. Although we have a Facebook page, we need someone to drive it forward and suggest other ways we can create more 'Socials'.

Any help gratefully received. Please contact Hon Secretary.

Thank you!!

Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick & Mary Berkeley & Duke of Monmouth & Lord Grey of Werke

By Michael Leach

Mary Rich of Leez Priory (1625-1678) was a sternly pious Christian who divided her life between London, and her Essex retreat where she spent many hours a day (when social duties allowed) in prayer, self castigation and reflecting on her own death. She made a regular daily record of her religious practices which included regular visits from puritan Essex clergy. Her repetitive religious introspection is interspersed with occasional observations on her social duties and other events. In addition, she recorded the verbal assaults of her irascible husband who suffered from repeated illnesses (noted as 'gout' but more likely to have been – or complicated by - renal stone). She also noted her irreconcilable grief over the death of her only son. Combined with the poor condition of the surviving MSS, the erratic spelling and the generous scattering of ink blots and dog-eared margins, the diaries do not make for easy reading. On her death in 1678, the diaries came to her chaplain, the Rev William Woodrooffe, and later into the hands of one of his sons who squeezed a large number of explanatory annotations between the countess's scrawled lines, as well as using the blank pages for the compilation of a partial index.

Amongst her visitors to Leez on 14 March 1671 were her friends, Lord and Lady Berkeley and their daughter, Mary (d.1719). The countess did not relax her religious imperative and within two days 'had with my Lord Berkeley much good discourse and did much persuade him to a more serious diligence in the wayes of God ...'. After a week the parents departed, leaving their daughter in the countess's care, probably to protect her from parental wrath about her entanglement with the Duke of Monmouth. On 30 April, the countess noted (in her idiosyncratic spelling) that she had spent much time giving 'good Counsell to Mrs Mary Berkeley, and in makeing please for hur with her father and mother who ware very arengery with her, I had at last the satesfaction to reconcile her parentes to her ...'. At this point an added note reads 'about ye Duke of Monmouth'.



Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick - by Edmund Ashfield.

© Burghley Collections

Mary Berkeley returned to London in early May but she must have returned to Leez before 4 July, on which date matters came to a head. The countess noted 'then there happned something that put me into a very high disorder but saw a good providence of God to me in ordering that affaيرة for the best in delivering me from what I feared.' The later annotator's cryptic note explains that 'Mrs Berkeley Du. of Monmouth came aft Mrs Mary Berkeley in preventing ye designs of.' Two of the added index entries expand on this, albeit somewhat obscurely: '4 July put into high disorder M. Gee D M Ber Duke of Monmouth & Mrs Mary Berkeley Mr Gee discover'd ye matter to his Lady ...' and (date illegible) 'this Mr Gee was my Ld's steward & if I mistake not was ye first yt discover'd yt there were some persons lurking about ye parks viz the Du of Monmouth & his servant'.

The explanation of all this is as follows. The Duke of Monmouth, one of Charles II's illegitimate sons, was noted for his amorous pursuit of young ladies, one of whom was Mary Berkeley. Undeterred by her banishment to Leez, he had come to Essex, together with one of his servants, both disguised as pedlars.

A note was smuggled to Mary Berkeley, allegedly hidden in a glove, and Mr Gee, the house steward, had discovered the couple together together in Pond Park at Leeze, and had informed his mistress. A week later, the Berkeley parents had returned to Leeze to collect their errant daughter and, not long after, married her off to Lord Grey of Werke (1655-1701) – later created earl of Tankerville.

Though there appear to be no further references to Mary Berkeley in the countess's diaries, this was by no means the end of the unfortunate young lady's troubles. Nearly a decade later, her husband, suspecting that her affair with Monmouth was still ongoing, ordered her out of his house. Meanwhile Grey himself had fallen in love, and soon eloped with, his wife's younger sister, Henrietta Berkeley. This led to a scandalous court case concerning the abduction, which subsequently formed the basis of Aphra Benn's novel, *Love Letters of a Nobleman to his Sister*.

Grey was no stranger to covert conspiracies and was involved in various plots to secure the Duke of Monmouth's claim to the throne. Grey's London house was searched in May 1682, revealing a stash of armour and ninety muskets, but he was released on providing recognisances which totalled the massive sum of £20,000. A month later he was arrested in connection with the Rye House Plot, but managed to escape en route to the Tower of London, and fled, together with his pregnant mistress Henrietta Berkeley, to Holland. He was indicted for high treason in absentio, with a £500 reward for his capture. In June 1684 he evaded capture by government agents, and he was involved in plans to put the Duke of Monmouth on the throne on the death of the ailing Charles II. He joined the Monmouth invasion in 1685, commanded a large militia force at the battle of Sedgemoor, and was captured the day after the rebels' defeat by James II's army.

Though Monmouth was executed, Grey, by exploiting heavy debt liabilities, managed to save his skin. He was pardoned in November 1685 and subsequently obtained various government posts in the reign of William and Mary. It is not clear if his wife Mary (née Berkeley) ever returned to his household. She did outlive him by nearly two decades, and she is not mentioned in his will. His estate was left to the daughter of this unhappy marriage, and her sister Henrietta, his erstwhile (and presumably abandoned) mistress, was bequeathed a relatively modest £200.

Sources:

Barham, Mr., 1847. *Memoir of Lady Warwick: also her Diary 1666-1672*, London

Diaries of Countess of Warwick BL Add MS 27352 (digitised format)

Greaves, R.L., 2004. 'Grey, Ford, Earl of Tankerville', in ODNB

Smith, C.F., 1901. *Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick (1625-1678): her Family and Friends*, London

Philip Morant's portrait and the mysterious Mr Head

Phillip Wise

When taking up their office, the new President of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History is handed, as well as the presidential badge, a framed photograph of the pre-eminent Essex historian, the Rev. Philip Morant (1700-1770). The photograph currently hangs in my office and I find it very inspirational when I start work every morning. It has also prompted an interest in the original portrait which is on display in the Grand Jury Room of Colchester Town Hall. The portrait is by Charles Head (1850-1926), whose name is not very familiar in Essex, and there is some uncertainty about the details of his life as we shall see.

The Rev. Philip Morant should really need no introduction to members of the Society. However, it is worth quoting a brief extract from the entry by Geoffrey Martin in the *Dictionary of National Biography* to remind ourselves of his importance for the history and archaeology of Essex. Martin writes of Morant's county history as follows, 'The "History of Essex" is characterized by learning, common sense, and consistency. Morant's great accomplishment was to devise a plan and fulfil it ... he set a pattern against which other county histories could be measured.'

Head's painting is based on the only known image of Morant, a pencil sketch in the Essex Record Office (Hills-Astle MSS). This posthumous portrait by Head, like a number of others, was commissioned by the mayor and corporation of Colchester for the current Town Hall when it opened in 1902.

The work of Charles Head is represented by several portraits in the Colchester art collection. As well as Morant, there are portraits of William Mason (d. 1802), who was an alderman and mayor of Colchester in 1796-7, the eminent rose-grower Benjamin Cant, Charles Henry Hawkins JP, another Colchester mayor, and the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould (1834-1924). The portrait of the latter is particularly interesting. In addition, the Colchester collection also has three illuminated certificates which represent Head's output as an illustrator and calligrapher.



Portrait of Rev. Philip Morant.
Painted by Charles Head in 1902
(Photo: © Colchester City Council: Colchester & Ipswich
Museums. COLEM:163A)

Charles Head was born in Portsmouth on 25th May 1850, the son of James Head, a cordwainer (or shoemaker) and his wife Sophia. Head's obituary states that he studied art at 'South Kensington, London' – this was probably the National Art Training School (now the Royal College of Art) – under Sir Edward Poynter (1836-1919). Poynter was a painter, designer and draughtsman who was also, at various times, the Slade Professor of Fine Art at University College, London, the director of the National Gallery and the President of the Royal Academy. It is unclear exactly when Head was training to be an artist but he was probably in his mid-twenties at the time.

By 1877 he was living on Mersea Island at the appropriately named Mersea Cottage as the private secretary of a French aristocrat Count (James) Considine. According to both a newspaper interview in 1924 and his obituary two years later, Head became acquainted at this time with the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould who was the Rector of East Mersea between 1871 and 1881. Head is described as being very close to the Rev. Baring Gould and as having provided the illustrations for his magnum opus 'The Lives of the Early British Saints'.



When Baring Gould left Essex to take up the living at Lew Trenchard in Devon, where he was also lord of the manor, Head is said to have followed him to undertake work as a painter of wooden panels in both the parish church and the manor house, Lew Manor. Puzzlingly though, the entry for Lew Trenchard in Pevsner's 'Devon' makes no mention of Charles Head in relation to either the church or the manor house. Instead the paintings of the rood screen in the church and in the parlour of the manor house are credited to Margaret Rowe, the married daughter of Baring-Gould. Could Head have been Margaret Rowe's teacher?

Head is also credited with 'some restoration work at St Martin's Church, Scarborough' in the early 1920s. Again Pevsner makes no mention of him in the relevant entry in his 'North Yorkshire' volume when describing the pulpit: 'A pre-Raphaelite gem. The pulpit has painted panels by Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown and Morris. There were however not executed by the three artists themselves but by Campfield.' This omission is perhaps less surprising as Head's work at St Martin's was probably restricted to cleaning the paintings.

Head was trained at a very prestigious art school and was undoubtedly a talented portrait painter. It has proved very hard however to find examples of his work despite the claim in his obituary that, 'Much of his beautiful work is in many churches all over the United Kingdom and abroad'. If any members of the Society are aware of his contribution to the decoration of Essex churches I would be very interested in hearing from them.

Head is recorded as living at three addresses in Colchester, including 32 Creffield Road where he died in 1926.

(Photo: © Philip Wise)

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to Peter Knott for his assistance with the research for this article.

References

- Cherry, B. & Pevsner, N. 1991 *The Buildings of England: Devon*. London: Penguin, p. 534-6.
Essex County Standard, 5.01.1924 'Interview with Charles Head'.
Essex County Standard, 11.12.1926 'Death of Well-Known Artist'.
Pevsner, N. 1966 *The Buildings of England: Yorkshire - The North Riding*. London: Penguin, p. 322-3.

Heritage Open Days in Colchester

By Philip Wise

The theme of Heritage Open Days this year is architecture which gives plenty of scope in a place with so many remarkable historic buildings as Colchester. Indeed, there are a record number of 51 venues and guided walks in the 2025 programme. Old favourites such as the Roman Circus Centre, St Leonard's at the Hythe Church and, of course, Colchester Castle, are joined by newcomers such as the remarkable former eighteenth-century building in Queen Street, once a police station and now housing SPACE artist's studios. This year there are several new guided walks, including the Victorian buildings of the Colchester Garrison and the Lost (and Found) theatres of Colchester. Lastly, it is very good to see the return of the 'Meet and Play the Moot Hall Organ' event in Colchester Town Hall after an absence due to essential ceiling repairs. All events are free to enjoy.

The national festival is now over thirty-years-old. Coordinated by the National Trust, it is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery and run by thousands of local organisations and volunteers. It is the nation's premier heritage festival bringing people together to celebrate their heritage, community and history.

Heritage Open Days runs from Friday 12 to Sunday 21 September.

For more information pick up a leaflet at the Visitor Information Centre or Colchester Castle. Alternatively go to: www.visitcolchester.com/whats-on/HODS2025



*The interior of Holy Trinity Church will be open for Heritage Open Days this year
(photograph: Philip Wise)*

Call for Papers

Essex Archaeology Conference: Recent Research & Discoveries in Essex

Since the last conference convened by Essex County Council, in 2008, responsibility for the management of the Historic Environment of Essex has changed with the creation of Place Services in 2012 to provide archaeological advisory services and maintenance of the Essex Historic Environment Record, coinciding with the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, there has been a significant amount of archaeological fieldwork undertaken in Essex, and this day conference is an opportunity for individuals and organisations to provide an update on the latest historic environment research and discoveries in our county.

The conference will take place at Essex Record Office on 3rd October 2026. Refreshments and lunch will be provided.

Essex County Council encourage submissions from heritage professionals, academics, early career researchers, community groups, independent researchers and students who have undertaken or will undertake research about the Historic Environment of Essex.

They welcome proposals for lectures and presentations that would be 30-45 minutes in length. Submissions can build on the conclusions of the previous conference or focus on new topics and alternate interpretations brought forward by recent work. There will also be space for societies and organisations to have a stand at the conference. They welcome submissions for stands that present and promote the historic environment of Essex.

Submissions must focus on work and/or research completed in the last 18 years. Submissions **must** be about archaeological work in Essex, and may be related to (although they will consider anything related to the historic environment):

- Recent research and discoveries
- New techniques and technology
- Community archaeology and public engagement
- Buildings archaeology

Submission Guidelines

Please provide the following information:

- Name
- Organisation/Society (if relevant)
- Title of presentation
- Abstract (250 words max)
- Anticipated length of presentation
- Short bio summary about yourself

Please submit proposals to Tim Murphy: tim.murphy@essex.gov.uk

A full submission form can be provided, please email Tim at the above address.

Deadline for submissions: 31st September 2025

Speakers will receive free entry to the conference. No fees or costs (including travel) will be reimbursed

Ash Dieback – the outlook may be less bleak

By Michael Leach

The UK is home to more than 100million ash trees. Every spring, mature trees infected with ash dieback caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* die within a few weeks of coming into leaf. Initial predictions suggested that at least 95% of UK ash trees would be killed, but recent work has ameliorated this figure to some extent. There was an early hope that a resistant species might develop, but this has not so far happened, though some trees with a specific genetic makeup have shown an ability to survive an attack.

Since 2013 the Living Ash Project has been identifying these resilient sub-species and actively propagating them to plant out seedlings in badly affected areas. Another approach is through woodland management. As the disease flourishes best in crowded plantings, and in trees which are stressed, or growing in less than ideal conditions, there are opportunities for improving survival rates by appropriate management. Perversely, global warming may also benefit affected trees as the fungus does not flourish in intense summer heat, and this results in a better chance of trees setting seed to produce more resilient progeny. Though ash is fast growing, it is also vulnerable to deer damage, and effective control of wild herds is an important consideration.

The other hopeful development is through a better understanding of the microbiome of the ash tree. Recent research in Germany and Poland has shown that trees survive better in the presence of certain soil bacteria, and elsewhere it has been found that specific soil fungi are beneficial in a similar way.

Progress with this research is particularly important as another threat to ash trees, the emerald ash borer beetle, which has been responsible for the death of millions of trees in North America, is slowly advancing westwards from East Europe. There is no evidence that it has reached the UK yet, but it would be rash to assume that we will be able to keep it from our door indefinitely.

Essex Industrial Archaeology Group (EIAG)

Annual Meeting

Saturday 18th October 2025, 2:00 – 4:30pm at the Essex Record Office, Wharf Rd, Chelmsford CM2 6YT

To mark the 200th Anniversary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, this year's EIAG Annual Meeting has been extended to allow for a series of short talks on the impact of the development of railways in Essex.

Provisional programme:

2:00 - EIAG business and introduction to the talks

2:30 - Peter Jones - Early Essex Railways

2:55 - Martin Rose - The Railway Through Audley End (TBC)

3:20 - Refreshment break

3:40 - Peter Wynn - Railway Engineers incl. Peter Bruff

4:05 - Alan White - The Impact of the Railway on the Development of Southend

4:30 - Close

As the room at the Record Office has a seating limit and this event may attract more than the usual Annual Meeting attendance, places must be booked in advance so that we can manage the numbers attending. Note that this is free for members, for non-members the cost is £2.

In order to book a place, please email Jane Giffould at jgiffould@aol.com

Give your name and email address.

If having booked a place you find you are unable to attend, please let Jane know as we will be maintaining a waiting list after all places are taken.

Please Note: There is no parking at the Record Office apart from three disabled parking spaces. However, the new bridge across the Chelmer from the Baddow Road car park to the Record Office is now open, so Baddow Road is the nearest car park just a few minutes walk across the river.

ESAH Events for 2025

We have arranged a number of events for this year. Details given as TBC here will be updated ASAP. ***We are very happy to receive expressions of interest for those events which are not yet finalised - we will contact you when more is known.*** We will send details of parking etc, to those who book.

Tuesday 26 August, 2pm. £5. Guided walking tour of Galleywood Common (racecourse).

Meet 2pm at Galleywood Heritage Centre, The Common, Off Margaretting Rd, Galleywood, Chelmsford, CM2 8TR

Tuesday 25 September, 2pm. £10. Morant Event: Tour of Colchester Town Hall.

Tour will focus on the building's art treasures, including the portrait of Rev. Philip Morant.

Meet 2pm at Town Hall entrance. Tea/cake included after. If travelling into Colchester please use Park & Ride.

Wednesday 15 October, 2pm. £10. St Stephen's Chapel (Bures) & Bures Mount.

Tour of St Stephen's Chapel (where the de Vere monuments are housed). Please park in the designated car park behind the barn and walk down the track. Anyone who cannot manage the 5 minute walk can drive down the track and park at the chapel. Followed by a visit to view Bures Mount and tea/cake.

Saturday 1 November, 10am-4pm. £10. Annual Archaeology & History Symposium.

Includes lunch and tea/coffee. Christ Church, 164 New London Rd, Chelmsford, CM2 0AW. A mixture of archaeology and local history speakers:

- **Rob Cullum**, *A Middle Bronze Age Settlement at Heybridge with possible continental parallels*
- **Angus Forshaw**, *Late Iron Age/Early Roman elite burials near Chelmsford*
- **Adam Wightman**, *A spectacular Roman burial from Colchester*
- **Jane Pearson**, *Victorian Railway Accidents*
- **Peter Jones**, *Life and times of the Eastern Counties railway, and 200 years since Stockton and Darlington*

Please email/write to the Excursions Secretary to book (howard000brooks@gmail.com). **Payment: Online as before.** Let us know if you require account details. Please give event reference and number of bookings (e.g. HAR 2). Alternatively: send a cheque to Hon Sec's Colchester address.

PLEASE NOTE: If you pay online you must tell us otherwise we won't be expecting you.

The visits on the Society's programme are open to members and associate members only. Non-members attending may not be covered by insurance.

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

Membership

Subscriptions are due 1st January each year as follows:

Single Member - £25

Family Membership - £30

Student - £15

Associate Member - £15

Institutions - £25

Associate Institutions - £25

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The Society's Publication and Research Fund (PRF)

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

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

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

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

DATA PROTECTION ACT

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

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