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Newsletter

Essex Society for Archaeology and History



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Copy for the next issue should be sent to the editor at the above address by no later than 14th February 2027.

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: Medieval Chipping Ongar
(Photo: © Visit Epping Forest)

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Society Events & Outings

By Philip J Wise & Howard Brooks

Members visited Boreham House on 13th July. The House is a splendid and almost untouched Grade 1 listed 18th-century mansion, now run by New Hall School. A tour led by the Deputy Principal and his wife showed us the ground floor rooms, and the exteriors. The details of the doors and windows were particularly impressive, along with determination of New Hall School to bring the house up to the standards to allow it to have a valid and sustainable future.



Boreham House facade



Boreham House interior

On 6 May members of the Society were hosted by the Manningtree Museum and Local History Group for a guided tour of Mistley. The focus of the tour was the Rigby family and especially the activities of the two Richard Rigbys, father and son, who together owned a country estate at Mistley for much of the 18th century. Richard the Elder inherited the estate in 1711 and was a wealthy man, owning plantations in the West Indies as well as being an investor in the notorious South Sea Company. He used this wealth to build a country house at Mistley, later demolished but recorded in drawings shown to members during the tour. The elder Richard also had very ambitious plans for the area known as the 'Thorne' with the construction of a wharf and the development of a new village. Richard the Younger inherited from his father at a young age, and his wealth with his experiences on the Grand Tour combined to make him an enthusiastic builder. He was also able to use his position in later life as Paymaster General, with responsibility for the finances of the British Army, to ensure that he had a good income. He brought in the Scottish architect Robert Adam to add entrance lodges to his estate and in 1776 Adam redesigned the remarkable parish church known as Mistley Towers, originally constructed some forty years earlier by the Rigby family. We were given rare access to the inside of the Towers to see the internal decorations, including a painted ceiling of the Holy Trinity. The tour also included the buildings in the centre of the new village constructed around Fountain Square, again with several by Adam, and the wharf, still in active use, with its impressive late nineteenth-century maltings.

Our AGM this year was held at Ingatestone Hall, the ancestral home of our patron Lord Petre. During the formal proceedings, the annual report and accounts were approved and the following officers re-elected: Philip Wise as President, Howard Brooks as Secretary and Bill Abbott as Treasurer. All the existing vice-presidents were re-elected and Laura Pooley was also re-elected for a further three-year term. After more than twenty years Philip Wise was replaced as the Society's Curator by his colleague Ben Paites, Senior Collections and Learning Curator at Colchester Museums. The AGM was followed by refreshments and a guided tour of Ingatestone Hall led by Lord Petre who talked about his family in an engaging and deeply personal manner, as well as being gently humorous about the mistakes made by experts that he had brought in to appraise the collections. It was fascinating to hear about the role of Lord Petre's ancestor Sir William Petre in the building of the house from 1548 to c. 1560 and the changes undertaken in the 1920s by his grandmother Lady Rasch, the widow of Lionel, 16th Lord Petre. We were shown the principal rooms of the house including the remarkable 'priest holes' whose exact function still remains rather a mystery. Perhaps the highlight is the Gallery, the only room to survive in anything like its original state and now housing a remarkable display of items associated with the Petre family including the blood-stained shirt worn by the 3rd Earl of Derwentwater at his execution in 1716. It was a truly memorable afternoon and the Society is most grateful to Lord Petre for his kind hospitality.



*Members visiting Mistley Towers at the end of the guided walk
[photo: Philip J. Wise]*



*Vice-president Adrian Corder-Birch chairing
the AGM during the re-election of Philip Wise
as President [photo: Louisa Tippet]*

An eighteenth century bath house at Ongar castle

By Michael Leech

The ownership of Ongar castle (and the manor) is well known from Morant's History of Essex. By the eighteenth century all that remained of the motte and bailey castle were the intact earthworks of the motte with its moat, the inner bailey with its bank and ditch, and some fragments of the outer bailey or town enclosure. Castle House had been built in the mid sixteenth century, obliterating part of the inner bailey earthworks and ditch, and there is no evidence – documentary or on site – of any further changes over the next two centuries. In 1716 Castle House and its estate was purchased by Edward Alexander (1671-1751), a proctor at Doctors' Commons, and registrar to the commissary of the Bishop of London. Both properties appear to have been tenanted until 1735 when Alexander took personal possession. Though his will dated 1745 indicated that he resided at Doctors Commons in London, it seems that Castle House became his country retreat and that, at about this date, he undertook some extensive landscaping of the immediate surroundings.

A plan and perspective view of the motte in The Gentleman's History of Essex of 1770 provide some details of what he did. A spiral path to access to the top of the motte had been laid out, 'arched over most of the way with trees, shrubs, &c'. Access across the moat must have been by boat, as no bridge is shown on The Gentleman's plan. On the summit Alexander built a red brick summer house, three storeys high, topped with a lead covered dome, surrounded by a walkway from which to enjoy 'a rich view on all sides'. Nothing else is known about this building, of which only a few low fragments of brickwork now survive, but it must have already been in ruins by 1835. It was in that year that John Mitford directed his executors to construct a mausoleum for himself and his family on top of the Ongar castle mound. He would have known with the mound through his family connections with the town, and it seems unlikely that he would have chosen this site for his mausoleum if the substantial brick summer house was still in good repair. He did not own the site, and it is not surprisingly the executors failed to obtain the necessary permission to erect his intended mausoleum which was never built.

The other feature shown on The Gentleman's plan is a small structure labelled 'A Bath' on the edge of the moat surrounding the motte. It is probable that this was a bath house, a popular feature of gentlemen's parkland improvement in the eighteenth century. These were situated on the edge of a piece of water, or above a natural spring. Though they contained a pool of water, they were often decorative buildings, primarily intended to be a landscape feature or eye-catcher. Though bathing in the modern sense was not a normal practice at this time, immersion in cold water was a popular remedy for gout and a variety of other conditions, though prolonged exposure was not recommended as it could result in 'a Horror' and it 'should not be indiscriminately adopted'. In the grander buildings there was an upper room for entertaining or picnicking, and perhaps another for changing into dry clothes after immersion. The Ongar example, like its near neighbour on the edge of the lake at Weald Park, was probably visible from the house but, being short lived timber structures, neither have left any visible trace today. During the nineteenth century immersion in muddy fresh water was replaced by the new enthusiasm for sea bathing and its therapeutic benefits, though even as late as 1832 the architect J. B. Papworth's book included an engraving of a single storey bathhouse on the edge of a lake.

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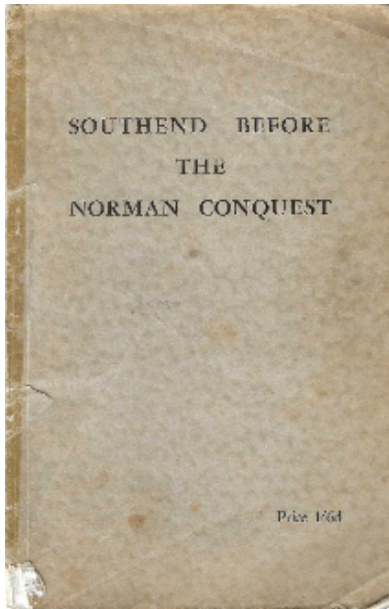
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Southend Before the Norman Conquest: ninety years on

By Nigel Brown



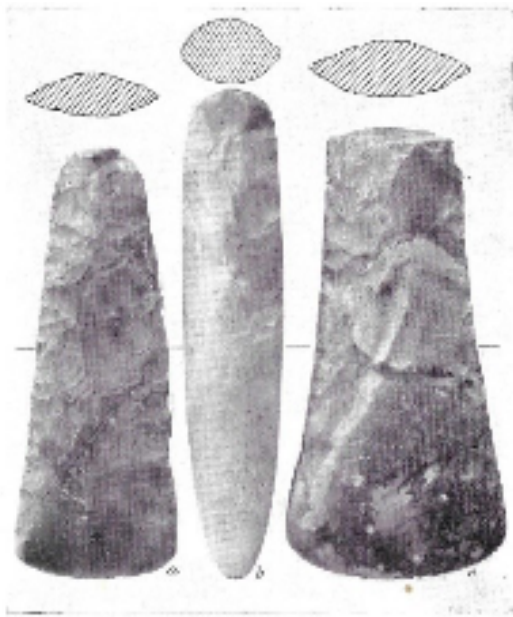
Last year was the ninetieth anniversary of the first publication of *Southend Before the Norman Conquest* (SBNC), which originally appeared in 1935 as a volume of the Transactions of the Southend-on-Sea Antiquarian and Historical Society (Pollitt 1935). It was subsequently published, in 1953, as a separate edition in the Southend Museum Handbook series (Pollitt 1953). The 1953 volume was a straight reprint of the 1935 text with only the gazetteer of sites and finds at the end of book being updated. It was probably the first serious archaeological book I bought (though it's difficult now to recall whether that accolade might actually belong to the *Collins Field Guide to Archaeology*, Wood 1968) in the late 1960s. It has remained in frequent use ever since, as the cover of my copy demonstrates.

The original publication of SBNC was part of a trend in the interwar years for books on the archaeology of individual counties, often produced, like SBNC, in soft back on good glossy paper with numerous high-quality illustrations. The archaeology of Wiltshire is an example of the type, whose title is reflected in the title of SBNC (Cunnington 1933). There was also a series of county archaeologies published in hardback by Methuen. That such a book could be produced on just the archaeology of south-east Essex, is a testament both to the richness of the archaeology of that area, and to the energetic scholarship of Pollitt who, based at Southend Museum, led the recording of archaeological discoveries in the area. It would be interesting to understand why, at that time, no attempt was made at an account of the archaeology of Essex as a whole. Though that is well beyond the scope of the present article and is not in itself a particularly unusual circumstance, many, probably most, counties were never covered either as individual books or as part of the Methuen series.

Inevitably SBNC is in some ways dated written long before the advent of radiocarbon dating. The chronology is the short one which obtained throughout the first half of the 20th century and which is now known to be markedly foreshortened with the whole of the Neolithic only lasting between 500 and 1,000 years (Pollitt, 1953 13-14).

The lack of revision of the main text between the 1935 and 1953 editions also results in a couple of anachronisms. The presence of, what are now, the long since discredited eoliths, is understandable in the 1935 edition. Although the studies which demonstrated that these supposed flint artefacts were of natural origin (work in which the great Essex archaeologist Hazeldine Warren was prominent) were well underway, eoliths had recently been accepted in authoritative accounts of European (Burkitt and Childe 1932, 4) and, though not without misgiving, British prehistory (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932, 1-6). However, by 1953 eoliths were well on the way to being definitively identified as of natural origin.

More striking to the modern reader is the extensive quotation (Pollitt 1953, 17-18) from a report by the prominent anthropologist and anatomist Sir Arthur Keith on the skull from a Beaker burial at Thorpe Bay. Keith's report not only assumes the superiority of particular races but indicates that class divisions in Britain are racially determined. Such views were not uncommon in archaeological and especially anthropological circles on the early decades of the 20th century. Those opinions were not uncontested and indeed were confidently opposed by some of the most prominent archaeologists of the time (e.g. Childe 1933, Trigger 1989). It is somewhat surprising that such racist nonsense should survive unremarked into the 1953 edition of SBNC, especially given the catastrophe visited upon Europe by the pursuit of racist politics in the 1930s and early 40s.



STONING INDULGERS: CANEWDON

That said, views like Keith's do not appear to have obviously affected Pollitt's interpretations, indeed his view of the inception of the Neolithic '...not brought about by a great invasion of new peoples but, rather by their infiltration bringing with them new ideas...' (Pollitt 1953, 14) would not be out of place in some contemporary interpretations.

The great strength of his work is the close engagement with the artefactual evidence base, supported by fine photographs (though the scanned versions here may not do justice to the original publication). This brings home the sheer quantity and significance of the material like, this hoard of flint axes from Canewdon.

SBNC was, with its careful descriptions accompanying gazetteer, the first publication to bring home the remarkable density of finds of Bronze Age pottery and metalwork in south-east Essex, particularly from the Southchurch and Shoebury areas.

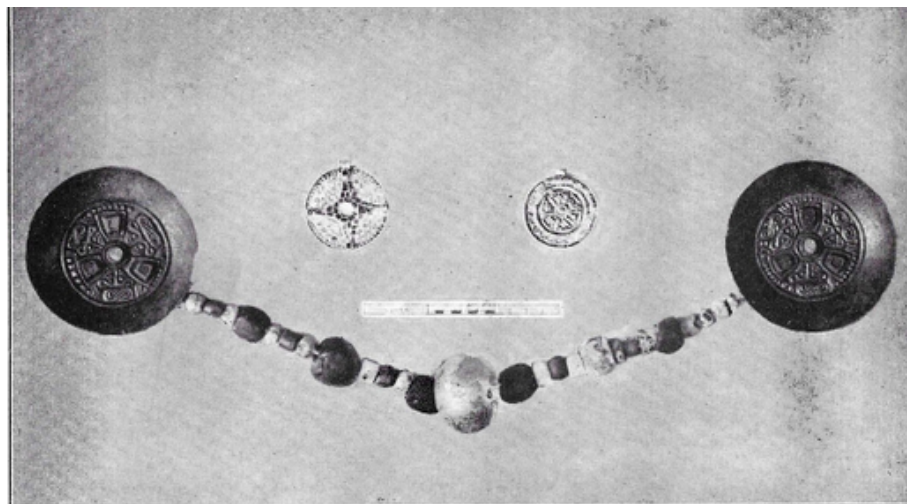


BRONZE AGE HOARD: SHOEBURY

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, important assemblages had been made by individual collectors, but most finds occurred during construction work and more especially the quarrying of both, the so called brickearth, from the extensive loess deposits in the area and gravel. It is clear that Pollitt had built up extensive and effective contacts with local firms and their workers engaged in those industries which enabled the acquisition of many finds for the collections of Southend Museum.

There is an essay at the end of SBNC (Pollitt 1953, 43-7) which gives an account of how archaeology was dealt with locally in the last decades of the 19th and early decades of the 20th century and the vital role played by Southend and Colchester museums in acquiring many of the local finds. That essay is a significant contribution to the history of archaeology, Pollitt notes (1953, 46) that already the mechanisation of mineral extraction was beginning to have an effect on the recovery of finds 'In recent years, however, finds have been less numerous than formerly, and the increasing use of the mechanical excavator, in brickfields and elsewhere is doubtless resulting in destruction of much of archaeological value and interest.' An issue that can be seen to have had a very marked effects on the recovery of archaeological finds by the 1960s (Brown 1998, 17).

Almost all the material which forms the basis of Pollitt's book are finds of artefacts, the opportunity for rescue, let alone research, excavations, was limited in the early decades of the 20th century. When opportunity for rescue recording did arise, Pollitt proved an adept recorder of archaeological remains in difficult circumstances. His excavations during road construction at Prittlewell established the importance of the Saxon cemetery there with its remarkable collection of swords, jewellery and other grave goods (Pollitt 1930, 1931, 1932).



SAXON JEWELS: PRITTLEWELL

After more than 90 years SBNC remains an essential work of reference and is likely to remain so long into the future.

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The Petition of the Freeholders of Essex to the House of Commons in the spring of 1640

By Christopher Thompson

The unpopularity of Charles I's regime in the county of Essex by the early months of 1640 is widely attested in contemporary sources and by the work of later historians like Brian Quintrell, William Hunt and John Walter. There were deep concerns over the religious policies of the Caroline regime, over forms of taxation unsanctioned by statute, the extension of the forest of Essex's boundaries and perceived threats to the liberties of the subject. Grievances of this kind and range were clearly serious matters for the King and his advisers on the one hand and for their critics on the other.

These issues undoubtedly contributed to the outcome of the election of the county's M.P.s held at Chelmsford on 17th March, 1640. There was a contest between a combination of Essex landowners led by the county's leading figure, the 2nd Earl of Warwick, and his gentry allies and the nominee of the Privy Council, Henry Nevill of Cressing Temple. The result was a triumph for the largely Puritan critics of the Crown and a humiliating defeat for Nevill. His subsequent complaints and the comments of those sympathetic to him indicate the profound hostility of the bulk of the freeholders present to Charles I's policies and regime. (i) They also suggest a high degree of organisation on the part of Warwick and his allies, men like Sir Thomas Barrington of Hatfield Broad Oak, Sir Harbottle Grimston of Bradfield Hall and his son, Sir William Masham of Otes, Sir Thomas Cheeke of Pirgo and others.

Subsequently, the freeholders of Essex presented a petition listing their grievances to the House of Commons on 18th April, 1640 at the start of the Short Parliament. (ii) It is now only known in detail from a draft, not a copy, preserved in the British Library. (iii) Exactly who signed it or how many freeholders may have done so is unknown. But it contained a formidable list of complaints about innovations in religious doctrines in the Church of England, about the deprivation of godly ministers from their livings, on the profanation of Sundays, the novel interpretation of the significance of the sacraments, and the activities of the Church courts. It was equally forthright on secular grievances like monopolies, on the taxation of goods, the restraint of free trade, the extension of the forest's boundaries, and demands for the payment of Ship Money. The county, it argued, was threatened with ruin and the peace of the commonwealth was in peril, hence the presentation of this petition by the two knights of the shire and the request for the redress of their grievances as well as the prevention of comparable ones for the future.

Precisely when this draft was composed was unclear but the notes of proceedings in the House of Commons on 18th April suggest it was comparable to that presented to the House. It is possible that it might have been prepared for and shown to the freeholders at the county court on 17th March, 1640. If this had been the case, it is highly likely that Henry Nevill or William, Lord Maynard or Sir Humphry Mildmay of Danbury would have commented upon it. It is much more likely, therefore, that it was drafted after the hustings at Chelmsford. Assuming that the petition presented to the House of Commons on 18th April, 1640 was signed by Essex freeholders – it would have been a contradiction in terms for this not to have occurred given the petition's title and presentation – this has wider implications. It suggests that the document was circulated in Essex and that signatures to its contents were sought and obtained. Some sort of collation of these signatures is, therefore, likely to have occurred before 18th April, 1640. If these inferences are correct, the petition was the product of careful organisation and considered political presentation: it was 'delivered by the Country' according to Sir Thomas Aston and formally offered to the House by Sir Harbottle Grimston, one of the county's two M.P.s. (iv) The most likely group to have conducted this operation consisted of the 2nd Earl of Warwick and his gentry allies. The freeholders' petition thus hints at the kind of pressure politics and popular mobilisation later associated with radical groups in London and at a degree of organisation amongst critics of Charles I's rule of which traces can be hard to find.

There is, moreover, a wider point to be considered. It has been strenuously argued since c.1990 that no one in 1640 or even in early 1642 believed that England would descend into armed conflict in a civil war. Nobody wanted that or envisaged it. This claim has gained widespread historiographical currency. But if one looks at this document, its author or authors feared that disputes over religion would cause “Disaffection one to another & ye greate Endangering of ye peace of ye Com-monwealth” while secular grievances would lead “ye whole County (if not the Kingdome) [to] soone runne to ruine.” In March or April, 1640, those were prescient comments which call the claim of prevalent pacifism into serious question.

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‘Silver End 100’ HeritageOpen Day

with

Essex Industrial Archaeology Group

Company Housing Fair

Sunday 13th September 2026

Silver End Village Hall, CM8 3RQ

Refreshments provided by Silver End WI

During the 19th and into the 20th century industrial companies provided housing and community facilities for their workforce, demonstrating both philanthropy and good business sense. Essex has a number of examples of this which we are celebrating today, as shown by our talks and displays.

Programme

10:00	Start of displays open to the public
10.30	Official Opening by Moira Tait Granddaughter of Thomas Tait, architect of some houses in Silver End
11:00 - 12:30	Guided Village Tour 1*
11:15 - 11:45	Talk 1 – Wilkin’s of Tiptree, Nick Wickenden
12:00 – 12:30	Talk 2 – Hunts of Earls Colne, Les Berner
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch break
13:30 – 14:00	Talk 3 - Why Silver End?, Jackie Nesbitt
14:00 – 16:00	Guided Village Tour 2*
14:30 – 15.00	Talk 4 – Courtauld housing in Halstead, John Miners,
16:00	End of event

***Village Tours** must be booked in advance with Alan Waine on 07522638129
or alan.waine@mypostoffice.co.uk

Displays include: Crittall’s Silver End, Bata’s at East Tilbury
Courtauld’s in Halstead, Ripper’s of Sible Hedingham
Hunt’s at Earls Colne, Great Eastern Railway, Parkeston

Dates for your Diary

Sunday 13th September Heritage Open Day, Silver End Village Hall (CM8 3RQ): 10am to 4pm.

EIAG and Silver End Heritage Society are holding an Open Day in Silver End to celebrate the industrial companies who provided housing and community services for their employees. There are guided tours of the village, and talks on Wilkins of Tiptree, Hunts of Earl's Colne, Silver End itself, and Courtaulds housing in Halstead. The tours must be booked in advance (see the EIAG website)

Saturday 3rd October: Essex Archaeology Conference 4. Essex Record Office. 09.00 – 17.10

Essex has a proud tradition, perhaps unequalled in Britain, of staging regular conferences giving updates on the County's archaeology and history. Following conferences in Clacton (1978), Writtle (1993), ERO - Chelmsford (2008), ECC Place Services, Essex Record Office and ESAH have organised conference number 4, to be held again at Essex Record Office. It is a day packed with interesting talks on a wide variety of topics. £40 for the day.

Booking via: placeservices.co.uk/conservation-courses

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.