

The Newsletter of the

# *Wivenhoe History Group*



Newsletter No. 11 - Oct - Nov 2014

## Heritage Lottery Fund Success

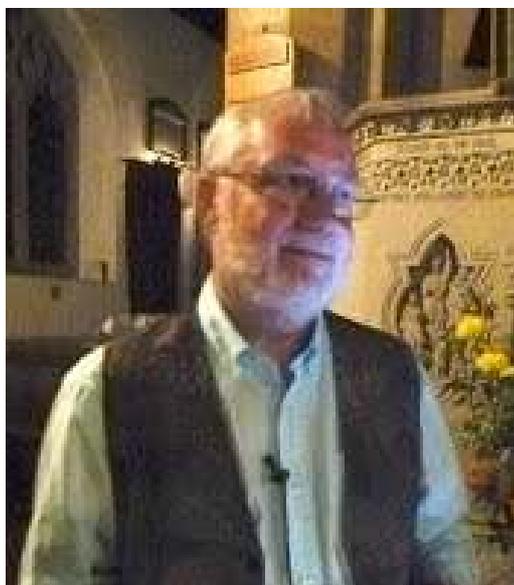
There is only one place this newsletter can begin. Thanks to the persistence and hard work of Gillian Strudwick and her husband, Eric, supported by Peter Hill, Ian Valentine and Chris Thompson, our History Group **has been awarded a grant of £9,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund** to create a digital archive for our local World War One records and for the history of our community.

This will enable us to gather together the documents – letters, newspaper reports, photographs and oral memories passed from one generation to the next – that will help to explain what the experiences of those who lived through this conflict or who perished in its course were and to pass them on to succeeding generations.

Exactly how we build the digital archive necessary to preserve these records and how we interact with our schools and other community groups in the years ahead is already preoccupying the Steering Group. It will be invaluable to get the suggestions and thoughts of other members of WHG too.

The digital archive will of course hold more than just WW1 information, it will be a massive store of every bit of Wivenhoe's history from the Domesday Book up until yesterday. It will be free to access by Wivenhoe residents and anyone else in the world for that matter via the internet.

We have got over the first hurdle. Now we can plan ahead. If you could be interested in being part of this project to compile and type up entries to be uploaded into the database, then please do contact Peter Hill ([peter@toadhall2.co.uk](mailto:peter@toadhall2.co.uk)) or talk to any Steering Group Committee member.



Or if you would like to help Gill Strudwick with the various aspects of WW1 and work with our schools, then please do get in touch with her. (email: [wivenhoehistory2@gmail.com](mailto:wivenhoehistory2@gmail.com))

## Paul Rusiecki's talk on World War One

Paul Rusiecki gave a highly interesting talk on the impact of World War One on the people of Wivenhoe and of Essex in St Mary's Church on the evening of Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> October. Just over sixty people filled the pews to hear him explain how many men from Wivenhoe went into the armed forces and how it

opened up new opportunities for women to work in jobs previously closed to them, in nursing and other professions. He also had important points to make about the stationing of troops here and elsewhere in Essex, the impact of German raids, especially by Zeppelins, and the distant noise of artillery bombardments in France and Belgium which became a feature of life for many Essex communities as the struggle on the western front developed. Those attending were also able to hear two poems from the period read and to see the displays created by our Wivenhoe schools. Once again, the organising group did us proud.

After the talk, those attending were invited to have some refreshment and to look the displays.



Above: Broomgrove Juniors  
Left: Broomgrove Infants  
Below: Millfields School



(Photographs by Peter Hill)



*Pictures taken inside the Church by Chris Thompson*

## **The Tribute to the Dead of World War One at the Tower of London**

Ian Valentine went to the Tower of London very recently to see the display of poppies there and has very generously provided these photographs.

He said ‘The sight of so many poppies, nearly 900,000 of them, one for each soldier who died in WW1, left him feeling gutted’.



For more of Ian's pictures, see this page on our web site:

<http://www.wivenhoehistory.org.uk/wwi-project/field-of-poppies>

## **Our October Talk by Chris Thompson on:**

### **Family, Sex and Marriage in Early Modern Essex**

Our group had a talk on this subject in the Scout and Guide Hall on the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> October. For obvious reasons, our speaker, Chris Thompson, was a little nervous but we all survived the experience and learnt some new things about our sixteenth and seventeenth century forebears.

Chris is an academic historian who specialises in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century English history.

**The skeleton of his talk is reproduced below.**



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#### **FAMILY**

Let me begin with the question about what Essex people meant by the word ‘family’ in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

There is a very useful survey of the market town of Romford in 1562 to start us off on this exercise.

Romford had 175 households, most of them with four or five people living in them.

Two parents plus children were the normal residents of such households. These were what we would call “nuclear households”.

But only thirty of the 175 had children over the age of 12. Most children had left home by that age to work in domestic or farm service or in apprenticeships arranged by their parishes.

But, for a variety of reasons, households in Romford and elsewhere in Essex, could be complex ones.

Because of the high death rate amongst young adults, men and women with children were likely to re-marry and have second or third families.

Households might well have people who were half-brothers or half-sisters or step-brothers or step-sisters.

If the parents died, children usually went to live with their uncles or aunts or, very occasionally, with their adult cousins.

Family structures look like modern ones but there were important differences too.

There could be other people who were accounted part of the household or ‘family’ too.

Almost thirty per cent of households had servants or apprentices. People who sold food and drink or ran inns were very likely to have servants or apprentices and about 40 per cent of all children were servants for a time.

So, the word 'family' might carry the same meaning as it broadly does now or it might mean everyone in a particular dwelling and thus include people who were not blood relations or married.

## **COURTSHIP**

How did couples choose their partners in Essex?

Who took the initiative and made the running?

Did men and women simply find themselves attracted to one another and then decide on marriage or was marriage intended from the start?

What was expected of couples as suitors and lovers and what obstacles lay in their paths?

Did parents play a part and, if so, what?

Were kinfolk involved at all?

How was what we would call an engagement celebrated or signalled?

What new obligations fell on couples?

Did they anticipate going to bed before their marriage ceremony in Church?

William Gouge, the clergyman educated at Felsted School who wrote extensively on marriage, thought that 'mutual liking', 'reciprocal affection', 'good liking of each other as glue' were essential.

Parents and friends should make their suggestions and the courtship should develop with the counsel and approval of 'wise and understanding friends'.

Marriages in clerical teaching were expected to be 'perpetual, loving and delightful between the parties'. Just what you would expect clergymen to say.

Courtship required the giving and acceptance of presents. Coins, rings, ribbons, gloves and girdles were the usual gifts from a man to a woman. They were symbolic of love and within the reach of the poor.

When Richard Thornton and Margery Peg exchanged gifts – he gave her a pair of gloves and she gave him a coin – it was a sign that they had serious matrimonial intentions. It soon became known to their friends that they had contracted one with another and plighted their troths.

This exchange of gifts was important: many cases reached the Church courts in which Essex people denied either having given or accepted gifts and claimed there had never been any 'contracts' between them.

Courtship reached its climax when couples agreed to marry. Some did so purely in private but others went through a ritual performance before witnesses.

William Gouge thought that couples ought to take one another by the hand before witnesses and recite promises to one another.

The man was supposed to promise to marry the woman and the woman to yield to agree to be married to him. This was legally binding unless there was an earlier contract or some forbidden degree of consanguinity that precluded marriage.

The Vicar of Dedham, Daniel Rogers, agreed because such ceremonies provided a firm foundation for subsequent marriage. Many of these ceremonies were the preludes to feasts and heavy bouts of drinking.

Sometimes things went wrong. William Mead and Margaret Rame of Great Waltham exchanged promises in her mother's house in 1577 but, when their banns were called in the parish church, Nicholas Satch, another local man, objected on the grounds of pre-contract.

By the mid to late-seventeenth century, such contracts were going out of fashion.

## **CARNAL KNOWLEDGE**

In the eyes of the Church, sexual intercourse was only permissible after marriage. Before marriage, intercourse constituted fornication and could be punished if discovered.

But not every couple took such advice or feared the law.

Between 20 and 30 per cent of brides bore children within eight months of marriage according to our parish registers. Perhaps half the couples getting married had indulged in carnal knowledge after becoming engaged but before the marriage ceremonies.

Jane Mead of Dunmow claimed in 1594 that she had become pregnant after betrothal but that her lover had deserted her before they could be married. Her unwanted pregnancy was the result. Stories of this kind are commonplace when accusations of adultery and the birth of bastard children came before the Church courts.

## **SEX**

### **Fertility**

Christian teaching required that married couples should be sexually mature when they married.

This was always likely to be so since the average age of marriage was in the mid to late-twenties in Essex and elsewhere in England.

What is much more difficult to establish is when men and women reached puberty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

For obvious reasons, the onset of menstruation in girls or young women offers evidence of a capacity to reproduce.

This was considerably later in the early modern period than now, probably – although this is not certain – around the age of seventeen.

Young women needed to reach a certain body weight before menstruation began, so it is likely that those who were well fed began earlier than those who were ill-fed, in other words that the daughters of gentlemen or yeomen did so earlier than the daughters of artisans or day labourers.

A gap of around ten years therefore existed between the start of menstruation and marriage itself.

We know even less about the age of menopause. Older women tended to have greater intervals between the births of their children which suggests that their fertility was declining or that they were practising some kind of birth control.

Deliberate attempts to practice birth control were regarded by the Church or Churches as sinful. But there is some evidence to suggest that information about contraception was spread through a subculture of female contacts.

Abstinence from intercourse was one obvious preventative method. Doctors advised this during breast-feeding and menstruation. Breast-feeding was an effective means of preventing conception – wet nurses are known to have had much lower fertility than the women whose babies they fed.

And there is a little material on the illegal practice of abortion. Doctors advised against tight-lacing and over-exercise for women, which, of course, gave clues about how abortions might be achieved.

Sheaths for men were not used or known before the eighteenth century.

### **Pleasure**

Medical writers thought that intercourse was generally beneficial for both partners. Lack of it caused many ailments, especially for virgins after puberty and for older widows.

Conception was easiest if both partners took pleasure in one another's bodies. Barrenness was due to a lack of love. Couples married against their wills and at their parents' commands were more likely to be childless.

That women had larger sexual appetites than men was commonly believed.

John Dane, a tailor who lived and worked in Hatfield Broadoak, left a graphic description in his autobiography of being propositioned by a serving girl in an alehouse.

Lots of the popular literature to be found in the rhymes and short stories in cheap chapbooks suggested that women were confident in their own sexuality and bawdier than men.

One court case in the early-1650s concerned a woman who observed that her first husband had performed a dozen times in a night but her second one "had done but eight".

Doctors advised men to entertain their wives with all kinds of dalliance, wanton behaviour and allurements if they wanted to beget heirs.

Masturbation on the other hand caused insanity at worst and, at best, a distaste for godliness and virtue, a weak bladder and hysterical fits, and barrenness.

There are no cases of lesbianism to be found in the Essex courts because it was not a criminal offence.

### **MARRIAGE**

Marriage had another essential precondition not mentioned by clergymen. Married couples had to be able to support themselves.

For well-off people in the upper ranks of Essex society, this was easier than for people in the lowest ranks of Essex's society.

Daughters of gentry and yeomen could expect dowries to help them find husbands. For the sons of such families there was the prospect of land to inherit or farm or rewarding work in the developing professions. They tended to marry in their early twenties.

Labouring people had the lowest incomes and expectations. They had lower prospects of familial inheritance and of being given household goods.

That is why they tended to marry in the mid to late-twenties. They were dependent on the demand for their labour in the places where they lived and how that varied. Up to c.1630, real wages were depressed by rising population numbers: after 1630, population growth eased off, real wages grew (if slowly) and their prospects improved.

Marriage was an important transition.

It made men into householders and women into housekeepers.

As single people, both sexes had been dependents who had followed orders from their parents or masters.

Marriage transformed a man into the governor (in theory) of his household and made him responsible for its government. Male householders were eligible to serve as jurymen in their Hundreds or at Chelmsford: they were obliged to pay local taxes for the care of the poor or the repair of roads. They were fully adult.

Women were defined by their new roles as mistresses of households, prospective mothers, helps to other women in childbirth. In your parish church, married women no longer sat with daughters, maids or servants but with their husbands and their new families.

Neither partner in marriage could legitimately indulge in flirtatious or rowdy games. Matrimonial honour had to be upheld. One or two very conservative Anglican ministers like Edward Shephard, the Vicar of Great Maplestead, maintained the old Catholic doctrine that marriage was one of the seven sacraments but this was unusual. Some radicals by the 1640s were denying that marriage was necessary at all but that was even more unusual.

### **What was marriage for?**

Partly for the procreation of children.

Partly as a remedy against sin and fornication.

Finally, for the mutual society, help and comfort of the man and woman in prosperity and adversity.

There was another implicit purpose as well.

William Gouge thought that family life was a pattern for the life of the country, that the government of the State and of the family could and should be compared.

Fathers, like Kings, according to Gouge, were the masters of their families; their authority was absolute over their wives and children (and servants); they owed their families support and sustenance throughout their lives or until their children married; they were to be loving husbands to their wives and fathers to their children; but their authority was not to be challenged; if it should come to be challenged, then anarchy would follow in the household just as it would if the authority of the sovereign were to be challenged in the State.

Wives were expected to be obedient to their husbands just as children were. Men who could not control their wives' behaviour were subject to censure and ridicule. Men who could not ensure their wives' conformity in religion were not fit for wider roles in society in which they were expected to secure obedience in politics, for example.

That was the official theory for much of our period.

In practice, however, things might be very different.

We all know of couples in which the woman is the dominant partner. The best documented family in Essex is that of the Barringtons of Hatfield Broad oak because a lot of their correspondence survives. Lady Joan Barrington, the wife of Sir Francis Barrington, had been born into the Cromwell family; she was a Puritan, the matriarch of a dynasty whose members married other Puritans in the home counties and a formidable figure in her own right. It is clear from her correspondence that she exercised very considerable influence over her husband until his death in 1628 and over the other members of her family after that.

Lady Joan's eldest son, Sir Thomas, married a Hertfordshire widow, Judith Lytton. Lady Judith was clearly the dominant figure in their relationship even though Sir Thomas was one of the county's leading gentlemen. During the Civil War of the 1640s, she was perfectly capable of giving him military and political instructions even though, in theory, as a woman she should not have done so.

What clergymen say is not necessarily a good guide to what people actually did or what male-female relations really were.

By coincidence, however, one of the Essex's clergymen, Ralph Josselin, Vicar of Earls Colne from the 1640s to c1680, has left us a diary in which he offers us lots of evidence about family relationships in our period.

Josselin's relationship with his father, who re-married when he was 14 or 15, was clearly poor. Josselin senior was not a very good manager of his own affairs or of his farm and his second wife was 'sour in spirit'. By the time Josselin was twenty, he had to fend for himself. Fortunately, he was able to turn to his uncles, Nathaniel, Richard and Simon, for help in establishing himself as a clergyman and teacher in Earls Colne.

Once he was married, Josselin's diary tells us an immense amount about his family life. We learn about the birth of their children: when their first son, Thomas, was born in December, 1643, Josselin was clearly delighted at the event and his wife's recovery of her health.

It was thirteen months later that their son was weaned. Shortly afterwards, she became pregnant again. This was a more difficult pregnancy about which Josselin was more anxious.

The state of his children's health was noted day by day as was his own and his wife's. He commented on a rash on his son's face, on his wife's swelling stomach as she expected their third child, on the teething pains his children experienced and so on. We can build up a picture of their family life over a very long period of time.

He noted their births, the variations in their health, the dates of their being put into adult clothes, how they progressed in their learning, when and why they left home and where they went into service.

As a father, contrary to what some historians have claimed, Josselin was deeply emotional about the lives and deaths of his children. His fourth son, also Ralph, was born very rapidly on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1648: he died eleven days later. He had noted his deteriorating condition and commented "This day my deare babe Ralph, quietly fell a sleepe, and is at rest with the lord, the Lord in mercy sanctifie his hand unto mee, and doe mee good by it and teach mee how to walke more closely with him".

He had plenty of other crosses to bear. One of his sons turned out to be a wastrel, unable to settle into any employment, addicted to gambling and taking up with unsuitable women – as a clergyman, Josselin

may have had higher expectations than normal – before his death in his early thirties. Seven of his ten children predeceased him.

Apart from his immediate family, Josselin's view of the world was largely confined to his uncles and one or two cousins when their paths crossed. The rest of his social world was occupied by friends and parishioners. How typical was he? I wish I could give you a definitive answer but we do not have enough other Essex diaries to be able to make a comparison.

*(Note: This talk is reproduced here by kind permission of Christopher Thompson, October 2014, © Christopher Thompson)*

### **A New Editor for the Newsletter**

Chris Thompson has written our newsletter since our group started in the spring of 2013 whilst Peter Hill has taken care of the formatting, editing and publishing of it. If anyone else is interested in taking over either of these roles and taking a new approach to the activities of the Wivenhoe History Group, please let Chris or Peter Hill know. With the Community Archive project now starting, we are all getting much busier and we need more people to help with such matters as our Newsletter.

### **Forthcoming Outing**

A visit to the Essex Regiment Museum in Chelmsford has been proposed and is being investigated. Watch out for a date.

### **December Meeting - Wednesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> December at 7.30pm**

This will be a very social evening with wine and mince pies together with well-known Brightlingsea figure, Jimmy Lawrence, who will talk about his life as a bargeman and a skipper up and down the Colne River. Guests are welcome at this and other meetings.

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**Wivenhoe History Group Web Site - [www.wivenhoehistory.org.uk](http://www.wivenhoehistory.org.uk)**

Our web site continues to grow and attract more visitors. We are grateful to Helen Barrell who has continued to supply us with details about Wivenhoe families (births, marriages and deaths) from about 1560 from her research and transcription of Wivenhoe parish records. I am hoping she will be able to come and visit us some time next year from her home in Suffolk.