

**SOME ASPECTS OF
THE HISTORY OF
WIVENHOE
1700 – 1900
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Introduction

The origin of the name Wivenhoe is extremely obscure. There are no less than nine different ways of spelling it, Wienhow, Wivenhoo, Wyfenho, Wyveho, Wyvenho, Wevenho, Wyvenhoo and Wivenhoe. Morant and others found such great difficulty in determining the true derivation of the name that they say it is impossible to solve the problem. Morant writes “hoo” means a rising ground and “Wiven” is unknown as to the meaning.¹ “Wiven” seems to be derived, not from one but from two, shorter words, namely “Wye” – water and “ven” – fen or marsh. If so it meant, as a complete word, the place built on the river, running through the fen, beside the rising ground, and nothing could more accurately describe the actual situation of the place. Isaac Taylor states that “Celtic river names were incorporated by the Teutonic invaders into the names they gave to their own settlements.....consequently the village names are derived more frequently than elsewhere from the names of the rivers on which they stand.”²

The earliest documentary record of Wivenhoe is that in the Essex volume of the Domesday Book, compiled in 1086, which says that “Aluric” (or Alaric) held it as a “manor” with two free men and twelve other men, one of them a serf. The settlement covered a piece of land, with field,

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| 1 | Morant | History of Essex |
| 2 | Isaac Taylor | Words and Places P.255 & 256 |



The Ropery House

meadow, woodland and water to turn a mill and which comprised about 585 acres. There is no mention of a church or priest and the stream which runs into the river probably supplied the drinking water.

The new owner was Richard Greno or Gernon and he granted it to Nigel another Norman. A later Lord, a Bataille, had two daughters, one of whom, Margery, was buried in Wivenhoe church about the year 1303. This is the earliest mention of the church.

The manor came at length into the hands of the de Veres, Earls of Oxford, by marriage. John, the twelfth Earl was a man of spirit. He was an eager Lancastrian and fought in the Wars of the Roses, probably taking men of Wivenhoe with him.¹ He was beheaded for his share in the Lancastrian cause on 26th February 1461. When he came to Wivenhoe, where he resided often, he endeavoured to capture the “fishing and noble royalty in the river that flowed past his demesne”, but Colchester protested, and, in spite of Oxford’s intimidation, defeated his claim.²

John de Vere, his second son, was restored to the earldom by Henry VII, and four generations of Oxfords followed him one of them making the road from Wivenhoe Heath into the town. John made Wivenhoe his home often. His hall is described as “standing pleasantly at the upper end of this town”³, at the top of the hill. “It was a large and elegant seat having a noble gatehouse with towers of great

1	Morant	History of Essex
2	“	“
3	“	“

height that served for a sea-mark”¹

The Oxfords were patrons of the church and gave rich vestments and ornaments to it. A lovely piece of church needlework is to be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, bearing the arms of Elizabeth Scrope and belonging at first to “My Lord’s (de Vere’s) Chapel” in Wivenhoe Church and which he left to “his most loving wife”. Elizabeth, in her turn, bequeathed these rich vestments to the church and to the “altar of St John Baptist in the same church”. This was a chantry chapel, with two chaplains to sing mass and a manor of St Albyns, and much other land as an endowment. Many tombstones in the north aisle of the church may belong to the de Vere family.

From the de Veres the manor passed to Sir Roger Townshend. Sir Roger Townshend is famous in history as one of the brave defenders of this nation against the Spanish Armada. For his valour he was knighted at sea by Admiral Howard. The assistance given by the ships and sailors of Wivenhoe, Fingringhoe, Mersea and Brightlingsea so moved the admiration of Queen Elizabeth that she bestowed “the freedom of the river” on certain citizens of those places, providing that those who received that honour were apprenticed mariners. Townshend himself desired the fishing rights, like his predecessor

1	Morant	History of Essex
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Oxford, but he was unsuccessful in his endeavour to capture them. ¹

A document in the possession of a descendant of the last lords of the manor gives some idea of the wealth of the de Vere's. It is an "exemplification" of a common legal process for the transfer of property, made before a court, usually the Kings Bench, and the copy bears the royal seal of Elizabeth. It bears the date 3rd June 1587. The Earl of Oxford needed Royal permission to alienate manors held of the king and this document is also a licence to sell. This is the gist of the document.

"Licence to Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, to sell to Roger Townshend, Esq for £2,513 the following property:-

"The manors of Wivenhoe, Battleswick and Gt Bentley with 100 messuages, 100 cottages, 30 tofts, 4 mills, 3 dove houses, 200 gardens, 1000 acres of land, 100 acres of meadow, 2000 acres of pasture, 300 acres of wood, 500 acres of broom-heath, 100 acres of moor, 40 acres of bog, 200 acres of fresh marsh, 300 acres of salt marsh, 40 acres of aldergrove, £20 of rent and common pasture with appurtenances in Wivenhoe, Gt Bentley, Little Donyland, Colchester, Old Hythe, Greenstead, Elmstead, Frating, Little Bentley, Thorington, and Weeley. View of frankpledge and whatever pertains to that privelge in Wivenhoe, Bentley and Donyland. Trinity Terms 1586.

Francis Wyndon}	
William Poryan }	Justices of the Queens' Bench in
Francis Rodes }	Westminster

St Mary of the Virgin, Church (Illustration missing)

His successors held the manor until the middle of the 17th Cent. When the reigning Townshend, Sir Horatio, Baronet, sold this manor and estate to Nicholas Corsellis, of London who kept a court here in 1657. He died in 1665, and his descendants held the manor of Wivenhoe until the early part of the 20th Cent.

The Corsellis family are therefore connected with Wivenhoe for the next two-hundred years. The eldest son was always called Nicholas, the second son also with the second name of Caesar and the initials N.C.C. may be seen on many local cottages. One was curate, afterwards rector of the parish and his name appears often in the church account book. Another, his eldest son, Captain Nicholas Corsellis, entered the Navy in 1774, aged eleven years, and "participated in the glories and perils of the storming and taking of New York, Philadelphia, and Charlestown. ¹

The Reformation made changes at Wivenhoe, as in every parish. The "massing chalice" of silver gilt, weighing 28ozs was sold for £8-5s to William Bock, goldsmith, of London, and the present communion cup purchased. The rich vestments disappeared, the more worn of them sold, the church repaired and cleaned and the table of Commandments painted up. This work cost the churchwardens £1-5s-7d²

- 1 From a document in possession of a descendant of the family
- 2 Churchwardens Account Book

Stools or seats were made for the congregation to sit while listening to the sermon or homily, “a newe loft in the churche with the stooles in the same for people to sit in” was erected. This is an early post-Reformation gallery and cost £4-13-6d including food for the workmen.¹

Apart from these personal histories few outstanding events occurred in Wivenhoe previous to 1700. The Siege of Colchester in 1648 must have affected Wivenhoe but there is no direct evidence to prove this. To capture Greenstead church the Parliament army must have passed through Wivenhoe. Since the Hythe was heavily guarded it is more than likely that they used Wivenhoe as the port for bringing in supplies. The following little extract gives an incident during the siege which occurred near Wivenhoe.

“The same day two ships brought in a quantity of corn and provisions, and 56 men from the shore of Kent with several gentlemen, who all landed, and came up to the town, and the greatest part of the corn was with the utmost application unloaded the same night into some hogs, bringing it up to the Hithe, being apprehensive of the parliament ships which lay at Harwich, who having intelligence of the said ships, came the next day into the mouth of the river, and took the said two ships, and what corn was left in them. The besieged send out a party to help the ships but having

1 Churchwardens Account Book

2

no boats they could not assist them.¹

The hogs which the Royalists used possibly came from Wivenhoe for they would normally be used for unloading ships in Wivenhoe and then taking the goods to Colchester.

Later in the siege Lord Croning did use Wivenhoe to bring in guns for fortifying Colchester, “To which end, some great guns were brought in from some ships at Wivenhoe.”² As soon as it was found that the Royalists no longer gave the protection which they had promised then it is probably that Wivenhoe took the Parliament side. This is further backed up by the fact that the fleet at Harwich in which many men from Wivenhoe would serve was on the side of Parliament. Therefore the people at home would tend to support Parliament.

Thus ends the period before 1700 in which the main features are the personal histories and the siege of Colchester. After 1700 Wivenhoe came much more into the national picture as will be seen in the chapters on Poor Law and Local Government.

1 Defoe A Tour through England and Wales Vol I

2 “ “ “ “ “ “ “