

Industry

Amongst Wivenhoe's many and varied industries perhaps the most important in the 18th Century was smuggling. Wivenhoe people cherish the story of the Marquis of Anglesea and his yacht Pearl. To have it built he had to arrange for a Wivenhoe shipbuilder and smuggler Philip Sainty to be released from a sentence along with his relatives. This story links together two of the town's chief industries – shipbuilding and smuggling. Just as Wivenhoe ships sailed far afield, in the Navy, on the West Indies route and in the coal carrying trade, so Wivenhoe's fishermen, hoysmen and boat builders smuggled over many miles of English coast. Sainty's relatives were not in Chelmsford but Maidstone gaol.¹

Most Wivenhoe smugglers operated on a small scale although some were involved in enterprises which poured hundreds of thousands of gallons of gin each year into North East Essex. In fishing boats they stood a good chance of escaping detection when they picked up a few tubs of spirits or some tobacco from a supply ship out at sea and then made their way back through the sand belts, where suspicious revenue men dared not follow in their large cutters.² In the Colne, fishing boats would attract less notice than larger craft.

- 1 See local histories
- 2 Information from local inhabitants

Wivenhoe was a busy port in 1750, because large vessels could not reach the Hythe owing to the state of the river. As a result customs and excise officers were stationed in the town and some of them settled their families there. Wivenhoe was also the headquarters of one of the revenue cutters. Two great revenue captains lived there in the 18th Cent. Robert Martin and Daniel Harvey. They supplied their ships under contract to the Customs. Captain Martin supplied a smack named "Wivenhoe" in 1731. More famous was Capt. Harvey's cutter "The Repulse".¹

Wivenhoe men served aboard the revenue cutters. They received their keep and 6/- a week, 7/- in wartime. This was a good wage for those days and in addition they could hope for a share in the occasional commission paid their captain for seizures. Thus Capt. Martin received £104 for a seizure of tobacco in 1752 and £140 for a similar seizure in 1754.² Life could be dangerous however. Three of his men were wounded, badly apparently, in one fight with smugglers, showed by the large fee of £5-3-0 which was paid to the local doctor.³ If a man was killed doing his duty, his widow was not entitled to compensation as a right, though in practice the customs were not ungenerous. In 1742 for instance Rebecca Durrell received £12 when her husband was drowned.

- 1 Customs Records
- 2 " "
- 3 " "

In war-time a revenue seaman's life was even more uncertain. He might suddenly find himself recruited into His Majesty's Navy, as in 1745, when Capt Martin's vessel was ordered to join the fleet at the Nore. In 1778 Capt Harvey's "Repulse" chased a smuggling cutter too near to the

French coast at Calais and ran aground. She was seized by the French, equipped as a privateer and then recaptured by the English. The master, the mate and nineteen of the crew spent thirteen months in Calais prison.¹

There were five ships of the name Repulse between the years 1770 and 1800 when Harvey was in command, each being larger and having a bigger crew than its predecessor. The fourth of 210 tons and a complement of 51, was the best of its kind in the kingdom and had little difficulty in mastering quite large smuggling vessels. In 1783 for instance, a local newspaper reported as follows :-

“Yesterday was taken near Fambridge Ferry by the Wivenhoe custom-house cutter, a large smuggling vessel, mounting several swivels. The smuggling cutter striking on a sandbank, they made little resistance, but threw their cargo overboard and abandoned the cutter.”²

There were several attempts by smugglers to capture the Repulse. In 1780 information was

- 1 Customs Records
- 2 Ipswich Journal
- 3

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The Garrison House

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received that “four large cutters are coming upon the Essex and Suffolk coasts in concert, which they were to supply with all sorts of prohibited goods. One carries twenty four six- and nine-pounders and others are nearly of the same force. They are to act in the double capacity of smugglers and privateers, having French Commissions and one Frenchman on board each to justify the taking of

English prizes, although all the rest of the crews are English and Irish. They mean, if they fall in with her, to capture Capt. Harvey's cutter, the Repulse, which is the great object of the expedition"¹

They did not get the "Repulse" but it was probably they who soon afterwards captured the "Swift" (revenue cutter of Colchester) and handed her over to the French.

With Martin or Harvey living on the Quay, Wivenhoe smugglers doubtless preferred to land contraband goods on the marshes between Wivenhoe and Brightlingsea. There is, however a local tradition that the Wivenhoe Brook itself, just S.E. of the town, was sometimes the route by which the goods travelled inland and that a farmhouse near the brook was a much-used place. It may have been at this farmhouse that in 1739 the leader of a smuggling gang was captured. He was himself a blacksmith from Elmstead, and his gang included farmers from both Elmstead and Wivenhoe.

Farmers

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The Shipyard Formerly Harvey's

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were useful allies when goods had to be hidden and later distributed. Members of this particular gang were not pleasant characters. They were horse thieves and highwaymen as well as smugglers and they had terrorised the Elmstead – Wivenhoe district for some time before their dissolution. In 1765 it was the custom of the farmers attending Colchester market to leave some hours before the usual close of business to go home in large companies, on account of the robberies that were committed upon them if they travelled singly.¹

Amongst the many advantages the smuggler possessed was the lack of a reliable constabulary and the unpopularity of H.M. Customs and Excise. The public's support for smuggling was not due entirely to its preference for cheap gin. One reason for the heavy duties on spirits was that Parliament, composed as it was of landlords, would not pay for its own very expensive foreign policy by an increased Land Tax and made the public pay by indirect taxation. Though they paid these taxes, the people had virtually no control over public affairs at all. In Wivenhoe in 1750 out of a population of about 600 only 40 had the vote, and that was a higher percentage than in most towns.²

However pardonable, smuggling was an evil.

- 1 D.W Collier The Peoples History of Essex
- 2 Victoria County History

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Thames Lighters at Cook's formerly Husk's (illustration missing)

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In Essex coastal regions it caused much drunkenness. Many men, including one Wivenhoe publican are reported to have died as a result of excessive drinking. After a successful 'run', labourers were paid partly in liquor. The customs too, often sold seized liquor cheaply. The following advertisement is typical.

"To be sold, by Inch of Candle, to the Best Bidder on Monday, the 20th inst, at His Majesty's Warehouse at Wivenhoe. Six hundred and Forty large casks containing upwards of Five Thousand, Nine Hundred Gallons of neat old Bordeaux and Nantes Brandies, which will be put up in large and small lots. N.B. The Brandy will be put up at 5/- per gallon for the Encouragement of Bidders"¹

Smuggling as a large scale industry ended after about 1830 with the establishment of the Coastguard the lowering of some customs duties and a more efficient system of control by the Customs and Excise. It was probably because of these new developments that Sainty was caught Thence forward only very small scale smuggling continued. In 1849 for instance, in one week, a Wivenhoe citizen was sent to Springfield as a result of possessing contraband goods and the captain of the "Pearl" himself pleaded guilty to having tobacco and liquor on board against the law.

- 1 Ipswich Gazette



Canal barge in the modern dock at Cooks

The quantities involved however were very small. Wivenhoe people now had other things to do working at the industries which were giving prosperity to the town.

Wivenhoe had long been famous for the building of small trading ships, fishing boats, revenue cutters, and the fast sailing craft for the smugglers, in which it was necessary to out-sail these government cutters. The ability to build fast sailing craft, for which the shipwrights of Wivenhoe were famous, led noblemen and others to these builders when yachting became a national sport after the Napoleonic wars.

The Marquis of Anglesea of that period owned perhaps the most famous of all, the 95- ton lugger yacht, "The Pearl". She was built by Philip Sainty, and her success laid the foundation of Wivenhoe's fame as a yacht-building centre. Sainty was born about 1754, he had been established at Wivenhoe many years and was the chief boat- and yacht-builder there at the time. Tradition at Wivenhoe speaks of him as a man of unknown origin of polygamous habits, and a confirmed smuggler, but very expert as a boat-builder. When the Marquis of Anglesea, desiring to build a yacht of unrivalled speed had inquired for the most suitable builder and had heard of Sainty, he learned that that individual was in Springfield jail for some smuggling exploit. The Marquis then procured from the King a free pardon for the boat-builder;



Cook's shipyard and the River Colne

but the latter, knowing that his services were essential, refused to come out unless his brother and brother-in-law named Pullen, both then in Maidstone jail for a similar offence, were liberated also, and the Marquis had to get all three out of prison before he could get his yacht built. ¹

Cromwell writing in 1825 says "At New Quay about a quarter of a mile nearer Wyvenhoe, pleasure yachts, are built for noblemen and others. One of these lately constructed for that distinguished member of the Yacht Club, the Marquis of Anglesea is considered one of the finest vessels of its kind in the kingdom." ²

In 1832 Thos Harvey took over the yard occupied by Philip Sainty. In 1840 he was described as a "shipowner and builder". About 1849 he took from Mr Reid an additional yard at Ipswich where he continued to build yachts as at Wivenhoe till about 1864.

About 1857 the firm became Thomas Harvey and Son, John Harvey (father of Sir John Martin Harvey, the famous actor-manager, who was born and spent his early years at Wivenhoe) having gone into partnership with his father. From now on a succession of famous racing schooners, yawls and cutters was launched from its shipways. Amongst the names appear Dagmar (a 33 ton cutter built for King

1 Victoria County History

2 Cromwell's History of Colchester

Edward VII when Prince of Wales). Sea Belle (described by The Field in 1877 as “unequaled for stiffness and weatherliness” by any other schooner built) and the Miranda. Miranda was noted as ‘the cutter with two masts’, for though she was schooner-rigged her huge mainsail took the heart out of her competitors, and played its part in bringing to an end the halcyon days that schooner-racing had seen in the seventies.

The Field in 1876 said “every year, something or other very good, and sometimes very original, is launched on the Colne, and the banks of the river, during the long winter months are as closely packed with yachts as those of the more fashionable Medina and Haslar Creek”.¹

Perhaps the most original boat launched was the Jullanar. This boat was conceived by Mr Bentall of Maldon who was a builder of ploughs and therefore it is not surprising to see in her the shapely lines of the plough. Thus in 1875 at Maldon was laid the keel of the most noteworthy yacht ever built in Essex, the pioneer of all modern racing-yacht design. “Her deadwoods were cut away in a fashion never before conceived, and her keel swept in a fair curve from her water-line forward to the heel of her rudder aft, cutting out the conventional fore-foot. Thus she was free from dragging under-water wetted surface and handy to

1 Last Stronghold of Sail Hervey Benham

manoeuvre”.¹ In December 1875 the hull was taken round to Wivenhoe, where Harvey decked her, rigged her and fitted her out as a cruising yawl. She was fitted out by Harvey in 1877 for racing and won more prizes that can be mentioned.

Yacht racing thus provided Wivenhoe with a very important activity. The crews of many yachts were recruited in Wivenhoe. Some of the older inhabitants can remember the time when there were as many as a hundred yachts clustered along the sea wall. There are many tales of races still told and one concerns the Audax built by Harvey.

When the Audax came out she was regarded as a duffer and in the autumn they lengthened her stern and added more lead to her keel. Wivenhoe church was being restored at that time and some of the leaden coffins are said to have been smuggled into the shipyard and run into the keel. After that she beat everything she met. While lying at Erith the skipper of the Audax, Captain Rayner, had a tiff with the owner, who ordered the yacht to be taken to the Colne instead of competing in the Channel race, Cowes to Torquay, which was a disappointment to all on board as it meant a gold cup containing a hundred sovereigns. So instead of going to the Colne the skipper telegraphed and entered for the race. The owner opening his copy of The Times, saw that his yacht had won the cup, and

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The last of the Sailing boats (Illustration missing)

all disagreements were soon forgotten.¹

Disaster came to Wivenhoe in 1872 when most of John Harvey's building sheds and models were destroyed by fire and a very serious loss was inflicted on him. To carry on the business, a company – the John Harvey Yacht and Shipbuilding Company L^{td} – was formed with John Harvey as managing director. This was not successful financially. Harvey had it is said the artistic rather than the business temperament and when carrying out a building contract, often thought more of turning out a fine piece of work, at whatever expense, than of making a commercial profit. Moreover as time went on wooden yachts, such as those he and his father had built so successfully, were replaced by yachts of steel, bronze or aluminium, and these could be built more advantageously in the North of England and on the Clyde than on the Colne. Gradually, therefore, Wivenhoe lost its old importance as a yacht-building station. About 1881 the company came to grief and Harvey went to America to build yachts, chiefly cutters.

Messrs Forrest of London took over the yard in 1881 and built amongst other things lifeboats, fire floats, ships, pinnacces and dredgers. Wivenhoe's heyday as yacht builder was over. Gradually shipbuilding was eclipsed but was revived by the two World Wars. During the Second World War many minesweepers were built and repaired in the shipyard which now owns

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the only dry dock between London and Lowestoft. Large sections of the Mulberry Harbour were assembled here and later towed to the Medway. During the war Vosper's who were bombed out of Southampton took over Husk's (a shipbuilder of lesser fame) yard, but though vast new sheds were built to house their M.T.B's and M.L's that firm departed early in 1946.¹ Since then James W. Cook and Co of London have reopened it and specialise in Thames lighters and canal barges. They also built the pontoons for the landing stages at the Festival Site in 1951. So it seems that even after some setbacks Wivenhoe is determined to keep in the limelight with its industry.

Out of the original yacht building several minor industries rose. Brown's ropery was brought to Wivenhoe from Nacton, in Suffolk, in 1770. The factory adopted steam power in the very early days, but its enterprise was part of its undoing, for the primitive boiler burst and blew the whole place to pieces, killing three people including the proprietor's son. The rebuilding after the explosion crippled the business, for there was no insurance at the time and the ropery finally closed down about 1900.

Another subsidiary industry was that of quarrying for ballast. Barges which carried the coal trade of the river were awkward to handle when light,

1 Information from direct experience and observation

consequently they were loaded with gravel. If possible they took sand which was a paying freight, sometimes loading a pony on top for the mines, but failing this they had to be content with shingle, which they unloaded in the sea outside the harbour¹

Barges were important to Wivenhoe in another way. Since Wivenhoe was virtually the port of Colchester for many years and barges were the main carriers of goods until 1880 then they must have had an effect on the prosperity of the town.

“In the statute of 9 & 10 William III Cap 19. For cleansing and making navigable the chanel from Hithe at Colchester to Wivenhoe. It is enacted that for 21 years from 1st May 1698, all merchants or owners of goods, wares and merchantdises, that shall be brought into the River or chanel commonly called Colne, and shall be landed at or shipped from Wivenhoe or the New Hithe in Colchester, or between either of the said places, shall pay to the collectors to be chosen, towards the cleansing and making navigable the said river and chanel, the duties hereafter expressed”.² The charges were different for the various commodities, e.g. Bay and Say ½ d per piece, timber sixpence a ton. Therefore in the earliest times something was done to keep the port open to trade and prosperous.

Trading was not limited to the local area or coast and was carried out in many kinds of

- 1 The Last Stronghold of Sail. Hervey Benham
- 2 Essex Review 1902 Vol.1 P. 108

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vessels. Brigantines went all over the world. As well as working locally in the coal trade, these vessels made voyages to Spain for nuts, Quebec for wood, Jamaica for rum.

The most widely known Wivenhoe industry is that of oyster fishing. It is mentioned in many early history books. Defoe said “But the chief place where the said oysters are now had, is from Wyvenhoe, and the shoars adjacent whither they are brought by the fishermen, who take them at the mouth of, that they call, Colchester Water, and about the sand they call the Spits, and carry them up to Wyvenhoe, where they are laid in beds or pits on the shoar to feed, as they call it, and then being barrellled up, and carried to Colchester, which is but three miles off, they are sent to London by land, and are, from thence, called Colchester oysters”.¹ Cox writing in 1720 says “The inhabitants have a peculiar art in barrelling them by which means they are so well preserved that great quantities of them are sent to London and other parts of the nation”.² Many oysters were sent abroad and thus Wivenhoe contributed to the revival of commerce which was taking place at the time.

There was much trouble in the ‘fishery’ up till 1758. Apparently people were taking more oysters than they were due and also taking them

- 1 Defoes Tour of England and Wales P 12
- 2 Victoria County History

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at the wrong seasons. In 1758 an Act of Parliament (Colne Fishery Act) was passed to prevent this. Three Justices of the Peace were to hold an Admiralty Court once a year with power to fine dredgermen who failed to attend, to appoint a water serjeant, to grant licences to dredgermen.¹

But not only did they have to combat the greed of their fellowmen but also the London fishmongers. Morant writing in 1748 says “The unfair tricks plaid by the London Fishmongers (who endeavour to engross them and would permit none if they would, to be vented on that city but what pass through their hands) have not served to enhance their value or reputation. For they not only

mix stale and fresh dishonestly, but also put off for them, some course ones, taken at great distance perhaps on the Western shores".² Here Morant is talking mainly of Colchester oysters which apparently at one time did not have a good name because of the underhanded methods of the London fishmongers.

In 1807, the dredgers then holding licences formed themselves into a company called the Colne Fishery Company and appointed two foremen, a treasurer and a clerk. It was never incorporated formally but was efficient. In 1861, says Collier the company consisted of 360 fishermen, each man paid two guineas annually to the corporation for his

- 1 Victoria County History
- 2 " " "

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licence to fish and the revenue derived from the fishing was over £150 per annum.¹ In 1915 the Company consisted of 400 members and the board employed in the fishery a steam dredger and about fifty smacks. To-day the oyster fishery has sadly declined due to a limited market and the uncertainty of a profitable season. The oyster pits in Wivenhoe no longer exist due to a pollution scare.

Alongside the oyster fishery was built up seasonal fishing which now takes prime place. Collier writes that at Wivenhoe until well into the 19th Century, the building of smacks and other fishing boats, of from fourteen to forty tons burthen was a large and flourishing industry, and up to twenty years ago (1840) the town had a large trade in sprats which were taken by 'stowboating'. Any surplus was carried in large wagon loads to the neighbouring farms for manure. Shrimping was carried on also from October to May.²

Most of the sprats caught in those days went for manure. The men also went 'five fingering' on the Kent coast- dredging starfish for manure. During the sprat season there would be seven or eight hundred bushels of sprats lying on Wivenhoe Quay in heaps. A good haul did not necessarily mean a good price because of the limited market. Often prices fell as low as threepence a bushel for manure.³

- 1 Collier Peoples History of Essex
- 2 " " " "
- 3 Last Stronghold of Sail. Hervey Benham

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To-day a modern canning factory absorbs any surplus which the few boats left working may bring in.

As was seen with the Poor Law Wivenhoe was very fond of introducing innovations. About 1750 Horace Flack, a Wivenhoe doctor, set up a sea-water bath near the river and the fascinating story of Wivenhoe as a health resort began. In the Ipswich journal of 23rd May 1752 Flack advertised his baths.

"Whereas the use of Bathing in sea-water has been found so universally serviceable in many Diseases, and the want of a private and convenient place has prevented many Persons from making use of so advantageous a Remedy. This is therefore to inform the Publick that there is lately continued a commodious Bath and Dressing Room at Wivenhoe, near Colchester, in Essex, where proper Attendance will be provided by applying to Mr Horace Flack"¹

Although there are many descriptions to the contrary the baths at Wivenhoe never provided any real competition to those at Harwich and other places. Wivenhoe thereby failed to become a resort as was promised by Flack. It seems reasonable to presume that the Baths failed with the death of Turner (Flack's successor). This was also due to the greater attractions of Harwich as a place of residence and the fact that a stage coach went there from London.

1 Ipswich Journal

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Some interesting facts on the agriculture of the area about 1800 are found in a diary kept by a Fingringhoe farmer – Mr Page. By then machinery was not unknown to the area, for in his diary is the following entry.

1799 Nov 28th. Mr Ashwell came here with his drill machine to drill nine acres of wheat after cole seed, and after we had done about one acre and a half was obliged to leave off, on account of my putting too much lime to the seed which gummed up the small works or notches in the different little wheels which regulated the hoppers and made it sow irregular.¹

The following entries show that famers here were no exception and that they were considerably wealthier than in previous years. They had become gentlemen of leisure.

1799 Nov 1st Up to this day I had killed 50 brace of birds and two and half brace of hares, for which I had shot 176 times, reckoning random shots.

1830 Feb 24th The Hounds met at Abberton Lion and turned south side of the parish but did not find fox; went with them to Chertwood.²

One of the most interesting entries concerns the Napoleonic wars. If the French had landed the people in the district were to carry out a 'scorched earth' policy.

1798. The inhabitants of Fingringhoe met to prepare a defence

1 Essex Review 1907

2 " " "

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against the possible invasion of the French. T.J. Page appointed to destroy mills and ovens and to mark cattle. Edward Wade appointed captain of 25 men for felling trees. Steward King and P. Stone conductors of waggons and carts.¹

When victory came in 1815 the people were not slow to celebrate.

Oct 1815. The rejoicings began yesterday and continued to-day, a vast number of intoxicated men, with flags flying and firing a canon paraded about the parish, dragging the canon with them. About ten in the morning the whole assemblage went to Mr John Cooper's where they continued for several hours drinking of punch and firing of canon, and in the afternoon returned to the whalebone with Cooper at their head singing "God Save the King" and other victory songs and continued until late at night on the 17th. This rejoicing will cost Cooper £100.²

The John Cooper alluded to in this entry is said to have made a large fortune by the high prices of farm produce which prevailed during these wars.

Unfortunately no record is made here or elsewhere of the methods of the progress of farming. As has already been seen the yacht building overshadowed farming. Few people were concerned with agriculture, the majority would find their living by the river during Wivenhoe's years of splendour.

- 1 Essex Review 1907
- 2 " " "