

Essex

Roman tessera

In 1967, my father-in-law built the house in which we now live in the garden of his Colchester practice. When the foundations were being dug, part of a Roman cemetery was unearthed. The site of this cemetery was fairly typical, adjacent to the main road to London. A small statue of Mercury was discovered. This is now in the British Museum. A number of *tesserae* were found of which this is one and acknowledges Colchester's Roman past.

Lent by Chris Manning-Press, VCH Essex trustee.

***The Prittlewell Prince*, book**

When at Southend Museum, I was the Borough's archaeological representative during the discovery and excavations of this fabulous burial. Almost every day, the Director of the excavations, Ian Blair, would telephone the Museum and say "Ken, come and see what we've found now!" A once-in-a-lifetime (if you're lucky) discovery, this is the most important princely burial to be found since Sutton Hoo, and possibly one of the earliest.

Lent by Ken Crowe, VCH Essex trustee.

Drawing of a timber-framed belfry

Between the third quarter of the 14th century and the early 16th century, over 100 Essex churches were fitted with elaborate, beautifully constructed timber belfry towers or free-standing bell towers. Constructed in a period and a county rich in oak forests but lacking either stone or great wealth, they were a logical solution created by generations of skilled and imaginative carpenters.

Lent by Geoffrey Hare, chairman VCH Essex.

Photograph of a 15th century timber-framed house

Simpler timber framing resulted in handsome and surprisingly eco-friendly houses like Monks Barn in Newport and countless more modest dwellings in dozens of Essex villages. The VCH Newport Group's dating of Monk's Barn to 1453 for their Newport 'short' was achieved by dendrochronological analysis, which means that every VCH supporter in Essex can now spell and talk learnedly about dendrochronology.

Lent by VCH Essex Newport Group.

Saffron bulbs

In the 16th and 17th centuries the area around Saffron Walden was the main centre in England for the cultivation of saffron. It was a labour intensive, though lucrative, crop, with whole families, including children, taking part in the autumn harvest. It was marketed at local fairs, notably Newport, which was on the main route to London. During the 18th century production declined, perhaps succumbing to competition from Spain. However, saffron crocus bulbs are still available locally, and I have planted some.

Lent by Anthony Tuck, VCH Essex trustee & Newport Group chairman.

Postcard of the Plume Library

Visit the Plume Library in Maldon, where you will be taken back in time to 1704, in a room unchanged since its creation by Thomas Plume in 1700 to hold his books, papers and pictures that he bequeathed to the town of his birth. Its very existence has spread local enthusiasm for history and willingness to join with others – at first to make sure that the Library survives, and then to find out much more about its founder. A group of enthusiastic historians from Essex, Kent, Cambridge and Hertfordshire, led by the inspiring VCH Essex Editor, Chris Thornton, under the auspices of the Trustees of the Library, are now at work researching and writing *Dr Thomas Plume (1630-1704) his Life and his Legacies*.

Lent by Tony Doe (one of the historians at work) & of the Friends of Thomas Plume's Library.

Historical coincidences

Amateur historians delving into the past of their families, or their houses, love to discover coincidences between their present and the past. The two similarities between past and present owners of our Elizabethan house have fascinated me.

Lent by Patricia Herrmann, VCH Essex Secretary and trustee.

A Martello Tower

The location of Essex facing the Continent made it vulnerable to seaborne attack. One endangered area was the gently shelving beaches of Tendring Hundred in north-east Essex. Napoleon's invasion threat led to the erection of 11 Martello towers between 1808 and 1812, armed with cannons and howitzers on traversing platforms. Although some towers were later demolished, others survived to be incorporated into modern resort seafronts such as at Clacton-on-Sea, and spawning this charming seaside souvenir, c. 1920.

Lent by Chris Thornton, VCH Essex Editor.

Who do you think you are?

Searching for my ancestors, I found more than I bargained for!

Lent by Geoffrey Hare, VCH Essex chairman.

Blue sky

During my 60 years living in Essex, I have enjoyed giving a true and very Essex reply to the perennial childhood question 'Why is the sky blue?', and I hope that I have thereby awoken an interest in both history and science. Turn the picture over to find the answer.

Lent by Patricia Herrmann, VCH Essex Secretary and trustee.

A Century of Iron, book

The most famous 'building' in Southend is, of course, its Pier. I was closely involved in supporting the establishment of Southend's Pier Museum and have been researching the Pier's history from original sources for many years.

Lent by Ken Crowe, VCH Essex trustee.

Maldon salt & Tiptree jam

Ask 'what does Essex mean for you?' and you may get answers about blondes, false eyelashes and stiletto heels. We cannot fit them into our box, but that concept is out of date anyway. Now we boast of old Essex businesses, growing steadily but purposefully, thriving and attracting international business, royal support, much praise ... and profit. Maldon's salt and Tiptree's jams are splendid Essex examples.

Lent by Patricia Herrmann, VCH Essex Secretary and trustee.

Nine postcards of Southend

A small collection of Southend postcards which together present a visual history of the town between about 1900 and 1912. A personal fascination with postcards began many years ago when it became clear that they capture stages in the development of the seaside history of the famous resort.

Lent by Ken Crowe, VCH Essex trustee.

Mistley Man's Log, book

Chuff Horlock's *Mistley Man's Log* so typifies the Essex attitude:
Business, yes – but let's also have fun!

Lent by Geoffrey Hare. VCH Essex chairman.

A Marconi valve

Famed as the inventor of wireless telegraphy, Guglielmo Marconi (1874 -1937) gave us much more. 2MT was the first British radio station to make regular entertainment broadcasts. Transmissions began in 1922 from an ex-Army hut at the Marconi laboratories at Writtle, near Chelmsford.

Two Emma Toc, in the spelling alphabet of the day, was a surprising success. The presenter, producer, actor-manager and writer was Captain P. P. Eckersley, a Marconi engineer. His regular announcement: "This is Two Emma Toc, Writtle testing, Writtle testing", became in short time quite well known and is still remembered with affection by radio buffs.

Lent by Lord Petre, VCH Essex President, VCH Essex Vice Chairman and trustee.

A Ford Popular

A scale model of the Ford Popular car made by the Ford Motor Company at Dagenham in Essex between 1953 and 1959. It was specially designed for the British market, starved of budget-level small cars after the restrictions on car-making during World War II, and the Popular lived up to its name. Many now elderly people in Essex learned to driver on it, and later it achieved a second wave of popularity as a 'hot rod' favourite.

Lent by Andrew Duncan and Andrew Sales (two car enthusiasts who were enchanted by this initiative and offered the model).

Radio Caroline, disc and description

Like other Essex teenagers, I spent many an evening huddled over a small transistor radio listening to "pirate" radio stations broadcasting from ships anchored off the coast.

Lent by Chris Thornton, VCH Essex Editor.

Matchbox

The University of Essex, where I have worked and studied since 1981, enrolled its first students in 1964. Sir Albert Sloman, founding Vice-Chancellor, in his 1963 Reith Lectures, set out his vision of a University which would break the mould and challenge expectation. Essex's brutalist architecture was designed to link social and educational space to encourage a sense of community. Over 100,000 students from more than 140 countries have graduated and gone on to make a difference in the world.

Lent by Sarah Manning-Press, VCH Essex trustee.

A Mersea Native oystershell and a rock oystershell

The Mersea Native shell was picked up on one of my daily walks with my dog, along Monkey Beach at West Mersea, where I work. It is quite different from the common rock oyster and is representative of the Island of Mersea and an important aspect of the history of Essex and the Roman occupation. When Colchester was the capital of England, the Romans must have fed on Native Mersea oysters brought up the Colne. Can they really have towed nets of this mollusc back to Rome?

Lent by Louisa Tippet, VCH Essex Treasurer & trustee.

Textile sample from Warner & Sons

Warner & Sons started life in the London's Spitalfields in 1870, but in 1895 moved to Braintree in Essex, home to other textile companies such as Courtaulds. Warner's gained a high reputation for silks and velvets and wove the robes for the Queen's coronation. Silk weaving ceased in 1971, and the company closed in 1990, but a Warner grandson worked to save an impressive archive of fabric samples and designs, the Warner Textile Archive in its original mill building. Preferring to look forward rather than back, the item here illustrates a very modern 21st century venture

Suggested by Paul Gilman, VCH Essex trustee, and provided by Braintree District Council from the Warner Textile Archive.