

**Billericay Archaeological
and Historical Society**
newsletter

Autumn 2025



The Essex Regiment badge

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Welcome to this Autumn edition of the Billericay Archaeological and Historical Society (BA&HS) newsletter, I hope that you find it to be an enjoyable read.



Did any of you manage to get to the Festival of Essex Archaeology and Heritage held at Cressing Temple Barns on Thursday 24th July? It was a very worthwhile event with many exhibitors, including Essex Record Office, Essex Society for Family History, Museums including Braintree, Harlow, Chelmsford, Rayleigh, Saffron Walden and Southend as well as several Essex Archaeological and Historical groups. There were talks available to attend and lots of activities for children. It is hoped that the fair will be held again next year.

Important announcement: Please note that from next year membership prices will be £15 for single membership and £25 for dual. Visitors will be £3. This will be for the new year, but if people want to pay in December, the new fees will still apply

I would like to thank Roger O'Rourke, Alan Taylor and David Bremner for their articles published here. Also included is an item about the Billericay Workhouse contributed from the Billericay Society archive.

On that note, I am happy to receive articles from any member for inclusion in future editions.

Jacky Hathaway

BA&HS Newsletter editor

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Future programme

October 13 th	Nick Dobson	The Spanish Civil War
November 10 th	Viv Newman	International Women at war
December 8 th	Chris White	Picasso
January 12 th	Janet Brewer	Ancient Egyptian Jewellery
February 9 th	Ted Woodgate	4 Marys
March 9 th	Philip McKinder	Lynmouth 1952

Meeting Notes

April 12th Alan Murdey Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives

This was an interesting insight into the history and activities of this organisation. Alan covered the rationale behind its beginnings and how the format of the cemeteries was planned. His talk was well illustrated with photographs of graves all over the world. He included stories of two local graves as well.

May 12th Joanna Moncrieff Food and drink emporiums of the West End

Joanna led us to many establishments describing their stock in trade and the, sometimes surprising, history of the business. Twinings (tea); Gerry's Wine and Spirits; Algerian Coffee Store; Maison Bertaux (patisserie); Caxton and Whitfield (cheese); Fortnum & Mason (general supplies); Berry Bros & Rudd (Wine); Justerini & Brooks (Wine & Spirits).

June 9th Jason Middleton The history of the pearl, a famous gemstone

The pearl is one of the most ancient precious gems, being found in oysters that were eaten by our prehistoric ancestors. Jason explained how the pearl is formed, how it was collected historically and how it is now farmed but still appreciated for its beauty. Well illustrated, but no free samples unfortunately.

July 14th Joanna Bogle Caroline Chisholm – a 19th century heroine

Caroline Chisholm was born into a Northampton farming family in 1808 but became an important figure in Australian history such that she featured on the reverse of the Aus\$5 note. After marrying an officer of the Madras Army of the East India Company and living in Madras for some time they moved to Sydney in 1838. Here she was concerned that young women were arriving in the new colony without any organised support and she established a women's shelter and identified employment opportunities. This eventually led to migration reforms and she returned to England to give evidence to Parliament.

As usual, there was no meeting in August

There is no Essex Park in France



The Newfoundland Park Memorial (left)

Newfoundland's sense of identity was born here on the first of July 1916 when 780 men of the Newfoundland Regiment suffered 736 casualties. This was 94% of the attacking force.

The Newfoundland Government bought about 70 acres of the battlefield to preserve as a memorial. It is now an educational centre.

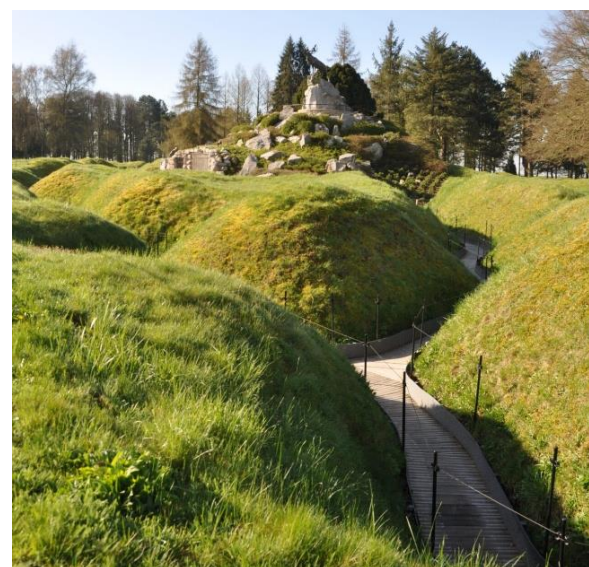
Moments later 841 men of the 1st Battalion the Essex regiment attacked suffering 216 casualties 26% of the attacking force.

The sad tale of the Essex Regiment on the first day of the Somme though has no memorial

The Battle of the Somme was planned as a French offensive with the British army playing a supporting role to the north of the River Somme. It was meant to be Britain's first meticulously planned offensive with an adequate supply of men, artillery and ammunition. The German offensive at Verdun meant Britain had to take the lead role and extend the offensive northwards.

It is generally not known that in the south where the better divisions and more thorough planning took place there was significant success. However in the north where the less well trained divisions and less thorough preparations took place the sad story is all too well known.

It was in this northern section at a place now called Newfoundland Park that the Newfoundland and Essex Regiments experienced horrendous casualties. Having been held in reserve they made separate uncoordinated attacks after the main assault attracting the full attention of the German defenders. The principal assault took place at 07:30 and was an abject failure. The Newfoundland and Essex Regiments were ordered to advance at 08:45 to reinforce shattered units, who were already back in their own trenches clogging them with survivors, wounded and some of the dead. Struggling to move up to the front line through the trenches the Newfoundland CO led his men over open ground from behind the rearmost trench at about 09:15 allowing the time Germans to call in a concentrated artillery barrage, there were no other



targets. The Essex CO chose to struggle through the trenches his men squeezing past the many shattered bodies of their predecessors, this must have been a ghastly experience. The Essex Regiment's attack started from the front line at 09:55. Fortunately this time the artillery was nowhere near as concentrated or devastating. The choice of the Essex CO possibly saved many of his men.

Commentators looking back with hindsight have described this episode as incompetent. If the inexperience of the men was serious, the inexperience of the officers was more so. Some of the officers who in 1914 commanded platoons of 60 men were now commanding battalions of a 1000 or brigades of 4000 men. Many if not most of the junior officers had been civilians. Britain had fielded an army in 1916 described by some as amateur. This fledgling army fought against the German Army at its peak; they went on to become, arguably, the most professional force in Europe and dominant allied force. It was the first, and only, time that the British Army has been the dominant force in a European war. In the Second World War the British Army never opposed more than 14% of the German Army at any one time.

Roger O'Rourke

Notes

Newfoundland was an independent dominion and not part of Canada at that time and had never had a military force.

The officer casualty rates as a per centage are much higher.

Regiments held back a cadre of officers, NCOs and some ORs from which to rebuild.

The only regiment to possibly suffer worse casualties, than the Newfoundland Regiment, was the West Yorkshire Regiment, which suffered 710 to 777 casualties (there is some confusion about the accounting).

Battalion strengths:

	strength		Held back		In assault		Casualties		%	
	Off	OR	Off	OR	Off	OR	Off	OR	Off	OR
1 st Ess.	36	910	14	91	22	819	9	207	41	25
1 st New.	45	842	23	84	22	758	26*	710	118*	93

*Officers held back went forward to assist.
A full strength battalion was 960.

Old Billericay

The name "Byllyrica" was first recorded in 1291, then, in 1307 it changed to "Billerica". Yet again, it changed to "Billyrecha" in 1436 and in 1594 it became "Billericay". But, by 1686, it was known as "Bilrecky". Apparently, there is no known explanation of the origin of the name of our town!

During the 13th and 14th centuries, pilgrims, on their way to Canterbury, travelled through Billericay. There were a number of inns available for pilgrims to spend the night here, on their journey to Canterbury. One was named The Red Lion. Pilgrims usually crossed the Thames at Tilbury, which was only 13 miles south of Billericay.

The town of Billericay was granted a concession to hold a market by the Stratford monks in 1291. They also allowed two Autumn Fairs. The confirmatory Charter for these was not given until 1478. Due to disuse, this privilege had faded away over time.

There was a Manor House at Blunts Wall during the 13th Century. It had been built by Bartholomew Blunt (or Blund). In 1262, the current owner of "Blunts Walls", Reginald Blunt, joined the Barons Revolt, under Simon de Montford. These barons were eventually defeated at the battle of Evesham in 1265. As a result of this defeat, his manor and lands were confiscated. They came under the ownership of the Augustinian monks of Thoby Priory, Mountnessing.

In 1342, Billericay acquired a Chantry Chapel. It's lands were sufficient to support a priest. It is believed that the Sulgrave family, of Runwell, founded this chapel. It was required because the parish church was two miles away, at Great Burstead. In wet weather, it became difficult to reach. Today, this chapel remains in the High Street. There have been many renovations to the building over the years, yet the tower still contains many of the original bricks!

During the 14th century, Billericay became a stronghold of the preachers of Wycliffe. They were known as the Lollards. Two of them, John Ball and Jack Straw, were very active in the area.

In 1381, there was the Peasants Revolt. This revolt was against the introduction of the Poll Tax by Richard II. The Essex men joined together with the men of Kent. The Kings Officers found it very difficult to collect this tax. Sir Robert Belknap was sent to Brentwood to deal with these local rebels. However, he found these men were well armed with bows and arrows and other weapons. He was driven from the town, whilst some of his officers were killed in the fracas that ensued. The Essex men then visited several of the local manors and burnt the manorial rolls, thus destroying all record of their bondage. Later, together with the men of Kent, they marched to Smithfield to meet with Wat Tyler. However, he was killed and, despite the King promising to right their wrongs, they were later hunted down and killed by the Kings armies! Back in Billericay, the rebels retreated to woods in the north – east of the town, believed to have been Norsey Woods. They were massacred by the troops of Thomas of Woodstock. It is believed that as many as 500 men were killed. Several of them were probably buried at Great Burstead.

The local leaders of this rebel group were a Billericay weaver, name unknown, and John Newman from Rawreth. Villagers who took part in this local battle included men who were from Stock, Buttsbury, Ramsden, Fobbing, Stanford, Mucking and Horndon.

During the 14th Century, Billericay grew in importance. It was the only town within the Barstable Hundred. The market was thriving at this time. There were prosperous wool merchants, a tannery existed and the local agriculture was flourishing.

So, this little town of Billericay was doing very well for itself.

Alan Taylor

(Adapted from "Billericay Through The Ages" by W.G.Harper.)

The Silicon Age

Archaeologists have defined the earliest development period of Homo Sapiens as the Stone Age, since only stone [a hard mineral deposit] in the form of flint was the main tool making material, mainly found in chalk beds.

Archaeologists have split The Stone Age into 3 phases: Palaeolithic. Mesolithic Neolithic.

These hard rock flints are found as seams, mainly as pebbles in a chalk or limestone geology. Flint had to be napped. Napping is the shaping of flint, chert, obsidian, or other conchoidal fracturing stone through the process of lithic reduction to manufacture the stone tools, that Homo-Sapiens needed for their survival, knives, scrapers, axes and needles etc. Water and flint were therefore an essential resource for the survival of Homo Sapiens.

In the middle Stone Age or Mesolithic period [c 10,000 – 4000 BC] homo-sapiens were classified by archaeologists as Hunter-Gatherers. They lived a nomadic existence, foraging for food; plants berries, nuts, roots and as groups, hunting for sources of meat. Homo-Sapiens originally ate their meat raw but cooked it once they had discovered "fire". This use of cooked meat it is claimed, enabled their brain to grow, leading to their departure from the other apes. Their regular annual wanderings around their local areas have led to our many national footpath routes.

At this time, c 8,000 BC, what is now Britain was attached to Europe by a land-bridge area known as "Doggerland" by archaeologists. This land-bridge stretched from the Humber to the Thames and across to Europe. As the North Sea water-level rose, "Doggerland" became buried with the melting of glaciers and the impact of tectonic forces in Norway. The loss of this "Doggerland" land-bridge made Britain an island.



Another significant change came during the Neolithic Age, [c 4,000- 2500 BC] with the introduction of farming, first developed in the Middle East. Received wisdom is that farming started in Mesopotamia, "the land between two rivers:" the Tigris and Euphrates. This area is referred to as the "Fertile Crescent". Mesopotamia is located between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea. The land of

Sumer, located north of the Persian Gulf, is considered to be the area where writing started, c 3,300 BC. Due to the need to make a record of trade dealings and to record laws as the cities and towns in the area grew. Archaeologists called the writing cuneiform, due to it being formed using a wedge-shaped tool. Cuneiform is from the Latin for wedge "Cuneus". I wonder what the Sumer called their writing?

The introduction of farming, to the existing Celtic inhabitants of Britain, is considered by British archaeologists as a Cultural Change - people, settling in one place and claiming the land and creating their own source of food by cultivating the land, and domesticating animals.

Metals had been mined from early times. The development from c 2,500 BC of the technology of metal working, is the next identified time in the Archaeological Record. Many types of metals: [gold, silver, copper, tin, zinc, lead etc] were mined in Britain. This made the country of interest to the Romans. Copper was known from [c 2500 BC]. Archaeologists found that metallurgists had improved the properties of copper by adding 10% of tin, by weight, to the copper. Thus, creating an alloy, they called bronze. This significant technology change they recorded as the Bronze Age, [c 2200 – 800 BC]

The next technology change was the development of the use of Iron. Identified, by archaeologists, as the Iron Age, [c 800 BC – AD 43]. After 43 A D archaeologists record the arrival of the Romans, followed by other European tribes, viz Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Normans, followed by British monarchs.

The use of the improved properties of iron, from the c 1760 A D, is recorded in the archaeological record as the Industrial Revolution. This was both a cultural and a technology change

The development of the properties of iron enabled the use of steam as a power source. Leading to the development of the steam engine. Firstly, as a pump to drain the mines and later as a mobile power source for driving locomotives.

From 1960, a major technology change occurred in the Telecommunications Industry. This was the change from the use of analogue signals, using the mathematics of the frequency-domain and the thermionic valve. To the use of digital transmission that used the mathematics of the time-domain enabled by digital technology in the form of the transistor within an integrated circuit. During the change-over period Marconi developed Radio transmission and Baird Television. This new digital and radio broadcasting technology enabled the Space Age to happen.

The patenting of the transistor, c 1949, enabled the development of digital technology, operating in the time-domain. From the 1950s, experience gained by physicists developing Solid-State Technology enabled the manufacture of the transistor and the use of the transistor in electronic circuit design, enabled the development of the Integrated Circuit, in the vernacular "The Chip". This led to the new technology of Microelectronics. Since microelectronics is based on the use of Silicon, I think this will be named The Silicon Age.

Microelectronics enabled the development of the modern mobile phone. The silicon chip, or digital circuitry inside the phone enabling all the applications to be carried out, is about the size of your thumb nail. Super-sonic flight, with Concorde, was achieved with the early development of integrated circuits that were available in 1969, this led to the exploration of

space. The next recognised technological change was The Space Age, when we sent space craft to explore the planets of our Solar System and achieved a moon landing in July 1969.



Picture of an integrated circuit connected to a printed wiring substrate. Note the 1 thousands of one-inch gold wire bonds connecting the silicon integrated circuit chip to the substrate. This picture was taken using a scanning electron microscope. The chip is about the size of a thumb nail. Such a chip controls all of the applications in your mobile phone, connecting you to the world.

David A. Bremner.

The Billericay Union Workhouse

The Union Workhouse was built in 1840 in direct response to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. It was built on an 11.5 acre site known as Stock Hill Field. The cost was £11,000 and was designed by George Gilbert Scott and William Bonython Moffet in an Elizabethan Tudor Style.

The main entrance was at the South where the Porter's Lodge was located although there were separate reception areas for men and women.

The main workhouse block was a large H shaped building to the south. Females were accommodated at the west side of the site and males at the east. All, except the infirm, were expected to work. The work included cultivation of the land, oakum picking (unravelling lengths of rope) stone breaking and domestic duties and nursing.

Children resided in the central and southern portion of the side wings. It was believed at the time that parents who needed to seek charity were a "bad influence" and the children were routinely separated from their parents. Family members rarely met within the workhouse walls.

The south west wing included a nursery and receiving wards. A chapel was erected at its far end.

The census of 1881 shows 198 residents – this being inmates and staff. The best known and last workhouse master was Walter Needham who took over in 1890. His daughter Mary was born in the workhouse and lived locally well into her 90's.

In 1898 additional land was acquired north of the workhouse. Additions included an infirmary, casual wards and a Labour Master's house. Further additions were a receiving ward and a new infirmary in 1927.

In WW1 the workhouse was used as a billet for soldiers in training and later in the war German Prisoners were housed in part of the building.

After 1930 the workhouse became Billericay Public Assistance Institution under the control of Essex County Council. Soon after the site became St Andrew's Hospital but in 1998 was closed to make way for a housing development. All historic buildings were retained and the chapel still stands

From the Billericay Society Archive

Future talks at the Essex Record Office. (ERO)

Wharf Road, Chelmsford, CM2 6YT

There is a small charge to attend these talks bookable through the ERO website. Refreshments are provided. The new Bow Bridge is now open and access is possible using the waterside footpaths as well as Wharf Road.

Tuesday 16th September

“Edward Seymour and his wives” speaker Rebeca Batley

Edward Seymour was brother to Queen Jane Seymour and married firstly Catherine Filliol and then Anne Stanhope. Both marriages led to scandal

Tuesday 30th September

“The former Essex County Hospital Site” speaker Adam Wightman

A report of the archaeological excavations carried out over the last five years. Much evidence of the Roman occupation has been found

Tuesday 28th October

“Workhouse People” speaker Stephen Norris

Chelmsford Poor Law Union, its Workhouse and some people connected to it.

Tuesday 25th November

“Essex Women’s Commemoration Project” speaker Dr James Bettley

This project was set up in 2021 and is due to wind down at the end of 2025.

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“The Origins of Maldon” An archaeological talk by Maria Medlycott, Senior Historic Environment Consultant

Thursday 18th Sept 7-8.30pm

Maldon Library, White Horse Lane CM9 5FW

Free event in collaboration with Heritage Open Days

Book via website, in person or by email maldon.library@essex.gov.uk