

# *The Roach Valley Way*



Essex County Council  
Planning



The Roach Valley Way is clearly waymarked in both directions with its unique *blue plaques* and directional waymarkers. These, together with the guide book, should make the walk easy to follow.

# Follow the Waymarks

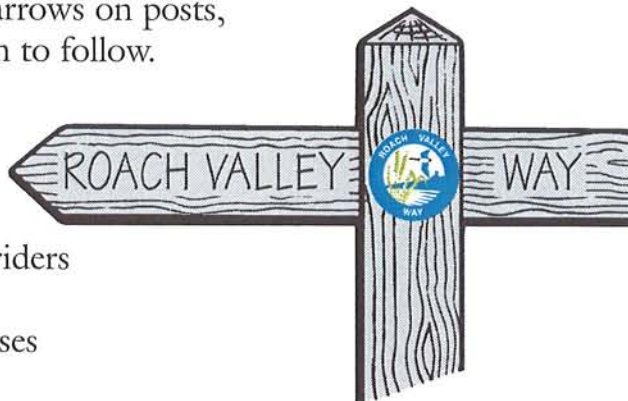


Look out for directional waymarker arrows on posts, stiles, gates and fingerposts. These indicate the direction to follow. Three different coloured arrows are used:-

**YELLOW** arrows are used on public **FOOTPATHS**

**BLUE** arrows are used on public **BRIDLEWAYS**, look out for cyclists and horse riders

**RED** arrows are used on public **BYWAYS**, look out for vehicles, cyclists and horses



<b>Distance</b>	23 miles, 37 kilometres
<b>Time</b>	Allow 9 hours if you intend to tackle it in a day.
<b>Maps</b>	Ordnance Survey 1:25000 'Pathfinder' Maps. <b>Burnham-on-Crouch No.1143 Sheet TQ 89/99 &amp; Southend-on-Sea No.1162 Sheet TQ 88/98.</b>
<b>Going</b>	Easy walking, with some gentle climbs. Ground may be soft after rain and coastal stretches are exposed to windy weather. Keep to the paths and use stiles and gates to cross fences. Please take care when walking road sections and crossing roads.
<b>Equipment</b>	Wear strong, comfortable boots or shoes. Carry additional waterproof and windproof clothing.
<b>Transport</b>	Regular trains run to Rochford Station and Hockley. Buses run from Rochford, Stambridge Mills, Loftmans Corner, Canewdon, Ashingdon and Hockley. For bus times ring the Essex Busline 0700-2000hrs daily <i>Tel 0345 000333.</i>
<b>Parking</b>	Car parks in Rochford and Hockley Woods. On-road parking in villages.
<b>Dogs</b>	Keep dogs on leads where stock are grazing. Remember the countryside is a place of work.
<b>Refreshments</b>	Pubs at Rochford, Paglesham Churchend, Canewdon and Ashingdon Shops at Rochford, Canewdon and Ashingdon

## KEY TO MAPS

..... Footpath	x Stile or gate	↗ other path or bridleway	<b>P</b> Parking
..... Bridleway	≡ Footbridge	<b>WC</b> Public Conveniences	Refreshments
o o o o o Courtesy Path	FP Finger post	Bus stop	pond or lake
0 Scale 0.5 1 Kilometre	Walk direction	Viewpoint	
0 0.25 0.5 Mile			

Front cover photograph: Lion Wharf, south of the Crouch Estuary by David Bartram © Essex County Council.  
Unless stated all illustrations by Paul Allen.



# *The Roach Valley Way*

A 23 mile circular walk around south-east Essex leading you through a rich variety of landscapes - from the ancient woodlands of Hockley to the expansive coastal margins of the Roach and Crouch estuaries.

The walk was originally devised by Rochford District Council's Conservation Project in 1986. However, ten years on, the project team had long since disbanded, the original guide leaflet was out of print and the route unclear on the ground.

Staff and pupils from the Deanes School at Benfleet have a long association with the Roach Valley Way. Having participated in the inaugural walk in 1986 and used the route for sponsored walks ever since, they were keen to see it restored. Since 1994, the School has been working in partnership with Ways through Essex, Essex County Council's public rights of way project, to re-establish the Roach Valley Way.

With generous financial support from Barclays New Futures, this new guidebook has been produced and the route is now clearly waymarked on the ground.

We hope that you enjoy walking the Roach Valley Way.



**Helping you enjoy  
the Essex Countryside**

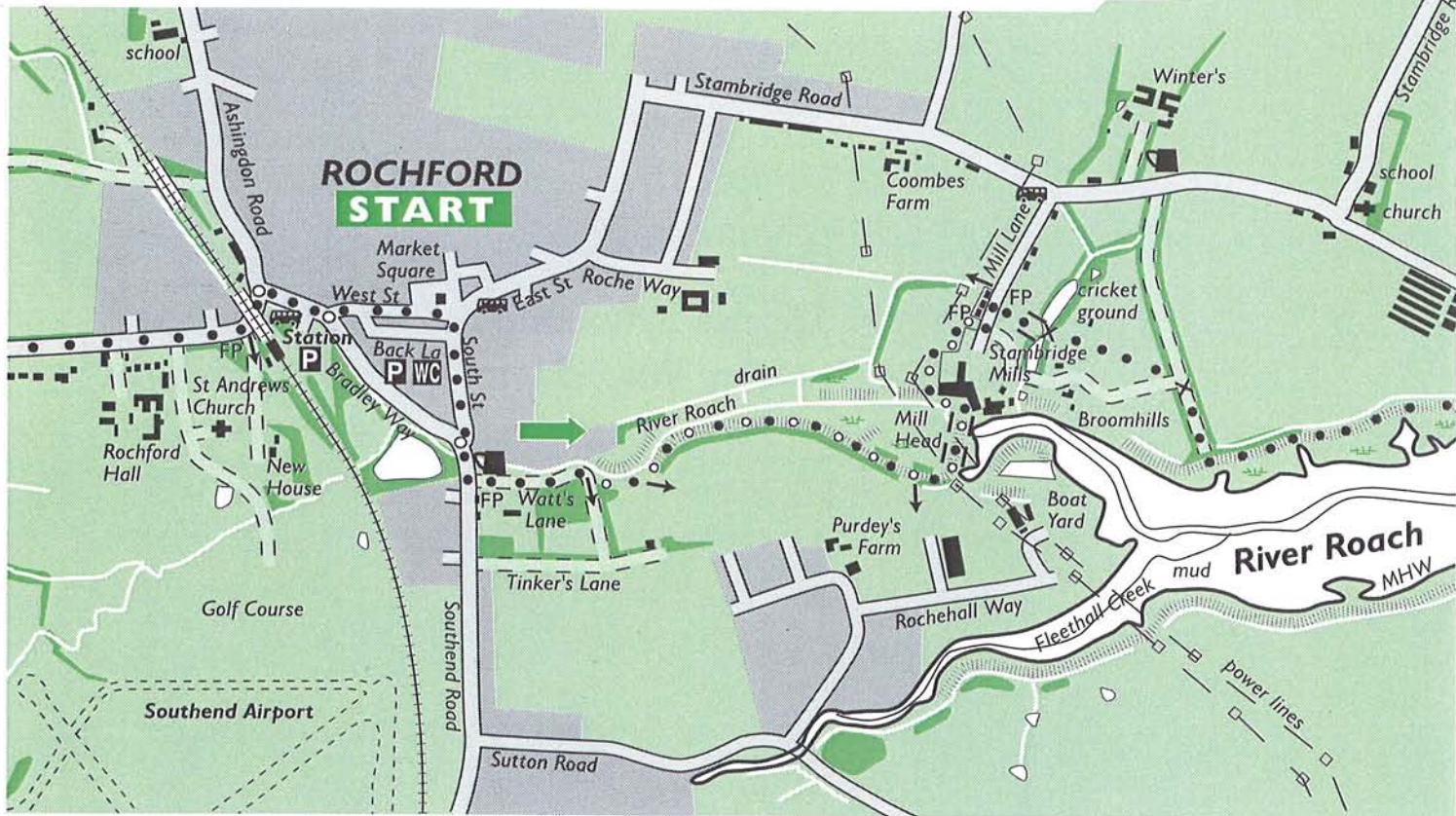


## Rochford

Rochford is a medieval market town, where Henry III granted market and fair rights to Guy de Rochford in 1257. There were originally two market squares, though only one remains today. The market ran for four centuries and was later revived in the eighteenth century. In 1707 a guildhall was built in the centre of the Square to house pigs, the village fire-engine and a barber's shop and wool was weighed upstairs. The guildhall sadly fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1861. More demolition followed when an earthquake ruined a row of market-side shops in 1884. The existing square was last used for cattle-trading in 1959.



*Brent Geese grazing*  
(C.A. Smith)



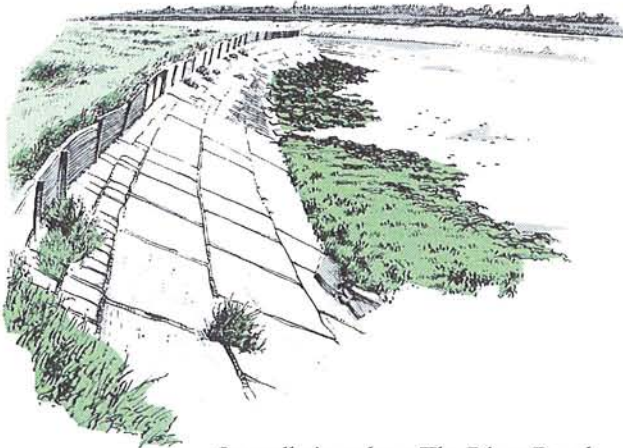
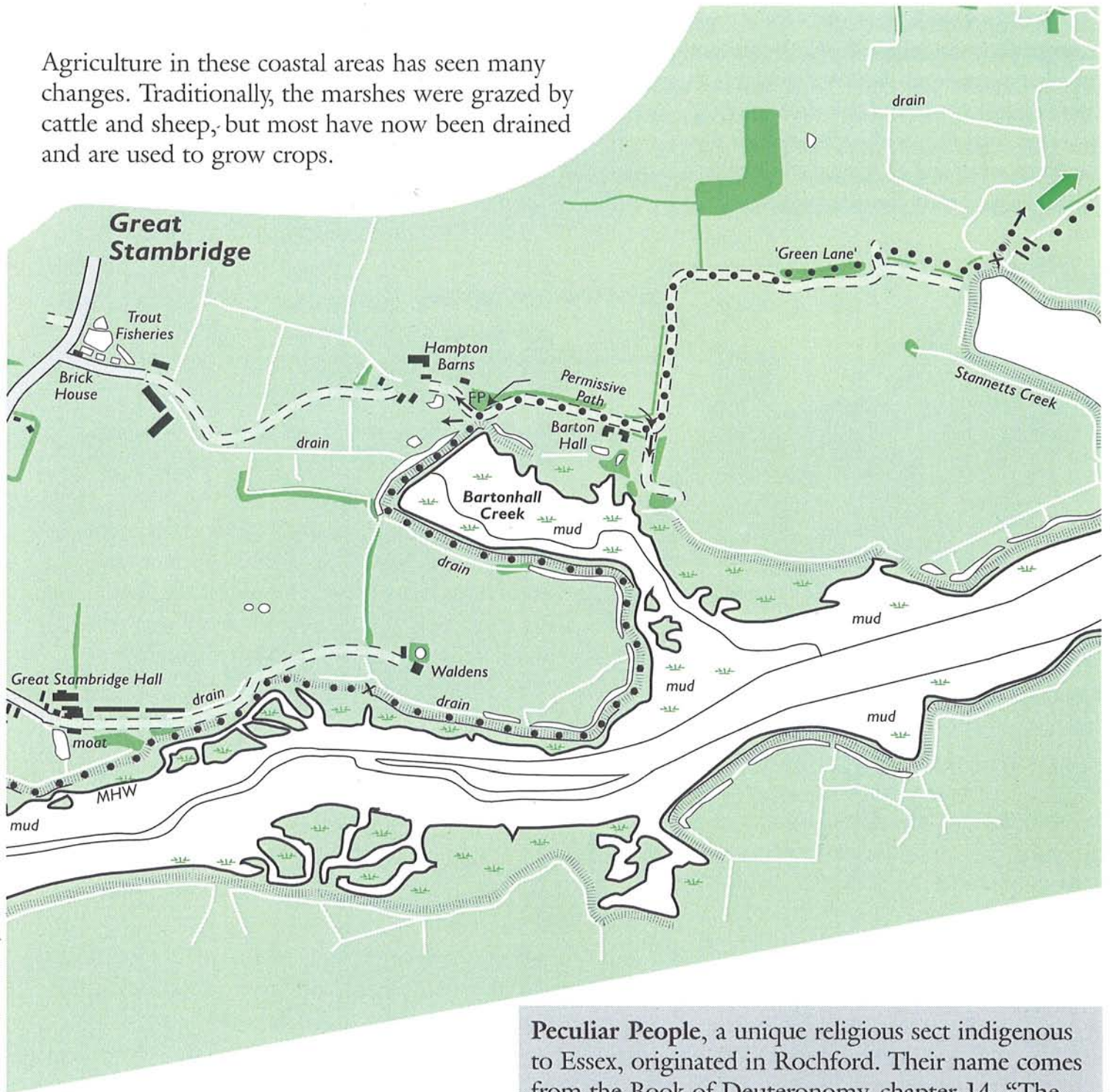
Nearby was the parish pump which supplied the whole village with water at one farthing a pailful. This was superseded by a horse-drawn cart which carried water from Southend to be sold in Rochford at half a penny a pailful.

The Square has also been the scene of an execution. You can see a plaque on the corner of Market Alley, by the bakery, commemorating the martyrdom of John Simpson, a farm labourer who worked at Great Wigborough, burnt at the stake in the square in 1555 for not conforming to the Roman Catholic church.

**Broomhills** was formerly the home of the 18th century magistrate, Captain John Harriott, founder of the Thames River Police. Despite his position, he made use of the illegal activity of smuggling, prevalent in the area at this time. In his 'Struggles through Life' he records how in 1786 he sought out smugglers at an inn in Dunkirk to obtain a boat ride home to England, knowing it would land within a few miles of his home at Stambridge.



Agriculture in these coastal areas has seen many changes. Traditionally, the marshes were grazed by cattle and sheep, but most have now been drained and are used to grow crops.



*Seawall view along The River Roach*

**Peculiar People**, a unique religious sect indigenous to Essex, originated in Rochford. Their name comes from the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 14, "The Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself". James Banyard, a Rochford shoemaker, founded the sect in 1838. His congregation endured widespread hostility as their practices were regarded with suspicion. Their attire made them readily identifiable as the men were clean-shaven and wore bowler hats, whilst the ladies wore black bonnets. They rejected orthodox medicine and were frequently in court on charges of manslaughter, however, many cures were reported to occur in the homes and chapels of the Peculiars by anointing with oil and the laying-on of hands.



**Stannett's Creek** was formerly a navigable watercourse from Paglesham but has since been dammed to form a settling lagoon which provides an important watering and preening site for resident wildfowl and over-wintering birds such as dark-bellied brent geese.



*Stannetts Creek*



*OBS Cottages, Paglesham*

The **O.B.S. Cottages** were built in the mid 19th century by Lady Olivia Bernard Sparrow, who at the time owned South and East Hall Farms. During her lifetime, Lady Olivia strove to provide an education for the poorer children of Essex. During the early 19th century, there was no formal education system and the only schools which did exist were private, fee-paying ones. The vast majority of poor children were therefore deprived of an education. Lady Olivia was responsible for the construction of Day Schools and, with the help of Rev. Herschell, ensured that many of the poorer children of Hadleigh and Leigh were taught to read and write - providing opportunities previously denied to them.

**South Hall and East Hall**, (so called because of their location in relation to St Peter's Church), are examples of early medieval farmsteads whose ownership can be traced back to two freemen during the reign of Edward the Confessor. The estates were eventually passed down to Lady Olivia Bernard Sparrow.

**East Hall**, the most easterly point of the walk, was formerly known as 'Paklesham Hall' and was once owned

by Lord Rich of Rochford. In 1944, East Hall and the surrounding land was given to the nation for use by the National Vegetable Research Station for seed trials.

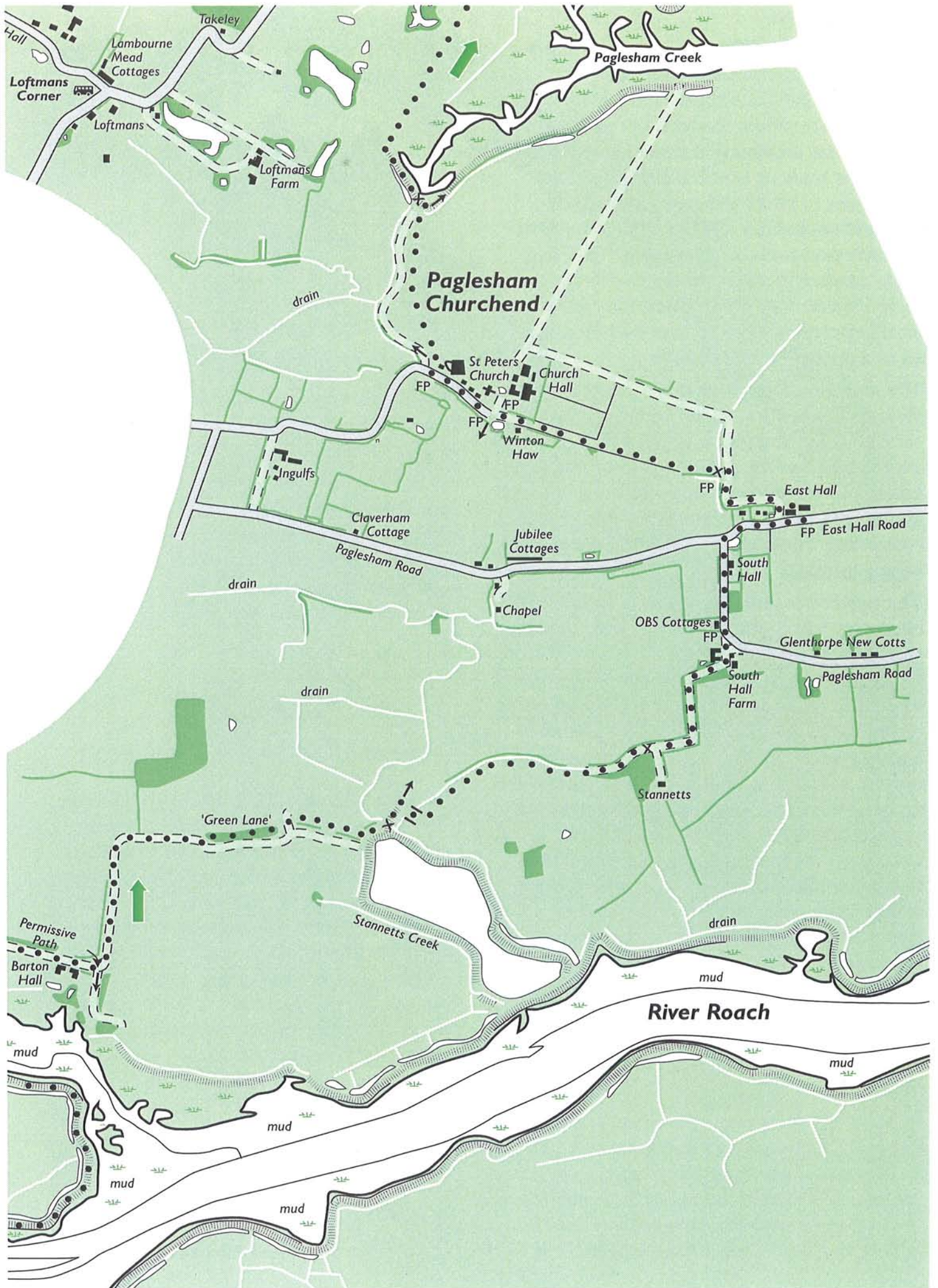
Both halls have now been replaced by modern houses, but the old brew house and part of its moat can still be seen at East Hall.

**Elm trees** were extensively planted on roadsides throughout most of Britain from Victorian times and in Essex became distinctive features of the rural landscape. These majestic trees provided local landmarks and three hollow elm pollards which stood on the bend of the road near East Hall until the early 1980s are the subject of much local folklore. Known as the 'Three Old Widows', these hollow trees were reputedly used by smugglers to hide their booty and tales are told of up to £200 worth of silk being hidden in them at any one time. In 1888, J.F.T.W., a writer and journalist in the County, refers to these trees in 'A Legend of Paglesham'. He tells how lovers would meet by the trees under the moonlight to spoon and listen to the nightingales. Unfortunately the trees have now gone but their memories live on through these stories.



*The Old Brewhouse, East Hall*







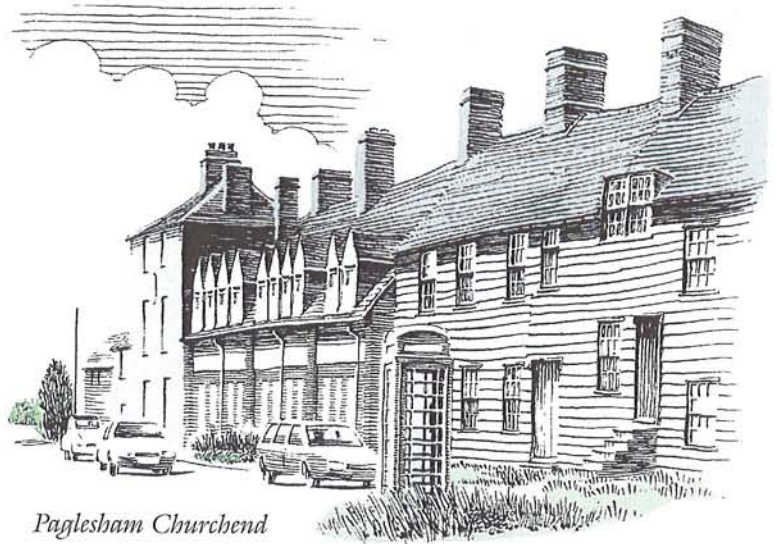
## Paglesham

The Roach Valley Way passes through many historic villages including Paglesham Churchend and Canewdon. In the 19th century, many of the residents of these two villages were employed in either agriculture, the oyster trade or boat-building. However, the mosaic of rivers and creeks provided a land and sea pattern ideal for one of the most lucrative occupations - smuggling! This 'free trade' reached its height in the late 18th - early 19th century when almost the entire local population seems to have been implicated to a greater or lesser extent.

The most notorious Paglesham smuggler was William Blyth, a.k.a. 'Hard Apple'. He was a churchwarden and grocer in the village and used pages torn from the parish registers to wrap up butter and bacon! He is renowned not only for his exploits with Customs officials but also for consuming whole kegs of brandy and eating wine glasses!

The **oyster** has throughout history played an important role in the coastal diet and economy, and no more so than at Paglesham. While in early history, oysters would simply be dredged straight from the mud-flats, or layings, of rivers and estuaries, by the 18th century the cultivation of oysters had become an increasingly specialised and large-scale industry. This culminated in the 19th century with the establishment of large companies such as the Roach River Company. The peak of oyster cultivation came in the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when oysters were considered the common food of poor Londoners. During its heyday there were approximately 80-100 boats and 160-200 people engaged in the industry on the Crouch and Roach estuaries. The industry began to decline at the beginning of the 20th century and despite many attempts to revive it, it has never really recovered.

As you walk along the seawall from **Lion Creek** to **Lower Raypits Farm** it may seem quite remote and isolated but you are not alone. The patchwork of salt marsh, sea walls, mudflats and grazing marsh supports an abundance of wildlife and, as a result, both the Roach and



*Paglesham Churchend*

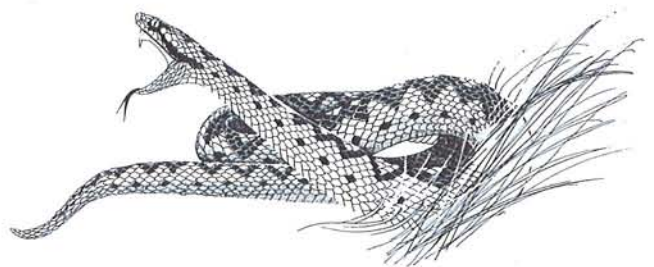
Crouch Estuaries have been designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest by English Nature.

The estuary provides a valuable feeding ground and roosting area for visiting wildfowl and waders including the dark-bellied brent geese now present in internationally important numbers. Other birds to look out for include black-tailed godwits, shovelers, shelducks, redshanks and dunlin, so don't forget your binoculars.



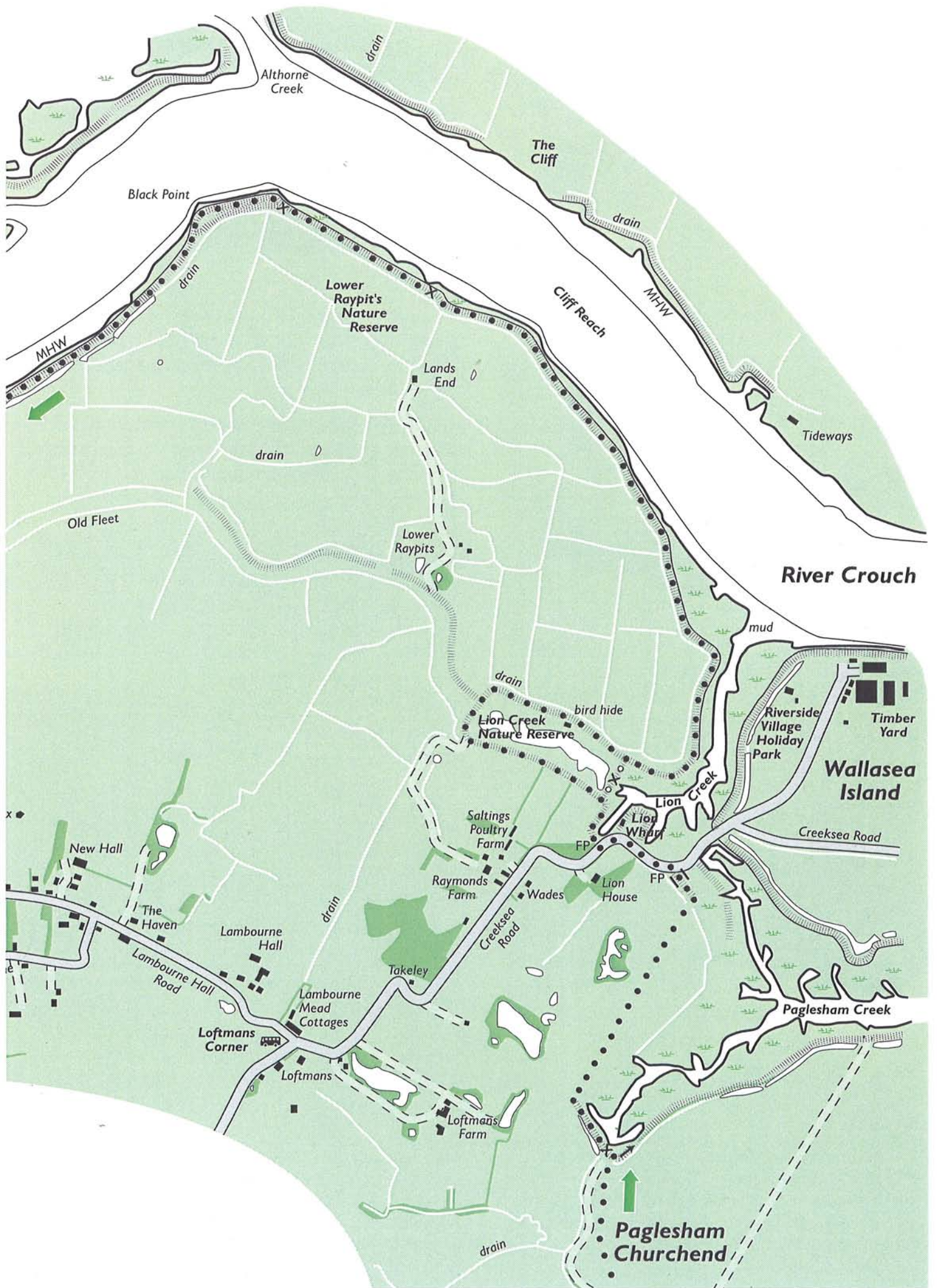
*Roesel's Bush Cricket.* (David Warner/Essex Wildlife Trust)

It is not only birds that make the Crouch and Roach special. The dykes and seawalls support nationally scarce plants such as beaked tassel-weed and sea barley and more than 50 insects and spiders which are scarce or rare in Britain have been recorded, for example, the Scarce emerald damselfly and Roesel's bush-cricket. The grazing marsh and grassy seawalls are home to small mammals and birds of prey such as hen harriers, and short-eared owls can be seen hunting over the grassland in winter.



*Adder* (David Warner /Essex Wildlife Trust)







## Canewdon

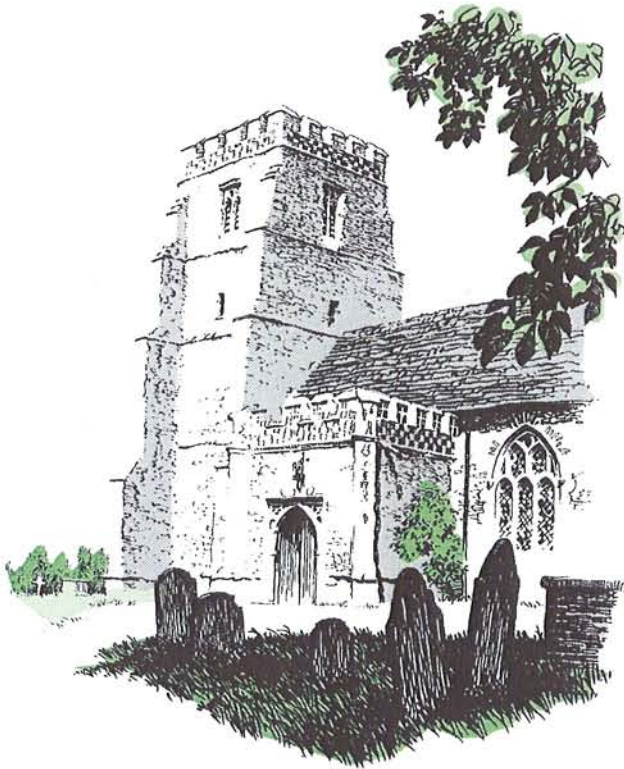
Throughout the 19th century, superstition was prevalent amongst the people of the Rochford Hundred and belief in witchcraft and ghosts



High Street, Canewdon

been seen riding down the hill on a hurdle towards the river. On reaching the Crouch she is said to disappear only to re-appear on the other side of the water.

Even today, Canewdon has a reputation as the centre of witchcraft in the County. Some believe that witches still exist in the village and claim that whenever a stone falls from the church tower a witch dies, only to be immediately replaced by another. The witches of Canewdon are reputed to be allergic to wheeled traffic and cast severe glances in the direction of any offending vehicles, bringing them to a sudden halt. Some local cyclists are still reluctant to ride into the village for fear that their wheels will seize up but you should be safe walking!

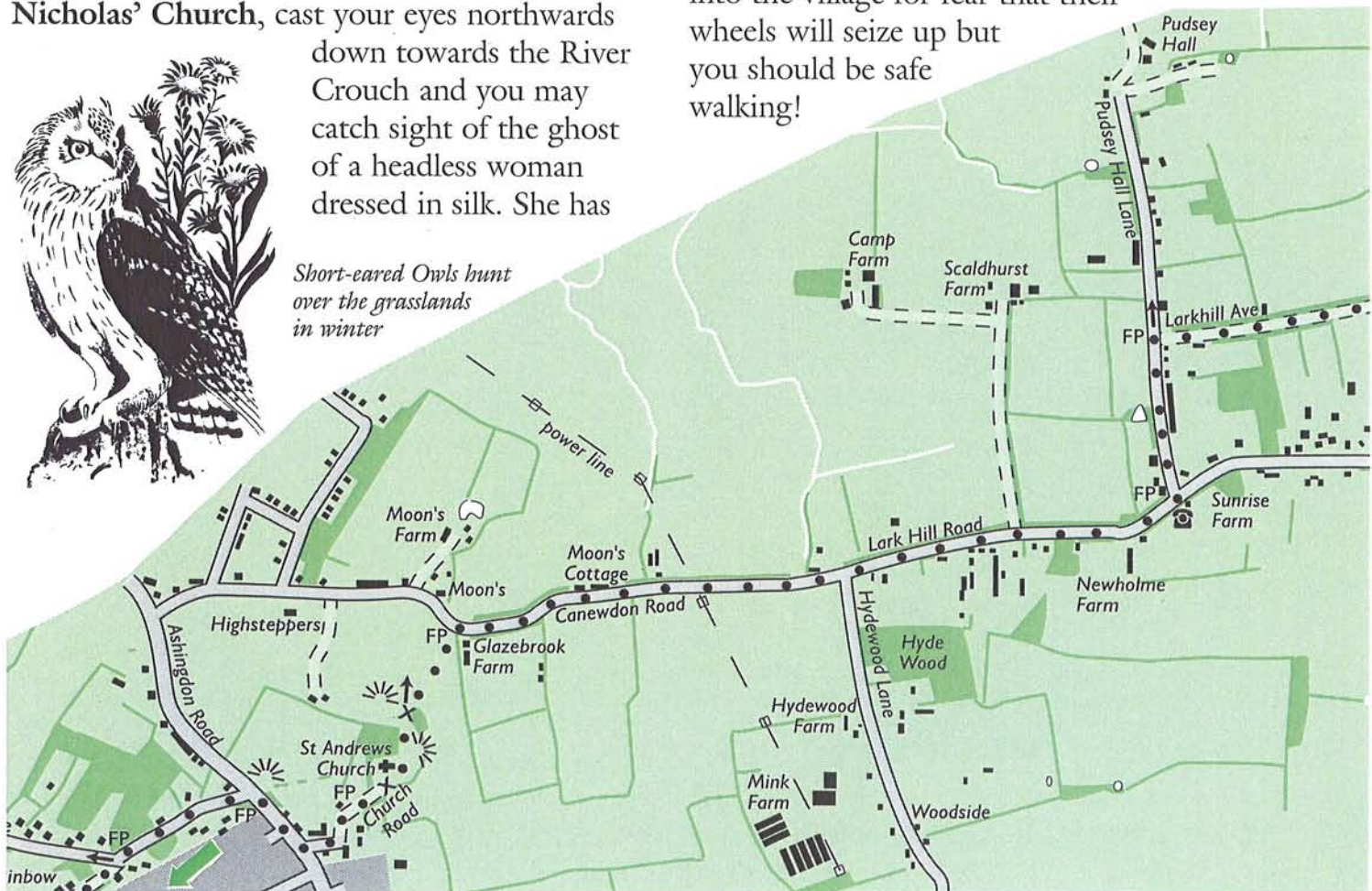


St Nicholas Church, Canewdon

was common-place. As you stand at the top of **Beacon Hill** at Canewdon, next to **St Nicholas' Church**, cast your eyes northwards down towards the River Crouch and you may catch sight of the ghost of a headless woman dressed in silk. She has



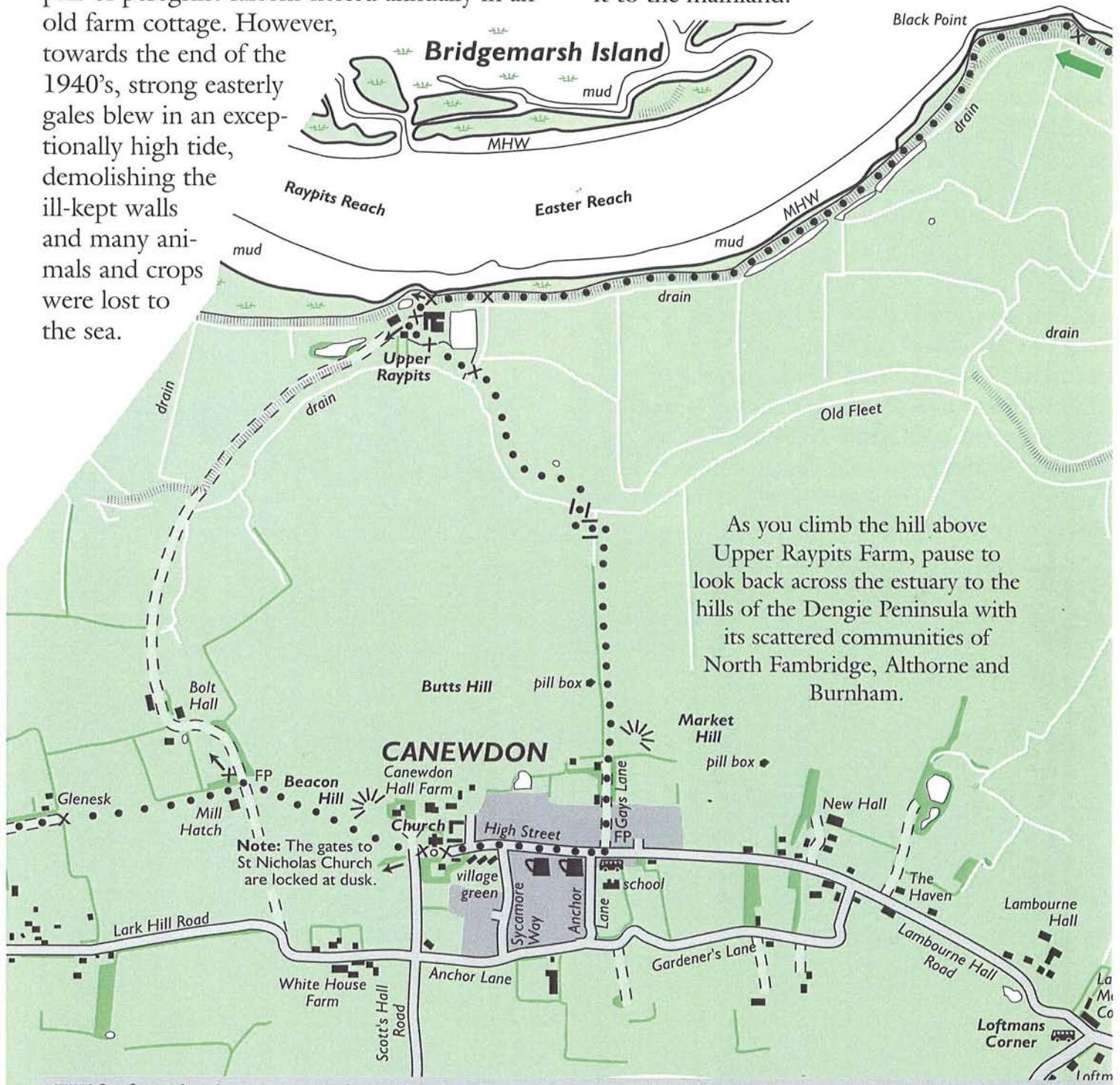
Short-eared Owls hunt over the grasslands in winter





**Bridgemarsh Island** was originally protected from the sea on all sides by walls and embankments, but, due to neglect, it was irretrievably flooded and is now only partly visible above the water. Until the 1930's, the island offered valuable pasture for sheep and cattle, its dykes and creeks were home to many ducks and eels, and a pair of peregrine falcons nested annually in an old farm cottage. However, towards the end of the 1940's, strong easterly gales blew in an exceptionally high tide, demolishing the ill-kept walls and many animals and crops were lost to the sea.

In the Great Tide of 1953, the coast suffered serious flooding and the remains of the Island's walls were salvaged to fill the last breach in the sea defences at Norpits. Saltmarsh is now developing rapidly on the Island, providing a rich feeding ground for wildlife, and silt is building up at its western end, which may eventually join it to the mainland.



As you climb the hill above Upper Raypits Farm, pause to look back across the estuary to the hills of the Dengie Peninsula with its scattered communities of North Fambridge, Althorne and Burnham.

'Wife-farming' appears to have been common practice in 18th century marshland Essex. In his journey through Essex, Daniel Defoe, author of 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Moll Flanders', tells of frequent encounters with men boasting fifteen or more wives. Wives were sought from the 'uplands' and taken back to the marshes to live. The men, born and bred on the marshes, fared well in the inclement weather but their wives, unaccustomed to such a harsh environment, soon took ill and seldom lasted more than a year. The story goes that the men simply returned to the hills to fetch another. Such loyalty!

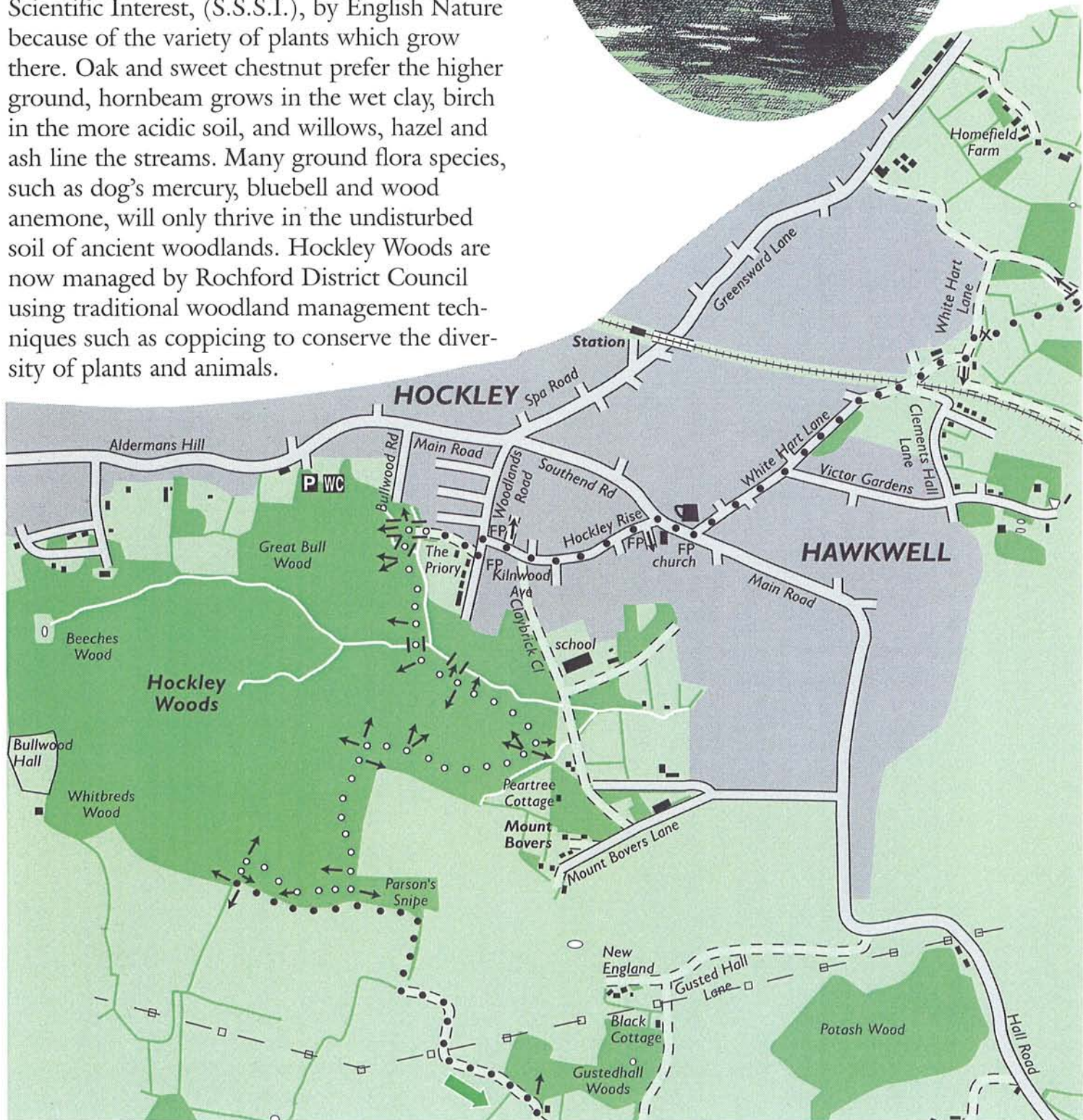


## Hockley Woods

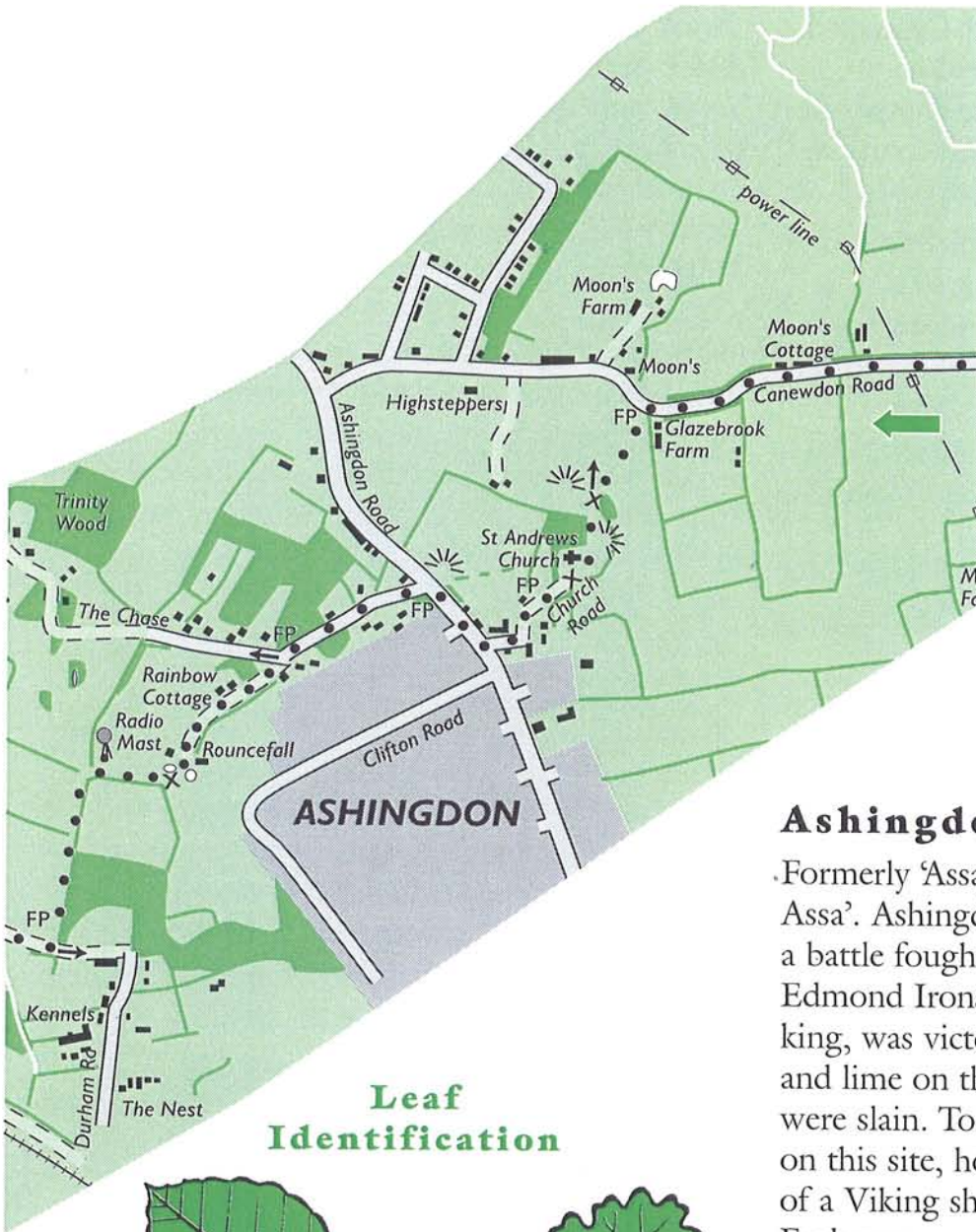
This is one of the most extensive areas of ancient woodland in south Essex which has existed since about 12,000 B.C. when primeval woods covered the county after the last ice age. The name 'Hockley' includes the Saxon term 'ley' meaning 'woodland clearing'. Hockley Woods still span over 130 hectares and have a network of over 20 km of ancient earth banks within them, marking boundaries between Saxon landowners and medieval parishes. The woods have been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest, (S.S.S.I.), by English Nature because of the variety of plants which grow there. Oak and sweet chestnut prefer the higher ground, hornbeam grows in the wet clay, birch in the more acidic soil, and willows, hazel and ash line the streams. Many ground flora species, such as dog's mercury, bluebell and wood anemone, will only thrive in the undisturbed soil of ancient woodlands. Hockley Woods are now managed by Rochford District Council using traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing to conserve the diversity of plants and animals.



Hockley Woods

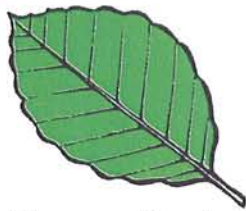






*tree lined footpath, Ashingdon*

### Leaf Identification



*Common Beech.*



*Pedunculate Oak*



*Field Maple*



*Hornbeam*



*Holly*



*Hazel*

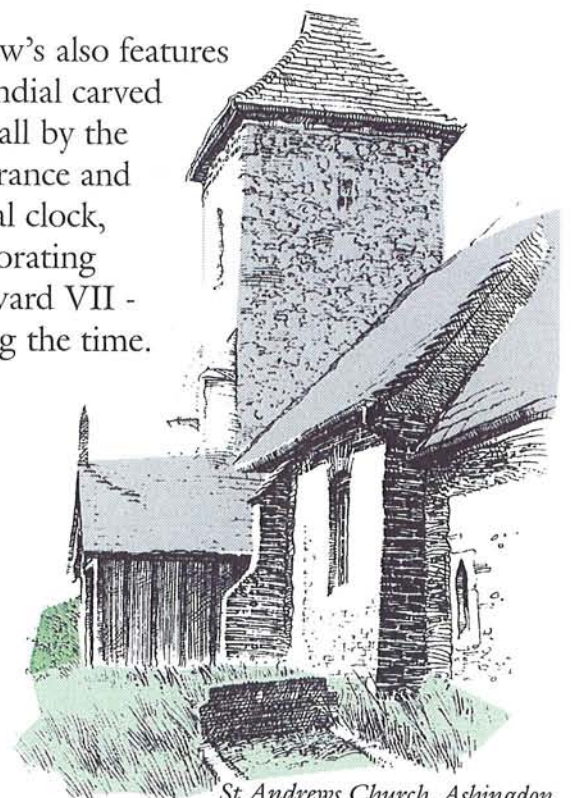


*Common Hawthorn*

## Ashingdon

Formerly 'Assandune' 'Asses' Hill' or 'Hill of Assa'. Ashingdon church was built on the site of a battle fought between King Canute and Edmond Ironside in 1016. Canute, the Viking king, was victorious and built a minster of stone and lime on the hill for the souls of those who were slain. Today, St. Andrew's Church stands on this site, housing a Danish flag and a model of a Viking ship - both gifts from the Danish Embassy.

St. Andrew's also features an old sundial carved into its wall by the south entrance and an unusual clock, commemorating King Edward VII - try reading the time.



*St Andrews Church, Ashingdon*



**Gusted Hall** was named after Peter Gristede in the early fourteenth century. It passed to William Harrys in 1558, whose family attained great wealth and importance and was connected with the Percys, Earls of Northumberland.

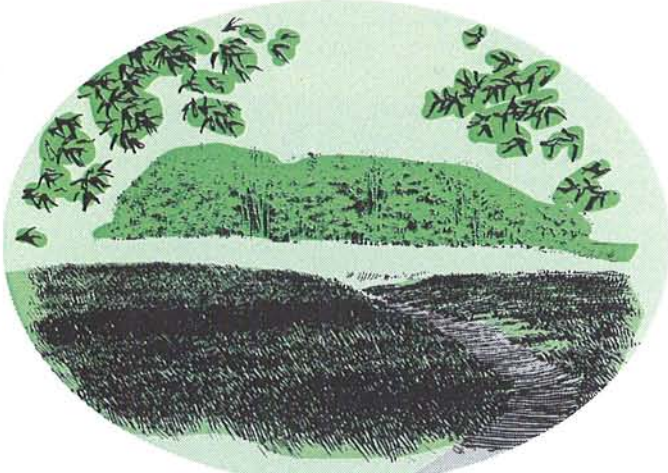
In 1840, Gusted Hall estate contained 135 acres of woodland and pasture, and was sold to George Wood, a solicitor from Rochford, who built up a valuable library of 3250 books. He was also a keen horticulturist who planted orchards and shrubs on the estate. Some of his specimen trees can still be seen today lining the northern boundary of **The Scrubs**.

**Brick Works.**

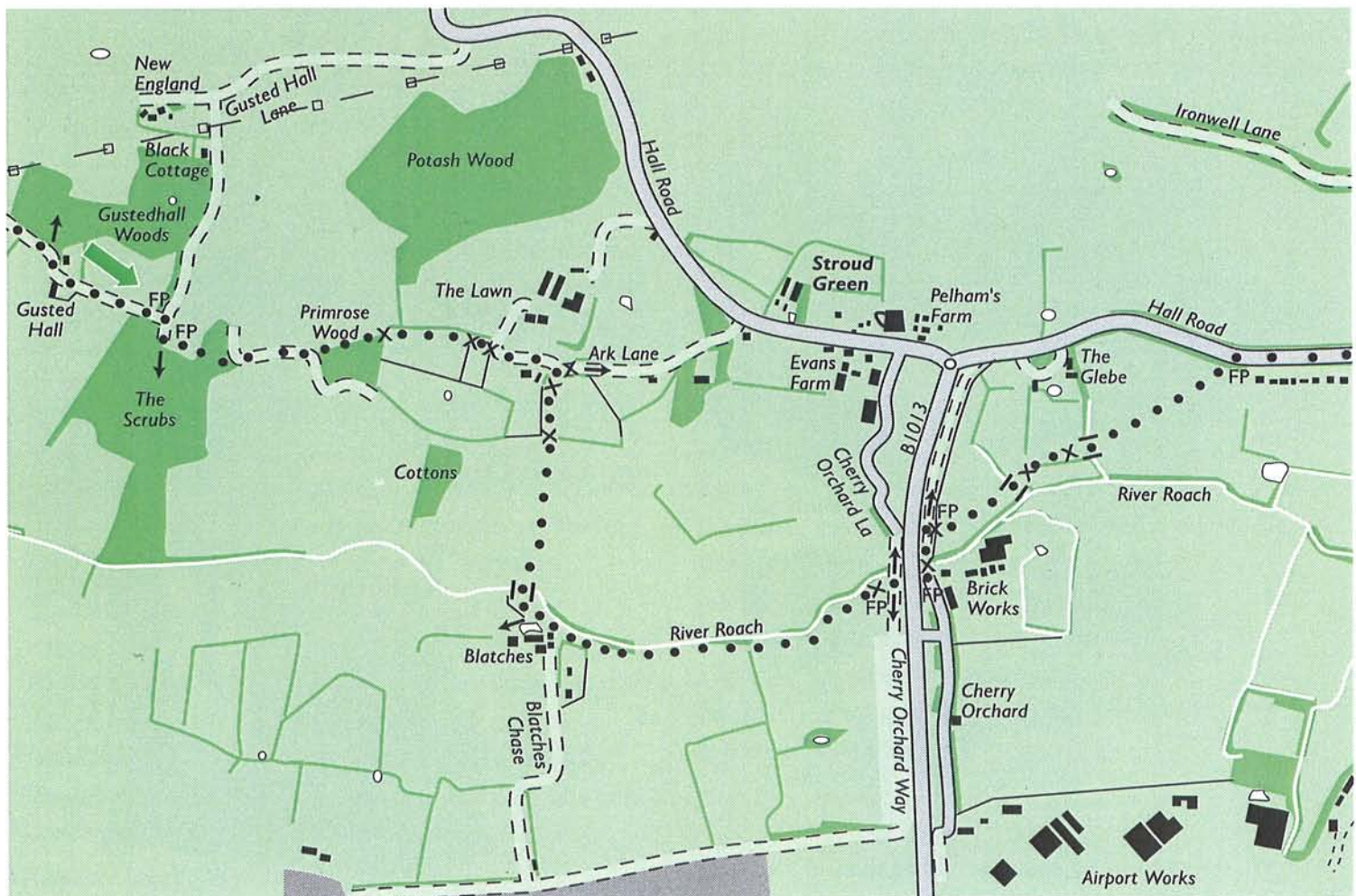
Brick-making is one of the world's most ancient crafts with sun-dried bricks being made in the Middle East over 10,000 years ago. The Romans introduced brick-making to England during the first century A.D. producing tile-like bricks, 1-2" thick and up to 24" square.

Following the fall of the Roman empire, brick-making in England lapsed until the twelfth century when Essex and Suffolk pioneered its revival. The lack of natural building stone and expansive clay soils led to extensive use of brick in Essex. It was also relatively cheap compared to building stone, strong and decorative, and more durable than wood. Grey, black or blue bricks could also be produced where the clay was in contact with the firing fuel.

**Rochford Hall** dates back to the twelfth century and has been home to many Noblemen, including the Earls of Ormond, Warwick and Wiltshire, Lord Rich, a Tudor Chancellor of England, and Thomas Boleyn, father of ill-fated Anne. The Hall was once one of the greatest houses in the county, with walls up to 2'6" thick and 3 or 4 courtyards.



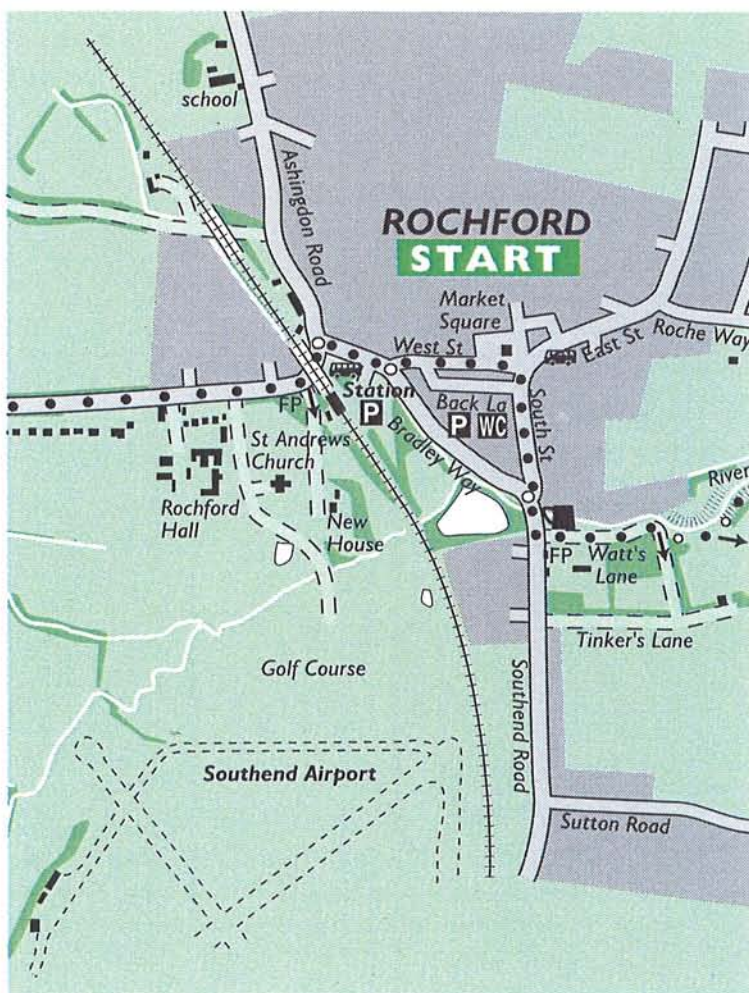
*Primrose Wood*





The Hall has suffered a turbulent history; the original stone manor house being demolished in the fifteenth century and re-built by Thomas, Earl of Ormond. Further destruction was inflicted by fire some years later when a candle was left on the altar in the private chapel. Between 1429 and 1433, Mathew Brykmason and his 'Brekmen' were paid for building the vault of a new chapel, repairing the walls, under-pinning a new barn and 'making the end of the old parlour next the moat with stones called Bryke'. It was restored again by Thomas Boleyn and later improved by Lord Rich during Henry VIII's reign. The ill-fated hall caught fire once again in 1760 and remained in ruins for some time. Eventually, its Elizabethan windows were replaced and Tudor brickwork plastered over. The Hall is now home to a golf club and private residences.

As you pass under the railway bridge to walk up West Street, note the culvert which carries a tributary of the River Roach and, opposite, the almshouses given by Richard, Lord Rich, in his will of 1567 but not built until the 17th century.



## Ways through Essex

is Essex County Council's

public rights of way project. Our aim is to help you enjoy the Essex countryside using the network of public footpaths, bridleways and byways which cross the County.

For more information contact:

Ways through Essex at Essex County Council,  
County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1LE.  
Tel (01245) 437647.

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Barclays New Futures,  
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Valley Way for their assistance and  
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for designing the new Roach Valley Way logo.

*The information contained in this publication was, as far as is known, correct at the date of issue. Essex County Council cannot, however, accept responsibility for any errors or omissions or changes in details given. Please remember that the countryside is constantly changing, e.g. hedgerows and fencelines change and public rights of way can be diverted. If, for any reason, the route of the Roach Valley Way is altered after the publication of this guidebook, the line of the new route will be waymarked. Walkers are therefore advised to follow the Roach Valley Way waymarkers.*

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*A 23 mile circular walk around south-east Essex.*



**THE DEANES SCHOOL**



**Rochford District Council**



**Essex County Council  
Planning**