

A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

Episode 20: THE OYSTER SONG AND DANCE

In episode 12 we mentioned how Joseph Outing established oyster farming in Southchurch around 1700, and how this grew into a lucrative business. Eventually, the whole of the foreshore from Shoebury to Hadleigh, so far as the ground was suitable, was being utilized for the cultivation of oysters, mainly for the London market.

Then, in another episode, we lauded Southend Town Council for their many improvements to the area, including in the matter of sewerage. Well, it seems Southend's improved sewerage system was not beneficial in all respects, as this song, written for our 1924 centenary celebration, points out:

The Oyster Song and Dance

Preamble

An oyster rarely speaks a word;
In public he is never heard;
But when his mouth is opened wide
Only good things are inside,
The moral of this tale is clear –
If our M.P.s would only hear,
But if an oyster had a tongue,
His song in this way would be sung:

Verse 1

In far off days of good Queen Anne
To Southchurch came a fisherman;
Now he was late and could not wait;
His little boat was overstored,
So he tipped us oysters overboard.

Chorus

*There in Southchurch mud we lay,
All untested, many a day,
As we scattered far and wide,
We increased and multiplied.*

Verse 2

And so there passed a year before
The man returned to Southchurch shore;
He uttered cries of great surprise;
The tide was out and we were shown,
And he saw the size that we were grown.

Chorus

Alas, the music to accompany this song is lost.

Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 21: "The Parish Tithe Barn".

See all Episodes of 'A Little History of Southchurch' [here](#)

Verse 3

"This Southchurch mud," the fisher said,
"Will make a wondrous oyster bed;
I'll lease the shore, and breed some more,"
He started trade, and kept to that,
And soon became a plutocrat.

New Chorus:

*There in Southchurch mud we lay,
Now well-tended every day,
As we scattered far and wide,
We increased and multiplied.*

And so went on the thriving trade,
Which healthy Southchurch mud had made,
Till fever pains came from the drains,
And joined the river at Southend,
Alas! The oysters met their end.

Final Chorus:

*No more in pleasant mud we lay,
Oyster trading passed away,
There in vain at ebbing tide,
You will seek us far and wide.*

By Mr Evan, Mrs Welch and Mrs
Pinney of Holy Trinity Southchurch,
1924
