

A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

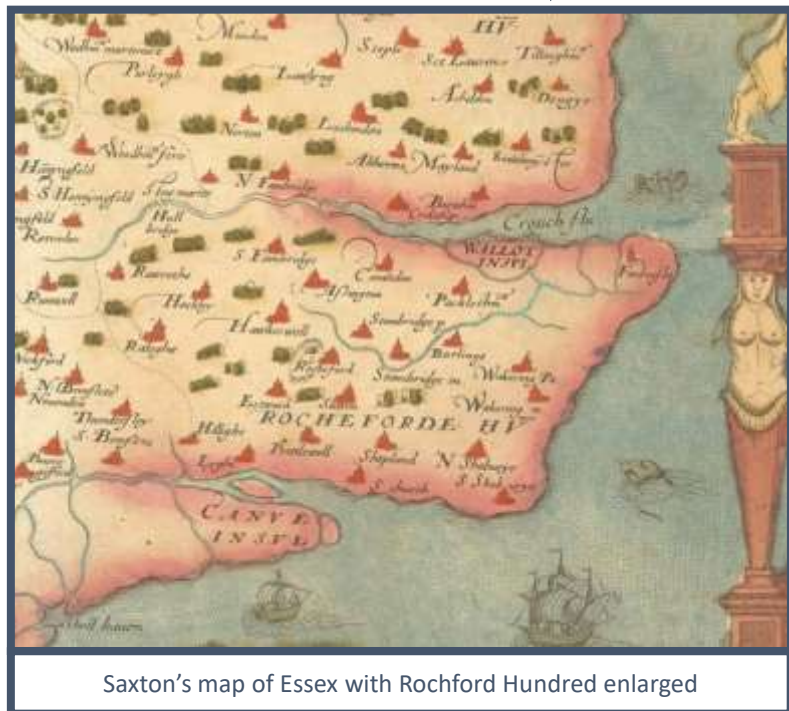
Episode 10: THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

At the end of the medieval period Southchurch was still a small rural community. Saxton's map of Essex (1576) shows only the Church at "S church", and Norden's map (1594) shows the same building. Southchurch was not yet a village in the commonly accepted sense of the word (and would not become so until the late nineteenth century); rather, it was a loose gathering of the manor house, its outbuildings, and the nearby dwellings of the major tenants and servants. It is possible that a few cottages stood near the church, on the main road from Shoebury to the west, but we do not know for certain.



Some of the historic farms in Southchurch are believed to have had their origins in the late medieval period:

- Samuels Farm may have been associated with the family of John Samuel who was in possession in 1270.
- The origin of Hamstel Farm went back to 1372, when Thomas de Staple held a messuage and 90 acres of arable called Botelers Hamstall.
- One William de la Botary is recorded at Southchurch in 1395, and it may be from him that Buttery's Farm took its name.
- Bournes Green Farm was known as Bawnes, Borne or Bonours at the end of the 15th century; by his will (1494) John Tyrell left to his wife Katryn, the profits of a tenement called Bawnes in Southchurch. More recently it was known as Daines' Farm, after a family who occupied it in the 19th century.



Saxton's map of Essex with Rochford Hundred enlarged

As we have seen previously, there were in fact three manors served by Holy Trinity, with the church almost at the centre of the area controlled by them. Only Southchurch manor, covering about 480 acres, was held by the monks at Canterbury. The other two manors – North Thorp and South Thorp ("Torpeia" and "Thorp" in the Domesday Book) – had been united by the fifteenth century. Lord Berners held them jointly of Elizabeth Woodville, queen of Edward IV, until his death in 1474. The estate passed to the Stafford family, and was held by Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, at the time of his trial and execution in 1521, when it fell to the Crown. Henry VIII granted the joint manor to Sir Brian Tyke, and it remained in the Tyke family until 1591.

The link between Southchurch manor and the Prior and Convent of Christ Church, Canterbury ended abruptly in 1539 when the manor was purloined by Henry VIII with the dissolution of the monasteries. The king initially granted the manor, with Milton Hall, to the Dean and Chapter of

Canterbury Cathedral, but quickly thought better of this and exchanged the manor for other lands in Essex belonging to Lord Rich. The capricious king did not however grab the church or its rectory, which continued their long association with Canterbury.

The Reformation appears to have had an equally dramatic impact at Southchurch. The historian Eamon Duffy, in his account of traditional religion in England between 1400 and 1580, suggests that the regime of Edward VI found it far easier to enforce the removal of images and altars than to make wardens equip their churches for the new worship by the purchase of Bibles and service-books.

"Nevertheless, the sources reveal parishes whose shedding of the materials of Catholic worship does suggest more than mere conformity. At a time when many Essex parishes were retaining and perhaps using their copes and vestments, the fact that Southchurch sold all but an alb, two surplices, and some cloths for the table suggests that their priest and people had embraced reformed ideas about worship."

Our local historian Alfred Goodale thought that the people of Southchurch may simply have been forestalling the confiscation of church valuables by Edward VI's Commissioners. Not without reason - our late medieval parish church would appear to have been quite wealthy. Items sold included several albs and copes, two decons of old green silk and a damask vestment, a pax of silver gilt, a chalice, three handbells, three great latten candlesticks and two small ones, a holy water vessel and an ewer "all of latten" (latten is an alloy of copper and zinc which resembles brass). The Commissioners found that a chalice of silver gilt was still with the churchwardens. Other property still in the church were:

Two bells in the steeple, one old chest, one alb, two surplices, two altar cloths and two towels. Edward Collens had church money totalling £1.4.4, William Barnard £1.3.0 and William Smith 10/-. There remained in the church box £8.10.0.

The Commissioners ended their report by stating that the chalice, surplices, altar cloths and towels had been delivered to the churchwardens for use in church, but that "the residue is comyted to the kyngs use".

Alfred Goodale finishes his account with the following wry observation:

"The sales and disclosures to the Commissioners indicate that the small church at Southchurch must have been well supplied with vestments and plate, but one wonders how much the parishioners kept from the knowledge of the king's men!"

Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 11: "The 17th Century".

- Discover our oldest surviving memorial.
- Look back to the days when the White Horse Inn (now sadly renamed The Old Walnut Tree – does anyone know why? Shame on them) paid rates to our church.
- And who set "an ill example of others"?

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