

2012 Olympic Mountain Bike Venue, Hadleigh Farm, Essex: The Evolution of the Historic Landscape

By Stephen Rippon,

The concept of the 'historic landscape'

In recent years the term 'historic landscape' has been developed within both academic research and heritage management to emphasise the remarkable time-depth that is present within the modern pattern of settlements, roads, fields, and land-uses which, in different parts of the country, can have relatively recent, medieval, Roman, or even prehistoric origins (Rippon 2004). The Hadleigh Farm area is an excellent example of how the modern landscape can have preserved within it many ancient features, in what is partly a typical piece of Essex coastal marshland landscape, but also a place with particular qualities of its own due to its hilly terrain and exceptionally strong history of use for recreation.

For a county with generally muted relief, the Essex landscape is remarkably varied in its nature, with a series of districts having particular sets of features giving rise to their unique character. These districts reflect the combination of natural topography and human activity over the passage of time, which produced particular countrysides with their own personalities and distinctive ways of life. One of the smaller but most distinctive districts in the Essex landscape is the Rayleigh Hills: an area of prominent high ground between Southend-on-Sea to the east and Basildon to the west. This outcrop of clays, silts, sands, and gravels of the Bagshot and Claygate Beds, that give rise to slowly permeable sub-soils and some seasonal waterlogging (Mackney *et al.* 1983, 13; Lake *et al.* 1986), rise some 40m above the low-lying claylands of South East Essex. The Hills consist of a relative flat plateau, upon which villages such as Hadleigh lie, which to the north, west, and south is fringed by a steep slope dissected by occasional valleys. The hills and valleys on the southern flank of the Rayleigh Hills are collectively known locally as the Benfleet and Hadleigh Downs, and it is here that the Hadleigh Farm Mountain Bike Venue is located. The poor soils and seasonal waterlogging probably account for one of the key character defining features of the Rayleigh Hills – their abundance of woodland and heathland – that is reflected in both modern land-use and place-names (-leigh and -ley names all refer to clearings in woodland: see below).

A history of the landscape around Hadleigh Farm

1. Prehistoric and Roman. A large number of archaeological sites and finds (see **Section 00** of this report) suggest that the Hadleigh plateau was occupied for much of this period, although today nothing survives above ground: no features of the present day historic landscape appear to owe their origins to this period. Before the marshes were ploughed, however, there were a series of important Romano-British earthworks surviving up to 'three feet' above ground: salt production sites whose burnt earth has led to the Essex term 'red hills' (Essex HER 9576; Fawn *et al.* 1990). The raised ground that these sites afforded meant that they were occasionally re-used in the medieval period as the locations for shepherds huts, as appears to have been the case on the Essex marshes (see below).

2. Early medieval period. It was in the period after Britain ceased to be part of the Roman Empire that the landscape of Hadleigh Farm originated. It is possible that there was an increase in woodland on the Rayleigh Hills in the early medieval period, as a number of Romano-British finds have been recovered from areas that are now wooded (e.g. Great Wood in Hadleigh: Rippon 1999, 22). The large number of '-ley' and '-leigh' place-names (Hadleigh, Thundersley, Rayleigh, Hockley, Leigh-on-Sea etc), recorded in a late 10th century charter and the Domesday Book of 1086, certainly suggest a landscape that contained a large amount of woodland as they contain the Old English place-name element *lēah* (Hart 1971; No. 28; Morris 1983). This place-name element is thought to mean 'a wood, or clearing in a woodland' (Reaney 1935; Smith 1970, 18; Watts 2004), although Hooke (1998, 148–54; 2008) has suggested that it may also sometimes indicate wood pasture. This was, however, also a landscape that contained a series of settlements and their associated agricultural land which is

reflected in the references to places such as Hadleigh,¹ Thundersley, Rayleigh, Hockley, and Leigh in these 10th/11th century documents.

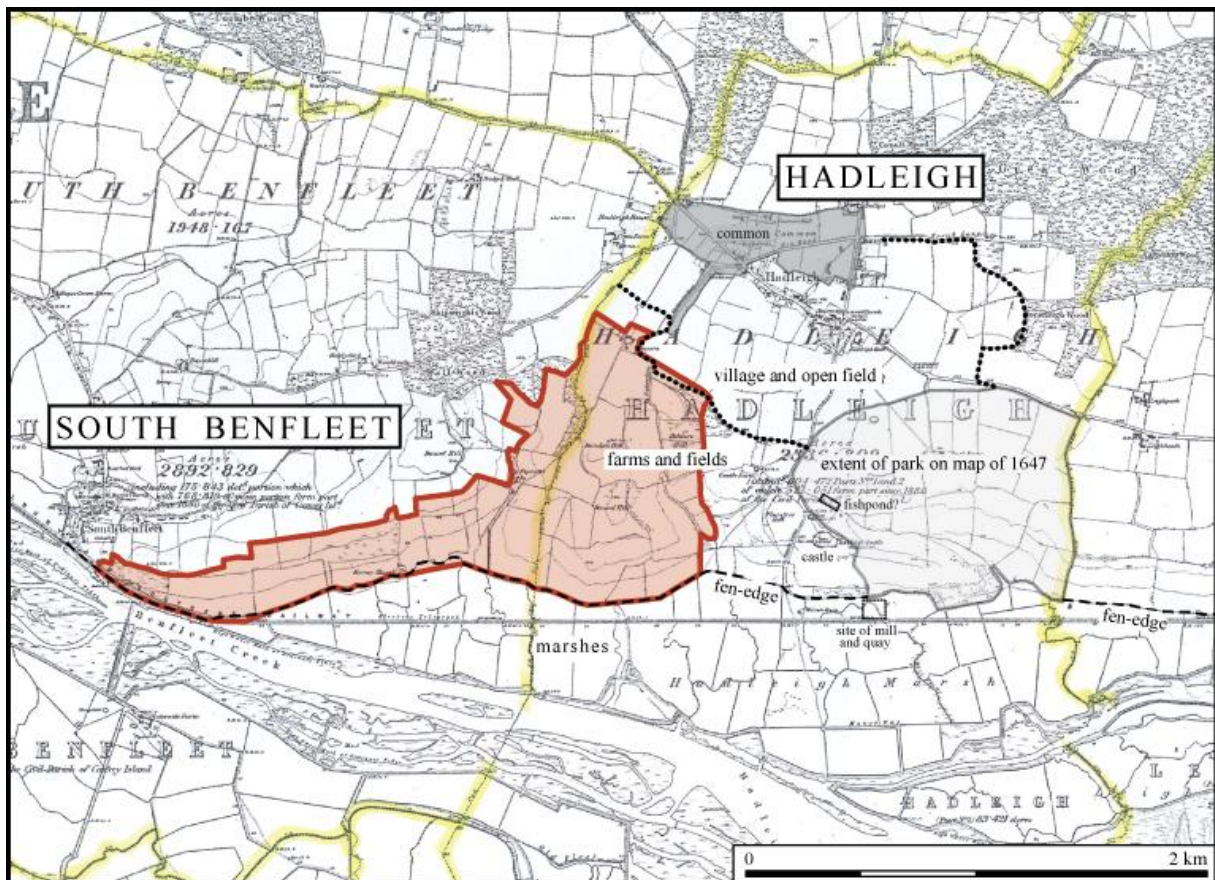


Figure 1: major features of the medieval landscape, overlain on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Six Inch map of the 1860s.

3. The Norman Conquest to c.1500. It is in the 13th century that we first get a detailed picture of what the medieval landscape of Hadleigh would have looked like (Figure 1). By then the manor of Hadleigh was held by the King, who had given permission for a castle to be built there (which lay on one of the most prominent hills on the southern-most edge of the Rayleigh Hills). The management of the estate by the Crown has led to the survival of a wide range of documents that along with physical features surviving within the historic landscape depicted on early maps and sometimes still surviving today, suggest there were six zones of land use (the evidence for this is described in detail in Rippon 1999 and 2004, 38-51):

1. The village

The village included the parish church and probable moated manor house at Hadleigh Hall, all lying at the south east corner of a large common (a fragment of which still survives, as the Chapel Lane Recreation Ground).

2. Open Field

To the south of the village/common there was probably a small open field, divided into strips and furlongs.

¹ Hadleigh is not explicitly mentioned in Domesday. Priestley (1984, 66-7) suggests that the otherwise unlocated *Atelia* (DB Essex 29,1) could have been Hadleigh, a place-name that means 'the enclosure where oats are grown': Morris 1983, notes for 28,1). *Atelia*, however, was in Barstable Hundred and once documented, Hadleigh was in Rochford Hundred (Reaney 1935, 185). Overall, the hypothesis that *Atelia* was Hadleigh is not convincing. Hadleigh is, however, documented in a list dated to c.995-998 of the estates of St Paul's Cathedral who contributed the manning of a ship (Hart 1971; No. 28): St Pauls continued to hold extensive lands in Hadleigh into the post medieval period (ERP D/DMq E7/1).

3. Woodland

North of the village/common lay extensive areas of ancient woodland, heathland (notably Dawes Heath), and piecemeal clearances (assarts).

4. Castle, deer park, and associated features

Hadleigh was the centre of an important medieval estate. Sometime before 1217 Hubert de Burgh was granted the honour of Rayleigh, which included Hadleigh and a large number of other manors (Burrows 1909, 253; Helliwell and Macleod 1980, 6). In 1227 that grant was confirmed by the King (CChR vol I, Hen. III., 12), and in 1230 de Burgh obtained a licence from the King to build a castle at Hadleigh (CPR Hen. III, vol II, 417). In 1239, however, de Burgh was disgraced and his estates were seized by the crown (CLibR Hen III vol I, 428), in whose ownership they remained until the 16th century. In 1250 a survey of the estate was carried out which revealed that it comprised 140 acres of arable, 2 acres of meadow, a curtilage, pasture around the castle, the barns of the castle for supporting a plough, pasture on the marsh for 160 sheep, a watermill, toll of the fair, and a park (Sparvel-Bayly 1978, 92). In 1274-5 there is reference to a vineyard (Colvin 1963, 662).

The earliest reference to a deer park at Hadleigh is in 1235 (CCR Hen. III, vol III, 57). In addition to sport and recreational use (ie hunting: e.g. CPR Hen. III, vol VI, 551), the park was a valuable source of timber (e.g. CCR Edw. I, vol I, 200), underwood (e.g. CPR Rich. II, vol I, 482), and fresh meat for both the King (e.g. CLR vol VI, 291) and as gifts to others (e.g. CCR Hen. III, vol VII, 325). Horses were reared in a stud there (CPR Edw. II, vol I, 392). Various enclosures and assarts are recorded that would have compartmentalised the park, allowing for more intensive management, for example by coppicing woodland, alongside the rearing and hunting of deer (e.g. CFR Edw. I, vol I, 325; CPR Rich. II, vol I, 482, 487). The earthworks of a dam across the valley north of the castle may indicate a fishpond in the park, and a 'stank' (fishpond) is recorded in the late 14th century (CPR Edw. III, vol XVI, 63; CPR Rich. II, vol IV, 406). The park also served an important social function as the object of patronage and gift, and its keepership was clearly a prized possession with rights of grazing, cutting timber, and a quota of deer (CPR Edw. III, vol XI, 96). The royal estate also contained a tidal mill down on the marshes (first documented in 1250: CLibR Hen III vol III, 11), and coastal fishery in Hadleigh Ray (CPR Rich. II, vol II, 531).

5. Farms and fields

South west of the village/common (ie where the Olympic Venue lies) was a landscape of ancient enclosed fields (closes) held by a single tenant/owner (ie they were held in 'severalty' as opposed to being shares within an open field) (Figure 2). This landscape extends from Castle Lane in the east, across the area south of Sayers Farm, and into the neighbouring parish of South Benfleet. These fields would have been used for arable or pasture, although there were also small areas of woodland, mostly on the steeper slopes, that were once coppiced: the grove by Adders Hill contained maple coppice stools 1.2 m in diameter (Rackham 1986, 89). The boundary with the marshes to the south (see below) was marked by a field boundary (such fen-edge boundaries are a distinctive part of the Essex landscape).

These fields were associated with farmsteads (of which there were at least two in Hadleigh parish: Castle Farm and Sayer's Farm) as well as a small block of fields on Adders Hill that were part of the glebe (ie land belonging to the rectory: ERO D/P303). **Sayer's Farm** may relate to William Sayer who is recorded in 1491 (Reaney 1935, 185). Although the present farmhouse is 19th century, this is probably the site of a medieval farmstead (Yearsley 1998, 27 describes its post medieval tenurial history). The estate, including its buildings, fields, and marshes were mapped in 1709 (ERO D/DQs 28). The farmhouse is a fine example of the local vernacular architecture, most notably the way that it is clad in weatherboarding, and until recently many buildings in Hadleigh were of this construction (e.g. the agricultural buildings associated with Park Farm, the Choppen family's forge, and Cunning Murrell's cottage in Endway, and numerous houses along the High Street: Yearsley 1995, figs. 35, 44, 52, 97 and 98). The old Parsonage House in the village is described as weather boarded in the 1821 Glebe Terrier (ERO D/P303).

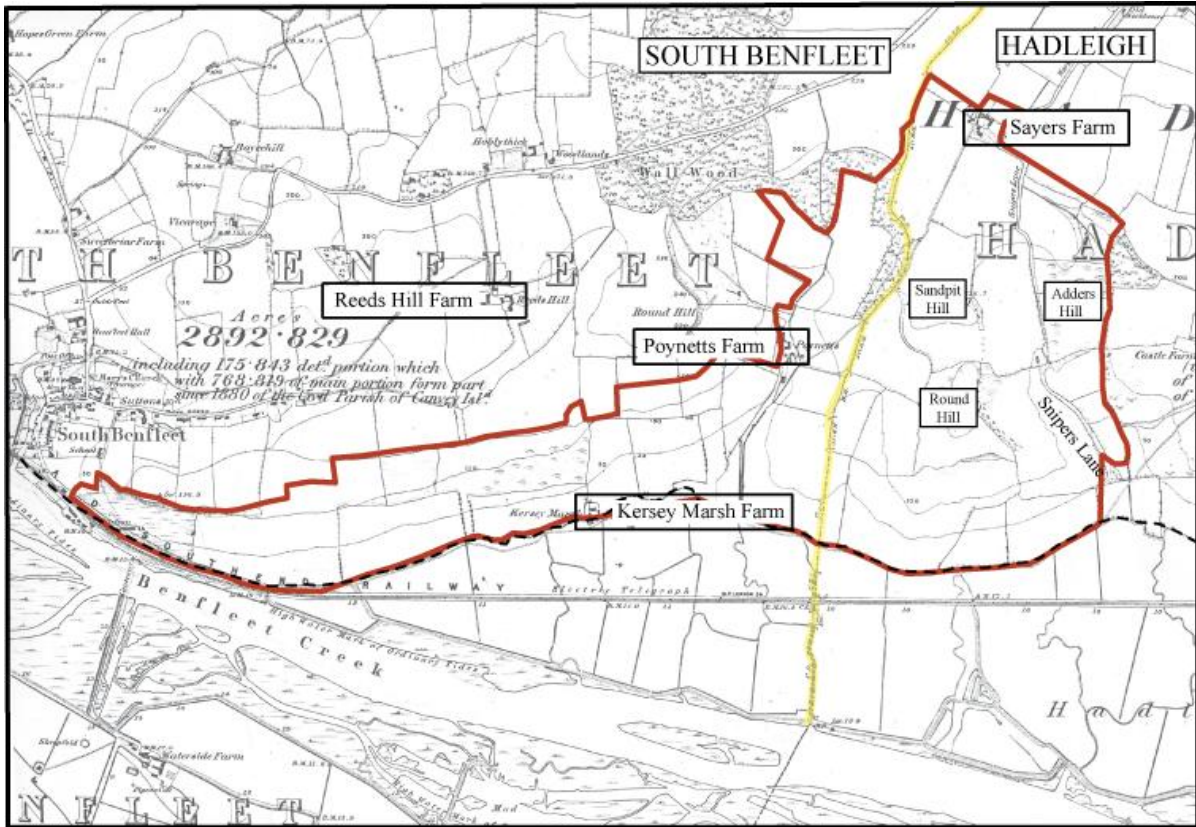


Figure 2: the medieval farms and other major landscape features in the Hadleigh Farm area overlain on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of the 1860s.

There were at least three farms in the neighbouring parish of South Benfleet: Poynett's Farm, Kersey Marsh Farm, and Reed's Hill Farm. **Kersey Marsh Farm** may have been the residence of Sampson de Kerseye in 1343 (Reaney 1935, 143). **Poynett's** may be associated with the family of John Poynaunt recorded in 1308 (Reaney 1935, 143). In 1343, John le Sturmy, the lord of the manor of Thundersley is recorded as holding a place called 'Pyesnest', which comprised a messuage [house] with 140 acres of arable and 10 acres of meadow; Morant (1768, 265) suggests 'Pyesnest' was in Waltham Holy Cross, but it is more likely to be Poynetts. **Reeds Hill** may be associated with William le Rede who is documented in 1285 (Reaney 1935, 143). The pattern of land-ownership on the South Benfleet Tithe Map would suggest that Kersey Marsh Farm was carved out of the south west corner of Poynett's Farm. Kersey Marsh Farm and Poynetts are now deserted and so are of high archaeological potential. Earthworks of the former field boundaries still survive as earthworks fossilized within the recent scrub/woodland.

When surveyed in the 18th and 19th centuries, these farms all covered very extensive areas: Sayers Farm, for example, is shown on an estate map of 1709 as covering 135 acres when it consisted of 79 acres of arable, 26 acres of 'upland meadow' [ie grassland on the dryland part of the estate, as opposed to the marshes], and 32 acres of marsh. This is far larger than the amount of land that would have been necessary to support a medieval family. Between 1199 and 1348 (the Black Death) 49% of the 57 tenements in South East Essex listed in the 'Feet of Fines' for Essex (records of land transactions) were 10 acres or less, although between 1349 and 1500 only 35% of the 23 tenements listed were this small, and between 1501 and 1603 just 19%. In part this increase in the size of tenements reflects the amalgamation of land-holdings after the Black Death and the subsequent outbreaks of plague, and then the acquisition of former monastic lands following the Dissolution. Through these processes the size of landholdings increased which led to the emergence of the landed gentry and the yeoman farmers, many of whose houses still grace the landscape (Rippon 2011).

Parts of Sayers Farm were not good agricultural land due to the steep slopes, and the marshes were not reclaimed until later, but in the medieval period we would still expect the 105 acres of dryland to have supported between 2 and 4 farmsteads. It may have been that rather than an isolated farmstead, there was once a small hamlet at Sayers Farm, or there may be deserted settlement sites elsewhere. The most obvious location for such an abandoned settlement is where Snipers Lane (the southerly continuation of Chapel Lane) meets the fen-edge: Kersey Marsh Farm lay at just such a wetland-edge location.

Although a rather unimpressive earthwork, an historically important field boundary was that marking the parish boundary between Hadleigh and South Benfleet. Another potentially important feature is the rather curious field boundary that runs roughly east to west c.250m north of the site of Kersey Marsh Farm. This currently marks the edge of the wooded area within Hadleigh Country Park, and partly marks the northern edge of the Indicative Site Boundary. This virtually straight boundary runs for almost exactly 1.0km, and is unusual in an area where most fields were more irregular in shape (sometime between the 1890s, when the boundary was straight, and the 1920s, its line was partly shifted to the north directly north of Kersey Marsh Farm).

6. The marshes

The far south of Hadleigh and South Benfleet parishes were formed by an extensive area of marshland. In the medieval period, these were intertidal saltmarshes, being drained by a series of tidal creeks. One substantial creek lay south of Hadleigh Castle and was the site of a mill and quay (Figure 1). Traditionally, the Essex marshes were grazed by sheep, and in 1250 the royal estate based at Hadleigh Castle is said to have had 'pasture on the marsh for 160 sheep' (see above). Other marshes in Hadleigh were held by monasteries (Rippon and Wainwright 2011, 15). In 1553 'Priors Marsh' and 'Abbotts Marsh' in Hadleigh were granted to Richard Riche, having formerly belonged to Prittlewell Priory and Stratford Langthorne Abbey respectively (CPR Edw IV, vol. IV, 57). In 1577 the manor of Hadleigh included the manor, demesne, the former deer park, Russells Marsh, Clerkenwick alias Abbotts Marsh, a water mill, and a fishery in the waters of Hadleigh Ray (ERO T/P 83/2, 441-2). In 1620 an Inquisition refers to 'Rushe Hulle alias Priors Marsh' and 'Clarckenwicke alias Abbotts Marsh', both in Hadleigh and both said to have formerly belonged to Prittlewell Priory [the latter being wrong according to the grant of 1553] (ERO D/DU 514/29/28). The location of 'Priors Marsh' and 'Abbotts Marsh' is unclear, although as 'Clerkenwick alias Abbotts Marsh' was part of the royal estate it may have lain in the east of the parish below Hadleigh Castle.

The old Romano-British 'red hills' would have afforded areas of raised ground within the marshes which could have been used for shepherds huts and dairies. In 1586, William Camden described just such a marshland landscape, on nearby Canvey Island, which was 'so low [lying] that often times it is quite overflowne, save for the hillocks cast up, upon which the sheepe have a place of refuge ... For it keepeth about foure thousand sheepe, whose flesh is of a most sweet and delicate taste, which I have seene young lads taking women's function, with stooles fastened to their buttocks to milk, yea and to make cheeses of ewe's milk in those dairy sheedes [sheds] of theirs that they call their 'wickes' (quoted in Cracknell 1959, 13). One such 'wick' is 'Clerkynwyke alias Abbotts Marsh' in Hadleigh (see above; CPR Edw IV, vol. IV, 57; ERO T/P 83/2, 441-2; Morant 1763-8, 18; Reaney 1935, 149) – and an example of one of Camden's 'hillocks' is probably the 'red hill' south of Snipers Lane that has produced medieval material (Essex HER 9714-16). Another distinctive marshland place-name was '-cote' which has two meanings in wetland landscapes: as a salt production site and as a dairy/raised refuge area for sheep (Rippon 2000, 205). There are a small number of examples in the coastal marshes of southern Essex, and as there are no earthworks indicative of medieval salt production these are presumably all sheep-cotes. In 1412, the manor of Whitehall in South Benfleet included 'Poyntates' (Poyntetts) and a marsh called 'Wodehammescote' (CCR Hen IV, vol. IV, 395).

All of these landscape types – including the woodlands and marshes – were exploited by the community living in Hadleigh. A series of lanes radiated from the village linking the settlement there with its more distant resources, such as Castle Lane and Chapel Lane/Snipers Lane that both led down to the rich summer grazing

on the marshes. Until the removal of many field boundaries in the 20th century (see below), both were classic droveways (Castle Lane having a marked widening as it approached the marshes, creating a funnel-shaped entrance into which livestock could be driven). Sniper's Lane, that survives as an earthwork within an area of scrub, is a particularly fine example of a droveway that linked the coastal grazing marshes with an inland common. The point where it met the fen-edge was clearly a very important nodal point in the landscape. A substantial amount of Romano-British building material on the fen-edge at this location points to a site of some significance (although it does not mean that Sniper's Lane itself is Roman in date; Essex HER 9718), and it is probably no coincidence that an old Romano-British 'red hill' lying to the south of the entrance of Sniper's Lane appears to have been re-used in the medieval period, probably as a shepherds hut and/or dairy. The significance of this location as a nodal point in the pastoral landscape was continued into the post medieval period when a sheep-dip was constructed next to the lane just to the north of the point where it reached the fen-edge (Ordnance Survey 1950s mapping in Digimap).

4. Post medieval period (up until the late 19th century) saw significant changes to each of these character areas.

1. the village expanded, and the common was mostly enclosed in 1852 (ERO TS/M 63/9); a fragment still survives, as the Chapel Lane Recreation Ground and Allotments.
2. the small open field was enclosed by the 19th century (probably most of it was enclosed in the late medieval period)
3. north of the village/common there was further clearance of woodland to create agricultural fields, although these are now built over.
4. the medieval deer park was enclosed and divided into agricultural fields, although the former existence of the park is reflected in the name 'Park Farm'. A map of 1647 appears to show the park before its enclosure (Huntingdon Records Office 1716/54).
5. The landscape of ancient enclosed fields has probably changed relatively little until the creation of the Salvation Home Farm Colony (see below).
6. The marshes were protected from tidal inundation through the construction of a series of sea walls (Figure 3). Firstly, the majority of Hadleigh Marsh was embanked with a sea wall running from the fen-edge south of Round Hill, down to and then eastwards along the coast, and then back to the fen-edge in Leigh-on-Sea. This wall was built after 1622 as a map of the marshes shows no sea wall and labels the area as 'Mariscus salsus' (saltmarsh) (ERO T/M 189/1), but before 1670 when the sea wall is shown (ERO T/M 507/1). Immediately south of the fen-edge it survives as part of an impressive complex of earthworks that includes a slight bank marking the line of the sea wall, a borrow dike (drainage ditch) on its landward side (to the east), and the palaeochannel of a former saltmarsh creek to the seaward side (west). The far western end of the Hadleigh marshes and the land in South Benfleet (Kersey Marsh) would appear to have been embanked later, and this sea wall is depicted on a map of 1722 (ERO D/DGs P7). A well-preserved group of fishponds survive at the junction of these two embankments. The remaining saltmarsh to the south of these two reclamations was embanked after 1847 (it not being shown on the Tithe Map: ERO D/CT 154B) but before the 1860s (it being shown on the OS First Edition Six Inch map).

Once embanked, the former tidal creeks became earthworks that will have helped drain the new freshwater grazing marshes (eventually becoming field boundaries with a distinctive sinuous/meandering line). These were supplemented by the digging of artificial drainage ditches (which have a diagnostic dead-straight line) which can be dated to the 18th century or later as they are not shown on the map of 'Mill Marsh' and 'Hadley Park Marsh' dated 1670 (ERO T/M 507/1), or the map of the lands belonging to Sayer's Marsh dated 1709 (ERO D/DQs 28), but are shown on the Tithe map of 1847 (ERO D/CT 154). At some point the surface of the marshes were drained through the digging of a series of parallel gullies, and ridging that was presumably from ploughing.

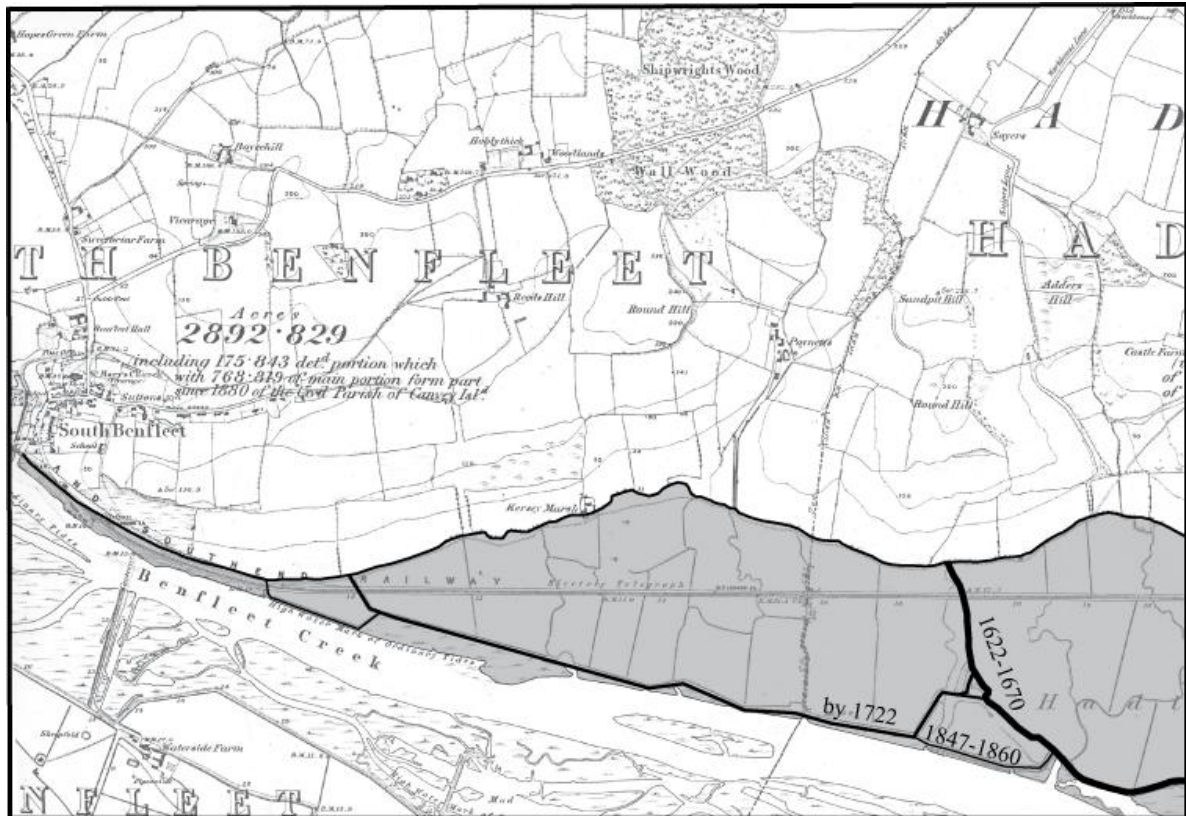


Figure 3: the wetland area, and sequence of sea walls, overlain on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Six Inch map of the 1860s.

5. late 19th to late 20th century: The development of the Salvation Home Farm Colony led to two profound changes to the landscape:

- agricultural intensification/diversification, including the planting of extensive orchards around Park Farm, the construction of a piggery on the northern side of Adder's Farm (shown on a schematic plan of the Salvation Army's Farm Colony dated c.1900: Yearsley 1995, 65), and a Poultry Farm in the valley between Adder's Hill and Round Hill (created in the first two years of the Home Farm Colony, as it appears on the Second Edition OS Six Inch map of 1893, although it had gone by the 1920s)
- industrialization: the creation of brickworks and digging of associated claypits south of Sayer's Farm and south of Castle Farm, that were linked to the estate centre at Castle Farm by a series of tramways. The Sayer's Farm brickworks appears on the Second Edition OS Six Inch map of 1893; see Yearsley 1995, fig. 74 for an aerial view in 1931), and the claypit still survives. These industrial landscape features are depicted on various editions of the Ordnance Survey mapping, and a schematic plan of the Salvation Army's Farm Colony dated c.1900: Yearsley 1995, 65).

After the Second World War, most evidence of the great social experiment that was the Salvation Home Farm Colony were removed, and the landscape reverted to a mixture of intensive arable and pasture, with some field boundaries and small areas of woodland being cleared away, and the drainage of the marshes. The construction of a large reservoir east of Sayer's Farm dates to this period.

In contrast, the landscape further west (in South Benfleet parish, in the areas of Poyntet's, Kersey Marsh, and Reed's Hill Farms) saw a decrease in the intensity of agriculture and the regeneration of scrub and woodland. This began in the late 19th century: field numbers 163 and 164 on the South Benfleet Tithe Map, that were open on the Ordnance Survey First Edition Six Inch Map of the 1870s are shown as scrub/woodland on the next edition in the 1890s. By the 1920s fields to the west of Kersey Marsh Farm had been invaded by scrub, as was the case to the west of Poyntetts. By the 1960s most of the Benfleet Downs were covered in scrub/woodland, transforming what historically had been agricultural land.

6. Second World War: gun battery south of Sayers Farm, parts of which were retained into the Cold War.

7. late 20th/early 21st century: although the area remained primarily agricultural, there were a series of developments all related to increased **recreational use of the landscape**:

- the guardianship site at Hadleigh Castle became a popular public open space, and lies at the heart of a network of public footpaths;
- to the west, the hills south of Sayers Farm were used for motocross;
- the development of the Hadleigh Castle Country Park;
- the development of a visitors centre at the Salvation Home Farm Colony;
- the use of the hills south of Sayers Farm for the 2012 Olympic Mountain Biking.

Along with the former medieval deer park (itself created for recreational use), this gives this landscape an unusually long and varied history for recreation and public access to the countryside.

Reflections

Landscapes of change

All landscapes contain within their physical fabric evidence of their past. Some landscapes show considerable stability over time, whereas others have experienced great change. In this respect, the Benfleet and Hadleigh Downs can be divided into three areas based on the extent to which they have experienced change since the foundations of today's historic landscape were laid in the medieval period (Figure 4):

Zone 1. East of Adders Hill, later 20th century agricultural intensification has removed much of the earlier historic landscape, including most traces of the Salvation Army Home Farm Colony created in the 1890s. Few medieval field boundaries remain, and the marshes have been drained and ploughed removing all trace of the traditional sheepwalks. The impressive ruins of the castle, and the line of the park boundary, do still survive. Below ground archaeology will, however, be well preserved.

Zone 2. Between Adders Hill and Sandpit Hill a greater amount of the historic landscape survives, particularly to the south. Here, a remarkable time-depth is visible within the landscape including some elements of the medieval agrarian landscape (a small number of field boundaries and Snipers Lane), components of the Salvation Army Home Farm Colony (Sayers farm, and the pond – possibly associated with the brickworks – next to Snipers Lane), and remains of the Second World War gun battery. Again, below ground archaeology will be well preserved.

Zone 3. West of Sandpit Hill there has been far less change and a substantial amount of the 19th century and earlier historic landscape survives, albeit cloaked in recent scrub and woodland. Again, below ground archaeology will be well preserved.

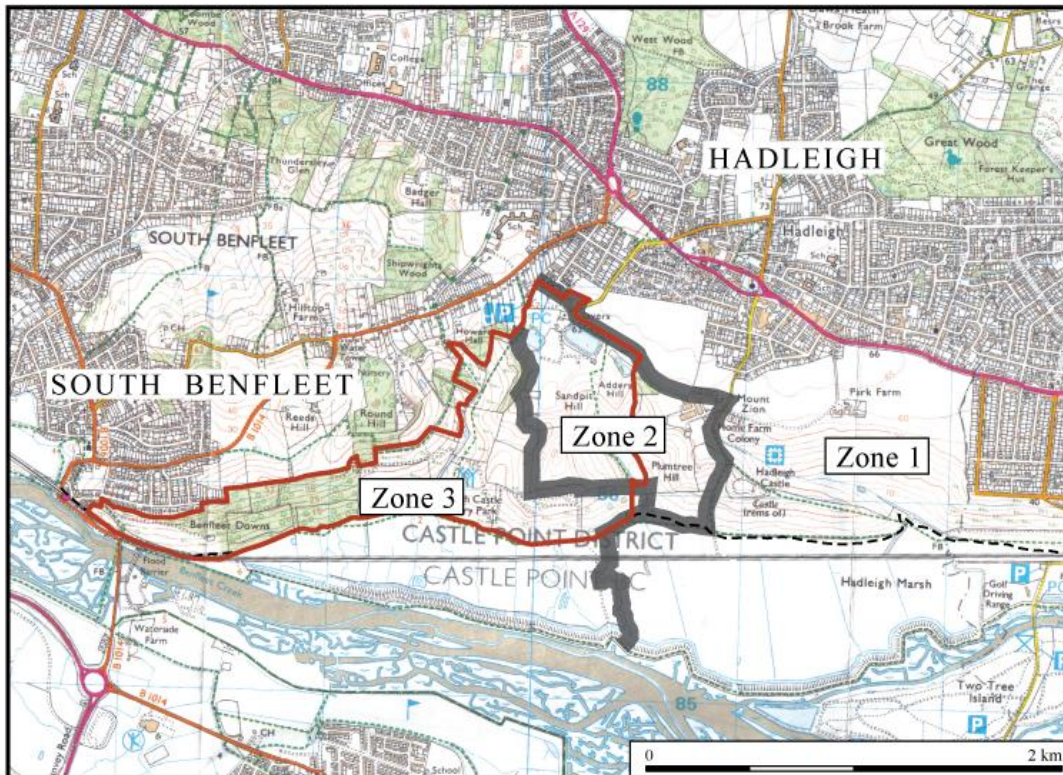


Figure 4: the three zones of change.

A landscape of recreation

Whereas most rural landscapes have a history dominated by agriculture, a remarkably strong theme on the Hadleigh and Benfleet Downs is that of recreation. During the 13th century a deer park was created, one function of which was to provide hunting for the King and his favourites: Edward II (1307-27), for example, hunted at Hadleigh or Thundersley in virtually every year of his reign (Burrows 1909, 27), and in 1271 the park was held by the Archbishop of York who was granted permission to restock it with deer for his sport (CPR Hen III vol VI, 551). Hadleigh Castle is now in the care of English Heritage and forms a popular public open space at the centre of a network of public footpaths. In the 1960s and 1970s the hills south of Sayers Farm were used for Motocross, while the area around Poynetts and Kersey Marsh Farms became a Country Park managed by Essex County Council. By hosting the 2012 Olympic Mountain Bike Event, the long history of recreational use of this landscape will continue.

Summary

The earliest above-ground features of this historic landscape are the fields and lanes associated with a series of probably medieval farmsteads (Sayer's Farm in Hadleigh, and Poynett's Farm, Kersey Marsh Farm, and Reed's Hill Farm in South Benfleet). By the 18th and 19th centuries these farms were associated with estates that were far larger than would have been necessary to support a medieval family, suggesting that either they were once small hamlets, or there are deserted farmsteads scattered across the landscape. The fen-edge is a prime location for deserted medieval settlements. The land-use on these hills will have been a mixture of arable and pasture, with woodland restricted to the steeper slopes. In the Poynetts and Kersey Marsh Farm area, the field boundaries of this former agricultural landscape are now preserved as earthworks within later scrub/woodland. During the medieval period the marshes were intertidal saltmarshes probably grazed mostly by sheep, and the surviving fragment of Snipers Lane is a fine example of a droveway linking these coastal

grazing marshes with the hilltop common west of the village of Hadleigh. During the 17th or 18th century a sea wall was constructed along the coast protecting the marshes from tidal inundation, with the earthworks of the former tidal creeks providing limited drainage of the now freshwater pastures. In 1891 parts of this landscape were transformed through the development of the Salvation Army Home Farm Colony, although very little trace of this actually survives within the project area (the Brickworks, Piggery, and Poultry Farm near Sayer's Farm all having been largely eradicated). During the Second World War Sandpit Hill was used as a Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, although much of this is now buried and most of the associated buildings demolished. During the later 20th century the landscape has been used for two purposes: agriculture and leisure. In Hadleigh, on the Salvation Army estate, many field boundaries have been removed as part of a programme of agricultural intensification, in contrast to the Benfleet Downs when scrub and woodland has progressively invaded many fields.

Abbreviations

CHhR	Calendars of Charter Rolls
CCR	Calendars of Close Rolls
CFR	Calendars of Fine Rolls
CLR	Calendars of Liberate Rolls
CPR	Calendars of patent Rolls
DB Essex	Domesday Book (Morris 1983)
ERO	Essex Records Office

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