

Local and Essex History – September 2022

Essex Village Challenge

ST MARKS COLLEGE, AUDLEY END, ESSEX



By chance I discovered this amazing building in the village of Audley End. After driving between two rows of small cottages, once alms-houses but now privately owned, we came to a gateway and drove through. Here I have to say I was driven by a friend who had family links with this college.

Audley End was the site of Walden Abbey a Benedictine monastery that was dissolved and granted to the Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas Audley in 1538 by Henry VIII. The Abbey was converted into a domestic house for him and was of Audley End.

However, close by, the building in the picture was built, 1605-1614, as a hospital. It was built by Thomas Howard Earl of Suffolk, and was contemporary with Audley End. Over time it was used as both a hospital and as alms-houses.

It was restored and the chapel rebuilt c1948-51. It now has one and a half floors with mezzanine bedrooms. There are two inner courtyards with a kitchen, stairs and a principal hall between the rectangular courtyards. There are arched porches leading centrally to the courts. Beautiful Tudor Chimneys abound.



We were only able to walk around the building and look into the windows but it really is a lovely Tudor building.

As St Marks College, it served as a residential youth and conference centre, a resource for children and young people in the Diocese of Chelmsford, owned by them, for 25 years.

In 2019, with overheads increasing and bookings declining it was decided to close the centre and instead seek funding to establish a community enabling young people aged 11-25 years to live, learn and lead together under a shared rule of life, drawing on the Benedictine Heritage of the building.

However, Covid came along and I can only assume that funding was not found. My source says this Tudor building is now on the market for sale. I can only hope a buyer is found who can put this amazing building to good use as left empty as it is, it will only deteriorate.

MARION COLEMAN

THE RODINGS

On Thursday 8th September, Marion and I visited the Rodings, which is a group of 8 villages with one overall name. The largest group in the country. This began as an Anglo-Saxon community which travelled down the river Roding and established themselves in this area.

Our first visit was to Leaden Roding to the church of St, Michael and all Angels where we were lucky to find the priest was there. He was very helpful and told us that he and his curate were in charge of 10 churches!

The back wall was bombed during the second world war and had to be rebuilt. It is thought this was a German bomber who was dropping his bombs before going home. This church has several interesting features. It has three bells Treble, Second and a Tenor which was placed there pre reformation in 1523.

It was pointed out to us that the font with a lovely wood cover had a device by which it was locked during Oliver Cromwell's time so only the priest could open it when needed.

The organ is a Holdich previously owned and designed by George Holdich for his own pleasure and was brought to this church in 1998 from Fingringhoe Church. It is only one of two. It has been altered to encompass electricity but is mostly original. The roof is now tiled but was originally lead.

We then went to Abbess Roding where we had lunch in the Black Lion. We had already seen the Axe and Compass which was once a coaching inn. There were many thatched cottages along the high street and also a house with a clock tower which may have been a school at some point.

We visited St Edmunds church which had a steeple. Inside it had ceramic sculptures on the walls which we thought might have been Elizabethan. The church had a very pretty high screen over the chancel made of carved open work wood which I thought was very attractive.

We then went on to visit High Roding passing the only surviving windmill in Essex. As it began raining, we decided to make our way home.

VERA SMITH

THE RODINGS

Rather late in the Summer, I went out with Vera, a new member of our group to visit an Essex Village. However, as Vera has expressed an interest in revisiting a childhood haunt, we actually ignored all my suggestions and made our way to The Rodings. This was a new area for me, heard about but never visited.

The Rodings, the remnants of a single Anglo-Saxon community known as the *Hroðingas*, who were led by *Hroða*; who sailed up the River Thames and along a tributary, to settle in the area in the sixth century. This was one of the tribal areas that were absorbed into the Kingdom of Essex. The River Roding and the villages derived their name from *Hroða*.

The villages are recorded in the *Domesday Book* of 1086 as *Rodinges* in the Hundreds of Dunmow. In the time of Edward the Confessor, it was held by the Abbey of St Æthelthryth of Ely, however, after the Norman Conquest, part was taken by William de Warenne, part was also held by the de Veres and de Mandevilles families, who became the Earls of Oxford and Earls of Essex. By the 14th century, the boundaries and names of the villages had become fairly established.

In the second half of the 19th century The Rodings parishes were in the rural deaneries of Roding and Ongar, the Archdeaconry of Essex, and the Diocese of St Albans. In 1914 the parishes came under the Diocese of Chelmsford.

Roman remains have occasionally been found in the area. Crops grown at the time were chiefly wheat, barley and beans, on a heavy soil with a clay subsoil.

The eight villages are

Abbess Roding,
Aythorpe Roding,
Beauchamp Roding,
Berners Roding,
High Roding,
Leaden Roding,
Margaret Roding,
White Roding,
Morell Roding (now non-existent, Absorbed into White Roding)

We drove through Margaret Roding first but, with parking difficult, we continued on to Leaden Roding where we parked close to the church of St Michaels and All Angels. Here we were fortunate to meet the Vicar, Reverend Robert Stone. He is priest in charge to 10 parishes but he spared us time to talk about the church. It was recorded as being part of an endowment in 1090 from the 2nd Earl Warren.

The roof of the Church used to be covered in lead and this is believed to be the origin of the name Leaden Roding. The 16th Century roof is covered now with peg tiles. There is a beautiful organ built by George Maxwell Holdich (1816-1896). He built over 400 organs including the one in Lichfield Cathedral. The one in this church may have been built for his own home and was moved here in 1998 from Fingringhoe Church. Opposite the Norman entry door is a here is a 14th century doorway and also an octagonal pulpit from the 16th century.



The Holdich Organ



16th Century Pulpit



St Michael & All Angel Church



The heavy font cover and retaining fixings escaped destruction by Oliver Cromwell's men

We left Leaden Roding, moving on to Aythorpe Roding where we visited St Mary the Virgin Church.



This 13th Century manor church is set away from the village down a quiet country lane surrounded by fields west of the B184

From here we returned down the lane passing the Axe and Compasses. This was once a Coaching Inn on the London to Norwich Road and is now a thatched traditional British Country pub with extensive outdoor space and menu.



Enroute to High Roding we passed Aythorpe Roding Mill, the largest post mill surviving in Essex, built in 1779, restored to working order in 1982.

As we approached High Roding the skies darkened and we decided to stop at The Black Lion for lunch. This was an excellent idea as it rained most of the time we were there. Lunch was also excellent catering for a wide range of tastes and pockets!



High Roding is a very attractive village with a long row of Tudor houses and several thatched cottages. Also, an interesting building with a clocktower (once a school maybe?)



The three pictures above are High Roding

We then drove to Abbess Roding and visited St Edmund Church. There were some interesting memorial plaques on the walls which we felt were Elizabethan from the style of clothing.



The pulpit had a very interesting Sounding board above it

We drove through White Roding but as it started to rain again, we decided it was time for home. A very interesting day, riding through beautiful rolling Essex countryside that was full of History. Less than 30 miles away, an area for you all to visit next year!

MARION COLEMAN