



James Nason

Tractor Plant 'Onion' water tower, Cranes Farm Road

A History of
BASILDON BOROUGH
in 25 Objects

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OBJECT

noun

'a material thing that can
be **s**een and **t**ouched'



The prehistoric era known as the stone age last for around 3.5 million years. The Mesolithic era, which means Middle-Stone age, lasted from c8000bce until c5000bce and sits in between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras.

At this time humans were hunter-gatherers living and hunting in and around wooded areas.

At the time Britain was joined to Europe by a land bridge. The bridge was made up of low-lying plains which became submerged as the Earth's climate warmed.

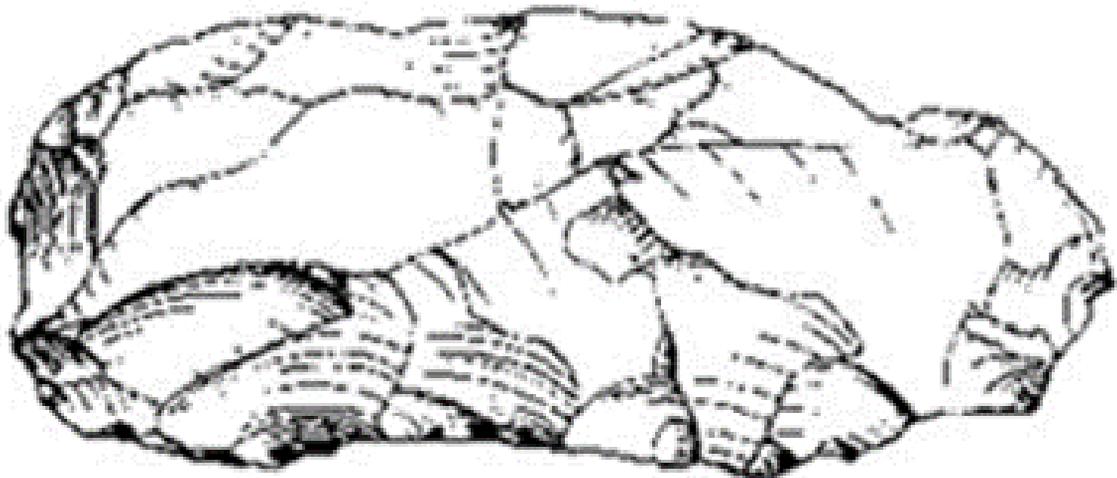
Much of the artefacts from this period are stone tools, such as axe heads.

A boy was visiting Norsey Wood in 1994. A stranger to the area, he became lost. Whilst trying to find his way back to his family he noticed a stone beside the path that he thought was something more than just a stone or rock.

The boy showed the flint to his brother and the two decided that it should be handed into the police, where it was logged as lost property. A member of the Billericay Archaeological Society realised what had been found, a Stone Age axe head.

The find was eventually released by the police and was sent to the Essex County Archaeological Office where it was looked at by an expert who officially identified the item as a Mesolithic flaked-flint axe head.

As the boy that found the axe head was lost, and a stranger to the area, he was unable to identify the spot he found it.



The Neolithic period, or New Stone Age, was the final period of the Stone Age and is marked by humans turning away from being hunter-gatherers and becoming farmers. The Neolithic era lasted roughly from 4,000bce until 2,500bce in Great Britain.

The Neolithic period is considered to have started later in the British Isles than mainland Europe. As humans migrated across the land bridge to the area we now call Great Britain they brought their technology and ideas on farming with them.

During an archaeological dig in 2009 evidence of Neolithic Houses were found in an area along Nevendon Road. Workers also found a pre-Christian monument and wooden posts in circular shapes. Small flint tools, an axe and pottery were also found.





Norsey Wood Tumuli, Billerica

The Bronze Age followed the Stone Age and is thought to have lasted from around 2,500bce until 700bce. The period started with the arrival of the Beaker people into Britain who brought the pottery they were named after as well as a skill of refining and smelting copper and then bronze. Bronze was a harder metal made of copper and tin.

During this time important members of the community such as elders and leaders were buried in barrows or tumulus.

Norsey Wood once contained two such tumuli.

An excavation of one of these was carried out during 1865. The dig discovered some Roman pottery, a bronze coin and three large cinerary urns, containing cremated human remains.

This tumulus still exists.

An archaeological dig on the second tumulus found seven more urns, one of which contained cremated remains. This tumulus was flattened in the 1950's and the site now has a house and garage built on it.



The Iron Age in Britain is thought to have started around 800bce and ended with the Roman invasion of the British Isles. The Late Iron Age is dated from 100bce until 50bce. Much of Essex was part of the territory of the Trinovantes, a Celtic tribe which had its capital in Camulodunon, now known as Colchester.

In 1887 a small yellow and blue glass bead was found in Norsey Wood. The bead is of a continental design and likely to have been traded with Celtic tribes from Europe. It has been suggested that the bead may have been left as a votive offering in the woods as they were treated as sacred places by the Celts.

The bead can now be seen in The Chelmsford Museum.

The Romans occupied most of Britain from 43 to 410AD. Evidence of Roman activity has been found in several places around the borough.

During building work in Billericay, in the area where Roman Way is now situated, some Roman burials were found.

Evidence of a fortified area has been found in Blunts Wall and other Roman artefacts, pottery and coins amongst them, have been found in the town.

It has also been suggested that the name 'Wickford' is named after a 'vicus', a Roman settlement.

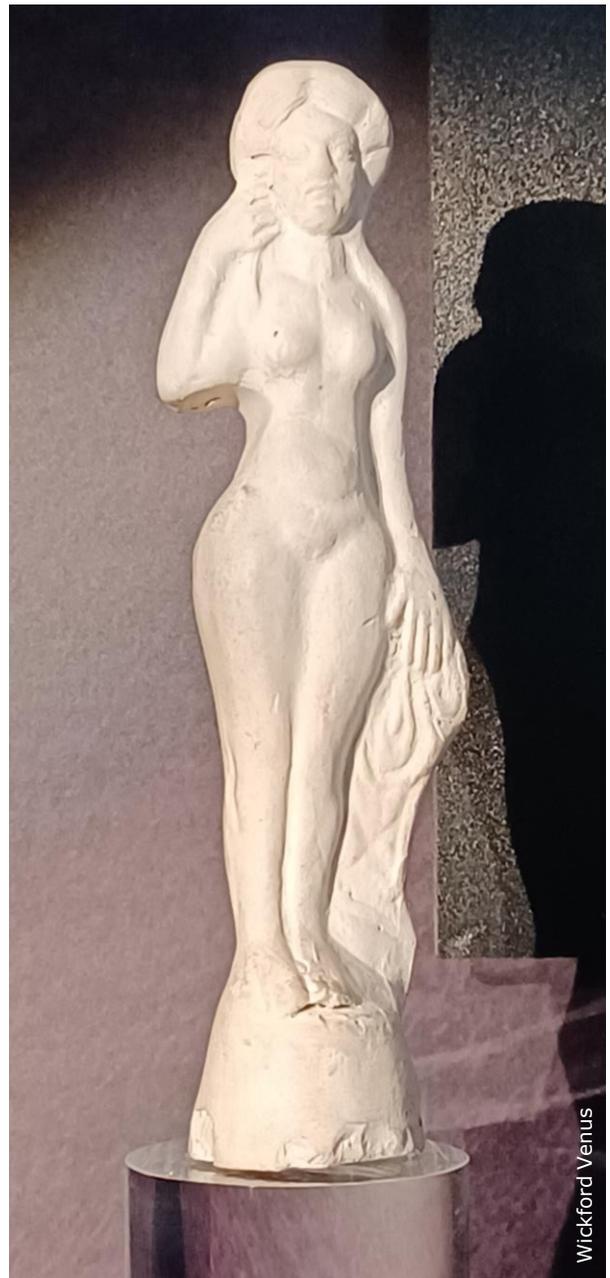
A survey in Dry Street during 2006 found evidence that the Romans had been in the area.

Land farmed from Belchamps Farm (also called Beauchamps), Wickford once occupied the area of a Roman camp and then a villa. Flooring, coins, pottery and metal work were found during excavations. The settlement is now buried under housing on Beauchamps Drive. During the early 1970's archaeologists carried out some work on the Beauchamps Farm site in Wickford.

During the work a small Roman devotional statuette of Venus was discovered.

Venus was a Roman goddess that covered love, fertility, victory and prosperity, amongst other subjects. A lot of the mythology around Venus was adopted from her Greek equivalent, Aphrodite.

The Romans believed that they were descended from Venus and Julius Caesar claimed her as an ancestor.



Wickford Venus

The Anglo-Saxon era in Britain spanned approximately from 410 until 1066ce.

The Anglo-Saxon's were Germanic tribes that travelled from mainland Europe. The Angles were from the Schleswig-Holstein region of Southern Denmark and Northern German. It was the Angles that gave their name to England.

The Saxon's came from Northern Germany.

These two tribes travelled with the Frisii, from Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium, as well as the Jutes who occupied Northern Denmark.

These Germanic tribes migrated to post-Roman Britain to find land that they could farm. The lowlands they came from were prone to flooding and unreliable to work.

On 12th July 927 the Saxon Kingdoms were united by Æthelstan to become England.

In 1990 some Anglo-Saxon loom weights were found at the Billericay School. Weights were used on looms to keep yarn taut during the weaving process.

Whilst the Romans and Celts used triangular weights, the Saxons used these circular ones.



In 1085 William the Conqueror sent out agents across England to survey all the land to find out who owned it, what it was used for and how much revenue he could make from these lands.

The complete record is known today as The Domesday Book. This was made of two works. Little Domesday covered Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, with Great Domesday covering almost the rest of England.

Much of the area we now know as Basildon Borough was listed in the Domesday Book:

Barstable Hall was recorded in the Domesday Book as Berdestestapla. There were 6 villages and 11 smallholders in the area with cattle, pigs and sheep. The land was valued at 5 pounds per annum.

Belesduna, now called Basildon, was land held by Turolf, son of Odo and contained 1 smallholder and 2 slaves.

Benfleet was recorded as one settlement, unlike today, and was a large settlement split between three owners and home to 36 villagers, 18 freemen, 24 smallholders and 5 slaves. The land was valued at 17 pounds and 10 shillings. The Battle of Benfleet (Beamfleote) was recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles during the 9th century.

Bura was split between several owners and tenants. The name 'Bura' means 'cottage'. It contained 4 villagers, 7 smallholders and 4 slaves. In the 13th century the lord of the manor, William Gifford, would give his surname to the area.

At the time Dunton was recorded as Dantuna. It was home to 2 villagers, 6 smallholders and 2 slaves. The land, which held 15 pigs and 34 sheep, amongst other animals, was valued at 7 pounds a year.

Burghsteda had just 2 villagers in 1086 and land valued at 2 pounds 10 shillings a year. The first recording of Burstead dates from 975.

Fanton Hall was listed in the Domesday Book as Phantuna and Fantuna. It was recorded as a settlement with 2 villagers and 10 smallholders living on land valued at 6 pounds, 13 shillings and 2 pence.

Langenduna, now Langdon Hills, was another small village with 5 villagers and 4 slaves recorded.

Lea was land owned by the canons of St Paul's, London in 1086 and valued at 1 pound a year. Between the 6 villagers and 5 smallholders were '1 cattle', a pig and 7 sheep, as well as 3 slaves. The chapel was added at a later date and has since disappeared, but the area is still known as Lee Chapel.



Leiendina (Laindon) was one of the largest settlements in the area with 14 smallholders as well as 3 villagers. The land was valued at 10 pounds a year.

Nezendena was recorded as 'Newendon' prior to the Norman Invasion. In 1086 Nevendon didn't have any recorded residents. The land was split between two owners, Roger the marshal and Hagebern, and was valued at 7 shillings and 2 pence.

Phenge (Vange) was split between Bishop Odo of Bayeux and Ranulf Peverel. The land, valued at 8 pounds 10 shillings, was home to 6 villagers, 9 smallholders and a slave.

The land recorded for Piceseia (Pitsea) was held by Wulfeva, wife of Fin, and valued at 6 pounds in 1086. There was 1 villager noted as living in the area, as well as 8 freeman, 3 smallholders and 9 slaves.

Ramesduna (Ramsden) was separated between 7 owners in 1086 and home to around 50 households. The annual worth of the land was valued at 14 pounds 22 shillings.

Wicfort's lands were valued at 15 pounds and 48 shillings a year, and were split between 9 different owners.



Billericay was not mentioned in the Domesday Book. It was part of Great Burstead at the time.

The town is first record in 1291 as 'Byllyrica'. The exact meaning of the name is not known.

The Grade II* listed All Saints Church in Vange can trace its origins back to the Norman as is thought to be the oldest building in the borough.

The font is thought to date from the 1100's with many other features built during the 1400's. The list of rectors goes back to 1328. All Saint's Church is considered to be the oldest building in Basildon Borough.

The last service at All Saint's church was held in 1994 and has since been managed and maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust. Visitors can now spend time in the church between 10am and 3pm.

All Saint's Church Hall was opened in February 1932.



All Saints Church, Vange

On 30th May 1381 John Bampton visited Brentwood to collect unpaid poll taxes. Taxes had risen to pay for the Hundred Years' War with France and workers could ask for higher wages after the Black Death had killed around 50% of the population, freeing up land and reducing the agricultural workforce. The confrontation resulted in violence, which spread across the south of the country.

Many local officials and workers from rural areas rose up and destroyed court records and released prisoners from gaols. Those involved in the revolt wanted taxes to be reduced, serfdom to be ended and a removal of the King's senior official and his law courts.

A number of rebels from Kent marched on London. They were led by Wat Tyler. The rebels were met by officials of the royal government who attempted to turn the rebels back, but their attempts were unsuccessful.

A few days later they entered London with many townsfolk. They attacked the gaols and murdered anyone they found that was linked to the royal government.

A day later the 14-year-old King Richard II met with the rebels at Mile End. He agreed with several of the requests, including the abolition of serfdom. The following day Richard and his party went to Smithfield to meet with Wat Tyler. Tyler was killed whilst the King calmed matters to create time for the Mayor of London to raise a militia and then disperse the rebels.

King Richard went back on his concessions with the rebels and started to re-establish order. He sent out 4,000 soldiers to restore order across the country. Many of the rebel leaders were found and executed.

On 28th June 1381 the King's soldiers marched into Essex and defeated around 500 rebels in an area thought to have been Norsey Wood. They were buried at Great Burstead.

In 1984 Basildon Council opened a country park in Pitsea and named it after Wat Tyler.

Artist Robert Koenig designed and made seven wooden sculptures to represent some of the local 'peasants' that were involved in the revolt. This is on display in Wat Tyler Park.





Great Chalvedon Hall, 1930's

Great Chalvedon Hall is on Tyefields in Pitsea, near where the road meets Rectory Road.

The hall is Grade II listed and is described as 'an early 16th Century timber-framed and plastered house'.

Prior to Mary Tudor ascending to the English throne in 1553 she took an income from the manor farms at Great Chalvedon Hall and Pitsea Hall.

It is likely that Great Chalvedon Hall is the oldest non-religious building in the borough.

Maps of 1888 show the hall being surrounded by fields with an entrance from Rectory Road, which then ran through to Burnt Mills.

Basildon Council purchased the Hall during 1977 and it was converted to a pub in 1979.



Great Chalvedon Hall, 1974

On 16 September 1620 The Mayflower set sail from Plymouth, Devon heading towards the New World. It lowered its anchor off the coast of Cape Cod on 19 November.

Amongst the passengers were Christopher and Mary Martin (nee Prowse), as well as Simon Prowse who is likely to be a son from a previous marriage. Christopher and Mary's marriage in Great Burstead during 1607 is the earliest record of the two.

The fourth member of the Martin group was John Langerman, Christopher's servant.

Christopher became the Church Warden of Great Burstead in 1611. When The Mayflower left England, he was the Passenger Governor, but was replaced by a far more popular passenger.

A large number of the passengers died during the winter of 1620-21 due to a lack of shelter and provisions. Simon died on 24 December 1620 as the harbour was being explored. Christopher died around 8 January 1621 and Mary died a few days later, both of the 'general sickness'. Langerman died that same winter.

All four were named on a plaque unveiled in the United Reform Church during 1920.

Today the Mayflower is a recognisable image in Billericay. Billericay Town F.C., the cricket club and the tennis club all use the image as a logo



John Chapman and Peter André were both surveyors with experience of county surveying. The pair surveyed Essex from 1772 until 1774, eventually publishing their work in 1777.

The map was printed on 25 sheets with a list of the subscribers that helped fund their work and a close-up street view of Colchester.



As well as each are of Basildon Borough being shown the map also gave the locations of farms and prominent buildings.

Wind Mill Hills between South Green and Billericay shows two Windmills, either side of Southend Road, near Mill Meadows.

Burnt Mill Farm in Nevendon and The Blue Anchor Public House in North Benfleet are shown.

In Pitsey are Charlton Hall and Little Charlton Hall, now known by the name of Chalvedon.

Barstable Hall, Little Barstable Hall, Middle Hall and Basildon Lodge are all shown near to each other, near what is now the town centre.

The first railway in Britain, powered by steam locomotives, opened in 1825 and ran between Stockton and Darlington. Local lines started operating eventually expanding into a national rail network during the railway boom of the 1840s.

Not only did the creation of this rail network allow people to travel around the country, it allowed the distribution of stock and goods around the country, allowing garden farmers in Devon to pick fruit and have it on sale in London within a few hours.

The railway helped seaside towns to boom as people spent their spare time, and money, on holiday around the nations coast.

The railway came to the area when Pitsea Train Station opened on 1 July 1855 on the line between Forest Gate and Southend. A site in Vange had been proposed for the station until land was bought next to Pitsea Hall.

The station was expanded and rebuilt with a direct line in to London in 1888. The brick arches, which are still a feature of the station, were built at this time.

The station became 'Pitsea Junction' until 1932 when it was renamed 'Pitsea for Vange'. The station has been called Pitsea since 1953. As the New Town was being built signs were added saying 'alight here for Basildon'.

The current station entrance, ticket office and shop, opened in 2005. The original structures had been demolished and removed in the early 1970s.

Billericay, Laindon and Wickford stations all opened in 1888 with Basildon following in 1974.



In 1891 the British Explosives Syndicate built a factory on the site of what is now known as Wat Tyler Country Park in Pitsea.

Alfred Nobel invented Dynamite in 1863, which was a stable and reliable way to make Nitro-glycerine. Dynamite was one of the items manufactured by the factory.

With much of the park being cleared in recent years a number of the blast mounds have been uncovered. These mounds were built around small huts where part of the manufacturing process were carried out. These mounds would send any explosions upwards and away from surrounding huts also containing explosive materials.



Explosive Factory Manager's Building

The site would have been an integral part of the war effort from 1914 until 1918 but was closed down in 1929 as its services were no longer required.

Many of the buildings used by the Explosives Syndicates are still visible in the park. Visitors can follow paths, see the information signs describing the work that took place at the park and enjoy nature and the amenities on offer.

On the night of 23-24 September 1916 Zeppelin L32 was making its way back from an attempted bomb run on London. The bombs were actually dropped on Purfleet as the air defences around London were too dangerous.

The airship made its way back towards mainland Europe it was intercepted by Second Lieutenant Frederick Sowrey of the Royal Flying Corp, the forerunner of the R.A.F. He was based at R.F.C. Suttons Farm, which later became R.A.F. Hornchurch.

The Zeppelin had been found by the searchlights and Sowrey unleashed a volley of incendiary ammunition which ignited the gas that kept the airship afloat.

Sowrey was awarded Distinguished Service Order for shooting down the Zeppelin. He would retire from the R.A.F. in 1940 as a Group Captain. He died in Eastbourne, Sussex on 21 October 1968, aged 75.



L32 crashed into a field near Snails Farm in South Green. The land the farmhouse once stood on is now occupied by housing on Greens Farm Lane.

Sightseers came from London to see the wreckage and many souvenirs were taken. Some can be bought on eBay today.

Queenie Carter, was born in Wickford in 1912. As a small child she was taken to see the wreckage and could remember the awful smell it had created.

The 22 crew members that were killed were buried in Great Burstead soon afterwards. Their remains were later removed to Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery in Staffordshire.

During the 1870s there was a decline in agriculture as improvements in shipping and refrigeration meant food could be imported cheaply. Essex was badly affected as the soil was made up of large amounts of clay.

Business men saw an opportunity and bought land from the farmers which they then divided into smaller plots to be sold as an opportunity to people wishing to have a piece of land of their own. With the spread of the railway network the chances for people to holiday had greatly increased so the plotlands became an opportunity for some to have a holiday home of their own.

Businessmen would arrange trains to travel into the area, offering champagne lunches, to attract Londoners into the countryside with a view to buying a parcel of land. Many of these parcels were bought but were forgotten or just left, but a lot were utilised.

Travelling in from London at the weekends, many new landowners would pitch tents or erect small sheds or cabins. Many would create larger dwellings; they would also have animals such as chickens in their gardens.



During the Second World War many East Londoners moved into their holiday homes to escape the heavy bombing suffered by London. Stories are told of these plotlanders standing at the top of Langdon Hills watching the fires blaze in the East End.

To this day there are still Anderson Shelters on the plotland are of Langdon Hills.

The Basildon Borough area was home to several plotland sites, with the Langdon Hills site being the best known. This is mostly because of the Plotlands Museum based in The Haven.

There were around 200 plotland homes in Langdon Hills, with The Haven being the last surviving structure, which dates from the 1930s, and built by the Mills family. The museum gives a window into the lives of those living in the area during the 1930s and 1940s.

The Second World War must have felt a lot closer to home than the Great War as the development in flying technology meant that many major cities were a target for heavy bombing, and later with the Nazi's 'wunderwaffe', or 'Wonder Weapons' landing in the area that destroyed homes and killed several residents.

In May 1940 a RAF Hawker Hurricane of 85 Squadron, flown by New Zealander William Hodgson was hit and caught fire whilst fighting enemy aircraft.

Pilot Officer Hodgson attempted to make his way back to RAF Debden, near Saffron Walden. It became apparent that the aircraft would not manage the journey so William crash landed in fields near Shotgate rather than bail out and risk the Hurricane crashing in to a populated area.



William Hodgson was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions and has since had the Hodgsons Way Industrial Estate named after him. He was killed in 1941 when a plane he was in with several others crashed.

The 1946 New Towns Act was a plan to build a number of New Town, mostly around London at first, to create new housing after so much of the housing in London was lost during the Second World War.

The plan was to build neighbourhoods based around schools, shops and a pub. There were also be jobs for the residents and green spaces for them to spend their spare time in.

After the war the government instructed Billericay Urban District Council to plan and build housing in the area. The District Council were unable to afford such a plan so requested that the area be designated as a New Town.

Lewis Silkin was Minister of Town and Country Planning from 1945 and 1950. Silkin attended a public meeting held by The Urban District Council of Billericay in Laindon on 30th September 1948 and made a speech to the residents that attended about the New Towns creating a "new kind of citizen" who would benefit from living in an area that didn't have the overcrowding and deprivation that living in London had bought them.

Basildon was officially designated a New Town on 4 January 1949. Basildon New Town was named after the small hamlet at the centre of the area, taking in Laindon, Pitsea and Vange.

URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL OF BILLERICAY
NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING
ON
BASILDON
NEW TOWN
AT WHICH
The Right Hon.
Lewis Silkin, M.P.
MINISTER OF TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING
HAS CONSENTED TO ATTEND
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH 1948
AT 7.30 p.m.
At SECONDARY SCHOOLS
HIGH RD., LAINDON
DOORS OPEN 7 p.m.



Fryerns Farm stood where Whitmore Court now is, just off of Whitmore Way. It gave its name to the Fryerns area and Fryerns School.

The farm was the first to be compulsory purchased for the building of the New Town.

The trees lining the track way from Cranes Farm Road can still be seen in Whitmore Park.



As Basildon New Town grew artist Maurice Lambert was commissioned in 1959 to create a piece of art that would represent the growth of the town.

Lambert spent more than a year on the statue, which was eventually installed in 1963. It cost £4,000 to make, over £60,000 in 2022.

Little could Lambert have known that his work would become a recognisable symbol for Basildon and at the centre of the Council's logo.

The Cold War ran from the end of the Second World War until 1991. During the time the threat of nuclear attack coming from the Soviet Union was a real danger.



From 1957 a total of 1,560 monitoring posts were installed across the UK. These subterranean posts were monitored by a member of the Corps who would rush to their post in the event of a nuclear attack so they could report any further explosions, monitor the radioactive fallout and to use specialist monitoring equipment to calculate how far they were from the explosion. The probes for these instruments would have been visible above ground.

Also above ground was the entry hatch which gave access to a 15-foot ladder that led down into the bunker and a ventilator to provide clean air for the bunker.

Two of these posts were installed in Basildon Borough. The first was in Vange, near Vange Hall and is now fenced off on Basildon Golf Course. It had been the subject of vandalism and arson in the years after it was closed in 1968.

The second was constructed during 1963 on a small site in Little Burstead near the church. This was closed in 1991, is on private land and is locked up. It is said to be in very good condition and to contain most of the equipment that was left in there in 1991.



Fords opened their tractor plant in 1964 on Cranes Farm Road. The construction saw the end of Oliphants Farm and Basildon Rectory.

Now a local landmark, the plants 125-foot-tall water tower is locally known as 'The Onion' and can be seen from around the borough and further afield. It has become an unofficial symbol for the town.

Today the plant is run and operated by Case-New Holland.

Basildon Development Corporation was created in 1951 with the first new homes being built in Vange and Fryerns.

The new housing was very well equipped and a lot of it was first occupied by the workmen employed in the construction. They were also a draw for the people already living in the area in houses on plotlands sites that didn't have the luxury of a modern bathroom, kitchen or running water.



From 1951 until 1972 the Development Corporation built over 15,000 properties for rent and 286 for sale (basildon.gov.uk).

They also built a number of schools, shops as well as improvements to existing roads and the creation of new roads.

There are still a few signs and objects in the area that bear the name of 'Basildon Development Corporation' or 'B.D.C.'

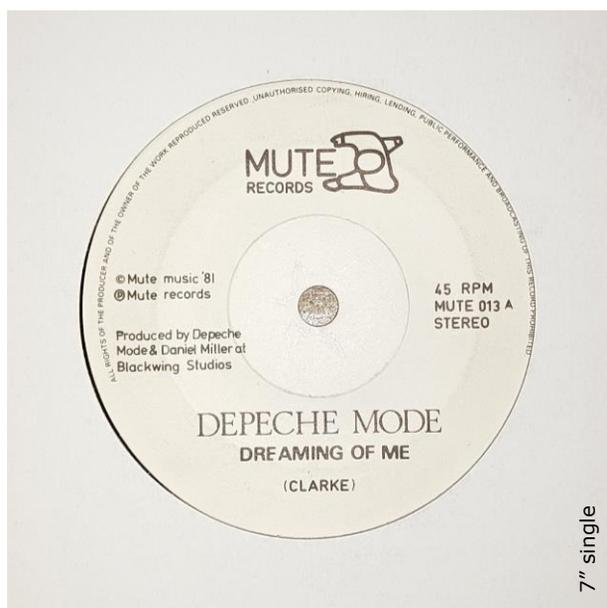
Basildon Development Corporation was wound up in 1986.

Depeche Mode were formed in Basildon during 1980, three of the founder members (Vince Clark, Andy Fletcher and Martin Gore) went to Nicholas Comprehensive School in Laindon. Dave Gahan, lead singer, was a pupil at Barstable. Fletcher and Gore were in the same class as Alison Moyet.

In May 1980 the band played their first gig at Nicholas Comprehensive, an event that is memorialised with a plaque.

The band's first single, 'Dreaming of Me' was recorded for Mute records in 1981 and made the top 60. Vince Clark left the band before the end of the year and would form Yazoo with Alison Moyet.

Depeche Mode have sold over 100 million records around the world and are still the town's most famous residents.





Basildon Council commissioned a project in 2010 to boost the economy in the borough. One of the ideas that was put into place was the erection of a Basildon sign, made up of 5 feet high letters on the side of the road next to the A127 at Noak Bridge.

The sign was the subject of much media interest at the time and was discussed on BBC1's 'Have I Got News For You' programme.

The sign is often illuminated in different colours in support of different events. It is still a very visible part of the borough.



@BasildonHistory

2022