

CANVEY ISLAND – SCRIPT

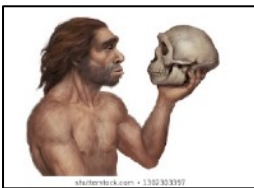
Picture 01 – Opening Screen and preamble.



Essex 450,000 years ago is unrecognisable. The River Thames flowed eastwards above London around the areas that became Chelmsford and Colchester, and the Medway flowed northwards across Essex towards Clacton.

Evidence of living in the area include 400,000-year-old finds at Clacton including flint chopping tools and a worked wooden staff have given the name “Clactonian Man” to a whole group of Homo Erectus people.

Picture 02 – Neanderthal Man (no not Norman Bambridge).



Hippopotamus were here 120,000 years ago. Then during the most recent Ice-Age a vast sheet of ice diverted the Thames and the Medway to their current positions.

Reindeer and Artic Wolves arrived while the Hippopotamus died out. When the last Ice-Age ended, Britain was joined to the European land mass.

This increase in warmth drove the local reindeer north, leaving the dense forests of birch, pine, hazel and alder to the elk, aurochs (Cows as big as Elephants), red deer, beaver. Summer heat allowed the pond tortoise to flourish in East Anglia.

The forest-dwelling MAGLEMOSIANS arrived from Denmark, they hunted deer, understood breeding habits, followed migration routes but did not enclose animals — living off red deer and roe deer, wild cattle and wild pig.

They also fished in fresh-water lakes with harpoons and nets and dwelt seasonally in lake-side raft-houses where they collected molluscs (oysters, periwinkles, cockles and mussels) and crustaceans.

During the Middle Stone Age, the SAUVETERRIANS came. They made clearings — the first in Britain in the all-pervading forests, their nearest-known dwellings were between Daws Heath and Thundersley.

In this part of the lecture I am going to quickly go through to the Bronze Age approximately 2500 BC to 800 BC. Then to the Iron Age to around 100AD the Late Iron Age.

Picture 03 – Roman Triremes.



Born in Alexandria in Egypt, when he was surveying the Isle of Grain and Sheppey. Ptolemy mentions the island as ‘Counos’ or Connenus’

but equally this may have been the names given to Sheppey.

The mainland was covered by Forest except where Iron-age Britons had made clearances from about the fifth century B.C. and by the time of the arrival of Romans, around 43 A.D. there must have been a settlement on the Island.

Triremes would pass up the river with their banks of oars – but because of the wide, soft yielding mud and the weight of the heavily armed and armour protected Romans would be generally safe from the arrows of the Britons but equally couldn't attack in return.

Picture 04 – Salt Pans.



Salarium was the salt money (blocks of salt) they received. Of course that is now known as Salary.

Salt was produced from distilling sea-water in the “Red Hills” situated along the banks of the tidal rivers. Of the two hundred or so found in Essex, Canvey had at least twelve and therefore must have been a major salt producing area.

Picture 05 – Wattle and Daub construction.



Portions of pipe clay figurines of Venus have been found at Rawreth and this almost certainly relates to the Roman Road between Canvey and Chelmsford of approximately fourteen miles.

It is possible that a small camp at Hadleigh, large enough for a cohort of 500 men, discovered outlined on the downs towards Hadleigh Castle, could be an outpost.

Although discovered by an aerial photograph in 1949, so far, it has not been excavated, neither has a similar sized one on Upper Horse Island on the other side of Canvey.

Picture 06 - SAXON AND DANE



There are no signs of Saxon invasion, though the fact that the farm at Leigh Beck was destroyed by fire, could indicate that it had been attacked.

The only reminder of the Saxon invasion, which gave its name to the County - the land of the East Saxons, is, Canvey's name, the land of Cana's people.

Picture 07 - HOW THE DANES WERE DEFEATED AT BENFLEET



In the autumn of 892 a large Danish fleet, some two hundred and fifty vessels strong, sailed across the channel. They landed at Lympe on the South Coast of Kent. Retracing the route taken by the Roman invaders some 850 years earlier.

This double threat was of concern to King Alfred. He particularly feared that the two parties would combine to form a formidable force. To counter this he positioned his army midway between the two camps.

Throughout the winter of 892-893 his men were continually raiding the invaders, gradually whittling down their powers and eventually the Danish Chief, Haesten was compelled to meet with the English leader. Haesten gave an oath to Alfred that he would keep the peace.

At Benfleet, fortifications were raised by the side of the creek to make the base secure from attack. Parties were constantly raiding the surrounding countryside for food and valuables, the inhabitants of nearby London suffered particularly severely.

Then came the king's troops and routed the enemy, broke down the work, took all that was therein, money, women and children and brought them all to London.

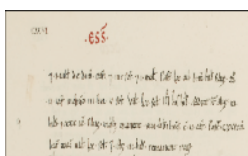
All the ships they either broke to pieces, or burned. **.So you see, it was us and not the Vikings that burned their longboats!**

PICTURE 08 – Earldoman Brythmoth.



In the year 991, the Saxons under the Earldoman Brythmoth were defeated in the Battle of Maldon and in 1016 Canute beat Edmund Ironside possibly at Ashingdon on the River Crouch, within a month of the battle, Edmund was dead and Canute (Knut), King of England.

Picture 09 – Domesday Book (FROM THE NORMAN CONQUEST TO TUDOR TIMES)



The Norman's under William I, had carried out the last real invasion and later William sent his Commissioners around the countryside (1086-7) making a survey of all land belonging to the King.

On the day appointed for Barstable Hundred, men from South Benfleet and Thundersley, with others from North Benfleet, Wheatley (Rayleigh), Wickford, Laindon, Pitsea, Vange and all the lands around, accompanied by their Priests, took the paths to Barstable to give their evidence to the Commissioners.

Picture 10 – A Mill.



It was the manor of North Benfleet which before the conquest had been held by King Harold and at the time of Domesday was in the hands of William and in the care of a certain Ranulph its bailiff.

The mill stood in South Benfleet **which could have been on Canvey** and was tidal, high up in the creek where it narrows enough to catch the incoming and outgoing tides.

It belonged jointly to the Abbey and the King and all those who lived on the two manors had to use it and pay for 'multure' this is, to have their own corn ground there.

Picture 11 – Nine Parishes of Canvey.



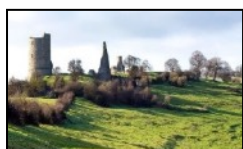
As early as 1066 the Essex marshes held about eighteen thousand sheep and as time passed, numbers grew larger and larger, for the sheep was a useful animal, providing meat, fat, wool and cheese.

Canvey cheese from the milk of sheep was almost the only kind that Londoner's could buy in the 'middle' ages.

A manor was held by Sweyne who lived in Rayleigh Castle. This too had pastures for two hundred and fifty sheep presumably on Canvey.

Some five hundred years later, this was one of the marshes in the hands of the Appleton family who were chief among those who embanked Canvey.

Picture 11 - HADLEIGH CASTLE



This rebuilding caused much hardship, and was responsible for the fact that at least seven are named at an 'inquisition' at Chelmsford in the fifth year of Richard II's reign. **This was the peasant revolt of 1381.**

Whether anyone lived on Canvey then is doubtful but men of Corringham, Vange and Fobbing, some of whom must have been responsible for sheep on the Island, led the uprising, men from Benfleet went too.

A ferry from Benfleet via Canvey was used by the leaders in rousing the men before they attacked the King's Commissioner, Thomas Bampton at Brentwood. They burned manor records and marched to Mile End and Smithfield, where their leader Wat Tyler was killed.

A few of the braver souls fought the King's men at the Battle of Billericay only to be ridden down by horsemen, their pikes and farming tools being quite inadequate against trained bowmen and the cavalry of Thomas Woodstock and Sir Thomas Percy.

Picture 13 - MEDIAEVAL TIMES



However, since pasture for sheep was needed, it, like other areas, would be inhabited by a community of shepherds living in temporary shelters and guarding their sheep against high tides.

Canvey has, in the fifteenth century, two references to the building of sea walls in the bailiff's accounts in the manor of Southchurch.

For its pastures about four thousand sheep of very delicate flavour, which have seen youths, carrying only a womanly task, milk, with small stools fastened to their buttocks and make ewe's cheeses in these cheese sheds which are called "Wickes"

The 'wickes' which have given their names to various parts of the island and other areas of the marshy coastline, were rough huts placed on the highest points, a safe place for sheep in times of exceptionally high tides.

Mention is made of these in the sixteenth century records: Knightswick, Southwyke and Attenash, Northwyke and Westwyke also Chaflett and Fartherwick, Salt marsh, Ant Liche and Wolfspittle.

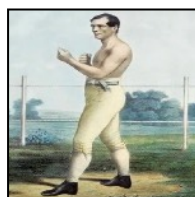
Picture 14 - THE LOBSTER SMACK



There would have been every justification for the location of an Inn there, since Holehaven Creek is a deep and sheltered inlet where many vessels would take up anchorage.

The Lobster Smack was host to prize knuckle fighting. It was not unusual to find a 'grudge match' in progress, due to a long-standing dispute.

Picture 15 – Ben Caunt and Nathaniel Langham.



The Fight resulting in a sixty round "agreed Draw" an amicable conclusion at this stage, for they had decided to end it by shaking hands.

Here I will also jump ahead to the twentieth Century and the "Stone Frigate" otherwise known as HMW Lobster Smack which for a short time was a part of the Royal Navy – a shore station of the River Emergency Service from 1939.

Brought into being at short notice by the Port of London Authority, Holehaven being the most seaward station and in 1940 the Royal Navy took over from the PLA and the shore station was established for the duration. Liquid refreshment was available at all hours.

PICTURE 16 - THE DUTCH COTTAGE ON CANVEY



By 1620 the need for enclosing the whole island became urgent. It is probable that at least one Dutchman was already settled here, the older Dutch Cottage dates from 1618 and they were already involved higher up the river at Dagenham.

From then onwards, the walled-in islands were divided into “third acre lands” (those which had been Croppenburgs share) “freelands” (those belonging to the previous owners and their successors) and “outsands” (land later reclaimed privately).

Though there is no proof, it is generally agreed that the engineer, who drew up the plans and was responsible for the drainage, was Cornelius Vermuyden who had married Croppenburg’s niece and who had been involved in the Dagenham levels.

So thoroughly did Vermuyden accomplish his task of reclamation, both here and in other adjacent reaches of the Thames at Dagenham, that King Charles I, recognising his skill and ability in this respect, conferred Knighthood upon him at Whitehall on 6th January, 1628 hence, through his connection with Canvey Island he became Sir Cornelius Vermuyden.

When the island was secured from tides, considerable numbers of Dutch labourers settled and they petitioned George Montaigne, Bishop of London, that services should be held in Dutch, either in some near church, or in the house they had provided and fitted for divine service until they had built their intended chapel, within two or three years.

This petition apparently was granted by King Charles I allowing them to **“do honour to the Great Architect of the Universe.”**

The Dutch religion and its conduct in the Dutch tongue seems to have perturbed the British dwellers on the island. Their Parish Church was St. Mary the Virgin at South Benfleet and in order to save their long journey in all weathers, they, in turn, petitioned the Dutch for the occasional use of their church, whereby the service could be rendered in English.

This, the Dutch peremptorily declined, with the result that the British indignation and resentment was aroused and anarchy between the two factions became so rife that on Whitsun Monday 1656, it culminated in a general riot and a free fight for the possession of the church.

Picture 17 – Dutch Fleet.



“Early in June 1667, during what is known as the Second Dutch War, the Dutch Fleet under the great Admiral de Ruyter, entered the mouth of the Thames, there being at sea no English fleet capable of meeting it.

On the 9th de Ruyter detached a squadron of eighteen light ships and frigates, with one thousand men, under Vice Admiral Van Ghent, to ascend the Thames and endeavour to surprise English ships they had heard were in the river.

In the evening, the wind fell and the squadron unable in consequence, to advance further than Hole Haven, at the western end of Canvey Island, where they anchored. On the following day, the 10th, in the morning, some of the crews landed on Canvey, where they stole some sheep and burned houses and barns.

Of this latter event, from English sources, there is ample evidence that it really took place. Thus on the same day news reached Chelmsford and Sir John Bramston, writing thence to a friend in London, informs him that “the enemy hath burned barns and houses on Canvie Island.”

By the 11th the news had got to Harwich and in a letter to Williamson, Secretary of State in London. Learned the Dutch had ‘landed in Canvey and plundered it’ They had a score of small boats which are for that purpose, and I believe they intend little else than to steal sheep; which they attempted at St. Osyth but the people appearing prevented it.

Further, one John Conny, a ship’s surgeon, forwarding to Williamson several days later, a narrative of the events of the raid, says: “On the 10th, in the morning, (the enemy) fired eight or nine houses on Canvie Island, on the Essex side of the Thames and stole sheep.”

Picture 18 – The Dengie Mosquito



Daniel Defoe makes this comment:

“I took notice of the strange decay of the sex here insomuch There was a farmer who was then living with the five and twentieth wife, and that his son, who was then about thirty-five had already about fourteen.

That when they took the young lasses out of the wholesome and fresh air, they were healthy, fresh and clean, but when they came out of the native air into the marshes among the fog and damp, they presently changed their complexion, got an ‘ague’ or two and seldom held above a half year, or a year at the most.”

PICTURE 19 – The first Dutch Chapel on Canvey Island.



The tumble-down desecrated, barn-like structure which had been used as a church by the Dutch, did not last long in the hands of the English.

Thanks to the generosity of a certain Mr. Edgar, then owner of Charfleets Farm, Canvey Island, it was pulled down and a more

suitable structure erected to accommodate about eighty people.

Dedicated to St. Katherine it was duly consecrated by the Bishop of London on 11th June, 1712 and a Curate was appointed to preach twenty sermons per annum at the highly remunerative figure of ten pounds for the course.

Other floods occurred in 1713 and particularly in 1736. The "Gentleman's Magazine" for February 1736 describes "The little Isles of Candy (Canvey) and Fowlness (Foulness), on the coast of Essex, were quite under water, not a hoof was saved thereon.

These floods probably due to the inadequate care of the sea-wall, besides causing loss to the eighty inhabitants and landowners, probably undermined the foundations of the chapel, for in 1745 a new chapel, this time dedicated to St. Peter, was built by Daniel Scratton of Prittlewell.

On days when services were to take place, a flag was hoisted onto a small spire and the shutters taken down. Since the minister awaited the hoisting of the flag before coming from the mainland, it was sometimes "unsuitable" not because of the weather but because a cargo of smuggled goods was being hidden there before being distributed inland.

Indeed, it could be dangerous as for instance, in September 1859 when the Reverend John Aubone Cook, Vicar of South Benfleet, returning from visiting one of his parishioners on Canvey, lost his way, fell into a dyke and was dead within two weeks from typhoid fever.

New lands were being regained during this century with new walls and counter walls "Newlands", "Sunken Marsh" and Sixty Acres" are some of these, especially on the Hadleigh Ray area.

Although most of the inhabitants of Canvey were Essex born and only a few came from places as farther afield, nevertheless, Canvey was not without a "foreign" community for further up Holehaven Creek, was the 'Emulous' a Watch vessel belonging to the Preventative Service and manned by men from Cornwall, Devon and Northern Ireland.

This Coast Guard Station had not been established without good reason as the desolate Essex marshlands provided numerous isolated spots where contraband could be (and was) landed safely and the people of Canvey, like other Essex marshmen, were not above engaging in a little "free trade."

The method most frequently employed in the estuary was the bladder and feather marker. Small craft such as fishing boats would bring spirit and other taxed commodities from places such as Amsterdam and would throw them overboard attached to a line.

Anyone wishing to own a boat had to obtain permission and a license from H.M. Excise Department and each application was forwarded to a central office with a report from the local excise man testifying as to the reputation of the applicant.

The farms, mainly built on old 'wicks' changed hands often. Not one of the twenty-two farms between 1773 and 1777 was owner occupied but they were let to bailiffs and their families.

PICTURE 20 - CHARLES DICKENS



The description and circumstances, however, do give us the idea of what it might have looked like at that time

In May, Dickens took a few days' holiday in [Dover](#). On the eve of his departure, he took some friends and family members for a trip by boat from Blackwall to Southend-on-Sea.

The mini-cruise was actually a working session for Dickens to examine banks of the river in preparation for the chapter devoted to Magwitch's attempt to escape.

On 11 June 1861, Dickens wrote that *Great Expectations* had been completed and on 15 June, asked the editor to prepare the novel for publication.

Two points in the story certainly tie in with the Lobster Smack. The custom ship "Emulous" later to be replaced by the coastguard post and cottages in 1852, was moored in the Holehaven.

PICTURE 21 – The Coastguard Cottages.



The eight Coast Guard Cottages built around 1883.

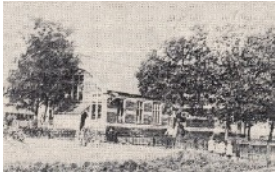
Secondly, the bodies often those of "preventative men" or customs officers who had been killed after boarding ships in the Thames, were washed up by the current into "Dead Man's Bay" as Thorney Bay used to be called.

By 1881, the economy of the island was in a very poor state. There were only forty-one occupied houses and farmers could not sell their wheat owing to the importation of wheat from Canada and the United States of America. In 1882 six farms, Knightswick, Kibcaps, Kittcats, Scar House, Lubbins (or Labworth) and Northwick were up for sale.

To add to the farmer's difficulties, on 18th January 1881, a fierce gale caused a breach in the sea wall for three miles from Sluice House to Leigh Beck. Huge gaps of ten to fifteen yards wide, were ripped out of the walls and tossed into the delf ditch behind.

Some fifteen hundred acres were submerged, and houses were flooded to a depth of two and a half feet.

PICTURE 22



The Reverend Henry Hayes had arrived as Curate in Charge, became the first vicar and began nineteen years of service to the community. Within three years he had built a new school for about fifty pupils and a new Church, dedicated to St. Katherine.

The school stood opposite the Church. To commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria, in 1887, he set about the sinking of a well to give the island a supply of fresh water.

Previously according to a contemporary writer “the only source of water for many of the inhabitants had been rain, or ditch water.”

Sinking the well was entrusted to Mr. Furlong who had to bore through some three hundred feet of mixed beds of sand and London Clay. It was, however, a great day when the well was officially opened on 5th December, 1889.

PICTURE 23



For the next thirty-three years the pump remained in constant use and during this period its reputation for providing water regarded as the “best supply in the parish.”

A thatched roof covered the iron pump and around the eaves a painted wooden board bore the inscription “Whosoever drinketh of this water that I shall give, shall never thirst.”

When the Reverend Henry Hayes died in the first year of the Twentieth Century, in his obituary it was said “he had presided over his remote island parish, the welfare of which was profoundly near to his heart.

PICTURE 24 - BEFORE THE BRIDGE



At low tide the famous “Stepping Stones, in this picture taken around 1928 were the only means to cross. (the insert in 1905).

PICTURE 25



And at high tide the Ferryman earned his living.

PICTURE 26



THE CHAPMAN LIGHTHOUSE

After more than a century of use, a short ceremony was held to say 'goodbye' to Chapman Sands Lighthouse before it was demolished in 1957. The Lighthouse with its clockwork mechanism came into operation in 1851, four years after a lightship had been moored in the area.

Part of the 1951 centenary celebrations of the Chapman Lighthouse

The salt water eventually took its toll and the lighthouse became in danger of collapse. Today, in its place, bobbing, eight hundred yards off-shore, is a single bell-buoy. No doubt it does the job but is considered to be a far less attractive guardian.

Picture 27 - AND FINALLY! ANY QUESTIONS