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XII: St Osyth to the Naze: North-East Essex Coastal Parishes. Part 1: St Osyth, Great and Little Clacton, Frinton, Great Holland and Little Holland

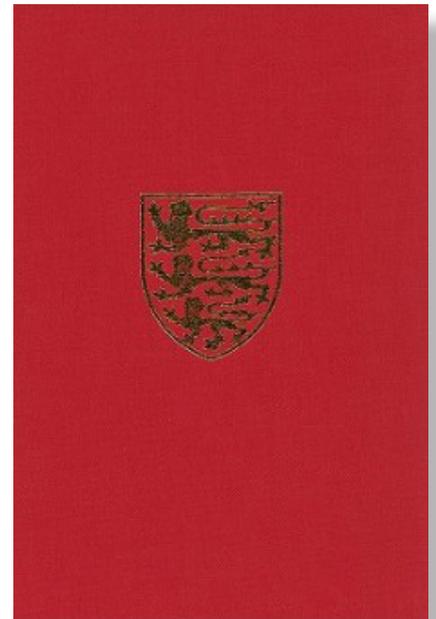
Edited by **CHRISTOPHER C. THORNTON AND HERBERT EIDEN**

The nine Essex parishes lying in a coastal district between St Osyth and the Naze headland at Walton encompass a number of distinct landscapes, from sandy cliffs to saltmarshes, recognised as environmentally significant. The landscape has constantly changed in response to changing sea levels, flooding, draining and investment in sea defences. Inland, there was an agriculturally fertile plateau based on London Clay, but with large areas of Kesgrave sands and gravels, loams and brickearths. Parts were once heavily wooded, especially at St Osyth.

The district was strongly influenced by the pattern of estate ownership, largely held by St Paul's Cathedral from the mid-10th century. About 1118-19 a bishop of London founded a house of Augustinian canons at St Osyth, which became one of the wealthiest abbeys in Essex. Most other manors and their demesnes in the district were small and their demesne tenants were of little more than local significance.

The area's economy was strongly affected by the coast and its many valuable natural resources, including the extraction or manufacture of sand, gravel, septaria, copperas and salt, and activities such as fishing, tide milling, wrecking and smuggling. However, it remained a largely rural district and its wealth ultimately depended upon the state of farming. Until the eighteenth century it specialised in dairying from both sheep and cattle, but afterwards production shifted towards grain.

The coastal area has produced significant evidence of early man and was heavily exploited and settled in prehistory. The medieval settlement pattern largely conformed to a typical Essex model, with a complex pattern of small villages, hamlets and dispersed farms, many located around greens or commons.



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Images from inside



Fig. 136 The York Road Gap in the early 20th century, before the resort development and sea defences had closed it off. Several 'gaps' through the cliffs to the beaches along the Holland and Clacton coastlines were used for the legitimate landing of goods and for smuggling.



Fig. 85 The chancel at St Osyth showing the unusual horseshoe arrangement of the communion rails known as 'The Fold'.



Fig. 124 Great Holland scenes in the early 20th century, including Manor Farm and the new Village Hall (also named the Institute).



Fig. 3 Mowing gang on the marshes at Blockhouse Wick, St Osyth, in the late 19th century. The large scale and open nature of the marshland landscape is evident.