

THE HISTORY OF HARWICH, DOVERCOURT, PARKESTON, LITTLE OAKLEY & RAMSEY

This is a new parish that came into existence in May 2004 by joining the three parishes of Harwich, Dovercourt and Parkeston, and Ramsey with Little Oakley. The population of the new parish is 20,997. There are four churches.

The Parish is situated in the north east of Essex on a peninsula created by the North Sea and the river Stour. St Nicholas Church – in the old medieval town of Harwich was built in 1820 and designed for civic, ceremonial and military occasions. It holds approximately 800 people.



Harwich, known as the “Gateway to Europe”, is an important port providing safe anchorage in all weathers to shipping along the east coast. For many hundreds of years, it has been the starting point for voyages of discovery and trade with Europe. Any hostilities inevitably placed Harwich in the front line from the 14th century to the 20th century.

Its prosperity, related almost entirely to the sea, is reflected in its fine Georgian and Victorian buildings. Of particular interest are:-

- The Guild Hall, a Grade I listed building.
- The Redoubt, a Napoleonic Fort built to repel the French.
- The Electric Palace, a Grade II listed building. One of the oldest purpose built cinemas to survive. Opening in 1911, it continues showing films today.

Harwich is also the headquarters for Trinity House (the national buoyage authority), and has a lifeboat station.



Dovercourt is principally residential with the shopping centre built in the second half of the 19th century. The town extends westwards to upper Dovercourt, with the Norman church of All Saints, and is mentioned in the Domesday Book.



From the early 19th century Dovercourt became an attractive seaside resort, with promenade, bandstands, boating lake, swimming pool and holiday camp. The population increased with a national interest in seaside holidays. Dovercourt boasts a Blue Flag beach and is still popular with the holiday-makers today, many of whom stay at the caravan park.

Parkeston was built as a Victorian 'industrial' railway village, alongside the River Stour. Huge investment in the 1880's developed the riverside into a new port for shipping and railway, up river from Harwich. The village prospered considerably in the early 20th century with almost 1,000 people employed at the port and railway. It was also used as a naval base in the first and second world wars. With the cessation of British Rail Shipping a number of foreign companies took control.

The present church, St Paul's, was built largely due to subscriptions from railway workers in 1914. The village also has a Methodist Church, which has a function room, used for social meetings and mother and baby group. There is a golf club, a welfare park, bowls and a football pitch – the pitch is used for youth matches – in the village.

Parkeston has over recent years become popular with young first time house buyers, and young families, taking advantage of affordable housing.



There is an oil refinery situated to the west end of the village, with port facilities for a tanker. Parkeston Quay is known as Harwich International Port for thousands of visitors each year from Europe, and passengers on the cruise ships that pass through the port. A retail park has been built in Parkeston, which includes a supermarket, garden centre, DIY store, clothes and shoe shops. A travel inn has also been recently completed.

Further west are the villages of Ramsey and Little Oakley, which retain their rural and agricultural characters. They are small villages largely made up of fields and meadows. The small church, St Michaels is also mentioned in the Domesday Book and has a Norman tower. There have been many additions to the church; the last one in 2000 is the Millennium Room, which is well used. Ramsey village is in part designated as a Conservation Area, and contains a prominent listed windmill. A new country park adjoining the church is being planned which will ensure the church will keep its rural setting.

The towns and villages benefit from a bypass linking the ports with the A120/A12 diverting heavy traffic. With the rise in house prices in the south-east, all parts of the peninsula have seen a growth in population and new housing. Many people have moved from Colchester, Chelmsford and beyond, some commuting to work and many others retiring to the area.

Recreation

The area has many clubs and activities including:-

Sailing (two clubs), bowls (indoor and outdoor), golf, football, swimming, roller skating, putting green, boating lake, model boating lake, theatre groups, choirs, bands, orchestras, scouts and guides.

THE FUTURE

Regional Planning Guidance identifies Harwich as one of the Priority Areas for Economic Regeneration. Under the latest EU review, the majority of the Tendring District is currently classified as an area eligible for Enterprise Grants. The plan also encourages further retailing and services, offices, leisure, recreation, tourism, entertainment and cultural activities within Harwich. The area is identified as a priority area for coastal tourism where existing tourist attractions/facilities should be retained and upgraded with new investment positively encouraged.



Harwich International Port offers potential for large-scale economic growth, through the development of Bathside Bay. There are plans for the regeneration of 'Old Harwich' as a result of the move by Trinity House into their new purpose built accommodation on the quayside. A new country park is proposed for the land to the north and east of the church at Ramsey.

BathsideBay

The economy of the Harwich area is heavily dependent upon the Port and its associated industries and services. Bathside Bay comprises of previously reclaimed land and inter-tidal mudflats situated between Harwich International Port and Gashouse Creek, up river from Harwich Quay.

Developers plan to build a new dock area on reclaimed land, which could greatly increase employment in the town. The Government will soon make a decision based on the results of a public inquiry.

Hospital

The existing cottage hospital is being replaced with a purpose built hospital and health centre. Work has started and will be completed in 2005 and the hospital will be operative early in 2006.

The new hospital will include a large ward for inpatients, a theatre for minor operations, including cataracts, an endoscopy suite, maternity unit, community dentistry, a purpose built base for district nurses and health visitors, a medical library and resource centre and enhanced diagnostic facilities. There will also be a large car park.