

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

ERL - 12

Where did you say you were living?

69 Ram Gorse,
Harlow, Essex,
England.

25 February 1968

Mr. R.H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 10016

Dear Mr. Nolte,

On the evening I returned to Harlow to live in Ram Gorse, Little Parndon, I was given a delightful and instructive gift, a brand new publication of the Harlow Museums Advisory Committee "Place Names in Harlow". On reflection I'm not sure if I was given the booklet in spite of the fact or because I innocently asked if Ram Gorse was some kind of modified bull run. Gorse it turns out is a prickly low plant with yellow flowers. Where these terraced houses now stand sheep once grazed among the gorse. The next field was a heronry. But that's not all I've learned.

What's in a name anyway? Harlow comes from the Saxon "here" meaning army or host, and "hlaw" a hill. "Here" pronounced "har" refers "to the tribes of the hundred when they met for the moot". The specific "hlaw" where those Saxon committees met, although spelled variably over the ages, is an exact point behind what is now called the Mulberry Green House. The combined place name made its first registered appearance in the Domesday Book, as Harlaua. Nine spelling mutations and four centuries later the issue was resolved as Harlowe. Perhaps modern efficiency knocked off the final "e", the booklet doesn't say. It does mention that in 1956 Wytch Elm lost its "t" for no reportable reason. The long ago cross roads of rural Essex, still heavily shaded by elm trees is an area of small service shops near the new town center.

In 1947 Old Harlow and its environs had a total population of 200. Today there are more than 75,000 Harlowites, about half of whom were born here. Most of the rest came from London, especially its East End, an area which has a vivid history of its own. Nevertheless, in establishing the new town, the Harlow Development Corporation and the Harlow Urban District Council (the public agency and the local government) have deliberately perpetuated names already associated with this part of Essex. In choosing names they have had plenty of help. It is the English tradition not only to name everything in sight, but to catalogue it meticulously as well. The guide lists 345 streets, roads, cross roads, housing clusters, individual buildings, shopping centers and landmarks. The source books used for inspiration published since the Domesday Book in 1086 were: an index of Essex field names, a two volume history of Essex published in 1786, two volumes of wills recorded at Chelmsford covering the period 1400-1720, the Quarter Session Rolls of Essex and the Tithe Awards, a parish by parish census document compiled in the 1840's showing the owners, tenants, field names, acreage and use of every corner of the area. In addition there is a minority of plain no nonsense names listed as "modern - Harlow Development Corporation".

There is a kind of system underpinning the Harlow names. The town is divided into large neighbourhood districts or parishes (see index) and the intermediate

"spine" roads of the districts all have names beginning with the same letter of the alphabet - M in Mark Hall, T in Tye Green. Roads between the large districts were named for town planning pioneers. Thus, Howard Way for Ebenezer Howard who dreamed of garden cities, and Abercrombie Way for Sir Patrick Abercrombie whose 1944 plan for Greater London suggested the area around Old Harlow as a new town site. Drably, the four roads leading away from the town center (the High) are numbered avenues. Still, that doesn't distract from the effect of the wholesale christening that accompanied the growth of the new town. The guide offers a fast eclectic survey of English History emphasizing local personalities as well as the characteristic agriculture and industry of this part of Essex.

The Crown Offices in the High are in Beaufort House named after Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of King Henry VII who "acquired" a manor here in 1505. In 1262 Miss Katherine de Winton, a local heiress, married a John de London, As his name was already well established the manor house was named for her. A later lord of Katherine's, Andrew Finche, who died in 1563, is remembered at Finchmoor which is near present day Catherines. In 1270 Richard the Ploughman received a small-holding of 30 acres which he called Dashes Farm. The Broomhill Cottages, old people's housing, is in the Dashes, Old Harlow. Prentice Place off Potter Street remembers the Prentice family who owned the Pot House in the 15th century. They made implements although they may have smoked stuff too. In the 16th century the Buggs family rebuilt a manor house called Brendhall, which meant Burnthall, which it was. Not to tempt fate or experiment boldly they called their structure New Hall. While the present Harlow New Hall is physically contemporary the name isn't. Burgoyne House is named for a Montague Burgoyne who bought Mark Hall in 1775. Yes, American history scholars, that name should ring a bell, Montague was the brother of the gentleman general John.

Several names refer to previously practiced trades: Felmongers, now a place, were people who prepared skins for tanning, Fullers Mead is where fullers cleaned wool.

A number of field names and crop descriptions have been preserved: Primrose Field, Clover Field, Barley Croft, Ash Tree Field, Rye Croft, as well, of course, as Ram Gorse. Historically, Ladyshot was the pasture where the ladies of Mark Hall took their recreation. Although Watersmeet sounds very imposing it is just the spot where two bubbling brooks join before flowing into the River Stort. Greygoose Park, however, does not refer to a place where honking poultry roamed, but to a local family, one of whom, a John Greygoose, served on the jury rolls in 1582.

Partridge Place too, has nothing to do with feathered friends or even usual accounts of Essex Gentry. A local "rogue" named Richard Partridge was caught and flogged on the spot on 2 September 1567. The name then found its way into the Essex catalogue, and was one of a number of suggestions offered to the decision makers a few years ago. They thought it sounded nice and didn't bother to ask where it came from. It's all right though, the upholders of local justice were remembered. Tany's Dell refers to the prominent deTani family whose number included Sir Peter deTani, Sheriff of Essex from 1236-1239.

The contemporary town fathers delicately forgot to carry forward several long standing names. Whatever happened to Beggar's Hall, Hanging Acre, Cock Sailors and Great Herrings? They've gone now and almost forgotten, except by the Museums Association. The medieval description of a bit of high ground projecting into the Stort marshes made it - happily it is still the Hoo.

Neighbourhood districts in Harlow

- Old Harlow The original town. Name comes from the Saxon.
- Potter Street Potters worked in the area. It was called Pottershill as early as 1254. The parish of Potter Street was established in 1867.
- Brays Grove The deBray family held the Netteswellbury manor in the 12th century. There is also a field called Old Bray's in the Tithe awards.
- Tye Green The Saxon word "teay" meant a clearing or a green clearing in the forest.
- Latton Bush This one is tricky. It could come from the Old English "leactun" which meant kitchen garden, but an 18th century scholar thought it was a corruption of Late Town, meaning a parish lately erected out of the forest.
- Netteswell The other Harold, the big loser who was not a technocrat, gave Netteswellbury to the Secular Canons at Waltham in 1060. They held onto it until the dissolution under Henry VIII. It may mean either stream or well, or cattle and well.
- Hare Street The Saxon word, part of the town name, is "hare". The street is pronounced "hair" the town "har".
- Little Parndon The word pirige, for pear tree, is common in this county. The Domesday book refers to the area as Perenduna.
- Passmores The name and manor of a Norman family; a Ralph Passemer is in the record books of 1198.
- Kingsmoor The immediate source is a house of the same name. There was a William Kings Field, and an Edward King of this district left a will in 1683.
- Pinnacles
Industrial Estate The now displaced woods were called the Pinnacles.
- Templefields
Industrial Estate The site of a Roman temple. It's on the other side of the railroad tracks but doing nicely nonetheless.

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