

Historical approaches to
seaside heritage in relation to
the resort areas in the Tendring
District of north Essex

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1. Introduction

This document has been produced as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Essex County Council funded development phase for the 'Resorting to the Coast' Project. The project is exploring and interpreting the unique seaside and resort heritage of the Tendring Coastal Towns through a wide range of activities, events, programmes and exhibitions. The towns covered by the project are Harwich/Dovercourt, Frinton, Walton-on-the-Naze, Clacton and Jaywick.

This report will give a critical overview of the relevant secondary sources in order to identify key works in the field and to signpost further contextual reference. It will then discuss the findings of more recent research and, rather than reiterating existing studies, consider areas that have been under represented in recent academic works. The recently published Volume XI of the Victoria County History of Essex covers the resorts of north east Essex, and provides a substantial, well-researched and comprehensive study of the subject matter; this document, therefore, should complement and add some further detail to what can be readily gleaned from this publication and those detailed below.

2. Contextual Historiography

In the broader context of the historiography of tourism and leisure, as part of the post-war emergence of the study of social history in academia, Britain's coastline and seaside resorts have increasingly become a focus for academic attention. Pimlott's pioneering study *The Englishman's Holiday* was first

published in 1947; a second edition was published in 1976.¹ The early development of the seaside resort and the impact of the coming of the railways are considered, but the first edition was published before the author could have had any concept of the later post-war developments in domestic post-war tourism, although the development of the commercial holiday camp comes under analysis and some of the predictions made for the coming decades are worthy of note. In the introduction to the later edition it is noted that the government's 1942 estimate that there might be around forty-five million holidaymakers after the war - some ninety percent of the population - were seen by the author as excessive. In this case he was largely correct, but the effects of the popularisation and availability of the car, hire-purchase and increasing working-class consumerism were amongst the factors that Pimlott had not foreseen.² Geographer E. Gilbert produced a study of Brighton in 1954, adding to a number of resort studies published in that decade, which established a standard for academic study of individual key resorts; these works would remain as the only serious enquiries until John K. Walton's work, discussed further below, heralded the start of a more sustained and in-depth series of studies.³

Anthony Smith's 1972 book *Beside the Seaside* was published after the author and his team made a survey of Britain's 6,000 miles of coastline by sea, air and land.⁴ As a result of their work, a useful picture of the coastal strip is described and three fundamental issues are identified and suggestions to resolve these are offered. Ownership of land beyond the foreshore is seen as problematical; despoilment and restrictions of access to what is seen by the author as 'an obvious national asset' could be resolved by the nationalisation of a strip 100 yards deep from high water mark around the entire British coastline.⁵ Secondly, more investment in the coastline is called for to improve

access, remove military and industrial remains and to purchase land for public benefit. Finally, a plea is made for recreation to be the focus for Government when legislating for the coastline. A call for caravan legislation to be drastically altered should, it is argued, form a core part of a national coastal plan. Many aspects of the coastline are considered in this book, both physical and social; commercial holiday camps, oddly, are virtually ignored. The so-called 'caravan problem' was not a recent issue when this study was published, it had been brought to prominence over a decade earlier before the 1960 Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act was passed, but its inclusion and sustained discussion demonstrates that the subject was still controversial in some quarters.

Two key works were published in 1978 which examined significant aspects of domestic holiday taking. John Walton's study of the Blackpool landlady, the legendary proprietor of the northern seaside guest house, examined this subject critically for the first time.⁶ James Walvin's *Beside the Seaside* acknowledged that the story of the English seaside holiday had by now been told many times and told well by Pimlott- but that this earlier work was due for revision.⁷ Both Walton and Walvin break new ground here, not by reaffirming the causes of the dramatic growth of the resorts during the nineteenth century and the effects of rail and improved travel, but by considering the emergence of the popular seaside holiday as being part of the wider experience of the working classes in an industrial society. These are developmental factors that are shared by other aspects of twentieth-century holiday taking. Walvin briefly describes 'the rash of caravan parks which erupted around the coast' as symptomatic of the growth in car ownership, and creating 'still further difficulties for those concerned about the slow erosion of the shoreline by urban development.' As with Smith's study, the caravan site is depicted here as

a problematical manifestation of another, more acceptable phenomenon; in this case the growth of car use and ownership. It is hardly given the status of an independently originated holiday choice, even though it is also acknowledged here that caravans had created new dimensions in holiday making, not least by significantly increasing accommodation at seaside resorts. Importantly, the phenomenon is linked more generally to widening choice and the growth of consumer power amongst working people.⁸ The agency of working people to formulate their own solutions to holiday needs, by originating (in collaboration with suppliers, landowners and operators) camping grounds, plotland holiday homes and static holiday caravan sites is clearly a significant factor in coastal resort development.

One of the problems to emerge from the historiography of tourism and holidays in post-war Britain is the tendency to include commercial holiday camps, static and touring caravanning in the same classification when considering holiday choice, at worst simply making no clear distinction, despite the obvious differences. A. Burkart and S. Medlik do, however, albeit briefly, make the distinction in *Tourism: Past, Present and Future*, a wide-ranging study of UK tourism (both domestic and foreign) published in 1981, but the problem of a lack of distinction in available statistical data becomes all too obvious.⁹ Some useful statistical data for domestic tourism is given in chapter eight, but tables of collected figures in particular highlight the problem. Accommodation for UK holidays between 1951 and 1970 for example, is categorised into hotel or motel (licenced or unlicensed), holiday camp, friends or relatives, self-catering and other. Static caravan holidays seem to fall within the self-catering category (a figure which rises from twelve to thirty-five percent over the period), rather than holiday camp (rising from three to six percent), but it is unclear as to what else might fall within this category.¹⁰ The authors do

emphasise the wider problems and uncertainties of twentieth-century UK tourism data and its sources, an issue further discussed by Walton in his later work.¹¹ In addition to some useful but limited data, the problems of statistical inadequacy are further emphasised in a later work of similar theme: *British Tourism: The Remarkable Story of Growth*.¹²

A detailed and comprehensive analysis of the development of England's seaside resort towns, *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History, 1750 – 1914*, was published in 1983.¹³ In this work, Walton demonstrates clearly the agency of the working-class holidaymaker in the popularisation and development of the seaside resort during the later stages of the nineteenth century. This was not always an easy process. Until the end of the nineteenth century the seaside is suggested to have brought the classes together more in conflict than in harmony. But Walton sees this as changing around the turn of the century, as resorts gradually provided 'a valuable safety-valve, a legitimised escape from some of the more irksome constraints of everyday behaviour, for the Victorian middle classes as much as for their social inferiors.'¹⁴ This was an important factor in the development of twentieth-century working-class holiday taking, as the often-described liminality and license of the seaside resorts encouraged workers and their families to gradually move from visiting as day-trippers, to eventually gaining a more permanent stake in the seaside. This would take the form of either plotland holiday home or caravan accommodation as the century progressed. Whilst Walton's work extends only to 1914, he acknowledges that the later expansion of the holiday industry does take the form of caravan, chalet and camping provision, rather than urban development at resort towns.¹⁵

To understand the Tendring resorts in wider context, the sheer scale of the popularity of the resort in Britain during the twentieth century is emphasised by further work, particularly that which focuses on the key northern pleasure-capital, Blackpool. Gary Cross examined Mass Observation data derived from the group's study of the community of Worktown (Bolton) and their relationship with Blackpool, publishing his work in 1990 in *Worktowners at Blackpool*.¹⁶ The limitations of the Mass Observation data are stressed, yet this 'snapshot' of Britain's most populous holiday resort is nevertheless revealing.¹⁷ The agency of the working class in the establishment of Blackpool's huge holiday economy in the early and mid-twentieth century is, again, clear. Cross's work in concert with Walton's later *Blackpool*,¹⁸ illuminates the nature of development at the resort during the early and mid-twentieth century, in particular highlighting the factors that created the appeal for the northern working families and individuals. However, Walton's work here also details the later decline in post-war years; a phenomenon shared by most UK seaside resort towns, not least the Tendring resorts, as visitor numbers fall with traditional forms of accommodation such as the guest house and hotel becoming increasingly unpopular. Local social problems were exacerbated by high seasonal unemployment, crime and the high population of social security claimants in former holiday accommodation. Resorts also became very popular as places for the retired to live in the post-war years. Such themes receive further detailed examination in a collection of essays brought together in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts: Cultural and Economic Perspectives*, published in 1997.¹⁹ Of key importance in this collection is Julian Demetriadi's chapter, in which the author briefly discusses the growth of self-catered holiday accommodation in the post war years to the mid-70s. Some areas of growth are shown to have a high proportion of accommodation other than

hotels and guest houses: the counties of Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall are suggested to have had 32 holiday camps, 487 static caravan sites, 398 touring caravan sites, 177 camping sites and 31 hostels by 1969.²⁰ The reluctance toward encouraging the establishment of caravan sites around resort towns is seen as symptomatic of the view of such places as unsightly and destructive to the traditional accommodation industries.

The historiography of UK domestic tourism from the twenty-first century continues to include the seaside resort in work such as Walton's *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*²¹, but the focus now also shifts from place to activity. Claire Langhamer's *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60* throws some light upon the wider context in terms of gender, drawing upon primary sources in the form of Mass Observation data and oral histories. This is useful when considering notions of portable or transferrable domesticity and of gender roles and rituals in the holiday resort environment. Langhamer avers that as the commercial holiday camp allowed freedom from the daily domestic routine of cleaning, washing and meal preparation, it 'was particularly popular among working-class women who could afford it.'²² This particular analysis is unsatisfactory for much of the post-war experience, given the relative popularity of the self-catering holiday. As this popularity was predominantly with working-class families, then there were necessarily a large proportion of women in this group who did take holidays in which cleaning, washing and meal preparation were not catered for as part of the holiday.

The nature of consumerism within tourism itself is considered in more depth by Hartmut Berghoff in *The Making of Modern Tourism: The Cultural History of the British Experience, 1600-2000*.²³ This is a collection of essays which, whilst

concerned with international aspects of tourism as well as domestic, adds some further contextual understanding of the wider phenomenon. Much of that which the tourist consumes is identified as intangible, and therefore difficult to quantify. Inasmuch as this is the case within the domestic resort and/or self-catering holiday, it is certainly one of the causes of the difficulties that the researcher of such issues is confronted with when trying to access reliable quantitative data. Wider aspects of UK tourism (including travel abroad and domestic cultural tourism) are illustrated to have experienced growth during much of the second half of the twentieth century, and have served to provide alternatives to established forms. Much more broadly, tourism as a whole is seen as the 'world's largest single industry'.²⁴ This single industry is a collective which encompasses many rather more disparate activities; unfortunately this approach can often obscure more discrete forms when they are collected together and analysed under more generalised headings.

The wider industry is scrutinised more closely in John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze*, first published in 1990 (with a second edition published in 2002), this time from a sociological perspective. Urry emphasises tourism's social and economic significance whilst arguing that the activity is essentially a visually-led experience, analogous to Foucault's theories of visual classifications, discussed in his 1970 study *The Order of Things*. Whilst this work does indeed shed some new light on the nature and significance of tourism generally, it considers English working-class holidaymaking in the immediate post-war period (1945-59) as virtually synonymous with the commercial holiday camp. Whilst acknowledging change from the 1960's in terms of movement toward self-catering and cheap foreign holidays, self-catered holiday forms are unfortunately not considered specifically within the discussion, leaving the reader to make their own connections in this regard.²⁵ This is unfortunate,

because the agency of the working classes as demonstrated by the avoidance of state-approved and widely advertised holiday opportunities in the form of the commercial holiday camp, and the trend to initiate and originate alternative forms as exemplified by campsites, holiday plotland colonies and the early static holiday caravan sites, is ignored. This agency is indeed, as mentioned above, an important theme as it is a key aspect in the development of the post-war self-catered holiday and the decline of the earlier forms of accommodation such as the hotel and guest house. Its impact upon the resort environment in the post-war period was tangible and controversial: the reported appearance of haphazard groups of caravans that 'littered' particular stretches of coastline and various inland locations gave rise to references from more middle-class individuals and environmental groups to the 'Caravan Problem'. This, in turn, catalysed the Arton Wilson enquiry and subsequent Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act of 1960. This balanced and thorough enquiry and subsequent legislation helped to undermine the judgemental attitudes of earlier years and move the recreational use of static caravans to an era of greater establishment and development within and around resort locations.

Susan Barton considers the role of the working class in creating and securing opportunities for holidays and instigating the ultimately successful campaign for paid holidays in her 2005 publication *Working-class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970*. Barton acknowledges and illustrates the real nature of the shift to self-catering holiday accommodation; not least in her analysis of the developments between Cleethorpes and Skegness on the Lincolnshire coast.²⁶ Insight is also given into the nature and significance of earlier makeshift holiday accommodation such as self-built plotland huts.

Discrete aspects of tourism are studied in *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict*, a collection of essays edited by John Walton.²⁷ In particular, the study of inter-war Frinton and Clacton is useful and revealing. In an essay which focusses upon beach huts and their immediate, yet contrasting, surroundings, Laura Chase convincingly shows the beach hut to have evolved into a kind of portable domestic space. In contrast to the more commercial delights of the resort in which they exist, beach huts are shown to have evolved into private spaces to which the owner-occupiers can return, and conduct their relationship with the resort on different terms to the day-trippers and hotel guests. Such insightful analysis invites further study of the relationship of this phenomenon with later forms of small, private self-catered holiday accommodation.

Although camping, holiday plotlands (with the exception of Hardy and Ward's work, discussed below) and static holiday caravan sites have had little if any academic attention, the commercial holiday camp, as described earlier, has been the subject of more detailed enquiry. Apart from a range of pictorial and nostalgic publications²⁸, commercial holiday camps came under serious scrutiny by Pradeep Bandyopadhyay in 1973²⁹ and Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward in 1986.³⁰ Bandyopadhyay's chapter provides a brief sociological analysis of the commercial holiday camp as an institution, and suggests some comparative connections with the caravan site. Other aspects of the camper's experiences there seem more specific to commercial camps only. In particular, the relationship between staff and clients appears complex and fluid in this study. This appears to be as a result of the high level of on-site organisation and client dependency; whilst this would probably not typically be experienced on a caravan site, it is an area that merits further investigation. More broadly, when this paper is read directly after Barrie Newman's 'Holidays and Social

Class³¹ which immediately precedes it, some key questions arise. Newman cites Opinion Research Centre data to suggest that the holiday camp, as described by Bandyopadhyay as a 'good example' of the working-class holiday, is 'characterised by a high degree of organisation, collective orientation and passivity.'³² He goes on to report the decreasing popularity of the highly-organised commercial camp experience in favour of family-centred, informal self-catered holidays. In the further analysis, several examples of alternative holiday options are mentioned including camping, package tours and even motorised-caravan touring.

Hardy and Ward's study sees the origins of the holiday camp emerging in the latter stages of the nineteenth century, and credits figures such as Thomas Holding and Robert Baden-Powell as instrumental in introducing working people to camping and outdoor recreation; the precursors to camp sites, and the later holiday camps. Early philanthropic 'pioneer camps' and later key legislation such as the Camps Act and holidays with pay are considered as important developmental landmarks. Much more recently, Sandra Dawson's work *Holiday Camps in Twentieth-Century Britain: Packaging Pleasure* approaches the subject from a more academic perspective.³³ Dawson's study considers the progress of the campaign for holidays with pay as a catalyst for the expansion of post-war holiday camps, and this emphasises the importance of this legislation for the other areas of post-war holiday-taking that are not considered. Themes of gender, class and consumerism are also examined in Dawson's work, and again many parallels with the development of post-war caravan sites emerge, but are not addressed. Kathryn Ferry³⁴ does make a clear distinction between caravan sites and holiday camps when briefly discussing the increasing popularity of the former over the latter during the 1960's in her 2010 publication *Holiday Camps for the Shire* series.³⁵ Factors seen as

precursors to the growth of pioneer camps, and later commercial camps, are identified and analysed, but there is no consideration of the subsequent development of caravan sites from these shared developmental relationships. Caravans themselves, both static and touring, have had occasional journalistic publications under the historical banner, with the salient exception of William Whiteman's scholarly *The History of the Caravan*, published in 1973.³⁶ Whiteman, for many years editor of *Caravan* magazine, was a key figure in the post-war development of the caravan industry and the setting up of the National Caravan Council (NCC). His knowledge of the subject is laid out clearly in this book, which sheds much light upon specific developments during and after World War Two, when materials for manufacture were scarce.

A number of themes emerge from this historiography which seem worthy of serious consideration from the perspective of the coastal resorts' recent historical development. The agency of the working class in originating and promoting domestic holiday forms, how legislation such as the Holidays with Pay Act and planning laws were originated and how they impacted upon post-war holiday taking, the popularisation of camping, the rise of pioneer holiday camps, the effect of plotland holiday development (early self-catered holiday forms) and the wider perception of caravan sites over the decline of guest houses and hotels are of key significance. In 2002 Walton observed that the 'underdevelopment of tourism as a mainstream theme in modern British historical writing is an interesting indicator of the cultural conservatism of the historical profession', whilst in the same paper he also notes that 'broadly defined', the current state of tourism history in Britain 'is lively and expansive'.³⁷ By 2009 he testified that 'the history of tourism is now a rapidly expanding field in its own right, complete with dedicated journal (*Journal of Tourism History*, Taylor and Francis, from 2009)'.³⁸

3. Tendring District before 1914

The last decades of the nineteenth into the early twentieth century saw a rapid development of resort locations within Britain; England and Wales alone had acquired some one hundred and fifty new resorts during this period. Census data illustrates this growth nationally, and it is revealed that 'Southend's successful (and sharply contrasting) neighbours at Clacton, Walton, Frinton in the Tendring district, and Canvey Island further south, made the Essex coast the most expansive resort district of all, growing by more than 150 per cent to nearly 200,000 over the period 1911 to 1951.'³⁹ Indeed, within the Tendring district, the resorts of Frinton, Walton and Clacton in particular became very popular with day-trippers and holidaymakers after 1880, and the growth in demand for accommodation and facilities continued until the hiatus of the First World War.

Tendring had seen some casual forms of tourism prior to this, however: John Harrison of Great Bromley Hall is reported to have used Little Holland Hall as a holiday retreat for his children and servants in 1799. In 1811 a farm and cottage at Little Holland advertised sea-bathing facilities, whilst the Ship Inn at Great Clacton was equipped with a bathing machine in 1824.⁴⁰ Tentative and informal usage of this section of coast continued until the building of the resort of Clacton-on-Sea was begun in 1871, after land was purchased close to Great Clacton by Peter Bruff, a developer, in 1865. The original forty-eight acres of land comprised only a limited sea-front area, but after an agreement was negotiated with W.P. Jackson, chairman of the Woolwich Steam Packet Co. in

1870, works began which included coastal defenses to protect the eroding shoreline and an access cut, known later as Pier Gap, through the low cliffs down to the expansive beaches.⁴¹ Subsequent developments, including the extension of the railway line in 1882 (after several abortive schemes had failed), and the construction of a pier, were the catalyst for Clacton-on-Sea's irrevocable establishment as one of the south-east of England's most popular seaside resorts during the early twentieth century.

The scattered and sparsely populated agricultural settlement of Frinton underwent a similar process of acquisition and development during the latter stages of the nineteenth century from about 1885; with the opening of the railway station and establishment of a fresh water supply in 1888 this process was accelerated. By the outbreak of the First World War the seaside resort of Frinton-on-Sea had been established. The very few original inhabitants were overwhelmed by the influx of visitors and residents; but this new resort was one of a much different character to neighboring Clacton-on-Sea. Largely due to the influence of those who acquired the majority of the available land at Frinton at this time, the resort took on an exclusive character, which persists to the present day.⁴²

The resort of Walton-on-the-Naze, just north of Frinton-on-Sea, could be considered to be the 'founding' resort on this coastline. Whilst smaller than Clacton-on-Sea and less exclusive than Frinton-on-Sea, Walton-on-the-Naze was establishing as a resort before either of these two. The soft geology of this section of coastline (London Clay with deposits of Red Crag) has ensured that for centuries the settlement of Walton had suffered from the effects of coastal erosion. Despite this, a substantial village community had grown up, and considerable sums were spent on the provision of coastal defences. With

reasonable road links to Colchester and beyond, the area was visited on a regular basis during the early nineteenth century, and with the arrival of the railway in 1867 visitor numbers grew. After the construction of a pier, steamers running between London and Ipswich would stop at Walton, further enhancing the resorts holiday status. Walton-on-the-Naze never quite achieved the exclusivity of Frinton-on-Sea, or the growth in terms of size and visitor numbers of Clacton-on-Sea. This may well be due to the significant problem of coastal erosion discouraging investment in building close to the shoreline. But, again as will be discussed further, the resort opened up the surrounding areas as potential holiday destinations, prompting developers and entrepreneurs such as Peter Bruff to set in motion a process that would, during the mid-twentieth century, transform the coastline of north-east Essex in a way that they could scarcely have imagined.⁴³

The pre-war years of the twentieth century saw the Tendring District, therefore, as a growing holiday destination dominated by three resorts: Frinton-on-Sea, Clacton-on-Sea and Walton-on-Naze. With developing rail and steam-packet links from the capital, visitor numbers grew accordingly. Clacton started to attract many working-class day-trippers as well as those who would stay in the new hotels and guesthouses. Frinton-on-Sea would remain a venue for middle-class visitors and holidaymakers; Walton-on-Naze attracting a combined clientele.

4. Holiday Plotlands: Tendring District and Beyond

Within the Tendring District resort areas there seems to be a very tangible link between inter-war plotland developments and the post-war holiday caravan

sites. Whilst some plotland areas such as parts of Jaywick, and areas between Frinton and Walton became fully residential in the post-war period, much was either replaced by or augmented with holiday caravans, particularly at Saint Osyth Beach, Point Clear, Jaywick and Wrabness. Whilst a number of the post-war caravan sites did not originate in a former plotland locality, those that did were some of the earliest and largest in the district. Of the forty-nine caravan sites identified as having existed in the Tendring District, eight are either on or very close to former plotland locations.⁴⁴ A further nineteen are within five miles. The ‘non-plotland’ sites would no doubt have been influenced by the general growth in popularity of the district as a resort, fostered in part by pre-war plotland activity, in the post-war period.

Fig. 1: Tendring District- Caravan Site locations in Relation to Plotland Locations

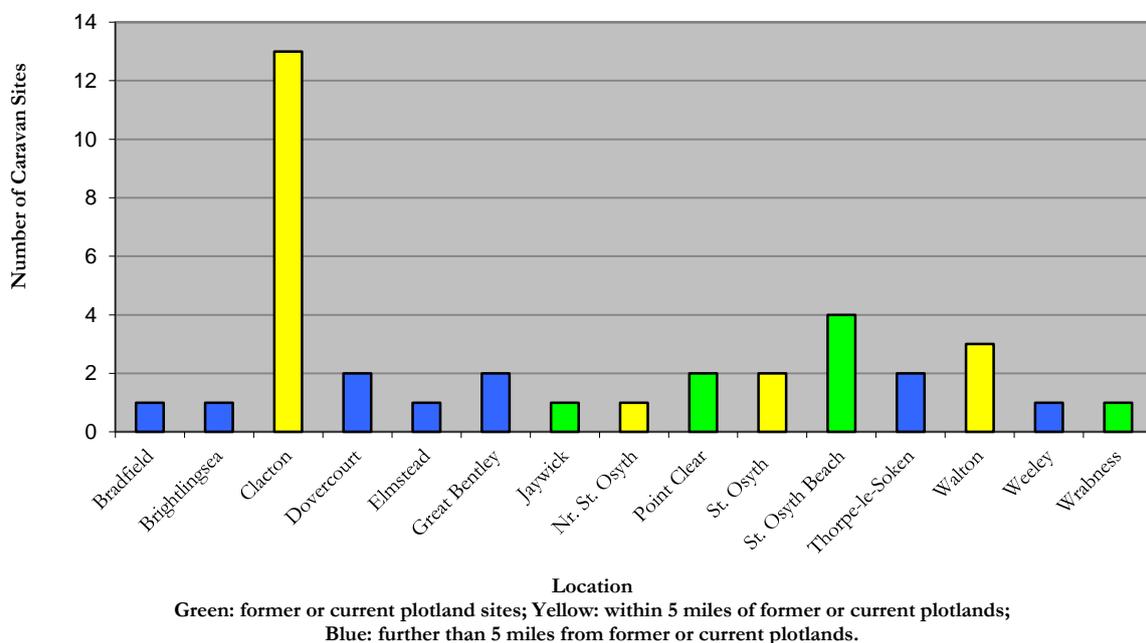
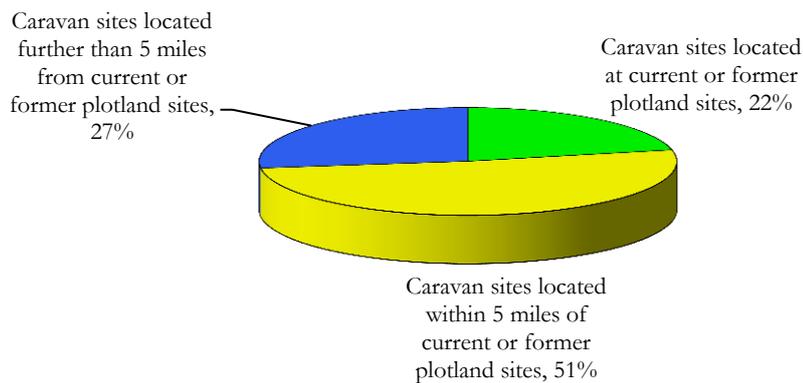


Fig. 1 (above) illustrates the relationship between the locations of caravan sites in Tendring and those of former or current plotlands; Fig. 2 (below) simplifies this further.⁴⁵

Fig. 2: Analysis of Location of Caravan Sites in Tendring in Relation to Current and Former Plotland Sites



The statistic of seventy-three percent of caravan parks that have existed in Tendring in the post-war period being at or within five miles of current or former plotland sites adds weight to suggestion of a developmental link between the two forms. But this statistic should be treated with some caution, as thirteen of the caravan sites shown as within five miles of a plotland location are, or were, at Clacton: itself a tourist resort in its own right, and an obvious location for caravan site development. Correlation does not *necessarily* mean causation.

Nevertheless, it still seems apparent that the plotland developments originating prior to 1939 in Tendring played a significant part in the re-enforcement of resort status to their immediate localities and perhaps beyond. At Saint Osyth beach, increasing numbers of casual visitors in the early 1920's

prompted the further development of the area, characterised by the holiday huts and their middle-class family owners. This led to the creation of an appealing resort area that would attract further visitors and investors. As a consequence of the removal of huts during the war and the restrictions of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, holiday caravans became dominant in considerable numbers during the post-war period. Likewise Point Clear saw a transition from its pre-war plotland type development to the dominance of a large post-war caravan site. Jaywick, after any further plotland expansion was curtailed, witnessed the birth and growth of a neighbouring caravan site. Even Wrabness, discrete and exclusive, spawned a caravan site after the consolidation of its unique plotland development.

The experience at Lee Wick shows that this process would not be guaranteed, however. The areas that were establishing plotlands during the late 1920's and early 1930's would be the ones that attained permanence as resorts. By the mid 1930's, developments that were not well established would not maintain momentum, and would not develop much further.

The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was a hugely significant factor in the cessation of further post-war plotland development of the kind that flourished in parts of Tendring District and beyond in the inter-war years. But it did not diminish the status of the district's plotland sites as resorts areas; and as caravans were not initially subject to the Acts sweeping powers, they effectively became the replacement accommodation in the former plotland sites. It also had no effect whatsoever, apparently, on the formation of what some have designated as a plotland development, the Bel-Air Chalet estate at Saint Osyth Beach.

More widely, by the late 1930's, the two evolving forms of holiday camp were reaching a new high in popularity. The 'pioneer camps', descendants of the late nineteenth century campsites founded by political, philanthropic and religious groups (such as Caister Holiday Camp and Cunninghams) were gaining popularity as holiday locations for working families. The new commercial camps such as Butlins and Pontins were now also gaining popularity; Clacton becoming the location for another Butlins in 1938. But it was the commercial camps that were to become the more dominant of these two forms in the post war period, offering as they did a more up-market experience to a populace weary of make do and mend, and who (in many cases) had already spent far too long under canvas or in military style accommodation. But it would be wrong in light of research to see these earlier holiday camps as the true forerunners of the post-war holiday caravan camps in the Tendring District. It seems far more likely that the appeal of the district to the inter-war campers and plotland holiday home makers was re-kindled in the post-war period as the early caravan sites replaced the growing trend for plotland type holiday accommodation. The holiday plotlands were, along with the camping grounds, the primary forerunners of the holiday caravan parks.

In discussing the origins of plotland developments, ideas of links between the traditions of pastoralism and agrarianism have been considered, alongside the notion of plotlanders inheriting an earlier sense of a 'right to enjoy the freedom to own a plot of land'. Although this link has been shown only to be at best tentative and notional, the situation in Tendring, in analysis, offers little to counter these arguments. We need only consider the vehemence with which the Jaywick hut owners pursued their rights in the face of an often-hostile local authority to evidence this. It is less clear, however, whether this notion initially held true for those first holiday caravan owners.

A walk around any of the major caravan parks in the district today will reveal many large, fully serviced static caravans, in some cases with established gardens, capable of sleeping up to ten individuals. But these are a far cry from the early post-war two or four berth units that had no toilet facilities, no electricity supply and, more importantly, did not stand in a plot that was owned by the caravan's occupants. In fact the vast majority of privately-owned static holiday caravans on such parks in Tendring and beyond still stand on a plot that is rented (often on an annual basis) from the site operator.⁴⁶

This is clearly a situation that does not suggest that the freedom to own a plot of land is a major motivating factor for those who have purchased such caravans, although it can be argued that the caravan owners perhaps treat such land today as their 'rightful plot'. In fact today's static holiday caravan seems, in all other respects, to be much more closely linked to the concept of the pre-war plotlands. Whereas early post-war static caravans were highly portable units differing little from touring caravans, standing in fields with little or nothing to define any boundary around them, by the mid 1980's privately owned caravans on holiday caravan parks seem to be rapidly evolving away from any sense of being portable, and were adopting features of permanence by becoming more chalet-like in appearance and structure. Owners of these units saw their investment as 'home from home', with a strong sense of established permanence. Fenced in, well-tended and ornamented gardens, with parking places and small outbuildings add to the sense of permanence and ownership. This leads to the observation that in spite of the 1947 planning legislation, the process is, in many respects, 'retreating' back to earlier plotland ideals and appearances (see Fig. 3, below).

Figure 3: holiday homes at Bentley Country Park, near Saint Osyth, 2009. Although on a caravan site, these 'caravans' are much more akin to the plotland chalets at Wrabness, or the pre-war huts at Saint Osyth Beach



In the Tendring district it has been suggested that, in common with other plotland areas, a large proportion of the Plotlanders were originally from more affluent, middle-class backgrounds, unlike their post-war counterparts at Canvey and Laidon, originating as they did from London's predominantly working-class East End. This view is supported by testimony from the Hutley family, and by evidence in the form of planning applications (especially at Saint Osyth Beach, Point Clear and Wrabness) that suggest that the huts were often supplied and erected by a third-party contractor, who would also have been paid to deal with the planning requirements.⁴⁷ This is in contrast to the hand-built, improvised structures that were constructed in the post-war period at

Canvey and Laindon, often on very cheap plots of land, without any formal planning consent.

The inter-war years were characterised by diversity not just in social and economic conditions, but also in attitudes to leisure and the popular perception of rural and coastal Britain. As motor transport became more widely accessible, the young middle-class would venture away from urban centres to pursue leisure activities, prompting adverse reaction from traditionalists. The growing disapproval of organisations such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and individuals such as Professor C.E.M. Joad (writing in 1937) raging against ‘hordes of hikers cackling insanely in the woods’ and ‘people, wherever there is water, upon sea shores or upon river banks, lying in every attitude of undressed and inelegant squalor’⁴⁸ is reflected somewhat in the tone of the Steers survey of the wartime East Anglian coast. This was at odds with the aspirations of a considerable proportion of the 1930’s modern middle-class, who wanted to motor through ‘Betjeman’s Britain’, go camping, hiking and above all, visit the seaside. And, better still; own a holiday retreat there as well. These were the first plotlanders at Wrabness, Saint Osyth Beach and Point Clear. Jaywick on the other hand, marketed directly to Londoners, probably saw a mixture of upper working-class and middle-class holidaymakers as its first occupants.

Distance from the capital would arguably be a contributory factor here. As discussed, the plotlands at places like Canvey, Laindon and Dunton were within easy reach of the capital and became the destination for working families after the war and for those escaping the bombing of London during the hostilities. Tendring District was, prior to post-war road improvements, a little further and a more expensive journey, even by train. With Clacton-on-Sea in particular

starting to appeal to a wider section of society, however, the district's popularity as a resort area was growing rapidly. The arrival of Butlins just before the war would confirm this situation.

What little remains, then, of Tendring's plotlands in the post-war period presents a relatively more mixed picture, and one that does not have too much in common with the wider examples, or models. The sub-urbanisation process that occurred at Canvey, Laindon, Dunton, Shoreham and Peacehaven only occurs in Tendring at part of the Jaywick Sands Estate. Wrabness, isolated and rural, survives to the present almost completely in-tact; the Brooklands and Grasslands sections of Jaywick remain, but in a run-down state; the plotland huts and bungalows at Saint Osyth Beach and Point Clear are largely replaced with expansive static caravan sites, with the exception of a handful of structures. With the probable exception of Wrabness, however (largely as a result of its continuity of ownership and usage, and therefore exclusivity), any post-war Plotlanders in Tendring would be much more representative of the working classes, now that the holidays with pay legislation was coming into effect, along with widening availability of transport opportunities.

Tendring's central resort towns of Clacton-on-Sea, Frinton, Walton-on-Naze and to a lesser extent Dovercourt did witness the growth of beach-huts, evolving as they did from bathing machines, to something of a thorn in the side for local authorities and traders. As public morality with regard to sea bathing and the consequent exposure of flesh relaxed through the 20th century, so the bathing machine became obsolete and the beach hut ascendant. Frinton, exclusive and genteel at all costs, was the last to relinquish the bathing machine but then embraced the beach hut, maintaining a sense of independence and social status for its owners, who have no need for the street

and beach traders and cheap entertainments. Frinton, therefore, where the 'nanny' rules the roost during the inter-war years with her privileged charges, often the offspring of colonial families, did not witness any real plotland development.

Clacton witnessed the growth and spread of the beach hut and 'mackintosh bathers', and did not welcome the phenomenon so enthusiastically. Street and beach traders, centred in Pier Gap, saw a loss in income as beach hut owners and occupiers became increasingly independent and had all their needs provided in their hut (food and refreshment, pastimes, shelter, bathing costumes and a place to change and relax). The local authority was also increasingly denied the income from the hire of costumes, towels, deck chairs and a place to change.⁴⁹

The beach hut as a significant aspect of the seaside environment, at odds with the commercial aspects of the seafront, has much in common, then, with plotland holiday 'huts'. There are clearly important distinctions between the casual day-tripper or short-term visitor, and the returning, independent family or group who have gained a stake in the culture and environment of the seaside resort, but as Chase observes, 'For regular hut users, the significance of beach huts lies in their incorporation into regular summer rituals of domesticity and strictly defined social interaction, thereby reinforcing notions of class and national identity.'⁵⁰ This observation may also apply in some respects to the inter-war holiday Plotlanders in areas such as St. Osyth Beach and Wrabness, but this would be a temporary situation.

The 1930's saw the launch of new campaigns aimed at marketing a wide range of goods and services directly to working-class households, including the concept of home ownership, via new sophisticated mortgage schemes. As

Scott finds, such was the success of this particular campaign, the 1930's witnessed the fastest rate of growth in working-class owner-occupation during the twentieth century, and this would also further promote the general growth of marketing-led consumerism, again particularly among the working class.⁵¹ As has been discussed, the marketing of holiday plots and the concept of domestic holiday home ownership would at the outset (in Tendring at least) appeal to the middle-classes. But with working-class consumerism in growth, it would simply be a matter of time before the concept of an affordable, private holiday home by the sea would form a major part of the post-war pattern of mass-leisure in Britain. The 1947 planning legislation would, as has already been suggested, have a major impact. This would be augmented by a number of developments that were to materialise shortly before and during the Second World War.

5. Resorts before and during the Second World War

Wartime changes that were forged on the home front in the capital and other large population centres were undoubtedly felt on a national basis; and the consequences would affect the post-war economies of Britain's holiday resorts in particular. For the resorts themselves, the wartime experience was varied but generally profound: the south and east coast resorts were rightly seen as increasingly vulnerable as the war unfolded, and mass evacuations for fear of bombing significantly affected many resort towns in the south of England. As a locus for case study within the scope of domestic holiday provision generally, the Tendring District of north Essex presents a rare and significant example; in a sense, a microcosm of the national picture. Physically, in addition to the usual resort hotels, guest houses and beach huts, it was the

location for Butlin's second major commercial holiday camp at Clacton and Warner's second camp at Dovercourt. It had by 1939, in addition to the resort infrastructure of hotels and guest houses, numerous examples of holiday plotland development both in the estate model at Jaywick, and in the more



F. Frith & Co., Ltd., THE BAND PAVILION. *[Reigate.]*



J. Salmon, THE BAND PAVILION AND EAST BEACH. *[Severnoaks.]*
Clacton. 5

Figure 4: Photographs in a 1927 tourist guide for the Tendring District showing Clacton-on-Sea's busy seafront area.

high school and a new railway station were all built during this period along with new housing developments.⁵²

grass roots examples at Saint Osyth Beach, Point Clear and Wrabness.

Clacton's main pier became a major tourist attraction. It variously featured facilities such as the Ocean Theatre, a Children's Theatre, a Concert Party Theatre, the Blue Lagoon Dance Hall, reputed to hold 1500 people and the Crystal Casino. A swimming pool was constructed as was the Steel Stella Roller Coaster, and the new amusement arcades The West Cliff Theatre was opened

in 1928 with the Princes Theatre shortly afterwards as part of the new Town Hall in 1931. A county

Prior to the outbreak of war, these facilities were frequented by a mix of middle-class and working-class visitors originating largely from London, with Jaywick pioneering the provision of affordable seaside holiday accommodation for working-class families. During the post-war period the area would spawn some forty-nine independent holiday caravan parks in response to demand from mainly working-class families, again largely from the capital, who sought an alternative experience to the 'state-approved' commercial holiday camp such as Butlin's.

As discussed in above, the principle holiday destinations in Tendring up to the outbreak of the First World War were Walton-on-the-Naze, Frinton-on-Sea and Clacton-on-Sea. These relatively new resorts quickly re-established themselves from 1919 to become increasingly popular during the inter-war years. Proximity to the capital and the railway link directly connecting to these key towns, coupled with expanding ownership of the motorcar as discussed in Chapter Two, and availability of accommodation, ensured that more and more people came to Tendring for a holiday or excursion, particularly during the 1930's boom time (see Fig. 4, above). This was aided by the fact that such resorts were now actively advertising themselves. An advertising Bill, promoted before the war, was finally passed into law in 1921 enabling local authorities at resorts to 'utilize profits from municipal enterprises up to the equivalent of a penny rate' to advertise their attractions in the form of guide books, on posters and in the press.⁵³

The visitors or holiday makers fell into three categories: day-trippers or excursionists, holiday residents staying in hotels or guest-houses and plotland holiday home owners. The day-trippers and excursionists were solidly working-class; the plotlanders (with the exception of many at the new Jaywick Sands

Estate) and the holiday residents staying in hotels and guest houses were essentially middle-class. Although Frinton remained staunchly middle-class, Clacton in particular was divided. Whilst hotel owners were keen to appeal to the middle classes, street traders and others who earned a living on the seafront were keen to attract excursionists. The result was expansion: whilst the district was able to appeal to working and middle-class holiday consumers, growth was inevitable- Clacton in particular resembling 'Blackpool on a small scale.'⁵⁴

The resort areas had in a relatively short period of time established a

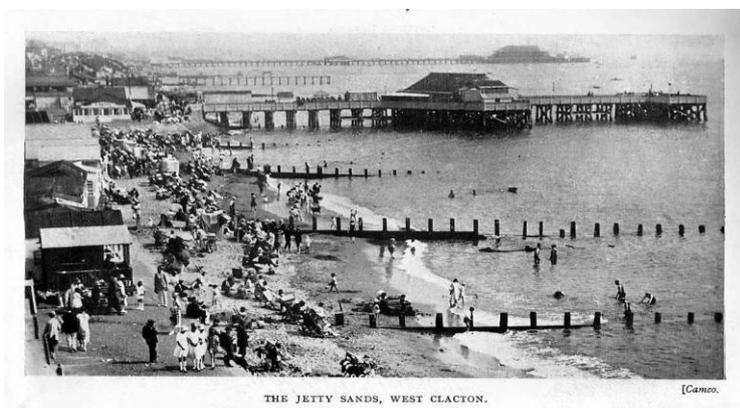


Figure 5: Clacton's coastal infrastructure in the 1920's- the two piers and beach amenities.

physical infrastructure (making the most of the beaches and coastline, see Fig. 5, opposite) that would also continue to attract visitors. This included piers at Walton and Clacton (Clacton had two at this stage, see Fig. 5), in addition

to the bandstands, pavilions, gardens and theatres. Beach traders would offer boat trips and bathing facilities, donkey rides, souvenirs and consumables. Tennis and badminton courts, putting courses, croquet, bowls and ballroom dancing are all mentioned in a 1927 guide book.⁵⁵

However, after the outbreak of war, resort areas in Britain such as those in the Tendring District saw radical physical and social change in their localities. During the first months of war Clacton saw the influx of evacuees from London, and the local population grew considerably as a result. But as the war

progressed and the threat of invasion grew, the coastal area of north Essex, in common with much of the south-east coastline of Britain was seen as highly vulnerable. By late 1940 Clacton, Frinton and Walton were transformed completely by wartime measures. Some eighty-five percent of Clacton's inhabitants were evacuated inland to the Home Counties and Devon; the town reportedly having one of the highest evacuation percentages in the country.⁵⁶ The area became heavily militarised: the new Butlins camp was taken over initially as an internment camp, but shortly after in October 1939 became a base for the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps until 1941. It was used by the army until the end of hostilities.⁵⁷ Much of the now empty housing in the town was used for the billeting of troops.⁵⁸

In addition to these developments, the whole of Tendring's coastal landscape was physically affected. As well as becoming a military zone, generally out of bounds to civilians, defensive structures such as concrete tank traps, mine fields, rows of barbed wire and concrete 'pill-box' bunkers were deployed or constructed along the shoreline. Any structure that was deemed to be of advantage to an enemy invasion force was demolished: at Saint Osyth beach the holiday huts were demolished and at Clacton the entire pier at West Beach was removed, although the main pier remained intact.

The area also suffered considerably from enemy bombing. Clacton in particular was deliberately targeted, the town being bombed and machine-gunned by enemy aircraft on several occasions. The first casualties in mainland Britain during the war occurred when a German mine-laying aircraft crashed at Victoria Road killing two civilians and four air-crew. As well as numerous subsequent casualties, many buildings and facilities were either destroyed or badly damaged during the conflict.⁵⁹

Thus, the burgeoning tourist economy that had developed during the 1930's in the region was, by 1940, brought to a complete standstill. The epicentre of this trade, Clacton-on-Sea, formerly popular with working-class day-trippers and excursionists as well as middle-class holiday makers would see no more of this clientele until after the war. Frinton, once popular with the middle-class holiday makers, suffered a similar fate. The developments at Walton, Dovercourt, Saint Osyth, Jaywick, Point Clear and Wrabness- thriving before the outbreak of war- were likewise brought to a standstill. The combined effects of militarisation, evacuation and the physical defence measures deployed locally effectively prevented any form of use or habitation. Inland from the coastal resorts, however, Tendring's rural agricultural economy would continue under wartime conditions.

The extended wartime hiatus in Tendring's tourism economy would have consequences for the post-war tourism picture. The physical removal of plotland holiday structures everywhere except for Jaywick and Wrabness would leave areas for potential re-development for holiday use after the cessation of hostilities and subsequent demilitarisation of coastal areas. Local entrepreneurs and landowners, as well as out of town business people, would see opportunities to provide basic holiday accommodation on redundant parcels of land within the districts coastal areas. The existing tourism infrastructure of the commercial holiday camps, hotels, bed and breakfast accommodation and holiday hutments that remained intact would help to re-establish the area once again as a popular holiday destination as they re-opened, but would ultimately scarcely be able to cope with demand. Hotels and guest houses would gradually experience diminishing popularity.

In whatever form Tendring's tourist trade would resume after the war, it would, therefore, have to be on a rather different basis to that which was in development previously. The demand, of course, for accommodation in Tendring's resorts would resume and grow as predicted once again in peacetime. The commercial holiday camps would be handed back and would re-open for business as would the remaining hotels and guest houses. But with high demand for holiday accommodation and the marginalisation or eradication of plotland holiday homes, the time was ripe for a new form to emerge. Hotels, once the principle form of accommodation in Tendring before the arrival of Butlins and Warners, would struggle to achieve any level of dominance in the post-war years, as the market place would be very different with increasing working-class and decreasing middle-class customers. The passing of the Camps Act and the embracing of the commercial holiday camp as a solution for the accommodation of increased numbers of working-class holiday makers by government ministers, as discussed further below, therefore marginalised the hotel traders in favour of the newer forms of accommodation that were envisaged in the post-war domestic holiday landscape.

6. Post-war tourism in Tendring: camping, hotels, guest houses, commercial camps and caravan camps

It is suggested above that immediately after the war (and indeed for a number of years thereafter) many individuals and families took to the form of individual, low-cost, self-sufficient holiday that was probably known to them as children accompanied by their parents or in organized groups, as described in Chapter One: camping in tents. Whilst commercial holiday camps were re-opening and receiving their share of holidaymakers, large numbers were

coming to the coastal resort areas and simply pitching their tents. In common with other resorts, Tendring District's coastal landscape was now accessible once more, and many areas of cleared land were available for use.

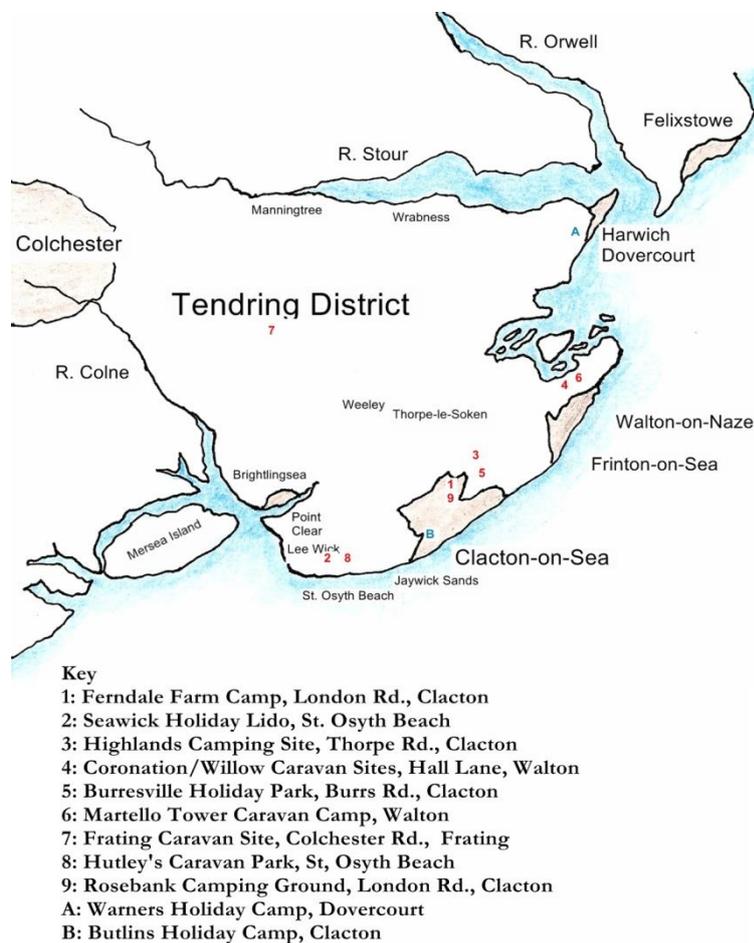


Figure 6: Location of the nine sites claiming to have been in operation prior to 1939, and the 2 existing commercial holiday camps.

The camping facilities that had existed before the war (see Fig. 6) were mostly re-opened. In addition to the nine sites that subsequently claimed to have been in operation by 1939 as camp sites, more must have been used informally; Valley Farm near Clacton, for example, was one of a number that made no mention of pre-war use in their later caravan site licence applications to the local authority.⁶⁰ Some of these

were characterised by plotland type shanties and permanently sited older caravans from pre-war days. But such was the demand that these early facilities could scarcely cope. Local entrepreneurs would capitalize on this, and new camp sites were set up with basic facilities such as fresh water tanks or stand pipes and chemical toilets. For the next decade at least, and despite the proximity of two major commercial holiday camps at Clacton and Dovercourt,

campers would flock to Tendring's coastal areas and camp on any available piece of land that they could find. In fact even by the start of the 1960's, campers were still 'thronging' to the district, particularly Holland-on-Sea. The East Essex Gazette carried an article in August 1961 entitled 'Campers Expected to Throng Roadside', describing how tents were being pitched along the roadside verges and on the 'un-official' free campsites, and that no-one was likely to stop them. The article was accompanied by a photograph of a large, family size tent with a washing on a line strung from its entrance, located on the roadside, with a bus passing by. It carried the caption: 'A familiar sight to bus passengers on Holland Marshes are lines of 'smalls' swinging in the wind. A big influx to join the tents already established on this free camping site is expected this weekend. Despite many local protests, it appears authorities have no power to stop them.'⁶¹

But there were organized campsites all over the country, and naturally in Tendring- particularly at Holland.⁶² As mentioned, many of these had existed before the war, but they now started to take on a new form. It has been shown how the new planning legislation prevented the establishment of holiday huts,



Figure 7: Valley Farm, Clacton-on-Sea, 1948: the birth of a caravan site.

shacks or buildings anywhere without the application for, and subsequent granting of, formal planning consent by the local authority. Any structure that could be considered mobile or temporary was,

however, seemingly exempt from this requirement. Old pre-war touring caravans, traditional traveller's caravans and tents were all acceptable. In fact, anything that could provide basic accommodation, and could be moved on if necessary, could and would be used as holiday accommodation in the post-war years. This *could* include old busses or coaches- even railway carriages if they were mobile. Although this activity smacked of the sort of 'shanty towns' of the plotland developments that the planning laws and their architects sought to discourage and eradicate, under the new planning regulations it appeared at first that there was little that could be done. Only structures built 'in situ' and that were immobile would appear to contravene the complex 1947 Act. And with the siting of such mobile forms of accommodation on campsites of this nature after the war, the static holiday caravan site was born. This would, of course, also create a new and popular alternative to the traditional guest houses and hotels.

Fig. 7 (above) shows such a site in Tendring, at Clacton-on-Sea. The old busses, coaches, carriages and other less purpose-made forms of

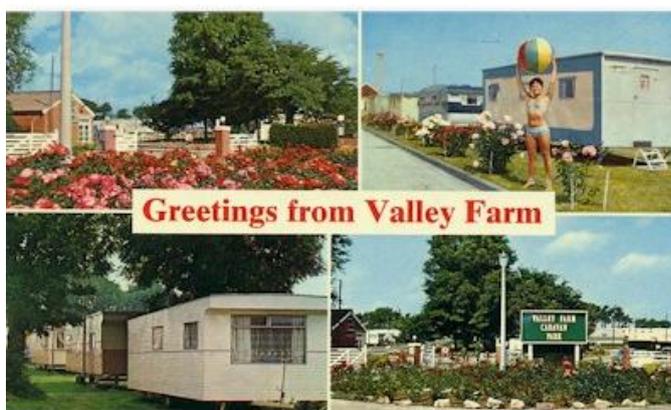


Figure 8: Postcard of Valley Farm Caravan Park, Holland-on-Sea, mid 1960's.

accommodation would soon be replaced by newer, larger caravans on such sites. Within a few years this particular site would develop into Valley Farm Caravan Park, one of the

numerous caravan sites in the Tendring District (see Fig. 8), in a similar way that such sites were in

fact developing in many parts of Britain. Local authority licensing for caravan or

camp sites was still an issue for developers, but in the immediate post-war period, concerns about the expansion of residential sites were a more pressing issue for regional authorities.

This embryonic form of caravan site, immune as it seemed to be from planning legislation for the time being, provided a base location which would now allow holidaymakers to establish their own forms of accommodation within a social space not unlike the pioneer camps of the pre-war years, but without the regimentation, rules and routine.

Other areas within Tendring saw similar activity to the developments at Valley Farm. The link between plotland holiday home development in the inter-war years and subsequent post-war caravan site development has been analysed above: the areas of former plotland holiday homes saw their structures either replaced or augmented by nascent caravan sites, including Jaywick, Wrabness and Point Clear and the area at Saint Osyth Beach which saw rapid development. Developments at Saint Osyth Beach, for example, evolved in much the same way, with the provision plots for camping and the siting of touring-type caravans for summer use.

The key aspect of this is that although these early caravans were mainly of the touring type, their owners would have no desire or intention to move the caravan once sited on the camp. The touring caravan, very much the preserve of the middle classes before the war, was utilised by the new post-war holiday caravan site clientele in a different way. Working-class holiday makers, in many cases, would not yet have the resources to tow a caravan around the country for a holiday; travelling extensively and visiting numerous destinations. But they could purchase a second-hand one (cheaply if it were an old, pre-war model) and park it on a site to use as a holiday home, and even let it out to

friends and family if the site was relatively close by and readily accessible. The camp would, therefore, become the destination for the holiday, and thus began to establish its own identity and purpose beyond that of a simple place to park the caravan or tent. As facilities on the camps or sites increased, this process would be further enhanced and consolidated.

A certain resourcefulness and determination perhaps characterises the early post-war caravan holiday home owners and users. They may well also have enjoyed the occasional holiday at a Butlins, Warners or Pontins commercial camp. But with good rail and improving motor access from London, the North-Essex coast was an ideal destination for those individuals and families who sought out an alternative. They were almost exclusively working-class east-end Londoners, looking for escape from the city, and an affordable holiday by the seaside. They were also keen to return to the same site, and therefore the idea of owning accommodation in the form of a caravan there appealed greatly. Again, a motivation first observed amongst the earlier plotlanders was also evident: that of having a plot, or 'stake' at the seaside- to own a small part of it and to enjoy the personalising of the holiday home.⁶³

As discussed, for many working-class families in the immediate post-war period, the cost of a holiday was a limiting factor as money was still tight. Prior to the full roll-out of paid holidays, many would be looking to find a holiday destination close enough to be affordable in terms of transport costs, and that would offer cheap accommodation in a favourable, resort environment. Thus, many East-End Londoners came to the Tendring district from 1946 for their holidays, just as their counterparts in the northern industrial cities would once again visit resorts such as Blackpool, and Midlands workers would holiday again on the Lincolnshire coast or the resorts in North Wales. Londoners would

also find resorts throughout the south-east of England close enough to visit without straining the budget too much. Some London families would find holiday opportunities at the resorts of the Norfolk coast.

In the Tendring district, the first caravan site proprietors were small-scale landowners, farmers or speculators.⁶⁴ Generally not from a holiday trade background, these individuals initially saw opportunities for the provision of camping grounds with basic facilities. As their clients sought to site caravans or similar structures on the site, the operators realised that with this came the opportunity to charge an annual ground rent, even a siting fee. This meant a more guaranteed, predictable income than that which could be derived from tents and basic camping.

It was soon apparent to the new caravan site operators that there was a need to further cater for their clients beyond just providing the most basic facilities and necessities. As caravans became holiday bases at a fixed location, communities were forming at these sites; returning families and friends would meet other groups, often from similar areas with shared experience. Somewhere to socialise, beyond the caravans themselves, particularly in the evenings was now required. With limited funds, site operators would not be able to provide more than basic facilities in this regard. The solution in most cases was a building (generally pre-fabricated or ex-military as these were still cheaply available) that would serve as a club house. With tables and chairs and eventually a bar and catering equipment, these club houses would become the social centre of the caravan site. And, again, with little or no budget, entertainment would generally be provided by the caravan site users themselves. With an upright piano, an amplifier, speakers and a microphone, such club houses could become the venue for impromptu entertainments,

games and competitions. Caravan owners would often have family members who had a party-piece or could 'do a turn' on the microphone. In this way entertainment came to the caravan sites. Not the formal, highly organised entertainments of the commercial holiday camps or hotels led by uniformed professionals and well-known artistes, but a self-originated, simple form: informal, amateur, improvised and owned by those who derived it (see Fig. 9, below).



Figure 9: Entertainments at the Seawick Club House, c 1950-55.

In this way the new caravan sites engendered a close, community spirit amongst their patrons who, as well as becoming stake holders in the sites by investing in the purchase of a caravan, would also have an involvement in the entertainment rituals and games that took place there. For the caravan owners on these sites this sense of stake-holding and involvement would continue to develop as the caravan sites became more established. This whole process of a domestic holiday caravan site experience was, therefore, a truly grass roots

alternative to the mainstream, commercial holiday camps and the more expensive hotels and guest houses. It was initiated mainly by small-scale, individual operators and driven by their clientele: the working-class families from the urban industrial centres, gradually gaining paid holiday time and more security in employment and exercising an independent, rational *and* preferred choice for their holidays.

7. The 1953 flood: disaster, aftermath and significance

Within the first few years of the establishment of the first caravan sites in the Tendring District, a catastrophic natural event occurred which severely impacted the lives and property of those who lived and worked on the East Anglian coastline. This event is significant not just in terms of its impact upon the local tourism industry, but how and why the sites that were affected emerged from the disaster in the way that it did.

Tendring District's coastal inhabitants awoke to a windy day on Saturday, 31st January 1953. During the day the north-westerly wind remained strong, and there were warnings of a high tide later on. This in itself was not uncommon; high spring tides could often occur and would not be the cause of too much damage or even inconvenience. What could not have been anticipated were the rare and yet disastrous set of meteorological and tidal circumstances that were combining along the east coast. The wind continued to blow all day. Gales were reported in Scotland, and high winds were causing problems at sea and all along the east coast, and to some extent inland. By dusk it was difficult to stand against the wind on the seafront at Harwich, and heavy seas were breaking over the foreshore. The first, and indeed only,

official communication to reach Essex as to the possibility of extreme conditions was communicated by telephone at six p.m. to the Essex River Board in Chelmsford. The East Suffolk and Norfolk River board warned their Essex counterparts 'that the sea was rough and that conditions on the Norfolk coast were favourable to a high tide.' There was, however, no apparent indication that this would be an extreme event, warranting anything more than the usual precautions in such situations.⁶⁵

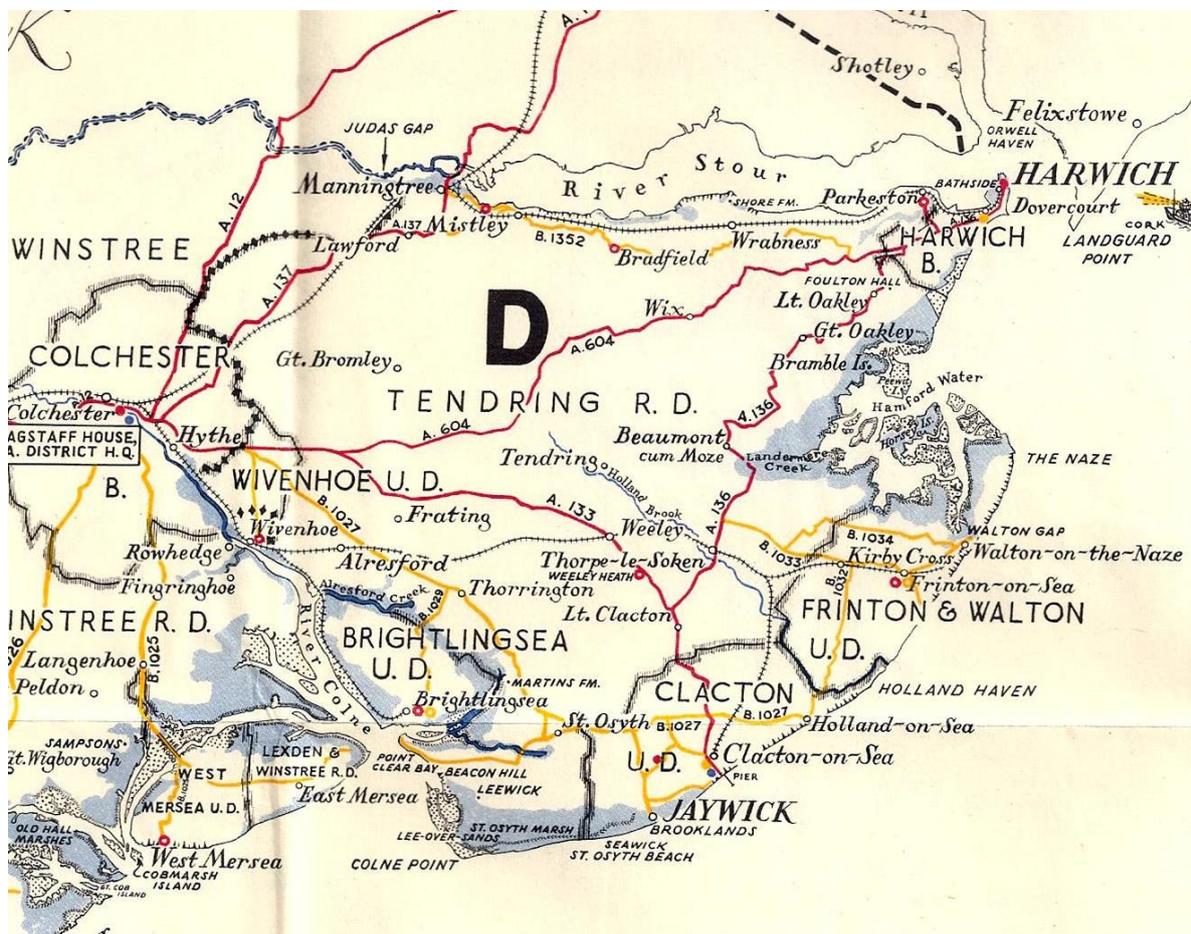


Figure 10: The extent of the flooding in north-east Essex and the Tendring District, January/February 1953. The areas marked in blue show the extent of the encroachment of sea water.

Thus, those who lived and worked along the low lying areas of the Essex coast, (one of the longest coastlines in England) were almost completely unprepared for what was about to happen over the coming hours and days.

The constant high winds had held or 'backed-up' up what was already a naturally high tidal flow or surge; long-lasting high winds in any other direction, or indeed in the direction that they blew but without the coincidence of a high tide, would not have yielded such disaster. Coastguards, and consequently fishermen and yachtsmen, were becoming wary about the fact that the afternoon low tide had not ebbed as usual, with the water remaining at low water at the usual height of high water on a neap tide. The next high water was due at about an hour after midnight at Harwich. When it came, the tide was far higher than anyone had witnessed in living memory.

As can be seen, in Tendring District some areas were affected more significantly than others. In the north, the area around The Naze, Great Oakley and Harwich (largely farmland) was flooded. The higher ground between Walton and Clacton escaped with less flood water. But the low-lying Wicks and marshlands from Jaywick, Saint Osyth Beach, Lee-over-Sands, Point Clear and the land surrounding the river banks and creeks around Brightlingsea and Mersea Island were inundated.⁶⁶



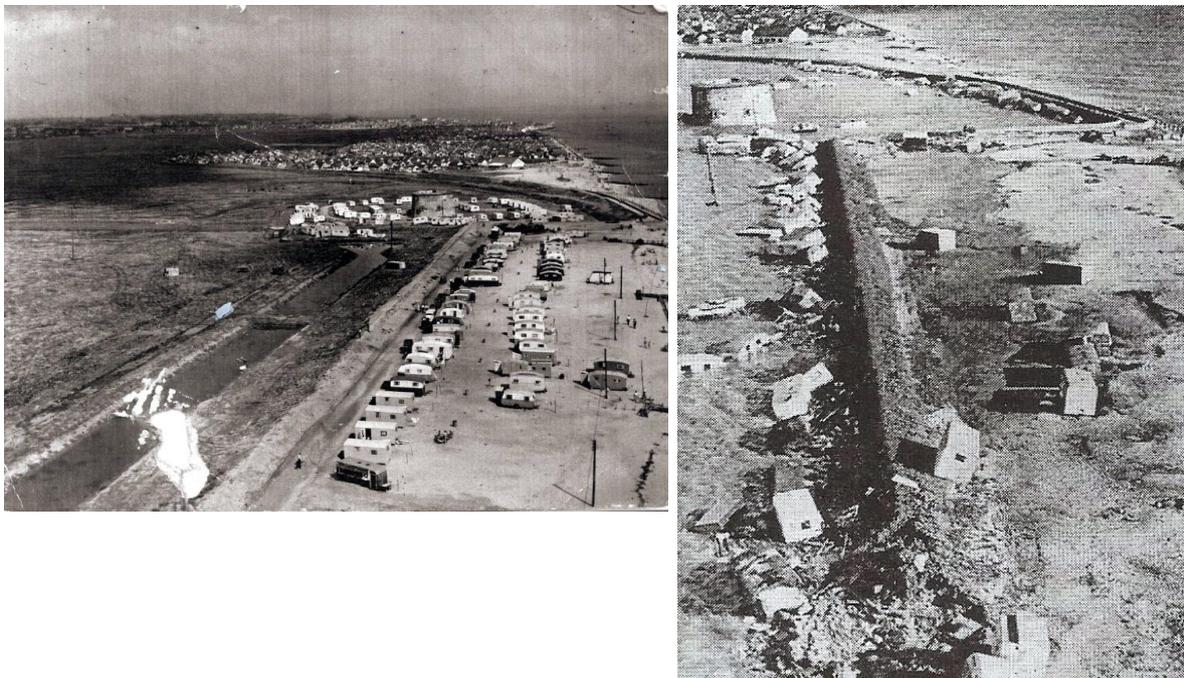
Figure 11: An aerial photograph of Seawick Holiday Lido which appeared in the Daily Sketch on February 3rd 1953. The double-decker bus where stranded residents sought refuge can be seen next to the central stores/workshop building.

A glance at the above map (Fig. 10) may suggest that things could have been far worse in Tendring at least, with much of the area seemingly uninhabited. However, there

were thirty five lives lost at Jaywick, as there was in many

other parts of the east coast. Parts of Harwich and Dovercourt were significantly affected. Many of the Jaywick holiday huts were flooded out, and the caravan sites at Saint Osyth Beach and Point Clear were under several feet of water. More widely, in Essex alone more than 119 people lost their lives in the disaster and 12,356 homes were broken into by the sea. In excess of 21,000 people were made homeless, and over 31,000 qualified as 'Flood Victims' under the Lord Mayor's National Flood and Tempest Distress Fund.⁶⁷ Other areas from Kent to Lincolnshire suffered tragedy and major disruption.

In the low-lying marshland areas once the sea had invaded, it stayed. After an initial ebb (which caused similar damage in the way that the initial inrush of water had), a residual body of water remained for some considerable time. Ironically, at Saint Osyth Beach and Jaywick, the sea had simply come around the existing sea walls, breaching the areas where the defences were



Figures 12 a) & b): The area along the sea defences between Saint Osyth Beach and Jaywick at the new Tower Caravan Site: a) before, and b) after the flood. The Martello Tower at Jaywick can be clearly seen in each photograph.

incomplete. In the coming days, the true extent of the damage to the holiday bungalows and caravan sites became apparent. Many of the caravans were picked up by the sea, and tumbled over or dragged along to be dumped down randomly as the water receded. As the waters finally receded, a full scale cleaning up operation began on the areas affected by the flood. Some buildings and many huts and caravans were damaged beyond repair; those that were insured were the subject of claims.

Amongst the serious disruption and chaos of the early months of 1953 along the Tendring coast line, many businesses both large and small suffered greatly. The commercial camps, holiday bungalows, caravan sites and farms incurred significant damage. Farms suffered greatly as a result of the sea water lying on land for extended periods. Nearly all of the estimated 5,000 acres of marshland between Harwich and Wigborough Wick (2,000 acres of which was ploughed and sown) was underwater. Large areas of grazing land were spoiled. This damage was longer term, as the land would remain unfertile for grazing and crops for a number of growing seasons.⁶⁸

But for the Campsites, Holiday homes and recently established caravan sites that were submerged, the situation was quite different. As the water subsided, the clean-up operation saw the removal of wreckage that was beyond salvage and a general clearing of debris. Repairs to storage buildings were carried out, and properties that could be repaired were worked upon, either by owners, or on their behalf by contractors.

After one of the busiest pre-season periods of their working lives, the holiday accommodation trade was open for business by the start of the 1953 summer season. Many visitors spent the season re-establishing their holiday homes, and making them habitable once again. But the key point here is that

the customers did return, with no apparent loss of enthusiasm for their holiday homes or the environment in which they were located.⁶⁹ With the combined efforts of site operators, staff and home owners, the commercial camps, holiday baungalows and caravan sites were soon back to the same sort of condition, both in a physical and commercial sense, that they were in prior to the floods.

The significance of this is that it demonstrates the levels of demand for, and commitment to, holidays in the area from the customer base largely located in east London. Although proportionally only a few of the commercial camps, holiday homes and caravan sites in the area were damaged significantly by the floods, the ones that were saw considerable damage and destruction to large numbers of units of accommodation. And yet, despite this, the growing popularity of these sites remained largely unaffected and continued to develop exponentially.⁷⁰

8. After 1960: the further decline of the hotel, guest house and commercial camp sector and the ascendancy of static caravan parks

The 1960 Caravan Sites Act regulated burgeoning development by instituting a licensing system for all caravan sites with very few limited and specific exceptions. A register of these site licences would be held by the local authority. Provision was made for the recognition and control of existing sites, and amendments to the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, specifically section 12 (5), were passed. Control of future development was also addressed. In anticipation of legislation, Essex County Council set up the Caravan Sub-Committee in 1958 to co-ordinate a response to the situation in

the county. It called on each town and district authority to appoint representatives to attend meetings and submit detailed local information. In Essex, a report to the sub-committee by the County Planning Advisor dated 7th August 1958 gives an overview of static caravan usage in the county, and in north-east Essex in particular. Numbers of caravans estimated to be in existence and therefore deemed to have permission were given, see Fig. 13, below:

Fig. 13: Estimate of Number of Static Caravans in Essex, August 1958		
Source: ERO, Essex County Council, Caravan Sub-Committee Minutes, 1958.		
Area	Holiday	Residential
North East	9750	206
East Central	4584	1050
West	355	156
South	50	221
North West	38	575
Totals	14777	2208

The above data clearly indicate the distribution bias toward, unsurprisingly, east Essex: the coastal and resort side of the county. North-east Essex, which includes the Borough of Colchester and Tendring District, appears to have the largest population of static holiday caravans in the county at this time, see Fig, 14, below:

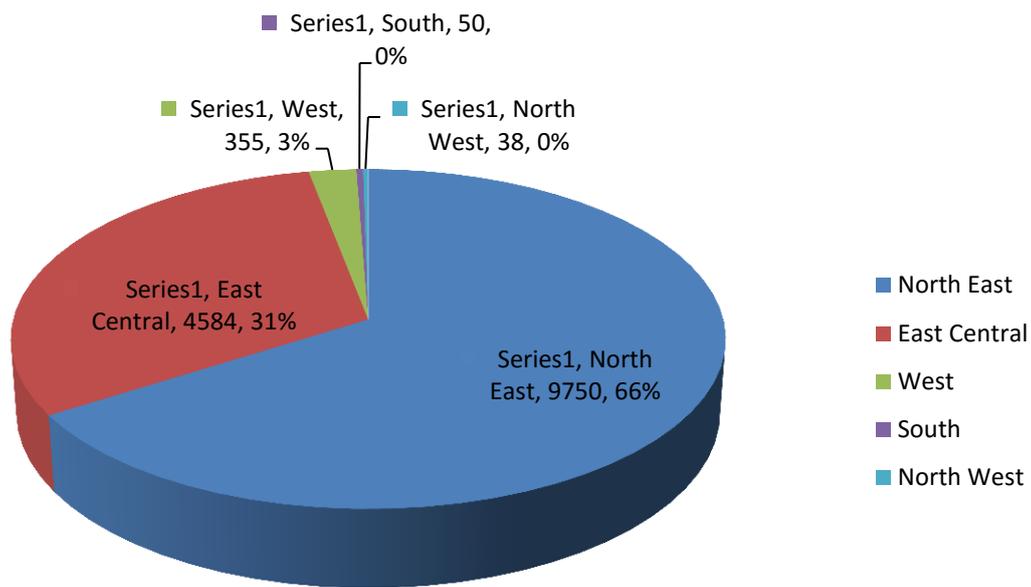
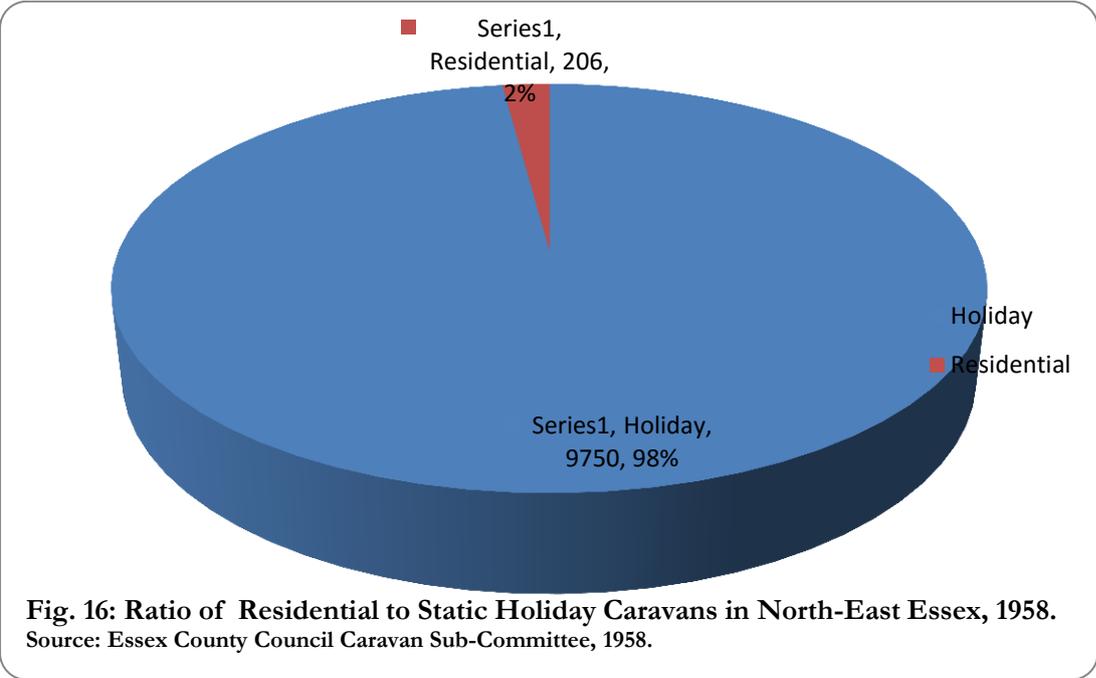
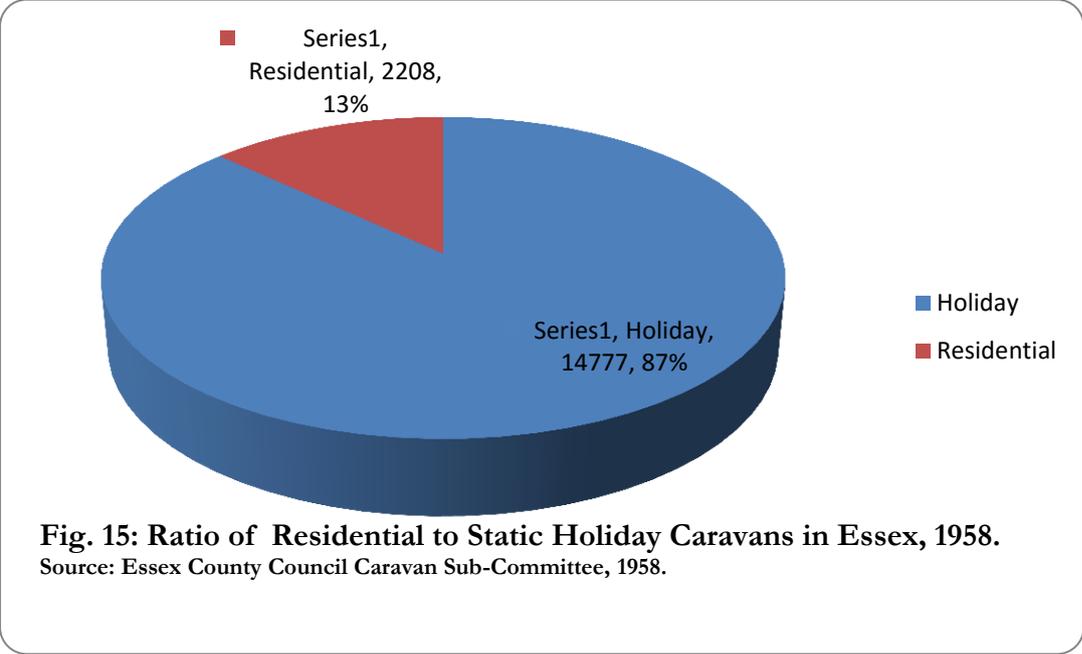


Fig. 14: Location and Distribution of Static Holiday Caravans in Essex, 1958.
 Source: Essex County Council Caravan Sub-Committee Minutes, 1958.

The data in Fig. 13 also give a clearer picture of the nature of static caravan usage in the county at this point in time. Although a relatively populous county, close to the capital and having coped with its fair share of housing shortages after the war, Essex at this stage, surprisingly, appears to have a seemingly low number of residential units when compared to the number of holiday use static caravans in the county. In north-east Essex, the ratio is even more pronounced toward holiday units; see Figs. 15 and 16, below:



To further illustrate this in terms of density if we take north-east Essex to be an area of approximately 260 square miles, then these figures represent a mean average density of over thirty-seven caravans per square mile. But if we consider that the vast majority of the static caravans of north-east Essex were in fact within the resort district of Tendring alone (8317 static caravan pitches

were licensed on 49 caravan sites in Tendring soon after 1960, see Fig. 17, below), as Tendring is an area of approximately 130 square miles, then the mean average density of static caravans there after 1960 was some sixty-four units per square mile.

<u>Fig. 17: Caravan Sites in Tendring Registered under Public Health Licence or Caravan Sites Act, 1960</u>	
Source: Tendring District Council Site Licence Application Records	
Number of Sites First Licensed for Holiday Caravans, P.H. & 1960 Act	49
Number of Sites Licensed for Tourers & Tents Only, First Record	17
Number of Sites Licensed but with No Pitch Numbers, P.H. & 1960 Act	5
Total Number of Licensed Static Caravan Pitches in Tendring, P.H. & 1960 Act	7133

We can broadly compare this figure with the estimated 11,000 combined static and touring caravans estimated to be sited on another area of caravan site development in 1958⁷¹, the East Lindsey coast of Lincolnshire (East Lindsey District being an area of some 680 sq. miles); which gives a density of less than seventeen caravans per square mile. This would be misleading, however, as East Lindsey has a large rural hinterland mainly devoid of caravan sites. Most

of the sites are concentrated mainly in the coastal area and its direct hinterland, an area of roughly 300 sq. miles. This brings the density up to just under thirty-seven caravans per square mile. This area of the Lincolnshire coast has traditionally attracted caravans; a recent report (2011) echoes the widely acknowledged claim that the Lincolnshire coastal area currently has the largest concentration of caravans in Europe.⁷² In addition to this, in comparison with the data that estimates there were around 90,000 caravans in the UK in 1959 ‘to be used as static holiday or weekend accommodation’, then Essex would appear to have been the location for over sixteen percent of the UK static holiday caravan population. North-east Essex and its resorts of Clacton-on-Sea, Walton-on-the-Naze and Frinton-on-Sea, close to London and easily accessible along the A12 corridor, would have accounted for almost eleven percent of the national figure. This is not, of course, an exercise in exact comparative statistics, but it does serve to offer a feel for how extensively the Tendring District had become populated with caravans generally by the beginning of the 1960’s.

The Arton Wilson report that preceded the 1960 Caravan Sites Act and subsequent legislation gave impetus to local authorities for the first time to gain a clearer idea of the numbers of static caravans in use on the ground around the UK. It was now fully evident from these data that the establishment of a considerable number of static holiday caravan sites in Essex, particularly in the north-east of the county, had occurred. These would now be subject to regulation, and those that had existing use rights would be licensed accordingly. Tendring District’s considerable caravan site industry (detailed in Fig 14, above), in common with that throughout the UK, was now entering a new phase of control and development. Residential static caravan use in Essex at least, represented a reasonable proportion (thirteen percent) of the total

picture; but in north-east Essex the figure was almost negligible at two percent. The dominance of the area as a centre for static caravan holiday home use is by now, therefore, clear.

Most static holiday caravans by 1960 were four to six berth units, in effect a mean average of five berths. Therefore, the 7,133 pitches licensed in the Tendring District at that point in time represented a mean average of 35,665 berths. By comparison, the two large commercial holiday camps, Butlins at Clacton and Warners at Dovercourt, in combination could accommodate an estimated maximum of some 6500 visitors: less than twenty percent of that in the static holiday caravan sector.⁷³ The remaining plotland holiday homes, mainly concentrated at Jaywick and Wrabness, were still in active use but had not expanded at all in the post-war period. Hotels and guesthouses were, of course, offering holiday accommodation but as has been discussed, they were in decline. The 1951 Clacton Town Guide listed some fifty-five hotels; four more are known to have been in operation, a total of fifty-nine. By 1971 thirty of these establishments had ceased to operate.⁷⁴

The Arton Wilson report estimated that in 1958 some 3,000,000 people (including children) went for odd weekends or for a week or two in the summer to a static caravan on a holiday site in this country.⁷⁵ For static holiday caravan sites at least, this period of ascendancy would continue, despite the rising costs which were having to be passed on to customers. In his scholarly social history of the popular seaside holiday *Beside the Seaside* published in 1978, James Walvin attests to the voracity with which the caravan had made 'major inroads' into patterns of holiday accommodation: 'In 1955, 2 million people took their holidays in caravans; by the late 1960s this had risen to 4 ½ million. In 1955, caravan holidays accounted for only 8 per cent of the national

total, but by 1970 they had reached 18 per cent.’⁷⁶ As Demetriadi observes: ‘With the explosion in car ownership during this period it is little wonder that the popularity of caravan holidays grew markedly’, and although this observation seems to generalise both touring and static caravan holidays, static use is, nevertheless, part of the picture of growth.⁷⁷ This ‘golden age of popular motoring’, aided by relatively low fuel prices, limited restrictions on parking, lightly policed speed limits and (at this stage at least) limited congestion on the roads ensured the continuing popularity of touring and static caravan holidays: ‘caravan parks and holiday centres were major recipients of shifts in holiday demand, and cars flooded to the countryside.’⁷⁸ It would not be until the early 1970’s that traffic congestion (particularly on the bank holiday weekends), the energy crisis and rising fuel prices would begin to affect the motoring boom.

9. Conclusions

During the early part of the twentieth century Tendring’s resorts grew dramatically in terms of facilities and visitor numbers, in line with the well-documented national experience as discussed above. The built infrastructure at the resort towns continued to establish until a high-point during the inter-war years. Holiday accommodation consisted largely of hotels, guest houses and bed and breakfast houses, plotland holiday homes and camping grounds. These were augmented during the inter-war years by the commercial holiday camps. The resort towns were, at this point, the hubs of entertainment and socialising. The theatres, amusements, beach areas, bars and recreation facilities similarly reached a high-point of popularity.

After the Second World War, a number of factors contributed to considerable change from the inter-war picture. Wider social change, increasing working-class consumerism, legislation (particularly the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, and the 1960 Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act), lack of infra-structure investment and changing cultural expectations coupled with cheap foreign travel opportunities saw a decline in the more traditional aspects of the resorts; hotels and guest houses in particular saw significant decline in visitor numbers.

Seaside resort entertainments would increasingly have to cater for a younger clientele that sought opportunities for dancing and live musical entertainments as the 1960s progressed. This was partly fulfilled at newer establishments at the resorts, commercial camps and caravan sites. Again this was at the expense of the more traditional entertainment models.

As hotel and guest house accommodation saw declining visitor numbers, self-catered holiday accommodation had the opposite experience. Holiday caravan parks in particular, with on-site entertainments and facilities flourished in the district. By the mid 1970s, after the post-war economic 'golden age', further decline in visitor numbers and perceptions of the Victorian and Edwardian seaside infrastructure of UK resorts as being tired and outdated saw local tourism economies suffer further. The commercial holiday camps were closed during the 1980s. Holiday caravan parks generally maintained their popularity during the 1980s, however, by offering a product that was updated with newer accommodation and would appeal to the more affluent as well as those of basic means.

It is hoped that the historical research discussed above can inform the development phase of the project and can feed into a series of possible outcomes as suggested below:

Online compendium

It is suggested that research should be incorporated into an online compendium of the history of the district and its key resorts. The compendium would be a compilation of chapters covering the various aspects of the district's development including individual resort creation and development; social and economic trends (including tourism history), physical development, landscape and environmental history and the district's relationship with the wider history of domestic tourism and resort development. The nature and character of Tendring and its resorts provides scope for the compilation of an interesting and informative online resource.

Themed talks

It is suggested that a series of themed could be organised to cover the key historical social developments that have impacted the resorts in the Tendring District. The manifestation of the various forms of tourism as discussed above, and the impact these have had upon the physical, social and economic character of the district can thereby communicated to a wider audience as the talks are delivered at local venues. Phenomena such as the development and use of seaside accommodation from the early bathing machines into beach huts, plotland holiday homes, hotels, commercial holiday camps, chalets and static holiday caravan parks are, as discussed, highly significant in the physical and social history of the district.

Conference

It is proposed to launch this series of talks with a public conference in the locality; this could be organised and integrated with current activities run by the Department of History at the University of Essex. In collaboration with the Centre for Local and Regional History at the university, it is proposed to issue a call for papers and invite guest speakers to contribute to a series of lectures and presentations. The event ought to be widely promoted, and should attract not only academics, but those with a more general interest in the area's recent history, thereby adding further momentum to the overall project.

Trail, website, e-books and a smart phone app.

Research could also be used to inform the creation of Heritage Trails at key areas in the district, in order to provide a long-term, activity based outcomes which continue to encourage and promote understanding of the resorts heritage. A website, possibly in collaboration with the University of Essex, may also be created in order to allow public interaction with the project, communicate ongoing research and activities and promote events. E-books and a smart phone app may also be created to further disseminate information, news and events within the wider context of the project.

Sean O'Dell, 2016.

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