

## HERITAGE CIRCLE

### Daniel Defoe's tour of the Eastern Counties in 1722.

Sarah Doig gave a talk about Daniel Defoe's tour of the Eastern Counties in 1722 to the March meeting of the Heritage Circle. Defoe is best known for his book *Robinson Crusoe*, grew up in a society split by politics and class. The son of a Huguenot family of religious dissenters who had fled Flanders, he wanted a life removed from politics and class, and believed in freedom of the press and better conditions for tradesmen. He wrote three volumes of his tour of Great Britain, set in places of historical interest, and tried to entertain the reader with his writing.

The route of his tour was from the Essex coast to Suffolk and Norfolk, returning to Essex. He visited what were then villages on the outskirts of London, which are now suburbs. In Essex he visited Barking, Lea, and Shoeburyness, which all produced fish and farm produce which were sent to the London markets, where the best prices were obtained. Wivenhoe was famed for oysters which as well as supplying the London markets were also a staple diet for working people.

Defoe described Colchester as fair and beautiful, with 40,000 inhabitants. Dutch immigrants had established a wool spinning industry, producing bays (baize) cloth which was exported. But after the Spanish War of Succession the French stole the trade. Colchester declined and never recovered. Harwich was a busy fishing port, and had a shipbuilding industry. Ipswich was described as rundown, although its inhabitants were described as well informed and entertaining, with good houses. The town was governed well, had good provisions, and easy passage to London. Sudbury was very populous, but poor. The area was famed for the rearing of turkeys and geese, and huge droves passed by on the way to London.

Defoe was impressed by Cupola House and the Athenaeum in Bury St Edmunds. He visited Bury Fair which was held on Angel Hill, and held concerts, plays and balls. From Bury Defoe travelled to High Suffolk, famed for its arable and dairy farming, producing high quality butter and cheese for London. Framlingham was described as unremarkable. He then travelled the route of the Waveney into Norfolk, visiting Scole and Redgrave. He described the county as having many small market towns and villages. Norwich, a city of 10,000 people, mainly employed in the textile industry. High quality cloth was produced in peoples homes and exported.

Yarmouth had good access to the low countries, the Baltic and also inland. Herring fishing was the main industry, and a herring fair was a huge event, held annually. Other industries included salt extraction, herring smoking and ship building. King's Lynn, described by Defoe as beautiful, well built and well situated. It was a port used for the export of grain. Newmarket did not impress Defoe. It was famous for its horse racing, and royalty and nobility had holiday homes there. Cambridge relied on the universities for its prosperity. Stourbridge Fair, held in September, was the largest in Europe. All trades were there, housed in booths and tents.

At the end of his tour Defoe acknowledged that things were changing and improving in the country, in industry, building and agriculture, hopefully for the benefit of the people.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be at 7.30pm on Wednesday 24 April when Tony Diamond will give a talk entitled *Shakespeare Buff*. New members and visitors are very welcome. Further information about the Heritage Circle is available on its website, [www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net](http://www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net).

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