

## Hacflet – the creek with the angular bend



The original name of Bradwell Creek, the stretch of water between the mainland and Pewet Island, was thought to be Hacflet, taking its name from the Old English *haca* and *fleot* and thought to refer to ‘the creek with the angular bend’.

In the Domesday Book (1086), there is a reference to *Hacflet* later *Hacke-fleta*, *-flete* and *Acflet* in 1185 and *Okflet* in 1195. By 1285 it is referred to as *quay in Bradwelle called Hokflete*.

The Domesday Book gives an indication of the landscape and settlement of the Bradwell-on-Sea area at the very end of the Saxon period. At the time of Edward the Confessor 4 manors are recorded, *Effescestra*, *Hacflet*, *Dona* and *Duna*.

*Hacflet* which was held by Alward consisted of 2 hides and 30 acres of both arable and pasture land. Some glebe land was included in this manor, as well as a fishery. A hide was thought to be about 100 acres and enough to maintain a household, whilst glebe land is owned by the church. So quite a significant settlement at this time. A fishery is recorded in the Domesday Book as belonging to *Hacflete* manor; This may be the fish trap recorded off Pewett Island.

The four manors mentioned in the Domesday Book gained new landowners in 1086; *Hacflet* was gifted to Odo, the warrior Bishop of Bayeaux and held by a man-at-arms.



The number of smallholders increases from 4 to 10 and the value of the manor also increases greatly, possibly due to increased productivity and the importance of the quay to trade.

It is possible to partially reconstruct the medieval landscape of Bradwell-on-Sea by using a variety of sources from the historic records. It would seem the Church held 40 acres as glebe. There was pasture for 260 sheep and enough arable land for 1 man’s plough. There was also a fishery. The Bishop was a prominent landowner in 1086, however it appears that his lands were broken up soon after this. Around 1186 there is a reference to ‘*Hackeflete*’ with a glebe of some 40 acres being held by John, son of Guy de Rochford, who was a minor in the Kings gift.

Over time the ownership and boundaries of the manors continued to change and merge. The smaller manor of ‘Dona’ became the manor of Down Hall that included copyhold lands at Bradwell Waterside including the Quay itself. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century ‘Dona’ became known as Bradwell Hall, which in turn held ownership of the quay at waterside.

The quay was an important focus of the community as the passage to Bradwell was by the water way called Poonte. This is interpreted as the Pant, which was the earlier name for the river Blackwater. The location of the parish meant it was potentially vulnerable to invasion by people and flooding by the sea. An early medieval marine incursion at Othona has been identified and may have been a cause for the settlement to move inland. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the quay at Bradwell Waterside remained busy with the export of goods associated with the thriving sheep market, although the main population had moved inland to the village.



The new focus of the parish was the village situated more centrally within the parish and on elevated land. St Thomas parish church was built in the centre of the new village leaving St Peters main use as a navigational aid and Chapel of Ease.

The early 1300’s record mention up to 3 windmills in the area that were not referred to in the Domesday Book which offers evidence of the agricultural developments. John de la Mare, the Lord of the Manor, was granted a weekly market in the parish in 1283. This must have been relatively successful as the Bishop of London, claiming that it damaged business at his market in Southminster, petitioned against it.



This claim failed, however the allowance of free use of the quay at Bradwell seems to have appeased the Bishop.

Wool was a particularly valuable resource and the ability to export it would have meant the quay would have been a busy trading port. So much so that Bradwell was recognised as one of only 4 Essex wool ports during the 1400’s. Hence the prospect that sheep were grazed on Pewet island from these early days. By this time the area was already notorious for smuggling, with records relating to charges for smuggling dating back to 1361. Wool was one of the commodities smuggled, indicating how valuable a resource it was considered.

Sir John de la Mare was Lord of the Manor from at least 1283 to 1313. He was in the service of the King. In 1283 he is in the possession of [the quay at] *Hocflete*. Therefore it seems as if some if not the entire manor of *Hacflet*, had been incorporated into Bradwell Manor by this time.

A small hamlet continued around the quay area which evolved as the village moved inland. The site of a lime kiln is marked on a 1774 map at Bradwell Wharf, at the end of Waterside Road. It is not seen on later prints and must have gone out of use by the 1880’s. It was built over by the boat sheds of the Sailing Centre. The Post Office was added to the hamlet at Bradwell Wharf at some time in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or possibly earlier. It is located off Waterside road and is now used as a house. It is a Grade II listed building. A Methodist chapel was added in 1863.

The importance of the coastal region has fluctuated over the post-medieval period reflecting military, agricultural and recreational activity. Fishing with a smaller version of a fish weir called a “kiddle”, continued until late in Bradwell.

The ease of water borne transport from the quay along rivers for export would have made the parish relatively prosperous. An Elizabethan return of Essex landing place in 1573 lists two places at Bradwell. As well as Bradwell Wharf, East Hall also appears to have a quay at this time. Apparently this second quay, known as “Key Haven”, lay between Wymarks and East Hall at one time. In 1919 it was bought by Strutt and Parker (Farms) Ltd who had been earlier tenants. It is now owned by the Othona Community and Strutt and Parker Farms continue to be the tenants.

Around 1603-1625 trading ports were assessed.

Bradwell was classed as a small port with only one vessel shipping goods. A very small amount of fishing was carried out from Bradwell at this time.



However the wharf at Bradwell was rebuilt during the post-medieval period and there was a weekly boat carrying corn and hay to London. Incoming cargoes included stone and chalk for sea walls and chalk for the lime kiln. Later, London muck was brought back for fertiliser

In 1667 the Dutch fleet appeared in the mouth of the Thames and as a consequence a company of foot soldiers were briefly posted at Bradwell. Around ca.1795 a gun battery was constructed at Wymarks Beach, but never put into use,

However a military presence continued at Bradwell with an earlier abandoned watch house re-commissioned in 1825. In 1833 the coastguard’s men were quartered aboard the Whitworth, which lay afloat in the creek till at least 1838, when cottages were asked for as she could not accommodate the crew of eleven.

Eventually the watch tower was abandoned due to its unsanitary conditions and a row of coastguard cottages were erected on the edge of the saltings. By the 1890’s a new block of coastguard houses were built on the top road, which incorporated the office. Apparently the Coastguard Houses on the top road were demolished because of the risk of collision from aircraft using the airfield.

However the older cottages can still be seen tucked behind the old sea wall. They remain in use to this day.

*This article was assembled from **BRADWELL-ON-SEA, HISTORIC SETTLEMENT ASSESSMENT REPORT** produced by Teresa O’Connor 2006 on behalf of Historic Environment Branch of Essex County Council. We apologise in advance for any inaccuracy or misinterpretation in the assembly of this brief synopsis.*

*Tony Comber - Friends of Bradwell Quay*