

A Brief Summary of Hadleigh's History

This summary was prepared in July 2022 by the Hadleigh Society for Hadleigh Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan 2023-38

The town of Hadleigh (originally Haedlaege or Hetlega meaning 'the heath clearing'¹) has a long and rich history. Testament to its remarkable heritage are its 246 listed buildings (four being Grade I) complemented by a Local List of over 100 properties of special local worth.²

Archaeological excavations and surveys (finds recorded on Suffolk Heritage Explorer website) provide good evidence of human activity in the Hadleigh area from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, through Roman occupation and into the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval periods.³ Possibly the first documented reference to Hadleigh emanates from 878CE with the defeat by Alfred the Great of Danish warlord Guthrum and the latter's enforced conversion to Christianity (baptized Aethelstan). Subsequently, Guthrum became ruler of East Anglia with Hadleigh noted as one of his royal towns and reputed place of burial.⁴

Medieval Hadleigh derived considerable prosperity from its woollen-cloth industry; this affluence is demonstrated by the prestigious Grade I listed buildings originating from the time - St Mary's Church, the Guildhall Complex and Rector Archdeacon Pykenham's Gateway (the Deanery Tower) – today these create a spectacular heritage area around the churchyard. Close by, were the manorial enclosures of two of Hadleigh's five manors – the Manor of Toppesfield and the Manor of Hadleigh. The latter was the town's chief and largest manor, bequeathed in 991 by Ealdorman Byrhtnoth to the Church of Christ of Canterbury (today's Canterbury Cathedral). The archbishops, and later the lord priors and monks of the Cathedral Monastery, became its lords and also chief lords of the town with responsibility for jurisdiction within the parish. Hadleigh's church (included in Bryhtnoth's bequest) then became an archiepiscopal peculiar of Canterbury making it independent of the local diocese.⁵ until 1838. Today's Hadleigh market also stems from the medieval period with the charter of Henry III in 1252 granted to the Lord and Lady of Toppesfield Manor.⁶ An unusually early grammar school was recorded in the town in 1275, possibly operating even before this date.⁷

The origins of Hadleigh's impressive Guildhall date from the early 15th century when the land (with a building), the market and market rights were granted to the town by the Clopton family of Toppesfield Hall; the initial 6s 8d rent changing to an annual red rose in 1438.⁸ Ever since, this important publicly owned building has featured prominently in the life and governance of Hadleigh. Its spaces have been used for conducting town and market affairs and as venues for the meetings and functions of many groups, including Hadleigh's six religious guilds of the 15th and first half of the 16th century. Almshouses, a grammar school, workhouse (at times referred to as a hospital or house of correction), prison, woolhall, National schools and a Sunday school have all been accommodated within the premises.⁹

By the 16th century responsibility for town matters lay with a group of leading citizens known as the Chief Inhabitants - comprising the Trustees of the Market Feoffment and Archdeacon Pykenham's charity, other wealthy townsmen and later the Rector or Dean. Perhaps their most commendable achievement was their ambitious and progressive poor-relief system involving the setting up of the workhouse.¹⁰ Town business would have been conducted against the religious turbulence associated with the Reformation, most poignantly evidenced locally by the martyrdom in 1555 of Hadleigh's former Protestant Rector Dr Rowland Taylor who was burnt at the stake on Aldham Common.¹¹

Borough status was awarded to Hadleigh by James I in 1618 creating governance by a council of eight aldermen (from whom the mayor was elected annually) and sixteen chief burgesses. Borough administration and justice were run exclusively from within Hadleigh's

Guildhall Complex. When this borough status was formally withdrawn by James II in 1686, town governance became the province of the Vestry - the ancient governing body of a parish dealing with local matters civil and ecclesiastical; the Chief Inhabitants were responsible for the market and the town charities. Both groups were chaired by the Dean.¹² The earliest known map of Hadleigh dates from 1668 with the town centre entirely recognizable today.¹³ The 17th century also witnessed the decline of Hadleigh's previously vibrant woollen-cloth industry and two plague outbreaks, all amidst the vagaries of Civil War and continuing religious strife. Hadleigh's prosperity suffered considerably.¹⁴

In the 18th century local government remained with the Vestry. The workhouse continued to function, inmates spinning yarn to raise income. Two successful Sunday schools were set up and Protestant Dissenters were allowed to meet in their own places of worship. Poverty was still rife, not helped by two visitations of smallpox though the recently-developed inoculations saved the day. The Hadleigh Gang of smugglers were particularly active in 1745 with their leader John Harvey of Pond Hall transported in 1747.¹⁵

The poverty and depression of the 19th century led to some conspicuous unrest in the town. Establishment of further agricultural-based businesses (long associated with Hadleigh), new ventures such as a silk throwster mill, production of gas, factories for coco-fibre matting, sacks and corsets along with considerable development in malting and some migration helped to alleviate unemployment.¹⁶ Today's Corn Exchange, New Town Hall, United Reformed Church and Deanery House date from this period. Dean Lyall commissioned a detailed street map of Hadleigh in 1836¹⁷ while his successor, Dean Knox, visited every home in the parish and recorded in a diary his candid opinions of the parishioners!¹⁸ The railway arrived in 1847 with passenger services ceasing in 1932 and goods in 1965.¹⁹ During the century Hadleigh Local Government Board became responsible for town governance until the formation of Hadleigh Urban District Council (HUDC) in 1894.²⁰

The 1900s saw substantial development in Hadleigh including significant social improvements for residents. Early in the century roads and pavements were constructed in the town centre and a motor bus service to Ipswich commenced. The WWI memorial warranted 112 names; after WWII a further 39 had to be added. By 1924 the first 24 council houses had been built; by 1950 there were 144.²¹ Sir Cedric Morris created the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing at Benton End in 1940; the swimming pool and High School opened in 1971 and Magdalen Road in 1973.²² HUDC was replaced by Hadleigh Town Council in 1974, appointing the town's first mayor after 288 years. Babergh District Council established its offices in Corks Lane in 1982, closing in 2017. In the second half of the century Hadleigh by-pass and a major refurbishment of the Guildhall were completed. The first planning application by Tesco for a superstore on land off the High Street was submitted in 1999, starting a fourteen-year battle ending in rejection for the retailer.²³ Perhaps one of the most influential 20th century developments was the Lady Lane Industrial Estate in 1964 which steered employment opportunities away from those of the traditional agricultural-based economy towards modern industries using new technologies; associated with this were major residential developments.²⁴ This expansion has continued into the 21st century with Hadleigh's population increasing from 3,250 to around 9,000, bringing with it a growth in prosperity not seen for centuries.²⁵

Sources

N.B. HA = Hadleigh Archive. CCA = Canterbury Cathedral Archives. SA/B = Suffolk Archives at Bury St Edmunds

¹ Mills, A.D. (2014) *Suffolk Place Names: Their Origins and Meanings*. Mills: Monks Eleigh.
Briggs, K. & Kilpatrick, K. (2016) *A Dictionary of Suffolk Place Names*. English Place Name Society, Nottingham

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- ² Historic England: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/>
Local List on The Hadleigh Society website: <http://www.hadsoc.org.uk/>
- ³ Suffolk Heritage Explorer: <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk>
- ⁴ Andrews, S. 'In search of Guthrum,' in Andrews, S. (2013) *The Hadleigh Historian*. Issue 13 December 2012-January 2013 pp4-10
Dumville, D., Keynes, S. & Lapidge, M. (1985) *The Annals of St Neots with Vita Primo Sancti Neoti*. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition. Vol 17: Cambridge
- ⁵ Woods, M. (2018) *Medieval Hadleigh*. Woods: Layham
- ⁶ Hadleigh Inspeximus Charter 1432 (royal confirmation of the original 1252 charter): HA:01/A/01
- ⁷ Hadleigh Court Roll 1275: CCA U15/16/1
- ⁸ Hadleigh Market Charter 1438: HA:001/13/01. Hadleigh Deed 1438: SA/B: E3/2/2
- ⁹ Guildhall Complex Timeline under 'Hadleigh History' on the Hadleigh Society website: <http://www.hadsoc.org.uk/> (not yet available)
- ¹⁰ Andrews, S. & Springall, T. (2005) *Hadleigh & the Alabaster Family: The Story of a Suffolk Family during the Tudor & Stuart periods*. S. Andrews: Bildeston.
M^cIntosh, M. K. (2013) *Poor Relief & Community in Hadleigh Suffolk 1547-1600*. University of Hertfordshire Press: Hatfield.
Hadleigh Market Feoffment Book: HA:04/A/01
- ¹¹ Jones, W.A.B. (1977) *Hadleigh through the Ages*. East Anglian Magazine: Ipswich.
Also, the memorial on Aldham Common.
- ¹² Andrews, S. & Springall, T. (2005) *Hadleigh & the Alabaster Family: The Story of a Suffolk Family during the Tudor & Stuart periods*. S. Andrews: Bildeston.
Guildhall Complex Timeline under 'Hadleigh History' on the Hadleigh Society website: <http://www.hadsoc.org.uk/> (not yet available)
- ¹³ Map of the Stoddard estate 1668: HA:080/14
- ¹⁴ Jones, W.A.B. (1977) *Hadleigh through the Ages*. East Anglian Magazine: Ipswich
- ¹⁵ Jones, W.A.B. (1977) *Hadleigh through the Ages*. East Anglian Magazine: Ipswich.
Market Charity Book 1707-1839: HA:004/G/01
- ¹⁶ Jones, W.A.B. (1977) *Hadleigh through the Ages*. East Anglian Magazine: Ipswich
- ¹⁷ Map of Hadleigh 1836: HA:080/15
- ¹⁸ Hadleigh parish diary 1841-44: SA/B FB81/C10/1
- ¹⁹ Andrews, S. 'The first & last trains' in *The Hadleigh Historian* Issue 2 June-July 2014 p2
- ²⁰ Local Government Act 1871. Local Government Act 1894
- ²¹ Hadleigh Urban District Council Minute Books: SA/B: EF504/3 series
- ²² Benton End information: <http://www.gardenmuseum.org.uk/benton-end-cedric-morris>
- ²³ Hadleigh Society Executive Committee Meeting Minutes 1999-2013
- ²⁴ Hadleigh Local History Recorder Scheme Annual Parish Reports
- ²⁵ Approximate population in 2022 extrapolated from http://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/eastofengland/suffolk/E34004142_hadleigh/