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ST MARY HOO, HOO PENINSULA, KENT

HISTORIC AREA ASSESSMENT

Joanna Smith and Jonathan Clarke



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ST MARY HOO, HOO PENINSULA, MEDWAY, KENT

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SUMMARY

The parish of St Mary Hoo lies on the north side of the Hoo peninsula, extending from the central ridge of higher ground to a northern marshland fringe and foreshore on the River Thames. Bordered east and west by the parishes of Allhallows and High Halstow, its chief settlements are the village of St Mary Hoo, the hamlet of Fenn Street and further ribbon development along the Ratcliff Highway, the principal routeway. Historically its economy was largely agricultural, but like others on the peninsula, St Mary Hoo saw industrial and military development in the 19th and 20th centuries, mainly in the form of gravel extraction, explosives storage, war-time defensive structures and land fill waste disposal. St Mary's Hall was the home of the influential agriculturalist Henry Pye, the so-called 'King of the Hundreds' who progressed farming practices and played a decisive role in the creation of the 'Hundred of Hoo Railway Company'. Yet the parish was bypassed by the railway and by the upgrading of the peninsula's main road, the A228. As a result St Mary Hoo retains a strongly agricultural character, and its landscape is one of fields, orchards and marshland pasture with dispersed residential clusters and isolated farmsteads.

CONTRIBUTORS

The report was written by Joanna Smith and researched and formatted by Jonathan Clarke. The character area maps were produced by Philip Sinton, and final DTPing was undertaken by Martin Jeffs. The photographs were taken by Jonathan Clarke.

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Frontispiece; 'St. Mary Hoo is a farming parish ... As you walk across its fields, superb views march beside you across the Thames Estuary to the north'

PREFACE

The Hoo Peninsula Historic Landscape Project was undertaken by English Heritage between 2009 and 2012. The project aims were to inform landscape change at a strategic level by providing an enhanced evidence base and a better-informed understanding of the area's rich historic character. To ensure a truly integrated project a number of different research and recording techniques at the disposal of English Heritage were deployed. These included aerial survey, analytical earthwork and buildings survey, historic landscape, seascape and routeway characterisation, farmstead characterisation and historic area assessment. An integrated narrative report drawing on this full range of work was produced in 2013 (Carpenter et al, 2013).

Historic area assessment was developed by English Heritage as one of a number of approaches to understanding the historic environment at area scale. Each assessment aims to explain how the past is encapsulated in today's landscape, to describe its character and to distinguish its more significant elements. Because resources, timescales and the nature of areas can vary three levels of assessment have been defined (English Heritage, 2010). For the Hoo Peninsula Historic Landscape Project it was decided to undertake historic area assessments of individual parishes at outline level - that is less-intensive survey and research to enable coverage of a wider area. The Hoo Peninsula, east of the ridge of high land at Higham, was assessed by parish. For each parish the key elements of its historic development were identified, its architectural interest and significance was evaluated and its landscape was subdivided into character areas.

The Hoo Peninsula outline historic area assessments were carried out within English Heritage by members of the Assessment Team South, Heritage Protection Department. Fieldwork was undertaken during a number of visits to the peninsula between 2010 and 2011. This consisted of external ground photography and site notes. A limited amount of research was undertaken in the local archives. Extensive use was made of historic maps, principally the tithe maps and various Ordnance Survey editions, along with on-line resources such as census data and historic newspapers, to produce the assessments. These were written in draft by the team members between 2011 and 2013.

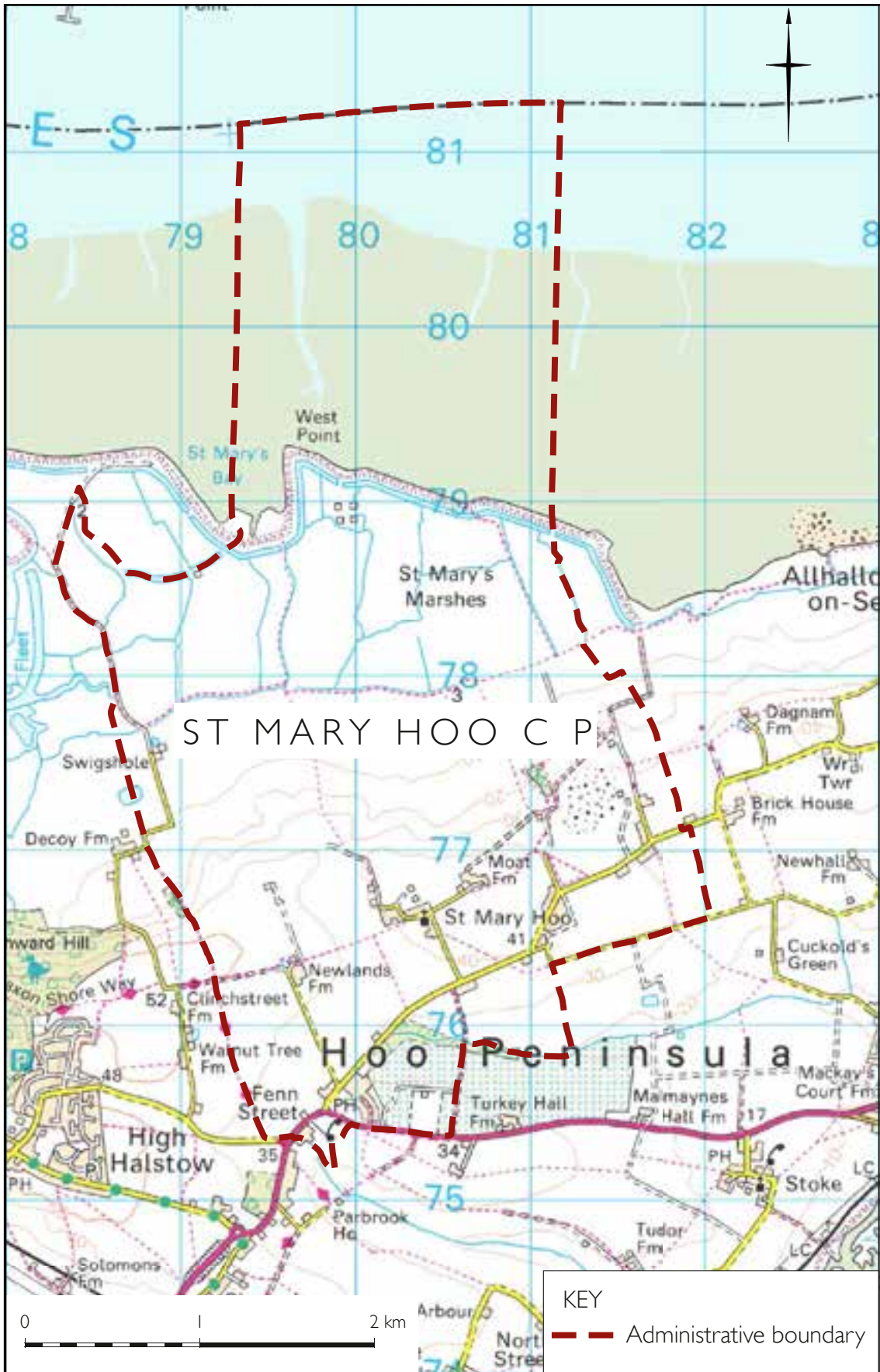


Figure 1 Location map showing St Mary Hoo Civil Parish. ©Crown copyright and database right 2014. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 1000124900.

INTRODUCTION

The parish of St Mary Hoo lies on the north side of the Hoo peninsula, extending from the central ridge of higher ground to a northern marshland fringe and foreshore on the River Thames (Fig 1). It is bordered by the parishes of Allhallows and High Halstow to the east and west respectively. The landscape of St Mary Hoo is one of fields, orchards and marshland pasture, with a soil of clayey gravel and a subsoil of clay. Its small population, the second lowest in the peninsula, is thinly distributed around the village of St Mary Hoo, the hamlet of Fenn Street and other ribbon development along its main routeway, the Ratcliff Highway. There are also a few dispersed residential clusters and isolated farmsteads.

The village of St Mary Hoo is a long-established settlement. During the second half of the 19th century its principal residence, St Mary's Hall, was the home of the influential farmer Henry Pye, credited with modernising agriculture in the peninsula. Largely unaffected by post-war development, the village has been designated as a conservation area.

The parish did not entirely escape industrial and military development in the 19th and 20th centuries, mainly in the form of gravel extraction, explosives storage, war-time defensive structures and land fill waste disposal. But the area was by-passed by the Hundred of Hoo railway and largely excluded from the upgrading of the peninsula's main road, the A228, and as a result retains a strongly agricultural character.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Development before 1800

Archaeological evidence points to some prehistoric activity in the area, including the discovery of palaeolithic implements and a bronze hoard. A possible Roman pottery site has been identified, perhaps part of the wider pottery-making district that existed in Cliffe and Cooling marshes between the 1st and 3rd centuries.² In the late 7th century land at St Mary Hoo was granted to a monastery at Peterborough by Caedwalla.³ Settlement along the edge of the upland escarpment is likely to have begun in the Saxon period. This developed into the village of St Mary Hoo, which, like other places in the peninsula, derived its name from the dedication of the parish church. The Church of St Mary may have replaced a chapel belonging to St Werburgh, known to have been in existence in 1274.⁴ Its earliest extant fabric has been dated to the 14th century.

Administratively the parish lay within the Lathe of Aylesford and the Hundred of Hoo (Fig 2). At the time of the conquest it had two manors. The paramount manor was St Mary Hoo and this still occupies its original site to the south of the parish church. It was anciently held by the Bardolf family, before passing briefly to Sir John Brooke, Lord Cobham in the 15th century. Thereafter it passed through the Wiseman and Faunce families.⁵ Parts of the present farmhouse at St Mary's Hall, as the manorial site is now known, are said to date to the 16th century.⁶ The other manor was at Coombe, to the east of the village. During the 18th century the estate was briefly owned by the trustees of St George's Church, Bloomsbury, who acquired it around 1732 and sold it in 1765.⁷ By the 14th century a 'reputed' manor was in existence to the west of the village at Newlands. This was held by the Somer or Somers family but was sold in the 17th century to the treasurers of the Chatham Chest, which had been established around 1590 to provide support for disabled seamen. It was they who rebuilt the farmhouse in 1746.



By the 18th century the village had developed into a loose cluster of farmsteads (St Mary's Hall, Ross Farm and Moat Farm), cottages and a poorhouse. A rectory was constructed in the late 18th century to the north of the church, probably built for Reverend Robert Burt, who acquired the advowson of St Mary Hoo and High Halstow in 1786, the year after conducting the marriage of George, Prince of Wales and Maria Fitzherbert.⁸

Figure 2 Extract from A Map of the Hundreds of Hoo and Chatham and Gillingham, 1798. showing inter alia the location of St Mary Hoo, and Coombe (spelt 'Comb') Farm.

Another focus of settlement was the historic routeway that traversed the ridge of higher land, presently known as the Ratcliffe Highway. Several farmsteads developed along the routeway; some remained as isolated sites, such as Hoppers Farm and Barn Street Farm, while two more closely situated farmsteads evolved into an informal linear hamlet known as Fenn (sometimes Fen) Street. This hamlet, situated at the western edge of the parish, included a number of cottages seemingly built on waste ground beside the road, and a public house, the Fenn Bell or Bell Inn. This was in existence by the 17th century and its name was said to derive from one of the bells used to guide travellers across the marshes in poor weather.⁹ An adjacent area of woodland, which lay mainly outside of the parish, was known as Bell Wood.

The western edge of the parish had a curiously ill-defined boundary. The strip of land extending northwards from Fenn Street to the riverside, known historically as Le Meneparishe and latterly as The Mean, was jointly administered with High Halstow parish. Its status had caused some problems and was the subject of a dispute over the right to tithes in the 15th century.

After the industrial occupation of the marshes during the Roman period the land probably reverted to open saltings. The process of reclamation started in the medieval period, if not earlier. As the saltings were progressively 'inned' to form sheep pasture, isolated farmsteads were established on the low-lying marshland, such as Egypt Marshes Farm, Lowlands Farm and Swigshole Farms, along with shepherds or 'lookers' cottages. After 1530 the North Kent Sewer Commission constructed and maintained a sea wall along the river frontage; this formed part of a sub section known as the High Halstow and St Mary Level. Rising sea levels and periods of stormy weather in the 17th and 18th century necessitated regular upkeep of the walls and drainage ditches to prevent sea water incursion and in the 1740s 2280 tons of chalk were required to strengthen the walls at High Halstow and St Mary. One consequence of the commission's activities was formation of an inlet known as St Mary's Bay.

Development 1800-1945

During the 19th century the population of the parish fluctuated between 214 and 302, probably never exceeding 320, according to the census figures. If the general trend was upwards during the 19th century the early decades of the 20th century indicate a gradual decline.¹³ Broadly speaking, such low figures were comparable to other parishes in the peninsula such as Allhallows, Cooling and High Halstow that remained predominantly agricultural, with little military or industrial development.

A modest degree of change, if not expansion, affected the village of St Mary Hoo during the 19th and early 20th centuries. When mapped for the Tithe Commission in 1839, the isolated settlement was only accessible from a lane leading off the Ratcliffe Highway. This meandered around the churchyard and through the village, interrupted by several ponds, before petering out into fields. On the north side of the parish church were a small group of farmworkers' cottages and the village poorhouse, which became redundant in 1835 following the creation of the Hoo Poor Law Union. Ross's Farm and the Rectory edged the village and trackways led eastwards to the Moat or Spongs Farm

and westwards to Newlands Farm. Over the next century a number of the village houses were replaced and in 1881 St Mary's Church was partially rebuilt. The most significant addition to the village was St Mary's Parochial School, built by the National Society in 1868 (Fig 3).¹⁴



Figure 3 St Mary's Parochial School, built by the National Society in 1868 (P5733069)

The western boundary of the parish continued to be ill-defined throughout the 19th century. When mapped in 1839 the area was shown with a fence marking a notional division slightly further to the east than the present line, which seems to have been agreed around the turn of the 20th century. This finally bought the hamlet of Fenn Street within St Mary Hoo parish. The settlement experienced a limited amount of new development during the 19th and early 20th century, principally the replacement of some cottages with residences of a more suburban character and the construction of a small chapel (beyond the parish boundary) (Fig 4).

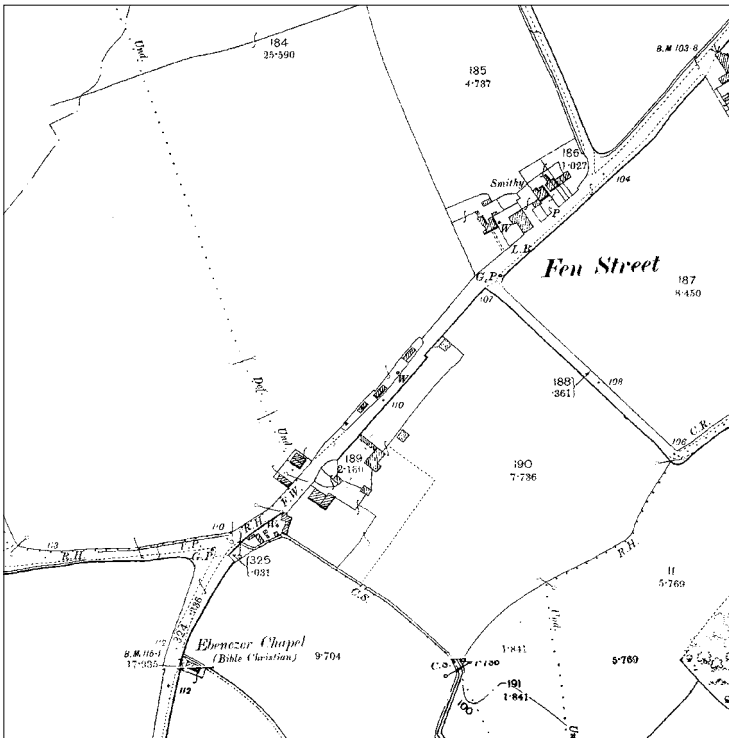


Figure 4 Extract from OS 1:2,500 map surveyed in 1896, showing the continued development of Fenn Street (here spelt with one 'n'), including the provision of a small chapel, just southwest of the parish boundary. © and database right Crown copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2014) Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024

On the east side of the parish several loose clusters of farmsteads and farmworkers cottages had developed. One was Bell's Farm and a small development of three pairs of cottages with substantial gardens, known as Coombe Houses and therefore presumably associated with Coombe Farm. In 1887 a row of five workers' houses, Rose Cottages, were built at the junction of the Ratcliffe Highway and an access road to Coombe Farm, sometimes referred to as Coombe Corner. This was near a section of the Ratcliffe Highway that followed the field boundaries, creating a succession of sharp bends. Further development occurred in the 1920s when Hoo Rural District Council constructed 12 semi-detached houses, known as St Mary's Cottages on a site beside the Ratcliffe Highway and opposite the access road to the village (Fig 5). These were part of the initial phase of local authority housing across the peninsula, intended to replace the poorest quality accommodation.



Figure 5 St Mary's Cottages beside the Ratcliffe Highway consist of 12 semi-detached houses that date from the 1920s and formed part of the initial phase of local authority housing across the peninsula. (P5733070)

Throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century agriculture continued to dominate the life of the parish. However, during this period farming underwent considerable change. Certain trends, such as the acquisition of land by trusts or institutions and the concentration of ownership had begun before the 19th century. By the 1840s one individual William Fuller owned St Mary's Hall, Lowland Farm, Moat Farm, Hoppers Farm and Ross Farm.¹⁵ This estate was subsequently acquired by Ecclesiastical Commissioners (latterly the Church Commissioners).¹⁶ The farms were often managed by baliffs and it was as a tenant that Henry Pye arrived at St Mary's Hall in 1851. He subsequently went on to lease Swigshole Farm, Ross Farm, Hoppers Farm and Fenn Street Farm (in St Mary Hoo parish) as well as Turkey Hall Farm and New Barn Farm (in Stoke parish).¹⁷

When Pye arrived farming was still conducted along traditional lines, with marshland grazing, a limited amount of fruit and hop growing and arable production on the uplands. He improved the drainage of his pastures and added chalk to the fields; introduced mechanical farming methods by using steam engines for ploughing and threshing and diversified the range of crops, growing potatoes and established seed growing as a large-scale industry.¹⁸ By the end of the 19th century the chief crops of the parish were wheat, potatoes, seeds and hops.¹⁹ Pye, along with other peninsula farmers, were also instrumental in the promotion of the Hundred of Hoo Railway Company, and was one of the company directors. His interest was in establishing quick and reliable access to the

London markets for his produce although when constructed in 1881-2 the railway line passed some distance to the south of St Mary Hoo.

One consequence of farm amalgamation was the subdivision of farmhouses into cottages. This had occurred at Bells Farm and Ross Farm by the 1830s and at Hoppers Farm by the 1860s.²⁰ There seems also to have been a gradual decline of the marshland farms. During the 19th century Egypt Marsh Farm was merged with part of Ross Farm.²¹ Similarly, a marshland cottage, Wick House, near St Mary's Bay, extant in 1839 was gone by the centuries' end. Lowlands Farm, to the north of Moat Farm, had lost its outbuildings by 1908 and had been entirely cleared by the mid-20th century. But there was also some renewal of farmsteads and the construction of new farm workers cottages across the parish. In the mid 19th century a new farmhouse was built at Coombe Farm. Around the 1870s Moat Farm (sometimes called Spongs Farm or Crevice Farm) was completely rebuilt (Fig 6). And in the early 20th century Bell's Farm was re-established as Shakespeare's Farm.



Figure 6 The earliest components of Moat Farm date from the 1870s, when the entire farmstead was completely rebuilt. (P5733071)

In the 1790s Edward Hasted observed that the land in the parish was 'not so much subject to gravel' except around Coombe.²² By the early 19th century gravel extraction was taking place and two pits flanking the Ratcliffe Highway by Barn Street Farm were depicted on the tithe map of 1839. These seem to have passed out of use by the end of the century. Little other industrial activity was occurring in the parish until the Thames Storage (Explosives) Company negotiated the lease of some land on St Mary's Marshes in 1891-2 for a gunpowder repacking station at St Mary's Marshes.²³ The explosives were transported by river and the benefits of an isolated location were demonstrated when one of the seven magazines was destroyed in an explosion on the 29th July 1905.²⁴ The site appears to have ceased operation soon after. Apart from these small scale operations the area was largely by-passed by industrial and military development in the peninsula during the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, a number of World War Two defensive facilities were located in the parish, included a heavy anti-aircraft battery at Fenn Street, light anti-aircraft batteries on the marshes and other anti-invasion measures such as pillboxes and anti-tank concrete blocks.²⁵

Development after 1945

The downward population trend continued in the immediate post-war years, with the census figures dropping to 154 in 1961.²⁶ Thereafter they began to increase, reaching 244

by 2001.²⁷ Post-war developments affecting the peninsula, such as road improvements and the shifting focus of industrial and economic development to the southern and eastern areas, largely by-passed the parish. Nor did it experience significant residential growth, as occurred nearby at High Halstow and Allhallows.

Evidence of post-war decline in St Mary Hoo included the closure of the village school (in 1947) and the parish church (in the late 1970s); both buildings subsequently underwent residential conversion. Road enhancements marginally affected Fenn Street, which became the point at which the A228 diverged from the long-established route of the Ratcliffe Highway. The latter was left as minor road serving St Mary Hoo and Allhallows although it was improved in the early 1950s, when a by-pass was built to avoid the bends near Hoppers Farm.²⁸ Some residential ribbon development followed in the latter decades of the 20th century.

Post-war changes in farming practice have also had an impact in the parish. An expansion of orchards in the early and mid-20th century is now being reversed. There has been a considerable amount of renewal of farm outbuildings and several farmsteads have passed out of agricultural use, including Coombe Farm, Newlands Farm, Hoppers Farm, Barn Street Farm and Fenn Street Farm. However, at least one new farm has been established at Ramsgreen, which originated as pair of isolated late-19th century farm workers cottages.

Other developments affecting the parish include the opening of a landfill site on the site of Shakespeares Farm in the late-20th century, operated by the waste management group Biffa (Fig 7). The anti-aircraft battery and associated camp was initially retained after the war as a Nucleus Force Battery Headquarters.²⁹ After this was closed the battery was cleared and its site was reused for a residential development, Bellwood Court, and a small industrial estate.



Figure 7 Biffa Environmental Technology Plant on the site of Shakespeares Farm (P5733072)

CHARACTER AREAS

St Mary Hoo is a predominantly rural parish (Fig 8). Its open landscape is a mixture of marshes and upland fields, with some small areas of orchard and woodland, that also encompasses former industrial sites and dispersed farmsteads. There are two areas of low-density settlement, the historic village and sections of ribbon development around the Ratcliff Highway.



Figure 8 Character Areas of St Mary Hoo Background mapping ©Crown copyright and database right 2103. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 1000124900

Marshland and upland farmland

Low-lying marshes form the northern part of the parish, protected from the River Thames by concrete sea walls. Beyond the wall is an area of saltings in St Mary's Bay. Inland is an expanse of marshland pasture defined by drainage ditches and fleets, the product of a long process of medieval and post-medieval reclamation. This retains features such as sheepfolds and is still being used for animal grazing.

At the western edge of the parish is Swigshole Farm, situated within an area known as The Mean. Because of this remained an ill-defined area, until the early 20th century the farmstead was often considered to be part of High Halstow parish.³⁰ Although it has lost most of its outbuildings, a substantial brick farmhouse remains, probably dating from the early 19th century. This is the now the only surviving marshland farm in the parish.

Non-agricultural sites on the marshes include the remains of the short-lived Thames Storage (Explosives) Company site, built in 1890s and 1900s.³¹ This was located to the east of St Mary's Bay and was served by its own landing stage. Seven roofless mass-concrete magazines still stand, possibly including the replacement of the magazine destroyed by an explosion in 1905. Evidence of World War Two light anti-aircraft batteries may also survive.

To the south of the marshes the land rises quite steeply before levelling off, permitting sweeping northward views across the estuary. This area of higher ground is largely fields, with some orchards and patches of woodland, most notably Bell Wood, much reduced in extent since the 19th century. The upland was anciently farmed for corn, latterly seed, potato and hops, and the escarpment appears to retain more of its historic field pattern than the southern part. The A228 clips the extreme southern corner of the parish. Its principal road, the Ratcliff Highway, crosses its southern part, from which run access roads serving the village and other residential clusters.

The parish's manorial sites all retain at least some historic fabric although Newlands Farm and Coombe Farm have now lost their agricultural function and have attracted subsequent residential development. At Newlands the handsome red-brick, two-storey farmhouse (listed grade II) bears a datestone of 1746. Its symmetrical front elevation faces east towards High Halstow (Fig 9). The farm outbuildings, ranged around an open courtyard to the west, probably date from the late 18th to the early 20th century. Some have been converted to residential use. A pair of late-19th century farm workers cottages have been demolished and two semi-detached bungalows and a detached house have been



Figure 9 Newlands Farmhouse with a converted outbuilding to the right. (P5733073)

built on adjoining land to the south. The site at Coombe has undergone more drastic alteration. Only its former farmhouse remains, built in c1860 to the south of the historic farmstead. Coombe House, as it now known, is a two-storey villa-type residence with white-painted rendered walls, a slate roof with overhanging eaves and a symmetrical three-bay elevation with a central porch (Fig 10). The complex of outbuildings was cleared in the 1980s. In the late-20th century a detached house was built to the south of the house.



Figure 10 The former neo-classical villa-style farmhouse of Coombe Farm, now called Coombe House (P5733074)

Ramsgreen Farm, located to the north of Newlands Farm, is an active upland farmstead. This originated as a pair of isolated late-19th century farmworkers' cottages, apparently rebuilt in the mid-to-late 20th century when a number of agricultural outbuildings were constructed. On the western side of the parish the historic farmstead, Bell's Farm, was re-established as Shakespeare's Farm in the early 20th century. This was provided with a new farmhouse, which still stands, but the other farm buildings were cleared in the late-20th century.

The name endures as Shakespeare's Farm landfill site. This was established in the late-20th century and is now closed to dumping; the build up of methane is controlled by a small technology plant, built by the site operators Biffa. Other non-agricultural features in the upland landscape include a World War Two pillbox to the north of Coombe House.

Settlement areas: St Mary Hoo village and the Ratcliffe Highway

The village of St Mary Hoo is situated on the edge of escarpment, to the north of the Ratcliffe Highway. Although historically the principal settlement of the parish, it remains modest in extent, formed of a cluster of houses and farms along a meandering street that ends at the village's northern edge. It retains most of its traditional elements - manorial farm complex, rectory, parish church, village school and pond - although not all remain

in their original use. The houses are a mixture of dates although the majority date from the 19th or 20th century. The relatively unaltered character of the village was recognised in 1984 when it was designated a conservation area.

The former parish church of St Mary (listed grade II*) lies at the centre of the village. This small unaisled ragstone building has a 14th-century nave with a 15th-century tower, the latter thought to be a conservative rebuilding of an earlier structure.³² In 1881 the church was heavily restored, probably by E. W. Stephens; this work included the rebuilding of the chancel and the addition of the present porch and vestry.³³ The building was declared redundant in the late 1970s and underwent domestic conversion the following decade.

To the south of the church is the manorial farm complex, St Mary's Hall. The farmhouse (listed grade II) is building of many phases, ranging from the 17th century to the late-19th century. The two-storey red-brick house, mostly painted white, was the home of Henry Pye between 1851 and 1909. Still an active farm, it has a timber-framed barn (externally of a 19th century character), late-20th century outbuildings and a walled kitchen garden. The historic farmstead at Ross Farm on the western edge of the village was cleared in the mid-20th century, replaced by complex of large agricultural sheds (Fig 11). Immediately to the south are a pair of early 20th century rendered houses, Ross Cottages; these replaced two older cottages belonging to the farm that stood adjacent to the village street.



Figure 11 Large portal-frame agricultural sheds replaced the historic farmstead at Ross Farm in the mid-20th century (P5733075)

Moat Farm (previously known as Crevice or Spongs Farm) lies slightly to the east of the village, linked by an access road that replaced an older track across the fields. The farmstead is long-established one but the present complex is entirely Victorian, probably rebuilt in the 1870s for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. It contains a two-storey farmhouse, a pair of farm workers cottages and ranges of sheds and stables around a courtyard, built of pale-yellow and yellow-stock brick. This relatively well-preserved

group was given further interest when part of a World War One airship shed was reassembled here for use as a grain store (listed grade II). This is formed of the canted roof of the timber-framed balloon store, clad in corrugated metal (Fig 12).



Figure 12 Moat Farm reused part of a World War One balloon store as a grain store, now a grade II listed building (P5733076)

The Old Rectory (listed grade II) is a late-18th-century red- and brown-brick two-storey house, apparently constructed in two phases, with a weatherboarded extension.³⁴ It was possibly built for the Reverend Robert Burt, who lived here from 1786 and 1791,



Figure 13 Sage Cottage and Church Cottage possibly dates from before 1800 and seems to have originally been a single property (P5733077)

and perhaps altered and enlarged by his son, Reverend Robert Gascoyne Burt, who occupied it until 1875. A small group of houses to the north of the church include a pair of rendered two-storey cottages, Sage Cottage and Church Cottage, that share a hipped tiled roof (Fig 13). These possibly date from the 18th century, or earlier, and appear to have been single property in the 19th century. This was subsequently unevenly subdivided and the smaller western property (Church Cottage) was extended to the west. The Red House is a red-brick building that was constructed on the site of the village poor house, probably in the mid-19th century, and enlarged in the 20th century (Fig 14). The other significant member of the group is the former St Mary Parochial School, built in 1868 and closed in



Figure 14 The Red House, erected probably in the mid-19th century, stands on the site of St Mary Hoo poor house (P5733078)

1947.³⁵ Thereafter, the single-storey school room became the residential rear wing of the two-storey schoolmaster's house. The plainly-treated building, of painted brick, has one ecclesiastical flourish, the gable walls of the house each have an arched window. A commemorative plaque exists, attached to a garden wall.

Two pairs of farmworkers houses were erected in the village in the late-19th century; one survives (4-6 The Street) (Fig 15), the other (Pond Cottages) was replaced in the late-20th century by a house (Pudding Cottage). A modest amount of back-plot infill has taken place in the late 20th or early 21st century, with the construction of a small number of bungalows.



Figure 15 Nos 4-6, The Street: a surviving pair of late-19th century farmworkers' houses in St Mary Hoo. (P5733079)

Development along the Ratcliffe Highway is intermittent, made up of a dispersed hamlet at Fenn Street, a single housing development near St Mary Hoo village and a loose agglomeration of houses along a realigned section of the road and around the former farmstead of Barn Street. The Ratcliffe Highway is a historic routeway that follows the peninsula's spinal ridge of higher ground to its north eastern conclusion at Allhallows, and settlement, in the form of isolated farmsteads, was occurring by the medieval period. These loose clusters of farms and cottages persisted into the early 20th century but have been largely replaced by mid- and late-20th century residential development.

The most significant of these clusters is Fenn Street, situated between the villages of St Mary Hoo and High Halstow at the once ill-defined meeting point of the two parishes. The hamlet developed around two farmsteads and a public house and by the 19th century had a population that was as large, if not larger, than St Mary Hoo. Although it has experienced a significant degree of rebuilding and new development in the late 20th-century a number of historic buildings remain. Fenn Farm, on the south side of the road, retains its farmhouse (listed grade II), a two-storey building with painted brick and a timber-clad timber frame that dates from the 15th and 16th centuries (Fig 16). A later phase



Figure 16 Fenn Farm retains its two-storey farmhouse which dates from the 15th and 16th centuries. (P5733080)

is commemorated with a 1760 date stone. Its 19th-century timber outbuildings and barn also survive, the latter converted to residential use. A small brick and thatch outbuilding in the grounds of a mid-20th century house Fenn Cottage, may be a remnant of a row of tiny farmworkers cottages that were associated with Fenn Farm. The Fenn Bell Public House is the product of several phases of construction from the 18th century onwards, although the building may contain earlier fabric. During the 1880s the landlord was the memorably named Time Of Day.³⁶ The building also retains a 19th-century barn and stable. A group of 20th century houses including Fenn House Farm and Nos 1-2 Forge Cottages occupy the site of the other historic farmstead and its associated cottages and smithy.³⁷ An inter-war pair of cottages (West Willows and East Mead) (Fig 17) and a late-19th century house (Little Acre, formerly Myrtle Cottage) replaced two modest waste land cottages.



Figure 17 West Willows and East Mead replaced a modest waste land cottage in the inter-war period. (P5733081)

The site of the former anti-aircraft battery and military camp at Fenn Street has been almost completely redeveloped. Adjoining the Ratcliffe Highway is a small industrial estate. This miscellany of late-20th-century industrial premises retains one former camp building, a single-storey brick range presently in office use. The gunsite to the south was entirely cleared in the 1980s; replaced by Bellwood Court, a single development of late-20th century large detached houses, individually designed using a mixture of vernacular styles, ranged around a cul-de-sac. Perhaps unconsciously, its layout has echoes of the semi-circular arrangement of gun emplacements that preceded it.

The isolated row of 12 semi-detached houses, St Mary's Cottages, were built by Hoo or Strood Rural District Council in the 1920s.³⁸ These plain rendered pairs with hipped tiled roofs and simple flat door heads, now much altered as a consequence of private ownership, were built to the same design as equivalent developments such as Jellicoe Cottages, Nos 1-15 Christmas Lane, High Halstow and Beatty Cottages, Stoke Road, Allhallows. However, St Mary's Cottages were unusual in being sited away from the village, perhaps necessitated by the availability of land.

The other residential clusters around the Ratcliffe Highway are entirely 20th century in

character with the notable exception of Rose Cottages, a row of five workers cottages built in 1887 at the junction of the Highway and the road to Coombe Farm (Fig 18). The farmsteads at Hoppers and Barn Street have been entirely developed and endure only as property names. An early phase of suburban ribbon development is represented by Home Lea Cottages, which bear a 1928 date plaque, and the inter-war Noreland Cottage, whose position reflects the pre-1951 road alignment. The land occupied by the



former bends was subsequently utilised for piecemeal residential development.

Figure 18 Erected in 1887 this row of five workers cottages named Rose Cottages prefigured subsequent clustered residential development along the Ratcliffe Highway in the 20th century (P5733082)

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST AND SIGNIFICANCE

The parish of St Mary Hoo, which has the second smallest population in the peninsula, retains one of its most well-preserved villages. In 1971 it was observed that there 'is perhaps more of an unchanged, old-world atmosphere here than anywhere else in the district', and thanks partly designation as a conservation area in 1984, this still remains the case.³⁹ The village did experience some change in the second half of the 20th century, including the rebuilding of Ross Farm, the residential conversion of the church and school and the modernisation of some of its houses. But it has escaped significant residential expansion and had only a minor amount of infill development. St Mary Hoo shares this 'unexpanded' character with other villages in the peninsula, but is perhaps the best example. This is reflected in the level of designation, both of the settlement and individual buildings. However the conservation area does not include Moat Farm and a number of houses might be of sufficient interest to be included in a local list, including the The Red House, Church and Sage Cottage.

The settlement at Fenn Street is one of a group of linear hamlets that developed along the peninsula's upland routeway. It also retains a number of historic buildings although the amount of general redevelopment has been significant. One building of considerable local interest is the Fenn Bell Public House (Fig 19).

St Mary Hoo remains a rural parish and in some ways its landscape and farmsteads exemplify the wider story of farming in the Hoo Peninsula. It retains a marshland farm, several vernacular farmhouses (including St Mary's Hall and Fenn Street Farm) as well as modernised examples from the 18th century (for example, Newlands Farm) and the 19th century (Moat Farm). Although few of the farms remain in agricultural use several preserve barns and other outbuildings dating from the 19th century. The principal farm St Mary's Hall (Fig 20), has an important historical association with Henry Pye and his son.

There are some industrial and military features of interest. These include the former explosives storage site on St Mary's Marshes, the surviving remnants of the anti-aircraft battery at Fenn Street, and a concrete pillbox on the marshes and some concrete anti-tank obstacles near Hoppers Cottage.



Figure 19 The Fenn Bell public house was in existence by the 17th century; its name was said to derive from one of the bells used to guide travellers across the marshes in poor weather (P5733083)



Figure 20 The historic barn and farmhouse at St Mary's Hall farm, which has an important historical association with Henry Pye and his son. (P5733084)

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⁴ Hasted. Accessed at <http://british-history.ac.uk> on the 23/04/2012]

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Listing description.

⁷ Hasted

⁸ Matthews, 141

⁹ <http://www.shepherdname.co.uk> accessed on 26/06/2012

¹⁰ Hasted

¹¹ Bowler, 38

¹² MacDougall, Appendix I

¹³ The 1931 census recorded a population of 290

¹⁴ MacDougall, 197

¹⁵ Tithe Apportionment, 1841

¹⁶ Medway Archives, CCRc_Church_Commissioners_Capitular_Estates_1349_to_1946/CCRc_T244_01

¹⁷ The only property owned by Henry Pye was Clinch Street Farm, High Halstow. MacDougall 128

¹⁸ Pateman, 105-6; Macdougall, 129-130; Matthews, 140-1

¹⁹ Kelly's *Directory of Kent, Surrey & Sussex* 1891, 353

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²⁶ MacDougall, Appendix I

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mary_Hoo accessed 27/04/2012

²⁸ *Chatham News*, 12th January 1951, 1

²⁹ English Heritage Archives, AMIE Monument NMR number TQ 87 NW42

³⁰ This ambiguity also led to the farmstead being included in both of the 1839 tithe maps, although depicted slightly differently; on the St Mary Hoo map it has an additional barn.

³¹ AMIE Monuments NMR Number TQ 77 NE181

³² English Heritage Archives, NMR Buildings File 51887, unpublished report by the Council for the Care of Churches, 5th March 1975.

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ Listing description

³⁵ MacDougall, 197

³⁶ Day was listed as an apprentice blacksmith at Fenn Street in the 1851 census. By 1891 the public house was being managed by his widow Martha.

³⁷ 1891 census; OS maps 1896 and 1908

³⁸ Evans, Kathy 2008 *Hoo's Who* Lulu.com, 7

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