

BOOK REVIEW

Sandlands - The Suffolk Coast and Heaths

Tom Williamson

Windgather Press Ltd.

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Anyone interested in the history of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths or landscape history in general would do well to look out for the latest publication from the Windgather Press in their 'Landscapes of Britain' series. Titled 'Sandlands - The Suffolk Coast and Heaths', the new book is written by Tom Williamson and published with the assistance of Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit.

Tom Williamson is Lecturer in Landscape History at the University of East Anglia, so he should know his subject. Anyone expecting a dry, academic tone will be in for a pleasant surprise. As well as being a detailed, in-depth look at the way the landscapes of this area have evolved through the interaction of nature and people, the new book is highly readable. Indeed, Sandlands is, in every way, an outstanding publication, beautifully illustrated with over 70 full colour photographs, maps and illustrations. Reading the book from any start point immediately propels you into the landscape with Tom Williamson at your side, explaining how the familiar but distinctive local features we see today were shaped by the passing centuries. The variety of landscapes described is surprisingly rich, from the intensively 'worked' open heaths north of Woodbridge to the 'landscapes of leisure' created from the eighteenth century when coastal settlements found new ways of making a living. One visitor to the Suffolk coast in 1829 upliftingly informs the reader that '...Instead of the clay-built cottages of the poor, which impressed the mind with a gloomy feeling of dirt and misery being hid within, we now see so many neat and tasteful mansions....'

Every page contains a wealth of interesting facts and detail, starting from the arrival of the first settlers, attracted by the light, easily worked soils and taking us right up to the present day and the current mix of modern agriculture, forests, heathlands, marshes, estuaries and coast. Tom explains how the underlying geology, combined with the adjacent sea, holds the key to the story of this area. He also charts the changes to the landscape and brings to life the communities who lived and worked on the land - providing a fascinating insight into the past.

'Sandlands - The Suffolk Coast and Heaths is available now from all good bookshops or direct from the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, tel: 01394 384948.

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