**Essex Way, Saturday 7th May 2011**

15 walkers, 20 miles – leader Rob Myers

After two dry months there was heavy overnight rain and it was a great relief that it had stopped by the time the walk started and weatherwise it turned out to be a very pleasant day. 15 of us gathered at Manningtree station including 4 locals. From the station we climbed up to Lawford Church to join the Essex Way. We passed through the town of Manningtree and walked along Mistley Walls NNR to see the boats and mute swans on one of the more beautiful places on the Stour Estuary. From there we passed through the pretty villages of Mistley and Bradfield to rejoin the Stour, where we walked along the shoreline to reach Wrabness NR. I didn't think that the Essex Way did justice to the NR so I added a diversion up to the top of the reserve where we had a drinks break whilst enjoying views of the old Royal Naval School across the Stour on the Shotley Peninsula. From the drinks stop we passed by a green burial ground before arriving at All Saints Church. The church built in 1100 is famous for the fact that the bell tower collapsed in the 1700s and the bell was removed to a temporary outside cage where it has remained since. The group got spread out when members decided whether to buy any of the home-made jams left by the roadside. Passing through Stour Wood and Copperas Wood we arrived at Ramsay and got good views of the Ramsay Windmill. Lunch was at the Castle Inn. The Castle Inn is a very quiet village pub which was bizarrely the scene of a 12-hour police siege in 1979 when someone held the landlord hostage. The siege did not end happily as police had to shot dead the assailant. Anyway we all sat outside and enjoyed some good beer "Woodforde's Wherry" and some reasonably priced food. In the afternoon I added another "extension" to the Essex Way to include an additional 2 miles of sea wall around Hamford Water. After that Harwich gradually came in view. We passed the caravan site and the beach huts before reaching the lighthouses of historical Harwich where the walk and the Essex Way ended. A really enjoyable walk!