

ESSEX LIFE

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The heroic Leigh cockle
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People List

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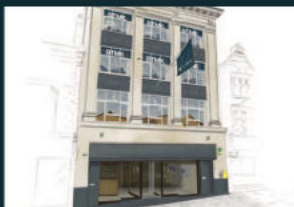
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THE ESSEX LIFE

50 *most* INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE LIST

While we all have a renewed *admiration* for key workers and those who quietly keep the country going with their hard work and *determination*, there will always be some people who really make a name for themselves. This list of Essex's most influential people looks at the achievements of those individuals. Whether they were born here or they've made Essex home, some of the people on this list have had their fair share of *controversies*, but love them or not, there is no denying that they have left their mark on our county. There are so many more people who are worthy of note – but we'll save them for next time!

WORDS: Hannah Gildart

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DAME HELEN MIRREN

Dame Helen has an English mother and her father was a member of an exiled family of Russian nobility. Growing up in Leigh-on-Sea, she attended St Bernard's High School for Girls in Southend, where she acted in school productions before successfully auditioning for the National Youth theatre. The rest is history, and she went on to win numerous awards including an Oscar for *The Queen* and a BAFTA for *Prime Suspect*.



RUSSELL BRAND

Russell Brand was born and raised in Grays, and he's come a long way from his days presenting *Big Brother's Big Mouth* in the early noughties. The next few years saw Hollywood films (*Get Him to the Greek*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*), plenty of controversy (Andrew Sachs scandal) and a two-year marriage to pop royalty (Katy Perry), but you're now more likely to find him campaigning on political and social issues.



DAME MAGGIE SMITH

Born in Ilford in 1934, long before Ilford became part of Greater London, so we're keeping her! Appearing in more than 60 films and 70 plays over her career, she is one of the few actors to have won the Triple Crown of Acting: an Oscar, an Emmy and a Tony. From 2010 to 2015, she played Violet Crawley, Dowager Countess of Grantham in *Downton Abbey*, earning a whole wave of new fans.



DANIEL MAYS

Born in Epping, Daniel went to school in Buckhurst Hill before winning a place at RADA and landing a role in Mike Leigh's *All or Nothing* in 2000. Luckily, he didn't have to put on an Essex accent for his role in *Made in Dagenham* in 2010. He has also appeared on stage and in a Steven Spielberg film, but I think his best role has to be as Sergeant Danny Waldron in *Line of Duty*.



RUPERT GRINT

Born in Harlow in 1988, can you believe that Ron Weasley is now 34? He shot to fame in the *Harry Potter* films after being cast at the age of 11, and he was 22 when filming the final instalment. Prior to that, he had only acted in school plays and his local theatre group. Apparently, Rupert wanted to be an ice-cream man growing up; I guess Hollywood film star was a close second.





SIR ROD STEWART and PENNY LANCASTER

While rock legend Rod may have been born in Highgate, London, his marriage to Chelmsford-born model-turned-Special Police Constable Penny Lancaster meant a move to Essex. Currently residing in a £4.65million mansion on the edge of Epping Forest, Rod, one of the best-selling music artists of all time, was seen fixing potholes in nearby Harlow early this year as he couldn't drive his Ferrari over them!



VICTORIA and DAVID BECKHAM

Pop star, fashion designer and worldwide superstar, it's hard to believe this Spice Girl came from humble beginnings in Harlow. You might have heard of her husband too! Since meeting at a football match in 1997 (apparently Victoria actually had eyes for Ryan Giggs), David and Victoria Beckham have gone on to become one of the most famous couples in the world, amassing a fortune of £380million.



DAMON ALBARN and GRAHAM COXON

When Damon Albarn and Graham Coxon met and formed a band while at The Stanway School, they probably couldn't have dreamed that Blur would go on to spearhead British music in the '90s and go head-to-head with Oasis in a chart battle dubbed The Battle of Britpop (Blur won). But I'm afraid the song *Parklife* was influenced by Hyde Park, not Colchester Castle Park.



STACEY SOLOMON and JOE SWASH

I don't know about anyone else, but I sometimes forget that Stacey started out as a singer on *The X Factor* in 2009. In 2010, she won *I'm a Celebrity...* and her TV career kicked off. More recently, she has appeared on *Loose Women*, *Celebrity Juice* and her own decluttering show, *Sort Your Life Out*. In July this year, Stacey married partner Joe Swash at their Essex countryside home, Pickle Cottage.



OLLY MURS

It was back in 2009 when we met fresh-faced singer Olly Murs on *The X Factor*; coming in second, he went on to have a string of hit singles and albums. He has also worked in television on *The Xtra Factor* and as a judge on *The Voice*. Born in Witham, he attended Notley High School in Braintree and still resides in Essex. He is also the chairman of Coggeshall Town FC.



SHOWBUSINESS



DENISE VAN OUTEN

Never one to shy away from her roots, Denise is the epitome of an Essex girl done good. Born and raised in Basildon, her varied career has seen her take the lead in *Chicago* on Broadway, narrate *The Only Way is Essex* and appear on a whole host of TV programmes, from *Celebrity Gogglebox* to judging on *Any Dream Will Do*. However, her stint on *The Big Breakfast* will always be my favourite Denise era.



GEMMA COLLINS

Love it or hate it, *TOWIE* has pushed countless people into the spotlight, with none more successful than Gemma Collins (or *The GC*, as you may know her). Her fun-loving attitude, mild tantrums and funny catchphrases have made her a reality TV superstar and viral sensation, appearing in *I'm a Celebrity...*, *Celebrity Big Brother*, *Dancing on Ice* and more. She also has a podcast on BBC Sounds and is a campaigner for animal rights.



RICHARD OSMAN

Billericay-born Osman was creative director at TV company Endemol UK when he came up with the idea for *Pointless*. He stepped in front of the camera to co-host the show with his university friend Alexander Armstrong, and he never looked back. In 2020, he released his debut novel, *The Thursday Murder Club*, which went on to become a platinum bestseller. He has since said that Steven Spielberg has bought the global film rights to the book.



RYLAN CLARK

Remember that clip of Rylan's tears of joy when Nicole Scherzinger put him through to the live shows on *The X Factor*? It seems the British public have been rooting for this Stanford-le-Hope boy ever since. He has graced our screens on *Celebrity Big Brother*, *Eurovision*, *Supermarket Sweep* and many more; he also presents the Saturday afternoon slot on Radio 2. He has recently revealed that his real name is Ross, saying he wants to be 'a little more real now'.



DAVID GANDY

Born in Billericay in 1980, David Gandy grew up wanting to be a veterinarian. However, when he was 21, his flatmate entered him into a modelling competition on ITV's *This Morning*, which he won. The prize included a contract with Select Model Management in London, and his worldwide career as a male model began. Most notably, he was the lead male model for Dolce & Gabbana and starred in the advert for the Light Blue fragrance.

Photos: PA, Gemma Colligen, Walterian Papetti / Wikimedia

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POLITICS



SIR DAVID AMESS

The only person on our list who has sadly passed, Sir David deserves a mention as his legacy is still being felt this year, with Southend-on-Sea gaining city status in his honour. He came from humble working-class beginnings to become one of parliament's longest-serving MPs. He served Southend for 24 years and was known for his commitment to his constituents. He was knighted in the 2015 New Year Honours for political and public service.



SIR BOB RUSSELL

His name is synonymous with Colchester, having served as the Liberal Democrat MP for the then-town from 1997 to 2015. Before this, he was leader of Colchester Borough Council and the Mayor of Colchester. He was knighted for public service in 2012 and currently holds the position of High Steward of Colchester. He is known to be a fan of Colchester United and wrote the foreword for a book about the club's history.



JAMES CLEVERLY

Born and raised in London but spending much of his childhood with family in Chelmsford, James Cleverly is an MP and Army Reserve officer. He became the MP for Braintree in 2015 and was co-chairman of the Conservative Party (from 2019 to 2020) and Secretary of State for Education for two months this year. Under Prime Minister Liz Truss, he is currently serving as Foreign Secretary.



GAVIN JONES

At the helm of Essex County Council since 2016 is CEO Gavin Jones, who joined local government after working in the commercial sector for most of his career. Jones was included in the *Observer's* top 50 New Radicals list for innovative leaders, and he was voted one of the most influential leaders in local government. However, he has recently faced criticism for his large salary and expenses claims.



PRITI PATEL

Despite growing up in Hertfordshire, Priti Patel forged links with our county when she studied at the University of Essex. A prominent member of the Vote Leave campaign and ideologically on the right wing of the Conservative party, she has not been without her controversies. However, she has served as MP for Witham since 2010, as well as being Home Secretary under ex-Prime Minister Boris Johnson until September this year.

Photos: Richard Townshend, Keith Edkins / Wikimedia / Wikicommons



JANE GURNEY

As the longest-standing CEO of the 21 air ambulance charities in the UK, Jane Gurney of Essex & Herts Air Ambulance has played a huge role in saving the lives of countless people since 2003. Without access to National Lottery funding and with limited support from government, Jane and her team work tirelessly to raise funds to keep this essential service airborne. This summer, she was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Essex.



CAROLINE TAYLOR

CEO of the Essex Community Foundation, Caroline Taylor oversees one of the UK's leading community foundations, which gives £5 million of grant funding each year from a growing endowment fund of £51 million. Caroline advises high-net worth individuals, businesses, public agencies and charitable trusts on how to invest their charitable giving, in a way that has the most impact in the county.



STEVE SMITH

Since being appointed CEO of Havens Hospices in 2019, Steve Smith went on to win the Rising CEO Award from Third Sector. Steve aims to put patients and families at the heart of every decision made at the charity, which offers palliative nursing and supportive care to adults and children living with complex or incurable conditions. With the help of an incredible team, the charity offers a lifeline to families across south Essex.



18TH BARON PETRE

The former Lord Lieutenant of Essex, it'd be impossible to list every organisation with which Lord Petre is associated. To name a few, he is a patron for St Clare Hospice and serves as the president for Brentwood Arts Council and Essex County Scouts. His family estate includes Ingatestone Hall, and he serves as Lord of the Manor for 17 manors in the county. In 2016, he was made a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.



ANDREW IMPEY

It was growing up in Essex and visiting reserves that got Essex Wildlife Trust CEO Andrew Impey interested in wildlife. After years of studying and working to support the environment around the world, he returned home to head up the county's leading wildlife conservation charity. The charity operates 11 Nature Discovery Centres and other reserves and landholdings across the county, all dedicated to conserving our unique habitats.



STEWART ROBERTS

It was while volunteering at a Salvation Army in Essex that Stewart Roberts came up with the idea for his charity, Haircuts4Homeless. As a hairdresser, he decided to bring in his scissors and give some haircuts – offering people respect, connection and communication. He now oversees 70 projects across the UK and Ireland and 600 volunteers who have given 40,000 haircuts. He received an MBE at the beginning of 2022.

LOCAL ORGANISATIONS



SALLY SHAW

Since becoming director of Firstsite in Colchester, Sally Shaw has transformed the gallery into a vital community space and visual arts destination, showcasing works from the likes of Grayson Perry and Michael Landy. Sally started her role by going out and meeting the people of Colchester to find out what they wanted from Firstsite; five years later, it won Art Fund Museum of the Year and a £100K prize. Sally herself received an MBE for services to the arts.



JENNIFER TOLHURST

Lord-Lieutenant of Essex, the Crown's representative in the county. She is the first woman to hold this non-political position since its inception in Tudor times. Jennifer is a proud ambassador of all things Essex, working tirelessly for the county. She started the Danbury and Little Baddow branch of the NSPCC and chaired the Prince's Youth Business Trust in Essex. She is also vice-president of the Essex Community Foundation.



SHAMI CHAKRABARTI

A member of the Labour party, Baroness Chakrabarti is a British politician, barrister and human rights activist. For three years she served as Chancellor of the University of Essex. In a speech during her final graduation ceremonies, she was described by vice-chancellor Anthony Forster as 'a wonderful ambassador representing the Essex spirit and personifying the values the University holds dear'.



BJ HARRINGTON

Essex Police chief constable BJ Harrington started his career with the Metropolitan Police Service in 1990, where he led policing at many large-scale events such as Notting Hill Carnival and the London 2012 Olympics. He made his way up the ranks before being seconded as deputy chief constable to Essex in 2017. In 2018, he took over as chief constable. BJ leads a team of more than 5,500 officers, staff and volunteers in one of the largest non-metropolitan forces in the UK.



DOMINIQUE TROPEANO

One of Essex's and the UK's top tourist attractions, Colchester Zoo is celebrating its 60th anniversary next year. At the helm is Dominique Tropeano, who took over in 1983. Not only is the zoo a thriving business, but it has also launched the charity Action for Wild to assist in conservation projects worldwide, as well as the UmPhafa Private Nature Reserve in South Africa. Dominique is an honorary graduate of the University of Essex.

Photos: Jayne Lloyd, Ivan Finch, Chris McAndrew / Wikimedia, Southend County Council, Colchester Zoo



FOOD AND HOSPITALITY



JAMIE OLIVER

Officially the second-best-selling British author (behind JK Rowling), Jamie Oliver has come a long way since helping out at his parents' pub, The Cricketers in Clavering. Since his first TV programme, *The Naked Chef*, came out in 1999, he has appeared in many TV shows, written countless cookery books and lent his name to many campaigns – most famously to improve children's school dinners. He now lives in Spains Hall, Finchingfield, with his family.



THE GALVIN BROTHERS

Growing up in Brentwood, Michelin-starred chefs Chris and Jeff Galvin began working as pot-washers for a local restaurant, which is where they met celebrity chef Anthony Worrall Thompson. After working in some of the world's best restaurants, they returned to the UK and opened Bistrot de Luxe in London in 2005. Their food empire grew and, most recently, they opened Galvin Green Man in Great Waltham, championing Essex produce.



CYRUS & PERVIN TODIWALA

Born and trained in Mumbai, Cyrus Todiwala, alongside his wife and fellow chef Pervin, moved to the UK in 1991 and opened Café Spice Namasté in London. The restaurant helped to reshape the UK's perception of Indian food, and this was soon brought to Buckhurst Hill. Cyrus has appeared on TV shows, and the couple are dedicated to training the next generation of chefs. Cyrus cooked for HM Queen Elizabeth II for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.



JULIET SEAR

Juliet Sear is a food stylist, author, cook, but most importantly, a cake-baker extraordinaire. You may remember her shop, Fancy Nancy Cakes in Leigh-on-Sea, but more recently you'll recognise her from her slots on ITV's *This Morning* and Channel 4's *Sunday Brunch* – oh, and for her recipes in *Essex Life* magazine! Her incredible sweet treats have graced the tables of countless famous faces, from Prince Harry and Kate Moss to McFly and Alexa Chung.



JIMMY DOHERTY

Growing up in Clavering, farmer Jimmy Doherty was a childhood friend of Jamie Oliver. His love of nature and animals has run throughout his career and he is known for the TV programme *Jimmy's Farm*, which follows Jimmy and his wife Michaela's life running their business, The Essex Pig Company. After appearing in several TV series and releasing three books, Jimmy became chancellor of Writtle University College, near Chelmsford, in 2022.

Photos: Scandic Hotels, Anton Rodriguez/Getty Images/Stockphoto, Niran Kapoor Photography, Andrew Lauren98/Wikimedia

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RONNIE O'SULLIVAN

Though he might humbly say otherwise, many consider Chigwell's Ronnie O'Sullivan to be the greatest snooker player of all time. Some 29 years after becoming the youngest player to win the UK Championship, The Rocket became the oldest world champion in history when, at 46, he claimed a record-equalling seventh world title in 2022. No one has won more than his 21 Triple Crown titles.



PETER SHILTON

No footballer has played more competitive games than Peter Shilton, whose 30-year career also saw him become England's most capped male player, win two European Cups and pick up countless other accolades, including an OBE. Shilton has called Essex home for numerous years, and together with wife Steph, he campaigns to raise awareness about the issues of gambling.



SALLY GUNNELL

Chigwell-born Sally Gunnell is one of Britain's most decorated and beloved track and field athletes. A golden run in the early '90s saw Sally win every event open to her, with the most notable being her victory in the 400m hurdles at the 1992 Olympics. The only woman to hold Olympic, world, European and Commonwealth gold at the same time, she is now a prominent health and wellbeing advocate.



ANNE WAFULA STRIKE

Anne Wafula Strike was the first wheelchair racer from East Africa to compete in the Paralympics. She joined Team GB shortly thereafter, and her efforts on the track, in supporting charities and promoting sporting equality saw Anne awarded an MBE in 2014. The Harlow-based Paralympian's services also earned her an honorary degree from the University of Essex earlier this year.



EDDIE HEARN

Eddie Hearn is one of the most successful sporting promoters on the planet. As then-MD of Matchroom Boxing, he helped to broker the sport's first \$1 billion broadcast deal in 2018. And his entrepreneurial spirit saw him bring world-class boxing to his backyard in Brentwood during the pandemic. At the time of going to print, he's reportedly busy putting the finishing touches on the long-awaited Tyson Fury-Anthony Joshua bout.



SIR ALASTAIR COOK

Knighted for his services to cricket at 34 just shows Sir Alastair Cook's prowess. Raised in Wickham Bishops, near Witham, his prodigiousness saw him playing with Maldon CC's adult Third XI by the age of 11. The Essex County Cricket Club star holds a number of Test records for England, including most runs, most centuries, most catches and most consecutive matches played, and he captained the team on 59 occasions.

Photos: DerHexer / Wikimedia, Matt Batchelor / Wikimedia, Carl Allen Big Wave PR / Visit Essex, Nick Potts, Nic Debned / Wikimedia



THE ARTS



SIR ANDREW MOTION

Poet Andrew Motion spent his childhood in Stisted, near Braintree. In 1999, Motion started a 10-year run as Poet Laureate. He wrote for the Salvation Army about homelessness, the TUC about liberty and for Childline about bullying. He also founded the Poetry Archive, an online library of poets reciting their work. Post-laureateship, he became president of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.



SARAH PERRY

Chelmsford-born writer Sarah Perry has a host of awards under her belt, including the Waterstone's Book of the Year and the British Book Awards for her novel *The Essex Serpent*. The book was adapted into an Apple TV series starring Tom Hiddlestone and Claire Danes, filmed on the Essex coast. Another must-read, her book *Essex Girls* is 'for profane and opinionated women everywhere'.



ELSA JAMES

Elsa's first solo exhibition opened at Focal Point Gallery in summer 2022. *Othered in a region that has been historically Othered* gave viewers the opportunity to question what it means to be black in Essex. Also, alongside writer Syd Moore, she was part of the Essex Girls Liberation Front, a campaign group that got the offensive definition of an Essex girl removed from the Oxford English Dictionary.



GRAYSON PERRY

As a child, artist, writer and broadcaster Grayson Perry lived between Chelmsford and Great Bardfield and studied art at Braintree College. He kept us all sane during lockdown with *Grayson's Art Club* on Channel 4, but his biggest gift to the county must be his House for Essex, a living artwork in Wrabness that explores the character and qualities of Essex.

BUSINESS



LORD ALAN SUGAR

Lord Alan Sugar, who lives in Chigwell, was once renowned as the owner of Tottenham Hotspur but is now best known for his appearances on *The Apprentice*, demonstrating his commercial nous. A self-made billionaire, he received a life peerage in 2009 and became enterprise champion to the business secretary seven years later.



SIR JACK PETCHEY

Once told he would never make it as a businessman, Sir Jack Petchey proved his doubters wrong in amassing a multimillion-pound empire and also used his profile for philanthropic purposes. The Jack Petchey Foundation was established to inspire young people in Essex and London to celebrate their achievements, and it has invested more than £140 million in projects. Sir Jack was knighted in 2016.



FRED DONE

The man who put the 'Fred' in bookmaker Betfred, Fred Done may be proud of his Greater Manchester roots, but he will be forever tied to our county for his resurrection of its racecourse. The former Great Leighs venue was a white elephant, closed for more than six years, before Fred took it over. Since 2015, Chelmsford City Racecourse has become a prominent fixture on Essex's social calendar.



JON HUNT

Property entrepreneur Jon Hunt is Essex's richest man. After starting out in the army, Colchester-born Jon spent time as an estate agent before co-founding Foxtons. His portfolio includes business members' club chain Pavilion and Wilderness Reserve, a collection of luxury country houses and cottages. This year's *Sunday Times* Rich List estimated Jon's net worth to be £1.436 billion.

Photos: Peter-Ashley Jackson / Wikimedia, Jamie Drew 2020, Tessa Hallmann, PA, Damien Everett / Wikimedia, The Jack Petchey Foundation, PA, A P Montblat / Wikimedia

