**Sheppey at war in the 16th century**

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The Anglo Dutch War was not the first time that Sheppey inhabitants suffered due to war, or the threat of war, since it was almost a hundred years earlier in 1588 that concerns about the Spanish Armada, approaching London via the Kent coast, caused the Crown to invest in fortifications at Queenborough Castleand Minster. In addition, Shurland Manor, Eastchurch (owned by the Cheney family) held a large armoury of weapons according to the Crown, including 25 muskets, 50 pikes, 40 ‘halberdiers’ whilst the rest of Eastchurch parish held 24 ‘calivers’ and 35 bills and 89 ‘able men’[[1]](#footnote-1). In 1583, Edward Hoby of the Privy Council and nephew to Lord Burghley, Treasurer of England, recorded his observation of the Sheppey people after they had been apparently trained to defend the island and the entrance to the Thames, impending the Spanish invasion:

‘where we have therin made offer of our selves, to see our new

mustered Sheppey souldiours…well taught and trayned up to the use

and handling of their severall sortes of weapons, at suche times as we

shalbe thereunto by then…’[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, the second half of his report reveals concern for the inhabitants of the island and the impact the defensive programmes might be having on the wellbeing of everyday life on the island:

‘…and whereas lately divers the poore inhabitants of this Islae have

been greatly oppressed with the loss of their lambes, capons, hennes,

chikins, and suche ordinary provisions of householde, by her Majesties

takers, the breading of theis veing the greatest parte of some of their livinges because I have alwaies found them willing to abide, whatsoever chardge

was layed upon them for the furtheranuce of her Majesties service, and

that if they sustayne by few more the like losses, they shall not be able

to maintaine that furniture with now they do; this are in their behalf most

humbly to beseech your honour, to take some speedy order for the redresse

therof, and that no inhabitante within this Isle, may be herafter pressed for

any the said provisions, unless he occupy 300 acres of fresh land within the

same at the least.’[[3]](#footnote-3)

Overall, Hoby’s account provides a complex insight into the tensions between the Crown’s military agenda and the everyday hardship of the local islanders, particularly in Eastchurch parish.

1. British Library, Lansdowne MS 42, xlii, f.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. BL Lansdowne MS.42.f.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. BL Landsdowne MS.42, f.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)