

## Labour Heritage



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**Bulletin Spring 2013**

## **Eleventh Essex Conference on labour history**

John Kotz, chair of the Essex County Labour Party welcomed over 70 people to the Essex labour history conference. It was held on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October at the Witham Labour Hall.

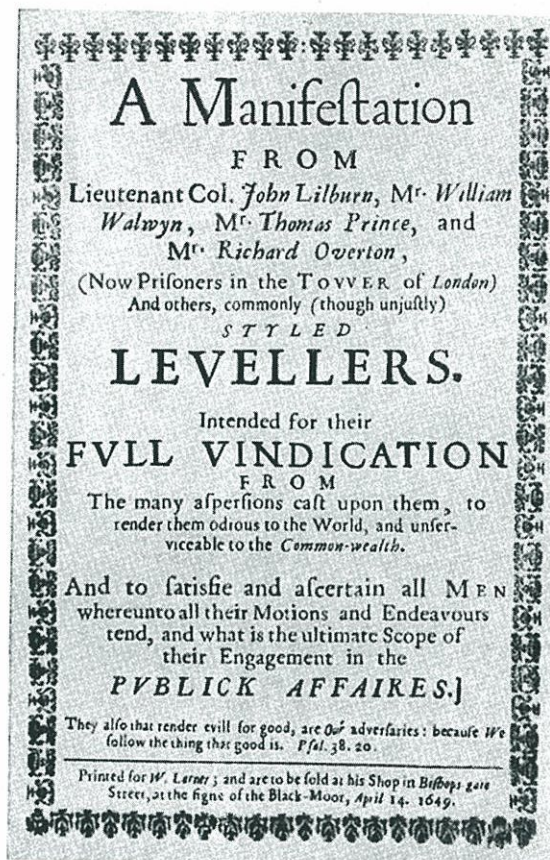
There were four speakers.

## **The Levellers in Essex in the 17<sup>th</sup> century**

Stan Newens explained how Cromwell built up the New Model Army as a fighting force of 22,000 committed soldiers to defeat King Charles I and his army in the English Civil War. After the King was beaten in 1645, the New Model Army was stood down at Saffron Walden, the soldiers billeted in the surrounding villages.

While Parliament was dominated by the conservative Presbyterians at this time, Cromwell supported the more radical Independents. The rank and file of the army were more radical still. They were angered by Parliament's refusal to pay their back wages and made contact with the Levellers, as the democratic faction within the movement supporting the Parliamentary cause was called. The Levellers, led by John Lilburne, Richard Overton and William Walwyn, campaigned for freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

In March 1647 the Army drew up a petition to Parliament demanding an indemnity for deeds done in the Civil War,



payment of arrears and support for widows and orphans, and wrote a pamphlet in support of its programme. Parliament tried to disperse them by packing them off to Ireland. The soldiers responded by electing shop stewards called agitators who formed a Council. The Council held several inconclusive meetings with Cromwell and other Independent grandees among the army officers. General Fairfax was in effect faced with a mutiny.