

# The Friends of Historic Essex

## Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 2020

### AGM arrangements and the COVID-19 crisis

I am sorry to say that due to the public health emergency the physical 2020 AGM, which we had planned to hold at Boxted Airfield, has had to be changed to an AGM held by e-mail. We have also had to change the arrangements over paperwork due to printing and postage difficulties.

Papers by e-mail: members registered to receive e-mails will have received the Agenda and all reports by e-mail.

Papers by post: members who have asked for postal mail will have received the Agenda and Chairman's report. All other reports and papers can be accessed via the FHE website:

<https://friendsofhistoricessex.org/>

\*All members\* will also have received an 'Acceptance Form' so you can express your approval (or not) on each agenda item. Please return these **by 4 July**, by e-mail or post, as indicated on the form. We need at least 25 responses so that the AGM is quorate.

### The Year's Activities

The committee met twice in October 2019 and February 2020, and then conducted a third meeting by e-mail at the start of June, to make the new AGM arrangements as described above. FHE has a stable financial situation and this has allowed us to continue to make grants towards the acquisition of documents. The committee also agreed two grants during the year: (a) to the Clacton VCH Group for venue and publication costs for a joint event with ERO to commemorate the Clacton-on-Sea WW2 Victoria Road air crash on 30th April (£250). Sadly, this event has had to be cancelled/postponed (b) a grant of £150 towards the conservation costs for a set of WW2 USAAF uniforms at Boxted Airfield.

During the year we supported a small number of events at the ERO, including two book launches for *A New World in Essex. The Rise and Fall of the Purleigh Brotherhood Colony, 1896–1903* by Vic Gray (former County Archivist) and *Harwich, Dovercourt and Parkeston in the 19th century* (VCH Short) by Andrew Senter. The committee had hoped to organise another 'thank you' event for the ERO volunteers in the spring of 2020, but the public health emergency made that impossible. An event will be considered as soon as it is safe to do so.

Our newsletter was sent to members in the Autumn of 2019, but the Spring 2020 issue was disrupted by the Covid-19 crisis. Many were distributed by e-mail, but the printed copies were stuck at the closed printers; at the time of writing this report the hard copies are about to be posted out. May I remind FHE members that contributions are always very welcome, especially on topics or projects that involve ERO sources or facilities.

### University of Essex placement

In the summer of 2019 FHE supported a 12-week research placement at the Essex Record Office for a University of Essex student, Julie Miller, who transcribed and researched the handwritten Journal of John Farmer, an itinerant wool comber who settled in the Saffron Walden Quaker community, before leaving his wife and family at home to travel to America to carry the Quaker testimony to the Native American communities and the West Indies. Julie provided an excellent article about her fascinating project for Autumn 2019 issue of our newsletter. In the course of her placement Julie also wrote a series of blog posts entitled 'An Essex Quaker...' which can be seen on the Essex Record Office website [www.essexrecordofficeblog.co.uk](http://www.essexrecordofficeblog.co.uk).

For the summer of 2020 the committee agreed £750 support for another University of Essex student placement. The topic was intended to be part of the 'Communicating Connections' Project (celebrating Marconi in Essex), but as this has been delayed the topic has been changed to working with a collection of oral history interviews about the establishment of women's refuges in London and the East of England, a collection deposited with the ERO in 2018. The placement will involve cataloguing the interviews and writing blog posts for ERO's blog.

### **Supporting the acquisition of documents**

We have had mixed success acquiring documents this year, mainly due to the ups and downs of buying at auction. We started the year with the successful acquisition of a large collection relating to the Benham family, for which we received a generous grant from the Hervey Benham Trust. But in a large number of cases we have been outbid despite pre-sale optimism that we had committed enough to secure items. In one notable case we were outbid for a sizeable collection of 16th-century court rolls from Hatfield Broad Oak, the successful bidder intending to use them as part of the endowment of a new legal institution and library in Cambridge. In another case we lost out on a Survey and Valuation of the Estate of the Earl of Essex in the Parishes of Stebbing, Saling, Raine and Bocking in the County of Essex, c.1795, despite raising generous additional funding from Stebbing Local History Society and the Friends of the National Libraries. Items we successfully acquired are listed below. Fuller reports have been given in our newsletter and more detailed catalogue entries are available for some on SEAX:

- (a) Large collection relating to the Benham family of Colchester and London, including diaries, manuscript texts and poems, sketches, photograph albums and loose photographs, now accessioned as A15129 (D/DU 3229).
- (b) a manorial court book of the manor of Weeley, 1900–1932 (D/DU 3225/1).
- (c) a large set of deeds of Bocking, Shalford, Finchingfield, Coggeshall and other places
- (d) an Elizabethan deed for the sale of land in Ashdon with three seals dated 1600
- (e) six 19th-century letters, of which three date from the early 1830s and are from a Mr Rochfort, evidently scion of the Spalding family of Great Maplestead
- (f) Boarding House Register from Rowhedge, 1929–50 reused from a Register of Aliens under the 1920 Aliens Order, now accessioned as A15270 (D/DU 3266).
- (g) Four stereoscopic slides of Broomfield, Finchingfield and Chelmsford
- (h) Map of lands in Great Waltham and Little Leighs (part of estate of Rector of Little Leighs), by John Waite 1735 (D/DU 3263/1).
- (i) Several first edition 1:2500 OS maps to augment the ERO's existing collection.

We look forward to continuing this work with the help of Richard Anderson, now ERO Archives and Collections Lead, and other ERO archivists.

### **Committee membership**

At this year's AGM two long-serving committee members, Martyn Lockwood and Sarah Ensor, are both stepping down. As you will be aware from previous reports, Martyn has been our marvellous Newsletter editor since 2014, while Sarah was the co-ordinator of our very successful Essex Great War Archive Project and also a fantastic fundraiser for the project. I thank them profusely for all their efforts on our behalf. Finally, I thank all of the officers and committee members for their support and hard work in managing and delivering the society's activities this year.

Dr Christopher Thornton  
Chairman, The Friends of Historic Essex (Reg. Charity No. 235270)  
6 June 2020