

Friends of Historic Essex

ERO Manager report to AGM, July 2021

Temporary closure of ERO building due to COVID-19: Since last year's AGM, when the ERO was in full lockdown, we have reopened, closed again and then reopened once more. During the second lockdown, the certificates service continued to operate although we had to suspend the Reprographics Service and Search Service. Email enquiries have been answered throughout the period. Indeed, in some months we saw unprecedented numbers of enquiries and very high numbers of certificates ordered. Essex Archives Online has remained available throughout.

The ERO is fully open to the public, including the Conference Centre and wedding venue, but still with limits on capacity to maintain social distancing. We have been advised that quarantining of documents is no longer considered necessary.

Talks and events: Unfortunately, we have been unable to offer any talks and events for over a year. However, we are cautiously approaching the possibility of running some 'ERO Presents' talks in the autumn.

University of Essex History M.A. Placements: For this year only, the Friends are generously supporting two placements rather than one. The two students – Aaron Archer and Adam Campbell-Drew – started in the week beginning 10 May. One is exploring letters sent to the early 19th century MP James Brogden, and the other is working on 18th century Poor Law records from Colchester parishes.

Marriage Registers: New legislation came into force in May 2021 modernising the system of marriage registration from a hard-copy marriage register to an electronic system of registering marriages. This means that all existing marriage registers – both civil registration copies and church copies – are required to be closed. As a result, huge numbers of registers have been taken in over the past few weeks.

This process started in the last week of May. By the end of June, over 400 of the 670 wedding venues in Essex (churches and approved premises) had brought in registers to be closed and stored at ERO. More than 640 Registration Service copies of the registers had been deposited and 226 'archive' copies of registers had been accessioned and catalogued: 130 from nonconformist churches and congregations and 96 from Church of England parishes. This is an enormous task for the Archivists and the Archive Assistants and is a great example of our successful partnership working with the Essex Registration Service.

Decarbonisation: With the roof surfaces having been replaced in most parts of the building, work has been undertaken to install an impressive array of photo-voltaic cells (solar panels). At the time of writing the system is not yet operational but, when complete, it should have a total capacity of around 118kWh. This is one of a number of decarbonisation projects which will be implemented at the ERO building over the next few months to include air source heat pumps for heating and LED lighting throughout the building.



Library cataloguing: The mammoth task of adding the ERO's reference library collections to Seax/Essex Archives Online has continued this year. Having completed the cataloguing of the volumes previously (with support from our team of volunteers), the pamphlets are now being tackled. All of the pamphlets relating to particular places – of which there are around 6,000 – have now been added (ref: LIB/E/) and the work to add the numbered boxes is under way. In addition, most of the periodicals in the Searchroom now appear on Seax, as do the parish magazines. These have been catalogued as LIB/PER 1-3.



Communicating Connections: sharing the heritage of the Marconi Company's wireless world: 30 oral history interviews have been recorded with former employees and others connected to the Marconi Company and, so far, over 13,000 photographs from the Marconi Photographic Archive have been digitised.

The project team are now using this material to develop exhibitions to be displayed in Chelmsford.

This project is funded by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Harlow Development Corporation archives: Work is progressing well on the cataloguing of the records of the Harlow Development Corporation. Hector Mir, who had worked as an archivist at ERO a couple of years ago on a short-term project, started work in December to catalogue this collection. A steering group including representatives from Harlow Museum and Harlow Arts Trust has been established to provide advice and volunteers from the museum are assisting with cataloguing some of the records.

This project is funded by an Archives Revealed cataloguing grant from The National Archives.

Wellcome funding for ANTAM: The ANTAM network (Association of New Town Archives and Museums) has been successful in securing £415,000 from the Wellcome Trust to catalogue and conserve important new town collections.

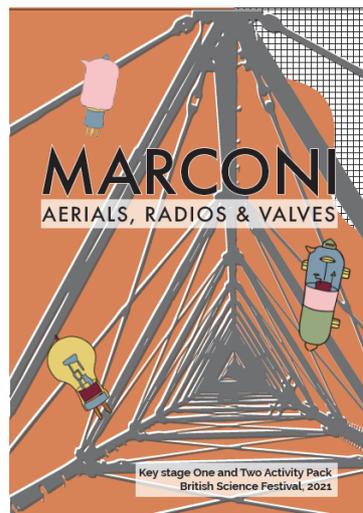
The network is supported by an Archives Revealed grant from The National Archives. The ERO is the lead institution for ANTAM (although West Sussex was the lead for the bid to the Wellcome Trust). ERO will receive £20,000 from the Wellcome Trust grant for conservation of Basildon Development Corporation records.

Kate Luard First World War Letters: Conservation repackaging has now been completed. Letters were removed from their envelope and unfolded, letters and envelopes were cleaned using a smoke sponge and then enclosed in polyester sleeves. Sleeves were then stored in archival quality box ring binders. 569 polyester sleeves and 7 box ring binders used. This work was made possible through donations from the Essex Society for Archaeology and History and the Western Front Association (Essex Branch).



Essex Ensembles Assembled: Digitisation of recordings by the Essex Youth Orchestra and the Colchester Youth Chamber Orchestra has been completed with the help of a grant from the Association of Recorded Sound Collections.

Artist-in-Residence: Chelmsford-based artist Elaine Tribley has created an Activity Pack aimed at Key Stage 1 & 2 school pupils. The activities are inspired by some of the thousands of photographs taken by the Marconi Photographic Unit and preserved at the ERO. These show the Company's factories and the products they produced, including examples of equipment installations from around the world. The photographs, dating from the 1890s to the 1980s, also include staff photographs and promotional material.



The pack is being released to coincide with the British Science Festival being hosted in September 2021 by Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford. The pack contains ideas and activities covering the subjects of History, Geography, English, Art and Science. It will be available from the ERO website and will be promoted to schools in Chelmsford and across Essex

This project is supported by funding from Chelmsford City Council.

Resonance Collective ambient album: A Chelmsford-based collective of musicians and artists have created an album of digital music using recordings from the Essex Sound and Video Archive.

The artists were given copies of selected recordings from the Sound Archive and each created individual tracks in response. As well as demonstrating that ERO holds collections which can be used in creative ways, the project will also raise awareness of ERO to new audiences.

The album is due for release (on [Bandcamp](#)) on the 15th of July and ERO will be working with Resonance to publicise and promote the album.

It will be a charity benefit album, all proceeds of sales going to the Friends of Historic Essex. So, download a copy, tell your friends and raise some funds for FHE!

Martin Astell