

FRIENDS OF HISTORIC ESSEX

Supporting the Essex Record Office

Registered Charity No. 235270

Minutes of the 67th Annual General Meeting held by email on 4th July 2020 due to the COVID-19 public health emergency

The Chairman, Dr Christopher Thornton, sent the AGM papers by email or post to members on 11th June, as the AGM to be held at Boxted Airfield had been cancelled. Agenda items 1, 2, 4, 7 were posted on the FHE website. Nominations for election to the Executive Committee and Resolutions for discussion at the AGM had to be sent to the Chairman by 26th June. The AGM acceptance form enabled members to vote for or against each agenda item and make comments.

1. Minutes of the 66th AGM held at Prittlewell Priory on 6th July 2019 and matters arising

There were no corrections to the minutes. 35 members voted to accept the minutes, and 2 abstained. There were no matters arising.

2. Annual report by the Chairman for the year ended 31st March 2020

The following report by Dr Thornton was emailed to members and posted on the FHE website:

“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.

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".

Acceptance of the report was agreed unanimously.

3. Appointment of Examiner for year ended 31st March 2021

Proposed by the Committee: Geraldine Willden.

This appointment was agreed by 35 members, with 2 abstentions.

4. Draft Financial report and statement for the year ended 31st March 2020

The accounts, delayed by the Covid-19 crisis, were under examination. Draft accounts were therefore provided, and will be updated on the website as soon as possible. The following draft report and statement by the Treasurer were emailed to members and posted on the website:

"Income and expenditure

The results show a net surplus for the year of £1,725. This is a reduction on the prior year surplus of £3,441.

Income was £6,236 compared to £11,484 last year. In the year to 31 March 2019 income had been boosted by one off legacies and donations totalling £5,000. We also held just one event this year vs two last year and events income was £345 lower. Membership subscriptions have reduced by £165. Gift aid income includes £184 relating to small cash donations for the last two years.

Expenditure reduced from £8,043 to £4,511. The main items of expenditure this year were £2,026 on document purchases for the ERO, and the £750 grant to support a University of Essex student placement. Last year's expenditure was inflated by a £4,000 one off contribution to support conservation of the Saulez papers.

Balance sheet

Net assets stand at £61,784. We hold £22,000 in National Savings income bonds, earning 1.15%, and £25,323 at Shawbrook Bank earning 1.40% (fixed until July). Cash and current account balances total £14,334".

FHE member Pat Bodin pointed out that on the income and expenditure account the total income for 2018-19 should be £11,485 (not £11,484), and that the overall balance to 31st March 2020 should be £61,785 (not £61,784).

The draft financial report was accepted by 35 members, rejected by 1 member, with 1 abstention.

5. Election of Honorary Officers under Rule 4 of the Constitution

Proposed for re-election: C. Thornton (Chairman); K. Crowe (Vice-Chairman); R. Earnshaw (Hon. Treasurer); J. Butler (Hon. Secretary.); J. Gooch (Hon. Membership Secretary)

All were re-elected unanimously.

6. Appointment of Executive Committee under Rule 5 of the Constitution

Proposed for re-election: A. Rowlands; S.O'Dell; J. Bedford; N. Wiffen.

All were re-elected unanimously. There were vacancies for up to three committee members, but no nominations were received.

7. Statement by an Essex Record Office representative

The following report by Martin Astell, ERO Manager, was posted on the FHE website:

Temporary closure of ERO building due to COVID-19: As you will know, the ERO building has been closed since the last week in March. A skeleton staff have been visiting the building to monitor the conditions and maintain the preservation of the collections. A number of staff have been furloughed but most have been working from home where possible.

As I write this, the date when the ERO will reopen to the public remains uncertain. However, work is under way to make adjustments to the building and procedures in order to enable social distancing and to minimise the risks of spreading the virus so that, initially, some staff will be able to safely return to work, and later, some access to documents and resources will be possible in the Searchroom.

We are liaising with other archive services and considering guidance from the National Archives and elsewhere around issues relating specifically to the risks around providing access to archive collections.

Work continuing: Although the building has been closed, some regular work has carried on. For example, we have continued to answer email enquiries and maintain outreach via social media. But the change in circumstances has also provided opportunities to carry out some activities which may not otherwise have been done.

These include:

- Data input for building plan catalogues
- Cataloguing of the Barrington deeds (D/Dba T4) – a collection of 253 medieval deeds

- Conversion of Conservation reports to electronic form

Talks and events: Unfortunately, we have had to cancel some major events, including the mini-conference in Clacton to mark the anniversary of the first mainland civilian casualties of the Second World War, and the event to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the opening of the ERO building.

However, before the virus took hold in earnest, we were able to hold a very successful and enjoyable conference on the history of science. This included talks on the history of gas manufacture, brewing, textiles, public health and the development of fibre optics, as well as the industrial archaeology of Chelmsford and a fascinating romp through some of the scientific techniques currently being used in the field of archaeology. We are grateful to all of the speakers and attendees, and in particular to Adrian Corder-Birch for giving the conference a glowing review in the FHE Newsletter.

With physical distancing restrictions set to continue for some time, we do not expect to be able to run any of our 'Essex Record Office presents' monthly talks this year, but we are working on the possibility of running a number of talks as online events.

Financial implications: It is not clear yet exactly what the effect of the shutdown will be on the ERO budget. Although we have continued to receive income from Essex Archives Online subscriptions, we will have had a period of three months (at least) in which it has not been possible to earn income from the certificates service, the Conference Centre and other services. This will clearly have a significant impact.

Communicating Connections [Marconi oral history and digitisation of photographs] project: We have been able to appoint the Oral Historian/Project Officer and the Evaluator for this project. We expect work to start on this in July.

New Town archives:

- National Archives 'Networks for Change' funding: Application (on behalf of consortium of record offices and museums holding new town records) for funding to assist with establishing a subject-specific network. An initial application was rejected but feedback indicated that it should be resubmitted with changes. The application was being led by Buckinghamshire but (because the County Archivist of Bucks has moved on) ERO is now going to lead. The application was submitted in June and a decision is expected in July.
- National Archives 'Archives Revealed' cataloguing grant to catalogue Harlow Development Corporation records: We were successful at Round 1, but that is no guarantee of success at Round 2. The second round application will be submitted in mid-June.

8. Resolutions proposed by members of the Friends

No resolutions were received.

Apologies for absence

Mike Davies for Rayleigh Town Museum

Acceptance forms received

Lesley Aitken, Martin Astell, Ian Beckwith, Jane Bedford, Tony Bedford, Pat Bodin, Anne Brooks, Jenny Butler, Gerald Coldham, Adrian Corder-Birch, Johanna Dale, Mike Durgan, Shirley Durgan, Ruth Earnshaw, Ken Edwards, David Elphick, Sarah Ensor, Ron Howlett, Sue Howlett, Elizabeth A. Kemp-Luck, Roger Kennell, David G. Llewelyn Morgan, Dorothy Lockwood, Martyn Lockwood, Patricia March, Lynn Marston, S. Mynott, Norma Newsome, Alison Rowlands, Lesley Ruse, Maureen Scollan, Julie Sherman, Nicola Thomas, Chris Thornton, Jennifer Ward, Neil Wiffen, Geraldine Willden

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27th July 2020