

FRIENDS OF HISTORIC ESSEX

Supporting the Essex Record Office

Registered Charity No. 235270

Minutes of the 72nd Annual General Meeting held at Maldon Town Hall at 11.30 a.m. on Saturday 12th July 2025

Jennifer Butler welcomed everyone to the AGM, and the President, Lord Petre, took the chair.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from 12 members. Names are shown at the end of these minutes.

2. Minutes of the 71st AGM held at Essex Record Office on 13th July 2024

The minutes were accepted as correct.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

No matters arising.

4. Annual Report and Address by the Chairman for the year ended 31 March 2025

The following report had been circulated to members.

“The Year’s Activities

Having just celebrated its 70th anniversary, the Friends of Historic Essex continues to support the Essex Record Office and the study of history in Essex. The Executive Committee met three times during the year, with some members attending in person and some online. The charity’s financial position is still healthy, very ably overseen by our Treasurer, Ruth Earnshaw. Committee members have supported several ERO events, including Peter Walker’s talk on county maps at Saffron Walden in October, and the ‘ERO Presents’ talk in November. We have purchased a contactless card reader, in order to accept card payments as well as cash when selling publications at such events. We also funded a lunch to thank the volunteers for the work they carry out at ERO. Our Publications Officer, Neil Wiffen has worked hard to produce two newsletters

this year, Winter 2024/25, and Summer 2025, and also to prepare for publication ERO in 70 Documents. In order to keep in touch between newsletters, several brief emails have been sent to members who have given their email addresses. There are 159 paid-up members, including institutions (mainly museums and parish councils). The annual subscription of £12 remains the same. We are very grateful for the continued support of all members.

Supporting the acquisition of documents

2024/25 has certainly been a busy, and mostly successful, year for the acquisition of documents. Grants of just over £6,200 have been made for a range of Essex documents at ten sales throughout the year. 16th and 17th century deeds of the Honeywood family of Marks Hall, from the Foyle library, a 17th century map of the manor of Hempstead, and a 16th century cartulary of the Golding family estates in Belchamp St Paul, were the most expensive items, and financial assistance to acquire these items was also given by the Friends of the Nation's Libraries. A deed of Manuden 1330 was purchased in memory of archivist Katharine Schofield.

Membership and publicity

Rachael Bailey-Gibson, who took over as Membership Secretary last year, has updated our membership records and improved communications. She has also designed some posters and leaflets and started to publicise FHE in outside locations. An article about the Friends appeared in Essex County Council's Essex Explorer magazine, and several membership enquiries were received as a result of the article.

University of Essex placement 2025

For a number of years the Friends of Historic Essex has funded a 3-month placement in ERO for a University of Essex MA History student. In November, a new Memorandum of Understanding was agreed and signed by FHE, the University of Essex, and ERO for the next three academic years. Lara Edwards has been awarded the placement this year.

Committee thanks and changes

I would like to thank all the officers and members of the Executive Committee for their assistance and contributions this year, particularly Cathy Pearson for taking on the role of Secretary. Our Vice-Chairman, Ken Crowe is stepping down from the committee after 10 years, so I would like to thank Ken for all his work, especially for liaising with ESAH, and for liaising with ERO over document purchases. There are several vacancies on the committee, and we would be most happy to receive nominations. Finally I would like to thank Geraldine Willden, who is stepping down after 8 years, having generously given her time to examine the charity's annual accounts.

Jennifer Butler BA Chair, The Friends of Historic Essex (Reg. Charity No. 235270) 26 May 2025"

5. Financial statement for the year ended 31 March 2025

The following report of the Treasurer, Ruth Earnshaw, had been circulated to members.

“For the financial year ended 31st March 2025, FHE is reporting an excess of expenditure over income of £4,143. Our reserves at year end were £56,205. We have made some significant acquisitions for the ERO during the year, and also committed a further amount towards their Open the Box project.

Income and Expenditure

Income for the year was £6,657 vs £11,208 last year (inflated by one-off donations for specific purchases). Membership subscription income was £1,968, a significant improvement on last year, as we collected subscription arrears from institutional members. Interest income was £2,189, also higher as we continued to benefit from strong interest rates on fixed deposits. We have received £900 from the sale of merchandise, mainly Chapman and Andre maps and Peter Walker’s map book at specific events. Donations were £780.

Expenditure for the year was £10,800. This includes a further commitment of £1,700 for the development phase of the Open the Box project, taking our total commitment to £9,500. Document purchases totalled £6,252. We contributed the regular £750 towards a University of Essex placement. Two Newsletters cost £784. Ad hoc items included funding a lunch for ERO volunteers, expenses for Erica Fudge’s talk on An Archive Full of Animals, and purchasing a cardless payment device for use in the Searchroom and at external events.

Balance sheet

At 31st March 2025, FHE reserves were £56,205. A number of different investments are held, which ensures we have funds readily available for acquisitions while also benefitting from the relatively high interest rates which have been available.

We hold £22,000 in National Savings income bonds now earning 3.3% and two 1-year deposits with Charity Bank: £21,241 maturing in August and £10,814 maturing next March, both at 4.51%. We also had £12,660 in cash and current account balances at year end.”

Proposed Ruth Earnshaw, seconded Simon Coxall. Agreed unanimously.

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

Chair, Jennifer Butler; Hon. Secretary, Dr Cathy Pearson; Hon. Treasurer, Ruth Earnshaw; Hon. Membership Secretary, Rachael Bailey-Gibson; Hon. Publications Officer, Neil Wiffen

Proposed Simon Coxall, Seconded Stewart Seymour. Agreed unanimously

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

Jane Bedford, Simon Coxall, Tony Gunn, Alison Rowlands

Proposed Martin Stallion, Seconded Stewart Seymour. Agreed unanimously

8. Appointment of Examiner for year ended 31 March 2026

New examiner Barbara Astell

Proposed Neil Wiffen, Seconded Andrew Smith. Agreed unanimously.

9. Statement by an Essex Record Office representative

Martin Astell, Essex Record Office Manager, attended the AGM and reported on various aspects of the service:

“25 Years of ERO Building

- On 6 March 2025 we marked the 25th anniversary of the opening of the ‘new’ ERO Building with a series of social media posts.
- Also to celebrate 25 years of the building, we arranged to have the Timeline sculpture cleaned and repaired. Michael Condron, the Essex-based artist who created the work, returned to ERO to carry out this work. The lighting and interactive elements of the sculpture are now all working again, except for the computer touchscreen.

Bow Bridge

- The new road and bridge adjacent to the ERO Building was opened on 11th July

Open the Box: connecting communities through archives

- The development phase of our Open the Box project is well under way
 - Recruitment of a Project Officer – Amber Marshall Callaghan
 - Commissioning of evaluation consultants
 - Establishment of a Steering Group
 - Users (and non-users) survey
 - Community engagement activities
 - Work towards a second-round funding application

Quince wine video

- Our YouTube video released in October shows how Neil Wiffen got on in his attempt to recreate a 16th century recipe for preserving quinces and a quince wine recipe from c.1725.

Accessibility and Inclusion

ERO has made further efforts to improve accessibility and inclusion and to benefit wellbeing:

- Free tickets for social prescribing.
 - Through collaboration with the Social Prescribing Link Worker/Team Manager, we have now set up a free ticket code for Chelmsford CVS to give to clients who want to come to our ERO Presents talks. People can be referred by their GP or self-refer.
- Deaf Awareness training
 - Eight members of the ERO team attended Deaf Awareness Training provided by the Royal Association for Deaf People
 - They learnt about terminology, different models of disability, methods of communication, potential barriers to deaf people (as researchers and colleagues), and working with BSL interpreters
 - They were also given an introduction to sign language, including archive-specific signs.
- Southend Deaf Histories Zine
 - Thanks to a grant from The National Archives, in 2024 the ERO partnered with deaf artist Damien Robinson to hold a series of workshops exploring the history of the D/deaf community in Southend-on-Sea.
 - We mapped out spaces that had been important to the Deaf community over the past hundred years, discussed material brought along by participants, and filmed short interviews in British Sign Language to record people's memories. These are now archived in the Essex Sound and Video Archive at the ERO.
 - As a result of the project a digital zine has been created telling the story of Southend's Deaf history, from 1900 to the present day.
 - The zine – available on the ERO website – is in English and BSL and features archive images as well as the memories of participants.

Guide for Creatives

- ERO published a new resource to help support creatives, such as artists, writers, filmmakers, photographers, musicians, designers and producers, to use the archive, particularly those looking to explore or respond to our county's unique heritage.

- The guide covers how to search, access, and use the archives at the ERO, what they can offer, case studies, and some inspiration from our collections

Art display guide

- A brief guide to the artworks on display on the Ground floor of the ERO Building has been created. The guide provides a few details about the works and has a map plan to help visitors discover art works they may not have seen.

Bloomberg Connects

- ERO now has a set of pages on the Bloomberg Connects app
- The app is used by visitors to museums, galleries, archives cultural sites across the UK and internationally
- The guide has floor plans, images, audio and video content to help people explore our collections either when they are in the building or at home.
- The content initially has a focus on the art collections held at ERO.
- Further content will be added in due course. For example, University of Essex students will be putting together a display of Spalding photograph images.

Talks and events

- **Industrial Archaeology** (Saturday 26 April)
 - In collaboration with the Essex Industrial Archaeology Group, the Essex Society for Archaeology and History and Anglia Ruskin University, we marked the 50th anniversary of the publication *Essex and the Industrial Revolution* by the then ERO Senior Archivist, John Booker.
- **The Men Who Shocked Victorian Britain** (Saturday 1 March)
 - ERO held a mini-conference event as part of LGBT+ History Month
 - Award-winning journalist and author Neil McKenna told the story of Fanny and Stella (Frederick Park and Ernest Boulton) and their sensational trial.
 - ERO Archivist Chris Lambert gave an introduction to the Spalding Photographic Archive, presenting highlights of the surviving images to put into context the photographs of Fanny and Stella.
 - There was also a display of Spalding photographs of Chelmsford.
- **Printed Maps of Essex** (Saturday 14 June)
 - Peter Walker very kindly gave his talk on the printed maps of Essex in Harlow. At the talk copies of Peter's book and C&A maps sheets were sold.
- **Anglo Saxon event** (21 June)
 - Richard Dolby gave an update on the work of the Battle of Assandun team (support by The Battlefields Trust).
 - Professor Stephen Rippon of the University of Exeter on 'How Anglo-Saxon was the East Saxon Kingdom?'

Projects - external

- Essex Book Festival
- VE Day commemoration in Chelmsford

HE partnerships

- University of Essex History M.A. placements
 - Lara Edwards working on Alien Registration cards, 1914-1988.
 - Enriching catalogue
 - Sharing stories of individual people and charting the bigger picture of migration in Essex over the twentieth century
- University of Essex public history projects

Cataloguing etc.

- Marriage licences
 - We are continuing to catalogue individual marriage licences on Essex Archives Online which enables them to be searched by names.
 - In September we published a further 812 marriage licences, covering the period 1826 to 1851.

Document purchases – Friends of the Nations’ Libraries Report 2024

- Prominence given to Essex acquisitions in the recent publication of the Annual Report for 2024 of the Friends of the Nations’ Libraries.
 - The inside of the front and rear covers is a full page image of the map of the manor of Hempstead (D/DU 3604/1). That it should have been chosen for such a prominent position is tribute both to Diane, who carefully cleaned, relaxed and flattened the map which was previously rolled up; and to Andy, who took a superb image such that the details of individual trees and acreages can all be made out:
- In the principal acquisitions the Foyle deeds (page 11) and Hempstead map (page 12) feature, as well as the crucial contribution from the John R. Murray Fund to acquire the volume recording the lands of Robert Rich (D/DU 3538/1) on page 16.
- We are in fact the only repository to get eight pages in the grants section of the report with the exception of the National Library of Scotland who also have eight!
- FNL have already provided three grants to us in 2025.

Looking forward

- Open the Box – delivery phase
- PlaceLayers – ERO may be a pilot for IHR project to create a nationwide online resource similar to Layers of London
- ERO digital future
- WWI Tribunal Records project
- New Jerusalems follow on?
- Chancellor architectural plans project completed??

- Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation
 - Devolution and LGR in Essex is on the horizon. At the moment we do not know how councils will be reorganised and what this might mean for ERO. We will do what we can to minimise disruption to staff and collections.
 - Whatever happens, I hope FHE will continue to support the documentary heritage of the county.”

10. Resolutions proposed by members of the Friends

None were received.

The meeting concluded at 12.05pm.

Apologies for absence

Cathy Pearson, Alison Rowlands, Ken Crowe, Tony Gunn, Sarah Ensor, Chris Thornton, Lynn Masters, Geraldine Willden, Barry Willden, Lesley Ruse, Karen Dennis, Steve Dennis

Attendance at AGM

Ruth Earnshaw, Neil Wiffen, Victoria West, Jenny Butler, Jacky Hathaway, Rachael Bailey-Gibson, Geraldine Gunn, Roy Gunn, Stewart Seymour, Elphin Watkin, Brenda Watkin, Mark Ellis, Martin Stallion, Jane Bedford, Tony Bedford, Peter Wynn, Roger Kennell, Julie Sherman, Diane Taylor, Graham Richards, Sandra Newens, Thomas Newens, Mary West, Pierre Waddoups, Simon Coxall, Martin Astell, Amber Marshal Callaghan, Pat Bodin, Andrew Smith, Maureen Scollan, Nicola Thomas, Lord Petre (32)