



## Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 2026

### The Year's Activities

The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the event on 25<sup>th</sup> October to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Friends and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ERO's Wharf Road building. The event was attended by some 120 guests including the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, Mrs Jennifer Tolhurst, and the Chairman of Essex County Council. After a few short talks, our President, Lord Petre, launched our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication *ERO in 70 Documents*. Guests then enjoyed seeing a display of documents, some of which feature in the book. Edited by our Publications Officer, Neil Wiffen, *ERO in 70 Documents* has been selling well, both at the launch event, at ERO talks and online. The contactless card reader which we purchased last year has made sales quicker and easier.

The Executive Committee met three times during the year, with some members attending in person and some online, and our Secretary, Cathy Pearson, has organised the meetings very efficiently. The charity's financial position is still healthy, overseen very ably by our Treasurer, Ruth Earnshaw. We have supported ERO's second-round application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for their "Open the Box" project, and committee members have assisted at several ERO talks and events.

In addition to editing *ERO in 70 Documents* and preparing it for publication, Neil Wiffen has edited two newsletters this year, Winter 2025/26, and Spring 2026. FHE members who have given us their email addresses will also have received occasional emails, informing them of Friends' events and visits, and discounts on ERO talks.

### Supporting the acquisition of documents

2025/26 has been a quieter year for the acquisition of documents. Grants of just over £2,100 have been made for a range of Essex documents at six sales throughout the year. Two MS volumes of Dr Jonas Asplin of Prittlewell and Rayleigh, containing student lectures 1792-1797 and patient notes 1826-1830, were the most expensive items at £1,300, but 70% of the cost was given by the Friends of the Nations' Libraries. A map of Lucas Farm, White Roding c.1830, two maps of Canvey Island 1787, five 1<sup>st</sup> edition 25 inch OS maps showing the manor of Henham, deeds of East and West Hanningfield 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and deeds of Maldon 1770-1845, were also purchased with grants from the Friends.

### Membership and publicity

Our Membership Secretary, Rachael Bailey-Gibson, has continued to update our membership records and improve communications with members. There are 176 paid-up members, including institutions (mainly museums and parish councils). We are very grateful for the continued support of all members.

The annual subscription of £12 remains the same. In order to encourage new members and assist with electronic payments, the Committee has proposed a change to the date of subscription renewal. Rachael has also been considering improvements to the design of the membership form on our website.

### **FHE Visits**

In response to a suggestion after last year's AGM, two visits were arranged for FHE members, namely to Essex Police Museum (thanks to Curator Hannah Wilson) and to Pleshey churchyard archaeological excavation (thanks to FHE committee member Simon Coxall).

### **University of Essex placement 2026**

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. Francesca Lombardi 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, enthusiasm and dedication during this busy year. Two committee members, Jane Bedford and Alison Rowlands are stepping down. I'd particularly like to thank them for all their work and very helpful contributions over a number of years.

Jennifer Butler BA

Chair, The Friends of Historic Essex (Reg. Charity No. 235270)

26 May 2026