

Annual Report to the Friends of Suffolk Archives

October 2024 - September 2025



A SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICE

Service consolidation

The consolidated service reopened on 4 February 2025, following the move of material from the closed Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft branches. Various improvements to the service were made, such as increasing the opening hours as well as removing the need to pre-order archives or book a seat in the searchroom. More details about how to use the service can be found on our website:

<https://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/how-to-get-started-at-suffolk-archives/plan-your-visit/using-the-searchroom>

Visitor figures for February and March were particularly high. Since then they have settled down with an average visitor figure of just under 400 per month. We will not be able to do any meaningful analysis of statistics until next year.

Exhibitions and events programme

During the period October 2024 to September 2023, we produced 3 successful exhibitions and associated programmes of events.

In October 2024 we opened *The Snowman and the Snowdog* exhibition. This was a charged exhibition with 2044 tickets sold. The exhibition was on loan from Penguin Random House Archives, and Penguin Ventures and was made up of over 40 original drawings, illustrations, and storyboards from the making of the 2012 animated film. These unique pieces, based on characters created by Raymond Briggs, gave an intriguing look into the creative processes involved in bringing The Snowman™ back to life for a new generation of viewers.



February 2024 saw the opening of the *Departures: Exploring Emigration from Suffolk* exhibition. It explored the diverse reasons behind emigration from Suffolk, from early colonists heading to America to those drawn by the Gold Rushes in Australia and California. It also examined the impact of emigration on both emigrants and the communities they left behind, as well as the lasting legacies of empire, colonisation, and their effects on indigenous communities.



We were fortunate to borrow archives from a variety of institutions. These included original letters from John Winthrop, a key figure in the founding of Massachusetts, on loan from the Massachusetts Historical Society. Winthrop, from Groton, led Puritans to America in 1630 in search of religious freedom.



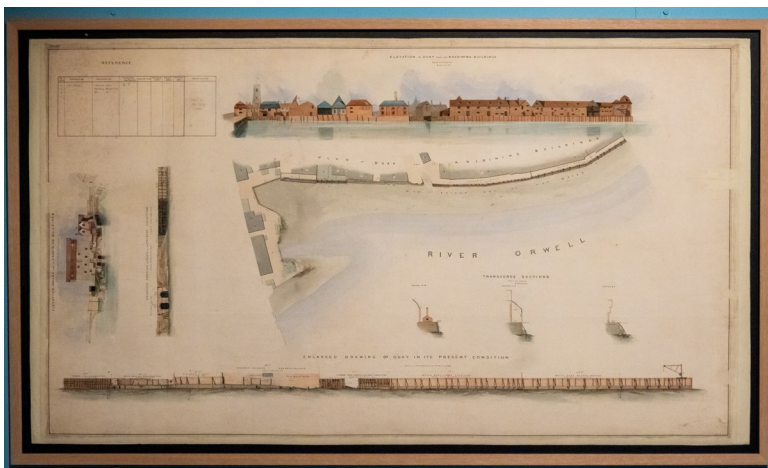
The exhibition also featured the original Titanic passenger list, loaned by The National Archives, detailing the names of those aboard the ill-fated voyage. We focused on the stories of two Suffolk passengers, Thomas Cupper Mudd and Frederick Sutton, who lost their lives in the disaster.

Nearly 2,000 people visited the exhibition and the feedback was very positive.

What do you like about the exhibition? What could be improved?

EXCELLENT SELECTION OF INFO COVERING
A LARGE PERIOD OF TIME, VARIOUS COUNTRIES
& GLOBAL CONNECTIONS ALL LINKING WITH
SUFFOLK. VERY WELL PRESENTED

Departures was followed by our summer block-buster exhibition *Anchors Away: Suffolk and the Sea*. This ran from June to the end of September and saw over 2,500 visitors. The exhibition covered stories of pirates, smuggling, shipwrecks and the development of the lifeboat service as well as the work of local boat builders and the increasingly important role that Felixstowe plays in modern business. The exhibition was sponsored by Associated British Ports.



The exhibition was accompanied by a touring version of the display hosted in the Suffolk Archives display trailer. This visited 23 locations/events across the county between June and October 2025 including Suffolk Show, Lowestoft Maritime Museum, East Anglian Game and Country Fair at Euston, Martello Tower P maritime festival and Newmarket National Horseracing Museum. The trailer display received 12,019 visitors and was accompanied by free family craft activities.



In addition to the exhibitions and associated events, we also ran three successful programmes across the county of talks, family and property history workshops, cinema clubs, Behind the Scenes Tours, children's craft sessions as well as continuing with of National Theatre Live productions.

The flexibility of the space at The Hold continues to allow us to host a number of temporary exhibitions created by local communities and organisations. Since October 2024 we have welcomed displays from the University of Suffolk, Arthur Rope, a local stained glass artist, Suffolk New College's fashion show, the Irish in Britain and a Kindertransport exhibition.

Projects

Since October 2024 we have worked on a number of projects, many externally funded which have been based on material found within the archives and local studies collections.

'Following the Fish' *Stories of the Herring Girls* - Scotland and Lowestoft

As mentioned in last year's report, we secured funding from Lloyds Register Foundation to work with Highland Life Archives in Wick, the Tasglann nan Eilan (Outer Hebrides), and Norfolk Record Office to collaborate on researching and sharing the stories of fisher girls who worked up and down the east coast. The exhibition has been moving around the county over the summer and will be at the Norfolk Record Office from 15 October.

The online exhibition can be viewed at <https://suffolkarchives.shorthandstories.com/following-the-fish/>

Martello Tower P

Suffolk Archives have been working in partnership with East Suffolk Council to deliver a research

and public programming project focusing on Martello Tower P in Felixstowe. The Martello Tower is an iconic historical structure in Felixstowe and was built in the early 19th century as part of Britain's coastal defence strategy during the Napoleonic Wars. The project aims to breathe life back into the structure and elevate its status amongst the heritage landscape of Felixstowe.

This will involve showcasing the research to the public, improving interpretation within the tower and a programme of schools' engagement. The research element started in February 2025 and the project is due to complete this autumn.

Heart of Suffolk Witches

The Archives have been working with Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils to develop a touring exhibition exploring the experiences of men and women who were accused of witchcraft in the towns and villages of the area and the subsequent trials at Bury St Edmunds in 1645. Research from the touring exhibition will be used in the Suffolk Witches and Witchcraft exhibition at The Hold planned for autumn 2026.

Constable 250

Suffolk Archives has been awarded £11,900 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of a larger project celebrating the 250th anniversary of Constable's birth, being run by Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service. The project will allow us to develop a touring exhibition in our archives trailer which we will take to a number of events in Suffolk over the spring and summer 2026. We will also be developing and hosting a conference to be held at The Hold in spring 2026 and a series of workshops for the spring or autumn 2026.

Museum and Heritage Awards

We were delighted that we won the Community Engagement Programme of the Year Award for our *Arrivals: Celebrating Migration to Suffolk* project at the 2025 awards.



The judges said: "Comprehensive, thoughtful and effective, this winning engagement programme successfully reached beyond its organisation's traditional audience, achieving impressive results with a strong legacy."

Collections

The Chair's report has covered the archives that the Friends have purchased so I won't mention those, other than to say thank you for purchasing those archives which are then deposited with us. We very much appreciate it.

We have taken in over 165 collections during the period covered by this report, including:

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| 1531 | Lowestoft and East Suffolk Circuit of the Methodist Church
Assorted documents, albums, registers, minutes
1800s to 2022 |
| GB608 | Martlesham Heath Aviation Society
WWII Record books for Spotter Air Raid Warden Mr G Watson at Ransomes Sims & Jeffries Ltd.
1940-1954 |
| 221 | Bungay Chapel archives (United Reformed Church)
Various documents, including accounts, Communion attendance registers
1884-1990 |
| GC685 | Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Newspaper cuttings, ephemera, membership records and minutes
1930-2004 |

- GH508 West Suffolk Federation of Women's Institutes
Records for a number of branches including Felsham and Gedding
1996-2023
- HD4460 Joseph Iron of Bury St Edmunds
Eleven notebooks of Joseph Iron, covering his travels.
19th century

We have also received a large quantity of local public records, including Magistrate Court records, Prison Chaplain journals and Coroners files.

Volunteers and staff news

Our volunteer numbers for the year April 2024 to March 2025 have increased to about 175 with a total of 5,200 hours contributed towards a wide variety of work. Like last year this has included cataloguing and indexing, repacking archives, helping customers in the John Blatchly Local Studies Library, attending fairs and craft sessions, research for exhibitions and projects and so much more.

In July we saw the return of our annual Volunteer Awards, a chance to celebrate all the wonderful volunteers who give their time and expertise to support the archives. The commitment of our volunteers allow us to complete many amazing projects, reach new audiences, showcase diverse stories and collections, and ensure everyone feels welcome at the Hold.

We also celebrated the winners of our 6 award categories, who were nominated by their fellow volunteers and colleagues. Huge well done again to:

- Angie Skelcher, winner of the County-wide Contribution Award.
- Graham Lambert, winner of the Unsung Hero Award.
- David Mitchell, winner of the Super Support award.
- John Rutherford, winner of the Ray of Sunshine Award.
- Paul Botwright, winner of the Outstanding Contribution to the Newsletter Award
- Rachel Field, winner of the Unsung Hero Award.



Lydia and Rebecca with some of the volunteers at the Volunteer Awards

We, the staff and volunteers were very sorry to say goodbye to Lydia Watson, who has done a marvellous job covering the Volunteer Engagement Co-Ordinator role while Rebecca was on maternity leave. It is however, lovely to have Rebecca back in post and I know she's looking forward to catching up with all of the volunteers.

In other staff news we have welcomed a number of new staff over the last year. Wayne Savage has joined us as the Marketing and Communications Officer, Katie Bishop as a Senior Archives Assistant, Isobel Renn and Polly Kaur as Archive Assistants and Aimee Piper as a Retail Assistant.

There have been a number of changes within the Collections Team. Bridget Hanley retired in July having worked for the service since 1986. Her speech at her leaving party illustrated how much the service has changed in the last 40 years - paper catalogues and indexes, a typing pool, no emails or mobile phones, no Ancestry or Find My Past, and apparently a tape slide presentation which included an archivist in a gorilla costume eating a banana to demonstrate how eating was not permitted in the searchrooms.



Bridget Hanley



Angela Graham has joined us as a full-time archivist and Geoff Cooper, as our zero-hour archivist.

In the last AGM report I mentioned that Kate Chantry had recently retired as Strategic Manager. Very sadly, Kate died shortly afterwards on 24 October 2024.

In her 35 years with Suffolk, Kate led the Archives Service through significant change, always supporting the team and going above and beyond to safeguard the collections and promote the service. As a manager, Kate was always willing to listen and support, suggesting solutions where appropriate or simply providing a sounding board for ideas.

This was also reflected in her contributions to the wider archive profession and the local history community in Suffolk. She served as Chair of the Eastern region of the Society of Archivists and was a longstanding member of the East of England Regional Archive Council. A former chair said: "Kate will be sorely missed; she made a tremendous contribution to the cause of archives in the East of England over many years."

Within Suffolk, she supported the various local history and heritage organisations, including the Friends of Suffolk Archives, attending countless committee meetings, book launches and events.



She is very much missed by the service and the wider heritage community.