

Friends
of the



Registered Charity
No 288042

Newsletter of the Friends of the Suffolk Record Office

March 2011

Chairman's Letter

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2011. It looks to be a rather special year for the Record Office as we know it, with the County Council's New Strategic Direction coming into play. At the last AGM in Bury, Mrs Margaret Statham stood down as chairman and I was elected in her place. Dr Nick Amor replaced Mrs Pamela Palgrave. We are thankful for both their contributions; Margaret Statham remains on the committee. Mr John Gibbs resigned recently, following long-standing service to the County's archives [from before WW2!] and we are grateful to him for his perseverance even when he found it difficult to attend meetings so often. We are very much aware that the committee needs to be strong and with complementary skills so that we may support the Record Office in this time of change. We have co-opted onto the committee Mrs Beryl Sims with an interest in local history and Mr Victor Gray from a professional career in Essex archives. I am Suffolk born and bred, a retired Bart's physician and set up a "Friends of the Archives" for the Society of Apothecaries, where I still volunteer. So that's the present committee, although we continue to look for people who might support our work in appropriate areas.

I chaired a meeting before Christmas for stake-holders to learn about the proposed **Suffolk Heritage Cluster** [linking up with the Suffolk Archaeology Unit and the Museum of East Anglian Life]. There are many issues to resolve but we felt that we must help steer the Record Office rather than just object to the whole scheme. To this end we have put together a set of core values [see page 2] and we hope you agree these too.

We also look to our Friends. About 40 of you didn't re-join last year and we so need the support of as many Record Office users and researchers as possible. We encourage all to re-join, along with those whose subscription standing orders are fixed in previous years' rates. We need to be able to swell our purchasing fund as well as show the County Council, and others, that we are a vibrant user group and need to be consulted about matters of concern to all of us who use the record office. We hope that many of our precious volunteers will also want to join us. The Friends organisation was probably never more important. It's less a matter of use it or lose it, more join it [the Friends] or lose it [the Record Office]!

Paul Simmons

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FOSRO's Core Values and Aims

“We wish any new agency to

- **protect, preserve and catalogue in a professional manner in accordance with relevant quality standards the rich archives of the county for the benefit of this and future generations.**

To achieve the above

- **maintain an appropriate level of suitably trained staff including professionally qualified archivists.**
- **provide access to local records at a location that is convenient for researchers and a safe and comfortable environment in which to do research.**
- **assist, equally, professional historians and amateur local and family historians in their work.**
- **encourage a wider interest in Suffolk history, enhancing the sense of cultural identity by promoting the archive resource.**

The opportunity of a new management structure should encourage the enhancement of all of these basic aims.”

Suffolk Record Office Update

Starters and Leavers

Suffolk Record Office was very pleased to welcome Gemma Field as the new Manorial Documents Register (MDR) Project Officer in September. The project, to which the Friends have contributed, hopes to fully revise and place online the MDR. Those Friends who attended the 2010 AGM heard Professor Mark Bailey speak about the amazing potential of manorial documents before officially launching the project. Gemma has very kindly provided a summary of her activities so far and we hope to include updates in the newsletters for the duration of the project.

We were very sad to say goodbye to Dave Feakes who retired in February. Dave will have been familiar to all those who use the Ipswich branch, having started there as a Searchroom Assistant on 3 August 1999. Dave came to the record office after spending his first career working on the railways. One of his first projects was the gathering in of all the parish registers to be microfilmed. He has particularly fond memories of collecting material from Sproughton - "Sproughton Church was a classic, having to climb two wall-mounted ladders, haul myself into the belfry, selecting items for deposit and then having them lowered to me by rope!" We will be seeing Dave in the future as he has volunteered to catalogue the records of the Ipswich Speedway.

Councillor Rosie Clarke

Both the record office and the Friends were deeply saddened by the death of Councillor Rosemary Clarke in December 2010. As Portfolio Holder for Sport, Culture, Diversity, Health and Wellbeing, Rosie also served as a Vice-President for the Friends. Her enthusiasm and support for the work of the archives will be missed by everyone. Councillor Kathy Gosling has recently been appointed as the new Portfolio Holder.



Outreach

Since September the record office has run 20 workshops, 17 talks, 19 5 and 10 week courses and 30 evening visits, fairs and Top Time talks, with an overall total of 1,685 people attending events. The programme for the April to September 2011 season has just been distributed and we look forward to seeing you all at our events.

Full details of times, costs and venues are available on the record office website - www.suffolk.gov.uk/sro

Suffolk Manorial Documents Register Project underway

The MDR is the official record of manorial documents across England and Wales, set up in 1926 following the Law of Property Act which abolished copyhold tenure. Originally it was intended for the use of lawyers and landholders wanting to prove title to property; today, it is a valuable resource for historians in uniting a particular class of record scattered across disparate repositories. The Suffolk project is already revealing how widely these are spread. Approximately 65% of the county's manorial records are held by the three branches of Suffolk Record Office. The remainder are split between The National Archives (TNA), the British Library, other publicly funded repositories, and private ownership.

The MDR is now located at TNA, but its format in loose leaf binders means that it can only be accessed on site. As a result, it was an obvious choice for the creation of an online resource and in so doing provided an opportunity to update the original register. The revision of the Suffolk MDR involves checking the accuracy of existing entries and adding further entries for records not previously included. The project also requires that an authority list of 'proved' manors be created for the county. This involves the identification of manors which can, with reasonable certainty, be shown to have maintained a manor court, as distinct from an estate which simply bore the name 'manor' (possibly as a form of aggrandisement) but did not exercise jurisdictional rights. Manorial records have statutory protection under the Manorial Documents Rules and are the only class of non-public record for which such provision has been made. Suffolk is particularly well-endowed with surviving manorial records, but they are currently under-utilised even though they are an invaluable source for the study of medieval rural society. It is hoped that the revision of the MDR will encourage their wider use by professional and amateur historians.

If you would like any further details of the project, including volunteering opportunities, or if you have any information regarding Suffolk manors which you think may be of assistance, please contact Gemma Field on 01284 352354, or email gemma.field@suffolk.gov.uk

The MDR can be searched online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mdr/

Purchase of Manuscripts

In November the Friends were given the opportunity to contribute towards purchasing, at auction, the Collings papers relating to Southwold, as well as Malaysian and African Anthropology. Various other local societies expressed interest in the collection and a successful joint bid was placed. The collection is being preliminarily listed and a meeting is planned to discuss where the collection will be stored and what may be digitised to allow all partners to have access. A full report on the collection will be included in the August newsletter.



Suffolk Record Office Contact Details

For any queries or comments about the Friends please contact the secretary or treasurer.

The Secretary
Suffolk Record Office
77 Raingate Street
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 2AR

Phone: 01284 352352
Email:
judith.stephenson@suffolk.gov.uk

The Treasurer
Moatfield
Oakhill
Hoxne
Eye
Suffolk
IP21 5AL

77 Raingate Street
Bury St Edmunds
IP33 2AR
Telephone: 01284 352352
Email: bury.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

Gatacre Road
Ipswich
IP1 2LQ
Telephone: 01473 584541
Fax: 01473 584533
Email: ipswich.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

The Library
Clapham Road
Lowestoft
NR32 1DR
Telephone: 01502 405357
Fax: 01502 405350
Email: lowestoft.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

Website address: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/sro>

FOSRO Activities

The Friends have taken part in two new activities since the last newsletter. In December St Mary Le Tower Church in Ipswich held a Christmas Tree festival. Thanks to the generosity of Claire Barker and the hard work of record office staff and volunteers the Friends were able to include a tree in the festival.



The decorations were made from copies of documents held in the record office. The feeling was that this was a new and perhaps surprising way to promote both the Friends and the record office.



Book Sale at Ipswich Record Office

After the success of the Christmas tree festival staff at the Ipswich office offered to help the committee organise a second-hand book sale on behalf of the Friends. A notice went up in the office appealing for donations of books and the response was amazing, including donations from people who had never been into the office before and had seen the poster on the windows. The sale itself took place on Saturday 25 February and raised over £146 for FOSRO. A second sale is planned in Ipswich for 16 April and we hope to repeat the event in Bury in the autumn.

The committee are always interested in ideas for raising the profile of the Friends so if you have any ideas please get in touch with the Secretary - contact details are listed above.