

Annual Report to the Friends of Suffolk Archives

June 2023 - September 2024



Centralisation of Suffolk Archives

At the beginning of 2024, the Council confirmed the closure of the North-East and West Suffolk branches of the archive service. This was following the confirmation of the wider budget plans, which required Suffolk Archives to achieve budget savings of £140,000 from 2025 onwards by centralising operations to The Hold.

The branches in Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds closed to the public at the end of August 2024 and most of the branch archives will now begin to be transferred to the county's purpose-built strongrooms at The Hold.

The decant and transfer of archives and local studies material to The Hold, and the associated work to reorganise the Ipswich strongrooms is a substantial undertaking. To facilitate this work, the archives and the John Blatchly Local Studies Library areas at The Hold are now closed to the public. The exhibition gallery, café and associated events programme are remaining open and operational.

We appreciate that this has temporarily impacted access to the archives, but complete closure is the safest and most efficient way to ensure a smooth move. We plan to reopen the archives and the John Blatchly Local Studies Library in January 2025 with an improved service offering.

We have been reviewing various aspects of the service such as opening hours and methods of document productions so that we can identify opportunities for improvement, as well as maintaining our community outreach programme and digitising our most popular collections so that they can be viewed online.

Please continue to email suffolkarchivesengagement@suffolk.gov.uk with comments or queries.

Exhibitions and events programme

During the period June 2023 to September 2024, we produced 4 successful exhibitions and associated programmes of events.

Summer 2023 saw the opening of *Wolsey's Ipswich*, an exhibition delivered in partnership with *Wolsey 550* and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The overall project, *Wolsey 550* aimed to celebrate the life of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1473-1530) during the 550th anniversary year of his birth. Ipswich's "most famous son" rose from humble beginnings to become the most powerful man in the country, working alongside Henry VIII to shape politics,

law and religion. His gate next to St Peter's Church is a reminder of his intended educational legacy to the town – Cardinal College. Suffolk Archives was awarded funding to develop the exhibition which included treasures from our own collections as well as material borrowed from The National Archives, Christ Church College Oxford, Ipswich Museum and Trinity College Cambridge.

The exhibition was visited by 4,432 people with nearly 700 people attending the associated workshops, children's craft sessions and Tudor dance and music sessions. A walking trail of the town was designed and printed into a pamphlet which highlighted the exhibition at The Hold as well as key Tudor buildings and locations which are relevant to Wolsey's life and story.

The exhibition was accompanied by a touring version of the display hosted in the Suffolk Archives display trailer. This visited 11 locations/events across the county between June and October 2023 including the Suffolk Show, Latitude, and Ipswich Music Day. The trailer display received 7,190 visitors and was accompanied by free family craft activities.



“To see ancient books, the portrait, the hat, Shakespeare's First Folio and so many contemporary exhibits from the time was truly stunning. ... it certainly created a wonderfully memorable exhibition. To have the vision to include the RSC costumes was a seriously insightful decision!”



Wolsey's Ipswich was followed by a co-curated exhibition which was part of our National Lottery Heritage Fund project *Arrivals: Celebrating Migration to Suffolk*. This ran from November 2023 to April 2024 and saw 2,670 visitors. The exhibition celebrated stories of arrival, community and contributions to both the historic and contemporary Suffolk. The two-year project is due to finish in July 2025 and includes community events and projects, the exhibition, cataloguing and digitisation of existing archives and new material generated as part of the project, school visits, as well as continuing professional development days for the heritage sector and teachers. We are also working with communities to develop skills in collecting, arranging and cataloguing their own collections, some of which will be deposited with Suffolk Archives.



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

BRILLIANT PAST HISTORY
OF IPSWICH I DIDN'T
KNOW EXISTED

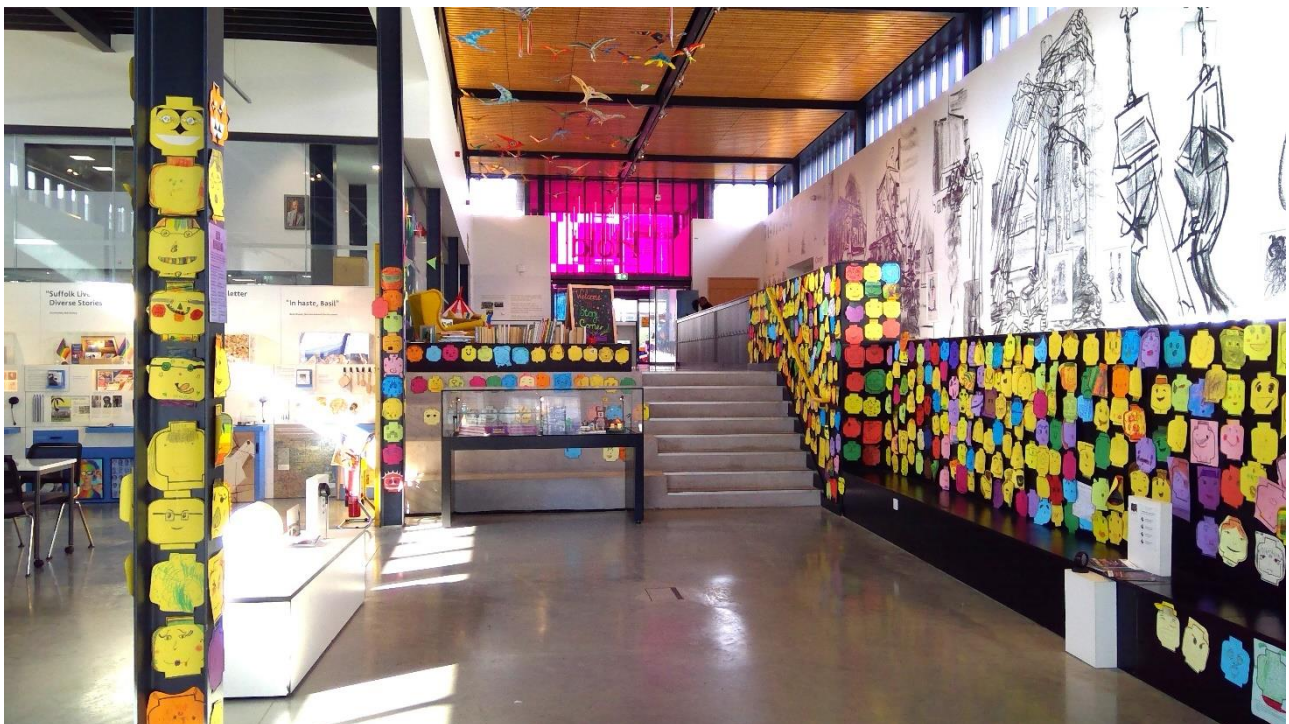
May 2024 saw the launch of the next exhibition *Art at The Heart of Ipswich: Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Ipswich Art Society*. This was another partnership project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and led by the Ipswich Art Society. We received funding to develop an exhibition that explored how the social, economic and political changes over the last century and a half have been reflected in the work of local artists. Artwork and ephemera was borrowed from society members, the Ipswich Borough Art Collection as well as material from Suffolk Archives. The exhibition itself saw 1,532 visitors.



The last exhibition to feature in this report was *Brick Wonders: Around the World in Lego Bricks*, which launched in July and closed at the end of September. Over 5,700 tickets were sold. Our Archives on Tour trailer featuring some *Suffolk Wonders*, attended 11 events across the county reaching over 8,000 people.



Alongside the exhibition was a series of workshops and Lego build sessions for children and young people. These proved to be very popular as did the *Design Your Own Lego Head* competition. There were over 1,200 entries which were displayed around The Hold.



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

The flexibility of the space at The Hold allows us to host a number of temporary exhibitions created by local communities and organisations. Since July 2023 we have welcomed displays from the University of Suffolk, Suffolk Pride, Suffolk Windrush Committee, Ipswich School, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce and Ipswich Photographic Society.

Projects

Since June 2023 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.

Extra Time at Lowestoft Archives

Extra Time is an intergenerational heritage and creativity project being delivered by Suffolk Archives in partnership with Suffolk Artlink and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Children in three Lowestoft primary schools worked with residents in local care homes to explore and share their love of football. One of the schools, Roman Hill Primary School visited Lowestoft Archives to research local football stories to share with the residents of Britten Court. They then worked with artists from Suffolk Artlink to creatively respond to their favourite stories.

We then started working with Pakefield Primary School who researched local football stories from the collections to share with the residents of Hilldesley Court, an independent living facility. Future work has been planned with schools located in Halesworth, Leiston and Oulton Broad.

Deaf Perspectives at Bury St Edmunds Archives

Many of the Friends will know of the collections of approximately 3,000 photographs taken by Walton Burrell (1863-1944) who lived his whole life in and around Bury St Edmunds. Walton was a prolific photographer and a world traveller. He was also profoundly deaf from birth, as were three of his siblings, all of whom were very early members of the British Deaf and Dumb Association. He may be the earliest known d/Deaf photographer at work in the UK.

Walton's life story and photographs were the inspiration for the Deaf Perspectives project. Suffolk Archives worked with Orchestras Live, Suffolk Music Hub, Britten Sinfonia, and others to run creative activities with Westgate Community Primary School and King Edward VI School.

26 students aged 5 to 15 from the school's Deaf Centres took part in the project, which included archive workshops, photography and film workshops, and music workshops with composer James Redwood and Deaf flautist Ruth Montgomery. The project culminated with a concert in which the students performed new music they had created with James and Ruth alongside Britten Sinfonia.



Remembering Radio Orwell with Cohere Arts

This project, again funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, involves working with visually impaired participants to host collecting events at The Hold, Eastern Angles and The New Wolsey Theatre in September 2024. Participants will attend training in oral history collection, in order that they can interview members of the public about their memories of Radio Orwell. Suffolk Archives will receive £6,000 towards project management, volunteer recruitment and management and oral history training.

Suffolk Women's History Group - countywide

Suffolk Archives has supported the establishment of a women's history research group to celebrate and share women's history in Suffolk. The group was launched on 19 September at The Hold, and will develop a forum method of meetings around the county to engage researchers with local stories. This will promote use of the archive service and remote research opportunities, whilst contributing stories to our exhibition and public programming.

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

Funding from Lloyds Register Foundation is aimed at fostering relationships with other UK archive services, enabling them to collaborate on a project which has local significance in multiple areas but also national significance. Highland Life Archives in Wick, Scotland and Suffolk Archives will collaborate on researching and sharing the stories of fisher girls who worked in both areas. Suffolk Archives will receive funding of £2,205 to facilitate volunteer research, attend launch events in Scotland (May 2025) and showcase linked stories through a touring exhibition display (Summer 2025) around East Coast, including Lowestoft, Kirkley, Pakefield, Southwold, Dunwich, Aldeburgh and Felixstowe.

Volunteers and staff news

Over the last year we have seen our volunteer numbers rise to over 100, contributing nearly 4,500 hours.

We have benefited from volunteers assisting with cataloguing and indexing, repacking archives, helping customers in the John Blatchly Local Studies Library, attending fairs and craft sessions and so much more.



In staff news, we have recently appointed Lydia Watson as our Volunteer Engagement Co-Ordinator covering Rebecca Harpur's maternity leave.

We have also said goodbye to Dominic Wall, the conservator in September 2023 as he moved to Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, and Kelly McGibney, Commercial Officer in June 2024 after she accepted a role with The Tate in London. Felicity French, the Marketing and Communications Officer, will be leaving in October to take up a role within the charity sector in Ipswich. Our thanks and good wishes go to all our colleagues who leave the archives service.

Last month saw the retirement of Kate Chantry, our Strategic Manager, after 34 years of dedicated service at Suffolk Archives. Kate's significant contribution to the archive service in Suffolk has been invaluable, particularly in driving forward the vision for The Hold, a flagship heritage centre for Suffolk. Her unwavering commitment, knowledge and determination have played a pivotal role in enhancing public engagement with Suffolk's history and archive collections. We wish her all the very best for her retirement.



And finally, we must thank the Friends of Suffolk Archives for their support and financial assistance in purchasing archives that are then deposited with the Suffolk Archives. Without the support of FOSA we would be unable to afford to purchase the wonderful archives that add to our collections.