

Annual Report to the Friends of Suffolk Archives

October 2025 - September 2026

SUFFOLK ARCHIVES

A SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICE

Exhibitions and events programme

Over the last year we have hosted three very different exhibitions.

In October 2025 we opened the very successful *Behind Bars: Suffolk's Criminal Past*. The exhibition looked at all aspects of crime across Suffolk, including famous local crimes such as the Red Barn Murder, the Acton Dumping murder and the last public execution in Suffolk. The exhibition also considered what constitutes a crime, from riots and protests to murder, as well as looking at the roles of the Police and Prison system.



Supported by items from HMP Hollesley Bay and the Suffolk Constabulary Museum, we were also able to borrow original material related to Margaret Catchpole from the National Library of Australia and the State Library of New South Wales. The letters from Margaret to her friends and family at home in Suffolk were on display on the UK for the first time. As always the exhibition was supported by a varied programme of events and activities.



Beyond Labels: Celebrating Disability in Suffolk

We were delighted to learn in autumn 2025 that we had been awarded a grant of £139,107 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver our Beyond Labels project. The project, which runs until April 2027, aims to shine a light on the lives, achievements, and challenges of people with disabilities across the county - past and present.

Beyond Labels will collect and preserve personal stories, alongside the histories of organisations, schools, and charities that support disabled people to create a record that celebrates disability while sparking conversations about inclusion, accessibility, and equality.

The project included establishing a community forum, running workshops across the county that provided opportunities for participants to co-create projects that continue to amplify disabled voices and educate others about the challenges faced in daily life, as well as the distinct project elements as described below.



A key part of the project was the exhibition held at The Hold in spring 2026. Co-curated with local communities, this exhibition celebrated the stories collected through the project and encouraged greater awareness and empathy across Suffolk. As part of the exhibition a variety of accessibility tools were made available. More details can be found on our website www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/pages/blproject

Part of the project involved undertaking an accessibility audit of the building and developing and trialling new ways of making our archives and exhibitions more accessible. In addition to the BSL tour of the exhibition and the audio tour, we created a 360 degree tour of the exhibition. Future exhibitions will incorporate more accessible features.

The Moon: Meet our Nearest Neighbour

Our summer exhibition was a touring exhibition which was supplemented with Suffolk Archives material, as well as an inflatable solar system hanging in The Street. The exhibition looked at the science and mythology of the moon, key moments in lunar discovery and the impact that the moon has on the natural world. Stories from the archives focused on Alice Grace Cook, a pioneering astronomer from Stowmarket, the legacy of the Rendlesham UFO sightings and Basil Brown's contribution to astronomy.



Constable 250: Touring Archives Trailer

As mentioned in last year's report, Suffolk Archives was 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 trailer explored Constable's life and work, encouraging people to visit the other exhibitions being held in museums across the county.

We visited 18 locations across the county and engaged with nearly 11,000 people. Some of these were new venues such as Flatford Mill, Munnings Art Museum and Gainsborough's House Museum.



In addition to our 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 and children's craft sessions. As part of the Moon exhibition the activities included a pop-up planetarium, an evening with Space East and an evening with the Orwell Astronomical Society at Newbourne village hall.

Lilian Redstone Day, July 2026

In July 2026 we celebrated the work and legacy of our very first Archivist, Miss Lilian Redstone. We welcomed stallholders from history and heritage organisations from across Suffolk and into Cambridge, including FoSA, to talk to visitors about their work and ambitions.



Emerita Professor Elizabeth Shepherd (UCL) spoke about the life and work of Lilian Redstone and her contemporaries based on recently published research on pioneering women archivists. The archivist and conservator team hosted a discussion panel, behind the scenes tours, a talk about the treasures of our collections, and an archive showcase which received nearly 100 visitors, all helping to promote the richness and significance of the work of the Suffolk Archives' team.

Temporary Exhibitions

We have continued to host a number of temporary exhibitions created by local communities and organisations. Since October 2025 these have included the Suffolk New College Fashion students, Skate Suffolk, SCC Youth Justice team photography, Urban Belonging and Spill Festival.

Projects

Since October 2025 we have worked on a number of projects with communities, many of which are designed to increase knowledge of and access to our collections.

Urban Belonging

In 2024 we worked with James Winterbotham and the Historic Towns Trust on their Town and City Historical Maps project. These maps are a modern map showing the history of the town or city, rather than a reproduction of an old map. The maps include an introduction, and a history of the featured city or town. They also include a gazetteer providing a brief history of the main features shown on the map, illustrations in the form of engravings, watercolours or early photographs, and 'topic boxes' related to points of interest specific to the town. The Ipswich map was published in April 2025, in association with the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History. There is a copy in the John Blatchly Local Studies Library, reference MC4/247. Copies can also be purchased in the Gift shop at The Hold.



The collaborative project Urban Belonging followed on from the production of the Ipswich map. The project worked with Ipswich Romanian Community, Suffolk Pride and Suffolk Windrush Select Committee. Each community produced a self-directed creative output, inspired by the Ipswich map.

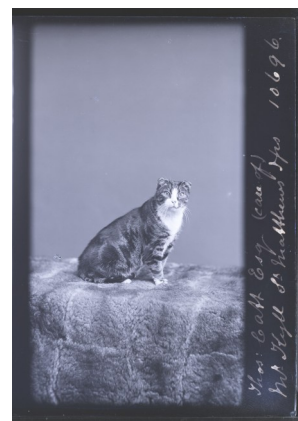
The project was an opportunity for the communities to discuss the history of the town, capturing different narratives and personal stories of town histories and urban development. These conversations highlighted buildings and spaces that are significant to different communities, and how important it is to showcase these on the map of Ipswich to paint a picture of the vibrant town.

Grounds for Appeal: First World War Military Service Appeal Tribunals in Great Britain

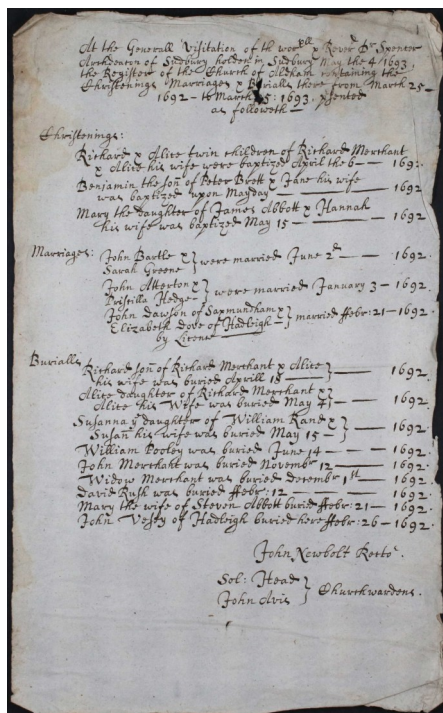
We are partnering on a project led by Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to share and promote access to First World War military service appeal tribunals records. We have already catalogued, indexed and digitised the Borough of Bury St Edmunds' tribunal papers as part of a volunteer project but we also hold a Local Appeal Tribunal Committee Book in the Felixstowe Urban District Council collection. The new consortium project will see Suffolk Archives as a minor partner, working with many other local authority archives to collaborate on engagement and outreach around the papers and create a national database to facilitate comparative analysis of these unique records

Vick Glass plate negative project (J14)

Following a comprehensive project to digitise thousands of glass plate negatives originating from the Ipswich based photography business of William Vick (1868-1890s), a staff and volunteer project has been launched to capture important data from these images. The images are primarily portraits of Victorian people from across Suffolk and will be invaluable to family and social historians, with the potential for ancestors and key Suffolk-based individuals to be seen for the first time. The project will facilitate access to thousands of images and enable greater potential for income from our digitisation service.



Ancestry



Suffolk Archives digitised parish registers were published on the Ancestry website in August 2025. The 8.5 million records comprise full-colour, high-quality digital images of parish registers from across the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, starting in 1538. They include key historical moments like the 1776 baptism of the artist John Constable and the 1846 burial of abolitionist Thomas Clarkson. Until now, these baptism, marriage and burial records were only available on microfiche or by visiting the Archives. Access to Ancestry is free at The Hold in Ipswich and at all Suffolk Community Libraries.

The Bishop's Transcripts were published online in September 2026. These can be helpful where the original registers have not survived. More information about BTs can be found on our website www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/pages/bts

Marriage licences are due to be published later this year with probate records scheduled for 2027.

Collections

We have taken in over 200 collections during the period covering by this report, including:

- 1695 Bungay Choral Society
Scrapbooks containing minutes, newsuttings, ephemera and accounts
1949-2013
- FK2/35 Association of Grace Baptist Churches
Includes Association Handbooks, Annual Reports, Annual General Meetings, Circular Newsletters, Information on the history of the Association and all of the associated Churches. Historic and contemporary photograph collections, press cuttings, Annual Tent Meetings and Fellowship of Youth. Meeting minute books, Account books and registers are present for Mendlesham Green, Leiston, Aldringham, Hoxne, Glemsford and Yarmouth.
1818-2021
- HA577 Wilfrid George (Suffolk map-maker)
Archive of Wildred George's cartographic and public access campaign work, including examples of his published footpath and street maps.
1955-2025

- GA414 Spill Festival Ipswich Caribbean Association Project
Oral histories and photographs from the Ipswich Caribbean Association project, run by Spill Festival in 2024
2024
- GC1005 Ipswich Art Society
Archive of the Society, including newsletters, accounts, correspondence, visitor books, exhibition catalogues
1873-2024
- GC1008 Bury St Edmunds Flower Club
Minutes and AGM books
1954-1995
- GC1011 East Suffolk Morris Men (1899-2025)
Papers of the East Suffolk Morris Men, including history of predecessors, photographs (mostly captioned with names and places) and programmes from events and tours
1899-2025
- HD4443 Phillips Deeds Collection
Collection of deeds, including manorial documents for Peacock Hall, Sudbury
C13-20th centuries
- HD4491 Papers of Harold Freeman, author
Formal letters to and from publishers, numerous letters, postcards, film rights correspondence, packing lists for trips, handwritten notes in Italian and Greek
1950-1990

New website

In 2025/26 we undertook a full re-procurement of all of our IT systems. This ensures that we are using the most suitable software and getting the best value for money. The scope of the procurement included our cataloguing software, website and digital preservation system. It's obviously key that these areas all work together to provide the best experience for both customers and staff. We're pleased that the final element of the project, our new website, went live at the beginning of September. The search functionality for the catalogue is much improved and we have been able to reinstate the full online ordering and downloading of digitised material. There is still work to do so if you have any feedback or spot any issues please let us know by emailing archives@suffolk.gov.uk

Education service

Since the last report, over 2,000 students have engaged with our activities through visits to The Hold, loan boxes, and outreach such as careers fairs. More than 100 educational resources have been downloaded online. We have engaged with around 25 primary and secondary school teachers through CPD events, delivering two sessions to date, with a further three planned for 2027. We have also developed additional resources linked to the themes of the Beyond Labels Project and the Witches programme. Created in partnership with local schools and university students, these resources will be made widely available to support future learning and engagement.

Volunteers and staff news

Our volunteer numbers for the year April 2025 to March 2026 have stayed fairly stable at about 172 volunteers with just under 5,000 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 June we celebrated Volunteers' Week but stretched it to Volunteers' Month to show our appreciation for all the hard work and enthusiasm that our volunteers give to the service. As part of the celebrations we held our annual Volunteer Awards. 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.



The winners of our 6 award categories, were nominated by their fellow volunteers and colleagues. Well done to:

- Janet Bull, winner of the Unsung Hero Award. *For being so eager to support at the welcome desk and exhibition. She often goes above and beyond in assisting the staff and public*
- Elaine Rush, winner of the Super Support award. *For supporting the learning team last minute and mentoring other volunteers*
- Becky Page, winner of the Ray of Sunshine Award. *For being positive and chatty and working so hard on oral histories and making a contribution to Beyond Labels*
- Rachel Field, winner of the Persistence Power. *For data cleansing St. Audry's/St Clement's case books on CALM which took a lot of willpower, persistence and attention to detail*
- Jordan Glass, winner of the Behind the Scenes hero. *For completing a huge number of Oral History transcripts over the last two plus years*

In staff news we have welcomed a number of new staff over the last year. Angela Oakey-Jones and Tilly Farrow joined us as Archive Assistants. Emily Mullin joined us as the conservator. We were sorry to say goodbye to Denise Parkinson, one of our archivists, who left at the end of August. Geoff has moved across from the zero hour archivist role to become a full time Archivist.

Emily Shepperson, our Exhibitions and Interpretation Officer, went on maternity leave in August and had a lovely baby boy who has already visited the archives! While she has been away we have been working with Anna Forrest, who has taken on the exhibition role. Anna may be known to some of you from her work at the National Trust. She is also a freelance curator and heritage consultant.

We hosted a SCC summer intern for the first time this year. The programme runs across SCC and is a great opportunity for current or recently graduated university students to spend three months working with teams across the council to gain invaluable experience working for local government. Connie had just completed her second year at the University of Sussex and spent most of her placement working with the Audience Development Team. She attended fairs and events as well as overseeing the exhibition of diaries that was displayed at the Heritage Open Days in September.

