

Trustees' Report 2019 – 2020

This is the report for the year 2019 to 2020, although perhaps we should re-define it as 1 – 0 BC, Before COVID. This is the first time that our Annual General Meeting has ever been delayed and then conducted via the internet.

During March, we were hit by the pandemic, causing us to suspend all live meetings and activities. We have responded by using Zoom software to make our meetings available over the internet. To date, Headquarters, the North East Essex, and West Essex Branches have arranged talks and workshops. These have been available to all our members, wherever they are in the world. Most now have an internet connected computer, tablet or smartphone, so that only a small number will be left out. Previously, only those who lived in or close to Essex, and had adequate transport, could attend meetings. We regret that a few have lost out, but vastly more members have gained. Feedback on these online talks has been overwhelmingly positive, and we intend to make the facility permanent. We want to run Zoom alongside live meetings as soon as we can get together again.

The year had started normally, with a review of the constitution, prompted by questions asked at the 2019 AGM. Proxy voting for absent members is now proposed, together with the quorum for general meetings to be based on the typical attendance level. The Executive agreed changes that have been published in the magazine and on the website. The updated constitution will be presented to this meeting for approval.

Our monthly meetings, at our five centres, continued for the first half of the year. Members and visitors enjoyed a variety of interesting talks on family and social history topics. Our Research Centre, in the Essex Record Office, has given the opportunity to members of the public to seek help and advice from members, who attend weekly sessions, when the ERO is open. I would like to thank those volunteers who have often had too little to do, but nevertheless have, maintained the service.

Society volunteers have, as well, attended libraries in the County, to give help and advice. We have twice held busy Drop-in Surgeries at the Southend Forum Library, two successful one-to-one sessions in Grays Library. Another planned at Basildon had to be cancelled, due to the lockdown. We provided an information point for attendees at two ERO events.

We were to attend the cancelled 'Family Tree Live' event at Alexandra Place in April. We have, however, had a presence at family history fair run by the Suffolk Society.

In November, we joined the stand of the East Anglian Group of the Family History Federation at RootsTech London 2019. This was a conference, at London Excel, run for the first time outside of Salt Lake City, by FamilySearch International, the genealogical organisation sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In our Constitution, one of our Objectives is 'to preserve and transcribe or publish source material'. During the year, one of our members discovered a register belonging to the non-conformist Chapel at Great Totham. It was in the custody of an individual Chapel member. Realising the potential research value of this document, we arranged to borrow the document, commission the Essex Record Office to photograph it for the archive, and to add the transcription to the Society's online database. Eventually, it will join the data that we make available to the world via the Findmypast website.

Another set of data is a list of many of the people who stood for the office of councillor as a direct result of the Local Government Act of 1894. has been donated by Ted Woodgate. a member, to add to our online database.

We have been given a collection of books on Essex from the estate of Lionel Devonish and a large collection of historic photographs from John Everett.

The Society made its usual contribution to support the Victoria County History and supported research by a post-graduate student at Essex University.

As usual, we must thank all our volunteers, in all roles, who work to contribute to the well-being of the Society. Deserving special mention, is Ann Church, who has for many years represented the Society at the Family History Federation (formally FFHS), a role from which she is now standing down.

During the year, we lost three long-serving members who had made significant contributions to the Society. We are most grateful to all of them for all the work they had done for us.

Keith Tunstill, long time photographer for the Society, had recorded notable events for publication in our magazine. His contribution to the recording of memorial inscriptions over many years, was invaluable.

Colin Smith had for many years, given constant service to the Society. He was a founder member of our Computer Group, which helped many to learn to use the technology that is now so vital, not only for family history research, but in all aspects of our lives. Colin established our website. He was our Webmaster and intimately involved in its development, almost until his passing in February. His contribution to the Society was huge. We were fortunate that he had had a capable Deputy Webmaster, Paul Stirland, who had already taken on Colin's role.

John Read, a former Chairman of the North West branch, had made many contributions to the family history world, including the Hearth Tax Project run by Roehampton University. He could always be relied on to translate Latin texts.

From the past to the future, we look forward to a time when we can resume our live meetings, but will be able to use technology to share these gatherings with all our members, wherever they happen to be in the world.

Fred Feather Chairman ESFH