

Essex Branch of the Historical Association (HA) Chairman's Report September 2025

Please note that we have an additional talk this year that is not on the pre-printed annual programme. On Saturday, November 15th at 2.30 p.m. Jools McCusker-Maxwell, Curator of Archaeology at Southend Museum will talk here about *The London shipwreck; her final voyage*. *The London* was one of the ships that fetched Charles II from Holland in 1660 and sank in the Thames in 1665 after a mysterious explosion. Jools contacted HA HQ in the summer to say that this talk was available. As the local branch, we felt we must honour the excavation's achievements.

Last season we lost two speakers at the last moment in January and March through serious illness, Dan Jordan on Charles II and Professor David Bates on the Normans. We hope that they are now in better shape. We are most grateful to Martin Frampton for securing Rosemary Hayes at short notice for her talk on the Huguenots and to our own Ian Mason for his survey of Essex timber-framed buildings.

The average attendance for our season's talks was 49, up from 41 in 2023-2024. Storm Darragh hit our December meeting (only 25 braved the wind). The other seven meetings averaged 52. The number of branch members was down from 51 to 43 but there was a large increase in the number of visitors that more or less balanced things out. We also attracted 14 national members (up from five last year), some from outside the county.

All this means that our publicity is getting through. Firstly our website and social media continue to be maintained by Andy Moir for which grateful thanks. Secondly Martin Frampton always ensures that our talks are publicised in the HA's magazine *The Historian* and continues to arrange fascinatingly varied programmes. Thirdly we now have 49 (up from 45 last year) historical societies U3A history groups, WEA groups, friends of museums, civic societies and family history groups scattered throughout Essex and the 'Essex' London boroughs on our mailing list and they kindly spread details of our lectures to their members. Fourthly we are extending our library and museum flyers over a wider area of the County. Two years ago we only covered Chelmsford library and its seven branch libraries plus Essex Record Office and Chelmsford Museum. Last year we added the libraries at Brentwood, Shenfield, Billericay, Wickford, South Woodham Ferrers, Braintree and Witham and this year the libraries at Great Dunmow and in the townships of Southend area. As we are a county branch the Committee feels we should try to maintain as wide a spread as possible to places that have good bus and rail connections to Chelmsford. We would like to extend to Colchester and Clacton but need some help. Any volunteers to make deliveries?

Our finances are healthy. Branches are encouraged by HA HQ to use surpluses to support history teaching in schools which is one of the Association's prime charitable aims. We appreciate the efforts of John Edgar, a Virtual Head in Essex, our Education Link on the Committee, to try to get some consensus from schools about speakers and topics they would prefer. But the multitude of different topics available for study for A levels and the wide geographical spread of schools means that we cannot yet find a practicable solution.

I am grateful to all Committee members for their hard work. Special thanks must go to Andy Moir for his 19 years' service as Treasurer. We are delighted that Kelvin Henes who joined the Committee last year, has agreed to take on the responsibility. But Andy will stay on the Committee for just one more year. We will then have a committee vacancy. Please give it serious thought.

Tony Tuckwell, Chair, Essex Branch of the Historical Association, September 2025