



NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025

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CRESSING TEMPLE BRAINTREE ESSEX CM77 8PD

Dear Friends and Donors

Thank you for your continuing support of Essex Heritage Trust. The Trustees met recently to discuss various projects. This was the first meeting of the Trust's financial year and we discussed six applications. Here are the projects for which we awarded a grant:

GESTINGTHORPE CHURCH



Photo of the nave before Moses & Aaron were taken down for conservation.
It looks west down the nave from the chancel.

The grant required is to assist in the cost of restoring two paintings by Robert Cardinall of Moses and Aaron both 6 by 3 feet which hang on the west wall of the Grade I listed church.

The Trustees approved a grant of £5,000

ESSEX SOCIETY FOR ARCHAEOLOGY & HISTORY

Publication – Essex Houses c800-1750

The study of historic houses in Essex has seen much progress since Cecil Hewitt's pioneering work in the 1960s. This book will bring this work together into one place more accessible to researchers and hopefully the general reader.

This will be a valuable addition to literature about how house construction developed in Essex historically.

The Trustees approved a grant of £3,000

ST PETER & ST PAUL CHURCH, BLACK NOTLEY



John Ray is considered the father of English natural history. He was a native of Black Notley. The church plans to install a stained-glass window as a testament to Ray as a naturalist and a Christian theologian in celebration of his birth in 1627. Nov 2027 marks the 400th anniversary of his birth.

The window will be a fitting contribution to Ray's legacy in the community. Two schools are named after him and there is a John Ray Walk sponsored by ECC and BDC.

The Trustees approved a grant of £10,000

In July 2021 the Trustees awarded a £5,000 grant to the Essex Women's Commemoration Project.

Project Update

In June 2020 Essex theatre director Graham Watts wrote to the Lord-Lieutenant, Mrs Jennifer Tolhurst, suggesting that the 400th anniversary of the birth of Margaret Cavendish in 2023 should be marked. Cavendish, who was born and lived in Colchester, was a remarkable woman: a playwright, poet, novelist, scientist and philosopher, internationally revered, especially in America, but relatively unknown in Essex. Graham's letter led to the idea of a blue plaque, like those erected by English Heritage in London or in Chelmsford by the City Council, which in turn prompted the thought that there might be other Essex women deserving of public recognition. Mrs Tolhurst asked Graham to join four Deputy Lieutenants with experience in heritage and the arts (Julia Abel Smith, James Bettley, Roy Clare and Juliet Townsend) to form the Essex Women's Commemoration Project (EWCP).

Their first task was to draw up a longlist of candidates, the criteria being that they should be generally accepted as being distinguished and were no longer living. This took as its starting point Essex women included in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB). Although ideally any plaque would be fixed to a building with which the person had a direct link (as having been born, lived, worked or died in it), a building on or near the site, as close as could possibly be identified, was deemed acceptable. The most important consideration was to commemorate the subject in a prominent position visible to the public.

Searching the ODNB produced a list of about 114 women closely associated with Essex who were not already commemorated. It was never the intention that EWCP would erect the plaques themselves. Rather, partner organisations were identified who might take the idea forward; apart from anything else this achieved the important aim of engaging with the wider community and spreading the word. A number of bodies soon signed up to the idea, including parish and district councils, civic and heritage societies, and bodies such as the Essex Gardens Trust and the Federation of Essex Women's Institutes.

Some of the names on the longlist fell by the wayside on closer examination; sometimes it proved impossible to identify a suitable site for a plaque. On the other hand, as news of the project spread, other names were put forward. The result is that by July 2025 thirty-four plaques had been erected with the support and encouragement of EWCP, ranging from Rose Allin, one of the Colchester martyrs burnt at the stake in 1557, to Ellen Willmott, who created a famous garden at Warley Place between 1879 and 1934, and from Hannah Woolley, author of *The Cook's Guide* (1664), to Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army. A full list can be found on EWCP's Wikipedia page (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essex_Women%27s_Commemoration_Project) with further information also on the Essex Lieutenancy website (Essex Women's Commemoration Project - Essex Lieutenancy).

EWCP itself had no funds; its role was to assist other organisations with the process of commissioning and erecting the plaque, advising on such matters as choice of manufacturer and planning permission. Some organisations were able to fund the plaque themselves, the cost typically being a little over £350, but some needed financial support as well. The Essex Heritage Trust kindly agreed to support the project up to a maximum of £5000, and this gave us the confidence to encourage small local organisations for whom erecting a blue plaque might not otherwise have been a fundraising priority. As it turned out, funding for most of the plaques was found locally, but we are extremely grateful to the Trust for enabling the erection of five blue plaques that might otherwise not have been possible: those to Isabel Rawsthorne (and her husband Alan) at Little

Sampford, Myra Sadd Brown at Maldon (jointly with the Maldon Society), Pamela Underwood at Beth Chatto Gardens (with the Essex Gardens Trust), Marion Wilberforce at Wickford, and Hester Woodley at Little Parndon. The Trust has also funded a sixth plaque, to Mary Gee at Earls Colne, which should soon be in place.

Although the Project will be officially wound up at the end of 2025 it is hoped that it will have inspired others to continue with the important task of commemorating distinguished women not only in Essex but also in other counties.



Family members at the unveiling in November 2022 of the plaque to Myra Sadd-Brown, suffragette and pioneer of women's rights, outside the house in West Chase, Maldon where she lived from 1872 to 1896.



Plaque to Hester Woodley on the exterior of St Mary's Church, Little Parndon, Harlow. It is placed near the original site of Hester's gravestone, which was moved inside the church in 1984 to protect it from the elements.

Essex Heritage Trust Annual Meeting

This year's meeting will be held on 11th September 2025 in the Conference Room, Visitor Centre at Cressing Temple at 7pm.

To help celebrate the 30th Anniversary of Cressing's Tudor walled garden, please join us at 6pm if you would like to self-tour the gardens.

There will be a short talk by Rebecca Ashbey, Head Gardener from Cressing Temple.

Please let us know if you would like to join us.

Next round of applications

The Trustees' next meeting to consider grants will be in November. The closing date for applications will be Monday 22nd September. If you are working on or know of a project that might qualify, we would be interested to discuss it with you in good time for you to submit an application. To make an enquiry please contact Sharon Hill at mail@essexheritagetrust.co.uk

If you would like more information about the Trust and some longer reports written by successful applicants about the results of their projects, please visit our website at: www.essexheritagetrust.co.uk

Talks for Groups and Clubs

Essex Heritage Trust gives talks about the Trust and what it does. We explain how to make an application for a grant and showcase some of the many projects we have supported over the past 40 years.

Please call Richard Wollaston Tel: 07889969061 for further details.

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