

SAFFRON WALDEN HISTORICAL JOURNAL

The following article appears by permission and is the copyright of the *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* and the author. Fair dealing for the purposes of private study or non-commercial educational, archival or research purposes is freely allowed, but under no circumstances are articles or illustrations to be reprinted in any other publication, website or other media without permission. All rights reserved. It has not been possible to include all the original illustrations with the articles, but these can be seen in copies deposited at Saffron Walden Town Library. Enquiries re articles can be sent to saffronwaldenhistor@gmail.com

The Essex Record Office Archive Access Point in Saffron Walden

Zofia Everett

Reprinted from: *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* No 21 Spring 2011



Archive Assistant, Zofia Everett with Newport historian Antony Tuck, at the Open Day held to celebrate the 15th anniversary of Archive Access. ©Gordon Ridgewell.

The Essex Record Office Archive Access Point in Saffron Walden was opened in January 1996 in response to prolonged lobbying from local organisations, historical groups and individual historians. Thanks to the support and generosity of Saffron Walden Town Council, the Access Point occupied two tiny rooms at the top of the Town Hall for the first ten years of its life. But the entry via steep entrance steps and the climb up three

'The Essex Record Office Archive Access Point at Saffron Walden' – *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* No 21 (2011)

flights of stairs, was not ideal, and in October 2007 refurbishment of the Corn Exchange created space for the Access Point on the first floor of the Library.

The first visitor to the Access Point in 1996 was Glenn Miller, curator of the remarkable museum in Ashdon, who arrived while the office was still being set up. He obviously brought good luck with him as the Access Point continues to generate interest and enthusiasm. Easily accessible historical material, together with the built heritage of north-west Essex, fostered interest in local history on an unprecedented scale, so that the office deals with over 1,000 visitors a year, as well as telephone, postal and email enquiries. Most visitors come from north-west Essex and adjacent counties, but some come from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and even China.

Many of the first users of the Archive Access Point in 1996 continue their association with the office to this day – people like Adrian Gray who at that time was the youngest visitor. He had just left Friends' School when he started using the Access Point to research his family history. Even though he now lives and works in Oxford, he has become an authority on all aspects of the history of his ancestral village of Great Sampford.

Another early visitor was Stan Sutherland, at that time chairman of the long-established Saffron Walden branch of the Essex Society for Family History. He provided help and advice from the very beginning, as so did other ESFH members, Janice Sharpe, Mike Furlong, Brian Gough and many others. Mr Francis, also a member, was one of the first family history researchers to visit the Access Point and is still using it for research.

Towards the end of 1996, Jacqueline Cooper was appointed as relief assistant, to provide help to the public when the staff member is on holiday. She had originally used the Access Point as a source for research, when writing books, reviving the Saffron Walden Historical Society's *Journal* and building up the network of the Records of Uttlesford History.

Supported by staff from the Essex Record Office, the Access Point organises exhibitions, training sessions, talks to local organisations and special events such as tours of the Nonconformist churches in Saffron Walden. The Access Point promotes oral history, training people how to use the equipment, copying the recordings and forwarding them to the Essex Sound Archive in Chelmsford. It also played a key role in a major project to record the recollections of past and present residents of Castle Street, Saffron Walden.

Although most of the researchers who use the Access Point are interested in family and house history, wider historical research also takes place, resulting in the publication of books, articles, pamphlets and theses, such as:

- The ***Saffron Walden Historical Journal*** was revived in spring 2001, published by the Saffron Walden Historical Society twice yearly and many articles in the *Journal* are researched at the Archive Access Point and the Town Library. This is a popular, high-quality publication, with articles on all aspects of local history in NW Essex.
- ***Newport News*** is an award-winning village magazine published since 1974. This is probably the best village magazine in the country. The Archive Access Point has close links with the *Newport News* as well as the Newport Local History Group.
- ***The Buildings of Saffron Walden* by Martyn Everett & Donald Stewart (2003)**. Martyn is a writer and historian, who uses his experience as local history Librarian in Saffron Walden Library for over two decades, to offer support and advice to researchers, particularly in making known the resources of the Town Library which adjoins the Access Point and whose holdings complement its facilities.



Olive Harvey with her books on Duddenhoe End. Photograph Jacqueline Cooper.

- ***Aspects of an English Village - Duddenhoe End with Wendens Lofts (2006 -2008) by Olive Harvey***. Born in 1920, Olive Harvey (pictured above) was fascinated by local history and published three books about the village. In her eighties, supporting herself on crutches, she used to climb the three flights of steep stairs to the Archive Access to do research. The third volume of her work came out in 2008 a year before her death.
- ***The Castle Street Oral History Project; Canter Down Castle Street; Castell Street to Castle Street 1600 to 1900. All three volumes published by the Street Residents' Association***. Most of the research for this project was done at the Town Library, the Access Point and the Essex Record Office. Copies of the

'The Essex Record Office Archive Access Point at Saffron Walden' – *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* No 21 (2011)

recordings, transcripts and books are kept at the Access Point. Thus the voices and stories of people who lived in the street between 1915 and 1950 are preserved for future generations. One of the residents used her drawing skills to produce two fascinating additional volumes, together with panoramas of the street in the 1600s and 1900s.

- **Mole Hill Green History - the Village and its Characters by Pat Salmon (2003).** Local postman and historian Pat Salmon became interested in his own family history dating back in Mole Hill Green for over 200 years. Pat has been a regular visitor to the Access Point, as he collects historical material and continues preserving it for future generations.
- Involvement with the church in **Debden** led **Henry Blackie** to research the burials in the church vault and to produce a study on the subject. He also produced an analytical study of the Debden Tithe Award of 1845 and has clearly developed a passionate interest in local history.
- **Land Agriculture and Industry in North-West Essex by Geoffrey Ball (2009).** An experienced agriculturist, Geoffrey first visited the Access Point when doing research for the Friends of Audley End. He has since written several major articles for the *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* and keeps in close touch with the Access Point. His book brings together his farming articles in a single volume.
- **Littlebury – A Parish History ed. Lizzie Sanders & Gillian Williamson (2005).** Many villages in Essex produced Millennium albums and contributors to the Littlebury book started their work at the Access Point, before moving on to other collections. This led to a surge in interest involving almost the entire population of the village, and to an ambitious project to write the history of the village. The resulting volume is a beautifully designed, erudite history book of the highest professional standard.



Local historians Pat Croxton-Smith (Hadstock), Geoffrey Ball (Saffron Walden) and Lizzie Sanders (Littlebury) at the Archive Access open day. Photograph ©Martyn Everett.

The Recorders of Uttlesford History commented on their experiences of using this facility:

- *I have used the Access Point since it opened. With Zofia's help, I have been able to study and obtain copies of all the church registers, study the census returns and many other records from the ERO including books published by the ERO. It has been a godsend not having to cope with the awful trip to Chelmsford. I have also met many people visiting Hadstock in search of ancestors and have been able to refer them to Zofia for help. Zofia is always so helpful and knowledgeable. I have also used the Access Point to forward some records to the ERO, again saving time and trouble in getting to Chelmsford. .*

Pat Croxton-Smith, Hadstock

- *I had gone down the route of internet searching to discover my family history but had reached a dead end after a short while. I decided to research my house history because it was local and I thought this might be more fruitful. I became a regular visitor to the AAP because of the expert guidance to local resources. I was able to look at census, maps and personal wills which traced the ownership of my house to the early 18th century. I found a wealth of information from celebrations to family tragedy including infant mortality, infidelity and suicide. The most remarkable thing I found through AAP was a hand written auctioneers notebook of 1810 in which the auctioneer had walked from room to room listing every household item in its place. I knew which books lined the bookshelves, the kitchen equipment and even the carpet on the stairs. I had no idea these personal records had been carefully saved locally. Henceforth I became more involved with local history and went on to study history to degree level.*

Debbie Lowe, Wicken Bonhunt

- *I have used the AAP facilities ever since it opened 15 years ago and continue to do research using the microfilms, particularly the local newspapers. I find the Access Point an essential part of the triangle of research facilities in Walden, its ERO material complementing resources in the Town Library and the Museum archives.*

Jacqueline Cooper, Clavering

- *We have used the facility at Saffron Walden to search for particularly difficult to find wills. The personal help that we were given was invaluable.*

Pat Salmon & Nia Watkiss, Takeley

- *I used this resource to study past inhabitants of Elsenham Hall. The staff at the centre gave me valuable tips and advice on how to proceed,*

Ray Franklin, Elsenham

- *I use the Archive Access Centre a great deal for advice from Zofia, which is worth its weight in gold and for access to archives. My use is for local history research. A copy of the Radwinter School records microfilm has been lodged there and I have used it to compile an article for the forthcoming book on Radwinter at War.*

Michael Southgate, Radwinter

- *As part of the Victoria County History project at Newport, it was necessary to trace the descent of the history of the manor of Newport Pond. Zofia Everett directed me to the microfilm collection and assisted me to find the relevant data. This enabled me to trace the descent from around 1600 AD from a PRIMARY source in a single session in around the travel time to Chelmsford and at minimal cost.*

David Evans, Newport

- *The Archive Access Point has been vital to my being published in the Local Historian this year, because the concentration of local records in one place allows for simple cross-referencing of sources, and the local knowledge of the staff has proved invaluable both in accessing these records and in contacting local people able to help with the project. It is so useful for this that I travel from Oxford to use it!*

Adrian Gray, Oxford & Gt Sampford

- *I made use of the ERO Access Point at Saffron Walden Library while researching the Pledger family. This would not have been possible without the help of Zofia, who guided me through the relevant records and files. It is fantastic that this facility is here as it saved me many trips to Chelmsford.*

Megan Ridgewell, Saffron Walden

- *As the highly regarded hub of so much local historical research in the Uttlesford area, Zofia has taught many how to pursue their studies. She never shrinks from handing out homework – usually some new, and mostly fruitful, line of inquiry which had simply never occurred to you to follow up. Her fielding and re-direction of many enquiries from overseas has made her helpful influence global. When compiling a History of the Manor and Parish of Strethall in 1996-98, I mentioned to Zofia that the then Vicar of Walden, a certain John Leche, was named as executor to part of his will by John Gardyner, Lord of the Manor of Strethall on his deathbed in 1508. She immediately said, 'Oh, he was the favourite brother of Dame Joan Bradbury, wife of Thomas Bradbury, sometime Lord Mayor of London'. I simply had no reason to know this and it shed a whole new light on the company kept by John Gardyner, former Middle Temple Lawyer, and enhanced respect for his wealth and influence.*

David Melford, Strethall

NOTE: The Archive Access Point in Saffron Walden Library is manned on Tuesdays and Fridays from 9 am to 5 pm and on Saturdays from 9 am to 1 pm. Research materials are also available at other times when the Library is open.

Disclaimer: please note that all opinions expressed in articles are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of the *Saffron Walden Historical Journal*. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of articles, but any corrections can be sent to the website editor at saffronwaldenhistory@gmail.com