



Explore  
Essex

AUTUMN 2026

# ESSEX EXPLORER

## Magazine



**Starring Essex, celebrating  
'Practical Magic 2' filmed  
on location**

**Magic, mystery and myth**

**Family days out**





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# Welcome...

To the autumn edition of Essex Explorer magazine, a special collaboration with the Essex Film Office.

Alongside our usual mix of culture, outdoor spaces and hidden history, we're celebrating a moment in the spotlight. This issue marks the release of 'Practical Magic 2', the long-awaited sequel to the Hollywood blockbuster, which reunites Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman, part of which was filmed here in Essex.

If there's one thing Essex does well in autumn, it's a good story with a little magic in it. Across these pages you'll find the county's ghost stories, historical tales and spooky trails through ancient woodland.

Whether you're here for the walking trails, a deep dive into our archives or the chance to spot a filming location on your next visit, welcome to an Essex that's always had a little magic hiding in plain sight.

Follow the movie map to the county's 'Practical Magic 2' filming locations as well other Essex sites and places featured on the big screen or TV.

[www.essexfilmoffice.co.uk](http://www.essexfilmoffice.co.uk)



Epping Ongar Railway starring in 'Practical Magic 2'

This magazine is available as an accessible PDF.  
To request a copy email [Explore.Essex@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Explore.Essex@essex.gov.uk)



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## About us

Explore Essex brings together a unique group of green spaces and heritage places owned and managed by Essex County Council. Our mission is to provide a range of facilities and activities for the people of Essex to enjoy. Conservation is also at the heart of what we do, and any money spent with the Explore Essex group of places is ultimately reinvested to maintain and develop our sites for the benefit of visitors and to protect the flora and fauna within.

## Get Connected

Keep up to date with our news, activities and competitions.

 [www.explore-essex.com](http://www.explore-essex.com)

 [@exploressex](https://www.facebook.com/exploressex)

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# Casting a spell on Hollywood

**The Essex railway with a starring role in 'Practical Magic 2'.**

The Epping Ongar Railway has been part of Essex history for more than 160 years. Now, thanks to its new starring role, the heritage line has added another chapter to its remarkable story.

**O**n a rainy spring afternoon in 2025, deep in the Essex countryside, the telephone rang in the office of one of the country's best-preserved heritage railways.

Picking up the receiver, Epping Ongar Railway Operations Manager Robert Bentley answered a call he certainly wasn't expecting.

On the other end of the line was a location manager searching for a very specific railway carriage to feature in the sequel to one of Hollywood's most beloved films of the 1990s.

Filmed in locations across the United States and at the world-famous Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden in Hertfordshire, the production also found some of its most atmospheric backdrops much closer to home, right here in Essex.

## From commuters to celebrities

As production arrived in Essex, Robert and the team at Epping Ongar Railway prepared to welcome the vast operation that accompanies a major Hollywood film.

"I didn't really know what to expect at first," explained Robert. "We've had a fair bit of filming here on the railway over the years, but nothing quite as big as this production.

"What's really cool is that you can sit in exactly the same seats where the stars sat in the film. I'm watching the trailer thinking, that's our train."

## Moving history for the movies

While scenes were filmed on the railway itself, the production also required the controlled environment of a studio for interior filming.

One of the railway's heritage carriages was carefully lifted onto a low-loader and transported to

Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, where it was reassembled on set and became a key part of the production.

For Robert, who accompanied the carriage on its journey, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

"It was the first time I'd ever been on a film set in a studio," he said. "It was an amazing experience. Everyone was incredibly friendly and focused on working together to create something special. It felt odd to see the carriage outside its usual setting, but I was proud that our heritage railway could contribute to such a big Hollywood film."

The railway first opened in 1865 as part of what would later become the London Underground network and remained in passenger service until 1994. Since then, the line has been lovingly restored and now operates as a heritage railway, welcoming thousands of visitors every year.



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We've teamed up with Vue Cinemas to celebrate the general release of 'Practical Magic 2'.

You could win family tickets to use at Vue Basildon and Colchester.

To enter the prize draw simply email the answer to the question to: [Explore.Essex@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Explore.Essex@essex.gov.uk) and title your email: Cinema Competition.

**What is the surname of the sisters in 'Practical Magic 2'?**

- Walsh
- Owens
- Dixon

Enter by midnight Sunday 25 October 2026.

To find out more: [www.explore-essex.com/ee-comp](http://www.explore-essex.com/ee-comp)



## 'Practical Magic 2'

Released this autumn, 'Practical Magic 2' reunites screen legends Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman in the follow-up to the cult classic about a family of witches navigating love, loss and a centuries-old curse.

The film sees the reunion of sisters Sally (Sandra Bullock) and Gillian Owens (Nicole Kidman) as they embark on another magical adventure. This time, part of their journey takes them through the English countryside by train.

'Practical Magic 2' opened in cinemas on Friday 11 September and will be available to rent and purchase on digital platforms later this year.

# An Essex star of the screen



With its beautifully preserved stations, vintage rolling stock and authentic period atmosphere, Epping Ongar Railway has gained popularity among film and TV producers in recent years.

**I**n 2025, the railway featured in Netflix's festive comedy 'Man vs Baby', starring Rowan Atkinson. The terminal at Ongar became Tring railway station where Trevor Bingley (Rowan Atkinson) rushed to catch a train for an important house-sitting interview, providing the perfect backdrop for the opening scenes.

The heritage line also appeared in a BBC's 'Death in Paradise' Christmas special where North Weald station was transformed into the fictional station of Swindon East for scenes set in the UK.

Recreate your favourite screen scene in a visit where you can travel through the Essex countryside between historic stations including North Weald, famed for its Victorian charm, and Ongar, with its distinctive architecture and period character.

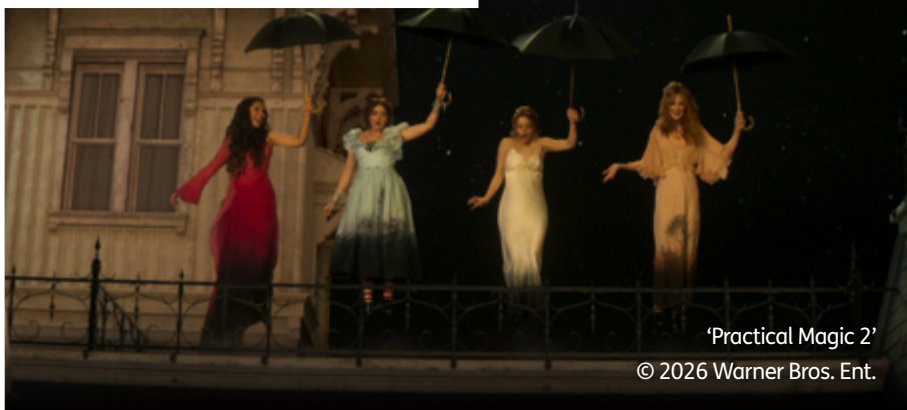
Find out more and book:  
[www.eorailway.co.uk](http://www.eorailway.co.uk)

## Wooden spires and atmospheric graveyards

The Epping Ongar Railway was not the only county location to play a starring role in the magical blockbuster 'Practical Magic 2'.

When producers began searching for locations that could double as small-town America, Essex was once again called into action. Their search for a traditional American churchyard eventually led filmmakers to the picturesque village of Abridge, near Lambourne.

Grade I listed St Mary and All Saints Church is one of the oldest churches in the district and holds exceptional historical significance. Dating back to the 12th century, the church offers a stunning insight into medieval parish life and Norman architecture. Its beautifully preserved Norman doorway is a particular highlight. Nestled among a peaceful churchyard and ancient trees, it offered the atmosphere and charm the filmmakers needed.



'Practical Magic 2'

© 2026 Warner Bros. Ent.



Image: St Mary and All Saints Church

### Finding a church ready for the cameras

When the Essex Film Office learned the production team needed a church that could double as an American church, the team instantly knew that the county had the ideal spot.

Large productions need a big support operation for crews, vehicles, equipment and welfare facilities. The team reached out to the local parish council to find a nearby spot for the production's unit base.

Gary Kinch from the Essex Film Office said: "Productions like this need a lot of space and privacy and we were able to find secure and discreet locations nearby.

"We're often the fixers behind the scenes, using our local knowledge and connections to make things happen. The parish council were fantastic and residents even baked cakes for the cast and crew. It's that community spirit that makes Essex such a great place to film."

If you have a site, building or office which you think would make a good location for filming, you can register on the Essex Film Office locations database: [www.essexfilloffice.co.uk](http://www.essexfilloffice.co.uk)

### Visit St Mary and All Saints Church

This route is part of the Abridge Country Walk, a three-mile route through the ancient woodlands and countryside surrounding Lambourne.

Find out more at: [www.visiteppingforest.org/things-to-do](http://www.visiteppingforest.org/things-to-do)

### Did you know?

The Holy Innocence Church in High Beach, Epping, was the main location featured in the 2025 film 'Wake up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery', starring Daniel Craig, Glenn Close and Josh O'Connor.



Credit: Netflix

# Enjoy a 'Midnight Margarita' at The Pier



© 2026 Warner Bros. Ent.

'Practical Magic' fans know the scene – two sisters, two aunts, a blender and a spell cast over 'Midnight Margaritas' that turns the party to something darker before night's out.

The Pier in Harwich has brought to life its own 'Midnight Margarita', served up with estuary views. Book a table and raise a glass. Alternatively, here's how to make one at home.

## Ingredients

50ml Lavender-infused Casamigos Blanco Tequila (fresh lavender is left in bottle for 48 hours)

25ml Blackberry Cointreau (fresh blackberries are left in the bottle for 48 hours)

25ml Freshly squeezed lime juice

5ml Sugarcane syrup

Pinch of edible glitter

## Method

Rim the glass with lavender and blackberry sea salt (take fresh blackberries, lavender and sea salt, blitz in a mixer, dehydrate overnight, or for 10 hours or more, and then crush).

For an alcohol-free version, follow the same recipe but replace Casamigos Tequila with Lyre's Agave Bianco Spirit and replace Cointreau with Lyre's Orange Sec.

Top with a witch's hat, sit back and enjoy.



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# Enchanting reads starring Essex



**Did you know that the 'Practical Magic' films are based on books?**

## Practical Magic series

by Alice Hoffman

## The Manningtree Witches

by A.K. Blakemore

Discover more about this captivating series and the witches of Essex in our recommended reads for autumn.

If you are a fan of the films then these bewitching books are a must read. Be spirited away to another time and place and deep dive into the lives of the Owens' family. Discover generations of witches and a terrible curse at the heart of their story.

The series includes: 'Practical Magic', its prequel 'The Rules of Magic', 'Magic Lessons' and 'The Book of Magic', the novel the latest film is based on.

"Full of Hoffman's bewitching and lucid prose and vivid characters, 'The Book of Magic' is ultimately about the very human magic of family and love and actions that echo through generations... it casts a spell."

Quote by Matt Haig.

Adapted for the stage by Ava Pickett earlier this year, with a sold out run at Mercury Theatre, Colchester, this award-winning novel continues to fascinate new readers with its visceral descriptions of life in Manningtree, Essex, during the Civil War.

When Matthew Hopkins, the self-styled 'Witchfinder General', arrives in the town, and with many of the men at war, mistrust and unease seep into the lives of the women left behind. Tension escalates as investigations into their motivations and behaviour begin.

Meticulously researched, step back in time with this powerful novel.

# ‘Something wicked this way comes’

Walk, watch and stay, explore the darker side of Essex this Halloween.

**T**he county of Essex is famous for its witches. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the county found itself gripped by a kind of hysteria, later driven to new heights by the self-appointed ‘Witchfinder General’ Matthew Hopkins, who based himself in Manningtree. His persecution of a group of women in the town triggered a wave of accusations across the county, as ‘witch fever’ spread and hundreds of women were accused of witchcraft.

According to The Essex Witch Museum there were a total of 836 charges and over 100 executed in the county. Many of the accused were held at Colchester Castle which was used as a prison during this period with the trials taking place in Chelmsford.

## Site of the witch trials, Shire Hall in Chelmsford

Shire Hall is one of Chelmsford’s most significant landmarks, featuring heavily in Essex Record Office’s collection of historic images of the city centre.

From its opening in 1791 until 2012, Shire Hall served as the county court, replacing two earlier buildings including the Tudor Market Cross. This area had served as both marketplace and courthouse, where the ground floor was open-sided, with enclosed galleries above.

Throughout the county’s history, hundreds of thousands of cases have been heard on this site and in the courtrooms of Shire Hall,

including the infamous county witchcraft trials.

Now, Shire Hall has become a prominent filming location facilitated by the Essex Film Office. Its untouched courtrooms, judge’s benches, and basement cells have starred in major television productions including ‘The Hack’, ‘The Jury: Murder Trial’ and ‘Mr Bates vs The Post Office’.



Image: Shire Hall soon after its opening  
Engraving: J. Walker after an original picture by Reinagle, 1795  
Credit: Essex Record Office



The TV duo filming at Layer Marney Tower  
Credit: Paul Olding / Mindhouse Productions Ltd

### Watch 'Witches of Essex', filmed on location

Did you know? Last year, Essex local Rylan Clark teamed up with anthropologist Professor Alice Roberts for 'Witches of Essex', a Sky History series investigating the hundreds of women accused of witchcraft in the county.

Guided by original court documents and a team of historians, psychologists and medical experts, the pair explored the women's lives, alleged crimes and trials in a fascinating series.

The Essex Film Office supported the production team, securing several local historical locations including The Mistley Thorn hotel, Colchester Castle, Layer Marney Tower, Chelmsford's Shire Hall and places associated with witches in Manningtree.

Watch 'Witches of Essex' on Sky History or History Play.

[www.history.co.uk/shows/witches-of-essex](http://www.history.co.uk/shows/witches-of-essex)

### Walk the Essex witches' way

This Halloween, why not take the Heritage Tending Witch Heritage Trail? It's an immersive route featuring wood-carved benches, augmented reality and information boards across St. Osyth, Manningtree, Harwich and Walton-on-the-Naze.

[www.essex-sunshine-coast.org.uk/tending-witch-heritage-trail](http://www.essex-sunshine-coast.org.uk/tending-witch-heritage-trail)

Or discover Manningtree on foot, search 'Walking with Witches' for Visit Essex's self-guided trail.

[www.visitessex.com/things-to-do](http://www.visitessex.com/things-to-do)

### Visit the Essex witch house

Steeped in myth and local legend, The Cage, in the coastal setting of St. Osyth and on the site of the former town lockup, is believed to have been the initial holding cell for those accused of witchcraft during the 1582 witch trials.



From October 2026, The Cage will be opening to overnight guests. Home to over 50 historic artefacts relating to witchcraft, magic, village lockups and cages in England, alongside period furniture and a modern heating system, The Cage welcomes visitors throughout the year.

Discover more:  
[www.thecage.co.uk](http://www.thecage.co.uk)

# Spooky tales and trails at Essex Country Parks

**If you go down to the woods this autumn, be aware of the spooky goings on.**

**T**his Halloween, visitors to Essex Country Parks and Cressing Temple Barns will be able to pick up or download a free spooky trail for family fun.

However some of these parks have a history of their own. Take a trip this autumn and walk the very ground these legends came from.

## Footsteps in Elizabeth Tower, Belhus Woods Country Park

Belhus Manor stood for over 400 years before it was pulled down in 1957, following wartime bomb damage.

The estate once stretched across what's now Belhus golf course, just south of Belhus Woods Country Park. Only a couple of courses of brickwork survive, visible from the fairways.

The Barrett-Lennard family lived there for centuries, said to have arrived with William the Conqueror. The manor house saw funerals, weddings and at least one royal visit – Queen Elizabeth I reportedly walked its gardens in 1578.

In 1977, Sir Hugh Dacre Barrett-Lennard, who inherited the estate, recalled a childhood encounter from the 1930s. Aged around 13, he and his mother climbed the Elizabeth Tower to look out across the rooftop.

Descending the narrow steps, they heard footsteps behind them, though no one else had been up there. The mysterious footsteps quickened as they did. Reaching the exit, they slammed the door shut, then heard banging from the other side. Neither dared open it.

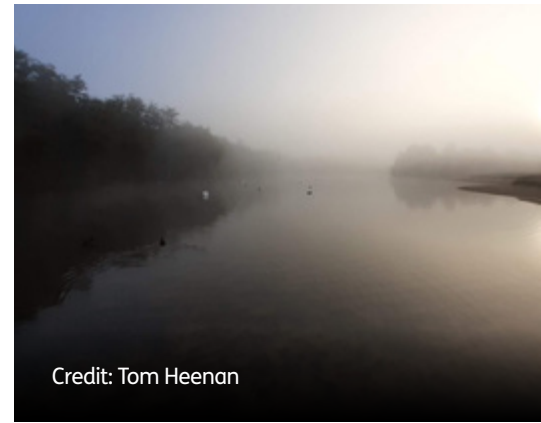
Visit the ancient woodland at Belhus Woods Country Park this autumn and you might hear ghostly footsteps too.

## The Devil and Lady Alice Grace, Danbury Country Park

The ancient area surrounding Danbury Country Park holds several old tales. Near Moores Bridge on the footpath to Lingwood Common, a local man once reported the ghostly figures of a sow and twelve piglets crossing the stream.



Spooky trail at Danbury



In 1402, locals believed that the Devil himself entered nearby St John's Church during a storm. According to folklore, his arrival and outrageous behaviour terrified parishioners and in the same moment, a tempest of wind, thunder and lightning tore off the church roof. It's rumoured that the Devil returned to steal a church bell, but having been chased away he then dropped the bell on a spot now known as Bell Hill.

Grace's Walk, the wooded avenue near the park, is named after Lady Alice Grace. Legend says her ghost, and sometimes a headless woman on a horse, wanders this path.

With its ancient woodland and the formal gardens set in the remains of the 13th century Danbury Palace, this park is steeped in history and spookiness, perfect for a Halloween walk.

### A tale of heartbreak and tragedy, Thorndon Country Park

Walk among the deep, dark woods at Thorndon Country Park and discover a haunting tale of ghostly apparitions and heartbreak.

The historic Thorndon Hall and country park are tied to an aristocratic tragedy dating to 1742. The Eighth Lord Petre planned to rebuild the Old Hall and landscape the gardens. He even employed an Italian architect and a French landscape designer to realise his dream.

However, tragedy struck Lord Petre and his young family at the tender age of 29. Sources say he saw up to 60 members of his household die during a smallpox epidemic in 1742.

Following the tragedy, the estate was left to the young Ninth Lord Petre. When the young Lord inherited the estate at 21-years-old, he abandoned and demolished the Old Hall (the remains of the estate became known as Ruin Wood). Whether he was trying to escape the family tragedy or make his own mark, no one knows.

However, park at Thorndon South and head to Ruin Wood and Pigeon Mount and you'll be close to the site of the original Old Hall (you can use the Thorndon Heritage Trail map to guide you).

Today, the barbed-wire-surrounded mounds retain a reputation for a heavy, sad and sorrowful atmosphere. Some claim that the spirits still linger among the landscape.

Over the years, visitors have commented on the eerie atmosphere at Ruin Wood and those who've explored the old, vaulted cellars and structural remains of the estate have reported the disembodied noises of phantom children.

Plan your visit to Essex Country Parks and search events for details on free children's Halloween trails: [www.explore-essex.com/events](http://www.explore-essex.com/events)

\*Check car park closing times on the website.

# Under a Colchester sky

A city that gave the world its most famous nursery rhyme about the stars, now has the moon itself hanging within its castle. Visit this autumn for the perfect day out as the nights draw in.

**A**utumn is the season when the skies darken early enough to see the stars come out. This year, a six-metre moon suspended in Colchester Castle makes the perfect autumn day out.

## To the moon and back

Enjoy a rare and intimate encounter with our closest cosmic neighbour inside one of the county's most historic landmarks.

Following the partial eclipse of the sun this summer, visitors to Colchester Castle are invited on another breathtaking cosmic experience, thanks to internationally acclaimed artist Luke Jerram's 'Museum of the Moon'.

Following the huge success of Jerram's previous installations at the castle, Gaia (Earth) and Mars, this latest exhibition presents an extraordinary opportunity to visit the moon in a historic setting.

## A striking and immersive experience

Suspended within the castle, 'Museum of the Moon' features a giant illuminated sphere, created using high-resolution NASA imagery of the lunar surface. At a scale of approximately 1:600,000, every centimetre of the sculpture represents six kilometres of the moon's surface, revealing intricate details rarely seen by the human eye.

Accompanied by an evocative surround sound composition by composer Dan Jones, the installation transforms the castle into a space for reflection, wonder and shared experience.





Image: Luke Jerram and Museum of the Moon

## WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE

“From the beginning of human history, the moon has acted as a ‘cultural mirror’ to our beliefs, understanding and ways of seeing. Over the centuries, the moon has been interpreted as a god and as a planet. It has been used as a timekeeper, calendar and to aid nighttime navigation. Throughout history the moon has inspired artists, poets, scientists, writers and musicians the world over.”

Quote by Luke Jerram.

Plan your visit to Colchester Castle. ‘Museum of the Moon’ is on now until Saturday 31 October.

[www.colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/events/moon-museum](http://www.colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/events/moon-museum)

### Twinkle, Twinkle

Colchester is the birthplace of the world-famous nursery rhyme ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’ written by poet Jane Taylor in 1806 who lived in the city. Key landmarks in the area include a life-sized bronze statue of Jane and her sister Ann on Colchester’s High street, and their former home on West Stockwell Street. Jane later moved to Ongar where she died in 1842 aged 40.

### An unforgettable encounter for all

Luke Jerram is renowned for creating artworks that bring people together, regardless of age or background. ‘Museum of the Moon’ continues this vision by offering a welcoming and inclusive space for visitors to gather, explore and connect.

Visitors are encouraged to slow down, spend time beneath the moon and experience it in their own way, whether that’s learning about lunar science, enjoying the atmosphere with family and friends or simply lying back and taking it all in.

Speaking about the project, Luke said: “I am delighted to be bringing my artwork back to Colchester Castle and this time visitors will get to marvel at the moon. Around the world, people have their own historical, cultural, scientific and religious relationships to the moon. And yet somehow, despite these differences, the moon connects us all.”

## Moon, Magick and Mystery at Colchester Castle

Friday 9 October and Saturday 10 October

Plan a captivating weekend exploring folklore, the supernatural and the unexplained.

There are spooky stalls, curios and expert talks by paranormal investigators and folklore specialists, plus after-hours investigations led by Seventh Sanctum.

Suitable for ages 12-years-old and over.  
Tickets from £7.00.

[www.colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/events](http://www.colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/events)



# Essex, look up

**From stargazing  
to celebrating the  
cosmos.**



## Star gazing at Great Notley Country Park

Did you know you can search the celestial heavens for free at the monthly star gazing events held at Great Notley Country Park?

Hosted by the North Essex Astronomical Society – one of the largest in the UK with over 200 members – the events are held with members ranging from beginner armchair astronomers to expert observers of the cosmos.

Open to all ages (children must be accompanied by an adult), the events cover a range of interests, knowledge, and abilities. Everyone is welcome to enjoy the wonders of the universe at this dark-sky location.

The society will have telescopes set up for you to observe the moon, any visible planets as well as other objects of interest in the night sky. They can also teach you about the constellations, how to recognise them and they'll answer any questions you have about astronomy or telescopes.

Events are coming up on Saturday 19 September, 24 October and 14 November. For more information:

[www.explore-essex.com/whats-on/north-essex-astronomical-society-at-great-notley](http://www.explore-essex.com/whats-on/north-essex-astronomical-society-at-great-notley)

**F**rom Great Notley Country Park with its night sky sessions, a science festival themed around space and a composer who wrote one of the most famous pieces of astronomical music ever composed, all within a few miles of each other.



Credit: Paul Starr and Anglia Ruskin University



Credit: Paul Starr and Anglia Ruskin University

### Chelmsford Science Festival to celebrate the cosmos

A few miles down the road, Chelmsford Science Festival, hosted by Anglia Ruskin University has also turned its gaze to the stars. Discover the wonders of the universe at this year's festival which runs from Tuesday 20 to Wednesday 28 October with exhibitions, installations, talks and workshops around the theme, Future Worlds: Earth, Space, You.

Also, taking place at the festival on Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 October from 9.30am to 4.00pm is the family-friendly weekend which will include demonstrations and maker-style workshops.

Among the confirmed highlights is Brainiac Live, the UK's favourite family science show, where the Brainiacs dive into the mysteries of science and do all the things you're told never to try at home.

For younger visitors, there are Family Science Days promising experiments, discoveries and hands-on fun.

Find out more about the festival and book your free tickets: [www.aru.ac.uk/events/chelmsford-science-festival](http://www.aru.ac.uk/events/chelmsford-science-festival)



### Holst, the sound of the planets

In 1913, the composer Gustav Holst, on a walking holiday near Thaxted, found a tune that would later become one of the best-loved melodies in English music. It was here in Essex, working from a weekend cottage just outside Thaxted, that he began the piece that found him fame.

Holst composed 'The Planets' between 1914 and 1916 drawing on the astrological character of each celestial body, rather than scientific astronomy, capturing the aggression of Mars through to the romance of Venus and the mystery of Neptune.

Following his success, he settled in Thaxted living in the town's Manse until 1925. The central melody of 'Jupiter' was later adapted into the hymn 'I Vow to Thee My Country' and is still known today by the name of the Essex village where Holst composed it, Thaxted. A blue plaque on Town Street marks the spot.

Read more about Holst on the Thaxted Parish Council website:

[www.thaxted-pc.gov.uk](http://www.thaxted-pc.gov.uk)

# Essex coast inspired the 'Master of Suspense'

**Tucked away in the British Film Institute (BFI) archives is an old reel which connects one of the world's most famous directors to Essex.**

Although Alfred Hitchcock moved to California in 1939, he never forgot where he came from or what first inspired him to pursue a career in filmmaking.

**K**nown as the 'Master of Suspense', Hitchcock's 60-year career saw him create some of the most influential films in cinematic history. From 'Rear Window' and 'North by Northwest' to 'Psycho', his ability to turn dark subject matter into compelling entertainment remains unrivalled.

However, it is his 1963 film 'The Birds' starring Tippi Hedren that has the strongest connection to Essex.

## Inspired by the Essex marshlands

Based on a short story by British writer Daphne du Maurier, 'The Birds' is set in the remote coastal community of Bodega Bay in Northern California. The film takes place in a seaside town which is attacked by violent flocks of birds. The fear grows with the film's dim lighting and tense atmosphere.



It was during the filming of 'The Birds' in 1963 that Hitchcock made a short film addressed to the Westcliff Cine Club, of which he was patron, revealing an unexpected Essex connection.

In his address he recounted how he often travelled as a child from his home in Leytonstone, then part of

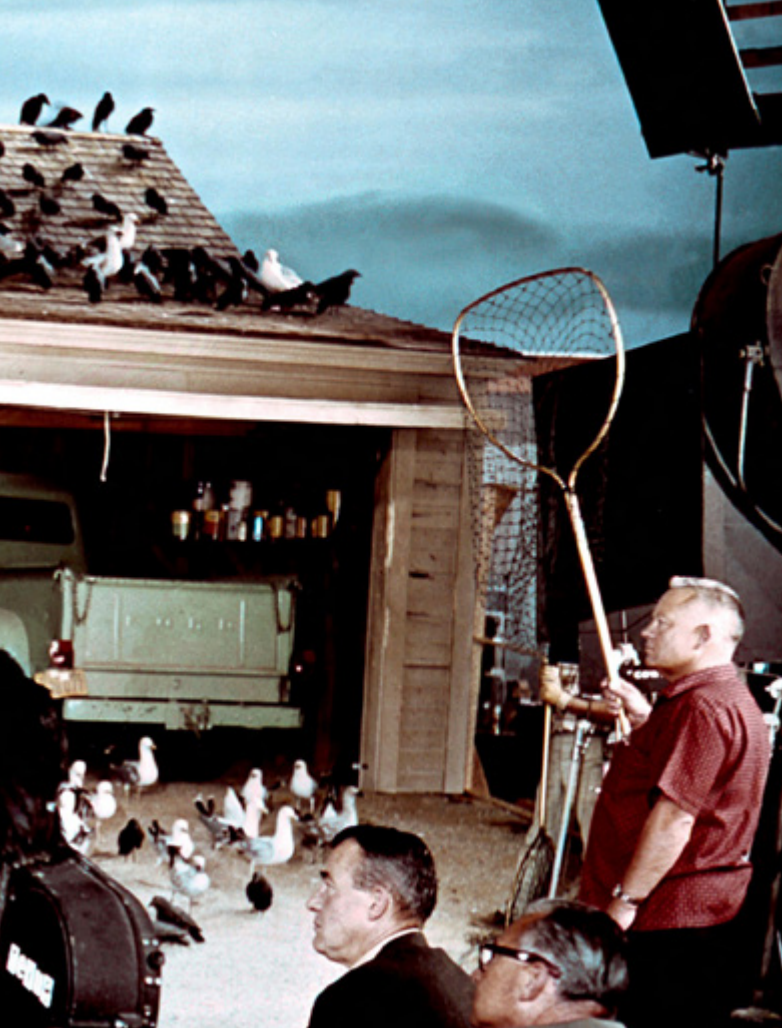
Essex, to the coast on family day trips. He goes on to reveal how, as a young scriptwriter in the 1920s, he brought fellow writers to the wild marshlands of the Essex coast.

Commenting in an article in The Times newspaper, Hitchcock said: "I almost wanted to send a letter to The Times saying the inspiration to become a giant of the cinema was inspired by a dreary November day at Burnham-on-Crouch. I've always had a fascination for seaside resorts

looking their worst in the winter.

"I can remember writing a script for a new film with my two scenario writers. I would get bored in the room in which we were working and I would say: 'Let's go to some dreary place. We might get some fresh ideas. Whether my assistant writers would be so inspired as I was, I didn't care. So long as I could get a kick out of the dreary waste of the Thames Estuary in the winter.'"





## Know a good film location?

Established in 2021 by Essex County Council, the Essex Film Office is a free, impartial single point of contact for productions looking to record in the county.

From location matching, permissions, highways and traffic management, to local crew, facilities and accommodation, the team helps put Essex on the big screen working with film and TV companies around the world.

If you have a residential, business, industrial building or site which you think would make a good film location, sign up to the free locations database.

[www.essexfilloffice.co.uk](http://www.essexfilloffice.co.uk)

Below is Bodega Bay, northern California, the actual location for 'The Birds'. Note the similarity to Essex's estuary landscape, which Hitchcock was so fond of visiting.

### An estuary landscape

With its flat horizons, muted light and vast mudflats, the south Essex landscape has inspired artists and writers for centuries, making it easy to understand why the young filmmaker saw such creative potential in the Essex estuary and coastline.

We can't know for sure how much these visits influenced his film, but it's easy to see similarities between the eerie Essex coast and the setting of 'The Birds'. The quiet shoreline, soft light and feeling of vulnerability in the landscape are themes that echo throughout the film.

With more than 350 miles of coastline, Essex continues to inspire filmmakers today. From the saltmarshes in 'The Essex Serpent' to the dramatic coast in ITV's 'Liar', it's clear why the county is a popular filming spot.

Search to watch 'The Birds' on the BFI website: [www.bfi.org.uk](http://www.bfi.org.uk)

Explore the Essex coastline: [www.visitessex.com/explore](http://www.visitessex.com/explore)



Image: Bodega Bay, California

# Explore the legends behind 'The Essex Serpent'

Discover the fascinating folklore, historical people and places behind the bestselling novel and Apple TV+ mini-series.

## Science, superstition and a serpent in the marshes

First published 10 years ago, 'The Essex Serpent' by Sarah Perry is a bestselling, award-winning novel, which ignited the imaginations of readers far and wide. It was adapted for the small screen by Apple TV+ and filmed on location around the county, starring Tom Hiddleston and Claire Danes. But are you aware of the legends behind the story?



Image: Dragon mural at Wissington Church

## The Worm of Wormingford

Essex, with 350 miles of tidal coastline, has a long history of watery tales.

The medieval myth of the 'Worm of Wormingford', tells of a dragon that allegedly terrorised the Essex countryside near the River Stour and Bures.

One theory is that the beast was an escaped crocodile from King Richard I's menagerie at the Tower of London. Wormingford, had a different name in Anglo-Saxon times, and came to be interpreted as 'the ford of the worm', worm being an old word for a 'serpent' or 'dragon'.

Could this be the inspiration behind Perry's 'Essex Serpent' and the mythical beast that is haunting the Blackwater estuary marshes in the novel?

Visit the local churches to see the 'serpent' for yourself, a modern stained glass window depicting a crocodile like creature at St Andrew's Church, Wormingford. Also, there's a medieval mural of a water dragon at Wissington Church, thought to have inspired the serpent wood carving in the novel's fictional Aldwinter Church.



## You might also like, 'Enlightenment' by Sarah Perry

Discover a beautiful tale of love, loss and scientific pursuit spanning 20 years by the award-winning author of 'The Essex Serpent'.

Tensions grow as two friends navigate their passions and the mysteries of the universe, whilst the mystery of a 19th century female astronomer stays just out of reach, and Comet Hale-Bopp blazes a trail above them.



### Leading ladies of Essex

As noted by University of Essex postgraduate research student Elelia Ferro, women are central to the plot of 'The Essex Serpent', with many historical references to strong women of the past, from queens to witches.

Protagonist Cora (Claire Danes in the TV mini-series) is described to resemble Boudicca, Queen of the East Anglian Iceni tribe, who led the uprising against Roman rule in Britain.

Perry also uses many Boudicca related settings in the novel, including Colchester Castle, built over the Roman temple which Boudicca set on fire, where centuries later Cora conducts some of her scientific research.

Elelia says: "By subtly interweaving layer upon layer of myth and history from this deeply misunderstood and historical county into a popular and compelling tale, writer Sarah Perry is challenging the national stereotype of Essex. In this tale, the county isn't a banal, flat and urban land with little historical and cultural richness. Perhaps making Sarah Perry the most contemporary, unruly Essex girl of them all."

Read Elelia Ferro's blog in full, the inspiration behind this feature, by searching 'The Essex Serpent' at: [www.essex.ac.uk/blog](http://www.essex.ac.uk/blog)

### Take 'The Essex Serpent' trail

Fans of the TV mini-series can visit some of the key filming locations from the atmospheric beach at Cudmore Grove Country Park to the Maldon area. Use the Essex Film Office's movie map to explore the sites. Just follow the green snake icons.

[www.essexfilloffice.co.uk/essex-movie-map](http://www.essexfilloffice.co.uk/essex-movie-map)

Search 'The Essex Serpent' to read the itinerary from Visit Essex: [www.visitessex.com/blog](http://www.visitessex.com/blog)



Image: Queen Boudicca by Dangrafart

# MURALS



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TALES  
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TOLD!**

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**[murals.game](https://murals.game)**



This project is supported by Essex County Council's Creative Industries Project Development Fund,  
to support the growth and innovation of creative businesses across Essex.

# Essex folklore on film

**Local talent trained on two horror shorts inspired by the county's own ghost stories.**

This year, Aura Films offered 16 paid internship placements through a new film production project supported by Essex County Council's Creative Industries Project Development Fund.



Essex's folklore has always travelled by word of mouth, passed down in the pub, in schoolyards and between generations who never wrote them down. This year, two of them have made it to the screen. Young participants gained hands-on experience working on two professionally produced short films inspired by the county's own legends and folklore.

The horror shorts, which draw on stories including 'The Headless Soldier' and 'Black Shuck', were written, filmed and produced entirely in Essex with a local cast and crew bringing the county's dark tales to life.

Together, the films and placements highlight Essex's creative potential and lay foundations for future largescale screen projects rooted in the county's distinctive folklore.

## Black Shuck in Essex

A huge black dog with glowing red eyes, Black Shuck, is said to prowl coastlines and lonely roads after dark. Essex marks the southernmost edge of his territory with centuries-old sightings across East Anglia.

In Maldon and the Dengie Peninsula area, seeing Black Shuck is said to bring the observer's own death soon after. Not every account is so grim. Elsewhere in Essex the beast is sometimes recast as a guardian or silent watchful presence protecting lone travellers.

## The Headless Soldier

This isn't Hollywood's 'Sleepy Hollow', perhaps the most famous headless horseman, but a distinctly Essex story.

A headless soldier is said to haunt one of Essex's coastal forts, roaming the ground where he was killed in an accident. Sightings include a ghostly figure in the window and some visitors have even reported being touched by an unseen presence.

Whilst Harwich's Redoubt Fort dates to the 1800s, constructed to protect the port from the threat of Napoleonic invasion, this supernatural presence is thought to have more modern origins.

In 1972, a soldier met a grisly end after becoming trapped in a cable attached to a 12-ton cannon, which snapped under the strain, instantly decapitating him.

Find out more: [www.harwich-society.co.uk](http://www.harwich-society.co.uk)





### Aura Films, from local start-up to national screens

Aura Films is an award-winning film and video production company based in Colchester. They specialise in high-quality video content for commercials, corporate videos, promotional films and training videos.

All images courtesy of Aura Films.



## Building Essex's next legends

Inspiring the county's young people to build games, not just play them.

Playable Worlds is a new youth-led gaming fringe festival programme by SPARK! at Chelmsford Science Festival this October.

As Aura's short films look back to Essex legends, Playable Worlds looks forward to who will build the next ones.

Part of Anglia Ruskin University's Chelmsford Science Festival, Playable Words invites participants to explore the world of gaming in innovative new ways.

Central to the programme is Schools Day, with hands-on interactive technology sessions and workshops designed to demystify gaming and open pathways into STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and maths).

Community venues across the region will host tabletop gaming events, while family days invite visitors into creative digital play, including a range of 'Minecraft' based activities.

[www.culturechelmsford.org.uk/playable-worlds](http://www.culturechelmsford.org.uk/playable-worlds)

# A taste of America



Earlier this year, Essex hosted a very special delegation from the city of Virginia Beach. Headed by City Mayor Bobby Dyer, the delegation visited the Innovation Centre at the University of Essex, followed by a reception launch held at Layer Marney Tower for the 'Welcome Home to Essex' tourism campaign, designed to attract visitors from the United States through our shared history.

To celebrate the partnership between Essex and Virginia Beach, home of the first English settlement in America, Explore Essex asked Mayor Bobby Dyer to share his favourite autumnal recipe, pumpkin pie.

## Mayor Bobby Dyer's pumpkin pie recipe

1 nine-inch pie dish

1 sweet pre-baked pie case (you can also blind bake your own pastry, for this recipe you will need around 250-320g of shortcrust pastry)

1 (425g tin) pumpkin puree (approx. 15 oz) available from most major UK supermarkets and online

1 (425g tin) sweetened condensed milk (approx. 15 oz)

2 large eggs

A small scoop of cream cheese (optional)

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon ground ginger

1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

1/2 teaspoon salt

## Directions

Preheat the oven to 220°C (or 200°C fan). Place the unbaked pie crust into a nine-inch pie dish and set aside.

In a medium-sized mixing bowl, whisk together the pumpkin puree (use 100% pure puree, rather than spiced pie mix for the best results), condensed milk, eggs and the spices and salt until the mixture is smooth and fully combined.

Pour the filling into the prepared pie crust, smoothing out the top with a spatula.

Place the pie in the preheated oven and bake for 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, reduce the oven temperature to 175°C (155°C fan) and continue baking for an additional 35 minutes. The pie is done when the centre is set and no longer jiggles when gently tapped.

Remove the pie from the oven and allow it to cool completely on a wire rack before serving with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.



"I love a delicious, classic pumpkin pie with a touch of cream cheese, vanilla ice cream and a sprinkle of cinnamon or nutmeg."

Mayor Bobby Dyer

Find out about the tourism campaign, 'Welcome Home to Essex':

[www.welcomehome-essex.com](http://www.welcomehome-essex.com)

# LET WONDER

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# Essex and the Conquest

**As the Bayeaux Tapestry returns to England for the first time in nearly a millennium, Essex's own front-row seat to 1066 is closer than you might think.**

For almost a 1,000 years, the story of England's most famous invasion has lived across the channel. This year, the 70-metre Bayeaux Tapestry arrived at the British Museum transported from France under police escort and in a climate-controlled container.



Image: Colchester Castle  
Credit: Colchester City Council and Roger Tamblyn



Image: Hedingham Castle  
Credit: Broadhouse Media



Image Hedingham Castle  
Credit: Broadhouse Media

**I**t sets the stage for 2027, which marks 1,000 years since William the Conqueror's birth. Ahead of the 'Year of the Normans', we look at the role Essex landmarks played in this epic story.

### From Essex to Hastings

In September 1066 fresh from victory at Stamford Bridge, King Harold stopped at Waltham Abbey to pray before news reached him of William's landing on the south coast and forced him to march on to Hastings. Waltham Abbey has deep roots in Harold's story. Originally belonging to a Danish nobleman, it passed to Harold as a royal gift and, after the battle, his body is said to have been returned there. A life-size statue still stands guard in the churchyard today.

William's own connection to Essex came soon after, when he ordered the construction of Colchester Castle, built directly on the ruins of the Roman Temple of Claudius.

### The largest Norman keep in Europe

Built around 1076 on William's direct orders and supervised by his steward, Eudo Dapifer, Colchester Castle marks the beginning of the Norman era in England. It is one of the county's earliest and most visible marks of Norman rule. It was the largest in England and remains the largest Norman keep anywhere in Europe, bigger even than the White Tower at the Tower of London.

[www.colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/visit/colchester-castle](http://www.colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/visit/colchester-castle)

### To Hedingham Castle

After his victory, William stripped the Anglo-Saxon nobility of their lands and rewarded his loyal Norman supporters with vast Essex estates. Among them was Aubrey de Vere I, thought to have come to England with William himself. The lands he was granted later led to the construction of Hedingham Castle, built in the 1130s by his son, Aubrey

de Vere II. One of the later Norman keeps, it's now considered one of the best-preserved in England.

It's stayed in the family ever since. Current owners, Jason and Demetra Lindsay, can trace their lineage through 25 generations back to Aubrey de Vere, a living link to the Conquest almost a 1,000 years ago.

Plan your visit:

[www.hedinghamcastle.co.uk](http://www.hedinghamcastle.co.uk)

### Their roots and yours

A few miles away in Chelmsford, Essex Record Office holds nearly a 1,000 years of the county's past, including parish registers, wills, estate records, tying ordinary Essex families to a place and a date.

The Griffin family, who took ownership of Audley End in the 1760s, once held a 12-foot painted pedigree tracing their lineage back to the 12th century, now kept at the Essex Record Office.

Its search service, plus free access to ancestry and the Essex Archive Online catalogue means anyone can start researching. Who knows, your own roots might lead back to a Norman nobleman?

### Essex's moment

As the Bayeux Tapestry draws millions of visitors to London over the coming year, remember the story didn't begin or end at Hastings. It ran through Essex from Waltham Abbey, where a king said his last prayers, to a castle that one family has called home since before the tapestry itself was likely stitched.

The county has a strong Norman legacy with castles, keeps and village names - Hatfield Peverel, Layer De La Haye, Castle Hedingham - throughout Essex to this day.



Image: Pedigree tracing 19 generations of the Griffin family from the Norman Conquest to 1602

Credit: Essex Record Office

## Visit The Bayeux Tapestry

The Bayeux Tapestry is now on display at The British Museum from September 2026 to July 2027.

The 70-metre-long tapestry depicts events leading up to the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest of England in 1066.

[www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/bayeux-tapestry](http://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/bayeux-tapestry)

# Unearthing Essex's history

**Across the county this year two very different excavations are revealing timeless treasures.**

**Visit an uncovered hoard of Iron Age gold on display and discover an organised dig racing against the tide to record details of a Tudor fort before it disappears for good.**

## The Great Baddow Hoard

In 2020, metal detectorists in Great Baddow, near Chelmsford, unearthed the largest collection of Iron Age gold coins ever discovered in Britain.

Known as The Great Baddow Hoard, it was acquired by the Museum of Chelmsford in 2025 thanks to funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and other supporters.

Dating to 60 to 20 BC, the coins come from a time of great upheaval during the late Iron Age, when the threat of Julius Caesar's second invasion loomed over the country.

The 'Timeless Treasures' exhibition also includes previously unseen ornate glassware and ceramics recently excavated by Archaeology South East at a newly uncovered 2,000-year-old cemetery to the north of Chelmsford and other wonders.

Visit the Museum of Chelmsford until Sunday 11 April 2027.

## Mysteries of the hoard

Two thousand years after it went into the ground, nobody knows who buried a king's ransom in gold and why they never came back for it.



Credit: Claire Naylor

### The Mersea blockhouse, racing the sea

While Chelmsford's gold is held safely behind glass, a very different Essex site is being excavated with urgency. At Cudmore Grove Country Park on Mersea Island, Essex County Council and Historic England have organised the excavation of a Tudor blockhouse, the only known example of its kind in Essex with surviving earthworks, before it is lost to coastal erosion

Colchester Archaeological Trust and their volunteers have recovered a good quantity of clay tobacco pipe, stems and bowls, many musket balls, some pistol balls and a beautiful complete bone comb.

The military fort was built during the reign of Henry VIII as a coastal defence to guard the mouth of the River Colne on the approach to Colchester.

The dig was supported by Essex County Council's Place Services, Essex Country Parks and Historic England, and was grant funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Countryside Stewardship Heritage Service.

A series of talks will take place during the autumn and winter following the dig this summer.

[www.catuk.org](http://www.catuk.org)

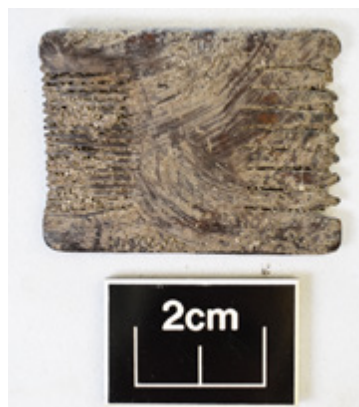


Image: Bone comb found at Cudmore Grove  
Credit: Colchester Archaeological Trust

### Meet the 'Lexden Lady'

Now on public display at the Roman Circus Visitor Centre in Colchester, the 'Lexden Lady' is one of the most stunning Roman burials to be uncovered in recent years.

'The Lexden Lady: From Burial to Biography' displays her coffin, her remains and what scientific analysis has revealed about her life and death. Discover the remarkable story behind the woman and her burial.

[www.catuk.org](http://www.catuk.org)



Credit: Colchester Archaeological Trust

### The Fenwick hoard

The 'Fenwick Treasure' is a rare hoard of Roman gold and silver jewelry buried beneath the floorboards of a Colchester house just as Queen Boudicca's forces attacked and burned the town in AD 61.

The hoard was discovered in 2014 by the Colchester Archaeological Trust during excavations ahead of a redevelopment at the former Williams and Griffin department store (part of the Fenwick Group).

Another curiosity is where the hoard was found. The coins are decorated with running horses and wreaths more typical of designs from the Catuvellauni territory, a tribe based in west Essex.

Yet, Chelmsford sits in the land of their neighbours and rivals, the Trinovantes, Iron Age people who occupied modern Essex and south Suffolk. Does this point to a conflict between the two tribes? Is the gold a tribute, a ransom or a desperate offering to the gods in a losing war?

Secrets remain with the coins buried until recently under the city, in the heart of Essex.

Visit the Museum of Chelmsford.

[www.museumofchelmsford.co.uk/events/timeless-treasures](http://www.museumofchelmsford.co.uk/events/timeless-treasures)

# Travel through the ages

**Where Templar history meets a family day out.**

Step back in time and discover 900 years of history with the new immersive trails at Cressing Temple Barns.

**F**rom Sunday 20 September, new interactive heritage trails invite visitors to explore centuries of history on foot.

The Working Farm project has been brought to life thanks to the dedication of the Friends of Cressing Temple, and with public funding from the National Lottery, through Arts Council England, plus other sponsors.

Visitors can take the interactive tour and discover stories from the estate and different periods of history, from the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 through to more recent farming practices.

Designed to be fun and educational for all ages, all the trails are fully accessible. Visitors can discover Cressing Temple's past through a series of characters that come to life by the touch of a button or via a QR code.

**The trails involve historical events such as:**

## 1137 Temple and Crusade: The Founding of Cressing Temple

Step into a medieval world of brave knights, dangerous journeys and powerful beliefs. Meet pilgrims, kings and the legendary Knights Templar as you explore Cressing Temple's remarkable past. From holy missions to royal gifts and dramatic downfall, this trail reveals the thrilling story behind one of England's greatest estates.



1137 Knights Templar: Ralph of Coggeshall

### 1381 Revolts and Rebellion: The Peasants' Revolt

Discover the real stories behind the Peasants' Revolt. Walk with Amicius the Skinner through hardship, rebellion and hope, as Essex villagers rise against unfair laws and crushing taxes. Explore Cressing Temple's dramatic role in one of England's most explosive uprisings.



1381 Peasants' Revolt:  
Amicius Palmere

### Kingdom in Chaos: The Tale of Two Thomases

It's 1549, three years since 12-year-old Edward VI inherited Henry VIII's broken kingdom. There's religious upheaval, poor harvests, rampant inflation and peasant revolts against landowners. The Tale of Two Thomases shows the gulf in expectations between the nobility and the peasants who worked the Cressing Temple estate.



1542 Reformation:  
Thomas

### 1830 Fire and Change: The Swing Riots

It's the late 1820s and fire, fear and change grip the Essex countryside. Walk beside farm labourer Luke and his boss, tenant farmer Mr. Grimwood, as riots erupt, new machines arrive and lives are reshaped forever. Discover courage, hardship and hope in this gripping self-guided journey into England's rural past.



1830 Swing Riots:  
Luke

### 1944 Feeding A Nation at War: A Land Girl at Cressing

As the Second World War rages, Betty leaves London life for the fields of Cressing. Discover how the young land girl – who 'didn't know one end of a cow from the other' – learns new skills, overcomes challenges and finds new friends. Betty's story reveals the extraordinary role played by ordinary women in Britain's wartime countryside.

Visit the new trail and enjoy a family day out: [www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/find-whats-near-me/cressing-temple-barns](http://www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/find-whats-near-me/cressing-temple-barns)



1944 Women's Land Army:  
Betty

## Have a go at apple pressing

Join the Friends of Cressing Temple for the annual Apple Day on Sunday 11 October.

Have a go at apple juicing with a traditional press and find out how to care for your fruit trees.

Visitors can also learn about making cider, beekeeping, willow crafts as well as enjoy children's activities, entertainment, craft stalls and more.

Discover more: [www.explore-essex.com/whats-on/apple-day-cressing-temple-barns](http://www.explore-essex.com/whats-on/apple-day-cressing-temple-barns)



Credit: Friends of Cressing Temple

# The forts that still stand

**Attracting film crews, ghost hunters and a queen on horseback whose spirit never left.**

From a Tudor blockhouse braced against an armada, to a fort that's hosted superhero movie productions, Essex's coastal defences have stood the test of time.

**F**or centuries, Essex has been prepared for an invasion. A chain of forts strung along the Thames Estuary and River Stour has survived every threat over the years.



Image: Coalhouse Fort

## A queen and a speech at Tilbury Fort

In August 1588, England faced annihilation as the Spanish Armada loomed off the coast. With a Catholic invasion force threatening the realm, Queen Elizabeth I made a dangerous, historic journey deep into the Essex marshes to see her troops at Tilbury Fort.

As Essex became the literal shield for London, the camp in west Tilbury housed thousands of local militia and soldiers from across the region, assembled to protect the capital. Dressed in a steel cuirass (a piece of defensive armor that covers the upper body, protecting both the chest and the back) over a white velvet gown, the Queen delivered what is widely considered one of the greatest motivational speeches in British history, declaring "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too."

The speech cemented Essex's role as the birthplace of an iconic cultural myth. Though the Spanish fleet had already been scattered by storms, Elizabeth's legendary stand unified a frightened nation and redefined female leadership from the Essex shoreline.

It's an important chapter in Essex's heritage that continues to capture the imagination. For more information and to visit search 'Tilbury Fort': [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

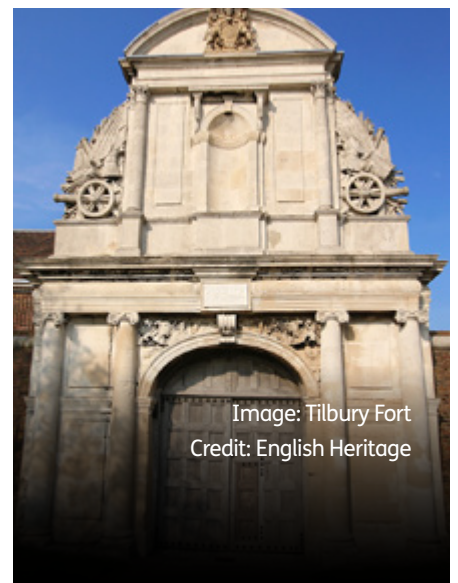


Image: Tilbury Fort  
Credit: English Heritage

## Harwich Redoubt Fort: maritime and ghostly secrets

Tucked away on the Essex coast, the historic town of Harwich holds a wealth of maritime secrets blending history with folklore.

Harwich Redoubt Fort was built between 1807 and 1810 to guard against a Napoleonic invasion. The impressive, 180-foot circular brick fortress was designed to withstand a heavy siege, but by the mid-20th century had fallen into total disrepair.

In 1969, the Harwich Society saved the Redoubt, transforming the ruins into a magnificent military museum.

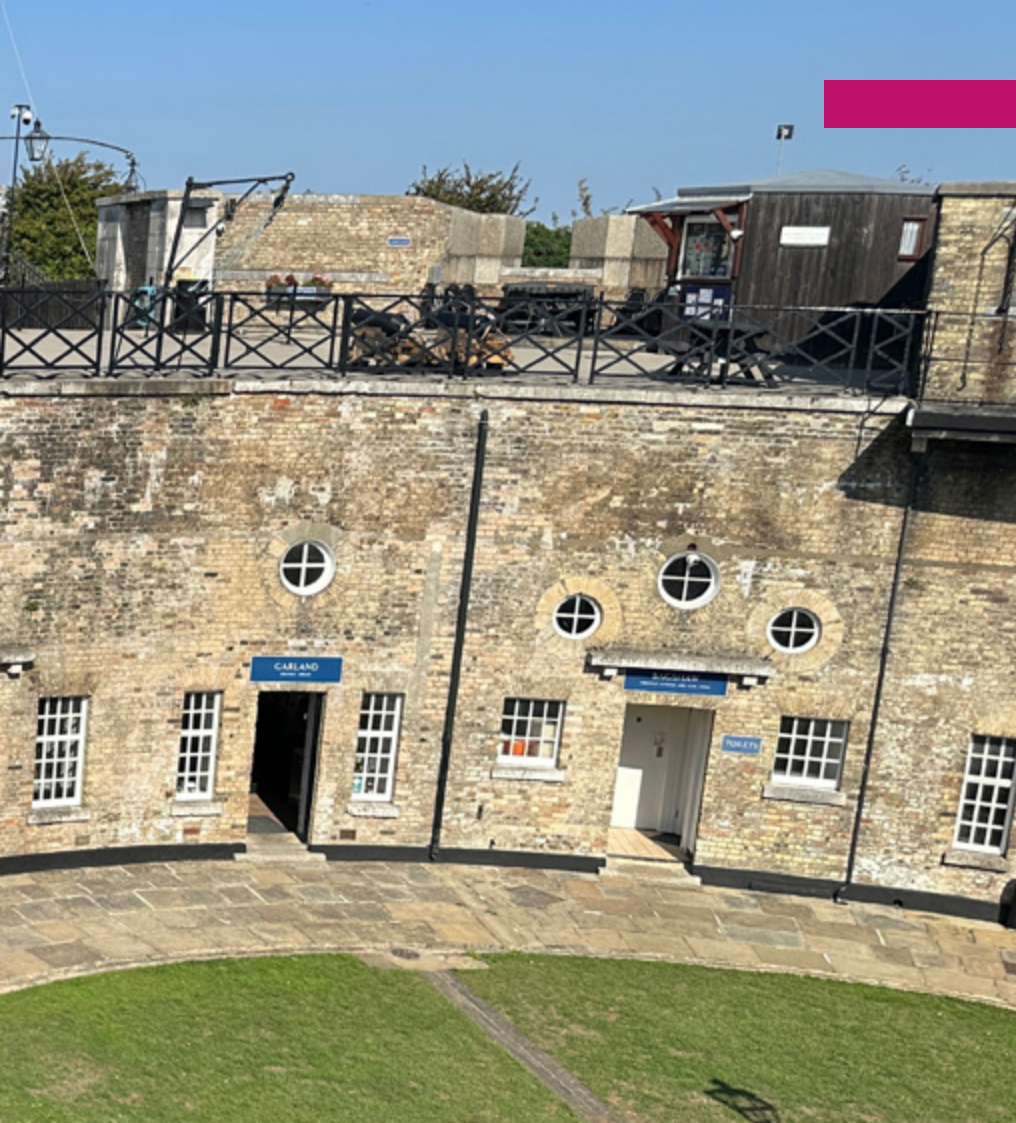


Image: Harwich Redoubt Fort

## Buried beneath New Hall School

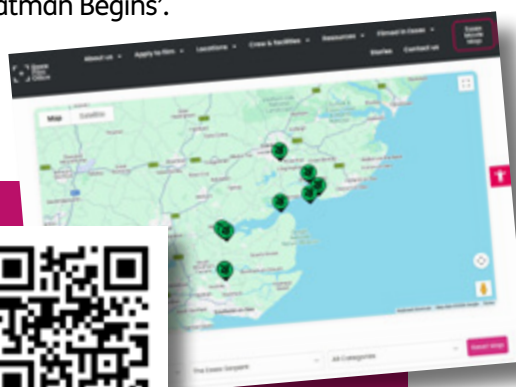
Not every Tudor secret is above ground. In June 2026, workers at New Hall School, Chelmsford, were repairing a ha-ha (a sunken ditch traditionally used to keep livestock off a landscape view) when then uncovered the entrance to a brick-lined tunnel.

Pottery, animal bones and glass jars were found, believed to date back to the Tudor period, although the exact purpose of the subterranean passage remains unknown. With only a few feet of the tunnels excavated so far, nobody is sure how far they extend or what might still be down there – spooky.

## From Tudor ramparts to Hollywood set

In 2016, Tilbury Fort became the location for action movie, 'Wonder Woman'. Its parade grounds and ramparts were transformed into a secret Ottoman military installation for the film's villains to develop a deadly new weapon.

Just along the Thames, Coalhouse Fort played its own part in blockbuster history as Gotham City's docks in Christopher Nolan's 'Batman Begins'.



Find these film locations and more on the movie map: [www.essexfilloffice.co.uk](http://www.essexfilloffice.co.uk)

## Headless soldier on the battlements

The Redoubt also has spookier claims. Local ghost hunter groups rank the fort as one of the most haunted locations in Essex, pointing to a terrifying local myth of a headless apparition that wanders the battlements, which was recently explored by Colchester's Aura Film – see pages 24 and 25.

Whether you're interested in the history or on the lookout for more spooky encounters, a visit to Redoubt Fort is an unforgettable experience.

# A season of stories

**This autumn, Essex libraries are telling stories in quite different ways.**



Image: The Katharine Project

There's storytelling for little ones who love a good roar and tales for grown-ups ready to listen closely.

## A voice from history, in a library near you.

**T**his autumn, historical stories are coming to life through headphones, not just on the page.

'The Katharine Project' is a new immersive theatrical experience exploring the life of Katharine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, touring cathedrals and libraries across the UK.

Locally, the tour is popping up across the county through a partnership between Essex Library Service and Suffolk Community Libraries, with an absorbing soundtrack rehearsed in Harwich and recorded in Walton-on-the-Naze.

Writer, Nicola Werenowska, has long been drawn to stories of real women that history tends to erase or overlook, and so Katharine of Aragon became the focus of this project. Moving past familiar history, the narrative comes from a fresh female perspective and her struggles as a woman displaced by marriage and caught in the politics of the age.

Take your headphones and wander through the library while listening to snippets of the soundtrack, 'The Katharine Mix', plus an exclusive bonus track commissioned especially for Essex and Suffolk libraries, exploring Katharine's love of books and her role in championing women's education.

The tour opened on Tuesday 1 September at Wivenhoe library and moves through Frinton, Walton and Manningtree before full 'Library Performances' at Colchester on Friday 27 November and Braintree library on Saturday 28 November. Every event is free.

For full events listings including an artist workshop and talks with the writer and producer, search 'The Katharine Project' at: [www.library-events.essex.gov.uk](http://www.library-events.essex.gov.uk)

If Katharine's story is for quiet, solitary reflection, The Gruffalo sessions are quite the opposite – welcoming group singalongs, character voices and the joy of a room full of toddlers enjoying the pages turning together.



## The Gruffalo and the whole Julia Donaldson world

The Gruffalo storytelling sessions are running across the county's libraries throughout autumn, alongside sessions built around 'Room on the Broom', bringing Julia Donaldson and illustrator, Axel Scheffler's witch, her cat and

her ever-growing broomstick of animal friends to life for a new generation of listeners. Part of a wider programme drawing on Donaldson's best-loved books, from 'Tiddler' to 'Superworm'.

For story time sessions and other exciting events search 'The Gruffalo' at:

[www.library-events.essex.gov.uk](http://www.library-events.essex.gov.uk)

## Julia Donaldson trails at Essex Country Parks

However, the story doesn't have to stay indoors. Essex Country Parks run two free Julia Donaldson trails to carry the adventure outside. Follow The Gruffalo trail at Thorndon Country Park or the Stick Man route, winding around the lake at Weald Country Park.

Meet the mouse, the fox and The Gruffalo himself in Thorndon's deep dark woods. Head to Weald to find Stick Man's family tree and look out for new interactive panels coming this autumn.

Find out about The Gruffalo trail at Thorndon Country Park and the Stick Man route at Weald Country Park: [www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go](http://www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go)



# Capturing the soul of Essex

**A new book and a countywide celebration dig into what really makes Essex.**

James Lawrence's latest work reveals the myths, legends and history behind one of England's most fascinating yet misunderstood counties.

Everyone thinks they know Essex. James Lawrence, also known as 'Man about Country', suggests otherwise. The county has long carried a reputation shaped more by stereotype than substance, but James's work argues that the real story runs far deeper and far stranger than most people realise.

"You only need to scratch the surface to find amazing stories, from ancient times to the modern day, many of which show that Essex hasn't changed as much as we might think," said James, I believe that the more of these stories we discover and put together, the closer we get to the true soul of Essex, the myths at the heart of this great county."

## A book made for walking, not just reading

That belief runs through 'The Essex Ways', James Lawrence's latest book, which follows an epic 400-kilometre adventure through the county's wildest and least-expected corners. Part story collection, part travelogue, part walking companion, it blends the practical with the mythical, guiding readers through Essex's landscapes, unearthing the legends attached to them.

With 42 walking routes and 22 hand-illustrated maps by local illustrator Stacey Williamson-Michie, it's written to be used as much as read. A book for lacing up your boots and discovering the county's places and stories for yourself.

The book launches on Friday 25 September, with original support from the Essex County Council Arts and Cultural Fund. This enabled James to travel the county collecting stories directly from residents. Alongside the launch, he continues to lead a regular programme of guided walks, encouraging people to explore Essex's most fascinating corners in person.

Find out more, visit: [www.manaboutcountry.co.uk](http://www.manaboutcountry.co.uk)



Image: St Peters on the Wall  
Credit: Visit Essex

## Essex Day, a county remembers its saint

Held each year on 26 October, Essex Day marks the arrival of St Cedd, the county's patron saint, who arrived in AD 654 to bring Christianity to the people.

This year, Essex Day is a fitting bookend to James Lawrence's project. Where 'The Essex Ways' unearths the county's dragons, warriors and half-forgotten legends on foot, Essex Day is a chance to step back to celebrate the whole picture.

From rolling countryside and tranquil seaside towns to ancient Roman sites and cultural attractions, Essex offers an abundance of experiences for residents and visitors alike, with something to inspire every generation.

Essex Day shines a spotlight on everything that makes the county unique. It's a chance to celebrate its remarkable heritage while recognising the communities that continue to shape it today.

Search for Essex Day events marking St Cedd's life and legacy: [www.visitessex.com](http://www.visitessex.com)



Image: Man About Country  
Credit: Barnaby Chinnock



Credit: Barnaby Chinnock



Credit: Barnaby Chinnock



Image: St Peters on the Wall at Bradwell-on-Sea  
Credit: Visit Essex

# It's a Halloween spooktacular

Discover ghoulish goings on near you this autumn.



## Audley End Miniature Railway

### Halloween Special

Sunday 25 October to Monday 2 November. Various times

Enjoy a magical day out and spot mummies, vampires, skeletons, mermaids and scarecrows. Meet William the Wizard, create your own potions, enjoy the straw maze and pumpkin market. Take a tour of the short Fairy and Elf walk, then warm up at the marshmallow toasting station. A magical family day out.

[www.audley-end-railway.co.uk/seasonal-event/halloween-special](http://www.audley-end-railway.co.uk/seasonal-event/halloween-special)



Credit: Thrill Nation

## Colchester Zoological Society

### Trail of Terror and Shriek Week. Various days and times from

Friday 16 October to Saturday 31 October: 6.30pm to 9.15pm (last entry)

Visit the zoo after dark and experience a journey filled with horror and screams. Follow the Trail of Terror (one and a half miles) and hop aboard for a spooky train ride. Look out for creatures of the night, live entertainment and pick up a delicious treat as you step into the unknown. Daytime half-term activities including creepy crafts, for younger visitors.

[www.colchesterzoo.org](http://www.colchesterzoo.org)



## Essex Country Parks

### Spooky Trail

Saturday 17 October to Sunday 1 November: 10.00am to 4.00pm

Watch out! There are some spooky characters and curious creatures lurking in the parks. Can you find and count them to help our rangers complete the spell to send the creepy characters home? Pick up or download a free Spooky Trail sheet for any Essex Country Park or Crossing Temple Barns. Free activity. Car parking charges still apply.

[www.explore-essex.com](http://www.explore-essex.com)



Credit: Aaron Crowe

## Hylands Estate

### Fear Fest

Nightly, Friday 16 October to Sunday 1 November: from 5.00pm

Hylands transforms into a Halloween playground. Fear Fest Spooky Trail blends gentle scares with playful ghouls for families (seven-years old and over). Fear Fest Extreme ramps up the intensity with live scares and special effects for thrill seekers 15-years old and over.

[www.hylandsfearfest.com](http://www.hylandsfearfest.com)

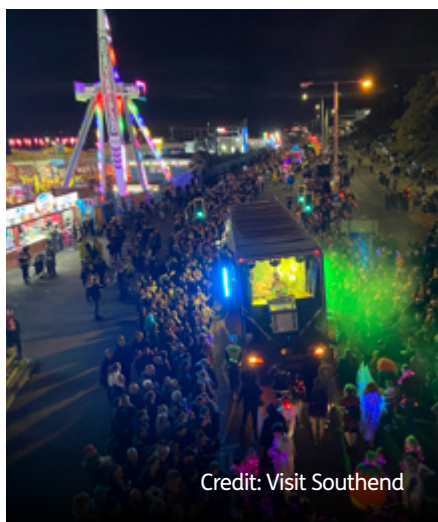
## Essex Record Office

### ERO Presents: Witchland

Tuesday 29 September: 10.40am to 12.00pm and 6.40pm to 8.00pm

Professor Marian Gibson talks civil war witches across Essex, Norfolk and beyond with the launch of her new book. Price: £6.75.

[www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on](http://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on)



Credit: Visit Southend

## Southend-on-Sea

### Southend Halloween Parade

Saturday 31 October: 6.30pm to 7.45pm

Head to Southend seafront for a frightfully fun celebration. The parade is renowned for its vibrant mix of giant puppets, energetic dance troupes and mesmerising performers, all coming together to celebrate Halloween in style. Register your group to take part for free by Saturday 10 October or simply turn up and enjoy an unforgettable evening.

[www.southendhalloween.org](http://www.southendhalloween.org)

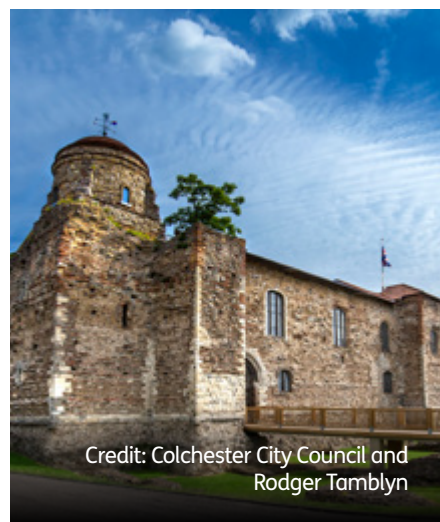
## Essex Outdoors

### October Holiday Activity Days

Various dates and times at four centres (Bradwell, Danbury, Harlow and Mersea)

In small groups of around 10, children will enjoy four exciting activities each day with enthusiastic and highly qualified instructors.

Sessions range from high ropes, climbing and zip wire, to water sports including canoeing and stand-up-paddleboarding, to archery, mountain biking and bushcraft.



Credit: Colchester City Council and Rodger Tambllyn

## Colchester Castle

### Moon, Magick and Mystery

Friday 9 to Saturday 10 October: morning and afternoon sessions

Spooky stalls, curios and expert talks by paranormal investigators and folklore specialists, plus after-hours investigations led by Seventh Sanctum. 12-years old and over.

[www.colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/events](http://www.colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/events)



There is no better way to keep eight to 16-year-olds active and entertained, making memorable experiences in the outdoors. £40.00 per child.

[www.essexoutdoors.com/school-holiday-activities](http://www.essexoutdoors.com/school-holiday-activities)



# Autumn festivals

Music, art and culture across the county, from coast to country.

Image: Sacconi Quartet, CAC 2023  
Credit: Lucy J Toms

## Colchester Arts Centre

### Chai Talks, Chai Makes, Chai Lates

Friday 2 October: 11.00am to 1.00pm, Saturday 3 October: 12.00pm to 2.00pm, Friday 13 November: 8.00pm to 10.00pm

Chai and conversation, with a little spice added. This trio of sessions celebrates the creative arts of South Asian communities. Chai Talks offers an inside look at the creative industries served up with a proper cup of chai. Chai Makes is a hands-on creative workshop where you might find yourself repurposing a sari or transforming basic ingredients into something delicious. Chai Lates closes the sessions with a cabaret-style evening of performance with poetry, dance and spoken word exploring what it means to grow up British Asian today, alongside plenty of food, drink and conversation.

[www.colchesterartscentre.com](http://www.colchesterartscentre.com)

## Maldon Festival

### Multiple venues

Friday 11 to Saturday 26 September

A revitalised programme of classical and contemporary music and arts across Maldon aligning with Heritage Open Days and the Maldon Art Trail.

[www.maldonfestival.co.uk](http://www.maldonfestival.co.uk)

## Roman River Festival

### Multiple venues

Tuesday 20 to Sunday 25 October

World-class classical performances, vocal ensembles and young soloists in historic churches and heritage venues across Essex.

[www.romanrivermusic.co.uk/whats-on](http://www.romanrivermusic.co.uk/whats-on)

## Walton Arts Festival

### Between the Tides, multiple venues

Friday 18 to Sunday 20 September

A weekend of coastal community and creativity in Walton-on-the-Naze, timed to the autumn equinox tides.

[www.waltonartsfestival.com](http://www.waltonartsfestival.com)

## Things to do in Essex

For festivals, gigs and family fun happening across Essex this year. Find more events near you.

[www.visitessex.com/whats-on](http://www.visitessex.com/whats-on)

visit **essex**

# Digging into history

Essex keeps revealing its past this autumn, come and see what's surfaced.

Credit: Claire Naylor

## East Anglian Folklore Centre

**New home opens at Harwich Arts and Heritage Centre**

From Saturday 3 October

After a successful year at The Minories Gallery in Colchester, the centre will leave its current home on Friday 25 September, reopening at the Harwich Arts and Heritage Centre. Visit their research library, shop and check out their lively programme of talks, music, sing-arounds, storytelling and much-loved Straw Club corn dolly workshops.

[www.eastanglianfolklorecentre.co.uk](http://www.eastanglianfolklorecentre.co.uk)

## Museum of Chelmsford

**Timeless Treasures**

Until Sunday 11 April 2027

The Great Baddow Hoard, Britain's largest Iron Age gold hoard with 935 coins buried around 60 to 20BC, on public display for the first time.

[www.museumofchelmsford.co.uk/events/timeless-treasures](http://www.museumofchelmsford.co.uk/events/timeless-treasures)

## Essex Record Office

**ERO Presents: How to dig up a castle**

Tuesday 27 October:  
10.40am to 12.00pm

Retired archaeologist Simon Coxall on excavating the early Anglo-Saxon castle at Clavering. Tea and coffee from 10.00am. Price: £6.75.

[www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on](http://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on)

## Essex Record Office

**ERO Presents: Coin hoarding in late Saxon Essex**

Tuesday 24 November:  
10.40am to 12.00pm

Curator Philip Wise examines the Braintree and Hatfield Peverel hoards and what they reveal about Saxon Essex. Tea and coffee from 10.00am. Price: £6.75.

[www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on](http://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on)

## Jaywick Martello Tower

**Autumn Talks: Various**

Friday 2 to Friday 30 October:  
11.00am to 12.00pm

Join Jaywick Martello Tower on Friday mornings throughout October for their Autumn Talks season. Talks include an underground guide to historical London (Friday 2 October), New Hall school Tudor tunnels (Friday 9 October), the Tudor blockhouse excavation at Cudmore Grove Country Park (Friday 16 October), a history of mudlarking and the stories beneath our shores and riverbanks (Friday 23 October) and a talk by David Grocott about Colchester born William Gilbert (Friday 30 October). Doors open at 10.30 and talks are £3.00 entry.

[www.explore-essex.com/events](http://www.explore-essex.com/events)

## Your gateway to Essex museums

For even more history on your doorstep, discover the full network of museums in Essex.

[www.museums-essex.org](http://www.museums-essex.org)

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[www.eorailway.co.uk](http://www.eorailway.co.uk)

