

What does Essex sound like? Capturing the changing sounds of an English county

By Sarah-Joy Maddeaux, Stuart Bowditch

Abstract

What does Essex sound like? How have its soundscapes changed? What do its soundscapes reveal about Essex society and culture? In 2015, the Essex Sound and Video Archive at the Essex Record Office gained a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to run the project, *You Are Hear: sound and a sense of place*. One output was an online audio map of past and present sounds of Essex, aiming to showcase the county's diversity through its soundscapes, and to encourage comparisons of historic and present-day recordings. This article will describe the processes behind the development of the audio map, then give a flavour of the types of soundscapes we captured. Finally, the paper will question what the map reveals about the soundscapes of this oft-maligned British county, and what function the map can serve in developing a sense of place for the county's inhabitants.

Keywords - Essex, sound map, soundscapes, public engagement, sound archive

Introduction: Developing the sound map

Waves crashing against the shore while the wind beats relentlessly against all obstacles. The drone of car after car whizzing down busy dual carriageways. The repetitive bang, hum, or snap of industrial machinery. Birds chirping in an otherwise tranquil atmosphere. And always, near or far, a plane flying overhead. These are the sounds of Essex – so what?

In 2015, the Essex Sound and Video Archive (ESVA) at the Essex Record Office (ERO) was awarded a Your Heritage grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to run a three-year project, *You Are Hear: sound and a sense of place*. The project involved digitising, cataloguing, and sharing a number of historic recordings from the archive, with the aim of helping people develop their sense of place and attachment to the county by engaging with the recordings.

One means of engagement was through the Essex Sounds online audio map (essexsounds.org.uk), where each sound is pinned to a map interface in the location where it was recorded. The map includes historic sounds from the archive, and modern-day sounds captured by Sound Recordist Stuart Bowditch. By bringing these sounds together in one interface, users can examine how the sounds of Essex have changed over the last century. But what do these sounds reveal about Essex life, past, present, and future, and what impact can these sounds have on users? Can an audio map of Essex

Sounds contribute to the research agenda called for in the still nascent field of soundscape ecology, to study the impact of soundscapes on humans? (Pijanowski, 2011)

This article will briefly describe the processes behind the development of the audio map, then give a flavour of the types of soundscapes we captured. The paper will reveal that, by recording at specific places and times, the project gave added significance to everyday, local activities of people who generally had not considered their 'noises' as being indicative of a time or place. Finally, the paper will question what the map reveals about the soundscapes of a diverse, twenty-first-century British county; and what function the map can serve in developing a sense of place for the county's inhabitants.

Northeast of London, on the northern shore of the River Thames as it heads 30 miles towards the North Sea, the county of Essex stretches 40 or so miles north to the River Stour. It is home to 1.5m people, several New Towns, and plenty of commuter belt. It played a strategically important role in the Second World War, hosting several airfields and naval bases, and boasts a 'secret' nuclear bunker, developed in the Cold War period as a safe haven in case of nuclear attack. It also has 350 miles of coastline, 86 sites designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and large areas of land reclaimed from the sea. Some of its most famous exports include oysters, sea salt, and jam.

The Essex Record Office is 'the storehouse of Essex history': the official repository for the county's archival documents dating back to 962. This includes an eminent sound and video archive, which collects recordings in a number of formats about Essex people and places: oral history interviews, programmes from local broadcast services, musical performances – plus the inevitable 'miscellaneous' recordings, such as field recordings of places and events in the county. The earliest recording dates back to c. 1906, but the majority were recorded from the 1980s onwards.

Our recordings come to us on a range of formats and in variable conditions. Audio and VHS cassette tapes or open reel tapes have been most common, with CDs, DVDs, and digital files gradually taking over. Current thinking within the sound and video archive community is to prioritise digitising these recordings before we lose the ability to play them, either through the deterioration of the media or technological obsolescence. This is not a permanent solution – the digital files must then be continuously monitored and managed – but it at least buys time while we conduct further research.

However, digitisation takes resources: of staff time as well as equipment maintenance. ESVA's You Are Hear project provided additional resources to tackle a large number of recordings. Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (with match-funding from the Essex Heritage Trust and the Friends of Historic Essex) allowed us to employ a Sound and Video Digitiser for three years to process some of our collections, and an Archivist to catalogue the recordings and publish them online. Because the recordings have been processed with National Lottery funding, they have all been made freely available under a Creative Commons (Attribution-NonCommercial) licence. This is a criterion of most funding grants from the National Lottery, but it also accords with the Archive's ethos of preserving records for public access. Digitisation enables us to provide greater access

than ever before, to a user from any location at any time of day. Making them available online was only the first step: the project also funded engagement activities to spread awareness of the treasures within the Archive.

One means of engagement has been our Essex Sounds audio map, the aim of which is to bring past and present sounds of Essex together into one online interface, freely accessible to those within the county and beyond. Although multiple sound map projects have been done before (i.e. Peter Cusack's Favourite Sounds and Stuart Fowkes' Cities and Memory projects), and with relative success, we were particularly excited by the idea of creating one specifically for Essex, and one that combined both historic and present-day recordings. We wanted the map to capture the essence of the county in all its diversity, and to demonstrate change over time. We recognise that no such construction can be objective and impartial, but rather that the process of recording involves decisions at each stage that shape the resulting recordings. Nevertheless, we aimed to make as limited an impact as possible: recording both 'positive' (e.g. birdsong) and 'negative' (e.g. traffic) sounds; adding minimal editing; and writing objective yet still engaging descriptions of the recordings. (Ouzonian, 2017)

Showcasing the county's diversity was particularly important to us given the largely negative stereotypes commonly used to represent Essex. An 'Essex man' is a derogatory term used to describe someone "characterized as a brash, self-made young businessman". 'Essex girl' signifies "a type of young woman... variously characterised as unintelligent, promiscuous, and materialistic." (Oxford University Press, 2018) The television programme *The Only Way Is Essex*, full of wealthy, young people with Estuarine accents, embodies and perpetuates these stereotypes. The current *Snapping the Stiletto* project has a similar aim to, "replace the outdated stereotype of 'Essex Girls' with stories of Strong Essex Women." [1] Could engaging with an audio map enable acts of 'sonic citizenship' whereby the people of Essex could claim the county for themselves, against this backdrop of negative depictions? (Andrisani, 2015)

In truth, Essex is a large county encompassing a variety of habitats, settlements, and peoples. Areas in the south and west tend to be more urban, including New Towns developed to help relieve the housing crisis in bombed-out London following the Second World War. Londoners continue to be a significant source of migration into the county, with resulting commuting towns growing up around train stations. The north and east of the county have many remote areas: small villages with chocolate-box image village greens and thatched roof cottages, or ecologically significant areas such as nature reserves, and one government-designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Dedham Vale). There are areas of great wealth, especially in the south-west, but also areas of poverty and economic inactivity, particularly along the Tendring coast. The majority of the population is White British, but there are small but significant representations from a wealth of other ethnicities. [2] The coastal resorts of Southend-on-Sea and Clacton-on-Sea have historically been the summer day-trip locations of choice for the East End of London. After declining from the 1980s, they are experiencing a come-back in this age of 'staycations', when more families are choosing to spend their holidays at home. All of these characteristics produce unique soundscapes; and all combine to build a richer picture of the county than many realise exists.

such as baby owls learning to hoot, recorded in a churchyard in rural Essex in 1974. Many of these were incidental recordings, background noises used for sound effects but now of historical importance – the happenstance that characterises archival research. We commissioned a Sound Recordist early in the project, so that he would be involved from the start with building our Essex Sounds map. Local sound artist Stuart Bowditch was a perfect choice. Having worked with ESVA in the past, he had an awareness of historic Essex sounds and how they could be combined with modern-day recordings to reveal similarities and differences. He also had a deep understanding of the county's diversity, its reputation, and its character.

The final stage was to design an interface to bring past and present recordings together. We visited other online sound maps to help us gauge what functionality and layouts we wanted. [3] We commissioned IT company Community Sites to build the basic design, to which we could gradually add content as we collected it. They delivered a visually appealing homepage that was easy to navigate, with multiple search functions to allow comparisons across time periods, categories of sounds, and locations. They also created an app version, enabling people to take the sounds out into Essex, potentially listening to a recording in the location where it was made.

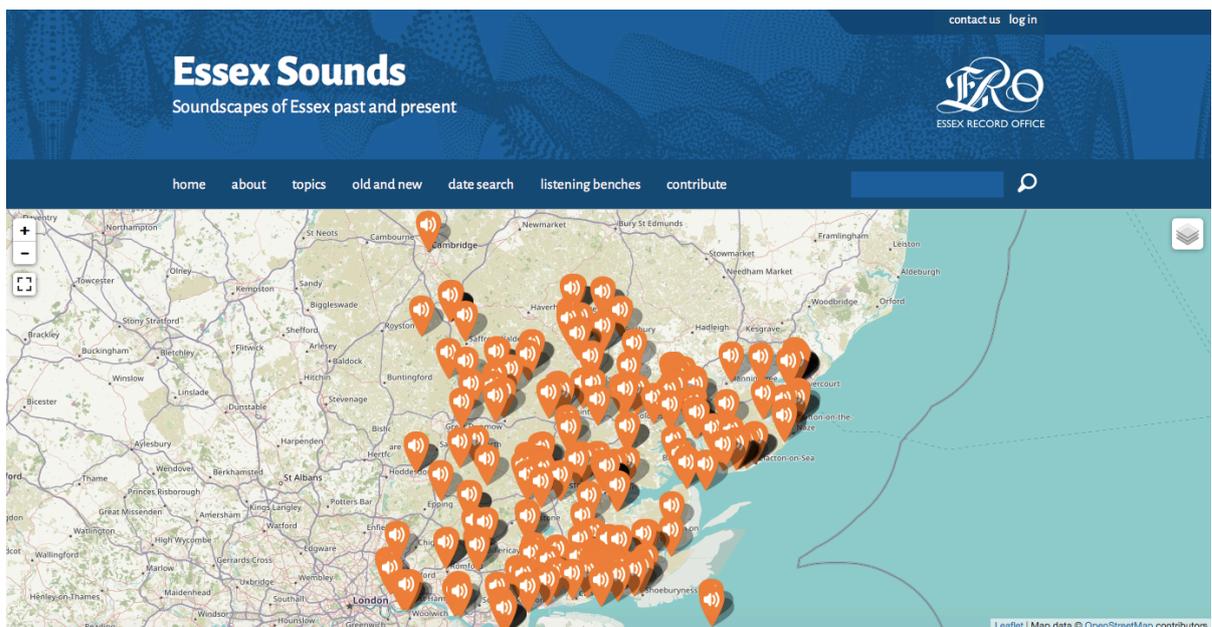


Figure 3:
Screenshot of Essex Sounds homepage

Having gathered suggestions and created the interface, we could then proceed to populate it with both historic and present-day recordings. What did we capture? What does Essex actually sound like?

Recording Essex

The primary focus of Stuart's work was to make new recordings of specific locations, people, industries and events. A detailed study of recordings already in the archive flagged up under-represented geographical areas. We identified existing historical recordings that could inspire a contemporary comparison recording. We also drew up a series of themes inspired by public suggestions to form a list to focus our recording

activities, which we added to as more suggestions and information came forward. One of these themes was ‘quiet places’. The public surveys revealed a paradox: some people gave peace and quiet as one of the sounds experienced in their daily life, while others stated that this was a ‘lost sound’, something associated with the past that could no longer be found in Essex. Often, unsurprisingly, the response depended on where the individual lived: whether in a busy urban environment or a more remote location. We took this theme as a challenge: could we find a quiet place in twenty-first-century Essex? [4]

Visits to some locations were planned in advance in order to negotiate permissions, devise a recording strategy, and make best use of the opportunity. This worked well with places that were not generally open to the public, such as Wilkin and Sons Ltd (the jam factory in Tiptree), Maldon Salt Company, and Chrishall Primary School. Others were more impromptu, such as a recording made at Ferry Lane, Fingringhoe whilst waiting for another appointment, or St Mary the Virgin Church at Fairstead, discovered whilst taking a detour from a traffic jam on the A12 trunk road.

Whilst a variety of recordings would add to the scope of the work, and give a more colourful picture of the county, it made sense to add a level of consistency to some of the themes, so as to enable better comparisons. For instance, we responded to the many public suggestions that traffic noise is a sound of our time: while not the most interesting of soundscapes, it has changed and will change over time. All of our recordings of the major trunk roads in Essex were made at around 2pm in the afternoon, and all made from locations where a lane or small road had been bisected when the larger road was built.

To add greater depth and breadth to the new recordings Stuart also recorded in all seasons throughout the year, and at all times of day, to capture sounds such as the popping candy crackle of fireworks and a ship's horn at Tilbury riverside at midnight on New Year's Eve, or the terrifying bark of a Muntjac deer in the darkness of Hockley Woods at 4 a.m.

Most people, once engaged with the idea, wanted to contribute: by suggesting a sound, describing the sound of where they live, or taking Stuart somewhere to find a sound (such as a man who instructed Stuart to meet him at 10pm outside the chip shop in Jaywick, who then took him to record the stridulating chirp of Great Green Bush Crickets and the electrical drone of the offshore wind farm). But there was a small minority who did not want to be involved (no breweries wanted to let someone come and record their processes).

Some sounds proved elusive and unrecorded: sometimes due to the sensitivity of an area (a private air strip that had an unknown activity happening on site), or due to being very hard to track down (the former ferry at Tilbury, the ‘Edith’, now in private hands, which after several months was eventually traced to a mooring place in Great Wakering only to discover it had once again been moved, a week earlier).

Essex sounds

Within the funding and timing limitations of the project, the recordings made by Stuart and received through public contributions both confirmed and challenged popular

assumptions about Essex sounds.

Comparative recordings were of particular importance to the project (see ‘Old and new’ page on the website), especially to promote temporal comparisons with the archive material we were digitising from older formats. For example, we hold a recording of Chelmsford Cattle Market in the 1950s, so Stuart made new recordings in the exact same location, now High Chelmer shopping centre. He also recorded the patter of vendors at the weekly Chelmsford street market (often indecipherable in-jokes), and at Stanford’s in Colchester, the only surviving cattle market in Essex. Many historical sounds could be assumed to have been lost, but in this case we discovered that the sounds of the cattle market, including the auctioneer, have only been relocated. Once in a very public arena in the centre of town, where they were part of everyday life to the general public, they now occur in a restricted area hidden away on an industrial estate, heard only by those directly involved with the industry.

[Link to audio files:

<http://d19az1b8nqezvo.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SA-24-1280-1-Side-1.mp3>

http://d19az1b8nqezvo.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Scene_995_Cows_auction.mp3]

In fact many sounds of ‘yesteryear’ can still be found, but as part of a tourist experience rather than a feature of daily life. Regular (yearly) train services run from Southend to a destination in the west country along the Fenchurch Street line, pulled by steam. There are also the Colne Valley Railway, Epping and Ongar Railway, and Mangapps near Southminster that still operate many old locomotives and rolling stock, allowing visitors to experience the hiss as steam is released from the boiler, or the shrill whistle as a train passes. The various clattering and rumbling sounds of vintage aircraft (and a suitably appreciative audience) can be found at the Stow Maries Aerodrome, where they hold several events throughout the year which are well attended by a variety of very old flying machines. In line with the national shift towards a service economy, many sounds of industry can now only be heard in the Museum of Power in Langford near Maldon. [5] Once utilitarian noises have become heritage sounds which we pay to encounter.

However, some industries remain present in the county. Wilkin and Sons jam factory in Tiptree, or the Maldon Salt Company, are examples of continuity: the processes may evolve and the machinery develop, leading to some sonic changes, but the operations have continued on the same site for generations. Other processes have merely relocated within Essex. Hoffman’s was a prominent employer in Chelmsford in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, manufacturing ball bearings that were exported across the globe. ESVA holds a video filmed on the eve of the factory’s closure in 1989, which includes recordings of some of the machinery in operation. But this is not a lost noise: similar hardware is now manufactured by Braintree Precision Components Ltd, just 15 miles north of the former Hoffman’s plant. Stuart recorded inside the factory in 2016 in all its loud, monotonous glory, capturing a moment in time which can be used to compare with previous manufacturing sounds but also may be used in future as the processes continue to develop.

The map demonstrates some cultural continuities. The trend towards secularisation has not stopped certain public religious ceremonies, such as the annual blessing of the whitebait catch in Southend-on-Sea. The prayers and hymns during the service have barely changed in the forty-five years since our earliest recording of this event. Meanwhile, predominantly secular traditions, such as the hanging of a hot cross bun on Good Friday at a pub in Horndon on the Hill, have become sacrosanct by their ritual repetition, ongoing for over a hundred years.

Even though there are large concentrations of urban and industrial development in Essex, especially in the south of the county, over 70% of land use is classed as agricultural. [6] One does not have to travel far to be ‘out in the countryside’. In fact, travel a little bit further and you will reach remote places such as Lee-Over-Sands, Foulness Island, or the Dengie peninsula. Some of these locations were suggested as ‘quiet places’, so Stuart went to investigate, sometimes with the person who had made the suggestion, and to document exactly how quiet they were.

[Link to audio file: http://d19az1b8nqezvo.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Scene_911_Dengie.mp3]

One discovery was that, even if the usually prevalent traffic noise was reduced to an occasional vehicle passing, there was no escaping the familiar drone of aeroplanes. In fact the longest time recorded between aircraft, during daytime at least, was around ten minutes. Naturally, the further west and nearer Stansted Airport (or south and nearer Southend Airport) one travels, the lower and louder the aircraft become. In Thaxted, where the aeroplanes use the windmill as a navigation marker, and in Hatfield Forest, the aircraft are very loud and can be heard every few minutes. But as parts of Essex also lie on the flight path to the London airports and beyond, aeroplanes, if only a distant noise easily tuned out, are one of the regular sounds of Essex common throughout the county.

Whilst the project has been making new recordings to compare to the past, it is important to also think about the future. In 2018, we made a series of new recordings at locations that could become proposed garden villages, planned to address the current housing shortage. Researching maps and plans on the Internet did not always reveal exact locations, and many of the proposals are speculative. Nevertheless, Stuart used this information to visit several potential sites and document the soundscapes as they were in 2018. These will be greatly significant as a comparison for any future recordings that could be made if the development plans go ahead.

Impact of Essex Sounds

The Essex Sounds website was first made publicly available on 25 February 2016. Then followed a period of testing, of improving, and especially of adding content to the map. We officially ‘opened’ the site at a hard launch event held on 28 September 2016. We invited people with whom we had made contact over the course of the wider You Are Hear project, particularly volunteers; those who helped us record soundscapes; and those who had expressed a significant interest in our plans for the audio map.

Once launched, we tried to maintain interest in the website by a gradual ‘drip-feed’ approach to publicity. The Sound Recordist had distributed postcards publicising the

map over the course of his activities, and we also sent these to local tourist information points. We seized opportunities to highlight the website on the ERO's social media profiles and its e-bulletin, including sharing messages posted by the Sound Recordist on his travels. Multiple appearances on the local radio station BBC Essex also helped to raise awareness.

From 28 April 2016 (when the website analytics started capturing data) to 30 June 2018, 10,954 users have visited the site. [7] They have come from 89 countries, with the majority (almost 85%) from the United Kingdom. Looking more closely at the locations of visitors, as far as Google Analytics can obtain this information, approximately 40% of visitors were from Essex.

The relatively high proportion from Essex (compared to population) is a pleasing result. It is encouraging to know that the site, designed largely to engage with Essex residents, has been of interest to them. However, it is also pleasing to know that the site is of interest to those outside the county – perhaps ‘ex-pats’ who want to aurally wander down memory lane, or people who want to see just what this oft-dismissed county is really like. Publishing the recordings online enables a widening of the ‘acoustic community’ beyond the ‘physical limits of audibility’ of the actual recording site, encouraging a sense of belonging and familiarity that can maintain positive feelings towards past experiences of the county. (Ouzounian, 2017, p. 15.)

This is, unavoidably, conjecture. Website visitors generally remain anonymous. How do we gauge whether the site is accomplishing what it meant to do: encourage people to develop their sense of place? Has it improved common perceptions of the county and encouraged local pride, as we said it would in our funding application?

Occasionally people leave comments on the site, allowing us an insight into people's reception to the map. For instance, one user thanked us for uploading a ‘valuable’ recording of a manual telephone exchange in Brentwood, recorded in 1972 for a radio documentary. As a former employee of the General Post Office (predecessor to British Telecom), the recording brought back to him memories of how things used to be done, processes which he described in his comment. Other contributors shared similar background knowledge, adding valuable contextual information to the historic sounds in particular. Some shared personal connections to the sounds, or the places in which they were recorded. These comments suggest the sounds struck a chord, taking users back to past experiences.

We also conducted online surveys in an effort to collect more qualitative measures of success. There are disadvantages to using online surveys, primarily because they are self-selecting: only people who have strong feelings about the site will bother to leave feedback. Nevertheless, they give some insight into why people are using Essex Sounds, and what they are gaining from it.

We asked users whether the site changed their perceptions of Essex. One respondent, from outside Essex, said it did: ‘Reminded me of the rural parts of Essex not just the urban areas.’ Though we have not collected a statistically significant number of responses, all respondents acknowledged that using the site improved their awareness of

Essex's history. Seventy-five percent stated that the site gave them a greater appreciation for the sounds of Essex, and for soundscapes generally.

Ninety percent of visitors to the site are first-time visitors, and only 10% are repeat visitors. [8] The average site visit lasts a mere two and a half minutes. Therefore, as is the nature of online services, the majority of the visitors only engage with Essex Sounds briefly, and it is unlikely to make a deep impact. It is hoped that the site has a greater effect on those who choose to return.

For some, the site is more definitely of interest, as they have engaged with it further by contributing their own recordings. Sometimes the recordings were collected for another purpose and merely shared on Essex Sounds. For others, the recordings were made specifically, hopefully having been motivated by the site to record a soundscape. The website allows users to write extensive text to accompany their recordings, enabling them to explain their reasons behind making and submitting the recording and potentially maintaining a connection between the sound and the emotional attachment to the sound. (Waldock, 2011) One user in particular has demonstrated a prolonged interest in the site, submitting numerous recordings, either of personal interest, or in response to other recordings and comments made on the site. Predominantly a photographer, he has also evidenced technical development in making field recordings, explaining in comments that he has learned tips from other recordings published on Essex Sounds. Thus some users have become more conscious listeners, and of Essex sounds in particular, due to the site.

There are limits to how far a sound map can represent a place. No two individuals perceive a sound in an identical way. Even for one person, no one sound can be repeatedly experienced in an identical way; the sound event is affected by other sounds and environmental conditions in each exact moment in time. (Powell, 2014-2015)

Additionally, extracting the sound from the occurrence that created it and the location in which it was found can affect how it is perceived. Does listening at home enable more positive reception? Of the factors discovered by Davies et. al. that encourage 'positive' soundscapes, listening at home has many: the user actively chooses which sounds to hear and controls for how long they listen; and they can discover the source of the sounds by reading the contextual information on the site. (Davies et. al., 2012.) Can this prompt the user to be more positively receptive when they then move outside the home to encounter similar soundscapes in person as they happen?

By adding historic sounds to the map, Essex Sounds encourages the user to think comparatively, particularly if using the app version within the place recorded; to perceive the distant past, the past, and the present of the place as they are represented by the place's soundscapes. The option for users to add their own contributions makes the map more representative, allowing multiple agents to create it rather than it being one authority's depiction of a place.

Yet the subjectivity of listening also places limitations on the historical comparison element. Recreated sounds such as vintage machines will not be perceived the same when taken outside of the context in which they were originally made: the original factory setting or the different soundscapes of a railway line a hundred years ago. Even listening to historic recordings will be different for the present-day user: a recording of

the 1950s cattle market may be interpreted through emotions of nostalgia or amusement; while to a contemporary passer-by, the sounds might have been filtered through a lens of annoyance at a weekly inconvenience, or perhaps hope, relief, or disappointment as the auction proceeded. Nevertheless, it is hoped that raising awareness of changing sounds will help to create a deeper sense of place, a connection to the county's heritage and sense of rootedness through imagining sharing a listening experience with past and present inhabitants of that space. (Colbert, 2013-2014)

Taking these limitations into account, the Essex Sounds map remains a valuable tool for both encouraging people to tune into the soundscapes around them, and then to build a connection to the spaces they occupy based on those soundscapes. Despite its age, dating back to the 1960s, soundscape art remains a largely niche culture: more work is needed to encourage listening as a common habit. While the majority of soundscape artists aim towards an ecological outcome from their work, it is also important to encourage deep listening in order to fully tune into the cultural as well as natural heritage of a place. Whether the accents of overheard conversations, the sounds of local industries, or even the driving styles of a place evidenced in accelerating engine noises, tuning in can encourage a greater awareness of what makes a place what it is.

Conclusion: Future of Essex Sounds

Essex Sounds will remain publicly accessible for at least five years from the formal end of the You Are Hear project, until the summer of 2023, though we will have minimal staff resources to do more than basic maintenance on the site. This basic maintenance will encompass publishing new recordings when submitted by members of the public and publicising it through the Essex Record Office's social media channels when appropriate, for example highlighting our birdsong recordings each International Dawn Chorus Day.

As a snapshot of what Essex sounded like c. 2015-2018, having a limited lifespan is not necessarily a flaw. Presenting the recordings we captured on Essex Sounds has been a fascinating and rewarding way to encourage people to wake up to the sounds around them. With the pace of technological change, the site and its functionality may quickly start to look dated. The website as a means of presenting recordings will have served its purpose.

However, the recordings themselves will serve a more enduring purpose. All of the recordings made by Stuart, and hopefully some public contributions, will be added to the Essex Sound and Video Archive: both the raw wav master files, and the edited mp3 clips published on the website. These will be managed by ESVA for future researchers. Throughout the process of building Essex Sounds, we often wished that we had recordings in the archive of lost sounds and places: recent sounds such as coal rumbling down a chute into someone's cellar, or long-lost sounds such as major country estates in their eighteenth-century heyday. We intend that future researchers will benefit from what we have captured today, and be able to more fully explore how the sounds of Essex are changing. What will they make of the way people talk today, the music played, the sounds of our roads? Will places be recognisable purely by their soundscapes? What sounds will be lost, or perhaps revived? On the verge of further development of the landscape, and continued technological changes, it is important that

we preserve the sounds of today for the future. We hope that the natural sounds we have captured – birdsong, urban foxes, or simply wind rustling tree leaves – will not be lost in future, but the prevalence of some types of bird species that crop up in our recordings, or the absence of them, might be of interest for ecological research.

In the short-term future, we now have a varied bank of audio recordings, gathered together under a Creative Commons licence for non-commercial use and reuse. This licence was stipulated by the funder in order to provide free access to the project outputs for the general public. However, it also benefits the archive, as it leaves us with a bank of recordings that could be re-used for new projects. ESVA would be excited to hear from artists or researchers who see an opportunity to use these samples of Essex sounds as a springboard for new work.

One potential future use would be to incorporate memories and emotions triggered by the sounds into the map interface, as recommended by Anderson in her critique of traditional sound maps. (Anderson, 2016) ESVA champions oral history testimonies of everyday people's experiences of the past. Targeted discussions around the Essex Sounds recordings could be a future focus for collecting interviews and re-presenting them in conjunction with the original recordings.

Additionally, attempts could be made to widen awareness of and contributions to the website, as recommended by Waldo. (2011) While we have engaged with some local schools, further connections could be made to encourage children's deep listening skills. We could also seek to engage with minority voices, giving them a platform to share their experiences and everyday soundscapes.

In conclusion, we once more ask the big question: what does Essex sound like? Was it possible to find silence? No, not truly. But there were moments, in places, where it was very quiet. Broadly speaking, Essex does sound like traffic and birds. These generic soundscapes reflect the generic high streets of many British towns, at risk of losing individuality and the heritage that defines them. However, when we stop and listen a little closer, we can discern a unique blend of urban-rural-seaside-industrial-London-overspill-hectic-tranquil-wild-manufactured noises that present Essex as it really is. But do not take our word for it, or merely engage with Essex Sounds from a distance through your computer speakers. Come see, and listen to, Essex for yourself.

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Endnotes

[1] Snapping the Stiletto: About, retrieved from <https://snappingthestiletto.com/>, 12 December 2018.

[2] Essex Economic Assessment: Evidence (Appendix 1), retrieved from <http://www.essex.gov.uk/AnalyticsReports/Appendix%201%20Essex%20EA%20160810.pdf>,

25 July 2018, Section 2: 'Theme: People and Communities'.

[3] We are particularly grateful to Peter Cusack of the Favourite Sounds site (<http://favouritesounds.org>), Ian Rawes of the London Sound Survey (www.soundsurvey.org.uk), and Alice Heywood of the Oor Wullie audio map (<http://digital.nls.uk/oor-wullie/audio-map/>) for sharing their methods with us.

[4] We gathered all our attempts to record tranquil atmospheres under the topic 'Quiet Places' on the Essex Sounds map.

[5] ONS Mid-year Population Estimates 2008, cited in Essex Economic Assessment: Evidence (Appendix 1), p. 24.

[6] Essex Economic Assessment Evidence (Appendix 1), p. 4.

[7] Many of these hits have come from users looking up information on another aspect of the You Are Hear project, a sub-section of the Essex sounds website.

[8] Measuring repeat visits is of limited meaning, as it cannot take into account users clearing cookies and histories from their browsers.

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Biography

Sarah-Joy Maddeaux is the Sound Archivist at the Essex Record Office, where she delivered a three-year project, *You Are Hear: sound and a sense of place*. Her most recent publication came out of a previous project, an article co-written with Andrew Flack, “‘Ask of the Beasts and They Shall Teach Thee’: Animal Representations in Bristol Zoo Guidebooks’ (*Society and Animals*, 26:5, 2018). Stuart’s practice is rooted in places and communities that exist on the fringes, both geographically and socially, with a particular interest in the sonic landscape, capturing overlooked and overheard noises and using sound as a documentative and creative medium. He has contributed field recordings to Peter Cusack’s *Favourite Sounds* project, Stuart Fowkes’ *Cities and Memory* project as well as his own projects, Arts Council England funded *The River Runs Through Us* (with Ruth Philo) and Dedham Vale AONB funded *Confluent: River of Words*. This article is based on a paper delivered at the 2017 Sound+Environment Conference, Hull.

Stuart Bowditch. Stuart’s practice is rooted in places and communities that exist on the fringes, both geographically and socially, with a particular interest in the sonic landscape, capturing overlooked and overheard noises and using sound as a documentative and creative medium.