



From the city to the countryside

Essex Community Foundation (ECF) is a charitable fund giving away millions of pounds to local charities. Each month, we hear from ECF about the worthy causes and inspirational people it works with

WORDS: Anne Fitzgerald, Essex Community Foundation

Living in rural Essex was fully embraced by Jonathan Minter after a long career in London and abroad as a fund manager. His work involved much international travel, but coming to live at Rivers Hall in Boxted, near Colchester, following early retirement, has brought more joy than his years in the city had ever given.

Ancient woodland and water meadows surround picturesque Rivers Hall, which is set in 1,100 acres, and Jonathan and his wife, Margaret (Jonny and Miff), have ensured that conservation and community involvement are at the heart of managing the estate.

'I am the third generation to live at Rivers Hall, which was bought by my grandfather, Sir Frederick Minter, almost 100 years ago,' Jonny says. 'His objective was to turn it into a shooting estate, back when they went out wearing spats and plus twos – a completely different world from today. When I retired and came back to the family home in 2006, I had my own ideas about how to build on his legacy.'

'I took over sole control of the estate management, and since that time, there has been considerable progress. My grandfather had planted trees and hedgerows and now

about half the estate is woodland and water meadows. We have received several awards for conservation work and, since 2010, the farm has been in Higher Level Stewardship, which brings more environmental benefits.'

Wildlife flourishes at Rivers Hall, including barn owls, water voles, lapwings and redshanks, but the greatest success has been the re-introduction of the endangered English partridge, which has gained widespread recognition. Farming in sympathy with the environment lies at the core of the estate's philosophy.

'I fully appreciate it is a privilege to live here in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and that there are areas desperately in need of support only a few miles away,' he says.

Jonny is mindful of the wider Essex community, so as well as being a farmer and conservationist, he is a philanthropist. His land hosts a Forest School for local children and a Men's Shed, which now has 74 members, and has been established in formerly disused barns on the estate. It gives men a place to socialise, support each other and share practical skills.

Jonny is a former Chair of Trustees of ECF, with ECF, with the Minter Family Fund being set up in 2011. It is tailored to Jonny and

above: Jonny and Miff Minter. Photo: Steve Brading

Miff's interests and gives grants to voluntary organisations concerned with young people, the environment, conservation and the sea.

The land at Rivers Hall is also the location for organised visits by metal detectorists and money raised from these events is channelled into the family fund.

Jonny says: 'ECF has become one of the joys of my life. They present us with applications that meet the criteria we set for our Fund and we decide which ones to support. The beauty is that they undertake all the administration and financial management. My son, Ben, applied to ECF to become a Trustee, and I was thrilled when he told me his application had been successful. My hope is that Ben, and the next generations of our family, will continue to be involved with our Fund, but if not, it will be our legacy to Essex and grants will continue to be awarded in line with our original wishes, forever.' ●

ECF can help you give back to your local community. Call 01245 355947, or visit essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk