

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S REPORT for period April, May, June 1999

Summary

1 The museum has taken delivery, through the kind offices of the Museum Society, of the Lindsell hoard, a collection of 23 4th century Roman silver coins. The exhibition *Jaws, Claws and Paws* opened at the end of March and has been enjoyed by visitors. It also provided the theme for a children's activity. Conservation assistance has been provided to Saffron Walden Archive Society to assist them in the care of records held in the Town Hall.

Special exhibitions

2 "*Jaws, Claws and Paws*", curated by Sarah Kenyon, opened at the end of March. It has proved successful with adults and children - alike - particularly the "Touch table."

3 Preparations are now in hand for the first of the millennium exhibitions "*Two Thousand Years of Treasures*", curated by Christine Allison and Julia Bazley. This uses artefacts currently in store and selections have been made from across the disciplines.

Events

4 Maureen Evans was present with a stall at the Saffron Walden Farm Club event. Sarah Kenyon attended the Rushy Mead Reserve open day, as well as promoting the Essex Biodiversity Action Plan, she took the opportunity to distribute the 'Predators' bookmarks and to publicise the museum.

Permanent gallery work

5 A gallery maintenance programme has been agreed, and this resulted in repainting the 'pargetting' stencils in the Local History gallery and retouching the paintwork in the mediaeval hearth and Iron Age hut areas. Work has also commenced on the redisplay of the building materials in the Local History gallery. This work has improved the general look of these areas.

6 Research has continued on the proposed display of the Great Chesterford material, as this important material has not previously been available for public view in the museum. A cheque for £400 was received from Great Chesterford Archaeological Group towards a display case. A reconstruction painting of Great Chesterford in Roman times was received in the form of a transparency from Peter Froste. Phase II of the report on this site has been received from Essex County Council.

7 Lighting in the ethnography gallery cases continues to be problematic. Various quotes have been received, for external lighting and also for fibre optic lighting. The latter is very expensive. The external lighting will be behind pelmets on the tops of the cases and therefore will not be intrusive within the gallery.

Education

8 School visits continue to be successful with the Ancient Egyptians still featuring heavily in the Education Officer's teaching sessions. In addition to the regular visits from primary school children, Bell College have also requested taught sessions with Jenny Gibsone, the Education Officer, on several occasions this term.

9 The Easter activity was an art workshop on the predators theme of the current exhibition, where the children made some wicked webs, cruel jaws and awesome paws! Jenny Gibsone ran story telling sessions from various time periods and countries, using objects from the collection as inspiration in the museum over half-term. The sound effects definitely added to the dramatic stories - popular with children and adults alike. Following the successful conclusion of the previous course for the Cambridge University Board of Continuing Education, a request has been received to run a further course from January to March 2000, entitled "Exploration, Encounters and Empire" and will be collections-based.

- 10 Jenny Gibsone was requested to run a reminiscence session at the Day Care Centre. The History of the Museum was the subject of an evening talk by Jenny to the Methodist Wives Group. Saffron Walden Archive Society visited the museum and enjoyed a series of short talks - Christine Allison on the museum's document collection, Jane Carter on the early history of the museum, and Jackie Cooper on her researches using the museum's archive.

Loans in

- 11 Sixteen loan items, consisting of ivory, tortoiseshell and snakeskin items have been received from the Museum of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy, University College, London. These are for use in the 'Man the Hunter.'

Loans out

- 12 No objects have been loaned out in this period. Objects are currently being reviewed and assembled as possible "candidates" for conservation at DeMontfort University, Lincoln.

Identification, Enquiries, Assistance with Research, Professional Visitors

- 13 Objects have been identified for eighteen people over the last three months, the majority of which were archaeological remains, coins and natural history objects.
- 14 Enquiries have covered, as always, a wide range of subjects, and yet more interest has been shown in the Henry Winstanley papers. Twenty researchers have used the collections during the past three months, with interest in local history material, especially the Guy Maynard papers, the John Player archive, and the saffron crocus material.
- 15 The local history recorders were invited to the museum, to inform them of the museum's resources which might be useful and also to provide the opportunity to elicit information from them. The East Anglian Conservators' Forum met at the museum in May, this brought together conservation officers from around the region to discuss pests within the museum environment and their management. An adult education class from Thetford visited the museum to study the ceramics with their lecturer.

Access

- 16 The EVAC chair is in place and staff, as appropriate, have received further training. The chair was sponsored by Saffron Walden Herts and Essex Building Society.

Publicity and Marketing

- 17 The 'predators' bookmarks were produced (free of charge) in co-operation with the Council's Committee and Public relations Manager. One side of the bookmark publicises the Uttlesford web site and the other side advertises the *Jaws, Claws and Paws* exhibition. They are handed to school children in the museum and will be useful as free publicity material at forthcoming events, such as Saffron Walden Carnival.
- 18 'Free' publicity has again been maximised by Maureen Evans over the last three months, with the children's workshops providing interesting photo- opportunities. Members of staff have also appeared on radio and television. Analysis of the February visitor survey shows that, during the winter months, local people from Saffron Walden and the Uttlesford district account for over 50% of the visitors. The museum is considered to be value for money (99.8%) and over 70% of visitors marked the museum as excellent/very good as an overall experience and also in the welcome they received from staff and volunteers.

Attendances, income and shop sales

- 19 The overall visitor figures are rather erratic compared with 1998/9. School visits were higher in April and May, but seriously lower in June. This was partly due to the half-term falling in June, which led to a loss of school income and also a consequential loss of shop income.

Security and Buildings Maintenance

- 20 The external CCTV camera has now been installed and is on 24 hour recording. The fire alarm system in the school/room lab has been overhauled and is now linked to a 24 hour monitoring service. In April, Newport

Store was surveyed for installation of a 24 hour monitored fire alarm, which would be purchased through the Risk Management budget on health and safety grounds. The annual portable electrical equipment testing has taken place.

- 21 Permission has been granted for the "Beware: Children Ahead" sign to be erected close to the bottom of the drive, warning motorists entering the grounds.

Collections Management

- 22 A pest monitoring programme was set up with Dr Simmons of Igrox, and a report prepared as a result of his findings. This indicated that there were localised problems: in one of the ethnography cases, in the textile store, ethnography store and the natural history store. The pleasing news was that the outbreak was not as serious as had originally been considered and the problems can be dealt with in-house.
- 23 A programme of reducing light levels entering the museum has been put into place. The light-damaged curtains in the Local History gallery have been replaced by a cotton blind, and the curtains within the doll's house area in the Furniture gallery have also been replaced. A quote was received for the application of solar film to the bay window of the Great Hall, which excludes heat as well as UV.
- 24 A gallery cleaning and maintenance programme has been drafted. All museum staff have agreed to be part of a week long "team clean" in December. Meanwhile a staff working group thoroughly cleaned Newport store: objects, shelves, and floors. The mollusc collection has been sorted into order and moved onto shelving in the Newport store by the Natural Sciences Officer. Within the museum, Heather Southorn, the MGC Conservation Intern, has cleaned Wallace - a large task! She has undertaken a survey of the ethnographic store, relabelled objects, checked for insect infestation, cleaned covered and repackaged a significant part of this collection. The cleaning of the Great Hall objects following the removal of the thatch was completed.

Collections Research and Development

- 25 Christine Allison and Julia Bazley are researching for the forthcoming *"Two Thousand Years of Treasures"* exhibition. Sarah Kenyon researched British birds and mammals for production of the label booklets accompanying the Predators display.

Documentation

- 26 A Documentation planning meeting has been held and an action plan decided. Funding has been obtained again to use the services of Jamie Everitt, on a short-term contract, to continue inputting archaeological data. The discussions with Essex County Council, Libraries and Heritage Department, on the digitization of images and information from a number of Essex museums' collections for incorporation in SEAX is still ongoing.

Additions to the Collections

- 27 Objects accessioned into the collections over the last three months include a French wasps nest from Beeches Close, a large engraving of the Dunmow Flitch, published in October 1806, and a collection of newspapers and photographs relating to the closure of the railway in Saffron Walden. The Lindsell hoard of 23 Roman silver coins, heavily clipped, has also come into the museum's possession, purchased by the Museum Society.

Training and Development

- 28 Lynn Morrison and Sarah Kenyon attended a "Webwise" internet training course at Thaxted. Sarah Kenyon attended a weekend course on woodland plant identification, which is aimed to assist her in performing hedgerow surveys. Lynn Morrison attended the Care of Collections Forum at the Tate Gallery, which discussed conservation plans. She also attended a first aid refresher course at Uttlesford District Council offices. Maureen Evans completed the computer training course and also attended an internet training course. A fire and emergency refresher course for all staff was held, and included training in the use of fire extinguishers.

Management

- 29 The removal of the thatch caused health problems to the three workmen involved, the problems have now been resolved. It has been recommended that a paper be written about the incident which would alert other museums to a potential hazard if they use a substantial amount of thatching material within a gallery.
- 30 a small working group of officers and volunteers carried out visits to other museums using an electronic till system. The group will be meeting the Chief Executive to report back in mid July.
- 31 The museum awaits the guidelines for the Designation process. These are due shortly. Designation is a scheme which carries the opportunity to access government funding through the Museums and Galleries Commission. To date only 46 museums have been granted designated status, but it is felt that the importance of Saffron Walden Museum's collections merits an application to join this elite group.
- 32 Sarah Kenyon has carried out work on the protected roadside verge scheme and undertook a hedgerow survey on behalf of the Planning Department at Little Dunmow. Lynn Morrison has provided practical assistance to the Saffron Walden Archive Society in the care of the town's document collections. She has also assisted Thaxted Guildhall with the care of a deteriorating iron sword.
- 33 Christine Allison attended meetings of South Midlands Museum Federation, the Essex Curators Group, the Fry Art Gallery, Ashdon Museum Society group and the Archive group. Lynn Morrison and Christine Allison have advised Ashdon Museum on matters relating to their museum move to Ashdon Labour Hall. Advice has been given to Great Dunmow Museum Society, and Christine Allison has been designated as the curatorial adviser. She will assist them, as required, with setting up a museum in the Maltings. Sarah Kenyon attended the Local Agenda 21 Initiative meetings. She has also attended meetings of the Essex Wildlife Trust and the Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working Group. The Essex Biodiversity Action Plan was published in March 1999, and Sarah has been involved in preparing events and an exhibition to celebrate and promote nature conservation. She has also attended a committee meeting of the Biology Curators Group.

Staff and Volunteers

- 34 Julia Bazley has returned from maternity leave, on a part-time basis at this time. Sue Miller, who provided part-time maternity cover for Julia, will return for one-day a week to assist with documentation and enquiries. As from October, an element of Julia's salary will be used to help extend the short-term contract for Jamie Everitt.

Christine Allison
22.7.99

Appendix 1

Attendances [97/98]	Public	[98/99]		Schools	[98/99]	Total
April	1615	1624	433	256	2048	1880
May 2057	833	1502		739	555	1572
June	1019	1164		527	1416	1546 2580
July						
August						
September						
October						
November						
December						
January						
February						
March						
TOTALS						

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Appendix 2

	Income Donation	Entrance [98/99]	[98/99]	Schools Box	[98/99]	Shop	[98/99]	
April	1094.50	756.50	511.25	168.00	1061.44	741.03	66.24	54.30
May	427.50 48.30	751.50	605.00	610.50	994.54	1202.81		33.48
June	486.00 36.45	481.00	661.75	1436.00	831.41	1694.83		30.24
July								
August								
September								
October								
November								
December								
January								
February								
March								
TOTALS								