

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT October - December 2001

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Strategic Plan A building with potential for conversion to an off-site resource centre for reserve collections has been viewed by the Curator in the Clavering area, thanks to Cllr David Miller who arranged the visit. Efforts are being made meanwhile to engage BAA in discussions concerning the future of the archaeological archives from excavations at the Airport, however it is clear that this issue cannot be quickly resolved.

Electronic Till Preparatory work continues with assistance from TIC staff, but much remains to be completed before training of volunteers can commence.

1.2 Staff

Congratulations to Julia Bazley and Jonathan on the birth of their second son, Adam, born on 9th December.

Roger Kirkpatrick is now back for Sunday relief duty following a hip replacement.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Volunteers: The volunteers' support is particularly valuable over the Christmas & New Year period, enabling us to open 363 days a year. A 'thank-you' gathering for volunteers and supporters was arranged for January 7th 2002. As well as desk duties, volunteers have helped with re-packing and indexing collections. Patrick Nathan (new volunteer) helped with team clean week.

Mary Adams now comes regularly to help with cash and statistics. A tree will be planted in the grounds in memory of her husband, Malcolm.

Work Experience: Julia Haugh continued to provide invaluable assistance during the preparation of the *Flight into the Past* exhibition.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

First Aid training for Appointed Persons - all staff attended one-day course in October

Free Internet training sessions provided by Martyn Everett at the Library for all Museum staff

Managing Stress, UDC, 13.11.2001 – Natural Sciences and Conservation Officers

BCG training day on Mammal collections, 17.12.2001 - Natural Sciences Officer

Museums Association Conference, London, 2 days attending sessions and taking part in the professional forum for MAGDA. (Museums & Galleries Disability Association.) – Visitor Services Officer

MAGDA AGM and access seminar, Walsall New Art Gallery – Visitor Services Officer

Pests conference, British Library – the Conservation Officer presented a poster display on problems we had with the thatch and biscuit beetle 2-3 years ago.

UKIC Archaeology Section AGM and talks – Conservation Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

Training session held in October for all staff on freeing a trapped passenger from the main passenger lift. This was conducted under the supervision of Peter Shepherd (UDC Planned Services Manager) and a surveyor from the lift maintenance company.

1.6 Town Library – sharing of journals

Back numbers of archaeological journals have now been stamped, listed and boxed ready to go to the Town Library on long-term renewable loan as previously agreed.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Internal work: windows in Ceramics Gallery, Local History, Temporary Exhibitions Gallery, Great Hall bay and Costume Gallery were repainted by Roalco. Sundry repairs to surrounding plasterwork were also carried out. Part of the back passage ceiling was also renewed. The programme of refurbishment of the Furniture Gallery area, ready for redisplay, began in December as requested but with the departure of the Repairs officer overseeing this work, its completion has been delayed. Stuart Elms (Maintenance section, Property Services) is now overseeing all buildings projects relating to the Museum premises.

External work: Re-pointing to areas behind three external down pipes. Ivy growth and overhanging trees were removed from the back passage area.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Nothing to report this quarter

2.3 Newport Store

Newport Store flooded on 22 October to a height of 8-9” at ground floor level. This resulted in a lot of work for staff in moving wet objects, boxes and drawers, dealing with malfunctioning equipment, power cuts and alarm system failures, as well as subsequent cleaning and reorganising salvaged collections. The store floor has been cleaned by a contractor. A report has been drafted and work continues. Two new small dehumidifiers have replaced the one damaged by floodwater, and the Curator is making a submission to Risk Management Group concerning the extra costs which the Museum has incurred. This only emphasises the need for alternative premises to house the collections adequately.

2.4 40 Castle Street

Work on the main roof went out to tender in December. Courtenay Building Contractors have been appointed and are expected to start work in February 2002. They will also be carrying out routine clearance and checking of the gutters etc. on the Museum and Schoolroom/Laboratory buildings at the same time.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

A bench made of recycled plastic has been donated by Waitrose and placed opposite the Museum entrance near the tennis court fence. The brick plinth to the right pillar at the front gate was repaired. A site meeting to discuss the Church Street entrance was arranged between Edwin Planterose, Stuart Elms (Property Services) and the Curator for 11 January.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions

138 acquisitions this quarter, including

- 1950s clothing.
- A collection of party games.
- Natural History specimens: mounted birds and mammals

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

- Checking natural history galleries and stores for pests (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Other stores and parts of the museum checked, traps renewed - only moth presents a problem this quarter (Conservation Officer)
- A quantity of objects conserved by Lincoln students was collected in October, some of which is to be displayed next year, and other material was left for conservation by them.
- Conservation and display work on Stansted material was carried out.
- Two of the clocks on display have been repaired by Mr M Howe.
- Thermohygrographs and environmental equipment were monitored as they are usually twice a year; two of the recording devices need repair.
- Visit to Royal Armouries, Leeds to see storage and mounting methods for display of Japanese armour (Conservation Officer)

Remedial conservation work has included:

- Simple washing of specimens affected by flooding at Newport store (ongoing)
- Textiles in the collection continue to be washed and repaired in the Lab.
- Hassal collection of dolls house furniture and memorabilia. repacked by volunteers
- Waterlogged leather from recent excavations in Thaxted is being freeze dried at the Museum of London after preliminary work in the Museum Laboratory

3.3 Documentation

No of new accessions catalogued: 137

Documentation Assistant Shirley Miller has made good progress with the cataloguing of the contents of the Organic Store (over 3,000 entries by the end of December) and expects to complete the basic inventory of the entire store (some 3,500 items) at the end of January. This will leave the remaining 2 months researching other records in the Museum, enhancing the catalogue with further information where available, and assisting in the selection and research of items for display in the Furniture gallery.

3.4 Loans In : 2

Saffron Walden Searchers Metal Detecting Club loaned archaeological finds representing all periods from early prehistoric to 20th century, for display during the archaeology weekend 13th-14th October which launched *Flight into the Past*. Saffron Walden Town Council loaned the Cigar Box presented to R.A. Butler by Saffron Walden Borough Council in 1954, for display in the Local History Gallery.

3.5 Loans Out : 1

A few archaeological items (pots and stone tools) were loaned to Saffron Walden Library for a display in October to promote archaeological books.

Passenger pigeon specimen was returned after exhibition at Chelmsford Museum.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 14

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 112 by phone, fax, email, letter or by visitors without appointment.

3.7 Researchers

11 research visits in person by appointment, including:

- 1 group of 30 German lacemakers to view lace samples in our collections
- Fashion students from the University of East London who came to see Victorian costume
- A local PhD student researching the Borough Police
- A person with an Edwardian bodice for possible donation

Other collections research

The American bittern specimen has been accepted by the British Ornithologists' Union Rarities Committee as being the first record of the bird for Essex, and the second record for the British Isles. This follows eighteen months of research by Nick Green, of the Essex Birdwatching Society, and S Kenyon, Natural Sciences Officer.

In October four fox corpses were sent to the Mammal Research Unit at Bristol University for autopsy to provide data for the National Fox Survey. The foxes died accidentally and were collected by members of the Uttlesford Local Agenda 21 group for the research project. The Natural Sciences Officer coordinated the documentation, storage in the museum freezer and their dispatch for the project.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

- A team clean of part of the galleries took place 17 – 21 December 2002.
- Dolls house relocated in the Toys case, which has been rearranged

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

13 October – 7 April 2002 *Flight into the Past – Archaeology of Stansted Airport*. This exhibition has proved popular with all ages, particularly the sand pit of 'finds'. There was a good crop of blooms from the saffron crocus planted for *Saffron on Show*

4.3 Visitor Services

Visitors

'Professional' visitors have included Stephen Lowry, the new Essex Museums Officer with colleagues, and David Laing, the new Museum Society Treasurer. The monthly survey of Museum visitors continues.

	Public		Schools		Total	
	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000
October	1262	2206*	535	883	1797	3089
November	524	760	822	782	1346	1542
December	866	918	375	186	1241	1104
Total	2652	3884	1732	1851	4384	5735

*Figures are distorted by huge success of the dinosaurs exhibition opened in October 2000, but are very similar to 1999, with some 'slowing down' post 11-11-2001

• Shop

	2001	2000
October	1111.15	2022.75*
November	990.95	835.41
December	608.58	457.86
Total £	2710.68	3316.02

* See dinosaurs above

Tickets

	2001	2000
October	577.50	945.50*
November	256.50	340.50
December	355	371
Total £	1189	1657

* See dinosaurs above

Donations

	2001	2000
October	62.60	55.88
November	36.46	37.47
December	30.08	23.16
Total £	129.14	116.74

Publicity and Marketing

The local press continue to give good editorial and photographic coverage of exhibitions and events. The Viking Day was publicised on BBC Essex Radio. Details of museum activities also appear on numerous websites. The museum's own Christmas card, featuring a festive cake decoration from the collections, included a brief summary of 2001's achievements, and was widely distributed. The Visitor Services Officer attended the inaugural meeting of Uttlesford Tourism Forum.

Corporate Entertainment

Hibbs & Walsh Associates held a successful launch and reception in the main Museum on December 13th. Approximately 40 guests attended. Costs of staffing & security included in the hire fee.

Following this successful 'trial reception', it is intended to offer the Museum to the local business community for appropriate corporate entertainment events, and Committee are asked to approve the extension of this scheme. A copy of the draft conditions are attached to these minutes.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

61 booked school sessions taken by Education Officer, autumn term 2001 (September – December): 1607 children and 263 adults attended these sessions. Other groups taught at the museum during this period include:

- adults with special needs from Fairycroft House
- student teachers from Homerton College
- Home Educated Children of Cambridgeshire Group.

3 school loan boxes were sent out. Tourism students from S.W.County High School students conducted visitor surveys.

5.2 Events and Activities at the Museum

13 October **Find Yourself at the Museum** – a family archaeology day to launch the *Flight into the Past* exhibition. Hilary Major (Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit) and Gerald Lucy (local geologist) joined Museum staff to offer identifications for finds brought in by the public. Some 20 families or individuals brought objects to the Museum Additional displays of local finds were provided by Saffron Walden Searchers Metal Detecting Club.

1 October Museum Society **lecture on Dick Turpin** by Mrs Georgina Green.

20 October **The Big Draw** (national event to encourage participation in art) Two drawing workshops were held for children aged 8 – 12.

23 October **Rubbish Rodeo** – Half-term activity for families, Rubbish Recycling Rodeo, was held, in conjunction with the Essex Waste Watch Officer for Schools and Waitrose supermarket. A garden bench made of recycled plastic bags was awarded by John Lewis plc for the museum grounds.

12 November Museum Society **lecture on the early excavations at the Stansted Airport site** given by County Archaeologist Richard Havis.

1 December **Viking Day** – attended by about 300 visitors. Two members of Regia Anglorum and Grunal the Moneyer provided an excellent insight into Viking times, with plenty of replicas to handle and the chance to strike your own Viking coin. Museum staff provided Viking storytelling for younger visitors, and a more formal illustrated talk for those who wanted to know more on the background to the period.

10 December **Museum Society Christmas Social**. Shirley Miller (Documentation Assistant) gave a short presentation on the Society-funded project to catalogue the contents of the Organic Social History store.

5.3 Outreach

Museum activities at other venues:

28 October **Tales of the Wildwood** – the Natural Sciences Officer provided some animal and bird specimens to accompany a wildlife puppet show for children (organised by the Arts Development Officer) at Saffron Walden Town Hall.

7 December **Late Night Opening**. To fit with this year's Dickensian theme, the Museum provided a simple quiz ("What the Dickens is This?" - 10 mystery Victorian household objects) in the Tourist Information Centre. The winner, a visitor from Cambridge, received a small local history prize from the Museum and TIC.

9 December **Farm Club Christmas Fair** with items for sale and Museum's mole

Television

27 November BBC 2's series *Blood of the Vikings* (presented by Julian Richards) featured Saffron Walden Museum and the piece of alleged Viking skin from the door of Hadstock Church. The programme published the results of the DNA tests which showed that the skin belonged in fact to a cow. However the story received good media coverage and stimulated interest in the Museum's Viking Day.

Other Museums and Local Groups supported

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice to:

- Ashdon Village Museum
- Great Dunmow Museum Society – preliminary discussions about the loan of part of the *Flight into the Past* exhibition to Dunmow after it finishes at Saffron Walden
- Fry Art Gallery Society – meeting to select designers for the Art Gallery's HLF project for a new storage and study area; Committee meeting (Curator)
- Newport Museum – the Curator attended a public meeting in Newport on 22 October and provided some advice and information to those involved in this initiative
- Henham – advice given on care and storage of village local history archive
- Environment Agency (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Biodiversity Action Plan steering group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Uttlesford) Committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Local Agenda 21 Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group and LA21 Forum (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges Committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working (Natural Sciences Officer)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

The Curator is now Hon. Secretary of the South Midlands Museums Federation, a professional regional organisation for museums and those who work in them.

- Eastern Region Consultation Group [Resource] Learning and Access Standards (Education Officer)
- Visitor Services Officer gave advice to various museums and galleries on access and disability issues on behalf of MAGDA.

Talks and Lectures given by Museum staff:

- Takeley Historical Society (Curator)
- Manuden History Society (Curator)

Future Programme and Projects

Forthcoming major events and developments for information, and urgent matters arising since the end of the quarter.

1 Museum Management and Staff

Preparation for Best Value Review which takes place April – November 2002 for Museum and Leisure Services, will begin in January and make additional demands on staff time, chiefly the Curator's. The Museum Society Committee will need not only to be kept informed of progress with this Review but also to play an active role. The Curator will be seeking Committee's views on 31st January as to how this can best be achieved.

2 Buildings and Site

Dolls House bay windows to be repaired. Chris Rix has been awarded the contract to undertake electrical works recommended as a result of the fixed wiring test report of December 2000. This work will be completed in January 2002. Heaters in Furniture gallery and Ceramics gallery to be overhauled and the insulation to be checked for asbestos. Area of blown plaster in Ethnography store to be replastered.

3 Collections and Research

Newport store collections work will be ongoing.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Subject to the completion of repairs and redecoration by contractors, work on redisplaying the Furniture Gallery will progress.

5 Events, Education and Outreach

American bittern press call and 'master class' on 2 February 2002.

Local Agenda 21 bird identification seminar to be held in the schoolroom on 23 March 2002 for invited delegates who took part in the 2001 song thrush and sparrow survey (Natural Sciences Officer).

Children's Half Term Holiday Workshops on 19 and 20 February 2002.

Archaeology Lecture series on 21 January, 4 February, 4 and 25 March in Parish Rooms, all Monday evenings at 8pm.