

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT January – March 2002

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Best Value Review

A review of Leisure Services, including the Museum, starts in April and will examine and make recommendations on the future of these Services. It is essential not only to keep the Museum Society informed of the progress of the Review, but to involve the Society as a partner in the Review and in formulating recommendations. The Curator has already written to officers of the Society to ask if a Best Value working party could be formed to work with the Curator and the Council on Best Value Review.

The Committee is asked to consider this proposal and nominate representatives to form a Best Value Working Party.

Strategic Plan

In pursuit of a new Resource Centre to replace the offsite store, the Curator and Head of Community & Leisure Services have held discussions with senior UDC staff and Planning Officers to consider options.

Due to the floods last autumn at the Newport offsite store, the total cost of this building to the Museum Service for financial year 2001-02 has been approximately £7,000, of which £4,000 are directly attributable to the flood (about £2,000 on repairs and replacement of equipment and about £2,000-worth of staff time so far on clearing up the aftermath) and £3,000 on rates, electricity and alarm systems.

Electronic Till

A further two days' work with Mark Starte from TIC have been completed, also a short visit from Fry Scales with Mark. The next stage will include a reorganisation of the Workroom to relocate the till's computer, and entering stock figures once end-of-year finances and stock-taking are completed.

Budgets and Finance

The end-of-year financial round-up indicates all spending heads have been used to capacity, and all income targets have been met or comfortably exceeded except ticket sales. These showed a slight shortfall reflecting the reduced visitor numbers experienced across the sector due to exceptional events in 2001. David Laing, the new Museum Society Treasurer, has been most helpful in re-establishing financial links with the Museum.

1.2 Staff

The Museum has continued to benefit from **Vicky Turner**'s employment as full-time maternity leave cover for Julia Bazeley, Documentation & Exhibitions Officer, who returns to the Museum on 6th May.

Shirley Miller, Documentation Assistant, has successfully completed her 6-month contract funded by the Museum Society; a full report is in section 3.3 below. A very small underspend in the Museum's salaries budget has enabled us to extend Shirley's contract for three days per week until 5th May, to assist with other documentation tasks and in particular preparation for the SEAX project.

Staff have been very sorry to learn of Rodney Heath's hospitalisation and wish him a speedy recovery.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

The Museum held a "Thirteenth Night" party on 7th January to thank volunteers, friends and supporters for the work over the previous year.

Barbara Stubbington continues her work on textiles, and marking incoming objects. **Barbara Mensforth** has been recruited to deal with the paperwork from objects conserved at Lincoln University. **Deirdre Fletcher** is helping with cataloguing the backlog of photographs.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

Biology Curators Group committee meeting, Scunthorpe (Natural Sciences Officer)

Biological Record archives at Colchester Museum (Natural Sciences Officer)

Modes for Windows and digital images training (Documentation and Conservation Officers)

SEAX/NOF Digitise Project *Jewels of Essex*, meeting at ERO (Documentation & Exhibitions Officer)

Supervisory Skills course (Conservation Officer)

Digital imaging skills exchange, Epping Forest District Museum (Conservation Officer)

Best Value training (Curator, Natural Sciences and Conservation Officer)

Managing Volunteers course (Visitor Services Officer)

'Welcome All', free place on East Anglian Tourist Board training day for services to disabled visitors, arranged in conjunction with TIC (Saturday Assistant)

Thaxted launch of new volunteering directory by UCVS (Visitor Services Officer)

Hidden Resources: Access to Collections, MA seminar (Curator)

Marketing Challenges in 2002, Campaign for Museum seminar (Curator)

1.5 Health & Safety

Some minor modifications have been made in accordance with the Fire Assessment Recommendations last year: fire-proof panelling beside the rear cellar steps and an internal corridor door replaced with a more fireproof one.

1.6 Town Library – sharing of journals

Transfer to the Town Library is now complete

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Thanks to the considerable efforts of Stuart Elms (Surveyor, UDC Property Services), we are now on top of our maintenance plan again:

Gutters, Hoppers and Downpipes have been cleaned and inspected.

Extensive electrical works on the building, resulting from the fixed wiring test of December 2000, has been undertaken by Chris Rix. Emergency lighting has been replaced and distribution boards upgraded with RCD protection for the public areas.

Furniture Gallery - Hart Johns have redecorated this in preparation for the forthcoming updating of the displays. The bay window has been repaired and the whole area opened up.

Great Hall Window Lintels - to be replaced over two windows at far end of main building. They have been found to have decayed further than previously thought and will require more extensive renovation.

Windows to rear of building and lean-to store repainted

A bench made from recycled plastic bags has been installed in the grounds, donated by Waitrose following collaboration in last year's 'Rubbish Rodeo'.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Schoolroom redecorated during Easter holidays. Some rewiring work carried out by Chris Rix as a result of 2000 fixed wiring test. **Roof, gutters and downpipes** cleaned and inspected.

2.3 Newport Store

Work on collections affected by the flooding continues.

All the smaller geology cabinets have been raised to a higher level using breeze blocks. Two new dehumidifiers now installed and working, and the large one in front has been repaired. Bait was put down after mice were found to have entered.

2.4 40 Castle Street

Courtenay Building Associates have started **repairs to the roof**, and are expected to finish in the next few weeks.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

Decayed portions of flint perimeter wall have been repaired, especially around the Church Street gate. Gates re-painted in black with the wicket gate in white.

English Heritage have been sent details of the proposed memorial tree to Malcolm Adams and its site, and the visit and initial reaction of the Inspector is awaited before a formal application can be submitted.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions

55 acquisitions this quarter, including

- A collection of early 20th century glass Christmas decorations
- Noticeboard from Radwinter Road Community Hospital
- Gramophone and collection of records

- Archaeological report and 1 box pottery from 42B High Street, Dunmow

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

- Natural history stores were checked for pests in January
- Storage of 10 boxes of birds' nests has been reorganised
- 53 specimens of bird skins have been repackaged and stored, incorporating new acquisitions (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Birds and animals in the woodland diorama were cleaned (Natural Sciences Officer, Documentation & Exhibitions Officer)
- Wallace the Lion was surface cleaned (Conservation Officer, Gillian Hicks).
- Other elements of the team cleaning programme were completed by various staff in the galleries.

Remedial conservation work has included:

- American Bittern conserved and displayed in Victorian Museum Workroom
- Alex Flinn returned on a short contract to complete mounting the Roman child's lead coffin which is now on display
- Further work on mounting the Japanese armour and helmet, an article on Alex Flinn's conservation work has appeared in the Asian Art Newspaper
- Clocks were overhauled, cleaned and repaired by Mr Howe
- Waterlogged leather cobbler's waste, from medieval Thaxted, was collected from the Museum of London where it had been freeze dried. A replica medieval shoe has been commissioned.
- A Cambridgeshire colleague used lab equipment for a day treating ironwork (chargeable). Museum archaeological iron was similarly treated for display.

3.3 Documentation

No of new accessions catalogued: 60

In addition, documentation work on existing collections has progressed:

- Natural Sciences Officer commenced documentation of the mammal collection, 67 Modes records are completed to inventory level.
- Documentation and Exhibitions Officer has commenced computer documentation of loans into the museum.

Documentation Assistant (Social History) – project funded by Museum Society

Shirley Miller completed her 6-month contract on 2/3/02 at a total cost of £7,583-40 for which the Museum Society has now been invoiced. This project has achieved:

- Inventory catalogue of entire contents of Organics Social History store on computer, a **total of 3,655 objects**
- Checking and (where necessary) allocating numbers and labels
- Repacking and checking condition of objects as they are catalogued, referring some to Conservation Officer for further treatment
- Checking and adding to catalogue information from Accessions Registers
- Undertaking digital photography of some significant items, mainly carved wood stored on shelving where it cannot be instantly viewed
- Providing object lists for and contributing research and ideas to display brief for redisplay of Furniture & Woodwork gallery

This project has been very successful and a significant step on the way to reducing the documentation backlog and improving management and use of collections in general.

The Museum Society are asked to consider funding a similar project in 2002/03, possibly with biological collections, in keeping with the Museum's Documentation Plan produced last year.

3.4 Loans In

Loans In: 1

A plaque from Saffron Walden Churchyard loaned by Saffron Walden Town Council.

3.5 Loans Out

Loans Out: 3, all concerning archaeology

- Archaeological excavation records for research project at County Hall
- The Great Chesterford Temple Model to Great Chesterford Local History and Archaeology Society
- A reduced version of the Stansted archaeology Flight into the Past exhibition to Great Dunmow Museum for several months' display. This will include a number of panels, some pottery and stone items and the Roman glass bowl from Takeley (not part of the current exhibition), but not the fragile glass and bronze vessels from the 'Rich Man's Burial'.

1 loan request: Epping Forest District Museum, at Waltham Abbey, has requested the loan of 16 Ancient Egyptian objects for a temporary exhibition from August to October 2002. Epping Forest Museum is fully registered and have agreed to our standard loan conditions.

The Museum Society is asked to approve the loan to Epping Forest District Museum, and to retrospectively approve the loans of Chesterford records and temple model and that to Great Dunmow Museum.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 15

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 192 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without an appointment)

3.7 Researchers

13 research visits in person by appointment, including:

- A natural sciences undergraduate researched the use of bird specimens in museum displays and education
- A Research Fellow from the University of East Anglia came to see Austral Islands ethnographic material
- Family history researchers, especially the Hart family.
- A UCL undergraduate researched the Egyptology collection for his dissertation.

Other collections research

The NOF-funded project *Jewels of Essex* will place records and photos of 2,000

objects and specimens from Saffron Walden Museum on the SEAX website. Staff have researched and compiled a draft list and will be needing to devote much time to this during 2002-03.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

New handling specimen of a pigeon is displayed in the Discovery Centre
 Redisplay of the Dolls and Toys case completed
 New layout for the Furniture gallery designed
 Roman lead coffin from Great Chesterford displayed

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The exhibition of archaeology from Stansted Airport, *Flight into the Past*, runs until 7th April and has proved very popular with all ages. After closing, selected objects and panels will be loaned to Great Dunmow Museum for several months.

4.3 Visitor Services

Visitors

Visitors have included members of the Young Archaeologists Club and the archaeology team working on the Transco pipeline south of Newport.

	Public		Schools		Total	
	2002	2001	2002	2001	2002	2001
January	756	798	692	743	1448	1541
February	1486	1679	731	455	2217	2134
March	1018	974	816	1047	1834	2021
Total	3260	3451	2239	2245	5499	5696

Shop

	2002	2001
January	1055.26	921.76
February	1172.71	1091.59
March	1300.72	1393.84
Total £	3528.69	3406.84

Tickets

	2002	2001
January	315	307.50
February	570.50	699.50
March	488.50	487.50
Total £	£1374	£1494.50

Donations

	2002	2001
January	31.98	26.79
February	55.26	57.26
March	40.78	53.04
Total £	£128.02	£137.46

Publicity and Marketing

Extensive press coverage in local, regional and specialist press for the American Bittern. Editorial & photos also for exhibitions, events and children's activities, including a new local paper *Stansted Life*.

England Marketing have been appointed to undertake a survey of non-visitors. This is a joint project with Braintree District Museum and the Fry Art Gallery.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

55 booked school sessions taken by Education Officer during spring term 2002
No. of school loan boxes sent out: 10, including 8 natural history loan boxes and loan specimens which were used by 260 school children.

Other educational work has included:

- Meetings with Essex CC Early Years education officer planning new programme of activities for under 5's.
- Illustration students from Anglia University drew objects and activities in the galleries.
- Paula Armstrong undertaking an MA in museum studies has had regular meetings with the Education officer re life-long learning projects.

5.2 Events at Museum

2 Feb **American Bittern 'Master Class'** (Natural Sciences Officer). 22 adults and children attended.

23 Mar **Bird Identification seminar** in preparation for this year's bird survey (Natural Sciences Officer). 8 adults attended.

19/20 Feb **Half-term craft activities** for children of all ages attended by 260 children and 125 adults (Education Officer)

5.3 Museum activities at other venues:

Jan – Mar **Archaeology in Uttlesford and Essex**, a series of 4 archaeology lectures with guest speakers, was held in the Parish Rooms and attended by over 200 people, resulting in net income of at least £200.

5.4 Outreach

Other Museums and Local Groups supported

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice to 11 groups:

- Great Dunmow Museum Society (Committee, AGM, various curatorial issues)
- Fry Art Gallery Society (Committee, joint marketing and publicity)
- Saffron Walden Archive Society (Committee)

- Essex Biodiversity Action Plan steering group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Uttlesford) Committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Local Agenda 21 Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Local Agenda Forum (Natural Sciences Officer)
- RIGS (Geology) group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges Committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working (Natural Sciences Officer).

Advice, support and involvement in 5 organisations outside Uttlesford

- Biology Curators Group committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- National Federation for Biological Recording (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Museums & Galleries Disability Association (Visitor Services Officer)
- South Midlands Museum Federation (Curator)
- Archaeology Terminology Working Group (Curator)

7 Talks and Lectures given by Museum staff:

- Talk to Saffron Walden Methodist Wives on *Famous Queens* (Education Officer)

The Curator has given a talk on the history and development of the Museum, *A World of Discovery on Your Doorstep*, to the following local Societies:

- Wendens Ambo WI
- Hadstock Society
- Stansted Evening WI
- Great Hallingbury Local History Society
- Takeley Wives
- Hatfield Broad Oak WI

Future Programme and Projects

1 Museum Management and Staff

Best Value Review is expected to take a significant proportion of the Curator's time and also impact on the work of other staff. The Natural Sciences Officer and/or Conservation Officer will also be part of the Officers' Review Team.

Museum Society representatives will be invited to the Challenge Event in May, where stakeholders are invited to discuss and contribute ideas on the future of the Museum and Leisure Services.

2 Buildings and Site

Lintels over windows at far end of building will require major works to repair and will necessitate the removal of some collections from Natural History Store and possibly items on display in Great Hall. The façade of the eastern end of the Great Hall will be buttressed while work is in progress; this may impact on parking space. Hart Johns will install steps at the Church Street gate. ROALCO to replace damaged wall to the access ramp at front door.

3 Collections and Research

The SEAX *Jewels of Essex* project will require much staff time in preparing computer catalogue records and planning the first digitisation session, which will involve the Ethnography collections and may be in June. It is likely that the Ethnography Gallery will have to be closed for a few days to provide adequate space for the photography contractors.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Furniture gallery to be re-displayed.

Future exhibitions programme:

- 20 Apr – 23 May BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition
- 1 Jun – 3 Sept Recently conserved objects from the collections – a spectacular selection of items from all round the world, the Japanese Samurai armour forming the centrepiece.
- 14 Sept – 3 Nov Quaker Walden, to coincide with the Friends' School Tercentenary
- 16 Nov – end Mar 03 Treasures of the Earth, featuring minerals, meteorites & moon rock.

5 Events, Education and Outreach

A full programme of educational activities for adults and children for 2002 is being prepared, including Early Years project and reminiscence boxes.

- 11 May Ceramics study day on *The Dawn of English Porcelain*

Local Agenda 21 survey of house and tree sparrows and song thrushes is due to take place