

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT July - September 2002

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Strategic Plan – following the Council's recent decision over BAA Stansted's planning application, the Museum is now able to proceed with negotiations with BAA for a new Resource Centre sited near the Airport, to replace existing off-site storage and offer better access to the Museum's reserve collections. An initial, informal discussion with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has been encouraging.

Best Value Review has progressed throughout the summer, involving the Curator in a total of 8 meetings this quarter and a few other staff in some meetings as well. The Museum's 'critical friend' Linda Scrutton (supplied through Arts & Business East), has had an additional meeting with Museum staff to assist with planning of human resources.

Audit carried out a routine audit of the Museum's income over the summer (final report awaited).

Electronic Till – work was postponed by the requirements of audit and the Quaker Walden exhibition, but is being resumed in October for completion by the end of the year.

IT - a very useful meeting with John Mercer, Head of IT and Audit Services and Wayne Caton, Senior Analyst identified priorities for developing the Museum's web pages and other IT needs over the next couple of years. Networking of the Conservation Laboratory to the Museum is to proceed this autumn now that Scheduled Monument consent has been granted.

1.2 Staff

Documentation Assistant (Natural History) – 6-month contract Jan – June 2003 funded by the Museum Society, to catalogue priority botanical collections. The job advert has been distributed and it is hoped that an appointment will be made in November, to start in early January.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Kayleigh Moore from Dunmow school completed two weeks work experience. .

Kay Cooper completed 40 hours very valuable 'admin' as part of her 'Back to Work' course, and has since been appointed to a post at the Imperial War Museum, Duxford.

Tom Wiseman, an archaeology undergraduate, came for four weeks vacation placement, and contributed to new cases in the Archaeology Gallery (see 4.1 below).

Canon Michael Swindlehurst has joined panel of desk volunteers.

The Conservation Laboratory welcomed another University of Lincoln student, **Alexia Willox** on a 6 week placement. She helped to take down the conservation exhibition, prepare the Quaker exhibition, clean the contents of the Worlds of Man gallery, prepare items for Lincoln students to work on and treat objects including a Korean cape, archaeological bronze, cushions and a clock. Staff attended a memorial service for Betty Hanley. UNISON staff members took part in lunch-time closure on 17th July.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

Biology Curators Group committee (Natural History Museum, London) - Natural Sciences Officer

RNIB seminar on Accessible Websites – Visitor Services Officer

Equal Opportunities – Documentation & Exhibitions Officer (Shirley Miller)

Supervisors Meeting – Conservation Officer

Accessible Collections (Museums Association seminar) - Curator

1.5 Health & Safety

No specific items to report this quarter

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

A leak in the plumbing caused minor flooding in the kitchen and cellar but this has been rectified. Outstanding building repairs have been pursued with the assistance of Property Services and a schedule of work for 2003-04 drawn up. The occupants of 38 Castle Street have been asked, and have agreed, to cut back the climbing plant which has blocked one window on the north face of the Museum and is beginning to obscure another. Pursuing electrical problems with display lighting has been less successful, due to the lack/unavailability of local contractors; advice is being sought from the Council. There has been one Fire Alarm (false alarm) and the building was evacuated in good order. Stores have been cleaned by the Cleaner and Conservation Officer, and two faulty dehumidifiers were repaired by Munters' engineer.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

No items on building to report this quarter.

2.3 Newport Store

Most of the natural history objects affected by flooding last winter have now been repackaged and stored to clear the floor area. Environmental conditions continue to be fair; one dehumidifier malfunctioned but its repair will be under guarantee.

2.4 40 Castle Street

Nothing to report this quarter.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

The dead-stock freezer in the workshop broke down for a second time resulting in the destruction of the contents. 10 plant specimens and bird and mammal corpses, all awaiting preparation, had to be disposed of. A new freezer will be ordered.

The new owner of the house in Museum Yard has been made aware of the problem of the down pipes feeding onto the Museum drive.

Scheduled Monument Consent has at last been received to plant a tree in the grounds on memory of Malcolm Adams. Unfortunately the dry weather in the early autumn has forced nurseries to delay uprooting of saplings for autumn planting and the ceremony, originally planned to take place on 30th October, will have to be rescheduled for mid-late November as a result.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions

10 acquisitions this quarter, including:

- William Kent Long case clock (bequest of the late Mrs White-Taylor)
- Tudor oak standing cupboard, joint-stool, English goblet c.1720 and three cushions (18th-century/later), all the gift of a generous anonymous donor.
- Cabinet of butterflies from Essex and Britain collected during the 19th and 20th centuries.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

- HLF Application has been made by the Conservation Officer for the conservation and display

of the Myddylton Place tapestry fragments and the Beauvais tapestry. The work will cost about £27,000 to treat and line these. The outcome of the application will not be known for several months.

- Barbara Stubbington continues to work on items noted in the textile collection condition survey, including a Victorian costume in the teaching collection.
- Pest trapping in summer revealed no worrying infestation. Stores and floors in the museum were sprayed against pest.
- Work is continuing on Roman ironwork from Great Chesterford, but has been held up by problems with the airbrasive unit; this has now been repaired.

Remedial conservation work has included:

- A tapestry fragment from Myddylton Place repaired by a volunteer, Gillian Holman, was returned after several years' work was completed. Other textiles were treated in the Laboratory, as well as items for the Quaker exhibition.
- 11 Pleistocene bone specimens affected by flooding at Newport store have been sent to the University of Lincoln. 30 other items were extracted from various collections, notably ethnography, for investigation and treatment.
- Howard Newman is working on a newly accessioned William Kent clock.

3.3 Documentation

No. of new accessions catalogued: 10

No. of backlog of MODES records catalogued: 5 Natural History

On-going work updating modes records for SEAX project: 40 Natural History

The **SEAX project** (digital images and records of collections for internet) has occupied much staff time this last quarter, principally the Documentation & Exhibition Officers, Conservation Officer and also the Curator, and will continue to do so for the rest of the year. So far, 550 ethnography and ceramic objects, and the glacial erratic boulder in the museum grounds, have been photographed and computer records edited for SEAX. Work has begun on preparing 250 archaeology objects and records for SEAX.

3.4 Loans In

Loans In: 11 (all for Quaker Walden exhibition)

3.5 Loans Out

Loans Out: 2

- 6 ethnographic objects sent to the Cuming Museum for loan to Cook Birthplace Museum in Middlesborough.
- 16 objects lent to Epping Forest Museum for Ancient Egyptian Exhibition

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 10

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 142 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without an appointment)

3.7 Researchers

7 research visits in person

Subjects researched included Southey manuscripts; corn dollies; North American Indian woven sashes; Chinese fiddle; Essex numismatics

Other collections research

- Geology objects researched for next SEAX session at Newport store.
- Geology specimens selected and researched for Treasures of the Earth exhibition.
- Carole Humphrey of the Fitzwilliam Museum has researched some of the textile collection with a view to dating some pieces, especially the embroideries.
- Visit by Secretary of Essex Numismatics Society, with view to more contact between society and museums in future, and potential assistance with numismatic enquiries and future displays.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Archaeology Gallery Display work in August was completed with the assistance of Tom Wiseman, archaeology student on work placement. Work included additions to Roman Religions case, completion of the Great Chesterford display case and the replacement of 2 large Roman pots with a small display on Roman building materials. This allows a selection of tiles and mosaics to be shown and used with school groups, including the recently-conserved fish mosaic.

Furniture Gallery Rush matting laid in Furniture Gallery, and improved lighting installed.

The Tudor Cupboard has been put on display and one chest removed to store. An application has been made to the Round Table Carnival Committee for a grant towards interpretive and display materials for the furniture gallery.

Natural History 2 new millipedes have been purchased for the Bug cage in the Discovery Centre.

Local History A replica of the pargetting stamp has been made for loan and use in museum activities.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

'Holding Back the Years' conservation exhibition continued until 3rd September. The Conservation Officer answered queries by the public who brought in objects, and demonstrated conservation techniques, while Janet Bullen demonstrated ceramics repair and restoration. Conservators and other staff from Norwich Museum Services visited the exhibition and talked to the Conservation Officer about it the day before it closed, and feedback has been received from other conservators in the area.. Research for the **'Friends' School and Quaker Walden'** exhibition was undertaken by Julia Bazley and Maureen Evans, greatly assisted by Jane Laing, former school head. Numerous items were loaned from Friends' School and Saffron Walden Friends Meeting House archives, the Griselda Fox Dress Collection, and from local friends and Friends. The exhibition was opened by Tony Watson on 13th September, jointly hosted by the Museum and the School. It has had an appreciative audience of past and present staff and scholars, and public alike. The Curator visited Thaxted Pharmacy and a local collector of pharmaceutical items with a view to a future special exhibition.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools		Total	
	2002	2001	2002	2001	2002	2001
July	1029	1282	699	751	1728	2003
August	1714	1901	60	15	1774	1916
September	2018 *	883	510	379	2528	1262
Total	4761	4066	1269	1145	6030	5211

* Visitors included Essex Museum Workers for their AGM and conservators from Norwich. Total figures are boosted by the Quaker exhibition opening (approx 150) and the Friends' School pageant

and procession into the museum grounds, (1000 estimated), but it has otherwise been a ‘slow’ summer. Totals are reflected in slightly reduced income, despite sales of 5000 saffron crocus, largely via the Tourist Information Centre.

Shop

	2002	2001
July	968.53	1424.40
August	736.76	1008.86
September	1070.94 +£525 TIC	789.27 +£306 TIC
Total £	3297.33	3528.13

Tickets

	2002	2001
July	477.00	579.00
August	795.00	881.00
September	489.50	417.50
Total £	1045.50	1877.50

Donations

	2002	2001
July	65.96	33.66
August	55.82	70.50
September	49.62	52.78
Total £	171.40	156.94

Publicity and Marketing

There have been some discussions with Chris Hingston, a local consultant, on various marketing opportunities. The Museum has enjoyed good press coverage for exhibitions and events.

A visit by MEP, Bashir Khanbai, resulted in highly complimentary radio and press features.

Marketing research on non-visitors came to a conclusion with the delivery of England Marketing’s Report, the culmination of a joint initiative with Braintree District Museum and the Fry Art Gallery.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education *Most of this quarter coincides with summer vacation*

No. of booked school sessions taken by Education Officer: 27 (17 in July and 10 in September)

5.2 Events at Museum

20 July **National Archaeology Day** celebrated with a Roman theme with ‘finds’ shown by the Curator, family activities with the Education Officer, and the opportunity to make ‘Roman’ oil lamps with a local potter.

27-28 August **Flying Fun Days** for families – making simple flying toys.

The Museum also hosted some outdoor drama workshops, run by Classworks, for young people, organised by the Arts Development Officer and on a Japanese theme inspired by the Museum’s Samurai armour (on display in ‘Holding Back the Years’). A schools’ production of ‘Farmer Giles of Ham’ was rehearsed here, but wet weather drove the performance to the Town Hall.

13th-16th September **Heritage Open Days** as usual the Museum offered free entry on the Saturday & Sunday.

To celebrate **300 years of Friends’ School and 350 years of Quakerism**, the school organised a

series of events, including a costumed parade and pageant, culminating in a play, music, and picnic lunch in the museum grounds, enjoyed by a large crowd.

5.3 Outreach

Other Museums and Local Groups supported

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

- Ashdon Village Museum (AGM) (Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery Society (AGM, Committee meeting and joint marketing report) (Curator)
- Saffron Walden & District Searchers Club (2 meetings) (Curator)
- 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 21 Forum (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges Committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Thaxted Guildhall Museum (Conservation Officer)
- Cater Museum, Billericay (Conservation Officer)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Biology Curators Group committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- MAGDA – Museums & Galleries Disability Association (Visitor Services Officer, who will be standing down from the MAGDA committee)
- Countywide Heritage Strategy (*Essex Inheritance*) – hosting evening meeting (Curator)
- South Midlands Museums Federation – committee (Hon. Secretary) and meetings (Curator)
- Essex Museum Workers Group – meetings and AGM (Curator, Vice-Chair as from Aug 2002)

Talks and Lectures given by Museum staff:

- Ashdon WI (Education Officer)
- Newport WI (Education Officer)
- Great Chesterford WI (Curator)
- Pampisford Village Society (Curator)
- Welcome Group (Education Officer)
- Dolls' Society of Great Britain (Curator)

Preparation and publicity for **Archaeology Evening Classes** to be held Jan – Mar 2003, which sold out within a week of booking opening in early September (£640 income from fees taken in advance).

Future Programme and Projects: October – December 2002

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

1 Museum Management and Staff

Best Value Review continues although the Members' Reference Group is expected to deliver their report before the end of the year. Some further work with IT on Museum's requirements for its own web pages. Till programming to be completed ready for training users in New Year. Negotiations and planning for the HLF bid needed to secure the new **Resource Centre** need to be progressed.

2 Buildings and Site

Routine inspection of the gutters etc. by staff, Property Services to arrange for contractors to clean as necessary when leaf-fall dictates.

3 Collections and Research

SEAX project will continue to take up much time of all curatorial staff, with session booked for October, late November – December and February 2003. A 'soft launch' of the website is planned for December, further images and records to be added in early 2003.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Furniture Gallery – further work on competing redisplay of this gallery, subject to Best Value Review, SEAX project and temporary exhibition programme

5 Events, Education and Outreach

16 Nov – March 2003 Treasures of the Earth exhibition by Gerald Lucy. An exploration of the remarkable world of minerals, rocks and gemstones. Including a rare opportunity to see **Moon Rock** for a limited period. Real nuggets of Moon rock and soil samples, collected by Apollo mission astronauts, will be on loan from NASA/PPARC and will be displayed in the exhibition from 16 to 27 November. Also on display will be rare meteorites from the Natural History Museum.

Associated events:

Moon rock and Minerals day Saturday 23 November

Treasures of the Earth evening lecture. Gerald Lucy will talk to the museum society about the exhibition on Monday 25 November at 8 pm.

Much work researching and preparing for Archaeology Evening Classes in early 2003

Joint publication planned with TIC: a booklet on Henry Winstanley to be published in Spring 2003 to mark the 300th anniversary of his death in the Eddystone Lighthouse. Curator negotiating with author and all parties with an interest, including Audley End and Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery.