

# SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

## CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT January – March 2004

### **1 Museum Management and Staff**

#### **1.1 Management**

##### **Resource Centre**

The Project Team has been established and met in February (and in early April). The siting within the Depot and plans for the Resource Centre have been developed by David Demery working with Museum Staff and Diane Burridge from the Depot. Discussions with various colleagues and contacts, including Community & Leisure Services, Essex County Council Planning Department and Libraries, have begun, with a view to assessing the future potential of the Centre and associated outreach programme. An outreach plan to develop new audiences for the Museum Service, especially among the young, family learning and rural communities, has been drafted in outline on the advice of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The Curator has had an encouraging meeting with the HLF officer at Cambridge, although HLF are still unable to estimate the maximum % of funding which they will be able to offer projects in future. The Museum has been asked to submit an application for a Project Planning Grant, to employ consultants on a more detailed audience development plan, as soon as possible. Extensive fund-raising and consultation will follow, and it is planned to submit the final application to the HLF in January 2005 for their Trustees meeting in March 2005.

##### **Council matters**

Visits with behind-the-scenes tours have been made by a number of Uttlesford councillors and by the new Chief Executive, Alasdair Bovaird. A reorganisation of Council departments is taking place and it is yet to be confirmed where the Museum Service will be located, but it is expected that existing close links with Leisure & Community Services will be maintained.

##### **Electronic Till**

Work has continued with Mark Starte from TIC. Fry Scales have also made several visits, needed to overcome system problems for printing bar code labels. Staff trials to be arranged once this is sorted.

#### **1.2 Staff**

Due to the continuing problems associated with troublesome youngsters, and the unavailability of both the Security Officer and Casual Assistant for parts of the summer, it is necessary to recruit additional paid casual assistants to maintain opening and improve security on Sundays and Bank Holidays, and assist with evening meetings if required. Our cleaner, June Ashley, has moved to Great Chesterford and given notice. These vacancies are currently advertised and it is hoped to appoint before the end of April. Because all staff may at times find themselves alone with children, Personnel Services have been advised of the need for all Museum staff to be 'police-checked' through the Criminal Records Bureau as a precaution.

The new flexi-time system introduced by the Council has been trailed, although the

concept of flexi-time is of limited relevance to the Museum. Because of the demands of additional weekend and evening work, it is highlighting the difficulties in some instances of staff being able to take time-in-lieu they are owed within the prescribed limits.

### **1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience**

Deborah Chancellor has continued to computerise agricultural collections data. The remaining Myddylton Place tapestry fragments were unrolled for inspection and re-rolled for storage. This project is now finished and payment of grant-aid has been completed by HLF.

We welcome a new desk volunteer, Pat Williams. Good wishes to volunteers Mary Adams and Rosemary Kenrick who both broke wrist bones during winter weather. Barbara Stubbington has finally retired from regular volunteering at the Museum, though she has kindly offered to help occasionally with special projects. Molly Glover, who has been a volunteer at the museum since the mid 1960s, talked about the Museum to the local Imperial Cancer group.

### **1.4 Training and Meetings Attended**

Natural Sciences Officer has attended meetings at Essex County Council about moves to set up a centre to provide a "one stop shop" for information about biological and geological records in Essex.

Supervisors training course (Natural Sciences Officer)

Conservators Professional Accreditation seminar; Excel training day; a Care of Collections tour of conservation facilities and galleries at Hampton Court Palace; seminars on Collection Surveys; Lighting in Museums and Galleries; and a two-day training course on Environmental Monitoring at the Natural History Museum (Conservation Officer)

Uttlesford Tourism Forum; an Essex-based seminar on Tourism and the Disability Discrimination Act, and a meeting of the Great Days Out consortium Visitor Services Officer)

Staff met with Martyn Everett of Saffron Walden Library to explore joint avenues for outreach work, and to look at new sources of research information.

### **1.5 Health & Safety**

Asbestos has been removed from a cupboard in the temporary exhibitions gallery. Disability access audit carried out by UDC officers, and health & safety audit by Caroline Burchall.

The Community Police have been very helpful in offering advice and support to Museum staff in dealing with antisocial behaviour by small groups of children in the Museum.

## **2 Buildings and Site**

Problems still continue with completing work on the 'new' second boiler. The site has been surveyed and a quote received with a view to installing the gas supply in the summer of 2004. The lean-to annexe used for storage has leaked during bad weather.

## **2.1 Museum Building**

Team cleaning of gallery and storage areas has been taking place. Pest trapping in stores revealed a spectrum of insects, none particularly damaging apart from moth.

## **2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom**

### **2.3 Newport Store**

Nothing to report on these premises

## **2.4 40 Castle Street**

The associated garage (in Museum Court off Castle Street) suffered damage to its doors during recent windy weather. Due to the age and poor condition of the doors, the Council have decided to replace them with a new set of doors, currently on order.

## **2.5 Grounds and Castle Site**

The new freezer to contain offers of dead animals and plants has been installed in workshop building, purchased by the Museum Society, with an alarm system connected to the Museum to alert for power cuts.

# **3 Collections and Research**

## **3.1 Acquisitions**

3 acquisitions this quarter, including

- 20<sup>th</sup> century-style doll's house, being used in educational programme
- 12<sup>th</sup> century silver gilt ring from Clavering, purchased by the Museum Society with a grant from Resource/V&A Purchase Grant Fund

The Museum has also been offered **two generous bequests**, both from local donors. The donation of one, an extensive private collection of drinking glasses, has been 'brought forward' by the donor and staff are to collect it in the next few months, allowing pieces to be selected for the redisplay of the ceramics gallery.

The second is an offer of a future bequest, currently under negotiation, but likely to include some fine glassware as well as items relevant to the ceramic and costume collections.

**Maldon District Museum** has offered a small but varied **ethnographic collection** of some 67 items, on the advice of their curatorial advisor. They have never been able to display the collection, and feel it would be better transferred to an established ethnography collection such as Saffron Walden's. The collection has been temporarily acquired for assessment by Museum staff with the assistance of Len Pole and the Museum Ethnographers Group, who visited Saffron Walden as part of their annual conference on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. Subject to formalities being completed, it is intended to agree to accept the collection, preferably as an unconditional gift rather than a loan, with the possible exception of a pair of anomalous French fencing foils and possibly one or two other unprovenanced edged weapons if found to duplicate existing collections.

The Museum has received a request from the National Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa, for the **repatriation of two preserved and tattooed Maori heads** which were originally acquired in 1836. Due to the complex issues involved in such cases, a separate report on this item has been compiled and is enclosed, so that Committee

can make an informed decision.

The Museum has passed to the Essex Record Office two **collections of documents** previously offered to the Museum but more appropriate for the ERO: old ledgers from Saffron Walden Co-op and a large bundle of deeds once housed in the vaults of a bank in Thaxted. Katherine Schofield from the ERO has visited to discuss the eventual transfer of the collection of Church Street documents currently held at the Museum, and has offered to support a potential local documentation project on the collection if Saffron Walden archive society are interested.

### **3.2 Collections Care and Conservation**

**Care of collections has included:** Photographing museum objects on loan to UDC offices for our records; removing some prints that had been on display long enough and cleaning within frames; placing newly selected objects in the Leader's office and photographing these in situ. A newly excavated tile floor in Bridge End Garden was examined and sampling arranged. Shoes removed from exhibition continue to be photographed for museum records, and repackaged in new smaller boxes. Lena Panov, a volunteer, finished her project to remount 212 herbarium specimens. Some were backed onto new acid free paper, and some re-adhered using paper strips.

**Remedial conservation work has included:** Removing acidic backings and wet cleaning 7 prints/drawings by private paper conservator.

### **3.3 Documentation**

**No. of new accessions catalogued:** 3

**No. of new backlog documentation records:** 324 (39 Natural Sciences, mammal collection and 285 Human History)

### **3.4 Loans In**

**Loans In:**

1 leech jar from Hitchin Museum for the *Tinctures and Tonics* exhibition

### **3.5 Loans Out**

**Loans Out:** collection of ceramic containers, a tile panel and a wooden panel to UDC council offices.

Two independent sets of insurance valuations have been obtained for the horse-drawn vehicles and hay rick base which it is hoped to exhibit at Priors Hall Barn. These have been passed to the owner, Mr Webb, to see if either of the insurance companies which he uses would be prepared to cover them, and at what premium.

### **3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries**

**Object identifications this quarter:** 6

**Collection Enquiries this quarter:** 118 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without an appointment)

### **3.7 Researchers**

**5 research visits in person**, including: insect collections for a secondary school art project, plant specimens photographed for an HLF project about Whittlesford village, two enquiries about Native American material; enquiry on Bronze Age burial from

Little Chesterford as part of national research project.

### **Other collections research**

The ongoing research by Essex County Council archaeologists into the Roman town of Great Chesterford has reached a new phase, as English Heritage have agreed the final grant for publication, anticipated in two years' time. The Museum has offered to support the publication with local publicity and possibly an exhibition at the appropriate time.

## **4 Displays and Visitor Services**

### **4.1 Permanent Galleries**

The video microscope system in the Discovery Centre is functioning again after the camera was repaired by JVC.

**Ceramics Gallery.** Further discussions have been held with ceramics expert Jonathan Dutton on the concept and presentation of collections in the proposed redisplay. An outline of the proposals will be presented to Committee separately, before more detailed work is undertaken.

### **4.2 Temporary Exhibitions**

The *Shoe Show* was taken down on 18<sup>th</sup> January, having been extremely popular with visitors. *Tinctures and Tonics: Thaxted Pharmacy in Times Past* opened 31<sup>st</sup> January, based on the collections of former Thaxted pharmacist, John Murrison. Cordials were served on the opening afternoon to large and appreciative group of invitees. The exhibition, with an accompanying programme of activities and events based on health and well-being, runs until 13<sup>th</sup> June.

### **4.3 Visitor Services**

**Visitors** included groups of councillors, both from Uttlesford DC and Iran.

	<b>Public</b>		<b>Schools</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>2004</b>	2003	<b>2004</b>	2003	<b>2004</b>	2003
January	<b>1074</b>	727	<b>301</b>	498	<b>1375</b>	1225
February	<b>1406</b>	1235	<b>375</b>	378	<b>1781</b>	1613
March	<b>1136</b>	1230	<b>946</b>	863	<b>2082</b>	2093
<b>Total</b>	<b>3616</b>	3192	<b>1622</b>	1739	<b>5238</b>	4931

### **Shop**

	<b>2004</b>	2003
January	<b>491.17</b>	709.53
February	<b>793.49</b>	976.44
March	<b>1206.37</b>	1388.86
<b>Total £</b>	<b>2491.03</b>	3074.83

### **Tickets**

	<b>2004</b>	2003
January	<b>441.50</b>	352.50
February	<b>592.00</b>	549.50
March	<b>556.50</b>	560.50
<b>Total £</b>	<b>1590.00</b>	1462.50

## Donations

	2004	2003
January	66.19	54.55
February	42.62	39.16
March	38.70	89.55
<b>Total £</b>	<b>147.51</b>	183.26

## Publicity and Marketing

As usual the Museum's events and activities have received extensive coverage in the local press. There was a drop of 1000 leaflets in Thaxted to publicise *Tinctures and Tonics*. The UDC holiday activities programme goes to all local school children and ensures that all Museum activities are well-supported and/or over-subscribed. The EESOP/SEAX website project featuring Essex museum collections has 'gone live'.

## 5 Education, Events and Outreach

### 5.1 Education

**No. of booked school sessions** taken by Education Officer: 33 school sessions (912 children + 168 adults).

1 session for children with severe special needs (7 children + 3 adults).

1 session for Home Educated children (30 children + 5 adults).

**No. of school loan boxes sent out:** 2 (1 Tawny owl and 1 Roman loan box)

### 5.2 Events at Museum

31<sup>st</sup> January 2 sessions of **Museum Minis** for pre-schoolers, looking at life in the snow

31<sup>st</sup> January **Tinctures and Tonics** exhibition opening, with archaeology and bird specimens from Thaxted also on display in the Great Hall

13<sup>th</sup> March **Body Works** event for Science Week where 228 people learnt about how the human body works through art, experiments with the eyes and guessing the amount of water in the body. Artist Kiran Chahal funded by ECC.

17<sup>th</sup> February Two days of Half Term Holiday Activities about **Magic and Medicine** with 264 children and 134 adults.

14<sup>th</sup> February – 6<sup>th</sup> March Eight Saturday **Family Workshops** led by artist Kiran Chahal and funded by ECC and NADFAS.

6<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March **Aromatherapy and Reflexology** free 'taster' sessions in partnership with the North and West Essex Adult Community College.

### 5.3 Outreach

#### **Other Museums and Local Groups supported**

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

- Great Dunmow Museum Society (2 meetings, advice on insurance and storage)
- Bridge End Gardens (put in touch with detectorists)
- Essex Biodiversity Action Plan Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Uttlesford) Committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Local Agenda 21 Farming, Wildlife & Countryside 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).
- Saffron Walden & District Searchers Metal Detecting Club (see BEG above)

### **Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford**

Essex Police Museum Education Service

Advisory Committee for Archaeology in Essex (Curator)

Museums in Essex Committee (Essex Museums Development Plan (Curator)

EEMLAC Board consultation meeting (Curator)

### **Talks and Lectures given by Museum staff:**

9<sup>th</sup> March *Medicine in the Ancient World* for the Methodist Wives Group (Education Officer)

11<sup>th</sup> March *Codes and Ciphers* evening activity for 1<sup>st</sup> Newport guides (Education Officer)

13<sup>th</sup> March Workshop for Uttlesford Local History Recorders about conservation and packaging (Conservation Officer)

## **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**

Resource Centre Project – most of Curator's time and input from other staff.

Recruitment of new cleaner and casual assistants, meanwhile curatorial staff will have to cover Sundays and Bank Holidays in May until new casual Assistants are in post and trained.

### **2 Buildings and Site**

Preparation for conversion of heating to gas in hand.

### **3 Collections and Research**

Removal of last remaining items from Audley End stables (including hay rick base).

### **4 Displays and Visitor Services**

Next temporary exhibition: *Archaeology in the Pipeline*. Planned opening date 26<sup>th</sup> June in conjunction with TRANSCO (to be confirmed).

The labels in the ethnography gallery are being updated with more current terminology, and all objects have been checked to make sure that they have a number which corresponds to the label.

### **5 Events, Education and Outreach**

Local Agenda 21 Bird Survey of song thrush, sparrows and other garden birds will take place during 8<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> April 2004. Survey forms are available from the museum (Natural Sciences Officer).

A programme of events for Museums and Galleries Month in May and the Summer Term has been produced with the national theme of travel and faraway places