

## SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

### CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT April – June 2004

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

##### **1.1 Management**

Under the new Council structure, the Museum Service is now part of Environmental & Cultural Services, which is headed by Diane Burridge. Both Diane and the Chief Executive, Alasdair Bovaird, have had tours of the Museum.

A revised Education Policy has been produced by the Education Officer, in line with current best practice and in readiness for the Heritage Lottery Fund bid. The Visitor Services Officer has done some research for a revised Access policy, which will be completed in the autumn.

##### **Resource Centre**

Subject of a separate report. Much work has been undertaken during this quarter, significantly the submission of an application for a Project Planning Grant for audience development. We are now poised to go forward to Community & Leisure Services in September to seek capital funding and permission to proceed with the full application to HLF.

##### **Electronic Till**

Staff have been given a demonstration and will continue to practice on it over the summer. It is evident that the till-computer system will make more demands on time for all staff, both in supporting desk volunteers and in routines and downloading to the computer at the end of every day; this will have to be done by curatorial staff on the 140+ days a year when the Visitor Services Officer is not present. Training of volunteers by Jenny Day is being planned for September-October.

##### **1.2 Staff**

Four new casual staff have been recruited: Sally Books, Tony Carter, Josie Graham and Alex Dwiar. They will mainly be supporting Roger Kirkpatrick on Sunday afternoons and helping at special events. Roger was away throughout May and staff covered his Sunday/Bank Holiday duties. June Ashley moved to Great Chesterford in April and has been replaced by James Bolder as our Cleaner from June 1<sup>st</sup>, working 6 hours per week. The Council has been investigating the 'Investors in People' scheme; Carolyn Wingfield, Julia Bazley and Bruce Tice were interviewed, also volunteers Michael Swindlehurst and Joyce Bailey – our thanks go to them..

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

Deborah Chancellor and Vanessa Pedder continued to assist in the lab and with objects and display projects. Ioanna Vasiou, a Cardiff University conservation student, worked a four-week placement in the Lab from 17th May. She undertook gallery cleaning, conservation of archaeological ceramics, metal small finds, and local history material. We welcome new desk volunteer Pat Williams. A 'thank you' strawberry tea for volunteers was held on 30<sup>th</sup> June. Molly Glover spoke of her long experience as a Museum volunteer at the Museum Society

AGM.

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

2 day course on environmental monitoring and choosing correct equipment at the Natural History Museum (Conservation Officer)

Care of Collections Forum AGM (Conservation Officer)

Visitor Services Seminar at the Volunteer Centre, London (Visitor Services Officer)

Economic Role of Museums, CPPS Seminar, London (Curator)

Museums & Heritage Show, Earls Court (Curator)

*Museums and Young People*, MA seminar, London (Education Officer, Curator)

Launch of *Inspiring Learning for All*, MLA/EEMLAC, Bury St Edmunds (Education Officer, Curator)

#### **1.5 Health & Safety**

Because museum work regularly brings staff into contact with children, all Museum staff will shortly undergo a CRB police check.

## **2 Buildings and Site**

### **2.1 Museum Building**

Stores and galleries were sprayed against pests, including under the Woodland diorama. Team cleaning continued with the Ground floor finally finished in areas normal cleaning does not reach. SunX measured for new light-reducing blinds in the Furniture Gallery to help preserve the tapestries. The roof to the rear of the Museum building was re-laid and repaired where tiles had become loose. At the same time a considerable amount of re-pointing was carried out to the rear elevation of the building. Gutters and hoppers were checked after heavy mid-summer rain but no obstructions or problems were found.

### **2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom**

A new negative/film scanner and CD-writer upgrade were installed to the PC in the Lab. Ventilation bricks were inserted into the plinth of the building to prevent the build-up of damp under the floors. There have been problems with the drains in Pudding House built on the former school yard, which may relate to the Museum's own sewage system, and is under investigation.

### **2.3 Newport Store**

Nothing to report this quarter

### **2.4 40 Castle Street**

New wooden doors and gable-end cladding have been fitted to the Curator's garage in Museum Court, since the old doors were wrecked by a gale in March. Repairs to the domestic water-heater at 40 Castle Street have been completed by contractors.

### **2.5 Grounds and Castle Site**

Vegetation at the driveway entrance has been cut and cleared. The Tennis Club removed ivy and weeds growing into Lab yard. Following concern by several members of the public, a report on the state of the perimeter wall has been made to the Council and a small urgent repair to flint-work by the Church Street gate has been completed.

## **3 Collections and Research**

### **3.1 Acquisitions**

**141 acquisitions** this quarter, mostly from a large collection of over 100 glasses donated by long time volunteer Margaret Kilbey.

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

#### **Care of collections has included:**

- The air conditioning unit in the Natural History store was serviced
- Thermohygraphs have been cleaned and calibrated
- Pest check of Natural History areas completed in April 2004 and pest traps that were full were replaced with new empty traps
- Monitoring in vulnerable stores is ongoing.
- A detailed Method Statement and Risk Assessment was made regarding moving the rare iron hay-rick base from Audley End storage – investigations continue. We are still trying to resolve the insurance issues with the owner of Prior's Hall Barn, in pursuit of displaying the hay-rick base and horse-drawn vehicles at that venue

#### **Remedial conservation work has included:**

- Flooded minerals cleaned and relabelled by Vanessa Pedder, those requiring further conservation work have now been identified
- Vanessa Pedder repackaged the incoming Maldon ethnographic material, wrote a brief condition audit, and items at risk from pest infestation were put in the freezer as a precaution. Formal transfer of ownership of the collection will take place after the Maldon District Council meet in September.
- A negligee of Ellen Terry's from Dunmow Museum was cleaned and conserved in the Lab for display in the Maltings
- A small number of objects were taken to Lincoln University for conservation and three treated objects collected
- The Young Gardeners tapestry (c. 1800) was collected from the conservation studio on 22<sup>nd</sup> May (work funded by HLF)
- Work on Network Archaeology finds for the Transco exhibition included reassembling ceramics and photographing metal small finds
- An abnormally-large oak leaf was cleaned
- A framed sampler was treated for the Cater Museum

### **3.3 Documentation**

#### **No of new accessions catalogued: 149**

**Backlog documentation:** 254 Modes records updated by the Documentation & Exhibitions Officers, 29 records updated by the Natural Sciences Officer.

A problem with the EESCOPE website was identified where 83 records had inadvertently displayed confidential information on field collection locations being available on the website. ECC was alerted, and the records have now been corrected and checked.

### **3.4 Loans In**

**Loans In:** A small group of East African objects, formerly loaned in 1975 by Mrs Layzell (deceased), has been kindly donated by her family, with the exception of one small neck rest which relatives wish to retain. They will arrange to collect this from the Museum at a suitable opportunity.

### **3.5 Loans Out**

**Loans Out:** renewal confirmed of loan to the Science Museum of the carved paddle from Polynesia. No new loan requests this quarter.

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

**Object identifications this quarter: 22**

Staff have been working with Caroline McDonald, the Finds Liaison Officer for Essex to help identify some of the archaeological small finds. Advice from Conservation Officer was sought on objects including a flying helmet, a 1920s lace wedding dress, and Arts & Crafts textiles. The care of metal detector small finds continue to be a problem for many, and advice and practical help was given as required by the Conservation Officer.

**Collection Enquiries this quarter: 117** by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without an appointment)

### **3.7 Researchers**

**7 research visits in person** including: research into colonial acquisitions of natural history and ethnography, insect collections, local history and the autograph letter collection. Museum Ethnographers Group meeting was held at the Museum on 3<sup>rd</sup> April

#### **Other collections research**

- Botanical surveys of special roadside verge sites (Natural Sciences Officer). The results are housed in the biological records files at the Museum and will be used by the verges project committee to inform the management plans for these roadside nature reserves.
- Analysis of the 2004 LA21 bird survey forms (Natural Sciences Officer). The survey results are also held in the biological records files. Reports of song thrushes and house sparrows have increased this year - results in the next edition of Uttlesford Life.
- Liaison with ECC archaeologists continues over the Great Chesterford Roman town project. English heritage have awarded a grant to ECC for completing research and publication, which is anticipated in 2007. This will be an important publication for Roman archaeology in the region, and the Museum has offered to help promote it with exhibitions and events, in liaison with ECC and the Great Chesterford Archaeology & Local History Society.

## **4 Displays and Visitor Services**

### **4.1 Permanent Galleries**

**Ethnography Gallery** - work continues on updating and up-grading the labels in the ethnography displays to improve sensory and intellectual access, and to follow current thinking and terminology in ethnography (advice from MEG visit in April)

Cuming Museum Collection - Bryn Hyancinth from the Cuming Museum visited to discuss the status of the long-term deposited ethnographic material.

**Ceramics Gallery** – the acquisition and subsequent cataloguing of the Margaret Kilbey glass collection has taken time but will contribute greatly to the display of glass. The Curator has made contact with Mr JRM Keatley, lender of the display of Studio Pottery, to discuss ways of enhancing this display and providing a better context for it in the new gallery.

Archaeology Gallery – recent acquisitions having been removed for conservation work and cataloguing, the display case which they occupied is now being reorganised to display the outstanding bronze and glass from the ‘Rich Man’s Burial’, Duck End Farm, Stansted Airport

#### **4.2 Temporary Exhibitions**

*Tinctures and Tonics - Thaxted Pharmacy in Times Past* ended on June 13<sup>th</sup> and was replaced by *Archaeology in the Pipeline* running from 26<sup>th</sup> June to November 7<sup>th</sup>. With input from Network Archaeology of Lincoln, all staff were involved in the preparation of this exhibition. It shows discoveries from the 2002 Transco gas pipeline project from Cambridge to Matching Green, and outlines the associated archaeology and natural history issues. A grant of £2775 was received from Transco towards graphics, poster/publicity and a reception on 16<sup>th</sup> July, addressed by Sir Alan Haselhurst MP. The text panels will be available for loan to parishes after the end of the exhibition, and several expressions of interest have already been received. Thanks are also due to the landowners who agreed to display the excavated items.

#### **4.3 Visitor Services**

##### **Visitors**

Visiting groups included a ceramics study group, Japanese, Chinese and student teachers. Outgoing UDC Chair Mike Hibbs invited the ‘chain gang’ of East Anglian local authority leaders to visit Bridge End Gardens, followed by tea at the Museum.

	<b>Public</b>		<b>Schools</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>2004</b>	2003	<b>2004</b>	2003	<b>2004</b>	2003
April	<b>1545</b>	1357	<b>405</b>	542	<b>1950</b>	1899
May	<b>905</b>	1369	<b>499</b>	466	<b>1404</b>	1835
June	<b>1025</b>	687	<b>845</b>	892	<b>1870</b>	1579
<b>Total</b>	<b>3475</b>	3413	<b>1749</b>	1900	<b>5224</b>	5313

##### **Shop**

	<b>2004</b>	2003
April	<b>875.74 *</b>	1049.91*
May	<b>863.43</b>	825.73 *
June	<b>836.82</b>	903.27
<b>Total £</b>	<b>2680.99*</b> **	2955.16 * **

\* plus sales to TIC = £105; £166.25 & £10 included in totals \*\*

##### **Tickets**

	<b>2004</b>	2003
April	<b>675.50*</b>	628.50*
May	<b>495.50</b>	630.50
June	<b>511.50</b>	301.00
<b>Total £</b>	<b>1682.50</b>	1560

\*Add 292.50 301.50 = Museum Society Season Tickets

##### **Donations**

	<b>2004</b>	2003
April	<b>60.80</b>	62.35
May	<b>39.82</b>	52.67
June	<b>37.32</b>	64.55
<b>Total £</b>	<b>137.94</b>	179.57

## **Publicity and Marketing**

The local press continue to provide good coverage of Museum exhibitions and events, alongside special interest journals such as Primary Times. James Sadler, the UDC press officer, visited and we hope to use his expertise to promote the service..

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

### **5.1 Education**

**No. of booked school sessions** taken by Education Officer: 40

**No. of school loan boxes sent out:** 4 natural history loan boxes (all birds), 1 Roman loan box, 1 Victorian loan box, photographs of 'old' children and toys.

### **5.2 Events at Museum**

5 April            Spray Painting Workshop for teenagers  
6 April            *First Aid and Foul Wounds* 2 family workshops  
7 April            Family School Holiday Easter nest craft workshops (225 people)

Museums Month in May followed the broad theme of Travel this year:

15 and 19 May *South Sea Sketching* – 2 art workshops for adults

22 May Spring *Safari family activity day* – looking for plants and animals in the grounds and in the Museum (93 people)

June 2<sup>nd</sup>            *Stories of Ancient Greece* (after Troy)

Also discovery/detective backpacks in use over half-term holidays

### **5.3 Outreach**

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

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

- Fry Art Gallery Society (Advice on lighting, Conservation Officer; Committee, Curator)
- Saffron Walden Archive Society (Talk at AGM, Curator, monitoring of environment in Town Hall store, Conservation Officer)
- Saffron Walden Initiative (meeting with Health Check Co-ordinator and Clean Up event 28/6, Curator)
- Biological records steering group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Uttlesford) Committee (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Local Agenda 21 Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (Natural Sciences Officer) including organisation of LA21 bird survey and analysis of results
- Local Agenda 21 Forum (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges Project (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Countryside Forum (Natural Sciences Officer, Curator)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Searchers (2 metal detectors' meetings, Curator)

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

Essex Museum Workers Group (Curator)

South Midlands Museums Federation (2 Committee meetings, Curator)

Regional Museums Group with EEMLAC (Curator)

EEMLAC Directory pilot (Curator)

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

- 21 April *Career Opportunities in Museums* Friends School (Education Officer)  
22 April *Medicine in the Past* Saffron Walden Day Centre Over 60's Club (Education Officer)  
10 May *The Coffin of Tayef Herut Nakht* Museum Society (Education Officer)  
12 May *The Stuff of Legend* Museum birthday talk (Education Officer)  
19<sup>th</sup> May :*Charms, Herbs & Wholeness : Anglo Saxon Healing* (Curator)  
20 May *The Work of the Natural Sciences Officer* Saffron Walden Day Centre over 60's club (Natural Sciences Officer)  
16 June *Vikings in North-West Essex* Ugley WI (Curator)  
18 June *Museum Mystery Quest* Christadelphian Youth Group (Education 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**

We say goodbye in August to Shirley Miller, who is going to work in Africa.

Bruce Tice is to be seconded to work on website research for the Council for six months, during which time his post as Security Officer will be filled by Tony Carter (currently Casual Assistant)

The main focus for next quarter will be driving the Resource Centre project forward, subject to decisions from the Heritage Lottery Fund (project planning Grant) and the Council.

The Curator will be attending Museums Association conference in September in Edinburgh

### **2 Buildings and Site**

Work on changing the heating system to gas will start in mid-September. The old oil tank will be drained and removed at the same time. Emergency lighting systems will be upgraded by Kidde Fire in late August.

### **3 Collections and Research**

Until another Documentation & Exhibitions Officer can be recruited to jobshare with Julia Bazley, and with the Curator's time increasingly taken up with the Resource Centre project and other management issues, time available is likely to be taken up responding to requests, acquisitions and enquiries.

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

*Archaeology in the Pipeline* will continue throughout this period till 7 November, after which a touring version (graphic panels only, no artefacts) will be available free-of-charge to interested parishes.

Work enhancing and updating the Ethnography and Furniture displays to be completed. Further material to be produced for the Museum's new website.

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

17 July National Archaeology Day

10,11,17,18,24,25 August Summer Holiday Activities for families – as publicised