

**SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM
CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
July – September 2006**

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Forward Plan Stage I : Heritage Quest Centre

Full reports are given in the minutes of the Resource Centre Project Team's monthly meetings. Items to note have included the fund-raising events: a Car Boot Sale in the Museum grounds on 2nd July was organised by the Visitor Services Officer and Museum Society members, and raised over £500 as well as bringing a different 'audience' to the site. *2000 Years of Wine Around Walden* on 9th September combined wine tasting, led by David Wrigley MW and sponsored by Waitrose, with wine-related objects from the collections and a light-hearted historical survey; all tickets sold and raised £600. A visit to the recently-completed Collections Discovery centre at Fishbourne Roman Palace, Chichester, on 31st July provided plenty of food for thought for staff and members of the Project Team. Attention is now focused on setting up the Heritage Quest Trust so that the Museum Society can enrol with Entrust and applications can be made for substantial landfill tax grants.

Forward Plan Stage II : Museum and Castle

A letter has been drafted to solicit local residents' and organisations' views on how the Museum and Castle can be improved, and will go out in late October. This will open consultation and planning for Stage II of the Forward Plan.

Accreditation

Much staff time has been spent in preparing documents and completing the Museum's application for Accreditation, which has now been submitted. In addition to the Forward Plan and policy documents previously reported, the Documentation & exhibitions Officer has produced a Documentation Procedural Manual for staff use and the Documentation Policy showing how backlogs are prioritised and dealt with, has been revised.

1.2 Staff, Volunteers and Work Experience

We welcome two new collection volunteers: Anne Wade will begin working on the textile collection including cataloguing on Modes XML. Hamish McIlwrick has begun documenting the maps he offered to the Museum. Stephanie Thompson continues to assist the Documentation & Exhibition Officer and the Conservation Officer with documentation and exhibition work. School student Liam Goddard carried out various projects such as changing silica gel in the archaeological metal storage boxes. Archaeology undergraduate Frank Bartlett spent three weeks at the Museum assisting with archaeological work in August. A student from Germany, Ines Frontzek, finished her placement of six weeks undertaking work on packaging, cleaning displays and treating a variety of objects. Michael and Rosina Down helped the *Snakes Alive!* team with the activity session. We note with sadness and respect the death of desk volunteer Stella Shield. Denise Taylor left the job of Support Worker to pursue a career in gardening. Sunita Dowson commenced work as Support Worker to the Natural Sciences Officer. All available staff had a 'working lunch' with the Chief Executive and Leader, Cllr Gayler.

1.3 Training and Meetings Attended

Creativity & Innovation (UDC)	4 July	Curator
Essex Education officers meeting	25 July	Education Officer
Modes XML training	6 Sept	Documentation & Exhibition Officer
Harwell Disaster Planning course	19 Sept	Natural Sciences Officer
AGM/Winding up MAGDA and AGM Assoc. Cultural Enterprise	21 Sept	Visitor Services Officer

1.4 Health & Safety and Security

In view of recent legislation, a meeting took place with Jason Dear, UDC and all staff to re-assess fire procedures for the Museum. Procedures on working with contractors and deactivating the fire panel are being written.

1.5 Museum Sector

ECC wrote to Essex Museum Workers Group to confirm their intention of appointing a new County Museums Officer early in 2007 (replacing Stephen Lowy, who left earlier this year). Meanwhile Stuart Warburton has taken up the post of Heritage Development Manager with ECC and will be visiting the Museum shortly.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Pest trapping in stores and galleries: woodworm were found in kitchen and carpet beetle in the Workroom. Areas were cleaned and sprayed to tackle the pest problem.

The air conditioning unit in the Natural History store was replaced in July– thankfully this was before the heat wave hit, and it has functioned well.

The programme of work on the Museum buildings continues, thanks to Martin Stocks and colleagues in UDC. The exterior paintwork on the Museum and Schoolroom has been re-painted. Quotations are now being sought for re-painting the interior of the Museum (in stages, some to be done December 2006). Vinyl floors in the Laboratory, Workroom and Kitchen were chemically stripped and sealed to make cleaning easier. Martin Stocks will organise electrical circuit testing as a matter of importance, as soon as the current wave of contractors and service engineers has finished.

As part of preparation for Accreditation, the Museum buildings and Newport store were inspected in July by Peter Caulfield, Crime Reduction Adviser & Architectural Liaison, Essex Police. He also discussed plans for the Heritage Quest Centre with staff and David Demery, UDC Architect. Generally, security arrangements were found to be satisfactory and robust, but he was able to suggest a number of small improvements (e.g. upgrading a few locks and window locks) and the Security Officer has a list of tasks to work on. Preparation for the Council's new telephone system has generated a certain amount of work and has kept the Security Officer busy with contractors. Installation is expected to be completed in late October.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

In addition to exterior paintwork, the Schoolroom's interior has been re-painted, the dry rot in the floor sorted and a fine new cupboard has been installed to replace the one removed when the rot was investigated. The WC has been refurbished.

2.3 Newport Store

The Security Officer was able to free the drawers that had become stuck inside the mineral and fossil cabinets during the last flood.

2.4 Grounds and Castle Site

Environmental Services (UDC) contracted Complete Weed Control to spray herbicide to ivy on the Castle ruin and to kill weeds inside the keep in September (completed in early October). The ivy is now brown and must be left to rot and fall away before the ruins can be assessed for further conservation work.

Two Scheduled Monument Consent Applications have been submitted for the wildlife area to the north of the museum drive. One is for an accessible path at the side of the drive and under the trees, the other is for the planting of a mixed species hedge to protect the slope at the back of the area which leads to a drop at the retaining wall.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions

6 acquisitions this quarter, including

- A postcard c. 1900 of the Bullring, Thaxted, from Powysland Museum
- Drainage tool and post-hole digger, used in Debden from 1969 till recently.
- The purchase from the DCMS of a small gold Bronze Age penannular ring, found at Takeley, has been completed with 50% grant-aid from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and 37.5% grant-aid from the Headley Trust.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included.

- Part reassembly of the cast iron hay rick base undertaken with a freelance conservator; with bent items going to a blacksmith for straightening
- The faulty airbrasive unit for archaeological iron was sent for repair and service
- A visit from Hanwell was arranged to try and get all 4 sensors at Newport store working so the environment can be monitored remotely from the lab. One still does not transmit.
- Dusting and cleaning floors in stores including Newport Store

Remedial conservation work has included:

- Metal small finds, coins and tokens
- Two Indian swords
- Moulding planes, gouges and other hand tools
- Handkerchiefs, weaving and embroidery samplers
- Social history items such as grooming items for men, a doctors medical box, a cribbage board

3.3 Documentation

No of new accessions catalogued: 100 human history

The Documentation & Exhibitions Officer and Natural Sciences Officer commenced the transfer of museum object records into the new Modes XML software. This software allows a number of users to access files of museum records at the same time.

3.4 Loans In and 3.5 Loans Out None this quarter

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 11 groups of objects for identification

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 79 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without an appointment)

3.7 Researchers

8 Research visits in person, including:

- 3 Fashion Design students at University of East London to look at corsets
- Catherine Hamilton researching for her book on Henry Scott Tuke to look at Gibson/Tuke material in the collection.
- David Monk to look at Bartlow material for a diploma project.
- Photography of butterfly and moth specimens by secondary school art student.

Other collections research

- The Education Officer carried out research on the Egyptian collection and as a result of this, discrepancies over object numbers has been resolved.
- The Natural Sciences Officer has been collating this year's special verge survey results and preparing the annual verge reports.
- A photograph of an Iron Age Mirror lent to Museum will appear in a Festschrift.
- The BBC requested a photograph of the Winstanley self-portrait outside its framing and glazing (Conservation Officer) for the 'Coast' series.
- Bronze Age metalwork re-evaluated and some identifications corrected (Curator)
- Roger Kirkpatrick is working through the Maynard papers from Ipswich.

Insurance Valuations

It is proposed to undertake a rolling programme of re-valuations over the next few years, as budgets and other work permits. In August an oil paintings expert, Andrew Bowyer, inspected the Museum's collection of oil paintings, including one on loan to Chrishall Church, and his report with suggested valuations is expected shortly.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Saffron Security replaced the video microscope system in the Discovery Centre. The new camera is able change focus, allowing visitors to zoom in and zoom out when viewing objects. The cost of the new system will be met by the Museum Society, as previously agreed. In Ethnography, the Oceania case and the Jewellery case were cleaned and surface dust was removed from objects. In August the Curator made some small changes to the Archaeology displays: Bronze Age metalwork was re-displayed, and two unusual Roman-period figurines were put on long-term display. The Viking necklace has been re-displayed, with two other Viking objects. The Security Officer has renovated a small wooden cabinet which will replace the Bronze Age smith figure and offer a wider range of prehistoric artefacts in sealed drawers.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Beneath Essex – A Journey Through Time (geology) continued through this quarter.

4.3 Visitor Services

Visitors

	Public		Schools		Total	
	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005
July	1442	1080	770	442	2212	1522
August	2728	2401	240	196	2968	2466
September	1183	865	441	439	1624	1304
Total	5353	4346	1451	1077	6804	5423

Shop

	2006	2005
July	711.04	465.66
August	870.11	896.18
September	563.23	654.69
TIC sales	575.00	540.00
Total £	2719.38	2556.53

Tickets

	2006	2005
July	526.00	631.50
August	1113.00	Free entry
September	428.50	304.50
Total £	2067.50	936.00

Donations

	2006	2005
July	46.90	91.04
August	158.00	655.19
September	70.93	80.85
Total £	275.83	827.08

4.4 Publicity and Marketing

As usual a good spread of coverage of museum activities in the local press and in *UttlesfordLife*. The museum also took part in the Saffron Walden Literary Festival and organised a summer story competition sponsored by Harts, with a prize giving and storytelling event on Sunday October 1st. The free entry weekend for the Heritage Open Days scheme brought in large numbers.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of booked school sessions taken by Education Officer = 20

No. of school loan boxes sent out: = 5 Reminiscence Boxes = 3 (total audience 65)

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers July - September 2006

No. of pupils in taught sessions with Education Officer (BVPI)*	572
No. of pupils taught in visits to schools by Education Officer (BVPI)	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum* (BVPI) (mostly Bell College pupils in large groups over summer)	724
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	50
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	1346
No. of adults with school parties visiting Museum*	105
Total pupils + adults (total school visitors in Visitor figures table under 4.3)	1451

* These three figures provide the total no. school visitors in Visitor figures table under 4.3
(BVPI) figures are those which constitute Audit Commission Best Value Performance Indicator 170b

BVPI figures this quarter

170a Users : 8806 (incl. 'remote' users and 1802 website visits)

170b Visitors : 6804

170c School pupils in organised groups : 1296

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
1 July	Colchester Young Archaeologists Club, visit to Museum and Castle (Curator)	25
2 July	Car Boot Sale for Heritage Quest Centre (VSO)	300 in grounds
17 July	Saffron Walden Initiative Business Forum launch (Curator and Visitor Services Officer)	150
17 July	<i>Living Costume</i> Roadshow launch (Conservation Officer, Documentation & Exhibitions Officer)	40
18 July	Art Fund, Essex visit – introduction from Curator	30
19 July	Friends of Braintree Museum evening visit (Visitor Services Officer)	35
26 July	Summer Evening Social for UDC Staff and Members	200 in grounds
2, 5 Aug	Creative writing workshop with Fitzwilliam Museum (Education Officer)	11
9 Aug	<i>Snakes Alive</i> holiday activity (Education Officer, Natural Sciences Officer)	412
15, 16 Aug	<i>Africa</i> Family Holiday Activity (Education Officer)	350
22, 23 Aug	<i>Arctic</i> Family Holiday Activity (Education Officer)	287
9 th Sept	<i>2000 Years of Wine around Walden</i> (Curator & VSO)	35
14 Sept	<i>Lions</i> museum minis activity (Education Officer)	10
26 Sept	Clavering Village Society Talk (Education Officer)	22
29 Sept	East Anglian Conservators Forum meeting in Schoolroom (Conservation Officer)	21
	Total	1928

5.3 Outreach

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
13 July	Saffron Walden Over Sixties Club, talk (Education Officer)	48
22 July	Stall outside library for National Archaeology Week(EO)	Not known
August	Adult story writing competition with Fitzwilliam Museum	Not known

Other Museums and Local Groups supported

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

- Great Dunmow Museum Society, 2 committee meetings (Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery Society, 1 committee meeting (Curator)
- BRIE Biological Records Initiative Essex (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Local Agenda 21 Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working (Natural Sciences Officer).
- Bridge End Garden HLF bid – Future Education Programme (Education Officer)
- S.W. County High School – ‘AS’ Education Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detector Club, 3 meetings (Curator)
- Uttlesford Local History Recorders and Saffron Walden Archive Access Point, museum archive meeting (Visitor Services Officer, Documentation and Exhibitions Officer and

- Curator)
- Advice to Plegdon Hall re care of a collection of agricultural material (Conservation Officer, Curator)
- Newport Local History group, advice on future arrangements for local collection (Conservation Officer, Curator)
- Little Hallingbury Village History Society – follow-up visit to Roman villa excavations (Curator)

Involvement with Professional and Specialist Organisations

Hub Partners meetings (2) and Essex Museum Workers Group (1) (Curator)
Great Days Out consortium (1) Visitor Services Officer

Future Programme and Projects Oct – Dec 2006

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

1 Museum Management and Staff

The need for the Curator and staff to dedicate time to planning the Heritage Quest Centre and future Museum and Castle developments will be paramount, but there is also some disruption to be expected with the installation of the new telephones and various other contractors expected. The Curator and Visitor Services Officer also need time to implement more of the Marketing Strategy's action plan. New museum leaflets will need to be designed; a reprint is not possible as the printer holding plates has gone out of business.

2 Buildings and Site

Clearance of oil tank compound and continuing work for Security officer with contractors, action plan from security inspection in July and keeping records in order.

3 Collections and Research

Documentation Officer and Natural Sciences Officer hope to complete the transfer of museum object records from Modes for Windows into Modes XML software. Work proposed on computer indexing of archive material with ERO staff and volunteers

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Beneath Essex will close on the 15th October and the *Living Costume* Roadshow, a touring exhibition augmented by our own textile collections will open on 6th November. Staff will be heavily involved in researching and planning the *Blades* exhibition for January 2007.

5 Events, Education and Outreach

Next special exhibition: *Living Costume* Roadshow : Nov 6th – Jan 4th 2007

Half Term Holiday Activities for Families – 24 & 25 October : *The Mysterious Case of the Missing Mummy*;

Museum Minis- *Clay* 2nd. November; *Patterns* 7th.December

Christmas Decoration Day 3rd. December;

Fundraising concert for the Heritage Quest Centre : February 17th 2007 at the Baptist Church Saffron Walden (venue provided free of charge) : *The Angel, the Serpent & the Iron Cello* with the assistance of Ann Holloway and Quintus Benziger.