

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT October – December 2006

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Forward Plan I :Heritage Quest Centre

Two milestones have been reached this quarter: the Heritage Quest Trust was given formal approval by the Council on 12 December, and when registration with Companies House and the Charity Commission is complete, the new Trust will be able to register with Entrust and approach Biffa and Viridor Credits for landfill tax grants. Fundraising has also reached approximately the £100,000 mark, and it was particularly pleasing to get grants from the Essex Heritage Trust and Essex County Council Community Initiative Fund – the importance of the project is recognised at county level.

Forward Plan II : Museum & Castle Site

A letter from Cllr Morson and the Chairman of the Museum Society has been circulated to seek views of local residents and organisations on future improvements to the Castle and Museum. Replies will be used to inform plans and feasibility studies as these are developed over the coming year.

1.2 Staff

Documentation & Exhibitions Officer Sarah Wilson, who joined the Museum in December 2004, left on 7 December to take up a new post at Peterborough Museum. Sarah has made a significant contribution during the last two years and we wish her well with her developing career. Since we are in the middle of preparing a new exhibition *Blades*, we have been fortunate to welcome back Sue Miller, who has kindly agreed to take on a temporary contract (21 hrs per week) to help get *Blades* up on schedule. We hope to be advertising for a permanent replacement for Sarah in the New Year. We welcome a new Casual Assistant to help with Sundays, Bank Holidays and occasional stewarding – Stefan Shambrook joined the team in December. The Curator was awarded Team Leader of the Year at a ceremony in the Council Chamber at the UDC offices, having been nominated by the staff.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Anne Wade continued volunteer work on documentation and textile collection care. As part of the living Costume Roadshow, Anne demonstrated tatting, crochet and hairpin lace to the public on 2 December. Local craftswoman Jackie Damary-Homan demonstrated other needlework techniques such as knitting, and Margaret showed how bobbin lace is made. Hamish McIlrick finished work on the map donation, and is now checking glass plate photographic plates, many of Saffron Walden and the local area. Stephanie Thompson has started work on accessioning the donation of approximately 160 Chinese costume items.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

Most staff attended U-Access training about the new UDC personnel computer system.

The Natural Sciences Officer attended a meeting about Modes documentation software. The Conservation Officer attended a 2-day Care of Collections Conference on Hazards in museum collections, such as explosives, radioactive materials, or other items which can damage our health if handled, and a seminar on accessing EU funding. The Curator attended the biennial Sutton Hoo Society Conference (Anglo-Saxon archaeology) in her own time.

1.5 Health & Safety

Staff met the newly appointed UDC Health and Safety Officer (Jit Patel). Portable electrical appliances and fixed wiring circuits have all been tested (see 2.1 below). As part of a UDC health and safety week staff attended presentations and viewed DVDs on 'safe use of ladders' and 'hazards in the work place'.

1.6 Museum Sector

Following the departure of the Essex County Museum Officer, Stephen Lowy, last summer, the Museum Development Officer, Hannah Kay, has now left as well. The new Heritage Development Manager Stuart Warburton is overseeing both these posts until re-appointments can be made early in 2007 (all Essex CC posts, based in the Essex Record Office).

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

There has been a continuous stream of contractors working in the Museum this quarter, which has absorbed much staff time (mainly the Security Officer's) in preparations, invigilation and risk assessments where appropriate:

The **five-yearly electrical circuit tests** were completed by Chelmsford Electrical, arranged through Martin Stocks, UDC. Various engineers have also seen to small problems arising with some lights and phone lines.

New cabling has been installed for the **new phone system** (to be completed end of January). A new **fire exit vestibule** was built by UDC Contract Services in the Discovery Centre during November. This will provide an enclosed fire exit from the Natural History store, and avoid the roof having to be used as a fire escape from the store in the event of a fire in the Discovery Centre gallery.

The Great Hall galleries were closed to the public from 12th December so that they could be cleared by staff before scaffolding and painters moved in. A lighter colour scheme and refreshing of white gloss paint has set off the existing displays to better effect.

Committee are asked to consider financing new carpeting and re-upholstery of the seats in the Bay Window dating to 1988, as these now show their age.

No problems with gutters, drain pipes or damp have been experienced so far this winter.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

The airbrasive machine in the Lab has been overhauled and repaired in order to treat corroded archaeological iron, and its glove box refurbished. The fume cupboard received a mandatory service. Certain "dead" water pipes have been capped off and the repainting of the Lab, office and darkroom has vastly improved the look of this area. 3 new blinds have been installed to improve security to the windows.

Schoolroom – a new cupboard has been installed to provide increased storage space.

2.3 Newport Store

The Hanwell radio telemetric system linking the Lab with Newport Store is not working and data ceased to be sent on 6 November; it is still being investigated.

2.4 40 Castle Street

Attention from UDC Repairs is awaited on several minor matters.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

Scheduled Monument consent has been obtained for the pedestrian path through the shrubbery to the north of the driveway. A large tree which was leaning on the north wall of the castle ruin has been felled.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions

93 acquisitions this quarter, including

- A collection of maps of the local area
- Littlebury archaeological field walking archive (featured in the local press)

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

- Quarterly check of pest traps in galleries and stores.
- 28 items in need of treatment were documented, packed and taken to the University of Lincoln for supervised conservation; items sent in previous years were returned.
- Work continues on putting away objects in stores, to address the backlog which has accrued due to the exceptional number of projects and workload this year.

Remedial conservation work has included:

- A 17th century print and document went to a paper conservator for cleaning and mounting (see 3.4 Loans In), to be displayed in the Local History Gallery when framed.
- Two mineral specimens were treated.
- Work commenced on Greek coins removed due to a broken panel in the Egyptian Room. Swords and blades for the forthcoming exhibition examined and treated.

3.3 Documentation

No of new accessions catalogued: 88 (human history)

Valuation of Oil Paintings

An evaluation of the Museum's collection of oil paintings has been completed and the final report received (separate agenda item). Simultaneously, the Public Catalogue Foundation has published its Essex catalogue featuring all oil paintings in public collections throughout the county. It will bring the Museum's collection to the attention of a wider audience.

3.4 Loans In

Loans In: 2

The Museum has been loaned the original bill of sale for Audley End to Charles II, together with a contemporary print of the Duke of Albermarle, Charles II's Lord Chancellor. They were purchased at auction recently by a local resident who would like the local community

to be able to see them. Conservation and framing has been arranged through the Museum (Conservation Officer) at the owner's expense, and they will go on display in the local history gallery early in 2007. Local tool collector Peter Hooper has kindly lent a number of bladed tools for the *Blades* exhibition.

3.5 Loans Out

Loans Out Requests: 1

Maidstone Museum have requested the loan of the following archaeological items from the 7th century nobleman's burial from Coombe, Kent for their exhibition *Hidden Treasures of Kent* 12 May – 9 December 2007:

- 1891.64 Tripod-footed bronze bowl
- 1891.65 Two fragments of textile that were covering the bowl
- 1891.66 String of 9 amber and glass beads
- 1891.67 Fragment of square-headed silver-gilt brooch

Maidstone Museum is fully Registered and has provided a UKRG Standard Facilities Report.

Subject to staff being satisfied with the details of showcases to be used (details awaited from Maidstone Museum), Committee is asked to approve this loan.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 9 object identifications

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 63 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without an appointment)

3.7 Researchers

6 research visits in person including:

- A Canadian visitor who came for two days to research Wallace the Lion, Wombwell and 19th century taxidermy.
- Researcher looking at mummification and animals.

Other collections research

A researcher in Hawaii has asked for measurements and images of a number of our Hawaiian objects on display, including combs and bowls.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

The CCTV camera in the Discovery Centre was moved to the other end of the gallery by Saffron Security so that the fire escape could be constructed. Objects returned from the Sainsbury Centre's exhibition on the Pacific were returned to the Oceania case. The Curator and Security Officer have been working on a small wooden cabinet which now has four drawers of Bronze Age metalwork in place and is ready to replace the Bronze Age smith figure as soon as other priorities allow.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Beneath Essex (geology exhibition) closed on 15 October and the *Living Costume Roadshow*, from Museums in Essex, opened on 6 November until 4 January. It includes a

fine array of costume and accessories from the Museum's own collections spanning all periods; and many replica costumes and accessories for all ages to try on, together with other interactives. The road show has travelled to venues all round Essex, heightening awareness of the wealth of costume and textile collections in the county's museums.

4.3 Visitor Services

Visitors

	Public		Schools*		Total	
	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005
October	1380	1418	854	582	2234	2000
November	587	615	430	617	1017	1232
December	818	720	250	185	1068	905
Total	2785	2753	1534	1384	4319	4137

* includes teachers and adult helpers as well as pupils

Shop

	2006	2005
October	1387.86	903.99
November	757.20	958.17
December	341.20	362.27
Total £	2486.26	2224.43

Tickets

	2006	2005
October	601.50	654.50
November	278.50	235.00
December*	106.00	327.00
Total £	986.00	1211.50

Donations *Free admission from 11 Dec due to redecorating, but donations encouraged

	2006	2005
October	108.15	115.50
November	39.00	43.27
December*	171.50	67.66
Total £	326.65	226.43

Publicity and Marketing

Several local designers have been asked to quote for the design of three new publicity leaflets:

1. A re-designed general leaflet for the Museum (yellow with Egyptian sarcophagus)
2. A new flyer for exhibitions and activities, to be printed twice a year.
3. District leaflet on 4 public museums and galleries (Saffron Walden, Fry, Ashdon and Dunmow) linking with the new Uttlesford Tourist Route.

It is intended to get these designed and printed for April 2007, using money made available by the Council's Community Committee in accordance with the Museum's Marketing Strategy. The Museum has also participated in discussion with Sarah Seward, UDC, over the new fingerpost signage and heritage trail being organised by Saffron Walden Initiative. The Museum Society will be supplementing the pedestrian signage with a new sign inside the Church Street entrance to the Museum and adjacent site.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of booked school sessions taken by Education Officer: 36

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 1; **Reminiscence loan boxes:** 4

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers Jan-Mar 2006

No. of pupils in taught sessions with Education Officer (BVPI)*	1045
No. of pupils taught in school visits by Education Officer (BVPI)	10
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum* (BVPI)	179
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	30
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	1264

* These figures + 310 teachers/adults provide total no. school visitors in Visitor figures (4.3)

BVPI 170a Total Users of Museum Service this quarter 7354

BVPI 170b Total Visitors to Museum this quarter 4319

BVPI 170c Total School pupils in organised visits / off-site tuition 1234

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
11 Dec	Museum Society Christmas party	60
24, 25 Oct	Family Holiday Activities (Education Officer)	179 children 130 adults
3 Dec	Christmas Decoration Day (Education Officer)	42 children 20 adults
5 Oct., 2 Nov, and 7 Dec	Museum Minis - 3 sessions for under-fives and carers (Education Officer)	52 children 20 adults
11, 18 Oct.	2 drawing sessions for students studying Art to G.C.S.E. level at S.W.C.H.S. (Education Officer)	18 pupils 2 adults
	Total	523

5.3 Outreach

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
3 Oct	Lecture <i>The Vikings in NW Essex</i> , Dunmow Historical Society (Curator)	55
16 Oct	<i>Saffron Walden Museum – A World of Discovery</i> , U3E, Saffron Walden (Curator)	70
21 Nov	Lecture <i>The Vikings in NW Essex</i> , Great Bardfield Historical Society (Curator)	26
27 Nov	Presentation on Heritage Quest Centre, Great Chesterford Local History & Archaeology Society (Curator)	25
20 Oct	Talk – Working in the Museum , Saffron Walden Nursery School (Education Officer)	12
7 Dec	Roman Quiz, Manuden Society (Education Officer)	50
	Total	238

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (10 groups, 15 meetings/activities)

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

- Great Dunmow Museum Society, Trustees meeting and Committee (Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery Society – two Committee meetings (Curator)
- Biological Records Initiative for Essex – two meetings (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Biodiversity Project (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club – two meetings (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Local Agenda 21 Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project – two meetings (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working (Natural Sciences Officer).
- St. Mary's School, Literacy Project (Education Officer)
- Bridge End Garden (Education Officer)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

The Curator completed her two-year term as chair of Essex Museum Workers Group in September. She has continued to attend Regional Museum Group and Hub Partners meetings, on regional issues for museums in the East of England, and the Advisory Committee for Archaeology in Essex.

The Curator also helped to organise the Essex Archaeological & Historical Congress's annual Symposium which took place on Saturday 4th November in the Parish Rooms. Case studies from local community projects and professional archaeological services highlighted the amount of work and interest going on in Uttlesford.

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

Sue Miller (temporary Documentation & Exhibitions Officer) will leave at the beginning of March, by which time we hope to have advertised for a permanent full-time appointment to this post.

2 Buildings and Site

Painters completed redecoration of Great Hall, Special Exhibitions gallery and Foyer on 10 January.

Kidde Fire to install new fire exit sign, break glass alarm and smoke alarm outside new fire exit in Discovery Centre.

New telephone system to be installed 23 – 25 January.

3 Collections and Research

Transfer of computerised documentation records onto Modes XML will continue.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Blades – a Cutting Edge Exhibition opens with Private View for Museum Society members on Friday 19 January, and to public on Saturday 20 January

Marketing: the Museum publicity leaflet is to be redesigned and a new Exhibitions & Activities leaflet designed en suite. A third leaflet, publicising the four public museums and galleries in Uttlesford (Ashdon, Dunmow, Fry Art Gallery and Saffron Walden Museum) and incorporating the new Uttlesford Tourist Route, is also being produced. The funds come from UDC Community Committee as a one-off boost to the Museum's Marketing Strategy.

5 Events, Education and Outreach

The Angel, the Serpent and the Iron Cello Saturday 17 February 8pm. A museum musical evening at the Saffron Walden Baptist Church in aid of the Heritage Quest Centre appeal, tickets £10 from the Museum.

Learning Links Project – an educational project run in collaboration with the Department for Education and Skills, M.L.A. East of England and Chesterton Community College, to research new strategies for secondary school pupils and trainee teachers visiting the Museum.

Fan Your Enthusiasm – recycle your plastic and paper waste to make an ingenious and beautiful fan. A competition open to all ages held in collaboration with the Fan Society of Great Britain.