

**CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT  
January – March 2007**

**1 Museum Management and Staff**

**1.1 Management**

**Heritage Quest Centre**

Fund-raising and publicity has continued with a very successful fund-raising concert in Saffron Walden Baptist Church on 17 February *The Angel, the Serpent and the Iron Cello*, with thanks to Quintus Benziger and friends, Ann Holloway and the choir of Thaxted Primary School. A total of £1,515 was raised. Following a workshop for UDC members on 26 February and reports to Community and Operations Committees in March, it has now been agreed that the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) can proceed and that the Council will raise its capital contribution to £100,000 (spread over two years), subject to confirmation by full Council on 17 April. The provisional timetable is to submit the bid to HLF in mid-June for a decision in December, and to raise the remaining £120,000 matching funding required by the end of 2007. A fund-raising group is to meet on 24 April and Museum staff are to meet with HLF officers on 26 April.

**Forward Plan and Income Generation Feasibility Study**

24 responses were received in reply to the letter from Cllr Morson and Richard Wallace. The responses have been collated and a summary report prepared by the Natural Sciences Officer. A copy is circulated with this report for information. Informal discussions and a site tour were held with one of the respondents, Kenneth Marks on 2 February, and with consultant Karen Eyre and the Museum Society Chairman on 23 February.

**Accreditation**

In March the Museum received the award of Full Accreditation from MLA (Museums Libraries Archives) and the certificate was presented on 2 April by Sir Alan Haselhurst MP at a short ceremony attended by the chief executive and staff of MLA East of England as well as Museum Society and UDC representatives. Accreditation also recommends areas for improvement (which will inform service goals for the coming year) and these are:

- Confirm VAQAS award by 30.06.2008 (Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Standards)
- Documentation Backlogs (mainly geology at off-site store) and complete microfilm copy of current Accessions register to be completed by 31.03.2010
- Collections Care: confirm outcome of Proposed HLF bid for replacement of off-site store by 30.08.2008

The last two are dependent on the Heritage Quest Centre project for completion.

**1.2 Staff**

Sue Miller completed her part-time temporary contract as Documentation & Exhibitions Officer at the end of February and the Museum's gratitude for her sterling work should be recorded. Meanwhile the post has been advertised for a full-time permanent replacement and it is hoped to make an appointment by the end of May, to start in July. The Security Officer has returned to work after a swift recovery from a routine operation. Staff shortages and the additional

workload necessitated by the Heritage Quest Centre project and Forward Plan have inevitably placed some stress on staff, several of whom have found it difficult or impossible to take their leave and/or TOIL entitlement.

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

A new student from County High School, Greg Pugh, has been helping the Conservation Officer with collections care, especially tidying stores. Stephanie Thompson has been involved in documentation work, particularly incoming items to the Museum's collections. Hamish McIlwray continues to work on maps, at present reorganising the entire map collection in the Workroom drawers. An interim survey has been drawn up and a cross-referenced, indexed list of all maps held is the ultimate goal of his work. Judy and Hilary (something) are cataloguing archival material held in store. Peter Damary Homan assisted the Conservation Officer and other volunteers with cleaning blades before the exhibition. Anne Wade continues to work on textiles in the store and was helpful in dealing with items recently offered, accessioned, or coming off display. A German student, Wibke Bernhard, worked in the lab on a four week placement prior to studies at Stuttgart University.

### **1.4 Training and Seminars Attended**

18 January Asbestos seminar (UDC)

10 March Study Day on castles in south-east Britain (Wuffinga Education, Sutton Hoo) attended by Curator (in own time) – context for Walden Castle.

### **1.5 Health & Safety**

Jit Patel, the Council's new Health & Safety Officer, attended the March staff meeting and discussed use of stepladders, risk assessments, listing substances hazardous to health and workstation assessments. New H&S assessment checklists now have to be completed for all areas of the Museum buildings.

### **1.6 Museum Sector**

No significant news to report.

## **2 Buildings and Site**

### **2.1 Museum Building**

A sudden failure of the water supply in New Year was traced to a badly corroded and leaking water main. A temporary repair in the area at the bottom of the drive was undertaken, but complete replacement is evidently required as the sudden loss of water, washing and WC facilities carries H&S implications for visitors and schools as well as for staff. This work is in hand and expected to be undertaken in April.

Redecoration of the Great Hall, Special Exhibitions Gallery and Foyer was completed on time in January. The old cork notice boards in the Foyer are to be replaced as soon as the Security Officer's work schedule permits. The new phone system has been installed. Electrical contractors have been repairing and replacing lighting. Kidde Fire completed work on the new fire exit (Discovery Centre and store) in January. Kidde also surveyed Museum and Lab smoke alarms in February, after a false alarm activation. The majority of smoke alarms are old; three in the zone activated have been replaced and a rolling programme to replace others is planned.

### **2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom** – no further work to report

### **2.3 Newport Store** – no further work to report

### **2.4 40 Castle Street**

Replacement of worn-out door handles and lock has been completed and repainting of the rear elevation is planned. The overgrown fir tree next to the north face of the Museum has been assessed and will be taken down in April to prevent it causing damage to the Museum building.

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

The ivy covering the Castle has died back as a result of last autumn's spraying and is being left to rot and fall away gradually. Trees and shrubs were coppiced adjacent to a new fence which was erected behind the old butchers' premises at east side of the castle.

## **3 Collections and Research**

### **3.1 Acquisitions**

**19 acquisitions** this quarter, a total of 235 objects including

- Group of items from the Sudan, including pipes smoked by village elders, knives and model animals
- Carved wooden food tray, Zulu
- Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century hats from Great Hallingbury, originally from a 'hats of the famous' auction and including 'RAB' Butler's bowler hat

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

**Care of collections has included:**

- Pest trapping carried out in galleries and stores in January.
- Deep clean of natural history store, discovery centre, natural history gallery and cases in geology gallery (Natural Sciences Officer + Support Worker).
- Mounting some large musical instruments for display at the concert in February. Some items have been re-boxed in stores and archival materials ordered for on-going storage projects

**Remedial conservation work has included:** Work on ethnographic, domestic and social history blades prior to the current exhibition; mounting two samplers for Cater Museum; working on a quantity of archaeological ironwork and various social history items recently offered to the collections such as a baby's whole-body gas mask.

### **3.3 Documentation**

**No of new accessions catalogued: 0 human history (no Documentation & Exhibitions Officer in post), 0 natural sciences.**

Backlog documentation: natural sciences 9 new records, 178 records updated.

Basic accession records have been completed for recent acquisitions.

### **3.4 Loans In**

**Loans In:** the bill of sale for Audley End House to Charles II, and a small contemporary engraving of Lord Abermarle, Charles II's Chancellor, have been loaned by a local resident Mr Miles for display in the Local History gallery. The Conservation Officer arranged for conservation and framing (at the owner's expense). Audley End House was consulted.

### **3.5 Loans Out**

**Loans Out:** loans previously agreed to the British & Commonwealth Museum in Bristol and to Maidstone Museum have been collected. One request for a loan renewal has been received: *Pacific Encounters*, first shown at the Sainsbury Centre in 2006, is to be re-staged at the Musée du Quay Branly in Paris 16 June – 14 September 2008. Loan has been requested of

1882.254.2 Barkcloth mat, Hawaii

1835.262 Stilt step, Marquesas Islands

1835.254 Barkcloth Cloak, Society Islands

The cloak is fragile but the Conservation Officer has ample time to undertake some conservation work on it before the loan.

Committee is asked to approve the loan to the Musée du Quay Branly subject to satisfactory packing and transport arrangements

There is one new loan request for approval:

David Bukach, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham, has requested the loan of an early Bronze Age archer's stone bracer (wrist-guard) from 'near Scarborough' for non-destructive testing, as part of nationwide survey of early Bronze Age stone, jet and shale implements. This would be a short loan in the spring/early summer of 2007.

Committee is asked to approve the loan of the stone bracer and arrowhead to the University of Birmingham for analysis and research.

Plans are under discussion with the Cuming Museum, Southwark, for return of long-standing ethnographic loan items which are currently in store here. This will probably take place later in the summer, and will help ease some of the congestion in the Ethnography store.

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

**Object identifications this quarter: 15**

**Collection Enquiries this quarter: 82** by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without an appointment)

### **3.7 Researchers**

**8 research visits in person**, including:

- 3 days of research into George Stacey Gibson
- Pottery from Clavering
- Civil War documents

## **4 Displays and Visitor Services**

### **4.1 Permanent Galleries**

There is work to be completed in the Archaeology Gallery replacing images and labels on the wall after redecoration and a growing backlog of changes and additions to be made to archaeology displays. A small chest of drawers has been adapted for 'display storage' of a wider selection of Bronze Age metalwork and is destined to replace the figure of the Bronze Age smith. The additional demands on the Curator's time due to the Heritage Quest Centre project and Forward plan, coupled with managerial and other general duties, mean that this

aspect of the service will inevitably slip back. The Roman amphora stands have been repainted and are displayed with new labelling by the potter figure.

The Conservation Officer has completed clearance of the island case in Ethnography consigning the Inuit parka and North American Indian jacket and leggings to storage after 23 years on display. A display focussing on the Far East is planned. New lighting has been installed in part of the gallery entrance.

The coins on display in the Egyptian Room have been removed for conservation and the Perspex mount is being redesigned so it does not protrude so much.

#### **4.2 Temporary Exhibitions**

*Blades – A Cutting Edge Exhibition* opened with a Private View for Museum Society members on Friday 19 January, and will run until Sunday 3 June.

#### **4.3 Visitor Services**

##### **Visitors**

|              | <b>Public</b> |      | <b>Schools</b> |      | <b>Total</b> |      |
|--------------|---------------|------|----------------|------|--------------|------|
|              | <b>2007</b>   | 2006 | <b>2007</b>    | 2006 | <b>2007</b>  | 2006 |
| January      | <b>762</b>    | 771  | <b>606</b>     | 358  | <b>1368</b>  | 1129 |
| February     | <b>1509</b>   | 1560 | <b>542</b>     | 513  | <b>2051</b>  | 2073 |
| March        | <b>930</b>    | 950  | <b>832</b>     | 583  | <b>1762</b>  | 1533 |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>3201</b>   | 3281 | <b>1980</b>    | 1454 | <b>5181</b>  | 4735 |

##### **Shop**

|                | <b>2007</b>    | 2006    |
|----------------|----------------|---------|
| January        | <b>508-46</b>  | 479-07  |
| February       | <b>971-97</b>  | 899-67  |
| March          | <b>1144-52</b> | 906-14  |
| <b>Total £</b> | <b>2624-95</b> | 2284-88 |

##### **Tickets**

|                | <b>2007</b>    | 2006    |
|----------------|----------------|---------|
| January        | <b>*163.00</b> | 372.00  |
| February       | <b>632.50</b>  | 668.50  |
| March          | <b>416.50</b>  | 451.50  |
| <b>Total £</b> | <b>1212.00</b> | 1492.00 |

\* Free entry while some galleries closed for redecoration

##### **Donations**

|                | <b>2007</b>   | 2006   |
|----------------|---------------|--------|
| January        | <b>92.41</b>  | 47.50  |
| February       | <b>77.64</b>  | 88.95  |
| March          | <b>46.50</b>  | 65.48  |
| <b>Total £</b> | <b>216.55</b> | 201.93 |

##### **Publicity and Marketing**

Three new leaflets are under preparation Page 5

## **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:** 6 boxes of birds

Reminiscence loans 1

#### **Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers**

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| No. of pupils in taught sessions with Education Officer (BVPI)*         | 1180        |
| No. of pupils taught in school visits by Education Officer (BVPI)       | -           |
| No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum* (BVPI)                   | 275         |
| No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom           | 95          |
| <b>Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service</b> | <b>1550</b> |

These two figures + 525 teachers / adults provide total no. school visitors in Visitor figures table under 4.3

|           |  |                             |
|-----------|--|-----------------------------|
|           |  | (2006/07 total provisional) |
| BVPI 170a | Total Users of Museum Service this quarter                 | 8525 (33,043)               |
| BVPI 170b | Total Visitors to Museum this quarter                      | 5181 (22,145)               |
| BVPI 170c | Total School pupils in organised visits / off-site tuition | 1455 (5,468)                |

### **5.2 Events at Museum**

The new laptop and portable digital projector, funded by the Museum Society, have been acquired via the Council's IT department and have already been used by the Curator.

| <b>Date</b>        | <b>Event and Staff</b>  | <b>No. Attending</b> |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1st Thurs of month | Museum Minis sessions for pre-school children and their carers, 3 sessions = 60children + 42 adults         | 102                  |
| 24 Jan             | Radwinter Local History Society – evening in Museum, looking at Radwinter items (Curator)                   | 7                    |
| 10 Feb             | West Essex Embroiderers Guild – day school using items from reserve textile collections (Education Officer) | 23                   |
| 14,15 Feb          | Half Term Family Activities (Education Officer)   | 315                  |
| 10,11 Mar.         | National Science and Engineering Week Activities (Education Officer)  | 88                   |
| 13 March           | Methodist Wives, Saffron Walden History Quiz evening (Education Officer)                                    | 13                   |
| 22 March           | Widdington Guides – Museum Mystery evening (Education Officer)  | 31                   |
|                    | Total   | 579                  |

### **5.3 Outreach**

**Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Event and Staff</b>  | <b>No. Attending</b> |
|-------------|---|----------------------|
| 26 Feb      | Presentation to UDC members about Heritage Quest Centre. (Curatorial staff)   | 7                    |
| 12 Feb      | Talk to Saffron Seniors at the Day Centre, Saffron Walden (Education Officer) | 12                   |
|             | Page 6 Total  | 19                   |

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

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

- Ashdon Village Museum (visit with leaflet designer, Curator)
- Great Dunmow Museum Society (committee and AGM, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery Society – (three committee meetings, Curator)
- Searchers metal-detecting club (2 meetings, Curator)
- BRIE Biological Records in Essex (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Uttlesford) Committee AGM (Natural Sciences Officer)
- LA21 Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group AGM (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working (Natural Sciences Officer).
- Bridge End Garden - Family Holiday Activities (Education Officer)

12 January Natural Sciences Officer and colleagues from Planning, UDC met to draft a Corporate Biodiversity Policy for Uttlesford District Council which has now been adopted by the Council.

20 February Natural Sciences Officer met with representatives of Stebbing parish council to discuss extra management work at the two special roadside verge sites in the village.

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

The Curator has attended meetings of Museums in Essex Committee, the Advisory Committee for Archaeology in Essex, Regional Museums Group (MLA East of England), and Hub Partners (East of England Museum Hub).

The Education Officer has been involved with the MLA Project 'Learning Links' working with trainee teachers and Chesterton Community School, Cambridge to create museum activities for gifted and talented pupils.

The Conservation Officer gave advice on storage and display problems to Epping Forest District Museum at Waltham Abbey

## **Future Programme and Projects**

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

### **Heritage Quest Centre and HLF Application**

With a short and concentrated timetable to prepare and submit the bid to HLF for mid-June, and to continue to fund-raise as a matter of urgency, staff's work will be strictly prioritise as far as possible. It is inevitable that some areas of the service will be comparatively neglected, especially with no Documentation & Exhibitions officer in post until mid-summer.

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

Interviews for Documentation & Exhibitions Officer in late May, hope to have new officer in post for July

Education Officer working on policy for protection of children and vulnerable adults with UDC

### **2 Buildings and Site**

Water main being replaced in April

Programme of minor repairs around premises continuing

Fire inspection by UDC team (under new legislation) may take place

H&S checklists for all areas to be completed

### **3 Collections and Research**

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

*Blades* runs until end of June

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

Ecological surveys of special roadside verge sites over the summer (Natural Sciences Officer and team of volunteers)

5 Aug Egyptology Workshop for all adults (partnership with the Fitzwilliam Museum)

9 Aug *Spiders and Snakes* for all

15, 16 Aug *Africa* Family Holiday Activity

22, 23 Aug *Arctic* Family Holiday Activity

29 July – 2 Sept Writing Competition for children (in partnership with Harts bookshop)