

**CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
January – March 2008**

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Heritage Quest Centre

The most important news was the decision of the Heritage Lottery Fund on 13 March to award the project the full grant of £976,500 (58% of project costs) which now makes the project viable. A high-profile fund-raising event, attended by our patrons, at St Mark's College on 29 February, was funded by the Museum Society and generated much good will, and so far £1,600 as a direct result of the evening; it is intended to send follow-up letters now that the Lottery funding has been secured. However we still have nearly £240,000 in matching funding to secure and so a last concentrated effort is needed before we can formally commence, hopefully in June or as soon after as the funding situation and other legal preliminaries permit. Staff continue to submit grant applications to relevant funding bodies and renewed efforts to raise serious sums from businesses are needed. The Museum Service / UDC and Society will be expected to acknowledge the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund wherever possible, using logos and publicity guidelines supplied.

Admission and Educational Charges 2008

Following discussion by MMWG, the Council has accepted proposals that the Museum's admission charges should remain at current levels (£1 adults, 50p discounts, children free) but a small increase in educational fees will apply from 1 April 2008: £2-50p per pupil, minimum group rate £40, with discretion to waive the minimum rate for small parties with special needs. These rates will also apply to adult groups requesting talks out-of-hours.

Computer lines

The Museum's computer system was out of action from 14 to 19 March due to problems with the BT line, which is shared. IT Services are investigating the possibility of a dedicated BT line for the Museum, in view of the increasing volume of data which the Museum needs to handle, and unpredictability of the current line at times.

1.2 Staff

Bruce Tice returned in March to the post of Security Officer from secondment to other Council departments. Tony Carter, who has been stand-in Security Officer, has been retained as a Casual Assistant but will return to Security Officer duties in April when Bruce Tice takes up a permanent post with the Council's CRM system. The approaching retirement of Education Officer Jenny Gibsone in May will result in a short suspension of services to schools and other educational work until a successor has been appointed. That this is now able to proceed, in the face of the Council's current financial difficulties, is thanks to the Museum Society's offer to meet buildings' costs up to a maximum of £24,000 in 2008-09, at a rate equivalent to Council expenditure on recruitment, salary and on-costs for this post (proposal agreed by Finance & Administration Committee 27 March 2008).

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Mary Adams received well-deserved recognition from the Council with an Uttlesford Community Achievement Award in recognition of her voluntary service both in the Museum and elsewhere; the Society's Chairman Richard Wallace was similarly honoured. Graham Gollard, a Duke of Edinburgh Award candidate, has been attaching the NOF digital images to human history Modes XML records. Hamish McIlwrick continued his survey of the map collection, much of which is in poor condition. All volunteers working on archives had a meeting on 28 January to ascertain working practices and who was doing what. Stephanie Thompson and Morgan Giles assisted the Conservation Officer in aspects of collection care and accessioning, as well as the reorganisation of the ethnography store and labelling and repackaging of the Chinese costume collection. Lenan Zhang, a Year 11 work experience student, assisted in the lab and stores and re-boxed all the old newspaper collection. Charlotte Housden digitally photographed all the galleries. Audrey Newton, a retired librarian, has joined the rota of desk volunteers. Mary Sheppard, another former volunteer, has passed away; and her contribution is warmly acknowledged by staff.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
28 Jan	Special session for 6 volunteers working on local history archives and maps	Documentation & Exhib Officer, Conservation Officer, Curator
7 Jan	Window mounting and hinging prints etc for display	Conservation Officer
12 Mar	Box making for non standard sized objects	Conservation Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

Workplace assessments were completed by all staff in January. A draft report from a fire inspection (compliance with new legislation) made last year has been received and comments and corrections are being submitted. A fire drill on 27 March was undertaken during a school visit and everyone evacuated the building in 1 min 45 seconds. COSHH reports on chemicals used were updated.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

CCTV upgrades have been completed, improving coverage of collections on display and protection for volunteers and staff at the reception desk. The Great Hall alcove seats have been much improved by new covers, thanks to Museum society volunteers Joyce and Norman Bailey who donated the fabric and re-covered the three benches. Museum stores, galleries and work areas were sprayed with insecticide to control insect pests in March by a UDC Pest Control officer. The floor of the natural history store was cleaned and pest traps in natural history areas were checked before spraying took place. Pest trapping revealed the presence of some museum beetle. A few of the stores were cleaned but good housekeeping needs to be more regular and thorough; the Conservation Officer is organising deep cleaning of further stores with Casual Assistants.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

A patch of damp and holes in the floor has been located in and around a cupboard on the Museum Street wall of the Schoolroom, and been reported to the Council's buildings maintenance staff.

2.3 Newport Store

Nothing to report this quarter

2.4 40 Castle Street

Building work on the neighbouring property (38 Castle Street) has accidentally caused a very small hole to be punched through the wall into the first floor spare room. This has been reported to the builders and architect (M Hibbs) and will be repaired by the builders. Remedial work remains to be done on internal plaster and electric sockets previously affected by water penetration.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

The Workshop compound fence was damaged by strong winds. The Museum's outside tap broke and flooded the drive in January, causing disruption to water supplies to the main building, but has now been repaired.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions

209 acquisitions this quarter including health records, Uttlesford District Council Official Guides, Saffron Walden Borough Guide, and a magenta skirt and jacket from the 1960s.

A 1930s wedding dress has been offered by the Oxfam Shop in return for a donation. The dress will be on view on 24 April for Committee to make a decision. It has been assessed by a costume specialist as historically significant and a nice example, though with some foxing. A donation of not less than £10 and not more than £30 is suggested.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included: Following training, a mount-cutter was purchased for window mounts. Reorganisation of the ethnography store continues and a number of objects needing conservation have been noted. A number of glass lantern slides have been scanned by Gordon Ridgewell who kindly donated his services. They are interesting local views and this is part of a rolling digitization project of our photographs.

Remedial conservation work has included:

Camberwell students, conserving the sketches by GN Maynard of ethnographic heads stuck onto paper, visited on 1 February to check registers and the life of this 19th century curator. A poster explaining their work will be displayed later this year.

The last pieces of iron belonging to the hay-rick base were collected from the blacksmith and stored in Newport Store.

3.3 Documentation

20 new accessions catalogued this quarter.

Backlog documentation: Natural history – 39 new records, 13,109 records corrected to validate them (Natural Sciences Officer). 948 digital images attached to 594 records by

Support Worker. Human history 242, updated 171 human history records with NOF images.

Modes XML was down for a month whilst it was upgraded to version 2 by the Documentation Officer. This could not have been achieved without the help of Paul Fletcher UDC, IT Services, who put in much work on Modes files and the upgrade.

3.4 Loans In None this quarter

3.5 Loans Out None this quarter

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 4

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 80 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without an appointment)

3.7 Researchers

10 research visits in person, in addition to regular volunteers, including:

- Local residents researching Roman Great Chesterford and excavations at Wicken Bonhunt
- Roman pottery specialists conducting a research programme for Essex County Council and English heritage on ‘town and country’ sites in Roman Essex: pottery from Wendens Ambo and Stansted Airport has been taken for further analysis
- Dr Darlene Weston from Durham University, examining early medieval skeletons from Wicken Bonhunt for evidence of TB, as part of a major European research project into the origins and history of the disease’s development.
- Scientist from Dept. of Earth Sciences at Cambridge University researching Cretaceous oysters in the geology collection.
- Local residents researching Saffron Walden Cricket Club and the former Saffron Walden Teachers’ Training College, latterly the Bell College, which has now closed.
- Health records for Saffron Walden
- Photographs of Castle Street

Other collections research

Continued sorting of the large historic loan of ethnography from the Cuming Museum. The remaining Cuming objects in the store will be returned to them in May 2008, making more room for our collections. Research of a selection of small medieval objects for display.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Costume: the costume in the island case has been redisplayed by rotating some costumes that had been on mannequins for longer than the advised period of five years.

Ethnography: Preparation of exhibits for island case and Chinese exhibition.

Ancient Egypt: a new Perspex mount for the Hellenistic coins was put up.

Natural History Discovery Centre: a pair of male and female Malaysian stick insects were purchased for the Bug cage.

Geology: Specimen labels for the Red Crag and Chalk Sea cases were replaced as many of the specimen names had changed.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The *Making of Modern Essex* exhibition closed on 6 January 2008.

Every Object Tells a Story: from Bee Hive to Bowler Hat opened with a private view for object donors and lenders and Museum Society members on 19 January 2008.

The next exhibition which opens on the 19th April is *The Victorian Child at Work and Play*. It is a touring exhibition which is supported by objects from our collection.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools		Total	
	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007
January	835	762	424	606	1259	1368
February	1260	1509	611	542	1871	2051
March	1023	930	488	832	1511	1762
Total	3118	3201	1523	1980	4641	5181

Shop

	2008	2007
January	668.14	508.46
February	1227.56	971.91
March	653.88	1144.52
Total £	2549.58	2642.89

Tickets

	2008	2007
January	361.00	163.00*
February	537.00	632.50
March	487.00	416.50
Total £	1385.00	1212.00

*Free entry during redecoration

Donations

	2008	2007
January	57.93	92.41
February	62.00	77.64
March	30.00	46.50
Total £	149.93	216.55

Publicity and Marketing

There has been significant press coverage of the HLF award. The Curator and Education Officer have been interviewed on local radio, and the Museum featured in a recent television programme about saffron crocus and its uses. For financial reasons, the Museum and Saffron Walden Tourism, representing Bridge End Garden, have withdrawn from the Great Days Out Around Cambridge marketing consortium. The reduced advertising budget may be reflected in reduced visitor numbers over the period.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of booked school sessions taken by Education Officer	43
No. of school loan boxes sent out:	0
Reminiscence loan boxes:	0

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in taught sessions with Education Officer (BVPI)*	1208
No. of pupils taught in visits to schools by Education Officer (BVPI)	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum* (BVPI)	53
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	0
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	1261

* These two figures + 262 teachers / adults provide total no. school visitors (1523) in Visitor figures table under 4.3

BVPI 170a Total Users of Museum Service this quarter	7722
BVPI 170b Total Visitors to Museum this quarter	4641
BVPI 170c Total School pupils in organised visits / off-site tuition	1261

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
3 January	Museum Minis	33
19 January	Private View for <i>Every Object Tells a Story</i>	85
1 February	Museum Minis	43
12, 13, 14 February	Half term family art activities with help from Saffron Walden teenagers Deborah Wilson & Graham Gollard	310
1 March	Partners In Time Family Day	9
19 March	Essex Craft Society –adults drawing day	6
21-31 March	Signs of Spring family activity trail.	64
	Total	550

5.2 Outreach

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
18 January	Talk to Newmarket Antique Collectors' Club on Vikings in north-west Essex (Curator)	30
29 February	Fundraising event St Marks College	65
	Total	95

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 13 groups, 17 meetings
Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice

- BRIE Biological Records in Essex (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Biodiversity Project, work on Grassland habitat plan (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (3 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust Uttlesford Group (AGM Natural Sciences Officer)

- Saffron Walden Botany Group (AGM Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (project work & 1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford Farming, Wildlife and Countryside Group (Natural Sciences Officer, 1 meeting)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (1 meeting, Curator)
- Castle Street Residents Association History Project (1 meeting Curator, scanning photos and access to collections Documentation & Exhibitions Officer)
- Fry Art Gallery (2 committee meetings Curator, and advice on light levels and new blinds, Conservation Officer)
- Dunmow Museum (Committee meeting, AGM and advisory meeting on acquisition policy, Curator)
- Heritage Sampford Project (advisory meeting on preparation of archaeological archives, Curator and Conservation Officer)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Regional Museums Group (MLA East of England) (Curator)
- Advisory Committee for Archaeology in Essex (Curator)
- Essex Museum Workers group (Curator)

Grants Summary for this quarter

Source	Grant for	Amount £
DCMS / DES	Part of the 'Partners in Time' schools project run by the Imperial War Museum, Duxford. Funds to purchase items for educational use, including replicas for handling.	1,744.77
MiEC	Grant for archival storage materials, much needed to upgrade local history archives being worked on by volunteers (bulk order by MiEC on behalf of museums)	258.10
Museum Society	Upgrades to CCTV system (Saffron Security)	2,185.92
Museum Society	Fundraising event 29 February	549.00
Museum Society	Purchase of two dresses for collections	70.00
	Total	4,807.79

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

Priority must be given to securing remaining funding for the Heritage Quest Centre project, completing the legal pre-requisites concerning transfer of assets and the site to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd. and amending the current lease and management agreements accordingly.

2 Buildings and Site

Programme of cleaning of natural history stores and galleries continues (Natural Sciences Officer & Support Worker).

3 Collections and Research

Documentation of Osteological bone collection continues now Modes XML upgrade has been completed (NSO).

Annual programme of ecological surveys of Special Roadside Verge sites will commence in May.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Signs of Spring activity trail will be available for families until 13.4.2008.

A programme of events and exhibitions for 2008 has been drawn up and put on the website, and continues to grow. It is hoped this will attract more visitors and income at a time when the education service is largely suspended.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

Education Services and acceptance of school bookings will cease in May on the retirement of the Education Officer, until a successor has been appointed and is in post, hopefully by the autumn.