

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT July – September 2008

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Heritage Quest Centre

Thanks to Saffron Walden Town Council and private donors to two independent consortia the three landfill tax grants have all been secured with third party contributions, and remaining funding is covered by the Museum Society's offer to underwrite up to £100,000 although it is hoped that three outstanding grant applications will complete the remaining sum between them. Following the approval of Community Committee on 18 September, and subject to completion of paperwork for the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) it had been hoped to start the project in November. Sadly the sudden and unexpected death of the project's architect David Demery in early October has temporarily placed the start of the project on hold while alternative arrangements for managing the construction programme are investigated.

1.2 Staff

We welcome Dr Aleksandra (Aleks) Jones who took up the post of Learning Officer in September and is already taking school bookings and planning activities for 2009. Former Curator Len Pole returned to the Museum on 21 August to begin his MA Monument fellowship, working two days per week with the ethnography collections to improve their interpretation and use. The Museum Society kindly provided refreshments for a social evening to welcome Len on 23 September, to give old acquaintances a chance to say hello outside the pressures of the working day. As part of the project's remit to benefit the wider museum community as well as Saffron Walden Museum, a seminar was held on 30 September and was attended by staff from four other museum services with ethnographic collections, three of which had no specialist in ethnography on the staff.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Graham Gollard assisted with holiday activities, moving geology collections and packing crocus bulbs. Graham also helped with attaching images to MODES XML and with preparation work for the Perfect Pets exhibition. Jenny Gibson has made a detailed examination of ancient Egyptian mummy wrappings which have now been photographed and documented on MODES XML. Jenny Gibson is assisting Len Pole to record information from the accession register for his selection of objects. Morgan Giles assisted with reorganisation of collections in stores, and has now departed for University to study History at Canterbury. Anne Wade continued working on textiles and new acquisitions while Charlotte Housden photographed the galleries and helped on the costume redisplay. Hamish McIlwrick made good progress on the map collection survey.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
12 Sept	Essex Heritage Education Group meeting	Learning Officer
16 Sept	Museums Association conference on safeguarding in museums	Learning Officer

17 Sept	Climate Change and Museums	Conservation Officer
18 Sept	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council schools database training course	Learning Officer
19-21 Sept	Conference on the Archaeology of Essex, organised by Essex County Council at the ERO	Curator
24Sept	Arts Marketing Association – Regional meeting looking at electronic means of marketing	Curator & Visitor Services Officer (free of charge)

1.5 Health & Safety

As a result of new fire regulations, work is being planned to replace some internal doors (stores and offices) in the Museum because they do not conform to the new specifications, and a new Stair Climber has been ordered to replace the old Evac Chair for safe evacuation of visitors in wheelchairs from the first floor and mezzanine. Portable Appliance Testing was carried out at all museum service buildings. Manual Handling training was given to newer staff members.

1.6 Museum sector

MLA East of England, the regional branch of Museums Libraries Archives Council, is being wound up as part of a national re-organisation of MLA which in future will have a reduced presence in the regions. Measures are being taken to ensure that the Regional Museums Group, in which Saffron Walden Museum participates, will continue as an important regional forum.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

The Security Officer has been undertaking repointing patches of brickwork where old mortar below windows has begun to crumble. The rear lean-to where cleaning and other equipment is stored has also been cleared of unwanted equipment and fittings, and improved with a coat of paint to the wall and brackets for keeping equipment tidy. Moss was removed from its roof. Pest trapping in September found moth in the Workroom and natural history store (Natural Sciences Officer).

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

The Tennis Club was approached to cut down ivy and foliage overhanging over School Yard, and they have now cut the foliage back. Three small redundant old display cases were given to Ashdon Village Museum.

2.3 Newport Store

Alarm system serviced by Secom.

2.4 40 Castle Street

Internal work to plaster and electrical sockets previously affected by damp has yet to be undertaken.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

A site meeting between Council staff, English Heritage and Essex County Council archaeologists was held to discuss work to the retaining wall, which has now been granted scheduled monument consent. A resident from Museum Yard has raised a query about a short and low-level section of brick retaining wall there, and this has also been reported to the Council's Repairs department for

investigation. Shrubs around the Museum building have been trimmed to prevent pest ingress, and the hedge around the Castle is due to be cut in October.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

42 acquisitions this quarter including

- A series of black and white photographs from Saffron Walden which date to the 1940s
- Mans cotton string vest
- Victorian food warmer

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

- 5 large geology specimens placed in acid free plastic crates to protect them from flooding at Newport store (Security Officer, Casual Assistant, Natural Sciences Officer).
- Mummy wrappings have been repacked, photographed and detailed records have been made. All this information has been documented on the MODES XML records (Documentation and Exhibition Officer, Conservation Officer and Jenny Gibsone)
- Moved Bridge End Gardens Summerhouse paintings back to store due to deterioration and vandalism (flaking paint, bird muck, pencil marks, scuff marks)

Remedial conservation work has included:

- Treating a Siberian mammoth tusk, textiles, mounting items for Perfect Pets display
- Redisplay and mounting of Costume and Textile items
- As in previous years, items for students to conserve under supervision were gathered and transported to the University of Lincoln for this academic year. About 20 objects they had worked on in previous years were returned.

3.3 Documentation

42 new accessions catalogued this quarter.

Backlog documentation: Human History 150 records updates, 12 new records, 1053 records corrected to validate them and 150 digital images attached by Documentation and Exhibition Officer. Termlists have been created and set up on MODES XML for Archaeology, Documents and Pictures. Natural history 129 new records and 375 records updated by Natural Sciences Officer and Support Worker. IT installed DVD/CD writers on most museum computers.

3.4 Loans In 4

Woolly mammoth hair loaned by local geologist for display with Siberian mammoth tusk. Other loans were prehistoric artefacts and an impressive selection of Iron Age coins kindly lent by members of the Searchers Metal-detecting Club for *Positively Prehistoric* (one day event) .

3.5 Loans Out 3

The Polynesian stilt step, mat and cloak lent for exhibition at Quai Branly, Paris, were safely returned on 29 September. The Sir John St.Aubyn mineral collection was loaned to Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery for a project to research, document, conserve and publish information about his collections of geology and herbaria that were dispersed after his death.

Committee is asked to approve the loan of 1891.76 The Anglo-Saxon sword from the Coombe burial, Kent for exhibition in the treasury at Sutton Hoo 14 March – 1 November 2009, *Welcome to the Feast*. The request has been made by the National Trust which owns and operates the site of Sutton Hoo, but the exhibition is being curated by Leslie Webster, who has recently retired from the British Museum and is a leading expert on Anglo-Saxon archaeology. This would be a prestigious exhibition where the sword would be displayed alongside other status objects illustrating the custom of gift-giving at feasts and the giving of heirloom weapons of which the Coombe sword is one such example.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 10

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 92 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without appointment)

3.7 Researchers and Len Pole's MA Monument fellowship project

20 research visits in person, in addition to regular collections volunteers, including:

- Fossils from the Red Crag and Cromer Forest Bed formations
- Documents relating to Sir John St.Aubyn
- North American Items
- World War 1 and World War 2 documents
- Corsets
- Erratic rocks, minerals and fossils in the geology collection
- Chinese armorial porcelain (Marc Fitch collection)

Len Pole's ethnography project

Len Pole took up his MA Monument fellowship on 21 August and is working a couple of days per week in the Museum, principally with the Documentation & Exhibitions Officer. So far a number of object groups and themes have been identified for further research and potential for use in displays and other activities. A meeting with representatives from three other small museums and the Hub (Colchester-Ipswich) on 30 September set out some ideas to be explored for using ethnographic collections and future collaboration, and a further meeting has been planned for 30 January 2009.

Other collections research

- Study group for Roman Pottery – 47 specialists looking at objects from Newport stores
- Maynard papers from Ipswich Museum sorted – some retained; some to Cambridge Record Office; some returned to Ipswich Museum

3.8 Insurance

AXA have apparently paid the £3,500 compensation agreed for the theft of the Ancient Egyptian offering tray, but made the payment to the Council; arrangements are now in hand to transfer it to the Museum Society's Acquisition & Display Fund as strictly it should be applied to improving the collections. Progress with the much-needed revaluation of the ceramics and glass collection has stalled because permission for expenditure on this has not been granted. A specialist who knows the collection well was prepared to do the valuation at a cost well below the usual market rate. The Council's Strategic Management Board has instead requested information on the cost of the programme of revaluation and a copy of the Curator's briefing paper is circulated with this report.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Broken belemnite fossil display fixed in Geology gallery. Quern stone has been made safe for children to operate and has been used and demonstrated at the *Positively Prehistoric* event.

The Costume Gallery is in the process of redisplay, whereby items which have been displayed longer than five years and are made of light sensitive pigments or threads are replaced by a similar item and the label updated.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The Victorian Child at Work & Play (touring exhibition from Luton Museum) closed on 24 August.

Perfect Pets (touring exhibition from Luton Museum) opened on the 6 September and runs until 2 November.

4.3 Visitor Services

As predicted, there has been some downturn in visitor figures this quarter due to the suspension of educational services for schools, but a number of late bookings for independent visits meant that the reduction was not as great as it might have been.

	Public		Schools		Total	
	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007
July	1153	1247	275	352	1428	1599
August	1917	2038	-	98	1917	2136
September	852	913	131	317	983	1230
Total	3922	4198	406	767	4328	4965

Shop

	2008	2007
July	527-78	426-02
August	816-54	870-11
September	188-51	334-39
TIC	661-60	455-00
TOTALS	2191-43	2085-52

Tickets

	2008	2007
July	559-00	517-50
August	881-00	946-00
September	340-50	377-00
Total £	1780-50	1840-50

Donations

	2008	2007
July	82-37	96-46
August	109-40	99-69
September	76-90	58-08
Total £	268-67	254-23

Publicity and Marketing

Good press cover and photographs for events and activities during the quarter. The profile of the Heritage Quest Centre was raised, and £210 received, by the Museum Society being selected in the pilot for the Waitrose community fund whereby three local good causes share £1000 per month in proportion to customers' votes. (Saffron Sight also received £210 and Uttlesford Carers £580). The Museum participated in the annual Heritage Open Days with free entry for all on the weekend of 13 - 14 September with a good response as usual.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

The Learning Officer is re-establishing sessions for schools and beginning to take bookings, so although school numbers are inevitably low over the summer vacation and will remain low during the autumn term, it is anticipated that they will rise gradually throughout the next two terms.

No. of booked school sessions taken by Learning Officer: 0 9Vacation / not in post)

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 1 (natural history), 40 users

Reminiscence loan boxes: 1 box, 20 users

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer*	0
No. of pupils taught in visits to schools by Learning Officer	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum*	342
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	40
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service (Local Indicator 5b; all Local Performance Indicators listed at the end of report)	382

* These two figures plus 24 teachers/adults provide total school visits (406) in Visitor table in 4.3

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
9 July	Textile Group talk, objects out of stores for viewing + coffee	11
9 July	Advisory Committee for Archaeology in Essex	8
19 July	Positively Prehistoric – National Archaeology Week activities with re-enactors and finds display	183
30 July	Littlebury Local History Group Summer Holiday Club investigating archaeology from their parish	18
6, 13, 20 August	Holiday activities on Victorian themes	362
8 August	AGM Saffron Walden Museum Society	35
14th Sept	Hands-on demonstrations by members of the British Printing Society	46
23rd Sept	Social evening with Len Pole and celebrating permission to commence the HQC project	50
30th Sept	Ethnography seminar	9
	Total	722

5.2 Outreach

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues: none this quarter

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 10 groups, 11 meetings

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice

- BRIE Biological Records in Essex (2 meetings & report to UDC committee for signature of Memorandum of Understanding between UDC & BRIE, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (1 meeting & committee work, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group (1 field meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (5 surveys & annual reports, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford Farming, Wildlife and Countryside Group (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (2 meetings, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (committee meeting, Curator)
- Littlebury History Group (summer holiday activities, Curator)
- Saffron Walden Town Council (assistance with forthcoming archives exhibition, Curator)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Regional Museums Group (MLA East of England) (Curator)
- Essex Museum Workers Group (Curator)
- Haverhill Museum committee (Curator)

Grants Summary for this quarter

Grants received for Heritage Quest Centre project are reported to Resource Centre Project Team

No other grants this quarter

Local Performance Indicators

These have replaced the previous national Performance Indicators. 5a will provide a baseline from which to measure the eventual impact of the Heritage Quest Centre and its outreach programme.

5a No. of users attending events and activities on/off site (outreach work): 722

5b No. of school pupils in organised groups (incl. nursery and loan box users): 382

5c Total Visitors to Museum building and on-site events: 3,922

5d Total Users of Museum Service: 5,954*

* This includes estimated website visits for September as the tracked files which permit monthly monitoring of visits to the Museum's web pages were unavailable for September.

Future Programme and Projects – next quarter (Oct - Dec)

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

1 Museum Management and Staff

It is hoped that ground works for the Heritage Quest Centre will begin this autumn, despite the setback due to the loss of the project architect. The increasing amount of staff time which will need to be allocated to this project means that 2009 especially will be a very demanding year, as a normal service is to be maintained at the Museum while the HQC project is in full swing.

2 Buildings and Site

Work required to ensure compliance with new fire regulations.

3 Collections and Research

A further meeting on ethnographic collections with Len Pole and partner museums is planned for 30 January and the curator will give a short presentation at a conference being organised by Len Pole in London on 12 February.

Transfer of natural history objects records from Access database into Modes XML software (NSO).

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Cleaning geology gallery and woodland displays (Natural Sciences Officer).

Preparation work for the next temporary exhibition on Clocks, in association with A James (Jewellers) Ltd. This exhibition will open to the public on Saturday 15th November.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

Snakes Alive! – return on Saturday October 18th for hands-on encounters in connection Perfect Pets

Book Launch – To mark the publication on Saturday 25th October of *Mr Saffron Walden; George Stacey Gibson* - a new biography by Rev Jeremy Collingwood following research at the Museum, Town Library and Friends' Meeting archives. Proceeds from sales on the launch day to be donated to the Heritage Quest Centre appeal.

Half term activities: Tuesday 28th and Wednesday 29th October – Make a 'Perfect Pet' inspired by the 'Perfect Pets' exhibition.

Thursday 30th October – The Big Draw with artist Steve Downey. Make Chinese circles (mandalas) to be displayed in the museum.