

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM
CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
October – December 2008

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Heritage Quest Centre

This project formally started on 1st December, after the Council, Museum Society and Heritage Lottery Fund had all signed the Permission to Start documents. The HLF had given permission for contingency funding to be used to cover extra costs anticipated for employing an architect to replace David Demery. The Museum's Christmas card this year features one of David Demery's sketches of the Heritage Quest Centre and is dedicated to his memory. Invitations to quote have been sent to a number of locally-based architects with a deadline of 12 January and it is hoped that a project architect will be appointed by the end of January 2009. Construction work will then go out to tender, and it is anticipated that construction will commence around July.

Grants received from the British & Foreign School Society (£43,500 over 3 years, for outreach) and the Garfield Weston Foundation (£50,000 for capital costs) allowed the original matching funding target and at least part of the architect's costs to be met, although donations and other fund-raising will continue to be welcome to 'top up' and minimise the draw-down on contingency at this early stage. Hibbs & Walsh Associates have been employed to bring together a small amount of work to comply with planning consent, which was due to run out in mid December. This has been successfully completed on time, with thanks to a number of Council staff (Phil Hunt, Jake Roos, Ben Smeeden and Tony Morton). Museum Society directors and Resource Centre Project team members were able to inspect the site on 1 December. Environmental Services have been asked to remove the remaining street sweepings debris and the site gates have been padlocked to prevent fly-tipping by members of the public, now that the recycling centre opposite has closed and moved to a new site. Legal documents are being drafted for the transfer of the site to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd with the assistance of Catherine Nicholson from the Council's Legal services. Jake Roos continues to work on 'green' energy options to make the HQC as energy- and cost-efficient as possible.

Financial situation

Restrictions on all Council spending in the present financial climate may delay or curtail work in some areas, as only expenditure considered 'essential' is approved. It remains to be seen how this might impact on the service in the long run.

1.2 Staff

Tony Carter, who has been covering the post of Security Officer since Bruce Tice left the post earlier this year, has now been appointed as Security Officer. Jenny Gibsone has joined the team of Casual Assistants. Susan Collier, Documentation & Exhibitions Officer, will be taking maternity leave from April 2009.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Jenny Gibsone has been assisting with research on early collectors and collections in the Museum, which has been valuable for Len Pole's ethnography project. Rosina and Michael Down used their zoological expertise to assist with the *Snakes Alive!* day in October. Ian Sharp, formerly of UDC, has become a documentation volunteer. Anne Wade worked on costume accessioning and Hamish McIlwrick has nearly finished the map survey with data input into an Excel spreadsheet. Some fragile maps have been photographed. Hilary and Peter Walker helped survey the maps regarding significance, date and value together with Judy Brook. Judy and Hilary continued their work on the archive collection. Sophie Oelman is getting some experience before her museum training and worked on care of collection projects. Charlotte Housden also helped with projects and displays. Pat Williams volunteered to help with the *Perfect Pets* half-term family activities. Christine Philips, former teacher and newly-recruited education volunteer, helped with the Christmas tree decorating event. GCSE student Philip Bitten completed three days of work experience, during which he had the opportunity to work on a variety of documentation, education and conservation projects. A-Level student Kenny Foot worked with artist Steve Downey on the Big Draw event as part of the *Artists of the Future* scheme, funded by Essex County Council.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
8-17/10/08	100 Years in America, Worcester, Massachusetts (attendance funded by organisers)	Conservation Officer
14/11/08	Social History workshop, Colchester Castle	Learning Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

Training for use of the stair climber, for emergency evacuation of visitors who use wheelchairs, was arranged for 27 November but unfortunately the climber developed a fault and had to be returned for repairs. It has now been returned and further staff training will commence in New Year.

The Security Officer has been continuing a programme of fire drills, including a surprise drill for weekday staff and a drill for weekend Casual staff. Workplace assessment checks were carried out on the whole Museum together with a ladder audit. The Health + Safety team at UDC has now formed itself into a committee with representation from a member of the SMB (Strategic Management Board) as well as our departments.

1.6 Museum sector

MLA East of England closed on 23 December; and it is anticipated that the East of England Hub will take on some of its former responsibilities, however there is still much to be clarified. The regional Museums Group (of which Saffron Walden Museum is currently a member) will continue with its independent role as an advisory, representational and advocacy body for non-Hub museums in the region. Emma Hartley, one of two Essex Museum Development Officers, left for a new post.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

The Security Officer, with Martin Stocks of UDC, has been addressing maintenance requirements.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Overflowing gutters, damp around the office window, have still to be remedied. Leaves and moss cause the yard to be slippery (these were removed in early January).

2.3 Newport Store

Under pressure from a number of archaeological units to receive archaeological archives, the Curator, Security Officer and Casual Assistant Stefan Shambrook reorganised remaining space in the archaeological storage areas and erected all spare shelving. This will represent the final intake of archaeological material in the New Year, but there will also be a growing amount awaiting the opening of the Heritage Quest Centre.

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

Work on the retaining wall behind Castle Street properties is temporarily on hold due to restrictions on spending. Andrew Hurrell, Surveyor (UDC) is currently transferring existing plans of the Museum Society's land from old deeds and lease agreements onto a modern base map. The frost cover was placed on the glacial erratic boulder to protect it during winter. The hedge around the castle was cut by the UDC Environmental Service team to make the ruin more visible. The Curator / UDC have received a letter from English heritage concerning a recent survey of 'monuments at risk' (which includes the Castle) and discussions are to be arranged.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

29 acquisitions this quarter including

- Corn sower for attaching to a 19th-century plough and sowing seed-corn in the plough furrow
- Pye radio c1945
- Chinese costume
- Booklet produced by the ministry of information on the outbreak of war 22 Aug – 3 Sept 1939
- Eight-day mahogany long case clock by John Barton of Saffron Walden (in current exhibition)
- Card game snap
- Saffron Walden Trustee Savings bank money box
- 1930s Minibrix (construction toy, a forerunner of Lego)
- Watch lamp

Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

- Treatments include Japanese socks, corn sower, African spear
- The objects treated by University of Lincoln conservation students were returned in September. 45 objects were unpacked and put in store, and included a collection of hand tools, ethnographic objects and some bones

Remedial conservation work has included:

- Repacking of items in education boxes and in use by Learning Officer
- Repacking and photography of Chinese bound foot shoes

3.3 Documentation

29 new accessions catalogued this quarter.

Backlog documentation: Natural sciences 68 new records and 19 updated records. Human History 239 records updates, 5 new records, 1000 records corrected to validate them and 168 digital images attached by Documentation and Exhibition Officer. Sunita Dowson has updated 406 records on Modes XML for ethnography, with its location and adding any additional information that is on the location card and not on Modes XML; this work supplements Len Pole's MA Monument Fellowship project and is being funded by the Museum Society.

368 records of natural history objects held in an old Access database have been updated and transferred to the Modes XML database in preparation for the HQC project. Simple name term lists have been set up in Modes XML for all 11 natural history object files. (Natural Sciences Officer, Support Worker).

3.4 Loans In 1

A selection of time-recording and clock work devices from private owners via Howard Newman.

3.5 Loans Out 0

Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 13

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

3.7 Researchers and Len Pole's MA Monument fellowship project

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

- Helder Wedge Collection (early Aboriginal items)
- Documents on allotments
- Information on Hubert Collar
- Photographs of Saffron Walden
- Bank notes from Saffron Walden banks
- 1920s costume
- Catalogue of the sale of household goods & furniture of Lord Suffolk of Audley End
- Wicken Bonhunt – finds from the Anglo-Saxon site excavated in the 1970s
- Flint dagger (late Neolithic / early Bronze Age) from Windmill Hill, Saffron Walden

Len Pole's ethnography project

The barkcloth collection numbering some 90 pieces were removed from store, photographed and measured, examined by Len Pole, and re-rolled on fresh acid free tissue and archival quality central rolls while a note was made of future conservation requirements.

After completing an initial review of the ethnography collections to get to know them again, Len has been working on a range of significant items and collectors, in conjunction with the Documentation & Exhibitions Officer. One of the main outcomes of this work has related to the choice of objects to illustrate themes in the forthcoming *Origins* exhibition. This process involved concentration on some of the early collections, such as the material from south-east Australia acquired by J. H. Wedge in the 1830s, which is of international importance. In addition Len has been gathering more detail about various items, including the important collection of barkcloth, mainly from the Pacific Islands, much of which dates from the early 19th century.

Other collections and research

A number of 'missing' archaeological objects, mostly pottery, were recovered from Edinburgh University where they had been left by a former member of Museum staff who moved to a new job in Edinburgh in the 1960s, taking a box of objects for students to work on. The objects include two locally-important prehistoric pots, a late Neolithic beaker from Berden and a Bronze Age urn from Wendens Ambo; the 'missing' items from the Rochford hoard of bronze palstaves and a socketed axe head from Braintree; Roman glass and pottery from Great Chesterford.

There have been several finds of archaeological treasure reported. The Curator has worked with the Finds Liaison Officer for Essex and the Portable Antiquities Scheme on these. There are currently no less than four hoards of Bronze Age tools, weapons and/or ingots from different parts of Uttlesford going through the treasure inquest process, and other smaller single finds.

3.8 Insurance

Arrangements are now in hand for Jonathan Dutton to undertake a valuation of the ceramics and glass collection early in 2009, as previously agreed. A payment of £3500 by Axa Insurance has passed to the Museum Society following the theft of the ancient Egyptian offering tray last year.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

A further round of replacing costume and textile items in the gallery was carried out, replacing like for like, as some items had been on display since 1984 and could suffer the effects of dust and lighting. All the costume on mannequins has now been replaced during 2008 and will be changed again in 5 years time. Lighting upgrade was carried out to replace existing fittings with energy efficient bulbs and converters. The interior of the Australia case and the Toys + Dolls case were cleaned of surface dust.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Perfect Pets, a touring exhibition from Luton Museum, closed on 2 November.

Clock Works runs from 15 November -22 February 2009. The exhibition was prepared in association with horologist Howard Newman of A. James Jewellers, and was opened by Dr. Colin Lattimore, a former Master of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers, on 14 November. As well as loaned-in items, the exhibition includes a fine long-case clock made about 1790 by John Barton of Saffron Walden. Its ownership passed through the Hart family of local printers and stationers, and recently, by a generous bequest, to the Museum.

Visitor Services

	Public		Schools		Total	
	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007
October	1598	1432	291	722	1889	2154
November	792	585	265	671	1057	1256
December	654	668	185	200	839	868
Total	3044	2685	741	1593	3785	4278

The suspension of education services with the retirement of the Education officer in May has clearly affected school visits, however the new Learning Officer is beginning to re-build the service

Shop

	2008	2007
October	415.94	876.46
November	748.12	1186.59
December	232.84	456.45
TIC	661.60	-----
TOTALS	2058.50	2519.50

It is expected that shop income will improve in proportion to increased school visit bookings.

Tickets

	2008	2007	Private Hire 2008
October	701.00	589.50	
November	331.50	250.50	170.00
December	293.00	279.50	
Total £	1325.50	1119.50	170.00

Donations

	2008	2007
October	81.72	77.92
November	41.25	40.67
December	37.97	52.42
Total £	160.94	171.01

Publicity, Marketing and Website

Museum staff have been working with James Burton of UDC to update and finish improvements to the Museum's web pages (part of UDC's website but independently accessible as www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org). There will be links to the forthcoming Museum Society website and the Curator has been working with Carol Law and Susan Hollingworth to ensure the websites are mutually compatible. All the exhibitions and public events received good local press cover, also coverage of the official start of the Heritage Quest Centre project and a profile of Aleksandra Jones, the new Learning Officer, which should stimulate school bookings. Anglia ITV came on New Year's Eve to film the *Clock Works* exhibition for their regional news programme.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

The Learning Officer took bookings for a variety of taught sessions this quarter, including the History of Saffron Walden, Vikings, Tudors, Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt. Tailor-made sessions were also organised for GCSE pupils studying Art and Design, and A-Level Leisure Studies students. It is anticipated that school bookings will continue to increase following recent publicity measures, which include the publication of a new brochure for schools (sent to over 100 institutions) and updated education information on the museum website. Data about past school visits has been input into a new MLA online database that records the educational impact of museums.

No. of booked school sessions taken by Learning Officer: 16

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 2 (Ancient Egypt, 100 users; natural history, 40 users)

Reminiscence loan boxes: 0

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer	*	408
No. of pupils taught in visits to schools by Learning Officer		0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum	*	238
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom		140
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service (Local Indicator 5b; all Local Performance Indicators listed at the end of report)		786

* These two figures, plus 95 teachers/adults, provide total school visits (741) in Visitor table in 4.3

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
18 Oct	<i>Snakes Alive!</i> Reptile + spider day. SK, CW, SS.	At least 500
25 Oct	Book Launch of 'Mr Saffron Walden', a biography of George Stacey Gibson by Rev Jeremy Collingwood.	101
28 & 29 Oct	Half-term family activities making Perfect Pets. AJ	158 & 96
30 Oct	Half-term: Chinese Circles. The Big Draw with artist Steve Downey funded by Essex Jiangshu Festival. AJ	111
14 Nov	Private View of 'Clock Works' exhibition	60
22 Nov	Evening Private Hire 60th birthday	30
7 Dec	Christmas Tree day - clocks and cogs theme of decoration. (Learning Officer)	34
	Total	1090

5.3 Outreach

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
29 Oct	Talk on pest in display in the Museum to East Anglian Conservators Forum (Conservation Officer)	40
10 Dec	Talk at <i>Scary Conservation Abroad</i> , Institute of Conservation, London (Conservation Officer)	20
	Total	60

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 9 groups, 13 meetings

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice

- BRIE Biological Records in Essex (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (3 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working Group (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (2 meetings, Curator)
- Dunmow Museum (committee Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (committee meeting, Curator)
- Quendon Church – William Winstanley evening (Curator read short talk on behalf of local author Alison Barnes, as part of an Advent celebration)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Regional Museums Group (MLA East of England) (Curator)
- Advisory Committee for Archaeology in Essex (Curator)
- Meeting with staff from Thetford Museum re. ‘Museums, Sustainability and Growth’ project involving museums in East of England in growth areas. Curator to write short case study on outreach programme for Heritage Quest Centre, for an advocacy publication in 2009.

Grants Summary for this quarter

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

Source	Grant for	Amount £
Museum Society	Updating ethnography location records on Modes XML, due to reorganisation of store and Len Pole’s project	800
	Total	800

In addition, payments to cover the Learning Officer’s recruitment and employment costs have also been made by the Museum Society as previously agreed with the Council.

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): 1,150

5b No. of school pupils in organised groups (incl. nursery and loan box users): 786

5c Total Visitors to Museum building and on-site events: 3,785

5d Total Users of Museum Service: 4,876

Note: Users includes website visitors for which 265 were recorded for December, but October and November figures were not available. This was due to recent changes to the Council’s website and the need to rebuild monitoring of website use. December’s figure has therefore been multiplied x3 (=795) to give an estimate for the quarter. In future, accurate monthly figures will be available, as before the website re-design.

Under the new monitoring system ‘unique visits’ are used to calculate the performance indicator (previously ‘visits’), not ‘pageviews’ (nearest equivalent to former ‘hits’).

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

1 Museum Management and Staff

The appointment of a new architect for the HQC is anticipated by the end of January. Once the timetable for contractors tendering and construction has been confirmed, recruitment of project staff will begin.

Admission charges increase from 1 April 2009 to £1.50 (adult) and 75 (discount) , season tickets £5 / £2.50 (discount) but with concomitant costs including new signage and tickets.

The Documentation & Exhibitions Officer will go on maternity leave in April.

2 Buildings and Site

Proposed survey/service of heaters/radiators around the building to clean/repair and run the heating system more efficiently and cost effectively following recent problems with the gas boilers.

3 Collections and Research

The last file of natural history object records in an Access database is to be transferred to the Modes XML database (NSO + Support Worker).

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Preparation for the next temporary exhibition *Origins of the Museum Collections – Creatures and Cultures from Around the World* that opens on 7 March 2008.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

The programme for 2009 has been compiled and been published on the Museum's website but no funding for high quality print version.