

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM**CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
January – March 2009****1 Museum Management and Staff****1.1 Management****Heritage Quest Centre**

The Resource Centre Project Team met on 19 January to interview architects who had given the three lowest quotations for the Heritage Quest Centre project. Cowper Griffith Architects of Whittlesford, Cambridgeshire, were duly appointed and have been energetic in getting to grips with the project and undertaking a large amount of work with a tight time-table. Other necessary consultants (Quantity Surveyor, Structural Engineer and Mechanical & Electrical Engineer) have been appointed.

Specifications, costs and detailed plans are being worked on and reviewed before the tender documents are drawn up; it is expected that tender documents will go out in early May and contractors should be in place to start construction work in August. The RCPT will be convened to scrutinise revised plans in late April before tenders are issued. Much staff time continues to be required in working on this project, drawing down grants and reports to funding bodies.

Finances

While spending restrictions on Council budgets continue, the Museum has been able to obtain several grants this quarter. Two small grants were obtained from the Museums in Essex Committee for marketing and conservation, although this grant scheme ceases in 2009. A deposition grant for archaeological archives from Essex County Council will be used to replenish supplies of low-acid boxes and other storage materials, some of which will enable Heritage Sampford to prepare their project archive for deposition. Details in section 3 of this report and grants table at end of report.

1.2 Staff

Maternity cover for the Documentation & Exhibitions Officer has been advertised with the intention of interviewing in late April and appointing someone to start as soon as possible in May. Meanwhile Susan Collier departs on leave after 17 April, so there will be no Documentation & Exhibitions Officer in post for several weeks. This may temporarily affect the Museum's capacity to deal with some enquiries and requests for access to collections.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Pat Williams volunteered to help with the *Hickory Dickory Dock* family activities, while Jenny Gibsons and Christine Philips helped in preparing and running the *Colour Chaos* event. Gerald Lucy is assisting with the preparation of geology loan boxes. Chris Baker has joined the volunteer rota and his skills as a retired IT trainer have already proved invaluable. Stephanie Thompson, Sophie Oelman, Anne Wade and Emma Dearing (student) assisted the Conservation officer in a variety of conservation and storage/packaging tasks. Ian Sharpe and Hamish McIlwrick started work on the cataloguing of a collection of 100 year old glass lantern slides and photographic plates, the latter having finished the map survey and cataloguing project. Some of the local slides were scanned by Gordon Ridgewell.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
8 Jan	In-house training on use of stair climber to evacuate wheelchair users in event of fire	All staff, led by T Carter, S Shambrook and A Jones
9 Jan	Heritage Education Group meeting, Chelmsford	Learning Officer
17 Jan	SAFEchild training course, Ipswich	Learning Officer
3 Feb	Tourism marketing/IT free seminar, Cambridge, run by East of England Tourism.	Visitor Services Officer
10 Mar	VAQAS, free seminar, Cressing Temple with Bridge End Garden head gardener. A grant may be available via Essex CC to apply, jointly, for the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme award, needed for museum Registration status.	Visitor Services Officer
16 Mar	Costume mounting seminar, Southend Museum	Conservation Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

The Conservation Officer, as H&S rep, was involved in the Council's H&S day on 29 January, with information and equipment exhibited by a range of organisations and suppliers. The Security Officer and Curator also attended. A new procedure has been adopted to ensure that the roof space can be accessed in a safe manner.

1.6 Museum sector

Museums in Essex Committee: following Emma Hartley's departure, there will now be one Museum Development Officer (Ashleigh Jayes) instead of two. The MiEC is planning to set up a 'life-raft' fund to assist cultural organisations in Essex which experience particular financial difficulties in the current economic circumstances.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

An exceptionally busy fortnight in late March with contractors undertaking work around the Museum buildings to meet the latest fire regulations: replacements of some internal doors with fire-proof ones and testing the electrical wiring for display cases in all galleries. This has required the Security Officer (p/t) and Casual Assistants (Stefan Shambrook, Jenny Gibsone) to work extra hours to supervise and invigilate contractors. Pest trapping in the natural history gallery and stores was carried out in March, and the natural history store floor has been cleaned (Natural Sciences Officer and Support Worker).

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Work on replacement fire-proof doors, as above.

2.3 Newport Store

Heavy rain coinciding with snow-melt on frozen ground in early February caused flooding of the River Cam at the Newport Depot on 10 February and the store was surrounded by floodwater up to 1 foot deep. Water started to seep into the store but fortunately the flood water subsided before significant

flooding occurred inside. However, staff monitoring the situation noticed that the whole floor rose because it was floating on the high water-table, and this caused creaking and slight movement of the metal framework supporting the upper floor. The Relative Humidity levels were too high in the store for some time afterwards at 60-67%.

2.4 40 Castle Street

Contractors stripped two areas of damp plaster in March, and will return in April to replace electrical sockets, re-plaster and decorate the walls concerned.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

Vegetation growing around and to the north of the Castle ruin was cleared by UDC Service Team. Work on the retaining wall behind Castle Street properties is expected to start in the spring, but no precise timetable is available yet. Following a number of occasions when visitors and staff have experienced difficulty parking due to other people using the Museum car park without permission, the Security Officer has been trying to catch illicit parkers or leave a letter on their vehicles. It appears that a few people are giving membership of the Museum Society as an excuse for parking for non-Museum business, although in one case the person was not a member as they claimed! A note will appear in the next Society newsletter so that all members will be aware of parking policy.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

7 acquisitions this quarter including

- 1950s overshoes
- The War Budget Book, a weekly photographic record of the Great War from August 22nd 1914 to November 14th 1914
- 1950s corset
- 2 piece suit

Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

- The map indexing project has been finished and the report will itemise maps for conservation
- Re boxing and reorganisation of collections in the Ethnography store

Remedial conservation work has included:

- Treatment of objects for the Origins display, and provisions of mounts for vertical display
- Corn sower

3.3 Documentation

7 new accessions catalogued this quarter.

Backlog documentation: 548 natural history records updated (Natural Sciences Officer and Support Worker, Sunita Dowson). Human History 242 records updated, 52 new records created, 4000 records corrected to validate them and 7 digital images attached (Documentation and Exhibition Officer).

Sunita Dowson has updated 2031 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. The Documentation & Exhibition Officer has created termlists for Ethnography and Social History files and these have been uploaded onto Modes XML, and the files have started to be corrected

to eradicate any validation errors. The documentation procedural manual has been updated. Files and templates have been reviewed by the Documentation and Exhibition Officer with help from the Curator and the Natural Sciences Officer.

3.4 Loans In 1

A framed colour print of the Museum elephant on display in the Great Exhibition of 1851 has been loaned for display in the Origins exhibition.

3.5 Loans Out 0

No new requests. The Anglo-Saxon sword from the Coombe burial is now on display for the summer at Sutton Hoo in *Welcome to the Feast* exhibition. The Museum also helped to arrange a loan from a local metal-detectorist to the exhibition *Anglo-Saxon Art in the Round* (coins and associated small finds) in Ipswich Town Hall Galleries for the Colchester-Ipswich Museum Hub.

Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 9

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 77 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without appointment)

3.7 Researchers and Len Pole's MA Monument fellowship project

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

- Saffron Walden Regional Survey
- Ophicleide
- 1822 Pamphlet on Female Preachers
- Contents of Violet Dix's Trunk
- Researcher on dummy boards to examine the early 18th-century dummy-board of a sweeping lady, which belongs to a Dutch-influenced group of sweeping figures with round-stock brooms

Len Pole's ethnography project

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 which opened on 7th March. 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 details about various items, including the important collection of barkcloth, mainly from the Pacific Islands, much of which dates from the early 19th century. Len has also been working with the Learning Officer to develop teaching sessions.

3.8 Insurance

It has not yet been possible to undertake the insurance valuation of the ceramics and glass collection due to personal circumstances of the valuer; this will follow when the situation permits.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

The costume gallery re-display was finalised with new objects now on display and updated labelling. A redisplay of the early Anglo-Saxon case is being planned by the Curator but has not been progressed due to the demands of the Heritage Quest Centenary project and management of the service.

The 'minibrix' church model and the long case clock have gone on permanent display in the Local History Gallery. The long case clock was 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.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Clock Works closed on 22 February after a very successful run and many visitors, including a number of specialists and members of horological organisations. Thanks to Howard Newman and James the Jewellers Ltd for an exceptional display and for additional publicity in horological publications and a brief airing on regional BBC TV in January.

Origins of the Museum Collections, creatures and cultures from around the world – This exhibition looks at the Museum's early collectors and collection for Ethnography and Natural History and it contains objects and creatures from around the world. The exhibition reveals where these early collections came from and who brought them to Saffron Walden. Visitors can test their discovery skills with objects to touch, activities to do, and trails to explore. This exhibition opened on 7th March and will close on the 31st August. This exhibition was a combined project, of the Natural History Officer and the Documentation & Exhibition Officer and took a lot of planning and research for all the objects and collectors that have been included in the exhibition.

The Essex touring exhibition *Silks of Life*, which features Chinese costume and textiles from Saffron Walden Museum and the Warner Archive in Braintree, had a very successful opening in Braintree Museum in January and is now at the Beecroft Gallery, Southend. The Conservation Officer assisted with mounting the exhibition at Braintree and Southend, and the ECC Heritage Manager has expressed his thanks to her and all Museum staff involved in helping with this exhibition.

A popular quiz based on Museum objects and display panels on the Heritage Quest Centre project were produced for the Museum Society's stall at the Uttlesford Local History Fair in Saffron Walden Town Hall on 28 March. At least 2,000 people attended the event and saw the Society's stall, and 130 completed quizzes were submitted. The Museum also lent four table-top display cases to the Town Council for display of documents from the town archives on the day.

Visitor Services

	Public		Schools		Total	
	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
January	1046	835	295	424	1341	1259
February	1548	1260	54	611	1602	1871
March	744	*1023	464	488	1208	1511
Total	3338	3118	813	1523	4151	4641

* Easter holidays and activities fell in March in 2008

Shop

	2009	2008
January	489-41	668-14
February	356-26	1227-56
March	458-17	653-88
TOTALS	1303-84	2549-58

Tickets

	2009	2008
January	540-50	*163-00
February	715-00	537-00
March	317-00	487-00
Total £	1572-50	1187-00

* Free entry during redecoration in 2008 as parts of museum closed to visitors.

Donations

	2009	2008
January	85-20	57-93
February	89-33	62-00
March	37-58	30-00
Total £	212-11	149-93

Preparations have been made to address increased entry charges from 1st April 2009, but expenditure on new signage required still has to be resolved.

Publicity, Marketing and Website

Visits to the Museum's web pages on the Council website have risen steadily this quarter, following redesign and updating of information last year (see performance indicators at end of this report). Local press and specialist publications covered *Clock Works* exhibition and family events. A new exhibitions and events leaflet for 2009 has been funded by an external grant.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of booked school sessions taken by Learning Officer: 23

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 5 (Tawny Owl, 46 users; Badger, 46 users; Victorians, 15 users; Anglo-Saxons, 42 users; Ancient Egypt, 17 users)

Reminiscence loan boxes: 0

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer	*	608
No. of pupils taught in visits to schools by Learning Officer		0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum	*	69
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom		166
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service (Local Indicator 12b; all Performance Indicators listed at the end of report)		843

* These two figures, plus 136 teachers/adults, provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
15 Jan	Hosting 'landowners and farmers evening' with two local detectorists and Finds Liaison officers (thanking landowners for co-operation and promoting responsible detecting and reporting of finds)	35
18+19 Feb	Half-term activities: <i>Hickory Dickory Dock</i> 350 children + 130 adults	480
9 March	Late opening for <i>Origins</i> exhibition and Museum Society reception before Len Pole's talk	25
14 March	Science Week activity: <i>Colour Chaos</i> 60 children + 40 adults	100
31 March	Late opening for meeting of the Saffron Walden Brownies (Aleks Jones and Jenny Gibsone)	33
	Total	673

5.3 Outreach

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
12 Jan	Presentation about Museum Learning Provision to the Local Development Group for Uttlesford North, Saffron Walden County High (Learning Officer)	15
28 Jan	Talk about Special Roadside Verges in Uttlesford for Hatfield Heath Gardening Club (Natural Sciences Officer)	40
5 Feb	Talk on Museum and Heritage Quest Centre to Gibson WI, Saffron Walden (Curator)	40
12 Feb	Presentation at MA seminar on ethnographic collections, chaired by Len Pole (Curator)	50
26 Feb	Talk on Museum and Heritage Quest Centre to Cherry Hinton local history Society (Curator)	36
28 March	Visitors to Museum Society stall (with display and quiz) at Uttlesford Local History Fair	2000
	Total	2181

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 10 groups, 13 meetings

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice

- Essex Field Club (2 meetings & 2008 accounts, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (management regime 2009, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford Farming, Wildlife and Countryside Group (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Futures Local Strategic Partnership (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)

- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (1 meeting, Curator)
- Dunmow Museum (committee, AGM, advice on Acquisition & Disposal policy, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (committee meeting, Curator)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Advisory Committee for Archaeology in Essex (Curator)
- Essex Museum Workers Group (Curator)

Grants Summary for this quarter

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

Source	Grant for	Amount £
MiEC	Marketing: production of 2009 Exhibitions, Activities & Events leaflets	490
ECC FAU	Deposition charge for archaeological archives (M11)	960
Renaissance	Training bursary for Natural Sciences Officer	50
	Total	1,500

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.

12a No. of users attending events and activities on/off site (outreach work): 2,854

12b No. of school pupils in organised groups (incl. nursery and loan box users): 843

12c Total Visitors to Museum building and on-site events: 4,151

12d Total Users of Museum Service: 7,732

Including 1,148 website visits for quarter (new monitoring system for website is now in place)

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

Admission charges increase from 1 April 2009 to £1.50 (adult) and 75p (discount), season tickets £5 / £2.50 (discount).

New signage to be resolved as soon as possible, before a VAQAS inspection takes place (a quality-assurance mark for visitor attractions)

Heritage Quest Centre project will continue to dominate staff timetables and priorities, with other Council officers involved with tender procedures when tender goes out in May. Three project staff posts will be advertised mid-April.

Interviews for maternity cover for Documentation & Exhibitions Officer to be held late April, appointment to follow as soon as possible.

2 Buildings and Site

Completion of current round of work to Curator's house and electrical works to resolve outstanding problems with a few display lights in galleries.

Work anticipated on rear wall behind Castle Street properties, to be confirmed by UDC.

3 Collections and Research

Len pole's ethnographic project continues until July, with emphasis on developing educational uses for collections with Learning Officer, and working with partner museums as a follow-up to the recent seminar held at Saffron Walden Museum.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Preparations continue for forthcoming exhibition of Henry Moore's sheep etchings

5 Education, Events and Outreach

New leaflet advertising 2009 programme now printed, copies available at Museum and information is also on website. Spring Trail and World Cultures Explorer Suitcases available for families over Easter holidays, Shadow Puppet workshop on 28 May (half term week) for 2 children @ £3 each (advance booking necessary).