

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

**CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
April – June 2009**

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Heritage Quest Centre

Issues concerning the inadvertent blocking of access to the site earlier this year have now been resolved with the neighbouring landowner and Essex County Council, but it has delayed further survey work to check the foundations required and postponed the tendering of the design and build contract. Meanwhile interviews for the three project staff were held in mid-June, but confirmation of appointments and start dates has been suspended until the timetable for construction has been finalised.

Audit

An audit of the Museum Service by the UDC Auditor concluded with an inspection of documentation records relating to a sample of Natural History objects and verification of their presence in storage, and an assessment of risks for collections generally.

1.2 Staff

We have welcomed Carla Purdue who is providing maternity cover for the Documentation & Exhibitions Officer post; post-holder Susan Collier had a baby boy on 14 May. Sunita Dowson, who has been an Access to Work support worker for the Natural Sciences Officer for three years, and a valued team member, left on 18 June and is replaced by Madeleine Fanthorpe from the end of June.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Trident student Hollie Bruce has undertaken work experience with the Conservation Officer. Emma Dearing, a university student, worked for 3 weeks on various projects such as cleaning the jewellery and games cases, changing 2 tapestry fragments on display, and some treatments in the Lab. Care of collection volunteers, joined by gap year student Rosamond Brown, worked in the stores and Lab, and inputted data about glass negatives/positives. Some of these will be selected for scanning. Prints and watercolours are being input with some selected for photography. All this information will eventually go on the Museum database. Jan Edwards has joined the rota of desk volunteers. An 'unbirthday' coffee morning for volunteers on 8th May brought the team up to date with Museum plans. Mr Roper, a geologist, assisted the Natural Sciences Officer with the identification of lavas and other geological specimens. Chris Baker has created a spreadsheet for the Teaching Collection and Ann Holloway will input the data. The regular team of archive volunteers continue to work on the document and map collections, and Ian Sharpe is assisting various staff with computer-related tasks.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
22 April	Taxidermy cleaning and repair	S Kenyon
27 April	Modes XML training in-house by S Kenyon	A Jones, C Purdue
1 June		

20 April	Pests, hazards in museums and dealing with a costume collections	L Morrison
15 May	Herbarium care	S Kenyon
14 May	East Anglia Conservators Forum	L Morrison
2 June	In-house training (refresher and practice) on use of stair climber for wheelchair users in event of fire	All staff, led by T Carter, S Shambrook and A Jones
4 June	Presentation about LED lighting	L Morrison, C Purdue, T Carter, S Kenyon
26 June	Collect: Collections Management Exhibition	C Purdue

1.5 Health & Safety

Work to bring the Museum in line with the latest fire regulations has now been completed: some internal doors have been upgraded to fireproof doors and the Security Officer has organised fire drills so that all staff including weekend casuals are up-to-date, and the Schoolroom and Laboratory annex has also had fire drill practice. Workplace inspections took place to make sure premises are safe for staff and visitors. Air-conditioning unit in the Natural History store received its annual service in May. The Lab fume cupboard was inspected.

1.6 Museum sector

The closure of MLA East of England has left a vacuum in the region which is being partially filled by the East of England Museum Hub and Regional Museum Group, which the Curator continues to attend. The Share scheme, a time-bank of professional expertise, has been launched by the Hub.

2 Buildings and Site

All Museum buildings (Museum, Lab/Schoolroom and Newport store) have recently been included in a general condition survey of all property owned or managed by the Council and undertaken by external contractors Dyson for the Council.

2.1 Museum Building

There have been several incidents of minor vandalism to the white-painted wooden gates at the end of the forecourt. This is locked out-of-hours to prevent access to the fire escapes and rear of the Museum. It appears that local youths force it open either as a prank or because the fire escape is a convenient hidden meeting place; local police have been informed. It is proposed to replace the gate with a pair of much more robust iron grille gates. Martin Stocks (UDC) is preparing a design and specification for quotes. One of the warning signs by the Castle has also been removed by vandals.

A UDC Pest Control Officer applied contact pesticide to museum stores, galleries and offices in order to reduce the incidence of insect pests, as part of routine conservation procedures.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

No items to report.

2.3 Newport Store

The Council arranged for a survey and check of the asbestos walls, following a query from a member

of staff, but the form of asbestos used did not pose a risk to health.

2.4 40 Castle Street

Work to re-plaster and redecorate walls previously affected by damp has been satisfactorily completed. An external water-meter (under the pavement in Castle Street) has been installed by Three Valleys Water at the Curator's request and a copy of details lodged with the Council for future reference.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

The Castle ruins are listed on English Heritage's recently re-published 'Monuments at Risk' Register. As the result of a site meeting and discussion between English Heritage staff, Barbara Bosworth, Barry Stansfield (UDC) and the Curator, Barbara Bosworth (building conservation advice, UDC) and EH are to assess the programme of work needed and the cost, should funds become available in future (EH can grant-aid the work but require matching funding). A further site visit with Malcolm Star, EH architectural consultant, took place on 26 June to assess the most urgent work required.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

15 acquisitions this quarter including

- Set of seven knitting patterns and numerous pieces of sewing equipment donated by Mrs Harrow, West Wickham
- Two bound volumes of *Castle Street Remembered; Oral History Project*, October 2007 – October 2008 from Peter Riding, Castle Street Residents Association local history project
- Medieval silver annular brooch, 13th century, Clavering (treasure find 2008 T164). Both landowner and finder kindly waived their rights to an ex gratia payment, consequently the Museum was not required to purchase this treasure find.

The Curator visited the former village store and pottery at Quendon at the request of the owners, who were sorting out a number of pieces of redundant equipment from the premises relating to its history as Quendon Store (subsequently Mumford's). A few items were photographed and others brought back to the Museum for recording or acquiring, including a large shop-counter tin-opener.

Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

- Repair stitching and stabilisation of a Chinese robe (MiEC funded)
- Conservation of archaeological pottery, previously loaned to Edinburgh University
- Treatment of modern coins
- Repair of a Victorian muslin day dress

Remedial conservation work has included:

- Cleaning of some stores prior to pest spraying
- Calibration of environmental monitoring equipment

3.3 Documentation

15 new accessions catalogued this quarter.

of maternity leave, and induction of the new postholder (maternity cover) have obviously affected work this quarter for human history collections.

	New Acquisitions	Backlog (existing collections not previously catalogued on Modes)	Edits and Updates to existing records
Human History collections	15	0	0
Natural History collections	0	6	836
Total (all collections)	15	6	836

3.4 Loans In

None this quarter

3.5 Loans Out

A request for the loan of some Australian Aboriginal artefacts from the Helder Wedge collection is anticipated from the National Museum of Australia. An extension to the loan of geology to Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery is also expected – details to be presented at the meeting.

A short -term loan request was received from Helen Tedman of Environmental Health at UDC for a kit comprising handle-able domestic implements and two ration books, to illustrate a talk about food health and hygiene to an elderly group at the Day Centre.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 14

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 90 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without appointment)

3.7 Researchers and Len Pole's MA Monument fellowship project

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

- Guy Maynard – his archaeological work and regional survey
- Several researchers from Australia all interested in the Helder Wedge collection
- Manuscript documents relating to the geology collections

A short article of the Corn Sower (see Acquisitions, January – March 2009 report) has been published in *Newport News* (Curator, with photographs and conservation work by Conservation Officer).

Len Pole's ethnography project

Len Pole has been working with the Learning Officer in developing links with schools, involving the world cultures collections, specifically some Kenyan items taken to St Mary's Primary, Burnham on Crouch, which has links with schools in Kenya through the Diocese of Chelmsford (See 5.1 below). They are also liaising with and advising other museum in the region in the use of world cultures material in their own collections for outreach; visits have been made to museums in Wisbech, Great Yarmouth, Bishops Stortford and Hertford.

Len has also been collating information on some collections acquired by the museum in its early days (such as the Wedge collection). He has contacted Steve Hooper of the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, who has helped with information about objects obtained from the Museum by his grandfather.

Len has also contributed a case study on his work here to *Museum Practice*, and put together ideas for consideration on future collaborative exhibition projects highlighting links between East Anglia and North America, also connected with the Cultural Olympiad 2012.

3.8 Insurance

Jonathan Dutton is currently working through the ceramics and glass collection, assigning insurance valuations and also adding to or correcting some of the identifications and descriptions on the Modes catalogue. It is planned that Jonathan's work will feed into a refreshing of the displays, with new labels and possibly a few changes of exhibits without altering the overall plan of the gallery.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

A small temporary display about Materials has filled the space left by the broken touch-screen computer in the Discovery Centre.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Origin of the Museum's Collections opened on 7 March and runs until 31 August. It is accompanied by a number of family activities and workshops designed to explore aspects of world cultures and natural history highlighted in the exhibition.

The Visitor Services Officer visited the Henry Moore Foundation to plan the *Sheep* exhibition.

4.3 Visitor Services

Admission charges increased to £1-50p (adults), 75p (discounts) and season tickets to £5-00 / £2-50 from 1 April.

	Public		Schools incl adults		Total	
	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008
April	1156	1216	149	169	1305	1385
May	1044	*1810	308	413	1352	2223
June	676	*833	613	301	1289	1134
Total	2876	3859	1070	883	3946	4742

*700 due to Victorian Day with evening opening (Museum & Galleries month campaign)

336 due to Essex Beekeepers demonstrations for National Insect Week in June

Easter fell in March in 2008 but in April in 2009

Shop

	2009	2008
April	524-76	555-74
May	501-61	708-36
June	1075-33	538-30
Totals	2101-70	1802-40

Tickets

	2009	2008
April	713-25	544-50
May	652-00	709-50

June	389-00	393-50
Mus Soc	322-50	322-50
Totals	2076-75	1970-00

Donations

	2009	2008
April	71-97	91-02
May	40-45	76-01
June	54-30	55-31
Total £	166-72	222-34

Publicity, Marketing and Website

New signage has been installed to incorporate increase in entrance charges and to improve ‘visibility’. The working relationship continues with the Tourist Information Office and the launch of their new website. A free VAQAS (Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme) inspection is due, funded via Museums in Essex. A joint report with Bridge End Garden has been negotiated and, if successful, the VAQAS award will be used for joint marketing.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of booked school sessions taken by Learning Officer: **18**

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 6 Local history loan box (92); Anglo-Saxon loan box (29); Seaside Holidays loan box (17); Victorian Childhood loan box (96); Toys loan box (30); Victorians loan box (30). In addition to these, and listed in table 5.2 and 5.3 below:

- Loan box of replica Ancient Egyptian objects was prepared at the request of Essex County Council for the ‘Egyptians at the Library’ May half term event. This loan box included objects and information to display at the libraries in Maldon, Saffron Walden, Colchester and Clacton. A total of 386 adults and children benefited from the use of this loan box.
- Loan box of pottery and other handle-able finds from Iron Age and Romano-British sites in Wendens Ambo was prepared at the request of the local organiser of a lecture (by Maria Medleycott, ECC) and village fete on a Roman theme. Museum staff also provided information and images of Wendens Ambo sites and finds for the local community to use and keep.
- An afternoon drop-in event for teachers, ‘Tea, cake and loan boxes’, was held on 3 June to raise awareness about the existing school loan box collection. Teachers were also provided with information about forthcoming outreach activities and loan kits linked to the HQC project.
- As part of Len Pole’s project, museum staff took part in a pilot outreach session to St Mary’s Primary School in Burnham-on-Crouch. 102 Key Stage 2 pupils benefited from seeing a selection of Kenyan artefacts, which complemented work they had already done as a result of St Mary’s existing links with a school in Kenya.

Reminiscence loan boxes: 0

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer	*	615
No. of pupils taught in visits to schools by Learning Officer		102

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No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	248
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	294
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service (Local Indicator 12b; all Performance Indicators listed at the end of report)	1,259

* These two figures, plus 207 teachers/adults, provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
4-20 April	Signs of Spring family trail (Learning Officer, Natural Sciences Officer)	101
4-20 April & 23-31 May	World Cultures Museum Explorer Suitcases (Learning Officer)	64
24 April	Essex Heritage Education Group Meeting (Learning Officer)	7
7 May	Museum Minis (Learning Officer)	30
8 May	Volunteers' morning event – 'cakes and catch-up' (Visitor Services Officer, Curator)	25
20 May	Evening talk on Walking Sticks by Christopher Dyer showing his private collection raised approx £200 for HQC (Curator and VSO)	25
28 May	Shadow Puppet workshop (Learning Officer, Len Pole and artist Jane Reid-Diagne)	40
3 June	Loans Box tea-time drop-in meeting for teachers (Learning Officer, Natural Sciences Officer and Jenny Gibsone)	4
4 June	Museum Minis (Learning Officer)	24
	Total	320

5.3 Outreach

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
29 April	Presentation on HQC Project, Saffron Walden Rotary (Curator)	50
11 May	Presentation on HQC Project, Probus Cub of Saffron Walden (Curator)	50
13 May	Talk by the Learning Officer at the Fry Art Gallery Society AGM (Learning Officer and Curator)	30
25-29 May	'Egyptians at the Library' event at Maldon, Saffron Walden, Colchester and Clacton libraries. A loan box of replica Ancient Egyptian objects was sent for display	386
27 May	Presentation on HQC Project, Probus Club of Audley End (Curator)	42
19 June	Wendens Ambo loan	25
	Total	583

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 9 groups, 11 meetings

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice

- BRIE Biological Records in Essex (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (1 meeting, 3 surveys, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Futures Local Strategic Partnership (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)

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- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (2 meetings, Curator)
- Dunmow Museum (exhibition opening, information on SHARE, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (committee meeting and AGM, Curator and Learning Officer)
- Residents at The Crump, medieval motte site in Berden, advice on finds (Curator)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Regional Museums Group (Curator)
- Essex Museum Workers Group (Curator)
- SHARE launch by Hub at Fitzwilliam Museum (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
MiEC	Conservation of Chinese robe embroidered with insects and butterflies (Miss Tebbutt's collection)	250
ECC FAU	Deposition charge for archaeological archives (M11)	960
Renaissance	Training bursary for Natural Sciences Officer	50
	Total	1,750

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, up to 31 March 2009.

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.

	Definition	This Quarter actual	This Quarter original target	Annual Target 2009-2010
12a	No. of users attending events and activities on/off site (outreach work)	903	50	1,000
12b	No. of school pupils in organised groups (incl. nursery and loan box users)	1,259	800	3,000
12c	Total Visitors to Museum building and on-site events	3,046	4,300	16,450
12d	Total Users of Museum Service Including 1,158 website visits for quarter	5,178	7,300	26,800

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

1 Museum Management and Staff

Learning Officer Aleksandra Jones will be leaving the museum in August. Arrangements are in hand to request permission to recruit to this post, but there will be a temporary drop in school bookings in the autumn term until this post can be filled.

2 Buildings and Site

Engineering work on the retaining wall between the Museum site and backyards of Castle Street properties will be preceded by about a week of work by archaeological contractors, Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit, planned to commence 16 July. The archaeologists will be looking for and recording any archaeological features along the north perimeter where soil is to be removed and ground re-landscaped before a new retaining wall and fence are constructed. The project is being supervised by Andrew Hurrell, UDC.

3 Collections and Research

Ecological surveys of Special Roadside Verge sites (Natural Sciences Officer).

Intake of some very small archaeological excavation archives and historic buildings surveys from various sources.

Research visit in August to examine Egyptian mummy of a boy, which will be removed from display for a couple of days.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Exhibition of sheep sketches by Henry Moore opens on 12 September, with a private view for members and guests on Friday 11th September 6 – 8pm.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

Natural History Museum Explorer Suitcases will be available for families to explore the museum from 20 July, for the summer holiday period.

World Cultures print workshops for adults and children, led by Aleks Jones, Len Pole and Jenny Gibsone, will take place in July. There will be an afternoon session for children aged 7 and up on Wednesday 22nd July, and a full day workshop for adults on Saturday 25th July. We will be printing with paint and ink so wear old clothes! To book places at £3 and £6 please contact the museum (01799) 510333.

Family drop-in sessions connected to the ‘Origins of the Museum Collections’ exhibition will take place in August. On Wednesday 5th August, 11am-1pm and 2-4pm, the theme will be Creatures and Cultures; we will be colouring, cutting and sticking and learning about different creatures and cultures by decorating a world map. On Wednesday 12th August, 11am-1pm and 2-4pm, we will be making decorative Bird and Butterfly Mobiles.

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LOANS OUT RENEWALS AND LOANS RENEWAL REQUESTS

Loan Extensions

LO 749

37 minerals donated by Sir John St Aubyn on loan to Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery. Loan is due back on 31.7.2009, however, the project staff have not finished the research and conservation work that is being funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. The input of external resources will benefit this collection and Saffron Walden Museum so it is proposed that the loan is extended for a period of 6 months until 31.12.2009.

LO 748

2 fossils and 1 piece of amber on loan to Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service. Loan is due back on 18.7.2009. The objects need to be transported by car and cannot be sent back by post. Research on the 2 fossil specimens has been completed and they will be returned when a member of Norfolk MAAS staff is travelling to this area. The specimen of amber is still being investigated by an amber specialist in Maidstone. It is proposed that the loan is extended for a period of 6 months until 31.12.2009.

Loan requests

1 Request for loan of a St Aubyn mineral specimen to Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery for the touring exhibition about St Aubyn.

SAFWM : 1834.140.35 is a piece of flint lined with chalcedony. It matches up with a specimen in the Plymouth collection to form a complete geode of flint. The flint specimen was split up during the period 1794-1815 to produce two specimens. This is a very interesting find and an article about this and another divided mineral specimen has been published in three geological journals. It is recommended that the loan request is approved, subject to a satisfactory agreement about insurance and security. The Saffron Walden Museum specimen will be important in telling the story of St Aubyn and his mineral collection in the touring exhibition. Its inclusion in the exhibition will raise awareness of the mineral collection, raise awareness of Saffron Walden Museum and increase the number of Users in our performance indicators.

The exhibition is booked to tour the following places and dates:

Royal Cornwall Museum	9th January - 5th March 2010
Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery	13th March - 8th May 2010
St. Michael's Mount	May 15th - August 31st 2010
Saltram National Trust house	Sept 11th - Oct 29th 2010
Devonport Guildhall/St. Aubyn Church	Nov 6th - January 10th 2010
Saffron Walden Museum	End of April - beginning of Sept 2011

2 Proposal to loan objects from the John Helder Wedge Collection from the Saffron Walden Museum, Essex, United Kingdom, for display in *Creating a Country*, National Museum of Australia 2011 – 2021

Exhibition Dates: April 2011 to April 2021. The loan period would be approximately 2-4 weeks either side of these dates to allow for object and mount assessment and for install/de-install and transport

A total of eight objects from the Helder Wedge collection are requested for the *Colonial Melbourne* Module of the exhibition, four from 2011 – 2016 and four from 2016 – 2021.

The first group of 4 objects between early March 2011 and end of April 2016

1) The first group of 4 objects would ideally consist of two shields of the different types, and perhaps two clubs.

Shield 1838.67 (E 156, Cat No. 126) *store*

Shield 1838.71 (E 158, Cat No. 129) *display no. 4*

Club 1838.73 (E 161, Cat No. 112) *display no. 8*

Club 1838.80 (E 169, Cat No. 119) *display no. 9*

The second group of 4 objects between early March 2016 and end of April 2021.

2) The second group of 4 objects would ideally consist of one shield, 1 club, 1 boomerang and 1 wooden bucket

Shield 1838.68 (E 156A, Cat No 127) *display no. 10* or 1838.69 (E 157, Cat No. 128) *store*, if 127 not stable enough for travel)

Club 1838.76 (E 164, Cat No. 115) *display no. 8*

Boomerang 1838.66 (E 115, Cat No 106) *display no.7* or 1838.65 (E154, Cat No 105) *store* if native repair to 106 is too fragile to travel

Wooden bucket 1838.98 (E 153, Cat No. 11) *display no.11*

There has been much discussion of this potential loan with Mrs Carol Cooper, from the Museum's Centre for Historical Research, who visited saffron Walden earlier this year and has been in correspondence by email with Saffron Walden Museum since. As a result, a formal request has been received from Matthew Trinca, General Manager Collections, Care and Exhibitions, National Museum of Australia.

It is recommended that this proposal is accepted, as it allows a good section of Helder Wedge objects to be displayed to a potentially large audience in Australia, while retaining sufficient items in Saffron Walden to continue to provide a display in the ethnography gallery. Committee are asked to approve the loan in principle, for Museum staff to confirm the precise selection of objects from the above list once further research has been undertaken.

Proposal from National Museum of Australia to digitise John Helder Wedge collection

The National Museum of Australia are also developing a project to digitise significant collections of Australian historical material in overseas institutions, and would be willing to fund the digitisation of the entire Helder Wedge collection for this purpose. This would make information and images of the while collection available for study and research, while allowing Saffron Walden Museum to retain copyright of images. There would be considerable benefits to Saffron Walden Museum in making the collection available to a potentially very large audience on Australia and worldwide, and in the additional information and research which the project would attract. It is recommended that Museum staff enter discussions with Carol Cooper to plan the photography and other work needed.