

## **SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM**

### **CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT October - December 2009**

#### **1 Museum Management and Staff**

##### **1.1 Management**

###### **Heritage Quest Centre**

Negotiations with Sainsbury's have culminated in an agreement to exchange sites if Sainsbury's planning application is approved in mid February and the subsequent 13-week referral period is completed without challenge. Architects Cowper Griffith are now preparing a new planning application for the Heritage Quest Centre's potential new site and this will be submitted in January for decision in March. All costs associated with design and planning work for the new site are being met by Sainsbury's. The Heritage Lottery Fund has been supportive and on 8 December their East of England regional committee formally approved the new site as an amendment to our original application, if it goes ahead next year. Other funding bodies are continuing to hold grants for the Heritage Quest Centre, despite the delays. Our fall-back position remains building on the original site.

###### **Consultant for restructure of Museum Service**

As part of its comprehensive review of services and long-term finances, the Council has initiated a long-term review of Museum Service budgets and staff structure. Tim Heathcote, a heritage business consultant with considerable experience in museums, latterly as Assistant Chief Executive of MLA East of England, has been appointed for this purpose and has met with Adrian Webb, Director of Central Services, Richard Auty, Head of Community Engagement and the Curator; he will meet with the Museum Society directors in January.

##### **1.2 Staff**

Due to the pending review of the Museum Service, the recruitment of a new Learning Officer has not been permitted, with an immediate and significant impact on school visits and other aspects of the service (as indicated in other sections of this report).

##### **1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience**

Work on the local history documents and photographic collections continues with a dedicated team of volunteers Hilary Walker, Judy Brook, Hamish McIlwrick, David Nash and Ian Sharpe, while Chris Baker assists with computer-related projects. Local 6<sup>th</sup> form student Anthony Braybrooke has made a start on transcribing the Moat Farm Murder letters donated last quarter; while Nadiya Ali and Beth Aitkenhead assist the Conservation Officer on collections and stores projects. Tony Morton spent 30 hours putting data from ecological surveys of Uttlesford special roadside verge sites 2004-2009 into the project database for Essex. Gerald Lucy also worked with the Natural Sciences Officer to complete 3 new Rock loan boxes using unwanted material from the University of London, and specimens from his own collection. Teresa Williams has joined the rota of desk volunteers.

##### **1.4 Training and Meetings Attended**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Training / Seminar</b>	<b>Staff</b>
7 Oct	Seminar on disposals from collections, South	Curator

	Midlands Museums Federation, Norwich	
19 Oct	Workstation / DSE Assessor training	Conservation Officer
Nov	Presentations about the new UDC Whistle-blowing policy	All museum staff
Dec	SHARE Masterclass – Porcelain (Fitzwilliam)	Documentation and Exhibitions Officer

### **1.5 Health & Safety**

No specific items to report.

## **2 Buildings and Site**

### **2.1 Museum Building**

Pest trapping in natural history stores, ethnography store and costume collection and some of the galleries took place in November. The heavy snowfall before Christmas caused water to leak through the roof of the Ceramics gallery affecting some of the newly refurbished cases and flooding the carpet. No damage was caused to the collections, the ceiling remains intact and the gallery has been reopened, but it is being monitored closely while wintry weather continues.

### **2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom**

A leaking gutter pipe which was damaging a window inside was repaired. A new computer was installed allowing the old one to move to the Organics Store, but unfortunately this is not working due to connection problems.

### **2.3 Newport Store**

Alarm serviced. The store has remained weather-tight so far in the cold weather.

### **2.4 40 Castle Street**

Nothing to report this quarter.

### **2.5 Grounds and Castle Site**

Contractors have still to complete work and clear up along the north boundary wall adjacent to Museum Yard and to 30-34 Castle Street. Since the removal of the large sycamore behind the Museum in October, residents at 42 and 44 Castle Street have requested a survey of the wall where it forms the end wall of their backyards, as some repair work may be required next year, and this has been reported to Building repairs at the Council. The low wall supporting the fence between 40 and 42 may also need attention and this boundary is likely to be the Museum's / Council's responsibility.

## **3 Collections and Research**

### **3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals**

**22 acquisitions / collections** this quarter including

- Large fragments of a well-preserved wall painting c. 1600 from Sibleys Farm, Henham (Chickney parish) which had been detached many years ago and were found stored in a barn.

These are awaiting conservation. Also a number of items and local history documents, mostly from 1930s-1940s, relating to previous occupants.

- 2 Pairs of 19<sup>th</sup> century leather boots and a shoe found at Dolphin House, Gold Street, Saffron Walden.
- Gramophone needles and Columbia typewriter carbon paper.
- Advertising card and shopping bags from Eaden Lilley and Weavers stores.
- Collection of programmes, cards and a ration book relating to WWII.
- Series of photographic postcards of Little Walden, Audley End House, Stansted Hall and Saffron Walden views.
- Large collection of 50 gift cards and ephemera from the wedding of Mabel Raven and Frederick Lindsell, held at Wimbish Church, 25 July 1946. Mabel Lindsell's diaries have been offered but are to be forwarded to the ERO (see note below).
- Two books of natural remedies published in 1929 and 1930.
- Hopi Kachina plaque from Northern Arizona, USA.
- Children's jigsaw puzzle and sewing book, early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Framed pencil drawing of Ron Liversage
- 45 CDs of interviews from the Castle Street Remembered Oral History Recording project.
- Stainless steel 'ACROW' ashtray.

Two interesting and extensive sets of personal diaries and notebooks which have been offered to the Museum, have now been offered to the Essex Record Office as the most appropriate institution for long-term care and research of Essex diaries. The diaries of the late Mrs Joan Wright of Sampford have now been passed to the ERO, but local historians from the Heritage Sampford project have had the opportunity to study them in the Museum first. The diaries of the late Mrs Mabel Lindsell of Sibleys are also due to go to the ERO in the New Year, as soon as the local history recorder for the area has had sufficient time to complete the study of them. Both diaries illustrate rural life through the Second World War and later 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are a number of potential purchases, mostly archaeological finds of treasure, either on offer or anticipated in 2010; items for an immediate purchase decision will be considered as a separate agenda item, as confirmation of valuations is still awaited in a few instances.

### **Collections Care and Conservation**

#### **Care of collections has included:**

- Survey of a small part of the Town Hall framed paintings. A pair of portraits c 1815 were taken to the lab for surface cleaning
- A selection of 15 objects was taken to Lincoln for conservation by students under supervision, and completed objects returned

#### **Remedial conservation work has included:**

- The interiors of cases in the Geology gallery were cleaned by the Natural Sciences Officer and Support Worker.
- Barkcloths were finally all wrapped, photographed, and stored; other examples are now on display.

- Ceramics in the Ceramics Gallery cases were removed, cleaned and returned after case interiors were painted light blue. This programme is ongoing.
- COSHH assessments for all the chemicals were renewed

### **3.3 Documentation**

**98 new accessions catalogued this quarter.**

	<b>New Acquisitions</b>	<b>Backlog (existing collections not previously catalogued on Modes)</b>	<b>Edits and Updates to existing records</b>
Human History collections	98	5	262
Natural History collections	0	9	975
<b>Total (all collections)</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1237</b>

### **3.4 Loans In**

- Renewal of long term loan in LN 385.1 from the Leeds Museum, an Hawaiian stone pounder currently on display in Worlds of Man gallery. Loan extended for 5 years until 22.10.2014.

### **3.5 Loans Out**

- Mathew Trinca, National Museum of Australia, called at the Museum while on a visit to the UK, to see the Helder Wedge collection (for which a future loan has already been agreed).
- Variety of objects was taken to Lincoln University in October for conservation by students.
- Mineral specimen loaned to Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery for display in an exhibition *Sir John St. Aubyn – The Secret Life of a Collector*.
- Renewal of long term loan out LO 757 to English Heritage Audley End House of two Cipriani paintings. Loan extended for 5 years until 6.10.2014.

### **3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries**

**Object identifications this quarter: 7**

**Collection Enquiries this quarter: 73** by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without appointment)

### **3.7 Researchers**

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

- Archaeological artefacts and carbonised plant remains from Neolithic Lake dwellings, Switzerland
- Moat Farm Murder papers (acquired last quarter)
- Bronze cauldrons from Killarney, Ireland
- Saffron Walden allotment rules document
- Mabel Lindsell diaries
- Joan Wright diaries
- Arkesden Hoard material
- Maps of Elsenham
- Medieval felt hat from Sampford

- George Bennett collection of ethnographic items from the Pacific, researcher investigating history of the London Missionary Society by whom Bennett was employed

### **Ethnographic collections: Len Pole's project**

While we wait to hear from Museums Association about the forthcoming *Effective Collections* project, Len Pole will be making a presentation at an MA seminar *The Knowledge* in London on 19 January.

## **4 Displays and Visitor Services**

### **4.1 Permanent Galleries**

The Ceramics gallery displays are being refurbished by the Documentation & Exhibitions Officer and Conservation Officer assisted by the Security Officer. The current lighting, by old-style fluorescent tubes, is now looking outdated with poor and varied colour rendition. More energy-efficient alternatives for this and other galleries have been investigated with the help of Jake Roos, Energy Efficiency Surveyor, who will propose the Museum's lighting upgrade forms part of UDC's carbon management drive. Labels in the Furniture gallery have been produced and replaced. Incorrect labels about mammoth teeth on display in the Great Hall were replaced by Natural Sciences Officer, Support Worker and Security Officer. Two male and female stick insects have been purchased for the bug cage in the Discovery Centre and a baby stick insect hatched from eggs laid by the adult female. Surplus eggs were given to a teenage insect enthusiast in Braintree.

### **4.2 Temporary Exhibitions**

*Henry Moore: Sheep* has proved very popular, attracting a wider spectrum of visitors. It runs until the 21st of February 2010. Richard Calvocoressi, Director of the Henry Moore Foundation visited on Wednesday 7 October.

### **4.3 Visitor Services**

	<b>Public</b>		<b>Schools incl adults</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008	<b>2009</b>	2008
October	<b>1855</b>	1598	<b>191</b>	291	<b>2046</b>	1889
November	<b>824</b>	792	<b>120</b>	265	<b>944</b>	1057
December	<b>738</b>	654	<b>29</b>	185	<b>767</b>	839
<b>Total</b>	<b>3417</b>	3044	<b>340</b>	741	<b>3757</b>	3785

### **Shop**

	<b>2009</b>	2008
October	<b>768.75</b>	415.94
November	<b>373.47</b>	748.12
December	<b>372.58</b>	232.84
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1514.80</b>	1369.90

### **Tickets**

	<b>2009</b>	2008
October	<b>1328.00</b>	701.00
November	<b>517.00</b>	331.50
December	<b>461.00</b>	293.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2306.00</b>	1325.50

**Donations**

	<b>2009</b>	2008
October	<b>93.65</b>	81.72
November	<b>68.26</b>	41.25
December	<b>55.00</b>	37.97
<b>Total £</b>	<b>216.91</b>	160.94

**Publicity, Marketing and Website**

Following an ‘incognito’ visit by an inspector from VisitEngland in November the Museum has been awarded Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme accreditation jointly with Bridge End Garden. The report makes suggestions for enhancing visitor experience and improvements to the website and object labelling. The VAQAS award will be publicised in the new year. Museum events continue to receive press publicity. The 2010 programme has been drafted, to be financed by the Museum Society.

**5 Education, Events and Outreach****5.1 Education**

With the Learning Officer post still vacant, the Museum has been unable to meet many requests from schools for taught sessions, consequently targets cannot be met at present and many pupils are sadly missing a memorable cultural and educational experience. Independent (self-guided) visits are still encouraged, but the majority of schools want a taught session tailored to their needs.

**No. of school loan boxes sent out: 0    Reminiscence boxes: 1** (37 users, Broome End Care Home)

**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	*	293
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom		0
<b>Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service</b> (Local Indicator 12b; all Performance Indicators listed at the end of report)		<b>293</b>

\* These figures, plus 47 teachers/adults, provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

**5.2 Events at Museum**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event and Staff</b>	<b>No. Attending</b>
1 Oct, 5 Nov and 3 Dec	Museum Minis: volunteer Chris Phillips is kindly leading these and staff are taking it in turns to assist.	<b>92</b> 53 ch, 39 adult
3 October	Private Saturday evening hire for engagement party	<b>50</b>
27 Oct	Big Draw: Jenny Gibsone organised a very popular session: children and adults drew a cow skull, jackdaw & red squirrel from the collections, and a life-sized woolly mammoth.	<b>250</b> 150 ch, 100 ad.

28, 29 Oct	Fluffy Sheep & Woolly Crafts family activity: sheep masks, Little Bo Peep collage, Sheep quiz trail and 2 spinners in the gallery, Documentation & Exhibitions Officer, Visitor Services Officer, Natural Sciences Officer, Chris Phillips.	<b>235</b> 140 ch, 95 ad.
5 Dec	Christmas Tree decorating family activity: shepherds and sheep. Jenny Gibsone.	<b>50</b> 30 ch, 20 adult
	<b>Total</b>	<b>677</b>

### **5.3 Outreach**

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event and Staff</b>	<b>No. Attending</b>
19 Oct	Talk to Colchester Archaeological Group: history of the archaeological collections at Saffron Walden Museum, Curator	40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

#### **Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford)** 8 groups, 14 meetings

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice

- Essex Field Club (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust Uttlesford (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (1 meeting, checking October verge cut, database, report on hedgerow work needed, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Futures Local Strategic Partnership (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Nature Conservation Working Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (2 meetings, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (2 committee meetings, 2 separate meetings with consultant and HLF, Curator)
- Dunmow Museum (1 committee meeting and 1 meeting re. historic photos)

In addition, three staff also attended the Christmas meeting of the Uttlesford Local History Recorders at Clavering, by kind invitation of Jacky Cooper.

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Essex Museum Workers Group (Curator)
- Museums in Essex Committee AGM, Barleylands (Curator)
- Advisory Committee on Archaeology in Essex (Curator)

### **Grants Summary for this quarter**

Grants received for Heritage Quest Centre project are reported to Resource Centre Project Team  
There have been no opportunities to apply for grants of any kind this quarter.

### **Local Performance Indicators**

12a will provide a baseline from which to measure the eventual impact of the Heritage Quest Centre and its outreach programme.

	<b>Definition</b>	<b>This Quarter actual</b>	<b>This Quarter original target</b>	<b>Annual Target 2009-2010</b>
12a	No. of users attending events and activities on/off site (outreach work)	<b>717</b>	370	1,000

12b	No. of school pupils in organised groups (incl. nursery and loan box users)	<b>293</b>	* 1,000	3,000
12c	Total Visitors to Museum building and on-site events	<b>3757</b>	* 3,850	16,450
12d	Total Users of Museum Service including 1,024 website visitors	<b>4943</b>	* 6,800	26,800

\* targets assumed Learning Officer would be in post and therefore booking more school visits, and that HQC and outreach programme would be further advanced by this stage.



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

### **1 Museum Management and Staff**

The Service will be running with one post (Learning Officer) unfilled for the immediate future.

### **2 Buildings and Site**

Work on the walls next to the Museum and at the bottom of the drive is still to be completed.

### **3 Collections and Research**

A number of archaeological finds from Uttlesford district have recently been declared treasure at a Coroner's inquest. Once valuations have been established, the Museum Society and Curator will need to look at an acquisition and purchase grant plan.

Work on sorting the contents of the 2D store continues and preparatory work in anticipation of the HQC project collections programme is being planned.

### **4 Displays and Visitor Services**

Refurbishment of the Ceramics Gallery will continue. Exhibition change is due late February / early March with silks of Life opening on 6 March 2010 and running until 4 July.

### **5 Education, Events and Outreach**

Museum Minis, half-term activities and independent (self-guided) school visits will continue, but the absence of a Learning Officer means that booked school visits cannot be taken, and therefore total visitor numbers and income will be markedly down until this post can be filled.