

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM
CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
January - March 2010

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Heritage Quest Centre

Planning permission was granted on 10 March for the Heritage Quest Centre on its proposed new site, to which it will move if Sainsbury's store goes ahead. The agreement with Sainsbury's concerning the proposed change of site has been signed and exchanged. The project now waits on the decision on Sainsbury's planning application, the date for which has yet to be announced.

Consultant for restructure of Museum Service

Tim Heathcote has undertaken some preliminary work, including interviews with Museum Society directors, Museum staff, Council officers and representatives of some key stakeholder organisations. Work on this will continue over the next few months.

The work undertaken to conserve and promote biodiversity by the Natural Sciences Officer and Sarah Nicholas in UDC Planning Department has contributed to an assessment of the Council's use of natural resources by the Audit Commission.

1.2 Staff

Susan Collier returns from maternity leave on Tuesday 6 April, and to accommodate her childcare arrangements, the post of Documentation & Exhibition Officer will now be jobshared between Susan, who will work Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and Carla Purdue, who will work Tuesday afternoons, Wednesdays and Fridays.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Work on various aspects of the collections and other tasks continues with regular volunteers Hilary Walker, Judy Brook, Hamish McIlwrick, David Nash, Ian Sharpe, Chris Baker, Nadiya Ali and Beth Aitkenhead. Tony Morton has completed entering data from ecological surveys of Uttlesford special roadside verge sites 2004-2009 into the project database for Essex.

1.4 Training and Meetings Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
19 Jan	Museums Association seminar <i>The Knowledge</i> on collections-related knowledge and its uses	Curator (free place)
10 Feb	Care of Cased Taxidermy, SHARE Hub course	Natural Sciences Officer
17 Feb	Care of Insect Collections, SHARE Hub course	Natural Sciences Officer
29 Feb	Egyptian Study day, Forensic examination of skeletons	Conservation Officer
17 Mar	Lecture about geologist Edward Charlesworth at Saffron Walden Library	Natural Sciences Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

A Fire Alarm occurred on the evening of Saturday 30 January at the end of a private hire event. Although it turned out to be false alarm (apparently caused by a spider activating a smoke detector in the Ceramics Gallery) the Casual Assistants on duty had to evacuate remaining guests as a precaution. Two issues arose: firstly, some guests were reluctant to leave the building immediately without any obvious signs of a fire, and secondly, the Fire Service attended on foot as they now no longer keep a small tender in Saffron Walden capable of accessing Museum Street and Museum drive. This is being investigated by the Council and Fire Service, although the presence of a water hydrant outside the Museum may offer a solution if a fire hose could be stored on site. It is hoped that a full-scale practice with the Fire Service might be arranged at a future date, in addition to in-house fire drills and tests.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Pest trapping in natural history stores and galleries, ethnography store and Organics store took place in February. Discovery Centre and Natural History store were cleaned by the Natural Sciences Officer and her Support Worker. The toilet in the Accessible WC was repaired by a Council plumber.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

No issues to report

2.3 Newport Store

No issues to report

2.4 40 Castle Street

A section of old fence between 40 and 42 Castle Street has come away and been reported to Repairs for replacement.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

We are still awaiting the resolution by various Council departments of the choice of security fencing along the north boundary wall, without which the contractors' temporary security fence cannot be removed. The Curator has previously asked if this could be resolved by May for the 175th celebrations and summer activities. Meanwhile a smart new frost cover for the geological erratic boulder has been constructed by Contract Services, and will be easier for staff to move than the old one.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

12 acquisitions this quarter including

- Archaeological and Historic Building Records for Wendens Hall Farm, Church Street, Wendens Ambo.
- Surveyor's wheel (way-wiser) from the Essex County Council.
- Archaeological watching brief archive from 'Bouchiers', Station Road, Little Dunmow.
- Drawing of the rear passage to the Rose and Crown Hotel prior to the fire in 1969.
- Collection of 1960s jewellery, costume and accessories.
- Stansted Airport and local elections leaflets.

- Documents from former UDC Planning Department at Dunmow.
- Chinese underwear.
- Photographs relating to the Ruby Hurn collection.
- Saffron Walden Parish Church guidebook, 1969.
- Set of 1980s surgical instruments.

Collections Care and Conservation

Care of collections has included:

Jonathan Dutton has returned to work on the insurance valuation project for the ceramics and glass collections, and has nearly completed the work. He also incorporates examples from Saffron Walden's collections into lectures to ceramics societies, which helps to publicise the collections.

Remedial conservation work has included:

- Barkcloth, surveyor's wheel, object marking, Anglo-Saxon terrets and maps to paper conservator

3.3 Documentation

34 new accessions catalogued this quarter.

	New Acquisitions	Backlog (existing collections not previously catalogued on Modes)	Edits and Updates to existing records
Human History collections	34	4	140
Natural History collections	0	12	504
Total (all collections)	34	16	644

3.4 Loans In

No new loans in during this quarter. Three existing objects on loan (LN 708, 709, 710) for *Henry Moore: Sheep* were returned to Tony Carter, Iris Weaver and Judy Brook at the close of the exhibition.

3.5 Loans Out

- St Aubyn minerals were returned from loan to Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery in January.
- Loan of mounted photograph of Labourers at Ickleton (1985.170) to Andrew Hann, English Heritage, for reproduction and display in café at Audley End House (LO 758)

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 14

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 89 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person (without appointment)

3.7 Researchers

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

- Archaeological archives from Thaxted, especially bone waste from the medieval cutlery industry, leading to the identification of new site from fieldwalking finds.
- Research on Mesolithic worked flint, contributing to understanding of early prehistoric settlement.

Ethnographic collections: Len Pole's *Effective Collections* project

A preliminary meeting to discuss the scope of the project was held on 31 March between Alison Porter, project coach appointed by the Museums Association, and Len Pole and the Curator. A meeting with our four project partner museums (Bishop's Stortford, Hertford, Wisbech and Time & Tide, Great Yarmouth) is to be held in late May.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Good progress has been made on the repainting and re-labelling of the Ceramics Gallery, with the cases all painted and most of the cases now re-labelled. The new LED lighting has been ordered for installation late April.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Henry Moore: Sheep closed on 21 February after a very successful run. *Silks of Life*, a Museums in Essex touring exhibition featuring Chinese costume and textiles from the Museum's own collections and orient-inspired fabrics from the Warners Textile Archive, opened with a private view for Museum Society and supporters on the 5 March. The exhibition features some striking graphic panels as well as mounted costume on open display and a dressing up box.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl adults		Total	
	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009
January	812	1046	39	295	851	1341
February	1688	1671	-	54	1688	1725
March	983	831	168	497	1151	1328
Total £	3483	3548	207	846	3690	4394

Shop

	2010	2009
January	508.34	489.31
February	615.30	467.02
March	232.03	458.17
Totals £	1355.67	1414.50

Tickets

	2010	2009
January	548.75	540.50
February	1067.00	715.00
March	670.00	317.00
Totals £	2285.75	1572.50

Donations

	2010	2009
January	32.74	85.20
February	105.10	89.33
March	73.60	37.58
Total £	211.44	212.11

Publicity, Marketing and Website

The Museum Society has funded (£750) the design and printing of 4000 colour brochures with the 2010 programme of exhibitions and events celebrating the 175th anniversary. The Museum's star Archaeological exhibit, the Viking necklace, has been featured in the BBC's *A History of the World*

project, being one of ten objects from Essex on the website, and subject of a short BBC Radio Essex programme recorded in February. The radio producer was so impressed by the collections that he returned to film interviews with staff and other colleagues on different aspects of the collections, to create a pod cast on the BBC Radio Essex website. The Museum also appeared in The Guardian's holiday activity supplement on 31 March of family-friendly destinations.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

Schools are still seeking taught sessions but are no longer booking, except for the very occasional self-guided visit, due to the continuing lack of a Learning Officer.

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 2 Reminiscence boxes: 0

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	*	171
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom		126
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service (Local Indicator 12b; all Performance Indicators listed at the end of report)		297

* These figures, plus 36 teachers/adults, provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
7 Jan	Museum Minis – Pantomime	15
20 Jan	Private hire – birthday party	60
4 Feb, 4 Mar	Museum Minis: Owls and Coins & Treasures (Jenny Gibsone, Curator, Visitor Services Officer; Conservator : (some) sessions led by retired teacher Chris Phillips with staff support	22 34
17, 18 Feb	Half Term activities – Clay, Chalk and Charcoal – <i>Henry Moore: Sheep</i> (Documentation and Exhibitions Officer, Visitor Services Officer, 2 x Henry Moore Foundation staff)	222 272
20 Feb	Gallery talk on Viking necklace (Curator)	25
22 Feb	Medieval finds and archaeological evidence from the Battle Ditches and medieval town, handling session for group of Cambridge University MA students (Curator)	8
5 Mar	Private View for <i>Silks of Life</i>	50
20 Mar	How The Earth Is Made, Science Week geology event (Natural Sciences Officer, Gerald Lucy)	140
	Total	848

5.3 Outreach

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
8 Feb	Geology of Uttlesford lecture & display of fossils/rocks for Museum Society (Gerald Lucy, Natural Sciences Officer)	72
17 Feb	Museum Fossil loan box used by Saffron Walden Library for Dinosaur event	425
	Total	497

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 12 groups, 16 meetings

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice

- Biological Records in Essex (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (2 meetings, 2009 accounts, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust Uttlesford (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (organising March verge & hedge cuts, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (1 meeting, publicising RSPB annual bird survey, UDC core strategy consultation, 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 (3 meetings, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (3 committee meetings, and advice on Forward Plan and light levels)
- Dunmow Museum (1 committee meeting and arranging joint visit to collect items from former UDC Planning Offices, Dunmow)
- Clavering Landscape History Group (letter in support of Lottery application for community archaeology project)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

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

Grants Summary for this quarter

Source	Grant for	Amount £
Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd	Colour printed leaflet for 175 th anniversary year programme and related publicity (banners)	750.00
	Total	750.00

The Museum Society is also funding the new display lighting for the Ceramics Gallery (up to £2,000) which is planned to be installed 26 – 30 April. The Curator is in the process of applying for grants on behalf of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd to assist with the purchase of various items of archaeological treasure which are currently undergoing the lengthy valuation process. Outcomes and purchases for the collection will be reported in full next quarter. There have been no other opportunities to apply for grants 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.

	Definition	This Quarter actual	This Quarter original target*	Annual Total 2009-2010	Annual Target 2009-2010*
12a	No. of users attending events and activities on/off site (outreach work)	1,345	320	3,637 of which 2,417 on-site and 1,220 off-site	1,000
12b	No. of school pupils in organised groups (incl. nursery and loan box users)	297	1,000	2,218 of which 570 school loan box	3,000
12c	Total Visitors to Museum building and on-site events	3,690	4,000	14,855	16,450
12d	Total Users of Museum Service including 1,419 website visitors	5,828	6,800	21,855	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.

Notes on Performance Indicators (annual)

12a records the numbers of visitors / users generated by specific events and activities, on- and off-site, as a baseline from which the impact of the HQC project can be measured. The target figure could not be set meaningfully in advance because a significant proportion of this work depends on opportunities and requests arising during the course of the year, favourable weather for outdoor events and other factors. It demonstrates the contribution made to visitor and user figures by events and activities.

12b School visits have inevitably failed to meet the target while the Learning Officer post remains frozen and only a few schools are willing to make independent (self-guided) visits. 25% of school pupils (570) using the Museum Service did so via loan boxes rather than visits.

12c Total visitors have not met the target due to the fall in schools, otherwise visitor numbers (non-schools) have held up well, being very close to 2008-09 figures. This is due partly to the contribution of on-site activities and exhibitions such as *Sheep* (Henry Moore), and despite a rise in admission fees in April 2009, but it is unclear to what extent this may have inhibited some new or repeat visits without in-depth visitor research.

12d Total users have not met the target for three reasons: firstly, schools (as above) and secondly, the apparent drop in website visits since the relaunch of the Council's website, but this appears to be linked to the new monitoring software and the way 'unique visits' are calculated. It is possible that only new website users are being counted, not those who make several visits at different times. If Pageviews (Museum Home Page) had been used, user figures would have been 23,619. Thirdly, at the time targets were set, it was anticipated that the HQC project would be much further advanced, with website and outreach figures benefiting accordingly.

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

1 Museum Management and Staff

From April, jobshare arrangements for the Documentation & Exhibition Officer post will be:

Susan Collier Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays

Carla Purdue Tuesday afternoons, Wednesdays and Fridays

2 Buildings and Site

Programme of cleaning displays by Natural Sciences Officer and Support Worker will continue with the Natural History gallery and Victorian Museum Work Room.

3 Collections and Research

The invertebrate collection is being re-stored by Natural Sciences Officer and Support Worker. Brief descriptions have been completed for Mineral documentation records on Modes XML. Work has commenced to improve the Herbarium documentation records.

Verge sites will be visited Natural Sciences Officer, Support Worker and other verge surveyors to check that the March management cut has been carried out properly.

Books put aside under cupboards were investigated with a view to re-integrating with the stored collection. Similarly posters, prints and ephemera found in a store need better curation and integration into documentation systems before re-storage.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

The *Silks of Life* exhibition continues until 4 July and will be followed by an exhibition *England at Leisure* which opens on 17 July, showing photographs from English Heritage and supported by objects from the collections.

New lighting to be installed in the Ceramics gallery late April, funded by the Museum Society.

The Curator is gradually making additions and improvements to Archaeology Gallery displays, especially Anglo-Saxon and medieval exhibits for which some new Perspex mounts have been made.

There is also an unprecedented demand this year for talks and support at various local history fairs throughout the district, which will involve more research and weekend and evening work.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

Saturday 8 May – archaeology display at Wicken Bonhunt

Monday 10 May – talk by Curator on the history of other museums and Saffron Walden in context

Wednesday 12 May – Birthday Tea Party for volunteers and supporters

Saturday 15 May – 175th Birthday celebrations: Punch & Judy 2pm; Magic Lantern Shows at 3pm;4pm;5pm; Museum by Moonlight 6pm – 9pm

Saturday 22 May – Brownies and Rainbows event in grounds 11am – 4pm

Thursday 27 May – Manuden and Berden history group to view local finds and objects in Museum

Wednesday 2 June & Thursday 3 June *Trees, Leaves and Bugs*, family activities to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity

Sunday 6 June – loan of exhibits to Elsenham local history event

Monday 7 June – workshop on interpreting medieval seal dies for Searchers metal-detecting club

Sunday 27 June - Roman finds at Great Chesterford open gardens weekend

Talks to local groups (Curator) 13 May, 14 June, 24 June (or 1 July)