

## SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

**CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT**  
**April - June 2010**

**1 Museum Management and Staff****1.1 Management****Heritage Quest Centre**

The project remains 'on hold' as the Council has not yet set the date for its decision on Sainsbury's planning application. Viridor Credits have informed us that due to the delay and the change in constitution of the Museum Society, we will need to reapply for our two grants from Viridor (total £100,000) once we know which site we are to build on. Low key fundraising continues.

**Consultant for restructure of Museum Service**

There has been no further work with Tim Heathcote while we wait for the outcome of his initial report and discussions with senior Council officers; this will set the timetable for the rest of the project.

**1.2 Staff**

As reported last quarter, Susan Collier returned in April and is now job-sharing the Documentation & Exhibition Officer's post with Carla Purdue. Tony Carter, Security Officer, retires at the end of July so a one-year contract for a part-time Security Officer has been advertised internally (i.e. within the Council). Permission has also been given for a temporary part-time Learning Officer post to be advertised; both these are fixed-term contracts while the outcome of the service review is unknown.

**1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience**

Volunteers Hilary Walker, Judy Brook, Hamish McIlwrick, David Nash, Ian Sharpe and Chris Baker continue to help with collections and many other tasks behind-the-scenes. Conservation student Babette Willis is on a seven-week placement assisting in the lab from the University of Lincoln. Alexia Michaelides from Herts & Essex Grammar School undertook a two-week placement in the Lab. Maddie Sharman of SWCHS assisted with some events. Chris Phillips has assisted with education activities. The team of desk volunteers remain indispensable, although fewer are now available on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

**1.4 Training and Meetings Attended**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Training / Seminar</b>	<b>Staff</b>
20 April	Fire procedures including refresher on use of stair-climber for evacuating disabled visitors	All Staff
22 April	Regional Natural History Curators meeting & tour of refurbished galleries at Norwich Castle Museum	Natural Sciences Officer
13 May	Museums and Heritage Show, Earls Court, London	Documentation and Exhibitions Officer (CP)
9 June	Life Raft Trust with Essex Tourism and Business Support team in Fry Art Gallery (discussed VAT etc)	Visitor Services Officer

9 June	Demonstration of an internet based GIS (geographical information system), UDC	Natural Sciences Officer
18 June	South Midlands Museum Federation AGM + seminar, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford	Conservation Officer

### **1.5 Health & Safety**

Following the Fire training in April, the Security Officer sprung a surprise Fire Drill in June, with a school present. Special thanks must go to volunteer Hamish McIlwrick who took the role of a disabled visitor requiring the stair-climber. Evacuation was successfully completed although it threw up some minor practical issues in wheeling the stair-climber onto the external fire escape steps.

In May there was a spate of instances of minor vandalism outside – the security light over the drive was wrenched from the cottage wall and the hook for the fire escape gate was pulled out of the brick wall – and there were a few instances of ‘nuisance’ behaviour by groups of teenagers in the Museum. Staff informed community police and the Council’s Anti-Social Behaviour Officer, and so far the problem has not reoccurred.

The air-conditioning unit in the Natural History store received its annual service in May, and the Emergency Plan was updated and reprinted.

## **2 Buildings and Site**

### **2.1 Museum Building**

Martin Stocks has obtained a quote from a company specializing in safety equipment for buildings, for a suitable safety harness for working on the roof (primarily to clear leaves and snow). This is now with the Planning Conservation Officer for approval, although listed building consent will also be required.

The Natural History galley and Victorian Museum Workroom were cleaned and checked for pests by Natural Sciences Officer and Support Worker. 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**

Nothing to report.

### **2.3 Newport Store**

Nothing to report.

### **2.4 40 Castle Street**

Fence repairs have been completed.

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

The permanent security fence for the north boundary wall is understood to have been ordered. The temporary fence remains until the permanent fence is in place. Urgent tree surgery work resulting from a UDC survey of the condition of trees on the site took place at the end of June. Further work is being considered by UDC committee in July. A new frost cover for the erratic boulder was made to measure.

### 3 Collections and Research

#### 3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

**172 acquisitions** this quarter including

- Medieval silver-gilt gem-set brooch from Broxted parish and gold ring from Elsenham (archaeological treasure, purchased with the aid of the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Headley Trust)
- Three late Bronze Age hoards of bronze axes, weapon fragments and ingots, two from Broxted parish and one from Hatfield Broad Oak. These have interesting implications for the study of this period in Essex and the region.
- Black and white photo of Monte Weaver
- 1950s sewing machine
- Leaflets and documents on Stop Stansted Airport
- Sale posters for land being auctioned in Essex
- Black and white photographs of Ernest Jennings shop and his Assistant

#### Collections Care and Conservation

**Care of collections has included:** repackaging and photographing all the dolls in store

**Remedial conservation work has included:**

- Treatment and packaging of 3 bronze terret rings (private work)
- Treatment of two Roman pots and Bronze Age axe heads
- Treatment of a mounted pike and a mounted coral
- Work on material for the exhibition England at Leisure e.g. Batons in case, silver trophy
- 5 maps were treated by a paper conservator and returned

#### 3.3 Documentation

**53 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	53	0	747
Natural History collections	0	58	733
<b>Total (all collections)</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>1480</b>

Modes XML has had a virus problem on the server, which has meant that it has been down for long periods of time. This has now been resolved and Modes has been moved onto a more secure server and all computers at the museum have been updated with the new files by the Documentation and Exhibition Officer Susan Collier with the help from Paul Fletcher from IT Services.

#### 3.4 Loans In

**4 Loans In**

- A number of Medieval seal dies were loaned to the Museum for research for a talk on seal dies to the Searchers (LN 712, LN 713, LN 714)

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- Medals reflecting the life and achievements of Sir Henry Marking have been loaned to the Museum for display by his nephew Giles Marking, together with photos and biographical information (LN 715). A permanent display near the entrance to the Local History gallery is planned.

### **3.5 Loans Out**

#### **4 Loans Out**

- Lindsell diaries and notebooks to be transcribed by Elizabeth Blackie (LO 779)
- Roman bronze figurine of African boy for filming (LO 780)
- Number of objects / artefacts went to the Elsenham Village fete including Neolithic axe, land sale catalogue 1922, photos and Patum Pepperium plastic lidded pot (LO 781).
- Small group of Sudanese ethnographic items loaned back to the donor for a talk to a Probus Club at Saffron Walden Golf Club (included Smoking pipes, Gourd water bottle, model animals and a couple of knives) – see loan boxes under 5.1

3 frozen bird and mammal specimens that are to be mounted were collected by the taxidermist, the funding for which has previously been agreed by the Museum Society.

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

**Object identifications this quarter: 11**

**Collection Enquiries this quarter: 138** 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:

- Local resident comparing field-walking finds from Thaxted with archaeological industrial waste from medieval cutlery industry (new cutler's site identified as a consequence)
- Continuing research into early prehistoric flint industries
- Carved frieze of lions from Audley End
- Winstanley family manuscripts
- Robert Southey's papers
- Gabriel Harvey's annotated books

#### **Ethnographic collections: Len Pole's *Effective Collections* project and Wedge collection**

Following planning and meetings between Len Pole, the Curator (project manager), Susan Collier and Alison Porter (project coach on behalf of Museums Association), the project got underway with a meeting of museum partners on 23 June also attended by Simon Floyd, SHARE programme manager from the East of England Museum Hub. Many potential strands of work and use of world cultures collections were identified, and the arrangements are now being made for Len's programme of collections review visits to partner museums over the summer. This will result in a Work Plan to be implemented autumn 2010 – spring 2011 to improve use of world cultures collections through interpretation, displays, learning activities and loans.

Meanwhile Carla Purdue and the Curator are working with the National Museum of Australia to prepare a specification for photographing the Wedge collection (to be funded by the National Museum of Australia). Once the specification is agreed in July, quotations from photographers will be sought and it is hoped that the work will be done in the autumn.

## 4 Displays and Visitor Services

### 4.1 Permanent Galleries

Work on new low-energy display lighting in the Ceramics Gallery has also been completed and the programme of display lighting upgrades, funded by the Museum Society, continues with the Great Hall natural history and geology displays, which have given some trouble, with more to be done later.

Work is continuing with replacing the interpretation and labels in the Ceramics Gallery. Useful additional information has been found regarding several pieces on display in the European tin-glazed earthenware section, and labels are being amended. The re-display and renumbering of pieces in the first section of late 18<sup>th</sup> century earthenware has been completed and labels are in production.

### 4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The *Silks of Life* exhibition will close on 4 July, and reopen in Bishop's Stortford Rhodes Centre on 9 July. The next exhibition *England at Leisure* opens on 17 July and is a touring exhibition of photographs from English Heritage, supported by objects from the Museum's collections.

Six potters met staff to arrange the forthcoming selling exhibition of ceramics. The Documentation & Exhibitions Officers are working on the temporary exhibition programme for 2011-2012.

### 4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl adults		Total	
	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009
April <sup>1</sup>	1569	1156	6	149	1575	1305
May <sup>2</sup>	1756	1044	61	308	1817	1352
June <sup>3</sup>	996	676	328	613	1324	1289
<b>Total £</b>	<b>4321</b>	2876	<b>395</b>	1070	<b>4716</b>	3946

<sup>1</sup> A busy Easter in April

<sup>2</sup> Museum 175th birthday events in May

<sup>3</sup> Half-term with free entry (courtesy of the Museum Society) in early June

These all boosted public visitor number, but this is partly masked by the reduced numbers of school visits while the Learning Officer post remains vacant. There were however a small number of independent (self-guided) school visits.

Visitors included Daws Heath Historical Society, a group of journalists with Essex Tourism, and reminiscence with Ron Liversidge, former WWII RAF, whose portrait is in the collections.

#### Shop

	2010	2009
April	370.72	524.76
May	294.75	448.96
June	561.84	1075.33
<b>Totals £</b>	<b>956.59</b>	2049.05

#### Tickets

	2010	2009
April	980.00	713.25
Mus Soc ST	525.00	322.50
May	614.25	652.00
June*	360.75	389.00
<b>Totals £</b>	<b>2692.75</b>	2076.75

\*2010 Total includes further £312.75 from Mus Soc for half-term free entry

**Donations**

	2010	2009
April	<b>89.96</b>	71.97
May	<b>87.53</b>	40.45
June	<b>119.16</b>	54.30
<b>Total £</b>	<b>296.65</b>	166.72

**Publicity, Marketing and Website**

The Museum enjoyed excellent coverage in the local media around its 175<sup>th</sup> birthday on 12 May. BBC Radio Essex broadcast a series of short interviews, and a podcast on the Museum and its collections is on their website. Discussions also took place on publicity opportunities with Saffron Screen, and the Museum was featured in the Saffron Walden Initiative's film on 'a day in the life of Saffron Walden' on 18 May. A large new banner (with planning permission) and posters outside and inside the Museum highlight the 175th birthday. The VAQAS award, jointly with Bridge End Garden, received press cover and *Uttlesford Life* regularly covers news of Museum activities. The Museum has been entered for the Essex Tourism Awards for Excellence scheme supported by Archant News.

**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 (250 users) Reminiscence + other boxes: 1 (60 users)**

1 special loan box for Thaxted Primary School with archaeological items and information about the town's medieval history and cutlery industry (50 users)

1 special loan box of 'washday' items went to Friends Junior School, included a dolly tub, laundry basket, wooden washboard and ephemera sourced from the 'At Home' Reminiscence Box. (200)

1 'Going Out' Reminiscence Box went to Broome End Care Home, Stansted Mountfitchet. (40)

1 special loan of ethnographic items from Africa back to donor for a talk to a local Probus Club in Saffron Walden (20)

**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	*	315
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom		250
<b>Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service</b>		<b>565</b>

\* These figures, plus 80 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 April	Museum Minis: Jokes & Tricks. Chris Phillips, Natural Sciences Officer.	27
7-8 April	Chinese Crafts family activities with Europa Chang	250
2 May	Trees, Leaves & Bugs activities. Natural Sciences Officer, with Support Worker, Visitor Services Officer.	90
2 May	Trees, Leaves & Bugs activities. Natural Sciences Officer, with Chris Phillips, Susan Collier.	100
6 May	Museum Minis	22
12 May	Museum's 175 <sup>th</sup> Birthday Party. All staff.	100
15 May	Fun Day to mark Museum's 175 <sup>th</sup> Birthday: Punch & Judy, Magic Lantern Shows and Museum by Moonlight	621
22 May	Guides, Brownies and Rainbows holding centenary event in Museum grounds	150
27 May	Parish history visit by Manuden and Berden local history group to see archaeological and historical items in Museum	15
4 June	REVI group (Polish club) meeting in Museum	29
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1404</b>

**5.3 Outreach**

Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event and Staff</b>	<b>No. Attending</b>
8 May	Archaeology display at community event, Wicken Bonhunt (Curator, Doc & Exhibitions Officer CP)	66
10 May	Talk on history of museums, Museum Society, Parish Rooms (Curator)	60
13 May	Talk to Linton ACE (senior citizens) <i>Saffron Walden Museum – 175 Years of Collecting</i> (Curator)	38
7 June	Workshop on identifying medieval seal dies for Saffron Walden Searchers (Curator)	18
14 June	Talk to Saffron Walden Seniors <i>Saffron Walden Museum – 175 Years of Collecting</i> (Curator)	19
27 June	Archaeology display at community event, Great Chesterford (Curator, Doc & Exhibitions Officer CP)	25
	<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>

**Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 12 groups, 15 meetings**

Museum staff have attended meetings, undertaken work or given advice to:

- Biological Records in Essex (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Clavering Countryside Group (advice, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Botany Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (2 meetings, 2 surveys, checking March verge, mailing about

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project to 28 parish councils, Natural Sciences Officer)

- Sustainable Uttlesford Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (1 meeting, 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, research for talk on 7 June Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (1 committee meeting, AGM and attendance at private view. Curator; light levels and calibration of environmental monitoring equipment Conservation Officer)
- Dunmow Museum (summer opening, Curator)
- Saffron Walden Battle Ditches Project (meeting with David Kenny, English Heritage and Bruce Tice, UDC; Curator)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Essex Museum Workers Group (Curator)
- Curatorial Advisors regional meeting (Curator)
- Regional Museums Group (Curator)
- Cater Museum – 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party on 8 May (Conservation Officer)

## Grants Summary for this quarter

Source	Grant for	Amount £
MLA / V&A Purchase Grant Fund	Acquisition of archaeological treasure (medieval brooch and ring)	1,925 - 00
The Headley Trust	Acquisition of archaeological treasure (medieval brooch and ring)	1,069 - 00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,994 - 00</b>

The grants were made to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd which paid the balance.

## Local Performance Indicators

	Definition	This Quarter actual	This Quarter target	Annual Target 2010-2011
	<b>Visitors</b>	<b>4,716</b>	3,500	13,700
	<b>Users</b>	<b>7,128</b>	4,720	18,580

Targets are based on average of previous three years' figures, including regular activities and events but excluding special and extra events which may be incorporated according to external circumstances.

School visits have been excluded while there is no Learning Officer in post to take bookings.

### Notes on Performance Indicators

**Visitors** are all those visiting the Museum in person, including activities and events in the grounds

**Users** are all those using the Museum Service, including:

on-site (visitors, as above),

off-site (attending talk, display or other off-site activity by Museum staff)

and 'remotely' (information, research enquiries and services by phone, fax, email, letter and website

Pageviews = visits to website)



## **Future Programme July – September 2010**

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

Tony Carter retires as Security Officer at the end of July

Recruitment for Learning Officer (part-time fixed-term contract) in progress

### **2 Buildings and Site**

Work in the workshop compound to clear and construct a platform for storing the frost cover for the glacial erratic boulder during the summer months.

### **3 Collections and Research**

Investigations for feasibility of radio carbon dating of red deer antlers from 19<sup>th</sup> century excavations in West Road, Saffron Walden (potential Neolithic causewayed camp ditch)

Natural Sciences Officer and survey team will be carrying out ecological surveys on 30 special roadside verges.

Work on archaeological pottery as preparation for workshop on 4 September (Curator and Helen Walker, ECC Field Archaeology Unit)

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

Preparation work for the next temporary exhibition on A Handful of Potters, a selling exhibition of contemporary ceramics. This exhibition will open to the public on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October.

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

8 July Museum Minis.

Archaeology Explorer suitcases available during summer holidays, from 17 July

30 July archaeological finds and short talk at Wendens Ambo

4, 11, and 18 August Games and Pastimes.

4 September Archaeological Pottery Workshops with Helen walker, ECC FAU

11 and 12 September Heritage Open Days with Tudor dance and music on Sunday 12th September.