

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM
CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
October-December 2011

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Museum Development Plan

Plans are evolving for a new purpose-built store at the Newport depot site, meanwhile a public consultation has been launched on developing the Museum. A letter has been sent to all donors to the Heritage Quest Centre project, asking if they would be willing for their donation to go towards the alternative development plans, and the messages of support received have been encouraging.

1.2 Staff

It is with much sadness and with gratitude for his years of service to the Museum, that we record the sudden death of Roger Kirkpatrick, Sunday and Casual Assistant, on 6th December. A tribute to Roger will appear in the next Museum Society Newsletter; condolences have been sent to Roseanne Kirkpatrick.

Susan Collier, Documentation & Exhibitions Officer, moved to a new post in Peterborough in October, after 4 years at Saffron Walden Museum. Susan will be much missed, but we are fortunate to have Carla Purdue, who has been job-sharing the role with Susan, to take over the post full-time.

Gemma Tully, Learning Officer, is currently taking a sabbatical in Egypt to undertake a post-graduate research project for a university in Berlin from mid-November to Mid-February. Gemma has therefore concentrated her Museum time (two days per week) into the early half of the Autumn term and late half of the Spring term, when schools are most inclined to visit.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Lucy Webb, a History of Art graduate, started working one day a week until gaining employment at the University of Cambridge library. Chris Baker, Ian Sharpe, and Hamish McIlwrick continue to help with collections and other work. Joshua Parker helped on the Town Hall art and photograph survey and database and left to pursue Open University. Catie Moon, who is qualified in working with archaeological human remains, has examined the ancient Greek cremation on display and will continue a programme of analysing other antiquarian human remains next year. Chris Phillips and Brenda Burch assisted with half-term family activities, Christmas tree decorating and Hallowe'en storytelling with support from Delia Delderfield and Jenny Gibsone. Christine Sharpe's help has been invaluable to the 'Uttlesford Sporting Heroes' project for 2012; she has compiled a mailing list of contacts for all the district's sports clubs, of which there are over two hundred.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
20 Oct	<i>A Matter of Trust</i> , Colchester; free SHARE seminar	Curator and Museum Society Chairman
29 Oct	PAS Conference <i>Hoards and Deposition of Metalwork</i> , British Museum	Curator

6 Dec	Museum Mentors and Accreditation seminar, free SHARE seminar, Bury St Edmunds	Curator
9 Nov	Ehive workshop, Spalding	Documentation and Exhibition Officer
15 Nov	MODES Complete training course, Derby	Documentation and Exhibition Officer
23 Nov	SHARE Eastern Region natural history curators meeting was held at Saffron Walden Museum, with tours of the museum & natural history store.	Natural Sciences Officer
23 Nov	Essex Tourism Conference re Olympics & Legacy	Visitor Services Officer
2 Dec	East Anglia Conservators Forum, Bishops Stortford	Conservation Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

Saffron Security carried out a service of the intruder alarms. Broken emergency lights were replaced by Chubb. Staff practiced operation of the stair lifts, and use of the stair climber equipment for fire evacuation. Newer staff were given a Manual Handling training course by the H&S rep (Conservation Officer). Roof fall arrest system continued to be shown to staff so they could help in a snow emergency on the roof and appropriate PPE and clothing was acquired. A Fire Services officer visited on 27 October and 22 December, and arrangements for a Fire Service familiarisation visit are being made for the New Year.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Window frames have been repaired and all exterior paintwork has been repainted on the west and south facades of the Museum building. The work was undertaken by ROALCO under the supervision of Bill Golbourn and colleagues, UDC. Collections were rearranged in the Inorganics store annex to improve access to the table top display cases. Pest trapping took place in the natural history store, ethnography store, costume store, some offices and galleries.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

No items to report

2.3 Newport Store

No items to report this quarter.

2.4 40 Castle Street

Paintwork on the north (Castle Street) frontage has been repainted by ROALCO and a small fixed window in the second-floor attic study was replaced by an opening window for easier and cheaper future maintenance.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

Pavements in Museum Street were resurfaced in November, and access to the site was maintained as far as possible, although inevitably visitor figures suffered a little while the usual access to Museum Street was closed. The new security fence, hand-forged by blacksmith David Gowlett, was finally installed in November and the temporary fencing along the drive removed. This completes the last stage of the work associated with the rebuilding of the north retaining wall in 2009.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

77 acquisitions this quarter including

- Animal skins from Zambia – 2 leopard skins and a rock python skin.
- Leather wallet belonging to Thomas Mead and Robert Catlin of Saffron Walden, 1797.
- Collection of Chinese objects – thimble, silk reel, ink sticks and a bamboo ‘beater’.
- Moorcroft vase commemorating Thaxted Morris Ring Centenary, 2011.
- Programme for the Saffron Walden Maze Festival, August 2011.
- Bronze Age hoard from Hatfield Broad Oak, comprising 49 pieces of metal and a set of drawings.
- Mineral water bottle from Taylor’s of Saffron Walden, 1840s – 1880s.
- Saffron Walden Corporation Baths ticket.
- Section of ‘The Times’ newspaper, dated 3 October 1798 – account of Nelson’s victory over the French at the Battle of Aboukir Bay.
- Small portable SONY colour television, early 1990s.
- 16th century Nuremberg jeton, found at Yardley Hall, Thaxted.
- Collection of domestic objects connected to Martyn Everett and his family – includes a shell purse, Victorian skirt hoist, two cigarette lighters and a World War II Civil Defence armband.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Conservation work has largely focussed on the preparation of items for the exhibition *Embroideries from the East* and making of individual mounts and supports. Surface cleaning, photography and object marking was carried out for a number of new acquisitions to the collection, and this also applied to the Wisbech Museum’s objects which are part of the Effective Collections project.

3.3 Documentation

77 new acquisitions catalogued this quarter.

	New Acquisitions	Backlog (existing collections not previously catalogued on Modes)	Edits and Updates to existing records
Human history colln.s	74	10	1272
Natural history colln.s	3	15	5905
Total	77	25	7177

Local History Photographic Collections Project (Museum Society funded)

For the period 1 October – 21 November 2011, Carla Purdue, Documentation and Exhibition Officer, completed scanning and attaching **1,089** images to Modes. To date **2,694** images have been scanned and attached, location confirmed and record completed. All of the core photograph collection has now been scanned, and a round-up and attaching of the final images is in progress with the assistance of a volunteer, Chris Baker.

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

Carla Purdue has taken over Susan Collier’s role in this project, working with the Curator and Len

Pole. Most of the five museums involved now have their object data for the website on eHive and work on the website specification will continue on the New Year.

3.4 Loans In

2 loans in of local archaeological finds of interest for research, from local metal detectorists, for recording and study by the Curator.

LN 775 – Loan in of a collection of glass, ceramics and costume and textile objects from the executors of an anonymous local resident; these items are likely to be bequeathed to the Museum in time.

Ethnographic objects from Wisbech Museum for conservation and photography (Effective Collections)

3.5 Loans Out

Loan of 2 birds, a jackdaw and a magpie, to University of Hertfordshire Galleries. The birds are on display in the exhibition *Softkill* at the Art & Design gallery until 28 January 2012.

Return of LO 784 – loan of Maori shell trumpet to Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden. Safely returned on 16 November.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 8

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 77 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person

3.7 Research

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

- Libby Gibsone and students, studying and sketching corsets from the collection.
- Maps of Thaxted.

The Curator and local geologist Gerald Lucy undertook a Saturday morning field trip in response to a request from local detectorists and historians to check a large sarsen stone which had been unearthed at a farm near Elsenham. The stone turned out to be a naturally-occurring glacial erratic, of geological rather than archaeological interest.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

The Egyptian gallery was completed and opened on 4 November with a small social event for invited guests. Thanks to the efforts of Learning Officer Gemma Tully, Museum staff and researchers, and funding from the Museum Society, the collections have been redisplayed incorporating new research and objects not previously on show, with new fibre-optic lighting.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The exhibition *The Great War 1914 – 1918: An Exhibition of Home Life and Service* acted as inspiration for half-term activities in October (Wounded Heroes and Women at War) and was brought to life on 5 November by three members of the 10th Essex Regiment Group who came in role as ‘tommies’ and an officer with equipment. *Embroideries from the East*, which showcases a recent generous and colourful donation of embroidered textiles by Doreen Hull, was opened by the Mayor on 12 December at the Museum Society’s Christmas Social which was very well attended.

4.3 Visitor Services

With the Learning Officer on a research programme in Egypt from mid November to February 2012, her teaching days (= 2 a week) were compressed into the early part of the term, concentrating on Ancient Egypt, plus Stone/Bronze and Iron Ages, Childhood and Toys. She also taught off site at Newport Primary School covering Tudors and Victorians. Other staff and volunteers covered remaining education-related activities including school loan boxes.

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
October	1275	1453	516	381	1791	1834
November	764	687	252	592	1016	1279
December	781	719	22	63	803	782
Total	2820	2859	790	1036	3610	3895

Shop

	2011	2010
October	583.83	390.88
November	406.75	591.50
December	205.63	127.90
Totals	1196.21	1110.28

Tickets

	2011	2010
October	931.50	891.75
November	564.00	461.00
December	406.50	411.00
Totals £	1902.00	1763.75

Donations

	2011	2010
October	111.00	117.00
November	65.30	86.63
December	40.90	56.07
Total £	217.20	259.70

Publicity, Marketing and Website

The public consultation on proposed Museum developments was launched at the end of November; so far there have been 75 online responses and a good many more on pre-printed forms. The deadline is 13 January.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of sessions taken by Learning Officer: 20 including one at Newport Primary School (40 pupils; 2 teachers) covering Ancient Egypt (8); Tudors and Stuarts (2); Victorian home life (3); African villages (2) Toys and Childhood (3) and Prehistory (2) (British Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages).

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 2 (Egypt) page 5

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer in Museum *	545
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	40
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	176
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	60
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	821

* These figures, plus 69 teachers/adults accompanying school groups, provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

5.2 Events at Museum

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
6 Oct	Museum Minis <i>Squirrels</i>	11
8 Oct	The Big Draw: <i>Draw like an Egyptian</i>	142
26, 27 Oct	Family activities, <i>Wounded Heroes and Women at War</i>	205
28 Oct	Halloween storytelling	60
3 Nov	Museum Minis <i>Colours</i>	8
4 Nov	Egyptian Gallery opening event	40
5 Nov	Great War Re-enactors: 10 th Essex Regiment group	130
23 Nov	SHARE natural history curators visit	6
1 Dec	Museum Minis <i>Christmas</i>	3
6 Dec	Army RETORT training in museum	15
10 Dec	Chinese embroidery workshop with Europa Chang	12
10 Dec	Family activities: decorate the Museum Christmas tree	40
12 Dec	Exhibition opening and Museum Society Christmas social	150
	TOTAL	822

5.3 Outreach

No activities, talks or lectures at other venues this quarter.

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 8 groups, 11 meetings

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

- Essex Field Club (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (1 meeting, checking Oct cut, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Off.)
- Uttlesford Futures Environment Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (3 meetings, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (2 committee meetings, Curator)
- Great Dunmow Museum (1 Committee meeting, Curator)
- Manuden Local History Society (Curator, 1 meeting)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Wisbech Museum (Conservation Officer)
- Essex Museum Workers Group (Curator)
- MEE (Museums East of England (Curator)
- Advisory Committee for Archaeology I Essex (ECC) (Curator)
- Sparks Will Fly (Cultural Olympiad event/Essex Arts Development) 2 Olympic Working Party meetings at UDC and 1 meeting with Library colleagues at Dunmow (Curator)

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter actual	This Quarter target	Annual Target 2010-2011
Visitors SI 12c	3,610	3,700	16,000
Users CI 39	5,845	5,200	22,000

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.

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 visits or 'Pageviews'. There were 2,096 Pageviews this quarter.

Comment on this quarter's results

Visitor figures are within 2.5% of target. The sporadic closure of Museum Street due to Highways works in November is known to have deterred some visitors, and school class sizes for group visits have been relatively small this term (average 27).

User figures are 12% over target, due mainly to sustained level of website visitors. Publicity surrounding the launch of the Museum's revised development plans and public consultation may have contributed to this. Levels of remote enquiries on the collections (77) remain high compared to numbers of researchers visiting in person, which was relatively low (2) this quarter.

Future Programme, January - March 2012

1 Museum Management and Staff

Awaiting resolution of staffing arrangements for coming financial year, and progress with the development plan for the Museum.

2 Buildings and Site

Resolution of insurance claim and work on gateway, following a minor accident on New Year's Day which rendered one brick pillar unsafe, necessitating its demolition.

3 Collections and Research

There will be an upgrade to the Modes XML databases, and work selecting sporting items from the collections for a forthcoming exhibition sporting heroes. The Effective Collections project on world cultures collections continues (Curator and Documentation & Exhibitions Officer).

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Planning for 'Sparks will Fly at Walden Castle' Cultural Olympiad event on 19 May and various projects and workshops leading up to this, notably the "Local Sporting Heroes" initiative to be launched in partnership with the district's four libraries by Team Essex Ambassador Chloe Rogers on 13 January.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

The Learning Officer's hours will be worked from 20 February to Easter this term.

The Museum's 2012 programme for Special Exhibitions, Activities and Events has now been finalised and will be produced shortly. Our two major events this year will be:

Saturday 19 May Sparks will Fly at Walden Castle

Saturday 8 – Sunday 9 September (Heritage Open Weekend) Anglo-Saxon 'living history' with Ealdfaeder.