

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT January – March 2012

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Museum Development Plan

While storage issues remain 'on hold', Museum and Council staff and Museum Society representatives met with English Heritage to discuss in outline the plan for a single-storey extension to the east of and at right-angles to the Museum building. At the suggestion of English Heritage, a geophysical survey of the site has been planned for April, to assess the extent of buried features and inform an archaeological strategy as part of the eventual HLF application.

1.2 Staff

Carla Purdue, Documentation & Exhibitions Officer, who joined us from New Zealand three years ago, had to quit her post in March when it proved impossible to get her work visa renewed or extended under the new Home Office regulations. This was much regretted, and a large number of volunteers, staff and Museum Society committee members assembled on 7 March for a special leaving party to wish Carla well. Since then, David Whorlow has been appointed and will take up the post from 16th April, just in time for the next exhibition change. Gemma Tully, Learning Officer, returned in late February from her research project in Egypt; we hope to organise a special talk by Gemma on her work in Egypt for Society members later in the year.

The Museum was pleased to host a reception on 24 March for the family and friends of former weekend staff member Roger Kirkpatrick, who passed away last December.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Chris Baker, Ian Sharpe, and Hamish McIlwrick continue to help with collections and other work. Catie Moon has undertaken a couple more days' work on archaeological human remains. Tony Morton volunteered to put up signs on posts on five special roadside verges to inform the public which rare plants grow there. The team of desk volunteers continue to provide invaluable service.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
18 Jan	Natural history collections and the law	Natural Sciences Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

The roof fall arrest system (safety harness) came into its own after heavy snowfall on 4 February saw several members of staff take to the roof with shovels. This forestalled any leaks into the galleries once the thaw set in. The system underwent its first annual safety check in February.

The fire crew from Saffron Walden Fire Station came for a familiarisation visit on the evening of 7 February. Staff provided a thorough tour of the Museum and schoolroom buildings, and fire crews

Curator's quarterly report January – March 2012

Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

advised on the feasibility of salvaging lists of 'most important objects' from the galleries in the event of a catastrophic disaster. There is a risk with the Museum building that fire could take hold quickly, because of the large amount of timber in the roof and because it is not 'compartmentalised' like modern buildings.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Pest trapping took place in stores, galleries and work areas. This indicated that a deep clean of the workroom and kitchen was needed. A hole developed in the roof of the lean-to at the rear of the Museum building during the snowy weather. This roof material is to be tested for asbestos content. Electricity meters in the Museum and Schoolroom were replaced with 'Smart' meters. The Museum heating system broke down at the end of March due to a faulty extractor fan on the roof and may require a more radical overhaul. (Heating was finally restored on 18 April and Carbon Monoxide Detectors were installed in both the Museum Boiler Room and the Conservation Laboratory).

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Repeated problems with Intruder and Fire Alarms in January were finally resolved when a faulty smoke detector was located and replaced in the roof space of the Schoolroom. The electricity meter was replaced and the heating system was repaired.

2.3 Newport Store

No items to report this quarter.

2.4 40 Castle Street

No items to report this quarter

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

Early on New Year's Day, a car accidentally rammed the brick pier on the north side of the main gateway, causing sufficient damage to the pier to render it dangerous, so it was dismantled and the main gates and pedestrian gate had to be removed. As part of the curtilage of the scheduled ancient monument (the castle bailey) and the conservation area, the pier would have had to be replaced. However, the visit by the Fire Service on 7 February established that the original width at 2.5 m was too narrow to admit fire engines and Building Regulations now stipulate a minimum width of 3.1m. English Heritage therefore agreed that the pier should not be rebuilt, and new gates have been commissioned to span the wider gap of 4.9 m between the remaining pier on the north side, and the nearest pier of the southern pair. The pedestrian gate will be re-hung between the pair of piers on the south side. It is hoped that this work can be completed before 19 May *Sparks Will Fly* at Walden Castle. A large proportion of the cost should be recoverable from the driver's insurance.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

55 acquisitions this quarter including

- Photographs. Some of which are of local buildings from the Council's planning department. Due to

Curator's quarterly report January – March 2012
 Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4
 staff reorganisation they are having a major clear out.

- 1920s shirt, day dress, organdie blouses and a doll with a full complement of underwear.
- Modern dolls and toys.
- Military issue bugle.
- Embroidered tray cloth.
- Glass bottle found in a pub cellar.
- Household notebook.
- Children's party invitations and paper coasters.
- Historic building records and archaeological archives from *Archaeological Solutions*

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

The New Zealand barkcloth cloak loaned to Leiden Museum for exhibition was conserved by inserting a large patch and put on display in the Oceania case again, and the conch shell trumpet was replaced. Some thirty OS maps of 1877 were conserved by repairing tears so they can be handled, and the rest of the collection will be tackled in stages.

3.3 Documentation

55 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	55	63	244
Natural history colln.s	0	17	6255
Total	55	80	6499

Modes

The Modes computer database system for documenting museum objects has been upgraded from Modes XML to Modes Complete software.

Disposals

The duplicate and damaged Ordnance Survey maps which the Board approved for disposal in February, have now been disposed of to volunteers as recommended.

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

Students and tutor from Hertfordshire College's A Level Anthropology course visited on 16th January to study world cultures objects selected for the project in the Museum, and on-line (Hertford and Saffron Walden records and images on eHive) and provided comments. They also demonstrated to staff how they use a VLE (virtual learning environment) at College and this helped staff to understand how our planned world cultures website might be used for study in higher and further education.

The Curator has been unable to progress the development of the website for world cultures collections due to pressure of other work and shortage of staff. The Conservation Officer has assisted Wisbech Museum with cleaning, treatment and photography of its chosen objects.

3.4 Loans In

Keatley Trust ceramics and glass. Arrangements in hand for the Saffron Walden Mayor's Chain and Badge of Office to be housed in the Museum when not needed for civic duties.

Curator's quarterly report January – March 2012
Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

3.5 Loans Out

Tudor items to Ware Museum. The bird specimens used in the *Softkill* exhibition were returned.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 16

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 64 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person

3.7 Research

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

- Auction sale catalogues for Audley End House
- Documents relating to Poor Law
- Prehistoric flints in the archaeology collections
- Fox, and stoats in summer and winter fur (ermine)
- Maps of Saffron Walden and surrounding area
- Pottery
- Wedge collection records

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

The microscope in the Discovery Centre was repaired by Saffron Security replacing a faulty transformer. Quotations have been obtained for replacement of the old Woods & Walks touchscreen computer interactive in the Discovery Centre. A new source of LED bulbs provided replacement for failing Armadillo LEDs in the Natural History areas.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Embroideries from the East has continued to attract visitors and compliments, and inspired the half-term programme of activities. In advance of the *Sporting Heroes* exhibition which opens in April, and the *Sparks Will Fly* event on 19 May, the Museum joined forces with local libraries on 13 January to launch a quest to find Uttlesford's local sporting heroes, nominated by sports clubs and residents in the district. Chloe Rogers, international hockey player and Essex Team Ambassador 2012, met schoolchildren and local sports representatives at the Museum, Saffron Walden Library and Dunmow Library to launch the search. So far 20 nominations have been received. These will be displayed in an album in the *Sporting Heroes* exhibition and as a separate display on boards on 19 May in a marquee in the grounds and also in the *Sporting Heroes* exhibition in the Museum from 28 April to 1 July.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011
January	676	894	98	137	774	1031
February	1155	1822	181	149	1336	1971
March	854	1024	273	554	1127	1587
Total	2685	3740	552	840	3237	4580

Shop

	2012	2011
January	153-08	302-73
February	316-07	533-50
March	227-59	378-58
Totals	696-74	1214-81

Tickets

	2012	2011
January	458-50	588-25
February	759-75	1109-75
March	419-50	706-75
Totals £	1637-75	2404-75

Donations

	2012	2011
January	61-00	42-77
February	80-65	1104-18
March	85-80	70-90
Total £	227-45	217-85

Publicity, Marketing and Website

The public consultation on proposed Museum developments closed with a total of over 300 responses. Preliminary results have been received and a more detailed analysis is being prepared by the UDC Consultation staff. The programme of exhibitions and events for 2012 has been printed and circulated to TIC and other venues. Good local press cover for half-term holiday activities.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of sessions taken by Learning Officer: 15 sessions, including: 3x ancient Egypt, 4x Toys through the ages, 2x Victorians, 5x Celts and Romans, 1x Ancient Greeks

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 1 (Rocks) 42 users

No. of reminiscence boxes sent out: 1 (At Home) estimated no. of users 30

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer in Museum *	392
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	85
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	42
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	532

* These figures, plus 75 teachers/adults accompanying school groups, provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

5.2 Events at Museum

Half term activities included embroidery and cross-stitch and hat-making relating to the exhibition

Curator's quarterly report January – March 2012
 Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4
 Embroideries in the East on 15th February.

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
15, 16 Feb	Half-term activities: Embroidery and Chinese hats	310
9-18 March	Science & Engineering Week: Move It! trail to illustrate Our World in Motion. Trail continued on use in Easter holidays.	6 29
	TOTAL	345

5.3 Outreach

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

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 10 groups, 10 meetings

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

- Essex Biodiversity Project (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (2 meetings, 2011 accounts, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust Uttlesford Group (2 meetings, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Wildflower Group (input into 2012 programme, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (1 meeting, March cut, producing plants signs for 5 verges, NSO)
- Sustainable Uttlesford Farming, Wildlife & Countryside Group (responses to Developing Uttlesford consultation, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Futures Economic Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Uttlesford Futures Environment Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (1 meeting, Curator)
- Great Dunmow Museum (1 Committee meeting, Curator)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Museums in Essex Committee AGM (Curator)
- MEE (Museums East of England (Curator)
- Advisory Committee for Archaeology in Essex (ECC) (Curator)
- Sparks Will Fly (Cultural Olympiad event/Essex Arts Development) 2 Olympic Working Party meetings at UDC and 2 Community Partners meetings (Curator and Visitor Services Officer)

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter actual	This Quarter target	Annual Target 2010-2012
Visitors SI 12c	3,237	4,300	16,000
Users CI 39	5,965	5,800	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 2,585 Pageviews this quarter.

Comment on this quarter's results

Curator's quarterly report January – March 2012

Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

Visitor figures are down 25% on target because of icy weather in February, fewer school visits in absence of Learning Officer for Jan-Feb, and because the *Embroideries* exhibition and associated activities, though very well received, did not have the radio publicity and exceptional number of families visiting as *Tudors* in Q4 last year.

User figures are 3% above target because of continuing good performance of website pageview figures.

Future Programme, April - June 2012

1 Museum Management and Staff

David Whorlow, new Documentation & Exhibitions Officer starts work 16th April

2 Buildings and Site

Work on main gateway entrance at bottom of museum drive, week of 14th May

Repair of lean-to roof.

Servicing of air-conditioning unit in the natural history store.

3 Collections and Research

More work is needed on the Modes databases after the upgrade to Modes Complete (Natural Sciences Officer & Documentation Officer).

Ecological surveys of Special Roadside Verges will commence for 2012 (Natural Sciences Officer, Support Worker and team of Essex Wildlife Trust verge surveyors).

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Saturday May 19th : 10am – 10pm Sparks Will Fly events in the grounds and museum open for torchlight exploration in the evening.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

6 & 7 June Crowns and Emblems. Holiday activities for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee to highlight a small display in the Museum's Great Hall.

23 June National Insect Week with the Essex Beekeepers. Event with live bees on Sat 23rd June and displays in the museum until 1st July.

Project for five schools to visit museum and use objects as inspiration to make banners for display at the Sparks Will fly event (Learning Officer and artist Kiran Chahal) undertaken during early April.