

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
July – September 2012

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Museum Development Plan

The search continues for premises suitable for conversion to an off-site store, without which the Museum's future improvement plan cannot proceed. Meanwhile, on the Museum and Castle site, the archaeological geophysical survey team led by Dr Tim Dennis has completed a full survey of all available areas, including the forecourt and all tennis courts, with thanks to Peter Smith and the Castle Hill Tennis Club. Results show very clearly the plan of a substantial and regular building underlying the Museum forecourt and extending southwards under the grass and tennis courts beyond; this is likely to be the 14th century de Bohun manor house, but further speculation must await a meeting in October of archaeologists and historians to discuss results and their implications.

UDC Internal Audit began a review the Museum in September, and this will conclude in October.

1.2 Staff

Maureen Evans, Visitor Services Officer, retired in mid July after over 30 years of service. At her request, there was no 'official' leaving party or publicity at the Museum, but a great many colleagues and friends attended Maureen's 'open day at home' later in the summer. Gemma Tully has now stepped up to the challenge of the combined full-time role of Visitor & Learning Services Officer. The Conservation Officer celebrated her 25 years with the Museum on 20th July.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Thanks as ever to our team of volunteers who operate the reception desk or assist behind-the-scenes. This quarter, special mention must go to Hilary Walker, Judy Brook and Hamish McIlwrick who have used their research skills and knowledge of the local history documents and maps to help staff preparing the *Castle & Community* exhibition. Annie Chambers and Kristian Kurwitz, two 17-year old school students, helped the Conservation Officer with various collection projects once a week over the summer. Special roadside verge surveyors Sue Birnage, Tony Morton, Ken Rivett, Margaret Rufus, Heather and Paul Salvidge, and Dominique Wallace helped to complete the 2012 survey programme .

We have a new work experience placement, Arts graduate Amy Glover, who started helping with Learning and Events on the 10 September. She will be in the Museum from 10-4:30 on Tuesdays, Wednesday and Thursday until Christmas.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

Date	Training / Seminar	Staff
3 July	Fire training: fire panel, evacuation, sweep, stair climber	Staff DH, SK, LM, SS, GT, DW, CW & 2 casuals Jenny &

		Libby Gibsone
3 Sept	UDC Freedom of Information and Data Protection	GT

1.5 Health & Safety

Fire extinguishers, stair lifts and water supply have been inspected.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Problems with the Museum's fire alarm system caused by a faulty smoke detector in the *Worlds of Man* (ethnography) gallery, resulted in one zone (first floor galleries, west end) being disconnected for a short period. Chubb engineers have now completed replacement of 12 smoke detectors on high level ceilings, and all zones of the fire alarm are fully operational.

Council surveyors have checked areas of damp in the Museum building with the Security Officer and Curator. These include some damp patches in first floor galleries (Ceramics and landing) and the bay window area in the Great Hall. Unfortunately the very wet summer has both caused the problem and prevented any remedial treatment being applied this year. Council surveyors are obtaining advice and quotes on a suitable treatment for a listed building of soft Essex red brick.

The Council's IT section installed computer network points at the reception desk and by the visitor services desk (near the kitchen). This will enable the Visitor & Learning Services Officer or other staff to undertake some work with laptops if they need to temporarily cover the desk in an emergency or supervise a new volunteer.

Other work undertaken this quarter has included CCTV cameras (faults fixed by Saffron Security), and pest trapping, which also indicated that the Museum is very damp in places. Arrangements are being made for a thorough clean of storage areas.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

No specific issues to report this quarter

2.3 Newport Store

No specific issues to report this quarter

2.4 40 Castle Street

Council surveyors have checked the kitchen and shed roof where heavy rain has been causing leaks and further work is expected to investigate the problem.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

Grounds maintenance tidied the site, trimmed the Castle hedge and cut down the overgrown weeds and nettles around the Castle ruin. Further work has been requested to cut and kill the ivy growing on the north side of the Castle, cut back the 'natural' vegetation along the north side of the site to allow it regenerate next year, and address problems experienced by a Castle Street resident from weeds

Curator's quarterly report July – September 2012

Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

overhanging his back yard. The Workshop interior was cleaned by the Museum's contract cleaner.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

17 acquisitions this quarter including

- Gold ninth-century Anglo-Saxon ring from Berden-Manuden area, a treasure find purchased by the Society with grant-aid from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, The Headley Trust and with donations made to the Society from two local sources, the Gibson Walden Fund and an anonymous local resident.
- Part of a very fine ninth-century Anglo-Saxon strap-tag from High Easter parish, a rare example of silver being combined with both gold and niello (black inlay of silver sulphide). Kindly donated by Mr M Cuddeford and Mr C Matthews after being disclaimed as treasure.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Work has continued on improving the physical condition and storage of remaining maps, photos and the conservation and photography of Roman coins from the Ashdon hoard. The latest round of objects conserved by students at Lincoln have been returned, checked and stored, and a few items were sent for conservation with the proviso that they tackle the backlog as well. An embroidered Iranian wool curtain was treated in the Lab.

3.3 Documentation

17 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	17	16	210
Natural history colln.s	0	5	829
Total	17	21	1039

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

This project has regrettably remained 'on hold' this quarter while the Curator and Documentation & Exhibitions Officer have been fully occupied with exhibitions events and other urgent work.

Collections Insurance

The Curator and staff have spent some time determining which objects and specimens should continue to be insured for All Risks and which should be moved to 'restoration only'. Len Pole has undertaken two days work advising on the ethnography collections as part of this project. The work is still in progress.

3.4 Loans In 2

One loan in from a local detectorist of a small and finely-decorated flat bronze mount, which shows two confronted birds-of-prey in classic Anglo-Saxon style of around the seventh century.

Curator's quarterly report July – September 2012

Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

Four items on loan from Essex Record Office for *Castle and Community* exhibition, including two deeds relating to property in Castle Street, one dated 1290 and the other 1561.

3.5 Loans Out 2

Loan to Newport Local History Society of archaeological and historical finds from Newport parish for their Heritage Open Days exhibition in the Village Hall. Items included prehistoric flints, Roman pottery, a piece of medieval carved stone from the site of St Leonard's Hospital, a horse-scraper, beekeeping equipment, a corn- and bean-sower and the Duodecim Society's gavel and box. They were also supplied with digital copies of local history photos.

Loan to Epping Forest District Museum of seven items of Chinese costume and an ink block for the touring exhibition *China in the East* as previously agreed. Items of costume included a fleece-lined winter jacket and gown for a woman and a fur-lined winter robe for a male.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 49 (38 left for identification and 11 natural history identifications dealt with on the spot)

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 74 by phone, fax, email, letter or casual enquiries in person

3.7 Research

1 research visit in person, in addition to regular collections volunteers:

- Bird specimens from Cambridgeshire. Research and photography for inclusion in a Ray Society monograph about Leonard Jennings.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Heritage Interactive Ltd has been working with the Natural Sciences Officer to develop a touch screen computer interactive called *Woods and Walks, Nature in North West Essex*. The project has been funded by Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd. The interactive will replace the broken computer system that used to be in the Discovery Centre gallery. One of the fragments of the Sibley's wall painting dated to c 1700 returned from conservation at Lincoln University, and was put on display in the Local History and Buildings Gallery.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The Museum hosted an exhibition by the Eastern Region Textile Forum, *ERTF Present Owen Jones*. This was a travelling exhibition of art textile works inspired by Owen Jones, an influential 19th century architect and designer, probably best known for his publication *The Grammar of Ornament*. The art textiles were produced by the members following formal study sessions. Some of the exhibits had responded purely to the decorative designs and motifs of Owen Jones whilst others had given thought and consideration to his design theories. This made for an eclectic and diverse exhibition. The exhibition was accompanied by members' sketchbooks and design work.

This exhibition was followed by *Castle & Community* which was opened by Bruce Munro at a private view on 13 September and runs until 27 January 2013. This exhibition examines the origins of Saffron

Curator's quarterly report July – September 2012

Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

Walden from Norman times until the present. It focuses on the history of Castle Street, which has been the subject of extensive research by the Castle Street Residents' Association. Highlights of the exhibition include a huge frieze that shows how Castle Street has changed from the 1600s through the 1900s until now through historic illustrations and interpretations and photographs, allowing visitors to make direct comparisons. On loan from the Essex Record Office are two important early deeds relating to properties in Castle Street and a listening post featuring excerpts from interviews with Castle Street residents. Exhibits include a Quaker bonnet, archaeological objects excavated in Castle Street and a dried out Black Rat discovered under floorboards in a nearby house! The exhibition also includes data from the recently conducted (Summer 2012) geophysical survey of the Museum and Castle grounds.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011
July	1038	1183	189	158	1227	1341
August	1798	1972	0	0	1798	1972
September	1239	960	0	0	1239	960
Total	4075	4115	189	158	4264	4273

Shop

	2012	2011
July	303.62	451.84
August	587.86	595.57
September	246.99	213.53
TIC/crocus	216.00	375.00
Totals	1354.47	1635.94

(Note: Crocus sales were reduced this year as the crocus company failed to deliver until very late in the season causing us to reduce our order before delivery)

Tickets

	2012	2011
July	668.25	823.50
August	1167.00	1233.50
September	596.25	558.75
Totals £	2456.25	2615.75

Donations

	2012	2011
July	81.04	119.28
August	121.16	109.60
September	119.70	92.50
Total £	321.90	328.38

Publicity, Marketing and Website

Press releases, newspaper adverts, posters, website information and the Museum email newsletter went out for both the Eastern Region Textile Forum and *Castle and Community* exhibitions. Summer

Curator's quarterly report July – September 2012

Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

holiday activities on the 8, 15 and 22 August, based on textile activities and making Anglo Saxon shields, were advertised via press releases, newspaper adverts, the Museum website, email list and locally distributed posters. The acquisition of an Anglo Saxon ring was publicised through press releases and the email list. The ring is on temporary display in the Museum's Great Hall

The Museum shop has had a cosmetic 'revamp' and also has some new 'Museum branded' merchandise (stationery) in readiness for the new school year. Some other new lines have also been started which are relevant to taught subjects, such as Egyptian pendants.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of sessions taken by Learning Officer: 6 sessions with 5 schools

No. of school loan boxes sent out: 2 (Bird + Romans)

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer in Museum *	158
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	0
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	80
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	238

* These figures, plus 31 teachers/adults accompanying school groups, minus the loan box figures (80), provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3 (189)

5.2 Events on-site (in Museum and grounds)

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
13 July	Private View and opening of Eastern Region Textile Forum exhibition inspired by the designs of Owen Jones	53
27 July	Museum Society AGM with staff presentations	40
8 August	Holiday activity: Textile crafts	143
15 August	Holiday activity: Textile crafts	154
22 August	Holiday activity: make an Anglo-Saxon shield	164
8-9 September	Heritage Open Days weekend: 166 adults + 112 children	268
14 September	Private View and opening of <i>Castle & Community</i> exhibition	107
	TOTAL	929

Heritage Open Weekend

Anglo-Saxon 'living history' group Ealdfaeder ('ancestor') set up a small encampment in the Museum grounds and demonstrated crafts, artefacts and combat. The shield-wall demonstrations were particularly popular with plenty of young recruits, who then raided the Museum for buns! Many children also took part in more shield-making activities. The Saxon gold ring recently purchased (see 3.1 above) was released from the British Museum just in time to be displayed on the weekend.

Curator's quarterly report July – September 2012

Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

The Museum also supported the Newport Local History Society exhibition in Newport Village Hall with a loan of archaeological and historical exhibits from Newport and a small portable showcase for the weekend (see 3.5. above). The Newport exhibition attracted about 200 visitors.

The Societies Showcase at Saffron Walden Town Hall was attended by Saffron Walden Museum Society. The Museum provided objects for a quiz on the Museum Society stall.

5.3 Outreach (Museum activities, talks and lectures at other venues)

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
27 August	Special display of Roman coin hoard and ring at Ashdon Village Museum, with staff on hand to talk about the hoard and its significance (Curator and Casual Assistant Tony Carter)	250
	Total	250

All Our Stories project application

An application has been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund *All Our Stories* community history programme for a £10,000 grant. If the Museum is successful, it will enable a small archaeological excavation to be run in summer 2013 by Carena Lewis and Cambridge Community Heritage Project (University of Cambridge). This will be in The Common by permission of the Town Council, to investigate the buried Norman outer bailey ditch. The exercise has been planned with staff from Saffron Walden County High and Newport Free Grammar School, the intention being to involve sixth-form students from both in practical archaeological research and presenting their findings to the public.

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 7 groups, 9 meetings

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

- BRIE Biological Records in Essex (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (1 meeting, 2011 gift aid claim, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (2 meetings, 5 surveys, October cut order, annual reports, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford Environment Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (2 meetings, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery (2 committee meetings, Curator)
- Town Hall survey of collection of photographs and artworks (Conservation Officer)

Advice, support and involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

- Essex Museum Workers Group (Curator)

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter actual	This Quarter target	Annual Target 2012-2013
Visitors SI 12c	4264	4000	13,700
Users CI 39	6902	5220	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.

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 those on-site (visitors, as above); those off-site (attending talk, display or other off-site activity by Museum staff) and those using the Museum

Curator's quarterly report July – September 2012

Museum Management Working Group, 14 November 2012, item 4

'remotely' (information, research enquiries and services by phone, fax, email, letter and website visits or 'Pageviews'). There were 2233 Pageviews this quarter.

Comment on this quarter's results

Visitor figures have slightly exceeded target, and activities and events have drawn many compliments from visitors.

User figures These continue to out-perform targets, due mainly to website pageviews but also to outreach this quarter.

Future Programme, October - December 2012

1 Museum Management and Staff

UPerform appraisals for all staff

2 Buildings and Site

Fire inspection visit in October

Five-yearly fixed wiring test is due.

Cleaning of stores to commence.

3 Collections and Research

Modes database: work on templates for records.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

The new touch screen computer interactive will be installed in the Discovery Centre.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

6 October The Big Draw on 'Barmy Buildings' theme

2 October Book-signing *Moat Farm Mystery* by Mark Oldridge

31 October & 1 November Home Sweet Home. Family holiday activities making miniature buildings.

30 October and 2 November Grand Union Orchestra workshops and concert *Dancing in the Flames*

1 December Decorate the Museum Christmas tree

10 December Museum Society Christmas social event