

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT October - December 2013

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Forward Plan 2013-2018 and Museum Development

Groundworks for the new store at Shirehill have been completed and outline plans agreed, for construction to start in the New Year. Consultants Purcell continue work for the Council's Planning department on a site management plan for the Castle and Museum site.

Accreditation

The Arts Council have delayed the current round of Accreditation due to workload and the Museum has now been invited to submit its return by June 2014. Remaining work to be done concerns collections care and documentation, to be completed as soon as the new Collections Officer (Human History) is in post.

1.2 Staff

The Conservation Officer was made redundant and will be leaving on 10th January 2014, after over 26 years of service caring for the Museum's collections. The post of Collections Officer (Human History) – replacing the Documentation & Exhibitions Officer post – has been advertised and interviews will take place in mid-January. The post of Security Officer (2.5 days per week) has been revised and from January Stefan Shambrook will be working 4 days per week as Security & Premises Officer (Tue-Fri alternating with Tue + Thur-Sat).

Congratulations to Libby Gibsone (Museum Assistant) on the birth of her son Thomas in November.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Our regular team of volunteers at the desk and behind-the-scenes continues to flourish and provide vital support and skills during the current staff shortage.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

29 Nov	SHARE Natural History network meeting in Cambridge attended by Natural Sciences Officer
3 Dec	Training meeting for Bishop's Stortford Museum volunteers held at Saffron Walden Museum by Curator and Conservation Officer
5 Dec	SHARE workshop on museum storage hosted by Saffron Walden Museum, Curator and Conservation Officer
6 Dec	Packaging workshop for Local History Recorders held at SWM by Conservation Officer
19 Dec	Manual Handling Course given to all new Casual staff by Conservation Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

A meeting with David Cottrell, Health & Safety Officer in December raised continuing issues over the Fall Arrest system on the roof, which still requires modification to reach the corner hoppers. (Total Access due to undertake annual statutory inspection in early 2014). Council officers involved in working at height issues have been informed of the situation.

Fire evacuation drill undertaken in the Museum.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

A building survey was carried out by Council contractors. Between Times (contractors specializing in work on historic buildings) carried out work to clear downpipes and re-point brickwork on the Museum, to reduce or eliminate the problems with damp in some areas. Sunfish have taken over the Council contract (formerly with Chubb) for fire alarms, detectors and extinguishers and carried out an inspection of the Museum and schoolroom buildings.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Downpipes and gutters cleared by Between Times.

Conservation equipment now surplus to requirements, lab tools and some supplies were donated to the Conservation Department, University of Lincoln with whom we have had a 25-year association. Other items went to local conservators via the East Anglian Conservation Forum, and a Lincoln textile conservation studio took the tapestry frame ends bought by the Museum Society some 15 years ago.

2.3 Newport Store

Sunfish inspected fire alarms, detectors and extinguishers.

2.4 40 Castle Street

The Curator's house is due to be vacated by the Curator in January, to allow the Council to rent out the property on the commercial market. The additional income which this will produce is needed to maintain Museum budgets and staffing at a viable level in the face of cuts.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

A bat survey was carried out in the grounds, including the castle site, by Purcell (consultants for the Planning Department) and the hedge around the castle was cut in October. The protective frost cover was placed over the cracked glacial erratic boulder in November.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

Of 62 acquisitions entered in the register this quarter, 30 entries were for Greek and Roman coins and historic OS maps 'found in stores' with no recorded accession number. Of new acquisitions, the most significant was the hoard of medieval silver coins from Farnham (treasure 2011 T242 purchased by the Society), finds and records from 15 sites in SE Uttlesford detected by M Cuddeford, and a number of donations of Victorian – 20th century costume and textiles.

The Treasure Appeal launched to raise funds for purchase of 5 treasure finds has resulted in a number of donations to the Society, meanwhile applications for grant-aid from various organisations have resulted in substantial grants towards one outstanding item and an announcement on treasure acquired by the Museum is expected in early 2014.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

The Horse-drawn vehicles are now all together in a barn near Saffron Walden, where they were cleaned and photographed. Options for their future retention or disposal are being assessed because when the current rental agreement for the barn ends in March, the Museum will be unable to house and care for all of these vehicles. An illustrated report has been produced and circulated to appropriate rural life museums in the region, also a notice has been placed in the *Museums Journal* on-line *Find an Object* section advertising intent to dispose; so far only one expression of interest has been received.

A circular map in the Organics store was investigated and found to be a Wind Dial possibly dating from the late 18th century and quite rare, albeit in a poor condition. Research on a mysterious cased scientific instrument or technical model in the same store has not yielded any results so far.

3.3 Documentation

0 new acquisitions catalogued this quarter (12 textiles were accessioned but no Documentation & Exhibitions Officer in post to document them on computer) and backlog / updates for

	New Acquisitions	Backlog (existing collections not previously catalogued on Modes)	Edits and Updates to existing records
Human history colln.s	0	0	0
Natural history colln.s	0	0	1779
Total	0	0	1779

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

Records for the website are now edited and the next step is to get quotes from website designers. It remains a struggle to bring this project to a satisfactory conclusion due to lack of curatorial staff.

Essex Numismatics Society

Roger Barrett, working with the Curator, has identified and sorted a large number of ‘miscellaneous’ Roman and other coins. Some have been accessioned, added to coin trays and location cards completed; others which are duplicates and/or poor or illegible coins, have been set aside for educational use or disposal.

3.4 Loans In

The Fitzwilliam Museum kindly loaned a number of Egyptian objects for the *Re-Imagining Egypt* exhibition.

3.5 Loans Out

The watercolour of *The Almshouses* by Edward Bawden has been safely returned from exhibition at the First Site gallery in Colchester and re-hung in the Local History gallery. Costume has been returned from loan to the *China in the East* touring exhibition.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: **8**

Collection Enquiries this quarter: **33**

3.7 Research

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

- An ecologist from Greengage to obtain biological records for the Museum grounds and castle site and to discuss ideas for an environmental management plan for the site.
- Fijian objects (Dr A Mills)
- Annotated books of Gabriel Harvey.
- World War 1 documents.
- John Helder Wedge collection (Australia / Aborigine artefacts) by Kimberley Benton

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

The **17th Essex Rifle Volunteers “colour”** or flag was collected from the textile conservation studio and put on display with other objects belonging to the Volunteers that were previously on exhibition in the Military case, and the flag adds a touch of colour. An article on the project was written for the grant giving body, the Essex Heritage Trust, and will appear in their Newsletter

The **studio pottery** loaned by the Keatley Trust was re-displayed in the Ceramics Gallery but requires new object labels to complete it. Work on these displays has stalled while the post of Documentation & Exhibitions Officer has remained vacant. An **updated dolls and toys display** was mounted in the Costume Gallery under new, brighter LED lighting that is not harmful to textiles. A new, secure display case with internal lighting was ordered from Mayvaert in Belgium for treasure acquisitions and coins (Art Fund Treasure Plus grant) to replace the Roman Potter’s workshop in 2014.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The *1950s - Having it so Good* exhibition closed and it was returned to Rutland, with many loaned objects that augmented the show returned to their owners.

Re-Imagining Egypt, an exhibition exploring 300,000 years of Egyptian history alongside contemporary art by the Egyptian artists Khaled Hafez and school children from the local community, opened on 16 November. The two private views for *Re-Imagining Egypt* were very well attended by the children who had participated and their families, and later by local dignitaries, Museum Society members and friends.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012
October	1516	1119	421	331	1937	1450
November	860	783	412	286	1272	1069
December	876	687	213	225	1091	912
Totals	3252	2589	1046	842	4298	3431

Shop

	2013	2012

Tickets

	2013	2012
October	985.50	746.00
November	479.75	499.75
December	528.50	529.00
Totals £	1993.75	1774.75

October	713.08	451.22
November	411.18	877.35
December	476.51	141.25
Totals	1600.77	1469.82

Donations

	2013	2012
October	136.29	121.16
November	57.17	119.70
December	64.93	89.70
Total £	258.39	330.56

Publicity, Marketing and Website

We now have Facebook ‘likes’ 252 and 567 ‘Followers’ on Twitter. The Council website including the Museum pages is being rebuilt and Museum pages have received **????** page-views this quarter.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of sessions taken by Learning Officer: 29 paying sessions (including one taught at a school, total of adults 120 children 662) and **9 free sessions** for the *Re-imagining Egypt* project (199 children and 31 adults), **2 independent visits** (55 children 5 adults), **2 loan boxes** were taken out (Local history and Victorians). Taking into consideration the Egyptian workshops, **this quarter represents record educational benefit with 38 sessions taught to 840 children from 21 different schools and community groups since the Learning post was made part-time.**

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer in Museum *	641
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	21
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	55
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	65
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	782

* These figures, plus the 199 children and 31 adults who took part in the Egyptian workshops, plus 120 teachers/adults accompanying paying school groups provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3.

5.2 Events on-site (in Museum and grounds)

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
1 Oct	Saffron Walden Initiative event Museum Society directors, CW, GT, SK objects)	25
5 Oct	Big Draw (GT and AG)	91
30 and 31 Oct	Space Race half-term events (GT and AG) (136 + 178)	314
31 Oct	Halloween with St Clare's Hospice (GT and AG)	123
15 Nov	Private Views for Re-imagining Egypt (GT and CW)	210
3 Dec	Training meeting, Bishop's Stortford Museum vols (CW, LM)	15
5 Dec	SHARE seminar on museum storage (CW, LM)	20
6 Dec	Workshop on packaging for Local History recorders (LM)	6
7 Dec	Xmas tree decorations (GT and AG)	107
9 Dec	Museum Society Xmas Party	97
19 Dec	Meeting and Christmas party of the East Anglian Conservators Forum in Schoolroom (LM)	15
	TOTAL	1023

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

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
9 Oct	GT talk to Littlebury Ladies	32
11 Nov	GT and Khaled Hafez talk to Museum Society	68
	Total	100

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

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

- Essex Field Club (1 meeting, treasurer work, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust Uttlesford Local Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (2 meetings, 2 planning applications, annual reports, winter cut, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford (1 meeting, 3 planning applications, 1 comment on Local Plan sites, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Fry Art Gallery (marking objects and light reducing film for skylights, Conservation Officer; 1 committee meeting, Curator)
- Thaxted parish councillor – informal meeting and advice on potential heritage project (Curator)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (2 meetings, Curator)

Attendance of meetings, advice, support or involvement in organisations outside Uttlesford

None this quarter

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter actual Q3	This Quarter target Q3	Annual Total 2013-14	Annual Target 2013-14
Visitors SI 12c	4,298	3,400		15,000
Users CI 39	7,222	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 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 'remotely' (information, research enquiries and services by phone, fax, email, letter and website visits or 'Pageviews'). There were 2,719 Pageviews this quarter.

Comment on this quarter's results

Visitor figures are. 26% over target due to strong performance by school visits, *Re-Imagining Egypt* exhibition and its associated activities, but a range of other activities and events offered by the Museum have contributed.

User figures are. 34% over target, due partly to strong performance of visitors figures and also to the continuing high number of pageviews on website, although most website visits are of very short duration.

Future Programme, Jan – March 2014

1 Museum Management and Staff

Conservation Officer, Lynn Morrison, takes redundancy in January as the post has been deleted.

Recruitment of a Collections Officer (Human History).

Security and Premises Officer, Stefan Shambrook, now working 4 days per week.

2 Buildings and Site

Curator's house vacated for work by Council prior to re-letting.

3 Collections and Research

Work continues on a project to document the presence of protected species of animals and plants in the Natural History collections (Support Worker Madeleine Fanthorpe and Natural Sciences Officer Sarah Kenyon).

Work continues to re-house the horse-drawn vehicles and to assess, cost and apply for grants towards racking for the new Shire Hill store.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Re-Imagining Egypt to continue until 23rd February 2014. *Secrets from the Stores* opening 8 March.

Visitors are being informed of new opening hours from January via notices, website, Twitter, Facebook and the local media.

Announcement and publicity for anticipated treasure acquisitions to accompany a new display in the archaeology gallery.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

School visits commence again in February once the Visitor & Learning Services Officer returns from Sudan (8 visits are already booked for the period). Events from Jan-March include: February half-term family activities *Ancient Egyptian Magic*, creating a magical Shabti.