

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM
CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT
January - March 2014

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Museum Opening Hours and temporary suspension of human history services

From 6 January the Museum has been closed on Mondays, and services for human history collections (enquiries, research access, offers for the collection and identifications) have been temporarily suspended due to lack of staff and more urgent priorities. Natural Sciences services continued as normal during this period. Mondays will become the regular day for staff to work off-site at the store.

Forward Plan 2013-2018 and Shirehill Store

Museum staff and Museum Society directors visited the new store under construction on Shirehill on 20 March and were delighted to see the store so far advanced. Attention is now focusing on racking and capacity issues, to allow specifications on services to progress, and in this respect it has been frustrating that staffing issues and the flood at the Newport store have prevented staff from detailed work on racking and storage for human history collections. However it has been possible to obtain an outline racking layout from one storage company, so that work on installing services can continue.

Accreditation

There remains a backlog of work in the stores and the documentation of 2013 acquisitions and loans, as a result of the Documentation & Exhibitions post being unfilled since June 2013. This will need to be tackled by the new Collections Officer (Human History) with the Curator in April-May as well as updating policy and procedural documents on collections care and documentation.

1.2 Staff

Conservation Officer Lynn Morrison left due to redundancy on 10 January. The Documentation & Exhibitions Officer post has been re-evaluated and revised as Collections Officer (Human History); interviews were held in January and Leah Mellors, whose specialism is social history, will take up the role from 1 April. The Security & Premises Officer is now working 4 days per week. The Curator took leave during January to move out of the Curator's House at 40 Castle Street, so that the Council and Museum Society can decide how best to use the house to maximise income for the Museum.

Lower than normal staffing levels this quarter has necessitated the regular use of casual contract Museum Assistants to maintain minimal staff levels in the building and to allow full-time staff to have lunch-breaks. The Museum Assistant team were also invaluable in helping with the aftermath of the flood at Newport (see below, 2.3).

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Collections volunteers Roger Barratt, Judy Brook, Hamish McIlwrick, Ian Sharpe and Hilary Walker have been working on collections and administrative tasks. The volunteer team of Verge Surveyors checked special roadside verges sites to ensure that the full-width cut which took place in January was done correctly and that no sites had been missed.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

Some staff have managed to attend some training this quarter, however others have had to miss or postpone essential Council training sessions because of lack of opportunity to leave the site or other urgent priorities, such as dealing with the flooded store.

18 March	SHARE eastern region natural history network meeting, Hunterian Museum – S Kenyon
19 March	E-buy G Tully – Council
26 March	Safeguarding G Tully - Council
March	E-Learning module Information Security - S Kenyon, G Tully – Council

1.5 Health & Safety

The Roof Safe Access system was checked for its annual statutory certification on 11 March, however we still await a quote for longer lanyards to reach the hoppers and the annual check on the harnesses. (PAT) Portable Appliance Testing of electrical equipment took place in all Museum service buildings.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Pest monitoring took place in natural history stores, galleries and museum workrooms in January.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Reusable laboratory equipment and supplies has been disposed of to appropriate organisations, mainly to the department of conservation at Lincoln, and the tapestry frame to a textile conservation organisation in Lincoln. The Lab has been used for laying out and drying collections affected by the Newport flood. Basic cleaning tools and conservation and packaging supplies have been retained.

2.3 Newport Store

Work at the Depot on electrical services and the car park has impacted on the store a little, requiring staff presence at certain times.

On Friday 7 February exceptional rainfall led to a severe **flood** in the area, the depot was evacuated and Museum staff were unable to check the store until the afternoon of Monday 10 February. Water inside the store rose to between 6” and 8”, deep enough to catch some objects on low shelves which could not be raised any higher. The receding flood water left a dirty brown film over floor, fittings and items affected. This caused a major disruption to staff work schedules, but a cleaning party on Wednesday 12 February removed portable items to the Lab for cleaning and drying and dealt with larger objects in the store. The Council’s stewards Mick Lench and Leo and cleaner Stev assisted with floor cleaning, extra cleaning supplies and two additional dehumidifiers. The prolonged high humidity in the store led to an outbreak of mould and fungus in one area, where there was also a leak trough the eaves from a broken gutter. The Security & Premises Officer has made some repairs to the store door, which has been prone to warping with the floods.

2.4 40 Castle Street

The Curator’s house was vacated on 13 January.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

As part of the Planning Department’s programme of improvements to the castle site, shrubs along the Tennis Club fence that were shading grass on the tennis courts have been removed. Hazel trees growing along the wall with Church Street were coppiced.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

17 acquisitions entered in the register this quarter, of which most were previously unaccessioned coins found in the stores and three were archaeological treasure (see below).

The Treasure Appeal and grant-aid from six funding bodies in total enabled the Museum Society to secure all the items of treasure currently available:

- Early Anglo-Saxon gold ring (North-West Essex ring'), 2014.1
- Silver Anglo-Saxon hooked tag, Thaxted, 2014.2
- Tudor-Jacobean gold ring with symbols of Christ's Passion, Canfield, 2014.3
- Silver Anglo-Saxon mount with animal-heads (collected from the British Museum on 3 April, accession number 2014.17)

The gold Iron Age staters (coins) have been set aside because the finder has discovered two more and these now have to clear inquests and valuations before the whole group can be considered.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Disposal of the Horse-drawn vehicles has been advertised in the *Museums Journal* and also on the Museums Association website ('Find an Object') and informally, through emails to other appropriate museums in the region. This has resulted in the disposal of the Jobmaster's Wagon of J Carter of Burwell to Burwell Museum (agreed by the Museum Society Board on 27 February, collected by Burwell Museum on 27 March). The wagon will be on display there from Easter 2014.

There have been two other expressions of interest, one of which resulted in a meeting followed by a site visit with a volunteer from Audley End, with a view to acquiring a tip cart for the Audley End Stables draft horse to pull; a response from English Heritage is awaited.

Thankfully, the Society has been able to take out one further 6-month extension to the rent agreement on the barn near Ashdon, so we now have until 30 September to re-house the remaining vehicles. Priorities for retention (apart from the Langley hand-drawn hearse) are the Essex Hay Wagon and one tip cart, preferably the one from Foxton, South Cambs, if there is sufficient space in Shirehill. Provisional plans for disposal at auction are being laid, if no museums or private buyers can be found.

3.3 Documentation

0 new acquisitions catalogued this quarter. Backlog / updates are as follows:

	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	663
Total	0	0	663

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

HLF All Our Stories project (the Dig ion the Common 2013)

The Curator has been unable to make any further progress with completing these projects due to staff shortages, time lost dealing with the Newport flood and other pressures this quarter. Also, the final

report on the Dig has only just been completed by Access Cambridge Archaeology in late March and a report and invoice on follow-up work at Newport Free Grammar School is awaited.

3.4 Loans In

None.

3.5 Loans Out

One request has been received from the Fry Art Gallery for Edward Bawden's framed linocut *Saffron Walden Church / Saffron Walden Festival* which hangs on the turn of the stairs from the Museum foyer. This is for an exhibition Ecclesiastical Delights, with collection planned for 13 September and return to the Museum on 27 October.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: **2**

Collection Enquiries this quarter: **30** (and a number of human history enquiries have been logged for completion when 'normal' services are resumed after Easter)

3.7 Research

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

Polly Keeler came for an Education shadowing day (with the Visitor & Learning Services Officer) from Cambridge University. 2 researchers consulted the owl study skins to investigate plumage colour change (Natural Sciences Officer).

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Treasure

In the Great Hall (archaeology) gallery, the Roman potter has retired and his former workshop has been re-fitted for a permanent display of treasure and other significant archaeological finds and coins, thanks to a Treasure Plus grant of £5,100 from the Art Fund and the Headley Trust. Preparations have been made for the new display which will open to the public on 5th April.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Re-Imagining Egypt, an exhibition exploring 300,000 years of Egyptian history, closed on 23 February after a very successful run, attracting over 3,000 visitors.

Secrets from the Stores opened on 8 March and presents a selection of specimens and objects which have not been exhibited at all before, or at least not for a very long time. The exhibition also aims to show a little of the work which goes on behind the scenes and touches on some of the many research, educational and other uses to which stored collections are put. It is hoped that some visitors will 'sign up' as potential volunteers for moving the collections into the new store later this summer.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013
January	719	688	23	31	742	719
February	1384	1594	236	324	1620	1918
March	750	954	416	338	1166	1292
Total	2853	3236	675	693	3528	3929

Shop		
	2014	2013
January	161.70	278.68
February	663.28	753.73
March	796.06	430.21
Totals	1621.04	1462.62

Tickets		
	2014	2013
January	551.25	316.00
February	826.75	1013.50
March	652.25	722.50
Totals £	2030.25	2052.00

Donations		
	2014	2013
January	126.47	44.72
February	66.71	53.79
March	48.36	70.18
Total £	241.54	168.69

Publicity, Marketing and Website

The Museum has benefited from the efforts of Jacqui Portway and her fund-raising campaign to commemorate Flossie Gedney, who was Saffron Walden's oldest resident when she died in 2013 aged 109. Jacqui kindly donated the balance of the funds (£1190.57) raised for a memorial bench on the Common and organised the 'Pull Up a Chair for Flossie Gedney' initiative in Waitrose's monthly community fund appeal. Malcolm Domb, Waitrose Branch Manager, presented a 'giant cheque' for £321.00 to the Museum Society with the Mayor and Jacqui in attendance, on 21 March. With the help of Harts, the funds will purchase eight smart and comfortable matching arm chairs for visitors to use in the galleries, with commemorative plaques in memory of Flossie, and a couple of freestanding cycle racks to stand on the forecourt.

The Museum Society is seeking to re-design its website, with the aid of Tony Morton, and to integrate it with the Museum Service's website to mutual advantage. The Museum Support Committee has set up a website sub-committee to take this further, in collaboration with Council Officers.

There were 2,698 Pageviews this quarter on the Museum's website pages, we now have 217 'Likers' on Facebook and 697 Followers on Twitter.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

No. of sessions taken by Learning Officer: 21 taught paying sessions (large groups have multiple sessions on one day) over 14 days of school visits with 14 different schools

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer in Museum *	566
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	2
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	31
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	599

* These figures plus 107 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
19-20 Feb	Egyptian half-term events (V&LS Officer and Amy Glover)	240+216 = 456
22 Feb	Egyptian drama workshop (V&LS Officer and Amy Glover)	128
14-23 March	National Science & Engineering Week trails/activities (Natural Sciences Officer and Visitor & Learning Services Officer)	26
	TOTAL	610

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

Date	Event and Staff	No. Attending
3 March	Talk to SW Initiative (Visitor & Learning Services Officer)	13
	Total	13

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 6 groups, 6 meetings

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

- Essex Field Club (1 meeting, 2013 accounts, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust Uttlesford Local Group (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (January cut, 1 enforcement issue, 4 planning applications, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford (2 meetings, 3 Local Plan site comments, 5 planning applications, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Fry Art Gallery (1 committee meeting, Curator)
- Searchers Metal Detecting Club (1 committee meeting, Curator)

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

- Museum Essex (successor to Museums in Essex Committee) 1 meeting (Curator)

Grants and Support

The Museum received grants and support from the following organisations:

- Museums Essex grant of £400 for storage furniture for natural history collections.
- SHARE paid £46.50 transport cost for Natural Sciences Officer to attend a training event.

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter actual Q4	This Quarter target Q4	Annual Total 2013-14	Annual Target 2013-14
Visitors SI 12c	3,528	4,000	17,552	15,000
Users CI 39	6,303	5,800	28,216	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').

Comment on this quarter's results

Visitor figures are about 12% below target and are also below figures for the same quarter last year. This reflects the effects of Monday closure, together with temporary suspension of human history services due to shortage of curatorial staff. The number of visits by school pupils has been maintained despite the absence of the Visitor & Learning Services Officer in January, due to strong performance by school visits in February and especially March.

User figures are nearly 9% above target, largely due to relatively high level of remote users via website (pageviews), although the number of pageviews is not as high as Q4 last year.

Comment on annual 2013-14 results

Visitor figures are 17% above target due to strong performance Q1-3. Activity and outreach events Q1-3 were largely responsible for this, and some of these were supported by 'one-off' grants or partnership opportunities, such the HLF *All Our Stories* project and Maze Festival. *Re-Imagining Egypt* and a consistently strong performance on school visits (restricted by the 2 days per week available for the Visitor & Learning Services Officer to teach) have also made significant contributions.

User figures are about 28% above target, mainly due Pageview figures for the website.

Future Programme, April – June 2014

1 Museum Management and Staff

Leah Mellors, Collections Officer (Human History), starts work at Saffron Walden Museum.

Staff time will be directed mainly to work for Accreditation and for planning the racking and move to the Shirehill store this quarter.

2 Buildings and Site

Construction of the new store continues. Work continues on the racking specifications.

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

Secrets from the Stores continues until 20 July.

Time to research and prepare the next special exhibition (on local civilian life in both World Wars) will need to be fitted in around the new store project.

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

5 Education, Events and Outreach

16 & 17 April *Back to the Stone Age* activities

16 May Museums at Night

28 & 29 May Cracking Codes activities

31 May Tudor Charters activities