

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT October – December 2014

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Forward Plan 2013-2018 and Shirehill Store

At the new Shirehill Store, installation of the racking by Link51 has been completed for the Natural History store (except one 'snagging' item still being resolved). Plans have been agreed and the orders placed for the Human History storage areas (Archaeology and Social History) and installation is expected during February 2015. Meanwhile the performance of the heating system and environment in the store have been monitored; the RH (Relative Humidity) and temperature are mostly at reasonable levels for the collections although dehumidifiers will need to be provided for the Archaeological Metals store and possibly one or two other areas.

Much staff time has been taken up with the recruitment and training of a 17-strong team of Store Volunteers, who started work in shifts with curatorial staff in December at the Newport store, checking, listing and packing collections in preparation for transport to Shirehill in the spring of 2015. Work has also started with Store Volunteers on listing and packing parts of the Natural History collection which are to be moved from the Museum to Shirehill. Packing of collections will continue from January onwards until the contents of the Newport store are ready for shipment, followed by some Natural History and other collections from the museum site in due course.

Accreditation

The Museum was initially awarded Provisional Accreditation subject to submission of signed copies of the revised Management Agreement, Lease and Under-Lease between the Council and Museum Society, and minuted approval of remaining policy documents by Cabinet. These formalities were completed and we expect ratification from the Arts Council England in February of Full Accreditation.

1.2 Staff

Hayley Wilson was appointed as casual Admin Assistant and will be working 12 hours a week from 6 January to assist with volunteer rotas and other day-to-day business. This will help to free curatorial staff time for essential work in the stores and other priorities, and enable minimum cover for security and H&S to be maintained.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

In October, Will Martin joined the museum team as a Collections Volunteer. He has been assisting the Collections Officer (Human History) with the backlog of accessioning, with particular focus on ephemera. In November, Hayley Wilson also began volunteering as a Collections Volunteer, in addition to her role as a Casual Assistant. Hayley has been assisting the Collections Officer (Human History) with accessioning and documenting a collection of paintings, prints and drawings.

Our other Collections Volunteers – Hamish McIlwrick, Judy Brook, Hilary Walker and Ian Sharpe – have

continued to assist the Collections Officer (Human History) in the documentation of our 2D collection and the digitisation of location cards. In total, the Collections Volunteers have donated over 160 hours of their time in this period. Roger Barratt (Essex Numismatics Society) has continued to assist occasionally with the coin collections and enquiries.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

2 Oct	Security meeting held at Museum (SHARE). Security Officer
7 Oct	Fire training: Collections Officer (Human History), Curator
9-10 Oct	Museums Association Conference, Cardiff. Visitor Services and Learning Officer
7 Nov	Collections Review and Rationalisation: Collections Officer (Human History)
11 Nov	1 st Aid training – all staff and casuals (in-house)
12 Nov	Natural Sciences Network meeting (SHARE, Newmarket). Natural Sciences Officer
17 Nov	SHARE annual conference, Fitzwilliam, Cambridge (Curator)
24-25 Nov	Manual handling training for staff, some casuals and Store Volunteers team
27 Nov	Money & Medals Network seminar, Fitzwilliam, Cambridge (Curator)
8 Dec	Retail Forum (SHARE, Ipswich Museum) Visitor Services and Learning Officer

1.5 Health & Safety

Basic first aid training for all staff has been completed (once every three years). Council Health & Safety Officer David Cottrell has provided guidance on the removal of collections from Newport to Shirehill and training in manual handling for the Store Volunteers and staff.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Pest trap monitoring took place in stores, galleries and offices. The lift serviced and alarms have been serviced.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Pest trap monitoring took place in stores and alarms have been serviced.

2.3 Newport Store

A fault on the intruder alarm system caused a night-time call-out in November, attended by the Police, Curator and Security Officer. Essex Police have now written to say that they are withdrawing response unless the alarm system is upgraded (this is standard Police procedure to reduce officer time spent on false alarm calls). It is not intended to upgrade the system as the store is soon to be evacuated.

2.4 40 Castle Street

The sale of the former curator's house has been completed and arrangements for the re-routing of the telephony and data cables are now in place with BT and English Heritage, as Scheduled Ancient Monument consent was required for the end of a trench which comes inside the driveway gates and castle bailey boundary. It is expected that this work will be completed 20-23 January 2015.

2.5 Grounds and Castle Site

The frost cover was placed on the cracked glacial erratic boulder.

The Planning Department’s programme of work on the Castle and Council-owned grounds continues to improve the site: Bakers of Danbury have completed work on the castle turret and are continuing to work on the flint boundary wall. The Museum has taken in some finds made inside the bottom of the turret including parts of the iron fittings for the 1796 flagpole.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

124 acquisitions entered in the register this quarter, including:

- A Stanley 55 universal combination plane, belonging to a local carpenter
- A collection of photographs, paintings, prints and drawings, previously belonging to the Saffron Walden Town Council
- A collection of ephemera relating to National Service at RAF Debden
- Eleven Chinese wooden carved models of figures and activities from daily life
- A wedding dress, worn by a woman from Wendens Ambo, dating from the early 20th century

An article and photographs of the North-West Essex ring (Anglo-Saxon gold ring 2014.1) has been published in the *Saffron Walden Historical Journal*.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Mould was discovered on the railwaymen’s uniforms in the local history gallery. The Collections Officer (Human History) sought advice from textile conservators and the mould has been removed from the objects. Environmental conditions are being monitored in the gallery, and the case has been sealed more effectively. Silica gel will be placed in the case to reduce the relative humidity.

3.3 Documentation

93 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	93	16	444
Natural history colln.s	0	0	682
Total	93	16	1126

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

The Curator is looking into quotes for the website promoting world cultures objects from several museums, and the possibility of this website being hosted by the Museum Society alongside the Society’s and Museum’s websites.

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

The final report has now been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

3.4 Loans In

No new loans in.

The loan of a collection of African material from the Royal Collection Trust was renewed for a further 10 years in October and the loan of four ethnographic objects from the Museum of Archaeology and

Anthropology in Cambridge was renewed for a further 2 years in December. A basalt poi pounder on loan from Leeds Museums & Galleries was returned to them in early October.

3.5 Loans Out

The Edward Bawden lino-cut print that was loaned to the Fry Art Gallery for their *Ecclesiastical Delights* exhibition was returned to the Museum on 28 October 2014.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: **6**

Collection Enquiries this quarter: **24**

Collections and research enquiries, identification services had to be suspended in November until further notice while staff time has to be prioritised for packing and moving collections.

3.7 Research

7 research visits in person, including:

- A-level art student drew and photographed the Spider collection
- 2 researchers viewed archaeological pottery (Neolithic beaker and Roman Samian ware)
- Enfield rifle seen
- Richard Weaver, relative of USA airman Montie Weaver, and 2 guests visited the North-West Essex at War exhibition

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

No major work on the main galleries has been possible due to other demands on staff time. A small recent acquisition (medieval miniature ring brooch) has been added to the treasure case in the archaeology gallery and labels for the medieval case 21 upgraded.

The Council has appointed historic building contractors Bakers of Danbury to undertake repairs to parts of the Ceramics Gallery where plasterwork and decoration have suffered from leaks. This will involve closure of the gallery and removal of exhibits (ceramics, glass and paintings including the Cipriani oil paintings) and will constitute another major project. This work will probably take place later in 2015 but no timetable has been agreed yet.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The special exhibition *North-West Essex at War* continues until 2 February 2015.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013
October	1159	1516	286	421	1445	1937
November	677	860	299	412	976	1272
December	551	876	123	213	674	1091
Total	2387	3252	708	1046	3095	4298

Shop

	2014	2013
October	£ 716.08	713.08
November	£ 491.91	411.18
December	£ 488.04	476.51
Totals	1696.03	1600.7

Tickets

	2014	2013
October	£ 701.25	985.50
November	£ 379.25	479.75
December	£ 342.00	528.50
Totals £	£ 1422.25	1993.75

Donations

	2014	2013
October	£ 106.46	136.29
November	£ 64.35	57.17
December	£ 23.97	64.93
Total £	£ 194.78	258.39

Visitor numbers and school numbers seem down considerably compared to the same period last year. As with the last quarter (July-Sept), this is due to the fact that last year grant-aided work was taking place for the *Re-imagining Egypt* exhibition which involved almost 100 children coming into the Museum for workshops every week in October and then many of the children, plus their family members, as well as Museum Society members, attending the Private View for the exhibition's opening in November. Otherwise general Visit figures are almost the same as those for the same quarter in 2011-12, before Monday closing, which suggest we are attracting more visitors on the days we remain open.

Museum Shop

After attending a number of the SHARE-funded Retail Forum meetings, the Visitor Services and Learning Officer has had the shop brightened up and introduced a number of new lines. Considering the lower visitor numbers compared to the same period last year, the slight increase in shop sales compared to the previous year is therefore a testament to the impact of the new stock and improved shop environment.

Publicity, Marketing and Website

The 2015 programme is now complete and in print. The highlights for 2015 include: *Visions of the World* (exhibition), Waterloo anniversary (re-enactment event in the Museum's ground), 180th birthday party (museum event for children), *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* (exhibition).

There were **1,364 Pageviews** this quarter on the Museum's website pages, and there are **405 'Likers' on Facebook and 998 Followers on Twitter.**

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

19 sessions were taken by the Learning Officer with 13 different schools over 14 days of bookings. A total of 581 children were taught in paying sessions and 26 children visited in independent visits. 49 students from Dame Bradbury's had a session on castles delivered at school in one of their assemblies.

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer in Museum *	561
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	75
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	26
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	26
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	688

* These figures plus 121 teachers/adults accompanying paying school groups provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3.

Loan and reminiscence boxes: 1 School Loan box was taken out: Toys

5.2 Events on-site (in Museum and grounds)

29 and 30 October: Wartime Food and Rationing Event, and the Dig Draw for October half-term – families learnt about rationing, saw rations weighed out and designed their own wartime food posters.

6 December: families made decorations of feathered birds for Christmas trees – 2 school loan boxes were used to show visitors the feathers of different birds.

Date	Event	No. Attending
2 Oct	SHARE Security seminar in School Room	31
25 Oct	Tour and talk for Local History group in Museum	18
29 & 30 Oct	Half-term events (188 + 99)	287
1 Nov	Birthday Party in School Room	35
3 Nov	Store Move Project induction day in Museum	18
4 Nov	Special session on archaeology of NW Essex for Gold Street Seniors Group	14
15 Nov	St Mary's School Cambridge use of School room for open day event	54
24 & 25 Nov	Store Move Team training days in Museum and School Room	17
6 Dec	Christmas Holiday activities	89
	Total	563

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

Date	Event	No. Attending
1 October	Castles session delivered at Dame Bradbury Infants by GT	49
6 October	Reminiscence session delivered at Stanley Wilson Care Home by GT	37
7 October	Egyptian Session delivered at William Westley school by GT	26
28 Nov	Short talk for Hadstock Society AGM by CW	8
8 Dec	Museum Society Christmas Social	60
	Total	180

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 8 groups, 5 meetings

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

- Clavering Parish Council (wildlife site information for community telephone box, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Field Club (1 meeting, treasurer work, 2014 accounts, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project (1 meeting, annual reports, winter cut order, 3 planning application comments, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford (1 meeting, Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Searchers Metal-Detecting Club, 1 meeting (Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery, 1 committee meeting and advice (Curator / Museum Mentor)
- Stanley Wilson Care Home (GT)
- Uttlesford Volunteers Centre (GT)

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

- ME (Museums Essex) (Curator, now a trustee of ME since autumn 2014)
- MEE (Museums East of England, regional forum) (Curator)
- The Collections Officer (Human History) continues to support the Social History Curators' Group in her role as administrator for their 'Object Lessons' resources.

Grants and Support

The Museum received grants and support from the following organisations:

- £1350 from Essex County Council for the *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* exhibition, 2015
- £1000 from SHARE Museums East for the recruitment of two interns to work on a collections review project in 2015 at the Shirehill store

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter Actual Q3	This Quarter target Q3	Cumulative 2014-15	Annual Target 2014-15
Visitors SI 12c	3,095	3,300	11,405	14,000
Users CI 39	4,696	5,100	17,960	21,000

Notes on Performance Indicators

Visitors are all those visiting the Museum in person, including activities and events in the grounds. Visitor figures are just under target by about 6% this quarter.

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'). User figures are 8% under target this quarter, due mainly to a decline in website visits and also visitor figures being under target.

Future Programme, Jan – March 2014

1 Museum Management and Staff

Hayley Wilson will start her temporary role as a Casual Admin Assistant on the 6th January.

2 Buildings and Site

Need to get Shire Hill store ready to take collections and be equipped for Museum work, once the racking contractors (Link 51) have completed their work around the beginning of March.

BT works 20-23 January mean that Museum Street will be closed for up to 4 days, affecting vehicular access to the Museum.

3 Collections and Research

Identification, enquiry, research, loan and acquisition services are suspended.
Packing of collections continues at Newport store.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Visions of the World, a touring exhibition from the Royal Geographical Society will open (augmented with items from the Museum's collection) on 14th Feb and run until 16th August

5 Education, Events and Outreach

No school visits will take place in January as the Visitor Services and Learning Officer will be on annual leave undertaking fieldwork in Sudan.

Family half-term activities, *Fabulous Finger Puppets*, inspired by the Museum's collection will take place on the 18th and 19th of Feb.