

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT July – September 2015

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Forward Plan 2013-2018 and Shirehill Store

Council IT officers and contractors have been working on phone lines, ITC cabling and alarm systems. The basic intruder and fire alarm systems are now functioning so that the move of collections can proceed from mid-October. Further work to finalise the broadband and IT services may need to be done by IT but is not an impediment to the move. Museum staff and the Corporate Health & Safety Officer David Cottrell have assessed equipment and signage. Essential fittings and equipment are now in place, including a set of robust and smart tables for the Research Room, funded by a grant from the Gibson Walden Fund through the Museum Society. Plans are in hand for the move to commence week of 19 October and continue until the week before Christmas.

Looking ahead to Forward Plan Stage II (development of the Museum), on 6 August the Curator and Museum Society Development Committee made visits to Chelmsford Museum, where the Victorian mansion had been extended to double the size of the museum, and to Finchingfield Guildhall, where a small historic building had dramatically enhanced its role as a heritage and community hub for the village through a Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

1.2 Staff

Hayley Wilson's contract as casual Admin Assistant (12 hrs per week) has been extended until 30 December, thanks to support from the Museum Society, to ensure continued efficient daily operation and adequate levels of staffing through the store move period. The Museum welcomed five new Museum Assistants (Casual Contract) this quarter: two from our team of desk volunteers, Fiona Turnbull and Gillian Knight; and three colleagues from Uttlesford District Council, Jamie Milne, Samantha Mann and Lee Brignull.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

Will Martin has ceased volunteering at the museum, due to other commitments at IWM Duxford. The remainder of the Human History collections volunteers have continued their work on documenting the collections and helping to sort through early museum documentation. They have contributed a total of 122 hours over the quarter. The Store Team volunteers have continued to assist curatorial staff with preparing collections for the store move.

The team of Special Roadside Verge surveyors Barry and Pat Kaufmann-Wright, Tony Morton, Ken Rivett, Heather and Paul Salvidge completed ecological surveys at 22 sites which was especially helpful this year when Sarah Kenyon was occupied with packing collections.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

21 July	SHARE Fund-Raising Cohort. Musuem of Power nr. Maldon (CW and Richard Priestley)
22 July	Spirit specimen conservation course. SHARE, Cambridge University Zoology Museum (SK)
30 July	Sickness Absence Management, UDC (CW)

8 Sept	Bone collections use and conservation course. NatSCA, Cambridge University Zoology Museum (SK)
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1.5 Health & Safety

The Corporate Health & Safety Officer David Cottrell has provided advice on procedures and equipment at the Shirehill store. First Aid kits and appropriate emergency signage are in place at Shirehill, and First Aid kits at the Museum and Schoolroom/Lab have been enhanced. The out-dated Schoolroom/Lab kit has been replaced.

Fire drill practice was provided at the Museum for casual contract Museum Assistants on 3 September.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

A major upgrade of the fire alarm system at the Museum was undertaken by Sunfish 8 – 11 September. A new fire panel was fitted, improvements made to the smoke detector circuits and in particular the roof-space areas over the Great Hall had their detection systems enhanced and reconnected. This work entailed some movement of exhibits and stored collections, chiefly on the first floor landing, which allowed a thorough clean of the woven rush matting and floor under and around the furniture display.

The Museum's new faster Broadband connection became operational this quarter. Saffron Security reprogrammed key fobs for the alarm systems in the Museum and Schoolroom buildings. Pests monitoring took place in stores, galleries and work areas.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Pests monitoring took place in the Organics store, and the gas boiler was serviced.

2.3 Newport Store

The intruder alarm was serviced. The Curator has written to Essex Police confirming that the Museum would be evacuating the store and the required alarm upgrade to comply with automatic Police attendance would therefore not be undertaken.

2.4 Grounds and Castle Site

Contractors EJ Taylor have been appointed to repair the damaged gate pillar, subject of an insurance claim, and work is expected to start in mid-October.

2.5 Shire Hill Store

New dehumidifier system was installed in the Natural Sciences store to maintain relative humidity at appropriate levels for the biology and geology collections that will be housed there. The store was given a deep clean over two days by Council cleaners.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

12 acquisitions entered in the register this quarter, including:

- Gold Viking-period ring from Thaxted, purchased by the Museum Society with grant-aid from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Headley Trust under the Treasure Act (1996). The ring was released by the British Museum in late September and is currently awaiting collection.

- Archaeological evaluations from Felsted, High Easter, Great Chesterford, Lindsell Church, Myddylton Place in Saffron Walden, Takeley and Great Dunmow (finds and records to be deposited by archaeological contractors at a later date)
- A collection of agricultural hand tools, used by Thomas Riviere Bland, a gardener and woodworker from Debden Manor.
- A set of canvassing leaflets from the 2015 national, district council and town council elections.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

No special projects this quarter, beyond checking and packing collections for removal to Shirehill.

3.3 Documentation

41 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	41	324	2193
Natural history colln.s	0	3	513
Total	41	327	2706

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

Discussions have taken place with the Museum Support Committee and Tony Morton to see how a standalone website for this project could be designed and managed in tandem with the Museum and Museum Society websites. Progress will remain slow until the Curator is able to devote more time to this project.

3.4 Loans In

The *Visions of the World* exhibition, loaned to the Museum for 6 months for a temporary exhibition, was returned to the Royal Geographical Society in August.

6 collections from local residents - Silver Jubilee tankards, animal skulls, army badges, Poor Man's Checks, model aeroplanes and cat ornaments - were loaned to the Museum for the *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* exhibition. These loans will run from August until November 2015.

1 Cast of a dinosaur footprint was loaned from a private collection for the activity day 'Make Your Own Dinosaur Feet' on 19 August.

3.5 Loans Out

One request this quarter, previously circulated to the Museum Society Board by email, which the Board is now asked to formally confirm:

Loan to Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology for their special exhibition *The Archaeology of Childhood*, January 2016 – January 2017 of

1. **Bronze Age burial urn with grave goods** (blue faience quoit bead, bone bead, and bone fragments) from Little Chesterford. (1982.2).
2. **Pair of infant's mittens** made from Flemish bobbin lace, with open finger-tips and flounced wrist cuffs. (1839.354.3.1+2 and 1839.354.6.1).
(Our Loan Out number 802)

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: **0 (service suspended)**

Collection Enquiries this quarter: **25** (visitors' 'on-the-spot' and urgent / essential enquiries only)

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

3.7 Research

4 researchers (human and natural history), as follows:

- Mike Fairchild viewed the collection of RAF Debden material currently on loan to the Museum from Ruth Braybrooke (which is being considered for acquisition to the collection)
- Deidre Brown, Professor at the University of Auckland, viewed the "patu onewa", or Maori stone clubs, in the world cultures collection for her academic research.
- 2 secondary school students drew shells and corals for their individual A level art projects.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Object of the Month continued with a reconstructed Iron Age pot in July; a swallow's nest in August; and the plaster bust of Dr George Eachus of Saffron Walden, from the 'phrenology collection', in September. The Treasure Case in the archaeology gallery was partially redisplayed in August to include recent acquisitions such as the hoard of four Iron Age staters (gold coins).

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors, opened with a well-attended private view on 28 August. Good coverage in the local newspapers has helped to bring many new visitors into the Museum, along with repeat visits from regular visitors. The exhibition has been well-received and we have had excellent verbal feedback from the participants about their involvement in the project.

The Collections Officer (Human History) has begun work on the second round of the exhibition, running a workshop with the participants, helping them to write and edit their text, and assisting with filming for a short documentary film that is being created for the exhibition (and for the Museum's archives) by Ollie Sandles.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014
July	1224	983	148	206	1372	1189
August	1924	2014	0	8	1924	2022
September	978	742	183	252	1161	994
Total	4126	3739	331	466	4457	4205

Tickets

	2015	2014
July	£ 814.75	£ 610.25
August	£ 1214.75	£ 1,210.00
September	£ 566.60	£ 402.75
Total £	£ 596.10	£ 223.00

Donations

	2015	2014
July	60.09	£ 94.50
August	209.80	£ 90.07
September	100.28	£ 85.67
Total £	370.17	£ 270.24

Shop

	2015	2014
July	£ 913.68	£ 551.70
August	£ 715.49	£ 678.04
September	£ 256.55	£ 339.92
Total £	£ 1885.72	£ 1569.66

Comments

Ticket sales are up from last year due to a busy summer of events and the opening of the Community exhibition. September ticket sales are slightly lower than actual visitor numbers because of the annual free-entry Heritage Open Weekend (12-13 September), when over 100 people enjoyed free entry to the Museum. Donations and shop sales have also benefitted from generally higher visitor figures.

Museum Shop

September sales were slightly down on last year due to a smaller number of school visits (most school bookings are for October, this half-term). New stock such as 'Nature Buddies' continue to sell well and having a few more expensive items in stock, such as the lions and woolly mammoths help to increase revenue and make other items appear very reasonable.

Publicity, Marketing, Social Media and New Website

The Museum currently has **587 'Likers'** on **Facebook** and **1301 Followers** on **Twitter**.

	New Website		
	Pages	Visits	Unique Visitors
July	6,410	1,588	1,019
August	8,178	2,023	1,394
September	6,395	1,625	1,013
TOTAL for Q2	20,983	5,236	3,426

Pages: the number of "pages" viewed by visitors.

Visits: the number of visits made by all visitors. (This could be described as the number of "sessions", implying the possibility of multiple pages per visit and multiple visits per unique visitor).

Unique Visitor: the number of persons or computers (hosts) that have made at least 1 hit on 1 page of the website during the current period. If a user makes several visits during this period, it is counted only once. Visitors are tracked by IP address, so if multiple users are accessing the website from the same IP (such as a home or office network), they will be counted as a single unique visitor.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

5.1 Education

In July, **2 Egyptian sessions** were held with two schools. Since September, **5 sessions** with **3 different schools** were taken by the Learning Officer reflecting the pattern of schools preferring to come in large groups when possible to save money. Subjects covered included: Local History, Ancient Greek and Egyptians.

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer in Museum *	213
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	78
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	440
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	731

* These figures plus 40 teachers/adults accompanying paying school and independent groups provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

Loan and reminiscence boxes:

6 loan boxes have gone out this quarter, of which four were from the archaeology/history side of the education loans: Local History, Prehistory, Anglo Saxons and Victorians. The Local History box is to be used across Year 7 at Saffron Walden High (approx. 150), the Anglo-Saxons box is being used for 1 KS2 Class at Clements Primary (approx. 30 children) the Prehistory box is being used with a KS2 at Great Chesterford Primary (approx. 30), and the Victorians with the whole of St Thomas More Primary as part of their Victorians week (approx. 200 children). The other two boxes were: 1 Fossils loan box (to Castle Camps Primary for KS2 Early Civilisation topic, 30 children) and 1 ‘Going Out’ reminiscence box loaned to Elsenham Dementia Group for a reminiscence session in September.

5.2 Events on-site (in Museum and grounds)

Date	Event	No. Attending
5 August	Summer activities – Clay figurines GT	216
12 August	Summer activities – Hoop gliders GT	197
19 August	Summer activities – Dinosaur feet GT/SK	255
28 August	Community Exhibition Private view CW/LM	84
11 Sept	Kid’s Party – GT	23
12 Sept	Heritage Open Weekend – Sat GC/SK/AT	70
13 Sept	Heritage Open Weekend – Sun LB/GC	42
25 Sept	Museum Society AGM – CW/GT/LM	37
	Total	924

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

Date	Event	No. Attending
17 September	GT Talk on the archaeology of Sudan at Great Chesterford History Society	27
	Total	27

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

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

- Essex Field Club - 1 meeting, treasurer work, investment (Natural Sciences Officer).
- Special Roadside Verges project – 2 surveys, Oct cut, comments on 2 planning applications, annual reports (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford – verge survey training for coordinator, report for meeting (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Searchers Metal-Detecting Club - 2 meetings (Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery - 1 committee meeting (Curator)

- Hadstock Millennium Committee (Battle of Assandun event 2016) – 1 site visit, 2 committee meetings and 1 meeting with ECC officers about forthcoming grant application (Curator)
- Thaxted Parish Council and Guildhall – advice (telephone) on offer of large collection and follow-up visit and advice planned for early 2016 (Curator)

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

- Museums Essex: 1 Management Committee meeting and AGM (Curator, who is a trustee)

Schoolroom Hire

1 x schoolroom hire for a kids party 3.5 hours (£45) on 11 Sept

Grants and Support

The Museum has re-applied to the Essex Heritage Trust for a grant to cover the costs of analysis of geophysical survey of Museum and Castle site, having been unsuccessful in the summer round. The result is expected in November.

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter Actual Q1	This Quarter target Q1	Cumulative 2015-16	Annual Target 2015-16
Visitors PI 22 SI 12c	4,457	4,000	9,382	14,000
Users PC 01 CI 39	10,189	5,700	18,284	21,000

Notes on Performance Indicators

Visitors are all those visiting the Museum in person, including activities and events in the grounds.

Users are all those engaging with the Museum Service in person or through other media, and include:

- those visiting the site (visitors, as above)
- those attending off-site events (e.g. talk or other off-site activity by Museum staff)
- those using the Museum ‘remotely’ (enquiries, research and services by phone, email, fax and letter and website visits which were 2,957 on the new website this quarter)

Comments on this quarter’s figures

Good attendance at August’s holiday activities, the opening of the *Community of Collectors* exhibition and Heritage Open Weekend have all helped to draw visitors in and exceed the target by 11.5%. The pattern of visits to the new website in August around the activity programme and exhibition suggests that the Museum’s new web profile is helping to encourage visits in person.

The user figures have overshoot the original target by 79% due to the strong performance of the new website. This is the first full quarter for statistics from the new website and it is very encouraging to see how it is raising the Museum’s profile on the internet.

Future Programme, October-December 2015

Main activities and items to note for the next quarter:

1 Museum Management and Staff

Increased use of Casual Assistant staff will be required to provide staff cover at the Museum whilst curatorial staff are out managing the move of collections to new Shire Hill store with store volunteers. The departure of the Visitor & Learning Services Officer at the end of October will create extra pressures on the service and temporary solutions are urgently being sought so that basic operations and opening hours can be maintained as far as possible.

2 Buildings and Site

Week of 12 October: the damaged gate pier at the Museum driveway entrance will be repaired.

3 Collections and Research

Enquiry services remain suspended.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

The second round of *Uttlesford a Community of Collectors* will open on 28th November, with a private view for Museum Society members and guests on Friday 27th November to which all MMWG members and Uttlesford councillors will be invited.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

9 Oct Edible Masterpiece competition in the Museum to raise money for the Art Fund.

29 Oct Performances of *The Canterville Ghost* and Museum by Torchlight for Halloween.

5 Dec Decorate the Museum Christmas tree.