

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT October – December 2015

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Forward Plan 2013-2018 and Shire Hill Store

The nine-week programme of moving collections from Newport to Shire Hill was completed on schedule on 18 December by curatorial staff and store volunteers, assisted by the 'van driving team' (Richard Auty, Daniel Barden, Paul Morrison and Bruce Tice) with a hired van. Large and heavy objects and furniture remain for professional removers in the New Year, and also the Bridge End Garden summerhouse paintings, to be removed by arrangement with the Town Council and Friends of Bridge End Gardens. It has also been possible to remove some other collections for the Museum: some natural history from the roofspace store (amphibians, reptiles, birds' nests and fish) and from the Social History collections, the map collection (formerly housed in the Workroom) and prints, watercolours, documents, photographs and books ('2D' collection). Remaining collections to be moved from the Museum in 2016 are: some natural history from the roofspace store (birds' eggs, invertebrates, molluscs, osteology, plant herbarium); Social History from the Schoolroom (domestic, furniture, paintings, musical instruments, wood carvings etc.) and some from the Inorganics store in the museum (mostly domestic and scientific collections); and archaeological metalwork.

The store now vacated by the 2D collection was intended for interim storage of the ceramics and glass exhibits in early 2016, allowing for redecoration of the Ceramics Gallery and removal of the Cipriani friezes to Audley End House (loan already agreed in principal). However, the need to evacuate the Schoolroom building by end of May 2016, so that it can be leased out from autumn of 2016, has placed the Ceramics Gallery work on hold, as the Museum has neither the space nor sufficient curatorial staff to accommodate both these projects simultaneously within the timetable. Negotiations are in progress with Audley End (English Heritage) and their fine art removal contractors, to see if the Cipriani friezes can be safely removed without taking out all the displays in the Ceramics Gallery.

Looking to the Forward Plan Stage II, the data from the geophysical survey of the Castle site conducted by Dr Tim Dennis and Ralph Potter in 2013 can now go forward for professional analysis thanks to a grant from the Essex Heritage Trust, awarded in November. This will provide the necessary report and mitigation strategy required by Historic England and the Heritage Lottery Fund for planning the Museum's intended extension and associated groundworks.

1.2 Staff

Gemma Tully, Visitor & Learning Services Officer, left the Museum at the end of October to take up a research post with the University of Durham, and will be much missed by colleagues, volunteers, schools and visitors. In the interim, arrangements have had to be made to cover Gemma's essential administrative and supervisory duties, and the Museum Service is grateful to Hayley Wilson, whose Casual Admin Officer contract has been revised to a one-year appointment as Administrative Officer, and to Leah Mellors, Collections Officer (Human History) for taking on extra duties in challenging circumstances. Hayley is now responsible for the desk volunteers, shop and financial administration, and Leah is managing the team of casual contract Museum Assistants, along with the exhibitions programmes, the museum's website and social media presence. Responsibility for holiday and half-

term activities is being shared out among staff with support from the casual team and volunteers.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

After a demanding year for everybody, the Museum is holding a New Year social event on 18 January as a ‘thank you’ to all our volunteers – those who have taken part in the Store Move project, or assisted with collection and activities at the Museum, and the Desk Volunteers who have helped us keep the Museum open while there have been fewer staff on the premises.

Human History collections volunteers have continued their hard work in documenting the 2D collection, volunteering approximately 146 hours of their time in this period.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

15 Oct	SHARE Natural Sciences Curators Network meeting, Sedgwick Geology Conservation Unit, Cambridge (Natural Sciences Officer)
21 Oct	SHARE Fund-Raising Cohort, Southend (Curator and Richard Priestley, Museum Society)
27 Oct	Dementia Friends training at UDC (Natural Sciences Officer)
2 Nov	Stress Awareness by David Cottrell, UDC (Curator, Human History Collections Officer, Natural Sciences Officer)
10 Nov	Integrated Pest Management (Level 1) (Collections Officer, Human History)
2 Dec	Shire Hill store training (All staff)
2 Dec	SHARE Fund-Raising Cohort, Braintree (Richard Priestley for Museum Society & Museum)

1.5 Health & Safety

Store Volunteers received basic training at the new Shire Hill store in October before commencing the move, this covered familiarisation with the store layout; location of phone and first aid points; use of lift, fire drill and safety in the Depot yard outside the store. In-house training has been given to Museum staff on basic operation of intruder and fire alarms, security and H&S essentials, use of equipment and fire drills. Fire evacuation drills took place at the Schoolroom on 16 December and at the Museum on 18 December.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

The roof, gutters and draining hoppers were inspected on 3 December by Contract Services and ROALCO contractors. They undertook some immediate clearance of leaves from gutters and hoppers, and will return in the New Year to replace broken slates and further works to minimize risk of leaks.

A new digital telephone system was installed throughout the Council in early December. Complication with remote sites, especially the Museum, led to the Museum phone and computer systems being down on a number of occasions, but the telephones are now working satisfactorily.

Lift and stair lifts were serviced. Saffron Security serviced alarms. Sunfish inspected fire equipment.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

Following a breakdown of the central heating system, Oakray Heating repaired the boiler in December. Saffron Security serviced the alarm.

2.3 Newport Store

Contract Services have been given access to the upper rear storage area (vacated by the Museum) to store documents, enabling them to clear a container in the Depot Yard.

2.4 Grounds and Castle Site

Planning department contractors have continued conservation work on the castle and site wall. The brick gate pillar at the Museum Street entrance was rebuilt (subject of an insurance claim).

2.5 Shire Hill Store

The Museum's insurers for collections required the alarm system to be upgraded to Dualcom standard required for Police response, with signals monitored by a monitoring station. The Fire Alarm system (Sunfish) was upgraded in December and arrangements are in place for the intruder alarm (Activ Security) to be upgraded shortly *en suite*.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

7 Acquisitions this quarter:

- An arctic fox fur stole, dating from around the 1930s
- A gold Viking finger ring, found in Thaxted, purchased under the Treasure Act (1996) by the Museum Society with grants from the ACE /V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Headley Trust.
- 5 archaeological archives from Saffron Walden, Berden, Felsted, Newport and Little Dunmow

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

All remaining objects and specimens, which had been taken to Lincoln University's Department of Conservation as potential student projects, were collected on Saffron Walden Museum's behalf in October by the Cater Museum, Billericay. The Curator and Collections Officer (Human History) collected them from Billericay on 7 October.

Janet Bullen carried out remedial conservation work on a Greek pot, which had been broken during a schools session, and a number of Iron Age pots that will be used for handling and education.

A number of agricultural tools were treated for woodworm before being taken to the Shire Hill store.

3.3 Documentation

6 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	6	171	397
Natural history colln.s	0	1	1051
Total	6	172	1448

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

Tony Morton and the Curator are now working on this project to create a new small website for promoting world cultures collections at Saffron Walden and three other small museums in the region,

for general public interest and as an educational and research resource.

3.4 Loans In

The items loaned to the museum for the first round of *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* were returned to their owners in November 2015. Items for the second round of the exhibition were loaned in November 2015 and will be returned to their owners in February 2016.

3.5 Loans Out

The loan out previously agreed to the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology (MAA), Cambridge, was regrettably cancelled by MAA in December as the intended loan objects (Bronze Age urn with grave goods and a pair of 17th century mittens) could not be accommodated in the display cases.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: **5**. While access to collections has remained on hold during the store move, staff have identified a few objects brought in by visitors when possible.

Collection Enquiries this quarter: **16**.

3.7 Research

2 researchers this quarter

- Chair of Special Roadside Verges committee consulted special verge records and photographs to determine verge widths which will help Essex Highways to calculate mowing costs.
- Wendens Ambo Society representative investigated use of Shire Hill store as a venue for an archaeology workshop.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

The *Object of the Month* scheme continues, displaying an object rarely seen by visitors each month and sharing it on our website and social media pages. October's *Object of the Month* was a Victorian boy's flat cap; November's *Object of the Month* was an early World War I gas mask; and December's *Object of the Month* was two Chinese lotus shoes, worn by women who had their feet bound.

The Anglo-Saxon weaving women were removed from the archaeology gallery to make space initially for the display of the Stansted Heritage Embroidery, commemorating Stansted's history and links with the Magna Carta barons. The space will be used later for a permanent community case, which will be purchased in 2016 and be a dedicated space for community groups or individuals to share their stories.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The first round of our current exhibition *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* ran from the end of August until the middle of November. Collections in this round included animal skulls, army badges and model aeroplanes. In their evaluations of the project, the participants in the first round were positive about their experiences, stating that it was "a unique and enjoyable experience", "a great learning experience" and that it gave them "more confidence".

The second round of the exhibition was installed at the end of November and will run until February 2016. Collections in this round include pestles and mortars, pomanders and walking sticks. The participants were filmed for a documentary film by Ollie Sandles and this film is showing in the exhibition.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014
October	1064	1159	407	286	1471	1445
November	601	677	11	299	612	976
December	660	551	208	123	808	674
Total	2325	2387	626	708	2951	3095

Shop

	2015	2014
October	833.38	716.08
November	348.54	491.91
December	355.03	488.04
Total £	1536.95	1696.03

Tickets

	2015	2014
October	650.50	701.25
November	430.50	379.25
December	408.00	342.00
Total £	1489.00	1422.25

Donations

	2015	2014
October	£ 0	106.46
November	£ 69.06	64.35
December	£ 112.08	23.97
Total £	£ 181.14	194.78

Comments

The inevitable decrease in School visits for taught sessions, following Gemma Tully's departure at the end of October, was partly compensated for by independent (self-guided) school visits in December.

Museum Shop

Hayley Wilson has taken over responsibility for the shop and has recently attended the SHARE Retail Forum Steering Group which acts as a central hub for those responsible for museum shops and other commercial activity and will champion development of effective retail and commercial practice by museums in the East. We are currently investigating stocking 'semi-bespoke' heritage tea in conjunction with other museums in East Anglia.

Publicity, Marketing, Social Media and New Website

The Museum currently has 611 'Likers' on Facebook and 616 Followers on Twitter.

	New Website		
	Pages	Visits	Unique Visitors
October	8,060	1,569	1,100
November	4,983	1,091	764
December	6,629	1,313	760
TOTAL for Q3	19,672	3,973	2,624

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

Analysis of School Visits and Pupil Numbers

No. of pupils in sessions taught by Learning Officer in Museum *	351
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	183
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	219
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	753

* These figures plus 92 teachers/adults accompanying paying school and independent groups provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

Loan and reminiscence boxes: 7 loan boxes have gone out this quarter.

- Rock box to Rickling and Farnham Schools
- Local History box to Rickling and Farnham Schools
- Egyptian box to Radwinter School
- Toys box to R A Butler School, Saffron Walden
- Victorian box to St Thomas Moore School, Saffron Walden
- Victorian and Prehistory boxes to Clements School, Haverhill

5.2 Events on-site (in Museum and grounds)

Date	Event	No. Attending
9 Oct	'Edible Masterpieces' Coffee Morning	5
9 Oct	Joint meeting for regional AMA students and members of the South East Museums Federation, organised by the Collections Officer (Human History)	19
24 Oct	Birthday Parties, Schoolroom (Visitor & Learning Services officer)	16
27 Oct		20
29 Oct	Two performances of <i>The Canterville Ghost</i> by Don't Go Down to the Cellar and Museum By Torchlight	84
29 Oct	Leaving event for Gemma Tully	35
27 Nov	Private view for second phase of <i>Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors</i> exhibition	50
5 Dec	Decorating the Christmas Tree family activity	46
8 Dec	Ceramics lecture by Hugh Belsey in schoolroom	18
14 Dec	Museum Society Christmas social	60
18 Dec	Museum staff Christmas party	18
22 Dec	<i>Art in the Museum</i> session led by Urszula Craig for group of children	13
	Total	384

The ‘Edible Masterpieces’ were inspired by an Art Fund promotion for museums and galleries, timed to coincide with the popular BBC TV *Bake Off* series. Three visitors submitted cakes inspired by Museum exhibits, two of them based on the archaeological sandpit! The Visitor & Learning Services Officer had the hard task of judging the best cake.

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

None this quarter

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

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

Please edit list from last quarter:

- Essex Field Club - 1 meeting, treasurer work, 2015 accounts (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Uttlesford) - 1 meeting (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project – 1 meeting, Oct + Nov cuts, comments on 2 planning applications (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford – report for a meeting I could not attend (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Searchers Metal-Detecting Club - 2 meetings (Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery - 1 committee meeting (Curator)
- Dunmow Museum – 1 committee meeting (Curator)
- Hadstock & Ashdon Millennium Committee (Battle of Assandun event 2016) – 1 committee meeting, preparation and submission of grant application to ECC (Curator) also attendance of study day at Sutton Hoo on the battle of Assandun and Sunday meeting at Hadstock Church with historian Prof. Keynes (both in own time)

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

- Insch Museum – contacts for public liability insurance provision (Natural Sciences Officer).
- The Director of the Norris Museum in St Ives, Cambridgeshire, shadowed the Collections Officer (Human History) for a day during the store move, to gain some insight into the processes and challenges involved.

Schoolroom Hire

2 birthday parties, as reported in 5.2 above

Grants and Support

Essex Heritage Trust Grant for Geophysics Analysis, Castle bailey area £5,000

Essex County Council Arts Development, for ‘Assandun’ Millennium £2,000
to commemorate the nationally-important battle fought in 1016

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter Actual Q3	This Quarter target Q3	Cumulative 2015-16	Annual Target 2015-16
Visitors PI 22 SI 12c	2,951	3,100	12,378	14,000
Users PC 01 CI 39	7,161	4,900	25,490	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

Visitors about 5% below target, school visits being affected by departure of Learning Officer at end of October.

Users continue to perform well above target (46% above) due mainly to the strong performance of the new website, and social media, in allowing people to engage with the museum remotely.

There has been direct evidence from visitors' comments that at least a few have visited the Museum as a result of visiting the website.

Future Programme, January -March 2016

Main activities and items to note for the next quarter:

1 Museum Management and Staff

Staff are under a great deal of pressure due to low staffing levels, the continuing store move project, clearance of the schoolroom building, temporary exhibition work and extra duties such as holiday activities and other requests. Services such as collections enquiries, identifications and research access, all suspended during 2015 during the store move project, need to be re-instated gradually.

2 Buildings and Site

Moving collections in to Shire Hill store commences again in January 2016. IT have been asked to complete work on installation of computer network as soon as possible.

Clearance of Schoolroom building: schoolroom, organics store, office, laboratory, packaging store, chemicals store are to be cleared by May 2016.

3 Collections and Research

Documentation of the 2D collection continues with Human History volunteers.

Improvement of the Herbarium Modes records continues with the Natural Sciences Support Worker.

There will be a considerable increase in the archaeological documentation backlog as new site archives are deposited.

There is also the collections insurance valuation project to run with Art & Antiques Appraisals, as planned with a grant from the Museum Collections Valuations Trust

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Utlesford: A Community of Collectors exhibition continues until 7 February 2016.

Ocean World exhibition 20 February to 3 July 2016, a marine exhibition created with the Travelling Natural History Museum.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

In the absence of a dedicated Learning Officer, and without the Schoolroom beyond May, school visits and hence income (fees, shop) will inevitably suffer in the short-term while we investigate options for delivering a service to schools in alternative ways.

Ancient World Activities (half-term). Be inspired by the Egyptians, Romans and Greeks in February 2016.

16 Feb – Egyptian cartouche door-hangers

17 Feb – Roman cone people

18 Feb – Greek Olympic medals

Underwater Crafts (Easter holidays). Get crafty with underwater craft activities.

30 March – Fishy fridge magnets

6 April – Marine masks

Drop in sessions, 11am – 1pm & 2pm – 4pm.

Children MUST bring an adult. Usual entry fees apply.

Plus 25 March to 10 April 2016 take part in our Easter treasure hunt around the Museum.