

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT January – March 2016

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Forward Plan 2013-2018 and Shire Hill Store

Staff and store volunteers have continued to move collections to Shire Hill store from Newport store and Museum stores in January 2016. This amounts to some 3,500 boxes and containers of objects and specimens packed, listed and moved to date. Remaining items at Newport will be moved on 13 and 15 April; archaeological metal finds will be moved by Museum staff at a later date and deposition of archaeological finds and records from recent excavations will commence later in the summer.

In these circumstances, work on the development of the Museum has been on hold although the Curator has taken up the opportunity (through the Museum Society Development Committee) of discussions with a senior museum consultant.

Evacuation of Schoolroom

Most of the 3,500 Social History objects which have been stored in the Organics store in this building, have been moved to Shirehill. Plans are in hand to complete the evacuation of collections with professional removers) by the end of April and complete the removal of educational handling collections and equipment by the end of May.

1.2 Staff

The magnitude of the store project, the additional work of clearing the Schoolroom, plus maintaining holiday activities and ‘normal’ services as far as possible without a Learning Officer in post, has placed a great pressure on remaining staff and resources. Staff will need time to catch up on other routine and essential work once the store and Schoolroom moves are completed.

1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience

This quarter, the store team volunteers contributed 65 hours of time moving collections with the Natural Sciences Officer and 44 hours of time packing and moving collections with the Collections Officer (Human History). The Store Volunteer team has been nominated for the annual SHARE Museum Volunteer Awards (for museums and galleries in the East of England). Volunteers also contributed approximately 15 hours of time packing and moving objects from the Ceramics gallery with the Collections Officer (Human History) to allow for the Cipriani paintings to be removed by English Heritage to Audley End.

The team of Human History collections volunteers contributed 116 hours of their time, assisting the Collections Officer (Human History) to improve the documentation of collections. This is considerably less than previous quarters, as volunteers are unable to work on collections at the Shirehill store until work to connect the store to the IT network is completed. Two people have applied to join the museum as collections volunteers and they will start volunteering with the Collections Officer (Human History) as soon as access to the network is provided.

1.4 Training and Seminars Attended

20 Jan	SHARE Collections Care Conference (Collections Officer Human History)
27 Jan	SHARE meeting of eastern region natural sciences curators at Saffron Walden Museum (Natural Sciences Officer)
29-30 Jan	<i>Changemakers</i> leadership development programme residential (Collections Officer Human History)
25 Feb	Mental Health Awareness training, Council offices (Curator)
7 Mar	Training for casual Museum Assistants (Collections Officer Human History, Curator, Natural Sciences Officer)
11 Mar	<i>Changemakers</i> leadership development programme (Collections Officer Human History)
14 Mar	Training for casual Museum Assistants (Collections Officer Human History, Curator)
17 Mar	Documentation Backlogs course (Collections Officer Human History)

1.5 Health & Safety

No specific items to report this quarter, but see 2.1 below.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

Works undertaken this quarter: PAT testing; lift serviced; fire service by Sunfish, and Roalco completed work in the roof. However we are still waiting for Sunfish to fix the faulty light in the fire exit vestibule off the Natural History Discovery Centre, and this affects access to the Natural History store. There have been problems with the Museum heating system over the Easter weekend (and more recently); these have now been attended to by heating engineers.

2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom

PAT testing, fire service by Sunfish.

2.3 Newport Store

Fire service by Sunfish. Contract services are arranging for contractors to release the folding doors (which have seized due to years of flooding) for easier removal of large items.

2.4 Grounds and Castle Site

Contractors Bakers of Danbury will be working on the castle for the next six months, with access to water and electricity from the Museum. The new Museum & Castle sign on the site wall by the Church Street roundabout will be replaced by one of more appropriate and clearer design.

2.5 Shire Hill Store

The alarm system has been upgraded to Dualcom standard as required by our collections insurers. PAT testing has been carried out. Broadband engineers and IT staff have made numerous visits to work on network access for computers (final stages still to be resolved). The store has been too cool in colder parts of winter, causing uncomfortable working conditions for staff and volunteers in storage areas and temperature and humidity levels outside the acceptable parameters for collections at times. Cocksedge have monitored electricity use and are looking at ways of boosting the output from the storage heaters.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

11 acquisitions have been recorded in the accessions register. These include:

- Archaeological archives from Little Canfield, Saffron Walden and Thaxted (to be deposited)
- A horse-brass found on Shortgrove Estate, Newport
- Knitting patterns dating from World War I and World War II

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Two Ceramics objects were broken during the decant of collections from the Ceramics gallery in March (partly old repairs becoming unstuck). These are currently being conserved by Janet Bullen.

3.3 Documentation

Saffron Walden Museum now has a licence from Natural England to possess and transport dead specimens of wild plant and animal species listed on Annex IV and II (b) of the Habitats Directive for scientific and education purposes. This means it is legal for the museum to store and move specimens of species that are protected by wildlife legislation when preserving collections for future generations and making objects available for research and education. It involved making sure that all museum specimens of protected animals and plants were catalogued on the Modes computer database and that an electronic register is kept and updated on an annual basis to show that new specimens have been collected without breaking any wildlife laws (Natural Sciences Officer).

Backlog / updates are as follows:

	New Acquisitions	Backlog (existing collections not previously catalogued on Modes)	Edits and Updates to existing records
Human history collections	7	126	779
Natural history collections	0	3	536
Total	7	129	1,315

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

Tony Morton has set up an initial design for the website, now waiting for the Curator to have time to dedicate to moving this project on.

3.4 Loans In

The Travelling Natural History Museum loaned giant marine models, fossils, casts and pictures for the *Ocean World* temporary exhibition. Installation started on Monday 15 February and the exhibition is due to close on Sunday 3 July 2016.

Objects loaned to the museum for the *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* exhibition were returned to the lenders in February.

3.5 Loans Out

The four remaining Cipriani paintings, which were previously displayed in the Ceramics gallery, were loaned to English Heritage for display at Audley End House. The other two paintings (making up a six-part frieze) have been on loan to English Heritage since 1997. The frieze was commissioned for Audley End House and it will be displayed in the room for which it was originally intended. The paintings will be loaned to English Heritage on a five-year renewable basis.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 5

Collection Enquiries this quarter: 34

3.7 Research

1 researcher this quarter

- A Brown and Mawe mineral tablet and historical file, and historical files relating to the collections of Sir John St Aubyn were viewed by a postdoctoral fellow from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art in Cambridge to research for a book/manuscript.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Object of the Month continues. January's *Object of the Month* was a Viking gold ring, found by a metal detectorist in Thaxted. This was a new acquisition for the Museum, purchased by the Museum Society with grant-aid from the ACE / V&A Purchase grant Fund and the Headley Trust. It continues to be on display in the Treasure case. February's *Object of the Month* was a Magneto-Electric machine used in the nineteenth-century to treat nervous disorders. March's *Object of the Month* was a flask made to commemorate the role of Henry Peter Brougham in passing the 1832 Reform Act. Objects are displayed in the Museum for one month and shared on our website and social media pages.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The second round of *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* ran until 7 February 2016. Collections in the second round included pestles and mortars, pomanders and walking sticks, and the participants were filmed for a documentary film by Ollie Sandles, which was shown in the exhibition. The participants de-installed their own displays in February 2016. Evaluations from the participants were overwhelmingly positive, with participants stating that they gained confidence, new skills and new friends from their involvement in the project.

Ocean World, a marine exhibition created by the Travelling Natural History Museum (TNHM) and Saffron Walden Museum opened with a private view for Museum Society members on 19 February 2016. The displays include giant models of sharks, a Pacific octopus and a seahorse; spectacular fossils of ancient sea creatures and pictures loaned by TNHM. They are supplemented by mollusc shells, marine life, seabirds, other animals, Red Crag fossils and photographs from the collections of Saffron Walden Museum.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015
January	770	624	43	0	813	624
February	1702	1509	83	186	1785	1695
March	1169	641	26	254	1195	895
Total	3641	2774	152	440	3793	3232

Shop

	2016	2015
January	260.74	134.80
February	711.63	777.40
March	531.16	508.53
Total £	1,503.53	1,420.73

Tickets

	2016	2015
January	555.00	419.25
February	1,178.00	941.50
March	973.75	461.25
Total £	2,706.75	1,822.00

Donations

	2016	2015
January	41.92	36.95
February	62.98	63.89
March	253.30	55.82
Total £	358.20	156.66

Comments

Visitor numbers, shop sales, and ticket sales are all significantly up on last year's figures, despite the inevitable drop in school visits in the absence of a Learning Officer. This may be in part due to an increase in activities, new trails, and innovative exhibitions, which have all been well received. Donations are also up on last year, to which a new donations box at family activities has contributed.

Museum Shop

Since taking over buying for the shop Hayley Wilson (Museum Admin Officer) has tried a number of new lines, including linking stock to the current exhibition. Hence the shop has been able to maintain sales so far, despite the drop in school visits (traditionally our main customers).

Publicity, Marketing, Social Media and New Website

The Museum currently has 678 'Likers' on Facebook and 1431 Followers on Twitter.

	New Website		
	Pages	Visits	Unique Visitors
January	9053	2318	1619
February	9321	2066	1279
March	7058	1975	1259
TOTAL for Q4	25,432	6,359	4,157

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 *	0
No. of pupils taught in visits out to schools by Learning Officer	0
No. of pupils in independent visits to Museum *	127
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	255
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	382

* These figures plus 25 teachers/adults accompanying paying school and independent groups provide total school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

Loan and reminiscence boxes: 4 loan boxes have gone out this quarter, used by 255 pupils:

Fossil box to Heathmount School 67 pupils

Egyptian box to Gemma Tully for teaching at school 50 pupils

WW II box to Radwinter 96 pupils

Local History to Rickling 42 pupils

5.2 Events on-site (in Museum and grounds)

Date	Event	No. Attending
18 Jan	Museum volunteers thank you party	29
27 Jan	Eastern region Natural Sciences Curators visit to Shire Hill Store	7
16 March	Holiday activities Egyptian door hangers	estimated 200
17 March	Holiday activities Roman cone people	estimated 200
18 March	Holiday activities Greek Olympic medals	estimated 200
19 Feb	Private view of <i>Ocean World</i> exhibition	40
17 March	Share Documentation course in Schoolroom	12
25 March -10 April	Easter Treasure Hunt trail	(not counted separately)
30 March	Holiday activities Fishy Fridge Magnets	273
	Total	961

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

Date	Event	No. Attending
18 Feb	Talk to Newport Local History Society (Curator)	35
5 March	Morning and afternoon archaeology workshops for Wendens Ambo Society, at Shirehill store	20
	Total	55

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 8 groups, 9 meetings)

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

Please edit list from last quarter:

- Essex Field Club - 2 meetings, treasurer work, 2015 accounts, fraud, insurance, sourcing accountant, AGM (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Uttlesford) - 1 meeting (Natural Sciences Officer)

- Special Roadside Verges project – March cut (Natural Sciences Officer)
- The Hundred Parishes Society – sourcing a geology speaker (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Searchers Metal-Detecting Club - 1 meeting (Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery - 1 committee meeting (Curator)
- Dunmow Museum – 1 committee meeting (Curator)
- Hadstock & Ashdon Millennium Group (Battle of Assandun events 2016) – 3 committee meetings and continuing work on programme with local partner and re-enactors Regia Anglorum
- Wendens Ambo Society – see Workshop at Shirehill store (5.3 Outreach)

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

- Museums in Essex (23 Feb, meeting at Munnings Museum) (Curator)
- Tour of V&A European Galleries with architects ZMMA, and Fry Art Gallery committee (Curator in own time, as museum mentor to Fry Art Gallery)

Schoolroom Hire

With no Learning officer and the loss of the schoolroom, party bookings and other hirings of the Schoolroom now cease until proposed Museum developments provide a new learning and functions room, and learning / outreach officer.

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	This Quarter Actual Q4	This Quarter target Q4	Cumulative 2015-16	Annual Target 2015-16
Visitors PI 22 SI 12c	3,793	3,500	16,171	14,000
Users PC 01 CI 39	10,497	5,300	35,987	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 exceeded targets mainly due to exhibitions and activities programme, also website and social media may be contributing to visits. Easter falling within March will also have helped to boost the quarter's figures.

Users very high number of website visits this quarter, probably helped by social media.

Main activities and items to note for the next quarter:

1 Museum Management and Staff

Museum entrance fees increase on 1 April 2016.

2 Buildings and Site

A professional removal company and museum staff will move the remaining collections to Shire Hill store from Newport store and the Organics store in the schoolroom building in April

The whole Schoolroom building (lab, store, schoolroom, packaging store, darkroom, office) has to be cleared by 31 May 2016.

3 Collections and Research

Natural Sciences Officer has 6 specimens to conserve in the lab before 31/5 when there is no further access to a laboratory or fume cupboard.

Contents of three large wooden cabinets containing mollusc shells and birds' eggs need to be packed before a professional removal company can move them from the natural history store at the museum to Shire Hill store.

Improvement of the Herbarium Modes records continues with the Natural Sciences Support Worker. The educational and handling collections have to be re-housed in the Museum and need a thorough sort, to be undertaken by staff and volunteers.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

The Ocean World exhibition continues until Sunday 3 July 2016.

Magna Carta exhibition opens on 16 July 2016.

5 Education, Events and Outreach

25 March to 10 April Easter treasure hunt trail around the museum.

6 April Easter holiday activity Marine Masks. 11am-1pm and 2pm-4pm. Children must bring an adult.

13 May Museums at Night 6pm-8pm.

1 and 2 June Half-term holiday activity Seals and Seals. 11am-1pm and 2pm-4pm. Children must bring an adult.