

# SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

## CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT

April – June 2016

### **1 Museum Management and Staff**

#### **1.1 Management**

##### **Forward Plan 2013-2018 and Shire Hill Store**

The Shire Hill store was formally launched on Monday 11 April with a reception for invited guests, including members and senior officers of the Council; the Mayors of Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, and directors of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd. Further store tours and tea were provided on Monday 18 April for Museum Society members and store volunteers. Removal of remaining collections and equipment from Newport was completed on 15 April with Schofield Removals, who also moved large and heavy items from the Schoolroom to Shire Hill on 19-20 April.

It has been a relief to complete this exercise, without damage to or loss of any objects or specimens, and to be able to show this excellent new facility and the extent of the collections which can now be better curated at Shire Hill. There is still a great deal of work to do sorting collections and creating space for the deposition of new archaeological finds and records. The wireless broadband is now operational and Museum staff are working with IT on supply of more computers for staff and volunteers to use at the store. Thanks should be recorded to our store volunteers and to colleagues from Corporate Services who assisted with moving some objects and equipment.

The new Chief Executive of Uttlesford District Council, Dawn French, visited the Museum and met with staff on 29 June. She toured the museum site, galleries and stores and discussed forward plans.

##### **Evacuation of Schoolroom**

The Schoolroom was evacuated at the end of June to allow refurbishment before it is commercially leased to generate income. Social History collections stored in the building were packed and removed under the supervision of the Collections Officer (Human History), with the assistance of store volunteers and Schofields Removals. Handling and educational collections from the Schoolroom were sorted and boxed, and removed to a small storeroom in the Museum, with thanks especially to Jane Evans, learning & activities volunteer. Conservation work on specimens preserved in alcohol was completed by the Natural Sciences Officer whilst a Fume Cupboard was still available in the Laboratory. Equipment and materials from the Conservation Lab have been sorted and moved, except for some chemicals which remain on the outside chemical store for disposal by specialist contractors in due course. The Corporate Health & Safety Officer is advising the Curator on how to proceed with this. Some older items of unwanted furniture (property of the Museum Society) have been sold raising a total of £350 for Museum Society funds (2 wooden cabinets and 2 benches).

#### **1.2 Staff**

Hayley Wilson left the post of Museum Admin Officer in mid-May, after keeping day-to-day operations running smoothly through a very demanding time for the service, for which we are all grateful. She remains a member of our pool of casual-contract Museum Assistants. Wendy-Jo Atter has been appointed as the new Admin Officer, which is now a permanent post, and is expected to start in early July. The post of Learning Officer remains vacant at present, until funding can be identified. This means that staffing has been temporarily reduced to 3 full-time curatorial posts and the part-time

Security & Premises Officer, making it necessary to frequently bring casual staff in during the week to keep the Museum open. The staffing situation has put considerable pressure on the workforce and service this quarter and inevitably backlogs have built up in some areas. These will have to be addressed before the service can move forward.

### **1.3 Volunteers and Work Experience**

The store volunteer team was nominated for the ‘Behind-the-Scenes’ category in the SHARE Museums East Volunteers Awards 2016, which covers all museums and galleries in the East of England. Richard Priestley, store volunteer and chairman of the Museum Support Committee, attended the reception at the Fitzwilliam on 9 June with the Curator. This was a hotly-contested category and although our store volunteers team did not win, we should receive a certificate marking their nomination, for display in the Museum.

Two new volunteers have joined the human history collections volunteer team – Emma Bastin and Vicky Geddes. Emma lives in Ashdon and has a keen interest in history and Vicky is a current history student at the University of Lincoln. Both are helping to document the contents of the Inorganics store onto the Modes database. Hamish McIlwrick, Hilary Walker and Judy Brook, who are long-standing volunteers who were forced to take a few months off from volunteering due to lack of IT facilities at the Shire Hill store, met with the Collections Officer (Human History) and have agreed to re-start their volunteering in August. Len Pole, Ian Sharpe and Will Butler continue to volunteer with the Collections Officer (Human History) and are working on various projects to improve documentation. In total, the Human History collections volunteers donated 157 hours of their time over this period.

Volunteer verge surveyors Barry Kaufmann-Wright, Tony Morton, Ken Rivett, Margaret Rufus, Heather and Paul Salvidge have been conducting ecological surveys of Special Roadside Verge sites in Uttlesford district. Each year 22 existing sites and potential new special verges are surveyed by the survey team and the Natural Sciences Officer.

### **1.4 Training and Seminars Attended**

22 April	Collections Valuations seminar at the Natural History Museum, London (Curator)
10 June	Changemakers leadership development course (Collections Officer, Human History)
26 & 27 May	SHARE Bird Feather conservation course, University of Cambridge (Natural Sciences Officer)

### **1.5 Health & Safety**

Fire Risk Assessment conducted.

## **2 Buildings and Site**

### **2.1 Museum Building**

The east fire escape has been assessed in the light of new regulations concerning evacuation of wheelchairs, as existing arrangements do not allow wheelchairs exiting from the rear ground floor fire exit to get round the side of the building to the forecourt. Discussions are taking place with Council officers on possible solutions. A fire alarm service was conducted by Sunfish, the faulty emergency light in the first-floor Discovery Centre fire exit vestibule was replaced, and minor plumbing repairs were carried out in the kitchen and WCs. Oakray engineers continue to work on the gas boiler heating controls. The lift was repaired after it failed to go up to the first floor; a new lift service contract is needed (under negotiation at the Council).

## **2.2 Laboratory/Schoolroom**

Evacuated by staff and volunteers (see above). Immediate consequences are that the Museum has had to turn down a few requests for children's birthday parties and other functions, and the Research Room at Shire Hill is now our only meeting space. This will limit community and income-generating events until we can build a new learning & activity room as part of an extended Museum. Conservation work will also be limited because there are less facilities and equipment available to treat specimens.

## **2.3 Newport Store**

Evacuated (see above) and passed to Contract Services for other Council use.

## **2.4 Grounds and Castle Site**

Contractors (Bakers of Danbury) continue to work on the fabric of the keep. This project is now overseen by Nicola Wittman (Corporate Services). Meanwhile early results from Stratascan's analysis of Tim Dennis' geophysics survey look promising and we await a full report by Maria Medlycott, Essex County Council later in the summer.

A Listening Bench was installed outside the Museum and inaugurated in June (see 5.2 below). This is part of an Essex Record Office project with the Heritage Lottery Fund and makes sound clips from oral history interviews available to a wider audience.

## **2.5 Shire Hill Store**

Museum staff will be working at the store every Monday from 25 July onwards, and the Museum will be closed and unstaffed on Mondays.

# **3 Collections and Research**

## **3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals**

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

- A collection of walking sticks donated in memory of the late Christopher Dyer
- A print of 'Littlebury', a bull named after the parish
- A collection of ephemera relating to Saffron Hall in Saffron Walden

The Board of Trustees agreed to the deaccession of three objects at their Board Meeting on 31 May 2016. These were:

- Four documents relating to land in Devon, which were transferred to the Devon Archives and Local Studies Centre
- One document relating to land in Horsham, which was transferred to the West Sussex Record Office
- One carriage canopy, which was in poor condition (having been stored at the Newport store) and was disposed of.

## **3.2 Collections Care and Conservation**

Two objects that were broken during the emptying of the Ceramics gallery in March were conserved by Janet Bullen – unfortunately, one of these has proven particularly difficult to conserve and remains broken. The Collections Officer (Human History) will identify an alternative conservator once the planned repairs and redecoration of the Ceramics gallery has taken place, in case further objects are broken as part of this process.

Six objects were conserved in the Laboratory by the Natural Sciences Officer:

- A common buzzard in a large glass case.
- Five jars of amphibian and reptile specimens preserved in various concentrations of industrial alcohol and water which required a fume cupboard to remove harmful fumes during the conservation work.

All these objects have been moved to their permanent stores with the help of store move volunteers and museum staff.

The frost cover on the cracked glacial erratic boulder was removed and stored with the help of the contractors working on the castle.

### **3.3 Documentation**

Backlog / updates are as follows:

	<b>New Acquisitions</b>	<b>Backlog (existing collections not previously catalogued on Modes)</b>	<b>Edits and Updates to existing records</b>
Human history collections	18	226	1733
Natural history collections	0	0	878
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>2611</b>

### **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**

There have been no new loans in during this period.

### **3.5 Loans Out**

A relief carving in stone of a Roman gladiator was loaned to the Grosvenor Museum in Chester, for display in their exhibition 'In Good Humour: Disease, Doctors and Dying in the Roman World'. It will be returned in November 2016.

### **3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries**

Object identifications this quarter: 7

Collections Enquiries this quarter: 27 These include objects 'seen on the spot' without an enquiry form being necessary plus enquiries dealt with by phone, email and letter or in person about the collections.

### **3.7 Research**

7 researchers this quarter

- Paul Drury and David Sherlock researching medieval floor tiles from excavations in Uttlesford as part of a regional / national survey (Shirehill store, 13 June)
- Sara Impey to see examples of Coggeshall lace (Museum, 12 May)
- Robert Pilcher to view Napoleonic prisoner of war straw-work items (Shirehill, 23 May)
- Arlie and Gavan McCarthy to view the early accession registers in relation to the John Helder Wedge collection (Museum, 3 June)
- Eugenia Fiocco, who was visiting from Italy, to see examples of pargetting and pargetting tools (Shirehill, 17 June)

## 4 Displays and Visitor Services

### 4.1 Permanent Galleries

*Object of the Month*, a project designed to display objects from the stored collections that are rarely seen by visitors, continues. In April, a sample of intricate lace made in the Essex village of Coggeshall during the nineteenth century was displayed. In May, a ‘mystery’ archaeological stone object found in Wendens Ambo was chosen as *Object of the Month*. In June, a sample of material used to make Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation gown was displayed, to coincide with the Queen’s official 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

*Object of the Month* is a popular project with both visitors to the museum and followers on our social media pages.

An order has been placed for our new Community Case, which will house a new rotating display (changing approximately every 6 months) featuring co-curated displays with individuals or groups from the local community. The Collections Officer (Human History) has identified the first two community groups to be involved in the project: the organisers of the Dunmow Fitch Trials, whose display will be installed in late August 2016, and the Saffron Walden Cricket Club, whose display will be installed in early 2017.

Tony Morton (Essex Wildlife Trust and Saffron Walden Museum Society) has offered to improve the Woodland interactive in the Natural History Gallery by producing new models of trees that more accurately reflect the growth cycle in coppiced woodland. Two visits made to plan work and measure.

### 4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

The *Ocean World* exhibition closed on Sunday 3 July 2016. The exhibition was very popular with visitors. The Travelling Natural History Museum loaned giant marine models, fossils, casts and pictures to display with mollusc shells, marine life, seabirds, other animals, Red Crag fossils and photographs from the collections of Saffron Walden Museum. An impressive Art Wall was created by visitors displaying their colouring sheets and drawings.

### 4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015
<b>April</b>	<b>1,161</b>	1,203	<b>38</b>	186	<b>1,199</b>	1,389
<b>May</b>	<b>924</b>	1,607	<b>146</b>	104	<b>1,070</b>	1,711
<b>June</b>	<b>987</b>	1,394	<b>113</b>	431	<b>1,100</b>	1,825
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,072</b>	4,204	<b>297</b>	721	<b>3,369</b>	4,925

#### Shop

	2016	2015
<b>April</b>	<b>460.00</b>	450.64
<b>May</b>	<b>338.69</b>	568.10
<b>June</b>	<b>816.72</b>	770.08
<b>Total £</b>	<b>£ 1,615.41</b>	£ 1,788.82

#### Tickets

	2016	2015
<b>April</b>	<b>1,404.25</b>	803.25
<b>May</b>	<b>886.00</b>	881.50
<b>June</b>	<b>1,109.00</b>	£458.25
<b>Total £</b>	<b>£ 3,399.25</b>	£ 2143.00

## Donations

	2016	2015
<b>April</b>	<b>36.80</b>	83.84
<b>May</b>	<b>36.00</b>	96.70
<b>June</b>	<b>77.04</b>	46.68
<b>Total £</b>	<b>£ 149.84</b>	£ 227.22

## Comments

Figures for the Q1 in 2015 were helped by free outdoor events in April-June 2015 (Waterloo, Fete de la Musique), also the Easter weekend and both days of Easter holiday activities fell in March in 2016, but in April in 2015. Ticket income reflects the increase in admission charges (now £2.50 adult, £1.25 discounts) from April 2016. The reduction in School visit numbers reflects the current lack of a Learning Officer to provide booked teaching sessions with objects. Independent (self-guided) visits from schools are still encouraged and this has probably sustained shop income at a relatively good level compared with the same quarter last year. Total income (tickets + shop + donations) was £5,164.50 this quarter compared to £4,159.04 for April-June 2015, an increase of about 25% overall.

Figures for the donations Box this quarter may be artificially low as the lack of an Administrative Officer for most of this quarter has made it difficult to keep up with regular emptying and banking. It is too early to say whether the increased admissions price will tend to depress donations.

## Publicity, Marketing, Social Media and New Website

The Museum currently has 720 'Likers' on Facebook and 1491 Followers on Twitter.

## Saffron Walden Museum Website – Statistics for months April May and June 2016

	New Website		
	Pages	Visits	Unique Visitors
<b>April</b>	12,725	5,686	3,327
<b>May</b>	8,803	3,520	2,464
<b>June</b>	7,433	3,107	2,404
<b>TOTAL for Q4</b>	<b>28,961</b>	<b>12,313</b>	<b>8,195</b>

**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**

Figures this quarter are affected by the lack of a learning officer and loss of the Schoolroom

#### **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 *	271
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	267
<b>Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service</b>	<b>538</b>

\* These figures plus 26 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 267 pupils. These were the Egyptian loan box (used twice), the World War II loan box and the Prehistory loan box.

### **5.2 Events on-sites (in Museum and grounds and at Shire Hill Store)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>No. Attending</b>
6 April	Easter holiday activities: Marine Masks	182
11 April	Shire Hill Store opening event	35
18 April	Shire Hill Store open day tours	25
8 May	Birthday Party in Museum with fossils provided for handling	20
13 May	<i>Museums At Night</i> : Museum by Torchlight evening for families	106
1, 2 June	Half-term activities: Seals and Seals	347
11 June	Castle St, Museum St and Church St local residents picnic party in grounds (Queen's 90 <sup>th</sup> Birthday celebrations)	30
18 June	Saffron Walden Nursery School Fete in Museum & Castle grounds	100
30 June	Inauguration of the Listening Bench outside the Museum (Essex Record Office / Heritage Lottery Fund project with SW Initiative)	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>865</b>

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

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>No. Attending</b>
8 April	Talk to Breathe Easy Group, Radwinter Road Hospital (Curator)	20
18 June	Hadstock Fete: Battle of Assandun project 'living history' demo by Regia Anglorum and Museum display in St Botolph's Church (Curator)	65 viewing display in church
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>

#### **Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 8 groups, 13 meetings)**

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

- Essex Field Club - 2 meetings, treasurer work (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project – 1 meeting, verge cuts, 2016 survey programme and forms,

- 3 ecological surveys, missing posts, response to 1 planning application (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford – 1 meeting (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Searchers Metal-Detecting Club – 1 Sunday conference, Quendon (Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery - 1 committee meeting ( Curator)
- Dunmow Museum – AGM (Curator)
- Hadstock & Ashdon Millennium Group (Battle of Assandun events 2016) – 3 committee meetings of the Millennium Group, 2 meetings of the Ashdon Battlers, attendance of 2 public lectures in support of the project and 1 day of outreach at Hadstock (see events off-site)
- Local History Recorders of Uttlesford AGM at Clavering (Curator)

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

- Bishops Stortford Talking Newspaper. Discussion of plans for interviews in the Museum with a geologist and the Curator (Natural Sciences Officer and Curator)
- ME (Museums Essex) management committee meeting hosted at Shirehill Store 24 May (Curator)
- MEE (Museums East of England) meeting at Epping Forest District Museum, Waltham Abbey (Curator)
- Maximising Cultural Partnerships meeting at Essex Record Office 28 June (Curator)

### **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**

<b>Definition</b>	<b>This Quarter Actual Q4</b>	<b>This Quarter target Q4</b>	<b>Cumulative 2015-16</b>	<b>Annual Target 2015-16</b>
<b>Visitors PI 22</b> SI 12c	3,369	3,200	3,369	13,000
<b>Users PC 01</b> CI 39	16,068	6,000	16,068	25,200

### **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 using ‘Visits’)

### **Comments on this quarter’s figures**

**Visitors** just exceeded targets by 5% due to on-site activities and events maintaining numbers, and independent school visits partly making up for lack of taught school sessions.

**Users:** there have been an exceptionally high number of website visits this quarter, for reasons not immediately apparent, and these have boosted figures out of proportion to the target. It remains to be seen if this is an abnormal quarter or whether similar levels of website use can be maintained in future.

## **Main activities and items to note for the next quarter:**

### **1 Museum Management and Staff**

The new Administration Officer, Wendy-Jo Atter, starts work in July. Staff remain under pressure with much work to follow up in the aftermath of the store move and Schoolroom evacuation, plus holiday activities to run without a Learning Officer.

### **2 Buildings and Site**

**From 25 July the Museum will be closed and unstaffed on Mondays, and curatorial staff will work at Shirehill all day.**

### **3 Collections and Research**

The educational and handling collections re-housed in the Museum need a thorough sort out by staff and volunteers, and will be a priority this autumn. There is a grant of £1,000 via the Museum Society for re-packaging this collection and purchase of replicas as teaching aids.

Records and equipment removed from the Laboratory and Schoolroom to the Museum need to be sorted out and stored by staff, but there is limited space in the Workroom.

The Natural Sciences Officer has the contents of three large wooden cabinets containing mollusc shells and birds' eggs to pack before Schofield Removals can move them from the natural history store at the Museum to Shire Hill. Completion of this work will depend on the availability of store volunteers.

Documentation work on all collections requires more time; insurance valuation work with Antiques Appraisals Ltd has yet to take place.

### **4 Displays and Visitor Services**

The *Ocean World* exhibition closes on Sunday 3 July 2016. *Magna Carta* exhibition opens on 16 July 2016. There is a Private View for Museum Society members on Friday 15 July.

### **5 Education, Events and Outreach**

16 July – Viking ring (found near Thaxted) with pop-up display at Thaxted Guildhall

Summer holiday activities:

3 August – create your own helmet.

10 August – make beaded necklaces and mini-shields.

17 August – Battle of Assandun mural.

Drop in sessions 11am-1pm and 2pm-4pm. Children must bring an adult. These are linked to the Battle of Assandun re-enactment in September

Saffron Walden Maze Festival 20 and 21 August.

Heritage Open Weekend 10 and 11 September. Free entry all weekend to Saffron Walden Museum.

Friday 9 September – Museum outreach with Regia Anglorum members at Ashdon Primary School.

Saturday 10 September – Museum project with Ashdon and Hadstock communities to commemorate the Battle of Assandun 1016 – living history camp and battle re-enactment at Waltons Park, Ashdon, with Regia Anglorum. Museum pop-up display and activities in marquee.

27-28 September Victoria Cave archaeological digitisation project taking place in the archaeology gallery, public event (detailed recording of finds held by Saffron Walden Museum from an important cave site near Settle, Yorkshire discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century)