

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT January – March 2017

1 Museum Management and Staff

1.1 Management

Museum Service

While work on collections continues at Shirehill, a basic activity programme has been maintained at the Museum by curatorial staff with the assistance of casual staff and volunteers, but at the expense of other work and developments. Confirmation of the budget growth item to allow the Learning & Outreach Officer post to be appointed (full-time, permanent) has been most welcome and the Museum Service looks forward to re-instating learning services for schools in particular.

Forward Plan 2013-2018

The Museum Society Chairman and Curator have completed their initial round of informal consultations with representatives of the Saffron Walden Initiative and Town Library Society, and the inaugural meeting of the Saffron Walden Heritage Development Group, convened by the Rev David Tomlinson (St Mary's Church) to explore the merits of more co-operation between organisations in Saffron Walden which have interests in local heritage and the visitor economy. The Curator and Richard Priestley (Chairman of the Museum Society's Museum Support committee) attended the final meeting at Hertford of SHARE Cohort for developing large-scale grant applications.

Day-to day operational pressures generally inhibit creative discussion of Museum development plans among Museum staff, so the curatorial team made a special 'team visit' to The Higgins, Bedford which underwent a major HLF-funded development a few years ago. This provided a stimulus for ideas and a chance to learn from discussions with colleagues about their experiences of creating new galleries.

1.2 Staff, Volunteers and Work Experience

Unfortunately a number of Welcome Desk Volunteers have been poorly this quarter; we wish them all a speedy recovery. We welcomed Lynn Howell and Gillian Ram to the Welcome Desk Volunteers team.

The nine members of the human history collections volunteer team continue to make excellent progress on documentation of the social history collections and transcription of the museum's accession registers and early records. A new human history collections volunteer, Paula Armstrong, has recently been recruited and Paula will be working on a repacking project with the world cultures collections. We have had volunteering requests from two Saffron Walden County High Sixth Form students and we hope that they will start soon. Archaeology collections volunteers Joanne Pegrum, Peter Morrissey, Peter Stribling and Peter Rooley have been helping the Curator with a variety of tasks and projects at Shirehill.

Tony Morton has completed months of work making models of tiny trees at different stages of growth for an interactive about coppice woodland management.

1.3 Training and Seminars Attended

20 Jan	Dementia Friends introductory session, UDC (Curator)
25 Jan	PowerPoint course, Great Shelford (Natural Sciences Officer)
31 Jan	Fire Training (All staff) including use of extinguishers and Evac Chair training

21 Feb	Uttlesford District Council small services focus group (Natural Sciences Officer)
28 Feb	Bedford, The Higgins study trip (Curator, Natural Sciences Officer, Collections Officer)
8 Mar	ILM Course (Admin. Officer)
9 Mar	SHARE Natural Sciences Curators Network, Newmarket (Natural Sciences Officer)
9 Mar	iTrent for managers, UDC (Curator)
10 Mar	<i>Changemakers</i> , leadership development course (Collections Officer)
14 Mar	Volunteers Forum (Admin. Officer)
16 Mar	E-Buy refresher (Natural Sciences Officer)
21 Mar	SEMFED Study Day, Watford Museum (Collections Officer)
21 Mar	E-Buy refresher (Curator)
22 Mar	E-Buy refresher (Admin. Officer)
28 Mar	Pensions seminar (Natural Sciences Officer)

1.5 Health & Safety

The Security & Premises Officer attended the SAT meeting at the Council Offices on 15 March.

2 Buildings and Site

2.1 Museum Building

PAT testing has been undertaken on all portable appliances. Sunfish carried out a service of Emergency Lights at the Museum on 3 March and replaced several faulty ones.

ROALCO cleared out the gutters and hoppers on the Museum roof. A refresher session on accessing the Museum Roof and use of the restraint equipment was held with the Security & Premises Officer and two colleagues from Contract Services (UDC) on 21 February. Total Access carried out their annual safety check of the equipment and anchor points.

Three wooden cabinets were moved out of Natural History store by Schofield Removals.

2.3 Shirehill Store

PAT testing, Fire service by Sunfish on 16 March and Intruder Alarm service by Activ Security. Invalifts repaired a fault on the platform lift. The faulty storage heater in Natural Sciences store has been looked at by an engineer but is still waiting to be repaired. Three cabinets for mollusc shells and birds' eggs moved in to Natural Sciences store by Schofield Removals.

2.4 Schoolroom, Grounds and Castle Site

As final preparations for lease to the Fry Art Gallery have been underway, some of the conservation chemicals remaining in the brick shed in the yard were removed to a fire proof cabinet in the Museum Natural History store. The remainder have been disposed of to a laboratory at Duxford or are awaiting collections by an appropriate contractor. The Corporate Health & Safety Officer has been involved. The Fry Art Gallery now have a full set of keys for the Schoolroom, since signing the lease with the Council.

3 Collections and Research

3.1 Acquisitions and Disposals

17 new acquisitions have been recorded in the accessions register this quarter, including

- Archaeological archives from Takeley, Widdington, Radwinter, Little Canfield and Newport
- Australian Aborigine stone hand-axe, found in North Queensland
- Sony Tri-Nitron colour television, dating from the 1970s
- Bayko Building Set (toy), dating from the 1940s

The archaeological archives were from a large deposition of backlog archives made by Archaeology South-East, which included many sites from the former Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit. One-off deposition grants, customarily charged by museums to archaeological contractors, have been collected from two contractors who deposited archives in December. This money is retained on a special holding account to use as matching funding for the forthcoming HLF application and so far amounts to over £4,116 with more to follow.

3.2 Collections Care and Conservation

Insurance Valuations

A further meeting was held in March with valuations consultant James Glennie to discuss and agree the new basis for the insuring the Museum’s collections, while detailed work on valuations of significant items continued. The final report is expected in late April.

Social History Conservation

Two donations, from a private individual and from the Saffron Walden Quaker Meeting, totalling £250 have been made towards the conservation of a silk reticule made to support the abolition of slavery movement. A quotation of £1,500 for this work has been received by the Collections Officer, who will be approaching charitable trusts to raise the remaining funds needed.

Archaeological Research and Conservation

A sample of prehistoric cremated human bone and charcoal was collected by a perceptive farmer who has regularly reported archaeological discoveries on his land. The nature and location of the remains make it worthy of further research through Carbon-14 dating. Another recent find of interest from Manuden has also been donated: a small medieval bronze ring-brooch with a piece of textile attached, which needs to be examined by a specialist in conservation of ancient textiles. Both these are to be pursued by the Curator.

Pest traps in museum stores, galleries and work spaces were inspected this quarter.

3.3 Documentation

Backlog / updates are as follows:

	New Acquisitions	Backlog (existing collections not previously catalogued on Modes)	Edits and Updates to existing records
Human history collections	53	839	1422
Natural sciences collections	0	1	492
Total	53	840	1914

Effective Collections (World Cultures project)

Still on hold awaiting for the Curator to have time to dedicate to moving this project on.

Musical Instrument collection

The Collections Officer involved the museum in a partnership project, entitled ‘MINIM-UK’, with the Royal College of Music. The project aims to create a national database of historic musical instruments in UK museums. Ana Silva from the Royal College of Music spent three days at the museum in March to photograph and document all the musical instruments in the museum’s collections. This information will be uploaded to the museum’s database in due course, as well as featuring on the MINIM-UK database.

3.4 Loans In

22 items were loaned to the Museum for the *Completing the Look: 300 Years of Fashion Accessories* exhibition, including

- Two hats – one 1920s cloche hat and one Edwardian hat – from Southend Museums Service
- A Victorian guide to etiquette, from Saffron Walden Town Library
- Hats, bags, shoes, sunglasses and jewellery from local individuals

3.5 Loans Out

One set of the archaeological pottery type series boxes were loaned to a local history meeting at Manuden, to help members of a local history project familiarise themselves with the sort of pottery they are likely to find when field-walking sites of interest in their area.

One loan request has been received from the Linden-Museum Stuttgart (an eminent ethnographic museum) for three Hawaiian objects, for an exhibition Hawai'i in Stuttgart to run 14 October 2017 to 13 May 2018.

1880.30 Wooden model canoe

1880.55 Finger bowl

1880.57 Spittoon

1880.66.4 Hawaiian Kapa

The loan request will be considered at the Museum Society Board meeting on 23 May.

3.6 Object Identification and Enquiries

Object identifications this quarter: 7 people (8 objects / groups of objects)

Collections Enquiries this quarter: 46 in total (20 human history, 13 natural sciences, 13 archaeology)

3.7 Research

7 researchers this quarter (total – taken from book), including

- Gaye Sculthorpe from the British Museum to view early Australian objects
- Marco Angelo to view phrenological heads and death masks
- Ali Clarke from Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology to photograph coconut fibre armour from Kiribati
- Serena O'Connor and Cherry, Artist in Residence at Walden School, to view natural sciences loan boxes for art projects at Walden School and Great Chesterford Primary School
- Alan Pickersgill to take anatomical measurements of birds for carving models in wood
- Dr Chris Preston to examine 180 herbarium sheets of mosses for a new book about the Bryophyte Flora of Cambridgeshire and 8 sheets of flowering plants for an article about a site in Cambridge.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

4.1 Permanent Galleries

Object of the Month: February's *Object of the Month* was a footprint made by a young Iguanodon dinosaur 145 to 100 million years ago during the early Cretaceous period. March's *Object of the Month* was a pair of clogs worn by a nun in the Carmelite convent in Saffron Walden.

On 10 March, a private view was held to formally open the new *Your Stories* community co-curated display. The display has been co-curated by the Saffron Walden Cricket Club and tells the history of the club from the mid-1700s until the present day. The private view was attended by cricket club members and town councillors including the Mayor of Saffron Walden (at the invitation of the Cricket Club, who lease their grounds from the Town Council).

New models of trees at different stages of the coppice cycle have been installed in an interactive about woodland management on the Natural History gallery. The interactive had been criticised by VAQAS.

4.2 Temporary Exhibitions

In January, our new temporary exhibition *Completing the Look: 300 Years of Fashion Accessories* opened.

The exhibition explores the changes in fashion accessories over the past three centuries and what this can tell us about the way people were living. The exhibition predominately displays items from the Museum's own costume and textiles collection but also features loans from other organisations and individuals. The exhibition has been well-attended since it opened and well-received.

4.3 Visitor Services

	Public		Schools incl. adults		Total	
	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016
January	749	770	30	43	779	813
February	1,121	1,702	56	83	1,177	1,785
March	676	1,169	17	26	693	1,195
Total	2,546	3,641	103	152	2,649	3,793

Easter fell on 27 March in 2016, but will be on 16 April (Q1 April-June 2017) this year. Visitor figures and therefore shop and tickets income vary with Easter holidays accordingly.

Shop

	2017	2016
January	352.69	260.74
February	504.63	711.63
March	207.79	531.16
Total £	1,065.11	1,503.53

Tickets

	2017	2016
January	788.75	555.00
February	1,325.50	1,178.00
March	882.50	973.75
Total £	2,996.75	2,706.75

Donations

	2017	2016
January	40.50	41.92
February*	100.67	62.98
March	45.22	253.30
Total £	186.39	358.20

*February's donations include £50.48 from the additional donations box in the Great Hall for contributions towards half-term activities

Comments

Visitor numbers in February reflect the half-term children's activities.

Museum Shop

Since taking up her position as Museum Admin Officer with responsibility for the shop, Wendy-Jo Atter has introduced a number of new lines which link shop stock to the current exhibition(s) and children's activities. Product range and Sales continue to be restricted by the lack of credit card payment facilities.

4.4 Publicity, Marketing, Social Media and New Website

Publicity and Marketing

Adverts

Bespoke adverts and editorial coverage, appropriate to the readership, have been produced and published in a number of different target market publications, Museum Features, including:

- Walden Local – Exhibition and Event adverts (Feb and Mar) – target market: locals and repeat visitors
- Group Leisure Magazine – Museum advert – target market: tour groups
- Select Traveller Magazine – Museum advert – target market: foreign / non-local visitors
- Essex Mums Website and email newsletter – Museum advert – target market: families
- Primary Times Magazine – Museum advert – target market: families
- Trip Advisor – Museum Listing claimed and updated with information and photographs.

Press articles:

- Saffron Walden Flyer – First issue of this new magazine which is distributed door to door in Saffron Walden and to venues in the town e.g. Tourist Information Centre and Supermarkets – Museum article, what’s on listing and volunteer recruitment
(<https://www.joomag.com/mag/0799143001490301094?page=14>)
- Salad Days - issue-70 - Completing the Look article
- Walden Local – 22 Feb 2017 – Belt-Up in Style Half Term Activities
- Walden Local – 08 Feb 2017 - Exhibition editorial
- Walden Local – 29 Mar 2017 – Cricket Display article

Exhibition and Events leaflet

Distributed to:

- Tourist Information Centres: Saffron Walden, Bishop’s Stortford, Great Dunmow
- Libraries: Saffron Walden, Bishop’s Stortford, Great Dunmow
- Local schools and all groups visiting the museum
- Hotels at Stansted Airport including: Raddison Blu, Holiday Inn Express and Premier Inn

The Museum Admin Officer is currently arranging for ‘Take One Media’ to distribute 4,000 Exhibition and Events leaflets to 39 outlets and obtain Management Information regarding monthly take-up rates at each over a 6 month period.

Exhibition and Events listings

Listed in on-line and printed versions of ‘What’s On’ publications including:

- Tourist Information Centres: Saffron Walden and Bishop’s Stortford
- Local Papers: Walden Local, Saffron Walden Reporter, Mercury (inc. Herts and Essex Observer), Dunmow Broadcast
- Specialist magazines / e-newsletters / on-line (distributed to Primary Schools): Salad Days, Raring to Go, Primary Times; Essex Mums
- School websites: Summercroft Primary School, Bishop’s Stortford

Awards:

- Trip Advisor ‘Certificate of Excellence’ Awarded. The Museum is now ranked in the top four of 18 things to do in Saffron Walden on Trip Advisor (with Audley End House, the miniature railway and Bridge End Gardens)
- A request has been sent to our supporters to nominate Saffron Walden Museum in the ‘Best Museum’ category of the ‘Essex Mum’s Loves’ awards

Social Media and Email Newsletter

The Museum currently has 808 ‘Likers’ on **Facebook** and 1642 **Followers** on **Twitter**. There are currently 448 subscribers to the Museum’s email newsletter.

Saffron Walden Museum Website – Statistics for this quarter

	Visits	Unique Visitors
January	4,326	3,262
February	3,560	2,617
March	4,709	3,604
TOTAL for Q4	12,595	9,483
TOTAL for Year	37,805	27,791

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 Learning Officer in post)

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 *	88
No. of pupils benefiting from schools loan boxes in classroom	60
Total no. of pupils benefiting educationally from Museum Service	148

* These figures plus 15 teachers/adults accompanying paying school and independent groups provide total 103 school visits in Visitor table in 4.3

Loan and reminiscence boxes: 7 loan boxes have gone out this quarter, used by 60 pupils.

Fossil loan box, two birds and a brain coral loaned to Walden School, Saffron Walden for use at the school and at a NADFAS art day at Great Chesterford Primary School. Used by 60 pupils.

Rock loan box used by Dame Bradbury School, Saffron Walden during a museum visit to study geology..

Cow skull used by Farnham Primary School during a museum visit to study skeletons and Egypt.

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

Date	Event	No. Attending
29 Jan	Private View: <i>Completing the Look</i> Exhibition	65
2 Feb	Support4Sight pre visit meeting with museum staff	2
15, 16 Feb	Half-term activities: Belt Up in Style 176 children + 145 adults	321
7 Mar	Eastern Region Textile Forum visit and tours of Museum and Shirehill store	4
10 Mar	Private View: <i>Your Stories</i> community display	15
22 Mar	Support4Sight visit with objects to handle	8
	Total	415

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

None this quarter

Other Museums and Local Groups supported (Uttlesford) 7 groups supported, 8 meetings)

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

- Essex Field Club - 3 meetings, Treasurer work and training, 2016 accounts (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Essex Wildlife Trust (Uttlesford) – 1 meeting (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Wildflower Group – identifying verge sites to visit in 2017 (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Special Roadside Verges project – minutes, one planning application comment, 2017 ecological survey programme and forms, March cut, list of sites with missing marker posts (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Sustainable Uttlesford – 1 meeting (Natural Sciences Officer)
- Saffron Walden Searchers Metal-Detecting Club – (2 meetings, Curator)
- Fry Art Gallery - (1 committee and 1 social event, Curator)

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

- SHARE Advisory Network and Museum Mentors' Meeting (Whipple Museum, Cambridge 28 Mar, Curator)

Local Performance Indicators

Definition	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	Annual Actual 2015-16	Annual Target 2015-16
Visitors PI 22 SI 12c	2,649	3,100	11,697	13,000
Users PC 01 CI 39	15,357	6,000	51,306	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: meeting visitor targets remains challenging while there is no Learning Officer in post however, a great deal of effort has been devoted to Publicity and Marketing in an effort to drive up the number of visitors over the coming summer season. The Museum website continues to perform above target, no doubt assisted by the steadily growing following on social media and the introduction of the new email newsletter, which drives traffic to the website via links.

Visitors: 15% below target, continuing the downward trend in school visits without a Learning Officer. Other contributory factors include the Easter holidays falling in April this year and holding 2 days of activities in February half-term (exceptionally, there were 3 days of half-term activities in 2016).

Users: actual figures were about two and a half times (250%) the original notional target, due to an excellent quarter for visits to the Museum's website. Social media and the Museum's new email newsletter, and features such as the 'piano hoard' reported in the national press, continue to bolster website figures.

Comment on Annual figures 2017-18:

Visitors: 10% below target overall, main factors being lack of a Learning Officer and therefore loss of school visits and associated family visits; no Easter holidays falling in the 2017-18 year; staff capacity seriously stretched with move of collections to Shirehill to manage as well as 'normal' Museum operations. Figures expected to improve through 2017-18 with appointment of a new Learning & Outreach Officer in the summer and with new publicity and marketing initiatives to encourage visits from different audiences.

Users: at 204%, the actual number of users was more than double the target due to the very large numbers of virtual visitors to the Museum's website. Use of social media, the new email newsletter and more low-cost advertising (in publications and on-line) should help to drive more traffic to the website, and hopefully a proportion of these should result in actual visits over time. The target will be raised in 2017-18 now that we have a better idea of how the website performs.

Main activities and items to note for the next quarter:

1 Museum Management and Staff

Recruitment to the new Learning & Outreach Officer post is expected to start in May once it has cleared the Evaluation Panel.

2 Buildings and Site

Chemicals from the Schoolroom Yard shed removed on 19 April.

The ivy growing up the NW rear corner of the Museum has now reached the roof and gutters and local residents below have requested guidance on how best to cut it back in their gardens. This has been circulated to Contract Services, Grounds Maintenance and Planning Conservation for guidance and possibly a meeting on site with local residents.

Work is anticipated on installing new boilers in the Museum cellar, and completing the installation of wi-fi throughout the Museum.

Castle – Bakers of Danbury are expected to return in late April to remove the last of their equipment and rubble, and leave a new set of castle keys for safekeeping at the Museum.

3 Collections and Research

Moving contents of 3 wooden cabinets from Museum third floor Natural History store to first floor Natural Sciences store at Shirehill Museum Store. 27 drawers of birds' eggs and 28 drawers of mollusc shells. (Natural Sciences Officer, Support Worker, SWMS Support Team).

Wildlife photographic archive bequest - digitising lists of contents of 123 boxes of slides and photographs. (Natural Sciences Officer and Support Workers).

Work continues to improve the Herbarium records on the MODES database (NSO Support Worker).

Work with a specialist contractor will continue to identify asbestos in the Museum collections and take necessary and appropriate action to contain or eliminate any potential risks. Items in need of further investigation include wartime gas masks; historic domestic appliances made between 1850 and 1970; Ancient Egyptian mummy wrappings and a variety of other objects.

4 Displays and Visitor Services

Special exhibition *Completing the Look* and the Cricket Club's display in the Community Case continue. The Treasure Case is due for re-display in late May, to exhibit a few recent acquisitions and also to highlight Treasure 20, a nationwide initiative by the Portable Antiquities Scheme and British Museum to highlight the 20th anniversary of the Treasure Act 1996 coming into force (from September 1997)

5 Education, Events and Outreach

19 May *Museums at Night*. Bring your torch and follow out night-time trail 6pm-8pm. Children must bring an adult.

May Half-term holiday activities. Nature Explorers – craft activities and outdoor trail. Children must bring an adult.

31 May drop-in sessions 11am-1pm and 2pm-4pm

1 June drop-in sessions 11am-1pm and 2pm-4pm