

# **SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM**

## **SUMMARY OF QUARTERLY REPORTS for 2020**

### **Introduction**

This document summarises the Museum's year January – December 2020 during most of which the Museum has been closed to the public and the Museum Management Working Group has been unable to meet. Further details are provided in the Quarterly Reports circulated with this summary.

## **1 Museum Management and Staff**

### **Covid Pandemic : overview**

The Museum closed to the public on Wednesday 18 March 2020 in line with government instructions to limit the spread of Covid 19. Covid-related work focused initially on creating safe working environments in the Museum and Shirehill store for staff and contractors. The emphasis then switched to providing the necessary Covid-safe services, equipment and procedures for the eventual return of visitors. Much effort and creativity has also been directed into engaging with the local community and wider audiences through on-line and 'click and collect' activities. The Museum re-opened briefly in mid-December to offer pre-booked visits to Museum Society members, Season Ticket holders and Museum volunteers. This also provided an opportunity to test our new Covid-safe ways of working and welcoming visitors.

At the opening of 2021, the Museum is ready to re-open when this is permitted by the government; the earliest that this is likely to happen will be the week beginning 17 May. This will also be subject to sufficient numbers of front-of-house volunteers and weekend / casual staff being able to return. Our opening hours will probably be 4 days per week initially, while we monitor visitors; provide refresher training for returning weekend / casual staff and volunteers, and induct them in the use of the new cashless payments system.

### **Accreditation Scheme (Arts Council England)**

The Accreditation scheme for museums has been put on hold by Arts Council England for another year, due to the repercussions of the Covid pandemic, so that it is unlikely that the Museum will be asked to submit a return in 2021. This does not affect our accredited status and ability to apply for grants.

### **Forward Plan: NHLF Resilient Heritage project**

Our project to research and scope the proposed development of the Museum has been able to continue throughout the year, with meetings conducted on Zoom. Fourth Street completed the Options Appraisal and Feasibility Study in June 2020. The Audience Development Report by Julia Holberry Associates was subject to a few months delay due to the impact of Covid restrictions, but during the late summer and early autumn it was possible to complete the focus group consultations and Saturday market consultation in Saffron Walden as planned; the Audience Development Report was delivered in December 2020. We have now embarked on the final phase of the project, to appoint a fund-raising consultant to work with the Museum Society and staff on developing a fund-raising strategy, by the end of April.

### **Staff and Volunteers**

It has been necessary to have some staff presence at the Museum and Shirehill store to maintain the collections and buildings, and because some types of work cannot be undertaken at home. Staff have otherwise worked at home where possible, or out of necessity due to home-schooling. The weekend and casual staff team and volunteers have been unable to come into the Museum this year, with a few exceptions for specific reasons (in compliance with Covid safety measures). They have been kept in touch with regular email briefings from the Museum.

## **2 Buildings and Site**

The extensive programme of repairs and maintenance to the exterior of the Museum, organised by the

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Corporate Property Surveyor, was completed in early 2020 with work on the flat roof area on the north side of the building. In the SE corner of the Castle grounds, work on the new pedestrian gate was also completed and has received favourable comments (Council and Historic England project). A new hearing loop system was installed in the Museum's main ground floor areas (reception, special exhibitions and Great Hall) in March 2020 with grants from the Museum Society, Gibson Walden Fund and Saffron Walden Round Table.

### **3 Collections and Research**

#### **Notable acquisitions have included:**

- Pair of gold Bronze Age bracelets (treasure) purchased by the Museum Society with grants from the Art Fund, V&A Purchase Grant Fund and Beecroft Bequest.
- African items transferred from Buxton Museum to supplement the world cultures collection.
- Lepidoptera cabinet: a 20<sup>th</sup> century collection of butterflies, collected in the NW Essex area.

#### **Loan to exhibition: Wampum – Mayflower 400 : Legend and Legacy**

The Museum loaned three items of Wampum (sashes of wove strings of shell beads) to this well-publicised exhibition at Sea City, Southampton, and now resuming at The Box, Plymouth.

Other collections work has included condition-checking of natural history taxidermy collections, a project with contractors Kadec to render asbestos minerals safe, cataloguing geology specimens on display (funded by the Museum Society) and cataloguing social history documentary archives.

Research enquiries have continued by email: 211 enquiries between January and December 2020.

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

While intended exhibition have been postponed or cancelled, staff have installed a **new special exhibition *Man and Beast: a cultural history of animals*** ready for re-opening.

**Installation of new cashless payments system** at the Welcome Desk (till, card reader and barcode scanner). This marks a major improvement and is essential for Covid safety but has been a very demanding project causing the Front-of-House & Admin Officer to work well above her p/t hours. IT staff and a dedicated front-of-house volunteer have also spent much time assisting with this. For re-opening, we need a member of staff stationed at the door to assist visitors with Covid safety compliance, and have received a SHARE Next Steps grant of £4,440 to cover the initial costs.

**Digital and On-line activities** have been stepped up to maintain public engagement. These included CV Walden (local accounts of 'life under lockdown'), website and social media features, while staff have continued to contribute to local publications such as the *Saffron Walden Flyer* and *Newport News*, and continue to work remotely with and support numerous local organisations.

### **5 Outreach**

The new '**Click & Collect**' **Activity Packs** for families were a great success and generated income through the summer and autumn; 323 packs were sold raising £1,450. A digital activity pack has been produced for spring 2021. The **new on-line Learning Hub**, providing access to on-line learning materials and services for all ages and needs, went live in February and continues to be developed. School Loan Boxes have continued to support learning in schools and at home.