

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at MUSEUM GREAT HALL, on WEDNESDAY, 20 MARCH 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillor M Sutton (Chair)
Councillors J Moran, A Reeve and G Sell

Museum Society: K Eden, D Kent, C Sharpe and T Watson
(P Salvidge – non voting member)

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Director of Corporate Services), C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer) and J Oxley (Interim Curator)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lemon and Richard Priestley from the Museum Society.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th November 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

3 MUSEUM SOCIETY CHAIR'S REPORT

The Museum Society Chair gave an update on the current situation within the Museum, he made the following points:-

- It was the first quarter with the new Curator, he thanked Jenny for her hard work and enthusiasm.
- A consultant, Sam Hunter, had been recruited to look at future options for the museum which tied in with the stage 2 review of Blueprint Uttlesford.
- The consultant's report would be available by the end of June with recommendations for the future and choices to be considered.

The Director of Corporate Services gave a brief overview of Blueprint Uttlesford and made the following points-

- The first stage of the review had concluded the staff consultation, with a number of staff deciding to leave.
- The process to recruit a new Collections Assistant post for 30 hours, to alleviate the pressure on the Interim Curator, was underway.
- A further position which related to the running of the building was also being advertised.
- The recruitment of a full time Museum Support Officer which was an amalgamation of two posts had also started.
- Two of the new posts would be on short term contracts until the end of March 2025, which followed current Council policy, however there was an option to extend if necessary.

In response to Members questions the Director of Corporate Services said:-

- The cost of the consultant was shared between the Council and the Museum Society and would be in the region of £40k in total.
- The consultant would be meeting with Members of the Museum Management Working Group, the Leader, Council Directors and the Chief Executive in early to mid-April.
- The decision following the report from the consultant in June would be made in the autumn to tie in with budget setting for 2025.
- The brief given to the consultant was to look at the existing structure and governance, to set out alternative solutions and ultimately to determine the best options to secure the future of the museum.
- A copy of the brief would be circulated to Members.
- The brief did not explicitly set out how the relationship with other museums in the area would work but this would be drawn out within the report.

The Museum Society Chair said that the process would challenge the purpose of the Museum. He said that it was only possible to display 6-7% of the 170,000 pieces in the collection, how this was managed would be part of the future plans.

The Museum Society Chair said that Historic England had previously stated that the vision for the museum was not wide enough and should incorporate Audley End as well as the rest of the site including the Tennis Club. He said that every option would be considered.

4

MUSEUM CURATOR'S REPORT

The Curator gave a verbal update on the current quarter, the report in the agenda related to October to December 2023 and she highlighted the following: -

- As many of the events as possible were linked to current exhibitions.
- There were between 50 and 60 volunteers at the Museum and offers of help came in every day.
- The museum's activities aimed to make the museum a community hub, examples included knit and natter, a children's tea party and using the museum as a warm space.
- The loan boxes and school sessions were a good source of income, there were now larger groups of up to 90 children per session. This could be expanded further with extra volunteers.
- The google analytics user figures were lower than the ones collated by the museum society however going forward the google analytics figures would be displayed on the website.
- The Saffron Walden Museum was thought to be the oldest museum in the United Kingdom, it opened in 1835 and was originally education based for the boys of non-conformist quakers.
- The target for the Key Performance Indicator which related to numbers of users from October to December 2023 was 2800 but the actual figure was 4200.
- The museum scored highly on trip advisor and google reviews.

- The Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme which was a Visit England mystery shopper was up by 5-6% and was now in the region of 80%.
- The Curator was working on a research project with York University on the indigenous American collection. She had been contacted by the Association of American Indian Affairs; this was a repatriation group who were asking for specific information on what the Museum held relating to American Indians.
- The Museum was the district depository for any archaeological finds within the area. This was a paid service and the funds went towards the collection audit.
- The Sun Inn project was an immersive Tudor experience which would be trialled as open days with a range of activities.
- There was nothing relating to the 80th D-Day anniversary at the Museum but they would be lending expertise and sending resources to other places.
- February half-term had been busy, and Easter activity programmes were being widely publicised. These could be booked via Art Tickets.
- Archaeological finds surgeries with the Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Liaison Officers were going well, the next one was this Saturday 23rd March.
- The Museum's school's day would move from Tuesday to Wednesday, in term time to capitalise on market days, this would be from April onwards.
- New Exhibition, Plants: The Struggle for Survival, opened on 30th March, and there would be a private view 5th April. This had been re-designed to be more accessible to a broader audience.
- The Museum's pet stick insects have gone to Saffron Walden County High School, the area would be replaced with a climate hub display.
- There would be a Saffron Walden Baptist Church anniversary display in May.
- Arts Council Accreditation – the Arts Council questions on the renewal application would be answered by 5th April.

The Members made the following points:-

- The Joseph Rowntree Trust provided funding and as their founders were non-conformist quakers, this opportunity should be considered.
- In 11 years, it would be the 200th anniversary of the Museum and this should be celebrated.
- In 2025 it would be 50 years since the partnership between the Museum Society and the Council.
- The suggestion to have coffee facilities in the museum was discussed but this would be potentially expensive and resource heavy. It was an option that would be considered in the future.
- The idea of showing big sporting events in the museum grounds with food trucks was raised.
- There was discussion about regular coach parties that came to Saffron Walden and the idea was raised to try and get more details in order to get the Museum included on the tours.

The Curator was exploring a number of avenues to help boost the Museum's income including social prescribing, contacting universities through the Eastern Academic Research Consortium, and working with Addenbrookes.

There were a number of activities coming up for the summer including:-

- A passport scheme for children to visit museums throughout the County which would help to raise their profile.
- Linking to the cycling scheme with Saffron Walden Town Council.
- Summer past times exhibition which would link to the beach theme on the common.

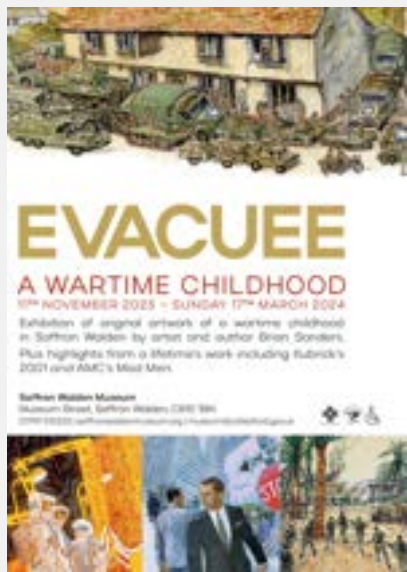
The Members thanked the Curator for the annual report that was handed out in the meeting and for her enthusiasm and innovative ideas. A copy of the report has been appended to the minutes. The Director of Corporate Services agreed that the report could be circulated to all Councillors and Senior Management within the Council.

5 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To be arranged in June 2024 once there was a clearer idea of the timing of consultant's report.

The meeting ended at 7:23pm

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM



EVENTS: PUBLIC

- 14 affordable craft activities for children and families attended by 500 children and generating £1200
- 4 free family events and activities delivered in partnership with Saffron Walden library and Saffron Walden Rotary
- 3 free activities for adults including an impressive pargetting workshop
- An immersive food tasting afternoon
- 2 printing workshops for adults
- The Ashdon meteorite celebration
- Outreach events at Linton Book Festival and Gardens of Easton Lodge
- 3 Archaeological finds liaison events
- Coronation celebration with Saffron Walden Town Council



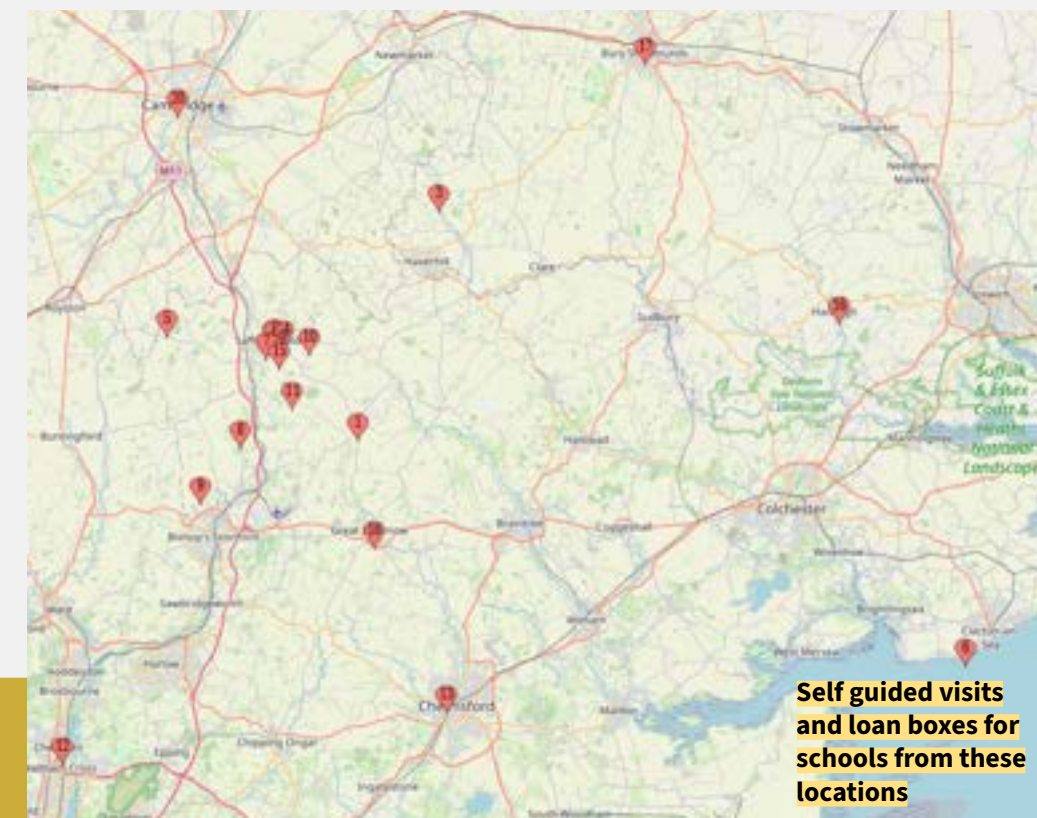
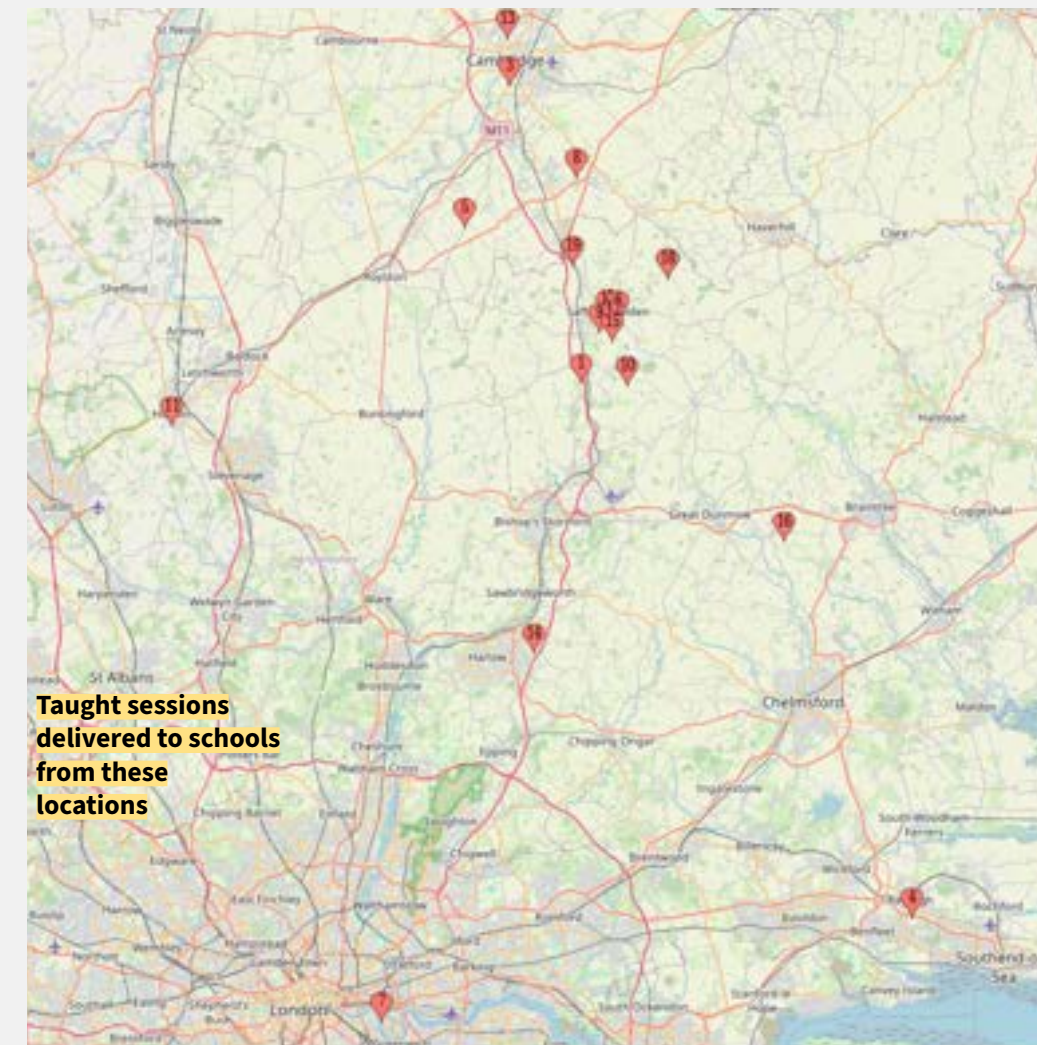
EVENTS: BY INVITATION

- 3 Exhibition private views
- A tea party for our valued volunteers
- Ambitious Women events
- UDC Staff Garden Party
- SWMS New Year Party
- Curator's retirement party



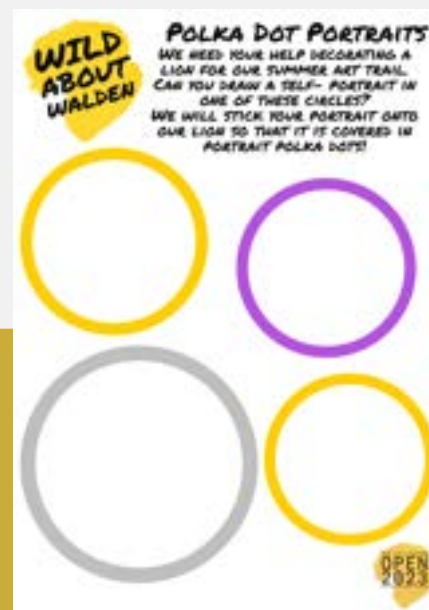
LEARNING

- Taught sessions delivered to over 1,000 school children
- Over 1,000 school children experiencing hands on history through our loan box service
- Free learning resources for all delivered through our learning website
- £3432.44 of income generated by schools sessions either at the museum or as outreach
- £810 of income generated by our school loans service
- A learning services leaflet sent to every school in Uttlesford
- Services used by children across Uttlesford and beyond



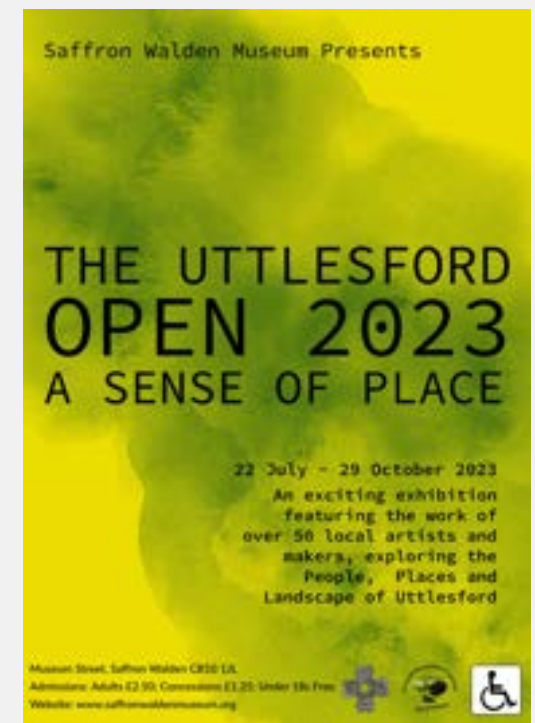
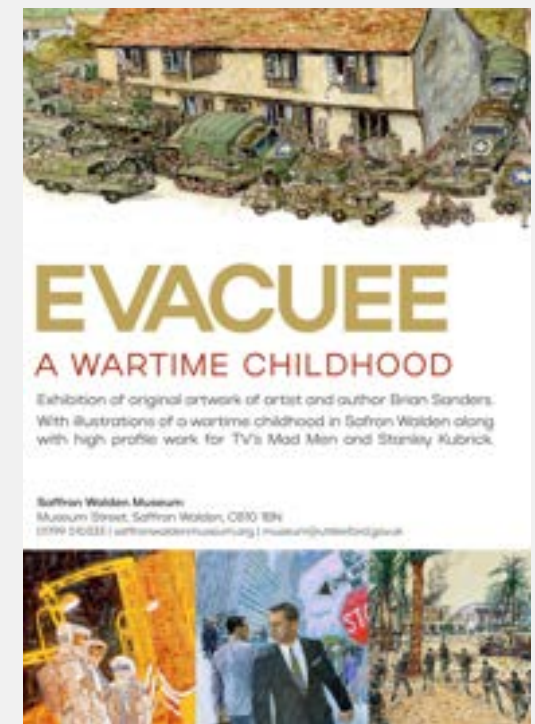
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- Submissions from over 50 artists from across the district
- Continued collaboration with Support 4 Sight to make an inclusive exhibition
- 13 lions at venues around the town decorated by local community groups
- £602.50 generated through entry fees
- £377.50 in commission (ex VAT)
- A free walking trail for families throughout the summer holidays



EXHIBITIONS

- Relevant, accessible & creative.
- Feeding the Family (linked to Uttlesford Foodbank)
- Taste of History – food historian, joined us for a historical food talk, demonstration and tasting.
- Open Art (family and community engagement focussed, hugely popular)
- Evacuee: Wartime Childhood (reminiscence and identity/sense of place)
- Plants: The Struggle for Survival (re-interpreting foundation collections, 19th century herbarium specimens)
- Meteorite display, Anniversary
- Object of the Month, chosen by staff & volunteers
- Curiosity Corner display for kids



GRANT PROJECTS

- Digital Transformation Project, funded by SHARE & supported by the Digital Cultural Network resulted in a newly re-designed website for the museum and google analytics for ongoing evaluation.
- Lost Language of Nature: Continued work on the traveling exhibition cases and celebration event.
- Greater in Spirit Larger in Outlook with Epping Forest Museum – exploring new interpretations of world cultures collections accumulated in Victorian times, community engagement with source and diaspora community groups.



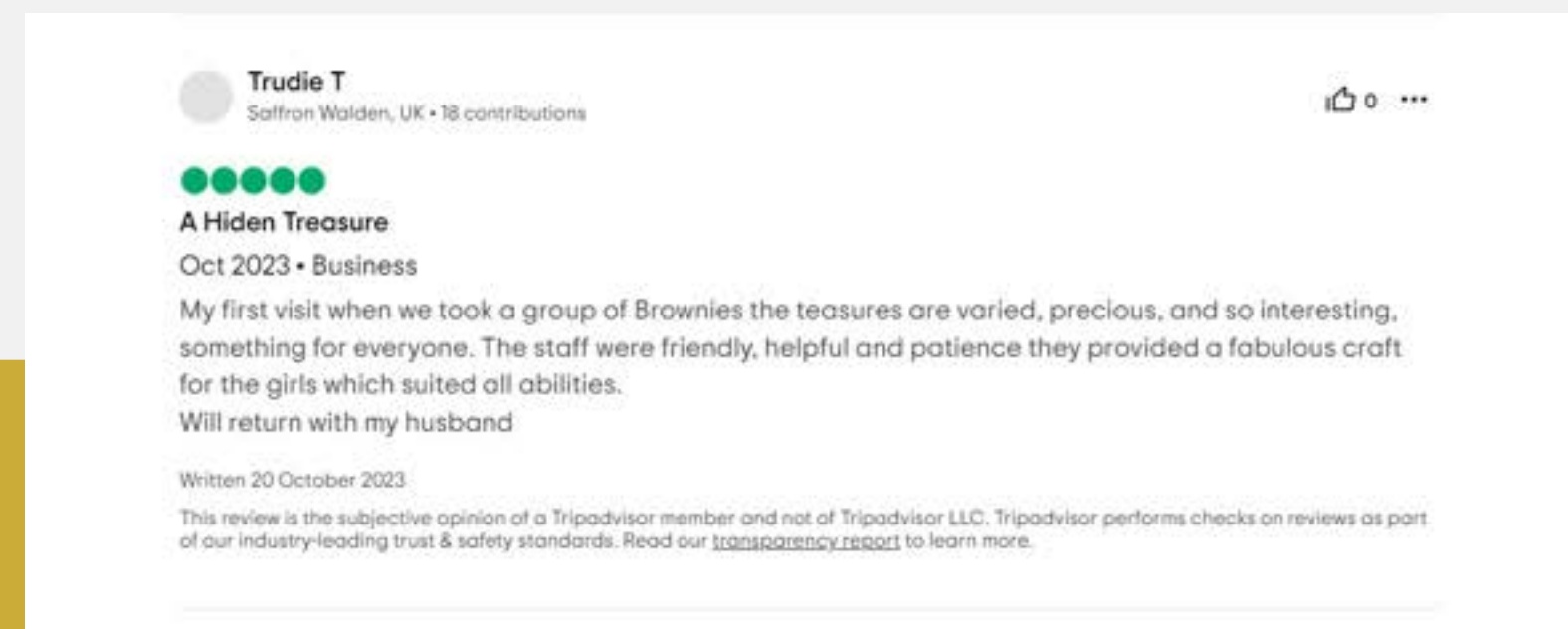
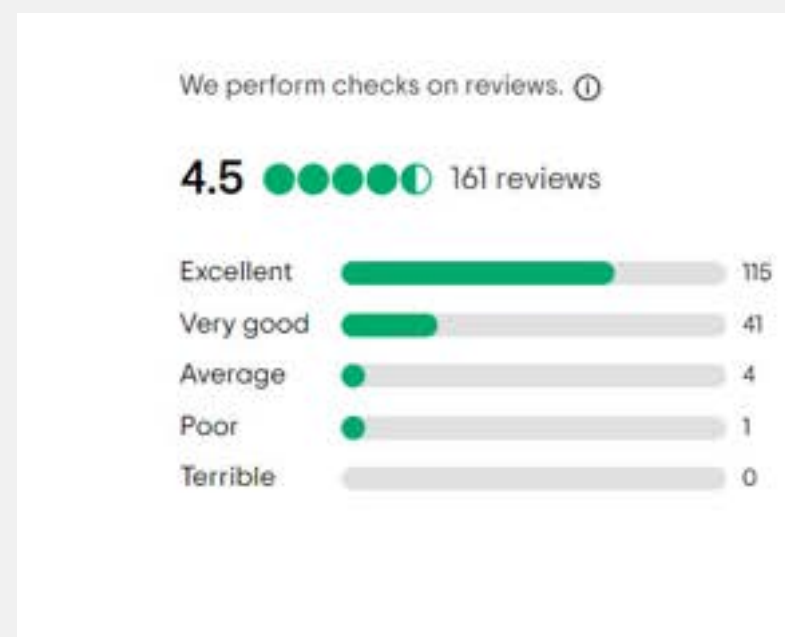
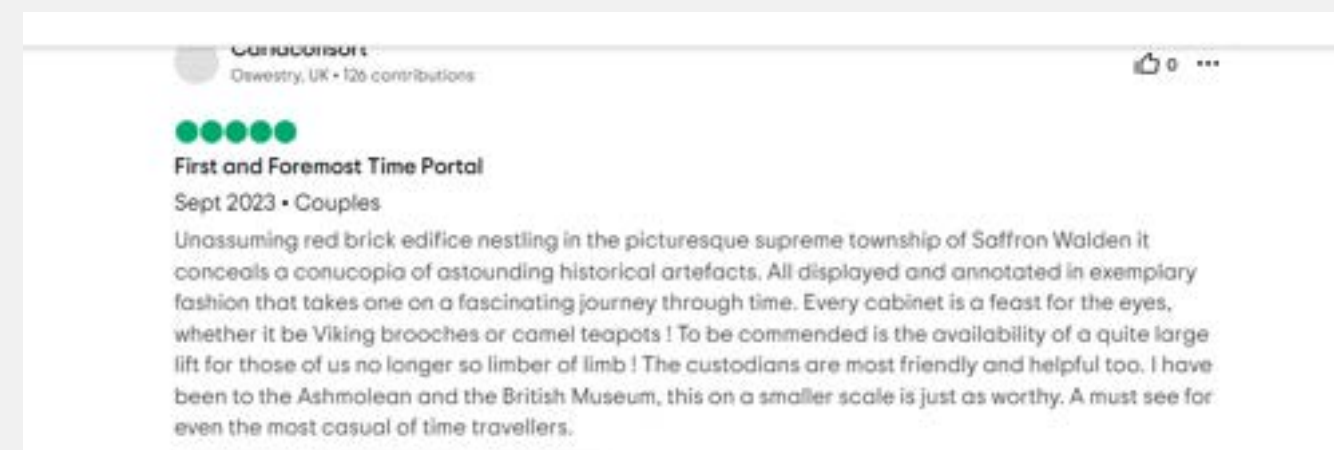
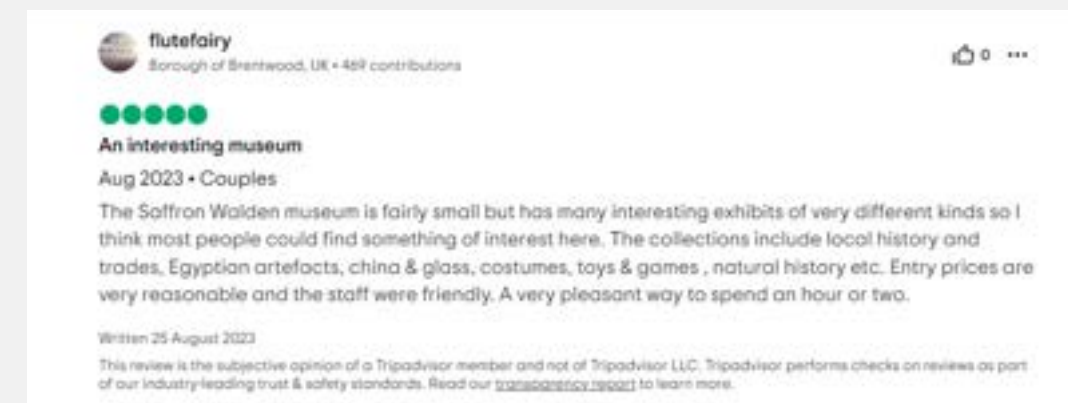
COLLECTIONS

- Collections audits undertaken with volunteers
- Research visits
- Collections Care – Environmental & Pest monitoring
- Cataloguing & Digitisation.
- World cultures collections, research visits by academics, source & diaspora community groups
- Archaeological metals moved to better quality storage at Shire Hill
- Carbon 14 dating of the Tudor Bed funded by the Furniture Society
- Depositions from commercial archaeological units
- Portable Antiquities Treasure finds
- Rationalising collections



PERFORMANCE

- KPI (Users) was significantly increased Oct-Dec – 4,200 versus 2,800 target.
- Great feedback on Tripadvisor and Google Reviews
- Learning income target significantly
- Visit England, Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS)



OTHER

- Accreditation renewal submitted January 2024,
- Staff Fire Marshall Training,
- Maintenance improvements including boiler refit.
- Visit England Access Guide
- We are changing the museum's school's day from Tuesday to Wednesday, to capitalise on market days, in term time from April onwards.
- Work on COSHH (Care of Substances Hazardous to Health) audit with H&S Officer & refuse team, to dispose of toxic and unwanted items safely.
- UDC IT department moving files onto the cloud, OneDrive and Sharepoint. Work on Digital Asset Management (DAM) and data retention.
- Recruited 3 Casual Museum Assistants (standard annual recruitment)
- Recruited a Collections Assistant, as partial backfill for the Collections Officer (Human History post), as JO acting up as Interim Curator.



INTERIM FORWARD PLAN

PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS FOR 24/25

- Reduction lino print workshop
- Botanical cyanotype workshop (June)
- Summer themed exhibition from July-Sept, and cycling to link to SWTC
- Sun Inn Project
- Wheels of Time scheme
- Saffron Walden Baptist Church 250th Anniversary week (May)
- 80th D-Day Anniversary (June)
- Fete de la Musique in the grounds (June)
- Thaxted Family Concert in the grounds (July)
- Gardens of Easton Lodge WW2 themed outreach event (July)
- New external signage
- Interactives improvements
- Climate Hub in discovery centre
- Realisation of external loans...

