

CURATORIAL NEWS



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Free

FROM THE CURATORS...

SPOTLIGHT

Hello,

Following the success of our first newsletter in the summer, here is the autumn edition from the curators Becky and Sarah. As hopefully some of you will already know, the aim of the newsletter is to give you an insight into the work that goes into caring for and displaying a collection of this size. The newsletter is produced quarterly, and is available in hard copy from the Castle, or in downloadable format from the Castle website (www.chiddingstonecastle.org.uk).

During our open season this year, we have been busy not only on our four open days a week maintaining the exhibitions on display, but also behind the scenes. Our biggest achievement over the summer has been project managing the installation of museum standard storage in one of our secure storerooms. This has involved re-packing and documenting all of the objects in the store with the help of a trusted team of volunteers. We then carefully moved all of the objects out of the store, boarded up the windows to prevent the objects being unnecessarily exposed to the light and treated the floorboards for woodworm. Polstore Storage Systems then installed our shelving and we have since moved all of the objects safely back into the storeroom. This new storage system will greatly enhance our ability to use the collection for research and to care for it even better. We are now working on funding applications to re-store the objects in our other storeroom.

Most people think that as we are closed over the winter that we go in to hibernation. Much as we wish this was true (!) our workload increases during the winter as we continue with our program of research, conservation and fundraising. We are also involved in delivering school visits and guided tours over the closed season, so there is never a dull day!

If you have any specific enquiries, please feel free to get in touch using the contact details below.

Best wishes,

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The Beckford Casket is one of Chiddingstone Castle's most ornate and interesting objects. It is one of only two known caskets (the other in Vienna) of renaissance shape made of wood and decorated in Japanese lacquer.



Dating from the late 1630s, the casket was made for the Dutch export market, evident through the decorative borders, geometric designs and motifs that were in contrast to the more modest and free flowing decoration of lacquer created for the domestic market. As well as being decorated elaborately, the casket also has a number of internal compartments including drawers, a sliding panel and a secret compartment in the lid.

The Portuguese reached Japan in the middle of the 16th century, being the first Western country to arrive. They immediately began to trade, ordering a distinctive style of lacquer called *Nanban*, of which we have a number of examples in our collection. When the Dutch arrived in 1600 they tried to take over the Portuguese markets but were not successful in selling lacquer in Holland until the 1630s. Private trade conducted by servants of the Dutch East India Trading Company was the stimulus for the Company to trade in fine-quality pieces. The Beckford casket is a fine example but the most famous example is the van Diemen box in the V&A Museum. The official Dutch shipping documents list cabinets, coffers and other shapes, but not the Beckford, so it was probably for a private order.

What is remarkable about this piece is not only the exceptional craftsmanship and detailed decoration but the intriguing provenance attached to it. The



casket was once in the possession of English millionaire, novelist and art collector William Beckford who famously possessed a large collection of very high quality lacquer pieces. Beckford is probably most renowned for writing the gothic novel 'Vathek' (1786)

and for building the gothic revival house Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire, to house his vast art collection.

EXHIBITIONS

The Victorian kitchen is the exhibition in which we need some assistance. We continue to look for a number of objects to increase its authenticity and make our Victorian themed school sessions even more hands on. Please let us know if you have any of the following items you would be



willing to donate: shoe brushes, black leather shoes, small rugs, a carpet beater, a dolly, a posser, a metal barrel for washing clothes, small lace items, white napkins, ladies' gloves, pestles and mortars, matching set of silver cutlery, small silverware items, old pillow cases and tea towels for washing and ironing activities.



All donations for hands on Victorian activities will be very gratefully received!

Plans are being made by members of the Castle team Peter and Marie Jackson to create a Japanese stroll garden in the Castle grounds, to reflect and



enhance the beautiful Japanese collection on display inside the building. These gardens will include a Japanese tea house, and to

give context to this feature a display on tea and the Japanese tea ceremony is currently being researched by Sarah and volunteers within the curatorial team. The display will be developed over the closed season (28th September 2009 to Good Friday 2010) and will feature objects from the Japanese collection related to tea and the tea ceremony, such as the fantastic number of *natsume* (tea caddies), teapots and tea bowls.



In addition to this display, stored objects from the Egyptian and Stuart and Jacobite collections will be researched and displayed as part of the curatorial team's rotating display ethos, which not only allows the public to see more of Denys Bower's astounding collections, but allows objects to 'rest' away from light and fluctuating relative humidity and temperature damage. More information about these changes will be published in the Winter Curatorial Newsletter.

CONSERVATION

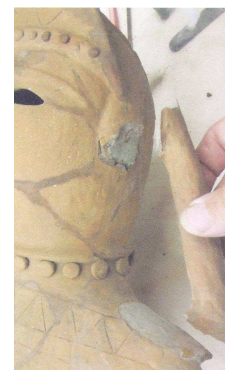
At the Castle as part of our everyday duties, we practise preventive conservation. This slows down the deterioration of an object by moderating the harmful elements of its environment. This includes monitoring temperature, relative humidity levels, eradicating pest and insect damage, and minimising light levels.

However, particularly in a place such as a castle, the environment and building itself can cause damage to an object at some speed. So it is crucial that we constantly monitor the exhibition rooms. Unfortunately in 2007 the Castle was without a curator and one particular object felt the effect of a combination of poor historic repair and lack of environmental control.

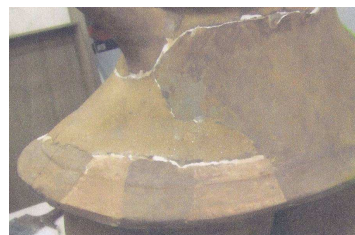


The earliest objects in our Japanese collection are our three 6th century haniwa. They are clay tomb figures which would stand around the edge of large keyhole-shaped imperial tombs. These figures were left in a damp room and old repair became white due to efflorescing

white salts. We contacted Richard Jaeschke, archaeological conservator, to stabilise the figure. The picture above shows the warrior haniwa before conservation.



The figure was in many pieces with some parts missing (right). It had been extensively restored and the pieces joined with unknown adhesives and gapfilled with different substances including cement backed with paper. The gapfill also extended over the original surface in many places and had been painted in several phases with different colours (below). Among other work,



Richard swabbed the surface to remove the overpaint, dust, dirt and white salts. He also reattached detached fragments of ceramic. The haniwa

is now back on display in our Japanese exhibition.

Conservation is crucial to prolonging the life of these objects, but is very expensive. If you are interested in making a monetary contribution to our conservation fund then please contact us via email or phone.