
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

Held on Monday, 26 February 2018 at 1.30 pm in
Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum, Fakenham Road, Gressenhall, Beetley,
Dereham, NR20 4DR

PRESENT

Mr H. E. J. Clarke (Chairman)	Mr F. Eagle
Mr P.J. Duigan (Vice-Chairman)	Mr M. Kiddle-Morris
Councillor C. Bowes	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr P. R. W. Darby	Mr W. R. J. Richmond

Also Present

David Blackburn (Co-optee)

In Attendance

Dr Robin Hanley	- Head of Operations and Learning
Hannah Jackson	- Operations Manager - West
Mr Oliver Bone	- Curator of the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer

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1/18 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

2/18 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gordon Bambridge, Councillor Terry Jermy, Councillor John Ward and Dr Keith Robinson.

3/18 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

The Chairman hoped that everyone enjoyed the tour of the Norfolk Collections Centre that took place prior to the meeting.

In future, meetings would commence at 10.30am; however, if a tour was included, Members would be asked to be at the venue by 9.30am.

On another matter, Members were asked if they would prefer to go paperless; Members were asked to inform the Democratic Services Team at Breckland Council if they did not want a paper copy of the agenda in future.

Another announcement made was from Hannah Jackson, the Operations Manager at the Museum. Prior to the start of the season on Saturday, 10

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March 2018, there would be a preview day aimed at Norfolk Pass Holders, Friends of Gressenhall and anyone who played the National Lottery. This event would be more of a drop-in session and would be promoted to all groups, organisations and individuals who had helped to create and support the Voices from the Workhouse project.

4/18 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

None.

5/18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

None.

6/18 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Oliver Bone, the Curator of the Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life presented the report and provided Members with a detailed overview of the exhibitions and events that had taken place since November 2017 which included:

- Handmade, Millennia of making Exhibition;
- Pulp, pin trays, pails and pots, the story of Thetford Pulp Ware exhibition; and
- Thetford Remembers, 1914 – 1918 – Commemorative events.

Councillor Kybird asked about the poppies that were being knitted for the 'Battle's Over' event taking place on 11 November 2018 to mark the centenary of the Armistice. He knew of other people who were knitting poppies but did not know who to send them to. Mr Bone said that he would keep everyone informed accordingly.

It was noted that the Thetford Remembers project had recently been chosen as a case study by the Heritage Lottery Fund for a publication about projects that it had enabled. A meeting had been arranged to take this forward.

The forthcoming displays were also highlighted, one of which was the Thetford and Punjab Festival and Exhibition. There would be several weeks of activities in July 2018. Included in these festivities would be a Maharajah Duleep Singh exhibition and a painting from the National Museums of Scotland would be loaned to Ancient House for this occasion from July until the end of November 2018.

Feasibility work continued for making a new display at Ancient House to make more of the unusual connections between the Museum and the Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family. A recent gift of a portrait of the Maharajah was planned to be included in the display. On the bank holiday Sunday in August, up to 10,000 people were expected to visit Thetford to commemorate the death of Duleep Singh.

The Museum once again took part in the town's Christmas Lights Switch and in the recent half term there had been a good turnout for the Anglo Saxon event; unlike the Silver Social Partnership event that had been poorly attended.

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By**

The Museum was filmed for the BBC's Antiques Road Trip in August 2017 and the programme was broadcast on 22 January 2018. Ancient House was also featured in a news item for ITV for the 150th birthday of Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, broadcast on the evening news on 20 January 2018.

Referring to other Museum developments, Mr Bone highlighted the fact that during 2017-18 the Museum had been and would be hosting a 12 month traineeship provided through the NMS Teaching Museum programme funded by the Arts Council England. Sam Belotti, the Museum's current trainee, was doing very well and would be undertaking a range of museum work to gain experience for his future career.

The visitor numbers were circulated and showed that year to date attendance figures were on track as the previous year. Dr Robin Hanley was very pleased with the visitor numbers and felt that all sites were making a valuable contribution with excellent programming.

The subject of marketing future events was discussed. The way events were marketed was changing for example a Wildlife weekend at Norwich Castle was advertised through Facebook which cost nothing and had attracted over 3,000 visitors.

Councillor Darby had noticed that the Time & Tide Museum had attracted more visitors than previous years in September. Members were informed that this had been due to the Titanic exhibition that took place in the summer.

Councillor Duigan questioned the visitor numbers in November for Ancient House which was less than previous years. Mr Bone explained that other events in Thetford at the same time had an impact on the Museum.

Councillor Richmond asked if the trainee was just based in Thetford. Members were informed that these trainees got a taste of life and were involved in all activities at all the Museums across the County. It was noted that other trainees had gained permanent jobs in the Museum sector. Dr Robin Hanley pointed out that there had been a really good success rates from those placements.

The Chairman felt that all credit should go to Mr Bone for the trainee system and he thanked him for his report.

7/18 GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Hannah Jackson, the Operations Manager for Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse presented the report and circulated a 'What's on 2018' leaflet to Members which was still considered to be the most popular way to advertise events at the moment. These leaflets would be sent out to all local and countywide organisations.

Gressenhall continued to offer a broad programme of events based around four operational models:

- Special Events days

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- Days with a Difference
- Norfolk School Holidays Activities; and
- Ticketed Events

Two new events planned for 2018 was the Father's Day – Beer and Brewing on 17 June and the Victorian Family Christmas planned for 20th and 21st of December.

The Museum opened its doors to the public in the recent half term holiday but visitor numbers were down most probably due to the inclement weather conditions.

Councillor Duigan mentioned the leaflet distribution and pointed out that there should be a specific place in the libraries where they should be displayed as he had noticed on several occasions that these leaflets were buried amongst other tourism material. Dr Robin Hanley said that he would contact Norfolk County Council's Head of Library Services, Janet Holden to discuss whether these leaflets could have more of a centrepiece within the libraries.

The Chairman mentioned Breckland Council's Market Town Initiative and felt a more joined up approach should be taken.

Other Museum developments included the successful grant award from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Voices from the Workhouse project and a dedicated space had been created to house an annual show. The 2018 exhibition Beer and Brewing - Norfolk's Rural Pubs would open for the start of the main season. This event would look at the changing roles of pubs and the relationships that they had on their local communities.

Gressenhall's Curator Dr Megan Dennis had been given the funding to visit Minnesota to develop links with the Digital Humanities Forum at Carleton College.

Also, in recent months the Friends of Gressenhall had generously agreed to support a project to restore the farmers' Foundry engine boiler (formerly part of the Bygones Collection at Holkham) back to working use. All volunteers played a very important part in the Museum's livelihood and last year at least 9,000 hours had been provided and Members were pleased to note that the number of volunteers was on the increase.

As far as marketing was concerned, maintaining and growing a strong Social Media presence remained a key priority for the Museum and the site now had four Social Media Champions to ensure the regular publishing of interesting content on Facebook and Twitter to engage with an ever widening audience.

Visitor numbers for 2017-18 to date was very strong and hidden behind these numbers were positive income figures. Members were asked not to take notice of the December 2017 visitor numbers that were slightly down from previous years as a couple of school trips had been inadvertently omitted from the chart and the Christmas event had been cancelled.

Councillor Duigan asked for his thanks to be conveyed to Megan Dennis for her help with the Dereham Antiquarians.

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Councillor Darby wanted to know more about the outreach work and asked if Care Homes were visited. The Operations Manager advised that Gressenhall did go out to a number of groups including Care Homes.

Councillor Richmond asked whether the Museum had approached Easton College in relation to the Futuristic Farming event in May. In response, Members were informed that the Royal Norfolk College of Farming had been approached.

The Chairman wished all concerned a very successful season and thanked the Operations Manager for her report.

8/18 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Chairman looked forward to seeing everyone at the next meeting on 14th May 2018 at 10.30am at Ancient House, Thetford.

Councillor Richmond conveyed his apologies for the May and September meetings.

The Chairman asked the Democratic Services Officer to check the dates of Norfolk County Council meetings to avoid any future clashes.

The meeting closed at 2.30 pm

CHAIRMAN