

Norwich Area Museums Committee**14:00 to 15:45****11 September 2018**

Present: **City Councillors:** **County Councillors:**
 Fulton-McAlister (E), (chair) Nobbs (vice chair)
 Bradford Clipsham,
 Huntley Jones (B)
 Maxwell Rumsby
 Price Ward
 Trevor Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society), and County Councillor Buck (Broadland District Council)

Apologies: Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund)

1. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

2. Declarations of interest

None.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2018.

4. Friends of the Norwich Museums – Acquisitions

Felicity Devonshire, on behalf of the Friends of the Norwich Museums, gave a presentation of the DVD *90 Objects* which highlighted the acquisitions made by the Friends and given to the museums service over 90 years. She said that Richard Fair at The Forum Trust would be creating another DVD of *100 Objects* to celebrate the Friends' centenary

5. Norwich Museums Briefing: June to August 2018

The assistant head of museums presented the report and highlighted areas of specific interest to members.

Members noted that *The Paston Treasure: Riches and Rarities of the Known World* exhibition was one of the most ambitious ever displayed at Norwich Castle with over 50 lenders, including international loans from the USA and the Netherlands. The exhibition had received critical acclaim and full catalogues were available, with condensed versions of the catalogue retailing at £9.99 available in the museum shop.

Members welcomed the forthcoming centenary exhibition, *Armistice: Legacy of the Great War* (20 October 2018 to 6 January 2019) and accepted the assistant head of museums' suggestion to arrange a tour for members on the day of the next committee meeting. The assistant head of museums would provide more information on the major exhibition *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* (9 February to 8 September 2019) at the next meeting.

The assistant head of museums then outlined the key events held at the Norwich museums. The *Norwich Medieval Mystery Plays*, created and directed by local theatre director Peter Beck, had been performed at Norwich Castle and Norwich Cathedral and had been well received. The plays also provided an opportunity to link into four local schools to learn more about the city's medieval past and traditions. The first performance of the plays in 500 years was in 2016 and it was the intention to make this a bi-annual event.

The assistant head of museums referred to the report and pointed out that The Summer Holiday Family Programme had encouraged visitors to the museums during the challenging hot weather. The programme incorporated activities which promoted *The Paston Treasure* exhibition at Norwich Castle; a varied programme at Strangers' Hall including *Busy for Lizzy* activities and a walking tour of Norwich, commemorating the visit of Queen Elizabeth I to Norwich in 1578; and a Refugee Day at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell which was funded by the Freeman of Norwich. The Freeman of Norwich had supported a fortnight from 24 July to 4 August which enabled Strangers' Hall and The Museum of Norwich to open free for visitors. Despite the hot weather, 2,000 visitors had attended The Museum of Norwich, during the fortnight. Of those visitors surveyed 48 per cent said that they had never visited the museum before and 98 per cent said that they would make a return visit.

The committee then considered the work of the activities of the learning team and its work in partnership with the Norfolk youth offending team and schools, particularly its engagement with secondary schools. Members also noted that the conference for history teachers and had been held during term time to ensure that it was well attended. Members expressed an interest in inviting Jenni Williams, Norwich Learning Officer, to the next meeting of the committee.

The *Knight Club* was an initiative that had come out of the activities plan for the Keep Project and provided an opportunity for children aged 8 to 11 to learn more about all aspects of medieval life. The assistant head of museums said that the club's activities had been piloted during the keep project development phase and that the NMS learning assistants had real skills at demonstrating medieval armaments and armour.

The bid for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Kick the Dust programme had been successful, with formal Permission to Start confirmed. Recruitment was

underway for a project coordinator and three project worker posts. It was anticipated that project activity would commence in November or December and continue for 3.5 years. The assistant head of museums said that further information on the progress of this project would be reported to future meetings of the committee.

During discussion members noted the retirement of Colly Mudie from her role as Norwich learning manager and considered that she would be “sorely missed”. She had been responsible for leading the award winning team.

The operations manager then referred to the Other Developments section of the report and pointed out that there had been a 5 per cent increase in registrar wedding bookings against 2017-18, with 622 ceremonies and as many as 6 or 7 held on key Fridays and Saturdays in the year. He also advised members that the History Mystery Escape Room games at the Museum of Norwich were proving very popular and likely to extend the hours of operation to Friday evenings and Sundays. He also reported that the external lift was fully operational. The complete refurbishment of the external Castle lift would commence in early winter for completion in January or February.

Discussion ensued on the analysis of twilight tickets at Norwich Castle as requested by members at the last meeting. The operations manager said that the outcome of the survey of visitors purchasing twilight tickets had been passed to the county council’s marketing manager. As had been anticipated by officers, visitors purchasing the twilight tickets were split 50:50 between those from NR postcodes and from outside Norfolk. The operations manager answered questions on the details of the survey. It had been a random survey of a sample of twilight visitors over a two month period. The results showed that a number of single visitors visited the museums, perhaps whilst their partner was shopping in the city, or as part of a visit to the Norwich. The chair said that she had been questioned as part of the survey. Members considered that a similar exercise of day tickets and across the Norwich museums would be a useful exercise. The assistant head of operations confirmed that regular surveys and analysis of museum audiences were undertaken, and led by Charles Wilde, marketing manager. He would invite him to a future meeting of the committee to provide more information about current audiences at Norwich museums.

In reply to a member’s question, the operations manager answered questions on the procurement of a contractor to provide a wedding and event management service for the Norwich museums. Currently there was limited provision to provide specialist catering in house and the contract had been awarded to Florentina.

Members noted the article in the “Independence Matters” publication on Harlan, who had a placement at Norwich Castle under the Opportunities at Work and Learning (OWL) initiative in partnership with adult social services. The scheme encouraged independence and work experience. Harlan would continue his placement at Norwich Castle and attended college.

The assistant head of museums referred to the report and drew members’ attention to paragraph 7.6 which demonstrated the breadth of the museums service and the work of the conservation department on the conservation of the Winfarthing Anglo-Saxon pendant.

Members also noted that Dr Rosy Gray had been appointed to the post of curator of modern and contemporary art.

The operations manager, circulated details of visitor numbers at the meeting, and reported on visitor numbers and said that this summer had been particularly challenging because of the hot weather making outdoor activities more attractive than visiting a museum. Members noted that visitor numbers to Norwich Castle were down 7 per cent on this period last year though members were advised that, because of the record breaking attendances to the Nelson exhibition last year, to use the 2016-17 figures for comparison. Members also noted that in respect of the Museum of Norwich and Strangers Hall, attendances this year were down by 20 per cent. Despite the same amount of marketing and promotion, attendance at the Freeman of Norwich's free attendance across the two sites was down by 32 per cent and was mainly attributed to the weather. Discussion ensued on the visitor numbers and variations across all the county's museums and a member suggested that the targets could be set higher. The assistant head of museums said that statistics were collected and monitored throughout the year, a key one being the number of school visits, and were set in consultation with the county council's statistics team. He was confident that the number of school visits could be sustained. The learning team had achieved targets despite the keep basement being out of use during this period.

Dr John Davies, project director for the Norwich Castle Keep project, presented an oral report on the progress of the project. The bid had been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and a decision was expected later that month on funding to support the project delivery stage. The project bid was strong and comprehensive, but this was a challenging and competitive process. He was proud that the project team had done themselves "justice". An application for planning permission and listed building consent had been submitted to the city council in June. He explained that the wider project team was on standby to commence the next stage of delivery and that community engagement was ongoing. Work was commencing on creating a Norwich tapestry based on the Bayeux tapestry and written in Latin. Taster sessions were being held to recruit embroiderers.

During discussion members commented on *The Square Box on the Hill*, and considered that it was of interest to the wider public and there was potential for elements of it to become a permanent exhibition at Norwich Castle. Members were advised that Paris Agar, project curator, would be leaving the Norfolk Museums Service to take up a post at the Imperial War Museum Duxford. She had been responsible for *The Square Box on the Hill* exhibition and had a major role in putting the HLF bid together.

Members noted that Dr Davies would be retiring from the museums service. He said that as the keep project was moving into another phase it was an opportune time to go and that Robin Hanley, assistant head of museums would be stepping into the role of leading the project. The chair thanked Dr Davies for his support and contribution to the museums service and Councillors Maxwell, Ward and Bradford, and Brenda Ferris, joined in congratulating Dr Davies and praising both him and Paris Agar for their contribution to the work of the committee, the museums service and the keep project.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) thank the officers for the report;
- (2) record the committee's gratitude to Colly Mudie, Paris Agar and Dr John Davies, and to ask the chair to write on behalf of the committee to express the committee's best wishes for their futures;
- (3) ask the assistant head of museums to arrange for Kate Thaxton, curator, to facilitate a tour of the *Armistice: Legacy of the Great War* exhibition on the day of the next meeting;
- (4) ask the assistant head of museums to invite Jenni Williams (Norwich learning officer) to talk to the committee on the work of the learning team;
- (5) ask the assistant head of museums to invite Charles Wilde, the county council's marketing officer, to a future meeting of the committee.

6. Friends of the Norwich Museums

Felicity Devonshire presented the report, which was circulated at the meeting, which outlined the forthcoming activities of the Friends of the Norwich Museums and preparations to mark the Friends' 100th birthday celebrations. She said that invitations had been received to speak to two Women's Institute meetings which provided an opportunity to promote the Friends and encourage new members to join. The Friends had received two applications from the museums service for initial funding to purchase two rare and important finds, The Sceatta Hord of early English silver coins and a Mid-Bronze Age gold torc found at Great Dunham.

RESOLVED to note and thank Felicity Devonshire for the report.

7. Norfolk Contemporary Art Society

(The chair agreed to take this as an additional item.)

Brenda Ferris circulated copies of the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society's autumn newsletter at the meeting (www.n-cas.org.uk) and said that the society had around 450 members. Frances Martin had been appointed as the society's new administrator replacing Sarah Ballard and she was also the administrator for the Norwich 20 group. The society's visit to Cambridge on 6 October would include the New Hall Art Collection at Murray Edwards College where members would meet former Norfolk Museums Service curator, Harriet Loffler.

RESOLVED to note the report and thank Brenda Ferris for the report.

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CHAIR