

Norwich Area Museums Committee**14:00 to 15:40****6 March 2018**

Present:

City Councillors:

Brociek-Coulton (chair)
Bradford
Herries
Jones (T)
Maxwell
Price

County Councillors:

Nobbs (vice chair, in the chair)
Clipsham,
Jones (B)
Rumsby
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society) and County Councillor Buck (vice-chairman, Norfolk Joint Museums committee) (ex officio member)

Apologies:

County Councillor Ward (other council business) and co-opted non-voting member Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund)

1. Friends of Norwich Museums

The chair welcomed Felicity Devonshire, the newly appointed representative of the Friends of Norwich Museums, to her first meeting of the committee.

The chair and members of the committee took the opportunity to express their gratitude for the contribution that Ceri Lamb had made over the several years that she had represented the Friends of Norwich Museums on the committee. The chair would write to her to express the committee's gratitude.

2. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

3. Declarations of interest

None.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2017. .

5. Update on Magritte Discoveries

Dr Georgia Bottinelli, Curator of Historic Art, gave a presentation on the discovery of the fourth and final part of René Magritte's lost masterpiece *La Pose Enchantée (The Enchanted Pose)* in Brussels.

In reply to a question, the curator said that artist's often reused canvases to save money. However it was unusual for a painting that had been exhibited to be cut up for other paintings. Magritte might have done this for a number of reasons, such as the painting had been damaged, that the painting was too large and could not be sold or that his style had changed and he needed the canvas for other works. Members were advised that *The Human Condition* was now "beautiful and vibrant" since it had been cleaned prior to its exhibition in Paris.

Brenda Ferris advised the committee that *The Human Condition* was one of the paintings that comprised Lady Jane Adeane's bequest to the precursor of the East Anglia Art Foundation, when a Norwich Tate was envisaged. The painting was now on permanent loan to Norwich Castle and Art Gallery. Sir Robert Adeane had been a keen collector of contemporary paintings. Both he and Lady Adeane had connections with East Anglia and wanted the paintings to be on display to the public. Paintings from the Adeane collection had also been bequeathed to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

The head of operations and learning said that there would be a small exhibition to update visitors to Norwich Castle of the discovery of the final part of *The Enchanted Pose*.

RESOLVED to thank Dr Georgia Bottinelli for her presentation.

6. Norwich Museums Briefing: December 2017 to February 2018

The head of operations and learning referred to the adverse weather conditions and explained that it had been necessary to close the museums on 28 February 2018 and in order to reopen Norwich Castle the following day, deploy members of staff from the Museum of Norwich. Members of staff had shown great commitment by clearing the bridge of snow and ice. All of the Norwich museums were re-opened by the weekend. It had been necessary to postpone some out-of-hours events. A wedding ceremony had gone ahead on 28 February 2018.

The head of operations and learning then presented the report and answered members' questions.

In reply to a question about the importance of exhibitions such as the *Rembrandt: Lighting the Darkness* and the newly opened *The Square Box on the Hill*, the head of operations and learning confirmed that the learning team was involved at an early stage in the development of all exhibitions. This was not only to promote school visits, but also to develop activities to encourage families and target early years, pre-school children.

Members were advised to view the Norwich Castle; Open Art Show: Inheritance (3 March to 20 May 2018) which was delivered in partnership with the East Anglia Art Fund, and provided artists resident in East Anglia the opportunity to show and sell

recent work. The theme complimented the *Norwich Castle: Gateway to Medieval England Project* and *The Square Box on the Hill* exhibition.

Members also noted that Dr Francesca Vanke, keeper of art and curator of decorative art at Norwich Castle, had contributed to the catalogue which supported *The Paston Treasure: Riches and Rarities of the Known World* currently on exhibition at the Yale Center for British Art, Connecticut and at Norwich Castle (23 June to 23 September 2018).

The committee noted that the *Armistice: Legacy of the Great War* centenary exhibition (20 October 2018 to January 2018) had been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and other funding partners, including the Town Close Estate charity and the Norfolk Regimental Museum Trustees. In reply to a question, the head of operations and learning said that he would ask the curator as to whether the exhibition would include references to the Russian Civil War. He pointed out that there would also be a mobile exhibition.

The committee noted that 3,600 visitors had attended the *Winter Wildlife Weekend* (20 to 21 January 2018) at Norwich Castle, and that the increase in visitor numbers, which had been 800 in previous years, was attributed to the use of social media, especially Facebook. Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) was aware of the potential of social media.

The committee noted that Strangers' Hall had closed between Christmas and New Year and that 21 volunteers, comprising NMS staff on their days off, regular volunteers and volunteers who worked at Aviva, had carried out the annual deep clean.

Members of the committee were interested in the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell's crowdfunding campaign to display the recently renovated Samson figure and welcomed the generous donation from The Friends of Norwich Museums. Following discussion it was agreed that, as members had a great deal of interest in this project, there would be a detailed presentation at the next meeting of the committee.

During discussion a member said that as a child she remembered the toy display in the Keep and hoped that there would be a display of toys at Norwich Castle as it was a good advertisement for Strangers Hall. The head of operations and learning said that it was planned that a bid will be submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund to improve the display of toys at Strangers' Hall and increase access to the wonderful collection. At Norwich Castle, the Keep project would ensure that there was a focus on early years' children and would create specific areas of interest for families with pre-school children.

The committee noted the work and activities of the learning team which included the *Childminders Day at Norwich Castle*. A member suggested that given the importance of working with early years children, childminders could be shown how to use handling boxes effectively. The head of operations and learning said that there had been some work around this and he would support the development of this proposal as there was more demand for outreach than NMS staff could provide.

Discussion ensued on the work of NMS with the Youth Offending Team and it was noted that the museums provided a neutral venue for young people who were then able to open up in conversation with their support workers. A member pointed out that this had beneficial outcomes for the young people. Members also noted that if the bid was successful, the four year programme *Kick the Dust* would benefit hard to reach young people.

The committee noted that the school library van *Learnalot* was used at events but there was concern that the service might not be sustainable in the long term.

In the absence of the operations manager, the head of operations and learning presented the *Other Developments* section of the report. In reply to a question from a member, he confirmed that there had been 600 weddings in the Wedding Room at Norwich Castle this year and that it was busiest in the summer months with several weddings a day.

Discussion ensued on the external lift improvements and members were advised that a temporary improvement had been achieved by the works to the lift last year but the mechanism and lift carriage needed to be replaced. The project would also include refurbishment of both entrances to the lift and improved signage and interpretation. The works were currently under procurement.

In reply to a question, the head of operations and learning, advised the committee that the first placement under the Opportunities in Work and Learning scheme had commenced in January 2018. NMS in partnership with adult social services was supporting young people over 18 in receipt of a personalised budget in work based placements to gain experience which would assist them in securing paid employment.

The head of operations and learning, in reply to a question, said that the case to the city council's civic regalia had been water damaged following a heavy storm. The silver had therefore been removed for safe keeping and was currently in the fine art store. It was not cost effective to replace the water-damaged case because all the display cases in the Keep would be removed as part of the Keep Project. Curators were liaising with the city council about the future arrangements for the display of the civic regalia.

The committee then viewed the visitor numbers which were circulated at the meeting. Members noted that the number of visitors were down in February, due in part to the poor weather during half term holiday. The fluctuations in monthly figures, compared from one year to the next, were also due to where school holidays fell and to the change-over period from between exhibitions. Overall visitor numbers were very strong and exceeded targets and this was attributed to the success of the major exhibitions. School visits were also doing well. Discussion ensued on how targets were reviewed. The head of operations and learning said that when targets were set for the next year following discussion with the council's statisticians. Members expressed their gratitude that the Town Close Charity would fund the free days at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell and Strangers' Hall again this year. The committee noted that over the whole service visitor numbers to museums were doing well.

A member pointed out that over half of all visits were to Norwich Castle and asked how the Keep Project would affect the service. The head of operations and learning said that it was anticipated that Norwich Castle would remain open throughout the development and that the scheduled Viking exhibition would be popular as it had previously seen very strong visitor numbers when displayed at Nottingham and York.

Tim Pestell, curator, provided a brief update on the progress of the Keep project. The project was moving forward to a tight deadline in accordance with the business plans. The project was 93% funded and would become eligible for further funding as the third stage was completed.

The curator invited members to view the archaeological works which were currently being undertaken in the basement. He explained that a metric survey had been taken of the castle which was an exact measurement of the building stone by stone and had shown a discrepancy of 60 cm on previous surveys. The archaeological survey was taking place in the north east and south west quadrants and would be around the internal lift shaft which would be replaced. There had been previous surveys in 1986 and the 70s and together with this survey would provide a better idea of the stratigraphy of the building. It would be necessary to use a crane to move materials on to the site because of the weight limit on the bridge and to protect areas of the mound. The archaeological works would also facilitate structural samples being taken through the depth of the mound. There had been some burials of prisoners in the vicinity of the castle. The project would also ensure that the wall to the Great Hall, dating back to Edward I, would be fully excavated and documented.

The curator then spoke of the collections that would be displayed as part of the Keep project. The British Museum would be loaning 100 objects to Norwich Castle. Norwich was mentioned in early texts as being a diverse community. It was important to tell the story of medieval Norwich and its relationship with the Jewish community and other faiths using objects from The British Museum's rich collection.

During discussion, a member asked whether there were skilled craftspeople, such as stone masons, who could carry out the work. The curator confirmed that there were sufficient stone masons with the required skills to carry out the work. He explained that the works to the Keep were not to provide a replica but an interpretation of a Norman great hall.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the report;
- (2) ask the head of operations and learning to investigate whether the Russian Civil War will be included in the "Legacy of the Great War" exhibition;
- (3) record the committee's gratitude to the members of staff and volunteers who conducted the annual deep clean at Strangers' Hall;
- (4) ask the head of operations and learning to invite Jenny Canes, curator at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell, to the next meeting to give a presentation on the Save Samson campaign and provide details of the background to the project;

- (5) record the committee's gratitude to the learning team for its contribution to the museums services and to ask the head of operations to explore whether the suggestion that childminders are trained to use handling boxes can be facilitated;
- (6) note the progress of the Keep project and that members of the committee are invited to view the archaeological works following the end of the meeting.

7. Friends of Norwich Museums report

Felicity Devonshire presented the report which updated members on the activities of the Friends of Norwich Museums (FNM).

She added that the FNM were very pleased to be able to support the Save Samson campaign and that its contribution would provide a digital interpretation of the display at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell. The FNM was also committed to support the Keep project.

Members were advised that the FNM hosted monthly talks and that the next one would be on 29 March at 14:30 given by Clive Slater, research associate, NMS, *Searching for Birds' Names in Honour of John Henry Gurney* and that further details could be found on its website.

During discussion a member said that the proposal to update the CD depicting 90 objects given by the group to the NMS over the years to 100 objects to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2021, was an excellent one. Felicity Devonshire said that she would ensure that the committee was updated with the proposals for the FNM'S celebrations of the anniversary.

Felicity Devonshire said that looking forward the FNM would like to be more involved with the work of the learning team and the Kick the Dust project. The head operations and learning said that the Friends of the Kings Lynn Museums had launched a scheme to encourage younger members.

RESOLVED to thank Felicity Devonshire for her report.

8. Norfolk Contemporary Art Society

Brenda Ferris said that the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society had a busy schedule of events planned for the year. She advised members that Martin Blackwell, Norwich Bid, would be giving a talk *The Importance of Public Art* at the Forum that evening.

(The Norfolk Contemporary Art Society spring programme is available on its website: http://www.n-cas.org.uk/uploads/cms/file/ncas_spring_2018_web.pdf)

RESOLVED to thank Brenda Ferris for her report.

CHAIR