



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 16:45

5 June 2018

Present:

City Councillors:

Fulton-McAlister (E), (chair,
following election)
Bradford
Huntley
Maxwell
Price

County Councillors:

Nobbs (vice chair, following election)
Clipsham,
Jones (B)
Ward
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

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

Apologies: City Councillor Trevor and County Councillor Rumsby

1. Appointment of chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Fulton-McAlister to the chair for the ensuing civic year.

2. Appointment of vice chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Nobbs to the chair for the ensuing civic year.

3. Councillor Brociek-Coulton

RESOLVED to record the committee's gratitude to Councillor Brociek-Coulton chair of the committee 2017-18.

4. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

5. Declarations of interest

None.

6. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2018.

7. Norwich Museums Briefing: December 2017 to February 2018

As requested at the previous meeting of the committee, Jenny Caynes, curator of community history at the Museum of Norwich, gave a presentation on the successful crowdfunding campaign which had raised £15,000 for a display case to preserve the restored 350 year old Samson figure which had stood outside the “Samson and Hercules” building in Tombland. This was accompanied by the promotional video for the fund raising campaign under the Art Fund’s initiative “Art Happens”. Supporters would receive “Save Samson” tote bags designed by local illustrator Leanda Jaine who like other contributors had donated her time for free. The curator explained that unlike the Samson figure, Hercules was a Victorian replica and therefore not as valuable as the Samson. In reply to a question, the curator confirmed that the display case would be the correct environment to preserve the oak timbers. The assistant head of museums referred to the Seahenge timbers and confirmed that there the necessary expertise in the service to ensure the preservation of this figure. The BBC had included the Samson in one of its 100 objects linked to the BBC Civilisations programme and the museum had permission to incorporate this into its display.

The assistant head of museums then presented the report highlighting areas of specific interest to members.

The assistant head of museums referred to the report and said that the *Square Box on the Hill* exhibition had proved very popular with visitors. The *Inheritance: Norwich Castle Open Art Show* complimented this exhibition. Amanda Geitner addressed the committee and said that this was the fifth open art show organised in collaboration with Norwich Castle and East Anglia Art Fund. She explained that 900 artists in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk had responded to the broad theme of “Inheritance” and 129 had been selected for inclusion in the show. Social media had been effective in attracting entrants. Around 41,500 visitors had attended the open art show and around £30,000, including the sale of work by O N Gerald Stamp for £16,000, had been raised of which 35 per cent was donated to the East Anglia Art Fund. In reply to a member’s question, Amanda Geitner said that the open art shows were held every three years and it was not practical administratively to arrange shows more frequently. Whilst the theme of the next show had not been agreed it could tie in with the Crome bicentennial.

Members were advised that Harriet Loffler, curator of modern and contemporary art, who had contributed to the *We Came to Conquer: eleven Artists Respond to the Print Collections at Norwich Castle* had left the Norfolk Museums Service to take up a new position in Cambridge. Recruitment for the post was underway.

Members welcomed the opportunity to view *The Paston Treasure: Riches and Rarities of the Known World* exhibition and agreed to this being arranged before the start of the next meeting. The assistant head of museums said that an official catalogue had been produced and a more affordable version of the catalogue was on sale in the museum shop for £9.99.

In reply to a question from the chair the assistant head of museums explained the number of events where there was free entry to the museums. This included the Museum at Night events which were part of a national initiative and held twice a year and Heritage Open Days, also part of a national campaign. The Norwich Freeman's Charity will again provide free admission to Strangers Hall and the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell for two weeks in 2018. There was also free admission for Norfolk school children attending as part of a school visit, Children's University Passport holders and looked after and foster children. The reduced price 'Twilight ticket' was also well used

Members noted that Strangers Hall had featured in the Channel Four documentary *Norwich – Britain's Most Tudor Town*. The assistant head of museums said that regrettably the programme was no longer available on demand.

The curator of community history answered members' questions on the arrangements for the dementia friendly coffee mornings at the Museum of Norwich. There were usually six to eight people at each morning and events were tailored to the individuals by specially trained staff.

The assistant head of museums referred to the learning team's activities and projects and pointed out that the number of secondary school visits had increased from 29 school visits to 48 over the three years to 2017-18.

(Amanda Geitner left the meeting at this point.)

The committee was pleased to hear that the Round 2 bid for Heritage Lottery Fund for the Kick the Dust Programme had been successful. The bid had included an activity plan and activities to engage young people would commence in September 2018. The assistant head of museums said that he would keep the committee informed on the progress of this four year programme as it rolled out county wide.

The operations manager presented the part of the report under the heading Other Developments. He explained that although it would be a challenge, weddings would be conducted at Norwich Castle during the works on the keep, with the Crome room being used during the phase where access to the Benefactors room was unavailable. In reply to a question, the operations manager said that the contract for wedding and event management catering for events had been awarded to Florentina Events.

The launch of the History Mystery Escape Room games in the undercroft at the Museum of Norwich would be on Friday, 8 June 2018. Members welcomed this innovative use of the undercroft at the Museum of Norwich and noted that it was the first museum in the country to enter into an arrangement where objects from the museums were used for the games. Discussion ensued on the arrangements with the company History Mystery that would be providing the service. Members noted that the games would be popular with the 18 to 25 age group and that half price admission would be offered as an incentive to get people to visit the museum. Members expressed an interest in experiencing the games for themselves.

The operations manager apologised that the external lift was out of use as it had broken down again. Works to refurbish it would be completed in the autumn 2018.

The assistant head of museums said that the cohort of Teaching Museum trainees had been appointed. There had been over 400 applicants had been received for the 8 twelve month paid trainee posts. The trainees would engage in real projects and graduates of the scheme had secured good rates of employment. Members commented that this year's cohort was unusual in that seven out of the eight were female. The assistant head of museums said that this reflected that more women were coming through. Trainees might attend future meetings of the committee as part of their development.

Members of the committee expressed their appreciation of the work of the Norfolk Museums Service conservation team and volunteers who had contributed to the conservation and repair of the Ensign of Le Génèreux and were pleased that it had been awarded a highly commended in the Conservation category of the Museums & Heritage Awards.

The committee was pleased to note the record visitor numbers for 2017-18 and that there had been a year on year increase. The national total for return visits from local people averaged 10 per cent of visitors. In Norfolk this was 30 per cent of visitors. A member pointed out that some people could not afford to visit the museums more frequently. Members were advised that the twilight price for people to visit in the last two hours in the afternoon were popular as were museum passes. In reply to a question from the chair the operations manager said that it was not possible to provide information about where people lived unless it was collected at the point of sale. This was something that could be considered and reported to a future committee meeting.

Tim Pestell, curator, gave an oral update on the Keep Project. Preparation for the second stage of the application for funding was due on 14 June 2018 and work was being undertaken to ensure that the appendices supporting the bid were completed. He outlined some of the contents of the appendices. Members were advised that the project was on target for opening in July 2020. The proposals included the completion of the business plan, ensuring that the project complied with the Green Business Scheme, digital strategy and arrangements for the construction and storage of flagstones during construction etc. Discussions had been held with the city council to ensure that, as the owner of the museum, the unlocking of funding for this project would not be detrimental to either party. The vice chair sought assurance that this would be the case. During his presentation Tim Pestell said that a femur bone had been discovered during the excavations. The results of carbon dating were still outstanding but it could be early human.

The curator also reported that there would be a press launch for the acquisition of an Anglo Saxon pendant.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the report;
- (2) thank Jenny Caynes, curator of community history at the Museum of Norwich, for her presentation on the Save Samson campaign;
- (3) ask the assistant head of museums to arrange tour of The Paston Collection exhibition before the next meeting of the committee;

- (4) ask the chair to write on behalf of the committee to the conservation team to express the committee's congratulations on the highly commended award in the Conservation category of the Museums & Heritage Awards:
- (5) ask the curator of community history, to look into the feasibility of members of the committee having an opportunity to try out the History Mystery Norwich game, The Merchants' Vaults.

8. The Friends of the Norwich Museums – Update

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

It had been her intention to give a presentation on the Ninety Objects that the Friends had given to the museums service over the years. Members considered that to give this their full attention the presentation should be at the start of the next meeting.

RESOLVED to

- (1) thank Felicity Devonshire for her report;
- (2) defer the presentation on the Friends Ninety Objects to the next meeting of the committee.

CHAIR