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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

Held on Monday, 27 November 2017 at 11.00 am in
Ancient House Museum, Thetford

PRESENT

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

In Attendance

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

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19/17 MINUTES

Cllr Richmond advised an amendment was required to minute no: 13/17. It should read "The Chairman congratulated Councillor Duigan on his appointment as Vice Chairman".

20/17 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillors Buck and Ward, David Blackburn and Dr Keith Robinson.

21/17 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman invited Oliver Bone to advise the Committee on a forthcoming event.

Mr Bone advised there was to be an opening event for the new exhibition, "Handmade". The event on Friday 15th December at 4.30pm would be an opportunity to celebrate the work of the Children's History Club. Certificates would be awarded to the Museums Young Members. He invited all Members of the Committee to attend the event.

Dr Robin Hanley –advised the Annual Review 2016-2017 had been issued (copies were given to Members). This review provided a taste of activities taking place across the Norfolk Museums Service.

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Cllr Duigan queried if the Nationally Produced Mendoza report was available.

Dr Hanley said he would send a link to Members to access.

RH

The Chairman stated he was proud of the work Norfolk Museums Service does and to receive extra validation on a National Level was great.

22/17 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

23/17 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

24/17 ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE REPORT

Oliver Bone Curator of the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life presented the report to Members which covered the period July-October 2017.

Highlights included:

The exhibition "Pulpware" had now ended which had been a successful theme due to the local connection of Thetford Industry and being in living memory.

"Flint Rocks" was another successful exhibition and involved working with Breaking New Ground. A further partnership bid had been made to the Heritage Lottery fund for a future project "Wet Brecks".

2014 saw a series of Commemorative Events take place within Thetford commemorating World War I. Ancient House was working with Thetford Town Council for events in 2018 commemorating the centenary of the end of World War I.

A new temporary exhibition "Handmade" was planned to open on 16th December. The display would cover different materials, there were currently some excellent community craft groups and it was hoped the display would encourage others.

Plans for a partnership project to create a Punjab themed arts and culture festival for July 2018 was being explored. In partnership with the Essex Cultural Diversity Partnership a bid for funding would be made to Heritage Lottery Fund. It was hoped that a painting "Casualty of War" by the Singh Twins could be loaned from the National Museum of Scotland to display at Ancient House for 6 months.

An update was given on the History Clubs activities. A 1940's Christmas event had taken place with various craft activities on offer.

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The Teenage History Club had looked at part of a future bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for an exhibition on people of the past who were not heterosexual linked to the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality. The club had visited the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for their "Queer History" tour.

The Friends used the museum as a venue for monthly talks. A new programme of events would be announced at the AGM.

Raj Bisram, presenter of Antiques Road Trip, had visited the museum to film for a feature on the show. The programme will air over the winter.

Ancient House continued to provide Thetford and Brandon Times with a monthly column "Thetford in 100 Artefacts". Contributions were also made to the About Thetford magazine.

It was confirmed that both Twitter and Facebook were still actively used by the museum, promoting exhibitions and events using social media.

Volunteers continued to be very active, helping behind the scenes, running the Mini Museum Club and assisting with events. Ancient House had been represented at the Christmas Light switch on.

Ancient House's current trainee is Sam Bellotti and a new trainee would begin in April 2018. It was advised there had been success with previous trainees who had moved into a career working within museums.

Cllr Bambridge queried if trainees were on the Payroll. It was confirmed that trainees were paid members of staff and on the pay scale for Norfolk County Council.

Dr Hanley advised there was a strong commitment to Learning and Development Traineeships and any opportunity for additional funding for trainees in projects across the museums would be investigated.

25/17 GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE REPORT

Hannah Jackson presented the report to Members which covered the period July-October 2017.

The museum had now closed for the Winter and would re-open in 2018 for School February half term (12th – 16th) and then daily from Sunday 11th March 2018.

During this reporting period the major events were "Village at War" and "Apple Day". Apple Day continued to be a popular event and 2585 visitors attended this year. A smaller scale "Days with a Difference" style event, entitled "Story Festival" was based on Alice in Wonderland. It included performances from touring drama company Strange Fascinations and attracted 419 visitors. "Workhouse after dark" offered free admission to players of the National lottery and

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gave the opportunity to view the Museum after dark by LED candlelight. 761 visitors attended over the two nights. Activity programmes ran for the School summer holiday and for October half term.

Planning had begun for the 2018 programme. The popular “Horse Power” and “Victorian Family Christmas” would both be held during 2018. A preview day of the Museum would be held on 10th March 2018 for Friends, Pass Holders and Lottery Players. The preview day would invite the family volunteers that took part in the Family Volunteering days within the Collections Gallery.

Events continued to attract Norfolk Museum Pass Holders and it had been recorded on Apple Day that 44% of visitors were pass holders and a further 27 were sold on the day.

The “Voices from the Workhouse” project was ongoing with the second phase in the Collections Gallery being completed during the Winter Closure.

To help families access the Collection Gallery a number of Gallery Challenges had been created. Aimed at Key Stage 1 and 2 children, they encouraged children to interpret and explore the objects in a different way.

A new temporary exhibition space had been created within the Collections Gallery to house an annual display. In 2017 this had been “Rural Lives” and had included photographs of Norfolk People. The exhibition planned for 2018 was “Beer and Brewing” focussed on the changing roles of pubs and the history of brewing.

Partnership development of the digital offer at Gressenhall had continued. There was an increased desire for electronic displays and tablets were available for families to borrow to go round the site.

Gressenhall’s curator, Dr Megan Dennis, continued to develop links with the Digital Humanities Forum at Carleton College, Minnesota. The college had created a 3/D virtual model of the workhouse as it was in 1779. Megan would return to America in the new year and hoped to work with the students to generate additional material for the in-gallery projections and handheld tablet devices used by visitors.

The new projectors allowed visitors to “meet” real people from the Workhouse history. It had been found that some visitors found these to be sensory overload. A programme had been piloted which allowed families living with Autism an “earlybird” opportunity to visit the Museum without these projectors in use. Visual storyboards were available in advance for parents to talk their children through the site so it would be familiar to them when they visited. Gressenhall visitor services, back of house staff and volunteers had been trained on the best way to engage and support families during these events.

The Norfolk Collection Centre had opened in recent years more frequently to support the major events held by the museum. The

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“Shine a Light” project had enabled a reorganisation of the collection. During 2017 season there had been chargeable events held at the Collection Centre which included behind the scenes tours, themed tours and West Runton Mammoth tours. Members of the committee were invited by Hannah to visit the Collection Centre prior to the next meeting.

There were now four Social Media Champions on site ensuring a Social Media presence on Twitter and Facebook.

A range of commercial activities continued to be developed which included room and venue hire. A means of generating income any such bookings did not detract from key museum activities.

Friends of Gressenhall had agreed to support a project to restore the Farmers’ Foundry engine boiler. This was in addition to a grant from PRISM fund to make the boiler fully operational.

The second hand book shop run by The Friends of Gressenhall was now manned on a daily basis.

There were currently 120 active volunteers, some worked in teams and some more time specific and volunteered from home.

The Gressenhall Learning Team had worked with members of the Norfolk Virtual School Sensory Support team (NVSSSt) to offer the opportunity for pupils and families to explore the site. 275 people of all ages attended the event, engaged in the range of activities and evaluated the new displays and galleries for those with sensory support needs. They had the opportunity to meet specialists (teachers, rehabilitation officers, education audiologist, child psychotherapist) in a relaxed atmosphere.

The format of the NVSSSt event mirrored the event held in partnership with the Norfolk Fostering and Adoption Services. Options were being explored by the Learning Team to use the model for a special day aimed at young people exploring issues surrounding mental health.

The Chairman commended the Museum and felt the special event days showed sensitivity with communities and dedication to work with all different sectors of the community.

The latest visitor figures showed a total of 58,370 had visited this year up from 51,365 last year.

Cllr Bambridge queried if the School figures were included in the total, which they were.

Cllr Kybird queried if the Autism and Sensory Support days were specifically funded. Ms Jackson confirmed that the Autism “earlybird” was self funding as it took place on a normal open day, visitors were allowed in earlier than the general public opening time. Dr Hanley

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advised Children Social Services had worked the Sensory School day as part of their calendar.

Cllr Duigan suggested as a lot of work had been in partnership with Adult and Children Social Services it would be beneficial for the information to be given to both committees to alert them and for them to encourage the work of the Museums.

A summary of the sensory day had been sent to the Directors of Children Social Services.

Cllr Eagle suggested that with regard to publicising the "Horse Power" event, the Rare Breed Survival Trust were this year highlighting the heavy horses. The Go Native campaign could therefore assist with publicising.

Cllr Kybird queried what information the Museum was collating for the "Beer and Brewing" exhibition. It was explained that the Curators were speaking to local pubs and restaurants for stories and photographs about how the role of the Country pub has changed over the years.

Members suggested to contact David Osborne a local Thetford historian, who had written about the history of Thetford pubs. Kitty Lynn, a Dereham historian, who had published pamphlets on the pubs in Dereham giving facts and census reports and were aware a group in Swaffham had completed a project on Pubs and Brewing in the local area.

26/17 NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 26th February 2018 at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. It was noted that prior to the meeting a tour of the Collections Centre would be available to Members and anyone wishing to attend should arrive at 1pm.

The meeting closed at 12:20pm

CHAIRMAN