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**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

**Held on Friday, 4 June 2010 at 10.00 am in  
Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum, Gressenhall**

**PRESENT**

Mr P.J. Duigan (Chairman)	Mr C. R. Jordan
Mrs J. Ball	Mr M. Kiddle-Morris
Mrs P.A. Spencer	Mr J. D. Rogers
Mr M Brindle	

**Also Present**

Mr R. Key	Cllr J Bracey
Mrs. C Walters	

**In Attendance**

Mr Oliver Bone	- Curator of the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life
Dr Robin Hanley	- Western Area Manager
Vanessa Trevelyan	- Head of Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Diana Dring	- Committee Officer

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**9/10 CHAIRMAN**

Mr P Duigan was elected as Chairman for the forthcoming year.

**10/10 VICE-CHAIRMAN**

Mr M Kiddle-Morris was elected as Vice-Chairman for the forthcoming year.

**11/10 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

**12/10 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr M Fanthorpe, Mr R Kybird, Mrs D Irving and Mr D Blackburn.

**13/10 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed Stuart Dunn, Chairman of the Norfolk Joint Museums and Archaeology Committee. Members were invited to join a tour of the site after the meeting which would include viewing the improvements to the Chapel and the new display in the Roots building.

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**14/10 URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**15/10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Mr M Kiddle-Morris and Mrs C Walters declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 17 (Gressenhall) as members of the Friends of Gressenhall.

**16/10 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE**

Oliver Bone presented his report covering the period between February to May 2010.

The number of visitors has continued to rise during the period and the total had exceeded the previous year. This was partly due to the increase in the number of school children visiting, March having been a particularly good month with school attendance topping 2000. Overall attendance by school parties was very pleasing and amounted to 20% of the total visitors.

The Moving Stories exhibition of the population growth in the Thetford area since Neanderthal times had been very successful and attracted new schools that had not previously visited. Mr Bone expressed gratitude to the team of volunteers, freelancers and staff particularly Learning Officer, Melissa Hawker, who had managed and co-ordinated the project.

The Museum had encouraged interest from the under 5's by setting up a monthly Mini Museum Club, which attracted 25 children at the last event. Each child was given a tool kit to use to explore the museum and make interesting discoveries.

Other events organised by the museum included:-

- An Easter event which included making and decorating traditional pulpware eggs had been popular.
- A programme of activities around textiles, which had been an active industry in Thetford since Saxon times, provided a change for visitors. The event included spinning taster sessions, knitting, tie dying, felt making and embroidery
- Afternoon Talks had been popular and had included one about Norfolk Workhouses
- House Alive event included stories and demonstrations of how Victorian servants lived and worked. Also offered participation in preparing food, which was cooked on the kitchen range.

The textile day also gave the museum the opportunity to gather post code information from visitors to be used to monitor visitors and change the programme to encourage repeat business.

Future plans included an exhibition in June 2010 featuring Maharajah Duleep Singh, which hopefully would include his portrait. A book

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about the Maharajah would be on sale, part of the income would go towards Museum's funds.

A Museum cleaning conservation programme was ongoing, advised by Sarah Norcross-Robinson, to encourage good house-keeping and environmental control. This would help keep up to date the collection care programme and included Insect traps as part of the pest management and control plan.

There had been active sharing of expertise with other museums e.g. Oliver had advised the Museum of Technology in Cambridge and officers from Bishop Bonner Cottage had visited Gressenhall to get ideas about lighting.

Commissioning had been received from the Thetford Area Partnership to set up a History Club for young people. The Museum was also looking at ways to contribute to the healthy living agenda such as heritage walking trails and encouraging cooking skills using the museum kitchen.

Oliver responded to Members questions regarding the recording of recent living history of Thetford such as the changes resulting from London overspill and the influx of Portuguese inhabitants, and agreed that it was important to collect memories and key objects. He gave the example of the recent oral record made with the retired Town Clerk.

He elaborated on the children's activities provided at the museum during the Moving Stories programme when children had been enthusiastically involved in their creation of ways to trap mammoths. The History Club involved children in developing historical skills and researching evidence to verify if stories were true. The healthy living agenda included ideas such as providing schools with high-viz jackets to encourage walking to the Museum and assisting with risk assessments.

The Chairman thanked Oliver for his report and congratulated the Museum on its good attendance figures which was encouraging and set a high standard for the following year.

**17/10 GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE REPORT**

Robin Hanley presented his report on activities at Gressenhall for the period February to May 2010. Visitor attendance had suffered as a result of bad weather during the first quarter of the year. The snow during the February half term had had a big impact with numbers down 800 from the previous year.

Other events held were:

- An Easter fair, which had attracted more visitors than the previous year with a variety of activities including an impressive parade of Easter bonnets.
- A Food & Farming Day on the early May bank holiday was similarly hit by bad weather but attendance was boosted by a large rally of classic cars.

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- A History Fair on the late May bank holiday, which was also hit by bad weather but received good feedback from visitors and stall holders.

Future plans included holding smaller event days focussed on the farm which would require less staff and would be aimed at attracting in the region of 600 visitors rather than the usual 2000 to 2500. These events received the same marketing as the bigger events and would offer an expanded range of events but with a reduced budget and would be working towards a fully sustainable event programme. It was planned to produce a targeted visitor evaluation to see if marketing was effective and how staff coped with reduced levels.

Planned events around the farming year included Big Boys Toys on Fathers Day with lots of big farm equipment. A Village at War event with the theme of Glitz in the Blitz was planned for the August bank holiday. Ongoing craft demonstrations were arranged during event days in the Learning Courtyard featuring the Produced in Norfolk theme.

Work had been progressing on the new Women's Land Army Gallery, which was due to open in 2011. Funding of £50,000 from the Wolfson Foundation/DCMS and continued fund raising from the Friends of Gressenhall had been gratefully received. Other improvement and redecoration work had taken place at Cherry Tree Cottage and in the Farmhouse. A new display had been set up in the Roots building on the history of the farm, rare breeds and horses, which was a very positive development. Work had continued in the adventure playground and consideration would need to be given to replacing some of the equipment in the future.

Funding from the County Council's Carbon Energy Reduction Fund had enabled the installation of roof insulation and draught-proofing on historic windows. It was hoped to see a reduction in heating bills as a result of this. Consideration was being given to improving the equipment in the café and to the installation of a biomass boiler to provide all the heating for the site.

The Chapel had been converted to provide a flexible flat floor space by using removable sectional inserts to level off the floor, which had increased its suitability for the use of exhibitions and performance events such as dance. Improvements had been made to the Training Room where it was planned to have wireless installed. The boardroom had also been improved which meant the Museum was able to offer a suite of meeting rooms with refreshments for hire, which would provide a useful additional income. A marketing campaign had been set up to promote these facilities particularly to the County Council and local businesses.

The birdwatch camera system on the farm had been upgraded and included remote control cameras which visitors found particularly enjoyable and helped to promote bio-diversity at the farm.

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Friends and Volunteers

The Friends of Gressenhall continued to actively raise funds for the Suffolk Punch Horse Appeal. The youngest horse on the farm was away undergoing basic training. The Friends were also fundraising for the Women's Land Army Gallery project. The Friends newsletter 'Rural Life' had been revamped and featured the story of the rebuilding of the Panhard car radiator. The museum relied heavily on volunteers and had a resource of 120 volunteers without which the site would not be able to operate.

Renaissance in the Regions

The Museum had benefitted from significant funding from the Renaissance in the Regions programme for a variety of projects. As part of the regional Sustainability Project, in which Gressenhall had taken the lead, it was planned to develop a new 'eco-building' to replace the ticketing sheds and provide much needed additional toilet facilities. County Council capital funding had been secured for this project but it was still at the design stage. The building would provide an opportunity to showcase local sourced sustainable building materials.

Visitor Numbers

The number of visitors was slightly down on the previous year with the year total to the end of March being 73,011.

Learning and Outreach

Although Gressenhall had achieved over 10,000 school and pre-school visits, the schools market was viewed as difficult with a need to ensure a visit would be relevant and worthwhile. A session had been run for pre-school children called Three Little Pigs and a dramatic session entitled Was the Workhouse so Bad, which challenged high school children about the realities of the workhouse.

The Museum had also been working with government programmes to provide 2 young people 6 month workplace and learning opportunities. Future plans included the provision of a land based skills course for young people not in education, employment or training. The apprenticeship post in partnership with Easton College was continuing.

The Museum had received good news that they had been successful in winning an award of £617,000 from Heritage Lottery Funding. Under the Skills for the Future Scheme, Gressenhall and the Museum of East Anglian Life at Stowmarket would be funded to deliver 3, 6, and 18 month courses and/or apprenticeships accredited by Easton and/or Otley colleges. Courses on subjects such as land management, steam engineering, historic buildings, and rare breeds would be offered. This would provide an opportunity to extend the skills and knowledge of staff and volunteers to provide future training and offer leisure learning on subjects e.g. working with heavy horses, veteran cars. The scheme would involve the employment of a Project Officer to oversee the training programme which would start in April 2011.

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Following questions Robin confirmed that there would be separate male and female toilets provided within the planned development. He expanded on the type of visitors attending Gressenhall as falling into 3 groups:- those who came regardless of the weather; an expanding group of Museum Pass Holders who comprised 40-50% of visitors and would be encouraged to come regularly by (electronic) reminders of events where possible; and casual visitors who might be tourists in the area and it was difficult to assess what would motivate them to visit.

It was suggested that the Museum consider selling advance tickets to events to encourage pre-booking, reducing the effect of non attendance due to bad weather on the day. Robin said he would discuss this with the marketing manager and that it was hoped that holding more indoor activities would also encourage attendance.

The Chairman thanked Robin for his report.

**18/10 NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on 10 September 2010 at 10am at Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum.

The meeting closed at 11.15 am

CHAIRMAN