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**BRECKLAND  
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

**14 May 2018      Item No.**

**ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE REPORT**

**Report by the Operations Manager - West**

**This report provides information on activities at Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life from February to April 2018**

**1. Exhibitions and associated events**

**1.1 *Handmade, Millennia of Making* Exhibition**

The current exhibition, *Handmade, Millennia of Making*, opened at the Museum on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December with a 'Takeover event' by the children from the museum's after-school History Club and the young people from the Teenage History Club. The display was officially opened by Cllr Phillip Duigan from the Area Museums Committee. The exhibition focusses on the craftsmanship of artefacts in the museum collections, exploring different materials with sections on textiles, ceramics, wood, metal and stone. Objects on display include a wooden nurse and child doll from the 1840s, an intricate and colourful patchwork quilt, prehistoric flint tools, a mantrap once used on the Kilverstone estate near Thetford and a 17<sup>th</sup> century acoustic jar which was once built into a wall at the former Central Hotel on the Thetford Market Place.

The titles of the different sections include contributions by volunteers who made the Textile and Paint headings. The display was curated by the Ancient House team supported by collections volunteers. As well as 'taking over' the opening event, the History Club children feature on the introductory graphic panel pictured with some of the objects on display. The exhibition continues until 8 September 2018.

**1.2 Thetford Remembers 1914 – 1918  
Commemorative events**

Following the Museum's delivery of a town-wide programme of commemorative events focussed on the anniversaries of 1914, 1915 and

1916, the Ancient House Museum will be contributing to the Town Council's plans for *Battle's Over* a nation-wide evening beacon event to mark the centenary of the Armistice on November 11<sup>th</sup> 2018 with a display of the knitted Field of Poppies exhibit with one poppy representing each of the Thetford's fallen. The Museum is also involved in early plans for an event in the summer of 2019 to mark the peace and aftermath of the First World War. A major Armistice exhibition at Norwich Castle in late 2018 is planned to cover Norfolk's experience of the First World War and the Armistice and the Ancient House will be lending material for this.

In addition, the Museum continues to display a First World War kitchen.

## **2 Forthcoming Displays**

### **2.1 Thetford and Punjab Festival and exhibition**

The Ancient House team has been working with Indi Sandhu and Giles Waterfield from the Essex Cultural Diversity Partnership on a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Thetford and Punjab Festival to take place in July 2018. A series of town-wide events are planned over this period covering various art forms and cultural connections.

In the Museum we plan to provide an exhibition about Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family to include a loan from National Museums Scotland of a painting by renowned contemporary artists, the Singh Twins of the Maharajah entitled *Casualty of War*. Work is underway to negotiate the arrangements for this loan.

The museum team will be working with historian, author and Maharajah Duleep Singh archivist, Peter Bance to create the exhibition which will involve interventions and displays all around the Ancient House Museum. This exhibition will be on display from 7 July to 1 December.

### **2.2 Duleep Singh Gallery Feasibility**

Feasibility work continues for making a new display in one of the upstairs rooms at Ancient House to make more of the unusual connections between the Museum and the Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family, especially his son Prince Frederick Duleep Singh. A number of private donations have been received towards this project totally approximately £2,500.

The Museum plans to submit a bid to the HLF later in 2018 to cover the costs of the permanent display project.

### **2.3 Teenage History Club Exhibition Project**

Learning Officer Melissa Hawker is currently working with the museum's Teenage History Club on a project to curate an exhibition. As part of our Arts Council England programme as a National Portfolio Organisation, the museum is committed to diversifying both the audiences to the museum and also those voices within its displays.

The teenagers are leading on the content and direction of the exhibition which will explore the history of LGBT+ communities. This links with the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality, drawing on the collections of the museum. As part of their investigation they visited the V & A in London in November where they went on a special tour of the museum with curator Dan Nouveau and his team of volunteer guides.

The resulting exhibition will be open to the public from 22 September to 1 December.

### **3 Learning with Adults, Children and Young People**

#### **3.1 Activities for children and Families**

The Ancient House Museum continues to offer a popular programme of themed gallery discovery trails, with a new trail available for each week of the school holidays.

During February half term, the theme was Anglo Saxons and Vikings. At the Tuesday Discover Day, families could meet costumed characters and handle real Anglo-Saxon objects, strike their own Anglo Saxon coin and try their hand at blending Viking cheese. A similarly themed trail was also available throughout the week, where visitors were encouraged to help Sweyn Forkbeard gather his Viking horde for the invasion of Thetford to win a prize.

The recent holiday trails focused upon Easter chicks and spring cleaning. A Discovery Day was held on Tuesday 10 April for families to discover how Victorians kept their houses neat and tidy. As part of this event, they could explore cleaning methods of the era, including brown sauce to polish copperware and banana skins to polish shoes.

#### **3.2 Museum Clubs**

The Mini Museum Club aimed at those under 5 remain popular. During the period of this report, themed sessions for this age group have included a teddy bears' picnic, a session devoted to dinosaurs and activities exploring colour and shape.

As part of events across the county to mark a century of suffrage, individuals and organisations were welcomed to the Ancient House on 14 February for a special event to explore the lives of Princesses Sophia and Catherine Duleep Singh. Their story was eloquently told by members of the museum's after school History Club, who had been studying the history of the Duleep Singh family.

#### **3.3 Textile groups**

The Museum continues to hold Knit and Knatter sessions at the Museum. A spinning group also meets at the Museum on a regular basis and offers demonstrations to visitors. The knitting group assisted with the Handmade exhibition by making letters in textile to make a title for this section of the

display. Examples of their work are also on display and a knitted tricycle has formed a popular aspect as one of the museums' changing window displays.

### **3.4 Silver Social Partnership event**

Ancient House Museum is pleased to be a community host within Breckland Council's Silver Social partnership. The Silver Social is an exciting new programme of daytime arts events in the heart of Norfolk, promoting engagement and participation among older people in rural communities. With funding from the National Lottery Arts Council strategic touring fund, Silver Social brings 'something a little different' to daily life in rural Breckland, in the form of creative workshops and live performances.

On 19 February 2018, the museum hosted a Sing Your Song workshop with internationally acclaimed singer Kate Dimbleby. Unfortunately, numbers to this session were low, but those who did attend were able to explore their voice, listen and remember the songs that inspire them.

A free workshop with award winning poet Martin Figura to explore writing from personal memory will be held at the museum on Monday 4 June, before heading to Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse on Wednesday 6 June.

### **3.5 Talks programme, in association with the Friends of the Museum**

A programme of illustrated talks continues to be offered at Ancient House Museum on Tuesday afternoons. Attendances average 15-25 and a number of talks are often delivered by NMS staff.

Recent topics have included an introduction to the Handmade exhibition by Curator Oliver Bone, Thetford's Revolutionary son Thomas Paine by former Teaching Museum Trainee Sam Bellotti, and how England was portrayed in art and illustration in the 1930s to 1960s by Dan Morgan.

### **3.6 Schools**

The Museum continues to offer a wide range of learning opportunities for schools. Delivery of the sessions is typically by a combination of museum staff, experienced freelancers and volunteers. A tried and tested format is to offer a 'carousel' of activities around the building with groups of schoolchildren moving between the activities such as object handling, drama, craft and food.

## **4 Ancient House and the Media**

### **4.1 Thetford in 100 Artefacts, monthly column in Thetford and Brandon Times**

Staff at the Ancient House continue with their project in partnership with Rebecca from the EDP's *Thetford and Brandon Times* to write a monthly column. Entitled *Thetford in a Hundred Artefacts*. The article provides an opportunity to highlight objects from the museum collections and to promote forthcoming museum events.

Recent entries include a pair of mittens created in 2008 by the museum's Knit

and Knatter group as part of the town's commemoration of the bicentenary of Thomas Paine's death.

#### **4.2 Social media**

The museum continues to develop its social media presence, with Twitter and Facebook accounts being maintained by staff. The Ancient House Museum accounts continue to grow with the Twitter account having 2,705 followers while the Facebook account has 661 follows. During the period of this report, the Museum engaged extensively with the #MuseumWeek annual campaign, which inspires content with a different hashtag each day of the week.

### **5 Other Museum Developments**

#### **5.1 Volunteers**

A small team of volunteers meet on a weekly basis in the Museum. Volunteers have continued with a programme of documentation work involving the photographing and cataloguing of some of the recent acquisitions. The team's work enhances and illustrates the museum catalogue available online through the museum service's collections website.

Volunteers also contribute to the Learning work through delivery of the Mini Museum Club for the under 5s, the delivery of sessions for schools and preparing resource boxes for learning activities.

#### **5.2 Friends of the Museum**

The Friends of the Museum continue to support the Museum through fundraising and promoting the Museum in the town. The Friends are currently planning a visit to West Stow further to a talk on 50 years of archaeological excavation of the site by Richard Hoggett which is planned for May.

#### **5.3 Teaching Museum Trainee Scheme**

During 2018-2019, the Lynn Museum is hosting a 12 month Teaching Museum traineeships provided through the NMS *Teaching Museum* programme. Samantha Parker is the new Curatorial Trainee, based at the Ancient House and Lynn Museum. Her traineeship is funded through the Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation 2018-2022 Business Plan. Amongst a range of other activities, Sam will help on the Thetford and the Punjab Festival, museum events and work with colleagues to support visitors with autism to explore the museum.

#### **5.4 Staff Development**

Melissa Hawker, Learning Officer has delivered a programme for the Museum Learning Assistants to help them deliver events for families and schools. In addition, the Ancient House team recently undertook customer service training as part of a programme of work across Norfolk Museums Service.

### **6 Visitor Numbers**

6.1 Up to date visitor figures will be circulated at the meeting.

## **7 Resource implications**

- |     |                               |      |
|-----|-------------------------------|------|
| (a) | <u>Finance</u>                | None |
| (b) | <u>Property</u>               | None |
| (c) | <u>Staff</u>                  | None |
| (d) | <u>Information Technology</u> | None |

## **8 Recommendations:**

That the Area Museums Committee notes the report

Originator of report:  
Hannah Jackson  
Operations Manager - West  
Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life  
Tel: 01842 752599 e-mail: [hannah.jackson@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:hannah.jackson@norfolk.gov.uk)