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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

24 July 2009 Item No. 10

GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE REPORT

Report by the Western Area Manager

This report provides information on activities at Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse from March to June 2009

1. Events

- 1.1 The Easter Fair event on Monday 13 April marked the start of the 2009 Gressenhall event programme. The event saw good weather and nearly 2,600 visits. Approximately 600 cars were parked on site during the peak of the day. Event highlights included a traditional funfair; the Easter bonnet-making Art Attack sessions; the Easter bonnet parade; and soil profiling on the farm.
- 1.2 The Food Fair event ran on Monday 4 May, with around 1,700 visits on a day that was dry but cool. Event highlights included the "Vegetable Voyages" dramatic performance; the gruel kitchen on the farm; and cookery demonstrations by professional chefs in the Chapel. This event traditionally has a strong retail component.
- 1.3 The History Fair event took place on Monday 25 May, with around 1,770 visits on a day with reasonable weather. There was a wide programme of events including displays in the arena area by the East Norfolk Militia and Backwoods Falconry. A large number of local historical societies manned stalls across the site and provided very positive feedback on the day.
- 1.4 Each of the events has featured the new *Produced in Norfolk* event-day shop sited in the Learning Courtyard area, in one of two rooms refurbished during the winter closure period. The shop features a range of items produced by local craftworkers, alongside a selection of local food products. The shop also hosts craft demonstrations by Produced in Norfolk members.

- 1.5 A programme of events was delivered during the February half term, Easter school holidays and Whitsun half term, targeted at children and families. Attendance levels on the site during the Easter holidays in particular were very encouraging.
- 1.6 A Bat Evening took place on Saturday 16 May, in partnership with the Norwich Bat Group. Some 30 pre-booked visitors enjoyed a meal in the café, followed by an illustrated talk and a tour of the site using bat detectors.
- 1.7 On each of the event days, the Gressenhall café and linked catering outlets provided a range of appropriately themed menu items which proved popular with visitors and helped enhance the interpretation of the event day theme. The refurbished café is dealing with visitors much more efficiently, especially on busy event days.
- 1.8 Remaining programme for 2009:
Days to Remember - Friday July 3 and Friday September 18
Village at War - Sunday 30 and Monday 31 August
Summer Holiday events - July 18 - September 1
Apple Day – Sunday October 25
October Half Term events - 24 October - 1 November
Close for season -1 November
Christmas Event – Sunday 6 December

2. Other Museum Developments

- 2.1 Gressenhall has acquired a second new Suffolk Punch horse to replace George, who sadly died from colic on 22 February. The funds to acquire, equip and train both of the new horses were raised by the Friends of Gressenhall, with support from a local charitable trust. Harvey is a four-year old who is currently off-site receiving basic training. The other new horse Jimbo has settled well onto the site, has a friendly nature and responds very positively to visitors.
- 2.2 The Gressenhall Curator continues to co-ordinate, manage and develop the volunteer teams at Gressenhall. Further volunteer forum days have been organised and team and individual work plans have been developed. Some 100 volunteers continue to be active on the site.
- 2.3 The re-display and redecoration of Cherry Tree Cottage during the winter closure period was marked by a tea party on 11 March for those volunteers who had assisted with the project.
- 2.4 The site staff newsletter “Gressenhall Gossip” continues to be produced. This publication is enabling staff and volunteers from the museum and archaeology wings to work more closely together.

- 2.5 The outcome of the funding bid to the Wolfson Foundation is awaited. If successful, this funding will support the creation of a Women's Land Army gallery at Gressenhall.
- 2.6 During June Gressenhall - along with other NMAS sites - participated in the £2 entry scheme promoted through the Eastern Daily Press.
- 2.7 A Gressenhall goat – accompanied by Farm Officer Richard Dalton - helped lead the parade marking the Thomas Paine anniversary celebrations in Thetford over the weekend of 6-7 June.

3. Friends of Gressenhall

- 3.1 The Friends have continued to actively raise funds for the Suffolk Punch Horse Appeal. This fund has provided the resources to purchase, equip and train both of the new horses, Jimbo and Harvey.
- 3.2 The Friends continue to develop the range of activities they undertake to support the museum and enhance the opportunities for members. A Friends Horse Night is planned for 16 July. The Friends AGM took place on 28 May.
- 3.3 The Friends have been actively supporting the event programme, including operating the Farmhouse kitchen during the Easter Fair.
- 3.4 Following building improvements and redecoration, the Friends Bookshop has been comprehensively restocked and re-displayed. The bookshop will be staffed on event days and will be open with an honesty box system at other times.

4. Renaissance in the Regions and Other Projects

- 4.1 Gressenhall is benefiting from significant funding delivered through the Renaissance in the Regions programme, under the new 2009-11 East of England Hub Business Plan.
- 4.2 Gressenhall continues to lead on the regional Sustainability Project originally funded by Renaissance in the Regions during 2008-09. Further funding has recently been secured to develop and extend this project during 2009-11. Joint working is now being planned with museums in other English regions under the terms of a national partnership being co-ordinated by the Museums Association and the Museums, Libraries & archives Council. A detailed report on progress to date and plans for the next phase of this project will be provided to a future meeting of this committee.
- 4.3 A meeting of the Rural Museums East partnership took place at Gressenhall on 3 April, involving representatives from the Museum of East Anglian Life (Stowmarket), Stockwood Park (Luton) and the Farmland Museum (Denny Abbey near Cambridge).

- 4.4 The Renaissance-funded post of Events Co-ordinator continues to support the delivery and evaluation of an enhanced event programme.
- 4.5 A series of maintenance and improvement projects have been undertaken in the adventure playground, including repairs to walls and paths and improvements to the play equipment.

5. Learning & Outreach

- 5.1 Jan Pitman, Learning Manager based at Gressenhall, is now managing the learning and outreach team across all NMAS Western Area sites. This will result in greater flexibility, skill sharing and support for team members delivering formal and informal learning in Thetford, Gressenhall and King's Lynn.
- 5.2 The Learning team at Gressenhall is continuing to offer a broad programme to local and regional schools. The *Homes on the Road* event was recently delivered in partnership with Traveller Education and members of the Traveller community. During this innovative programme, pupils from Downham Market High School were able to experience Traveller life, see inside traditional and modern caravans, try their hand at traditional cooking and washing and learn about recycling. Members of the Traveller community also demonstrated traditional dancing and more contemporary music mixing.
- 5.3 Recruitment has taken place for the new post of NMAS Western Area Community Outreach Officer. Marie Kennedy took up post in June. She will be primarily based between King's Lynn and Thetford museums and will provide access to museum services and collections through informal learning events delivered both on-site and as outreach. Target audiences will be those in isolated rural communities and disadvantaged areas in the market towns of Breckland and West Norfolk. This post is being funded by Renaissance East of England as part of the 2009-11 Hub business plan.
- 5.4 Recruitment has also taken place to the post of Western Area Bookings Officer. Fiona Lund will be responsible for school and other event bookings for Gressenhall, King's Lynn and Thetford museums. This post is 50% Renaissance-funded.
- 5.5 A farm apprentice has been working on Union Farm under the terms of short-term apprenticeship scheme with the Shaw Trust. Further apprenticeship opportunities linked to the traditional skills agenda are being explored with Easton College.

6. Visitor Numbers

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

7. Resource implications

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| (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:
Dr Robin Hanley
Western Area Manager
Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse
Tel: 0773 3001 301
e-mail: robin.hanley@norfolk.gov.uk