

# Public Document Pack

## BRECKLAND COUNCIL

### At a Meeting of the

## BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

Held on Friday, 27 February 2009 at 10.00 am in  
The Council Chamber, Town Hall, 4 London Street, Swaffham

### PRESENT

Mr P.J. Duigan (Chairman)	Mr. J. Joyce
Mr C.W. Armes	Mr. J.D. Rogers
Mr. D. Blackburn	Mrs P.A. Spencer
Mr. R. Key	

### In Attendance

Mr Oliver Bone	- Curator of The Museum of Ancient Life
Dr Robin Hanley	- Area Museums Officer
Helen McAleer	- Member Services Officer
Jan Pitman	- Learning Manager (Gressenhall)

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### 28/08 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

### 29/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Gurney, Mr Lloyd-Owen, Mrs Matthews, Mrs Miller, Mrs Ravenscroft, Mr Stephens and Ms Trevelyan.

### 30/08 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Jan Pitman, Learning Manager at Gressenhall, to the meeting.

### 31/08 ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE

Olive Bone introduced his report.

#### New Exhibition

The new exhibition about the growth of Thetford, past and present, was up and running. The consultation on new plans for the town had been launched at the museum on Monday and the exhibition had generated a lot of interest from local people, many of whom had come to the town in the 1960s. The Museum was playing its part in raising conversation and encouraging participation in the plans.

There were various artefacts on display from the 1960s, some of which had been provided by local historian, David Osborne. There

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were also old photographs of the town, which had generated press interest.

A full programme of events was planned and it was hoped to erect a banner across King Street to publicise the exhibition and to attract visitors.

Visitor numbers were good and this was partly due to better publicity including items in a local magazine 'About Thetford' which was delivered to all residences.

Community knitting had proved so popular that the target of 200 mittens had already been exceeded. Plans were in progress to introduce a Sewing Circle. Cloth and patterns would be provided and 18<sup>th</sup> Century costumes would be made for the Thomas Paine weekend and for the community play. The Friends were keen to support this and had offered funding.

Christmas Events had proved popular and were made possible by the involvement of staff, volunteers and freelancers such as Mike Webb who had played the role of Father Christmas and would be participating as a Victorian jailor in a future event about Prisons.

Post Code Information

Oliver suggested that Charles Wilde be invited to a future meeting to give a presentation to the Committee about this as there were interesting patterns and trends and a lot of information on visitor profiles.

Tom Paine 200

All members received a brochure about the events planned to celebrate Thomas Paine's centenary. The initial focus would be on the first week in June.

John Weeks, a volunteer, had done an enormous amount of work and it was felt that his contribution should be acknowledged in some way.

Recent Acquisition

Although the museum was small and fairly full it was still able to accept donations such as the photograph of a Daimler from a local garage.

The Chairman thanked Oliver for his report and commented that it was encouraging that the museum was playing a part in the future of Thetford as well as the past.

The 'then' and 'now' photographs of Well Street in Thetford generated discussion about the loss of some of the historic parts of the town which had happened during the earlier re-development.

**32/08 GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE, THE MUSEUM OF NORFOLK LIFE**

Robin Hanley presented his report for the period October 2008 to

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February 2009.

He told members the sad news of the death of a second Suffolk Punch on Sunday. George had died of colic, similar to Queenie (who died in November 2008) and although George had actually been expected to die first, it was no less of a shock to them all. Both had been just under 18 years of age.

A two-year-old Suffolk Punch called Jimbo had been acquired, just before Christmas, as a replacement for Queenie. He had been put in with George who was to act as a mentor and companion. It had been hoped that George would work alongside Jimbo during his training.

They were now looking at options to replace George. The intention had been to buy a new mare by December 2009, but this would need to be done sooner. However the market for Suffolk Punch's was quite limited.

The press had been on-site just before half-term and had taken some lovely photographs of George and Jimbo. George would be missed and he had brought great pleasure to hundreds of visitors.

**Events**

Apple Day in October and both Christmas Experience events had been well attended with figures up on all three from last year.

During half term over two and a half thousand visits had been made which was also an improvement on last year. It was too early to judge but it was possible that the credit crunch was having a positive effect on figures.

The site would re-open on 22 March for Mothering Sunday.

Over the winter there had been a major revue of events and this had shaped the programme for 2009. The core events would stay the same, but due to budget restrictions the number of events had been reduced. The Go Green days would not be running, but a green strand would be incorporated into all events. Robin was confident that the 2009 programme was affordable.

**Other Developments**

The new visitor parking arrangements were working well and would continue.

The new curator was working on supporting the 100 or so volunteers on-site. This was going well and individual work plans were being developed.

The AGM of the Rural Museums Network had been held at Gressenhall and colleagues from all over the country had attended.

A funding bid for a Women's Land Army and Timber Corps Gallery had been placed and the outcome would be known in July. If successful the exhibit would look at the changing lives and roles of

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women in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and would be the first of its kind in the country.

Friends

The Friends had been successful in raising the money to acquire Jimbo and the Horse Appeal was still running.

Renaissance in the Regions

This had brought additional resources to the area and was funding the Sustainability Project. Robin suggested that Hannah Jackson be invited to the next meeting to give members an update.

Various projects were taking place on-site and a survey was being undertaken of other opportunities available at Gressenhall.

Improvements to the cafeteria had worked well during half-term. They were now able to seat up to 120 (previously 80) and visitor flow was significantly better.

Low-level lighting was also being introduced in the car park to illuminate key routes.

An outreach officer was being recruited, and the events co-ordinator was supporting the delivery of the events programme. Both posts were funded by Renaissance in the Regions.

Visitor Numbers

Up to the end of January there had been approximately 68,000 visits which was a drop of 8,000 on the previous year. Most of this drop could be attributed to the fact that there had been no Easter in the 08-09 year, whereas there had been two Easters in the 07-08 year. Bad weather had also played a significant part and better weather was hoped for this year.

The Chairman asked about a newspaper article concerning work on archives from Kew.

Robin said there was a team based at Gressenhall who were helping to transcribe digitised records of workhouse correspondence. Very exacting standards were required. Kew had failed in a funding bid and was therefore relying on teams at workhouse sites across the country to help with this work.

A Member asked why the number of events planned had been reduced and thought that in the current climate perhaps more should have been on offer.

Robin explained that the events did not generate additional income and that they had had to fit the programme to the budget. A larger budget had been available the previous year which had allowed them to do more, but this was not sustainable for the 2009-10 year.

They were concentrating their efforts on significantly increasing Museum Pass sales which would make them less reliant on event

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days.

32 .1 Gressenhall schools learning programmes for 2009

Jan Pitman told members that he was just coming to the end of his first full financial year in post and he gave them an overview of the work being done.

About 10,000 school children had visited site during the year: 30% with formal school groups; 20% for specific sessions such as washday or cooking; and 50% to participate in the buy into learning programme with either full or half day events. The aim was to engage children through theatre and education and one example of this was the Victorian activity day when children played the part of orphans looking for work.

Numbers had been slightly down on the previous year and it was thought that transport costs had been the reason. A charity had donated money and schools were offered £75 of this to off-set these costs.

The bookings for the next year were robust, but more 'self-led' visits were needed and the intention was to be more pro-active next year to encourage this and maximise the use of the site.

The Centenary Wood was being used for activities for the young, in all weathers, which covered nature, numeracy and literacy. Other sessions were being delivered which focussed on pre-school groups.

Older children were able to participate in the Wash Day activities using the wash house which had been built the previous year and actually able to use the copper and have a hands-on experience.

All Key Stage 2 activities were being re-appraised to ensure that the children's role was more active.

The same sort of evaluation would be done with the Key Stage 3 activities to ensure they were relevant to the curriculum. The Geography days, where children participated in a planning enquiry to decide if the workhouse should be re-developed, were extremely successful and over 1,000 children had attended for those sessions last year. Variants on that day were planned, in response to requests from the schools, to include subjects such as tourism and sustainability.

At the end of March a 'Homes on the Road' session would take place. This aimed to raise awareness of Travellers and their lives.

Overall it was important to ensure that the product being delivered was relevant to the changing curriculum.

In response to questions Jan told members that schools could buy sessions at a cost of £35 per hour. As an example he said that a group of 60 children could attend for the wash day session for about

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£70.

Entrance was free for all school visits (the admission cost was covered by Norfolk County Council) and for the day events the charge paid for the hiring of freelancers (who played the parts of characters for the theme) eg for the Victorian Day it worked out at £4 per child. The museum broke-even for such events.

**33/08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Friday 22 May 2009, at 10.00 am in the Council Chamber, King's House, Thetford (TBC).

The meeting closed at 11.28 am

CHAIRMAN