
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

**Held on Friday, 31 October 2008 at 10.00 am in
Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum, Gressenhall**

PRESENT

Mr P.J. Duigan (Chairman)	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mr C.W. Armes	Mrs P.A. Spencer
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe	Mr D. Blackburn
Mr R.G. Kybird	Mr R. Key
Mr C.B.A. Lloyd Owen	Mrs B. M. Ravencroft
Mrs S.M. Matthews	Mr H. Stephens
Mr F. Pitt-Pladdy	

In Attendance

Mr Oliver Bone	- Curator of The Museum of Ancient Life
Dr Megan Dennis	- Curator of Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum
Dr Robin Hanley	- Area Museums Officer
Helen McAleer	- Member Services Officer
Christina Milton	- Ancient House Musuem
Alison Tebbit	- Events Co-ordinator Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum

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20/08 TOUR OF GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE MUSEUM

Dr Robin Hanley gave Members a tour of the farm including a ride on a horse drawn cart to view hedges and new fencing. The two Suffolk Punches pulling the cart were the younger pair of four working horses currently used for a range of duties and without which the farm could not function.

The farm benefitted from various government grants received for returning areas of land to grazing, leaving an uncultivated strip of land round crop and arable fields and for introducing new hedging.

Produce from the farm was used in the cafeteria at the museum and for events involving school children.

Various improvements had been carried out over the year, including a new building adjacent the farm house for a Victorian style water boiler to provide hot water for 'washday' school visits and the laying of new paths to improve access and safety.

Changes to access arrangements had also been introduced at the museum, during event days, and these had worked well. Cars were being redirected down the lane adjacent the site and parking was provided in what had previously been the overflow parking field. New

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ticketing huts located at the gate of the car park, including the ability to take credit/debit card payments, had improved facilities for visitors who had previously had to walk past the entrance to the museum to pay. It was hoped to use this parking area all of the time and further improve the facilities by introducing a permanent building incorporating ticket office and visitor toilets.

21/08MINUTES

Subject to an amendment to include apologies from Mrs Ravencroft, the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

22/08APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Dawson (Breckland Council Arts Development Officer), Mr Fanthorpe and Mr Joyce.

23/08CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked Dr Hanley for a very interesting tour and welcomed Dr Megan Dennis, the new Gressenhall Curator.

24/08GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE, THE MUSEUM OF NORFOLK LIFE

Dr Hanley presented his report which covered the period June to September.

1. Events and Activities

The various event days had been very popular and well attended despite bad weather conditions for many of them.

There had been a full summer holiday programme and activities every day during half term.

2. Other Museum Developments

The new Curator had a key role in co-ordinating the volunteer team. The museum placed a heavy reliance on volunteers and Megan would be responsible for their recruitment and development.

3. Friends of Gressenhall

Christine Walters had been elected as the new Chairman of the Friends. They had recently launched a Horse Fund Appeal to raise £7,000 for the purchase, training and equipping of a Suffolk Punch foal. The farm needed four working horses on site and as two were getting old, this scheme represented an investment for the future. The EDP had covered the launch and printed a cartoon on the subject. The original had been donated to the museum and would be

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sold to raise money.

4. Renaissance in the Regions and Other Projects

Gressenhall is hosting the region wide sustainability project and the recent two day conference in Norwich was attended by key-note speakers and about 90 delegates.

Various on-site sustainability projects were being developed and it was hoped these would give pointers to visitors encouraging them to try the same at home.

5. Learning and Outreach

There had been staff changes and the new Learning team was now in place. Outreach events were being trialled and there was more cross-district working.

6. Visitor Numbers

It had been a very challenging year. Figures had been low in April, affected by particularly bad weather and the fact that Easter had fallen in March this year. The events programme had been beset by bad weather.

Last year's figures had been helped by the Objective Two funding and it had been accepted that there would be an overall reduction this year. However, although numbers were down, the 'product' on offer had been good and it was hoped this would lead to a better return next year.

The Chairman noted that the credit crunch was probably also having an effect on numbers. He asked if there was any feedback following the change to catering providers at the cafeteria.

Although separate figures were not available, it was likely that the café would break even this year. The changes had produced very positive results. The catering staff were now fully involved in planning for future events and everyone was 'pulling in the same direction'. The quality and range of food on offer had improved significantly and produce was tailored to compliment the theme on event days. Apple day was used as an example, when various items on the menu had used apples and pork produced on site.

The café was a key part in visitors' experience at the museum and it was important that they were able to make the connection between farm and food.

In response to a Member's request, Robin agreed to try to get figures for the next meeting, however he pointed out that they would not give a true reflection this year as they would include set-up and transition costs incurred by the change of caterer.

It was pointed out that Bressingham had gone through the same

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process four years ago and was now making good money.

Discussion then turned to the appeal for a Suffolk Punch foal. A Member asked if Breckland Council would be able to give money for this and the Committee requested that a letter be sent seeking support, possibly in the form of Match Funding.

Finally Mr Blackburn noted that the effects of Learning and Outreach activities were being felt by the small independent museums and that it was working well.

25/08EVENTS PROGRAMME AT GRESSENHALL

Robin introduced Alison Tebbit, the new events Co-ordinator at Gressenhall, who had been in post since April.

Alison gave an illustrated presentation giving Members details of visitor numbers and trends and explained the work being carried out to evaluate the cost of individual events. This work would form part of the planning for events to be held in 2009.

She stressed the importance of building up networks and relationships with groups such as Women's Institutes, Tourism Offices, Arts Groups and the media to promote events and provide publicity. Private events also provided a valuable source of income and led to new visitors to the museum and she hoped to maximise their potential.

Members were shown breakdowns of the costs and figures for each event held during the year. Copies were available from Alison on request.

Mr Lloyd-Owen noted that one of the biggest costs was the marquee hire and he enquired if the museum had thought of purchasing their own. He had made some enquiries and discovered that the marquee company would erect and take down the marquees for purchasers.

Work was also being done to calculate standard operating costs per hour. Robin said it would be interesting to see what the effect on numbers would be if no event was held on a bank holiday. Feedback from visitors and museum pass holders would be used to shape events in 2009.

26/08ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE

Oliver Bone introduced Christina Milton who was doing a post-graduate Museum Course at UEA and was working at Ancient House Museum on Thursdays and Fridays.

1. Thetford Treasure Exhibition

Visitor numbers were up as a result of the exhibition and the good publicity received from an EDP report. The increased display area had also helped, enabling an event programme which had included afternoon talks. These had proved

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popular and might replace evening talks, especially in the winter months.

2. Ancient House and Sikh Culture and History

Schoolchildren now learnt about Sikhism as part of the National Curriculum. Museums could contribute to make learning more interesting and accessible.

3. Thomas Paine

Plans for the bi-centenary continued. The Friends of Ancient House had purchased two cartoons of Thomas Paine and it was hoped to loan a portrait of Paine, by Laurent Dabos, from the National Portrait Gallery.

Other plans included working with Gressenhall to include animals in re-enactments planned for next year.

The first exhibition would open in January 2009 and would deal with the massive housing growth expected and look back at the expansion of the 1960s and the lessons learnt from that.

4. Knit and Natter

This item also linked to Thomas Paine who gave the proceeds from his Common Sense pamphlet for the making of mittens for soldiers.

People were being encouraged to come into the museum to do knitting. This had already proved very successful.

It was pointed out that an item in the news had highlighted the isolation and loneliness of older people and this might be a way to help to address this.

The mittens made would be put on display and eventually passed on to a charity or neo-natal unit.

5. Animation Project

This was part of the Outreach activities and was a way of teaching new skills.

6. Ancient House Participates in Town Events

Oliver was keen for the museum to be part of the town scene and to participate in social events.

They were working with the Dad's Army Museum and the Charles Burrell and it was useful to learn from other museums.

The next event coming up would be the 'Christmas Lights Switch On' on 5 December and the Ancient House would be

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open that evening as would the Burrell Museum. It was usually one of the busiest days and Father Christmas would make a visit.

7. Ancient House as a Venue

The museum was able to contribute to the community by offering space for performances. The atmospherics were very good for small performances and about 30 could be seated.

27/08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Friday 27 February 2009 at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Swaffham Town Council.

The meeting closed at 12.30 pm

CHAIRMAN