
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

**Held on Thursday, 24 October 2013 at 2.00 pm in
The Council Chamber, Thetford Town Council, King's House, King Street, Thetford,
Norfolk IP24 2AP**

PRESENT

Mr P.J. Duigan
Mr C. S. Clark
Mr P R W Darby
Mr R.G. Kybird

Mrs P.A. Spencer
Mr W. R. J. Richmond
Mr P Smyth

Also Present

Mr D. Blackburn
Mrs T Paines

Mr M Oakes

In Attendance

Mr Oliver Bone

Dr Robin Hanley
Ms Sarah Cassell
Ms Megan Dennis

- Curator of the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life
- Western Area Manager
- Curatorial Assistant Museums Trainee
- Curator, Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum

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5/13 CHAIRMAN

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

6/13 VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr Harry Humphries was elected as Vice-Chairman for the forthcoming year.

7/13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2013 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

8/13 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Humphrey and Kiddle-Morris and Mr Steve Miller, Head of Service.

Members were informed that Mr Ray Key had now retired, and the term of office of Ms Christine Walters, Chairman of Friends of Gressenhall had come to an end. It was asked that a letter of thanks be sent to them.

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9/13 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

10/13 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11/13 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

12/13 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE

Mr Oliver Bone presented the report which covered the period from February to September 2013.

There had been two exhibitions during this period at Ancient House, with the current one being Thetfords Lost Tudor Sculptures. A guide book had been written by the principal investigator of the research project, Mr Phillip Lindley and was circulated to members.

Project Funding allowed free admission to Ancient House during August and September, when normal charges apply, which resulted in significantly increased visitor figures.

The previous exhibition was based on 'Hard Times' and looked at life of the poor 100 years ago. A star object on display was a rare workhouse doll loaned from Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse.

Members were informed that forthcoming themes were being looking at including Toys and Games of the last 50 years and would be open Easter 2014.

The Museum was actively involved with co-ordinating commemorations for the centenary of the Great War which would be held during 2014.

Last October, Thetford and the museum were visited by a group from Japan keen to build cultural exchange with the Thetford area. There were hopes of developing student exchanges, internet resources exhibitions and other forms of connections using the rich archaeological heritage of both areas, particularly flint and obsidian.

A mobile app had been developed to link with the Thetford Lost Tudor exhibition, and was being used around Thetford Priory.

A Museum trainee had been working on developing a social media presence of Ancient House. Both Twitter and Facebook accounts had been set up which was used to highlight events and provide links with other museums.

Ancient House was trialling a £2 pre-ordered goody bag for visiting

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school groups, particularly suited to their themed visit and had received good feedback on this.

The Museum continued to benefit from a Curatorial Assistant Museums Trainee, Sarah Cassell as part of the Teaching Museum scheme. Sarah said the placement had been varied and she had been particularly involved in outreach activities in Kings Street. She had really enjoyed the placement which would finish in January 2014.

The Museum had been very busy with activities and in particular the family museum trails, of which Mr Bone expressed his thanks to the Friends of Ancient House for supporting this project.

Volunteers of the Museum continued to work on scanning images from the museum collections to provide better access and to assist enquirers. Friends of Thetford Museum had provided valuable support including the promotion of Museum at Thetford's Night Market.

Visitor numbers were circulated and Mr Bone said the figures were very encouraging and had increased compared with 2012.

Mr Smyth asked if the Museum had been in contact with the Imperial War Museum for the commemorative celebrations in 2014. Mr Bone confirmed that he had been liaising with them.

Mrs Spencer mentioned that she had visited the Lost Tudor Sculpture exhibition and said it was fascinating and was stunned at the different types of sculptures. She asked how much of it was also at Framlingham.

Mr Bone said that whilst there was some sculptures at Framlingham, the Church had the best examples of monuments.

Mrs Paines said that Friends of Ancient House were working very hard and were involved in all talks and events held at the museum. She was proud that it was becoming more of a community museum.

The Chairman thanked Mr Bone for his report.

13/13GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE

Mr Robin Hanley presented highlights from the report which covered the period between January to September 2013.

The Museum opened with a 'Behind the scenes' trial event for Museum pass holders only. This was a chance for visitors to meet volunteer teams, and visit parts of the museum which were not normally open access to the public. There were 800 people in attendance and very positive feedback had been received.

The event programme was the key driver for key sales, particularly those with museum passes. Events were based on three operational modes, main event days, days with a difference and ticketed events.

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The 2013 programme of events consisted of a number of new events as well as maintaining the core events. Each event was reviewed and would shape the programme for 2014.

Following the success of the Breckland Festival in 2012, Gressenhall hosted the event again in 2013 which was organised and funded by Breckland District Council. In 2012, 772 visitors attended the event, however this year saw over 2000 of which staff stepped up to the challenge. Everyone was very pleased with the event and were looking into the potential for running it again in 2014.

The Village at War event was held August Bank Holiday weekend which saw the full Battle of Britain memorial flypast. There were over 3,500 participants for this event.

Apple day had just taken place on 20 October. Again it was a very good event and had received huge positive feedback.

During the summer holidays the museum offered a comprehensive programme which was themed throughout the 6-weeks. It had been marketed throughout all cluster schools and resulted in over 17,000 visitors during the summer holidays. It had been a great opportunity to sell museum passes.

Gressenhall hosted Radio 4's Gardeners Question Time and the recording session generated significant media interest and coverage for the site.

Planning was underway for a programme of activities in 2014 to mark the centenary of the outbreak of World War One.

The Rediscover Gressenhall marketing campaign which featured discounted entry during April and was aimed to recruit new museum pass members and to capture email contact details for use in follow-up electronic marketing, proved to be very successful with the site welcoming over 11,000 visitors in April, and resulted in very strong pass sales. The museum looked to repeat this campaign in 2014.

A heritage grant application had been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for Voices from the Workhouse project. It would focus on providing new displays in the main museum building, work yards and laundry, with an emphasis on those galleries relating to the workhouse and Norfolk's rural life collections.

Gressenhall continued to maintain its strong social media activities and had an active Twitter and Facebook account. This helped to raise awareness of events at the museum.

Research had been carried out based on the exit surveys undertaken during 2013. It reinforced that the site was a family attraction with 70% of visitors arrived in parties including children.

Staff were continuing to invest in the site, and a new CCTV system

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had been installed providing day/night coverage.

The new Seeds Merchants shop had opened in Village Row and the Taylor Brothers had attended the opening event.

Gressenhall continued to develop a range of commercial activities as a way to generate new income.

The Friends and Volunteers of Gressenhall continued to provide valuable support to the museum, and they were heavily reliant on volunteer teams across the site. There were currently 130 volunteers at the moment of which the site could not function without them.

The Gressenhall Learning team continued to provide a broad programme to children which attracted between 11,000 – 12,000 children on site during 2013.

There were changes to the national curriculum of which the learning team were looking to re-scope programmes to ensure they offered relevant topics.

Gressenhall was also hosting two trainees as part of the Teaching Museum programme and recruitment was currently underway for the next cohort of trainees for January 2014. One of these trainees would be based at Gressenhall and work on the event programme for 2014.

The Skills for the Future training programme continued to run from strength to strength covering a variety of activities.

Visitor numbers were up on 2012 figures with just under 50,000 visitors to the end of September.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hanley for his report.

13 .1 Review of the Collection at Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse

Ms Megan Dennis, Curator for Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse presented this report.

The NMAS Acquisition and Disposal policy sets out that Collections should be regularly reviewed. The core collections fell into three categories with different levels of access which were display material, study collections and long-term research material.

When reviews took place museums needed to consider what to do with items that were not retained for the core collections. They were categorised into five options including dispersal (where objects are found alternative homes), or disposal (if no other homes can be found then objects are sold at auction or scrapped).

This was the fifth phase of reviewing collections at Gressenhall with stores and external storage space containing a number of social history objects. These were brought into the collections during the 1970s at a time when museums were generally actively collecting

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items in a relatively uncontrolled manner, without reference to an official collecting policy or quality control. As a result many collections contained duplicate objects, objects that were duplicated in other museums and/or poor quality objects that now required large conservation resources to be of display standard. Some objects had little or no provenance and some had no known relevance to local history of the area. As a result these fell outside the Acquisition Policy of the museums service today.

There were two parts to this review, the first to consider removing threats to other display items and the second was to release storage space.

Ms Dennis bought some objects and shared them with members.

Mr Darby asked if it would be possible to sell items in the museum shop, if the museum was unable to re-home these objects.

Mr Hanley said that the shop was guided by the museum code of ethics which stated that if items were sold in the shop, the money would be ring-fenced to go back into the collection.

The Chairman asked that a list be compiled of items that the museum no longer needed. He also asked if there was a list of objects the museum would like.

Ms Dennis said that by doing the Collection Review it had identified gaps and therefore he had an idea of the strengths of collections.

Resolved to recommend to Joint Museum and Archaeology Committee that the objects listed in Annex 1 of Agenda Item 13a be de-accessioned.

14/13NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be confirmed and would be held at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum.

At the end of the meeting, the Chairman thanked Mr Hanley for the 3-month period where he held the position of Head of Service.

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm

CHAIRMAN