

# Public Document Pack

## BRECKLAND COUNCIL

### At a Meeting of the

## BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

Held on Monday, 25 January 2021 at 10.00 am

This meeting is in line with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

### PRESENT

Mr R.G. Kybird (Chairman)	Mr F. Eagle
Councillor C. Bowes	Mr T. J. Jermy
Mr R. F. W. Brame	Mr M. Kiddle-Morris
Mr P.J. Duigan (Vice-Chairman)	

### Also Present

David Blackburn  
Bill Rhodes

### In Attendance

Oliver Bone	Curator of Kings Lynn and Thetford Museums
Brett Girling	Commercial Property Manager
Dr Robin Hanley	Assistant Head of Museums
Andrew Smith	Operations Manager – West (& East), Norfolk Museums Service
Teresa Smith	Democratic Services Team Leader
Julie Britton	Democratic Services Officer
Ruth Tudge	Democratic Services officer

### 1/21 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 2/21 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillors Clarke, Harvey, Richmond and Mr Ward.

### 3/21 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

### 4/21 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

### 5/21 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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None.

**6/21 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM REPORT**

Dr Robin Hanley, Assistant Head of Museums, Norfolk Museums Service (NMS), provided the Committee with an update on the effect of COVID-19, the current museum closures, and how it had affected the NMS and the impact experienced so far.

All Norfolk Museums had been closed to visitors on 19 March 2020 as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The majority of NMS staff had been working remotely since that time. Following a phased COVID-secure reopening of the NMS museum sites at Norwich Castle, Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse and the Time & Tide Museum during July and August and at Lynn Museum in October, all sites had closed again from 5 November 2020 as part of the second national lockdown. He explained if an area fell into tier 3 or 4, current government restrictions meant that legally they could not reopen to the public until restrictions were released.

Dr Hanley further explained that many normal activities and services, including school visits had been severely impacted due to COVID-19. Many NMS staff had been involved in key duties relating to the Norfolk County Council's COVID-19 emergency work, including making telephone calls to vulnerable residents and managing the distribution of food and medicine to residents who needed that support. He added that during museum closures, staff had made regular checks to all buildings to ensure safeguarding of buildings and collections.

Museum staff had been very positive and creative and had adapted to new ways of working by exploring different ways to engage both existing and new audiences particularly through digital activity. He explained that following the Government announcement that museums could legally reopen from 4 July 20 with suitable COVID-19 security measures in place, Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse successfully reopened to visitors in the summer. This followed the implementation of strict COVID-19 safety procedures that were reviewed and signed off by the NCC Health & Safety and Wellbeing team. Re-opening had also been in accordance with sector-specific guidance issued by the National Museums Directors Council. Gressenhall reopened to Museums Pass holders and Friends on 20 July, prior to opening to the general public on 3 August. All visits had to be pre-booked using timed tickets available from the Art Tickets website and had to accommodate social distancing, site visitor capacity had been significantly reduced.

The Curator of Kings Lynn and Thetford Museums, Oliver Bone, presented the Ancient House Museum report that covered the period from September 2020 to December 2020.

He explained that the layout of Ancient House, with a number of smaller rooms over two floors made the re-opening more difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the requirements for social

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distancing and confirmed that Ancient House had remained closed since March 2020. Extensive work had been carried out by staff to plan carefully controlled COVID-secure on-site activities for schools in liaison with the NCC Health, Safety & Wellbeing team with the first groups expected in December 2020 but those visits had to be cancelled due to the effect of building works at the property next door, the former King's Head Public House. The impact of the building works had caused disruption to the museum's plans to provide a safe return of school groups.

The Studio Ceramics exhibition, which was the last exhibition at the museum prior to lockdown, would now be deinstalled and packed up for storage to make room for a new exhibition of Thetford Treasure which had originally been planned for 2020. Staff were now hoping that this exhibition would be held in 2021 to provide added interest for the reopening of the museum, from 27 March to 4 December 2021, with exact dates to be confirmed with the British Museum.

The Ancient House was working with the Brecks River and Fen Edge Landscape project, with the focus being on Vikings, in partnership with Dr Richard Hoggett to curate the exhibitions. This would also involve members of the Teenage History Group who would work with the NMS Learning officer, Melissa Hawker to work together as community curators to choose artefacts and themes for the display.

The Ancient House continued to host a paid traineeship, provided through the NMS Teaching Museum programme, and the current trainee, Sami Yusuf provided Members with a short talk on his experience so far. He explained that his placement had started at the beginning of the pandemic with the vast majority of work being done remotely. He had some concerns at the beginning of how his traineeship would progress during lockdown but although the digital aspect had presented different challenges, it had also offered many opportunities. He had joined Melissa Hawker in providing some school deliveries on-line and had recently livestreamed to two primary schools to link in with their learning curriculum of Anglo Saxons and Vikings.

The Chairman enlightened the Committee that, the funders of the scheme, Arts Council England, had confirmed that due to the current pandemic, the current trainee scheme would be extended to 18 months.

**7/21 GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE REPORT**

The Operations Manager for East and West, Andrew Smith, presented the report that covered the period from October 2020 to December 2020.

The effect of lockdown and procedures that had been put in place were reiterated. Members were informed that Gressenhall had reduced 'touchpoints' in the museum, covering these over where appropriate. He explained that new takeaway activity trails and packs for younger visitors and their families to use around the Gressenhall

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site had been introduced. All museum visits had to be pre-booked using timed tickets from the Art Tickets website and to accommodate social distancing, site visitor capacity had been significantly reduced.

Due to the pandemic, most of the events programme had to be cancelled. However, there had been a focus on digital delivery as an alternative means of engaging existing and new audiences. The school holiday programme for October half term 2020 was able to go ahead in an amended COVID-19 secure self-led format. The half term week theme was Awesome Autumn which ran from 22 October to 1 November and staff had been able to blend a combination of physical and digital engagement to support this theme. It had allowed visitors to explore nature more closely through autumn crafts, quiz trails, adventurous woodland games and a pumpkin obstacle course which had proved popular.

Since the reopening of the Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse on 20 July 20 a reintroduction of small-scale event activities had been instigated which had focussed on self-led, pencil free activities. The Events, Learning and Curatorial teams had focussed their efforts on digital resources and had uploaded information including an online murder mystery and children's craft activities along with creativity and wellbeing activities inspired by the Lorina Bulwer exhibitions.

With the events programme cancellations, particularly major events such as Apple Day, Gressenhall had presented the first virtual event day with Apple Day Online which delivered creative craft ideas, apple recipes, an apple variety quiz and regular on-line posts across the day for audiences to enjoy. The second virtual event was hosted on 21 and 22 December with Online Festive Activities. Visitors online were greeted with Christmas themed storytelling, craft activities, cooking sessions and a special virtual visit from Father Christmas.

Subject to COVID-19 restrictions, by mid-March it was hoped to have de-installed the 'Full Steam Ahead' exhibition which originally opened on 17 February 2020 for half term, and progress to 'More in Commons', the temporary exhibition for 2021. For this exhibition staff were working in partnership with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. This would be a celebration of the wildlife, history and community of Norfolk's common land. Working together with natural history colleagues, community groups (including Gypsy and Romany Travellers) and volunteers, staff would be developing a COVID-19 secure but engaging exhibition.

Staff at Gressenhall had created several on-line versions of previous temporary exhibitions and tours during the lockdown period to allow online visitors to explore objects and images at their own pace. These included the Full Steam Ahead exhibition and the Behind-the-Scenes Collections Store Tour. This digital content would be uploaded to the Google Arts and Culture platform which would make it accessible to a much wider audience online.

Gressenhall continued to lead on the 'More than Oliver Twist' project. NMS had been granted a further extension to the project which would

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be completed by 31 March 2021. This was originally due to have been a physical exhibition which would have toured around the UK with the six regional partners. However, since lockdown this had been changed to a completely digital offer, now to be hosted on the Google Arts and Culture platform.

The Farmers Foundry Company - steam engine restoration project, funded through Arts Council England had another revised and approved timetable due to delays experienced with lockdown. The plan was to bring the steam engine back to Gressenhall in spring 2021, the engine was now ready to be returned to site, once restrictions had been lifted.

Andrew was pleased to inform the Committee that the new adventure playground at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse did finally open on 25 October 2020, in time for the October half term week. He was also pleased to report that it had been extremely well received by family visitors during that week. The opening followed the implementation of strict COVID-19 safety procedures that were reviewed and signed off by the NCC Health & Safety and Wellbeing team. All visits had to be pre-booked using timed tickets available from the playground entrance once families had arrived at Gressenhall using their pre-booked museum entry tickets. The capacity of the playground was significantly reduced to maintain social distancing, with 25 children able to use the play equipment during a 40-minute play session with a 30-minute cleaning regime between each session.

The Gressenhall farm staff continued to ensure the daily feeding and care of the livestock had been maintained. One element of the farm operation which had been able to continue during lockdown, was the training of the youngest Suffolk Punch horse, Caspar. It was hoped he would be ready to join the rest of the team from the 2022 season onwards.

The Friends of Gressenhall remained supportive but had been unable to generate any new income from the second-hand bookshop which had been closed since the middle of March. Mr Bill Rhodes from the Friends of Gressenhall, explained that the income had dropped tremendously, both with Membership and the book shop, which meant they had not been able to meet every request for funding from Gressenhall that they would have hoped to. It was noted that funding had dropped to approximately £3,000, reduced from an average of £8,500, a considerable drop.

Councillor Kybird conveyed his thanks to the Friends of the Museums and stated that they were an essential part of engaging with the community and contributed towards the success of the museums.

The planned COVID-secure return of school visits had been delayed due to the second lockdown in November. This had been frustrating for staff and schools as there were 800 children from schools booked in which had been clear evidence there remained a strong demand for the service. There had been a small window where Gressenhall had been visited by five schools in total, each visit being from a single

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class group bubble. Preparations had been thorough; the visits went well, and it was felt that the experience of face-to-face delivery proved a useful learning tool for staff to be prepared and ready for when physical visits could recommence.

Learning staff had completed and piloted two sets of films to support classroom learning where schools could watch the films, think of questions they wished to ask and then talk to a costumed character or member of staff via livestream. Responses to both series of films had been very positive.

Dr Hanley updated the Committee on the Kick the Dust Project which had been funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Project Team had adapted their activities and continued to engage with young people to support existing groups across Norfolk using digital means. The project had been running since October 2018 and had been working with young people, outside of a school setting, in the age group 11 to 25 with most of the activity focussing on young people aged 16 and above. As part of the project, they had worked closely with key partners, YMCA Norfolk and Creative Collisions. He explained from the first lockdown in March to the 21 December 2020, there had been a total of 1,860 interventions, involving 704 individual young people taking part in 880 hours of digital activity. The Project Team had worked hard with YMCA partners to provide engaging activities during lockdown when young people were unable to leave their accommodation.

Dr Hanley reported that the summary of evaluation responses had confirmed that the Kick the Dust Project in Norfolk continued to be very successful and had engaged and developed sustainable relationships with young people who now considered museums to be more relevant. It had also increased staff skills and confidence in working effectively with young people and ensured digital content remained relevant and engaging.

Dr Hanley suggested, if Members wanted a more detailed update at a future point, he could arrange for the project co-ordinator to come along and speak to the Committee.

The Chairman felt that this would be very useful, particularly during the active lifetime of the project, as opposed to a summary afterwards.

Andrew Smith then provided Members with an update on the visitor figures, with an additional report on Social Media which has been attached for information.

**8/21 NEXT MEETING**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 17 May 2021 at 10am were noted.

The meeting closed at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN

Briefing Note on Kings Head Public House, Whitehart Street, Thetford

At the end of November a complaint was received by Breckland Council that work was being carried out at the Kings Head and that there was rubble being placed to the rear of the property.

Officers of the Council attended the site following receipt of the complaint.

Following the site visit the Council took action to ensure the safety of the building.

The works on the Kings Head PH were completed on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 and Whitehart Street was partially reopened.

Simon Wood

Director of Planning and Building Control

**Breckland Headline social media report October – December 2020**

*Compiled January 2021*

**Audiences**

Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse have gained over 400 new followers across the three platforms since the last report in September, with a total 13,902 across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram – a very healthy 3% increase in three months.

Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life have gained 170 new followers, representing an excellent 4% increase since September. They now have a total of 4482 followers across the two platforms (Facebook and Twitter).

**Engagement & Reach**

Tracking engagement and reach/impressions tells us how many people are seeing our content and engaging with it. Facebook and Twitter calculate the engagement rate slightly differently, but expressed as a percentage it's an indicator of how many of the people who saw our content (reach/impressions) went on to interact with it by liking, commenting, sharing, visiting our profile etc (engagements/engaged users). Generally speaking, an engagement rate of between 1% and 3% is considered good engagement from our followers.

**Twitter:**

<i>Site</i>	<i>Impressions</i>	<i>Engagement Rate</i>	<i>Link Clicks</i>	<i>Retweets</i>	<i>Likes</i>	<i>Replies</i>
<b>Gressenhall</b>	132.1k	1.1%	109	148	639	38
<b>Ancient House</b>	225.5k	1.8%	129	445	1700	103

**Facebook:**

<i>Site</i>	<i>Engaged Users</i>	<i>Reach</i>	<i>Engagement Rate</i>
<b>Gressenhall</b>	7462	132,809	5.6%
<b>Ancient House</b>	4857	77,657	6.3%

**National and NMS-wide Social Media Campaigns**

**Black History Month:**

**Ancient House** shared on social media the stories of Black abolitionists who lectured in and around Thetford, as well as other famous figures such as Bamba Muller, Allan Noel Minns, and children born to British women and Black American GIs during and after the Second World War. They also delivered an online event 'A Glimpse of Thetford's Black History' on 28 October.

**Gressenhall** shared the exciting news of a decolonisation collaboration with the University of East Anglia, where three UEA History MA students will help the museum seek and tell new stories for 2021.

### **Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day:**

**Gressenhall** remembered those affected by war, including Sergeant Ernest William Freezer, who died on 10 April 1918, and the women involved in the Women's Land Army.

**Ancient House** shared items from their collection, including a large bronze plaque in memory of Frederick Ernest Crick of Thetford, who died in WW1, as well as retweeting a post from South Asian Heritage Month honouring the over 1.3 million Indian soldiers sent to fight for Britain during WW1.

### **November's #ThanksToYou campaign with the National Lottery Heritage Fund:**

**Gressenhall's** Katy Sheard, a participant in the Kick the Dust project, thanked National Lottery players for the opportunities available to her through their support: *"Being part of this has been so valuable, I've gained so much confidence and acquired new skills for my CV"*.

**Ancient House** were delighted to thank National Lottery players for funding some of their amazing projects, including Flint Rocks, Forgotten Soldiers, Festival of Norfolk and Punjab and Teenage History Club's Pride Project.

### **#MerryNMSmas**

In December NMS celebrated the festive season on our social media platforms using the hashtag #MerryNMSmas:

**Ancient House, partnership with Lynn Museum**, made their own advent calendar (an object a day) running up to Christmas itself, plus a 12 Days of Christmas theme to run from Christmas day until 12th Night with historic information about the 12 days and associated traditions.

**Gressenhall** posted daily festive content throughout December, ranging from craft activities, objects from the collections, quizzes, throwback images and Christmas jokes from Father Christmas.

### **Online Events & Activities**

#### **Gressenhall:**

The 30<sup>th</sup> **Apple Day** event at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, a beloved event of both staff and visitors, was held online this year. 'Apple Day Online' was held Sunday 11 October, sharing videos, creative craft ideas, delicious apple recipes, an apple variety quiz and more to enable visitors to enjoy this event from home.

The **More Than Oliver Twist** project set out to discover the real stories of people in the workhouse system through the 1881 census returns. Researched and interpreted by volunteer researchers at six workhouse sites across The Workhouse Network, the stories have been used to create an amazing on-line exhibition. Working with artists, Morgan Tipping and Mel Rye, [a digital exhibition has been created](#) that explores 6 of these lives and the contemporary echoes of these historic experiences. Using recordings with researchers and people experiencing similar issues today, created during the first pandemic lockdown, the exhibitions encourage reflection on these universal issues and on how we support those in need today. The project has also created the largest database of poor individuals and

families yet constructed to shed light on the diverse experience of the poor. The project created over 325 biographies of these everyday people who experienced hardship and support under the very first system of national welfare. This is the [largest national database of biographies](#) of people known at the time as “paupers”.

For some time Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse has had a fruitful **research and digital collaboration with Carleton College, Minnesota, USA**. Recently an article entitled '[Reconsidering Poor Law Institutions](#)' was published by the Historical Journal, which grew out of the collaboration. The work is also featured in the Cambridge Core blog in the post '[Bringing the Past to \(Virtual\) Life](#)'. Gressenhall is acknowledged in both, with Susannah Ottaway, Professor of History at the College, kindly describing the partnership as a 'phenomenal experience'.

Unable to host our **Victorian Family Christmas** at Gressenhall this year, the team provided a host of festive activities to enjoy from the comfort of home. From printable colouring and craft activities to cookery videos, jokes and storytelling hosted by Scrooge himself, viewers could create their own Victorian Christmas at home.



*Father Christmas with Bowler the Suffolk Punch at Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse*

### **Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life:**

Ancient House was chosen as a hub for **OUTing the Past 2021**: an International Festival of Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Trans History comprising events throughout the year and around the world, and a conference and gathering for academics and activists once a year in February. Ancient House joins other hubs across the UK and the world. The conference programme will be selected by Teenage History Club building on their Pride of the People work and will run on 19 February 2021. Due to the ongoing uncertainty over Covid-19 the conference will run digitally. Melissa Hawker, Learning Officer is working with LGBT+ History Month to run a teachers' CPD session and Primary Pupils Conference alongside OUTing the Past in February too.

A digital event, **A Glimpse of Thetford's Black History**, was held on 28 October as part of Black History Month, highlighting aspects of Thetford's Black history.

Ancient House has been 'beaming into classrooms', with opportunities for schools to **interact with costumed characters including a Roman soldier and a Stuart woman**. For Forest Academy, we talked to three classes about Garbology, the study of ancient rubbish, and with support from the curatorial team was able to help them identify the objects they had excavated from their Forest Schools site, including a crucible and a range of Victorian perfume and medicine bottles.

Ancient House and Lynn Museum took part in **UK Parliament Week** in November. Melissa Hawker, Learning Officer gave a talk on Votes for Women with a focus on Norfolk women's contributions to the fight for women's rights, including Helen Dexter (pictured above) and the Duleep Singh Princesses. The talk was delivered via a Zoom webinar and attendees came from across Norfolk, the Midlands and some from India. One of the participants emailed this feedback: *"Just to say how marvellous last night's Votes for Women presentation was. A most interesting talk (really enjoyed the "local" connections). I appreciated all the "graphics" too - they made the historical aspect so pertinent. Thank you again and I look forward to - hopefully - more events like this."*

An online talk '**Did the Victorians invent Christmas?**' was held via Zoom on 9 December, focusing on the many Christmas traditions which have their origin in the 1840s, including crackers and Christmas cards. The participants particular enjoyed the more unusual Christmas cards, for example one featuring children riding bats!