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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

Held on Friday, 12 February 2010 at 2.00 pm in
Council Chamber, King's House, Thetford

PRESENT

Mr P.J. Duigan (Chairman)	Mr M Brindle
Mrs J. Ball	Mr M. Kiddle-Morris
Mrs P.A. Spencer	Mr J. D. Rogers

Also Present

Mr R. Key	Cllr J. Bracey
Mr D. Blackburn	
Mrs C. Walters	

In Attendance

Oliver Bone	- Curator of the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life
Robin Hanley	- Western Area Manager
Vanessa Trevelyan	- Head of Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service
Helen McAleer	- Committee Officer

1/10 MINUTES

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm with the Vice-Chairman, Mr Kiddle-Morris in the Chair.

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

2/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr S Dunn, Mrs D Irving, Mr C Jordan and Mr R Kybird.

3/10 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mrs Christine Walters was welcomed to her first meeting. Mrs Walters was replacing Mrs Brenda Ravencroft as representative of the Friends of Gressenhall.

4/10 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

5/10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Mr M Kiddle-Morris and Mrs C Walters declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 (Gressenhall) as members of the Friends of Gressenhall.

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6/10 GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE REPORT

Mr P Duigan arrived at the meeting and assumed the Chair. He welcomed Mr John Bracey, Vic-Chairman of the Joint Museums Committee, to the meeting.

Robin Hanley presented his report and explained that there had been changes to the staff structures in the western area since he wrote it. Previously Oliver Bone had been curator at Thetford and Tim Thorpe had been curator at King's Lynn. A new post of curator of both King's Lynn and Thetford had been created and he congratulated Oliver on assuming that post. Tim Thorpe would take on the duties of Collections Officer for both towns. Steve Harris would assume premises and Health & Safety responsibilities for both locations and this would free up time for the curatorial teams.

The written report covered the period from September 2009 to January 2010 and Robin briefed Members on its contents.

Events

Days to Remember (18 September) – The weather had been kind and over 1,000 visitors had attended this event which was aimed at people over 55 and had provided an opportunity for working closely with other agencies involved with older people.

Heavy Horse Day (10 October) – This was a smaller scale event and had been used as a pilot scheme using only the usual open day staff resources. It had focussed on one of the unique selling points of Gressenhall, the Suffolk Punches.

Apple Day (25 October) – With 3,404 visitors this had been the biggest attendance in recent years. The site had coped well and it had been a tremendous day celebrating all things to do with apples and the autumn.

Christmas Experience (26 December) – This had been reduced to a one day event and had been blessed with reasonable weather. Activities included Father Christmas, fairground rides, Victorian characters in costume, carol singers, hand bell ringers and cookery in the farmhouse.

The Produced in Norfolk shop would continue through 2010 and would focus on demonstrations on event days. It was seen as a good way of supporting local craftsmen.

The critical factors on event days were catering, car parking and toilets! All had performed well and the café and other food outlets had themed their catering to fit in with the events.

The event programme for 2010 had been finalised and included both old and new events which would hopefully attract existing and new audiences. The season opened on Mothering Sunday (14 March) and other highlights were the Food Fair (3 May) which was a big retail event with the focus on food and farming; and a new smaller event for

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Father's Day (20 June) which would have the theme of 'Big Boys' Toys' and would include a display of modern combines and tractors alongside the older exhibits.

Other Museum Developments

Work was progressing on the Land Army Gallery and the Friends were heavily involved in fundraising for this project. The target opening date was March 2011.

During the closure there had been a programme of works which included the erection of safety fencing around the adventure playground; installing a removable pine floor section to the chapel, to provide a flat surface; and insulation and draft exclusion works to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel bills.

There had also been major refurbishment works on the farm buildings and the Roots building would include a display explaining the history of Union Farm and the rare breeds.

Friends and Volunteers

Fundraising campaigns continued for both the Women's Land Army Gallery and the Suffolk Punch Horse Appeal.

Renaissance in the Regions

As part of this project a new Eco-building was being planned to replace the ticketing huts. This would probably be of straw bale construction with compostable toilets which could also be accessed from the adventure playground. Work was scheduled to commence in the Summer of 2010.

Learning and Outreach

The team had worked on developing new and enhancing existing projects. An innovative session for older high school students would ensure greater participation and interaction and would explore the theme of "Was the Workhouse so Bad?"

In November 2009 Gressenhall Chapel had hosted the Beetley school nativity play, with over 80 students performing.

Another group of young people, not in education, employment or training (NEET) had taken part in the creation and editing of a film exploring the changing attitudes to women. Normally such schemes saw a high drop-out rate but in this instance all had stayed to the finish and received accreditation at the end of the programme which had been co-ordinated by the Western Area Community Outreach Officer.

Robin noted that the Farm Apprentice had started in January. This post was for 18 months and included day-release to Easton College and had been funded by Renaissance in the Regions.

They would also be recruiting for 2 'Future Jobs Fund' six month placements, the following week. One would be attached to the learning team and the other would work in collections.

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The visitor figures were circulated. These were slightly down on the previous year but the fact that there had been fewer events did not seem to have impacted on overall numbers. School visits had reduced slightly but the Learning Team was working hard to deliver the new programme.

Vanessa Trevelyan commented that Gressenhall had a lively programme of events and maintained its numbers by constantly refreshing itself.

The volunteers and Friends provided sterling support to the staff throughout the year, working harmoniously to deliver an excellent service. This was an important element and more support was being offered to volunteers. A second volunteer conference had been held, as a way of saying thank you and also to provide an opportunity to meet other volunteers from around the district and share experiences.

7/10 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE

Oliver Bone presented his report which looked back over the autumn and winter.

A commemorative DVD of Thomas Paine was now available and his death mask (from the Ancient House) was one of the ten Norfolk objects to feature in the BBC's local version of A History of the World. Radio Norfolk were doing an article on Thomas Paine and would be visiting Ancient House to interview local people.

The museum had an ambitious events programme as it was important to encourage repeat visits from the local audience. It also joined in with other activities in the town and those of partner agencies.

At Christmas the Ancient House had participated in the popular switch on of the Christmas lights and had featured a window display of knitted decorations produced through the community knitting project.

Oliver would be attending a meeting to discuss involvement in the Thetford Festival Week to be held from August Bank Holiday and was hoping to persuade David Osborne to give a talk on festivals in the town.

Children from the History Club would be participating in a play on Harry Bensley, who was reputed to have walked round the world, wearing an iron mask and pushing a pram!

An exhibition and programme of events on the Maharajah Duleep Singh was planned to take place from 18 June 2010. It was hoped that a painting of the Maharajah could be borrowed for the exhibition, from a private collector. The Daily Express had featured an article about the Maharajah earlier in the week and had included photographs provided by the museum.

The current exhibition in the museum, which had opened in January, was about people who had settled in Thetford. It started with mammoth butchers and worked forward to the present day and

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included a feature about a previous mayor of Thetford, who had been the first black mayor in Britain.

The kitchen at Ancient house had a display about rabbits as a previous occupant had been a Warrener and it was hoped that the museum would feature in a rabbit cookbook.

Oliver also mentioned work that had been done to install an induction loop at the museum to improve access to the talks and performances held there for those with hearing problems.

The current mayor of Thetford (Mrs Spencer) reminded Oliver that the Town Council had a painting of the Maharajah Duleep Singh which the museum could borrow for their exhibition if required.

Vanessa Trevelyan concluded with a word of caution about the current financial situation. She explained that they were facing funding pressures and that the projected budget for the next three years was very tight. The Renaissance in the Region funding would end in March 2011 although new project grant funding should be available in place of revenue funding.

If the Unitary decision went ahead it would have implications on the Museums Service. There was no further information about that at the moment but it should be borne in mind. Senior Managers were, however, good at getting the funding that was around and this was one of the more successful County Museum Services in the country.

It was noted that Vanessa had served for 10 years in office and the Chairman congratulated her on reaching that milestone.

8/10 NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on **Friday 4 June 2010**, at **10.00am** at the **Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse**. Members would have the opportunity to see the improvements to the chapel and to look at plans for the new Land Army Gallery.

At the conclusion of the meeting Members were invited to visit the Dad's Army Museum, where the Manager, Corinne Fulford, was in attendance to provide answers to any questions.

The meeting closed at 3.05 pm

CHAIRMAN