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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

24th October 2013

Item No.

ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE REPORT

Report by the Curator

This report provides information on activities at Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life from February 2013 to September 2013

1. Exhibitions and Interpretation

**1.1 Thetford's Lost Tudor Sculptures
27th July 2013 – 29th March 2014**



The current exhibition at Ancient House displays the findings of a research project into the stone monuments of the Dukes of Norfolk at Thetford Priory, and features the return to Thetford of artefacts from the British Museum, Norwich Castle and Framlingham Castle. The sculptures are set in their Tudor context and the displays encompass the exhibitions room, Hall, the stairs and a part of one of the upper rooms. .

A guide book to the exhibition has been written by the principal investigator of the research project, Phillip Lindley.

This is a partnership project with the University of Leicester and English Heritage with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Engineering and Physical

Sciences Research Council and others.

Project funding has allowed free admission at the Ancient House in August and September when normally a charge applies. An additional marketing push for the exhibition has included production of a leaflet with details of events, advertising in the monthly 'About Thetford' magazine, a street banner on the pedestrianised high street and door to door distribution of fliers. August and September visitor figures are significantly increased.

1.2 Hard Times

Earlier this year the Museum showed the Hard Times exhibition which looked at the poorest members of society around 100 years ago, covering topics such as sanitation, factory work, slum housing, and the workhouse. The display also made reference to the work camps for unemployed people set up in Thetford Forest after the First World War.

A star object of the display was a rare workhouse doll on loan from Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse.

1.3 Toys

12th April 2014 – 19th July 2014

Museum staff are currently planning a more light hearted exhibition based on the theme of toys and games of the last 50 years or so. A public appeal has been made for objects and a photographer is lined up to take portrait shots of people of all ages with their favourite toys.

1.4 Thetford's World War One 2nd August 2014 – June 2015

The Museum is actively involved in coordinating commemorations for the centenary of the Great War, which falls next year. We are working with colleagues in the town from a number of community organisations and interested individuals, with a view to creating exhibitions and events to mark the local version of an international anniversary. We plan to write a funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund this autumn for support to enhance the various activities.

Recruiting Sergeant Hall



1.5 Future Exhibitions

The Museum is included in a Stage Two bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund badged 'Breaking New Ground'. The Ancient House is one of a large number of partners in this umbrella project led by the Brecks Partnership to conserve, enhance and promote better understanding of the Brecks area of Norfolk and Suffolk. Included for Ancient House in the bid are two exhibition projects (history of the countryside with the Norfolk Record Office, and All about Flint) and funding for learning activities for children and young people.

1.6 Japanese cultural exchange visit.

Last October Thetford and the Museum were visited by a group from Japan keen to build cultural exchange with the Thetford area. Facilitated by Simon Kaner of the UEA School of Japanese studies, this was followed up in August by a visit to Nagawa Machi Japan by the Museum Curator and Deputy Head of Thetford Grammar School generously funded by the Japanese prefecture and partners. There are 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.

1.7 Thetford Priory App

In addition to the Thetford's Lost Tudor Sculptures exhibition mentioned above, an accompanying app and digital teaching resources is being launched this autumn. This interpretive device provides talks from experts and actors, maps and reconstruction drawings to enliven and make sense of the Priory ruins. The app will be available for download onto mobile devices and the Museum has a set of ipads available for use at the Priory. Melissa Hawker, Learning Officer has been much involved in the development and testing of this educational resource working with colleagues from the Leicester team.



Using a trial version of the app at Thetford Priory.

1.8 Social Media

One of our Museum trainee's contributions has been to set up and develop the Ancient House's social media presence. These media offer an increasingly important way to promote the museum's work and activities and to communicate with our audiences. Please join us on

@AncientHouseMus

<https://twitter.com/ancienthousemus>

<https://www.facebook.com/AncientHouseMuseum>



Ancient House Twitter page

2 Learning

2.1 Work with schools

The Ancient House welcomes over 2,000 pupils each year for a variety of activities including: Traditional Tales, Toys, Romans and Iceni, Vikings, Anglo-Saxons, Castles, Tudors, 18th Century, Homes Long Ago, Sikhism, Victorians, WW1 and WW2, Maps, Shops and Shopping, Food and Healthy Living, 1970s life and the London Overspill Project. Feedback from teachers and pupils is valuable, here are two examples:

"...Thank You for a very well organised morning. The children really enjoyed it and were full of all the things they had found out when they got back to school!! Perfectly pitched for year 1."

Year 1 Teacher visiting for WW2 Food and Healthy Living

"My favourite bit was the feather writing. I would like to use a feather for all my writing."

SEN pupil visiting for a Tudor event

The school events rely on a dedicated team of staff, volunteers and freelancers for delivery. They often use a 'carousel' of varied activities perhaps including object handling sessions, story telling, drama, cooking and craft with introductions and plenary sessions at the end. This format provides variety, enjoyment and memorable, effective learning.

2.2 Income generation and new themed souvenir bags for school groups

Ancient House is trialling £2 pre-ordered goody bags for visiting school groups. It is often impractical for large school groups to visit the small museum shop but by offering these bags school, children will still be able to take home a souvenir of their visit and also help the Museum's income generation. Orders have come in for Toys, WW2, Victorian and Roman goody bags.

One teacher commented:

"Love the goody bags. So easy to order and saved me the headache of worrying about the children bringing money."

Ancient House staff will be working with Maria Wong to explore some new shop stock specifically for goody bags.

2.3 Arts Award at Ancient House

The Ancient House continues to provide a variety of ways for young people to gain Arts Awards from work with museum collections. This nationally recognised scheme offers a very good way for children to learn from museums and use collections as inspiration. Melissa Hawker, Learning Officer has developed this area of work, which has gained national recognition. For example, Melissa spoke at the 2013 Museums and Heritage Show to present a workshop on using Arts Award in museums, alongside staff from the Essex Police Museum and Caroline Bray from Trinity College, London which accredits Arts Award. The presentation was well received and Melissa has been asked to repeat it elsewhere.

The Arts Awards work at Ancient House has been written up as a case study of good practice as part of a series of NMAS in-house guides. Copies will be available at the meeting.

2.4 Teaching Museum

Ancient House continues to benefit from the work of our Curatorial Assistant Museums Trainee, Sarah Cassell. Sarah is one of a group of museum trainees working with and learning from the Museums Service around the county as part of the Teaching Museum scheme. This is one of a number of projects made possible by the major partner funding from Arts Council England. The Teaching Museum scheme provides the trainees a way of gaining a variety of skills and knowledge of museum work to give a springboard to a career in the museums sector. A new trainee will be joining us in January and recruitment to the scheme takes place this autumn.

2.5 The Duleep Singh Connection

Because of the interest in the Maharajah Duleep Singh (who lived at nearby Elveden Hall), and the founding of the Museum by his son Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, the Ancient House welcomes a number of visitors each year wanting to find out more about this link and the Duleep Singh story.

In April, the Khalsa Bikers came to the Museum as part of their charity motorcycle ride. Ranveer Singh, group leader said: *I'd just like to thank you all for your kind welcome on Saturday. The riders really enjoyed the visit, it was most educational.*

In September the Museum played a part in the rededication of the equestrian statue of Maharajah Duleep Singh sited on Thetford's Button island by the Maharajah Duleep Singh Centenary Trust. The Trust was marking its 20th anniversary.

3 Events and informal learning

The Ancient House has an active programme of informal learning events and a summary of event highlights since February include:

3.1 Looking at timber framed buildings with a chance to make a wattle and daub wall in the garden with expert Anna Kettle.

3.2 Textiles activities including silk painting, knitting, dyeing, blackwork embroidery, spinning, weaving, molas work, needle felting and drop spindling.

3.3 Museums at Night. Ancient House contributed to the countywide annual celebration which saw over 3,000 visitors enjoy out of hours activities at the county's museums. At Ancient House special tours were provided using powerful torches.

3.4 Archaeology Day

As part of the Festival of British Archaeology, Ancient House ran a special event to focus on local archaeology. Visitors were given a bag of real archaeological finds donated by an excavation unit which they washed, identified, labelled and took home to create their own museum. Archaeological conservator, Debbie Forkes joined us to show how objects are prepared for display. Visitors also had the opportunity to handle objects from the past, explore the layer of our archae-bin, work out the age of a skeleton and strike their own Anglo-Saxon coin.

3.5 Outreach events

On occasion Ancient House staff choose to take activities outside the museum and examples include:

1 Worldwide Knit in Public Day

On 20 June, undeterred by the wet weather, the Museum's Knit and

Knatter group joined millions of other knitters across to world, to knit outside. The group were based on the middle of King Street in the centre of Thetford with a display of some of their creations. Passersby were welcome to join in too with card weaving or knitting nancies. Many thanks to Thetford Town Council for offering the space and providing much needed gazebos.

2 Local History Day

Museum staff joined local historians and community librarians at Thetford Library on 27 June for a special adult local history event. Visitors enjoyed looking at objects from our collection and learning about our extensive talks programme.

3 Tudors in King Street

Volunteers took a Tudor themed event to the main shopping street in Thetford. Members of the public had the opportunity to handle real Tudor objects, try their hand at Tudor games and find out about the new exhibition, *Thetford's Lost Tudor Sculptures*.

3.6 Family Museum Trails

Over the summer holidays the Ancient House launched a Family Trail Loyalty Card scheme. Throughout the year we are running changing family trails around the museum. To encourage repeat visits, especially through the summer, the Museum has issued loyalty cards, stamped for each trail completed. Visitors who complete six trails over the year will receive a special badge and certificate. We are grateful to our Friends for supporting this project.

3.7 Ancient House Clubs

The Ancient House currently offers three children's clubs, a monthly Saturday club, and weekly term time History Club and Teenage History Clubs. All three clubs at Ancient House have been working towards Arts Awards.



Museum club members examining a fossil.

3.8 Mini Museum Club

For very young children under the age of five, the Ancient House offers a regular Thursday morning session for youngsters and their carers. Activities have included exploring colours and shapes in our collections and creating a college rainbow, blowing bubbles and potato printing.

3.9 Thetford Festival 2013

Members of the team at Ancient House were much involved in the planning and delivery of the Thetford Festival which ran during the last week of August and first week of September. The festival is a good opportunity for encouraging community engagement and promoting Thetford to new visitors. The Thetford Tourism and Heritage partnership received a grant of £9300 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards Tudor events and resources.



This year's highlights included free storytelling events for families and adults on 29 August at Ancient House, a young people's art exhibition at the Charles Burrell Museum for the length of the festival and a grand finale day with a Tudor theme coordinated by Ancient House. The 'Meet the Tudors' finale event attracted 1300 visitors who enjoyed a variety of costumed interpretation and events at Kings House gardens. Guided tours to the Priory and exhibition

at Ancient House by scholars from the project university team were also on offer. The full Festival programme can still be seen here <http://thetfordfestival.org.uk/>

4 Friends and Volunteers

New collections volunteers continue with work on scanning images from the museum collections to provide better access and to assist with enquirers. Learning volunteers continue to support the work with schools and public events.

The Friends of Thetford Museum offer valuable support including promotion of the Museum at Thetford's Night Market and also financial support towards equipment and other resources. The afternoon talks programme continues to provide a varied and interesting programme.

5 Visitor Numbers

5.1 Up to date visitor figures will be circulated at the meeting.

6 Resource implications

(a)	<u>Finance</u>	None
(b)	<u>Property</u>	None
(c)	<u>Staff</u>	None
(d)	<u>Information Technology</u>	None

7 Recommendations:

That the Area Museums Committee notes the report

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