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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

20 February 2017

Item No.

GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE REPORT

Report by the Operations Manager – West

This report provides information on activities at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse from July 2016 to January 2017.

1. Events and Activities

- 1.1 Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse opened for the main 2016 season on Sunday 6 March and closed on Sunday 30 October 2016.
- 1.2 For 2016, Gressenhall continued to offer a broad programme of events based around the four operational models:
 - Special Event days – major events which require full event staffing and set up, including the use of large parking fields. For 2016, these were: *Spring Fair*, *Village at War* and *Apple Day*. A premium ticket price, established in 2015, was implemented again to reflect the high level of activities taking place. Free admission continued to be provided to Norfolk Museums Pass holders.
 - Days with a Difference – smaller themed events such as *Gressenhall Goes Wild* and *Rock 'n' Roll at Gressenhall*. These required smaller staffing complement and utilise core parking. They were aimed to attract audiences of 500-800 visitors. Again, they were free to Norfolk Museums Pass holders.
 - Norfolk School Holiday activities – extra themed activities delivered each day of the Norfolk School holidays, with minimal increase in staffing. Free to Norfolk Museums Pass holders.
 - Ticketed Events – pre-booked and pre-paid events. For 2016, these were a Halloween family party entitled *Ghostly Gressenhall* and *Victorian Family Christmas* events. These events, held outside of standard opening hours or of the main season, offered a reduced charge to Norfolk Museums Pass holders.
- 1.3 During the period covered by this report, these events have included:
Special Event Days:

- *Village at War* (1,390 visitors on Sunday; 2,130 visitors on Monday)
- *Apple Day* (2,006 visitors)

Days with a Difference:

- *Gressenhall Goes Wild* (520 visitors)
- *The Workhouse Experience* (347 visitors)
- Heritage Open Day – free admission (2,169 visitors)
- *Horse Power* (780 visitors)

Norfolk School Holiday Activities:

- Summer Holidays: *I'm in the Workhouse - get me out of here!* theme followed by a *1940s Home Front Mystery* theme (11,339 visitors)
- October half term – *Create!* (2,153 visitors)

Pre-booked:

- *Ghostly Gressenhall* (243 over the two evenings)
- *Victorian Family Christmas* (528 over the two days)

The most recent events were the two *Victorian Family Christmas* days which were fully booked, following coverage in The Guardian. Families were able to join in with the carol singing with Upper Octave and watch magic lantern shows. They took part in festive crafts including making traditional Christmas decorations. There was the chance to taste biscuits and drop scones cooked on the range, as well as the slightly less-appetising workhouse gruel. Whilst enjoying traditional games and spooky Victorian ghost stories, visitors had to make sure they kept their hands on their belongings as the Artful Dodger was lurking about, seeing if he could get a little Christmas bonus!

Future events prior to the start of the main season include half term activities between Monday 13 and Friday 17 February 2017, when the museum will reopen from 10am to 4pm daily. These are themed around the Norfolk character of Jack Valentine.

- 1.4 A review of the 2016 programme took place on Tuesday 1 November, following which details of the 2017 events were confirmed. These include an enhanced *Rock N Roll at Gressenhall* event, participation within the national *Open Farm Sunday* programme, and an October *Museums at Night* evening offer which will be free to those with a current National Lottery ticket. The latter will act as a thank you event towards the end of the Voices from the Workhouse project, making a connection between HLF funding and the twice-weekly draw.
- 1.5 These events continue to attract Norfolk Museums Pass holders and to act as a driver to further pass sales. At the 2016 *Apple Day* event, 54% of visitors were Norfolk Museums Pass holders or Friends of Gressenhall. During the day, a further 23 Norfolk Museums Passes were sold.

- 1.6 The costs of delivering and marketing the Gressenhall event programme continues to be subsidised with funding from the Arts Council England (ACE) as part of the 2015-18 Major Partner Museum ACE business plan.
- 1.7 The Gressenhall events programme is promoted via a specific piece of print, as well as an increased programme of digital marketing including Facebook adverts. As well as the museums own social media presence, paid Facebook advertising was taken out for *Village at War* and *Apple Day*. Through this, and the organic reach of the Facebook event pages, *Village at War* reached an audience of 47,000; *Horse Power* 10,000 and *Apple Day* 21,000. On the *Village at War* Facebook event page, 742 noted that they were 'interested' in attending; 217 'went' and 73 'shared' the event with their friends and family. During a brief survey on site of 233 visitors, 18% referenced Facebook as the primary way that they heard about the event.

2. Other Museum Developments

- 2.1 Following the successful grant award of £1.47m (79%) from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Voices from the Workhouse project, the redeveloped workhouse spaces were formally launched on Friday 8 July 2016, following a soft opening at the start of the May Half Term. The second phase of this project is now underway. It will focus on the first floor Collections Gallery and the creation of an interactive handheld device. Both of these elements will be completed in spring 2017. Work on improvements to the Collections Gallery is underway, including redecoration, new flooring and case lighting. Around 2,000 items from the museum's rural life collections will be incorporated into the new themed displays.
- 2.2 During October Half Term, the Chapel was turned into an exhibition space for *Collaborate*. This project has seen the Workhouse building, rich collections and fascinating narratives from the archives being shared with creative and engaged individuals and organisations. The project developed out of Curator Dr Megan Dennis' work with the Museums Association Transformers Programme. The process started in January with an 'Inspiration Day' for all interested parties. Links were established and staff throughout the organisation set about supporting groups and individuals to access workhouse stories. The final exhibition featured items from a variety of disciplines including music, computer graphics, painting, textile art, 3D sculptures, creative writing photography and academic research. A similar programme of engagement and exhibition is planned for 2017, under the theme of 'Rural Lives'. More information can be found on the *Collaborate* blog <https://collaboratewithgressenhall.wordpress.com>

- 2.3 The *Collaborate* exhibition also featured the three workhouse touring exhibitions, co-ordinated by Assistant Curator Lauren Ephithite. Gressenhall was one of 22 workhouses in Norfolk, and staff worked with Aylsham Heritage Group, Downham Market Heritage Group and Wicklewood Archive Group to research the stories of their local workhouses. During the summer, the temporary exhibitions toured venues local to their towns, including libraries and local heritage sites. They were displayed together for the first time as part of *Collaborate*.
- 2.4 The Engineering volunteer team at Gressenhall have cleaned and restored some of the machines within the laundry through a project funded by the Arts Council England Preservation of Industrial and Scientific Material PRISM fund, as part of the wider Voices from the Workhouse project. The volunteers worked with Assistant Curator Lauren Ephithite and NMS Conservator David Harvey. These machines were used when the building was a County Care Home for the Elderly, but have not been in operation since the museum took over the building in 1975. Final work is now underway and the aim is that by restoring these machines we will be able to run them during event days from the 2017 season onwards.
- 2.5 Maintaining and growing a strong Social Media presence remains a key priority for Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and the site has four Social Media Champions to ensure the regular publishing of interesting content on Facebook and Twitter. All staff are encouraged to support this, supplying content and images. These Champions also respond to enquiries and reviews made via these channels, Trip Advisor and Google Reviews. At the end of December 2016 the museum had 3,065 Facebook likes and 4,608 Twitter followers. A Pinterest account has also been established with a wide range of boards including 'Weddings at Gressenhall'. An Instagram page has also been recently established and currently has 38 followers. Furthermore, Gressenhall continues to generate regular blogs about work taking place at the museum. The site was once again awarded a Certificate of Excellence in 2016 from the influential TripAdvisor website.

To connect with Gressenhall, please visit:

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

<https://twitter.com/GressenhallFW>

<https://www.pinterest.com/gressenhallfwh/>

https://www.instagram.com/gressenhall_fw/?hl=en

<https://gressenhallfw.wordpress.com/>

[http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Gressenhall_Farm_and_Workhouse)

- 2.6 Gressenhall continues to develop a range of commercial activities as a means of generating income, including room and venue hire. Two weddings and receptions were held on Saturdays in late July and early August, with highly positive feedback. Together with the initial wedding ceremony in The Old Chapel in May, these events have enabled the team leading on weddings to evaluate and further develop the

operational delivery of these in advance of a further four confirmed bookings for 2017, with more already exploring dates in 2018. The aim is to deliver a high quality offer whilst ensuring that such bookings do not detract from key museum activities.

3. Friends and Volunteers

- 3.1 The Friends of Gressenhall AGM took place on 16 June 2016 at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. No changes were proposed to the committee who were duly re-elected.
- 3.2 The Friends of Gressenhall continue to support a range of activities across the site including significant levels of funding towards the upkeep of the Suffolk Punch horses. In recent months, the Friends have funded an assessment of the renovation work required to return the Farmers' Foundry engine to working order. This engine previously formed part of the Bygones Collection at Holkham Hall. This assessment identified the level of work required to restore the engine and the museum is now working with the Friends to identify additional funding sources available to undertake this work.
- 3.3 On Wednesday 13 July, the Friends hosted a special evening event for members to explore the work of bees in creating honey. This included a talk from Norfolk Beekeeper Venetia Rist who oversees the beehives on Gressenhall Farm. A talk on the history of magic has been arranged for members in April 2017.
- 3.4 The Friends continue to operate the Gressenhall second hand bookshop, generating income for the Friends. Recruitment of a new team of active Bookshop volunteers has helped to ensure that new donations are processed daily and the shelves tidied. Income from this shop continues to grow.
- 3.5 The Gressenhall Curator Dr Megan Dennis continues to co-ordinate, manage and develop the volunteer teams at Gressenhall. Around 120 volunteers are currently active on site, organised into a number of specialist teams. Volunteer hours are currently being recorded to provide HLF contribution in kind match funding for the Voices from the Workhouse project. During 2016, the volunteers across the site gave over 9,750 hours of time to support the museum.
- 3.6 During the 2016 school summer holidays a Family Volunteering scheme was piloted. This work supported the careful packing of the museum collections previously on display within the Collections Gallery, prior to redevelopment of this space. The aim was to develop the way we interact with families, who form a significant proportion of the museum audience, increasing their participation with the collections by giving them a real collections-based job to do rather than an activity. Eight hour-long sessions were run, attracting 54 people: 22 adults and 32 children. Each

family was asked to pick their favourite object that they had packed, stating why they had chosen it. These 'favourite objects' will form a small temporary exhibition when the gallery reopens. We also intend to invite the same families to return for an exclusive preview of the redeveloped space.

4 Learning & Outreach

- 4.1 School visit numbers in the Autumn term at Gressenhall were positive. In particular, the KS2 Neolithic day proved popular, with more than 600 children visiting in a single, and very busy, week. The Learning Team rely upon feedback from visiting teachers and, as a result, have modified one of the four sessions during the day. This session, which formerly focused on pastoral farming and shelter-building, has been broadened, and sets of reproduction clothes have been made to give children the opportunity to dress like Neolithic people.
- 4.2 Following the Voices from the Workhouse development, the museum opened for a *Victorian Christmas* programme once more for primary schools, attracting around 500 children. Children were put to work in the workhouse, made peg dolls and listened to traditional tales as they found out about Christmas for rich and poor and tried to discover who had been leaving oranges in the workhouse.
- 4.3 Looking ahead, school bookings remain strong for the coming year. Once Upon A Time, a traditional tales event for 5 to 7 year olds is already fully booked for June and July. The Learning Team have utilised the January pause in delivery to schools to carry out further development work, addressing a particular curriculum need following an enquiry from a teacher. This has led to the development of a new event for Key Stage 1 children focusing upon 'time'. The day explored different experiences of time through the eyes of the family of Christopher High, a family who entered the workhouse in the mid-nineteenth century and whose statues now grace the main courtyard. Amongst other activities, the children will think about seasonal time as they work out on the fields, weekly chores as they help clean the farm house, boring time as they pick oakum in the workhouse, play time on the swings in the boy's yard and, of course, telling the time in the school room.
- 4.4 Gressenhall is ideally suited to working with children and young people with particular needs, due to its varied settings and displays both indoor and outdoor. Over the years, the Learning Team have developed a specialism in this respect and continue to work closely with Norfolk's Special Schools. We were very pleased that, in addition to meeting their learning needs and having a great day out, an evaluation form from a recent visit thanked staff for treating their children 'with dignity and respect'. The team were also flattered to be asked to run an activity for a small group of young people with complex needs about Ancient Greece. Although not an area of focus within the Gressenhall museum collections

or site, the Learning Team were told that they were so good with young people that the school would like to visit. The resulting event - 'Greekenhall' - will shortly be making an appearance, with the tastes, smells and sounds of Ancient Greece, a quest to make a scary mask to defeat the Medusa and potentially some Greek dancing to finish.

4.5 Learning Officer Katie Smith is currently on maternity leave. Her maternity replacement is Rebecca Hale.

4.6 NMS and Norfolk Arts Service have been successful in a Grants for the Arts funding bid to Arts Council England, for a project to be delivered in partnership with Sinfonia Viva, a nationally recognised orchestra. This exciting project will see an orchestral and sung performance by Sinfonia Viva and a choir of school children, volunteers and members of adult community groups at Gressenhall in June 2017. The words will be co-produced by school children and community groups and will be performed at evening and schools' performances. Gressenhall's Learning Team will be heavily involved in developing an Inspiration Day to provide material for the choral piece and in a Sharing Day following the main performances at which schools will share their own creative responses to the stories from the workhouse. The project is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the continued contemporary relevance of the workhouse and to promote Gressenhall's offer shortly before the start of the summer holidays.

4.7 During the summer, Gressenhall hosted two Professional Internship Programme (PIPs) placements. The first of these saw Samuel Ellis, a student at the Institute of Food Research, spend twelve weeks at Gressenhall from May to August 2016 working on a project entitled "Medical History in the Workhouse". Sam was interested in exploring the differences between historical research and scientific research as well as utilising the opportunity of working at a public museum to gain transferable skills in team work and public engagement. Sam initially conducted an audit of the items within the museum collections linked to medical history and updated documentation relating to these. He then identified which were suitable as future exhibits, as well as researching medical care during the period that the site was a Poor Law Workhouse, using sources such as surviving minutes from Guardian board meetings. This then led to extensive genealogy research of medical officers and notable patients and cases at the institution, some of which featured within the Collaborate Exhibition. A second student, Sam Walpole carried out a similar programme of research, documenting and recording the graffiti on the walls of the Workhouse buildings. The PIPs scheme gives the museum a fresh look at the way the museum works and the collections held, providing significant benefits to the museum as well as the students.

4.8 Gressenhall continues to be registered with NCC as a Care Farm. The site is currently offering funded work-based placements to a number of adults with learning difficulties.

5 Visitor numbers

5.1 Visitor figures for the period will be circulated at the meeting.

6 Resource implications

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

7 Recommendations:

7.1 That the Area Museums Committee notes the report

Originator of report:

Hannah Jackson

Operations Manager - West

Norfolk Museums Service

Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, Gressenhall, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 4DR

Tel: 01362 869254 e-mail: hannah.jackson@norfolk.gov.uk