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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

20 February 2017

Item No.

ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE

Report by the Curator

This report provides information on activities at Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life from July 2016 to January 2017

1. Exhibitions and associated events

**1.1 Thetford Remember 1914 – 1918
Commemorative events**



Under the Thetford Remembers project there have been several events over the summer and early autumn 2016. These have included an exhibition of photographs and artefacts at Thetford Guildhall, an event at the Methodists church and a screening of the Battle of the Somme film made in 1916. A talk on the History of Tanks, first tested in the Thetford area, was given in September as part of Heritage Open Day.

The project was extended by Heritage Lottery Fund to allow the final events to take place. These included the last event which was the opening of the commemorative garden in Thetford's King's House gardens on the 11th November 2016 following the Armistice Day commemorations on the Market Place. The project is now complete and an illustrated evaluation report has been supplied to the HLF. Funding for the Thetford Remembers project has come from Heritage Lottery Fund and from Arts Council England.

The 1914 kitchen display and the First World War Thetford Camp displays will continue until 2018.

The Town Council is planning to be part of a nation-wide evening beacon event to mark November 11th 2018 and the Museum is in early discussions with the Council about contributing to this.

1.2 Flint Rocks! Exhibition

The last main exhibition at Ancient House was 'Flint Rocks!' telling the story of flint in all its aspects. The last day of Flint Rocks was Sunday 27th November 2016. The display covered the geology, social history, archaeology, art and craft of flint and featured unusual dimensions of the material such as its use to make Wedgwood teapots, flint sounds from a kind of flint xylophone, and the production of sculpted flint dogs.

On display was a panel depicting a pony. This was lent to the exhibition by Nick Dickson of Breaking New Ground, who oversaw its extraction from Brandon Library during demolition work. There was also an exhibit created by Volunteer and artist in residence Dan Morgan, who had made a model imagining two flint miners working across the millennia. A Neolithic miner, with his antler pick and flickering lamp is about to come face to face with Arthur 'Pony' Ashley, the last of the Brandon gunflint miners from the earlier 20th century. Dan's finished model featured in the exhibition.

A section of the exhibition featured prehistoric Japanese obsidian, kindly lent by the Archaeology Museum of Obsidian in Nagawa, central Japan. Further assistance with the exhibition had also been given by English Heritage and by Norfolk Museums Service colleagues David Waterhouse, Curator of Natural History and Francesca Vanke, Curator of Art. 3D design was done by Katie Jeffs from the Design and Technical Department and conservation was by colleagues from the NMS conservation department. Volunteers Dan Morgan and Keith Robinson helped with photographing and selecting flint artefacts. A flint necklace by Bill Basham had been loaned to the Museum by the Museums Service at Bury St Edmunds and has now been returned.

This exhibition was part of the Breaking New Ground programme to conserve and interpret the Brecks area of Norfolk and Suffolk. Breaking New Ground receives major funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

1.3 Pulp, Pin Trays Pails and Pots, the story of Thetford Pulp Ware exhibition

The current main exhibition in the Museum's programme opened on the 16th December with a stakeholders opening event on the 3rd February. The display focuses on the story of Thetford Pulp Ware, a distinctive local industry. Thetford Pulp Ware was made in the town's Pulp Works from 1879 until the 1950s. In many ways a green industry it used power from the river to pulp up recycled materials such as old jute bags to make useful articles for the home, for shops and for industry. Decorated with a variety of colourful paint finishes, the products were lightweight, durable and waterproof. They were used for all sorts of purposes including washing-up bowls, baby baths and buckets.

During the Second World War Churchill's secret documents were brought under armed guard to Thetford's Pulp Mill. There they were then transformed into items such as baby baths or fuel tanks for fighter planes. Also during the

war, pulp ware was made into decoys to fool the enemy and the fake pulp soldiers became known as the Thetford Army.

From the start the company made safety helmets. There is a testimonial in an early catalogue from a man who unfortunately had a weight of half a hundredweight (50kg) dropped from four feet onto his head. Luckily he was wearing a pulp ware helmet and although the helmet had to be forcibly removed the man lived to tell the tale. The company made helmets right through the last century and after a change of names from the Patent Pulp Manufacturing Company Ltd. the company continues business in Thetford as Centurion Safety Products. The Museum has been in touch with Centurion during the production of the exhibition and has arranged with permission for a new line of postcards on sale in the museum shop.

This exhibition will run through until December 2017. Exhibitions at Ancient House are funded by Arts Council England as part of the support given to Norfolk Museums Service

2 Forthcoming Displays

2.1 Duleep Singh Gallery Feasibility

Feasibility work is being undertaken for making a new display in one of the upstairs rooms at Ancient House to make more of the unusual connections between the Museum and the Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family, especially his son Prince Frederick Duleep Singh. A number of private donations have been received towards this project totally approximately £2,500. A recent gift of a portrait of the Maharajah is planned to be included in the displays.

3 Learning with Adults, Children and Young People

3.1 Activities for children and Families

The Museum continues to offer a varied programme of holiday activities for members of the public, including craft events and trails. In addition the museum's after school History Club, Teenage History Club and monthly Museum Club continue to be offered.

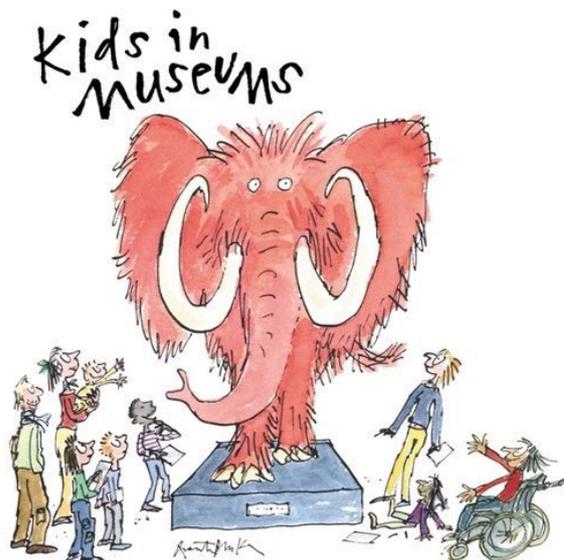
During the school holidays the Ancient House Museum continues to offer a popular programme of themed gallery discovery trails, with a new trail available for each week of the school holidays. Recent trails have included a Christmas trail and a Royal themed trail.

3.2 Nagawa, Japan – Thetford Norfolk Teenage Exchange

The Museum's teenage history club was much involved in a visit by 14 Japanese teenagers last July, 'Obsidian Ambassadors', as part of the Flint Obsidian / Thetford Nagawa exchanges. Members of the Thetford Teenage History group went to Japan last summer. The Japanese teenagers were

shown places of cultural and historical interest in Norfolk, including NMS museums at Gressenhall, Cromer and Norwich and English Heritage sites at Castle Acre and Grimes Graves.

3.3 Takeover Events



In August, the teenagers participated in a Teen Twitter Takeover. The young people joined 50 other heritage organisations across the world who enabled teenagers to takeover their museum twitter feeds. This was part of an annual Kids in Museums event which aims to empower teenagers and give them a voice. Teens had the opportunity to explore behind the scenes, look through boxes of prints, take #MuseumSelfies and hunt for Pokemon amid the Tudor beams. During the day, teens in Thetford

tweeted with teens in London, Durham and Canada. A group of teens at Time and Time Museum, Great Yarmouth issued challenges which sent the young people all over Ancient House seeking answers. The teens also uncovered some fantastic Victorian humour which they shared with Bob Nicholson, historian and curator of @VictorianHumour. Takeover days give children and young people opportunities to showcase their talents by getting involved in decision making, working alongside adults and gaining valuable work experience by taking on adult roles for a day. Ancient House has a long-term commitment to supporting local young people through this scheme. Earlier this year, this work was recognised by the Children's Commissioner when Ancient House was awarded a Gold Commendation for participating in the Children's Commissioner's Takeover Challenge.

For the Christmas Lights Switch On event in late November, the young people also 'took over the event' with a Mystery theme and were commended by visitors for their confidence and ability. The Youth opening of the pulp exhibition in December included another Takeover element with a drama based on the story of secret documents being brought to Thetford in the Second World War for pulping and making into something useful.

3.4 Talks programme, in association with the Friends of the Museum

A programme of illustrated talks continues to be offered at Ancient House Museum on Tuesday afternoons. Recent topics have included A History of the Ancient House by the Curator. Attendances average 15-25 and a number of talks are often delivered by NMS staff.

3.5 Textile groups

The Museum continues to hold Knit and Knatter sessions at the Museum. A spinning group also meets at the Museum on a regular basis and offers demonstrations to visitors.

3.6 Schools

The Museum continues to offer a wide range of learning opportunities for schools. Delivery of the sessions is typically by a combination of museum staff, experienced freelancers and volunteers. A tried and tested format is to offer a 'carousel' of activities around the building with groups of schoolchildren moving between the activities such as object handling, drama, craft and food.

A notable collaboration from the summer was the display of artwork by year 9 pupils from Thetford Academy at the Ancient House, inspired by the Flint Rocks exhibition. A successful private view with parents, teachers and pupils was held in the Museum and artwork was displayed in the museum's bow window. We hope to work with the Academy again in a similar way in 2017.

4 Ancient House and the Media

4.1 Museum on 'Look East' regarding new postage stamp featuring Grimes Graves

The Museum featured in a news bulletin on 17th January on BBC's *Look East* about Grimes Graves's appearance on a new postage stamp with illustrations of prehistoric Britain. A short interview with the Curator was included.

4.2 Thetford in 100 Artefacts, monthly column in Thetford and Brandon Times

Staff at the Ancient House continue with their project in partnership with Andrew Fitchett from the EDP's *Thetford and Brandon Times* to write a monthly column. Entitled *Thetford in a Hundred Artefacts*, recent pieces have included a Victorian kitchen range, the coat of arms designed for Duleep Singh by Prince Albert and a flint arrowhead. The article provides an opportunity to highlight objects from the museum collections and to promote forthcoming museum events.

4.3 Social media

The Museum continues to develop its social media presence with Twitter and Facebook accounts. At time of writing, the Museum currently has 2,338 Twitter followers and 534 likes on Facebook.

The Museum joined other museums across the world for International Museum Mash Up day. Museum Mash Up is a day of "shared experimentation with a focus on improvisation and embracing risk taking". It was started in 2015 in America. At Ancient House both our young people's groups, History Club and Teenage History Club, participated. Members were

presented with a random selection of museum objects and challenged to find links between them. Imagination and improvisation were more important than factual accuracy. Once links had been identified, the groups worked on creating an 'experience' inspired by the connections. The 'experiences' ranged from found poetry to drawing to an aroma quiz. Jen Oleniczak Brown, founder of Museum Mash Up commented: "I'm blown away by the kids ... so happy the history club is part of the Mashup!!" Find out more about the event here <https://storify.com/TheEngagingEd/international-museum-mashup-day>

Other Twitter events the Museum has been involved with include the #ArtStarTrail (National Gallery) before Christmas and #Heritagetreasures (Heritage Lottery Fund) in January.

5 Other Museum Developments

5.1 EDP Tourism Award Best Norfolk Attraction (under 50,000 visitors)

In November 2015, the Ancient House was awarded Best Visitor Attraction in the Norfolk Tourism Awards. The judges were particularly impressed with the customer service of the museum staff. The award has helped the museum publicise its activities through the year.

5.2 Volunteers

A small team of volunteers continues to meet on a weekly basis in the Museum. Volunteers have continued with a programme of documentation work involving the photographing and cataloguing of some of the recent acquisitions. The team's work enhances and illustrates the museum catalogue available online through the museum service's collections website.

Volunteers also contribute to the Learning work through delivery of the Mini Museum Club, the delivery of sessions for schools and preparing resource boxes for learning activities.

5.4 Poetry Workshop

As part of the Breaking New Ground initiative, the Museum has served as a venue for a poetry writing workshop by Sandlines using flint as an inspiration. One of the participants used the Flint Alphabet as inspiration to make an alphabet poem about Bill Basham of Brandon who knapped the alphabet in the 1920s.

5.4 Museum Trainee Scheme

During 2016 -2017, the Ancient House Museum is hosting a 12 month Teaching Museum traineeship provided through the NMS *Teaching Museum* programme, funded



by ACE as part of the 2015-18 Major Partner Museum business plan. Imogen Clarke, one of 6 hosted by the museums service as a whole is our current Trainee. She has worked on a project to provide handling boxes for learning activities.

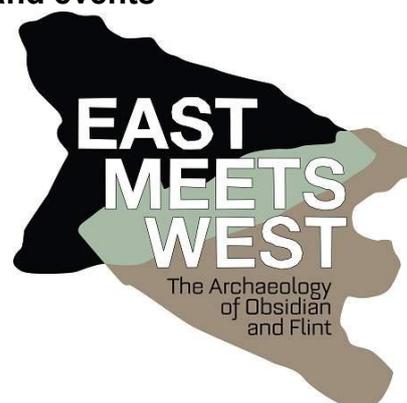
Imogen has settled in very well and will be undertaking a range of museum work to gain experience for her future career.

5.5 Civil partnership ceremony at Ancient House

In August Ancient House hosted its first civil partnership ceremony. The couple were attracted to the atmosphere of Ancient House for their special day. Guests took the opportunity to explore the museum and try out the dressing up costumes. The small courtyard garden proved popular during the sunny afternoon for photographs and toasts. One of the couple commented: "Our Civil Partnership was a dream event made extra special by [the museum staff]."

5.6 East Meets West flint and obsidian conference and events

In July 2016 the Ancient House team, working with the UEA, Sainsbury's Institute and English Heritage, hosted three days of international activities including a conference on flint and obsidian held in Thetford, a day of schools activities and a family event in Kings House gardens. Part of the July activities was a ceremony held at Grimes Graves to mark an archaeological twinning between Norfolk's flint mines and the Hoshikuso Obsidian mines in Japan – a world first.



5.7 Artist in Residence scheme

Dan Morgan, Ancient House Artist in Residence, has imagined what might have happened when Thomas Paine, Thetford's famous revolutionary son returned to his home town to visit his 91-year old mother. Speaking about the project, Dan said: "This summer I have created a model to fit in with the museum's exhibits. The young Thomas Paine must have walked regularly down White Hart Street, past the Ancient House in the 18th Century; I have made a diorama scene of him proclaiming the stirring of his republican thoughts in the streets of Thetford."

This is Dan Morgan's third summer as Ancient House's Artist in Residence. In 2014 he used the museum's pottery collections and Sir Thomas Brown's "Hydriotaphia – Urne Buriall" to produce still lifes. In 2015 he created two model flint miners for the Flint Rocks exhibition. Dan's completed Paine model was displayed as part of Ancient House Heritage Open Day on 10 September.

5.8 New Acquisition – Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man

The Museum has acquired a rare French 1791 edition of Rights of Man (Droits de l’Homme) by Thomas Paine. The acquisition has been paid for by the generous support of the Thomas Paine Society, the Thomas Paine legacy committee and the Friends of Thetford Museum. A presentation event of the book is planned for Monday 27th February. The Museum plans to incorporate the book into the Thomas Paine displays.

6 Visitor Numbers

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

7 Resource implications

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

8 Recommendations:

That the Area Museums Committee notes the report

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