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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

Held on Monday, 27 February 2017 at 2.30 pm in
Ancient House Museum, Whitehart Street, Thetford, IP24 1AA

PRESENT

Mr J Ward
Councillor C Bowes
Mr H. E. J. Clarke

Mr P. R. W. Darby
Mr P.J. Duigan
Mr W. R. J. Richmond

Also Present

Mr D Blackburn

In Attendance

Mr Oliver Bone

Dr Robin Hanley
Hannah Jackson
Melissa Hawker

Leanne Neave

- Curator of the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life
- Head of Operations & Learning
- Operations Manager – West
- Learning Officer, Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life
- Democratic Service Officer

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1/17 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2/17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Dr K Robinson.

3/17 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Leanne Neave to the meeting in her capacity as Democratic Services Officer.

It was requested that Robert Kybird be co-opted to this committee, an invitation to the next meeting would be duly sent.

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4/17 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

5/17 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

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6/17 GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE REPORT

Hannah Jackson presented the report from Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse.

A broad programme of events was still in operation, which ranged from large scale events such as Apple Day to the smaller scale events like the Workhouse Experience. There had been activities throughout the school holidays and special ticket only events such as "Ghostly Gressenhall" and "Victorian Family Christmas".

Visitor numbers for the events were noted as:

Village at War 1390 Sunday, 2130 Monday
Apple Day 2006
Gressenhall Goes Wild 520
The Workhouse Experience 347
Heritage Open Day 2169
Horse Power 780
Summer Holidays 11339
October Half term 2153
Ghostly Gressenhall 243
Victorian Family Christmas 528

The Horse Power day goes from strength to strength, it had however been removed from the coming years programme to enable the programme to remain fresh but would return in the future.

The Victorian Family Christmas days were both fully booked. There had been some fantastic coverage in the Guardian newspaper and visitors enjoyed a full activity programme.

A review of the programme had taken place in November and a new programme had been designed to keep events fresh. Apple Day was now in its 26th year and remained incredibly popular. A Murder Mystery night was planned for June and would be a pre booked event. The site would open on Sunday 19th March for a Lottery Players Preview and similarly Workhouse After Dark on 27th and 28th October. These events gave Lottery players and their families the opportunity to see the site free of charge. These events link in to the heritage funding and Voices from the Workhouse project.

Events held throughout the year help with Museum Pass sales. On Apple day alone half the visitors were pass holders and a further 23 Museum Passes were sold at that event.

The costs of delivering and marketing the Gressenhall event programme continued to be subsidised by ACE (Arts Council England).

Marketing had taken a digital route with the current trend seeing people looking on line for events. Some hard copy marketing would

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still be produced but the majority would be done online.

Cllr Clarke asked if there were any events they were particularly pleased or disappointed with regarding the attendance figures. Hannah Jackson advised that the Heritage open day had over 2100 visitors which was great. It was something done slightly differently to showcase Gressenhall which then encouraged people to come back. The "day with a difference" workhouse experience had only 300 visitors which was disappointing. In recent years the event day in August had not worked as well as hoped, several different days had been tried but numbers always fell short. It had been decided that during the school summer holiday the museum would focus on school holiday activities and events days would be held at other times of the year.

Cllr Ward queried the absence of the "Horsepower" day and what was new on the programme.

Hannah Jackson confirmed the "Horse Power" day had run every year since 2009 and it was decided to rest it and hopefully when brought back into the programme in the future it will create renewed interest. She confirmed there were no "new" events on the programme as all had run in previous years. These included Mother's day, Father's day and a Wedding Fayre.

Cllr Richmond queried if the "Workhouse after dark" event was "Ghostly Gressenhall" with a new name. Hannah Jackson confirmed it was that this event was less "Ghostly" and focussed more on the workhouse.

Cllr Darby asked if the History Fair which gave the opportunity for all museums to demonstrate what their museum had to offer had been thought of as an event.

Members were advised that it was held on the May bank holiday, however over time it had been recognised that museums had less capacity to send a representative. The Museum used the "Heritage Day" to invite groups to attend and hold demonstrations, such as "Metal detect" and "Wise Archive".

Cllr Duigan suggested they invite groups with a local spin. He advised there was a local writer Augustus Jessop who had written a collection of local Ghost stories, he wondered if these could be incorporated as a local link. He also suggested Childhood stories by Eleanor Fenn.

Dr Hanley said several events had life cycles. They were popular for a number of years before a decline begins. The museum identified these events before the decline in numbers thereby allowing more attention to be given on other events. The success of "Heritage open day" was continuing to grow. Strong numbers were also seen on this day across the museums in Norwich and Great Yarmouth.

Cllr Ward queried if on "Heritage open day" the Museum offered a free

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bus service from Dereham to the Museum. Dr Hanley advised a successful free bus service ran in Kings Lynn from the town to different sites and had previously been tried in Dereham but the take up had been disappointing. He agreed the transport links to Gressenhall were difficult and a free bus service on "Heritage day" could be looked at but believed it would need to be in partnership with an organisation or with sponsorship.

Clr Duigan advised that the Mid Norfolk railway hoped to extend their service to County School station so a connection could be made there. Dr Hanley confirmed a partnership was in place with Mid Norfolk railway, for example banners for events were displayed at each site.

The "Voices from the Workhouse" project had been launched on 8th July 2016. The museum had now moved into the second phase of the project, the 1st floor of the building "Collection's Gallery". This was due to open in late Spring. Over 2000 items were to be displayed and at the time of the report the installation of new lights is imminent.

During the October half term holiday the Chapel was transformed into an exhibition space. The display "Collaborate" inspired textiles, drama and art. Spearheaded by Dr Megan Dennis resources were used to engage with a different audience. The programme of engagement and exhibition was planned for 2017 "Rural Lives" would begin with an inspiration day for interested groups.

The Engineering volunteer teams had cleaned and restored some of the machines in the Laundry, which was funded by the Arts Council Preservation of Industrial and Scientific Material fund. It was hoped that these machines will be used on Event days.

Social Media presence remained a key priority for Gressenhall. With 3065 Facebook likes, 4608 Twitter followers and 38 Instagram followers staff were encouraged to support this by supplying content and images. The site was again awarded the Certificate of Excellence in 2016 by Trip Advisor.

The Museum continued to explore additional commercial activities. To date there have been 2 Wedding Receptions held at the site and 1 ceremony. For 2017 there were 4 bookings confirmed with more for 2018. These private hire functions did not detract from the other events held at the museum but generated additional income.

Clr Richmond queried if there was a way the Museum could encourage Facebook followers to link up with Instagram so photos could be shared. Hannah Jackson confirmed that Instagram was a new platform to be used by the Museum and they were looking at how the 2 sites could be linked.

The Friends of Gressenhall continued to support the Museum. They were currently identifying funding sources to carry out renovation work on the Farmer's Foundry engine which previously formed part of the Bygones Collection at Holkham Hall.

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Members had been invited to an evening event to explore the work of bees and a further evening on the history of magic had been arranged for 2017.

The bookshop continued to be supported by the Friends and displays were being themed by volunteers to link in with events at the Museum.

There were currently 120 volunteers on site. The Heritage lottery fund enables recording of hours – 9750 hours were recorded in 2016.

There had been a recent family volunteering opportunity. Families could come together to pack up collections. 54 people attended for 1 hour sessions. The only negative feedback received was that families wished they had a longer session.

Cllr Richmond questioned whether the “Shine a Light” project had finished. Dr Hanley confirmed this was funded as a limited project. Housed in the Norfolk Collections Center items had been rebadged and guided tours of the collection could be arranged.

Cllr Clarke queried if 120 volunteers was a constant or a peak. Dr Hanley advised that Gressenhall was a model for service delivery with volunteers. 120 was right for Gressenhall. They had clear role descriptions for volunteers. The “Voices from the Workhouse” saw different people who were available for a set amount of time for a specific project.

Cllr Ward queried if there was a Young history group at Gressenhall. Dr Hanley confirmed there was a time limited Youth Forum at Northgate High School. Work was underway to look at project funding to enable transport to the museum.

School Visit numbers were high. Through feedback the sessions are constantly evolving. Bookings for 2017 are strong. The “once upon a time” day aimed at 5-7 year olds is fully booked. A new Key Stage 1 event “Time” had been designed to offer different experiences of time through the eyes of Christopher High. (One of the new statues at the front of the museum depict Christopher High). The Learning team were delighted to have received a letter from a teacher requesting a bespoke session for young people with complex needs on Ancient Greece. “Greekenhall” was designed and successfully delivered.

Norfolk Museum Services had been successful in their bid for a Grants for Arts to work with Sinfonia Viva a nationally recognised orchestra. This would see local choirs and music groups working with writers and producers culminating in a performance at Gressenhall in June.

During the Summer Gressenhall hosted 2 Professional Internship Programme (PIP) placements. A new PIP student would start in September 2017.

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The site continues to be registered with NCC as a Care Farm. Cllr Clarke wished to commend what the site does as a Care Farm, he believes it to be very beneficial.

Hannah Jackson presented the visitor figures. She highlighted the decrease in April, was due to the cancellation of the Spring Fair event as a result of Storm Katie. She commented that figures for August were very good.

Dr Hanley pointed out that as the current financial year did not include the Easter weekend figures would be affected. Visitor figures were record breaking and although with the absence of Easter these figures were unlikely to be improved upon. The school visit figures had increased through a lot of hard work from the Learning Team to deliver more sessions.

7/17 ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE

Oliver Bone presented the report from Ancient House Museum.

As part of the Thetford remembers project, funded by Heritage Lottery there have been several events looking at Thetford experiences of WW1. The final event was the opening of the commemorative garden in Kings House gardens. Ancient House had been invited to be part of the Beacon lighting event in 2018.

The last main exhibition had been "Flint Rocks" which showcased the different aspects of flint. It received support from other groups donating objects to display.

The current exhibition focussed on the story of Thetford Pulp Ware. This distinctive local industry worked in a very green way, using power from the river it pulped recycled materials to produce new products. This exhibition would run through to December 2017. The new exhibition will be "Hand Made" where a lot of different types of material will be displayed.

Work was currently underway on a feasibility study to redevelop one of the rooms located upstairs to incorporate displays relating to the Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family.

Melissa Hawker presented the Learning section of the report.

As part of the Learning Activity programme for the summer holiday a variety of Museum trails were used to encourage exploration of the museum on a particular theme. Upon completion of the trail the visitor received a small prize. A Loyalty card was available to promote additional visits and a free trail was given upon completion of the card.

There are many different clubs at Ancient House. A "mini museum club" was held for the under 5s monthly on a Thursday, History Club for children in Year 1 and above was held on a Wednesday after school and Teenage History Club aimed at 12-19 year olds was held on a Friday after school. In addition Discovery Day family activity events were held on certain Tuesdays during school holidays. These

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focussed on different areas of the museum and included costumed characters.

As part of the "Flint Rocks" project the teenage History Club had been working with teenagers in Nagawa in Japan. In 2015 the group went to visit them in Japan and in 2016 15 Japanese teenagers visited Thetford as part of the East meets West project.

Takeover day – This gave young people a taste of adult life and jobs. Ancient House had been awarded a Gold Commendation for participating in the Children's commissioner's Takeover Challenge. The Museum also took part in the "Teen Twitter Takeover day" teenagers were responsible for "tweeting" throughout the day, connections were made with the Time and Tide Museum, The Oriental Museum in Durham and followers in Canada.

Talks on a variety of subjects organised by the "Friends" were ongoing. An event was held each month with the exception of August and December. Some of these talks were already fully booked.

It was hoped the Textiles group that meet at the Museum would be involved in the new "Handmade" exhibition. It was hoped the Spinning and Knitting group at Ancient house can link with the sheep and volunteer dyers teams at Gressenhall.

The Museum was very reactive to the needs of teachers and proactive in their delivery of events. To date there had been 1500 school children visit the museum, Some Year 9 students from Thetford Academy took inspiration from the "Flint Rocks" exhibition and created their own interpretation in clay, textiles etc. this formed part of their Art GCSE studies and the work was displayed at the Museum.

Cllr Ward queried if group visitors were recorded as individual visitors. Melissa Hawker confirmed each visitor to the Museum is recorded as an individual visitor.

Cllr Clarke asked if a Loyalty card was something worth exploring at other sites. Dr Hanley confirmed a number of sites had their own scheme, the "real" loyalty card was the museum pass. However each site had their own initiatives and flexibility to work locally.

MH advised the Trail loyalty scheme was beneficial to visitors as the trails were an additional fee to the entrance fee.

The Museum had featured on Look East as part of the Grimes Graves report. The Thetford 100 Artefacts remained a monthly feature in the Thetford and Brandon Times, which was a fantastic opportunity to publicise events. Social Media is also working well, currently with 2338 Twitter followers and 534 likes on Facebook. The Museum took part in the Museum Mash up day, an American initiative that saw museums linking up globally.

The Museum was awarded the 2015 EDP Tourism award for Best Norfolk Attraction for under 50,000 visitors.

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It was noted that the small team of volunteers continued with the behind the scenes work and learning delivery.

The current Museums trainee, Imogen Clark, was coming to the end of her traineeship/ A new trainee would be based at both Ancient House Museum and Lynn Museum, Kings Lynn from April 2017. The Teaching Museum trainee programme was funded by Arts Council England.

In August the Museum hosted its first Civil Partnership Ceremony.

As part of the Norwich Castle exhibition of Dolls Houses Dan Morgan had worked with the afterschool club to help make a contribution. "Small Stories" allowed the children to design their dream rooms. 23 were exhibited in total and from all the entrants Mitchell's room based on Norwich City Football Club was chosen, Dan helped to create a 3d model of the room.

Thomas Paine's Rights of Man – The Museum had acquired the 1791 edition of Rights of Man. A striking and powerful book that survived the French Revolution. The Portuguese ambassador joined the presentation party.

8/17 NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 19th July 2017 at 2.00pm to be held at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. It was noted that prior to the start of the meeting a tour of the Museum would be available to Members.

The meeting closed at 16:00pm

CHAIRMAN