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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

19 July 2017 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
March 2017 to June 2017**

1. Exhibitions and associated events

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

The Museum was involved in a town-wide programme of commemorative events focussed on the anniversaries of 1914, 1915 and 1916. The Town Council is planning to be part of *Battle's Over* a nation-wide evening beacon event to mark the centenary of the Armistice on November 11th 2018. A number of other Norfolk communities are also getting involved. The Ancient House Museum will be contributing to this with a display of the knitted Field of Poppies exhibit with one poppy representing each of the Thetford's fallen. The Museum is also involved in early plans for an event in the summer of 2019 to mark the peace and aftermath of the First World War.

1.2 Flint Rocks! Exhibition and Breaking New Ground

Last year's 'Flint Rocks!' exhibition covered the geology, social history, archaeology, art and craft of flint and featured unusual aspects of the material such as its use to make Wedgwood teapots, flint sounds from a flint 'lithophone', and production of sculpted flint dogs.

This exhibition was the Museum's main contribution to the Breaking New Ground set of projects supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund working to conserve and interpret the special character of the Brecks area at the heart of Norfolk and Suffolk. In addition to the temporary exhibition at the museum

two interpretive pop-up panels have been made by the Museum (Flint Rocks on tour). These are now available for taking out and about to other venues.

Museum staff continues to work with the Breaking New Ground project. The Museum is promoting the new Brecks Earth heritage trail (also available as a phone app), the Museum Curator is part of the curatorial board for the Journal of Breckland Studies, and attended the recent Revealing the Heritage of the Brecks conference at the Carnegie Rooms, Thetford. At this event, ideas were proposed for a second phase of Breaking New Ground with a new bid planned to the Heritage Lottery Fund with a focus on the 'Wet Brecks' including the rivers of the area and riverine settlements such as Thetford. Museum staff were also interviewed as part of the formal evaluation of the project as a whole.

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 2016 with a stakeholders opening event on the 3rd February 2017. 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. The Museum is working on a project to create a Festival-e-Punjab to take place in the town in July next year. This will be an opportunity for further consultation on the display plans. A project team is working on developing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to cover the costs of this project.

2.2 Handmade Exhibition

Work is underway on planning the new temporary exhibition at Ancient House, this time focussing on the craftsmanship of artefacts in the museum collections. The display will cover different materials with sections on textiles, ceramics, wood, metal and stone. The exhibition will open in December 2017.

2.3 Adjustment to the Thomas Paine display

Museum staff are to update the Thomas Paine display case to incorporate the Droits de L'Homme (Rights of Man) book presented to the Ancient House in February.

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.

On the night of the 28th April, the Museum provided a Night at the Museum sleepover event for 4th Old Catton Brownies group.

A 2017 events flier has been printed to promote the programme of activities to children and families. 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 Hopping Mad Easter trail and a Taste the Past trail.

3.2 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 Recent Finds from Norfolk by Julie Shoemark Attendances average 15-25 and a number of talks are often delivered by NMS staff.

3.3 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. The knitting group made a knitted tricycle which was displayed at the Forum in Norwich as part of their Makers Month event. The group was also treated to a visit to Gressenhall, which they thoroughly enjoyed.

3.4 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. Recent activities have included a visit by Town Close School, Norwich for a day learning about the Maharajah Duleep Singh, an 'outreach to the UK' day at Lakenheath Middle School, and leading the delivery of an Archaeology Day at Thetford Grammar School.

4 Ancient House and the Media

4.1 Antiques Road Trip

The Museum has been approached to appear on the BBC's Antiques Road Trip, this time focussing on the story of Thomas Paine. There could be an opportunity to show the recently acquired early French edition of Rights of Man as part of this programme. Filming will take place in the summer with transmission later in the year or into 2018. Last time the Museum was featured this led to additional people coming to visit.

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 Rebecca from the EDP's *Thetford and Brandon Times* to write a monthly column. Entitled *Thetford in a Hundred Artefacts*, recent pieces have included a medieval gold ring and a prehistoric perforated stone mace. 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 2,481 Twitter followers and 551 likes on Facebook.

The Museum joined other museums across the world for #MuseumWeek in June with posts about Stories, Food, Travel, Women, Heritage, Music and Sport, drawing upon the collections people and activities associated with the museum and the history of the area. Other social media events the Ancient House participated in were #internationalWomensDay and #DayofFacts. In

the summer there will be another Teenage History Club twitter Takeover Day in association with Kids in Museums.

5 Other Museum Developments

5.1 Volunteers

A small team of volunteers 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 for the under 5s, the delivery of sessions for schools and preparing resource boxes for learning activities.

5.3 Friends of the Museum

The Friends of the Museum continue to support the Museum through fundraising and promoting the Museum in the town. The Friends committee has organised social events and an outing to Sutton Hoo, thanks to a bequest to the Friends from former chair, John Rogers.

5.2 Museum Trainee Scheme

During 2017 - 2018, the Ancient House Museum is once again hosting a 12-month traineeship provided through the NMS *Teaching Museum* programme, funded by Arts Council England. Imogen Clarke, one of 6 hosted by the museums service as a whole finished in April and has now started a job at the Fan Museum, Greenwich as Curatorial Assistant. Our new Trainee is Sam Bellotti who has settled in very well and will be undertaking a range of museum work to gain experience for his future career.

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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