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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

27 November 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 July
2017 to October 2017**

1. Exhibitions and associated events

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

The current main exhibition in the Museum's programme opened in December 2016, with a stakeholders opening event taking place 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. 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 2nd December 2017. Exhibitions at Ancient House are funded by Arts Council England as part of their funding support given to Norfolk Museums Service as a Major Partner Museum.

1.2 *Flint Rocks!* Exhibition and Breaking New Ground

Museum staff continue to work with the Breaking New Ground project and have contributed plans for inclusion in a new landscape partnership bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, with a focus on the 'Wet Brecks' including the rivers of the area and riverine settlements such as Thetford. The Museum Curator is also part of the curatorial board for the Journal of Breckland Studies whose second publication is planned for 2018.

1.3 *Thetford Remember 1914 – 1918*

Commemorative events

Following the Museum's delivery of a town-wide programme of commemorative events focussed on the anniversaries of 1914, 1915 and 1916, the Ancient House Museum will be contributing to the Town Council's plans for *Battle's Over* a nation-wide evening beacon event to mark the centenary of the Armistice on November 11th 2018 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. A major Armistice exhibition at Norwich Castle in late 2018 is planned to cover Norfolk's experience of the First World War and the Armistice. The Ancient House will be lending material for this.

2 Forthcoming Displays

2.1 *Handmade* Exhibition

Work is underway on producing 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. Objects on display will include a wooden nurse and child doll from the 1840s, an intricate and colourful patchwork quilt, prehistoric flint tools, a mantrap once used on the Kilverstone estate near Thetford and a 17th century acoustic jar which was once built into a wall at the former Central Hotel on the Thetford Market Place. The exhibition will open to the public on 16th December 2017 when the Museum will also be offering Free Admission as part of a Thank You event for Lottery ticket holders.

2.2. Duleep Singh Gallery Feasibility

Feasibility work continues for making a new display in one of the upstairs exhibition 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. A recent gift of a portrait of the Maharajah is planned to be included in the displays. The Museum plans to submit a bid to the HLF later in 2018 to cover the costs of the permanent display project.

The Museum is also working on plans for a partnership project to create a Punjab themed arts and culture Festival, to take place in the town in July 2018 year in association with Indi Sandhu and Giles Waterfield from the Essex Cultural Diversity Partnership who are planning a bid for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This festival will provide an opportunity for further consultation on the display plans.

.2.3 Adjustment to the Thomas Paine display

Museum staff will be updating the Thomas Paine display case in the Ancient House to incorporate the Droits de L'Homme (Rights of Man) book which was presented to the Museum 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. A 2017 events flier was used to promote the Museum to children and families during the school holidays. In addition the museum's after school History Club, Teenage History Club and monthly Museum Club continue to be offered.

The Museum's Teenage History Club received a grant of £200 towards their activities from the Thetford Mayor's Office, allocated by outgoing Mayor Terry Jermy.

The museum is in regular contact with national campaign group Kids in Museums who also support the 'Takeover' events in museums. Ancient House undertook another *Twitter Takeover* event and Kids in Museums used a quote from a Thetford young person in their campaign: *'The best thing about today and when we have 'taken over' before is knowing that we are being trusted by the museum. 'Cos I know the museum staff are happy that I will do a good job it gives me confidence to do things which I am nervous or scared about. Then when I do the thing I realise I am quite good at it and the museum is right to trust me.'*

Two of the Thetford teenagers, Bethan and Emilia undertook their work experience at Ancient House and in July wrote a piece for the museums 'A History of Thetford in 100 artefacts' series for the Thetford and Brandon Times.

The Teenage History Club had requested a project to find out about people in the past who were not heterosexual. This links with the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality. As part of their investigation they have visited curators at Norwich, and a visit to the Victoria & Albert Museum in

London is planned in November. This project may form part of a future bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund's *Young Roots* strand to include a 3 month-long exhibition at Ancient House Museum.

The younger age-group History Club meets each Wednesday after school. Club members have been working on their Arts Awards inspired by the planning for the forthcoming *Handmade* exhibition.

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 an *Eric the Archaeologist* trail, a *Tales from the Riverbank* trail and a *Halloween* 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 Thetford Pubs by David Osborne, 'The High Lodge project by Ann Mason, Dr Minns, and Britain's first Black Mayor by Richard Maguire. 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 are assisting with the forthcoming *Handmade* exhibition by making letters in textile to create a title for this section of the display. Examples of their work will also be on display and the knitted tricycle will form one of the changing window displays for the exhibition.

3.4 Schools

The Museum continues to offer a wide range of learning opportunities for schools. Delivery of the sessions is typically through 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.

4 Ancient House and the Media

4.1 Antiques Road Trip

The Museum was filmed for the BBC's *Antiques Road Trip* in August 2017, this time focussing on the story of Thomas Paine. Learning Officer Melissa Hawker was filmed with presenter Raj Bisram. This provided an excellent opportunity to show the recently acquired early French edition of the *Rights of Man* as part of this programme. We are waiting to hear from the production team about a transmission date. The previous occasion on which the Museum was featured in this programme resulted in 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 the EDP's *Thetford and Brandon Times* to write a monthly column. Entitled *Thetford in a Hundred Artefacts*, recent pieces have included a miniature cannon, star pincushion and Thetford Cage model. 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 included #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.

5.2 Friends of the Museum

The Friends of the Museum continue to support the Museum through fundraising activities and through promoting the Museum across the town. The Friends committee visited Sutton Hoo in the summer paid for by a bequest to the Friends from former chair, John Rogers.

5.3 Museum Trainee Scheme

During 2017 - 2018, the Ancient House Museum is hosting a 12-month traineeship provided through the NMS *Teaching Museum* programme, funded as part of the NMS Arts Council England Major Partner Museum business plan. Our current 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.

5.4 Staffing

The Museum has recently appointed Kathryn Knock as a new Museum Learning Assistant.

6 Visitor Numbers

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

7 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 |

8 Recommendations:

That the Area Museums Committee notes the report

Originator of report:

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Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life

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