
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

**Held on Friday, 27 June 2008 at 10.00 am in
Charles Burrell Museum, Thetford**

PRESENT

Mr P.J. Duigan (Chairman)	Mrs P.A. Spencer
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe	Mr J. Joyce
Mr R.G. Kybird	Mr C.B.A. Lloyd Owen

Also Present

Mr D. Blackburn	Trustee Charles Burrell Museum
Mr R. Key	Friends of Ancient House Museum

In Attendance

Mr Oliver Bone	- Curator of The Museum of Ancient Life
Dr Robin Hanley	- Area Museums Officer
Laura Matthews	- New Communities Project Officer
Helen McAleer	- Member Services Officer

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10/08 TOUR OF CHARLES BURRELL MUSEUM

Members were given a tour of the Charles Burrell Museum by Mr David Blackburn. He gave a brief talk explaining the recent history of the museum and the origins of the building which has a very unusual Belfast Truss roof construction.

When the building was converted into a museum a mezzanine floor was added to facilitate the display of smaller exhibits whilst the ground floor houses larger items, including a traction engine, a steam road roller and a living van as used by road-making gangs in the early 20th century.

A new exhibit, not present at the time of the tour, is a Showman's engine which was bequeathed to the museum in a will. Although the engine has now been secured by the museum some costs were incurred during the settlement of the will and these have eaten into funds. Efforts are being made to raise money to recoup this unexpected outlay.

Advertising banners and the introduction of the Charles Burrell Museum logo have greatly improved the profile of the museum and the ability to present displays at off-site events.

Another recent acquisition is a display table and working models of steam engines which will greatly enhance the educational talks given

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to school children. A series of such sessions is in progress, planned in partnership with Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life.

Members then made their way to King's House.

11/08CHAIRMAN

After being duly proposed and seconded it was

RESOLVED to re-elect Mr P Duigan as Chairman.

12/08VICE-CHAIRMAN

As no Members met the criteria for Vice-Chairman in the Terms of Reference it was agreed to proceed without one and to elect a temporary Chairman as and when the need arose.

13/08MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

14/08APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr C Armes, Mr M Fanthorpe, Mrs S Matthews, Mr J Rogers and Ms C Salley.

15/08CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked Mr Blackburn for the tour of Charles Burrell Museum and was pleased to see how well it was prospering.

He told Members that Claire Salley had now left Breckland to take up an appointment with Norfolk County Council and thanked her for the work she had done.

16/08ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE

The Curator of the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life, Oliver Bone, presented his report which outlined the work of the Museum between February and May 2008.

Stone Unveiling

A memorial stone to the Maharani Jind Kaur had been unveiled at the museum on 12 March 2008. Members were shown slides of photographs of the Maharani Jind Kaur and her grandson Prince Frederick Duleep Singh who had founded the museum. The event had been held in conjunction with the Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail and there had also been a talk about the Maharani, held at the Carnegie Rooms in Thetford.

New Communities Project

Laura Matthews was introduced to Members. She gave a separate presentation later in the meeting.

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Thetford Treasure Exhibition

This exhibition runs from May to December and many items are on loan from the British Museum. The display also includes late Roman gold and silver jewellery items discovered by a metal detector. This find was not disclosed at the time and unfortunately the site was later developed without the opportunity for a full archaeological investigation.

The jewellery was thought to be an offering to the God Faunus and had been buried when new.

The exhibition also included recently discovered artefacts from other areas of Norfolk, including the Kilverstone site (around Tesco's) where a Roman blacksmith's hoard had been found, a figure of Mercury found at Hockwold which had been acquired by Norwich Castle Museum along with other 'lumps' yet to be fully excavated and a key handle of a lion devouring a man.

The exhibition has received good publicity in the newspapers, TV and radio and this together with a voucher scheme run by the EDP allowing access to museums for £1, has generated an increase in visitor numbers.

Following an event for teachers, to encourage them to bring their classes there has been an increased number of school visits to the museum.

Outreach and Audience Development Officer

Melissa Hawker, covering Ellie Hill's maternity leave, had been working with the volunteer team on a Roman theme this year.

£1,000 funding had been received to operate an after school club for gifted children.

A new museum linked to the Dad's Army television series had opened last year. Visitor numbers had not declined since the opening and a 1940's themed event was planned linking with this. A number of circular coach tours included the Dad's Army museum on their tour, along with the Bressingham Steam Museum.

A Member mentioned that there had been an idea to erect a statue of Captain Manwaring in Thetford. The Town Council had submitted a sketch of a bench with the Captain sitting on it as a suggestion – giving a wonderful photograph opportunity for visitors to sit alongside the Captain and have their picture taken. However, funding had proved a problem and nothing more had been heard about this since the opening of the museum.

It was suggested that Mari Martin of Norfolk County Council should be contacted as she may be able to advise on funding streams.

Thomas Paine 2009

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Funding of £50,000 had been awarded and Match Funding applications had been submitted to bring the total available for this project up to the £100,000 required.

Thomas Paine was an influential writer, author of the three bestselling works of the 18th century, Age of Reason, Rights of Man and Common Sense. 2009 was the bi-centenary of his death.

Members were given more details of the events planned and the work being done to promote community involvement in these celebrations. The aim was to give local people a chance to come together both as individuals and in community groups, to celebrate Paine and Thetford.

Events were planned to run from June to October 2009 and would include museum displays, workshops, story telling, concerts, art exhibitions, schools events, tours and lectures and a Community Play.

It was hoped that Richard Attenborough might be guest of honour.

17/08 GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE, THE MUSEUM OF NORFOLK LIFE

The Chairman welcomed Robin Hanley to the Committee. Robin was already a well known face and had replaced Stuart Gillis who had moved on to Ellesmere Port.

Robin then reported on activities at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse from March to May 2008.

Events and Other Activities

A photograph was shown of the latest additions at Gressenhall – a family of piglets born on Monday night.

The weather had had an impact on some of the events during the past three months, particularly the Easter Fayre as Easter had been so early this year, but there had still been over 1000 visitors.

The Creepy Crawly vintage car rally on 19 April, when the drivers had lunched at Gressenhall, had given visitors a wonderful opportunity to see the cars.

The first of the Over 55's event days, held on 16 May, had suffered from cold and wet weather and visitor numbers had been down to 320. The second of these three events would be on 11 July and would include lots of activities and information.

Other Museum Developments

Following a review of management arrangements it had been decided to link King's Lynn & West Norfolk and Breckland districts. Robin would cover both areas, spending most of his time at Gressenhall.

The creation of this 'Western Area' had led to the formation of an Area Board and at the Board's first meeting it had been agreed that the

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sites at Lynn, Gressenhall and Thetford should get together and identify strategic issues. A working group of staff had also been set up with the aim of sharing skills, support and best practice, providing benefits to all sites.

Recruitment for a new Curator was underway with short-listing next week and interviews two weeks later. This was an important role and would include the recruitment, training and co-ordination of volunteers.

The new newsletter '*Gressenhall Gossip*' had been launched and it was hoped it would encourage closer working between staff in the museum and archaeology wings.

Friends of Gressenhall

The Garrett Steam Boiler which had been repaired and refurbished by the volunteer engineering team, was up and running and proving very popular with visitors. It had been surrounded by fencing for safety reasons.

The Friends had scheduled a "Steam Up" evening for September.

Renaissance in the Regions and Other Projects

- (i) Significant funding has been provided through this programme under the current 2008-09 East of England Hub Business Plan. This has enabled the appointment of two additional posts.
- (ii) Hannah Jackson has been appointed as Sustainability Project Officer. This project will include an expanded *Go Green* event on 28 September and a partnership conference with the New Communities regional Renaissance project being delivered through the Ancient House Museum on 23-24 October. It will develop a range of practical on-site projects including improved composting arrangements and a new wormery which will digest all paper towel waste from the site.
- (iii) Alison Tebbit has been appointed as Events Co-ordinator. This project will enable Gressenhall to develop and evaluate its event programme and improve the quality of events. Funding will also enable the enhancement of the holiday activities programme.

A presentation on the two projects above will be made to the next meeting.

- (iv) Funding of £13,000 from DEFRA and Norfolk County Council has been put to good use. The farm is looking terrific with new fencing, hedging, gates, paths and tracks. Six metre grass strips have been left around arable fields enabling visitors to see the wild flowers and encouraging ground nesting birds and attracting barn owls and kestrels. Access to the Centenary Wood has also been improved.

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- (v) With the expansion of opening times, new low-level car park lighting has been provided. These non-intrusive lights improve safety and security for visitors.

Another area that has benefitted from County Council funding is the café. This had previously had a bottleneck effect on visitor flow. With a new layout, including a servery counter and the provision of other food outlets on site such as the hog-roast and ice-cream stall, the customer experience has been enhanced.

Learning & Outreach

- (i) The end of April saw the completion of the April's Horse project. This project had resulted in the installation of the April's Horse sculpture adjacent to the main museum entrance and the creation of a trail around the site. Representatives from the Traveller community attended the launch event, as did April Cunningham who originated the horse design.
- (ii) NMAS is piloting an extension of community outreach activities in Breckland this summer. This is an example of partnership working as the project is being co-ordinated by Stuart Hall, Community Outreach Officer from King's Lynn Museums. Venues include Watton and Thetford and after school events for younger children in Shipdham.
- (iii) School booking numbers are strong. Gressenhall has developed a really successful educational programme, including *Spring on the Farm* for KS1 children and *All Change!* for KS2 children.
- (iv) The *Three Little Pigs* session for younger children includes a visit to the farm and activities based around the children's story including the making of pig masks, animal homes and dumplings for the stew.

Visitor Numbers

A snapshot of visitor figures was passed round for information. April numbers were down on last year, due to the really bad weather and to Easter falling in March this year. May numbers were up and June figures were encouraging. It was clear that the EDP voucher scheme was encouraging 'non-typical' visitors and it was hoped that they would return. A survey was being carried out on visitor's postcodes and the results would be looked at carefully to see if there had been a change in the demographic profile of visitors.

Members discussed the problems caused by the 'credit crunch' and rising fuel costs. Gressenhall had had an exceptionally good year in 2007 and it was unlikely that those numbers would be matched in 2008 as people were having to 'cut back'. There had also been increased spending on advertising last year. However, it was hoped that the Museum Pass scheme would have a positive effect.

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A request was made for the *Gressenhall Gossip* newsletter to be e-mailed to the Committee members.

Following a question about the profitability of the café now that it was being run by NCS catering, members were told that it was early days yet. The aim was to move away from the previous loss-making to reach break-even with the hope of achieving profitability in the future.

18/08NEW COMMUNITIES PROJECT

The New Communities Project Officer, Ancient House - Laura Matthews, gave a PowerPoint presentation showing growth areas and outlining the contribution that museums can make to communities. These include:

- Providing a shared experience for residents
- Healthy living and voluntary work
- Engaging young people in after-school clubs
- Community engagement in projects and events
- Providing a Sense of Place
- Conservation and preserving heritage and the built environment
- Providing historic records for developers and the planning department.

The New Communities Project is initially funded for a year from April 2008 – March 2009 with plans to achieve funding for a further two years.

Its aim is to develop a partnership with Government Agencies concerned with the Government's growth agenda and with other museums in the region in Growth Points or within Growth Areas. The project will involve consultation with users and partners and the delivery of trial activities.

A regional conference titled '*Museums, Sustainability and Growth*' will be held on Thursday 23 and Friday 24 October 2008 at Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery. This will be aimed at museum managers, planners, policy makers and elected members and anyone with responsibility for development control, regeneration, community cohesion and the environment.

Museums can actively contribute to the growing environmental, economic and social sustainability agendas. This can be through practical on-site action and through museums serving as facilitators for interpretation and debate.

The Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life is well placed to offer a historical and contemporary perspective to issues of growth and integration. The museum can offer advice and help with design, street naming, recording archaeological finds and representing new communities.

Ancient House is planning a temporary exhibition in January 2009

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linked to Growth Point proposals for 6,000 new houses and the redevelopment of the town centre. The exhibition would provide a historical perspective on Thetford's growth to help local people make decisions about how they would like the town to develop in the future. It would focus on key themes for proposed development eg housing, industry, transport, etc and chart how they have changed over time. This exhibition would fit in with Breckland Council's timetable of six week's secondary consultation on the plans for Thetford taking place in January and February 2009.

A Member thought the conference title was wrong and should refer to Heritage rather than Museums. He stressed that archives and libraries should be included along with Conservation officers and the entire Historic Buildings team in Norfolk County Council. He also wanted Member Champions to be invited to attend.

Laura responded by saying that a lot of thought had gone into what the conference should be called and Culture was another term that had been considered. It had been concluded that both heritage and culture were based in Museums. She confirmed that the intention was to hold a major conference, discussing important issues and all interested parties would be welcome.

The Chairman questioned the emphasis on Thetford and pointed out that Attleborough was earmarked for 4,000 additional houses and was also set for major growth. Apart from a small workhouse, Attleborough has no museum buildings. He asked if some learning experiences should be passed on to Attleborough.

Robin pointed out that museums have limited resources. They were looking at what works, where and how to focus resources. He felt they would be in a stronger position to answer that question next year.

The Chairman thanked the Town Council for hosting the meeting.

19/08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Friday 31 October 2008 at the Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. There would be a tour commencing at 10.00 am prior to the meeting which would commence at 11.00am.

The meeting closed at 12.25 pm

CHAIRMAN