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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

26 February 2018

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 November 2017 to January 2018

1. Exhibitions and associated events

1.1 *Handmade, Millennia of Making* Exhibition

The current exhibition, *Handmade, Millennia of Making*, opened at the Museum on Friday 15th December with a 'Takeover event' by the children from the museum's after-school History Club and the young people from the Teenage History Club. The display was officially opened by Cllr Phillip Duigan from the Area Museums Committee. The new temporary exhibition focusses on the craftsmanship of artefacts in the museum collections. The display covers different materials with sections on textiles, ceramics, wood, metal and stone. Objects on display 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 titles of the different sections include contributions by volunteers who made the Textile and Paint headings. The display was curated by the Ancient House team supported by collections volunteers with 3d and graphic design by Lynne Avery-Johnson and Jon Maxwell from the Norfolk Museums Service with preparation of objects by Museums Service conservator colleagues. As well as 'taking over' the opening event, the History Club children feature on the introductory graphic panel pictured with some of the objects on display.

The exhibition opened to the public on 16th December 2017 when the Museum also offered Free Admission as part of a Thank You event for Lottery

ticket holders. Exhibitions at Ancient House are funded by Arts Council England as part of the support given to Norfolk Museums Service

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

The period of this report covers the last weeks of the previous main exhibition in the Museum's programme for 2017 which had opened in December 2016 with a stakeholders opening event on the 3rd February 2017. The display focused 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 ran through until 2nd December 2017.

1.2 Thetford Remembers 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 and the Ancient House will be lending material for this.

The Museum continues to display a First World War kitchen. In November the knitted poppy window display once more took centre stage and the museum's knitting group once more knitted poppies in support of the British Legion. In January the Museum was visited by a group from the Norfolk Branch of the Western Front Association who enjoyed a tour and listened to a talk about tanks.

The Thetford Remembers project has recently been chosen as a case study by the Heritage Lottery Fund for a publication about projects they have enabled.

2 Forthcoming Displays

2.1 Thetford and Punjab Festival and exhibition

The Ancient House team has been working with Indi Sandhu and Giles Waterfield from the Essex Cultural Diversity Partnership on a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Thetford and Punjab Festival to take place in July 2018. A series of town-wide events are planned over this period covering various art forms and cultural connections. In the Museum we plan to provide an exhibition about Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family to include a loan from the National Museums of Scotland of a painting by renowned contemporary artists, the Singh Twins of the Maharajah entitled Casualty of War. If all is agreed with the loan, this will be with us at the Museum from July until the end of November.

2.1 Duleep Singh Gallery Feasibility

Feasibility work continues 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.

Further money was added to the total from a dinner at the nearby Thomas Paine Hotel hosted by the owner Gez Chetal to mark the 150th birthday of the Museum's founder, Prince Frederick Duleep Singh.

The Museum plans to submit a bid to the HLF later in 2018 to cover the costs of the permanent display project.

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 Mini Museum Club continue to be offered.

The Museum once again took part in the town's Christmas Lights Switch on event with a Retro 1950s event complete with food, song and dance. Then in January to mark Prince Frederick Duleep Singh's 150th anniversary and event day was staged and this was followed by a tour and dinner at the Thomas Paine Hotel.

The museum is in regular contact with national campaign group Kids in Museums who also support the 'Takeover' events in museums, such as the opening event for the Handmade exhibition. .

The Teenage History Club have 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 they visited the V and A in London in November where they went on a special tour of the museum with curator Dan Nouveau and his team of volunteer guides. We plan this project to form part of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Young Roots strand to include a 3 month-long exhibition at Ancient House Museum and an initial 'expression of interest' form has been submitted.

The younger aged History Club which meets on a Wednesday after school continued to work on their Arts Awards in association with the 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.

3.2 Silver Social Partnership event

Ancient House Museum is pleased to be a community host within Breckland Council's Silver Social partnership. The Silver Social is an exciting new programme of daytime arts events in the heart of Norfolk, promoting engagement and participation among older people in rural communities. With funding from the National Lottery Arts Council strategic touring fund, Silver Social brings 'something a little different' to daily life in rural Breckland, in the form of creative workshops and live performances.

In mid-February 2018, the museum will host a Sing Your Song workshop with internationally acclaimed singer Kate Dimbleby. In this unique workshop, Kate will invite participants to explore their voice, listen and remember the songs that inspire them.

3.3 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. Attendances average 15-25 and a number of talks are often delivered by NMS staff.

3.4 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 have assisted with the Handmade exhibition by making letters in textile to make a title for this section of the display. Examples of their work are also on display and the knitted tricycle will form one of the changing window displays.

3.5 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.

4 Ancient House and the Media

4.1 Antiques Road Trip

The Museum was filmed for the BBC's Antiques Road Trip in August the summer, this time focussing on the story of Thomas Paine. Learning Melissa Hawker was filmed with presenter Raj Bisram and the programme was broadcast on January 22nd 2018 on BBC1. When the Museum is featured in this was additional people are encouraged to visit.

4.2 Ancient House on ITV news about Prince Frederick Duleep Singh

The Museum was featured in a news item for ITV for the 150th birthday of Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, broadcast on the evening news on January 20th.

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*. 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 2,658 Twitter followers and 632 likes on Facebook.

The Museum joined the following social media events:

#MuseumSelfieDay2018, #Heritage Treasures, #ThankstoYou and #InternationalVolunteerDay. The 'Thanks to You' promotion was in association with the Heritage Lottery Fund, a major stakeholder in the Museums Service. It linked to a national programme offering free admission

to heritage sites to lottery players.

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 enjoyed their Christmas social and AGM in December and have plans for talks and an outing to West Stow in 2018.

5.2 Museum Trainee Scheme

During 2017 - 2018, the Ancient House Museum is hosting a 12-month traineeship provided through the NMS *Teaching Museum* programme, funded by Arts Council England. 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. Advertising and recruitment has started for a curatorial trainee for 2018-19.

5.4 Staff Development

Melissa Hawker, Learning Officer has delivered a programme for the Museum Learning Assistants to help them deliver events for families and schools.

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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