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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

10 September 2018

Item No.

ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE REPORT

Report by the Operations Manager - West

This report provides information on activities at Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life from May to July 2018

1. Exhibitions and associated events

1.1 Duleep Singh Special Exhibition

As part of July's Thetford and Punjab Festival and with financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Ancient House team created an exhibition about Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family. This exhibition included the loan from National Museums Scotland of an important painting by renowned contemporary artists, the Singh Twins of the Maharajah entitled 'Casualty of War'. In addition to the loan of the painting, the museum team worked with Nanaki Bance to create a series of pop up display panels in the Hall which tell the Duleep Singh story. Other interventions around the Museum include the display of original printed portraits of the Maharajah and his son Prince Frederick, loans of Sikh miniatures from Lynn Museum in King's Lynn and the loan of items from the First Anglo-Sikh wars by the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum. Items on display that were donated to Thetford's Museum by the Duleep Singh family are indicated with stickers, the carved oak panel acknowledging the gift of the museum to the people of Thetford by Prince Frederick Duleep Singh has been re-instated and an interactive touchscreen display has been loaned by the Sikh Museum Initiative.

The exhibition opened on 7 July as part of the launch of the town-wide Thetford and Punjab Festival. The Singh Twins were able to be part of the exhibition launch. The exhibition runs from until 1 December.

1.2 Handmade, Millennia of Making Exhibition

The current exhibition, *Handmade, Millennia of Making*, opened at the Museum on Friday 15 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 exhibition focusses on the craftsmanship of artefacts in the museum collections, exploring 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. 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 continues until 8 September 2018.

1.3 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 11 November 2018 - with a display of the knitted 'Field of Poppies' exhibit, with one poppy representing each of 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 running from October 2018 will address Norfolk's experience of the First World War. The Ancient House will be lending material for this exhibition including a mask worn by tank drivers and a fragment of a zeppelin.

In addition, the Museum continues to display a First World War kitchen and a display of finds from the Thetford Camp, a military base during the war.

2 Forthcoming Displays

2.1 *Pride of the People* Teenage History Club Exhibition Project

Learning Officer Melissa Hawker is currently working with the museum's Teenage History Club on a project to curate an exhibition. As part of our Arts Council England programme as a National Portfolio Organisation, the museum is committed to supporting the Arts Council's Creative Case for Diversity, diversifying both the audiences to the museum and also those voices within its displays.

The teenagers are leading on the content and direction of the exhibition which will explore the history of LGBT+ communities and connections with local history. This links with the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality, drawing on the collections of the museum. As part of their investigation the young people visited the V & 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.

The resulting exhibition will be open to the public from 15 September to 1 December 2018.

2.2 Duleep Singh Gallery Feasibility

Feasibility work continues for creating 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 already been received towards this project.

The Museum plans to submit a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund when their new funding framework is in place, probably in 2019.

3 Learning with Adults, Children and Young People

3.1 Thetford and Punjab Festival

The Ancient House team worked with Indi Sandhu and Giles Waterfield from the Essex Cultural Diversity Partnership on a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Thetford and Punjab Festival, which took place in July 2018. A series of town-wide events were delivered over this period covering various art forms and cultural connections.

At Ancient House in addition to the special exhibition (see item 1.1), there were public events on Saturday 7 July relating to the Duleep Singh family members. On Saturday 14 July there was an event about the life of the Maharajah and on Saturday 21 July a Takeover Tour by the Museum's History Club. A family trail was available throughout the festival period.

Another Festival event at the Museum was a pair of talks and book signings by author Fraser Harrison, 'Casualty of War, Casualty of Peace: Ways of seeing Duleep Singh'. The talks were attended by 54 people and a number of his new book 'The Maharajah's Statue' were sold.

An evening talk was given by the curator to members of Hardingham W.I. and members of the public about Maharajah Duleep Singh

As part of the Festival children at the Museum participated in a puppet making workshop on Wednesday 11 July and then took part in the grand Festival Parade on Saturday 21 July as part of the Festival Finale. The Festival Finale day included open-air dancing and music by the river, linking to the annual River Day organised by Thetford Town Council. The Museum welcomed 353 visitors on that Saturday.

One of the themes of the Festival was cross cultural connections and collaboration. An example of this was the link between the Ancient House's textile groups and the Guru Nanak and Milan Day Centre, Gravesend. The

groups visited one another and a joint window display at the Ancient House of textile work was created.

Two more events arranged by the Museum team at alternative venues were the outdoor theatre performance in King Street of a drama about the Last King of Punjab and a Comedy Night with Iszi Lawrence Z List Dead List championing obscure people from history.

In addition to the funding of event, the Heritage Lottery Fund grant also facilitated a project to further enhance the digital catalogue of material at Ancient House relating to Maharajah Duleep Singh, Prince Frederick Duleep Singh and family.

3.2 Activities for children and Families

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 trail themes have included 'House for a Mouse', 'Chocs Away' (World War Two themes), and Spot the Khanda

During May Half Term a 'Meet the Tudors' family discovery day was delivered and the first of the summer holiday family event days followed a Second World War theme.

3.3 Museum Clubs

The Mini Museum Club aimed at those under 5 remains popular. During the period of this report, themed sessions for this age group have included Garden, Mini-beasts, and Dragons and Knights.

As part of events across the county to mark a century of suffrage, members of the Museum's History Club gave a performance of the short drama about the lives of Princesses Sophia and Catherine Duleep Singh at Thetford's annual Mayor Making event in May. Their story was told by members of the Museum's after school History Club, who had been studying the history of the Duleep Singh family.

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 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 a knitted tricycle has formed a popular aspect as one of the museums' changing window displays.

The textile groups have been involved in the Thetford and Punjab Festival (see 3.1 of this report) and are participating in the Town Council project to commemorate the Armistice in November by knitting poppies.

3.5 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.

A free workshop with award winning poet Martin Figura to explore writing from personal memory was held at the museum on Monday 4 June and the museum hosted a performance by Martin on Friday 20 July.

3.6 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. Recent speakers and topics have included: Rik Hoggett exploring Excavation and Experiment: 50 years of archaeological work at West Stow, Nigel Amies on the Civil War and Elaine Rushin speaking about East Harling Church Art and Mysteries.

3.7 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.

3.8 Young Persons' link with the Archaeology Museum in Nagawa, Japan

The Museum has continued the links with the community in Nagawa, central Japan where there is a museum exploring the prehistoric mining and use of obsidian. A party from Nagawa including 8 teenagers visited Thetford in July and early August.

They joined the Museum's Teenage History Club for participation at the Flint Festival at Grimes Graves and a week of activities including visits to Norfolk Museums Service museums and other sites in Norwich, Cromer, Gressenhall, King's Lynn and Thetford. The group was received by the Mayor of King's Lynn and West Norfolk at the Town Hall, King's Lynn and in Thetford they met with the Mayor at King's House where the town's civic regalia had been displayed for them to see.

When in Thetford, the Japanese youngsters stayed with host families and also had two sleepovers at the Ancient House Museum where they ate food prepared in the old kitchen, played games and experienced a tour of the museum including the cellar.

3.9 Museums at Night event

On 19 May, the Museum staged an evening performance of 'Rebel Queen', a story telling event about Boudica who was probably associated with the Thetford area.

4 Ancient House and the Media

4.1 Thetford in 100 Artefacts, regular 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*. The article provides an opportunity to highlight objects from the museum collections and to promote forthcoming museum events.

4.2 Coverage of Festival of Thetford and Punjab

The Museum's participation in July's Festival of Thetford and Punjab was covered in the local papers, the Radio Norfolk Breakfast Show, BBC Look East and ITV Meridian News.

4.3 Social media

The museum continues to develop its social media presence, with Twitter and Facebook accounts being maintained by staff. The Ancient House Museum accounts continue to grow with the Twitter account having 2,773 followers while the Facebook account has 698 follows.

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 learning activities 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 and promoting the Museum in the town. The Friends enjoyed a visit to West Stow with a tour of the site from Richard Hoggett in May. The Friends Summer Social in June was also well attended.

5.3 Teaching Museum Trainee Scheme

During 2018-2019, the Ancient House is hosting a 12 month Teaching Museum traineeships provided through the NMS *Teaching Museum*

programme. Samantha Parker is the new Curatorial Trainee, based at the Ancient House and Lynn Museum. Her traineeship is funded through the Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation 2018-2022 Business Plan. Amongst a range of other activities, Sam is supporting work on exhibitions, volunteers developing educational resources, museum events and she plans to work with colleagues to support visitors with autism to explore the museum.

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. In addition, the Ancient House team recently undertook customer service training as part of a programme of work across Norfolk Museums Service.

5.5 The Theodford Hare

As part of GoGo Hares 2018 a large model of a young hare was painted by artist and museum volunteer Dan Morgan to reflect Thetford's heritage. The decoration of the hare was partly carried out at the Ancient House and visitors enjoyed meeting with Dan and hearing about the meaning of the motifs used. The decorated hares are in support of the Break Charity and the 'Theodford Hare' joined others at Pensthorpe and then at Chapelfield in Norwich.

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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