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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

18 March 2019

Item No.

ANCIENT HOUSE, MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE REPORT

Report by the Curator, Ancient House Museum

This report provides information on activities at Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life from August 2018 – January 2019

1. Exhibitions and associated events

1.1 Olive Edis: Photographer 15th December 2018 – 14th September 2019

The current main exhibition at Ancient House is *Olive Edis: Photographer* which opened on the 14th December at a 'Takeover event' by the children from the museum's after-school History Club, which included the children giving a short dramatic performance based on the life of Olive Edis. The exhibition celebrates the life and work of pioneering British photographer Olive Edis (1876-1955). Although relatively unknown, Edis was one of the most important photographers of the first half of the 20th century and the first-ever accredited female war photographer. The breadth of her subjects from British royalty and aristocracy to the characterful faces of the fisherman of north Norfolk, together with her highly atmospheric photographs of the battlefields of France and Flanders taken during her time as an official World War One war photographer, raise her to international status. The exhibition was created in association with Alistair Murphy, Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) Curator at Cromer Museum. Alistair has previously curated exhibitions at Cromer and Norwich and written the book with Liz Elmore *Fishermen and Kings* about Edis, currently on sale at the museum bookshop. The Olive Edis project was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The exhibition runs until 14th September 2019.

1.2 *Pride of the People: Helping History Out of the Closet* Teenage History Club Exhibition Project. 22nd September – 1st December 2018

The previous exhibition was *Pride of the People: Helping History out of the Closet* curated by the Museum's Teenage History Club. Learning Officer

Melissa Hawker worked with the museum's Teenage History Club to curate this exhibition exploring LGBTQ+ history. As part of the NMS Arts Council England programme as a National Portfolio Organisation, the museum is committed to diversifying both the audiences to the museum and also those voices within its displays. The teenagers led on the content and direction of the exhibition which explored the history of LGBTQ+ 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 they visited the V & A Museum in London in November, where they went on a special tour of the museum with Dan Nouveau and his team of volunteer guides. Dan Nouveau has been very supportive of the team at Ancient House and Professor Richard Sandell from Leicester University also visited Ancient House to meet with and advise the young people.

The resulting exhibition was officially opened to the public by Cllr John Ward, Chairman of the Norfolk Joint Museums Committee on 22nd September 2018 and ran until 1st December 2018. The young people participated in a number of associated events. These included Queer History tours of the Museum given by the teenagers and featuring items in the exhibition as well as exhibits all around the museum. David Shenton, maker of the Duo Shirt loaned by the NMS Costume and Textile collections at Norwich, gave a public talk about his work. On the 13th October, Alan Quick shared his knowledge and collection of material relating to footballer Justin Fashanu, who was featured in the exhibition. The teenagers are following up the project by making a film about their work and developing Queer History tours at Gressenhall and Lynn Museums. A pop-up version of the exhibition is planned which will be available to tour to various community venues. Melissa Hawker gave a presentation about the project to a *Hidden History* conference at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

1.3 Duleep Singh Special Exhibition 7th July – 1st December 2018

As part of last July's Thetford and Punjab Festival, the Ancient House team provided an exhibition about Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family with financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (now known as the National Lottery Heritage Fund). The exhibition included a loan from National Museums Scotland of a 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 graphically tell the Duleep Singh story. Other interventions around the Museum included the display of original printed portraits of the Maharajah and his son Prince Frederick, loans of Sikh miniatures from Lynn Museum 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 were 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 was loaned by the Sikh Museum Initiative.

The exhibition opened on 7th July as part of the launch of the successful town-wide Thetford and Punjab Festival. The Singh Twins were able to be part of the exhibition launch. The exhibition ran until 1st December when the exhibition was de-installed and the loaned painting returned safely to Edinburgh.

1.4 Handmade, Millennia of Making Exhibition

The report period includes the exhibition, *Handmade, Millennia of Making*, which opened at the Museum in December 2017 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 focussed on the craftsmanship of artefacts in the museum collections, exploring different materials with sections on textiles, ceramics, wood, metal and stone. Objects on display included 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 ran until 8th September 2018.

1.5 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 contributed to the Town Council's plans for *Battle's Over* a nation-wide evening beacon event marking 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 took place in late 2018 to cover Norfolk's experience of the First World War and the Armistice and the Ancient House lent material for this including a mask worn by tank drivers and a fragment of a zeppelin.

In addition, the Museum continued to display a First World War kitchen until 1st December and a display of finds from the Thetford Camp, a military base during the war.

2 Forthcoming Displays

2.1 Studio Ceramics

The team at Ancient House is working with curators at the NMS Art Department on a new exhibition to open in September 2019 featuring highlights from the decorative art collections, including recent acquisitions and items not previously on public display. This approach is planned to complement the domestic scale of the museum and the high quality modern display cases in the exhibitions room.

2.2 Thetford Treasure

A request has been made to borrow once more a selection of items from the late Roman hoard of inscribed and decorated silver spoons and gold jewellery known as the Thetford Treasure from the British Museum. If the loan is agreed, the exhibition would take place in 2020.

2.3 Brecks River and Fen Edge landscape project.

The Ancient House has applied to be part of this initiative to focus on the conservation and interpretation of the Brecks Area. If successful, the museum would produce exhibitions on the themes of Vikings and Riverside Industrial Heritage.

2.4 Duleep Singh Gallery Feasibility

Feasibility work continues around 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 been received towards this project totalling approximately £2,500.

The Museum plans to submit a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, following the launch of their new Strategic Funding Framework.

3 Learning with Adults, Children and Young People

3.1 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 dinosaurs and Christmas. The Museum offered a *Handmade* themed event in August to link to the exhibition and in the October Half Term a Romans themed event took place.

On the Sunday of the August Bank Holiday, the Museum contributed to a Duleep Singh event in partnership with the Thetford Town Council and the Anglo-Sikh Heritage Trail. Poor weather drove visitors indoors and activities were held at the Guildhall, Carnegie Rooms and at Ancient House. Some 450 visitors were recorded at the Museum who enjoyed the exhibition around the building including an interactive touchscreen of Sikh art and culture kindly lent by the Sikh Museum Initiative.

The Ancient House participated in the Thetford Heritage Open Day with a *Moving Stories* themed event, and in the popular Christmas Lights Switch on event at the end of November.

3.2 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 Water, Pirates, Snowflakes and Icicles, and Christmas.

The after-school History Club which meets on a Wednesday afternoon continues in popularity and has grown to 20 members. Recent topics have included Olive Edis and the Tudors.

The after-school Teenage History Club continues to meet on a Friday afternoon. Recent activities have included curating the *Pride of the People* exhibition at Ancient House and presenting at an International Archaeology Conference in Japan.

3.3 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 eight 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 the museums at 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 did two sleepovers at the Ancient House Museum where they ate food prepared in the old kitchen played games and did a tour of the museum including the cellar.

In October 2018, Learning Officer Melissa Hawker took five teenagers from Thetford to Japan for a four day visit, during which the young people made a presentation at an international archaeology conference held in Nagano. The visit was paid for by the town of Nagawa and an anonymous donation via the Sainsbury's Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Culture.

3.4 Textile groups

The Museum continues to hold *Knit and Knatter* sessions at the Museum and recently marked their 10th anniversary. 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. The members of the textile groups participated in the Town Council project to commemorate the Armistice in November by knitting poppies.

3.5 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 topics have included Victorian Christmas and the English Civil War.

3.6 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 *Thetford in 100 Artefacts* column in Thetford and Brandon Times

Staff at the Ancient House continue with their project in partnership with the *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 Appearances on BBC Radio Norfolk

Ancient House featured on Radio Norfolk's *The Social* with Jay Lawrence on 28th November and on the Radio Norfolk Breakfast Show.

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 2,873 followers with Facebook having 817 follows. The Ancient House participated in several national social media campaigns including #ThanksToYou, #MuseumSelfieDay, #HeritageTreasures and #Museum30.

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 events and learning programmes including delivery of the Mini Museum Club for the under 5s, the delivery of sessions for schools and preparing resource boxes for learning activities.

Volunteer Dan Morgan created a Victorian Father Christmas window display in December.

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 Annual Christmas Social and AGM took place in December and was well attended. It proved a good opportunity to thank Maggie Findlay who has been Treasurer for seven years.

5.3 Teaching Museum Trainee Scheme

During 2018-2019, the Ancient House is once again hosting a 12 month Teaching Museum traineeships provided through the NMS *Teaching Museum* programme. Samantha Parker is the current Curatorial Trainee, based at the Ancient House and Lynn Museum. The Teaching Museum programme 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. This successful traineeship will be offered again through the Teaching Museum for 2019-20.

5.4 The Theodford Hare

As part of *GoGo Hares* campaign in 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 Thetford hare joined others for a display at Pensthorpe and then at Chapelfield in Norwich. The Theodford Hare is currently on display in one of the upstairs display rooms at Ancient House.

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

Originator of report:

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