

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 29 JULY 1996.

Present:- Councillors D M Miller and D W Gregory (Uttlesford Members); Ms S Kirkpatrick, N B Newman, Mrs J Sturge and A Watson (Museum Society).

Officers in attendance:- L M Pole and J Unwin.

At the commencement of the meeting Mr Newman introduced Ms Sarah Kirkpatrick, the Secretary of the Museum Society and welcomed her to her first meeting of the Museum Management Joint Working Party.

I. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs M R Green, D J Morson and G W Powers.

I. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

It was agreed that Mr N B Newman be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

I. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Notes of the meeting of the Museum Management Joint Working Party held on 17 January 1996 were received.

I. CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Working Party considered a report on the formal relationship between the Museum Society and Council. It covered all aspects, summarising the development of the Museum, the range of its services, staffing, the ownership of land, buildings and the Museum's collections, the current financial position and insurance arrangements.

The report had been prepared in response to concern expressed by Members of the Council at the meeting of the Amenities Sub-Committee on 21 March 1996 and an amended copy of the report was circulated at the meeting which addressed particular issues especially the likely consequences of taking in a valuable collection in terms of insurance and care. It was noted that arrangements for leasing the buildings, land and contents of the Museum (including both Museum collections and equipment) to the Council needed to be concluded without further delay. All that remained was for the Council to be asked to ratify the changes proposed to the Saffron Walden Museum Society's Constitution, confirm the Memorandum of Agreement and authorise the completion of the necessary lease documents relating to land and buildings at the Museum, the Curator's house and the Museum contents.

Councillor Miller proposed that the recommendation set out in the amended report be approved for submission to the next meeting of the Amenities Sub-Committee. This was seconded by Mrs Sturge and it was therefore

RECOMMENDED that the Council be asked:-

- 1 to ratify the changes proposed by the Saffron Walden Museum Society to its Constitution;
- 2 to confirm the Memorandum of Agreement governing the relationship between the Council and the Saffron Walden Museum Society; and
- 3 to authorise the completion of the lease documents relating to land and buildings at the Museum, the Curator's house and the Museum contents.

I. REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MUSEUM SOCIETY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Mr Newman reported briefly on meetings of the Museum Society Management Committee on 25 April and 25 July and the Annual General Meeting of the Museum Society held on 28 June 1996. He also referred to the various events taking place at the Museum throughout the Summer and in particular to the opening of the new Natural History Gallery on 18 May 1996 by Sir Henry Marking and to the special exhibitions which had been held during the Spring and early Summer. He said these events had been very well organised and had proved to be most successful and asked for his thanks to Mr Pole and his staff to be recorded.

He also referred to the cancellation of the meeting of the Working Party, which had been provisionally arranged for 6 March 1996, owing to lack of business. He suggested that it was essential that meetings of the Working Party were held and that it would have been possible in consultation with the joint Chairmen of the Working Party to have found some subjects for discussion to justify a meeting being held.

I. CURATOR'S REPORT

Mr Pole submitted a report on the operation of the Museum for the period from April to June 1996.

He referred to the special exhibitions on "Wildlife Images", "Feeling Good" designed for the benefit of visually impaired visitors and preparations for the forthcoming Autumn exhibition "Star Tracking" produced for Museums in Essex by Southend Museum. He also referred to special events and meetings including the "Animals and Art" event during the half-term holiday at the end of May and the poetry and music evening "Sense and Nonsenses" held on 15 June at the Corn Exchange. The evening aimed to publicise the opening of the "Feeling Good" Exhibition and had been successful in raising funds to contribute towards the cost of the exhibition. The AGM of the Museums in Essex Committee had been held at the Council Offices during June and had included a tour of the Museum and other heritage venues in Saffron Walden. The Annual General Meeting of the South Midlands Museum Federation had also been held at the Museum in June and helped to extend appreciation of both the work of the staff and the collections held at Saffron Walden Museum within the Museum profession.

Of particular significance during this period had been the opening of the new Natural History Gallery which virtually completed the refitting of the Great Hall at the Museum. The official opening of the "The Nature of North-West Essex Gallery" had taken place on Saturday 18 May, co-hosted by the Chairmen of the Museum Society and the District Council. The opening ceremony had been performed by Sir Henry Marking in the presence of Sir Alan Haselhurst MP and over 250 guests. Mr Pole paid tribute to the work of the Museum staff, particularly Nick Gordon, Natural Sciences Officer for his outstanding work from the conception of the Gallery to the finished project. The completion of this project represented the culmination of eleven years work and he also expressed his thanks to all those who had been involved in the work and including the Great Hall Appeal Committee.

The report went on to cover the other areas of the Museum's work including education, loans out, identifications, enquiries and assistance with research, publications and work which had recently been completed to improve access for disabled people involving the installation of a handrail to the main stairs in the entrance hall and tactile signage in various parts of the building. It was noted that the majority of the recommendations of the Access Audit had now been implemented and it was understood that the Museum had been short-listed for the Gulbenkian Award. It was expected that The Museums Association would make an inspection in August on behalf of the Gulbenkian Foundation. The report went on to cover publicity and marketing, attendances, income and shop sales. Both public attendances and schools use had showed an increase over the same period last year. This had produced a substantial increase in income reflecting both a greater level of use and an increase in charges. Gross takings at the shop had also shown a substantial increase. The report also covered security and buildings maintenance, conservation, collections care, collections research and development and documentation. In relation to documentation it was noted that a strategy was in place for the completion of the documentation of the Herbarium Collections through updating and upgrading MODES records and the transfer of data on to the RECORDER biological records package, supported by a grant from the Pilgrim Trust. Staff training and development were covered. Regarding Management, the Curator reported that the Museum Development Plan was in the process of being updated in connection with an application to the Museums and Galleries Commission Registration Scheme Phase II.

He also reported on help from volunteers including two students, one from Saffron Walden County High and the other from Newport Free Grammar School whilst engaged on two weeks' work experience at the Museum and help from the WRVS in guiding visitors around the "Feeling Good" exhibition when required.

After Mr Pole had submitted his report, Councillor Miller referred to Mr Pole having accepted a new appointment in Exeter. It was confirmed that this was the last meeting of the Museum Management Joint Working Party he would be attending and on behalf of the Joint Working Party Councillor Miller expressed his appreciation for the outstanding way in which Mr Pole had managed the Museum since 1975 and helped bring about the renaissance in the Museum's fortunes which had occurred in that time and wished him every success for the future. On behalf of the Working Group the Chairman welcomed these comments and expressed his wish to be associated with them.

I. FUTURE EXHIBITION PROGRAMME

Mr Pole submitted a verbal report introducing the forthcoming programme of exhibitions at the Museum.

The current "Feeling Good" exhibition would end during August and would be followed by "Star Tracking", an interactive exhibition dealing with the development of astronomy which had been prepared in co-operation with Southend Museum and would run until the middle of October. From the end of October until the middle of March an exhibition on "Minerals and their Uses" would make use of exhibits and specimens in the Museum's own collections and show the range of practical uses of many different kinds of minerals.

From the end of March until June 1997, the Museum would be preparing an exhibition in connection with the Centenary of the Moorcroft Pottery. This firm produced a distinctive style of pottery and had been rescued from extinction in recent years by a local man and the exhibition would serve to celebrate this achievement and display the distinctive designs of some of the pottery. This would be followed from the end of June to the middle of August by an exhibition of contemporary pottery and later in the year retrospective exhibition would be held on the work of Edward Bawden in co-operation with the Fry Art Gallery.

I. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Working Party would be held on Wednesday 3 October 1996 at Saffron Walden Museum.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm.

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