

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at 7.30 pm at SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM on 21 NOVEMBER 1996

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

Officers in attendance:- Mrs C Allison, Mrs S McLagan and J Unwin.

I. MRS J STURGE

The Joint Working Party noted with regret the death of Mrs J Sturge. Mr Newman paid tribute to her work with the Saffron Walden Museum Society which now felt a great sense of loss.

I. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

It was agreed that Councillor G W Powers 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 29 July 1996 were received.

I. BUSINESS ARISING

With reference to Minute MM4 - Constitutional Arrangements, Mr Watson reported that the revised constitution had now been submitted to the Charity Commissioners and this completed the process for formalising the constitutional arrangements between the Council and the Museum Society.

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

Mr Newman reported briefly on the meeting of the Museum Society Management Committee held on 24 October 1996. He referred amongst other things to the success of the "Feeling Good" exhibition and suggested that although the exhibition had ended, the theme should be continued in some form. He also referred to discussions with the Essex Records Office about the facility in Saffron Walden and ways in which the Museum Society might assist; the forthcoming publication of the Museum Guide in several foreign languages; a dialogue with Saffron Walden Tennis Club in connection with the management of the premises in the Museum grounds; and the appointment of Saffron Walden Town Council as custodian trustees. The need to attract young people into the Museum Society had been considered and he went on to mention Saffron Walden Museum's involvement in BBC Television's presentation of the "Antiques Roadshow" at the Lord Butler Leisure Centre recently; the possibility of arranging an exhibition of Moorcroft Pottery; details of forthcoming Museum talks; and the possibility of producing a brochure on the Museum's collections which could be used as a teaching aid by schools.

Having reported on the meeting of the Museum Society Management Committee he went onto raise a number of issues which were of concern to him. He referred to the cancellation of the previous meeting in October and to certain misgivings regarding a staffing issue.

He also referred to concerns about the relationship between the Council and the Museum Society as governed by the memorandum and suggested that the Members of the Council should be kept better informed of progress of work at the Museum.

Other concerns included the control of items loaned out; the management of the Castle ruins and Castle grounds; issues of copyright in relation to publications by former employees; commission on the sale of paintings from exhibitions at the Museum; and the need to appoint an Assistant Curator.

Councillor Powers said that he was not in a position to comment on the staffing issue. He suggested that the best way to ensure that the many issues raised by Mr Newman were properly considered was to write a detailed letter to the Director of Community Services listing the issues and highlighting those which were of particular concern to him.

Mr Newman felt that the Officers should be able to identify issues of concern from the minutes of the meeting but the Chairman of the Meeting reiterated his suggestion that it would be helpful to write a letter setting out the issues.

Mr Newman referred to a meeting which he had attended with the Director of Community Services, the Chief Executive of the Council and a Member of the Council and said that he expected that the issues he had referred to would have been taken up at this meeting. He suggested that it might be beneficial to hold meetings of the Museum Management Joint Working Party more frequently, particularly as he understood that the memorandum made provision for quarterly meetings.

I. **CURATOR'S REPORT**

Mrs Allison submitted a report on the operation of the Museum for the period from July to October 1996.

She referred to the special exhibitions, particularly the success of the "Feeling Good" exhibition, the current "Stone, Status and Superstitions" exhibition highlighting the Museum's geological collections and the arrangements which were in hand for the "Moorcroft Pottery: A Century of Colour" exhibition.

She referred to the loans out which had been made during the period and also to new guidelines, connected with Phase II of the Museums and Galleries Commission's registration requirements on documentation, which would affect the way in which loans and new entries were documented.

With regard to the successful "Feeling Good" exhibition, the Museum had been entered for awards in recognition of good access provision and awareness. Regarding publicity and marketing, she referred to interviews on BBC Radio Essex and involvement with BBC TV's "Antiques Roadshow". It was understood that this programme would be broadcast during February.

The report went on to cover details of attendances, income from admission charges and shop sales, security and buildings maintenance issues, conservation and collections care, collections research and development and progress with documentation.

As the "Feeling Good" exhibition had been so well received the possibility of developing it into a touring exhibition was being considered and discussed with Essex County Council.

She also referred to several management issues in connection with deadlines for Phase II of registration with the Museums and Galleries Commission. The necessary documentation arrived late from the Commission. This had reduced the time available for the forms to be completed. The Curator had taken up this issue with SEMS and was seeking an extension of the deadline so that the Museum had as much time as the other applicants to prepare its submission. She explained that the format of the application form had been changed and time was needed to collate the necessary information and then for the form to be approved through the Council's Committee system. It would be necessary to call another meeting of the Joint Working Party by 23 January and this would ensure that at each stage there was sufficient time for the details of the submission to be fully considered.

With regard to the collections policy, the Curator drew attention to the need to closely control what was accepted into the Museum's collections. This would also have implications for the development of local museum collections at other locations in the District. Councillor Powers agreed that it was most important not to delay the registration process and if another meeting was required with the Dunmow Collectors' Club then it should be possible to make suitable arrangements.

I. **ADMISSION CHARGES AT SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM**

A report was submitted by the Head of Leisure and Amenities reviewing the current scale of admission charges at Saffron Walden Museum and seeking the Working Party's views on the possibility of increasing the admission charges.

Mr Newman proposed that the admission charge of adults should be increased to £1.25 and suggested that any effect this might have on attendance numbers could be softened by making available a family ticket. He suggested that this arrangement worked well at other museums and could be useful in encouraging parents to visit the Museum with their children.

Referring to paragraph (e) in the report, the Museum Curator commented on the likely effect of an increase in the admission charge on the total number of visitors to the Museum. As paying visitors represented only a proportion of the total numbers of visitors to the Museum, the effect of an increase in admission charges would be to significantly reduce that sector and seriously erode one of the Museum's sources of income. In policy terms, what was required were measures which would attract paying visitors. Also it was necessary to consider the need for equity and to encourage access to the services provided by the Museum by the wider community.

She gave an example of techniques which had been employed at the Cambridge Folk Museum. Visitor surveys were conducted regularly every six months. The information provided by the surveys enabled a visitor profile to be produced which gave a clear picture of precisely who visited the Museum and what their requirements were. This was of great help in determining the approach to be adopted in marketing the Museum's services and ensuring that they were able to appeal to a wide range of visitors. She said she would adopt a similar approach at Saffron Walden and a visitors' survey was planned to begin in February.

The Head of Leisure and Amenities commented that as the Curator had only recently taken up her appointment she needed time in post to judge the situation for herself and to determine the Museum's customer profile and the likely requirements which might need to be met. Councillor Morson added that there was a strongly held view that the new Curator should be able to decide, to a large extent, how the Museum should be run.

There was some discussion of the value of offering season tickets. From the information set out in the report it was shown that season ticket holders represented only a small proportion of paying visitors. However, Mr Newman suggested that there were ways in which season tickets could be promoted in order to encourage greater take-up. It was also suggested that membership of the Museum Society should be included with season tickets. Councillor Miller requested that issues related to season tickets should be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Working Party.

The Chairman of the meeting referred to conclusions reached in the Museums and Galleries Commission report by 'By Popular Demand' that it appeared that charges tended to deter those kinds of visitors which museums most wanted to attract in order to extend their appeal to the wider community and furthermore it appeared that free entry might offer increased income from donations and shop sales.

RECOMMENDED that no increase be made in the scale of admission charges at Saffron Walden Museum.

I. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that a meeting of the Museum Management Joint Working Party be held on 23 January 1997.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.

\D051