

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at 7.30 pm at SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM on 5 JUNE 1997

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

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

I. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

It was agreed that Councillor Mrs M R Green be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

I. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D M Miller and A Watson.

I. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the meeting held on 23 January 1997 were received. With reference to discussions at the last meeting, in response to a question from Councillor Powers, the Museum Curator confirmed that a FAX machine was now in operation at the Museum and a telephone answering machine would be installed shortly.

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

Mr Newman reported on the previous meeting of the Museum Society Management Committee. Amongst the issues which had been discussed had been arrangements for monitoring items loaned out. Related to this, arrangements for the display of items too big to be exhibited within the Museum which could be put on show at other locations had also been considered.

Mr Newman reported that Tony Watson had retired as Honorary Solicitor and the Museum Society was seeking a local solicitor to take his place.

He reported that the Museum Society had been considering ways in which it could attract more members and widen its appeal within the local community. Various initiatives were being considered at present including a review of the membership fee. Concerning representation on the Museum Management Joint Working Party, Mr Newman felt it was not clear whether the Secretary of the Society was there as a member of the Working Party or merely as an observer and it was agreed that the Chief Executive would confirm the position.

He also reported that the draft annual accounts had been submitted and various insurance and security issues had been considered. He asked the Working Party to note that the Annual General Meeting of the Museum Society would be held on 27 June 1997.

Councillor Morson asked whether the Saffron Walden Historical Society held meetings at the Museum. The Secretary of the Museum Society explained that meetings were normally held elsewhere as the number of people attending meetings and lectures presented by the Saffron Walden Historical Society was too large to be accommodated at the Museum. Mr Newman suggested that it might be possible to carry out internal adaptations to the Museum School Room which would enable it to accommodate larger groups than at present. The Curator pointed out that the area she was considering was currently used for storage. Councillor Morson suggested that it might be a good idea if the Museum could develop closer links with other groups and operate more as a community facility and resource. The Museum Curator commented that in many ways the Museum was already operating in this way and that the current priority was to address the urgent need for additional storage space for the Museum's collections.

I. CURATOR'S REPORT

Mrs Allison submitted a report on the operation of the Museum for the period from January to March 1997. Regarding special exhibitions she reported the outstanding success of the "Moorcroft Pottery: A Century of

Colour" which had attracted interest nationally and from as far away as the United States of America. Over the first ten days, more than 2,500 visitors had come to the Museum, most of them to see this exhibition. It was acknowledged that the association of the Museum with Moorcroft Pottery had attracted widespread publicity and had focused attention on the character of Saffron Walden Museum and its cultural and artistic connections. Following on from this, preparations were in hand for the "Take 5 Potters" exhibition. An application had been made to Arts for Everyone Express for financial assistance and a substantial grant had been made through the Museum Society which would enable workshops to be run for a variety of groups to complement the exhibition. After this a short exhibition was planned about the life and work of Joyce Sturge who had been for many years a member of the Museum Society and had worked as a volunteer at the Museum. The exhibition was to be sponsored and prepared by her son who was a museum professional.

In recognition of their contribution towards the success of the Moorcroft Pottery exhibition, Councillor Morson requested that the Working Group's congratulations be sent to Maureen Evans and Julia Bazley.

With reference to education whilst the Museum continued to work closely with the schools and to give lectures for adult education courses, it had in addition recently been approached by a company who ran courses to enable care assistants working in old people's homes to organise reminiscence sessions for the elderly people in their care. The Museum loaned suitable items which could be handled during these sessions and could be of great value in helping elderly people in care to come to terms with their situation. The Working Party agreed that helping with reminiscence work provided the opportunity to serve a group who, in many cases, were no longer physically able to visit the Museum personally.

With regard to publications, it was noted that the leaflet about Saffron Walden Castle had been reprinted and arrangements were in hand for the local history activity guide to be reprinted. "Saffron Walden in Old Photographs", the book which Len Pole had been preparing, would be published later in September and details of the fee negotiated were reported. Mr Newman asked whether the fee took account of further editions being printed. Whilst it was felt unlikely that there would be further editions, the Museum Curator agreed to investigate the possibility of the copyright agreement covering subsequent editions.

With reference to publicity and marketing, the Museum Curator reported that information relating to the Museum would be broadcast on the Internet with the support of the Museums in Essex Committee. This was quite important as more information was being published by this means and it was a way of making the Museum accessible to a wider audience. However, there was a drawback in that pictures and photographs relayed and reproduced via the Internet were free of copyright and consequently it would be important to control any visual images of objects in the Museum's collections which were published in this way.

Councillor Powers referred to "Saffire" which was a locally developed network of community information and suggested that information about the Museum should be included amongst the information published on this local network. Whilst no charge was made for using the service there was a cost involved in putting information on to the system and the Council was currently considering funding the use of this system.

Regarding the recording of visitors to the Museum, the Museum Curator explained that a six monthly visitor survey had been introduced which would provide more useful information than was presently available from the attendance records. The survey would enable the precise nature and characteristics of the current market which the Museum served to be identified and this information would be essential in determining the scope and direction of future policy on publicity and marketing. As an example she said that the survey conducted in February had shown that 50% of visits were return visits to the Museum and also that more than 50% of visitors came from Saffron Walden and the Uttlesford district generally.

With reference to security, various measures to improve and upgrade the security provisions were reported along with arrangements for the emergency response plan and the need to consider the periodic revaluation of items in the Museum's collection for insurance purposes. There was some discussion concerning the adequacy of insurance arrangements and the difficulties involved in insuring unique objects. It was confirmed that current arrangements provided sufficient cover and value for money, but it would be necessary from time to time to review aspects of insurance cover at the Museum.

Whilst progress was being made with documentation, because of the difficulty of funding this work on a continuing basis, work was being carried out by means of short term contracts. Work was currently proceeding to input archeological data on to MODES (the documentation software programme). Standards of documentation were an important factor for museum registration purposes and it was therefore important that progress was maintained with the timetable for computerised documentation. Whilst Saffron Walden's

programme was the most advanced within Essex there was nevertheless a considerable amount of work remaining to be done which would require funding.

Mr Newman referred to the possibility of producing a season ticket set out in the form of a greetings card which could be beneficial in stimulating interest in the Museum and attracting new members to the Museum Society. The Museum Curator said that this idea had been used at the Cambridge Folk Museum and whilst it was a useful idea, it was found that if people had not themselves chosen to buy a season ticket they tended not to renew it when it expired. Consequently it was seen as being of limited lasting benefit in encouraging broader support for the Museum.

Councillor Powers referred to the need for adequate signing in Saffron Walden to ensure that visitors were able to locate the Museum easily from the main public car parks. He suggested that visitors who were not familiar with the Town who parked at Swan Meadow car park might be unsure of the distance and the direction in which the town centre and other facilities in the Town were located. He appreciated that extensive road signing had been installed but felt that signing within the Town, particularly from car parks could be improved. Mrs Allison said that she was currently discussing improved signage with the Tourism Officer and the Saffron Walden Town Manager.

In addition, Councillor Powers asked what progress was being made with repairing the fencing around the Castle ruins, as the Council had a responsibility to safeguard the public and crumbling masonry on the ruins presented a potential danger.

The Museum Curator confirmed that this issue was being pursued but there were practical difficulties which needed to be considered carefully when carrying out any work on an archeological site which involved digging holes or foundations.

I. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Museum Management Joint Working Party would be held at the Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden at 7.30 pm on Thursday, 9 October 1997.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm.

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