

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at 7.30 pm at SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM on 15 JANUARY 1998

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

Also present:- Mrs P V Wawn (Museum Society).

Officers in attendance:- Mrs C Allison and A Forrow.

I. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

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

Mr Newman stated that, in Mr Watson's absence, Mrs Wawn had been invited to attend the meeting to speak on the tapestry from the YHA Hostel which was being restored.

I. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Mr A Watson.

I. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the meeting held on 9 October 1997 were received.

I. BUSINESS ARISING

Minute MM12 - Curator's Report

In answer to a question from Councillor Powers, the Curator reported that SECOM had been contacted with a view to looking at the Newport depot but no changes had so far been made.

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

Mr Newman reported on the previous meeting of the Museum Society which had had a full agenda and had been well attended. Mrs Wawn had spoken on the tapestry project which had generated a considerable amount of good publicity. The County Council's new representative, Councillor R Wallace, had attended his first meeting. Although technically he had retired, the Society's immediate past Treasurer was continuing his work. The Museum's Activity Guide was going well, as was Len Pole's book. Exhibitions had done well, particularly the Joyce Sturge Exhibition.

Among other items which had been discussed was the insurance of the Trustees of the Society who it was understood were now insurable. It was agreed that the Officers would make enquiries to see if an arrangement could be made with Zurich through the Council. It was also noted that paint work which had only recently been carried out to a number of windows was already flaking and Mrs Allison said that she had drawn this matter to the attention of Property Services. It was noted that Julia Bazley's current contract would end in March. The Working Party again noted the importance of the documentation project for the maintenance of Full Registration status. In this connection, Councillor Powers informed the Working Party that the Council would be finalising its budget on 17 February. The proposed Museum staffing arrangements would be considered during the next cycle of meetings along with a number of other projects.

Reference had also been made to the loss of a historic town lamp. The tapestry from the Youth Hostel had also been an important item on the agenda and at this point in the meeting Mrs Wawn outlined the sequence of events which had resulted in the tapestry being entrusted to the care of the Museum for cleaning and restoration. The tapestry was in nine pieces which had lined a staircase in the Youth Hostel building. It had taken some 2 years to reach the present stage. The Essex Heritage Trust had contributed £3,000 towards the work of conservation, storage and display. It was intended ultimately to make the tapestry available to the public. There was a shortage of information about the personal history of the tapestry and much more was needed. The total cost of the project could be as much

as £10,000 and the Working Party discussed possible avenues of obtaining funding. The Working Party unanimously agreed that Mrs Wawn was to be congratulated on her efforts over the past 2 years in furthering the project. It was also agreed that the District Council should be approached with a view to establishing the feasibility of mounting an exhibition of photographs relating to the tapestry in the Offices at some time in the future.

I. CURATOR'S REPORT

Mrs Allison submitted a report on the Museum's activities for the period October to December 1997.

In November, the Museum had received the National Heritage Award for the best Museum of Social History, in addition to being short-listed for the Museum of the Year Award. This was extremely gratifying. However, there was no room for complacency and the report stressed the importance to the future of the Museum of maintaining Full Registration status and the implementation of staffing proposals for the forthcoming Financial Year which would enable the continuation of the documentation work essential to fulfil the requirements of the MGC.

The Joyce Sturge Exhibition "An Artist's Life" had been most successful and the current exhibition entitled "People in Parliament - the Civil War in Saffron Walden" was generating considerable interest. Len Pole had returned to the Museum on 27 September for the launch of the book "Saffron Walden in Old Photographs". The Reminiscence Workshop for carers organised by Paragon Trainers had been successful and Paragon Trainers had made a further approach with a view to mounting 2 more sessions in April and September. It was noted that this kind of activity brought into the Museum people who might not otherwise visit it and was an important aspect of the Museum's outreach programme. Work was underway in preparation for the ten week "History through objects" course which was to begin on 20 January in conjunction with Cambridge University Board of Continuing Education.

Efforts were continuing to arrange sponsorship of the re-displays of Stansted and Great Chesterford material. Gaining sponsorship was a slow and laborious process. In relation to security, the Museum was close to achieving compliance with Zurich's requirements in relation to additional security for the ground floor windows and consideration would then be given to security gates for the ceramics gallery window.

Educational visits by schools to the Museum continued to be extremely popular and staff concerned lost no opportunity to impress on schools the fact the Museum's collections could be used for a variety of educational purposes in addition to history. The number of visitors to the Museum and the income from them had held up remarkably well at a time when other Museums had shown a decline. The Working Party considered a detailed report on the finances of 2 major exhibitions and these details are attached to this report.

In this connection, it was noted that the Curator proposed to use part of the £750 prize for best Museum for Social History to purchase 2 ceramic objects which were very appropriate to the Museum's collections. The first was a large jug celebrating the Year 1997 through the Hale Bopp Comet, in a style based on the Castle Hedingham ware in the Museum's collection. This item would cost £292. The second was a large decorated wine jug which had featured in the Take 5 Potters exhibition and was recognised as one of the best pieces of work of the maker. This would leave £372 to spend on publicity and marketing the Museum.

RECOMMENDED that the above purchases be approved.

It was recognised that the museum received good publicity locally, and the Working Party discussed possible ways of improving coverage in the regional press.

In answer to a question from Mr Newman, the Curator outlined the very full programme in store for the Museum over the next few months. This included participation in Science Week in March which would include a session in the Saffron Walden Library, a lecture for adults at the Museum and a workshop on the Saturday. This was another illustration of the outreach approach. Museums Week would take place in May and Saffron Walden's contribution would be a project entitled Amazing Mazes. The Edward Bawden exhibition would be opening on 10 April and during the exhibition there would be a print workshop. The exhibition would run until 5 June 1998. Later that month the Museum would be working with the North West Essex Adult Education Group on a small display in the Museum. By July, it was hoped that the tapestry would be ready for display, when part would be hung in the "Falling Apart at the Seams" exhibition. It was hoped to advertise some of these events by way of leaflets and the Curator would welcome any suggestions on how the Museum's activities could be publicised. The School visits programme was booked until the end of term.

The Working Party congratulated Mrs Allison on an excellent report and thanked her and all the Museum staff and volunteers for the continuing efforts they made in promoting the Museum.

I. **NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Working Party would be held at the Council Offices, Saffron Walden on Thursday 23 April 1998, subject to confirmation.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.

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