

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at 7.30 pm at THE SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM on 11 NOVEMBER 1999

Present:- Councillors Mrs J E Menell and G W Powers - Uttlesford Members; Ms S Kirkpatrick, N B Newman and E Planterose - Museum Society representatives.

Also present:- M Adams - Museum Society.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs C Allison and M T Purkiss.

I. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D M Miller, R J O'Neill and R C Smith and from Mr A Watson.

I. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Notes of the meeting held on 17 August 1999 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Mr Planterose expressed concern that no record had been made of the suggestion from Councillor Miller that the running of the shop be returned to the Museum Society. Mr Newman said that the matter would be fully discussed later in this meeting.

I. BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Curator's House

Mr Newman said that he was satisfied with the documentation which he had seen regarding the repairs to the Curator's house. The Curator said that The Lodge House had been painted and some other work was now being undertaken and she hoped to move in after Christmas.

(ii) MM10 - National Museum of Australia

The Curator explained the current position with this matter and confirmed that the advice of the Head of Legal Services would be obtained.

(iii) MM11 - Curator's Report

In answer to a question, the Curator confirmed that no charge was made for the outreach work.

She referred to the present County Council policy under which all museums in the County took all material coming from archaeological digs. This would be included on the agenda for the Essex Curators' Group on 10 December 1999 and she would brief Councillor O'Neill for MIEC. She also reported on the future arrangements for SEMS and on the regional arrangements which were being established.

In answer to a further question, the Curator reported that the inputting of archaeological data had progressed very well with the assistance of Jamie Everitt. However, he had now left. SEMS had approved a grant of £500 which would be used towards improving the documentation of natural history items. The Working Party noted that inputting data was very time consuming and labour intensive.

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

Mr Newman reported that most of the items dealt with at the last meeting of the Museum Society Management Committee were included within the Curator's report.

I. CURATOR'S REPORT

The Working Party considered the Curator's report for the period July - September 1999.

The exhibition on predators 'Jaws, Claws and Paws' curated by Sarah Kenyon closed on 26 September and had been very successful, proving popular with both adults and children. The Millennium exhibition '2000 Years of Treasures' curated by Christine Allison and Julia Bazeley had involved all staff in object selection and research for labels. Hidden treasures from the reserve collections formed the basis of the exhibitions with objects from across the disciplines. The Education Officer had written and illustrated two worksheets to accompany the exhibition.

It was noted that the two snakes and spiders days had been extremely popular and had brought in over 1,100 visitors.

Various pest control works had been undertaken. However a live carpet beetle larva on the upper staircase had given cause for concern and further pest control measures had been carried out in the costume, ceramics and natural history gallery.

The Curator reported that school visits continued to be successful, with the ancient Egyptians still featuring heavily in the Education Officer's teaching sessions. The adult education course organised through Cambridge University Board of Continuing Education had appeared in the University's publicity. The course running from January - March 2000 entitled 'Exploration Encounters and Empire' would use items from the ethnography and social history collections. Afternoon lectures for older people had been arranged during the Winter months and the first on 1 December would be based on '2000 Years of Treasures' and the second on 8 December would be entitled 'Christmas Customs'.

The Curator particularly drew attention to the Disability Discrimination Act which was now in force. The Museum had a legal as well as a moral duty to ensure that access was available to all residents of the district. It was felt that there was a need for an audit to be undertaken.

She reported that during Museums Month 2000 the Museum would be distributing 2000 season tickets around the district with particular emphasis on the outlying villages. A grant request had been made to 'Engage' who were managing funding for 'welcome days' during May 2000 which would enable assistance with transport to be offered to mothers and toddlers, people with disabilities and older people to enable them to visit the Museum.

At the Saffron Walden Carnival, the 'Predators' bookmarks, produced free of charge in liaison with the Committee & PR Manager, had been handed out and a total of 20,000 of these bookmarks had been distributed throughout the district. The holiday activities in the Museum had again produced good photo opportunities. An analysis of the July/August visitor survey showed that the Museum was considered to be value for money by 99.8% of visitors and over 70% marked the Museum as excellent/very good as an overall experience and also in the welcome which they received from staff and volunteers. The overall visitor figures for the last quarter were comparable with last year, although the pattern appeared to be somewhat erratic. A representative of SEMS had stated that the Museum was doing well, particularly at a time when there was an overall decline in Museum attendances across the country. Members felt that much of this was due to the excellent special exhibitions and activity programmes provided and the reasonable level of charges. Mr Planterose suggested that consideration could be given to providing some picnic tables in the Museum grounds. It was also generally felt that signage to the Museum needed to be improved and the Curator would raise the matter with those District Councillors who served on the Saffron Walden Town Council.

The Curator reported on meetings she had attended with the Ashdon Village Museum Society and the Great Dunmow Museum Society Group and Mr Newman suggested that at some date in the future, it might be appropriate to consider inviting representatives from the Great Dunmow Museum Society and Ashdon Village Museum to attend meetings of the Working Party.

The Curator reported on the current staffing situation and, in answer to a question from Councillor Powers, confirmed that the problems of taking time off in lieu were continuing. Heather Southorn, the MGC Conservation Intern, had left the Museum on 1 October. During her year at the Museum she had proved to be a great asset. Jamie Everitt had now taken up a full-time post with the Norfolk Museum Service and Katie Jude who had been a volunteer in the Museum in the last year had now commenced training as a conservator at Durham University.

The Museum had been represented at the Open Evening for District, Parish and Town Councillors which had been held at the Council Offices on 8 November 1999. This had been very successful and the Curator circulated copies of the hand out which gave details of the work undertaken by the Museum and forthcoming activities and exhibitions.

I. PRELIMINARY BUDGET FOR THE MUSEUM

The Curator circulated copies of the preliminary budget for the Museum for the year 2000/01. The budget was accepted by the Working Party.

The Curator reported that, as a result of the Cultural and Leisure Strategy, a report would be submitted to the Community Services Committee on 14 December 1999. One of the key recommendations for the Museum was that the post of Education Officer be made full-time. It had long been recognised that there was a demand for 'life-long' learning in addition to the school visits. The cost of increasing the Education Officer's salary for the additional hours, from 20 to 37, would be in the region of £8,000 and there would be on-costs. However, the benefit to the Museum of the Education Officer's post had long been appreciated. In the first year, it was estimated that the post would generate £2,200 towards her salary. This post also generated general visitor income through workshops and holiday activities and it would be possible to increase the yearly number of these activities. The income generated by school visits currently met the cost of this part-time post.

During the discussion on the budget, the Society's treasurer explained the current situation with the Society's investments. There had been some delay in transferring investments, particularly as some of these were overseas investments. He was still attempting to expedite this matter with the Society's brokers.

It was agreed to advise the Amenities Sub-Committee and the Community Services Committee that the Working Party fully supported the proposal to increase the hours of the Education Officer.

I. MUSEUM TILL

The Curator reported on the current situation regarding an electronic till. A demonstration of a till had been arranged for volunteers and staff. However, there was still some concern. The Curator reported that, at the suggestion of the Chief Executive, if an appropriate till could be found it would be installed for an initial three month trial.

Following discussion at the last Museum Society meeting, Mr Planterose suggested that the best way forward might be to transfer the operation of the shop to the Museum Society. However, Mr Newman did not feel that this was appropriate and said that the Museum Society might also require the use of a till. He outlined a number of management problems which would arise from transferring the operation of the shop to the Society and felt that there could be a loss of income to the Society under these circumstances. He concluded that a simple option must be identified which would satisfy both the Council and the Society.

After lengthy discussion, it was agreed that the Corporate Director - Finance would be asked to meet with representatives of the Society and the Working Party to discuss the best way forward.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm.

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