

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at the SCHOOL ROOM, SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM at 6pm on 25 JANUARY 2012

Present: Councillor K Eden – Chairman.

Councillors R Chambers, D Morson and H Rolfe (Uttlesford Members), J Bullen, P Salvidge and A Watson (Museum Society Limited).

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services), L Bunting (Democratic Services Officer), A Webb (Director of Corporate Services), C Wingfield (Curator) and N Wittman (ICT Manager).

MM17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from D Laing (Museum Society).

MM18 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2011 were received and confirmed as a correct record.

The Director of Corporate Services asked the Chairman if he would agree to item 5 – Curator's Quarterly Report - on the agenda being brought forward in the meeting in order that the items regarding the Museum's future projects, which were of a sensitive nature, could be discussed later in the meeting. This was agreed.

MM19 CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT

The Curator submitted a comprehensive quarterly report which covered the months October to December 2011.

Paragraph 1.2 – Staff

The Curator drew attention to the sudden and sad death of Roger Kirkpatrick on 6 December 2011. Mr Kirkpatrick had been a Sunday and Casual Assistant for a great number of years. A tribute to him would appear in the next Museum Society Newsletter.

It was reported that Susan Collier, Documentation and Exhibitions Officer, had moved to a new post in October after four years at the Museum and would be greatly missed.

Paragraph 2.1 – Museum Building

The Curator reported that window frames had been repaired and all exterior paintwork had been repainted on the west and south facades of the Museum building.

Page 1
Collections had been rearranged in the Inorganics store annex to improve access to the table top display cases and pest trapping had taken place in

the natural history store, ethnography store, costume store, some offices and galleries.

The Curator reported that the annual inspection of the roof harness had taken place recently. Unfortunately the inspection had failed due to the soft Essex red brick not being hard enough to 'slip' into. This had been made apparent under a pressure test taken on the bricks. Replacement of the brickwork would need to be undertaken but listed building consent would be required to possibly change the red bricks to modern.

Paragraph 2.5 - Grounds and Castle Site

Work on resurfacing the pavements in Museum Street had taken place in November and, as far as possible, access to the site had been maintained. Inevitably visitor figures had suffered a little during the time that the usual access to Museum Street had been closed. The new security fence, hand-forged by blacksmith David Gowlett, had finally been installed in November and the temporary fencing along the drive had been removed. The last stage of the work associated with the rebuilding of the north retaining wall during 2009 was therefore now complete.

The Curator reported that an accident had taken place on New Year's Day when a car had reversed into one of the pillars to the Museum gateway. Advice would need to be taken before repair on the gateway was undertaken as it was a listed structure which pre-dated 1948.

Paragraph 3 - Collections and Research

The Curator reported that there had been 77 new acquisitions during this quarter.

Recent conservation work carried out had mainly focussed on the preparation of items for the exhibition 'Embroideries from the East' and the making of individual mounts and supports. Surface cleaning, photography and object marking had been carried out for a number of new acquisitions to the collection. Conservation and photography had also been undertaken on Wisbech Museum's objects which were part of the Effective Collections project.

With regard to the Effective Collections (World Cultures project), most of the five museums involved now had their object data for the website on eHive and work on the website specification would continue this year.

Paragraph 4 - Displays and Visitor Services

Permanent Galleries - The Egyptian gallery had been completed and was opened on 4 November. Thanks to the efforts of Learning Officer, Museum staff and researchers and funding from the Museum Society, the collections had been redisplayed incorporating new research and objects not previously on show, with new fibre-optic lighting.

Temporary Exhibitions - The exhibition 'The Great War 1914 – 1918: An Exhibition of Home Life and Service' had acted as inspiration for half-term activities in October (Wounded Heroes and Women at War). It was brought to life on 5 November by three members of the 10th Essex

Regiment Group who acted as 'tommies' and an officer with equipment. 'Embroideries from the East' which showcased a recent generous and colourful donation of embroidered textiles by Doreen Hull, had been launched by the Mayor on 12 December at the Museum Society's Christmas Social which had been very well attended.

The Curator reported that visitor figures were slightly down but within 2.5% of the performance indicator target although ticket and shop sales were up on the same quarter last year. She considered that the sporadic closure of Museum Street due to Highways works in November was known to have deterred some visitors, and school class sizes for group visits had been relatively small this term. User figures were 12% over target, due mainly to sustained level of website visitors. Publicity surrounding the launch of the Museum's revised development plans and public consultation might have contributed to this. Levels of remote enquiries on the collections (77) remain high compared to numbers of researchers visiting in person, which was relatively low (2) this quarter.

The Curator also reported on the future programme, January - March 2012 and events to be held during the year.

MM20

MUSEUM PROJECTS

The Director of Corporate Services updated the Working Group on Museum projects.

The meeting ended at 6.50 pm.