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**KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

March 13th 2017

KING'S LYNN MUSEUMS REPORT

Report by the Head of Operations and Learning

**This report provides information on King's Lynn
Museum activities in the period from December
2016 – February 2017**

1. Temporary exhibitions and events at Lynn Museum

- 1.1 The current major exhibition at Lynn Museum is *Little Lives, Snapshots of Childhood 1800 to the Present Day*. The Mayor Cllr David Whitby opened the exhibition on 23 September 2016 and the show will run until 17 June 2017. This exhibition explores the stories of childhood using objects from the museum collections that, together with photographs and paintings, offer snapshots of the changing experience of childhood over the last two centuries. Photographs of the Monement family of King's Lynn by pioneering Victorian photographer William Bolding accompany the family dolls house made by William Monement. The unconventional Ruskin School at Heacham of a century ago also features, as well as more recent stories of childhood from the 1960s with the four Breen brothers went to the King Edward Seventh Grammar School. The exhibition also features a range of childhood objects from the last two decades.
- 1.2 The Lynn Museum is currently displaying a special exhibition of two of the Anglo-Saxon Pentney brooches, which are objects of national importance. On loan from the Trustees of the British Museum, the display was installed on the 9 January 2017. These silver brooches, were found by a gravedigger in Pentney churchyard and date from the late 8th century and early 9th century AD. They are amongst the most significant and finest of their kind. During their first month of display, some 430 people visited Lynn Museum specifically to see them. Due to the ongoing popularity of this exhibit, the loan from the British Museum has been extended to 14 May 2017.

- 1.3 The display of the Pentney brooches at Lynn Museum has generated excellent publicity in the local media including a piece on the *Look East News*, coverage on Radio Norfolk and pieces in the EDP and Lynn newspapers. A re-union in the Museum on 1 February of family members of the original finder of the brooches, the late Geoff King, prompted considerable interest amongst journalists and has helped raise awareness of the Museum and the display.
- 1.4 The reception case at Lynn Museum is normally re-displayed regularly by Museum Trainee, Imogen Clarke. Over the Christmas period, Edwardian Christmas cards, archive photographs and other Christmas related material went on display for our visitors.
- 1.5 A programme of monthly illustrated talks continues to be offered at Lynn Museum on Wednesday afternoons. Recent topics have included a talk on Anglo-Saxon East Anglia and the Pentney brooches by Dr Tim Pestell, Norfolk Museums Service's Curator of Archaeology, which was attended by 47 people. Attendances average 15-25 and most talks are delivered by NMS staff.
- 1.6 An enhanced programme of informal family learning events continues to be offered at the Lynn Museum for the school holiday periods. The 'drop-in' format event in the February Half Term was *Smashing Saxons* (to link with the Pentney brooch display) with an attendance of 156.
- 1.7 During the school holidays the Lynn Museum continues to offer a popular programme of themed gallery discovery trails, with a new trail available for each week of the school holidays. Over the Christmas period a Christmas-themed Trail was available and over February Half term, a *Super Saxons* Trail was provided.
- 1.8 The Lynn Museum continues to host monthly *Coffee, Cake and Collections* "coffee morning" style events for adults, with each session exploring a different aspect of the collections. Topics have included a Museum Quiz and reminiscence handling objects.

2. Other Museum Developments

- 2.1 The Lynn Museum, in partnership with the Google Cultural Institute, launched a 'cultural platform' as part of Google Arts and Culture on 7 February. This prestigious development allows Lynn Museum to display extremely high resolution images of paintings in the collection by local artists Henry Baines, Thomas Baines, Walter Dexter and others. It also allows the museum to create online exhibitions. The first of these is *Blubber, Bone and Baleen*, exploring the history of the whaling industry using collections from Lynn Museum. This initiative was covered by local media including the EDP, Lynn News and ITV Anglia News. Another useful feature of the cultural platform is the facility to use Google Street View to explore the galleries and displays

inside the museum. This can also be accessed from Google maps and we expect this will be helpful for some visitors, including schools, planning a museum visit. Up until 21 February 2017, the Lynn Museum pages had received 4,800 unique page views, with 853 visiting the Lynn Museum Collections page and 210 visiting the whaling exhibition.

- 2.2 The Lynn Museum continues to develop its social media presence, with Twitter and Facebook accounts being maintained by staff. The Lynn Museum Twitter account has 2805 tweets and 1866 followers while the Facebook account has 413 likes. The Museum participated in the Twitter #HeritageTreasures in support of a Heritage Lottery Fund photography competition, the #ArtStarTrail over Christmas and #InternationalVolunteerDay.
- 2.3 A team of collections volunteers continues to meet on a weekly basis in the NMS offices at Queen Street. Volunteers have continued with a programme of work involving the scanning and cataloguing of the drawing collections by local artists. Work has now been completed on the drawings by Thomas Baines which illustrate his experiences in 19th century Africa and a start has been made on topographical prints of the King's Lynn area. The team's work enhances and illustrates the museum catalogue available online through the NMS collections website – see <http://norfolkmuseumscollections.org/#!/home>
- 2.4 The Museum has been successful in obtaining grant funding of £1,160 from the Woodmansterne Conservation Awards, supporting the conservation of two newly acquired portraits in poor condition. The portraits are of John Langley and his wife Elizabeth. John Langley travelled around the world with Captain Vancouver and later in life managed a public house in King's Lynn. The Friends of Kings Lynn Museums and two private donors are also contributing to the costs. Both portraits have now been conserved and framed in the NMS workshop in Norwich. An event is planned by the Friends to mark the restoration of the paintings on 13 March 2017. The Museum plans to hang the paintings in the main gallery close to the Maritime history display case.
- 2.5 The Museum's fortnightly *History of Kings Lynn in 100 Objects* series with the Lynn News has generated significant interest. Recent artefacts featured include a Valentine's Card, a Mourning Brooch and a Fish Hook from Nootka Sound collected on Captain Vancouver's voyage to North West America.
- 2.6 Last year Lynn Museum participated in a 'mystery shopping' scheme run through SHARE Museums East, in which members of staff visit other museums and offer feedback on their findings in exchange for comments on the Lynn Museum from six peer reviewers.

As a result of comments received, the team have updated information on the museum website and answerphone and renovated the signage

at the museum entrance, addressing comments relating to the appearance of the front of the museum which were made by three of the six 'shoppers':

- "We walked from the train station to the museum and we walked around the Museum looking for the entrance, the area around the museum is messy/ untidy and the entrance near the bus station is a little confusing, one could think it's the information centre for bus routes and tickets rather than a museum."
- "Exterior impression was that the signage was a little faded and needed some TLC, however the inside was very well maintained and attractive. A pity the entrance is not through the old chapel itself but assume this may be due to disabled access issues?"
- "Seeing the exterior of the museum from a distance was impressive. The exterior of the modern entrance was disappointing. We felt it looked uninviting. The text above the entrance looked a bit uncared for. There were a group of bus drivers in high vis jackets gathered beside the entrance, which looked a bit like a picket line! Walking round to the side of the museum there is a planted raised bed and museum poster which look more inviting."

Generally the feedback from the six visits were positive, and covered a wide range of subjects across 85 questions. From such a small sample, it is difficult to identify trends, but the comments included below reflect the majority of responses in each category:

- Regarding pre-visit phone calls "Staff were friendly and were able to answer my questions in a timely manner (they didn't need to check them)."
- On the website: "Easy to navigate and find information quickly. Good links for travel options, including public transport. The website was a good shop window for the museum and would encourage you to visit. Lots of information that could be downloaded about things at the museum and also in the local area."
- On Social Media: "The Facebook page had all the information you need to plan a visit to the museum and all the events are laid out nicely. There was a good mix of information to pictures that made the museum seem very accessible and fun to visit for families."
- On wayfinding: "Good fingerpost signage in the town centre"
- On the sense of welcome: "Staff were extremely welcoming on our arrival"
- On the audio guide: "A free audio guide was offered and taken up. We were told to look for symbols on the exhibits and that there were separate ones for children's commentaries. We listened to both and thought they were well done. We liked the use of experts, clear recording and some thought provoking material. We would have appreciated basic instruction in how to use the audio guide, although we did work this out for ourselves."

- On the museum shop: “One of the best ranges of items for children that we have seen in a museum shop. Lots of different, colourful items around £2- £3. Well displayed at the right height. Good selection of books, cards and postcards.”
- 2.7 An important set of recent acquisitions for the Museum collections has been a donation of material relating to Samuel Gurney Cresswell, the Arctic explorer. The Museum has received a ceremonial sword, cabinet, scroll and epaulettes presented to Cresswell by the people of Kings Lynn in 1853. These items have been taken to Norwich for assessment by the NMS Conservation team for future display.

3. Friends of King’s Lynn Museums

- 3.1 The Friends are continuing to offer a varied programme for members including a newsletter, trips and an annual lecture. Other Friends benefits include free admission to the Museum and to the afternoon talks programme. The Friends have continued to support the exhibition programme of the Museum and have kindly paid for a protective Perspex lid to allow the display of the large Monement family dolls house in the Little Lives exhibition.
- 3.2 The Friends of the Museum held their annual AGM on the 10 October and received reports about the work of the Museum, and the organisation’s finances and activities. Officers and committee were elected.
- 3.3 The Friends are continuing to fund a programme of fine art conservation, most recently the cockerel drawing for the Art of the Mart exhibition and support for the conservation of the portraits of John and Elizabeth Langley.
- 3.4 A Junior Friends of Kings Lynn Museum scheme continues to be offered to encourage more young people to be involved.

4 Partnerships

- 4.1 The Lynn Museum free admission period runs from October to the end of March. This free admission period is provided under the terms of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Borough Council and NMS.
- 4.2 NMS continues to support the Borough Council with the delivery of the HLF-funded Stories of Lynn project focussed on King’s Lynn Town Hall. As well as being part of the project steering group, NMS continues to lead on the delivery of the project Activity Plan.
- 4.3 NMS is continuing to host the Stories of Lynn Learning & Engagement Officer, who works closely with colleagues from the Borough Council and the Norfolk Record Office. Dayna Woolbright, Assistant Curator for Lynn Museum continues to support curatorial aspects of Stories of Lynn, such

as display snagging, the production of the town App to guide people around the history of King's Lynn, and work on the Town Hall's collections storage facility.

- 4.4 Assistant Curator, Dayna Woolbright has helped with the production of an exhibition at Stories of Lynn featuring a film about the Lynn Mart organised by Ruth Farnan, Stories of Lynn Activities and Engagement Officer.
- 4.5 Partnership working with the Borough Council continues and the museum has again been asked to organise a town wide event during the summer. Sunday 23 July will see the return of the popular Second World War themed event *Forties Lynn: Life on the Home Front*. Heritage Open Day in September is another opportunity for Lynn Museum to participate in a town-wide celebration of local heritage.
- 4.6 The delivery of NMS services in King's Lynn & West Norfolk continues to operate under the terms of the 2016-17 Service Level Agreement with the Borough Council. Under an extension to this agreement, NMS continues to provide curatorial advice, support and an enquiry service for those Borough collections currently held in the Town Hall including fine art and Civic Regalia.
- 4.7 On behalf of the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, museum staff have worked on a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for improving the interpretation and display of the town's South Gate, a grade one listed building and scheduled ancient monument. Preliminary research work on the project has started.
- 4.8 The Lynn Museum will be opening once more on Sundays from 12pm until 4pm for the 2017 season running from April until September, made possible by financial support from the Borough Council. A Sunday joint ticket will be available for visitors to Stories of Lynn to also explore both the Custom House exhibition and the Lynn Museum.
- 4.9 The Museum is planning to work with the organisers of the King's Lynn Festival again in 2017 to provide the Museum as a venue for pop-up recitals and educational events.
- 4.10 Through social media the Museum team has made contact with the 'Digital Pilgrim' project, supported by the Paul Mellon Foundation and in conjunction with University of Cambridge and the British Museum. As a result of working with researchers at Digital Pilgrim, the team plan to improve interpretation of the Lynn Museum's important collection of lead pilgrim badges for the public benefit.
- 4.11 Recently, Storm Doris caused travel chaos resulting in the visit to the Lynn Museum from a young man who is a student of the TITAN scheme. His bus had been cancelled and he needed assistance. The King's Lynn team were able to make arrangements with TITAN to get him a taxi home and he had a guided tour of the museum while he waited. Lynn Museum

remains a TITAN safe haven, supporting individuals with complex needs to travel independently. The message that the Lynn Museum team received from the boy's mum revealed how vitally important the scheme is in assisting independent travel for these students, especially when things do not go quite to plan.

5 Learning & Outreach

- 5.1 During 2016-2017, the Lynn Museum is hosting a 12 month Teaching Museum traineeship provided through the NMS *Teaching Museum* programme, funded by Arts Council England as part of the 2015-18 Major Partner Museum ACE business plan. Imogen Clarke is our trainee this year, one of seven hosted by the Museums Service as a whole. Amongst a range of other activities, she helps coordinate the trails programme, assists with the coffee cake and collections mornings, supervise collections volunteers, contributes to social media work and schedules displays in the museum reception area. Assessment days for our Trainee for 2017-2018 took place on 22 and 23 February 2017, with the new trainee expected to start work at Lynn Museum in mid-April 2017.
- 5.2 Lynn Museum has continued to work with local schools to deliver a broad range of formal learning sessions. Learning programmes have been adapted following recent changes to the history National Curriculum. The Seahenge and early history displays and themes are proving popular with schools and school numbers are up on last year's total. New boxes of handling artefacts are being created for use with schools including a new prehistoric box used by our Learning Officer, Melissa Hawker, and freelance educators to help children investigate local history and archaeology.
- 5.3 The schools bookings for Lynn Museum show the continued popularity of the toys programme, an upsurge in interest from schools in sessions on local individuals such as Captain Vancouver and Frederick Savage, and an interest in flooding as a topic in environmental education.
- 5.4 Recent partnership work with Stories of Lynn at the Town Hall has included a joint session for schools looking at the town's Victorian fairground heritage.
- 5.5 The Learning Officer has been training and mentoring the Museum Learning Assistant team at Lynn Museum in delivering sessions for schools and the Museum Learning Assistants are now undertaking at least one session per school visit. A recent example is work with a group to achieve the 'Discover' level of Arts Award.
- 5.6 The Learning Officer has recently met with an enthusiastic group of teachers at Lynn Museum using an object based learning session. This has helped show the enormous potential of learning with objects in museums for their pupils.

6 Visitor numbers

6.1 Visitor figures for the period will be circulated at the meeting.

7. Resource implications

(a)	<u>Finance</u>	None
(b)	<u>Property</u>	None
(c)	<u>Staff</u>	None
(d)	<u>Information Technology</u>	None

8. Recommendations:

1. That the Area Museums Committee notes the report

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