

NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

29 September 2008 Item No. 6

NORWICH MUSEUMS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME SEPTEMBER 2008

Report by the Norwich Museums Manager

1. NORWICH CASTLE

Background

Norwich Castle, in addition to being one of the city's most famous landmarks and having a magnificent Norman Keep, is home to outstanding locally, regionally and nationally significant collections of fine art, archaeology and natural history. It is the most visited museum within the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service and houses the largest number of collections.

In 2000 Norwich Castle re-opened following a multi-million pound development project. Eight years on it is essential that there is a plan in place for building upon this achievement and for refreshing and renewing the permanent displays and interpretation in order to meet visitor expectations and sustain visitor numbers.

1.2 The Arts of Living: Design & Decoration Galleries

The former ceramics gallery and an adjacent gallery are being transformed in a complete redisplay. The gallery aims:

- To tell the story of British decorative arts focusing on the importance and role of Norwich and Norfolk. Many of our objects have a direct Norfolk origin or local historical connections, while others are important to decorative art history as a whole.
- To showcase star objects from the collections of Carrow House Costume and Textile Centre and Norwich's decorative arts collections in mixed media displays, giving prominence to costume and textile collections.
- To include opportunities for rotating displays of costume and textile collections and featuring different aspects of the collection.
- To direct visitors to other galleries within Norwich Castle, and other Norwich sites to see and learn more: eg Cathedral, St Peter Mancroft, Dragon Hall, Bridewell, and Strangers Hall.
- To deliver an accessible, aesthetically attractive gallery which focuses on a diversity of stories and appeals to a wide range of visitors
- To support delivery of the National Curriculum.

We will use mixed media displays incorporating ceramics, glass, metalwork and textiles and mounted costumes, to show key developments in style and design, and to explore themes suggested by the strengths of the collection from the medieval period to the 21st century.

Together with the existing Twinings Teapot Gallery, the sweep of three galleries will enable the Norwich decorative art collections to be seen to their best advantage.

Capital budget: £357,000, principally comprising a major donation from HEART (Heritage Economic and Regeneration Trust), and a major private donation.

Target completion date: Autumn 2008

1.3 Rotunda Balcony

The Rotunda Balcony has 3 groups of high quality well lit display cases, providing opportunities to showcase other aspects of our collections, including those not displayed elsewhere. Plans to re-display the Silver Case are under development and a new display called '*About My Person*' will be installed in November 2008 to coincide with the opening of the *Arts of Living Gallery*. This will be an exhibition of items worn on the body which are primarily functional and designed to fulfil a specific need of the wearer but are also decorative and transmit messages about the wearer, their wealth, social status and taste. It will include collections from the Costume & Textile, archaeology, decorative arts and military collections.

Capital budget: £8,000: Renaissance in the Regions.

Target Completion Date: Early 2009

1.4 Mammal Gallery: Collectors and Curators

The natural history galleries at the Castle received only minor investment during the Castle redevelopment. However, the Ted Ellis dioramas and the Mammals gallery, in particular, remain among our most popular attractions. These galleries are being revisited with a project which will enhance and revitalise the displays, incorporating new interactive interpretation, and new specimens in the Mammal Gallery. This gallery will tell visitors more about the Victorian explorers and collectors who put the collections together, focusing on collectors across the whole range of our collections, including the collectors of the most popular mammals already on display. Recent events run by the Castle interpreters on Margaret Fountaine, the butterfly collector, have shown there is considerable public interest in the natural history pioneers.

Capital budget: The DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund has agreed an award of £60,000 towards a £90,000 project. The project has also been received generous support from the Friends.

Target completion date: Summer 2009

1.5 The Bird Gallery

A positive outcome of having to strip out and prepare the natural history collections to undergo a freezing process to eradicate the current bug infestation is the opportunity to refresh the displays and interpretative material. The Bird Gallery has been redecorated, and following the completion of the freezing process and necessary conservation work, the collections will be re-displayed new graphic illustrations and labels.

Target completion date: Mid 2009

1.6 Boudica Gallery

This popular gallery has recently been refreshed in response to public evaluation and general wear and tear. The improvements, funded primarily by Renaissance, include additional and changed displays of collections, new graphic interpretation and a complete reworking of the Roman end of the gallery.

1.7 Norwich Castle Keep.

Norwich Castle Keep is a key part of the visitor experience at our landmark site. It received significant investment as part of the 2001 redevelopment, but we were only partially able to fulfil the very ambitious display brief at that time. Since then, over a million visitors have taken their toll on interactive elements, and it has become apparent that certain areas are not meeting our objectives. A wealth of informal feedback from staff and visitors has led us to a new display vision for the Keep.

The vision falls into several phases:

Phase 1 - Prison Display: Will create new displays on Norwich Castle's 500 years as the County jail. We will move some elements of the current displays into a more intimate space in the Keep basement, and introduce more museum objects and more engaging interpretation of some of our most popular stories, led by visitor feedback. The displays need to appeal to all our main visitor groups, and to enable project work with hard-to-reach groups like young offenders, building on our existing work programme in this area.

Phase 1 - Prison Display: Capital Budget £120,000 with £70,000 secured from the DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund.

Target completion date: Summer 2010

Phase 2: Moving the prison story into the keep basement will free up the main floor to interpret the earlier story of the building as a medieval castle more effectively. A modest amount of funding has already been secured from the Heritage Lottery Funds' Collecting Cultures funding programme, a scheme set up primarily for the purpose of acquisitions but also available to support display and learning objectives. This will enable us to display and interpret medieval archaeology collections currently not on display. There will be £50,000 project funding available to support display of medieval collections.

Target Completion Date: 2011

We are also in the process of establishing a partnership with Museums and heritage organisations in the East of England and Northern France, with a view to developing a joint project on Norman Castles to submit to the European Union's Interreg IV funding programme. The project would include display and interpretation funding for Norwich Castle Keep and the other partner's sites, in addition to joint benefits for all of the partners including a Norman Castle trail, marketing, web site and learning materials. The project is very much in the early stages of development. There have been a number of meetings between potential English partners, including who have put themselves forward to lead the project, but negotiations are still underway with potential French partners.

Target EU application submission date: March 2009

1.8 Norwich School Cotman and Colman Art Galleries

Norwich Castle, working in partnership with TATE Britain, Tyne & Wear Museums, Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust, the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA) has secured in the region of £1.75million funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other funding partners including Renaissance in the Regions, for a project called *Imagine a Nation*.

The project will explore British art and identity from multiple perspectives in the 21st century. It will draw on regional collections - for example the region is unique in the United Kingdom in having its own school of painting, The Norwich School – and national collections to focus on questions about the notions of identity and nationhood as evidenced by local visual culture. The project aims to explore and respond to questions about cultural differences and commonality in the lead up to the London Olympics in 2012, and investigate and celebrate the creative possibilities provided by the interaction of cultures in contemporary Britain and in the world. Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, hub leader for Renaissance East of England, will represent the regions interests within the project and support the development of new regional audiences for the collections. The project will be developed and delivered through a high degree of community engagement and public consultation.

In addition to enabling Norwich Castle to generate two temporary exhibitions and host those produced by the partners over a 5 year period, the project will also fund a learning post dedicated to developing audiences for Norwich's art collections and support the re-display and re-interpretation of Norwich Castle's permanent art galleries. Through the on-going process of public engagement and consultation over a 5 year project, we will have the opportunity to develop, evaluate and implement proposals for the Norwich School and other permanent art galleries and ensure that the *Imagine a Nation* project delivers a long term legacy.

2. STRANGERS' HALL

Background

Strangers' Hall is one of Norwich's oldest and most fascinating buildings, dating back to 1320. The building and collections are largely displayed through means of room settings bringing the past vividly to life.

In 2006, Strangers' Hall re-opened after *Phase 1* of a £185,000 improvement project. In the first phase, we were able to re-wire the building, and install new heaters and light fittings throughout. This project substantially improved the appearance of the public rooms as well as bringing our core systems up to date.

Funding was also secured from a range of sources including the DCMS/Wolfson Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund and the Friends of the Norwich Museums, for *Phase 2* of the improvement project, which has enabled us to bring alive the 17th century period room settings following a successful pilot project in Lady Paine's Room. The *Mayors and Magnates* project has used carefully researched replica textiles and other replica objects to help tell the story of the mayors and magnates who lived at Strangers' in its heyday. There have also been improvements in signage and

interpretation. Initial informal visitor feedback and visitor figures have been positive, and snagging and post-project evaluation are underway.

Phase 1 funding of £125,000 from the NCC Building Maintenance Fund; completed spring 2006.

Phase 2, Mayors and Magnates, £60,000 external funding completed November 2007
Capital budget: £185,000

In order to improve access to physically disabled visitors we are currently working to enable physical access into the courtyard, and are making a film about the building which will be viewable by disabled visitors in the Learning Room, just off the courtyard.

2.1 Future Developments

Our responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act to make the building as physically accessible as we can, within the constraints imposed by its Grade 1 Listed status. Full physical access around Strangers' Hall, with its multiple level changes, is never going to be possible, but we are hopeful that we might be able to achieve very limited access to one or two spaces. A 2005 access audit of Strangers' Hall proposed a solution for level access to the Great Hall area which unfortunately does not appear to meet Listed Building requirements or operational constraints; we are therefore looking creatively at other possibilities which might deliver access and other service benefits.

Strangers' Hall however is currently only open two days a week, and requires a substantial staffing commitment to open to the public in order to operate safely. Major funders are unlikely to consider making substantial awards unless opening arrangements can be increased. Only small-scale incremental improvements are therefore possible at the moment.

The following proposal is being considered to overcome this conundrum. Now that capital funding has been secured for the Bridewell Project the museum will have to be closed for two seasons. It is proposed that the Front of House salary budget for the Bridewell is transferred to Strangers' Hall during this period in order to increase opening hours, providing us with an opportunity to build audiences, including schools, with no or minimal revenue implications. It will then be possible to develop and justify a business case to increase the revenue budget for Strangers' post Bridewell Project and pursue capital funding opportunities to improve access and interpretation. A business plan is being prepared to support the proposal.

Target completion date: 2011/12

3. BRIDEWELL: Norwich People and their City.

The Bridewell is the next major capital project for Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

Background

The Bridewell began life as a house in the 14th Century. It has undergone many changes and been many things during its long life, a medieval merchant's house, a prison for women and beggars, a tobacco and snuff factory and later a shoe factory. It was set up as a museum of trade and industry in 1925.

The building is currently physically inaccessible. There are significant differences between the external and internal floor levels, which prevent level access into the building, and access around the building is limited as a result of further floor level changes.

In 2004/05 Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service became the Renaissance in the Regions Hub for the East of England. A key element of its business plan was to explore the development of the Bridewell Museum as a potential community museum and funding was provided to create a Community History Curator post to consult with stakeholders, build partnerships, and develop and evaluate modest displays and interpretation improvements and to generate new activities, events and projects for museum visitors and outreach groups.

Part of this work also included the commissioning of an access audit in May 2005, followed by a Feasibility Study in 2007 to investigate opportunities for accessibility improvements, including creating a new accessible entrance, lifts, level access around the museum and accessible toilets. A capital bid for Study's recommendations was submitted to and approved by Norfolk County Council's Capital Works Programme in 2007.

The proposed accessibility improvements impact on the museum displays by displacing collections and changing the way visitors circulate around the building. The displays whilst still popular with many visitors have remained substantially unchanged for a number of years.

Norwich Castle has a Norman Keep and is home to some of the most outstanding collections of fine art, archaeology and natural history. The Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum tells about the everyday lives of soldiers and their families. Strangers' Hall offers a historic house experience with period room settings and the Bridewell Museum focuses on Norwich people and how they earned their living. All four Museums contain collections and exhibitions relating to the history of Norwich but none tell its full story. The Bridewell Museum currently contains the highest number of Norwich related collections, focusing on Norwich people and how they earned their living, and comes closest to telling the Norwich Story.

A core objective of the Focus Group Research Consultation carried out in the summer of 2007 was to 'To establish whether there was a need for or interest in the 'Story of Norwich'. The research findings demonstrate that there is considerable support from both Norwich residents and visitors to the City for a museum to tell the Story of Norwich, but the consultation findings suggest that, whilst the Bridewell would be a good place to do this, it should not attempt to turn the entire museum over to telling the whole story in great detail. Rather, in addition to telling its own part of the story, focusing on Norwich people and bringing the displays and interpretation up to the present day to reflect the popularity of living memory, it should provide a historical context and act as a reference point or hub. Sending people out into the City to explore the historic built environment and other heritage attractions and museums with greater knowledge and understanding.

The Bridewell Project will not only add value to the City's heritage offer by making accessible an important Grade 1 listed building and its collections, but will improve access to and understanding Norwich's historic built environment, historical events and characters and act as a catalyst for visiting other historic sites in the City.

The availability of funding to carry out the accessibility improvements presents an exciting match funding opportunity for considering further improvements to the Bridewell. To revisit the displays and themes, to consider contemporary interpretation methods, also to improve visitors facilities, and to update and refurbish the building.

Unlike Great Yarmouth, where arguments for raising £4.7million to develop Time and Tide, Museum of Great Yarmouth Life were based on the fact that Time and Tide would be the Town's largest museum and provide the critical mass necessary to establish the Town as a heritage destination, The Bridewell is situated in a City comprising a large number of museums, heritage and other cultural attractions and historic buildings. Norwich has a Castle and the Bridewell alone is unlikely to attract significant numbers of tourists to the City but rather be seen as part of a heritage package.

The scope of the Bridewell Project is therefore relatively modest, a £1.4 million project seeking less than £1million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The aim of both the building and display programmes is to improve physical, sensory, intellectual and emotional access to the building and the displays. This will develop some new display schemes but will also mean making the best of what is already there through adaptation and enhancement and new interpretation.

3.1 Project Vision, Aims and Objectives

The Bridewell Project would create the first ever museum to tell the story of Norwich people and their City. Norwich was historically one of England's most important cities: we want the Bridewell to be a source of pride in the City and to reflect and articulate a local sense of identity. To achieve this, the choice of collections and interpretation approaches will be generated through participation and consultation, involving people with a wide range of life experiences.

We want the Bridewell Project to:

- build on the Bridewell's strengths in industrial history, and bring in social history, costume and textiles, art and archaeology collections to tell the wider story of Norwich people and their City.
- include oral testimony and contemporary collecting and recording to bring the Norwich story up to date.
- interpret a remarkable Grade 1 Listed 14th C building.
- provide a fully accessible museum experience, which minimises barriers to physical, sensory, and intellectual access, and enables all visitors to feel welcomed and engaged.
- develop and sustain local participation in the museum's development and operation.
- provide local people with access to their heritage.
- increase visitors' understanding and knowledge about the development of Norwich and the story of its people over time.
- identify and establish the position of the Bridewell within Norwich's heritage offer.
- contribute towards the development of Norwich as a heritage destination.
- enable outstanding schools and events programmes.

To achieve these objectives, the project budget will be used to:

- create an accessible and welcoming new entrance to the museum, and level access throughout the displays.
- redisplay many of the galleries and enhance and refurbish other displays, which remain popular.
- carry out minor improvements to the building and its basic services.
- fund a thorough consultation process to inform the project at all stages.

The Bridewell has been awarded £998,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £224,000 Norfolk County Council capital funding, £60,000 from Norwich City Council's maintenance fund, £20,000 from Norfolk County Councils building maintenance fund and £25,000 from the Friends of Norwich Museums. Renaissance in the Regions and Norfolk County Council supported the development and feasibility study stage of the project and HEART supported the first stage of a public consultation programme.

Total Project Budget: £1,432,410
Target completion date: Spring 2011

4. ROYAL NORFOLK REGIMENTAL MUSEUM

Background

The Museum enables visitors to find out about the everyday lives of Norfolk's soldiers and their families during times of war and peace.

The museum has recently undergone *Phase 1* in a programme of improvements. These have included providing direct access to the Shirehall Study Centre giving access to disabled toilets and generally improving joint working opportunities and communications between the sites. Further physical improvements include level access into the education room/office, upgraded emergency lighting, fire prevention and intruder systems. These changes have necessitated changes to the layout of the reception area. Which has been redecorated and fitted out with new reception and retail furniture and the museum cases have been re-displayed.

4.1 Phase 2

Autumn/winter 2008/09 will include re-thinking the whole of the post 1st World War section. This will include re-designing the WWII displays to better delineate between Europe 1940 and Europe 1944-5, Burma 1944-5 and Singapore and Far East Prisoners of War. The Home Front section will be removed and its story told at the Bridewell, to be replaced by a large display about the post war years and National Service. The Ireland display will be relocated, extended and brought up to date and there will be a completely new Biographical display containing stories of individual soldiers supported by personal items and documentary material.

Funding for the project totalling has been provided by Norfolk County Council's minor works capital programme, the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum Association, the Town Close Charity and The Ogilby Trust.

Their Past Your Future award: Norfolk Men on National Service

This exciting new project at the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum involves school students from Diss High School and ex-National Servicemen working with NMAS staff to explore the experience of National Service. It will generate a new permanent display and learning materials about the post-war years and National Service, including the Korean War and Cyprus emergency. The project has recently received £9,750 funding from the Big Lottery Fund's 'Their Past Your Future' funding stream through the MLA. The project is a discrete element of a larger redisplay of the whole of the post First World War section of the Museum which will be completed in the next few months.

5. CARROW HOUSE COSTUME AND TEXTILE STUDY CENTRE

Background

Carrow House has been closed for 18 months as a result of major building improvements including a new roof. During this period a reduced level study and enquiry service has been provided at Norwich Castle's Shirehall Study Centre. Additional improvements will include disabled toilet facilities and access to and shared use of the Victorian Conservatory. Work is now underway to re-occupy the building with the intention of re-organising and improving storage conditions of and access to collections, rethinking the public areas, reviewing operational arrangements and developing an activities and events programme. A funding bid to WREN has been submitted to support this work and the Costume and Textile Association are also provided funding support for open storage facilities.

5.1 Carrow House is home to outstanding costume and textile collections and NMAS has aspirations to establish it as a Centre of Excellence in the East of England for Costume and Textiles. In order to achieve this NMAS will need to obtain designation status for the collections and establish itself as a specialist and leader in the field. In order to facilitate this process Renaissance in the Regions is providing modest funding during 2008/09 to enable the Curator to develop contacts and partnerships in the Region. We are also intending to submit a funding bid to the Esmee Fairbairn Trust to support necessary collections management work and will explore opportunities for EU funding.

5.2 Costume and Textile Displays

We are exploring opportunities to display costume and textile collections across Norwich sites. This aspiration will be achieved through the *Arts of Living Gallery* and Rotunda Balcony *About My Person* display at Norwich Castle, and in new displays in the redeveloped Bridewell. We are also exploring the possibility of staging a major temporary costume and textile exhibition in Bernard Matthews and Norwich Union Galleries in 2012. The exhibition would also deliver a long term legacy in terms of collections conservation and the purchase of mannequins and mounts which could be used to display collections across the Norwich sites in future years.