



**Norwich Area Museums Committee**

**14:30 to 16:00**

**5 December 2023**

Present:

**City Councillors:**

Huntley (chair)  
Hoechner  
Kidman  
Schmierer  
Wright

**County Councillors:**

Ward (vice chair)  
Reilly  
Watkins

**Co-opted non-voting members:**

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of the Norwich Museums), Amanda  
Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund and Councillor Graham (South Norfolk  
District Council)  
Councillor Kybird (ex officio member)

Apologies:

County Councillors Birmingham, Brociek-Coulton and Rumsby,  
Councillor Booth (Broadland District Council) and Danusia Wurm  
(Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)

Also present:

Robin Hanley, assistant head of museums  
Jan Pitman, learning manager (Norwich)  
Emma Clarke, learning officer  
Francesca Vanke, senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of  
fine and decorative art

**1. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023, subject to noting that Councillor Kybird had sent apologies for that meeting.

**3. Norwich Museums Report – August to October 2023**

The assistant head of museums introduced the report (which is available on the website [here](#)) and proposed that he and his colleagues would present the relevant sections and pause after each section for members to ask questions or comment.

The assistant head of museums presented sections 1 and 2 of the report. He confirmed that the Covid-19 measures, as detailed in the report, were still in place. The situation was being monitored as the winter period due to the increase in respiratory infections. The pop-up café and temporary retail offer in the Rotunda continued to be popular and it was positive to see that some form of refreshments and retail offerings had continued. The number of ceremonies continued to be increasing and this had led to an additional 18,500 guests to the museum.

The learning manager (Norwich) presented section 3 of the report, Norwich Learning Team activities – highlights report. He highlighted the work that the service had done regarding Early Years learning through a partnership with Earlham Nursery. This partnership allowed the service to interact with families in a holistic manner and it was looking at ways of improving access for these visitors. This formed part of the Early Years learning Strategy which included the Early Years Saturdays. The focus on improving access was a key area for the service, and this would form part of a review of the learning service. Through the work undertaken with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) the service had been looking at different approaches to delivering the material. Members were referred to the number of activities that had taken place for a range of learners through events and conferences. Highlights of these events included tours of *The Last Voyage of the Gloucester* exhibition which were conducted in British Sign Language (BSL) led by a Deaf tour guide. The guide had been a participant of the Kick the Dust work experience programme. Further crossover with the Kick the Dust programme had been through the *Knights of the Sound Table* which was working with the Keep project to create a soundscape based on objects within one of the new galleries. This had encouraged the participants to engage with heritage objects in different ways. The service had also begun piloting a new Key Stage 2 event based in the Boudica and Romans gallery, which was enquiry based. This allowed the students to engage with the objects in the gallery and explore the information within. During the summer a number of events has been held around the *Gloucester* exhibition, which included *Shipwrecked!* an event that had been held in the Castle Quarter which allowed members of the learning team to engage with a broader range of people. The partnership with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) had given the opportunity to give visitors a better understanding of the work of the RNLI and water safety.

A member commented that it was positive to see the service looking at ways to break down barriers to engaging with people who would not ordinarily engage and queried whether any monitoring had taken place on the activity in Castle Quarter. The learning manager (Norwich) said that the service were looking at ways to monitor this in more detail. The people who had been engaged with during the event in Castle Quarter had been given free tickets to attend the Castle Museum. There had been a variable return on the number of tickets used and there were likely to be a range of other barriers to visiting the museums.

In response to a member's query the learning manager (Norwich) said that the focus of the Romans event was based on a particular time period during Boudica's revolt and therefore it did not necessarily contain references to Icenian sites near Thetford, however any queries related to this would be addressed during the sessions. A member queried whether the sessions also explored the historical fact of the adversarial nature of the time period. In response the learning manager (Norwich) said that the event was focused on the beginning of the rebellion and on the

experience of an individual who was caught between the Romans and Iceni. The schools that visited would then be able to explore with the pupils the details of the rebellion.

In response to a member's query the learning manager (Norwich) confirmed that activity similar to the Museums Club was still ongoing through a larger number of different groups. Some of these were through the Saturday events and other groups.

The assistant head of museums presented section 4, Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update, of the report. The report detailed the total participation figures for the project that had been funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) which had run from October 2018 to March 2023. The project had regularly been reported on to the committee. It had engaged with young people aged 11-25, particularly those aged 16-25, who experienced various access barriers to engaging with the heritage sector. The programme had been very impactful and important to the Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) as it had changed the way of working for the service. The service had been able to secure additional funding through an Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) Uplift award for 2023-26 which would enable NMS to continue to support young people. While the funding was focussed on other areas in Norfolk some activity would continue in Norwich. For the year 2023-24 the service had also received funding from Norfolk Public Health to support and measure activities related to improving the mental health of young people. Through the new programme NMS were partnering with the library service to deliver activities, including at library sites. The programme would look at building skills and their appreciation and understanding of their local culture and history. Data from the first six months of the project were included within the report and numbers would build as the project progressed. The data captured through the project, including measuring mental health outcomes, was key to communicate with stakeholders and sources of funding to demonstrate the impact of the project. Following the success of the Round 1 application to the NLHF Grants for Heritage NMS was working with YMCA Leicestershire on the Round 2 bid for the Your Heritage Your Future project. This bid was currently in the development phase and would be submitted in May 2024. If the bid was successful project delivery would start in late 2024.

Members commented that it would be positive to see the impact of the initial project on the young people involved. The assistant head of museums clarified that the data for the current project was based on a small sample size, but this would likely increase. If numbers for particular target groups did not increase, then NMS would be working with partners to conduct targeted work. Members were informed that where possible within data protection legislation, the service tracked the participants in regard to employment. There were Kick the Dust participants which were now employed by NMS.

The assistant head of museums presented section 5, Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn – project update, of the report. A photo within the report showed the installation of the glass roof in the atrium, this was a significant milestone of the project. Through the installation of the glass roof the Percival Wing was now weatherproof and this would allow other works to be started within the wing. The glazed atrium roof would allow visitors to see the Castle Keep as soon as they entered the museum, putting the Castle at the centre of their visit. Other works that were ongoing included the fit-out of the new shop, the re-installation of the City Crest

mosaic in the entrance area and the installation of the new lift in the Percival Wing. Within the Keep the steel work for the roof platform and the lift shaft had been completed. The new lift in this area would allow all visitors to access the battlements of the Castle. The oak floors within the Keep were shortly being installed along with division of the space. The display cases for the new British Museum Partnership Gallery were being manufactured and NMS was working closely with various colleagues from the British Museum. In preparation for the reopening the service had engaged a specialist PR company to create a strong campaign for the reopening. The company, Culture Communications Collective, had previously worked on other museum openings such as the opening campaign of the Museum of Making. The next major milestone of the project would be the installation of the glazed bridge which would connect the Percival Wing with the Keep. A tour could be arranged for members of the committee to view progress of the works. The chair commented that it would be beneficial to see the progress.

The assistant head of museums presented section 6, other activity across Norwich museums, of the report. The report included details of a range of activities at both sites. Members were referred to section 6.1 of the report, Museum of Norwich, a highlight during the period had been the deep clean of the museum during October. Staff from the Museum of Norwich had worked with NMS conservation teams and volunteers from English+ and Women at Work.

The learning manager (Norwich) presented the learning update for the Museum of Norwich. The Museum of Norwich had successfully applied for funding from UEA's Norfolk Initiative for Coastal and rural Health Equalities (NICHE) to continue running the Community Culture Club for a further three years. This club was a wellbeing programme for older adults with dementia. The funding would also allow this programme to be evaluated to demonstrate the impact of arts and heritage on wellbeing. The Museum of Norwich had also hosted an event for the Royal College of General Practitioners for new GPs working in the region. This and other events demonstrated the value of the Museum of Norwich as a venue for events and was an asset to the city.

The assistant head of museums presented section 6.2, Strangers' Hall, of the report. 2023 had been an important year for Strangers' Hall as it was the museum's centenary year of being a museum. Events to mark this celebration had been supported by the Friends of the Norwich Museums and the Freemen of Norwich. This included Free Admission days and the final event to be held before Christmas was the *After Dark Tour*, this tour would be held by LED candlelight. The museum had also offered free admission for Heritage Open Days. The senior curator had been working with the Norfolk Record Office to show archival information from the museum's opening in 1923 including photographs. The windows to Strangers' Hall had also been updated for the centenary and this should help draw visitors to the museum as it unified the frontage of the building. Due to the age of the building and the garden work was ongoing to maintain and conserve both. The museum had been gaining more attention both on social media and traditional media, especially in relation to the initiative that was looking to collect objects related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A member commented that the service should look at having information displays within the libraries that informed them of the museum sites in Norwich as these had proven to be popular. The assistant head of museums said that the service could

consider this and highlighted the increasing collaboration between the two services on social media.

The senior curator of Norwich Museums presented section 7, Norwich Curatorial update, of the report. She highlighted that the curator of historic art following the start of her latest exhibition in the Watercolour Gallery, *Where Land and Water Meeting: Norfolk's Rivers, Streams, Brooks and Broads*, would be doing further research on one of the artists. The artist was Catherine Maude Nichols and it was likely that the next exhibition by the curator of historic art would be a women-only exhibition. She was also conducting research on women artists and collectors in East Anglia. The curator of modern and contemporary art had been working on new exhibitions including one exhibition that would coincide with the re-opening with the Keep showing the breadth of contemporary art within the NMS collection. Within the Colman Project Space she had been working with artists to commission work that took inspiration from the Norwich School of Artists. The curator of the Norfolk Regimental Museum had been continuing her work to encourage new and younger visitors to the collection. This included the launch of a website and work with Norwich University of the Arts tutors who would be looking to incorporate items from the collection in their courses. The digital screens within the Rotunda had been reinstalled to allow visitors to engage with the collection, these had been removed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The senior curator of costume and textiles had been occupied with moving the costume and textiles stores from their location within Shirehall to allow for the remedial building works. This had involved a range of different items that had to be temporarily moved, including rolled textiles such as rugs and quilts, costume collections and the large collection of patterns and tools. The senior curator of Norwich Museums had recently opened an exhibition in the Time and Tide Museum based on the Turner painting *Walton Bridges*. She was currently working on a Turner based exhibition that would be in Norwich Castle in late 2024 and further updates about this exhibition would be brought to a future committee meeting. The senior curator of archaeology continued to be mostly occupied with the Castle Keep project but also worked on funding applications.

The assistant head of museums presented section 8, other developments, of the report. The Shirehall Courtroom works were ongoing to treat the dry rot. Through the works on the roof further issues had been identified but these would be addressed, ensuring that the roof would be secure. NMS were working closely with Norwich City Council conservation officers to ensure that the works conducted are done in a sensitive manner. The Wider Impact Group continued to meet as it monitored the operational impact of the Keep Project. The group was working in the fit out of the retail shop and the retail manager had been able to start planning the stocking of the new retail units within the shop. Within the restaurant the fit out was ongoing and it was hoped that both the new restaurant and shop could be brought into operational use in due course.

The assistant head of museums presented section 9, visitor numbers, of the report. The number of visitors had been increasing for the three Norwich sites and the overall number of visitors was starting to reach pre-pandemic levels. The Norwich Castle visitor numbers had seen a positive impact from both *The Last Voyage of the Gloucester* and the *Norwich Works* exhibitions. Strangers' Hall had seen positive increases due to the centenary celebrations. NMS continued to offer free admission to the Museum of Norwich for visitors to Norwich Castle due to the decreased offer.

The members thanked the assistant head of museums and his colleagues for the report.

**RESOLVED** to:

- 1) note the Norwich Museums Report August to October 2023; and
- 2) ask the assistant head of museums to organise another site visit of Norwich Castle for committee members.

#### **4. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations**

The representative for the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS) had been unable to attend and a written report had been circulated to members and was available on the website [here](#).

Felicity Devonshire, Friends of the Norwich Museums, addressed the committee. A written report had been included within the agenda, the period had been relatively quiet for the Friends. The Friends had supported Strangers' Hall with their centenary and the organisation had been pleased to see the upgrade of furnishings within the museums. The Friends Tapestry that would be hung in the Castle Keep when it reopened was nearing completion and the Friends would organise a tea party for the volunteers who had worked on it as celebration before the Keep reopened.

Amanda Geitner, East Anglia Art Fund (EAAF), addressed the committee. The EAAF had been pleased to support the visual art programme within the Norwich sites including temporary projects such as the *Norwich Works* exhibition. The displays and levels of engagement with these had been positive to see.

**RESOLVED** to thank Danusia Wurm, Felicity Devonshire and Amanda Geitner for their reports and record the committee's gratitude to the voluntary organisations that support the Norwich museums.

CHAIR