

NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

13 July 2009

Item No.8

GENERAL UPDATE ON THE NORWICH MUSEUMS

Report by the Norwich Museums Manager

This report updates the Committee on work in the Norwich Museums over the last 3 months and forthcoming activities.

1. Visitor Numbers

- o Total visitor numbers for the April and May 2009 for the Norwich Museums and Study Centres have met the target for 2009/10.
- o Visitor numbers for Norwich Castle and Strangers' Hall continue to be strong.
- o Visitors to the Norfolk Regimental Museum via the Tunnel from Norwich Castle are lower than last year. The route through the Mammal Gallery provides the simplest and most direct route to the entrance to the Tunnel and following its closure at the end of the Easter school holidays, visitor numbers are noticeably lower. In order to turn this situation around additional signage is being produced to promote the opportunity of visiting the RNRM to Norwich Castle visitors and provide alternative directions through the art galleries to the Tunnel.
- o School visits for the Norwich Museums are slightly lower than the target figure. This may be as a result of a combination of the full 2 weeks Easter holiday falling in April along with SATs tests and further Bank Holidays and half-term school holidays in May having a negative impact on the timetabling of school visits. Alternatively it could be as a result of the impact of the current economic situation. Figures for June will be examined closely in order to predict possible trends.

2. Recent New Displays, Temporary Exhibitions and Events

- **Norwich Castle: *Arts of Living* galleries – Conservation and Display**

The Arts of Living galleries were formally launched and opened by Mike Loveday, from Norwich HEART, in March 2009. These galleries, which are proving very popular, have been a particular showcase for the specialist talents of our conservation and display departments, as well as a learning opportunity to develop new skills.

For example, conservation staff and volunteers worked with Deborah Phipps (freelance textiles conservator) to prepare collections from Carrow House for display, building our own in-house skills and expertise in the process.



Deborah Phipps, Textile Conservator, working on a mannequin support



These galleries involved a great deal of detailed display design and preparation for the NMAS Display Department, including the creation of a magnificent tower of glasses, one of the highlights of the gallery, but which involved some nerve racking moments of installation!

- **About My Person**

The former Silver display on the Rotunda Balcony has recently been re-displayed. The cases now contain a new display called '**About My Person**', 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 includes collections from the costume & textile, archaeology, decorative arts and military collections.

There have been two major temporary exhibitions in Norwich Castle since the last meeting of this Committee:

- **Moore | Hepworth | Nicholson**

A Nest of Gentle Artists in the 1930s- 31 January – 19 April 2009

This exhibition at Norwich Castle explored the development of sculpture during the 1930s, focusing on the work of three leading artists: Henry Moore,

Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson.

In the summers of 1930 and 1931, Moore and Hepworth spent holidays in Happisburgh with friends and fellow artists. Hepworth's husband, John Skeaping, joined them in 1930 and in the following year, Ben Nicholson. Inspired by the landscape, they collected ironstone pebbles from the beach to take back to the studio to carve.

Works carved in ironstone on show in the exhibition included *Reclining Figure* (Henry Moore, 1930) and *Mother and Child* (Barbara Hepworth, 1934).

- **Mary Newcomb's Odd Universe: FIRE, EARTH, WATER, AIR**

This memorial exhibition celebrated the work of rural visionary Mary Newcomb (1922-2008), a self-taught painter whose work was very much rooted in the landscape of Norfolk and Suffolk. Praised by Ben Nicholson and collected by film stars, Mary Newcomb remained the unaffected poet of the rural scene, communicating the joy of existence in the world of country rites and rituals and the wonders of nature. She became one of the best-loved painters in Britain - and most of all in East Anglia, where her pictures were especially celebrated in Norwich Castle's recent *People's Choice* exhibition. The exhibition moves from pottery via early earthy paintings and watery images to end in the poetry of flying things (butterflies, birds, planets, balloons). The exhibition was curated by writer Ian Collins - a friend of the artist for 30 years.

- **Hockwold Glass: conservation project**



Debbie Forkes, from the NMAS Conservation Department, has completed the reconstruction of a group of broken Roman glass vessels.

The glass was excavated in 2003 by a metal detectorist as part of a 4th century AD Roman pewter hoard with the help of the Finds Identification and Recording Service.

The hoard was acquired in 2007 with funding from the Friends of Norwich Museums and the Heritage Lottery Fund with a commitment in kind from NMAS staff for the conservation of the hoard.

The glass is currently on display to visitors to Norwich Castle Study Centre in the Shirehall; there are longer-term plans to display it in the Boudica Gallery. In the meantime, the story of this conservation project – and of the glass vessels themselves - has been included in a web interactive star object trail which is on the NMAS website.

- **The Bridewell Project: BBC History Fair event**

The public consultation element of the Bridewell redisplay project is well underway, with a major programme of focus group consultation recently completed. One of the highlights of the programme, in January, was our participation at a 3 day event at the Forum in January. At the Forum Footprints local history fair organised by the BBC and the Forum Trust, we recreated a 1950s sitting room, which encouraged visitors to engage in conversation about Norwich history and the Bridewell project.



BBC Voices had a specially set up recording studio, and NMAS staff interviewed over sixty people, to get their views about what should be included in a museum telling the Norwich story. The BBC and Forum Trust estimate that 20,000 people visited the Forum over 3 days, with 5,000 stopping to look at the displays, so this event has really helped to raise the profile of the project.

3. Learning Department

- **New funding: START**

Every year, The Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts looks for new partners for their START programme. Its aim is to provide students, who would not normally have a chance, with an opportunity to visit an arts venue at least twice in an academic year to see a professional performance, exhibition or otherwise.

The Learning Department has been successful in receiving a grant to bring in 700 students from the Costessey Cluster three times during the 2009-10 academic year. These students, ranging from year 1 to year 8, will have the opportunity to see *Great British Art?*, *Watercolour* and *Beatles to Bowie*. With the aim of doing practical workshops both in and out of the exhibition space, this project will fit in nicely with *The Great British Art Debate* and other learning programmes.

- **Visual Dialogues**

Norwich Castle has been invited by Tate Britain to be a partner in this project working with 16-18 year olds. Ellie Hill will be working on the project with a group of young people from different schools over a period of 6 months, using the Art collections to inspire a piece of work. Tutors from Norwich University College of the Arts (NUCA, formerly the School of Art & Design) are taking some of the workshops and the focus is likely to be the graphic novel. This work is closely linked to the Great British Art Debate and other partners include Manchester City Art Gallery, Sheffield and Newcastle.

- **Teacher Training**

Work with UEA to engage trainee teachers with museums is becoming an established part of our work. In May Norwich Castle hosted three days for trainee primary teachers which were very well received. Two secondary History trainee teachers are presently doing part of their school placement (teaching practice) with the Learning Team as part of a national pilot project.

3. Forthcoming Exhibitions and Events

- ***No Visible Means of Escape***, Norwich Museums contribution to Contemporary Art Norwich 09 CAN09 opens to the public on Saturday 18 July 2009. The exhibition features work by leading national and international artists, exploring the themes of control, punishment and surveillance, taking inspiration from Norwich Castle's long history as a prison.
- July is **Garden Month at Strangers' Hall** and will be taking part in the National Gardens Scheme. Throughout the month visitors will be encouraged to discover and make use of the garden.
- **Interpreter** led drop-in events and activities will be delivered across the Norwich Museums during the school holidays.

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NORWICH MUSEUMS: Visitor Numbers to date

			APR	MAY	TOTAL TO DATE
N O R W I C H	Castle Museum	TARGET	11,891	13,488	25,379
		ACTUAL	14,559	12,278	26,837
		VARIANCE	2,668	-1,210	1,458
	Norwich Castle Study Centre (Shirehall)	TARGET	252	227	480
		ACTUAL	225	237	462
		VARIANCE	-27	10	-18
	Strangers Hall	TARGET	541	466	1,007
		ACTUAL	1,050	664	1,714
		VARIANCE	509	198	707
	Royal Norfolk Regimental	TARGET	304	368	673
		ACTUAL	393	289	682
		VARIANCE	89	-79	9
	Royal Norfolk Regimental via Castle	TARGET	2,964	2,377	5,341
		ACTUAL	1,939	1,076	3,015
		VARIANCE	-1,025	-1,301	-2,326
TOTAL		TARGET	15,953	16,926	32,879
		ACTUAL	18,166	14,544	32,710
		VARIANCE	2,213	-2,382	-169

School Visits		APR	MAY	TOTAL TO DATE
Castle Museum	TARGET	709	985	1694
	ACTUAL	481	898	1379
	VARIANCE	-228	-47	-275
Strangers Hall	TARGET	68	86	154
	ACTUAL	28	48	76
	VARIANCE	-40	-38	-78
Royal Norfolk Regimental	TARGET	51	49	100
	ACTUAL	45	29	74
	VARIANCE	-6	-20	-26
TOTAL	TARGET	828	1120	1948
	ACTUAL	554	975	1529
	VARIANCE	-274	-105	-379

NB Bridewell Museum and Carrow House are currently closed to the public.