

Norwich Area Museums Committee 11 December 2018

Norwich Museums briefing: September to November 2018

1. Exhibitions at Norwich Castle

1.1 *The Paston Treasure: Riches and Rarities of the Known World* (23 June – 23 September 2018)

This major exhibition in collaboration with the Yale Center for British Art reunited - for the first time in three centuries - a number of rare 17th century works of art and objects originally featured in the enigmatic painting *The Paston Treasure*. Painted by an unknown Dutch school artist circa 1663, the work features an array of exotic treasures from around the world, as well as animals and people, drawn from what was once one of the greatest private art collections of 17th century England. The result of an intensive 10-year research project, *The Paston Treasure: Riches and Rarities of the Known World* explored the history of the Paston family and how they acquired and lost one of the most distinguished art collections in 17th century Britain. It also examined the puzzle of the painting and its anonymous artist. Supported by the East Anglia Art Fund, the exhibition was divided into thematic sections, which were illustrated by relevant objects, paintings and artefacts, the majority of which have been loaned from distinguished national and international public and private collections. Prestigious international lenders to the exhibition included the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Chicago Institute of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Royal Collection and many others.



With over fifty lenders and international loans from the USA and Holland involved, this exhibition was one of the most ambitious ever undertaken at Norwich Castle. The exhibition enjoyed critical acclaim and very positive media coverage, including an interview on Radio 4's *Front Row*. A major international

scholarly publication will be a lasting legacy of the project. An affordable exhibition guide priced at £9.99 and authored by Keeper of Art Dr Francesca Vanke sold nearly 800 copies during the run of the exhibition.

1.2 *Armistice: Legacy of the Great War* (20 October 2018 - 6 January 2019)

Generously supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and by other funding partners including the Town Close Estate Charity and the Norfolk Regimental Museum Trustees, *Armistice* is a major centenary exhibition which explores the breadth and depth of the impact of the First World War on Norwich and Norfolk, showing the physical impact on the county, coastal defences and changes in agriculture and industry, alongside stories of the communities and individuals whose lives were transformed by the War. The exhibition provides a fitting finale to four years of commemorations across Norfolk Museums Service (NMS). It is the culmination of a huge amount of research by individuals—including a team of 24 volunteers—local history societies and museums around the county, and places the national story into local context providing an opportunity to discover the particular impact of the War on Norfolk in a varied and thought-provoking way.

Drawing on photographs, letters, posters, newspaper reports and evocative artefacts such as original uniforms and aircraft models, the exhibition paints a vivid picture of how the war brought profound and long-lasting changes to the communities of Norfolk. The exhibition has been produced in collaboration with the Norfolk Library and Information Service and Norfolk Record Office and is also a NMS-wide project, featuring loans from across the Service. Contemporary responses are also key, including Paddy Hartley's extraordinary work *Papaver Rhoeas* (the Latin name for the Common Poppy) which presents a series of intricately crafted and botanically accurate poppies created entirely from lambs' heart tissue and horsehair to explore ideas around remembrance.



The Hubbard wedding, photographed by Olive Edis

1.3 Colman Gallery temporary displays (- 30 December 2018)

The current extended exhibition in the Colman Project Space is *Magritte: The Lost Painting*. This explores the story of the detective work recently undertaken on NMS' Magritte painting *La Condition Humaine*, where a quarter of a missing Magritte painting, *La Pose Enchantée* was discovered underneath the later work.



La Condition Humaine by Rene Magritte

1.4 Timothy Gurney Gallery - Visible Women (-28 April 2019)

A showcase of work by women artists from both the modern and contemporary NMS art collections. Works are in a variety of media by different artists, including Barbara Hepworth, Jo Spence and Penny Slinger.

2. Forthcoming exhibitions

2.1. *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* (9 February – 8 September 2019)

A major exhibition exploring what it meant to be a Viking and how the Vikings transformed and shaped every aspect of life in Britain, featuring some of the most significant Viking discoveries ever made. A partnership exhibition from the British Museum and York Museums Trust.

3. Norwich Castle Events

3.1 *Girl Power: International Day of the Girl* 13 October

The first NMS International Day of the Girl was an event celebrating women past, present and future.

Staff worked with local partners and inspirational females; the NMS Costume and Textiles department demonstrated the semiotics of fashion; the Golden Triangle WI championed female skill development; Siobhan Eke founder of the Inspirational Females collective and Cherish Watton, a Women's Land Army specialist to provide a range of talks and panel discussions, in an environment of encouragement and support for women of all ages and their progression.

Supporting the Arts Council England's Creative Case for Diversity, this is an event NMS now plans to hold every year, building on these new partnerships.



3.2. *Architecture Day: Grand Designs* 3 November

This event saw high levels of engagement with the activities on offer, which had been developed by students and staff at Norwich University of the Arts. The labyrinth in particular was popular and impressive – built in cardboard boxes for younger children to walk through, with a place where they could ‘graffiti’ the walls of the labyrinth and slay a dragon. There is significant potential to further develop this work and partnership.

3.3. *Rebels! Suffragettes in Norwich* special event day 10 November

The event *Rebels! Suffragettes in Norwich* created a rich atmosphere, with varied activities on offer including talks from local historians. The event also featured *Feminism & Fashion*, a popular Female Voices tour and performances and recreated Suffragette Trials, providing a link to the *Armistice* exhibition.

3.4 *Life during WW1* special event day 24 November

The trials of an infantry soldier were brought to life with the Royal Norfolk Regiment Living History Group. Drills took place involving adults and children as young as four, providing an effective way to immerse visitors in some of the regimental activities. A variety of costumed characters represented different male and female roles in the war. The day also featured trails, crafts and demonstrations.



3.5 October half-term: *Could it be Magic*

October half-term at the Castle was themed around Magic and also made connections with the Science Festival. Artist Kate Munro made magic wishes for the world, creating healing potions and helping visitors learn about the special properties of herbs. For the activity *Animal Magic* the NMS Natural History Curator Dr David Waterhouse explored the magic found in creatures of the world. Actor Neil Paris was commissioned to devise an original performance telling the *History of Magic*; Spooky Dungeon tours proved very popular and staff created a Hallowe'en themed Generation Game to point up the magic of the human memory. The team also created a Silent Disco in the Castle Keep where three generations danced along to magic-themed music, from *I put a spell on you* to *Monster Mash*.



Actor Neil Paris

3.6 Knight Club

The first season of *Knight Club* at the Castle has been successful. It has proven to be an accessible, engaging course that has captured the imagination of everyone involved.

The young 'squires' have learnt that it takes more than just hitting people with a sword to be a knight: compassion, courage, skill, and understanding were shown by all the participants. Staff are preparing for the next Knight Club, due to start in January.



3.7 Start Club

It was amazing! They have been keen to go each week. Come out happy and proud of their work. Really enjoyed learning about art and "proper art." (Parent)

Following successfully gaining another three years of funding from the Town Close Estate Charities, ST*ART club is back in action and kicked off with a *ST*ART Drawing* course this autumn. Led by artist and arts educator Ali Atkins, ST*ART provides an inclusive and dynamic introduction to art for 8-12 year olds providing a much needed high quality offer evermore more critically important given the reduction of art in the curriculum within schools and the importance for supporting creativity within our children. A strategic relationship with Norwich University of the Arts means that all participants are able to visit the NUA degree shows with their families, and with many being inspired to go to art school following this course, we wanted to make it a reality for them. NUA volunteers will also be working with us and creating a city pathway with other partners such as SCVA is already on the cards. We are delighted to have the Support of the East Anglian Art Fund

4. Strangers' Hall

4.1 Activities at Strangers' Hall

September saw a successful level of attendances for Heritage Open Days at Strangers' Hall, with tours of Queen Elizabeth I's Norwich provided by Norwich Guide Shea Fiddes.



Since the start of the Autumn term, a record number of schools have visited the museum, with sessions on Kett's Rebellion, the Great Fire and Toys in the Past all proving popular.

The mummified cat and rat from the Strangers' Hall 'Household Superstitions' collection are currently on loan to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, as part of their Exhibition *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, alongside the 17th century painting 'Boy with Coral'. The exhibition draws on these rare examples of animals whose remains were concealed in houses as protection against perceived forces of evil, with accompanying filmed documentaries for Channel Five and Blink Films.

Senior Curator Cathy Terry featured in a documentary about the textiles trade: *Pubs, Ponds and Power – the Story of a Village*, which screened on BBC 1 on November 26th.

Curatorial work on the Toys and Games audit and the Children's Books collection progresses well, with support from the NMS documentation team and NMS Teaching Museum Trainee Laura Reeves. An audit of the nationally important doll collection is being carried out and Bonham's expert Fergus Gambon generously spent a day assessing some of the more interesting examples.

Building work to tackle a decayed timbers caused by a small wood-boring beetle infestation on the north façade of the Great Hall and Parlour have recently been completed and scaffolding removed.

5. Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell

5.1 Activities at the Museum of Norwich

The Museum of Norwich had a strong offer for October half term, with an increase in visitors from 2017. A range of science-based activities were on offer linked to the city-wide Norwich Science Festival. Trained weavers demonstrated their specialist skills on the Jacquard loom and explained to visitors how the punch-card system operating the loom links to the early development of computing.



Paul Wisdom, operating the restored Jacquard loom.

The latest exhibition *Picturing the Past* has proved popular, and the science of photography also provided a theme for half term family activities.

Curator Jenny Caynes and Assistant Curator Bethan Holdridge have both been filmed recently by *Developing Experts*, a Norwich-based company, featuring over 700 online science lessons supporting schools nationwide. Staff spoke about the loom and recorded a series of short films about the pharmacy.



Jenny Caynes and Sam Rowe from Developing Experts

Many younger visitors have been engaging with the *Talking Statues* trail which features Snap. *Talking Statues* is a Norwich-wide trail which has brought statues across the city 'to life' with the help of stars such as Stephen Fry, George Szirtes, Olivia Colman and Sarah Perry.

In October half term, the museum featured a creative writing workshop lead by acclaimed children's author Alexander Gordon Smith and the National Centre for Writing. Under 16's have been challenged to write Snap's story in a competition which comes to a close at the end of November. A winner will then be chosen, and Snap's new voice will be revealed in February.



The Snap head on display at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell.

Samson was recently removed from his current temporary resting place at the Collections Centre at Gressenhall for photography, and assessment by the NMS Design and Technical Team. A specialist mount maker from conservators Plowden & Smith was on hand to demonstrate how Samson will be mounted when he goes on display at the museum next spring.



Samson in store being photographed.

6. Learning Team activities and projects

6.1 HLF Kick the Dust programme

The Heritage Lottery Fund is providing a grant of £776,500 for the project Norfolk Journeys, under the HLF's Kick the Dust programme. Formal Permission to Start was issued in July 2018. This consortium project is being delivered in partnership with YMCA Norfolk and Creative Collisions (a youth arts network based in Great Yarmouth). The project aims to engage with 11-25 year olds – including those most hard to reach - during a four year period from 2018-22. Through the project the young people will be able to participate in a range of structured heritage activities that will develop their skills, experience and confidence.

Recruitment of the HLF- funded Project Coordinator and x3 Project Worker posts has been completed, with the following team members now in place:

- Project Coordinator – Christine Marsden (based at Museum of Norwich)
- Project Worker (Norwich) – Rachel Daniel (based at Museum of Norwich)
- Project Worker (East) – Becky Demmen (based at Time & Tide)
- Project Worker (West) – Rachel Duffield (based at Gressenhall)

A summary of what the project aims to achieve:

“This project will create a model that will facilitate sustained engagement with the young people of Norfolk, including those most hard to reach. NMS will work with YMCA Norfolk and Creative Collisions, two organisations with a strong record of engaging the most vulnerable young people. Young people will create an individual journey into active engagement with Norfolk’s heritage, using structured progression pathways based around a menu of options, tailored to meet individual needs. Specialise mentoring and the support of NMS will ensure young people reach their potential and achieve their aspirations. Outcomes for young people will include certificated skills and training, enhanced employment opportunities, active involvement in programming and a chance to shape the direction and governance of heritage organisations.”



The new project logo being used on social media accounts

The Project Coordinator and Assistant Head of Museums attended a meeting of the 12 Kick the Dust projects organised by the Heritage Lottery Fund in Manchester on 28 November.

6.2 Norwich Learning Manager

Colly Mudie has now retired from her role as Norwich Learning Manager following 17 years of service to NMS, based at both Norwich Castle and Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse. The recruitment process for her successor is currently underway, with interviews scheduled for 14 December.

7. Other Developments

7.1 Registrars

A total of 139 weddings took place at Norwich Castle between September and November 2018. Staff have been working with colleagues from the Registrars’ Service to continue the provision of Registrar weddings during the construction phase of the Keep project. Staff have also been working on the future wedding offer following the Keep project opening, which will involve a new alternative entrance for wedding guests as well as new facilities for interviewing the bride.

7.2. History Mystery Escape Room games at the Museum of Norwich

The Merchants' Vaults Escape Room games at The Museum of Norwich are continuing to gain momentum. Since the partnership began with Mystery History in June of this year, a total of 995 players have played the game up to the end of October. We also successfully introduced Friday evenings, which are selling well, and have been training up further staff ahead of Sunday opening starting at the end of this month. October also saw us named in The Guardian both online and in print as one of the top 10 escape games in the UK, where we were described as "The masters of making history fun".



7.3 Norwich Castle external lift improvements

Preparatory works to refurbish the external lift are now complete. R.G Carters have been appointed as the principle contractor overseeing the works and a new KONE lift has been ordered. The lift will close to the public on 11 February 2019 to allow for the refurbishment and the new lift is due to be opened on 15 April 2019.

7.4 Venue hire at Norwich Museums

September to November has proved a busy period for venue hire and events at Norwich Castle. In September the site hosted two evenings in partnership with the UEA to welcome international students to the city and showcase some of the heritage and culture on offer in Norwich.

Linked to the current *Armistice* exhibition, the site welcomed the Royal British Legion for a private view of the exhibition following the culmination of their torch relay at Norwich Castle on Sunday 21 October.

November saw another successful fireworks display from the Castle for Norwich City Council's *Big Boom* fireworks, which was very well attended again this year, drawing crowds across the city. November also saw one of the most challenging venue hire events of 2018, with the site hosting the BBC Eastern region's live coverage for *Children in Need*. Whilst this was a substantial undertaking with regards to set-up along with the complexities of hosting live camera crews, the evening was a great success. The event provided a fabulous evening of entertainment for families, local charities and fundraisers as well as great coverage for the Castle across the region.



Pudsey bear at Children in Need





Royal British Legion event on 21st October

7.5 Wider Impact Group

During the construction phases of the Keep project there will be some disruption to the operation of the museum. In order that disruption is minimised a working group called the Wider Impact Group has been established. This group will be chaired by the Norwich Area Operations Manager, with support from Artelia, the Project Management Consultants working on the Keep project.

Work is already well underway with this group and various solutions are in the process of being finalised to deal with the many areas directly affected by the closure of key areas of the museum. This includes; a temporary entrance and ticket desk, temporary café, temporary retail outlet, construction work to temporary and new wedding entrances, decanting and relocation of areas and the relocation of collections.

7.6 Retirement of Chief Curator

Dr John Davies, NMS Chief Curator and former Director of the Keep project, retired on Friday 30 November following 27 years of dedicated service.

8. Visitor Numbers

Detailed visitor numbers will be circulated at the meeting.

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