

NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

30 November 2009

Item No. 5

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 AND ADMISSIONS INCOME

1.1 Museum & Study Centre Visits (See Appendices A, B C & F)

- Total visitor numbers for from April to October 2009 for the Norwich Museums and Study Centres (*excluding visitor to Regimental Museum via Norwich Castle*) are in excess of the target 2009/10 and visitor numbers for the same period 2008/09.
- Visitors to the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum via the Tunnel from Norwich Castle continue to be lower than last year and against target. 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. This had not been anticipated when setting target visitor numbers. Additional signage has been provided and Norwich Castle Visitor Services staff inform visitors of the opportunity for a free visit to the Regimental Museum at the reception desk, but despite these efforts visitor numbers continue to be low. The Mammal gallery re-opens in December and visitors exiting from Norwich Castle via the Regimental Museum will hopefully return to their original level.
- Pop in for a Pound visitors made up 11% of museum visitors in 2008/09 and 13% in the period April-July 2009. The higher proportion this year may be as a result of a very popular exhibition in May, Mary Newcomb's Odd Universe'.
- It is possible to estimate from the MORI survey of Norwich Castle the percentage of visitors that are first time/infrequent visitors and those that have visited Norwich Castle before. The 08/09 MORI survey asks the question '*Is this your first visit to Norwich Castle?*' 41% of the 421 visitors who took part in the survey said yes, therefore 59% of visitors have visited the Castle before. This is a similar percentage to that shown by the Objective 2 funded visitor research at Gressenhall.
- Further analysis of the MORI survey shows that when asked '*How many times have you visited Norwich Castle in the last 12 months?*', the first time visitors make up 14% of annual total visits, and the repeat visitors, some making more than 2 visits per annum, make up 86% of total visits.

- 2646 visits were made to Norwich Castle, Carrow House, Strangers' Hall and the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum in September 2009 compared with 2292 the previous year.

1.2 School Visits (See Appendix D)

- School visits for the Norwich Museums for the same period are in excess of the target 2009/10 and school visits for the same period 2008/09.
- The proportion of self-guided school visits to the Norwich Museums for this period is 29%. School visits which include workshops, costumed interpretation and/or object handling sessions amount to 71%. The most popular topics are Romans, Egyptians, Tudors and Toys.
- The additional costs of delivering workshops and other sessions are charged to the school (*cost of freelance education workers*) but no profit is made by NMAS.
- Schools do not pay admission fees to the Norwich Museums. There is no charge to schools that choose to undertake self-guided tours and material is available on the web site to support teachers to undertake self-guided tours.
- There is also a bursary available for schools who request help with covering travel costs.

1.3 Admissions Income (See Appendix E)

- Admissions income for the Norwich Museums is 2.58% higher than for the same period last year, and the projected annual outturn is over 10% higher than the budget.

2. RECENT TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

2.1 Norwich Castle

No Visible Means of Escape 18 July- 4 October 2009

- In the wake of the very warmly received Mary Newcomb show discussed by the Committee at its July meeting, the summer offering at the Castle was inspired by the Castle's history as a prison. 'No Visible Means of Escape: Contemporary Art and Imprisonment' looked at control, punishment and surveillance, themes which have been widely explored in contemporary art. Part of the high profile CAN09 programme of exhibitions and events across the city, the exhibition also included a new commission. Christine Borland's new work was inspired by the castle's collection of death masks and phrenology.

Great British Art Debate 24 October 2009- 10 January 2010

- This exhibition, which is currently on show in the main exhibition galleries, is the first exhibition in our new Heritage Lottery Funded Tate Partnership programme, with partners Tate, Museums Sheffield and Tyne and Wear Museums. In the next two years, visitors will have the opportunity to see four exhibitions curated by the partnership, with access to major works on loan from all of the partners. The overall theme of the partnership is introduced in

this exhibition, which includes an eclectic mix of 'Great British Art' and invites visitors to give us their views on the works on show. Works by Cotman and Turner are displayed alongside more contemporary works by artists like Tracey Emin.

2.2 Garden Month at Strangers' Hall

- July was Garden Month at Strangers' Hall. On Sunday 5th July, the garden was open especially for the National Gardens Scheme (the 'Yellow Book' garden openings which benefit various charities), with cream teas and activities as well. With 132 visitors, many of whom were new to Strangers', the event was a great success, and the Friends garden team received many compliments on their excellent work. During the rest of the month, visitors took their pick from a range of events, including a display of floral objects from our collections, tours of the garden by the Friends volunteers, a garden-based Workshop led by volunteer group, the 'Strangers' Stitchers', and garden themed family activities. Charlotte Crawley also gave a well-received talk on Dutch formal gardens, and showed images of her own Dutch garden in North Norfolk.

2.3 Carrow House Costume and Textile Study Centre

- Carrow House re-opened to the public during Heritage Open Weekend in early September. There have been visits from individuals and groups for research, special interest and general interest purposes. An activities and events programme is being organised in liaison with the Costume and Textile Association starting in January 2010. These will include workshops and talks.

2.4 Norwich Castle Study Centre (Shirehall)

- 27% of visitors from April to October 2009 visit the study centre as part of a group. The small events programme at the study centre has been successfully targeting the over-55 age group with a series of very popular 'Try it on a Thursday' taster sessions. These two hour pre-booked sessions introduce different parts of the collection and provide an opportunity to study objects in detail. The study centre has also been working closely with tutors and staff at Norwich University College of the Arts (NUCA). In September we offered NUCA tutors two introduction visits to the study centre and its collections. These worked well to highlight the collections and services we offer and have resulted in a further six student group visits from the art school. As well as these group visits, the study centre has had regular monthly visits from the Norwich U3A Artefact group.
- 30% of visitors to the study centre come as individuals to work with the collection. These visitors include research students, interested individuals and students from NUCA. The introductory sessions delivered to tutors at NUCA have led to a boost in the number of NUCA students accessing collections at the study centre as more students have been.

3. OTHER NEWS

Visitor Services colleague achieves Customer Service award

- Norfolk County Council recently joined the Institute of Customer Services and staff were offered the opportunity to take part in a pilot scheme to achieve Customer Service awards. Lydia Greyson chose to take part in the

Communications award and worked with a coach to complete a Customer Service passport. She passed with flying colours and was praised for her 'dedication to customer service'. It is hoped to give other team members the opportunity to take part in this scheme in future.

Customer Service Week

- Customer Service week at Norfolk County Council was the 5-11 October 2009 and there were various events throughout the different sites.
- At Norwich Castle David Gurney, County Archaeologist asked if he could come and work at the front desk for a morning to meet visitors and sell tickets. David helped to meet and greet visitors and did a pretty good job of working his way around our ticketing system.
- Charles Wilde, Head of Marketing, also worked at the front desk to cover a lunch time slot and slipped effortlessly into the routine, chatting to visitors and giving them information for their visit. He also sold loads of guide books.
- Vanessa Trevelyan undertook some visitor research on customer satisfaction and spent a morning interviewing visitors to the Castle.
- David White, Chief Executive of NCC, joined Ian Flint and the Interpretation team at the Castle and the Regimental Museum, and seems to have had a great time meeting members of the public and school students.

Partnership working with The Archive Centre



- Curatorial and conservation colleagues have recently been involved in two exhibitions at the Archive Centre. The first, illustrated here, was "Smile for the Camera" - Images of childhood, 1860-1918. The display included some traditional children's toys from Strangers' Hall, and children's costume and accessories from Carrow House. The second collaboration was a display of the textile pattern books from the Bridewell collections, together with associated archives from the Norfolk Record Office. This project has provided valuable research information for the re-display of the Bridewell. Both these displays have now finished but the collaboration between museums and archives colleagues continues.

4. UPDATES

4.1 Natural History Gallery.

The re-display of the gallery, formerly the Mammal Gallery, is progressing well and is due to re-open to the public on 17 December 2009.

4.2 The Bridewell Redevelopment

- Building plans, to include a new accessible entrance and further access improvements within the building have been submitted for planning permission and Listed Building Consents. The tender process for appointing building contractors has commenced and the building work is expected to commence in February/March 2010.
- Following further public consultation during the Summer term the display team are researching display themes and will be finalising design briefs for each gallery by Christmas.
- The Bridewell Collections have been packed up and will be removed to temporary stores for the duration of the building work and display fit-out contracts.

4.3 Civic Coach

- Norwich City Council are liaising with NMAS's Conservation Dept with regards organising carbon dioxide treatment of the Civic Coach in order to deal with the moth infestation. NMAS have recommended that the Civic Coach is moved to alternative premises immediately following treatment in order to prevent re-infestation. The Assistant Civic Support Officer at Norwich City Council is liaising with relevant officers within the City Council with regards identifying and funding alternative accommodation.

5. LOOKING FORWARD

- The second Great British Art Debate Project ***Watercolour in Britain: Travelling with Colour*** exhibitions opens in late January 2010. This exhibition has been jointly curated by TATE, Norwich, Sheffield and the Laing, Newcastle with collections from each partner. The exhibition opens in Norwich before travelling on to the partner venues.
- Following a successful series of family focused weekend events last winter at Norwich Castle, a further series of events have been programmed from January to March. Themes include Kett's Rebellion, costume through the ages, storytelling, Romans, archaeology, natural history and rocks.