

Norwich Area Museums Committee 7 March 2017

Norwich Museums briefing: December 2016
to February 2017

1. Exhibitions at Norwich Castle

1.1 *Fisherman and Kings: The photography of Olive Edis* (8 Oct – 22 Jan 2017)

This highly successful exhibition celebrated the pioneering and important work of Olive Edis, the Norfolk photographer based in Sheringham. Her unique and arresting images, often immortalising local people, place her at the forefront of modern photography. The show was curated by Alistair Murphy, Curator at Cromer Museum and an expert on the life and work of Olive Edis. The Norwich exhibition formed part of a wider project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund that will transform access to, and awareness of, the work of this influential female photographer, including a new permanent gallery at Cromer Museum. A catalogue was produced to complement the show and this saw strong sales.



'Belcher' Johnson & autochrome self-portrait images from the NMS Olive Edis collection

1.2 Colman Gallery temporary displays

A display of drawings and prints by the artist Claughton Pellew (1890-1966) is currently on show in the Colman Project Space, exploring the harmony of country life on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the artist's death.

A selection of works by the priest, artist and antiquarian Edward Thomas Daniell (1840-1842) is also currently on show in the Colman Watercolour Gallery, featuring watercolours from his travels across Europe and the Middle East.

1.3 *Sixty years On – Highlights from Norwich Castle's Collection* (Timothy Gurney Gallery from 24 September 2017)

This exhibition showcases the modern and contemporary art acquired over the last 60 years with the support of the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society. The show includes a range of works by artists including Prunella Clough, Graham Sutherland, Keith Vaughan and Frances Kearney.

2. Forthcoming exhibitions

2.1 *Small Stories: At Home in a Doll's House* (4 Mar – 25 June 2017)

Selected as one of only two UK regional venues, NCM will host this international touring exhibition from the V&A Museum of Childhood. Showcasing a stunning collection of twelve of their best dolls' houses, this exhibition will attract families and doll's house enthusiasts from across Norfolk and beyond. The main exhibition will be enhanced by the Dream House, an installation of 22 dream rooms created by Norfolk artists, architects, makers, community groups and school children.



Kaleidoscope House
Laurie Simmons, Peter Wheelwright and Bozart, USA, 2001
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

2.2 Nelson and Norfolk (29 July – 1 October 2017)

A major exhibition drawing on some of the most extraordinary objects connected to Admiral Lord Nelson, reflecting his naval victories, his relationships and above all, his affection for his native county of Norfolk. The focal point for the exhibition will be the Ensign of Le Généreux, which will take up one half of the whole exhibition, filling the first temporary gallery space. Other objects in this exhibition will be drawn from NMS's own collections, including stored collections from Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, Strangers' Hall, the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell and Norwich Castle Museum. Curators are also working in partnership with the Norfolk Record Office and Norfolk Heritage Centre to display some fascinating documents and books including letters from Nelson and the Parish Register in which Nelson's baptism is recorded. Of the loans coming into the exhibition there are some significant objects that have never been seen in a public museum before which are being loaned from private collectors. The exhibition will also include a number of significant loans from the National Maritime Museum.

2.3 Rembrandt: Lightening the Darkness (21 October – 7 January 2018)

An important new exhibition featuring the nationally significant collection of Rembrandt etchings held by NMS, alongside selected loans from the National Gallery, the Royal Collections, the British Museum and the National Galleries of Scotland.

3. Norwich Castle Events

3.1 RSPB Big Castle Birdwatch (28-29 January 2017)

Over the weekend of 28 and 29 January, Norwich Castle hosted the annual 'RSPB Big Castle Birdwatch' event. Each year, the RSPB holds a 'Big Garden Birdwatch', which encourages the public to count birds and wildlife visiting gardens, and helps build a picture of the UK's wildlife through the world's largest wildlife survey. To celebrate 2017's survey, the RSPB and NMS teams hosted a special weekend packed full of events to cater for all ages, and inspire people to discover the natural world living in their own gardens. Attendance was high, with 1,165 visitors on the Saturday and 973 on the Sunday afternoon. The NMS Learning Team ran a range of craft activities. The Castle Café was also very busy on both days with high spend reported.

The NMS Natural History team, assisted by Teaching Museum trainees Anne Brown, Freya Monk-McGowan and Jen Hooker, presented many garden-wildlife objects from the collection. These included taxidermy of a tawny owl, marsh harrier, carrion crow and a hedgehog. There were also replica fox, goose and hedgehog droppings, which proved popular with visitors of all ages.



RSPB event

3.2 February half term events - Rowdy Romans (11–18 February)

This year's half term theme was Rowdy Romans, taking a light hearted look at life in Roman times linked to our Boudicca Gallery. Actor Neil Paris performed *A History of the Roman Empire* in 20 minutes which was specially written for us and included lots of interactivity. Brutus the Roman soldier took visitor through weapons and tactics that were used in the Roman army and Belona's Battlestar Training Academy showed how the Romans kept fit. Visitor learned about how gladiators fought with fight expert Keith Wallis and how to make themselves beautiful the Roman way.

Visitor feedback was excellent, many saying that it was our best programme yet. There were lots of activities and something for everyone. Visitor comments included: *Fantastic, the children loved it!*; *Really enjoyed the talk (Recline with Me about Roman manners)* and *I've expanded my knowledge of the Romans*.



4. Curatorial work

4.1 Nelson exhibition conservation work

Work has begun on the conservation of the Ensign of Le Généreux. From careful assessment of the flag it appears that between the removal from St Andrews in 1897 and the flag's appearance in the Castle Keep for the 1905 Centenary some conservation work was carried out to support this delicate textile. Linings were stitched in place and holes were herringbone stitched to the lining to prevent further damage. The lining fabric is cotton, matching colours for the white and red and black for the blue stripe, unfortunately the black cotton has subsequently deteriorated and broken down and this lining was removed in October 2016.

The current conservation work involves supporting the blue stripe with a new lining, made of conservation tested fabric which has been dyed at the National Trust Conservation Unit. After the end of the exhibition the flag will be folded into a bespoke box so that it can be viewed and appreciated much more easily in the future. This is an extraordinary survival and a textile which carries its history in the evidence of gunpowder particles in the dust removed during surface cleaning, splinters of wood lodged in the fabric and in the patches used to mend the flag during its active life.

The Costume and Textile Association is providing a grant of £5,000 towards this work and hosting a Just Giving campaign to enable people to donate and match the C&TA grant. The Nelson Society have also given a grant of £1,500 which has paid for the new lining fabric so that the Nelson Society will always be closely woven into the life story of this object.

5. Stranger's Hall

5.1 Additions to the collection

Two more significant acquisitions of eighteenth century Norwich textiles were made, generously funded by the Costume and Textiles Association and helping build the important record of our local industry. These are piece of striped patterned callimanco chosen for its unusual length and quality, and a worsted damask pelmet, lined with stamped worsted camlet. The latter is the first example of this fabric in the collections, selected because the stamping technique used is acknowledged to be an important precursor of the colour printing process for textiles.

5.2 Events

In December Strangers' Hall celebrated the Christmas season with a month of activities designed to show visitors how Christmas customs have changed through the centuries. A team of staff and volunteers gather greenery, prepare it

for use in the museum and decorate every room to complement the period room settings. This provides a backdrop for Christmas parties and venue hire, schools groups and special tours. This year, new evening tours of the house were offered, giving people a chance to see the museum after dark. Seasonal entertainment offered during the month included the telling of spooky tales, Foolhardy Circus performance, Mummers play, magic lantern shows, Auriga Capella singers, and display of traditional cribs. Father Christmas once again found time to visit too and there was an increase in the number of children visiting him in his Toy Workshop, ably assisted by Alf the Elf.



5.3 Deep Clean

After Christmas the museum closes to allow the annual deep clean to take place. A team of volunteers was recruited by curator Bethan Holdridge, provided with training by the NMS conservation team and set to give ceiling to floor cleans of every display room; a huge task that involves removal, wrapping, freezing and vacuuming of every single textile and careful conservation cleaning of each individual object. Some 25 volunteers participated. Among them was a small group of recent asylum seekers who were invited to join in as part of the New Routes collaboration with Norwich's City of Sanctuary initiative. The aim was to give the refugees a constructive work experience, to help them make connections in the local community and to understand a little more about the history of the city. Strangers' Hall is a particularly appropriate venue given that its association with the welcome of refugee families to Norwich in 1565 and the subsequent integration of communities of 'Strangers'.



Strangers' Hall deep clean

5.4 Exhibition plans

The V&A touring exhibition *Small Stories :at Home in a Dolls' House* opens at Norwich Castle in March, with Strangers' Hall Curator Cathy Terry providing the curatorial lead for the show. The strong link between a Norwich Castle temporary exhibition and collections held at Strangers' Hall has facilitated an ambitious and complementary programme of events and displays, drawing on the museum's extensive toy collections and encouraging visitors drawn by the internationally- touring show to take in Strangers' Hall as part of their trip. Visitors will be able to see the newly-conserved and re-displayed Norwich Baby House in the Strangers' Hall Toy Room, alongside delightful examples of dolls' houses, dolls' furniture and miniatures arranged for the duration of the show throughout our period room settings. A special trail 'Small Stories at Strangers' Hall' will draw all of the elements together. The Norwich Baby House is a rare 18th century survival of one of a small group of high quality period dolls' houses, and has been conserved over the last few months by Alice Forkes of the NMS Conservation team. An audio-visual interpretation has been installed to bring the tiny dolls inside the house to life.

The exhibition project has also provided an opportunity for the some of the best collections at Strangers' Hall to be catalogued and assessed, with Jan Roberts, a senior member of the Doll's House Society working with the museum to provide expertise over the last two years. Furthermore, the upgrade of the Baby House case in the Toy-Room provides an opportunity to undertake consultation with visitors to inform funding bids aimed at improving the display of the important collection of children's toys, dolls, books and games.

6. Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell

6.1 Dementia support

On 25 January, NMS staff from the MoN attended the launch of the Norwich City Dementia Action Alliance at The Forum. NMS has pledged its support to the scheme along with other local businesses such as John Lewis, Archant, Open, Norwich Theatre Royal and The Norfolk and Norwich Festival. The members have pledged positive action to make their organisations more dementia friendly, supporting the DAA's overall mission to gain 'Dementia Friendly City' status for Norwich by 2018.

6.2 February Half term

The museum saw a busy half term, with activities linked to 'make do and mend'. Visitors enjoyed activities such as make your own no sew bunting, a rag rug making session, make your own recycled jewellery work shop and a badge making activity, linked to the recent acquisition The Duvet of Love. The museum welcomed 431 visitors over the week.



The Duvet of Love

6.3 Stores Audit Volunteer Team

Behind the scenes MoN staff have recently recruited four new volunteers to help audit the collections. The new team are being trained to use MODES as well as being advised by NMS conservator David Harvey on how to care for collections. The museum is also hosting a new MA Museum and Heritage Studies student from UEA until Easter who will assist the stores audit project.

7. Learning Team activities and projects

7.1 Young Offenders Project at Norwich Castle

Norwich Castle has run another successful annual art project with local Young Offenders. The group learned about the history of the Castle, as first a Norman royal palace and then a prison, with a particular focus on the array of historic graffiti on the stone walls of the castle keep. This graffiti includes intricate patterns, religious figures and symbols, coats of arms, animals and stylised faces, some of which are believed to be up to 900 years old. After exploring the building with museum staff, the young people then worked with an artist to sculpt their own designs into clay which was cast into plaster blocks resembling the castle's limestone bricks.

As well as finding out about the past and learning new skills, the group created some fantastic designs that they were rightfully proud of. The time spent at the museum counted toward their reparation orders, but it is also hoped that the project will have sparked an interest in learning and making that will develop after the life of the project, and that the young people now feel welcome in the museum and it is a place they would be comfortable visiting.

The project, which has been running for over 10 years, builds on a long tradition of working with underrepresented and difficult to reach groups.



7.2 Family Friendly Autism Activity Days

Norwich Castle held the first two Family Friendly Autism Activity days in January. On each day there were a range of activities that had been developed and tested with local complex needs schools. There was a quiet space and instructions were written in symbols. The museum was decorated with stunning images from photographs taken by special school students when they took over the museum in November as part of Kids in Museums Takeover day.

Coverage on the local radio helped boost attendance to 743 visitors on the Saturday and feedback from adults was very positive. Many were delighted and hugely relieved that they could bring the whole family to an activity without feeling threatened or under pressure. One parent of two boys, one with Autism and one with Asperger's, particularly liked the tour of the Castle Keep commenting that it was *'...Brilliant talk, informative but also child friendly...'* and added that previously she would not have attempted to take her sons to any 'formal' tours.

The Takeover Day Picture Board Guide which was initiated during Takeover Day was edited and launched for the Family Friendly Days was very well received by visitors who were able to download this in advance. We plan to make this an annual feature of our visitor programme.



7.3 Schools Visits at Norwich Castle

Schools Visits continue to be good and match last year's record-breaking numbers. This year the new Anglo-Saxon Viking event for KS2 children is proving popular. Children explore the story of a brooch found on a Norfolk field, meeting costumed characters from the Viking period who explain the significance of grave goods and how important story-telling is to their culture

'I liked how the day all revolved round a story and the children being able to touch the artefacts' teacher, Beccles Primary Academy

8. Other Developments

8.1 New Geographies of the East project

Norfolk Museums Service is part of a successful consortium which has secured £600,000 of Arts Council England investment under their Ambition for Excellence programme.

This important project, called 'New Geographies of the East', is being coordinated by ECVAN (Eastern Contemporary Visual Art Network) and will deliver 10 major site specific art commissions across East Anglia developed with and for communities in the East of England with the additional aim of building links between artists and curators in the East of England and the Netherlands. At the heart of the project is a region-wide community engagement programme that will encourage diverse audiences to contribute to this three year project.

9. Visitor Numbers

Detailed visitor figures up to the end of February will be circulated at the meeting.

Report contact:

Dr Robin Hanley
Head of Operations and Learning
Norfolk Museums Service
Shirehall,
Market Avenue,
Norwich NR1 3JQ.
Tel: 01603 493663
Email: robin.hanley@norfolk.gov.uk