

Ripon Museum Trust : Annual General Meeting 2015

Held at the Golden Lion, Allhallowgate, Ripon, 12 March

Minutes

(Draft, for approval at 2016 AGM)

1. Present : Seven of the Board's Trustees/Directors – Anthony Chadwick, Christine Orsler, Richard Taylor (Chair), David Thelwall, Jill Wilkinson and John Witherick together with three staff members – Wendy Hunwick-Brown, Carrie Philip (who starts in April) and Jessica Cooke, and a further twenty-four Trust members or attenders including Mick Stanley and Martin Webber who both attend Board Meetings.

The chairman welcomed everyone, in particular our guest speaker Jenny Alexander

Apologies were received from : Chrissie Dummer, Val and Eric Monk, Roger Newby, Harry Corps, Ralph and Mary Lindley, Shirley Jones, Mandy Whitehead, Tina Gilchrist, Christopher Hughes, Bess Chapman, and Jill and Paul Freeman.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 6 March 2014

These were unanimously agreed as correct, this having been proposed by Anthony Chadwick and seconded by Christine Orsler.

3. Chairman's Report

Reviewing Last Year

Once again the Museums have continued to develop on many fronts, with new programmes and with changes of personnel. My notables for the last twelve months are these:

- In April we welcomed Naomi Parsons from Lancaster to take on the Learning & Access Officer role vacated by Sue Mackay and covered meanwhile by Wendy. Naomi brought us some excellent sessions of object handling, volunteer training and introduced new items for younger visitors at the Workhouse. Funding for Namoi ran out in December and she has since gone back to the North West.
- Naomi was soon joined by Kathryn Bedford- Dr Kathryn Bedford – academic, museum specialist, story writer and belly dancer. Kathryn's time with us as Learning Development Manager has been made possible by our first significant grant from Arts Council England. This has funded a year's joint project with the Cathedral to develop our respective learning offers and in particular to see if our learning work can grow to be self-funding by 2016. It looks as though we are on track for this and as she steps down this month Kathryn can be rightly proud of what she and the project team have achieved.
- We have run a programme of successful exhibitions and events in 2014, a notable example being the Richard III evening back in June. Over 150 people packed the Spa Hotel ballroom to hear Philippa Langley and Michael Jones launch the paperback edition of their book on “the king in the car park”. Thanks to them and to Wendy who dreamt up the idea. More recently, Workhouse Connections explored the family history links that so many of us have with these grim institutions. Some excellent talks as part of this two-day event have been captured on video and will provide useful resources.
- Two contrasting exhibitions were put on at the P&P. One was the Bobby on the Bike, sparked by the Tour de France Grand Depart in July, and the other was Noble Bloods, an art installation inspired by the First World War police memorial. I think we can say the latter attracted a wide variety of responses!
- Volunteering featured large as ever with a push at the Volunteer week in June to get more people involved, with visits to see other places such as Preston Park and with training covering everything from the new tills to customer care and dementia awareness.

- Our efforts have not gone unnoticed, with our being once again finalists in the White Rose tourism awards and regional winners in the Marsh Awards for education volunteers. The latter saw a party of volunteers making the trip to the British Museum to receive their certificates.
- The Workhouse kitchen garden has also fared extremely well during 2014. The collaboration with Lockwoods is growing. As well as taking our produce and featuring it on their menu, we had a number of cookery demonstrations, a fantastic alfresco dinner in the Workhouse Garden and reciprocal marketing.
- Work on sorting, conserving and recording our amazing collection of objects has gathered momentum with three teams now working in the Town Hall basement and the P&P. One entirely unexpected request has been to help police with their enquiries or rather the Independent Police Complaints Commission with its work on the Hillsborough Inquiry. Here we have been able to supply the only readily-available copies of defunct police manuals for extracts to be presented in evidence. This just shows how important it is not to dismiss seemingly unimportant items in our collection.
- Our unexpected departure this year has been Sue Dalton, our energetic Head of Museums, who decided in January that she wanted to turn her talents to something new after three successful years with the museums. We were able to celebrate her time with us at a leaving event notable by her declaring our new tramps toilets open! Sue can look back with pride at her achievements in bring more professionalism to our operations and widening our contacts with regional tourism, museum and arts organisations. We wish her well in whatever career direction she chooses to take.
- We remember Linda Blades following her untimely death in August. Linda was a much-loved, larger-than-life figure and we greatly miss her as one of our most enthusiastic volunteers.

Looking forward

- The star of the show already this year has been Wendy Hunwick Brown who has stepped up to cover in part for Sue's departure while we assess the future of the Head of Museums post. Till the end of September Wendy has agreed to act as Operations Manager as well as covering her volunteer management role. We are taking on additional temporary part-time staff and office volunteers to provide sufficient support. It would help the smooth running of the office if most visits could be agreed beforehand, preferably by email.
- Carrie Philip who is currently the education manager at Bede's World in the NE, will be joining us on 7 April in the new role of Learning Manager, our first such post funded from our own resources and covering all three museums. Carrie brings a wealth of experience from here and abroad and I feel sure she will prove a valuable member of the staff team.
- Our work continues to be shaped by the Strategic Plan adopted last year. An abbreviated version is available on the Trust's website. The plan sets priorities for us within six strategic aims – being serious about our collections; recognising that volunteers are our magic; seeing that learning is our DNA; making us Yorkshire's go-to museum; growing so that we can pay our way and running a truly professional operation. This is all directed to our vision to be the most engaging and admired small museum in the country delivering our mission with pride and integrity.
- A big step forward to realise the Strategic Plan will be our new Leadership Development Project funded by ACE to the tune of £85k. This will begin in the autumn and is designed to change the way we work by encouraging more self-led teams to deliver our growing operation. Training and visits to best practice organisations will be a big part of how this is done.
- Employing a professional curator in some form (possibly part-time) is seen as one of the main objectives of the Strategic Plan and a priority this year will be to identify the funding for this.
- Acquiring Sharow View, the workhouse site, continues to be on our agenda but the County Council is in no hurry to make a decision on its future. Meanwhile a grant-aided feasibility study to see how we might best use the site was completed and revealed that an enlarged museum rather than a hybrid scheme was the most likely solution to be successful. We will continue to press for a resolution.

- At a smaller scale but nonetheless important is the transformation of the Woodshed building at the Workhouse to provide an all-year-round education and group visits space. A team of volunteers led by John Witherick will have this space up and running very shortly and we should soon see the benefits to our operations, not least an increase in the capacity for school and group visits.
- Part of the funding for this work has come from the ACE-funded learning development project. This has also made it possible for us to install public wifi in all three museums which opens up the possibility of digital interpretation delivery. Already a scheme for audio tours delivered via smartphones and MP3 players has been trialled at the Courthouse with very promising results.
- Getting more younger volunteers has long been an ambition and a step towards this has been achieved with the setting up of a Young Volunteers Club. We also continue to support voluntary work placements.
- New events and exhibitions are in the pipeline. One planned for next month on the uplifting topic of Death, Disease etc will be centred on our newly acquired funeral bier. This coffin trolley from Skelton is being repaired and will be housed in the lean-to of the Workhouse vagrants workyard. We also hoping to retrieve our town diorama which featured in an exhibition of model police cars at the P&P some years ago and which we hope to restage this summer there.

Once again I offer my thanks to fellow Board members, to our staff (especially Wendy Hunwick Brown, Kathryn Bedford and Katy O'Malley) and to volunteers for all their hard work over the last year. I have great pleasure in inviting Wendy to come forward to accept flowers as a mark of our gratitude.

Richard Taylor
Chairman

4. Treasurer's Report

David Thelwall explained that for the second year running we had our best trading year ever with a turnover of £131,000 on the trading side of which just under £96,000 was from admissions - an increase of 9%.

10 years ago our footfall was just under 10,000 whereas last year it was almost 35,000.

We saw an increase of 6% compared to last year, a great achievement, especially when our local peers only managed an increase of 2%.

Gift Aid was a very significant contributor bringing in £3,000-4,000 two years ago but now it is a huge £15,000.

In terms of development, much is happening:

- Strategic Plan is playing an important part
- A great deal of training is being undertaken
- The current focus is on partnership working, school and group visits and audio tours
- We are maximising our use of technology and now have WiFi at all three sites
- The net is being spread wider for funding sources, in particular for a curator's post
- We have received an offer of £85,000 from the Arts Council for a Leadership Development Grant

To expand on the latter point, the Arts Council now have responsibility for museums and have established a Museum Resilience Fund. The grant we have received from this will be used to encourage responsibility and increase our leadership skills at all levels as we move from a centralised view to a wider empowered approach. This will involve everyone and is due to start later this year.

5. Curator's Report

The team working on cataloguing our collections in the Town Hall cellar has increased from three to seven and has almost completed the police collections. Part of the team is working at the P&P, cataloguing all the items on display which have not previously been recorded.

Two further teams are in the process of digitising the Workhouse records held at Northallerton. This will enable the material currently in 30 large ledgers to be accessed from 3 memory sticks. Forthcoming exhibitions include 'Death and Pauper Burials' - focussing on the newly acquired funeral bier which will be housed in the work yard at the Workhouse. There will also be an exhibition of model police cars at the P&P.

We have recently submitted our latest phase of accreditation and should soon have the result. Thanks are due to Mick Stanley for his advice and assistance in this.

6. Appointment of Independent Financial Examiners

Our thanks go to Pam Corp and Ann and David Boase for their invaluable assistance during the year.

The Board have been extremely happy with the service provided by Stuart Baldwin at Abacus who has previously acted as our independent financial examiner and recommend that we continue to use him.

This recommendation was proposed by Pam Corps, seconded by David Boase and carried unanimously.

7. The Board

Jill Wilkinson has stood down from the Board and does not wish to be re-elected. Jill was thanked for her years of service and presented with flowers by the chairman. She responded that she looked forward to continuing as Curator of the Courthouse.

Christine Orsler has also stood down but is offering herself for re-election.

Chris Hughes and Martin Webber have both attended Board meetings in various capacities and are standing for election to the two remaining vacancies on the Board. No other nominations were received

Martin Webber, being present, introduced himself and explained his interests in learning and research and his affinity with the museums.

It is the recommendation of the Board that Christine Orsler, Chris Hughes and Martin Webber be appointed as directors and trustees of the Ripon Museum Trust.

This was proposed by Ann Boase , seconded by Tim Robinson and carried unanimously.

8. Chairman's Forum

There were no questions nor any further business from the floor.

Jenny Alexander from York Museums Trust gave a short talk on their ambitious £8,000,000 HLF Project to upgrade York Art Gallery due to be completed this summer. She was thanked by the chairman on behalf of the meeting.

Pat Waterfall
RMT Secretary
14 March 2015