**Minutes of the SHARE Museums East Meeting**

**Natural History Museum Tring**

**3 April 2014**

**1030: Welcome: Paul Kitching, Museum Manager, Natural History Museum, Tring**

The Natural History Museum in Tring was designed and created as a museum, founded by Walter Rothschild, the 2nd Baron Rothschild, who had a fascination for natural history from an early age. He used his family’s influence and affluence to open a museum at the age of 12, but at 21 was gifted the money to buy the land for the current museum and to build it, opening to the public in 1892. He bequeathed his collection to the nation on his death in 1937, including both the building and the land. His collection included insects, mounted stuffed animals and bird skins, but unfortunately his collection of bird skins was sold to alleviate debts, and is now in New York.

**1040**: **Kate Carreno, Assistant Director, Central Services, Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge Museums**

Kate would like to thank NHM for hosting this session, especially in this delightful room. She is a local girl, having grown up very nearby so this is a special visit and a privilege to return. Kate is here representing the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) and as a Founding Partner of SHARE. Share is a very positive legacy of the East Anglian Renaissance Hub, as part of which various organisations organised a free exchange of skills and networking. Despite initial scepticism, this has become a model for other networks across the country,. All former partners contribute to SHARE; it is funded as part of Norfolk and Norwich museums, and is the main source of collaboration between museums in East Anglia.

As a major partner, UCM is responsible for contributing to all parts of SHARE, and last year, a Front of House Network was set up by Linda Brooklyn, Jane Felstead and Phil Wheeler (Fitzwilliam staff) as Front of House is always the most numerous staff group within a museum. Simon Floyd was supportive in funding an initial selection of events, at the Fitzwilliam, the Norwich and Norfolk Museum and the Chelmsford Museums, which were so successful and popular that a new years’ worth of events has now been programmed, starting today.

Feedback is very important, so please would all attendees let Fitzwilliam or UCM staff know of any topics they would like to see at the upcoming SHARE meetings.

**1050**: **Keynote speaker: The Welcome – From Car Park and Back Again. Lesley Baxter, Director of HR, Warner Brothers Studio Tours**

Surprisingly this venue has quite a few things in common with museums but Leslie was lucky to have been able to train her staff from the very beginning. This was incredibly helpful, due to the wide range of visitors the Studio Tours site receives.

As Leslie is working with an American company, she had to deal with the very different ideas held in the USA with regards to attitude to customer service compared to in the UK. Her initial approach was to focus on recruiting local and part-time staff, of all ages and backgrounds. And to encourage this, the recruitment process was made as simple as possible, e.g. a recruitment event was held next to the building site and Job Centre staff were also in attendance to advise those who needed help with CVs etc. Even locals who were sceptical at the time applied for jobs and are now working on the tours.

There was a heavy focus on the training for Front of House, including commissioning a company to design the training programme for customer service employees, part of which involved designing a ‘Super Hero’ for Customer service. There was an emphasis on the employees’ own perceptions of good customer service, e.g. what does it look like, the importance of reading body language, e.g. how to tell when someone is feeling uncomfortable in their surroundings and may require assistance, as well as the types of information to give out.

There are several different teams making up the Front of House staff on the tours, including the Interactors (very vibrant characters, livewires, fantastic with the guests, but can be challenging to manage) and the Quiet and Serious (tickets-takers, calm, good in a crisis).

There are very different types of customer service staff, such as the contrast between those working in Libraries and those at Eureka!, the National Children’s Museum. Some long time staff can be reluctant to change attitudes towards the public’s interaction with the museum, and making the most of what it has to offer, so these groups must be encouraged to rediscover their passion, remembering what made them want to work in the museum/venue in the first place. They are also encouraged to meet in the middle with the public; Leslie has found that some staff see access to museums as a privilege, however, even if the public have not had to pay an entrance fee, they are still entitled to come in, to learn and enjoy the museum.

The training provided for the Studio Tour staff is very specific to the venue, including voice coaching, Health and Safety, team building, maintaining the enthusiasm for what they’re doing. Staff are then buddied up with more experience members of staff in order to learn from them. Feedback from customers, mystery shoppers (who give comments to the staff at the time and feed back to management) and third party reviews all go into constantly tweaking the training. The Front of House staff represent the brand and so are just as important as any other members of the venue team.

Managing the funding for the training depends on the circumstances at the time, it can be provided by Warner Brothers and/or third parties, dependant on the group of staff going in for training.

The venue has just passed its 2nd birthday, so Leslie is starting to look at refresher training, providing secondments, moving staff between teams, putting staff through team leader training and other ways of developing her team. Local people are still encouraged to work there, for as long as they would like to, and the team now includes members of several local families. This can cause a conflict if a family member is put in charge of another, but there is a concerted effort to prevent this situation occurring.

The initial idea was that a broad base method of recruitment would reflect the wide range of visitors, but not always true as there are also cultural differences to be taken into account, e.g. tips. A visit from an Arabian Royal highlighted this issue, as it would have been seen as very rude for the staff to refuse the tips, but the rules and regulations do not permit staff to accept them. This was solved by putting in place a team ‘piggy bank’ for the tips, which goes towards funding events for the staff.

There is also the issue of differing work ethics between generations; this can cause problems between staff members so training was designed to deal with this, looking at compromise and how to understand other people. This is important in order to balance out expectations, but one cannot expect that people can be moulded to the job, even if they have an amazing personality, as there are times when this is just not possible. However, by trying to find everyone’s ‘Key’, their passion and tapping into this, job satisfaction from both the team member and the team leader’s point of view can be greatly improved.

As well as the Studio Tours site, there is also a set rental business next door, all the staff there have been working in the business a very long time, very typical builders etc., which proves a great contrast to the tours side who are very enthusiastic, very keen to do things.

Security has been made part of the venue, but, in the case of undetected thefts etc. on site, there are people at Warner Brothers whose job it is to scan the internet for things that should not be for sale. Extra security can be needed at certain times, due to royal visits, or visits from the film sets nearby, which is when a 3rd party firm is brought in to provide this additional support. Local police are encouraged to visit the lot, to use the canteen and to bring their dogs – which is a bonus for the police and provides a useful deterrent due to a regular police presence on site. Also builds good relations in the area, which was especially useful when there were still building works on site and a local traveller community tried to use the site, so there were horses turning up and caravans trying to get in, but this was managed with the help of the local police.

The Studio Tours rarely take on volunteers, due to Time Warner’s worry about being seen to exploit people. But there have been a few instances, e.g. when working with charities etc.

Contributions from the floor:

There can be extreme differences between the attitudes of paid staff and volunteers, as some volunteers can be reluctant to do what is asked of them since they are not being paid. To this end, the National Trust now has a disciplinary procedure for volunteers.

Some places rely on volunteers for crucial cover, and agreements/contracts between orgs and volunteers can help manage these issues. But volunteers are mostly seen as an extra benefit for those that are not entirely volunteer run.

At the Studio Tours, monitoring visitor numbers has been very useful when managing staff numbers and types, including those on zero hours contracts. Staff numbers are matched to expected visitor numbers, and it’s always possible to call on zero hours when extra support is required.

**1145: The Induction (Interactive Session) with Malcolm Armstrong, Visitor Experience Manager and Rachel Mackay, Front of House Section Manager, both from Natural History Museum, London**

The Natural History Museum in London is the 3rd busiest attraction in UK, but the recession has meant a recruitment freeze, and this means having to rely on agency staff to cover peak periods. On school holidays, up to 75% of the staff can be from agencies.

It’s very important to make the agency staff engaged and enthusiastic about being in the museum, which has meant changes to the induction programme. The museum is now very involved in the recruitment program, in order to ensure a high level of quality in the recruited staff, and that the museum has a presence from the very start. Induction takes place on site, and involves 2 days training followed by 1 day spent buddying a member of permanent staff. This is the case for all recruits, even those with only a 1 week assignment.

The training format has changed massively over the past 5 years, but is still run by Malcolm (who has been delivering inductions for 14yrs). At the start training involved 1 room, 1 flipchart and 1 trainer.

But now: (training is often run by permanent staff members)

The day starts with a Welcome, covering key working standards, how to get around, how they are expected to conduct themselves, giving out an induction pack etc.

This is followed by a brief history of the museum, including the museum’s Vision and Mission statements.

The new recruits are then given the chance to put names to the faces of those they will be working with.

Health and Safety and Manual Handling training are both legally required, and include the use of case studies.

Operations Training is also a constant, including fire evacuation and fire exit training, dealing with unattended bags and lost children.

On the floor sessions are also used, allowing inductees to get to know the museum, learn the layout, and meet some of the permanent staff. This part includes some FAQ from visitors, and key information, stories behind the exhibits etc., providing new staff with the knowledge to handle the most popular visitor enquiries.

There is also training related to the specific roles the inductees will be filling, e.g. queue management, dino queue training (most popular gallery), cash room and handling training, gift aid and till training.

The summer induction is 4 days long (due to the 6week employment period) and includes introductions to any special exhibitions, as well as any learning aims of exhibits etc.

All new recruits start attending the Morning Briefings straight away, this means they keep up to date with any news/information/changes regarding the museum.

Inductions finish with a quiz (both useful and fun)

The last session is visitor experience training, which covers customer service, followed by a day of shadowing permanent staff, with the new recruits provided with a checklist of the typical tasks that need to be carried out whilst on the galleries.

Benefits of the training:

For temporary staff: it has received good feedback, ‘enjoyable’, ‘engaging’, it encourages the retention of key information and introduces them to the permanent staff they will be working with

For permanent staff: they are introduced to the temporary staff so know who’s who, it provides ownership of what they put into the training, they are re-enthused by having new staff, they develop new skills by learning to deliver training, there is now even some competition as to who gets to deliver the training.

For museum: temporary staff can now apply for internal jobs, gaining a foot on the career ladder within the museum, with some now on the management team. Other previous temporary staff are now on the learning and finance teams.

For the visitor: they are welcomed by a diverse workforce and cannot tell between permanent and temporary staff.

Key points for improving training:

Involving permanent staff

Getting out of the ‘classroom’

Every Tuesday is a training day, in order to keep permanent staff up to date, which also includes sharing sessions with other departments in the museum, e.g. learning, research, conservation. The security staff also come to operations training as most are permanent staff and are required to complete a certain amount of training before moving on to the floor. The level of training is constantly monitored in order to maintain high levels of customer service.

Key to all the training is underlining the support available for all staff, permanent or temporary.

**1315: Visitors with more than 2 legs: The importance of Pest Management awareness for Front of House staff with Andor Vince, Collections Care Officer, University of Cambridge Museums**

Pest awareness is very important for Front of House staff, with sessions now being run across all UCM museums, with all staff from cleaners to management level attending, to ensure they are aware of the damage that pests can cause to collections.

Main problem species for Museums: beetles, moths, silverfish and book lice

**Beetles**: carpet beetles (tiny ladybird like) and wood borers (Death-Watch beetles (9mm) and furniture beetles (2-3mm)).

The wood borers lay their eggs in crevices and holes in wood, and, after hatching, the larva grow inside the wood for up to 5 years, depending on the type of beetle. The holes in the wood are caused by the larva leaving to lay eggs elsewhere. The only sign of infestation is piles of beetle droppings below/around the object, and the size of the hole can be an indication of the species of beetles; however, very old objects may have had previous infestations meaning hole size cannot provide a definitive answer as to the beetle present. An infestation can cause complete collapse/disintegration of the object, leaving it beyond repair. By examining the droppings under a microscope, the species can be correctly identified; the Deathwatch beetle’s droppings are muffin-like, whereas furniture beetle droppings resemble rice crispies.

However, since Deathwatch beetles live in very moist wood and Furniture beetles in not quite so moist wood, infestations are much less of a problem since the introduction of central heating.

Carpet beetles eat fabric, feathers, mummies etc., and can live in drier environments than the beetles. This means they are more of a threat to collections, and again, it is the larvae that cause the damage.

**Moths**: clothes moths and case-bearing moth

These moths eat fabric, and live in dark, peaceful and dirty places, e.g. old packing crates of clothes, fabrics etc. Again the damage is only caused by the larvae, and in this case, is irreparable.

**Silverfish and Booklice**: These live in places with a high humidity, which means they are often indicators of structural problems within a building, as they would not survive inside unless there was a leak. They eat paper, books, wallpaper etc. and Silverfish will also eat starchy materials. They can be monitored by trapping and visual monitoring, the latter being the most important in discovering collection infestations. (If there are no current problems, then 6 monthly visual checking is recommended, if there are current problems, then checking more often is advised.)

**Prevention:**

Regular cleaning of galleries (visitors shed a lot of skin which attracts the bugs)

The fabric of the building can also attract pests, as well as cafes, cafes being generally less clean than other places within the museum.

**Damage caused by dust and dirt:**

As dust is generally sharp it leaves micro-scratches when items are wiped, eventually resulting in visible scratches.

There are 3 kinds of damage: Mechanical damage (such as above), biological damage (pests) and chemical damage (e.g. corrosion of metals)

Cleaning of the collection should only be done when necessary but, by regularly cleaning galleries, the amount of damage inflicted upon the collection can be kept to a minimum.

Front of House staff must be aware of why cleaning is so important, and what it is preventing, that their hoovering and dusting is actually preserving the collections. They also need to be aware of what they need to be checking or looking for, i.e. placement of bug traps, insects in traps. This raises awareness of another aspect of their vital role in protecting the collection.

**1400: Debate between Stuart Craik, the Head of Security at National History Museum, Tring and Phil Wheeler, the Security Manager at the Fitzwilliam, as to the impact of break-ins both for paid and unpaid staff as well as the Museum itself. Chaired by Paul Kitching.**

Following a series of rhino horn thefts, including from a couple of places in the UK, there was an attempted break in at NHM Tring, August 2011. The glass door at the front was broken, but the oak door held. However, after the site was secured, there was a successful break-in, the thieves broke through one of the windows and stole 4 rhino horns, from various locations around the museum. This was a very significant incident. (After hearing about the incidents around the country, all the rhino horns within the museum had been replaced with casts, so it was only replica horns that were stolen.) Everyone returned to the site, including police, everything was photographed, a statement was drafted to release to the press as soon as the news broke. Scene of Crime officers took samples from around the museum, examined the entry point etc. The aim was then to re-secure the site and begin to move forwards.

**Precautions**:

Often the most useful information is about events/incidents that have occurred elsewhere as this can provide clues as to what may be targeted and what methods may be used. Front of House staff are vital when it comes to monitoring visitors, as the criminal groups tend to check out the building around a week beforehand. Unfamiliar groups, asking odd questions or behaving oddly are all warning signs.

Such incidents present a high level of risk to staff on site, due to the nature of the criminals involved. So the focus of the security checks must be on people, then the collections, followed by the building. Due to the rural location of NHM Tring, various measures have been taken to ensure the security staffs’ safety, including creating a secure hub for the guard, with monitors linked to the boundaries, and containing controls for all the security systems, with the aim of preventing the possibility of encountering any criminals whilst out on patrol. There is now also a security crisis process that must be followed. The police have also recently become more aware that these kinds of thefts are part of organised crime, as the money generated from these thefts goes towards funding crime elsewhere; this means that there are now more resources available to the police when dealing with these crimes.

The local community are also now involved, e.g. being encouraged to report any strange goings-on near the museum. With regard to the gallery staff, they are encouraged to keep an eye open for abnormal behaviour. As there is rarely a focus on the monetary value of objects within museums, more often it’s the scientific/historical value, it can be difficult for those working within the museum to fully understand the value of certain objects to criminals, and the lengths they can go to in order to obtain them.

It is vital to maintain a good relationship with the local planning officer, and English heritage, when it comes to improving security measures on and around listed buildings, as planning regulations must still be adhered to.

Theft of 18 Chinese Jades from Fitzwilliam Museum.

The thieves entered via the road round the side of the museum, with the gang including a 15yr old. They’d brought a petrol powered grinder to cut through the steel shutters, matching the hole to markings made on the stone outside on a previous visit when the shutters were up. Again, the thieves had visited the target venue in advance in order to prepare for their break-in.

One of the thieves was also involved with an attempted rhino horn theft from Norwich museum. The police later said that the number of these thefts is on a level they have not previously seen, and that the criminals involved are very dangerous groups of men, with the wherewithal to handle any situation they may come up against during the thefts. This highlights the threat they pose to any staff on site at the time.

Once again, sharing knowledge about what’s being targeted in other museums is very important with regard to staying on top of what may be at risk within a museum’s collection.

Precautions:

Deter – alarms etc

Detect – keeping an eye out for suspicious visitors

Delay – make it harder for thieves to reach targeted items

Highlight the importance of DBS checks for staff, and Fact Checking for non-UK staff.

**2 initiatives came from last year’s session:**

Mystery shoppers, training staff to perform this role at each other’s museums

FoH Training, SHARE is offering up to 5 places to museums in Cambridge and Peterborough as a tester run for this style of training.

**Next event:** 3 July at Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket

Last meeting this year will be at Sutton Hoo, 25 September

**Please note:**

SHARE is recruiting for a steering group member to volunteer their time to help organise the meetings. We are looking for an early career museum professional.

Heritage traineeship places in Suffolk have just been announced.

Burwell Museum is looking for a young person to do a paid work placement with them.