

**Social and Community Services**

**Cogges Manor Farm Museum**

**Cogges Project Bulletin 3 April 2008**

**1) NEWS!**

**a) FUNDING BOOST FOR MARKETING - WITNEY TOWN HALL CHARITIES GRANT**

Witney Town Hall Charities have very generously provided a grant of £5000 towards improving the marketing at Cogges for this season. The money is to be spent in a number of ways – increasing the print run of publicity leaflets, extending the distribution of leaflets, more local publicity around Witney.

**b) DON'T MISS**

**3,4,5 May Wool and Weaving weekend (sheep shearing on 4 May)**

**c) EASTER OPENING – COLD BUT SUCCESSFUL**

Over 650 visitors braved the sleet and snow to visit Cogges over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend – a very successful start. More than 180 season tickets were sold – that in 3 days is significantly more than last year altogether.

**d) VOLUNTEERS**

More than 50 volunteers are now on the museum's database. Thank you all for signing up. An Open Day is being planned to invite all of you to the museum to plan the work you may be able to do through the season.

**2) David Cameron met the Project Board on 4 April**

David Cameron has requested to be kept informed about progress at Cogges, and following a meeting with the Cogges Trustees at Christmas he has now held a meeting with the Board to hear about its work and ideas for the future of Cogges. He plans to visit Cogges with his family later in the year.

**3) Cogges Project Board – 8 April meeting**

The Board considered a draft paper of 'Project Objectives' – following a number of comments by the Board these are now being revised. It is planned that they will be agreed by the end of April and they will then be distributed through the next Bulletin.

#### 4) Conservation Statement

A first draft of the Statement prepared by John Rhodes was presented to the Board meeting. The document was welcomed by the Board. It is very comprehensive (more than 50 pages) – it explains the current knowledge about Cogges and its environs and assesses the significance of a number of different elements: the archaeology, historic buildings, character and setting, ecology. Some further consultation on the Statement is necessary before the final version is completed and maps, plans and other illustrations are to be added. In this final form it is then proposed to submit the Statement to Oxfordshire County Council's cabinet for adoption.

Copies of the Conservation Statement will be available for public reference at Cogges and at the Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock, by the end of April.

#### 5) Cogges – a Community Enterprise

During March two meetings were held in Witney to bring together a number of individuals and organisations interested in the possibility of submitting a proposal to the Project Board to operate Cogges as a 'Community Enterprise'. The meetings helped to shape a possible vision for the future – incorporating a range of activities which would engage the community both in Witney and beyond. Ideas explored include contemporary cultural programmes, arts and crafts (courses and exhibitions), live music (especially 'new folk'), organic food, farmers' market, therapeutic horticulture, a high quality restaurant, and an exciting adventure playground. A further meeting is planned for April to consider the practicality of these ideas in response to the Conservation Statement.

#### 6) Proposals

External organisations which have submitted Proposals for the future operation of Cogges are to be invited to a workshop in May to present their visions and business plans for the museum and site.

#### 7) National Network of Rural Museums

Roy Brigden (Keeper, Museum of English Rural Life) and Stuart Gillis (Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse) visited Cogges and submitted the following report:

*Whilst we don't have detailed knowledge of Cogges, the situation appears to be one of long-term declining visits, declining income and declining relevance to its community. This situation may be further affected by other factors, perhaps including rising costs, as well as changing perceptions in Oxfordshire of the role of local government.*

*The first observation is that, whilst being acute, these factors are not unique to Cogges, especially within the wider sector of UK traditional rural life museums.*

*There are around fifty-member museums of the Rural Museums Network and a number of these are comparable institutions to Cogges. Many of them were*

formed between the late 1960s and early 1980s. The motive for establishing these museums might be described as an attempt to remember a traditional rural way of life, central to which was farming with horses. Rapid technological and economic changes meant that this form of farming had largely died out by the 1960s, and the new rural life museums, attempted to keep the memory of a way of life alive.

As original audiences have died out, the original motive for the museums may no longer be sufficient to sustain them. Many have experienced declining visitors, and declining relevance to wider stakeholders. As the link with living memory has been lost, a significant proportion has become more marginalized.

**The challenge for museums in this position is to find ways to become more relevant to modern audiences and more relevant to other stakeholder organisations.**

We understand that one option is for Cogges to be transferred into private hands and operated as a commercial visitor attraction. It is conceivable that a visitor attraction based on the traditional rural-idyll concept (and Cogges certainly is breath-takingly beautiful) could be commercially viable and could thereby yield community relevance as a local amenity, source of civic pride, and non-subsidised contributor to the local economy.

However, we would also suggest that even more significant benefits can be realised if Oxfordshire County Council were to investigate the feasibility of reforming the museum and helping set it up to realise some contemporary opportunities. The opportunity is to position Cogges, not as a frozen relic of a redundant age, but as an embodiment of long term, on-going sustainability, where layers of human adaptability have helped define 'sense of place' for successive generations. Cogges can be turned around and presented as a record of constant change, where people are influenced by what has gone on before to shape and respond to change in their own lives. In this way, strategic partners could develop Cogges as a museum that draws on the past to help people and organisations work out their own future. Cogges could be used to provide the physical connection between Oxfordshire people and the county's strategic planning institutions and processes.

The concept is one of taking the long view of sustainable living. Everything about Cogges can be re-presented to look at how real Oxfordshire people did things in the past, how people do them today, how they want to do things in the future. The subject matter is limitless. For example:

- Waste In the Home: The Three Rs (reduce, re-use, recycle) over the Three Ages
- Construction: Choose materials to build an Oxfordshire home
- Food: How to grow your own; Is it best to buy local?
- Farming: Are horses carbon neutral? Should we grow bio-fuel?
- Land use: More farming, more homes, or more business?
- Power: Is fossil fuel a necessary evil? Is there an alternative?

- *And more ....Transport, Health, Care, Schooling, Enterprise etc.*

*It is essential that the interpretation is well informed, accessible, inviting. It should be challenging and balanced – the merits of opposite viewpoints should be open for investigation. The tone must be right – people must feel that they are in control of interpreting the evidence presented. And crucially, visitors need to be involved - in working out solutions, taking part in activities, having conversations, registering their opinion, finding out as small (family sized?) groups. Event days, school sessions and school holiday programming are likely to be focal points. Calculating Cogges carbon footprint and then involving audiences in the on-going process of managing Cogges emissions will drive improvements, bring credibility, create expectations, spread the learning and build relationship between museum and audience.*

*This proposal is a new concept. Although it might be seen that Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse: the Museum of Norfolk Life is beginning to evolve into this way of working, the vision is not yet articulated. The Museum of East Anglian Life is also increasingly innovating towards similar ends – its work on social enterprise is one notable example. Also the wider UK rural museums community is beginning to embrace the importance of sustainability in what we practice and in what we interpret. However, we recognise that the challenge for Cogges is now more heightened and more immediate than elsewhere. We suggest that the severity of the threat towards Cogges existence could help galvanise support, draw focus and bring together a partnership to realise a new look vision for rural museums in the twenty-first century.*

*We would suggest that the feasibility of this ‘sustainable sense of place’ museum concept be fully explored by Oxfordshire County Council.*

*Finally, to end with a reminder of some of the strengths inherent to Cogges that could be drawn on in realising this type of vision. These include:*

- *The museum is a symbol of the county – it belongs to all the people of Oxfordshire.*
- *It is beautiful, warm, welcoming - something for all to be proud of.*
- *The museum can be seen as a repository of long Oxfordshire history – it is a record of how local people addressed choices in their own lives over a deep history.*
- *The stories to be told at Cogges can connect global issues to a local dimension and a human scale – often relating to real Oxfordshire people.*
- *Whilst the approach to interpretation would need to be over-hauled, the subject matter, and resources – buildings, collection, animals, land and landscape - are all in place.*
- *Museums are amongst the most trusted of institutions by members of the public. For public bodies that can otherwise feel remote, there is untapped potential to reach their constituents and citizens through working in partnership with these public-facing organisations.*

- *Cogges either has, or has the scope to develop, the amenities for regular visits, large-scale events, school holiday programming, curriculum work, seminar and conference programming.*
- *This type of initiative has the potential to draw in community, business and public bodies as a manifestation of vibrant, inclusive local strategic partnership working*
- *Oxfordshire has the potential to lead the field in taking the long view approach to sustainability and in engaging audiences and organisations in facing up to contemporary strategic challenge.*

### **Workshop by Tim Wonnacott of "Bargain Hunt"**

" I am very keen indeed to help raise funds for Cogges Manor Farm Museum. I am exploring the possibility of BBC TV personality Tim Wonnacott of "Bargain Hunt" to come to Cogges to give a workshop with his good humour and extensive knowledge of history and antiques. I anticipate this will be a weekday workshop possibly held in Cogges Church. The day will be spent working indoors with Tim and out on the Farm. I know it will be excellent, with a catering firm coming in to do a buffet lunch.

If you would like to participate in a thoroughly enjoyable day and at the same time help raise vital funds for the Museum, or you know friends who would enjoy such a relaxing and interesting day, kindly leave a message on my ansaphone:

Tel. no. **01993-812141**

or email me at [margie.mcgregor@UKF.net](mailto:margie.mcgregor@UKF.net)

and I shall get back to you. I am hoping this will start off many happy events. Remember, even if you are not able to join such a day, any gift, no matter how small, to the Museum will be received with immense gratitude. There are so many of us keen to see Cogges kept alive and every aspect of this ancient site brought out to its very best for everyone. (Other fundraising ideas very warmly welcomed)."

Margie McGregor.

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