

## Arts Award in Museums: Case study

### Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life

**Arts Award programmes:**

Young Volunteer Project  
Teenage History Club – Doctor Minns Project  
Bronze Award in a Week

**These programmes were offered by:**

Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life in Thetford, Norfolk. The museum is part of Norfolk Museum and Archaeology Service.

**Who took part in the programme?**

Fourteen young people aged between 12 and 19 took part in Bronze Arts Award at Ancient House.

**Description of the programme:**

Ancient House ran three different Bronze Arts Award programmes:

Young Volunteers Project:

Two young people worked on Parts A-C of their Bronze Arts Award through independent study with support from the Arts Advisor. For Part D the young people will work with museum staff to plan and deliver two 'Night at the Museum' events.

*Night at the Museum: Secrets and Shadows* was aimed at a family audience and exploration. The evening kicked off with a torch light tour of the museum focusing on using light to pick out features of the building such as carving, marking on window glass and symbols on the timbers. The tour also included a visit to the museum store. This was a highlight for many visitors.

Then visitors enjoyed two crafts activities run by the young people – creating shadow puppets inspired by our silhouette collection and a wax resist painting. Visitors also experience a mock air raid in a Morrison shelter during a black out as part of our temporary exhibition, *World War Two: Local Secrets and Stories*. The evening finished with hot spiced apple juice, biscuits and stories around the range. We received many enthusiastic compliments from visitors.

*Filmmaking at Night* was aimed at a teenage audience. Our young volunteers are very keen to encourage more young people to visit museums and wanted to highlight an evening out at Ancient House as a good use of a Saturday night. The young people worked with a professional filmmaker, museum staff and volunteers to create a short film telling the story of Fred Ford, a rat who visits Ancient House after dark.

Teenage History Club - Doctor Minns Project:

Starting in September 2011, eight members of Teenage History Club worked on a film making project exploring the story of Doctor Minns, Britain's first black mayor. The young people used documents and other resources to research Dr Minns' life and work. They planned, scripted, filmed and acted in a docu-drama film summarising and dramatising their findings. This involved shooting on location at Thetford Borough Council Chambers and Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. They worked with a professional film maker to create the film.

They also ran an activity as part of an Ancient House family event. They demonstrated and shared their skills making origami flower pots as part of our Wartime Christmas event.

### Bronze Award in a Week

Five home educated young people worked at Ancient House over six days on their Bronze Arts Award. The young people explored and reviewed the museum displays. They used additional objects from the museum stores to create additional displays to enhance the visitor experience. Working with a professional film maker, they created rod puppets inspired by characters featuring in the museum displays. At the end of the week, the young people ran a simple puppet making workshop for their friends and family to share their skills.

For each programme our recruitment process was different. For our Bronze in a Week we recruited from home educated children using various home education networks and newsgroups to distribute information. Our other programmes were run with pre-existing museum groups.

### **What was the impact of the programme?**

#### Teenage History Club - Doctor Minns Project

The teenagers commented: "Over this term we have put a lot of time and research into making this film. We have used and improved a variety of skills, including decision making, acting, patience to wait my turn, camera work and sound, interviewing and lighting, especially how to light a scene from under a table!"

### Bronze Award in a Week

The young people gained confidence during the week in terms of working together and sharing their skills. One said: "At the start of the week, I never even thought I could make a puppet and now I'm showing other people how to do it!"

### Young Volunteers Project:

Both young volunteers enjoyed the freedom of the Arts Award scheme to pursue their own varied interests. In retrospect, the Bronze Award was probably too basic for their level and I think they will find Silver more challenging.

### **What did you learn about offering Arts Award in a museum setting?**

Overall, Arts Award offers a new way of viewing museum spaces and collections. It encourages the young people to engage with area of the collection which can be overlooked or which, as a Learning team we can sometimes be wary of using as they do not relate directly to the National Curriculum (for example, watch making tools). It also offers a flexible way of working with mixed ability groups.

To make the most of delivering Arts Award in a museum setting it would be useful if some museum specific arts forms could be included. For example, curating (how to set out a display/write labels etc), costumed interpretation (delivering handling sessions in character). Both of these are activities which the young people were keen to pursue but which are not possible within the scope of the current programme.

### **What are your plans for the future?**

I intend to continue offering Arts Award via our Teenage History Club. Arts Award offers a good method for accrediting Members efforts.

I would like to be able to offer it as a week long programme to schools and as a holiday activity.

### **What advice would you offer other museums thinking of offering Arts Award?**

- Give yourself plenty of time to recruit young people.
- Working with a pre-existing group enables you to plan more fully in advance which takes some of the pressure off during the delivery.

- Ensure other staff members have a full understanding of Arts Award.

**Any other comments?**

I would welcome some flexibility on what art forms can be used to make the scheme more accessible to museums.

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