

Norwich Area Museums Committee 10 September 2019

Norwich Museums briefing: June to August 2019

1. Exhibitions at Norwich Castle

1.1 *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* (9 February – 8 September 2019)



This major partnership exhibition from the British Museum and York Museums Trust explores what it meant to be a Viking and how the Vikings transformed and shaped every aspect of life in Britain, featuring some of the most significant Viking discoveries ever made.

Over a thousand years since the Great Viking Army arrived in East Anglia in 865, the Vikings! *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* exhibition brings some of the most significant Anglo-Saxon and Viking treasures ever discovered in Britain to the Castle for an extended run from 9 February to 8 September 2019.

Featuring star objects from the British Museum and Yorkshire Museum, *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* offers a fresh perspective on how the Vikings shaped many aspects of life in Britain. The exhibition features a number of iconic objects including the Anglo-Saxon York Helmet - the most outstanding example of its type to survive, a knight from the Lewis Chessmen and the most significant Viking treasure ever found in the UK – the Vale of York, Cuerdale and Bedale Viking Hoards.

These finds are shown alongside highlights from Norwich Castle's own extensive collections, including many items on display for the first time, which help to tell the distinctive regional story of the Viking presence in East Anglia.

As well as providing a spectacular display, these fabulous objects are interpreted in new ways which challenge our perceptions of what it meant to be a Viking. The gallery features a range of different approaches to interpretation including interactives, making the exhibition accessible for visitors of all ages. A comprehensive programme of schools and other activities has been delivered alongside the exhibition including gallery tours led by the NMS exhibition curator Dr Tim Pestell.

2. Forthcoming exhibitions

2.1. Laura Wilson - *Deepening* 18 January – 29 March 2020

Deepening is a new film work by artist Laura Wilson exploring the hidden landscape of Must Farm. Must Farm is an exceptionally well-preserved settlement dating to the Late Bronze Age (1000 – 800BC) located on the edge of a working quarry at Whittlesey, near Peterborough. The site, often referred to as the UK's Pompeii, has revealed many important discoveries about how people lived and worked. *Deepening* explores these discoveries, opening up questions around labour, trade and everyday life.

Wilson's work has been commissioned as part of *New Geographies*, a three-year project which aims to create a new map of the East of England based on unexplored or overlooked places. As part of the project, the public was invited to nominate unexpected places in the region that they found meaningful and interesting. Over 270 sites were identified and ten artists were commissioned to highlight some of those places through new site-specific work. Wilson responds to the nominated site 'View from the North Brink across the Fens' from which Must Farm is visible.



Must Farm © Courtesy the Artist

3. Norwich Castle Events

3.1 LEGEND! A programme of visitor events at Norwich Castle

Norwich Castle's exhibition *Viking! Rediscover the Legend* has continued to be the inspiration for the holiday events programme branded as 'LEGEND'. Over the summer period the Learning team have introduced new events and maintained popular crafts, activities and trails for children, families and adults.

Highlights from the period June – August included:

- The *Shieldmaidens* event offered a new style of engagement encouraging a more active level of participation by visitors involving physical movement and lively debate.
- The continuation of *Hiccup the Viking* – a hugely popular story-telling drama suitable for all the family. As well as the standard performances, staff were also able to create a non-threatening, safe environment in which to offer a ‘relaxed’ autism-friendly performance of the same drama.
- The strong story-telling traditions in Viking society have also been drawn on with new tales of *Skadi’s Husband’s Feet* and other stories. 90% of visitors thought the event was very good or excellent and comments included “Brilliantly engaging, good for a wide range of ages – liked link to display”
- *Warriors!* – the ever-popular stage and screen fight choreographer Keith Wallis returned to give demonstrations of Viking weapons and combat techniques.
- Craft activities, including flat-braiding and recreations of the famous Coppergate helmet, have again proved extremely popular with families, linking directly with artefacts in the exhibition and stimulating conversations about their making and the stories they can tell.



3.2 Taboo: Colonialism in the Decorative Arts

After several months of research and development the Learning team presented this tour to the public for the first time on 1 June. The tour is one in a growing series of events which seeks to present non-standard, alternative or under-represented narratives as a means of engaging with Arts Council England’s Creative Case for Diversity. The programme launched in May with an illustrated talk exploring myths surrounding the medieval morality of chivalry, hyper-masculinity, brutality and gender identity. In feedback the ‘Colonialism in the Decorative Arts’ tour was rated very good or excellent by 100% of participants.

Visitor comments include:

“I found out about interesting artefacts which I hadn't particularly noticed before.”

“It was really well delivered and covered some very interesting points in a limited time”

“Like that it challenged traditional ideas in a museum environment”