

A statement of concern – Margate Museum and the TDC art collection

In 1995 I became associated with the Margate Museum as a volunteer historian and as a member of Thanet District Council and as a Margate charter trustee. I am also the largest donor of artefacts to the Margate museum in modern times that in all accounts makes me a stakeholder.

In 2005 I became very concerned at how the Margate Museum was being managed with a TDC grant. In my opinion I felt that all previous management guidelines set in place by TDC and EKMT to run the Museum were being ignored. I have listed these concerns below in bullet points to a timeline of events.

In 2005 I found the following problems with the Margate Museum:-

- People were having free access to the collection of photographs and archive unsupervised;
- The archives were becoming more photocopies. I was concerned as original material was unlisted and there were no checks. A large number of photographs were missing from the George Hoare wartime scrap book;
- Individual Sunbeam photograph collection duplicates were all listed under the same number as the original. As many as ten identical photographs under the same listing;
- Items were being accepted into the archive and the collection without receipts or being recorded on the accession register;
- Items of no relevance to Thanet were being accepted into the collection. Examples being Victorian bottles from South Wales, printing blocks that had no provenance and a vacuum cleaner;
- Members of the public were enquiring about items that could not be found. An example being a Mr X (name redacted) enquiring about two band uniforms that he had donated, they could not be found. I personally witnessed these items one point in the Museum;
- Items within the Museum could not be found in the designated locations;
- Items from other TDC locations were being added to the collection. An example being Winter Garden items that were not immediately listed. Works of art were also being added to the storeroom from Albion House and other TDC locations. Even though all the items belonged to TDC some had no list numbers therefore they had to be re listed 31 years after becoming TDC property;
- There was no one at the museum with conservation experience. This resulted in newly acquired items being poorly stored in the storeroom. An example like prints and paintings resting against each other in racks;
- It was a well known fact that photographic negatives were decomposing in the collection due to age and dampness.

Following on from my concerns I had in 2005 this led me to further research the background of the main TDC collection of art inherited by TDC from the Borough of Margate. I have listed concerns and details in bullet points below to a timeline.

- My first concern in 2006 was the discovery of two prints hanging on the wall in the former EKTA offices in Victoria Road Margate. They had TDC logos on them and they were TDC numbered. When I checked with the Museum they had no record of them in the TDC data base. However, the people occupying the offices did return them to the Margate Museum as a gesture of good will;
- Following this error I researched further into the history of the TDC art collection and found that the collections of art originated from the Boroughs of Margate and Ramsgate during local government reorganisation in 1974. The Borough of Margate collection originating from the Rowe Bequest and Parker collection. In 1974 the Borough of Margate library collection was also actually transferred to KCC and part of the art and artefact collection went to TDC. This can be confirmed;
- At Ramsgate TDC inherited from the Borough of Ramsgate the contents of Albion House all except the civic items inherited by the Ramsgate Charter Trustees;
- Many of the items received from the Borough of Margate were found to be unlisted and the records were inadequate. I do have a letter that confirms this. It should be also noted that no true figure of what TDC received has been ever recorded;
- In 1985 all the art and artefact items stored at the Margate Old Town Police station were relisted under a manpower service organisation project. Staff was given guidance by the Museum and Galleries Commission. A new functional data base was set up and many unlisted items and listed items were added to the new data base. However with no provenance it was impossible to say as to whether the art items were from the Parker bequest or Rowe bequest. This can be confirmed;
- Some unlisted items stored in one of the cells at the old police station in the old town hall had to be disposed of due to many years in dampness;
- The Margate Museum opened in 1987 with a fully functional data base;
- In 1991 TDC produced a document outlining the disposal and acquisition and collection policy for the Margate Museum. However the management of the TDC art and artefacts at other locations like Albion House was not covered in this document of which I have a copy. The document does mention a TDC owned collection of 17,000 sea shells and I wonder when they were last audited;
- In 1994 the East Kent Maritime Trust took over the management of the Margate Museum and TDC art collections with a direct grant from TDC. The EKMT continued to monitor and audit collections. This included an audit in 1998. The EKMT also acquired donations of items from the public that were added to the collection;
- In 2006 I realised how vulnerable the art collection had become due to the goings on in 2005 and the discovery of two prints in the EKTA building. I did acquire some data on the art collection. In June 2006 I requested a full list of art and artefacts owned by TDC under the freedom of information act. My intention was to research further into

the TDC art collection and cross check with the situation that had been going on at the Museum since 2005. This was refused under the data protection act because TDC claimed I could identify donors. In fact most of the acquisition was from the Rowe Bequest and Parker collection from the 1920's and I did state this. I was as assured that the running of the Museum met all criteria's;

- After the FOI refusal I used external sources to research further into the TDC collection and continued to note the situation at the Margate Museum. I even made a DVD of the collection on display and took photographs. The unedited DVD is now in the possession of TDC;
- In 2007 TDC announced that funding to the Museum was to be stopped;
- In 2007 twenty loaned prints and paintings were returned to the Margate Museum from the judge's quarters at Maidstone assizes. It was found that a number of the prints and paintings were not listed even though they were identified as TDC property. These items were relisted;
- In October 2008 the Museum closed its doors and many loan items were returned.

The East Kent Maritime Trust vacated the Margate museum leaving assets behind and closed the Ramsgate Maritime museum in 2008. In total receiving more than a £1.3 million grant over a fourteen year period to manage both facilities. Following the EKMT departure at the Margate museum no audit of TDC assets took place. The Margate Museum reopened in 2011 with volunteers of the friends of the Margate museum. In late 2012 under the supervision of a TDC officer an audit took place and is still in progress.

Following on from my 2007 research I joined the Friends of the Margate museum and was able to get access to the storage areas. In 2012 I was co opted onto the executive of the friends group to assist with establishing provenance. With more access to the Museum I was able to confirm that prior to closure in 2008 the Museum was not meeting all criteria's as specified at the time of my FOI request in 2006.

I have made observations of the current state when the audit began at the Margate museum and have listed bullet points of my experiences confirming my worst fears as specified in 2005.

- Carbon copy receipts from the accession register of donated items were missing;
- Storage of items in the back storeroom was appalling with piles of paintings and prints in racks resting against each other covered in thick dust. Some items have been damaged as a result. It was found that 680 prints and paintings were found stored in that room;
- There was no managed storage system in the back storeroom;
- There were items in the museum suffering from damp;
- Items were found to be unlisted and with no provenance;
- Items were found to be misidentified;
- Items were found in the collection that had no relevance to Thanet;
- The collection of books was not in a library system or recorded;

- From the audit I now know there is a missing list that prompted me to inform the TDC chairman of governance and audit committee;
- One example of missing items is a TDC listed smuggling album that has items removed with scissors.

From a personal experience I was the instigator of setting up a comic postcard collection at the Margate Museum. I paid for a postcard album and bought comic postcards on the open market and donated them as I made purchases in bulk and duplicate. The EKMT also made funds available to purchase comic postcards of which they did and there were also donations to the collection. This collection is now missing from the Margate museum collection.

XXXX XXXX (name redacted)

7th April 2013.