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Museums Journal blog

<http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/22012012-staff-foil-smash-and-grab-rhino-horn-theft>



Staff foil smash-and-grab rhino horn raid

Rebecca Atkinson, 22.02.2012

Norwich Castle will now replace horn with replica

Staff and a group of visiting curators foiled the attempted theft of a rhino head at Norwich Castle earlier this week, as demand for horn continues to pose security concerns.

Four men entered the castle during visiting hours on Monday and smashed open a display case to remove the head. They then attempted to run out of the gallery carrying the head between them but were tripped up by a member of staff, causing them to drop it.

A group of visiting curators from the University Museum of Zoology in Cambridge, who were being shown around the galleries at the same time, and other members of staff at the castle also managed to slow down their progress.

The gang then exited the castle and escaped in a waiting get-away car.

Vanessa Trevelyan, head of museums for Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, said the castle was “very fortunate” not to have lost the rhino head.

Norwich Castle has recently increased its night-time security and its CCTV systems. But it has now decided to remove the horn from display and replace it with a clearly marked replica.

“I have reiterated to staff that they should not put themselves in harm’s way but clearly when curators see the collection disappearing through the door then adrenaline kicks in,” Trevelyan said. “We will now review our security to see if there is anything else we could be doing.”

Police were informed of the incident and have taken CCTV footage and forensic evidence for investigation.

The commercial value of rhino horn has soared in recent years fuelled by demand from Asia where it is used in traditional medicines as a cure for cancer.

This has led to a rise in the illegal poaching of rhinos in the wild. There have also been more than 20 thefts of rhino horns from museums and auction houses across the UK and Europe in the past year, including a nature museum in Paris where stun gas was used to disable guards.