

# INTERPRETATION JOURNAL

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## PUSHING BOUNDARIES





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The next issue will feature: **Maps, plans, trails and wayfinders.**

For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation [AHI], send an email to [admin@ahi.org.uk](mailto:admin@ahi.org.uk) or write to the Administrator, AHI, 54 Balmoral Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4PG tel: +44 (0)560 274 7737. Individuals can join AHI as Associate or Student Members or can apply to be elected, subject to qualifications and experience, as Full Members or Fellows. Businesses can join as Corporate Members with the same rights as individual members. All members receive *Interpretation Journal*, and other mailings. They can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can vote at the Annual General Meeting. Printed in UK © AHI 2011.

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# FOREWORD: PUSHING BOUNDARIES

Welcome to the latest edition of the Interpretation Journal.

We begin, as usual, with news, views and research articles, including a challenge from Bob Jones that we should more actively consider the ethics of our profession.

The main thematic content then starts with a provocative leader by Carolyn Lloyd Brown, past Chair of AHI. The inspiration for this edition came from last years' Annual Conference. After the end of the first day, having heard several thought-provoking presentations, I was left wondering 'is that *really* interpretation?' or more poignantly 'is *that* really interpretation?' I was excited, challenged and stimulated by the projects being presented as 'interpretive', and so the concept of this journal was born.

As James Carter so eloquently sums up on page 14, boundaries are funny things, and humans have been pushing them since we first swung down from the trees. In fact, pushing boundaries is an evolutionary imperative without which we'd still be grunting at each other in a cave. So which boundaries are we pushing here?

We start at The Enchanted Palace, a bold, radical and spirited re-presentation of Kensington Palace. We then explore how, with the imaginative the use of technology, visitors to Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum are encouraged to make a personal pledge of action to prevent future acts of genocide. No shying away from a difficult message there.

We then discover how the Pitt Rivers Museum has retained a highly idiosyncratic approach to presentation and interpretation, and so delivers one of the most memorable museum experiences around. We pop in to and 'irreverent and energetic' modern art exhibition in Manchester, where teenage Creative Consultants push boundaries with Grayson Perry. We investigate a text-free display at the Tank Museum dedicated to removing the museum's voice and letting the subject – the soldiers of the Royal Armoured Corps – speak for themselves.

Finally, we explore *a Heat!* – inspired approach to interpretation in Kent, taking a message to the masses, and wind up with an award winning interpretive art installation in Exeter which transforms a drug alley into a work of international acclaim.

So, the message of this journal is 'be daring, seek new frontiers, and go where no interpreter has gone before'.

Please let us know what you discover when you get there!

**David Masters**  
Commissioning Editor

# OPINION & DEBATE

## CHASING THE BALROGS...

**Bob Jones considers the morality and ethics of interpretation – and interpreters!**

*DATELINE May 2010:* At time of writing, Fort McMurray Oil Sands Discovery Centre in Canada are *not* recruiting a senior interpreter. The Alberta State Government, who run the facility, have placed a moratorium on recruitment (including any posts just advertised) to help address a large fiscal deficit. For many that scenario will sound depressingly familiar. However, were Alberta not facing the effects of global recession like the rest of us, our profession should be pleased that 'big oil' recognises its need for a professional interpreter. Or should we?

### OIL FROM SAND

Opened in 1985 as the Oil Sands *Interpretative* Centre, this facility tells the story of the extraction of oil from sand. More specifically, from sands that make up large tracts of the Alberta landscape. Unfortunately, extraction takes the form of strip-mining on a massive scale, never a pretty sight, leaving vast ponds of contaminated waste (remember the red sludge breach in Hungary last year?), or through 'in-situ' steam pressure-cooking deep underground. This, in a landscape that is the homeland of no less than five of Canada's first-nation peoples... And one of the major business investors is our own Royal Bank of Scotland.

Search the Discovery Centre's website and there is little if any mention of the flip side of open-cast strip-mining – deep places where surely Balrogs<sup>1</sup> must dwell – the destruction of habitat, pollution leading to sickness (significantly high levels of cancer amongst

the native peoples), unsightliness (in a state that relies heavily on tourism), but more particularly the disregard of big business for cultural heritage. It was ever thus – when people get in the way of mineral extraction it is usually the former who suffer. Not always though, as Alastair McIntosh and colleagues showed when Redland Aggregates planned to level Mount Roineabhal on Harris, in our own Western Isles, turning it into a super-quarry for road stone to pave Europe<sup>2</sup>. But Oil Sands is no pristine mountain on the Celtic fringe – much extraction has already taken place. However, as giant machines gouge welts in the earth they are inexorably destroying lands held sacred and cherished by native communities, leaving scars that are visible from outer space. Indeed, Oil Sands has been described as 'the most destructive project on Earth'.

### THE MORALITY OF INTERPRETATION

The question that this poses is not should we be pleased that the extraction of oil takes place in such a brutal manner in this corner of Canada (unlike the Gulf of Mexico, here it is confined to large but specific areas and the oil is in the form of bitumen which, until distilled through boiling water, is fused with quartzite sand). Rather, it is a question about the morality of interpretation – about the very ethics of our profession. Looked at another way, would Oil Sands be looking for an enlightener or an apologist?

This is not a simple argument twixt the hard shell of business and the soft underbelly of cultural memory – although the latter defines who we are as humankind. Like it or not, we all depend upon oil to make the world go round, to manufacture the myriad of things upon which our daily survival depends. Allegedly. And that's not going to change



ABOVE:  
Cover of leaflet of the Oil Sands Interpretive Centre 1985.

anytime soon. As the Gulf of Mexico, and spectres such as Braer, Exxon Valdez and Torrey Canyon have shown, the cost of extracting this lifeblood of our society can be high – most often to defenceless wildlife and the 'small people' of local enterprise and subsistence endeavour. But should we not be pleased that

1. Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

2. McIntosh, A. *Soil and Soul – People versus Corporate Power*.

Canada has access to oil reserves within its own borders? That it does not have to rely on the economics of 'oil miles', on deep-sea drilling, on the supertanker, breeding grounds for human error and calamity. Surely the scars, the obliteration of traditional homeland, and the rape of a sacred heritage are a small price to pay for a 'sustainable' energy resource.

## THE ETHICS OF INTERPRETATION

*DATELINE March 2011* – Corporate oil now plans to drive a pipeline from Oil Sands in Alberta throughout the length of the USA to its Texas refineries, coincidentally across the largest natural aquifer in the world, which just happens to provide drinking water to eight US states. Not content with screwing up the Gulf, it seems we now have to put the pieces in place that could allow us to turn enormous tracts of the US heartland into sticky black sumps – think tornado-alley rather than Fukushima-like tsunamis. Or when nature is done with us, think 1,700 mile-long terrorist target...

Again, the rights and wrongs of the Oil Sands enterprise are not in contention here. Rather it is the *ethics* of interpretation – and interpreters – that we should consider. Those who have worked in the energy or raw materials industries have long wrestled with the *moral code* of the *communications business* (!?!). Too often we have found our efforts confined to 'pushing' the feel-good aspects – usually on the margins – of our industries. Aspects that might be seen as the collateral benefits of fusion, of clear-felling, of deep-pit mining. Usually they involve the oohs! and aahs! of fur and feather, or the turning of one man's working hell into a sanitised 'experience' museum. When no one could figure out what to do with the decaying assets – or redundant workers – once they closed the pit, enter the



ABOVE:  
'One man's family pays the price' For another man's vision of country life' Steve Knightley:  
from album title song 'Country Life', Show of Hands.

heritage industries version of the fun fair: *thrill!* to the journey into the dark bowels of the earth; *tut tut!* at portrayals of child labour as restored looms clack clack in the mills; *gawp* at stories of human misery and waste... of men and women 'stripped bare of dignity and pride'<sup>3</sup>.

## WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

So, as interpreters, what do we do? What do we say when faced with an unspeakable truth? Do we take the sugar pill and 'glaze' the facts? Suck on a lemon and follow orders? Don't think that we merely interpret facts, that we let the audience make up their own minds. History, we are told, is written by the victors, interpretation I suggest, is too often edited by the paymasters.

There is much talk at the moment amongst our number about accreditation, stirred by a desire

for professional recognition and development. Many see these attributes as important to progress, to the enhancement of standing and status. But 'professional recognition' must surely demand responsible behaviour as a mainstay. It must have, as its foundation, a moral and ethical bedrock. As an Association we have not defined what this foundation should be. We have therefore not yet come of age; nor, I would contend, can we do so until we have probed the darkness and depths of this pit. And, like Gandalf in the mines of Moria, we may find demons there – our own '*Balrogs*' that some might rather we did not disturb.

Bob Jones HFAHI  
planxtyjones@btinternet.com

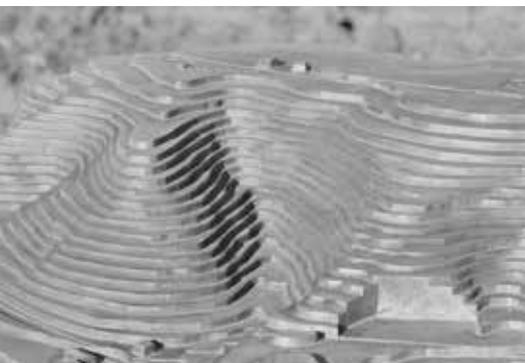
3. Morre, C. *Ordinary Man*.

# FEATURE NEWS

## WILL IT MARK IF I HIT IT WITH A HAMMER?

**Tom Cann gives a run-through on different materials now available for outdoor interpretative panels and sculptures.**

Incredibly, this is a question all too often asked of us when supplying interpretive panels and sculptural features for the outdoor public realm. I guess that our clients' priorities are not always the same as our own, but when the hard-won funding is considered, perhaps this is not such an unreasonable enquiry.



ABOVE:  
SG Iron can be made to serve the natural world such as this sculpture on the Wye Downs.

## FRONT RUNNERS

Rarely is one particular material the total solution to all requirements and a degree of compromise is needed. With the choices on offer, much time must be spent negotiating the way through lists of specifications for what may be suitable for any given site. Will it fade, burn, warp, stand up to being fired at by shotguns – yes, it has happened – and, perhaps more importantly, will it look right in its intended setting?

What follows is a very short run-through of the materials we believe to be the 'front runners' in the race to provide for our panel

and sculptural production at the moment. Before we steam in, it's worth giving a quick thought to your priorities regarding any given product. Is it going to be subject to harsh environmental conditions or vandalism? Does it need to have an industrial quality to it or is there a need for a more natural look? How long does it need to last?

Some materials might not immediately suggest themselves as an interpretive medium but by exploring them we can push the boundaries of how we interpret the world around us. From high-grade carbon steel to live willow, it's all up for grabs, but these are our 'top five' for the month.

## CAST SG IRON

Think 'Angel of the North' and you will be on the right track. This material, although essentially iron, can be cast relatively inexpensively, has low inherent material value and is incredibly tough and durable. In fact it will outlast you and me quite easily. For interpreters and sculptors, the industrial feel of this material is very appealing, especially if it references the industrial vernacular.

One of the most striking qualities of Cast SG (Spheroidal Graphite) iron is the bright orange rust colour that it develops initially. This is only at surface level and it later acquires a more polished patina with age and use. In summary the pros are mega durability, solid looks, low metallic value compared to bronze, and great for use within industrial heritage sites. Cons: very heavy, installation can be tricky and design requires some specialist knowledge of the production process.

## VITREOUS ENAMELLED LAVA STONE

A relative newcomer to the UK market, the process of creating full-colour interpretation panels in this way produces results very different to the more traditional route of producing panels using conventional signage

methods (usually involving plastic). Again durability is one of its best attributes, along with the colour-fastness of the graphics themselves. Basically, as the name suggests, a solid slab of quarried lava stone is enamelled with a layer of white enamel on the surface to take the images, then subsequent screen-printed layers of metal oxides are added to create the colours before firing. Once fired, the slab has the feel of a glazed pot and includes a degree of crazing on the surface which is part of its charm. This material is a great all-weather solution and has a unique natural quality all of its own. Pros: it never fades, it's stable in extremes of heat and cold, graffiti can be cleaned off with any solvent, it can be shaped, it's fully biodegradable with no pollutants and it's ideally suited to both historic and environmental sites. Cons: it is considerably more costly than conventional inkjet printers, weight adds to transport costs and means that supports must be robust and well designed, and although colour reproduction is generally excellent, Pantone colours can be tricky to match precisely.

BELOW:

**Stone plinths can echo the local vernacular as in this panoramic panel overlooking the Medway.**





## ETCHED METAL

Another great product, strong on durability and with a high-quality feel. We have used this material to the greatest effect when we have combined it within other structures to provide graphics and information. This material also has an industrial look about it. Pros: durable, can be in-filled with many colours other than black, has a tactile quality, and can reproduce Braille very clearly and rubbings can be taken from the panels. Cons: although not the most expensive of solutions, large panels can start to seem costly compared to the alternatives, needs experienced designers in this process to produce the right results, and inkjet technology exterior grade substrates.

## LATEX-BASED INK ONTO SELF-ADHESIVE VINYL

There is a bewildering raft of different printers and methods available but we prefer latex – i.e. latex-based ink onto self-adhesive vinyl. This is the industry's latest answer in terms of colour fastness and image quality verses environmental issues. For full-colour images and illustrations you can't get better. Mount these graphics onto aluminium or other flat, clean substrate and what you get is vibrant colour at a much lower cost than other more permanent outputs.

This product is different from the others in that rather than being bombproof, it has to be seen as a low-cost 'sacrificial' approach. Although an exciting and innovative new product, vandal resistance is not great. The truth is that (apart from perhaps enamelled lava stone) there is no vandal-proof method of producing full-colour graphics. For this reason we are often asked to mount prints to both sides of a panel. The graphic can simply be removed and turned over if it has suffered irreparable damage. Pros: solvent-free eco inks used in the production and great print quality. Cons: not as durable in vulnerable situations as the alternatives and it's plastic!

## GRP RESIN-BONDED GRAPHICS

Another long-standing range of products to consider are GRP (Glass Re-inforced Plastic) resin-bonded graphics. These can be supplied in moulded carriers or as a flat sheet. They add a layer of protection to the prints so are more resistant to vandalism. They also have strong weather resistance. As an alternative to GRP, there are also a number of quite tough laminates that can be mounted over the vinyl prints to help to protect them. The

ABOVE:  
360° graphic enamelled onto lava stone in the French Alps.

BELOW:  
Cast GRP floorscape of the River Thames.

problem with all of these approaches is that, although they are undoubtedly more tough the extra costs are often equivalent to a replacement panel.

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# REPORTING RESEARCH

## TEXT APPEAL

Inspired by a past Journal that focused on interpretive text, Carol Thompson embarked on her own study into how museums can make their text more appealing. She wanted to discover whether there is still a place for the humble printed label among the glitz and glamour of high-tech interpretation.

I soon found that there's no lack of advice. And what's more, the numerous sets of guidelines written over the past 30 years are still generally sound. All recommend using Plain English – a conversational style, everyday words, simple sentence structures, active rather than passive tense, and so on – and stress the importance of good typography and design. So the question is, why does so much museum text still fail to inspire?

## VISITORS FIRST – ALWAYS!

Studies in the 1990s showed that visitors want museum text to fulfill three basic needs: to provide orientation and context; to facilitate social interaction by answering questions and providing talking points; and to help them make personal connections with the objects on display. My own research confirmed that today's visitors soon switch off if text doesn't tick these boxes.

However, other agendas often get in the way. Curators are usually excellent scholars but tend to write for their peers rather than non-specialists. Interpretive writer James Carter states that museum text should be 'underpinned by scholarship, not a demonstration of it'. Added to this, museum managers often feel that they have to impress influential stakeholders or bow to their wishes. The result is that visitors' needs fall from top priority.

## LIGHTEN UP

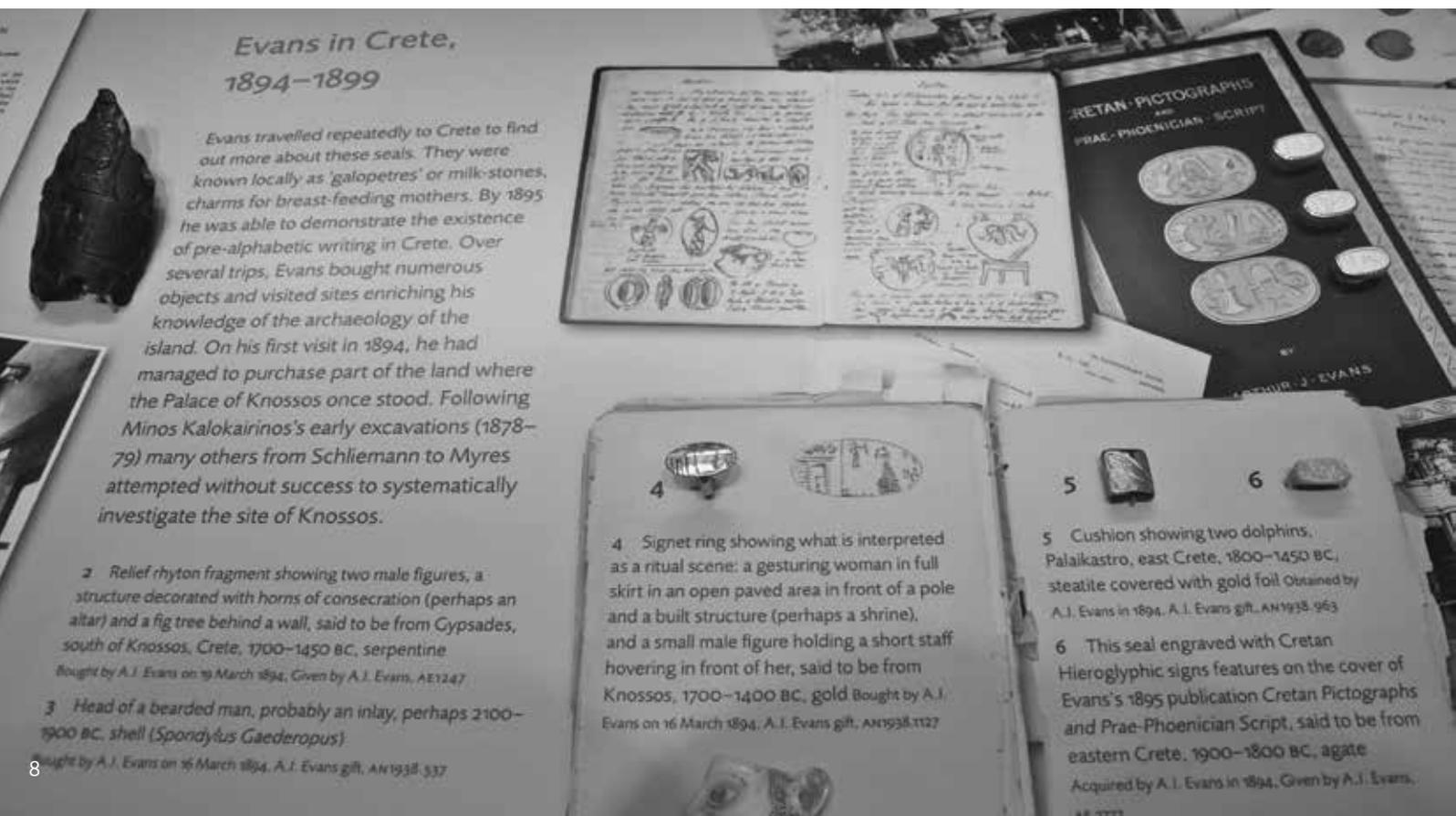
American researcher Beverley Serrell likens text to a product that has to be 'sold' to visitors, who 'pay' with their attention. If the cost appears too great – i.e. if reading it looks like hard work – then visitors won't bother. However, curators regularly overestimate visitors' attention spans.

Successful museum text appears deceptively simple and effortless but can be fiendishly difficult to write. It must also be brief. In fact, target word counts are shrinking. In 1996 Serrell recommended up-to-100-word labels; today the aim is 30 words or fewer!

Also, text is regularly weighed down by facts and descriptions. Putting people and stories first makes for much lighter reading.

BELOW:

Although this text at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, is long, the imaginative design and story-telling approach 'lighten the load'.



## TAKE SOME RISKS

Several of the experts I consulted believe that museums take text too seriously. Interpretation consultant Lucy Harland refers to the 'burden of permanency' – the curator's fear of taking risks with text that may stay put for a number of years. James Carter and fellow interpretive writer Michael Hamish Glen believe that museum text only comes to life if it has personality, rhythm, light and shade, and the occasional well-placed touch of humour. But this takes practice.

## RECOGNISE THE SKILL

Very few curators are trained in the art of writing interpretive text, so 'doing the labels' can be a bit of a chore. Often it drops to the bottom of the to-do list and is a last-minute job, leaving no time for proper planning or front-end evaluation.

Martin Roberts, senior curator at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry, acknowledged that writing and editing high-quality text in-house requires huge commitment in terms of time, money and staff training. At the Herbert this paid off and much of its gallery text is seen as a model of good practice.

Another option is to call in the experts – professional museum writers or editors who can work with curators to create really good, imaginative (even quirky) text, underpinned by scholarship. This can be well worth the cost.

## INVOLVE DESIGNERS FROM THE START

As Beverley Serrell says, every effort of the text writer can be torpedoed by poor design.

My own visitor observations showed that badly positioned labels, small or fancy type, poor layout, inadequate contrast and poor lighting all cause instant frustration.

Research also shows that overloaded design soon causes visitors to switch off. Tyra Till of Button Interpretation commented that 'you need breathing spaces'.

Involving designers right from the start is crucial to producing visitor-friendly text. It encourages writers to think in terms of time and space – how, where, and when visitors might read the text. It also allows a more creative approach, where words, objects and other forms of interpretation can all weave together to carry the exhibition's message.

## DON'T WASTE TIME ON INTRODUCTIONS

In the words of Lucy Harland, 'writers need to be much more conscious of how visitors respond to introductory text – they walk straight past it!'

Visitors want the themes of the exhibition to be transparent but only a tiny proportion of them stop to read introductory panels. Instead, most visitors mooch around randomly, stopping at a couple of objects that catch their eye. So it's vital that text writers embed key messages into headings and object labels.

Several museums are now following the British Museum's lead in providing context via focus objects rather than relying on intro panels. These carefully chosen exhibits are supported by extended labels, which relate to the exhibition's themes, and which visitors are far more likely to read.

## PROVIDE CONVERSATION STARTERS

As museums become more democratic, text can be an ideal tool to pose questions and facilitate debate. However curators are often uncomfortable admitting uncertainty. Also, it can be tricky to pose questions that don't alienate visitors – there's always the danger of seeming patronising or provoking a response

BELOW:

Each word of this text at the V&A is carefully chosen to engage visitors with the objects on display. The artist's personality is strongly present throughout.



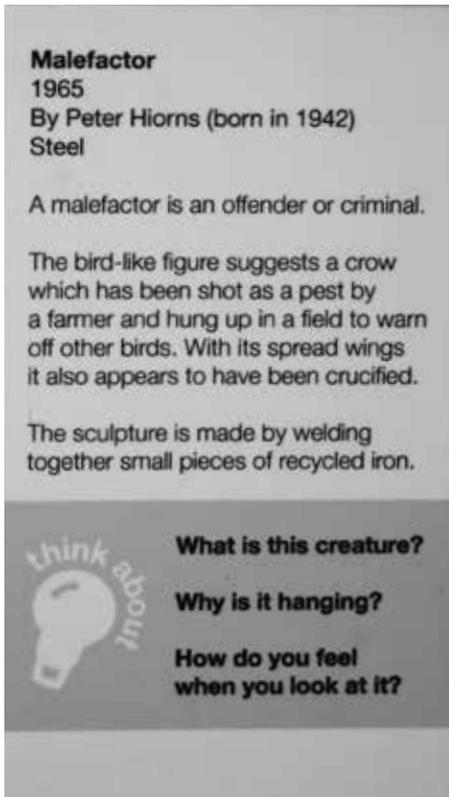
of 'so what?' or 'I haven't a clue'.

A safer way to fuel conversation is to provide text that answers visitors' immediate questions and provides crunchy facts. Rebecca Mileham and Dea Birkett of Text Workshop suggest starting with the 'Hey! Factor' – something that makes the reader think 'Hey, I never knew that!' and feel compelled to share their discovery. All too often curators leave the best till last.

## DON'T BE DAZZLED BY THE SCREEN

The growing reliance on digital media is likely to condition people to expect text delivered on-screen – whether via smartphones, ipads or interactive labels. But the professionals I consulted felt that screen-based text would not replace printed labels – not within the near future at least. Most took a cautious approach – as Susan Cross of TellTale Interpretation pointed out, dull text is still dull even if it's delivered via a snazzy device.

However, digital media can be a great way to provide deeper layers of interpretation,



ABOVE:  
This label at The Herbert, Coventry, manages to tell an evocative story, answer visitors' questions and encourage curiosity within just a few simple sentences.

text in other languages, and/or material to download and print (preferably on-site) and read at leisure.

## IS THE WRITING ON THE WALL?

My research confirmed that well-crafted printed text is still the most direct and simple form of communication in a museum environment – after a real person. However, the very fact that text is low-tech and relatively easy-to-produce can lead to it being undervalued. So, let's consider its merits:

- It provides instant orientation.
- It is immediate, straightforward and relates directly to the object it supports.
- It can be shared by several visitors at once.

- It can facilitate social interaction and discussion.
- It has a long life-span, a low carbon footprint and is easy to maintain.
- It can interweave different voices and perspectives.
- It instantly defines the character of an exhibition (you can completely redefine this just by changing the text).
- It can add aesthetic appeal and a sense of theatre.
- It has the power to delight visitors or alienate them.
- It's cheap!

With all this potential, text can be a powerful tool for interpretation. Isn't it time to put it in the spotlight, and maybe push the boundaries a little? Let's give humble text the investment it deserves.

## THE 4 PS

The Product, Place, Price, Promotion model used in marketing can provide a helpful basis for creating effective museum text.

- Right product – fits with visitors' agendas (answers their questions, closely relates to the object, relates to their own experience etc.).
- Right place – positioned where visitors most need it and where it is easiest to read.
- Right 'price' – provides maximum reward for minimum effort.
- Right promotion – attracts attention, without detracting from the object.

## TOP TEN TIPS

1. Put visitors' needs and interests first – always.
2. Write for the commonest common denominator within your target audience (not the most or the least knowledgeable, but the one in the middle).
3. Use simple, clear English and a direct, conversational tone with a touch of personality.
4. Involve designers from the outset.
5. Offer deeper layers of interpretation in the form of well-produced pick-up guides, or provide facilities to print material on-site (and provide seating).
6. Write each piece of text with a specific aim or message in mind, and make sure that it ties in to the 'big picture' of the exhibition.
7. Don't expect visitors to read introductory panels.
8. Don't let facts and descriptions come before a good story.
10. Think visually: invest in good typography and graphics to make text look effortless.
11. Accept that writing for museums is a specialist skill and consider hiring help.

Carol Thompson currently works as an assistant curator at Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Beverley Serrell (1996) *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (Altamira Press)  
 Lucy Trench (2009) *Gallery Text at the V&A: A Ten Point Guide* ([www.vam.ac.uk/files/file\\_upload/10808\\_file.pdf](http://www.vam.ac.uk/files/file_upload/10808_file.pdf))  
 Falk and Dierking (1992) *The Museum Experience* (Whalesback Books)



© US Holocaust Memorial Museum/Naaz Reid

## FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

Each issue James Cokeham reports from the front line on the ever-advancing world of new media and technology.

### INTERACTIVE GAMES FOR SMARTPHONES

As was eulogised in *Interpreting our Heritage*,<sup>1</sup> 'interpretation that doesn't in some way relate to something within the personality or experience of our visitors will be sterile'...

This is a critical, yet very challenging, element of developing great interpretation. After all, visitors are a very diverse bunch with a myriad of backgrounds, interests and experiences. As a park ranger in 1957, Freeman Tilden had the relative luxury of pitching his talks, tours and demonstrations specifically at the predominant demographic of his attendees. Can an individual interpretation panel or exhibit really have the same breadth of connection? It can't – that's why first-person interpretation is *still* the most effective tool at our disposal. The greater flexibility offered by new technology does provide us with more open-ended opportunities to create personally tailored experiences however...

1. *Interpreting our Heritage* by Freeman Tilden pub. University of North Carolina Press (1957).

### SYDNEY AND 'CHINA HEART'

An interactive game for smartphones and the web, 'China Heart' was launched as part of Sydney's Chinese New Year celebrations. Combining video with GPS gaming, it guides players on a walking tour of significant locations in Sydney's Chinatown, using objects from the city's Powerhouse Museum to provide context. Users are asked to try and solve a series of puzzles to bring a young couple divided by cultural differences together, the whole experience being driven by a fictional story developed by a popular Australian TV actress and writer. In order to do this, they must explore China Town, visiting heritage features and following in the footsteps of the story's protagonists.

The approach taken by this project is both novel and refreshing, creating powerful personal connections between user and place through the power of 'a good story' and encouraging competition and discovery through the introduction of gaming elements. Smartphones and the mobile Internet provide much greater opportunity than merely showcasing high-res images and audio commentaries – see for yourself at [www.chinaheart.org.au](http://www.chinaheart.org.au).

ABOVE:  
Making a pledge at the US Holocaust Museum, Washington.

### US HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

When developing their 'From Memory to Action: Meeting the Challenge of Genocide' gallery (see page 20), the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's key objective was to help visitors understand that genocide didn't end with the Holocaust. The museum wanted to compel visitors to consider their personal role in responding to genocide today, emotionally involving individuals within this contemporary story and encouraging them to take action. The 'Pledge Wall', a large digital screen, dominates the space. Visitors are asked 'what will you do to help meet the challenge of responding to genocide today?' and prompted to write their response on a piece of perforated digital paper. The visitor takes one half of this home, whilst the other is dropped through a digital scanner into a large glass box, with tens of thousands of other pledges. The digitised *handwritten* pledge then appears on the wall for all other visitors to see, along with other pledges made on-site and through a distinct section on the USHMM website. A powerful, moving and personally affecting experience that is anything but sterile. (See also page 20.)

James Cokeham is a heritage interpretation consultant specialising in new media and technology.

# PUSHING BOUNDARIES



'Growth means change and change involves risk, it means stepping from the known to the unknown'

# DISCOVERING THE PUSHMI-PULLYU – A DILEMMA FOR DR DOLITTLE

Carolyn Lloyd Brown discusses the main theme of this issue – pushing the boundaries and the tensions this can create for interpretive development.

Dr Dolittle's<sup>1</sup> pushmi-pullyu ('push-me-pull-you') is a shy animal with two heads, one at each end of its body. Therefore, whenever it wants to move, both heads try to go in opposite directions. It's a marvellous metaphor for the creative challenges often experienced between interpretive planner/designer and commissioning client!

Pushing the boundaries of interpretation – whether through an unusual content development approach, trying a new medium, placing interpretation in an unexpected context, or getting people to interact in a different way – is something that I believe is essential for the wellbeing of our profession.

It's that heady mix of insight, inspiration, innovation and risk-taking that leads us to those slightly scary and exciting approaches that result in something akin to freshly squeezed genius. The road to that rewarding outcome is often paved with obstacles and challenges for the creative interpreter, *especially when risk is increasingly deliberately designed out of the development process*. This seems to happen primarily as a result of the transparent, yet complex, tendering process that can be onerous and time consuming for both parties.

However, I believe that calculated risk (possibly mixed with a slight touch of subversion) should be encouraged when looking at new projects. Being open to new ideas and ways of looking at places, people and objects is vital for those commissioning new projects to consider when preparing their briefing material. The thought-provoking and enriching results of such trust when commissioning an individual or team is evident in the contributors' and collaborators' experiences described in this issue.

I wonder how often the freedom of creativity and innovation is actively requested by commissioning organisations, as it is evident most are highly constrained by time, budget and operational parameters. Furthermore, many are understandably reluctant to commit time and resources to necessary research and development, as well as being confident enough to take responsibility for a proposition that may never have been delivered before.

*"Your current safe boundaries were once unknown frontiers"* should be the inspirational fridge magnet for everyone involved in commissioning and creating interpretation. Yet why is it that artists are given much greater creative freedom and often have much larger budgets with longer delivery programmes than interpreters?

Why is it that many innovative and different pieces of interpretation, that genuinely provoke thought, are developed by artists working in a wide range of media? Is it because they are commissioned and funded in a different way to 'traditional' interpretation projects? Does the desire to generate evidential datasets for demonstrating the value of investment in interpretation impact negatively on our capability to push those creative boundaries?

I know that interpretive planners and designers are capable of wonderfully creative ideas and are genuinely frustrated by project briefs that are quite prescriptive and confining in their approach, having been agreed by a steering group through a series of consultation exercises, that include a requirement for delivering many specific corporate, strategic and funding body outcomes. The resulting briefing and tendering processes inevitably rarely enable true innovation on the part of interpretive teams.

1. Dr Dolittle and the pushmi were invented characters by the author, Hugh Lofting, made into a popular Disney film in 1967. Dr Dolittle discovered he could talk to the animals and discovered the pushmi on one of his adventures as he pushed the boundaries of his 'scientific research'. He was an eccentric pioneer and innovator whose imagination knew no bounds!

Carolyn Lloyd Brown is an independent heritage consultant and past Chairperson of AHI. She can be contacted on [clloydbrown@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:clloydbrown@yahoo.co.uk)

# DON'T FENCE ME IN

James Carter argues the case for revising and extending the boundaries around interpretation – and getting visitors to work a little harder.

Funny things, boundaries. They're often invisible, but they define the shape of something. And that can help us feel secure, so boundaries are often something to defend or celebrate – think of ceremonies to 'beat the bounds' of a parish, or the pantomime ballet enacted each evening at the road crossing between India and Pakistan.

## DEFINING BOUNDARIES

For a profession, boundaries identify what it does, and may even mark out aspects of good practice that must never be crossed. But what if a boundary becomes a constraint, something that holds you in and stops you exploring new territory? In cricket, after all, the boundary is something to aim for and surpass, and most human cultures have been driven by a desire to see what lies beyond the frontiers of the known, the familiar. So, what boundaries around interpretation might need a little revision?



Perhaps the most challenging line to cross is the idea that interpretation is about communicating a message. Many people are attracted to the profession by a sense of mission, a zeal to get others to think about something they feel passionately about. That ardour is perhaps most common in environmental work, where countryside interpretation is often linked with a desire to promote conservation values. In the cultural and historic field, the view of interpretation that fits the boundaries has been as a tool for 'teaching', with an expectation that audiences will learn something from what we do.

ABOVE RIGHT AND BELOW:  
Stegastein viewpoint, Norway –  
no message in sight, but a powerful  
interpretive experience.

Architect: Todd Saunders, Saunders and Wilhelmsem © photo: Per Kollstad.



RIGHT:  
The delights of drinking Thames Water,  
from the Wellcome Collection's Dirt show.

## CROSSING BOUNDARIES

But the world is a different place from the one in which interpretation's boundaries were drawn. Fifty years ago, people might only have come across ideas about the environment or heritage conservation when they visited a nature reserve or a historic house; now prime-time television shows us the private lives of rare birds, or invites us to vote for which historic houses should be saved. There are many more influences on the way visitors think than there used to be, and that means they will arrive with a more complex set of expectations – perhaps even, on a good day, a more sophisticated knowledge of the underlying facts about our site. In this new landscape, interpretation's role needs to change. It is not enough simply to teach visitors something, or to hope to influence their thinking.

Some of the most stimulating projects that push at these boundaries involve the very fabric of the site itself, focusing on the whole nature of the experience it offers. The National Tourist Routes project in Norway includes some spectacular examples, including the famous Stegastein viewpoint above Aurlandfjord. I wrote about this place in my keynote paper for the 2010 AHI conference: it's an inspired piece of architectural design that offers a truly visceral, and memorable, insight into just how deep the fjord is. There is a small display of panels just next to the viewpoint, but the site's meaning is in the sense of drama you get from standing, suspended in space, above the water. To me, this is truly interpretive. It invites visitors to experience the place in a way that would not otherwise have been possible, and is far more likely to create a powerful emotional link between the audience and the landscape.

This shift in what interpretation might mean pushes at another boundary, one that defines the skills it involves. Many definitions still describe interpretation as 'a communication process', but if its role widens to encompass



visitor experience, it must include the skills of site design and set design. Interpretation as a professional activity has porous boundaries, which makes it difficult to codify it or to establish standards by which it might be measured and tested.

## NUDGING FORWARD

Another interesting boundary is the line around what we might call instant understanding. It's a well-established principle that text in exhibitions needs to be easy to read, but does that mean the ideas it addresses must always be instantly clear? If one of interpretation's functions is to encourage audiences into new ways of seeing and thinking, isn't there a place for presentations that need a little work?

It's perhaps easier to develop projects that push this boundary in presenting contemporary art, where the subject itself is often concerned to challenge our thinking and perceptions. The Grayson Perry exhibition at Manchester Art Gallery, (see page 24), is a case in point: at first it's almost shocking to find a gallery that doesn't tell you how to look at or understand the collection, and where even basic information about what the objects are takes a back seat. But with a little mental effort, you find the show is actually offering you

interesting ways to think about the key pieces on display, and to come to your own conclusions about them.

Other venues make playful use of unusual juxtapositions in planning entire exhibitions. I particularly like the work of the Wellcome Collection in London, where major exhibitions take a thought-provoking look at a particular topic through objects, documents, and historic as well as contemporary art. Their current show, *Dirt*, will have you looking at notions of racial purity as well as dust and disease. A shamelessly off-the-wall piece by artist Serena Korda is thought-provoking and amusing: you'll never look at the contents of your vacuum cleaner bag in the same way again.

BELOW:  
A scene from Serena Korda's artwork,  
pushing the boundaries of our attitudes  
towards dirt at the Wellcome Collection  
Show.



http://bit.ly/3xTYH

LEFT AND BELOW:  
**A detail from one of the panels in Glen Affric, where Gaelic is released from the sterile boundary of a straight bilingual presentation. There's a place for text that needs a little work from the reader.**



### NEW MEANINGS REVEALED

There's scope for asking audiences to do a little thinking outside a gallery too. I recently worked on new interpretation for Glen Affric, one of Scotland's top beauty spots and home to the largest area of native pine forest in the country. To evoke the Gaelic culture and history of the area, I worked with writer Rody Gorman to develop a section on each panel that contained a short poem in Gaelic, together with a rendition in English. Rody's work often translates Gaelic words with several English ones, reflecting different possible meanings and giving more depth than a straight translation. The end result may need a little concentration, but I believe it does more to reflect the unique perspectives of Gaelic culture, and also more to encourage an interest in the Gaelic language itself, than simply presenting two bilingual slabs of text.

BELOW:  
**New technologies are fascinating, but our understanding of how they will actually fit with people's use of them is in its infancy. For an amusing take on where we stand in their development, scan the QR code with a smartphone. No smartphone? Have a look at the top of the page.**



### WITHIN LIMITS

The media we use can present boundaries too. New technologies offer enticing ways to push at these apparent limitations, in particular to exploit the fact that many people now carry with them a small computer more powerful than anything that could have been imagined 20 years ago. QR codes are an example: a more sophisticated version of a barcode, they can be scanned by a free application on a smartphone, and they're beginning to be used in interesting ways to offer visitors content that expands on conventional media. But experimenting with these new technologies can teach us an important truth about the nature of boundaries.

In another gallery at the Wellcome Collection, there's a small display from the Wellcome Image Awards, which celebrate excellence in medical and scientific photography. Below selected photographs, a QR code leads to a video giving more information about the image or the techniques it portrays. It's a great idea, but not without its problems. The gallery generously offers free WiFi connection, but

I found the signal too weak to support the high rates of data transfer needed for really smooth video. That's just a technological boundary, and sure to be crossed soon. More significantly, I hadn't realised my smartphone would start playing a video until it began. As the soundtrack started blaring from my phone's loudspeaker, I was panic-stricken at the idea that I was about to shatter the peace of the gallery. I fumbled desperately for my headphones, trying to avoid violating that most sacred of heritage commandments: thou shalt not disturb other visitors. And that's the trouble with pushing at boundaries. As soon as you've crossed one, you find there are more just around the corner.

**James Carter is an interpretation consultant, writer and trainer. He is a Fellow and committee member of AHI.**

# THE ENCHANTED PALACE

David Souden describes a radical makeover and new departures in interpretation at Kensington Palace, London.

Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) takes pride in its willingness and ability to try new things – and sometimes to be quite radical – within the constraints that working in major and palatial sites imposes. Big places demand a big scale. The re-presentation of the baroque King's Apartments at Hampton Court Palace in the early 1990s after the disastrous fire of 1986 was a landmark in scrupulous reconstruction. Life was given to those spaces by costumed interpreters, an area of interpretation activity in which HRP has often led the field. The full re-presentation of Kew Palace, which opened in 2006, provided an immersive environment that had at its heart 'a radio play within a doll's house', dividing visitor opinions as soon as it opened. Henry VIII's quincentenary at

Hampton Court and the Tower of London in 2009 was celebrated in permanent and temporary exhibitions, in site-specific drama both new and old – and in a visual and verbal joke-filled catalogue that deliberately imitated *Hello!* and *GQ* magazines (with permission).

## A RADICAL MAKEOVER

Kensington Palace is the latest site to have a radical makeover. And the radicalism is even more extreme, building upon experimentation elsewhere to make something quite unique. The Enchanted Palace.

The palace itself, built in 1689, was where George II died in 1760, where Queen Victoria

BELOW:  
Fashion designer William Tempest installing his dress with a train of a flock of origami birds in Princess Victoria's bedroom.



was born in 1818 and where she came to the throne in 1837. She gave the State Apartments to the nation in 1898, and some two-thirds of the palace complex is now in the hands of Historic Royal Palaces. Kensington came to the fore at the time of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997, when it was the focus of national grief as it had been her home (she lived in the private side). The palace is situated in Kensington Gardens, and millions of people walk, jog and roller-blade past every year. The 'Diana factor' raised recognition and increased visitor numbers considerably, but the potential was surely far greater. The palace was cut off from the main walkway by security fencing, the entrance was difficult to find, and the visitor route inside was a long audio-guided

BELOW:  
**Dame Vivienne Westwood captures the spirit of Princess Charlotte escaping the clutches of the palace in 1816, in a dress installed on the King's Staircase.**

parade through museum spaces showcasing the royal ceremonial dress collection, the historic spaces of the King's and Queen's Apartments, and latterly the former home of Princess Margaret, unromantically known as Apartment 1A. Time and form were often jumbled. Visitor appreciation was high, but there was significant room for change.

### A NEW DEPARTURE

The palace re-presentation scheme was born. Kensington – a palace for everyone: the scheme encompasses new gardens connected to the spine walkway, a new entrance, free access to a central hub, story-led separate historic zones, a dedicated learning centre, full disabled access, new but discreet buildings for visitor facilities, and radically altered visitor circulation, in a £12 million project that will be complete in March 2012.

Visitor income is the lifeblood of HRP, which is the independent charity safeguarding the unoccupied royal palaces. A two-year closure was barely an option, but neither was keeping open the parts that would largely be unaffected by the works without making some radical changes in presentation in order to continue to attract an audience. So the Enchanted Palace was conceived.

### TRICKS AND TREATS

All the tricks of the HRP trade, and a few more besides, have been deployed: site-specific theatre, storytelling, playing with light and sound, an emphasis on fashion and dress, as well as developing the special, essentially feminine, character of the palace. A succession of strong royal women, from Queen Mary II to Diana, has lived there, and their stories permeate its history.

The palace's curators have led the new presentation scheme, working with the site-specific drama company WildWorks, who are noted for performance in unusual places and for their strong community relationships, with a range of fashion designers including Vivienne Westwood, Boudicca and Paul Costelloe, and with the native collection, as well as with a re-purposed and re-energised front of house staff. The conceit is that the building works have shaken out the stories of the past, stories that will often involve a sad, real princess. The visitor embarks on a journey of discovery, in a darkened interior that is as far from a traditional historic house presentation as it is possible to imagine, while still keeping many of the interiors untouched. Trees lit by eerie blue light. A modern cabinet of curiosities filled with mementoes of wartime and a dress symbolising the pain and the abolition of the slave trade. The lair of a feral boy who was the court's plaything, and the nests of giant magpies filled with things to discover. A knitted throne. Victoria's bed piled high with mattresses in a room filled with her dreams of escape and with gargantuan dolls that were her playfellows. Clues are everywhere, with staff on hand to explain and WildWorks' actors as detectors ferreting out the stories. Layer upon layer of





fragments of story, scraps of evidence, real objects and witty interpretations of them, and dresses designed for the spaces and the occasion to evoke a storyline, all lead to the final space in which the seven princesses are revealed. Their shadows dance on the ceiling, to Purcell or to Duran Duran as their era dictates.

**BELOW:**  
**'Detectors' from the theatre company WildWorks investigate the knitted throne complete with sound amplification and echo installed as a piece for visitors to use and enjoy in the 'Room of Power'.**



## BUT DOES IT WORK?

A leading educationalist thought every primary school child should have the opportunity to see the Enchanted Palace – the spirit and type of enquiry it embodied was absolutely right. The palace's education and outreach services have been well served. For a visitor who wants pre-digested information and a gorgeous palatial interior, let alone to 'get close to Princess Di', the disappointment may be keen. The English language-based presentation is without a multilingual audioguide, as the intention was to make this an immersive and involving experience, but for some this too has been a barrier. One aim of the endeavour was to generate a new, domestic audience, and the Enchanted Palace attracted groups of fashion-conscious teenage girls who had never been seen there, and would never have thought of visiting before. Some have said this is interpretation without interpretation: many of the expected props, aids and pointers are absent, the stories are often fragmentary, and a fair degree of prior knowledge may be needed to gain the full benefit of the experience.

**ABOVE:**

**Young visitors are captivated by the gargantuan dolls designed and dressed by Paul Costelloe to evoke Victoria's own dolls.**

The principal aims of keeping the palace open, continuing to achieve the sorts of visitor numbers it had attracted previously, and extending the range of experiences HRP can offer, have all been met. A great many people have enjoyed the novel experience in the process.

The Enchanted Palace will close at the start of 2012, and the renewed palace will reopen two months later. It is safe to say that after this experiment nothing will be quite the same again.

Joanna Marschner of HRP and Sue Hill of WildWorks have compiled an illustrated report on the venture, incorporating the stories and poems included in the experience. A limited number of copies is available on application.

**David Souden is Head of Access & Learning, Historic Royal Palaces, responsible for education, publishing, outreach and design across HRP.**

# FROM MEMORY TO ACTION

**Bridget Conley-Zilkic and David Small describe how they provoke visitors into thinking about their own actions today in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, USA.**

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's permanent exhibition, *The Holocaust*, begins with an ascending elevator and a voice stating these things 'just don't happen'. It ends with testimonies from individuals describing the sometimes painful, sometimes beautiful realisation that they had survived. In between is a relentless presentation of the Holocaust. 'This happened,' the exhibition intones with the searing injustice of millions of shattered voices. The historical presentation is not a palatable morality tale, but repeatedly asserts the historical facts of this terrible past. Even the architecture conveys finality: harsh angles crafted from granite, industrial brick and metal. Not merely exhibition visitors, those who enter this space are asked to become witnesses.

How could the museum move these visitors from a terrifying history to a consideration of their own actions in the world today?

This task is demanded by today's incomplete story – genocide in our lifetimes. The museum's representation of this challenge occurs in a single room that most visitors encounter after visiting the permanent exhibition. Inside the new installation, the pace immediately accelerates in terms of the variety of types of media, diversity of content presented, and aesthetic of an impromptu setting intended to be reminiscent of refugee camps. The room has one core message: genocide did not end with the Holocaust and you have a role to play in changing how we respond today.

Visitors encounter this message through three main elements. First, static images and text printed on bands that weave between wooden poles. Second, 25 short video profiles of key actors during genocide: survivors, human rights researchers, humanitarians, journalists, prosecutors, rescuers, negotiators and activists. The videos are displayed on 15 screens suspended in a circle from the ceiling. Underneath the screens is an interactive



Image courtesy C & G Partners

ABOVE:  
Cards to enable visitors to save stories.

table (designed by Potion, Inc) where visitors can 'touch' quotations from each of the profiles in order to learn more about the people. They are also invited to insert pledge cards distributed from two kiosks in the room into slots on the table and bookmark the story to a personalised website.

The third and most direct challenge the space puts forward to visitors is the 'pledge wall'. The same card that enables visitors to save stories at the interactive table provides a space for the pledge wall activity. Visitors sit at one of the desks before a large wall with dynamic

BELOW:  
Making a pledge on the Pledge Wall.



Image courtesy C & G Partners

projections that provide brief introductions to places at risk today, sample pledges, news headlines and the core installation messages repeated to reinforce understanding of genocide. Visitors are asked to respond to the question, 'what will you do to help meet the challenge of responding to genocide today?' The question is designed to provoke a first-person statement from the visitors, thereby asking them to write themselves into the solution.

The card operates with a smart pen that captures the handwritten pledge and projects each visitor's handwritten pledge onto the wall. Thereby, visitors see their decision to take action become a part of the display and join the decisions of others. This message is reinforced by inviting them to drop their pledge into a glass bin and by displaying the number of other pledges made by other visitors – nearly 100,000 to date. The card is perforated, forming two halves. One half is taken home (and can be used to access the pledge online), and the other is then dropped into a large glass box (with all the other pledges). The use of technology to digitise, store and project the pledge of each visitor allows us to create an experience that is, at its core, non-technological – the writing of one's own words in one's own hand.

Since opening, visitation to the space that houses this installation has more than doubled to 30% (or higher) of the museum's total visitation. Additionally, around 10% of visitors to the space engage in the activity of writing a pledge. Two years after the space opened in April 2009, nearly a million people had visited it and over 100,000 had made pledges. Observation of visitors in the space reveals that the video testimonies are very compelling and successfully provide a personal component. The interactive table is extremely popular with younger people, and the pledging activity is popular with youth and adults alike. Pledges are typically thoughtful and heartfelt. Initial

evaluation indicated that the display is well received, the focus on contemporary genocide of great interest, and the technology both engaging and visually impressive.

The museum's work on contemporary genocide predates this installation; it is a critical component of the institution's founding document, the 1979 report of the President's Commission on the Holocaust, which states: 'A memorial unresponsive to the future would violate the memory of the past.' For many years, the museum prioritised engaging with political leaders, educating teachers and students; convening diverse groups and catalysing their efforts to organise against threats of genocide; and engaging the general public through our website. While the museum did produce several temporary exhibitions on cases where entire civilian groups were at threat, notably the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Sudan, this current installation is the institution's first attempt to introduce key concepts about preventing genocide as such

BELOW:  
Visitors can 'touch quotations' to learn more about the people.

to its on-site visitors. In fact, these visitors represent one of the unique ways that the museum can contribute to genocide prevention – it has access to new audiences, some 1.7 million annually, who may not have otherwise have encountered issues related to the Holocaust or to genocide today.

Asking these new audiences to consider their roles in changing how the world responds to genocide is a critical part of this installation. It is the core transition envisioned for visitors. A pledge in one's own handwriting – the 'I will' – increases a visitor's emotional engagement with the subject matter. When visitors also see their pledge projected on the screen and visible to others, it helps them see their own choice as part of a larger movement, each choice to take action a unique contribution to a problem of global and historical dimensions.

**Bridget Conley-Zilkic is The Research Director, at The Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington USA;**  
**David Small is Creative Director at Small Design Firm, Inc.**



Image courtesy C & G Partners

# SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES

Jeremy Coote explains how objects appear to remain in their original Victorian setting at the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum but in fact the interpretation has been subtly updated.

## GENERAL PITT RIVERS

The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford is widely – and wrongly – celebrated as being 'a museum of museums', with displays that haven't changed since Victorian times. The museum was founded in Victorian times, in 1884 in fact, to house a collection of some 20,000 archaeological, ethnological and antiquarian objects given to the University of Oxford by Lieutenant-General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers (1827–1900), a collector and archaeologist famous for his contributions to the development of the stratigraphic method (i.e. showing the relative positions of artefacts and therefore the chronology of successive layers of occupation).

The collection was quickly added to, however, with the transfer of thousands of similar objects from Oxford University's Museum of Natural History and the Ashmolean. Moreover, the first curator, Henry Balfour, added greatly to the collections, as have his successors, so that the museum now cares for some 300,000 objects and a similar number of 'field' photographs, as well as extensive collections of manuscripts and sound recordings.

## ARRANGED BY TYPE

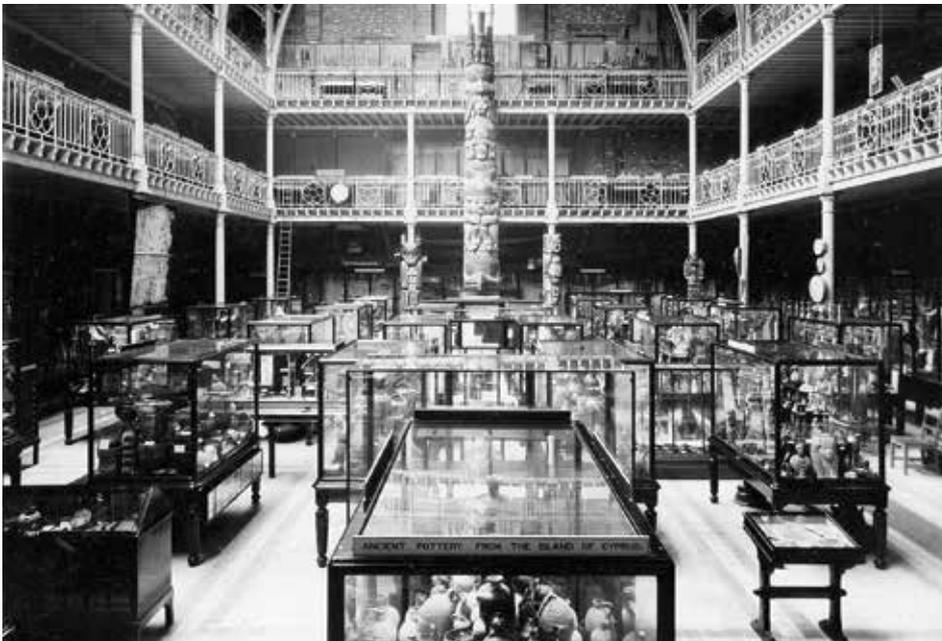
The installation of the first displays was carried out by Henry Balfour, who drew on General Pitt Rivers' ideas about the evolution of forms of material culture from simple to complex, but designed the displays to manifest his own versions of such theories. Displayed in typological series, the objects were arranged to illustrate the development of technologies, ideas and forms. After his death in 1939, and in response to changes in anthropological and archaeological thinking, Balfour's evolutionary series were dismantled from the 1940s onwards.

The displays continued to be organised primarily by type – all the spears together, all the baskets, all the toys – but were now arranged to illustrate the varied ways in which peoples around the world and throughout history have developed technologies to deal with the common problems of existence, from how to keep warm (fire-making equipment, clothing, etc.), through how to cook, store, and transport food (pots, vessels, baskets, etc.), to how to deal with misfortune (amulets and charms, etc.).

## KEEPING THE VICTORIAN STYLE

For many years now, the museum's displays have been conceived as illustrating the material aspects of people's response to the challenges posed by the human condition and to celebrate human creativity and ingenuity. In addition, since the 1980s, the museum has become increasingly conscious of its own 'aesthetic' qualities, and has set about reinforcing them. So, for example, over the past decades a number of new cases have been built in imitation of the original Victorian style. In addition, the high density of objects in new cases and redispays have been maintained. In a number of cases the density has even been increased (in stark contrast to what is common practice in most other museums). Using wire armatures, the museum's display team utilise the three-dimensional space of each case, rather than two-dimensionally placing each object flat on the floor or against the back.

BELOW:  
View of the Museum c.1902.



Courtesy and © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

BELOW:  
View of the lower gallery in 2009.

## KEEPING VICTORIAN LABELS

In the 1970s and 1980s, museum staff mounting new displays had taken to removing the historic metal-edged handwritten labels and replacing them with printed ones on card. Since the 1990s, this practice has been amended so that the old labels are retained (except in rare cases, where the wording they contain is too misleading or potentially offensive), but supplemented with new labels bearing up-to-date information. Indeed, 'supplemented' is a good word to describe what has been going on at the museum in recent years.

In the many refurbishments and redisplay, and even in the completely new displays that have been mounted, the aims have been firstly to maintain the primary organisation by type rather than geographical-cum-cultural origin; secondly to maintain the high density of objects; and thirdly to limit the amount of additional, contextualising information without interfering with the number of objects to be displayed or getting in their way. In this way, the museum's special atmosphere – in which fear, awe, laughter and puzzlement, inspired by the objects themselves, all have a place – has been maintained.

## MAINTAINING THE VICTORIAN ATMOSPHERE

In other words, the objective is to let the objects do the work, to let them speak for themselves as much as possible. To do this, however, is not to throw together a random



ABOVE:  
Museum postcard featuring a selection of Victorian labels.

collection of objects and let them fend as best they might. They are, of course, selected to fit together physically, visually, conceptually and intellectually. They are also *introduced* to the visitor. Since 2000, this has been done in a number of ways. Firstly, in the displays themselves, through the installation of case-headers and brief introductory texts, providing the visitor with a brief account of the nature of the display and about one or two objects in it, along with the occasional 'field' photograph from the museum's own collections illustrating the making or use of an object in situ. Secondly, outside the displays, through the development of audio tours and themed fact-sheets providing an overview of the museum and its displays and detailed accounts of selected individual objects. Thirdly, beyond the museum itself, through the provision online of an enormous variety of resources ranging from publicly accessible versions of the museum's databases through to introductory guides, virtual collections, and sub-sites devoted to the museum's numerous externally funded research projects in which staff work with members of source communities and other stakeholders around the world.

The most recent example is a new 'Body Arts' sub-site developed as part of the Museum's recently completed project, Some Thing for Every Body (funded by a grant from the Designation Development Fund). This site contains, as might be expected, introductions to the themes of the 'body arts' displays

and a gallery focused on the particular objects on display, but also specially produced audio and video podcasts featuring interviews with, and presentations by, University academics, artists, and members of local community groups and source communities.

## FACE TO FACE WITH EXHIBITS

What makes all this work hang together is that it has been developed in direct response to the museum's collections and its displays, which have come over time to be so widely celebrated. The latter have not remained unchanged and unaffected – indeed they have been much changed and heavily affected, though most visitors may not realise it – but the aim throughout has been to maintain the feel of the museum as a place in which visitors and objects can meet each other 'face to face' and, after a brief introduction, can be left to get on with it. For those who want guidance, there are guidebooks, information sheets, trails, audio guides and online resources. For those who feel no need for such guidance, the museum remains as undidactic as ever. The possibilities for direct engagement with objects thus remain undiminished and the objects continue to speak for themselves.

For the Museum's website, go to [www.prm.ox.ac.uk/](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/)

For the 'Some Thing for Every Body' site, go to <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/bodyarts/>

For a 'Virtual Tour', go to [www.chem.ox.ac.uk/oxfordtour/pittrivers/map.html](http://www.chem.ox.ac.uk/oxfordtour/pittrivers/map.html)

**Jeremy Coote is Curator and Joint Head of Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum.**



Courtesy and © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Courtesy and © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

# TEENAGE INTERPRETERS

Liz Mitchell recounts how Visual Dialogues, a collaborative programme involving young people interpreting art collections at Manchester Art Gallery, changed the way everyone working on the project looked at art.

What do a pair of 1930s wrestling pants, Playmobil riot police and 18th-century porcelain teawares have in common? They were all chosen as interpretive material for the exhibition Visual Dialogues: Grayson Perry, by Manchester Art Gallery's young people's group, the Creative Consultants, working with artist Jim Medway and the gallery's curatorial and learning teams.

## VISUAL DIALOGUES

Visual Dialogues is a project which has just completed its sixth and final year. Funded by DCMS, it is a partnership with Tate and a number of regional art galleries. Young people aged 15–19 (called the Creative Consultants) work with an artist and gallery staff to select, display and interpret two artworks from the host venue collection and from the national collection held by Tate. 'Dialogue' refers to the encounter between the historic and contemporary; between the young people, the artist and the institution; and between the group, the works and the visitor.

## COLLABORATION, COLLABORATION, COLLABORATION

This programme has been one of the most exciting and challenging areas of the gallery's work in recent years. Over the past six years the Creative Consultants have reinterpreted aspects of Manchester's historic collections alongside work by high-profile contemporary artists such as Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor-Wood, Mark Quinn, Jake and Dinos Chapman and, this year, Grayson Perry. During this time, it has evolved considerably from a small-scale intervention into a much more ambitious collaborative display and interpretation programme. At the start of the programme it would have been inconceivable for the gallery to have the confidence to share aspects of decision-making and interpretive authority in the way that we have done this year.

## COMMITMENT REQUIRED

Over a nine-month period starting in the summer, young people from across Manchester commit their weekends and holidays to a programme of workshops, talks, practical activities and visits, culminating in an intensive programme of ideas development, presentation and delivery of the final outcome in the spring. It is a steep learning curve for all concerned, in which a disparate group of young people, guided by the lead artist and gallery staff, come together to develop ideas, test them, adapt them and turn them into a viable reality within budget and to deadline. It is a wonderful opportunity, but does ask a considerable commitment during a period of rapid change in young people's lives. We generally start with about 60 young people attending the initial three-day summer school, from which 20 will form the core group that stay with the project throughout its duration.

This final year's project was the most ambitious to date, focusing on two new acquisitions for

BELOW:  
Installation with work by Grayson Perry.



RIGHT:  
**Grayson Perry with a group  
 looking at displays.**



Manchester and artist Jim Medway. On the positive side, this enabled more budget, more profile, more internal support and the generation of legacy interpretation. On the other hand, it also brought greater internal scrutiny, exposure to competing institutional priorities and higher risk of perceived failure.

## THE TASK

*Print for a Politician*, by Turner Prize-winning artist Grayson Perry, is an epic landscape panorama, peopled by tiny groups of warring factions engaged in all manner of aggressive, antisocial or absurd behaviour. Everyone is at war with everyone else, all conceivable groups are represented and labelled, from vegetarians to Satanists, and all are as good/bad as each other. *Jane Austen in E17* is a monumental ceramic vase, lavishly decorated with incised and printed decoration depicting young women in Regency dress against a backdrop of contemporary imagery from Walthamstow, in London, where the artist lives. It is intended as a comment on polite middle-class culture and the relationship between appearance and reality. Both are typical of Perry's socially and politically engaged work, an exploration of the multiple identities constantly at play in our lives. They are extremely seductive, intelligent and subversive, with a strong dash of humour thrown in. The task for the Creative Consultants was to interpret these two new works in the context of the collection into which they had been acquired.

## DON'T PANIC!

The group spent time exploring aspects of interpretation, the inspiration behind Perry's work and the collections in store. Themes were identified, curatorial staff suggested areas of the collection worth exploring, the collections database was investigated and tours of the collections stores took place. In developing their final proposals, it became clear that the young people had been deeply affected by the experience of 'rummaging' in the

privileged space of the stores and wanted to focus on the nature of this encounter as much as choosing individual objects to display. Initial ideas were ambitious for a project with a £10,000 display budget and a 12-week lead time, a maze of objects with the Perry works at the centre, rows of cupboards and drawers for visitors to open and explore, the re-creation of a Regency bedroom and a film dramatising the scene in *Jane Austen in East 17* using material from the collections. All of which had the potential to induce heart failure in curators and conservators!

The open-ended nature of this programme is such that the final outcome is only ever decided about three months beforehand and staff have to swing into action very quickly to make it happen. Expectations have to be managed, this year more than most as we were working with a diverse permanent collection including ceramics, costume and ephemera. Managing internal relations becomes more important than anything else. However, because of the track record of this programme in delivering a professional outcome plus the unshakeable belief and energy of staff and lead artist, we were able to help the group transform their aspirations into a coherent, engaging, and ultimately delightful exhibition.

## NO LABELS

Visual Dialogues: Grayson Perry opened on 31 January 2011. In the final show, Perry's works are complemented by a collage of diverse objects from the collection and sourced from ebay, which are intended as a contextual visual landscape (so no labels) against which to consider Perry's themes. A Regency mini-drama plays on a TV screen, in which two young girls go shopping in modern-day Manchester, and a series of second-hand wardrobes display

Regency items from the permanent collections. However, at the opening event, as it became clear that the media strapline was 'teenagers take over the gallery', we became a little uncomfortable. This soundbite failed to acknowledge the more complex iterative process that went on. As staff we were keenly aware that the practicalities of display, conservation, timetabling and budget meant that we had to make certain decisions without consulting the group, taking their ideas as a starting point. To be genuinely collaborative in all these aspects would have required considerably more time and a clearer process for decision-making than we had available to us.

## THEY SO GET IT!

However, the exhibition has been wonderfully well received. It has an irreverent and energetic sense of provocation and quirkiness that absolutely embodies the spirit of Grayson Perry's work and has taught us a thing or two about some of the 'hidden gems' in our own collections. Perhaps most importantly, the quality of the finished product is a testimony to the distance travelled by the group, best described in the words of one of their teachers:

'I asked them to take me round the exhibition (the role of teacher and student reversed) and I listened to a group of confident, articulate, knowledgeable, creative and inspiring young adults. All I could do was smile – they get it! They SO get what it is all about! Just fantastic!'

**Liz Mitchell was formerly Interpretation Development Manager at Manchester Art Gallery, and is now a freelance interpretation consultant.**

# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Sarah Lambert explores the powerful effect of using the soldier's voice rather than text in the Bovington Tank Museum's new exhibition, *Battlegroup Afghanistan*.

*'The special exhibition spaces many Army museums currently have are much smaller than peer institutions. Every effort should be made to maximise space available for the modern Army.'*

In 2009, the Bovington Tank Museum in Dorset took its first step towards meeting this army heritage policy aim with the launch of *The Tank Story* – a major new exhibition showcasing vehicles, artefacts, images, footage and oral accounts from the past century of armoured warfare. The 'present day' element of the gallery examines some of the challenges facing the army today and provides an overview of recent conflicts in Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

With the large amount of material gathered, it quickly became clear that the museum could

go further and tell the modern armour story in much greater depth in a 'stand-alone' exhibition. Afghanistan was chosen not just as a topical subject in which the experiences of today's soldiers could be related, but where the museum could also touch on wider issues that reflect the national debate on the role of the army in the 21st century.

## THE SOLDIER AS SPEAKER

From the outset, the project team had in mind an interpretive approach significantly different from any used in the other galleries – to take the museum's voice out of the picture as far as possible. It was felt very strongly that the soldiers themselves could fulfil this narrative function in a more direct and engaging way

BELOW:  
2nd Royal Tank Regiment on patrol in their Viking armoured vehicles during 'Operation Panther's Claw' 2009.

© UK MOD Crown Copyright.





LEFT:  
Under construction: the Patrol Base takes shape.

whilst also lending the opportunity to put a more positive angle on negative media reporting. First-round interviews with soldiers of the 2nd Royal Tank Regiment confirmed that this approach could be extremely effective: as I and other staff sat listening to their often emotional accounts of Helmand life, it became very apparent that for this exhibition, there could be little substitute for the soldiers' voice.

*'When something bad happens, all the lads will gather round and give you a pat on the back but it's still not the love and affection that you have with your family or your missus and just the thought of seeing my nephew and stuff. I just couldn't wait to get back.'*

*'Afghan totally changed me, as a soldier, as a commander, as a person.'*

*'I'd trade anything, any amount of money in the world to get back the people that didn't come back or that's changed the way that some lads are now. We've got some lads who've been injured in such a way that they won't recover properly and I think any one of us would trade anything to reverse that.'*

As material flowed in from over 50 interviews with Royal Armoured Corps soldiers, covering a wide range of topics from living conditions, communicating with family and friends, operating and maintaining the vehicles to direct combat situations with the Taliban and the inevitable injury and loss of comrades, the themes and a physical design for the exhibition rapidly emerged. When it came to appointing designers, we had a very clear picture of how we wanted the space to look and the key messages to convey.

## RECORDED 'TOURS OF DUTY'

It was decided that audiovisual content should form the heart of the exhibition. Aside from the potent immediacy of hearing the actual voices of the men who had served on the front line, there was a wealth of images and incredible in-theatre footage being supplied to us. Digital media was clearly the main means in which soldiers recorded their tour of duty and we wanted the exhibition to reflect this. The project team also knew through evaluation based on learning outcomes for The Tank Story that information presented in an audiovisual format was the most popular form of interpretation for our audience, (text panels came in a notable last with only 12% rating their ability to inspire and educate). The museum's reconstructed First World War trench was also a gallery that visitors frequently commented on as the best exhibit in the museum. For Battlegroup Afghanistan, then, the designers were essentially set the task of producing an audiovisual experience in the crude set of a Helmand Patrol Base or Forward Operating Base – 'FOB' in army speak.

## HEARING VOICES

Has focusing heavily on these two elements and so consciously reducing the museum's voice produced a successful exhibition? Early indications are that it has. Detailed evaluation will take place over the summer holidays when half of the museum's annual audience pass through the galleries. Yet from many entries in the visitor comments book less than two weeks after opening, we know the soldiers' voice is having a compelling effect:

*'A very detailed and moving exhibition – almost moved me to tears.'*

*'The best most informative exhibition I have ever seen – well done.'*

*'It was absolutely amazing – good luck to the guys out there.'*

This initial feedback confirms that the interpretive strategy taken for the exhibition was the right strategy. Exposing the visitor so directly, in as many places as possible, to the soldiers' own words has provoked a strong emotional reaction that the museum believes would not have existed to the same extent had we opted for a more traditional interpretive approach. Our visitors do not appear to be suffering from the lack of 'a museum voice' to guide them through; on the contrary – immersed in a visually dramatic space with troopers to brigadiers telling them exactly how it is in Afghanistan, people are connecting to this exhibition in a way not witnessed before at The Tank Museum.

**Sarah Lambert is an Interpretation and Learning Officer at the Bovington Tank Museum and project managed 'Battlegroup Afghanistan'.**



ABOVE:  
Two visitors listen to a Royal Marine's experience of fighting in a Viking armoured vehicle.

# KENTISH DELIGHTS

Jo Wiltcher looks at how *Kentish Delights*, a touring exhibition with a difference, was developed to engage hard-to-reach audiences.

Kentish Delights has just finished a six-month tour of non-traditional venues across Kent. This innovative project, funded by MLA Renaissance South East, was originated by Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery. The exhibition showcased objects from more than 30 museums across Kent in venues as diverse as pubs and supermarkets. In order to fully engage hard-to-reach audiences in these commercial venues, the project team devised an innovative approach to the interpretation of the exhibition.

## TAKING THE MOUNTAIN TO MOHAMMED

Kentish Delights originated as a project to engage hard-to-reach groups and non-museum visitors. The concept was simple. If people don't come to the museum, take the museum to the people. Put museum displays onto the high street where the majority of people spend their leisure time. Whilst the concept was simple, the practicalities and logistics for this project were complex. The key was to ensure that the venues met all the environmental and security criteria of the loaning museums, without compromising the project aims of taking museum objects to truly non-traditional venues.

Project Managers Polly Harknett and Suzie Plumb devised an exhibition that would site a single display case containing three or four museum objects in a busy local venue. All venues were vetted for their environmental suitability and security arrangements. Museum quality, bandit proof, demountable display cases were commissioned to ensure that the objects would be stable and secure in their new environment.

## PUBS AND POST OFFICES

Installing the cases in non-traditional venues was a challenging experience! The cases had to be small enough to go through a standard

shop door and be mounted with help from volunteers. Most of the cases were installed while the usual business of the venue happened around them. People queuing for the post-office in Hythe mistook the display case for a new photo-booth, while customers at a pub in Tunbridge Wells thought they had a new quiz machine. Despite the logistical difficulties, it has prompted many curious people to talk to the project team, and a dialogue about local history has ensued.

Once the decision had been taken to site museum objects in commercial settings, the project team realised that traditional museum interpretation was not going to grab people's attention, particularly in supermarkets where the visitors have limited time and are bombarded with well-known commercial brands. The project team came to the conclusion that in order for the displays to work in this setting, they had to take a commercial approach to display and interpretation of the objects.

## THE OBJECT AS 'CELEBRITY'

When thinking about hard-to-reach audiences, the team knew that many of these target groups are familiar and comfortable with the format of celebrity magazines such as *HEAT* and *OK*, and TV shows such as *The X Factor*, which present information in an easily digestible way. When thinking about how to compete with the racks of celebrity gossip magazines, the team developed the idea to create interpretation that spoke the same language as those magazines, with design to match. And so the idea of presenting the object as a celebrity was born. Each object was presented as a celebrity in its own right, with its own story. Contributing museums were asked to select objects that told an interesting story about that place. Perhaps something unusual or curious, that said something outside of the normal local history story.



ABOVE:  
Kentish Delights display cases installed in the Ashford Designer Outlet shopping centre food court.

## KENTISH DELIGHTS MEETS HEAT

The team quickly realised that traditional object labels would be a barrier for engagement in the venues where the exhibition was being displayed. The 'curator's' voice could be off-putting and many visitors would not have the time to read them in venues such as supermarkets. In keeping with the theme of presenting the objects as celebrities, the team decided to present the interpretation as a celebrity gossip style magazine. The language of the magazine is deliberately gossipy, light-hearted and fun. Each object has a headline and a few sentences to tell its story. Perhaps the only difference between the Kentish Delights magazine and *Heat* is that

the information presented in it was thoroughly researched historical fact! At the same time, presenting the information in the gossip-style format opens it up to comment in the same way that gossip magazines do about film and TV stars. Further information about the object, in a more traditional format, was posted on the project website [www.kentishdelights.co.uk](http://www.kentishdelights.co.uk). Each page of the magazine represents one display case and that page was enlarged and mounted in the display case as a text panel for those that have the time to read it. Purpose-built, branded, magazine racks were sited next to the display case with copies of the magazine for visitors to pick up and read in their own time. The magazine includes a 'style' section to present historic costume. Kent-based celebrities Vic Reeves and Jo Brand were approached and agreed to contribute. Vic Reeves produced a cartoon and Jo Brand some text about two of the objects in the exhibition.

Branding and colour themes were chosen carefully in order to be striking and compete in the commercial environment. The design for the magazine was translated to all aspects of the exhibition. A Kentish Delights logo was created and the display cases were covered in eye-catching vinyl to ensure that they stood out in the busy venues, and could be easily recognised as the Kentish Delights brand.

## TAKING OBJECTS TO THE HIGH STREET

Finally, the team commissioned a branded trailer, which has toured the county to support the displays. Parked on the high street or in the car parks of busy venues, staff in the trailer took museum objects onto the high street. Project team staff, as well as participating museum staff, and their volunteers, talked to people face to face about their local history and local museum.

Feedback so far has been extremely positive: instead of talking about *The X Factor* over a pint in the local pub, people are discussing the fact that the only two birds named after towns are from Kent.\* And did you know that the Bishop of Rochester was an Olympic runner...?

\*Dartford Warbler and Sandwich Tern

**Jo Wiltcher is the Museum Manager at Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery and the project lead for Kentish Delights. Polly Harknett and Suzie Plumb shared the project manager role for Kentish Delights.**

# MARKING TIME

Patricia Mackinnon-Day describes how she evolved ideas for Marking Time, an innovative interpretative installation marking the site of medieval almshouses in central Exeter.

*'These derelict but historically significant ruins have been transformed into an area of renewed prominence to provide a stunning night-time experience.'*

Director, Insite Arts

Prior to the development of Marking Time, St Catherine's Chapel and Almshouses in Princesshay, Exeter, had become a haven for drug users, and initial thoughts had been to simply put railings up around the site.

## A SHORT HISTORY

The almshouses were first founded in 1457 by Canon John Stevens to house 13 poor men. The entrance, from Catherine Street, opened into a large room with a fireplace and bake-oven. The building also had a range of small 'cells' off the central courtyard.

When Canon Stevens died, the Dean of Exeter Cathedral took on the upkeep of the almshouses. Later, Edward VI suppressed them, only for almshouses to be restored to the Dean by Elizabeth I. Over 400 years later, Lady Hotham financed their restoration in 1894 and they were handed over to the Church Army as a hostel. During the Second World War, servicemen were billeted in the buildings and in May 1942 bombing destroyed the almshouses and chapel.

## LOST DOORS

Following an initiative by Land Securities, Exeter City Council and English Heritage, a permanent installation was commissioned to create an improved setting for this, one of Exeter's most historic landmarks. On my first visit to the site, I was struck by the small spaces marked out by the former building: inhabitants had lived in rooms measuring no more than eight by five feet. My aim was to create an explanation of the history of these buildings through the recreation of the lost doors to

the almshouses. These take the form of nine free-standing arched glass doors placed exactly where the original doors once stood. I considered that highlighting the positions of the doors would draw attention to small living spaces and become monumental and symbolic of the lives of the people they once framed.

## FINDING A VOICE

Originally, I was commissioned by Land Securities to create a fence around the site in order to prevent the space being used by the homeless. However, I felt that rather than close the area off, it should be celebrated: there is a richness and subtle ambience to the space, texture and surface of the remains of the building that hold so much history.

When working with permanent structures such as this, the voice of a building is not apparent immediately. Often it emerges over time, after sifting through historical information and scrutinising physical clues for its suggestive power such as: Who lived here? What sort of people were they? How did they come to live here? Fortunately, precise records were kept by the almshouses authorities and archived in the cathedral and I was able to track down exactly who had lived where, and when.

*'Saturday the Seventeenth Day of May 1777. They gave the Room in St Catherine's Alms House vacated by the Removal of The Widow Williams to the Workhouse to Martha Townsend Spinster.'*

*'Saturday the Eighteenth Day of August 1770. They ordered the Door of Priscilla Rice's Room in St Catherine's Alms House, to be repaired.'*

*'Saturday the 11 August 1810. They ordered Philip Baker's Bill of ten shillings for sweeping chimnies at St Catherine's and St Ann's to be paid.'*

*'Saturday the Twelfth Day of September 1772. They ordered That the Hatch belonging to the Dog Whipper's Room in St Catherine's Alms House, be repaired.'*

BELOW:  
Uplighting emphasise the texture and surface of the building.



RIGHT:  
Arched glass doors are placed exactly  
where the original doors once stood.

*'Saturday the Twenty Ninth Day of June 1771.  
They gave to Mary Grant One Shilling & to  
Eighteen Poor People a Two Penny Loaf Each.'*

*'Friday and Saturday 22nd and 23 December  
1809. They ordered the chapter clerk to give  
notice (to) Mrs Holmes to quit the house, and  
when she has quitted they ordered the surveyor  
to pull down the house and to lay the scite  
of it into the street'.*

Out of curiosity, I visited shelters of the local homeless and old people's homes, comparing schedules, rules and sanctions adopted by the almshouses with those of their modern equivalents. It became apparent that the language had changed but the intent was very much the same. I found the human context all very ordinary, but for me the ordinary becomes significant. But if a place has a voice I don't want to amplify it too loudly. I want to give people clues and a sense that they are looking at a small part of a whole mysterious whole.

## INSTALLING HISTORY

The doors also seek to provide an explanation of the history surrounding the buildings. They double as display cabinets containing small objects embedded within them, retrieved from the archaeology of the site and arranged chronologically with earliest artefacts located at the bottom of the door and the most recent at the top. There is glazed and colourful pottery, the molten glass of beer bottles scattered from a nearby pub, which also caught the blast of the bomb in 1942, and even a ring-pull from a 1970's drink can. (Ring-pulls have changed so often that they will be able to assist in the accurate dating of our own age.)

## LIGHTING UP HISTORY

Working in collaboration with BDP Lighting, the doors are uplit by fibre-optic lighting hidden within their foundations. The glass doors appear to glow and float in mid-air, providing ambient light, framing significant views and



aiding navigation. (The almshouse lighting has since received an award from the International Society of Lighting Designers as one of the most successful examples of collaborations between artist and lighting designer.)

Other aspects of the installation include rows of still and flickering votive lights filling the chapel space, and texts sandblasted into the pavers describing the lives of medieval occupants. These are illuminated by reflected light from low-level walls and a field of fibre optics arranged to form a grid pattern. Soft lights flicker on the floor of the chapel space

and the textures, edges and depths of the walls are only selectively lit, leaving the glass monuments to speak the loudest and provide the traces of past journeys.

The site has become a hugely popular destination within Exeter, attracting so many visitors that a new cafe has now been opened in Bedford Square, overlooking the almshouses.

**Patricia Mackinnon-Day is an installation artist. She is currently on a three-month residency in China.**

# Bringing information to life!

- INTERPRETATION DESIGN
- CREATIVE MAPPING
- GRAPHIC DESIGN
- VISITOR GUIDES
- ILLUSTRATION

