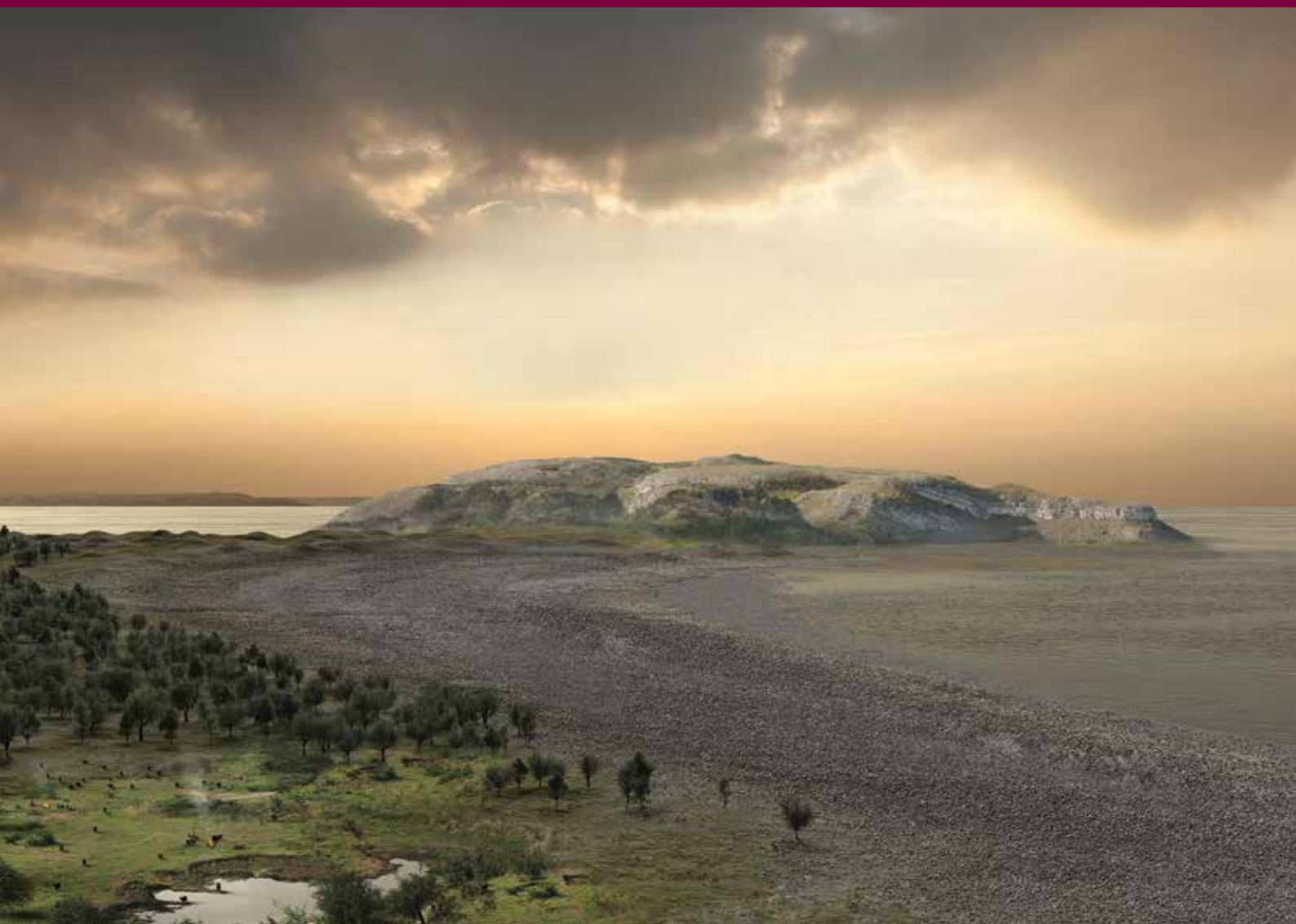
INTERPRETATION JOURNAL

AHI

JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR HERITAGE INTERPRETATION | SUMMER 2015 • VOLUME 20 • NUMBER 1

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF AHI



Published by the Association for Heritage Interpretation

ISSN 1357 9401

Commissioning Editor:
David Masters
0121 449 1600, david.masters@zen.co.uk

Production Editor:
Elizabeth Newbery
01865 793360, elizabeth@newberyandengland.com

Copy Editor:
Rachel Minay

Editorial Board:
AHI Marketing and Communications Group

Design:
Touchmedia, www.touchmedia.uk.net

Cover: Great Orme © Julian Baum.

Interpretation Journal is published twice a year in Summer and Winter.

You can visit AHI's website at
www.ahi.org.uk

Advertising rates	*(member/non member)*
Full page	£250/£350
Half page	£150/£210
Quarter page	£90/£130

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1 copy	£91
2 copies	£126
3 copies	£161
4 copies	£196
5 copies	£231

Overseas postage supplements

(1 copy)	
Europe airmail	£10.00
World airmail	£15.00

CONTENTS

The next issue will feature: AHI Awards 2015

For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation [AHI], send an email to 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.
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FOREWORD: HAPPY BIRTHDAY AHI!

Welcome to another edition of the Journal, the latest in a long line serving the UK's heritage interpreters.

As usual, we start with news and views from the interpretation community. Committee member Lisa Keys then introduces the thematic section, in which a range of contributors reflect on 40 years of the Association and the changes, milestones and personal journeys this represents.

When the Committee asked me to commission this edition, I began to consider both the authors and articles I might approach, and my own journey as an interpreter.

I stumbled into this field more by accident than design, courtesy of an ecology MSc and a job at the Centre for Environmental Interpretation. I have since come to appreciate my good fortune to work in a profession that marries science, history, culture, art and design in such a uniquely creative way. The workshops and conferences I have attended, including those organised by the AHI, have been great fun and full of committed people making a difference.

As a relatively new profession, the support of the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage (SIBH) and its successor the AHI has been invaluable. Although this edition largely takes a look back at the last 40 years, it's the next 40 years that interests me more – the vision and energy of young people entering the profession, the coming together of heritage interpretation and museum education, new developments in design and technology, and the growing recognition of the value of heritage in all its forms. AHI will be there to support our profession as it continues to develop and mature.

For the last 9 years my personal journey has included being Commissioning Editor of this journal – a greatly rewarding and enriching role. However, I now feel it's time to pass the baton to a new editor with a fresh approach – please contact the Association if you are interested in this challenge!

For my final message as editor, I ask that you stay involved, support our profession, and paraphrasing John F. Kennedy, ask not what the AHI can do for you, but what you can do for the AHI.

Best wishes

David Masters
Commissioning Editor

Website Members' Section

The AHI website has a 'members only' section full of useful resources for the practising heritage interpreter. This is the place where you will find back issues of *Interpretation Journal*, conference papers, best-practice guidelines and a host of other materials relevant to professional development. We are adding more resources all the time and will publicise them in the AHI e-News as well as on the website.

You need to be a member of the AHI and register with the website to access this section. To register, you will require your AHI membership number (shown at the top of your e-News) and the email address your copy of the e-News is sent to.

You then enter your membership number and the common case-sensitive password to log in. The password will change with each issue of the journal and the new password is AHI40.

The resources link is http://www.ahi.org.uk/www/resources.

TRAINING & STANDARDS

THE GRUNDTVIG INHERIT PROJECT

Steven Richards-Price reports on a key aspect of the Grundtvig InHerit Project: creating a competence profile for heritage interpretation.

I am lucky enough to represent AHI on the Grundtvig InHerit Project, working with a number of European Partners. We are very pleased to have TellTale's Susan Cross and also James Carter providing expert trainer advice to the project.

WHAT IS THE GRUNDTVIG INHERIT PROJECT?

The overall goal of InHerit is to build the capacity of heritage staff across Europe to offer inspiring informal learning experiences to visitors at heritage sites, and offer access to lifelong learning.

BELOW:
The opening project meeting was in Alden Biesen, Belgium in January 2014.

The first aim of InHerit is to develop a 'competence matrix' for the whole field of heritage interpretation. This is now available – details at the end of the article.

WHY DO WE NEED A COMPETENCE PROFILE?

'What do heritage interpreters offer and what qualifications do they need in order to plan and deliver interpretation in a professional way?' This is one of the main questions InHerit tries to answer.

Many professionals in the heritage sector are aware of the power of interpretive techniques and personal meaning-making in catching the attention of visitors and engaging them in a communication process. Many more though have never heard of interpretation or do not apply it in a structured way.

In Europe, tens of thousands of people are involved in facilitating informal and non-formal learning to visitors at natural and cultural heritage sites, monuments and museums. But probably only a fraction of this group has ever heard about the discipline of 'heritage interpretation'.

LACK OF SUPPORT

Only a limited number of people working in the heritage field have had training in communication skills targeting non-captive audiences. In many cases, guides, content writers or curators may have started with a background in one of the heritage-related disciplines such as biology, archaeology etc. and then learned on the job to communicate heritage to non-experts. They may be highly respected as experts in their subject matter but may often have only little understanding of professional communication principles. This can lead to poor-quality interpretive experiences at heritage sites.

FOCUS ON QUALIFICATIONS

Therefore, it is high time to focus on the specific qualifications of the professionals in the field of heritage interpretation.

The InHerit Project wants to contribute to the development of the interpretation competencies of all relevant professionals in heritage sites and museums. The project team will create and deliver in-service training material and in-service training courses on heritage interpretation. The team will also develop a strategy to establish heritage interpretation as a recognised profession in the museum, monuments and sites sector. But the first step is to create a 'competence profile matrix'. This is a reference framework for competences in the professional field of heritage interpretation.

This is in the light of Europe 2020, when professional development is due to be presented (and recognised) in terms of validated competence development. So, if we want professional development in heritage interpretation to be recognised, we will have to turn it into competence development. This also means that training courses must be conceived as a competence-driven learning activity.

THE MATRIX

For the purpose of this profile, we define a competence as a person's ability to perform a particular task or activity in a specified range of working contexts. In order to become competent, an individual needs to acquire a particular combination of knowledge, skills

LEFT:
Partners from nine organisations at work.

and attitudes (KSA) which is required to perform in the specified of context (e.g. as a guide).

The InHerit competence matrix maps competencies that are relevant for the professional field of heritage interpretation to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It provides guidance for those who develop or offer training and education. Different certificates or qualifications in heritage interpretation that refer to this matrix will become more easily comparable and transparent in terms of competences and EQF levels. The competence matrix can also be useful to assess an existing programme regarding possible gaps.

THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD OF HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

We defined areas of competences that are relevant to the professional field of heritage interpretation as a whole, covering all positions related to heritage interpretation.

Core competence areas in the field of heritage interpretation:

- Research;
- Conceptualisation and planning;
- Personal delivery (e.g. roving interpretation, guiding, costumed live interpretation);
- Delivery by media (e.g. labels and panels, mechanical or digital interactives, audio-guides, smart phone apps, projections, for self-guided trails and exhibitions).

Additional generic competence areas in the field of heritage interpretation:

- Evaluation;
- Promotion and advocacy;
- Management;
- Training.

COMPETENCIES

In practice, an individual does not need to be competent in all these areas; which competence areas are relevant and at what level depends on the specific position an interpreter holds.

By referring to this framework, the competencies a learner has gained in terms of the ability to perform in certain contexts will be transparent and comparable. Competence-oriented qualifications and certificates in the field of heritage interpretation referring to this reference framework will then make it easier for employers to compare candidates in relation to their specific job description, regardless of which country the competence has been gained in and how the qualification will be named. This competence profile also allows those who develop or offer training and education to relate their certificates or qualifications in heritage interpretation to the European Qualification Framework (EQF). It can also be useful to assess an existing programme regarding possible gaps.

This matrix does not link competencies to interpretive tasks or jobs/roles but links competences to qualification levels. These competencies and levels are building blocks. A certain job/role in a certain context

Competence matrix example for an interpretive guide (G) and interpretive media content specialist (M)

EQF level	RESEARCH	PLANNING	PERSONAL DELIVERY	MEDIA DELIVERY	EVALUATION	PROMOTION	MANAGEMENT	TRAINING
3	G				G			
4		G	M	G	M	G	M	
5	M		G			M		
6		M		M				
7								

ABOVE:
Partners working through group feedback at the Krakow meeting in December 2014.

will require a combination of identified competences at different levels. For example, interpretation staff acting as local guides (see 'G' in the matrix above). They would need a combination of competencies in six areas at the identified levels.

Media interpretation specialists (M) who are competent to develop and deliver interpretive products (and programmes) for various sites that are related to one major thematic field/ one major subject matter would need a different combination (see 'M' in the matrix above).

UNIVERSAL VALUE

In this way, the matrix has a universal value and offers a common ground for comparable job description and curriculum development, which is exactly the aim of the InHerit project and a starting point for further development of training material and courses.

To get the detail of the competencies required at each EQF level you would go to the 'Personal Delivery' competencies section of the profile. The example to the right shows EQF level 5 competencies for a Guide from this section to give you an idea of how to use the profile:

5 PRESENTING

1. To explain more complex topics and ideas which are connected to a site's main themes, e.g. with conflicting perspectives, in simple words and images that are easily accessible for non-expert audiences.
2. To develop and make appropriate use of props and supporting media that illustrate the content.
3. To deliver an interpretive narrative in a flexible way that relates to the visitors' backgrounds while keeping on track regarding theme, timing and learning goals outlined in the interpretive plan.
4. To help visitors with various and diverse backgrounds build in personal meanings and connections with the heritage resource.
5. To ensure that the interpretive presentation of a theme, despite inevitable simplifications for non-expert target audiences, is credible, appropriate and accurate.
6. To play a role in costumed live interpretation under the guidance of an experienced live interpreter.

GUIDING/INVOLVING

7. To lead larger groups of more than 20 participants autonomously, responsibly, safely and comfortably through an itinerary.
8. To induce and manage group processes for groups of people with diverse backgrounds. (To evoke and manage questions, issues, inputs and dialogues among a diverse group of visitors.)

RESPONDING

9. To provide guidance for visitors beyond one's own site (to help them choose what they want to see/do and how to get there) related to the main thematic focus of the site.
10. To respond autonomously and appropriately to diverse audiences with a wider range of attitudes, views, and feelings about local heritage and heritage values.
11. To autonomously and flexibly respond to unforeseeable challenges (e.g. an emergency) in an appropriate way *in relatively safe environments*.
12. To appropriately answer questions on facts, concepts and ideas related to the site's main thematic focus and its broader context, and connect the answer with a thematic message (e.g. as roving interpreter).

The full profile is available as 'Key competences for HI staff' on the project website, and we have to credit Patrick Lehnes of Interpret Europe for the incredibly hard work he has done in putting this together. The next step will be getting acceptance from the profession. Follow the development of InHerit at: **www.interpretingheritage.eu**

Project partners

Landcommanderij Alden Biesen (coordinator) (BE)
Interpret Europe - European Association for Heritage Interpretation (DE)
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Univ. of Zagreb (HR)
Istituto Pangea Onlus (IT)
Malopolski Instytut Kultury (PL)
Platform Opleiding, Onderwijs en Organisatie (NL)
Association for Heritage Interpretation (UK)
English Heritage (UK)
Swedish Center for Nature Interpretation (SE)

Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This communication reflects the views only of the InHerit consortium, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information therein.

Steven Richards-Price is AHI Chair.
This article is adapted from work by Patrick Lehnes (Interpret Europe), Guy Tilken (Alden Biesen, Belgium), and the wider project partnership.

RIGHT:
Trustees Jim Mitchell and Clare Sulston presenting to the M+H Show.

REVIEWS

AHI AT THE M+H SHOW

AHI Committee member and Trustee Cassie Herschel-Shorland reports on the Museum and Heritage Show held in April 2015.

The Museums and Heritage Show is a major annual opportunity to talk to fellow interpreters, businesses and heritage organisations. This year's show took place over two days in April at its usual venue in Olympia in London and enjoyed record visitor numbers. We were represented at the 'ask the expert' area and also in the Design Theatre, where we gave a presentation. AHI trustees and members also helped spread the word about the Discover Heritage Awards 2015.

Our presentation this year was entitled *High-tech or Low-tech? Choosing the best media to tell your story*, and was given by AHI trustees Jim Mitchell and Clare Sulston. We highlighted the basic principles of good interpretation and the importance of interpretive planning in helping choose effective media. The presentation is available in the resources area of our website in the conference section. Feedback was very positive and we look forward to presenting again in future years.

AHI members demonstrated their breadth of knowledge in heritage interpretation at the M+H Show 'ask the expert' area. Corralled into a dedicated space, alongside other sector organisations such as ICOM (International Council of Museums) and the Audience Agency, AHI responded to a diverse range of questions presented by visitors. AHI member volunteer experts offered their experience in interpretive design, planning and management; multimedia content development; accessible information; fundraising and more.

Visitors booked in for advice from heritage sites as widespread as Twyford to Tehran and included Kirkaldy Testing Museum and Wilton's Music Hall. A museum professional asked about setting up a museum in India as part of a larger ashram complex, another presented concern for safety messaging for young people; and others expressed interest in how to get tenders for heritage image production.

Enquiries were in-depth and an opportunity for AHI to be fully represented in its capacity for professional knowledge. Advice was given on sensitivity and care in evidence-based restoration of historic photos. A timely question about interpreting challenging subjects was supported by articles in the recent AHI Interpretation Journal and case studies presented at the AHI conference 2014.

Thank you to all the AHI Members who gave time and expertise to make this happen. Volunteer experts indicated their enjoyment of the interaction with professionals keen to learn more about heritage interpretation and also the opportunity to exchange ideas on challenging questions with fellow AHI Members. Most felt the 'ask the expert' area was a great initiative for disseminating AHI knowledge. However, the footfall was low compared to the promotional stand of recent years. Could we resource AHI 'ask the expert' and a stand with your help in 2016? Please do contact AHI Office if you are interested in being involved next year.

Cassie Herschel-Shorland

LEFT:
AHI Committee Member and Trustee Cassie Herschel-Shorland and AHI Intern Michelle Lopes at the 'ask the expert' area.

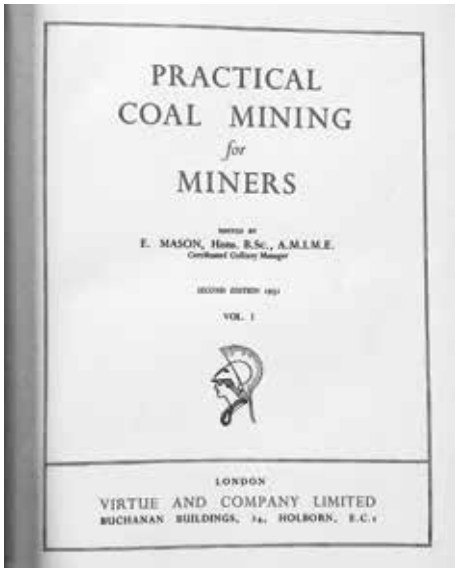
RIGHT:
Engaging with a seam of knowledge. Audience members exploring the resources which inspired some of the new songs produced as part of The Seam.

CASE STUDY

SINGING OUR PRAISES!

How would you interpret Victorian mining textbooks with the instruction 'breathe life into these dusty tomes'? Fiona Forsythe and Jennifer Hillyard outline lyrical solutions.

The library and archive collections of the The North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers cover both coal and metalliferous mining far beyond the Great Northern Coalfield. It is one of the most extensive collections of its type in the world, yet little known amongst even local former mining communities.



ART, DRAMA AND MUSIC

For several years, the institute has welcomed a variety of creative people who have produced drama and art based on the materials, as well as participating in regional festivals such as The Late Shows and AV Festival. This brought people into the building, and started asking the question: How can you explain the collections, and tell the stories contained in a manner that will connect with people?

In 2014, the institute hosted an Arts Council funded Songwriter in residency project to write new songs that told the story of the collections. The singer/songwriter Gareth Davies-Jones is now touring the North East performing this body of work, *The Seam*. From the outset, Gareth was very clear that he wanted to write songs that were firmly rooted in a particular book or manuscript. The first song Gareth wrote for *The Seam* was inspired by the textbook *Practical Coal Mining:* his lyrics provide an anthem for the library.

A SONG CYCLE

Within Gareth's 11 songs are titles that specifically connect to local communities. *Mr Austin Kirkup* tells the story of a managing director of a local colliery, whose memoirs are held in the library. A member of the audience at one gig told how as a child she would play in Kirkup's former house and subsequently brought four other people to hear another performance of *The Seam*.

The story of the invention of the safety lamp, as with many technical inventions, does not only involve one person. It can be difficult to convey the nuances of each step to a lay audience. In *Clanny, Stephenson and Davy*, Gareth has written an overview of the three main lamps showing their development:

'But though he had the right idea
His lamp it proved too clumsy…
His lamp with safety wire gauze
First used in Hebburn Colliery…
His name it was Humphry Davy'

Gareth's detailed research for each song ensured that the material he wrote was historically accurate. Only by listening to the songs, however, do the words acquire something mysterious and spiritual. Go and listen! https://soundcloud.com/gareth-davies-jones

Reaction to *The Seam* has been incredibly positive. At each venue, members of the audience have taken the opportunity to pour over the resources that inspired the songs. Collating the comments from the audiences has shown that they have been inspired to find out more:

'Enjoyable, educational and entertaining, an excellent evening. Thanks'

'Absolutely brilliant – captured the music in words as the miners captured the coal'

We hope to take *The Seam* on tour to a wider audience this autumn and to see other arts projects mining this rich seam to create exciting new projects from this historic collection.

Notes
The Seam CD (The Usual Quarterly Days) is available for sale £10 (plus p+p) from www.ebay.ie/itm/The-Seam-Coal-Mining-Song-gig-Usual-Quarterly-Days-Gareth-Davies-Jones-CD-/171764681645?pt=LH_DefaultDomain_3&hash=item27fdf90bad or direct from the institute. Samples are available at https://soundcloud.com/gareth-davies-jones

Fiona Forsythe is a freelance consultant, www.fionnconsultancy.co.uk @FMForsythe; Jennifer Hillyard is Librarian of Mining Institute. @mininglibrarian; Gareth Davies-Jones is a singer/songwriter www.garethdavies-jones.com/@waterandlight

CASE STUDY

A DAMAGED LANDSCAPE

Steve Pardue and Cath Brew describe how the pride of the local community has helped to reclaim a damaged industrial landscape.

Horden Denes was a damaged place. Once a coal place. Then a wasted place. A place of fly tipping. A fragmented and littered landscape. The beaches and coal waste were seen in dark films such as *Get Carter* and *Alien 3*, which used them as a dramatic backdrop.

SETTING THE SCENE

From Sunderland to Hartlepool, the coastline had dozens of collieries, some of which mined inland and others that mined under the North Sea. The waste coal and slag was dumped into the sea in pulleys and washed back onto the beaches. Not only were the sea and beaches affected, but the machinery left huge scars on the landscape when it was removed. And when the mines were closed during the 1980s, the economic downturn affected the region badly.

ABOVE:
Stories about growing up in a mining family and skipping songs came from cafe conversations. These were engraved onto discs.

BELOW:
Metalphoto and GRP panels were made in small sizes so they could be replaced easily. They contained images and stories about the 'happy times before the closure of the mines'.

LOCAL PRIDE

But the local community are justly proud of this area and we were able to draw upon their connection with the landscape and their memories. Consultation was asked for and collaboration with community and stakeholders provided a rich well of stories and information. One of the most effective methods we employed was to take over a local cafe for an afternoon and simply record conversations. Extracts from these conversations were then used as carved phrases attached to seating.

A REPAIRED LANDSCAPE

Other aspects of the interpretation, were, in part, led by the risk of vandalism. Large and robust Oak Wayfinding provided not just a base for signage but also a statement that you are allowed to be here. The signs themselves were made from glass-reinforced plastic that can be repaired and cleaned, and Metalphoto in small modules so they could be easily replaced. The backs of the panels carried stories and images of life lived and nature emerging.

BELOW:
The Horden Butterfly sculpture was based on a Speckled Wood Butterfly and carries poetry. You have to walk through the wings to reach the beach, creating a sense of arrival.

Each panel tells a small story – bite-sized landscape and history. Powerful and visible features such as a sculpture of a butterfly made in Corten steel, which weathers red over time, provide a visible destination. The words are a reminder of how coal links to the colonisation of nature.

As you walk through the seating area along the England Coast Path, the views north and south are outstanding. As you walk through the grassland, orchids reveal themselves and butterflies emerge. A story of regeneration and a landscape repaired is told.

Steve Pardue is an artist and designer who works with poetry; Cath Brew is a writer and landscape designer.

BELOW:
Carved ends to the seating area and a path running through it were carved by a local artist. The seating provides a place of contemplation and shelter.

CREATING SPACES FOR CONTEMPLATION

Seating was used to create a space that local people could value. Integral to the seating are the two end pieces, which we commissioned local artist David Gross to carve as representations of the opening of Horden Colliery in 1900 and the closing in 1987. The tools in the carvings demonstrate in part how difficult it was working in the mines – the tools had hardly changed in 87 years.

REPORTING RESEARCH

WHAT IS THE PLACE OF INTERPRETATION IN UK POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION?

Dr Philip Ryland summarises the key themes associated with courses delivering aspects of interpretation.

This brief article summarises the key themes associated with courses delivering aspects of interpretation, as well as offering a comment on the place of interpretation at postgraduate level in UK higher education. Deliberately, no specific institutions are mentioned and a number of well-known websites are available where a potential applicant can review the merits of institutions they might be considering.

The courses that contain elements of interpretation education continue to broadly divide between those centring upon the natural or cultural and heritage environments. Courses concentrating upon the natural environment tend to lie within Schools of Biological or Environmental Sciences, Geography, Tourism, Planning or Rural Development and tend to focus upon aspects of environmental management and modelling, biodiversity monitoring and sustainability, as well as more broadly rural land use, tourism, leisure studies and the 'green economy'.

Cultural and heritage-based courses largely exist within Schools of Archaeology, History, Education, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities and Museum Studies. Courses that offer these specialisations are often explicitly aligned with the work of museums and galleries, heritage and archaeological landscapes, as well as cultural and visitor centres. Courses focused upon museum studies also frequently blend elements of natural and cultural interpretation.

Within these courses, the field of interpretation manifests itself in a variety of forms from content with a single module of study focusing upon visitor management, personal interpretive skills and/or non-personal interpretation to courses offering typically two or three dedicated modules each focusing upon a particular aspect of interpretation, such as the interpretive planning process, media design as well as media and programme evaluation. There are also a small number of courses where interpretation is a more dominant or indeed the dedicated theme.

In attempting to explore some of the key components of these courses more fully, it would appear that the principles and philosophy of interpretation, the types of interpretive media as well as the 'experience itself' are the most common topics of study. The evaluation of media or programmes as well as marketing and social media also seem to be widely covered, as does the design of non-personal interpretive materials. The role of interpretation as a visitor management tool appears in some of the environmental courses. The alignment of topics such as: learning and communication theory; ethnography, culture and audience diversity; bid writing and project management; volunteer management; certification and accreditation of the profession; as well as a broader commentary on the range of issues facing the modern interpreter proved more difficult to identify.

The field of interpretation continues to develop and mature and the education sector does need to continue to refresh and update its courses to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the profession fully.

Consistency in terms of a minimum offering (the development of a 'core curriculum') seems critically important and this could be informed by the agreement at sector level of a core set of skills and competencies for the professional interpreter (which is currently being developed through the Grundtvig InHerit Project). Based upon the research undertaken for this article, an update to the existing directory of 'recognised' courses would also seem to be of significant value to the profession.

In summary, the presence of interpretation within so many postgraduate courses is encouraging, but also reinforces the importance through these courses of formalising the study of the profession to ensure that graduates have the skills necessary to provide meaningful interpretation that entertains, informs and educates visitors.

Useful sources of further information

UCAS Postgraduate courses: www.ucas.com/ucas/postgraduate
Find a Masters degree: www.findamasters.com
Graduate Prospects: www.prospects.ac.uk
The Masters Comparison Directory: www.masterscompare.co.uk
Grundtvig InHerit Project: www.interpretingheritage.eu/en

Dr Philip Ryland is Deputy Dean (Education), School of Tourism, Bournemouth University.

REPORTING RESEARCH

PUTTING VISITOR STUDIES AT THE HEART OF INTERPRETIVE PLANNING

Lyndsey Clark explains why visitor studies should be a core element of both interpretive planning and visitor engagement.

Putting visitor studies at the heart of interpretive planning provides benefits such as not only an improved visitor experience, but also organisations learn from their audiences and thereby develop deeper insight into the public value of their work.

GETTING STARTED

For anybody aiming to interpret a site for the public, some of the first questions we ask ourselves might be: 'Who is the audience?' and 'What are their needs and wants?' We might have some more detailed questions about prior knowledge, preconceptions and attitudes. Often to save time and money, we make assumptions about the answers to these questions, or rely on impressions that public-facing staff have built up over decades. However, it is important not to underestimate the value of understanding that can be reached by asking today's visitors or potential visitors directly.

THE VISITOR STUDIES GROUP

Visitor research doesn't have to be daunting, expensive or overly time-consuming. And there are people and organisations that can help. Since our founding in 1998, the Visitor Studies Group has acted as a skill-sharing network in the UK for organisations undertaking audience research; whether they employ in-house specialists, buy in consultants or train staff from across the organisation. Our website and events offer connections, resources and advice.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

During the lifetime of the Visitor Studies Group we have seen a dramatic change in attitude to visitors. Initially, visitor studies was often limited to 'evaluation' at the end of projects, to meet funders' expectations. However, we believe passionately in the power of audience research at the start of projects to help us inform and deliver excellent visitor experiences. When the VSG began, there was little sense that visitors could contribute meaningfully to the development of sites of informal learning. Yet today we find ourselves in the current position where engagement is an everyday phrase.

BELOW:
Speaking to visitors about exhibition concepts.

© The Science Museum

VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

However we interpret 'engagement', audience research plays an important role. Asking visitors about their experiences to report to funders or boards of trustees can be a form of engagement. Working closely with members of a community to inform the development of a visit experience is certainly engagement.

The benefits engagement brings are numerous; staff and organisation learn from their public, are challenged and develop deeper insight into what makes their visitors value the site. The communities involved develop ownership of the site and become advocates for it, ensuring security into the uncertain future.

SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

As we look to the future, visitor studies can only become more important. The need to truly engage is not going to diminish. The skills needed for engagement, for any end, involve asking the right questions, listening carefully and acting sensitively. With that, comes a need for those skills to become embedded across institutions, and for visitor studies to be valued at all levels and stages in project delivery.

Lyndsey is a freelance exhibition and interpretation developer and administrator for The Visitor Studies Group, www.visitors.org.uk

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

SEEING THE LIGHT

Dan Boys looks back on 40 years of AHI, home computing, mobile phones, digital cameras and even YouTube!

'Why would anyone ever want to look at photos on a TV screen?' That was what bewildered company executives told the Kodak engineer who first proposed the idea of a 'filmless camera' to them in 1975. This concept was, of course, the first digital camera.

Thirty years later, I received a similar response from my contemporaries when I proposed a new approach to audio guides. Taken by my enthusiasm, I was left to pursue the idea and develop the first downloadable audio trails in the UK. Until that time, audio guides were limited to indoor locations and listened to on hired handsets.

FAST-MOVING TECH

As a new AHI Member, back in 2005, I was surprised at the level of opposition I was met with when I rather boldly stated that digital interpretation would play a big role in the coming years. Some of the 'old guard' were

The Apple iWatch launched in 2015.

far from convinced about this new-fangled technology, and of course digital interpretation hasn't been a magic wand – but when applied correctly it has been a valuable tool for engaging and informing visitors.

THINK TWICE

In those 'early' years, everyone was keen to jump on the latest technology to 'out-tech' their competitors. It still happens today, but perhaps not with the same vigour. Everyone is a little more cautious about the technology they adopt. We have all seen too many bad applications of QR codes, Bluetooth and Augmented Reality. In many instances this was because the technology was still very much in its infancy, or those trying to make a 'quick buck' abused it. Even today there are few good examples of Augmented Reality in the heritage world. However, this is still something that has great potential in allowing visitors to interact with former castles, forts etc. in all their glory – albeit through a screen. Bluetooth is also making a renaissance in a new guise and this time it is set to be a success – in no small part because Apple are backing it.

LEFT:
Altair 8800, the first home computer, launched in 1975.

1975 – A VINTAGE YEAR?

The year of AHI's birth was a significant one for digital interpretation but many years would pass before we would realise that. In 1975, Bill Gates founded Microsoft and developed a BASIC program for the Altair 8800 – the first marketable home PC. In this same year, Motorola obtained patents for the first portable mobile phone, and Sony's Betamax and JVC's VHS were also introduced.

WHAT WILL WE BE WEARING IN THE FUTURE?

As we look ahead, it will be 'wearables' that form the new 'tech' guard. Google Glass didn't make quite the bang as expected first time around and has gone away to re-invent itself. The iWatch has made its long-awaited appearance, but how long will it take to be effective in the heritage world? These things take time to find their feet.

What does the future hold for AHI and interpretation in all its forms? Perhaps 2015 is the year that new interpretation tools are being frowned on by executives and championed by enthusiastic newbies. Only time will tell.

Dan Boys is Creative Director of Audiotrails.

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF AHI

'The first 40 years of life give us the text: the next 30 supply the commentry.'

Arthur Schopenha

INTRODUCTION: LOOKING FORWARD AND BROADENING HORIZONS

In May 2015, 128 interpreters from 14 countries gathered in Montreal, Canada, for an international heritage interpretation conference. The overriding theme was 'international standards in interpretation', on which a number of papers were presented. Delegates explored professional development, certification and training examples from across the world. As well as papers on the theme, there were a number of opportunities to explore international standards through facilitated discussions.

The *World Café* was the first opportunity to discuss the idea of working collaboratively towards an international standard. These conversations were rooted in many years of informal discussion among established organisations or associations, including AHI, on whether there might be opportunities to work together for the benefit of the profession. 15 delegates explored the potential benefits, challenges, goals and potential for working together. Benefits were seen as advocacy, providing a voice for interpreters on a global stage and sharing of ideas and resources. The challenges included cultural differences and overall management of a global working relationship, which for capacity reasons might have to be undertaken by one or more of the established organisations or by enthusiastic individuals. In these initial discussions it seemed premature to be talking about goals. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that one of the goals should be to develop an internationally recognised definition and understanding of the interpretation profession, which would engender respect and legitimacy for the profession and help to influence policy-makers. There was very little mention of the word 'standards' except from one participant – 'we don't like the word "standards".

A second lunchtime discussion examined two established, successful international organisations or federations and how they might provide a model for working internationally to an established standard or quality. These organisations were the International Ranger Federation (IRF) and the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA). The conference delegates were asked to look at these examples and once again discuss the benefits, challenges and goals for similar international collaboration. The discussion included the majority of the conference delegates and it seemed to build on those arising during the *World Café*. Benefits included opportunities to network, to provide support for each other and to celebrate diversity. Diversity was however seen to present challenges, which related to language barriers and also to interpretive programmes not being recognised or valued by all cultures in the same way. This wider discussion began to see the development of shared goals, which included having a broad representation of organisations/individuals from different countries, and finding a way to exchange ideas and best practice without implementing standards.

The conference culminated in a two-hour panel discussion on international standards, involving a representative from the Swedish Centre for Nature Interpretation, Interpretation Network New Zealand, the South Korean interpretation community, IC, NAI, AHI, Interpret Europe and Interpretation Australia. Each panel representative was asked to present ways in which their respective organisation or association was developing or implementing 'standards'. Many representatives spoke of 'certification', whether the organisation or association was directly involved in the certification process or not. I presented examples of AHI's 'standards', which include the opportunity for AHI Members to be recognised individually as a Full Member (MAHI) following an application process that recognises training, experience and contributions to the profession. I also presented the established (and growing) suite of *Best Practice Guidelines* (available in the AHI members-only area of the website) and the relaunched Discover Heritage Awards, which imply through their application that interpretation is expected to be of a certain quality or standard.

ABOVE:
The discussion panel
© Mavisol Mayorga.

What was very clear during the panel discussion was that there is a need for the profession to support individuals and countries that do not have an established membership organisation or association. This was certainly true for countries such as Costa Rica and China who currently look to the NAI for support, certification advice and training. However, the established organisations or associations exist to serve the needs of their individual countries or areas of influence, and to ensure that their members' needs are met. How would working internationally serve our members' interests? What benefit would international collaboration have on the ground in the UK and Ireland when interpreters are delivering projects and programmes? These need further exploration as the conversation continues.

AHI's patron Loyd Grossman says that: *'The UK's rich and varied heritage is one of our greatest national assets, giving pleasure and economic and spiritual value. Caring for our heritage is not a luxury, but a necessity for our present and future national well-being. Interpretation is the vital tool with which we encourage and inspire the public to engage* [with heritage] *in a creative, productive and supportive relationship'.*

This is not unique to the UK. It is true the world over. The Montreal conference and the international collaboration-focused discussions and sessions demonstrated loud and clear that there was a need for our profession to receive recognition for its role in heritage management, helping to connect people and place. But it also demonstrated the need for the profession to share information, research, resources and examples of best practice in order to improve the practice and to evolve as the world changes around us. In order to move forward, we need to have a common understanding of what we as interpreters do and what our values are. We need to embrace a common understanding and share it widely.

So where do we go from here? As a result of the conference a 'steering group' of representatives from countries across the world has been established. Where an established organisation or association exists, then a steering group member would be derived from the current committee or board of trustees. As AHI turns 40, it seems apt for it to be looking forward and engaging with conversations that look to the future, building on a solid foundation of experience. AHI is fully engaged in this conversation and will bring our experience to the table. We will ensure that our voice, your voice, will be heard.

You can find proceedings from the conference on the NAI website www.interpnet.com

Lisa Keys, Secretary AHI

40 YEARS ON – SNAPSHOTS FROM THE ALBUM

Michael Hamish Glen looks back at the journey from SIBH to AHI and remembers key moments.

ABOVE:
Receiving a Gateway Interpretation Britain Award from Magnus Magnusson, Glasgow (1990).

ABOVE RIGHT:
Members enjoy visiting Rochester, led by a voluntary tourist guide (1984).

When 60 or more folk met in Caxton Hall, London, in April 1975, they could not have predicted that the new organisation they created would become part of a worldwide network of interpretation associations. The Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage (SIBH), however, did have big ambitions as well as a big name.

IN THE BEGINNING

Interpretation hit Britain in the 1960s when government agencies and local authorities decided that this explanatory approach, as codified by Freeman Tilden for the US National Parks, could have a role in the UK. And so, by 1968, there was a standing committee on countryside interpretation, formed from staff working in some national parks, several museum services, a number of local authorities, the Nature Conservancy and the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Commission.

A seminal conference in Hampshire in 1974 led to SIBH's inaugural meeting in London the following year and the new society took to the country lanes and the streets of towns and villages. Its chair, J Geraint Jenkins, the colossus of Welsh museums, led by example. The first newsletter recorded over 100 members from myriad backgrounds and professions. Only a few were practising interpreters.

SNIPPETS AND SNAPSHOTS

How can one encapsulate these past 40 years? There is a temptation to provide personal recollections, or a list of the many successful conferences we have held all over the UK. However, snippets in early newsletters and later journals suggested a five-yearly dip into a diversity of thoughts and activities to produce a series of snapshots. So this is not a history, it's simply an album of selected milestones and memories. And we've now done 1975.

In 1980, the Carnegie UK Trust, SIBH's generous midwife, awarded Manchester Polytechnic £75,000 to set up the Centre for Environmental Interpretation. According to the society's journal/newsletter, it had bold aims of promoting 'the idea of interpretation through

RIGHT:
Three interpreters discuss interpretive sculpture in Grizedale Forest (1996).


Michael Glen

the collation and development of both the philosophy and techniques of interpretation.' To do this, they planned to hold conferences, publish papers, visit organisations round the country, provide advice and undertake consultancy work. Training courses also figured on their ambitious agenda. CEI is no more, but some of its staff continue to play a formative role in today's interpretation world.

AWARDS AND AN ANNIVERSARY

By 1985, the Carnegie Interpret Britain Awards were in their second year and SIBH celebrated its tenth anniversary at an awards ceremony presided over by the Duke of Gloucester in Edinburgh Castle. Kenneth Hudson – journalist and museums pundit – delivered a keynote address that took a sardonic look at what 'heritage' had come to mean and the challenge of national awards schemes. Recognising merit was relatively easy, but balancing north v south, industrial v artistic and minute v large led, he said, 'to anguishing and horse-dealing when judges meet.'

The winter 1990 edition of *Interpretation Journal* carried a rare contribution from Don Aldridge whose passion for interpretation sadly morphed into a sceptical and sometimes scornful view of the profession as then practised. He describes his video cartoon *The Tempest: how the ship of interpretation was blown off course,* which had greatly amused an international heritage interpretation conference in Warwick. In the same issue, the Committee announced that SIBH would use *Interpret Britain* as a campaigning slogan while looking for a new (perhaps briefer) name. That was some way off.

THE JOURNAL

By the middle of 1995, CEI was producing the journal for AHI and decided 'to develop a theme of commissioned articles for each edition.' The first to follow this approach dealt with *Multicultural Issues* and embraced a series of thoughtful and thought-provoking discourses. One such, *Issues, ethics and morality when working on the Transatlantic Slave Gallery*, describes the challenge of 'a largely white institution [Liverpool's Maritime Museum] taking on a subject to which black people laid claims to ownership and in doing so raising questions about the motivation for doing the gallery'. Similar challenges face interpreters around the world.

By the new millennium in 2000, when SIBH was now AHI, interpretation had grown from its early interest in natural areas and historic buildings to encompass new topics. The January journal of that year was devoted to *Sports museums – the problems encountered when interpreting a national obsession*. In the foreword, the curator of the Museum of Rugby refers to many sports originating in the UK and that 'it seems only appropriate, therefore, that the legacy of these sports is finally being taken seriously in Britain'.

HOT INTERPRETATION

2005's autumn journal saw Professor David Uzzell returning to 'hot interpretation', a term he coined in 1988. His concern remained that visitors to heritage sites do not experience heritage simply as a cognitive experience – the clear aim of most designers. On the contrary, he doubted that many interpreters designed material for specific emotional responses. 'The emotional palette which heritage and heritage interpretation can inspire and to which we can respond is infinite.' However, not all hot interpretation need shock; it can also startle visitors but lead to more gentle responses.

The spring journal in 2010 was dear to the hearts of many of us. A way with words gave an opportunity for skilled practitioners to demonstrate what the editor described as 'one of the crucial lessons of good interpretation – the need for economy'. He was referring not only to publishing the journal only twice a year but more appositely to the need for brevity when writing good copy. Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum's insistence on the 30-word label will ring joyfully in the ears of many interpreters and even more visitors to heritage sites.

AND NOW...

Now it's 2015 and AHI has a vibrant membership, a committee that is achieving great things and excellent relationships, particularly with Interpret Europe and the USA National Association for Interpretation. The awards scheme has been revived and we look forward to visiting Stonehenge's long-awaited new visitor facilities in the autumn. Another year, another conference! Some of AHI's founders remain active in the field and those whom we have lost over the years have left us a legacy of wisdom and good fellowship. The Association has its own proud heritage.

Biographical note
Michael Glen, then the British Tourist Authority's Information Manager, was 'drafted' on to SIBH's first committee as newsletter editor. He later set up *Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants* with Michael Quinion and still runs this interpretation planning consultancy aongside *QuiteWrite*, his creative writing practice. He is an honorary fellow of AHI.

Michael Hamish Glen

MILESTONES IN INTERPRETATION

Our interpretative 'milestones'... mostly – and probably inaccurately – remembered by Bob Jones with help from Susan Cross

I am dismayed. Well... just a little disappointed maybe. Why? Because I missed being one of the actual founder members of our august body by just six months, way back in 1975 (then the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage). Not a big discombobulation in the great scheme of things perhaps, but in this year as we look back over the four decades of our being, I would love to be able to say, 'I was *there*..!'

In those intervening 40 years, we have seen our membership grow from 60 to 600(?) and we have seen our calling become a profession. We have made so many great friends, argued about the meaning of life – or at least the definition of interpretation – way into the wee small hours of many annual conferences and other inspiring 'retreats'. Wow!

Thinking about this last year – in retirement one has the time to indulge – got me pondering how history might view us. How would we plot our course? How would we chart our journey from a gathering of enthusiasts to professional cohort? What 'waymarkers' would we use to define our being as a 'body'? And who were the key 'movers'?

I shared these thoughts with Susan Cross plus one or two other erstwhile colleagues, and together we came up with what we felt were – to steal a phrase coined by James Carter for one of those very waymarkers – the '*vital sparks*'. So, in no particular order of precedence – but roughly chronological...

RIGHT:
Like bees to honey – SIBHers flock to new technology 'listening post' at Ironbridge conference (Sept 1979).

ABOVE:
Interpretation for the younger forest visitor (and not a few adults!) (Grizedale, 1989).

- **Don Aldridge's Countryside Commission for Scotland Interpretation Workshop – Oct 1969**: *unfortunately (again!) I wasn't there, but I know a man who was and he says it was inspiring. He should know, he's Michael Glen and went on to become one of our foremost interpretative planning practitioners and writers.*

- **The founding of the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage (now AHI), April 1975**: *brought together interpreters from all over Britain for the first time and lit the fire of a new profession. Geraint Jenkins, then of the National Museum of Wales at St Fagans – amongst other luminaries – was key to the Society's early energy.*

- **The Forestry Commission visitor centre programme of the 1970s and 1980**s: *with its Grizedale Forest Visitor Centre, probably the first countryside visitor centre in Great Britain, the Commission was also the first large public-sector agency to invest significantly in environmental interpretation as a management tool and means to explain its activities, the purpose of an industry, the landscapes and the wildlife around us. Under the leadership of Martin Orrom, and informed by an insightful report by Richard Harrison – (both SIBH founders) – this programme was central to turning the FC 'supertanker' away from the 'rocks' of tree-farming into multi-use land management, access, environmental education and interpretation. The programme stimulated many others to 'get in the game'.*

- **Ironbridge Gorge, late 1970s – early 1980s**: *Robin Wade Associates, work for the complex of museums and visitor facilities that make up this highly regarded World Heritage Site set the gold standard for interpretative design in the UK for many years.*

BELOW:
The Model Forest at Liverpool Garden Festival captures the imagination (1984).

- **Countryside Commission (CCEW) Listening Post programme, late 1970s – early 1980s**: *steered by Philip Eden, this innovative programme led the way in onsite audio and multimedia, heralding the development of digital and hand-held technologies long before the latter became the 'must-have' gizmos of the 21st century. Perhaps now thought of as 'clunky' and archaic – who remembers 8-track cartridge audio?! – this was the touchstone for the interactive electronic media now so central to virtually all interpretative programmes.*

- **The Garden Festivals bi-annual programme, 1984-1990**: *these large scale government-funded urban renewal initiatives fanned the flames of innovative and bold interpretative design, giving many young and hopeful planners, writers, designers and makers a 'leg-up'. They also brought about the intense collaboration of architects, landscape, graphic and interpretative designers that seeded an invaluable pool of talent across a wide range of creative disciplines, many of whom are the 'named' practitioners of today. A great boon to the profession, even if the 'festivals' themselves did little for long-term urban regeneration!*

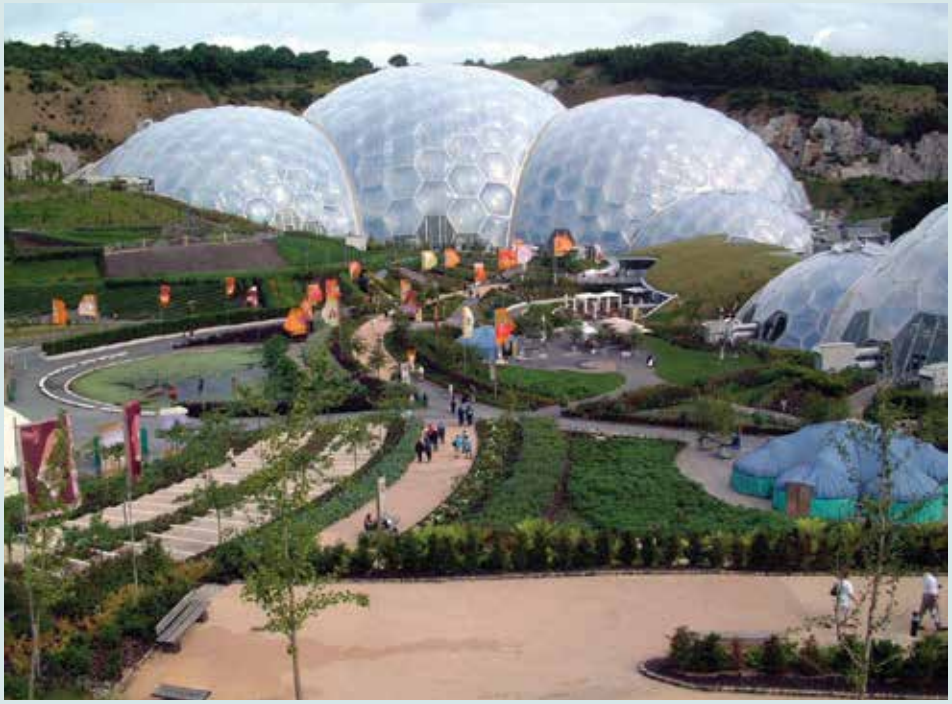
- **The Centre for Environmental Interpretation, Manchester and Losehill Hall, Peak District National Park –1980s and 1990s**: *these two institutions provided an immensely valuable training and academic bedrock to both the existing cohort and the upcoming generations of interpreters. Their demise (through so-called 'cost-cutting' expediencies) remains a great loss to the profession. Their academic work and importance has not yet been bettered.*

- ***'A Sense of Place' Interpretative Planning Handbook*, 1997**: *published by the Tourism & Environment Initiative Scotland, mentored by a cross-agency steering group and edited by James Carter. This important document was the first truly UK guideline into the dark arts of interpretative planning to be published on this side of the Atlantic. A practitioner's manual that was on a par with the work of our US counterparts and gurus who had dominated the sector until then.*

- **The Eden Project – opened 2001**: *Tim Smit's vision of how the dots of our world are joined up resulted in probably the single most innovative, ambitious, engaging and successful interpretative enterprise and destination of our times.*

- **Interpret Scotland & Dehongli Cymru (Interpret Wales), 1997 and 2002 respectively**: *the creation of these two bodies enabled staff engaged in interpretation and visitor experience activities from the public agencies, NGOs and voluntary sector to come together and share expertise and resources. This, at a time when funding streams were*

BELOW:
The Eden Project, the early years.



BELOW:
The Eden Project, the early years.

ABOVE:
The Eden Project, the early years.

ABOVE:
The Eden Project, the early years.

stretched, recruitment moratoriums abounded, and personnel were coming under increasing pressure to do more – much more – with less. Through a 'can-do' attitude adopted by individual members, they were able to disseminate best practice to a wide audience (often beyond home-country borders), to set and promote standards and, importantly, provide a forum through which 'torch-carriers' within the representative organisations could draw inspiration and reassurance from each other.

- **The UHI MSc Interpretation course – founded 2004**: *ambitious and important Masters programme set up within the auspices of the University of the Highlands and Islands (Perth campus) and filling a significant gap in the development of interpretation as a disciplined and 'grown-up' profession. Despite early promise, some would argue this initiative has yet to evolve into a foundation stone for interpretative endeavour across the UK, but the spark is there and the ember glows.*

- **The Vital Spark International Interpretation Conference, 2007**: *when 350 interpreters from all over the world gathered in the north of Scotland as part of the Highland Year of Culture festival. This conference was seen as a seminal event by many delegates, but just as importantly it marked the UK's 'stepup' to the international interpretive stage and recognised the crucial role interpretation can play as an economic driver.*

- **The Heritage Lottery Fund's national guidelines on interpretation for grant applicants, 2009**: *institutional recognition of the importance of interpretive planning and the centrality of a quality approach to interpretation in the many projects they fund.*

- **Neil McGregor's *'A History of the World in 100 Objects'* 2010**: *arguably the first real (and successful) attempt to open up the museums world and catch the attention of a diverse and non-aligned audience by using 'popular' media – radio (yes, radio!) – delivered to the recipient as 'discerning listener' at home (or in the car), as opposed to media that is 'presented' to the captive visitor on site. Invites the question as to why there are not more such initiatives?*

- **The Pan-Wales Interpretation Strategy, 2012**: *this far-seeing and ambitious project holds interpretation up as a cornerstone of a nation's cultural development and national identity. Interpretation in the 'home nations' truly coming of age.*

- **The London Olympics opening ceremony, 2012**: *if only because it was a spectacular piece of interpretation that reached out to the single biggest interpretative audience of all time – way to go Britain!*

...and not forgetting:

- **Every SIBH/AHI annual 'road-show' conference,1975-2014, 40 years and counting**: *these annual bashes bring practitioners old and new together to share experiences, see what's new, see what's good, and listen to the wisdom of the profession's savants. Many who have been dipping a toe into the interpretative world for the first time have found these events to be transformative – that word again, 'seminal'. A big pat on the back to all those unsung conference organisers and volunteers down the four decades of our history who made – and hopefully will continue to make – them happen.*

There will of course be other 'markers', other sparks, and indeed each of us will have a very personal collection of 'mileposts'. The latter are important and in time I would love to see the members section of the AHI website include an archive of individual 'journeys', with commentaries. However I would also invite all Association members to contribute their own thoughts on the wider perspective – what sparks have we missed? A true 'profession' needs a timeline containing the anchor-points of its development.

Bob Jones, HFAHI, MBE and former Head of Design & Interpretation, Forestry Commission, retd; Susan Cross FAHI

A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

Annette Simpson, a long-term member of AHI, describes her career in interpretation.

RIGHT:
Me doing my thing – preparing a floating exhibit based on the many different cargoes carried by working canal boats. Everyone loves the chance to get on-board.

My title comes from the recently released film documenting the life of the bass player from the Levellers. It sprang to mind when I started to think about this article as, apart from my family, there are two things that define my life – my love of music of a certain sort and my work. And I've come to realise that both of these passions are based on the love of place. The love of a landscape moulded and tended by the people from my past – not queens, lords and the aristocracy, but farmers, navvies, pottery workers and gamekeepers. Whether this love is communicated through singing at the top of your voice in a muddy field or by thoughtfully planned interpretation there is little difference as both spring from a passion to share and enthuse others.

FROM LIVERPOOL...

My journey in interpretation starts in Liverpool. I was studying industrial archaeology and we were discussing the ethics of moving buildings and whether reconstructing interiors was useful or strewn with assumptions – actually recalling this debate makes me realise that my journey started much earlier. It was on a cold, misty, smoke-filled morning in Ironbridge. I was on a school trip to Blist Hill and in the distance standing outside the Toll House was a person in costume by the door – I was intrigued immediately!

...TO CHESHIRE

I loved industrial history but decided archaeology was bad for the knees. So the next point on my interpretive journey was in Cheshire with the Ranger Service where we worked hard to engage people in the county's amazing countryside. We delivered a vast range of activities; I learnt how to lead environmental activities, tried my hand at my first interpretive panel, produced newsletters using Letraset, became passionate about coppicing and dug compost toilets. I think the days were always sunny, filled with the smell of freshly mowed meadows and the sound of trainee farmers ordering double egg and chips in the local agricultural college cafe – but I may be wrong, it was over 25 years ago! And that's where I first came across AHI, as someone in the office had entered the Interpret Britain Awards and we were all called to a photo call – apparently our Adventure and Discovery programme, filled with family activities, was quite good; we were all very excited by the recognition.

ABOVE:
One of my favourites – a great, locally relevant interpretive panel designed with a local high school on the Dudley No.2 Canal.

...AND THE INDUSTRIAL MIDLANDS

The next point on my journey took place in a very different setting. I left the forever sunny, green fields of Cheshire for the canals of the industrial Midlands – only to discover that there were many sunny, green spaces there too. I joined British Waterways (BW) as an Environmental Ranger working on the Birmingham Canal Navigations (based in a floating wharf built by Thomas Telford, the archaeologist in me was very happy). I worked on an anti-littering project and daily wondered at the often untouched industrial landscape. We used every interpretive trick in the book to engage local communities with their canals in an attempt to encourage people to love them just as much as us. I learnt to navigate blocked bridge holes, to understand the varied Black Country accents and most importantly how to work with designers.

During this time I started attending training courses on interpretation organised by AHI, but was also being steered towards a management qualification as I was managing my first team. I tried it, sitting through many dark nights ploughing my way through OU books – until I took a deep breath and gave myself a good talking to. Was this what I wanted to do? Luckily, a change of role within BW brought a change of perspective and I was lucky enough to go to Ironbridge to study Heritage Management. There I met many good people and amazing interpreters and a desire to specialise in interpretation was ignited.

LEFT:
David, one of our Explorers education volunteers, investigating the wildlife in Bingley North Bog and using an interpretive panel as a spotter's guide.

...AND CANALS

Outside of BW the world was changing – well at least in the funding world. The Heritage Lottery Fund was opening up many new opportunities. The possibility of restoring canals and their varied and wonderful engineering was now a reality. The necessity for interpretive plans as part of funding bids was great for me as the post of interpretation manager was created to plan and oversee various interpretive projects. This meant that I got to work at some truly amazing places – the Anderton Boat Lift, the Falkirk Wheel, the Kennet & Avon Canal and Sowerby Bridge Wharf. We restored boat lifts (and built new ones), dredged tunnels, rebuilt boats and restored engine house chimneys; and I got to share my love of these places with many different people in many different ways. To support the delivery of such a large number of high-profile and large programmes scattered throughout the UK, I needed to develop a new way of working and AHI was there ready to help. We set up an interpretive roster of consultants and designers, all of whom were AHI members, as a means of ensuring high-quality delivery. Along the way we won 'Best in Show' at the Interpret Britain Awards; which brought both internal and external recognition for the work we were doing.

In 2012, my work life changed dramatically when the Canal & River Trust was launched to take over the care of the nation's historic waterways. Becoming a charity has had a huge effect. There is now more emphasis on learning and involving a wide range of people in our work. At the moment, my work is focused on establishing a schools' learning programme. It is a truly exciting time for us; our education team is growing fast, along with the numbers of children and young people for whom we lead activities. I have learnt lots about working in museums, with schools and volunteers – and I have been able to share lots of techniques and ideas from my interpretive background.

THANK YOU AHI!

AHI has introduced me to some of the most inspirational people I know. It has encouraged me to plan my work with care, to keep an eye on the goal not just the beautifully crafted bit of interpretive media in front of me and helped me acquire the skills needed to deliver a range of projects. I don't regard myself as an academic or someone who will drive the theory of interpretation forward. I am a practitioner; someone who can plan and deliver a range of interpretive programmes to a high standard. I have learnt and practised these skills supported by both AHI and the Canal & River Trust – and I will always be grateful to both organisations for my less ordinary life.

Annette Simpson is Head of Education and Interpretation, Canal & River Trust.

BELOW:
Take your daughter to work day! Trying our hand at third-person interpretation with Tony and Fred, two wonderful canal men, who to be honest dressed like this most of the time. Fred was born on a boat and gently and willingly shared his way of life with many people.

VIRTUAL LIGHT REVEALS PAST WORLDS

Julian Baum examines the relationship between an image and the viewer.

The relationship between an image and its viewer is a powerful one. Images of the past can be particularly potent: challenging, inspiring, surprising. Familiar places in other times, perhaps recognisable, maybe with merely a ghost of the modern site that we might know, but invariably fascinating.

IS IT TRUE?

But what is the truth of these times and places? What did they really look like? Can we even get close to a glimpse that someone from those days might recognise? That will always be a hotly debated question, perhaps to the point of asking if we should even be trying, for fear of misleading the wider audience. The same audience that all too often is informed by TV and feature film historical dramas, 'sword and sandal' epics, novels, illustrated books from childhood, all of which create a general impression of the Tudor world, the Romans, the Ice Age, every past period in fact – a comfortable awareness in the collective mind which, once formed, goes unchallenged.

That's not to claim that any of those are necessarily incorrect, or any more misleading than anything else. Indeed, in a conversation with a senior archaeologist recently, the matter of ventilation slats in Roman granaries was discussed. How many times have we seen reconstructions of Roman granaries with ventilation slats? Many. I have done it myself, without necessarily questioning it. It transpired that there was no real evidence for them. An archaeologist, many years ago, made a single statement about their possibility, which in turn propagated to an almost accepted design.

BELOW:
ROMAN CHESTER – HARBOUR
A view of the western extents of Chester in the mid third century. This model of the fortress and settlement combines all the known knowledge about the location of buildings and fortifications, and was created as an overview of the settlement as we currently understand it.

ABOVE:
GREAT ORME – NEOLITHIC
Produced for Llandudno Museum's current exhibition, The Lady of the Little Orme, celebrating the return of Blodwen, a woman who lived in the Upper Neolithic period. This image is based on a photo of the modern landscape. In consultation with specialists on the historic environment, we came up with this depiction of a familiar landscape, but around 5,500 years ago – a glimpse of the landscape that Blodwen would have seen. Last year, we created the same view but as tundra landscape, some 13,000 years ago. Together with the modern photo and displayed large, it is a startling view of now and then.

SO MUCH FROM SO LITTLE

It may seem quite incredible that so much can be gleaned from apparently so little, but such is archaeology. The core art and science of the discipline itself relies on so many supporting arts and sciences, techniques and technologies, to reveal and explain what is unearthed from the soil and what remains above ground. This wide ranging, multi-faceted approach to what is genuinely so little, allows us to have an unprecedented understanding of the past, with a healthy nod to an open mind and the many things we don't know. It's one thing to describe a barn that is so wide and deep, with evidence for doorways here and there, sited on this spot close to a stream, with pollen analysis revealing a certain collection of flora for that period. Supporting evidence hints at the surrounding buildings and wider settlement. All well and good, but what did it look like?!

A LITTLE HELP FROM TECHNOLOGY...

Finely drawn and rendered illustrations are a joy, but archaeological investigation has for years used 3D recording technologies; from 'simple' surveying to laser scanning, what remains is minutely recorded, in 3D space; a virtual record of the space that remains.

The same technologies that the film industry uses to take us journeying through Middle Earth, or around futuristic cities, uses the very same kind of data. The startling and rapid developments in digital imaging and computer modelling over the past 30 years now mean that archaeology and history can add yet more disciplines to their arsenal of tools to reveal the past, and this is a truly powerful opportunity.

Take the 3D datasets from excavations and surveys, collaborate with academic specialists, build 3D models from data and those discussions, review those models, amend them, test them against practicality, common sense, what's visible and known from elsewhere. Test again, discuss again, and there will be a point where it is as right as it can be, given the sum of what is known.

...AND THE ROMANS

During my work on reconstructing the Elliptical Building, from Roman Chester, we went through this process over many weeks. Luckily, the Romans could be very ordered, and in this case there was enough of the site's footprint to make a plausible reconstruction. The great pleasure is not in believing that we had it right, but knowing that once finished, after all of that process, it would be hard to make it look like anything else.

LEFT:
CHESTER ROODEE
The same landscape viewed at different periods, showing the silting of the River Dee and the consequent creation of the Roodee, Chester's racecourse. From top to bottom, mid third century, early 13th century, and the first horse race in February 1539. The three images are matched to a photographed panorama spanning 220°, but the three historic periods are completely generated using computer modelling and digital visual effects.

That was 16 years ago. I am currently applying exactly the same process to Chester's later Roman amphitheatre; the topography, from detailed topographic surveys and observations, laser scans of the excavations, from drawings created during previous excavations, from brainstorming with experts in their fields. Everything that is available is brought to bear, sifted, placed in context, tested. All with 3D computer modelling; it places us where the audience sat, it puts us in the arena, in the entrances, it locks all the evidence together and obliges us to get it as right as the data allow.

BACK TO THE IMAGE AND THE VIEWER

But recent advances in computer-generated imaging mean that we can apply physically correct materials to each and very surface – materials that mathematically respond to virtual light the same way their real-world counterparts do. In turn, the virtual light that shines on these surfaces is programmed to play off the surfaces like light in the real world. Structural evidence may be difficult to interpret, and is likely sparse in the first place, but what brings an image to life, what makes a great image, is the interplay of surface and light, colour and tone; and that is as true now as it was for the Romans and every other period. Couple this with our best interpretations of the data, and we can begin to reveal glimpses of the past that we are comfortable calling plausible.

Computer modelling and physically based surfacing and rendering are recent tools, but they open an intriguing and pioneering field, both as another tool to support research, and as a means for that audience to see a genuinely accurate and considered glimpse of the past, in stills and as movies, and all the way around a site, not from just one viewpoint.

Ultimately, it's about that image again, and its viewer. In an industry that has so much to offer and draw upon, that is consumed with display styles, light shows, projection, performance, gadgets, it is still a great truth that a 'simple' image is one of the most powerful tools in the service of revealing the past.

Julian Baum is Director, Take 27 Ltd.

A ROUTE THROUGH LANDSCAPE AND ROCKS

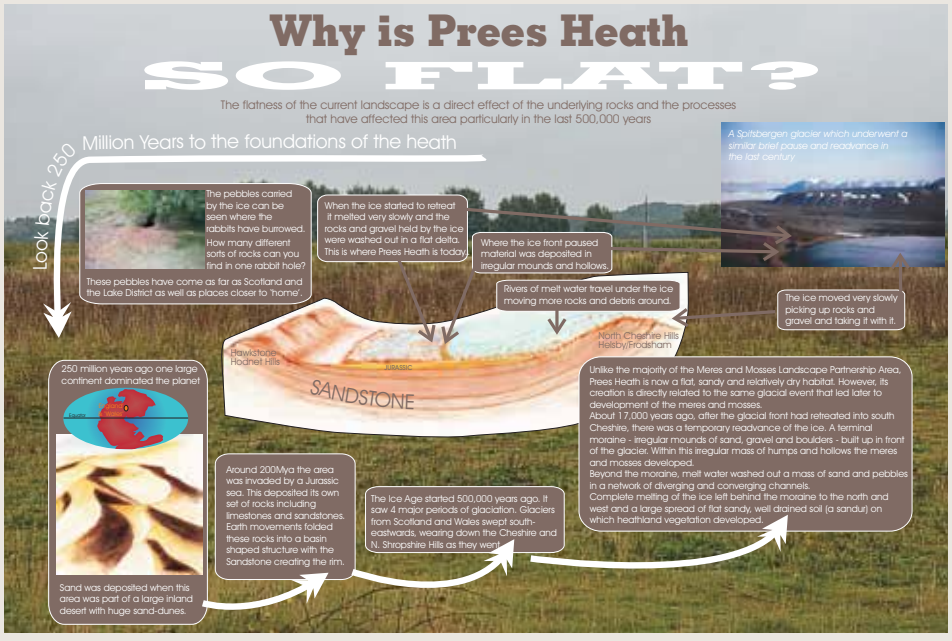
Long-term member of AHI Andrew Jenkinson remembers how joining SIBH 40 years ago enabled him to develop interpreting the natural landscape.

40 years ago, as an Adult Education Tutor for Environmental Sciences with Shropshire County Council, I learned of the establishment of a new organisation – The Society for Interpretation of Britain's Heritage (now AHI). I realised this was likely to answer my needs for communication with like-minded professionals.

STARTING OUT OUT

My adult education courses were well attended, but I wanted to reach a wider, non-specialist audience in order to engender a greater understanding of the processes of the natural world, and in particular of how wildlife and shaping of the landscape were influenced by the rocks beneath the surface (*aka* geology). And the last was the problem – the subject was an '...ology', a science with its own arcane language detailing facts: lists of fossils and minerals, names of periods of geological time and a description of earth structure that only 10 years earlier had undergone a radical change in understanding based on continental drift or plate tectonics.

BELOW:
PREES HEATH
An interpretative panel by Scenesetters.



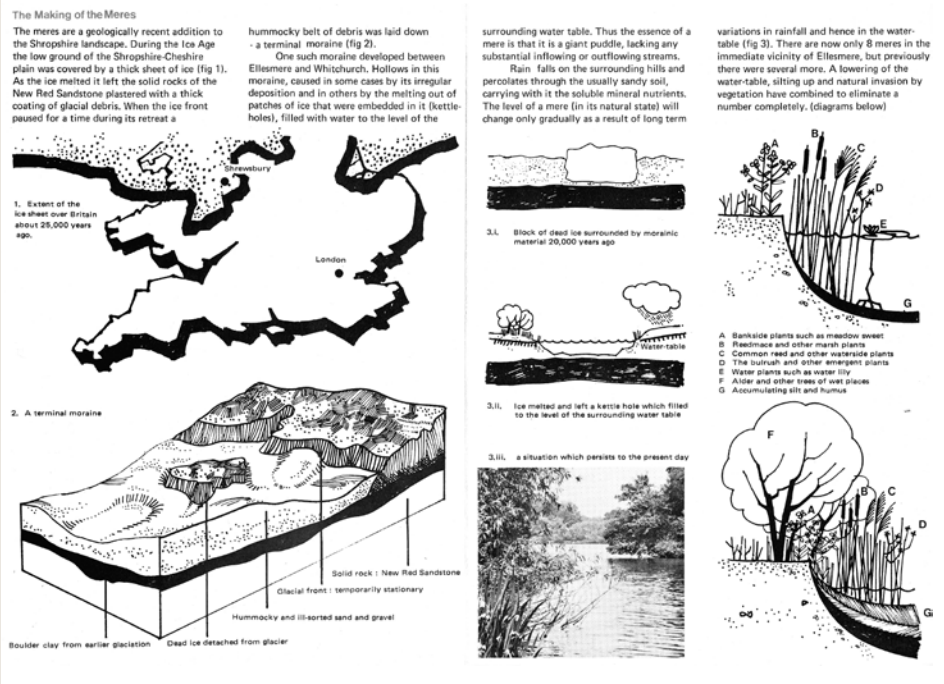
SETTING THE SCENE

What was needed was definitely interpretation, not information, and that interpretation needed to be done in the landscape, not in the confines of a winter evening class. Inspired by a talk in 1975 from John Barrett, National Park Officer for the Pembrokeshire Coast, I initiated a programme of summer guided walks with two colleagues, Geoffrey Toms, an archaeologist, and Barrie Trinder, an industrial archaeologist and a leading figure in the setting up of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum.

To the same end, 1975 also saw the establishment of my small publishing business, Scenesetters, with two friends working for the Nature Conservancy Council. We published brief eight-page guides with the specific intention of doing what the subtitle said on the proverbial tin (or leaflet) '...What it is; What to see; Where to see it', setting the scene on distinctive parts of the incredibly varied Shropshire landscape. Each began with a section on how the landscape related to the underlying rocks and how it had evolved. This was followed by coverage of distinctive aspects of the natural history related explicitly to the landscape in question.

THE SHROPSHIRE LANDSCAPE

The landscapes of the four titles: The Meres, Wenlock Edge, The Long Mynd and The Stiperstones, had no single ownership or management as visitor attractions, though each in its own way was a popular visitor destination. Outlets for the leaflets were as diverse as the landscapes – refreshment kiosk, caravan sites, pubs, a few local TICs, in short anywhere that visitors made use of. There was a small charge for each leaflet and a mark-up for the retailers. They didn't make a fortune, but they did secure a commendation in one of the early Carnegie/ SIBH awards. More importantly, they set a


The Making of the Meres

The meres are a geologically recent addition to the Shropshire landscape. During the Ice Age the low ground of the Shropshire-Cheshire plain was covered by a thick sheet of ice (fig 1). As the ice melted it left the solid rocks of the New Red Sandstone plastered with a thick coating of glacial debris. When the ice front paused for a time during its retreat a hummocky belt of debris was laid down - a terminal moraine (fig 2).

One such moraine developed between Ellesmere and Whitchurch. Hollows in this moraine, caused in some cases by its irregular deposition and in others by the melting out of patches of ice that were embedded in it (kettle-holes), filled with water to the level of the surrounding water table. Thus the essence of a mere is that it is a giant puddle, lacking any substantial inflowing or outflowing streams.

Rain falls on the surrounding hills and percolates through the usually sandy soil, carrying with it the soluble mineral nutrients. The level of a mere (in its natural state) will change only gradually as a result of long term variations in rainfall and hence in the water-table (fig 3). There are now only 8 meres in the immediate vicinity of Ellesmere, but previously there were several more. A lowering of the water-table, silting up and natural invasion by vegetation have combined to eliminate a number completely. (diagrams below)

1. Extent of the ice sheet over Britain about 25,000 years ago.
Shrewsbury
London
2. A terminal moraine
Solid rock : New Red Sandstone
Glacial front : temporarily stationary
Hummocky and ill-sorted sand and gravel
Boulder clay from earlier glaciation
Dead ice detached from glacier
3.i. Block of dead ice surrounded by morainic material 20,000 years ago
Water-table
3.ii. Ice melted and left a kettle hole which filled to the level of the surrounding water table
3.iii. a situation which persists to the present day
A Bankside plants such as meadow sweet
B Reedmace and other marsh plants
C Common reed and other waterside plants
D The bulrush and other emergent plants
E Water plants such as water lily
F Alder and other trees of wet places
G Accumulating silt and humus

LEFT:
MERE'S HEATH GEOLOGY
A leaflet by Scenesetters.

pattern for my thinking about interpretation of rocks, landscape and the wildlife of distinctive areas.

When Margaret Thatcher's philosophy saw the demise of my job as an adult education tutor, I moved seamlessly into environmental interpretation, establishing Scenesetters as a business that created outdoor panels, literature and small exhibitions for The National Trust, Forestry Commission, Severn-Trent Water and a number of local authorities. But the limitation I saw with most of this work was that it related solely to managed properties of these organisations with restricted visitor outlets and a need to inform the visitor and 'brand' the organisation as well as interpret.

SCENESETTERS

With a bit of lateral thinking (and the need to earn a better living), I moved Scenesetters – by now a family business – into the tourism market and for 22 years from 1985 we published visitor information papers – *Explore The Marches* and later *Explore the Forest of Dean and Lower Wye Valley* and *Explore the Malvern Hills and Severn Vale*. But by writing our own copy and selecting our own advertising supporters we maintained a broadly interpretive purpose, revealing to the visitor the special qualities of the area rather than just a list of B&Bs or diverse turnstile attractions.

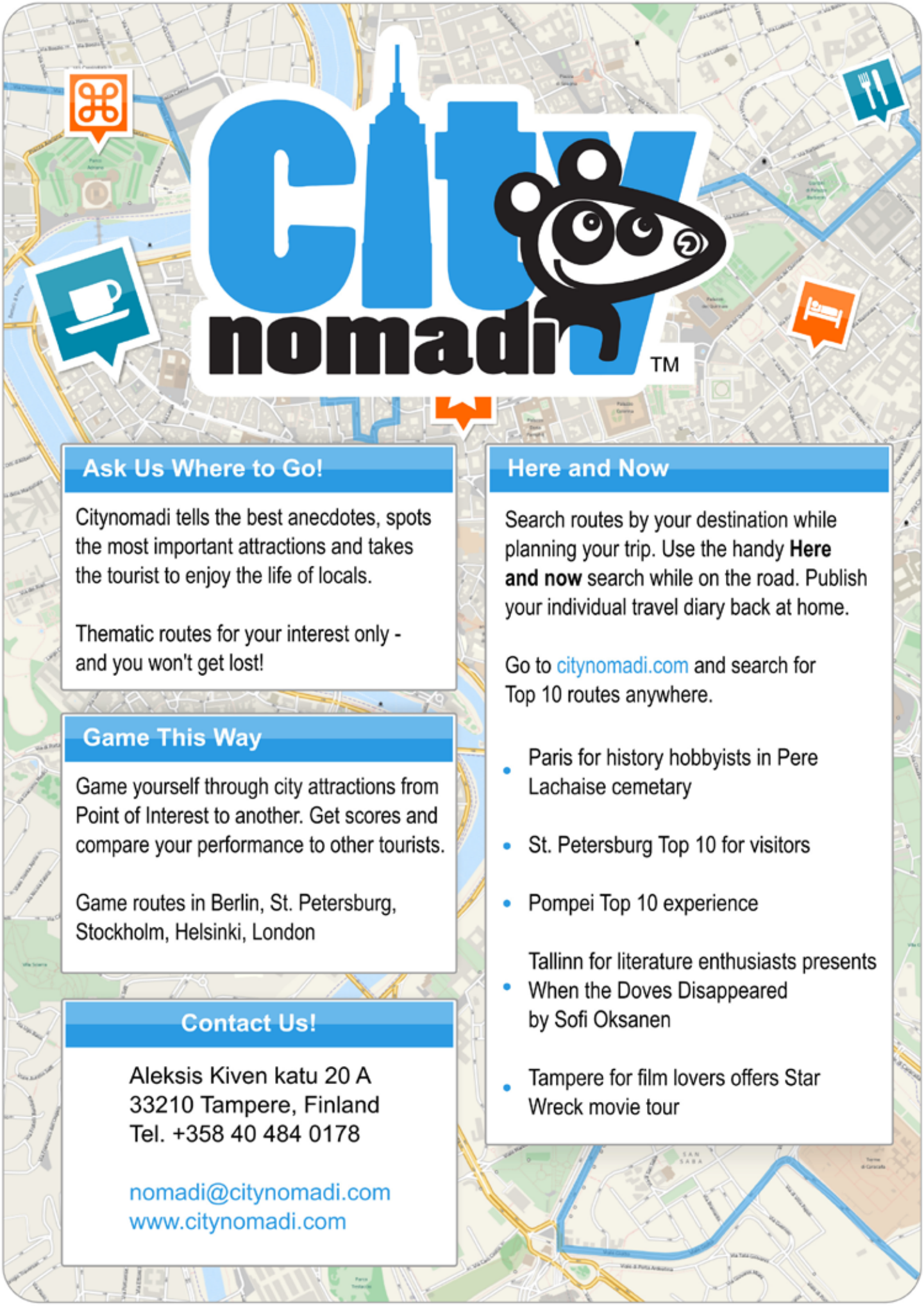
A move onto a small holding in the heart of Wales has led to semi-retirement but I still retain and cherish my membership of AHI, now metamorphosed from SIBH, though I do detect two trends that I believe limit the amount of true interpretation of the natural world. First is a move towards 'heritage' being more restricted to human history and therefore interpreting stories that are integral to 'tourist attractions' such as museums and country houses; and along with that a tendency for media to dominate over message. In the natural environment there is a continuing tendency for nature reserves to concentrate on the rare and protected, which I fully accept is the purpose of the reserve but is unlikely to resonate with a large audience unless providing a spectacle such as nesting ospreys.

THE WAY I SEE IT

At the same time, this gives little scope for interpretation of landscape within the great outdoors. Our National Parks continue to attract huge numbers of visitors, but by offering interpretation primarily in dedicated visitor centres they attract and interpret only to those with a positive incentive to go through the door, and the rocks and landscape evolution that makes the area distinctive is rarely presented in a way that the non-geologist can easily understand. The two concepts most difficult to grasp are the length of geological time and the physical changes to the landscape during that period. I am hoping to solve these problems through my latest project, a smart-phone app for the evolution of The Wrekin, Shropshire's favourite hill, which will enable the visitor to stand on the summit and plot 600 million years of evolution of the hill, from its origins near the Antarctic Circle to its present position amidst arguably the most diverse 100 sq km of rock and landscape in the world.

But for now just reflect on the fact that the Earth is still moving. The current disaster in Nepal is a product of the continental plate of India continuing to drift northwards into Asia, pushed by an expanding ocean floor to the south. Far from the generalisation that the hills are old landscape, the Himalayas are our youngest mountains and getting higher. How much of that will be interpreted in the heritage of the future?

Andrew Jenkinson is Director of Scenesetters.
andrew@scenesdetters.co.uk



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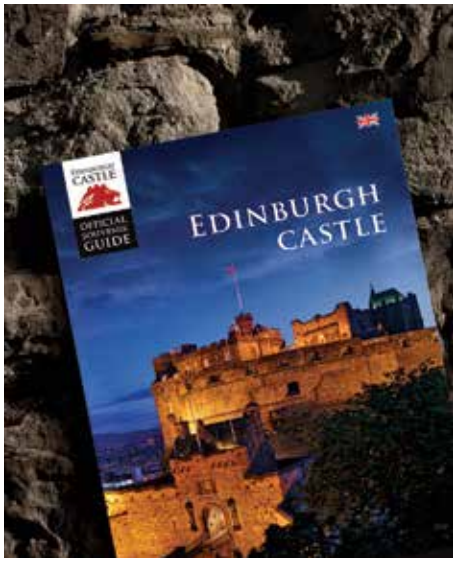
Visitor signage and map –
Imperial War Museum, Duxford

Signage Imperial War Museum, Duxford

Visitor interpretation Exeter Cathedral, Exeter



Visitor guides Edinburgh Castle, Historic Scotland

01872 248355 info@abgdesign.uk.com www.abgdesign.uk.com