



EXCEL LENCE

Taking Flight: The Journey to Excellence

Impressions of the joint AHI/IE
conference from a mainland European

Muriel Reviews Conference from 1957!

AHI 2017 Discover Heritage Awards

Museums and historic properties/sites

Landscapes, forests, nature reserves, parks
and gardens

Visitor/Interpretation Centres

Community projects

Interpretation for a target audience

AHI Award for Excellence in
interpretation

Lifetime achievement awards

Acknowledgements



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Foreword

Welcome to the AHI 2017 Discover Heritage Awards special issue of Interpretation Journal with all the 2017 awards winners, runners-up, commended and recipients of the lifetime achievement award.

Also included is a feature article about excellence from Ted Cable and Larry Beck of Kansas State University and San Diego State University respectively, featuring a little-known story about the Wright Brothers to illustrate key factors in the successful pursuit of excellence in interpretation. They identify passion, professionalism and purpose as being essential in powering the journey to interpretive excellence, noting that the journey to excellence comes at a cost and requires courage but the rewards are great if one dares to strive for excellence. Inspirational reading for projects that might be contenders for the 2019 awards.

In this issue, we celebrate excellence in interpretation by showcasing those who were either commended or shortlisted for the 2017 awards. Once again the job of the judging panel was a difficult one, first in shortlisting the entries to be assessed by the site judges, then in choosing the category winners from a diverse range of exceptional projects. The judging panel were looking for projects that combined thorough interpretive planning with innovation and the courage to make changes based on evaluation – helping people to think and see in new ways. Not every shortlisted entry reached these heights but where winners excelled in only one or two areas, they made up for their shortcomings through being exceptional in other areas.

We feel that the recipient of the AHI Award for Excellence in Interpretation took a very new approach to getting back to the roots of interpretation – to use it to further conservation. In doing so, it brought historic house furniture out of its well-choreographed yet often overlooked set positions and provoked visitors to see it in new ways. You'll also see that this year we have awarded the lifetime achievement award to two long-standing members.

As ever, AHI is grateful to the sponsors who have made the 2017 Discover Heritage Awards possible – Wessex Archaeology as overall sponsor and Bett Associates, Bright, Canal & River Trust, Colour Heroes and Minerva Heritage for pinning their colours to the masts of each category. Without them the awards could not happen. We also give a big shout of thanks to all the people who have volunteered their time to manage and judge the awards the organising committee, judging panel and site judges.

Bill Bevan

AHI Chair, Judging Panel



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 password is Inverness2017

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

News & Views

As well as the excitement of the awards and the tension of the 2017 awards ceremony, so ably presided over by Bob Jones OBE FAHI, the last six months since the summer issue of Interpretation Journal have been a somewhat busy time for the AHI Trustees!

We have just returned from our biggest conference in 10 years. Inverness was huge, in terms of numbers of delegates, the landscape and the themes we discussed. *Making connections: Re-imagining landscapes* was an enormous joint effort with our colleagues in Interpret Europe, which both marked the 10th anniversary of the Vital Spark (an international conference hosted by AHI and NAI in Aviemore in 2007) and the changing times we live in during the process of Brexit.

We have made great progress developing our new website, thanks to the leadership on this by Trustee Suzanna Jones. The new website should be more engaging and clearer to navigate, as well as a lot easier to update and maintain. We will launch the site within months. The ahi.org.uk URL will remain the same so there is no need to update bookmarks. In the meantime, the existing website has a new best-practice guideline. Written by Philip Ryland and Jim Mitchell, it covers the interpretation of Nature and Wildlife. It is one of a number of new guidelines in the pipeline.

If a large joint conference, new website and the biennial awards weren't enough to contend with in 2017, AHI is also in the process of transferring to a new charitable legal entity. AHI will soon become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This status was identified as a necessary next step for AHI when we created the current constitution in 2013 and has been recommended by The Charity Commission as the correct type of structure for AHI as a membership charity. This gives members and trustees more protection and assures we are constituted on the right footing to meet charitable legislation. AHI owes a massive thanks to Laura Sole who has progressed this important development with members of the CIO sub-group. We have taken legal advice throughout this process. The new entity and constitution will be in place in 2018.

AHI also participated fully at the Museums and Heritage Show in May, thanks to the lead taken on this by Barbara Hamilton and the many members who volunteered on the stall to meet attendees at the show. Our stall and talk on, Interpretive Writing, attracted huge numbers of people, not only raising the profile of AHI and interpretation within

the heritage sector, but also gaining the organisation more new members. This has been part of a positive trend over the last year where membership has been steadily growing, following a decline in the wake of the financial crash of 2008.

Hopefully you have completed a training questionnaire over the summer. We will use your responses to inform the development of the training we offer. We are already taking some ideas forward as we partner with the Group for Education in Museums (GEM) to develop and deliver an intermediate course in interpretation as part of GEM's Arts Council funded Learning and Sharing Centre.

As announced at conference, our 2018 conference location is confirmed. We look forward to seeing you in Chester on the 3rd to 5th October, where planning for an exciting and diverse range of site visits is already underway. More details next year.

Finally, AHI said goodbye in Inverness to Ruth Coulthard after seven-years service as Conference Manager. She's staying around to help our new Conference Manager – Sheena Irving. AHI gives a massive note of thanks for Ruth for all her hard work in York, Shropshire, Edinburgh, Manchester, Stonehenge, Belfast and Inverness!

Debate

Taking Flight: The Journey to Excellence

Ted Cable and Larry Beck debate a course of action which leads to exceptionally good, outstanding, meritorious and, yes, excellent interpretation.

“The test of the artist does not lie in the will with which he goes to work, but in the excellence of the work he produces.”

THOMAS AQUINAS

What is excellence?

Dictionary definitions of the word “excellence” often include phrases like “a state or quality of being exceptionally good” or “possessing outstanding quality or superior merit.” We believe that those who are honored with the prestigious awards described in this issue of the Association of Heritage Interpreters journal likely traveled this path to excellence. And we hope that those who read this essay will be inspired to pursue excellence in interpretation and achieve the successes described herein.

Consistent with the introductory quote by Aquinas, the AHI awards recognize that interpretation is indeed an art that results in excellent interpretive products. Or in the case of some awards, AHI honors a lifetime of producing excellent results. Likewise, the aim of this essay is to speak to the production of excellent tangible products (i.e., programs, plans, exhibits) rather than merely excellent efforts, excellent attitudes, excellent approaches, or having excellent credentials, although these may be related to the ultimate goal of producing an excellent interpretive product.

The Journey to excellence

We believe the following story illustrates what is required to achieve excellent results.

Most people have never heard of Samuel Pierpont Langley. In the early 20th century, when people all over the world were competing to be the first to fly, Samuel Pierpont Langley had every advantage. Money was not a problem. The U.S. War Department gave him \$50,000, an extraordinary amount of money in those days, to design a flying machine. Connections were not a problem. Langley was associated with Harvard University and the Smithsonian Museum. He could hire the best minds to work with him. Langley also had tremendous public support. The New York Times regularly reported on his progress and Americans everywhere were rooting for him.

Meanwhile, working in a garage in Ohio, Orville and Wilbur Wright had none of Langley's advantages. They had no money. They financed their dream of flight with proceeds from their bicycle shop. Not a single person on the Wright brothers' team had a college education, not even Orville or Wilbur. Nobody had heard of the Wright Brothers, so they had no public encouragement and media attention. They failed often. When the Wright brothers' team went to the field they reportedly took five sets of parts because that's how many times they would crash before supper. But they persevered and on December 17th, 1903, the Wright brothers took flight. No one from the press witnessed it. When word got out, instead of celebrations of their success, rivals soon were trying to take credit. Even after the granting of a patent by the Government, the Wright Brothers had to fight off patent infringements. Instead of investment in their success, the U.S. government did not want to buy their flying machine because they had just spent so much money on Langley's efforts.

The day the Wright brothers took flight, Samuel Pierpont Langley quit. He could have worked with the Wright Brothers to advance flying. But since he was not going to be the first, and because he was not going to get rich and famous, he quit.

So why does everybody know the Wright Brothers, but most people have never heard of Samuel Pierpont Langley? The difference was that Orville and Wilbur were driven by a cause, by a purpose. They passionately believed if they could get their machine to fly, it would change the world. Perhaps Samuel Pierpont Langley is unknown because he was pursuing a paycheck, not a passion.

As illustrated in the story of the Wright Brothers, the journey to excellence is fueled by three factors: Passion, Professionalism and Purpose.

Passion

“Nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm.”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Regardless of the endeavor, you cannot have passion without a purpose and you cannot achieve excellence in your purposes without passion. Building on the work of Enos Mills and Freeman Tilden, we compiled 15 guiding principles for interpreting nature and culture and first published them in the book *Interpretation for the 21st Century*. Our 15th principle states, “Passion is the essential ingredient for powerful and effective interpretation – passion for the resource and for those people who come to be inspired by it.” Freeman Tilden used the word “love” to describe his essential ingredient of excellent interpretation. Whether you call it love or passion, the emotional connection and commitment to the craft of interpretation gives rise to enthusiastic efforts leading to excellent accomplishments. The well-known adage that “enthusiasm is contagious” certainly applies to interpretation. Audiences will be drawn into enthusiastic interpretive efforts and share that enthusiasm. Likewise, boredom is also contagious. Methodical, uninspired interpretive efforts will spread apathy throughout the audience and coworkers.

Excellent interpreters are passionate interpreters.

Interpretation is a voyage of discovery in the field of human emotions and intellectual growth, and it is hard to foresee that time when the interpreter can confidently say, “Now we are wholly adequate to our task.”

Professionalism

“Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better.”

PAT RILEY

The journey to excellence requires continual steps toward increased professionalism. If you are passionate about interpretation, then you will want to perfect your craft and become increasingly more professional. These steps along the journey often require refueling and reinforcement as professionalism also can be lost. As Tilden noted more than a half century ago, “*Interpretation is a voyage of discovery in the field of human emotions and intellectual growth, and it is hard to foresee that time when the interpreter can confidently say, ‘Now we are wholly adequate to our task.’*”

Organizations such as AHI, Interpret Europe, National Association for Interpretation and others provide resources, guidance and encouragement in nurturing professionalism. Likewise, it behooves senior interpretation professionals to share their knowledge and insights with those seeking professional development.

We believe that excellence in interpretation comes with the understanding that the interpreter follows certain professional principles and best practices. In 2011, we revisited our 15 principles and associated each of them with a gift – such as revelation, provocation, wholeness, illumination, beauty, joy and hope – in a book titled

The Gifts of Interpretation. As interpreters gain in their ability to apply the professional principles and practices, they bear these gifts that can change the lives of those who seek interpretive experiences. Giving these gifts to audiences form the backbone – the foundation – of excellence in interpretation. Enhanced professionalism adds quality to these gifts and makes them more valuable and accessible.

As a measure of excellence we composed the following professional creed for the individual interpreter aspiring to excellence.

The Interpreter’s Creed

As a Practicing Interpreter, I Shall:

- Seek to serve visitors; to be an ambassador for the place I work; to instill in visitors the ability and desire to sense beauty in their surroundings.
- Seek to respect all the visitors with whom I come in contact and welcome them as I would welcome guests in my home; and to share equally my knowledge and passion regardless of the visitor’s age, gender, interests, physical abilities or cultural differences.
- Seek to be agreeable, look good, have a polished presence, speak in a well-modulated voice and be genuinely friendly.
- Seek to see the good, or the humor, in any situation and answer repetitious questions with enthusiasm, as if they were asked for the first time.

- Seek to convey only well-documented, accurate information.
- Seek to be an exemplary role model for environmentally responsible behavior by word and example.
- Seek to structure interpretive design and programming in such a way as to minimize the impact on cultural and environmental resources.
- Seek to improve my mind, continue learning about the resource and expand my learning about the principles and processes of interpretation that will ultimately benefit visitors to the site.
- Seek to help other interpreters achieve their interpretive goals, particularly assisting new interpreters to develop confidence and abilities.
- Believe in myself; give my best to the world and expect that the world will give its best to me.

Excellent interpreters strive to grow in their professionalism so that they might provide ever-increasing quality service to the public and the profession.

Purpose

“This is the true joy of life: the being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clot of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.”

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

What makes an interpretive product excellent is the degree to which it achieves its purposes. Interpretation as currently defined by the National Association for Interpretation begins with the words, “a mission-based communication process”. To achieve excellence, an interpretive product must be purposeful and aimed at achieving strategic mission-based objectives. These may be to create a stimulating visitor experience, teach certain concepts, provoke specific attitudes or behavior changes, or evoke powerful emotions. And, of course, unless you know what your objectives are you cannot evaluate the effectiveness of your efforts. In fact, in recognition of the essential role of having a defined purpose when interpreting, American scholar Dr. Sam Ham titled his most recent book, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*. Regarding the alternative, Jay Miller, current president of NAI, bemoans what he calls “pet the bunny” programs, meaning programs without defined purpose; programs bordering on the trivial. Excellent interpreters avoid investing their talents and time on such trivial programs or exhibits.

A purpose that almost everyone could agree on would be to make our world a better place. Heritage interpretation lends itself to a better world, but is rarely put out front and center. With that in mind, our most recent work is titled *Interpreting Cultural and Natural Heritage: For a Better World*. Each of the 21 chapters concludes with reference to the subtitle of the book; how the content of that chapter relates to changing the world for the better. We believe at the root of interpretation is the desire to make this world a better place through greater understanding, appreciation and sense of stewardship for culture and nature. This is interpretation's highest purpose. Perhaps the truest test of excellence in interpretation is its degree of effectiveness in making the world a better place.

Excellent interpreters interpret purposefully.

What price excellence?

“Excellence is the result of caring more than others think is wise, risking more than others think is safe, dreaming more than others think is practical, and expecting more than others think is possible.”

RONNIE OLDHAM

To achieve excellence, an interpretive product must be purposeful and aimed at achieving strategic mission-based objectives. These may be to create a stimulating visitor experience, teach certain concepts, provoke specific attitudes or behavior changes, or evoke powerful emotions.

Many readers and some AHI award winners will be able to relate to the Wright Brothers. They achieved excellence in spite of not having support or encouragement. They persevered through failed attempts at excellence. Upon achieving excellence, they may have had to fend off jealous competitors wanting to share in the credit. They pursued excellence without the promise of substantial financial reward. Certainly few in our field of interpretation achieve great wealth even from excellent work. Our riches and rewards are not measured in currency. Excellent interpreters achieve excellence through a passionate belief in a meaningful and important purpose and a passion to achieve that purpose. They pursue professionalism to achieve their purposes more effectively and efficiently.

Excellence in any endeavor does not come easily. It means striving to do more than what is required by others and the fundamental task at hand. A personal cost is required to gain excellence; an investment of time, energy and resources. Because excellence comes at a price, some people are unwilling to pay that price and settle for being satisfied with the satisfactory. To them, good is good enough. Moreover, given the costs and risks involved, striving for excellence often requires courage. The Wright Brothers did not stop with their first short, tenuous flight. They continued their sometimes dangerous and always demanding labor of love. Similarly, outstanding and courageous interpreters must dare to become excellent. As noted in the above quote, excellence in interpretation requires caring, risking, dreaming and expecting more than others who lack their purpose, passion and professionalism. Like the Wright Brothers, those who are honored in this journal can attest that the personal and professional rewards are worth all of the crashes on the journey to excellent results. And their results have collectively made the world a better place.

The Wright Brothers did not stop with their first short, tenuous flight. They continued their sometimes dangerous and always demanding labor of love. Similarly, outstanding and courageous interpreters must dare to become excellent.

Ted T. Cable, Ph. and Larry Beck, PhD are professors at Kansas State University and San Diego State University respectively. They have contributed extensively to the interpretation literature through several books and many journal and magazine articles. Both are Fellows of the National Association for Interpretation.

Reviews

Impressions of the joint AHI/IE conference from a mainland European

Having just returned home from Inverness, Janja Sivec shares a few impressions of her experience and the memories forged whilst enjoying many sandwiches.

The conference was a bit of a blind date, not knowing what to expect; I think there was a bit of reserve on both sides, but the site visits and evening entertainment were a huge success at bringing delegates from both organisations together.

In my opinion, the first keynote speaker, Drew Bennellick of the Heritage Lottery Fund, was very UK-focussed, which made his presentation more relevant to some delegates than others, but the second one, Carol Ritchie of the EUROPARC Federation, was brilliant and really made us think about landscape and stories. I think inviting somebody from the UK who is in charge of a big European organisation was a great analogy for the conference.

Some presentations I attended were more, others less, related to the theme of re-imagining the landscape, but then again landscape is such a broad term

and can be interpreted in very different ways. We all see it differently, which I tried to emphasise in a workshop that I led. But the site visits were spot on and really landscape themed, leading us from archaeological, geological and nature parks, to battlefields, up the mountains and over lochs to ancient castles. All situated in the beautiful and mysterious Scottish landscape.

It was interesting to listen to some presentations from UK delegates and attend a workshop about language and the difficulties with interpreting in two languages – mostly Gaelic and Welsh alongside English. It was interesting to listen to discussions about bilingualism and different point of views. Since we use so many different languages to interpret our heritage on mainland Europe, I felt a bit lost. I guess lessons could be learned on both sides here.

The final summing up speech from Susan Cross was (as expected) brilliant, bringing it all together: finalising thoughts about landscape; joining two organisations; meeting new people and going home with a mission to pick at least two people to stay in touch with. We shall see if we succeed.

The AHI Awards dinner was a very grand affair and all the short-listed finalists seemed very proud of being among the chosen ones. It was difficult for me to keep up, not knowing the places or the projects, and the presentations went by very quickly. A special moment for me was when Michael Glen was awarded one of the lifetime achievement awards. I met him at the IE founding conference in Slovenia and he was one of my first contacts in heritage interpretation. The evening entertainment with traditional singing and dancing was just brilliant and, again, one more key element in joining us together.

Looking back, I think the conference was more oriented to the political landscape than geographical/geological, which I think is extremely good, since IE is trying to promote interpretation all over Europe and the UK is dealing with Brexit.

For me, the conference was interesting and well organised. I have met interesting people and got to visit Scotland.

.....
Janja Sivec, NGO Legends, Slovenia
 (janja.sivec@dlegende.com)



Delegates await the results at the 2017 awards ceremony

Muriel reviews conference from 1957!

Following her appearance at the conference as one half of Muriel and Jasper, costumed interpreter Jackie Lee gets into character as 1950s housewife Muriel Wylie to give her own take on Inverness 2017.

Many months ago I received an invitation from Ruth Coulthard on behalf of Dr Bevan (no relation, as far as I know, to the socialist Mr Bevan) and his committee of the AHI to speak to some heritage interpreters at their confabulation.

Apparently heritage interpreters are people who tell us all about what has been going on in the past, and how we should see it from our viewpoint of the present.

A large number of these people work in the countryside and therefore do not approve of sling backs or nail polish. I, for one, cannot understand why nature cannot be glamorous. I think much could be done with rucksacks, for example, to make them more stylish. I myself would go for something in a slubbed dupion as it would catch the fading light. I notice also that when I mention the subject of a Mackintosh Square there are often barely

suppressed giggles from these outdoorsy types. I know it must be terribly amusing to sit on a damp log in a forest or a mossy boulder by a babbling brook, but there is a price to pay for prolonged damp.

Anyway I am in danger of digressing which Jasper says makes AHI people wince, along with complicated sentences. Ruth and Dr Bevan not only asked if I could provide one of my lecturettes, but would I write my reflections on my time spent at the conference; 500 words would be perfect, as “Muriel, who else can we trust not to split an infinitive?” I know they like brevity and layered text, but frankly one is hard pressed to write 500 words or less on one’s bag.

One of course always rises to a challenge. I am confident that my lecturette on the subject of suppa with the gentry opened the eyes of many delegates to a way of

life that clearly needs their attention. In turn I too learnt much when I attended a wonderful masterclass on olive oil in the Adriatic where people have been encouraged to take pride in the history of olive cultivation in their region. I am wondering if we might do the same for the turnip in Scotland.

Jasper was fascinated by the piece on Hadrian’s Wall and fully intends to organise his Hysterical, I mean Historical, Group outing to the Wall, now fully aware that there is more than one fort to call at along this marvellous site.

There was one area of my conference experience where I think there might be room for future improvement and “re-imagining” and that is the area of the soup and sandwich lunch. May I suggest that while smooth soups have their place at dinner parties, “soups with bits” are



Conference delegates at Knockan Crag



Study visit to Clava Cairns



Muriel Wylie trains conference delegates in 1950s Scottish etiquette

essential for a filling lunch. We are talking broth here. I also took issue over one particular aspect of sandwich making when I suggested removing the crusts and, as to fillings, my comment to the catering staff that “we are trying to encourage visitors not feed chain gangs” did not go down as well as I had hoped.

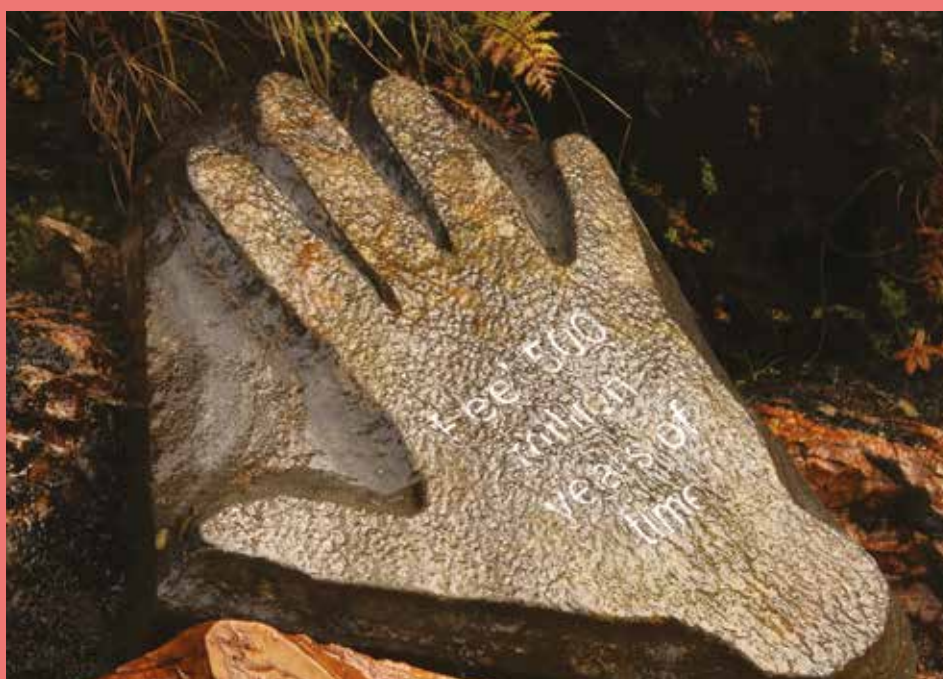
Thursday saw Jasper set off with some of his new interpreter chums (they are a jolly bunch) to see the wilder side of the Highlands and made it all the way over to Wester Ross and the impressive site of Knockan Crag, having first stopped off at Beinn Eighe Nature Reserve opened in 1951. Jasper enjoyed this immensely.

With him safely out of the way I embarked, with some of the gals I had met, to the ancient site of Clava Cairns, Culloden and the icing on the cake – a trip on Loch Ness to the magnificent ruin that is Urquhart Castle. Despite Constance Whyte’s book on the loch and its supposed monster, nothing was seen but calm waters.

I must also mention dear Ruth who is simply marvellous at arranging everything, even when people are asking her a thousand conflicting questions at once. She most certainly did a wonderful job.

All in all I would say it was a simply marvellous few days in the Highlands.

Muriel and Jasper interpret the 1950s through a blog which is ‘written’ exactly 60 years before the date it is published
<http://murielandjasper.co.uk>



Interactive stone rock carving to interpret geological time, Knockan Crag

Christopher Lee

A large number of these people work in the countryside and therefore do not approve of sling backs or nail polish. I, for one, cannot understand why nature cannot be glamorous. I think much could be done with rucksacks, for example, to make them more stylish.

MUSEUMS AND HISTORIC PROPERTIES/SITES

This is a project that is based upon a collection, building or property. A museum is defined as a collection-based organisation rather than the display of objects at a visitor centre. Museum-led projects that take parts of their collection off-site to places that are not visitor centres are eligible. A historic property/site could be a house, castle, industrial or archaeological site.

Winner

LIFTING THE LID AT THE VYNE

What the entrant said:

Lifting the Lid grasps the opportunity afforded by a massive roof conservation project to tell the royal story at the Tudor heart of the building. It reveals to our visitors and members their vital role as the latest in the long line of guardians whose love keeps the place standing.

STUART MAUGHAN



Susanna Austin

Welcome to the Vyne

On arriving at the site, receiving a timed ticket and then walking to the house, the overwhelming feeling is one of excitement at seeing The Vyne in what are extraordinary circumstances.

The interpretive plan had a clear set of aims and objectives, setting out strong themes and intended core audiences. Examples of where evaluation has been used to construct the interpretation show clearly that this project has benefited from a thought-trough and structured approach. The property team have trained a keen and enthusiastic group of volunteers who are adding value to the visitor experience and enjoyment.

This solid foundation has allowed The Vyne to create some very effective interpretation for their project. The rooftop walkway route was the highlight of the visit. It was memorable and unique and not only provided an overview of the project work within the space, but also had tantalising glimpses into the grounds and at tree level; this was a new experience for visitors at this property. It was of interest on many different levels, beyond informing the visitor of the conservation works. The roof was a fantastic example of utilising subtle interpretive media to support the primary attraction of getting to walk above the rooftops of the house and see the conservation in action. This section used temporary and interchangeable panels to inform and update visitors.

In the ground floor rooms of the house there are some stand-out examples of effective interpretation that tell parts of the overarching story very well. The way the first three rooms have been laid out to convey the theme of packing away the collection achieves the effect of telling the visitor that conservation work is going on in the house, whilst at the same time giving the sense that layers of history are being packed away to reveal the 'Tudor heart' of the building. Using this interpretive approach also allows the objects to be mounted and displayed in unconventional ways; we noted this was particularly engaging for visitors, who began to see them as objects in their own right, rather than just furniture in a room.

The chapel is also an incredible space to enter; ambient noise, smells and images evoke a sense of being in the chapel when a mass is taking place, witnessed by both the visitor and King Henry VIII.

Getting onto the roof through the 'Lifting the Lid' project was a very special experience due to the scale of the project, and created a unique and memorable visit. From this physical and interpretation perspective, the aims and objectives were definitely met, and it was easy to understand and connect to the project, The Vyne and the National Trust.



Victorian family relations interpreted as dinner place settings in the Dining Parlour

Dennis Gilbert

The roof was a fantastic example of utilising subtle interpretive media to support the primary attraction of getting to walk above the rooftops of the house and see the conservation in action.

Overall, the project engaged visitors on an intellectual and emotional level, and provoked thought and discussion beyond the visit. We really liked the name of the project, and the delivery of it. For us it 'did what it said on the tin'. There was a sense that the budget had been used wisely.

The National Trust
The Vyne, Vyne Road, Sherborne St John,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG24 9HL

Runner-up

TANK MEN – THE STORY OF THE FIRST CREWS



Photo courtesy of the Tank Museum

A tank man welcomes visitors to the new gallery

Using eight stories, objects and archive material of tank men from the museum's own collections was a powerful interpretive tool. It had a noticeable effect on visitors in the space; they listened intently to guides, discussed the tank men's lives and objects on display, usually in intergenerational groups, and dwelled in the gallery space for a good length of time.

The level of interpretation within the displays was pitched at a suitable level for most audiences, with very little assumed knowledge, and new interpretive techniques were used. The use of silhouettes with the names, age and pre-war job title of the eight tank men in the exhibition was an effective way of introducing them to the visitor, though they would benefit from being nearer the new exhibition.

The attempt to bring eight human interest stories to the tank story of the First World War, as well the cabinets displaying the tank in art or the wider social history of the tank in British culture, works well. There is scope to integrate the stories of the tank men more effectively with the tanks in which they served, and to give them more centre stage – the Eliot Hotblack display being a perfect example.

Overall, a real sense of remembrance and reflection has been achieved through an emotional connection with the tank men and their stories, rather than solely the tanks themselves.

The Tank Museum
King George V Road, Bovington BH20 6JG

Tank Men – The Story of the First Crews is a timely exhibition. It has helped the Tank Museum to mark the 100 anniversary of the first use of tanks in battle, whilst at the same time giving the museum a chance to update the interpretation in a 17-year-old gallery space that was beginning to show its age.

The project team worked from a clear set of aims and objectives. The decision to use the evidence of their earlier evaluation exercises and introduce more emotive narratives into their exhibition is to be commended.



Photo courtesy of the Tank Museum

Visitors can climb up and look inside First World War British tanks



The Gallos sculpture is dramatically located to reflect the relationship between fact and fiction

Photo courtesy of English Heritage

Runner-up

TINTAGEL CASTLE – WHERE LEGEND MEETS HISTORY

AHI
AWARDS 2017

RUNNER UP

Tintagel Castle dates to the 13th century but legends link the site to King Arthur, Tristan and Iseult. The project includes a new introductory exhibition and a series of outdoor panels and art installations. It aims to emotionally connect visitors to the site's unique mixture of history and legend.

Where Legend Meets History has met its key objective of engaging visitors emotionally through exploring how history and legend both play their part at this visually dramatic place. The strong themes and storylines are evident in the interpretation and this bold approach allows for powerful, engaging and accessible messages.

Around the site, a series of small interpretation panels are well positioned, well written and visually appealing without being obtrusive. The themes introduced in the entrance centre are reinforced and explored, without precluding other interesting topics such as geology and wildlife. Among these are four more elaborate panels that each tell the tale of a key character. These are enhanced by 3D bronze representations

of objects connected to that character. These are a very appealing and effective way to show changes in material culture over time and introduce a human element to ruins that are hard to imagine as living places. Scattered around the site are interesting 'discoveries', such as the story on slates in the medieval garden, that add a sense of distinctiveness to the project.

The most striking element of the project is the sculpture 'Gallos' on a cliff top at the far end of the island. This is a thought-provoking comment on the shifting interaction between fact and fiction, and between human power and nature. It is cleverly situated to be dramatic in its setting without impinging on views from most of the site.

The interpretive media is well chosen and well executed. The high quality of the interpretation is evident. The artistic elements are thought provoking and the interpretation is sensitive to place; the Merlin and Gallos sculptures are both powerful and enhance the landscape. The 2D design, illustrative style and scriptwriting are all strong.

The visitor experience is high quality, the introductory exhibition works well at setting the scene and, although there are a fairly large number of interpretive panels around the site, the visitor is not bombarded with information.

Accessibility at Tintagel is difficult; the Castle has many steps and narrow paths and is inaccessible to some people. As people often visit in family groups this means that some members of the group are excluded from visiting all the site, and future development could address this by interpreting the castle from the café and quay area.

Children are catered for through events, a family trail, along with low reading heights, tactile elements and the use of story in the panels.

This is a well planned and delivered project, its key success being the bold and evident theming.

English Heritage Trust
Tintagel Castle, Castle Road, Tintagel,
Cornwall PL34 0HE

Commended

BRITISH MOTOR MUSEUM REDEVELOPMENT & COLLECTIONS CENTRE PROJECT



Photo courtesy of the British Motor Museum

The new British Motor Museum galleries

The redevelopment displays good practice in front-end research, interpretive planning, visitor consultation and evaluation which has clearly led to a step change in the way parts of the collection are displayed and the audiences it appeals to.

The display of the cars is very appealing. It is excellent to see a museum not afraid to self-evaluate and to put changes into practice based on that evaluation. This clearly sets the museum on the road to creating more engaging interpretation.

There is great potential for more dynamic approaches to displaying the cars to offer greater opportunities for visitor interaction with the collection. There are opportunities to further connect wider stories with the cars and to excite visitors about why certain cars are important socially as well as technically.

British Motor Museum
Banbury Road, Gaydon, Warwickshire
CV35 0BJ

LANDSCAPES, FORESTS, NATURE RESERVES, PARKS AND GARDENS

For the interpretation of cultural and/or natural heritage of the wider outdoors in any form, from a small garden to a landscape.

Winner

POWERSCOURT ESTATE ORIENTATION VIDEO AND MULTILINGUAL GUIDES



What the entrant said:

We are so pleased to receive this prestigious award from the Association of Heritage Interpretation. Although Powerscourt Gardens receives 250,000 visitors a year, our new video and audio guides enable visitors to enjoy a guided tour with my family as we would normally deliver a private tour. We are delighted with the positive feedback on the guides from our visitors as delivering them an exceptional tourism experience is our priority. I would like to thank the AHI for the honour and recognition this award brings to Powerscourt Gardens.

SARAH SLAZENGER

One of the key aims of the project was to create a memorable and accessible experience for both domestic and international visitors, and to share some of the hitherto untold stories of Powerscourt and its people.

The beauty of the setting is outstanding and requires a sympathetic interpretive approach that neither intrudes nor detracts from the surroundings. The low key audio guide succeeds admirably in enhancing the visitor experience while integrating seamlessly into the parkland environment.



These icons signpost stops on the thematic audio tours of the gardens



Photo courtesy of Powerscourt Estate

The Slazenger family audio guide narrators: Anthony Wingfield and Sarah Slazenger (left) and Alex Slazenger (right)

The decision to use the owners of Powerscourt as the audio narrators works extremely well, creating a sense that one is being given a personal insight into the Wingfield and Slazenger families, the trials and tribulations involved in returning Powerscourt Gardens to their former glory, and enhancing them on an ongoing basis.

For example, in one of the audio segments, a family member recounts how as children they used to enjoy exploring the numerous rooms of Powerscourt House and ride horses along the approach avenue. That this was all destroyed in the disastrous fire of 1974 creates a sense of poignancy for the listener, but given that the house and gardens have managed to 'rise from the ashes' and can now be enjoyed by so many people, this is ultimately a positive story.

Visitors are encouraged to watch the audio visual presentation before venturing out into the gardens. Like the audio tour, this film is presented and narrated by the owners of Powerscourt Gardens. Having the family introduce themselves on screen allows the visitor to put faces to the voices they hear on the tour, helping to create a more personal interpretive experience. Much of the information presented in the film is crucial for giving context to what visitors see and hear as they tour the gardens. Both the audio visual and audio guides are multilingual and are available in English, Chinese, German, Spanish and French.

Powerscourt Estate and Martello Media
Powerscourt Estate, Enniskerry,
Co. Wicklow, A98 WoDo



Photo courtesy of Powerscourt Estate

A visitor enjoys a Podcatcher audio guide

In the words of the site judges:

Powerscourt Gardens' new tourism experiences – an audio visual presentation welcoming visitors, an audio guide for adults and family action quests for children – enrich the visitor experience.

Runner-up with special mention by judging panel

THE HIVE – KEW GARDENS



The Hive installation presents a dramatic and memorable visitor experience at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. The multi-sensory effects are triggered by actual bee activity that create a unique experience. The main interpretive theme identified was: 'We need pollinators and pollinators need us. Human impact on pollinators is real and could affect our food supply.'

The Hive is sensitively placed within the garden landscape and is hidden from wider view adding to the drama of its discovery. It is further enhanced by the wildlife meadow planted around it and its accompanying pollinators.

The interior of the Hive is accessible by a slope of stairs and provides an immersive experience of sight and sound. Its design reflects the geometry of a bee hive. The soundscape includes the buzzing of bees in the key of C and specially commissioned music inspired by this sound.

The Hive is sensitively placed within the garden landscape and is hidden from wider view adding to the drama of its discovery.

Explainers answer visitors' questions and special 'bone conductors' enable visitors to 'hear' different bee sounds – vibrations sent through their jaw and skull, reinforcing the importance of vibration in bee communication. The sound of a newly emerged virgin queen 'talking' to an unborn queen is haunting.



An interpretation panel designed to look like a bee hive

Other elements support the interpretive plan theme and aims, including the site leaflet, films, interpretive panels and the Pollination Trail. A number of panels explain the significance of the installation in more detail. The judges particularly

liked the panels designed to look like bee hives, a nice touch creating the right feel and supporting the theme.

**Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond,
Surrey TW9 3AE**

Runner-up

HAMPTON COURT PALACE GARDENS PERMANENT INTERPRETATION



Photo courtesy of Historic Royal Palaces

Inside the shepherd's hut

The objectives of the permanent interpretation are clear in the interpretation scheme that includes permanent garden panels, a shepherd's hut and charabanc.

The gardens' history in terms of their use, key characters and plant species are clearly communicated in the panels across the garden and hang together well. They clearly follow a format which enables visitors to grasp and engage with the content being delivered, which focuses on the formal history of the gardens and their development. The panels are located at points to which visitors are drawn or where they enter and are at an appropriate height for wheelchair users.



Photo courtesy of Historic Royal Palaces

Graphics on deck chairs designed for those seeking relaxation

The shepherd's hut is well situated in view of the main visitor route and is full of interesting information, artefacts and photos detailing the work, plants and tools and the people involved in the gardens. The Cabinet of Curiosity is effective and visitors are engaged in exploring the jars, pots and drawers. They are drawn towards the hut through the doorway which doubles as a blackboard indicating current activities and wildlife to look out for.

The hut cannot be accessed by wheelchair users or those with other mobility issues so there is a large print book provided in a cupboard on the back of the hut.

The wayfinding map leaflet complements the scheme beautifully. It is clear, illustrated in an engaging way and provides points of interest to look out for. The 'year in the life of the garden' film is viewable online and there is a condensed silent version on-site. To have this film located fully on-site would be a nice addition to the scheme.

Historic Royal Palaces
Hampton Court Palace, East Molesey
KT8 9AU

Runner-up

SECRETS OF THE HIGH WOODS



The Secrets of the High Woods project aims to reveal the meanings and relationships of the archaeology of the area discovered through the use of LIDAR technology. LIDAR is a way of surveying landscapes and structures using a laser form of radar. The key theme is that this is a landscape where people have lived for thousands of years and whose ancient stories lie hidden below the trees of the High Woods.

This project is well thought out and well presented. The design is appealing and the mobility elements of the display work well as a 'travelling exhibition'. Visitor feedback and evaluation is very strong and the designers employ a wide range of media to appeal to different user groups, especially children and younger tech-savvy visitors.

There is a strong element of community involvement with volunteers assisting with archaeology in the field and helping bring the story to life in the exhibition. Innovative media such as augmented reality, CGI and gaming technology is used alongside more traditional media such as display panels, oral history recordings and real people to talk to.

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**South Downs National Park Authority
 and Jam Creative**
**South Downs Centre, North Street,
 Midhurst, West Sussex GU29 9DH**



Photo courtesy of South Downs National Park Authority

Tablets, maps and video screens engage young learners



Sponsored by Bett Associates

VISITOR/INTERPRETATION CENTRES

This category includes new visitor centres as well as established centres producing new interpretation. A centre may be linked to a property, site, landscape or whole region. It may be a stand-alone building or set within a larger building, such as a tourist information centre. Entrants were judged on how they used the built space of a centre to tell the cultural or natural heritage story of a property, site, landscape or region. An eligible centre can include a collection of objects in its displays, but the centre itself should not be a collecting museum.

Winner

MAN & BOY EXHIBITION AT SEAMUS HEANEY HOMEPLACE



In the words of the site judges:

Engaged by Mid Ulster District Council, Tandem developed a visionary, multisensory interpretive experience about the life and writing of the Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney, situated in the very locality where he grew up and from which he drew so much inspiration.



Photo courtesy of Tandem Design

Visitors are asked for comments, poems and drawings in the final gallery

The exhibition provides visitors with the opportunity to gain an understanding of Seamus Heaney, the family man, whilst attaining an insight into the impact and inspiration that neighbours, peers and the surrounding landscape had on him, especially during his formative years.

The visitor centre is divided into three themed zones: People and Place, Imagination and Inspiration, and Release Your Inner Artist. Each zone uses a variety of media to enable visitors to explore the theme through a range of inspirational content. This is a well-considered approach, providing a diversity of

methods in which to engage with the story being told and meeting the needs of visitors with varying degrees of understanding and abilities.

There is an effective and sympathetic use of visuals to support the interpretive aims – and these are apparent from the vestibule right through the building. The judicious use of text and some inspired graphics make this a memorable visitor experience that does justice to its subject.

A great deal of thought has gone into the final part of the exhibition with a wide variety of media and interactive exhibits on offer. There is a diverse variety of thought-provoking activities, such as the 'star wall' where visitors vote on their favourite poem, creative art activities and a panel where people are encouraged to 'build' their own poems by placing words into a template, resulting in some memorable and interesting results.



Photo courtesy of Tandem Design

Heaney's own words are used effectively in the HomePlace

The visitor centre was designed to offer a 'fitting tribute to one of Ireland's cultural giants. 'The feedback shows only very high ratings, suggesting that this has been achieved. Renowned poet Michael Longley describes HomePlace as 'an echo chamber for the poet's beautiful lines'.

This is a very good exhibition – one site judge knew little of Heaney and his work before the visit and left with a greater understanding of him and the sources of his poetry. In fact, this exhibition makes poetry more accessible through an exploration of the influences that inspired Heaney – man and boy from Bellaghy.

Mid-Ulster District Council and Tandem Design
Seamus Heaney HomePlace, 45 Main Street, Bellaghy BT45 8HT

What the entrant said:

On behalf of Seamus Heaney HomePlace, I would like to say how absolutely delighted we all have been since we received the AHI 2017 Discover Heritage Award. We were so pleased to be shortlisted, and to win was a very pleasant surprise.

BRIAN MCCORMICK, MANAGER, SEAMUS HEANEY HOMEPLACE

Runner-up with special mention by judging panel

GPO WITNESS HISTORY VISITOR CENTRE

AHI
AWARDS 2017

RUNNER UP



Photo courtesy of Mark Leslie

Touchscreens explore the issues behind the objects

If interpreters like a challenge, then the brief for the GPO Witness History visitor centre certainly doesn't disappoint. What has been delivered in the exhibition is impressive and perhaps a model for conciliatory interpretation covering a highly charged story.

GPO Witness History, in the courtyard of Dublin's 200-year-old General Post Office (GPO), was purpose-built for Ireland's Decade of Centenaries, celebrating its role as the rebel headquarters during the Easter Rising of 1916, the pivotal event of modern Irish History.

The brief called for contested history to be presented in an accessible, inclusive, layered and interactive manner to appeal to audiences of every kind. Overarching aims included: to reclaim Ireland's revolution from narrow political partisanship; to provoke reflection and debate on the causes of political violence; to promote understanding and

reconciliation within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain; and to stimulate visitors to record their own social, cultural and political aspirations.

This very contentious subject is told in a remarkably balanced and respectful manner. The experience was engaging and immersive without being trivialised or sensationalised. The exhibition is extremely thought provoking with the interpretation going further to capture and share visitors' thoughts and views. Visitors are encouraged to think about the rising, its causes and consequences and question 'who owns history?'. The interpretation caters for those with a wide range of knowledge and viewpoints on the subject and uses a wide range of media, including costumed interpreters.

The immersive film is the main 'wow' of the experience making the story intellectually accessible to the broadest range of audiences. The nature of the attraction, based around 'causes-event-consequences', makes the film a particularly appropriate choice of media to bring the story to life. By being played within the actual building, the viewer certainly feels that they are in the midst of the action as the GPO is under attack.

The 'witness' approach to the rising successfully places the visitor in an objective bubble within the heart of the story. This was a particularly clever interpretive approach and the foundation for successfully navigating such a politically charged subject.

The GPO Witness History visitor centre demonstrates how highly controversial events can be interpreted in ways that encourage social and political cohesion and understanding.

**GPO Witness History Visitor Centre
and Martello Media
The General Post Office, O'Connell
St Lower, Dublin D01 F5P2**



The Parade and Protest Gallery

Photo courtesy of Mark Leslie

Runner-up

PEARSE CULTURAL CENTRE



Photo courtesy of Bright

Screens are grouped together to present a display wall



Photo courtesy of Bright

A motion-triggered projector



Photo courtesy of Bright

An historic map of Ireland overlays part of the floor

The Pearse Cultural Centre has been created to introduce the region and its tangible and intangible heritage through Patrick Pearse, Irish teacher, barrister, poet, writer, nationalist and political activist. He was one of the leaders of the Easter Rising in 1916.

The centre focuses on Pearse's legacy and what drew him to Connemara rather than the life and work of the man himself. Its aims are to create a hub for celebrating Irish as a contemporary living language and the Gaeltacht culture, to highlight Connemara as a region of outstanding natural beauty, to provide interpretation about Patrick Pearse, to meet the needs of the local community for social and learning opportunities throughout the year and, finally, to act as a flagship gateway site on the Wild Atlantic Way.

The centre excels in its use of the physical location, the beautifully designed space, the various media elements, the deep knowledge and enthusiasm of the guides and of course the cottage itself. It tends to focus on information, while the guides themselves provide deeper insights into the site and Pearse himself.

It was decided at the planning stage not to go too deeply into Pearse as a revolutionary, or on any other aspect of his life, as the centre wanted to avoid repetition with other exhibitions in Dublin. Bearing in mind the iconic position this man holds in Irish history, and that the centre is marketed as part of 'Pearse's Cottage', this could raise visitor expectations that they would be provided with more information about the man.

What makes the centre stand out is the design, architecture, materials, the conceptual framework and the clear themed structure supported by a range of topics offering a very interesting perspective on the landscape and culture. Most importantly, it is the terrific guides who provide the critical interpretive element that helps visitors establish an emotional connection with the site.

**Údarás na Gaeltachta and Bright
Ros Muc, Co. Galway, Ireland**

Runner-up

VOICES FROM THE WORKHOUSE, GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE



Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse comprises a new interpretive display in the original workhouse building. It takes a multi media approach to interpret the primary aim of the exhibition: to engage people with the real people of the workhouse and their stories, and to challenge popular misconceptions about workhouse and rural life. The impact of the interpretive planning process is strongly apparent throughout in the use of key themed areas and messages, consistent design and text, and the use of language, media and objects.

The various media appeals to a wide-ranging audience. The use of surfaces, such as quotes on walls, etched wording on benches and printed wording on bedclothes, in particular provides the opportunity for visitors to stop and reflect. The exhibition panels are well branded and use old photographs and text short enough to engage visitors. Extra material is available in the form of folders in rooms with catalogue sheets and old photos of rooms.

The entrance to the exhibition is particularly strong. The talking head, display of archive material (logging-in book), dressing up, baths (with changing quotes) and call to action with the separation of genders immediately made visitors aware that they were entering a workhouse as an inmate. The start of the visit sets the tone for an immersive visitor experience.

**Norfolk Museums Service and Bright
Gressenhall, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 4DR**



Photo courtesy of Bright

Gressenhall combines graphics, sculptures, objects and digital displays to bring the workhouse to life

The impact of the interpretive planning process is strongly apparent throughout in the use of key themed areas and messages, consistent design and text, and the use of language, media and objects.

Commended

SEATON JURASSIC

AHI
AWARDS 2017

COMMENDED



Photo courtesy of Devon Wildlife Trust

Visitors travel through a 180-million-year exploration of the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods



Photo courtesy of Devon Wildlife Trust

A young visitor in the Rockpool gallery

Seaton Jurassic is an exciting visitor destination/experience which is organised into three clearly defined areas, each with its own theme and connected learning outcomes, using interactive installations based on audience research and an interpretive design document.

Devon Wildlife Trust decided to offer visitors a combination of authenticity, participation and surprise. The aim was to create a story with depth and breadth at a location where the whole story of life on earth is exposed and accessible due to natural features and processes. The centre shows that people have interacted with and adapted to their natural environment over millennia while, in turn, the local economy, culture and custom have shaped Seaton's natural environment. The interpretation journey is transportative; it can take visitors forwards or backwards in time and transform an individual's scale in relationship to their environment. The centre's narratives are rooted within

the local landscape and heritage and structured by scientific discovery. Each narrative allows for varying levels of immersion and engagement.

Seaton is a gateway to the Jurassic Coast and allows physical access to the geological past and to unique marine and terrestrial environments and their wildlife. Interpretation is designed to stimulate active learning, therefore it is highly interactive; exhibits involve the visitor and demand their engagement. The centre then provides people with ideas to explore the wider landscape and discover Seaton's natural assets at first hand.

Building on Seaton's seaside town history as a centre of entertainment, the aim of project interpretation is to re-imagine Seaton's natural environment, making the most of its obvious attractions whilst revealing elements of its natural heritage that have been, up to now, hidden, obscure or inaccessible.

The centre has made a huge difference to the regeneration programme for Seaton. The centre was built on an underused car park in the town in an area undergoing transformation through regeneration and redevelopment. The centre has acted as a catalyst for other improvements in the area. There are exciting times ahead as regeneration continues and new private sector improvement on privately owned land and buildings comes forward.

Devon Wildlife Trust
The Underfleet, Seaton, Devon EX12 2WD

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

This is for a project that has been led or co-produced by a volunteer-based community organisation or group. It can be one where the whole project has been produced by a community group, where the group has brought in contractors to help with delivering interpretation or where a group has worked as equal partners with an organisation such as a museum, local authority or charity employing staff. The award will recognise the work of volunteer-led groups in taking the lead or being equal partners in producing and co-producing interpretation.

Winner

POP-UP RUSKIN MUSEUM

What the entrant said:

I felt humbled for our project to be a winner alongside such a wide range of high-quality projects. The Pop-Up Ruskin Museum volunteer hosts and Guild of St George are delighted and it's fantastic to know that this kind of work is understood and valued by such experienced peers.

RUTH NUTTER, PRODUCER, RUSKIN IN SHEFFIELD



Ruth Nutter

The Pop-up Museum with lots of family-friendly activities on offer

Imagine if, faced with a budget of only £19,000, the local community created a museum full of engaging activities based on the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme of events that aims to rediscover Ruskin's Guild of St George in Sheffield? This is exactly what has been achieved with the Pop-Up Ruskin Museum.

The museum was a temporary neighbourhood museum created in a disused shop in Walkley, Sheffield, in 2015. There are many good examples of using vacant shops to promote local heritage but this project goes beyond the shopfront to create a whole interactive pop-up museum within. The judges particularly liked:

- The 'Walkley Wunderkammer' which displayed loans of visitors' treasured curiosities.
- 'Mr Ruskin's Pick & Mix' glass jars which contained Ruskin quotes and the chance for visitors to add their own words of wisdom.
- The 'Bold & Beautiful' mannequin which was adorned with visitors' hand-stitched tapestries.
- The 'Small is Beautiful' shelf cabinet which displayed mini-canvasses drawn by visitors.
- The homely relaxed feel with comfy sofa, reclaimed furniture and central flexible activity table – this was not a stuffy old museum!
- The wealth and breadth of activities accompanying the pop-up museum, particularly the Cabaret Boom Boom promenade performance *Desperately Seeking Ruskin*, and the walks and talks.



Ruth Nutter

The start of the 'Desperately Seeking Ruskin' tour of Walkley

Ruth Nutter

Resources provided for visitors wanting to delve deeper into Ruskin's philosophy

Where the project excels is in community involvement – a heritage project with the local community owning it from planning through to delivery. A core of around thirty local people were involved in researching, interpreting and sharing this Ruskin heritage. It is clear from the project that the volunteers were well managed and both enjoyed and benefited from their involvement.

The judges liked the simplicity of the project. The museum was not aiming to wow visitors but rather to engage, encourage creativity and share the Ruskin philosophy. It was simple and accessible so that people could participate meaningfully.

The judges also liked the way that the project reached out to and included local artists. It was clear that a significant amount of thought had gone into delivering the theme of Ruskin in many different ways and that the activities were well planned and executed.

This project demonstrates how heritage interpretation can benefit a neighbourhood, by actively being involved in its planning, delivery and operation. It is clear that there was plenty of goodwill, capacity and support from the local community and a good relationship between volunteers and the project producer.

In the words of the site judges:

This is a project where the sum is very much greater than its parts and we can't wait to see what the Guild does for the bicentenary of Ruskin's birth in 2019!

Guild of St George
381 South Road, Walkley,
Sheffield S6 3TD

Commended

THE WORKHOUSE HISTORY CENTRE



Photo courtesy of Llanfyllin Dolydd Building Preservation Trust

Traditional dancing at the opening of the Workhouse History Centre

The Workhouse History Centre is a community-led project grounded on the connection made between historical and present-day conditions.

The project has a good understanding of the issues related to the content. We were pleased to see that the group took a central role in developing and writing the exhibition, with some support from an interpreter. The project approached the exhibition from the understanding that visitors relate to stories about people.

The group has achieved a lot on a small budget. It made excellent use of visitor comments responding to negative as well as positive comments. We hope the project is ongoing and that the group has opportunities to survey their visitors and gain greater insights into audience profiles and interests for future exhibitions.

Llanfyllin Dolydd Building Preservation Trust
Llanfyllin Workhouse, Y Dolydd, Llanfyllin
SY22 5LD



Sponsored by Colour Heroes

INTERPRETATION FOR A TARGET AUDIENCE

Where an organisation has identified the need to create an interpretive project for a specific audience that they are not otherwise catering for. This may be something created specifically for audiences already using a site, but who are not effectively communicated to, or to reach out to new audiences an organisation wishes to engage with more fully.

Winner

EGYPTIAN SCULPTURE GALLERY TOUCH TOUR – BRITISH MUSEUM



What the entrant said:

Winning the Interpretation for a Target Audience Award for the Egyptian Sculpture Touch Tour is great news. The Touch Tour has been a truly collaborative endeavour and it is great to have the work of all of the staff and volunteers who have contributed recognised. It is extremely important to us to have the endorsement a professional body like the Association of Heritage Interpretation; it gives us confidence and reassurance that we're on the right track as we look to expand this approach to other parts of the Museum.

STUART FROST, HEAD OF INTERPRETATION & VOLUNTEERS, BRITISH MUSEUM

To be able to touch selected sculptures in a busy popular gallery is a great addition to any blind or partially sighted person's visit to a museum. Nine objects are available to touch highlighting the range of different sculptures in the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery. The Rosetta Stone is in a separate gallery.

The touch tour was supported by a large print booklet and downloadable audio as well as a braille guide with raised drawings and supported by specially trained tour guides providing a range of options for both independent and guided visits for this audience. Access to the sculptures is sensitively designed by giving users badges on lanyards so



The touch tour comes in many formats including Braille

Photo courtesy of the British Museum



Photo courtesy of the British Museum

Visually impaired visitors are allowed to touch exhibits

that they are easily identified and not stopped from touching by security guards. The information desk is very helpful in providing the booklets and lanyards without question.

The commentary on the sculptures is detailed and interesting, giving explanation of some of the symbolism, but more context could be given about the sculptures to provide additional information on their purpose, construction and place in the Egyptian culture. Some way of setting the context would enhance this tour, but having said that there is great value and learning in the opportunity to experience the sculptures through touch enhanced by the audio and large print and braille guides.

In the words of the site judges:

The British Museum's Egyptian Sculpture touch tour (Room 4) provides an inclusive, hands-on experience for blind and partially sighted visitors. Using a variety of resources, visitors can take a self-led or volunteer-guided touch tour of one of the Museum's most popular galleries, experiencing 3,000 years of ancient history.

If the British Museum can enable visually impaired visitors to touch some of their most important, albeit robust, collections then other museums and galleries can follow suit to make some of their collections accessible for this audience. It would open up museums to an audience often overlooked or perceived as being difficult to cater for.

The British Museum
Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG

Runner-up

STIHL TREETOP WALKWAY – WESTONBIRT ARBORETUM



Photo courtesy of the Forestry Commission



A wooden sculpture to represent a tree trunk

Photo courtesy of the Forestry Commission



The walkway is designed to be physically accessible

Photo courtesy of the Forestry Commission



Eye spy panels encourage visitors to look at trees in detail

The STIHL Treetop Walkway at Westonbirt Arboretum is a striking wooden structure that links Silk Wood to the rest of the site. Along the walkway are interpretation panels, swing flaps and various installations aiming to communicate messages about trees.

The quality of the walkway is very impressive and it provides a pleasant route to Silk Wood. It is wide, gently sloping, accessible to mobility vehicles and does not become slippery in the rain. The walkway's physical accessibility is excellent and has clearly been given a great deal of consideration. It is not simply a route, however – the height from the ground makes it a fun experience for children and adults of all abilities.

At a small number of points along the route, trees close to the walkway have had bright pink bands or picture frames added to highlight certain features that are explained by 'eye spy' interpretation boards on the walkway balustrade. These are very effective, encouraging visitors to look at the trees in detail and understand how they have grown and why.

.....
Forestry Commission
Westonbirt National Arboretum, Tetbury
GL8 8QS

The quality of the walkway is very impressive and it provides a pleasant route to Silk Wood. It is wide, gently sloping, accessible to mobility vehicles and does not become slippery in the rain.

Runner-up

TALKING LAW – UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS



‘Talking Law’ was a dramatisation of the trial of Patrick Hamilton, executed in St Andrews, Fife, for heresy in 1528. A public debate followed about the legal issues raised by the case which still have relevance today. The event was free and open to all members of the public.

The project combined enactment of Hamilton’s trial with public debate, a website and radio series for a local audience, members of the legal profession plus academics and students from the University of St Andrews. The summarising of archival material and contemporary accounts, and play-writing were well done. Even though it was not an accurate reconstruction, it conveyed the meaning of historical texts and events for modern audience.

The main theme was that difficult legal questions recur in various historical and contemporary contexts, and that thinking about the past is an invitation to think about the present. This was supported by additional themes including how real issues relate to current law should be debated, and that participants should have a voice in the discussion.

Topics were made accessible through free entry, a central location and the use of modern language. Expert panelists in the debate made an historical event become relevant in a modern day environment. The numbers attending the drama – a full house – revealed the popularity of the topic for the target audience.

**University of St Andrews
Institute of Legal and Constitutional
Research, School of History, University
of St Andrews, 69–71 South Street,
St Andrews KY16 9QW**

The project combined enactment of Hamilton’s trial with public debate, a website and radio series for a local audience, members of the legal profession plus academics and students from the University of St Andrews.



Photo courtesy of the Talking Law Project

The play of Patrick Hamilton’s trial encouraged the audience to consider case law



Photo courtesy of the Talking Law Project



Sponsored by Association for Heritage Interpretation

THE AHI AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INTERPRETATION

The Awards Judging Panel chose one of the five category winners to be the best overall project of 2017.

Winner

LIFTING THE LID AT THE VYNE

In the words of the site judges:

The rooms in which the objects were being displayed as if they were being packed away allowed visitors to view them in a different context – as individual objects rather than furniture in the room. It helped highlight how objects are catalogued and labelled, kept in storage, and the methodology behind relocation for some of the collection into storage.

The choice of recipient for the AHI Award for Excellence in Interpretation was a difficult one for the judging panel having to choose between three of the category winners.

Lifting the Lid at The Vyne, the Pop-Up Ruskin Museum and the Egyptian Gallery Touch Tour each scored the highest number of points from the site judges' reports. Each is an exemplar of how we would like to see interpretation develop in the future, demonstrating best practice in accessibility, community co-creation and the role of interpretation in conservation. None of these projects shied away from making bold and innovative decisions in the respective areas they focused on. Other organisations may take note from each project for ideas and inspiration that will drive interpretation to higher levels of successful engagement and visitor experience.



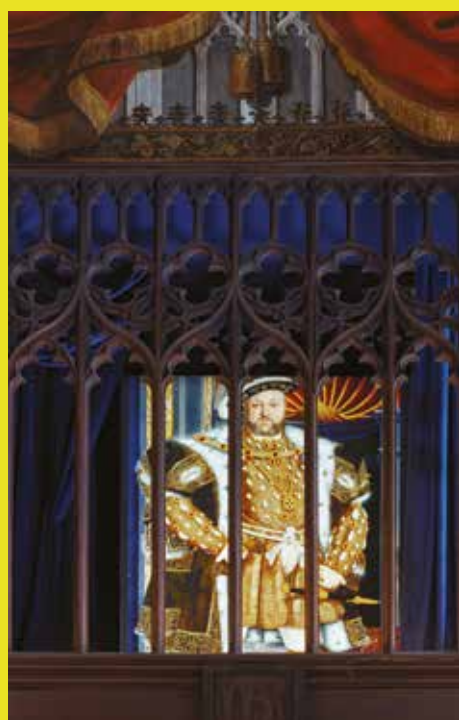
Animated digital tapestries help to tell the Tudor story at The Vyne

Dennis Gilbert



Susanna Austin

The display of stored furniture



Dennis Gilbert

Illuminated image of Henry VIII on the Tudor chapel balcony

The 2017 Discover Heritage Awards Judging Panel chose *Lifting the Lid at The Vyne* because of the quality of interpretation, innovative approaches to interpreting a historic property and conservation, and the use of evaluation to make changes to the project. What stood out was the bold decision to take major renovation to ‘dust off’ their approach to interpretation introduce new and dynamic interpretive methods to fully implement the idea that everything you do on site can – and should be – interpreted.

Everyone involved has worked incredibly hard in delivering the ‘Lifting the Lid at The Vyne’ project. To win the Museum and Historic Properties Award and the overall AHI award for Excellence in Interpretation is a fantastic achievement. We are all incredibly proud of what we have accomplished and we are truly delighted to receive this recognition.

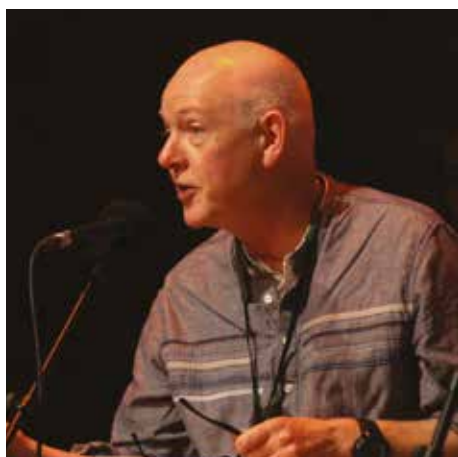
KATHRYN ALLEN-KINROSS,
ASSISTANT PROJECT CURATOR



THE AHI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

This is a special award for nominated individuals, which recognises an outstanding and lasting contribution to the heritage interpretation profession over a significant period of time.

Given the special circumstances of one long-standing member's professional retirement in 2017 and the awards ceremony being held in the 'beloved' Scotland of another, AHI has taken the special decision to present two lifetime achievement awards this year.



CARL ATKINSON

Carl's doctoral work in applied cognitive psychology has underpinned his long and successful interpretation career. His strong interest in the psychology of the visitor experience and the role of visitor studies and evaluation has helped many of us think more clearly about what interpretation is and what it can do.

Carl joined the Centre for Environmental Interpretation (CEI) at Manchester Metropolitan University as a Training Officer/Research Fellow in 1993, making him one of the first cognitive psychologists to enter the interpretation

profession. He later became a consultant before joining the Countryside Council for Wales in 2001 as Head of the Communication Section which includes interpretation. Carl served as a Trustee for the Association of Heritage Interpretation (AHI) for over six years, and has chaired the Membership panel since 2005. He was instrumental in setting up Dehongli Cymru/Interpret Wales which was formally launched at the AHI annual conference at Swansea in 2001, having formerly been known as the Welsh Environmental Interpretation Group (WEIG). He has chaired the group since 2001 and has been the drive behind the numerous newsletters and training events that Interpret Wales have produced over the last 15 years, inspiring and bringing together interpreters in Wales and beyond.

Carl has led numerous Interpretation Planning training courses at Plas Tan y Bwlch, Snowdonia. His delivery of the courses, his insights into visitor motivations, their characteristics and behaviour when in 'visitor mode', has inspired many careers in interpretation and a focus on the evaluation of projects. Carl has influenced many colleagues and is held in high regard by fellow AHI members both in the UK and abroad.

'Carl is a special brand of enlightened leader in the interpretation profession, inspired by his love of virtually everything around him and armed with an empirical understanding of the interpretation process that has helped shape a generation of practice.'

Sam Ham

Carl was awarded Full Membership (MAHI) in 2004. Following his retirement from Natural Resources Wales in 2017, it is a fitting tribute to award him the AHI 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award.

CARL ATKINSON: IT'S ALL ABOUT STATES OF MIND!

Thank you to AHI for presenting me with this award. I am deeply honoured.

I thought I would leave you with some general thoughts about interpretive practice which I have gleaned from my experiences of working in the field, conditioned as they are by my previous career in psychology, and therefore inclining me towards a natural interest in the area of visitor studies.

It has occurred to me that we as interpreters sometimes think of visitors as we want them to be, the idealised visitor, rather than as they actually are. We produce interpretation out of a process of thinking about our subject area, the principles of good interpretive planning and communication, media selection etc. We talk to subject specialists. We identify our audiences. We work at it.

Visitor studies research suggests that we can describe a visitor state of mind which has identifiable characteristics. It is not a set of personal dispositions or traits, i.e. a kind of person. We can all, and do, inhabit this state of mind, depending on the environment we are in and our motivations for being there. The characteristics of the visitor state of mind which interpreters need to take account of are as follows:

- Unfocused and shifting deployment of attention
- Likely to have little or no familiarity with the subject matter of the interpretation

- Avoid effort unless there is an obvious perceived reward – won't read much or in depth
- Avoid boredom – will simply move on if something appears unstimulating
- Sensation seeking – i.e. responsive to cues which are:
 - Novel/surprising
 - Eye-catching
 - Exciting/thrilling/threatening.

This means visitors will pay more attention to peripheral cues rather than central cues – i.e. how something looks rather than its content:

- Searching for meaningful experiences but unlikely to be deep or complex
- Regarding content, will pay more attention to themes which are personally relevant or relate to universal human emotionality e.g. love, death, loss, fear, injustice, joy, social status, aggression and conflict
- Concrete rather than abstract thinking.

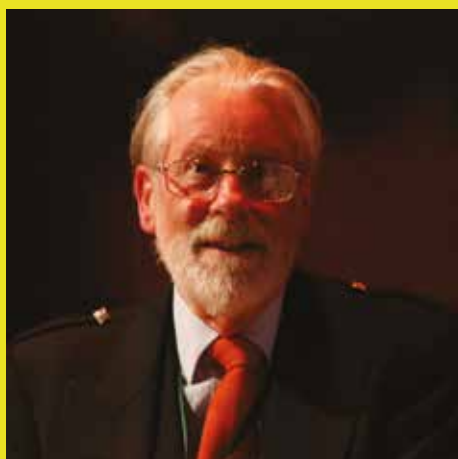
Visitor studies researcher Paulette McManus described this constellation of characteristics as like 'window shopping', particularly with regards to galleries and exhibitions, where exhibits compete for attention.

Another relevant comment here is from the field of behavioural economics and the study of cognitive bias, usually attributed to psychologist Daniel Kahneman – 'Thinking for humans is like swimming is for cats – they can do it if they have to, but avoid it if they can'.

The problem arises because we as interpretive professionals produce interpretation out of a different state of mind or mental set, which we can characterise as work mode, sharply contrasting with the visitor or leisure mode. In work mode, thinking is focused, deliberative, effortful and abstract. It's what we do when we work as professionals. Clearly it differs markedly from leisure mode.

These two states of mind do not normally co-exist because their characteristics are, more or less, mutually exclusive, and it is therefore hard to be in one and entertain the other. Hard but not impossible – that is the challenge for interpreters. I suspect it is quite difficult for interpreters to engage with interpretation in anything other than a professional manner i.e. work mode, even in their own leisure time. But that is what we need to do. Otherwise we risk producing interpretation which is biased towards the idealised visitor, one who is prepared to work at it. There are such people, but they are a minority of our visitors.

We therefore have a range of pressures on us, both internal and external. We may have experts/curatorial staff sitting behind us and expecting us to do justice to their subject. The challenge for us is to have a place in our minds where our own inner naïve visitor still lives, and to let them inform our work. Next time you visit an exhibition, don't think, don't work, just window shop! And then think about it!



MICHAEL GLEN

Michael has been a leading professional interpreter for more than 40 years, and continues to be a stalwart of British interpretation. He was one of the founder members of The Society for the Interpretation of British Heritage – as AHI was called in the early days.

As one of the first generation of interpreters in the UK, Michael has been a constant and consistent advocate for interpretation and its benefits throughout his professional life. He has demonstrated by example that interpretation is not only a distinct and recognisable discipline, but

also that it is possible to make a living from it. He is a thoughtful, thorough and innovative interpreter and interpretive planner. He draws upon his considerable writing talent and poetic sense (he is a recognised, published poet) to create powerfully evocative interpretation.

One of Michael's standout qualities is his steadfastness as an advocate for interpretation. He has consistently made the case for interpretation, in the UK and beyond, as a speaker and as a consummate professional with a clear vision for the role of interpretation in tourism, in community development and other spheres.

Michael has taken been actively involved in AHI and was part-time administrator in the 2000s, as well as being one of the key movers and shakers, with Patrick Lehnies and others, in the development of Interpret Europe (IE), where he was chair of the Supervisory Committee from IE's inception in 2010 until 2015.

Michael has always sought out new people at events and engaged them in conversation. Many of these conversations had far-reaching impact on people's careers. Hospitable, convivial and with strong views he is happy to share, Michael always been a great conversationalist and networker. It is not surprising that he has a worldwide network of friends in the field of interpretation.

His work was and still can be found in many major public agencies, continuing through decades of name changes, finding fresh, new ways to engage the visitor in the subject.

Michael was made an Honorary Fellow in 2008. It is hugely appropriate that Michael, who has given so much to both AHI and Interpret Europe over many decades, should receive the AHI Lifetime Achievement Award at Inverness in his beloved Scotland.

MICHAEL GLEN: GREAT EXPLANATIONS

Very many thanks to AHI for this honour. I am delighted, of course, and extremely proud to receive the recognition of a Lifetime Achievement Award.

My old friend St John said, wisely, 'In the beginning, was the word'. It's now 60 years since Freeman Tilden published his much-respected words about interpretation. You could say his words were made flesh and dwell among us.

Don Aldridge had Tilden's words ringing in my ears 48 years ago when I attended, apprehensively, his first UK course for interpretive trainers. He taught me how my passion for finding out could be transformed into sharing what I'd learnt. It's child-like, but then, the child is father of the man. It changed my life.

I tried to imbue the spirit of interpretation in the work I did in Edinburgh and London with statutory tourist boards but tourism folk didn't – then at least – understand and value interpretation.

However, I was sent to a meeting of museum, park and forest managers who were planning a new association after successful events in England where public organisations were implementing Tilden's words.

And so, in 1975, the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage (SIBH) was born. Our chair, Geraint Jenkins, head of the Welsh Folk Museum, laid his hand on my shoulder and said 'Michael, you'll be our journal editor'. At last I could get my hands dirty on interpretation!

These early days saw the arrival of a guide to countryside interpretation, the appointment of countryside rangers, new jobs with interpretation in the title and a rush of heritage centres. SIBH expanded rapidly and, with members from 80 backgrounds, we were eclectic.

Urban and built heritage interpretation grew in status, helped by agencies, NGOs, local societies and European Architectural Heritage Year for which Brian Goodey and I produced a book of town trails.

I was still a step away from paid employment in interpretation. Then I started doing freelance work and soon took the plunge to hang up my shingle, as they say. In 1985, I linked up with Michael Quinion, a wise and scholarly man, and Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants were born.

What have I seen in the 30 years since? Well, a flowering of the profession in myriad ways, many exciting advances in media and ever-strengthening links with colleagues round the world.

SIBH became AHI – thank goodness – and included Ireland, reflecting our shared heritage. The awards scheme flourished and flourishes again.

Tilden's principles, I believe, still hold good – but they're now implemented very differently. Social and digital media are creating new, fast-changing and exciting opportunities.

The biggest changes – and challenges – are what I called, at our conference two years ago, the *democratisation* of interpretation – everyone can now discover, appreciate and share their heritage – and the *communitisation* of interpretation – local people can decide what they want to interpret and how. This demands a new role for us professionals.

The forces of identity that produced political devolution have driven interpretation in Wales and Scotland where they play a part in attesting and presenting nationhood. Both countries have a second language and that strengthens the overall impact.

And then there was The Vital Spark, that outstanding convocation of interpretive folk ten years ago. I'm delighted we're back in the Highlands again, still sparking.

We have a unique master's degree in interpretation – practice supported by theory – which is run by the equally-unique University of the Highlands and Islands. Its inter disciplinary approach mirrors that of interpretation.

And we have Interpret Europe which took shape at a meeting during The Vital Spark. I'm proud to have been part of its development.

I'd like to end with plaudits to some heroes. To John Foster, first director of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, for sending Don Aldridge to the USA to strengthen interpretation in the UK; to Don for bullying me into becoming an interpreter; to Geraint Jenkins for giving me a leg up in SIBH; to Annette Simpson, Bob Jones and other clients who gave me freedom to write creatively; to Kenny Taylor who writes better than me about our land and life; and to James Carter whose whimsy and intellect have illuminated interpretation.

And to Bill Taylor who delivered The Vital Spark and still had the energy to take on this conference. Thank you all for helping me to grow.

For me, interpretation is great explanations, a term I've pinched from Ricky Gershon. It's a craft that demands inspiration, intellect and discipline. It's a passion. Maurilio Cipparone calls it *una missione*, a mission. Who can argue with that?

This is probably my conference swansong – *mio canto del cigno*, mein Schwanengesang – but I have great expectations of all you young interpreters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Association for Heritage Interpretation would like to thank all members of the judging panel, site judges and awards sub-group who have volunteered their time and skills. It is thanks to their commitment and professionalism that the 2017 awards have been such a success.

Judging Panel

Bill Bevan
(Chair)

Ruth Coulthard
(Vice-Chair and Panel Member for Wales)

James Pardoe
(Panel Member for England)

Jennifer McCrea
(Panel Member for Ireland)

Kev Theaker
(Panel Member for Scotland)

Site Judges

Mark Cox, Catherine Croney, Emma Crowley, Megan Doole, Helen Evans, Katherine Findlay, Maureen La Frenais, Rory McCarthy, Jennifer McCrea, Julie McNeice, Steven Richards-Price, Rob Robinson, Annette Simpson, Ruth Taylor, Amy Wedderburn, Matthew Wood

Awards Sub-Group of the AHI Committee

Bill Bevan, Kate Lindley, Jo Scott, Ruth Taylor

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