Association for Heritage Interpretation

Interpretation Journal
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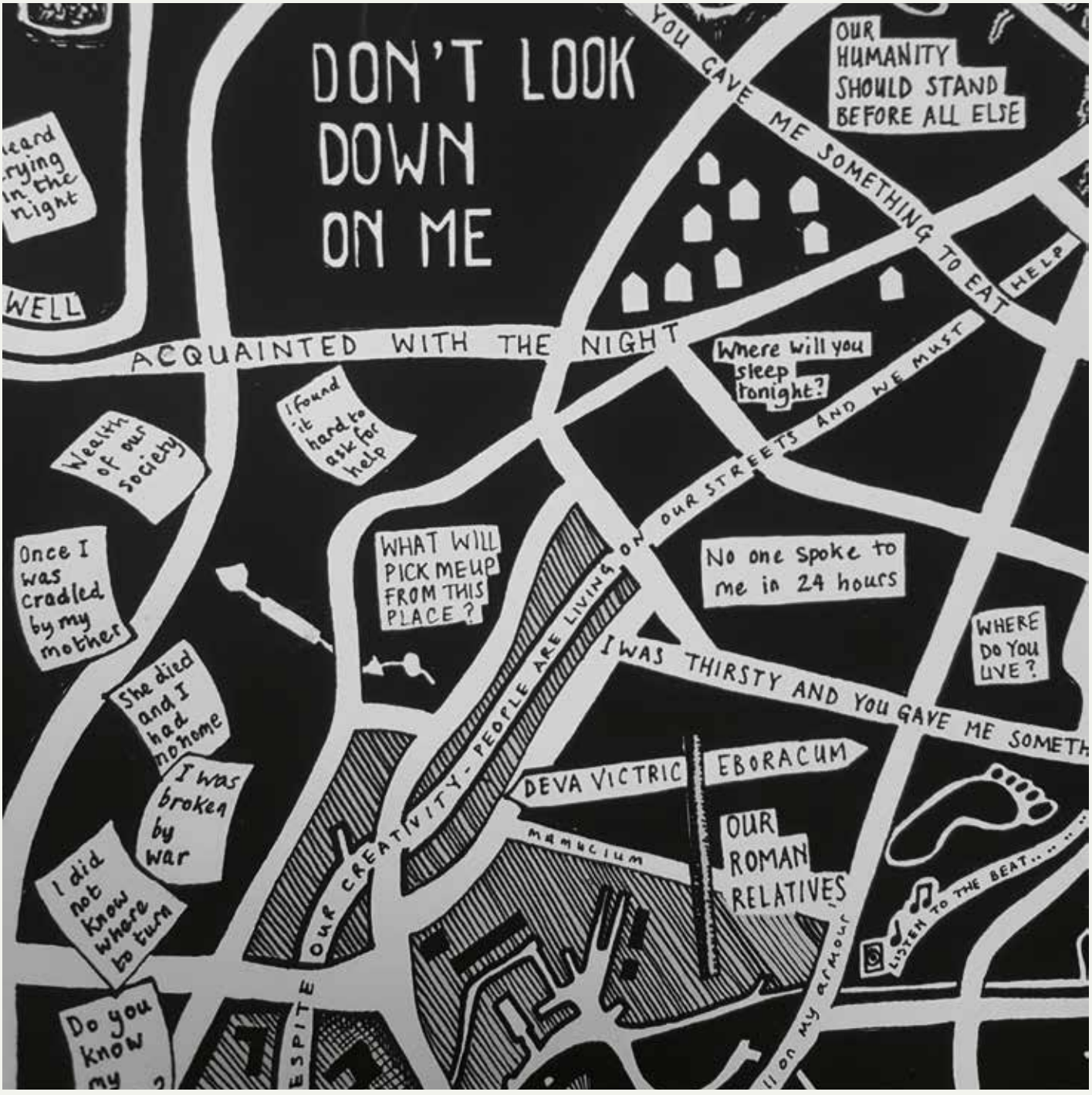
Summer 2020



My view: Engage, explore, enhance
Global view: Seasons of change in Japan
Focus: We want you to visit your Invisible Cities
Debate: To be or not to be... a freelancer in heritage interpretation

Association for Heritage Interpretation

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Individuals can join AHI as Associate or Student Members or can apply to be elected, subject to qualifications and experience, as Full Members or Fellows. Businesses can join as Corporate Members with the same rights as individual members. All members receive *Interpretation Journal*, and other mailings. They can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can vote at the Annual General Meeting.

Front cover image: Illustration by MANCSY www.mancsy.co.uk. Part of the Invisible Cities project, see page 16.

Foreword

We are delighted to bring you the 'new look' Summer 2020 edition of *Interpretation Journal* – our first as newly appointed editors. The job description for the role of AHI Journal Editor sought 'an individual ambitious to further enhance the profile of the Journal, focusing on developing new content, themes and ideas'... a tall order following in the footsteps of Eric Langham and Elizabeth Newbery, who so successfully produced engaging and thought-provoking issues of this publication for several years as Commissioning Editor and Production Editor, respectively. But we are certainly up for the challenge and hope that you enjoy the new direction we have taken.

And the AHI has got two for the price of one! Our collaboration for this role is entirely democratic. We take the view that two heads are better than one and working together gives us the scope to bounce ideas back and forth, bringing our varying but complementary skills and experience to the partnership. We have thoroughly enjoyed the process of mapping out a new format, a fresh design, and exploring new thematic avenues. We have listened to the views of AHI members and Trustees, taking on board what you would like to see feature on the pages of the Journal. This is an ongoing and ever-evolving process, so please get in touch to share your ideas for future inclusions: journal@ahi.org.uk.

What can you expect to find?

We've divided the Journal into three new sections: **News & Views**, **Focus** and **In Practice**.

News & Views draws together opinion pieces and the latest news and research – from academics, Fellows of the AHI, regional AHI groups and across the globe. In this edition, Bob Jones calls for the creation of a Code of Ethics to bring a new standard of professionalism to heritage interpretation (My view), and Charlotte Dew brings us a refreshingly new seasonal approach to exhibition planning from Japan and asks whether UK museums could enjoy greater engagement by following suit (Global view). Philip Ryland looks at the training and development needs of staff (Reporting research) and we hear the views of the AHI North regional group on a recent visit to Bolton Museum, as well as a round-up of the latest developments in the heritage interpretation world (Interpretation news).

Focus looks at a range of interpretation projects from one particular area of the UK, bringing transferable ideas and initiatives that can be shared nationwide. For this edition we take Scotland as our Focus, bringing you three very different projects: The redevelopment of the exhibition space at the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick coincides with Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters, and takes on the challenge of including environmental responsibility in its interpretation (Dive deeper). A social enterprise project, started in Edinburgh, to employ formerly homeless people to become tour guides of their own city gives an alternative voice to the interpretation of an urban environment and has the potential to provide a blueprint for other towns and cities (Invisible Cities). Lastly, the Skye Ecomuseum – a talking landscape and a museum without walls or a roof (Balancing heritage and tourism with blue Skye thinking).

In Practice creates opportunities for interaction, debate and the sharing of best practice, knowledge and skills. In this edition we ask how we can better connect with visually impaired audiences and improve the accessibility of our interpretation (Connection: VocalEyes). The National Holocaust Museum demonstrates how digital developments can ensure that the stories of survivors are preserved in a post-survivor era (The Forever Project). We talk to freelancers about the pros and cons of going it alone (Debate), and we meet Laura Hampden to discuss diversity and equality within our workforce, inclusive interpretation and the representation of marginalised communities (In Conversation with...).

We would like to thank Elizabeth Newbery, Neil Morgan and Philip Ryland for their advice and guidance in getting us started, and of course we'd like to thank the Trustees for entrusting us with their Journal. We are also extremely grateful to all those who have contributed to our first edition. It was heart-warming to see how positively everyone responded to our enquiries and how much goodwill there is within our profession. ■

Nicky Temple and Nicolette Evans

View from the Chair

Jim Mitchell
Chair, AHI

Welcome to the Summer 2020 issue of the *Interpretation Journal*.

Interpretation training

By the time you read this there will have been another of AHI's highly regarded Heritage Interpretation training courses, this time at Hampton Court Palace in London. The course was developed by Sarah Oswald (the Authentic Spark), in a partnership between AHI and GEM, and over the past three years we have delivered nine training sessions to more than 130 people. The event this Spring was our most successful yet in terms of numbers, with 20 people attending, taking place just before the recent crisis. Attendance included a good mix of AHI members and those new to AHI. The course brings together heritage learning and interpretation professionals to share practice, ideas and approaches, and work through the challenges we mutually face. It's a modern and flexible approach to training with a one-day workshop and pre- and post-course home-based work. We plan to run another course in the Autumn, so look out for the e-news announcing this. If you know of a venue that might be interested in holding a session, please also get in touch.

Conferences and coronavirus

We are sorry to announce that we have cancelled the AHI 2020 Conference in Dublin. Although October is still a long way off, there were obvious risks to AHI in holding a conference outside of the UK. The Trustees recognised that even if restrictions are lifted by the Autumn, there is still likely to be considerable disruption, which would make it difficult for us to run the conference successfully and enable us to break even. We would like to thank all those who have worked on planning so far, including all the contacts we have made in Ireland who have helped greatly to this point. We know this will be disappointing as it is a high point of the year, but we hope members will understand the decision.

The call for papers for AHI Conference 2020 is therefore withdrawn. However, the 2021 Conference will have the same theme of 'Interpretation as a catalyst for change'. Please continue to consider the theme and the 2021 call will be issued in the New Year. We will explore options for virtual and one-day events that could run if and when the situation allows.

The Trustees have decided not to increase the membership fees for 2020/21 in light of the financial situation in which the interpretation sector now finds itself, due to the coronavirus outbreak. Membership rates will be held at the same rate as last year. Whilst we understand this is a small cost saved, Trustees wanted to send a message to the membership that we understand how difficult it will be over the coming months and that now was not the time to increase rates. In addition, if you are an Associate, Full or Fellow member struggling financially due to a lack of income and your membership is now due, please contact the office to see what we can do to delay payment. All members receive renewal reminder emails one month and then again seven days before their membership is due for renewal. If you receive one of these e-mails and are experiencing difficulties, please contact the office as soon as possible. Those members whose subscription expires on 31 March 2020 and is not set to auto-renew will have recently received an invoice for the 2020/21 membership year. Please disregard it, the office will issue amended invoices at the old rate as soon as possible.

Our Trustee comms lead, India Rabey, has set up a Facebook group for members – for discussions, sharing ideas, support and anything else you would like to bring to fellow members' attention. Details are in our members news bulletins or contact the office to get the link. AHI's strength is in its diverse network, so please do join if you can and share your advice and thoughts. Keep safe and well. ■

AHI360 Programme

Engage, explore, enhance

Bob Jones
Honorary Fellow of AHI, MBE

A key recommendation following a review of the Fellowship category of AHI membership was that the Association should introduce a 'Fellowship 360 Programme'. The objective is to harness the skills and experience of interpretative professionals already recognised for their high commitment and achievements. It is hoped that through increased engagement by the Fellows, more of our members will consider applying for Fellowship status. *This is important*, for if we are to consider ourselves as professionals, if we are to stand alongside peer professions, we must 'up our game'.

The new editors of this journal intended to flag this section as 'My view'. Their aim: *'to involve experienced interpreters in a bid to provide an opportunity for early and mid-career level interpreters to find practical information, support and inspiration, and so help with their professional development'*. This happy collision of objectives is hopefully the beginning of a new impetus within the Association. What follows is indeed 'My view' – and as such may not be shared by others, nor indeed by AHI as a body. It is, however, a call to arms, a call to put in place mechanisms that will allow us to take on, once and for all, the mantle of 'professional'. Foremost amongst these mechanisms I believe must be a Code of Ethics.

Bob Jones

Riverside Museum "No amount of bright shiny clever stuff will deliver...

My view is that interpretists – yes 'interpretists' (see page 6) – rank equally alongside those other professionals, the architects, engineers, curators, that we find ourselves sitting alongside when we deliver interpretative projects. And they all subscribe to or are bound by a code enshrined in their respective charters or constitutions.

Why such a statement? Those same professionals do stuff. They make stuff – often bright shiny, mostly practical stuff. Stuff you can see, stuff you can touch, stuff you can walk around, you can hold, you can read. However, **interpretists** *explain* the meaning of stuff, both in the creative processes leading to the presentation of that stuff and in conveying the explanation to an audience. Without that explanation the clever physical stuff will ultimately fail. Witness the wreckage of many of those much lauded (and expensive) Millennium projects.

Heritage Interpretation is our Association's 'banner'. As interpreters we first **engage**, we then **explore** and research to find the true facts of this world, of our heritage, of the bedrock →

My view

Bob Jones

...unless you first engage. Then explore and hopefully enhance." Glenlee Historic Ship, Glasgow

of a topic. In Freeman Tilden's words our work *'begins where the decision – "This is what we think proper to call the facts" – has finally been made'*. **Interpretists** face those facts to enable our audiences to consider the appropriate conclusions. Put more simply, and with regard to historical interpretation, we reach back into the past to inform the present – thus we **enhance**.

We measure the success of our interpretations through evaluation, but how do we measure – and, importantly, how do our clients measure – our professional performance?

In a paper to the Association's conference in Bedford – *"The Rise of the Ragged Trousered Interpretist"* – last year, I proposed that we rethink Tilden's familiar mantra by which we undertake the practice of interpretation – **'provoke, relate, reveal'**. The issues that surround us today, from climate change to fake news, cry out that we also have a common protocol to steer the formulation of our activities – a protocol that is more relevant to our First World society, one that ensures that we understand and abide by our responsibilities. That *our* values are just and by which our actions can be measured.

Mantras challenge us to focus down into succinct terms the essence of endeavour, of a calling, of our values. But the American idea of ethical values are not the same as ours. We need to forge a more pertinent ethical code that is relevant to *our* own journey, which better captures *our* purpose. I propose we should consider **engage, explore, enhance** as the keystone for our new Code of Ethics.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word **'provoke'** as *'to rouse or incite'* – do we really think opening a conversation in an adversarial manner is the best approach? Whereas to **'engage'** is defined as *'to hold fast a person's attention'*. It is far from coincidental that this is also the first principle of marketing.

The OED defines **'relate'** as *'to narrate or recount'* – suggestive of repetition of the given rather than a true exploration of the possible, a safe haven. Where as to **'explore'** is to *'travel extensively through a "landscape", actual, metaphorical or conceptual in order to learn or discover; to investigate thoroughly'*.

'Reveal' is defined as *'to display or show'* and, mark this, *'to allow to appear'*. Suggestive of the interpreter as demagogue? Whilst to **'enhance'** is to *'heighten or intensify our knowledge and understanding'*.

By its very nature 'interpretation' means taking a particular view on something – it's what gives a topic life and interest. It's what shapes a visitor's or recipient's experience. A Code of Ethics by its nature means being bound to a behavioural standard in what we do. It is what shapes who we are. In short, it governs how we set about enhancing the experience of others. It keeps us honest.

Discuss? ■

'Interpretist' – noun; alternative descriptor of an individual who practices the art of *explanation, of interpretation.* Akin to archaeologist, economist, agronomist, etc.

The word 'interpreter' by which we refer to ourselves and our calling is misunderstood by many outwith the profession, often confused with its more common association with one who translates one language into another. If we cannot explain better who we are, then how can we presume to explain – or interpret – stuff?

→ Bob was Founder and formerly Head of Design & Interpretative Services, GB Forestry Commission. Currently an occasional Consultant: BlueSkyBlueWater Interpretative Planning. Chair: Association for Heritage Interpretation Fellowship Panel.

Training needs

Dr Philip Ryland
MAHI and Trustee

Philip Ryland makes the case for an analytical approach to identify the training and development needs of interpretation staff.

The development of staff is of critical importance to the success of any business and arguably even more so where the staff are required to engage with the general public in focused and positive experiential encounters.

Over the last 30 years or so, numerous studies have focused upon the training needs of staff engaged in interpretation, both in terms of their personal and professional development as well as their broader on-site roles. These developmental needs have often been assessed through some form of training needs analysis. A recent article by Powell, Depper and Wright (2017) offers an interesting insight into this activity, in relation to the development needs of staff working within the National Park Service (NPS) in the United States. The article also went on to assess the actual importance of each of the skills identified, thus creating an interesting measure of discrepancy between the skills needed and each skill's importance to the staff member's actual role. It is suggested that the results of this study, which are briefly outlined here, could be used to guide and inform the broader assessment of staff needs in other organisations, as well as potentially the assessment of the 'efficacy of any training' offered (Yamada & Skibins, 2019:86).

Study methodology

The research study was based around the assessment of 80 competencies, split into six broad categories, which were identified as being important to staff involved in visitor education and interpretation (see Table 1). A number of research activities were undertaken against each competency to support this study and these are summarised in Table 2.

The resulting survey for this study used a 7-point Likert scale as follows: for 'importance' (1=unimportant and 7=extremely important) and for 'level of preparedness' (1=unprepared and 7=extremely well prepared). The survey was completed by 1,032 NPS staff (profiled in Table 3), a response rate of 29.7%.

Results of the study

Table 4 summarises the mean results for each of the six categories of competency whilst Table 5 identifies the three highest-weighted discrepancy scores for each of the six categories.

It is interesting to note that the category of 'Planning and evaluation' attracted the lowest preparedness score of 4.55, whilst the gap between importance and preparedness was most noticeable in 'Professional development' at -7.13 and of least concern in 'Appropriate techniques' at -5.87.

This data seems to reflect the results of other studies, which have also identified gaps in training provision focused around staff personal development. For instance, Yamada (2014:39-57) reported on interviews with 24 interpretive guides and found that their perceived training needs focused upon: 'the management of interpretation setting' (x=4.70); 'understanding the audience' →

Table 1. Competencies identified
(summarised from Powell, Depper & Wright, 2017:22).

Category (with number of competencies)	
Audience experience	16
Finding and assessing knowledge	12
Appropriate techniques	19
Partnering, collaboration and community outreach	8
Planning and evaluation	11
Professional development of self and others	15

Table 2. Research study processes
(summarised from Powell, Depper & Wright, 2017:20).

Step	Activity
1.	Assess the importance of each competence against job performance
2.	Assess the level or preparedness of the employee to perform the competency
3.	Determine the gap existing between the importance assigned to, and perceived preparation to perform, each competency

Table 3. Profile of respondents
(summarised from Powell, Depper & Wright, 2017:23).

Age range	46.5% were over 50. Age range from 22–78, mean=46.
Qualifications	51.7% held an undergraduate qualification. 42.3% held a postgraduate qualification.
Role at work	62% were in a non-supervisory role. 89% of respondents spent more than 20% of their working week undertaking education and/or interpretive duties.
Years of service	The mean years of service in the role was 15.56.

Table 4. Mean results: views of respondents on importance and preparedness
(summarised from Powell, Depper & Wright, 2017:24–8).

Category (mean)	Importance (mean)	Preparedness score (mean)	Weighted discrepancy*
Audience experience	5.92	4.78	-7.08
Finding and assessing knowledge	5.92	4.94	-6.30
Appropriate techniques	5.90	5.04	-5.87
Partnering, collaboration and community outreach	5.94	4.72	-6.05
Planning and evaluation	5.83	4.55	-7.02
Professional development of self and others	6.07	4.87	-7.13

* The Weighted discrepancy score is calculated as: Preparedness minus Importance divided by Importance Grand Mean

(x=4.67); 'enhancing interpersonal relations' (x=4.65); 'improving communication skills' (x=4.61) and 'evaluation of their own interpretation' (x=4.57). Where x relates to the mean score on a Likert scale of 1-5, where 5 = very important.

Commentary

In terms of the transferability of these results, the following comments are posed to encourage conversation and reflection.

The highest-weighted discrepancy scores between actual preparedness and importance for the role related to the broad competencies associated with: 'developing skills related to research literacy', 'engaging changing and new audiences' and the 'effective use of available and emerging technologies' (summarised from Powell, Depper & Wright, 2017:31). These results therefore pose three areas for further exploration.

First, to consider the ability of staff to engage with and utilise current research to enhance their interpretative offering and engage in meaningful and direct evaluation of their own and other colleagues' interpretative activities.

Second, to consider the skills associated with engaging with new and diverse audiences. An important question would appear to be how well staff understand the diversity of their current audience in terms of that audience's needs, interests, values and preferences? Ballantyne & Hughes (2001) identified this, where the skills development for ecotour guides included: 'encouraging visitors to interact with each other' (40%), 'involving visitors through the use of questions' (23%), 'public speaking and communication skills' (18%) and 'interacting with visitors from other cultures' (6%).

In concluding, the work of Interpret Europe on the Grundtvig InHerit project, in which the AHI collaborated, has provided a useful set of standards for the interpretative profession from which various sets of competencies can easily be derived.

Table 5. Top three highest-weighted discrepancy scores by category
(summarised from Powell, Depper & Wright, 2017:24–8).

Category	Competencies	Weighted discrepancy score (mean)*
Audience experience	Assess the needs of diverse audiences	-10.60
	Identify and engage non-visiting audiences	-9.89
	Update based on changing societal trends	-9.89
Finding and assessing knowledge	Update the site's story through research	-7.68
	Identify biases in data and documents	-7.53
	Remain current with issues and research	-7.49
Appropriate techniques	Develop content for park websites	-9.09
	Comply with technical and legal standards	-8.76
	Develop content for social media	-8.50
Partnering, collaboration and community outreach	Building a trusting relationship with partners	-6.57
	Collaborate with academic institutions	-6.45
	Engage personally with the local community	-5.93
Planning and evaluation	Evaluate the effectiveness of interpretation	-9.06
	Identify the training needs of staff/volunteers	-8.89
	Analyse the costs and benefits of interpretation	-8.57
Professional development of self and others	Plan for self-development/personal growth	-9.61
	Keep current on interpretive best practices	-9.02
	Develop and experiment with new techniques	-7.71

Third, a perhaps somewhat inevitable focus on digital and emerging technologies and the needs and interests of a modern audience, which may or may not reflect the interests, abilities and current methods of engagement offered by staff.

In concluding, the work of Interpret Europe on the Grundtvig InHerit project, in which the AHI collaborated, has provided a useful set of standards for the interpretative profession from which various sets of competencies can easily be derived. These could then be used to guide the design of distinctive site- and staff-specific in-house training offerings. After all, as Christie and Mason reported, at the heart of effective interpretation lies 'enthusiasm, confidence and good delivery' (2003:5). ■

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→ Philip teaches tourism and is also Associate Dean (Student Experience) in the Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University.

AHI North go to Bolton

Alison Cooper, Emma Crowley, Paul Ellis, Lisa Keys, Sue Latimer, Carolyn Lloyd Brown, Geraldine Mathieson

Inspired by the Bedford conference, members from across northern England met in Bolton in November to seek more interpretive truths – and to network and exchange ideas. The focus of the visit was Bolton Museum's Egyptian exhibition, but we discovered other galleries full of imaginative but pragmatic thinking. Bolton staff and their designers, Core, were generous with their time, honesty and insights.

These are our key takeaways:

Visitors first Collection staff re-examined the research behind standard museum light levels and made an informed decision to relax their conservation needs in favour of visitors' viewing experience.

Pragmatic The designers worked creatively with the limitations of the museum building. Switches, windows and radiators were hidden behind banners or incorporated into the large illustrations lining the main Egyptian gallery.

Purposeful Not surprisingly the graphics incorporate hieroglyphs, but cleverly they are chosen to mean something when translated. Building in a learning opportunity like this is far-sighted.

Pragmatic 2 When two traditional portraits were too big to move, they packed the staircases around them with dozens more 'Faces of Bolton' to create a real picture of the community that draws people upstairs.

Sustainable A multi-use themed space can be easily converted from museum gallery to event venue, generating income as well as community use.

Saving the environment step by step No more plastic substrates for temporary exhibition labels at Bolton – it's now recyclable cardboard only.

There are many more good, simple and often low-cost ideas – Bolton Museum is definitely worth a visit for inspiration.

This was a great opportunity to get together with fellow interpreters – once a year really isn't enough. We also promoted the visit to regional museum development services as an opportunity to find out more about AHI, which brought in a new face or two. There is so much goodwill in the profession that visits like this are relatively low-cost and easy to set up, and we recommend members in other regions do the same. You're welcome to join us on our next visits to Manchester and the North York Moors to find out more. Contact: SueLatimer03@gmail.com ■

The arches in Bolton's Egyptian gallery show large numbers of objects from an intriguing variety of angles, interpreted by the visual and informative graphics filling the walls

Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation

Michael Hamish Glen
AHI Trustee

World-wide aspiration

Working together in the world of interpretation has always been a goal of mine and it's been satisfying to be able to contribute in different ways. The creation of the Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation (GAHI) is one outcome of the combined efforts of many interpreters' representatives around the world over many years. Key documents include the *Banff Declaration* in 1985, *the Honolulu Charter* in 1991 and the *Freiburg Declaration* in 2011.

Related debates took place in Denver CO in 2014, in Montreal, Canada, in 2015 and at the Interpret Europe conference in Kraków, Poland, in 2015 where targets for setting up a new alliance were set.

Following that, a small group led by Chuck Lennox of the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) drafted a paper for wide consultation under the heading: *Stronger together – a proposed global alliance of heritage interpretation associations.* That paper is now on the GAHI website, which NAI helped to set up: www.gahi.online. There is also a Facebook page: @GlobalAllianceforHI

Why do we need a global alliance?

The rationale behind what is now GAHI is set out on the website. The heritage interpretation community around the world is committed to using good interpretative practice to encourage people to understand, appreciate and protect the enormous reservoir of natural and cultural, tangible and intangible heritage which is collectively our common wealth. However, some people still do not recognise or accept the role of interpretation. While individual heritage interpretation associations can try and influence these doubters in their own countries, many have felt the need for support at an international level to show that interpretation has benefits in a global context.

The proposal for a global heritage interpretation alliance is designed to help address this challenge. In the draft GAHI *Memorandum of Understanding* (on the website), the first commitment of ten reads:

> *We, as the* Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation, *aim to represent those around the world involved in, and supportive of, the theory and practice of heritage interpretation as a professional discipline that transcends all boundaries of geography, race, gender, politics and belief.*

GAHI's aims sit well with AHI's own plans to widen its advocacy for heritage interpretation in the UK and Ireland.

Progress so far

Since the website came online, there has been some progress. AHI is one of several organisations that support the principles behind GAHI and efforts are under way to speed up formal agreement. We need more people to comment on the draft so that it can be produced as a final document that membership associations can sign up to and use to develop cooperative action. If you have any, please send them in the first instance to Jim Mitchell (jim.mitchell@ahi.org.uk) ■

Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation

Dennis Kummer/UnSplash

Tourism Sector Deal – government invests in tourism

Nicolette Evans
Journal Editor

Visiting our heritage is the number one reason international visitors come to the UK. In 2018, 38 million international visitors visited the UK and this number is expected to grow by a quarter by 2025. Last Autumn the government set out its Tourism Sector Deal to support this growth. Here is a summary of its findings:

- Five new pilot Tourism Zones will be set up from 2020 to increase visitor numbers across the UK. Small- and medium-sized enterprises in these areas will receive digital skills training and be offered management and leadership guidance to boost productivity.
- A new independent Tourism Data Hub will be established to understand visitor activity and product preferences.
- An International Business Events Action Plan (2019–2025) has been published to support the business events industry in securing more business travellers to the UK.
- New investment in the industry workforce through the introduction of two new T level qualifications in Catering and Cultural Heritage and Visitor Attractions. Industry will offer 30,000 apprenticeships per year by 2025 and run a mentoring programme supporting 10,000 employees.
- The government wants the UK to become the most accessible tourism destination in Europe by 2025, increasing the number of international disabled visitors by a third. A UK conference on Accessibility Tourism will be run with government departments, accessibility organisations and charities to share best practice, prioritise making business changes and examine the potential economic and social impact.
- The UK government will continue to invest in projects across the museums, heritage and arts sectors that will enhance visitors' experience.

This could be an area to keep a close eye on in terms of new funding and future projects. There could be campaigns or projects to piggyback onto that in turn may also help boost visitor numbers and extend the tourist season for heritage and natural interpretation sites. ■

Further reading
www.gov.uk/government/publications/tourism-sector-deal/

Above:
Accessible landscapes: the tourism sector deal includes continued investment in the England Coast Path, the world's longest managed and waymarked coastal path

Seasons of change

Charlotte Dew
Public Programme Manager, Goldsmiths' Centre, London

Charlotte Dew asks whether Japan's seasonally themed exhibition programmes are a key to greater engagement?

Charlotte Dew

'Crow and Sparrows' screen, 1910, Shunso Hishida, colour on paper

Tokyo's National Museum, Nezu Museum and Ukiyo-e Ota Memorial Museum of Art each structure their exhibition programmes – in part – responding to the seasons of the year. They change elements and sometimes all of their displays every four to eight weeks. The works exhibited connect with the weather, fauna, flora, food and customs associated with the time of year. An exhibition's title or theme does not always make the seasonal relationship explicit, but, through the choice of works and sensitive in-exhibition interpretation, links are made and explored.

Over the course of 2019, the Nezu Museum's seasonally responsive programme manifested itself in shows including 'Ogata Kōrun's *Irises* – Felicitations in Edo-period Paintings'. This ran from April to May, coinciding with the time the iris blooms in nature. The *Irises* will be shown again in April 2020, in an exhibition titled 'The Allure of Colour'. From November to December 2019, the exhibit 'The Tea Ceremony in Edo' was accompanied by a display exploring the tradition of breaking the seal on new tea in November, and included a calligraphic scroll inscribed with a haiku telling of the Yellow Mountains in Autumn. From September to November 2020, the Nezu's three exhibitions will each provide a perspective on melancholy to reflect the transition from Summer to Autumn: 'Adventures in Monochrome', 'Learning from Shards' and 'Melancholy Autumn Tea'.

The connection to nature at the Nezu Museum continues through its extensive gardens. The Visitor Guide states that the 'Japanese garden behind the museum offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy the changing seasons'.

The connection to nature at the Nezu Museum continues through its extensive gardens. The Visitor Guide states that the 'Japanese garden behind the museum offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy the changing seasons'. Its beautiful tea room, with floor-to-ceiling glass walls and a delicate paper-lined roof, is set deep within the garden's mature trees, immersing visitors in foliage.

At the Ukiyo-e Ota Memorial Museum, the June 2019 exhibition 'Walking the Hills and Valleys of Edo' considered the growing popularity of 'walking around the city with its unique topographical aspects, such as slopes and undulating terrain' at a time of year →

Right:
'The Tea Ceremony in Edo' exhibition poster, Nezu Museum

Far right:
A seasonal vegan bento box, a series of small dishes eaten together

Charlotte Dew

Charlotte Dew

when the weather is conducive to, and may be an inspiration for, such exploration. The December 2019 show focussed on the prints of Utagawa Toyokuni, and the interpretation drew visitors' attention to a highlight piece – *Eitai Bridge and Mitsumata Viewed from Nakazu* – depicting children flying kites on New Year's Day.

At the Toyko National Museum, the large-scale rotation of exhibits is less frequent, but in the National Treasure Gallery a different significant work is presented each month. In March 2019, *Merrymaking under Blossom Trees* by Kano Naganobu was shown. At the time, blossom petals were floating on the breeze outside the museum and queues snaked away from the entrance to Tokyo's Imperial Gardens, where the cherry trees were in bloom.

Charlotte Dew

Nezu Museum's gardens

In Japan, this seasonal approach to the display and interpretation of collections is married with a spare, more aesthetic arrangement of objects than is normally seen in Western museums. The current pressure that UK museums face to reduce the percentage of collections in storage does not appear to have made an impact in Tokyo. Lighter hangs make a higher rate of exhibition changeover more tenable.

So, for the visitor, what are the benefits of a seasonally sensitive approach to programming? On an immediate and visceral level, a connection to the world outside and their own lives is made:

the songbird's song
it stops what I am doing
at the sink
Chigetsu

The themes explored are universal; we all experience the seasons and the varying emotions, activities and traditions that accompany them. The choice of objects gives pause to question the colour of the leaves, the strength of the wind or sun on the journey to the museum; to reflect on the food eaten subsequently, and the flowers blooming and being cut at that time. The collections become more relatable and accessible, despite the origin of many exhibits in high society. The approach also provides an opportunity to consider how seasonal traditions have changed: what people of the past did and experienced at the same time of year, which evolving society, science and technology have adjusted and, in some cases, made redundant.

the spring wind –
the skirts of the thatcher
are blown about
Issa

The monthly or bimonthly redisplay of objects can make an organisation and its collection feel alive and responsive. Any sense of stasis is removed and frequent repeat visiting is encouraged. The Nezu Museum publishes its programme for the year ahead in a single fold-out leaflet available to all visitors. That it is only possible to see specific treasures from the Nezu collection at certain times of year, for example the *Irises* in May, rather than in a permanent display, is an incentive to value the experience and make an effort to visit at a certain time. Further, for the organisation, it is a good basis for publicity and fragile objects are protected against over-display.

It is an opportune time for Western museums to learn from Japan's seasonally responsive programmes. The importance of engaging with climate change and questions of sustainability increases in line with public interest and concern.

Charlotte Dew

New Year offerings

A seasonally themed programme is not common in Western museums, except when, for example, in museums of rural life or social history a sense of the changing seasons is used as a means of communicating the meaning and function of tools, machinery, clothes and more. However, even in these instances a monthly rehang is not usual. Seasonal links are most frequently made through a public programme of events such as Apple Day in September, for Halloween, Christmas, Easter and so on, but often these types of activities are add-ons, not rooted in collections or themed exhibitions.

That this approach to museum programming is common in Japan, but not more widely, may be attributed to the country's heightened awareness and observation of seasonal changes in general. For example, bento boxes artfully present in-season produce. It is suggested that 'it should be possible to place a haiku in one of the five seasons of the year (five because in Japan the New Year is reckoned to be a season in its own right)' (Cobb 2002:4). In Shinto shrines, the flowers and plants illustrated on the hana-mi-fuda – amulets sold to guard your family – change each month to reflect the time of the year; pine in January, plum blossom in February, peach blossom in March and so on.

It is an opportune time for Western museums to learn from Japan's seasonally responsive programmes. The importance of engaging with climate change and questions of sustainability increases in line with public interest and concern. A seasonal interpretative approach can also be used as a mechanism to talk about change more broadly; ideas of renewal, life and death in societies where a crisis in mental health provision is recognised by many. In a time of flux, exploration of seasonal themes is an effective and collections-rooted means for museums to make themselves relevant and purposeful. It is a lens that can usefully be applied to all collections in small and greater ways. ■

Poetry extracts taken from David Cobb (ed.). *The British Museum Haiku*, The British Museum Press: London, 2002

→ Charlotte is Public Programme Manager at the Goldsmiths' Centre in London, Professional Development Manager at the Touring Exhibitions Group www.teg.org.uk and a Museum Consultant.

We don't want your pity, we want you to visit your Invisible Cities

Zakia Moulaoui
Founder, Invisible Cities
Nicolette Evans
Journal Editor

Invisible Cities is an award-winning social enterprise which trains formerly homeless people to become walking tour guides of their own city. Its founder, French-born Zakia Moulaoui, shares with Nicolette Evans how giving people a voice can bring a fresh, new perspective to interpretation.

Where did the idea for Invisible Cities come from?

I was in Greece in 2015 and witnessed street paper vendors giving tours of Athens to tourists, school groups and businesses. When I returned home to Scotland in 2016, I spoke to many charities, social enterprises and groups working with the homeless about setting up a similar idea. Invisible Cities started in Edinburgh with the help of my partners, including Big Issue Invest, and a small grant from Edinburgh Airport that helped pay for a website and leaflets. It then took about six months to recruit the first four guides and get the initial tours going. The tours focus on showing tourists and locals a side of the places the guides know best.

Emma Ledwith/Invisible Cities

Giving people a voice so they can share what it actually means to be homeless

As a social enterprise, we got some support to attend workshops, receive professional advice and some additional finance, but this can never be used for staffing or getting contractors. This meant that for the first two years Invisible Cities was entirely volunteer-led. Only once they started generating enough income, did we start having a real team on board.

How has it been working with vulnerable people?

What we do is simple but complex at the same time: we give people a first chance when, too often, they have been given no chance at all. We work with people who experience a range of challenges: low confidence, long-term unemployment, addiction, poor physical and mental health, they may have experienced trauma or just don't have the extended social networks others have.

We treat people as people, with their differences and their aspirations and always on a one-to-one basis. We help them achieve whatever they want to achieve, whether that is being an Invisible Cities guide or working in hospitality, tourism or with other tour companies.

Paul is a legend and his tour was extremely enjoyable, fun and insightful (even for someone like me who grew up in Edinburgh). Very well-researched and interesting history from the area, complemented by Paul's personal experiences from his life. As fans of Trainspotting and all of Irvine Welsh's books we enjoyed all the snippets of facts and readings throughout the tour.

Frazer, visitor on an Invisible (Edinburgh) tour

Emma Ledwith/Invisible Cities

Above:
A symbolic sculpture of Jesus Christ depicted as a homeless man highlights the growing homelessness crisis in Manchester

Right:
Making a point: the centre of York station was the Zero Point for the measurement of 10 of the North Eastern Railway's lines

Invisible Cities

Encouraging people to look at the streets differently

How do you balance people's needs and commercialism?

The biggest challenge is always to balance the commercial aspect with the social mission we have. We work with people who still face complex issues but, at the same time, have to deliver professional tours every time.

Looking on the back side of the city helped me to see beyond the high-gloss tour guide book impressions. Impressive and highly professional, Daniel delivered figures and facts, showed flexibility and sprinkled fun.

Isabella, visitor on an Invisible (Glasgow) tour

We believe in giving everyone a chance, no matter where they come from or how they live. But being inclusive and supportive also means having clear boundaries. We are a business and so, if a guide doesn't represent us well or behaves in a way we are not comfortable with, they will be told. People respect honest relationships and conversations so whether it's in a positive or negative way, always be honest first.

What have you found most satisfying on this project?

The most exciting thing is always to see our guides thrive and do well, in whatever field they have chosen. Working with our trainees and guides is like going on a journey of development; we go through learning, getting opportunities, failing etc. so it can be quite emotional. Seeing the pride guides take in what they do and what they deliver is also very great.

Invisible (York) has been genuinely inspiring for everyone involved. You're not only given the space to write and develop a unique tour of York from a personal perspective, but the training has helped us all to build our confidence and learn new skills. We've had terrific support from so many local people and they have helped me turn my life around and I have enjoyed the process so much.

Gavin, tour guide at Invisible (York)

If you had to start over, what would you do differently next time?

When we started, we tried to create our own booking engine and worked with an incredible web developer. But it took time, money and frustration. I realised that it was like reinventing the wheel. Instead I decided to use the amazing tools and expertise that are already out there.

Invisible Cities

How will Invisible Cities become sustainable?

In three short years we've welcomed more than 6,000 customers and won several awards in tourism, including the Innovation in Tourism Awards at the Scottish Thistle Awards and the Social Enterprise of the Year at Barclays Entrepreneur Awards 2019.

We want to welcome more guests onto our tours in each of our Invisible Cities and expand into more places. As any other tour operator, we will be financially sustainable by selling more tours and merchandise. But our tours also educate and talk about issues that are important nowadays so the more guests we have, the more social impact we can also have. That will be our way of growing. ■

Further resources:

Visit www.invisible-cities.org

Facebook: @invisiblecitiestours

Twitter: @InvCities

Instagram: InvisibleCitiesTours

Dive deeper

into Scotland's marine environment

Dora Roden
Project Officer,
Scottish Seabird Centre

The Scottish Seabird Centre is a conservation and education charity based in the coastal town of North Berwick in East Lothian. The Charity's twentieth anniversary falls in 2020, which coincides with Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters – an initiative led by VisitScotland with the aim to celebrate and promote Scotland's stunning coastline, islands and waterways, encouraging responsible engagement and participation. Perfect timing for the launch of a brand-new exhibition at the Scottish Seabird Centre. Dora Roden explains how the project tells the story of Scotland's marine environment and coastal heritage, but also encourages an understanding of the threats it faces and the steps visitors can take to help protect it.

BassRockfromTantallon

The story so far

The original concept for the Charity was to bring people closer to the Bass Rock's internationally important colony of Northern gannets using interactive camera technologies. Whilst some additions to the cameras and exhibition space have been made since 2000, many of the original components remained unchanged. The opportunity 'for a refresh' was there to be grasped, especially with the increasing demand for marine-related educational opportunities from our visitors. Programmes such as *Blue Planet II* have helped us all to become aware of the importance of protecting our coastlines and natural heritage, as well as the wider global issues of climate change and the pollution of our oceans. As a conservation and education charity, we wanted our redesign to rise to the challenge and meet the demands of our diverse audiences.

© Susan Davies

Isle of May puffin with sandeels

Kicking off the project

The 18-month refurbishment project started in the middle of 2018. It was enabled by a range of funders and expert input from Glasgow Science Centre's (GSC) 'Experience Design Service'. The project was implemented in two phases to minimise impact on the Charity's operations, especially during the peak visitor season. The first phase involved a refit of the welcome areas including the ground floor café and retail space, at the start of the year. The second phase, the transformation of our classroom into a bright and flexible learning hub and extensive works on the 200 sqm 'Discovery Experience' exhibition space, took place at the end of the year.

Working with GSC we embraced the challenge of making the subject matter accessible and exciting to people of all ages. Creative ideas were brought to the table and a 'long list' of potential exhibits was created. Then came the reality check.

Putting the fundamentals in place

The Charity's staff team is relatively small, so taking on a substantial project was a challenge. External expert input was vital, so a formal procurement process was followed to appoint a principal contractor and specialists to make the exhibits. The procurement journey can be quite daunting when it's something done infrequently, but led to the appointment of a team we were extremely happy with. The project budget was not extravagant but it was adequate and fixed. With an end deadline set by funders, the time and cost elements of the project were a driver for keeping the schedule on track.

Getting creative

Fairly quickly, four main zones emerged for the exhibition – **Seabirds, Scottish marine environment, Threats** and **Discover**, where the remote cameras sit alongside information about the local islands and wildlife sightings. These zones gave us the scope to put seabirds in context, and also respond to the growing interest in environmental issues – particularly in relation to the sea and coast.

Working with GSC we embraced the challenge of making the subject matter accessible and exciting to people of all ages. Creative ideas were brought to the table and a 'long list' of potential exhibits was created. Then came the reality check.

Some ideas sounded fantastic on paper but the practicalities of turning these into functioning and reliable exhibits were prohibitive. A subset of exhibits was included in the tender process which resulted in the appointment of two contractors: one to create the electro-mechanical exhibits and another to realise the IT-based ideas. Once actual quotes were received, a value management exercise helped the team arrive at a final scope that fitted the budget and timescales, while still providing a cohesive exhibition that met all of our objectives. →

Exhibits in the Threats Zone

Technology

It was important to achieve a balance between high-tech and low-tech exhibition components. Table-top exhibits were roughly half screen-based and half mechanical.

'Hero' is our virtual reality booth where visitors can experience diving off the Bass Rock – encountering gannets, dolphins and humpback whales along the way. Other innovative IT-based exhibits allow the user to, for example: take the role of a fulmar chick defending its nest from predators; attempt to clear an island of invasive tree mallow to enable puffins to nest; hunt as a seal searching for fish using the vibrations of its whiskers; and hear the natural and man-made sounds of the seas.

'Hero' is our virtual reality booth where visitors can experience diving off the Bass Rock – encountering gannets, dolphins and humpback whales along the way.

The infrastructure supporting the remote cameras on the islands of the Firth of Forth was upgraded. A new visitor interface allows users to switch between different feeds as well as to pan and zoom. The system has been converted from analogue to digital with future-proofing built in. It is hoped that feeds from these cameras will benefit researchers as well as the general public.

We didn't always get the technology right. Looking to repurpose an existing 'cliff face seabird taxidermy display' we underestimated the degree of complexity. The idea was to create an eye-catching and interactive projection wall, showcasing Scotland's kelp forests and cold-water coral reefs. However, the concept was somewhat experimental and the initial result was blurry and distorted on a surface which was just too full of crevices and outcrops to be workable. Back to the drawing board!

Although later than anticipated, the iconic projection exhibit did finally fulfil its intended purpose – bringing to life these amazing habitats in an innovative and immersive way. Lesson learned about the need for testing a concept before full-scale implementation!

Copywriting

The amount of copy required for the number of information panels, exhibit screens and hands-on activities was large and required some outsourcing of the workload. By breaking the overall content down, and dividing up the effort, it became manageable. With several individuals involved, an early copywriting workshop was key. The team arrived at an appropriate tone of voice (modern, fairly informal, yet professional and authoritative) and agreed some 'rules' around style of writing. We also ensured that copy was 'layered' such that a visitor could either 'dip their toe' into a topic, go for a 'deep dive' or land somewhere in between.

The sourcing of other exhibition 'assets' was another test. Striking photographic imagery was essential in bringing the exhibition to life. A wide range of species from whales and dolphins to tiny sea snails to unusual invasive species was required. Sourcing these, along with sound and video clips, took time and persuasion. Fortunately, we have a strong network of contacts and eventually every requirement was met ... but not without a few last-minute emergency pleas – 'Has anyone got a photo of a cormorant chick?'

© Maggie Sheddan

Gannets and gugas

The Future

The project journey has been extremely positive overall. Our vision of a modern interactive visitor experience which supports our charitable objectives and can easily be adapted in future has become a reality. It has been hugely satisfying to see ideas and plans that existed for so long on paper transformed into reality. We learnt that a small-team, time-bound, fixed budget project is not the place to be too experimental but also that taking some risks is essential to push the boundaries of what's on offer. Refreshed interpretation, coupled with our staff's and volunteers' passion for wildlife, has brought plenty of optimism. ■

© Helen Pugh

Seabird Zone

→ Dora is a Project Officer at the Scottish Seabird Centre and has been leading on the development of the new exhibition and interpretation. To find out more, please visit www.seabird.org

Balancing heritage and tourism with blue Skye thinking

Angus Murray
Programme Manager, Skye Ecomuseum

Known as Druim nan Linntean (Gaelic for Ridge of Ages), the Skye Ecomuseum is an outdoor museum 'with no walls and a roofless sky' and includes a footpath network on the Inner Hebrides. Set up 10 years ago, it recently received further National Heritage Lottery funding to enhance visitors' experience of its crofting and industrial heritage, rugged landscapes and scenic shorelines.

Angus Murray led the project to review the island's interpretation in consultation with the local community, and explains how they found a way that delicate landscapes and increased tourism can co-exist.

Walking in dinosaurs' footsteps

Set among stunning landscapes and beach dinosaur footprints, Skye Ecomuseum's interpretation brings to life the island's local stories, shorelines, mountains and hidden lochs. Information boards invite you to discover the waterfalls, gorges and learn about a traditional way of life.

The Quiraing viewpoint in the snow

The Ecomuseum is surrounded by a thriving community of more than 500 people living in 23 bailtean or townships, dotted around Staffin Bay and the Trotternish Ridge. Their way of life has been shaped by the land and their Gaelic culture.

Our residents have the good fortune to live in an area of exceptional geology, paleontology and cultural heritage. However, it's also an area that faces important challenges. Year upon year, visitor numbers have grown to the extent that the island population increases six-fold in the busiest months. This has a high impact on the environment including eroding established walking paths and pressure on the designated car parking areas.

To help address this, we built a viewing platform at the Lealt Gorge waterfall in 2018 and recently installed new interpretation boards to draw visitors beyond these busiest locations to visit lesser known places, seeing the community as a whole.

It's still early days, but we hope these efforts will help cater for the thousands of people from across the world who come to see Staffin's many scenic landmarks, including the Quiraing, Old Man of Storr and Kilt Rock. →

Encouraging walkers to go off the beaten track to slow down path erosion: the challenge for Isle of Skye as a popular 'walking holiday' destination

"The volunteers in the workshop decided that people needed to feature in all the images of our outstanding and iconic landscapes on our signage... After all, interpretation is about communicating an idea to people".

Casey McIntyre

Lateral North

Blending in: the corten steel rusts in the landscape so the colour changes with time

Warm welcomes in spades

For our new interpretation, we organised workshops with people from a wide range of ages and backgrounds to explore the ways in which we could improve how we welcome visitors. The volunteers in the workshop decided that people needed to feature in all the images of our outstanding and iconic landscapes on our signage. This is to help visitors understand that, when they are visiting an amazing location, it's the people who live here that are impacted the most. After all, interpretation is about communicating an idea to people.

These open sessions also looked at the signage that had been put in place a decade ago. There have been many changes in the sector since then, especially in the importance of colour contrasts with regards to the graphics – particularly for those visitors with visual impairment. We looked at what was missing, but also what was strong, and tried to retain that essence in the new signage.

A particular win for our project was the way we worked on our path network. We put on volunteer work parties, where people gave their time to put in long days of heavy labour, many for the first time. As a result, we can proudly say we have improved almost half of our path network through this project. Tour companies now talk of reducing their carbon footprint in Staffin by spending days with us with shovels and spades in their hands. We continue to build on these relationships proving that delicate landscapes and increased tourism can find a way to co-exist.

Making heritage naturally enjoyable

Getting a diverse group of people involved in the project has been very rewarding and resulted in some great activities, such as restarting the Staffin sea fishing competition again – a historic event that had stopped in recent years. Through this we met people who owned boats that were more than a 100 years old and school pupils got their first fishing lessons! It was a really fun and natural way for people to get involved in their local heritage.

Empowering volunteers

A key part of the interpretation work was researching Skye's history. We broke down each location into stories and gave volunteers a template to collect the information. They enthusiastically interviewed a diverse range of people including local crofters, fishermen and even academic geologists and then emailed us the information.

Sometimes these completed templates were short and sweet, others came back as huge documents with highly detailed information. Luckily we had our excellent copywriter, Lucy Harland (Lucidity Media), who had amazing clarity of vision to make sense of it all.

Respecting other languages

We're fortunate to have a vibrant community where Gaelic is often the main language, so we wanted to include it within the designs. Although I'm not from the Isle of Skye, I grew up on another island where Gaelic is widely spoken. This meant it was quite natural for me to be working with other speakers of the language.

The dramatic landscape around the Old Man of Storr

We wanted to avoid offering a translation and included Gaelic in other ways, such as place names, words connected to wildlife and some poetry, songs or quotes directly connected to the specific location. I think that the way the interpretation comes across is as natural as the language spoken in this part of the world. We are lucky and grateful to have Myles Campbell, a renowned Gaelic poet and writer, on hand in this community. He was really generous with his time and contributed a great deal to the interpretation to ensure we kept Gaelic elements local to this community and accurate to their dialect.

What's been the feedback so far?

It's early days (the new interpretation only went in during February and March), but the feedback so far has been positive.

'Good map, good that it includes distance and what you need for this particular walk – this is often lacking from other maps I've seen at sites on Skye.'

'Like the use of professional Scottish photographers – this should be capitalised upon.'

'It has a better layout that the previous signage. It is more concise than the previous signage – before, you had to read the whole thing to understand.'

It always takes more time

Having involved a relatively large number of people, the project took six months longer than we anticipated. We were lucky that we had time to develop this idea. In hindsight, I would have put the signage bases out in the landscape before the text panels. They could then be retro-fitted as someone is always looking to make last-minute changes. I feel the result has been worth the time and effort.

Encourage locals to be the driver

Our intention was always to put the local community 'in the driving seat'. By letting them make the decisions on what they wanted to say, it created a real sense of ownership. Sometimes, parts of this community can feel overwhelmed by visitors at times – although this is usually because of busy roads and too little parking. Although we live in an amazing natural landscape, it's the impact on people that matters most, and we want this to be positive for locals and visitors alike. ■

Angus Murray

What a catch! Fishing lessons in 100-year-old boats and reintroducing the popular Staffin sea fishing competition

→ Angus is the Programme Manager for the Druim nan Linntean project at Skye Ecomuseum. This project was awarded a £522,000 National Heritage Lottery Fund (second phase) grant and supported by the Coastal Communities and SSE Sustainable Development Funds.
www.skyecomuseum.co.uk

TO BE OR NOT TO BE...
A FREELANCER IN HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

Lyndsey Clark, Emma Metcalfe, Steve Slack and Taissa Csaky talk to **Nicky Temple**
Journal Editor

Why are increasing numbers of heritage interpretation professionals turning to freelance work? What are the benefits and drawbacks? What is it like in reality to make the leap from employee to business owner? Where do freelancers go for support? What is the key to success?

We put these questions to four experienced freelance heritage interpretation consultants, each working with a wide variety of organisations in different areas of the country.

Lyndsey Clark is an interpretation, exhibitions and public engagement consultant, based in Scotland but supporting organisations country wide to develop creative and exciting projects. Lyndsey worked at the Science Museum and National Museums Scotland before becoming a freelancer.
www.ltclark.co.uk

Emma Metcalfe is an illustrator and interpretation designer. She is based in Nottingham but works across the UK, specialising in working with museums and heritage sites to create family trails, children's guide books, maps, murals and more. Emma is unusual in that she has always been self-employed.
www.emillustration.co.uk

Steve Slack is a heritage interpretation consultant based in Manchester, helping organisations across the country to communicate with their audiences. He also offers coaching and training workshops to enable organisations to find their voice. Steve worked at the Imperial War Museum and British Museum before setting up his own freelance business.
www.steveslack.co.uk

Taissa Csaky is a heritage interpretation consultant from Oxford. Her work includes preparing and writing interpretation and content plans, and writing and editing copy for panels and audio-visual content. Before freelancing, Taissa worked for a design studio as an in-house content developer, at an educational publishing house and for an interpretation consultancy.
www.taissacsaky.com

Why turn to freelance work?

Steve: I used to work on interpretation for the British Museum. When I was made redundant, I chose to see it as an opportunity to go freelance. I was lucky to get my first freelance job through the contacts I had made at the museum. It's so important to work hard at networking and build on the contacts you have from previous employment when you start out as a freelancer.

Taissa: At some point in my late thirties I became very opinionated! I was developing my own views on interpretation – on the process that decides what stories should be told, on who the interpretation was for and how it should be delivered. I wanted to have the flexibility to try out those ideas for myself. A more flexible routine was very appealing too. I felt that working on my own I could be more efficient and get more done in less time. And I wanted a dog. As with many major life decisions, there was a whole jumble of factors.

Work comes when you make genuine connections and really enjoy speaking to people and visiting places.

Lyndsey: I became freelance in 2011 when I couldn't find any jobs in the sector that really appealed to me. I knew organisations had a need for people to do project work and that smaller organisations often didn't have the experience necessary to deliver capital projects and could really benefit from input.

Emma: It tends to be the way with illustrators – most are self-employed unless you choose to take a sidestep to be able to work in a related field such as design or marketing. I like the flexibility of being self-employed but it can feel like a pretty precarious way to start your career.

What are the benefits and drawbacks?

Emma: The main benefit of freelancing is that I can manage my own time and don't need to ask anyone else's permission to take time off or do something a bit different. The downside is that, in reality, I'm often too busy to make the most of that flexibility and end up not actually doing those fun, spontaneous things!

Lyndsey: The key benefit to me is variety. I love working with a wide range of different organisations and types of client and types of content. It keeps my work fresh and exciting. The drawback is always trying to balance projects and competing priorities, and keeping a healthy balance between work and life.

Taissa: I love having control of my own schedule, choosing which projects to bid for and following my own process for evolving an interpretation plan. I think I work in a focused way and can cover more ground than I would in a busy office with administrative and social distractions. The reverse of this coin is that I have to be pretty self-reliant. There's no IT support, no finance or HR department, and nobody to go for lunch with.

Steve: A difficulty I find in freelancing is that there isn't a standard approach or pricing system when it comes to pay, and we don't like to talk openly together about how much we charge. There is also a danger that we over-service our clients because we want to do as much as we can within the budget and conditions that they offer. But for the sake of our freelancing community, we need to have the confidence to draw the line in a polite way and call out low pay and poor contracts when we see them, to send the message to organisations that this is not OK. This leaves us with a moral quandary, when we know that the sector is not overflowing with funds and we want to be kind and offer our help. The Museum Freelance Network intends to carry out a survey later this year to identify problems such as these, potentially enabling us to have a louder and more unified voice.

What advice would you give to a fledgling freelancer to ensure success?

Taissa: Be honest with yourself about whether you really want to spend most of your time working alone. It can be tough. Maybe start by working for yourself a couple of days a week alongside a part-time job. This also helps ease the transition from regular, reliable salary payments to fees that may be paid at variable times. Be prepared to do admin as well as exciting interpretation work. Keep clear records of your earnings and outgoings. Save at least 20% of every fee for tax. This is all very boring but vital if you don't want to end up stressing out over your tax bill. →

Lyndsey: My advice would be to stay curious and keep learning from anywhere and everywhere you can to keep your practice continually evolving and developing. Work comes when you make genuine connections and really enjoy speaking to people and visiting places.

Emma: Sadly, I've just found out that I have a significant health issue to contend with. Although I'm hoping to be able to continue working, I really wish I had taken out insurance to cover potential loss of earnings due to something unexpected happening. I just never thought I would need it because I'm young and fit.

Steve: There is a temptation early on as a freelancer to say yes to everything, but as you gain more experience you'll feel more confident to turn things down that don't fit exactly with what you want to be doing. This can also help to avoid burnout from taking on too much and overloading. Ask: is the work what I want?

Emma: Many people worry about the 'nuts and bolts' side of freelancing (tax, accounting, contracts etc.). Those are all really important things which you need to learn, but don't overlook the need to work on your confidence. I faked it until it felt a bit more natural, then gradually it got easier because I got to know people in the industry.

Further information

Museum Freelance Network offers support for all freelance heritage professionals, not only those working with museums. They hold an annual conference, this year on 5th October at the London Canal Museum. The website hosts a range of resources and articles, including a very useful guide to freelancing: museumfreelance.org

Gov.uk has several useful introductory guides to self-employment: www.gov.uk/topic/business-tax/self-employed

The Freelance Lifestylers Facebook Group is a group for freelancers and freelancers-to-be from a wide range of industries. A useful place to ask questions, pick up tips and network.

#museumhour on Twitter hosts weekly Monday night live chats (8pm UK time) on various museum- and heritage-related subjects.

www.artsprofessional.co.uk is a website that keeps you up to date with the latest news, training opportunities and job offers.

And of course, the AHI website has details of training, regional meet-ups and much more.

Steve: Work hard at networking. You can never buy too many cups of coffee in your first few years of freelancing. Get yourself in the position to be able to make connections, even if it takes you out of your comfort zone. The universe is listening but you've got to make some noise! To build your network, start with the contacts you already have. Go to meet-ups, lectures and talks – put your hand up and ask a question! Follow this up with an email to the speaker. Why not volunteer to speak yourself? Talk about a recent project you've done. Take on a trusteeship or advisory role for a local association or heritage interest to build connections and also show that you are reliable and trustworthy. All this takes time and effort but think of it as an investment in yourself.

Where do you go for support?

Lyndsey: For a long time I got all my support from networks within the sector and other museum and heritage people, regardless of their employment status. However, in the past two years or so I've really benefited from joining a Facebook group for freelancers across all industries and listening to podcasts about freelancing. If you work with museums, I highly recommend connecting with the Museum Freelance Network for their newsletter and attending their once-a-year event.

Emma: I have a room in a shared studio in Nottingham and can't overemphasise the importance of my studio friends and being able to work (for at least some of the time) in a space with other people, rather than at home on my own. The in-jokes, the cup of tea chats, the gossiping and the hug when you're feeling a bit low. If you're looking for a workspace then make sure you like the people there, and if it doesn't feel right then don't be afraid to move on.

Taissa: On most projects I work within a wider network of designers and other consultants, so when a project hits a sticky patch we work it out between us. I think the freelance consultants of the heritage world learn a huge amount from working with different teams at a range of museums and heritage sites and bring this varied experience to each new project. I like to think I'm part of this and that it results in 'cross-pollination', improving the diversity and quality of interpretation for everyone. ■

THE FOREVER PROJECT

AT THE NATIONAL HOLOCAUST CENTRE AND MUSEUM

Chris Walker
Bright White Ltd and AHI Trustee

The National Holocaust Centre and Museum (NHCM) communicates the memory of the Holocaust for a contemporary purpose: to cultivate 'Upstanders' against the hatred and persecution of difference.

Today, at the National Holocaust Centre in rural Nottinghamshire, survivors tell their story to thousands of schoolchildren each year. Importantly, it has been shown that giving visitors the ability to ask a survivor a question helps them to connect, engage and relate. Chris Walker explains how the aim of the Forever Project was to preserve this profound opportunity for future generations in the post-survivor era.

The National Holocaust Centre and Museum's three columns are:

- **Witness:** to collect Holocaust testimony and artefacts, as the UK's only accredited Holocaust museum.
- **Create:** world-class curatorial and academic expertise, brought to life with innovative exhibitions and storytelling and immersive digital technologies that truly involve the audience.
- **Distribute:** make these learning experiences accessible in the widest range of places and formats, to continually reach new audiences and provoke attitudinal change across all our communities.

A part of every visit to the NHCM is the opportunity to hear the testimony of a visiting survivor, ask questions and receive answers. NHCM's key audiences include primary schools, secondary schools and sixth forms, university and teacher training, conferences, professional training and development, and other community and adult groups. →

They were filmed in 3D, with a third camera focusing on a facial close-up. Spending such an intensive week in the company of each survivor resulted in a great deal of camaraderie.

Bright White Ltd

Kitty Hart-Moxon during her filming week

Bright White Ltd

The production team in the studio with Steven Frank

The post-survivor era looms, meaning measures are being taken to ensure that Holocaust education can continue to be actively used to fight hate crime, and defend against the very real phenomenon of Holocaust denial. The Forever Project filmed survivor testimony, and the answers to hundreds of questions asked of each survivor. Our company, Bright White Ltd, was chosen for the design and delivery.

Production

Ten survivors entered the Forever Project programme, each with widely varied experiences. Most were filmed in York, the first in December 2014 and the last in March 2016. We collected 200 hours of film, covering 10 testimonies and answering over 10,000 questions in total. Each survivor spent a week in the studio. They were filmed in 3D, with a third camera focusing on a facial close-up. Spending such an intensive week in the company of each survivor resulted in a great deal of camaraderie. The paperwork systems in place to ensure that we asked every question and kept track of progress were immense – far beyond a normal film project. All of the survivors took a real interest in the process, as we took real interest in their extraordinary life experiences. All the breaks between filming were jammed with questions and answers in both directions.

The installation

Today at the Centre, some of the survivor sessions are delivered digitally. Whether a session involves a living survivor or a digital survivor depends upon factors such as their availability, present health or the needs of the group. Primary schools, for example, can sadly no longer meet the real Steven Mendelsson, so they meet the digital Steven.

Methodology

The survivors had no prior view of the questions, they were not coached or briefed on how to answer, and there were no leading questions. Approximately half of the questions were seeking details about that given survivor's personal experience, using a systematic combing of the events the survivors describe. Questions were generated by a mixed panel

Most were filmed in York, the first in December 2014 and the last in March 2016. We collected 200 hours of film, covering 10 testimonies and answering over 10,000 questions in total.

representative of the audiences, which provided varied perspectives from which questions could arise. The end result is a huge interconnected mass of questions effectively creating a new type of archive with breadth and depth.

Technique

A full body and facial close-up camera arrangement was used. The archive rushes included the spoken question, so there can never be any doubt as to which question was being answered. Second takes are generally limited to technical issues. We strictly enforced the use of identifying question tags to enable full traceability back to the archive.

What was important?

On these specific filming days, we pointed the camera at the survivor, asked these questions, and this is how they answered. All accounts were first hand; the questions covered a breadth of topic, as well as a depth of inquiry. The polyvocality of the 10 survivor experiences is very powerful. There are really great examples of the clarity with which survivors communicate the fallibility of human memory. The project highlighted the crucial role of cultural organisations as trusted organisations, being able to plan and manage the ethics of working with contributors, and eliciting the best response from a subject. ■

→ Chris was lead designer for The Forever Project, delivered by Bright White Ltd – a creative design consultancy based in York. www.brightwhiteltd.co.uk

LAURA HAMPDEN

Laura is a Historic Environment Record (HER) Project Officer for the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS). GLAAS sits within Historic England's London and South East Regions Group. She is also part of the executive committee for Museum Detox, a network for BAME heritage professionals, and is coming to the end of her first term on the committee of the Chartered Institute for Archaeology (CIfA) Equality and Diversity Group. Nicky Temple talks to Laura about her career and her work to encourage openness, inclusiveness and understanding – both in the way we present our interpretations of the past, and as we strive to build a more diverse workforce.

What does your job with Historic England involve?

As the HER Project Officer for GLAAS, I work with the information that we hold on our database on a variety of interpretation projects to enable greater understanding and enjoyment of our archaeological heritage. The HER is a dynamic resource containing over 90,000 records of archaeological sites, historic buildings, parks and landscapes, finds and heritage features, from the earliest human occupation to the present day. The evidence we have on the HER is continuously updated. It must comply with high industry standards; up-to-date professional methods are vital for understanding the significance of any heritage assets affected by development schemes. This understanding is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We are the busiest Advisory Service in the country, and we need to be efficient, concise and ensure that the advice we provide is timely and accurate.

I'm currently undertaking a project to review Greater London's Archaeological Priority Areas (APAs). APAs are areas where there is significant known archaeological interest or potential for new discoveries. They are used to indicate where development might affect heritage assets. Through interpretation of the data that we hold on the HER and through undertaking wider research, I must communicate the archaeological significance of specific places or areas. The process recognises the importance of the historic environment in place-making and sustainable development.

Historic England is faced with a number of strategic challenges to deliver maximum public value through all our work. This includes ensuring that the historic environment is everyone's business, continuing to engage with new audiences and understanding wider interpretations of heritage. London is a great place to work; it is a unique, culturally diverse city and GLAAS is committed to ensuring that all Londoners feel a stronger sense of identity and community through heritage. I particularly enjoy researching how the social and communal values of a given area have changed over time. Understanding a community is fundamental to place-making and ensuring that new development makes a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness of a place. As such, I have also been working on a volunteer project for Londoners called 'Understanding Local Identity'. This focuses on the enhancement and addition of database records with social-cultural and community heritage information. This helps to communicate our understanding of local identity, and helps the development of cultural activities, places and spaces in London.

You are also on CIfA's Equality and Diversity Committee and the executive committee for Museum Detox. Why is your work with these groups so important?

GLAAS is a CIfA Registered Organisation. All CIfA members and Registered Organisations are obligated to ensure our work as archaeologists is of public benefit. I joined CIfA's Equality and Diversity Group in 2016 because I'm really passionate about making archaeology more accessible. We are not a very diverse profession and I believe that this impacts on our ability

to reach wider audiences. In order to become a more diverse profession we must address the inequalities that have consciously and unconsciously become structurally embedded throughout all aspects of archaeology. As a group, we have contributed to the revision of CIfA standards and guidance, and papers including a Disability Practice Paper (forthcoming). This year we are focusing our efforts on producing a 'Decolonise Archaeology Toolkit'. I'm also really excited about the formation of Inclusion, Diversity and Equality in Archaeology and Heritage (IDEAH), which is a collaboration of groups and networks throughout the profession working together to address these issues. I'll be stepping down from the CIfA Equality and Diversity Group later this year, but I will very much be a part of IDEAH through my involvement with Museum Detox.

Museum Detox is a network for people of colour working in the culture and heritage sector. I joined Museum Detox to be able to share my experiences with others as to how it feels to work in heritage and often be the only person of colour in the room. Museum Detox has very much become a positive pro-action voice for deconstructing systems of inequality so that everyone can feel safe and represented in a workforce that is reflective of society. Through interventions, activism, discussion at conferences and through social media we challenge organisations to shine a light on behaviours and policies that perpetuate structural racism and systems of oppression. Our work has led to a more inclusive and informed interpretation of heritage, but there is still a lot to be done!

What inspired you to work in the heritage sector?

As a child I remember trips to Reading Museum with my family. I loved dressing up in the historic costumes and taking part in children's activities. It was all very accessible and sparked my imagination from a young age. As I got a bit older, I wanted to study history but felt increasingly that I was not represented. I'd gone from being engaged and interested to not feeling like I was part of the story. I think the desire to uncover the untold histories of marginalised people stemmed from stories told to me by my grandparents. Through one branch of the family I heard about the atrocities of the First and Second World War, and the impact they had particularly on families that didn't come from a wealthy background. On the other I heard about the devastating impact of the transatlantic slave trade in the Caribbean. Both histories are relevant to society today, but we tend to only focus on the glamour or the wealth.

Luckily, I found archaeology which gave me greater access to the lives of everyday people. To me, it felt more inclusive; I'm much happier and engaged with heritage when I'm learning about the lives of the everyday person rather than the lives of the privileged. Whilst studying archaeology at Reading University I went back to Reading Museum as an advocacy volunteer, helping to open up the museum to new audiences within the community. It was this feeling of openness and inclusiveness that inspired me to pursue a career in the heritage sector, particularly focusing on inclusive interpretation and the representation of marginalised communities. I think it's really important, now more than ever, to explore wider narratives and to celebrate and acknowledge the history and diversity of the 21st-century audiences that we all serve.

What advice would you give someone wanting to follow in your footsteps, particularly if they want to explore the histories of marginalised or underrepresented groups, as you did?

Connecting with people who aren't from the same background as you is vital. This can come from networking, attending conferences and workshops that focus on diversity and inclusion, or from engaging through non-traditional mediums like blog-posts and zines. It is important to expand your perspective and don't always approach things from your own experiences or understanding – interpretation is not fixed to one person or one group. I've learnt a lot from joining and supporting equality, diversity and inclusion groups and committees. Participating in these groups allows for a meaningful exchange of knowledge, ideas and expertise. ■

Further resources:

Find out more about GLAAS here: historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/our-planning-services/greater-london-archaeology-advisory-service/

Find out more about Historic England and Local Identity here: historicengland.org.uk/get-involved/protect/local-identity

Find out more about Museum Detox here: www.museumdetox.org

Find out more about CIfA here: www.archaeologists.net

OPENING UP TO OPEN SPACES

India Rabey
AHI Trustee

There was a new format to part of this year's AHI conference, an Open Space session led by AHI Trustee, India Rabey. We caught up with her to find out more.

Open what?

An Open Space can be held anywhere with anyone. Its aim is to create an inclusive space to enable facilitated discussions around a question, come up with solutions and generate action. The best Open Spaces bring together a host with a particular question or topic with those who have experience and advice to answer it.

How did the idea come about?

In 2018 I attended the *Happy Startup Summercamp* (yes, it's as hippy as it sounds) where they ran a half-day Open Space for attendees. I was really impressed by the format. I could see it working well at the AHI conference, as people always say the biggest benefits to the conference are the connections made and the discussions had in-between sessions. I could see the benefits of creating a relaxed environment for peers to workshop challenges, problems and talk through best resolutions. For me, Open Spaces create a friendly, focused environment for professionals to meet, share knowledge and experience.

Informal brainstorming finding solutions in a relaxed environment

India Rabey

How were the Open Space sessions run?

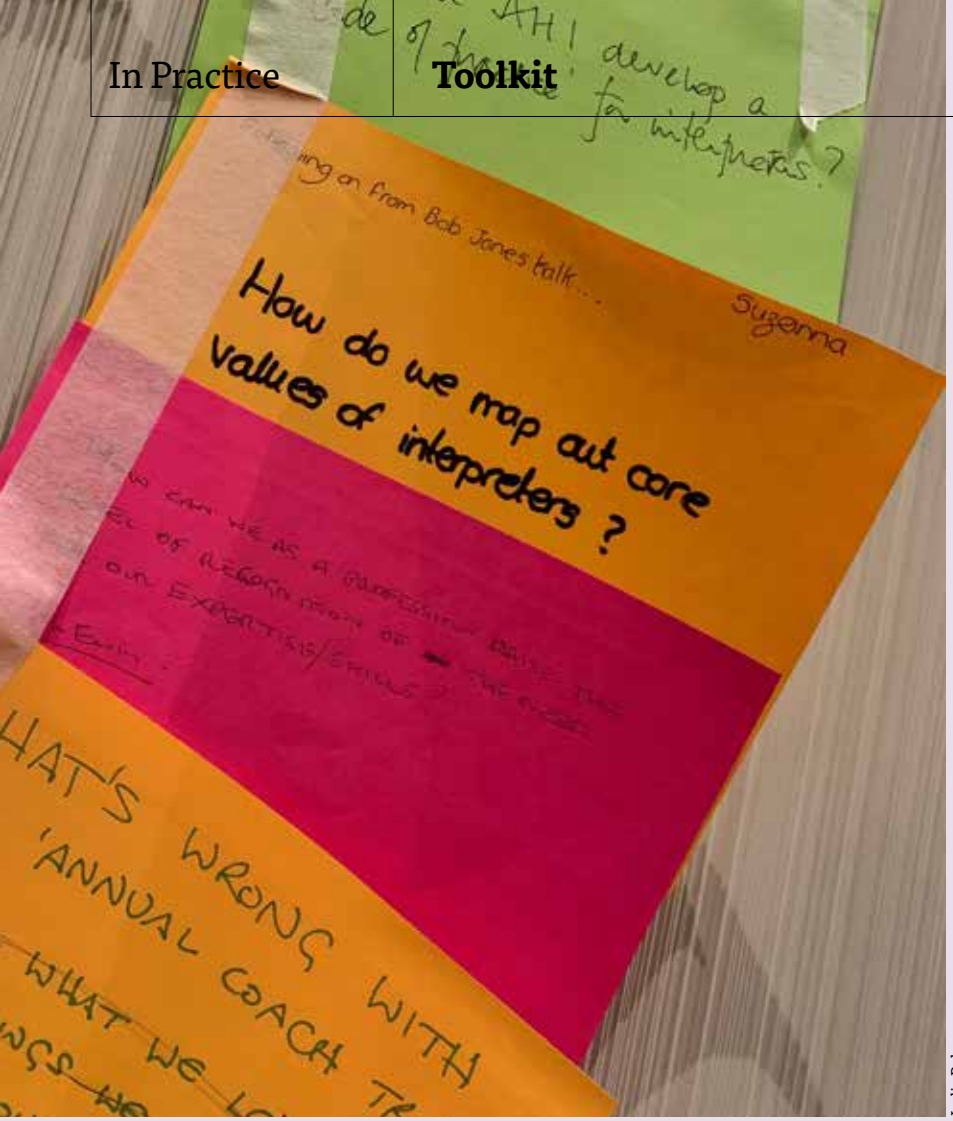
On the evening before the session, we invited people to write their interpretation-related questions on post-it notes and stuck them all on a wall. No question is a stupid question, anything goes. The next day we put together a timetable of when the questions would be discussed. Each question had 20 minutes allotted discussion time. Several discussions ran simultaneously, with a variety of topics selected for each time slot, so people could choose the one they wanted to participate in. Each question was given a number and whoever submitted the question went to a table with the corresponding number and waited for interested participants to gather. They then facilitated the discussion. Notes were made and any key learning points or resolutions documented.

Which common themes came up?

A whole range of questions came up, which was a reflection of the diverse skill sets present at the conference. Some focused on audiences: whether this was 'how to create a digital project with young people?' or 'does anyone have any good examples of co-creation/co-curated projects?' Others looked at client and contractor relationships and those who were new to the industry sought advice from seasoned interpreters.

Can you go through an example question?

One question at the Open Space session was 'how do you convince clients that less is more?' Anyone who was interested in this attended the round-table discussion. Those who came may have been seeking knowledge and experience relating to the question, while others may have had thoughts to contribute. Below is a list of recommendations:



India Rabey

Open for discussion – just some of the many questions posed by AHI members

- Take people to see good examples/show best practice
- Being focused on a theme or story and it being strong
- Learn from other industries like graphic designers
- Run readability statistics on the text; can do this on Word
- Establish the take-aways, what do we want people to go away thinking?
- Encourage clients to think about layering the content?
- Decide on what you want to say and why you want to say it
- Find someone who is receptive in the group
- Local authority clients can be challenging because of things they 'need' to say, i.e. corporate objectives
- Showing opportunities of mixed media
- Point people towards AHI, e.g. winners of AHI awards and have their case studies available
- Compare developing interpretation to everyday experience/choice, i.e. choosing a novel to take on holiday versus reading the headlines when you have less time.

Finishing up

At the end of the sessions, everyone gathered for a quick round-up of highlights and next steps from the myriad of chats held. Some discussions helped people make decisions, take action and even set up new working groups, such as a freelance interpreters' group.

Summary

Open Spaces can be a good way to workshop ideas and challenges because, as we found out from the conference, everyone has different knowledge and experience within the same industry. You can get a long way in the time available, by putting heads together, and it can create a feeling of solidarity.

The feedback we received about the Open Space was overwhelmingly positive and so it looks set to become a fixture on 2020's conference programme, perhaps in a slightly tweaked format following the pilot.

As the old saying goes 'two heads are better than one' and, by putting our heads together, we can really make a difference to audiences, colleagues and clients across the country. ■

What's your question?

Which Open Space topics would you like to see covered in the In Practice section of future editions of the AHI Journal? Were you at the last conference? Did you ask a question? Send us an email to journal@ahi.org.uk.

→ India is a AHI Trustee and founder of The Way Design – a brand, design and interpretation consultancy. www.thewaydesign.co.uk

India Rabey

Members came together at the AHI Conference to share knowledge and make useful connections

Lucy Inskip

The illuminated entrance to the Abbey

EVENT REVIEW

The Light of Lode

December was a month naturally decorated with festivities. Increasingly, it appears that heritage sites have taken this time of year as an opportunity to physically transform themselves and deliver unique visitor experiences, often interpreting these special places in exciting and novel ways.

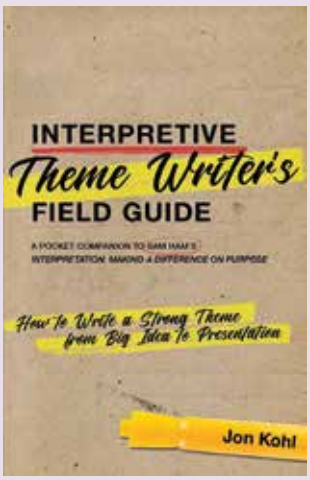
On a perfectly clear evening in early December 2019, I attended Anglesey Abbey's 'Winter Lights', which most likely reached beyond their 'usual' visitors, but this is itself a problematic category. Located in Lode, Anglesey Abbey is a characterful Jacobean-style house with gardens and a working watermill and is cared for by the National Trust (a member of The Heritage Alliance, like the AHI).

Anglesey Abbey was transformed into a magical mix of colour, sound and reflections, presenting this much-loved site in a very different light to visitors old and new. Despite it only taking around an hour to complete the outside circular Winter Garden route, the dramatic lighting of familiar sights such as the house, mill and statues was particularly enchanting. Throughout the sensory trail, I was intrigued to see how old favourites had been reinterpreted through vivid light installations. This was accompanied by wonderfully calming music, which helped to create atmosphere and also gave a nod to the role of heritage in mindfulness.

Although a more extensive food and crafts market could be a fruitful future addition, introducing a coffee outlet was quite literally warmly received. In addition to free parking on site, there was accessible parking 50 yards from the Visitor Centre and a thoughtfully constructed wheelchair- and pushchair-friendly route.

By interpreting heritage spaces in increasingly performative ways, these occasions can create memorable visitor experiences, but also financially benefit such sites during the winter period. I hope opportunities will continue to arise for further innovative collaborations between historical places and the creative industries to demonstrate the pervasive potential of heritage. ■

Lucy Inskip is Communications Assistant for The Heritage Alliance. @lucyskippin



BOOK REVIEW

Interpretive Theme Writer's Field Guide, Jon Kohl 2018

Published by National Association of Interpretation (NAI)

A key aspect of interpretation is the development of themes, therefore a text specifically targeted at helping interpreters in this has to be welcomed. This is described as a companion piece to Sam Ham's *Interpretation – making a difference on purpose*. Although it can be read without prior knowledge, it is best used with a good understanding of Ham's work. Kohl sets out a clear objective for his work: 'Assist communicators in crafting strong interpretive themes' and the key word is crafting. Any craft requires constant practice, refinement and reflection and this guide gives plenty of examples and opportunities to do all three. The guide has numerous examples of different themes, exercises to encourage the reader to develop their own writing and encouragement to work with others.

Presented as a field guide this includes space for a reader's work, notes and exercises. These are perhaps superfluous for some, especially those who do not like to write in books, or carry text books with them. Don't let the peripherals detract from the excellent content. There is much here that comes from direct experience of implementing Sam Ham's theory and Kohl's own practice.

Jon Kohl has set out to demystify theme-writing and has produced a well-written and very useful work which deserves to sit on your desk alongside Sam Ham's books. ■

Kev Theaker, Written in Film and AHI Trustee

Charlotte Dew

Right:
Timeline in Derek Jarman PROTEST!, at IMMA, Dublin

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Touring exhibition Derek Jarman PROTEST!

Artist Derek Jarman's practice, from the mid-1960s until his death from AIDS in 1994, was highly politicised and connected to the cultures and sub-cultures of the time. Spanning painting, film, literature, poetry, costume, set and stage design and music videos, it addressed issues of equality and discrimination, particularly but not exclusively for the LGBTQ and HIV-positive communities. His work has a strong, defiant and personal voice.

It is this voice that curators of the first major retrospective in 20 years have sought to highlight in *Derek Jarman PROTEST!* The title frames the exhibition for the visitor: this is work that has something to say. In selecting protest as the exhibition's thematic foundation, its curators have created a space for visitors to reflect on our present-day, polarised society, whilst also experiencing the breadth and depth of the work itself.

Charlotte Dew

Self-portrait, 1959, Derek Jarman

Derek Jarman PROTEST! was mounted by the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, before going on tour to the Manchester Art Gallery and the John Hansard Gallery in Southampton. Touring partnerships between large-scale art galleries are common, but this show is exciting because the exhibition will be interpretatively reframed at each venue. Still under the umbrella theme of protest, each gallery will foreground different works to increase the show's relevance to the local audience. In Dublin political agitation was the emphasis, at a time when Brexit negotiations posed a threat to the Good Friday Agreement. In Manchester the focus has shifted to pop and film culture. The John Hansard Gallery will concentrate on queer nature and the landscape, reflecting the proximity of Jarman's south-coast home and garden, Prospect Cottage at Dungeness.

The exhibition opens with the earliest painting – *Self-portrait*, 1959 – and Jarman's last film-work *Blue*, 1993. The film is a direct and honest meditation on the impacts of AIDS on his body and daily life. This selection of work cleverly reveals the exhibition's arc to visitors – from early work to death. Jarman's narration of *Blue* and self-portrait draws you into the space and invites you to experience the journey in-between their making.

The subsequent work is arranged by genre including feature film and Super 8 screening rooms, and features a costume and theatre design section, titled 'Designing for Others'. These displays are interspersed with groups of paintings, arranged chronologically. The interpretative narratives are delivered through text panels introducing each section, object captions and a timeline. Further layers are created through the presentation of 12 books from Jarman's library, many annotated in his own hand, and his published diaries.

The limitation of the interpretation to a written format could restrict engagement from a broad audience, were it not for two factors. The first is the nature of the work itself. Many of the paintings communicate directly with the viewer, particularly the collage works incorporating pills and medical paraphernalia prescribed to Jarman, and the later 'Slogan Paintings', inscribed with terms including 'QUEER', 'AIDS BLOOD' and 'MORPHINE' over tabloid headlines concerning AIDS. The film works and music videos provide a wealth of material for visitors whose preference is for auditory engagement.

The second factor is the exhibition's timeline which connects the chronology of Jarman's life and artistic career to concurrent social and political events. The visitor is immersed in the context in which the work was made and used to protest.

Derek Jarman PROTEST! is a timely and well-conceived exhibition, and an example of a touring show in its most effective form; the curatorial work and cost have been shared, and each venue will tailor the product to ensure its relevance to their audience. ■

Charlotte Dew is Professional Development Manager at the Touring Exhibitions Group www.teg.org.uk and a Museum Consultant.

VOCALEYES
ACCESSIBILITY IS ACHIEVABLE

Anna Fineman
Programme Manager, VocalEyes

Anna Fineman explains how access organisation VocalEyes work to ensure blind and partially sighted people have the best possible opportunities to enjoy art and heritage.

Why would someone with sight loss visit museums? It can be tricky to fathom what 'visual' arts and heritage venues offer visually impaired people.

Sight loss is an extremely broad spectrum and the majority of blind and partially sighted people have some degree of vision or light perception. Of those registered blind, only 4% have no sight at all. Therefore, many visitors with sight loss will still experience arts and heritage venues in a visual way. Furthermore, there is much to be encountered by other means in these multisensory environments – touching a marble sculpture; tuning into birdsong; noting the layers of scents at a historic house. However, despite audience demand, access provision across the sector remains inconsistent, and barriers frequently restrict or prevent visits.

Exploring sculpture through touch at Reading Museum

© VocalEyes & Art UK

The visitor journey begins before setting foot on site. People with sight loss, in particular, will seek advance information when considering a museum visit. They need to determine whether they will be welcomed, and what level of support will be available. Is this place going to be worth their money, time and effort? If website access information or the response to a phone enquiry falls short, they may not have confidence in making a visit. If the visitor is reassured to attend, a positive experience then depends on the skills and attitude of staff on site, and the accessibility of interpretation.

VocalEyes supports museums, galleries and heritage sites to identify and remove barriers, in order to increase accessibility. We believe blind and partially sighted people should have equality of opportunity to experience and enjoy arts and heritage. Our approach is tailored, supporting venues to recognise all they have to offer their visitors with sight loss and to become more inclusive, through staff training, production of accessible interpretation and audience development.

Inclusive interpretation

There are many interpretative resources that can help visually impaired people. Providing large print versions of all text is simple and also affordable to produce in-house and should be made part of standard practice. Many visitors find tactile opportunities useful, so consider supplying handling objects or tactile diagrams, or more informally making use of what you already have, such as inviting touch of sculpture or encouraging hands-on exploration of trees.

Audio description is a key means of bringing collections and venues to life. The use of precise language structured in a logical way, to coherently describe an object, building or landscape, interwoven with historic references and cultural narratives, can greatly enhance a visit. Joanna Wood, a partially sighted museum-goer from Brighton, explains the impact: 'I've only had sight issues over the last three years, and museums and history were such a big part of my life beforehand that having audio description gives me a piece of myself back, it gives me a big part of my life... There is a perception that you can only get something out of museums or cultural sites if you've got sight, so people are very visually biased.'

An audio-described recorded guide can be used by visitors at a time of their choice, for an independent visit. Uploading the tracks to your website allows access to the descriptions for visitors to download or stream to their own devices. Additionally, providing them on accessible handsets on site allows visitors to choose the method which best suits their needs.

Train the team

Audio description can also be delivered live, and tours are popular. They offer a dynamic, social experience at which people can request further description, and offer their own interpretations – often resulting in a very rewarding visit. A professional audio describer can work with you to develop and deliver

© VocalEyes & Art UK

Audio-described tour at Leeds Museum and Art Gallery

audio-described tours of your site. However, if you are keen to programme ongoing accessible events, and develop inclusive practice across your organisation, the best resource you have is your team. VocalEyes audio description and visual awareness training courses will give your staff and volunteers the skills, knowledge and confidence to be able to welcome visually impaired visitors, effectively guide them round your site and deliver engaging audio-described tours.

'[The tour-leaders] were marvellous, well trained and informative. It was a perfect day in every way.'

Member of Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group on visiting Sherwood Forest

© VocalEyes & Sheffield Park and Garden

Audio description training and using touch at Sheffield Park and Garden

An embedded approach

The Old Royal Naval College re-opened in 2019 following major restoration of the extraordinary ceiling of the Painted Hall. From the outset their plans included a commitment to increasing accessibility, and VocalEyes worked with them throughout the three-year project, towards that goal. At the beginning we facilitated an inclusive design workshop, to embed an accessible approach to the redesign and interpretation of the spaces. We supported recruitment of visually impaired people for an access panel, to help steer the direction of developments and ensure they would meet visitor needs. Training followed, with the team's new skills put into practice for unique audio-described tours of the Painted Hall ceiling, while the scaffolding for conservation was in place; visitors were just metres from Sir James Thornhill's 17th-century masterpiece. These events routinely sold out. A recorded audio-descriptive guide to the Painted Hall was also created, giving visitors choice over how they could experience the site. Following re-opening, live audio-described tours continue, ensuring blind and partially sighted people are always welcome at the Old Royal Naval College.

Exploring the outdoors

Expanding on our established role in the cultural heritage sector, VocalEyes are delighted to this year begin working with natural heritage venues. Following a pioneering project with the University of Exeter in which we supported natural heritage sites to offer more inclusive visitor experiences, we are now offering audio description training to outdoor venues. During the project we trained teams at RSPB reserve Leighton Moss, Durlston Country Park, Sherwood Forest and Sheffield Park and Garden. The trainees at these sites were passionate about their environments and often already extremely skilled at communicating sightings and stories. As such, following their training, it was a natural progression for them to begin practising audio description immediately. All venues have since taken steps to become more inclusive to their visually impaired visitors, implementing their audio description skills, and reviewing the accessibility of their sites and interpretation more broadly.

Consider the barriers to access at your venue, and what you can do reduce and remove them. Feel free to contact VocalEyes to discuss. You have a keen audience waiting to visit! ■

Further resources:

Examples of recorded audio description (vocaleyes.co.uk/audio/)

State of Museum Access 2018 – guide to website access information (vocaleyes.co.uk/state-of-museum-access-2018/)

UK Association of Accessible Formats – guidance for large print (ukaaf.org/large-print/)

Article: Nature Narratives: Project conclusion and next steps for VocalEyes (vocaleyes.co.uk/nature-narratives-project-conclusion-and-next-steps-for-vocaleyes/)

Sensing Nature, University of Exeter: (sensing-nature.com/)

Old Royal Naval College: (ornc.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/accessibility)

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AHI AWARDS RETURN FOR 2021

Time to think about which of your projects you could enter into the awards. We are looking for the best projects that promote and celebrate great interpretive visitor experiences.

The eligible period for entry will be 1 April 2019 – 30 April 2021.

In this round of Awards, we also aim to acknowledge organisations producing innovative distance and online engagement initiatives in response to Coronavirus.

Entry will open later this year via **ahi.org.uk/awards**

If you would like to register your interest to hear when the Awards open for entry or have any questions please contact the AHI office, **admin@ahi.org.uk**.

Pictured: 2019 Winner: Dunfermline Museum, Fife Cultural Trust.

AHI AWARDS 2021