



Review: How it feels returning to a Covid-safe museum

My view: Rooted in place: the power of folk song and music

Global: America in crisis

Focus: Dunes on the move: boosting coastal biodiversity

Debate: How do heritage interpreters respond to Culture Wars?



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Cover: Visitors wear face-masks and keep to social distance markings around the re-opened British Museum. Part of *The Visitor Experience – how it feels returning to a Covid-safe museum*, on page 38.

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Foreword

Another six months of uncertainty have passed since the last edition of *Interpretation Journal*. Half a year of adapting to new rules, continuous changes to the way we work and live, aiming for ever-moving goal posts. But perhaps when we look back at this historic period, we will also say that it was a time of great ingenuity and creativity. Many of the contributors to this edition reflect on the difficulties they have faced as a result of the pandemic, and the steps they have taken to find a way through, ensuring that projects are still delivered, jobs are protected and organisations can continue to operate, albeit in new and different ways.

We hope that there is now light at the end of the tunnel.

In this edition

News & Views brings together latest news, opinion pieces and research from academics, Fellows of the AHI and from across the globe. In this edition, AHI Fellow, Neil Diment, discusses the power of folk song and music to tell a story and enhance a sense of place (*My view*), Philip Ryland looks at the effectiveness of different types of interpretive media at Cát Tiên National Park in Southern Vietnam (*Reporting research*) and Amanda Hughes-Horan sends us a letter from America (*Global view*). We also bring news on how you can become a full member of AHI, and Michael Hamish Glen reports from the Forum for Interpretation in the Americas (*Interpretation news*).

The **Focus** section for this edition takes us to the South West, where LaToyah McAllister-Jones reflects on the challenges in taking the iconic St Pauls Carnival online (*Spirit Up!*), Iona Keen describes how the South West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries was able to adapt to ensure its survival in the face of the Covid-19 crisis (*Ninety in the time of corona*). We also visit Devon and Cornwall to hear how a project is succeeding in engaging audiences in coastal biodiversity, despite the difficulties of the last year (*Dunes on the move*).

In Practice shares best practice, knowledge and skills and encourages opportunities for debate and interaction. Bill Bevan and Michele Curtis discuss how heritage interpreters can respond to Culture Wars (*Debate*), we tune into nature with Listening Walks at Snape Maltings (*Digital*) and Anooshka Rawden talks about her role at South Downs National Park, and the importance of mentoring as part of the Museum Futures programme (*In conversation with...*). Charlotte Dew reports from the British Museum and Charlie Pratley introduces the *Sherwood Retold* project, which looks at ways to interpret an ancient forest.

We welcome your feedback and ideas for future editions, so please get in touch: journal@ahi.org.uk.

Stay safe and well. ■

Nicky Temple and Nicolette Evans

View from the Chair

Jim Mitchell

Chair, AHI

Welcome to the Summer 2021 issue of the *Interpretation Journal*.

Virtual excitement

Since the last journal we've been using the virtual platform, Hopin, for our events. Following the conference we have also hosted a webinar and our virtual pub sessions on the platform. We have invested in learning how to make the most of this resource after the great feedback we received on the 2020 conference, and we are pleased to again be holding a virtual conference on Hopin in November. Look out for the booking invitation!

Awards

2021 is an Awards year, and we are very excited to be embarking on the programme of judging the crop of entries over the summer. The new-look awards are bringing in different and diverse entries under the refreshed title of 'AHI Engaging People Awards'. As ever the focus will be on who will take away the coveted awards, but the scheme is so much more than that. It's a chance for the industry and interpreters as a whole to celebrate what we do, to showcase talent and achievement and nurture interpretation as a profession through the judging and mentoring process. I am really looking forward to hearing all about the entries and who has won at the conference and awards ceremony.

New members

In November we launched our new initiative to broaden the diversity of our membership with the offer of a free year's membership for those who are within the 'protected characteristics' of the Equality Act. We have had a great response with 17 expressions of interest and 13 new members signed up as of March. A huge welcome to all new members; we really hope you find AHI rewarding and useful to your professional life. New members with different backgrounds and perspectives will make AHI a far stronger and more effective organisation for the future, able to better represent the rich natural and cultural heritage of the UK, Ireland and beyond.

Code of ethics

In March the committee approved the new AHI code of ethics on behalf of the organisation. This has been developed over the last few months and we ran a consultation questionnaire in January. More than 50 people contributed thoughtful and constructive feedback, and a refined version of the code has been produced – you can find it on the website. It will be formally adopted at the AHI AGM in November. We think this is an important step for us as a profession and I am very grateful to the team who have put this together, led by Carolyn Lloyd Brown FAHI and Bob Jones FAHI. We are really keen to hear how the code will support your practice or organisation, so please get in touch with your thoughts and any training needs that would help your professional development. ■



Rooted in place

Neil Diment
AHI Fellow

AHI Fellow Neil Diment has worked in the field of heritage interpretation and environmental education for over 40 years. However, only in more recent years has he begun to explore the power of folk song and dance to cross generations, to tell a story and to enhance a sense of place in familiar interpretation settings – and to pick up his old guitar!

*“There are places I’ll remember
All my life though some have changed”*

from ‘In My Life’ by the Beatles

Music has the ability to invoke a strong sense of place, but we interpreters seldom seem to make use of its potential as a technique to engage visitors or local communities. This may be part of a wider malaise in England in particular, for as Steve Roud (author of the monumental *Folk Song in England*¹) has commented, compared to other countries in Europe and the UK, England has ‘lagged behind in its appreciation of the folk tradition’. Perhaps this lack of appreciation and understanding was never better revealed than in the words of former Labour MP and junior minister for culture, media and sport, Kim Howells, when he addressed the House of Commons in 2001 saying: ‘The idea of listening

to three Somerset folk singers sounds like hell.’² And yet both folk singing and heritage interpretation have storytelling at their heart.

Ten years ago, I stayed on a farm in Romania to attend the 2011 International Haymaking Festival organised by the Pogány-havas Association. Based in Gyimes, a village nestled in the Carpathian mountains in a remote part of Transylvania, I was taking a busman’s holiday from my job on the ‘Hay Time’ project for the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This involved engaging with farmers and local communities to prevent the decline of traditional upland hay meadows, something for which I became a passionate proponent. At the end of a week spent honing our haymaking skills in Romania, we were entertained by a group of young musicians and dancers in traditional costume. I recognised one of the dancers as the daughter of our host – we had barely →

Farmer and festival host Attila Sárig (left) presents the young musicians’ performance at the Haymaking Festival. The primitive-looking cello is a ‘gardon’, played as a percussion instrument. Instead of using a bow, the player plucks and beats the strings with a stick



Neil Diment

exchanged a word beyond a morning greeting the whole week. But the concert forged connections beyond any language barriers, and the dancers displayed an unmistakeable sense of pride and enjoyment as they performed.

I was left with mixed feelings. While it was great to see young people continuing their cultural traditions, I felt sad that my own kids, both learning to play an instrument, had nothing comparable back home in Teesdale. There was a tradition of silver band music and some classical music teaching in schools, but traditional folk music had all but died out. Another victim, in my view, of the creeping American coca-colonisation of much of our culture.

“‘Rule Britannia’, or ‘Swing Low...’ Are they the only songs the English know?”

from ‘Roots’ by Show of Hands, a Devon-based folk duo

On my return home I wanted to try and change that. A call for community initiatives by the Heritage Lottery Funded ‘Heart of Teesdale’ landscape partnership project, and a chance meeting with fellow folkie Mike Bettison, led to an idea. We set up a project to revive the folk music, song and dance traditions of Teesdale, unashamedly calling it ‘Music at the Heart of Teesdale’ (aka M@HoT), signalling our belief in its potential. The project aimed to:

- Research the cultural heritage of the area
- Inspire groups of younger musicians and dancers to play, sing and enjoy folk
- Support the young people to produce their own music, inspired by folk traditions and local landscapes
- Engage local people and visitors with the area’s rich cultural history.

With the help of the local secondary school and the County Durham Music Service, who acknowledged that we were filling a gap in their provision, we recruited a group of young musicians willing to give it a go. They were led by a marvellous young folk fiddler, Hinny Pawsey, who had been schooled in the Northumbrian/ Tyneside tradition. We began regular weekly sessions, and Hinny taught our young musicians in the folk tradition – by ear – which some of them struggled with at first.

Teaching included tunes that Mike, as Artistic Director of Blaize Community Arts, had uncovered during his research. At the start of the project he knew of only a couple of local tunes – by the end of our first three years, our archive contained records of more than 80. We could even lay claim to the version of *Scarborough Fair* made popular by Simon and Garfunkel³, based on a song collected from Teesdale quarryman, Mark Anderson in 1949!

After two years of learning a range of tunes, the group – now named ‘Cream Tees’ – had been performing and gaining in confidence. We wanted to set them a new challenge – to write their own tunes, inspired by the landscapes and stories of Teesdale. We began by taking the group on a tour of the area, visiting many of the attractions that had inspired the likes of Charles Dickens and JMW Turner in previous generations, and some wonderful tunes emerged.

The group worked with professional folk musicians Ian Stephenson and Sophy Ball to compose *Rooted – a Teesdale Suite*, which premièred in November 2014 in front of an enthusiastic crowd in our local arts centre. The performance was recorded on film and CD for posterity.⁴ As they took a bow in front

Members of Cream Tees rehearsing their Teesdale Rooted suite at a residential weekend at Langdon Beck youth hostel in Upper Teesdale



Paul Place



Paul Place

Rooted – A Teesdale Suite première performance by Cream Tees and their tutors at The Witham, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham, November 2014

of a standing audience, I felt the same sense of pride in the young musicians that I had seen in the faces of those young performers in Romania a few years before.

The *Rooted* suite has since been performed live on many occasions, reaching audiences both near and far, travelling as far south as Sidmouth Folk Festival. M@HoT has now worked with many partners to revive the folk music, song and dance traditions of the area for the benefit of local people and visitors alike.⁵ To help achieve this aim, the project has:

- Meaningfully engaged with a wide range of individuals and organisations, including local schools, Durham Music Service, Newcastle University's Folk degree course and local and regional arts and community organisations, such as Folkworks at Sage Gateshead
- Inspired young people to take an active interest in the cultural heritage of their local area
- Brought the music and dance traditions of Teesdale to the notice of a wider local, regional and national audience
- Successfully demonstrated that music – particularly folk music, song and dance – can enhance a sense of place.

I left the project in the capable hands of a young artist and musician, Rupert Philbrick, who continues to develop the project. As I left, two of our oldest musicians had gained places on Newcastle University's prestigious Folk Degree course. Another has since passed the auditions

*“Seed, bark, flower, fruit
They're never gonna grow without their roots.
Branch, stem, shoots – we need roots.”*

Show of Hands

to join the National Youth Folk Ensemble. I am hopeful that the project will turn full circle in the future with these young musicians returning as tutors.

All this was achieved by an avowed non-musician as project co-ordinator, with the help of a hard-working committee of volunteers and supporters – not least the parents of the young musicians! I remain convinced that, if I can do it, the model is transferable to other places and projects elsewhere. ■

References:

- 1 Roud, S. 2017. *Folk Song in England*. Faber & Faber.
- 2 BBC News website. 5th Dec. 2001. 'Folk fans furious at minister'. See also: Skinner, H. [2017.] *Representations of Rural England in Contemporary Folk Song*. Institute of Place Management.
- 3 Bettison, M. 2013. Tracking Down Scarborough Fair. *English Dance & Song*, 75(2).
- 4 See: www.mathot.co.uk/projects/the-rooted-suite
- 5 Diment, N. 2017. Project revives folk traditions in rural dale. *English Dance & Song*, 79(4).

Join in the melody

Michael Hamish Glen

Some of you will know how passionately I feel about the storytelling role of folk song as a powerful interpretive medium. You might even have been at my session at our IE/AHI conference in Inverness in 2017. Neil's article proves that I was not a lone voice! As a result, the editors have given us space for an additional article in the Summer 2022 edition of the *Journal*.

We want to draw broader conclusions and to set this exciting account in a wider, universal, context. You can help, both by commenting on Neil's piece and by telling us of other occasions when folk song or music has played a part in interpreting a landscape, a site, an event, an activity or just a human story – ideally drawing together place and people, land and life, as a single thread of heritage. Please contact me at michael.hamish.glen@mhg.scot

→ Neil worked for East Sussex County Council, the Centre for Environmental Interpretation (CEI), then Northumberland National Park Authority and the North Pennines AONB, before going freelance and setting up and running the M@HoT project.

Interpretation in a natural setting

Dr Philip Ryland
MAHI and Trustee

The value and importance of personal and non-personal interpretive media in enhancing the visitor experience and the broader management of protected areas is now well established in the academic literature. Prior to a visit, a site's website and a range of downloadable materials can successfully provide helpful information about the area, its range of wildlife, natural features as well as the facilities and services available on-site. A downloadable app can be used to inform the visitor on how they might behave on-site, perhaps using a 'code of conduct'. On arrival, leaflets, guidebooks, exhibits and on-site staff can help guide the visitor around as well as entertain and inform them throughout their visit. Research studies continue to assess the effectiveness of interpretive media in delivering this combination of functions but also for educating the visitor about the wonders as well as the fragility of many protected areas.

A study by Phan & Schott (2019) explored the importance and performance of various interpretive media for tourists visiting Cát Tiên National Park in southern Vietnam. This national park is approximately 150km from Ho Chi Minh City and is bordered on three sides by the Đông Nai River. Tourists are required to make a river



Enjoying a tour with a local guide

crossing to access the park via a single entry and exit point. The park is a typical lowland tropical rainforest and rich in biodiversity, reporting some 113 species of mammal, 351 species of birds, and is abundant with butterflies, hosting half of all the species recorded in Vietnam. It is particularly famous for its primates, including golden-cheeked gibbon, langur and three species of macaques. It is also a reliable place to see Siamese crocodiles as well as a good range of lizards and snakes (Cát Tiên National Park, 2021). The park includes two wildlife centres: the Cát Tiên Bear Rescue Centre established in 2005 and the Dao Tiên Endangered Primate Species Centre founded in 2008, both of which attract international funding (Phan & Schott, 2019:494).

Table 1. Mean results: views of respondents on importance and performance, presented in a ranked order by importance

(summarised from Phan & Schott, 2019:497).

Interpretive media	Importance (mean) + rank order	Performance (mean) + rank	Performance v. Importance
Site interpreter/local guide	4.82 (1)	4.03 (2)	Negative
Interpretive signs about the park	4.67 (2)	4.45 (1)	Negative
Videos at the rescue centres	4.64 (3)	3.26 (8)	Negative
Staff at the museum	4.58 (4)	4.00 (3)	Negative
Displays at the museum	4.44 (5)	3.28 (7)	Negative
Brochures at the ticket office	3.51 (6)	3.94 (4)	Positive
Directional signs around the park	2.18 (7)	3.42 (5)	Positive
Staff at the ticket office	2.03 (8)	3.34 (6)	Positive

Note: In this study, a 5-point Likert scale was used where 5 = extremely important/excellent performance and 1 = not important at all/poor performance.

Table 2. Importance-Performance Grid

(source: the author, 2021).

IMPORTANCE	5	Concentrate here	Keep up the good work			
	4					
	3	Low priority	Possibly overkill			
	2					
	1					
		1	2	3	4	5
		PERFORMANCE				

It is interesting to note that the three least important media for tourists on arrival ('Brochures', 'Directional Signs' and 'Staff at the ticket office') all performed well in the post-visit analysis.

In Phan & Schott's study, eight interpretive media available to tourists within the park (see Table 1) were assessed using Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA). IPA measures the importance of a factor for tourists and compares it against their view of the actual performance on the day of their visit, typically using pre- and post-visit questionnaires. It is similar to the Expectation-Experience Analysis model which is also widely used to gauge visitors' views of interpretive media and on-site facilities and services. Both models use a series of Likert statements to provide scores which can then be compared against the two axes of Importance-Performance or Expectation-Experience. The resulting means for each factor are plotted on the relevant axis, creating a quadrant for the IPA model (as illustrated in Table 2) with four resulting groups of data indicating factors which were regarded by visitors as being of 'low priority', 'keep up the good work', 'possibly overkill' or 'concentrate here'. Thus, these models becomes a useful tool in assessing whether the interpretive media and on-site



One of the park's on-site interpretation panels

facilities and services under scrutiny are being directed at and received by tourists in the right way.

A total of 316 tourists agreed to take part in the survey at Cát Tiên National Park. All completed the pre-arrival questionnaire but only 237 completed the post-arrival questionnaire, giving an overall response rate of 77.9% (Phan & Schott, 2019:495). The profile of respondents is recorded in Table 3.

It is interesting to note that the three least important media for tourists on arrival ('Brochures', 'Directional signs' and 'Staff at the ticket office') all performed well in the post-visit analysis. However, it is clearly worrying that the top five media in terms of importance on arrival for tourists all scored worse in terms of their actual performance on the day of their visit. However, of the top four media, only 'videos at the rescue centres' dropped out of the top four completely based on its actual performance. →

Table 3. Profile of respondents

(summarised from Phan & Schott, 2019:496-7).

Gender	53.6% female and 46.4% male
Nationality	74.3% Vietnamese and 25.7% international (predominantly American, Australian & Japanese)
Travel arrangements & length of stay	64.6% independent travellers 35.4% on a package tour 67.1% staying 2 days, 32.9% staying 1 day
Visited before	53.2% had not visited the park before, 44.3% 1-3 times, 2.5% more than 4 times



www.vietnamtravel.com

Using people for scale – visitors pose by the buttress of a huge, ancient Tung tree

Commentary

In terms of the transferability of this study, the following comments are posed to encourage conversation and reflection on the use of the IPA model at other locations.

1. The use of IPA through pre- and post-visit questionnaires generates a quadrant of data enabling site managers to better understand the value of interpretive media and on-site facilities and services in the eyes of their visitors. In the study by Phan & Schott, one of the media of least importance to tourists actually seemed to be one of the best-performing. This might indicate perhaps that too much time had been spent developing something that visitors did not value strongly. This approach of analysing feedback from visitors can therefore be an extremely valuable outcome from an IPA study, revealing what they do not necessarily value very strongly.

Crossing the Dong Nai river to reach the national park



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2. The outcomes from an IPA study should always be further tested using in-depth interviews or perhaps focus groups with your visitors.
3. It is also important to explore whether the results of an IPA study represent the collective view of all of your visitors or merely a particular sub-group. In this study it is reasonable to assume that the Vietnamese visitors, for instance, may react somewhat differently to the media on offer compared to the international tourists.
4. Finally, an IPA study can also be highly effective in comparing the responses of those visitors who visit the location regularly and who may well have a different view and needs from the location, in comparison to those visitors who are making their first visit. ■

References:

Three useful webpages providing further about Cát Tiên National Park:

UNESCO World Heritage (Tentative List) information: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5070/>

A brief travel review of the park:

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/vietnam/articles/a-brief-guide-to-vietnams-famous-cat-tien-national-park/>

A brief overview of the park:

https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Cat_Tien_National_Park

Dao Tiên Endangered Primate Species Centre:

www.go-east.org

Phan, T.T. and Schott, C. 2019. Visitor responses to environmental interpretation in protected areas in Vietnam: a motivation-based segmentation analysis. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 44(4), 492–506.

→ Philip teaches tourism and is also Associate Dean (Student Experience) at Bournemouth University's Business School.

Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation

Michael Hamish Glen
AHI Trustee

Forum for Interpretation in the Americas, February 2021.

The Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation (GAHI) is an umbrella organisation that welcomes any recognised international or national heritage interpretation association – AHI is a member. It has just organised its first conference, bringing together Interpret Canada, the Canadian Interpretive Guides Association, the USA National Association for Interpretation and the newly-established Asociación Mexicana de interpretes del patrimonio (its clever abbreviation underlines an attractive logo, below). The event was hosted on Zoom although the Hopin platform we use is more flexible.



The theme of this trilingual online forum was *Interpretation in a Changing World*, perhaps predictable but none the worse for that. A dozen speakers from the three countries chose topics ranging from the global (appropriately), to the subject/site-specific. It was an engaging and often illuminating event although the opportunity to contribute, other than through the chat function, was limited to a lively one-hour session. I would have wished for shorter talks and more break-out sessions in small groups. However, the conference worked well with each of the three days being limited to five hours including so-called networking breaks. One of these celebrated Mexican food and drink, another showed off American traditions such as baseball.

Ted Cable, much-published author, took Tilden's fifth principle (of addressing 'the whole person') as his text. He gave a characteristically optimistic, if philosophical, view of how interpretation could contribute, in a time for hope, in three spheres. These were conservation, prosperous and peaceful communities and personal health and wellbeing. In a completely contrasting, and fascinating session, Carlos Cruz also took people as his focus in describing the work of MIDE – the Interactive Museum of Economics in Mexico City, the first economy museum in the world. It employs and trains a staggering number of cultural and heritage interpreters in imaginative programmes.

Other presentations dealt, as AHI did at its conference, with the challenges and opportunities presented by Covid-19 and wider issues of coping with bad news. Two Mexican speakers took as their subjects interpreting archaeology in more meaningful ways and archaeology and prejudice in the conquest of Mexico. A problem which I haven't heard of in Europe – dealing with inappropriate racial and gender behaviour among visitors to sites – was a challenging topic, as was a heart-felt plea to allow indigenous peoples to determine how their heritage should be interpreted. Maybe there's a lesson for us on this side of the Atlantic too.

My lasting impression: the high level of investment in professional interpretation in North America. ■

Gaining full AHI membership status

Dr Philip Ryland

MAHI and Trustee
Co-Chair AHI Full
Membership Panel

The AHI is fully committed to supporting the professional development of current as well as potential future members in whatever field they find themselves working. AHI Trustees continue to manage a variety of ways in which members can engage with the Association including online and face-to-face events and training courses, our newsletter and journal as well as online resources, the annual conference and the many opportunities to make more informal connections with fellow colleagues in the profession. As part of this offering, the AHI also welcomes applications for membership, starting perhaps initially with associate or student membership, through to full membership and, for some, onwards to becoming a Fellow.

Two years ago, former AHI Trustee, Lisa Keys, and I reviewed and updated the full membership (MAHI) application process to make it simpler, more transparent and accessible. As a result, the application is now based around demonstrating competency across three areas of interpretation:

- The process of planning
- The process of delivery of interpretive media
- The evaluation of interpretation and its associated media.

In each case a brief explanation of the process is required (a maximum of 500 words each), together with up to six pieces of supporting evidence.

The application process is explained in detail on the AHI's website, with an email link in case any questions arise during the process.

Each application is reviewed by a panel chaired by either Dr Philip Ryland or Lisa Keys and if the information supplied demonstrates competency then full membership status is awarded. If not, the panel will provide the applicant with feedback and recommendations on what further evidence they might wish to submit to satisfy the full membership criteria.

The AHI wishes to encourage as many existing, or potential new, members as possible to apply to become full members of the association. So do please consider putting in an application, and if you have any queries please use the email link on the website, or contact us through the office, using admin@ahi.org.uk.

<https://ahi.org.uk/join/>



AHI Trustee Beth Môrafon recently received full membership status (MAHI) and shared why she decided to apply.

I sought the MAHI membership to reflect my contribution to the sector. I have 20 years' practice in visitor experience creation, so it felt important for me to benchmark my professional development with AHI.

The process required examples of work to show my competencies in interpretation planning, delivery and evaluation.

In some of the areas, I had a glut of high-quality projects from which to select evidence. But in others it was much harder to find supporting materials. For example,

I have a wealth of project delivery experience but fewer pieces of evaluation work, so sourcing these slowed my submission.

I referenced all my examples, with matching names for the supporting materials. Last, but not least, the form was signed by my former line manager who verified my work.

I was delighted when my MAHI application was approved. It provided recognition of my contribution to the sector and supported my successful appointment as an AHI Trustee. And perhaps it might also bring me closer to a FAHI membership invitation...

I would urge all members to apply for full membership.

America in crisis

Amanda Hughes-Horan
Interpretive Insights

British-born Interpretation Consultant Amanda Hughes-Horan reflects on the impact of Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement in this 'Letter from America.'

I'm cross-country skiing high up in the Colorado Rockies and pause to catch my breath. Snowflakes fall silently around me, and deep snow blankets the surrounding forest. Absorbing the complete and utter silence, I realise how much I love these mountains, and how this visceral connection to nature has been my driving force since early childhood. A passion for wildlife conservation drove me to work and study in America, and later to set up my interpretive planning and design consultancy.

These days I'm usually called on for professional insights: how best to interpret our precious natural heritage, connect people to nature or increase public awareness of pressing conservation issues. This invitation to reflect on the current Covid-19 crisis and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is very different. I'm writing just a few days before the US Inauguration, and it feels as though America is holding its breath. Looking back over the tumultuous events of 2020, I'm unsure how to make sense of it all. How best to comment on

America's racist underbelly which is now tearing this country apart and which, in my opinion, has been the cause of such great suffering for so many years? The situation has been brought to a head by the current pandemic which has sadly only served to further exacerbate the shocking inequality, poverty and injustice that I've witnessed in America for many years. It's hard not to feel completely overwhelmed.

Understanding the crisis

To better understand how the pandemic has impacted our profession, I reached out to José Chavez who currently serves on the board of the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) and is also manager of the Reedy Creek Nature Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. He told me that after an initial three-week lockdown in March 2020, he and his staff went back to work. Luckily 60% of their revenue comes from county property taxes, and that has helped with budgeting since they're no longer delivering live programmes. Here in America, federal, state and local governments are the biggest employers in our profession, and they've been able to absorb some of the shockwaves generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In his opinion, smaller non-profit organisations have been more severely impacted, and in some cases have laid off up to 80% of their workforce.

Learning to adapt

Parks and natural resource agencies have been very successful at pivoting from live to virtual field trips and other online programming very early on in the pandemic. Francis Mendoza is the director of NAI's Justice, Equity, Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion (JEDA) Section and an Interpretive Naturalist with the East Bay Regional Park District in Oakland, California. He told me that pre-recorded videos posted on social-media feeds and comprehensive online teaching resources have actually enabled many more people to enjoy his park. 'Covid-19 forced us to get creative', he said with a smile. →

Signs displayed in Houstonians' front gardens showing support for the Black Lives Matter movement



Amanda Hughes-Horan

A protest sign using the words from the late US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg



Amanda Hughes-Horan

In response to the 2020 lockdown, the East Bay Regional District ramped up its advanced and augmented reality programming using online apps such as Timelooper. Creative use of these virtual platforms to deliver interpretive programming has also enabled people with disabilities to explore areas that were previously inaccessible to them. Instead of funding regular on-site programming, funds were diverted to purchase quality cameras, lighting and microphones. 'Our parks are now more popular than ever', stated Mendoza.

Responding to Black Lives Matter

Many organisations in America were quick to show support for the BLM movement after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. However, Mendoza is concerned to see the growth of what is known as *performative allyship* in America with organisations merely paying lip-service to the BLM movement rather than honestly listening to the needs of underserved communities. In his role as Director of NAI's JEDAI Section, Mendoza is now spearheading a push to hold interpretive organisations more accountable and looking at interpretive programming in a more intentional way to ensure that minority voices are heard.

Welcoming diversity

America is becoming more ethnically diverse, yet this changing demographic has traditionally not been reflected in visitor numbers to our national parks and natural reserves.

As interpreters, we cherish these places – yet for them to receive public support in the years to come, we must ensure that visitors from underserved communities feel welcome. As Chavez states: 'It's easy for us to think our programmes are successful if they're well attended, but we should be asking ourselves who is not coming – and why not?'

It's fundamentally important for us to recognise that different cultures relate to nature and enjoy the outdoors in different ways. If you don't know how best to adapt your programming to diverse audiences and make people feel welcome, Chavez's advice is to simply go out and ask. He recommends reaching out to leaders of local underserved communities and inviting them to help you plan and develop programming. Those of us in positions of leadership shouldn't presume to know what works to welcome in people from other cultures and traditions. As Chavez so wisely states, 'you need to be humble and understand that just because you're the professional doesn't mean that you have all the answers.'

At the end of the day, we have to do more. It comes down to opening our hearts to others who are different from ourselves and recognising our shared humanity – something that we perhaps feel more profoundly given all we have lived through recently. ■

"A healthy, vital society is not one in which we all agree. It is one in which those who disagree can do so with honor and respect for other people's opinions... and an appreciation of shared humanity."

Marianne Williamson

→ Originally from South Devon, Amanda has an MSc in Fishery and Wildlife Biology from Colorado State University. She worked as an Interpretive Planner with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for many years before starting her consultancy Interpretive Insights in 2008.
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"Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ninety

in the time of corona

Iona Keen

Heritage Interpretation
Consultant

The South West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries celebrates ninety years of supporting and connecting the heritage sector

2021 is a year of transformation for the South West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries. As the Covid-19 pandemic led to a crisis across the sector last year, the organisation was able to demonstrate resilience and flexibility by changing its business model and board structure to ensure its survival. Emergency funding from Arts Council England was a vital lifeline.

Supporting the sector since 1931

The South West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries was formed in 1931 along with eight other regional federations in the UK. The South West Fed, as it is now known, promotes a culture of shared learning across the South West of England. This large region stretches from Gloucestershire in the north across to Wiltshire and down to Cornwall in the south. It encompasses a huge variety of organisations, from tiny volunteer-run, rural museums to heritage sites of international fame, such as Stonehenge. We connect members with each other, our partners and wider sector organisations. And we act as a representative and independent voice for museums, the

staff and volunteers who work in them and freelancers working across the sector.

Our vision is for a flourishing and confident heritage community in the South West. Our mission is to create opportunities to connect and inspire the heritage community across the region, for the benefit of organisations and their audiences.

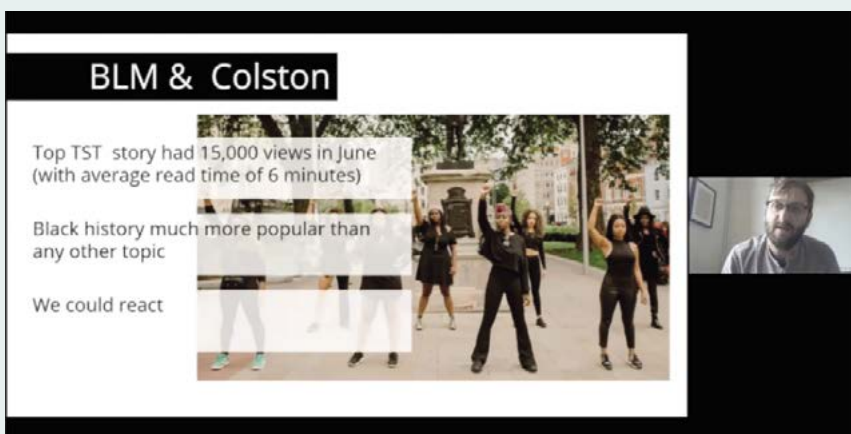
The Fed under threat

At the start of the pandemic last year, the South West Fed's very existence was under threat. Membership levels had dropped to an all-time low and we agonised over what to do about our annual conference – a staple in the South West heritage calendar. In March 2020, our plans for the conference were well underway but, in the midst of a national lockdown, we had no idea if we could go ahead with the two-day event at Bath Spa University in July. Speakers had been booked, tickets had been sold and funds been spent. Our popular bi-annual seminars and our monthly 'Culture and Heritage Mingles' in Bristol were also under threat. At the same time, we were witnessing museums and heritage organisations around us at risk of permanent closure, staff facing redundancy and audiences unable to access vital cultural resources. What were we to do and how could we continue to support our South West community?

Responding to a global crisis

The South West Fed has been through many changes during its long life but it seems that the organisation's role as a connecting lifeline across the region is never more vital than now. With museums, cultural organisations and schools closed and our communities locked down at home, we have been reviewing how we can best support our sector. →

Finn White, Engagement Officer (Communities) at Bristol Culture, gave our first online Spotlight Talk about The Bristol Black History Project, August 2020





Jona Keen

The Bristol Culture and Heritage Mingle socially distanced visit to Winterbourne Medieval Barn in September 2020

Zooming in

Our solution, like many others in the sector, was to go digital. Our first online webinar took place in August 2020 and replaced our monthly 'Mingles', which previously took the form of physical meet-ups in central Bristol. It was a real success and, with a wider reach, attracted far more people than would normally gather each month in person. Although originally programmed for May 2020, the timing of the spotlight talk, which focused on Bristol's Black History Project, was poignant after the toppling of the Edward Colston statue in June.

We also hosted our first socially distanced Mingle. In September, the group visited Winterbourne Medieval Barn, an NLHF-funded heritage regeneration project which, against all odds, had managed to open during the national lockdown.

As the AHI were planning their digital conference, we were also migrating our conference online. We literally found our 'digital feet' during the event, which was hosted on Zoom on 1 and 2 October and attracted 80 virtual participants. In the wake of the Extinction Rebellion protests in 2020 and the inevitable links between climate change and the global pandemic, the original theme of the conference still seemed relevant: 'Combating, curating and interpreting the climate emergency'.

Inspiring presentations and workshops included calls to action from the Carbon Literacy Trust and case studies from large national and smaller local museums. Topics included the British Museum's Arctic exhibition, climate activism and greening museums, engaging young people and families and using archaeology and natural science collections to interpret the climate emergency. Collectively they revealed the diverse approaches that heritage organisations are taking to involve visitors and environmental activists in co-production and to use innovative interpretation to stimulate debate and behavioural change inside and outside the museum.

Children in a South West bicycle museum



The success of the conference has led us to start 2021 by launching a new series of monthly webinars, aimed at better connecting our sector. The talks showcase best practice, encourage learning and discussion and enable networking. We welcome volunteers, operational staff, freelancers, institutions, leaders in our sector or those seeking employment to participate. We are committed to showcasing all the wonderful work being done across the South West. ■

Find out more:

www.swfed.org.uk

Facebook: @swfederation

Twitter: @SWFed

Instagram: south_west_fed

www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/bristols-black-history/

www.winterbournebarn.org.uk

Final thoughts from the Chair

Claire Dixon, our Chair, said:

“Covid-19 has brought significant challenges for our entire sector and its impact has been devastating. As institutions and individuals face huge financial challenges, I am proud to have been part of a transformation of this incredible organisation.

The changes we have made with the support of the whole board and our members mean we can continue to serve this important community and ensure that, in turn, our public audiences continue to benefit from the important, engaging and fun experiences that we know our sector can provide.”

→ Iona is a Heritage Interpretation Consultant and Creative Programmer and Trustee of the South West Fed
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Dunes on the move:

Boosting coastal biodiversity

Emma Brisdion

*Dynamic Dunescapes
Communications Officer,
Natural England*

Easily damaged and becoming increasingly scarce, the UK's coastal sand dunes are one of the most threatened habitats in Europe for biodiversity loss. Emma Brisdion shares how Dynamic Dunescapes is helping restore the sand dunes in Devon and Cornwall.

Gwithian Towans, Cornwall

Naturally, sand dunes are constantly changing – building, receding and shifting with the wind. They're at their best when they're dynamic and encompass a mosaic of habitat types including areas of mobile, bare sand. Lizards and beetles burrow and nest in these open sandy slopes. Wildflowers flourish in the nutrient-poor soils behind foredunes, supporting insect life which props up coastal bird communities. In the dips between dune ridges, delicate orchids bloom while toads and newts breed in freshwater pools.

But over recent decades these systems have lost their natural dynamism. Growing vegetation increasingly holds the sand firm, overstabilises dunes and smothers essential areas of bare sand and freshwater pools. As plant growth fertilises soils, scrub outcompetes wildflowers and non-native, invasive species run rampant and damage the species balance.

This is the challenge facing the Dynamic Dunescapes project partners, Natural England, Plantlife, Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust and The Wildlife Trusts.

Shaping our interpretation

At the start of the project, we consulted educators, sand dune site managers and some of our target audiences, such as communities who support and care for those with dementia, to understand their needs and aspirations, which then helped develop our interpretation plan. We focused on the key message – 'Sand dunes have been damaged and are becoming increasingly scarce' and a key theme 'Sand dunes that move give life to wildlife and help us thrive.' →



These are supported by sub-themes:

- Dunes move and experiencing dunes changing shape is a sensory experience
- Dunes are beautiful places to enjoy
- Dunes offer homes for special plants and animals
- Dunes are for playing in which is good for our health and well-being
- Dunes are still a mystery: learn how they behave and what wildlife lives there.

Historically, dune conservation promoted sand stabilisation – the opposite of what is now understood to be needed. Bringing local communities on board with the (often visually dramatic) conservation work was essential. Sand dunes are important for people as well as wildlife – as recreational spaces allowing personal connection with nature and places with cultural heritage and local significance. These were themes we also wanted to tackle through our interpretation.

As the pandemic erupted, in sync with the rest of the world, Dynamic Dunescapes had to re-think its plans.

Our socially distanced team

The engagement team found new ways to share information. They exchanged face-to-face events for webinars, online talks, dune-inspired family activity videos, training volunteers online and developed educational resources for school groups and citizen scientists. Digitising printed activity sheets actually increased their potential reach so these channels will continue to be a core part of engagement work going forward.



Sand dune i-spy activity sheet

In Cornwall we put up temporary interpretation boards to inform the public about the work that's going on, explain why it's needed and the positive impact it'll have on the dunes.



© Dynamic Dunescapes

Julia Galbenu, People Engagement Officer, in one of the 'dune dens' in Studland Bay, Dorset

Work on the ground

In Cornwall we put up temporary interpretation boards to inform the public about the work that's going on, explain why it's needed and the positive impact it'll have on the dunes. We scraped back some of the overgrown slacks (the dips between dune ridges) to restore the freshwater ponds that used to be there and, within six weeks, we saw a large deposit of frogspawn (in January, so early in the season!).

Our partners, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, have been on regular 'poo patrols' spray-painting dog deposits at Gear Sands, using an eco-friendly chalk-based paint to literally highlight the issue. In Cornwall we have ponies and in Devon we have a herd of cattle, and dog faeces can cause serious disease in grazing animals. It also fertilises the soil, which encourages more rapid plant growth and dune stabilisation.

In Devon, the National Trust is leading an exciting new community engagement project using a series of six fibreglass cows around Woolacombe dunes. Each painted by different community artists, the cows will form a trail and help engage local people with the project and increase awareness about why we have animals on the dunes. By grazing, they keep vegetation low (and are a much cheaper and more natural control method than using mechanical mowers) and create better conditions for wildflowers, insects and other wildlife. The trail will be unveiled on 25th June, International Sand Dune Day.

© Dynamic Dunescapes



Andy Nelson

Frogspawn returns to the dunes



Emma Brisdion

Dark green fritillary butterfly

Historically, dune conservation promoted sand stabilisation – the opposite of what is now understood to be needed. Bringing local communities on board with the (often visually dramatic) conservation work was essential.

Thinking outside of the box

To attract attention, we've created giant branded 'dune dens' (a bit like gazebos) to house our events, leaflets and activity sheets. We wanted to draw visitors into the dunes and showcase them as areas to explore, not just to pass through on the way to the beach. The dens also house dune-related children's toys and activity packs to inspire and encourage an interest in the landscape and wildlife. Complete with matching deck chairs, wind-breaks and giant beach flags, they will also be a meeting point for guided walks, litter picks and volunteer events when we're able to run more of those.

We also created 'picnic-style' hampers with old photographs, sticks of rock and a 1950s-style swimming cap for dementia patients and care groups that we're working with, with the aim of bringing happiness and connection through



Andy Nelson, Cornwall Wildlife Trust

'Scratch-and-sniff' postcards enjoying a day out at the beach

memories and associations with the coast. This included sending self-addressed and stamped 'scratch and sniff' postcards (they smell of suncream) to care homes residents to post back to us, with their seaside memories.

The Dynamic Dunescapes Legacy

The project's legacy hinges on forging deeper, long-term connections between communities and their sand dunes. By increasing their understanding of dune health – its importance, how to assess it and support it – we hope to leave sand dunes in the capable and caring hands of their communities and help ensure a resilient future for dune wildlife.

Dynamic Dunescapes is a UK-wide project which received £10m from EU LIFE Programme and National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project partners aim to restore 7,000 hectares of sand dunes in England and Wales by 2023 and will host a conference that year as part of their evaluation. ■

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Spirit Up!

A digital journey for St Pauls Carnival

**LaToyah
McAllister-Jones**
Executive Director,
St Pauls Carnival

LaToyah McAllister-Jones tells us how she took Bristol's iconic St Pauls Carnival online in 2020. She explores some of the key challenges, collaborations and partnerships whilst reflecting on the creative journey of a small community arts organisation, and the lessons learnt on the way.

St Pauls Carnival: Bristol's premier cultural event

St Pauls Carnival is in its 53rd year and is one of Bristol's best-known events. Bristol is a festival city and has a jam-packed, year-round events calendar, but St Pauls Carnival is the jewel in the crown of summer events. It attracts over 100,000 carnival-goers each year and generates an estimated £5.1 million spent both within the neighbourhood of St Pauls and across the city. Crossing generations through a celebration of Afro-Caribbean culture and heritage, it is an event where every float, every stage, every performer and every person tells a story – and that story is how music, dance and a sense of community can bring people together, embodying a living interpretation of an intangible heritage.

When the world changed

As March 2020 began, we were busy preparing for the annual event, which takes place on the first Saturday of July every year. As the weeks rolled by and the pandemic took hold, we started to think about how the event might be impacted by the virus and pressed pause on our planning to meet with the board of directors and discuss whether it was even possible to go ahead.

On 24th March 2020 we announced that the event would be cancelled.

Going digital: Making lemonade out of lemons

During the initial weeks of lockdown there were lots of online live streams and events. I really enjoyed the sense of community and joy these events inspired. After taking part in a carnival-inspired Zoom party, the idea for 'Spirit Up! United at Home' was born. We went live in June 2020, with a two-week online cultural programme, culminating in an 11-hour live stream on Carnival Day. We were the first UK-based carnival to go digital, attracting a reach of 250,000 across social media, 20,000 views of our videos and with people across the globe tuning in for the live stream.

The online programme encapsulated the Carnival's history, cultural significance and vibrancy, with storytelling sessions, drumming and spoken word performances, poetry commissioned for Windrush Day and carnival headdress-making workshops.

Obstacles

Despite delivering a great experience on the day, the organisation faced several obstacles on the way:

The people: During lockdown St Pauls Carnival was operating with a team of just one, with additional contracted fundraising 4 days a month. Without a team in place, it was incredibly difficult to deliver on the vision. →



A live-streamed activity with carnival headdresses for Spirit Up! United at Home, 2020



St Pauls Carnival CIC

We now have the experience, skills and knowledge to ensure that the organisation is much better equipped to withstand the challenges ahead.

The resource: We are fortunate to be supported by The Arts Council and Bristol City Council, as well as a small number of partners that invest in the Carnival's work. Our key funders agreed to continue their support, but the organisation's ability to fundraise against activity was very limited.

The timeframe: The vision for the online project didn't solidify until April 2020 when there was a greater sense of what lockdown really meant and that it wasn't going to end any time soon! This left very little time to turn the project around.

Skills and knowledge: This was a big one. I have many skills and talents, but digital content development isn't one of them! Going from the vision to creating the online programme was truly the biggest unknown quantity of the whole project.

How St Pauls Carnival responded to the challenge

The things that worked well and helped to drive the project were:

- **Putting a call out for volunteer support.** This was invaluable for bringing new skills in to support the admin, project management and additional networking. It also forged a sense of community with everyone working together to make the project happen.
- **Paying for tech support.** Other than the artists, the tech support was the greatest investment for the event and was worth every penny! Live stream events need experts to deliver the end product.
- **Strong branding.** Having a clear sense of what we were trying to achieve and the underlying principles of the project helped to create a really strong brand which was linked, but separate, to the overarching look and feel of the Carnival.
- **Strong project management.** This might seem obvious but having a project plan with timelines and deadlines and weekly project meetings meant that everyone was clear on what needed to be done. Of course, there was some slippage but the project plan helped us to manage that and re-prioritise ahead of time.



- **Keep it simple.** For the two-week cultural fringe project, content was filmed via mobile phone and sent to us for topping and tailing with a logo. It was very rough and ready, which worked well with our brand and allowed us to make the most of taking a less than polished approach.

Lessons

The scope of the project became quite ambitious. I am extremely proud of what we achieved, both with the cultural fringe programme and the live stream, and have learnt some valuable lessons going forward that may help others to plan audience engagement projects online, in these difficult times:

- Don't give yourself too much to do! The cultural programme could have been a week shorter and the live stream could have been half as long! Cut down on the workload and focus on delivering quality over quantity.
- Get expert help early on. Unfortunately, the time frame meant that this wasn't possible for St Pauls Carnival. But having tech support, a curator for the programming and a project manager makes life easier.

Vibrant carnival costumes from 2018



St Pauls Carnival CIC

- Generating income. Think ahead to how your programme might generate income, whether it be a paywall for more high-profile performers, easy access to donating platforms or selling merchandise on the day. Plan it and build it into your comms strategy.
- The role of the host. Critical to a live stream event. We used a number of hosts throughout the day to help knit the stream together between segments and to 'hype' the crowd.

Spirit Up! The legacy

The events industry has been hit hard by the pandemic. We rely on the live and direct experience, which provides work and income to thousands of individuals, including artists and small businesses that provide tech support, equipment, catering and infrastructure. However, one of the key takeaways from 2020 is the sheer scale of creativity and resilience that came to the fore. Events like St Pauls Carnival define a community's sense of place, so it feels significant that we were able to reach out to our audience and beyond, offering something new but in the same celebratory spirit.

We now have the experience, skills and knowledge to ensure that the organisation is much better equipped to withstand the challenges ahead. We have a wider audience and a platform in digital spaces where previously we had no presence. This will have a huge impact on how we approach community engagement and outreach, knowing that we are now able to showcase Bristol-based community artists all over the world, opening up possibilities of new partnerships and new ways of interpreting our heritage in exciting ways. ■

→ Find out more about St Pauls Carnival:
www.stpaulscarnival.net
www.facebook.com/stpaulscrnl
 Twitter: @StPaulsCRNVL

HOW DO HERITAGE INTERPRETERS RESPOND TO CULTURE WARS?

In 2020, Culture Wars erupted into the heritage world with the toppling of statues, political criticism of the National Trust's review of its properties' slave trade connections and the heritage sector's response to the Black Lives Matter movement. The issue is high on the political agenda with government initiatives including the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport holding a summit with heritage bodies in February. Essentially, the issue is over the stories we choose to tell about our heritage. Journal editor Nicky Temple chaired a debate on Zoom between two AHI Trustees from different backgrounds to see what differences or common ground there may be in answering the question: How do interpreters respond to the 'threat of war'?



Bill Bevan is an interpreter, archaeologist, photographer and writer from a Northumbrian coal mining family. He has been doing interpretation for 32 years, though he's only known it by name since 2005. He has his own consultancy, www.inheritage.co.uk, and is an AHI Trustee – ex-Chair and current Chair of the Awards.



Michele Curtis is a multi-award-winning artist and interpreter from Bristol. Michele has been working in the field for seven years. Her work predominantly focuses on Black British history from a grass-root, intangible cultural heritage perspective. Michele promotes the concept that Black British history is British history.

Nicky: What are the implications for interpreters in reacting to Culture Wars? Is it our responsibility to raise questions and take an activist role, or should we keep a neutral, passive voice?

Bill: Neutrality suggests that we are objective and we don't have bias, but I think we all do, we just don't always acknowledge it. Our biases can lead us to focus on one aspect of a story. By being passive we are always going to propagate those biases which might then become the status quo, repeating some very dominant stories. One of the things we must always do as interpreters on any project is start by asking questions. Why are we interpreting this heritage? Who are we interpreting for? What is the breadth of the collection or property? I don't know whether I'd call it activism to bring up a wider range of stories or look for diversity, I think that is just being really good at interpretation. Looking at all the stories that are connected, not just going for the dominant narrative.

Michele: People often try to categorise me as an activist or an artist whose work is very much focused on black civil rights, and I don't consider myself to be that. I didn't know that my work was heritage interpretation until recently. From my perspective as a black British person who has always had an interest in history, I want to create a balance with my work. It always seems to be positive white stories or negative black stories, or a 'we are the victims and white people are evil' narrative, and I don't subscribe to that. That is not what my work is about. Nobody is the enemy and there is good and bad on both sides.

I'm a child of the Caribbean diaspora and growing up we didn't have a history. Our history was the transatlantic slave trade or the Windrush. There was no discourse as to why we were in Britain and what we did when we got here, so that other communities could understand our story. My work doesn't focus on the negative but rather tries to balance the scales and explain that it's not a black history but it's a shared history. Our histories are intertwined. When I have interviewed people from the Windrush Generation I have made a point of explaining their experiences of racism and hardship, but also of the local communities who supported them, giving them somewhere to live or a meeting place and joining them on the front lines; that they went through suffering but also achieved amazing things.

I am currently working on a new logo for the Dolphin School in Bristol and their history is directly connected to the Colston family. From the consultation I have carried out, it is interesting to see that people think by changing the logo you are erasing history. But it is about acknowledging and explaining what happened and why change is needed to move forward with a more balanced history, rather than erasing one history and replacing it with another.

I can understand why it is a contentious and difficult conversation to have. When you do speak up, you are labelled an activist which I believe has negative connotations, especially when it is applied to the black community or to black individuals. When white people unite against something they are protesters; when black people get together in the same way, they are activists, which sounds like an aggressive means of protesting when actually that is not the case. The way that we use language and the way that we express our work and our mission is really important, especially when dealing with marginalised communities.

Nicky: We can be active in the way we work, looking for the gaps, the other point of view, and filling in the bits of history that we might not have learnt about to build a fuller picture. That's an active way of being an interpreter.

Bill: I also worry about people criticising something for being activist or activism in relation to the immediacy of a protest or movement. I was thinking about this in relation to women's suffrage in Britain. That is what you would call an activist movement – very strident and strong. It was aggressive at its extremes, but a hundred years later the activism of one generation has become the status quo of the future. Yes, people react against it but we should be open to listening as it might shine a light on our differences and give us an understanding of other viewpoints that we might not have considered due to our own life experiences. Culture Wars is a snappy phrase, but has a dangerous tone. Once it gets introduced into our consciousness it is very difficult to deconstruct. It takes an instant to embed but then a lifetime to argue about.

In terms of interpreters engaging with Culture Wars, there are several things I think we need to be aware of, especially with the word 'war'. The first is that it implies aggression and conflict. →

I want to create a balance with my work. It always seems to be positive white stories or negative black stories, or a 'we are the victims and white people are evil' narrative, and I don't subscribe to that.

No debate, no discussion. It also implies that you take sides. Once you take a side then you tend to sign up to the agenda of that side and you don't break ranks. That then leads on to criticism of the other side with offensive terms being thrown up as a quick and easy way to insult the opposition, whether that is woke or fascist or something else. It also implies fighting until you win. Wars don't tend to be a little squabble that carries on for a while and then you say 'well I enjoyed that, let's have a cup of tea and talk about something else'. People who enter into war want to win and defeat the other side. That to me is very dangerous territory for interpreters to get into.

Firstly, good interpretation is people-led and should always be inspired by the stories of the people connected to the heritage in question. Secondly, we must always take on board the audiences that might engage with our work. By doing that we really open up a diversity of the past.

We are much better off doing what we already do really well within our principles of interpretation. Firstly, good interpretation is people-led and should always be inspired by the stories of the people connected to the heritage in question. Secondly, we must always take on board the audiences that might engage with our work. By doing that we really open up a diversity of the past.

This is why I can't see how anyone could label as contentious the National Trust's survey to look at the slave trade connections to their properties. The organisation has spent the last 20–30 years opening up the stories they tell and this is a continuation of that journey. Gone are the days when you simply learnt about the architecture, art history and the wealthy family who lived there. It is now commonplace to see stories of the working-class people employed at the properties and the women associated with the household. We don't simply look at a tapestry because it is beautiful and fits into an art history perspective. Now we ask how it was made, where the materials are from and how it arrived in this house. That isn't cancelling out anybody's history. It makes the history wider, richer and more relevant to people today. Relevance is the other principle we should think about. Is this why visitor numbers to National Trust properties and membership subscriptions have increased dramatically over the past 20 years?

Nicky: So why have the Common Sense Group objected particularly to the National Trust's survey? Some of the argument has been that audiences don't want to be challenged and faced with questions or histories that make them feel uncomfortable. Should audiences be made to feel uncomfortable if the truth is to be portrayed and inequalities addressed? If you shy away from these questions then perhaps you are not presenting a full picture of how these objects came to be inside these buildings.

Michele: It's the way that the interpretation is presented. While I understand that people having a nice day out with their families don't want to be bombarded with pictures of enslaved Africans, it's the way you interpret those stories with a level of sensitivity. As a person of colour, I don't want to go on a family day out and be faced with lots of images of people who look like me in chains. It works both ways. It's trauma that I live every day and see played out in films. I don't want to see it when I go to a heritage site. But at the same time, it is important to acknowledge it and share it in a sensitive way and I really think that is possible. I think it also has something to do with the way that heritage is viewed as white upper middle class and anything else isn't heritage, and that's where I think interpreters have the power to make change happen and give the definition of heritage in the work we do. It's not about shaming anyone but it is about educating and learning because it is a shared heritage, not mine or yours. We are all British people and all have a stake in British history.

Funding bodies can be very specific about the demographics you are reaching out to. The application form has boxes to tick and you have to pick only one. On my journey I fought against this constantly. My work is for everybody. Black people don't necessarily know about this history because there aren't the platforms to discuss it, but it is also important for people who don't look like me to find out about these stories too. Because if you don't have these conversations and you don't expose people to particular histories, then how do you expect things to change?

Bill: The National Trust was the organisation of the upper middle classes, but this has changed. Perhaps the Common Sense Group find it difficult to see things change in a bastion of their society and culture. They don't realise

how democratic the visitor base of the National Trust has become. As Michele says, it's not that long ago that British history was perceived as the heritage of the ruling classes.

Nicky: What can we say to interpreters who don't always have the freedom to make choices when interpreting heritage? They may be following the plan of a director, curator or manager with strong views on how a story should be told. They may be employed as a consultant by an organisation that already has a vision for how the heritage should be interpreted.

Bill: It comes down to the fundamentals of good interpretative planning. Widen out your perceptions of the different stories that could be told and what they might mean. This gives you balance and helps you to avoid being swayed.

Michelle: You have to stay focused on what you are interpreting and who it is for and make sure you are curating a story that someone can connect to emotionally. Sometimes people are afraid of offending and try hard to please. The heritage is what it is. Your job is to pull out the narratives and present them in a balanced way to show a full picture, and then allow your visitors to decide what they take away because you can't control how someone perceives something.

Bill: You might not always be successful, but interpreters need to be asking questions all the time of their employer or client, to avoid a narrow focus. Your successful interpretation will be based on consulting with your audiences and finding out what interests them and what works for them. Don't just consult with your existing audience base. Who are your potential audiences? Which aspects resonate with different groups?

Nicky: Can we tell new stories and bring in new perspectives by bringing in audiences to work with us?

Bill: Absolutely, but some organisations are scared to let go of that authoritative control. Co-curation and participatory projects open up aspects of a story you may not have thought about. It makes your collection more relevant to a wider range of people and you learn from the process of working with people outside of your discipline. Narrative is built from the ground up.

Michele: Just because you don't tell the story doesn't mean that it isn't being told. So it's best if you tell it and you present it in your space and you can control how its told. People have knowledge, but don't always know the full facts and fill in with things they think they know.

Nicky: Any closing thoughts?

Bill: Let's not engage in a culture war with people who really like fighting. Then we are fighting on their territory. Let's do it through our professional practice and remain open to telling diverse stories. As Michele has said, heritage is shared and doesn't belong to one group or another. If you take that as a principle it really cancels out the whole principle of Culture Wars and breaks it down by not fighting it head on, but undermining the whole concept.

Michele: There is nothing to be afraid of. People might see these political and social movements and feel like their very existence is at threat. It is about sharing all parts of our combined heritage and being proud to do so. If done in a sensitive way you will appeal to all demographics. ■

You have to stay focused on what you are interpreting and who it is for and make sure you are curating a story that someone can connect to emotionally. Sometimes people are afraid of offending and try hard to please.

TUNING INTO NATURE: LISTENING WALKS AT SNAPE MALTINGS

Mike Challis
Sound Artist, Maker
and Educator

Wildlife enthusiast and sound recordist, Mike Challis, shares his experience of delivering listening walks to music lovers and the general public at Snape Maltings in the East of England.

Formerly used to prepare barley for brewing, Snape Maltings in Suffolk was bought by a local farmer in the 1960s and soon afterwards the largest malthouse was leased to Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears to convert into Snape Maltings Concert Hall, the new home of the Aldeburgh Festival. Now one of the world's leading centres of music, run by Britten Pears Arts, the buildings sit close to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with marshes and reed beds along the tidal River Alde, home to a huge variety of birds and plant life.

For a time, Britten lived in the Old Mill above the Maltings and wildlife was always important to him. He was known to compose at his desk in the mornings before walking in the afternoons to organise his thoughts and ideas. Bob Ling, caretaker at the Maltings, said that Britten, after a concert, would often say 'Come and listen to the bittern' and they would go outside and listen to the bird's call booming across the marshes.

The Maltings and River Alde





Shoël Stadlen/Britten Pears Art

Sound artist Mike Challis leads listening walks at Aldeburgh Festival 2019

Exploring the sounds in the marshes

I've been associated with Snape for 20 years and previously supplied sounds for a 'Piano in the marshes' promotional video a few years back. While talking to Shoël Stadlen, Head of Communications at Britten Pears Arts, about my SoundHides (a den-like structure where people can listen to seasonal sounds at different times of the day and night), he asked me about leading some 'listening walks' from the visitor centre. Shoël had recently attended a soundwalk elsewhere and he saw great potential in doing something similar at Snape.

The idea was to create listening walks that would appeal to shoppers, nature lovers and concert goers, taking in the breath-taking scenery and wildlife surrounding the site and to do it in a way that gently introduced people to the joys of focused listening.

First steps

So in February 2019 we tried a taster walk around the immediate Snape Maltings site as an activity to begin the day for the Arts Health Early Career Research Network conference. The act of 40 people walking in silence and enjoying the winter sunshine and a strong wind in the reeds was a profound ritualistic experience.

The Listening Walks begin

Encouraged by the taster walk, the first Listening Walks began in earnest in June 2019 for the Aldeburgh Festival. Twenty of us walked for an hour from Snape Maltings along the river, taking in the marsh to the north that belongs to Suffolk Wildlife Trust to reach the heathlands at the RSPB Snape Warren nature reserve.

There was always a tension between listening and listening to nature. 'I wanted people to listen. People tend to talk when walking with family and friends, so establishing a rule of "no talking" encouraged listening and paying attention to their environment as a shared experience', said Mike.

Once again the act of walking in a group, in silence, and paying attention to the sounds, sights and smells around us felt like a ritual. We paused a few times to listen in silence, and then broke the hush to share what we had heard, before once again going back into silent listening mode and walking on.

The weather played a big part in the walks. Sometimes it was calm and sunny, at other times windy and it threatened rain. I have fond memories of entering the small, wooded area at the end of the riverbank and going from being blasted by wind to the sheltered space in the oaks, listening to the wind in the leaves. →



Mike Challis

Reeds and River

For the Festival walks in June, the raucous Cetti's warbler often started the listening walk for us. As we moved along the riverbank, we heard reed warblers with their repetitive melodies and the rougher sedge warblers with their rasping song interspersed with purer high notes. We saw male reed buntings singing from the reeds' tops and joyful skylarks singing above the marshes. We saw marsh harriers and occasionally heard a cuckoo in the distance. In the woods we were treated to long-tailed tits, robins, greenfinches and other woodland birds and the sounds of the wind in the trees. On the hot days of summer, there were crickets stridulating, bees and insects humming and the gentle flutter of the butterflies. For me, the highlight had to be the evening prom walk in August watching the swallows gathering to roost in the reeds and skeins of geese flying in from the sunset to roost on the mudflats. Magical sights and sounds.

For me Snape's soundscape always includes the curlew, but this bird leaves the river to breed, only returning in midsummer and, even then, it's only heard as a distant call from the mudflats towards Iken.

As with any new project, we made some adjustments, such as extending the walk time to 75 minutes and longer again (90 minutes) for the August prom walks so we could loop the heath.

Plugging soundscape gaps

For me Snape's soundscape always includes the curlew, but this bird leaves the river to breed, only returning in midsummer and, even then, it's only heard as a distant call from the mudflats towards Iken. As a result, I decided to set up an impromptu sound installation with three pocket speakers to play previously recorded sounds of the landscape of Snape, including curlew, oystercatcher, redshank, sedge warbler and skylark. This quick demonstration was a surprise for the walkers and well received.

I also recorded the walks, stopping when there were discussions, to make them available on SoundCloud for visitors and the public to listen to whenever they wished.

Looking towards Iken from the Maltings

Future walks

I'm hoping the walks will restart after lockdown with suitable social distancing. It would be wonderful, too, to retrace Britten's steps from the Red House and up to the North Warren. Nature is such a wonderful thing to be immersed in and I believe people have become more 'sound aware' over this past year; listening to your environment is a fundamental instinct, with great benefits to the listener. ■

Further reading and listening:

Snape Listening Walks

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKeQNY_xUvc

Britten Pears Arts

www.brittenpearsarts.org

Useful site to hear the birdsong mentioned in the article

www.british-birdsongs.uk

Wellbeing Research Conference

www.artshealthecrn.com/research-intensive



Mike Challis

Mike leads a listening walk with a windproof microphone rig to record the soundscape around Snape



Mike Challis

→ Mike makes art installations from the sounds he collects. He is also currently making a series of instructional videos on listening and recording the sounds outside your door for the Community Department at Britten Pears Arts. www.mikechallis.com

ANOOSHKA RAWDEN

Anooshka Rawden is Cultural Lead at South Downs National Park, a 1,600 km² landscape of rolling chalk downland, ancient forests, market towns and the iconic white cliffs of the Heritage Coast. Nicky Temple talks to Anooshka about her career and her role as a mentor with Museum Futures, a programme that invests in a new generation of diverse professionals, opening up careers in museums and heritage to currently under-represented groups.



What does your current role involve?

My role is essentially relationship management and facilitation. I get to support some fantastic projects that conserve and enhance the heritage we have, and initiatives that are creating the cultural heritage of the future through contemporary arts and crafts. Since March last year, the focus has understandably been on Covid-19. We've worked to advocate for the sector across as broad a range of channels as possible, while also mobilising to create programmes of support where we can. Despite this difficult time, I've been inspired by cultural organisations in and around the National Park responding to the needs of their communities, such as Towner Eastbourne providing creative materials and activities through food banks and community networks, and Ditchling Museum's #CreateToRelate campaign, which used craft to address isolation in lockdown.

We have some projects coming up that I am really excited about, which give a flavour of my role. We're working with the National Trust and Worthing Museum to create digital interpretation for Cissbury, a site owned and managed by the National Trust. Using digital technology as opposed to traditional interpretation panels will help to retain the sense of wild open space, capitalising on use of personal hand-held devices. We hope that people visiting Cissbury will be more aware of the stories it has to tell about ingenuity, impact and recovery, and get a better sense of 'natural' and 'historic' landscapes as a single, unified concept.

We're also working with the artist and writer Alinah Azadeh at Seven Sisters in East Sussex. Alinah's use of speculative fiction to explore landscape settings and bigger concepts like belonging and identity creates some really innovative opportunities to interpret landscape through a different lens. Fiction enables us to explore a variety of futures, as well as the diversity of experiences. We hope that working with a gifted artist and writer can offer a new kind of landscape interpretation to visitors, through storytelling.

What inspired you to work in the heritage sector? How easy was it to find your first job and have you come up against any hurdles on the way?

I went on a school trip to the British Museum when I was at primary school. My mum worked in factories and my dad worked at Devonport Dockyard on night shifts, so we didn't get to do many day trips anywhere and never went

on holiday. The impact of a visit to the British Museum was transformative. I remember having to be calmed down by my teacher as I was ridiculously excited.

I started looking for work in museums in the early 2000s. It was tough. There were a lot of rejection letters (and I mean a lot). Because of the expectation that you needed significant experience before securing your first job, I did almost 5 years of volunteering, incurring debt as well as having an unhealthy juggling act between study, paid employment and volunteering. I wasn't alone in having this experience of entering the sector 20 years ago. I remain eternally grateful to Reading Museum for my first job, which left me with a lot of respect for the work of civic museums. But I think it's crucial we now have initiatives like Fair Museum Jobs challenging the sector on its recruitment practices – ultimately, we need to attract as wide a range of talent as possible to avoid 'group think' and genuinely embrace innovation.

You have been a mentor as part of the Museum Futures programme. Why is this scheme important and how did you find the experience?

It remains one of the best things I've done with my career. I learnt so much from my mentee, Tasha Brown. As she explored the museum sector, I got the chance to rediscover it with the benefit of fresh eyes and perspectives thanks to Tasha's insights. Mentoring is a two-way process, and she mentored me as much as I mentored her. Alongside Tasha's placement mentor (the wonderful Kevin Bacon, Digital Manager at the Royal Pavilion & Museums Brighton) I got to see a person coming into the sector with both practical and pastoral support in place – learning skills, but also growing perspectives – and who in turn helped us to reflect on our own professional practice as part of the journey.

I felt it was essential to support an initiative like Museum Futures – a scheme that provides on-the-job training, a qualification and a bursary. As a sector, we have operated within unrealistic assumptions for a long time – we're still an industry that's surviving on privilege but could be thriving by embracing broader skills, perspectives and experiences.

What advice would you give someone wanting to follow in your footsteps and pursue a career in heritage and interpretation?

More than ever, digital platforms give us the opportunity to get involved in active debate. #MuseumHour has opened doors for more people to connect and feel part of a network. Added to this has been the impact of grassroots networks, who challenge and create a voice for change – this includes Museum Detox, Museum as Muck, Fair Museum Jobs and Museum DCN (Disability Collaborative Network) among others. I would advocate that anyone entering the sector familiarise themselves with the work of these networks, as it will help to hone your understanding of where we are and where more work is needed. We're not always a time-rich sector, but there is a genuine willingness to reflect, support and share, so don't be afraid to approach people for a chat, ask questions, make connections.

For interpretation specifically, I would say always keep your eyes and ears open for the stories not yet told. Interpretation is an opportunity to draw out meaning and explore the diversity of human experience, whether through objects, archives, buildings or landscapes. We've got more work to do to ensure the contemporary museum is reflective of the society that actually exists, and interpretation is a crucial ingredient on that journey. ■

AHI BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES: AN UPDATE

Dr Philip Ryland
MAHI and AHI Trustee

Our latest best practice guideline 'Interpretation for diversity and inclusion', written by Beth Mōrafon, Damon Mahoney and Iona Keen, was launched back in November in time for the conference. It's now seven years since we started publishing these hugely valuable practical guidelines on a whole range of aspects of our work relating to the field of interpretation. The current list of guidelines published on our website is as follows:

- 1 – Guidelines on commissioning and tendering (2013)
- 2 – Interpretation panels: an introduction (2013)
- 3 – Interpretive leaflets: an introduction (2013)
- 4 – Writing interpretation for children and families (2014, updated 2020)
- 5 – Guided walks and tours: an introduction (2014)
- 6 – Heritage interpretation and tourism: an introduction (2014)
- 7 – Interpretive writing (2014, updated 2020)
- 8 – Introducing a costumed interpretation programme (2014, updated 2020)
- 9 – Inclusive design: principles and practice (2014)
- 10 – Thinking interpretively about colour and type (2015)
- 11 – Creating an interpretation plan: an introduction (2015, updated 2020)
- 12 – Demystifying evaluation: a brief guide (2016)
- 13 – Natural interpretation: a brief guide (2017, updated 2020)
- 14 – Diversity and inclusion guide (2020)

MANAGEMENT OF THE COSTUMED INTERPRETATION PROGRAMME: TRAINING

If you are planning to train your own on site costumed interpreters in this particular form of interpretation, here are a few suggestions of things to consider when training:

- 1** While the organisation will have information to pass on to the interpreter(s), it's good practice to encourage the interpreter(s) to conduct their own research. This will help to them to understand and develop the character(s) they are to interpret and is relevant to 1st, 2nd and 3rd person interpretation.
- 2** Interpreters need to understand about their body language as much as that of the visitor and learn how to approach visitors and read the signs when visitors really want to be left alone.
- 3** Interpreters must ensure accuracy in presenting attitudes and/or values or demonstrating crafts or skills of the historic period regardless of whether they are doing it in 1st, 2nd or 3rd person.
- 4** For those who embark on a 1st person programme, it should be remembered that the reactions of people in the past to ideas, concepts and values are described in the context of the time period being interpreted – we cannot impose our values on the past. For example the early 20th century view about wearing fur is very different from how we think about this today. If using 1st person, the interpreter must convey that it is perfectly normal to wear fur. Costumed interpreters must learn that facts must not be presented out of context to make a point or communicate personal or contemporary social or political beliefs. It is in this way that the visitor is confronted with the what happened in the past and invited to question it.



HES Linlithgow Palace, early 16th century court. © Anonimo Scotland
Family activity with Mary Queen of Scots at MMS. © Alison Rait
Meeting Mary, Queen of Scots. © i3a Photography
Captain with visitors at the Tall Ship, Glasgow. © Anonimo Scotland

8 – Introducing a costumed interpretation programme

Two years ago, through the AHI newsletter, I invited members to suggest topics for new guidelines and we are currently hard at work developing three new titles: 'Bilingual and multilingual interpretation', 'Digital heritage interpretation' and 'Community-based interpretation'. I hope all of these will be published this year.

We are also really excited by the work that India Rabey (from The Way Design) and designer Damon Mahoney are doing to support me and our authors in the updating of all of our existing guidelines. The original authors have been invited to update their text, and India and I are using this opportunity to add more photographs, case studies and create additional interesting imagery for each title. To this end, five guidelines have already been updated and are now live on the AHI website. The remainder will follow through the spring, with the aim of having all fourteen existing guidelines updated by the summer.

I am always looking for new ideas for further guidelines, so if you would like to get involved or have a suggestion for a topic, please do get in touch. I can be contacted using the email link on the AHI website or through the office using admin@ahi.org.uk. ■



13 – Natural interpretation: a brief guide

3 GET INTO THEIR WORLD
If your family interpretation is to engage with today's children, you need to know them. Listen to children, observe them, read their books, watch their TV programmes, browse their websites.
Think about how to target adults and children at the same time. There are lots of examples of where it's done well, such as movies (Shrek, Toy Story, Spiderman, Incredibles), TV series (Doctor Who, The Kicks, A Series of Unfortunate Events, Avatar), or even good old pantomimes.
Speak to people who lead guided walks for mixed-age audiences. How do they include everyone and 'work the crowd'?

1 Hook them!
No matter how fantastic your story is, you've wasted your time if people don't read it. So you need to make sure you 'hook' them, right from the start. Children in particular will be put off immediately if your interpretation looks 'boring'.
Use lively, enticing, intriguing titles and sub-titles to hook their imagination.
Use attention-grabbing illustrations, or colourful, animated photographs.
Focus on an 'angle' that's interesting or relevant to their lives.
Make them desperate to know more...

5 Keep it simple
Keep the text short and simple, but still packed with bite-sized information.
Use familiar every-day terms and keep to one idea/subject in each sentence.
Keep paragraphs short – don't make it look like 'hard work'.
Use photos, illustrations and captions to tell as much of the story as possible.
Importantly, this approach will help your interpretation reach out to people with learning disabilities – by writing in simple language, with simple sentence structure, but full of fascinating facts, you can reach out to a much wider audience.
The same applies to people for whom English is a second language.

4 – Writing interpretation for children and families

CASE STUDY
TOUCH TOURS AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Contributors.
Stuart Frost, Head of Interpretation & Volunteers, British Museum; Fiona Slaton, Equality and Diversity Manager, British Museum.
Image: © Trustees of the British Museum.

14 – Diversity and inclusion guide

THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE –

HOW IT FEELS RETURNING TO A COVID-SAFE MUSEUM

Charlotte Dew

Public Programme Manager
at The Goldsmiths' Centre,
London

Charlotte Dew reflects on the experience of visiting the British Museum during the pandemic.

In October 2020 I made my first post-lockdown visit to the British Museum's permanent displays. The experience was uplifting and inspiring, despite the safety measures the pandemic has made necessary. It gave me pause to wonder – what can museums learn from the systems they have introduced to make their venues Covid-safe?

The visit required an online booking, made some weeks in advance. With the reserved ticket came the delight of anticipation. Retaining booking systems to visit permanent as well as special exhibitions could serve a range of purposes:

- Better regulation of visitor flow
- A means of obtaining audience demographic information and feedback
- The expansion of mailing lists when consent is given
- A system for giving priority to certain audiences at particular times
- The chance for visitors to make voluntary donations with ease.

For those who like to plan and are literate in online booking it is ideal, and, for some, a booked ticket may provide reassurance of their right to be there and could reduce anxiety. These pros will need to be balanced against the barriers – to audiences uncomfortable or unable to book and those with a preference for spontaneity.

Access to the galleries was via a clearly designated one-way route. I have always valued the freedom to roam, and target objects

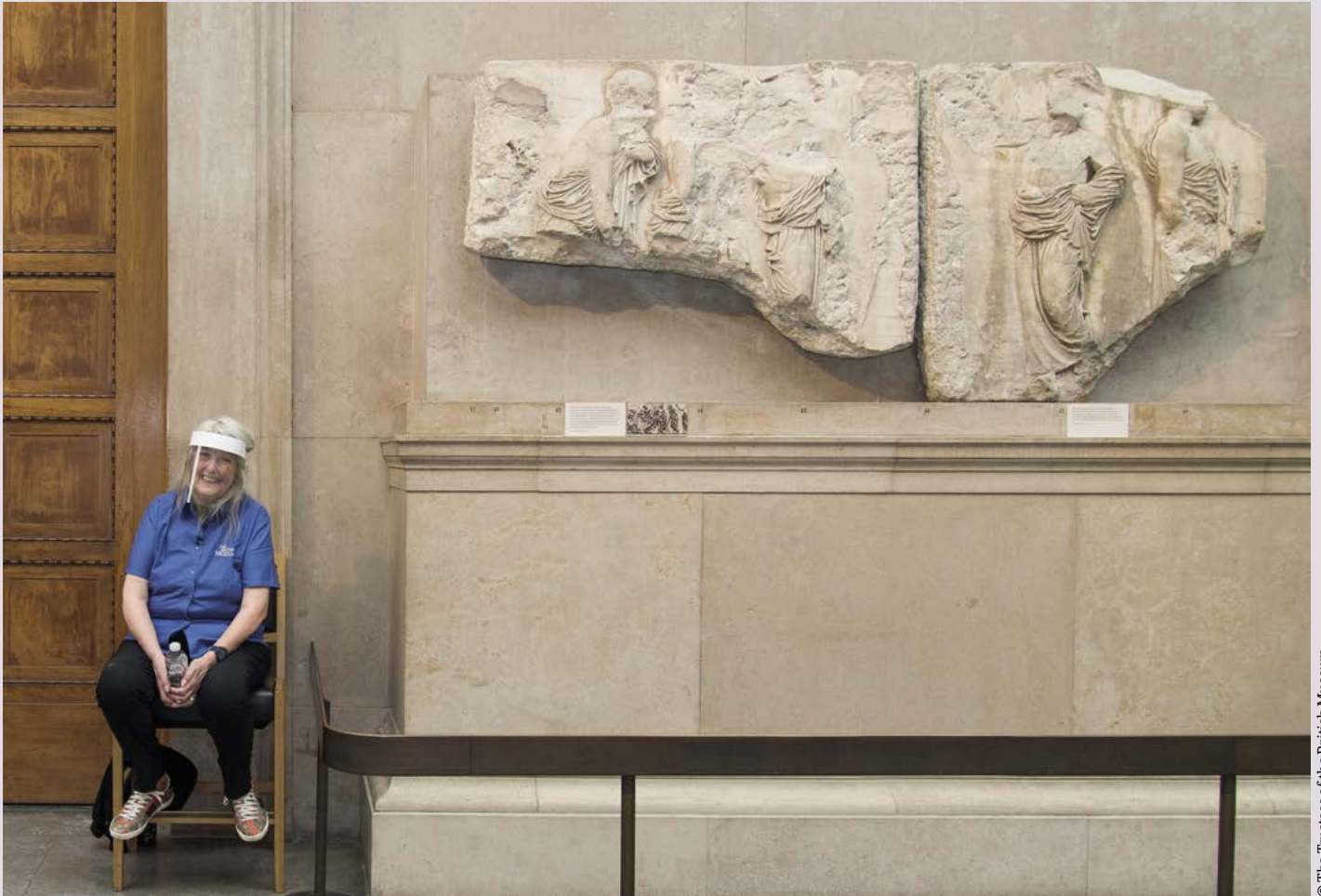
For those who like to plan and are literate in online booking it is ideal, and, for some, a booked ticket may provide reassurance of their right to be there and could reduce anxiety.



A visitor wearing a facemask views the collections



Digital payments help reduce risk



© The Trustees of the British Museum

Mary Beard donned a gallery assistant uniform and personal protective equipment to welcome visitors back to the British Museum

and collections that interested me. However, following the prescribed direction of flow had surprising benefits. It encouraged me to engage in parts of the collection I had not looked at before, and with whole galleries, rather than moving more sporadically between pieces and displays. A deep sense of enjoyment came from the opportunity to compare similar artefacts from different eras, in consecutive rooms. For visitors overwhelmed by the scale of a museum, or seeking help to engage, such routes could have considerable benefits, particularly if combined with the option of self-led engagement, at the same or different times.

My experience was significantly enhanced by the low visitor numbers that social distancing dictates and the even flow of people that →

My experience was significantly enhanced by the low visitor numbers that social distancing dictates and the even flow of people that prevented bunching around exhibits.



© The Trustees of the British Museum

Hand sanitiser and panel highlighting a new route around the Egyptian collection



Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights exhibition at the British Library

prevented bunching around exhibits. This benefit, the prerogative of those with privileged access, is perhaps the most attractive and the hardest to retain. A question in a British Library survey I recently completed after seeing the 'Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights' exhibition, asked if: 'Having fewer visitors in the space due to social distancing made the experience better?' I could not deny that it had, in this instance and at the British Museum. Continuing to use booking systems could help with the retention of this benefit, but it will require an imaginative approach to square the potential financial impact and avoid exclusivity.



© The British Library

Protest banners loaned from Southall Black Sisters, Bishopsgate Institute, People's History Museum, Sisters Uncut, Feminist Archive South (Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights/British Library)

David Jensen

I left the museum with a great sense of well-being and satisfaction. I credit this to the new and unexpected perspective from which I had explored the exhibits, the enhanced opportunities for contemplation and imagination afforded by the relative quiet and the ease with which it was possible to ask gallery staff questions, from their positions along the route. Some recognition may also be given to the very pleasant tea and cake enjoyed in the café.

Without doubt museums are undertaking extraordinary work to engage with their communities whilst closed, but when it is possible to invite people in again returning to the pre-pandemic modes of operation is unlikely to be possible in the short term or potentially preferable longer term. There is much thinking to be done about what of the old and new we retain and take forward, to create the museum experiences of the future. ■

→ Charlotte is Public Programme Manager at The Goldsmiths' Centre in London and a freelance Curator and Museum and Galleries Consultant.

ANCIENT FOREST, NEW APPROACHES TO A LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

Charlie Pratley

Lecturer, Nottingham Trent University

The ancient Sherwood Forest is globally renowned for tales of Robin Hood and the Major Oak but less known as a mosaic of wood pasture, heathland and acid grassland which, through generations of management, has provided resources, habitats and homes, creating fascinating yet underrepresented narratives.

Sherwood Retold, a strand of Miner2Major's Landscape Partnerships Scheme supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, aims to identify key interpretation priorities and implement a strategy to highlight the natural and cultural heritage of the area. Lecturer in Museum and Heritage Studies, Charlie Pratley, reflects on the first six months of the project.

Addressing misconception

Historic Sherwood Forest, covering over 100,000 acres, is a key asset in Nottinghamshire's tourism offer but the area is much larger and more nuanced than many residents realise. 'Forest' was a legal term derived from Norman law, designating a royal hunting ground rather than a wooded area. Sherwood Forest incorporates many of Nottinghamshire's urban areas, meaning that local people are often unaware of the direct connection between their gardens and the ancient landscape. This misconception is partly due to the concentration of interpretation in the north of the county at the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre & National Nature Reserve, with Robin Hood largely reduced to a commercial strapline elsewhere. The region has a wealth of conservation organisations and local history groups producing high-quality projects, but reduced budgets and staffing have meant fewer opportunities to build cohesive partnerships to strategically engage communities with the wider stories of the landscape, wildlife and history. →

Historic Sherwood Forest, covering over 100,000 acres, is a key asset in Nottinghamshire's tourism offer but the area is much larger and more nuanced than many residents realise.



Bethany Coulson

*Exploring a sense of place through photography:
Sherwood Forest*



Lyn Hopkinson/MinerzMajor

Bestwood winding engine, the last remaining part from Bestwood Colliery – one of the busiest coal mines in Nottinghamshire

In nature, mature systems create closed loops, reducing wasted energy through symbiotic relationships (Benyus, 2009). Similarly, this project considers how the interconnected nature of work in the region can help to develop and amplify projects.

I became involved in the project when the Scheme Manager and former Heritage Lottery Fund officer, Steve Little, approached Nottingham Trent University (NTU) for support in developing an interpretation strategy. It was clear that a new approach was needed, so I introduced the team to artistic and co-curative projects, such as Ferrowhite's rebellious community workshops to build escape pods in the shadow of towering industrial plants (*El Arca Obrera* in Argentina) and Common Ground based in Dorset for its grassroots conservation and environmental projects. Paul Wood's *London is a Forest*, which reveals the unique metropolitan ecosystem of the world's largest urban forest, showed us different ways of viewing the region. Padlet (a free online pin board) became invaluable for drawing together sources of inspiration and mapping out ideas, which helped us decide how best to engage the partners in order to align with their priorities.

Porous partnerships

Like Sherwood Forest's historic hedges, partnerships in the region are a dense network of personal histories and established methodologies so we used design thinking to understand what aspects the project needed to address. This aimed to create a challenge mindset, allowing us to examine the usual rules of project delivery and try new patterns of working, such as regular 'stand up' meetings to share action points and keep the project on track. Through the lens of biomimicry, these

meetings function as 'pores' (Drubay, 2019); just as the pores, or gaps, between particles of sand in the area's acid heathland allow water to flow through the soil, these gaps allow ideas to permeate our busy schedules, an essential in such a complex partnership project.

Closing loops

In nature, mature systems create closed loops, reducing wasted energy through symbiotic relationships (Benyus, 2009). Similarly, this project considers how the interconnected nature of work in the region can help to develop and amplify projects. For example, oak trees are central to Nottinghamshire's identity but are underexplored. The Woodland Trust is addressing habitat gaps by carefully mimicking natural damage in selected trees to speed up the hollowing process. This fascinating and vital work, known as veteranisation, could engage walkers with two key interpretive themes, the importance of the area's ecology and its long history of land management. It could inspire craft, literary and educational projects through its connection to the use of oak gall ink in the 1217 Charter of the Forest to re-establish rights of access to the royal forest. Digital projects could develop the use of existing tree maps. Through sharing information and copyright-free images, the project aims to create tools for partners to develop traditional interpretation and support them to experiment with digital and community engagement to elevate quality without restricting grassroots activities.

University partnerships

As a partnership, the consultant/client relationship has developed organically into a mentoring relationship. In the beginning, there was a pressure to produce, but, as nature works beautifully without deadlines (Hudson, 2018), so this new approach has allowed for more organic, sustainable growth. 'Although we're only part way into this project, I've already seen many benefits of partnering with the University', said Steve Little. 'It's provided a space to gain wider knowledge of contemporary practice and experiment with new ways of working to develop community ownership, with the practical benefits of student researchers and academic support.' The process has allowed an in-depth consideration of the complex situation, an analysis of existing interpretation and increased capacity and outcomes through student involvement.

When approaching a university, it can help to understand how your ideas might fit with their research strands and strategy. The Sherwood Retold project aligns with NTU's strategy for local impact and core themes of climate and social justice in our Museum and Heritage Development Master's degree. As such, initial ideas have included localist themes, such as 'home' mapping to global narratives of displacement which echo the legal persecution faced by residents when 'forest law' was created in the 11th century. Seedcorn funding to cover academics' time is also useful to establish the relationship before applying for further funding together. In some cases, the university can provide this initial funding.

Exploring a sense of place through photography: Major Oak in Sherwood Forest



Bethany Coulson

The legacy of a legendary landscape

Although the project is in its early stages, the relationship has helped to tie together different strands of Miner2Major activity, draw in partners and create opportunities for students to learn heritage skills. It has allowed additional capacity for networking, keeping up to date with wider strategic plans as complex partnerships forge ahead with new ways to interpret its history, particularly through Nottingham Castle's ambitious £30 million redevelopment, The Nottingham Project's dynamic new board for rejuvenation, National Justice Museum's co-curation approaches and Framework Knitters Museum's creative work with communities and artists. Through this permeable approach to nurturing the local heritage ecology, the strategic potential of Sherwood Forest is growing. ■

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→ Charlie Pratley is module lead for *Purpose, Planning and Development* and *Working in Museums & Heritage* on the Master's in Museum and Heritage Development at NTU. Her background is in contemporary art, audience research, project planning and grant funding, with a focus on employability. www.ntu.ac.uk/study-and-courses/courses/find-your-course/arts-humanities/pg/2020-21/museum-and-heritage-development Follow Charlie and NTU on Twitter: @charlie_pratley and @ntu_museum

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