Association for Heritage Interpretation

Interpretation Journal
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Winter 2022

Global view: On The Morning You Wake (To The End Of The World)
Focus: Broken Angels and Rave Music – Coventry UK City of Culture
Toolkit: AHI Code of Ethics – The 'Cloak of Visibility'
Connection: Interpreting with intent

Association for Heritage Interpretation

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Cover: Virtual reality headsets take visitors back to 1989 with the 'In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats' immersive experience. Part of Broken Angels and Rave Music – Coventry UK City of Culture, featured on page 23.

Foreword

Welcome to the Winter 2022 edition of Interpretation Journal, our last as editors. We've had three incredibly rewarding years editing the Journal – researching ideas, commissioning articles, meeting interesting people from across the UK and beyond, and learning so much along the way. Of course, it has not been without its challenges. Taking over as editors just as the pandemic hit added an extra layer of complexity as we attempted to implement our plan for a new look Journal.

We believe we've managed to fulfill most of the things that we promised, despite the obstacles, and we're grateful to those of you that took the time to complete our recent survey and provide us with valuable feedback. Comments will be passed on to the new editor and will be reported on in a future edition.

We'd like to thank the AHI Trustees for their support, copy-editors Kathrin Luddecke and Greer Glover for their care and attention, and designer Neil Morgan for working his magic and being patient! We look forward to seeing where the Journal goes next, as we both move on to new projects of our own.

In this edition

News & Views brings together latest news, opinion pieces and research from academics, Fellows of the AHI and across the globe. In this edition, AHI Fellow David Masters shares some thought-provoking ideas and invites discussion on what it means to be a heritage interpreter (My view), Philip Ryland investigates what visitors want from a visitor centre (Bitesize), and Charlotte Dew brings us a review of an arresting and important exhibition at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo (Global view).

In the **Focus** section, we go to the Midlands to hear from Borderland Voices, an art-for-mental health organisation using reminiscence and archival material about the Women's Land Army for creative inspiration and wellbeing, while Ian Francis shares Birmingham's long and rich cinematic history, including the cultural and social role that cinemas played in South Asian communities (Wonderland reflections). As Coventry finishes its year as the UK's third UK City of Culture (2021), Nicolette Evans examines the strategies behind their successful bid for the title, its legacy and lessons learnt, and shares some thought-provoking interpretation blending the city's ancient and modern cultural history.

In Practice shares best practice, knowledge and skills and encourages opportunities for debate and interaction. In this edition, we hear from a Victorian garden cemetery in Reading, where new technologies have brought new audiences to a beautiful and tranquil space (Digital). Dirk Bennett argues that less is more in Debate, and the Toolkit feature takes us through the AHI's Code of Ethics. We meet the wonderfully creative and thoughtful Romilly Swann (In conversation with…), and Steve Slack discusses how we might persuade audiences to change their behaviour by interpreting with intent (Connection). ■

Nicky Temple and Nicolette Evans

View from the Chair

Beth Môrafon, MAHI
Chair, AHI

As the year draws to a close, and after a year as AHI Chair, I'm reflecting on my role and what it means. Of course, I was hugely honoured to be invited to stand, and before accepting I carefully considered the offer. My ruminations mostly took place at my local pool, where I stretched out long lengths in the cool, shifting-blue water, weighing up the value I might bring to the position. Finally, I decided that being a Feminist, I should do it for Feminism – Feminism in its broadest sense being a synonym for advocacy of equality. I hope this rationale is justified through my approach.

Looking ahead, we are starting to think about how we will celebrate 50 years of AHI, in 2025. It seems right that we would look back at the foundations of the organisation and its archives, but it is also important to consider where the next half-century might take AHI.

In other news, I'd like to highlight former AHI Chair Jim Mitchell's AHI success in achieving AHI Fellowship status. With a glowing review from the assessment panel, it was wonderful to communicate the news. Jim has been working to represent AHI with the Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation (GAHI) alongside fellow former AHI Chair, Bill Bevan. Together they have been supporting the development of a series of live webinars called 'Global Excellence in Heritage Interpretation', throughout 2022. All the presentations have been recorded and are free to access. The series will continue throughout 2023.

Likewise, our AHI Best Practice Guides (BPG) have been presented bi-monthly throughout 2022 and will continue into 2023. They are presented as free seminars for AHI members and for a modest fee, non-members can watch too and receive the accompanying guide. Of course, our BPGs are free to AHI members and available in the Professional Development Resources area of the website.

Looking ahead, we are starting to think about how we will celebrate 50 years of AHI, in 2025. It seems right that we would look back at the foundations of the organisation and its archives, but it is also important to consider where the next half-century might take AHI. If you are interested in getting involved in our 50-year celebrations, or have ideas of how we might celebrate, please do get in touch.

I want to say thank you to all our members. For the Journal, I send special thanks to our editors Nicky and Nicolette who reshaped the Journal into what it is today; packed with rich and enticing features. Sadly, the talented Nicky and Nicolette are stepping down from their joint role as editor; they will be sorely missed and we send a huge thank you and best wishes for their future. In this issue I'd also like to thank our brilliant Trustee Astrid, who has been leading the conference team for the past three conferences and this year led 'Y cysylltiad/ The connection' with super Siân and the wider conference team; our first in-person conference since 2019. Big thanks go to our dynamic designer Damon, our excellent administrator Lyn, our meticulous treasurer Michael, and all our Trustees, volunteers, and of course the Fellows for their continued work and support. ■

→ Beth is the founding Director of VisitMôr – a public realm and visitor experience consultancy creating magical ways for people to reconnect with natural and cultural heritage. With over 20 years' practice in international visitor experience design, with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and WWT Consulting, she is a passionate advocate for social and environmental justice.

AHI360 Programme

More than meets the eye

David Masters
FAHI

When journal editor Nicky invited me to write an article for this edition, I thought to myself, just like Zsa Zsa Gabor's ninth husband, 'I know what's expected of me, but how on earth do I make it interesting?'

The invitation was part of the AHI 360 Programme for Fellows to 'give something back'. In response I'd like to share some practical and political thoughts that I hope will provoke new ideas and connections.

A complex beast

In 30 years of heritage interpretation, I've seen our practice grow from a worthy add-on with a niche following to becoming a core part of the visitor offer, expected by funders and the public alike.

But I still find it hard to know quite what to say when someone at a party asks what do I do? I tend to say something like:

'I'm a heritage interpreter, a kind of storyteller for people visiting heritage sites, museums, galleries and the countryside.'

If there's a flicker of interest in response, I'll waffle on about some example or other, and usually people do find it interesting. If they are really interested though, I might tell them that although it can seem simple, heritage interpretation is difficult to do well, and there's far more to it than meets the eye.

I once heard a director of a major agency describe museum interpretation as the most complicated design discipline of all – and I agree. Interpreters and designers navigate this complexity using well-established principles and practice, supported by degree courses and modules, training opportunities, best-practice guidance and academic research. The general quality of interpretation is much improved as a result. However, public expectations and technology move on too, and new challenges constantly arise.

Takeaway 1: Interpretation is difficult to do well. It is very multi-disciplinary, audiences can be fickle, and the context for our work is constantly changing. We need to be open, reflective, adaptable and willing to learn (and that's what helps to keep it fresh).

From hero to zero – a story of two new museums

Although much of our training focuses on a tightly defined area of 'heritage interpretation', we usually operate within a wider visitor experience context. Get the basics wrong here, and as interpreters we are wasting our time.

I was lucky enough to visit Oslo this summer, where two brand new museums illustrate my point.

The Munch Museum

This new museum has been designed with the entrance, ticketing and circulation on one side of the building, facing the harbour and the city, where most visitors approach from. The elevators and lifts extend all the way up this side of the building, which is glazed with great views. Circulation is extremely simple and intuitive.

The main public floors each do a different job, with permanent galleries, temporary galleries and immersive experiences. There is a clear entrance and exit to each gallery. You arrive in each gallery knowing where you are and how you got there, ready to engage with the displays. The curation and interpretation is clearly thematic, exploring aspects of Munch's work and influences, and is very well written too. →

Henrik Jorgenson / Flickr Creative Commons

The Munch Museum, Oslo

The apparent ease and simplicity of the circulation, the building design and gallery layout are exemplary and make the interpretation far more effective.

Furthermore, ticketing is online and there is no ticket desk, just friendly assistants to talk to, which is easy, informal and welcoming. We bought our tickets via QR code in the reception and went straight in.

The National Museum

This brand new modern art museum couldn't be a bigger contrast.

Its large and sterile foyer has a formal reception desk, with receptionists whose uniforms look more like security guards. It felt intimidating from the outset. The building has a very confusing internal arrangement and vertical circulation, and we got immediately lost trying to find the way back up from the basement cloakrooms.

The main permanent gallery floor has a succession of gallery spaces opening from one to another in all directions that left us quickly disorientated. There is no clear narrative or thematic structure, with seemingly random stuff from one gallery to the next. You have to work really hard to engage with the displays, and we left disappointed. No doubt they spent a great deal on the interpretation, but with the fundamentals so wrong, I believe this investment will be largely wasted.

Takeaway 2: The visitor experience element of interpretive planning has a vital role in creating welcoming and accessible places from the outset. Strive for simplicity and coherence, even when it is hard to achieve.

Being a project manager

Good interpretation needs good project management. The old adage of creative work being 90% perspiration and 10% inspiration really is true.

Heritage interpreters often need to manage diaries, programmes, clients, stakeholders, creatives, producers, budgets and integration with larger projects. This can be quite a task. Unless you are on top of the admin, delivering even the most erudite and compelling themes will be weighed down by a morass of 'pm' tasks. However, little of this practical underpinning is taught on interpretation degrees or training courses.

Elements of project management can be learnt on the job and that's how I've managed to get by, but there is no substitute for specific skills and training.

Takeaway 3: If you want to get ahead, get some project management training.

Fake news!

As interpreters our mission is to tell the truth, but truth of course can be subjective. Just to complicate matters, history is increasingly being contested too.

Beyond the facts, it is our job to give people a way to create their own meaning and reach their own conclusions about the value or significance of heritage. Facts deployed in this way can lead to revelation, but to what end?

To paraphrase the godfather of interpretation Freeman Tilden, writing about his work with the US National Park Service in the 1950s: 'with understanding comes appreciation, with appreciation comes protection'. This is the ethical basis of what we do and without which we might as well be working for a greenwashing PR agency.

Think carefully about how fixed interpretation complements activities and programming, and how live interpretation works alongside installations and exhibitions.

Research shows that museums are far more trusted to tell the truth than politicians or journalists. When we work as interpreters it is incumbent on us to give people the facts and help them to reach their own conclusions. But what does this mean at a time of climate emergency and the destruction of nature? How do we remain relevant over the next 20–30 years of upheaval and division, whilst the neo-liberal system slowly destroys everything of value?

To me, heritage interpretation is fundamentally a progressive practice, and we have to stand by our principles. The National Trust, for example, is being targeted by the regressive forces of Restore Trust for the way it is responding to issues of inclusion and decolonisation – and these are issues at the heart of interpretive practice. If the political right and shady vested interests insist on a culture war, how do we, as interpreters, respond when some of that war is fought on our turf? The ongoing impact of slavery and racism is incontestable, as is the science of global warming. To me these are not areas for 'balanced views' but for honest and open interpretation.

Takeaway 4: Be proud to be 'woke'. Support one another and organisations committed to truthful and inclusive interpretation. Seek out international connections too, as we are all in this together. Membership of Interpret Europe would be a good place to start.

It's all about the detail

Good interpretation needs attention to detail. The bigger picture matters hugely, of course, but an interpretive display will fail at the final hurdle if the copy is poorly written, the interface too complex, the lighting too dark or you don't understand your audience.

Leave sufficient time, money and thinking space to address the details. Pilot, model, test and formatively evaluate everything you can. Create pen portraits of your audiences, talk to them and game play how they will engage with your content and designs.

Think about how people will experience a space or view, and how this will vary from one individual to the next. Think carefully about how fixed interpretation complements activities and programming, and how live interpretation works alongside installations and exhibitions.

Takeaway 5: Know your audience, pay attention to the detail and you'll tell your story well.

Stay lucky

We really are lucky to work in such an interesting and creative field.

Heritage interpretation hardly existed when I graduated, but since stumbling into it as a career I've traipsed the jungles of Uganda with mountain gorillas, delved into the obscure nooks and crannies of numerous heritage sites, become part of an African tribe, had VIP access to extraordinary pieces of archaeology, worked with hugely dedicated clients who believe in public service, had fun at numerous conferences and survived whirlwind work trips to China.

My final takeaway, apart from a good curry, of course, is: embrace the creative and rewarding opportunities of heritage interpretation. In a small way we help to make the world a better place. If a door opens, see what's on the other side and if fate hands you apples, make cider.

~~Hasta la vista baby~~ Onwards and upwards!

PS Do please email the editor with any response to what I've written. Sharing thoughts, views and debate is vital to our profession. ■

→ David is lead consultant with Imagemakers and NLHF mentor for public engagement with heritage.

What do you want from a visitor centre?

Dr Philip Ryland
MAHI and Trustee

Visitor centres come in a variety of forms and sizes from converted sheds, modified spaces in existing buildings, to state-of-the-art, purpose-designed facilities, but in whatever form they exist, what is required by visitors is often very similar. Research undertaken by Philip Ryland tested this by asking visitors at a range of cultural and heritage sites the question, 'What do you want from a visitor centre'?

Sixty groups of visitors were approached, of these: 12 were visiting on their own; 23 were with a partner and 25 were with family and/or friends. They were asked if this was their first visit to the site and for 41 groups it was. A breakdown of this information as it links to their social grouping is detailed in Table 1.

Fallon & Kriwoken (2003), in exploring the purpose of a visitor centre, identified a range of roles including providing visitor information services and orientating the visitor whilst on site. They further suggested that a centre would typically offer a range of displays and exhibits, often with some form of audiovisual presentation, provide the location on-site for visitor services staff as well as the starting point for guided walks, events and other activities. On most sites, the visitor centre would also offer ancillary services including toilets, a restaurant and a gift shop.

Gross & Zimmerman (2002) suggested that the design of a visitor centre can be significant in establishing and/or influencing a 'sense of place' by being in harmony (visually, culturally and ecologically) with the site itself.

A successful visitor centre, therefore, is a place which physically, mentally and potentially even spiritually, prepares the visitor for their experience on site.

In this study, the visitor groups were asked if they had sought out the visitor centre on arrival or had come across it during their visit. Their responses are shown in Table 2.

In all three groups, the highest proportion of visitors who sought out the visitor centre on their arrival were first-time visitors. This is pleasing as a key role for the centre is to promote awareness of the site, by informing the visitor of what to expect as well as encouraging them to explore. This guidance and orientation on arrival is important, particularly for the first-time visitor who is more likely to fully engage with the site if they feel comfortable, secure and relaxed during their visit.

In exploring the actual role of a visitor centre, six main themes emerged from the visitor groups, which are summarised in Table 3 below:

In addition, the visitor groups were asked about the importance of the provision of toilets and refreshments on site. In terms of their responses, for toilets: 84% of 'alone'; 78% 'with partner' and 96% 'with family and/or friends' agreed. Whilst for refreshments: 83% of 'alone'; 87% 'with partner' and 84% 'with family and/or friends' agreed.

Table 1. Profile of visitors

Social grouping	Is this your first visit to the site?
Alone = 12 (20%)	Yes = 8 (19%)
Partner = 23 (38%)	Yes = 11 (27%)
Family &/or friends = 25 (42%)	Yes = 22 (54%)
Total = 60 groups	Total = 41 groups

Table 2. Finding the visitor centre

Social grouping	Sought out the centre on arrival	Came across it during the visit
Alone = 12 (8 of whom are first-time visitors)	Yes = 5 (17%)	Yes = 7 (23%)
Partner = 23 (11 are first-time visitors)	Yes = 10 (35%)	Yes = 13 (42%)
Family &/or friends = 25 (22 are first-time visitors)	Yes = 14 (48%)	Yes = 11 (35%)
Total = 60 groups (41 groups are first-time visitors)	Total = 29 groups	Total = 31 groups

Table 3. What do you want from a visitor centre: main themes identified (as reported by total ranking score, where a score of 3 would be the best possible score)

Access to activities and events on site (n=7)	Get information about the site (n=8)	To view displays and exhibits about the site (n=10)
Chat to friendly and helpful staff (n=11)	Buy brochures, guides and other souvenirs (n=13)	Get information about the local area (n=14)

Table 4. What do you want from a visitor centre: ranking of the six main themes (as reported by visitor group)

Theme	Alone	Partner	Family and/or friends
Access to activities and events on site (n=7)	2nd	4th	1st
Get information about the site (n=8)	1st	5th	2nd
To view displays and exhibits about the site (n=10)	3rd	2nd	5th
Chat to friendly and helpful staff (n=11)	4th	1st	6th
Buy brochures, guides and other souvenirs (n=13)	6th	3rd	4th
Get information about the local area (n=14)	5th	6th	3rd

A successful visitor centre, therefore, is a place which physically, mentally and potentially even spiritually, prepares the visitor for their experience on site.

In considering the ranking of these six main themes by the different social groups, Table 4 summarises the results.

So, what do these results suggest about the role of a visitor centre?

1. *'Activities and events on site'* proved to be the most popular response for families which is encouraging and suggests that visitors want to engage fully with the site: its history; local communities and artefacts. Opportunities exist for guided walks and living history experiences, self-guided trails, events and demonstrations and family-orientated activities clearly form an important part of this offering. These activities and experiences can also be used to manage where visitors go, helping to reduce visitor pressure in fragile areas as well as enabling a visitor experience in locations which are normally 'off limits' to the public, or sites with features scattered over a wide area.
2. *'Get information about the site'* proved a popular response for those 'visiting alone' or 'with family and/or friends'. Whilst many visitors will typically access information on the internet prior to their visit there is still a demand for high-quality, tailored information on arrival. This information should 'bring the site to life' by creating a sense of meaning about it. The material produced should also be geared towards extended families as well as specifically for those visiting with children.
3. *'Friendly and helpful staff'* was the most important role for those visiting 'with a partner'. Providing opportunities to talk to staff is a powerful way of helping visitors understand the importance of, and therefore create a personal connection with, the site.
4. The range of responses for *'viewing displays and exhibits'* reinforces the need for visitors to be able to access and then discuss their experiences through tailored materials which recreate the site (physically, mentally and even spiritually) thereby enabling them to appreciate the whole story. When designing exhibits, it is also important to provide opportunities for families and their children to interact with each other as well as with the site. Displays and exhibits should be updated regularly (or by using temporary displays) to encourage and support repeat visits.

A visitor centre therefore plays an important role in providing core site information, enhancing visitors' on-site experience, providing access to staff, activities and events and ultimately, helping to create a memorable visit. ■

References:

Fallon, L.D. and Kriwoken, L.K. 2003. Community involvement in tourism infrastructure: the case of the Strahan Visitor Centre, Tasmania. *Tourism Management*, 24, 289–308.

Gross, M. and Zimmerman, R. 2002. *Interpretive Centers: The History, Design and Development of Nature and Visitor Centers.* Stevens Point, WI; University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Next issue:
What do visitors want from a self-guided trail?

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

'On The Morning You Wake (To The End Of The World)'

A Virtual Reality Experience at the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo

Charlotte Dew
Public Programme Manager at The Goldsmiths' Centre, London

I have given a lot of consideration to how the threat of nuclear weapons is perceived over the last 10 years, whilst researching my book about Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (1981–2000).[1] To the women who campaigned at Greenham, the risk posed by nuclear weapons was imminent, threatening the future of the world. This motivated them to work tirelessly in calling for the removal of NATO[2] cruise missiles from the UK, and with them the latent danger.

Their view was not shared by all. The official position of the British government and other NATO member countries is that missiles act as a defensive deterrent. Officially their presence is still characterised as protective.

With this in mind, I was fascinated to visit 'On The Morning You Wake (To The End Of The World)', a virtual reality (VR) experience hosted at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo for two weeks, in June 2022. It was advertised as a 'pop-up activation', where visitors are invited 'to reimagine nuclear disarmament',[3] and in the film's trailer as 'an immersive experience about nuclear threat'.[4]

On arriving at my pre-booked time slot, I was welcomed by a member of the museum staff. In a room of approximately 20 evenly spaced white stools, a number were already occupied by other center visitors kitted out in the necessary technology. Each appeared completely absorbed, jerking their heads and moving their bodies in tune with the narrative. I was helped into a VR headset, given a handheld console and instructed in its use.

Delivering VR events is staff-intensive. There were six people assisting and in my only other experience of VR in a cultural setting – 'Virtual Veronese' at the National Gallery (7th March – 3rd April 2022) – the ratio of staff to public was 1:1. As familiarity with the medium develops these numbers may be reduced, but I cannot think of another equivalent staffing requirement in museums.

The 'On The Morning You Wake' experience builds from a true story. Early on 13th January 2018, the citizens of Hawaii received an emergency alert via mobile phone about an imminent missile attack. This was sent to all 1.4 million residents. It took 38 minutes for people to be informed that the message had been sent in error. In the opening minutes of the film, a native Hawaiian asks viewers to 'dive yourself back to the depth of creation'. In so doing, the potential for nuclear war is set in the context of the world's millions of years of history. On a beach, a canoeist is shown preparing to go to sea, then receives the alert message:

"Emergency Alert
BALLISTIC MISSILE ALERT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL." [5]

At this point my console started to buzz like a mobile phone, representing millions of texts arriving. This effectively evokes a sense of fear, further emphasised by visuals and multiple spoken first-hand accounts, including from children, describing panic, disbelief and the urgent search for shelter. A father with two children talks about being turned away from a building because it was too full. The most

Documentary promotional banner

Charlotte Dew

Charlotte Dew

Visitors take part in the experience wearing VR headsets and using handheld consoles, with two stills from the documentary in the foreground

impactful sensation – that the headset's visuals make physical – is of descending into a storm drain, which many did in the hope of finding refuge.

The experience is divided into three chapters – 'Take Cover', 'The Doomsday Machine' and 'Kuleana'.[6] This facilitates the central story being interspersed with poetry and factual information. A graphic in chapter two illustrating the trajectory of all the nuclear weapons currently in the world – if fired – is especially impactful when wrought in 3D.

For me, the strength of the experience lies in choosing a real incident to base the narrative around, alongside a broader exploration of the nuclear threat. Viewers hear from a woman who was in Hawaii for the false alarm, and who also survived the Hiroshima bomb. And a nuclear researcher based at Princeton, originally from Hawaii, describes switching her view of nuclear weapons from that of 'technology and security' to thinking of them in terms of 'my family, my home'. In this way, reality is brought to an abstract threat. It is excellent storytelling.

The level of pixelation and 'digital' appearance of the film surprised me at first. I had expected it to be more 'real' looking. This was by design. Breaks between scenes are created by dissolving pixels that reform to represent molecular change and the range of devastating impacts of a nuclear bomb. But they may also have been dictated by the processing capacity of the VR headsets. Reflecting on this, I believe a more heightened level of reality may have made it disturbing and difficult for viewers to process the argument and ideas set forth.

In museum interpretation we are charged with representing a balance of views. 'On The Morning You Wake' poses a challenge, as it is partisan and encourages disarmament. In a venue other than the Nobel Peace Center – whose aims sit understandably on one side →

www.onthemorningyouwake.com

Timelines for nuclear disarmament and proliferation from 1940 to date

of the peace debate – it may be determined that the other side of the nuclear argument would need to be presented. This notwithstanding, whilst wearing the VR headset, I felt as if I was being led through a well-researched case and in so doing invited to develop my own view. The risk of singular perspective influence, however, may be greater in an audience with less prior understanding of the issue in question.

What I found striking about the use of VR was the dwell time and level of absorption. I was immersed for 38 minutes; the experience timed to last for the same period Hawaiians believed the threat was real. Captive within the headset, the attention span of any participant is likely much longer and more focused than viewing more traditional museum displays. A range of senses are appealed to at once – visual, audio, kinaesthetic – but the experience is linear, in this instance not suitable for families and requires people to see it on their own, before they can discuss it.

What is undeniable is that VR may offer opportunities to engage new audiences interested in the technology. In the right circumstances it may also be suitable for outreach work. This project, realised by Games for Change,[7] must have had significant investment.[8] For the time being, creating interpretation of this type will require external expertise and partners.[9]

I found 'On The Morning You Wake' profoundly impactful and thought-provoking, and I hope arts organisations in the UK will consider showing it, with some supporting context. Such opportunities give museums, especially those with connecting collections, a way to engage in current debate and introduce new technology. ■

Further information:

'On The Morning You Wake' premiered in January at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival and then at a range of peace-related events including some organised by the United Nations.

To get involved and 'act' in response to the 'threat' of nuclear weapons, visit the project's website: https://www.onthemorningyouwake.com/#get-involved

Footnotes:

1 Dew, C. 2021. *Women for Peace: Banners from Greenham Common.* London: Four Corners Books.

2 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

3 https://www.nobelpeacecenter.org/en/on-the-morning-you-wake

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJI8jsmMGUI&ab_channel=RealiteVirtuelle%DC%82com

5 https://www.onthemorningyouwake.com/#about

6 The Hawaiian word for 'responsibility'.

7 https://www.gamesforchange.org/

8 I have not been able to find specific figures. The British Film Institute, CNC and La Région Occitanie are credited for their support, and Games for Change lists a significant number of private and public sector supporters for their work in general on their website.

9 VR experience 'Virtual Veronese' at the National Gallery was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Royal Holloway, University of London, StoryFutures and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

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

In search of the Women's Land Army around Leek

Nicolette Evans
in discussion with
Andy Collins
Co-ordinator, Borderland Voices

Often posted far from home, Land Girls and Lumber Jills helped provide food and timber for the war effort and beyond. Nicolette Evans spoke to Andy Collins, from Borderland Voices, about their National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)-supported 'Women in Wartime Farming and Forestry' project to record memories of the Women's Land Army (WLA) in Staffordshire and use heritage to support mental health.

How did the project come about?

The idea came from a conversation about the WLA and finding out that it didn't stop when the Second World War ended but continued until 1950. We were worried that local memories about these women were fading or being lost entirely. We wanted to record reminiscences and hear how women coped being sent away from home, what their mental health was like at that time and what they did in the local area.

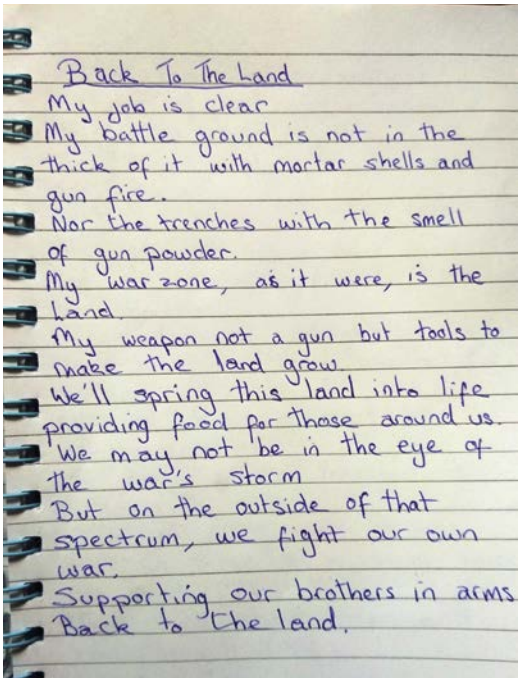
Andy Collins

Women's Land Army display including uniform, artefacts and project information at the Foxlowe arts centre, Leek as part of an environmental festival

Borderland Voices (BV) runs weekly facilitated creative writing and art groups often taking inspiration from the landscape and natural history. With 'Land Girls', we anticipated interesting themes such as growing food sustainably in the UK, gender stereotypes and learning about the artwork of Evelyn Dunbar, one of only five female war artists appointed in WWII.

Staying in

The whole project centred around a launch event and outreach to get local people involved and come forward with their memories. But because of lockdown, we put this on hold and focused on publicity through press releases, telephone radio interviews, flyers, virtual talks and being part of other people's online events. We embraced social media and took part in the virtual, seven-day Staffordshire History Festival, posting photographs and short pieces of writing daily to raise awareness. →


Back To The Land
My job is clear
My battle ground is not in the thick of it with mortar shells and gun fire.
Nor the trenches with the smell of gun powder.
My war zone, as it were, is the Land.
My weapon not a gun but tools to make the land grow.
We'll spring this land into life providing food for those around us.
We may not be in the eye of the war's storm
But on the outside of that spectrum, we fight our own war.
Supporting our brothers in arms
Back to the land.

'Back To The Land', Jane's creative writing in response to the Women's Land Army

'My mum has always been a bit miffed about the recognition the Land Girls eventually got. As she says, she, and many others like her, were just expected – had no alternative – but to stay at home and help out on the farm. But they never got any thanks or recognition for it.'

During lockdown, our groups moved online and the writing group became more of a mutual support group than ever. Much of the writing reflected people's fear and isolation as a result of the pandemic and in a peculiar way mirrored similar feelings the Land Girls might have experienced during the war.

Who came forward?

So far, we've heard back from around 17 people, including Reg Barks, who sadly has since died, aged 102. His late wife, Doreen, was just 16 years old when she left Stoke to join the WLA. She was posted to Leek in 1947 and met Reg when he was working on a farm. They were married in 1949.

Heather Smith, a wood worker, came forward about a Lumber Jill: 'After speaking with a former Lumber Jill when I was about 18 years old, I was inspired to work with wood. I am now a pole lather and started a whittling group on Facebook during the lockdowns. We now have 500 members.'

One writing group participant was taught at agricultural college by ex-land girls and a woman grows produce for the local food bank from her allotment, on the site of a market garden where one of the land girls worked. Others came forward who knew or were related to land girls.

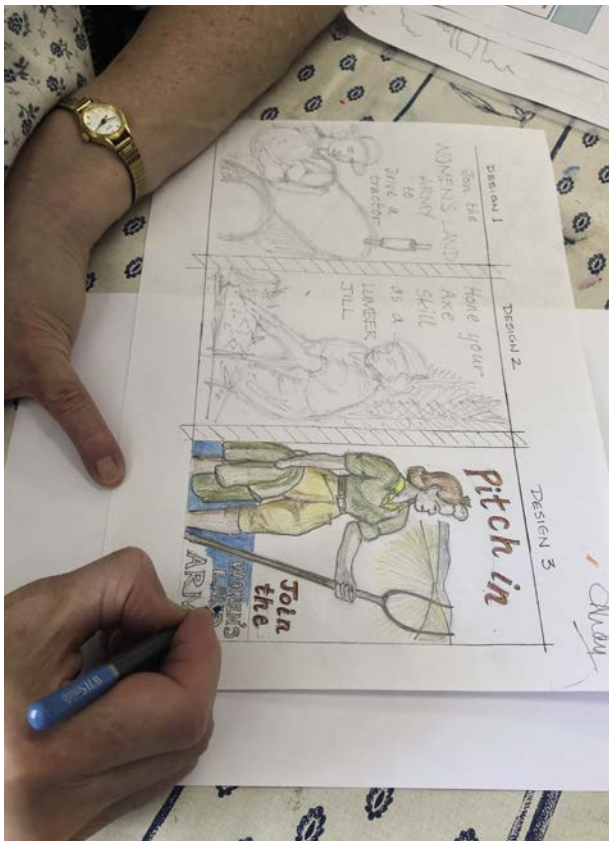
Research suggested that not many land girls worked locally, possibly because more were needed in labour intensive areas to help with fruit picking, field crops and large forestry work. In Staffordshire, we have more small-scale, mixed, single farm units and farmers ensured their daughters stayed at home to provide labour.

'My mum has always been a bit miffed about the recognition the Land Girls eventually got. As she says, she, and many others like her, were just expected – had no alternative – but to stay at home and help out on the farm. But they never got any thanks or recognition for it.' (Anecdote recounted by a local friend from a farming family).

Going out

When we were able to venture out again, a small group visited the bronze Women's Land Army and Timber Corps Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas, which was created by Denise Dutton, a Staffordshire-based sculptor.

We took photographs for our small exhibition and to inspire the creative writing and arts groups. One image, of a rat and rat trap at the base of the Land Girls' sculpture, prompted Su, a professional pest control officer, to make contact saying she had 'got that rat' for the sculptor to cast for the memorial!



Gavin Bowyer

Opposite: Art facilitated by local artist Gavin Bowyer, to think about how WLA recruitment posters were designed

The Midlands

Andy Collins

Andy Collins

Above: Digging spuds in a Women's Land Army overcoat and hat

Top right: Turning a wooden dibber (for planting seeds and bulbs) on a lathe

Rat catching was a very important aspect of Land Girls' life because of the damage rats did eating supplies and they were known as 'Hitler's little helpers'. Our writing facilitator even found a photo of Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret watching a procession in London with a Land Girls' float strung with rats.

Working in partnership

A visit to an ash dieback project in Buxton helped participants learn about woodland management and Lumber Jills, and some of the group's artwork went on to feature in a three-month art exhibition at Buxton Museum and Art Gallery.

It was always our intention to work with the wider population and we started accepting social prescribing referrals from September 2021, when our in-person sessions resumed.

Over the summer, writing and arts group participants, including social prescribing referrals, visited the nearby WELLIES Project, to gain experiences that BV doesn't have facilities to deliver, such as learning to cook on a budget and make food using WWII recipes. We've extended this opportunity to other local mental health groups, hoping this will attract more volunteers to come forward to help with plans for a 1940s celebration day in 2024.

What's the future for the project?

We're hoping NLHF will give us additional time and the second grant instalment, to do things we had to put on hold: produce podcasts that will be available to schools and libraries; a booklet of reminiscences and project outcomes, illustrated with material from BV participants and other groups; a dedicated webpage and a small travelling exhibition. We're also hoping to work with a local school to map how the local landscape has changed and, in the autumn, we're giving talks to local farming communities about the project to encourage them to share their memories of WWII too. ■

Further information:

'In search of the Women's Land Army around Leek, Staffordshire Moorlands' project: www.borderlandvoices.org.uk/land%20girls.html

National Memorial Arboretum: www.thenma.org.uk/visit-us/what's-here/the-memorials/our-memorials

National Academy for Social Prescribing: www.socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/land_girls/

→ Andy Collins is the Co-ordinator at Borderland Voices, which started in 1998. Andy has helped steer projects inspired by the Peak District National Park and local rivers and given people gentle encouragement to be more physically active while enjoying their environment. www.borderlandvoices.org.uk

Wonderland reflections

Ian Francis
Director, Flatpack, Birmingham

The seeds for this project were in the buildings themselves. Travelling across Birmingham, they catch the eye as grand, crumbling facades with a big shed out the back, some of them enjoying second or third lives as bingo halls, banqueting suites and furniture showrooms. Having come here from Shropshire in the 1990s, where cinemas were few and far between, it was a shock for me to discover that Birmingham boasted over a hundred of these places during the peak of movie-going in the 1940s. What effect did this picturehouse boom have on the neighbourhoods where they sprang up? And how did they shape the people who worked in them, and the millions who queued up to escape into the dark?

When Flatpack had the opportunity to develop a project as part of the Birmingham 2022 Festival, this was the first theme that sprang to mind. It's a universal story for a start; pretty much everyone has a formative cinema-going experience. As the birthplace of celluloid and the Odeon chain, the home of the UK's oldest cinema and the place where South Asian movies established an early foothold, Birmingham also had no shortage of USPs.

Kaja Ogrin

Mapping Birmingham's cinemas in the Wonderland exhibition

Like many recent heritage projects, the process began with a series of online conversations as volunteers and partners mapped out the territory and came up with a plan of action. Before too long our spreadsheet numbered more than 200 venues, while researchers disappeared down all manner of rabbit holes from upholstery and censorship to Cinerama and the kung fu craze. It was clear that we had taken on a big subject, and minds were focused by the imminent arrival of our first deadline – the eagerly awaited re-opening of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, which would include a Wonderland exhibition.

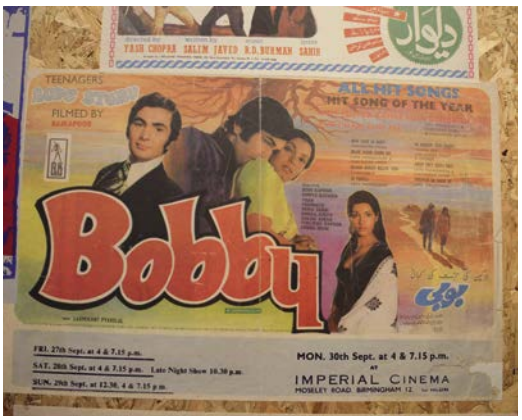
Working with curator Felicity McWilliams, designer Keith Dodds, and Adam Carthy and Habib Ali from Spaceplay leading on the interactive elements and user experience, we decided on two key elements. The walls would tell the chronological story, from early fairground experiments through super cinemas to the colourful diversity of the 1960s and 1970s, while the floor would be devoted to the city's cinema geography, a light-up map charting the different eras taking centre stage. The two would be knitted together by a series of collage character portraits created by Habib, a scrapbook of visuals, interactive games and 'tickets' at the entrance encouraging visitors to discover certain elements.

Jas Sansi

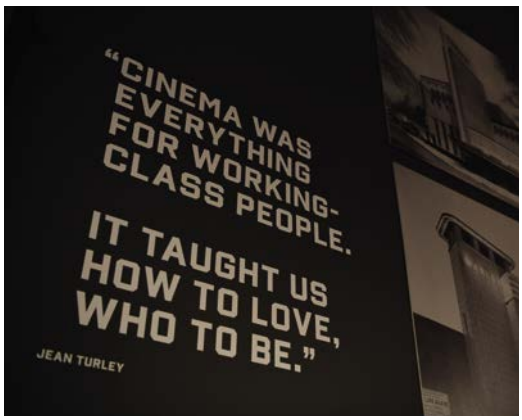
Above: A visitor taking in Birmingham's picture palaces at the Wonderland exhibition

Right: Poster for 1973 classic Bobby, from its run at the Imperial in Balsall Heath

Far right: Words by Jean Turley who began taking photographs of surviving picturehouses after seeing many fall into decline in the 60s and 70s



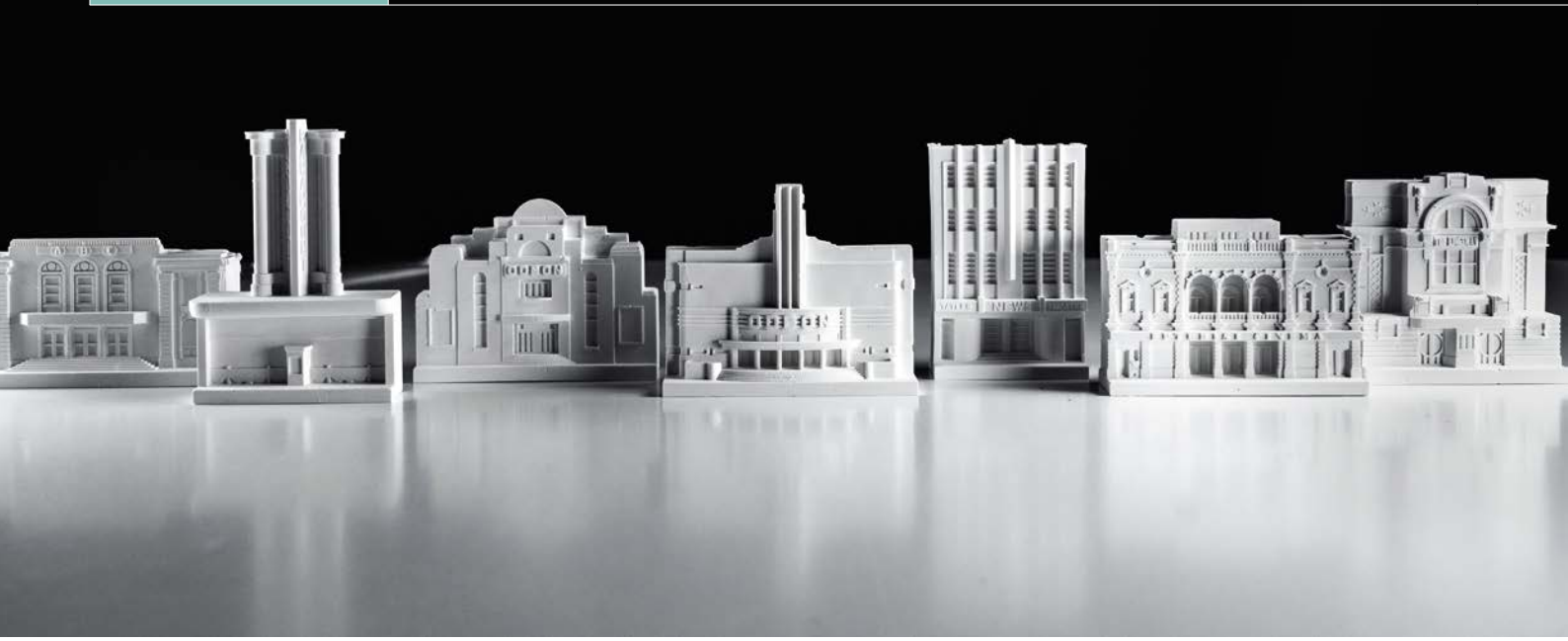
Jas Sansi



Jas Sansi

Watching people in the space, we've seen visitors engage with the exhibition on multiple levels, whether dipping into the maps and the games or taking a deep dive into the history. The comment cards filled out by Wonderland visitors are a journey through time, memory and emotion, evidence that the subject resonates with people on a daily basis. →

As the birthplace of celluloid and the Odeon chain, the home of the UK's oldest cinema and the place where South Asian movies established an early foothold, Birmingham also had no shortage of USPs.



Wonderland Miniatures: Birmingham cinemas in miniature, designed and created by Spaceplay

In the months since the exhibition opened, we've gathered oral histories and developed an online map resource which will feature a page for every Birmingham cinema. Spaceplay has also produced a series of miniature architecture models and 'trading cards' which form the basis of a city-wide treasure hunt, so people can explore cinema stories in their own neighbourhoods.

In July we teamed up with various partners on a series of screenings and events in Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook. Despite the steady decline in the 1960s and 1970s, many picturehouses in this area survived thanks to South Asian audiences. In a period when community infrastructure was threadbare, cinemas were vital places where people could come together and connect with their language and culture. However, if you look at newspaper or local cinema histories from the time the attitude to Indian and Pakistani cinema was often dismissive. The implication was clear that a venue 'going Asian' meant they no longer qualified as a proper cinema and might as well be demolished or converted to bingo.

We wanted to celebrate the cultural and social role these places played and attempt to fill some holes in the historical record. We worked with partners and volunteers with deep roots in those communities, producing events specific and local to them rather than expecting them to make their way to the museum in the city centre. The Balsall Heath Film Festival climaxed at the former Waldorf cinema, now a Hindu temple, with a screening of Hindi classic Amar Akbar Anthony. The Randhawa family, who ran the cinema, were able to recapture their past 40 years after closing, and the audience was a joyous mix of different cultures, faiths and

Below: The Shree Ram Mandir Hindu temple was formerly known as the Waldorf Cinema, and became a cinema again for a day in 2022

Katja Ogrin

Below right: Smiles all round at the Waldorf Revival event

Katja Ogrin

Avtar Singh Randhawa (who formerly managed the Waldorf) reminiscing about his time running the cinema in the 70s

Katja Ogrin

We worked with partners and volunteers with deep roots in those communities, producing events specific and local to them rather than expecting them to make their way to the museum in the city centre.

generations. A recurring theme in the feedback was the appetite for this kind of communal experience and how much people valued the opportunity to connect with a shared heritage which they felt had been swept away.

It's clear that we've only scratched the surface this summer, and there's so much more to explore. With this kind of heritage the sheer volume of rich material and stories is one of the big challenges, alongside carving out the necessary time and resources. The multi-layered nature of Wonderland is a strength and a testament to how important film-going is to Birmingham's story, but effectively bringing together research, physical events, exhibitions, self-guided trails, print and an online offer is a complex business and will require long term partnership working. Whatever shape it may take in the future, Wonderland has demonstrated in spades that cinema heritage strikes a chord with people and that it can be a window on so many other things – from architecture, fashion and technology, to migration, labour relations and family.

I'll leave the last word to Avtar Singh Randhawa, manager of the Waldorf cinema until 1983 and still haunted by his cinema days:

'They also came in dreams sometimes in the night – sometimes the Imperial came, sometimes the Waldorf came, sometimes some other cinema came, and dreams are still coming that films are running like this. One cinema was at this place, the other cinema was at that place. The dreams do not stop, now what can you do? We just continue to remember the good times.' ■

Wonderland was produced by Flatpack Festival as part of the Birmingham 2022 Festival, supported by Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
www.flatpackfestival.org.uk/projects/wonderland
www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/birmingham-museum-and-art-gallery

→ Ian Francis is the Director of Flatpack, a mobile arts organisation that delivers the annual Flatpack Festival alongside a year-round programme of screenings and events. Flatpack is also is a lead partner in Film Hub Midlands, an initiative as part of the BFI Film Audience Network to develop a thriving film culture in the Midlands.

Broken Angels and Rave Music —

Coventry UK City of Culture

Nicolette Evans
Journal Editor

Known for Lady Godiva and its post-war modernist architecture, Coventry's cultural history reached new audiences far and wide this past year as the UK City of Culture (2021).

Awarded the title back in December 2017 and delayed by the pandemic, Coventry's UK City of Culture (UKCoC) year opened in May last year followed closely by signature event Coventry Moves, a day-long celebration telling the story of the city's pioneering identity and how it continues to reinvent itself.

The delivery of the 2021 year was led by the Coventry City of Culture Trust, an independent charity initially set up to run the bid for the title in October 2015.

Over the course of the year, over 700 events took place, many co-curated with local residents and 1,000,000+ audience members engaged with the programme. Millions of pounds in investment was secured into the city as a result of Coventry being awarded the UK City of Culture.

The Trust recently opened the UK's first permanent immersive digital gallery, The Reel Store, within the newly opened Telegraph Hotel (formerly home to the Coventry Evening Telegraph).

The background for the bid stemmed from local research and a series of workshops and consultations, which resulted in 'Seven Big Ideas' for transforming cultural life in the city: Place partnership; Creative production hubs; City is a festival; Seven years younger; Nation in Coventry; Diverse City and Getting Coventry Moving.

This process formed the basis for a new 10-year cultural strategy (2017–2027) funded by Arts Council England and Coventry City Council, developed through a unique 'co-creation' approach with city communities led by Coventry University and the University of Warwick. Five principles emerged: partnership; lifelong learning; diversity; health and wellbeing; and economic growth, while the Seven Big Ideas remain as achievable targets bringing each goal to life and adding substance.

Legacy

The UKCoC is now in its legacy phase and will continue to support the creation of ambitious, engaging, interactive and playful arts programmes that supports individuals and organisations to build capacity and create extraordinary activities that enhance the city's Green Futures credentials. Alongside this, the Trust will operate The Reel Store as a national visitor attraction.

Bradford will be the next UK City of Culture in 2025.

Here are just a few examples of the projects and events that took place during Coventry's UK City of Culture year.

Below: Janus Sonic Travels performed songs, myths and stories inspired by their travels along the waterways with their canal boat, The Gongoozler. Part of the Random String festival in November 2021

Below right: A placard made at a Roam + Dwell workshop inspired by playfulness and taking action to make positive changes

Bottom: One of the uplifting phrases displayed on architecture and the canal path during the Light Nights Arts Walk

Water-inspired folklore

Using their base at Coventry Canal Basin, arts and technology company Ludic Rooms organised weekly free 'Roam + Dwell' sessions encouraging fun, experimentation, making and play. Participants used creative technologies to try cyanotype printing, pixel art and explored a historic canal trail created by Photo Archive Miners.

May Day was marked with both traditional and tech-based versions of Maypole dancing, workshops inspired by the weaving ribbons of the maypole, garland-making, music, yoga and robots. Partners delivered storytelling and craft sessions, ecology and heritage walks, have-a-go kayaking or cycling along the canal.

In November, Ludic Rooms put on a 1km 'Light Nights Art Walk' as part of their biennial 'Random String' arts and technology festival with the theme 'Future Folk' uncovering new kinds of folklore and rituals for life by the water in the 21st century. Visitors explored the past and future ecologies of the canal corridor and what it means to be by the water in the most landlocked city in the country. A 'collection of rites' book and music has been released based on field recordings from the towpath and inspired by crossing the 19 bridges which lead to the Coventry Canal Basin. →

Ludic Rooms/Maria Raluca

Ludic Rooms/Maria Raluca

Andrew Moore

Anne Petters' installation responds to the destruction of the glass and Coventry Cathedral's response of hope and reconciliation. A broken piece of window glass is magnified and projected onto the screen where the original Angel used to be, appearing as an abstract reflection of an angel's wing

Dylan Parrin/Coventry Cathedral

A City of Sanctuary

With strong civic values of welcome, peace and reconciliation, Coventry was a pioneer for city twinning and has 26 civic relationships around the world. The cathedral, through its peace and reconciliation work, has more than 90 international connections.

There was much potential to maximise the cathedral and its quarter, and events embraced and celebrated the people who have made the UK's City of Sanctuary their home.

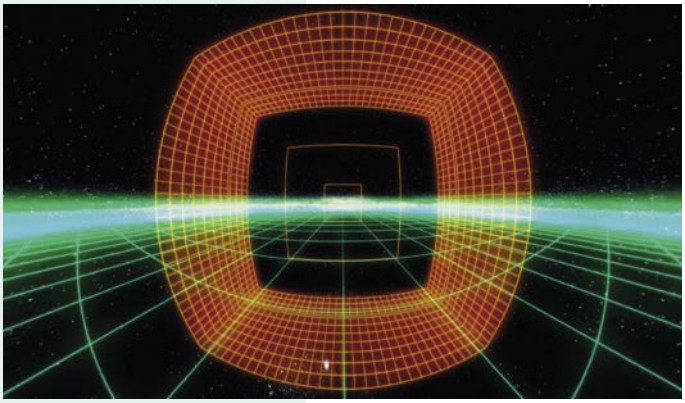
Broken Angel was a 15-month series of new art installations to temporarily replace 'The Angel of the Eternal Gospel' at Coventry Cathedral.

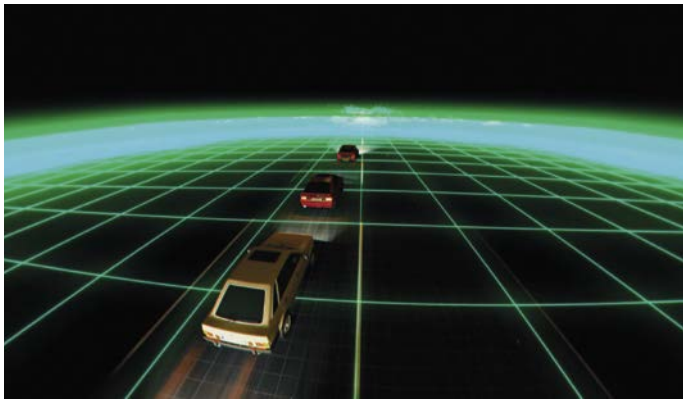
The 'The Angel of the Eternal Gospel', part of John Hutton's great glass West Screen, was destroyed during an act of vandalism in 2020 and the window left as a blank pane of glass. Three contemporary artists were commissioned to work alongside community groups to explore themes of brokenness and reconstruction.

The first installation was by Anne Petters, who was born in another catastrophically bombed city, Dresden, one of the first of Coventry's 26 twin towns.

Earlier in the UKCoC year, the cathedral hosted a photography exhibition, 'Concrete Collar', by local photographer Tom Illsley, featuring photographs of the Coventry ring road. The dual carriageway took 14 years to build and 25 years to plan before it was completed in 1974.

Made over a period of three years, the photographs show the road as a historically and culturally important part of Coventry's urban landscape within a rapidly changing environment. The images reflect how the city is regenerating and growing within the constraints of its post-war footprint.





Screenshots of cars and graphics from the VR experience 'In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats'

Music and a sense of place

Coventry is a 'Young City', the mean age of residents being 32, seven years younger than the national average. It's home to the 2-Tone music era, named after the record label to which Coventry bands like The Specials belonged and popular in the 1980s, when music lyrics reflected issues of race, culture and national identity. Later, the city became well-known for rave parties and the Acid House music genre. During UKCoC, the cathedral hosted 'Deliaphonic' to commemorate the life and achievements of Delia Derbyshire, a Coventry-born composer who helped create the famous Doctor Who theme music and who was a pioneer of electronic music.

Film-maker Darren Emerson created 'In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats', a virtual reality experience called to transport small groups (up to four people) to 1989 in search of an illegal rave party in the city. An immersive exhibition, participants experience a virtual world of anticipation, trepidation and euphoria as the stories of party promoters, police officers and rave-goers are brought to life. ■

www.eastcityfilms.com/inpursuitofrepetitivebeats

www.eastcityfilms.com/inpursuitofrepetitivebeats

Above: Poster-strewn bedrooms from inside the VR experience

Above right: Screenshot of a virtual police station as officers try to track down rave promoters

Further information:

Coventry University's Coventry Digital, a searchable community archive and repository: https://coventry.digital/

The University of Warwick's Coventry Cultural Place Profiler, providing hyper-local place information so cultural organisations can understand the needs of communities when planning an activity: https://coventry.culturalplaceprofiler.co.uk/

Coventry Culture Change: https://culturechangecoventry.com/

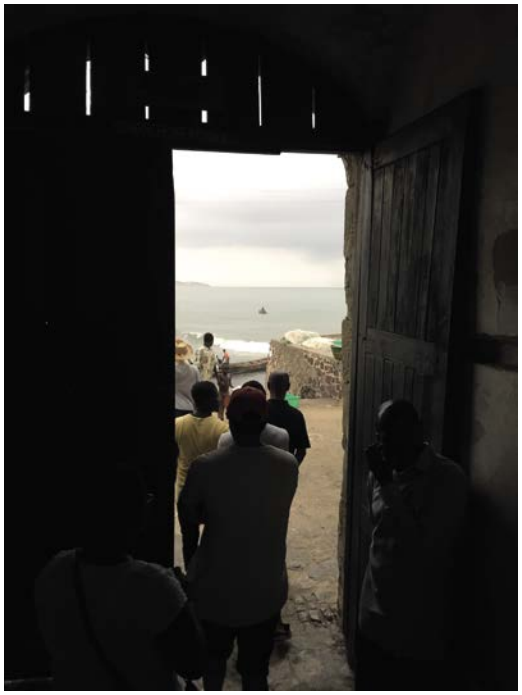
© Dirk Bennett

A school from the past used for educational programmes today, Lychnostatis Open Air Museum, Crete 2020

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Dirk Bennett
Tower Bridge and The Monument, City of London

Anybody know Friedrich Torberg? Austrian critic, sportsman, raconteur, journalist and novelist. His mother Hungarian, his father Czech; Jew and anti-fascist; writer of the 'Schüler Gerber' and translator of the satirical works of Ephraim Kishon. His writing combines irony, elegance and a turn of phrase that was the hallmark of German-language writing pre-WW2, and in my opinion has never been achieved again since. He stands in a proud tradition with Karl Kraus and Joseph Roth, Alfred Polgar, Ferenc Molnár – his writing the scalpel to Thomas Bernhard's chainsaw… but enough, this piece ain't about the literary merits of Central Europe in the earlier parts of the 20th century.



© Dirk Bennett

The Gate of No Return. Just a small plaque on the door with three words. Sparing but devastating in its impact, Cape Coast, Ghana 2017

Full of wit and wisdom, one of his best works is the bittersweet farewell to that pre-war world: *Tante Jolesch or the Decline of the West in Anecdotes*. There is one story particularly poignant. It describes the spectacular success of the eponymous aunt's Krautfleckerl, a classic Austrian pasta dish (try it, it's delicious, recipe below). Whenever it becomes known that, say for the coming Sunday, she is planning to cook the all-time favourite, unexpected relatives, friends and neighbours announce their visits, make their pilgrimage from the furthest corners of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to her Vienna home; turning up unexpected, uninvited, hungry. Asked about the secret recipe she only smiles, knowingly. And had she been English, she would have probably tapped her nose.

Finally, she succumbs to old age and illness. Around her death bed the family assembles, inconsolable, already in mourning. Her favourite niece takes a heart, approaches her cautiously and dares to ask that question on everybody's mind. The recipe! Isn't it time to preserve that invaluable culinary legacy? To pass it on to the next generation? And so she asks: what is the secret of her famous *Fleckerl*?

Aunty Yolesh (as she is otherwise known) raises from her pillow: 'The secret is…' she whispers, gasping for breath: '…the secret is: I've never made enough!'

This is an unexpected twist, and when you think about it, there is a wider lesson here. Because it is such a simple and brilliant concept: always leave a little bit of appetite unsated, an empty space to be filled, a yearning to be fed. Let the imagination do its bit. Thus creating a memory of something truly unforgettable.

Especially valid for our times, where we have been getting used to instant and complete gratification. Where (almost) nothing is left to the imagination, where borders are persistently pushed further and further, and limits only exist to be smashed. Where everything is available at every moment. Where we are protected, guided, safe and mollycoddled in every moment of our lives. Told what to do, what to think, what to feel, what to say.

Which applies to our work as well, to the exhibitions and displays we develop. To be clear, I am not saying, let's skip all that. This is what we do, and I am no fan of the 'let it speak for itself' school of thinking anyway: that's just laziness. But there is an argument to be had that we let go of the hand of the visitor… just a little bit. I am sure we've all had that feeling that sometimes we do too much of what we do:

Too much direction

- Our sites are full of warning signs, directions and instructions: for what to do and where, to pay attention – the effect, frequently is that many visitors don't pay attention anymore. In effect, fewer signs might even raise awareness: suddenly they gain meaning, attention and impact.

Too many stories

- Sometimes we are trying too hard to tell everything, from every angle. What if we left some of the stories only hinted at, leave questions open and leave room to explore and discover. Leave it to the visitors, just whet their appetite – and not underestimate their curiosity and intelligence. This might also encourage dialogue and personal discovery.

Too much noise

- Media, sound, colours: today's experience tries hard to appeal to all senses, be immersive, interactive and virtual. The consequence: an overload by technology and which is hugely expensive, unsustainable and the impact is often temporary rather than lasting. Reducing all that noise might lead to a calmer, more relaxing and ultimately more enjoyable visit. →

Right: Maybe not quite the right words? Frieze 2019 panel text

Far right: Evocative and beautiful recreation of the interior of the medieval Anne of Cleves House, Lewes 2019

© Dirk Bennett


© Dirk Bennett

Too much teaching

- Are we trying too much to teach our visitors something, instead of entertaining them and allowing them time off? Telling them what to think, if they want it or not, instead of fostering a true, democratic variety of opinions, as varied as our visitors themselves? Doing less might also be less upsetting and more inclusive than trying to convert the unconvertible and antagonise those who hold different views. Teach instead by stealth!

Too much seriousness

- Fun, entertainment and beauty are probably why most visitors really visit our sites. What about a bit of lightness and even humour? Make it beautiful and fun. To stretch the metaphor a bit: make it taste nice – it is not supposed to be a (bitter) medicine.

Too many words

- Use as many as necessary, but as few as possible so visitors become curious and come back, or buy a book, attend a course or pick up a hobby. Holding back leads to a more satisfying experience when that revelation suddenly comes, from within themselves, not imposed by us.

To me, this approach holds an immediate attraction: to hold something back, leave some space for imagination, for initiative, whet the appetite for more. There is appeal in keeping things slightly mysterious; it can support that process that is central to us interpreters: personal revelation. And, like for Aunty Yolesch's guests, to create the memory of something special, and to come back for more.

But that's – not quite? – enough from me. ■

Recipe for Krautfleckerl

(not quite enough for 4)

300 g square pasta (Fleckerl, Quadretti or Lazanki)
Small head of white cabbage, shredded
Lardons to taste
Butter
Salt & pepper
1 tsp caraway & ground paprika
Onion & garlic

Melt a knob of butter with the garlic and onion. Once softened, add the cabbage, the caraway and paprika; add the fried lardons. Season and leave to cook until nice and soft (not too soft). Add the boiled (al dente) pasta. Add a bit of the pasta water and leave to reduce: you don't want the mix too wet.

For more flavour boil the pasta in stock. You can also add some white wine (don't overdo it). Also, I always add a sprinkle of sugar.

→ Dirk is responsible for the Interpretation for Tower Bridge and The Monument in London. He has worked in the cultural sector for private and public bodies since the mid-90s. A former Trustee of the AHI, he writes extensively on cultural and historical themes for publications in the UK and Germany.
Email dirk.bennett@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

THE EAST ENDERS OF READING

INTERPRETING A VICTORIAN GARDEN CEMETERY

Professor Yota Dimitriadi
University of Reading
and
Teresa Verney-Brookes
Outdoor Educator

Old cemeteries are intriguing outdoor museums that offer a wealth of information on cultural heritage, wildlife, conservation and more. They are places for remembrance, contemplation and education... for those who dare to cross the gates! In this article, we share reflections on how we have encouraged local communities to engage with Reading Old Cemetery, a Victorian garden cemetery, situated in East Reading, Berkshire.

#ROCuP (Reading Old Cemetery Undertaking Project) has been a successful collaboration between the Institute of Education at the University of Reading and volunteer group, Friends of Reading Old Cemetery (part of Econet, a wildlife conservation group). The aims of the project have been to encourage more conversations with families and schools around death, grief and bereavement, and to encourage our local communities to find out about the town's social history and conservation through the cemetery. →

Volunteers help with conservation work

Leslee Barron

Perceptions of cemeteries

Cemeteries might not be everyone's first choice for a family outing, but they are central to our attitudes towards death and dying, and the connections between the living and the dead. In the Victorian era, before the creation of public parks, garden cemeteries became popular touristic destinations, with their Arcadian landscapes offering a space for families to socialise and commemorate their dead, away from the hubbub of the town.

In order to attract younger people and families to explore the cemetery, we decided that the audio guide would be in the style of the well-loved and playful children's television series, Horrible Histories.

Reading Old Cemetery is a closed burial ground, with funerals only taking place if there is an existing family plot. Many local people told us that they have only ever seen the cemetery from the top deck of the buses that pass by and had never stepped inside before: because of fear and not knowing what to expect! The cemetery, as with other urban spaces, has suffered from vandalism and anti-social behaviour, which may have also added to negative attitudes.

Building community engagement with digital developments

Over the last 10 years, the Friends of Reading Old Cemetery have encouraged community engagement by running conservation work parties, family open days and guided walks, but the pandemic impacted this significantly. In September 2021, funding from the University of Reading Community Fund, in association with the John Sykes Foundation, enabled us to extend the offer creatively with the development of a GPS-enabled audio guide, a website, and a series of podcasts, strengthening our campaign to re-engage the community in the history and wildlife of this local gem.

We started to research individuals buried at the cemetery for the audio guide and soon found ourselves immersed in the exciting world of archival research: census data, death certificates, workhouse records, newspaper articles and obituaries.

As we researched these individuals, we published snippets of their life stories on social media. People were intrigued and the numbers joining our Facebook group started to grow. Dialogues opened, with people asking for help to find relatives buried at the cemetery, and with us inviting them back to share stories on the project website. Beautiful Victorian photos of local people were shared, giving a glimpse of what it was like to be living in Victorian Reading. It was important for us to share the stories in the contributors' own words and writing style, an approach followed by other cemetery projects like Horton in Epsom, Surrey.

A key part of the project was to work with the local community and share ownership of the work, rather than helicoptering in as 'experts'. Locals who frequently visit the site are protective of the space and concerned about the impact of more visitors. It was important to show that we cared. We were present on-site frequently, updating them on the project, listening to concerns and co-constructing solutions. We organised regular litter picks to demonstrate our commitment to conservation and we liaised with local councillors about anti-social behaviour. We also wanted to ensure that their accumulated knowledge of the site was recorded for future generations – and in their own words – with our podcast series, *Death by Podcast*.

Tickets to the Victorian Perambulations open day

Yota Dimitriadi, ROCUP Project

We do it for the kids

In order to attract younger people and families to explore the cemetery, we decided that the audio guide would be in the style of the well-loved and playful children's television series, *Horrible Histories*. We felt that the *Histories* format would give families more license to visit a space sometimes perceived as frightening. The idea was not without challenges and took longer than expected, as we embarked on the art of combining scriptwriting and research. We were glad to employ local budding actors for the voiceovers and we are delighted with the result.

Experience from running family events on death and bereavement at the University of Reading, as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science,

Yota Dimitriadi, ROCUP Project

Caption: Some of the costumes worn for the Victorian Perambulations open day

taught us that the gatekeepers for conversations around death were the adults and we needed to find ways to encourage families to visit and start these discussions. So, our Victorian Perambulations event was born! Dressed up in period costumes and taking on personas from the research, we welcomed visitors and shared life stories. A 'best outfit' competition concluded the event.

As a community project, we strongly believe that all resources should be accessible and free, which means regularly sourcing funding to enable more research and activity.

Another key audience for our project was school groups. We teamed up with Reading Museum to invite a local special school to become our CSIs (Cemetery Student Investigators), with a data handling workshop on-site focusing on heritage and biodiversity – counting grave monuments, using insect nets and looking at adjectives to describe gravestones.

Inclusivity and representation

The stories of the 206 war graves were already documented on the Cemetery Junction War Graves website and featured in the guided walks. We wanted to extend the lens to include in our audio guide the history of the ordinary people buried in the cemetery. Prior to the project, the graves of note were mostly those of wealthy men. Our work became a quest for those marginalised or forgotten; looking for representations of disability, multiculturalism and researching the forgotten women of Reading. The research threw up amazing stories:

- Mrs Eliza Ratcliffe, a suffragist and principal of Burlton School for Ladies and the only signatory from Berkshire on the 1866 Women's Suffrage petition that went to Parliament.
- Miss Mary Gordon Burnett, a fearless activist for the welfare of the blind community in Reading.
- Willie Wimmera, an Aboriginal 11-year-old.
- Marie Smart, the first Sierra–Leonean in Reading.
- Contributors also researched people buried in unmarked graves and those names and stories were spoken once again.

This was not a case for less is more. We piloted the route several times and extended it to 60 minutes to ensure we included as much as possible. Visitors can pause the app or download it on their phone and read the script, but it was important for the diverse stories to be acknowledged.

We recognise though that in the multicultural town of Reading there are communities that we still have not approached to encourage engagement with the cemetery, and this is something we plan to develop in the future.

Epilogue: Famous last words

As a community project, we strongly believe that all resources should be accessible and free, which means regularly sourcing funding to enable more research and activity. This takes time, especially as we currently work on the project as volunteers. But we also found that throughout the pandemic the project gave us all an outdoor space to enjoy and a wonderful community, and we love that!

So, here's an invitation to all of you: on the outskirts of Reading lies Reading Old Cemetery with its 120,000 permanent residents. They are dying to meet you! Find out about them from our online resources or if you get the chance to visit this beautiful garden cemetery, use our audio guide available via the 'YourTour' app. ■

Further information:

Website: https://readingoldcemetery.uk/
Instagram: @readingoldcemetery1843
Facebook: Friends of Reading Old Cemetery

→ Yota (Y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk) is a Professor of Computing Education at the Institute of Education, University of Reading and National Teaching Fellow.

Teresa (Teresavb@btinternet.com) is an outdoor Environmental Education Specialist, Director of Green Trees and Clown/Performer as Professor Queen-Bee. She is Chair of the Friends of Reading Old Cemetery.

ROMILLY SWANN

SHEPHERDESS, NATURAL DYER, EDUCATOR

Nicky Temple
Journal Editor

Romilly doesn't just work in heritage interpretation, she lives and breathes it. On a scorching-hot Sunday afternoon in August, I travelled to south Oxfordshire to meet Romilly at her home in the ruins of a red-brick Victorian tennis court, at Hardwick Estate.

Romilly, there are so many things I want to ask you, but where to start! Firstly, where are we?

Hardwick is a very magical place on the banks of the Thames. My three daughters and I arrived here on a pair of narrowboats over twenty years ago. We loved the place and the community and decided to stay, moving from the boats into the derelict real tennis court twelve years ago. I worked tirelessly to make the place safe, functional and homely, mostly by building a myriad of unique constructions within and around the colossal walls. Now a visitor is presented with a curious labyrinth of useful spaces. A dye house, wash house, workshops, storerooms, a music studio and other community spaces. I guess that when people step through the gate it is clear that amongst the bustling quirkiness, lots of social and creative stuff happens here.

Your business, The Outside Dyers, is based here at your home, but you also travel far and wide. Tell us about your work.

We are a small, ethically-minded organisation using natural dyes from homegrown and foraged plants to create historically authentic colours. We dye wool from the fleece of our own small flock of Shetland sheep, (some of which are crossed with Gotland and Boreray), which we shear, and process ourselves using traditional techniques. We use water from our well in the dyeing vats, which is then recycled into withy beds. Our aim is to rediscover lost techniques whilst adding to a greater understanding of the past and the natural world, treading lightly on the earth as we go. Alongside our research and experimentation, we run a public engagement programme, travelling across the country with our mobile demonstration dye house to festivals, education centres, and well-known sites such as Stonehenge.

How did you come to work in this field?

I learnt about natural dyeing accidently. I was working on a living history project at Grey Hill, near Chepstow, where we built a seventeenth century hamlet, complete with a dye house. My only previous dying experience was with Dylon, but I quickly found myself giving demonstrations to groups of children on natural dyes whilst learning on the job! I was glad of my ignorance, because from the inquisitive minds of children came questions that really got me thinking, too – How? What? Why? By explaining processes to visitors in an accessible way, I was educating myself as well, and I started to think about the way we learn things now and the way we learnt things in the past. So often visitors would say: 'Isn't it amazing that our ancestors discovered such complex dyeing processes!' to which I would answer that I am more amazed that we know so little about them now.

Can you think of some examples to illustrate what you mean?

Human discovery in the past was much more visceral, immersive and spiritual, without the scientific knowledge we have today. Take for instance woad, a plant from the cabbage family with a yellow flower. Indigo dye is extracted from the leaves and at first, wool appears yellow when it is removed from the vat, but then it turns green and then finally blue as it comes into contact with the air. We understand now about the chemical reaction that takes place as the indigotin reacts with the oxygen molecules, but how would a person living in the Neolithic explain this? There could only be a magical interpretation! They must have experienced the world with so much more wonder than we do now, and certainly had a much deeper connection to nature and an understanding of how to use plants to their advantage.

This led me to consider how we describe colour and what meanings we associate with certain colours. Did you know that there wasn't a word for blue in Britain until the Normans arrived? Before that, the word 'glass' was used for blue. Celts were described as being painted the colour of glass, which is where the name Glastonbury comes from as it was an area known for growing large quantities of woad for the blue dye it produced.

What associations might we have had with certain colours? This is difficult to discern from the archaeological record. We find threads from Georgia dating back to 35,000 BP, dyed in shades of turquoise, pink and black, but what significance did these colours have? In various places round Britain, we find Mesolithic middens of dog whelks, which make a wonderful purple dye (I've tried it – a messy job!) What did this colour mean to people, more than simply the ability to change things from one colour to another?

I am also fascinated by the connection between the words *heritage* and in*heritance*. How do we feel about who we are? How do we communicate our identity to others? How do we pass this knowledge on to future generations? Through our stories, music, art, clothes etc, much of which is deeply linked to colour. Our understanding of plants and dyes also formed part of our identity as it became our inherited knowledge and an important part of our frame of reference – something we have lost along the way.

All these questions and more led me to experimental archaeology. Like a child, I wanted to explore and play as I experienced things firsthand. This reminds me of when I worked at Beale Park as an Education Officer and we were building an Iron Age round house and playing with alder wood. One thing led to another and before I knew it, the children had created their own brand of orange hair gel. There were some surprised looks from parents at pick-up time!

It is difficult to define what The Outside Dyers have become or aim to achieve. After many years working in education and completing an Archaeology masters, it is clear that scientific exploration, understanding and communication is critically important alongside immersive experience and hands on teaching. We incorporate experimental archaeology, living history, native awareness, hard work and belonging all rolled into one! I need to create a new term for it! Simply, it is how I live, surrounded by plants and sheep, boiling dye vats, piles of wool and creative doings!

What is at the heart of your work? What change do you hope to inspire?

I am concerned by our modern disconnect with the natural world. It worries me deeply because we need the next generation to inherit a passion for nature, in order for them to care enough to make the right choices for the future. I'm not suggesting that the way forward is for everyone to start foraging for plants to dye their clothes, but improving our relationship with the natural world must be of utmost importance. I see my work as a lesson from the past, and I hope this pro-environmental educational stance comes through in the public engagement work I do with The Outside Dyers. Of course, I could talk more about the production of ethical textiles and the under-researched effects of synthetic dyes on our bodies, but that is a topic for another article! Ultimately, I believe that engaging people in our natural heritage can inspire them to make positive changes for the future. ■

Romilly is currently writing a book on natural dyes and the plant mysteries that have coloured our world view. Through a spectrum of lived experience, it explores how human connections with each other, the land that supports us and the beings we share this planet with, might help us stay cheerful in uncertain times.

Further information:

https://www.theoutside.org.uk/
Facebook: @TheOutsideDyers
Instagram: @TheOutsideDyers

THE 'CLOAK OF VISIBILITY'

Bob Jones, Carolyn Lloyd Brown and Jim Mitchell

During 2020-21 AHI consulted its membership on the role ethics should play in our activities. 2021 will be remembered by many for the pandemic, for illegal parties, for culture wars and for statues toppled. However, few may remember that year for the milestone moment in our Association when we adopted a Code of Ethics to help support practitioners with advocacy of good practice and ethical behaviours.

Association for Heritage Interpretation (AHI) Code of Ethics

AHI promotes excellence in the practice and provision of interpretation. Interpretation practitioners help enrich people's lives through deepening and challenging understandings of tangible and intangible heritage, engaging their emotions and enhancing their experiences. Although some of the more experienced members in our 'kirk' may feel able to defend their proposals, their research or their stance on a given theme or issue in the face of challenges levelled by a particularly 'hands-on' client, many others – particularly those beginning their career journeys – may feel intimidated by a client or a funder with a strong agenda.

Visibility in practice

The AHI Code of Ethics – our '*Cloak of Visibility*' – is not intended to be a comfort blanket, something we would wrap around our activities as practitioners and creators of interpretive media and endeavours. Rather, it is intended to function as a flag to others – a beacon to peers, clients, partners, employers, commissioning bodies, project funders. Our values, as laid out in the Code, are a set of red lines that signal how we are governed by a code of behaviour that lays down adherence to high and inviolable standards in the work we do.

The '*Cloak of Visibility*' is just what it says on the tin – a means by which our intent and purpose as professionals is made visible.

Interpreters are given an important position of trust in relation to their audiences and local communities, to their employer, to commissioning organisations and to their funders. We must make sound ethical judgements in all areas of work in order to maintain this trust. The AHI Code of Ethics encourages the recognition of values shared by practitioners. It embraces the key principles of individual integrity and inclusive engagement. All existing members of AHI, and those joining, agree to uphold our Code of Ethics and to champion good practice and ethical behaviour. Advocacy for the Code is provided during training sessions, including practical case study examples, to help practitioners apply the Code's values and principles.

In the coming months we want to explore and share with you what this means in practice. We want to hear from you about situations and experiences where the Code has helped to steer your endeavours through a sticky patch, or conversely where, with hindsight, it could have helped; where you've been able to use it for positive advocacy and where you've been proud to share it with others; has it helped you in bidding for a commission or in securing a job? The Trustees see the Code as a 'living entity', a section in the members area of the website that is regularly updated with examples and case studies illustrating how the Code has been or can be applied in real-time.

The publication date for this edition of the Journal means you will be reading this edition after our Conference in October. At the time of writing, we hope to have held a workshop

at that annual gathering of members to explore the subject further and we intend a further webinar during the coming months to develop your thoughts and contributions. The outcome of both will form the core of a second and more in-depth article in the Spring/Summer 2023 edition of the Journal, where we hope to demonstrate the Code's purpose and effectiveness in practice. However, if you have any thoughts or insights on the Code that you would like to share directly with the Ethics Group, please forward them through the AHI Administrator – admin@ahi.org.uk – to Bob Jones, Carolyn Lloyd Brown or Jim Mitchell. ■

Values

Interpretive practice in all its forms should demonstrate our core values:

Integrity – uphold the highest level of integrity and personal conduct at all times, treating everyone equally, with honesty and respect.

Honesty – act in the public interest in all areas of work, generating accurate and balanced information for, and with, individuals, organisations and communities.

Respect – build respectful, transparent and collaborative relationships with organisations, colleagues, individuals and volunteers to ensure public trust in the planning and delivery of interpretive activity.

Veracity – ensure that interpretive content is balanced, and is based on rigorous research, which recognises and addresses implicit bias, avoiding the use of discriminatory language.

Diversity – support freedom of speech; respect the right to express different views; welcome the currency of distinctive perspectives.

Inclusion – understand and engage with existing, potential and under–served audiences, including intellectual and physical accessibility, address barriers to inclusion and seek equity, equality and social justice.

Reflection – learn from reflection on the effectiveness of interpretive activities and use that understanding for personal and professional development, and to inform best practice.

Stewardship – promote the conservation of, and access to, tangible and intangible heritage resources for sustainable public benefit – for learning, inspiration and enjoyment.

Probity – avoid pursuit of any personal interest that may conflict with or influence, or be perceived to conflict with or influence, the public interest.

PAST FORWARD: FROM THE AHI ARCHIVES

Bob Jones
MBE, HFAHI

(This series of articles is part of the AHI Fellowship 360 Programme)

In this issue we look back to spring 2011 and Journal No.1/Volume 16. Inspired by the previous year's AHI Annual Conference this edition's theme looked at 'Pushing Boundaries'. Once again, the commissioning editor was David Masters who introduced it thus: '*...the message of this journal is "be daring, seek new frontiers, and go where no interpreter has gone before".*'

The cover, sporting the title 'Pushing Boundaries?', features the spectacular Stegastein viewpoint above Aurlandsfjord, Norway. The viewpoint image speaks 'boundary' in a way that is hard to better!

Articles in this issue included:

'Chasing the Balrogs' – Bob Jones, HFAHI (*Interpretation Consultant*) considers the morality and ethics of interpretation and interpreters. The article was possibly the keystone moment in the Association's subsequent 10-year journey to our recently adopted Code of Ethics – our 'cloak of visibility'!

'Will it mark if I hit it with a hammer?' – Tom Cann (*Creative Director*) gives a run-through on different materials available for outdoor interpretative panels and sculptures. In an age of evermore demanding digital media, panels and waysides remain the most often go-to practical and budget-limited media. The question in the title will be familiar to many!

'Text Appeal' – Carol Thompson (*Assistant Curator*) on whether there is still a place for the humble printed label among the glitz and glamour of high-tech interpretation. What to avoid and what to apply – text only comes to life if given personality.

'Interactive Games for Smartphones' – James Cokeham (*Heritage Interpretation Consultant*) reports from the front line of the ever-advancing world of new media and technology. That same technology which provides us with more opportunities to create, to push boundaries – however, with it often comes risks that can be unexpected...

'Discovering the Pushmi-Pullyu – a Dilemma for Dr Dolittle' – Carolyn Lloyd Brown, FAHI (*Heritage Consultant*) discusses pushing the boundaries and the tensions this can create for interpretive development. Hugh Lofting's bizarre character – the Pushmi-Pullyu – is quite possibly the best descriptor for an 'interpreter' ever penned!

'Don't Fence Me In' – James Carter, FAHI (*Interpretation Consultant*) argues the case for revising and extending the boundaries around interpretation and getting visitors to work a little harder. James, as ever, presents a searching and forensic insight into what 'boundaries' mean, how they define us as a species and how we as interpreters must constantly push our audiences to reach for more.

Case studies include:

'The Enchanted Palace' – David Souden (*Head of Access and Learning, Historic Royal Palaces (HRP)*) describes a radical makeover and new departures at Kensington Palace. HRP have been at the forefront of interpretation in the nation's capital for many years, but public spaces were often seen as jumbled. Enter 'The Enchanted Palace' idea and a radical transformation.

'From Memory to Action' – Bridget Conley-Zilkic (*Research Director*) & **David Small** (*Creative Director*) describe how they provoke visitors into thinking about their own actions today in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Are boundaries in fact boundless? 'Lest we forget' is empty rhetoric unless we realise that aspects of our society, such as genocide, continue in our own time.

'Speaking for Themselves' – Jeremy Coote (*Curator and Joint Head of Collections*) explains how objects appear to remain in their original Victorian setting at the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum despite the interpretation having been subtly updated. How innovative curators can push traditional boundaries whilst remaining true to original values.

'Teenage Interpreters' – Liz Mitchell (*Freelance Interpretation Consultant*) recounts how a collaborative programme involving young people interpreting art collections at Manchester Art Gallery (MAG) changed the way everyone working on the project looked at art. 'Visual Dialogues' was a six-year programme that set out to 'pair' groups of teenagers with an artist of note (eg Grayson Perry) to select, display, and interpret artworks from the MAG and the Tate Gallery, to explore boundaries between youth and the creative establishment.

'In Their Own Words' – Sarah Lambert (Interpretation and Learning Officer) explores the powerful effect of using the soldier's voice rather than text in the Bovington Tank Museum's new exhibition 'Battlegroup Afghanistan'. With space at a premium, the bold decision to produce a primarily audiovisual exhibition meant the soldiers' own voices had a compelling effect.

'Kentish Delights' – Jo Wiltcher (*Museum Manager*) looks at how a touring exhibition with a difference was developed to engage hard-to-reach audiences. How the Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery took the 'mountain to mohammed'.

'Marking Time' – Patricia Mackinnon–Day (*Installation Artist*) describes an innovative installation marking the site of medieval almshouses in Exeter. How an historic building ducked the fate of being enclosed in a keep out 'boundary fence' to become a space of celebration and opportunity.

'Pushing boundaries' as an exhortation from the comfort of a keyboard chair is all very well. However, without 'interpretists' with vision, matched with clients or commissioning bodies who themselves have a willingness to tread new ground – in other words to take risks – our profession would be terribly dull. We would descend into producing the same-old same-old; into the domain of complacency; the acceptance of *'it's good enough'*. The back issues of our Journals are a testament to their editors: a treasury of innovative ideas, the 'journeys taken', lessons learnt, and practical guidance, portrayed by members – past and present – whose vision is often as pertinent today as it was back then.

NB: job titles linked to the authors of the above articles (see italics) pertain to the roles those individuals held when they contributed to that journal in 2011. ■

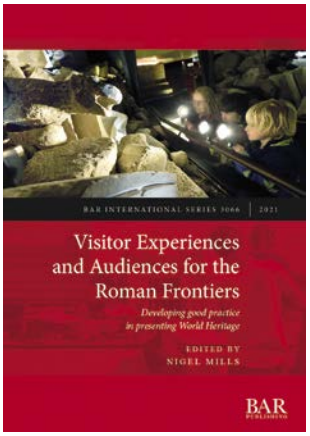
Past issues of the AHI Journals, dating back to Spring 2008, are available in the Members Section of our website.

The 'Past Forward' series of articles stem from an original 2021 proposal to AHI's Trustees arguing for an official online Association Archive entitled '*We Need Roots*' by Bob Jones, MBE, HFAHI.

BOOK REVIEW

Visitor Experiences and Audiences for the Roman Frontiers: developing good practice in presenting World Heritage

Editor: Nigel Mills
Publisher: BAR Publishing, 2021



Mr Grumpy says that when historians and curators determine the content of interpretation, it is likely to reflect what THEY want to tell US rather than what WE, the visitors, want to know. Mr Happy finds that Nigel Mills, and his score of international contributors, counsel in this book that interpretation should be visitor-focused and must engage with local communities.

The Roman frontiers reflect an extraordinary achievement in empire-building, much less slash and burn, much more govern and earn. (V V Putin, please note.) While advocating a strategic approach to interpreting many miles of remaining evidence, the authors recognise that few visitors to any of the multitude of sites will visit more than one or two, and what is important to them, and local people, is the story of a particular site, albeit set within the whole story of the frontiers.

The Romans are long gone but they remain with us in spirit. Their domination was as much benign as oppressive. However, their presence and activities along the European frontiers are often misconceived, misrepresented and inaccurately explained to visitors. Nigel Mills has carefully assembled these readable but scholarly essays that describe the many, sometimes conflicting, reasons for the shortcomings.

They also set out how excellent general and site-specific interpretive techniques can counter the inadequacies and paint an authentic, engaging, inspiring and crucially, accurate picture of a fascinating era in the story of Europe. Their lessons apply widely and make this book valuable reading for all those involved in heritage interpretation. ■

*AHI members are eligible for a 25% discount on this title until 31st December 2022. Enter the promotional code **S3066_25** at the check-out when you purchase through www.barpublishing.com*

→ Michael Hamish Glen was a library assistant, printer, broadcaster, bookseller, publicity officer, tourism administrator, graphic designer, information director and public relations consultant before becoming an interpretive planner in 1985 with Touchstone Heritage and, later, creative writer with QuiteWrite. He administered AHI for eight years, having helped to establish the association (as SIBH) in 1975, Interpret Europe in 2010 and the Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation in 2019. He is currently treasurer of AHI.

INTERPRETING WITH INTENT

Steve Slack
Freelance Interpretation Consultant

Exhibitions often invite visitors to reflect on a topic – to think, to discuss, perhaps to reconsider what they understand or value. But can exhibits actually persuade people to change their behaviour? And if so, could we ever prove it?

An experimental display

'Dive In! Protecting our Ocean' was a temporary exhibition at The Wardlaw Museum, St Andrews, programmed to take place while Scotland was hosting the COP26 conference in early 2022. The display had an explicit aim – not only to influence what visitors *think* about the ocean and climate change, but also to influence what they might *do* as a result of visiting.

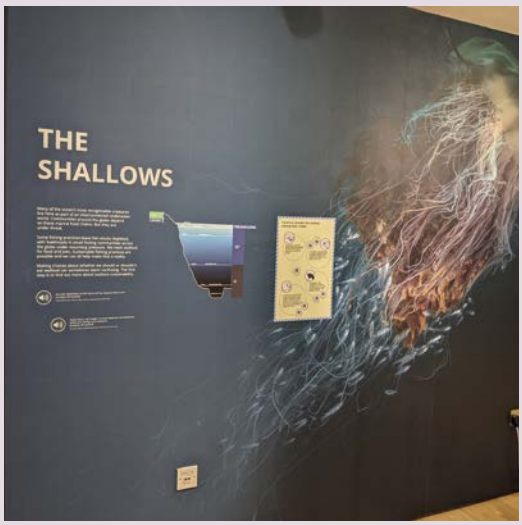
The museum brought together a range of staff, ocean scientists, exhibition designers and two external consultants – me, to advise on interpretation and an environmental behaviour psychologist to broaden our horizons and open our minds to new different ways of working.

What does behaviour change look like?

During our collaborative interpretation planning workshops, we had conversations about what kind of impact we might have on visitors – something that went beyond the realms of intellectual > emotional > behavioural outcomes; beyond the usual quotations about 'understanding', 'appreciation' and 'protection' and even beyond generic learning and social outcomes. While we acknowledged Freeman Tilden, Sam Ham and others, we also immersed ourselves in environmental psychology. Campaigns that seek to actively involve people in protecting our planet were just as inspirational as existing interpretive theory.

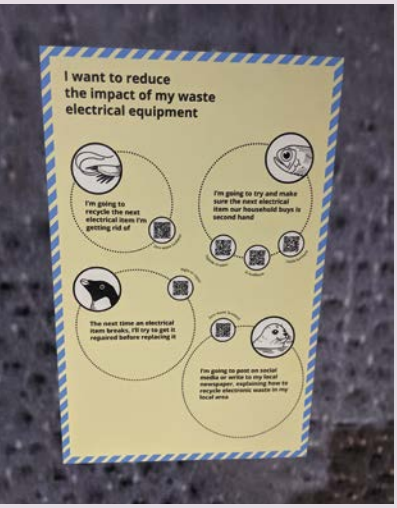
We developed a vision of what visitors might do, or intend to do, as a result of visiting, but we were also interested in what visitors might think and feel – their attitudes, identity, sense of inclusion in the story, their sense of agency/confidence, their willingness to engage etc. It is these constituent parts – which we called the 'building blocks' for behavioural change – that we were as interested in provoking in visitors (and ultimately interrogating in our evaluation) as much as whether visitors actually did anything differently. →

Steve Slack



Steve Slack

Exhibition wall graphics echoed a journey from the deep ocean to dry land



Steve Slack

Behavioural 'asks' were tailored to four visitor types

Constructing an exhibition narrative

The displays took the format of a journey from the deep ocean – dark and distant – getting shallower and brighter until it reached the coastline. The intention was that visitors felt the story getting closer to their own experiences, becoming more relevant to our lives here on dry land.

We decided not to bombard visitors with everything that marine science and behavioural psychology has to offer. Instead, we chose to highlight just one main threat/concern at each ocean depth and a range of potential ways in which people could make manageable-but-meaningful changes in their own lives in relation to that threat. The aim was to create an authentically positive exhibition, rather than one laden with negative messages.

Personalising provocation

Throughout the exhibition, visitors encountered suggestions of things they might do differently, tailored to their circumstances. To attempt a clean messaging structure, we developed an approach based on four 'personas' – a simple segmentation inspired by environmental communication techniques on a spectrum of existing engagement with climate change. These were articulated as four marine animals that visitors could follow through the exhibition. The seal icon, for example, was for people already doing a lot in relation to climate change and who wanted to take it to the next level. The krill persona was for people who may be just getting started.

In each section, visitors could scan QR codes linked to behavioural asks that we judged might be right for them. Our hypothesis was that by combining content about protecting the ocean alongside a set of semi-tailored behavioural asks, people with different levels of environmental confidence and experience could find the right conditions to be prompted into behaviour change.

Did it work?

Feedback offered clues as to how well the exhibition fared at stimulating this change. In the exit interview (triangulated with other research methodologies), 78% of visitors thought they'd do something differently as a result of visiting; 16% definitely would. Whether anyone actually held off upgrading their phone because of a new understanding of deep-sea rare mineral mining we might never know – and there's a whole other conversation to have here about the complexities of attempting to measure longitudinal impact beyond an exit survey. But we do know the exhibition provoked thoughts and conversations – and keeping our broad definition of change in mind, we suggest there was definite evidence of our 'building blocks' being activated.

One thing we know didn't work as well was the persona-led approach to our asks – not that the concept didn't appeal to visitors, but we probably designed the persona animals as too cute and cuddly. Visitors told us they looked like a kids' trail and therefore was not for them. Lesson learned about being too adorable.

Reflecting on process

Rather than brushing this modest success aside, the team at the Museums of the University of St Andrews are keen to keep on experimenting. Matthew Sheard, Head of Experience and Engagement, told me:

'We're thinking quite hard about how we approach this in future projects, and we've an exhibition on our relationship with the animal kingdom taking place in summer 2023 where we'll be taking what we've learnt and applying it in a different way to increase understanding in this area. The 'Dive In!' project and what we've learnt from it has taught us a lot, but there's still a great deal more for us to learn.'

The right place to provoke

One of the findings of the evaluation was that visitors are not only comfortable with the idea of museums provoking people about pro-environmental behaviours, they suggest we have a duty to take a stance, to encourage, to interpret with intent.

Steve Slack

Celia, the instagrammable replica harbour seal

'Museums should provoke and trigger thoughts and evaluation but also give instructions/guidance on how to deal with the new thoughts and where to read more.'
Visitor

'A museum is one of the places that has almost an obligation to raise the actions people can take. They are backed by research and when research backs up the claims there needs to be a clear message about what people can do.'
Visitor

Handing on the baton

And so we must do more. The environmental threats facing the ocean – including, although not limited to, climate change – are serious and urgent. Museums, like every other forum for connecting and engaging with public audiences, have been stepping up to the challenge for some time.

For our small part, we produced an interpretation guide – a list of conversation points for museums interested in creating content that seeks to encourage behaviour change, based on our experiences. We'd be delighted to see a boosted confidence in heritage sites taking bigger steps and bigger risks in how we interpret pro-environmental stories. If we keep on collaborating, experimenting and testing new engagement ideas, we'll surely have a better chance of communicating meaningfully with our audiences. ■

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