



# WINNERS

Excellence in interpretation – some reflections

Review of the AHI Conference 2019

Facts, Fiction and Interpretation, a review

AHI 2019 Discover Heritage Awards

Museums and Historic Properties/Sites

Visitor/Interpretation Centres

Outdoors – Rural and Urban

Volunteer and Community Projects

Events and Activities

The AHI Award for Excellence in Interpretation

Acknowledgements



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# Foreword

## Welcome to the *Interpretation Journal* special issue about the AHI 2019 Discover Heritage Awards for excellence in cultural and natural heritage in the UK and Ireland, sponsored by NovaDura.

I've taken over the editing of the *Journal* for this one issue, in the interregnum between the editorships of Eric Langham, and Nicky Temple and Nicolette Evans.

In this issue we focus on the projects, exhibitions and events entered into the awards which have demonstrated their success at planning and delivering engaging, thought-provoking and successful interpretation. We feature the winners, as announced by AHI Patron Loyd Grossman at the gala ceremony on 10th October. We also look at the runners-up, finalists and those entries that were not shortlisted but received an Awards Judging Panel Special Recognition for an aspect of their project.

AHI again received a high number of entries in 2019. One feature of this year was the number, quality and range of entries from museums, with a significant percentage from smaller, independent museums. Such was the quality of entries that a record six projects are shortlisted in this category alone. We also received a good range of volunteer-led and community projects, and the shortlist represents the breadth and scale of types

of projects volunteers lead or form the heart of – from small local projects to large-scale museum redevelopments and reconstructions. A number of national agencies also submitted entries, with English Heritage, Historic Environment Scotland and National Museum Wales all entering high quality projects.

There are a number of people to thank for making the AHI 2019 Discover Heritage Awards happen.

Without our sponsors we would be unable to fund the awards. We are grateful to NovaDura for their support as the 2019 official sponsor, and our five category sponsors – Bright, HDC International, Minerva Heritage, Studio LR and The Way Design.

A lot of individuals volunteer their time, experience and expertise in assessing, shortlisting and judging the entries. The judging panel has a lot of entry forms, supporting documents, images, videos and audio to check – and then have to make difficult decisions that honour every entrant. This year's panel was Ruth Coulthard (Wales), Jackie Lee (Scotland),

David Masters (England) and Andrew Todd (island of Ireland).

There are also many site judges, drawn from across the UK and Ireland, who anonymously visit the shortlisted entries in pairs. As part of this process AHI matches an experienced interpreter with someone at the early stages of their career. Thank you for your long journeys and sharing your experiences and insights with each other.

Finally, a massive thank you must go to Jo Scott who manages the site-judging process, juggling distances, experiences and conflicts of interest to ensure we have neutral mentor and mentee pairs assessing every shortlisted entry. Jo is also instrumental in training judges, during which we had the expert help of Maureen Le Frenais.

**Bill Bevan**

Journal Editor and Awards Chair



### Website Members' Section

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

AHI members can access the new online system (if you haven't done so already) by going to the website (<https://ahi.org.uk>) and selecting the 'Login' button on the home page. If you haven't already set your own individual password, select the 'Lost your password' option. Enter your registered e-mail address – the one that AHI currently uses to communicate with you – and select 'Get New Password'. Check your

e-mail for a confirmation link noting that it has probably gone into your Junk folder and follow the instructions.

Congratulations, you are now logged into the new AHI website and can access member only, pages. Why not check out your personalised Membership Dashboard by selecting the 'Member' tab.

For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation [AHI], send an email to [admin@ahi.org.uk](mailto:admin@ahi.org.uk) or write to the Administrator, AHI, 25 Recreation Way, Kemsley, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2RD. Tel: +44 (0)1795 436560. Individuals can join AHI as Associate or Student Members or can apply to be elected, subject to qualifications and experience, as Full Members or Fellows. Businesses can join as Corporate Members with the same rights as individual members. All members receive *Interpretation Journal*, and other mailings. They can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can vote at the Annual General Meeting. Printed in UK © AHI 2019.

# News & Views

Welcome to the Winter 2019 issue of Interpretation Journal.

## Full membership and fellowship

Since we reviewed the appraisal process for Full Membership a couple of years ago we have had a big increase in the numbers applying and achieving Full Membership of AHI. We encourage all associate members, corporate members and student members to check out the form available on our website. The process is based around three areas of competency-planning, delivery and evaluation of interpretation. We want it to be a vital and relatively early step in the career of an interpreter, so that Full membership continues to be both a badge of achievement and proficiency but also a recognition to employers, clients and the wider sector of good practice in interpretation. If you would like to talk to either myself or fellow trustee Philip Ryland about the process, please make contact via the office and we would be delighted to speak with you.

## A global alliance

AHI is now part of a global family of interpretation organisations. The Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation (GAHI) was born from a desire to better collaborate between Interpretation organisations worldwide, to achieve the objectives of **acting as advocate** for the profession, **raising awareness** of interpretation, and **supporting** heritage interpretation associations or representative individuals (i.e. those without a national membership organisation). There is a new website [www.gahi.online/](http://www.gahi.online/). We are discussing how we can now work together, and a first project is looking to collectively have a presence at the World Conservation Congress in Marseille in June 2020. Watch this space.

## Journal editor changes

This year we have seen two longstanding editors of the journal step down. I would like to offer our huge thanks to Elizabeth Newbery and Eric Langham and who have been so instrumental in ensuring that we have a strong and engaging journal as a voice for our profession. Elizabeth has been our Production Editor, editing countless high-quality editions of the journal for many years. Eric has been Commissioning Editor for four years and has done a great job provoking conversation and thought about interpretation. I wish them all the best in their next endeavours.

In our next edition we will be welcoming new editors Nicky Temple and Nicolette Evans, who will be taking over at the helm at a very exciting time for our profession. The AHI trustees look forward to working with them to help continue the success of the journal.

## Bedford and the 2019 AHI Discover Heritage Awards

I've just returned from our annual conference, which was an inspirational two days entitled 'Facts, fiction and interpretation'. There we discovered that on huge issues, such as conflict, climate change, identity, colonial history and the provenance of objects in the museum, the interpreter can help light the way on how to convey difficult subjects. We explored many aspects of truth from fictional screen narratives, through art, culture wars, memorial parks, dark tourism, historic interiors and the history of the role of women in medicine. The sheer variety of the conference was testament to the range of situations that interpretation is brought to bear,

and gives me great encouragement that the profession is, far from diminishing in relevance, becoming ever more important across the full heritage sector.

We were also challenged to think about not just what interpretation can do for you but what you can do for interpretation. There was a call to create a code of ethics for our profession. This was a hot topic through the conference, and I would like to propose that we continue this conversation over the coming year to articulate and agree our shared values by the time of next year's conference, and create a meaningful code that can help guide what we do.

We also developed the idea of an 'advocacy group' – a group of members who can work together to help bat for the profession across the whole sector and beyond. Look out soon for how to get involved in both of these new initiatives.

A real high point was the 2019 Discover Heritage Awards evening. It was fantastic to congratulate all those shortlisted, the finalists, special recognition recipients and of course to all the winners. Our patron Loyd Grossman spoke passionately about how interpretation is needed more than ever out there – as from interpretation, to understanding, and from there to love and protection of heritage.

Well done and thank you to the conference and awards team for putting together such a great event for us.

**Jim Mitchell**  
Chair, AHI

## Debate

# Excellence in interpretation – some reflections

Over the years Susan Cross has seen hundreds of interpretation projects in the making and has been privileged to work closely with many of them as a mentor, trainer and consultant. Almost all of them begin with an aspiration of excellence. But she says only a few of them make that grade.

These stand-out, excellent interpretive endeavours are varied – I am thinking as I write of an exhibition at the Tate Modern, three vastly different visitor centres, guided walks in Sweden and Poland and numerous family activities in art galleries, museums and nature reserves. They do not all have a unique heritage resource or even an incredible story, although some do. As we all know, exceptional heritage does not inevitably lead to great interpretation. In fact, it can create another set of challenges that maybe makes excellence even harder to attain.

Excellent projects have some things in common. Some are self-evident; the public face of excellent projects share my criteria of excellence set out below. But a large part of any successful project is behind the scenes and there are important similarities there too.

My criteria of excellence include that the interpretation works extremely well for the people it was designed for. So, whether it is a new exhibition, a guided walk or a self-guided trail, visitors clearly enjoy it, they spend time on it, they think about it and talk about it. Excellent projects also tend to look good, they exude qualities of care for visitors and their experience,



*The Moose Safari run by Wild Sweden, possibly the best interpreted guided walk I have ever been on.*

regard for the heritage resource and its preservation and respect for the organisation behind it.

These criteria also apply to strategies; these have to work for the intended audience, to engage with and win support from the key players, provoke and utilise new thinking and highlight the value and potential of the heritage. The road to fulfilling the aspiration of excellence in interpretation begins here, with people sharpening their vision and thinking long and hard about how they can work together to achieve it. Doing this well is the bedrock of excellence. It is essential and it is where stand-out projects are created.

*The road to fulfilling the aspiration of excellence in interpretation begins here, with people sharpening their vision and thinking long and hard about how they can work together to achieve it.*

I believe the following are characteristics of truly great interpretation projects:

### **A great team**

It is vanishingly rare for successful interpretation to be the work of one person. Collaboration brings a vital range of perspectives. You can guarantee that your visitors will always have even more ways of looking at your interpretation than you have. Your team members must bring a range of skills but equally they need commitment, energy and vision. A great team makes almost anything possible.

### **Skills and knowledge**

That great team needs skills and knowledge. You need people who know your visitors, people who know your site, subject experts, front-of-house staff, 3D designers, 2D designers, landscape designers, digital stars, writers and marketing experts. Locating high-quality skills and knowledge is a crucial first step on the road to excellence – you need a professional superhero for each of those areas.

### **In-depth understanding of the end-users**

In that super team, it is maybe not surprising that I am going to single out the expert on visitors for special mention: the one who knows who their visitors are, why they visit, what they love and what they don't, when they visit, how long they spend with you and what they do.



AHI Award winner in 2017, the Seamus Heaney HomePlace feels that it was built from love, but there is enormous skill here too.

This is the person who is forever watching visitors, talking to them and collecting data on them. In practice this may be more than one person; the interpreters, front-of-house staff and marketing folk all contribute to this. Their job is to keep the focus of the team on the visitors. Without these experts having the ear of the team, the interpretation might look glorious, contain all the right information and still fail. All the great projects that I have seen, big and small, are run by people who understand and value their visitors – that's not a coincidence.

## Learning

The people who work on the best projects never seem to rest on their laurels. They do not think they are excellent. Their work is not done. They are always looking ahead to how the next project will be better than the last. They collect data on what is working and what is not and they use those insights to improve. They are hungry to learn, so they network, looking around at what other people are doing. They stay on top of relevant research and

industrial insights. They are creative and experimental and so learn from, and build excellence on, what others might see as past failures.

## An agreed common goal

Clarity is vital. The team needs a vision, a goal, and clear path to achieve it. All this needs to be agreed at the outset and restated regularly. It must be the measure against which the work is tested.

Everyone must understand the vision and the goals, believe in them and be able to communicate them. They must be worthwhile so the team members are inspired to do their best work. Excellence can be short-lived and many projects have floundered or been derailed when a key person left the team.

## Resources

Time and money are vital and both too often in short supply. Under-funding and unrealistic timescales are enemies of excellence. Fight them.

## Conclusion

The road to excellence in interpretation is long and hard. Most project teams stumble at some stage; they may reroute, abandon some of their early goals or take shortcuts. They will get over the line, even if it's not the line they first thought of, with outcomes that are good, but not excellent. This is where most of us, me included, are most of the time and that's okay, good is good. Maybe the main benefit of striving for excellence is to turn that good into better and better over time. That may, eventually, enable us to produce excellent work – but remember, if and when we are really excellent, we will probably not recognise it.

**Susan Cross FAHI, TellTale**

## Reviews

# Review of the AHI Conference 2019

Pamela Pearson

**This is my second AHI conference, my previous was Belfast where I met Sam Ham. It was wonderful, could this conference live up to my very high expectations?**



Bill Bevan



Bill Bevan



Bill Bevan

I dived into the key notes with an open mindedness that can only come when surrounded by peers who approach everything with curiosity, and a genuine desire to engage at a meaningful level.

It was just as well! It was challenging. What is truth? Can there only ever be situated knowledge? Can there really still be people who deny the Holocaust? What responsibility do I have... me... for revealing truth and creating opportunities for people to think critically about what they're engaging in?

Conversation flowed all through the conference: a great melting pot of people at different stages of their career, all willing to share. Particularly Bletchley Park who shared so much. Their site visit was revealing in many ways. We all talked excitedly about whether or not we should be able to understand how a Bombe worked from visiting their exhibition – deciding that the truth they revealed was that the work at Bletchley Park had been complex and was difficult to easily grasp.

The most innovative part of the conference was the Open Space session, where we all got to discuss our burning questions. Friday morning's sessions were outward looking, there was plenty of networking time, and a good pace.

My three takeaways were:

- Our words are important. They can have great impact, and be remembered for years.
- Truth is subjective and what we should aim to do is engage audiences in a way which allows them to think critically.
- Interpretation matters, and is most effective when organisational structures are in place that allow everything to be about interpretation. Even the bins!

**Pamela Pearson, Interpretation and Engagement Manager, Chatsworth House Trust**

# Facts, Fiction and Interpretation, a review

**Sue Latimer**

**FACTS: The 2019 Association for Heritage Interpretation conference took place at the Mercure Bedford Centre hotel from Wednesday 9 to Friday 11 October. The hotel is next to the Great River Ouse, where swans gather and rowers row.**

What follows is pure interpretation – my truth.

This year's conference theme was Facts, Fiction and Interpretation – and truth, secrets and myths were words scattered through it. Several speakers even struck at the heart of interpretation and questioned the truth of Tilden's principles. David Uzzell's keynote challenged the reality of revealing truth through interpretation. He demonstrated the many different individual truths that exist for any event, taking examples from the trickiest of

subjects – slavery, war and genocide. He concluded that an interpreter's job is to raise questions about facts – and tell the truth about truth.

Bob Jones also took issue with Tilden in an eminently provocative talk that questioned the interpretive mantra of Provoke-Relate-Reveal. In the process he demonstrated the dangers of selective use of facts, by relating Tilden's words to a range of alternative definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary. He also revealed that everyone from the Probation

Service to Good Morning USA is a sucker for a three-word mantra, and proposed a new one for interpretation – Engage-Explore-Enhance – along with a need for a code of ethics for our profession.

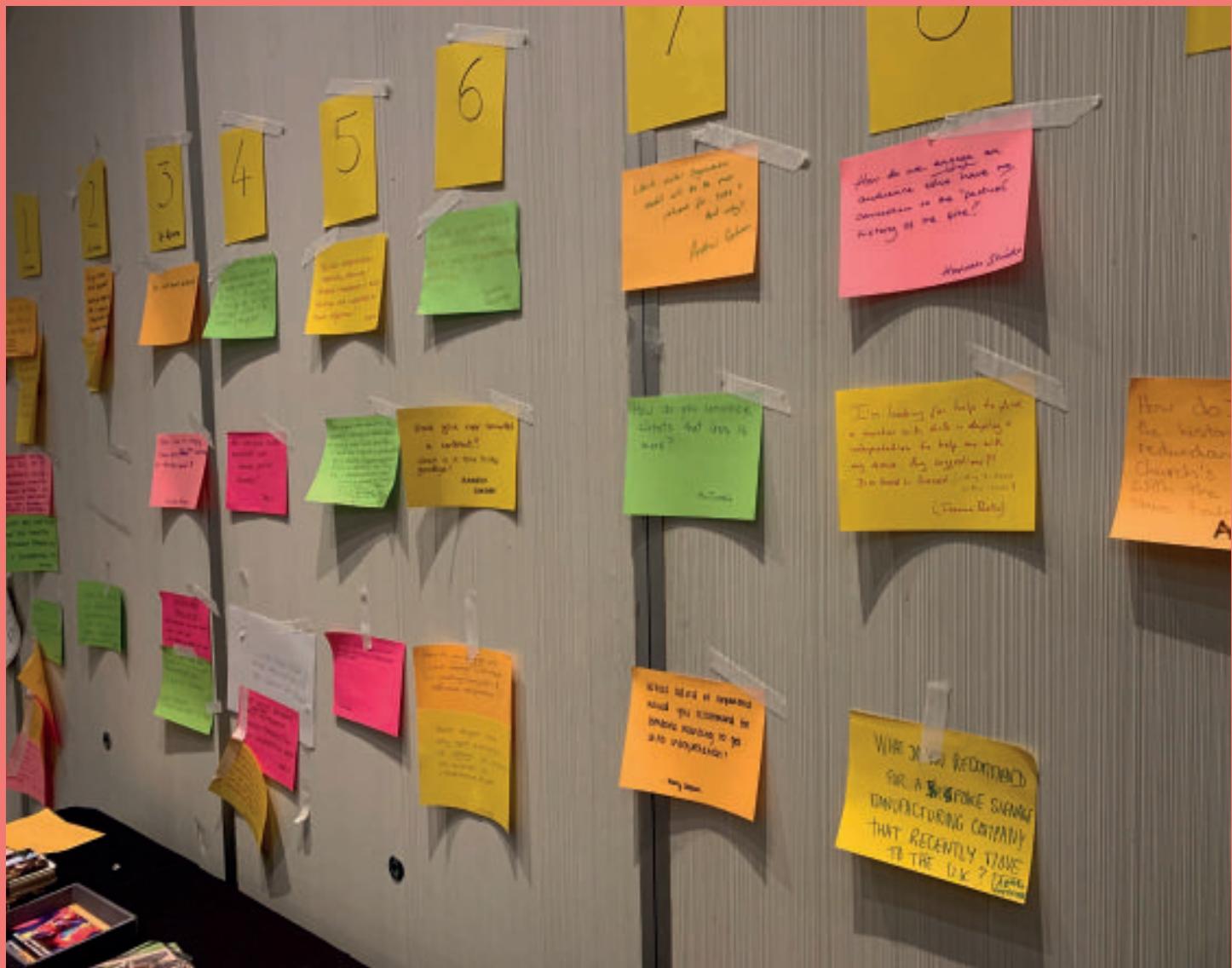
I didn't agree with all that Bob said, but was glad to have had the opportunity to hear him. Unlike Friday morning, which was given over to the dreaded parallel sessions. I went to four excellent talks – and missed four others. The ones I attended were undoubtedly thought-provoking but maybe failed to provoke me sufficiently. They didn't challenge my own underlying interpretive principles, which may be why I was drawn to them, but I might have discovered new truths elsewhere if I'd had the chance.

Thursday was the much anticipated visit to Bletchley Park where code-breaking secrets were revealed along with excellent interpretation. The focused and well-chosen stories and themes were delivered through a wide range of methods – one of the best guided tours I've ever heard, imaginatively reconstructed rooms, sophisticated but straightforward table-top interactives, an engrossing film about Bletchley's contribution to D-Day, and well-written and designed traditional displays. Everything I came across was beautifully and clearly presented, striking the right tone whether sombre or witty. Where I was still struggling to get my head round code-breaking or



India Rabey

# Reviews



India Rabey

computer technology, it definitely felt like my failing, not any fault with the interpretation.

In a packed conference, there wasn't a false note. Plenty of time for conversations with old and new colleagues – though still not time enough to speak to everyone. A canter through this year's Discover Heritage Awards at Thursday's dinner revealed new places to visit, with the overall winner, Dunfermline Museum, top of my list. And India Rabey's introduction of an Open Space workshop for shared problem-solving was an inspired addition to the conference that I hope will be repeated next year.

If we do need a new three-word mantra as interpreters, we could do worse than the one used for Bletchley Park's D-Day display: Interception-Intelligence-Invasion. Intercept people with an accessible hook, use the intelligence gathered about our audiences to play to visitors' own intelligence, and invade their minds with well-interpreted ideas and information. Be honest – isn't that what we do?

**Sue Latimer** is a freelance museum, gallery and heritage interpreter. Her previous projects include Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum & Art Gallery, the Battle of Preston 1715, and Discover Preston at the Harris Museum



India Rabey



Sponsored by Minerva Heritage

# MUSEUMS AND HISTORIC PROPERTIES/SITES

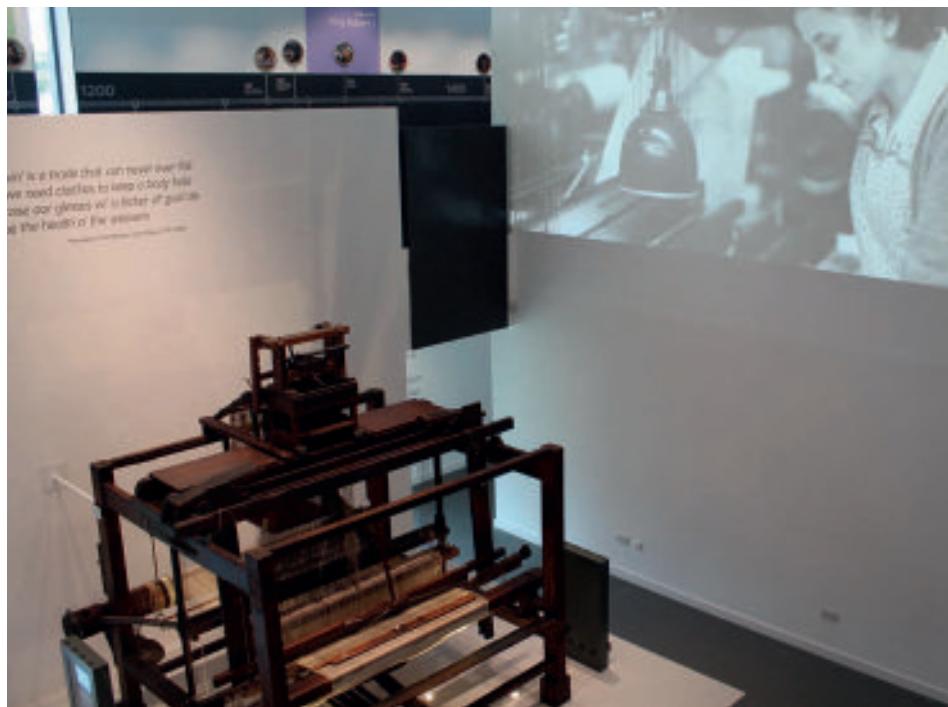
This is a project that is based upon a collection, building or property. A museum is defined as a collection-based organisation rather than the display of objects at a visitor centre. Museum-led projects that take parts of their collection off-site to places that are not visitor centres are eligible.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

Winner – Museum

## DUNFERMLINE MUSEUM FIFE CULTURAL TRUST

### What the entrant said:

Dunfermline Museum's new permanent displays are one element of the capital project to extend the world's first Carnegie-sponsored public library to house an integrated museum and library with changing exhibition galleries, local history and archives services.



This is a true community museum – one made by and for the people of Dunfermline, with objects partly selected or loaned by local residents. Consultation shaped the museum from the start. The public voted to choose the final themes, ensuring they have broad appeal to visitors and local residents alike. Evidence of community participation could be seen throughout the displays, from oral histories to research projects through loans or gifts of objects. The voices, perspectives and experiences of Dunfermline locals headline the displays. Extensive use of oral history and documentary film from the 20th and 21st centuries reinforce the connection of Dunfermline people to the displays and make the interpretation very contemporary and relevant to today's visitors, especially local residents. Stories are told more through their words than





through a 'museum' narrative voice. It is also laudable that the museum sets out to complement, not duplicate, interpretation elsewhere in the town through consultation with other heritage bodies in the Heritage Quarter.

The six key themes (Meet the Kings & Queens, Dunfermline Homes, Industry, Music & Leisure, Transport, 20th Century War) are easily identifiable to visitors as they make their way through the museum. The visitor journey is a delight, with surprising vistas, unexpected media and varied approaches to displaying objects practically around every corner. The use of humour throughout the exhibition is great fun. A wide range of media allow visitors with different physical or intellectual challenges to access the interpretation through sight, sound and touch. The tone of voice used throughout the interpretation is casual, friendly and welcoming – almost 'neighbourly'.

The audio visual content throughout the exhibition is exemplary. The integration of AV with other components, such as sets and object displays, works especially well. The low-tech and digital interactives nicely complement and support the main interpretive stories, are easy to use and suitable for all ages from young children to adults.

The design of this building has rightly won its own awards, but we were especially impressed by its use as an interpretive tool. Being inside the museum doesn't close the visitor away in a space apart from Dunfermline's Heritage Quarter. Instead, the dramatic views from the Museum exhibitions out to the surrounding townscape further strengthen and provide context to the stories told within. In this sense, the museum also functions as an interpretive centre.

Views within and through the exhibition areas also impress. The use of mezzanine levels for two of the thematic areas means that there were constantly changing views of other exhibition areas, allowing visitors to glimpse yet unvisited exhibits, view objects from different heights and see exhibits already visited from new angles.

One of the stated project objectives was to provoke an emotional response – pride, inspiration, amazement, questioning and reflection. While each visitor will react differently, we feel that the museum delivers on this aspiration.

---

**Fife Cultural Trust**  
1-7 Abbot Street, Dunfermline, Scotland  
KY12 7NL

*The dramatic views from the museum out to the surrounding townscape further strengthen and provide context to the stories told within.*

Winner – Historic Property

## PROJECT PILGRIM VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND INTERPRETATION GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL



### What the entrant said:

*A holistic interpretation scheme, inside and in the grounds of Gloucester Cathedral as part of a larger conservation and regeneration project. This exciting, entertaining and layered scheme brings to life our faith, history and traditions for all visitors, adding to the experience and meaning of a visit.*



Right from the start, the site judges enjoyed their visit immensely. The tone and quality of the interpretation was set by the items and design of the Cathedral Green outside. The blocks of stone with snippets of interpretation and messages sandblasted into them, in addition to the low wall which runs around the planted borders, were superlative and conveyed the themes succinctly. The design of the Green is such that one is enticed to enter the Cathedral passing a series of colourful and welcoming panels in the porch. Having got an idea of the Cathedral and what it has to offer via the large interactive table near the entrance, the judges downloaded the app easily and began their experience of the Cathedral itself.

The interpretation throughout is of high quality and well paced, with panels or touchscreens at appropriate points near features of interest. None of the interpretation is too detailed and there is a layered approach, enabling visitors to pick up messages at a glance or delve further by reading on, pressing a touchscreen or using the app. Certain aspects or stories are conveyed several times in slightly different ways, all of which built up into a whole in order to reinforce the themes of the Building, the People and the Place. Animations and virtual tours are particularly effective in bringing the Cathedral alive with regards to the building process and for the benefit of those with physical challenges.

*Questions are posed throughout for visitors to ponder and think, reinforcing the message that the building is a religious one in addition to providing a stimulating experience.*



Interpretation is very visitor focused and includes a human dimension, utilising a range of media – panels, sandblasted stone, interactive activities, ceiling projection, tours, touchscreen animations and the phone app. As a result the current core audiences are very well catered for and there seems to be something to suit most tastes.

The interactive activities, backlit panels and projections in the Tribune Gallery are highly effective and engage with adults in addition to the anticipated children – ABC1 families are part of the core audience. The space is used creatively and effectively, and the look and feel of all items suits the space well. Throughout the Cathedral the interpretation strikes the right balance between grabbing attention without being too intrusive, and includes elements which can be easily removed if needed.

Questions are posed throughout for visitors to ponder and think, reinforcing the message that the building is a religious one in addition to providing a stimulating experience. It is also made clear that there are some questions we don't have answers to, which again is good interpretation practice and thought-provoking.

The extensive formative evaluation greatly influenced the approach taken and content of the interpretation. All text is very well written and appropriate to the audience. We are also glad to see that the Cathedral are in the process of responding to the results of summative evaluation.

.....  
**Gloucester Cathedral**  
**College Green, Gloucester GL1 2LX**

Runner-up

## CREU HANES – MAKING HISTORY ST FAGANS NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY



Participation is at the heart of Creu Hanes, delivered in a slightly different way in each gallery. The 'post it' note debates in the 'Wales is...' gallery are very popular, the retro board games and piano in the 'Life is...' gallery add a sense of fun and the giant basket-making in the Gweithdy (workshop) gallery attracts all ages.

The Gweithdy gallery is perhaps the most accessible interpretation we have experienced, with step-by-step simple illustrations and plain-English copy: 'Clay is found underground', 'It is soft and easy to shape', 'To make it hard we bake it'.

Many of the exhibits on display were produced during workshops, or feature 'real' people telling their stories. Controversial storylines are presented without any assumed prior knowledge of the subject matter. There is a hierarchy of provision throughout, from catchy titles to flippy books for those who want to delve deeper, with linkages between the different media.



The project received a Judging Panel Special Mention for the extent of public consultation and the quality of the interpretive exhibits.

**St Fagans National Museum of History  
St Fagans, Cardiff CF5 6XB**

*Co-creation has put people at the heart of this project.*

Runner-up

## MUSEUM EXPLORAR EXPERIENCE AMGUEDDFA CYMRU NATIONAL MUSEUM WALES

A handset hired from the museum shop delivers the AR experience. Its interface is clearly designed, intuitive to use and has a map to lead you to your choice of three AR zones: evolution of Wales, marine and the French Impressionist gallery. The AR explorer also offers suggested routes through the museum with the aid of virtual arrows, exhibit labels and interpretation panels featuring videos.

Pop-up banners indicate where the AR zones start. The technology delivers a seamless and completely immersive experience. The interface between the real and virtual world was mesmerising and fun, especially when non-AR-using visitors were completely unaware they had a great white shark skimming their heads!

The Evolution of Wales and marine galleries offered the most immersive experiences, while the French Impressionist gallery delivered its desired messages and provoked thought. As a pilot project, it is very successful and shows how this technology has great interpretive potential when married with a clear narrative.

.....  
**Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales  
National Museum Cardiff, Cathays Park,  
Cardiff CF10 3NP**

*We watched in awe as flat fossils came to life, dinosaur skeletons became fully fleshed moving animals, and we ducked to make way for a group of swimming stingray.*





Runner-up

## SHIRE HALL HISTORIC COURTHOUSE MUSEUM



Shire Hall is a fascinating building with equally fascinating stories to tell about people from all sections of society and about society itself.

There is a sense of stepping back in time in the entrance hall, but it is really once visitors reach the cells that they find themselves immersed in the building. The courtroom space is popular, where visitors can sit and feel part of the courtroom drama with props (hats and clothing) suitable for all age groups and abilities. This definitely feels like the final part of the visit where the full case and ruling on the defendant (of your choice) is now to

be revealed. All the defendants' stories are really interesting, in particular the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

The interpretation offers a clear story about the Shire Hall and 'justice in the balance', allowing visitors to compare and reflect upon similar issues raised today. The chosen media engage visitors with particular physical, sensory and intellectual needs.

**Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum**  
High West Street, Dorchester, Dorset  
DT1 1UY



*Here, in these cramped spaces with low light levels and a damp smell, is where the first real connection to people and the enormity of the justice system is revealed.*

Runner-up

## WHITBY ABBEY SITE IMPROVEMENT AND REINTERPRETATION ENGLISH HERITAGE



Whitby Abbey is an excellent example of integrated museum and historic property interpretation. Visitors can approach these two parts from either side which produces a sense of exploration in the visit and brings the site to life anew.

Church and national, literary and local history are communicated through the stories of a few characters and the objects they and those like them left behind. This encourages thought, provokes imagination and creates connection to people who lived, worked, worshipped and were inspired here. The 'Ammonite Quest' provides an exciting experience of using a beacon to 'discover' find spots of archaeological objects displayed in the gallery.

Well-written texts are complemented by visuals, including digital 3D reconstructions of the Abbey's changing form, a beautiful animated film highlighting its evocative influence on artists and authors, and a series of striking illustrations – printed 10 feet high on the walls – of characters significant to the Abbey's history.

English Heritage  
Whitby Abbey, Abbey Lane, Whitby  
North Yorkshire YO22 4JT

*The reinterpretation project transforms a striking visual ruin into fantastic and engaging interpretation.*



Special Recognition

## MULTIMEDIA GUIDE FOR CHATSWORTH, CHATSWORTH HOUSE



The multimedia guide is a new, fresh and more engaging guide for Chatsworth. Built around the stories and voices of the Chatsworth 'family' the guide interprets the house, family and collection. It also contains an exhibition tour, a family tour and is translated into French, German, Spanish, Mandarin and British Sign Language.

This is a well-conceived and thoughtful way to add a new layer of interpretation to a much-loved site. Having testing phases built into the approach is very positive, as is the holistic approach to the overall offering and how this new addition would fit. The planning process showed sensitivity to existing guides and included the secondary audience as one that the delivery mechanism could appeal to. It is

great to see a site such as this being willing to adopt a proactive role in testing and implementing a new delivery mechanism and also being truly reflective practitioners.

.....  
**Chatsworth House**  
 Bakewell, Derbyshire DE45 1PP

# VISITOR/INTERPRETATION CENTRES

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

Winner

## INTERNATIONAL BOMBER COMMAND CENTRE LINCOLNSHIRE BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL TRUST



### What the entrant said:

*This multifaceted project brings to life the story of RAF Bomber Command and the bombing war in Europe, 1939–1945. It covers a memorial, peace gardens and a visitor centre housing three exhibition galleries, and an extensive online digital archive. The project has partnerships and connections with institutions, organisations and communities globally.*

International Bomber Command Centre is very well planned with a clear narrative and the use of 'an orchestra of voices' to tell the interwoven story of 'The remembrance and recognition of the human cost of Bomber Command's War'. This is difficult heritage and the site has worked hard to interpret this theme in an engaging and thought-provoking manner – just what great interpretation should do.

There are three very clear aims of the project: the 'Three Rs' of Remembrance, Recognition and Reconciliation – these can be seen as the themes running through the whole site. Extensive research was undertaken to identify the core audiences of: those who served, young





visitors, aviation enthusiasts, serving RAF personnel and regional residents.

The tour guide and exhibitions are excellent. There is a good mix of media to appeal to their wide audience, with a variety of ways to engage – not just lots of text. Examples include the use of appropriate old telephones to listen to personal stories, use of gamification to give a small sense of what it would be like to take part in a mission, and an immersive large screen with effective lighting that drew people in and held their attention. A timeline of a day in the life of someone in Bomber Command gave a structured route to those who wanted it and provided a chronological narrative.

It was good to see the huge amount of work done to make the site accessible: from obvious adaptations such as accessible parking, to the use of subtitles on films, contrasting tableware in the café and training for staff in dementia and autism awareness.

*This is difficult heritage and the site has worked hard to interpret this theme in an engaging and thought-provoking manner – just what great interpretation should do.*

There was a high level of evaluation at different stages of the project. Formative evaluation included a mock-up of the exhibition and asking volunteers, stakeholders and students for their feedback. They also worked with master's students from the University of Lincoln to conduct summative evaluation which included conducting observations of visitors around the site.

It is important to acknowledge the involvement of over 500 volunteers in the project, from research and archive management to tour guides and support at public events.

The project team were told by the Imperial War Museum that they 'have a brave story to tell, just make sure you stick to it'. We believe that they have and doing created a wonderful site which remembers, recognises and reconciles using the stories of the men, women and children whose lives were impacted by Bomber Command during World War Two.

.....  
**Lincolnshire Bomber Command Memorial Trust**  
**Canwick Avenue, Lincoln LN4 2HQ**

Runner-up

## THE ENGINE SHED – SCOTLAND'S BUILDING CONSERVATION CENTRE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND



Visiting the Engine Shed is a fun experience. Housed in a former railway building, its materials and conservation form part of the interpretation. The main exhibition design retains the open-plan nature of this industrial building and is sympathetic to the dominant aesthetic, working with, not obstructing an appreciation of the space.

Visitors can quickly grasp the exhibition structure, with bold titles of building materials identifying the perimeter exhibits. Interpretation can be accessed in any order and the central AR map, an innovative approach to layering information in an engaging way, approached from all sides.

The permanent exhibits brilliantly succeed in interpreting traditional materials. Poetry on the panels, tactile elements, interactives and object displays all work well together.

The Engine Shed achieves great results for its target audiences in the professional and heritage sectors, tertiary education and skills training. The activity programme brings some of this hands-on and facilitated engagement to family and general audiences.

**The Engine Shed**  
Forthside Way, Stirling FK8 1QZ





Sponsored by The Way Design

## OUTDOORS – RURAL AND URBAN

This award is for permanent or semi-permanent interpretation of cultural heritage, wildlife or the environment anywhere outdoors, from a small garden to a landscape, a street to a city centre.

### Finalist

#### CONISTON COPPER LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY



The interpretation across a wide area in the valley and in the village brings the industrial past of the landscape powerfully to life.

Panels with historic photographs and excellent reconstructions alongside well-written text are perfectly but unobtrusively placed to make sense of the features. In the quiet landscape of today, the noise of past industrial activity is conjured up – ‘waterwheels creaked, ore wagons clanked along the rail track and gunpowder blasts shook the earth’.

Interpretive themes cover the questions visitors will ask – geology, industrial processes, the workers and the wider story of copper – and have been carefully plotted across the site to link to the landscape.

The self-guided trails are graded, with impressively detailed information for disabled ramblers, and offer a tour of the village discovering the miners’ lives as well as exploration of the fells and the ruinous industrial structures. The family-friendly ‘spotter’s guide’ and I-spy activity provide a focus for groups with children.

**Lake District National Park Authority  
Coniston Copper Mines, Coniston, Cumbria  
LA21 8HP**

*‘BOOM’ certainly makes you want to read Simon’s story, told in just 31 words.*

Finalist

## REDISCOVERING WALMER PLEASURE GROUNDS ENGLISH HERITAGE



Visitors to the gardens at Walmer are treated to a wealth of beautiful, well-kept and wild spaces to explore, each with its own unique character and feel. The interpretation aims to educate visitors about current planting, garden history and the wider landscape, and to link the castle and gardens more closely. Interpretation for children focuses on observing nature.

The overarching theme is one of rediscovery. Paths and seating options abound across the site. Tactile and sculptural elements provide engagement for people with visual impairment. Graphics, text, tactile, digital and exploratory elements provide a multisensory approach that complements a wide range of learning and engagement styles.

The multimedia guide was a highlight. It provides high-quality content about the gardens and includes an innovative 'coin scratch' image to reveal the present gardens behind an old photograph. English Heritage should be highly praised for making all areas of the garden both physically and intellectually accessible.

English Heritage  
Walmer Castle, Kingsdown Road, Walmer  
Deal CT14 7LJ



*The different garden spaces draw visitors through and encourage a self-led journey with a level of exploration.*

Special Recognition

## ECHOSCAPE: SOUNDS AND MEMORIES OF MAIDEN CASTLE

### ENGLISH HERITAGE



Echoscape is an immersive audio experience that connects time, place and imagination. Maiden Castle has been a focus of imagination for countless people over its history. By exploring different stories through time within this ancient landscape, Echoscape asks visitors to consider our own place within Maiden Castle's ongoing history.

This was an experiment by English Heritage to address ways of interpreting sensitive, scheduled, unstaffed properties in a non-obtrusive way. Echoscape integrates online and high-quality audio content. That a national agency is willing to take on such a high-risk test project is to be lauded.

---

**English Heritage**  
Maiden Castle, Winterborne Monkton,  
Dorchester, Dorset DT2 9EY



Sponsored by Bright

## VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS

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

Winner

### NEOLITHIC LONGHOUSE LA HOUQUE BIE MUSEUM



#### What the entrant said:

*Building a full-size, replica Neolithic longhouse at La Hougue Bie, involving a team of specially recruited volunteers, using authentic tools and techniques, in order to provide a unique educational and interpretation resource – with volunteers at the heart of its delivery.*

Volunteer participation is at the heart of this fantastic interpretive project at the newly built Neolithic longhouse at La Hougue Bie Museum.

Without thousands of hours of hard work and commitment by a dedicated team of volunteers, the project would not have been possible. The result of two years and 9,000+ hours of work is a unique, awe-inspiring, immersive and multi sensory experience that takes visitors on a journey back to Neolithic Jersey.

The project had a clearly defined set of aims, with volunteer engagement and experimental archaeology at its heart. These were thoroughly and effectively delivered. Guided by Luke Winters, a specialist from the Ancient Technology





Centre, the volunteers were trained in ancient woodworking techniques to create a historically accurate Neolithic building. Colourful, informative interpretive panels on site, and Luke Winters' project blog provided dynamic interpretation throughout the build phase of the project, keeping visitors to the site and people globally informed and engaged with the work. Luke's blog was also an effective method of ongoing evaluation, as well as offering a useful case study for other institutions or groups considering similar community-driven or experimental projects.

Today, visitors can learn and enjoy in an authentic, historically accurate Neolithic setting. The space is designed to speak for itself, motivating self-led exploration and discovery. It very much achieves this. A range of tools and equipment litter the house interior, giving the impression that its original occupants stepped outside

just moments before the visitor enters. This is powerfully emotive. Visitors can wander at leisure, looking, touching and gaining insight into the sights, sounds and smells of Neolithic life. This sensory experience promotes reflection, question and thought. Additional layers of interpretation in the form of written and graphic panels, a documentary film, volunteer-led tours and talks and living history demonstrations have also been used to excellent effect to complete the picture. Together, these elements offer a variety of engagement methods for people with a range of different learning styles.

Physical, as well as intellectual access, has been thoughtfully catered for. The volunteer project was in itself extremely inclusive, making a unique learning and community experience accessible to a broad range of people, irrelevant of their sex, age or physical capability. The tiered system of volunteer roles

allowed everyone from pensioners to school children to contribute in some way. Equally, the flat approach path to the longhouse and layout within can be accessed by people with mobility issues, and the tactile nature of the space allows for engagement with people with visual impairments.

Placement of the longhouse at the archaeological 'theme park' of La Hougue Bie is wholly fitting. The structure juxtaposes with the sites' Neolithic passage grave to provide a rich lived experience that contrasts with the stories of death, memorial and ritual that have been told to date, and offers core audiences identified as school children, tourists and locals a chronological journey through Jersey's history.

That the volunteers who built the longhouse now act as guides, passing on their unique understanding and skills to visitors, is a crucial legacy of this project. It ensures a personal level of engagement and allows for a sharing of genuine knowledge learnt through experience. This legacy clearly highlights the success of this inspiring project in engaging and working with people from Jersey to achieve shared investment in, and understanding and presentation of, their local heritage.

.....  
**Jersey Heritage**  
**La Hougue Bie Museum, La Route de La Hougue Bie, Grouville, Jersey JE3 9HQ**

*That the volunteers who built the longhouse now act as guides, passing on their unique understanding and skills to visitors, is a crucial legacy of this project.*



Runner-up

## FUTURE THINKING FOR LOCHBROOM'S PAST ULLAPOOL MUSEUM REDISPLAY



The community feel and involvement in the redisplay really shines through, and you can see community ownership of the project. A huge amount of volunteer hours have been donated, and current skills utilised while developing others.

The museum is a very welcoming space but doesn't overwhelm with too much content. A new dividing wall fulfills its function to increase the usable display area significantly very well, though taking away from the original charm of the space. Stand-off graphics give depth to some of the cleanly designed panels.

The use of audio is strong, with oral histories especially engaging and giving an authenticity to the exhibition. As a visitor walking around you get taken into these stories. The Gaelic polyphony on the church psalms adds a lot to the experience. If anything, it would have been nice to hear more of those voices, particularly in the gaps between the film presentations.

**Ullapool Museum**  
7 & 8 West Argyle Street, Ullapool  
Ross-shire, Scotland IV26 2TY

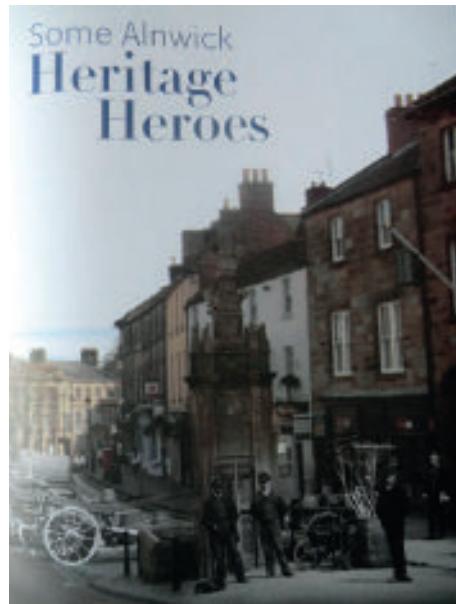


*This is an exceptional example of a community project that creates an enjoyable museum visit.*

Runner-up

## SOME ALNWICK HERITAGE HEROES

### ALNWICK CIVIC SOCIETY



Thorough planning meant clear themes and story plans were in place at the outset, carried through to the final publication and to outreach engagement around the book's release. Aims and objectives, broken down into people, community and heritage, were useful for both project development and delivery.

The well-illustrated publication works well for the target audience and has obviously been enjoyed by them, with some lovely feedback. The supporting outreach element has been immensely useful in meeting the aim to raise public awareness.

*Central to the project was capacity-building amongst people and communities who can influence the future of heritage conservation in the town.*

The project can develop in the future, by working with a wider range of audiences, including younger generations, and with schools in cross-generational activities that encourage exploration of their heritage and resources to use going forward. A less traditional design might also increase the range of people engaged; some visual elements (graphics, icons, infographics and illustrative text) could bring some of the larger sections of text to life.

.....

**Alnwick Civic Society**



Sponsored by Studio LR

**Spark something in Visitors**  
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## EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Entries for this award should highlight excellence in using creative approaches to enhance visitors' heritage experience through the use of time-limited events or activities.

Winner

### PERFORMANCE OF ROSELISKA AT PORTCHESTER CASTLE ENGLISH HERITAGE



#### What the entrant said:

*'Roseliska' is a three-act melodrama that was written and performed in 1810 by French prisoners of war held at Portchester Castle. English Heritage, in partnership with the University of Warwick, commissioned Past Pleasures to perform this historic play at Portchester once more, in a newly recreated, historically accurate, site-specific theatre.*

The performance of Roseliska at Portchester Castle is the culmination of academic research into French theatre of the early 19th century and a wider project to reinterpret the castle through the history of Napoleonic prisoners of war. The recreation of the theatre, using the recently revealed archive of papers by the prisoners, and the dramatising of an original script with newly commissioned music brought to life a little-known aspect of the castle's heritage.

The in-depth research into the history of the castle and the documentary evidence created a solid context for the overall project and demonstrated a valuable partnership between academia and the heritage sector.





The production of the play was highly professional and gave a real sense of the melodrama of the time and the curiously sociable relationship between the local community and the prisoners. The audience responded very positively to the performance, which was entertaining and thought-provoking, and cleverly incorporated an introduction to the history behind it.

Although the performance was the basis for the entry, there are a number of valuable legacy items remaining. The theatre itself remains as part of the visitor experience, and the recording of the performance is apparently used interpretively on-site. There is excellent online material revealing the background research through professionally designed and produced films, including the full-dress rehearsal performance.

**English Heritage**  
Portchester Castle, Church Road  
Portchester, Hampshire PO16 9QW

*The in-depth research demonstrated a valuable partnership between academia and the heritage sector.*

Runner-up

## SPOTLIGHT ON MARY HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND



The main aim of the project was to test the operational aspects of a large-scale evening event, combining lighting, projection and storytelling, at Historic Environment Scotland properties.

The recordings prove that it was an ambitious, engaging, dramatic and highly immersive experience, as some of the informal feedback testifies. Digital projections cleverly played with the idea of opening or removing the castle's walls to open up colourful and impressive interior scenes. The programme and script were well written, without assuming prior knowledge. Hour-long tours gave the audience a sense of the story, place and historical context.

Projection, sound and live actors effectively delivered the aim of creating an immersive story-led experience. Evaluation focused on informal audience feedback. We hope Historic Environment Scotland trial the approach again at another property with more in-depth evaluation, because the potential for engaging interpretation that redefines the visitor experience as part of a wider interpretation plan is great.



*We were impressed by the ambition of this event, with the large-scale projections and combined use of live actors in a historic setting.*

.....  
**Historic Environment Scotland**  
**Craigmillar Castle, Craigmillar Castle Road**  
**Edinburgh, Scotland EH16 4SY**

## Special Recognition

# HADRIAN'S CAVALRY, HADRIAN'S WALL TYNE & WEAR ARCHIVES & MUSEUMS



Hadrian's Cavalry was an ambitious 'dispersed' temporary exhibition set across 10 museums along Hadrian's Wall. Each museum explored an aspect of the Roman cavalry, a vital part of the Roman army. The exhibition included a comprehensive events programme including the first full Roman cavalry *turma* (30 riders) since Roman times.

This is one of the most ambitious projects we have seen and truly impressive to bring together so many stakeholders across such an area and actually deliver!

A standout moment must have been the Cavalry 360° installation along with the spectacle of the *turma*, which achieved high audience numbers. The ongoing research benefits of studies of specialist areas such as the saddles will continue to benefit the wider narrative for years to come. Congratulations to all involved in the delivery of a project of this scale and on the negotiations that must have been involved to bring together the loans – exemplary diplomacy and co-operation across the board.

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**Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums  
Hadrian's Wall**

Sponsored by Association for Heritage Interpretation



# THE AHI AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INTERPRETATION

The AHI Award for Excellence is chosen from the five category winners and represents the project that the judging panel felt achieved the highest quality in terms of interpretive planning, delivery, visitor experience and evaluation – as well something innovative that helps to move the profession forward.

Winner

## DUNFERMLINE MUSEUM FIFE CULTURAL TRUST



### What the entrant said:

*Our vision: to bring the past, present and future to life by showcasing Dunfermline's historic collections and superb built heritage. Everyone visiting the museum will leave wanting to come back again.*

As mentioned (p.10), this is a new museum, grounded in an ambitious vision and community involvement. Long-term and thorough interpretive planning set out clear interpretive aims and objectives, identified its target audiences, developed strong themes with topics to support these, and involved the public in developing and choosing the themes through a programme of consultation.

Members of the community were involved throughout, not only through formative consultation but also as project volunteers and trainees. There was a strong element of co-creation in producing the museum, including donations of objects from the local community. Volunteers and trainees have been empowered and some have found paths to employment as a result of skills gained.



your  
Majesty!



The delivery of the museum produced an engaging, accessible and thought-provoking series of exhibitions. The museum's objectives to provoke emotional responses – pride, inspiration, amazement, questioning and reflection – are successfully delivered. The presentation of objects and audio visual displays help formulate questions from young visitors to older generations, thus helping the museum and the community to savour, preserve and cherish a common past. As tourists, the site judges felt the museum provoked an interest to visit more of Dunfermline.

Simple yet sophisticated design draws the museum visitor in, and there are spaces for quiet reflection. Significantly, the architectural design of the building has been integrated with the interpretive aims, opening up views to key parts of the town to provide context to the interpretation.

Evaluation has been undertaken from the start, with formative evaluation undertaken with volunteers, stakeholders, partners and the wider community. There are opportunities for feedback, especially asking museum visitors what stories they wish to add. There was also been evaluation around the museum impact on the local economy, with increased visitor spend in the town rising by 25%.

To make this all happen to the standard achieved shows the vision and project management have been excellent. The whole team deserve the highest recognition for their achievement.

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**Fife Cultural Trust**  
1-7 Abbot Street, Dunfermline  
Scotland KY12 7NL



*The museum awakens curiosity through the attractive and clear display of artefacts and interpretation.*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Association for Heritage Interpretation would like to thank all members of the judging panel, site judges and awards sub-group who have volunteered their time and skills. It is thanks to their commitment and professionalism that the 2019 awards have been such a success. A key part of the awards is the pairing of experienced mentors with early career interpreters to judge sites. We are grateful for the knowledge our mentors are will to pass on.

## AHI Patron

Dr Loyd Grossman CBE

## Awards Sub-Group of the AHI Committee

Bill Bevan, Kate Lindley, Jo Scott, Ruth Taylor.

## Judging Panel

Bill Bevan

(Chair)

Ruth Coulthard

(Vice-Chair and Panel Member for Wales)

Jackie Lee

(Panel Member for Scotland)

David Masters

(Panel Member for England)

Andrew Todd

(Panel Member for the island of Ireland)

## Site Judges

Beccy Angus, Claire Atherton, Natalie Buy, John Castling, Emma Crowley, Joanne Davenport, Gavin Glencorse, Suzanna Jones, Maureen La Frenais, Sue Latimer, Katie McAdam, Josh Sankey, Siân Shakespear, Clare Sulston, Ann Tweedie and Sabrina Willekens.

## Sponsors

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hsd

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