Interpretation Journal
Association for Heritage Interpretation
Volume 23 / Number 1 / Summer 2018

PROVOKE

Published by the Association for Heritage Interpretation

ISSN 1357-9401

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Print:
Henry Ling Limited

Interpretation Journal is published twice a year in Summer and Winter.

The opinions expressed by authors in this journal are not necessarily those of the committee of AHI.

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Membership rates

Fellow	£84
Full Member	£75
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1 copy	£94
2 copies	£129
3 copies	£165
4 copies	£201
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Overseas postage supplements
(1 copy)

Europe airmail	£12.00
World airmail	£12.00

Contents

The next issue will feature:

Conversation – how interpretation can create seeds for a conversation, discussion and/or debate among visitors.

For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation [AHI], send an email to 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

Foreword

PROVOKE

Why do interpreters try to provoke? Provocation can be seen as a fairly aggressive stance. Dictionary definitions of 'provoke' point to an act that stimulates a reaction or incites a feeling, especially one of annoyance or anger. But I don't think this is exactly what Freeman Tilden (*Interpreting Our Heritage*, 1957) meant when he said that provocation was one of the chief aims of interpretation. So, what did he mean? And what does provocation mean to today's interpreters and audiences? In my view the following strands are key:

Grab attention

Provocation can highlight an issue or capture people's attention and, in doing so, shift the way that audiences think about heritage organisations and sites. This in turn can help to draw new audiences to our heritage places.

Take a stance

Interpretation is about taking a view. It is not a neutral discipline but one that is inherently editorial. It can set an agenda, generate a debate or create a viewpoint that provokes – sometimes even making the headlines. A provocative approach ensures that interpretation challenges the norm and stays relevant to contemporary life and society.

Bring something to light

Histories, memories and meanings can be lost or remain untold. There is a social responsibility for interpretation to identify and articulate these stories, to highlight the hidden and the intangible, and to communicate controversial or unheard narratives. We should also be provoking our visitors to search out meanings for themselves.

Improve people's lives

Interpretation, and our museums and heritage sites, should always strive to contribute to the wellbeing of society – providing a forum for dialogue, learning and debate, and a place for communities to come together. Provocation can help to stimulate conversations and provide alternative narratives that help people navigate the key issues of our time.

Provocation is also about how we do things and the way we choose to tell our stories. In this regard, interpreters ought to be risk-takers, constantly looking for new forms of expression and media to communicate our messages. We should be involving others – our communities and third parties – in the interpretation of our heritage places. And we should be exploring new and novel ways to make our stories relevant: a provocative approach to media can be as important as a provocative message.

This edition of the AHI Journal sheds light on how and why interpreters provoke, raising some fundamental issues that could help to both shape and disrupt our interpretive thinking.

Our next edition is all about 'Conversation' and explores how interpretation can create the seeds for conversation, discussion and debate among audiences. If you would like to contribute an article on this, or in any of the other sections of the Journal, please get in touch with me: eric@barkerlangham.co.uk

Eric Langham

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

You need to be a member of the AHI and register with the website to access this section. To register, you will require your AHI membership number (shown at the top of your e-News) and the email address your copy of the e-News is sent to.

You then enter your membership number and the common case-sensitive password to log in. The password will change with each issue of the journal and the password is Chester2018

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

News & Views

Welcome to the Summer 2018 issue of Interpretation Journal. I am delighted that our contributors in this issue focus on provocation. It is one of the fundamental tenets of interpretation that distinguishes what we do from the simple communication of information. I hope the features provoke thought and responses from you.

As highlighted at our AGM in Inverness, 2018 is not just another year for AHI with the end of last year heralding some fundamental changes to the organisation.

Conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Following the recommendations of the Charities Commission and the endorsement of our membership, AHI is well underway in changing legal status to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). As a CIO, the work of AHI will continue as before, including our legal requirements to the Charities Commission, but with stronger safeguards for trustees and members. This will limit AHI's liability for any debts, making it a more resilient organisation, and AHI as a body can enter into contracts or employ staff in its own name rather than the names of trustees. Following member consultation and legal advice, our new constitution is ready to be submitted to the Charities Commission.

Changes to our administration

At the end of December, the company that provided our administration and company secretarial functions for a number of years was retired by its owner, John Stevenson. After some deliberation, trustees decided it was time for AHI to employ its own administrator rather than contract this via a service provider. We are delighted to announce that we employed Lyn Redknap in this role on the 8th January 2018. We hope the changeover in systems has gone as smoothly for members as it has for trustees. We have a new office address and telephone number but retain the same email address (see page 2).

New look www.ahi.org.uk

A more visible public change will soon be evident. After some time in development the new look website will be launched this spring. We are excited to be bringing the look and functionality of our website up-to-date and look forward to your feedback in due course.

Chester – Here We Come!

Finally, our 2018 conference and AGM is being held in Chester 3rd – 5th October with the theme 'Provoking Conversations'. We'll be based at the Crown Plaza, and we have some great site visits planned including to Chester Zoo and we had a good response to the call for papers.

Bill Bevan
Chair, AHI

Reviews

REPORTING RESEARCH

Jim Mitchell and Philip Ryland report on the results of the AHI Learning and Development in Interpretation survey.

In the summer of 2017, AHI carried out a survey to seek views on learning and development and preferences for the topics and types of training. In this article and infographic we dig into the results to see what conclusions we can draw on how the training landscape currently looks for those that answered our survey.

Who answered the survey?

We had 79 surveys completed via the online survey site SurveyMonkey. It was broadly answered by those who had experience of interpretation, with 75% indicating more than five years' experience.

What areas of training were they interested in?

We asked people what areas of training they were interested in, using the AHI Full Membership competencies as a guide. These covered planning, delivery and evaluation. Respondents were asked if they were either very interested, interested or not interested in each area. The results could then be weighted to give a measure of the most popular topics. Results reflected a preference for practical applications, for example the most popular area in planning was 'Choosing suitable media for delivery' with 87% finding this very interesting. At the other end of the scale, 'An introduction to interpretation planning' was not of interest to 42% of respondents, reflecting the experience level of the sample.

In delivery, the most popular areas were 'Accessibility and inclusion' (91% interest) and 'Mobile technology, virtual reality, augmented reality' (93% interest) and audio-visual content (95% interest).

How do they like to learn?

This question was a primary reason why we wanted a survey. It will help AHI offer learning and development to people in ways that they would most like, and help us respond to the changing training landscape. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a whopping 96% of respondents said they were interested in the single day workshop or course, showing the value of this frequently used method. Conferences also scored highly as development opportunities and interest in coaching and mentoring was strong with almost 70% of people either interested or very interested.

Online methods proved popular too, whereas the least popular was the 4-5 day course. However, there still are almost a quarter of people who responded (bearing in mind their relatively long involvement in the field too) with interest to a week-long course on interpretation.

The free text

We wanted to allow people to respond in detail to the survey, so there were several 'free text' questions. Digging a little deeper into the motivations of those completing the survey, the following themes jumped out:

- Practical learning – there was a definite hunger for practical, on the ground examples and learning opportunities, reflecting the need to make a case for learning when budgets are tight and to be able to quickly translate learning into practice. Theoretical aspects and research were wanted less.
- A big theme raised by many was developing leadership in interpretation – advocating our profession and influencing others to see the value of good interpretation.
- Up front or 'in development' evaluation was trumpeted in the free text by several – the need to road test approaches before finalising content and media.
- Several responders indicated the range and types of digital interpretation as a difficult challenge to overcome. How can learning help people understand this fast moving sector to ensure that digital interpretation is high quality and has lasting appeal?

Conclusions

The first conclusion we took was that even though we had a good response rate, the survey sample was definitely reflective of more experienced interpreters, those who have been doing this for a while. This is useful as it enables us to see a picture of what our more experienced members are interested in and how they like to learn, whilst also leaving more work to do to find the preferences of those starting out in interpretation or even doing interpretation without calling it that. We will think more about how we get this information, and perhaps run a future survey targeted at this group.

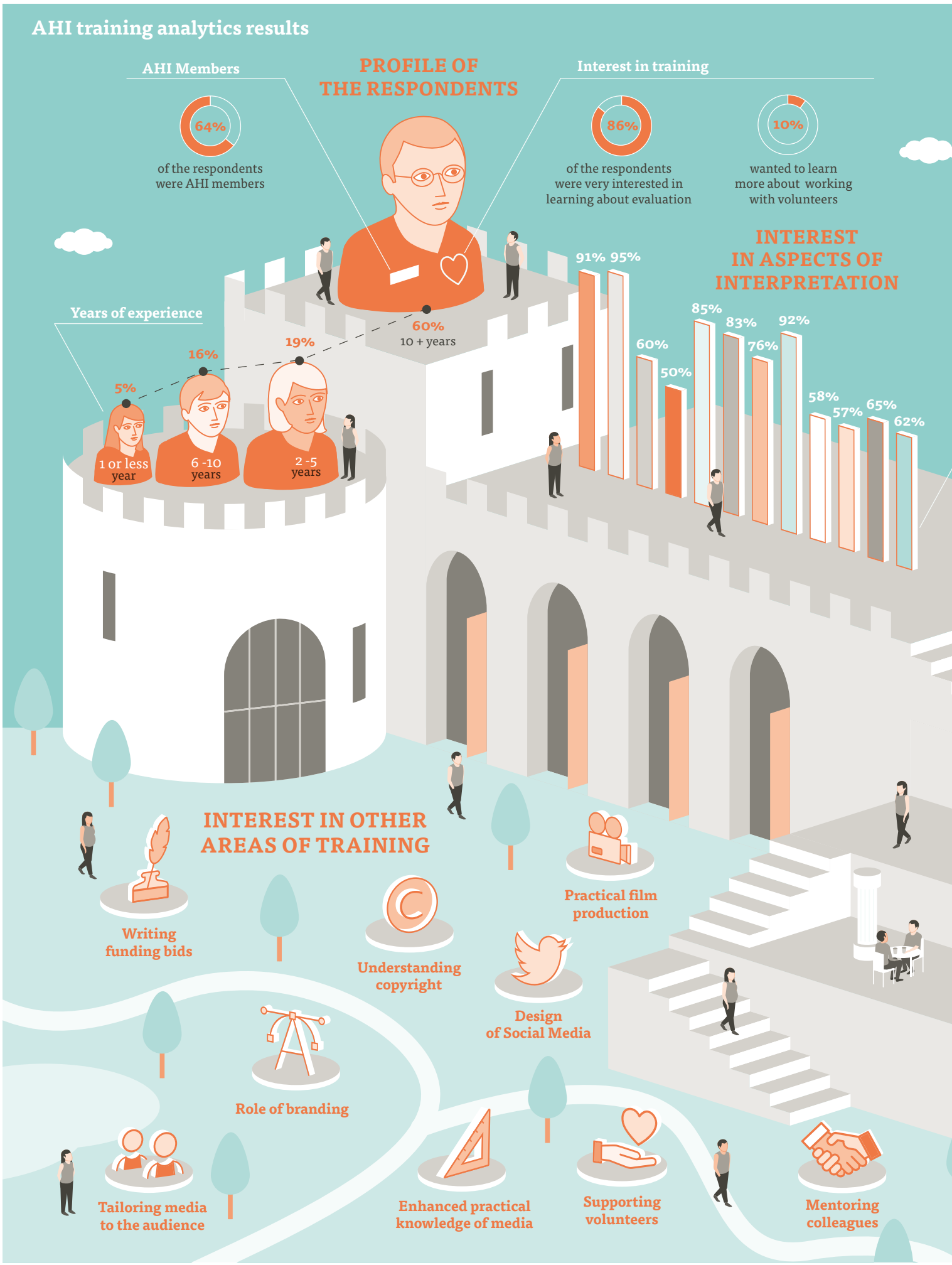
A second conclusion is that training in planning, delivery and evaluation are all of interest, and we need to maintain a broad reach of topics and skill areas to appeal to the widest number of members.

Thirdly, more flexible learning methods seemed to be preferred; we need to be mindful that one size doesn't fit all. It's also good to know that the conference is popular as a vehicle for learning – posing some interesting questions about how we can maximise this opportunity.

Lastly the favoured topic areas reflect wider trends, for example an interest in co-production (with e.g. visitors/communities) using technology and increasing accessibility. These will all help us focus future learning and development opportunities.

Thank you to all who filled the survey in. We are still seeking views and ideas on learning and development, please get in touch to discuss! (admin@ahi.org.uk)

Jim Mitchell and Philip Ryland are AHI Trustees.



Infographic: Barker Langham (Olivia Boutrou, Jessica Richer, Bill Bolton)

- Accessibilty and inclusion
- Audio / visual
- Briefs and contacts
- Costume live
- Interactive e.g. exhibits
- Interpretive design
- Interpretive writing
- Mobile tech, AR, VR
- Outdoor e.g. panels
- Print media
- Project management
- Roving guided walks and talks

PREFERRED LOCATION FOR TRAINING

1. East of England: 30%
2. London: 68%
3. Northern Ireland: 20%
4. North East England: 30%
5. North West England: 46%
6. Republic of Ireland: 19%
7. Scotland: 36%
8. South East England: 59%
9. South West England: 50%
10. Wales: 47%
11. West Midlands: 50%
12. Yorkshire & Humber: 37%

METHOD OF DELIVERING TRAINING

Courses

Single day: 96%

Study days: 95%

On site

Study on site, 5 days +: 36%

Internships / placements: 28%

Less than 5 days : 28%

Online

Online seminars: 51%

Online self-directed: 63%

Online with support: 68%

Dist. learning, 5 days +: 60%

Coaching / mentoring: 69%

Conference

2-3 days: 90%

Two days together: 83%

Two days appart: 72%

Team training

Three days (together): 94%

Four / five days (apart): 38%

A PLEASURE PIER FOR A NEW GENERATION

Fiona King tells how for many years, local residents watched as their beloved Hastings Pier fell into disrepair, culminating in a devastating fire in the autumn of 2010. Fast forward to 2017, and a transformed Hastings Pier celebrated a clutch of architectural awards, including the prestigious RIBA Stirling Prize 2017 – the highest accolade for the best building in the UK.

Given the nature of the award, it's perhaps unusual that my first impression of the pier was of a distinct lack of buildings, a stark contract to the somewhat more cluttered piers of Hastings' near neighbours, Eastbourne and Brighton. Only the Pavilion restaurant, which is all that remains of the original buildings, and a new visitor centre, built as part of the restoration, breaks up the vast expanse that characterises the new Hastings Pier.

The effect of this – the beautifully repetitive boardwalk planks; the uninterrupted views out to sea; and the huge amount of empty space – means that the pier felt, quite simply, an incredible place to 'be', in its most reflective sense. The rows of memorial plaques lining each side of the pier no doubt contributed towards this. But even without those, the architecture and the space did inspire an emotional response in me, which can be all too difficult to do.

An elegant exterior

With such an uncluttered space, it is only fitting that the interpretation on the pier should be similarly elegant, and arguably that has been achieved. A trail with ten markers neatly sums up the history of the pier, giving a real sense of the structure in its heyday. A range of 'I can see…' plaques at the far end of the pier are intended to highlight to visitors things that you could potentially see from that spot, such as species of fish, barnacles on the pier structure, boats, and other things. I wasn't able to spot most of them, but at least came away knowing what was in the vicinity.

A little lost at sea

Once inside the visitor centre – home to the permanent interactive exhibition, the 'Memories Room' café and gift shop – I felt a bit more lost at sea. The café had been moved from the top deck of the visitor centre into the exhibition area for the winter, with the result that the space didn't feel like one or the other.

A series of pier-like themed structures throughout this space provided more detail to the history of the pier, covering topics like engineering, entertainment, the fire, and its reconstruction. A small AV in the corner played short films created by students in Broadcast Media at the University of Brighton Hastings, a nice nod towards engagement with the local community but unfortunately incomprehensible due to the clinking of café cups and saucers in the background.

The Digital Archive is a flagship interpretive tool for Hastings Pier, available through a couple of interactives in this space as well as online. This is an impressive repository of images connected to the pier, with visitors invited to share their own photos, creating a constantly evolving record – perhaps a very visual reaction to the loss felt in the past with the pier's deterioration and destruction. In this world of the touchscreen, the slightly clunky digital memory station was not the easiest to navigate, although a more stylised tabletop interactive with games was more engaging.

In the adjacent flexible space, I settled into a deckchair to watch a film by Archie Lauchlan charting the pier's significant contribution to British musical history over four decades, and the journey by the local community to restore the structure once more. Easily missed, and not always accessible due to being shown in the flexible space, this film was a great way to end my visit, leaving me with a strong sense of the pier's history, but more importantly a strong sense of the way that the local community feels about it.

This community has already given generously to the pier, raising nearly £1 million in shares towards its restoration through a community shares scheme. Yet, as I write, the Hastings Pier Charity has entered into administration, making it all the more crucial for visitors and the local community to continue to support and stand up for this new landmark on the south coast.

Fiona King works in the cultural heritage sector and is a Trustee of Lewisham Building Preservation Trust.

THE INTERNATIONAL BOMBER COMMAND CENTRE, LINCOLN

Ruth Coulthard describes how the International Bomber Command Centre rises to the challenge of a story that has not been a popular subject of discussion.

For many blanket bombing German cities was seen as an act of terror. For others, it was an essential component of the allied victory in WWII. Such is the controversy surrounding the bombing raids undertaken by Bomber Command, a debate which continues to this day. No wonder, then, it has taken 73 years for a permanent museum to commemorate the 125,000 men who risked their lives and the 55,573 airmen who sadly lost theirs during the devastating raids on Germany.

The sensitivity required to create a national exhibition centre to tell this story cannot be underestimated, especially as it also acknowledges the estimated 600,000 German civilians who were also killed.

However, despite the difficulty of the task handed to the design team, the end product is both compelling and inspiring. At the heart of the varied media chosen to tell this story were voices from the past – captivating stories from those who lived and breathed what was a terrifying experience, not only for the crews sent to Germany, but also for the civilians who were victims. Before long, you felt you were travelling back in time to listen to those voices which seemed to speak directly to you.

The main exhibition, built at a cost of £1.4 million and opened January 2018, carefully weaves together high impact soundscapes and 360 degree audio visual presentations projected onto walls and ceilings to allow you to experience just a fraction of the terror, whilst simple interactives and text book interpretative panels help you to get to know those involved and all they faced.

Whilst never sensationalising the shock and awe of warfare, you were left in no doubt as to the bravery of the airmen involved, whether you agreed with the military tactics or not. Indeed, what the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) does very well is to provide a balanced view of the reasons which led to Bomber Command's actions.

But the message goes deeper than this and encourages visitors to reconcile their feelings not only towards the civilian victims, but also British military figures and politicians who had to make such difficult choices.

However, the only question mark I have about the experience is also quite a fundamental one. The interpretation plan states that the target audience is aimed at the people of Lincolnshire (Bomber County), families and schools parties and specifically not aviation or history enthusiasts. As someone who was attracted to the historical theme, I cannot be therefore regarded as a good evaluator!

It remains to be seen whether this exhibition can achieve its mission statement, and capture the enthusiasm and engagement from those target audiences, especially the younger generation. I say this because marking the bravery of Bomber Command has come nearly 80 years after the event and, due to its controversy, has not been a popular subject of discussion. Being immersed in such a creative, snappy and hard hitting exhibition works well for people with background knowledge of the subject, but what is yet to be demonstrated is whether this will work for those new to the story.

Ruth Coulthard is a Project Manager at the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and AHI trustee.

Reviews

EXPERIENCE VERSUS EXPECTATIONS:

INTERPRETATION IN NATURAL SETTINGS

Philip Ryland looks at a study from the Kruger National Park, South Africa, which explored the importance of interpretation to the visitor experience.

A study in 2016 from the Kruger National Park, South Africa, explored the importance of interpretation to the visitor experience but in so doing also specifically focused upon visitor expectations and whether or not the on-site interpretation offered actually met their needs. It is already recognised that high quality on-site interpretation can not only add value to the visitors' experience but increasingly can deepen their understanding of the site and potentially the need for them to respect it (Ham, 2013; SNH, 2015; Ward & Wilkinson, 2006). A number of recent studies have shown that this increased awareness can also translate into a broader environmental understanding generally, increased support directly or indirectly for conservation initiatives and for the protection of individual species or indeed whole systems (Ham, 2013). In a recent study by Kruger *et al*. (2017) in the Kruger National Park, 'secondary and tertiary interpretation' scored m=4.11 (mean) as factors which supported a 'memorable visitor experience' although the two most important factors were 'amazement' [in the viewing opportunities] (m=4.29) and 'variety of species' (m=4.27). Botha *et al*. (2016) also suggest that ensuring 'personal relevance' is particularly important if you are attempting to inform and educate visitors about the rarity of certain species and the efforts being put in place to conserve them.

The Kruger National Park is situated in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces of South Africa and is arguably the most high profile of the 21 parks managed by South African National Parks (Botha *et al*., 2016; SANParks, 2018). It receives upwards of 1.4 million visitors per year with approximately 350,000 of these spending at least one night in the park itself (Kruger *et al*., 2017). Visitors are hugely important to the Kruger National Park where some 80% of its core funding comes directly from visitor revenue, notably through accommodation and admission fees (Kruger *et al*., 2017; SANParks, 2018). In terms of attractiveness of the park itself 'biodiversity' (mean=4.29) was the most important competitive advantage factor followed by 'eminence' (m=4.18) and then 'accommodation' (m=4.05) (Kruger *et al*., 2017:323). The profile of regional and international visitors to the park is relatively stable (Kruger *et al*., 2017) and is detailed in Table 1.

The park itself is approximately 2 million hectares in extent and is managed for the conservation of its rich biodiversity, to provide human benefits and to 'preserve as far as possible the wilderness qualities and cultural resources associated with the park' (SANParks, 2018). The flagship animal species found in the park which are perhaps most attractive to visitors are detailed in Table 2.

Sightings of the "Big Five" remain something of an imperative for many visitors and the Kruger National Park currently has good opportunities for these species with an estimated 1,500 lion, 17,000 elephant, 48,000 buffalo, 1,000 leopard, 8,000 white and 300 black rhino (SANParks, 2018).

Currently, no formal interpretation strategy exists within the park; however, educational programmes are offered which focus principally on outreach into the local communities (Botha *et al*., 2016; SANParks, 2018). The current management plan for the park was updated in 2008 and is due for review in 2018. The role of interpretation is therefore somewhat variable currently but is broadly stated as being to 'create

a memorable experience' leading to 'increased loyalty', 'competitive advantage' and 'contributing to the sustainability' of the park (Botha *et al*., 2016:163; SAN Parks, 2018).

In investigating visitor expectations, Botha *et al*. (2016) used as a guide the categories of interpretative service outlined by Stewart *et al*. (1998) in their study of Mount Cook National Park, New Zealand, where they identified: **primary services** (the visitor centre and its associated displays, panels, models and staff); **secondary services** (written or verbal commentaries during on-site activities) and **tertiary services** (marketing materials, merchandise and informal conversations with on-site staff) (Stewart *et al*., 1998). Botha *et al*.'s research was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire which was issued in the rest camps within the park; distribution took place in the evenings which ensured respondents had ample time to complete the survey. 855 questionnaires were duly completed. The design of the questionnaire included a Section A which captured the demographic data and a Section B which contained statements about 24 interpretative services offered within the park. For the 'expected' services, respondents were measured on the importance they placed against them on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = extremely important / 5 = not important at all) and for the 'actual experience' of the service, a 5-point Likert scale (1 = excellent / 5 = very poor). Factor analysis was applied to the resulting data and services with a loading value weighting of more than 0.2 were identified as contributing to the overall factor. A summary of the key results is displayed in Table 3.

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Based upon these results, it seems that the respondents regard 'primary interpretative services' (m=2.42), 'secondary interpretative services' (m=1.74) and 'knowledgeable staff' (m=1.74) as being 'important' or 'extremely important' to their visit. However, only 'secondary services' met the respondents' expectations (m=1.74) since they appear to have scored their experience of these as being 'sufficient' (m=2.42). As a result, the visitors' expectations of 'primary services' (m=2.42) and 'knowledgeable staff' (m=1.74) have not been fully met since these two factors were only scored as being 'fair' (m=2.92 and 3.13 respectively), indicating that there is potential for improvement in the current provision (summarised from Botha *et al*., 2016:169).

Interestingly, the data also indicates which services carry the strongest loading in relation to each of the three interpretative factors. Thus for 'primary services', expectations about the 'visitor centre, its displays and accompanying slide shows' were rated as 'important' and this together with 'geology and climatological displays' was reinforced by the actual experience which (based upon these results) 'could be improved'. For 'secondary services', 'directional signs', 'route maps' and 'access' are all important in terms of expectations and again all three appear to be carrying the strongest loading in terms of the visitor's actual experience suggesting that the park has sufficient 'internal signage' and 'access' to meet current visitor needs. Despite levels of experience only being rated as 'fair', 'well-informed and knowledgeable staff' achieves a similar loading in terms of both visitor expectations and actual experience.

What might the implications of these results be on your site?

1. *'The research confirms the factors which are most important to ecotourists visiting the Kruger National Park'*. In summary, 'primary interpretative services' and 'knowledgeable staff' clearly play a critically important role within the visitor experience as does a reliance on 'secondary services' (notably directional signage, maps and access). It seems reasonable to expect that these results could be applied to other natural locations. How do these results by factor correspond to the visitors' expectations and experiences on your site?

2. *'A second finding is the difference between expected and experienced services'*. This again bears critical consideration and reflection. What evidence do you have on your site that your visitors' expectations are regularly being met? How do you currently measure and subsequently analyse and evaluate your visitors' prior expectations as opposed to their actual on-site experiences?

In conclusion, the studies of both Botha *et al*. (2016) and Kruger *et al*. (2017) have revealed that visitors to the Kruger National Park are well educated, expect information-rich experiences and as a result the associated interpretative services to be of high quality. Locations like this which rely heavily on income from visitors to service their financial budget need to ensure that their on-site interpretative services deliver on both the expectations but also the actual experience of their visitors. Thus for a park manager, the planning, delivery and evaluation of interpretative services across the park should be a continuous activity within their overall visitor management strategy.

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

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For further information on the interpretation of nature and wildlife, please do consult the latest AHI Best Practice Guidelines, written by Jim Mitchell and Philip Ryland (*Natural interpretation: a brief guide to the interpretation of nature and wildlife. AHI Best Practice Guidelines no. 13*).

Table 1.
Profile of visitors to the Kruger National Park, South Africa

(adapted from Botha *et al*., 2016; Kruger et al., 2017; SANParks, 2018).

Language: Afrikaans (48%); English (35%)	Gender: Male (56%); Female (44%)
Average age: 46 years	Marital status: Married (approx. 80%)
National visitors (87%): Province of residence: Gauteng (57%); Mpumalanga (13%)	International visitors: Netherlands (19%); USA (14%); Germany (12%); UK (10%); Australia (9%); New Zealand (9%)
Level of education: Diploma/Degree (36%); PG Degree (21%)	Length of stay: average 8.19 nights

Table 2.
Profile of flagship animal species located in the Kruger National Park, South Africa

(Adapted from SANParks, 2018).

Chacma Baboon; Bushbaby Vervet & Samango Monkey	Pangolin; Porcupine; Aardvark; Cape & Scrub Hare; Hyena	Elephant; Zebra; Giraffe; Warthog; Hippopotamus
Bat-eared Fox; Jackal; Wild Dog; Serval; Cheetah; Lion; Leopard	Otter; Honey Badger; Mongoose; Genet; Civet	Black & White Rhinoceros
Buffalo; Eland; Kudu; Nyala; Duiker; Roan & Sable Antelope; Waterbuck; Wildebeest; Impala		

Table 3.
Mean results: expectations and experiences of respondents
(Botha *et al*., 2016:170-171).

Factor: Expectations **Primary services** **(Mean Likert score: 2.42)**	**Loading value/ Weighting**	**Factor: Experiences** **Primary services** **(Mean Likert score: 2.92)**	**Loading value/ Weighting**
Interpretation activities, e.g. slide shows, informative sessions and specialist talks	.825	Geological and climatological displays	.821
Authenticity of interpretation	.825	Interpretation activities, e.g. slide shows, informative sessions and specialist talks	.817
Auditorium with nature videos	.780	Educational talks, activities and games for children	.810
Interactive field guides on game drives and guided walks	.780	Educational displays	.771
Geological and climatological displays	.716	Information boards regarding the fauna/flora in the park	.668
Educational displays	.527	Information regarding the history of the park	.656
Educational talks, activities and games for children	.513	Auditorium with nature videos	.637
Information regarding the history of the park	.401	Life-like examples of different animals, insects, birds and trees with descriptive data	.491
Information boards regarding the fauna/flora in the park	.388	Identification of trees, e.g. nameplates or information boards	.425
Life-like examples of different animals, insects, birds and trees with descriptive data	.366	Authenticity of interpretation	.421
Information centres and interpretation centres in specific rest camps	.264	Information centres and interpretation centres in specific rest camps	.407
Identification of trees, e.g. nameplates or information boards	.234	Interactive field guides on game drives and guided walks	.268
Secondary services **(Mean Likert score: 1.74)**	**Loading value**	**Secondary services** **(Mean Likert score: 2.42)**	**Loading value**
Clear directions to rest camps and picnic areas	.964	Clear directions to rest camps and picnic areas	.886
Available route maps with descriptive information	.951	Available route maps with descriptive information	.813
Enforcement of park rules and regulations	.764	Information regarding interpretation in the park available on the web	.457
Information regarding interpretation in the park available on the web	.626	Lookout points in the park	.450
Lookout points in the park	.567	Information boards with animal tracking	.429
Information boards with animal tracking	.515	Enforcement of park rules and regulations	.358
Bird hides in the park	.324	Bird hides in the park	.309
Knowledgeable staff **(Mean Likert score: 1.74)**	**Loading value**	**Knowledgeable staff** **(Mean Likert score: 3.13)**	**Loading value**
Informed staff who can handle any queries concerning the interpretation aspects in the park	.647	Informed staff who can handle any queries concerning the interpretation aspects in the park	.630

Typology

The value of the guided tour

Ashleigh Hibbins knows that all museums and heritage sites tell fascinating stories – the trick is getting visitors to listen.

Modern institutions have many different tools they can use to intrigue, educate and inspire: from text panels and audio guides to more recent developments such as apps and interactive screens. Perhaps the most well-known interpretive medium is the guided tour [1]. Yet for all their prevalence, the value and opportunities of guided tours have been overlooked and understudied by the heritage sector [2].

Tours provide ample opportunities for visitors to form personal connections with objects and places, and for institutions to better understand the needs of their audiences in turn. Great tours are dynamic and interactive experiences that adapt to each unique circumstance. They are closer to participatory theatre than monologue: each one a singular event created through the knowledge and personality of the tour guide, the energy and interests of the participants, and the nature of the space itself. Tours can make a heritage site or museum more accessible and relevant, especially for audiences with interests that aren't specifically catered to in other forms of interpretation.

This makes the tour an ideal medium for exploring experimental, niche, or even controversial stories. Some might even argue that guided tours help to disrupt the museum's traditional authoritarian voice by providing opportunities to highlight new perspectives and narratives that better reflect different communities [3].

Ashleigh Hibbins

A guide ensures their group stays shaded from the intense desert sun in Masada, Israel. Tour guides can help promote visitors' physical wellbeing as well as sparking their imaginations.

Pirje Mykkänen

Tour of Central Art Archives, Helsinki.

A tour is by its very nature a more personal and empathetic experience than more permanent forms of interpretation. A sign or guidebook will provide a static narrative to all users; on the other hand, a tour is a dynamic experience that changes and adapts to the participants and environment. Tours can be tailored to different age groups, interests, abilities, and languages. For example, an autism-friendly tour might choose to explore less crowded parts of a site, or at quieter times. A tour targeted at older visitors or those with mobility challenges might be planned around step-free access and ample rest stops.

Tours are also a form of co-curation; participants can ask their guide questions or contribute their own knowledge and perspectives, adding further complexity to the tour. This two-way conversation between museums and the communities they serve is only starting to be explored in collections research and gallery displays, but it has been a key feature of the humble guided tour since the beginning.

From a more practical standpoint, tours can also be crucial to increasing visitor numbers. A recent field study benchmarking visitor behaviours at Carnegie Museums found that respondents were more motivated to visit by programmes and events than by collections or temporary exhibitions – a result that even surprised the researchers themselves [4].

Ashleigh Hibbins

Tours bring the complex and difficult histories to life at Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin.

These findings certainly don't diminish the value of collections and exhibits, which are the very foundation of every museum, gallery and heritage site. Instead, what the Carnegie research shows is that tours and other educational programming are the key to fostering personal connections between people, objects, and spaces.

We need only look across the Atlantic to U.S. tour and consulting firm Museum Hack to understand how the guided tour can disrupt and reshape the traditional museum experience. The company runs self-proclaimed 'renegade' group tours at major museums in cities across the U.S., and does consulting for institutions worldwide. Museum Hack aims to offer a more exuberant and offbeat experience for participants. Tours can include games, scavenger hunts, and selfies, and focus on themes such as 'un-highlights', pop culture, and LGBTQ stories. Although not in every visitor's budget, the success of Museum Hack's irreverent and contemporary approach demonstrates the continued importance of the guided tour to audience engagement and growth.

But just offering tours isn't enough – institutions need to recognise the important role this medium plays in accessible interpretation and audience development. This means investing in the development of high-quality content, and in the tour guides themselves through education, training, and ongoing support [5]. Great guides are not just sources of information; they are storytellers, imagination-sparkers, and need to be responsive to the diverse needs of each group.

Even the most relevant and engaging guided tours won't appeal to everyone – there will always be those who prefer a more independent visit.

Even the most relevant and engaging guided tours won't appeal to everyone – there will always be those who prefer a more independent visit. Like text panels, guide books, or gallery interactives, tours are an essential part of a site's overall interpretive story, giving visitors diverse experiences and information layers that enhance one another, and help each person to find the stories that are meaningful to them.

Whether you attend them or avoid them, there's no denying the valuable interpretation and engagement opportunities provided by the not-so-humble guided tour.

Ashleigh Hibbins

Visitors ponder Parthenon sculptures at the British Museum.

Ashleigh Hibbins is a London-based museum educator and writer.

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Digital Update

HOW DIGITAL CONTENT CAN HELP YOU REACH NEW AUDIENCES

Alyson Webb asks what digital content should we be producing? How do we choose which stories to tell? What do we include in our blog? And how do we attract new audiences in these tough times?

These are questions we are hearing more and more often from heritage organisations and indeed the wider cultural sector. Interestingly, they seem to be challenges no matter the size of the organisation. The truth is that these are tough times for everyone. Externally, the economy feels precarious and there's lots of competition for our audiences' attention and time. Internally, we see pressure from trying to reconcile digital aspirations with limited resources and conflicting views over what should be published. We are seeing a lot of organisations stuck in this moment of 'analysis paralysis'.

New challenges

Websites have traditionally acted as a shop front to an organisation – what's on and opening hours. Important information, but increasingly fulfilled by websites such as google or trip advisor. There was an assumption in the past that this type of activity would in itself attract new audiences but that isn't how it has worked out. We face a real challenge in reaching new audiences – people who may be a perfect fit with for your organisation but don't yet know you – or deepening your connection with existing audiences.

Digital content is a significant part of the answer but what we've seen through evaluations and research is that it has to be well-designed. Get it right and it can help your audiences find you, discover the value you offer and then stay connected. Get it wrong and lots of time can be spent on content that is never seen or used. So, how do we create effective well designed content and what might that look like? Following are a few examples. They come from larger institutions, but contain lessons we think have relevance for organisations of all sizes and give a sense of what audience insight and well designed audience-centred content can do to help.

Get to know your audience

The first step is, perhaps unsurprisingly, identifying the audiences you want to connect with and getting to understand them. Well implemented analytics has a role in this, but is limited. It will tell you what is happening on your website for your current audience, what they are looking at, when and how they are arriving but it won't tell you anything about those folk who never make it to your website.

It's likely you will need more qualitative information that helps you to understand these new audiences in some detail. For example, what do they do in their spare time? What do they value? What do they read? How do they discover new things? What do they know (or think they know) about you? What words do they use in discussing your subject? At this stage in the process, it is crucial to keep the questions open – you are an anthropologist discovering your audiences in the wild.

Have nothing on your website you do not know to be useful and believe to be beautiful*

Armed with your research, you should have a sense of what your audience values, what are they really interested in, what might they find useful or delightful. Really getting under the skin of an audience can be inspiring! This insight sets you up to begin to design your content.

At the Royal Academy of Arts (RA) it led them to develop lively – and generous – arts journalism. Articles such as '10 Art Shows to See in February' reach out to an art-motivated audience searching online for things to do. They may or may not already be RA visitors but it places the RA where they are looking. So it's useful and valuable but it also demonstrates that for lovers of art the RA is your 'go to' guide and companion – building trust and connection for the future.

> *Armed with your research, you should have a sense of what your audience values, what are they really interested in, what might they find useful or delightful. Really getting under the skin of an audience can be inspiring!*

Meanwhile, at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) understanding the needs and motivations of a scholarly audience for the artist Robert Rauschenberg online catalogue meant providing lengthy, in-depth essays, high resolution images, detailed bibliographies and a citation tool to aid referencing the work in publications and theses. In its first year alone it had already reached a larger and more diverse audience than similar publications by the Museum.

Go where your audience is

Reframing your challenge from 'how can I increase the number of users on my website' to 'how can I connect with my audience' opens up a world of possibilities. The Wellcome Trust's MOSAIC website produces content designed (and licensed) specifically to be distributed and published on other platforms. In its first year it achieved 10 million views. Notably just 1.5 million of those views were on the MOSAIC website – the other 8.5 million were via republished articles.

On a far smaller scale, we've worked with an organisation in the last year who discovered that family audiences simply don't think of the museum website when planning things to do and places to go. For them producing content that is engaging and designed to be shared via family websites and social networks is likely to be far more successful.

Identify the best next step

If we want to build longer, deeper connections with our audiences we need to think ahead – every encounter, whether in person or online, should be positive for both the individual and the organisation and, ideally, lead to further encounters. Too much content is designed in isolation with little consideration as to its effect. If your user has just finished reading a wonderful article about your site, what might they want to do next – visit (we hope so), read or watch more about the subject – a historical account, a novel, a movie – or maybe make a recipe, follow your gardening or housekeeping tips, sign up to be a volunteer or take a class.

Don't worry if the very next step doesn't involve selling a ticket or a visitor walking through the door. The key is to be genuinely valuable to the audience and they will come. And the good news is you don't have to do all the heavy lifting yourself – you might link out to (high-quality, appropriate) content elsewhere.

Alyson Webb is founder of Frankly, Green + Webb

In that spirit here's some reading you might find helpful...

A great (short!) book on content design: http://amzn.eu/gavMhVw

The Royal Academy's content design strategy process: https://mw17.mwconf.org/glami/digital-content-strategy/

Wellcome Trust's MOSAIC: https://mosaicscience.com/

The value of audience-centred design for SFMOMA's Robert Ruaschenberg project: https://www.slideshare.net/franklygreenwebb/designing-audiencecentred-digital-services-in-museums-the-opportunities-and-challenges

What the Science Museum learnt about its online audience: https://lab.sciencemuseum.org.uk/how-audiences-discover-the-science-museum-group-collection-76ccd732ef72

Further reading from Frankly, Green + Webb: https://medium.com/frankly-green-webb

* Apologies to William Morris

Benchmark Project

Deeply dippy
about pond interpretation

Beth Môrafon explains how the new pond dipping design and build developed for RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond showcases the importance of bringing the natural environment to urban areas, helping to reduce flooding and pollution as well as providing health and wellbeing benefits.

Arrival at the site is picturesque: from the car park an idyllic path, flanked by fast flowing mossy gills, winds down steeply though an ancient mixed-deciduous woodland. As the landscape flattens it opens out into a steep-sided dell populated by wet grassland and a medium sized U-shaped pond. The wider site was bought by the RSPB in 2012 and its significance is not just its beauty. It is also one of the most highly designated areas in Scotland including SSSI, SPA, SAC, NNR, National Scenic Area and Ramsar site status.[1] Any developments proposed here must adhere to strict planning regulations, be attractive, functional and worthy of inclusion in a National Park.

Pond dipping is the first planned step towards a longer phase of new developments to expand the visitor experience including schools, residents and families, and visitors who may visit the site during quieter periods, enjoying the sensual qualities of the space.

Damselfly on Soft Rush, carved by Peter Bowsher.

A holistic approach

The approach was multi-faceted. Within the project, WWT Consulting's skills from ecology to hydrology, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to habitat design, visitor centre planning and interpretation have been resourced to deliver a pond dipping shelter and platform, suitable for up to thirty students. Interpretive messaging is embedded deeper than the medium of signage and resides cohesively within every aspect of the delivered design. The SuDS rain garden and bunded pond deliver added benefits to the area by slowing down water run-off and reducing the impact of flash flooding on water catchments further downstream.

Landscapes that speak their function

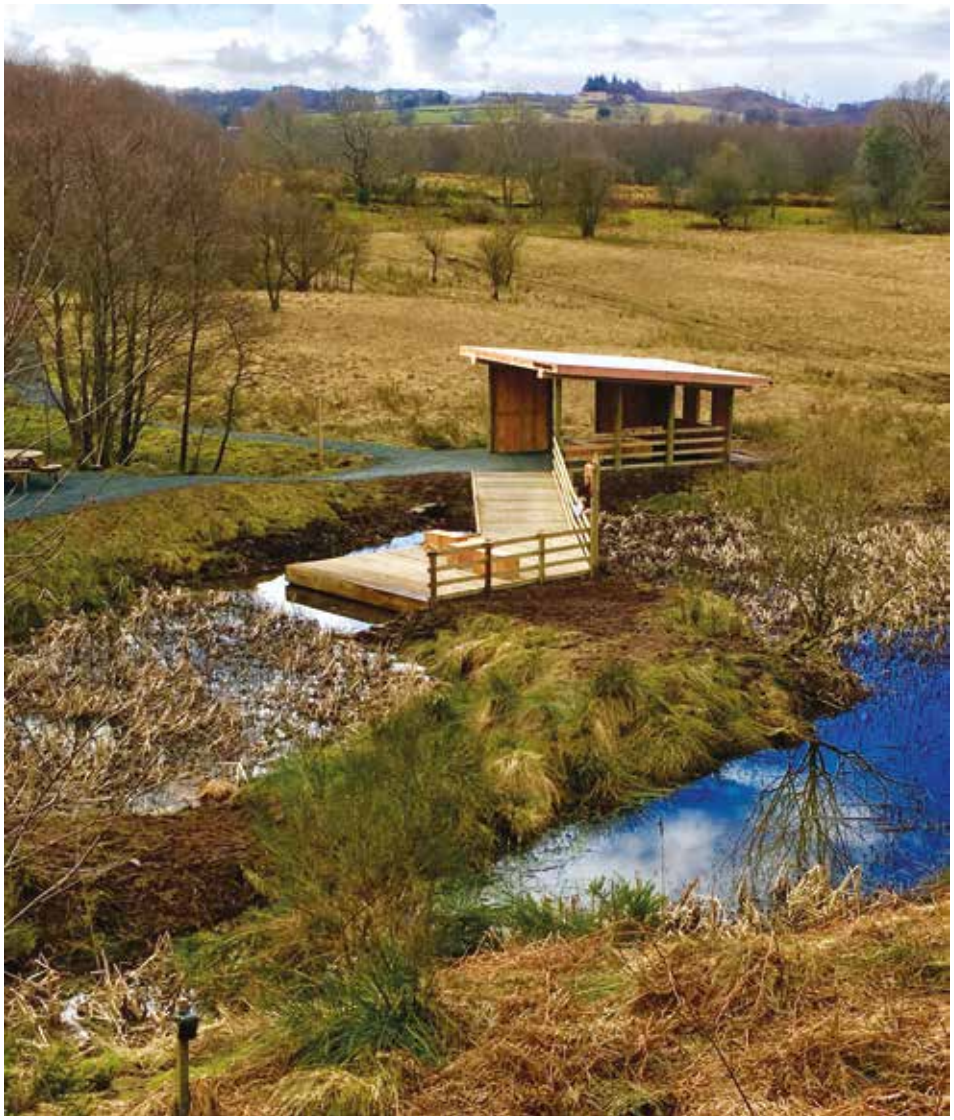
The landscape is designed to visually communicate its functionality and this forms part of the interpretive story. Water from the pitched box-profile roof is channelled into a steel gutter, down an attractive rain chain feature and into a meandering rain garden where the water is cleaned before being fed into the dipping pond. The dipping pond has been bunded to raise the water level and improve dipping. An attractive wall mounted interpretive panel depicts this functionality, showing diagrammatically how rainwater from the rain chain tops up the ponds. The design of the building offers views to the rain chain, meadow, rain garden, bund and pond.

Access and adventure

The dipping platform offers wheelchair-accessible dipping on a deck that stretches out across the water to a planted 'island'. A combination of railed and smooth edges ensure that even visitors with varied needs will be able to enjoy dipping together. Illustrated graphic panels are mounted onto the rail inside the building and the dipping platform, to help visitors who are dipping to identify the species. Interchangeable benches allow adult visitors to be seated or younger visitors can use the benches as dipping plinths on which they can rest their trays. Special teacher-led activities, such as wildlife trails, will allow limited groups to access the 'island'.

Integrated wetland sculptural features

Sculptural features celebrating the unique qualities of the site have been designed into the fabric of the build.



The new development, named Damselfly Pond, will be open to the public for dipping in May.

A native Common Blue Damselfly, carved locally in sustainable sourced Western Red Cedar, rests upon the stem of a soft rush. The stem is represented in an extended rail post which bursts through the ground, past the deck and stretches beyond the structure of the decking rails that it supports, adding dynamic interest in an integrated interpretive sculpture. The words 'pond dipping' are mounted in raised lettering onto the generous larch fascia of the building. They rest suitably between the dipping shelter and the platform, linking the two spaces to their function.

Metamorphosis of pond and species

Around the deck, sitting as carved end caps on rail posts, the phases of a frog life cycle are depicted post-by-post from dark-eyed globes of spawn, to an emergent tadpole and finally to an adult frog. These tactile interpretive features don't just represent species metamorphosis seen in amphibians, dragonflies, diving beetles or other pond creatures. They also symbolise the nature of the pond and its predictable transition over time, as it inevitably changes from a water body into a land mass, in the process referred to as succession. These open ended simple sculptures provide an opportunity and a prop from which teachers can engage with students, at the level they deem appropriate, to discuss transition and change.

Wetlands for health and wellbeing

Like many of our wetland interpretation projects, the pond dipping installation delivers tangible and intangible benefits, some of which we are only just starting to measure. We are particularly interested in the benefits this type of project can bring to the health and wellbeing of the people who engage with it. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), our parent charity, has recently begun a study for health and wellbeing at London Wetland Centre. It involves investigating the psychological, cognitive and physiological responses of people when they are in the wetland in contrast to the surrounding built urban area, to detect measureable difference in people's health and wellbeing in these two environments. There are already many proven health benefits related to increased contact with nature. These range from the positive effect of exercising outside to improved self-esteem and mood and reduced stress and anxiety. Water related environments are linked to mental health benefits, facilitating psychological restoration.

With these benefits in mind we stand behind WWT's campaign to get government to consider new greener policies through the publishing of the Nature's Way report. Reassuringly, some of the suggestions in the report have been included in the new twenty-five-year plan for the environment, but there is still a long way to go.

Beth Môrafon is a Senior Consultant at WWT Consulting, managing interpretation and designing visitor experience developments.

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In conversation with...

KATHERINE SKELLON

Katherine Skellon is co-Creative Director of design agency Skellon Studio. She talks to Rachel Teskey about collaborative design, balancing space and story, and future sector trends.

How do you get started on an exhibition design project?

It varies depending on the physical environment and the story of the exhibition, but one of the things we always start with is the visitor: how are we going to get visitors to engage? How can we bring the story to life for them? How can we provoke people? One of the key things we do at Skellon Studio is to make sure we step away from our perspective as designers and think about how visitors will feel in the space, how will they understand the story.

What are your favourite kind of projects to work on?

I get a real kick out of working in historic buildings. I've been lucky enough to work in St Paul's Cathedral, the Tower of London and a number of historic houses and sites. Despite their constraints I enjoy responding to the building's fabric, its features and atmosphere. On other projects you might just have a blank space. Then, we look to the story for inspiration and use the space as a canvas to be creative. When we worked on *Fire! Fire!* at the Museum of London, we had a completely blank canvas, which we used to creative a collective, theatrical experience.

For our latest project, the new visitor centre for the Battle of Britain Bunker, the aesthetic of the exhibition responds directly to the new building drawing on the materials, finishes and angular forms of the space.

That's an interesting contrast. How do you balance creating environments and telling stories?

Initially I was more focused on creating the environments. Skellon Studio's work has been described as theatrical. It's an approach that I like, and I think that the heritage sector can learn a lot from the world of theatre, especially for temporary

John Chase

Fire! Fire!, Museum of London.

John Chase

Lifting the Lid at the Vyne.

exhibitions where we have more opportunities to push boundaries. But the more I've worked with interpreters, the more I have understood the role and value of storytelling in design projects. Storytelling can really help to shape the space, the visitor journey and the details, colours and textures of our designs.

How does your work interface with the wider interpretative and client team?

We have a totally collaborative approach. We value early input from everyone, especially other design contributors – from writers to fabricators to lighting to digital media specialists and others. At the start of a project, we spend a lot of time with the client, listening to them and absorbing information. We do a lot of thinking, sketching, talking and model-making to get to our big idea.

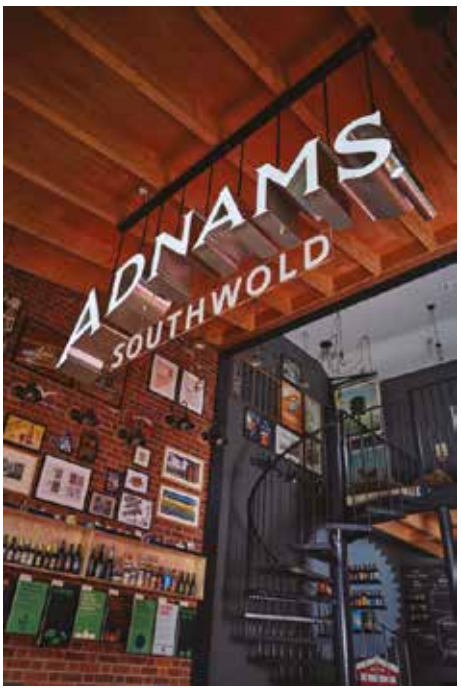
How did you get into exhibition design?

I actually trained in interior design at Kingston University. In my third year we did an exhibition project, which I really enjoyed. Peter Higgins came in to work with us and I got chatting with him. He was setting up a new company (now Land Design Studio) and I joined them on day one. We had one telephone, three drawing boards and no work! We started off doing a lot of production company work. But then the Heritage Lottery Fund really kicked in, and we started working on lots of museum projects. The National Maritime Museum in Cornwall was my first big major project – I worked on it from the pitch through to the opening. It was a huge learning curve but a great experience.

What emerging and future trends are you seeing in exhibition design?

It's an exciting time for exhibition design. The sector is growing and drawing in people from a range of industries who bring a proactive approach and a different perspective. Big museums, the National Trust, Historic Royal Palaces and others are increasingly open to trying out new ways of delivering their stories. There's more willingness to put new ideas out there – they might not always stick, but they make people think.

Rachel Teskey is a writer and interpretation consultant in the cultural heritage sector.



Lol Johnson

Adnams Visitor Centre.

Debate

Breaking up museum fatigue with games and activities.

Friend or Foe?

Julia Kennedy looks at weighing the benefits of third-party interpretations – a hot-button issue in the cultural field in recent years.

Museums and cultural institutions go beyond simply holding material culture – they are also tasked with the responsibility of interpreting collections, objects and spaces. Often dictating the narrative presented, interpretation is curated by the institutional voice of the organisation, having a profound effect on the visitor experience. While cultural sites regularly use their own internal interpretation staff, should these spaces allow for outside third-party providers to interpret their collection?

Museum Hack

Museum Hack functions as one of those third party groups. We provide reverently-irreverent museum experiences in five cities across the United States, and consult with museums worldwide to reimagine museum experience for adults. In our work, we provide a new approach and a fresh perspective on collections for audiences.

Having non-institutional voices interpret a museum or cultural spaces is not entirely revolutionary. Many museums have engaged with outside organizations to examine and respond to their collections. These have often included:

- Artists or historians in residence
- Inviting outside groups to write exhibition text
- Performers in gallery spaces
- Putting up visitor comments/tweets in public areas
- Post-It note boards

Our goal is to introduce audiences who aren't already visiting the museums to these spaces, and give them an access point that feels colloquial, relevant and maybe even a little subversive.

However, while these voices aren't the institution itself, they are more often than not endorsed by the institution in some capacity; participating museums often choose artists-in-residence, or may screen comments for publication, for example. So what happens when a cultural institution fully lends itself to outside interpretation with limited (or no) restrictions on the interpreters?

Alternative views

Museum Hack's approach is purposefully segmented from the museums where we interpret – we do not claim to be of the institution, or claim to represent the institution. For tours that we provide, our content and approach is not vetted by the museums themselves – and our consulting work seeks to help museums push the boundaries of their current interpretive practice. Ultimately, Museum Hack guides are enthusiastic storytellers who deeply love these museums, and want to share our approach with those also who seek a non-traditional museum experience. This gives us greater freedom when curating an experiences for our audience, and occasionally provides an alternative view that the institution itself may not be able or willing to give.

The need for an alternative museum experience came from an encounter founder Nick Gray had years ago at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Those who have heard Nick's TEDtalk know the story: he went on a date to the Met and ended up falling in love that night – with the museum. Quickly Museum Hack grew beyond one city and just Nick, to five cities and 65 employees and contractors. At the core, Museum Hack guides aren't your typical docents. Our renegade tour guides are passionate communicators and storytellers, who are also research fiends. Focusing on the true stories, guides chart their own path diving into the museum with attendees for a fast-paced, high energy, reverently-irreverent tour. Tours take an 'UnHighlights' approach – looking at untold backstories and hidden histories and backstories through a humanistic lens. Growing beyond the Un-Highlights to expand into thematic tours, tours for team-building, and using the museum as a catalyst spaces to train in new storytelling methodologies.

Ultimately, there are advantages and challenges to allowing third-party groups to interpret a museum's space.

New allies bring new audiences

Just like museum professionals that work in institutions, Museum Hack staff are ultimately outside allies. Both on our tours or in consulting work, its primary goal is to showcase the institution, and – just like Nick – make people fall in love with the museum.

We become tireless advocates for the institution, directing our focus towards an audience that the museum itself may not have the time or resources to court. Our goal is to introduce audiences who aren't already visiting the museums to these spaces, and give them an access point that feels colloquial, relevant and maybe even a little subversive. This specific audience, which we term a "non-constituent audience," may perceive the current museum programming to be unattractive, "boring," or out-of-step with their choice of leisure time. They do not feel a connection to the museum space, and do not perceive how the museum itself can meet their needs.

By working in conjunction with an outside group like Museum Hack to produce experiences, museum spaces gain an additional outreach mechanism. That, in many cases, not only results in new attendance, but also new revenue streams.

New approaches mean new narratives

From a content standpoint, third party groups often provide an alternative take on these space. Museum Hack guides dive deep into collections. Tours can be highly opinionated, often showcasing diverse perspective about the museum's collection, one that the museum might not put forward itself. When involving a non-institutional actor in interpretation, museums often discover new voices and allow for a fresh perspective on the collection and histories provided by the museums. This approach allows for these organic discoveries, and gives guests who do not see themselves represented an entrypoint, enabling other narratives and perspectives to be highlighted. This allows for museum experiences to take on a different energy, creating a platform for diverse viewpoints, and dialogue.

New voices means new experimentation

But these diverse viewpoints can also act as a catalyst for new approaches within the museum itself. By functioning outside of the museum, Museum Hack has the ability to pursue more experimental activities within the museum space, with limited risk to the institution.

Muuuuu-seums!

We'll tell you some of our favorite stories in our favorite museums.

Our approaches to rapid prototyping is centered around the idea of "no failure, only feedback." With less restrictions, Museum Hack is able to test boundaries, pioneer new experiences, and experiment with approaches which museums can draw inspiration from, and build upon. We have been referred to as a "skunkworks" R&D lab, putting resources behind projects that are risky, but could lead to higher payoffs for museums.

Those are a few of the benefits of involving an outside group in interpretation. But what are some of the challenges museums face?

Outside voices require a loosened control

While interpretation from an outside group does offer access to new audiences, insights, revenue streams, and experimentation, it does require the institution to relinquish some control, the first of a few potential challenges. As keepers of our stories and material culture, institutions are often very protective of their sites and the way their collections are interpreted. Having an outside group come in requires that they are comfortable with having stories and perspectives contributed to the interpretation, ones that they may not bring themselves. Loosening this control, however, has, in our experience, been shown to allow the organization to be humanized in the eyes of visitors who may not be constituent audience members.

Traditionalist audiences may become confused

If it is a radically different approach to the current experience or expectations of the regularly attending "constituent" audience, it can be confusing to them. While Museum Hack is here to introduce the museum to new audiences through a new technique, that technique can feel foreign or event disruptive to current, already-bought-in visitors. Without the context of understanding the broader goals, many dismiss this approach as silly or unwanted in their space. Fortunately, museums have the benefit that they can disavow these third-party groups to these constituent audiences if they choose.

Museums question if they should be doing this work

Other challenges are more intrinsically focused for the museum. These are centered around the idea that staff may not like outside groups interpreting their space, and that the museum itself could be generating that revenue. Even in the case of Museum Hack and other third-party providers, museums see an admission fee, often going beyond that with most groups charging on top of that baseline to cover the cost of the guide and their services. This leaves many institutions to question if there is an opportunity to capitalize on new audiences.

Many groups with the resources to dedicate to cultivating new audiences through a non-traditional experience have successfully created a "sub-brand" tour that incorporates new ideas of interpretation into their practices that are separate from their standard museum experience. This idea has been conceptualized at Roosevelt's Campobello International Park, The First Division Museum, and The Birmingham Museum of Art. Although these programs have been successful, this approach can occasionally cause internal challenges if challenging the status quo. With a respectful approach put forward by outside groups, this interpretation does not replace staff work, but complements it – providing alternative approaches and new perspectives. Ultimately, for both groups, museum or third-party, success is found through understanding and validating that both approaches are still important to providing visitors with the best experience possible.

Julia Kennedy is Museum Hack's Audience Development Marketing Associate. Museum Hack rethinks traditional museum experiences.

Provoke

Lapland's dark heritage

Suzi Thomas looks at how the idea of 'dark' heritage has been useful in understanding the processes at play in Finland in relation to the legacy of the Second World War.

In this short article, I start with a brief overview of the local history of the area that we have studied, and then describe some of the different examples of 'dark heritage' engagement that we have encountered. What they mean for future treatment of the wartime material heritage in Finnish Lapland remains to be seen.

Finnish wartime history

Since 2014, researchers from the Universities of Helsinki and Oulu in Finland have been investigating the different ways that locals and tourists alike come to terms with the material legacy of the Second World War in Finnish Lapland. Finland's wartime history has many controversial facets, not least the country's co-belligerency with Nazi Germany. The mass destruction of much of Lapland's settlements and infrastructure during the 1944-45 Lapland War remained a traumatic scar in the north of the country for many decades. The research project, titled 'Lapland's Dark Heritage' and funded by the Academy of Finland (a major national research

SA-Kuva (the Finnish Wartime Archive), CC-BY 4.0 license.

The city of Rovaniemi burns during the Lapland War.

funding body), has aimed to understand how different people value, perceive and make meaning from the material culture related to this period. Its uses include traditional museum display and other touristic or interpretational methods, through to very private practices such as keeping objects as family mementos or trading and exchanging them between private collectors and treasure hunters.

Difficult histories

The topic of difficult histories seems to be hot in cultural heritage debates at present. From international conferences addressing presentation of controversial and painful subjects such as the ICOM conference in Helsingborg, Sweden, in Autumn 2017, through to news debates in the USA over how to handle commemoration of Confederacy historical figures, the topic has gone hand in hand with discussions about the social responsibility of heritage interpretation to represent different histories and experiences. Which histories are celebrated and which are silenced seems more relevant than ever.

Finland, like so many places, did not escape involvement in the Second World War. Two wars with the Soviet Union – the 1939-40 Winter War and the 1941-44 so-called Continuation War – demonstrated the small republic's vulnerability to external attack. The loss of territory including Petsamo, parts of Salla and Kuusamo, and Karelia (a region which included Finland's second city, Viipuri – now Vyborg in the Russian Federation) meant economic loss but also displacement of many citizens who were evacuated to what remained of Finland. As a response to the Soviet threat, Finland entered into a co-belligerency with Germany (they were never official allies, and the Finnish authorities were keen to keep their war effort a separate issue from that of the Germans). As part of this agreement more than 200,000 German troops, in addition to *Organization Todt*[1], labourers and prisoners of war, were posted in Finland, and especially in the Lapland region.

An aeroplane engine mounted and displayed at a local campsite in Inari, Finnish Lapland.

Testing relationships

Relationships seem to have been relatively harmonious, with local recollections of friendly encounters between Finns, the indigenous Sámi, and the foreign visitors. However, this balance was not to last, and following a truce with the Soviet Union, Finland had to expel its former brothers in arms from its borders. German troops retreated mostly into occupied Norway, but as they departed Finland they employed 'scorched earth' tactics, destroying much of Lapland's towns, settlements, rail networks, bridges and so forth. Although actual casualty numbers were relatively low, the material destruction was high.

Researchers have already studied the impact this material loss has had on sense of place and cultural memory. Combined with the effects of short-notice evacuation and in particular, the impact of the war on the Sámi way of life (such as the Skolt Sámi who permanently lost their homelands in Petsamo), the topic of Lapland's war experience has remained a difficult one for official heritage authorities to address. There have also been feelings in the north that their story has been overlooked in favour of the more politically dominant southern regions. Another particularly terrible, and, until recently, hidden aspect of the Finnish Laplanders' experience of the Second World War was the actions of Soviet partisans, who roamed the territory targeting villages and other small settlements. They executed indiscriminately – the elderly and children were not spared – with the aim of distracting the Finnish and German armies, but their actions were not discussed for many years, for fear of Finland upsetting the awkward peace with the Soviet Union during the Cold War years.

We have met a remarkable array of people, from avid collectors of the so-called 'war junk' left over in the forests, to Sámi elders who still remember vividly being evacuated as children from their homes ahead of the burning of Lapland.

Interpreting the difficult heritage

Our research team consists of archaeologists, a museologist and an ethnologist. Several students have also found useful material through collaborating with our research group and have contributed invaluable discussions and ideas. In our own interdisciplinary way, we have been exploring the responses to this 'dark' heritage in Finland's far north. This has included interviewing different people (local residents, visitors, people with family connections to the area, descendants of soldiers), and conducting archaeological surveys and public archaeology excavations with volunteers. We have met a remarkable array of people, from avid collectors of the so-called 'war junk' left over in the forests, to Sámi elders who still remember vividly being evacuated as children from their homes ahead of the burning of Lapland.

Unofficial monuments

In addition, we have noted with interest the different ways that the heritage has been used (or ignored) in interpretation and tourism strategies locally. We have seen remnants such as tanks and parts of Second World War aircraft "mounted" as features at points of interest, such as at the Sovintovaara scenic view, for visitors to observe when they arrive at the car park, ahead of taking a short walk to a breathtaking view over Lake Inari. These objects often come with little further explanation, but seem to be seen as interesting and aesthetically eye-catching curiosities in their own right. A similar instance of what might be termed 'unofficial monuments' is also encountered at a camping site in the village of Inari, where one finds the engine of a crashed aeroplane, apparently dredged from Lake Inari, exhibited next to the camp site's entrance from the main road. There is very little contextual information offered, or history provided of the aircraft or the war that brought it to Lapland, but its presence at the campsite points to its perceived usefulness as a place marker and symbol of the local history of the area.

Museum representations

In what might be considered more 'official' forms of heritage interpretation, such as the region's museums, we have found patchy coverage, especially of the Lapland War itself. Given the impact that the war and associated evacuations had on Sámi life, it is perhaps surprising that so little of this period is represented in the Finnish Sámi Museum – *Siida*, in the centre of Inari. There is some incidental mention of the war among the narratives on display, including a passing mention that, as a result of the war, the Skolt Sámi had to move from their traditional homelands in Petsamo. However, this and other difficult aspects of Sámi history (such as the widespread practice of sending Sámi children to boarding schools to assimilate them into the majority Finnish language and culture), seem understated in favour of presenting more positive and neutral

themes such as the Sámi relationship to nature, and traditional handicrafts. (It is, however, important to note that the permanent exhibitions in Siida are due to be renewed in the coming years.) Other small museums in the area, such as the Gold Prospector Museum in the village of Tankavaara, also relegate the war to a passive mention within its texts. This is despite the impact that war had also on gold prospecting activity in the region, and the museum's location close to a key battle site. The Provincial Museum of Lapland, in Rovaniemi, does, however, have in its permanent exhibition several references to the Second World War in general, and to the Lapland War itself. This includes two striking scale models of the city – showing how it looked before the Lapland War, and then the burnt and mostly destroyed remains after the war, which was particularly devastating for Rovaniemi. In Salla, close to the Russian border ('Old' Salla now in fact lies abandoned across the border), there is the Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction. This museum is unique in its focus on the impact of the Second World War in Finnish Lapland.

Looking ahead

Our project has given us the opportunity to spend time in Lapland, and to interview many actors, both private individuals and heritage professionals. The project seems to have sparked debate regionally and nationally about whether to draw more attention to the wartime heritage in Finnish Lapland as a means of enhancing tourism – an intriguing contrast to Lapland's 'typical' imagery of wilderness tourism, the Northern Lights and family visits to meet Santa Claus. At the same time, it is clear that certain aspects of the wartime experience, such as the plight of prisoners of war north of the Arctic Circle or the terror of the partisan attacks, are still to be unpicked further, in both the private and the public spheres. Although our project is coming to the end of its first round of funding, we are all of us determined to continue to research aspects of Lapland's dark heritage, and to see how the debates around how best to commemorate (or not) this chapter in Finland's history develops.

Suzie Thomas, museologist, is Professor of Cultural Heritage Studies at the University of Helsinki, Finland.

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1. Organisation Todt was a civil and military group in the Third Reich, named after its founder Fritz Todt, which was notorious for using forced labour.

Exterior of the Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction.

Provoke

Conservation or Provocation?

John Orna-Ornstein's advice to anyone starting a new job is sit back and to think hard about the organisation you're joining – its history, its purpose, its ethos, its current form – and, only then, to consider its future. But where to start?

The National Trust

The Trust was established in 1895 and, put simply, its charitable purpose is to look after places of historic interest and natural beauty for the benefit of the whole nation. Its founders had a number of motivations, but it is clear that the 'delight of thousands', with a particular focus on the urban poor, was one of them.

Today, the Trust is an extraordinary organisation by any standards. It cares for some five hundred places in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including 300 houses and gardens, 41 castles, 39 pubs and nine lighthouses. It manages more than 700 miles of coastline and 250,000 hectares of land. It holds collections of the highest quality: paintings by Rembrandt, Turner and Titian; Classical and Renaissance sculptures; and other objects as varied as England's oldest terrestrial globe at Petworth House and a heated billiard table at Tyntesfield. And on top of this are the Trust's people: from five million members and 25 million visits a year to its paid sites, to 60,000 volunteers and thousands of tenants in farms and villages. In short, the Trust is far more than a museum; it's a living, breathing cultural resource that is a fundamental part the identity of the three nations it encompasses.

A slow change

The Trust has arguably, though, been slower to change than many other cultural organisations. It led thinking about the interpretation of historic houses in the 1970s, but probably doesn't do so today. Its interpretation and cultural programmes have tended to focus on local and family histories rather than on the bigger, sometimes more contemporary issues often picked up by museums and galleries. It might be fair to say that the Trust is more famous for its scones than its cultural programmes.

But audiences and expectations are changing. The National Trust's membership now includes more individuals from families than older people. And our audiences have high expectations whatever their age – for service, for entertainment and for the quality of the Trust's presentation and programmes. And our own expectations are changing too. We value the Trust's existing membership enormously, but we also want it to be broader and more representative of the whole nation we were established to serve. And we're increasingly aware that, given the Trust's astonishing holdings, we have a role in telling big histories as well as local ones.

So what role does provocation play in the future of the National Trust?

In the summer of 2017, and within a month or so of my joining the National Trust, we found ourselves on the front page of the Daily Mail and the number one story on BBC News. *Prejudice and*

Tom Marshmann, 'Sex, Lies and the Greek Gods', Hanbury Hall, 2017.

Pride was the Trust's first national public programme, specifically established to explore new and sometimes challenging histories across a range of our places. Around a dozen historic properties marked the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality with programmes that explored the role of gay people in their history. One of these, at Felbrigg Hall in Norfolk, was the catalyst for a series of articles and hundreds of social media comments that criticised the Trust for being, at best, 'politically correct' and at worst an organisation that had lost sight of its true purpose. The regular refrain was that the Trust should return to what it was established to do – conservation.

Chris Alton, 'Adam Speaks', Croome, 2017.

Heather & Ivan Morison, 'Look! Look! Look!' Berrington Hall 2017.

The Trust has followed *Prejudice and Pride* with a second national public programme season, this time focusing on *Women and Power*, with almost 100 properties marking the centenary of the Representation of the People Act and the role of women in their histories. Early responses to the programme have been positive at many properties, but a writer for the Daily Mail described it as 'turning our heritage into an excuse for achingly PC campaigns', and a quick scan of the social media commentary the piece attracted shows that it has been, for many people, hugely provocative.

Politics and provocation

The Trust's efforts to vary the presentation of its historic houses and to vary its programming have also been the subject of criticism. The use of bean bags at Ickworth in Suffolk attracted attention from the national media. The omission of the word 'Easter' from one version of the advertising for an Easter egg hunt attracted comment from the Prime Minister Theresa May.

To be clear, the purpose of the National Trust is neither to be political nor to provoke – it is to bring benefit to the whole nation through places of historical interest and natural beauty. But is it possible to do that without sometimes provoking and without telling a range of, sometimes challenging, histories? I suspect not. If programming national themes that are also programmed by hundreds of other organisations provokes, and if small changes to presentation or programming do so too, then perhaps provocation is an inevitable part of the work of an organisation with millions of diverse members and stakeholders? And that's when it's helpful to be clear about our charitable purpose – including benefit to the whole nation – and indeed that the founders of the National Trust, and particularly the social campaigner Octavia Hill, were no strangers to controversy themselves.

What will we be in the future?

The Trust's places are, in the most wonderful sense, living cultural resources; connecting collections, places, people and stories in a way that can be extraordinary. To maximise the benefit they bring to the nation I think they will exemplify six key characteristics:

1. They will be changing

Our places, whether gardens or houses, factory or landscape, have always changed. To assume they now need to be frozen in a particular state is to misunderstand the value they bring. Looking after them 'forever' is not the same as keeping them frozen in aspic. It's extraordinary how difficult change can be – for staff, visitors, volunteers, other stakeholders – but change is essential if our places are to be something more than museum pieces.

2. They will be relevant

Sometimes relevance will mean offering people what they want for an enjoyable visit, whether it's a level pathway to walk, a good lunch to eat or a wonderful playground to explore. Sometimes relevance will mean telling stories that connect with a wide variety of people, whether stories of Chippendale and Capability Brown or stories of challenge and persecution. Sometimes relevance will mean caring for an increasingly diverse set of places that cumulatively reflect a broad history, from work houses to mansion houses, and from fields to factories.

'Exile', Kingston Lacy, 2017.

Andrew Logan, 'The Art of Reflection', Buckland Abbey, 2017.

3. They will be locally rooted but also nationally resonant

The Trust's places are wonderfully connected to local people and local stories and, partly because of the organisation's delegated model, these local stories predominate. But national and international themes also abound. Big stories of trade, empire, cultural and societal change, movement of people and so on connect the places we care for to each other and to others around the world.

4. They will be creative

Our places are expressions of wonderful creativity in the past and they have a role today to foster creativity. That might mean through commissioning well-known artists. It might mean supporting local crafts and skills. Or it might mean being a platform for the everyday creativity of visitors, staff and volunteers.

5. They will be delivered with quality and panache

Visitors rightly have high expectations of the Trust for quality. And everything we do should be delivered to an appropriate quality. That doesn't mean there isn't a place for 'quick and dirty' experimentation, and indeed for beanbags. But our standards should be high. And there should be little space for the pedestrian; we want flair and confidence to abound in our presentation.

6. And finally, above everything, they should be focused on people

The Trust has the extraordinary privilege of being supported directly by many millions of people, and connected to many millions more. We need to be a responsive, people-centred organisation. Our opportunity, and our greatest challenge, is to do our conservation work and the presentation of our places with, not for, our audiences, members and volunteers. The National Trust should not seek to provoke. But our places should never be 'beige'; our houses and gardens are so much more than the backdrop to a pleasant picnic. So provoke we will at times.

John Orna-Ornstein leads the National Trust's work with collections, houses, heritage and public engagement. He was formerly director of museums for Arts Council England and a curator at the British Museum.

Provoke

More than words

Justine Lee explains how interpretive signage plays a bigger role in visitor and daily experiences than simply imparting information by inspiring, provoking and creating emotional connections.

We see signs every single day, walking along the street, driving along the road, wandering through a wildlife sanctuary, but we rarely stop and think what the purpose is for all these signs. Signage is usually defined as any kind of notice on public display that gives information or instruction to an audience. Wayfinding signs direct us, warning signs keep us safe, interpretation signs inform us. But signage could, and should, do much more than this.

It is worth remembering that in 1957, Freeman Tilden stated in his seminal book *Interpreting our Heritage*[1] that 'the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.'

The potential of signage

Interpretive signs are an opportunity to interact and connect with potentially thousands of people each day. Instead of thinking of these signs as simply a platform to inform, they could instead be used as a means to inspire or provoke the viewer, to create curiosity and encourage them to think.

Interpretation signs that have moved beyond educating and informing make for a more dynamic atmosphere by invoking amusement, excitement or curiosity, and a desire to discover and know more.

Creating an emotional connection

To provoke or inspire, signage must create an emotional connection with the reader. Research has shown that consumers primarily use emotions rather than factual information to make decisions, to choose whether to progress further or to find out more. Emotion is an incredibly powerful engagement tactic but can be difficult to achieve via the medium of an inanimate platform such as a sign. However, there are several ways by which it can be accomplished.

The theory

Emotional engagement is affected by a number of different scientific principles that can directly impact on how signs are produced:

- Design
- Colour
- Image

Designs that evoke the greatest emotional response tend to involve something out of the norm. Information that is different to what is expected can increase interest, and memorability, as reflected in the above examples.

Colour can have a powerful impact on the viewer's emotional response. Studies have shown that visuals in colour can increase people's willingness to read a piece of content by 80 per cent. Looking at the National Trust signs shown here, as well as reflecting their brand, the use of strong colours attracts your attention whilst also encouraging you to read and engage with the sign.

Using specific colours can also have a significant impact on mood – red, for example, evokes energy while yellow can foster happy feelings and purple cultivates a feeling of exclusivity, luxury and imaginativeness.

Images can increase trust and belief in the information conveyed. Ninety per cent of all information transmitted to the brain is visual. Images can also be used to evoke specific emotional responses. For example, photos of people have been shown to increase empathy.

Putting the science into practice

How do we now turn this science into impactful, emotionally engaging interpretation? Canal & River Trust, the charity that cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of waterways across England and Wales, is doing just this through

its latest interpretive signage project. By basing design and content on the principles for emotional engagement, it is seeking to connect with the thousands of people who pass through its sites each day, to provoke a positive reaction and to encourage the viewer to find out more.

Whilst not strictly an interpretative sign, organisations such as the Canal & River Trust and National Trust have been bringing humour into its signs to create a more welcoming atmosphere, to engage with their visitors and encourage people to explore and enjoy the location.

Canal & River Trust produces hundreds of signs each year – from straight forward information giving signs, to safety notices, to creative interpretation signs that bring the location, building or structure to life. Its subject matter is usually very traditional and information is usually presented in a traditional manner; however, the waterways under its guardianship pass through a myriad of communities and the many millions of people who use these canals and rivers each year are often far removed from the traditional 'canal visitor' who understands and values the historical importance of these waterways.

Canal & River Trust wants these communities to care about their canal, to understand how these waterways have helped to shape how and where we live, and why they are still important to our lives today. But it also needs to consider what the audience actually wants to know.

By using interpretation signage to create an experience for the people who use and travel along its waterways each day, the Canal & River Trust is seeking to provoke viewers in a positive way so they have a sense of understanding and feeling for the environment through which they are passing.

Used this way, these interpretation signs create a connection between the audience and the place, moving the experience beyond a mundane commute to one that builds a stronger affinity between the passer-by and the surrounding environment.

Think: what does the viewer want to know?

We have so much to say, there is so much that we know about the building or the place but we need to remember our audience. It is vital to consider what the audience really wants from signage – information, inspiration or practical advice?

When creating their new interpretative signs, instead of starting with the question 'what do we want to say?', Canal & River Trust looked at it from the perspective of the viewer and what they wanted to know. It has carefully considered its audience and has selected stories that evoke emotions such as surprise and curiosity.

Think: how can colour help to convey these emotions?

Colour is a powerful tool in building emotion. Interpretive signs traditionally use low-key subtle colours that blend with the environment. Canal & River Trust is using bolder colours to help draw attention whilst reflecting the context of the environment and complementing the feelings that water evokes. The new signage also incorporates images to attract attention in these busy thoroughfares.

Think: how can people actively participate?

What do we want people to do with the information garnered through our signs? Viewers are no longer content to be passive readers, they want to be part of the story, to take some form of action. The new signs created by Canal & River Trust include a direction – such as 'share' or 'find out more' – this enables the signage to move beyond simply imparting information or eliciting an emotion. It is now a conversation starter, a way for the Trust to connect on a more direct level with the viewer and to start a relationship with them.

Sharing stories

Some may argue that these signs are not interpreting the heritage, they do not discuss the physical nature of the environment, they are not discussing something that can be physically seen. Instead they highlight how people have shaped the place and how the place has shaped and inspired people. Using surprising facts adds value to the information, making it more memorable and sharable.

The stories used create a narrative about the location, a thread that people follow and that evokes an emotional response, providing an opportunity for a previously unconnected public to engage with Canal & River Trust.

Stories have been carefully selected, they are relevant to the place, non-traditional and make the viewer think again. They are also relevant to the audience, in this case a group whose use of the canal is incidental rather than purposeful, and who have very little connection with the waterway.

As the Association of Heritage Interpretation believes, Interpretation enriches our lives through engaging emotions, enhancing experiences and deepening understanding of people, places, events and objects from past and present. It is this sentiment that Canal & River Trust is hoping to realise.

Justine Lee, director at Tan Creative, works with organisations to identify their story and how to bring it to life across all touch points and platforms. She was formerly Brand Manager with Canal & River Trust.

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When creating their new interpretative signs, instead of starting with the question 'what do we want to say?', Canal & River Trust looked at it from the perspective of the viewer and what they wanted to know.

Provoke

(BR)EXIT our Values?

Nicole Deufel argues that interpretation, alongside museums and heritage sites, has a social and political responsibility to step up its efforts to publicly defend our long-held values and to present an alternative narrative to that of division and exclusion in these turbulent times.

During the EU referendum in the United Kingdom, and during the previous General Election, many of the proclaimed values of museums and heritage sites such as social inclusion, justice, diversity, mutual understanding supported by heritage interpretation, were under attack [1]. Some museums responded by telling the story of past migrations into the UK [2]; a few heritage and museums organisations joined the debate directly on issues such as the economic benefit of EU membership [3] or the blessings of EU environmental laws [4]. Since the vote for Brexit, the number of hate crimes in England and Wales has risen by 29% [5] and the number of EU citizens leaving the UK is at its highest since 2008 [6]. Elsewhere, too, anti-immigrant nationalism is on the rise, making it clear that the Brexit phenomenon is not a singular event.

There are many definitions of interpretation. Nearly all of them refer to higher values: Freeman Tilden invokes 'the greater truths' [7] that interpretation is supposed to help people understand, while AHI emphasises that interpretation is about 'deepening understanding' not only of material history, but of people and places of the present [8]. Community involvement is asserted as an important element of our work, for it captures the heritage values held by more people than just select experts [9]. And finally, the organisations that interpretation serves proclaim, for example, to be 'for everyone' [10].

A wake-up call

Consider then the experience of rapid exclusion from British society shared by many non-UK EU citizens in the country during and since the EU referendum. In a recent article in The Guardian [11], EU nationals describe their increasing feeling of being unwelcome. A young Polish man writes that, 'It was a shame that after 10 years of living in a country I thought was my home, I've been so brutally asked to get out.' He was 15 years old when he came to the UK. These are the stories of people well integrated into British society, and yet a few short years have changed matters to such a degree that all of the article's contributors have now left the UK.

There are no studies to date to evaluate the impact of the various activities of the museum and heritage sectors on the debate during the EU referendum. However, we may raise a few critical questions in light of the drastic change in people's sense of belonging as referred to above. For example, were the exhibitions about Roman and Anglo-Saxon immigration to Britain enough to provoke understanding of the contributions made by immigrants to modern-day British society? Did they do enough to challenge the prevalent negative discursive framing of immigrants and inspire a critical look at the native population and its master narratives? Were the statements about the economic and environmental benefits of EU membership a sufficient contribution to the debate?

Interpretation's responsibility

Brexit today appears as only the beginning of a series of international developments that may best be described as exclusive and divisive. From Donald Trump's guiding principle of 'America First' to the election of the right-wing *Alternative für Deutschland* to the German Parliament; from 'alternative facts' to 'fake news': the ground under our very feet has shifted and it is affecting every aspect of our societies, nationally and internationally. I argue that this requires a more active role of interpretation, alongside museums and heritage sites, in the political and social debate. It is a responsibility that arises out of our own values. If we are serious about facilitating understanding, promoting diversity and welcoming everyone to the sites we manage and interpret, we must do more than stand back from current debates. Silence is not neutral. The past is not the present. History, as it is being written now, will judge us on how we respond to current injustices.

In order to meet that responsibility, interpretation must first take a critical look at its own core assumptions. We must clarify, for example, *whose* understanding we mean if we declare it our purpose. In the EU referendum debate and since, for example, EU nationals have often reported a lack of understanding and acknowledgement of their situation by the British Government and even British peers. A Portuguese teacher who has been in the UK for 20 years is moved to state in a newspaper article, 'Stop thinking that your country is not that kind of country. There's a serious thing happening here and you have to take it seriously.' [12] If this is the sentiment, then interpretation that does not acknowledge and foster an understanding of the issue within British society is one-sided. We might even argue that such interpretation hides key elements of the situation, leading not to 'understanding' but to something else, depending on the user's viewpoint: for the Portuguese teacher, it may well feel like another dismissal of his experience and a narrative of British tolerance that does not reflect his reality. Far from fostering understanding, such interpretation may serve to further alienate and exclude.

This is also true for public silence. An institution that confidently proclaims its inclusive policies will lose credibility when it remains silent in the face of abuse. In August 2016, only two months after the EU referendum, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted in a report that 'the referendum campaign was marked by divisive, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric, and that many politicians and prominent political figures not only failed to condemn it, but also created and entrenched prejudices, thereby emboldening individuals to carry out acts of intimidation and hate…' [13]. We may argue that given the sectors' goals and values, museums and heritage organisations should have directly counteracted such rhetoric. This did not take place on a public scale, however. We may expect, therefore, that many EU nationals in the UK did not feel more welcomed by the museum and heritage sectors than they did in other areas of their lives.

Easier said than done

Of course, speaking up in such a climate of hostility, and shining a light on areas that do not match the majority's self-image, is not easy. Taking responsibility here may well mean opposing decision-makers or the local community. It may even mean offending some of our own peers, for we must not forget that even as interpreters or museum curators, we are firmly rooted in our own cultural identities, with all the attachments and defensive reflexes these may bring.

Some may argue that to act politically and expect impacts such as inclusion and justice is too much to ask of interpretation. That is a view that must be accepted. We may pose, however, that this view also demands a rethink of the philosophy that has been developed and which has underpinned interpretation since Tilden first defined interpretation as a comprehensive discipline and practice. From Tilden onwards, interpretation has claimed to be more than a mere toolbox of communication techniques applied in a heritage context. Its values were set out at the start of this article, and they proclaim a deeper engagement with the world around us than a more superficial preoccupation with delivering content. Therefore, if interpretation is considered ill equipped to deliver larger social and political impacts, then such interpretation must surely appeal to a different philosophy than one focused on understanding, appreciation and protection.

Why it's worth it

It is true that we do not currently have sufficient data to state with absolute confidence that interpretation that takes greater steps to inform public debate is better at achieving our stated goals and purposes. Nevertheless, there is reason to expect that interpretation, museums and heritage sites that do speak out and represent diverse perspectives are in fact heard and have a realistic prospect of making people feel welcomed, acknowledged and appreciated. Such actions and interpretive narratives would respond directly to what EU nationals have lamented in the articles quoted above, for example, and we may assume that they would therefore feel differently with regard to museums and heritage sites than concerning the overall situation they face.

Similarly, it seems unlikely that a refugee in the United States is not at least somewhat reassured by the statements issued by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum through diverse channels and on various current crises, condemning violence and genocide. It is a signal that not everyone supports the divisive public discourse that pitches immigrant versus native.

Applying interpretation's values and pursuing socio-political impacts may not be a simple task. It is a responsibility, however, and one we must take on if we hope to maintain relevance. The past eighteen months have proven that all silences will be filled by someone, and all spaces left empty will be occupied by something. We should claim these gaps ourselves, or we may find that others do it for us.

Nicole Deufel is a founding member of Interpret Europe and Vice President for Strategy for ICOMOS ICIP. She holds a PhD in Heritage Studies from University College London and works as Head of Museums at the City of Oldenburg in Germany.

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Provoke

Decolonising Interpretation

Sara Wajid and Katie Hall explain how creative provocation was a central theme on the recent exhibition 'The Past is Now: Birmingham and the British Empire' at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

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"Museum defends exhibition of 'evil' Empire" screamed the headline. 'One visitor, Ross Fenn, a gallery owner, said that the 'public want to keep their trust in museums by believing they are giving unbiased information. You wouldn't want an exhibition on evolution with curators who were creationists or a Holocaust exhibition if the curators were all Holocaust deniers.' [1]

While other visitors felt the opposite way about The Past is Now exhibition, 'Yes @BM_AG! This is how you write an interpretation panel! So blown away by #ThePastIsNow exhibition for its approach #MuseumsAreNotNeutral #DecoloniseTheMuseum' [2]

Eight seminal stories

'The Past is Now: Birmingham and the British Empire', the co-curated display at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG), presented eight stories about the British Empire and its relationship to Birmingham: gun manufacturing, eugenics, Kenyan independence, Indian independence, Joseph Chamberlain, the environmental impact of the British Empire, and capitalism and representation.

The Times also published an editorial:

'It (the exhibition) seeks "to challenge the typical colonial narrative" of Empire. The result is sharply critical. Outrageously so in the opinion of some visitors. ...The average history teacher, musician, writer, film-maker or public figure routinely lambasts the Imperial era. What was once a revisionist view has long since become the established orthodoxy. The museum's claim to want to 'provoke a response' with its inclusion of information panels citing 'racism and aggression' as prime imperial motivations is therefore disingenuous. ... While encouraging wider public engagement in historical discussion is to be applauded, the danger in so doing is that a balanced presentation of the facts is swiftly surrendered to a wildly partial political agenda.' The comment piece goes on to suggest that, 'A truly radical approach to the thorny issue of empire might be to mount an exhibition showcasing its benefits.' [3]

Making waves

The Past is Now was not just another exhibition in the regular programme. The project was an outcome of the Arts Council England's ambitious 'Change Makers' programme to develop arts leaders from disabled and Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and spark organisational change around diversity and inclusion. Creative provocation was a central theme. The dedicated funding and the mandate to create change enabled the interpretive risk-taking that followed at BMAG.

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Sara Wajid was appointed as Head of Interpretation to lead the establishment of a prototyping gallery. The 'StoryLab' would test stories for the interpretation masterplan towards a wholesale rehang of the museum.

Finding a new interpretation approach to appeal to the young multicultural citizenry of Birmingham is a priority for BMAG (more than 30% of Birmingham's population is BAME). The co-curated permanent gallery 'Faith in Birmingham' by and about the diverse faith communities had set a strong precedent for co-curation at BMAG. But while that gallery had been a successful in representing an under-represented aspect of Birmingham cultural heritage it hadn't set out to challenge the museum's own practice nor especially to appeal to younger multicultural adults.

Decolonisation

In the intervening years, a growing social movement to 'decolonise culture' had developed. Prominent national campaigns such as 'Rhodes Must Fall' mobilised student bodies across the country calling for the removal of celebratory memorials of slave traders and imperialists such as Cecil Rhodes. Beyond the museum walls a generation of activists had come of age who had grown up post-Macpherson enquiry with a keen awareness of institutional racism. The debate had moved on from calls for equal representation to a reckoning with the ideological colonial legacies in our national institutions, educational curriculums and museums. Until now, attempts by museums to implement decolonial museum practices had taken place primarily in ethnographic museums such as Pitt Rivers in Oxford and with 'world cultures' collections rather than with civic Victorian collections in large museums in multicultural cities such as Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

The co-curators were well versed in decolonial practice and theory and had wide collective experience of campaigning for change in the cultural and political sphere and creative and artistic production. Their skills were combined with the museum team's expertise in collections research, exhibition production and interpretation.

The co-writing process began with a workshop about approaches to written museum interpretation. As a group we considered several different approaches to creating tone of voice in museum writing, from the authoritative and 'neutral' voice seen in many museums to more direct styles. One approach we proposed was that the interpretation

We were intent on drawing attention to the museum as an imperial structure that is intimately tied to systemic whiteness.

could appear as a quotation from the co-curator who was most interested in that story and include a photograph of them. This was firmly rejected by the co-curators as undermining the authority of the exhibition in the eyes of traditional museum visitors and enabling the museum to distance itself from the content as mere 'personal opinion' [4].

The price of honesty

'We were intent on drawing attention to the museum as an imperial structure that is intimately tied to systemic whiteness. We also strove to highlight how individuals reproduced institutions. In meetings, we threw out phrases like "white fragility" and "systemic racism" to staff who had, perhaps, never been confronted in this way. Although we were allowed creative freedom within the exhibition and were encouraged to be candid, it often felt like the price of our honesty was any future chance to work with the museum or, worse, that it might jeopardise further decolonial projects. Though we were encouraged to be upfront, we were never sure where we stood. Meetings could be very tense.'

After this, the co-curators were emailed the interpretation (the exhibition text). 'To our dismay, it was written in the same neutral voice that we had critiqued weeks earlier. We were told that we could "edit" the text, but there would be little time to make larger changes. There was nothing to be done: we had to set aside questions like *am I being exploited and would a white man accept this and what about self-care* so that we could "decolonise". Four of us locked ourselves in a room and collectively re-wrote the entire interpretation. We spent hours arguing about wording and grammar – what would be added to the story, what would we leave out – on the history of Birmingham and eugenics, partition, Kenyan independence, the environment... All the while we were concerned that our efforts might not be accepted, and that our passion might be edited away.

Shifting shapes

Decoloniality is also challenging because it is necessarily unreachable, necessarily indefinable. The legacies of European colonialism are immeasurably deep, far-reaching and ever-mutating, and so decolonial work and resistance must take on different forms, methods and evolve accordingly. ...In the end, the museum accepted our re-write. And when I walked into the exhibition gallery, it was undeniably moving: objects are properly contextualised as souvenirs of traumatic histories.'

Alternative approaches

We then looked at an alternative approach seen at the American Art Galleries at Brooklyn Museum Art Gallery. The interpretive text is written from a more opinionated and emotive standpoint and, in contrast to most UK museums, feels like it is directly addressing a multicultural audience. The Brooklyn model was selected as the preferred approach: it maintained the authoritative voice of the museum through using relatively conventional museum presentation but consciously challenges the perceived neutrality of museum text. The goal was to create interpretation with a shared authorial voice and the content and tone driven by the co-curators.

The original idea was that the museum curators would take the key points and questions identified for each of the stories by the co-curators, draft museum-style text based on the Brooklyn approach and send this to the co-curators for approval. As noted the panel texts were rejected by the co-curators, who rewrote the panels over the course of one very intensive day, resulting in text that was more provocative, challenging and pitched at a considerably higher reading age.

A question of accessibility

The next challenge was how to ensure the co-curators' voice led the content but was still widely accessible. Or whether to make an exception on the reading age? An argument would certainly be that in trying to tackle complex and difficult histories, it is not possible to express it with the nuance it needs at a standard reading age of 12. There is also the question of audience. The primary target audience for the exhibition is Birmingham's young and diverse population, many of whom are engaging with these debates on a daily basis and are familiar with the language used. Maybe some variation in levels of language used within the museum is ok. Does every display need to be pitched at the same level? We did edit the texts further to ensure they were accessible to a wide audience as far as possible, therefore melding the museum and co-curators' approach. The team also arranged for academics in relevant areas of expertise to fact-check the panels and negotiated specific changes as a result. These were often subtle but significant changes to the nuance of the message. For example, in the Indian Independence panel:

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Co-curator text: *The large scale violence of partition was largely created by British policies of pitting Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities against each other, who had previously lived together in relative peace.*

Final text: *The extensive violence of Partition marked the culmination of complex processes, which pitted Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities against each other, with British policies of divide and rule playing an important role in widening differences. But for centuries, people of different religions had often intermingled, shared language, food, cultures, music and ways of life.*

Different voices

This academic consultation has also been a useful line of defence for the whole team when the content of the gallery has been criticised. In this way, the voices of the museum and the co-curators were combined to reach a place which would hopefully work for both in terms of tone, emphasis and content.

The result of this challenging and emotional process was language in the exhibition that addresses the reader directly and asks questions. It takes a stance about the effects of the British Empire on the world and the erasure of this history in Britain. The texts are emotive and definitely not 'standard-issue museum neutral':

'If you aren't (racialised as) white it is difficult to see yourself fairly represented in popular culture, media and government policy.'

'Migrants are often surprised to find Britain's inhabitants have forgotten their centuries-long relationship. To those who have forgotten, here is a reminder: "We're here, because you were there".'

'One of the central features of the British Empire was a desire to control and exploit natural resources.'

'This history [of human exploitation and environmental impact] is often hidden in museum displays. Instead, museums often highlight the craftsmanship of objects and the stories of the people who made them or owned them…. What is the true cost of the things you own?'

'Capitalism is a system that prioritises the interests of individuals and their companies at the expense of the majority.'

Where we are now

When museum staff seek to challenge our own institutions and our audiences, our parameters are that the museum 'must adapt or die' but workers generally believe that museums are a public good and benefit and so are deeply invested in the preservation of the museum institution. How could we employees be otherwise, no matter how self-critical we may try to be? But for some people, the existence of museums themselves and the construction of certain collections is not a public good, but a 'normalisation of ongoing colonial violence' [5].

Our training teaches us to seek consensus and create non-judgemental, inclusive and above all neutral interpretive text. But too often, in trying to offend no-one we also touch no-one. Effective provocation to the museum world and its audiences takes non-workers. Self-regulation is no regulation.

Sara Wajid, formerly Head of Interpretation at Birmingham Museum Art Gallery is now Head of Engagement at Museum of London. Katie Hall is Exhibition Curator at Birmingham Museums Trust.

References

1. p.17, The Times, 24 February 2018.

2. Twitter, Livvy_Drusilla, 5:54pm, 31 March 2018.

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4. The Museum will not be Decolonised by Sumaya Kassim, Media Diversified, 17 November 2017.

5. Laura Peers, talk at Museum Ethnographers Group Conference, Pitt Rivers Museum, 12 April 2018.

Toolkit

THE HUMBLE CAPTION

What makes a great image caption? To answer this question, we first need to think about the work captions perform in different settings – books, films, exhibitions etc. We can probably agree that a first task across all these contexts would be to provide information, the caption supplying the 'raw data' of who, what, where, when that allows the viewer to read the image more accurately. Already we run into a problem here, however, as such captions are just as likely to mislead as they are to enlighten. As Susan Sontag argued in one of her last pieces of writing, all photographs 'wait to be explored or falsified by their captions'.

Purpose and framing

We therefore need to look a bit deeper to work out what it is image captions actually do. While this will always depend on circumstance, one potential response would be to say that the caption frames. No matter what information they convey, the words associated with an image always ask us to look differently – to see in a new way. We are called upon to observe certain characteristics of the image, and to disregard others. This may be to do with the content of the picture, or it may equally relate to the image as an object, emphasising methods of printing or processes of production, for example.

Focused on this question of framing, we can begin to see how the caption might take on a new role within the interpretive landscape. Text is always transformational. Even the simplest caption, such as an image title, cannot escape this fate. The moment words are placed in dialogue with an image they begin to play off one another, sparking new meanings and possibilities.

Positioning and content

Given this knowledge, can we say there is an ideal system for captioning images? While I would not want to advocate for a one-size-fits-all approach, I think there is space for a mode of caption writing that plays with the expectations of this particular aspect of interpretation. We might for example write captions that speak to each other rather than simply *for* the image, creating hidden trails within these standardised texts. Alternatively, we might play with well-established rules of positioning and content to force a different kind of engagement with the text, one that asks questions rather than seeks simple answers.

Whatever the approach, we need to recognise that the image caption occupies a difficult position within the museum, gallery, or heritage site. Often the last concern of the harried curator, the caption is like the last figure in a set of Russian dolls. This is because the person encountering the label has already negotiated a series of frames before reaching this point. These frames may be visual, emotional, curatorial, experiential, or any mixture of the above. Seen from this perspective, perhaps the most compelling use of the caption would be to offer a sudden jolt of meaning – an unexpected moment of reframing that transforms not just the image, but the very experience of encounter itself. In this way the caption might transcend its humble status to become a powerful tool in the interpreter's arsenal.

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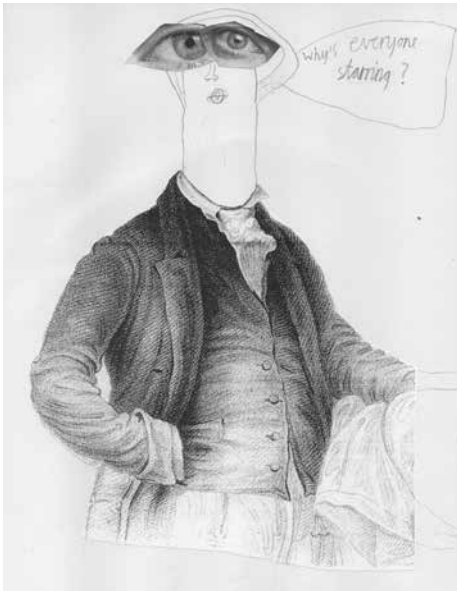
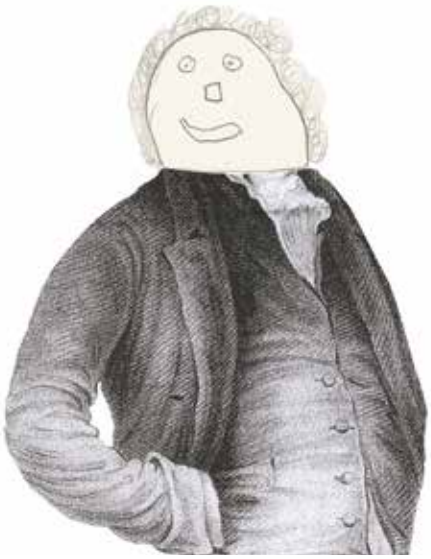
Revealed

Interpretation that amuses and inspires...



These portraits of Samuel Oldknow (1756-1828) were made by Year 4 All Saints' Primary School, Marple in Cheshire, as part of the *Revealing Oldknow's Legacy* project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. They were made in a workshop inspired by the work of contemporary illustrator Sara Fanelli who incorporates images collaged from other sources.

From Elizabeth Newbery, a consultant who specialises in interpretation for families and children.



Call for academic posters competition

Association for Heritage Interpretation conference, 'Provoking Conversations' 3rd – 5th October 2018, Chester

The Association for Heritage Interpretation is offering six students (working typically at Masters or PhD Level) the opportunity to present an academic poster at the AHI annual conference in October 2018, and one day attendance at the conference.

The conference theme is 'Provoking Conversations'; however, AHI are looking for academic research that examines heritage or nature-based interpretation and visitor engagement in the widest sense and ideally covers a range of interpretive practice.

The students who are selected to present their posters will also have their abstract published in the AHI Journal. The best submission for a poster will also be invited to present a summary paper of their research to the full conference.

To submit a poster outline for consideration please send an abstract (500 words max) to admin@ahi.org.uk by 1st May 2018.

Enquiries should be directed to AHI trustees:
Kev Theaker (kevtheaker@gmail.com)
or Philip Ryland (PRyland@bournemouth.ac.uk)

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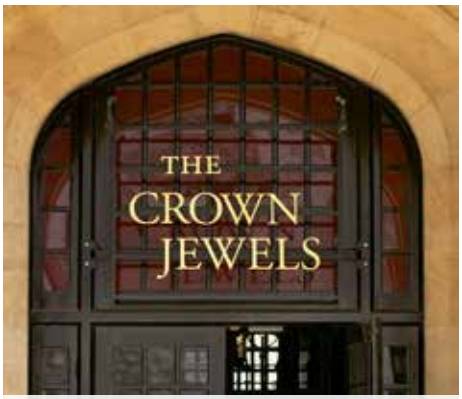

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