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CONVERSATION

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Contents

The next issue will feature:

RISK – exploring some of the risks we are or could be taking to enhance our practice and create ground-breaking interpretation.

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

CONVERSATION

Interpretation is an art, a creative process. There are of course formulas that help interpreters 'create' or teach others to think interpretively. The why, who and what of a site, place or collection forms the basis of our plans. But for our thinking to go beyond this we must dive deep into more challenging waters. Concepts such as empathy, entertainment and provocation define our relationship with our subject and our audiences. They have also played a starring role in theming some of the most recent journals.

My reason to address these concepts in the Journal is because people – young people in particular – are increasingly turning to other places for entertainment and for learning. We must compete with these real and virtual places and, if we want to thrive and see our audiences increase, we must create places where people can share, talk and participate. This journal explores conversation.

At face value conversation seems a simple enough idea. It is about interaction and communication. But in the field of interpretation its meaning is myriad. Are we creating places of dialogue? Do our visitors come to our sites as an interesting place to converse? Or is it that our interpretive ideas themselves create a dialogue between exhibit and visitor?

So, to unpick some of these ideas…

We have come to talk

Research tells us that our visitors come to connect, to learn, to feel moved and to interact. It is this social interaction with friends, with family, with others and with our stories that is an increasingly motivational factor to visit.

I have worked extensively in the Middle East where it is the social and participatory nature of the heritage site that is by far the largest motivating factor for audiences – often multi-generational family audiences – to come. And today in our technology-infused world those places that allow people to connect and converse with others are increasingly popular. It is as if the conversation is key and the content is just the thing to talk about.

Interpretation itself is a form conversation

As interpreters we present ideas, objects and stories. This act of presenting is itself a dialogue or conversation between the intentions of the interpreter and the experiences of our visitors. But is this a true conversation or is it just a flow (often one-way) of information?

So, how do we generate conversation

Conversation is not a passive activity. We must provoke – by generating content that sparks debate. We must resonate – appealing to the experiences (as best we can) of society. And we must actively involve our audiences – providing space and activity to generate conversation. Remembering the power of conversation in our places can help break traditional authoritative approaches to curation and interpretation.

In her book *The Participatory Museum* (2010) Nina Simon talks extensively about social objects, '*objects that connect the people who create, own, use, critique, or consume them*'. These do not need to be physical objects but they do need to be entities. Our sites and institutions are filled with these. She uses the example of her dog as a social object – a great conversation starter as she walks around town. So think about the social objects you could use the next time you are planning your interpretation and perhaps conversations will start flowing.

Our next edition, my last as Commissioning Editor, is all about 'risk' and we will explore some of the risks we are or could be taking to enhance our practice and create ground-breaking interpretation. If you would like to contribute an article to this, or to any of the other sections of the journal, please get in touch with me: eric@barkerlangham.co.uk

Eric Langham Founder, Barker 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 archives, best-practice guidelines and a host of other materials relevant to professional development. We are adding more resources all the time and will publicise them in the AHI e-News as well as on the website.

AHI members can access the new on-line system (if you haven't done so already) by going to the website (https://ahi.org.uk) and selecting the 'Login' button on the home page. If you haven't already set your own individual password, select the 'Lost your password' option. Enter your registered e-mail address – the one that AHI currently uses to communicate with you – and select 'Get New Password'. Check your e-mail for a confirmation link noting that it has probably gone into your Junk folder and follow the instructions.

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

News & Views

Welcome to the Winter 2018 issue of Interpretation Journal. I am delighted that the theme of the Journal – Conversations – ties in with that of our recent conference in Chester, and that it is explored by an international set of writers. We also welcome AHI Patron Loyd Grossman with a view on the role of professional membership associations. I hope you enjoy the articles and that they lead you to a few conversations with colleagues, clients and consultants.

New website

Those of you check AHI online will have noticed that we have a new website. It was soft launched at the M&H Show. The website is a radical departure in functionality and look from the previous site, as it allows people to book the conference, events, check the suppliers directory, and join or renew membership online. A vast amount of volunteer work has gone into developing this site, especially by Trustee Suzanna Jones.

Awards

The AHI 2019 Discover Heritage Awards open for entry in January, and we are looking for great projects from April 2017 onwards. We have some new categories and are recruiting a team of new judges. If you are interested, please get in touch with the AHI office for more details.

Conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation

The Charity Commission approved our conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) at the end of September. AHI is now on the register of charities under its new legal status. The lengthy transfer process of assets, bank accounts and members from our existing charity status to the new CIO has started. We will update members with any information about your membership as we progress this work. Thank you to trustee Laura Sole for leading on this process on behalf of AHI.

Chester 2018

I hope those of you who gathered in Chester enjoyed this year's annual conference. Did it provoke you to have any new conversations? Have you taken anything back to inform your practice? We owe a big thank you to Sheena Irving and Kev Theaker for organising the conference, as well as to our Chester partners who helped – Chester Zoo and Cheshire West & Chester Council.

Finally…

As some of you will know this is my last AHI News for the Journal. I stepped down as Chair at this year's AGM after three years in the role. I have felt privileged to have been Chair of such an organisation representing such an open, friendly and dedicated group of people, and to have worked alongside some hard-working trustees. Thank you all who saw me off at Chester. I wish Jim Mitchell good luck in the hot seat.

Bill Bevan
Ex-Chair, AHI

Reviews

REPORTING RESEARCH

Philip Ryland reviews an augmented reality experience at the Deoksugung Palace, Seoul, Korea.

The use of, and engagement with, modern technology is widespread at museums and galleries, as well as heritage, cultural and natural sites. Such technologies can include portable and personal devices such as smart phones, tablets and even small wearable devices, notably smart watches and glasses (Tussyadiah *et al*. 2018).

The power of technology in interpretation

The role of these devices in everyday life is well documented and increasingly academic studies are looking at their value in informing and enhancing the on-site visitor experience. The opportunity such devices provide 'to increase information provisioning, support navigation and orientation (using GPS apps), provide language services (using translation apps) as well as interactive interpretative experiences is staggering' (Tussyadiah *et al*. 2018). Whilst such technologies continue to provide fun and entertainment they also have the power to energise the site in a very real way engaging visitors with it and its inhabitants who can literally come to life in front of them.

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR)

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are two of the technological advances which are now widely adopted. Their use can help to enhance the visitor understanding of the significance and importance of the site but also aid the decision-making process as well as encouraging and guiding appropriate on-site behaviours.

Virtual reality (VR) applications can augment and afford experiential understanding via interaction 'in a way which may not always be possible on a site' (Champion 2008:210). Augmented reality (AR) is a 'visualization technique which

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superimposes digital images, sounds and text-based information on top of a real-world view of the site' (Kounavis *et al*. 2012:2; Tussyadiah *et al*., 2018). Haptic communication (through touch) can also be possible using these technologies. There are three key elements to a VR or AR experience and these typically include:

1. Visualisation of the site and its inhabitants at a particular point in time through virtual and/or augmented walking experiences
2. Immersion (both social and cognitive) into the experience through sights, sounds and smells
3. Affective involvement in the experience through well-designed activities which offer a degree of control over the experience by the visitor.

A recent study by Chung *et al*. (2018) investigated visitor satisfaction, attitudes and behavioural intentions as a result of engaging with AR at a royal palace, the Deoksugung Palace, located in Seoul, Korea. The research investigated the value of a mobile application called *Deoksugung in my Hands* which provided visitors with high-quality historical and 'point of interest' information using photos, videos non existing (i.e. they existed once but are no longer present as remains on site) (Chung *et al*. 2018:635; Korea Tourism Organization 2018).

An important part of the research was to explore the visitors' aesthetic experience. Chung *et al*. (2018) argue that this is particularly important given the limitations of many mobile devices in terms of their display and resolution by comparison to a home PC.

The research tool for the study consisted of 34 statements, each measured on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The statements were arranged in groups (see Table 1 overleaf). 145 responses were obtained. 94 (64.8%) were female and 51 (35.2%) were male. 102 of the respondents (70.3%) were aged under 30, of which 87 were students (60%). 108 (74.4%) had a university/college education. Despite this, only 48 (33.1%) had ever used AR at a site before. Some of the key results in relation to the statements are presented in Table 1 (page 6).

The study suggests that overall satisfaction with the visit was indeed linked to satisfaction with the AR app. App linkage to a positive attitude towards the site, as well as an 'intention to return', was also proven. However, the aesthetic experience of the app appeared to relate more strongly to overall satisfaction than the perceived enjoyment of using it.

The use of VR and AR experiences has raised a number of concerns in recent years and some of these are briefly noted in the following list:

Table 1. Responses of visitors to the Deoksugung Palace to the Likert statements

(adapted* from Chung *et al*., 2018:638)

Group 1: Expectation confirmation (Mean score for the group: 4.726)	**Weighting****	**Group 2: Perceived advantage** (Mean score for the group: 5.490)	**Weighting**
The service level provided was better than I expected	.825	Using the app I can visit more effectively	.925
My experience of using the app was better than I expected	.844	I feel I will be able to get more information during my visit	.892
My expectations from using the app were confirmed	.844	I find the app useful	.887
Group 3: Aesthetic experience (Mean score for the group: 5.508)	**Weighting**	**Group 4: Perceived enjoyment** (Mean score for the group: 5.372)	**Weighting**
Just being there was very pleasant	.907	I enjoyed using the app	.924
The setting was not bland	.901	I had fun using the app	.911
I felt a real sense of harmony	.868	Using the app did not bore me	.871
Group 5: Satisfaction with the AR app (Mean score for the group: 5.112)	**Weighting**	**Group 6: Attitude towards the location** (Mean score for the group: 5.352)	**Weighting**
Satisfied with the quality of information	.904	Using the app has been very educational	.897
Satisfied with the visual interface design	.882	Using the app was a real learning experience	.885
Satisfied with the system stability and speed	.847	Using the app has stimulated my curiosity to learn new things	.856
Group 7: Behavioural intentions towards the location (Mean score for the group: 5.859)	**Weighting**		
I think I will visit again having used the app	.903		
I will continue to visit in the future	.880		
I want to recommend the location to others	.836		

* The Likert statements listed have been abbreviated to reduce the space needed in the Table.
** The weighting is an indicator of significance, a higher score indicating greater significance.

1. Some apps continue to offer an over-emphasis on the presentation of the site, its inhabitants and their experiences rather than promoting a deeper understanding of these events.
2. Many visitors still require a briefing on how to use such apps which means academic studies struggle to gauge a more 'spontaneous' response to the use of, and interest in, an app.
3. Demographics remain a challenge, with young, well-educated and highly interested visitors still more willing to accept apps, meaning that truly random sampling has still yet to be fully achieved in many settings.
4. An obsession with technology means that some visitors might 'miss the point of the experience' because of their interest in the design of the app itself.

Suggestions for further research include looking at downloading activities (prior to arrival), the speed of mastering an app as well as on-site behaviours linked to app-directed activity.

Modern technology has the capability to bring experiences and events 'to life' which can be truly mind-blowing but that does not mean that the visitor has understood or even fully appreciated their significance. A number of academic studies have revealed that visitors often remember more about the technology itself and the way it is presented than they do about the actual experience and that is our challenge going forward.

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

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Reviews

Ashleigh Hibbins

Immortalised asks visitors to consider why, how and what we remember.

EXHIBITION

Ashleigh Hibbins reports on Historic England's temporary free exhibition: Immortalised.

For just a few weeks from 30 August to 16 September 2018, The Workshop in Lambeth was transformed into *Immortalised*, Historic England's latest temporary free exhibition. During its short run, *Immortalised* aimed to uncover 'the people loved, left and lost in our landscape' by exploring memorials of all shapes, sizes and subjects.

Sprawling across The Workshop, a cavernous former warehouse for the London Fire Brigade which doubles as a community events and exhibition space, *Immortalised* makes a bold statement. In fact, it defies the notion that Historic England only does interpretation at traditional historic sites. The open concept design, massive placards of unvarnished wood, painted-on interpretive panels, mish-mash of memorial ephemera and flowing gauze drapes give hints of a travelling roadshow or an old Western film. The temporary feel of the exhibition – and indeed its short lifespan – is a pleasing and thought-provoking contrast to the eternal nature of the content and objects on display.

A reimagined statue of Robert Clive, featuring the 'shadow' of his colonial legacy in India.

Contextualising Colston, one of the winning memorial design submissions.

Instead of a prescribed visitor route, the exhibition is grouped into six broad themes: *Immortalised, History, Remember, Discuss, Honour* and a separate *Competition* space. Although there are some design nods to more classic definitions of memorials, the focus and strength of this exhibition are the myriad other ways we remember people and events. Street names, engraved padlocks, bicycles by the site of an accident, bank notes and even an Underground station temporarily renamed 'Gareth Southgate' during the 2018 FIFA World Cup are all poignant examples of how memorials are embedded in the very fabric of our lives.

Immortalised aims to provoke conversations about why some people and events are fixtures in the public memory (think: European, male, royal), while others aren't. Displays such as *A Long Shadow over London* – a reimagined statue of the controversial Major-General Robert Clive – also asks visitors to consider alternative narratives about who is currently memorialised. I saw for myself how well the exhibition achieves this goal when I witnessed two visitors debating over whether *A Long Shadow* should be flipped with the shadow on the plinth and the idealised image of Clive on the floor.

This topic is explored further in the *Competition* space, which features the top design submissions from a nationwide call for memorials that are currently missing from our landscape. The winning designs cover a huge range of topics, from Bristol-native Edward Colston's involvement in the slave trade, to Rosalind Franklin (English chemist and X-ray crystallographer), to the first British woman in space, Helen Patricia Sharman. All provide a glimpse into a future collective memory that is more balanced and representative.

Visitors are not only encouraged to reflect and discuss, but also to contribute to the exhibition. In the *Honour* section, you can read about who fellow visitors would like to remember (from next-door neighbours to Michael Jordan), and add your own to be included in the display. This section provides an important element of participation and offers a fascinating glimpse into personal stories and memories.

The impressive Workshop venue is not without challenges. The exhibition is dominated by huge plywood and gauze silhouettes of London's most recognisable memorials such as Marble Arch and the Trafalgar Square lions. According to Historic England's curatorial team, this was intended to create the effect of walking 'inside' the bones of these iconic pieces. The concept is intriguing but isn't entirely successful in practice. The sheer size of the space makes it difficult to visually connect the gauze and wood silhouettes, and the overall effect looks more decorative than part of the interpretation. The unusual venue also poses another challenge; the echoing acoustics make it difficult to hear the interpretive soundscapes at busy times.

The postbox and visitor response wall behind.

Wood and gauze silhouettes dominate the exhibition space.

Yet overall, *Immortalised* is remarkably successful at exploring a complex topic in a way that balances sensitivity with a bold, modern approach. For those looking for a traditional exploration of stone war memorials and marble statues – this exhibition is not for you. With its striking design, limited traditional artefacts and provocative interpretation, it is more akin to an art installation than a conventional exhibition.

There is so much more to memorialisation than the Cenotaph and Nelson's Column. Ultimately, *Immortalised* succeeds not only in challenging how we think about memorials and remembrance, but also how we view Historic England as an organisation.

Although there are some design nods to more classic definitions of memorials, the focus and strength of this exhibition are the myriad other ways we remember people and events. Street names, engraved padlocks, bicycles by the site of an accident, bank notes and even an Underground station temporarily renamed 'Gareth Southgate' during the 2018 FIFA World Cup are all poignant examples of how memorials are embedded in the very fabric of our lives.

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

Reviews

AHI MEMBERSHIP AND BEYOND!

Jim Mitchell and Philip Ryland explain how to access the recently updated AHI Membership and its benefits.

One of the great strengths of AHI as a network is its diverse membership, drawing from many different disciplines and the entire width of cultural and natural heritage. Its membership is made up of people at all stages of their professional interest and experience in the field of interpretation, from those just starting out through to lifelong interpreters with many decades of experience.

Engaging with AHI

AHI is committed to supporting and assisting your professional development in interpretation wherever you are in your career. There are many different ways you can engage with AHI and its membership including through its events and conferences and the myriad of informal connections you make at these events. There are also some set milestones that you can reach in your career related to membership categories, starting with Associate and Student Membership, through Full Membership, and for some, onto becoming a Fellow of AHI.

AHI has recently reviewed and updated its Full Membership process, making it simpler, more transparent and more accessible, as befitting our diverse range of applicants. The process is based on demonstrating core competencies in three areas of interpretation:

- **Planning**: the process to help guide delivery and evaluation of interpretation.
- **Delivery**: employing suitable media to deliver the planned interpretation.
- **Evaluation**: formal or informal techniques used to inform and improve interpretation development and delivery.

These are explained more fully on AHI's website. The new process more easily allows those who are practitioners in a particular field to become AHI Full Members, for example a guided walk leader, designer or costumed interpreter can demonstrate the competencies with reference to their particular discipline.

The application process is simple – to apply you fill in form detailing your experience and describing how you have demonstrated these competencies in your career to date. This form is reviewed by a membership panel drawn from volunteer members. If the information supplied in the application form demonstrates the applicant's competency then Full Membership is awarded. If not, the panel will come back to the applicant with feedback and recommendations for how this can be achieved and what further evidence they might wish to see. This might include attending events or training, and we are now matching many of these to the competencies to help those interested in membership identify which would be most suitable for them.

The current panel consists of Dr Philip Ryland, Lisa Keys and Jim Mitchell with an additional person being recruited this autumn. We want to encourage Associate to become Full Members and we are very happy to talk through the process and answer any queries by phone, email or in person at our conference. Please do contact us through the office if you have any questions, by calling us or emailing admin@ahi.org.uk

Full Members can use the AHI logo and letters MAHI after their names. Full Membership is an important step in the career of an interpreter and one to be celebrated, but there is more to do after that! Our ongoing professional development never stops and AHI is committed to supporting interpreters throughout their careers. Keep in touch with AHI through our e-bulletins, social media and website to see upcoming courses that will aid your professional development. Likewise, AHI is a great platform to share your experience, through presenting at our conference to writing an article for the journal.

For those for who have practised interpretation for many years and made a significant contribution to the field, there is a further category of membership that can be applied for – Fellow of AHI. Fellows have often had a very active role in the development of interpretation, a significant contribution to good practice or a substantial publications record. We are now starting to review the process of becoming a Fellow of AHI in the light of the Full Membership review, and are keen to encourage more of our experienced members to consider applying. Please get in touch if this is of interest to you.

Jim Mitchell and Philip Ryland are AHI Trustees.

AHI: supporting every step of your professional journey

Advocate the work
of the profession

4 EXPERTISE IN INTERPRETATION

Submit an article
for a newsletter, journal or other publication

Deliver a workshop
or training event for colleagues

Apply for AHI Full Membership

Planning

Delivery

Evaluation

3 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Reflect on the work
delivered and projects completed

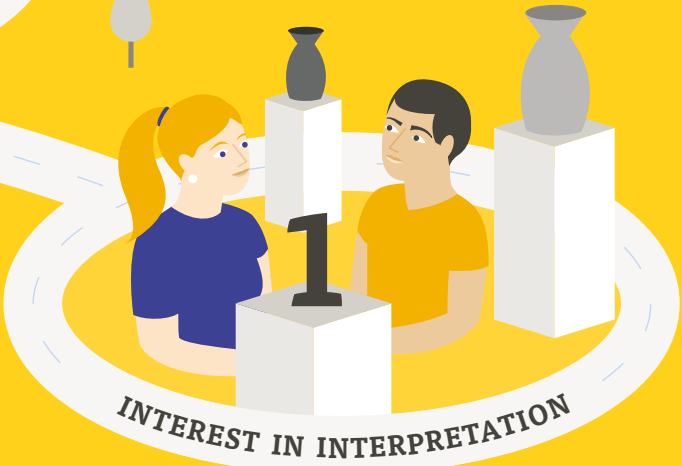
Attend events
training, workshops and conferences

Apply for AHI Associate or Student Membership

Work with clients
and colleagues to deliver interpretation

2 INVOLVEMENT & TRAINING

Gain an awareness
of the breadth of the profession



1 INTEREST IN INTERPRETATION

Typology

Looking at interpretation techniques

One person's ideal interpretation is another's nightmare display. We know that people learn in different ways and in Finn Wooley's job at the museum of London he spends a lot of time trying to balance the many and often competing preferences of our public.

Empathy

So, stepping away from the day job I have been thinking about my most memorable museum experiences and have come to the conclusion that for me empathy always trumps description. I have also come to realise that although some great immersive experiences can remain in the memory long after a visit, the fact that many fail to do so suggests that we need a much more rigorous approach to deciding on the content of our exhibitions before we begin layering in the most appropriate exhibition techniques.

I am interested in how we create an atmosphere that gives space for the visitor's imagination.

Dignity and passion

We can all recall the museum visits that remain in the mind long after the experience. For me a visit to the Heroes and Martyrs Gallery in Estelí, Nicaragua, many years ago remains fresh in my mind. The museum is dedicated to the history of the young revolutionaries who lost their lives in the Sandinista revolution of 1979. The displays when I visited consisted of little more than a few rusting AK47s and a dense display of snapshots of young people most of whom lost their lives in the fighting. The domestic and intimate nature of the family snapshot, the often handwritten first-hand labels and the dignity and passion of the museum volunteers (often relatives of the young people in the photos) still remain in my mind to this day.

Wellclose debtors' prison cell.

We all know that visitors remember the experience first and foremost. That experience can be manufactured in many ways. When museums have sufficient budget they invest in technology which helps to create an immersive experience. Whether it's the dark ride of the London Dungeon or the secret cinema performance, the public crave to step beyond observation to become participants in some way in the experience.

To use technology or not?

I am not arguing against the use of the immersive display but rather suggesting that it be used sparingly. The Titanic experience in Belfast is a good case in point. A very well-executed heritage experience it undoubtedly is and one which employs many very good interpretation devices. The standout one for me is the fly-through experience from the lower decks to the first class apartments. This experience was to my mind the one outstanding memory of the entire visit and was strong enough to have allowed the exhibition planners to cut back on some of the other technology used in the exhibition.

Can it be done without technology I ask myself? Visitors to the modern galleries at the Museum of London are always intrigued by two exhibits, the interactive Booth History map and the Wellclose debtors' cell. Today the Booth map display represents fairly basic interpretation technology. Visitors can scroll through a large-scale digital map which is projected onto a wall encased within a small room some three metres square. The genius of the display is the subject of the 130-year-old map which catalogues London streets by the class of their occupants. Contemporary Londoners crowd into this display to discover if their house or street was aspirant or down at heel when the map was made. The map itself is fascinating and the immersive nature of the display makes it easy to understand.

Interactive Booth History map.

The Wellclose display which is also very popular employs no technology at all. A written label explains the context of the debtors' prison and the cell which is heavily decorated with graffiti from debtors is left as an empty quiet space for visitors to experience.

Unlike heritage experiences museums have access to strong objects that can do a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to memorable visitor experiences. The Museum of London has a collection of bricks which still bear the marks and smell of the Great Fire of London and we hold the bloodstained execution vest of Charles I. The challenge for displaying such material in an age when a digital narrative is always only a smart phone away is to hold back and allow space for the visitor to immerse themselves in a moment with the collection.

The power of objects

And museums have brilliant objects that can tell amazing stories. It might be the propeller from the SS Kennett in the Discovery Museum in Newcastle which was rebuilt by sailors in the mid-Atlantic in 1899. It could be the incredible sniper's camouflage suit in the Imperial War Museum's First World War Gallery created by soldiers who were trained by former Highland gamekeepers and deer stalkers.

However, we remain nervous of giving those objects space to impress. We surround them with other objects, we continue to crowd cases with objects sometimes mixing really accessible objects with things like ephemera and then we worry about how to make the story accessible when what we should do is pare back our messages, choose really strong objects and give the visitor space to empathise.

For many years I was responsible for the wonderful collections of the Horniman Museum. The story of the overstuffed walrus is one which is arguably the great takeaway experience for visitors to the museum. Why? Firstly it's a spectacular exhibit, an object that literally towers over visitors in the museum's natural history gallery. It's also an accessible object; people understand what it is. Finally there's the marvellously human story of somebody over stuffing it because they hadn't seen one in real life.

So we must be bold, chose our collections well, be sparing in our displays whilst investing heavily in targeted and truly memorable technological experiences. When we get that right we give our visitors the very best museum experience possible.

Finbarr Whooley is the Director of Content at the Museum of London.

Benchmark Project

Hintze Hall

Restarting the heart of a museum

Fiona Cole-Hamilton describes how the interpretation team at the Natural History Museum sought to create a sophisticated snapshot of the museum's science and collection, and in doing so, revive the tired heart of the building.

The Natural History Museum (NHM) in London is a sprawling organism that is kept fed and alive by the pulse of visitors that enter through the central Hintze Hall at the heart of the building. Over the years, this hall has undergone several redevelopments, the most recent of which was completed in July 2017.

Curatorial aims

As with many capital projects, the plan for a redevelopment of the NHM's central hall began many years before implementation. After several iterations, the Hintze Hall redevelopment advanced with three main curatorial aims: to better showcase the breadth of the museum's vast collection, to present the museum's key intellectual narratives and to improve the visitor experience within the space.

As the majority of visitors who enter the NHM do so through the central hall, the displays had to appeal to a general audience, be eye-catching enough to excite visitors but not increase dwell time in the space, and reposition the museum as an institution dedicated to challenging the way people think about the natural world.

Inspiring origins

The curatorial vision for Hintze Hall gained inspiration from the museum's original designs. Created by founder Richard Owen to inform architect Alfred Waterhouse's plans for the space, Owen proposed an index for the museum displayed across the nave-like alcoves of the hall. Each alcove was to represent the epitomes of the key classes of the natural world, and at the heart of these displays there was to be a specimen that Owen considered to be at the apex of nature: the whale.

The vision for simplistic displays that capture the diversity of the natural world underpinned the curatorial visions for the revived hall of 2017.

Owen worked closely with Waterhouse throughout the development of the museum. One of the most familiar design features of the building – the terracotta mouldings that dress the interior and exterior of the museum – were designed to represent the diversity of the natural world. The animals and plants depicted on the east of the building represent extinct species, while those on the west depict extant, or living, organisms (except for the ill-fated passenger pigeon). This early organising principle became another source of inspiration for the reviving curatorial vision.

Breadth of the collection

The NHM has a collection of over eighty million specimens. An internal review conducted in 2012 discovered that just 0.02% of these collections were on public display. While the museum would ultimately like to increase this figure, after consultation with collection heads and the visitor experience team it was decided that this was not the right space to do that. Instead, one of the key aims became to create displays that drew from every section of the collection, and therefore gave visitors an impression of the diversity of specimens the museum looks after.

The curatorial team decided that within each alcove, or 'Wonder Bay' as they would come to be known, one large, visually impressive specimen – or collection of specimens – would be chosen to represent one section of the museum's collection. The specimen selection was also to demonstrate diversity in: the material type of specimens held by the museum – bone, stone, tissue etc., geographical origin and deep time. All specimens were to be authentic and, where possible, come from the museum's current collection. The last selection criterion was that every specimen should fit into one of the museum's three new intellectual narratives, outlined below.

Extensive consultation with collection curators, scientific researchers, division heads, museum directors and trustees led to the final selection of specimens now seen on display in Hintze Hall.

Intellectual narratives

As the Hintze Hall redevelopment team shaped the curatorial vision, the museum also released a new strategy and as part of this defined three key intellectual narratives that all future exhibitions, programming and scientific research should support: Origins and Evolution, Diversity of Life and Sustainable Futures. Pinning each specimen selected for display to one of these key narratives paved the way for the interpretive response.

The specimens selected to represent the Origins and Evolution narrative – a fossil mastodon, four fossil trees, the most

The blue whale: an icon of evolution, biodiversity and sustainability.

Hintze Hall: a selection of star specimens.

complete fossil dinosaur ever found in the UK, a piece of banded iron formation and a pallasite meteorite – were each selected because they said something about the origins and evolution of life on our planet. These specimens were positioned chronologically on the east side of the hall, along with the extinct terracotta animals, running from front to back.

The Diversity of Life narrative was conveyed using a combination of pinned, pickled, dried and taxidermed specimens – two giraffes, a blue marlin, a large coral, a selection of red, green and brown seaweed and a diverse representation of the thirty-two known insect orders. These specimens were positioned on the west of the hall.

The Sustainability narrative appears as a thread running through the interpretation of all specimens.

The whale hoisted into the centre of the Hall was selected for its ability to carry all three narratives simultaneously. Having evolved out of the sea and back again, existing now as the largest animal on our planet and having been brought back from the bring of extinction by the same species that took it there, there was really no better specimen to become the icon of the revived NHM.

Interpretation

The light-touch, layered interpretation panels were designed to convey three layers of information at an increasing level of detail to engage multiple segments of the general audience. A star fact about each specimen sits in large font to the left of the panel, while the body text offers information on the importance of this specimen, its link to the intellectual narrative and detail on the collection it represents. The final layer provides the collection details of this specific specimen, demonstrating the museum's commitment to authenticity.

Watching visitors activating the hall by taking photographs, discussing the stories and moving from bay to bay feels like life has returned to the NHM.

Fiona Cole-Hamilton led on the interpretation development of Hintze Hall between 2012–2017. She is now a consultant working in the cultural sector.

Digital Update

BODY IMMERSIVE ARCHAEOLOGY

A few weeks ago Don Enright was lost in a warehouse in Tokyo. The experience started purely with the haptic – it was pitch-black, with the warm feel of water above his knees. As more people joined him there was the delicate sound of splashing. Next, iridescent Koi carp began to swim between Don's legs, abruptly transforming into a carpet of summer flowers. This was teamLab Planets: a multisensory exhibition providing a succession of collaborative experiences, including a forest of mirrors and LEDs outstanding in its beauty and effect. Every step in Planets took charge of more of the body until the final planetarium where responsive flowers and music replaced nebuli and shooting stars, cocooning tightly-grouped, joyous strangers on the floor.

teamLab is an artist collective whose work focusses on body immersive works, blurring people, nature and art, physical and virtual. My own research interests parallel those of teamLab, on a rather smaller scale and substituting the past for nature. In particular I have worked with graphical and imaging methods to create different forms of representation of the past. My concern though is that, despite a canon of writing on digital representation, significant projects such as EMOTIVE and a broad sweep of other extraordinary, creative experiments in interaction design, heritage experiences often fall short of Planets' ability to overwhelm. Indeed, this emotive power has been at the heart of a reticence by some at taking similar flights of fantasy across the heritage sphere, and I think it's time to let go.

Grant Cox; ArtasMedia

The Tidgrove Key.

When I was nine I was taken by my parents to a Roman site in England and I remember clearly peering into the glass case at a slightly dusty wooden model of the reconstructed building whose remains surrounded me. I peered through the doorway, straining to see the colours of the wall paintings and to hear the sounds of the occupants. And as I stared at the model, I closed my eyes, and I was there. The model took me half way, and my imagination did the rest. And that's where the magic was.

When we think about digital design we might refer to these kinds of interactions – the peering through the smeared glass of the case at the model – as "interface effects", following Alexander Galloway's phrase. The combination of my nine-year-old eyes, the wooden model, the shadows cast through it from the tiny Christmas tree bulbs inside all created a unique space for interaction, just like Norman Rockwell's famous palimpsest of representations. But these interaction spaces were not created to provide me with some kind of time travel. They were providing a space for empathy, thinking myself into another Roman place, both creating and conjuring existing memories. Now that I make digital models myself I've appreciated the impact that modelling has on understanding. Milton Glaser famously made it clear that drawing is thinking. And as many of us have suggested over the years, crafting a digital representation, of whatever form, is also an embodied, thinking process – doing the modelling makes new understandings, if for no other reason than the fact it often takes so damn long. Increasingly we now blend digital and physical making, strengthening this embodied process, exemplified by Pat Tanner's recording of the Newport Ship which in turn fed into his meticulous work on Damien Hirst's *Unbelievable*. We also see this in the links between archaeologists, animators and dancers or potters and CG artists, explored so eloquently by the CinBA project.

This modelling sometimes forms part of a wider quest for a kind of hyper-realism, sharing its roots with artists like Estes and with supercomputing. It aims at verisimilitude: making the world inside a computer, so we can experience imagined places as real. Like the different strands of photorealist painting, approaches such as predictive rendering attempt either to exactly mimic a particular view or create real-seeming but wholly imagined views from many disparate variables and components. An example here is a reconstruction of Çatalhöyük by the artist Grant Cox. A digital version of my childhood Roman model would funnel light and sound across mosaics in ways that are physically accurate, down to the wearing of the pavement by habitual movement of the building's residents. These increasingly, indexically real expressions of the past draw on the same technologies as teamLab to create multi-sensory experiences, based on information sampled from the world according to the same modalities: the anechoic sound of chant convolved in

Grant Cox; ArtasMedia

The Shrine of the Hunters, Çatalhöyük.

the model of a chapel or the changing surfaces of a piece of sculpture relayed by a haptic glove.

Jaron Lanier describes such haptic experiences as coming before visual experience in the origins of consumer virtual reality (VR). Different modalities allow information to be exchanged more effectively, with work in areas such as sonification demonstrating the value of sound as a complement to visualisation. One day we will be able to taste the provenance of a digital model, just as a sommelier links wine notes to soil. Lanier emphasises the need to use these body immersion technologies not to replicate the world but to create wholly new worlds, crucially from within VR, that in turn will allow us better to appreciate the real. This embodied creativity has also been expressed in the ZH VR Group, where VR extends painting as a creative architectural form.

Through these means our models attempt to create presence: a sense of being in a place, often with others. Here the digital modelling and interaction technologies available to us all can now literally kill or cure: they can treat psychosis (as in the work of my colleague Lucia Valmaggia), or increase the likelihood of a soldier shooting someone dead, for real.

For heritage this presence might allow us to serve as a slave in the building, to smell the garden and be reminded of one's childhood, to be afraid of retribution for some misdemeanour. Should digital models of the past then make us more afraid? Aroused? Angry? Interaction design research has proved that all three are possible and yet the ethics behind their use and their anchoring in the real world need much more attention.

Having shown us the world as it is and allowed us to feel a part of it, the third facet of digital experience modelling is inspiration: to create digital artefacts and places that have a biography, a patina, but that leave gaps, prompt emotions and give the imagination space. In the case of the Tidgrove key, produced from a range of archaeological evidence, the visual inspires proprioception – one can feel the bones of the wrist turning the key in the lock, even without devices to stimulate that sensation. Again, we know that this virtualised experience is so profound that it can train physical skills and rehabilitate physical disabilities. It is here then in this imagined space that I see so much opportunity for the heritage world to draw on body immersive works.

It is undoubtedly the case that visceral experiences such as teamLab Planets could convey a sense of certainty about the past that is illusory, but only if they were accompanied by the coherent narratives associated with public interpretation of history. Their ambiguity means that this is not the case. The question remains how those of us who want to tell emotional stories about the past, perhaps linked to sources and arguments, can do so in ways that do not destroy these experiences. To date I think we have relied too much on digital instantiations of physical interpretation, such as the ubiquitous label floating in an augmented reality (AR) magic window. We lack the interaction grammar for using the whole reality – virtuality continuum in ways that don't destroy the affordances of the technology. This presents an enormous opportunity. By all means let's use technology to expose the facts and the gaps, but let's stick to the good bits. Above all, we should create our own body immersive interfaces to the past, memory palaces as unique and glorious as that warehouse in Tokyo.

Graeme Earl (Professor of Digital Humanities, King's College London).

Debate

Greater than the sum:
what networks can achieve

Loyd Grossman states that the heritage sector is as an intricate web of civic and voluntary institutions with diverse missions to protect and highlight the UK's rich history and culture. He suggests that in today's fragmented global environment, these organisations must cultivate their networks to address the many challenges facing the sector.

The sector's combined expertise, much of which is volunteered, is the envy of the world. Since 2002 the Heritage Alliance, the sector's umbrella body, has helped build and strengthen the sector's networks. Foreign delegations now regularly visit us to try and understand both how we function and how our sector manages to draw in this incredible level of organised civic engagement.

Yet too often, the sector's achievements, such as the £10 billion in gross value added it adds to the economy, are under-recognised or blindly attributed to other sectors, which is why organisations such as the Heritage Alliance are needed to work to ensure that our sector's cumulative value, both economic and cultural, is appreciated by government and other key stakeholders.

Introspection

Work in the heritage sector can sometimes be introspective. The work done by AHI and others ensures that messages explaining the value of heritage reach beyond an individual's work to be built into the UK's collective consciousness.

It is public enthusiasm married to public understanding that will give heritage a sustainable future – something neither Government intervention nor simply increased funding can do alone. This work is made easier by collaborating through our networks. While partnerships are not always easy – we all have our agendas, loyalties and priorities – working together brings benefits to us all.

The benefits of AHI

The AHI harnesses the benefits of connecting individuals who recognise the power and importance of heritage interpretation. Its network allows AHI members to learn from each other and encourages multi-lateral conversations that in turn generate greater engagement and interaction. This is exactly what needs to be replicated on a larger scale across the sector and beyond.

As Chairman of the Heritage Alliance I have a good understanding of how the sector works together. But to an outsider, the disparate channels of communication and relationships may appear confusing, illogical or both. However, it is this multitude of networks that keeps the sector working. They enable it to offer more and to have a stronger impact, far beyond the sum of its parts.

Below, I look at a few areas where networks can really help make a difference.

Policy change: a focused and coherent ask is stronger

The heritage sector is made up of organisations of all sizes, and whilst a multitude of voices can be valuable, a loud and persistent central voice is vital to clearly making our case. Networks also help large organisations understand the issues faced by smaller ones, helping even the quietest voices to be heard. Given the current pro-development, politically tempestuous climate, it is vital that third-sector organisations work more closely to protect heritage's interests and longevity. Heritage is incredibly specialised and understanding it takes time and experience. Ministers and decision makers rarely have had this exposure to understand our needs, so the case for policy change must be made clear through a focused, coherent and direct ask. However, this ask must be evidenced, which leads us to the second point.

Heritage counts: an evidenced and memorable case is stronger

Heritage and culture are a huge part of the bedrock of British civil society but without a protected budget they have been disproportionately affected by cuts. Ironically, the long-term success of third-sector heritage institutions has meant that heritage protection is taken for granted.

Heritage protection has become an assumed truth, without acknowledging the massive effort that goes into maintaining it. The general lack of understanding of the sector's precarious financial situation makes advocating for heritage – both in terms of funding and policy – more difficult. During this period of austerity, all funding requests and policy changes that have an economic cost are heavily scrutinised and need to be supported by highly detailed evidence that clearly demonstrates their worth. Collating such research requires teamwork from organisations across the sector, which in turn requires networks to be built.

Current heritage construction in England alone is already worth £9.6bn; working more closely together, so much more could be done.

Such research allows us to create more memorable statistics such as the fact that nearly four times more people visited heritage attractions in 2016 than attended league and championship football matches. Yet the unified voices of heritage supporters have yet to be properly networked and mobilised in public debate. If the sector could harness this power, who knows what could happen?

Networks with other sectors: we are stronger when we demonstrate value to others

The benefits of a strong heritage sector manifest themselves in other areas such as housing, health and international relations. But we must make an evidenced and memorable case for heritage to these industries to ensure our efforts are recognised. Relationships across sectors demonstrate heritage's value to others while reinforcing the case for why it should be supported.

Ever more research backed by health professionals is highlighting the links between heritage and improved health/well-being. In fact, the National Trust's 'Places That Make Us' report discovered that the brain's amygdala, which processes emotion, was particularly stimulated by locations special to the monitored individual. Of those who were surveyed, 86% described this place as being part of them and 58% felt like they belonged when visiting this place. Another example is the 'Museum's on Prescription' project, run by UCL and Canterbury Church University. Health, social care and third sector partners referred 115 lonely, isolated and elderly people to partner museums in London and Kent. Participants who enjoyed a range of 20–30 minute activities for 2 hours a week, such as talks, object-handling, discussions, creative activities and production of exhibition and museum guides, reported an increased sense of wellness. Social prescribing – the term given to non-clinical care for medical conditions – is well suited to many activities in the heritage sector. Collaboration with the NHS could lessen the burden on local GPs while engaging people who may not normally visit heritage sites.

Heritage can help tackle the housing crisis through closer collaboration with the construction sector and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. New homes do not necessarily need to be new build. Hundreds of brownfield sites and under-utilised heritage buildings are ripe for sensitive renovation and reuse. Current heritage construction in England alone is already worth £9.6bn; working more closely together, so much more could be done. For example, applying standard office floor space densities to the total amount of net vacant floor space in Greater Manchester and Lancashire's textile mills illustrates the potential to generate 133,000 new net additional jobs (equivalent to £6bn of Gross Value Added per annum) or 25,000 new homes which would go a long way to accommodating the North West's growth needs without building on precious greenbelt.

This year, the UK topped The Soft Power 30 index which rankings, with its heritage and strong cultural traditions being a major contributing factor. A British Council study which asked young American adults what made the UK attractive showed that governments' current and past actions were only the 16th most important aspect at 17%, whereas the UK's 'cultural and historic attractions' topped the list, with 43% agreeing that this was key to the UK's image and international offer. International cultural networks forged through initiatives such as the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund (CPF) can operate alongside traditional streams of diplomacy to help elevate the UK's international status and foster stronger ties abroad, something that will certainly be key in the coming post-Brexit period. The UK has much to share with others, and to learn too; the heritage sector can in turn help facilitate this.

Everywhere we look there are opportunities to build our networks with other sectors by making the case for heritage; the examples above provide only a glimpse into the amazing work heritage can do with other sectors. Fostering larger and more resilient networks will help heritage to be featured in the big conversations that will shape the UK's future.

Brexit: a multi-sector case is stronger

We are incredibly fortunate to have such robust heritage institutions in the UK, but in the transitional post-Brexit period these institutions need to be able to secure the funding not only to continue to protect British heritage but to be able to be at the forefront of crafting Britain's emergent cultural identity. This can only happen if the heritage sector joins with others to provide a multi-sector case on shared issues such as funding, movement of goods and people and regulation. Horizon 2020 funding will soon be inaccessible, and solutions to this need to be found. However, most alarming, is that heritage is not explicitly mentioned in the Brexit White Paper. The sector must work with others to make its case heard.

I hope you will think about your personal networks – what do you bring, what do you need to join? As a collective, we are doing well – the heritage sector is increasingly seen as coherent and coordinated. But addressing the areas highlighted in this article will help us avoid drifting into an echo chamber. Bringing together a mix of perspectives and unusual combinations can help us look ahead and not just firefight. Dynamic networks help us grow stronger and ensure our long-term success, relevance and survival.

Loyd Grossman is Chair of the Heritage Alliance and Patron of AHI.

In conversation with...

JANICE MAN

Janice Man is Graphic Designer at the Science Museum. She talks to us about working in a museum context and the interface between designers and curators.

How did you get into museum graphic design?

I started out doing a BA in Graphic Design at the London College of Communication. I specialised in information design, with a focus on accessible and inclusive design. After university, I worked for two small publishing companies. I've always been interested in museums and galleries – I volunteered at the Serpentine Gallery throughout my time as a student – so when the opportunity came up at cultural heritage consultancy Barker Langham it was an ideal fit. Working there, I realised how much behind the scenes work went into exhibitions: things like visitor flow and structuring of information, which linked with my background in information design. Later, I wanted to do more exhibition work so I moved to the Imperial War Museum and then the Science Museum.

You've worked in several different contexts. How does the museum environment compare?

I really enjoy the variety of working in museums, doing everything from digital media to publications to exhibition graphics to education packs, and working as part of a multidisciplinary team. Museums tend to have strict graphic guidelines, which might be seen as restrictive, but I enjoy the challenge of being creative within those guidelines. And it's great to be able to see a project through from the initial kick-off meeting all the way through to the completed design actually being seen by visitors.

What have been some of your most memorable projects?

Some of the most memorable projects have been those where I've worked directly with artists whose work was being exhibited. Working on George Butler's illustration exhibition at IWM was an amazing experience: the drawings were extremely powerful and it was a huge privilege to have the artist's trust to display his works. Recently, I was involved in the display of the engineering model of BepiColombo (the spacecraft used for the mission to Mercury due to launch in October 2018). The interpretation graphics are very clean and simple, but a huge amount of time and thought went into designing them in order to ensure that visitors could understand what each element of the spacecraft did.

How does that interface of designer and curator or interpreter work from your perspective?

It can be an extremely positive relationship, but it can also be challenging if the parameters for the design aren't clearly established at the start of the project. Often curators want to include too much information in too little space, so the message can get muddled. It's great when the curators are open to dialogue with the designers – we can help to balance the visitor perspective with content needs and use the exhibition text to shape the design of the display.

How can that relationship be improved?

Graphic design is often seen as a support service, especially in museums, but the visual aspect of exhibitions is so important. So, when the wider team have respect for design skills and involve us in discussions from the outset, it makes for a much better outcome. Things like defining a clear brief, sharing text and content as early as possible, and having open discussions about word counts can really help to smooth the process.

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

Graphics will always be a key part of exhibition displays as they are such an important part of museum communication. But at the same time, I think there will be a boom in using smart technology such as gesture-based experiences and immersive technology. It's a really exciting area, especially for contemporary art.

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

It's great when the curators are open to dialogue with the designers – we can help to balance the visitor perspective with content needs and use the exhibition text to shape the design of the display.

Conversation

What is Dialogic Interpretation?

Don Enright explains how dialogic interpretation is an interpretive practice that gives new structure and purpose to an age-old technique: the art of conversing with and listening to the visitor.

For interpreters who pride ourselves on our presentation skills, the idea of handing the reins of the program over to the visitor can be utterly unappetizing. For career presenters, the idea of not knowing how a program will go – or even what the content of the program will be, exactly – might even be terrifying – in the loss of control, and the risk of failure. Nobody wants an unhappy audience, after all.

Dialogic interpretation, also known as facilitated dialogue, takes that risk.

Dialogic interpretation is a programming style that builds on the simple, spontaneous exchanges that we have always had with our public. It creates a platform where we relinquish the spotlight and step into the role of moderator, facilitator and stage manager of an imperceptibly-but-carefully-structured program that we call an *arc of dialogue*.

Why should we facilitate dialogue?

One of the most important transformations in the heritage sector in recent years is the growing recognition that we are not simply in the business of communicating heritage: we are in fact defining it with our visitors.

Heritage is, of course, not history and it's not science: it is what we make of them. To borrow the language of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, historians and other scientists uncover *forensic truth*, also known as fact. Individuals interpret those facts as a kind of *personal truth*, and groups of individuals come to consensus over these in what we might call social truth. (For us in the heritage sector, *social truth* equals *heritage*.) The inconvenient thing about social truths, of course, is that they sometimes place us in conflict with other groups who, by virtue of their own experiences, hold very different truths.

Dialogic interpretation is a step toward a reconciliatory process, referred to by some in the South African context as *restorative* or *healing truth*. By facilitating dialogue, we hope to arrive at these healing truths by listening to each other's stories and beliefs, and by gently challenging each other within a safe and civil forum.

Now, not all of us treat themes of South Africa-scale social upheaval. Our content is often simpler than that. But the idea behind dialogic interpretation is that, whether you are an aquarium, a historic house or a sports hall of fame, your stories *matter*. They have relevance today – social importance beyond the face value of the resource at hand. All interpretation asks the question, "Why is this subject important today?" Why do the 1933 Olympics matter now? Why does the plight of an immigrant family 100 years ago matter today? What social import is there in the story of a clownfish swimming around the aquarium in front of us?

Facilitated dialogue is a way of answering those questions, and daring to find answers that your interpretive planners, manager and curators may never have considered.

The goals of dialogic interpretation are lofty, to be sure. But there are other, more immediate benefits for our institutions. Visitor engagement is one of the first. There are visitors who process learning socially – and there are visitors who simply enjoy talking about what they've seen and done. There are visitors who solidify memories through the rehearsal of their visitor experience – by talking through what they've just seen and heard. There are visitors who – believe it or not – have zero interest in lectures, tours and demonstrations, and who have never darkened the door of our interpretive programs in the past. There are marginalized visitors who have never seen themselves valued by the houses of culture that we manage. What if they saw themselves valued in the context of a meaningful dialogue?

What does it look like?

Facilitated dialogue can take the form of a few minutes' exchange at the end of a presentation, or it can be a 45-minute program in its own right. It may extend beyond the actual in-house phase of the visit, with dialogue that continues through social media and email.

When offering dialogic programming for the first time, it's probably best to start modestly: include an element of light dialogue over the course of a guided walk, say, or a single question for discussion at the end of a presentation.

First and foremost, dialogic interpretation is not the debating of forensic truth. It is not a group of people gathering in a room to argue over whether climate change is real or the Holocaust happened. Fact is fact, and one of the interpreter's most important roles is steering the dialogue away from factual debate, toward questions about how visitors feel about the facts, what they choose to do about the facts in their own lives, how other groups feel about the facts and how we might face those facts together as a society.

Like traditional interpretive programming, interpretive dialogue is centred around a principal theme. But in dialogic interpretation, that theme becomes a *theme question*. Theme questions dig at the big ideas and "so whats" of our subject matter. For example, "What responsibility does society have to protect species at risk?", "What are the limits of freedom in a democracy?", "How do we value land?", "How do we define justice?"

Theme questions are by definition problematic. They are a catalyst for discussion and can't be glibly solved or answered. And they expose real-world dilemmas which your site addresses at the core of its mission.

An *arc of dialogue*

Facilitated dialogue is often most successful when it follows a shared visitor experience. A group visits a gallery, for example, or watches a thought-provoking film or has an encounter behind the scenes with the collection. Through that collective experience, they become accustomed to the subject matter, to the facility, the staff and each other. They are exposed to an interpretive message that is ideally simple, clear and thought-provoking.

In the facilitated dialogue that follows, the interpreter begins with simple, non-threatening questions. The New York-based company Museum Hack uses the metaphor of "green light" questions that begin the dialogue; from there you progress to yellow-light and red-light questions – questions that ask more of the visitor and involve a bit more risk and substance. The US National Parks Service, who have invested heavily in dialogic interpretation in recent years, recommend beginning with easy "me" questions, and progressing to easy "we" questions before advancing to challenging "we" questions.

Regardless of how you classify them…

- Dialogic questions shouldn't be answerable with a yes or no
- They must be inviting and generative, leading to new questions
- They must not – and this is a vital point – depend on subject matter knowledge. It is a conversation, not a quiz

The US National Parks recommends remembering the mnemonic ORACLE: the "Only Right Answer Comes from Lived Experience".

- "What does the word 'progress' mean to you?"
- "When was the last time you were without shelter? How did it feel?"
- "When have you had to choose between two bad solutions in your life?"
- "How do you feel when someone asks where you're from?"

Over the course of the interaction, the conversation follows an arc that flows from a simple and relatively superficial exchange, to the sharing of personal truths, to the exploration of others' experiences and finally toward gesture of synthesis and closure.

Some techniques

When offering dialogic programming for the first time, it's probably best to start modestly: include an element of light dialogue over the course of a guided walk, say, or a single question for discussion at the end of a presentation. Forty-five-minute dialogic arcs are daunting for interpreters and audiences alike.

Ensure that your visitors know what they're getting into, and allow them to opt out. Nobody should feel pressured into participating in a dialogic program; it's not going to be everyone's cup of tea.

Establish parameters off the top. Why are you having this dialogue? How long will it last? What will you be exploring as a group? "By the end of this 10-minute conversation, we will have an understanding about how each other feels about subject XYZ, and perhaps have some new insights about the subject ourselves."

You'll want to establish guidelines for dialogue, which might include the following: not telling another person's story without their permission; listening without interrupting; holding what you hear in confidence; not setting out to change someone else's mind; not debating facts; not making assumptions, and so on.

You will need to moderate the conversation actively. In any public forum, there are voices that dominate, and voices that need encouragement. There may be those who interrupt others, and those who take offence at what is being said. As an interpreter, you've probably developed the skill of being politely assertive; you'll need to use that skill. You might use traditional group facilitation techniques like a talking stick passed from speaker to speaker. Or, you may break up the group into pairs, speed-dating style, and have them report back afterwards. You may encourage participants to write how they feel in a few words, and post those words on the wall for a few minutes of group reading and reflection. As with any style of interpretation, you are free to use your creativity, and change tactics on the fly in response to the group dynamic.

Some caveats

As the facilitator, you are the voice of your institution, and you are responsible for the themes discussed in your facilitated dialogue. Are you confident that you have your institution's backing when you raise difficult questions among your visitors? Are you and your institution confident that the subject of your dialogue is open for discussion? Be aware that the act of asking questions tacitly legitimates both sides of the question. When in doubt, talk it over with your managers before you begin with your public.

Every interpreter's "guide to fallacious thinking"

Listen carefully to your participants' turns of phrase. Hot-button language, gross generalizations, misrepresentations of facts and other counterproductive contributions need to be gently identified and discouraged. If at any point you sense that an individual is more interested in attacking or intimidating than engaging in dialogue, you need to be assertive enough to remove the individual or end the program. That isn't easy or pleasant for most interpreters.

Listen particularly for these common examples of fallacious thinking. If you hear them, do not point them out as bad arguments; rather, gently use questions to point the speaker to constructive, logical responses to the issues at hand.

Straw man arguments are a way of projecting a point of view on an imaginary other, in order to discount it: "You probably think that…", "Everyone says that…", "You people always say that…" Be sure to reinforce the ground rule that everyone speaks for themselves, and nobody puts words into another's mouth.

False dilemmas are a common technique to try to polarize people. "You're for us or against us.", "Either we fight, or we live in shame forever." These are easily pointed out – the interpreter can introduce multiple solutions that are neither A nor B.

False causal chains, or slippery slopes, suggest that if A happens, then B will happen and then of course C will happen. Gay marriage will lead to people marrying animals, and to the total breakdown of society, say. A reasonable dialogue might identify many different outcomes resulting from A, none of them being the B that has been proposed.

Whataboutery tries to deflect responsibility by pointing out a completely unrelated wrong. "What about her emails?" to cite a contemporary example. The interpreter can suggest that the group discuss each issue on its own.

There are numerous other types of hot-button reasoning; anyone who has spent time on Facebook or Twitter will have encountered them in all their forms. As a facilitator, your role is always to listen for patterns of fallacious thinking, and to use constructive questioning to guide the speaker toward a more logical exchange.

Some people just don't want to be enlightened

People don't always want to listen to each other. As a facilitator, you'll need to reconcile yourself to the fact that some visitors are simply entrenched in their points of view, and have no interest in considering how others think or feel. Fortunately, people like that tend to steer away from dialogic programming. Usually.

If you find yourself feeling frustrated by your inability to change someone's mind about an issue, you may be facilitating dialogue for the wrong reasons. You are not there to change minds; you are there to facilitate the broadening of horizons. If your visitor refuses to have their worldview expanded, that's their right. You can accept that, and resolve to have your own worldview expanded by having met them.

Good luck.

Don Enright works with museums, historic and environmental sites to increase their revenue, attendance, satisfaction and relevance.

Conversation

Can we engage citizens through heritage interpretation?

Thorsten Ludwig states that the European Union (EU) describes itself as "a society in which peace, freedom, tolerance and solidarity are placed above all else" (EC 2017:26), but in many European countries strong movements are challenging such demands. He asks whether we can we encourage citizens to reflect upon these rather abstract concepts without agitating and without spoiling the time of those visiting heritage sites to escape such uncomfortable issues?

Interpret Europe's publication *Engaging citizens with Europe's cultural heritage* (IE 2017) triggers thinking on such questions. Written for the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, it connects interpretive qualities with findings about the wider European public, about values and about mental frames, and it includes some practical examples of how this connection might succeed. The EU awarded its Altiero Spinelli Prize to this initiative. This article introduces its basic ideas.

Shifting the focus of interpretation?

To define something as heritage is the result of an interpretive process. Without interpretation, there would be no heritage. It is that simple.

However, once heritage has been defined, what is the actual role of interpretation? Should we explain to people what made a site so significant that it has been declared heritage, or should we, rather, support people to interpret their own heritage experience? The latter would mean that we act as thoughtful facilitators, providing facts and offering different perspectives to inspire people's search for meaningful connections.

IE training courses bestow significant attention on this second approach, focusing on the question of what deeper meaning heritage phenomena can reveal to individuals interpreting them.

Figure 1. Interpretive triangle

This approach is represented by a version of the interpretive triangle which arose from several international projects, and to which four basic qualities are assigned:

1. Offering paths to deeper meaning
2. Turning heritage phenomena[1] into experiences
3. Provoking resonance and participation
4. Fostering stewardship for all heritage.

IE suggests that the best possible combination of these elements (see Figure 1) is key to quality interpretation.

The idea that people should be encouraged to interpret on their own is not new. In 1871, when John Muir wrote: "I'll interpret the rocks [...] to get as near to the heart of the world as I can" (Wolfe 1978:144), he didn't suggest that someone else would interpret the rocks for him and, for many years, there has hardly been a conference within the interpretive community where a debate about the pros and cons of encouraging further participation has not been on the agenda.

Looking at visitors or local people as interpreters means that we need to reconsider our own role. At IE, we started thinking about aspects of involvement and taking ownership at rather different levels: in the way we lead our organisation, in the way we train our trainers, in the way our trainers run their courses and in the way interpretive planners, writers or guides emerging from these courses communicate with the public.

Active involvement is required if values and mental frames are to play a more critical role in interpretive activities, and considering this role is at the heart of the *Engaging citizens* study.

The relevance of mental frames

"The story's the thing" (Tilden 1957:26). This is especially true if it comes to the search for narratives that provide personal meaning. According to the linguist George Lakoff, "narratives are frames that tell a story" (Lakoff 2008:250).

1. 'Phenomena' includes all heritage features that can be experienced first-hand, be it tangible (site, object...) or intangible (skill, costum...).

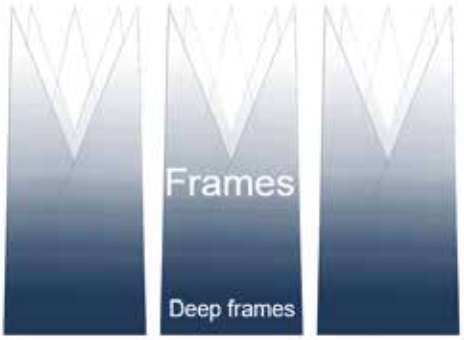


Figure 2. Surface frames and deep frames (Darnton and Kirk 2011:78)

Such mental frames include surface frames and deep frames (Fig.2). If we consider the idea of 'home', mentioning an armchair, a table or a cabinet helps to understand the concept of home; but all of us might agree that home has a far deeper meaning to each of us. Tilden would have said, it includes "a larger truth" (Tilden 1957:9) which can barely be captured by a list of furniture, although describing the furniture might evoke this deeper frame. The same is true for all terms we usually call universal concepts, including solidarity, tolerance, freedom and peace.

To frame an experience for others means to take responsibility towards the heritage phenomena as well as towards the people. Lakoff (2008) explains the process of framing with a well-known example:

In 2001, after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York, the President of the United States claimed that it would now declare "war on terror" (Bush 2001). War is a deep frame which implies on its surface armies, battles, victims and maybe victory. It includes processes that are usually unacceptable, such as killing people. These processes go without saying, once this frame has been accepted. Until today, the war frame guides the policy of many states. An alternate frame to war could be crime. The crime frame implies courts, trials, culprits – and maybe justice. Since 2001, world policy might have developed differently if President Bush had followed this other frame (Fig. 3).

What we can take from this is that using mental frames can have a tremendous impact, that different frames can be used to interpret the same case and that, through these different frames, rather different goals might be achieved.

Frames are connected to values

The stories we offer to people do not only trigger frames that put heritage into context, they also strengthen (or weaken) specific values. One of the most extensive international studies on basic human values has been done by Shalom Schwartz (1992). It was found that all around the world, the complete set of values does not differ very much. It was also found that values appear in relation to other values and that therefore all values can be arranged in groups resulting in a so-called value map (Holmes *et al*. 2011:67). A reduced version of this map is the value circle (Figure 4).

The value circle consists of ten groups of universal values which people of virtually all cultures recognise. Any individual is usually driven by all these values, although to different degrees.

Two effects observed within the value circle are the spillover effect and the seesaw effect (Holmes *et al*. 2011).

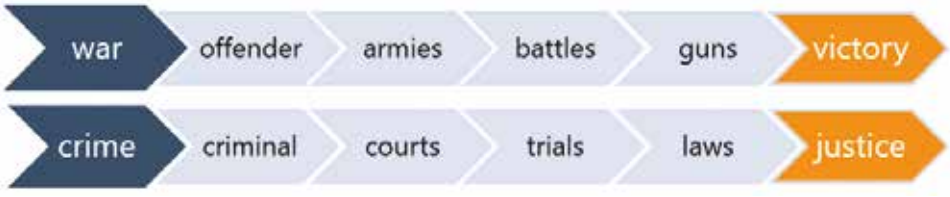


Figure 3. Mental frames (visualisation of an example brought up by Lakoff 2008).

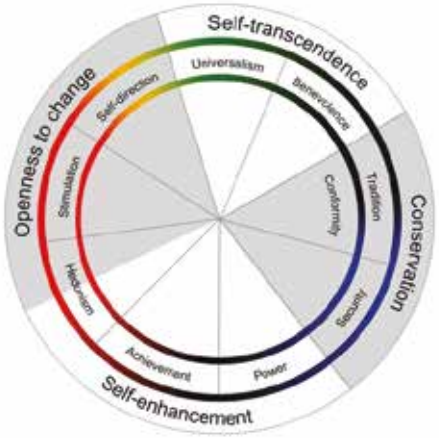


Figure 4. Value circle (based on Holmes et al. *2011:16).*

- The seesaw effect is related to values opposing each other in the circle. For example, emphasising power and achievement values weakens universalism values. This occurs to all opposing values within the circle.

- The spillover effect means that, for example, people who practise universalism values also start to employ the neighbouring value groups of self-direction and benevolence. Again, this is true for each value group around the circle.

This latter effect is critical especially if we intend to encourage communication among people with quite different ideas.

In general, value-driven attitudes are quite stable. However, the relevance of single values might change, depending whether and how these values are triggered. Personal values are mainly influenced by the perceived consequences of acting according to them.

If a society rewards self-enhancing behaviour, it is less likely that it will strengthen self-transcending values and vice versa. Besides knowledge and skills, values are what can usually be influenced through learning; and while formal learning is often urged to focus on knowledge and skills in order to train people for specific job opportunities, non-

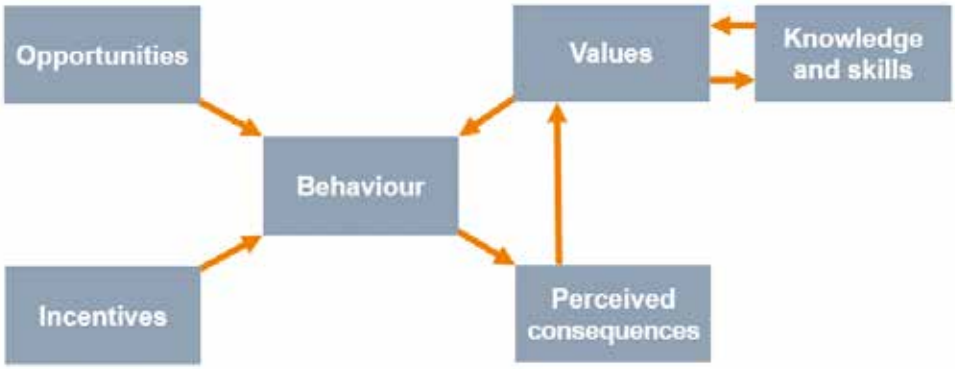


Figure 5. Framework model for environmental action based on Fietkau and Kessel (1981).

formal learning at heritage sites is free to focus more on values and exchange.

Interpretation triggering peace and solidarity?

Let's have a look at how Europe's shared values (such as solidarity, tolerance, freedom and peace) relate to other values that people are driven by.

- Looking at the value circle, there is a vertical axis from more self-transcending values (within the value groups 'universalism' and 'benevolence') to more self-enhancing values (within the value groups 'power', 'achievement' and partly 'hedonism').

- Beyond that, there is a horizontal axis from more change values (the value groups 'self-direction', 'stimulation' and partly 'hedonism') to more conservation values (the value groups 'security', 'conformity' and 'tradition').

According to Schwartz, "one basis of the value structure [i.e. the value circle] is the fact that actions in pursuit of any value have consequences that conflict with some values but are congruent with others" (Schwartz 2012:8). "The closer any two values in either direction around the circle, the more similar their underlying motivations; the more distant, the more antagonistic their motivations" (*Ibid*:10).

"For example, pursuing achievement values typically conflicts with pursuing benevolence values. Seeking success for self tends to obstruct actions aimed at enhancing the welfare of others who need one's help. But pursuing both achievement and power values is usually compatible. Seeking personal success for oneself tends to strengthen and to be strengthened by actions aimed at enhancing one's own social position and authority over others." (Schwartz 2012:8)

It is significant that all values that are mentioned in key papers of the Council of Europe as well as the EU are placed around the value group of 'universalism'. If such values are to be strengthened, it is not useful to put too much attention on the value groups of power and achievement. However, papers of the European Commission often focus on the value group of 'achievement', and the daily news is much more organised around power and achievement than around solidarity or tolerance.

Which are the values triggered by the stories we offer at our heritage sites? For example, aren't historic palaces and castles often organised around self-enhancement values? Do we encourage people to catch a glimpse of these glamourous times or, rather, do we encourage them to question the frames behind them?

Dealing with conflicting values

A recent Chatham House study suggests that in Europe "a new societal divide has emerged along the liberal – authoritarian political spectrum" (Raines, Goodwin and Cutts 2017:24); a clash between 'cosmopolitans' and 'nativists', or between competing visions of 'open' and 'closed' societies. This divide can be aligned to the horizontal axis of the value circle. The authoritarian spectrum can be found mainly in the value group 'security' which will most likely spill over to 'tradition' values – but there is no overlap with 'universalism' values.

According to the rules of the value circle, the most promising way to reach the authoritarian political spectrum might not be to confront the values behind it but to go through benevolence values (spilling over into both, 'universalism' and 'tradition'). These are for example true friendship, responsibility or helpfulness (Schwartz 2012:7).

Obviously, cultural heritage offers opportunities to meet at the 'tradition' field in the value circle; but, especially for liberal-minded people, this is often challenging. One argument for this hesitation is that 'openness to change' is needed more than 'conservation' to master future challenges. However, for people who mainly value tradition, there is no direct way towards openness-to-change values and it might make more sense to pick them up where they are (keeping the spillover effect in mind). Through 'benevolence', it should be possibly to move from 'tradition' towards 'universalism'.

These relationships are mirrored by an old model which has recently been revived: the value rectangle (Fig.6). Following this model, conservation is seen as a 'sister virtue' (Aristotle) of openness and one should value the positive tension between both since it can lead to engaged dialogue. On the other hand, suggesting

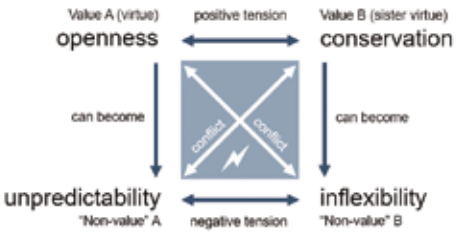


Figure 6. Value rectangle based on Helwig 1965.

that opponents are driven by non-values leads to negative tensions and opens opportunities for populist leaders.

The findings of the Chatham House study significantly support an interpretive approach that could be described as focused on values and on facilitation and mediation. If the European project is to succeed in future referenda, the 'universalism' value mindset towards Europe needs to be strengthened in a way that, for example, not just "50% of the public think that richer member states should financially support poorer member states" (Raines, Goodwin and Cutts 2017:2), as it is the case right now.

Building trust in interpretation

EU Commissioner Tibor Navracsics said: "Through interpretation, I believe heritage can contribute to the building of communities, not just at local level, but also on national and European levels. Bringing citizens closer to their heritage is about bringing them closer to each other, and this is an important step towards a more inclusive society." (Navracsics 2016)

That the Commissioner opened this year's IE Conference, and that heritage interpretation was awarded with the Altiero Spinelli Prize, underlines the potential that others see in the interpretive approach. Triggering conversation, discussion and debate around heritage will not solve all issues; but it can play a more significant role than we often assume.

These are exciting times for the development of our profession. We obviously face some new challenges but there are also new opportunities opening up. For IE, it is an amazing and welcome opportunity to be able to invite members from 48 countries to work on this development.

Thorsten Ludwig is Managing Director of Interpret Europe, the European Association for Heritage Interpretation. He has recently been awarded the European Union's Altiero Spinelli Prize which recognises an initiative of Interpret Europe (IE) to make heritage interpretation key in considering Europe's shared values.

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The study *Engaging citizens with Europe's cultural heritage* can be downloaded for free from www.interpret-europe.net/material.

Conversation

Photograph by Hype TV

Port Arthur Historic Site is one of three sites within the PAHSMA portfolio.

Conjuring conversations on convictism

Jody Steele & Gemma Davie explain how they have evoked enquiry through conversation about convicts and convict settlements in Australia.

For a very long time, historic site interpretation appears to have followed a well-established recipe. These include period furnishings and manicured lawns, ruins named, dated and detailed on signage out the front. We have presented artefacts in cases with labels aplenty, and an ever-knowledgeable guide, all too willing to tell you a story. The Port Arthur Historic Sites in Tasmania, Australia, indeed still have many of these traditional interpretive techniques in play across our portfolio of sites. However, more recently we have been seeking to find other ingredients to complement this age-old recipe.

Incarceration to interpretation

Between 1787 and 1868 a large proportion of the British criminal class were shipped across the seas, the intentional migration of a labour force, to build cities and roads, infrastructure and industry in the antipodes. British transportation to Australia was the first global attempt to build a new society using the labour of convicted prisoners. Around 166,000 men, women and children were transported to Australia from Britain and its colonies during this 80-year period, thus beginning a story now recognised as having global significance.

The Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority (PAHSMA) is fortunate enough to be the custodians of three of Australia's eleven historic sites that form part of the World Heritage listed Australian Convict Sites Property. PAHSMA's three Tasmanian-based sites represent very different aspects of the global story of forced migration: secondary punishment at Port Arthur, industry and hard labour at the coal mines and female incarceration and assignment at the Cascades Female Factory. Between the years 1829–1877 some 20,000 convicts passed through these three penal establishments, hundreds upon hundreds of military and civilian personnel lived and worked in them, several thousand died and remain interred there today. There is a story hiding around every corner, just waiting to be discovered.

Seeking the spark

In 2017, nearly half a million people visited at least one of the three convict related historic sites managed by PAHSMA. Their reasons for visiting varied enormously, ranging from a genealogical connection or perhaps World Heritage tourism, or they were on-board a cruise ship that weighed anchor in the nearby harbour or their school bus delivered them to the door for a field excursion. Whatever the case, our mission as the team responsible for the interpretation of these incredibly significant places, is quite simple – to spark conversation.

While the idea of 'starting a conversation' may sound simple, we work within expansive and evocative landscapes, with multiple layers of history, each representing very different stories. Identifying which, if any, of those elements can create our conversation spark is a far greater challenge. Understanding the 'learning' expectations of each of our visitors is a near impossible task, especially if they themselves know little about the place to which they're arriving. For example, many know Port Arthur as a destination, arriving unclear of the size, scale and complexity of the historic site, let alone if the stories they may encounter will interest or be relevant to them. Without any understanding of what drives an individual's or group's visit, or their personal views, it is difficult to identify the spark that will engage and challenge them.

Photograph courtesy of Department Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Photograph by Hype TV

Aerial images of Cascades Female Factory both before and after landscaping and interpretive 'pathways' installation.

Photograph by PAHSMA.

Cor10 steel, canvas and timber interpretive elements are used throughout the yards to help visitors engage with the space.

Photograph by PAHSMA.

Pack of Thieves Publication and playing cards. Each card represents a woman associated with the factory, each card's 'character' story can be found as a chapter in the accompanying book.

As much as we have an obligation to share a range of very specifically themed stories (forced migration, changing penal philosophy, secondary punishment as a deterrent for crime, and the list goes on), there is the inescapable fact than many, if not most of our visitors, are people on holidays, vacationing and recreating far away from the routine of their daily lives. Although there may be an expectation of learning while visiting, there is also an expectation that they will experience enjoyment in doing so.

Ultimately, our daily challenge is to establish how serious ideas and information can be best communicated to ensure that our visitors are engaged. We hope to present a stimulus for enquiry, to arouse emotion and create meaningful connections to our places and people. Thus, we aim to create an unforgettable experience.

Conversations starters

In an effort to engage with our enormously varied audiences, international and local, young and the young at heart, PAHSMA has delved into a variety of interpretive methods, using a myriad of old and new technologies and materials. Some have surprised us with their success, others we seek to improve as time and of course budgets allow. In the next few paragraphs we shall present only a few of PAHSMA's more recent attempts to capture our audiences' attention and start the sought-after conversation.

The redevelopment of the Cascades Female Factory Yards 1 and 4 started with two vacant grassy/weed filled expanses with no notable above ground evidence of the past beyond some remaining prison walls, a small cottage (Matron's Quarters) and a 20th century fudge-factory repurposed as a makeshift visitor centre. With limited suitable space or conditions for exhibition and very few items within our collection provenanced to the site, we were left primarily with the great outdoors as our interpretive stage.

Defining confining

As you would expect, within the walls of a place of incarceration the grounds were once a very confined and restricted space. Hence, we were faced with the challenge of defining that confinement for our visitors without any of the physical elements that were originally used to ***do*** the confining. Our solution, to recreate the pathways that the thousands of convict women had tread throughout the years. Using hard landscaping and re-establishing the many straight lines of the past (such as building footprints, gateways and fences) we are not physically restricting the movement of our visitors but psychologically creating formed spaces that encourage our visitors to ask "Why is this line/path/gap/material here?". We have used other subtle elements in the otherwise stark landscape to evoke enquiry into the historical use and purpose of those spaces, "What is that over there?".

As well as traditional interpretive panels, throughout the three separate yards of the factory site, you will find strategically placed small A5-sized illustrations of 52 women with strong connections to the Female Factory, be that as administrators of the penal system or women incarcerated. Each real life 'character' reveals her story as you flip the panel over. These women are a just a sample of the multitude of stories connected to the place and have since been immortalised in a publication and set of playing cards to allow those interested to take some of these stories away with them, in a format for the whole family.

Finally, for the readers among our visitors, we've taken the 21st century cooking show approach to history interpretation panels, and deconstructed the paragraphs of text from original documents about the female convicts. We have taken some of the many terms used by the administrators to describe the women directly from their records and placed them in the original entry way of the Factory, significant

as the transitional zone where each woman's identity was both logged and lost simultaneously.

Port Arthur Historic Site

Taking a quick journey down to the Tasman Peninsula, to the Port Arthur Historic Site, we can introduce a complete shift in approach: PAHSMA recently installed what we have termed "SMELL – O – VISION". Unlike the Female Factory, Port Arthur has substantial ruins, for which the historic function of many can be clearly read. An example would be our bakehouse. Attached to the Penitentiary building, the bakehouse was once the centralised 'kitchen' for the prisoner population, and the space in which meals were prepared, bread was baked and food was stored. The walls still stand tall

Photograph by PAHSMA.

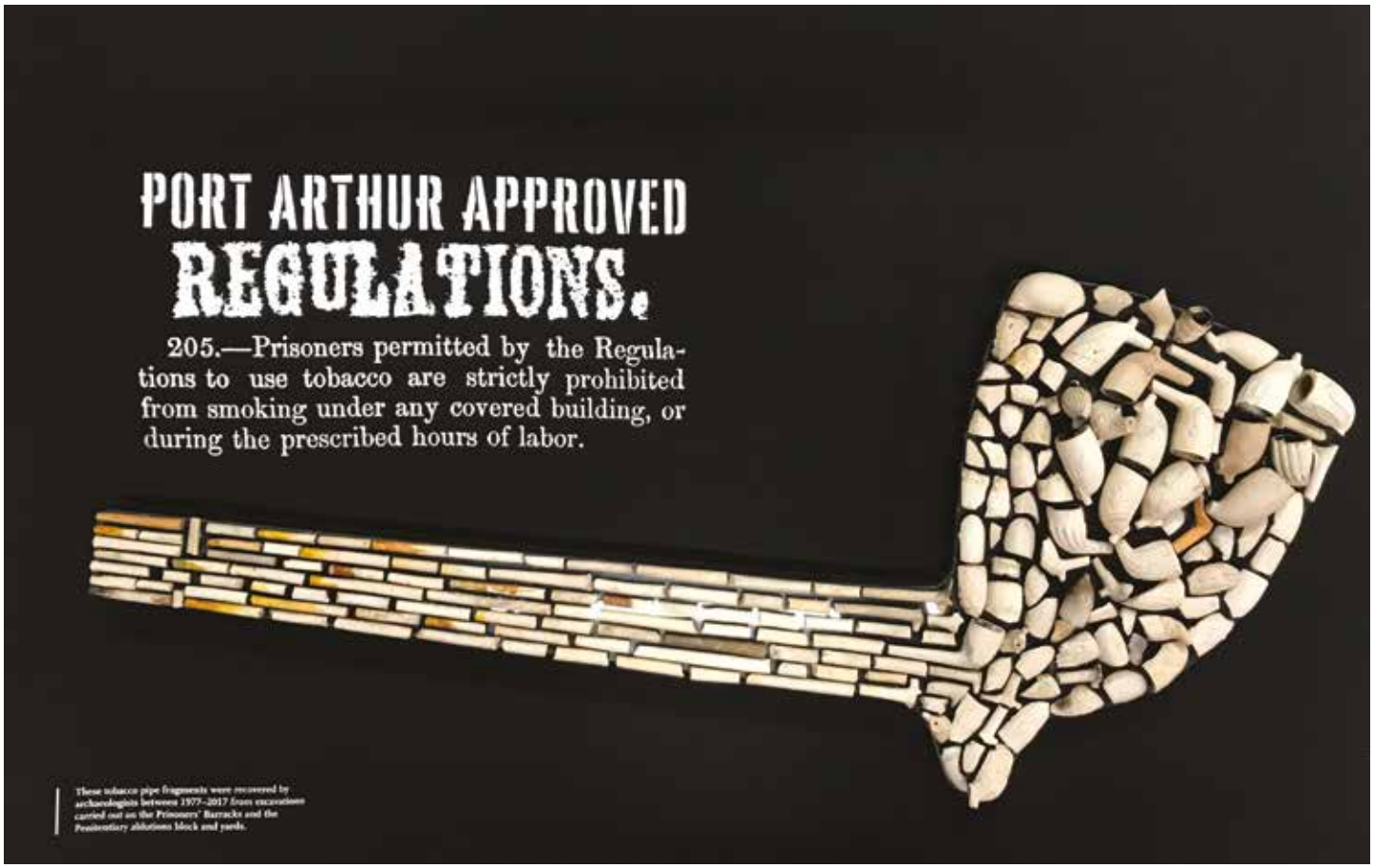
Recreation of the entry 'foyer' of the Factory using Cor10 steel wall panels with black vinyl lettering representing historic documents.

> *Visitors often finds themselves, standing still, closing their eyes, using all their powers of recall to identify that scent, while we stand in the back ground, waiting for their lightbulb moment and rejoicing when we see it.*

and, to the all-enquiring eye, the ovens are still tucked in the wall, the cooking hearths and chimney remnants remain, and yet the space was missing something. Being devoid of the men who would have worked in that structure and the inability to reimagine them in the space effectively and sympathetically, we needed that little something extra to capture the attention of the visitor exploring the ruin, a pause point that wasn't 'another' sign.

After several interactions with suppliers and other informed sources, and being told that what we wanted to do was impossible, our team devised a motion-activated system, driven by visitor entry to the ruin, that injects the air with a vapour. A waft of freshly baking bread, permeating from beneath the walkway in front of the ovens. "Do I smell something?", "What is that smell? It's familiar." Visitors often finds themselves, standing still, closing their eyes, using all their powers of recall to identify that scent, while we stand in the background, waiting for their lightbulb moment and rejoicing when we see it.

One last example presented itself recently in the redevelopment of our on-site interpretation gallery. The space was redesigned to serve as both the launchpad for our visitors' onsite experience and



Photograph by PAHSMA.

Over 100 fragments of excavated tobacco pipe arranged to form a larger than life pipe, showcasing the variety of brands and styles of pipes available to the convict population.

the refuge for post-visit enquiry. Among the many themes and stories that are introduced and interpreted within the new space is a corner committed to challenging our visitors' misconceptions of the convict system.

Port Arthur played an important role in the formation of modern Australian society, and the convict settlement and its related narratives have become integral to our understanding of the convict story. Generations of writers and artists have added to the public understanding of convictism and, as a result, the truth is sometimes lost at the expense of a good story. Fictional work such as the novel 'For the Terms of his Natural Life' by Marcus Clarke published between 1870–72 popularised several myths about Port Arthur, including the well-known tale of two Point Puer (the site's juvenile prison) boys jumping to their deaths from the seaside cliffs – which never happened. Early tourism operators also capitalised on the 'horror' stories of the settlement, and may have been responsible for the creation of one or two ghostly apparitions.

Port Arthur played an important role in the formation of modern Australian society, and the convict settlement and its related narratives have become integral to our understanding of the convict story.

Our new space was equipped with suitable exhibition cases and real space for installations and gave us the opportunity to highlight both education and recreation as aspects of convict life that are not often realised by our visitors. Using a tiny sample of the thousands of archaeologically recovered artefacts from the site, we were able to introduce

Photograph by PAHSMA.

Nine Men's Morris Board with larger than life token cushions enabling visitors to challenge their friends and family members to a game.

Photograph by PAHSMA.

Photograph by PAHSMA.

A few of the ceramic tokens currently exhibited in the gallery, these are made from recycled crockery and excavated from the penitentiary exercise yards.

the stories associated with smoking and gaming, and to draw people in with dramatic shapes, lighting and total immersion in a game of Nine Men's Morris.

Made from recycled lead, slate and ceramic fragments, the tokens excavated from prisoner exercise yards across the settlement are exhibited in a bespoke exhibition case, in a long line, forcing the visitor to stand almost uncomfortably close to the case to identify the variations in material, design and style of each token. When turning their eye and self from the well-lit case to continue through the gallery, the visitor stumbles upon larger than life size cushion replicas of these tokens, poised on a similarly enlarged game board on which we challenge everyone to find an opponent, test their skills, and perhaps trade something of value with that opponent for a win. The activity is intended to provoke thought and conversation about trade and illicit activity within in the prison system, "What would I have to trade?", "How might I trade something?", "What was the value of these teeny tiny little tokens?"

While there are still many myths and misunderstandings associated with the convict system, we hope to represent as many different perspectives on the Port Arthur and Female Factory experience as possible, leaving our work open-ended with many questions asked but not definitively answered, keeping in mind that history is always open to interpretation!

Dr Jody Steele manages interpretation, collections and education for the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority (PAHSMA). Gemma Davie is the Heritage Programs Officer with PAHSMA.

Obituary

James Neil Wilson 1944–2018

Exhibition Designer – An Appreciation

After graduating from The Glasgow School of Art in 1966, Neil spent a postgraduate year in Denmark. He then practised for five years as an interior designer in London, working on a variety of public projects including a British embassy in the Middle East.

MkW Design Partnership

Returning to Scotland in the early 1970s he set up as a one-man consultancy in Edinburgh, designing retail shops by day and working on designs for the *7:84 Theatre Company* in his spare time. In his one-bedroom flat in the Dean village, Neil had more design work than he could handle. So, in 1974, he invited Bill Macpherson and Brian Kernaghan to get together to form MkW Design Partnership in Edinburgh – at that time one of very few 3D design studios in Scotland.

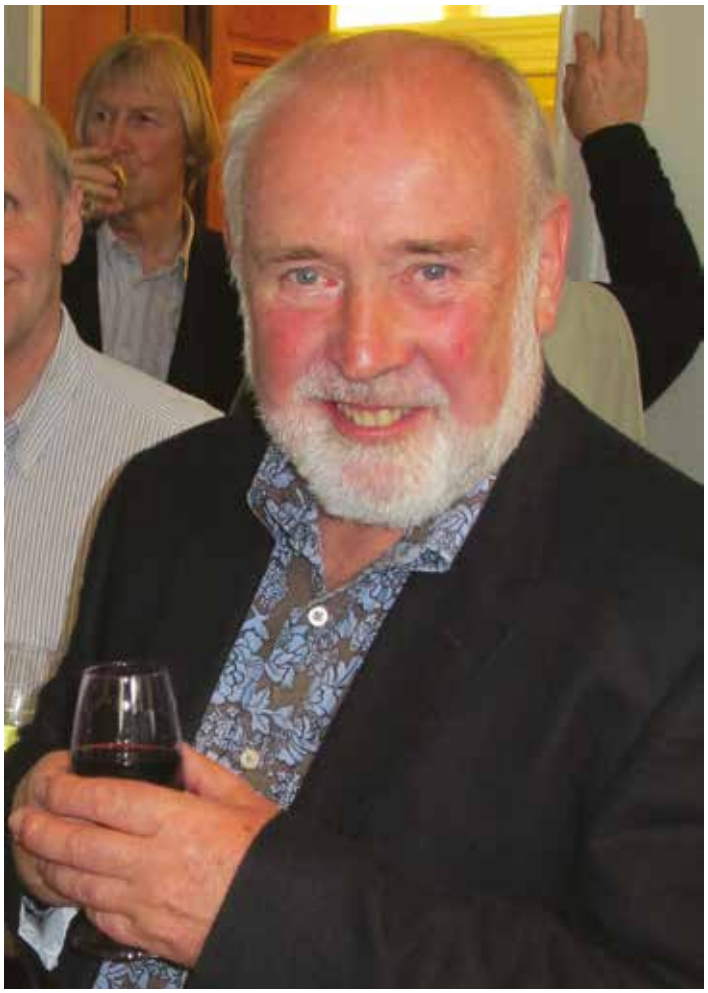
Public interiors and exhibitions

MkW carried on without a break for 41 years until closing the books three years ago. The last project, for Glasgow University, was job number 777. Throughout that time – with sterling contributions from a steady stream of, young, talented and energetic employees who came to work with MkW – Neil and his team carried out projects large and small – designing retail shops around Britain, including a flagship unit in London's New Bond Street and retail shops in all of Scotland's airports. They went on to design interiors for universities and local authorities, offices, town facelifts, and an impressive list of interpretive exhibitions for major museums and institutions in Scotland and beyond.

Temporary and travelling exhibitions

Many of MkW's exhibition projects – for the National Library, The National Museums of Scotland and other clients – were temporary and travelling exhibitions. Although transitory, they were often memorable, if modest, milestones in the cultural landscape.

These exhibitions focussed on a huge range of subjects – typically literature, poetry, Scotland's music national heroes, and world wars. The list is long. Each required a bespoke design approach and a willingness to work with curators to get to the heart of the subject – something Neil always relished. With his readiness to include proffered 'technology solutions', his exhibitions buzzed with sound, film, lighting, all believed by him to be part of the 'visitor experience'.



Skills and qualities

The success and staying power of the practice was due in no small part to Neil's skills and qualities – not just as a 'hands-on' designer, with a passion to deliver the best creative and practical design solutions – but also his canny business sense, warmth and generosity as a person, his ability to get on with clients, colleagues and contractors and perhaps most of all, his dry sense of humour and sense of fun, which all who knew him recall with affection.

"Whenever I think of Neil I think of the ever-present twinkle in his eye. He was an incredibly warm and lively presence on a project, approaching any job, large or small, with an overriding sense of fun and an openness to any and every opportunity. The Library worked with Neil on a wide variety of exhibition themes, from banned books to David Livingstone to the First World War, and he brought to each of them a keen and lively interest in the subject matter, an unquenchable curiosity in our collections and how they could best tell the story, and an imaginative yet pragmatic design eye. The exhibitions which Neil and MkW produced for us were richly immersive, packed full of content, and always went down a storm with our visitors. For us, working with Neil and MkW to create those exhibitions was always an absolute joy."

Jackie Cromarty, National Library of Scotland commented:

He enjoyed recounting, with great hilarity, the delicious irony of being instructed by a panicky client, The National Library of Scotland, to cover up the 'naughty bits' in some illustrations from Fanny Hill – featured in a lively exhibition he was working on entitled "Banned Books", and yes, it was about censorship!

A steady hand on the wheel

Over its 41 years in practice, MkW was, for the most part, a happy place where many designers started their careers and where, remarkably, among the staff two couples met, married and prospered. All this would not have happened without Neil's enthusiasm, skill and steady hand on the wheel.

As a former employee put it: 'He was a great boss, mentor and friend. I will miss him.'

Bill Macpherson & Sheena Irving MAHI.

Cusworth Hall, 2007.

Toolkit

UN-INTERPRETATION

Everything has a story to tell. But does every story need to be told? We, as interpreters, are placed on this earth to help people see the significance, or meaning within a place, or an object. We highlight value, we communicate ideas, stories, memories. We know when it is needed by the bucket load, and when just a sprinkling is required. Importantly, we know that there isn't really a 'one size that fits all' approach to interpretation – we make our own judgements on a case by case basis.

But how exactly do we decide when to put our roles on pause? Are there moments in exhibitions or in spaces when we need to step aside, and let meaning 'just happen'? Do we know when 'un-interpretation' is needed?

The why

We examine what a place or an object is as a means to understanding how best to convey its meaning: we find patterns in content and then shape our intentions from there. At other moments we choose to leave the outcome in the shape we found it in.

No matter how we might structure a story, there are instances when the end result would not do it justice. Take for example, the Museum of Terror in Budapest, Hungary. The former headquarters of the Arrow Cross Party (fascist regime), it is now a museum that tells of the harrowing story of Fascism and Communism in Hungary. The former prison cells in the basement – no panels, no sculptures, no interventions – are an example that show us why it's important for us to make this call. We facilitate encounters, experiences and understanding, and it's in these moments that we know that the encounter *itself* is enough. Within these basement cells, it is the charged emptiness that tells the story. Here, an intervention would have been nothing short of valueless.

Here, 'why' is about knowing the story is much bigger than we are.

The where

There is no algorithm or equation that helps us plot exactly where these moments might occur. We could say that experience tells us that (although it's not always the case) 'un-interpretation' tends to be inextricably linked to sites of memory, sites of sensitivity... sometimes landscapes, sometimes buildings. Whilst objects, artefacts, photographs all lend themselves to pointing a visitor in the right direction, more often than not they play a part in an experience.

A site of any scale can bear the scars of an event, a person or a period in time. It can be comprised countless components, and it's this context and plurality, that moment in which it all comes together which means that our job can be to step back and let 'it' speak for itself. Whatever 'it' is. It is inherent, natural, an unconscious decision, that a visitor to a place makes these judgements about heritage, and history.

Here, 'where' is about a location, imbued with meaning, hidden just below the surface.

The who

Moving on from 'where', it's important to think about 'who' we are dealing with. It is about understanding a visitor as much as it is about understanding the story. In these instances, it is knowing (and relying on the fact) that a visitor will have prior knowledge – they will actively be pre-informed of the context. Their knowledge is not down to us, but more due to their enthusiasm. At the heart of any story we tell are people – they are entwined within the histories of places, and they are our contemporary witnesses. Knowing and understanding who they are, and how they learn, plays a key part in helping us decide whether to plan an intervention.

Picture the Eduardo Paolozzi tiles at Tottenham Court Road tube station, put up in the mid 1980s. To the everyday commuter, they were a graphic delight. But to others making their design pilgrimage to the central London site, their prior knowledge informed them of the context of these tiles. It was perhaps no less an enriching visual experience for both sets of visitors, but for those who know of the impact of this designer, they were able to gather the story in their own way, and in their own time, delving into layers of understanding and experience. Transport for London (TfL) could have plastered the walls with panels, captions and explanations. But instead, there was an active decision to leave layers of the piece open for active discovery.

Here, 'who' is about acknowledging, and giving credit, to a visitor's subjective understanding.

The how

How is about our own understanding, intuition and knowing when the who, why and where are in perfect alignment. The junction where these meet allows us to leave the mediators, curators and learning teams behind. Visitors may not get the whole story, in the most direct way – but their imagination, memory and emotion will bridge any gaps. Sometimes, leaving the decision in a visitor's hands is just one way of letting them explore, digging beneath the surface of a place.

When the time is right, the interpreter steps back – because it is understood that the story is apparent, however subtle this may be. Sometimes the job of the interpreter is simply not to interpret.

Eleanor Suggett is an interpretation consultant working in the cultural heritage sector.

Revealed

Interpretation that amuses and inspires...

Left: Museum at the Citadel, Amman, Jordan. From Barry Joyce.

Below: Stonehenge sculpted in fudge and wilting in a Salisbury sweetshop. From Joanna Bellis.

AHI conference delegates investigate a Snow Road installation. From Jacqui Barbour.

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