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EARTHY MATTERS




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Commissioning Editor:
David Masters
0121 449 1600, david.masters@zen.co.uk

Production Editor:
Elizabeth Newbery
01865 793360, elizabeth@newberyandengland.com

Copy Editor:
Rachel Minay

Editorial Advisory Board:
James Carter and Carl Atkinson

Design:
Touchmedia, www.touchmedia.uk.net

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The next issue will feature: Interpretation without 'interpretation'.

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FOREWORD: EARTHY MATTERS

Welcome to the second edition of the new-look *Journal*, which judging by reactions has been the positive development we had hoped for.

In this edition our 'news and views' section begins with a challenge: that you should consider interpreting for teenagers, surely the most difficult audience of all. We also report on two great musical interpretation projects at the V&A and in the North Pennines, both of which help visitors to connect emotionally with their subject.

On page 9 our research article explores the key researched-based connections between marketing and interpretation; between 'product and promise'. Following this, our media and technology correspondent reports on the use of QR codes to launch multimedia presentations and to access web content 'in the cloud' (the future, it seems, is already with us...)

Then, in the main themed section of the *Journal*, we roll up our sleeves, put our wellies on and see how the garden's doing. On our journey we encounter many trees and plants, some visitor data, community engagement activities, a best-in-show award, organic principles, science and food, and the flowering of creative play. As always, it's the underlying principles and thought-provoking inspiration that matter most.

Wishing you green shoots and verdant growth in your work.

David Masters MAHI
Commissioning Editor

PS. A great deal of the planning and commissioning of the *Journal* is done on a voluntary basis. We always welcome offers of articles, so if you're up to something special, or want to rant or let off steam, please drop me a line. david.masters@zen.co.uk

OPINION&DEBATE

R U UP 4 IT?

Cathy Lewis considers which organisations have been brave enough to tackle teenagers.

Teenagers are the lost generation when it comes to interpretation. Traditionally, heritage and countryside sites have targeted their communications at adults. Many have now made provision for the under 12s, or for family groups. So what about the in-betweens, the terrible teens? It seems most of us are still ignoring these much-maligned, often scary, but potentially passionate young people.

TEENS ARE NOT CHILDREN

I often write interpretation for children. I'm increasingly asked if I can write for teenagers. The answer is yes. But when I'm asked to write a piece for an audience of 5–15-year-olds, my reply is a resounding 'no'. If I've learned one thing from having a teenage daughter, it's that teens don't want to be lumped in with children. 'I'm not a kid anymore,' my daughter repeatedly says, giving me that withering 'teen to idiot adult' look. If I want the best from her, I have to treat her differently from my 12-year-old.

This was backed up by a seminar I attended at the 2009 London Book Fair. It seems that many booksellers are now taking teenage books out of the children's sections. No self-respecting 15-year-old would be seen dead in a children's library! Another fact that came out loud and clear at the fair was – shock horror – teens do still read books, despite computers, iPods, iPhones, etc. In fact, for the last year or so, teenage books have underpinned the whole publishing industry. Ok, so it's largely teenage girls reading Stephanie Mayer's *Twilight* series, but hey, they're still reading.

So what about teenage boys? A survey in *The Guardian* (10.10.09) found that the vast majority of teenage boys are 'ambitions, career-minded, home-loving and above all, happy'. Yet the most common words used to describe teenage boys in the media were found to be 'yobs, thugs, feral, hoodies and louts'. It's no wonder that many people shy away from the idea of working with them.

TECHNOLOGY AND TEENS

One firmly held preconception of teenagers is as thugs hanging around in a shopping centre, spitting and swearing; the other is the techno-geek. This is the teen who spends all available time on a computer or other gadget, unable or unwilling to communicate in the real world. It follows that many people believe that teens' obsession with new technology means that we'll never keep up with them, or that they won't be remotely interested in traditional media.

Yet a 2009 report on 'How teens use media' by US market research organisation The Nielsen Company concluded: 'It's easy to get caught up in the hype around teenagers. The notion that teens are too busy texting and Twittering to be engaged with traditional media is exciting, but false… The averages will show you that teens can often be reached by the same means as their parents. To best engage this segment in marketing, civic and cultural pursuits, you must discard the notion that they are alien. Instead,

CASE STUDY: LISTEN TO THEM

Audio guides produced for teenagers, with the help of teenagers, have been introduced at Downe, the village where Charles Darwin lived. The London Borough of Bromley was keen to expand audiences at the nominated World Heritage Site, particularly teens who were recognised as being under-represented.

© Dan Boys/National Trust

'Our activities and events are often aimed at children or older people and we wanted to fill in the gaps,' says Aimee Clarke, World Heritage Officer. Working with Audio Trails, the first step was to set up focus groups of teenagers to get their input. Then the groups were consulted during the production of the five audio trails – circular walks through the countryside around Darwin's former home. The youngsters trialled the first drafts, and were also used to record one of the trails.

'The trails were designed to educate and enthuse teens about Darwin's work in their local area,' says Aimee. 'But we had to engage with them first – this was where the technology came in. They were especially interested in the new media – as the trails were downloadable to iPods and mobile phones.'

Aimee is convinced that in order to produce successful interpretation for teens, you need to involve them. 'We were surprised in our initial consultations. The teenagers opted for the more intellectual scripts, rather than the scripts that were what we thought right for their age group. So my advice to anyone running a similar project is: Don't presume you know what teenagers want.'

Listen to the trails on www.audiotrails.co.uk/charles-darwin-audio-trails-bromley

examine the nuances of their media behaviour as you would any demographic segment.' (http://www.nielsen.com/)

WHO SAYS IT'S GOOD?

If I told my daughter that tartan baggy trousers were back in fashion, she'd give me the look. If her friends told her, she would be badgering me to buy her some! If adults tell teenagers they'd have a great time at a historic house or country park, the chances are they'd get the look too. But if other teenagers said it, their friends might just listen. This peer recommendation works more effectively than ever today with the popularity of social media. So, including teens in the preparation and delivery of your interpretation could expand your audience way beyond those directly involved.

NATIONAL TRUST SURVEY

Daniel Rose, the National Trust's Youth Volunteering and Participation Officer, has come up with some interesting findings in his research into how the Trust should best communicate with younger audiences.

Part of the project was to look at the Trust's welcome marketing, and its impact as a first impression. Three focus groups were set up, split into the age ranges of 11–14, 15–17 and 18–25. They considered marketing material from the Trust, other charities and high street magazines aimed at young people.

Daniel says: 'We are still compiling the report, but some findings came out loud and clear. All the groups wanted access to information that was relevant and exclusive to their age range, not general. They weren't impressed by images of beautiful places, nor 'fake' family photos – they were more inspired by photos of young people having fun or doing adventurous activities.'

One of the most inspiring aspects of the research is that teenagers did see the Trust as being potentially exciting and relevant to them. One comment from a participant was: 'It's easy to get your mates together, but it's hard to find a place to go. It sounds like the National Trust can provide that place for us; you just need to tell us about it through channels that we use.'

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DO...

As you will see when you read on, some organisations are producing inspiring interpretation with teenagers. But whether it be via technology, music or arts projects, key messages emerge. If you want to work with teens, you firstly need to forget those preconceptions. Don't underestimate them or patronise them. Listen to what they have to say. And, crucially, make sure you have the right adults on board to work with them.

Cathy Lewis is an interpretation consultant and copywriter, specialising in interpretation for children and families.
Email cathy@froghopper-design.co.uk
www.froghopper-design.co.uk

LEFT:
Teenagers test audio trails at Downe.

RIGHT:
Plas Newydd interpreted via teen opera.

CASE STUDY: GETTING TEENS IN TUNE

Hard-to-reach teenagers performing in an opera? Colleagues must have thought that Susan Mason, the National Trust's Regional Learning and Interpretation Officer for Wales, was off her rocker when she suggested it! But her project at Plas Newydd culminated in a successful teens fantasy opera which toured venues across north Wales.

The aim of the project was to interpret a property to new audiences through the arts. Plas Newydd, the 18th-century home of the Marquess of Anglesey was selected, and the audiences were youngsters from local secondary schools. 'Most of the teenagers had no experience of Plas Newydd, the National Trust or opera!' says Sue. 'They were from a variety of ability and backgrounds. So they were new audiences in every sense.'

According to Sue, the keys to working with teenagers are to get them involved in the planning stages, allow them to find their own answers and to avoid patronising them. 'At first they were uncomfortable, so they were a bit stroppy and loud. But slowly they began to get enthused. The important thing is that they were allowed to enjoy and discover the place for themselves. They then interpreted this and created something which is unique to them and to Plas Newydd.'

Sue had help at the workshops from skilled and dedicated musicians and composers, and even members of the Welsh National Opera. Crucially, the Trust and volunteers supported the project, despite their initial reservations.

'Some had preconceptions about teenagers and were expecting the worst. But in the end, the work of the youngsters at the property filled the house with music, enjoyment and life – and it was a magical experience for all of us.' So positive was her experience that Sue would love to introduce interpretation for teenagers throughout her region.

FEATURE NEWS

MAKING MUSIC

Stuart Frost describes the collaboration with the Royal College of Music in the Listening Gallery project at the V&A.

The Medieval & Renaissance Europe 300–1600 galleries opened at the Victoria & Albert Museum in December 2009. The series of ten rooms, including a new day-lit gallery with lift and glass viewing area above the roof, represented a transformation of a substantial part of the museum and the end of phase one of Futureplan, the V&A's strategic plan to transform the visitor experience. Quantitative evaluation had demonstrated clearly that the old medieval and Renaissance displays were underperforming significantly.

A multi-sensory, layered interpretative framework to reflect the needs of a diverse audience with varied motivations and learning styles was envisaged from the start. The new displays incorporate, handling activities, touch-screen interactives, gallery films, two Discovery Areas and a Study Centre with eight computer workstations. The main focus here is on the integration of music with the displays.

THE LISTENING GALLERY PROJECT

There are 14 audio points distributed evenly throughout the Medieval & Renaissance galleries, each consisting of a touch-screen interface and a pair of headphones. Each offers visitors a selection of tracks, including short narrated scripts, enhanced audio description of key objects and high-quality recordings of music. There are over 40 short audio tracks in total, some of which are also integrated with touch-screen interactives that explore subjects in greater depth. Many of the pieces of music were new recordings made specifically for the galleries by the Royal College of Music (RCM). These were made possible by the enormous enthusiasm, expertise and commitment of many people at the RCM and a Knowledge

© Maike Zimmerman

ABOVE:
Musician from the RCM performing music recorded for the V&A.

Transfer award from the Arts Humanities Research Council.

The V&A is the National Museum for Art & Design so it is probably surprising to many that music is represented so strongly in its collections. Its holdings of musical instruments, acquired primarily as fine examples of art and design, are of international importance. Some of the most significant pre-1600 instruments, including a harpsichord and a lute back, were integrated with the new displays. Beautiful medieval and Renaissance manuscripts from the National Art Library were also introduced into the permanent displays for the first time. Many of these illuminated books (and single leaves) preserved music as written notation. A significant number of objects also include representations of either musical instruments, performances associated with festivals, rituals and ceremonies, or musical notation.

Music was envisaged initially as a means of engaging visitors on a more emotional level by helping to give a vivid feel for the period covered by the displays. However, as the partnership with the RCM progressed, the role of music became more specific and integral as it became clearer how strong the connections between music, displays and objects were.

At the V&A the first significant integration of audio with permanent displays was in the British Galleries in 2001. Summative evaluation of audio in the British Galleries demonstrated that it worked most effectively for visitors where there was a direct connection with an object or display. This evaluation informed wider ranging refinements to audio including content, sound quality, hardware and ergonomics. The decision was taken to locate almost all of the audio points in seats, to provide visitors with an opportunity to sit, relax and look at a highlight object. The object generally reflected the wider themes of the gallery or adjacent display. Each of the ten galleries has its own narrative, but a thematic framework and loose chronological arrangement provides consistency and progression throughout.

HARDWARE

Various options were explored for delivering the music. Ambient delivery through focused sound cones was considered in the Florentine chancel chapel displayed in Room 50. Careful consideration was given to the use of hand-held devices for the galleries as whole. However, integrating almost all of the

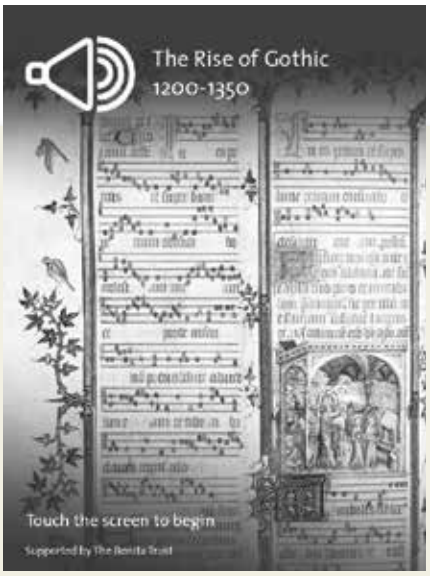
BELOW:
The audio point in Gallery 10: *Noble Living 1400–1500*.

CASE STUDY: THE RISE OF GOTHIC 1200–1350 (ROOM 9)

The displays in Room 9 introduce visitors to the origins of the Gothic style in Paris, its key elements and its development. One of the greatest treasures displayed here is a missal made for the Royal Abbey of Saint Denis in Paris in 1350. The book contains some of the finest examples of 14th-century illumination. The pages also contain musical notation, music that would have been sung in the abbey and which had never been recorded before.

Existing research allowed one chant, *Hail Father Dionysus (Denis)*, to be adapted into modern notation that professional singers and RCM students could rehearse and record. The piece itself would have been performed in the abbey on the feast day of St Denis. To be present at the recording in a local church was a spine-tingling moment. In the gallery, the missal is placed in its own display case with a touch-screen page-turning interactive alongside. Visitors using the interactive can listen to the music contained in the book in front of them, underlining the book's function and the sacred context in which it was used.

The track is also available via the audio point located in the central gallery seat which faces a display of beautifully lit stained glass from Gothic churches, a subject called Glazing the Gothic Church. Observation and tracking studies elsewhere indicate that most visitors are unlikely to use both pieces of interpretation, so repetition is an effective strategy.



ABOVE:
The Rise of the Gothic audio point attractor screen.

The audio point in the gallery seat also includes pieces of music that were performed for courtly entertainment, the secular side of the Gothic style.

permanent audio points into seats was felt to be the most appropriate approach.

The touch-screen interface gives visitors (and the museum) more flexibility than the manual controls used in earlier projects. A template was developed and tested with an external agency. The development of this prototype allowed the interface for each audio point to be built in house, making significant cost savings. The attractor screen uses details from the objects related to the tracks helping to strengthen the connection between both. The project has established a format that can, and has already been, used in other gallery projects.

Headphones with armoured steel cable have been used throughout the galleries and complex retracting mechanisms used elsewhere were eschewed in favour of a simple approach that is easier to maintain in the long term. After almost nine months of use, the hardware is standing up well to daily wear and tear.

CONCLUSION

The summative evaluation of the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries is not yet finished and will be crucial in assessing how successful the project has been in improving the visitor experience. Nevertheless it is already clear that the Listening Gallery project has had many benefits.

The RCM was able to offer its students the opportunity to engage with periods of music that usually fall outside of the traditional curriculum. The students gained valuable experience for their future professional careers. The V&A benefited enormously from the RCM's expertise in numerous ways, not least in terms of knowledge about complex copyright and licensing issues. The museum has obtained over 30 high-quality recordings of music that it would not have been able to source otherwise. The recordings made by the RCM give the museum complete freedom to make the music available online and to use it in multimedia guides and other mobile applications. Most importantly, the music makes a significant contribution to enhancing the visitor experience, helping to transform people's engagement with periods which are often seen as difficult, distant and remote.

Further details can be found at:
www.cps.rcm.ac.uk/CPS/Research/Listening+Gallery

A series of four short films were made documenting aspects of the project.
For two examples:
i. Notation Knife, www.vimeo.com/6923962
ii. Saint Denis Missal, www.vimeo.com/7792739

Visitor research reports are at:
www.vam.ac.uk/res_cons/research/visitor/galleries/index.html

Stuart Frost was part of the Concept Team at the V&A that steered the development of the Medieval & Renaissance galleries.
sfrost@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

A MASH-UP IN THE PENNINES

Effie Warden describes how the haunting sounds of medieval wind instruments combined with contemporary brass and a live video mix formed the basis for an unusual and atmospheric evening of specially commissioned music and film to celebrate the special qualities of the North Pennines.

Traditional brass ensemble His Majesty's Sagbutts and Cornetts joined forces with Stanhope Silver Band at Wolsingham Parish Church to play 'Ear to the Ground', a new piece of music by community composer Andy Jackson, which has been inspired by the thoughts and feelings the people of the North Pennines have for their unique landscapes and heritage.

The concert was part of Stanhope Silver Band's fifth annual Festival of Brass, and was the culmination of two projects run as part of the North Pennines AONB Partnership's Living North Pennines initiative, funded with nearly £2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the area.

Abi Wylde, the AONB Partnership's Community Interpretation Officer, said: 'The evening was a unique combination of music and film, bringing together different arts disciplines, different age groups and even musical instruments from different centuries, creating a spontaneous mix to excite the senses. The concert expressed in sound and vision the impressions that composer Andy Jackson collected from local people about the places they live and work, and the feelings of the volunteers involved in the Museums Live! project.'

Museums Live! is the West Durham Cultural Volunteering Project, based at Killhope, the North of England Lead Mining Museum, where people aged 16 and over can get involved in community and environmental projects, learn new skills and gain qualifications at the same time. Within the *Ear to Ground, Eye to Sky* project, volunteers helped digital artist Rachel Clarke to produce an animation to accompany the music, capturing the impressions and thoughts of people of the AONB visually. Other media and roles, such as photography, sound recording and public relations, including updating the project blog, were allocated between volunteers, helping them gain skills for employment.

© NPAP/Abi Wylde

ABOVE:
Volunteers were inspired by the landscapes and heritage of the North Pennines.

Daniel Parmley, aged 21, a Museums Live! volunteer from Stanhope said: 'Over the weeks I photographed Hartside at the top of the world, Whitesykes – an old lead mine – and Low Force in Teesdale, all of which has helped me appreciate what is on my doorstep. I got a lot out of listening to other people's opinions and ideas about the area.'

Rachel Clarke, the digital artist, said, 'We wanted to incorporate different ways people could creatively contribute ideas about the North Pennines. We approached people with colour palettes and asked them to choose the colours they most associated with the local area. The colours provided a focus for discussion, which opened up what people thought was important to them about the landscape. These palettes and discussions were used as starting points for the animation.'

The *Ear to Ground, Eye to Sky* video can be seen by visiting http://bit.ly/ctTlCN and clicking on the image halfway down the web page.

For further information contact the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership: tel: (01388) 528801 email: info@northpennineaonb.org.uk www.northpennines.org.uk

REPORTING RESEARCH

UNITED WE STAND!

Emma Courtney argues that the role of the interpreter and the marketer are both rooted in learning and that we should stand united.

I was talking to a colleague in the heritage sector recently about a dated and tired-out museum. my colleague's opinion was that it needed some 'clever marketing'. My view is that no matter how big your communications budget or how clever your marketing team, you can't polish shit. There's just no getting away from the smell.

MAKING A PROMISE

The most successful heritage attractions are the ones where marketers make a promise that matters to audiences, and interpreters (with the rest of the organisation) deliver on that promise. Do you remember the last time someone broke a promise to you? At best you don't ever rely on that person in the same way again, at worst you cut them from your life completely. So keeping promises to audiences is mission-critical for cultural organisations and in doing so their marketing and interpretation functions must work in harmony.

Let me share a personal example of how this works in practice. My little brother was over from Ireland last year for a visit with his cool big sis in London. Cal was a late one in our family and frankly I'm easily old enough to be his mother. Now Cal's in his early teens I'm at a loss about where to take him. So, like most people trying to entertain kids, I googled 'family day out in london' which brought up www.dayoutwiththekids.co.uk. I clicked on the first thing to get my attention, that old favourite, London Zoo.

A cyber moment later to London Zoo's website homepage made me some immediate promises:

- We'd learn something new
- We'd be amazed
- We'd get up close and personal with lots and lots of different animals
- We'd all have a good time (not just the child)

We did learn things, we were amazed, we did see lots of weird and wonderful animals. In short, we had a ball.

DELIVERING THE GOODS

Now Joe Public is not going to get as excited as I did by the great interpretation and the way the experience lived up to the promise, but I know readers of the *Interpretation Journal* will get where I'm coming from.

But let's get down to the nitty gritty. I came across a job description for Manager of Engagement and Interpretation, within the Engagement and Interpretation section, under the Discovery and Learning Department that the zoo advertised in May 2010. At that time this role had the job of managing a designer, two interpretation developers, a graphics technician, a handyperson, a lead explainer, three permanent explainers, seasonal explainers and a volunteer coordinator.

So going back to that tired and dated museum we mentioned earlier. Same said institution would give their eye teeth for a staff and department structure like this. In reality, the majority of heritage attractions could only dream of such resource. But one of the key responsibilities in that job description screams out why the visitor experience to Zoological Society London (ZSL) is so successful. And the beauty is that this critical success factor can be adopted by anyone, no matter how big or small the staff or budgets. The responsibility is:

'To develop site interpretation and signage to promote ZSL, London Zoo's/ZSLs mission and brand values and to ensure that they are appropriately expressed to the visitor and other users of ZSL London Zoo.'

This is an organisation that knows who they are and what's important to them and in every communication from that organisation they radiate that purpose. The magic of our visit to the zoo was the fact that at every visitor 'touchpoint' the mission and values of the organisation touched us in perfect synergy.

TOUCHPOINTS

So what's a visitor touchpoint when it's at home? Think about the last time you visited the theatre. You may have seen a good review in the paper. You might then have looked them up on the Internet and visited their website. A friend may have recommended a show or you received the autumn/winter programme. You either booked tickets online or called up and spoke to box-office staff. You visited the theatre building, interacted with staff, accessed the refreshments and deeper learning via the programme or a post-show discussion with the director. You watched the performance. You got home from the theatre. And through all of that you were making brand judgements.

Every single moment that you came into contact with that show was a visitor touchpoint with the theatre company involved. You may have been lured in by an extravagant billboard advertising campaign but if the box-office staff were rude or the theatre a dump when you got there, then the promises made in the initial communications are redundant.

BELOW:
That's Cal and me on the flying zebra.

Figure 1: The 7 Ps of service marketing

Product (offers)	Place	Price	Promotion	People	Process	Physical evidence
Is your current product/service, or mix of products and services, appropriate and suitable for your market and the visitors of today?	Where you're based and the surrounding environment impacts upon visitor engagement.	Is your current pricing appropriate for the market? Is a visit value for money? (Consider hidden costs if you're free entry e.g. transport, shop and cafe prices.)	What you say and how you say it when you tell visitors about your product and/or service. (Is it consistent and communicated in the right way at the right time?)	Staff should have the appropriate interpersonal skills, attitude and service knowledge to provide the service.	The systems used to assist the organisation in delivering the product/service.	Visitors will form perceptions based on their sight of the product and service provision and how it's presented.

And that's regardless of how good the show was. What you'll remember, and, more importantly, what you'll tell other people about, are the negatives. There's even a book based on the premise that, 'Satisfied Customers Tell Three Friends, Angry Customers Tell 3,000.' Eeek!

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Integral to my work is a significant amount of qualitative research with people from every background and age across the country. Unlike quantitative research, which is rooted in facts, figures and the measurable, qualitative research facilitates true gems of insight. Whether conducted with individuals or groups, qualitative research interrogates the why and how, not just the what, where and when. Take some real-life verbatim quotes by some real-life people in relation to some of the heritage attractions or development projects I've worked on:

'Whatever you do, don't be putting in any of those sound effect things they have in the London museums. That would really spoil the atmosphere here.'

'It doesn't really matter how much they spend on technology. The places you remember are the ones where the staff are really friendly but also really know all the stories that computers can't get across. Computer's can't tell stories.'

'You don't want to be reading too much. Who's got time for that? But you do want to know the key stuff. You know, the scandal and the gossip. The stuff you wouldn't read in the history books.'

'This building is awful. To be honest you just assume everything here is boring no matter how good it is because you wouldn't want to go any further once you stepped through the front door.'

'Nobody I know would be interested in this. It just doesn't talk our language.'

'It has to be interactive and hands on for kids. They just won't be interested otherwise. And if they're not interested then we're not interested.'

Is your interpretation telling a story about your brand as well as your collections? For true organisational success you'd better hope so. What's the point of a whizzy interpretation offer if the people delivering the brand are stuck in the 1980s and, dare I say it, don't really give a damn about the public engaging with 'their' collection?

'PS' PLEASE

There are seven 'P's of a service marketing mix; product, place, price, promotion, physical evidence, process and people. Each one of these seven elements represents numerous customer touchpoints and important considerations for interpretation. Tate's mission is: 'To promote public knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of British, modern and contemporary art by facilitating extraordinary experiences between people and art through the Collection and an inspiring programme in and well beyond our galleries. We do this by bringing a contemporary perspective to all that we do, and inviting debate and exchange centred on art.'

Consistently in the top three 'Association of Leading Visitor Attractions' league table, Figure 1 above details some of the questions Tate answers as an organisation in ensuring that its mission resonates across every aspect of the marketing mix. The crossover of where interpretation plays its role throughout is startling.

THE HOLY GRAIL

The point of this article has been to exemplify the fine line that exists between marketers and interpretation specialists. We can't deliver a wow factor visitor experience and lasting visitor relationships without each other and the buy-in of the organisation at every level. And our holy grail, the perfect blend of product and promise, is a critical driver for disseminating the organisation's sense of purpose and values.

If interpretation is rooted in learning then marketing is rooted in stimulating a desire to learn. The more I work with interpretation experts the more I realise the power we have in working closely together. The boundaries between the full spectrum of education, engagement and excitement are blurred. The most important thing I can see for marketing and interpretation going forward, not least against these difficult times, is keeping our promises to the past and to our present and potential public. United we stand.

Emma Courtney is a leading cultural consultant specialising in brand, marketing and audience development.
www.courtneyconsulting.co.uk

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

APPS AND QR

Each issue James Cokeham reports from the front line on the ever-advancing world of new media and technology.

I remember debating with a colleague over whether off-site, Internet-based interpretation is truly interpretive – to make a feature meaningful, surely you have to be able to see it, or appreciate it through other sensory means?

The advent of Internet-enabled portable multimedia devices and the startling growth of the mobile web have blurred this. Now, we can make engaging 'virtual' content available *in situ*.

DON'T WORRY – BE 'APPY'

Much has been made of smartphone 'apps' in this respect and rightly so – the features inherent to smartphones make them an incredibly powerful medium. But, as with all interpretive media, apps have their disadvantages too. The most important of these is the multi-platform nature of the market – an app has to be completely rebuilt for every major smartphone operating system (there are currently six) to ensure maximum accessibility. Unsurprisingly, this is both time-consuming and expensive.

ABOVE:
The Dallas Museum of Art's web app.

THE MOBILE WEB

What other options do interpreters have? How can we deliver a rich and engaging experience across all platforms? An increasingly compelling option is through the use of a 'web app'.

Unlike 'general' smartphone apps, which host content on the devices themselves, web apps keep it 'in the cloud', on web pages optimised for viewing on mobile devices. This means that content doesn't have to be developed for each specific platform and can be accessed on any device that has access to the mobile Internet (currently over 50% of UK mobile phones and growing).

Take a look at The Dallas Museum of Art's web app at http://dallasmuseumofart.mobi/ for a flavour of how this works.

The downside? In order to access content, users require an Internet connection. This can be through standard wireless broadband (if the device supports this capability) or a mobile phone's signal. Installing a wireless network is possible over a small area, but if we're interpreting a large exterior site becomes a little unfeasible, meaning users have to rely on their mobile phone signal – which, depending on site location could be weak or non-existent.

DECODING INTERPRETATION

Similar to barcodes, QR (Quick Response) codes are an intriguing method of making Internet-hosted content available. Instead of containing product information, QR codes are embedded with email addresses, phone numbers and website URLs.

ABOVE:
Let's QR: Scan me and see where I lead...

Codes can be printed on panels and attached to existing installations. Using a QR reader app, users scan codes with their mobile phones, automatically launching a mobile-optimised webpage containing an audio clip, short video or archive imagery, for example. This negates the need to type in a web address (a fiddly process) and adds a powerful, physical element to the engagement process.

So, we have options for making 'virtual' interpretive content available in situ. As always, the opportunities/constraints offered by your site, and the quality of interpretive content available, should drive this choice.

James Cokeham is a heritage interpretation consultant specialising in new media and technology.

EARTHY MATTERS

'The garden has for many people become far more than an attractive addition to the home. It is a form of therapy. The dedication and devotion needed, and the response from plants, provides solace and inspiration, supportive through many crises that inevitably come in the course of life.'

Beth Chatto, from *An Englishwoman's Garden*, Helen Penn, 1993

TIMELESSNESS, PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY

Visiting a garden is a unique experience. At their best, gardens are beautiful places of peace and tranquillity which restore the soul. I was struck by the timelessness of the landscape and the peacefulness when I recently visited Prior Park, Bath. The view of historic Bath down the hill and over the Palladian Bridge was just as I remembered it and yet a major restoration of the lake and cascades in the wilderness had taken place since my last visit. As interpreters we want to preserve the timelessness, beauty and tranquillity and yet communicate with the garden visitors in an unobtrusive way. This leads to a few issues when it comes to interpretation, some of which I shall discuss below.

ABOVE:
Prior Park, Bath.

If Confucius' maxim is true: 'I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand' why is garden interpretation so passive on the whole? How can we get people more involved so they understand more? The National Trust and Garden Organic have given examples in their articles in this journal, with visitors being invited to give green pledges at the National Trust, and at Ryton Gardens being invited to turn compost and feed the worms. How else could we get visitors involved? Could we involve them in the design of the garden? Or encourage them to have a go at pruning or other garden crafts (under supervision)? Could we encourage our gardeners to explain to visitors what they are doing as they work in the garden on open days? Could we teach each visitor how to make a paper pot and sow seeds to take home for their own garden or window box as a reminder of their visit?

Ideas behind the design of a garden are often overlooked with an assumption that by looking at a bed of plants a visitor will be able to dissect the component parts and understand the way it has been put together. Often we presume the level of knowledge of our visitors without asking them first and forget to explain the basics. How do we explain what was in the mind of the designer of a famous 18th-century landscape garden when we are living in a very different culture and time? One of the areas I worked on at Montacute, Somerset, was to decode the design principles of the beds in the walled garden area. This was done by a small exhibition in the adjoining gazebo. The panels illustrated the different layers which made up the bed design from ground cover, low perennial shrubs to climbing perennials. Gardens are a key place to explain the effects of climate change and to encourage visitors to live in more environmentally friendly ways. Is it better to stop watering the lawns in the summer droughts as an environmentally unfriendly practice and explain to visitors that the lawns will recover once the weather changes? Would this not give a better message by showing water conservation by example? One of the aims of interpretation is to involve the visitor in helping to preserve the site they are visiting. We should also be taking every opportunity to alert people to the way they can change their behaviour to help reduce the effects of climate change, and where better than in the natural setting of a garden?

Dr Ruth Taylor is ex-chair of the AHI and has worked on interpretation in gardens of the National Trust and Chelsea Physic Garden and former Head of Education at the Royal Horticultural Society.

GREEN AND GREENER

Dawn McDonald tells how the National Trust is focusing on the importance of the outdoors with a three-year sponsorship called The Outdoor Programme placing gardens at the centre of visitor and community engagement.

Gardens and parks are sensitive barometers registering the pressure of environmental change on our lives, and on the natural world around us. Spring flowers now bloom two or three weeks earlier than 30 years ago. Summer rainfall in central England has fallen by 20 per cent since the 19th century, and extreme weather events increasingly cause flooding and high winds. The growing season has lengthened by a month. Frosts that once kept pests and diseases in check are now uncommon in the West Country and frozen lakes and rivers have become a rarity, even in northern England.

MANAGING CLIMATE CHANGE

In the face of climate change, the Trust is keen to find ways of reducing the environmental impact of gardening; trialling new technologies to manage energy, water and waste such as solar-charged lawn mowers and water recycling wash pads alongside revived techniques including restored Victorian ram pumps used to distribute water without the use of electricity.

Composting, water harvesting and other green gardening methods are good for the environment and save money as well as resources. We are using techniques which care for our historic gardens without harmful chemicals. Gardening without peat helps to conserve the carbon dioxide locked up in peat bogs and protects endangered wildlife through protection of their threatened habitat. All National Trust gardens have been peat free since 1999 as are all plants sold at our properties, yet amateur gardeners are currently responsible for two-thirds of all peat use in the UK.

ACCESSIBILITY V PROTECTION

As one of the country's leading conservation organisations and popular visitor attractions, the Trust has always had to balance demand for access with the need to protect vulnerable species and habitats. How we communicate these often serious issues effectively to our visitors and supporters in an engaging way that is relevant to them can be a challenge when research shows that many are experiencing 'green fatigue' and really just want to escape the cares of the world for a day out with family or friends.

With more than 3.6 million members, the National Trust has the potential to influence visitors and supporters by example through its own sustainable garden practice and campaigns to raise awareness of how we can all make small steps towards a healthier and more sustainable future.

PARTNERSHIPS

Building on the successes of Plot to Plate and Small Steps Big Change, the Outdoor Programme partnership with Yorkshire and Clydesdale Banks has helped to highlight the effects of climate change on our gardens and demonstrate how greener gardening can help to reduce our environmental footprint.

The National Trust Food Glorious Food campaign and DEFRA supported Eat into Green Living Project also illustrate how by creating community growing spaces and cooking and eating locally and seasonally, we can lead a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle by supporting our local food producers and so reducing food miles.

A Plant in Time – an exciting growing interactive exhibition – has toured NT gardens this summer celebrating their beauty and diversity but also their vulnerability in the face of climate change. The exhibition was designed from the start to be fun, engaging and participatory, and to help change people's behaviour. It highlights the implications of climate change for the National Trust's own collection of 200 historic gardens and shows that there's no better place to start making a difference than in all our gardens. A Plant in Time demonstrates simple ways that we can reduce our impact on the environment and help secure the future of the plants that make our gardens special.

BELOW:
Children learning about gardening and growing your own vegetables on a visit to Trerice, Cornwall.

RIGHT:
Children participating in the Plant in Time workshop at Hidcote Manor Garden, Gloucestershire.

© NTPL/Paul Harris

GREEN PLEDGES

Thousands of visitors have been making green pledges to change their behaviour to reduce their environmental impact in a small way, believing that collectively we can make a difference and influence larger organisations and industries to do the same. Following an enjoyable interactive experience the conservation message was gently reinforced with take-away activities to try at home with the opportunity to share results.

Laura Hetherington, Project Manager, reflects on what made the exhibition such a success:

'Key to the success of A Plant in Time has been its participatory element and its growing element. Visitors have loved the fact that the main exhibits, the flowers, have been made by themselves and even those who have not wanted to contribute have engaged with the idea of the flowers having been created by people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. The other participatory element has been the beautiful willow pledge tree which has grown with leaves of pledges added to it – and again, even when visitors have not felt the urge to leave their own pledges they have loved reading those left by others.

The "Growing" element of the exhibition, whilst providing us with a lovely marketing pun has also been key to the exhibition – each day the exhibition has changed according to contributions made – and many visitors have returned to later venues to observe the changes

The exhibition was created as a generic interpretation of plant collections and the effect upon them of climate change but at each garden individual elements have been introduced to ensure relevance to that particular garden and to the visitors themselves. Some gardens have included garden trails whilst others have tied ribbons on particular plants already affected by climate change and others have highlighted unusual aspects of their collections. Tailored tours and talks have been on offer for groups of visitors including schools and local community groups.

The exhibition was designed to be accessible on a number of levels and to a variety of learning styles. At one level it can be appreciated as a visual art exhibition whilst at another we have offered a variety of information on plant collections, plant recording and climate change.

We made a decision early on that this was to be a celebration of our plant collections and that any change in behaviour brought about by the exhibition should be through engagement, appreciation and wonder and according to the number and range of green pledges we have received this approach seems to have worked. Even when visitors have disagreed with the climate change messages (and one or two have) they have been provoked to engage in a debate with the exhibition guides and with other visitors so we may not have changed everyone's behaviour but we have sent them away talking, thinking about and discussing the issues.'

A Plant in Time was recently awarded 'highly commended' at the IVCA Clarion Awards for outstanding visual communication of environmental issues.

GREENER GARDENERS

The Greener Gardens Initiatives give visitors an insight into how we are making changes to manage our historic gardens sustainably on a large scale and how these can easily be incorporated into our own gardens. Greener Garden Fairs will be sharing best green practice countrywide this autumn, celebrating harvest time with cookery demonstrations using property grown and locally sourced food – practising what we preach, making it delicious, with recipes to try at home. And to reinforce the green message, from simple composting tips to how to grow your own, the Greener Garden online videos share tips from NT head gardeners and gardening celebrities to inspire us to have a go ourselves.

Gardens have immense potential beyond the conventional boundaries in which we often place them. Through the experience of the Trust's own diverse collection of gardens, we have begun to understand the power of gardens and the ways in which they can transform people and places – as outdoor classrooms, to recruit and train tomorrow's gardeners, as garden spaces for communities, for healthcare and well-being, or as inspiration for green thinking and greener living. Helping people connect with these special places will secure their future in all our hearts forever.

Dawn McDonald is Learning in Gardens Project Officer, The National Trust.

WHO GOES THERE?

Philip Ryland briefly introduces some of the key themes emanating from recent garden tourism research and comments on their implications for interpretive practices.

VISITORS IN THE GARDEN

Like so many, I find it a delight to spend an afternoon strolling through a garden and admiring many of the plants on show. It seems I am far from alone in this view. Recent visitor figures are impressive, an estimated 19.5 million visitors to the principle UK gardens each year and across the world, 250 million visitors to the main botanic gardens and arboretums. But, these figures only cover the larger gardens, in the UK, for instance, the sheer number of small, private gardens which open under the National Garden Scheme may well mean that estimates as high as 300 million visitors per year could be possible. So, who are these visitors? According to Joanne Connell (2004/5), 36.2% are over 60, 48.4% are 40–60 and a mere 15.4% under 40. Whilst the perception of the mature visitor may still be an accurate reflection for many gardens, recent studies suggest that there is tremendous opportunity for gardens to engage with a younger as well as a family-orientated audience. Indeed, Dorothy Fox (2008) identified the importance of the influence of family and friends on garden visiting, with 58.0% being inspired to visit because of a friend's recommendation and 46.0% because of family.

INTERESTS AND MOTIVATIONS

So, what are these visitors looking for? In recent studies, Roy Ballantyne (2008) and Dorothy Fox (2008) both placed 'the pleasure in being outdoors in pleasant surroundings' (98.2% of visitors) at the top of the list, followed by 'the admiration of plants and garden scenery' (80.0%) and 'social interaction with the family' (64.0%). The 'ambience and setting' and 'tranquillity' (82.2%) were mentioned by many visitors as was the

BELOW:
The Italian Garden, Compton Acres, Bournemouth.

LEFT:
The Palladian Bridge, Stourhead, Wiltshire.

'opportunity to relax' (90.0%); some even talked about the 'spiritual and restorative quality' of many gardens. Connell (2005) reports that 60.5% of visitors have a 'general interest in gardening' and 10.0% a 'specific horticultural interest'. She suggests that for many visitors 'gaining ideas and inspiration for their own garden' is important, as is the opportunity to take photographs (51.5%) and, note down the names of plants (48.0%), as well as the enjoyment of viewing rare and unusual plants (73.6%). Those visitors with a specific interest in gardening also tend to visit gardens most frequently and according to Connell's study 'at least once a month' (47.1%), whilst 47.7% visited gardens two or three times a year. And how long do they stay? For most, the dwell time is up to two hours (49.2%). But, some will spend a half day (37.4%), typically those who wish to take photos, make notes about the plants or who are seeking inspiration. 5.6% of visitors will stay for the whole day and these are typically those looking for relaxation.

GARDEN FEATURES

In terms of features, a recent study discovered that greenhouses with displays of exotics was typically the most popular feature followed by themed collections (herbaceous borders, rock gardens) and then specific plants groups (grasses, heathers). Beyond the garden, Connell (2005) identified a range of facilities which were important for visitors including the opportunity for 'a delicious home-made tea' (76.8%) and the need for a car park (77.5%) and toilets (81.4%). Plant sales remained important for many (70.2%) as did a shop (38.1%).

GARDEN INTERPRETATION

Connell (2005) also discovered that 52.5% of visitors would like a guide book, 42.4% were interested in garden events and 41.9% in a guided walk. Gardens are informal learning areas as well as recreational spaces with tremendous potential to inform and educate visitors on the conservation and management of plants as well as on global environmental challenges, typically achieving this through well-designed and delivered interpretive materials and activities. Maps and guidebooks are commonly used in many gardens as are leaflets detailing perhaps the 'plants of interest' that month. Self-guided trails are widely used and are often linked to a particular theme, such as 'autumn colour' or a particular series of garden features, such as 'alpines and rock gardening'. In a summer house, tea room or visitor centre, displays and exhibits may illustrate the garden through the seasons or its development over the last century. Guided walks can be available when specific plant groups', features are at their best. Walks may be led by the head gardener or may be run in association with a 'friends' group. Workshops are also valued and, sometimes in conjunction with a local horticultural society or gardening club, topics such as propagation, weed control, fruit/vegetable growing and water-wise gardening may be offered. Finally, plant labels can provide important information for many visitors who are simply anxious to know what a plant is called and where it comes from.

THE FUTURE

To attract families and younger audiences a number of initiatives might be considered, indeed community programmes (linked to a 'friends' scheme) have been suggested as a good way of attracting both groups. With the interest in 'instant gardens' and wildlife in general, workshops and activities focused upon creating and maintaining planters and 'instant' borders, attracting wildlife and 'fun' growing techniques can be a good way of attracting younger people. Events such as arts and crafts weekends and wildlife watching are also likely to be successful – indeed, many gardens now rely on a calendar of events running right through the year as a way of enhancing and broadening their appeal. Quizzes, discovery trails, plant hunts and wildlife-themed activities specifically tailored for children are also worthy of consideration. In terms of opportunities, the extended use of themes to enhance the storytelling power of the garden and the use of worked demonstration gardens are important. The newer technologies also provide exciting opportunities, with trails, walks and guides that can be downloaded to a mobile phone. The use of augmented reality has tremendous potential in association with music, natural sounds and commentary to bring the restoration, development and/or changes in a garden over a period of time to life, in a quite extraordinary and powerful way.

Philip Ryland is Deputy Dean (Education) in the School of Tourism at Bournemouth University.
pryland@bournemouth.ac.uk

Further reading:

Roy Ballantyne, Jan Packer and Karen Hughes. 2008. 'Interests and motives of botanic garden visitors.' *Tourism Management*, 29(3).
Joanne Connell. 2004. 'Motivations of garden visitors.' *Tourism Management*, 25(3).
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Dorothy Fox and Jonathan Edwards. Ch. 13. 'Managing gardens.' *Managing visitor attractions: new directions*, 2nd ed. (2008).

HELLO, IS THAT WESTONBIRT ABATTOIR?

Ben Oliver explores the challenges of interpreting the significance of the National Arboretum's tree collection to visitors and the lessons learnt over the past eight years.

When I first started at Westonbirt I thought selling the concept of a place that cares for trees would be easy – after all everyone likes trees. How little did I know! The first time I was asked about Westonbirt abattoir, I have to admit to being thrown. I now have a more polished response to this question; sadly, I still have the opportunity to practise it.

SEEING TREES

'The wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more'
Ralph Waldo Emerson

In common with other botanical collections, we want visitors to think more deeply about plants. To do this, our first interpretative challenge is simply getting visitors to observe individual trees more closely, which is not as easy as it might seem. Indeed, research suggests people pay less attention to plants than other aspects of their immediate environment to the point that they become a uniform 'green backdrop'; always present, but often overlooked [1]. This is further exacerbated by Westonbirt's historic landscape style, which means we lack the discrete plant collections and glasshouses that offer others the opportunity to create areas of thematic interpretation.

SEARCHING FOR SPECIMENS

Having a mapped, catalogued database of our entire collection has always been critical to our management, but increasingly it also underpins our interpretation by allowing visitors to search for particular specimens. Of course, this is fine if visitors know what they're interested in – but daft as it may sound many new visitors ask 'so where are the trees?' What they really mean is, which ones are worth looking at. While our database enables us to create new interpretative trails and walks to particular trees, with 3,000 different species and over 16,000 numbered specimens, choosing the most significant is not always simple – we must have a very clear understanding of our key messages and visitor motivations.

Recently we have undergone an extensive process of redefining what our key messages are to enable us to identify the key trees and areas that highlight Westonbirt's true significance. However, this must be matched with an understanding of which trees visitors look at during their visit. Through visitor evaluation we know that certain specimens make visitors' jaws drop – and it is at this moment that they are open to finding out more. Simple 'key tree' boards located next to these specimens have had a dramatic impact on visitor appreciation. Similarly seasonal rhythms play a massive role in visitor behaviour. Seasonal trails, hotspots notice board, themed guided walks and events such as our spectacular illuminated trail in winter take advantage of seasonal changes by working with visitor preferences rather than against them. It also ensures that interpretation is constantly changing – a key requirement for a site with 70% repeat visits.

1. See *Plant Science Bulletin of The Botanical Society of America* – Volumes 47 (1), 2001 and 48 (3), 2002 – http://www.botany.org/plantsciencebulletin/issues.php

BELOW:
Simple den building structures signal it's okay to create dens and encourage creativity and exploration of natural tree-related materials.

ABOVE:
Lighting up the trees in winter shows off each tree's natural form and textures.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

'Trees r quite cool if u get showed them right'
Emma, 14

Trees have a very different physical presence to other plants. They're not behind ropes – visitors can walk among them, get up close and personal. Nor are they under glass in controlled environments; there is space for the wilder, more untidy bits frowned upon in carefully tended herbaceous borders. It's vital that our interpretation doesn't become overbearing or cause Westonbirt to lose this sense of freedom. Careful zoning ensures interpretation is graded from intensive high-use areas to those natural areas where people can go to escape: sometimes the best interpretation is not to do any.

In this respect, media selection is also a fundamental issue. Perhaps in contrast with current trends, Westonbirt relies on more traditional solutions such as trails, panels and guided walks to provide the core interpretative experience. This is partially driven by our visitors' preferences but also by our belief that interpretation should not interfere with first-hand interaction between people and real trees. Unsurprisingly the use of timber at the correct scale is a key component for all signage, reinforcing links.

This approach is perhaps best exemplified by our family offer. Talking with families about their experiences highlights two key issues:

1. Parents are keen to actively engage their children with Westonbirt but feel unsure about what their children are allowed to do.
2. Interpretation should be physically as well as emotionally engaging.

Using volunteers and our own timber, an immersive play trail has been developed that gives parents clear boundaries on issues such as climbing trees, making dens or picking up natural objects. This helps to overcome their anxiety that they must keep their children under control and helps them guide their children's experiences. It also aids our own staff by making management easier. Speaking with a parent whose child is snapping branches is much more positive if we can provide fun alternatives rather than simply saying 'don't do that'. As with much of our new interpretation we are using the web to provide further activities so that families can continue to develop relationships with trees growing in their local area.

HANGING OUT LAUNDRY IN PUBLIC

'What madman is running this arboretum? This is insane "management" by any standard'
Anonymous visitor comment

Linked with the nature of trees is the challenge to interpreting time. Most trees live long enough to ensure none of us will see them grow from start to finish, but short enough for visitors to notice change. This is a particular issue when it comes to exploring the need for ongoing care; as custodians of a living collection we have to take a proactive view to the future. Unfortunately, felling mature specimens makes a rather obvious hole. At the same time, enabling visitors to get close to management can be difficult because of issues such as bio-security and visitor safety.

Increasingly we look to engage visitors in dialogue about tree management and related issues like climate change through personal interpretation. Volunteers provide guided walks from Easter to October and a carefully designed training programme has been developed to ensure that they are comfortable discussing what can be controversial issues. A new internal skills-sharing programme will also enable different teams to better understand tree operations so that they can weave key messages about our work through their programmes.

IN SUMMARY...

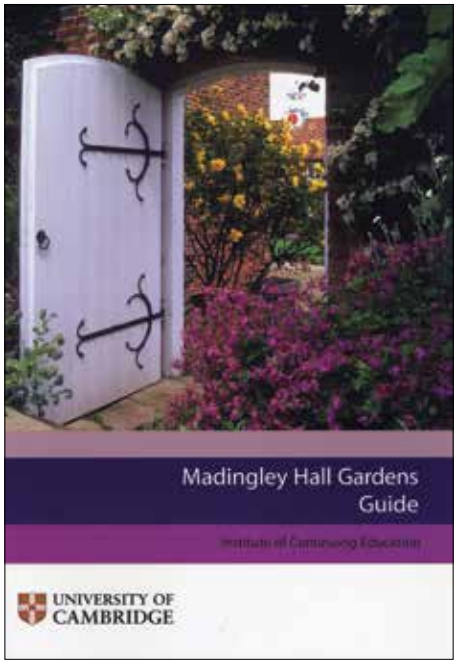
Above all Westonbirt has taught me the importance of three things:

1. Take time to set your key interpretative themes and to find out who your visitors are and what they want.
2. Plan holistically with the wider team to ensure everyone understands their role in the process.
3. Remember interpretation is an iterative process: celebrate success; learn from mistakes – but always move forward.

Ben Oliver is Head of Learning and Interpretation at Westonbirt, the National Arboretum.

WHAT MAKES A WINNER?

Richard Mawrey, co-founder of The Historic Gardens Foundation, describes the process involved in picking the winner of the Best Garden Guide 2009.



ABOVE:
Madingley Hall Gardens, Cambridge.

To enjoy a historic park or garden to the full, the visitor needs to know all about it: not just the plants and the whereabouts of the loos and the tearoom but also its history, the significance of the design and the best way to explore it. Yet guidebooks or leaflets are often neglected by those running the garden. Sometimes visitors are given (or worse, sold) a guidebook years out of date, and then wander round trying to orientate themselves on a long-changed map. Occasionally, the garden has no publication at all – or only material displayed on obsolete and vandalised panels. Those who produce well-designed and informative guidebooks and leaflets, on the other hand, enhance their gardens, enrich the visit and, more prosaically, increase the chances that visitors will either return or encourage others to visit.

GOT WHAT IT TAKES?

For our 2009 prize, the Historic Gardens Foundation (HGF) decided to celebrate the guidebook in all its forms. What we were looking for was set out in the criteria for entry: 'There should be informative commentary on the gardens, with information and illustration relating all periods, from the garden's creation to recent restoration (if appropriate). All parts of the garden should be described, preferably with a plan or site drawing. Historical features, such as fountains, as well as the flora should be clearly presented. In short, something held in the hand, easy and enjoyable to use.'

THE PRIZE

The three categories were a) simple leaflets b) specialist guides to a garden and c) separate sections about the garden in a general guide to a property. Each category winner would receive a £500 prize and the overall winner also a voucher worth £200 generously donated by Haddonstone, the specialists in artificial stone garden ornaments.

THE HOPEFULS

Amongst the best were entries from private gardens, major ones such as Eaton Hall in Cheshire and from slightly less famous but very interesting ones, for example Vann in Surrey. From local authorities, we liked Wallingford Castle Gardens in Oxfordshire, and other excellent entries came from a trust (Painswick, Gloucestershire), a school (Westonbirt, Gloucestershire), and a university (Madingley Hall Gardens, Cambridge). Two gardens, Stoke Poges Memorial Garden in Buckinghamshire and Holehird Gardens in Cumbria, submitted an entry in both leaflet and booklet categories. Surprisingly, the third category, a general guide to a property with a section for the garden, attracted no entries at all.

IS THERE A WINNER?

The overall standard of the entries was very heartening. Some of the leaflets and guidebooks were outstanding and all of them met the criterion of enhancing a visit to the park or garden. In some cases, however, other vital criteria were not met or not fully met, particularly that the material should contain an adequate account of the history of the park or garden. One garden sent a lovely set of children's trails but were unable to fulfil the history criterion. In another, tantalising references to Capability Brown were not followed up.

MARKS LOST...

The clarity of the plans of the park or garden varied widely and marks were lost for putting the plan in an inaccessible place in the guidebook such as the guide where vital information was lost in the 'gutter' between the pages. Some plans were too sparse and others too fussy. Others contained small but inexcusable historical errors, for example 'Humphrey' instead of 'Humphry' Repton.

LEFT:
The map of Stow Hall Gardens, Norfolk.

At the risk of seeming ungrateful, it has to be said that some guidebooks were perhaps too lush. The Eaton Hall book, beautifully produced and illustrated though it was, did not really come into the 'hold-in-the-hand-and-walk-round' bracket. It is the sort of book one would buy after the visit as a souvenir rather than to use as a guidebook at the time.

Illustrations let some guidebooks down. For example, in the otherwise admirable guidebook for Painswick, the photographs of early paintings and plans were presented in a format too small for any relevant detail to be seen.

... AND GAINED

Plans tended to score highly when they had numbered features not only explained in a key on the plan but also corresponding to numbered sections in the text. Some plans were charming. All the judges thought the one of Stow Hall Gardens in Norfolk would have also made a lovely tablemat!

In the leaflet category, there was much wrangling between the judges over Betley Court in Staffordshire. The history was, as one would expect, fascinating and detailed, and the tour of the garden exemplary. Eventually, though, this leaflet was reluctantly pipped at the post.

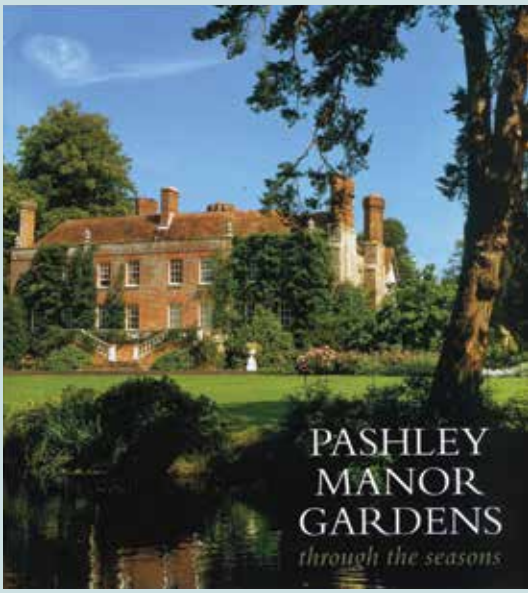
Similarly, in the guidebook category, Vann, with its personal, signed text was only dislodged from the top spot with difficulty and was certainly there 'on the podium'. The guidebook from High Beeches in West Sussex was very informative on the history of the gardens, from the famous Col. Loder in the 19th century to the Boscawen/Gray dynasty of gardeners now in command.

Some guidebooks were very imaginatively presented. Pashley Manor Gardens in East Sussex, as befits a major garden and winner of the HHA Christie's Garden of the Year Prize for 2009, was another strong contender. The guidebook was divided into seasons. Not only does this allow the visitor to concentrate on what is actually in flower at the time but offers an incentive to return at another season. In contrast, Colesbourne Park in Gloucestershire is primarily a garden for just one season – snowdrop time. It was the home of Henry John Elwes, after whom galanthus elwesii is named, and the well-illustrated guidebook quite rightly concentrated on snowdrop-related aspects of the garden.

Where a garden is linked to a particular period or a single designer, then a guidebook with a focus is a good idea. Iford Manor in Wiltshire concentrated its guide on the garden's creator, Harold Peto, and produced a thoughtful insight into his work.

THE JUDGES

As in all good courtroom dramas, the jury did not find it easy to come to a decision. The judges were Gillian Mawrey (Chairman of the Historic Gardens Foundation and Editor of Historic Gardens Review), Linden Groves (former Assistant Editor, whose idea for a guidebook prize it was), Richard Mawrey, Sarah Dickinson, who did much of the initial planning, and, to give a non-English viewpoint, Kai Laja from Estonia. The category winners were then submitted to the final casting vote of Simon Scott of Haddonstone for the selection of the overall winner and recipient of the Haddonstone prize .



ABOVE:
Pashley Manor Gardens, East Sussex.

ABOVE:
Lee Manor House, Lewisham.

When the standard of entries was as high as this, choosing a winner often depends on the 'wow' factor or on what the French call *le coup de coeur*. Two entries produced this effect on the judges.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

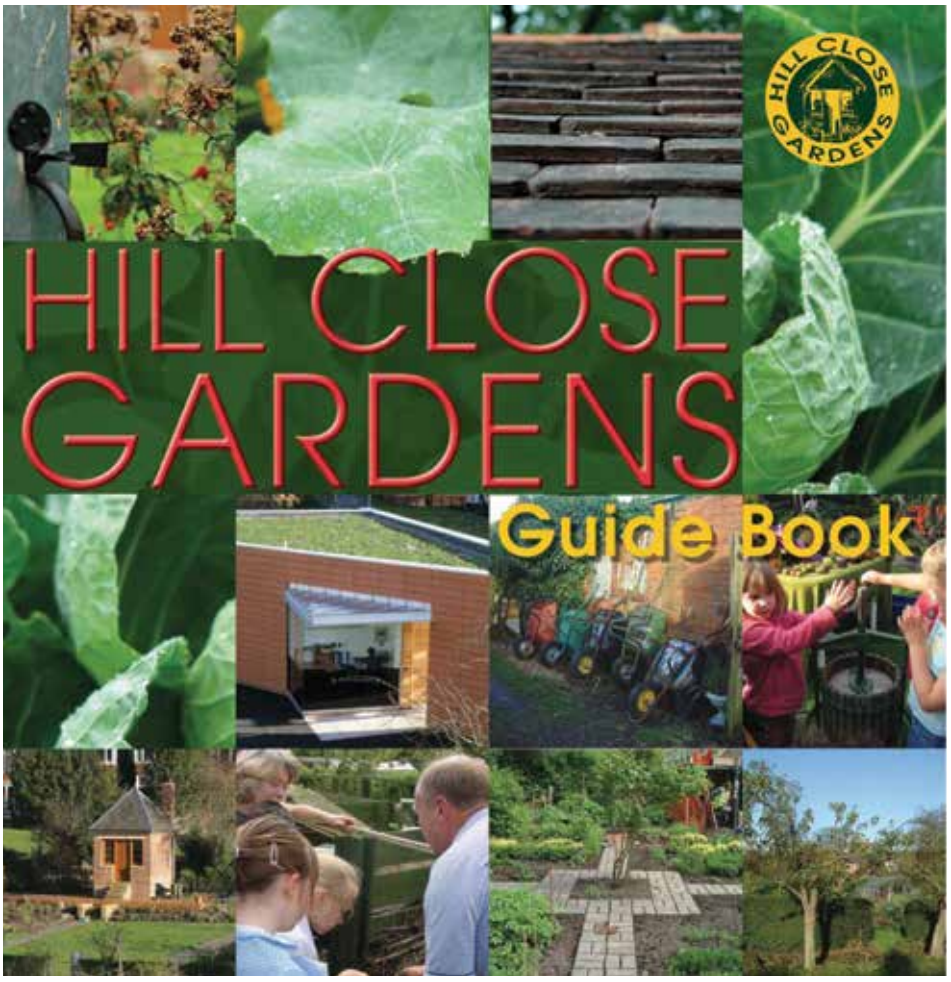
Lewisham is one of the less affluent of the London Boroughs with many more pressing calls on its well-stretched public purse than the restoration of a historic house and garden. Nevertheless, the Council has carried out a full restoration of the 18th-century Lee Manor House and of its gardens, a public park since 1902. The leaflet is a stunning production. On one side there is a detailed and scholarly history of the house and park, presented as an illustrated timeline designed for the ordinary reader. The other side of the sheet shows a clear and user-friendly plan surrounded with coloured pictures of the flora and fauna likely to be seen (designed principally, though not exclusively, with children in mind). Lee Manor took the leaflet prize.

Hill Close Gardens in Warwickshire are unusual in themselves. As towns came to be built up in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, householders with no proper garden attached to their houses would buy or lease garden plots elsewhere. Hill Close, once pasture, was bought in 1845 and turned into plots which were sold off as gardens in the succeeding years. Each has its own history. They were hedged around and many had Victorian summerhouses (four of which are now listed Grade II*). By the 1990s, the plots had all been acquired by Warwick District Council and the site was menaced with development. A group of local people formed an action group to save it and the gardens are now restored to their former glory and open to the public. The guidebook is a model of its kind. Modern in layout and appearance, it is packed with history, old photographs and pictures, descriptions of the plots and their families and explanations of the ecological innovations introduced into the gardens. A worthy winner of the guidebook section and overall winner.

Log on to www.historicgardens.org for details about past prizes and announcements of future ones.

This article first appeared in *Historic Gardens Review*, Issue 22 and is adapted for the *Journal* by Elizabeth Newbery.

BELOW:
The winner, Hill Close Gardens, Warwick.



SELLING THE MESSAGE

The art of gardening is not easily communicated through a single garden visit. So, how does the UK's leading organic growing charity demonstrate gardening the 'organic way' to its visitors? Garden Organic's Charlotte Corner explains.

ABOVE:
The children's garden trail.

Ryton Gardens in Warwickshire is the home of leading charity, Garden Organic. Borne out of the vision of one man, Lawrence D Hills, a pioneer of organic gardening, the gardens came to fruition after the organisation outgrew its research trial grounds in Bocking, Essex.

Formerly a paddock with farmhouse and riding stables, the 22-acre site began life as open fields, sitting in a frost pocket, open to the mercy of the elements. Twenty-five years later Ryton Gardens comprises eco-offices for the charity's staff, an organic shop, restaurant and plant sales area, a themed visitor centre and ten acres of beautiful organic gardens designed to inspire, demonstrate and educate.

PRACTICAL AND ACHIEVABLE

The key to Ryton Gardens' success at showcasing organic gardening lies in its practical demonstrations and themed gardens. Setting itself apart from other UK gardens that are designed to be seen but not touched, the site invites visitors to walk in and around over 30 modestly sized gardens, each with a different focus, ranging anywhere between wildlife and biodiversity, to veg growing, naturalistic planting, woodland and roses.

Director of Horticulture at Garden Organic, Bob Sherman says, 'The idea behind Ryton Gardens is to impress our visitors by showing them how beautiful and productive an organic garden is and then demonstrating how things are done.'

To achieve this, the development of the gardens has led the charity to provide welcome opportunities for visitors to lift up the lids of compost bins, turn the compost tumblers, watch the bees at work in the apiary, feed the worms in the wormeries, scrump from the fruit trees and watch seed saving in action. Even the themed gardens are designed to entice visitors on a journey by incorporating winding gravel paths, hidden seats, shaded and sunny spaces, open doors to potting sheds and greenhouses – all geared at getting people to imagine the space as their own.

LEFT:
The shed and water butt!

BELOW:
The bee garden.

'Ultimately what we want to do is turn a visit to our gardens into action, 'Says Sherman, 'so we try to give people an experience that leaves them feeling that what they've seen is attainable, as well as opportunities to find out the answers for themselves, all in the hope that they'll begin adopting our ideas in their own homes.'

INSPIRATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL

Having over 50 years of experience promoting organic gardening, Garden Organic recognised early on that the key to convincing organic-doubters of the benefits and successes of organic methods was by inspiring visitors.

As a result, the Herb Garden, Paradise Garden, Rose Garden and Cook's Garden, among others, serve to impress novice gardeners with their beauty, scent, edible offerings and informative signage, whilst the inclusion of fruit orchards, allotment gardens, shrubberies and specialist vegetable gardens provide practical ideas to inspire the more advanced gardening visitor.

And the experience isn't just about seeing inspirational organic gardening in practice, according to Colette Bond, Head of Education at the charity: 'The gardens are also an educational base whereby Garden Organic has successfully been able to use the demonstrational areas to train teachers, apprentices, project volunteers and the general public, not to mention delegates from other leading gardening organisations.'

Bond Says 'Part of our ethos is to use the gardens as an outdoor classroom, where self-guided learning and supervised learning can take place.' And to bring the gardens further to life, group visitors have the chance to book bespoke garden tours, while school visits can be tailored to reflect specific areas of the curriculum.

UNUSUAL AND QUIRKY

Gardening has a long and very serious history, but until more recently it has been rare to see the demonstration of food growing alongside ornamentals and this is significantly where Ryton Gardens sets itself apart. With a quirky and informative visitor centre, aptly named the Vegetable Kingdom, adults and children can enter into the enthralling story of the world's vegetables, and from large glass viewing panes, can watch as horticulturists conserve some of the UK's most endangered vegetable varieties including the Gravedigger pea and Auntie Madge's tomato.

The Vegetable Way Garden, adjacent to the visitor centre, combines edible and ornamental planting in stunning displays and instantly makes the visitor take note, breaking the conventions of what a normal garden is thought to be.

'Our aim is to get people thinking about the things they normally take for granted,' Sherman reiterates. 'We want our visitors to think about the food they eat, where it comes from, how it's grown, why diversity is important, and we want them to do something about it. Perhaps by seeing a beautiful flower bed full of lettuces they'll go home and grow something edible. Or by seeing how much life is in a wildlife pond they'll think again about their plans to concrete over their garden. We know it works because increasingly more public gardens, parks and even garden centres are beginning to follow suit.'

SUSTAINABLE AND ORGANIC

A day spent at Ryton Gardens is intended to provide practical ideas, change attitudes and help people understand that the way they garden and care for their green space will have a lasting impact on the planet. As a result, the day-to-day operation of the gardens also reflects this. From raising its own organic plants from seed, saving excess water in butts, using an onsite reed-bed sewage system for all waste, sending compostable material to giant onsite composting bays, and supplying the shop and restaurant with truly local, organic produce – the sustainability message goes through everything the organisation does.

Myles Bremner, Chief Executive of Garden Organic says, 'What makes Ryton Gardens successful at conveying the organic message is a clear and fundamental belief that gardening and growing food organically is far more than just a nice thing to do – in fact it's the best thing to do if we are to protect the natural environment, and ultimately our own health. All it takes are small steps in our own back gardens to make a genuine difference.'

Charlotte Corner is PR Campaigns Coordinator, Garden Organic.

A VISITOR CENTRE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Ian Edwards describes the thinking behind the John Hope Gateway in the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh.

© Matt Lever

ABOVE:
Entrance to the From Another Kingdom exhibition in the John Hope Gateway.

A FRESH APPROACH

When set with the task of designing a new visitor centre for the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) the creative team decided to take a fresh approach, fitting for a botanic garden in the 21st century. The John Hope Gateway (JHG) replaces a 1970s, 'black-box', exhibition hall, and the contrast could not be greater. The new, two-storey 'eco' building, has a green sedum roof, supported by massive laminated-timber beams that appear to float above the light, airy space that contains exhibition, event, restaurant and retail spaces. A long, curved, glass edge curls around the ponds in the biodiversity garden, so that light is bounced back from the surface of the water to the inside spaces; and the boundaries between building and outside environment begin to merge. This illusion of bringing the garden into the building continues with displays of real, living and preserved plant material among the exhibits that explain the scientific work of the RBGE.

KEEPING IT FRESH

A raft of ecological features in the JHG, including fresh-air ventilation, water recycling, solar and wind power generation and a biomass boiler, has resulted in much peer-praise for the architects Edward Cullinan, but does it work for the public? So far, nearly half a million people have been through the building since it opened in October 2009 and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The RBGE has always been popular with tourists, although the bulk of visits are from local Edinburgh folk; both groups have been unanimous in welcoming this new addition to the garden's facilities and the JHG has increased visitor numbers, length of stay and enjoyment of visit.

Presently we are still riding on the wave of enthusiasm and curiosity stimulated by the novelty of a new building and we know the challenge will be to maintain the high level of visitation and satisfaction in years two and three and beyond. In order to keep interest up,

Visitor to the From Another Kingdom exhibition in the John Hope Gateway.

we have developed a programme of exhibitions and events that ensure that people who visit the RBGE on a regular basis will always find something fresh and interesting to experience. This simply mimics what the garden has always achieved through seasonal changes and an active accessions policy that means new plants are added to the collections all the time. Our ambition is to maintain the same level of novelty in the JHG as the visitors experience outside.

The RBGE exhibition and events team has neither a large staff nor a large budget to achieve this, but we do have good friends in Scotland and around the world. We have formal and informal links with many academic institutions, conservation organisations and a variety of other groups and individuals that have proved to be essential in putting on a very wide variety of relevant material. Already, within the first year of operation, the list of collaborators has reached more than 50 partner organisations and is growing all the time. The beautiful building, set within an unparalleled location in Scotland's capital city has helped attract new partners although quite a few, including many of Scotland's major life science institutes, have been working with us for years, especially during the annual Edinburgh International Science Festival.

REAL SCIENTISTS AND REAL SCIENCE

Science Festival activities have been transferred to the JHG and this remains a big event, with dozens of organisations taking part. However, a challenge has been to maintain the 'buzz' associated with the Science Festival throughout the year. Scientists are encouraged to recognise presenting science to the public as a valid part of their work and we can provide training and mentoring where necessary in skills required to engage with a non-specialist audience. The purpose-built Real Life Science Studio, in the JHG, provides an open, laboratory-type environment for practical presentations, far removed from the traditional lecture theatre with tiered seating. The results have been impressive, with many scientists rising to the occasion by demonstrating the relevance of their work to topical issues through 'show-and-tell' and direct dialogue rather than relying on Powerpoint. Ultimately I believe it is this approach – using real scientists to present real science – that will be the unique selling point of the JHG.

FORAYS INTO FUNGI

The current programme, From Another Kingdom, illustrates how this can be achieved. Accepting our remit within the JHG has to encompass all biodiversity and sustainability issues, not only plants, we have embraced the fungal kingdom with a major exhibition and events programme and new publication, which demonstrates why and how fungi are essential for life on Earth. It is a good example of a collaborative project because the initial approach came from the British Mycological Society (BMS), over two years ago, as a way of contributing to the International Mycological Congress that took place in Edinburgh at the beginning of August this year. This required us to create something that would meet with the approval of over 1,000 visiting professional mycologists as well as appeal to the general public!

The flagship From Another Kingdom (FAK) exhibition transforms the temporary exhibition space in the JHG into a labyrinth of underground and above-ground spaces that explore both the positive (food, medicine, ecological services) and negative (poisons, disease, rotting) aspects of fungal biology and ecology. It involves a variety of media including models (life-like and gigantic), film, inter-actives, live material (including bioluminescent mushrooms), artefacts and images. Collaboration with the BMS and medical mycology units at Aberdeen and Manchester Universities has been essential, as was additional funding from the Wellcome Trust and the Scottish Government's Science Engagement Grants. Most of the narrative is provided by an audio guide that uses material recorded from real scientists working at a variety of different institutes. Carefully edited, these one-minute soundbites have been well received, showing that the public appreciate hearing about science from those that practise science and can speak with authority as well as enthusiasm. The exhibition received 12,000 visitors during its first month, with nearly half the audience taking up the option of using the audio guide.

© Matt Laver

FUNGI, FILM AND FOOD

Collaboration extends further with the FAK event programme, which runs for four months during the autumn and includes forays, science demonstrations, an art exhibition, and family drop-in sessions, with a total of 18 different organisations contributing 35 events. This has given further opportunities for innovation, such as a programme of fungi-related films at the Edinburgh Filmhouse cinema and using the restaurant in the JHG for a Café Scientifique event, with psychoactive mushroom expert Andy Letcher. The programme is also supported by a new multi-author illustrated book on fungi, written by experts but carefully edited to appeal to a broad readership.


© Matt Laver

Plans are now underway for the next three years with themes selected to fit in with events happening in the outside world (International Year of Chemistry, International Year of Forests, etc.) as well as reflecting the research interests of RBGE and our partner organisations. The most popular exhibit in the JHG has been a beautiful short film, presented on two screens, which has the simple message that if the human race is going to survive in the future we will need to follow nature's example and adapt to change rather than resist it. This message applies equally to our own strategic planning – if the JHG is to continue to attract big audiences, and engage them in contemporary science issues it will need to continue to evolve and adapt to a continually changing social, economic and physical environment. The inspiration is out there, just the other side of a thin glass wall, among the plants, animals and landscapes of the garden.

Ian Edwards is an ecologist and educator who is currently responsible for exhibitions and events at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

A GARDEN OF DELIGHT

Christine Joy explains how emotions have guided the development of the design and educational strategies at the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden, Melbourne.

ABOVE:
Ferns planted to evoke the movement of the sea.

BELOW:
Sunflowers in the children's garden.

© RBG

In 2005, the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden (IPFCG) opened in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. 'It's a place where children can delight in nature and discover a passion for plants. It is a garden that celebrates the imagination and fosters the creative nature of play'. (IPFCG Vision statement)

FEELINGS AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

For many years educators have spoken of the importance of the emotions in the learning process. At the beginning of the 20th century, the 4H (Head, Heart, Hands and Health) movement in the US, for example, identified feelings and personal development as crucial to both healthy living and the learning process. Those who have written about the role of the environment in learning are perhaps most passionate in their eloquence. *Nothing Without Joy* (Malaguzzi), *A Sense of Wonder* (Carson) and *A Symphony of the Senses* (Jenkins), among many others. All seek to communicate the intensity of the experience where the emotions are integral to the learning process and the depth of feeling that environmental learning can bring to the child.

So what is our objective as facilitators of emotional experience? For me, I hope that there are life-changing moments that trigger a new way of seeing and feeling about plants, the landscape and the interaction with other living things. Within this context we choose not to preach about the destruction of the world's natural ecosystems and the depletion of its resources, or place responsibilities on small shoulders. Importantly, the choice of taking that responsibility now rests with the young people, as they move into their questioning teens and are able to make decisions about their own role in sustainable living and environmental activity.

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TOUCH AND FEEL

It is no coincidence that the same word, touch, is used in our language for defining both the sense of feeling and to be moved by emotion. It is not only the sense of touch but all the senses that feed and enrich our emotions. And it is this remarkable combination that triggers and enhances memory. Perhaps it is no coincidence either that sense, the word that defines the way we experience the world, also means to have knowingness or wisdom, as in good sense. There are also interesting connections of definition between feel (to touch) and feel (be affected emotionally).

Many educators stress the importance of the senses as learning tools. The outdoors is a sensory wonderland, and gardens and wild places especially provide opportunities for rich learning through the senses, Research on the use of sensory experiences suggests significant and long-lasting learning that contributes also to changes in children's feelings that lead to positive attitudes and behaviour towards nature and the environment.

So, how do we engage the senses? Sensory experiences can be gentle, subtle, funny, surprising, forceful or powerful. Try our strategy 'Cheeks and Tummies' in which children 'meet' trees and their surfaces, textures, temperatures and smells by placing cheeks and tummies against them. Children enjoy a sudden freedom

in their responses to plants and 'interpret' for themselves – bamboo is described as being 'like metal'. Adults and children alike begin to laugh and smile: it is as if the emotional connection between people and plants is opened, renewed and rejuvenated by this simple gesture. Importantly, the connection is made between members of the group.

FEELING FEAR...

Fear can cause helplessness and apathy but let's consider how we can use fear to become stronger and braver. In plant landscapes there is a potential for scary games, of playing hiding and exploring the wildwood – the scary forest where monsters lurk. In the IPFCG the most satisfying squeals and the shiniest eyes emerge from the bamboo wildwood! No wonder that the most popular play spaces in the IPFCG are the wild places, where children from about seven years head instinctively to challenge themselves to come out of the wildwood alive!

BELOW:
Girls in the flax tunnel.

© RBG

RIGHT:
Examining seedlings.

AND AWE...

Is there a connection between the sense of fear and another significant emotion elicited in the natural world – awe? Standing under the tree the children call Lady Loch (an Algerian oak planted by a Lady Loch 116 years ago) is certainly awe-inspiring. Her branches and 'fingers' touch the earth and sweep her giant leaves about, enclosing you in her vast green cathedral. Being under her is to be transformed through sensory immersion awareness to a new place, a feeling and seeing.

OVER-CONTROL?

Is there a point whereby we diminish the experience by. over-control? Perhaps there is no real way of knowing without being able to measure the light in the learner's eyes. However, we can continue to ask ourselves the following questions:

- Do we trust visitors to direct their own discovery?
- Are learning experiences personal and open rather than directed or closed?
- How do we avoid over-control?
- Do we acknowledge that discovery can be emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual?
- How do we retain a compelling sense of mystery?
- What is the relationship between mystery, discovery and transformation?

When first considering interpretation options for the IPFCG, we asked ourselves about the appropriateness of signage in a garden for children, a space for personal and open discovery rather than directed. We decided that we would have minimal signage. How would a sign impact on the child's need to feel that he/she is discovering the rainforest for the first time? Would they feel like an explorer arriving at a wilderness like the moon and seeing the US flag piercing the landscape in an aggressive gesture of ownership?

© RBG

If a sense of agency and identity engenders a 'play of emotions', then what is our role in designing learning experiences that facilitate this?

- Can our visitors contribute to change e.g. through real gardening experiences?
- Can our visitors contribute to decision-making processes e.g. round-table decision-making?
- Do we engender a sense of belonging to place through learning experiences?
- How do we recognise/measure a sense of belonging?

PEOPLE PASSION

'People passion' is one of the key design elements for learning experiences at the IPFCG. It acknowledges our connection to their interests. Research shows that adults who are actively engaged with and committed to caring for the environment have two main sources for their enthusiasm: positive experiences in rich natural environments as children, and family role models (or other significant adults) who

BELOW:
Children digging in the garden.

demonstrated their respect for the environment (Chawla, 1999).We planned so that people passion would be an active player in communicating delight (and therefore care and respect) in the plant landscapes and also in allied programming.

THE POWER OF STORY

Inspiration for the design team was supplied by memories of stories and the role landscape played in the literature of childhood. It seemed that there was a powerful link between literature and landscape, and between landscapes both real and imagined. Is it because of the powerful sensory immersion that rich plant landscapes provide? Or is it more complex in that the diverse and dramatic landscapes of our memories feed the imagination, feed the creative impulse?

THE DELIGHT FACTOR

Is the sense of wonder also driven by emotion to question and to understand something new, but perhaps not always to know all? With regards to the landscapes and experiences we provide for our children to play and learn in, shouldn't they be joyful, playful, and allow for the contribution of the imagination, the creation of stories that connect us to people and place, ones that we carry away with us in our hearts? They remind us, as educators, that the 'delight factor' is the most powerful teaching tool of all.

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Christine Joy is one of six designers of the award-winning Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden and Education Coordinator at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

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