

# INTERPRETATION JOURNAL



JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

SPRING 2012 • VOLUME 17 • NUMBER 1

## WELCOMING THE WORLD



Published by the Association for Heritage Interpretation

ISSN 1357 9401

*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](http://www.touchmedia.uk.net)

Cover photograph: Mandip Sehmi and Andy Barrow, Stoke Mandeville © Finlay Mackay/National Portrait Gallery/Road to 2012

*Interpretation Journal* is published twice a year in Spring and Autumn.

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

You can visit AHI's website at

[www.ahi.org.uk](http://www.ahi.org.uk)

**Advertising rates (member/non member)**

Full page	£250/£350
Half page	£150/£210
Quarter page	£90/£130

Discount is available for a series of adverts.

To discuss advertising with AHI through the journal, website, conferences and events, please contact [advertising@ahi.org.uk](mailto:advertising@ahi.org.uk)

**Membership rates**

Fellow	£78
--------	-----

Full Member	£62
-------------	-----

Associate Member	£52
------------------	-----

Student Member	£27
----------------	-----

Corporate Member:

1 copy	£78
--------	-----

2 copies	£109
----------	------

3 copies	£140
----------	------

4 copies	£170
----------	------

5 copies	£203
----------	------

**Overseas postage supplements**

(1 copy)

Europe airmail	£5.00
----------------	-------

World airmail	£10.00
---------------	--------

# CONTENTS

**Foreword: Welcoming the world** David Masters 3

## FEATURE NEWS

**A potpourri of curiosities** Kathleen McCulloch 4

## REPORTING RESEARCH

**Hide and seek** Paul Hibberd 6

## EXHIBITION REVIEW

**Bond in Motion** Ruth Taylor 9

## FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

**A view from the Continent** Michael Hamish Glen 10

**Contact-free technology** Dan Boys 11

## WELCOMING THE WORLD

**Introduction: Play up! Play up! And play the game!** James Carter 13

**Road to 2012** Andrea Easey and Matt Lewis 14

**Sailing by** Catherine Brew 16

**Taking the Slow Boat** Kate Self and Laura Wilson 19

**Stories of the world** Helen Mears 22

**Much Wenlock's Olympic magic** Nigel McDonald 25

**The Games are coming!** Kate Sayer 29

**The next issue will feature: The Sea**



For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation [AHI], send an email to [admin@ahi.org.uk](mailto:admin@ahi.org.uk) or write to the Administrator, AHI, 54 Balmoral Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4PG tel: +44 (0)560 274 7737. Individuals can join AHI as Associate or Student Members or can apply to be elected, subject to qualifications and experience, as Full Members or Fellows. Businesses can join as Corporate Members with the same rights as individual members. All members receive *Interpretation Journal*, and other mailings. They can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can vote at the Annual General Meeting. Printed in UK © AHI 2012.

The text, illustrations, photographic images and design of *Interpretation Journal* are protected by copyright. You may not reproduce any content without first obtaining written permission from the contributors of AHI and AHI.

# FOREWORD: WELCOMING THE WORLD

**2012, in case you hadn't noticed, is the year in which the Olympics come to Britain. What has this got to do with heritage interpretation you may well ask? Well, quite a bit in fact, as we hope to show you here.**

As a nation, the Olympics is a chance to showcase our wonderful built, natural and cultural heritage to the world. It is also a prompt to all of us to dust off our tracksuits, swim suits or cycling shorts and engage with sport and recreation – both as participant and observer. So, in this edition of the journal we grasp an Olympic sized opportunity to explore interpretation relating to a very special 'once-in-a-lifetime' event.

On page 13 James Carter sets the scene with a personal reflection on the subject and his forthcoming participation in a Cultural Olympiad event. Hope the training goes well James!

Following this, we take the 'Road to 2012' with the National Portrait Gallery/BT, the largest commission the Gallery has ever taken, whilst Catherine Brew draws on her experience of the sailing events at both the Sydney and London games, reflecting on the role of interpretation at such global gatherings. Kate Self then takes a 'Slow Boat' from Birmingham to London as part of an Olympic interpretation and engagement project involving young people and artists.

Helen Mears describes an ethnographic museum interpretation project inspired by the Olympic 'Stories of the World' initiative, and Nigel McDonald returns to the place of revival of the modern Olympics in a quiet Shropshire village... strange but true.

Finally, Kate Sayer relates the huge impact of the Olympics on the Stratford Discover Children's Story Centre, Britain's first storytelling museum for children.

Elsewhere we explore an Olympian technology that will rapidly find its way into our digital interpretation. We learn of the surprising findings of an MSc research project comparing fixed and first person interpretation in Scotland, and we discover the marvellous secrets of the

Bond cars at the National Motor Museum – with a real light touch approach to their interpretation. We also learn of an innovative approach to virtual interpretation of objects from museums in southern England, and welcome an update from our colleagues at Interpret Europe, who are making rapid strides to represent and champion interpretation across Europe.

In the next edition we dive into the sea to explore the world of maritime heritage interpretation. As ever, offers of articles gratefully received.

Enjoy the Games!

**David Masters MAH1,  
Commissioning Editor**

## Website Members Section

The AHI website has a new members only section full of useful resources for the practicing heritage interpreter. This is the place where you will find back issues of the Journal, conference papers, best practice guidelines and a host of other materials relevant to professional development. We will add more resources over time and publicise them in the AHI e-News as well as the website.

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

You then enter your membership number and the common case-sensitive password to login. Wonders will then unfold to you. The password will change with each issue of the Journal and the first one is HER1tage.

The resources link is  
<http://www.ahi.org.uk/www/resources>.

# FEATURE NEWS

## A POTPOURRI OF CURIOSITIES

**Kathleen McCulloch looks at how Heritage100, an image-based website of fascinating historic objects, was developed to inspire and reach areas of low participation with museums in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.**

### WHAT AND WHY

The aim of the Heritage 100 website [www.heritage100.org.uk](http://www.heritage100.org.uk) is to inspire users of all ages to discover more about collections in an effort to attract audiences who would otherwise be uninterested in visiting Hampshire museums. The website has a contemporary and vibrant design, using a lightbox effect to showcase the images.

#### BELOW:

**Frost's penny-farthing from the stores at Winchester City Council Museums.**

*Cyclist F.D. Frost won the 100 Miles Hants, Wilts, Dorset and Channel Islands Race on this penny farthing in 1891.*



In an era of partnership working and funded by the Renaissance Museums Development Programme, the project took full advantage of the rich resources available to make the website cohesive and interactive. There are eight Hampshire-Solent Alliance partners working together on the project:

- Hampshire Archives and Local Studies
- Winchester City Council Museums
- Hampshire County Council Arts and Museums Service
- The Mary Rose Trust
- Portsmouth Museums and Records Service
- The National Motor Museum Trust
- Southampton City Council Arts and Heritage
- Isle of Wight Heritage Service.

#### BELOW:

**A 1959 Austin Mini Seven from the National Motor Museum.**

*Model Twiggy and singer Lulu both featured in advertising for this 60s icon.*



### HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

The eight partners, a project manager and web developer, all located and working for different local authorities or museums, proved to be an exciting challenge. Before we started on the six-month project, my colleague Robin Iles and I were unaware as to the scale of this undertaking. I was tasked with uploading text and images, some of which show the object rotating 180 degrees, whilst also charged with the social media and marketing side of the project. Robin edited the data sent to us from the partners and researched interesting facts to add value and charm to the object – unusual information that museum labels don't normally have the luxury of space to show.

### SKIP YOUR WAY THROUGH

A selection of searches and indexes tempt the website visitor to explore the objects in Heritage100 in a variety of ways, depending on their own personal interests, location, and what is most relevant to them. The functionality developed especially for this website aims to make exploring easy, increase 'dwell time' and engage visitors with the objects. Special features include:

- an interactive map – allowing website visitors to look for items associated with, found or made in their local area;
- an interactive timeline – allowing the user to search through time for objects dating any time from the 20th century to the age of the dinosaurs;
- showcases or galleries of items based on meaningful themes or relating to the museum and archive sites where the items can be found.



ABOVE:

**Chameleon phone from The Willis Museum & Sainsbury Gallery, Basingstoke.**

*When the phone rings the chameleon starts to roll its eyes and dance while 'singing' the chorus from 'Karma Chameleon.'*

- 'taking part' – featuring outreach events involving local communities in the Hampshire/Solent area, and their results, and highlighting upcoming events that people can take part in. Outreach participants will be able to see their own responses to objects both in this section and on each specific item page;
- voting stars – visitors can rate their favourite items in Heritage100.

focus of the campaign, we introduced QR codes to drive people to the website. Particularly successful were the railway station posters, which triggered notable spikes in the website visitor statistics.

BELOW:

**Wedding cake on display at The Willis Museum & Sainsbury Gallery, Basingstoke.**

*Made in 1898, could this be the oldest wedding cake in the world?*

## REACHING OUT

An important part of the project is a concentrated programme of outreach events, involving non-user communities (people who don't normally visit a museum) identified by each partner. Using the objects featured on Heritage100, outreach practitioners prompted responses, the idea of which is to provide web visitor with a wide variety of memories, opinions and responses to objects, in addition to the interpretation offered by the museum curator.

## PROMOTION

For me, a new and exciting challenge was to work with designers to produce pop-up stands, passenger panels for the interior of buses and posters for train stations across Hampshire and the Solent area. As the objects were the main



## THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

The website is being developed and the 'taking part' section, maps and timeline will all be improved upon during May 2012. Robin and I both feel that if we are involved in other partner-driven projects with more time to spare we would definitely have a prototype website up and running so partners can see exactly how their objects/items will be displayed and their priorities and deadlines taken into account earlier on in the planning process.

The website has been hailed as a great success by all the partners in the Alliance and has received over 30,000 hits in ten weeks, exceeding the target for the whole project by 100%. In particular we would like to thank HCC IT Support, iCandy Design and Future Creatives for their enthusiasm and creative professionalism.

Kathleen McCulloch is e-Communications & Development Officer Winchester City Council; Robin Iles is Museums Education Officer Winchester City Council.

# REPORTING RESEARCH

## HIDE AND SEEK

**Paul Hibberd** reports on Forestry Commission Scotland's research into interpretation and visitor satisfaction at the Kylerhea Otter Hide on Skye.

There is a generally held presumption (amongst interpreters at least!) that well-delivered personal interpretation is the single most effective form of our art. However, many wildlife viewing sites rely heavily on static interpretation due to their location and the resources available. This research investigated the level of visitor satisfaction with the existing static interpretation at the Kylerhea Otter Hide. The research then looked at the effect that the addition of personal interpretation had on visitor satisfaction. Other factors influencing visitor satisfaction were also explored. The results suggest that, for this site at least, the static interpretation is perfectly adequate in facilitating a good visitor experience for most situations and audiences. The results also offer some interesting insights into visitor motivations, and some guidance for managers looking to improve the overall visitor experience at wildlife viewing sites.

## WHO'S WATCHING?

Scotland is currently promoted as Europe's top wildlife viewing destination, and a number of recent studies have shown the growing importance of wildlife tourism to the economy.



ABOVE:  
Kylerhea Otter Hide.

Visit Scotland research has revealed that nature and wildlife is an important factor for the majority of visitors in choosing Scotland as a holiday destination. Otters are one of the country's most iconic species and the west coast remains the destination of choice for would-be otter spotters. Although Scotland does attract a good number of dedicated wildlife watchers, the majority of visitors watching wildlife in Scotland are non-specialists. Arguably, many wildlife hides cater well for the experienced wildlife watcher who arrives armed with binoculars, experience and knowledge, but less well for the more average person!

LEFT:  
Spotting otters.

## ON THE TOURIST ROUTE

Although in a very remote location, the Kylerhea hide is close to the Glenelg/Kylerhea ferry. For folk going 'over the sea to Skye', the hide is very much on the tourist route. As such it receives a wide range of visitors. Observation by the author suggested that the visitor profile changed significantly throughout the study period. Early in the summer (generally the best time for wildlife watching in Scotland), there appeared to be a high proportion of keen wildlife watchers, complete with expensive optical equipment. During the school summer holiday period, there was the expected increase in families, but also in overseas visitors. Many of these visitors did not have their own binoculars; the impression was of people who were at Kylerhea to enjoy a day out, rather than being on a dedicated mission to see an otter.



## SPOTTING OTTERS

The Kylerhea Otter Hide is managed by Forestry Commission Scotland and has been open as a wildlife viewing site for many years. Following a visitor experience planning exercise, the hide received a major refit by CMC Associates in 2010. The new interpretation was guided by the theme 'Kylerhea is one of the best places in Scotland to look for otters and other marine mammals'. One of the identified issues was the difficulty visitors had in distinguishing otters from the much more commonly seen seals (it is surprisingly easy to confuse the two animals when they are in the water and at a distance). As such, a significant

proportion of the interpretation was aimed at helping people identify what they were looking at. Graphic panels were chosen as the main onsite media.

In order to be directly comparable, it was essential that the personal interpretation offered during this research was of a similar quality to the static interpretation already onsite. This meant it had to be delivered by an experienced professional interpreter, using recognised good practice and guided by the same themes. Stephen Wiseman of Alba Interpretation was appointed and delivered a total of 24 short presentations over five days in July and August 2010.

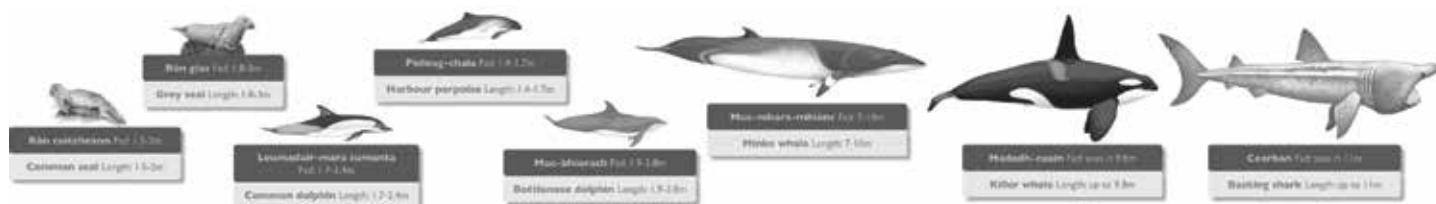
## VISITORS' VIEWS

Self-completion questionnaires were the main form of research. The questions were developed to provide a visitor profile, investigate visitor attitudes to the interpretation and investigate overall visitor satisfaction. A total of 239 questionnaires were completed, roughly half completed by visitors who had only experienced the static interpretation, and half by visitors who had experienced personal interpretation as well. The results were analysed using the software package SPSS.

The responses showed encouraging levels of visitor satisfaction with the interpretation and the overall visit. There was less difference than predicted between the satisfaction levels of

**BELOW:**





**ABOVE:**  
**Identification panel for marine mammals**

those visitors who only received the static interpretation, and visitors who received the additional personal interpretation.

Respondents who experienced the personal interpretation as well as the displays rated their experience as slightly more 'engaging and enjoyable' (4.56 out of 5) than those who only experienced displays (4.37 out of 5). An often repeated comment was that the displays were 'very informative' whereas the personal interpretation attracted comments such as 'friendly', 'engaging' and 'amusing'.

There was very little difference in how 'useful and helpful' respondents found the interpretation (the display-only sample gave an average rating of 4.36 out of 5 and those visitors who received the additional personal interpretation gave a rating of 4.37 out of 5). The inclusion of descriptions and the use of images were among the aspects of the displays cited as being most useful and helpful, whereas the 'local knowledge' of the presenter was cited as one of the most useful and helpful aspects of the presentations.

There appeared to be some relationship between the type of interpretation experienced and overall visit satisfaction (with those who experienced the personal interpretation recording a slightly higher satisfaction rating), but this did not prove to be statistically significant.

## OTTERS OR SEALS?

Interestingly, for a wildlife viewing attraction, there was no apparent correlation between whether otters or other wildlife were seen and visit satisfaction. No otters were seen from the hide by the author or presenter during the research, but seals were usually present. 'I think that's a seal' became Stephen's catchphrase. Even so, a number of respondents recorded as having seen otters during the presentations, despite repeated corrections from the

presenter. This issue of misidentification raised the interesting possibility that the presence of an expert may actually decrease visitor satisfaction, by shattering the illusion that visitors had seen rare wildlife. Certainly, any such correction needed to be done with sensitivity.

Factors which did appear to have a relationship with visit satisfaction were the sex of the respondent ('interview a local lassie on a sunny day if you want good feedback!' – females are apparently easier to please!), the proximity to respondents' home locations and the weather. Whilst watching wildlife was cited as the most enjoyable aspect of the visit by many visitors, many others cited the views, scenery and natural surroundings as the best bit.

Many other interesting comments were received. In particular, the quality and availability of binoculars at Kylerhea provoked a great deal of strong negative reaction from visitors, with more comments on this than any other single issue. Informal recording by the author suggested that around half the visitors arrived without their own optical equipment. Although three pairs of binoculars were available in the hide for public use, these were in a poor state of repair by the summer, having suffered from rough usage.

## LOOKING AHEAD

It is clear that there were a range of factors influencing visit satisfaction at Kylerhea. Further investigation into visitor motivations would no doubt reveal more useful information. As Falk and Dierking<sup>1</sup> have noted, 'it is relatively easy to identify who is visiting, it is harder to identify why people visit'.

The addition of personal interpretation did appear to be able to deliver more enjoyment

than the static interpretation alone, but it was not perceived as any more useful than the static interpretation. These results do, in part, challenge the view that personal interpretation is superior to static interpretation. In many ways this is a pleasing result for site managers; suggesting that good static interpretation together with good infrastructure can adequately deliver a satisfying wildlife watching experience.

It might sound obvious, but we need to help people see the wildlife. My own conclusions from this research were that any infrastructure and interpretation provided on a wildlife watching site needs to facilitate the viewing experience for the anticipated audiences. A panel giving specific local information, for example explaining where to look and what to look out for, is likely to be of far more use than one giving generic information such as the lifecycle of a particular animal. If hides need to be positioned away from the wildlife to avoid disturbance, then we need to provide decent optical equipment if we are to make the experience accessible to all visitors. Seats need to be comfortable and windows need to open properly. In short, a carefully planned and holistic approach to offering a good visitor experience is really important.

This research was based on a relatively small scale study at a single site. Further research with larger samples and a wider range of sites would reveal further insights.

Paul Hibberd is the Interpretation Officer for Forestry Commission Scotland. This research was part of the author's MSc dissertation on interpretation and visitor satisfaction at wildlife viewing sites.

1. Falk, J. and Dierking, L. (2011) *The Museum Experience*. USA: Left Coast Press.

# EXHIBITION REVIEW

## BOND IN MOTION

Ruth Taylor reviews *Bond in Motion* at the Beaulieu National Motor Museum, Hampshire until December 2012.

As my attitude to cars is basically that a car is a vehicle to get you from A to B as comfortably as possible, the opportunity of attending the launch of the *Bond in Motion* exhibition at Beaulieu National Motor Museum was not immediately appealing. However, when I arrived I was spellbound! Although I'm not that interested in cars, I am a huge fan of James Bond films, I love the drama and the chase of the films and the ingenious escapes Bond effects when in a tricky situation. I discovered that the exhibition was not just of the Bond vehicles but also the films they starred in.

2012 is the 50th anniversary of the James Bond film series and the 40th anniversary of the National Motor Museum. This exhibition, with 50 vehicles on display, is the largest official collection of Bond vehicles. Part of two floors of the museum are given over to the exhibition, which opens with a film sequence accompanied by the classic Bond theme tune inviting you in. The exhibition cleverly juxtaposes the Bond vehicles with film clips of the vehicles in action. The National Motor Museum is a stark



ABOVE:  
Skyfleet S570, Aston Martin DBS and Aston Martin stunt car from *Casino Royale*.

functional space and the exhibition is designed around the spaces of the exhibition hall, producing a range of film sets. In some places the film is shown across the whole wall and in others a small screen above the vehicle is used. Otherwise, the interpretation is minimal, letting the cars and films speak for themselves. Each exhibit has an interpretation board with technical information on the vehicle and the relevant film. But the magic of this exhibition is being able to see the vehicles in action in the film clips as well as get close up to cars like the Silver Cloud of *A View to Kill* and Jaguar XKR convertible used in the ice palace scene of *Die Another Day*.

My favourite object is the cello case sled used in *The Living Daylights* as an escape from the police down the snow-covered mountain-side. This is shown in a film projected across a 6m wall that is so close that you feel part of the action.

The exhibition doesn't just feature cars and motorbikes, there are also the parachutes and under water tow sleds, the crocodile mini submarine from *Octopussy* and the wetbike (now called a jet ski) from the *Spy Who Loved Me*.

Does there need to be more or different interpretation? In my opinion, no, although others may disagree! To me the simplicity works. This exhibition shows how effective the use of film can be in bringing the objects alive, telling their story and showing them in action.

More information can be found at: <http://www.beaulieu.co.uk/attractions/bond-in-motion/bond-film-and-vehicle>

Ruth Taylor



LEFT:  
Parahawk from *The Living Daylights*.

# FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

## A VIEW FROM THE CONTINENT

Michael Hamish Glen describes the development of Interpret Europe, AHI's sister network.

### IN THE BEGINNING

Led by the late Chris Wood, Bournemouth University and AHI hosted an international conference in 1999 where delegates supported the idea of a pan-European forum. My own involvement began then and it's exciting to have played a part in IE's development.

After Bournemouth, a network was formed and it flourished gently, but faded. However, a key participant, Patrick Lehnes (now IE's executive director), didn't give up. At the National Association of Interpretation's (NAI) international gathering in Vancouver in 2007, he gathered support from a number of us and got more during *The Vital Spark* in Scotland later that year. Two years later in Athens, several of us at NAI's conference formed – with their support – a proto-committee to move things forward. Finally, at the invitation of the Slovenian Interpretation Network, we founded the European Association for Heritage Interpretation (now called Interpret Europe) in Ljubljana in July 2010.

### WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

We are an independent, non-profit association bringing together people from across Europe who are involved in heritage interpretation. Like AHI, IE includes practitioners, consultants, managers, teachers, trainers and researchers – and others keen to further our objectives. We aim to foster good practice and research in heritage interpretation throughout Europe by providing services, encouraging the exchange of experience and ideas, and collaborating widely to raise the profile and impact of interpretation.

Importantly, our work complements, not replaces, the activities of national associations where they exist, and helps interpreters in countries which have no interpretation association. We want to establish common standards across Europe and our vision is that, by 2030, *heritage interpretation will be established as the generally accepted and professional approach to creating public understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural heritage throughout Europe.*

Essentially, we want IE to gain a reputation as an excellent 'transnational' non government organisation (NGO) by representing the profession in debates with other international NGOs the European Union (EU) and other public agencies, and in supporting Europe-wide initiatives related to natural and cultural heritage, community identity and citizenship.

That's the theory, but what about the practice? What have we achieved so far and what's on our agenda?

### A VIEW OF THE CONTINENT

Until recently, beyond North America and the UK, few countries recognised our interpretation of 'interpretation' as a defined term, let alone as a profession, or even implemented interpretation in practice. Sweden's pioneering open-air museum at Skansen showed one way forward. Denmark was one of the first countries to develop environmental interpretation, principally for children, on a wide scale.

Movements to develop, teach and implement interpretation spread. In Spain, for example, the Asociación para la Interpretación del Patrimonio was an early formalised gathering of interpreters, which has since published several books on interpretation.

Italy's Pangea Institute has just celebrated its 20th anniversary of teaching and training people in environmental interpretation. There

is a lot of interest in Belgium – the home of the Ename Centre – and in the Netherlands. Germany, partly through the universities that formed the original network, has seen interpretation used increasingly but not yet widely adopted. Although interpretation has a role in France, there is no representative association and our efforts to involve its professionals have not yet borne fruit. In the east of Europe, interest and experience are growing considerably and the creation of IE is helping our members and others in Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Greece and Turkey.

### WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED SO FAR?

Since our foundation assembly in Slovenia, we have gone some way to meeting our aims. We have a growing membership from nearly 30 countries, including some beyond Europe. We have an active supervisory committee that represents six countries (eight if you count England, Wales and Scotland as separate in interpretation terms). Our management is well established, we have a much-visited website and publish a regular newsletter.

Last year, we held our first annual conference in Freiburg, welcoming nearly 70 delegates from 22 countries. It led to our publishing the *Freiburg Declaration on Heritage Interpretation* – a statement of our belief in the profession and its benefits, and intended for wide circulation to public agencies and NGOs.

This year we have just enjoyed our second gathering in Pisa, with a healthy number of participants – even in straitened times. Next year, we go to Stockholm at the invitation of the Swedish Centre for Nature Interpretation. We shall be joint hosts with them, and with NAI, which has run its own international events for some years. IE, after such a short time, is playing on a world stage.



European Association for Heritage Interpretation

To strengthen worldwide collaboration, we prepared an *International Memorandum of Understanding*, confirming a shared ethos and willingness to cooperate, which has been signed by all the interpretation associations round the world.

We are delighted that AHI is one of the first to sign. It is a very public signal of the excellent relationship we enjoy and which has been reinforced by AHI's deputy chair, Steven Richards Price, joining our supervisory committee.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

AHI, like English Heritage, is a full partner in the first of our applications for EU funding. Under the provisions of the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme, IE is seeking €300,000 to establish a professional European training scheme for interpretation. We are very hopeful of beating the competition for funds this year, making our mark with the EU and establishing cross-border cooperation. The bid, led by the University of Malta, also involves organisations from Belgium, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands and Sweden.

The pace of developing our activities is sometimes a little breathless, but we are getting fitter by the day. My own feeling is that the creation of Interpret Europe was an event waiting to happen – and possibly overdue. We look forward to working even more closely with our friends in AHI.

Michael Hamish Glen is Chair of Interpret Europe's supervisory committee. [www.interpret-europe.net](http://www.interpret-europe.net)

## CONTACT-FREE TECHNOLOGY

**Dan Boys explains how the London Olympics will be the first Games to embrace the next big thing in technology – transactions requiring no PIN.**

Imagine swiping a till with your credit card or mobile phone to make a payment without entering your pin. Imagine no longer, the technology is already here. This is Near Field Technology (NFC) and London 2012 will be the first Olympic Games to embrace it. NFC allows UK shoppers to make pin-free purchases.

Although a little slow to take off (just like internet shopping), Barclays, a host of high-street retailers and an increasing number of smartphone companies have jumped on the bandwagon too. Think about the TV ad of a man sliding through the city on a water slide paying for goods with his Barclaycard? That represents contactless payment.

One year on and every sales terminal at the London Olympic venues will allow 'wave and pay' purchases. People travelling to the Games using the city's 8,000 buses will also be able to hop on and pay direct, using contactless payment. Financial institutions don't have a monopoly over NFC. It can also be used for something more in keeping with the values of the Olympic Games.

## A CASE IN POINT

As this latest edition of the *Interpretation Journal* rolls off the press, British Waterways' canals and rivers will be transferring to the care of a new charity called the Canal and River Trust. One of their first interpretation projects is to deliver a smartphone trail along the Montgomery Canal – a timely project, as more than half of the UK population now owns a smartphone.



ABOVE:  
A lamppost-mounted trailhead sign marks the start of the trail in the Welsh border town of Welshpool.

Ten 'waymarks' can be found along the 2km length of the canal. On each one, a QR code and NFC tag point to a mobile-optimised webpage containing information about the canal's wildlife. Throw in some images, wildlife sound effects and a blog with the latest wildlife sightings and events, and visitors have at their disposal a variety of media to engage with.

Web-based content allows the visitor to easily switch between English and Welsh translations. People at home can also appreciate the trail too – viewing a standard version of the web pages on their desktop. Activity sheets for children can also be downloaded.

## HOW DOES THE TECHNOLOGY WORK?

Essentially, the pre-programmed QR code and NFC tag work in the same way. The user does not have to type in a web address, or browse a website to find the relevant information or files. The novelty of scanning a QR code or 'bumping' a NFC tag is appealing too. Small and unobtrusive waymarks are an important requirement for the interpretation along the Montgomery Canal. QR code and NFC tags have alleviated the issue of limited space for bilingual text on the waymarks. Of course, for non-smartphone owning visitors this approach does prevent full engagement with the trail. Nevertheless, as more and more blue chip companies embrace the technology, and the ownership of smartphones continues to double each year, the London 2012 Olympics really could herald a golden era for contactless interpretation.

Dan Boys is Creative Director of Audiotrails.

# WELCOMING THE WORLD



‘It’s an odd boy who doesn’t like sport’

The Bonzo Dog Band

# PLAY UP! PLAY UP! AND PLAY THE GAME!

I really shouldn't be writing this. I've never understood sport. The sports section of my weekend newspaper goes, unopened, straight into the recycling box. I started writing this article while most of the country was probably watching the FA cup final. I didn't know it was on until I saw it in the TV guide; I still don't know who won.

I'll admit that one reason sport plays no part in my life is that I've never been much good at it. My abiding memory of cricket at school is bowling what I hoped was a scorching delivery, only for the ball to hit the teacher, who was umpire at the bowler's end, in the head. But my ineptitude isn't the whole story. There's something about sport that I feel actively uncomfortable with. Its rabid tribalism celebrates traits in human nature I find depressing. The salaries of major stars are obscene; their lifestyle and behaviour troubling considering that they are people who are often seen as role models.

So for the Olympic movement, and for anyone else who might want to interpret sport, I'm an ideal if challenging subject. Come on, guys – sell it to me. Help me understand what it's all about.

The problem is, sport is difficult to get someone to understand, to feel engaged with. The places that try to interpret it often concentrate their efforts on the personalities involved, or the minutiae of a particular sport's development. They end up as pilgrimage sites for the already converted.

Through the Cultural Olympiad, the Olympic project recognises that the Games aren't everyone's cup of tea. Although you might expect it to have a quite a focus on engaging the unconvinced, relatively few of the projects it supports have a direct connection to sport. This journal features one of them, the National Portrait Gallery's Road to 2012 (see page 14), although it doesn't seem to appear on the London 2012 website. Among the other events, two strike me as particularly interesting in the way they provoke new ways of thinking about sport. In Craig Coulthard's Forest Pitch ([www.forestpitch.org](http://www.forestpitch.org)), teams drawn from people who have recently taken up British citizenship will play football matches on a pitch created by clearing an area of forest. A concept that seems just eccentric at first, it starts to get under your skin with questions about identity and belonging, and how the Olympics themselves change utterly the venues they touch.

Speed of Light ([www.speedoflight2012.org.uk](http://www.speedoflight2012.org.uk)) has been developed by NVA, better known for elaborate sound and light performances in wild landscapes, such as the Quiraing on Skye. Their new venture invited applications from people willing to run around Holyrood Park in Edinburgh at night, wearing suits fitted with lights so they paint moving lines of colour across the hill. It will involve 4,000 runners as well as audience members: as much part of the event as the runners.

There was something about Speed of Light that caught my imagination, and I've signed up to run. I won't be entering a marathon any time soon, and the machismo of pitching myself against ever better times or longer distances, let alone other runners, still leaves me cold. But I have enjoyed the physical activity for its own sake, as well as the sense of being part of something that feels at once futile and heroic.

In getting me to that point, I think Speed of Light has achieved something that a visit to Cardiff Arms Park probably never could: it's helped me to discover that the meaning of sport lies in getting involved. I'm tempted to see a lesson for all interpretation here, and to suggest that intellectual understanding will always be empty without a meaningful personal experience to give it some sticking power. If that's pushing things a little too far, then these two Cultural Olympiad events at least give some real meaning to the clichéd phrase that is part of the Olympic creed, 'The most important thing ...is not to win but to take part'. Running around Holyrood Park in the dark, my arms and legs picked out by flashing coloured lights, it just might become real.

**James Carter is a consultant, writer and trainer on interpretation projects. If he manages to keep to his training goals, he will be running in Speed of Light on 25 August 2012. [www.jamescarter.cc](http://www.jamescarter.cc)**

# ROAD TO 2012

**Andrea Easey and Matt Lewis describe the National Portrait Gallery/BT Road to 2012, a three-year photographic project on the build-up to the Olympic Games, and the largest commission that the gallery has ever undertaken.**

## RECORDING THE GAMES

Following London's successful bid to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the National Portrait Gallery began to consider what it could do to record the long-lasting build up to the Games. Conceived as part of the Cultural Olympiad and subsequently selected to be part of its culmination, the London 2012 Festival – Road to 2012 was launched as a three-year partnership between the gallery and BT, the official communications services partner for London 2012. It will create more than a hundred specially commissioned photographic portraits that would serve as a record of the London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

## A BROAD APPROACH

From the outset, the approach was as broad as possible, not just celebrating sport at the highest level, but featuring some of the otherwise unseen roles crucial to staging the Games, in areas such as transport, engineering, design, construction, food, marketing, ceremonies, music and art.

The project was conceived as a chronological journey running over three years with exhibitions at the National Portrait Gallery in the summers of 2010 (Setting Out), 2011 (Changing Pace) and 2012 (Aiming High). Maintaining the momentum and visitor interest over such a long period would be a challenge. The structure of the commission gave us an easy win – each year, two internationally renowned photographers would be invited to photograph the sitters selected by the gallery project team. This meant we knew we would have differing – in fact often contrasting – approaches to answering the photographic brief. The overall brief was simple: a compelling portrait made on location; and the project team would work with the photographers to find a place that was relevant to the sitter's role in 2012. This variety kept the content fresh and visually arresting.

Each year the audience would discover which sitters had been included. Some names had already captured public attention: Sebastian Coe, Tessa Jowell, Rebecca Adlington, Jessica Ennis and Tom Daley among others. Some were aspiring athletes who would move into the public eye through competition success and Team GB selection as the process moved on.

## FROM FILM TO FLICKR

The National Portrait Gallery's audience expects a high level of interpretation, and therefore the exhibitions include text panels and labels to inform the audience about the project, the sitters and the photographers. However, the dynamic nature of sport meant that additional interpretative approaches would be particularly welcome and appropriate. Therefore from the outset, whenever possible, sitters were filmed following the photographic shoot and substantial interviews with the photographers were also recorded. This bank of material on which to draw could then be edited for use as a 10-minute video in the exhibition during the run of each summer show, but also have an ongoing presence on the project website. Of course, running a project with living sitters whose careers can rise and fall on a daily basis as the result of competition success or sustaining an injury presents other interpretation challenges around accuracy and the need to frequently update caption material. This was a project without an 'off' switch, for while the current year's exhibition was about to open, the next year's commissions were being planned. When the exhibition phase ended, the content still lived on in the context of the website.

Conceived as an interactive response to the project as well as showcasing the work produced, the project website at [www.roadto2012.npg.org.uk](http://www.roadto2012.npg.org.uk) is a hub for all the digital interpretation content. It has been a constant presence between the summer exhibitions where the commissioned



© Anderson & Low/National Portrait Gallery/Road to 2012

ABOVE:

**Beth Tweddle (third from left), Hannah Whelan (left), Jenni Pinches (second left) Rebecca Tunney (right).**

photographs, filmed interviews, behind-the-scenes footage and images, the commissions manager's audio blog and the images produced for the participation projects can be found, as well as the invitation to upload images to the site's flickr stream.

## FURTHER COLLABORATION

Participation projects with thriving grass-roots sports clubs in the vicinity of the Olympic Park had been an important thread running through the project with outreach sessions run by the gallery staff at which audio recordings were made with the participants. On-location portraits were made by East London based photographer Katherine Green. Originally these outputs were created for the website. However, an unexpected opportunity arose in summer 2011 to display the photographs at the View Tube, London, the arts and community resource, information centre and café situated on the edge of the Olympic Park. The installation of selected photographs from the participation project under the title 'Road to 2012: A Local Story', with explanatory text and the audio listening point, was an unexpected interpretive

opportunity to reach an audience who might not otherwise travel to the gallery in central London. The project-commissioned photographers each ran a one-day free drop-in portrait photography workshop.

The project has also provided a starting point to work with students in a creative way with collaborations with Goldsmiths College and an ongoing project with the University of East London inspired by the Road to 2012 project. The Goldsmiths students worked with producer and sound artist Martyn Ware to explore sound as a creative response to portraiture and a selection of their completed work formed the basis of a evening Late Shift Extra evening event at the gallery in August 2011.

## STILL GROWING

As the gallery approaches the final months of the commission and prepares for the final exhibition, another possibility to extend the audience has arisen. An outdoor touring version of a selection of photographs from all three years of the project can be seen in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Birmingham in the months

leading up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games. For these exhibitions, often in bustling public spaces, the interpretation has to be shorter, sharper and more direct than in the gallery setting. QR codes printed on the panels lead visitors to the Road to 2012 website where they can access the additional rich interpretative material gathered over the course of three years. Further development work to the website has enabled users to access this content in pages designed for browsing on smartphones. Road to 2012 has grown in ways we never expected and enabled us to connect with the public in new ways.

**Andrea Easey is Interpretation Editor and Matt Lewis is Digital Participation Producer at the National Portrait Gallery.**

# SAILING BY

Catherine Brew remembers the Sydney Olympic Games, 2000, and questions whether interpretation around the Olympic sailing events in Weymouth and Portland 2012 actually interprets the Games?



ABOVE:  
Some of the stunning scenery found along the Dorset Coast includes this view over Fortuneswell on Portland towards Weymouth.

## DÉJÀ VU

The Olympics are coming! In fact, they've been before. Well, at least for me anyway. This is my second time around the sailing competition. During the Sydney 2000 Olympics I was working as a ranger in Sydney Harbour National Park (SHNP) and was heavily involved in managing the large numbers of visitors who came into the park to watch the sailing each day. This time around, I'm somewhat more removed, but as a local resident of Portland, the home of the National Sailing Academy and one half of the Olympic sailing venues, I can't help but be involved. 30 years of roadworks in 18 months kind of has an impact on the local population.

## HOSTING THE SAILING EVENTS

Weymouth and Portland are due to play host to the sailing events 27 July–9 September. With 30,000 extra people expected to visit each day in addition to the 30,000 daily seasonal visitors, this is undoubtedly a great opportunity to present the area and its local nuances to a global audience.

It has been interesting being so close to the same event at two different Olympic Games and reflecting on each with my interpretation hat firmly on. We're yet to fully experience

2012, but the lead up has proven to have its own idiosyncrasies and has made me wonder a great deal about the role of interpretation in such global gatherings.

## BLURRED LINES

We all understand interpretation to be a communication process that aims to engage people with a place or subject. Whilst this concept sounds quite simple, when reviewing Olympic interpretation projects, the lines become a little blurred. The lead up to both events creates a large number of activities designed to celebrate the local area, national life and to soak up the Olympic atmosphere generally. Yet how many of these events do we consider to be interpretation projects?

Locally, there are clearly defined interpretation projects such as a new walking trail between Portland and Weymouth. Known as the Legacy Trail (at least until a more suitable name has been found), it utilises existing walking paths and the South West Coast Path, to provide a continuous route between Littlemoor and Portland (a distance of over 12 miles on foot). Designed to be the backbone of access to nature in Weymouth and on Portland, the path travels through three important wildlife sites, Lorton Valley Nature Park, Weymouth Wetlands and Portland Quarry Park.

ABOVE:  
Sydney Harbour.



**BELOW:**  
Located alongside Chesil Beach and the Fleet Lagoon Nature Reserve, the Chesil Beach Centre interprets these two natural features.

## A GREEN LINK

Lorton Valley Nature Park is a newly created reserve, made up of existing reserves and an environmental mitigation package that was put in place as a result of the new Weymouth Relief Road. Described as Weymouth's 'green lung', it provides a vital green link to urban Weymouth. Also within the urban environment is the RSPB's Radipole Lake, which lies in the heart of Weymouth and is possibly one of the finest urban wetland sites in the UK. Further away on Portland, several disused stone quarries form Portland Quarry Park. They offer new habitat for wildlife and rich stories of quarrying, sculpture and geology. Accordingly, as a walk, the Legacy Trail provides a great opportunity to engage and inspire people with local stories.

## A LACK OF VISION?

Obtaining planning permission for the trail's interpretation has had its challenges. The proposal to install nine large ring-like sculptures which framed the best views along the coast and housed the interpretation, was turned down by the Council in April. Visitors would have been able to sit in each ring sculpture to contemplate the view and access the interpretation through a scanner code, with more information available through a phone

app and geocaching system. Weymouth and Portland Borough Council considered that the waypoints were not appropriate; deeming them too great an urban artificial shape for the natural environment of the Legacy Trail. Clearly, the juxtaposition between the urban and the natural was acutely evident in the waypoint design. However, it is also worth considering that the combination of these two elements could have been crafted into a powerful message to visitors. At the time of writing this article, the project team, feeling somewhat disappointed, had decided to return to the commissioned artists to reconsider the interpretation design and ideas.

## TRIGGERING CHANGE

The Olympics has also brought the expansion of the Chesil Beach Centre, due to be opened in July 2012. Managed by Dorset Wildlife Trust, the new centre will incorporate improved educational facilities, indoor catering and enhanced interpretation of Chesil Beach and the Fleet Nature Reserve. Directly opposite one of the sailing competition areas, the centre is expected to serve large numbers of visitors during the Olympics. Across the other side of

Weymouth Bay, two interpretation panels have been updated for the Games. Both located at key viewing sites along the coast, the panels provide information about the natural and historical history of the coastal parish of Osmington Mills and Ringstead.

Likewise, 12 years ago, the Sydney 2000 Games triggered changes in Sydney Harbour National Park. Interpretation signs were updated, guided tour programmes increased and the South Head Heritage Trail was made accessible. New interpretation panels and a leaflet were developed for the trail to help visitors explore the area's Aboriginal heritage, 19th-century fortifications and historic lighthouse and cottages. The benefits were twofold. Not only did the accessible path increase access to the park for visitors with mobility issues, but it also provided safe easy access to key areas used to view the sailing competition. The trail remains one of the most scenic walks around the southern side of Sydney Harbour.



## TRUE TO FORM?

In recent months, the opportunities for local people to become involved in Olympic-based celebrations have grown enormously, with free cultural events focusing on Dorset food, arts, music, local history and the natural environment. There's the local writer who has been declared as one of the 100 official BT storytellers for London 2012, his role being to encourage storytelling and give different perspectives on the Games. Weymouth seafront is now home to the Weymouth Sea Life Tower – a 53 m high tower with a rotating gondola that gives visitors 360° views of the Jurassic coastline and highlights local landmarks. This summer also sees the Battle for the Winds, a three-day theatre and dance project that incorporates the historic high angle battery on Portland.

Some might argue that these events being held under the banner of the Cultural Olympiad are not classically interpretation. Maybe they aren't. However, it is worth considering, if one of the objectives of interpretation is to reveal hidden meanings and to bring places to life through unforgettable experiences that help people understand their environment more, that perhaps these social and cultural events are interpretation in its truest form? The numerous festivities planned will certainly encourage people to get out and explore the area more than they might otherwise.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE OLYMPICS 2012?

What is apparent in both 2000 and 2012 is that relatively few local interpretation projects actually interpret the Olympics themselves. Whilst it is important to develop interpretation that is locally distinctive and leaves a legacy for local people, the global nature of the Olympic Games offers enormous potential to interpret British life through sport. Amongst the dozens of Cultural Olympiad events linked to the sailing venues, only two projects directly interpret sport. The travelling exhibition Our Sporting Life will visit this area in the summer and aims to stimulate enthusiasm, inspiration



ABOVE:  
Updated interpretation panel at Osmington Mills,  
a key viewing area for the sailing events.

and involvement with British Olympic history at a local level. Secondly, an exhibition that interprets the use of materials in sport will take place at the Museum of Design in Plastics at the Arts University College, Bournemouth. Why are there not more similarly themed events I wonder?

## LEARNING FROM SYDNEY

Experiences in Sydney showed that people really do want to engage with the Olympics. In 2000, temporary interpretation panels were placed at various locations throughout Sydney Harbour National Park (SHNP) to help visitors understand sailing, the competition and its competitors. Whilst these panels proved to be more about information than provocation, they highlighted an interesting issue – static versus live interpretation. On a regular basis visitors would approach SHNP staff to ask questions about the sailing. Not knowing any great detail, staff would refer visitors to the interpretation panels, only to watch the visitors walk straight past the panels. This situation occurred repeatedly until staff decided to learn the panels off by heart. Immediately the results were different. By verbally communicating the

information held on the panels to visitors, staff were able to satisfy the public's questions. The personal communication also served as a platform to start other conversations about the history of the park and the natural environment in which we were standing. It was a valuable lesson that motivated staff to engage with visitors more and share their knowledge of the national park, rather than feeling disconnected from its visitors.

Regardless of whatever eventuates and what occurred in Sydney, one thing is certain; the Olympics bring a vibrant opportunity to interpret local life and showcase it to the world through a range of projects, activities and celebrations... and that's got to be a good thing.

**Catherine Brew is a partner at Red Plait Interpretation LLP.**

# TAKING THE SLOW BOAT

Kate Self and Laura Wilson explain how Slow Boat is a mobile art programme connecting artists, young people and two contemporary galleries with the Grand Union canal during the most environmentally friendly Olympic games in history.

## THE OLYMPIC SITE

Significant regeneration of canals is taking place as part of the Olympic development plan, particularly the neglected part of the system in the Lower Lea Valley area. The strategy includes opening up the waterways via restoration of the towpaths to provide new office and retail space, schools and leisure facilities. New waterways are also being built and the canals will be cleaned and dredged 24 hours a day during summer 2012.

In building the Olympic site, the organisers of the 2012 Olympic Games used canals to meet their promise of creating the most environmentally friendly games in history.

The government has encouraged the use of canals and waterways when transporting building materials to the Olympic site, as it is a much greener option than using trucks and trains, and also acknowledges the region's rich industrial past. During the Games, a waterbus operated by Water Chariots will provide a unique ferry service, taking visitors from Tottenham Hale or Limehouse Marina along the River Lea and docking just 70 m from the stadium to their very own VIP gate to the stadium.

In the past year or so, funding has been made available towards projects with a specific Olympic focus. As a result, a lot of work has

BELOW:  
The Ikon Slow Boat 2012.



been parachuted in to the Olympic boroughs, which, beyond the summer, may leave no trace. We felt here was a need for a project with a different pace, to develop something that would be meaningful for the participants and sustainable beyond this period.

## SLOW BOAT

Slow Boat is a three year project (2011–13) and for 2012 focuses on a collaboration between the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and Chisenhale Gallery in East London (which are connected by the Grand Union Canal). This project involves young people working with contemporary artists to undertake an in-depth exploration of Britain's Inland Waterways. It is supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and British Waterways and is set up to explore a sustained way of working with young people aged between 15 and 19. Members of the Ikon's Youth Programme (IYP) will have the chance to experience London during this exciting time and for Propeller, the Chisenhale

Gallery's youth group, this project will encourage their members to get out of town and into the countryside.

## THE AARON MANBY

Since Birmingham boasts more canals than Venice, and the Ikon Gallery has a rich history of dynamic offsite programming, the idea of a boat on the Grand Union Canal linking Birmingham to London seemed natural. The *Aaron Manby* generously leased from Sandwell Council, is named after a highly influential engineer, who worked in the Midlands and designed the first seagoing iron steamship also called *Aaron Manby*, constructed 190 years ago. She was built in Tipton and shipped, in pieces, to London, where she was completed in April 1822. Converted by Birmingham-based designer Queen & Crawford, the interior of the *Aaron Manby* canal boat is flexible and can host meetings, seat 30 people for workshops, screen films and function as a moving gallery. We liked the idea that *Aaron Manby* (junior) will follow

the steamship's path almost two centuries years later.

## A SLOW JOURNEY

With a crew composed of Ikon Gallery staff and IYP members, Chisenhale Gallery staff, Propeller members and artists, Slow Boat will leave Birmingham on 22 July 2012 on a journey to London that will take five weeks, travelling at approximately three miles per hour. It will provide a five week travelling venue for offsite gallery learning engaging with local, national and international communities through stop-offs along the way, and an extended mooring in London. The entire journey will be documented by our young participants through regular broadcasts made via internet radio and regularly updated blogs. It is anticipated that the summer's activities will also showcase artworks and printed materials will be accessible once the journey ends.

## THE GRAND UNION CANAL

Coincidentally, this year, Britain's longest canal, the Grand Union, celebrates its bicentennial of unification by British Waterways. The Grand Union is the single largest canal network in the UK and measures 137 miles with more than 160 locks. The original canal network, constructed in the 18th century, provided a thriving industrial artery designed for the transportation of raw materials such as coal and steel from Birmingham to London. Fine imported goods, such as silk and tea, then made the return journey.

In the canal heyday of the early 19th century, working boats could complete the journey from Birmingham to London in as little as ten days. Superseded by rail transport, industry on the waterways was all but abandoned by the 1960s and, since 1968, the Grand Union has been developed primarily for pleasure traffic. Today, much of its waterways are the subject of development and regeneration initiatives.

BELOW:

Members of the Ikon Youth Programme and Propeller meet in Birmingham.





ABOVE:  
Discussing the route from Birmingham to London.

## THE CANAL & RIVER TRUST

2012 also marks an important moment in history as British Waterways (BW), our long-term partners, transfer responsibilities to an exciting new charity, the Canal & River Trust. As part of this transition, BW have commissioned a programme of arts activities working with Arts Council England. Slow Boat is one of the six pioneering arts engagement programmes. Newly appointed Arts Development Manager, Tim Eastop, highlights the potential benefits of Slow Boat's slow pace in contrast to the Olympic focus on speed:

*'We live in fast-changing times; rapidity and power will be dominant themes in this year of athletic excellence, speed and records. However, the wonderful Slow Boat project will offer different, unhurried forms of brilliance and resolution.'*<sup>1</sup>

## LIVING HERITAGE

Slow Boat will be a slow adventure; a discovery in real-time and a unique opportunity for an in-depth examination of the UK's often overlooked landscape. It will contribute to widening participation with Britain's canals and harvest shared interests amongst its young participants and their surrounding environment. Projects such as these present new ways of working, and collaborations between cultural organisations, artists and local authorities are enhanced further through inter-generational working.

As British Waterways make the transition to charitable trust, 2012 and beyond will be exciting times indeed. The invaluable support of projects such as Slow Boat will demonstrate innovative approaches to the revitalisation of canals and rivers, encourage an increase

in the diverse use of and engagement with our waterways, and ensure that our shared heritage is protected and better understood.

**Kate Self is Learning Co-ordinator, Ikon, Birmingham; Laura Wilson is Offsite and Education Organiser, Chisenhale Gallery, London.**

*The organisers wish to thank the support of the Birmingham Canal Navigation Society (BCNS) whose members were generous with their time.*

1. Tim Eastop, Arts and Development Manager – British Waterways, 2012

# STORIES OF THE WORLD

**Inspired by Stories of the World an initiative of the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council and London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Helen Mears reflects on the presentation of ethnography.**

## MISMATCH

Interpreting ethnographic museum collections to UK audiences can be fraught with difficulties. Given the measure of most museum displays, success is the extent to which they engage the visitor in their subject matter. It is also the extent to which displays generate an appreciation of visitors' relevance to their own lives and the geographical and cultural distance between the lives of ethnographic subjects. To the average UK museum visitor, this makes establishing any kind of 'connection' a near-impossibility.

This is even more the case when these collections reside in regional museums. Visitors to such museums traditionally expect to be engaged in the history of the region, and the presence of material culture from outside Europe can cause confusion. Generally such collections have a local relevance, having been formed by travellers, colonialists and government administrators with local links, but this connection may feel tangential. Moreover, ethnographic collections are also implicit in the

colonial endeavour and as such entangled in the complex and unsavoury processes by which Britain extended its reach around the globe.

## DISPLAYING ETHNOGRAPHY

Brighton Museum & Art Gallery's World Art collection is a designated collection of some 13,000 objects and images from Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Americas. Elements of the collection have been on display in the museum since it opened in 1873. A lively history of display and publication projects has ensured it has a local and national reputation. A whole museum redevelopment, which opened in 2002 funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, resulted in three new galleries displaying material from this collection. One of these, the James Green Gallery of World Art, took a strongly aestheticised approach to its displays. Objects were chosen for their visual qualities and were presented spotlit and with minimal interpretation. Additional interpretation was limited to a single globe, a touchscreen and a spiral-bound booklet.



RIGHT:  
Young Kachin women from the Lisu (Putao) minority photographed at the 2011 'manau' festival, Myitkyina, Kachin State, Burma.



ABOVE:  
Young people interview Mauricio Taricco, assistant manager of Brighton & Hove Albion.

## WHAT'S IT GOT TO DO WITH US?

The regular use of the gallery by art students testified to its aesthetic appeal, but concerns grew amongst world art collections staff that its displays were failing to engage some audiences – especially non-traditional ones. These concerns were confirmed in 2007 when commissioned audience research was conducted with targeted 'non-user' groups. This process involved bringing the groups – including 12 young people aged 18 to 24<sup>1</sup>. As this group had not visited the museum before, the researchers were keen to capture their immediate response to the displays. They were completely baffled by the displays in the Green Gallery: 'What's it got to do with us?' was their defining response. They didn't understand why these objects were at 'Brighton' museum or what possible relevance they could offer to the city, to themselves, or other young people.

## NEW AUDIENCES

This set a challenge to collections staff. If an opportunity came about to redisplay the gallery, and young people were its target audience, what would the displays look like? What interpretative mediums would most effectively engage this notoriously challenging group?

The announcement of the Stories of the World scheme by the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council and London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games was timely. The scheme's aspiration – to 'get young people ... to explore and reinterpret museum collections, giving a new perspective on the stories that tell us about our place in the world'<sup>2</sup> – resonated completely with our own.

## REFOCUSING

The first project appointment was a youth support worker seconded from Brighton &

Hove City Council's Youth Support Service team. With her help we undertook an intensive period of baseline evaluation activities, gathering responses to the Green Gallery as it was and exploring ideas for its redevelopment. These were undertaken through participative workshops with young people, commissioned focus group research with young people identified as non-users and face-to-face interviews with museum visitors.

## LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

The results were surprisingly consistent: almost all respondents expressed a dislike of the 'dark and cramped' existing gallery displays and the sense of being in a 'glass corridor' created by a gallery full of large cases. They wanted a 'lighter, brighter' space. They also wanted more information than that provided by the gallery's modest label and panel text but wanted it communicated through images, sound and film as well as text. They wanted things to touch, try on and do. In contrast to the geographical and cultural mix provided in the existing gallery (which was organised by theme, although few visitors picked up on this), they wanted displays

1. *Upside Down and Inside Out*. Non-user research: DCF Courtship Project at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. Brighton: Lucid and Sam, 2007

2. <http://festival.london2012.com/about/culturalolympiad/stories-of-the-world.php>. Accessed 01/05/12

that combined historic and contemporary objects and which were culturally specific. As the project progressed it also became apparent that there was a demand for authentic 'voices', the voices of people who knew about the material on display.

### CAPTURING YOUNG VOICES

The project then focused on the creation of a new World Stories: Young Voices gallery. In this new gallery, displays are structured by cultural context with seven 'stories' from different parts of the world. Young people are not only the gallery's target audience, they also worked alongside staff on the generation of content. Each story has involved the input of a different group of young people, most of whom are locally based – Art in Mind, a group for young people with mental health issues; the Refugee & Asylum Seekers' project; Whitehawk art group and Patcham High School. The project has also had an exciting international dimension with contributors including young footballers attached to a Coaching for Hope project in Bamako, Mali, and youth members of the Kachin ethnic minority group living in north eastern Burma. Diaspora communities were also involved with young Iranians contributing to a display about the use of the written word in Iranian art.

### 'WORLDS APART, WE ARE THE SAME'

When the gallery opens in June this year, these 'young voices' will hopefully be much in evidence. The gallery's interpretation is largely formed of quotes from young people and members of source communities. The gallery also includes examples of young people's artwork, films and audio content, including a pilot use of QR codes. Thanks to our youth advisory group, Museum Collective, young people have also had a role in shaping the gallery, its structure, content, use of interactives and AV, and now in its marketing, events programme and web presence.

Despite the 'what's it got to do with me' attitude shown by young focus group members, all the young people we have worked with quickly made links to the subject matter of the displays, no matter how distant in time or geography. Moreover, all have engaged with the challenges of museum interpretation and have found new and exciting ways to enable gallery visitors to make their own connections. As the first line of a film made by young footballers during the project reads: 'Worlds apart, we are the same'.

World Stories: Young Voices opens at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery on Saturday 23 June 2012.

**Helen Mears is Keeper of World Art at Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove.**

BELOW:  
Members of Whitehawk art group with ancient Peruvian items from Royal Pavilion & Museum's collection.



# MUCH WENLOCK'S OLYMPIC MAGIC

Nigel McDonald explains how, in the glare of the world's media, Much Wenlock Museum is living the Olympic dream.



ABOVE:  
The Much Wenlock Museum.

RIGHT:  
Cycle race.

## ONE MAN, ONE CAR, A MOUNTAIN OF CARDBOARD

It's Wednesday morning and it's raining. Picture a man breaking down cardboard boxes and carefully stuffing as much as he can into a small grey Japanese hatchback. The museum has been open for an hour, it's already busy and there's a coach load of Chinese TV and newspaper reporters expected any minute.

This is the 'Olympic Effect'. Many who said that it would never happen are tucking into generous portions of humble pie. This small, recently revamped museum is receiving over

1,000 visitors a week. This figure is steadily increasing the closer we get to the big event.

The 'Olympic Effect' is an extraordinary magic that has brought the world's media and visitors by the coach load to Much Wenlock. Its small museum is totally unused to this level of attention. Even the future-sighted masterminds behind its timely refurbishment have been caught off guard. For example, the demand for leaflets has left unexpected stacks of empty boxes, and storage is becoming a problem. Hence the man stuffing cardboard into his little Toyota.



But why is this quiet corner of glorious Shropshire suddenly blinking in the glare of an international spotlight? It's because it all started here. This was the birthplace of the modern Olympic movement.

## THE OLYMPICS STARTED HERE

In the mid 1800s, William Penny Brookes, a doctor from Much Wenlock, campaigned for exercise and education for the working classes. Inspired by the Ancient Greeks, he instigated the first Much Wenlock Olympic Games in 1850. The annual games were soon drawing amateur competitors from all over the Midlands. In 1865 Brookes became a founder member of the National Olympic Association, which held a festival at London's Crystal Palace in 1866. Over 10,000 spectators attended.

In 1889 Baron Pierre de Coubertin, organiser of the International Congress for Physical Education, came to England to meet Brookes. He found they held a shared ambition to revive the Games as an international event. De Coubertin worked for seven years to realise this dream, which came true with the first Olympics being held in Athens in 1896. Unfortunately Brookes never saw it, he died in 1895.

BELOW:  
Baron Pierre de Coubertin.



ABOVE:  
**Penny Brookes** "If the Olympic Games that Modern Greece has not yet been able to revive still survives today, it is due, not to a Greek, but to Dr W P Brookes". Baron De Coubertin 'La Revue Athletique' 1890.

## THE MUSEUM

In 2002 when museum managers Emma-Kate Lanyon and Nigel Nixon sat down to discuss the possibility of revamping this small unloved museum, no one could foretell London 2012. Both were soon committed, even though resistance to the project and other demands on their time meant jumping more hurdles than Colin Jackson.

From the start it was agreed that the museum should have a broader focus than the Wenlockian Olympic story. The people of Much Wenlock are equally proud of the town's geology and medieval history. Even with London 2012 being announced during

the design stage, Emma-Kate worked closely with exhibition designers Vertigo and an enthusiastic community to make sure that the Olympics didn't overshadow the other exhibits.

Not that the museum service were reluctant to tell this story. The Wenlock Olympics had proven to be a very popular project for the award winning Museum on the Move. This travelling bus museum was an excellent proving ground for telling the story. It considerably helped the translation to the static exhibition.



LEFT:

Use your smartphone to scan the QR code to meet the founders of the modern Olympic Games movement. The QR will open Layar or tell you to download Layar (a free app) to your phone. When Layar opens, hold up the phone, using the camera to look around you.

## WI-FI AND SPACE SAVING QR

This is a small museum with more than one big story. The anticipation of the possible popularity of the museum, and high standards for accessibility mean the designers had to think carefully about the space allowed for exhibits. Inevitable sacrifices have been balanced by the generous use of QR codes on every display linking visitors to online content. Shropshire has been working for some time with Orangeleaf Systems to digitise its collections and archives. Much Wenlock is the first museum in Shropshire to embrace QR coding to facilitate access to these online resources.

BELOW:  
QR code.

## MEDALLISTS

For me, winning bronze amongst the museum's impressive exhibits is a huge projector, dating from when the building was the town's cinema. Emma-Kate was quick to point out the projectionist's window high up in one of the walls, telling of the building's colourful past. My silver medallist is affectionately known as 'the giant toilet roll,' an immersive pillar of sound and pictures where re-enacted voices of early athletes recall their Olympian exploits. But gold is awarded to the exhibition's centrepiece. The strain on the faces of the stout whiskered mannequins precariously perched on penny-farthings, recreating an early cycle race, would have Cavendish and Hoy blessing their super-light modern bikes.

BELOW:  
Projector.



MUCH  
WENLOCK  
MUSEUM



The  
© 2012

RIGHT:  
Wenlock.

## EXPLORING MORE WIDELY

Overall the museum is fascinating and is receiving high praise from increasing numbers of visitors. However, where location is everything, its role as a gateway to the town and its landscape is also notable. The town has a remarkable number of historic buildings within an easy stroll, including a picturesque medieval priory. In addition, The Raven Hotel, where de Coubertin famously first met Brookes, is a short walk away and has an excellent reputation. Its link to the Games also means that business is expected to be good.



Like the town's buildings, which are a delightful hotchpotch of old and new, the media developed to explore it have not followed any particular plan. Standing the test of time, the Olympic Trail was first away from the starting blocks some years ago. Visitors follow a series of bronze floor plaques to the Windmill Field where the Wenlockian Games have been held since the early 1850s.

A more recent series of walks criss-cross the town and explore the surrounding hills, and include audio guides suitable for smartphones and MP3 players. They lack QR-coded points but it's hoped that these won't be too long in coming.

The sudden explosion of Olympian interest has also led to a hasty revamp of the town's interpretive panels. Although these are unlikely to win any medals, they fill the gap for the more traditional audiences and provide information where a weak phone signal may let smartphone users down.

And finally, sprinting to be completed by the end of June are two QR coded smartphone trails. The first takes its lead from the museum's QR-coded panels by linking the town's historic buildings to web content and archives. The second is an augmented reality audio trail where talking virtual avatars of Dr Brookes and Baron de Coubertin will guide visitors with smartphones around the town.

## TEN YEARS IN THE MAKING

It is hoped that London 2012 will leave a lasting legacy in the UK. It can only dream to match the legacy inspired by Dr Penny Brookes. However, if the results of ten years' planning for Much Wenlock Museum are a measure of what can be achieved with good planning and perseverance, we are in for a golden summer.

Nigel McDonald nononsense-  
interpretation ltd.

*With thanks to Emma-Kate Lanyon and Nigel Nixon from Shropshire Council ([www.shropshire.gov.uk/museums.nsf](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/museums.nsf)) and to Vertigo-Creative ([www.vertigo-creative.com](http://www.vertigo-creative.com)). More about QR-coded augmented reality tours can be found at [www.heritageAR.com](http://www.heritageAR.com) and [www.orangeleaf.com](http://www.orangeleaf.com)*



ABOVE:  
The geology of the Wenlock Edge is, in the right circles, as internationally famous as the Games. This robust microscope shows the high quality of equipment installed to help visitors appreciate it.

# THE GAMES ARE COMING!

Kate Sayer tells how the Olympic and Paralympic Games have provided a unique opportunity to engage children in the transformation of the Olympic Borough of Newham and to showcase the fantastic diversity and talent of East London communities.



## A STORY MUSEUM

Discover Children's Story Centre is the UK's first story museum for children aged 0–11 years and their families, dedicated to generating a love of language, literature and stories. Based in Stratford, East London – less than a javelin's throw away from the Olympic Park – young Story Builders enter a labyrinth of magical environments designed to stimulate curiosity and imagination. Children cross the trip trap bridge, delve into the sparkly forest, play in polka dot sounds, explore the secret garden and listen to stories in many different languages. We invite exciting artists from many disciplines; authors, illustrators, poets, musicians, visual artists, storytellers, puppeteers, photographers and film-makers to work with children and their carers to create new ways of telling and

sharing stories. In the Story Studio artists are invited to create immersive installations inspired by stories designed to feed children's creativity and develop their storytelling and creative-writing skills. Discover works with over 80,000 people a year.

## TELLING THE STORY

Our role as a Story Centre, a place where stories are created and shared, informed the first of our key Olympic projects. In autumn 2005 we started On Track, a seven year photography and sound project tracking the changes taking place in Stratford through portraits and interviews with children in the school closest to the Olympic site as they moved from Reception (aged 5 years old) to Year 6 (aged 11 years old). Working with two

ABOVE RIGHT:  
Crossing the Sparkly River on the  
Trip Trap Bridge.

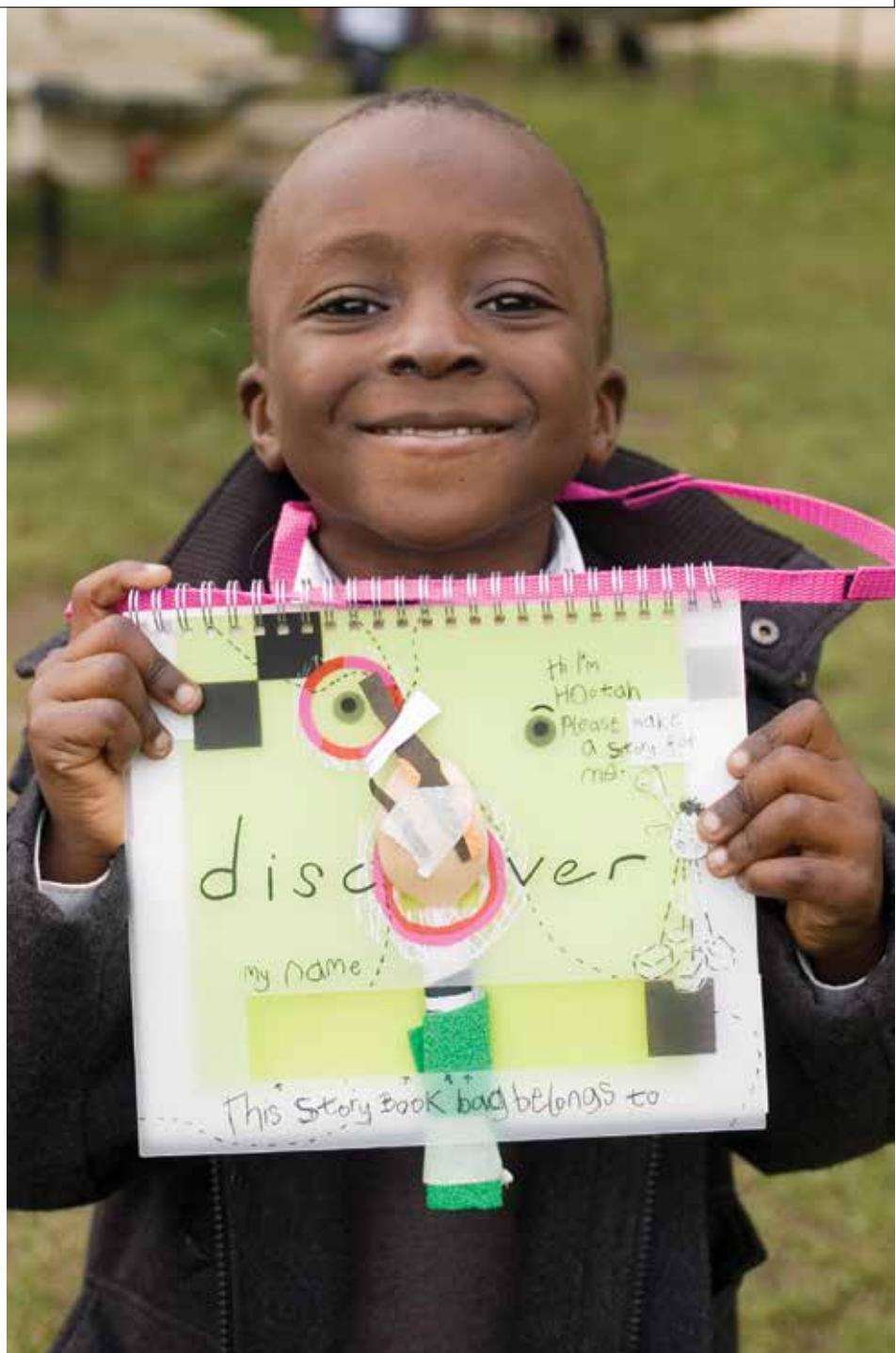
East London artists, Jon Owen and Talula Shepherd, each year we have photographed and interviewed the children. Over the seven years they have shared their dreams, frustrations and everyday lives, including stories about friendships, what they want to be when they grow up, their worries about what is happening to their homes and their delight and fascination with the diggers and trucks working on the Olympic Park they could see from their windows. The resulting piece is a fascinating portrait of a moment in time from 2005–2012 when both the children and Stratford grew up. It is also a moving piece of art where the children's personalities and enthusiasm for the future shine through. A short film has been created and a final exhibition will take place in Stratford in early July.

*'On Track is a conversation that has been going on for seven years. Children have a space to reflect and talk about what has happened to them and each other over the past year, how their relationships with each other have developed; what it's like to lose some friends when they leave and now increasingly talk about their hopes, aspirations and concerns for the future. It has been a privilege and fascinating to see this group of people growing up over the last seven years. They have a story that is funny, serious and moving'.*

**Jon Owen and Talula Shepherd**

## ENGAGING WITH REGENERATION

When we grasped the full scale of the changes planned for Stratford, we realised we needed to find ways to ensure that children's views were listened to by the regeneration agencies. In 2006, we started Listening to Learn, a three-year project with a local primary school and the major developers leading the regeneration. 120 children worked with artists, photographers and film-makers to express their hopes, values and aspirations for Stratford to key decision



ABOVE:  
Collecting stories with a Discover Story Book Bag.

makers, including planners, architects and developers. They directly fed into the design process for public spaces, looking at parks, traffic, street furniture and way finding. They made presentations to Newham Council, The London Development Agency and The Olympic Park Legacy Company amongst others. Not everything they said has happened – perhaps the see-through bridge was a little over budget – but their focus on playful designs, safe walking and cycling routes and water features had a direct influence on the Olympic Park and the public spaces in Westfield Stratford City.

Listening to Learn formed the starting point of an ongoing relationship with Westfield, which resulted in our Young Consultants group writing a guide to the new shopping centre and some exciting new arts initiatives.

## STORYCLOUD – LONDON 2012 FESTIVAL

In June, Discover will launch StoryCloud, a national digital project featuring East London children and the UK's leading children's authors and illustrators, including Malorie Blackman, Michael Rosen, Andy Stanton, David Almond

and Chris Riddell. Each author/child has recorded a brand new story and 12 top illustrators have created digital pictures in response to the stories. Children will be able to listen and read along with the author/child telling the story and then play with the illustrations to discover hidden secrets and surprises. A new story will be released each week for the 12 weeks of the festival. Alongside the stories there will be a set of tasks and prompts to inspire children to create their own stories and drawings, a selection of which will be displayed in an online gallery throughout the summer (<http://www.storycloud.org.uk>).

BELOW:  
Modelling the future as part of Listen and Learn.

## LEGACY

Moving forward into the legacy of the Games, we are running a summer writing competition to inspire children to write poetry and connect them to the unique architectural (Stadium, Orbital, Velodrome and Aquatics Centre) features of the future Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. 12 schools in the host boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Waltham Forest are taking part, 12 winning poems will be published in a book that will be distributed by The Legacy List – a charity dedicated to creating a cultural and educational legacy in the Park.

## THE LAST SEVEN YEARS

For the last seven years, the Olympics has been a source of inspiration and occasional frustration – some meetings really are like the spoof television programme, *Twenty Twelve*. With less than 100 days to go and the excitement building in Stratford, we are already planning next summer's programme and how we will continue to share stories and create new partnerships with the ever-changing community we serve. However, before the legacy begins, we'll be on our roof on 27 July, watching the fireworks and enjoying the biggest party ever on our doorstep.

**Kate Sayer is Learning Manager of the Discover Children's Story Centre.**





**vertigo**

designers of:

**Museums & Galleries**

**Heritage Sites**

**Visitor centres**

[www.vertigo-creative.com](http://www.vertigo-creative.com)



**MUCH  
WENLOCK  
MUSEUM**



Being passionate about your collections is one thing.  
Interpreting your knowledge and enthusiasm in an  
evolving world is quite another.

Our aim is to help you bridge that gap.

**design to engage and inspire**

**Vertigo Creative Studio Ltd**

3 Oswin Road, Brailsford Industrial Park, Braunstone, Leicester LE3 1HR

**t** 0116 2795052

**info@vertigo-creative.com**