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## WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES





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# FOREWORD

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – OPPORTUNITY OR BURDEN?

Welcome to this spring edition of the journal, in which we explore the principles and practice of community engagement in interpretation.

### Website Members' Section

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

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

You then enter your membership number and the common case-sensitive password to log in. The password will change with each issue of the journal and the new password is 100trenches.

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

We begin with a range of features, opinions and research, including reviews of recent high profile interpretation projects at Stonehenge and Bannockburn, and an MSc study into community engagement in interpretation projects.

Interpreter and AHI committee member Ruth Coulthard then introduces the main section, followed by a wide range of community engagement case studies from the UK, Canada, USA and Costa Rica.

These case studies are a reminder that there has always been an emphasis on community engagement in interpretation. If anything, this emphasis has grown in recent years as a result of the need to justify funding for heritage projects, and as a result of our perspectives shifting more towards the needs of the audience and not just the resource.

But to really understand this subject, we need to ask what we mean by a 'community'. As our case studies show, communities can be groups of people who live in the same place, who share an interest, who are already learning together, or who share a particular agenda (e.g. enjoying, protecting, selling, shopping).

We also need to ask what we mean by 'engagement'. As Bill Bevan neatly summarises, and as demonstrated by all the authors, engagement is very broad concept and can encompass a great range of community development, interpretive planning, content creation and implementation activities.

The key conclusion from all this experience is that community engagement is not just a worthy box ticking exercise, but is a highly valuable process for all concerned. So, to answer my question at the beginning of this foreword, community engagement is clearly an opportunity – and one to be grasped with enthusiasm, openness and creativity.

**David Masters**  
Commissioning Editor

# FEATURE NEWS

## LINKED UP

**Steven Richards-Price, founder of AHI's LinkedIn Group takes a look at the pros and cons of signing up to this social networking service.**

Can LinkedIn be regarded as the social-media choice for interpretation professionals? Purely in terms of numbers engaged, it could be. Let's have a look at some of the larger interpretation LinkedIn groups:

- The US National Association for Interpretation (NAI) was first off the mark in 2008 and now boasts 2,571 (as of 20 May 2014) members.
- Next was the UK-based Heritage Interpreters group, which started in February 2010 with 1,601 members.
- AHI's group started in September 2011 and has 1,482 members. In AHI's case, there are far more LinkedIn Group members than actual paid-up members – I'll come back to that one.

## DEBATE AND CONTROVERSY

Since I started the group just over two years ago, a number of discussions have created quite a bit of debate as well as some controversy. Some of the more popular discussions have covered topics such as:

- Are interpretation panels back in vogue?  
*63 comments*
- Apps for interpretation  
*47 comments*
- What did you do before being an interpreter?  
*44 comments*
- Apps – just a fashion accessory for today?  
*32 comments*
- Job title change from 'Interpretation Manager' to 'Visitor Experience Manager' – a forward or backward step?  
*31 comments*



Tendering is another area that created a lot of debate. This resulted in AHI creating a sub-group to produce tendering guidelines, which are now available on the AHI website in the professional development area for members.

Moderation is an important part of managing the AHI LinkedIn Group. A while back, the NAI group was being spammed by inappropriate job announcements. We received a couple at AHI so I introduced a 'request to join' system where I 'vet' potential members by seeing if their summary profile gives a bona fide indication for wanting to join (e.g. museums or heritage professional). For people where it is not obvious, I send them a personal message. Other challenges include members who either blatantly or more subtly self-promote, so I move items to the 'Promotion' section and contact people privately asking them not to do this. I recently had a request from a language interpreter who had the wrong end of 'interpretation' – but it does raise the old "how do we explain the word 'interpretation'?" challenge, which is taking place across Europe – perhaps the next LinkedIn discussion topic?

I mentioned that far more people are members of the AHI LinkedIn Group than the actual association. This raises the question of whether LinkedIn results in increased membership of AHI, and, indeed, what are we hoping to get out of LinkedIn? Should it be just to feel happy that there is a forum for debate on interpretive best practice? Should its primary aim be to drive membership and raise awareness of AHI? Does it spread the word about interpretation as a field and its aims and benefits? With the number of 'requests to join' coming in daily from around the world, this could be the main benefit. Having the privilege of also sitting on the Interpret Europe Supervisory Committee, where we are trying to get interpretation more widely recognised and understood, I am content with that. Let us know your views – or start a discussion about this on LinkedIn!

*Steven Richards-Price is AHI Chair and Visitor Experience Manager, Natural Resources Wales.*

RIGHT:  
The new Visitor Centre at Stonehenge.



© James O Davies/English Heritage

## INTERPRETING NATIONAL ICONS

**What are the special problems of interpreting national icons?**

**Robert Campbell of English Heritage and Elaine Clark of National Trust Scotland, compare notes.**

### STONEHENGE

Interpreting Stonehenge was intimidating and exhilarating at the same time. After 40 years of planning and misfires, this was a once-in-a-generation chance to give visitors to the stones an adequate understanding of the monument and the surrounding World Heritage Site.

The interpretation includes a permanent exhibition, a 40-minute audio tour, an external exhibition and a landscape panel scheme.

### PRESSURE FROM EVERYWHERE

With any interpretation of an iconic site there is always more pressure than on a 'normal' project. However, this seemed to be turned up to maximum on Stonehenge with both internal and external interests coming to bear on the project at all stages.

BELOW:  
A section of the 360 degree projection.



© Clare Kendall/English Heritage

We were acutely aware that whatever interpretation we put in, the site would be under a large amount of scrutiny. Mentally, this could have made us too fearful to be decisive and push the design and content forward. To overcome this, we worked extensively with an expert group of prominent academics in the build-up to content generation. Devolving authority from our own curatorial team to this expert group to ensure every fact we put in the exhibition was as up-to-date as it could be both guaranteed the intellectual robustness of the interpretation but also emboldened our own historians, allowing them to get on with the task in hand of writing the text and selecting objects with confidence.

### PRACTICALITIES

At Stonehenge we get a huge footfall of over 1 million visitors per year and 50% of our visitors are on pre-booked group tours. Many of these have Stonehenge as just one stop on a packed itinerary. As such, in order to accommodate the large numbers and also meet the needs of our visitors in a rush, we need to ensure that visitors can have a valid encounter with the onsite interpretation without it taking too long. The new exhibition at Stonehenge has been designed so that an 11-15-minute visit will

allow you to pick up all of the key messages. We also haven't included any deep content layers on computer interactives or through handheld digital devices. The displays are about big messages, amazing objects and punchy AV with less emphasis on lots of text.



© Clare Kendall/English Heritage

ABOVE:  
One of the new object displays in the Visitor Centre.

### DOING SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

With this vast audience comes another challenge, providing an enjoyable and interesting experience for every type of visitor you can imagine. With a set of highly vocal experts, tour operators and trip advisor/twitterati 'reviewers' to please, we worked hard to consider different audiences to ensure that everyone would feel intellectually welcome at the site. The starting point was a base of excellent primary objects on long-term loan from Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum and Wiltshire Museum. With this core we knew we would be able to enthrall most people. Some large AV pieces also help, including a 360 degree projection that allows visitors to stand inside Stonehenge. We took a design-led rather than technology-led approach to the AV, so we hope it will be as powerful in ten years as it is today.

Feedback on the new offer has been positive so far and we are happy that it complements the

RIGHT:  
The battle game enables visitors to recreate their own battles of Bannockburn. © NTS.

visit to Stonehenge rather than competing with it. We were always very aware that visitors have come to see the iconic monument, not an exhibition or audio tour about it. It may seem obvious, but reminding ourselves of that often solved tricky design discussions and even calmed everyone down on a few occasions!

## BANNOCKBURN

Bannockburn is a nationally iconic site, not only due to its place in history on Scotland's path to nationhood, but in its legacy within the modern Scottish psyche as a symbol of success against the odds, the small nation against the world, that universal story of David and Goliath. Significant national sites with heart-stirring roots pose somewhat of a challenge for interpretation. This is especially true within the current political environment as, in 2010 – when the Battle of Bannockburn project started – we looked ahead to 2014, the year of the 700th anniversary of King Robert's victorious battle in 1314, but also, as it turned out, the year of the Scottish Referendum.



### A MODERN SCOTTISH PERSPECTIVE

It was vital that the interpretation for Bannockburn sought out the modern, 21st-century Scottish perspective, or rather explored what side of 'ourselves' we wanted to show to the world. The cutting edge, interactive, 3D immersive experience that recently opened at Bannockburn, near Stirling, hopefully showcases something of what Scotland is about now. Rather than picking sides or falling back on dated nationalistic stereotypes, visitors are encouraged to get into the Medieval mindset and think like a military leader.

### SCOTLAND V ENGLAND

Visitors get an opportunity to walk through the Scots and English camps as they prepare for battle. 3D visualisations show the effect of archers unleashing a cloud of arrows on an infantry group, or knights mounted on warhorses bearing down to strike. All this is a 1:1 preparation for the battle – a high-tech interactive turn-based strategy game, played over a model of the 1314 battlefield. Anyone participating can't fail to appreciate that Bruce is outnumbered: how could he possibly win against Edward II's larger and better equipped force?

### THE STRENGTH OF A GOOD IDEA

And therein lies the genius of this first-person role-playing strategy experience. The concept of 'learning through doing' underpins the whole approach, first pitched to the client team by

York-based interpretative designers Bright White in April 2010. Stepping inside the new Battle of Bannockburn visitor centre four years later, in 2014, it is nothing short of miraculous that their original vision has materialised, unblemished. Such is the strength of a good idea.

### A BATTLE OF HEARTS AND MINDS

On the summit beyond the centre, the crown-like circle of the Rotunda monument commemorates the battle for modern audiences. A motorway dissects the view from here, which is framed by housing estates. Nevertheless, as the wind blows through this 'A' listed structure towards the famous Pilkington Jackson statue of Bruce, one can't help but feel a stirring of something. Whether it is pride, nationhood, transience or the cold, the sharply inscribed poem by contemporary Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie says it all: 'We are mere transients... small folk playing our part'. At the core of Bruce's story is a universal message about what can be achieved against the odds. Today, a 21st-century Scotland looks outwards and invites: 'You win me, who take me most to heart'. In a battle of hearts and minds, our past, and our future seems to be about both.

Robert Campbell is the Head of Interpretation and Resources for English Heritage. Elaine Clark was Interpretation Sub-Project Manager for the Bannockburn Project from 2010 until 2012.



LEFT:  
The Rotunda monument with the Bruce statue beyond. © NTS.

# REPORTING RESEARCH

## WHO TELLS THE STORY?

**As part of her Interpretation master's dissertation, Sarah Watts presents her research into involving communities in interpretive planning decision-making.**

There's a lot of talk about community engagement! Many key UK organisations wish to see greater involvement of communities in decision-making about local issues. Both Scottish and Welsh Governments have developed guidance and, more recently, tools to support community-engagement good practice, and, as you know, the Heritage Lottery Fund wants more people to take part in heritage activities (HLF 2012).

So how has interpretive planning been influenced by this agenda? For my Interpretation Masters dissertation I decided to look at community heritage projects and specifically at how 'communities' are involved in interpretive planning decision-making.

### WHAT DID I DO?

- You (AHI members) and others suggested 48 'good examples' of projects where a community had been involved in interpretive planning.
- I concentrated on 24 that focused on a specific place.
- 13 project managers took part in telephone interviews.
- 7 projects met my essential criteria, i.e. that they'd gone through an interpretive planning process that had involved their 'community'.
- 2 case studies were chosen. I analysed their documents (Interpretation Plans) and interviewed people involved in designing the planning process.

### WHAT DID MY RESEARCH SHOW?

#### 1. Are communities involved in interpretive planning?

My study would suggest that the majority of community heritage projects are not going through a formal interpretive planning process. Both case study communities wrote interpretation plans because they were asked to by funders, but the reasons for the other projects not planning can only be guessed. Perhaps the fact that interviewees highlighted that people don't understand interpretation or interpretive planning could be a major factor?

Theoretically, there are many opportunities for communities to be involved in interpretive planning decision-making, however in the case studies their involvement was limited. Whilst both projects were managed by community-led groups, interpretive consultants guided all key decisions. The communities contributed information about local heritage but there was very limited 'consultation' about some options (interpretive messages and media). Interviewees all wanted more people to be involved.

Community heritage projects don't appear to be using interpretive planning models. Neither case study interpreter acknowledged using a recognised model. Whilst the models offer little guidance about how communities might participate in decision-making, they all provide a checklist of the factors that should be considered when developing interpretation. One case study did not research their potential visitors; neither researched their 'community' audiences. By making assumptions about audiences, projects risk developing interpretation that is not fit for purpose. Perhaps using an interpretive planning model might have addressed this?



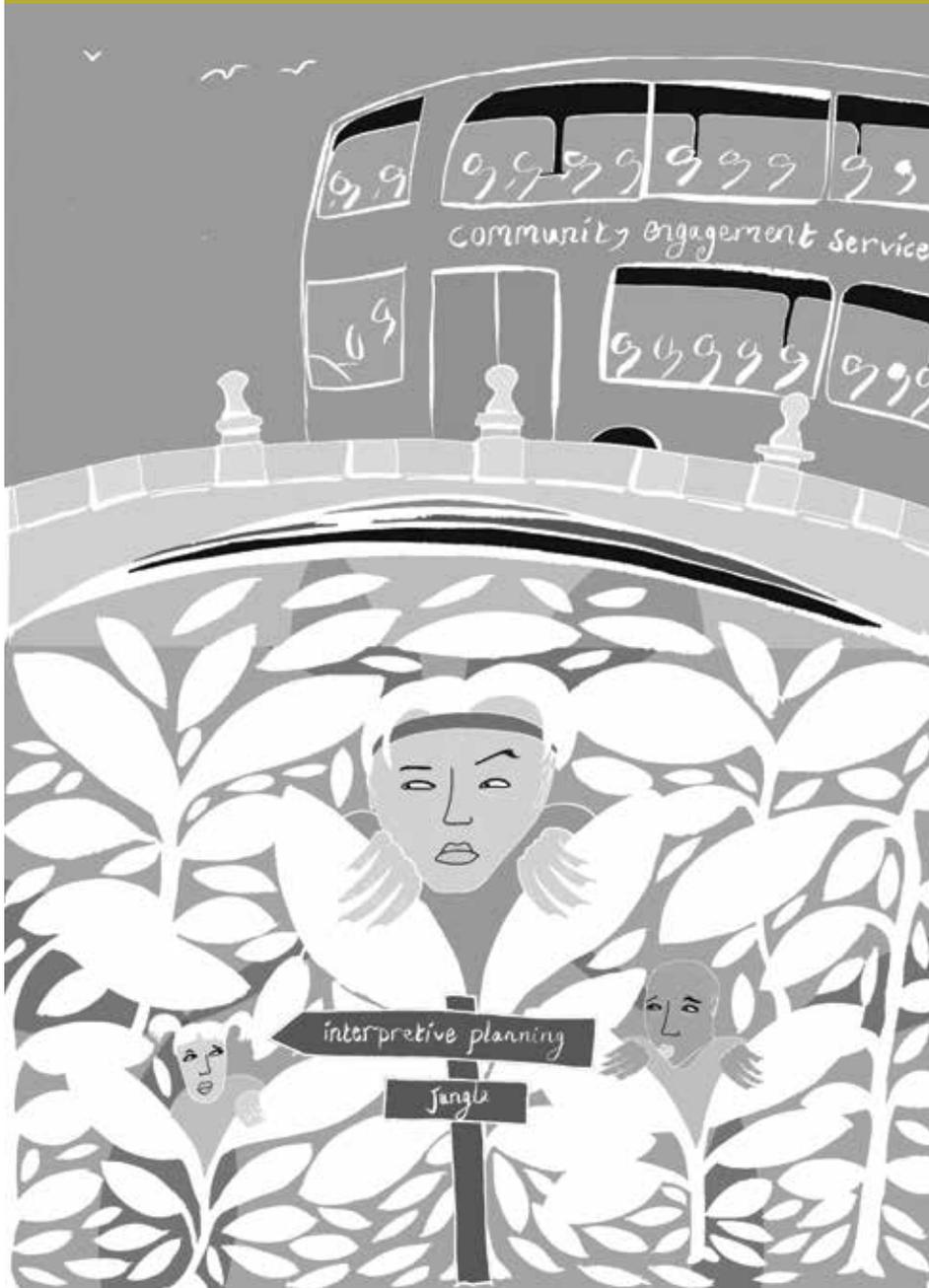
ABOVE:  
**Be prepared!**

#### 2. Are community heritage projects using community-engagement good-practice guidance?

There are national and international good-practice standards and guidance for community engagement. They raise questions that need to be considered when planning any community engagement. They also suggest a period of research to find out about stakeholders and the context for engagement in order to determine an appropriate approach. Researching and planning for community engagement complements that for interpretation.

None of the community heritage projects interviewed in this study used any standards or guidance to plan their community engagement. Case study interviewees did reflect on the potential benefits and challenges of community engagement to interpretive planning, but it is not clear if these were considered at the project design stage.

It is unclear whether community heritage projects are dedicating time and resources to plan community engagement. Interpretive planning tendering processes may restrict



Illustrations: Calum Brodie

opportunities to do this. When writing a tender, consultants are likely to propose a specific methodology. This approach could be based on a limited knowledge of the specific community and therefore the methods selected might not be the most appropriate. They are, in effect, choosing the 'engagement method first and then fit[ting] the process to the method' (Dialogue by Design 2010:5). It's a bit like choosing your interpretive media before considering your messages or audience.

### PINCH OF SALT!

Whilst my study took a systematic approach to identifying and then analysing information, there are several important limitations to it:

- The size of the study meant the information collected was limited.

- It is possible that contributors did not understand, or had a different understanding of, the language. This may have resulted in a misinterpretation of their responses.
- The case studies were both small rural communities, so it is not clear how applicable the findings are to other situations.

### CONCLUSIONS

There's very little research into interpretive planning, so these case studies should give a valuable insight into practice. They have shown that whilst projects are keen to involve communities, their engagement approach is not always as effective as it might be.

LEFT:  
There's a way out of the jungle.

One way in which practice could be improved is by using interpretation or community engagement models/guidance. Whilst good-practice guidance is not a guarantee of project success, it is produced to help projects achieve their objectives more effectively. Therefore, its use is in the interests of both community heritage projects and project funders.

From my findings, I've developed a new approach to interpretive planning, based on community engagement planning tools. It combines good practice from both professions. It guides projects through a design process that can look at and address the many challenges identified in this study. The next step is to test it out!

Sarah Watts [sarah@gibsonwatts.co.uk](mailto:sarah@gibsonwatts.co.uk);  
illustrations Calum Brodie <http://calumbrodieillustration.co.uk/>

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# FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

## CAPTURING VOICES

**Dan Boys shows how digital media is an effective way to facilitate community involvement in interpretation projects.**

The large majority of our projects involve collecting personal memories that are then woven into an audio trail, app or website. Like photographs, these collected oral reminiscences provide us with historical documentation. But more importantly they capture a mood, a voice and a unique insight into individuals' thoughts. They bring the past alive and, once collected, digital media becomes the ideal channel in which to share, enjoy and comment on them.

Elizabeth Bassett, daughter of the man who invented Liquorish Allsorts, was interviewed in the 1980s. Her voice and words are now an integral part of the Ashover audio trail in Derbyshire. Digital media has kept her memories alive and has revealed her experiences to the wider community.



ABOVE:  
Telephones (old and new) can be used to record people's memories.

## POIGNANT MEMORIES AND TALES OF COMRADESHIP

Last year we recorded the memories of men and women who had worked at Lofthouse Colliery. Today, as you explore the playing fields and woodlands of the former pit site, their voices are triggered automatically from within the Lofthouse Colliery app. Poignant personal

experiences of the 1973 colliery disaster mixed with tales of friendship and pit humour can be heard. Real voices, real people.

## SOCIAL NETWORKING

Communities who wished to share their heritage, in their words, initiated the above examples. However, many projects are developed to encourage the collection of memories, photographs and artefacts from a wider community. Social networks such as Facebook and Pinterest make that process easier than ever.

Digital communities make it easier to connect, and they are enjoyed by a growing audience that are keen to contribute. They facilitate the collection and curation of valuable content, sometimes without even realising it.

## GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN...

'Gone But Not Forgotten... Eastbourne's Vanished Shops' is an excellent example of how social media can facilitate community involvement. This active digital group has grown into a valuable collection of images and memories relating to Eastbourne's heritage.

Apps such as The Natural History 'Bugs Count ID Guide', Bristol City Council's 'Heritage Eye' and the Environment Agency's 'Plant Tracker' work in a similar way, encouraging members of the public to undertake and submit simple but specific surveys to build a valuable database.

## ANSWERING MACHINE

Today, technology allows us all to make good-quality recordings on smartphones or computers, which can then be easily shared. Within a museum environment, an adapted 'traditional' telephone can be installed and



ABOVE:  
Poignant stories mixed with tales of friendship and pit humour bring the Lofthouse Colliery app to life.

programmed to play AND record visitors' memories. This is a simple way of capturing memories from visitors as they engage with an exhibition. The phone can even ring as visitors walk past to increase the likelihood of interaction.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

The key to success is making the process simple and enjoyable. If people feel they have something to contribute, then digital media can be successfully utilised to facilitate this process.

Dan Boys is Creative Director of Audio Trails Ltd.

# WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES



*“Good interpretation needs at its heart....  
an enthusiasm and love for a place and  
a desire to share that with others.”*

James Carter, 2001.

# INTRODUCTION

Working with communities can be one of the most rewarding experiences for an interpreter. For it is within communities that we have all the raw ingredients for a remarkable story, and the development of that story can often be a magical voyage of discovery for both the interpreter as well as the community involved. However, working in this way is not without its challenges with interpreters having to introduce additional skills in engagement and advocacy.

Interpreters are entrusted with the unique privilege of taking a moment in history and weaving that into a story that will provoke, relate and reveal. We can take our sources from historical documents, or individual objects, but there is nothing as special as learning it via the passion of an individual or a personal connection. It is here that we find the emotion that will be key to creating real connections with the heritage we are working with. As Dan Boys writes in this issue, stories can 'capture a mood, a voice and a unique insight into an individual's thoughts. They bring the past alive'.

Communities across the country have fascinating stories to tell and thanks to programmes such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, we are hearing more of them. Such accounts may not, in their own right, be historical blockbusters or lynchpins in the nation's history, but if told, and told well, they play a powerful role in engaging people with their past. In addition, they can engender a strong sense of pride amongst residents and bring increased economic benefit to an area.

However, whilst working in this way can be incredibly rewarding, it does require us to bring additional skills to the process.

First we need to become true co-producers, working in genuine partnership with communities, not for them or on behalf of them. It can be too easy when given a limited timescale and budget, to just 'get on with it', taking words and extracts from consultations and weaving our magic. When this happens, we lose so many of those wider benefits of community pride and economic regeneration. In this issue we learn about the combination of community engagement techniques as well as interpretative planning tools which can, and has, led to much success.

Also, now, more than ever, we need to be advocates of our profession. Many with whom we engage will be volunteers and both limited time to offer and limited knowledge of our profession. If we can sometimes find it too easy to jump straight to the media, we cannot blame communities for doing the same. Convincing our co-workers for the need to invest time at this stage for sound interpretative planning is as important as the content creation itself.

However, despite all these additional challenges, interpreters are not only succeeding, but creating some magical outcomes too. Within this issue there are many examples of successful partnerships between interpreters within our profession, working expertly with communities, giving us all much to learn from and build on for the future.

**Ruth Coulthard is a Trustee for AHI and works for the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.**

# A SENSE OF BELONGING

**Community. It defines who belongs ... and who does not. Jane Severs explores a project designed to make one community a more inclusive place.**

You've probably never heard of Torbay, Newfoundland, but I'll bet you know a place very much like it. For centuries, it was a quiet seaside village. Today, it's a rapidly growing commuter town populated by two distinct groups: a core body of families with deep roots in the region and a larger, steadily growing number of more recent arrivals.

## A SIMPLE BRIEF

In the spring of 2012, the Town of Torbay commissioned me and my project partners (Graphic Artist/Photographer, Kristine Breen and Interpretive Designer Melanie Lethbridge) to develop a series of outdoor interpretive panels. The brief was straightforward. Somewhere, amidst the tracts of new housing and business development, was a local heritage worth preserving and promoting. Our tasks? To make an inventory of community's heritage assets, identify a short list of sites and develop accompanying interpretation.

In theory, it was all very simple. In reality – not so much. We quickly discovered that most of the built heritage that once defined Torbay's landscape no longer exists. It left us thinking: if one of the tenets of heritage interpretation

is to facilitate connections between a resource and its public(s), does interpretation still make sense if the resource isn't there?

## TAKING STOCK

We went back to the drawing board. Without a confirmed list of sites, we deferred all content-related discussions and focused instead on the overall project agenda: What did the town hope to achieve with this work? What problem did they hope to solve? Our client's answers were revealing.

First, they clearly prioritised local residents, not tourists, as their primary audience. Second, they wanted to engage residents and create a sense of 'shared heritage'. Contessa Small, the town's Heritage Officer, noted the declining participation in the local heritage committee and the fact that its current members came almost exclusively from families with deep roots in the region. How, she asked, could we encourage participation from the town's more recent arrivals?

## UNDERSTANDING OUR AUDIENCE

In response, we conducted a series of focus groups. Participants were drawn from local residents and were divided into two categories: those who already participate in community heritage (primarily members of the town's heritage committee) and those who do not. Both groups were asked to respond to broad questions on their opinions of and participation in heritage both locally and in general.

The results? Those currently involved in heritage were much more likely to define heritage in relation to themselves. As a result, the heritage activities they engaged in were directed towards developing links with their individual and/or family pasts. When asked to recollect their most memorable heritage moment, most of the group recounted an experience that was family-related (e.g. visiting grandparents), rather than an organised heritage product or event.

**BELOW:**  
Each panel includes a site portrait, filtered through found objects such as seawater, local vegetation... even beer glass. The results are altered and abstracted... mirroring the memories each site presents.



## BUILDING BRIDGES

In contrast, those not currently involved in heritage were much more likely to define heritage in terms of 'universals' – shared connections and/or experiences with others. When asked to describe their most memorable heritage moment, a majority of participants spoke of experiences that allowed them to make 'big connections' or forge links to a larger group.

While our focus groups were far from scientific, findings suggest that residents did not participate in local heritage when they felt excluded and/or when their expectations of heritage didn't match the version promoted through local heritage efforts. Our task was finally clear. Engaging locals required interpretation designed NOT to meet the wants and needs of one group or the other, but to build a bridge that allowed both groups to meet in the middle.

## INVISIBLE RESOURCES

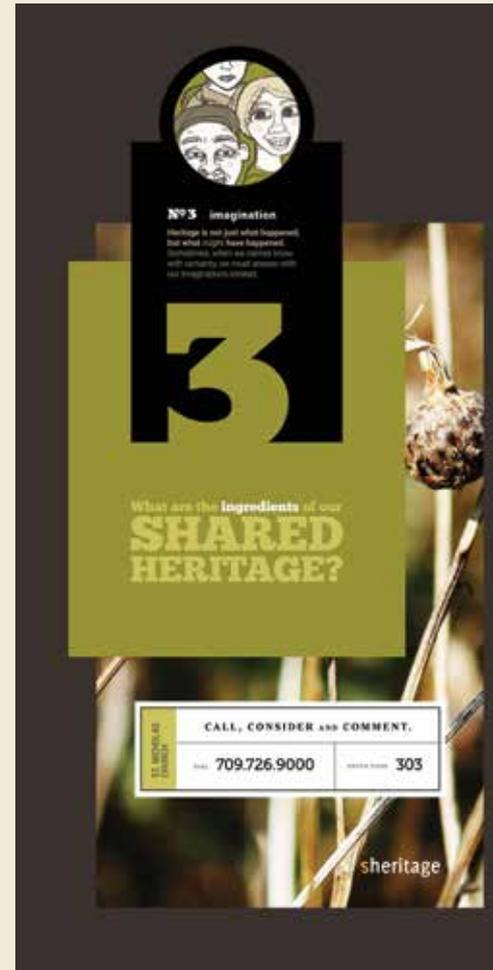
For some time, Contessa had been collecting place-based narratives – audio recordings of long-time residents recounting memories of specific locations within the town. Initially, I'd dismissed this material as trivial and without focus. Contessa knew better. When the narratives were plotted, we quickly realised that specific sites, regardless of their current appearance or usage, resonate deeply with local residents... though often for a range of reasons. This observation became the basis for our interpretive solution.

It's called the Sheritage Project (sharing + heritage) and consists of a single interpretation panel for each site. All panels pose exactly the same question – What are the ingredients of our shared heritage? – followed by one suggested ingredient and its definition. It's important to note that the ingredients aren't historic events, individuals or objects, but abstract concepts or universal ideas. Opposite is an example:

## FORGETFULNESS

Coming together as a community requires us to forget our differences. Sometimes, it's as important to reshape our past as it is to preserve it.

This is followed by a telephone number which gives callers access to a place-based narrative. When the audio is finished, callers have the option of leaving a comment, which is later displayed at the town museum. Need an example? At the local beach, we paired 'forgetfulness' with the following audio: 'I never understood the bitterness between the churches. I've often said, all we needed was some idiot to fire a shot and we'd have Northern Ireland here in Torbay. I heard the story numerous times about when a load of lumber came in at the beach for Holy Trinity... and the Catholic priest was on the beach. And their men were there and our men were there, getting their boats in. And one of our fellows went over and said, "As soon as we're finished unloading our boats, we'll help haul your..." "It will be a cold day in hell but we'll ask for your help," said the priest. And that story, short as it is, stuck with our men – forever and ever... That's what they thought of cooperation. That's the way it was. But it's not now. We've learned to have a lot more respect for each other'.



ABOVE:  
Sample Sheritage panel.

## FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORK

The panels have been designed so that the ingredient text can be easily removed and shuffled amongst the sites. Add a switch of the audio and a site that interprets forgetfulness one week, can present adversity or imagination the next. This is important for several reasons. First, it provides residents with a reason to revisit the sites. Second, it accommodates the ongoing collection and sharing of local stories from an increasing number and range of residents. Finally, it suggests that meaning and significance are applied, not inherent, constantly open to discussion and debate. And we think that's an essential prerequisite to engaging all residents in a meaningful way.

Jane Severs is an interpretive planner who lives and works in Newfoundland, Canada. [jsevers@nf.aibn.com](mailto:jsevers@nf.aibn.com)

# HAVING WORDS WITH VOLUNTEERS

David Walmsley talks anecdotally about working with volunteers at a small rural heritage centre to help develop their exhibition on a low budget.

Volunteer-run heritage centres rarely spring from the efforts of shrinking violets; more likely the thrusting efforts of mighty oaks. And it was to one in the remotest part of the least populated English county on the edge of northern Europe's largest man-made forest that I hoped to help some mighty oaks develop their skills.

## 'ENTHUSIASTIC' KNOWLEDGE

Ged had previously put together a very well-attended exhibition in the Heritage Centre's small temporary gallery about a local railway line, affectionately known as 'The Wannie' that was destined to become a permanent feature in the education/exhibition carriage. But, how to transform his precious exhibition, which comprised photographs and plans with detailed, technical captions arranged around model railway track attached to the wall?

At the beginning there were some stony stares and long silences, not caused by the batteries failing in his hearing aids, either. But Ged indulged me in the tussle around what railway buffs expect to read and what this 'incomer' thought the ordinary visitors might want to read.

I suggested that detailed descriptions of the stations, including the length of their platforms and timber clapperboard buildings might not be needed for every station. After all, many were built to a standard design. I hinted that each station might have a different story, such as Woodburn being the embarkation point for

The Heritage Centre at Bellingham in Northumberland had just secured an HLF grant to purchase and restore two old railway carriages – one as a tea room; the other as a flexible education/exhibition space. With the carriages came funding to engage a consultant to develop the volunteers' education and curatorial expertise.

Fresh from attending the excellent 2011 Heritage conference in Whitby organised by the NYM, Coast and Hills LEADER Programme and AHI for small organisations and volunteer groups, I headed north to 'The Debatable Lands'.

And that's when I encountered Ged – a gentleman and a passionate railway enthusiast with knowledge of yawning proportions.



ABOVE:  
The Heritage Centre is on the site of the old station, where former buildings are used for storage and by its landlord as offices.

BELOW RIGHT:  
The daunting task of converting not one but two carriages was taking its toll, so to lift spirits I arranged an outing to visit a recently converted carriage at Guisborough Forest & Walkway to talk to the volunteers there.



© David Walmsley



LEFT:  
The Wannie Line Exhibition. Just like the locomotives hauling their heavy cargo, progress was slow and steady but we kept to the timetable.

troops, horses and supplies to nearby training camps, Knowesgate serving three local quarries and Reedsmouth servicing the engines and where many staff were consequently based. That hooked him, and, in time, we developed a good working relationship. At our weekly meetings, he genially presented his 'homework', which I'd set the previous week.

## DIRTY LANGUAGE

Next up was 'The Doc', a social historian with two research degrees under his belt and whose multi-syllable words flowed freely. Mine did too, but were considerably shorter and more to the point, when he brought in over 100 large muddy field drainage pipes to exhibit. However, the pipes did represent an important but invisible part of the area's agricultural heritage.

Volunteers cleaned them all and helped display some, even creating a bespoke plinth. Collectively, we worked on a panel to present them – not without some amusement – but agreeing to use short words. The collection comprised many designs from various makers, so, we agreed their differences would best be explained through illustrations rather than words, as well as offering younger visitors the challenge to spot how many types they could see.

## CAPTURING CHARACTERS

Another committed volunteer, Rob, manages the very popular, large, family names database,

derived from various sources, on two computers near the entrance. Children lunge towards them, but very quickly lose interest in what is really a large database. What could we therefore do to maintain their interest? I suggested we look for an engaging historical challenge. Collectively, we trawled the records, which revealed some dastardly deeds over the centuries, and resulted in our Naughty Northumbrians activity panel, full of robbers, reivers, witches, outlaws and poachers, along with the odd hanging and beheading.

## SPEECHLESS

A nearby garage had a façade of boarded-up windows. Overhearing a couple of unfavourable comments from locals about their state, I suggested that 'heritage panels', using images from our archive, might not only enhance the building but engage local people more with their heritage, and introduce visitors to the area's history. Volunteers agreed, and helped choose images that showed the locality in the past. One volunteer, Ken, began a fundraising campaign, approaching other community groups for contributions to the printing costs. However, local planning regulations prevented us from adding text.

## DIFFERENT TEXT STYLES

After a review of the Heritage Centre's well-researched exhibitions, I recommended developing a new layer of low-level interventions. Low in cost, low amount

of words and low level of display – especially for younger audiences.

We agreed on a graphic style and set about producing 15 panels using Foamex, matt laminating pouches, a scalpel, steel rule, spray mount, high-quality printing paper and cheap compatible printer inks, funded from a Museum Development Grant. Though the graphic style was consistent, the style of language varied according to the tone of the story. This was deliberate because the panels were seen as only semi-permanent and could be removed and replaced at any time, but creating them in this way provided a focus for some fun volunteer training.

To tell the story of our spade collection we used poetry to highlight their various designs and uses; for the rescue and conservation of the old station clock, we used campaign language; the Lister engine and milker were given a very light touch through email conversations with a former volunteer and agricultural lecturer now living in New Zealand. The parcel shed scales, used by children waiting to go to school by train to secretly weigh themselves and scrawl their names, age and weight on the back of the door, had a mischievous angle. And the veterinary tools were given a tongue-in-cheek approach. The irony not lost when you see what some of the tools on display were used for.

## HAS THE PENNY DROPPED?

The next exhibition will commemorate the start of WWI – Postcards from the Front – working with Mike, a passionate philatelist. We recently met to look at content, themes and storylines. Ged came along to listen in and, after another of his pondering silences, declared, "Now I see what you were doing with the Wannie exhibition!"

David Walmsley works as a consultant on heritage and education resource development projects.

# WINDOWS ON PENRITH

Jo Scott describes how she reached out to new audiences, stretched a small budget – and shopped till she dropped!



ABOVE RIGHT & BELOW:  
Penrith Market Cross below and Penrith Architecture right. Penrith is slowly being corralled by edge-of-settlement supermarkets, drawing visitors and locals away from the characterful independent shops and historic buildings in the town centre.



## WINDOW SHOPPING

'You shop; we provoke, relate, reveal' isn't as snappy as the Tesco version of the old adage, but that was the concept behind the interpretive work I carried out for the historic market town of Penrith in 2013. It was enormously rewarding to stretch a small interpretive budget to strengthen community bonds, reach out to new audiences and generate new creative writing (and shop till I dropped!).

## THE SHOPPING LIST

I'd already been invited by Eden District and Cumbria County Councils to add a dash of interpretation to their bold new signage scheme for Penrith, designed to inspire locals and visitors using its edge-of-town supermarkets to park up and explore the historic centre on foot. When an additional £8,000 was made available for interpretation, I was keen to find a more innovative, community-focused solution than another flurry of graphic panels. But how could we use the town's heritage to reward those who followed the signs to its historic heart? Could we really draw together shoppers, shopkeepers,

heritage sites, historic objects, a literary legacy and the community in a meaningful way?

## LICENSED TO SHOP

The solution was surprisingly simple, based on another familiar adage of putting interpretation where the people are. We would display intriguing historic objects in town centre shop windows, supported by tantalising snippets of interpretation and new creative writing, inspired and developed by the community that hosts them. The client team was excited by the concept, as was the Chamber of Trade & Commerce who had, serendipitously, just set up a new ambassadors' scheme for the town's shopkeepers. The council's museum team was also hugely supportive, but they had understandable reservations about lending out their objects. Our first potential stumbling block became a liberation from worries over security, insurance, display conditions and breakages: we would buy objects specifically for the scheme instead. This was my licence to shop! So, for less than £100, I purchased about 20 objects of historic significance to Penrith online and in town, including local pottery, old postcards, bottles and military badges.

BELOW:

We wanted to surprise and intrigue window shoppers by displaying objects and telling stories that linked with the shops that hosted them. This historic grocer's shop overlooks the Market Square, so we displayed colourful postcards of the square in the 1960s when the main road ran right through it.

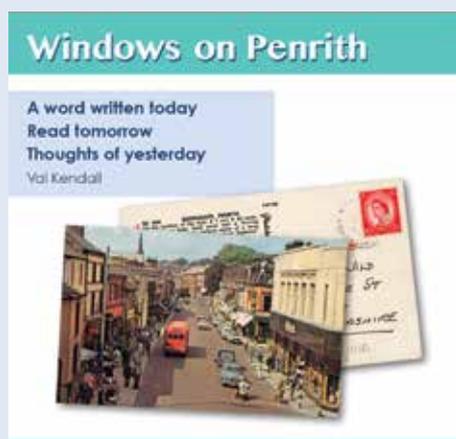


## NEW WRITING INSPIRED BY THE HERITAGE

Penrith has long inspired great writers, including William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and our next step was to use the objects to elicit an original response from local people. Fortunately, creative writing tutor Jane Thomas immediately understood what was needed and led a memorable writing workshop in Penrith's historic Town Hall. The free event attracted seven amateur writers who spent the day engaging with the objects and exploring the concise and precise Japanese writing forms of *haiku* and *haibun*. These wonderful Penrith writers produced lyrical and often poignant short pieces that were ideal to augment the snappy, provocative graphics I envisaged.

BELOW:

Sample graphic and haiku.



## FLEXIBLE RESOURCES FOR THE FUTURE

Meanwhile, my interpretive design colleague David Patrick was busy ordering lovely little acrylic display cases, and a range of plinths and A4 and A5 graphic stands, ready for the various objects. The aim was to provide as flexible a set of resources as possible for the client team, so that they could work with the community in future to change the displays and mix and match the elements as required. We also provided templates so that new graphics could be easily written and printed in-house.

Then it was time to knit the whole thing together. For each of the ten displays, I wrote about a different aspect of the town's history in less than 100 words, including a few words explaining the project, then selected a few lines of writing from the workshop that added a more emotive response to the object and story. It was all about as clean and simple as it could be.

## ENGAGING WITH THE AMBASSADORS

Our final task was to take the objects and interpretation onto the streets. We approached ten shops, many of whom were the new town centre ambassadors, and matched objects and stories with each shop's history, location or products where we could. Of the ten we visited,

only one shopkeeper declined (with regret), purely because she didn't have room in her window, and we quickly found an alternative nearby. Indeed, all the shopkeepers were delighted to be involved and several immediately suggested other participants, objects and stories for future phases.

BELOW:

I was delighted to find a Bird's Beer bottle on ebay for a fiver! We displayed it in a lighting shop immediately opposite the original George Bird brewery.



BELOW:

The old fashioned bike horn and horse's harness bells worked particularly well set against the modern bikes and cutting edge equipment in the window of Penrith's popular cycle shop.

## FOUND OBJECTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

We made a conscious decision to present the items as treasures to discover. They were 'found objects' rather than along a formal trail: the scheme could only work if it remained flexible for the shopkeepers, who could pass on objects to others at any time. There was, however, a link provided on each display to the project's web pages, where anyone could find out more and read the new creative writing in full.

## DID IT WORK?

True to Mary Portas, the retail guru who urges all High Streets to re-imagine themselves by experimenting, this town-centre project was small but bold, and I'm delighted the council team gave us the freedom to instigate it.



ABOVE:

Striking new signage had already been introduced to encourage people to explore the town centre on foot and discover its highlights and stories.

And it seems to have worked. It captured the imagination of local people and received plenty of publicity – great for the council and a bonus for the town museum – and has provided an easy-to-use template for showcasing more objects and stories in future. The shopkeepers took ownership of their objects with great enthusiasm, and the displays created new physical and intellectual links, complementing the quirky identity of the town. The 'treasures' hopefully added value and inspiration for local and visiting shoppers, and certainly provided an opportunity to unleash the community's creativity.

## CREATIVE COMMUNITY; CEMENTING PARTNERSHIPS

The project helped cement existing partnerships, not least in providing a unique vehicle for the new town centre ambassadors' scheme, and strengthened links between the community, its shops, its historic buildings and its heritage. And for me? The most exciting

outcome was the formation of a new Penrith Writers' Group as a direct consequence of our creative writing workshop. Oh, and I can now add 'professional shopper' to my CV. Result!

**Jo Scott is an independent heritage planning and interpretation consultant (and professional shopper!).**

# THE COMMUNITY, THE INTERPRETER AND THE CO-PRODUCED PROJECT

Bill Bevan looks at how co-production of interpretation projects between professionals and communities can maintain the quality of interpretative planning, writing, design and accessibility.



ABOVE: Members of Castleton and Hope historical societies with a co-produced exhibition. Professionally written and designed, members of the societies were centrally involved in deciding themes and key messages, editing the text, taking photographs, and choosing and displaying artefacts.

Community participation is now a key part of many interpretation projects – and rightly so. More active community roles have, in part, been driven by the rising prominence of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) as a key funder of heritage projects. It was also an ethos held by some organisations long before the Lottery became one of the last funding taps left flowing. Such participation gives much more decisive and active roles to communities and can see heritage become an effective agent of social cohesion and change. However, increased community control over heritage interpretation can also risk quality in terms of interpretive planning, writing, design and accessibility. One local historian's essential points about 19th-century industry might be another person's methadone.

How can we as interpreters be involved in such projects to balance community involvement with good quality interpretation? One answer is for an active partnership between 'the people' and heritage professionals – including interpreters – to co-produce projects together. Co-production is not about public outreach, consultation or engagement, institutional phrases that hide a multitude of sins, it is about professionals working with groups in an equal and reciprocal relationship to deliver a range of activities and services.

I offer some thoughts based on my experiences as an 'embedded interpreter' on a number of community projects. Most, though not all, have been funded by the HLF. I have worked closely with groups of people who have strong, yet varying, desires to discover their local heritage and communicate what they discover to others. I hope these will be useful whether you are, like myself now, a contractor employed by community groups or, like I used to be, an employee of an organisation working with communities.

## PEOPLE PARTICIPATION

The Heritage Lottery Fund has clear guidelines on what community participation means. These place the projects they fund on the citizen power rungs of Arnstein's ladder of public involvement.

*'By community participation, we mean people having an active role in your project, in particular taking part in decision-making and delivery. These people could be your audiences, or potential audiences, people that live or work locally, or people that have a stake in the heritage of your project because of their background or experience.'*

The HLF makes a distinction between informing and consultation on one hand, and the 'real participation' of:

**'Deciding together:** creating opportunities for people to make decisions about and influence the direction of your project.

**'Acting together:** creating opportunities for people to develop and deliver your project, taking a role in heritage conservation and/or learning activities.

**'Supporting others to take the lead:** empowering people to have ownership of the project, make final decisions and deliver activities with some independence.'

These tenets bring an ethos with them, applicable beyond HLF-funded projects, that professionals work in partnership with communities to provide support and skills that enable people to take on as wide a variety of active roles as they feel able to do while creating quality results. Whether providing memories for an oral history project, doing historical or archaeological research, taking photographs, organising public events, developing trails or helping to create publications and exhibitions, there are numerous

RIGHT:

A co-produced exhibition about slum clearances in Walkley, Sheffield. A working group within a larger project did the research, interviewed ex-residents, sourced photographs, scanned documents and chose the exhibition themes. Other members of the community provided personal photographs and memories.

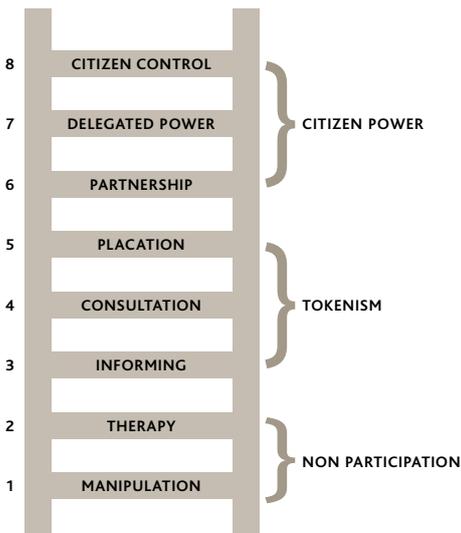


roles in a community heritage project that appeal to a range of people's interests, skills and perceptions about what they can do.

Participation in heritage projects can have significant and lasting social benefits. It enables people to engage with their own heritage in a meaningful way, to develop new skills, gain life-confidence and self-esteem, and to be more intellectually, physically and socially active. Heritage can be part of the social glue that helps communities reconnect, appreciate others and strengthen shared identities. As such, heritage has an important and active role in society, more so where many arenas for social interaction have been eroded. I have seen this on a project I manage in Walkley, Sheffield, centred on aspects of a community centre's 20th-century history, including the First World War and 1960s/70s slum clearance/rehousing. It is bringing together different generations and those born in Walkley with incomers, while members of the diaspora are returning to visit

the suburb they left when their houses were demolished and scattered families linked through dead First World War soldiers are making contact. Shop, bakery and café owners are told by their customers how Walkley has a buzz about it once again, after two decades of slow decline. The heritage project is quoted as one example of this renaissance. A co-produced exhibition based on community research has attracted good audiences while on display in a butcher's, café, general store, library and church, as well as the city centre's Winter Gardens.

of the tangible – the architect, archaeologist or ecologist. Writing and design are too often seen as something 'to have a go at' despite the HLF's interpretation guidelines and willingness to fund the costs of interpreters to provide training, mentoring and technical skills. The AHI plans to work with the HLF to address this issue.



ABOVE:

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation was developed in 1969 as a way of classifying public involvement in planning processes in the United States. It is one method of categorising participation and is still relevant 25 years later as a good benchmark for assessing how an organisation is working with communities in heritage projects.

### WHERE'S THE INTERPRETER?

Interpreters can, and should, play important roles in co-produced heritage projects, whether this is as part of a team of other professionals, with well-defined roles to help deliver an interpretive output, or as project facilitators and co-ordinators. We certainly have the experience to act as the latter because of our roles linking clients, subject specialists, designers, writers, illustrators, etc. The way we stand back to take an overview of a location or subject's heritage also places us well for this position.

Sadly, many community groups, as well as far too many organisations who should know better, do not appreciate the need for an interpreter and focus more on the professionals

### WORKING ON A CO-PRODUCED PROJECT

Co-production brings its own set of challenges. It is a very different way of working to *doing* heritage interpretation to a site or for a client, but it is usually very rewarding and generates high quality interpretive outputs. Success can be greatly enhanced if the project is an honest partnership with a clear management structure and works to a well-thought-out yet flexible framework that manages expectations. When I work as part of a community heritage project, we establish a steering group who meet regularly. This is the forum for making things happen and drawing skills into the project, as well as having tea and biscuits. Most people will respect professional opinion, and may desire it, though you can also encounter resistance, especially from 'The Specialist'. This is why the interpreter can be crucial. We can use communication skills and the ability to stand back from a subject without

having our own specialist-subject axe to grind. On a more pragmatic level, who else can advise on the turnaround time to design and print a leaflet or produce a panel?

### KEEPING FOCUSED

As on any project, a coherent framework that outlines aims and objectives, messages, outputs and a schedule will help keep participants focused. Be prepared for this to be flexible within set boundaries, whether it is a formal interpretation plan, an HLF project plan or exists in some other form. Involve people in decision-making by, effectively, undertaking mini, informal interpretive planning sessions throughout the project. Move away from the institutional 'them and us' approach to allow a more permeable definition of whose project it is. Communities can imbue interpretation projects with a wealth of knowledge, expertise, effort and enthusiasm. Amongst others, I have worked with scientists, electricians, cartographers, community workers, artists

and factory workers – all of whom have brought skills, insight and local knowledge into interpreting a place. They have offered their time and skills because the heritage of their place is so important to them that they are highly motivated. Thought a panel might work best in a set place on a specific subject? Be prepared to amend it if local knowledge tells you more people will see it somewhere else or are likely to be interested in a different aspect of the topic.

### QUALITY CONTROL

When it comes to ensuring excellence and quality control, the interpreter and other professionals have essential roles to play. I have found that community groups will look to me as one of the 'professionals' to train them, give advice or guidance and provide key skills they don't possess or feel unable to learn. On oral history projects in Calver, Derbyshire, and in Sheffield I have provided technical audio editing skills, while on a similar project in

Tideswell, Derbyshire, this has been undertaken by an ex radio station employee.

Ultimately, working as an embedded interpreter involves going on a personal journey with the group, a ride that can weave its way through births and deaths, local politics and street-corner gossip, huffs and hurrahs, from aspiration to realisation. By the end, you will hopefully have helped deliver some excellent interpretation, enabled others to discover their heritage, trained people in new skills and, in some small part, contributed to stronger, more vibrant, communities.

**Bill Bevan is an interpreter, archaeologist, writer and photographer who runs [inHeritage.co.uk](http://inHeritage.co.uk).**

BELOW:

**The Tideswell Living History Group's steering group plan permanent exhibitions in a coaching inn and a telephone box. Note the café setting.**



# OPENING UP OPPORTUNITIES

Lisa Brochu and Tim Merriman explain that very few community leaders think about applying an interpretive approach to the planning and development of the sites, agencies and organisations integral to most communities.

In the United States interpretation has traditionally been the province of private, non-profit and governmental agencies and organisations. It is a valued approach to communication by parks, zoos, museums, aquariums, historic sites and nature centres, largely because it helps to build understanding and support for the many varied resources being interpreted. And though these agencies and organisations are integral parts of almost every community, very few community leaders think about applying an interpretive approach to community planning and development. They may use a branding approach devised by the Convention & Visitors Bureau or Tourism Office that promotes the community through media advertisements, but have not considered planning community experiences in a collaborative manner that keep the community's culture alive for residents and visitors.

## TOURISM CONSULTANTS

Dr Dan Shilling, former Humanities Director for the State of Arizona, wrote a book entitled, *Civic Tourism: the Poetry of Politics and Place*<sup>1</sup>. He points out that most tourism communities have invested in advertising and promotion as their only strategies, with economic growth as the only indicator of success. Dr Shilling suggests that tourism communities should reframe tourism with three strategies:

1. Rethink Economics
2. Invest in the Story
3. Connect to the Public

He emphasises a triple bottom line approach to community economics that involves monitoring social and environmental qualities along with economic indicators. Dr Shilling also believes local people need to be consulted and heard in planning community improvements for tourism. We agree with this premise and believe that his suggestion to 'invest in the story' is essentially a call for improved



ABOVE:  
Pike Street Market in Seattle, Washington, exemplifies some of the core values created and monitored by Sustainable Seattle, a community coalition that works to keep Seattle attuned to its natural and cultural heritage.

interpretive services and planning on a community-wide basis. This notion opens the opportunity for interpretive planners to engage communities in collaborative conversations to help them create better tourism and community experiences that people will value.

## FORT COLLINS

We live in Fort Collins, Colorado, a very nice city of 100,000 or so people located at the edge of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Through the years it has earned a great deal of praise as a lifestyle city. In fact, *Money Magazine* recently named it the best place to live in America, characterised by great weather, beautiful bike trails, Old Town shopping and restaurants, microbreweries and Colorado State University. It has a rich history that spans Native American settlements to sugar beet farming to today's growing craft beer industry. The town's slogan, created by a marketing firm, is 'Adventure Casual, and So Much More.' We live here, but we don't know what that means. The tagline doesn't seem to distinguish the community in any way or even begin to tell its unique story. While the eclectic nature of Fort Collins may be appealing by virtue of offering a little something for everyone, there is no strong central thread that ties all the disparate pieces together. And unfortunately, that lack of a common sense of story is reflected in

1. Shilling, Dan; 2007; *Civic Tourism: the Poetry and Politics of Place*; Sharlot Hall Museum Press, Phoenix, AZ, US.

RIGHT:  
**Local market in Mto Wa Mbu, Tanzania, a village that encourages tourism but is home to representatives of almost every one of Tanzania's over 140 tribes. Whether the community is large or small, street markets bring people together.**

the fractured approach Fort Collins takes in community planning. There is little to no collaboration between various interests, so while there is much to praise about Fort Collins, a sense of place is somehow missing. Visiting the Fort Collins website will tell you how many hotels are in town and what special events you can find, but it won't tell you anything about what makes this place special, what's at its heart.

## THE HEART OF THE MATTER

We wrote *Put the HEART Back In Your Community: Unifying Diverse Interests Around a Central Theme* to help communities discover and capitalise on their own stories. The book documents 19 case studies of communities that embrace and illustrate various elements of the HEART approach to community planning. We believe that communities, large and small, can benefit from assessing how they measure up to these five characteristics of an interpretive approach to development.

*Holistic* – Does the community have a sense of place? Do all the elements (architectural style, landscape features, story elements) make sense as a complete package to those who live or visit there?

*Engaging* – How does the community involve its citizens and its tourists in meaningful dialogue about its past, present and future? Does it make an emotional connection as well as intellectual connections with people, blending information with experience?

*Appropriate* – Are the community's members, stories, and natural and cultural resources considered in development projects and special events? When adding anything to the mix, is it right for this town or merely a copy of something seen somewhere else?



*Rewarding* – What measurable results does the community want to see? Are those rewards built around core values established by consensus?

*Thematic* – How does the community's story reveal itself through various means? Is it evident to residents and visitors? Has it become an integral part of community planning?

## BUILDING A BETTER PLACE

After an assessment is completed, the community can begin to work together to fill in the gaps and build a better place to live, work or visit. It isn't always an easy process for a variety of reasons. Finding the right balance between the desires of residents and the expectations of visitors can be a significant challenge. Attempting to achieve equity between economic, environmental and social interests can also create the potential for conflict. Certainly, it can be easier to help small indigenous villages tell their stories than larger communities in more developed nations, where diverse stakeholders must be consulted and included in decision-making. The politics of decision-making is always easier with fewer stakeholders, but there are excellent processes

for engaging a community of any size in collaborative planning if the key players are willing to participate, and the rewards can be well worth the effort. Ultimately, it becomes easier to protect and promote individual agencies, organisations, businesses and resources if they are considered as part of a whole.

**Lisa Brochu and Tim Merriman, PhD**  
**are Principals of Heartfelt Associates,**  
**Fort Collins, CO, USA.**

# ACHIEVING SELF-IDENTITY AND SELF-WORTH

Jon Kohl looks at how participatory interpretative frameworks can strengthen community identities.

Interpretive planners with development experience and facilitation skills can guide communities through the creation of meanings held and displayed in interpretive frameworks, which contribute to community self-identity and self-worth. These frameworks not only allow them to design more authentic heritage products, but also to more fully participate in development projects of all kinds. The interpretation community has underestimated the role of interpretation in community development.

## INTERPRETATION AS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The difference between heritage and resources are the meanings that a community ascribes. Once a consensus emerges that a resource indeed embodies significant meanings, we call that resource 'heritage', even though no such consensus may exist on what those meanings are. Though consensus may seem elusive, the

 Interpretive Framework <small>29 nov 2012</small>			
<b>A New Leadership Emerges from the Integration of Different Forms of Understanding Natural Resources</b> A new leadership in natural resource management built on the integration of academic and community knowledge is iteratively applied and improved in practice, offering solutions to complex socioenvironmental challenges.			
<i>Description to come</i>			
<b>Postgraduate Academic Training for a New Leadership in Natural Resource Management</b> The globalization of knowledge and sharpening of socioenvironmental problems demand a postgraduate academic training to create new leaders capable of working with communities to resolve complex challenges facing natural resource use.		<b>The Use of Natural Resources as a Conservation Strategy</b> Far from promoting preservation as a principal conservation strategy, the rational and permanent interaction of people and natural resources foments learning to achieve sustainable development objectives.	
<i>Description to come</i>		<i>Description to come</i>	
<b>From the University to the Field</b> Socioenvironmental problems cannot be solved from a university campus; they require both virtual and physical extension to communities in order to generate and transfer knowledge, both academic and community-based.	<b>New Leadership in the Region's Natural Resource Management</b> Each year thousands of students graduate around the world from renowned natural resources master's and doctoral programs; but resolution of complex environmental challenges requires leaders with social, economical, and environmental consciousness, capable of integrating different forms of knowing, such as scientific and community knowledge.	<b>Sustainable Development in Rural Communities</b> Despite the international trend of short-term projects, in order that rural development truly become sustainable and lasting, theoretical knowledge about conservation and use of natural resources must be created, applied, and improved over and over in practice.	<b>Conservation of Genetic Plant Material</b> Only with the conservation of a vast collection of genetic material from diverse parts of the world and in all of its forms, can institutions innovate new varieties important for humanity's food security and economy.
<i>Description</i> For centuries, the great universities have erected their buildings in the hearts of metropolitan areas, enjoying privileges that flow from civilization. But with the increase in the dynamic complexity of challenges emerging today requires that universities leave behind the ancient concept of ivory towers and look to extend and integrate themselves with other forms of knowledge especially local in order to transcend problems that grow increasingly resistant.	<i>Description to come</i> Attractions and stories to come	<i>Description</i> The current development model emphasizes short-term projects and results. This model nevertheless does not allow sufficient time to forge trusting relationships with communities or to learn by means of trial and error in a world increasingly uncertain and complex. Instead, a new model emerges that promotes sustainable development that seeks long-term relations that integrates theoretical and local knowledge as well as foments learning critical to overcoming socioenvironmental problems.	<i>Description to come</i> Attractions and Stories
Attractions and Stories • Principal Building Wallace		Attractions and Stories • Los Espeveles Trail	Visitor Products • Botanical Garden Tours

RIGHT: Figure 1: Partial interpretive framework from a university community (CATIE, in Costa Rica) showing examples of descriptions, attractions and stories matched to messages.

RIGHT:

**Figure 2: Residents of Union Island, the most southern island in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, used the historical scan technique to identify stories, eras, and themes in their island's history. This participatory tool is the first of three principal steps in developing a community interpretive framework.**

© Jon Kohl



prize well merits the hunt. A community's self-esteem, self-identity, pride and even market potential all depend on meanings that people both inside and outside the community assign to the place. Often residents may perceive only a shadowy notion of their site's worth or its central story and have never joined their thoughts with those of fellow members in a facilitated, consensus-based conversation.

Most communities cannot boast the attractive power of, say, Paris and not just because they do not share such outstanding heritage. Often they have never even articulated a collective meaning. Thus they suffer a confused self-identity and self-worth that can inhibit development, especially in poor, underdeveloped communities, leading to a lack of self-confidence and dependency on outsiders.

If indeed interpretation can be used by skilled interpretive facilitator-planners to help people forge collective meanings, (meanings that help them to more deeply understand and appreciate their own community), then perhaps interpretation could be not only a therapeutic tool, but a force to promote development, especially in heritage tourism.

Communities that cannot articulate their meanings, or have been wooed into declaring marketing slogans or have lost inherited meanings can fall victim to uncontrolled tourism that threatens the very heritage and value that attracted tourists in the first place. To avoid meaninglessness or to pull communities from a negative story that chains them down, interpretation can meet the need, but first interpreters must cast down the traditional consultant-driven approach. Instead, interpretive planners need to become meaning facilitators and one tool that can help is the participatory interpretive framework.

## INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS GUARD COMMUNITY MEANINGS

An interpretive framework holds local and universal meanings, stories, attractions and symbols relevant to a community on a single page so that people can view the entire framework. Aside from the hierarchical, interrelated web of interpretive messages themselves, the framework may include brief descriptions of each message offering evidence for perspectives revealed in messages as well as how messages connect to the local site. They may also include short lists of principal site attractions and stories that correspond to different messages in the framework (Figure 1). It is through attractions and stories, as well as interpretive products, that visitors encounter and experience messages.

While the bottom row may have messages that directly refer to the interpreted site (Figure 3), the upper echelons display universalised messages that express some truth applicable throughout the world, for which the interpreted site proves an outstanding illustration. Through this universalisation of meaning as we ascend the pyramid, local stories enjoy a direct connection to revealed truths relevant to people around the world, thus tying local reality into greater arcs of consciousness and importance, granting even the most forlorn place its rightful place in the evolving universe.

## MEANING MUST BE CO-CREATED

For an interpretive framework to have any chance of success, a wide and diverse slice of the community must participate in its forging. If they do not co-create, they will not own, and when the intervener leaves, the framework will fall into disuse. If key community perspectives are left out, people who represent those perspectives may not support the framework. Co-owning is not enough though; a community must be accompanied in its learning to use, practise, know and create a new habit to integrate it into daily work. There must be enough awareness of its utility and even leadership to try out the initiative.

## INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS ARISE THROUGH PARTICIPATION

The methodology herein described comes from the PUP Global Heritage Consortium's Interpretive Framework module, part of its Public Use Planning Process ([www.pupconsortium.net](http://www.pupconsortium.net)). The one-day workshop consists of two principal exercises:

*Historical Scan.* While site history may be well documented in books, when a community reconstructs it collectively its members come to understand its evolution and its eras in a new collective light, out of which arise stories that will later populate the framework as well as possible theme ideas that feed into the afternoon session (Figure 2). While this step is not essential to an interpretive framework, its

Overarching universal message	<b>Glacial Routes, Biological Routes</b> With the passage of time, glacial routes open and close routes for humans and other species.				
Universal messages	<b>Throwing Salt on the Sacred Wound</b> Commerce along the Salt Route unleashed a wave of desecration of indigenous territory.		<b>Glaciations and Biodiversity</b> The millennial expansion and retrocession of glaciers in El Cocuy National Park created refuges that permit speciation along altitudinal gradients.		
Local messages (small committee)	<b>The Salt Route</b> Commercial traffic along the Salt Route, whether indigenous or Spanish, drove the cultural and territorial domination of El Cocuy and its surroundings.	<b>Desecration</b> Despite the fact that the Spanish brought the Holy Cross to extend their religion over the indigenous cosmivision, in reality, they desecrated their land.	<b>Glacial Masses</b> Although the snowcap mountains of Güicán, Cocuy and Chita have one of the most extensive glacial masses north of the equator, the peaks that were once covered in ice, one by one, are melting.	<b>Biodiversity and Endemism</b> Given the altitudinal gradient that cuts across extensive forests and paramos and the resulting abundant of habitat, El Cocuy National Park is the heart of high levels of biodiversity and endemism, such as the Frailejón <i>Epeletia clefti</i> and collard lizard ( <i>Stenocercus lache</i> ).	<b>Without name</b> Too few cards to reflect a consensus
Message groupings (workshop)	<b>Thoughts of the locals</b>		<b>Biophysical characteristics of the place</b>		
Emerging messages (workshop)	Cocuy, Art, Beauty, and Culture	History of the magic and religious	The Sierra Nevada in its majestic height	5300 meters in biodiversity	

LEFT:  
Figure 3: The interpretive framework for El Cocuy National Park in Colombia illustrates how a framework is built from the bottom up, from emerging messages produced in plenary through local and universal messages written by a small committee with the approval of the plenary.

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This article was derived from a presentation he gave at the European Association for Heritage Interpretation conference in Sigtuna, Sweden, in June 2013.

absence lessens the group's ability to develop a collective flow and work together, which will be well served in the upcoming exercise.

*Consensus creation of emerging messages.* The steps follow the Consensus Workshop Method, a participatory tool, along with the 'Historical Scan' within the Technology of Participation, developed by the Institute for Cultural Affairs. Essentially, the facilitator asks participants to brainstorm significant attributes about the site which participants then group, name, and analyse into short thematic phrases, called 'emerging messages' (Figure 3). Later the facilitator works with a small committee of participants to convert emerging messages into interpretive messages and then to fill out the hierarchy of 4-7 messages, local to universal.

### INTERPRETIVE PLANNERS REQUIRE NEW SKILLS

Carrying out an interpretive framework in a community development context requires a new job description for conventional interpretive planning consultants. Such workers need training in participatory process facilitation, experience in community development, and a deep sensitivity to interior issues of both individual and collective minds, such as concerns, motivations, values and consciousness. Anyone who works in

development should also be emotionally mature, have an ego in check, and be willing to accompany communities during extended periods. Of course, they also have to be expert interpreters, especially capable of helping others make connections between local stories and universal meanings and then help them capture these meanings in well-crafted messages.

BELOW:  
Figure 4: The co-ordinator for the historic centre of the World Heritage City of Evora, Portugal leads individuals from throughout the city in creating its interpretive framework, drawing on thousands of years of history.



Jon Kohl

# STUDENTS AS INTERPRETERS: WORKSHOPS IN SCHOOLS

Community-based heritage projects frequently take interpreters into schools. Georgia Litherland argues that to make the most of these opportunities, we should offer interpretation activities to students.

Workshops often take place in schools and in order to make the most of these opportunities we must first understand something of how teachers manage their time and planning. Here are some practical tips on setting up for success, based on what I've learnt from recent interpretive activities delivered within archaeology and history projects.

## PREPARATION AND PLANNING

What exactly are you being asked to deliver? And where does your part fit in with the project as a whole? Understanding this, along with understanding who's who, who's *met* who, and who knows what will help you deliver a workshop that is successful for the project, the school and the students. If you are involved in project development, then talk with possible participants from as early a stage as possible. Discuss their interests, current practice, hopes and learning objectives, to discover how you can craft relevant offers they value.

## PEOPLE

Who will you be working with? What age are the students, and how many will be in your group(s)? Have a look at the school and local community websites. A successful project is tailored to the students' abilities and offers a dynamic, hands-on activity, something a bit different from their usual classes.

Are there other partners involved: archaeologists, historians, local societies or community members? Artists, writers, storytellers, actors? What are the communication lines here, and the interests at stake?

## PLANNING

Successful sessions do not 'just work out once we're there'. While adaptability is important, you will better ensure key interpretive messages are communicated – *and* respond to who and what

you find when you get there – by creating a bank of resources and a preferred structure. Keep a file of other possibilities you've considered – they might be perfect for the next project, or something four years down the line.

School staff are busy. One-line emails or confusion over details usually signal lack of time *not* lack of commitment. Even if we are convinced of the quality of our offer and delivering it free of charge, in-house staff have to do a lot of extra work to accommodate us. Offer succinct, well-organised files of any background information and images, in a format school staff have said they can use. Give a menu of possible class-based preparatory and follow-up activities, as well as being clear that your workshop can stand alone if the participants have no available class-time for supporting activities.

## ASK SOMETHING!

Let's take examples from some of our current projects in South Yorkshire. We begin by introducing ourselves and setting the factual and interpretive background to the activity, perhaps using images on the interactive whiteboard. We prefer to ask the students about what they've done, what they've studied or found and what these might mean, rather than talking at them. We let the students inform and surprise us.

## DO SOMETHING!

In Athersley, Barnsley, students from three primary schools had sessions introducing archaeology, excavating test pits and interpreting their finds through handling artefact and art sessions. How did the artefacts come to be in the ground? How has that location changed over time? How do children's lives differ 'then' and now? For eight-year-olds, even 40 years back is long past. So how

BELOW:  
Students collaged the landscape background and drew Georgian characters to create a mural and comic interpreting the loss and excavation of a Georgian fob seal.





engaging is the sherd of a 150-year-old pot, created with the help of child workers, transported by pony, sold by a travelling salesman, dumped in a privy when broken, collected by the nightsoil man and spread with the poo as fertiliser, only to be found by their school group!

In Walkley, Sheffield, we led schoolchildren in marking out former streets, cleared during the 1970s to make a park. Local history volunteers did archive and oral history research to populate the demolished houses, while a professional mapper and heritage interpreter worked with Years 4 and 5 pupils (8-10 years) to mark out the footprints of the houses, complete with passageways and offshot kitchens. We talked of outdoor toilets, 19 children in a one-up, one-down, and a front room too cold to use except at Christmas and funerals.

In a follow-up activity, community 'elders' visited the school to answer questions and chat with the children about life then and now. They brought 1940s/50s toys, books, photographs, kitchen equipment, vinyl records, recipe books (brawn anyone? tripe?) and fashion mags – even weighed out portions of weekly rations from their post-war childhoods.

## MAKE SOMETHING!

Make something that the participants are proud of, and can keep individually or collectively. Not everyone is a confident writer or artist. Experiment with collaborative making, using collage or manipulated photographic images, for example. Interpretation happens during the creative act and pupils may cascade their learning to parents or guardians.

In the Athersley test pits students found a Georgian fob seal! An artist and interpreter led students in creating a collaged historic landscape and characters to tell possible stories of the fob seal's journey from its loss to their excavation some 200 years later. We created a take-home mini-comic book and a large vinyl-printed mural for display. We offered instructions on how to play an interpretive storytelling game, using the vinyl print laid flat as a game board.

In Walkley, the children followed up their 'Ask Your Elders' sessions by working with a local writer to create poems and artwork about 'Walkley then and now'. We published these as a take-home booklet for participating students and on the project website for the wider community.

ABOVE:

Students measure out the footprints of former houses to interpret life in a 1960s terrace. Council park-keepers followed the children's lines with sports field paint for a park Fun Day.

## FINALLY, SOME THOUGHTS ON QUALITY

Quality shifts. You've done something excellent – you want it to be even better next time.

Quality is objective and subjective. It is multi-faceted, with many elements making up a successful workshop. It is easier to identify what objectively does not work than the magical elements that do.

Good-quality process is rather situational, dependent on the context and participants. Nonetheless, inclusivity, clarity of purpose, warm, clear communication, planning that facilitates successful participation rather than frustration – these are important values for community workshops. *Listen* to, and for, your co-participants' values and sense of quality. You can create great things together.

**Georgia Litherland is a heritage interpreter, with a background in academic publishing.**

# LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Adrian Lambert explains how he brings communities together through performance and production.

The Rural Media Company is an education and development charity working throughout the UK. Working in partnership with historians, archivists and archaeologists, we create a diverse set of outputs with members of the community that include film dramas, documentaries, animations, audio tours and digital stories.

## CRAFTA WEBB

The *Crafta Webb* project began as a mystery. The name of this forgotten settlement didn't feature in the local archives or museum, but was still featured on maps of the area. This 'lost village', once home to 60 people and tucked away on the top of Bredwardine Hill in Herefordshire was rumoured to owe its origins to the 'one night house', when, it's said, erecting a chimney and smoking it by dawn meant you could claim rights!

Working with three rural communities over an 18-month period, we embarked on an ambitious community film project to shed light on this part of Herefordshire's heritage and discover a way that the story of *Crafta Webb* could be conveyed through film drama and documentary.

The project had several key outputs:

- A short film drama built on research, archaeology and discussion, which members of the local community would help research, devise, write, crew and perform.
- A community archaeology programme.
- A practical media training programme and equipment resource for members of the community.
- An animation project with a local primary school.
- A DVD with a book with interviews, maps and photographs.

The most significant output was the practical participation of the community. Over 120 people took part in the project; their involvement and their passion for the work was key to its success.

## THE PROCESS

The process was divided into three themes – drama, documentary and research/archaeology – giving the members of the community the opportunity to select the discipline that they found most interesting, or even take part in all three.



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RIGHT:  
Filming *Crafta Webb*.



Robyn Collins and Jean Dubberley in *Crafta Webb*.

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The group ranged in age from nine to 75 years of age and met every weekend in the village hall. The process began by introducing the equipment and art form to the groups, playing with cameras and computers, writing scenes and exploring dramatic texts, researching and delving into archives and old photographs. As the groups established themselves, we began to explore the ideas for the project through all three strands.

As the project progressed and we learnt a little more about the lives of the people who had once occupied the settlement, the group began to discuss their own personal journeys to the present-day community; why they came, how it made them feel to settle in a new home and how *they* created and formed an attachment and a sense of place.

We decided to take *Crafta Webb's* past and find a way of retelling it in the present. We wanted its discovery to be part of the film and its lure to be reflected by both historical and contemporary reference points. We wanted its ruins and its mythical 'one night houses' to be echoed in the naïve architecture of a 'den' built of sticks and the diaries of a Victorian reverend replaced by those of a young girl.

## THE PRODUCTION

The group had the choice of whether to take on a performing or production role. For the

majority of the cast this was the first time that they had ever acted; learning lines, creating their character and understanding the discipline of screen acting presented an enormous learning curve. Production roles were assigned to members of the group, Assistant Director, Script Supervisors, Costumes, Props, a task that soon became titanic in its organisation and complexity, but was handled like a slick military operation!

Over eight days the film was brought to life with members of the community working side by side with professionals. Finally, on the last day, the production required the full support of the wider community to capture the moment when the field is brought back to life. Over 80 people complete in Victorian costume came that day and the sight of them walking up the *Crafta Webb* field was a truly magical sight for everyone involved.

## THE IMPACT

The film premiered at a packed out local village hall and was later screened at the Hay Literature Festival. We had worked with babies to residents in their 70s – we even managed dogs and horses! Every contribution, no matter how big or small, made the difference. We left the village with a camera, sound kit and Mac book, so they could continue to create their own work.

Judy Hargreaves: *'I've always known about Crafta Webb. When my kids were little we used to wonder what it was and who lived there... the film struck a chord with me because when I first came here we were incomers and seen with some hostility. ...it wasn't just about making the film: it was also about getting on good 'hello' terms with your neighbours.'*

Jean Dubberley, was probably the oldest person on the project: *'It was absolutely fascinating... Crafta Webb is a story about incomers. In our film it's about the most recent incomers from Eastern Europe and about how the child is bullied... media projects like these could, and should, help remote rural communities like ours. This was an opportunity to bring the community together.'*

Robyn Collins, took on the main acting role: *'I'd just like to thank you again for the incredible experience you gave me aged just 11, without it, my eyes may not have been opened to what is now my biggest passion.'*

Community engagement and content creation proved to be an effective way of discovering, learning, sharing, celebrating and the heritage of *Crafta Webb*.

Adrian Lambert is Artistic Director of  
The Rural Media Company.  
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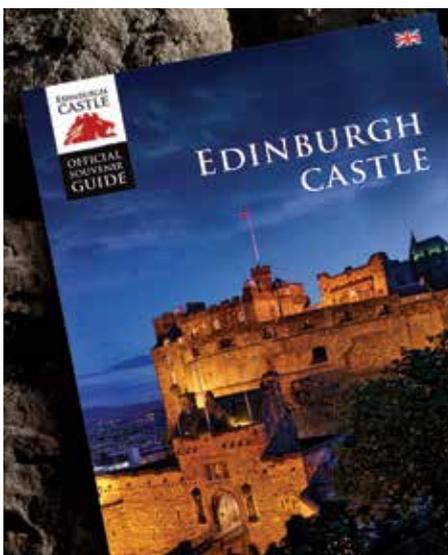
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