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EMPATHY

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You can visit AHI's website at **www.ahi.org.uk**

Contents

The next issue will feature:

Interpreting the 'impossible'

For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation [AHI], send an email to admin@ahi.org.uk or write to the Administrator, AHI, 54 Balmoral Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4PG. Tel: +44 (0)560 274 7737. Individuals can join AHI as Associate or Student Members or can apply to be elected, subject to qualifications and experience, as Full Members or Fellows. Businesses can join as Corporate Members with the same rights as individual members. All members receive *Interpretation Journal*, and other mailings. They can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can vote at the Annual General Meeting. Printed in UK © AHI 2016.

Foreword

Welcome to the new look version of the Journal. We have kept the best bits of the old Journal and introduced some new ideas, a new approach and a new editor (me).

Each Journal will continue to be themed, with every edition aimed at building bridges of best practice and connecting a diverse range of people and institutions.

We are going to widen our pool of contributors – with articles from within and beyond the interpretive profession – as we look to see how other disciplines, from film-makers to artists, communicate stories.

Whilst our new themes may appear slightly esoteric, the aim is to create an encompassing Journal that encourages thoughtful debate and new ideas. So it's goodbye 'outdoor interpretation' and welcome 'empathy'.

Empathy is a skill that every interpreter requires, and is often a key objective that exhibits and programmes strive to achieve. But what does empathy actually mean?

Is it about understanding visitors' perspectives and feelings? Or creating moments that resonate with our audiences and inspire people to act? How can something so particular as empathy be universal? Can institutions be empathetic? And is empathy always a good thing?

Within this Journal we have four very different takes on empathy, each attempting to address these profound issues. Errol Francis challenges definitions of empathy and what it means to be empathetic, transcending the emotional trope and bringing in ideas of deduction, perception and humour. Clare Patey writes about the creation of a new museum without walls enabling visitors to experience what it's like to be someone else through walking in their shoes and listening to their stories. Deborah Shaw presents the inventive and theatrical ways Historic Royal Palaces are connecting audiences with 'the human experience of people from the past' and Kerry Wilson writes about the unique positioning of heritage institutions in empathic practice through their authentic collections and stories of real people.

The new-look Journal will also have a number of regular features, some familiar and some less so.

There will be a regular piece on exhibit typology. Here we invite interpreters to explore the historiography of a piece of media they have an affinity for. For this Journal we are delighted to feature Graham Black on the object caption.

We have also introduced a debate section. In this issue Emma Courtney addresses the question of whether audiences really know what they want. She makes a great case for audience research once you have a defined product. But in defining the product should we just stick with the expert? Perhaps this is a subject to debate at another time…

We will also feature different digital agencies investigating new ideas from the world of multimedia; interview key people who work alongside interpreters; debate interpretive questions; and we have introduced a new tool kit section in which people 'in the know' will provide you with tips to help realise your heritage projects. And of course we will continue to showcase benchmark projects and review the latest exhibitions, books and publications.

Part of our new approach is to involve our readership more. We are looking for readers' experiences – so please write in with your insights or any burning issues you want to tell us about. We also want to feature irreverent and inspiring examples of interpretation from across the world in a new section, (Revealed, page 33). So please send in your photographs to journal@ahi.org.uk.

The theme of our next Journal, due in Autumn 2016, is 'impossible'. So think controversy, sensitive subjects, intense emotions, unrealistic budgets, super-fast programmes and ambitious intentions.

I am really looking forward to a stimulating tenure as your Editor.

Eric Langham
Founder, Barker Langham

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

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

You then enter your membership number and the common case-sensitive password to log in. The password will change with each issue of the journal and the password is **Belfast2016**.

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

News & Views

The Committee

The AHI committee consists of 13 members drawn from across the membership. We currently count freelance consultants alongside employees of national parks, universities and private companies amongst our number. A broad spectrum of skills are united under a singular passion to develop heritage interpretation as a profession and AHI as the UK and Ireland's professional organisation for interpreters. The committee meet face to face three times a year with each of the sub-groups holding interim meetings – usually by Skype. If you have any questions for the committee, please get in touch via the office (contact details are in the front of the journal).

A blueprint for future

A couple of years ago, the committee created a blueprint for the development of AHI, which can be found on the website within two documents – The Forward Plan and the Activity Plan. In order to develop and execute these plans the current committee is divided into the following sub-groups: Professional Development, Membership, Events, Conference, Awards, Advocacy, Marketing & Communications, Fundraising and Operations.

Key areas for review

With the fundamental planning in place, we are focusing on key areas for development. Having launched the new look *Interpretation Journal* under the new editorship of Eric Langham, for the remainder of this year we will be primarily working on Professional Development and Membership. These go hand in hand as we review membership categories and the application process for Full Membership.

We aim to make membership categories clearer, administration easier, and to sustain AHI's future. We are evaluating ways to encourage more of our Associate Members to step up to Full Membership status. We are working with the Membership panel to review the current criteria, looking at ways to align this with the European InHerit programme (see *Interpretation Journal* volume 20, 1), to ensure that Full Membership is available to a wider range of people who have interpretation at the core of what they do – from planning, and live interpretation to design and many things in between. Experience, professionalism and a proven passion for interpretation in all its forms will underpin the criteria for success.

Work on these reviews has already started. We will consult members during the year and present our proposals at the AGM during the annual conference.

The Annual Conference

The annual conference is the most important event in the AHI calendar. It's the time of year when a large cross-section of members get together to listen, discuss and debate a key theme for the industry. By now, you will have received details of the 2016 conference in Belfast.

Winning hearts and minds. Can interpretation change the world? will be our key theme for discussion, alongside some great site visits and a brilliant line up of keynote speakers. We will be announcing more about the speakers via our eNews and eBulletins over the coming weeks, and are excited to welcome Sam Ham as keynote speaker and workshop facilitator.

Bill Bevan
Chair, AHI

Reviews

REPORTING RESEARCH

Philip Ryland summarises research undertaken and some of the key results and conclusions emanating from recently published studies relevant to the field of interpretation.

Two studies are briefly explored, both relating to the development and application of a narrative for use with a personal or digital guide.

Quinn & Ryan (2016) explored the role of the tour guide in managing the experience at Dublin Castle, Ireland, where the content of the narrative which was being delivered was likely to be challenging for some visitors. Participant observation followed by semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to experience a number of on-site tours and thus observe how the narrative unfolded on each tour. Notes were made on narrative detail, verbal emphases, exchanges between the tour guide and their visitors as well as the general behaviour and engagement of visitors. Interviews were then used to explore the development and content of the narrative itself. It was noted that the narrative should ideally be kept to 45 minutes in duration.

The results identified four key story lines running through each narrative, namely: 'social significance', 'centre of wealth', 'centre of power' and 'the Irish state' (Table 1, p329). Based upon these four story lines, the results revealed a series of key historical points which were covered and that the historical role of the castle itself was largely 'depoliticized by the Guides' (p330) which resulted in a 'sensitive, yet flexible' storyline (p334).

However, interviews revealed that the Guides were sometimes 'more sensitive to the storyline' than was necessary given the visitors prior knowledge (p331), and indeed this heterogeneity meant that the visitors were typically making sense of the narrative from their own perspectives (p333); thus the importance of 'playing host', detailed scene setting and the use of cues to gauge interest were all identified as critically important tools for these Guides. The encouragement of visitors who were able to share their 'expert' knowledge on architecture, art and the like was commonly welcomed (p332).

The unintentional tension between visitors and international tourists based upon a lack of knowledge and understanding of what the narrative was attempting to convey (p331) occasionally emerged during a tour and required the Guide to manage a difficult situation. In conclusion, the role of the Guide was summarised as being to provide a 'contemporary re-working and re-inventing' of the narrative, particularly where 'memories evoked could be highly emotive' (p335).

Bohlin & Brandt (2014) also looked at the guide narrative but in relation to digital guides produced at four heritage sites in Sweden. The four locations were: Falun near Stockholm (a World Heritage site); the old industrial town of Avesta; Molndals Museum, outside Gothenburg and Vitlycke World Heritage site, north of Gothenburg. The research analysed the content of the narratives used in each of the digital guides in relation to four dimensions: 'meta-narrative', 'power structure', 'authenticity' and 'interpretation' (p6) through the observation of visitors, transcription and a qualitative text analysis. The way in which each of these dimensions was presented through the guide itself was also analysed. The results suggested that a linear view of the historical development of each site was commonly adopted (p10), and whilst the narrative in some guides focused on people or even individuals, in others, the site and its wider influence provided the focus (p13). It was also noted that some sites had multiple stories available for their visitors; others did not, although work was on-going to develop stories for different audiences. Authenticity came across strongly and was well grounded in the stories being used typically through a 'direct interaction with the artefacts' (p11).

In terms of interpretation, evidence for 'provocation', 'relating', 'revealing' and 'embodiment' were sought and explored (p13). It was noted that the narrative content had been written to engage with visitors but that all of the guides suffered in part from a lack of direct linkage between the narrative and the view or object (p11). It was therefore suggested that the developer must know what can be seen on the site at each main point in the narrative's storyline. The findings broadly suggested that the narrative at a particular location should be limited to three minutes but that movement at the location should be encouraged and could be used to extend the stay (p12). In conclusion, the study recommended that the digital guide should include 10 stops and last ideally 30 minutes but that this could be extended to 40-45 minutes (p12).

For visitors, being able to replay or fast forward elements of the narrative was also identified as being valuable. Co-creation with visitors was also mentioned with the idea of them asking questions and contributing to changes or amendments to the narrative which it was suggested could provide a basis for a 'range of alternative and tailor-made narratives' (p14).

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

References

Bohlin, M. & Brandt, D. (2014) Creating tourist experiences by interpreting places using digital guides. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 9(1), 1-17.

Quinn, B. & Ryan, T. (2016) Tour guides and the mediation of difficult memories: the case of Dublin Castle, Ireland. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(4), 322-337.

INTERPETING CATHEDRALS

York Minster Revealed

The great cathedrals are some of our finest and best loved historic buildings, beautiful structures that everyone should be encouraged to visit, appreciate and enjoy. Of course they are not museums or simply heritage sites as such, although they have an element of both about them. Cathedrals are multi-purpose working environments that serve a number of everyday functions as well as having a vital spiritual and symbolic place in our cultural heritage.

Screens, exhibition panels and a/v presentations in a cathedral are often intrusive, clashing with the aesthetics and the contemplative nature of a quiet space which may already be cluttered with stacking chairs and other equipment. These are busy and crowded places. Sightseeing visitors will always want tours and access at the same time that church services and other activities are taking place. They are working buildings with conflicting missions and priorities.

Now that many cathedrals charge admission, visitors quite reasonably expect to be treated like paying customers and be offered an appropriate 'visitor experience' on a par with a good museum, gallery or heritage attraction. This could range from a personal welcome and guided or audio tour to a full scale exhibition. Facilities like accessible toilets, an attractive café and a good shop have become essential, and not just desirable extras. Shouldn't well designed interpretation and display always feature in the mix as well?

Cathedrals have not generally been very good at this, and are way behind the best that museums, galleries, the National Trust and English Heritage offer. I always enjoy visiting a cathedral, but am often disappointed at the poor quality of their presentation. Having to buy a guidebook and read up afterwards, which is what it often amounts to if there is no guided tour, is really not good enough. A tour, if one is available, does not suit everybody, and will always depend on the quality of an individual guide. As for displays, I am not really interested in hearing about the outreach and community activities of the church but I do want to have its history and architecture explained on-site. Unfortunately, that is not usually what a cathedral seems to want to talk to me about. So what is the way forward here?

I found a partial answer on a recent visit to York Minster, where a five year Heritage Lottery Funded project called *York Minster Revealed* has included extensive new interactive and multimedia galleries in the East End, Undercroft and Treasury. These are without doubt the best interpretive displays I have seen in a cathedral anywhere and should be a benchmark for others to follow.

> *Now that many cathedrals charge admission visitors quite reasonably expect to be treated like paying customers and be offered an appropriate 'visitor experience' on a par with a good museum, gallery or heritage attraction.*

The designers have made creative use of a difficult, winding sub-surface space that is broken up by massive concrete and steel support blocks installed in the 1970s when it looked as though the whole building was in danger of collapse.

The rather dull 1980s exhibition here has been replaced with new displays explaining the Roman structures found under the site, the development of the Minster over time and its many current activities. There is excellent use of images and audio-visuals, a minimum of text, selective incorporation of historic objects and documents, and various hands-on display features. To my surprise I was even gripped by a well presented explanation of how liturgical objects and clothing are used, and the symbolism of their decoration, which could have been deadly to a non-believer like me.

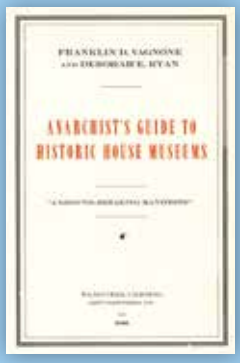
Unfortunately the well-thought-through below ground interpretation scheme at York completely unravels on the main cathedral floor. The principal visitor entrance to the Minster has been inexplicably relocated from the east to the west end doors of the building. This means that the pay desk and reception area is now as far as it can be from the Undercroft, which is where every visit should really begin. The new reception space is uninviting, full of strident backlit pink panels announcing too many pay options to choose from. After passing the clumsily positioned pay tills there is a confusing welcome but no interpretion or labelling around the main cathedral floor. Visitors are left to wander round with no suggested route or guidance.

York Minster has taken a giant leap forward but stumbled half a pace back in its overall interpretive scheme. Smaller cathedrals like Gloucester and Bath are already snapping at York's heels with their own HLF projects but it seems there is no straightforward blueprint for success in this. Nobody has fully cracked it yet.

Oliver Green is a museum and heritage professional both as a curator, historian, writer, lecturer and manager.

ANARCHIST'S GUIDE TO HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS

Franklin Vagnone and Deborah Ryan
Left Coast Press, 2015



With such a provocative word as 'anarchist' in the title, it is no surprise that this book confronts current normative ways of managing and presenting historic houses. The authors want to overturn existing practice to improve the visitor experience and financial sustainability of historic houses. However, the title *Anarchist* could be replaced by *Imaginative*.

The book is premised on five stimulating critiques of the way historic houses are managed in the USA, which resonates with heritage management elsewhere, including the UK and Ireland. Solutions are organised by five themes – community, communications, experience, collections/environment, shelter. Each theme contains a series of 'rants' from practitioners, followed by evidence of what the authors deem bad and good practice, then a set of 'therefores' for property managers to do. Through a guidebook approach, the authors aim to convert 'emotionless and dry' heritage sites into more attractive, engaging and relevant visitor experiences, with greater community use.

While the direct and provocative style has been both popular and controversial with American curators, the critiques and solutions are grist to the interpreter's mill. They are about shifting from presentation of historical information to interpretation of lived-in spaces, from forcing visitors on a linear path past dressed room sets to enabling visitor-led explorations, from curating houses as museums, to creating venues for emotive people-based stories.

Anarchist's Guide is a thought-provoking, affirmative reading for interpreters, essential for property managers. I can think of some properties that do some of what is recommended here, and others that don't but should.

Bill Bevan
Chair, AHI

Typology

And my favourite interpretive device is...

the object label!

Despite the explosion in technologies, object labels are still the most flexible interpretive tool we possess, declares Graham Black.

I have been working in or with museums for over forty years. In that time, the tools available for us to engage and enthral museum visitors have been transformed. Right now we are living through an explosion in technologies that allows people on the one hand, to connect globally, and on the other to personalise their experiences to meet their own needs.

The oldest tool?

According to Wikipedia (!) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum_label), the first known 'museum labels' in a museum are from the Ennigaldi-Nanna's museum in Mesopotamia originally dating to circa 530 BCE. The 'museum labels' of the much older items found in the museum were in three different languages on clay cylinders [1].

The most flexible?

The prime responsibility of the label is to engage and excite visitors with objects that are normally right in front of them. You still get the occasional pedant who uses the label to say 'Pot, 15th century' and give you an accession number. But, really, the world is your oyster. This is your chance to write literary masterpieces in 25 – 50 words, in whatever style you think works best.

What do our audiences want to know about? Why not be a friendly companion? Read this description by Judy Rand, my all-time favourite label writer [2]:

> Imagine you're a first-time visitor.
> Wouldn't it be great to go through the museum with an insider?
> Someone at your elbow, someone friendly, who knew the inside story.
> Who could answer your questions.
> Point out things you might not notice.
> And know when to stop talking and be quiet.

Or how about using riddles to send visitors on an object hunt through the galleries?

> I may be bold, my armour is black.
> I carry a sword upon my back.
> I fight for Japan, day and night,
> In hopes of chasing enemies out of sight.
> I wear a mask on my face,
> With some string held in place.
> I am a warrior, big and bright.
> Who am I? You guessed right.
>
> DENVER ART MUSEUM

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum_label; Casey, Wilson (2009) *Firsts: Origins of Everyday Things That Changed the World*, Penguin; Woolley, Leonard (1982) *Ur "of the Chaldees": the final account, Excavations at Ur*, Herbert Press

2 Judy Rand (u/d) *Adventures in Label Land*, www.familylearningforum.org/images/presentation-rand-11-15-10.pdf

Display cases with labels developed by local children, V&A Museum of Childhood.

Can you work out exactly what families will want to know – and respond to parental panic – by highlighting exactly the right content at exactly the right moment to answer a child's question? Can you write text that works perfectly when read out loud to a youngster? Or will your words fire children's imaginations, putting them on board your warship in 1812:

> Do you get more than 4 hours of sleep at a time?
> Not if you are a sailor in 1812!
> Can you nap in your hammock during the day?
> No, off-duty sailors have to curl up on the wooden deck.
> Do you like to sleep on your stomach? A sailor's life may not be for you.
>
> *A SAILOR'S LIFE?* USS CONSTITUTION, BOSTON

Or perhaps you can scare your audience witless, like this label attached to a small print of a strangely rounded orange figure:

> '... you can just hear it in your head saying things like 'I love you' and 'be my friend'.
> Then you decide to take it home and hang it on your wall.
> Every time you pass by, it seems to have moved a little.
> Then your pet rabbit Bubbles goes missing...'
> 'It's giving me the Creeps!'
>
> ART FROM THE LONGWOOD CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS PERMANENT COLLECTION THAT SCARES THE STAFF.

How about an intervention by artists Christina Davis and Jen Bervin to get imaginations flowing at Harvard Museum of Natural History?

> This object has been temporarily removed as we revise its facial expression, which was deemed zoologically improbable and/or terrifying to small children.

See this label and others at: http://museumsaskew.com/2011/11/20/this-exhibit-is-temporarily-awesome/

My most moving object label moment: watching Bangladeshi origin children from a primary school in Bethnal Green proudly showing off to their parents the labels they had written and installed at the V&A Museum of Childhood.

What makes a great label? Beverley Serrell, author of *Exhibit Labels*, once wrote:

'I want the label to flow easily from beginning to end, and to leave me with a sense of completion and satisfaction. I want to be glad I took the time to read it, that it was worthwhile.'

My chief advice. Give yourself time – too many labels are written at the last minute. Start with the audience – what will they want to know and how can you get them to look at the object more closely? Write the label with the object in front of you. Enjoy writing it.

Professor Graham Black is a Fellow of AHI. He describes himself as both a practitioner and an academic and believes this combination strengthens his work in both fields.

Benchmark Project

Game on:

Using technologies to engage young people with the historic environment

Jim Mitchell and Lawrence Shaw explain how a recent project used computer gaming and 3D modelling to successfully attract new audiences to the New Forest's heritage.

Shedding new light on the New Forest

The Verderers of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship scheme is the largest agri-environment scheme currently taking place within in the United Kingdom. As part of this scheme, archaeologists are undertaking a 10-year endeavour to discover, record and interpret the lost and forgotten heritage of the New Forest. Archaeologists and local volunteers have used a detailed remote sensing technique known as Lidar (light detection and ranging) to record thousands of archaeological features ranging in time from the Bronze Age to the Second World War. Crucially this technique penetrates the tree canopy and maps the ground below in three dimensions, providing a glimpse into what is hidden beneath the ancient New Forest woodlands.

Citizen science

Through the use of tablet devices and the utilisation of open source mobile applications such as FieldTrip GB and Google Earth, local volunteers and enthusiasts have been trained to undertake the field survey required to verify all features identified within the Lidar data. Whilst also improving the quality of data gathered during the fieldwork, this approach has helped to develop a citizen science aspect of the project and engage a younger generation of volunteers, through the lure of 'gadgets' and 'tech'. As a result of the approach taken by the project, over 450 volunteer survey days were recorded during the first three years, which included the participation of youth groups such as the cub scouts. The development of innovative web pages that allow the public and researchers to explore the Lidar data from the comfort of their own home also helped to fuel interest in the project further and increase participation.

Sharing discoveries

In September 2015, we produced a four-month exhibition highlighting the work of the first five years of the project. The exhibition was deliberately produced to target a younger audience (8-24) and staff looked to utilise new technologies to bring the Lidar data to life and make the exhibition as engaging as possible. Themes focussed on the process and excitement of discovery, rather than interpreting the actual finds and historic sites.

Individual exhibits included:

- A 46" multi touch table which allowed users to identify archaeological sites found within Lidar data
- Virtual reconstructions of archaeological sites found within the New Forest on tablet devices, created within Unreal Gaming Engine
- Tactile 3D printed archaeological sites reconstructed using the 3D Lidar data.
- An interactive light box which showed how Lidar data processing is undertaken to reveal the archaeological features
- Objects loaned from Ordnance Survey related to historic survey techniques used before the development of Lidar

The exhibition attracted 19,890 people and feedback was given in the form of a visitors' book, as well as observing how people used the exhibits to inform future work.

> *'My son really loved coming to the Digi Arc weekend and seeing all the laser mapping images and the local landmarks you had created in Minecraft. He has been inspired to look online at the laser mapping images for walks in the Forest and create some more historical buildings in Minecraft, possibly starting with our house!'*
>
> (QUOTE RECEIVED AS FEEDBACK FROM A NEW FOREST DIGI ARCH WEEKEND).

Minecraft re-construction of Hurst Castle on touch table

3D Lidar image of Whitsbury Iron Age hillfort with trees still in place

Local school child undertaking the AR trail within the exhibition

Minecraft and more

We used the exhibition as a springboard to run events where staff and volunteers could engage further with visitors. The most successful of these was the 'New Forest Digi Arch Weekend', highlighting the gaming elements of the exhibition. As part of this we used the interest in the game Minecraft among our target audience to attract them to attend. Activities included:

- A competition where participants re-created archaeological sites discovered in the New Forest with Minecraft
- Virtual tours of archaeological sites through Oculus Rift goggles and Google Cardboard
- Interactive virtual 3D models of shipwrecks
- Learning how to use 3D laser scanning equipment to record local historic buildings
- A 3D modelling master class introducing open source software Trimble Sketchup
- An Augmented Reality (AR) archaeology trail to bring the exhibition panels to life and could be undertaken on visitors' personal mobile devices
- The use of tablet devices and Quiver AR app to design and animate virtual Lidar plane

With over 800 people attending across the weekend, it was clear that the approach really caught the public imagination. Feedback from participants has indicated that it has encouraged children and young people to explore the natural and historic environment of the New Forest further. The success of the approach taken for both this event and the exhibition was further indicated in January 2016, when DEFRA included it as a case study during a review of the release of Environment Agency open Lidar data and the reformation of DEFRA.

The project team were very pleased with the level of engagement and the new audiences drawn to the exhibition. Part of its success was effectively using social media and digital communication to raise awareness prior to the event. #Minecraft was an especially effective hashtag for this. Interaction on social media resulted in many visitors arriving prepared with their own devices ready to use the AR trail (there were some devices available to borrow for others).

We are keen to develop future opportunities to combine technology with natural and cultural heritage and continue to engage new audiences with National Parks and the work to protect and enhance them.

Jim Mitchell is Interpretation Officer for the New Forest National Park Authority and an AHI Trustee. Lawrence Shaw is Heritage Data and Mapping Officer for the New Forest National Park Authority.

Digital Update

HOW EXPERIENCE DESIGN BENEFITS MUSEUMS

Nick Cristea explains how the tools and processes of the user experience designer can be extended to anticipate and resolve the challenges of interpretive design, and realise a successful visitor-centred design philosophy.

Atmosphere, Science Museum, London

With the availability of cheap and powerful technology to deliver interpretation, visitors are accustomed to encountering multi-screen audio-visual experiences and engaging with myriad digital interactives, as they navigate an exhibition. However, with each new form of engagement and 'digital opportunity' there arises an increase in curatorial complexity. Ensuring a seamless experience through artefacts, exhibits and interpretation and delivering the interpretation objectives in an educational and entertaining manner for every visitor can only be done with a considered strategy upfront.

Common challenges, tools and processes

Whilst there are of course many spatial, technical, and budgetary challenges to overcome within every exhibition design project, this article focuses on those that originate with the diversity of visitors, the difference in their needs, interests and experience, and the unpredictable behaviour that this results in. Shaping the solution with an understanding of these variables from the outset eliminates many unknowns and their inherent risks.

Designing around visitors with *Pen Portraits*

Personas, otherwise known as *Pen Portraits*, are a commonly used tool in *user experience design* (known as a UX) that allow the project team to think objectively about the exhibition and design solutions from the perspective of different visitor types. Since group interaction is a significant variant from 'pureplay' interface design, we use a set of group personas that begin with a couple and scale up to a full classroom.

Creating a balanced experience with *Experience Profiles*

In parallel, we use a tool known as an *Experience Profile* to describe in detail the type of experience that each artefact, exhibit, or piece for interpretation will deliver for that user. The profile is derived from the use of experience sliders that allow us to quickly and consistently describe features, and in so doing compare everything side by side. By laying out these experience profiles in different sequences, we can quickly test out the variety, rhythm and balance of alternative visitor journeys with the aim of creating a solution that will surprise and delight everyone.

Pulling it all together with *Visitor Journeys*

Visitor Journeys is a tool commonly used in both interface and service design. Deployed within museums, it plays a critical role in helping to envisage different scenarios in which people will experience the interpretive narrative within the exhibition. Through a number of workshops, and using the flow and dwell studies from the architects and the floorplans and elevations of the physical spaces, different journeys are sketched out for each *Pen Portrait*.

By ensuring that we consider different times of the day and different days of the week, we can imagine how people will behave during busy or quiet times, what they will see as they move around, and how they are likely to interact as a visiting group as they do so.

Ancient Lives, New Discoveries, British Museum

With this methodology, countless different layout variations for exhibits and interpretation can quickly and easily be hypothesised. It is quick and easy to move things around to achieve a better balance, a more interesting rhythm and a more compelling flow through the story for different visitor types. In addition, it becomes a lot clearer where and how we need to signpost the spaces to reinforce the narratives as well as lead visitors.

Putting it into practice

There are plenty of good books and resources on the internet that cover the principles and practices of User Experience Design, often also known as Service Design, that allow project teams to start putting in place the basics of a visitor-centred design methodology.

We have also collated our experience from the last 14 years into a more specific version of these principles for the design of museums and exhibitions which will be made freely available very soon. Get in touch if you are interested in receiving a copy.

Ancient Lives, New Discoveries, British Museum

Nick Cristea is a co-founder of AllofUs, an Interactive Design Studio that has worked with Science Museum, British Museum, NHM, V&A and many others. nick@allofus.com
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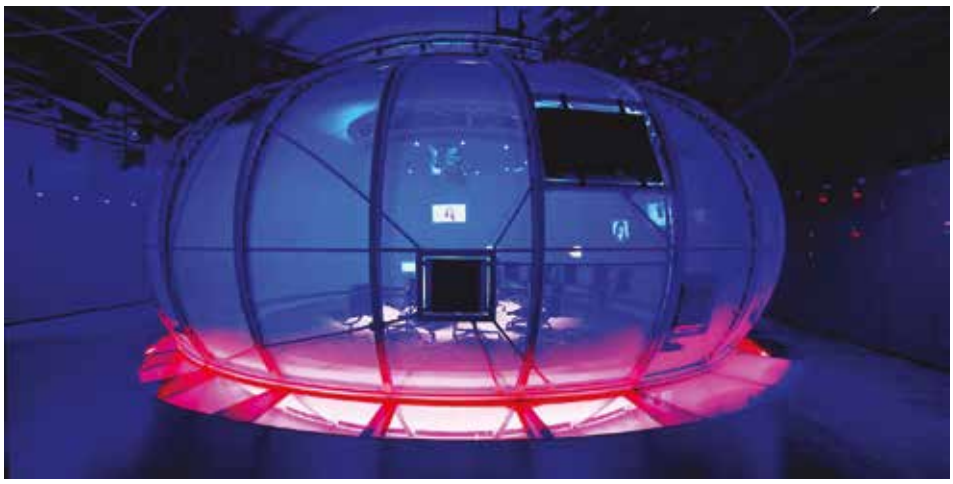
Atmosphere, Science Museum, London
Ancient Lives, New Discoveries, British Museum

In conversation with...

CHRIS CAWTE

Chris Cawte is the Founder and Director of DesignPM, a specialist company that works with museums and visitor centres worldwide. He gives Rachel Teskey his take on the process of developing new projects and on the future of interpretation.

Mishkat Interactive Center for Atomic & Renewable Energy, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



Lucent Technologies, Centre of Excellence, Nuremberg, MET Studio Design

Could you explain your role?

As time goes by I seem to find it more and more difficult to sum up the work that I do. On the face of it, maybe it looks very straightforward, but in truth it varies a great deal. Fundamentally we're in the business of delivering projects. We are involved from the very early stages right the way through to opening. This role is really about gluing together all the component parts – the client, the designers, the subject specialists, the contractors, the whole lot. It's about understanding their individual needs and roles, making sure that everyone is on the same track and always acting as a champion for the project. It's not what's best for me, for the designers, or even for the client – it's what's best for the project.

And how does your work interface with the work of the interpretation specialists?

Our role is distilling what's required and expressing it very clearly to all parties. Inevitably this starts with the brief. Everyone will remember a project back in college, when you started with a brief, and maybe a week later you looked back at it, realised you were answering a slightly different question and had to remind yourself what the original intention was. I find I have to be just as wary now, 35 years later! It's very easy to go off course if you don't have a clear brief that is clearly expressed. And in terms of interpretation, the content really is at the core of the brief and the starting point for any project.

So the content plays an important role in your work?

Content is fundamental to all interpretation projects. Looking at it from the bottom up, all decisions stem from the content and how best to communicate it. There's an overarching ambition for the project from the client, which leads to a series of fundamental aims. This gets broken down into a project-wide narrative and sub-narratives; and coursing through all of that is the content. From a project management point of view, we are constantly looking at the content requirements: the content is what's ultimately delivered to visitors, so it informs everything we do.

What makes for a good relationship between external consultants like yourself and the client team?

The working relationship with the client can make all the difference to a project. The ability to have an open dialogue, to make decisions quickly and having trust in our work is vital. With that you can really achieve something. We worked on a new science centre in Saudi Arabia, where the client wanted to open – from a blank sheet of paper – within nine months. The building was a concrete shell when we started. But with that dialogue and a fantastic working relationship, we got as close as possible to the client's vision: a 4,500 m² exhibition with about 80 exhibits. Although we did it in ten months rather than nine! And we're still in touch with that client now, talking about further collaboration.

Are the expectations of cultural projects changing? Are new technologies and increasingly complex design affecting the way you work?

Definitely. I feel technology is catching up with the ambition of designers, so we need to be aware of the changing limits of what's possible and what's viable. But we've always tried to push the boundaries. I worked on a project in Nuremburg about fifteen years ago, creating a VIP visitor experience for a telecommunications company. They wanted something that had never been seen before, and we created something that even now, I think, stands up and looks fantastic.

Sometimes, though, there's too much focus on what technology can do as a whizz-bang feature, rather than what's the best and most direct way of articulating the content to our visitors. Making the technology and design more complicated than it needs to be can create a disjoint between the fundamental intention from the content and interpretation side, and what's actually delivered to the audience. I would hope that, over the coming years, we don't lose sight of the fundamentals of exhibition design and avoid the mistake of using technology for its own sake.

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

Debate

I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want...

Emma Courtney asks whether audiences really know what they want, or is it our job to show them?

Henry Ford famously said, 'If I'd asked the people what they want they'd have said faster horses.' Steve Jobs said, 'A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them.' I don't think anyone's going to argue that Ford and Jobs didn't know a thing or two about engaging people and capturing imaginations. So why on earth do we bother spending such a lot of time and money consulting audiences about interpretation?

The majority of Joe Public talk about interpretation in the comfortable context of audio guides, tours, text panels and printed guides. Is it wise to take strategic, directional advice on board from a public with limited perspective on what a seasoned interpreter does day in, day out? If audiences don't have the 360 degree view on the heritage in question or the expertise in interpretation what chance have they of articulating what will transform their understanding and experience of a visit? As Ford and Jobs have advocated, perhaps interpretation specialists need to ignore the audience altogether. Perhaps it's time to trust your own expert judgement in developing and delivering channels of engagement that the public will love, even if they don't yet know it.

I have a confession before I go any further. I'm not an interpretation specialist. However, a significant amount of the audience research I do involves heritage interpretation as an engagement tool. And I'm pretty lucky to have been involved with some of the most exciting interpretation development out there. Courtney Consulting was recently contracted to develop an audience evaluation framework for some pioneering interpretation work with Historic Royal Palaces (see also p23). Tim Powell, HRP's inspiring Digital Producer has the ambitious and exciting task of delivering The Lost Palace of Whitehall project.

Whitehall was once the largest palace in Europe, comprising 1,500-plus rooms over 23 acres – larger than Versailles or the Vatican. It was the main residence of British monarchs from the 1530s until it was destroyed by fire in 1698. Banqueting House is the sole surviving part. Numerous nation-changing events happened within Banqueting House; the execution of Charles I; births, deaths and marriages of Henry VIII; Stuart mistresses (and male 'favourites'); several Shakespearean premieres; the collection of art by Rubens, Michelangelo, Holbein, Raphael and Da Vinci; and many more. Whitehall's status as the seat of political power today is directly linked to these origins of royal power. And all of these stories are currently invisible in one of the most iconic and visited areas of London.

The aim of the Lost Palace project is to take audiences out onto the streets discovering 'history where it happened'. From an interpretation perspective the challenge pivots on three lynchpins that must come together seamlessly; storytelling, technology and practical logistics. HRP started the ball rolling with an open call for an experimental R&D round of funding, calling upon creatives from a diverse range of backgrounds from tech programmers to theatre producers to magicians to traditional interpretation developers. Five exciting proposals addressing the Lost Palace challenge were chosen for investment to develop their interpretation prototype further.

We already knew that audiences wouldn't have experienced anything quite like what they were going to test. The challenge was to facilitate a meaningful conversation between the audiences (HRP target audience segments including families), the designers and HRP towards developing one or more outstanding interpretation tools. To meet the challenge and ensure the audience response was as authentic as possible we engaged a videographer (the camera never lies!) and began by simply observing real life responses in real time to the prototypes being tested. This ethnographic approach rooted the audience response in direct experience and emotion and provided a powerful spring board for the follow-up quantitative and qualitative feedback.

'Heart of a King', created by interaction designers Chomko & Rosier, was one of the prototypes chosen for further testing and development. 'Heart of a King' guides visitors through the actual steps of Charles I's final walk before his execution, using the heartbeat of Charles himself. Beginning at St James' Palace, each user holds the smooth wooden device that softly beats a human heartbeat – a haptic object. Following the direction when the heart beats strongest, the user discovers the path he walked on his final journey and the events that happened along the way. As they approach Banqueting House, the heartbeat grows in intensity and speed, until they locate the site of his execution, where it dramatically beats no more.

When you hold this 'heart' in your hand it's a pretty amazing piece of kit. Observing audiences testing the prototype was also pretty amazing. People held that beating heart carefully and protectively. They tuned out of today and connected deeply with history where it happened. We soon realised that we needed to involve local law enforcement to advise them of the nature of our experiment around the area. What we didn't realise was how such a high security presence would impact on our visitors' perceptions of their own behaviour. Interestingly this was less pronounced when groups such as families and friends tested the experience. However, individual adults walking around with the 'King's Heart' perceived themselves as a possible threat to others around them who didn't know what they were doing. A genius idea but had we not had these enlightening discussions and observations HRP could have spent a lot of time and money on something that was brilliant in theory but needed further thinking through in practice.

Testing for The Lost Palace project

The point is that until we involved the target audiences this information lay within that magical quadrant of the Johari's window model – the stuff we didn't know we didn't know. Discovering that magic is simply impossible without a dual conversation between the creators and those you're creating for.

So we've come full circle. Do audiences really know what they want from interpretation or is it your job to show them? In 2014 Apple spent $6.04bn (yes billion) dollars on research and development. Agreed, customers may not have seen the iPhone or Apple Watch coming but when it came they played an enormous role in making sure those products were the absolute best that they could be. Through investing in customer feedback, listening and taking that advice on board Apple have created one of the world's most successful companies.

There is no doubt that you as heritage professionals are the experts when it comes to heritage interpretation. Like Ford and Jobs you have the power to push boundaries and pioneer new ways to connect past and present, people and places. A typical heritage attraction visitor is unlikely to have the semantics to articulate the exact features or specifications of advanced interpretation tools and techniques. However, only your visitors can articulate how your work makes them feel, learn and connect with the heritage involved and each other. If you don't seek that insight out, asking the right questions in the right way at the right time, your brilliant idea may actually be no better than a faster horse.

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The majority of Joe Public talk about interpretation in the comfortable context of audio guides, tours, text panels and printed guides.

Empathy

Empathy, deviance and irony

Errol Francis debates the question about the extent to which concepts of empathy may be useful in arts and heritage curatorial strategies to engage audiences with objects and subjects.

This essay aims to question how concepts of empathy operate in arts and heritage curatorial strategies. After briefly sketching the complex field of empathy studies I discuss two artworks that I believe create empathy though strategies of irony, deviance and humour in order to question the invocation of empathy as an objective in art and heritage education, and interpretation. I conclude by asking questions about the limits of empathy as a curatorial strategy and how we might engage with the concept without resorting to simplistic or crude notions of identification with the experience of others.

Definitions

The concept of empathy derives from a translation of the word *Einfühlung* which appeared in German philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century – a description of how aesthetic appreciation involves a projection of the self into the object of beauty [1]. From its earliest formulation empathy is concerned with the relation between subject and object. Philosopher Robert Vischer argued that 'artworks and nature manifest themselves as emotional beings that can be felt with empathy'[2]. Wilhelm Worringer's 1908 study of abstraction, [3] as a universal human tendency associated with anxiety and crisis, argues that empathy is its antithesis in which artistic responses to the world are realistic or naturalistic. As such Worringer's treatise is among those early philosophical enquiries that associates the concept of empathy not only with aesthetics but with psychological affinity and subjectivity.

The theory of empathy is thus generally about an animated identification with an object and the concept gradually migrates into other disciplines, most notably psychotherapy [4], but also anthropology and now even museum studies and design. In much of the characterisations by these disciplines empathy is depicted as mainly emotional or subjective. But empathy can be sub-divided into different levels or modalities such as: cognitive, taking another's perspective; emotional, the possibility to actually feel what someone else is feeling; and compassionate, a motivation to act on the basis of someone else's position [5]. It has been suggested that empathy necessarily involves taking sides [6] which implies both emotional involvement as well as cognition and this is what Bertolt Brecht set out to control in formulating his concept of theatrical alienation, stating that for an actor

> 'to look at himself is for the performer an artful and artistic act of self-estrangement. Any empathy on the spectator's part is thereby prevented from becoming total, that is, from being a complete self-surrender. An admirable distance from the events portrayed is achieved [7]'.

Brecht is arguing for a type of engagement with an audience that does not involve complete emotional identification such that intellectual analysis is compromised; he wants us to think. This is quite a different conception of empathy from that which seeks to dissolve the difference between one and the other or between subject and object.

It has now become commonplace for museums and heritage sites to represent themselves as spaces of empathy to engage audiences with historical subjects that are in some way contested: 'Museums enhance understanding between communities, helping people to empathise with others' [8]. This concern about empathy seems to arise from anxieties around how to more effectively engage audiences. Yet there is a risk here that 'to make suffering visible and intelligible… in making the other's suffering one's own, that suffering is occluded by the other's erasure' [9].

The transatlantic slave trade is such a subject that is often mediated by 'the discourse of empathy, sympathy and sentiment' [10] and indeed accompanied by an absence of the other. However Jill Bennett [11] argues that it is possible to go beyond what Bertolt Brecht called 'crude empathy'. There can be a more complex engagement with trauma and empathy by contemporary artists that Bennett talks about which does not seek to 'make suffering visible and intelligible' or the kind of 'self-surrender' to which Brecht referred where there might not have even been an intention to create empathy in the first place. Below I would like to discuss two artworks (one visual and the other musical) in which I was involved in their commissioning and which I believe engage with two particular dimensions which are not normally associated with empathy, those of: deviance and irony: Yinka Shonibare's 2007 National Gallery installation *Colonel Tarleton and Mrs Oswald Shooting* and the *Anxiety Fanfare and Variations* composed by Jocelyn Pook in 2014.

Deviant empathy

Shonibare's commission occurred during the 2007 Bicentenary of the Parliamentary Abolition of the Slave Trade that was marked by nearly every UK museum [12] with exhibitions aiming to engage audiences with empathy [13]. Shonibare was commissioned by the National Gallery to work with their collection as the museum's contribution to the Bicentenary entitled 'Scratch the Surface' curated by Jonah Albert and Colin Wiggins, and the artist's response is an example of how empathy was achieved without explicitly setting out to do so but by upsetting the expectation that the marking of the abolition of a system of atrocity should involve any kind of attempt to make suffering visible and intelligible.

Shonibare removed two portraits that normally hang in the National Gallery's Barry Room: Johann Zoffany's (1763) *Mrs Oswald* and Joshua Reynolds' (1782) *Colonel Tarleton*. Banastre Tarleton, painted by Reynolds in military attire, was known for his ruthlessness in the American War of Independence, was the son of Liverpool slave trader John Tarleton, eventually becoming MP for Liverpool and was an outspoken opponent of the abolition of slavery. Mrs Oswald was married to Richard Oswald, a wealthy Scottish landowner, and was daughter of Alexander Ramsay, a super-rich plantation owner in Jamaica [14].

Upon encountering the installation we first of all wonder why the paintings have been removed – a mischievous gesture that involved their relocation to another room where wall texts gave background information on the sitters in the portraits and their links with the transatlantic slave trade. Back in the Barry Room we are left with the male and female figures in 18th century attire made with Shonibare's trademark Dutch wax 'African' prints, a fabric whose design and production is a signifier for European colonialism and a kind of cultural hybridity. The two headless mannequins are in the act of shooting a pheasant which is depicted in the roof of the gallery in the process of being hit by the shot and falling from the sky.

Instead of asking the spectator to empathise directly with particular horrors and the violence of human slavery, in which both Tarleton and Oswald were implicated, we are asked to look at a form of sport that involves killing animals. Yet there is something humorous about the whole ensemble. How absurd that a man and woman dressed in African batik fabrics are shooting a pheasant in the middle of a space devoted to quiet aesthetic contemplation. Now we are laughing in a situation that demands empathy. The artist has got us to feel the pleasure involved in some forms of cruelty and violence so we are now empathising with perpetrators of atrocity.

Shonibare had used headless mannequins a number of times in a hilarious manner, such as in his 2001 installation after Fragonard's painting *The Swing* with its upstaging of aristocratic frivolity and decadence. But here again is a reference to decapitation that adds dark humour and seduces the spectator into a deviant pleasure around a particular form of violence towards the aristocracy: execution by decapitation that is here 'intrinsically violent but never made

Anxiety Fanfare and Variations *in rehearsal, 2015. Tête à Tête Opera Festival*

Lore Lixenberg and George Ikediashi

graphic' [15]. If Shonibare is 'moving audiences politically by aesthetic means' [16] he does so by engaging us in subversive and deviant gestures that force us to think through the uncomfortable links between beauty, violence and pleasure.

Ironic empathy

As part of the Anxiety Arts Festival London 2014 composer Jocelyn Pook was commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation to write a new piece of music. In contrast to the 2007 Bicentennial there was no overarching national framing of empathy but there was a curatorial desire to engage a wide audience with the theme of anxiety in the making and performance of a new work. Music, with its tendency to abstraction, was thought to be an ideal medium in which to explore mental illness, an experience that is often beyond narrative or visualisation. Anxiety was chosen as a theme because of its widespread prevalence and its connection with the history of modernism in art [17]. Pook's approach to the commission was based on a personal awareness of mental illness: the experience of her great-aunt who was severely disturbed by the death in action of her brother in the First World War [18].

Pook was asked write a new piece of music that would specifically address contemporary anxiety in the form of a fanfare, replacing the usual brass instrumentation with human voices. The commission stipulated a choral element specifically for an amateur choir to perform alongside a professional ensemble and soloists. It was the decision to write for a choir of people with personal experience of mental health issues (the Mind and Soul Choir based at the Maudsley Hospital) that engaged the audience with the experience of mental illness. The music stretches the abilities of the choir and asks them to perform as equals beside professional soloists and it is this that engages the empathy of the audience, not the depiction of psychological trauma and distress.

The Anxiety Fanfare and Variations is a 26 minute song cycle written for the full range of solo voices with an ensemble of ten instrumentalists. Premièred at London's Wigmore Hall in 2014, a music venue which has been part of the classical musical heritage both nationally and internationally, the performance of the *Fanfare* was a radical experiment in taking participation and education activities which are not normally front of house and placing them literally centre-stage.

Pook asks the audience to regard anxiety as a subject for melodic tonality, humorous lyricism and irony, and in this sense it was postmodern in its use of sampling and references to popular music such as pop and blues. In the opening movement mostly written for the choir the *Hustle and Bustle* of everyday life is suggested by the sounds of trains and traffic and in the second, *Insomnia*, the mezzo soprano sings languidly about such daily chores as collecting the dry cleaning and taking the children to school.

The movement entitled *Waiting in the Wings* is about performance anxiety and the counter-tenor renders a virtuoso and very humorous account of a soloist preparing to go on stage that allows the audience to laugh at the absurdity of a condition that can actually be highly debilitating. Even *Bad Habits*, written for the bass soloist, makes fun at the childhood origins of his 'habits' or perhaps his neuroses. The only moment that attempts to replicate full-blown anxiety attack is *OMG*. Here the soprano describes going out shopping and then suddenly, with increasing shrillness, asks herself: 'Am I, am I, am I, am I, am I, am-I-am-I-am-I…having an existential crisis?' Yet it is the very shrillness of this coloratura movement, almost a send up in itself of a certain type of operatic melodrama that one cannot completely take seriously that engages the listener in an intense aural experience of heightened emotion.

Discussion

Empathy is a multi dimensional and complex engagement between subject and object that can be understood in more nuanced ways than simply attempting to make an other's experience one's own. The two artworks discussed here are intended to emphasise the limits of strategies of empathy where the objective is to put the spectator in the place of the other or to experience some kind of approximation of another reality or experience. The migration of the concept of empathy from its origin in aesthetics to fields such as anthropology and psychotherapy has often distorted and simplified its interpretation in areas such as heritage. A concept that was originally formulated to explain human responses to art seems to have acquired feeling before coming full circle to explain strategies of engaging audiences with heritage objects. Empathy has literally been subjected to subjectivity so that the qualities of contemplation and thought that should go with the encounter between subject and object are overlooked. The two artworks we have discussed show how contemporary artists have been experimenting with other ways of creating empathy in audiences, sometimes with mischievous, deviant or ironic strategies. Other effective dimensions such as humour or even as Brecht theorised, a degree of distance or 'alienation' can produce engagement with an audience that involves thinking and analysis rather than emotional enthralment. Most controversially, as Marcus Wood [19] has argued the possible connections between empathy and pleasure raise disturbing questions about how far feeling the pain of others is a desirable or ethically justifiable objective.

Errol Francis is an artist and curator, formerly artistic director of the Anxiety Arts Festival 2014, Acting Out Nottingham 2015 and is presently chief executive of Cultural Co-operation and curator in residence at the National Institute of Experimental Arts at the University of New South Wales.

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Empathy

Empathy in action at Historic Royal Palaces

Deborah Shaw explains how the Historic Royal Palaces are using performance and live interpretation to increase emotional engagement with visitors.

We are hardwired for empathy. Neuroscientists have discovered that, in common with other primates, we have 'mirror neurons' in our brains that fire up both when we perform an action ourselves and when we observe an action performed by someone else. These neurons 'mirror' the behaviour of the other, as though the observer themselves were acting. It's an evolutionary superpower, allowing us to instinctively understand what other people are experiencing not only by thinking, but by feeling it ourselves. And they appear to let us simulate the intentions and emotions behind those actions, not just the actions themselves.

Feeling our way

The word *Einfühlung* (meaning 'in-feeling' or 'feeling into') was first used in 1873 by German philosopher Robert Vischer, to define the human capacity to enter into a piece of art or literature, or to view an object and feel the emotions that the artist sought to inspire. The word 'empathy' first appeared in English in the early 1900s in a translation of Vischer's work. (See also p18.)

Empathy can be defined, then, as the ability to feel or imagine another person's emotional experience, whether it's the momentary flinch when you see someone stubbing their toe or the dawning sense of understanding someone's emotional state or point of view.

This is rich territory for heritage interpretation, as we seek ways into the human experience of people from the past.

Pitch perfect

Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin remains, for me, the most empathetic of museums.

I think it's because it continually forces you to connect with the experience of others, in a perfect balance between the cognitive and the emotive. Feelings of disorientation and powerlessness in a world out of kilter begin with the architecture, with its underground entrance, vertiginous, tilted walls and cavernous voids. The jumbled family possessions and photographs built into cases in the corridor walls evoke immediate empathy with the people who left them behind. The helplessness, fear and grief I felt, standing alone in one of the voids, amongst a pile of stones with primitive faces cut into them, staring up at a small chink of light in the sky, is a visceral memory nearly 20 years later.

The biggest shared traumatic memory project at Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) was in 2014, when we commissioned the Poppies Installation, *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* at the Tower of London, and captured the nation's imagination on the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War. Part public art, part commemoration, part tribute and part ritual, it gave people a physical place to bring and share their personal memories of lost family members. Thirty thousand volunteers helped us plant the ceramic poppies and hundreds gathered on Tower Hill each night to participate in the 'Last Post' ceremony, where names were read out of men and women from the Commonwealth killed at the Front, as nominated by their relatives in a weekly online ballot. In this art work, the ceramic poppies each represented a life. The scale and meaning of the whole endeavour struck a chord across the world, with over five million visitors to the installation and millions more commenting online; truly *Einfühlung* in action.

Shakespeare at Hampton Court

A volunteer helping to install Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red

Great stage sets of history

At Historic Royal Palaces, we are increasingly looking to dial up the opportunities for emotional engagement, creating experiences that enable a deeper level of understanding and insight into the lives of the people who lived in the greatest palaces ever built in Britain. Our Creative Programming and Interpretation team is made up of creative professionals with backgrounds in heritage, museums and the arts. The intersection of our combined skills makes for a rounded, imaginative and continually evolving signature style. We respond to the architecture of the palaces – some of the great stage sets of history – layering empathetic interpretive devices through evocative, sensory presentation of historic routes and the creation of ephemeral experiences within them. At Hampton Court Palace, the smell of wood smoke drifts across the courtyards from the Tudor kitchens and entices you in. There, you find our chefs using produce fresh from the kitchen garden to create feasts from original recipes.

On the Baroque side of the palace, you can pick up a 'smell map' and scratch and sniff your way from room to room. In the Queen's private apartments, the intimacy of the towel-draped bath tub, gentle sounds and the delicately-scented bath water combine for a moment to fold time in on itself, as you inhabit the sensory world of the bather.

Conjuring up emotion

Theatre is an art form where empathy is a stock-in-trade – the best writers and actors 'hold a mirror up to nature' allowing us to engage with the characters before us, sharing their emotions and seeing the world from their different individual perspectives. Over the past two years, we have used site-specific theatre, and brought in the highest production values of contemporary theatre (in writing, direction, acting, music and movement) to tell the stories of the people who lived at Hampton Court Palace, in a series of micro-plays written by playwright Elizabeth Kuti, who is a Chekhovian observer of human behaviour.

Last night I stood in the Queen's Drawing Room for the final rehearsal for the new season, surrounded by the florid cherubs and romanticised monarchs of Verrio's exquisite wall paintings, while in front of me the beautiful, bored Georgian court played cards, laughed and bickered, made assignations, shared confidences and stoked rivalries. Subliminally, as well as bringing the palace to life, the language, clothes and bearing of the actors make sense of the scale of the palace rooms and spaces.

Layering history

The night before, I witnessed Old Hamlet's ghost stalking the Great Hall and heard Shakespeare's words finding their perfect home amongst the high-vaulted Tudor architecture. Played out in front of me was a 'history where it happened' moment, where the Players' tale of regicide was performed for King Claudius and his Queen Gertrude, watched by King James I, who had not only honeymooned in Elsinore with his Danish Queen, but had himself lost his father to murder when a child, with his mother marrying the suspected murderer soon after.

These micro-plays also allow us to layer in the intangible history of the palace and to access a myriad of stories, 'democratising' and diversifying our interpretation by telling the stories of some of the people found only in the margins of history – from Henry VIII's black trumpeter to George I's Turkish servant and confidante and most of the women who lived at court, from Royal Consorts and mistresses to laundry maids.

At the Banqueting House this summer, we are playing with a mix of deep historical research, theatre, binaural sound and digital technology to create a ground-breaking adventure into the past on the streets of Whitehall, allowing visitors to experience life in the great Palace of Whitehall, which burned down in 1698 (see also p16). The layering of time and different realities is a step further into the empathetic imagination than we've ever been before. And this time, empathy is a two-way thing, as visitors test and trial the experience as it develops, allowing us to put ourselves in their shoes every step of the way.

Deborah Shaw joined Historic Royal Palaces as Head of Creative Programming and Interpretation in 2013. Prior to that she was Associate Director at the Royal Shakespeare Company and Director of the World Shakespeare Festival for London2012.

Empathy

Empathy, professionalism and cultural connections

Kerry Wilson argues that however it is constructed and practised, the ability to empathise with one another is arguably what makes us human.

> *"...empathy is at the heart of social happiness: to enquire about people's happiness is to welcome their views on the quality of their experiences – in specific domains such as health, relationships or work, or in life in general."*
>
> (Thin, 2012, pp. 24)

Empathy is regarded as the ultimate human virtue. In seeking to define empathy, there are two dimensions to consider: firstly, empathy is regarded as a cognitive or intellectual process, involving an imagined understanding of others and perspective-taking; secondly, empathy is considered to be an intuitive response based on emotional reaction and vicarious understanding of another's situation (Wilson and Train, 2008). However it is constructed and practised, the ability to empathise with one another is arguably what makes us human.

The right thing to do

In his study of social values and ethics, Sayer (2011) emphasises the cognition behind human virtues, arguing for example that qualities such as altruism and care require an attempt to understand the other, positioning them as a form of knowledge or 'truer ideas' about life. This is also represented in Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* – that being the capacity to contextually *know* the morally correct thing to do. This requires a developmental acquisition of both moral and intellectual virtues, via understanding, skills, training and practice (Stark, 2011, pp. 38).

Positioning empathy as a cognitive virtue brings attention to its value as a desirable professional attribute or skill. In studies of interactions between professionals and service users in health and criminal justice sectors for example, empathy is associated with better outcomes influenced by higher levels of user trust and confidence in the service (Flanagan *et al*, 2005; Norfolk, 2007; Sylvester *et al*, 2007). Harte and Dale (1995) rate empathy as an essential component and quality dimension of a professional service, and along with more tangible dimensions such as timeliness and reliability, empathy will often be rated and used to inform clients' continued use of a service.

Interpreters as mediator

Heritage and cultural sectors have come to regard the practice of empathy as a professional asset – and unique selling point (USP) – with regards to their relationship with audiences and extended communities of interest. This is especially true when considered in the context of socially responsive cultural practice, which seeks to complement and add value to the work of statutory health and social services. Recent work on new models of engagement with ageing for example, illustrates the value of museum spaces, collections and objects not just in reconnecting with the past, but in creating 'new narratives about ageing and caring' (Robertson, 2015). Heritage interpretation – or the role of the interpreter as a mediator between the public and the venue or collection – is essential in mobilising shared communal and interpretative repertoires of sense making and emotional affect (Wetherell, 2012). As a professional skill therefore, heritage interpretation has a significant role to play in creating and sustaining a culture of empathy in public life.

Heritage interpretation has a significant role to play in creating and sustaining a culture of empathy in public life

> *'The most important overarching change was that historians began to write seriously and with sympathy about the beliefs and behaviour of the mass of historical populations: they actually did, in an important sense, "give their hearts" to the people.'*
>
> **(Johnson, 1979, pp.58)**

The human dimension

The positioning of empathy as a USP for heritage and cultural sectors is driven by their connections with and relevance to human experience. Where many service sectors struggle to engage with diverse communities, museums are widely recognised for their ability to foster empathy amongst museum visitors for different cultural groups and experiences, through their authentic collections, artefacts and stories of 'real people' (Silverman, 2010). This inherent capacity to represent and engage diverse communities, and to be socially responsive and relevant, places the sector at a strategic advantage (Ocello, 2011).

This is perhaps best represented by the growing momentum behind museums and health and wellbeing in the UK. Alongside a developing evidence base on health and wellbeing outcomes for the sector, it is also mobilising itself via the formation of national advocacy and lobbying groups [1]. Research by Chatterjee and Noble (2013) offers a succinct overview of the health and wellbeing benefits offered by museums, illustrating the sector's contribution to health literacy and our understanding of societal influences, acting as a conduit between the environment and our inner selves, and encouraging an 'interrelationship between the individual and the wider determinants of health'.

A sense of trust

Pilgrim *et al* (2011: 41) discuss the relationship between trust and ontological security – that being the extent to which we *belong* to places and situations – and the relative implications for experiences of health care. The sense of trust and ontological security potentially enabled by museums and heritage organisations is a key attribute for mutually beneficial professional practice across cultural and health sectors. Empathy as a cultural intervention and USP for the sector therefore can provide the missing link between key policy concepts and their true lived experience. Concepts such as wellbeing, welfare, health, human rights and economic status are often used to 'assess people's conditions or resources' with scant reference to how people feel about or make sense of their own situation (Thin, 2012).

1 See for example the Arts Council England-funded National Alliance for Museums Health and Wellbeing: https://museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com/

Articulating professional value(s)

This creates real opportunities for museum and heritage sectors to position and articulate their strategic, cross-sector professional relevance and value in relation to contemporary policy concepts and agendas. In her research on the social work of museums, Silverman (2010) defines empathy as a learnable skill, and the authentic artefacts and stories of real people that are unique to museums as 'untapped and innovative' assets for empathy training interventions. This is further evidenced through research undertaken by the Institute of Cultural Capital (ICC) on the impact and value of a museums-led dementia care training programme *House of Memories* (Wilson and Grindrod, 2013; Wilson and Whelan, 2014). Commissioned by the Department of Health and launched by National Museums Liverpool in 2012, the programme continues to have a profound impact in relation to skills development, professional standards of care and capacity building for participating health and social care sectors.

Strategically, the recognition of cultural assets in tackling the social determinants of health inequalities is also gaining considerable traction via the social prescribing movement [2]. This illustrates how pastoral skills and qualities such as empathy should not be sentimentalised and under-valued as a USP for the sector, particularly as it has regulatory processes, including defined codes of practice and ethical standards set by professional bodies including the Museums Association, which facilitate the same level of trust expected from other professional public policy sectors (Blond *et al*, 2015). The interpersonal skills demonstrated by museum and heritage sectors are complex and difficult to replicate. As a form of empathic mediation, heritage interpretation professionals define a subject 'within the terms of its representation', engaging in a process of encoding and decoding, producing messages of the past that are rooted in the various social, cultural and economic relations that made them (Dicks, 2000). If only policy-making processes could follow the same attention to detail.

Arguably more can still be done by the sector to develop and promote its empathic qualities. Research undertaken on the role of empathy in community librarianship (Wilson and Birdi, 2008) revealed a number of shortcomings within England's public library services regarding organisational culture, training and development. The proactive promotion of these values and strategic connections, where they exist, is especially pertinent given the sector's current vulnerability as a single area of government spending, and shifts towards cultural commissioning from statutory services. Perhaps this will be the ultimate test – and public service accolade – for the sector's interpretative powers.

2 See for example The Art of Social Prescribing research programme at the ICC: http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/?research=the-art-of-social-prescribing-informing-policy-on-creative-interventions-in-mental-health-care

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Empathy

One step at a time

Empathy is one of the most important skills we can possess. Clare Patey describes how she tries to develop this through her innovative 'The Museums Of' project.

From a distance, it looks like a giant cardboard shoebox with the lid on. But if you go round to the front, the door is open, and you step inside a shoe shop. An assistant asks your shoe size (if you don't know, you get your feet measured) and takes down a box from the shelves. The pair of shoes belong to a stranger, and the only information you have about them is the name on the label. You put the shoes on, take some headphones and an MP3 player, and head off on a mile-long walk. The shoes might turn out to belong to a sex worker, a lifeboat operator, a drag queen, a Vietnam vet, a neurosurgeon or an ex-prisoner. Gradually, step by step, you walk your way into someone else's life.

Different perspectives

A Mile in my Shoes is the first project from The Empathy Museum. Empathy, of course, differs from sympathy in that it is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from *that person's point of view*. Today, in our highly sophisticated consumer society, there are many forces that could be said to work against empathy. The museum sets out to explore three of them. The first is that we are constantly encouraged through advertising to be individualistic and narcissistic. The second is that social media encourages us to surround ourselves with groups of like-minded people who don't unsettle our assumptions about the world around us. The third is that free public spaces for social interaction are diminishing. We wanted to respond to these trends by creating a free museum that enables visitors to experience what it might be like to be 'someone else'. Someone perhaps we might not meet in our day-to-day life – like a refugee, a transgender woman or a diamond miner – and to spend a few minutes seeing the world from that person's perspective.

Stories as the agents of change

Underlying this is a belief in the transformative potential of art. Stories are agents of change. *A Mile in my Shoes* is an experience that is rooted in an openness towards others, and especially towards strangers.

Last autumn, creative producer Kitty Ross, philosopher Roman Krznaric and I launched the project in London as part of Totally Thames with 30 pairs of shoes (and 30 personal stories). Since then we've added another 40 pairs of shoes and stories from Western Australia as part of the Perth International Arts Festival and we're currently collecting stories from across the NHS commissioned by Health Foundation. We are also developing the project for shows as part of LIFT (the London International Festival of Theatre) this June, and in Brazil, Beirut and Singapore.

A Mile in my Shoes

The visitor's experience is intensified by the intimate act of putting on someone else's shoes and going, alone, for a 10-minute walk in them.

Walking in someone's footsteps

In common with other museums, we house a collection, but the project is more relational than material, more about the situation than the artefact. The visitor's experience is intensified by the intimate act of putting on someone else's shoes and going, alone, for a 10-minute walk in them. It's an act of empathy that takes place on more than one physical level. Recent research by the Princeton neuroscientist Ura Hasson using MRI scanning has revealed that when a storyteller and a listener really engage with one another the neural patterns in their brains begin to synchronise.

The strength of our collection lies in its diversity of voices. It offers an alternative to the single-voice narratives of institutions, corporations and governments. There's an element of randomness too: the people you get to know first are the ones who have the same shoe size as you. The stories are varied, personal and moving, but they touch on shared human experiences of loss, love, hope, grief and laughter. With *a Mile in my Shoes* we create the framework, as carefully as we can, but anything could happen. Everyone's experience is different. What makes it work is the receptivity of the listeners. They are the co-creators of the walk.

The Museum Of

The Empathy Museum is only a year old, but my interest in participation and in museums as cultural spaces goes back to the 1990s and 'The Museum Of'. That's when I was given the chance to take over a derelict warehouse on the South Bank. It was a four-storey building that no-one had been in for 40 years: the windows were boarded up, and pigeons and rats had taken up residence, but it was still beautiful. I had been working as an artist for Friends of the Earth, doing a project about the Newbury bypass, where we had built 'a mile of motorway' in the middle of the countryside involving over 100 artists, performers and campaigners. It was my interest in activism, communities and the transformative power of art which attracted me to the warehouse. It is owned by Coin Street Community Builders who primarily develop social housing on the South Bank. The head of the group, Iain Tuckett wanted there to be a new museum of the River Thames, right there on the river.

It was a perfect opportunity to think about what it means to open a new museum in a city that is already full of them. What if we did something that involved the local community and the wider arts community, and designers, scientists, anthropologists, historians and curators? What if it brought a new audience to the area (this was long before the Globe and Tate Modern)? And what if this work informed the future of the building? The project would be a conversation, with as many people as possible, about what a new museum for London would look like and what people might want it to be and to do.

Engaging new audiences

The Museum Of was also a chance to bring together two sides of my life. I had studied philosophy and education at university and then fine art at St Martin's. This was when the Young British Artists were making their names. But I was more interested in people like Joseph Beuys, John Berger and Suzanne Lacy and the relationship between art and society, particularly ideas of public space and socially engaged art. I wanted to work outside the commercial sector and outside gallery spaces. And I wanted to engage new audiences. I suppose that's why I have an affinity with museums. Many are free. They are public spaces. They're not controlled by Russian oligarchs or advertising supremos. I'm happy working in a hospital or on a bridge or in a garden, collaboratively, and with interdisciplinary teams. These two interests – learning and participation – came together with The Museum Of. This was when I started working on projects that genuinely put audiences at the heart of the experience, enabling them to have as much agency to shape the work as the artists and curators.

The Museum of Collectors

The Museum of the River Thames

The Museum of Me

Inside the mind of collectors

The starting point for each exhibition was a question about museums. The first show was called *The Museum of Collectors*, and it tried to get inside the minds of individual collectors and the psychology of collecting. We invited more than 40 local residents to display their own private collections – toast racks, cheesy record covers, rejection letters, Dolly Parton memorabilia, snow domes, electrical insulators, drinks cans (full) and 15,000 toys from inside Kinder eggs. We interviewed each person in their home about their collection and what it meant to them and then, working alongside a theatre designer, we asked them how they'd like their collection to be shown. For instance, we built Dolly Parton's living room to show the Dolly Parton collection. The Museum Of captured the public imagination and its appeal was wide-ranging. We had press coverage from The Financial Times to The Sun, from Blue Peter to Blue Print. Will Self came along and said it was his favourite museum.

The Museum Of captured the public imagination and its appeal was wide-ranging. We had press coverage from The Financial Times to The Sun, from Blue Peter to Blue Print.

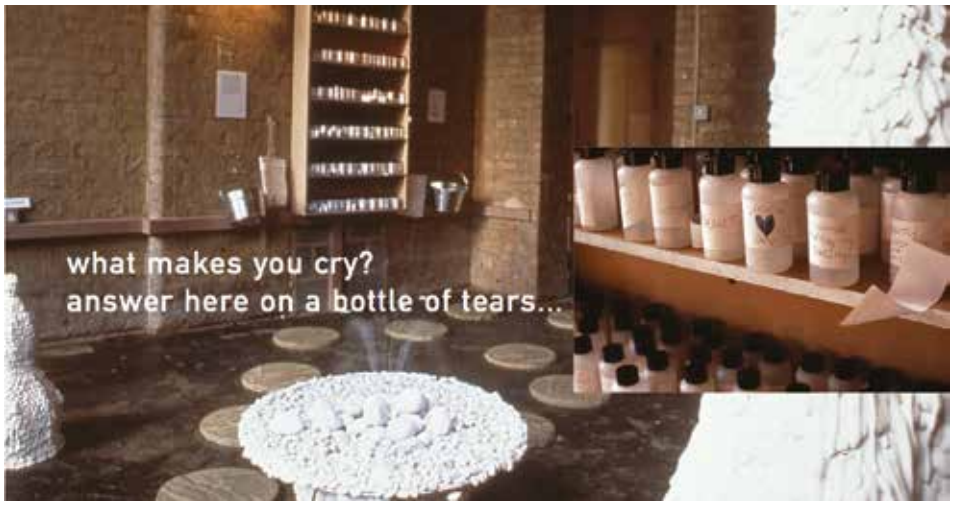
Museums – but not as you know them

The next project we did was *The Museum of Me*, in which the public, in response to questions and exhibits, curated mini-museums of themselves in cans. There were 35,000 by the end, time capsules of personal identities, a snapshot of 1999 that's now held in the Metropolitan Archives. Then came *The Museum of The Unknown*, which included mysterious objects on loan from other museums – objects that the museums themselves had been unable to identify. The public was invited to become the archivists for this strange collection and decide what the objects were for and where and when they came from. After that, *The Museum of Emotions* created spaces in which to scream, sigh, feel love and lust and traverse the seven stages of grieving. Our final project was *The Museum of the River Thames*. The whole series took five years and provided the foundations for how I have approached the Empathy Museum.

An empathy revolution?

One of the people who had come to *The Museum of Emotions* was the writer Roman Krznaric, whose book Empathy: Why It Matters, And How To Get It argues that developing empathy is one of the most important skills that we can possess, and what's needed in the world is nothing less than an empathy revolution. He believes there are six habits that highly empathetic people possess. Roman's extremely passionate about this and stresses that these are habits that we can learn. Towards the end of his book, Roman introduces the idea of an Empathy Museum, which might allow people to practice the art of empathy. A couple of years ago, Roman contacted me about the idea of this museum. He wanted me to turn the things that he writes about in his book into something that people could experience for themselves.

The Museum of Emotions created spaces in which to scream, sigh, feel love and lust and traverse the seven stages of grieving.



The Museum of Emotions

Illuminating feedback

Some of our visitors to The Empathy Museum start to think they're in a real shoe shop saying, 'Have you got these in a red or with a bit of heel?' When they return their feedback comments show how closely people feel they have got to know the shoe owners: 'It's as if the person is talking into your ear, confiding,' wrote one person. 'Life seems larger,' wrote another. Some would have liked to meet them ('Where is their flower shop?'). For others the experience enabled them to reflect on their own lives. Conversations would break out when people returned from their walk. One night, just before closing, two young doctors who were training to become surgeons discussed how they'd had to make themselves reduce their capacity for empathy during their medical training and now they were thinking about how to build it again.

A Mile in my Shoes is the first of a series that will eventually become a fully installed Empathy Museum, which is conceived as an antidote to the consumerism and homogenisation of high street culture. It will have a library, café, shoe shop, undertaker, gym, launderette and travel agency. Each project will approach empathy in its own distinctive way. With *a Mile in my Shoes* we've discovered that there's something about being on a physical journey while you're on an emotional one. Inhabiting someone else's shoes makes a significant psychological difference. You find yourself walking along, listening to the MP3, taking this story in, and then looking down and seeing that they are not your own shoes. They feel new and strange. And just for a mile, on that short journey, that physical and imaginative journey, it's not your life, it's someone else's. That's empathy.

Clare Patey is an artist and curator and Director of the Empathy Museum.

Toolkit

DEVELOPING YOUR HLF SUPPORTED INTERPRETATION PLAN

Interpretive Planning is central to almost all heritage and cultural projects. Janina McBride gives guidance on how best to navigate the HLF process and what role interpretation can play in realising that elusive grant.

First Round HLF Application

This is all about defining a project, checking its feasibility and creating a masterplan. Any design is usually only up to RIBA Stage 1, but needs to communicate great ideas.

Top tips:

- Refer to HLF's Interpretation guidance, and think about how you will achieve the relevant HLF programme outcomes. Then begin your conversation with HLF early – submitting a Project Enquiry Form can provide you with valuable feedback before submitting your First Round application.
- At this point interpretation can be pivotal to a project's success by articulating the significance of the heritage and how that heritage will be accessed and enjoyed. So ensure that interpretive thinking is completely embedded in any project at this stage.
- Consider your target audiences, including how to interest new people. Review your existing visitor experience; think about how can you make it more accessible and enjoyable, and think about the needs of potential new audiences.
- Think about the interpretive media you will use – what will be accessible for the most number of people, and can you provide multiple options?
- Develop more accurate outline costs by requesting quotes from suppliers, and speaking to people who have run and delivered similar projects.
- You do not need a full Interpretation Plan at this stage BUT ensure that interpretive thinking permeates the whole application, and if applicable write a detailed brief for an Interpretive Plan to be developed early on in the development phase using HLF funds.

Second Round HLF Application or the 'Development Phase'

In this phase a project is planned in detail. By the time you are ready to submit your Second Round application, the design of any exhibits will be at Developed Design or RIBA Stage 3.

Top tips:

Start this phase by developing a full Interpretive Plan or reviewing the existing Plan: projects continually change!

- During this phase local people can be a mine of information and can help you develop your story with memories, personal archives and photographs.
- Can you involve local communities in decision-making and set up a working group or access panel to help develop, refine and test your proposals?
- Think about how proposals will impact on your organisation – do you need to build in training for staff and volunteers?
- A draft of the Interpretive Plan should be completed prior to the HLF Development Review meeting – usually when the Design team completes Concept Design/RIBA Stage 2, roughly midway through the Development Phase.
- Be prepared to cost your interpretive plan yourself – don't just rely on the Quantity Surveyor (QS) to do this for you.

Janina McBride used to work for the Heritage Lottery Fund and is now a cultural consultant.

Revealed

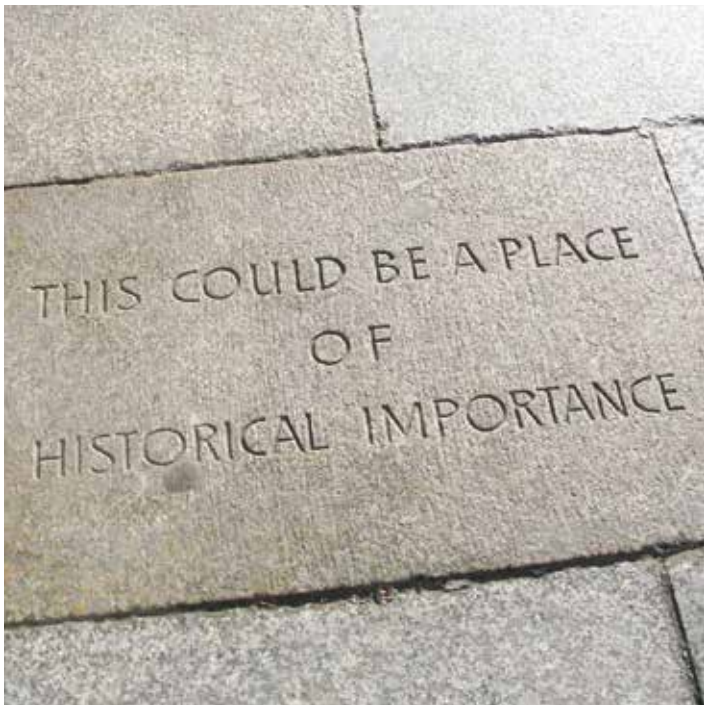
Interpretation that amuses and inspires...

With thanks to Sarah Niemann

The crocodile farm, St Lucia, South Africa. We found this at the top of a very steep slope with a pen full of scarily big crocs at the bottom. To the point, you might say

Crocodiles in India. This was at the gate leading down into a river valley. Needless to say we didn't go down to the river...

Siberian crane. This was at Bharatpur. Rather thought-provoking



Cologne. This was in the square in front of Cologne Cathedral when I went there in 2005. I looked for it again a couple of years ago and couldn't find it. Quite profound!

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