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for the Association for Heritage Interpretation

A H I



*The problems encountered
when interpreting
a national obsession*

Sports Museums

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A Question of Balance

Kathryn Baker | Assistant Curator, British Golf Museum

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The successful replication of movement and action in a museum environment may seem incongruous, but it is much sort-after holy grail. Kathryn Baker outlines methods for achieving this aim and also warns that it is not always the best route to take.

When the British Golf Museum opened in 1990, a major concern was how to portray the action and movement of golf within static displays. It was understood that this was an important part in the interpretation of the sport and had to be undertaken in a suitable fashion.

The answer to this problem came in the form of the most up-to-date technology available at that time. Using CD-I technology displayed on touch screen consuls, visitors were introduced to elements of golf history through static and moving images of players and tournaments from the past. These were designed to compliment the displays of objects, text panels and illustrations surrounding them. Material relating to the early years of the game centred around still photographic images displayed against a pre-recorded commentary whilst the modern game was represented by edited highlights of the Open Championship, again with commentaries.

Tools not toys

When the Museum opened, thirteen interactives were positioned thematically through the galleries. These were designed to convey information in an entertaining yet informative manner – being tools for interpretation rather than toys. They displayed film clips of in-depth segments from golf history and had an overall emphasis on tournament golf and the associated players. Providing a more entertaining element were two quizzes, one asking questions about the information displayed in the Museum whilst the other was more specifically related to the rules of Golf. 1

In terms of the information about competitive golf and players, little has changed since the interactives were first produced in 1990. Hardware has seen the most major change with touch screen monitors being replaced by roller ball displays and consuls being replaced for a variety of reasons. New interactive





Previous page: The mid-Victorian Gallery.

Literature and art and their place within golf history are shown here. Above: Dictionary Corner and the Origins of Golf gallery. Examples of the interactives used within the museum today can be seen.

consuls have been added since the Museum opened: these provide information about the origins of golf as well as providing a game allowing visitors to play the first hole of the Old Course.

Surfing in a golf museum?

The main interactive development to take place at the Museum in recent years, has been the development of an internet website. This project began with a brief introduction to the Museum displayed on the Royal and Ancient Golf Club's website. In the last year this has developed so that the Museum now has an independent site featuring information on the galleries, publications, news and so on.²

The site, along with the Royal and Ancient Golf Club's website, is displayed on a stand-alone consul in the Museum. The information on this provides an insight into the administration of today's game as well as looking at the functions of the Royal and Ancient. It was deemed necessary as a replacement for two interactives which had previously provided similar information and that had become out-of-date. Rather than being 'live', it is run from a CD-ROM. This makes it much easier to keep up-to-date as well as ensuring that security problems are kept to a minimum. This is one area that is open for development. It runs concurrently with an interest in exploring other suitable uses for information technology within the galleries.

Since 1995, ideas within the Museum have developed considerably. This has led to the detailed exploration of the concept of what sport actually is. The history of sport and, in our specific case, of golf is about much more than simply playing the game. It rapidly develops a cross sectional view of social history. This includes such themes as economic development and changing social attitudes. In order to develop this further, the exploration of a large variety of new themes has taken place, hence the appearance of displays either concentrating solely, or in part, on such topics as art, literature, transport issues, course architecture and social development. Consequentially, action and movement are not essential, nor at times even desirable.

¹ The use of interactives in the British Golf Museum was much discussed and documented at the time. For more information see *Taking the British Golf Museum Home*, Peter N. Lewis; *Proceedings of the International Conference on Hypermedia and Interactivity in Museums, 1991: Touch Play at the Golf Museum*, Peter N. Lewis; *Environmental Interpretation, August 1991: Touch and Go*, Peter N. Lewis; *Museums Journal*, February 1993.

² The Museum's website can be found at www.britishgolfmuseum.co.uk

The future's bright...

Much groundbreaking research has been undertaken at the Museum into eighteenth and nineteenth century golf, which is reflected in the diversity of the displays and themes covered in the Museum. In addition, the implementation of eye catching and highly illustrative display techniques has helped to improve communication with the Museum's visitors. Recent display changes have introduced vivid colours into each gallery. For example, works of art are now prominently displayed on what were previously blank walls and text panels are no longer simply black text on a white background but incorporate eye catching colours, fancy borders and full colour illustrations. Action and movement are important elements in the Museum's interpretation of golf history. The interactives in the galleries have stood the test of time, being as popular and effective an interpretation tool as they were nine years ago. The recent move away from the muted colours and understated design of the galleries towards an eye catching and vibrant approach, coupled with the diversification of the subject matter, has ensured that the Museum retains this concept of action and movement. It remains an important objective to retain this fundamental principle – one that the Museum will continue to strive towards in the future.

However, it must be emphasised that there is much more to sport, and in this case golf, than purely action and movement. Many other elements make it a diverse and rewarding subject to explore.

Kathryn H. Baker has been assistant curator at the British Golf Museum for two years.

The role of the private collector

Jed Smith | Curator, Museum of Rugby, Twickenham

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The relationship between sports museums and private collectors is a particularly close one, but, as Jed Smith explains, not always happy one.

Almost everyone today is a collector. As we approach the end of the twentieth century more people are hoarding and collecting than ever before. You may not dream of owning that elusive Dixie Dean cigarette card, but the chances are that you may raise a knowing smile at the thought.

It was not always thus. The compulsive wholesale preservation of material remains is a relatively new phenomenon. Only three centuries ago the standing stones of Avebury were being broken into pieces for building material. Within the last fifty years the Euston Arch was dismantled and thrown into an East London canal. Today there are whole organisations dedicated to protecting Avebury and people determined to recover all of the Euston Arch pieces.

It is not the purpose of this article to examine this significant shift in cultural attitude. By acknowledging it, however, we start to appreciate why the private collector has such a significantly closer relationship with sports museums than with their longer established and more venerable museum peers. The number of collectors is high and so is their influence in the sporting museum sector.

Cheap and easy: a collection for the masses
Sports are a relatively modern subject. True enough, all major sports can be traced back through many centuries – but the modern versions of these games, as beamed out from our television sets (assuming that you have invested heavily in satellite television) are relatively youthful. The bulk of material culture relating to the various football codes, for example, only really starts to appear in the middle of the nineteenth century. The oldest accessioned object in the Museum of Rugby is a leather ball dating to circa 1830. The recently discovered 'Mary Queen of Scots football' (circa 16th century) is a remarkably early example of its type. In terms of museums with archaeological, geological and ethnological collections this is ultra modern – the equivalent of the day before yesterday.

Into this equation can be added the great popularity of organised spectator sport – and the large amount of material / merchandise being produced as a consequence. This means that a large amount of sporting material exists – which means that it is relatively inexpensive to purchase and quite easy to trace. This also means that with so much



material existent, a higher proportion rests in private hands. It is not hard to see why sports collectors are so thick on the ground. With regards to the different roles that they play...

The voice of authority

Most private collectors are knowledgeable experts. There is so much to know about a living, developing sport and so much material to collect that experts in particular areas have to be consulted regularly when new artefacts are accessioned or displayed. Need references to Rugby being played in World War II prison camps? Contact a certain rugby book collector. Why did New Zealand play at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge in 1905? Contact a particular Chelsea programme collector. Detailed knowledge of particular areas is by no means a phenomenon unique to sport. However, the curator of a more 'finite' collection, such as Roman archaeology, is unlikely to have the opportunity to contact owners of larger specialist collections when a particular artefact is unearthed.

Beg, steal and borrow

The private collector is a potential source of loan material. Loan items arrive at the Museum of Rugby for many reasons. The competition trophy that was too fragile to be thrown around dressing rooms. Silver items that had become too valuable to remove from the bank vault. The book that can be handled and read, but not put on display (the collector in question suggested that visitors would be just as happy viewing photocopied sheets!). The Museum of London was able to produce an entire temporary exhibition ('Soccer City', 1996) based upon loans from the Museum's own staff and private collectors. The latter may have welcomed the opportunity to increase the value of their objects, or their own prestige, by subsequently referring to their involvement in the exhibition.

Many sports museums are new to the market place (the Museum of Rugby has only been proactively collecting for 3 years) and still some way short of having a definitive collection, so the availability of loans can totally shape an exhibition. A display planned to celebrate the achievements of the 1974 British Lions was cancelled recently because certain collectors could not be persuaded to loan relevant items.



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JAMES FINLAY

Above: Tour guide and visitors at the MCC Museum;
Right: Top floor of the MCC Museum, re-opened in 1993.

and redisplayed. The then Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Major MP, re-opened the Museum on 19 May 1993. In 1996 further alterations were made to the Museum entrance foyer and a new gallery for temporary exhibitions was created upstairs. Thanks to the generosity of Sir Paul Getty, a new Film Theatre was created on the ground floor. Sir Paul opened this as a memorial to Brian Johnston on 1 September 1998. The latest major work in the Museum took place in the spring of 1999 when the chronological exhibition on the ground floor was redisplayed in new showcases.

A design for life

Since 1990 these alterations and improvements have taken place under the guidance of our designer, Mr Barry Mazur, who has had many imaginative ideas which have greatly enhanced the Museum. Occasionally the Committee is able to make a major purchase. In 1986 Thomas Lord's punch bowl was brought and three years later the Club acquired the portrait by Nathaniel Dance RA of *George, 9th Earl of Winchilsea*, 1771. The sitter was Thomas Lord's patron and the real founder of MCC. Sometimes the collection has also been enhanced by generous donations, such as the gift in 1993 of the portrait of

the *Revd Lord Frederick Beauclerk* (President of MCC in 1826) by Sir William Beechey, RA.

One area where the Committee has taken the lead is in the commissioning of portraits and landscapes connected with the game. John Ward, CBE, RA, for instance, has depicted many of the MCC presidents and secretaries, Bryan Organ has drawn *Colin Cowdrey*, and Andrew Festing has undertaken conversation pieces showing many of the game's greatest players. William Bowyer, RA, and the Hon Jonathan Warrender are two artists who have been commissioned to paint the ground in action.

Facing the future

The Marylebone Cricket Club has a proud record over many years of providing many attractions for visitors. People who come to Lord's can find much of interest even on wet days in the season and in gloomy winter conditions! Plans for the next millennium include the introduction of more interactive displays. This will keep my successor busy well into the 21st century!

Stephen Green has been curator at the MCC Museum for over thirty years.

Better the (red) devil you know?

Mark Wylie | Curator, Manchester United Museum & Tour Centre

This year, whilst most of our international teams were failing to fulfill their potential, one club was making history. Mark Wylie tells us of life inside a company museum when the company just happens to be a sporting phenomenon.

It may seem strange to call Manchester United Museum and Tour Centre a company museum. Essentially however this is precisely what we are – the Museum of arguably the biggest and most financially successful football club in the world. Manchester United's Museum was opened in 1986 as (what is thought to be) the first purpose built museum in British football. Originally the idea of one of the Club directors, Denzil Haroun, the Museum became an instant success attracting more and more visitors over the years. Eventually it became clear that the original narrow constricted site underneath the Scoreboard End of the Old Trafford ground was far too small for the numbers flowing through – even after expansion in 1991.

Twelve years of visitor figures

1987: 26,137	1988: 24,308	1989: 24,900
1990: 40,042	1991: 45,251	1992: 45,153
1993: 86,773	1994: 145,150	1995: 149,543
1996: 190,707	1997: 192,095	1998: 199,736
1999: 205,000		

A new museum is born

In April 1997 Manchester United opened a brand-new Museum and tour centre in the redeveloped, eight storey North Stand. Costing four million pounds the new Museum occupies three of these eight storeys. Displays were completely rethought for the new Museum with the initial hope that the Museum would be less *Glory Glory Man United* and more oriented towards social history. An early plan was to look at how dramatically players' lives had changed over the years as the maximum wage limit was abolished and freedom of contract became established. Almost inevitably this was not quite how the displays turned out and it has been left to other football museums to take a social history angle when interpreting football. Pressures of time and internal political pressures rather restricted any progress away from the glory-oriented display.

It was also hoped that the Museum would aim for MGC registration and become a charitable trust. Whilst I thought this would ultimately be of great benefit to the Museum, other, more powerful, members of the Museum Committee disagreed. Everything in the time scale for the development of the Museum was oriented towards the arrival of the

legendary Pele to open the Museum on a rare visit to the United Kingdom in April 1997. Unfortunately the pressure to be open for the visit gave everyone involved a very hectic and stressful time. Trying to arrange everything at very short notice meant that many proposals were simply forgotten about.

Balancing the positive and the negative

Most of our displays ended up accentuating the positive by concentrating on the glories of United's 120-year history. The new displays did, however, also try to cover areas previously skirted over, such as United's two near bankruptcies in 1902 and 1931 and the lack of title success from 1967 to 1993.

The displays also tried to tackle a number of other negative aspects of football, such as football hooliganism. This was, and to some extent still is, a major problem for football and it certainly was for United in the 1970s. An outburst of football writing in the 1990s has concentrated on the fans' stories and looked at football from their perspective.

Unfortunately some of the writing has been almost a glorification of hooliganism and a harking back to the *good old days* of mass punch-up inside and outside of football grounds. We were very concerned both to try to look at some aspects of club affairs from the fans' perspective but also not to glorify or condone aggressive behaviour.

We also wanted to show that football in general, and Manchester United in particular, is not just about glory and always looking on the bright side of life. As with every football club – for every championship or cup win there are plenty more seasons with nothing to show at the end for all the efforts of players and management. This led us into internal problems with some people at the Club, who wished to exercise a right to veto text that they felt was giving the wrong impression. In each of these instances the text had to be thoroughly examined. Whilst it became virtually impossible for us to be overtly critical of the Club or people who had recently / were still holding powerful positions we did manage to counterbalance the '*Manchester United is good*' factor.

A moving experience

The fact that football is all about movement and action was something we wanted to incorporate into

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Above from left:
The kit and players'
equipment displays;
A display of caps and
shirts recently acquired
from Phil Neville;
A tribute to the 'Busby
Babes' in the original
museum;
Manchester United's
archive. A source for the
professional researcher.

our displays. Inevitably a static traditional display of showcases would be important in the Museum but we felt we had to try to increase the excitement factor for our visitors. To try to increase the degree of excitement that the visitors would feel we

incorporated as much video footage and audio as possible into the displays. Ultimately, this will never replace the sensation of movement that you get at a real football match, but with many supporters seeing most of their football through a television screen it is a good substitute.

It is also relatively unusual to see football-related artefacts on display in a museum. Many local authority museums, the guardians of great collections of social history material, have often ignored what is a sport of great significance. I have often felt that it would be easier to find cricket, tennis or lawn bowls items on display rather than football objects. Happily this state of affairs does seem to be changing as more curators realise the importance of football – if only as a temporary exhibition to draw in visitors.

Football anorak

To satisfy both the so-called *football anoraks* out there who wanted to know obscure facts about United players and for those people searching for information on relatives we installed the Man-U-Net. This is a computer encyclopaedia of Manchester United with career details of every player to make a first team appearance since the 1880s. This has been one of the undoubted successes of the Museum – encouraging visitors, both young and old, to try out our touch screens and draw up information, photos and video clips on players from the present or past.

Inevitably such a large encyclopaedia has needed a great deal of research. Firstly to get it up and running and secondly to keep it as up to date and comprehensive as possible.

Temporary exhibitions

We also have an active temporary exhibition programme. Whilst we have set up a number of exhibitions on Manchester United related themes we have also tried to take a broader outlook. In fact our first two exhibitions had very little to do with Manchester United. Pele, who opened the Museum, became the first subject for our programme of exhibitions, followed by a look at *The History of Black Footballers in Britain* – a previously neglected subject. The panels from this exhibition have since gone on tour around the country, whilst the interest that the exhibition provoked at United stimulated a very active anti-racism promotion for the Club's *Football in the Community* scheme.

Future developments

Development work continues at the Museum. Club success means that large sections of text can sometimes be out of date literally overnight. A continual programme of text and panel renewal is currently underway and a comprehensive captioning programme will shortly be started. A major new display on Manchester United's 1999 *treble* success has also been proposed for an area currently used for storage.

Mark Wylie AMA is the curator of Manchester United Museum and Tour Centre.

How do you get 'horsey' people interested in a museum? Hilary Bracegirdle reveals her secrets.

Museums are like rice puddings. Britain is divided into those who love them and those who loathe them, often depending on their childhood encounters with the stuff. Thus, despite the fact that over five million people go racing each year, the number who will visit our Museum is finite. And how many museum addicts are also interested in horseracing?

This was the major problem facing me three years ago when I became the Director of the National Horseracing Museum in Newmarket. Before taking up my appointment I had, of course, visited, and was bowled over by the quality of the items on display, the amazing history they portrayed, and the friendliness of the staff. I knew that the Museum did not deserve its falling visitor numbers and indeed was charged by the Museum Council with reversing this trend. In any case, urgent action was required to attend to our financial situation, since (as a totally independent Museum) we rely on admissions income for a substantial proportion of our running costs.

These considerations underpinned the five-year forward plan, which my (small) staff and I developed for the Museum. The resulting marketing strategy – whilst by no means particularly unique or clever – seems so far to have succeeded extremely well. It has been achieved by an integrated approach, which affects nearly all our activities, and which has actually involved a reduction in advertising spend.

The first hurdle

One of the most immediate problems is that even keen race goers can't imagine what is in the Museum. In fact we have a very varied collection ranging from stuffed horse's heads, race badges, cups, starting flags, technical equipment, and astoundingly high-quality paintings – after all, the 18th century gentleman might pay more for a portrait of his racehorse than of his wife. Subjects covered include local history, royal history, science, art, applied art and general history as well as sports technology. In addition, we suffer from the same preconceptions as racing itself – that it's for top-hatted types dribbling champagne or for flat-cappers in smoke-filled betting shops. One of our first actions, therefore, was to change our advertising and leaflets to try to give a better flavour of the contents of the Museum.

This was supplemented by a media campaign – five minutes of TV coverage is worth thousands of

leaflets. Media coverage certainly doesn't come free – it is extremely hard work and involves considerable ingenuity to capture editors' imagination. However, once you have established a relationship with TV and radio stations, freelance journalists and magazine editors, it becomes far easier and self-reinforcing. Fortunately most of our new initiatives resulted in exciting news stories. In racing, of course, we are very lucky in having numerous dedicated publications including a daily newspaper.

Red Rum's mints

Lacking the funds to redisplay the entire Museum, we concentrated on altering our collecting and interpretation policy. Labels and print concentrated on the amazing personalities involved in racing, both equine and human, and assumed far less specialised knowledge. We now proactively collect contemporary material, both for the displays and our archive.

One of the first, the complete set of silks worn by Frankie Dettori when he went through the card (i.e. won every race) in 1996 at Ascot, still attracts considerable interest. My favourite recent display is the collection of material relating to Red Rum, which includes a postcard from Paul and Linda McCartney and the polo mints that he left behind when he died at the age of thirty. Incidentally, when his trainers, Mr and Mrs 'Ginger' McCain visited recently, both were nearly in tears.

Hands-on activities and a horse simulator

It is hard for those outside racing to appreciate how passionately horses are loved – some Newmarket types would marry their horse if they could, and several are named after horses rather than the other way around. This, too is one of our tasks – to open up the weird and wonderful world of racing without spoiling its mystique. We want visitors to leave the Museum knowing more about the far-reaching and important history of the sport, but also how it works today and how important it is to the national economy (it is Britain's sixth biggest industry, employing over 100,000 people). A major plank in this aim has been the creation of a hands-on gallery, where visitors can tack up a model horse, dress up in silks and ride on the horse simulator.

The gallery is staffed by a charismatic group of retired jockeys and trainers whose heads would be

Leading the field

Hilary Bracegirdle | Director, National Horseracing Museum, Newmarket

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enormous if they believed the feedback they get from visitors! It is designed for all ages, but is very popular for children's parties and school and college groups. Again, this hands-on initiative is not particularly innovative in museum terms but was achieved with minimal budget and has been stunningly popular, to the extent that we have duplicated it in mobile form. The Travelling Paddock (or part of it) has appeared at racecourses, playgroups, the Royal Show, shopping centres and for the lifers at our local prison. We hope to offer it, and some of our in-house exhibitions, to other museums.

This positive action for the image and understanding of racing has brought other benefits. We now have a very positive relationship with the racing industry without having lost our independence. This of course has resulted in hugely increased sponsorship, which in turn has allowed us to undertake further imaginative initiatives. We are lucky, too, that racing itself is very keen to open up its audience and that we are able to work together

towards this. We were particularly lucky when developing the Practical gallery to have a placement from a local teacher, Bev Neeves, who developed teachers' packs for Key Stages 1 – 4 in maths, English and Science. This has been fed into the British Horseracing Board's national educational strategy.

Make them laugh, make them cry

As well as redisplaying two of our five galleries and creating the Practical Gallery, we embarked on a series of high-profile exhibitions. We were fortunate to be able to display the National Gallery's *Whistlejacket* by Stubbs and an internationally important collection of racing pictures by Munnings, on loan from California. It was a pleasure to show these to a 'horsey' audience – several people were in tears in front of *Whistlejacket*.

We have also paid close attention to overall customer care. Improvements have ranged from redevelopment of the front and back gardens, a redesign of our logo,



Can a museum founded on philanthropic principals actually more for a sport than one set up primarily to line the investor's pockets? Tim Rusby thinks so, and uses his recent experiences within the soccer world as an example.

The recent media revolution is sparking an ever expanding public involvement in secondary aspects of sport like never before. Numerous specialist sports television channels, new media publishing and a plethora of internet sites allow followers of every sport to engage in sporting activity outside of the historical limitations of match days or sports events. Quite naturally fans are looking for any and every opportunity to immerse themselves in (and celebrate) their sport. Where better, in theory, than at a specialist dedicated visitor attraction venue?

The rise and rise of sports museums

The last few years have seen a surge in the number of such large-scale facilities of regional or national significance: The Museum of Rugby, Twickenham, The River & Rowing Museum at Henley on Thames, the Olympic Spirit in Munich and the FA Premier League



Far left: A painting of the Godolphin Arabian; Below left: Riding the horse simulator.

Above right: The minibus tour;

Above far right: a horse enjoying the therapy of swimming in the equine pool.

and a re-launch of our minibus tours. Perhaps most noticeably, our shop and café have been completely overhauled – and the results both visually and financially have been amazing. The café (which we now run ourselves) has been completely altered by wonderful murals from our first artist in residence, Jacque Jones, and whenever a famous racing person comes to the Museum they sign their portrait.

As I write this, Jacque is finishing her depiction of Jenny Pitman, who will be filming 'Collectors' Lot' here next week. It is one of the great pleasures of working here to see the expressions of visitors when they look up from a display case and see one of their heroes in the flesh looking round the Museum!

The final furlong

Our activities have been constrained by finances, available space and the fact that the long-term expansion plans of the Museum are on hold whilst various fund-raising activities take place. We are also

a very small team, with only myself, a curator, an enterprises officer and an administrator working full time on Museum and shop activities. However, given these restrictions I feel that we have achieved a great deal, and have been rewarded by increasing visitor numbers, improved finances and very positive visitor feedback.

I am particularly proud of the shop, gallery and café staff, about whom I receive many complimentary letters and comments. Indeed, we have just won the award for the best visitor attraction in East Anglia (under 100,000 visitors). Part of the evidence which we submitted included our visitors book, and looking at it again I was taken by two comments: '*what an interesting time here, and such friendly staff*', and '*your displays were great. I have never seen anything so wonderful*'.

Hilary Bracegirdle has been director at the National Horseracing Museum, Newmarket, for three years.

For the coffers or the community?

Tim Rusby | Principal, Montclair Design Consultants Ltd

Hall of Fame in London. As the lead design consultant to the FA Premier League Hall of Fame, one of the key questions I ask, as we look forward to new sports projects, is will they, and should they, be commercially or educationally led? In other words, should they be for the coffers or the community?

Whilst it is a generalisation, projects can be divided into two broad categories:

1. Commercial: Where the attraction is primarily a place of entertainment looking to create a commercial return for its investor. The bums on seats business!

2. Educational: Where the remit is generally more philanthropic, focussing on providing more of a specialised facility and an accessible public resource.

Capturing the middle ground
Of course, this differentiation is rapidly disappearing

through convergent evolution. Both sectors are now looking to exploit an important middle ground – so called 'edutainment'. Educational versus commercial is now less of a gulf and more of a discrete gradient. The considerations that make up a developer's mission statement for a new attraction facility for any given sport can include:

1. creating a place of homage and pilgrimage
2. providing education which promotes the sport
3. providing casual recreation and entertainment
4. offering active participation and sports training
5. celebrating contemporary aspects of a sport & looking forward
6. providing an interpretation a sports heritage and culture (nostalgia)
7. providing a home to display a particular sporting collection
8. a general celebration of a sport versus an in depth focus on a team or individual
9. a purpose built landmark building versus a cost effective use of an existing space

Who starts the ball rolling?

How these considerations are weighted and balanced is, of course, dictated by the facility's developer / financier. Financial providers may come from:

1. sporting governing bodies or leagues
2. individual sports clubs or teams
3. local or national government
4. grant in aid bodies
5. sponsors
6. independent commercial organisations.
7. individual sportsmen and women

The FA Premier League project faced just such considerations when it was conceived in 1996. The concept was simple and based on the North American sporting halls of fame such as Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame and the Toronto Ice Hockey Hall of Fame. The challenge was that if these American sports can have a spiritual home, why not our national game here in England? Whilst these American attractions have become institutions and are unashamedly for the community (ie the dedicated sports fans as opposed to casual visitors) they have successfully harnessed and embraced commerciality. This is possible because the providers and the subsequent project finance come from all of the possible avenues

in a very real commercial / philanthropic partnership.

A model museum

The Americans recognise that sporting ideals, the philanthropy of training, education and the commerciality of sponsorship, brand promotion and media presentation are not mutually exclusive. There is true recognition of the sporting cycle that:

- media profile, training and education creates interest and participation
- participation creates new sportsmen and women
- sportsmen and women generate achievement
- achievement in turn promotes the sport, raises its profile and the commercial brands of all those associated with it, sponsors, suppliers media partners and the sports clubs and leagues alike

This model clearly shows that to contribute to the provision of a sporting attraction is not philanthropy, merely enlightened commercial self-interest. The FA Premier League Hall of Fame set out to become the definitive celebration of our national sport encompassing and promoting football and the achievement of those who have excelled in it – past, present and future. In short, to create a definitive home of English football and celebration of football fanaticism.

However, an obviously worthy and (if located in central London, one would imagine potentially successful venture) took over three years to get off the ground. Unlike enthusiasm for the sport, the project finance was very hard to find. The disappointing fact, was that those directly involved in the sport, such as clubs, leagues, sponsors and broadcasters were at first rather more keen on what they could take from the project rather than an enlightened view of what they needed first to put in. That, together with the seemingly inevitable and endless sports politics almost caused the project to fade and die.

It was not until a white knight in the form of United News and Media plc recognising the potential for the project in amongst their own diverse portfolio of sporting media projects, came along as a sole investor and finally the project became a reality.

High risk investments

This sole investment with no support from other

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Below: The 'Wall of Fans' where supporters from all walks of life can be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

funding avenues has necessarily dictated the direction of the project. Some of the more ambitious and perhaps philanthropic elements of the concept have had to be phased into the plan, through reinvestment of returns rather than provided on day one. But of course a large capital investment coupled with high central London operating overhead commitments is a high risk.

The FA Premier League Hall of Fame is now open with initial visitor interest very high and attendance figures growing steadily. Through the foresight of the developers, the attraction has managed to achieve much of what the original concept set out and has created a very good blend of information and integrity for the dedicated fans together with entertainment for more casual visitors. The hall of fame for English football is indeed now born and looks certain to grow and prosper.

Taking on the world

If other new sports attraction projects are to flourish in the United Kingdom, however, there will need to be an accelerated cultural evolution. All of those involved in sports will need to acknowledge their responsibilities and what they stand to gain though

an enlightened investment now, with the recognition that the returns will come in the longer term.

Grant in aid for projects such as the National Lottery funds could perhaps be channelled more towards helping commercial developers reduce risks and attract greater investment and project interest rather than providing funds for what are frequently perceived as overly ambitious white elephants. An enabling role in a greater number of successful projects is surely better than a providing role in a small number of not so successful ones. Perhaps then the very best of entertainment / commercial sports attraction projects can combine with the very best of the educational / community projects and create definitive, world class sporting attractions of which we can all be justifiably proud.

But then, the need for us in the United Kingdom to address investment in our sporting grass roots is not exactly news. Is it?

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Interpretive Reflections

Review by Michael H Glen

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**The Hall of Mirrors:
Reflections on the
Sublime and on the
Iconography of
Ossian at the
Hermitage, Dunkeld**

by Christopher
Dingwall and Don
Aldridge in *New
Arcadian Journal* No
47/48, 1999, price £15*

The *New Arcadian Journal* (which might equally be titled *New Arcane Journal*) publishes artistic and scholarly research into cultural landscapes and their political contexts. 'Integral to its task', says Patrick Eyres in his editorial to this edition, 'is the assertion of cultural history in order to redress the preference for the history of natural phenomena in the prevailing climate of site conservation and interpretation'. So there, all you bugs and beetles buffs. That landscape is as much to do with bipeds (without wings) as with furry creatures and huggable trees.

Don Aldridge, always at his best when having a swipe at current interpretive practice, with his co-conspirator Christopher Dingwall, regales readers (all 300, if every copy of the journal is purchased) with the cultural and political background to what many must think of as simply a designed landscape around some pretty spectacular natural features. Everything that the Murrays of Atholl did at their Hermitage 'pleasure grounds', from planting exotic species to building what became Ossian's Hall of Mirrors, was set against the turbulent times of post-Culloden Britain and changing political and social allegiances in succeeding decades.

It is this context that Dingwall and Aldridge contend is almost entirely lost in the present-day

interpretation of the site which is owned by the National Trust for Scotland. Without understanding that Ossian was used as a vehicle for promoting and reflecting the resurgence of interest in Gaelic culture – and why – at a time when London was still very twitchy about Scotland, is to lose some of the story. Equally, without awareness of the characteristics of distinguished and ordinary visitors to the site over two centuries is to suffer gaps in understanding the whole nature of this piece of adapted nature.

The broader principle is at least as important as the detailed argument in relation to the Hermitage. There are many fewer sensitivities to descriptions of landscapes in terms of their plant and animal life, and their use for agriculture or pleasure, than to expositions of the socio-historical and cultural influences upon them. Memories (and prejudices) are very very long and we should be grateful for the authors of this little book for alerting us to be wary of being wary, to be assertive not submissive, when looking out upon – and interpreting – the designs of men and women upon the land.

* From *New Arcadian Press*, 13 Graham Grove, Leeds LS4 2NF (0113 230 4608)