

Interpretation

journal

of the Association for Heritage Interpretation



How we see each other

Interpreting cultural identity

ISSN 1357 9401

Managing Editor:

Ruth Taylor

Production Editor:

Elizabeth Newbery

Tel: 01865 793360

Fax: 01865 793375

Email:

emnewbery@connectfree.co.uk

Design: Nicole Griffin

Carrington Griffin Design

Email: cgd@pavilion.co.uk

Printed by Dataprint, Oxford

Cover photograph: Tanzanian
school girls

Credit: Richard Barton-Wood

Interpretation Journal is published
three times a year in Spring, Summer
and Autumn

The opinions expressed by authors in
Interpretation are not necessarily
those of the committee of AHI

You can visit AHI's website at:

www.heritage-interpretation.org.uk

Contents

- 3 **Foreword: Re-visioning the past for the future**
Brian Goodey
- 4 **Who we are**
Judy Ling Wong
- 8 **Faith under the spotlight**
Harry Dunlop
- 10 **Interpreting Wales for the Welsh**
Dyfed Elis-Gruffydd
- 13 **Postcards from Tanzania**
Richard Barton-Wood
- 17 **Connecting people through place**
Laura Hetherington & Polly Andrews
- 19 **The view from the hill**
Bella Dicks
- 23 **Book review**
- 24 **'The spell of far Arabia'**
Jo Scott

The next issue will look at:

**Interpreting
archaeological sites**

Email suggestions for
contributions to

WPARET@smtp.ntrust.org.uk

Advertising Rates (mono):

	members	non-members
Full page	£250.00	£350.00
Half page	£150.00	£210.00
Quarter page	£90.00	£130.00
One eighth page	£55.00	£80.00

(no VAT is levied by AHI)

Membership rates from

Fellow	£55
Full Member	£45
Associate Member	£25
Student Member	£14
Corporate member:	
1 copy	£38
2 copies	£53
3 copies	£70
4 copies	£83
5 copies	£104

Overseas Postage Supplements

(1 copy)	
Europe airmail	£4.50
World airmail	£9.50
World surface mail	£4.00

If you would like to respond to articles in this issue please write to or email:

Elizabeth Newbery
3 North Street
Osney Island
Oxford OX2 0AY
Email: emnewbery@connectfree.co.uk

For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation (AHI), send an email to admin@heritage-interpretation.org.uk <<mailto:admin@heritage-interpretation.org.uk>>, write to the Administrator, AHI, Cruachan, Tayinloan, Tarbert PA29 6XF or telephone / fax 01583 441114.

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*, a bi-monthly Newsletter and other mailings. They can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can vote at the Annual General Meeting.

Re-visioning the past for the future

Brian Goodey welcomes the end of 'one heritage, one market, one story' interpretation

3

The terms 'exciting' and 'challenge' crop up so regularly in corporate glossies as to make their use here mundane. But coin anew, these are the keys to unlocking the next interpretive box.

In the 1950s North American interpretation arose from a need to present national and natural conservation policy to audiences that had little part in its establishment. Transfer to the UK allowed inspired educators in rural settings to re-state interpretation as a subtle weapon in the conservation armoury. In the 1970s we transferred a similar ethic to the conservation of built form and towns - the European Architectural Heritage Year was key.

In the 1980s leisure and tourism hinted at rewards that were embedded in declining industrial communities, and interpreted 'attractions' were wrought from the residue of an industrial society. By the 1990s such attractions developed their own momentum. It was Disney writ small rather than Tilden writ large that guided interpretive practice down a path which, in the media-event spirit of the age, crashed headlong into architectural shells devoid of purpose.

By 2000 the plot, if there ever was one, had been lost. Amazing Millennial buildings filled with cables failed to draw the consultant-inflated visitor numbers, responsible conservation agencies shuddered as each new wave of 'New Britain' hit their modest defences. Interpretive practice, as many had known it, cowered.

Academic cynicism... well, perhaps. I told you so... certainly. And the battle isn't over. This year's Museum & Heritage Show was inflated by its own puff and full of technology, thinner than ever on caring and thinking voices who remember what conservation means.

We have come to the end - thank goodness - of one heritage, one market, one story interpretation. Quietly permeating world discussions of heritage is the realisation that we are not in conserving one heritage, for one society, with one correct story, to be enjoyed by one, paying, market.

In my own practice, which is largely abroad, it has been easier to realise the importance of multi-cultural interpretation, than in the U.K. A seminal experience of interpreting the Portuguese 'discovery' of Brazil where affluent urban, ex-slave, and 'native' Brazilians staked their claim on the place and event set dulled

grey cells in motion. The tri-partite, Islamic, Hindu and British Colonial, inputs to contemporary Indian culture re-enforced the need to 're-vision' both the past and the future in that country. Such re-visioning requires looking, reading and, especially, conversation.

Thirty years ago I was confronted, in the Council of Europe, with a Franco-Belgian concern for animation, a process of stimulating and developing community expectations. I suspect that the spirit of animation has, at last arrived in the U.K. and that interpreters will need to re-learn, from the community, the key features and experiences of a multi-cultural heritage. Recently I have heard that the Birmingham Jewellery Quarter, an award-winner in the past, is now steered by just such an animateur.

This should be neither surprising, nor demanding. If we consider the 2002 heritage resource, especially in urban situations, it has clearly been shaped by a society which, whilst conveniently blanketed as 'British', enjoyed the benefits of waves of European, then World, investment. Try to explain London's post-war development without reference to eastern Europe, try to explain its functioning without reference to the West Indies and South Asia. A negative media focuses only on the urban sinks today, but fails to identify the past personal and financial investment in metropolitan rebuilding.

I daily enjoy the benefits of a multi-cultural Britain, in shopping, in talking with the cab driver, in music culture and design. (Though I can also relapse into the English idyll of Cotswold hills, grainy pubs and village streets). From being a practice that picks up the heritage pieces, interpretation could, and should, be at the forefront of the personal dealings which help to forge a truly multi-cultural society. Skills which we once took for granted - oral history, negotiation, understanding - need to be recaptured, the media baggage needs to be left at home.

Twenty years ago Banbury, my nearest town, was the typical market centre. Since then it has lost its cattle market and much more, but it remains typical of the new market town, in having a substantial, and rooted, Asian population. Their heritage brings the Punjab and Kashmir to a staid British population which had just about arrived from its displacement

from Birmingham and London. The town's post-war history is hidden, and in the old style might be submerged beneath buildings of note, but this is no longer sufficient.

The new interpretive challenge, for which we are better equipped than most, is to re-define the shared heritage of this society that will long transcend the quick-fixes of political rhetoric. Interpretation has

the values and purpose which are needed as a shared focus for community development, it's time to use them.

It's back to talking, walking, celebrating... the lights and screens may, or may not, follow.

Brian Goodey is Emeritus Professor of Urban Landscape Design at Oxford Brookes University



BEN Above: Creating a mural with children's thoughts about wildlife in the city

Who we are

Judy Ling Wong, appeals for a wide ranging re-assessment of cultural identity and social inclusion

'Issues of social exclusion and cultural identity are not just for embattled minority groups'

Who we are and what we can achieve depends on how we see ourselves against the enormous pressure of how others see us. Across the world, no community can feel this more than the Muslim community, subsequent to the events of September 11. But issues of social exclusion and cultural identity are not just for embattled minority groups. They are set within the urgency to move towards social cohesion as the basis for a democratic society, within which the work of social inclusion is only part. Threats to identity, among the supposedly 'secure' and dominant mainstream population, are also deeply felt. Indeed, it is the clarifying of what cultural identity means for everyone in our time that will allow the multiplicity of minority cultural identities.

The history of people is the story of their movement through the millennia, across continents. Groups disperse, fall into isolation under particular circumstances, meet, clash or join with others, constantly evolving their cultures through their

impact on each other. In my vision of multiculturalism, the representation of diverse cultures is about interpreting the full range of achievements and potential of the one human race, with each unique culture at a point in time defined as unique combinations of multicultural elements. In practice, it is an exercise in the integration of neglected histories and shared histories with the mono-cultural official histories of dominant cultures. This concept encompasses not only ethnic origin but all diverse cultural groups, each with distinct characteristics which we must understand if we are to engage with them successfully, including former mining communities, the rural poor or those who suffer prejudice because of their age, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

The scope of an inclusive heritage

Interpretation does not happen in a vacuum. It is set in the structure and context of personal and



BEN

Above left: Storytelling on Boxhill, Surrey

Above right: These young people spent hours exploring the beach and rockpools on Flatholm Island, Wales

'The representation of diverse cultures is about interpreting the full range of achievements and potential of the one human race, with each unique culture at a point in time defined as unique combinations of multicultural elements'

organisational world views. The approach to interpretation sets boundaries for what we think and feel. To move interpretative initiatives towards examining the scope of an inclusive heritage, let us set ourselves in the most testing of settings, the local environment in which we live, and ask ourselves the following questions:

- What do we mean when we identify aspects of heritage as 'local'? Is this a spatial definition? If so, what is the spatial limit of this concept?
- When does an ongoing foreign socio-cultural influence become regarded as local?
- How does someone qualify as a 'local' person in relation to heritage? Does it depend on how long one has been there? Or is it through simply being physically present in a locality? Is it through subscribing to the ways of a culturally dominant group? Or is it through being a person who has obvious influence on the evolution of local heritage?
- Is heritage a fixed quantity or is it re-assessed and re-constructed for each period?
- How do we value mythology that we no longer identify with? Is there a case for the creation of new mythology?
- Is local heritage conceived as something that is embodied in concrete artefacts within a locality or the manipulated character of a landscape? Or, on the contrary, is it the non-manipulated character of the landscape? Is it considered as being also embodied in the living memory of local people, including those who bring their heritage with them when they arrive?
- Should a local heritage initiative take its inspiration from existing artefacts or landscapes, or seek to identify and celebrate meaningful heritage that is invisible through the creation of new artefacts?
- Does the significance of heritage have anything to do with how old it is?
- Who decides what is significant and meaningful local heritage?
- Should a local heritage initiative involve everyone in a locality?
- Is what we present intellectually and physically accessible to all?

Inclusive expression of history and heritage

Heritage interpretation can work powerfully at many levels. Heritage interpretation which strikes at the heart of the historical relationships of the countries of the world can confirm the legitimacy of the presence of diverse minority cultural communities who are testament to a web of shared histories across the globe. Uniqueness and sameness will be seen to be in continuity with each other. It is part of the process of the healing of a society that can contribute to the re-positioning of intercultural relationships in the world. Or, heritage interpretation that recognises and explains little-known cultural practices of minority groups can lend comfort to individuals.

Key heritage institutions need to strategically raise awareness within their organisations and reposition themselves in order to:

- Move away from the projection of an exclusive dominant mono-culture
- Fill the gap that is the fact of our shared multicultural history and heritage
- Recognise the essential involvement of diverse cultural communities in filling the gap that is multicultural history and heritage, and therefore the importance of working in partnership with representative cultural community groups and organisations
- Re-define pivotal concepts in relation to participation in heritage by diverse cultural communities, and embody the transformed concepts in policies and strategies.

The mono-cultural dominance of the official histories of many countries means that citizens whose cultures are neglected cannot begin to mould their presence and make their contribution towards an inclusive heritage. It is time for them to make their legitimate claim and situate themselves within the socio-cultural history and heritage of their countries in order to advance from the position of the normal social strength of being rooted in a common history and heritage into the future.

Action for change by heritage institutions

Things are changing but at the present time, special efforts still need to be made to enable minority cultural groups to have the courage to undertake and



Above: The head gardener at Plantazia, Swansea labelled all the plants from India when he knew young Asian people were visiting

participate in initiatives that make them more visible. Many members of diverse minority cultural groups have not yet thought about the significance of inclusive history and heritage projects to their communities. There is a 'forgetfulness' that is born of the despair of decades of exclusion and neglect.

Heritage institutions should undertake interpretative initiatives which:

- Uncover the currently invisible multicultural aspects of local and national history and heritage
- Encourage, support and assist diverse cultural communities in making connections with the multicultural aspects of local and national history and heritage
- Encourage, support and assist diverse cultural communities in the creation of new artefacts which embody and celebrate cultural memory and multicultural history and heritage in the urban and rural environment at large
- Enable the population at large to see themselves

positively in the context of multicultural history and heritage

- Work in partnership with representative cultural community groups and organisations to enable minority cultural groups to:
 - Set their agenda and represent their issues, concerns and wishes
 - Pool ideas and join together as partnerships to take forward initiatives
 - Support each other as part of a network
 - Create a forum for debate
 - Form a movement working for social inclusion.

Parallel to this there needs to be investment that aims to shift the vision of history and heritage within the mainstream population. Mainstream infra-structural institutions (schools and universities, museums and other heritage organisations) should undertake to:

- Highlight the multi-cultural nature of history and

'It is important to understand that working with excluded minority cultural groups is not about doing a favour to small groups of people'

- heritage within the mainstream population
- Identify and integrate multi-cultural aspects of history and heritage into all publicity and resource materials whenever relevant
- Express the ownership of history and heritage by everyone through the use of positive images of its multicultural audience in publicity and resource materials
- Organise special events and programmes of activities highlighting the multicultural nature of heritage
- Strategically develop multicultural interpretation to enable intellectual access to cultural memory and multicultural history and heritage by everyone
- Research multicultural aspects of heritage sites and collections of artefacts
- Undertake the multicultural interpretation of sites and collections of artefacts
- Undertake initiatives which enable physical access to multicultural heritage by everyone
- Undertake initiatives enabling physical access to multicultural heritage through the provision of transport, entry fees and programmes of activities for economically disadvantaged groups including ethnic groups
- Re-define significant catchment areas in the context of access strategy, according to the special significance which certain aspects of heritage sites or collections of artefacts may have for particular cultural groups
- Undertake initiatives and produce resource materials which enable intellectual access to multicultural heritage by everyone
- Undertake initiatives creating new socially and culturally relevant resources to enable intellectual access to multicultural heritage by traditionally excluded groups
- Involve relevant minority cultural communities in the creation of resources relating to cultural memory, multicultural history and heritage
- Recognise the importance of the local presence of affordable facsimiles and replicas of particular artefacts for various minority cultural groups
- Research, document and celebrate the cultural memory of minority cultural communities and multicultural history and heritage associated with collections of artefacts, properties or localities
- Work in partnership with relevant minority cultural groups to research cultural memory and multicultural history and heritage associated with particular properties or localities
- Create new artefacts in the built and natural environments of heritage properties to celebrate and mark the cultural memory of minority cultural communities and multicultural heritage related to properties or localities. The absence of artefacts celebrating the role of minority cultural communities in the settings of history and heritage within which they should be cradled has left many without vital points of reference in the environment
- Create innovative projects through the imaginative interpretative use of landscape, properties and artefacts enabling diverse cultural groups to make meaningful links to their cultural memory and remote heritage.

The future

We are all challenged by a combination of demography, self-interest, and the principles of equality and human rights to build local and global communities in which the strengths of all cultures join together in common enterprise. It is important to understand that working with excluded minority cultural groups is not about doing a favour to small groups of people. It is about working towards a vision of an equal and sustainable society of which we can all be proud and which underpins all our futures.

The role of multicultural interpretation cannot be underestimated in advancing the cause of social inclusion. Its power lies in the shaping of the big picture of heritage against which all of us see ourselves - the playing out of the shifting of balance between who we are, how we are seen, and who we can be. It is hoped that the multicultural interpretation of heritage will be recognised and resourced as a major project of these turbulent questioning times.

Multi-cultural Interpretation and Access to Heritage by Judy Ling Wong published by 6 Llainwen Uchaf, Llanberis, Wales LL55 4LL, on the concept of multi-cultural interpretation.

Judy Ling Wong OBE, is Director of Black Environment Network, Llanbaris, Gwynedd, Wales

Faith under the spotlight

Harry Dunlop discusses some of the challenges involved in interpreting religious and cultural identity

8

'The museum staff became increasingly worried that visitors were - sometimes within the same hour - kissing St Patrick's feet while others spat in his face'

On Friday 14 September, following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, hundreds of people attended a rally for peace and reconciliation in Glasgow's George Square. This public show of unity was intended not only to remember those who lost their lives in those terrible atrocities but to stand shoulder to shoulder with the leaders of the major faith communities in the city and condemn religious hatred and violence. The need for inter-faith dialogue is all the more important following September 11. St Mungo Museum in Glasgow has as its mission statement '...to promote mutual understanding and respect between people of different faiths and of none' and has an important role in bringing the faith communities together to share the values they hold in common and cherish what makes each community special and unique.

The power to shock

The very concept behind the creation of the Museum still has the power to shock and to many its existence signals the end of organized religion as we know it. Religion and cultural identity are indeed minefields and some museums (consciously and unconsciously) will avoid interpreting the meaning of religious objects. Why? Quite simply, to err is human but to offend unwise. Religious objects can have the power to stimulate deep emotional responses because of the layers of meaning we attach to them. When a statue of St Patrick was displayed in an exhibition charting the story of the Roman Catholic community in Glasgow, the museum staff became increasingly worried that visitors were - sometimes within the same hour - kissing St Patrick's feet while others spat in his face.

The Museum is divided into four main exhibition areas: the Gallery of Religious Art, the Gallery of Religious Life, the Scottish Gallery and a temporary exhibition space. The art gallery was an attempt to look beyond the art history of the objects and focus on their religious and - and in some cases - cultural significance as manifestations of living faiths. For some visitors this is a provocative space with the Spanish surrealist artist Salvador Dali's painting *Christ of St John of the Cross* surrounded by Buddhist iconography, an Islamic prayer rug and a Kalabari ancestral screen. Rabbi Julia Neuburger commented

during a visit prior to the formal opening that the museum would be a challenge for believers, especially for Christians - a prophecy soon to be fulfilled. A month after opening the cast bronze image of the Hindu deity Shiva Nataraja was seriously damaged by an evangelical Christian enraged by the inclusion of pagan 'idols' in the displays.

Humanizing displays

A variety of interpretative media was used to communicate in the museum. In the Gallery of Religious Life a section of the displays explores the importance of faith in the human life cycle across the world and across time. The gallery attempts to communicate what people believe and share in common (such as Rites of Passage) and what is unique and special in each cultural tradition. Initially the brief was directed by a traditional museological interpretative approach with emphasis on taxonomic displays such as ritual equipment, iconography and religious costume. However, a more radical brief was developed which allowed us to humanize the displays and give people a lever into the subject through empathy. The displays raise questions and explore issues through powerful object juxtapositions, images and oral testimony. By using oral testimony we

Right: 'Buddhism',
Gallery of Religious Life





Above right: 'Catholics and Protestants', Scottish Gallery

Above far right: The display on the Holocaust, Gallery of Religious Life

included personal and sometimes contradictory points of view which sometimes conflicted with the orthodoxy and authority of a particular faith. The key interpretative text for each display was included in Urdu, Gaelic, Mandarin and Punjabi for those local people for whom English is not a first language. This also makes a powerful political statement about the multi-cultural face of Scottish society today in valuing diversity.

The darker side of religion

Some displays focus on the darker side of religion including religious persecution and violence. A small display about the Holocaust communicates the horror of mass extermination in the name of race and religion in the 20th century. Given the sensitivities involved, the Jewish Representative Council and the Education Department were both consulted on how this subject should be approached. The result is a display showing a prayer book used by a local rabbi whilst imprisoned in a concentration camp juxtaposed against a photograph of a mass burial pit. A simple yet harrowing display. In contrast, we were picketed by a group of feminists over the inclusion of a photograph showing a young Egyptian girl undergoing genital mutilation. They felt this image was not appropriate and demeaning to women by its very inclusion. Extensive consultation with our visitors using our talk-back boards resulted in the image being retained but with the label re-written to explain the context in which it was displayed. In other areas of the museum we were accused of creating and re-enforcing stereotypes and caricatures -especially in the field of popular devotion. Some Roman Catholics argued that a clock in the shape of the Lourdes grotto trivialised the important subject of healing. However, despite the fact that many in the church today will see such images as romantic piety, for many people these are still sacred objects and symbolic of their faith in a changing society.

The dreaded subject of sectarianism

The Scottish Gallery was the most difficult gallery to tackle. A general lack of material of the same standard and visual impact as the objects in the Gallery of Religious Life, coupled with visitor expectations of what subjects should be addressed,

forced us to abandon a planned chronological approach in favour of a thematic one. Themes were identified which were felt to be crucial in understanding the character of Scottish religious culture, both past and present including the dreaded subject of sectarianism. There was a fine line between underplaying the reality of sectarianism in Scottish culture, especially in the central belt, and marginalising those Scottish Catholics and Protestants who distance themselves from religious tribalism. A design solution largely solved this problem where in the foreground we placed objects relating to the major Christian traditions in Scotland and placed photographic images of Rangers and Celtic football matches partially hidden in the background.

Since 1993, we have tried to sustain our existing audiences, especially the faith communities and attract new audiences through a varied exhibition and events programme. The main event of the year is our 'Meet Your Neighbour' multi-faith event – a festival involving all the faith communities in the city with music, dance, drama and an exhibition organised by the faiths themselves. This event is organised in conjunction with a number of inter-faith agencies including the Scottish Inter-faith Council (currently based at the Museum), Glasgow Sharing of Faiths and the Churches Agency for Inter-faith Relations in Scotland. Recently we have set up 'Discovering' days - a series of one day events focusing on each major faith including a visit to a place of worship. Guest speakers will include members of the local faith community who will provide an overview of their faiths main beliefs and answer questions posed by the group. These events follow the success of a series of seminars on Islam organised to support the photographic exhibition 'In the shade of the tree'.

Harry Dunlop is Curator of St Mungo Museum, Glasgow

'We were accused of creating and re-enforcing stereotypes and caricatures – especially in the field of popular devotion'

Interpreting Wales for the Welsh

A transcript of the paper given by Dyfed Elis-Gruffydd at the AHI annual conference 'Spirit of Place: Spirit of People' University of Wales, Swansea 2001

10

'It is Gaelic speakers who should be creating the interpretive material that is relevant to and meaningful in their own areas'

'Here's a great opportunity to bring history alive... in order to create a feeling for the period and bring home to the visitors that Welsh was the natural language of the household'

'In order to remember the things* which have been forgotten' (Waldo Williams): interpreting Wales for the benefit of the people of Wales

'I gofio am y pethau* anghofiedig': dehongli Cymru er budd y Cymry (*'Y peth' can also mean that which is characteristic and special to Wales and the Welsh language)

I know, before starting, that my comments will not be well received by everyone in the audience but I blame the Scots for that! Reading the Spring 2001 edition of the magazine *Interpret Scotland* really got my back up: 'One issue we feel is worthy of further debate,' said Caroline Tempest in her article entitled 'Thinking about the audience', 'is the use of Gaelic translations in Gaelic speaking areas.' Maybe I'm far too sensitive and have misunderstood, but this patronising comment had the same effect on me as that proverbial red rag had on the bull!

Pity the poor Gaelic speakers if they have to exist on translations of English pearls of wisdom alone. Fair play to Caroline for recognising that it is worth considering that translations of English pearls should be provided for the 'dregs of folk' - (*gwehilion o boblach*), to quote T.H. Parry-Williams' scathing expression [or, for those of you who don't understand Welsh, T.H. Parry-Williams who?] - who speak the indigenous language of the Highlands of Scotland. I truly hope that these folk, who cause such a headache for interpreters, value the fact that Caroline Tempest and her like are willing to think about them.

I have no right to meddle in the affairs of the Scots but may I suggest, in all sincerity, that it is Gaelic speakers who should be creating the interpretive material that is relevant to and meaningful in their own areas. Language is more than just a means of communication (a fact which I hope that members of this Society, in the field of heritage interpretation, are prepared to recognise). So forcing those who speak Gaelic, one of the indigenous languages of Britain, to live on translations of material designed for those who speak English, (a foreign language which threatens the lifeblood of their native language) is a form of cultural oppression.

It hardly needs saying that the situation of Welsh in Wales is much healthier than Gaelic in Scotland; healthier, please note, but not healthy by a long chalk.

Although, to the eye, one is aware that local authorities and institutions such as the Countryside Council for Wales and the National Trust make considerable use of Welsh there is more than enough evidence to suggest, if not prove, that in the opinion of the majority of them the language is 'a bit of a headache to those who believe in order' (*'tipyn o boendod i'r rhai sy'n credu mewn trefn'* - T.H. Parry-Williams).

Going overboard and grossly unfair, I hear you say. Reserve your judgment until the conclusion of this brief account of my experiences on visiting two of the attractions you too will visit between now and the end of the conference, namely Glancaeath Fawr, - sorry Llancaiach Fawr - and the National Botanic Garden of Wales.

I'd like to emphasise that it's my intention to look at the provision made by the two attractions primarily through the eyes of a Welsh-speaking visitor, an individual who is a member of one of the three main audiences which need to be provided for in Wales, that is: the Welsh speakers (including those learning Welsh and fluent Welsh speakers who have learnt Welsh as a second language); the non-Welsh speaking Welsh; and the other English-speaking audience (primarily, perhaps, English but also Cornish, Scottish and Irish, together with people of all other backgrounds, including many to whom English is a second language, who live in Wales, or who are visitors to the country from beyond Offa's Dyke).

So, off I went to Glancaeath Fawr and, after reaching the gate, followed the bilingual directional signs to the reception area: '*Prynhawn da, tocyn oedolyn, os gwelwch yn dda.*' (Good afternoon, a ticket for one adult, please.) 'I don't speak Welsh' was the abrupt reply. Not even a '*Prynhawn da*, but I'm sorry I don't speak Welsh'. Therefore, no choice but to turn to English and ask for a guidebook, the Welsh version that is, unless of course the publication is bilingual. 'We don't do a Welsh guidebook.' Another disappointment, but at least I could look forward to wandering around the exhibition in the 'excellent visitor centre', to quote from the AHI conference programme. In the exhibition I was greeted by English-only panels, in spite of the fact that only Welsh would have been spoken by the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Glamorgan and west Gwent until the middle of the eighteenth century, not



Above left: Glancaeach Fawr, where according to the guidebook, most of the servants would have spoken Welsh
 Above right: The National Botanic Garden of Wales. Not one of the award winning interpretative panels is error free

Unique Roman Goldmine, the only known Roman gold mine in the UK, and the only extant and active of its kind. The lost gold mining heritage of Wales. The mine is set within a beautiful natural estate. Almost the entire site will still remain. A fascinating and full-scale day for adults and children. It's a unique experience. Under £10 per person. The Roman section of the mine (which is July 08)

Mr Wynnglodlau Aur Rhufeinig Unigryw
 Cymraeg unigryw ydyddau aur Rhufeinig a gwyddir amdan ym Mynyddau. W dyma'r unig safle i'w gweld yn ddiwydiedig yn ym Mynyddau. Mae'r mwynglodlau aur a stâd goestlog yn y safle hon. Cymraeg y dyddiau hyn. Dewch i'w gweld a'i gwneud o'ch ym ddyddiad. I'w holl gweld, 'mae'n broffid unigryw'. Gwll blant a dach'n oed gwyddo'n i'w gweld o'r mwynglodlau hyn. W dyma'r unig safle i'w gweld yn ddiwydiedig.



- Tethau tywylls tarddwarol (Elyr) a'wsg osgidau cryfion
- Dewch i'w gweld a'i gwneud o'ch ym ddyddiad
- Ysfaell gwyddiaethol y plant
- Adroddau ac offer mwynglodlau o'r 1930au
- Canolfan astudiaeth maes ac arddangosfa ddwyg
- Sêp - ym ddyddiau'r Aur Cymraeg

D ELIS GRUFFYDD

to mention the seventeenth century, the era portrayed in Glancaeach.

I wasn't in the best of moods leaving the exhibition but by the time I found myself in the gardens in front of the house the sun was shining and I set about reading that section in the guidebook about the life led by the servants because they, evidently, would be taking us from room to room.

To be fair, I was informed that Welsh would have been the mother tongue of the majority of servants in the house; only the steward would have been fluent in English as well as Welsh. Here's a great opportunity to bring history alive, I thought to myself: the servants chattering amongst themselves in Welsh, especially at the start of the tour, in order to create a feeling for the period and bring home to the visitors that Welsh was the natural language of the household including, in all probability, Colonel Edward Prichard and his wife Mary, the owners of Glancaeach. And Glancaeach, not Llancaiach, was the name during the period in question, in other words the house that was built on the banks of Nant Caeach ... or 'Caiach Brook', according to the English guidebook.

So, on to the house, fully expecting that I would receive a *croeso Cymraeg* (Welsh welcome) and hear at least some Welsh conversation between the servants. But that was not to be by a long, long way. Yes, the occasional Welsh phrase was to be heard on the lips of **one** of the role players - and thank goodness for that - but here, according to the guidebook, we were supposed to be surrounded by '... the sights, smells and **sounds** [please note] of the past', and here, according to the preface written by Caerphilly County Borough Council, the owners of the site, history was supposed to come alive. History coming alive? How in the world could this happen with us only hearing the sound of English? Spirit of place, Spirit of the people of Glancaeach? I certainly didn't experience anything of the kind.

I wholeheartedly agree with Sam Ham, author of *Environmental Interpretation* (1992), that there's nothing worse than unauthentic living history. According to him this sort of interpretation is '... among the worst when authenticity [is] lacking ... Living history demonstrations must present an accurate picture of the past, undistorted by the interpreter - even in the name of dramatic impact.

Remember that your job is not to create history but to re-create it... you cannot change what occurred or how people really were in those days. To do so... goes beyond your rights and responsibilities as an interpreter?

In Glancaeach, Caerphilly County Borough Council are guilty of creating history, turning monolingual Welsh speakers into non-Welsh speaking Welsh, if not actually English. But also, of not providing for Welsh speakers (and depriving non-Welsh speakers and other visitors of the opportunity to see and hear the Welsh language in use,) – a language which is part of their own heritage. The Council is also guilty of giving the two fingers to 100,000 and more Welsh speakers, that's 20% of Wales' Welsh-speaking population, who live within 30 miles of the site. It's evident that Caerphilly Council doesn't give a dam for the contents of the Welsh Language Act of 1993 - a thoroughly inadequate piece of legislation as we Welsh speakers know all too well - but an act even so which states that '... public bodies must develop ways of treating the Welsh and English languages equally in their services.' Isn't Glancaeach one of their services?

The philosophy of the National Botanic Garden of Wales is so different. Here's an institution that takes its duties seriously. In essence, interpretation is an educational activity and the education policy of the Garden is healthy and firm (in spite of the fact that there isn't a Welsh version of it on their web site!) and the document outlines their commitment to the Welsh language. Before stepping in to the Garden the visitor can buy his or her ticket in Welsh, get a copy of a bilingual explanatory leaflet for free, and buy a Welsh version of the guidebook. And in the Garden the panels and exhibitions are bilingual. Here's an institution that also recognises that losing languages, like losing species, is an enormous loss (and oh! that every self-proclaimed conservationist would be prepared to make this admission). 'Every lost language,' to quote one of the panels in the Mediterranean Garden, 'is a loss of a unique worldview.'

To be honest, the panels were the reason I revisited the garden recently, because on 19 July 2001 these signs were awarded one of the Welsh Language Board's main prizes in its Bilingual Design Awards

Above: Dloaucothi Gold Mines. Mistakes characterise a fair share of the interpretive material for institutions such as the National Trust

D ELIS GRUFFYDD



Scheme. According to Rhodri Williams, Chairman of the Language Board, 'The response to the award scheme [which attracted over a thousand applications] was very good and the standard of the work has been especially high...' By the way, the Board developed the competition in co-operation with the National Eisteddfod and Design Wales in order [and I quote the Board] 'to promote excellence, quality and imagination by designers in Wales'.

And my reaction to the excellent, prize-winning bilingual signs (or, at least, those panels between the main entrance and the Wallace Garden), everyone of which I examined quite closely? If these were the best, then I dread to think what the standard was like of those that were not deemed worthy of a prize.

Whilst that which I'm going to say next doesn't give me one iota of pleasure, may I note three points:

Firstly, the panels, in terms of their design, are acceptable, although it would be good to know on what basis the designers decided to set the Welsh text in a typeface which is lighter, if not a little smaller, than the English. Are we really to believe that Welsh speakers have much better eyesight than non-Welsh speakers?

Secondly, if we really believe that language offers 'a unique viewpoint on the world' why, oh why can't we hear the Welsh speaker's voice, rather than having to put up with slavish translations of text which more often than not has been written by members of the two non-Welsh speaking groups in today's Wales. If I want to try to understand and value the unique viewpoint of the non-Welsh speakers and the English on the world I'll read the English text, but in Welsh I expect to see the world through the eyes of my fellow Welsh speakers. Not only is there no need for one text to be a translation of the other, such a practice is totally unnecessary. I wonder if Welsh speakers have ever had the pleasure of reading a piece of interpretive literature composed first and foremost for their benefit? Once in a blue moon, perhaps, but far too often in Wales one has had to put up with translations offering an Anglo-centric viewpoint on the world and its ways.

And thirdly, no one's perfect: after 18 years as editor and director of publishing for Gomer Press, Llandysul, I know from painful experience how the most basic mistakes can slip through the net – sometimes, but not on every page of every book.

After that preamble, I venture to state the

following in respect of 50% of the panels viewed: if the English had been as mistake-ridden as the Welsh the panels wouldn't have seen the light of day because those running the Garden would not have dared to put them before the public. But in Welsh – if Welsh, indeed – it appears that anything will do: misspellings, mistranslations and clumsy expression. And on the basis of the Garden's panels it appears that members of the Language Board, of all people, don't care a toss for either the correctness or the dignity of the Welsh on the signs that they have been all too willing to praise to high heaven.

'If you vandalize a beautiful thing', wrote Freeman Tilden in his volume *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 'you vandalize yourself'. In vandalizing the Welsh language the Garden brings shame upon itself and insults Welsh speakers. The only hope, therefore, is that the trustees and staff are true to their philosophy and their own policy and that all the faulty panels will be destroyed immediately and we will see correct ones erected in their place.

After reaching the Wallace Garden I didn't feel like reading the rest of the award-winning signs, so I turned in to the exhibition in the Physicians of Myddfai building. With a bit of luck I would get a cure all there! But no, a quick glance at two or three panels was enough: here, once again, the mistakes were evident and an eyesore.

If it's any comfort to the trustees and officials of the Garden, the same weaknesses characterise a fair share of the interpretive material of institutions such as the National Museum of Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales, the National Trust, Cadw and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. And it would be all too easy for me to draw to your attention evidence in support of my case. The plain truth is that it's way beyond high time for interpreters of Welsh heritage not only to think about their audiences but also to respect them, especially the Welsh speakers and native non-Welsh speakers who have for so long been ignored and misrepresented. And, also, to respect those visitors from beyond Offa's Dyke by offering them a true taste of Welsh heritage and not a distorted Anglo-centric view.

Dr Dyfed Elis-Gruffydd is a lecturer at Trinity College, Carmarthen, Wales.

'Not only is there no need for one text to be a translation of the other, such a practice is totally unnecessary'

Postcards from Tanzania

Richard Barton-Wood looks at how he seeks to readdress stereotypical views of an African culture

Right: A party of schoolgirls enjoying a steam train excursion from Dar es Salaam to the Pugu Hills



13

“Tanzania? That’s in Australia isn’t it?” asked the shop girl in Norwich’

‘Ask anyone on the streets of Dar es Salaam where they come from and they will never mention the city itself; always they will name the district or village from which their family originates’

Of the hundreds of snapshots I took last year, a clear favourite is the one above of the schoolgirls on the steam train excursion. Their smiles and waves to me, a stranger on the platform, convey such a sense of confidence, old-fashioned fun and sheer delight in the moment. Were it not for their black faces, this could be a Sunday School treat somewhere in the Home Counties in the 1950s. No, this is Tanzania, East Africa, October 2001. But it is not the sort of image that most British people would immediately identify with life in a developing African nation.

Tanzania is a land full of surprises, almost all of them positive. This, at least, was my experience during a six month stint of voluntary work at The Village Museum, Dar es Salaam. My purpose was to work alongside museum staff, sharing ideas and developing some new resources. In particular, I was there to gather information, images and artefacts for an exhibition in the UK about contemporary life in Tanzania. In the process, I would discover much about Tanzanian cultural identity - how Tanzanians see themselves, what they value in their culture and traditions, and how they hope to be seen by others, particularly in the West.

The Live Aid Legacy

There is, sadly, a mismatch here, so often unintentionally revealed in casual comments. “Tanzania? That’s in Australia isn’t it?” asked the shop girl in Norwich (she thought I meant Tasmania). I explained that it is in Africa. “Is it a district of Africa, then?” she enquired. And so I had to explain, not for the first time, that Africa is really a continent with many different countries. Others, a little more knowing, would say “Tanzania - ah, that’s Tanganyika, isn’t it?” Perhaps their geography was better, but their

history was still forty years out of date. Some people were surprised that I would risk taking my family to live in this strange place. “How stable is it now?” they said (it seems to be a widespread view that, since regaining Independence, all African countries are inherently politically unstable. So much for the ‘land of peace and harmony’, as the locals know it!) “Will you be safe?” they enquired (again, the whole continent seems to be tarnished with the reputation of Johannesburg, though Tanzania must have one of the world’s lowest crime rates.) “Will you be able to get enough to eat?” they asked. After a Rotary Club talk, one local businessman commented that the children in the photos I had shown “didn’t look thin,” (yet Tanzania is a fertile country, effectively self-sufficient in food, its city supermarkets stocked with almost every luxury we would find in the West). As a recent VSO report makes clear, the whole of the developing world still seems to be tarnished by what has been called the Live Aid Legacy - summed up in images of famine, warfare and dependency, its begging bowl forever extended. As I was pointedly asked by a young student from the Tanzanian School of Journalism, “Why does your press never print the good stories about what’s happening in our country?” Why indeed!

In terms of how we understand a country’s cultural identity, these misleading generalisations seem to me to have two unfortunate consequences. First, at a general level, they may cause us to undervalue (as merely ‘primitive’) the historic richness and sophistication of African traditions, and of their continuity to the present day. Secondly, they blur over any real appreciation of the diversity of those cultures. Artefacts are all too readily thrown together by type, under the general label of ethnography, with

Above right: Only 10% of Tanzanian children reach secondary level, where teaching is usually in English. A good command of English is seen as the means to personal and national enrichment, but also as a threat to traditional cultural and social values

Above far right: The domestic items on sale at this market stall in Mwanza, Tanzania's second city, are all locally made, unlike its counterparts in the west



RICHARD BARTON-WOOD

little regard for the distinctiveness of the different tribal or ethnic traditions they represent.

A two way experience

The perception - often by Africans as well as Europeans - that the Western way of life is in some way 'superior' may be a by-product of our unequal economic relationships. On my return from Tanzania this year, several casual acquaintances stopped me in the street and greeted me with "Back to civilisation then!" Others commented that the Tanzanian museum professionals 'must have learned a lot' from me. Very flattering, I'm sure, but did it not occur that I might have learned a lot from them, too? Of course I did. On a practical level, I learned how a little funding can be made to go a long, long way. I also learned to admire the commitment and dedication of the staff, especially the curator Jackson Kihyo, who often worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week to ensure that events ran smoothly. More importantly, I began to see the Museum's role through his eyes - those of a social anthropologist with a personal crusade to ensure the survival of his country's culture and traditions. So often our own museums are run from a marketing perspective. Admission charges are determined by what the 'market' for our 'product' will bear; publications on local culture are justified (or, more usually, not) according to their 'shelf life'. But for Jackson Kihyo and his colleagues, these are secondary considerations. For them, the principal purpose of a museum is to research, record, preserve and display what are still - just - living traditions of building, art and craft-making, music, dance, storytelling, social and family life.

The Village Museum

A little more background. The Village Museum is a unique and remarkable place. It occupies a twenty acre site in the city of Dar es Salaam, the nation's commercial and cultural capital with a population of some 3 million people. Until I went to live there, I used to imagine the Museum as 'an oasis of greenery' in the city. But then I discovered that Dar is a very green place anyway, so the epithet seemed less apt (another assumption about African cities bites the proverbial dust). What the Museum does have is a great variety of trees, shrubs and crops and - dotted

about between them - eighteen authentically reconstructed furnished homesteads from different parts of the country. Some of these structures date back to the foundation of the Museum in the 1970s, not long after Independence. Despite the ravages of El Nino, tropical rainstorms, termites and time, they are maintained in good order.

One, the house of the Wasukuma, was built only last year. I was privileged to watch and record in photographs the Museum's technicians building it from fire-hardened wood, bark string, clay daub and thatch, using traditional skills that are fast dying out, even in Tanzania. There is much pressure from the Government for all new houses, in country as well as town, to be built of fired bricks or cement blocks with roofs of tiles or corrugated iron. It was almost bizarre to see the builders working in the Museum with traditional hand tools and natural materials, while just over the road a vast new concrete and plate glass office complex and multi-storey car park were under construction using a giant crane and the most modern techniques. Some of the construction workers were Maasai morani (warriors) wearing their red chequered robes coupled with orange reinforced plastic hard hats. That, however, is part of the paradox of a country like Tanzania. It is the Museum's mission to ensure that the old and the new continue to meet and inform each other.

A living Museum

Tanzanians certainly have a strong sense of cultural identity and the very existence of The Village Museum is evidence of its importance to them. As we in the UK know only too well, in lean times when public expenditure is under pressure, museums are often the first to suffer. And Tanzania has certainly had some lean times. It remains one of the world's poorest countries, with a GDP of less than one dollar per head per day. But the Tanzanian Government has continued to provide basic funding for the Museum and ensure its survival. So what do they get for their money? It is, of course, a tourist attraction. Admission charges (which are higher for non-Tanzanians), shop profits and income from hall lettings and the cafe franchise all help with running costs. But this is not just a display case of Tanzanian culture - in fact, cases of any sort are conspicuously absent. Like all



Above: Education officer Lucina Shayo in front of the Chagga House. For these westernised city teenagers, rural ways of life are as remote as they are from most of their contemporaries in the UK

Right: The Village Museum's Wanyakusa houses are built with bamboo from the shores of Lake Nyasa in SW Tanzania

Far right: The Village Museum sign looks almost incongruous beside the busy city road



'For them, the principal purpose of a museum is to research, record, preserve and display what are still - just - living traditions of building, art and craft-making, music, dance, story-telling, social and family life'

the best open air museums, it presents a living culture, almost like a real village. Fires are lit daily in one of more of the houses, meals are cooked, crops are tended, paths are swept and roofs repaired, dogs loll in the shade. There are artists and craftspeople at work, too, threading beads, carving wood, painting, potting and making batik. Among these Petre-Paulo Mayige has an international reputation for his clay figurines, and John Kilaka is known as a story-teller and Tingatinga-style painter in Europe as well as Africa. His children's book *Frische Fische* (Fresh Fish) became an instant best-seller in Germany last year, and his paintings have been exhibited in France and Switzerland. Most afternoons you will find local dance groups rehearsing or performing for visitors, and shady sitting-places beneath groups of spreading mango trees are used freely by many local organisations for meetings.

One day, I watched in amazement as 68 children disembarked from a single minibus. Despite the discomfort they had just endured, their enthusiasm was palpable as they split into groups to explore the homesteads with Lucina Shayo, the Museum's indomitable Education Officer. Children in school groups, in fact, constitute a high proportion of overall visitors and I began to understand the critical importance of education work at a site like this. Critical, because Tanzania is not a society with a single cultural identity, but with many. It is a country with over 120 different ethnic groups, each with their own (very distinct) language, history and traditions. Most people are at least bilingual, speaking a tribal language as well as Swahili, the official – language a

true lingua franca as it does not originate from any one ethnic group. Ask anyone on the streets of Dar es Salaam where they come from and they will never mention the city itself; always they will name the district or village from which their family originates. For those now living in the city, the Village Museum has a special importance as a place where they can identify with 'their' house and keep in touch with their rural origins. It is often used as a venue for initiation rites and ceremonies by families who understand the full symbolic importance of the traditional artefacts on display. The Village Museum is, then, more than a mere collection of objects. It visibly demonstrates the variety of cultures in Tanzania, educates the young about their own background, and teaches all to value each other's traditions.

Cultural festivals

The Museum's 'Ethnic Days' programme, established ten years ago, every year celebrates a different tribal or ethnic group with a Cultural Festival. For three days last September, some 200 Sukuma people came down from their homelands near Lake Victoria to present a festival of music, dance (amazingly complex choreography and ear-splitting drums), drama and food celebrating Sukuma culture. Debates addressed issues such as the erosion of traditional values through the westernising influence of mass media, especially television; the roles of traditional remedies and western medicines; and, tragically, the real impact of Aids on family life, employment and wealth. The people brought with them hundreds of

Right: Artist John Kilaka works on a mural in the traditional Tingatinga style of painting



RICHARD BARTON-WOOD

'But there are no pictures of hungry children with begging bowls, or of elephants, as most Tanzanians have never seen either of these'

artefacts which Museum staff worked through the night to label and display. Many were then donated to the Museum. The festival was a huge organisational feat, shared by Museum staff and organising committees in far-away Mwanza and Shinyanga. But for the Sukuma themselves, and for the 6,000 other visitors who came during the three days, it gave real value to their culture, and they went away justly proud in themselves. Once again, the festival demonstrated that the Museum is not just a symbol of Tanzania's remarkable record of social harmony, it is part of the means of achieving it.

A travelling exhibition

So I return to those images for an exhibition. It is impossible to sum up the cultural identity of a whole nation - particularly one as diverse and complex as Tanzania - in a few pictures and objects. This is meant to be an educational display, aimed primarily at children, a backcloth to a series of school and family workshops on Tanzanian culture. Working with Tanzanian colleagues and with Dr Anne Grosfilley, a freelance curator from Manchester University, we came up with the title 'Postcards from Tanzania'. Text will be in the form of simple messages, as if from young Tanzanians to their British pen-friends. Artefacts are all everyday items which would be instantly recognisable to the average Tanzanian - a padded bicycle saddle-cover in the colours of the national flag, a child's wooden bicycle called a ngongongo (from the sound it makes on a bumpy road), a long bar of solid soap, an oil lamp made from an old tin can, some car stickers and a home-made football specially made for me by a primary school boy whose ambition is to go to Cambridge

University. There are lots of colourful kanga cloths, with instructions on how to wear them - or use them for carrying babies on the back or heavy loads on the head. There are Moslem robes and hats, too, and football shorts for Yanga F.C. (though most Tanzanians seem to support Manchester United or Arsenal, which they watch on Sky TV!) The pictures, again, are a personal selection, with the emphasis on people. But there are none of hungry children with begging bowls, or of elephants, as most Tanzanians have never seen either of these. On the other hand, the cheery smiles of the girls on the train are utterly characteristic. You will see those everywhere.

Richard Barton-Wood, formerly an education officer with Norfolk Museums now works as a freelance writer and museum educator. The exhibition Postcards from Tanzania is showing in the Manchester Museum's Discovery Centre during July and August and will be available to other venues later in the year.

Further information on: tzimages@hotmail.com. This is a partnership project between UK and Tanzanian museum professionals, part-funded by Visiting Arts and the John Higgs Memorial Fund of The Arkleton Trust.

Contact the Village Museum on villagemuseum@raha.com.

Connecting people through place

Laura Hetherington and Polly Andrews explain how a National Trust initiative helped people to explore their cultural identity through the arts



17

THE NATIONAL TRUST PHOTOGRAPHIC LIBRARY/DAVID LEVENSON

Above: Homeless people explored the idea of home through creative writing

Above right: A storyteller sits with toddlers at Morden Hall Park

'Participants were encouraged to find ways of interpreting the history of the house when it was used as a squat in the 1980s rather than by a Tudor merchant's family'

"Gave me a break from the daily grind of my illness"

The National Trust's historic houses and gardens have the potential to engage people in exploration of their own identity and place in the world. 'London Links' was a project devised to help achieve this, particularly for those people who would not normally consider a National Trust property relevant to their lives.

In this project professional artists helped four different community groups create their own responses to four diverse National Trust sites through a variety of art forms. Everyone taking part was included in the planning right from the start and in making their own decisions about what they wanted from the project, with whom they wished to work and how they would engage. Working through a creative process engaged the participants at a deep emotional level: the process of creating art as a way of telling others about their own responses enabled the participants to express their own feelings about their cultural identity and tackle personal issues of social exclusion.

Ham House

At Ham House near Richmond, 48 children aged between 6 and 16 from refugee and asylum seeking families representing Afghanistan, Kosovo, Croatia, Somalia, Iran and Pakistan, worked with puppeteers Helen Manners, Laurence Moon and Amanda Browning. Puppetry crosses cultural boundaries and enables children to express themselves without worrying about language. The children explored the seventeenth century formal gardens, the furniture, textiles and paintings and heard stories about the

history of Ham House. Stories included tales of the dangers endured by the Murray family during the Civil War when, at great risk of discovery, they maintained their secret support for Charles II who fled to France and lived there in exile - mirroring some of their own experiences. Each child made a puppet, decorated a puppet theatre and devised plots for their puppet shows.

Older children concentrated on what Ham House was like when home to the Murrays. Younger children imagined the kinds of people such as footmen and cooks who might also have lived there and what their daily lives might have been like. Everyone rehearsed and performed shows to the other groups and visiting parents.

Sutton House

Through photography and poetry, six people who had experienced homelessness explored 'what home means'. This session, led by photographer Anthony Lam, encouraged participants to find ways of interpreting the history of the house when it was used as a squat in the 1980s rather than by a Tudor merchant's family. Responses included: 'Talking about the people who lived at Sutton House and then remembering how we were brought up in our homes - it's very personal, it's very difficult - but I am pleased with the work I have produced.' 'It's different from the normal projects I get involved in - I've enjoyed what I've seen and the prints I've produced. I hope they show what it's really like to live in a hostel.'

THE NATIONAL TRUST PHOTOGRAPHIC LIBRARY/DAVID LEVENSON



Above: A young refugee boy with puppet making equipment

Below: Children playing with puppets they made at Ham House



2 Willow Road, Hampstead

Architect Erno Goldfinger built this modernist house on the edge of Hampstead Heath in 1939. Intended as his family home it contains Goldfinger's outstanding collection of modern art as well as furniture and other domestic items. Artist Rachel Brown worked with users of Camden and Islington Mental Health NHS Trust services to help people explore their own identity and develop confidence through their creative responses to the house and its unique collections. The group spent a day and a half in the house drawing from observation and experimenting with a range of mixed media including acrylic paint, oil and conte pastels, charcoal, collage and appliqué. Crucial to the success of the project was a close working relationship with the Royal Free Hospital whose mental health workers advised and contributed, ensuring the well being of the participants. The value of such projects is shown in the comments from participants such as "I would value a continuing relationship with 2 Willow Road in future. Gave me a break from the daily grind of my illness" "Very good for getting me out of my problems I encounter most days of my life. Also gives me a chance to feel a little self worth".

Morden Hall Park

Morden Hall Park is a green space in southwest London. This former deer park has a network of waterways, ancient hay meadows, an impressive avenue of trees and an interesting collection of old estate buildings. Storyteller Kevin Graal and illustrator Rosie Casselden worked with a group of 20 parents and 55 children aged from 18 months to 4 years from the nearby Pillar Box playgroup, using the creatures and plants in the park as the inspiration for stories songs and artwork.

The storyteller helped the children adapt this Aesops fable:

The Ant and the Blackbird

One morning Anita the Ant woke up feeling very thirsty. She went to the river for a drink. Suddenly, splash, Anita fell in to the river. "Help", she cried. Anita could not swim. Her friend the blackbird heard her shout. He took a twig in his beak and dropped it in the water. Anita climbed onto the twig and floated safely to the riverbank. Later that day Anita saw the wicked birdcatcher with his net. He was going to catch the blackbird. Anita called her ant friends to help. They climbed up his trouser leg and nipped and bit. He had ants in his pants. He dropped his net and the blackbird flew away.

Friends help each other.

Art is a powerful medium to help people explore and express their identity. The skills of artists coupled with the exceptional National Trust places with their variety of cultural links from the past has enabled these groups to explore their identity through the theme of connecting people through place.

Laura Hetherington is Head of Education and Interpretation; Polly Andrews is Education Projects Officer at the National Trust. The National Trust received an award of £15,720 from London Arts through the Regional Arts Lottery Programme for this project.

The view from the hill

This paper was given by Bella Dicks at the AHI annual conference 'Spirit of Place: Spirit of People', University of Wales, Swansea 2001

Most of us have had the experience of visiting a place that, on leaving, can be seen from an elevated vantage point. It may be a place nestling in a valley or on a plain where the road out takes you back up, where you can stop and look back from where you've come, and survey the place from above. (The Welsh ex-mining valleys just north of here are full of such vistas). Or it may be a city which you can view from an elevated building - a tower or a plane, perhaps - or a landscape you can see from a bridge.

The point is, on leaving the ground and ascending the hill, the place you have left behind subtly changes. The cacophony of sounds on the street gradually coalesce into a distant single hum. The varied sights of human lives and culture you had while down on the streets - glimpses and images and messy impressions which were always moving and changing as you went about your business - fade from view, till the place telescopes into a whole. It becomes a view.

And, gazed upon in that way, it assumes a single form. All the streets seem to become part of a whole, and to share an *identity* with each other. They seem to become a common unity - a community. The physical boundaries of the place also come into view - the space between it and the neighbouring place or places. The city centre becomes defined by the surrounding suburbs, the village by the surrounding countryside, the town by the space between it and the next town. Thus the place itself is marked out

and given a boundary.

Such a perspective comes only from distance - social, geographical, cultural distance. It is a unity which is immediately lost from view once we descend back down into the streets and houses themselves. Once down, we are back in the ever-mobile myriad of human lives and relationships, where it is difficult to discern patterns or common features, to make sense of the place as a whole. But from the onlooker's perspective on the hill, the place seems to have this quality of being special, a world apart. It seems to embody, in fact, distinct values and ways of life.

Let's imagine that the onlooker on the hill is involved in the heritage business, and is interested in what this place was like in the past. He or she sits and imagines how to represent what life there was like in the past. In the act of assigning the place a past, it is given a temporal existence, a historical biography. Its past becomes the inheritance of its present - the foundations of its identity - of it's being the same place, now, then and into the future.

How does the heritage interpreter come to know and define this identity? By descending the hill, of course, and moving amongst the people who live there. Talking to them, listening to their stories, gathering impressions, images, artefacts, local accounts, points of view. It's difficult, though. How to meet the right people? How to get people to agree on what the place was actually like, what were the key events and people? Not only do conflicting and contradictory impressions and experiences immediately come rushing into view, but the accounts are peppered with personal, detailed experiences and anecdotes that often seem overburdened with detail, full of subjective judgements or confusing and unstructured reminiscences.

To make sense of them as an outsider involves assimilating a considerable number of such accounts and examining closely their detail and particularities in order to identify common narratives or themes. But that takes time and implies a different role - it involves being an ethnographer, in the field for a lengthy period, searching out different informants until stories finally start repeating themselves, and he/she can be reasonably sure that the picture is as full as it is going to get.

¹ My research was focused on the Rhondda Heritage Park in Trehafod, in the south Wales Valleys, a Victorian-built colliery which closed in 1983 and subsequently developed into a heritage museum (see Dicks, B. [2000] *Heritage, Place and Community*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press). It is not a traditional collection museum, but one of the new breed of 'living history' centres, with audio-visual shows, dioramas and costumed guides (who are ex-miners themselves from the local area) who take visitors around a simulated reconstruction of the underground roadways. The study consisted of several years on-site research, comprising in-depth interviews with those who helped manage, fund and put the exhibition together (local government officers and councillors, the project managers, heritage interpreters, guides, local informants) as well as with 20 groups of visitors to the site. I also carried out extensive archival research, looking at the minutes of meetings and consultants' reports.

² Extracted from focus group comprising local ex-miners and members of the Friends of the Rhondda Heritage Park Association, my emphasis.

Right: View of the Lewis Merthyr Colliery Trefor Winding House and Wheel, from the pit yard



BELLA DICKS

A heritage interpreter can not be an ethnographer. If you're a interpreter working to a deadline, you may only have a few weeks to do this historical research. This research then needs to be distilled into a set of designs, which will in turn provide a blueprint for a public exhibition of some form - whether audio-visual or artefact-based. It has to be condensed into usable stories, it has to yield exhibition designs that will do the job of attracting the attention of an unknown audience.

So interpreters need stories, and, in the case of local, working-class heritage, local people are - in theory - available to provide them, since, meanwhile, down on the streets, local people themselves are getting interested in the heritage project. And it is also the case that many local people (though certainly not all, my research suggests¹) do want to have their history put on display. Here - at last - is an opportunity for them to have their past represented - making a change from castles, manor-houses, cathedrals and the like.

M1: I believe the Rhondda - if it isn't, if it wasn't built on coal, it was built on nothing. The Rhondda was coal.

M2: Coal. Full stop.

M1: Right. Anybody that was outside the coal industry in the Rhondda, they had connections [to it] somewhere. And I think that we look at castles or people or things that happened you know 400 years ago and so on...

M3: *Why shouldn't we in the Rhondda have something?*²

In this way heritage can affirm local identity and give it a public platform. The identity of the self is confirmed via the identity of place and the past, through giving space to a set of experiences (local mining) that have conventionally been denied entry to the realm of 'national heritage'.

So there seems, in theory, to be a happy coincidence of motives and interests. Heritage interpreters want to access and represent local people's stories, and local people are gratified to find that someone, finally, somewhere, is interested in their lives, and the lives of their forebears.

So what's the problem? The following extracts (opposite and overleaf), from my own research in the Rhondda Heritage Park, illustrate just a few of the potential pitfalls.



BELLA DICKS
 Above top: view of the lamp room, with two life-size models of miners
 Above: Jenkins the Butcher, one of the reconstructed shop fronts in the visitor centre

The audio-visual team at the Rhondda Heritage Park described how they put together the Creative Treatment for *Black Gold* (the three audio-visual shows that punctuate the tour of the site) and assembled three stories from the mass of available historical detail:

D: "It's what's significant to you - there's always subjects you'll come across that are new to you and it's what strikes you..."

T: What hits you as individuals...

D: And what you think would strike your kids, or your wife. You know, that's what I suppose you're going for in the story-line, in the way that it's produced, isn't it? ... If it's new to you ... so whatever comes across as amazing or remarkable or interesting... you're fairly sure that the visitor's going to find the same ...

T: If you are new to something... that's why it would probably be more difficult if it was a producer in South Wales, to give such an objective... well, assuming it was objective in people's eyes, but in order to have an objective view of a situation, you have to be quite removed from it... and pick out a few features of a story that, that make an impact. And make people remember it, and enjoy what they see. I think that's important." (Personal interview with members of production team; my emphasis.)

The focus here is on communicating the strangeness and unfamiliarity of the past. The assumption is that visitors will be like the interpreters themselves - novices and outsiders to local history. The communicated story has to be that which will 'strike' the audience through its novelty and difference from their own lives. This can only be achieved by an outsider looking in - the 'view from the hills'.

In the case of industrial, working-class history - such as mining - local people will have lots of stories to contribute to this public display of the self - both their own memories and the handed down stories of their parents and grandparents. What they see is not, on the whole, the view of the town from the hill, but the biography of their own lives, and the lives of those around them. These require getting the details right - because these confirm the concrete and particular memories of the self. And they also require getting the artefacts right. Here's Ivor, one of the key figures in the development of the Rhondda Heritage Park, the subject of my study, and an ex-miner himself, now a guide at the Park, talking about the process of transforming the mine into a museum:

"Lewis Merthyr ... is a traditional pit, it's one of the old pits. It's one of the pits of the familiar scene when I was a boy. This head gear here was the same head gear, virtually, as all the collieries in the Rhondda. [...] I really believe they've done a good job of telling the story of mining, you know, with the audio visuals, but I wanted a lot more here.[...] I certainly would have liked to have all of this colliery with all the paraphernalia that we were used to you know.

For the local miner, it is the familiarity and recognisability of genuine artifacts, that underpin the idea of a proper museum. The point was to save the particular, concrete remainders of lived experience: 'the paraphernalia we were used to'. The perspective is of an insider looking out - wanting to see the messy paraphernalia of remembered scenes.

The project photographer, noting the 'touchiness' of local informants about how their lives were to be represented, confided:

"Because of the nature of the project and the people involved, we had to be really, really particular about it, and search out individuals who could give us a definitive yes or no: yes, that lamp was in use at the time, or no, they wouldn't have used those tools, they'd have used others... But you might miss certain details - out of choice not out of ignorance... Because a lot of things that people present you with, although they may be intimately interested in it and think it's of value, ultimately to a school party visiting from Bristol or from Edinburgh, it doesn't have much relevance really."

Another designer, responsible for assembling the simulated miner's cottage in the Park, tried to access these stories by holding a workshop with local informants. But it was a disaster:

"We were in this tiny little classroom thing, with a large group of people. We started off by sitting round. We'd got a structure to work on, but we never got beyond the first section, because I think that these people had been briefed to come and just tell their story, as it were, in one way or another. They were all desperate to unload something, ... like this woman had written a poem that she wanted us all to hear, which took her about half an hour to read ... By the time we'd gone round the whole group, and been very fair with people and let them have their say, they'd say, 'Well, I've written this down because...' And they'd launch into a story about their great Aunty Lilly, which was why they'd wanted to come in the first place. So it was kind of fatal, really."

The problem is that Aunty Lilly is not going to be particularly interesting for an audience. Neither is the precise detail of artefacts. Small details, long and involved personal reminiscences - none of these things can easily be interpreted into arresting public displays.

Ivor continued:

"It was a terrible waste. There were engineers phoning me from Lady Windsor [colliery] and saying 'Ivor, for Christ's sake are you going to come and pick this stuff up? Because the scrap merchant's coming and they're going to have it, and I don't want to see stuff going into skips but I can't hold it much longer.' I got so bloody frustrated in the end I went over to Abercynon colliery which was intact but closed, and we actually piled a load of stuff out of the winding engine that we needed here into the boot of my car. And the car was right down on its bloody axle almost. ... Maerdy closed down in 1990 and the boys there had Communist gear, a lot of things, depth gauges, mining shovels that we could have had. We could have even had the bloody locomotives up because once the Board had finished with them, if the winders were still working the boys had virtual control of things and the management were sympathetic..."

But for the designers all this machinery and industrial equipment was not necessary. For them, a few choice examples would suffice, since to house more would be to clutter the visitor's view unnecessarily.

Ivor himself was frequently approached by interpreters who had descended the hill in search of local stories:

"You'd get people asking you, 'Oh, Ivor, what was it like in a typical street in the '30s, the '40s, the '50s? ... Could you tell us what it was like when you were a boy? What did you and your sisters play in the street?' I did co-operate, but I co-operated grudgingly because I thought 'No, why should you have my bloody knowledge? At the end of it all, you'll present it in a great big glossy kind of consultancy study and then you'll get paid handsomely and then you'll go away."



BELLA DICKS
Above: Graham, one of the ex-miner guides, in the lamp room

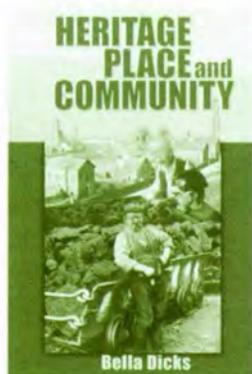
Discussion

What these quotations show is the gulf between the ground level and the hill. Whereas down in the streets themselves there is a babble of different voices saying different things, telling different stories, from the hill these blur into a single sound. The heritage interpreter is looking for coherent stories that can be presented to the public in a lively, accessible, digestible way. For the purposes of self-representation, however, local people want to tell the detailed, personalised, idiosyncratic, contradictory stories that for them constitute how things were.

But I don't want to end by suggesting that heritage can never do justice to local people's sense of the past. There is a potential meeting place between the ground and the hill. It is possible for interpreters to involve local people much more closely as subjects rather than objects. Instead of starting with the assumption that the stories they are looking for will float up to them from the streets, they can go and

listen to local people first - before assigning the place an identity by climbing up the hill. There will always be a creative tension between the demands of public exhibition - for something that can be viewed with interest, from afar, by outsiders - and the demands of local memory - requiring something more complicated and personal. But the public representation does not have to assume the form of a unified and coherent place and people. It could be more open and honest about the fault lines of local identities and seek to do justice to the myriad of voices and scenes down at on the ground. It's difficult to achieve this bridge between public spectacle and local memory, but this is the kind of heritage project that we should be pursuing.

Dr Bella Dicks is a lecturer at the Cardiff School of Social Sciences



University of Wales Press
Paperback £14.99
ISBN 0-7083-1668-0

Book review

Heritage Place and Community

Bella Dicks

With all the problems of an academically-derived text, this book is essential reading for all those who maintain any claim to the original purposes of interpretation. It is all the more important because it is based on (though does not always reflect) a well structured academic exploration using primary data set within the broad disciplinary areas of contemporary geography and sociology, and outside of the narrow, undernourished, literature of interpretation.

The book is set within the recent search for Welsh cultural identity. There are valuable chapters on the evolution of heritage in Wales, set within a broader introduction to the heritage debate - Hewison is here, but so is Harvey.

The key discussion of the development of the Rhondda Park is pursued through a series of chapters which often reflect their origins in separate academic articles. More effective editorial skills might have been

applied to some repetition and to their continuity, but fortunately the sound evidence from documentary and interview sources, set within an underlying framework for enquiry carries the work though.

Dicks provides most unsettling evidence as to what happens when interpreters and interpretation are claimed as part of a process which maintains 'authenticity' at its masthead. The combination of political and economic expediency, community complexity, market and visitor expectations... and interpretive powerlessness suggest just how far short our professional intentions may fall.

Nobody who claims the term 'interpretation' in their work or purpose can afford to ignore this study and its implications; it must join the 'top five how to do it' texts as the first significant external assessment of interpretation's mission.

Review by Brian Goodey

'The spell of far Arabia'¹

Jo Scott explains her involvement with interpreting the culture of a Kingdom

24

'As a result of a swift and dramatic departure from many aspects of traditional life, there is a fear that the essence of the country's culture is being lost'

'Interpreting the culture of the country could have a major impact in halting - or at least slowing down - the loss of built and archaeological resources, collections, customs and skills in the Kingdom'

As a visitor, the experience of Saudi culture begins on the journey there, with thimblefuls of thick, cardamom flavoured coffee and ripe dates being offered by Saudi Airlines. This unquestioning welcome to strangers is found in all Muslim countries but the widespread coffee ceremony of Saudi Arabia is particularly distinctive. Like so many traditions in the country, it is a blend of Arab custom and Koranic guidance - of the practical and the spiritual. The spiritual - the teachings of Prophet Mohammed and the tenets of Islam - permeates every aspect of life in the Kingdom and has done for the last fourteen centuries.

Saudi Arabia has undergone drastic social change within the last seventy years, however. From an essentially disparate tribal society, the country was united by the al Saud family in 1932; more recently, life in the Kingdom has been transformed by oil-generated wealth. As a result of this swift and dramatic departure from many aspects of traditional life, there is a fear that the essence of the country's culture is being lost.

In response to this, PLB - as part of a large consultancy team led by Ernst & Young looking at wider tourism and sustainability issues in the Kingdom - was invited in 2001 to visit Saudi Arabia to explore ways in which aspects of this rich and vibrant culture might best be preserved and promoted. My role was to offer guidance on the benefits of interpretation as part of the preservation, management and presentation of the heritage and, in particular, to look at the intangible culture of the Kingdom. Together the team of consultants and Saudi counterparts were aiming to establish a strategic interpretive framework for the future that could be built upon and developed in the coming years.

West meets East

The challenge facing our Western European team has been to find a suitable approach to interpreting a Middle Eastern culture that is so radically different to our own. In some ways, the task was made simpler by an absence of foreknowledge and experience of Saudi Arabia and its culture until we arrived there - we truly brought 'fresh eyes' to the vast and fascinating country. Yet this same innocence meant difficult lessons had to be learnt quickly about what would be regarded as appropriate and acceptable outcomes

from our work. This was achieved by working closely with our Saudi counterparts, bringing together our understanding and experience of cultural heritage development practice in the west and their vast knowledge of, insight into and enthusiasm for their country. Awareness of some of the more sensitive religious issues was provided through the coincidental good fortune of having a Muslim member on the consultant team.

Understanding the audience

As ever, it was essential for the team to first understand the potential audiences for the cultural heritage development opportunities we were to explore. Given that international tourism is a fledgling industry in the Kingdom and unlikely to become a major factor in the near future, the focus has been on residents and Saudi nationals. However, pursuing leisure activities as we understand them is not a widely accepted part of Saudi culture. Spending time with the family is a very important aspect of life in the Kingdom but, due to the strict segregation of men and women outside the home, it can be very difficult for families to enjoy activities together in public places. This is one reason why many Saudis take their holidays outside their own country. One of the fundamental remits of the consultancy study has therefore been to explore ways in which Saudi nationals can be encouraged to take their holidays at home. It is anticipated that raising interest in the distinctive local cultural heritage, and developing appealing activities related to this, will contribute to this process.

The essence of interpretation

For me, the first task was to distil down some key interpretive principles to inform the overall cultural heritage strategy. Across the country, museums, historic buildings and other significant sites are busy interpreting their cultural resources quite successfully, but the 'theory' of interpretation is not widely understood

I began at first principles, wanting to demonstrate the ways in which interpreting the culture of the country could have a major impact in halting - or at least slowing down - the loss of built and archaeological resources, collections, customs and

Below left: Camels have been raced in Arabia since ancient times and many customs are associated with the event



Above right: Each area across the kingdom has its own styles of basketware in distinctive colours and shapes

skills in the Kingdom. By raising awareness of these aspects of the past and encouraging a sense of pride in shared history, the aim is to stimulate a desire throughout Saudi society to ensure their protection, and there is a great willingness on the part of our counterpart team to promote this approach.

Most importantly we needed to reiterate the management, communication, educational and economic benefits that good interpretation could offer.

Inform, entertain, inspire

To begin the process of creating an appropriate interpretation strategy for the Kingdom, we wanted to propose a central theme and key message. To our team it seemed obvious that Saudi Arabia's significance lies first and foremost as the place where Islam began but, having identified this as the fundamental USP - and thus the obvious focus of an interpretive approach - we faced difficulties. Interpreting or even discussing Islam in an appropriate way requires great sensitivity, especially in the knowledge that Muslim scholars dedicate entire lifetimes to interpreting the Koran. Also we need to take care with our terminology since using the term 'message' led to misunderstanding, due to its religious connotations.

Thus any interpretive proposals we made had to be particularly carefully phrased and unambiguous (especially since everything we produced had to be translated into Arabic), highly sensitive to their subject matter and underpinned by accepted Muslim principles. To achieve this, we went back to the basics of interpretive practice once more and were again forced to question our accepted approach. PLB's interpretive

philosophy has always been to 'inform, entertain and inspire'. Using interpretation to inform was absolutely acceptable to the Saudis, since education is highly regarded and widely embraced for both sexes. Exploring the use of interpretation as entertainment (even as part of the learning process) was rather more tricky; when not working or eating, members of the Muslim community are encouraged to spend their time in prayer or with the family. Finally, interpretation as inspiration was also challenging, since emotion belongs with and comes from one's relationship with Allah. Thus our focus for Saudi Arabia has been primarily on interpretation as a formal and informal educational tool, and the next stage of development work will be to identify interpretive proposals with clear educational messages.

Incense, cardamom and coffee

'One of the unique qualities of the Arab World is the desire of its people to celebrate the past while moving towards the future. Many traditions have not changed over the generations. Today, as in antiquity, when entering the home of an Arab - a farmer or a millionaire - one is still welcomed by the aroma of burning incense, small cups of Arabian coffee and the scent of cardamom and a plate of sweet dates' ²

There is an increasing will in Saudi Arabia to encourage interest in its cultural heritage in order to preserve it for the future, and the distinctive Arab traditions and historic sites we enjoyed on our visit are without doubt worthy of celebration. We were given a fascinating insight into this insular country and I will never forget the honour of joining the men at a traditional feast in a Bedouin tent or meeting

'We needed to reiterate the management, communication, educational and economic benefits that good interpretation could offer'

Right: The traditional full-length thobe and checked ghutra are worn by most Saudi men



© PLB CONSULTING LTD



'There is an increasing will in Saudi Arabia to encourage interest in its cultural heritage in order to preserve it for the future'

place, nor the drama of massive carved Nabataean tombs in the midst of searing sand desert and the fascination of the bustling carpet and gold souqs of Riyadh. But, amidst this fabulous cultural wealth, there was a sense of its fragility in the face of 21st century development. Perhaps most at risk, because of its nebulous nature, is the intangible or 'soft' culture of the Kingdom - its traditions, customs, social mores, sports and pastimes.

Grappling with intangibles

Once the interpretation strategy framework was determined, the cultural heritage team's next task was to look in more detail at specific aspects of the heritage. With the invaluable assistance of my Saudi counterpart, I began to explore in more detail the issues and opportunities surrounding this intangible culture. The aims of the work were to identify the intangible cultural heritage of the Kingdom and its different regions and to understand how it is currently preserved and presented. We also explored opportunities for protecting and conserving this aspect of culture for the future and the most appropriate and sustainable ways of presenting and interpreting it.

In Saudi Arabia, largely because of the great speed of change, there is an ambivalence towards traditional skills and customs. Many are not valued - particularly by young people - as they are regarded as old-fashioned and outdated, and there is little financial or other incentive in the current climate to pass on or pursue these crafts and customs. As a result, like so many other countries east and west, Saudi Arabia has become flooded with cheap handicrafts from other cultures, so that it is almost impossible to buy distinctive locally made products. The team needed to

explore ways in which pride in traditional customs and skills could be encouraged and how a desire to learn them could be stimulated, as well as to identify incentives that could be offered to craftspeople and potential apprentices to ensure their knowledge would not be lost forever. In particular, my aim was to clearly establish the role interpretation could play in this process.

New lamps for old?³

One of the most exciting aspects of our visit to the Kingdom was the opportunity to explore its diversity. It is a vast country, large areas of which are virtually uninhabited, and it comprises the dramatic contrasts of high rise cities, remote mud brick villages, mile after mile of rock and sand deserts, cool mountain retreats and a string of coastal resorts. It also contains the birthplace of Islam at Mecca and the second most holy Muslim city of Medina, where the Prophet Mohammed is buried. While each region - whether mountains, desert or coast - has generated locally distinctive ways of life, our approach to reviewing the cultural heritage of the Kingdom was initially to identify particular customs and traditions that are widely shared and valued, such as the coffee ceremony, traditional meals, the burning of incense, poetry competitions and traditional sports such as camel racing and falconry.

Having identified these shared aspects of the heritage, it was essential to determine the potential economic benefits, and in particular the tourism development opportunities associated with Saudi Arabia's intangible cultural heritage. In tandem, we reiterated that the preservation and presentation of these unique cultural aspects could also bring



Above: A restored mud brick palace in Al-Diriyah on the outskirts of Riyadh

Above right: Some of the 150 massive Nabataean rock tombs at Madain Saleh, north west Saudi Arabia

Above far right: A museum of social history has been created in a restored palace in the village and is strongly supported by local people

'Perhaps most at risk, because of its nebulous nature, is the intangible or 'soft' culture of the Kingdom - its traditions, customs, social mores, sports and pastimes'

considerable social and educational benefits.

Our research revealed many reasons why aspects of the Kingdom's heritage, and specifically the intangible culture, are currently undervalued, including a lack of understanding of their significance, low incomes in the sector, a lack of protective legislation and obstacles to training and skills transference. It was important therefore to identify ways in which the intangible culture could be used to deliver economic benefits, since this was likely to be the stimulus for encouraging, for example, young people to value and become involved with traditional skills and customs. We demonstrated how aspects of the intangible culture could be used as attractions in their own right (such as poetry competitions and sporting events), for product enhancement (demonstrating traditional weapon making at a related historic site, for example) or as an economic activity (such as craft fairs and restaurants serving traditional foods).

This raised issues regarding the protection and management of aspects of the intangible heritage and the importance of access, quality and value in any development initiatives. We made recommendations to address these issues and on ways in which the intangible heritage could be preserved for the future, through for example recording customs and traditions, skills transference and training. We also explored how intangible culture could be integrated at non-heritage sites, such as hotels, restaurants and shopping malls, and looked at marketing and product development opportunities. This built on the sound foundations laid by Saudi Airlines who, as I mentioned earlier, have already successfully added the essence of local culture onto their flights in and out of the Kingdom.

A future for the past

Following on from this foundation work, the next stage for the consultant and Saudi teams will be to develop proposals for a number of specific cultural heritage sites. This will be an exciting opportunity to work together using the strategies to create viable action plans that will reach fruition in the coming years. I look forward to returning to the Kingdom later this year.

As a consultant used to working with client teams to interpret aspects of British and European heritage, it was a tremendous challenge to explore interpretive principles and aspects of the heritage and to make relevant recommendations for another culture with such different values and distinct parameters. A further challenge was being a non-Muslim woman in such a male-oriented environment - but that would be the subject of an entire article on its own! Overall it was a fascinating and rewarding assignment that explores sustainable solutions for protecting, managing and interpreting the Kingdom's internationally significant cultural heritage and should provide practical guidance for the people of Saudi Arabia to achieve this.

Jo Scott is Senior Interpretive Planner at PLB Consulting Ltd. Jo can be contacted on 01653 698 309 or at jo.scott@plbltd.com. She would be particularly interested to hear from anyone who has had similar experiences of the challenge of working in the Middle East.

¹ Walter de la Mare (1912): *Arabia*
² Arab Heritage: *Arabic Heritage*
³ *Arabian Nights: The History of Aladdin*

Whether you require complete project management or the supply of one element we are pleased to oblige

Graphic Design

Structural Design

Printing

Panel Production

Timber Construction

Metal Fabrication

Assembly and Finishing

Installation



Arien Products Ltd
99 Church Street
Highbridge
Somerset
TA9 3HR

T: 01278 785268
F: 01278 780331
W: arlen.com
E: sales@arlen.com

Communicating a Quality Image