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# Interpretation journal

of the Association for Heritage Interpretation

A H I



Ready and willing

*Award winning schemes from Interpret Britain 2002*

*Special category: volunteers*

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The next issue will feature  
**interpretation of  
plants and gardens**

Email suggestions for  
contributions to  
ruthaylor@nationaltrust.org.uk

In recognition of the immensely important role that volunteering plays in the heritage sector, the Interpret Britain Awards 2002 Special Category was volunteers, some of which illustrate this issue. In addition, Bridget Yates makes a cry for the vital role volunteers play in small rural museums in Norfolk; Heather Perry describes the part that volunteers have played at the Haslemere Educational Museum in Surrey since its foundation in the late 19th century; Liz Cope describes how certain tours at Dunster Castle in Somerset are only available with the help of volunteers and Tracey Borman tells how events at English Heritage sites are dependant on volunteers.

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# Magic moments on the Awards trail

John Iddon looks back at his time as Awards Secretary with some amusement

overlooking the Grand Canal had the rider's arms outstretched and penis prominently erect, was unable to remember that Peggy Guggenheim had positioned it to embrace the spirit of that sexy city of carnival and courtesan. Instead she said she'd go and ask a colleague at the information desk, ran off and never came back.

However, such experiences are unusual and, to be serious, as the articles in this Journal show, volunteering is immensely important and valuable in the heritage sector. The use of volunteers is such a productive activity, so long as they are well selected and well trained. They offer the public enthusiasm, variety of personality and expertise, and a brief 'relationship' and knowledge of the local area that often goes beyond the professional duty of a paid employee. Furthermore volunteers mostly do what they do because they love the site, subject or institution they are serving. They themselves also benefit from entering a community with the advantages of a common mission, companionship, the development of knowledge and technical and communication skills. Indeed not a few people have found that volunteering and 'work placements' have set them on course for future full-time employment in the sector.

As Liz Cope says in her account of the use of volunteers in the Attic and Basement Tours at the National Trust's Dunster Castle (page 4): 'They provide a human interface... giving opportunity for active participation within their audiences. The dedication and enthusiasm demonstrated to property staff by the volunteers also proves to us the very great value to them... a chance to pursue personal interest, meet different people and play their part in supporting the continued preservation of the property'.

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# Are you being served?

Liz Cope gives praise to the volunteers who indulge visitors in life behind the scenes at one of the busiest National Trust properties in Somerset

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Dunster Castle, located in West Somerset, overlooks the medieval village of Dunster with spectacular views across Exmoor, the Quantock Hills and the Bristol Channel. Essentially unchanged in appearance since its last major alterations in the 19th century, the site now attracts 120,000 visitors per year and offers a varied programme of events and learning activities ranging from Family Fun days to specialist talks and tours.

The National Trust has been providing access to the attic and basement rooms for over ten years. Through guided tours, visitors have the opportunity to gain access to a part of the property that is not normally open to the public and the success of the tours is very much the result of the hard work and enthusiasm of the volunteers who conduct them. Their knowledge and interpretive skills lead to sell-out tours that are enjoyed by a broad cross section of the visitor market.

## What the butler saw

Rarely a day goes by at Dunster Castle when a visitor doesn't ask about the kitchens, where the servants used to live or what their working conditions would have been like. With recent films such as *Gosford Park*, the story of life behind the scenes continues to intrigue visitors and the demand for access to these parts of the property is high.

The attic and basement rooms at Dunster are pretty much as they were when the National Trust acquired the property in 1976. The incredible Victorian Kitchen with its high ceilings and tall windows is full of atmosphere, as is the Bell Chamber, Game Larder, Crypt, Estate Office and Scullery. There is a tantalising feeling that characters such as the Butler, Housekeeper, Cook and Kitchen Maids have only recently vacated the premises.

The rooms have not been filled with contents or recreated in any way: they are essentially just a shell, a reminder of the once great and elaborate workings of an English country house.

At present, the attic and basement rooms are not included in the standard tour of the castle show rooms. The existing visitor route encompasses the above stairs family rooms, although strong hints at life below stairs are made by drawing attention to the bell pulls in each room which would have been used to summon the servants.

'There is a tantalising feeling that characters such as the Butler, Housekeeper, Cook and Kitchen Maids have only recently vacated the premises'

## The Attic and Basement tours

Developing regular access to the attic and basement as a part of the visitor route would greatly enhance peoples' understanding of the whole property, but the scale of the task and complexity of the layout presents a major challenge to the conservation of these areas. Although the attic and basement rooms are robust, the wear and tear on the existing steps and corridors would increase dramatically, and the issue of actually manning the rooms would contribute toward a major project which at this stage we do not have the resources to support. Therefore, the best way to bring people to the attic and basement is to take them on a guided tour. This allows us to manage the number of visitors to the area, minimise impact, and use live interpretation, which in this case is the most effective method.

Access to the attic and basement rooms has been offered in some shape or form at Dunster for over ten years, with regular tours provided since 1994. At present, an average of 38 tours take place during the year for the general public, which means that 570 people gain access to this special part of the castle (places on the tours limited to 15). A number of additional tours are also organised during the year for education and private groups.

## Working with volunteers

The success of this venture would not have been achieved without the help of volunteers. The volunteers have enhanced the tour over the years, adding more detailed information, often as a result of personal research. They are committed to and enjoy their guided tours, and work hard to provide an excellent visitor experience.

The volunteers are keen to involve visitors in the discovery of how life was once lived behind the scenes, and many return from their tours glowing with pride at the enthusiasm shown by the group.

In its own right, the attic and basement tour meets the needs of both visitors and volunteers; those who want to delve deeper into the castle's past and those who have enthusiasm for domestic and social history. Each tour can be tailored to the individual needs of the group, whether it is a school group, an adult group, history society or families; the dedicated guides have the skill and the knowledge to adapt their information accordingly.



Above left: Volunteer David Bryan explains how water was heated in the scullery  
Above right: These bells summoned the servants

'The volunteers have enhanced the tour over the years, adding more detailed information, often as a result of personal research'

Many volunteers come from the local community and we are therefore working with them to provide opportunities for life long learning as well as creating an active role for them within the regular operations of the visitor services department at the property.

In a sense, the volunteers task of interpreting the attic and basement is made harder by the lack of contents in the rooms, but our volunteers use this to their advantage by provoking the visitors and encouraging them to use their imaginations. A task that is clearly achieved judging by the feedback we received. This is especially evident with the school groups, as the tours tie in with the National Curriculum and provide a tangible support to their studies.

We encourage volunteers to lead the attic and basement tours because they are the people who, through room steward duties and assisting with school groups and events, are the ones who have the knowledge of the property and the experience of interacting with the visitors. Their time and skill is greatly appreciated and without them we would not be able to provide half as much access.

## Fitting in with strategy

The tours were set-up originally with the intention of providing access to the castle on one of the closed days (the castle is closed every Thursday and Friday during the open season), thus avoiding the inevitable disappointment of visitors who arrived expecting it to be open. This initial access vision has

since been incorporated into the property learning strategy where aims and objectives have been clarified and set.

The aim of the Attic and Basement tour is quite simply to provide visitors with a greater insight into the domestic functioning of Dunster Castle as a late 19th century family home. Objectives that stem from this look to provide learning opportunities for a wide audience, increase access to the castle and excite interest and understanding for both visitors and volunteers.

The Attic and Basement tours are a key element of our property learning strategy, and focus upon the provision of increased access and better interpretation, thus enhancing the visitor experience. This person-to-person interpretation technique actively involves the audience and is extremely effective at achieving the objectives of the tour. We are exploring opportunities for future developments including costumed characters, links to specific education courses and access to handling collections. The interpretative strategy for the tours is amended as a result of visitor feedback and recommendations that are made by the volunteers and staff.

Dunster Castle is the only large country house in West Somerset where access to such rooms is provided. This makes it an extremely valuable resource to local schools and history groups. The attic and basement are also important to the community as many local residents can actually remember working for the Luttrell family or have



Above: Volunteer Jo Willicombe captivates her audience in the scullery

**'The aim of the Attic and Basement tour is quite simply to provide visitors with a greater insight into the domestic functioning of Dunster Castle as a late 19th century family home'**

friends and family who used to work at the castle. The tours also broaden the appeal of the property and reach out to new audiences, for example, involving different visitor groups who may be less interested in the 'traditional' and magnificent showrooms.

#### Training and development

As mentioned above, the volunteers often undertake their own research which is then shared with their counterparts. Alongside this, we have provided training sessions with Peter Brears and John Iddon.

The Peter Brears session in 2000 really brought to life the workings of the old domestic areas for the volunteers, and through illustrations and talks, the group were able to envisage how the rooms would have been used. Peter produced a fascinating Guide to the Kitchens which, along with other documents and research, is used as a part of the training for new volunteers.

Peter's workshop was complimented in February 2002, when John Iddon provided a training day for most of the attic and basement volunteers. We looked at their existing presentation skills and encouraged them to share their experiences and top tips. Suggestions for ways to improve their tours as well as ways to read their audience and deal with potentially difficult situations were included. Feedback from this session was extremely positive, and the training has hopefully increased confidence and awareness.

Leading a tour for the first time and remembering all the information in the right order (as well as remembering the route!) is quite a daunting task. This is why we encourage a 'buddy system' which allows a new guide to back-up an established guide on their tour. The volunteers help each other understand and develop their knowledge of the tour, and it is always pleasing for property staff to see the teams working well together.

#### Benefits for everyone

In conclusion, the attic and basement tours are very much the product of the volunteers who conduct them. Our volunteers are an endless source of information about the work and social lives of the people who lived behind the scenes at the castle. Stories of illicit meetings between male and female servants on the rooftop at night and the cook who fell in the deep freeze continue to captivate our visitors.

As with all National Trust properties, we could not operate without volunteers. They provide a human interface and bring to life the remains of days gone by, giving opportunity for active participation within their audiences. The dedication and enthusiasm demonstrated to property staff by the volunteers also proves to us the very great value of the tours to them; a chance to pursue a personal interest, meet different people and play their part in supporting the continued preservation of the property.

*Liz Cope worked as the Assistant to Property Manager at Dunster Castle. She is now the Visitor Services Manager for Tyntesfield in the Wessex Region of the National Trust*

*Dunster Castle – Attic and Basement tours were awarded a commendation in the special category of the AHI Interpret Britain Awards, 2002*

# Face to face with history

Tracy Borman reports how English Heritage brings historic sites to life through events staged by volunteers and professional groups



Above left: A medieval knight defends Dover Castle

Above right: Re-enactors recreate a battle from the English Civil War



being revived at properties linked to Richard III, Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria. Queen & Country events celebrate the influence of queens through the ages – from Bodicea to Elizabeth II.

#### Volunteer re-enactment groups

There are literally thousands of volunteers who perform at these events. Many of these are drawn from re-enactment groups across the country. It wouldn't be over-stating the case to say that there is currently a craze for historical re-enactment, spurred on at least in part by the increasingly high profile of history and heritage in the media.

Re-enactment events are important and popular ways of engaging with the past and probing more deeply beneath the surface of historical research. In a highly competitive environment, volunteer re-enactment groups are increasingly professional and meticulous in their approach. Modern enthusiasts learn to ride as the Romans did, make their own chain mail, weave and dye their own cloth, produce tools, weapons, and surgical instruments, and prepare food from authentic recipes. High quality, authentic re-enactment of this kind is an excellent way of bringing the past – and our sites – alive for visitors.

**'The guiding principle for our historical events is that they derive their inspiration from the sites at which they are staged'**

The guiding principle for our historical events is that they derive their inspiration from the sites at which they are staged. For example, we celebrate the history of cricket at Portchester Castle, which is in the heart of cricketing country and has a cricket pitch within its grounds. We explore the links between royalty and our sites with the return of Richard III to his childhood home of Middleham Castle, or Henry VIII walking the ramparts of Dover Castle once more. And we recreate the Battle of Hastings on the field where it actually took place.

We have also created a series of themed events that are tailored to each site, but highlight the links between them. For Jubilee year, we are staging a host of 'Royal Heritage' events that celebrate the rich royal history of our sites. Plays, pageantry and music feature in programmes of entertainment put on for the court as part of the Royal Progresses, a tradition

#### A note of caution

But I would sound a note of caution here: poor re-enactment actually does more harm than good to the interpretation of an historic site. An example might be one that has not been well researched or rehearsed, comprises obviously inauthentic costumes and props, and has nothing to do with the site at



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Above: The duo 'Hogarth's Heroes' put a humorous spin on 18th century military life

Above right: Children's entertainers, Heuristics

'The current popularity of history looks set to continue, and this can only benefit our sites, events and performers'

which it is staged. This inevitably calls into question the integrity of the site and the standards that it endorses. But more importantly it leads to disappointment among visitors who leave without either understanding more about the period or the site itself.

These events were more common during the early days of re-enactment, when the novelty of such events outweighed considerations of authenticity and quality for many historic sites. The range of groups and periods on offer was also relatively limited, so if an historic site wanted an event of this nature it might be compelled to choose a period that was incongruous with the site: a good example being the American Civil War at Audley End. However, the huge growth in the popularity of re-enactment over the last ten or so years has led to increasing professionalism. There are also far more groups and therefore more historical periods on offer, which is great news for historic sites. But it is still imperative that custodial or events staff check the groups carefully (perhaps visiting one of their performances elsewhere) in order to be sure that they are appropriate for their site.

#### Costumed interpretation

Fortunately, the danger of enlisting poor quality historical performers has been offset by the rise of costumed interpretation - the professional branch of historical recreation. In England, it first started to become popular in the 1980s and is now a highly competitive industry. Over the past decade, the costumed interpretation of history in museums and historic sites has boomed. Visit a museum or historic house at a weekend and you are very likely to meet a medieval scribe, a country squire or even a royal courtier. The great advantage of such events is that the interpreters undertake meticulous research in order to make their performance site-specific. In so doing, they can uncover some fascinating stories: such as the unexpected arrival of Henry VIII at Dover Castle that caused great consternation among the household. English Heritage relies increasingly on this form of historical interpretation, working with well established groups such as the excellent *Past Pleasures* to bring its sites to life.

Not all of our historical events involve people in costume. We also stage an exciting programme of



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tours and lectures that give visitors a more in-depth look at the fascinating history behind many of our sites. For example, the celebrated broadcaster and historian, Dr David Starkey, presented a lecture on Henry VIII at Eltham Palace, where some of the most important events of the King's reign. Similarly, the best-selling author, Alison Weir, has shared the secrets of her new research on Mary Queen of Scots at Carlisle Castle, where many of the events unfolded.

#### Linking themes

An event that does not involve costume but which can be enormously effective in telling the story of historic sites is the guided tour. For 2002 we have developed a programme of tours which visit several sites in one day, linking them by theme. From imposing fortresses to romantic ruins, this exciting programme of fully guided tours takes an in-depth look at the fascinating stories behind a range of historic sites throughout England. These include Henry VIII's coastal defences at Deal and Dover, a selection of castles that played a key role in the Wars of the Roses, and the great monastic houses that were seized during the English Reformation. As with costumed interpretation, these tours have been very carefully researched so that they are firmly based on the history of the sites, whilst at the same time setting them in the context of national events.

So what is the future for our historical events? The current popularity of history looks set to continue, and this can only benefit our sites, events and performers. It is likely that there will be an increase in the number of volunteer re-enactment and living history groups and professional costumed interpretation groups, and in an increasingly competitive environment will come higher quality and enhanced authenticity. Historical recreation is becoming a profession in its own right, and is no longer the domain of amateurs and hobbyists. This is great news for historic sites because it will enable them to broaden the appeal of their events programmes and keep them vibrant and exciting for years to come.

Dr Tracy Borman is Director of Education & Outreach at English Heritage

# Who's volunteering?

Bridget Yates looks at the important role of volunteers in small rural museums



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Above: Two volunteers 'living' in the 1940s cottage at the Farmland Museum, Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire

For most people living in the countryside, in other words for approximately 25% of the population of England, it is more likely than not that their nearest museum will be a small independent museum, often entirely volunteer run. It is rare for these small museums to employ paid and qualified staff, but even when that is possible, the museum will still remain largely dependant on voluntary effort for many of its activities. For many, that is the secret of their success and stability, particularly if we measure success more broadly than through visitor numbers alone.

#### Rural museums

Rural England has been the focus of a great deal of attention recently. There has been a growing recognition that although the countryside may look untroubled, many rural communities are facing considerable difficulties with declining services, poorly paid, seasonal and part-time work, a pattern of deep seated, scattered deprivation and poor public transport. The Rural White Paper *Our Countryside: The Future - a fair deal for rural England* (November 2000) highlighted the role of market towns in the regeneration of rural economies, seeing them as distinctive places to live, often with a fine heritage and historic buildings and with the potential to act as a centre for cultural activity and as a focal point for trade and public services. Generally speaking, market towns have a population of between 2,000 and 20,000 people; they may never have had an agricultural market, but can be seaside, coastal, industrial or mining towns, as well as rural. One hundred market towns were chosen for inclusion in the first phase of a new *Market Towns Initiative*, in which Government funding of £37m has been made available through the Regional Development Agencies for projects developed through community led partnerships. It is anticipated that this funding will help release a further £63m from agencies such as English Heritage and the Countryside Agency, as well as from Europe. In the East of England Region, twenty-one towns were selected; sixteen of these either have museums or have advanced ambitions for a museum or heritage centre. All of these are small independent museums; only two of them have employed staff.

#### An important role

Small rural museums clearly have an important role to play in supporting regeneration in market towns and rural communities and, in theory, plenty of opportunities to access funding, but do they have the capacity or the ambition to do so? A recent report published jointly by National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Countryside Agency *Supporting Rural Voluntary Action* highlights a number of key findings that are appropriate to the rural museum sector. These findings include:

- *Building the resource base and capacity of smaller organisations will continue to be of particular importance*
- *More needs to be done to increase the capacity of smaller organisations in identifying and bidding for funds*
- *Challenges for the sector in rural areas will include guarding against volunteer fatigue and continuing to draw in enthusiastic volunteers, particularly amongst the young*
- *One challenge may be to ensure that rural organisations have the evidence base and the confidence to... raise awareness of their economic as well as their social impact*
- *Support is needed to enable organisations to improve networks, increase co-operation and develop the skills needed for partnership working*

#### Innovative work

Of course, there is a great deal of exciting and often innovative work going on in small rural museums. Halesworth Museum in Suffolk is voluntary run, and attracts about 2,000 visitors a year. As part of the town regeneration programme, they have recently moved premises which they share with the Tourist Information Point, the local branch of MENCAP and Halesworth Community Transport. They have been active members of the Halesworth Partnership, particularly within the Tourism Group, which has brought in £480,000 of external funding for the town, and have devised a popular heritage trail. Members of the Museum Field Group keep a watchful eye on developments, and have undertaken and published a number of rescue excavations. The museum has an active programme of publication of members' research, and an educational programme

**'Diss Museum . . . is particularly popular on market days, when there is a regular stream of residents, many from the surrounding villages, coming to share memories, chat to the volunteers, and see what's new'**

#### **A great asset**

Just across the River Waveney, which forms the county boundary between Norfolk and Suffolk, is Diss, part of the Market Towns Initiative. Diss Museum has been described by an appreciative Town Council as 'their greatest little asset' and in a survey of what was good about the town, came out on top. Like Halesworth, Diss Museum is very, very small. It is situated right in the middle of the town and has free admission. It is particularly popular on market days, when there is a regular stream of residents, many from the surrounding villages, coming to share memories, chat to the volunteers, and see what's new. They have recently started a Memory Bank, where people can listen to and record their own experiences of changing life in the town, and have extended their opening times to include Sundays during the summer months to help bring visitors into the local area. Diss Museum provides a hospitable, safe and welcoming environment for those who have found the world of work rather too challenging and voluntary work here has been a stepping off point for a number of people wishing to return to work in gradual stages.

#### **Grouping together**

In Cambridgeshire, European and local authority funding has encouraged the grouping together of five

small independent museums in Fenland, led by Wisbech Museum which has the advantage of professional staffing. 'The Fenland Five' are the Wisbech Museum, the Octavia Hill Museum, also in Wisbech, and March, Whittlesey and Chatteris museums. They have embarked on a successful joint marketing initiative and run a joint training programme that has encouraged skills and knowledge sharing. Wisbech Museum has assumed a 'pastoral care' role, giving curatorial advice under the Registration scheme, and running educational programmes in each of the museums. All four towns are in the *Market Towns Initiative*; Fenland is one of the most deprived rural areas in England.

Villages too have successful volunteer run museums. Flintham in Nottinghamshire has a population of only 700 people and yet it has managed to develop and sustain a museum based around the stock of the former village shop that has won through to the finals of the European Museum of the Year awards! Mundesley Museum, on the North Norfolk Coast, is certainly one of the smallest museums in the country (four is a crowd), and yet they have a team of some sixty dedicated volunteers ready to welcome visitors. Mundesley is one of a number of villages that attract a high number of retired people; becoming involved in the museum is an excellent way of integrating into the community and avoiding the loneliness that can follow a move to a new area. Mundesley Museum volunteers are also involved in a wide range of other village activities, including the jazz festival and the horticultural society, so like many groups of small rural museum volunteers they are involved in a complex web of mutually supportive organisations, without which community life would be diminished. Meeting Hill at Worstead in Norfolk is a hamlet centred round the Baptist Chapel built in 1829, with buildings that once included schools, stables, and the manse as well as cottages and a staith. The small congregation decided not only to collect and preserve items

relating to the heritage of their unique community, but also to invest substantially in care for the living. A Millennium Commission grant enabled the conversion of a former school building into a day centre for elderly people. It is up and running successfully, so now they feel able to devote more



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*Above left: A volunteer demonstrates corn dolly making to a young visitor*

*Above right: Volunteering should always be a social occasion*

energy to museum developments, which they hope will bring visitors into the area to support the rural economy. These two projects may seem different, but in the views of the participants, they are both part of a seamless whole, demonstrating and sharing the best of their history and continuing to work for the welfare of all.

#### **Why volunteer?**

So why do people become involved in these very small museums? The answers are probably as many and various as the people involved. For many it is a way of facing up to and making sense of a world where change has overturned so many certainties, and of validating their own life experiences. This is perhaps particularly true of museums with farming at their core, such as the Farmland Museum at Denny Abbey in Cambridgeshire where the dedicated team includes people who have spent a lifetime on the land and enjoy passing on their skills and knowledge to others, particularly to children. There is a strong imperative to improve understanding between urban and rural communities, and to share a cultural experience that is different and which should be valued. Others participate through a love of historical research or because they are passionately interested in a place, and many more through a simple feeling of doing something useful for the enjoyment of others. What they get from it is friendship, different challenges, a sense of pride and achievement, the chance to share knowledge, to learn something new and make a difference to their community.

#### **Good support**

Most small museums also enjoy feeling part of the wider museum community. The Registration scheme run by Resource: the Council for Museums Libraries and Archives, embraces small village voluntary run museums alongside larger independent, local authority, university and national museums. If they are without qualified or experienced staff, they have the benefit of a Curatorial Adviser to support them. They can also become involved in networks and lobby groups at District, County and increasingly at Regional level. But it isn't always easy. Many find it hard to increase their volunteer base, are anxious about the increasing age of their volunteers and find



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it increasingly hard to match their ambitions for the museum, or what they feel to be the requirements of others, with the time and the financial resources that they have available. They also feel, with some justice, that they are always at the bottom of the list, and that any money that is going will stick to the sides long before it reaches their level. If the museums sector is serious about working with equity and inclusiveness, it will need to think hard about how it can better support small rural, volunteer run museums, because it is largely through them that the sector will contribute to market town regeneration and rural renewal.

#### **What should be done**

Two things need to happen: the broader museums sector and museum agencies need to be more understanding and sensitive to the different needs and strengths of rural communities, they need to 'rural proof' their policies, plans and strategies, and develop more sophisticated ways of measuring social impact that will capture and value small scale rural initiatives. Small rural museums need empowering, they need to be given enough confidence to hold their own in debates and discussions and not feel that just because they are not 'professional' that they have nothing of value to contribute. A new accredited course specifically for small independent museums piloted during 2002 at the University of East Anglia School of World Art Studies and Museology with funding from Resource, aims to do just that. We hope that it will level out the playing field by developing leadership skills, giving a deeper understanding of Government and regional agendas and priorities and teaching the broader philosophical and ethical framework that underpins museum work. Of the twenty students on the pilot, all but two came from a rural or market town museum; we hope they will be the seed corn of a new generation of vigorous, confident small rural museums.

*Bridget Yates is Visiting Tutor at the University of East Anglia, School of World Art Studies and Museology*

# The heart of Haslemere Museum

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Haslemere Educational Museum. Heather Perry reflects on the role they play within the running of the organisation

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Below: Sir Jonathan Hutchinson, founder of Haslemere Educational Museum



© HASLEMERE EDUCATIONAL MUSEUM

## Haslemere Educational Museum

Haslemere Educational Museum was founded by Sir Jonathan Hutchinson, an eminent London surgeon, in 1888. A firm believer in educational opportunities for all, he soon opened his extensive collections to the public. The Museum has been housed in a number of different buildings since it was established, but was moved to the current building on Haslemere High Street in 1926 when it became apparent that more space was required for the growing collection.

Today, Haslemere Educational Museum is an independent, registered Museum with a collection that includes geology, natural history and human history items.

## The first volunteers at Haslemere

The use of volunteers in museums is not a recent development: addressing the Sixth Annual General Meeting of the Museums Association in 1895, G. Brown Goode, Assistant Secretary at the Smithsonian Institute, declared that, 'around the nucleus of such a staff will naturally grow up a corps of volunteer assistants, whose work properly assisted and directed will be of infinite value.'<sup>1</sup>

Volunteers have been an integral part of the Museum from almost the very beginning. An article in the *Surrey Advertiser*<sup>2</sup> records the inaugural meeting for a new museum building in 1895, when the Museum's founder Sir Jonathan Hutchinson called for help from the members of Haslemere Natural History Society:

'He invited all who would to share his own pleasure in completing the collection by assisting to arrange and label the specimens, by adding to them, and by helping to form the temporary collection of flowering plants and other botanical specimens; and he asked the co-operation of his neighbours and friends to take part in the Sunday afternoon demonstrations'<sup>3</sup>

'Around the nucleus of such a staff will naturally grow up a corps of volunteer assistants, whose work properly assisted and directed will be of infinite value.'

G Brown Goode, 1895

## The role of volunteers

Volunteers are involved in every aspect of running Haslemere Educational Museum, from greeting the public to serving on the board of trustees. There are

currently about a hundred people who regularly help at the Museum. Most volunteer for one morning or afternoon a week, although some do more and others are project based (for example, assisting with workshops and temporary exhibitions) and come to the Museum as required.

Volunteers at the Museum work in the following areas:

- Collections - cataloguing/ researching/ conservation
- Educational workshops
- Organising and installing exhibitions
- Reception/ Visitor Information Centre
- Shop
- Management - trustees and council
- Stewarding exhibitions
- Library and archive
- Enquiries
- Administration
- Gardens and grounds

The Museum Council, which serves as an advisory body to the Trustees, includes a volunteer representative (currently Diane Abbott, who helps in the shop, with the collections and educational events), in order that the views of volunteers about the running and the future of the Museum can be heard.

## The recruitment process

Potential volunteers find out about working at the Museum in a number of different ways. Often they have had a long-standing knowledge or association with the Museum (or have a friend who has) and have gradually become involved. Appeals for volunteers have been made in the local press and on radio. People who enquire at the Haslemere and District Volunteer Bureau – an organisation whose aim is to promote, support and develop volunteering locally – may be given our details, whereas others enquire at the Museum of their own accord. In addition, volunteers may be introduced through the local branch of NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies) and there is a pool of NADFAS members upon whom we are able to call for special projects. We are also approached by schools, colleges and universities looking to send students on work placements.

Right: HYPE chairman Liam Rowlings with his Simpsons collection

When someone first expresses an interest in helping at the Museum they are asked to fill in an application form. This requests details of when they are available to work, the type of work that appeals to them and any relevant qualifications or experience they may have. Expertise is certainly not a prerequisite for volunteering at the Museum, but we do like to make use of the specialist skills available to us! We currently have volunteers with no knowledge of a specialist subject, those who have an amateur interest in a particular area and those who have a doctorate. Most of our volunteers have no previous experience of working in a Museum.

At this stage a reference is required – this is carefully checked as once someone becomes a volunteer they may work with children and have access to the collections and restricted areas of the Museum.

Once an application form has been completed, an informal interview and tour of the Museum is arranged. This gives both sides the opportunity to discuss what is expected of them. The potential volunteer can consider what they want to get from working at the Museum, while the Museum can explain the types of work available. Not everyone who expresses an interest will become a volunteer – sometimes people realise it is not what they expected and drop out and sometimes people may need to wait until a suitable project becomes available for them to work on. New volunteers are given a copy of the 'Charter for volunteers working in museums in Waverley' (which puts into writing what is expected of the new recruit and what the new recruit can expect in return) and also a copy of our 'Volunteer's Handbook' which gives useful information about the Museum.

## Why volunteer?

From speaking to the volunteers, there seem to be a number of reasons that people become involved with the Museum. Many enjoy contributing to the success of the Museum and to the local community. Some indulge an existing specialism or area of interest, while others want the opportunity to learn about new subjects. Some want to continue to use their skills after retirement, others to build their skills when starting out in their career. Many also enjoy the social aspect of volunteering and look forward to talking to friends while working.



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## Learning on the job

Volunteers receive a general introduction and basic training when they first start at the Museum. After this, training is normally carried out in-house on an informal, task-by-task basis. Front of house staff also have regular meetings to keep them up to date with what's happening at the Museum. More formal in-house training has been given – for example a workshop for collection volunteers on insect pests with the Museum and how to spot signs of infestation. Attendance at relevant external workshops and training days is also encouraged. Fortunately many of the courses available locally are either free of charge or for a small fee – due to financial restrictions, there is no budget for volunteer training.

## Worth the HYPE!

Although people of all ages help at the museum, the majority of our volunteers are retired. We are making a positive effort to get younger people (particularly teenagers, who traditionally make up only a small part of our audience) involved in activities.

Through an innovative project run by Maggie Monteath, the Museum's Education Officer, a number of youngsters have been involved in planning and mounting an exhibition of collections made by young people from the local area. The project, called HYPE (Haslemere Young People's Exhibition) involved year 8 pupils (aged 12 and 13) from three local schools. Participants held regular meetings over 12 months to plan the temporary exhibition. Although they received advice from a number of professionals, including Mike Cashman from John Hart Design (who are also involved in the gallery refurbishment project), all major decisions were left in their hands.

The finished exhibition, which included collections of Beanie Babies, bottle tops, Star Wars and Simpsons memorabilia, was held at the Museum last October. The HYPE team stewarded the display out of school



Above: The Volunteers' Window

'Volunteers allow the Museum to tap into many different communities – not only providing links with the local area, but also to other institutions and societies with which they are involved'

some have volunteered to help with the other events at the Museum.

#### Bringing the Museum into 21st century

In 2000 Haslemere Museum was awarded a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to carry out an extensive refurbishment project. This included a complete re-display of the galleries, whose exhibits were arranged in the 1950's. Again volunteers have been fundamental to the success of the project. They have assisted in many aspects of the refurbishment, including writing, research and selection of objects. One of the major tasks with which they have been involved was the preparation of objects to go on display. Simon Moore, a natural science conservator, assessed the objects for exhibition. He advised the Museum on those specimens that needed professional treatment and those that could be treated in-house. A training session was then arranged for a selection of volunteers, showing them how to carry out basic cleaning. This project allowed volunteers to find out about a different area of museum work and also saved money for the Museum. Other objects have also been cleaned by volunteers – but only with the advice of a qualified conservator.

#### The value of volunteers

Attitudes towards volunteers seem to vary greatly in the heritage sector. Research shows that while many museums recognise the importance of volunteers, this is not always the case. One survey<sup>4</sup> quoted a museum as saying that volunteers 'are not only of no use but are decidedly horrible people'. This is certainly not the view at Haslemere Museum! Volunteers are an

hours and were happy to chat to visitors about the project. The project was a great success! We were impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment made by many of the young people who took part. Indeed, many of those who were involved are keen to undertake another project as soon as possible and

essential part of the Museum – it would certainly not be able to exist in its present form without them.

A recent survey<sup>5</sup> commissioned by Re:source (the council for library, archives and museums) showed that institutions that do not use volunteers were deterred by worries about the staff time required for training and supervision. While volunteers do require a great deal of time, the investment is paid back many times over. It would be impossible for staff alone to achieve the tasks carried out by volunteers.

Apart from the hard work and time given, the goodwill that volunteers create is invaluable. Volunteers allow the Museum to tap into many different communities – not only providing links with the local area, but also to other institutions and societies with which they are involved. Some volunteers, particularly those with specialist interests, travel to conferences and meetings all over the country, bringing attention to the Museum wherever they go.

Volunteer time can also have financial benefit for the Museum. A HLF access fund grant awarded to set up an education programme at the Museum allows volunteer time to be used as part of the matching funding requirement. The Education Officer is able to claim volunteer time at a rate of £50 per day (or more for those with special qualifications). Volunteers bring a combination of skills, enthusiasm and independence that could not be provided by paid staff alone. Even if Haslemere Museum had unlimited funds, it would not succeed without its volunteers!

#### The Volunteers' Window

In 2001 Haslemere Museum commissioned the 'Volunteers' Window' to celebrate the immense contribution made to the life and success of the Museum by volunteers past and present. The spectacular stained glass panels depict some of the wildlife found in the Museum's grounds, reflecting the Museum's strong natural history tradition. The middle panes of the design have been left blank in order to allow visitors to enjoy the spectacular views at the back of the Museum. A grant from the Challice Trust made it possible to add a sill made from slate carved with designs produced by Natalie Jewell, the granddaughter of Arthur Jewell, a former curator of the Museum.

The window has attracted a great deal of positive



Left: The Volunteers' Window at Haslemere Educational Museum

Above: The new geology gallery

Above right: Volunteers enjoying a party in the Museum's grounds

attention and highlighted the essential role played by volunteers at the Museum.

The Museum also tries to acknowledge the work of volunteers on a regular basis. The annual Chairman and President's Christmas party and the Summer Barbecue are ways of saying thank you to those who have contributed to the success of the Museum throughout the year. Volunteers are invited to private views for new exhibitions and various other events that are held at the Museum and the Annual Report always highlights the important work that is carried out by them over the year.

#### The way forward

Although Haslemere Museum has had many years of experience working with volunteers, it does not mean that there are not improvements to be made! Throughout the busy period of the gallery refurbishment, further investigation of the needs of our volunteers was postponed and the recruitment of

new volunteers suspended until staff had more free time. With the completion of the project, we will be able to dedicate more time for discussion with volunteers regarding training and the role they play within the Museum, finding new ways of cultivating the successful relationship between the Museum and its volunteers.

Heather Perry works with volunteers on a daily basis as Assistant Curator at Haslemere Educational Museum.

<sup>1</sup> G Brown Goode, 'The Principles of Museum Administration.' *Museums Association. Report of the Proceedings with the Papers Read at the Sixth Annual General Meeting*. 1895, pp 86

<sup>2</sup> The Surrey Advertiser, August 24th, 1895.

<sup>3</sup> Swanton, E W 'A Country Museum' Haslemere Educational Museum. 1947, p14

<sup>4</sup> Graham, Margaret 'Who wants to be a volunteer?' *Museums Journal* March 2000

<sup>5</sup> The Institute for Volunteering Research. *Volunteers in the Cultural Sector*. Re:source 2002.

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# 'Dig into the Past'

Rhinaanon Hiles describes one of several interpretation events at The North of England Open Air Museum, Beamish, which cannot take place without the involvement of volunteers

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'The project helps us to improve the ways in which we encourage volunteers and harness their skills'

© EDDIE RYLE HODGES



Above top: Pockerley Manor where 'Dig in the Past' is based

Above: Volunteer demonstrating light and candle making during 'Dig in the Past'

© BEAMISH THE NORTH OF ENGLAND OPEN AIR MUSEUM

'Dig into the Past' has taken place for the last two years at Beamish in conjunction with National Archaeology Days. It takes place at Pockerley Manor, which is set in the 1820's and which has attracted funding for the further development of the surrounding land. The challenge was, and still is, to channel enough time and energy to produce new and innovative methods for interpreting this period within the confines of our resources, whilst contributing to the continual development of a wider scheme.

## Benefits

The costumed staff at Pockerley Manor demonstrate traditional activities and talk to visitors about the social and industrial history of the region in the early 19th century. Involving volunteers enables as many activities to take place as possible, which in turn results in heightened levels of interpretation than visitors could normally expect to see. The aim of 'Dig into the Past' is to exploit this and encourage a deeper understanding of the period. These objectives are met by volunteers working alongside staff conducting initial research through to working and demonstrating in costume. Methods of interpreting based around the Museum's ethos of third person interpretation and 'hands on' interaction are also utilised and broadened by this event. The value and benefits of this are three-fold; firstly to the Museum as it strives to better interpret its collections. Secondly, for all those taking part a greater feeling of involvement; and thirdly and most importantly to the visitor, without whom there is no better judge of an event's success.

## Harnessing skills

Volunteers form an integral part of the project both before and during the event. Their involvement and contribution is encouraged at all stages from pre-event discussions to staffing exhibits over the weekend. Our volunteers come from varying backgrounds including the local community, the Museum's 'Friends' organisation, local schools and Universities. Many are students and pupils or individuals requiring more experience in co-ordinating events, staff and research. The project helps us to improve the ways in which we encourage volunteers and harness their skills, and in return

they feel that their time is well used and valued by the Museum.

## Research and training for the event

Research began in 2001 when we approached volunteers to assist us with the event. In order to present a true representation of period life as many demonstrations as possible had to take place at Pockerley Manor. This included all of the core demonstrations as well as added extras and volunteer participation was essential in order to supplement the normal staffing levels. Training involved familiarising volunteers within the areas they would be working over the two days. Those working in costume spent time 'shadowing' experienced members of staff and other volunteers. Those involved in research were instructed on handling techniques, care of collections and the use of resources. The results were seen in

knowledgeable, proactive and enthusiastic staff who encouraged visitors to feel involved and take part in discussions and activities. The weekend was excellent and the house and gardens were buzzing with activity. The static display held in the Town area of the Museum showed the background to the restoration of Pockerley and plans for the rebuilding of a chapel. There was also the opportunity for visitors to try on 'period' clothing which proved to be a roaring success and one to be repeated in 2003!

## Continual development

The event attempts to make history more accessible to those taking part as well as the visitors. This is accomplished through the use of demonstrations, as well as archive materials within the static display. The use of this material helps to demonstrate the level of sound academic research surrounding any of the Museum's projects, which without volunteer involvement would not be as successful or effective. Our aim as a Museum is to encourage a wider interest in our regional heritage amongst our immediate community and the North East region as a whole through the use of events such as 'Dig into the Past'. This event attempts to widen our audience, we were listed on the National Archaeology Days web site and literature and local visitors were encouraged through our own press coverage.

'The results were seen in knowledgeable, proactive and enthusiastic staff who encouraged visitors to feel involved and take part in discussions and activities'

Following this year's success we aim, in 2003, to attract more family groups and visitors from farther afield, interested in the further development of the Museum as well as the historical environment.

## Incorporating within a wider scheme

Ensuring that our aims for the event meet with those for the further development of the Pockerley area we monitor and evaluate through observation, head counts and visitor and staff comments. The countryside surrounding Pockerley Manor is currently funded by County Durham Environmental Trust (CDENT) in order to produce an authentic Georgian landscape. Through this we are also conserving various mills, ponds, and a burn as well as wildlife inhabiting the area. Already visitors can

see evidence of the traditional ridge and furrow system of field management and view the landscape from a steam locomotive. Future building will include a wooden waggonway, pit workings and workers' housing.

The opportunities for interpreting the social history of the region are endless and the event is continually developing as our knowledge grows. 'Dig into the Past' has become a part of the development and promotion of this part of the Museum, and as part of next year's plans for the event volunteers hope to include a guided walk providing insight into the history of this changing environment.

Rhian Hiles is the Interpretation Assistant at Beamish

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Above: The Medieval Tour of La Haugie Bie Chapel

'Inclusion is important if volunteers are to feel valued'

The old adage says that 'an organisation owes its success to its workforce' and that could certainly be said of the Jersey Heritage Trust. The Trust is committed to preserving and interpreting Jersey's unique heritage. It strives to enhance visitors' experience and facilitate learning through the innovative interpretation of collections and sites. Our group of enthusiastic and committed volunteers helps us to meet those aims.

Volunteers are actively involved throughout the organisation, working behind the scenes alongside professional staff in archive, research and conservation projects as well as in the public eye, conducting tours, boat restoration and a major community art project. We now have over 140 volunteers working regularly.

## Am I too old?

Our volunteers come from all walks of life and are aged from 15 to 80+. Unlike some museums in

Britain, we don't demand that they have prior experience or academic qualification. The question I am often asked by potential recruits is 'am I too old?' With age comes a wealth of experience, a lifetime of amusing anecdotes and, contrary to belief, a desire to learn new skills. People join for a number of reasons - a desire for self-development, an opportunity to meet new friends, to enhance their CV, an interest in their chosen field or, sometimes, the chance to get away from their family for a few hours!

In the early days there was a tendency to take everyone who walked through the door. Many requested a certain post while others were placed wherever they were considered suitable. Surprisingly, this worked extremely well. Where it didn't, they were offered further training or an alternative post. For a minor few, we came to a mutual decision that their skills could be better utilised elsewhere. With a little experience behind me, I have tried to develop the job and then recruit the right person, followed up by a

# Value your volunteers

Cassie Horton looks at the role that volunteers play in the running of the Jersey Heritage Trust

Award winning  
case study

**Judges' comments**

This project has many features which make it worthy of an award. Of these perhaps the most telling is the way in which all the volunteers managed by the Trusty, whatever their role, are managed. All the volunteers are seen playing a part in responding to the Trust's aim as far as the visitor experience is concerned. The training programme provided is excellent.

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**'With age comes a wealth of experience, a lifetime of amusing anecdotes and, contrary to belief, a desire to learn new skills'**

© JERSEY EVENING POST



*Above top: Millennium Mosaic volunteers*

*Above: Trevor and Bob restoring Fiona*

**'Volunteers, like artefacts, should be treasured'**

© JERSEY EVENING POST

thorough induction programme.

Inclusion is important if volunteers are to feel valued. Volunteers are invited to attend staff training, such as Welcome Host. A focus group made up of volunteers from across the organisation has evaluated our customer care policy and also given feedback on the training and support they wish to have. Their recommendations have been implemented in training programmes. A quarterly newsletter informs them of job vacancies, events and achievements within the organisation, whilst cards and letters sent out on birthdays and special events let them know that they are valued. An end of year Christmas party enables volunteers and staff from the eight sites to socialise together.

**Taking care of the past**

Volunteers with specialist skills work alongside the Conservator restoring many of the larger items, such as Victorian furniture. Their work was recently displayed to the public as part of a major restoration of the Merchant's House.

Jersey's love affair with the sea is celebrated at the Maritime Museum with an ongoing programme of boat restoration. Volunteers work alongside the boatbuilder and have recently completed a refit of *Fiona*. This historic vessel was part of a flotilla organised by St. Helier Yacht Club to help in the evacuation of British Forces from St. Malo in 1940.

During the Second World War, islanders living in Jersey under German rule were forced to carry identification cards. These Occupation Registration Cards, numbering almost 30,000, have been processed and recorded by volunteers working at Jersey Archive. This information is useful, not only as a research tool for those trying to trace family members, but as a resource in its own right. As part of a plan to catalogue the backlog of art collections numbering about half a million items, volunteers have been working with the Registrar cataloguing to the appropriate professional standards.

**Telling tales**

The Living History programme's aim is to provide outstanding, memorable and inspirational experiences at all sites. Locals and visitors to the island can take a tour of one of our six sites (two castles; national museum and art gallery; maritime museum and Occupation Tapestry gallery; Neolithic site; country life museum) where dedicated and knowledgeable guides and demonstrators entertain them with stories of local legends and characters. Although guides are provided with all the necessary information relating to Jersey's history, they are encouraged to personalise their tour by including their own memories and experiences, as many have grown up in the island or have some family connection.

**A piece of history**

The Jersey Heritage Trust works closely with many different parts of its community and this has proved to be a huge success with the Millennium Mosaic. A team of volunteer mosaicists worked with members of the public to create a series of 18 panels reflecting islanders' hopes and fears for the Millennium. The panels travelled to community centres, care homes, schools, shops, libraries and the Trust's own sites to enable as many people as possible to place their piece in the largest community project ever undertaken in Jersey. The panels will eventually form a centrepiece in a new leisure complex.

**Little treasures**

Volunteers, like artefacts, should be treasured. Their skills should be nurtured, their ideas welcomed. Volunteers are a valued resource able to enhance the work of paid staff. Competition for visitor numbers in the face of a declining tourist trade is fierce and museums need all the help they can get. The Jersey Heritage Trust owes much of its success to its volunteer workforce.

*Cassie Horton is Volunteer/Living History Manager at Jersey Heritage Trust*



© FALMOUTH ART GALLERY

*Above: Sun, boat and sea by Lloyd Clarke aged 5*

# The Falmouth family project

Brian Stewart describes a scheme in which local families put together an art exhibition with the help of volunteers

Falmouth Art Gallery runs an active volunteer programme which is part of its learning provision. It identifies its volunteers, for example RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Programme), New Deal, Pentreath Industries, students etc and then tailors the work placement to an individual's requirement.

**Family Falmouth**

Family Falmouth was Falmouth Art Gallery's contribution to the Family Fortunes Project spearheaded by South West Museums Council and funded by the DfES and CLMG. The success of the project relied heavily on local partnerships, the gallery's innovative volunteer programme, an enthusiastic family friendly policy and a strong desire to widen access.

**Three local families**

A scheme to promote family learning got off to a flying start when three families from the Beacon Council Estate in Falmouth were invited to select an exhibition at Falmouth Art Gallery. Each family was represented by three generations – a grandparent, parent and child – all brought up in Falmouth. None of the families had visited the art gallery before, except for a couple of the children who had been on a school trip.

During the National Family Learning Weekend, the Clarkes, the Clements and the Tregenzas, selected paintings from Falmouth Art Gallery's permanent collection and from the collection of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society and put on a show at the gallery.

Graham, a story-teller, observed and listened to the family's responses, memories and comments and later used them as source material to enrich his magical tales told to a wide range of groups from Surestart to Age Concern.

**Working with artists**

The three families went on to work in the studio of two highly regarded professional artists, Gareth Edwards and Rachael Reeves, who asked the families to consider their responses to the pictures they had chosen in terms of three words. They chose or created colours that reflected these words and produced paintings and drawings sometimes

individually, sometimes collectively as a family.

The families' choices from the permanent collection were displayed alongside their own artworks, professionally framed, together with their interpretative comments and family photographs. A colour brochure accompanied the exhibition, and the paintings from the collection and their own art work were given equal importance.

**A larger project**

The exhibition was only a small part of the project, becoming a catalyst to invite all sorts of groups and new audiences to the gallery, whether family related or not. Age Concern, Brownies, Educational Providers in Cornwall (EPIC), The Women's Friendly Hour Group of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Home Educators and Surestart were just some of the range of groups that attended. We got unexpected visits from their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren asking if they could take part in workshops and activities.

By word of mouth the project gained momentum. Extra money was found to employ Yvonne, a magician, who amazed Surestart families from Camborne with her magic, producing doves and dogs from the most unlikely places, and linking them to works on show. One mother commented: 'I think in general if you are not brought up with art you wouldn't dream of coming to an art gallery and having a look. I would think I was intruding – but there is a lovely atmosphere to Falmouth Art Gallery and we enjoyed producing art as a family'.

**Tea and cakes**

As an access project, its success was beyond the wildest dreams of the staff and volunteers who made it happen. With volunteers we deliberately created a party atmosphere, where people could relax and have fun. Some of the people who visited the project had had a negative experience at school. Constant testing does not promote self esteem or confidence for those who are not successful. We were not about to repeat this experience in the gallery. We were lucky to have a highly experienced and enlightened educator to evaluate by observation. The gallery and the project were evaluated, not the people taking part. Perhaps that's why the standard



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Above: Artist Gareth Edwards with the Clements family  
Below: Babies' feet were dipped into paint and tip-toed across coloured papers



© FALMOUTH ART GALLERY

of their work was so high.

Falmouth is situated in the poorest county in England. The Beacon and Penwerris Council estates, where most of the participating families were from, is situated in the poorest ward in Falmouth. As Youth Club Chairman, Gerald Chin-Quee commented: 'In some respects the estate contains the people hardest to reach. Art Galleries, all too often, are buildings that are designed to appeal to the middle-classes. The assumption that working-class people have no love of art is simply not true. Yes, confront them with an elitist idea of art and there will be no feeling of ownership or involvement. But, take a look at the care with which the mother works on a collage with her toddler at the playgroup and you see more than duty at work... It is my hope with projects such as Family Falmouth, to see people reconnect with that artistic streak we all possess as children but frequently lose as adults. The sheer, glorious joy of playing with paint and paper as children, somehow evaporates with age, as if it were no longer important. It should not be so. If we can remind someone - anyone - that Art is for everybody, that art galleries are for us all equally, I feel happy. To achieve this with families from a socially excluded ward such as Penwerris was gratifying'.

#### Judges comments

The process by which the exhibition was produced was an excellent interpretative experience for all those involved and with benefits spreading to the whole community. This project was rooted in the community in every sense - local people working with local artists, using local art collections reflecting local history and environment.

#### Enhanced visitor numbers

Family Falmouth attracted wide publicity and the project reported final visitor figures of 16,602, educational visits of 906, and a media reach of 2,293,678. The exhibition had to be extended for a month to fit in advanced bookings from schools and groups. The project was acclaimed nationally in professional journals such as GEM, Museums Journal and in CLMG publications.

*Brian Stewart, Gallery Director devised and co-ordinated the project. It was run by gallery staff and volunteers*

## In bed with the WI

Cherrie Trelogan describes how a partnership between the Women's Institute and the Lakeland Arts Trust marked the millennium and produced a collection of replica costumes for schools

'The standard of workmanship is superb and it is almost tempting not to let them be worn!'

Along side its main collection, the Lakeland Arts Trust has a much smaller Education Collection, containing objects acquired specifically to be handled by visiting school parties. Over the years, various original costume items have been donated to this collection. Although it is wonderful to have original items, many are too large for children to wear, boys are less well catered for than girls, some periods are not well represented and costumes rarely come with all the necessary accessories.

#### Good timing

The Trust had already considered having replica items made commercially but found the cost was prohibitive without major financial support. Sometimes however, the right circumstances fall into place unexpectedly. In late 1999, we received a telephone call from Susan Renshaw of the Cumbria-Westmorland Federation of WIs who was looking for a suitable project to mark the millennium and was thrilled by the idea of producing costume for children.



Above: 'Fashion through the Ages' a pageant put on in Kendal Town Hall

'...it meant that the vast range of skills of the current members of the WI could be employed to create something worthwhile for future generations'

#### Judges comments

This is a scheme that has hit so many buttons in its development and in its use of the end project. New audiences have been engaged in the museum and its collections and the life-long learning opportunities that the subsequent art appreciation sessions have brought are to be commended. Community involvement is clear through many people who contributed to the project.

#### The project

This proved to be a perfect project to mark the new millennium as it meant that the vast range of skills of the current members of the WI could be employed to create something worthwhile for future generations. It also meant that the ladies involved worked closely with the staff at the museum and gallery in Kendal and found out more about the collections in their care.

With typical enthusiasm, the WI began work immediately with discussions to decide how many costumes to make and to identify the most suitable sizes, in line with the National Curriculum.

The valiant co-ordinator, Mrs Christine Sellen, sought funding and donations for materials from a wide range of sources. She also placed an article in the WI newsletter in order to find suitable volunteers from local clubs and acted as the point of contact for the Trust and members of the clubs.

Several of the costumes were based on original garments from the Trust's main collection or inspired by images in paintings. Around 100 ladies were involved in creating patterns, sourcing fabrics, stitching, lacemaking, tailoring and knitting. Throughout the project, museum staff met members of the team at club meetings as ladies studied the costume collection at the museum and at mid-project progress events at WI headquarters.

#### The finale

By the end of the year 2000 costumes ranging from the Tudor period to the 1970s were complete and capacity crowds enjoyed two performances of 'Fashion through the Ages' in Kendal's Town Hall. Members of the WI played appropriate music, read poetry, provided refreshments and led a war-time sing along as a group of children took the stage as 'evacuees'. At the end of the event, the beautifully made costumes with special Millennium Project labels were officially handed over to the Trust.

#### The costumes in use

Shortly after the pageant in the Town Hall, some of the costumes were displayed in the museum alongside the original pieces from the collections. Now they are used regularly as part of the Tudor, Victorian, Costume and Portraiture workshops at the Trust's museums and gallery and lent out to local

schools. Each pair of costumes has an additional range of accessories so that most children in a group are able to try on at least one item.

The standard of workmanship is superb and it is almost tempting not to let them be worn! But the aim of the project was to produce a worthwhile educational resource that was completely 'hands-on' and this has been achieved beyond everyone's expectations.

#### Benefits

Children now have the opportunity to find out more about the clothes worn by people in the past. The Trust has a wonderful resource for use both in the museum and in the locality. It would not have been possible to have done this without the enormous enthusiasm and commitment of this group of volunteers.

Lasting links have been developed between members of the WI and the Lakeland Arts Trust. Members of the WI have pride in their workmanship and in being part of a successful and worthwhile project that will be of long term benefit to children.

Participating members found out a great deal about the history and construction of costume through their own research and by studying the museum's collection. Information discovered from sources such as Hampton Court and the internet was recorded by many of the clubs as reminders of their involvement in the project.

#### Unexpected benefits

Several ladies became interested in other collections housed at Abbot Hall and the museum and suggested that a visit should be arranged to look at the paintings in the gallery. After discussion with gallery staff, it was decided to hold an informal art appreciation session focussing on portraits in the care of the Trust. In the second year, similar sessions were held on landscape art and in 2003, the focus will be on abstract art.

Museums and galleries are encouraged to instigate 'audience development' initiatives such as art appreciation sessions, but some of the best results are those which happen naturally.

*Cherrie Trelogan is Deputy Director/Head of Education at Abbot Hall Gallery, Kendal*

# Stoned in the Peak District

Gavin Bell recounts how a chance discovery led to an award winning project



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© GAVIN BELL

Above: Working with sculptor Carole Kirsapp, children created a carved labyrinth

Below: Carving the Roundhouse doorposts  
Bottom: Preparing the wattle structure



© FRANK ROBINSON

The Ashover Rock Art Project is a community archaeological interpretation project celebrating and investigating the prehistoric past of a small village on the edge of the Peak District. Following exciting chance discoveries of two unique pieces of Bronze Age cup and ring rock art while constructing an environmental area in the local school grounds, a partnership between the school, local community and the Peak District Interpretation Project developed a project with huge community involvement. The many interpretative and educational activities culminating in the construction of a Bronze Age roundhouse.

## Rock art

The discovery of the rock art generated huge interest amongst the children, community and archaeologists. The ideas for the rock art project were devised by teachers and children and guided by Gavin Bell of the Peak District Interpretation Project and local archaeologist Frank Robinson. The project proposal successfully levered funding from a variety of sources - principally from the Local Heritage Initiative, Derbyshire County Council and Volvo, with huge support from many local businesses.

The project had many different aspects including: making casts of the rock art, interpretative panels and a tree trail, archaeological investigation activities, contemporary rock art working with a sculptor, improvements to the school environment and an investigation into life in prehistory through building a Bronze Age roundhouse. Many of these activities took place as parallel activities - the project took over the school and community involving everyone for almost a year.

The designs for the interpretive panels were produced by the school Environment Club who researched and created all the text and illustrations. Designer Sarah Gillot worked with the children to bring the designs to a final stage. The finished product is worthy of any interpretation professional - anyone looking for new staff in about 4 years?! The fact that village children created the work has generated huge pride and ownership.

## The ultimate design and technology project

The biggest element of the project was the construction of a full size Bronze Age roundhouse. This is probably the first roundhouse to have been submitted to planning permission and have a fire escape! Throughout construction, only hand tools were used - the door posts were cut to size from tree trunks nearly 145 cm in diameter - impressive when you consider this was done by children aged 9-11. Others stripped the bark from the timbers using de-barking tools made by a local engineering firm. Close supervision gave the children the opportunity to discover the joys of using professional woodworking tools such as draw knives. This level of hands on experience is something rarely encountered by this age range. Even the youngest children in the school had opportunities to take part such as preparing the wattle, the roof materials and the ultimate experience - daubing the walls. To create a durable and authentic daub, a plea went out for a supply pet hair - a request received with great enthusiasm with hair from unspecified sources flooding in.

## What next?

As well as the work within school time a number of community days were held at weekends, both on and off site. Several wet and windy days were spent on the moors of the Chatsworth Estate collecting heather for the roof thatch. These community days attracted large numbers of volunteers and provided an excellent social atmosphere bringing young and old alike together.

When this part of the project was completed, it was quickly replaced by questions of what next? The next phase has started with the planting of grain crops ready for the construction of a prehistoric oven and further investigations into life in ancient Ashover.

## Read the stones - now watch the movie!

The project has been followed from start to finish by Video Producer Frank Parker who has spent a huge amount of time in a voluntary capacity working in school filming the project in broadcast quality digital video. The amount of time Frank spent on site made the children oblivious to the presence of

'The bottom line for success is ensuring that it is fun and imaginative - make people smile and you are halfway there.'

a camera resulting in many hours of 'rushes' now being edited to produce a professional 30 minute documentary that we hope will be broadcast nationally. Several of the children became talented presenters - on one occasion usurping the regional news team and turning a 30 second short into a full 5 min feature presented by an 11yr old.

## The keys to success

The success of this project was due to the development of a strong local commitment and involvement, good quality project support from the Peak District Interpretation Project, effective fundraising, an enthusiastic and committed team

who worked delivering the project. The project has won recognition through several awards - Derbyshire Greenwatch and now the AHI awards helping to generate motivation and pride which leads to a self-sustaining momentum.

Gavin Bell is Interpretation Project Officer for the Peak District Interpretation Project. This is a partnership between the Peak District National Park Authority, Derbyshire County Council, High Peak BC, Derbyshire Dales District Council, Severn Trent Water, United Utilities and the National Trust. It aims to facilitate and encourage high quality interpretation within the Peak District.

## Book reviews

### A Collective Insight

Scotland's National Audit Full Findings Report  
July 2002



Scottish Museums Council

*A Collective Insight* is a valuable and vital tool for the development of Scotland's museums and wider cultural heritage and will be key to ensuring a sustainable museums sector for the future. Most pertinent to this edition of AHI's Journal is Section 05, Staffing and Volunteers.

On first reading, the figures provided are surprising - 53% of staff in museums are volunteers, 84% of volunteers work in the independent organisations.

*'The extent of volunteer involvement across the sector, but particularly within independent museums, confirms the social importance of museums within their local communities. It also suggests the current and potential roles of museums in addressing social exclusion may have been underestimated'*

The significance of volunteers in museums is something which, as the National Audit shows, the policy makers must take onboard. The national collections, and our experience of them, are dependent on people who receive no payment for

their time, who provide their skills out of their own interest in and love for the subject and collections. These volunteers must be given the necessary support, by the management and through training and personal encouragement, to allow them to continue to play this vital role. Without volunteers, Scotland's independent museums, many of which hold collections of national importance, may be unable to function or to maintain their much needed income.

The Scottish Museums Council and the Scottish museums sector as a whole clearly has a lot to do over the next few years if it is to ensure that the findings of the first National Audit are not resigned to a shelf. Even if numbers are not your thing, reading the report of *A Collective Insight* will open your eyes to museums in Scotland today.

To find out more about *A Collective Insight*, Scotland's National Audit, contact Scottish Museums Council, County House, 20-22 Tophichen Street, Edinburgh, EH3 8JB. Tel: 0131 229 7465. Email: inform@scottishmuseums.org.uk. Web: www.scottishmuseums.org.uk

Review by Sarah Oswald



## Countryside Recreation Site Management: A Marketing Approach

Ian Keirle

This book focuses on the management of countryside recreation sites, including national parks, country parks, heritage coasts, national trails, regional routes and cycle routes. It takes a 'marketing' approach whereby countryside sites are viewed as products that the consumer makes a choice as to whether to visit or not. At last here is a text that focuses on understanding the needs of the visitors first before anything else. Ian begins his book by outlining the subject of marketing and considers how a marketing approach can be applied to the management of countryside sites. In the following chapters he goes on to consider what you need to find out about sites and visitors. For example, there are chapters on how to make sites more accessible, how to deal with conflicts, and perhaps of most interest to readers of the AHI journal, a chapter on information and interpretation in the context of countryside recreation.

By devoting a chapter to the subject, Ian places interpretation at the centre of site management and not as a 'pretty add-on' as it has been dealt with elsewhere. In a relatively short space he covers an

impressive variety of topics, such as definitions, principles, planning, writing, design and evaluation. There is nothing new here, but for the student studying interpretation for the first time, the style Ian adopts makes the subject easy to understand and hopefully leaves students eager to find out more. I was impressed by the range of material he has used to support the topics covered in the book including diagrams, photographs, up to date case studies and some excellent web based references (which actually work – well the ones I tried anyway!) This makes a somewhat 'list' based text into a book which is visually pleasing, interactive and perhaps most important of all, a book which will hopefully stimulate and facilitate further learning.

This is a useful text, principally, for students but also for those working in any related countryside profession. As the author himself suggests it will certainly be useful for those undergraduates studying towards countryside based qualifications (I will certainly be recommending it to our tourism students) but it also provides checklists which might be useful prompts for those decision makers working at countryside sites.

*Review by Emma J Stewart*

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