Summer 2003 / Volume 8 / *Number* 2

interpretation

journal

of the Association for Heritage Interpretation

AHI

How does your garden grow?

Interpreting plants and gardens

Summer 2003 / Volume 8 / Number 2

Published by the Association for Heritage Interpretation

ISSN 1357 9401

Managing Editor:
Ruth Taylor
Email:
ruth.taylor@nationaltrust.org.uk

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: **The Umbrella Seat at Stourhead**

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

You can visit AHI's website at:
www.heritage-interpretation.org.uk

Contents

The next issue will feature
New technology
Email suggestions for contributions to
ruth.taylor@nationaltrust.org.uk

The British are known as a nation of garden lovers and produce some of the best gardens in the world. So how do we interpret plants and gardens to cater for a high proportion of knowledgeable gardening public as well as those who know relatively little? In this issue, articles deal with wide-ranging solutions from plantings as a vehicle for expressing sensitive issues to putting the pungent smell of jaguar urine in its jungle context!

In this issue we also introduce a special interest section for members who wish to air their views about subjects not part of the theme of the current Journal. Email your suggestions to ruth.taylor@nationaltrust.org.uk or Elizabeth Newbery emnewbery@connectfree.co.uk

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

For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation (AHI), send an email to admin@heritage-interpretation.org.uk or 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* and a bi-monthly Newsletter and other mailings. They can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can vote at the Annual General Meeting.

If you would like to respond to articles in this issue please email emnewbery@connectfree.co.uk

Wry reflections on a botanical garden

Timothy Walker looks back on early plans for the interpretation of the University of Oxford Botanical Garden

At the beginning of the 1990's a decision was made that more interpretation was required at the University of Oxford Botanic Garden. 'More' is perhaps an exaggeration. 'Some' or 'any' would describe more accurately the situation. For most of the previous 370 years the interpretation was limited to a board detailing the opening hours and conditions of entry. In the 1960's and 70's large engraved labels were deployed in a few borders to explain the evolution of garden roses, the causes of variegation in the leaves of plants and the C-value paradox in cultivated varieties of bearded irises. This may have been the first example of dumbing-up.

The first toe in the ocean of interpretation was the provision of maps at both entrances. In addition to orientating visitors, these maps included both an explanation of the words on the plant labels and information about which parts of the Garden were looking especially good on that day. The latter could be changed and updated easily. Too easily as it transpired since the information was constantly removed from its slot on the plan and taken away. This very basic interpretation was hardly controversial or original yet the maps provided a more sinister reaction than petty vandalism. There was opposition from vociferous 'highly educated' visitors to the provision of a map. This opposition was not a reaction to the dreadful design of the maps, for which I take all the credit. Instead it was based on the idea that people should be allowed to discover this 'secret walled garden' unencumbered by any information about the Garden or its plants.

The argument went along the following lines. Visitors would enter the Garden and realise that here was a plant collection cultivated for three and a half centuries to support the teaching of herbal medicine and then botany and plant science. They would delight in the sight of the English yew tree planted by Jacob Bobart, the Garden's first Curator. Furthermore they would be struck by the appropriateness of this species as the oldest plant in the former physic garden now that life saving chemotherapy for breast cancer is derived from its leaves. As they wondered between the rows of long narrow borders they would examine every flower and see clearly why these plants are grouped in the same genera and families. Fortunately they were already familiar with Bentham and Hooker's 1860 system for placing families in orders. Presumably in 18 months time our visitors will appreciate that Bentham and Hooker's sequence has been changed to the system proposed by the Angiosperm Phylogeny Group in 1998 that reveals the course of evolution.

Of course all this is grossly over optimistic nonsense. Unless our mythical visitor is accompanied by a very knowledgeable grandparent with a gift for story telling all of this information will remain hidden. Only the exceptionally gifted person such as Charles Darwin or John Ray has been able to make such huge deductions by observation. We lesser mortals can no more understand and interpret a historic garden than we can look at the mother board of our computer and understand how it works (or doesn't work). To ignore this fact is to deny access for the vast majority of the public to some of the most wonderful and fundamentally important stories ever told. The way in which those stories are told and access to the knowledge widened will vary from garden to garden but this Garden, and the University as a whole, is totally committed to providing that access to everyone.

Timothy Walker is Director of the University of Oxford Botanical Garden

A prize winning garden

Ruth Taylor explains the concepts behind the interpretation of The Courts Garden in Wiltshire which won the Interpret Britain Judges' best award 2002

Above: The Pillar Garden – cloth was dried hung over chains between these columns

An appetite for gardens

Over the last few years there has been a huge expansion of interest in gardens and gardening, fuelled by the media and especially television programmes. Many gardens open to the public have not really kept up with this interest and provided visitors with the information they come wanting to find out. The National Trust has certainly found from their market research that visitors to gardens have an unfulfilled thirst for more information. It was with this in mind that the interpretation at The Courts was planned.

There are many challenges when interpreting a historic garden. It can be similar to interpreting an open site where the landscape is paramount and every effort must be taken to preserve the view. The restrictions on interpreting such a site include the need to avoid any signs or panels and indeed in many historic gardens the plants are not labelled, as historically this would have been the case. The approach taken at The Courts was to enhance the visitor's experience of the place without intruding on the peace and tranquillity of the garden. Nothing very innovative was used but the basic principles of interpretation were applied with great effect.

Village Law Court

As the name suggests, The Courts was originally the village law court. The present house –'an early Georgian gem'– was built about 1720 for a wealthy cloth merchant from Bradford-on-Avon. It is built of mellow Bath stone and is the place around which the whole L-shaped design of the garden swings. The site was used for manufacturing cloth with the water flowing through the garden powering the cloth mill and the ponds in the eastern corner being used to dye the finished cloth. Evidence of the cloth industry can still be seen in the garden.

The architect Sir George Hastings laid out the bones of the garden between 1900 and 1910. From 1921 two generations of the Goff family established the tradition of rich and varied planting and in 1943 the family gave the house and garden to the National Trust.

Illusions of space

Although only 2.8 hectares the garden appears much bigger.

Yew hedges define the different spaces with one area flowing naturally into the next... Vista's tempt the eye in every direction.

The themes and stories

The themes and stories in the interpretation plan at The Courts were based on the statement of significance, which every National Trust property has prepared as part of its ongoing management plan.

The historical stories driving the concepts were:

- Garden history and the place of The Courts within it – 'The English Garden style at its best'
- The growth and development of The Courts garden to the present
- The people connected with The Courts
- The early history-cloth making at The Courts

Objectives

The learning objectives were:

- For visitors to be able to identify the trees and other flowering plants
- For visitors to understand the work of the National Trust in looking after such special places
- For visitors to realise that the garden is a living entity and will continue to develop and change

The behavioural objectives were:

- That visitors will be enthused to find out more – maybe by buying a guidebook
- That visitors will recommend a visit to The Courts to others.

Different levels of interpretation were produced for the different types of visitor. We formed a project team of the Head Gardener, Troy Smith, who produced all the information and many of the ideas for interpretation; the Property Manager, Graham Heard, who oversaw the budget and the interpretation officer, Ruth Taylor, and assistant George Hockin, who guided the property staff through the interpretation planning process.

Troy had identified an old shed in the garden as a suitable place for a small display (the Orchard Room) as the entrance kiosk was barely big enough for selling tickets. We came up with a plan which provided an introduction to the first time visitor and more detailed interpretation for the expert based around the Orchard Room, leaflets for sale and an innovative events programme.

Left: The Top Lawn at The Courts in February. Bare branched trees rise above the sharp, edged yew hedges

'Different levels of interpretation were produced for the different types of visitor'

Key elements

Key elements of the interpretation were as follows:

- **Monthly newsletters** which outline work taking place in the garden; plants of interest; what to come back for next month and events
- An **A4 colour tree plan** with a birds-eye view of the garden on one side showing all the trees numbered and a list of the trees on the reverse side – to enable visitors to identify the trees
- **A planting plan** for the expert wanting to know any plant in any border
- **An exhibition** showing the history of garden design and where The Courts is placed as a 20th century garden; a map of the garden with highlights of things to see; a history of The Courts and information on recent work in the garden
- **Plants in flower** on display
- **A souvenir guidebook** describing the early history and a tour of the garden written by the Head Gardener including an annotated birds-eye view plan inside the front cover
- **A blackboard** at the entrance to the garden listing plants to look out for
- **Postcards**
- **An events programme**
- **Guided tours** by the Head Gardener
- **Workshops** on gardening techniques such as pruning and tree planting
- **A temporary sculpture exhibition** of natural sculptures in the arboretum which brought in three times the normal visitor numbers one Sunday
- **A dance event** where three local schools came together (a secondary school and the feeder primary schools) to devise their own dances inspired by the garden and the sculptures

Right: A stretch of green lawn leads to the Ionic Temple

Conclusion

It is possible to interpret a garden to the satisfaction of visitors without intruding on the sense of place. Some of the judges' comments for The Courts in the AHI Interpret Britain awards were as follows. . .
'As things are we feel we are being treated like privileged country house guests rather than tourists or visitors to a Garden Centre'... 'So the interpretation consists of nothing innovative, nothing ambitious, nothing clever. It is minimal, discreet, appropriate, clear, relevant, in good-taste and wholly user friendly. What more could one ask?'

Ruth Taylor is The National Trust Learning Adviser for Interpretation based in the central office at Swindon.

'It is possible to interpret a garden to the satisfaction of visitors without intruding on the sense of place'

Building optimism from a tangled past

Beverley Lear discusses the creation of the Peace Maze as a means of interpreting the peace process in Northern Ireland

Nowhere into somewhere

The fact that the Peace Maze at Castlewellan was a sheep field three years ago and now that 'sheep field' has received around 100,000 visitors, is a staggering thought. Given that this transformation of nowhere into somewhere has occurred during a period when tourism figures have generally fallen and in a part of Britain not exactly renown for its buoyant tourism market, it might be seen as some acclaim for the approach to interpretation that we have taken. Unusually, the project has not involved the interpretation of a pre-existing heritage 'artefact' but has made use of a traditional landscape form to represent a particular aspect of cultural heritage. In abstract terms the design and layout of the maze makes use of a rich symbolic language, but it is the process of its making as much as its completed form that has motivated and underpinned the project. As a result, it is this delivery of 'ownership' that now contributes to its success and community acceptance.

'A maze represent process and journey but it could also be a symbol of a community mapping out the way together'

Above: The Peace Maze

The idea is born

The idea of the Peace Maze came about as I listened to a radio announcement of the signing of the peace agreement on Good Friday 1998. The vision of a few trees planted in commemoration of the event, each with its own little plaque struck me as utterly inadequate and inappropriate. If this was to be a real peace then everybody had to take part. If there was to be a commemoration of the signing of the peace agreement, then it should reflect its tangled process and the many different avenues and points of view along the way. In my interpretation, a maze seemed the perfect metaphor – not only would it provide an opportunity for lots of tree planting, but the trees themselves would symbolise a community growing together in mutual dependence as a hedge. In short, not only could a maze represent process and journey but it could also be a symbol of a community mapping out the way together.

Community support

With financial support from the European Union Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, the Peace Maze has been made by the Forest Service of Northern Ireland. It is situated on the fringes of an historic landscape park in the small town of Castlewellan some 30 miles south of Belfast. For anyone familiar with the complexities of Northern Ireland, Castlewellan, on the one hand might be seen as a picturesque town situated at the foot of the Mourne Mountains, but on the other it is a town which has gained something of a reputation as a 'hot-bed' of republican activity. However, the more 'ordinary' people of the town were already regular users of the park and before the funding had been secured, approval of the project was sought from local political and religious leaders, and a close rapport was established with the local schools. I am told that this was the first time that the people of Castlewellan had actually been consulted prior to something happening in 'their' park. However, gaining the support of the people of Castlewellan was more than a public relations exercise – it also gave senior Forest Service staff confidence that the project was a good idea.

The maze is made

Although the totality of the project has not yet been completed, the maze itself has been made and is already well established. As yet there is no 'interpretation centre' (one is planned) and there are no leaflets or visitor guides. There is a gap then, between the maze as a new tourism and educational venue and the 'official' story of its symbols and meanings. This lack of interpretive closure has unintentionally allowed for the constant reinterpretation and invention by each visitor. In this respect, the institutionalisation of the project name has been most important.

© MICHAEL LEAR

Above: The bridge allowing visitors to view the maze from above

Symbolism of mazes

As patterns inscribed on buildings, on jewellery, and on battle shields or as pathways cut in turf, marked out by stones or defined by hedges, maze-like forms occur throughout the world and have been made from antiquity to the present day. However, although it might be said that the prehistoric engravings at Newgrange, near Dublin, and the entwined forms in Celtic art have a certain maze-like quality, there is no landscape heritage of mazes in Northern Ireland in the same way as they are a familiar element in English garden design. Indeed this position of novelty is an important aspect of the Peace Maze 'visitor-pull'.

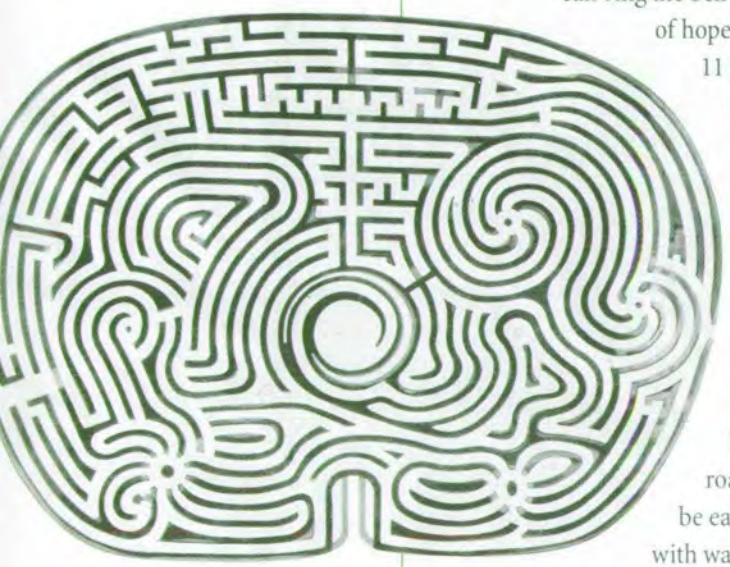
Although mazes take a myriad of different forms, they are readily identifiable as complex symbolic patterns. Mazes are generally divided into two distinct types: unicursal or meander mazes in which the overall design is created by one continuous path followed (often meditatively) from entrance to centre, and multicursal or puzzle mazes in which a network of paths, turnings and decisions must be made in order to reach the central goal. The Peace Maze is of the latter kind. Alfred Gell[1] has suggested that mazes universally derive their significance as patterns which slow down perception and confuse the 'reader'. In this way it seems that mazes are often regarded as protective devices. They are said to be 'sticky' and entrapping – evil thoughts travel only in straight lines! It is the capacity to demand a mental unravelling which, in contemporary terms underlies their appeal, but the idea that they are in some way protective, that at their centre there might be safety or 'peace' is further confirmation of the appropriateness of the maze motif for this project.

Developing a design

If the Forest Service had been persuaded of the suitability of the maze project, it was another problematic to 'deliver' the ideals of participation and community involvement. Fundamentally what should the maze look like and who should design it? As an anthropologist, I felt strongly that the design of the maze should not be placed in the hands of a professional maze designer and it was therefore decided to launch a competition for schools to canvass ideas and designs from throughout the Province. Entry forms were sent to all schools and about 4000 completed entries were received from children ranging from 7 to 17 years old. The standards were very high and included a number of fully workable maze designs as well as some exceptional ideas for 'special features' within the maze. The unusual layout of the maze which combines both rectilinear and curvilinear sections comes through an amalgamation of some of the school designs. Many children said that the maze should be heart-shaped but the final design is often

described as looking like a brain scan! We decided that peace comes about through reason not passion.

The different design elements are considered to have various symbolic meanings. For example, the curvilinear sections represent the rural aspects of life in Northern Ireland and the rectilinear sections are the urban landscape. The design layout also divides into two halves, not mirror images but symbolically two communities bearing similarity as well as difference. This is an important aspect of the design, since the visitor must cross the central divide in order to 'see another's point view' before they can reach the centre. At one level then, the Peace Maze carries meaning as a structural pattern, but it also incorporates certain 'special features' which specifically symbolise the trials to be found along a route to peace. In this respect, we have included those ideas which seemed either exceptionally poignant or very high in the "I think the Peace Maze should have ..." stakes. For example, two 9 year old boys suggested that at the centre of the maze "there should be a bell, so that people who get to the middle can ring the bell and send out a sound of hope[iii]" ; in a similar vein an 11 year old girl told us that "the maze should have a drinking fountain because Catholics and Protestants drink from the same source". It also includes a rocky road and rickety bridge because "the road to peace should not be easy"; stepping stones with water jets because "the road to peace is dangerous and you need to take a step at a time"; and banks of mirrors which should be "angled so that you see other people realising that we are all alike".



The final design for the maze

The language of symbols

Such recommendations reflect a sophisticated cultural use of metaphor and symbol and dispel sceptics who thought that visitors simply 'wouldn't get it'. Whilst undoubtedly some conventional interpretive material is needed to get these ideas across, the point is that visitors do understand the 'language' of symbols fundamentally because the project is giving back the ideas that have been given to us.

Furthermore, whilst the main concern had been one of 'delivering ownership', the schools competition has proved to be an extremely valuable asset. Not only did the large number of entries constitute a substantial insight into the way that the children of Northern Ireland conceptualised both 'the troubles' and the ideals of peace in the year 2000[iii], but it established a ready made and informed client base in the target market sector of educational visitors[iv].

Maze making

'Delivering ownership' did not end with the completion of the maze design. Whilst structural engineers and contractors have necessarily been involved in much of the layout, path construction and planting. There has been a regular programme of community 'planting events' bringing together different sectors of the community, schools, voluntary groups and mums and dads. Overall, the maze, which has been made with 6000 yew trees[v] and has involved 1000 members of the public in planting events. During these events, participants were asked to leave their comments about their maze planting experience. From this, it is clear that some people came because they personally wanted to endorse the ideals of peace; others came to plant and remember friends and family members lost in the troubles – no plaques, just memories implanted and intermingled. Others came, especially as family groups to literally and symbolically play their part in shaping a future. Indeed, the idea that the maze would endure and belong to future generations was a powerful and commonly expressed sentiment.

Even before the maze itself was finished, it became the repository for new meanings and personal interpretations. Perhaps the most remarkable of which were the ideas brought by a primary school group from Dublin. Prior to their visit, each child had been asked by their headmaster to dig a lump of soil from their garden and to ask each family member to impress a thumbprint into it. This soil was then gathered up and brought in a bag to Castlewellan and interred in the roots of 'their'

© MICHAEL LEAR

'This lack of interpretive closure has unintentionally allowed for the constant reinterpretation and invention by each visitor'

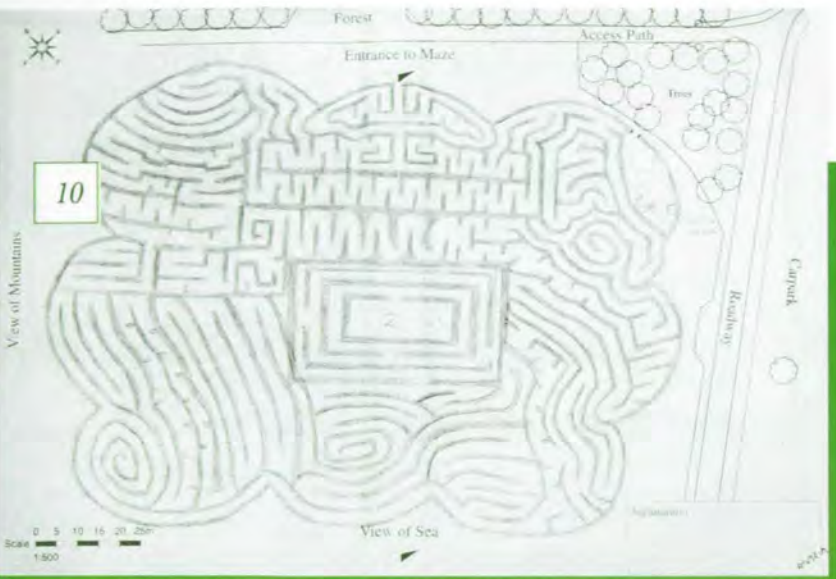
Above: Visitors exploring the maze
Above right: Children viewing the maze

tree. A gift of imprinted soil appeared as the antithesis of a colonising act – maybe it was a hinted longing for a unified Ireland, but nothing was said. Significantly, far from being part of a conscious effort to orchestrate, such events were spontaneous and reflect the way that the maze has constantly been part of shaping new meanings. As such, the transience of events and the potential for many different readings, has by default kept the Peace Maze fresh from much of the fixity that might come with information panels and guidebooks. Indeed, one of the most exciting aspects of the project has been the way that the maze is able to penetrate the arts community. New musical compositions and poetry have begun to emerge in response.

Experiential meanings

Having set out from the perspective of a heritage of conflict, I now see the maze as a proactive expression of a changed and different future. Whilst conducting research in the early stages of the project, I had noticed when visiting the mazes at Longleat, Leeds Castle and Hampton Court, that strangers would often enter into conversation with one another. There appeared to be a sense of mutual participation and shared lost-ness. This sense of mutuality is an important one, since in terms of visitor experience, mazes level out the distinctions between individuals. The ability to find the way does not depend on how much you earn, what you wear, what your education is or to some extent how old you are (although children seem to find their way more easily than adults).

Furthermore, since 'talks' are the stuff of any peace process, making space for dialogue is yet another level of symbolic importance and therefore encouraging communication has been very much part of the agenda of the Peace Maze. Certain physical attributes of the maze have been designed to enhance the potential for conversation; the hedges will be kept lower than is often usual; the paths have been made wider and the central 'goal' of the journey is a large raised mound – 'the moral high ground of peace'. In practical terms, this enables eye contact and conversations to develop across hedges and allows those who have reached the centre to give directions to those who are still trying to find the way. If at the outset, the Peace Maze was conceived as a representation of the peace process in Northern Ireland, understanding the influence that the experience of being in a maze can have upon the patterns of social behaviour brings with it the recognition that the core theme of the interpretive project must involve working through these perceptual and social processes. By focusing on the psychological responses to the maze, the interpretation might critically challenge the way that people see themselves as individuals, as members of families and groups, as well as their responsibilities to others. What did feel like to struggle? Did you need help? Did you help anyone else? What did it feel like to succeed? The forthcoming interpretation facility will, of course, need deal to some degree with the symbolic meanings of the maze, but priority will be given to encouraging a personal sense of self investigation.



'The interpretation might critically challenge the way that people see themselves as individuals, as members of families and groups, as well as their responsibilities to others'

Above: A design submitted by Tara Quinn, aged 14

Conclusion

The Peace Maze is polysemic and multilayered. Like the best and longest enduring myths, the maze is not only amenable to further interpretations but proactively gathers understandings in a reinforcement of its relevance and significance. It is, however, an artefact of contradiction, at once commemorative and forward looking, it takes a universal trope and lays it open to personal interpretations and meanings. On one level it is a way to exhaust energetic children, but at another it is a forum for teaching courses in citizenship, art & design, maths, environment and ecology.

Fundamentally, the popularity and local acceptance of the Peace Maze comes about because the ideas that it incorporates and the labour that has made it, has come from within the community. Recognition of the role of the Forest Service should not be overlooked. The institutional knowledge base of the Forest Service is almost exclusively focused on forestry practice, certainly peace and reconciliation projects are far from their regular agenda. However, despite an unfavourable economic assessment of the project conducted by Price Waterhouse Cooper in 1999, their advice to a) build only a small maze; and b) to engage a professional designer, was overturned, thanks to the foresight of a few key Forest Service staff. The same staff should be also applauded for their belief that a top grade project could be developed from the basis of a schools competition. In retrospect, this has been one of the major strengths of the project and contributes to the large number of visitors that regularly come to the Peace Maze.

Finally, it is worth considering the day that the maze was officially opened to the public. It was the 12th September 2001 and the world was in shock. In deciding to go ahead with the planned event, Mrs Brid Rogers, Minster of Agriculture and Rural Development and 300 guests[vi] came together in a hushed marquee to witness the opening of something which overnight seemed to have gathered a new set of symbolically significant meanings. No longer was the Peace Maze a symbol of peace in Northern Ireland but had become the focus of an appeal for world-wide peace. There can be no greater tribute or greater expectation placed in the hands of the children of Northern Ireland.

Beverley Lear is an historic landscape consultant, designer and anthropologist. She has current research interests in the study of English culture as seen through the lens of the garden.
www.learassociates.co.uk. www.peacemaze.com

[i] Gell, A. (1998) Art & Agency: an anthropological theory. Clarendon Press:Oxford

[ii] At present there is a large old bell hung in a temporary wooden cradle. It is hoped that funds will be found to cast a new 'peace bell' for the project. The aim is to include metal from decommissioned weaponry within in the casting.

[iii] Competition entries have been archived as a resource for researchers in social science.

[iv] The Forest Service has prepared work sheets for curriculum studies in maths. Similar schools programmes may be developed in citizenship and social studies, art & design, history & environment. Non-schools groups have developed their own fund raising 'maze busting challenges" and corporate training courses and arts activities are anticipated.

[v] The choice of Yew is a symbolic. As an evergreen it represents at least the potential for a perpetual peace. A deciduous species such as Beech would make a good maze but its message would be of a peace which was 6 months on and 6 months off! Furthermore, unlike Beech, Yew is native both to Britain and Ireland and is a species long associated with sacred and mystical places. We have used seed raised stock collected from mother tree growing on the Pilgrims Way. The genetic diversity arising from seed raised rather than clonal stock (the short fat, tall thin, dark green and golden foliage forms) not only have the potential for classes in biology but as a naturally dioecious species, the separate male and female plants also abstractly represent the multiplicity of shape and form within our own communities.

[vi] At all stages of the project, the schools competition winners and pupils at local schools have been invited to press events and developments in the maze have attracted regional TV coverage. The project has also appeared on BBC Newsnight.

A garden of stories

Ian Edwards tells how living in the remote mountains of New Guinea inspired him to develop the education programme at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

© DEBBIE WHITE

Right: Storytellers in action

Going native

I was living among tribal people in the remote mountains of New Guinea when I first became aware of the power of storytelling as a didactic medium. My particular passion was trees and my guide was a young man, about 16 years old, called Sertilus. Being part of a preliterate society he never went to school and didn't read or write. Yet Sertilus could identify by sight more than two hundred rain forest trees and had an intimate knowledge of their flowering and fruiting cycles, ecology and useful products. Although I have two ecology degrees, both from good British universities, he put my botanical knowledge to shame!

Intrigued by Sertilus' deep understanding of his own environment and realising this had not been learnt from books I spent my next few weeks observing the education of children in Sertilus's village. Two things seemed especially important. One was practical example. Small children make bows and arrows that are exact replicas of the powerful tools that are used by adults to such great effect. They shoot small birds or mammals and so learn the skills of the hunter and the ways of wildlife. Then in the evening after dark, everybody gathers around the fireplaces for storytelling – men and boys in the male hut and women and girls in the female hut. There they tell anecdotes, jokes and the stories of the real and mythical inhabitants of their misty forests.

Tree tales

These stories are full of references to plants and animals, both domesticated and wild, and they serve to reinforce the practical lessons learnt during daylight hours. Storytelling in this context is not simple entertainment, it is also a very important means of learning. My experience in Sertilus' village left me excited by the possibility of developing storytelling as medium for use in my own work at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. If New Guinean children could learn about trees through this powerful combination of stories and practical activities surely Scottish children could also?

During the past few years I have been working with staff, volunteers, professional storytellers and the Scottish Storytelling Centre to develop ways in which storytelling can have greater prominence in our work in education and interpretation.

Tours, theatre and stories

Story trails are a form of live interpretation that combines elements of the guided tour, promenade theatre and storytelling. At RBGE we have developed several different versions for both our Edinburgh Garden and our regional garden at Dawyck in the Scottish Borders. A central story line or quest links individual stories, like beads threaded onto a necklace. Often, but not always, the material is traditional – personally I have a difficulty inventing good stories from scratch but fortunately Scottish, Celtic and other northern traditions are very rich in suitable material that we are able to use. Recently with the help of our first storyteller-in-residence, Claire Mulholland, we have been able to gather quite a collection of tree stories from northern lands and train staff and volunteers to take part in story trails for people of all ages.

'Sertilus could identify by sight more than two hundred rain forest trees'

I don't claim that we are unique or even original in using storytellers and traditional stories in live garden interpretation – the Eden Project in Cornwall, for example, is doing this superbly every day of the year – but immersion in the story culture of our land has had a profound effect on the way that we have developed many aspects of our interpretation master plan.

'If New Guinean children could learn about trees through this powerful combination of stories and practical activities surely Scottish children could also?'

Above: The RBGE storyteller-in-residence, Claire Mulholland with a group of young people

Film and animation

In using film, we have avoided the conventional and formulaic approach of showing a video of beautiful scenes of the garden through the seasons. As an alternative we have made a series of animated films that deliberately set out to tell a story. Donald Smith, Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre, was the first person to point out to me the close relationship between these genre – storytelling and animation – which lend themselves to playful use of the imagination. There are no boundaries at all in animation – you can fly up in the sky or tunnel underground, go back in time or into the future, make animals talk and trees walk...

The transition from story to animated film is a relatively easy one. Many traditional storytellers will admit that they see stories visually rather than learn them as narrative, a secret that enables them to hear a story only once and then incorporate it into their personal memory bank. Animation reverses this process and takes a story and visualises it. The result is a media that is both accessible, memorable and, of course, highly entertaining.

More than a decade of experimenting with this media has produced two wee gems. The *Story of the Himalayan Weeping Cypress* which was put together for the Glasgow Garden Festival in 1987 and *Return of the Natives* that formed a central part of an exhibition to celebrate the Millennium Forest for Scotland project in 2001. Red Kite, the Edinburgh based animation studios that produced the *Return of the Natives,* have also made a superb 15 minute animation based on the classic Scottish folktale *The Green Man of Knowledge* that has appeared on mainstream TV in both English and Gaelic.

Audio trails

The RBGE has also been pioneers in the use of audio trails in Gardens. In the past these have sometimes had a mixed response partly because it has not always been possible to obtain hardware for an outdoor environment. However, the latest generation of Guideman audio wands, resembling a mobile phone and allowing non-sequential access to sound bytes, appear to have solved this difficulty and once again we are embarking on producing two new audio tours for our Edinburgh and Benmore Gardens. Fortunately we have not had to go very far to find good material to put on to the trails. Working at one of the world's leading botanical and horticultural institutes we are surrounded by people who have a wealth of interesting and exciting stories based on their personal experiences of collecting plants in some of the most remote corners of the world.

Storytellers and audiences

Although we now have a directory of professional storytellers who are contributing enormously to keeping Scotland's oral tradition alive and healthy, it is not always necessary to employ a professional on every project. We have found that there are many storytellers who will come along on a summer afternoon and tell stories for the sheer pleasure of seeing the delight in the faces of their audiences. We are also discovering that many of our own staff, not just in education but horticulturalists and scientists as well, possess a real gift for telling stories, especially when they are from personal experience. Following the training sessions run last year by Claire Mulholland we also now have a group of volunteers who meet regularly to share stories and to perform them for the visiting public. There is never a lack of audiences for these informal performances and the feedback that we have been getting has been very encouraging.

Ian D. Edwards is Director of Public Programmes, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
i.edwards@rbge.org.uk

Seeds for survival

Pat Griggs describes how a project of global significance is interpreted for the general visitor

Storage for seeds

The Millennium Seed Bank (MSB) at Wakehurst Place in Sussex, the sister garden for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, was established in 2000 to provide safe long-term storage for seeds from up to a tenth of the world's flowering plant species. The Millennium Commission (£30 million), the Wellcome Trust (£9 million) and Orange plc (£2.5 million) made major contributions to the total project cost of £74 million.

Above: Visitors in the exhibition space can watch scientists investigating the properties of seeds
Below right: Interactives supplement the exhibition panels by providing more in-depth information about the MSB Project's activities

Ensuring a harvest

Thousands of years ago, people found that if they harvested seeds in autumn and then planted them out the following year, they would produce a new generation of plants would eventually provide another useful harvest. This discovery led ultimately to the development of agriculture which, in turn, encouraged settled communities and a new way of life for all humans! If seeds were kept dry, they could often be stored successfully for several years, so they could be transported on long voyages around the world and introduced to new lands. Among botanists, stories of immensely long seed survival times abounded, often relating to seeds from the Egyptian pyramids. Many of these have never been proved, but scientists recently showed that the 1000-year old seeds of a sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) from an ancient lake bed in China were still able to germinate. The seeds of many species will probably survive naturally for a few years, but their lifespans can be extended dramatically if they are dried and then frozen. In recent years, scientists have begun to exploit the seeds' inbuilt longevity as a means of conserving plants.

The Millennium Seed Bank Project is, in essence, building a 'botanical ark' for the world. The MSB already holds seed from virtually all the UK's flowering plants – some 1400 species. Over the next 10 years, the Project will work in collaboration with partner organisations around the world towards the goal of placing another 24,000 species in safe-keeping. These will be collected primarily from the world's drylands, where the native vegetation is threatened by climate change and human activity. After careful cleaning and drying, the seeds will be stored in underground vaults at a temperature of –20°C. Under these conditions, they should survive for hundreds of years.

Seed banks

The MSB is a global resource that provides the basis for an active research programme seeking to understand more about seed biology. Of particular interest is identifying those seeds which will not survive the cold dry conditions in conventional seed banks and finding alternative techniques for storing them. Research data and seed banking expertise is shared with partners. Seeds held in the MSB can be made available for species reintroduction, for academic research and for trialling potentially useful plants, under careful legal agreements to ensure that any benefits arising from their use will be shared with the country of origin.

Increasing public understanding of the importance of conserving plant diversity is key to the MSB Project. An exhibition space lies at the heart of the Wellcome Trust Millennium Building, directly above the seed vault. The exhibition highlights the importance of plants, the threats they face in the wild and the role of seed banks in ensuring their survival.

'The Millennium Seed Bank Project is, in essence, building a 'botanical ark' for the world'

Above right: UK plants from a variety of habitats provide a colourful introduction to the MSB summer
Below: The Seed Hall introduces visitors to the astonishing diversity of seed form

A global context

As visitors enter the exhibition space, their first encounter with seeds is via a 'seed wall' illustrating the diversity of seed shape and size, ranging from the huge double coconut (weighing in at 20 kg) to the tiny seeds of orchids which are no larger than specks of dust. An audiovisual presentation introduces the MSB Project and its global context. It also shows seed collectors in action out in the field, harvesting seed and gathering information about the source plants, before despatching them back to the UK. In the course of the exhibition, visitors can follow the progress of the seed from its arrival at the MSB to its eventual storage in the vault. They can actually see into the seed processing and research laboratories and watch scientists at work. Interactive programmes allow them to check out some of the cleaning techniques for themselves or to have a go at assessing the X-ray images that show damaged or empty seeds. The programmes also contain lab tours illustrating the equipment on view and explaining how it works. To one end of the exhibition space, where they look down over the seed vault itself, visitors can take part in a virtual-reality challenge to retrieve seeds from the MSB. This interactive emphasises the fact that each seed held in the vault represents a potential growing plant.

'Increasing public understanding of the importance of conserving plant diversity is key to the MSB Project'

Different types of seeds

Various exhibits illustrate the types of plant that are being collected for the MSB and the activities of the partner organisations involved. Many seed-collecting expeditions focus on useful wild plants. In Burkina Faso, for instance, people harvest the leaves of the horse-radish tree (*Moringa oleifera*) for the oil they contain and eat the young fruits and flowers as vegetables. The dried crushed seeds can be used to purify dirty water. In tropical regions, people take blackjack (*Bidens pilosa*) to treat many illnesses from jaundice to whooping cough. Blackjack seeds from the MSB have been the subject of a research project investigating ringworm treatments. Wild plants are often the sources of famine foods; the desert date (*Balanites aegyptiaca*) was particularly important during the Ethiopian famines of the 1980s. The mopane tree (*Colophospermum mopane*) provides valuable fuel wood in southern Africa and is home to an edible caterpillar known as the mopane worm that is popular with local people. Other species of particular relevance for the MSB are those that are endangered in the wild due to loss of habitat. Among the British species safely in the MSB are endangered species such as pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) and strapwort (*Corrigiola litoralis*). The MSB has provided seeds for English Nature's programme of strapwort reintroduction.

Living plants

Visitors also encounter displays of living plants, representing some of the species stored as seed in the MSB. A planter within the exhibition space holds dryland plants, whilst outside the building a series of parterres show plants from different UK habitats. Beyond the building's immediate environs lie the outstanding collections of trees and shrubs of the gardens at Wakehurst Place. Combining a visit to the gardens and the Millennium Seed Bank exhibition offers both a celebration of the beauty of the plant kingdom and an opportunity to see what can be done to ensure that it survives for future generations to enjoy.

Dr Pat Griggs is Education Officer (Higher Education and Training) at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. She was a member of the team which developed the MSB exhibition

The scent of the jungle

Sara Ruks explains how plant interpretation plays an important role in the *Spirit of the Jaguar* at Chester Zoo

'One of the challenges we faced was how to highlight the plants in the jaguar's habitat'

Above: *Spirit of the Jaguar* was sponsored by Jaguar cars
Above right: Inside the jaguar's enclosure

A holistic approach

All large projects at Chester are conceived and developed by a team drawn not only from the Animal and Estates Divisions, but also from Horticulture, Education, Visitor Services and Marketing. In this venture we worked together to create *Spirit of the Jaguar* as an immersion exhibit where visitors walk into the central drum of a Mayan temple decaying on one side into a savannah habitat and on the other, into the Amazon jungle. Jaguars prowl in each of these habitats.

The interpretation was designed to complement the building and to create an exciting, enjoyable learning experience that would allow our visitors to discover a greater understanding of:

- the ecology of the rainforest
- the lives of the people living in and depending on the rainforest
- the biology of the jaguar
- conservation issues

One of the challenges we faced during the planning stage was how to highlight the plants in the jaguar's habitat and make links with both jaguars and people. We know from experience and from research (Lewis 1988[1]) that whereas visitors may remember as little as 10% of what they hear and 30% of what they read, many will retain as much as 90% of what they do. Also investigations have shown that smell is linked more closely than our other senses to those parts of the brain that deal with emotions and memory (Herz and Engen 1996[2]). These facts led us to develop a suite of multi-sensory interactive interpretation, accessible to all, both physically and intellectually.

Jaguar urine and vanilla

As we took a holistic approach to this project, plants feature all the way through the exhibit. The 'taster' interpretation, mounted on wooden posts on the entrance promenade and originally intended as a means of keeping restless children occupied on busy days when queues may develop, consists of 3-D resin objects such as hinged rainforest fruits with 'fascinating facts' inside, a jaguar skull and pug marks. Tactile models are a feature of both our plant and animal interpretation at Chester. Models attract visitors to signs, help to increase their understanding of the subject being interpreted, as well as providing a sensory experience for visually impaired visitors. We are lucky to be able to use the services of Ian Hughes of 'Lifeforms' who makes all our models for us.

Inside the building, visitors are immediately invited to embark on a scent trail to discover for themselves a few of the vast range of smells that jaguars experience in the rainforest. Six smells, scattered throughout the exhibit, have their identities concealed by a flap. The first one is the acrid, ammonia-based odour of jaguar urine. For health reasons, we couldn't use the real thing so we commissioned Dale Air (a firm of scent manufacturers) to produce the first synthetic Jaguar urine. The rest are all of plant origin: vanilla, mahogany, chocolate, coffee and tobacco. Coffee and tobacco are not found in the South American

Above: Model of papaya on the *Fruits of the Forest* board
Above right: A young visitor sampling *The Sounds of the Forest*

'We have also illustrated the impact of jaguars on vegetation'

rainforest, but are grown in the deforested areas and using these smells helps to reinforce our conservation messages.

In the rainforest side, sounds of the jungle surround you among the lush tropical vegetation; birds call, insects buzz and a jaguar suddenly grunts from behind a bush. Visitors are drawn to a soundboard where they can press a button and listen to the jaguar as well as other species sharing its home. This helps them to identify the sounds they have heard during their journey through the rainforest.

Species native to South America have been planted in this area and here the plant interpretation focuses on food, crops and medicines of the forest. These boards with their impressionistic representation of the rainforest are designed to blend in with planting. This artwork, along with the other stunning pictures on the signs, was painted by Anthony Smith, a local watercolour artist. The resin attachments (including plantain, vanilla pod, cherimoya fruit and quinine bark) are particularly popular with children. Lifting the flaps next to models enables the visitor to discover the name of the plant, its use by indigenous people and its economic significance nowadays.

Not only is the relationship between people and the rainforest highlighted, we have also illustrated the impact of jaguars on the vegetation. Jaguars regularly use the same trees when sharpening their claws. During this process trees become deeply scored on the sides and rubbed smooth on the front, creating a visual signal for other jaguars. As part of our 'be a jaguar tracker' activity, model trees have been marked with jaguar scratch marks, made with real jaguar claws for authenticity!

Leaving the building, visitors walk along side a bed containing plants which have significance in our everyday lives, that originated in South America – potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, corn and tobacco are all represented here with their relevant signage. Again tactile models not only enhance the experience, but also provide interest during the winter months.

The conservation message is promoted very strongly throughout *Spirit of the Jaguar*, and reinforced at the end with information on our work to save jaguars and their habitats in the wild. One of the most poignant pieces of interpretation is the satellite imagery of rainforest destruction, kindly provided free of charge by NASA. It demonstrates the potential we have in a short period of time to destroy some of the things we should value most.

And more....

The theme of the relationship between plants and man is not unique to the *Spirit of the Jaguar*. It is a recurring topic throughout other plant interpretation around the Zoo. For example, within the Roman Garden (our Millennium project) the plant labels by the kitchen, medicinal and ornamental gardens give an insight into how the various plants were used by the Romans.

Also our *Talking Plants* interactive events, run by our botanical presenters, highlight the many weird and wonderful uses of plants throughout history and suggest what the future may hold.

The practical stuff

Although the Education Division is responsible for devising the signage, including writing the text, commissioning the artwork and planning the layout, the graphic work is done by Zoosign.com who are based in Manchester. They send the finished product to William Smith who prints the sign onto vinyl, which is then bonded to aluminium. This results in a very robust sign that stands up to the worst that our million plus visitors a year can dish out!

Sara Ruks is Senior Education Officer at Chester Zoo

[i] Lewis William J. Interpreting for Park Visitors Eastern National Park and Monument Association, Philadelphia PA 1998

[ii] Herz R.S. & Engen T. Odor Memory: review and analysis Psychonomic Bulletin & Review 3 n3 300–313

'Stourhead Revisited'

Richard Higgs recounts how a temporary project was designed to help visitors understand an important 18th century landscape as it would have appeared 250 years ago

Background

The landscape garden at Stourhead appears as a perfect world where Roman and Greek architecture sit harmoniously in an Arcadian landscape of rolling beech clad hills, surrounding a lake at the base of the valley. To imagine that this landscape was once much further embellished by ornament of exotic and often conflicting architectural styles is almost unthinkable. However, at the end of the 18th century when arguably at its zenith, the garden looked very different. The existence of these lost buildings in zthe landscape has been known ever since the late 70s when much of the research into the garden at Stourhead was carried out by the late Kennith Woodbridge, detailed in his work *Landscape and Antiquity*, and *The Stourhead Landscape*. Richard Colt Hoare succeeded his father Henry Hoare I in 1791 and inherited a landscape garden that had been conceived in the 1740s and developed over the following 30 years. Henry Hoare first embraced the classical style that he had admired on his Grand Tour, but in keeping with fashions of the day had added to the exotic garden buildings. Colt Hoare was said to dislike this unharmonious mix of architecture that 'did not accord with Greece and Rome' and set about a rationalisation of the landscape.

Stourhead has gone through many changes over the years and as buildings were removed at the end of the 18th century, other additions were being made to the Palladian Mansion and the planting of exotic trees from around the world was beginning. The conservation policy of The National Trust has always been not to replace these buildings.

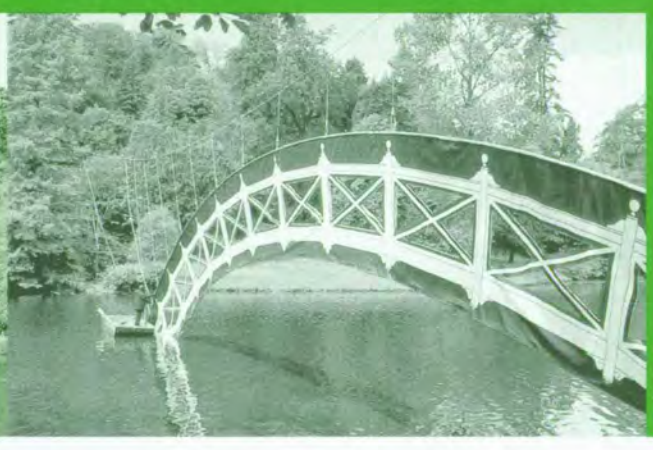
The project

In 2002, the Stourhead landscape was transformed with the addition of temporary buildings and features to recreate the feel of the garden at the end of the 18th century and to re-interpret this to the 21st century visitor. The brief was to recreate as many features as possible within available budgets, on a temporary basis. Buildings could use any materials and construction techniques but the overriding purpose was to allow visitors to experience these features back in the garden in the original positions and as close as possible to the original design.

Funding

Demands on funds within a conservation organisation such as the National Trust are always immense and the idea of using these to fund a series of 'temporary buildings' could not be considered as good use of resources when so much valuable conservation work is needed. Some lateral thinking gave the idea of looking for sponsors for each of the structures and elements of the project, using the potential marketing opportunities that such an event would present to make this attractive. Local contractors and businesses that had links with

'The conservation policy of The National Trust has always been not to replace these buildings'



Above: The reconstructed bridge seen from across the lake
Above right: The Chinese Bridge during erection

Above: The reconstructed Turkish Tent at Stourhead
Above right: An engraving of the original Temple on the terrace

'The principles of the 18th century landscape garden are complex and often difficult for the modern day visitor to understand'

Stourhead or obvious links with the features were approached, and the response was extremely positive. The idea seemed to fire the imagination of both craftsmen and engineers and The National Trust is indebted to these people for helping find practical solutions to the ideas put forward.

Not all of the features that once stood in the garden were recreated for Stourhead Revisited and the final list was compiled using the following criteria: those that could be recreated within the budget, to an acceptable level of authenticity; those that would have most impact in the landscape considering the changes that have happened to the garden over the last two and a half centuries, not least with the planting. Features that we do not have enough historical information on were not considered, as timing and budgets did not allow for any extra major research.

The Chinese Bridge

This spanned over 30 metres across the northern arm of the lake, and was undoubtedly one of the most impressive architectural features at Stourhead in the 18th century. The solid oak structure was constructed in 1750 with open slatted planking for the walkway. Crossing the bridge would have been a hair-raising experience, with one visitor of the time saying that it was 'like crossing the lake on a very flimsy ladder!'

To support this impressive feature, the banks on either side of the lake were extended into the water and jetties of stone built to act as footings. Only one large piece of stone has survived which is still in the garden close to its original position.

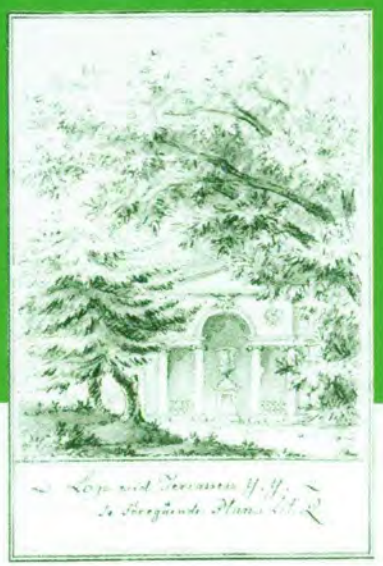
Drawing inspiration from the modern day practice of creating huge murals on material used to enclose scaffold to depict the building underneath, an innovative approach was adopted to find a modern solution to recreating this historical feature. This technique was seen used to great effect in 2000 on the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. Using original drawings from the 18th century, an image of the bridge was printed on to a large banner. Mann Williams, structural engineers, together with a specialist rigging company designed a system using towers and tensioned cables to hang the image of the bridge across the lake in its original position. Existing planting from the 20th century was used to hide the supporting structures and from the walks around the lake the bridge appeared much as would have done in the 18th century.

Main sponsor was the Mackintosh Foundation, and the project would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and expertise of engineers from Mann Williams. Their involvement started when they were told of the idea at the Christmas party when I took the group around the garden before a meal in the local pub. They were so excited that they were designing possible structures on napkins over the meal!

The Turkish Tent

When Mrs. Lybbe Powys visited Stourhead in 1766 she remarked: 'The Turkish Tent at Mr. Hoares is very pretty, 'tis of painted canvas, so remains up the whole year; the inside is painted blue and white in mosaic.'

The late 18th century saw garden fashions using many varied architectural styles, and Turkish Tents were recorded at a few of the landscapes at this time. The Green Frog dinner service that belonged to Katharine the Great shows the Stourhead tent in its



Above: The recreated Temple on the Terrace
Above right: An engraving of the original Temple on the Terrace

position on the hill overlooking the lake and Pantheon on the far bank.

To reconstruct the Turkish Tent at Stourhead today, the Bruton Yurt Company adapted a Mongolian yurt, recreating the style and feel of the original ornate structure. The position of the tent was decided based on 18th century plans and site lines in the garden. Once removed the yurt will remain at Stourhead and will be used for other temporary events such as children's activity days.

The Temple on the Terrace

The extensive landscape garden of Worlitz on the river Elbe, south of Berlin contains a copy of a temple that stood at Stourhead until the end of the 18th century. The temple was recreated by painting a mural based on the German copy on to a façade. Local artists, 'Unframed' used photos of the German temple and also copied the Borghese Vase that now stands in another Stourhead temple but originally was the centrepiece of the 'Temple on the Terrace' as it was known.

An archaeological dig was carried out to coincide with *Stourhead Revisted* on the foundations of this building and confirmed its position and dimensions. Archaeologists and volunteers worked on the dig at weekends and visitors were able to view the work in progress.

The Statue of Apollo

As part of the original 18th century landscape, a monumental sculpture of the Apollo Belvedere stood at the end of a formal axis from the house. To recreate this statue a two-dimensional Apollo was constructed and painted by mural artists with a face on either side. From even a few yards the skill of the artists gave the illusion of a real statue and from the House he was magnificent, once more giving a structure to this part of the garden that had been lost since his removal at the end of that century.

The Umbrella Seat

Seats were an important feature in 18th century gardens, as they are today. Indeed, it was the last feature of the project to be removed from the garden because it was so loved by visitors. A local firm who help young people back into work recreated the ornate umbrella seat.

Interpretation

The principles of the 18th century landscape garden are complex and often difficult for the modern day visitor to understand. Stourhead with its perfect setting and extensive plant collection from the 19th and 20th century does not suffer unduly by this, attracting over a quarter of a million visitors each year. However the garden's real significance does lie with the landscape begun in the 1740's which marked a seminal moment in English garden history when we swung away from the formal to the contrived natural. *Stourhead Revisited* gave an opportunity to tell this story in a visually stunning and exciting way.

Each of the reconstructed buildings had an interpretation board that explained its significance and gave information on how the reconstruction was carried out. An illustrated leaflet was produced and given free to all visitors giving information and exposure to sponsors. There was also live interpretation using key figures from the gardens history to tell the story. Tours that passed the visitor from one interpreter to the next ran through the day each weekend in August. Skiffs gave visitors rides on the lake recreating the elegance that would have been the pleasure of a Georgian house guest.

'Whilst gardens often succeed best when they are totally naked of any interpretative material, *Stourhead Revisited* explored new ways of bringing the history of a place to life in an innovative and exciting way'

Above: Visitors enjoying the reconstructed seat placed in its original position
Above right: The Umbrella Seat in the 18th century
Below: The reconstructed two-dimensional Statue of Apollo

Reaction from visitors

Visitor numbers during August when the live interpretation and skiffs were running at weekends was up 35%, and in September when the features were still in place 25%. Feedback from visitors during *Stourhead Revisited* was almost all favourable. As expected the skiffs were a great success, but comments were that it was wonderful to see the garden and its views from a different angle not just that boating is good fun per se. The live interpretation provided a real talking point and it may be a self fulfilling prophecy but it appeared that many more visitors were talking about the garden and its history as they walked with there families and friends than the usual chat of last nights TV. This is comment based on anecdotal evidence but there was certainly a garden history buzz that seemed to hang over the garden during that month.

There was a certain risk involved in the project in how it would be received by the serious garden history scholars but without exception it was held as a triumph that pushed the boundaries of garden interpretation and should be copied elsewhere. It was only the Chinese Bridge that provoked any adverse comment. Although most loved it, some hated it and there was nothing in between. It presented the same architectural presence as it would have in the 18th century and so inevitably some visitors found its appearance in their beloved landscape too much to bear.

The future

At the press briefing the first question was: Will these features be recreated permanently? Present conservation policy will not allow for this, but *Stourhead Revisited* certainly opened up the debate and informed it in a way that plans never could. As for revisiting *'Revisited'*, the feedback suggests that it should return with perhaps more features and ideas.

Interpretation boards cluttering the landscape, actors destroying the peace and tranquillity and visitors messing about in boats can only be justified if done to interpret the significance of the garden. Whilst gardens often succeed best when they are totally naked of any interpretative material, *Stourhead Revisited* explored new ways of bringing the history of a place to life in an innovative and exciting way. Its lasting memories will remain long after the temporary structures have been put into store, in both the minds of the visitors who enjoyed them and the curators who will use there temporary existence to inform future management of this complex landscape.

Richard Higgs is Acting Property Manager at Stourhead for The National Trust

New gardens for old sites

Russell Williams reports on how English Heritage are creating contemporary gardens to reflect historical themes

Contemporary heritage gardens

It sounds a contradiction in terms, but this is the name of the English Heritage initiative to design and build new gardens at its historic properties. Starting in 1999, six gardens are now complete or under construction for completion in 2003. The project aims to create gardens that are contemporary, but appropriate to their historic setting. Designers were selected for their ability to produce concepts and the use of materials that relate to their chosen site.

A team approach

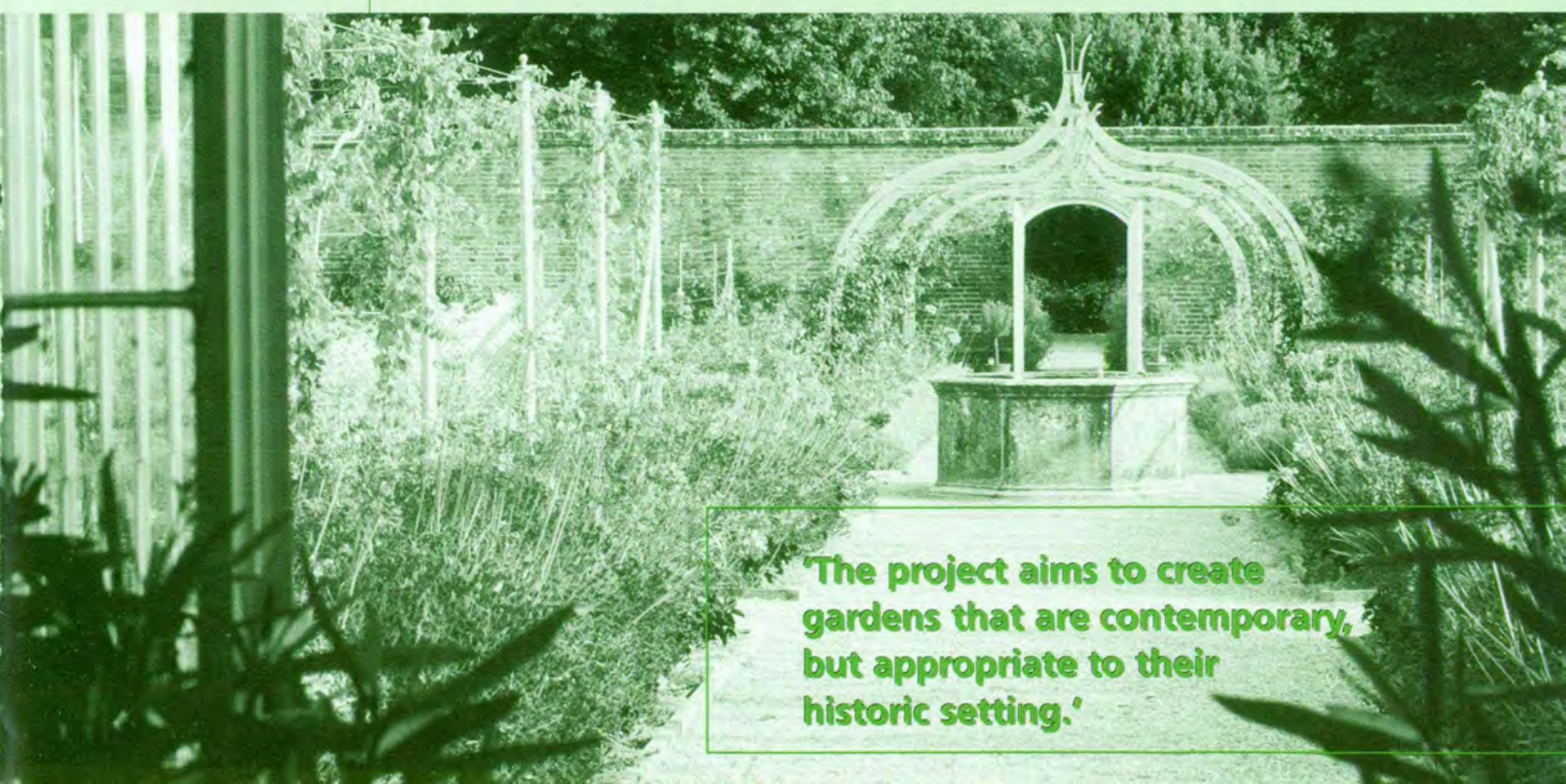
Following the success of the creation of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother's garden at Walmer Castle in Kent, English Heritage set up and funded the Contemporary Heritage Garden initiative in 1999. Some of the best landscape designers in Europe were selected by open competition to design gardens that combined the new with the historical setting of the sites. Each garden is very different, and will provide a bench mark for the future quality of design and management of heritage sites. The gardens show visitors how good design and interpretation, can in some cases link in with broader regeneration projects. Examples are the new gardens at Lincoln Bishop's Palace, part of the Lindum Hillside project to regenerate part of the City of Lincoln, and at Portland Castle in Dorset, where tourism is being promoted following the closure of the Royal Naval base.

English Heritage has called on a wealth of in-house expertise, including archaeologists, quantity surveyors, structural engineers, horticulturists, regional teams, as well as specialists in interpretation and publicity, to work with the designers and construction contractors in the completion and promotion of the gardens.

Eltham Palace and Osborne House

Eltham Palace in south east London, once the home of Henry VIII and more recently that of Stephen and Virginia Courtauld who re-built one of the most outstanding Art Deco houses here in the 1930s, offered great opportunities for this project. Isabelle van Groeningen, a designer from Belgium was chosen to design planting of the south moat borders and adjacent shaded woodland. Her design for the border, includes a palette of carefully co-ordinated colour planting along its length. Shrubby species are mixed with a profusion of colourful herbaceous plants and exotic grasses, to give a long season of interest. Summer bedded species such as *Canna* add to the effect. The woodland area has a much cooler effect; white flowering herbaceous and shrubby species predominate. This garden, part of the larger garden and landscape elements at the site, opened in 2000.

Below: The walled garden at Osborne House, I.o.W



'The project aims to create gardens that are contemporary, but appropriate to their historic setting.'

Above: Children at play in the garden at Lincoln Bishop's Palace
Above right: The garden in the Cockpit, Richmond Castle, Yorkshire

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert built Osborne House between 1845 and 1850, as their private family home on the Isle of Wight. The walled garden, once a working garden for the Estate producing flowers and fruit, was chosen for the project. It was completed in July 2000. Rupert Golby produced a contemporary interpretation for the site. He used period correct flowers and fruit, both in formal layouts and abstract patterns, with trained apples, pears, plums and cherries, to retain the spirit of the walled garden. The original path network, dividing the garden into four, is supplemented with galvanised steel archways, bearing the symbols V & A. Many exotic species known to the Victorians are planted in the restored lean to glasshouse.

Lincoln Bishop's Palace and Richmond Castle

The Bishop's Palace at Lincoln, lying under the shadow of the Cathedral, is over 800 years old, reflects the past splendour, wealth and power of the bishops of Lincoln. A garden sited on the small lower east terrace of the Palace, was designed by Mark Anthony Walker and opened in summer 2001. Its simple layout can be appreciated both from above and at ground level. An intersecting grid of brickwork paths set in a fine lawn, reflect the vaulted ceilings to be seen in the cathedral roof. Etched stainless steel discs and tree grilles, refer to bosses in this roof and chalices used in the religious service. Tapering hornbeam trees provide a vertical dimension, but allow clear views to the landscape beyond. An oak platform gives a dramatic entrance to the garden, planted with a simple block of purple lavender, climbing red roses and *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Llandaff'. A garden video featuring the project team, tells the visitor how the new garden was created.

Richmond Castle in North Yorkshire standing on a bluff above the River Swale, also has dramatic views. These have been exploited by Neil Swanson, the designer from the Manchester Landscape Projects practice. This medieval castle in the heart of the market town of Richmond, has a long military history including the First World War, when conscientious objectors were held there. The garden designed and built in the enclosure on the east side of the Castle, known as the Cockpit, makes reference to these objectors in the form of sixteen yew topiary forms on the upper terrace. Tall yew hedges will enclose a large grass space including a level grass performance and picnic area. In contrast to the general simplicity of the design, a long border with contemporary plantings of herbaceous plants and grasses, gives a long season of interest. The garden was opened in spring 2002.

Portland Castle and Witley Court

These gardens are expected to be completed in 2003. Christopher Bradley-Hole's design for the Governor's Garden at Portland Castle in Dorset uses local Portland Stone also used to build the castle built in the reign of Henry VIII. A circular stone seating area, topped with finely finished Portland stone will enclose an area of lawn with blocks of tall ornamental grasses planted to form points of the compass, referring to the maritime siting. A steel bridge connecting to other parts of the garden mirrors the walkway of the jetty in the harbour beyond. Further grasses, trees and shrubs, suited to this maritime site, will be planted to enclose the boundaries of the garden.

Witley Court in Worcestershire, once one of the greatest Victorian houses in England, includes large landscapes, formal parterres and magnificent fountains. Michael Ibbotson of Colvin and Moggridge designed the garden, to include spaces within existing woodland, creating views and providing settings for contemporary sculpture.

Russell Williams, horticulturist and garden designer is working for English Heritage as garden adviser on this project

The forgotten tool

Ken Howarth looks at the important role of oral history in heritage interpretation

What is oral history?

Oral history is a structured method of recording memories as sources of information. It is necessarily a very personal and interactive process, requiring trust and professionalism. It records in the main 'that which is not written down' and should be seen as an investigative tool to use alongside other sources of information. The actual process of interviewing is in itself 'interpretive', often providing information that cannot be obtained in any other way.

A new approach for heritage interpreters

There is tremendous potential using the interview skills of the oral historian - without necessarily using a tape recorder - exploring memories in an informal yet structured manner. It goes without saying that note-taking must be of the highest order. A recording will of course always remain the best way of ensuring accuracy, but there are many occasions when using an audio recorder is counter productive for example, some older people still find the recorded interview intimidating preferring to chat informally.

Approaches

So how can oral history techniques be used?

- **Photographic interpretation**: interviews based on old photographs allow the informant to interpret them in a meaningful way. Grid reference nets are used on photographs to identify individuals in group photos or specific parts of an image.

- **Photographic and oral history documentation**: the recording of processes, buildings and structures using contemporary survey record photographs and oral history can produce a unique interpretive document.

- **Document interpretation**: most documents are open to interpretation. For example a wartime diary kept by a soldier who relived his experiences into the tape recorder. His account interpreted his feelings. Or a retired country house gardener who interpreted estate plans by outlining what grew in the gardens, the seasonal rota and the location of a pet's cemetery and various lost features.

- **Objects**: the interpretation of objects can only be covered in brief here. Museums have countless objects that lend themselves to interpretation using oral history.

- **Site interpretation**: this explores locations with an informant interpreting remains. Suitable subjects include changes in land use, conservation areas, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and national parks. Oral history is an essential component in Ecomuseums where the whole landscape, buildings, people, language, traditions, culture, geology, wildlife etc. is interpreted.

The benefits

Oral history employing community interaction often attains a level of understanding - interpretation - which cannot be achieved in other ways. It allows the interpreter to engage with people, and people to engage with the interpretive process. Oral history provides raw material for better interpretive panels, leaflets and publications. It can form the basis of effective drama re-enactment, can be included in audio tour guides, in interactive displays, and as a way of ensuring knowledge and skill survival through demonstrator and guide training.

Ken Howarth is Director of the North West Sound Archive. He can be contacted at:
Heritage Recording UK, 28 Bryn Seiri Road, Conwy, North Wales LL32 8NR Tel/Fax 01492 584113
e-mail ken.howarth@btinternet.com
www.hrec.ndirect.co.uk