Autumn 2003 / Volume 8 / *Number* 3

interpretation

journal

of the Association for Heritage Interpretation

Pushing the right buttons

Using technology in interpretation

Autumn 2003 / Volume 8 / Number 3

Published by the Association for Heritage Interpretation

ISSN 1357 9401

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Printed by **Dataprint, Oxford**

Cover photograph: **The Set Sail gallery at the National Maritime Museum Cornwall**
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Interpretation Journal is published three times a year in Spring, Summer and Autumn

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

You can visit AHI's website at:
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The next issue will feature
Conflict and contemplation
Email suggestions for contributions to
ruth.taylor@nationaltrust.org.uk

This issue focuses on the challenges, innovation and accessibility that state-of-the-art (and some not so state-of-the-art) technology can bring to displays.
Simon Beer argues the case for more technology in cultural attractions; Oliver Newbery asks why on-line interactives aren't more challenging for children and Peter Higgins examines the possibility of new locations for museums supported by new technology. Katie Black and Jo Quinton-Tulloch explain how even old technology can provide exciting displays at Durlston Country Park and the National Maritime Museum Cornwall; Matthew Jones and Annette Simpson look at how new developments enable low-tech displays to be used in outdoor locations; Marcus Weisen and Clare Stewart describe how technology can make attractions more accessible for those with disabilities while Stephen Done explains the role of AVICOM in developing new technologies.

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Technology brings the past to life!

Simon Beer puts the case for technology in cultural attractions

When you think British heritage, what springs to mind? A specimen with a label in a dusty natural history museum somewhere near Stoke? Gift shops stocked with pencil sharpeners and luminous, museum-branded erasers? Or being dragged round the local National Trust Jacobean mansion as a teenager, praying you won't see anyone you know?

The fact is Britain's computer-literate children see technology as the answer to everything and our nation's museums and heritage centres are competing with computers as the preferred source of entertainment and education. The temptation to look information up on the Internet, rather than experience the genuine article is a serious alternative in today's society – we choose email where we would previously have turned to the telephone, we play video games where we used to read books and we surf the Web when we would have been visiting a museum.

But Museums are beginning to realise that the best way to beat the rise of technology, is to join it. The misconception that technology simply means computers, is giving way to the realisation that using technology creatively can bring the nation's past to life and communicate with a much wider audience. The discerning visitor doesn't want to be faced with a myriad of buttons and screens at every point along a display – anyone can experience that by surfing the Web on their home PC. But using technology creatively can lure audiences away from the Internet with the chance to be entertained and challenged intellectually.

And creativity is not a problem in Britain's museums, which have long been at the forefront of heritage worldwide. With some of the most innovative hardware and software and some of the world's best designers, the potential is immense. Already museums are starting to realise that technology needn't mean installing a computer and a mouse, but that lighting, sounds, smells and movements can be created to bring any static display to life.

The most recent interactive display to hit the news is the London Science Museum's Everest exhibition, using the latest technology teamed with the power of science, to allow visitors to experience the freezing conditions of climbing Everest for themselves. Looking up the famous expedition on the Web just doesn't compare. And curators at Shakespeare's Globe have also appreciated the subtlety of combining stunning exhibits with ingenious, yet simple, audio visual facilities – who after all could resist the lure of being led round the museum by an interactive Judi Dench?

The key is to offer something more – some kind of incentive for visiting a museum rather than reading about it on the Internet, which is where the entertainment factor comes into play. Animatronics is one form of technology that has taken off in museums and heritage centres around the world, bringing displays to life with moving characters that actually 'speak'. The Natural History Museum's moving dinosaurs display is one of the most successful of this type, proving as timeless as the dinosaurs themselves having pulled in visitors for ten years now with its captivating special effects.

The key to the Natural History Museum's success is using technology in moderation. There is a temptation to use whizz-bang technology to get the greatest effect, but subtlety of use can often have a much greater impact as anyone who has been to the World War I trenches or the Blitz experience at the Imperial War Museum will appreciate. Clever lighting and sound effects, integrated into an extremely evocative set does, and will continue, to teach both children and adults about these times better than any book, website, or television programme.

Technology is inevitably an integral part of our future, and the only way for museums to compete is to take it onboard themselves. And as long as it does not 'Disneyfy' our heritage, there is no doubt that technology can be the friend to museums and heritage, rather than the enemy it is often perceived.

Simon Beer is CEO of Integrated Circles that specialises in the design and production of audiovisual systems and interactive displays

Game plan

Oliver Newbery argues the need to make museum on-line computer interactives more exciting for children

'Why are so many ideas for museum on-line computer interactives so dull, simplistic and unchallenging?'

According to press reports, three out of four children aged under 4 years of age have a television in their bedroom. All children have access to computers through schools and most are considerably more computer literate than their parents. Children are bombarded with sophisticated imagery not only via TV and the internet, but through advertising, film and print too. So, why are so many ideas for museum on-line computer interactives so dull, simplistic and unchallenging?

Why on-line interactives?

The advantages of on-line interactives for children are considerable: they can pick up the way an interface works very easily and they don't have to be on site to use them. They appeal to children's love of games and competitions and even subjects such as conservation, which most children would regard as a total turn-off can be made inspiring. There are advantages for others too. If on-line interactives are well designed and exciting they can fulfil every marketing manager's idea of heaven – the desire to visit the attraction NOW! What's more, attractions can take advantage of a free promotional tool.

Fun zones?

On-line games are promoted as fun zones but are often about exciting as filling in a tax return! The most obvious need is for more excitement – think of the success of Tomb Raider, a game that requires children to master complicated manoeuvres and puzzles in order to succeed. Children like competitive elements but rewards for completing activities or answering questions correctly are rare and there is often no backup to confirm why answers are right or wrong. There are hardly ever

A case study

Secret Signs is an interactive application commissioned by Historic Royal Palaces (HRP). The first in a proposed series, it aims to introduce children to heraldry and the King's Beasts, (symbolic animals common in the Tudor period) at Hampton Court Palace. The ultimate goal of course, is to encourage children to want to see the real thing for themselves.

The audience

NEi were asked to focus on children of 7-10 years which made life simpler since the National Curriculum dictates what children of this age group are studying and most children go through a period of universally similar interests at very specific ages. What's more, there are always plenty of children around more than willing to test your ideas and give honest accounts on how ideas might be adjusted.

The style

The illustrative style reflects the success of cartoon characters used in previously produced print-based family trails. Through a series of interactive tasks, the King's Beasts characters feed bite-size nuggets of information and the user is rewarded through a series of outcomes by responding to the challenges. Sometimes these can be as simple as being congratulated for looking and finding King's Beasts in paintings or stained glass windows, sometimes with the opportunity of designing and printing out your own personalised coat-of-arms which can be hung on a bedroom door.

...' think of the success of Tomb Raider, a game that requires children to master complicated manoeuvres and puzzles in order to succeed'

links to other websites so that children can find out more about the subject in question. Moreover, interactives rarely draw on technology to send electronic postcards to friends thus missing out on marketing opportunities, such as e-cards, to deliver branded material.

Oliver Newbery is Creative Director of NEi specialising in interactive applications and websites. If you would like to receive a promotional copy of Secret Signs on CD-ROM email NEi at: studio@ne-interactive.co.uk or visit www.ne-interactive.co.uk for further information

Below: The interface with characters based on the King's Beasts

The application

The application, which is designed to deliver content though both a CD-Rom and on the HRP web site, is packaged as a series of activities including:

'Bedroom Sleuth' – searching around a child's bedroom to discover examples of modern heraldry such as the England football team emblem

'Design Your Own Heraldic Shield'– to hang on a child's bedroom door

'Window Watch'– spotting heraldic symbols in a stained glass window

'Spooky search' – looking for the King's Beasts in a painting hanging in the Haunted Gallery at Hampton Court by torch light.

Technicalities

Because 56k modems are still the norm in most households, the application had to be small to download as quickly as possible. The HRP server has a very secure Firewall, so there had to be an effective way of delivering a dynamic game without using several popular file types. This problem was overcome by using Flash SWF files, one of the disallowed file types but inside a self-extracting application that is downloaded from the HRP website.

Once on the desktop however, the game runs very quickly, even on a slow machine, and has the advantage of being kept for future use. Saving the download also serves to increase the life of the interactive. A further bonus is that because the application doesn't rely on web pages for delivery, the content can be easily modified and delivered on CD-Rom, which in turn can provide revenue through shop sales.

Accessibility

Accessibility to all is a top priority and with today's software and technology we can ensure that our interactives can be read by screen reader software. (The software detects the descriptive words on the page and reads them aloud to the user).

Left: The moat bridge at Hampton Court Palace adorned with the King's Beasts

Shopping and learning

Peter Higgins looks at the bigger picture and the potential for new locations for museums supported by new technology

1

At a time when many lottery rollercoasters are coming off the rails we need to stand back and assess their potential value. Whilst the appropriation of emerging technologies may well be a pre requisite to make the machine more aerodynamic, there is no point unless we investigate the engineering of the whole support structure.

The need to inspire

The evolutionary concept of the New Museum/Science Centre, which we may define as Informal Learning Environments (ILE) encouraging self directed learning, has yet to be acknowledged as a valuable socio/ educational tool that could help define and inform any significant city or regional planning. As with any emerging new genre we have to suffer extensive, flat, plagiarism and limp 'lookalikes' of the most successful models, before critical criteria and conceptual values can be established.

Within the context of our ridiculously accelerated programme of lottery funded initiatives within the UK, it is possible that the time has come for such centres to inspire more than inflexible, stand-alone, iconic, architectural landmarks, that have no duty of care to their dislocated interpretive content.

A defining starting point is that the ILE could provide a substantial physical locus for any town or city masterplan in the way that the Agora, the Forum or even the Mechanics Institute did for our predecessors. It can help define a sense of place that encourages a respect for culture, of social interaction, and revalues the concept of learning.

The commercial test

The economic climate that has enforced so much private investment to drive developer led, commercial planning initiatives, has sidelined and isolated many lottery funded projects. It would come as no surprise that the prospect of integrating such worthy components into, say, a major retail development, would never survive the first pass of an accountant's calculator. Interest would only be raised if it were possible to genuinely conceive activities that would extend the profile and volume of footfall, with identifiable revenue streams and sound operational strategies to sustain survival. Sadly few lottery models pass this test.

The cultural test

As well as passing the commercial test, cynical observation may be that true creative breakthroughs are suppressed by authority, uninformed opinions, and meddling. Hard won intuition and ego run counter to these characteristics but provides the springboard for vision and inspiration. Possibly the worst option is the compromised middle ground that blends these extremes and provides us with the soft concept of edutainment promoted by Disney and the post modernist 'placemaking' architecture of Jon Jerde.

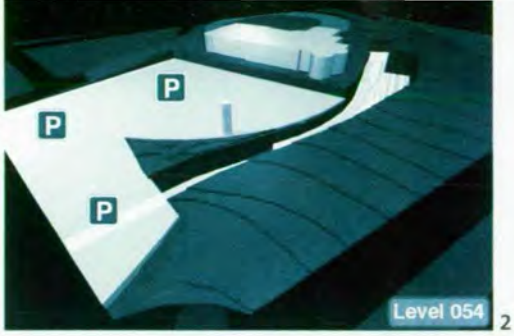
Checklists

The following provides a checklist of criteria that typically describes an ILE bid for lottery support:

- A landmark architectural envelope
- A core generic big theme such as science & technology, natural history, ecology, social history, transportation, sport etc. This may be drawn from existing collections involving the permanent presentation of material culture, or originate from an 'inspired idea'
- Interactive installations
- Temporary exhibition
- Auditorium presentation facility
- High quality ICT, providing flexibility

Below: PlayZone at The Millenium Dome, Greenwich

'As with any emerging new genre we have to suffer extensive, flat, plagiarism and limp 'lookalikes' of the most successful models, before critical criteria and conceptual values can be established'



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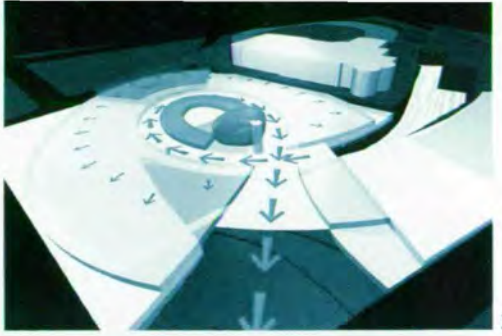
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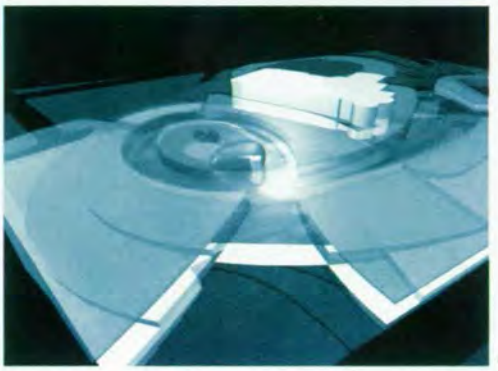
Above and right 1,2,3,4 & 5: Concept masterplan dealing with the convergence of retail, learning and entertainment environments within a 100K Sq.M site in Brussels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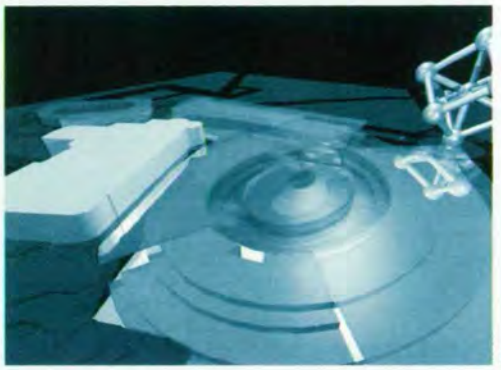

5

- Curatorial ownership (often controlled by the keepers of the collection)
- Director experienced in running museums
- A convincing business plan
- Branding

How could this be deconstructed to appeal to a commercial partner?

- The primary architectural construct must complement and acknowledge the real need of the ILE . Issues of visual stimuli, views, movement and sequence, light & dark, intimacy and openess, technical infrastructure even the use of materials must be agreed between the architect and the interpretive designer. The success of such collaboration will enhance the sense of place and inevitably contribute to the quality of the architecture. The mall may discover that an anchor attraction doesn't have to be Selfridges.
- Any such centre must understand the fundamental need for the core narrative to embody change, which will automatically encourage spontaneous repeat visits. This can be driven by a clearer understanding of how to link with existing formal educational programmes, but more importantly to embrace and respond to the extensive growth of alternative informal communication media such as the internet, DVD's, interactive TV, factual TV. Could there be broadcast partnerships? At the same time ILE's biggest USP is the power of the REAL - real objects in real space and real time that must be exploited.
- 'Interactivity', the mantra of our clients, is a term that has been responsible for many ill-fated briefing documents. We have established certain criteria that we believe help define the value of interactivity. It is our view that any participation, in a cause-and-effect process, must stimulate memory learning through emotional engagement. It is important to incorporate interfaces and mechanisms that cannot be found in either the high street or the home. This can be supported by the scale of presentation material, and the possibilities of group experiences, where a number of people understand and enjoy the activities of a single avatar (passive interactivity). As a result of working on the Playzone at the Millennium Dome, where we committed to design a digital playground for up to 25,000 people per day, we examined the world of new media artists where practitioners are working with high-end, computer processing which can access and manipulate digital data in fascinating ways. Subsequently we have continued to exploit the digital domain to help conceptually unlock glass cases, access stored digital assets, navigate and map time and space, and create sensory environments .We often use unique intuitive interfaces which may be understood and used by a broad range of users.
- Temporary exhibition spaces are often demanded without any clear understanding of a supply programme. These can be used as a valuable device to refresh user interest, but there would need to be a extensive programme of high quality touring installations probably best developed by National Museums. This hypothetical initiative could rotate valuable reserve collections throughout the regions.
- Auditoria can be expressed as a focal feature rather than locked away in the architect's section. The possibility for demonstration or debate is best encouraged by physically expressing such a facility.

Left: Digital Interface, 'Imagining the City', Urbis, Manchester

'The breakthrough involves the concept of the convergence of the cultural and the consumable'

The presentations could range from passing famous scientists to sponsored wine demonstrations, council debates or even videoconference links to other international facilities. Flexible configuration and communication systems would be a pre-requisite.

- A well appointed media centre with recording, editing and transmission facilities supported by a talented technical crew would help maintain a vital topical component to the centre and the extended site. Webcasting has now become a reality and can be viewed daily at the superb Darwin Centre at The National History Museum.
- Any commitment to a truly responsive institution would extend the perceived role of the curator and require a news gathering , authorship and publishing facility that may be best associated with the media centre. The website would of course benefit from such topical material. ILE's are really places of inspiration, and it could be the website that would allow the user to access continuing information at their own intellectual hierarchy in their own time and place. The website post visit may well be of more importance than the pre-visit which merely acts as brochureware.
- Running such an institution would certainly not be for the faint hearted. The continual programming of events, promotion of media opportunities maintenance of cultural standards supported by sophisticated PR and marketing acumen, would require the creative vision and drive of an exceptional person who may be familiar with running big arts festivals, world expos or even theatrical companies.
- Creative business planning requires a keen knowledge of the leisure and tourism marketplace, the idiosyncracies of visitor expectation along with a highly pragmatic understanding of operational and revenue issues. In the right hands it can in fact enhance rather than suppress the creative quality of the product. Corporate events have become a vital part of the revenue stream and need to be factored in to the architectural and interpretive masterplan.
- There is an unfortunate tendency in Lottery supported projects for the corporate design of the variety of material to be spread across several agencies. Rarely is there a suitable budget or apparent need to create a homogenous approach to corporate identity, exhibition graphics, print, web design and merchandise that would present the institution as a really serious commercial venture.

A sustainable vision

In summary the concept of the ILE providing a fundamental new City planning component will only be possible by convincing both commercial, public and funding stakeholders that the above is deliverable, and that if adopted, add extraordinary value to a prime retail development and provide an entirely sustainable vision.

The breakthrough involves the concept of the convergence of the cultural and the consumable.., where authoritative institutions could describe the science behind mobile telephony, the smell of perfume, the cause of sports injuries or simply the social history of a conservation quarter before you set off on your city walk with a newly acquired guidebook. In a world where our consumption is driven by abstract and vacuous marketing strategies, the unlikely association of these extreme activities, shopping and learning, could conceivably redefine the meaning of 'purchasing power'.

Professor Peter Higgins is Creative Director of Land Design Studio who have completed ten lottery funded projects over the past five years
www.landdesignstudio.co.uk

New ways with old techniques

Jo Quinton-Tulloch explains how good old-fashioned audiovisuals provide innovatory displays at the National Maritime Museum Cornwall

The National Maritime Museum Cornwall (NMMC) opened its doors to the public for the very first time in December 2002. This brand new museum sited on the waterfront in Falmouth boasts a variety of highlights. Many of the gallery displays use the latest technology to surprise and delight, and to encourage interaction with the visitors. But one particular gallery in the museum is repeatedly receiving accolades for innovation and design. And surprisingly it is not a gallery that uses groundbreaking technology. *Set Sail* is a totally immersive, audio-visual, walk-through experience that has captured imaginations and proves that new technology isn't the only way to provide innovative and memorable experiences.

Below: The quality of production adds strength to the experience

© BOB BERRY

'...A precisely choreographed, audio-visual experience linking real objects with light, sound and special effects'

A total experience

Set Sail is the first gallery in the Museum. A sign outside the door warns of strobe lighting effects and you enter a dark environment. Both the entrance and the exit (there is a set route along a ramp that takes you through the gallery) are baffled to stop light and sound contamination. Once inside, you are surrounded by a precisely choreographed, audio-visual experience linking real objects with light, sound and special effects. Nine boats are displayed inside this dark environment. Behind the boats are three large screens (5m x 4.5m) and nine smaller screens (2.5m x 2.0m).

Each boat has a piece of film associated with it – a mix of contemporary and modern footage, archive material, interviews, still images of the boats and associated objects, adverts and memorabilia, all combined with sound, music and special effects to produce a multi-layered piece. Simple quotes, either audio or text, strengthen main messages. Some of the films are themed to the era of the boats using contemporary background music and imagery. Even the style of the filming itself is appropriate to the time and location. We had a lot of fun with the swinging 60s production for the very first ever Mirror dinghy (No.1); while *Waterlily*, a steam launch built in 1866, languishes in archive footage from the era and gentle period music. The piece that supports the Everest canoe (the boat used to break the record for high altitude canoeing in 1977) shows breath-taking footage taken by a camera strapped to the front of the canoe.

At any one time each large screen shows the story of one boat, while the boat itself is illuminated. There is then a short linking piece before the next boat is highlighted and their story is displayed. While the large screens relate the primary messages, the nine top screens provide a background vista, choreographed to support the main stories. The sheer scale of the effect adds an extra dimension.

The grand finale is a thunderstorm – rolling thunder and flashes of lightening provide a dramatic climax when all the boats are lit, followed by soft images and calm music before the show is repeated. Newangle created and produced the show, commissioned by Land Design who designed the gallery.

'Sometimes the most successful exhibitions are the simplest ones'

Atmosphere and emotions

So why did we chose to develop the displays in this way? The aim is to introduce visitors to the very wide variety of types of boats, their different uses, the people who use them and locations around the world. Boats are incredibly diverse – they aren't only used for fishing or leisure; they are used for sport, exploration, rescue; their development echoes the social changes that we have seen in the last 100 years; their shape and construction change according to the region in which they are used –

'In a small boat you are incredibly close to the elements, experiencing speed, extreme conditions and a wide variety of emotions. We could only get close to portraying these feelings by creating an atmospheric experience.'

Above right: Nine boats are displayed, including a life raft
Above: The scale of all elements creates a dramatic effect

and even the materials that are available to make them. They can be powered in a variety of ways and are a wealth of shapes and sizes. In a small boat you are incredibly close to the elements, experiencing speed, extreme conditions and a wide variety of emotions. We could only get close to portraying these feelings by creating an atmospheric experience.

Know your audience

We anticipate that a large portion of our visitors will be from the region. Nowhere in Cornwall is more than 16 miles from the sea. You can't help but be affected by the sea if you live here, even if you have never sailed. However a greater number of our visitors will be tourists whose experiences of the sea will be varied. We realised this when we trialled some prototype interactives (for a different gallery) with some London school children. We saw that many of our assumptions were wrong. A few of the children had never been to the seaside and many of them had no concept of, for example, a tide. A small subset of our total audience, maybe, but an important lesson none the less. The point is that we have a very broad audience with a wide range of previous knowledge and experiences. We decided that audio-visual technology was the best approach. We tell the specific stories about the boats in the rest of the museum – this gallery serves to set the scene, to raise the ideas and questions in visitors' minds, to impart the sense of diversity in use, people and location, and ultimately the thrill of small boats.

Careful planning

The challenges of creating such an experience are not to be underestimated. The huge gallery was integrated into the building plans at a very early stage of the project, along with all the facilities for the supporting equipment. There are also large objects on display that have special supports and access requirements. We are still amending the acoustics – the cavernous nature of the room has created pockets of sound that reverberate more than expected. And a huge amount of research went into developing and scripting the pieces of film, sourcing images and clarifying information, not to mention the cost associated with copyright fees and licences. Maintaining the projectors effectively is essential and costs are high – each bulb costs £350 to replace and only lasts about six months.

Feedback

Has it been successful? From the visitor feedback we've have it appears to generate many emotions. People often either love it or hate it. Many of those visitors who love it come back again and again. Those in the latter camp may be disappointed because of their prior expectations – they often tell us there's not enough to read. *Set Sail* can be loud and noisy in places, and it is an audio-visual experience. Some visitors seem unsure about what to do in the gallery and may feel cheated because they haven't read very much. We intend to carry out an evaluation of the gallery to explore this further.

So is it new technology? No. Big audio-visual experiences are frequently used in museums. They are very effective at creating an atmosphere and both portraying and initiating emotion. *Set Sail* uses reliable techniques, intelligent design, superb choreography and high-quality production to bring the stories of the boats to life. Sometimes the most successful exhibitions are the simplest ones.

Jo Quinton-Tulloch is Head of Exhibition at National Maritime Museum Cornwall.
Newangle tel: 020 7916 0106
Land Design tel: 020 8742 1712

Breaking down barriers

Marcus Weisen and **Clare Stewart** discuss making online heritage collections accessible to disabled people

Heritage interpretation is about bringing heritage objects and places to life for all visitors – enhancing enjoyment, experience and understanding. But how well do heritage sites and venues succeed in presenting and interpreting heritage to some 8.6 million disabled people in the UK? Using online cultural and educational resources as an example, we shall look at the barriers disabled people face to heritage and ways of improving access.

Barriers

It does not take extensive research to realise just how many barriers disabled people face to the enjoyment of online heritage resources:

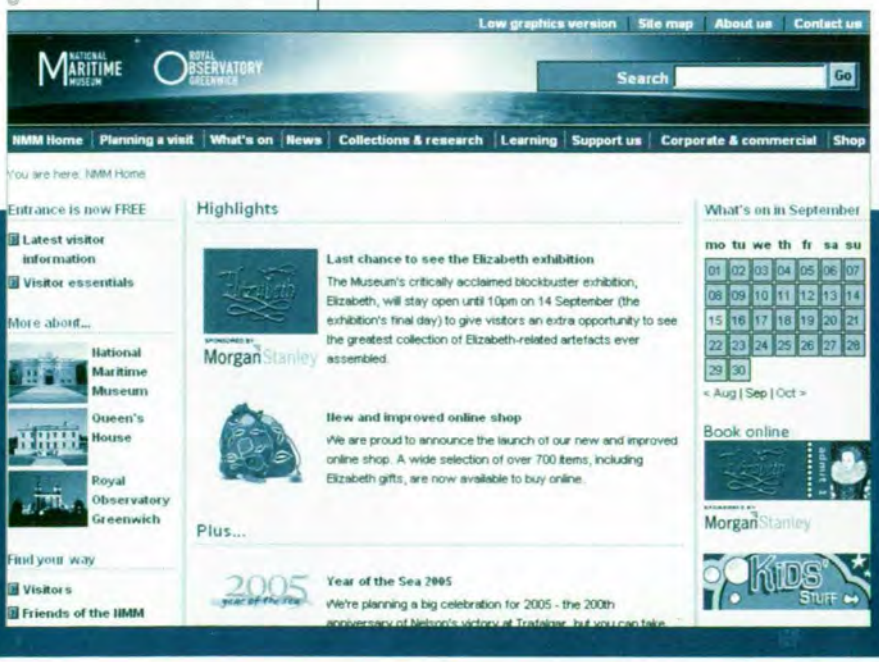
- it can be a frustrating, even hopeless, experience for a blind person to surf the web, if technical web accessibility standards have been ignored. Online museum and heritage collections which have no descriptions of digital images will remain an arid abstraction
- a deaf person who does not read – and many don't – will not enjoy some cultural websites. Whilst he or she will see the digital images and may analyse them visually, their meaning cannot be fully decoded, as the necessary information is not available in sign language (now recognised as a minority language in the UK)
- people with dyslexia will experience barriers when there is no audio or the ability to control presentation, such as text size or colour
- to a person with a learning difficulty and very limited literacy, navigation of most websites is likely to present serious issues – because they lack qualities such as immediacy and instant communication. Academic and curatorial language will present further barriers

Winners

According to disability organisations, such as Abilitynet and the National Library for the Blind (NLB), only between five per cent and 30 per cent of websites meet the minimum web accessibility standards of the world wide web accessibility initiative. And yet, a commitment towards compliance with these access standards is the cornerstone to content accessibility of online cultural and heritage collections. This is why the first Jodi Mattes Award for the most accessible museum, gallery and heritage website was given in May 2003 to the National Maritime Museum. For users this commitment expressed examples in:

- good contrast between text and background
- being able to use the ALT attribute to describe graphics
- the possibility of changing the size of the text with browser controls
- the ability to use style sheets to redesign appearance
- 'meaningful' links

Below: The award winning website of The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich



'It does not take extensive research to realise just how many barriers disabled people face to the enjoyment of online heritage resources'

The judges, who included staff from the Museums Computer Group; Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries and the Royal National Institute for the Blind, gave a special commendation for innovation to the Tate i-Map webpages. The site introduces blind and partially sighted people to the work of Picasso and Matisse and key concepts of modern art. I-Map paves the way to a whole new way of interpreting online cultural and heritage collections to visually impaired people. Of striking quality are the use of:

- strengthened colour contrast, which heightens the visibility of the art works online
- descriptions
- visual analysis starting from detail and gradually reconstructing the whole painting
- animation to illustrate the transformation of figurative art into abstract art
- outline drawings which can be printed off at home and in schools and transformed into tactile images on 'minolta/thermoform copiers' for use by blind people.

'... only between five per cent and 30 per cent of websites meet the minimum web accessibility standards'

Accesibility

Online cultural collections and resources can be made accessible through the provision of:

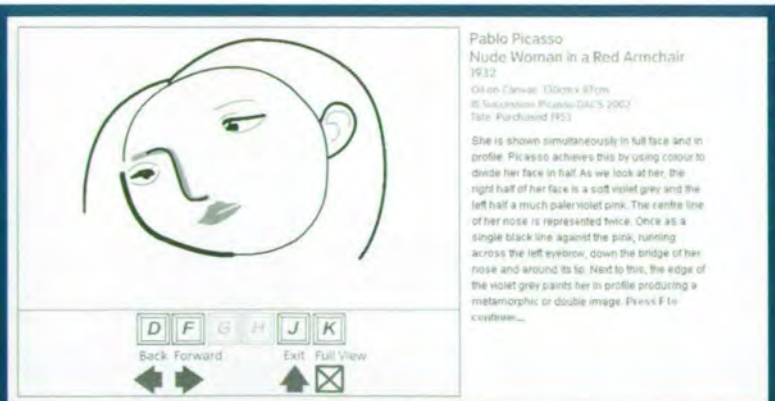
- text and subtitles for people with a hearing impairment with audio resources
- British Sign Language for Deaf people (BSL)
- images as a communication support for people learning difficulties and plain English. Featuring situations, beings and objects with which people with learning difficulties engage
- audio for people with dyslexia
- a friendly and welcoming design and style could prove beneficial for everyone.

Some of these improvements consist of communication aids and translation into another language – and anyone with the experience of translating knows that this always implies a creative dimension. Other improvements go straight to the heart of the business of heritage interpretation. How does one for example, skilfully interweave description with commentary? How do you present heritage to people with moderate or profound learning difficulties? None of this can happen successfully without a knowledge of one's audiences. It is vital that the cultural sector as a whole address these issues.

Meeting needs

The challenge for the sector, web designers and web content managers is to meet new communities, to learn from them and involve them and to translate this into accessible websites – technically and content-wise. There is much expertise among disabled people, teachers, disability organisations, sub-titlers, sign language interpreters and audio describers. There are two essential steps forward: to audit existing websites and to write web accessibility into new web development briefs and contracts.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act, service providers need to make reasonable adjustments and provide 'auxiliary aids' which make a service more



Below : Nude Woman in a Red Armchair by Picasso, 1932

Above: Talking Images auditor assessing an audioguide

accessible to disabled people – and accessible websites, description, BSL and image support are examples. Public sector websites have an obligation to be accessible to disabled people (up to level 2 of the web accessibility initiative) by 2005. Resource has made compliance with web accessibility standards a funding criterion for projects funded under the NOF Digitisation programme for museums. This is the first step Resource has undertaken to promote access to online cultural content for disabled people.

Improving access

75% of visually impaired people who never visited galleries, museums or heritage sights said that – if there were specialist facilities such as audio guides, tactile objects, or information in large print or Braille – they would. Furthermore, of those that used audio tours designed for people with sight loss, 63% found them either helpful or very helpful, general tours were less likely to be similarly beneficial. These statistics are part of a recent research programme *Talking Images* undertaken by Vocaleyes and Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) in to improving access for people with a visual impairment to museums, galleries and heritage venues. The research and subsequent guidelines focused on the use of audio description and audio guides as a tool for improving access.

'Audio guides are essential for the enjoyment and understanding of venues, artwork and objects, enabling visually impaired people to appreciate collections and their history without having to rely on members of staff or other sighted assistance. Audio guides contribute enormously to the pleasure I, as a visually impaired person, get from visiting museums, galleries and heritage sites. Without audio guides the impact of major exhibitions, and the pleasure they would give me would be greatly reduced.'

An auditor

What is audio description?

Audio description, gives key visual information on a building, picture or artefact, providing the detail that someone with a visual impairment would otherwise miss. It can be delivered live or pre-recorded. The emphasis is on objectivity, not subjectivity, allowing those with a visual impairment to form their own interpretation. Unlike live description in theatre, description in museums and heritage venues may also include contextual information - the sort of information sighted visitors take for granted in the form of labels or printed captions.

From the research it is clear that there are as many styles of guides as there are places that offer them. Some are presented by curators, recorded on-site and delivered via Walkman-style audio cassette players, others contain detailed descriptions with background on artists, sound effects and may include directional information. At its best an audio guide can be exciting, engaging and easy to use. At its worst it can be boring, out of date, cumbersome and badly designed.

Choosing equipment

The choice of equipment to deliver an audio tour will have a bearing on its content, format, and ultimately user satisfaction. For visitors with serious sight loss this choice will have an even greater impact. Familiarity of a keypad to those used everyday on mobile phones, the simplicity of a personal stereo and the ability to also handle a guide dog or a cane, bags or a tactile map will all influence the ability to access information on a guide.

These details will also inform the way the information is written. A simple personal stereo with the facility to rewind, pause and fast forward will be more conducive to a linear tour where the user moves around an exhibition or building. A digital player will allow the user to select what information they would like to listen to, enabling them to access more detailed information through a further selection.

Covering other aspects

Practical challenges don't end there. If artefacts are numbered to cue a recorded description, how does someone with low or no vision access that information? Is a tactile map available or are there other tactile clues to help people know where they are – such as changes in floor texture, light levels or

© TOM MILES/RNIB

Above: An auditor assesses an audioguide at The National Museum of Scotland

room temperature?

With an increasing awareness in the heritage sector of the needs visitors with disabilities, more venues are turning to audio guides as a way of improving access to buildings and artefacts – and the range of equipment available for providing audio description is increasing all the time with the introduction of way finding and satellite positioning. But the key to ensuring that the equipment is right for the job is to consult with those that will ultimately benefit from it – blind and partially sighted people. An often enlightening experience, which draws attention to detail over looked by people with full sight such as a handset were there is no aural clue as to whether the correct number has been entered.

Maintenance and upgrades

What the *Talking Images* research and case studies demonstrated was that providing a service which is accessible and sustainable involves planning and careful consideration. For many organisations the provision of a pre-recorded tour is enough. and the need to ensure it is maintained and updated is too often forgotten. A quick call round to museums illustrates how often the existence of guides for visually impaired visitors is unknown to front line staff or batteries have run down, artefacts moved. However as more people with visual impairments are made aware of such facilities the more they will be requested and used.

'A quick call round to museums illustrates how often the existence of guides for visually impaired visitors is unknown to front line staff or batteries have run down, artefacts moved'

One of the biggest debates surrounding the provision of audio guides for visually impaired visitors is the potential for an inclusive a guide for all visitors. The ideal position is where all visitors have access to a collection using the same equipment. Having separate hand or headsets singles out users and all too often can lead to a poorer service, with less rather than more information. There are even examples where the information on a general guide contradicts the specialist guide for visually impaired visitors.

A note of caution

Just because a guide is in an audio format, it doesn't mean that it will be accessible to visually impaired users and therefore mainstream guides that have not been specifically developed for people with sight loss may fail to meet their needs. However as technology evolves so does the possibility for imaginative and creative approaches to inclusive audio guides.

A well produced guide, which has been developed in collaboration with people with serious sight loss, can be stimulating, informative, educative and enjoyable, making treasured collections, historic buildings and exhibitions relevant and accessible to the two million blind and partially sighted people in the UK.

Resources

Web accessibility standards and guidance

www.w3.org/WAI

report on how disabled people use the web:

www.w3.org/WAI/EO/Drafts/PWD-Use-Web/Overview.html

www.abilitynet.co.uk

http://bpm.nlb-online.org/

Online access to cultural and educational resources

www.ukoln.ac.uk/nof/support/help/papers/writing-web

www.mencap.org.uk/html/easytoread/easytoread/htm

www.culturalcontentforum.org/intro/html

A few online cultural resources

www.thebritishmuseum.ca.uk/compass (NLB Visionary Design Award)

www.fng.fi/hugo

www.nmm.ac.uk (Jodi Mattes Award; NLB Visionary Design Award)

www.tate.org.uk/imap (Jodi Mattes Award commendation; BAFTA Award)

http://tours.daytonartinstitute.org/accessart

Access for disabled people/DDA

www.drc-gb.org

www.resource.gov.uk/action/learnacc/00access.asp#3

Talking Images Guide: Museums, galleries and heritage sites – improving access for blind and partially sighted people £9.95; *Talking Images Research* £5.95. Available from RNIB Tel 0845 702 3153 cservices@rnib.org.uk

Marcus Weisen is Disability Development Officer, Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries; Clare Stewart is Director of Vocaleyes

Big Brother: Guillemots

Katie Black appraises one of the first installations of CCTV in a country park

Durlston Country Park, a Dorset County Council site, on the southern corner of Dorset, is now part of the East Devon and Dorset World Heritage Site. Durlston itself is a magnificent cliff-top site with fabulous views, wonderful walking, unrivalled geology, downland, meadows and Victorian artefacts. It is home to a superb selection of wildlife species: 400+ wildflowers, 34 butterflies, 250 birds and much more. Unfortunately some of this wildlife is difficult to see because of its inaccessibility on the sheer 30m high cliffs.

Viewing the birds

Over a decade ago the Durlston Country Park Rangers decided that it would be fascinating to be able to see, watch and monitor the colony of Guillemots breeding on an unobservable, inaccessible cliff 400 metres from the Visitor Centre. To achieve this the obvious method was to use a 'video camera' that transmitted pictures to the Centre and display them to the public. The use of a camera to watch wildlife is now common-place and highly popular method of interpretation in visitor centres and wildlife parks around the country but it was not the case then.

'all the planning and work had come to fruition and the Guillemots were visible live in the Visitor Centre'

Our interpretation already included daily records of the wildlife and daily weather readings so visitors were used to, and liked, the up-to-date information. Having decided on live pictures, attention turned to siting the camera and mounting it on the inhospitable cliffs in all weathers and sea conditions for eight months of the year while the birds were in residence. It therefore needed to be robust, waterproof, saltproof, waveproof and securely attached. We also wanted fabulous picture quality, 24 hour power, sound, the ability to zoom in for close-ups and out for observing any passing sealife and

Previous page: The camera is bolted to the cliff face
Above: The cliff camera being installed
Above right: Common Guillemot

'Visitors come regularly and ask specifically about Tufty, whether he is back from the winter, has an egg, a chick'

seabirds, good picture quality under low light conditions and a windscreen wiper and washer to keep the lens clean. It also needed to be attached 15m down an overhanging cliff so the weight and size needed to be a minimum or at least manageable – quite a long list of requirements and all on a small County Council budget!

Going live

The shopping list was sorted and suppliers found: the camera and cover from Bellards in Chester, the rest locally sourced, a purpose built bracket, 400+m of coaxial and of power cable, drainage pipe and water pipe plus 1000m of string amongst other things.

Durlston Country Park is fortunate to have a fabulous 'Friends' group who provided brilliant expertise, labour and donations to enable the project to proceed. Having spent days digging trenches for the pipe and cables, 20 volunteers arrived and amid much laughter, screams and effort the cable was threaded through the protective pipe ready for connection to the camera.

Volunteer climbers carried the camera down the cliff and attached it to the bracket (previously bolted with great difficulty onto the cliff face) and the cables attached. Magic – all the planning and work had come to fruition and the Guillemots were visible live in the Visitor Centre. Now the fun could really begin!

Justification

Interpretation and science were both important in justifying the expense and effort of live cliff camera pictures.

Science: this would be the first colony of seabirds monitored entirely through the camera. They are the most easterly colony on the south coast of Britain and hence on the edge of their breeding range, so monitoring this colony could provide indicators to changes in the population as a whole. Monitoring includes daily individual counts, mapping of breeding sites, breeding success and feeding activity plus behavioural activity. The results over the last 10 years have shown Durlston to be a very successful colony, with one of the highest breeding successes in Britain, and the number of birds and breeding sites occupied has increased. Some unique behavioural footage has also been seen and recorded.

Interpretation: as an interpretative tool the live camera has proved itself beyond doubt. It is used as a continual feed into the Visitor Centre where it is displayed to the public on a 25" television screen – action as it happens. Guillemots in the breeding season (March – July) are always on the ledge, so there is always something to watch and show the visitors.

The camera can also be moved to watch another area of action via a panel – highly effective in today's 20-second attention-span culture. Visitors can zoom in so a bird fills the screen, watch an egg hatch out, or a fight in progress etc. Much better than a wildlife programme – controlling the direction and focus for yourself. Visitors come back time and again to see the progress of the Guillemots.

Education: it is wonderful way of interesting and alerting schoolchildren to the fascination and adaptability of birds and their environment. Not knowing what is about to happen on the screen when speaking to thirty ten year olds can be an eye-opener. The spontaneity it provides improves the sessions - an interesting moment can be focused on, questions answered and points covered, all by moving the camera and watching the live pictures.

Some of our education sessions also involve a trip to the cliff top to watch the birds in the flesh. The camera has been a great asset helping the

children to look at birds in a different way and carry their knowledge to other species. This is particularly noticeable when the camera fails to work (as happened in 2003): the sessions are not as effective with a recorded video as with live pictures..

Since the camera was installed, some very interesting and highly unusual behaviour and individual birds have been seen including the identification of a unique Guillemot named 'Tufty'. Tufty has a white plume of feathers protruding from the back of his chocolate brown head (this is particularly good as Guillemots look very alike) so the opportunity for people to identify with an individual bird is fabulous. Visitors come regularly and ask specifically about Tufty, whether he is back from the winter, has an egg, a chick etc.

Recent developments

In 2000, the National Trust, in conjunction with Durlston put a camera down to watch Puffins on another cliff face two miles away. However, it is impossible to get electricity to this site so the camera is powered by batteries carried down in a Landrover along with television and video. Public interpretation is therefore extremely difficult and the camera has been used primarily as a scientific tool to attempt to prove the Puffins are breeding. Other cameras have been deployed at Durlston – one watching rabbits in a warren, another monitoring boat traffic across our hydrophone sending live sound to the Visitor Centre.

So what of the future?

Science: a ten year Guillemot study report and appraisal is to be completed.

Interpretation : videos are in production using previously recorded footage including long and short versions with subtitles. And Tufty stars in *Tufty–a Guillemot's view of life!* – with voices and subtitles. These will be used for public display and for education groups, providing good interpretation and education when the birds are not present.

Digital technology : once this area has a broadband connection, live images will be added to our website www.durlston.co.uk. Further use of digital technology may enable the Puffin camera to transmit live pictures from the cliff top via a computer and larger and clearer screens. Monitors for weather are being considered on the camera, while temperature, salinity, wave movement, visibility are all being considered for the hydrophone.

Problems

There are continual problems with technology: the sea and cliff environments are very hostile and electronics, metal and rubber all corrode quickly. Unfortunately the camera has broken down a few times and it can then not be fixed until the birds have left the area. In 2003 this meant no live pictures after May! The camera microphone has corroded and been destroyed by Herring Gulls, and the hydrophone has had water in its connectors. However, despite these problems technology is a fabulous method of showing local wildlife to people. The images are close-up, live and do not cause disturbance. It also provides the opportunity for those unable to get to the cliffs, or those who have no inclination to, to enjoy live images of birds.

Katie Black is a Ranger at Durlston Country Park in Swanage, Dorset
www.durlston.co.uk : info@durlston.co.uk

'The camera microphone has corroded and been destroyed by Herring Gulls and the hydrophone has had water in its connectors'

The towpath telegraph

Annette Simpson and **Matthew Jones** look at a new way of delivering audio outdoors and how British Waterways used it to interpret canals

Above: Hatton Locks piling boat with sound post and panel

Amongst the boating community there is a thing known as the towpath telegraph – this means if something happens at one end of the canal it is soon known about at the other. Messages get passed from boater to boater, shouted from the back of a boat. The power of verbal communication can never be underestimated – a thing worth remembering if you are seen kissing someone you shouldn't beneath a canal bridge!

British Waterways are currently developing interpretation at their key visitor sites. We want to engage the public, telling them something of our waterway's history helping them to value and respect this aspect of our heritage - and of course we want everyone to have a good time and tell all their friends how wonderful waterways are for a day out!

On-site interpretation is one of the methods we are using – but we all know the limitations of static interpretation. Most people will just pass it by with a glance and move on to the ice cream shop. So in an effort to engage people through participation and make this brief contact with visitors more memorable and accessible, we have been trying a range of options, including the use of sound.

At Hatton Locks we have used one of the Black Box U-turn units incorporated into a display created by MICE Cymru. This tells the story of piling – essential if you don't want the waterway edge to collapse. We were lucky to have been able to record people who worked on piling boats from the 1930s-50s and their stories bring the original piling boat alongside the sound post to life. Messages are re-enforced by the visual design of the panel, the use of original and reconstructed objects and the tactile nature of the whole display – people often sit on the boat to take in the scene and kids climb in and out of the hold. To introduce further activity we will soon be installing picnic benches with quiz questions embedded in the top. We even have a live interpretation character based on those interviewed, who is around on special days.

'... but we all know the limitations of static interpretation. Most people will just pass it by with a glance and move on to the ice cream shop.'

At Kingswood Junction we have used a different system developed for us by Science Projects, Furneaux Stewart and Michael Glen. Here we have installed winding posts based on the paddle equipment used to work locks. These stand next to interpretive panels and as you turn the windlass handle a character illustrated on the panel will tell you about an aspect of waterway's life important to them. Rosie O'Dowd will extol the virtues of Cadburys as they actually paid the boatman's wife a wage, one of the few canal carriers to do so.

Activity, participation, maximum use of all the senses, the use of people focussed interpretation, linking interpretation to facilities and site furniture – all these things make static interpretation more effective. In fact if we could only get them to dispense ice cream we'd have it sorted!

'The U-Turn (as it is called by inventors Black Box AV) is a new concept in delivering audio that requires no mains power supply or batteries'

The U-Turn

Above: A visitor using the U-Turn

Audio has long been a powerful weapon in the interpreter's armoury. There are of course many different solutions – both fixed-point and portable devices. Generally though, they require a power supply – either directly from mains, or through use of batteries.

The U-Turn (as it is called by inventors Black Box AV) is a new concept in delivering audio that requires no mains power supply or batteries. As the name suggests, the user turns a handle to generate an electrical charge.

This lack of reliance on a power supply, allied with a rugged, weatherproof construction, substantial sound storage capacity and various operational configurations is opening up a whole raft of new interpretive possibilities – particularly in the outdoor environment where options for audio have traditionally been quite limited.

One track or two?

In its simplest form the U-Turn allows the user to access two separate sound tracks. These can be almost any length (limited only by the capacity of the internal compact flash card), and can include narrative, music and sound effects. Turning the handle clockwise gives access to one track; turning it anticlockwise gives access to the other track. For example, you might wish to provide two levels of narrative – one for a more specialist audience; one for children, or two different language options.

When two tracks won't do

Another version of the U-Turn gives access to multiple tracks – up to eight at present. These tracks are selected using simple push buttons. This added functionality has obvious benefits. For example, your interpretive content can now be made available in multiple languages or tailored to an even broader audience spectrum. By integrating buttons within a static display board, you can instantly make it interactive – for example pointing out key site features on a map, or triggering various sounds relating to an illustration e.g. bird song.

Work is also in progress on developing a U-Turn where multiple tracks can be selected by physically turning the whole unit through different positions. This will enable selected tracks to relate to specific site features or views.

Fixtures and fittings

The U-Turn can be fixed in many different ways. As a standalone feature, it can be flush mounted onto a post, or any vertical surface. It can also be incorporated within a panel (i.e. the graphical component) or the frame. The units come in three standard colours – green, blue and black, but can be painted to any required hue.

Summary of features and benefits:

- can be used in situations where there is no power supply, or where obtaining a power supply would be costly and/or intrusive
- used in conjunction with interpretive panels, it adds instant interactivity and enables a reduction in word count
- at sensitive outdoor sites it may be less obtrusive than an interpretive panel
- ability to select multiple tracks allows interpretation to be tailored to specific audiences
- use of a compact flash card as the sound storage medium enables for content to be updated and changed with ease.

For more information on the U-Turn visit: www.blackboxav.co.uk

Annette Simpson is Interpretation Manager, British Waterways; Matthew Jones is Heritage Project Manager at Imagemakers who implemented the interpretation at Hatton Lock

The next generation

Steve Done explains the role of AVICOM in developing new technologies in museums

AVICOM (International Committee of Museums for Audiovisual, Images and Sound New Technologies) is one of ICOM's (International Council of Museums) most dynamic international committees. With over 500 members from 50 nations, it has attracted curators, scientists, IT experts, heads of services and professionals working in any number of new media, from within a wide diversity of museums, cultural institutions and companies developing and using these services. With 12 publications to its name, AVICOM has made huge efforts to ensure that the work of the committee and its members, reaches as wide an audience as possible.

Out of the Dark Ages...

AVICOM was formed back in 1991, a time that seems like a kind of Dark Ages of information technology, when the internet, DVD's, mini-discs and the like, were still a long way from becoming the staple part of our daily working lives. On its formation, AVICOM was truly in the vanguard of the museum world, trying to help like-minded museum professionals find a way forward through the thrilling, exciting, yet trouble-strewn road that lay ahead in the rapidly changing world of so-called 'new technologies'. The founding committee of Marco Tonon, Claude-Nicole Hoquard, Michael Faber, Karina Durand and Jean-Marcel Humbert (present day chair), felt that it was essential that we shared our experiences, successes and failures, the blind-alleys, and the breakthroughs, and try our best to share this information, initially through annual conferences and more traditional printed publications, and in later years through the powerful tool of the internet.

Advice and information

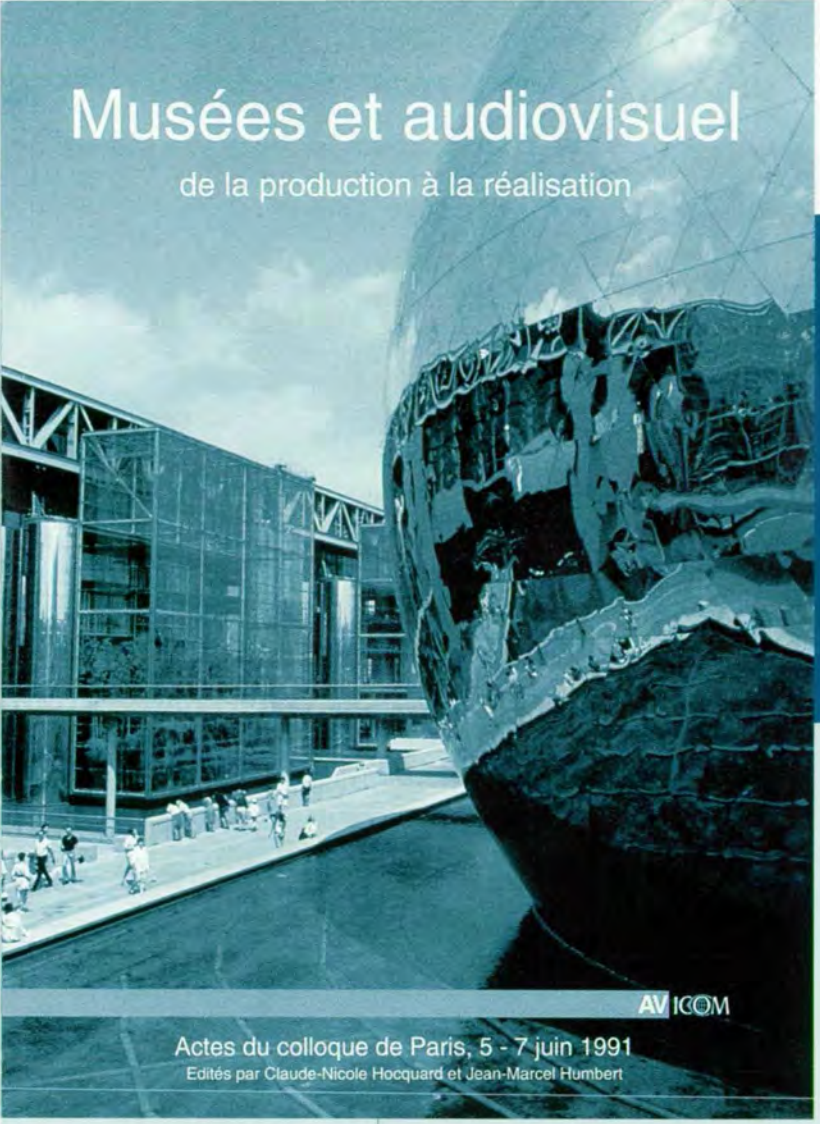
AVICOM's aims have remained the same until today. To help advise and inform members on the most cost-effective way of creatively using sound, images, so-called new technologies, whether CD-ROMS, DVD, or the internet in all aspects of museum and cultural interpretation, promotion and commercial development. Appreciating that this can often be a costly process, and a field beset with innovations that rapidly become technological blind-alleys, AVICOM has consistently retained a pragmatic approach, eager to encourage 'entry-level' and affordable solutions as well as looking at productions by huge cultural institutions with significant development budgets. One of the means by which AVICOM attempts to showcase and encourage all levels of development in its field, is through the international recognised festival F@IMP.

F@IMP

One of the great success stories of AVICOM was the creation of the 'sister' organisation, F@IMP (the Festival Audiovisuel International Musees et Patrimoine), is organised under the joint auspices of AVICOM and ICOM, with additional support from UNESCO. It was created as a result of the huge demand for professionals to show their creations in the fields of film, video, cd-rom and the internet at the annual AVIOCM conferences. F@IMP aims to encourage, enrich and promote the production and distribution of audio-visuals and multimedia products made by, and used by, museums and cultural institutions. The festival is run in a style reminiscent of the great film festivals such as Venice and Cannes, with an international jury of experts viewing the entries in different categories prior to the festival, and making awards of Gold, Silver and Bronze Palmares for the finest works of that year, presented at the closing ceremony. Prior to the awards ceremony, the festival aims to make all submissions available for viewing, as well as holding round-table discussion groups on aspects of the developing new technologies, and papers delivered by carefully selected experts in their fields.

The scale of the F@IMP festival is now impressive. In June this year a catalogue was produced (Festival Audiovisuel International Musees & Patrimoine – catalogue des productions audiovisuelles et multimedia inscrites aux competitions F@IMP 1996-2002), listing all works submitted since the first-ever F@IMP in 1996. Running to over 150 pages of entries, it is a fascinating testament to the increasing awareness of the importance of these developing technologies in our quest to find better way to preserve and interpret our heritage.

Above: AVICOM information leaflet. First produced in November 2000



Above: 'Musees et audiovisuel' AVICOM's first publication presented papers from the inaugural meeting in Paris, June1991

'The founding committee ... felt that it was essential that we shared our experiences, successes and failures, the blind-alleys, and the breakthroughs'

Remember the videodisc?

The type of submissions entered into successive F@IMP festivals tells its own story of the evolving nature of new technologies: At first video and film, followed by CD-ROMS were the staple, but slowly this has evolved into a far heavier percentage of websites being entered, of increasing sophistication, and the virtual demise of video and film as an interpretive medium. In the June 2003 meeting in Paris, successive speakers discussed the already perceivable demise of the CD-ROM as a staple solution to using new technologies to interpret collections: CD-ROMS are already seen as expensive to produce, even more expensive to promote and sell to a wide audience. At the same time much of the younger sections of the target audiences are becoming more and more familiar with DVDs, and X-Boxes, making the CD-ROMs increasingly look poor value for money, whilst the increasing availability of high-speed internet connectivity is seeing internet development as the most cost-effective way forward for even the smallest museum. If anyone needs reminding of the rapid obsolescence of such technologies, then they need only recall the dead-end that was the videodisc. Anyone want a perfectly good example, virtually unused... and unusable!

Another aspect of AVICOM's aims is to look at and encourage research into the long-term benefits, but also threats posed by many of these new medias. For example, how stable are CD-ROMs? Will they truly make stable and effective resources for archives? That particular debate will continue into the foreseeable future, and AVICOM will aim to keep the professional world updated. AVICOM also has a special sub-committee for the study of photography and the way new technologies can be used to interpret and archive a medium that perhaps more successfully than any other, apart from music, has exploited these developing technologies.

Space does not allow for a detailed look at the many brilliant and innovative solutions that have been studied and shown at successive AVICOM/F@IMP meetings, but readers are encouraged to visit the website, www.unesco.org/webworld/avicomfaimp/avicom/jeucadres_avicom.htm, where the F@IMP archives will direct you to some of the outstanding successes and achievements of the last seven years.

Beyond the limits of time and space

However special mention should be made of one museum's enthusiastic embracing of the challenges of developing technology. The committee of AVICOM and the jury of F@IMP have been consistently impressed by the almost peerless work of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan. Their website and companion DVD, are both beautiful examples of the genre: informative, innovative, fun, but perhaps most elusively of all, manage to communicate beauty, passion and sensitivity through a medium not

'...whilst the increasing availability of high-speed internet connectivity is seeing internet development as the most cost-effective way forward for even the smallest museum'

Above right: Cover of the DVD 'The Beauty of Painting', produced the National Palace Museum, Taiwan

exactly noted for these strengths. 'Digitising art beyond the limits of time and space' is the claim made by the creators, and who would argue? This museum has truly attempted to step outside its own superb, but very real walls, and create a medium to interpret its unique collection of Chinese art and artefacts in a manner that sets new standards. With over 19 awards collected so far, including a special Palmares from F@IMP, the National Palace Museum website and DVD, is a wonderful vindication of why AVICOM was created in the first place. Visit their website on www.npm.gov.tw, or attend the forthcoming AVICOM/F@IMP festival May 3-7, 2004 to be held at their REAL and not VIRTUAL museum!

For further information visit:
www.unesco.org/webworld/avicomfaimp/avicom/jeu cadres_avicom.htm
www.icom.org/avicom
AVICOM: Musee national de la Marine,
17 place du Trocadero, 75116 PARIS,
FRANCE. Tel: (33) 01 53 65 69 30
Email: jm.humbert@wanadoo.fr
Stephen.done@liverpoolfc.tv

AVICOM/F@IMP publications

(majority in French language only, with some English articles within):

Musées et audiovisuel, de la production à la réalisation
International meeting 4-7 June 1991

Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires – Paris – France published 1992

Les Nouvelles Technologies de l'audiovisuel au service des musées XVIth General Conference ICOM, 19-27 September 1992

Musée de la Civilisation – Québec – Canada, published 1993

La photographie et le musée
International Meeting 20-24 September 1994

Maison de l'Histoire Contemporaine - Bonn - Germany (in preparation)

Cinéma et vidéo pour les musées XVIIth General conference, ICOM, 2-7 July 1995 Stavenger – Norvège

Nouvelles technologies au service des musées pour la conservation, le catalogage et la communication des images et des sons
International meeting, 1-4 May 1996 Ethnology Museum, Budapest – Hongrie

Colloque International des technologies informatiques et audiovisuelles: F@IMP.96 20-25 October 1996 Mémorial de l'Amérique latine / Institut Culturel Itau - Sao Paulo –Brésil

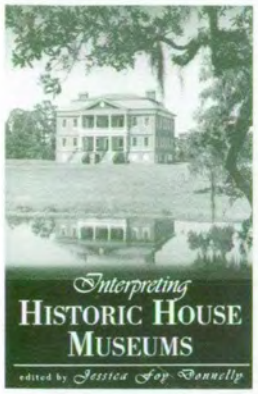
Festival Audiovisuel International Musées & Patrimoine 4-8 November 1996 Centre Culturel Borgés - Buenos Aires – Argentine Catalogue published 1996

Festival Audiovisuel International Musees & Patrimoine – catalogue des productions audiovisuelles et multimedia inscrites aux competitions F@IMP 1996-2002 published June 2003, for F@IMP 2003, Musee National de la Marine, Paris

Les publications et les actes sont en vente et fournis sur demande. Pour tout renseignement, contacter le secrétariat AVICOM au musée de la Marine de Paris

Stephen Done has been Secretaire General of AVICOM for the past five years and is currently curator of Liverpool Football Club Museum

Book review



Altamira Press
October 2002
ISBN 0-7591-0251-1
Paperback $24.95

Interpreting Historic House Museums

Jessica Foy Donnelly

This book is a really practical resource for anyone involved in the interpretation of historic houses. It reminds us of the need to look at familiar issues with new perspectives and new methods to meet the sophisticated demands of today's visitors. Based on American Historic House Museums the content and ideas are equally relevant to other places. Fourteen contributors tackle topics from a practical viewpoint with guidelines and examples from case studies. A useful chapter at the start explains the importance of planning and how to match your interpretation to suit the way people learn in a leisure setting. It reminds us that;

'Providing diverse perspectives is still one of the most important qualities of successful interpretation'

Also the importance of consultation is addressed;

'A wise museum staff will enlist the aid of the community (museum and otherwise) as it prepares to assimilate a new interpretive subject. As more people and views become involved, the opportunities for diversifying messages and audiences increase. The resulting messages presented will also be more accurate and better conveyed'.

Tackling contemporary issues like race and gender and infusing the historic house with characters and activity are covered. Interpreting the whole house including the domestic areas has a chapter-

'Because of the commonality of domestic life, historic house museums should be as eager as other types of museums to strike a personal chord with diverse segments of the population'

A couple of chapters cover tours with practical examples and checklists.

The discussion of contemporary issues and successful programmes, practical guidelines and information make this a useful book for both students and practising professionals.

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