

INTERPRETATION JOURNAL



JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

SPRING 2007 • VOLUME 12 • NUMBER 1



The Best of Interpretation 2006

Fifteen award-winning schemes from Interpret Britain

HENRY BLOGG OF CROMER



Maureen la Frenais relates the multi-award winning exhibition on Henry Blogg – 'one of the bravest men who lived'.

A trawl through any book on the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's past will reveal accounts of extraordinary people and the remarkable rescues they carried out. Henry Blogg earned a special place in this history. As a volunteer, he joined the lifeboat crew at 18 in 1894 and retired 53 years later at the age of 71 (today's volunteer crew retire at 55!). In a drawer of his sideboard at home, he modestly kept three Gold and four Silver RNLI Gallantry medals, the George Cross, and a British Empire medal. No other person in the history of the RNLI has won so many medals.

GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunity to tell the story of Henry and lifeboats in Cromer arose in 2002. An old boathouse on the seafront had become a museum and displayed the HF Bailey wartime lifeboat used by Henry and his crew. A new home was needed for the Cromer inshore lifeboat. During the search for a new home it became clear that the best launch site was the museum, which would therefore have to close.

While plans were being discussed within the RNLI to find a new place to display the HF Bailey lifeboat, North Norfolk District Council began to develop an innovative seafront regeneration scheme. The result was the building of a new contemporary building which houses the new Henry Blogg Museum, opened in 2006 just yards away from the old building.

FOCUSING ON INTERPRETATION

Interpretation in the previous museum was basic. Although rich with images and information, there was no clear story and viewing the lifeboat was difficult. The steady flow of visitors however clearly indicated people's interest to discover more about Henry, rescues in Cromer and how lifeboats continue to save lives today.

ABOVE: An innovative way to display all the rescue records in miniature.

RIGHT: The HF Bailey wartime lifeboat.

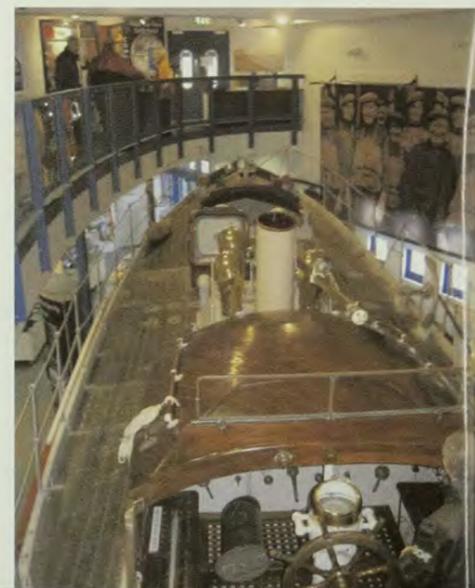
'MAKING CREW MEMBERS AND THEIR BRAVE ACTS AT SEA INTERESTING TO TODAY'S AUDIENCE IS NOT ALWAYS AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS'

Making crew members and their brave acts at sea interesting to today's audience is not always as easy as it sounds, though. The lifeboat career of someone like Cromer's Henry Blogg, for example, was long and complex. How can we explain to children – the potential RNLI supporters of the future – how important Blogg was without losing them amongst boat names, launch dates and technical terminology?

The interpretation strategy focused on Henry and his wartime lifeboat, and extended the story to include a wider picture of lifesaving in Cromer. 'Ordinary people doing extraordinary things' became a key thread reflecting how volunteer spirit and courage sustain our charity.

OUR SUCCESSES

The recent award from the AHI identified the interpretation as a stimulating mix, using materials suitable for all ages and levels and



abilities of interest. Recognition that the museum had successfully fulfilled its aims, by providing a clear and absorbing story of the lifeboat and Coxswain Henry Blogg, was a great boost to our new RNLI Heritage Trust and its volunteers who manage the museum.

On reflection, the success of the final interpretation was enhanced by the imaginative building, and architects who responded to our requirement to provide better access, and went even further by designing an exhibition space that reflected and enhanced the shape of the lifeboat.

One of the early concerns was the lack of objects belonging to Henry, and the move to a larger space. We deliberately allowed the interpretative strategy to be flexible and evolve, allowing late additions to the collection of objects. A good mix of interpretation is achieved by combining objects with low-tech mechanical interactives. One of the favourite areas for visitors is the life-size beach hut reconstruction where Henry is shown working in his day job hiring out deckchairs.

Amongst Henry's awards was a medal from the Canine Defence League for the rescue of a dog that he rescued from an Italian steamship *Monte Nevosa* in 1932. Monty remained with Henry and the exhibition features cartoons of Monty leading younger visitors around.

OLD FOR NEW

An evaluation is planned a year after opening, and some early research shows that the lifeboat is the most popular exhibit followed by Henry in the beach hut. A very positive 'thumbs up' by visitors was for the volunteers who have stepped naturally into the role of interpreters and who we intend to support as much as possible. No mean feat, when the number of visitors in the first three months exceeded the previous year's total, and many more school groups are making bookings.



RIGHT: Ronnie Corbett opens the museum and revisits Cromer where his career started.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Ensure that the baseline for interpretation is source material.
- Chase up untold stories (visiting people in their homes produced some great photos and archives. Factor in lots of time at the start of the project – this bit is fun!
- Encourage community support and sense of ownership (when deadlines loom, more help becomes available!)
- If you identify younger visitors as your audience, ensure interactives are strong enough to withstand them.
- So – older visitors unexpectedly like these as well; ensure displays are strong enough to withstand them too. (Test before opening.)

BELOW: Captions connect the interpretive flow of the exhibition.

"If anybody in my crew... say they don't believe in God and they ain't frightened by the sea, I want 'em, because that sea is your master".

"...always respect the sea. Because... them sand banks, they don't run true. You might have a northerly wind, and you think, well, the swell's going to come from the north, suddenly you'll get one come from the west, out of nowhere. You might get one fly at you from the east. uncanny, uncanny..."

Richard Davies, Coxswain of the Cromer Lifeboat 1976-1999

- Proof-reading and corrections – slow, but really important.
- Be brave – your favourite bit of the interpretation may not be a favourite with visitors. Listen to their comments – ideally, before producing it.

CRANKING UP THE PEOPLE STORIES

In 2004, Henry Blogg was voted most popular hero over Nelson in a BBC East poll. We never realised so many people knew his story, but now it is quite clear that people like people stories, as well as technical facts about lifeboats. Our shift of interpretation, we hope, will inspire and engage more visitors of all ages and abilities.

The next major project for 2007 is the redevelopment of the Grace Darling Museum in Northumberland. Again, it tells the story of a brave volunteer (this time a heroine) and a famous rescue.

These projects concentrate on interpreting the RNLI's past, but telling the story of our modern-day lifeboat service is equally as important. A rolling programme of providing interpretation at our stations has therefore been underway for a few years. After all, the men and women that crew our modern lifeboats are the Henry Bloggs and Grace Darlings of the future.

Maureen La Frenais is RNLI Display & Interpretation Manager.

THE SECRET HILLS TIME TRAILS

Nigel McDonald describes the route to innovatory trails involving treasure and new technology in the depths of Shropshire.

Imagine, a treasure hunt asks a self-guided walk out for a date. One date becomes two; they fall in love, settle down and have a baby. Their beautiful bouncing child would look pretty much like a Geocaching trail and that's exactly what the Secret Hills Time Trails are.

GEOCACHING – WHAT'S THAT?

Geocaching is a fast-growing global phenomenon. It uses global positioning systems (GPS) to find boxes, full of goodies, hidden all over the globe. The secret locations of these boxes are posted on a free website (www.geocaching.com). Cachers download the details into their GPS and follow them to find the hidden boxes. Once found, they plunder the treasure, replacing it with trinkets of their own. It's the best excuse for a walk in the countryside you'll ever get. It certainly beats golf.

'Mega mega mega excellent!' (Tom aged 7) What sold it to us as a potential vehicle for a series of interpreted trails is that the feedback is built in. Not only can you theme the trail and communicate the specialness of the locations to your audience; you also get their enthusiastic comments back as they write up their experiences on the website.

As part of the Interpreting Shropshire Project, we developed two sequentially themed Geocaching trails from the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre. The trails explore two facets of Shropshire's superb landscape; the Iron Age and World War II history. We also developed a further geological trail in the Onny Meadows adjacent to the Discovery Centre. This allows visitors to try out their hired GPS kit before they strike off into the Shropshire wilderness.



RIGHT: Getting the whole family involved. The interpretation is often the only one of the rewards you'll find in a cache.

'CACHERS DOWNLOAD THE DETAILS INTO THEIR GPS AND FOLLOW THEM TO FIND THE HIDDEN BOXES'

Our philosophy was that the interpretation should be the reward for finding the boxes. Each box in the sequence has its own visually powerful, succinctly but engagingly written 'pop up panel'. We also stuffed the boxes full of themed goodies, like Celtic jewellery, figures and trinkets or soldiers, coins and badges.

EVALUATION

Evaluation of the first 150 customers to hire the GPS and explore the trails showed very high levels of satisfaction, value and enjoyment. The trails were a particularly big hit with the audiences they targeted, especially families.

The trails also won critical acclaim from the caching fraternity who added our caches to their 'must cache' lists. Special thanks must go to Jim Stabler, a local caching enthusiast who advised us throughout the project.

CHEAP TO DO

The three trails cost less than £6,000 to set up. This included research for the trails, leaflet production, setting out the caches and buying ten GPS for the visitors to hire. The funding came from the European Regional Development Fund, Shropshire County Council and Advantage West Midlands.

FUTURE PLANS

As always with new ideas, the way you promote them can be the make or break of them. After considerable interest, helped by national media coverage in the first year, use has tailed off. We intend to develop a new trail from the Discovery Centre for next year and invest more heavily in promotion through the media and locally.

'THESE TRAILS WOULD APPEAL TO GROUPS OF ALL AGES AND PROVIDE AN EXTRA INCENTIVE FOR WALKING IN THE HILLS... A GREAT DAY OUT'

JOHN & ERICA



Geocaching is here to stay; it sounds nerdy, but it really is great fun. Here are some comments from some of our first customers:

ABOVE: Some caches need more than sharp eyes to find. It's all part of the experience.

'It was very enjoyable and I would recommend it to others' (William aged 11)

'Thanks for an exciting journey Dad' (Joe aged 3)

'Great' (Tom aged 6)

'Brilliant for families, very different, we will do it again' (the Parents)

Nigel McDonald is Interpretation Manager, Learning and Culture, Shropshire County Council.



BARTON BROAD RESTORATION PROJECT

Nicky Rowbottom describes this inspiring scheme as a sort of travel guide to a lake restoration project in Norfolk.

Imagine a lake, pea-green with algae and accessible only by boat along the river which flows through it. Imagine also a swampy woodland at the lake edge which no one has been able to enter for 50 years or more. This was Barton Broad ten years ago: a great lake for sailing, but inaccessible by foot and under the water surface a very dark and gloomy place.

Like most of the shallow lakes that make up the Broads, Barton had suffered a catastrophic decline in water quality. Drastic action was needed and the Broads Authority, in partnership with the owners, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, started a complex restoration project that is slowly

bringing life back into the broad. Now there is a great variety of water plants and fish – and the otters are back.

A SAFE ROUTE THROUGH WILD SWAMP WOODLAND

A wheelchair-friendly boardwalk was the obvious answer to getting people safely and comfortably out to the water's edge, but the terrain was an awesome challenge. A magically beautiful swamp woodland has grown up over what was once mats of floating reed and sedge. The initial route-planning expedition involved jumping from tussock to tussock, clinging onto trees and using planks to get across the wettest sections. Our landscape architect slid into the mud up to her waist. Piles later driven into the mud went down ten metres before hitting solid ground!

GOOD COMPANIONS FOR VISITS TO THE BROAD

We wanted to interpret without ruining the experience of being in this seeming wilderness, and we knew that few countryside organisations provide media accessible to blind and partially sighted people. These two factors together persuaded us to go for minimal on-site signage and a prototype 'access pack' – a large-print booklet, Braille booklet, CD and audio tape – widely advertised, available in tourist info centres and posted out on request.

The pack and signage were designed to enable blind and partially sighted people to find out independently about the lake's history and wildlife. The on-site Braille does not simply translate what is on the visible text signs but concentrates on things which can be touched or smelt, chosen in company with our blind consultant. As a result, any visitor will gain more from the on-site interpretation if they visit the site with someone who reads Braille.

BELOW: Tom finds out about the birds but has he read the sign that tells him he's poised over mud ten metres deep?



BELOW: The Access pack includes raised pictures on swell paper, Braille, large print and audio.



Blind and sighted people worked together on making the tactile pictures, maps and Braille elements understandable; how best to label the pack elements and how to arrange the tracks on the audio cassette/CD; where to position the Braille signs on site and how to let blind visitors know they are there. Extensive trials were conducted to make the pack's packaging as user-friendly as possible.

ATTRACTING A NEW GROUP OF VISITORS

The Broads Access Advisory Group made us aware that people with disabilities in general have very low expectations of being made welcome in the countryside. For many it feels like visiting a strange, foreign country. The pack is therefore a mix of interpretation (interviews, commentary, birdsong) and information on the site's accessibility (gentle ramps, dedicated car park close to board walk, a tapping rail, resting places, accessible boat trip on solar-powered boat). It can be used before or after visits, functioning much like a radio programme.

Interviews with local residents and enthusiasts give a variety of voices and views. We recorded the interviewees expressing themselves freely without script, then edited their pieces to improve fluency. Some interviewees have distinctive local Norfolk accents which add spice and colour to the tape. A blind user's comment on the finished audio was: 'All too often audio material can be rather boring and

dull to listen to. I know this, since I receive lots of audio cassettes at home and at work and unless the presentation is good with various voices and presentation styles I will not bother to listen carefully to the information but just skip through it.'

Different elements of the pack were intended, in part, to appeal to different age groups. We decided to include Braille on the grounds that although Braille readers do not make up a high proportion of blind people as a whole, there are more among younger people who tend to be more active and independent.

USING ALL AVAILABLE EXPERTISE

In total more than 30 people contributed to the pack. The Barton liaison group (the broad's owners, neighbours and users) discussed content, and the placing of signs. Norfolk Disability Awareness Trainers advised on how to give information about physical accessibility, and a sound recordist with decades of experience in local radio recorded and edited the interviews. On the CD/tape the warden paints a vivid sound picture of the reserve, two volunteer rangers take the listener on a guided walk around the boardwalk, an ecologist explains the complex science of the restoration in words of only two or three syllables and describes an early-morning encounter with an otter. A member of one sailing group tells tales of triumphs and near-disasters on the water

BELOW: Carefully sited and discreet signage doesn't detract from the wilderness experience.



'PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN GENERAL HAVE VERY LOW EXPECTATIONS OF BEING MADE WELCOME IN THE COUNTRYSIDE'

and another describes water sport opportunities for people with disabilities. The people who built the boardwalk share their experiences of working in the swamp, and the birdsong and otter calls provided by members of the Wildlife Recording Society set the scene.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Trying out the materials at every stage of production helped ensure that they are understandable, user-friendly and work for the intended audience.
- It was an expensive process and took time to get the content right and to produce the tactile booklet on swell paper, so we were keen to 'future proof' it as far as possible.
- The case holding the access pack materials needs to be tough to stand up to posting.
- Working with the blind consultant and having the pack produced by the Norfolk & Norwich Association for the Blind was crucial in ensuring that the material got wide publicity among the intended audience. It was nominated without our knowledge for an RNIB award.

FUTURE PLANS

- More copies of the pack, and maintaining its profile.
- Sharing our experience with others.
- Making use of the lessons we have learnt in future projects.

Nicky Rowbottom worked for the Broads Authority on this project and is now freelance.
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SS GREAT BRITAIN

Kate Rambridge shows how a major conservation project has transformed Brunel's *ss Great Britain* from a provincial museum to a gilded icon of our maritime history.

Brunel's *ss Great Britain*, launched on 19 July 1843, represents a eureka moment in the history of ship design. The ambition of her design, which combined an iron hull and a steam-driven propeller, challenged the conventions of her age and forced the pace of change in maritime technology. She was described at her launch as 'the greatest experiment since the creation'. Built as an experimental prototype, she nevertheless had an extraordinarily long working life, and quickly became a symbol of progress and achievement for the Victorian public.

Since 1970, the *ss Great Britain* has been preserved in the Bristol dry dock where she was built between 1839 and 1843. She was salvaged from the Falkland Islands – famous as a graveyard for ships. After several decades of slow decay, her wrought iron hull was contaminated with salts, which caused corrosion so aggressive that conventional dockyard maintenance techniques were of little or no help in combating the problem. Analysis showed that the hull was at risk of complete collapse if no solution was found. The urgency of the corrosion problem became the imperative for a major conservation project, which received Heritage Lottery funding in 2001.

VISITORS AND PASSENGERS

The need to tackle the corrosion problem led to the transformation of the ship's dry dock into a giant dehumidification chamber for the fragile, vulnerable hull. It also drove a more extensive redevelopment project, which prioritised the need to interpret the *ss Great Britain* for a diverse audience. The iron ship, long loved by engineering and maritime professionals, represents a rich resource for social as well as technological and economic history. Many of the personal stories associated with her passengers and crew have an immediate relevance and fascination for even the most technophobic visitors.

'A HIGH PRIORITY HAS BEEN TO MAKE THIS EXPERIENCE UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE BY OVERCOMING THE PROBLEMS HISTORIC SHIPS POSE FOR PEOPLE WITH SENSORY AND MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS'

These personal stories, recorded in passenger diaries, letters and memoirs, are now central to the interpretation of the ship. Visitors explore the decks in the company of their chosen 'audio companion', who offers an immediate insight into the past, describing the experiences and impressions of a long sea voyage. The authentic experience of Victorian travellers is part of an immersive environment, where every interior has been reconstructed on the basis of the best available historical evidence – right down to the stink of the ill-ventilated water-closets. The visceral and emotional stimuli which visitors encounter make an immediate impression, and their response to the on-board experience has been overwhelmingly positive.

INTERPRETATION AUDIENCES

A high priority has been to make this experience universally accessible by overcoming the problems historic ships pose for people with sensory and mobility impairments. All facilities and visitor areas, including the dry dock and the lower deck levels, are accessible by wheelchair. A customised audio tour has been developed for visually impaired visitors, and there is a choice of two BSL video tours for profoundly deaf visitors. Disability awareness training is a high priority for staff in public-facing roles. There is also a strong emphasis on making sure that families and children will feel engaged and welcome. The Dockyard Museum, which tells the story of the ship through four distinct phases of her working life, represents 'formal learning', and complements the immersive experience on board. However,

BELOW:
The dry dock and lower deck levels are accessible by wheelchair.



RIGHT:
Interactives are based on real objects and activities - like trying to steer a 322' ship.

BELOW:
Every interior has been reconstructed on the basis of the best available historical evidence.

interpretation within the museum wears its 'intellectual' label lightly. The story is told through a series of objects and images which help to make approachable even some more unfamiliar structures and technologies associated with ship design. Children are made to feel as much at home here as on board – they are expected and encouraged to interact with artefacts, graphics, and hands-on exhibits.

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

The wrought-iron dockyard gates at the 'new-look' *ss Great Britain* opened to the public for the first time on 16 July 2005, three days before the ship's 162nd birthday. Since then, the public reaction has been overwhelmingly positive and 98 out of 100 visitors say that their experience has exceeded their expectations. The critical response has been in clear sympathy with this enthusiasm, and Brunel's *ss Great Britain* has won a series of plaudits of which the AHI award and commendation are the most recent. Word-of-mouth recommendation has combined with a prominent public profile to support an increase of more than 120% in visitor numbers. This compares with a predicted increase of around 50%.

The unanticipated extent of the popular success has of course created its own challenges. Not only is the pressure on staff and facilities high, there is also rapid wear and tear on museum and ship-board displays. Instead of 'downsizing' following the completion of the capital project, the Trust is recruiting new staff and volunteers to help



maintain the quality of the visitor experience. Identifying resources to achieve this is now a priority: it is clear that a more substantial budget allocation should have been planned for continuing to develop interpretation in the period immediately following the public opening, as the Trust learned from and responded to visitors' reactions.

Strategic planning is now underway in order to ensure the sustainability of all aspects of the Trust's work, including the delivery of a high-quality visitor experience. It is hoped that this will include a development of derelict areas of the Great Western Dockyard site. The objective is to create not only a source of income to support this independent museum, but also new education facilities. These would include the Brunel Institute, a research centre linked with Bristol University and housing archives of national significance. The development, which has been supervised by the Trust's architect, will

recreate key areas of the 19th century dockyard: the most imposing of these was the main factory, which produced components for the ship's engine.

There are major challenges ahead, but there is a new sense of confidence now about the ship's future. An unshakeable commitment to giving visitors the real thing underpins consistently high-quality, popular interpretation – and this wins real friends. With good ground to build on – strong public and local support, a flourishing education service, and the affirmation of the ten awards which it now boasts – the Trust remains ambitious for the future of the *ss Great Britain*.

Dr Kate Rambridge has worked for the Trust since 2000, researching, planning, coordinating and delivering interpretation.



TUDOR LIVES



Susan Raikes looks at an award-winning touring exhibition about the Tudor period, involving nine different museums and galleries across the North East.

To begin with, at the start of the Tudor Lives project, there were no objects identified within Tyne & Wear Museums' collections that might be able to be used. Nor was there a clear story to be told. No objects and no story, but a very clear message from visitors that they were interested in the period and were looking to us, as a large regional museum service, to deliver it for them.

WE WANT THE TUDORS!

To make that delivery possible, funding was provided by the North East Regional Museums Hub and a project team was drawn from across Tyne & Wear Museums' venues and teams, including curatorial, communications, learning and design. Unusually, both the project leader and the officer researching and developing the exhibition plan came from the learning team, so that the audience focus, and particularly the needs of the families and schools which were the impetus for the development of the exhibition, always remained at the forefront.

The initial concern regarding the possible lack of Tudor objects in the collection was soon allayed and almost 150 items, the majority held in the decorative art collection, were soon located, brought out of the stores, researched and conserved. Indeed, one of the most satisfying parts of this project has been the benefit to the collection brought about by the audience-focused approach. Loans from both local and regional museums and archives were also secured, ensuring an excellent range of both domestic and religious items.

INTRODUCING HENRY AND JEANNETTE

More detailed market research was then carried out to ensure that the exhibition would meet the audience's needs. The project officer also worked very closely with local archives and historic properties to ensure that the exhibition was based on sound scholarship and, as much as possible, the real experiences of the people

'NEW AUDIENCES, INCLUDING SPECIALISTS IN ARMS AND ARMOUR AND A-LEVEL GROUPS HAVE ALSO BEEN ENGAGED'

who lived in the North East in the Tudor period. It was decided to focus on Henry Maddison, a wealthy Newcastle merchant, whose memorial is still to be seen in the cathedral, and Jeannette Stevenson, a poor woman, known only through records of alms payments.

DIFFERENT WORLDS

The physical structure of the exhibition was designed to reflect the very different worlds of Henry and Jeannette and is a major departure from the 'usual' temporary exhibition approach. It was very much felt that Tudor Lives must be more than 'just' an exhibition and it was conceived as an holistic experience appealing to all the senses and encouraging people to



ABOVE: Henry Maddison's parlour.

RIGHT: Visiting children meet Henry Maddison.

BELOW: A visitor explores the collections on display.

RIGHT: Making pomanders in the kitchen area.



get involved. The exhibition was to be rich in information but presented in a variety of ways to appeal to the different learning styles, ages and abilities of its audiences.

Two themed areas of rich and poor life with full-size replica room sets were constructed to enable school audiences to use the exhibition to its full potential, while also providing a clear structure for families and other audiences. The sets represent a public room or parlour in Henry Maddison's house and his kitchen, 'inhabited' by servants. The parlour has objects from the collections set into cases which form part of the set, displaying Henry's armour and silverware, mixed with replica furniture allowing visitors to interact with the space. Information in this section is limited to hand-held panels so as not to detract from the illusion of a real Tudor room. The kitchen is entirely replica and allows visitors to take part in activities such as grinding spices and making pomanders. Objects reflecting domestic life are shown in a nearby display area, along with text panels and both low- and high-tech interactives exploring crime and punishment, food, medicine and disease, and building in Tudor times.

LEARNING LEADING!

Whereas learning staff might often be asked to draw up an activity programme to accompany a temporary exhibition, in this instance, these were an integral part of the project from the very beginning. A budget was allocated to employ an interpreter to run activities for children and families throughout the first year of the tour and the needs of other more specialised groups, such as college students, were considered from the design stage.

REACTIONS AND RESPONSES

Tudor Lives opened for the first time at Segedunum Roman Fort in Wallsend in January 2006 and at the time of writing has also visited three other sites, with one more Tyne and Wear venue and then the regional tour to follow in 2007/08. Response to the exhibition has been fantastic. The school sessions have been fully booked with waiting lists, an extra day for college students has been fitted in to cope with demand and families have given excellent feedback from the weekend and holiday activities. It is estimated that around 40,000 people will enjoy the exhibition in Tyne and Wear before it tours to other North East venues. Volunteers have taken an active part in interpreting the exhibition and new audiences, including specialists in arms and armour and A-Level groups, have also been engaged.

Detailed evaluation of the school activity programme is being carried out – results so far include 97% of teachers feeling personally motivated by the experience and 98% stating that their pupils had gained a deeper understanding of the Tudor period. Many hundreds of comments from visitors have also been collected, demonstrating the wide range of different experiences which can be had by different people in the same exhibition. For example,



'My daughter is autistic and enjoyed dressing up' (adult visitor)

'Definitely a great instrument to increase interest and galvanise pupils into action' (KS3 teacher).

'I would like to come again sometime with my family' (Paige, age 8)

'I found it interesting to find out more about the ways of life' (adult visitor)

LESSONS LEARNT

Tudor Lives has been a real learning experience for the staff involved as well as the visitors. Key lessons learnt include:

- Taking a genuinely audience focused approach has benefits for the collection as well as for visitor figures!
- Considering the needs of school groups as a primary audience leads to accessibility for all visitors.
- Never be afraid to juxtapose lots of different interpretative techniques. Done carefully, it looks good, and appeals to many different learning styles.

The experience is now feeding into plans for regional work around the Ancient Egyptians and the suggestion has been made that a similar interpretative framework might also be employed for a touring art exhibition. It seems that our unusual approach may become our usual one in the future.

Susan Raikes is Principal Learning Officer, Tyne & Wear Museums.

MR HARDMAN'S PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO

Jennie Cochrane describes how the recent award acknowledges the importance of using different methods of interpretation to appeal to those with different needs.

Edward Chambré Hardman was the pre-eminent professional portrait photographer in the North West from the 1920s until the 1960s. The former home of Hardman and his wife Margaret from 1948–1988, the house is presented to the public as an intimate glimpse into his work and lifestyle.

A THRIVING BUSINESS

1922: A young Irish photographer called Edward Chambré Hardman arrived in the bustling port of Liverpool to set up a portrait photography business. In partnership with his fellow army officer Kenneth Burrell, Hardman became the most respected photographer in the North West, photographing many of the local aristocracy and visiting celebrities. In 1948, his success led to the purchase of 59 Rodney Street in Liverpool's Georgian quarter. His business was thriving, as the photography profession was a reserved occupation during the war years, and Hardman was able to move his premises to live and work amongst the most respected professionals in the city. The war years had a profound effect on Hardman, contributing to his reluctance to throw anything away, should supplies be limited again in the future.

2002: Things were looking bleak at 59 Rodney Street. Hardman had died 14 years earlier, having left his house (containing all his possessions, photography equipment and 140,000 photographs and negatives) to a Trust set up in his name. The aim of this Trust was to open the house to the public, and allow people to get a glimpse into the life and work of this extraordinarily talented man. But they were running out of funds, and so approached the National Trust for assistance.

2004: The National Trust, by now the owners of the house and its collection, opened 59 Rodney Street to the public, with assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Liverpool City Council. Its aim was to celebrate the lives of



Hardman and his wife Margaret (herself an accomplished photographer) whilst recreating the atmosphere and experience of visiting a professional photographer in the 1950s. The only surviving example of its type, the property provides an enjoyable and informative experience for all visitors.

BRINGING IT TO LIFE

A visit to the house brings the Hardmans to life as a somewhat eccentric couple. The business was contained in the property, but it was also the Hardmans' home and so is a glimpse into the social lives of a devoted couple through post-war austerity. Volunteer guides take visitors around the house, which is presented as to suggest that the Hardmans left the studio one day in the 1950s and never returned. Visitors experience many forms of interpretation, from live talks by the guides to the various uses of technologies. The tour is enhanced by the dedication and enthusiasm of the volunteer guides, whose understanding and knowledge of the Hardmans and their lives brings this house to life.

Since the property opened in September 2004, it has been the response of the visitors that truly reflects the experience of the tour. In particular, the Discovery Room, a new interactive room at the property, has enabled

RIGHT: Visitors enjoy the experience in the interactive 'Discovery Room'.

the National Trust to illustrate the art form of photography that is becoming lost in a digital age and has been particularly welcomed by our visitors.

The property has the advantage of having a complete and original collection. As Mr and Mrs Hardman did not throw anything away, everything was in the house including all their clothing, furniture and even original food rations. This allowed the National Trust to dress the house as it was in the 1950s, helped by contemporary photographs (helpfully taken by Hardman!). All of this has led to high praise from our visitors. Notes left in our Visitor's Book include, 'a step into a bygone age', 'magical with superb guides', and (our personal favourite) – 'flash, bang, wallop, what a visit!'

MEETING THE NEEDS

In preparing this property for presentation to the public, the National Trust wanted to portray the house in as atmospheric a way as possible. It was done using several methods, including:

- contemporary photographs;
- Hardman's own paint charts for use in redecoration;
- consultation with the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford, former employees and clients, and with the Edward Chambré Hardman Trust.

The property staff have also realised the importance of using different methods of interpretation to appeal to those with different needs:

'IN PREPARING THIS PROPERTY FOR PRESENTATION TO THE PUBLIC, THE NATIONAL TRUST WANTED TO PORTRAY THE HOUSE IN AS ATMOSPHERIC A WAY AS POSSIBLE'



- Pre-opening trial tours gave the opportunity to test the best method of touring the house – should it be free flow? Guided with one escort? Guided by many volunteers? We settled on the final option, as it adds to the character of the visit.
- An introductory video allows those with little or no knowledge of Hardman to feel at ease with their surroundings, whilst including some of Hardman's photographs to introduce the style of his work. Produced using a film company based in Scotland, it drew upon their experience, including the option of subtitles for hard-of-hearing visitors.
- Audio memories of the former members of staff allow an atmospheric insight into the busy environment of a photographic studio.
- The Discovery Room includes static interpretation panels used to convey key information regarding the photographic process and television monitors showing a variety of photographs – this is in direct response to visitor requests to see more images.
- Handling equipment is used to enhance visitor interaction with the collection. This equipment is not original to the property but was sourced from the citizens of Liverpool through local radio appeals. This enhanced our connections with the community whilst improving our interpretation mediums.
- A virtual tour of the property was commissioned to allow those visitors with access limitations to view the entire house from the ground floor. This included a 360 degree view of each room, along with all audio recordings and photographs on display.

'DEVELOPING' THE EXPERIENCE

The property has now been open for over two years, and has established itself as a quality visitor attraction, and a great addition to the culture of the city of Liverpool. In this time, it has been twice awarded the accolade of Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme, administered by VisitBritain. We now have the opportunity to develop (no pun intended!) the visitor experience in the house. Next season, visitors can have a digital photograph taken in the studio in the black and white, traditional style. This will be printed and mounted, ready for collection at the end of the tour – in stark contrast to Hardman's business, when clients frequently had to wait months to see their portrait! A small events programme has also been designed, including family friendly days, to increase the appeal of the property.

The house and its contents present the most complete record of a photographer's studio open to the public, whilst the photographs offer a complete record of a city and countryside through many years of change. Would Mr and Mrs Hardman have approved? As members of the National Trust, they certainly approved of our values – and, of course, we have carried on with their principles. We haven't thrown their food rations away either!

Jennie Cochrane is Custodian of Mr Hardman's Photographic Studio.

ABOVE: 1950s life is typified in the Hardman's cramped kitchen.

BELOW: An introductory video sets the scene.



WAR AND PEACE AT ABERYSTWYTH CASTLE

Stuart Evans looks at wonderful mosaics made by local people to interpret their past in a project organised by Ceredigion Museum.

One of the first things that visitors do when coming to Aberystwyth is walk the promenade and take in the sea air. Local people stroll the mile and a half long prom regularly, no matter what the weather. This takes them past the ruined castle which sits on a perilous rock and commands a breathtaking view of Cardigan Bay. Here you will see the best sunsets. Today the site is little more than a picnic area – but it was once the scene of war and death.

ABERYSTWYTH CASTLE

The walled town and castle were begun in 1277 under Edward I. The streets still carry the names of the Great Dark Gate and East Gate. When Owain Glyndwr took the castle in 1405, Prince Henry tried to take it back using canon, possibly for the first time in Britain. Aberystwyth Castle was used as a Royal Mint in between 1639 and 1642 for Charles I, with silver being supplied from the local mines. During World War I a circle of stones was placed in the castle by the Gorsedd of Bards for the National Eisteddfod. And in 1988 a human skeleton was found within the castle during excavations.

BELOW:
This mosaic was made by the Young Archaeologist Club who meet at the Ceredigion Museum.

OPPOSITE ABOVE:
The puppet show *George and the dragon*, part of the final celebrations.

OPPOSITE BELOW:
The Treaty with France, a mosaic made by Llwyn-yr-Eas After School Club.



'MOSAIC IS A TECHNIQUE THAT APPEARS IN MANY PARTS OF ABERYSTWYTH AND IS KNOWN TO BE LONG LASTING AND DURABLE'

MOSAIC PANELS

The project was devised by the staff of Ceredigion Museum in conjunction with the local community. The aim was to create a series of nine mosaic panels illustrating aspects of the castle's history. Pod Clare, who has worked on a number of local arts projects with various groups, was asked to lead the project.

The initial plan was to create nine mosaic panels, mainly because there were nine alcoves already in the wall along the promenade below the site. When these were checked by the county Health and Safety Officer, it was deemed unsafe to use two which were very near a sharp bend. So two of the mosaics had to be placed in a larger 'walk in' alcove at the end of the series.

ARTISTS, ALL

The elderly and the young, those with special needs and learning difficulties, people who are under-confident, young offenders, young archaeologists, people who are on rehabilitation programmes, lifelong learners and some people with previous craft and art skills made the mosaics. It was easier to target local groups which already existed and had showed an interest in this type of work with previous projects, although we did approach some new groups too. One mosaic was made by the public at open access sessions.

Stuart Evans of Ceredigion Museum undertook the research and design with advice given by David Browne from the Royal Commission of



Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, who was in charge of the castle excavations. The designs include words and pictures together with reference to Ceredigion Museum. Stuart chose suitably dramatic visuals pinpointing key issues in the long history of the site. Words in Welsh and English are included in the mosaics and each is headed with an appropriate date.

The panels are clearly visible from the promenade. Each is cemented to the brickwork at the back of each alcove and needed to be well fixed due to the very exposed nature of the site. Mosaic is a technique that appears in many parts of Aberystwyth and is known to be long lasting and durable.

WAS THE PROJECT A SUCCESS?

We worked closely with the local community groups and encouraged those who took part to investigate their local history. They visited Ceredigion Museum and the Aberystwyth Castle ruins. People were stimulated by this and enjoyed the process of creating something that

will be a permanent feature in the town. Ceredigion Museum plays a key role in the cultural life of the area and has recently focused on working with community groups. This project is part of an initiative to include a wider audience in the work of the museum and to have a more visible presence at the castle grounds.

HOW DID YOU COMPLETE THE PROJECT?

We were very fortunate to be supported by: Aberystwyth Town Council; Arts Council of Wales; Communities First (Welsh Assembly Government); Prince of Wales Trust; On Common Ground (Heritage Lottery); Ceredigion



County Council and Cymal (a division of the Welsh Assembly Government for Archives, Libraries and Museums).

We held a day of celebration on 2 September 2006 at the castle. This featured a medieval re-enactment group and Bryan Paterson who brought eight birds of prey. We also put on an exhibition at the museum about the project and the town silver band came to play some rousing tunes. A huge chocolate cake made in the shape of a castle was shared amongst the participants. We are still in the process of making a children's activity book about the castle and the project.

WHAT NEXT?

We have just started a project focusing on Aberystwyth harbour which is now a 'swish marina'. There is nothing there to make people aware of the long and exciting history of this once vital part of the town.

Stuart Evans is Designer/Technician at Ceredigion Museum, Aberystwyth.

NATIONAL WATERFRONT MUSEUM SWANSEA

Richard Bevins and Steph Mastoris recount how the acclaimed new National Waterfront Museum in Swansea tells the story of the industrial and maritime history of Wales.

The National Waterfront Museum in Swansea opened its doors to the public on 18 October 2005. It replaced Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum and represents a partnership with the City and County of Swansea. By the anniversary of its opening, the new museum had welcomed over 241,000 visitors. For those involved in the project since its inception in 1998, as well as those involved in all manner of ways through to its completion, that was a truly satisfying moment, which was compounded by extremely positive independently commissioned visitor exit survey results. The project cost a total of £33.5m, with major funding coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund (receiving the largest award ever in Wales), the Welsh Assembly Government, the Wales European Funding Office, the Welsh Development Agency and the Wales Tourist Board. The new museum comprises a new build element linked to an existing Grade 2 listed Victorian warehouse that was formerly Swansea Maritime and Industrial Museum. Swansea was selected as the location for the new museum following a comprehensive site options appraisal, considering 'offers' from the length and breadth of Wales.



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- there would be a drive to incorporate technology into the galleries, especially computer-based interactive technology;
- there would be a strong programme of 'product renewal', made possible by the establishment of a protected refreshment budget.

The technological media have actually served to facilitate rather than detract from the human nature of the 15 interpretative themes, and allow for the presentation of a rich, layered approach to content delivery, in which it is possible to link digital images of the objects with the real 3D version, and to combine 2D images, historic film or spoken testimony into a 'complete representation'. The approach also allows visitors to create their own narrative, by choosing which areas to dwell on across subject matter and time.

BROADENING ACCESS

Another aim was to enhance access to the industrial and maritime heritage of Wales across ages and genders. The Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum in Cardiff was based, quite literally, around a small number of large artefacts, which had resonance with a certain audience but could in no way be considered to have a broad appeal. It was this desire that drove the human approach to content and storylines.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

One of the major achievements has been in the use of existing and newly developing technology in the interpretation of the storyline and its related objects. From the outset, the project team made a strong commitment to a number of principles, namely that:

- the storyline would be delivered thematically not chronologically (although themes have their own chronologies);
- the focus would be on people and how they were affected by the processes of industrial and maritime trading, and that those would not only be the people of Wales but also the people who moved into Wales;

BELOW:
The museum draws widely on existing and newly-developing technology.

ABOVE:
Access was a major concern for the project team and exhibition designers.

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RIGHT:
15 interactive themes allow for presentation of a rich layered content.

BELOW:
The First Minister, the Rt Honourable Rhodri Morgan, gets a guided tour of the new museum.

Independently commissioned visitor exit surveys have revealed extremely positive results in enhancing access in the way the project team envisaged. The ages of our visitors for the first six-month period revealed a profile which is almost directly equal to the age profile for the Welsh population. In terms of 'enjoyment', 73% of visitors said that they had a 'very enjoyable' time (our top category), but especially interesting is that more women (75%) reported this level of satisfaction than men (71%).

Negative feedback was in the minority and from written comments seemed mainly to relate to a disappointment that some of the 'old favourites' from the previous museums (in both Cardiff Bay and Swansea) were not in the new galleries. This is reflected in the feedback relating to which parts of the museum had been the unprompted 'best part of the visit' comments. After 'everything/all of it', came the interactive computer elements (18%), followed by the industrial/iron and steel/machine gallery (11%).

MEDIA COVERAGE

In terms of repeat visits, 54% stated that they were very likely and 22% fairly likely to come back in the next 12 months. This was endorsed by a subsequent review which showed that 33% of visitors between April 2006 and September 2006 were repeat visitors. An aspect which has been especially pleasing has been the nationwide media coverage which the new museum has received.

An area where there was a project team desire to make a real access contribution was in meeting, and indeed trying to exceed, the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. The exhibition designers in particular made a highly significant contribution by meeting with and attempting to incorporate the needs of members of a local access group, who reflected a broad range of access issues.



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There was a genuine aim for total inclusivity and we believe this was met to a large extent. This is being followed through in the operational protocols developed by the visitor services team.

KEY LESSONS

A number of important lessons have been learnt during the life of this project. The main ones are:

- secure strong political support for major projects;
- establish a full design team early in order to maximise cross-discipline collaboration and fertilisation;
- maintain and regularly review a costed risk register;
- establish early that sufficient expertise are available in-house and, if not, be prepared to fund external expert advice;
- develop a realistic, sustainable business plan based on operation experiences (and allow for unexpected cost increase – e.g. utilities costs!);

- establish and preserve a post-opening contingency budget;
- avoid being forced into a 'premature' opening;
- communicate regularly with key stakeholders through scheduled presentations;
- maintain internal communication with the concepts team, especially in relation to establishment of text/graphic/AV turn around times and sign-off process;
- do not underestimate the importance of a smooth, costed transition from project to operation (we allowed 12 months overlap of Project Leader and Head of Museums operations);
- be careful not to disappoint by raising expectations above the deliverable.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Changes to the core displays between 2007 and 2009 will aim at addressing issues raised in the visitor feedback and advancing the opportunities for formal and informal learning. Further discussion of contemporary industry and innovation in Wales will be added. A priority for the temporary exhibition programme will be to extend the museum's profile beyond the south of Wales and foster relationships with industrial heritage organisations, sites and museums.

Richard Bevins was Amgueddfa Cymru, National Museum Wales Project Leader, and worked on the project from inception to delivery and opening. Steph Mastoris is Head of Museum, National Waterfront Museum.



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THE THREADS OF TIME

Nigel Wright describes how a celebrated exhibition explains how Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury, used textiles as a symbol of her wealth and status at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire.

The story of Hardwick Hall is very much wrapped up in the story of one remarkable woman, Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury, usually known as 'Bess of Hardwick'. The first part of the Threads of Time provides an introduction to Hardwick and to 'Bess'. As well as answering some basic questions (who built Hardwick?) the room known as 'the Butler's Pantry', contains touch screen computers and various interactives designed to inform people, primarily through touch, about the difference between various textiles to prepare them for their visit through the house.

RARE TEXTILES

In the 1590s, when Hardwick was built, it was the richness of the furnishings that emphasised Bess's status and wealth. Visitors now move further into Hardwick Hall to the Audit Room, where precious and rare textiles are displayed, still retaining much of their original colour and texture. These original pieces of furnishings are backed up with richly decorated graphics and further interactives, emphasising the way that light fades once gloriously colourful textiles.

The little Muniment Room is next and its adjacent Evidence Room demonstrate where the money came from to build and furnish Hardwick. A fascinating room, containing a vaulted ceiling and almost 400 small wooden boxes, the Muniment Room housed the legal documents relating to the vast business empire Bess created – and which still exists today as part of both the Chatsworth and Hardwick estates.



RIGHT: Children discover different types of textiles.

'WE HAVE ALMOST LOCKED MORE THAN ONE PERSON IN THIS ROOM WHO HAVE BEEN ABSORBED IN THESE FOLDERS LONG AFTER WE SHOULD HAVE SHUT UP SHOP FOR THE DAY'

From this room visitors move through to view the Tobit Table carpet in the former School Room. This carpet is a huge embroidery put together in the 1580s to celebrate the final marriage of Bess of Hardwick, and is interpreted through a dedicated audio guide. The Dukes Room explores the 400 years of Hardwick since the death of Bess and contains the Ivan Turner Miniature Furniture Collection, a remarkable collection of miniature furniture relating to the Elizabethan period.

INCREASING ACCESS

The exhibition has greatly increased physical access to Hardwick, by opening up these six rooms, all on the ground floor of the house. A series of ramps and an ingenious platform leading into the Muniment Room allow access to everyone in this area. The touch screen computers offer access to lots of information about the collection in addition to a virtual tour allowing a glimpse of the upper floors.

To increase intellectual access to the house and its collections, the displays had to at least begin to get over the message that the house and its interiors were at the pinnacle of high society 400 years ago; as a result the graphics are of a high quality, with limited text but strong images and rich colours. The directional focus of the lighting, onto the graphics and objects in the cases, means that even if a visitor just walks through these rooms they should hopefully pick up an impression of wealth and status.

BELOW: A family enjoys the introductory exhibition.



While some visitors with a special interest travel hundreds of miles to visit Hardwick, most come for a day out, and it was a real challenge to satisfy both types of visitors. One of the main ways of doing this was through the variety of display techniques used. The touch screen computers, for example, while incorporating a virtual tour and interactive puzzles for all ages, also contain a lot of detailed information that we just could not get on to graphic panels.

LESSONS LEARNT

One of the chief lessons from the process of putting together this display has been to reinforce the necessity of having one designated project manager. Having too many people involved in the decision-making process can create confusion over who has the authority to make the final decision.

Another lesson reinforced, rather than learnt anew, is the importance of having a variety of interpretative techniques. One of the most satisfying aspects of the project has been to see the way visitors engage with the displays, not just the interactive elements but also the more traditional aspects of the displays. One of the most popular parts of the whole project has been a series of leatherbound folders containing a variety of information in the Dukes Room. We have almost locked more than one person in this room who have been absorbed in these folders long after we should have shut up shop for the day.

Finally, do not forget your front of house team who are going to interpret the displays for you, in our case, largely volunteers. We spent many hours briefing our team of volunteers who help interpret these rooms and it is interesting to

note that the judges commented on the fact that the staff were a major contribution to the success of the project.

The project was funded by a combination of the National Trust, the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and the EU, through their Alliance Sub Strategic Partnership. Project architects were Rodney Melville and Company, Infinite Design provided the design and installation and Stephen Cannon-Brookes designed the lighting.

Nigel Wright is House and Collections Manager, Hardwick Hall.

YEATS AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

Catherine Fahy describes how the Yeats exhibition at the National Library of Ireland showcases manuscripts, publications and personal effects of the Irish poet William Butler Yeats. It uses interactive technology to allow people to engage with these artefacts and to explore the creative process. Visitors absorb the Yeatsian atmosphere arising from careful design and use of colour.

ABOVE:
Verse and vision: listening to a Yeats poem.

BELOW:
Looking through a display case.



THE PROJECT

The Yeats collections, which comprise the manuscripts and library of the poet William Butler Yeats, have been used by Yeats scholars for many years but are not well known to the general public. The quality and significance of the collections, and the desire to bring them to the public as part of the national heritage, led to the decision to mount a major Yeats exhibition. The exhibition opened in May 2006, and will run for three years.

THE CHALLENGE

The main challenge was to find a way of presenting a writer who was very prolific and who led a very active life. Key questions were whether to focus on the life or the work, whether to take a chronological or thematic approach, and how to engage with controversial aspects such as his fascination with the occult and his admiration for fascism as it emerged in the 1930s.

We wanted to convey the magic and the complexity of Yeats. The Yeatsian term 'antinomy' (a contradiction, a paradox), was a key word at an early stage of the project; the contrast between the dreamy romantic Celtic Twilight Yeats and the man of action, constantly embarking on new projects, meeting new people and making new philosophical and spiritual discoveries. And lastly, above all else, we wanted to encourage people to have their own encounters with Yeats, to listen to and read his poems, to engage with his creative process and discover their own.

A LAYERED SOLUTION

The organisation of the material was a compromise between the nature of the exhibition space and our organising principle, which was a movement from outer to inner, both in physical space and through interactive technology. We used concentric paths to allow people to go from the external facts of his life to inner varieties of experience. The outer path



is a non-rigid chronological progression through his life, with thematic clumps; an associated inner path shows manuscripts of his best known literary works. An internal space at the entrance to exhibition, entitled 'verse and vision', offers an immersive experience where visitors can listen to readings of poems accompanied by images – this is one of the most popular parts of the exhibition. A large mock 'book', The Tower encloses a space where visitors can spend time studying Yeats's working methods, and his use of book art as an intrinsic part of his work.

AMBIENCE

This structure was arrived at after extensive discussions with our design firm Martello Media. They paid close attention to the general feel of the exhibition, using colours and graphics to convey mood in an effective way.

'THE INDIVIDUAL ROOMS WERE ESPECIALLY REMARKABLE. YEATS BROUGHT TO LIFE!'

NIAMH O'DONOVAN

'OUTSTANDING EXHIBITION WILL CERTAINLY REVISIT'

EDWINA VAN DAM

RIGHT:
A view of the outer exhibition path.

BELOW:
W.B. Yeats 1865-1939.



As Mark Leslie of Martello puts it, visitors can absorb a lot by drifting through the exhibition in a Yeatsian trance, but the overall layered approach enables them to discover more, indeed as much as they want about Yeats's works and his life.

TOUCH SCREENS

A brilliant interpretative stratagem by Martello, and a major success of the exhibition, is the touch screens which accompany each display case. These allow visitors to explore objects in close-up, go through more pages if the object is a book or a manuscript, and to have access to a timeline of Yeats's life. They, along with the 'Turning the page' installations developed by the British Library, are a brilliant way of providing visitors with an unprecedented level of access to manuscript and other material.

EVOCATIONS

Four 'evocation' spaces, i.e. small rooms designed by a professional set designer, evoking Yeats's study in London, a theatre, a room in Thoor Ballylee, and his library, are very popular with visitors. They also serve as resting places where visitors can watch films on major themes in Yeats's life – his relationships with women, his involvement with the theatre, his occult activities, and his politics. Our brief to the film-maker, Alan Gilsenan of Yellow Asylum Films, included a requirement to present a wide range of opinion and views on all aspects of Yeats's activities, and not to soft-pedal any of the more controversial aspects.

FACSIMILES

Other successful elements are a small collection of facsimiles of documents – his passport, some notebooks and diaries – used by Yeats which visitors can handle and which can also be used as teaching objects. The inside of the giant facsimile book The Tower has a giant graphic showing the process of compiling a book of poetry as well as masterclasses on the writing of specific poems.

VISITOR RESPONSE

Visitors comment very often on the accessibility of reading the manuscripts with the help of the multimedia touch screens. The two 'Turning the page' installations, showing two of Yeats's notebooks are very popular – visitors enjoy reading Yeats's work using this new type of technology. Visitors have also commented that they enjoy the atmosphere that is created by the evocation rooms and the topics discussed in the four films.

DEVELOPING NEW AUDIENCES

The exhibition has resulted in new interest in Yeats in the media, including a newspaper supplement on Yeats published by the *Irish Independent*, one of Ireland's main daily newspapers. An adult education course on



'EVOCATIVE, ENLIGHTENING, TAKES ME BACK TO MY STUDENT DAYS'

ANTHONY DAVIS

Yeats is being run by University College Dublin in the Library, and a series of Yeats plays are being produced. Particularly gratifying is the strong interest shown in the exhibition by the primary school sector, and by adult groups with disabilities who wish to do workshops based on the exhibition.

KEY LESSONS

- Choose a design firm that is flexible, innovative and creative, and willing to listen to client feedback.
- Use a layered approach.
- Provide a varied yet visually congruent visitor experience.
- Recognise the importance of tour guide staff in enhancing the visitor experience.

FUTURE PLANS

- Launch an online version of the exhibition in early 2007.
- Develop a travelling version of the exhibition.
- Introduce new elements to make the exhibition interesting for repeat visitors.
- Continue working with curriculum support groups to build education programmes.

Catherine Fahy is Keeper of Special Programmes at the National Library of Ireland.

COMMENDATIONS



YORK COLD WAR BUNKER

Until 2006, York's Royal Observer Corps Bunker was shrouded in mystery. Allowed beyond the blast-proof doors for the first time, visitors can now see how the UK prepared for nuclear attack during the Cold War. The site is interpreted through a hard-hitting introductory film and guided tours. Projections of original training films are used to evoke the bustle of the building in use and a short exhibition explores how close we were to nuclear annihilation.



THE PHILIPHAUGH SALMON VIEWING CENTRE

Philiphaugh Salmon Viewing Centre is an exciting new attraction for guests to the Scottish Borders, where visitors can watch salmon leap the cauld (weir) and see live under-water images of the salmon on the last leg of their epic migration back to the streams of their birth. The visitor centre hosts a range of interactive interpretation and information displays where visitors can learn about the life cycle of the salmon.



TYNE & WEAR MUSEUMS

Look, Touch, Listen, Smell improves the quality of multi-sensory interpretation across five Tyne and Wear museum venues. Innovative audio tours, touch and olfactory exhibits and trails, tactile static orientation floor plans and pre-visit information packs were developed after consultation with under represented and socially excluded groups, especially blind and partially sighted people, minority ethnic communities and people without English as a first language. The project reaches new audiences and meets the needs of all visitors.

Tyne & Wear Museums (Laing Art Gallery and Discovery Museum, Newcastle; Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens; Arbeia Roman Fort, South Shields; and Segedunum Roman Fort and Museum, Wallsend).

THE GREAT LAXEY WHEEL

The Great Laxey Wheel in the Isle of Man celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2004. Manx National Heritage, as guardians of the monument, undertook a major re-interpretation programme including bold and imaginative signage around the site, a temporary exhibition and a live re-enactment of the original opening ceremony. The theme throughout was to bring the miners, who depended on this great wheel for their livelihood, back to the forefront.



ACROSS THE BOARD

Across the Board was a British Museum Partnership UK touring exhibition forming part of the DCMS/DfES Strategic Commissioning Programme. Tyne & Wear Museums developed the exhibition and its innovative learning programme and hosted its initial showing at Segedunum Roman Fort. Five regional venues came together for the tour. The exhibition comprised game boards and pieces from around the world through the ages and featured 24 of the famous Lewis chess pieces.

