

**Eric Langham argues for
storytelling and beyond**

**Explore storytelling in Bath Abbey, Derbyshire
Woodlands and South Downs National Park**

Naoko Yamada reports from Japan

The Journal of the Association for Heritage Interpretation 29-2 / Winter 2024

Connect



**Read about AHI's
Glasgow Conference and
Interpretation Gold**

Contents



12



20



24



28

Editorial *Bill Bevan*

3

News, Views & Reviews

View from the Chair *Jackie Lee*

4

Interpretation Gold: Celebrating 50 Years of Heritage Interpretation

Eric Langham

5

Industry Digest

6

Globetrotting Association for Interpretation Japan

7

Diversity Sponsored Membership *Barbara Stella Acan*

8

Conference Review *Bill Bevan*

10

Review *Catherine Wright*

12

Interpretation Hacks

Live Interpretation *Paul Hibberd*

14

Sustainable Interpretation *Mary James*

15

Digital Horizons *Chris Walker*

16

Write Track *Bill Bevan*

18

Best-Practice Guidelines Writing interpretation for children and families

19

Storytelling

We Hear You Now: Speculative Fiction as Site Interpretation

Anooshka Rawden & Emily Summers-Mileman

20

Growing Stories of Nature *Gordon MacLellan*

24

Striking the Balance When Storytelling *Howard Miles*

28

Provocative Fellow

Can Stories Change the World? *Eric Langham*

32

Interpretation Research Lab

Gen Z Reimagines Engagement with Archives

Irida Ntalla & Thomas Giagkoglou

36

The Art of Storytelling *Philip Ryland*

40

AHI Engaging People Awards 2025

42

Past Issues *Bob Jones*

43

Cover image: AHI conference delegates learn about the interpretive design behind the refurbishment of The Burrell Collection in 2022.

Photograph by Christine Woodcock, White Oak Photography.



Association
for Heritage
Interpretation

Published by the
Association for Heritage
Interpretation

ISSN 1357-9401

Editor:

Dr Bill Bevan

journal@ahi.org.uk

Copy Editor:

Greer Glover

www.greerglover.co.uk

Editorial Board:

Dr Bill Bevan (Editor)

Dr Philip Ryland (Trustee)

Design:

Neil Morgan Design

www.neilmorgandesign.co.uk

Print:

Henry Ling Limited

Interpretation Journal is published
twice a year in Summer and Winter.

The opinions expressed by authors in
this journal are not necessarily those
of the committee of AHI.

Advertising rates (2024)

(member/non-member)

Full page £284/£394

Half page £165/£236

Quarter page £104/£148

Eighth page £40/£50

Discount is available for a series of
adverts. To discuss advertising with
AHI through the journal, website,
conferences and events, please
contact admin@ahi.org.uk

Membership rates

Fellow £75

Full Member £75

Associate Member £62

Student Member £32

Corporate Member:

Corporate Memberships will receive
two copies of the AHI journals and a
free listing in the suppliers directory.

Community: for community groups,
charities, institutions or companies
who have an operational budget less
than £100,000 – £80

Institutional: for all heritage
institutions – £175

Commercial: for companies and
consultants – £175

Overseas postage supplements (1 copy)

Europe airmail £12

World airmail £12

For more information about
the Association for Heritage
Interpretation

email: admin@ahi.org.uk

or write to:

The Administrator,
AHI, 25 Recreation Way, Kemsley
Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2RD.
Tel: +44 (0)1795 436560.

Individuals can join AHI as Associate or Student
Members or can apply to be elected, subject to
qualifications and experience, as Full Members.
Retired and low-income existing and prospective
members can apply for an AHI sponsored
50% discount on their joining fee, subject to
submission of requested evidence. Businesses
can join as Corporate Members with the same
rights as individual members. All members receive
Interpretation Journal, and other mailings. They
can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can
vote at the Annual General Meeting. Printed in UK
© AHI 2024.

The text, illustrations, photographic images and
design of *Interpretation Journal* are protected by
copyright. You may not reproduce any content
without first obtaining written permission from
the contributors of AHI and AHI.



Editorial

Welcome to Winter 2024. By now many of you will have attended this year's AHI conference, held in Glasgow. Some of you may be thinking ahead to Christmas, traditionally a time for telling tales and sharing stories. It is perhaps apt that storytelling is the theme for this issue of Interpretation Journal.

In This Issue

News, Views & Reviews brings together news from AHI and across the industry. There is exciting news to announce about AHI's new Interpretation Gold project, and the Sponsored Membership Scheme. You will notice that we have only one interpretation membership organisation reporting on their work in Globetrotting this issue. The Canadian-based Interpretive Guides Association was due to feature alongside the Association for Interpretation Japan. Unfortunately, the author had to evacuate their home due to the recent wildfires in Jasper National Park, Alberta, which also affected other members of the Association. We wish everyone impacted by the fires well and I have invited the Association to tell us about their work next year. We also have a report on the conference and a review of the Book of Kells Experience at Trinity College Dublin.

Interpretation Hacks features practical tips on performance storytelling in Live Interpretation, writing narratives in Write Track, carbon offsetting in Sustainable Interpretation and non-linear storytelling in Digital Horizons. We also put the spotlight on AHI's excellent 'Writing interpretation for children and families' best-practice guideline.

Storytelling is central to interpretation. Interpreters tell stories. How can we harness the power of storytelling techniques to meaningfully and emotionally engage audiences? Three case studies give insights into how this has been done in very different contexts and using different interpretive approaches. These focus on how interpretive design frames storytelling at Bath Abbey, creative writing for outdoor audio installations in South Downs National Park, and co-producing new stories about woodlands in Buxton, Derbyshire. You will also find research results and practical tips about storytelling elsewhere in the Journal.

This issue's **Provocative Fellow** is Eric Langham who extends the storytelling theme. He argues that interpreters should ditch key messages for stories and diversify who tells these stories before asking the question – can we move from storytelling to story-making?

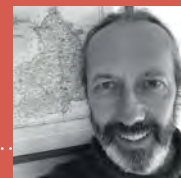
Interpretation Research Lab features Philip Ryland's field study of answers to his question, 'What helps to bring a story to life for you?' at a range of heritage and cultural sites. We also have a report about final year projects by undergraduate students at the London College of Communication

in partnership with York Archives and interpretive designers Bright White Ltd that provides insights into how to make collections relevant to Gen Z.

In **Past Issues**, Bob Jones delves into the Journal archive to bring back into the light previous articles that discussed interpretive storytelling.

I hope you enjoy the issue. The next issue is a significant one. It celebrates the 50th anniversary of AHI by looking back and to the future, at our members and member projects that show how the Association and interpretation **Makes a Difference**.

We always welcome feedback, ideas, article proposals and discussion about the content. Look out for posts about the journal on AHI's social media channels and feel free to email me at journal@ahi.org.uk.
Bill Bevan, FAHI



Bill Bevan, FAHI
Editor, Interpretation Journal,
and Interpreter, inHeritage.

This issue we feature the following contributors:



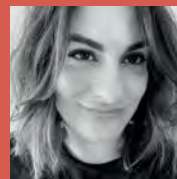
Eric Langham
Barker Langham



Gordon MacLellan
The Creeping Toad



Howard Miles
ABG Design



Anooshka Rawden
South Downs National Park
Authority



Emily Summers-Mileman
South Downs National Park
Authority

View

from the Chair

Hard to believe that my first year as Chair has gone by and with it, our Glasgow Conference. It is always a delight to meet old friends and make new ones, too, and welcome them into our amazing association. We listened, we sang, we discussed, we disagreed at times, we ate (and drank a little!), we laughed, we looked, we observed – and then we all went home refreshed by the experiences we had had. Here's to Cardiff next year.



Friends old and new at the conference.

It was also a great pleasure at our AGM to congratulate Bill Bevan, Iona Keen and Steve Slack on recently achieving AHI Fellowship.

Naturally the talking point in Glasgow was 'Interpretation Gold' and that we successfully secured £150,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This will enable AHI to celebrate its 50th year with the fantastic Interpretation Gold project led by Lyndsey Clark, project manager. Alongside all the elements that are part of the project, growing our membership is a key component which, as I have highlighted before, is very important to the future of AHI. With this project, we can confidently look to the future and the next 50 years as a more diverse and resilient organisation. Eric Langham explains the project and Lyndsey introduces herself on the page opposite.

Next year is also Awards Year and at the conference we launched the new round of the Engaging People Awards. The closing date is 30th April 2025. New to the Awards is a fixed closing date – there will be no extension this year. I urge those of you with completed projects to send in your entries as soon as possible. The entry form and all the required information is on our website.

Talking of awards, our overall winner of Interpretive Excellence 2023, Stromness Museum and its project 'Calling Out Climate Change' and project leader Katy

Firth, provided the AHI contribution to the Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation's Excellence in Heritage Interpretation Webinar Series in August. Katy has well and truly put Stromness and the island of Orkney on the world map with her outstanding presentation. Feedback has been superb, many making the point that the museum's work on climate change was an incredible achievement for a small museum. As a result of this webinar, Katy and other Stromness Museum staff are now in conversation with the Natural History Museum of Utah, which has undertaken a similar project. For me this particular dialogue as a result of our awards and webinar demonstrates the importance of sharing best practice on a world stage.

I have enjoyed the experience of being Chair and am looking forward to 2025 and our 50th anniversary celebrations.



Our three new Fellows. Left to right: Steve Slack, Bill Bevan, Iona Keen.



Jackie Lee, MAHI

Chair

Association for Heritage Interpretation

Interpretation Gold: Celebrating 50 Years of Heritage Interpretation

We are thrilled to announce that AHI has secured £150,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for an ambitious project to mark its 50th anniversary in 2025.

What is the Project About?

In reflecting on our five decades of achievements, we've also set our sights on the future. Interpretation Gold will be a springboard for innovative ideas that align with the evolving needs of our profession. Here's how we plan to drive meaningful change:

Grow and Diversify

Diversity is at the heart of AHI's mission moving forward. The strength of our organisation depends on broadening the voices within it. This project aims to attract more small-scale community memberships, targeting those under-represented in the heritage interpretation sector.

Protect

Our heritage is rich and safeguarding it for future generations is a priority. We will digitise our journal archive of 50 years to create a lasting, accessible resource for all. An oral history project will capture the stories of pioneering figures in the field.

Exchange

In response to member feedback from our 2023 conference, we are launching a 'freecycle' programme, a groundbreaking initiative that promotes resource-sharing among our community. Members will be able to gift surplus or unwanted interpretation materials – display cases, signage and even entire exhibits – to other members. This will foster a circular economy and help reduce inequalities in access.



Photo courtesy Amgueddfa Cymru/Museum Wales

St Fagans: A key partner for AHI's landmark 50th Anniversary Conference in 2025.

Celebrate

The 50th anniversary is also a rallying point for our community. It provides the perfect opportunity to reflect on our journey, celebrate our successes and renew our commitment to the future.

Looking Ahead

Interpretation Gold is a bold step toward the future, more than just a commemoration of the past. We invite you to join us on this exciting journey and be a part of AHI's next chapter.

Here's to the next 50 years!



Introducing Lyndsey Clark

Interpretation Gold Project Manager

I am a freelance museum and heritage interpretation consultant and project manager. I am passionate about community engagement and high-quality interpretation. I have been a member of AHI for many years and I am very excited about the opportunity to help the Interpretation Gold project celebrate our past and secure the future of AHI.

Our heritage is rich and safeguarding it for future generations is a priority.

Active Storytelling at The Bowes Museum

The Curiosity Project is a co-production project at The Bowes Museum, County Durham. As a result of co-production, the museum has transformed how it views its collections. Objects are no longer seen as static artefacts to be passively observed; instead, they are active participants in the storytelling process. The project has five key lessons for successful co-production.

<https://bit.ly/BowesMuseum>

STEM Storytelling

Here are two guides to using storytelling to teach science, technology, engineering and maths, which have relevance to science engagement and heritage interpretation.

<https://bit.ly/STEMStory01>

<https://bit.ly/STEMStory02>

Narrative Reversals

Research has shown that an important element of successful storytelling is narrative reversal. This describes a key turning point in a story from positive to negative, or vice versa, such as when a successful protagonist faces a challenge or someone is saved from danger. It is a technique worth considering to give interpretive storytelling more impact.

<https://bit.ly/PhysNRev>

<https://bit.ly/SciNRev>

Scotland's First Fully Digital Museum

The Scottish Historic Buildings Trust has announced proposals to turn Leith Custom House in Edinburgh into a digital-only museum. It will also house community-creative studios for artists and makers, alongside events, conference, commercial and retail spaces. The results of a late-summer consultation may be available when you read this:

<https://bit.ly/SHBTLeith>

Narrative Transportation

Research into how cultural products influence social media interactions on a music streaming platform in China have produced results that are applicable to interpretation. If we substitute stories or messages for songs, there are three key takeaways, especially for interactive digital platforms.

- Autobiographical narratives and emotions amplify impact.
- Cultural objects gain local influence through their ability to evoke users' emotions and memories.
- When engaging with culture on shared online media, people are not merely engaging with the content itself but also the voices and stories of others.

<https://bit.ly/NatureNT>

Engagement for Nature Recovery

The Agile Initiative and the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery have created a guide to engagement that members in all fields may find useful. It covers engagement techniques from consultation to interpretive events and activities, as well as evaluation.

<https://bit.ly/EngNatRec>

Climate Change Engagement Award

A joint initiative between the Royal Meteorological Society and British Antarctic Survey has been awarded the Outreach & Communication Award 2024 by the European Meteorological Society. Of relevance to interpreters are the techniques used to successfully consult with and engage communities to understand a subject, and be motivated to act by linking experts with key community leaders and groups. A case study with lessons learnt is at the end of the following article:

<https://bit.ly/RMS-CCEA>

D-Day Exhibitions

'Legacies of D-Day' and 'D-Day and the Battle of Normandy' are two linked exhibitions at the British Normandy Memorial in France running until June 2027. The former tells personal accounts of D-Day, while the latter is a 12-minute video of one person's journey by sand artist Kseniya Simonova.

<https://bit.ly/DDayExhib>

UNESCO Learning Landscapes

UNESCO has teamed up with Interpret Europe to improve interpretive planning and delivery at its designated sites in Europe. The aim is to 'enhance the synergy between the conservation of cultural and natural heritage and the promotion of education for inclusive, sustainable, and resilient societies'. As well as benefitting the chosen sites, UNESCO hopes that the sites will be exemplars for 'value-based' heritage interpretation.

<https://bit.ly/UNESCOCLL>

Video Games, Internet Culture and Cultural Heritage

A review of the connections between video games and heritage sites. The author looks at heritage references in video games, museums who create video games or reference game fandoms, opportunities provided by video games, and the barriers to cultural collaborations with video games.

<https://bit.ly/VidGamesIC>

If you have anything you would like to submit to Digest, please email journal@ahi.org.uk. Deadline is Friday 28th February for publication in June.

Globetrotting

News, Views & Reviews

Japan

Growth of the Association for Interpretation Japan

Contributing to a sustainable society through professional development is at the core of the Association for Interpretation Japan.

The Association for Interpretation Japan (AIJ) is a non-profit organisation that serves as a nationwide hub for interpretive professionals to expand their networks. It offers a range of professional development courses and acts as a consulting group for interpreter and tour guide training, as well as interpretive planning. The organisation aims to contribute to a sustainable society by enhancing the quality of the interpretive profession and applying interpretation across various settings in Japan. It started accepting members in 2024 and currently has 108 members.

Since its founding as a non-profit, and originally non-membership organisation in 1994, AIJ has provided a variety of training programmes and workshops. One of its key international initiatives is the Japan-US Park Interpretation Training Seminar, which has been organised in collaboration with the US National Park Service since 1995. This seminar has seen participation from Japanese interpreters, academics, tour guides, and local and national officials at national parks in the US.

Professional development is a major focus for AIJ. In 2022, the organisation underwent significant restructuring to identify the essential skills, knowledge and competencies required for interpreters, and to develop new training content. As a result, AIJ now offers the following courses on a regular basis:

- Introduction to Interpretation Course
- Interpreter Training Seminar Guide Course
- Interpreter Training Seminar Director Course
- Trainer Workshop
- Interpretive Planning Course.

Most courses are available online, enabling individuals nationwide, including those on islands and remote areas, to participate and network with other interpreters. Since 2022, 255 people have completed guide courses, 19 trainers have participated in trainer workshops and 64 individuals have joined the planning course.

Another major activity is the annual Interpreters' Forum, which has been held online since the Covid pandemic. The forum features keynote speeches and concurrent sessions on interpretation practices, research and discussions, and in 2024 engaged 109 interpreters, tour guides, academics, and national and local officials. The forum is a key event for professionals to stay updated on the latest issues and to network.

AIJ is excited to inspire and engage professionals in Japan and to expand its network both nationally and internationally.



Hitoshi Nishimura

Interpreter Training Seminar Director Course held at Kiyosato, Japan, 2024.



日本インタプリテーション協会
Association for Interpretation Japan



Naoko Yamada, PhD

Board member of AIJ and Associate Professor
Kanazawa University, Japan.
<https://interpretation.jp>

Diversity

Sponsored Membership Scheme

In the run up to the AHI's relaunch of the Diversity Sponsored Membership Scheme this winter, Trustee Barbara Stella Acan discusses diversity with recipients of the scheme Julie Samuels and Dr Norma Gregory, and Trustee Gav Glencorse.



Julie Samuels.



Dr Norma Gregory.



Gav Glencorse.

Barbara: Please tell us about yourself and what you do.

I'm **Julie Samuels**, a practising artist and academic author. As co-lead of the Augmented Society Network, I have collaborated with the Royal Society of Arts' thematic network on an educational report.

I'm **Dr Norma Gregory**. I founded the Nottingham News Centre CIC in 2013. We provide EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) services and a wide range of professional heritage services, from media production and educational publications to touring exhibitions.

I'm **Gav Glencorse**, one of the three interpretation managers at Historic Environment Scotland (HES). I also sit on the HES Thinking Differently Neurodiversity Forum steering group and have been a Trustee of AHI since 2022.

Barbara: What drew you to apply for the scheme?

Julie: The emphasis on diversity in the sponsored membership scheme motivated me to apply, as it suggested a culture of belonging and meaningful contribution for everyone. The 2023 conference being held in Lincolnshire, where I live, provided the perfect opportunity to attend.

Norma: I heard about the scheme after meeting the former AHI Chair Beth Môrafon. The word 'diversity' in the name of the AHI membership scheme gave me the confidence to apply and I'm glad I did! The scheme aims to raise awareness of diversity of culture, race, thought, etc., promoting inclusion and access for all through interpretative practice.

Barbara: What barriers have you experienced in your profession?

Julie: In my profession, living where I do has exposed me to numerous barriers rooted in racism. I've seen how the under-representation of minority groups in leadership roles stifles diverse perspectives

in the historical narratives we present. Storytelling often skews towards a Eurocentric view, leaving marginalised voices unheard and reinforcing outdated stereotypes. The gatekeeping I've experienced – based on connections rather than merit – has restricted opportunities and perpetuated inequity. Being told I'm just ticking a box underscores this reality. Despite my efforts to challenge these issues, the progress I've achieved feels minimal, as many organisations remain resistant to meaningful change.

Barbara: How can AHI be more inclusive?

Gav: I think we can and should all advocate for inclusivity and diversity as part of what we do as an organisation. Early career interpreters almost always tend to be white and middle class. That can only really be addressed by looking outwards and encouraging interpretation as a career choice for all young people at high school level.

Norma: Through more opportunities for networking and a calendar of events, for example. I would hope to become a full member of AHI and mentor new members of the scheme. As such, I think it's important that all members can recognise themselves within the organisation. It's just as important everyone can work together with the same goal of improving interpretation.

Barbara: How would you describe your experience since becoming an AHI member?

Gav: It's been resoundingly positive. I've felt accepted by everyone and have never felt that I was being judged for my differences. Everyone's openness has been the thing that made me join in the first place. Maybe because of my ADHD, I feel that I've always got so much to learn from everyone, which I find incredibly enjoyable. I've felt more comfortable discussing my differences openly.

Julie: Becoming a member of AHI has broadened my understanding of the sector and the incredible diversity of roles, projects and opportunities that exist. I've connected with professionals who are passionate about sharing history and culture in meaningful ways, and I've gained insights into the impactful work being done to make heritage accessible to all whilst shaping our collective identity and future.

Barbara: How has the scheme benefitted you?

Julie: Having access to the archived journals has provided a valuable opportunity to deepen my understanding of the profession. This resource allowed me to critically engage with misleading or derogatory examples of heritage interpretation I have encountered in real life. I felt confident in challenging these portrayals, recognising the importance of accurate and inclusive representation in shaping our collective understanding of history and culture.

Norma: AHI provided me the opportunity to give a talk to delegates at the 2023 conference about interpreting fascinating and untold histories of miners of African and Caribbean heritage. I have had commissions as a direct result of being in the same spaces as my peers. Overall, it's been a great opportunity to connect with interpretative practitioners from across the globe.

Julie Samuels, FRSA
Augmented Society Network

Dr Norma Gregory, DLitt, MA, BA, PGCE, PG Cert
<https://normagregory.com>

Gav Glencorse
Historic Environment Scotland



Barbara Stella Acan
M Moser Associates and AHI Trustee
www.mmoser.com

Applications are now open for the **AHI bi-annual Diversity Sponsored Membership Scheme!**



Association
for Heritage
Interpretation

The AHI seeks to actively broaden the diversity of its members. We are offering up to 30 AHI sponsored places to new members for people who face barriers in the sector due to ethnicity, disability, socio-economic background, gender identity or sexual orientation (LGBTQ+). If you work in natural, scientific or cultural heritage and would like to join the AHI and enjoy its benefits, including access to best-practice guidelines and bi-annual journals, then we'd love to hear from you.

Closing date is 31st January 2025.

Please keep an eye out on our website and socials for how to apply.



Christine Woodcock, White Oak Photography

Conference Review

AHI Members Connect, Engage and Get Inspired

The AHI 2024 Conference in Glasgow asked how we tell stories of the past, present and future as a diverse group of professionals working in many fields. We were promised lively talks, networking, visits and the chance to be inspired, connected and engaged. Did the conference deliver?

Connecting at Conference

Jackie Lee, AHI Chair, opened the conference by welcoming delegates as members 'old, new and maybe'. She emphasised the conference as an opportunity for the AHI family to get together and for everyone to make new friendships. The scale of the AHI conference makes it a personal event, with the chance to meet a large percentage of delegates and the opportunity to have inspiring conversations. Connections are easily made.

I was interested to find out why people came to the conference. I asked a few delegates over the three days. The range of answers are illuminating. Which of these reasons are yours?

- I work alone and want to meet other interpreters.
- I like to see what questions and priorities organisations and museums have for their interpretation.
- I have developed my practice by intuition in a bubble so want to find out what is good practice.

- I'm looking for practical ideas and inspiration to use in my projects.
- It is important to talk with others about challenges and solutions.

AHI Chair Jackie Lee opens the conference.



Christine Woodcock, White Oak Photography

(opposite): Delegates on board the *Glenlee*.

Inspiring Sessions

The first day of the conference featured two keynotes. Duncan Dornan reviewed the regeneration of Glasgow's museums from the 1990s onwards and the impact this has made to the most disadvantaged Glaswegians. Mark O' Neill analysed two of the biggest issues to interpretation today: how we reverse inequality in museum access and how interpreting Britain's imperial past has provoked backlash and deflection instead of curiosity and reflection.

We learnt about too many projects to list them all here. They ranged from Uist's archaeology to botany on board Bristol's *SS Great Britain*; from motivating people to act for nature at the Highland Wildlife Park to co-creating exhibitions with the South Asian community at Hampton Court Palace; from reinterpreting flight at the Science Museum to discovering transgender duels in the Royal Armouries. We were wowed by a demonstration of virtual reality painting and discussed solutions to common challenges encountered in collaborative projects.



Christine Woodcock, White Oak Photography

Delegates making notes during the first day of sessions.

As I sat in these sessions, I saw notes furiously made to catch ideas, examples and lessons. Popular topics to prompt note-taking included audiences, visitor journeys, interpretive themes, exhibition layouts, co-creation and diversity. The most meaningful presentations were those with examples and insights from projects or about big-picture research and evaluation results.



*Delegates learn by engaging with interpretation on the *Glenlee*.*

Engaging Onsite

Thursday was a day of site visits. Delegates experienced the diverse visitor attractions of The Burrell Collection (fine art), *Glenlee* (a tall ship), Glasgow Science Centre (STEM interactives) and the Riverside Museum (transport). We felt wonder by digitally diving into a carpet, fell over in an angled room due to optical illusions and worked together to load sacks into *Glenlee*'s hold. Then we returned to the conference venue and engaged in a healthy and robust debate about what we had seen.

Business and Pleasure

Members attended the AGM and supported the AHI initiative to change full membership to accredited membership and learnt about AHI's Interpretation Gold project, which you can read about on page 5.

We also ate well, connected over shared singing of sea shanties and listened to traditional folk music.

Mission Accomplished

Jacquie Gilson shared some closing thoughts. She asked us if we had felt connected with other people, been inspired by projects or engaged with ideas. There was a resounding yes to each question from delegates.

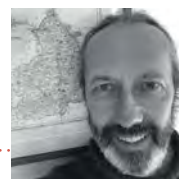
I certainly felt that we all achieved Jackie Lee's hopes for the conference, to feel part of the wider family and to make new connections. I clearly remember how I felt when I attended my first AHI conference in

2008. I was welcomed by everyone I met and was grateful for the lack of barriers between me as a newbie and the AHI trustees of the time. Sixteen years later, I still relish renewing the friendships I have made at AHI conferences in the years in between and of meeting new people.

I look forward to seeing you in Cardiff next year. The 50th anniversary conference is in the Welsh capital from 8th to 10th October 2025. It should be an event to remember.



An animated discussion about wayfinding at the Riverside Museum.



Bill Bevan, FAHI

Editor, Interpretation Journal, and Interpreter, inHeritage.

REVIEW

The Book of Kells Experience Trinity College Dublin

In recent years, immersive visitor experiences have surged across cultural institutions worldwide. From Van Gogh's swirling starry nights to light shows in medieval cathedrals, these digital spectacles promise to transform how we engage with art and history.

But what happens when this technology meets one of Ireland's most important cultural treasures?

The Book of Kells Experience at Trinity College Dublin offers a compelling case study in how digital technology can enhance engagement with a centuries-old manuscript, housed in one of Ireland's leading cultural institutions.

I was eager to explore the fusion of medieval artistry, cutting-edge technology and academic prestige in the expanded visitor experience and examine how it enriches our understanding of the *Book of Kells* and its home in the iconic Old Library.

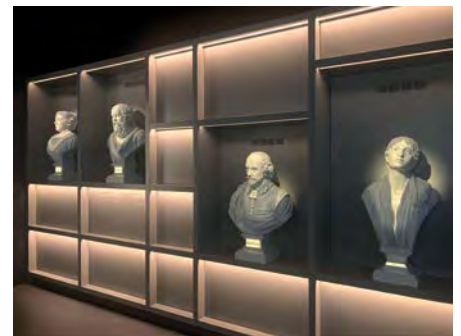
Expanding the Existing Experience

The new experience is a result of the Old Library Redevelopment Project: a once-in-a-generation conservation effort to preserve the 18th-century library and its

vast collection. The opportunity has been taken to enhance the visitor experience across Trinity's campus, using digital tools to breathe new life into the famous illuminated manuscript and its historic home.

The visit begins in the familiar exhibition space, where panels tell the history of the *Book of Kells*. This often overcrowded space has been in situ for some decades (and is due to be redesigned later in the project), but it provides written context for the manuscript and its significance in medieval European art.

From here, visitors are funnelled to the dimly lit Treasury, where you can see two folios of the *Book of Kells* on display. This sudden encounter with the manuscript feels almost underwhelming, yet it reinforces the need for the expanded visitor experience to enrich access and engagement with this cultural treasure.



Visitors eavesdrop on the engaging conversation held between these great historical figures.

Reimagining the Long Room

The next stop is the Long Room of the Old Library, often cited as 'the front room' of Ireland. Now, with the conservation project underway, most of the library's 200,000 books have been temporarily removed. The shelves stand empty, offering a unique view of this historic space.

Yet this absence is turned into an experience in itself. Large screens hang amongst the shelves, depicting the delicate conservation process. These subtle interventions are extremely effective, offering a behind-the-scenes glimpse into a process often hidden from public view.

Most impressively, at the far end of the room, floats *Gaia*, an illuminated replica of Earth created from NASA images. While I found artist Luke Jerram's installation about the beauty and fragility of the Earth (and our collective responsibility to protect it) somewhat out of place in this context, the installation is, nonetheless, a striking visual centrepiece amidst the library's empty shelves.



A breathtaking 360° experience transports visitors through the history of the Book of Kells and immerses visitors in the spiritual significance of the Gospel book.

The colourful and ornate illuminations appear to lift from the manuscript and direct the visitors to the standout immersive experiences.

The Immersive Experience

The experience continues in a temporary structure on campus as a digitally-led immersive journey into the illuminated pages of the *Book of Kells* and the Old Library.

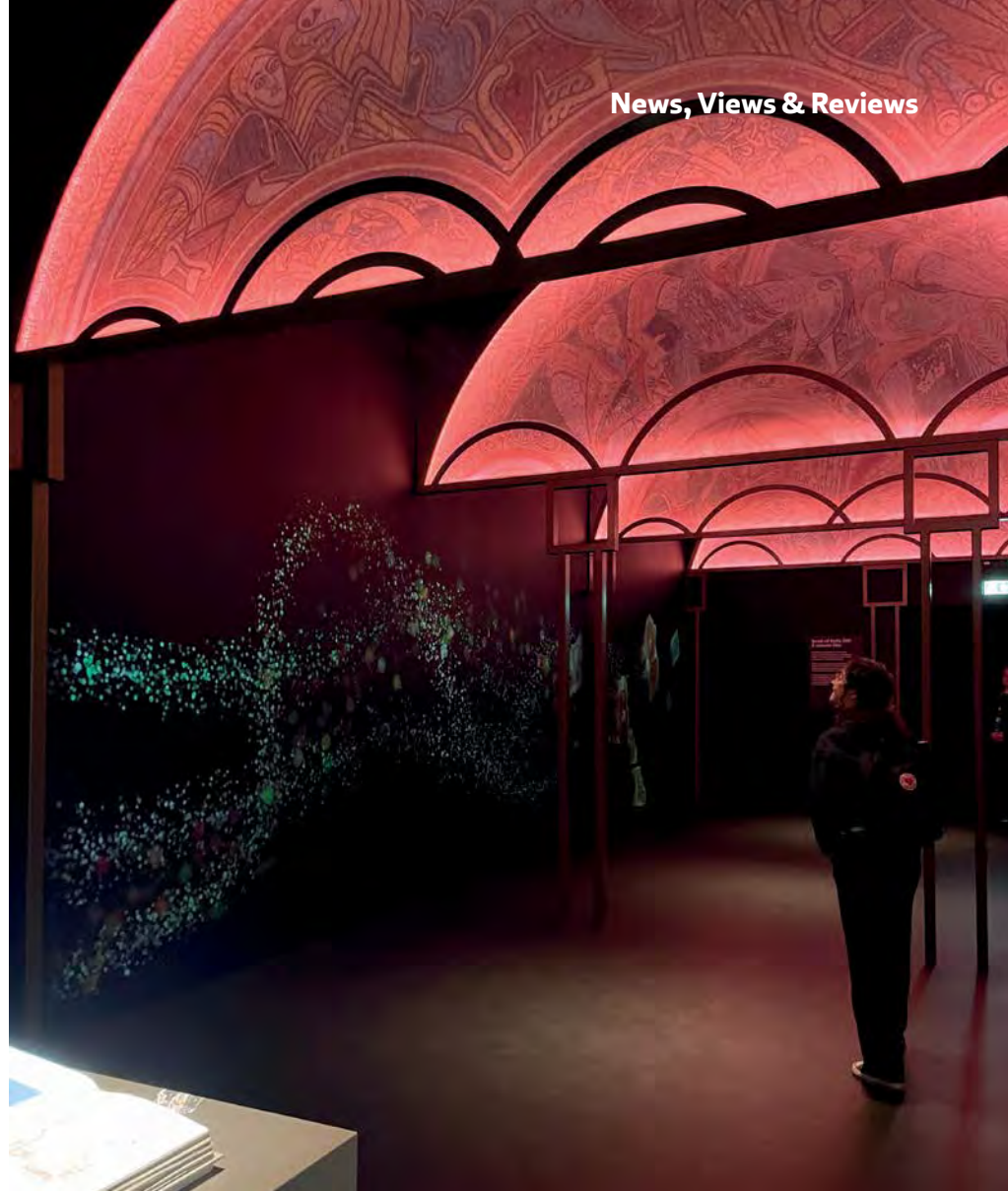
Starting in a room mostly drained of colour (a notable contrast to the colour-rich immersive spaces to come), 'The Secret Life of the Collection' features replica artefacts from the Old Library, newly invigorated with bespoke audio scores and visual effects.

One wall is lined with models of storage boxes that appear to contain the many thousands of books from the library. Each is labelled with an imaginative description and QR code (which links directly to the digital resource in the library), encouraging visitors to explore Trinity's impressive collection.

Busts of historical figures from the Long Room are animated through projections and well-scripted conversations (you can eavesdrop on Rosalind Franklin discussing DNA with Isaac Newton!). These not only humanise these great thinkers, but also reflect Trinity's role in nurturing thought-provoking discussions for centuries.

Spatially, a digital recreation of the *Book of Kells* is used to guide visitors, with vibrant illuminations that seemingly lift off the page and travel along a transition space that draws visitors into the standout 360° immersive room. This uses stunning animations to envelop visitors in the story and pages of the *Book of Kells*. Illuminations leap across the walls and floors, accompanied by a bespoke soundscape and voice-over narration that conveys the manuscript's artistry and spiritual significance. However, the experience isn't without issues: often visitors enter midway through, disrupting the narrative flow, and some had to leave early due to feeling nauseous in the space.

The final immersive area recreates the grandeur of the Long Room, using animated projections to bring the stories and contents of the library to life. The seamless blending



of past, present and future conveys Trinity's status as a continuous hub of learning and creativity.

Takeaways from the Experience

The Book of Kells Experience represents a bold step for one of Ireland's most renowned cultural institutions. With minimal copy and a range of digital interventions, the experience relies on striking visual storytelling to provoke emotion through colour and design – much like the illuminations in the manuscript itself.

Yet the experience also has its challenges. There are concerns regarding the accessibility of the experience, with the over-reliance on digital interventions and sound spill between spaces posing the risk of overstimulating some visitors.

Furthermore, the perennial debate continues over whether these digital experiences prioritise spectacle over substance. I believe it imparted a strong

sense of the significance of the manuscript, set within the context of the breadth and depth of the Old Library collection as a whole.

The immersive journey is a worthy and much-needed addition to the Book of Kells visitor experience. Providing new avenues for access and engagement, the experience offers a digitally innovative lens to understand this beautiful manuscript, its story in the cultural history of Ireland and its home in the Old Library of Trinity College Dublin.



Catherine Wright

Interpretation Planner at Tandem Design and AHI Young Interpreter 2023.
catherine@tandemdesign.co.uk
tandemdesign.co.uk

LIVE INTERPRETATION

Telling Tales: An Introduction to Traditional Storytelling

Whilst storytelling is a unique art form, the edges between interpretation, education and storytelling are pleasantly blurred. All are rich forms of communication and can complement each other well.

© Joshua Crisp



Shonaleigh Cumbers, a drut'syla (storyteller) in the Jewish tradition.

Starting out as a countryside ranger many years ago, I delivered a fairly standard mix of guided walks and education sessions. But I was lucky enough to work alongside some skilled storytellers, and began to incorporate traditional stories (myths, legends and folk tales) into my own work. It was a pleasant surprise that this was well received – people of all ages do like listening to a story.

Starting Storytelling

There is a rich treasury of source material available to help you weave storytelling into your own practice. *Earthtales* by Alida Gersie and *Storytelling for Nature Connection* by Gersie et al. have been useful books for me. But look and listen out for stories that really appeal to you; you will tell them better. There is plenty of guidance available on how to develop the skills of storytelling – online, in books and via training courses with experienced tellers. Close to home for me, the Scottish Storytelling Centre hosts both performances and training.

Planning, Preparing and Performing

Unsurprisingly, there are many similarities between the delivery of engaging storytelling and effective live interpretation:

- Identify your intended audience.
- Think about what sorts of stories are most appropriate.
- Audience comfort is always vital – unless it's a short story then seating will be required.
- People must be able to see as well as hear.

There are also some differences:

- Storytelling can involve more use of rhythm and tone than live interpretation. Whilst storytelling is not acting, it can include more aspects of performance. The World Storytelling Café has many examples of experienced storytellers in action.
- Arguably, stories are easier for the audience to engage with; there is an invitation for attention, but nothing is demanded. The listener can relax and form their own vision.

- Disturbances are even more disruptive if you're sharing a story. Mobiles on silent! Minimise external noise and visual distractions. Have someone available to deal with any issues that arise – it's difficult for a storyteller to break the story to do this.

Finally, treat the stories with respect and be mindful of those who have passed them on to us.

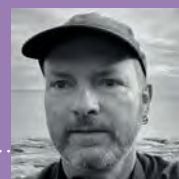
*"Might be you can hang on.
Hang on to this story.
To this earth."*
Bill Neidjie, Kakadu

Discover more...

Scottish Storytelling Centre
www.scottishstorytellingcentre.com

Alida Gersie www.hawthornpress.com/authors/alida-gersie

World Storytelling Café <https://www.youtube.com/@worldstorytellingcafe86/videos>



Paul Hibberd, MAHI

Visitor Services Manager, Forestry and Land Scotland
paul.hibberd@forestryandland.gov.scot

Sustainable Interpretation

Dive into Carbon Offsetting

If you're looking to balance the carbon emissions from your projects or day-to-day activities – whether you're a writer, designer, site manager, you work in print and production, or anything in between – there are straightforward resources out there to guide you in making impactful decisions to support sustainability efforts.

I'm focusing on Ecologi, which we use here at The Way Design, a platform that supports businesses and individuals to achieve carbon neutrality. The platform funds a diverse range of carefully chosen and scientifically verified projects including renewable energy initiatives, reforestation efforts, and community-based programmes both in the UK and internationally, that not only reduce carbon emissions but also promote social and ecological benefits.

Ecologi simplifies the often-complex process of calculating your carbon footprint, whether through their existing system or by developing a bespoke solution tailored to the specific needs of larger or more complex operations. As well as offsetting emissions, Ecologi provides tools to support your efforts to reduce your carbon footprint. You set realistic and achievable goals, and Ecologi tracks your progress. This empowers us to integrate sustainability into every aspect of our work.

There are many other platforms out there which can support your carbon neutral and net-zero ambitions. Here are a few:

- Positive Planet – offers comprehensive services to help measure, reduce and communicate carbon footprint.
- Carbon Neutral Britain – provides proactive solutions by offering simple subscription options.
- Skoot – a platform to purchase verified carbon credits.



Some actions you can take include:

- Switch from using main search engines or browsers like Google to Ecosia.org, which allocates 20% of its profits to initiatives like renewable energy and 80% to planting and protecting trees globally.
- Minimise café food waste at visitor sites using Too Good To Go, selling surplus food at lower prices.
- For work travel, use BlaBlaCar to share rides, thus reducing costs and emissions.

Carbon offsetting isn't the answer for everything but has its place in helping us move towards a greener future.

Find out more...

Ecosia
<https://blog.ecosia.org/ecosia-search-engine>

Ecologi
<https://ecologi.com>

Positive Planet <https://positiveplanet.uk>

Carbon Neutral Britain
<https://carbonneutralbritain.org>

Skoot <https://skoot.eco>

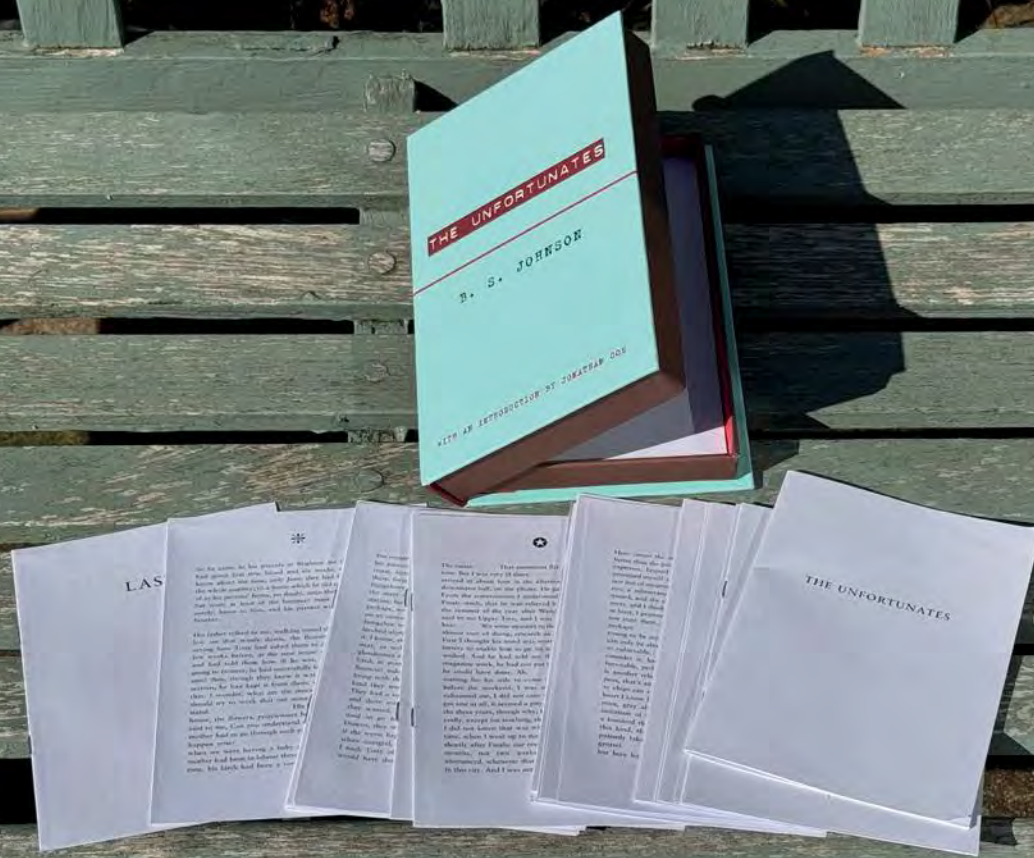
Too Good To Go
<https://www.toogoodtogo.com/en-gb>

BlaBla Car <https://www.blablacar.co.uk>



Mary James

The Way Design
<https://thewaydesign.co.uk>



Digital Horizons

Non-Linear Storytelling – Part 1

I've always been excited by stories that break the rules. One of the rules is linearity – the idea that a story has a beginning, a middle and an end, and that's how you are expected to engage with it.

Non-linear stories require a distinctive mindset to both create and consume. Through working with interactive digital media and being interested in video games, I've realised there are interesting parallels between non-linear stories and interpretive planning, design and content development. In this, part one of a two-part series, I'll introduce non-linear storytelling and why it matters to us as interpreters. Part 2 will explain how it can be applied.

It turns out that non-linear storytelling is related to something called Cognitive Flexibility Theory – a theory of learning with relevance to some theme and topic areas encountered through heritage interpretation.

What is Non-Linear Storytelling?

Here are a few examples from literature:

The Unfortunates by BS Johnson (Picador, 1969)

In the 1960s, some writers were experimenting with non-linear

storytelling. A great example is *The Unfortunates*. It looks like a book from a distance, but inside there are 27 loose chapters. Apart from the first and last chapters, the reader is encouraged to rearrange and read them in a random order.

In the fictional story, a sports journalist is sent to a city on assignment, and the trip triggers memories of one of his best friends, who died of cancer at a young age. Each chapter is a memory of his friend, brought on by immersion in this distantly familiar city that they both knew. It genuinely doesn't matter

in which order you read the chapters, and the apparent randomness of the memory recall is part of the story.

2666 by Roberto Bolaño (Picador, 2004)

A different approach to non-linear storytelling is *2666*. Bolaño intended to publish five separate but connected novels. He died a year before their eventual publication. However, his heirs said they decided to reverse Bolaño's intention and published all five parts as one volume, to 'respect... the literary value of the work'.

The five parts are distinct novels and can be read in any order. Each novel touches on a series of horrific murders, set in different times and countries. This leads the reader to imagine a sixth novel – the actual story of what happened if seen from the perspective of the murderer who links these tales together – a work so gruesome that it is probably best left to the imagination of the reader. It's a work that stays with the reader a long time for the right artistic reasons.

The arrival of interactive media brought new ways to engage with non-linear stories. A pure example is from British video game designer Sam Barlow.

Her Story by Sam Barlow (iOS, Android and Windows, 2015)

The game is based on the conceit that you have access to a cold case file of a murder and can review video interview footage of the suspect Hannah Smith. When the game starts, you're presented with a terminal and can search for interview clips based on keywords. It takes time to get used to the complete freedom that this game provides and it can be disconcerting for some, but you soon discover one of the narrative threads and can follow your own lines of inquiry. Can you find incontrovertible evidence to solve the cold case?

What are the Benefits of Non-Linear Stories?

The reader can approach any part without feeling pressured into reading everything. This is a much more gentle way to encourage engagement with stories.

Because each part has to stand in its own right, it's easier to vary the delivery and thus make it more engaging and enjoyable for the reader.

Being free to choose which part to engage with next offers a sense of fun and agency for the reader, which helps maintain engagement.

How do Non-Linear Stories Relate to Heritage Interpretation?

Interpretive planners and designers map story parts out across a space (an exhibition gallery or a heritage site, for example) yet the order that those story parts are encountered is fundamentally decided by the visitor.

If your heritage interpretation story is linear, then you'll sincerely hope that visitors will engage with the parts in sequence. However, visitors often don't (or can't) follow your ideal flow.



Sometimes there are big crowds that mean unacceptable waits to access a part, or perhaps a part is unavailable to everyone because it is undergoing maintenance.

Like it or not, interpretive stories are discovered in a non-linear fashion.

Coming in Part 2 (next issue):

- What makes a good non-linear story?
- Cognitive Flexibility Theory
- How to plan non-linear content



Chris Walker

Bright White Ltd
www.brightwhiteltd.co.uk

Write Track

Tell Them a Story



© Phil Gradwell, CC BY 2.0

Dragonfly and exuvia.

You can add narrative techniques to your interpretive writing to help your audiences engage emotionally with your subject so that they care about it. This is relevant whether you are writing a museum label or visitor panel or scripting an audio-video installation or live interpretation.

Cause-and-Effect Storytelling

Cause-and-effect storytelling moves your interpretation away from being mostly descriptive by adding drama. In its simplest form, it has the following key elements:

- A protagonist(s). Examples can be a person or an animal.
- A goal the protagonist needs to achieve.
- An obstacle or threat that the protagonist(s) has to overcome in order to achieve their goal.
- A resolution to the story. They may be successful, though maybe they fail.

This form of storytelling was described by Aristotle and has been part of story structure throughout the centuries.

Before writing this Hack, I was watching dragonflies by a river. I wondered; how can we turn a description of metamorphosis from larva to adult into a story? Here is one way to try this.

Descriptive Interpretation

This is an *exuvium*, the skin of a dragonfly larva. At this time of year, you can sometimes find these ghostly remains on tall plants that grow out of the water. Notice the huge jaws: dragonfly larvae are the top insect predators in the water.

The adult dragonfly emerges tired, soft and crumpled from this larval skin and takes about three hours to stretch its wings and harden. Look out for newly emerged, or *teneral*, dragonflies – they are pale grey and have a slow, floppy flight.

A Narrative Version Could Go Something Like This

Every dragonfly makes a dangerous journey from water to the skies. The larva (the protagonist) leaves its safe underwater home and slowly climbs a tall iris to turn into an adult (its goal). It stops high above the water where it pushes its adult body headfirst out of its larval skin. Now comes the dangerous wait: it is unable to move until its soft outer skeleton hardens (an obstacle).

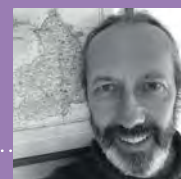
Rain falls. One drop could smash the soft body (a threat), but the shower passes. The dragonfly is ready to fly for the first time. This will be weak and short. If a bird spots it, the first flight will be its last (another threat).

If you see a dragonfly today, it made it (resolution).

Read on...

The Power of Narrative Structure in Storytelling
<https://quietquill.com/unveiling-narrative-structure/>

How to Structure a Story
<https://www.authorlearningcenter.com/writing/fiction/w/plot-planning/6366/how-to-structure-a-story-the-fundamentals-of-narrative---article>



Bill Bevan

Editor, *Interpretation Journal*,
and Interpreter, *inHeritage*.

Best-Practice Guidelines

If you are looking for advice on how to successfully interpret for families and children, AHI has a best-practice guideline for you. 'Writing interpretation for children and families: Inspire, excite, amuse and amaze!' has been created by an expert in the field, Cathy Lewis, MAHI.

Cathy takes inspiration from children's fiction to create her 10-point plan for writing interpretation that captivates visitors of all ages.

1. Make it fun – don't be tempted to link everything to the curriculum.
2. Fun for the whole family – encourage intergenerational conversations by using 'wow' facts, asking questions, getting children to imagine things and enabling them to test adults' knowledge.
3. Get into their world – listen to children, observe them, read their books, watch their TV programmes, browse their websites.
4. Hook them! – children in particular will be put off immediately if your interpretation looks 'boring'.
5. Keep it simple – keep the text short and simple, but still packed with bite-sized information.
6. Engage the emotions – arouse curiosity, make children laugh out loud, gasp in surprise, grimace in horror, shudder at the thought...
7. Use everyday, conversational language – aim to chat, not preach or teach.
8. Relate to their lives – this is important if you're writing about something that a child might never have encountered or experienced.
9. Choose characters carefully – pick a character children can identify and empathise with.
10. Include families without alienating others – have specific family interpretation, or sections of panels, that are clearly aimed for children.

These are just the headlines and short extracts from Cathy's guide. To read all her advice, you can download it from the AHI website. As a member you can register or log on to the website to access best-practice guidelines under Professional Development in the Resources tab.

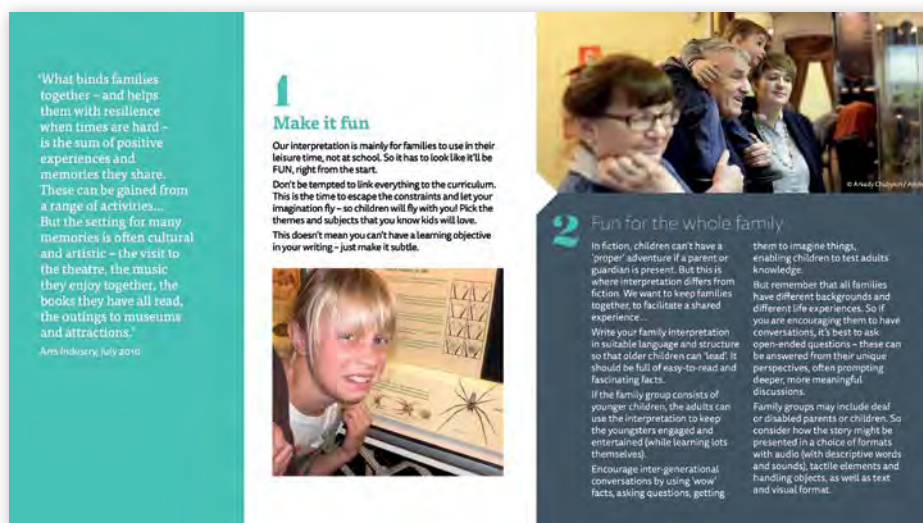
'Writing interpretation for children and families' by Cathy Lewis, MAHI
AHI Best-Practice Guideline 4,
June 2020

Read on...

You can read and download the full version of 'Writing interpretation for children and families' and all our best-practice guidelines – <http://bit.ly/3ESodIW>



...pick a character children can identify and empathise with.



We Hear You Now:

Speculative Fiction as Site Interpretation

*From the taxonomic object label in a museum communicating hierarchies of value, to contemporary storytelling – could the next step be: ‘What if **we** didn’t write interpretation at all?’*

As cultural organisations seek to become spaces for community dialogue, the question of whose voice is heard becomes more critical. Heritage organisations are trusted bodies and our legitimacy rests on solid research, but what stories are told and who is telling them? ‘We Hear You Now’ was a storytelling project that aimed to answer this in the South Downs National Park.

The South Downs National Park comprises 1,600 square kilometres of some of England’s most valued lowland landscapes, spanning East Hampshire, and parts of East and West Sussex. It is an archaeologically rich landscape, and as such is often steeped in the language

of the English pastoral. It has been a space for contemplation and tradition, influencing noted literary figures, including William Blake, Jane Austen, Rudyard Kipling and Virginia Woolf. In 2020, we embarked on a transformative project in partnership with (and led by)

writer and artist Alinah Azadeh, to explore what the landscape means to people today, and to create new interpretation inspired by untold and under-told histories and experiences of rural spaces. Working with Black and ethnically diverse writers, ‘We Hear You Now’ has embedded storytelling in the landscape through audio work that brings together the past, present and future of the South Downs.

We Hear You Now

Funded by Arts Council England and the South Downs National Park Authority, ‘We Hear You Now’ developed a new interpretation trail for Seven Sisters Country Park and the Sussex Heritage Coast. Alinah was committed to increasing the presence of culturally diverse voices in the stories of the Sussex coast, and the project created spoken-word performances by writers from diverse backgrounds, recorded and embedded into the landscape using NFC technology (used for contactless payments) and QR codes on plaques, both of which take you to a YouTube video featuring captioned audio of each story. The location of the plaques coincides with a view or vista that had inspired the writer in the creation of their work.



Bip Mistry

Lead writer Alinah Azadeh at Seven Sisters.

(opposite): Launch of the audio trail at Seven Sisters Country Park.



'We Hear You Now' was only possible thanks to a development period between 2020 and 2022 under the title 'We See You Now', which brought together a community of emerging and established writers thanks to a partnership with Writing Our Legacy, a network of writers, artists and creatives from across the South East, some of whom were first-time visitors to the South Downs. Through workshops, walks, writing under the stars and time with ecologists, archaeologists and environmental campaigners, this period also provided opportunities to perform and platform work to audiences (in person and online) both through public events and networking activities with other creative practitioners, making the development of site interpretation one of dialogue and conversation with a variety of people.

We purposefully worked to a loose brief – as long as the interpretation responded to landscape past, present or future, we were open to how each individual writer wanted to respond. This presented risks, but these were outweighed by the opportunity to platform authentic responses and experiences. The outcome was 16 audio works, 14 of which were embedded into the landscape as site interpretation across the Sussex Heritage Coast, featuring the voices of the writers themselves, as captioned video or audio. Themes varied widely: the shipwrecked



Jade Hylton

We Hear You Now at the Walk the Chalk festival.

"From this highest point, it was proclaimed – look, we stand on the place of our ancestors, we reclaim this land, our bones are here. We belong."

If You Can Imagine by Alinah Azadeh

exotic goods washed up on Sussex shores; Irish labour creating coastal industry (the straight lines of human endeavour set against the undulations of nature's hand); soldiers from St Lucia buried in Seaford in 1915, far from home. Speculative fiction (or writing the 'what if?' – a method of exploring beyond what is real or possible as we understand our society today) imagines what place could be with a change of perspective, a resetting of dialogue, a recognition of shared custodianship.

The Design Process

Once audio recording was complete, we moved on to designing the interpretation plaques with NFC technology and QR codes. We wanted to ensure the plaques were designed in a way that integrated into existing landscape 'furniture' such as gateposts and fingerposts, so this dictated size and shape and ensured we were not adding new posts into the landscape, which is protected by multiple designations.



Anuja Sharma

Writer Razia Aziz with a We Hear You Now listening post.

This approach also avoided complex permissions and consents, and used places like benches or stiles – points where we stop or pause as we walk the landscape, to encourage people to listen to the audio. The interpretation was therefore sensitive to the surroundings but offered an immersive user experience. The plaques themselves were low cost to design and produce, coming in at £2,150 for 60 (covering initial installation and multiple rounds of replacements/spares). Other than logos and brand identity, all text and images on the plaques were selected by the writers.

Lessons for the Future

- **Research doesn't have to be translated into 'formalised' content:** Using speculative fiction to interpret place came with immense opportunity. Each work was grounded in research, much of which was under-told in the narratives of countryside. This ability to wander into futures unmade gave the work the potential to create a gentle activism, that encourages the listener to consider their own perceptions of place.
- **Ensure you give co-design the time and space it needs:** A co-design approach creates rich work, but the journey to produce the final interpretation was far more involved by its very nature and needed time and space, as well as fair financial recompense to freelance writers, to be an equitable experience. The process itself is something to value, not just the outcome.



Anuja Sharma.

Two participants from a We Hear You Now workshop writing in the grass at Seven Sisters Country Park.

- **Recognise that history is not neutral:** Each writer brought to the project their own intergenerational migration experiences and in some cases, research drew on challenging histories of visibility and reclamation. Care is needed when exploring difficult themes.
- **Consider your technologies from a user perspective:** Emerging from the pandemic, the public was very confident with the use of QR codes, but users to date have demonstrated less engagement with NFC technology as a method of accessing digital content.
- **Interpretation at scale needs time to build collective buy-in:** The audio trail spanned land owned by the National Trust, Eastbourne Borough Council, Seaford Town Council and Seven Sisters Country Park, so it was crucial to secure their early support. Coordinating installation across four organisations was at times challenging given differing resources and capacity.
- **Plan in promotion, not just to celebrate installation but to support ongoing public engagement in the content:** Planning for ongoing promotion is crucial, especially as this is interpretation that, by its nature, has been designed to not create a visible impact in the way a large interpretation panel might. We plan to create a new display in the Seven

Sisters Country Park Visitor Centre, focusing on digital offers in the park, including the We Hear You Now trail, so visitors are aware of the added extra experiences available to them.

Impact

Creating this interpretation trail enabled us to work closely with a community of creatives who gave us new perspectives, created positive challenge and revealed stories we simply weren't telling.

The project contributed to cultural change within our organisation, embedding principles for collaboration and co-design, so the focus now in all our partnership work is to centre, wherever possible, community voice over our own.

'We Hear You Now' launched on 24th June 2023. A series of engagement events, including creative writing workshops and public performances, complemented the launch. In total, an audience of 18,132 people attended live performances of the new interpretation, 528 people participated in workshops, and a radio play (BBC Radio 3) reached 69,755 listeners. Access from the interpretation plaques has so far reached 2,544 users. Although we're still building an audience for, and awareness of, this interpretation, the feedback so far has been rich, demonstrating that co-designed interpretation delivers meaningful connection:

"It made me see the South Downs and the Seven Sisters in a whole new light, and I've known this area my whole life, fifty-three years."

"The non-British part of my own cultural heritage has never known how to engage with my local landscape, so I enjoyed being transported."

"Many things that I take for granted like this landscape is experienced so differently. It was eye opening in a very good way."

"[It] gave me a feeling of deep belonging, of 'this place is mine', that I didn't have before."

We are running a competition to secure more in-depth feedback from listeners.

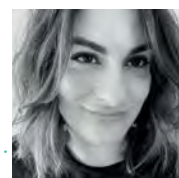
We must close by thanking Alinah Azadeh for the vision and for leading this work with us, and to the writers who reframed the landscape: Dulani Kulasinghe, Razia Aziz, Georgina Aboud, Akila Richards, Jenny Arach, Joyoti Grech Cato, Oluwafemi Hughes, Georgina Parke, Pauline Rutter and Sheila Auguste.

Discover more...

Website We Hear You Now – Seven Sisters

Project film <https://youtu.be/hcqjJaLwZrY>

Writer testimonials <https://youtu.be/AR1JEfgYYZ8>



Anooshka Rawden

Cultural Heritage Strategic Lead,
South Downs National Park Authority



Emily Summers-Mileman

Interpretation and Place Officer,
South Downs National Park Authority

Growing

Stories of Nature

How do we create new stories of the relationship between people and the world they live in? We worked among the trees of Buxton, Derbyshire, where ash dieback was starting to change the nature of our woodland. The aim was to enable members of the local community to create stories from their experiences of the woodlands, facilitated by a professional storyteller.

*We are the people
Who walked,
Who wondered,
Who laughed,
Who talked,
Who held hands,
Who strolled,
Who held their hearts and loves and
hopes
Under Ash tree.*

From *We are the People*

Stories, Old and New

Stories are important. Stories told well inspire... they might not give direction but they will hopefully provoke reflection. With increasing awareness of environmental change and the need for a sea change in our relationship with

the world around us, as a storyteller, I am often asked for 'new stories of nature connection'. In many traditional stories, a relationship with the world around us was taken for granted, and was often fierce, violent and ended with death on all sides. There are relatively few (unedited by modern sensibilities) that invite the sort of reflection currently wanted and many of those that do have strong religious, or spiritual, over or under-tones that don't always sit well with contemporary audiences. Organisations and individuals, however, are looking for new stories that will inform that change in understanding.

The quick answer to my question at the start of this article is quite possibly, 'Yes, we can write a new story' but with a warning that 'stories, like seeds, need time to grow'. Effective stories need time for the ideas to evolve and be eroded by use into working shapes. I think the best that we can do is start the process and see where it goes.

Shaping Woodland 'Stories'

We have been trying to do just that in the project in Buxton in the Peak District. 'We' are the community group Stone and Water and myself as artist and storyteller Creeping Toad. Stone And Water are a small group of artists and environmentalists who organise projects and individual events that 'celebrate the people and landscapes of the Peak District'. We wanted to find ways of exploring and expressing the

relationship between the residents and the woods of the town as ash dieback was making its presence felt and we knew that our familiar treescape was likely to change significantly over the next few years. We wanted to explore emotional responses and, without any dedicated funding, we had no report boxes to tick. We could experiment and see what happened. That was five years ago. Then 2020 arrived and, well, everything changed. The relationship between people and their woods, however, became even more important. With few other places to go, people walked those woods more regularly, and, we hoped, more thoughtfully.

We were hoping to create some of those 'new stories of nature connection' by aiming to grow tales out of people's experiences rather than sit down and compose them. We were not necessarily going for stories with heroes, villains and dramatic plots. We wanted feelings to start that story process with; reflections on what these woods meant to the people who walked them.

At that time we couldn't meet indoors. We rarely met out of doors, but we could collect impressions: phrases written by woodland visitors on strips of paper and left in a box or taped to boards by a car park. We invited comments, offering starting points: How do you feel about the woods, are they important to you? Why? Then added a few questions to turn thoughts around: What might these



A Rhode

Working with puppets takes effort and laughter.

In many traditional stories, a relationship with the world around us was taken for granted, and was often fierce, violent and ended with death on all sides.

A tall tree puppet in the woods that inspired its creation.

woods think of us, the visitors? What do woodlands need from us? Project participants at this stage were anyone who was passing by. We promoted the activity but most of the time there was no organised 'event', just a box and some pens.

The process involved four phases:

Phase 1: 'strips of paper' – visitors writing and leaving notes and phrases collected on boards or leaving them with us if we met on visits to the woods (several months of casual contributions and little direct contact).

Phase 2: more phrases collected and now, with more direct interaction with artists, permanent pens, paper and pieces of fabric gave us pictures of woodland life (over the summer, a few definite 'events' but still with opportunities for casual contributions).

Phase 3: gathering words into poems (a job for a single storyteller) and building tree people puppets using the images (a small public event with 10–15 people helping).

Phase 4: project extended with Buxton Civic Association woodland activities in schools, and events in woodlands for the general public (about 10 days of activity over several months then ongoing occasional events).

Participation was a delight: those first phrases came in as the spring unfolded. When we could start running events, images were gathered as well (Phase 2). Visitors played with paper, pencils and wax or fabric and permanent markers, had clipboards to work on and drew, or wrote, or made rubbings, sketched and scribbled. All of this then fed into woodland poems – rather than stories. Because of the ideas we were receiving, open-ended poems seemed more suited than trying to turn phrases into adventures. The words and small images then inspired two large 'tree-people puppets' (Phase 3). Not part of



© G Wright

Planning puppets, dance and music for filming.

the original plan, they evolved through an event with a small group of members of the public, Stone and Water and another local group, Two Left Hands. Fabric pictures were stitched onto cloth tree trunks and branches. Drawings were incorporated into willow and tissue crowns, and framed cardboard faces inspired by tree bark and wild ideas.

We did not end up with finished pieces. The poems have been used, told, retold, changed. I recite them as part of my storytelling performances. They are displayed at events for people to see and read. Our finished 'tree people' stand 3–4 metres tall. Together with the poems, they have featured in exhibitions including 'Treasuring Trees: Celebrating Derbyshire's Trees' at Buxton Museum and Art Gallery (2022). They put in guest appearances at the Nairn Book and Arts Festival (2022) and at various events in Buxton

itself. Puppets and poems were filmed to produce the *We Are the Trees* video for CelebrationEarth!, a short project run by FaithInvest for World Wide Fund for Nature, UK, in 2020.

As time went on, the project sprouted new twigs. The following summer (Phase 4), I worked with the woodland managers, Buxton Civic Association and visited local schools. There, the tree poems started conversations about what children thought of 'their' woods and how they used those woodlands. In this, we tapped a vein of wonderful childhood geographies: meeting woodland mapped by informal bicycle trails, 'the woods where you can play on big children's swings', 'the woods where your dens don't get knocked down' and 'the woods our parents take us to' which were quite distinct from 'the woods we go to ourselves'.

Lessons Learned

Planning a project like this offers opportunities for both visitors and site managers. For organisations, it reveals the value people place (or don't!) in landscapes and in your work. Most people like to talk, so the opportunity for visitors to share their experiences and be listened to (or read to) is often welcomed. In this project we would meet visitors at informal drop-in events, chatting, listening; not telling people about the woods but asking them for their thoughts, hopes and fears. Having comments on our 'word boards' helped (usually flip chart stands with contributions on strips of paper stuck onto the board). Other people's ideas and comments were often the element that provoked deeper thought and stronger responses, as if these raised the questions that made people think. Other people, without us asking, wrote their own poems, stories or a line or two. There is trust in here as well: most local contributors knew us as individuals and organisations and trusted that we would use their words and that this was not a pointless exercise (or maybe they just liked the chance to say something on paper!)

Ownership of the work becomes important and I'd argue for finding:

- A professional wordsmith: a storyteller or poet perhaps who creates their own material (as well as using traditional material) but one who...
- Will respect the original material and not try to shoehorn it into their view of how a story or a piece of collective writing should be and...
- Who will then let it go. I have worked on projects where we have suddenly found the storyteller decides they own any material produced and the whole enterprise gets bogged down in intellectual copyright snares. Writers in this process should be creative technicians not divas.

Most people like to talk, so the opportunity for visitors to share their experiences and be listened to (or read to) is often welcomed.

I also advise that you:

- Trust the visitors and the project's creative process. If the ideas (phrases, picture, then puppets and later maps, in this case) work then the chances are they will suggest paths that hadn't been there in the original plan.
- Be flexible: both in what you want and in your own approach to place, people and activity.
- Don't get too hung up on what you think the outcome should be. Consider how you might accommodate uncertainty and unpredictability in a project plan: 'co-creation' is unpredictable!
- Be bold: embrace those unexpected moments.
- Trust your visitors: they will join in!
- Ask the questions that might seem awkward: people can always not answer them (such as 'What do you think the woods think of us, their visitors?')

Stories Grow and Change

Our stories grew. Out of the schoolwork and then story sessions in the woods, we gathered small snippets of 21st-century folklore. There was 'the tree that...', 'the hollow where...', the places where you always fall over...' Four years on, the original Tree poems are still being told. Those odd snippets appear in other stories. Several of them are germinating into new stories in their own right: the children who turned into trees (this was a conscious choice), the rabbits who turned into squirrels, the pine tree that grows hedgehogs. A whole series of the misadventures of the Pirate Mice of Gadley Woods.

The poems were a beginning and that is what we need just now. Not finished stories defining new relationships with the world but starting points to encourage us to think, reflect and find our own ways of expressing relationships, telling new stories.

*We are the trees
Who grow the leaves,
Who hold the birds,
Who paint black buds on grey fingers,
Who rattle our keys,
Who lift our trunks,
To raise the clouds.*

...

*We are the trees
Who dread the wind.*

...

*We are the trees who
Grow the keys of hope.*

From *We are the Trees*

Discover more...

Links to the full texts of *We are the Trees* and *We are the People*, the *We are the Trees* video, and details of partner organisations can be found at <https://bit.ly/WordsAshTrees>.



Gordon MacLellan

Creeping Toad Environmental
Storytelling
<https://creepingtoad.com>



Striking the Balance When Storytelling

As interpretation designers, we strive to seamlessly blend spatial design, graphic design and media choices to create welcoming and engaging visitor experiences. Our aim is to bring stories to life in a way that encourages exploration and learning, leaving visitors feeling inspired and informed.

Bath Abbey has been at the heart of Bath's spiritual, social, cultural and economic life for more than 1,300 years, serving as a central landmark in this UNESCO World Heritage City. The Footprint Project's new Discovery Centre is about uncovering and narrating the Abbey's journey from its early beginnings to the present day. Here we explore how we have used spatial design, graphic elements and a variety of media

choices to tell the story of Bath Abbey. By blending these elements, interpretive design transforms spaces to engage audiences on a multi-sensory level.

Telling the Story of Bath Abbey

With such a rich collection of artefacts and stories to be told, it was crucial to thoughtfully design the exhibition space to present these



Bath Abbey Discovery Centre graphic panels featuring large-scale illustrations and minimal text.

stories in a meaningful and memorable way. The challenge was to tell the story to a family audience in a way that was respectful, meaningful and uncomplicated. Working on the principle of show more than tell, we used strong colours with large-scale illustrations and minimal text to break the story up into sections. Content was developed around the themes of worship, hospitality and engagement to reveal how Bath Abbey has always been, and remains today, an active, vibrant community and a vital part of the city's daily life.

The current church, known as Bath Abbey, is actually the third to be built on this site so the most significant changes to the abbey were identified as the focus for storytelling: the Benedictine Monastery, Elizabethan rebuilding and the Anglo-Saxon Monastery, the Norman Cathedral of Bath and the Tudor Church. At each of these points in time there were key events and people who shaped the future of the abbey.

The Footprint Project's new Discovery Centre is about uncovering and narrating the Abbey's journey from its early beginnings to the present day.

A broadly linear narrative was developed to tell the story in a chronological order. This was used throughout the exhibition starting from the principal entry point and continuing into the main exhibition space. We start with the story of life in a Benedictine monastery and its closure by Henry VIII in 1539 and lead into how the community came together to rebuild, starting in 1573. A timeline running across the top of many panels supports the text and enables visitors to relate important events to a particular date in time. As visitors progress through the exhibition, the themes are central to ensuring a focused approach to the storytelling.

Each of the sub-stories make sense independently of each other, allowing visitors to also take a non-linear route if an area is congested or they simply choose to do so. The spatial design uses natural



Rebuilding the church. Telling the story of the rebuilding through a large-scale illustration.



Bath Abbey Discovery Centre graphic panels featuring large-scale illustrations and minimal text.

breaks in the architecture such as stairs, entry points and buttresses to reinforce the literary cadence of the storytelling process, giving visitors time to process and reflect before moving on to the next exhibit. Non-linear story telling is used to good effect at the periphery of the exhibition space, such as the story of the end of Bath Monastery.

Many of the stories relate to the community of Benedictine monks and visitors are encouraged to think about what life would have been like for them. For example, in the 'old English gospels' section we explain how the monks translated the gospels from Latin into Old English and were responsible for painstakingly copying each by hand to help spread ideas and knowledge. We use gamification here to add a new dimension to the story, offering visitors an alternative way to engage with this content using digital technology to have a go at writing like a monk – using a specially designed quill to dip into virtual ink before scribing on the screen. Visitors experience how much longer it would have taken to write like a monk. The costume area, recreated in authentic materials, further explains how the monks led a simple life and wore plain, simple clothes, very different to the colourful clothing that was

fashionable in medieval times. These exhibits offer visitors the opportunity to experience the story in a relatable and tactile way.

We also offer an animation that tells the story of Bath Abbey through time, for those who engage better with an audiovisual approach to storytelling. These are all good examples of experiential storytelling; using digital media and interactive technology to provide dynamic content that changes based on visitor interaction, providing a personalised narrative.

In the 'a new church' section we have focused the story on the three key phases of rebuilding and their benefactors; Queen Elizabeth I & Mr Edmund Colthurst, Thomas Bellot and James Montagu. A picture says a thousand words and this story is told through a large-scale illustration, with minimal text. Another layer to this story is that many other people also contributed to the rebuilding and this is told through the benefactor's book. The original document is displayed alongside a digitised version where visitors can interact and turn the pages to reveal the content, enabling individuals to search the virtual book and take away their own narrative. We have used large-scale illustrations throughout the exhibition

to tell complex stories in a visual way and another example of this is the 'the daily routine of a benedictine monk' story.

Stories often mean more when a person can relate to them. To add authenticity we have included excerpts from historic manuscripts throughout the exhibition to support the text, along with prompts to think about the content and to encourage participation such as, 'Can you write like a monk? Try your hand here', 'Are you as skilful as a Norman builder? Rearrange the tiles to match the photograph'.

The speed of content delivery is an important factor to consider in storytelling. Some visitors have a heightened sensitivity to sensory input and it is important to give consideration to the speed of audiovisual content, line breaks and how text is laid out, and the complexity of interactive elements to ensure the exhibition is accessible to everyone.

On Reflection

In the first month of opening, the abbey welcomed 16,645 visitors to the Discovery Centre. The target audience was children and families and one of the most successful things about the exhibition is the use of illustrations to convey complex stories, with

Working with the architecture of the space to tell a stand-alone sub-story.

visitors particularly enjoying 'the daily routine of a Benedictine monk' illustration.

Feedback indicates this audience also enjoys the interactive storytelling elements highlighting the multimedia experiences such as the 'Bath Abbey through time' animation, the 'write like a monk' interactive display, and dressing up in replica period costumes. They all enable the audience to interact with the stories of Bath Abbey in a tactile and fun way.

Visitor feedback: 'The museum gives visitors a real chance to get hands-on with history with opportunities to dress up, write like a scribe and create illuminated letters using interactive screens. We would absolutely visit again, and recommend it to anyone.'

Visit...

www.bathabbey.org/visiting



Howard Miles

Managing Director

ABG Design

<https://abgdesign.uk.com>

hmiles@abgdesign.uk.com





'Florence Nightingale: A Living Portrait' is an exciting 2024 exhibition at Cromford Mills, Derbyshire, offering a fresh perspective on the legendary figure. Through her own words and the reflections of others over time, the exhibition uncovers new facets of Nightingale's life and legacy. The centrepiece is a dynamic, digital 'living portrait' of Florence Nightingale, which evolves based on real time visitor comments, encouraging everyone to shape their own unique understanding of this remarkable woman.

Can Stories Change the World?

I am not a fan of key messages. I feel they have led communication and interpretation down a route that has created boring and formulaic exhibits. Instead, throughout my career, I have hunted out and then told stories. But now I want to go even further, using stories – and maybe more – to incite action and bring about change.

Losing the Big Picture

When you look back at the history of what we mean by narrative, I think you can start to see why storytelling can feel

so dead in many heritage places. In 1957, Freeman Tilden, the founding father of heritage interpretation, advocated the idea of using themes and messages to

shape our interpretive storytelling. But he also advocated an approach where we never lose sight of the big picture – always keeping the story at the heart of any project. And that is what I think has sometimes been lost along the way.

In the years since then, many interpretive planners have readily adopted a thematic approach to telling stories, seeing this as the best way visitors can understand and 'be educated' about our collections, places and ideas. This educative role sets up the interpreter as the expert, the one 'with knowledge' revealing meaning to audiences – the ones 'without knowledge'.

But to me, this type of 'theme first' thinking loses the big picture, the very one Tilden was also talking about. Structuring by themes can often feel simply like a new incarnation of Victorian object classification. And as we create and classify our themes, we are getting further and further away from the big picture;

the connections that can and should bring all those themes together. Instead of encouraging storytelling, this approach boxes narratives in. Any semblance of what narrative there might be in the exhibition is left to the script writer or the designer to identify and it is they who must try to join the dots and make the links that the interpreter or curator has lost. If you believe, as I do, that the role of interpretation is to forge connections between people and ideas, then our approach has to be quite different.

What is a Story?

A story, in simple terms, is a sequence of events and experiences. But it is a sequence that is arranged and shaped by the motives, beliefs, imagination and skill of the human brain that created it.

As humans, we are natural storytellers; we make sense of the world and

ourselves through narrative. Storytelling is greatly valued within human society and its importance throughout history probably indicates that information structured narratively is more likely to be remembered. As storytellers we have the power to impart information that sparks cognition and emotion, ultimately leading to understanding and meaning. As a hardwired human instinct, therefore, storytelling is the perfect way for interpreters to reach audiences.

Choosing the Story to Tell

So, instead of our job being to decide on key messages, our job becomes that of choosing and structuring a sequence of events – the story – and then deciding on the emphasis, tone and language to use that will spark connections.

In *this* scenario, nothing is off limits. We can choose stories that make the

invisible visible and the intangible, tangible. We can use the power of stories to communicate complex, perhaps even conflicting, narrative in compelling ways. After all, some of the greatest stories of all time have divergent viewpoints and conflicting narratives as their backbone.

Take a look at this storyboard poster developed for the American Alliance of Museums in 2023. It articulates a complex and divisive subject – how we deal with public memorials – but it does it in an irreverent way that might provoke some but resonate with others. Instead of a more cerebral approach, this storyboard focuses on the cycle of emotions elicited by memorials – everything from passion to devotion, opposition, outrage and even disgust. In short, it tells a story, rather than conveying a message.



Time Immemorial by Barker Langham. This poster tells a story. Each tableau represents a unique chapter in the evolving story of a memorial, balancing simplicity and complexity, irreverence and gravity. It's in the delicate interplay between these contrasts that the true art of storytelling comes to life.



This exhibition was about who we choose to commemorate in the public realm and – equally importantly – whom we choose not to commemorate. The ideas contained in this storyboard outline this as the big picture for this exhibition and provide the basis for the creation of the story we are going to tell.

I think it is also very important that we choose stories that are not completely buttoned-down and definitive. Yes, we want to craft stories that enable us to share what we know, but they should have more ambition than that; we want stories that invite and enable visitors to share what *they know*, because in my experience, visitors are very rarely ‘without knowledge’.

How to Tell a Story

To create this kind of story, we must challenge the way we approach our craft and rethink our processes.

Firstly, we must keep an eye on the big picture and arrive at a singular story that memorably defines a project or a place. This is not an exact science. Working systematically through objectives, audiences, themes and heritage significance will not get you there. It is rather about combining these complex elements and synthesising them into a single narrative that embraces them all. It is almost a kind of alchemy.

Secondly, it's important to write the story at the outset, not regard it as something that is generated, possibly by others, towards the end of the process. For me, the most important phase of a project is the planning and concept – this is where our big idea is formed and where our narrative is developed.

It helps here to think more like filmmakers. Once we have researched our content and audiences at the beginning of planning, we should create

a storyboard to communicate the visitor journey through space. This storyboard is the place to articulate big ideas, to focus attention and curate the story, creating a sense of movement – what filmmakers would call the narrative arc.

This illustration is a storyboard extract from ‘Immortalised’, an exhibition for Historic England in 2018.

With the storyboard capturing the concept, we should then, at this early

Interpretation is already a promiscuous discipline but we have a unique opportunity to bring even more voices into our work, from many different communities: the audience, academics, artists, philosophers.

stage, look to script our experience and not leave writing to later phases. Of course, as we produce our exhibits we can edit, refine, rewrite – but always keeping sight of, and constantly checking in with, the story.

Finally, we must rethink and broaden what we see as ‘our roles’ and who we view as ‘our community’. Interpretation is already a promiscuous discipline but we have a unique opportunity to bring even more voices into our work, from many different communities: the audience, academics, artists, philosophers. With multiple authors, an exhibition could have an almost unlimited potential to contain multiple points of view and perspectives. And this will all be fine, because we have the narrative arc of the story to hold onto. Everything will be held together by

the unifying power of the story we are telling, and by our skill as interpreters to give coherence and meaning to diverse ideas and perspectives.

Beyond the Story

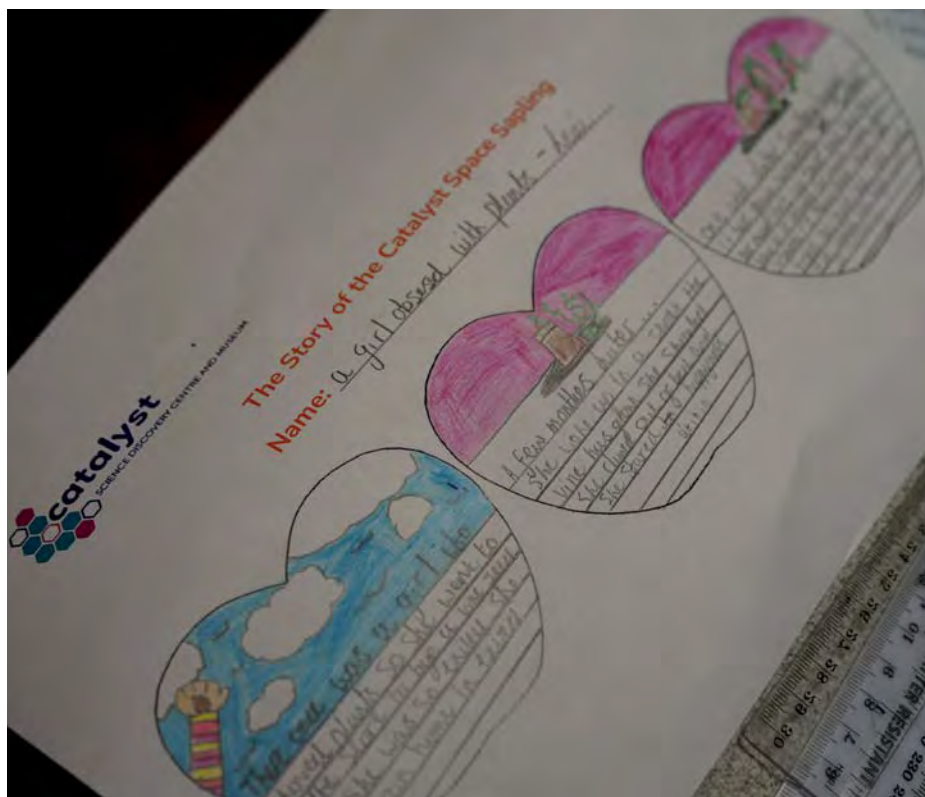
The stories we tell have the power to inspire and influence, but is storytelling alone enough to drive real change? It’s time to ask ourselves: should we go further? While stories can spark awareness, creating truly meaningful impact requires us to think beyond the narrative. How can we use our platforms to challenge prejudices, shift behaviours, revitalise communities, improve well-being and foster a more equitable society?

Stories are just the beginning. To truly change the world, we may need to embrace a more activist approach –

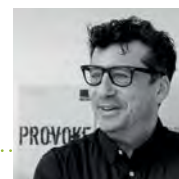
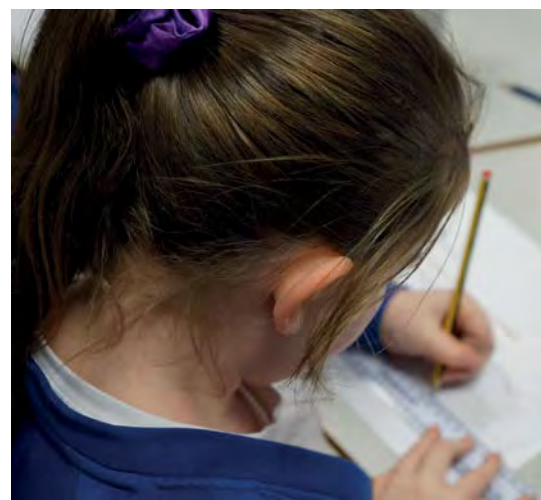
one that engages not only the mind but also the body and senses. An approach that not only inspires but also creates a space for real change and action. We must move beyond telling stories to building campaigns for the causes we believe in, using our influence to actively shape a better future.

Take, for example, the London-based Museum of Homelessness, which pairs powerful storytelling with direct action to fight injustice. It’s about moving from storytelling to story-making – where we actively help build the world we want to live in.

Are stories alone enough to create lasting change, or is it time for us to step into the role of change-makers ourselves?



The ‘Seeds that went to Space’ exhibition at Catalyst Science Discovery Centre, Cheshire, is a truly special collaboration, co-created with children from a local school in a disadvantaged area. These young visionaries shaped the exhibition’s narrative, crafting story booklets filled with vibrant poems, prose, and colourful illustrations. Their work, beautifully bound in apple-shaped booklets, is now proudly displayed on a freestanding tree at the heart of the exhibition – inviting every visitor to explore their creativity and imagination.



Eric Langham

Founder, Barker Langham and
AHI Trustee
www.barkerlangham.com



Gen Z Reimagines Engagement with Archives

London College of Communication (LCC) students and creative design consultancy Bright White Ltd worked together to explore potential solutions to a persistent challenge in the archives sector: how to encourage young generations to appreciate and value archives. Using digital tools and creative approaches students provided fresh perspectives to make archives accessible and relatable to them.

A Brief Introduction to London College of Communication

London College of Communication, part of University of the Arts London (UAL), is a well-known arts institution dedicated to a forward-thinking approach to media, communication and design education. With a long history of nurturing creative minds, LCC equips students with the skills needed to navigate the ever-evolving media landscape. Through Knowledge Exchange (KE) initiatives, LCC actively brings together students, graduates, academics and external partners to address real-life challenges and to co-create positive change.

An Exciting New Collaboration

In an ambitious step, LCC's BA (Hons) Media Communications course partnered with Bright White, which specialises in innovative approaches to heritage interpretation. Bright White provided a real-life design challenge.

The project, which gained special commendation at UAL's KE Staff Awards 2024, invited students to apply their creative communication skill set to reimagine how younger audiences can engage with archives. The collaboration offers insights into how media and communication education can work together with the heritage interpretation sector.

The Design Challenge: Connecting Archives with Gen Z

This was the challenge set by Chris Walker at Bright White:

'How can we encourage young people to discover, appreciate and value the memories held in their community's collective memory bank?'

The main challenge of the project was to address a long-standing issue within the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector: how to make archives appealing to a Gen Z audience. Gen Z refers to a generation of individuals who are presently between 12 and 27 years old and the first generation in which digital technology has been with them from birth.

While archive collections are increasingly digitised, which typically makes them accessible to diverse users, young people are still not engaging with them despite their prominent digital life. In the student briefing session Chris highlighted that traditional users of archives tend to be people in their 50s or older. This is also supported by The National Archives, which note that 77% of their volunteers are over the age of 55, while 91% are white.

A study by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport in 2020 showed 16–24 was the second least common age group to have visited a museum or gallery in the past 12 months. This disengagement is especially pronounced in deprived areas, where young people are half as likely to visit any cultural institutions.

Our students, many of whom are from diverse backgrounds, were well-positioned to tackle this challenge. Over 86% of the student cohort in the course is aged 18 to 24 and a significant proportion identify as ethnically diverse. This diversity not only reflected the demographic the heritage sector is trying to reach, but also brought in a range of fresh perspectives.

The Students' Creative Responses

Drawing on their rich media skill set, students tackled the brief on multiple levels, from ideation and creative direction to production and execution, through showcasing their deeper understanding of Gen Z's digital habits.

The main challenge of the project was to address a long-standing issue within the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector: how to make archives appealing to a Gen Z audience.

One standout project, 'Memory Orbs', took inspiration from the popular Disney film *Inside Out* (2015) and prototyped interactive digital orbs to propose immersive user journeys through archival content. The project envisions users to interact with archives both in physical exhibition spaces (blended reality) and within the metaverse (virtual reality). Blended reality environments allow for virtual and real elements to interact like they would in the real world, while virtual reality allows the user to fully immerse themselves in a digital space.

'Memory Orbs' video still showing a digital orb in a memory deposit. Amrita Gurung. Freya Mashru, 2024 BA Media Communications, London College of Communication, UAL.



For example, with the help of a VR headset ‘memory orbs’ users could create a digital avatar to virtually deposit a memory into an archive and, through repeating this process over and over again, a virtual track of several ‘memory orbs’ would be created. This would form part of the archive’s online collective memories for the user. The project aspires to make archives feel alive and resonates with Gen Z and the born-digital nature of smartphone video.

Another project, ‘Girlhood’, explored personal identity within girlhood. The team proposed an immersive exhibition, which invites audiences to reflect on their own lived experiences of girlhood and adolescence using archives as a medium to explore personal and collective memories. These archives might consist of photographs depicting childhood memories that visitors could identify with, audiovisual artefacts referencing music, fashion, film & TV or arts content that whole generations of girls might have had a shared passion for, or specific technological platforms that might have empowered girlhood. The visitor could also take pictures of themselves in the immersive room and upload on social media and tag the arts company.

The project highlights archives as tools for personal storytelling but also creates – for visitors – a sense of belonging, community and girlhood collective.

‘Girlhood’ video still showing point-of-view shot from immersive room. The video was a test film rather than a fully produced video of the immersive experience room. Shakila Razaei, Liyah Saeed, Jahkaya Smith, Lianne Yu, 2024 BA Media Communications, London College of Communication, UAL.



The project highlights archives as tools for personal storytelling but also creates – for visitors – a sense of belonging, community and girlhood collective.

‘404 Archive’ tackled the sensitive area of media censorship during China’s zero-Covid policy (Davidson, 2022). It aimed to bring banned news stories to light through an adventure role-play game proposal. Players would be presented with scenarios based on true censored media content and make critical decisions that affected the outcome.

One such event was the devastating fire that broke out in a high-rise building in Urumqi, Xinjiang, in November 2022, which left 10 people dead and several others injured. The city was under strict Covid restrictions at the time and local authorities were widely criticised online for under-reporting the incident.

In the process of discovering the truth about these events, the player is met with a series of on-screen options. By ‘unlocking’ the event bit by bit, the player encounters relevant photographic content and is eventually presented with the original news video at the end of the ‘journey’. The project’s gamified approach duly met Gen Z’s preference for interactive storytelling.

What LCC and Media Communications Students Gained

For us as educators, this small-scale, yet powerful, collaboration highlighted the educational value of engaging students with real-world industry challenges.

The students gained exposure to the heritage interpretation field, which they may not have previously considered as a graduate employment destination.

The GLAM sector’s continuing shifts in digital practice creates a necessity for skills in media and content creation, interactive storytelling, social media engagement, crowdsourcing and online participation. This highlights the relevance of media and communication skills in heritage interpretation and notes the value of graduates with such skills for the sector.



'404 Archive' video still showing a gamer's on-screen options. Yuxin Chen, Yao Wang, Wenxuan Xu, 2024 BA Media Communications, London College of Communication, UAL.

Key Takeaways For Those Working in Heritage Interpretation

Chris said, 'From an interpretation professional point of view, the insight generated by the collaboration was considerable in both breadth and depth. Many small and interesting points came up. Surprisingly, a series of strong themes also emerged which, taken together, really help us as a design team to see the world the way that Gen Z does. This helps us make sure that we are planning our media, content and engagement modes to suit the large and enormously important Gen Z cohort.'

The following themes were observed in the students' projects:

- Gen Z liked to overlap their personal interests with archive content that covered themes such as fitness, gaming, armed forces families, women's history, art, censored media, hidden history and precious family interactions. In this sense, personal interest was a critical bridge between the individual and the collections.
- The majority of the cohort use TikTok and this is often the place where Gen Z discovers new things. Students started their communication through line with a TikTok post, which led to a website and a web-borne experience, or a physical experience. Like it or not, to ignore TikTok is to ignore Gen Z.

- All students were very media and technology literate. They demonstrated an encyclopedic knowledge of media and were highly knowledgeable about the possibilities of linking different media or digital techniques together to make one 'story space'. The idea of transmedia storytelling was present in every response. Examples included storytelling through games, film, photography, installations, theatrical productions, podcasts, web media, video, user-generated content, chatbots, AI, augmented reality, virtual reality, and were all completely technically feasible.

For future steps, we urge deeper connections between the field of media communication and heritage interpretation, further integrating creative storytelling and digital platforms. By expanding such knowledge-exchange projects, we can develop insights that bridge the gap between Gen Z and archives, as well as other heritage sites, so fostering long-lasting engagement and ensuring they remain relevant in the digital age.

Read on...

The National Archives, 2017. Volunteering at The National Archives. <https://bit.ly/VolNA>.

DCMS, 2020. Museums – Taking Part Survey 2019–2020 <https://bit.ly/DCMSStudy>.



Dr Irida Ntalla

Senior Lecturer in Communications and Media,
and Knowledge Exchange Coordinator
Media School, LCC
i.ntalla@lcc.arts.ac.uk
<https://bit.ly/INatalla>

Dr Thomas Giagkoglou

Senior Lecturer in Communications and Media,
and Programme Coordinator (theory/research)
Media School, LCC
t.giagkoglou@lcc.arts.ac.uk
<https://bit.ly/TGiagkoglou>

The Art of Storytelling

Telling a good story is an integral part in the creation of most pieces of interpretive media.

In researching this article, I found myself standing next to an elderly lady in a museum exhibition.

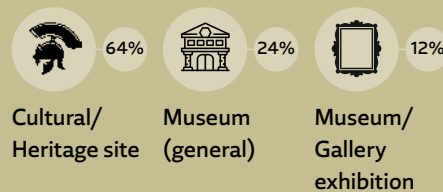
She was reading a panel and as I approached, she turned and spoke to me. 'They suffered so much, didn't they,' she said. Her comments reminded me of the importance of the human element in any piece of good storytelling.

The literature in exploring the art of storytelling identifies a number of key principles to help the interpreter engage the story and its accompanying messages more successfully with the visitor.

- Include a strong human element, be that in the form of a character or far better, through the use of a real person directly linked to the history of the site. Brochu & Merriman (2002) suggest that this can be best achieved through the use of cultural informants who can connect in a more powerful way with the visitor than pure narrative often can.
- To bring the story to life for a modern audience these characters need to relate their experiences directly to that of the visitors, who may not always grasp the whole story, its implications or indeed even find it particularly interesting to them and their life experiences. Ham (2013) talks about the importance of self-referencing so that, through the story, the visitor is enabled and encouraged to think about themselves and relate the story directly to their own experiences. A really effective way of doing this is often to allow the visitor to hear the characters speak to them directly, ideally through a living history performance but alternatively through a narrated piece.
- Artefacts are important to 'frame' a story. Unsurprisingly, the more personal the artefact, the more likely it is to engage and make a direct connection with the visitor.

This article explores these and other principles through asking 50 visitors the simple question, 'What helps to bring a story to life for you?' This research has been undertaken at a range of cultural and heritage sites across the UK's south-west peninsula. In terms of their social grouping: 6 were alone; 12 were with a partner and 32 with family and/or friends. This research only focused on the responses of adults

Type of location visited



and thus the response of any children within family groups was not captured.

The nature of the locations visited along the south-west coastline meant that some very specific and consistent themes were being presented within the stories.

Themes of the stories being viewed



In exploring the visitors' experience of storytelling, a range of responses emerged which are grouped here for ease of presentation.

Characters and their Traits

In exploring what made some characters more likeable than others and indeed what traits the visitors found most easy to relate to, the following comments emerged.

Characters perceived as 'likeable' (56%) were the most popular, even if they were also regarded as being a 'rogue' (21%) or a 'villain' (15%). Characters who were flawed (31%) were also regarded as being easier to relate to, as were those who formed part of a family unit in the story (12%).

Visitors preferred characters who were identified by a name, be that real (32%) or a pseudonym (26%). Likewise, 'real' characters from history (64%) were more strongly favoured over purely fictional characters (46%).

Media Adopted

In terms of the range of media adopted to tell the story, the following sequence of preferences emerged.

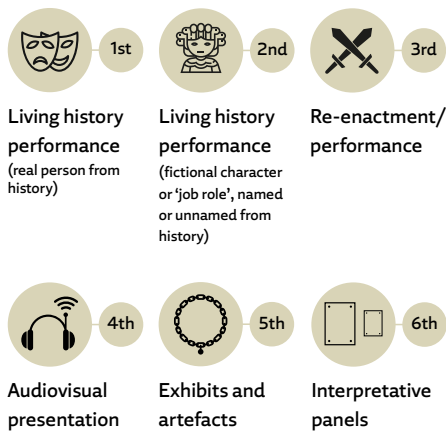
Living history performances came across very strongly (77% as first or second choice) and in consequence visitors were invited to respond to what aspect of the living history performance they found most engaging in telling the story. Their responses in order of preference are recorded as follows: telling a good story about life at that time (67%); use of humour and anecdotes in the story was strongly favoured, too. Drama and musical performances (28%) or offering a guided experience around the site as part of the story (27%) were also favoured. Listening to a reading/poetry (12%) and/or taking part in a Q&A (6%) were the least popular living history experiences.

Time Length

In terms of length of the storytelling experience (excluding guided walks around the site), the range of responses recorded in order of preference were as follows: less than five minutes (36%); six to ten minutes (52%); more than ten minutes (12%).

For those visitors who were happy to engage with a longer experience, two key points emerged: first, they wanted to be advised of the opportunity in advance, either on the site's website or via social media so they could plan their visit accordingly. Second, they preferred it to be part of a guided site experience, typically a guided walk.

Preferences for media adopted to present the stories being viewed



Initial Visitor Engagement with Story

Visitors were asked what helped them to initially engage with the story and its content. The strongest response was for a named 'living' character (46%), followed by a personal artefact (30%), unnamed character (12%) and then a specific event or date from history (12%).

Visitors were also asked what helped hold their attention with the story being presented. Being able to ask questions (43%) was the strongest response, followed by caring about the fate of the character(s) (37%) and being able to participate in some way (21%).

Audience

Finally, in asking who the experience should be aimed at, not unsurprisingly the most popular response was 'for families' (57%), although within this a specific focus on children was mentioned by 78%. An adult audience was the second most popular response at 39%, whilst 'anyone' was mentioned by 4%.

What Broad Themes Emerge from this Study?

1. *The human element behind the story features strongly.* Reminding us of the importance of identifying a lead character(s) who cannot only 'tell a good story' for visitors but ideally, in so doing, speak directly to them. Where possible

these characters should be real people who can reflect their own life experience alongside the history of the site.

2. *The appeal of living history.* Another strong theme through this research was the value of living history performances in bringing the past to life. The enthusiasm and passion which is typically delivered through these performances can be incredibly powerful in helping visitors make intellectual as well as emotional connections with the site, its people and history.

3. *The value of artefacts.* Artefacts and indeed the more personalised the better also came across strongly in this research. The prominent display of an artefact can be a valuable way of creating an initial link where the visitor's interest is aroused in hearing the story behind it. Beyond this, making an initial connection through a tangible artefact to a more intangible story and its associated stories can be profoundly important in 'holding' the visitor's attention and engagement.

4. *A passion for good storytelling* is clearly important. Passion was of course Tilden's 'priceless ingredient' and in this context the interpreter needs to demonstrate their skill and passion in telling a good story. Delivering the story's narrative in a logical way with appropriate transitions where necessary, with style and enthusiasm, making personal connections throughout, and concluding with appropriate takeaway messages, all form part of the practice of good storytelling.

5. *Increasing enjoyment through participation.* Making the story enjoyable will always help to engage and 'hold' the visitor. In this study, it was interesting to note the number of visitors who appreciated the opportunity to engage with the story directly through participation. This included responding directly to particular points in the story (booing, cheering, clapping) (59%), making sound effects (32%), dancing (14%) and singing (8%), beyond the obvious opportunity for a Q&A. It is always worth reflecting on whether

sufficient opportunities are created for this type of engagement when a story is being told.

It is important to note that the visitors in this survey had voluntarily chosen to visit a site and engage with its stories and so it might be suggested that there is a bias in these results, in that they do not capture the reasons for not engaging with an individual story or indeed the site as a whole.

A further interesting reflection on this study is the lack of reference to authenticity in any of the visitors' responses. Whether this is because they simply assumed that the stories they were engaging with were true and authentic it is not possible to say, but it is interesting to note that a concept which features so consistently in the views of visitors at cultural and heritage sites did not emerge here.

To conclude, a reminder of the work of Ham (2013:19), successful interpretation has: 'A strong theme, is easy to follow, matters to the audience and is enjoyable to process'.

Read on...

Brochu, L. & Merriman, T. 2002. *Personal Interpretation: Connecting Your Audience to Heritage Resources*. Fort Collins, CO: InterPress.

Ham, S.H. 2013. *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.



Dr Philip Ryland, MAHI

Teaches tourism and is also Associate Dean (Student Experience) in the Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University.



EH AH I

Engaging People Awards 2025

Sponsored by



The Digital Visitor Experience Company

Enter the 2025 Engaging People Awards and showcase your inspiring projects

Are you telling great stories about your place, people or collection, or inspiring visitors and communities across the UK and Ireland to explore and discover?

There are six award categories to choose from, plus two that recognise inspirational people in the interpretive sector. The core categories are:

- **Indoors**
- **Outdoors**
- **Temporary Events & Activities**
- **Online & Remote Engagement**
- **Community Engagement**
- **Calling Out Climate Change**

The entry deadline is **30th April 2025**.

Winners will be announced at the AH I Conference in Wales, October 2025.

Top: The Future Belongs To What Was As Much As What Is by Morag Myerscough for English Heritage at Housesteads Roman Fort. Winner, Temporary Event or Activity, 2023.

Above right: National Famine Museum, Strokestown Estate, County Roscommon. Winner, Indoors, 2023.

Right: Rebuilding Lives: 50 years of Ugandan Asians, Navrang Arts. Winner, Community Engagement, 2023.



Being shortlisted enhances your professional credibility

To find out more and enter ahi.org.uk/awards



PastIssues

Storytelling... it's what interpretists do. Done well it can inform cogently, it can excite, it can create magic. Arguably one of the most accomplished storytellers of the current era, J.K. Rowling, in her Harry Potter series, created the 'Room of Hidden Things' as part of the 'Room of Requirement'. It was a place to lock away objects in secret. With the recent success of our HLF bid, as described elsewhere in this issue, we can now truly begin to see a path whereby your Journal's archive will avoid that fate!



Words into Pictures

Revisiting the Spring 2009 Journal (vol. 14-1), we see its theme was 'Words into Pictures' and the premise was to extoll the virtues of using illustrations to convey narrative. In his foreword, then editor David Masters drew inspiration from an article in an even earlier 1980s journal which advocated 'using an illustration rather than 30 words of convoluted description and the tortured avoidance of technical terms' to describe a nautilus.

It is of course a truism that 'a picture speaks a 1000 words' – read Cathy Lewis and Tony Kerins' article of the same title in that issue. Such an assertion may seem contradictory to this issue's focus on storytelling, however, think of the attention-grabbing graphic novel, the speech bubbles of children's comics, or the increasing reliance on pictograms alone to convey complex information on everything from medicine and recycling instructions to increasingly cross-cultural audiences, all facilitating short attention spans.



Words that Sing and Dance

Storytelling exists not just via oral wordsmiths and first-person dialogue, but across a wide range of media opportunities. It is also a truism that 'storytelling' is the beating heart of interpretation. By way of contrast to the above, Michael Hamish Glen, in the Spring 2010 Journal (vol. 15-1) in his article 'Words that Sing and Dance' argues 'that interpretive wordsmiths are akin to drystone dykers. Their skill is to make humble words sing and dance, brightly or sadly...'

In the Gaeltacht (p: geeltaicht) of Ireland and in the Gaidhealtachd (p: gaeltach) of Scotland's western isles, 'storytelling' is considered an art form, particularly so in the indigenous languages of those cultures. To many it is how history, myths and legends, on the one hand, have been passed down generation to generation, and on the other, in days gone by (sadly), travelling 'storytellers' would entertain their hosts in exchange for vittles and a bed for the night.



Makeovers

In the Spring 2011 Journal (vol. 16-1) we are treated to a 21st-century upgrade of the storytellers' craft in Sarah Lambert's article 'In their Own Words'. Bovington Tank Museum chose to feature in their new audio-visual exhibit the 'potent immediacy of hearing actual voices of the men who had served on the front line', the soldiers telling their own stories of Afghanistan

David Souden describes how Kensington Palace approached a radical interpretive makeover through story-led historic zones, 'repopulating' the Palace and bringing a previously 'stuffy' royal palace to life in 'The Enchanted Palace.'



Bob Jones, MBE, HFAHI

planxtyjones@btinternet.com
BlueSkyBlueWater Strategic Design &
Interpretation Planning Consultancy

A' cruinneachadh sgeulachdan

Gathering stories

Bhiodh sgioba luchd-taic ag obrachadh às leth Iain Òig Ìle gus na sgeulachdan a thrusadh. Thug iad cuairtean air feadh taobh siar na Gàidhealtachd, a' tadhal air na sgeulaichean.

Dh'iarr Calmbeul gun deidheadh na sgeulachdan a chlàradh facal air an fhacal bhon sgeulaiche. B' fheàrr le cuid, ge-tà, na sgeulachdan aca a sgrìobhadh sìos ann an litrichean a chuireadh iad thuige.

Dheidheadh na sgeulachdan a chlàradh sa Ghàidhlig, agus chuireadh Calmbeul Beurla orra.

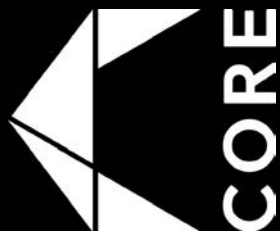
Campbell worked with a team of helpers to gather folktales. They went from place to place across the western Highlands and Islands, meeting with storytellers.

Campbell wanted the stories to be recorded exactly as the storytellers told them, word for word. Some storytellers preferred to write down the stories and would send them to Campbell by letter.

Stories were recorded in Gaelic and Campbell translated them into English.



Image: Neil Hanna / National Library of Scotland



Proud sponsor of the AHI Conference
2024: *People, Place, Nature & Stories*

Visitor experience design



Find out more