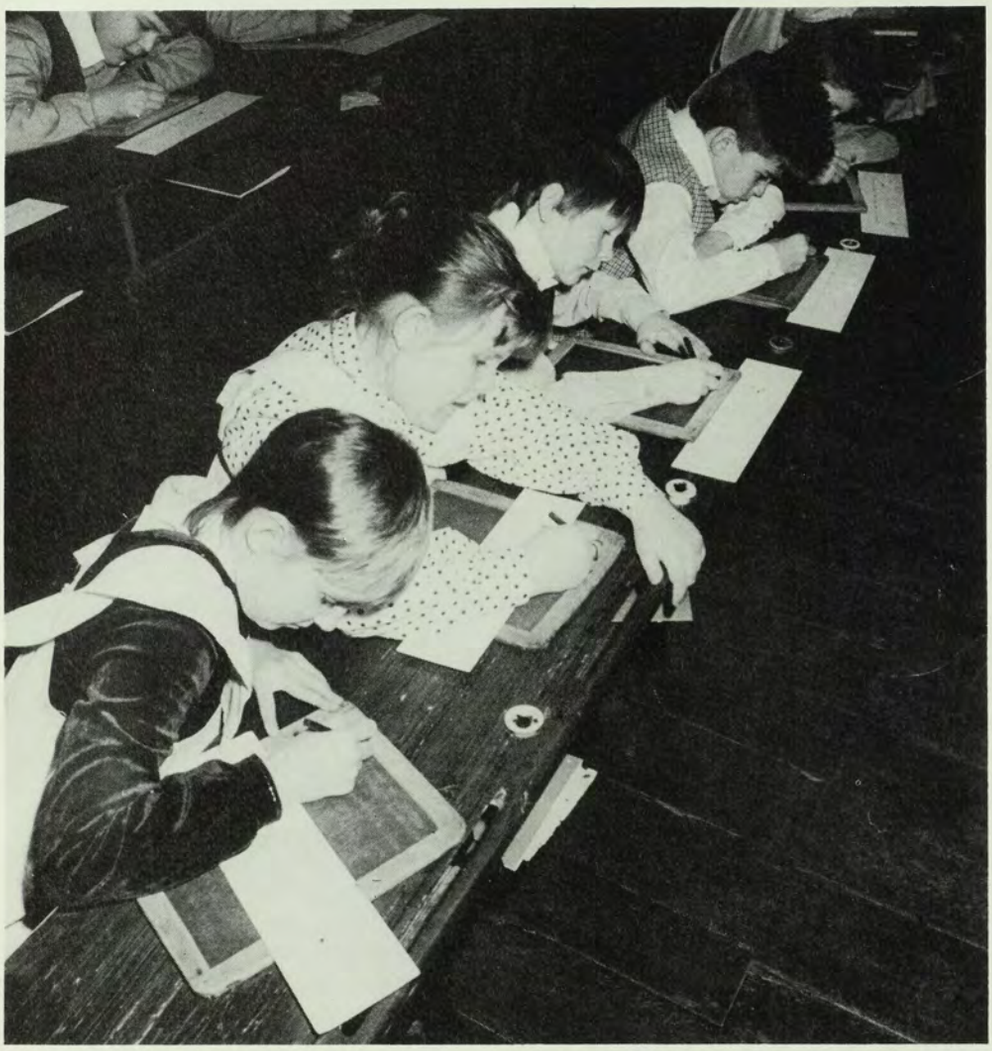
The Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage Spring 1992 NO. 50

INTERPRETATION *journal*



Shugborough Hall's year-round Living History programme – with a particular emphasis on school groups – is managed and presented by a large full-time and part-time staff.

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The Journal of the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage

NO 50 Spring 1992

INTERPRET BRITAIN

Interpret Britain (which is the short title of the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage) was formed in 1975 to

- provide a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas on the interpretation of Britain's Heritage, both urban and rural;
- disseminate knowledge of interpretive philosophy, principles and techniques;
- promote the role of interpretation and its value among those involved with recreation management, conservation, education, tourism and public relations in national and local government, charitable bodies and private organisations.

Interpretation is the process of explaining to people the significance of the place or object they have come to see, so that they enjoy their visit more, understand their heritage and environment better, and develop a more caring attitude towards conservation.

Membership of the Society

To apply to join the Society, please write to the **MEMBERSHIP CO-ORDINATOR**
Alison Maddock
36 Westhaven Crescent
Aughton, nr Ormskirk
Lancashire L39 5BW
Tel (H&W) 0695 422369

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

Individual UK	£20
Library	£10
Corporate	£45
Student	£10

Publications

Back numbers of ***Interpretation Journal*** may be obtained (subject to availability) for £2 (earlier issues) or £3 (more recent issues) per copy, inc. p&p within UK.

Other SIBH publications include ***Good Practice Notes*** - reports on the winners of the Interpret Britain Award Scheme for the years 1984-1989. Prices on request.

Helping the Stones to Speak (advice on interpretation of parish churches) by Moya Feehally, £3 including p&p.

Please Follow Me (advice to tourist guides) by Don Cross, £3 including p&p

Requests for publications should be addressed to the Membership Co-ordinator.

The Editor welcomes contributions to the journal, especially illustrated articles of 2000 words or less; letters; thoughtful reports, especially with clear photographs of recent events or developments; and announcements of forthcoming events related to interpretation.

Articles and reports should preferably be typed, on one side of the paper only, and 1½ or double line spaced. Photographs preferred are crisp black and white prints, though high-quality colour prints, negatives or transparencies may be acceptable.

The Committee of the Society

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Interpret Britain Awards - 1991

In 1991 – the eighth consecutive year of this award scheme – ten of the entries received recognition. Five gained the full award, and another five received commendations. Since the scheme exists to encourage good practice in interpretation, readers will no doubt be interested to see summaries of what the assessors said (one assessor to each entry) – and may perhaps like to visit some of the sites to learn what they can from them, and to compare their own opinions with those expressed by the assessors.

Awards

CAERPHILLY AND THE TRILATERAL CASTLES (CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments)

This programme of interpretive signage is exceptionally good. It covers one heavily visited site (Caerphilly Castle) and three other remote but thematically linked castles (Grosmont, Skenfrith and White Castles) in South Wales.

That the same interpretive technique should work successfully in such differing circumstances says a lot for the skill of the project. The signs have been carefully researched and sited and contribute significantly to the visitor's understanding of the castles. This programme could be promoted as a model approach to the design of a sign system.

GUIDE BOOK SERIES (National Trust for Scotland)

My immediate impression was of a carefully designed and very attractive series with excellent cover photographs and a very high quality of text and illustration. Particularly impressive was the variety of content and illustration achieved within a set of design standards, ensuring a quality product which served both as a guide on site and a memento of the visit.

I found the Falkland Palace and Royal Burgh guide a particularly well-balanced approach to a site of which I had no previous knowledge.

The series presumes a well-educated readership, but at the same time instructs the novice reader through the quality of illustrations and the careful directions for site visits.

The National Trust for Scotland

"An attractive series with excellent cover photographs"

OAKWELL HALL AND COUNTRY PARK, BATLEY (Kirklees Borough Council)

This is an excellent entry – well put together and reflecting a broadly based approach to the presentation and use of Oakwell Hall and the surrounding grounds.

In particular two elements impressed me. The first was the fact that the development was based on a carefully thought-out plan; the second was the range of provision that had been created – in spite of the starting point being a not particularly outstanding example of West Yorkshire architecture with minimal museum resources.

Given further improvement, Oakwell Hall could become one of the best examples of this kind of museum/ visitor attraction in the country.

SHUGBOROUGH HALL LIVING HISTORY PROGRAMME (Staffordshire County Council)

Here, living history events have expanded from simple beginnings in 1987 to a year-round cycle of activities open to different segments of the market. It is very professionally and enthusiastically conducted by a group of committed people. There is particular emphasis on school groups, but an intelligent awareness that the adult market could be developed further.

With thirty full-time staff and a total roll of 127 staff capable of being costumed and dealing with the demands of role-play, the Shugborough enterprise is very ambitious indeed. There seems to be no limit to these people's imagination and to the ways the resources of the estate can be exploited.

New ideas are researched in depth, worked out in detail and pilot tested before going live. So the foundations are well built and the results show it. Staffordshire County Council are to be congratulated on their enterprise during difficult times.

"Very ambitions indeed," the Shugborough Hall Living History programme places a particular emphasis on school groups, though the adult market could be developed further.

WEST STOW ANGLO-SAXON VILLAGE (St Edmundsbury District Council)

This entry scored well because it was good almost all round, showing evidence of having been carefully, sensitively and imaginatively planned.

Photo by Martyn Chillmaid St. Edmundsbury Borough Council/West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village Trust

A costume event among the reconstructed Anglo-Saxon buildings

The combination of genuine archaeological site, reconstructed buildings and a system of guiding by 'personal stereo' was unusual as a visitor experience. The commentary was clear both in its messages and its instructions to users. The wood fire burning in one of the reconstructed Anglo-Saxon huts was a nice interpretive detail – and it was good that the management had taken the trouble to light it even on a wet November day when there might have been few visitors to appreciate it.

A friendly staff, evidence of response to suggestions from visitors and an active 'Friends' group show that the management is succeeding on several fronts.

Commended

DAN YR OGOF CAVES, SWANSEA (Dan Yr Ogof Caves Ltd)

The managers of the caves have responded very well to a difficult set of physical challenges. The caves have been open to the public for twenty years, but have consistently been adapted to maintain the sense that the visitor is enjoying a fresh and new attraction.

The caves are a marvellous example of instructive, entertaining, surprising and cost-effective interpretation.

JAMES VI CHRISTENING PAGEANT, STIRLING CASTLE (Smith Art Gallery and Museum)

The James VI Christening Pageant is an excellent example of environmental/historical education. It is essentially the same at each performance, and no fewer than twelve schools in rotation were involved during the week of the event.

With back-up from the curriculum, the experience of actually constructing for themselves the banners for the 'Nine Incorporated Trades', and the opportunity to dress up in period costume, the children must have formed a vivid and enduring impression of a slice of history and its setting in their own local castle.

The children were clearly engrossed, learning a lot and enjoying the experience immensely – even if some of the other visitors were a little uncertain what was going on!

THEMATIC TRAILS (Oxford Polytechnic)

Here is an excellent series of wildlife and nature guidebooks. They impress by their clarity – bold maps and clear directions – as well as by the highly informative texts and pleasant drawings of plants and animals, and some dramatic photographs, including aerial views of the landscapes you are guided through.

There is also a refreshing element of challenge to the reader – with questions such as 'Is there evidence here of grazing?' which prompt the user to look more searchingly at what he passes.

This is a delightful series full of variety, with sections on history, literature and geology – and incorporating old newspaper articles and bibliographies and information about the history of (for instance) the National Trust and National Parks.

REGIMENTS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE MUSEUM

A competent and polished piece of work in an urban area which has been transformed over the last few years. Radical and tasteful refurbishment of the old Custom House in Gloucester Docks has created a space ideal for its new function – an inspired choice to house a museum to commemorate the two regiments of the county.

The creators have faced the dilemma between dealing respectfully with the proper dignity of the two historic regiments, and injecting that ounce or two of showmanship that today's museum visitor has come to expect. The World War One trench and the desert reconstruction are particularly ambitious and work well.

There are lots of good things one could single out for mention – the treasure showcase of regimental trophies and banners; the welcome rest of the tiny cinema with Korean War newsreels; the pinboard with family snaps of today's serving soldiers. An excellent experience.

The desert reconstruction in the Regiments of Gloucester Museum is particularly ambitious and works well..

LONDON TRANSPORT CENTENARY TUBE EXHIBITION (London Transport Museum)

Within the museum, there is an effective entrance to this relaxed exhibition, cleverly fitted into a very small space. The historical sections are clear and instructive, with some good 'hands-on' opportunities. There is good sound separation in early parts of the display, and surfaces are well finished and maintained, with clear graphics.

The interactive 'plan your own tube route' is an excellent example of innovation in this varied exhibition.

Planning for Quality

The 1991 Interpret Britain Awards described above were presented by Jeremy Isaacs, Director General of the Royal Opera House, at the London Transport Museum on 5th February 1992. The occasion was followed by a symposium on interpretive planning.
We reproduce here the texts of four of the contributions.

Planning for Quality: 1

Some Thoughts on Interpreting Science in Museums

by Graham Farmelo
Head of Interpretation and Education at the Science Museum, South Kensington

'There are no facts, only interpretation,' Nietzsche remarked. This flatly contradicts the commonly held view that science is a catalogue of facts, in no need of interpretation. The challenge to the interpreter of science in museums is to address this popular misconception and to persuade non-expert visitors that Nietzsche had a point, if somewhat overstated.

Science is widely perceived to be a difficult and forbidding subject, so it follows that its interpretation presents a considerable challenge. To understand the task of the scientific interpreter, it is worthwhile to break down the idea of 'interpreting science' into its component parts. What is meant by 'science'? What is meant by 'interpretation' in this context? This may seem to be a tiresome piece of linguistic deconstructionism, yet until these basic ideas are clarified, it is not meaningful even to debate what we mean when we say that a scientific object or theme is well interpreted.

In this article, I want to draw attention to some of the challenges that face the interpreter who wishes to communicate science in museums. I shall begin by looking at the complex nature of science – foreign territory to most visitors – before commenting on how we can interpret it through objects.

SCIENCE AND MUSEUMS

The proverbial travellers on the Clapham omnibus are unclear about what science actually is, a confusion they share with scientists themselves. To the non-specialist, the word 'science' conjures up a myriad of images – white coats, odious smells, impenetrable formulae, nuclear explosions, dead animals, electronic circuitry, and so on. The work that scientists actually do, however, is widely misunderstood. In media coverage of science, emphasis is quite reasonably given to results that are likely to impinge directly on the everyday lives of punters, but there is little discussion of how those results are actually obtained. Yet if you ask practising scientists what they are doing, they are likely to outline the general strategy that they use in their work, and they will probably mutter something about the scientific method.

"The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking," Einstein teased us from his Olympian heights. The truth is that the word 'science' defies a simple definition because its practitioners do not agree on what they are doing in a general sense. Much to the frustration of philosophers, few scientists actually care about this confusion. "Science is what scientists do," a distinguished commentator has remarked unhelpfully. Thoughts about the nature of science have been strongly influenced by the English philosopher Sir Karl Popper, who believes that science is a continuous process of conjecture and refutation, and the American historian Thomas Kuhn, who stresses that most scientists carry out comparatively mundane work until a revolution overturns the consensus of the scientific community, and provides a new paradigm.

Whatever one believes about the nature of science, no one would deny that it is an extremely complex activity, with numerous overlapping branches and connections with other aspects of human endeavour. The essence of scientific endeavour is, however, the elucidation of new *ideas* about the way nature works. For scientists, an exciting discovery is not one that they can understand, it is one that causes problems because it overturns conventional expectations and therefore needs to be understood. Debate and controversy is at the heart of all this activity, because scientists are continually arguing about the best way of approaching a problem, about the meaning of results and about which avenues are most worth exploring (and, therefore, funding). Any true representation of science must reflect the continual uncertainty in the scientific community – this is one of the most daunting challenges to the interpreter in museums.

For most (but not all) scientific advances, there is an associated object – and therefore a symbolic icon that can be presented in a museum – but it is not always a straightforward matter to demonstrate how the hardware is related to the idea. Take, for example, two branches of science which were conceived in the twentieth century – molecular biology and quantum mechanics. In discovering the structure of DNA, Crick and Watson used a variety of hardware (X-ray crystallography photos, three-dimensional models, etc) that can be exhibited to tell this marvellous story in a museum. However, in the case of quantum revolution, the story is pretty well object-free, unless you are prepared to count the manuscripts of the

original papers. This explains why quantum ideas – the basis of the electronic and IT revolutions that have swept over us since the early 1970s – are so poorly represented in science museums all over the world. The moral of all this is that the display of objects alone will not allow the story of science to be told in a comprehensive way, because some branches of science do not lend themselves to this form of presentation. Ideas cannot all be manifest as objects.

In technology, which I take to be the useful application of science to human life, this problem scarcely arises, because technologists work, for the most part, on real things, not on abstractions. For this reason, technology as an area lends itself to communication in museums rather more easily than does pure science. A quick walk round the Science Museum in London confirms this. One is immediately struck by the glorious icons of the Industrial Revolution – steam engines, locomotives and so on. Less striking are the equally important, but superficially less impressive, objects that together span several hundred years of scientific progress. One of the Museum's challenges is to make the objects of science speak as eloquently as their technological counterparts.

For most people, science is of interest in so far as it is contemporary and relevant to their lives (hence the popularity of health science topics established in the public understanding of science surveys). Museums therefore have an uphill struggle to make objects of the scientific past as alluring as those of the present. A modern object has the allure of contemporary interest and the promise of importance in the future, but most historical icons must justify their place on the gallery – this is one of the key jobs of the interpreters in a museum.

INTERPRETATION IN MUSEUMS

The word 'interpretation' in the museums and heritage industry is a fuzzy and slippery term. To one expert, it refers to the quality of the signage and the upkeep of the site, while to another it concerns the ways in which the objects are presented to the visitors. A senior member of Her Majesty's opposition once told me, as the Science Museum's Head of Interpretation, how much he admired my multilingualism – he thought I was responsible for translating the labels into foreign languages!

I take the word interpretation, in its museological sense, to refer to the methods used to communicate information in a museum. In order to make progress in the field of interpretation, there are two areas that must be clarified – the nature of the object and the visitors for whom one is catering. In my view, it is the job of a museum interpreter to draw together information about these two sources in order that the visitors derive as much as possible – in terms of the Reithian parameters of information, education and entertainment – from the museum's objects.

Merely to present a scientific artifact in a museum is an extraordinarily ineffectual thing to do. The object is unavoidably displayed out of its original context and, more often than not, it will not be working as its inventor or discoverer intended. Even if the scientific significance of the object were clear (a very big 'if'), it remains for the museum to pass some sort of comment on the object's significance in a wider sense (for example, from the socio-economic point of view). At the most obvious level, the view of an industrial innovation made by a Marxist interpreter would be very different to that of, say, a Friedmannite monetarist. Is the museum obliged to summarise all views, is it satisfactory to give one, or would a vapid and crowd-pleasing neutrality suffice?

Objects are traditionally the responsibility of the curator, the expert on the exhibits. It is hardly surprising that, as custodians of the objects, curators have historically been largely responsible for the presentation of their collections. Although curators are all expected to be experts in their areas of study, they will not all be gifted communicators. It is plain from other areas of public discourse that those who are experts in their field are rarely the best at delivering the message to others. How often is the most gifted academic the best teacher? In science, at least, the connection between academic expertise and lecturing capability is tenuous to say the least, although I would not go so far as to assert an inverse correlation, as some have suggested.

In essence, the interpreters exist to improve their museum's ability to communicate with its visitors. Their role, in my view, is to work *with* their curatorial colleagues to present the objects (and associated information) to non-specialists as effectively as possible. Plainly, there are areas of overlap – the curator will bring interpretive ideas to any project, just as the interpreter will bring insights into the objects. Tensions are therefore inevitable, but they can (and should) be creative and this can be ensured by a good project manager, who ensures that the sum of the inputs made by all the team members is greater than (not equal to or less than) the sum of the individuals' contributions.

One of the advantages of museums as an interpretive medium is that they can be very flexible. That would have been an absurd statement fifty years ago, when the typical museum was a shrine of embalmed objects presented to the public in ranks of glass cases. Nowadays, an array of interpretive methods is available – hands-on interactives, audio and audiovisual presentations, films, drama roles and curator tours, etc. When a new gallery is being designed, a mix of these ingredients is decided upon, and this crucial decision will ultimately be presented to the visitors as the museum's interpretation of the topic. It is a crucial part of the interpreter's job to be the 'visitor advocate', to try to ensure that the presentation is aimed at the non-experts who come to see it, not at the tiny minority of experts who can so easily become the focus of attention. How can one quantify the views of the visitors?

To answer that question, one has to turn to the experts in visitor studies, a branch of museology pioneered in the United States (where, as a matter of political ideology, one would expect the customer to call the tune). These experts have now made available a veritable armoury of techniques: surveys (formative and summative), focus groups, questionnaires and so on. The data from these investigations are always going to be controversial, especially when they constitute bad news for the planner of the exhibition or gallery in question. If the originator feels that he or she is under threat, there are always loopholes to be crawled through. Were the questions really unbiased? Did the setter have a secret agenda? Were the questions posed in a disinterested way? Were the criteria of the evaluation meaningful? Was the sample of visitors really significant and wisely chosen? Somehow, these questions (and others) must be addressed if the data are to be taken seriously and if it is going to be possible to implement the subsequent conclusions.

In my view, it is essential that the museum profession invests heavily in visitor studies. The discipline should grow in status if the required amount of intellectual effort is invested in it – the critics must be answered intelligently, constructively and sensitively. More important, we must listen to our visitors, for ultimately it is they who are most important in deciding whether we are communicating successfully with them. The alternative – the arrogant, sterile and self-serving judgement of the peer group – is unthinkable.

This enthusiasm for visitor studies is not to be mistaken for a naïve belief that a gallery can be designed from survey data. That would be absurd. The purpose of visitor research, in my view, is to inform the process of exhibition and gallery design so that the planners can better appreciate what the visitors are likely to bring to the exhibition. In this sense, museum galleries resemble the more popular media of TV, radio and newspapers, in which journalistic creativity is informed by a welter of market research. No editor in his or her right mind would want to tell Bernard Levin, Hugo Young or Keith Waterhouse what to say, but it would only be sensible to check from time to time that their messages are getting across.

A NEVER-ENDING CHALLENGE

One can think of science as the never-ending quest to understand nature – we shall never know whether our investigations are at an end because there will always be the possibility that some new phenomenon remains undiscovered. Similarly, one can think of interpretation as the never-ending quest to present information as effectively as possible – we can never be sure that we have found the best method of communicating information. No matter how popular or ingenious a method of interpretation, there will always be someone to protest that it is crass, misleading or tasteless (often all three at once). Interpreters, like the scientists who provided them with their raw material, have a difficult – nay, never ending – task on their hands.

Planning for Quality: 2

Briefing the Designer

by Giles Velarde
Design Consultant

As a designer who considers himself to be an interpreter, I find myself about to give a short sermon on behalf of designers, with a strong reference to the briefing of designers.

I am at the moment the founding Chairman of a group called Exhibition Forum, started recently to give moral and physical support to all designers concerned with commercial, information, museum and heritage exhibitions. Heritage has become a very important part of my discipline in recent years, rather following in the footsteps of museums, who themselves only discovered designers in the early sixties. I have worked extensively in all fields of exhibition design, so I suppose I am peculiarly qualified to talk about exhibition design as a unique and separate discipline.

First perhaps I should talk about designers: needless to say, I am talking about exhibition designers from now on. I am a firm believer in different types of brain: just as left- and right-handed people use different parts of their brains predominantly, so I believe it is the same with different human capabilities. I only really know about my discipline but I have worked long and often with academics and I find it important to respect these differences.

Designers think, eat, sleep, dream, see, hear, smell, communicate, appreciate and understand in a visual – spatial – lateral – but certainly not literal way. They are problem solvers and they use visual and lateral skills to solve visual and spatial problems, generally presented to them in a literal and linear form.

The problems are to do with communication, circulation and ergonomics in often complex three-dimensional spaces. There is no recognised formula or accepted linear structure for an exhibition in the way there is for a film, a book or a radio programme. Each problem is therefore new and unique.

Frequently museum or heritage clients, unable to conceive of information without a linear structure, try to pre-empt the design by asking for a trail, a ride or a fixed route exhibition. They should try not to do this. The public is not necessarily oriented in this way; the visitor might well prefer to absorb history in small appetising chunks here and there, or indeed to progress backwards into history, relating it more easily to today than to an earlier period. What the client should do is to give the designer what he needs to solve the problem – and that is a good brief.

Each brief, like each problem, is unique. A good brief will provide all the known data, allowing the designer to examine the structure of the problem constrained by the data.

A brief is therefore the starkly simple setting out of all the known elements that comprise the problem. Each element should then be examined in detail by the client and the designer together, to ensure a total understanding of the problem.

There are six main elements in a satisfactory brief.

The Aims. These are best established by the client with the assistance of professional research into possible visiting public, isochromes, potential returns, educational, cultural and trade fall-out, etc. However, it is no good if the client simply has a few vague aspirations and no clear idea of his audience.

The Venue. This should be examined from two distinct points of view: firstly as a site, its size, structure, form, services and immediate accessibility, parking, lift sizes and capacities, stairs, power, water and so on. Secondly it should be examined as a geographical place: its accessibility to the public, roads, trains, boats and planes, its setting in the landscape, its environmental circumstance, its relationship with other similar or counter-attractions.

The Information. This is quite simply the message that is to be communicated: it does not need to be in great detail at the briefing stage, but it needs to have been sufficiently researched to be confidently supported by the client, and accurate as far as it goes. It should, at this early stage, be supported by a fair number of the less likely types of illustration needed, and at least sketch ideas of diagrams and maps.

The Objects. There must be a clear idea of the objects to be displayed. In the heritage area the objects are often the containers of the exhibition – ships, castles, ancient sites – so clearly they should be examined as sites in themselves. But as often as not the objects are artefacts. Do they have to be collected, bought, made, acquired on loan? How big are they now or are they likely to be? Security and conservation characteristics should be generally known along with other factors that might affect their display, such as weight and size.

The Timing. It is hardly worth embarking on a project unless there is a definite idea of when it should be completed. Projects without a deadline are wishy-washy and irresolute. Any designer will put them to one side and deal with other more pressing matters, making it pointless even to approach a designer, except for assistance in writing the brief, until an approximate deadline has been established. Once it is firmly established it is as well to link it to a significant date, or a Royal or VIP visit. This generally avoids the danger of putting back the opening. It is important to state at this point that, when fixing a deadline, the longest lead item is invariably the collecting, assembly and writing of the script and labels for the exhibition.

The Budget. This is quite as important a design constraint as anything else. Without it, it is impossible to design in detail. If the designer has been involved in the preparation of the brief he will have advised on the likely cost. A budget should be set and adhered to but it is good practice, if it is to be a lengthy production schedule, to allow for inflation and to set aside 10% as a contingency sum. A sensible budget should be based on construction charges, with designer's fees and expenses agreed as a separate item.

For a designer there is a seventh hidden element: the client. For the client the hidden element is the designer. It is crucial, in the long and often close working relationship that is to follow, that the designer and the client should get on. Compatability therefore is an important factor to be assessed by both client and potential designers at the earliest stage.

If you wish to go into more detail about the complex business of working with designers, I recommend the following reading, in the order in which they were published:

On Display by Margaret Hall, published by Lund Humphries in 1987; *Designing Exhibitions* written by myself in 1988 and published by the Design Council; *Exhibitions in Museums* by Michael Belcher, published by Leicester University Press and the Smithsonian; and *Museums and Art Galleries* by Geoff Matthews, published by Butterworths Architecture. The last two came out last year.

Forthcoming Events

CEI TRAINING PROGRAMME
The Centre for Environmental Interpretation has issued a leaflet advertising its training programme for 1992 until March 1993. Events this year include the following:

- A 5-day course titled **'Environmental Interpretation'** at Manchester, 5th-9th October
- A 3-day course on **Interpretive Planning** at Losehill Hall, 4th-6th November
- A 3-day course on **Bird-watching And Tourism** in West Lancashire in November.

Further information on these and other courses is available from:

CEI, Manchester Polytechnic,
St Augustine's, Lower Chatham St.
Manchester M15 6BY.

WORKSHOPS & COURSES AT ST. MARY'S COLLEGE
The Heritage Interpretation Department of St Mary's College, Strawbery Hill has notified us of the following events for the rest of the year, which may be of interest to Society members:

- A 2-day workshop on **Low Cost Exhibitions For Museums And Heritage Sites** on 25th-26th June
- A 1-day conference on **Theatrical Heritage** on 28th November
- A 1-day conference on **Ecclesiastical Heritage** on 5th December.

For further details write to:

John Iddon, Director,
Heritage Interpretation Dept.
St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill
Twickenham TW1 4SX

Planning for Quality: 3

Interpretive Planning – To Enhance the Visitor's Experience

by Andrew Scott
Director of the London Transport Museum, Covent Garden

In 1993, the London Transport Museum will close for eight months whilst a major refurbishment budgeted to cost about £3M is carried out.

I thought we would look for a few minutes at why we are doing this and at the approach we are taking to this substantial redisplay project.

WHY ARE WE PROPOSING A CHANGE?
A simplistic answer would be to say that we are proposing change in response to falling visitor numbers, and to an extent this is true. We are aware that visitor expectations are changing if not increasing. The quality of what we have to offer must increase to meet that of other competitors for our visitors' time.

No organisation that measures success in terms of numbers of visitors and their satisfaction can rest on its laurels and expect visitor numbers to be maintained or to increase unless there is change to re-attract visitors.

But an awareness of the need for change begs the question of the direction in which we should go – and we have given this matter considerable thought.

When the London Transport Museum opened in 1980, it offered something new – a transport museum which attempted to look beyond the objects, to a large extent avoiding their technical nature and telling a far more socially based story about public transport in London.

By the standards of 1980, this experiment was at least partially successful, but an analysis of our displays today reveals a number of problems which affect the quality of the museum as an interpretational experience.

First, the principle objects are very large and are displayed separately from the graphic panels which tell the story. This is a problem for many transport museums.

Secondly, left to themselves the vehicles give no clue to their own part in the story of the people they served. They dominate the visitor's experience and by their very size and attractiveness pull visitors away from the interpretational material which is supposed to make sense of them.

To make matters worse, the graphic panels themselves are a little relentless. There is a great deal of writing all set in the same typeface and point size, appearing beneath headlines which suffer the same problems. There are no visual clues to priorities – a book on the wall not much appreciated by users who get their undoubted satisfaction from the spectacle of the vehicles.

We decided that these problems added up to a lack of effective interpretation, and this set the direction for our redisplay plans.

WHAT THEN DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN OUR REDISPLAY?
First, we are clear that we are in the business of interpreting. The London Transport Museum's mission is twofold – to manage its collections and to 'communicate an understanding of London's public transport through displays, research and education services'.

On the other hand, Covent Garden is a superb site for us to present the story to a very broad audience of tourists, Londoners, school groups and the relatively small group with a specialist interest.

So our aim in improving Covent Garden is to help the museum tell the story of London's public transport more effectively to a wide audience by providing:

- more space
- better environmental control
- and a new generation of displays.

This should ensure that the London Transport Museum fulfils the potential of its site and collections.

This is a mission-led aim but, as I suggested earlier, we can see that it makes sense in market terms also. In a museum like this where there has been little change over twelve years, inevitably interest will wane. We can demonstrate that visitor figures in this situation will fall gently year by year and apart from any philosophical or professional desire to renew displays, stemming this decline is a significant justification for the investment which we shall make.

CONSTRAINTS
So this is why we are proposing change. But before turning to what we are doing, just a few words about the constraints we have to reckon with.

First – and inevitably – there is cost. We must work within a budget and it is one which severely restricts what we are able to do.

Secondly, space: the envelope of the building is our boundary and there is no scope for extension.

Thirdly, we are housed in a listed building and we are limited both by English Heritage and by our own desire not to abuse our wonderful 19th century context.

Fourthly, these large objects dominate displays and people's perceptions of what a transport museum has to offer.

HOW WE ARE APPROACHING IT

i. The Theme

I stated earlier that our aim was to tell the story of London's public transport. We spent some time breaking this down into a series of themes:

- economic geography of London
- physical geography of London
- passengers
- workers
- LT's infrastructure
- transport technology

We wanted to ensure that each of these areas was fully covered in new displays.

ii. The Approach and Style

Almost as important, we set out to agree the approach and style we intended to employ. We were convinced that we wanted the displays to be people-based. By this we mean that the displays should reflect the experience of ordinary people – travellers and workers – in

an effort to help visitors make connections between what the museum has to offer and their own experience.

Our interpretation would relate more to commuting than to trains; more to safety than to signalling.

Next, we will structure the information to help visitors. This implies dividing the overall message into a number of smaller packages – 17 in total – to make the story easier to digest. We have called them 'islands'. Taken overall we think we can tell all the story we want to tell through these 17 islands.

We have used this approach because we think a continuous narrative is inappropriate both to the shape of the building and the complexity of the subject.

Islands have several key characteristics:

- they have a simple storyline and message of their own
- they will be clearly distinguishable from each other
- the message should be self evident even from the most cursory inspection of the display
- added together, the storylines and messages tell the whole story

The message is the key to each island. We have asked the question "What do we want to ensure that the visitors take away with them from this display?" (eg "London had the first Underground railway in the world.") Although visitors will be able to explore deeper layers of interpretation to find out about construction techniques, electrification and so on, we will not let them lose sight of this basic story.

iii The Vehicles

The question might be asked – is there still a role for the vehicles in this communicating museum?

Emphatically, the answer is yes. The new displays will contain as many vehicles as now (although we shall have more space overall).

But for each one we will be asking ourselves how it will help to tell the story, and we will integrate it accordingly into the displays.

The six main themes I mentioned earlier overlie the islands. As each island is developed it is possible to test its content against the themes to ensure that the direction we seek is maintained.

The islands are being designed to 'stand alone' so that they can be tackled in any order – or ignored completely if visitors want. The only order imposed on visitors is the initial orientation display which – if only because of its physical constraints – is followed by the displays which relate to the earliest days of public transport in London.

This then is the structure within which we are developing our new displays. The next year sees a phenomenal amount of work to be done in the writing and detailed design but I hope that you will visit us in November of 1993 to see the finished product – I'm sure it will be worth the wait.

Planning for Quality: 4

Interpretive Planning as an Integral Element in Place Development: Examples from Spain

by Brian Goodey

Reader in Urban Design at Oxford Polytechnic, and Chairman of SIBH

This afternoon's seminar is devoted to a rather elusive subject – interpretive planning. In my experience, which includes membership of a School of Planning for the past sixteen years, 'planning' is not a process which comes easily to any culture, and is far from accepted in Britain, even though we claim one of the most sophisticated environmental planning systems in the world.

Planning requires the systematic structuring of a path to the future, built upon best-guess estimates as to future scenarios, markets and demands, but initially generated by social constructions as to the world which we wish to inhabit, balanced against the image of the world which we expect to inhabit.

Most often, the planned future is grasped by means of visual proposals at a variety of scales – the exhibition design, the architectural facade, the planners' axonometric of the world as it might be. This must be backed by business plans and feasibility studies, but it is the graphics which too often convince the client that an imageable future is possible.

Such graphic material, and the new images which they convey, suggests an end-state where a new or revised facility is operational, with the presumption that staffing, publications, maintenance and marketing are all integrated with the design and development process.

This leap to a new image is what many national attractions and museums seem to have embraced over the past decade. Within a couple of miles of this room you can, no doubt, visualise a range of innovative attractions which have arrived on the scene 'graphic-first', and indeed, can reflect on buildings and environments which seem to have made a similar journey to the public consciousness. Although visitor surveys and evaluations are often quoted in support of new schemes, the graphic image still tends to dominate.

Before commenting on a more complex process, let me make it quite clear that the indicative and conclusive graphic is essential in the public promotion and financial development of a new scheme. The ability to visualise a future reality is essential if popular support is to be achieved, and expectation raised. Behind it must be a level of analysis which is too often neglected.

There is far more to the interpretive planning process and I want to share with you some observations on this in the context of a recent visit to Spain.

In doing so, I will cite three examples observed in Madrid, Barcelona, and in the Valle del Almanzora area between Alicante and Almeria. Each is a tourist destination, with Barcelona in 1992 fighting Seville for the visitor market, and developments on the Andalusian coast possibly re-stating the significance of the area against the dominant image of a despoiled environment.

REAL JARDIN BOTANICO, MADRID

The Royal Botanical Gardens, adjacent to the Prado in central Madrid, date to 1781 and were reconstructed to their present form after a decade of neglect in 1981. The admission charge is modest and the gardens are open the year round. They are within the walking pattern of tourists to the city, and are well signposted. Unlike many British botanic gardens and arboreta, they are integral to the city as presented to visitors, and adjacent to the emerging art and design 'triangle' described by three key galleries.

But plant materials, even in the form of an 'Artistic Garden' as conceived in Spain, attract a different audience from museums and display material, with a language less accessible than that of the gallery and museum.

Although maintaining scientific and educational purposes, the Madrid Garden has been planned and designed for a range of visitor sectors, and it is this plan, inevitably long-term given the materials involved, which interests us here.

Although complemented by good axonometric diagrams and leaflets (including an English language version) the garden endorses one of the keys of effective interpretive planning, in that the layout and structure serve to guide the experience of the visitor.

Although each bed in the 'Terrace of Plots' has a well-designed interpretive panel, it is the plots themselves, devoted to ornamental, medicinal, aromatic, endemic and vegetable species, which catch the eye. The structure of each bed, and the contrast between them, stimulates enquiry, which is met by almost universal scientific labelling, translated into popular names in the interpretive panels.

Rising up a terrace to the taxonomic beds, the unsigned but carefully designed route takes the visitor from the most primitive to the most highly evolved plant species. Fewer panels here, but again the overall structure aids interpretation of the plants displayed.

Finally, the terrace, 'Plano de la Flor', above consists of beds devoted to decorative species, where it becomes clear that the selection and arrangement of the plant material is the key consideration.

At the Royal Botanical Gardens in central Madrid, high standards of design and maintenance ensure that your visit is a pleasant one.

The interpretive plan for the Madrid Botanic Gardens has been developed from a need to integrate the requirements of a range of markets – the urban resident, the Spanish provincial visitor, the tourist, the local schoolchild, the landscape student, and the scientist. The emphasis is on uniform quality of presentation with sufficient readily available information upon which each group can base its experience. Clearly teachers and guides can add much more. The informality of high standard design and maintenance ensure that, at base, the visit is a pleasant one, with the realisation that much more can be gained from lingering and contemplation.

Lessons to be learned here are that whatever the site or building, the key to interpretive planning is in the physical structuring of the facility, and in the provision of uniform and appropriate basic information which serves all visitors. There was no evidence of mid-course corrections, shifts in graphic style, imposed innovations or budget cuts, but rather of a clear plan, sustained through good management.

All my examples are drawn from my own specialist area of landscape and townscape, and from a culture where interpretation does not exist as a profession. It is important, therefore, to note a recent arrival on the Madrid scene which, I fear, contradicts many of the lessons of the Botanic Garden.

The 'Campo de las Naciones', (Zona Verde, 1991) under construction on the northern edge of the city, close to the airport, is in the new tradition of French 'grand projects', (see Goodey, 1992) a massive intervention in the suburban landscape of the city in post-modern style. Although including congress halls and sports facilities, the 'drawing-board' scheme incorporates a number of features which are designed to convey meaning to the park's users. There is, for example, a 'Garden of the Three Cultures' with symbolic forms and planting reflecting the Christian, Arab and Jewish cultures of Spain.

In my experience such symbolism, although exciting for the architect and landscape designer, is unlikely to be recognised by the casual user unless explicit interpretive material is integrated with the design and execution.

The need to interpret novel, as well as heritage, environments is evident in Barcelona.

MODERNISM IN BARCELONA

Although the 1992 Olympics are likely to monopolise popular imagination, the city's more enduring contribution to European culture is in terms of its architecture, public art, and twentieth century design. The Catalan national centre, a major industrial city, and Spain's 'bridge' to northern Europe, Barcelona has built rapidly on the traditions of Gaudi, Dali and Picasso over the past twenty years.

Some fifty urban spaces, squares and public art areas were established between 1981 and 1987, prior to the current Olympic schemes and these, together with an increasing network of building conservation projects, museums, parks and historic areas make Barcelona one of the most exciting pedestrian experiences in the world for both visitor and resident.

But, just as the highway infrastructure and other essentials for the year seem to be lagging far behind the Olympic timetable, so the array of urban attractions betrays an absence of planning and coordination which is evident to any visitor.

One of the key functions of an interpretive plan, especially at city scale, is that it integrates the spatial and temporal aspects of opportunities as might be perceived by the visitor or user, rather than by the provider. It makes none of the presumptions which are commonplace to the designer, the engineer or other local resident and seeks to guide individual interpretation of local identity. (This issue is explored in Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990 and in Hough, 1990.)

Although there is a profusion of literature on the historic and new art and design of the city, there are few, if any, guidebooks or plans which integrate the various interests, and no signage system which, for example, integrates historic sites with more recent schemes. As in so many cities, interpretive panels offer only partial coverage and are attributable to agencies with specific and limited briefs.

At Valle del Almanzora, this 'splendidly solid coastal fortification' could be swamped by extensive leisure development.

Although many of the public spaces were primarily intended for local neighbourhoods which, we must assume, know both the location and the hidden meanings of their design, the same cannot be said for the visitors to whom unmapped colour brochures are now directed.

In Barcelona, the absence of any effective interpretive scheme for the city on display, may be the result of a number of matters – largely structural – which are echoed in the British world of presentation.

Designers and architects are primarily interested in the implementation of their work, not in its use, visibility and evaluation. Often, too, there is direct opposition to any written 'interpretation' which detracts from the artists' presumed interaction with the viewer or user through the design. We are much readier to insist that interpretation of past environments and the value systems from which they developed is essential, than to confront the fact that cultural languages require as much interpretation in the present. This is especially true when contemporary cultural features are presented to visitors from other cultures, be they resident or tourist.

The absence of an integrated presentation, or network for discovery, in Barcelona is also an indictment of a tourism and promotion industry which relies on attracting the visitor to, rather than guiding the visitor through, a place. The skills of interpretation are also less than evident in the available literature on many British towns.

VALLE DEL ALMANZORA

Located in the next emerging 'Costa' north of Almeria, the development around the Valle del Almanzora raises some fundamental questions with regard to interpretive planning which find an echo in new British residential areas.

Here a relatively unspoilt coastline, mined coastal ranges, and modest settlements are to be wrapped around by a very extensive leisure development which, we are promised, draws its imagery both from Venice, and from fortified hill towns.

Current proposals call for the superimposition of marketable images and places on a local landscape which will contribute little of its history to the design or place-making, this despite evidence lurking just beneath the surface. Within the new town will be the site of the oldest Phoenician settlement in Spain, a splendidly solid coastal fortification (see illustration), as well as a variety of industrial landscapes and ecological remnants.

My own vision of interpretive planning is as a key ingredient of place making, a researched and mapped foundation for design and development. It is the responsibility of, and makes sound economic sense for, the developer to draw from past meanings and universal understandings in the generation of new places.

In the Valle del Almanzora there is, indeed, one of these universal understandings, a key theme with which to draw and hold the visitor.

But as part of Europe's only desert landscape, what does 'desert ' mean in terms of vegetation, geomorphology and the fragile agriculture of which remnants remain? How too, does the intensive landscape of three-crop tomato and vegetable production fit with the array on Tesco's shelves?

Central to the interpretive plan is a summary analysis of the historic and cultural resource, not only as a tool for restrictive conservation, but as an opportunity to highlight design and visitor opportunities in the new development.

Mention of 'sustainability' in this context may seem inappropriate as the fragility of local environment and culture can surely not be sustained under such a development. But 'sustainability' is being discussed in the Valle del Almanzora and the quality of the resident and visitor experience is being re-evaluated before development begins. It is certainly a context where a developer who values the implicit meanings of the environment could pioneer a more positive contribution to the region and stimulate a range of Spanish authorities to follow the lead.

At home we need to so enhance environmental experience that tourists and visitors demand a higher standard of interpretation and coordinated opportunities to gain from their leisure experiences. We especially need interpretive plans which link museum and visitor centre displays with the environment surrounding them.

CONCLUSION

My concern in these comments has been with environments, rather than with single sites, or interior facilities. Whilst it is clear that interpretive planning can, and should, operate at all scales, I have focused on the larger scale, and in novel environments, which bring home, to me at least, the essentially new task which we have before us in the next decade.

In the rapid growth of destinations and facilities, their upgrading, renewal, theming and promotion, the interpretive profession has evaded the broader context within which these are set. In doing so, I believe that we have lost sight of one of the major purposes of interpretation, which is the integration of disparate sites, attractions, landscapes and meanings into physical and management plans which ensure that the exploring visitor has evidence and information upon which to build a personal set of experiences and meanings of place.

Interpretive planning, the rigorous analysis of resource, access, themes and potential markets, and the phased proposal of orientation, information and sites, is ill-developed in Britain and non-existent in Spain. In its absence the relationship between the visitor and resource is at best only partly fulfilled, and at worst destructive. We must encourage, and endorse, the interpretive plan, as we have sought quality in individual sites and publications.

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Interpret Britain Awards 1992

Entries are due soon - consider your nominations!

The purpose of this Award Scheme, organised by the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage in association with AIM (the Association of Independent Museums), is to encourage and publicise outstanding practice in the provision of interpretive facilities for visitors throughout the United Kingdom. Entries of outstanding quality will be recognised by the presentation of an Award. Entries of high standard will receive a Commendation. All entries will receive a written appraisal from their regional Interpret Britain Awards assessor.

The Award Scheme is open to any organisation or individual in the public, private or voluntary sector who interprets a theme, place, site, collection or facility, for the benefit of the general public. This year there will be an entry fee of £30.

Readers of Interpretation Journal are encouraged not only to make this known to any good interpretive schemes that they think might like to apply, but also to write to the Awards Secretary (address below) to recommend schemes that might welcome an individual invitation to take part.

The closing date for applications is 1st July, 1992.

Further details may be obtained from the Society's Interpret Britain Awards Secretary, John Iddon, at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, London TW1 4SX.

Quality in Interpretation

Alice Bondi, Interpretation Officer for the East Cumbria Countryside Project, gives her personal report on the seventeenth Annual Conference of the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage.

This was a superb conference! If you missed it, start regretting it now. The main purpose of the conference was to focus on what Interpreters mean by quality, and thus what it is that should be recognised in the Interpret Britain Award Scheme which the Society administers. There has been much debate in recent times on the objectives and methods of the scheme, and it proved to be an excellent catalyst for some lively discussion.

We began on Friday evening with an open session where anyone could present recent work in which they had been involved. There were three fascinating and extremely varied presentations. Gillian Taylor (SIBH Events Organiser), who works for Dartmoor National park, showed some video clips of work she had done in Denmark, using music as a way to establish an emotional connection with the natural world for eight year old urban children. I was delighted with the obvious involvement of adults and children.

Then Lesley Anne Wilson (from Touchstone consultancy) outlined a recent project that she had been working on. I've always wondered how consultants approach a brief when the possibilities seem very limited; now I know. The client's aim was to encourage tourism, and Lesley Anne gave us a cogent appraisal of the original situation and the rather thin story around which the interpretation was to focus. She then neatly outlined the way in which Touchstone had met the brief, proving their ability to build on basic ideas and satisfy their clients. This process itself had quality.

Lastly, Andrew Jenkinson of Scenesetters focussed our minds on a problem which I come across frequently in my work: how do you present maps to people who don't know how to use them? His ingenious – and patented! – solution involves a piece of card with a window in which one can see the immediately relevant section of route displayed by turning a disc. There was considerable debate on the merits and problems of this scheme, including the conundrum I have yet to work out for myself – how to display an anti-clockwise circular walk on a disc turning clockwise...

All three schemes provoked lively debate. It was good to be dealing with real, tangible issues, so it was not surprising that discussion continued afterwards in the bar, and veered into the whole issue of the Award Scheme. Ideas flew around the table, including recognition of individual interpreters, and the possibility of more complex categorisation.

Saturday morning started with a presentation from Kerry Godfrey, a Canadian student of Brian Goodey (Chair of SIBH), on the meaning of 'quality' in tourism. There followed an interesting exercise in which the sheep were separated from the goats – that is, those who had already been associated with the complex assessment form used by judges in the Award Scheme up to now, and those who had not. The first group met to discuss whether the method could be improved or simplified; while those who had never even seen the form met separately to devise their own method of assessment. It was very revealing for the latter group to consider what they saw as the main criteria by which to judge an interpretive scheme. Not surprisingly, the old problem of whether, and how, to include ancillary aspects that affect one's *enjoyment* of interpretation, but are not *in themselves* interpretation, raged for some minutes.

GUT REACTIONS MATTER

This group ended up by proposing ten criteria by which interpretation schemes might be assessed. Perhaps the most significant point was that all its members were insistent that gut-level reaction was a crucial element in any judging process – though the other nine criteria were more tangible, and included the appropriate choice of media as well as the standard of execution of work in these media.

In the afternoon the two systems – the old form and the new ten-point system – were tried out. The visitor attractions of York, interpretational and semi-interpretational, are legion (a Roman pun). On some of these we descended as pairs of experimental assessors – a conventional 44-point form-user and a new 10-point form-user. I took the opportunity to visit Jorvik Viking Centre (it takes us country bumpkins a long time to get round to these things), and was amazed to find I thoroughly enjoyed it. It got some very good marks from me, and I was pleased that my conventional-form-using opposite number, Andrew Pierssené (who teaches at Otley College), had come to the same conclusions, and that his marking corresponded closely with mine.

We discussed our findings the following morning, noting with interest that, with one or two exceptions, assessments corresponded closely between the two systems. It seemed inevitable that the differing judgements would have occurred even if the persons concerned had been using the same form – which just confirms that appreciation and enjoyment of interpretive material does have a strong element of individual preference. It is none the worse for that, of course, but does make an 'objective' judging system rather difficult to devise.

THE DANGERS OF INTERPRETATION?

Saturday night saw a presentation by Peter Newby, who recently found his work being highlighted in The Guardian. He argued that interpretation can actually endanger conservation (specifically of buildings) in a variety of ways, from creating confusion between the real and the (re)created, through to direct damage by wear and tear. But it did seem that rather a lot was being laid at the door of interpretation that didn't rightly belong there, and that the contribution of interpretation to creating the climate of opinion which makes possible considerable financial spending on such work was not adequately highlighted.

For twenty-four hours the question of good and not-so-good interpretation had been explored from several different angles. It was appropriate that the Sunday Morning session raised (but did not have time to explore at all fully) the matter of training in interpretation, and the standards to be set by the proposed National Vocational Qualifications. Gill Binks and Graham Barrow, co-directors of the Centre for Environmental Interpretation explained CEI's involvement in drafting these; no doubt many conference members left the session confused and concerned. It would be easy to try to ignore the whole business, as some may be hoping to do, but NVQs are undoubtedly the shape of the future – "Just watch them!" as Graham Black from Nottingham said.

Sustaining our Industrial Heritage

Nicholas Falk, Founder-Director of the non-profit-making URBED (Urban and Economic Development Group) writes that he was stimulated by articles on sustainable tourism and sustainable interpretation in the last issue of the Journal to contribute to the discussion his own strong convictions about some of the matters these articles raised.

"I feel that the Society has important common interests with people involved in both urban design and tourism," he adds, "and it might be interesting to promote a combined conference on the topic of urban or industrial heritage areas."

The recession is not only causing private businesses and development projects to collapse, but is also taking its toll of voluntary initiatives, such as independent museums, that seek to promote interest in historic areas. At the same time, limited public resources are likely to be concentrated in ever smaller areas, through for example City Challenge and the new Training and Enterprise Councils, with the aim of making a tangible impact. It is therefore a good time to rethink the goals of conservation and to find ways of balancing economic and environmental interests, particularly in the 'industrial heritage' areas which have suffered most from economic change.

Brian Goodey in his editorial on Sustainable Interpretation in the Winter edition of Heritage raises a number of crucial questions about the values that should underlie work in this field, how it can be made sustainable, and what kind of team is required. Over the last decade and a half URBED have tried to find answers to these questions and to put answers into practice in areas as diverse as London's Covent Garden, Bradford's Little Germany and Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. We are currently grappling with the far greater problems of how to promote the regeneration of the 'old quarter' in Bucharest, and some of the forgotten parts of London's heritage, like the South Bank. In this short piece I would like to put forward an approach, which I call Balanced Economic Development, which aims to strike a balance between conserving what is truly special and attracting new uses that help to generate new life and make good use of empty industrial space.

In the work we do, which ranges from acting as consultants to playing the role of enabler and project manager, we find there are two main stages: finding the right vision, and organising for action.

VISIONS TO RESULTS

The starting point is often the availability of large amounts of empty property as a result of the decline of traditional industry. Too often, as in London's Docklands, this has been seen as the opportunity to clear away the past, and to display a few mementos in a splendid exhibition or museum, often in a new building, as part of an elaborate tourism and marketing initiative. Such approaches can destroy not only the character of the area but also drive out the very activities that make the place special and keep it alive.

My early initiatives in Rotherhithe and Covent Garden were driven by three basic sets of values, which formed the basis of my doctoral thesis and a number of subsequent talks and articles. The first is **social justice**, which means ensuring that the new initiatives do not harm the existing community and that they bring some early benefits. This requires careful consultation in

advance of coming up with proposals; a good example is Sowerby Bridge Riverside, where local ideas for a canoe slalom course enabled an early start to be made on changing the area's image; or Elsecar near Barnsley, where local concern to generate new life after the collieries closed provided the energy needed to convince the Council to acquire the property and start the process of regeneration going. Rather than relying on outside developers and standardised packages, it seems far better to find and support local people who are prepared to provide the driving force.

A second important value is **natural balance**, and here, applying ecological principles, it is important to attract uses that can reinforce and not drive out what is already there through planning and urban design. A common problem is attracting in new uses without creating speculation in the price of land that drives out existing activity. There is no easy answer, and sensitive planning briefs are needed rather than crude zoning; in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, for example, we divided the area into a number of zones – the smart quarter of St Pauls, the industrial middle, and the 'golden triangle' – where different types of use were appropriate. Improvements were focussed on places where the public would not pose a threat; for example the new Discovery Centre is located in the area where retailing is concentrated, and away from the industrial area which can be accessed through guided tours.

The third value is **minimising waste**, and here the prime concern must be with stopping buildings deteriorating and promoting a range of appropriate new uses. Artists and small businesses will move in when an area is still dilapidated and unsafe, and so form the regeneration equivalent of 'pioneers' or even 'shock troops'. Later, when the demand builds up for cafés and shops, it becomes easier to attract uses such as recreation or housing, and buildings often need to be mothballed until the time is right, or temporary uses found. This in turn may require the setting up of new agencies dedicated to the task. An example is Globe Works at the entrance to Sheffield's Kelham Island, which is now a pub, visitor centre, cutlery workshops and small offices, thanks to the initial dedication of a community arts organisation who saw the potential where others could only see problems. In other situations where demand is stronger, such as the old Liberty Silk Printing Works, Merton Abbey Mills, it may be possible to set up partnerships with property owners, and to use planning gain to secure some contribution towards conserving and interpreting our industrial heritage. The crucial argument is that by taking an entrepreneurial as opposed to an institutional route adaptive reuse can pay off in economic as well as environmental terms.

ORGANISING FOR ACTION

A key ingredient in 'balanced incremental development' is breaking schemes up into manageable and financeable chunks. This means looking for ways of producing some 'early wins', which is why festivals and other events can be so valuable, as they are so much less costly than buildings. One of our successes has been Festival Square in Little Germany which was devised and implemented in under six months to allow a festival to take place. The festival went on to become the Bradford Festival, the largest community festival in the country, and last year was broadened to include a Summer Season, which Little Germany Action, one of our local project teams, master-minded. We are delighted that this and related initiatives, which include the Bradford Design Exchange with its exhibition space, Treadwell's Arts Mill, and the first urban sculpture trail, have led to Little Germany being short-listed for an Arts Council/British Gas award. Our task has been made easier by having a couple of full time people on the ground, and a projects budget which is used to commission (for example) distinctive street furniture (made by a local foundry) and signs. Success depends crucially on there being a partnership between Central and Local Government before the business community is involved.

By their working with the local business community, through an Improvement Association, it becomes possible to minimise the conflicts between the interests of visitors and of existing businesses. This in turn should make it possible to turn working places into places to visit, rather than relying instead on synthetic simulations. It means of course taking time, but our research suggests that even the classic success stories, such as Baltimore and Lowell, have taken over 20 years before regeneration becomes self-sustaining.

In promoting and undertaking projects of this kind, we believe it is essential to put together multi-disciplinary teams, involving architects, designers and tourism experts. They must share the same values, for in many ways regeneration is a labour of love, and not a progress of producing glamorous reports or monuments. It has similarities with the doctor, healing tears in the urban fabric, but also with the gardener, looking after somewhere that is growing. The underlying problems in doing this well are immense, and there is a desperate need to document and share experience. To help this process, a number of projects are hoping to set up an Industrial Heritage Areas Network. Further information is available from Simon Quin, c/o Little Germany Action, Merchants House, Little Germany, Bradford.

A Devotion to ISIS

Jack Lohman and Brian Bath, of the Design and Interpretation Branch of English Heritage, describe an integrated pattern of planning that seeks to identify what kind of experience the visitor really wants.

Over the last three years the Design and Interpretation Branch of English Heritage has been using an interpretive planning method for major site developments called ISIS. ISIS, or Integrated Site Interpretation Schemes, put interpretation at the heart of site development by linking it closely with marketing, trading, educational and conservation matters related to a particular site.

Our approach to interpretive planning combines three main initial studies; marketing analysis, flow analysis, and visitor studies. Taken together, these studies provide the basis upon which an interpretive stategy can be developed.

The use of marketing analysis creates an understanding of basic visitor dynamics. Research is focused to address the question of how best to optimise the fit between the setting and the visitor it attracts. The task calls for specialised skills in measuring visitor responses to the environment and setting.

Planning develops from an assessment of the potential audience, their profile, interests and expectations. It explores patterns of arrival and departure over the year, design and peak days along with patterns and trends at similar attractions. This is set against the carrying capacity of the property which involves input from conservators and curators. Techniques to assess the visitor density on peak and design days, from the visitors' point of view, have been developed with the aim of predicting the maximum capacity of a site while retaining the appropriate atmosphere.

THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE COUNTS

We have been particularly interested in the results of qualitative surveys which explore the visitors emotional reactions to a site, or proposed developments. These may take the form of structured interviews or focus group discussions.

English Heritage

Brodsworth Hall, Yorkshire, was built in the 1860s by an obscure Italian architect.

In the final analysis we believe that it is the emotional experience of site visiting, rather than the collection of historical facts, that attracts visitors to our sites. On this basis, interpretation must complement that experience and not compete with it.

As a case study the interpretive planning for Brodsworth Hall in Yorkshire deserves mention. This magnificent fossilised Victorian country house and its content were acquired by English Heritage in 1990. It is a veritable time capsule. The house was built in the 1860s for a wealthy financier, Charles Thelluson, by an obscure Italian architect, Chevalier Casentini. The Chevalier set the house in a landscaped garden and gave it large spacious rooms, well provided for fashionable weekend parties. The property presents a complete unaltered servants wing.

The policy for interpretation arose here from the policies for the conservation of the house, its content and its setting. Broadly speaking this is to conserve rather than restore. The fragile nature of the fabric and the special qualities of the interiors and gardens have to be respected. In order to safeguard the features which make Brodsworth unique, great care and sensitivity have to be exercised in the way in which the property is explained to visitors and visitors are introduced to the property.

Primary visitor statistics and information were collected and analysed. Census returns and reports from similar types of property in similar conurbations were of greater importance than usual since this property has never been open to the public. A flow analysis around and through the house was carried out and the reaction of potential visitors was tested.

Since acquiring Brodsworth there have been a number of assumptions about what visitors will want to see and find out and how these things should be interpreted. These assumptions were tested on local people with an interest in country houses, and horticultural groups

were invited to discuss the gardens. The selection was based on a match to the potential visitor profile.

THE INTERPRETATION THAT VISITORS WANT

The groups expressed concern about the first impresssion of the house which differed considerably from that of the Press – "dowdy ... depressing, dark and gloomy". It showed a need for pre-visit publicity to set the scene of elegant decay in order to avoid initial visitor disappointment.

The interpretive strategy takes a lead from identifying the responses and themes of the discussion group interests. Briefly, it was evident that visitors would want to explore the house and gardens on their own, rather than being guided, and they were particularly interested in how the house had been restored. They were concerned that interpretation should be woven in to the fabric of the visit, available at point of need rather than separated, and taken by choice rather than necessity. (This particular theme has emerged in a number of different surveys, not just for Brodsworth). They were not overly concerned with the artistic merits of items on display, but more with the atmosphere generated by their presence, the setting created for Victorian family life. The sense of continuity of occupation was strong for all members of the group, and they wanted this to be preserved, even if it meant keeping the modern water heaters in the Victorian bathrooms.

The special qualities of the interior of Brodsworth have to be respected.

A great deal of information was gathered on visitor attitudes and this has helped to inform interpretive, management and marketing strategies that will be uniquely appropriate for the house and its visitors. A number of ISIS studies have been completed now, and these are developing into a valuable body of knowledge relevant not only to the specific sites they refer to but to heritage management at all our sites.

(*The Brodsworth study, A Qualitative Exploration of Ideas for the Presentation of the House at Brodsworth Hall, Yorkshire,* was prepared by Dr Paulette M. McManus, Communications Consultant, 4 Gills Hill, Radlet, Herts, WD7 8BZ)

Can You Advise?

English Heritage asks: How dense should visitors be?

English Heritage has proposed a development of visitor facilities at Stonehenge which involves removing the present visitor facilities and the A344, and building new facilities a kilometre away near Larkhill. Market research, flow analysis and visitor studies have been completed for the visitor facilities area. Brian Bath, Head of Design and Interpretation at English Heritage, writes:

As a continuation of our studies we are currently making a more detailed assessment of the impact of visitors in the landscape between the visitor facilities and Stonehenge itself. The study attempts to unite tour routing, trampling pressure, personal space requirements, and visual impact along the tour routes. The aim is to accurately predict, not only the land management regime that will be required, but the emotional impact of visitor density upon the visitors themselves. This would lead to the ability to predict the total capacity of the landscape within the parameters we have set.

So far we have not been able to find a great deal of other work on open landscapes which could add to or help with the study. If you are involved in a related project, or know of studies that may be relevant, I would be pleased to hear from you.

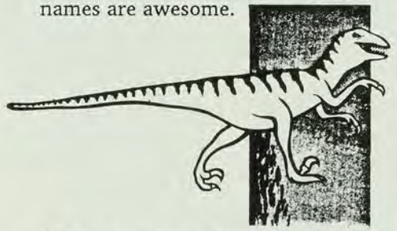
Brian Bath
English Heritage
429 Oxford Street
London W1R 2HD
Tel. 071 973 3461

It has been suggested that we might include a regular 'Problem' section in the Journal. If you think that other readers might have the answers to queries or problems that are baffling you, please write to the Editor, and see if the collective wisdom of the readership can be tapped to your advantage! As far as possible, we would publish any answers, as well as forwarding them to the original enquirer.

News and Comment

'THE FINEST DINOSAUR EXHIBITION IN THE WORLD' ...

This is the claim made by the Natural History Museum of London in promoting their new permanent exhibition in the Ronson Gallery which opened in April. Exhibits include a 74-million-year-old dinosaur egg, and 'three vicious robotic *Deinonychus* roaring as they devour their large prey, *Tenontosaurus*'. Latin scientific nomenclature seems unavoidable in the world of dinosaurs – the very names are awesome.



We are sorry we missed the official Press Review day – we would have been offered Cretaceous Coffee followed by Dino Delicacies. We could also have photographed the amazing Dino, 'your friendly, walking, talking 2-metre tall dinosaur' outside the museum.

The exhibition is designed by Imagination Design and Communication.

...AND A NEW GALLERY AT THE MARITIME MUSEUM

July 21st will see the opening of a new 'Twentieth Century Seapower' gallery at the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, London. Gallery highlights are to include the reconstructed steel bows of a warship, whose hull slices the length of the 50-metre gallery; a specially designed radar system to enable modern ferries to dodge traffic; and a recreation of the cramped and airless conditions of life under sea in a submarine of the 1940s.

SWASHBUCKLING AT GREENWICH

The National Maritime Museum also opened in May an exhibition on 'Pirates: Fact & Fiction', which is planned to run until 6th September. They have promoted it as 'the first family exhibition devoted to pirates and piracy', and clearly hope that it will attract children and parents during the summer holiday. And so it no doubt will, with exhibits including Dustin Hoffman's Captain Hook costume from Steven Spielberg's movie 'Hook'; pigtails from captured and beheaded Chinese pirates; and Arthur Ransome's typescript and drawings for *Swallows and Amazons*.

If you fear that Arthur Ransome may not be so appealing today as he was a couple of generations ago, don't worry. Visitors will also learn about the real pirates of history. How many cutlass wounds did it take to kill Blackbeard? Why did the notorious Edward Low cut off his victims' ears? Did we know that the fearless female pirates Mary Read and Ann Bonny were saved from execution by revealing that they were both pregnant?

How all this is presented as family entertainment you may go and see for yourself. There will be story-tellers, and an adventure playground on a pirate theme. A teacher's pack is available, since pirates and smuggling are now included in the 'Ships and seafarers' section of the history syllabus of the national curriculum.

Admission £3.95 for adults, £2.50 for children, OAPs and UB40s.

FARM ANIMALS IN CITY FARMS

While we are on the subject of entertaining but educational experiences for children and their parents, please note that a list of City Farms open to the public in towns around the country has been compiled by the National Federation of City Farms. The locations, addresses and telephone numbers of farms vary considerably, so that it may pay to phone in advance of a visit to find out what is on offer. For this list please contact the National Federation of City Farms, Avon Environmental Centre, Junction Road, Brislington, Bristol BS4 3JP (telephone 0272 719109).

BEING A GREEN TOURIST

Green and sustainable tourism seems to be a current pre-occupation with many of us. John Elkington and Julia Hailes have prepared a book with practical advice on how to plan a holiday without adding to the worst effects of tourism; the best ways to travel; how to find 'environmentally good' destinations; and what leading tour operators are doing to prevent further degradation of the environment. It is hard to imagine that such a book could avoid adopting an interpretational approach. But does it recognise the problem that promotion, like interpretation, may compound the problem rather than resolve it? You can find out by getting a copy of *Holidays that don't cost the Earth,* published by Gollancz at £5.99.

SERIOUSLY, ARE YOU CONCERNED?

The spring 1992 issue of *IN FOCUS*, the journal of *Tourism Concern*, contains articles that will cause many interpreters both delight and dismay. Delight, because the conservation of sites and other things of value which lies (or should lie) at the heart of the 'interpretation ethic' is also clearly the motive of *Tourism Concern*'s crusade. Dismay, because we interpreters have always hoped that our 'interpretation' was having some success in modifying, for the better, the behaviour of the visiting public.

"Education for tourism is a great disappointment, while education about tourism is hopelessly pious," we read in the introduction to the first article in the spring issue of *IN FOCUS*. Possibly one reason that we in the 'interpretation' movement (let alone anyone else) are not terribly effective in mitigating the misuse of the environment is that our visions, our objectives and our methods are rather limited.

IN FOCUS is obtainable from *Tourism Concern*, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PV.

RICHARD III STAYED HERE

Another fashionable concept among interpreters is Living History. Though the Sealed Knot and the Civil War Society led the way a decade or two ago (more, perhaps, because playing soldiers is fun, than out of any altruistic desire to educate), and medieval banquets followed, most of us are only just now joining in the costume parade.

The Old Hall, in the middle of the Lincolnshire town of Gainsborough, a well-preserved manor house with original kitchen and great hall, was visited in 1483 by King Richard III. Last year it temporarily became home to a professional group, the History Re-enactment Workshop, who for three weekends took on themselves the roles of members of the Old Hall household of 1607, including the man who later became the first governor of Plymouth Plantation in North America.

The Chiltern Open Air Museum is offering Living History events for local schools studying the medieval period 1066 to 1500. Last year nearly 15,000 children enjoyed taking part in Iron Age and Civil War history events. Much involved in these schemes are volunteer members of the Museums' *Friends*.

The first year of the Cambridge Green Belt Project Walks and Events programme included costumed re-enactment of Anglo-Saxon activity along the (probably) seventh century Fleam Dyke ... There is costumed activity each season at the celebrated reconstructed Saxon Village at West Stow in the Suffolk Breckland, near Bury St Edmunds ... A 'ghostly friar' in grey habit was on hand at Dunwich Friary (Suffolk) last summer, to take visitors on a short circular walk. "I have often walked here," commented one satisfied visitor, "But this is the first time the place has really come alive to me."

Living History is very much alive just now. The value of good historical and costumed re-enactment can hardly be denied, even if the novelty of it may soon be wearing thin: before long, only the best and most imaginative will be acceptable.

WHAT DO YOU RECALL ABOUT KIDWELLY?

Richard Prentice, of the Department of Geography at the University College of Swansea, has kindly let us see a reprint of an article by him published in Area (1991), on *Measuring the educational effectiveness of on-site interpretation designed for tourists; an assessment of student recall from geographical field visits to Kidwelly Castle, Dyfed.*

The title may be a bit of a mouthful (though after all, it is a scientific paper, and one has to be precise); but the findings are very relevant. Interpretation is usually regarded as aimed at 'the general public', and higher education students qualify to be included in that category as much as anyone else. One might even guess – though this is, of course, a scientific exercise where guesswork is not part of the game – that they should be expected to be a shade brighter and quicker on the uptake than average.

There is no space here to spell out the carefully contrived system for testing the students' recall (though anyone seriously intending to undertake such monitoring themselves should study this paper): suffice it to say that the on-site interpretational material that was on trial as much as the students were, was provided by CADW – whose panels justly feature earlier in this issue of the Interpretation Journal as winners of an Interpret Britain Award.

It is particularly interesting - though it doesn't come as a shock - to discover that correct recall of fairly simple basic information (Why was the castle founded? What century does it date from? Who ordered the castle to be constructed? etc) averaged, at the end of a student visit, just over 40%. 'Don't know' averaged 36.6%, while wrong answers averaged a little over 23%.

Richard Prentice's findings are much more complex and precise than that simple summary, and he describes methods by which he tried to probe for possible explanations of his detailed findings. But they lend strength to the elbows of those interpreters who (perhaps taking an easy way out) aver that off-site recall of detail is not necessarily as important as the quality of the on-site experience. That may be true for popular interpretation, but it seems to offer little encouragement to those who take students on educational field trips!

Food For Thought - From this issue of Interpretation Journal

"...One can think of interpretation as the never-ending quest to present information as effectively as possible – we can never be sure that we have found the best method..."

Graham Farmelo, p. 4

"...Frequently museum or heritage clients, unable to conceive of information without a linear structure, try to pre-empt the design by asking for a trail, a ride or a fixed route exhibition. They should not try to do this. The public is not necessarily orientated in this way..."

Giles Velarde, p.6

"...Symbolism, although exciting for the architect and landscape designer, is unlikely to be recognised by the casual user unless explicit interpretive material is integrated with the design and execution..."

Brian Goodey, p. 9

"...It is the emotional experience of site visiting, rather than the collection of historical facts, that attracts visitors to our sites... interpretation must complement that experience, not compete with it..."

Jack Lohman and Brian Bath, p. 16