



Real lives



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Magical places



The personal touch

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

Interpret Scotland

issue 10 | autumn 2004

'A' Foillseachadh na h-Alba

Taking stock

Man-eater or paper tiger:
is interpretation ready for the next five years?



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Interpret Scotland is an inter-agency initiative that seeks to:

- ◆ Improve the quality and quantity of interpretation in Scotland
- ◆ Promote the co-ordination of interpretation at local and strategic level
- ◆ Share resources, expertise and experience to avoid duplicating effort



Progress might have been all right once, but it has gone on too long.
Ogden Nash

Cats... the ultimate predators exhibition
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What's in the store cupboard?

Taking stock is something wise warehouse keepers do every now and then. They need to check what they've got, think about what they might need to order up next, and make sure they haven't lost anything since the last time they looked.

So after ten issues of Interpret Scotland, that's what we've done with this edition. Pithy quotations about stocktaking for the top of each page weren't exactly thick on the shelves; instead you'll find meditations on change and development, which seemed close enough.

It's good to see evidence of real progress in the way interpretation is perceived and managed within the major organisations that commission it. Several articles point to a shift that has seen interpretation take centre stage, or at least be recognised as a discipline in its own right with its own set of professional standards.

But there are places where the stock in hand doesn't look so strong. The need for a cohesive and broadly based forum in which people interested in interpretation can meet and exchange ideas is as strong as ever. However, membership of groups that provide this, such as Interpret Scotland, the Association for Heritage Interpretation, and the Scottish Interpretation Network, is sporadic. The relationship between them is often unclear or uncertain, with a risk of wheels being invented several times over.

Perhaps we can live with this as a classic British fudge: not the most efficient way to organise things, but it works well enough for us. More worrying is the possibility discussed by Robyn Hartell on page eight, of a tendency for interpretation to present the same ideas wherever you go. Fully stocked on measurable messages, corporate identity, and generic content; fresh out of uniqueness and creativity? Sounds like something important went missing since the last stock taking ...

James Carter, editor of Interpret Scotland

Interpret Scotland is published twice a year and is distributed free on request. If you would like to join the mailing list, or if you are receiving duplicate copies, please contact Sandra Phipps at Scottish Natural Heritage on 01738 444177. You could also visit the Interpret Scotland web site: www.interpretscotland.co.uk

Next edition

The next edition will be looking at the relationship between interpretation and education. Please contact the editor with any letters, news items and articles. Copy deadline is 26 November 2004.

"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."

Andy Warhol

Taking Stock



The tenth edition of Interpret Scotland seemed an appropriate time to review the state of interpretation in Scotland. We asked Kev Theaker, lecturer in Interpretation and Countryside Management at the Scottish Agricultural College in Auchincruive, to build a picture of how Interpret Scotland members see interpretation, and how their organisation's attitude towards it has changed. We sent out a short questionnaire that asked them to reflect on where interpretation had got to, how it had changed in the last five years, and how it might progress in the next five. The response gives a glimpse of how organisations in Scotland are thinking.

All respondents felt that interpretation had a greater profile within their organisation than previously. In particular, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and National Museums of Scotland (NMS) both identified interpretation as *leading* projects rather than being an extra, add-on benefit.

In terms of identifying the drivers for these changes, no one pointed to anything specific. NTS have built on their successes and used the strength of their team to raise interpretation's profile, while NMS appear to have benefited from internal restructuring and budget improvements. Visit Scotland cite better branding of Scotland and Scottish Enterprise recognise the need for quality, value for money, and the improvement of visitor experience as drivers for improvement.

There was a consensus that interpretation now had a higher profile across Scotland. Evidence for this was seen in the expansion of interpretive teams, the increased awareness of audiences in the political arena, and also in the developing needs of funding bodies and performance targets.

The practice of interpretation was considered to be much more professional, with a greater palette of media and approaches used routinely. Interestingly, one comment about media was: *'Seems to me to have moved back to a focus on people and what they can deliver rather than an emphasis on technological solutions.'*

Some respondents noted that although technology offers tempting toys, there was a greater emphasis on the role of personal interpretation



So what about the future? Among the challenges identified were:

- ◆ The need for visitors' experience to be 'authentic'
- ◆ 'Keeping a careful watch on *why* we are doing what we are doing'
- ◆ Refreshing existing products rather than developing new ones
- ◆ Demonstrating the effects of good interpretation.

Money is perceived as a major obstacle, as ever, especially with the decrease in lottery funding. Another was *'people stuck in the old way of doing things!'* Whether this refers to interpreters or other staff was not clear - let's assume it means both. But there are opportunities too. For NTS these include interest from the Scottish Executive, and more rigorous monitoring of projects. NMS see scope for joint projects that cross-fertilise ideas and audiences. Though changes in tourist markets are a challenge, several organisations also see them as an opportunity, with people looking for learning and high-quality experiences.

So, where does this leave us? In 1998 Nuala Lonie's review of interpretation's practice and profile identified the need to improve communication; promote good practice; improve training and sharing of good practice; and increase the profile of interpretation. Can we sit back, pleased that we have achieved a higher profile for interpretation? Have senior managers and policy makers finally recognised that interpretation underpins every museum, gallery, and heritage attraction? Are interpreters served by an outstanding national group focused on pushing forward professionally?

Without doubt, we have progressed. Major projects are being driven by interpretation, with visitor consultation and evaluation built into the budgets. Perhaps, as indicated by the questionnaire, we are moving away from an infatuation with technology and design to ensuring that they are used to meet interpretive purposes. Interpretive planning is (I hope) central to our major agencies in Scotland, and central to planning are visitors' needs for authentic, high quality, meaningful experiences.

But where is the vision to carry us forward? Interpret Scotland as a group has no equivalent in England, the Association for Heritage Interpretation has a limited membership and we are still importing consultants and trainers from America. SIN's 'Scotching the Myth' conference showed the demand, from across the UK, for interpreters to meet on common ground. It also showed some of the gaps - there were few participants from the private sector.

Perhaps we should celebrate what we've managed, praise the innovators and ground-breaking projects, but remember to lift our eyes to the horizon occasionally and think *'Where do we want to get to, and how can I help?'*

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Nowadays most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never regrets are one's mistakes.

Oscar Wilde

Touching the past

Alexander Bennett, Project Coordinator for the re-development of the National Trust for Scotland's Culloden centre, describes how a new approach to interpretation underpins the project.



© National Trust for Scotland

Anyone who has visited the Culloden Visitor Centre in recent years could be forgiven for believing that time stands still. Not because they have just experienced an awe-inspiring recreation of the battle of Culloden, but because the presentation of this turning point in Scottish history is set in a time warp from the early 80s. Time and thinking have moved on since the current display was created and visitors these days expect a more sophisticated, engaging and 'interactive' experience. In creating a new, more sympathetic, and intellectually engaging visitor centre for Culloden, The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has an awesome responsibility to tell a story that is authentic and based in the best research and evidence available.

The project is being driven by interpretation in conjunction with world-class design. This marks a step change for the Trust, since in previous projects interpretation has had to fit into a given space, often dictated by the architect. The Trust has recognised that this is not an ideal way of working. Often the architecture would dictate visitor flow and exhibition space, limiting the interpretive possibilities even before the interpretive plan was written. Thus at some of our older visitor centres there are now problems with visitor congestion, as the space required to interpret the story was vastly underestimated. Another problem with this approach was that if building work was running over budget, the interpretive budget was often cut to make up the shortfall!

At Culloden the NTS is moving into a new era of planning all aspects of the visitor journey at the start of the project. This is done in conjunction with the architects, interpretive designers and the Trust staff, all on an equal footing. Working together from the start has already proved invaluable for Culloden and its visitors. There is a synthesis between architectural and interpretive design – one complementing the other. For example, significant views of the

battlesite which help to tell the story of the battle have been incorporated into the architectural design.

Within the interpretive story, we aim to engage the visitor's intellect and emotions on an equal level. Essential to that will be the ability to bring the visitor into the story by making it real, based on fact not fiction. Myths will be de-bunked. One approach is to use what evidence we have of real people who fought or were otherwise involved in the battle – from Prince to pauper. The visitor needs to believe that what they are experiencing still has an influence on them today and is not just a distant point in history. Again this is a different approach for the Trust, and will hopefully prove successful. The 'book on the wall' method of interpreting complex stories has definitely had its time!

Another new departure has been to engage two tiers of academic researchers, in order to achieve complete objectivity and academic authority. Firstly we have employed a team of academic research consultants to work with our own specialist staff. They are studying the latest research on the events of the Jacobite rebellion, and identifying characters involved for whom we have enough evidence to tell their story. Secondly, all concepts, text, visuals and audiovisual scripts will be ratified for accuracy by an independent academic advisory panel.

In addition to using real people from history to tell their own story, the Trust will build on the current success of its Living History programme at the site. This will develop the humanitarian side of the conflict as well as interpreting some of the true horrors of this conflict to our visitors.

Throughout the centre the emphasis will be on getting people to engage with this immensely complex story in a meaningful way, and to encourage them out onto the battlefield itself – a place so resonant with atmosphere that any external interpretation must be as unobtrusive and sensitive as possible – another challenge that will need courage, and a lot of vision and determination!

The National Trust for Scotland is working with Gareth Hoskins Architects of Glasgow and Ralph Appelbaum Designers of New York on the re-development of the Culloden Visitor Centre.

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All progress is based upon a universal innate desire on the part of every organism to live beyond its income.

Samuel Butler

Interpretation a public benefit?

Colin McLean, Manager for Scotland with the Heritage Lottery Fund, reviews the priorities for interpretation projects.

Those of you with pre-Lottery memories may recall that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is actually run by a body called the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF). You might also recall that the original NHMF objective was to save and preserve. It was a well known fact that saving and preserving were aims best served by locking things up safely in the dark, well away from the harmful rays emitted from visitors' eyes.

Personally, I always had a slight problem with this. Perhaps I was influenced by my experiences of collecting at the Scottish Mining Museum, where a fair proportion of the collections – underground mining equipment – had been designed to survive in one of the most challenging environments on the planet. A robust kick from a visitor's steel-toecapped boot was unlikely to damage such items; never mind a little exposure to UV light.

Now things have moved on. Recent and current investments by the HLF require commitments to a wide range of benefits other than simply "preserving", and it is in this context that we have taken an interest in interpretation. It is not my intention here to give pre-application advice to all of you seeking support for interpretation schemes. However, it is certainly worth mentioning that the very (and I mean very) competitive situation we currently find ourselves in, where demand exceeds available funds by an unprecedented margin, means that applications are being subject to a tougher assessment regime – same criteria as before, just higher standards against those criteria.

Interpretation is best viewed in the context of HLF's wider objectives. We are primarily a conservation organisation, so the starting point is that there has to be something – a tangible or intangible heritage asset – to conserve. However, we are every bit as interested in and committed to opening up the heritage to as many people as possible, and to getting people involved in their heritage – conserving it, understanding it, taking decisions about it. You might say we are trying to promote a virtuous circle, whereby the more people can get involved in taking decisions about their heritage, the more likely they are to want to conserve it (or see it conserved).

This all means that preserving and conserving the heritage asset is simply not enough for us – there has to be a real commitment to "opening up". Conversely, interpretation – one of the tools for opening up – is by itself not enough.

As an example, take our recent award to a project on Bennachie, that much-loved hill west of Aberdeen. We have invested in



© Forestry Commission

upgrading the visitor centre and its displays but, critically, the greater part of the expenditure is in conserving, repairing and improving the path network on the hill. We would not have invested in just the paths; nor would we have simply upgraded the visitor centre.

Our relatively new guidance on Access and Audience Development is there to assist applicants in promoting this multiple approach to projects. Without that combination of benefits, we are unlikely to become involved.

We try hard not to get bogged down in defining heritage, and we are determined that it is wide and inclusive. If you as a community can argue that a heritage asset, tangible or intangible, is important to you and your understanding of where you come from, then it meets our definition – it is *your heritage*.

The range of heritage assets that we are investing in continues to get wider. We are indeed still assisting the National Galleries to acquire, conserve and promote access to great Renaissance masterpieces. But elsewhere we have been supporting a project looking at the role of sectarianism in the history of Scottish football. Young Roots, a recent addition to our programme, is aimed specifically at getting a teenage audience interested in and involved with their heritage. One lesson we learned from the pilot scheme is that not all projects have tangible benefits in the form of a building, an exhibition or a book. Participation is itself a vital and potent benefit, particularly for new heritage audiences. Can there be any better way to be investing Lottery players' money?

Colin McLean, 0131 225 9450 ColinM@hlf.org.uk



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Thank goodness I was never sent to school; it would have rubbed off some of the originality.

Beatrix Potter

A smell of Jaguar pee

Careful evaluation has helped the Royal Museum test the success of their exhibition on Cats

Cats... the ultimate predators, the Royal Museum's major exhibition for Spring 2004, broke the mould in several ways. Our exhibition brief emphasised that the experience should be *"fun, inspiring, informative and entertaining"*, and *"accommodate a range of different learning styles within the 5 to 12 age range"*. Everyone on the exhibition team agreed we were creating an exhibition for families and stuck to this throughout the process. Crucially, the external designers, John Csaky Associates, took this on board from the start and worked closely with us to create a truly family-focused exhibition.

In-house taxidermists spent over five years bringing new cat specimens vividly to life – the first time all 37 species have appeared in the same room. A high-profile marketing campaign reached out to new audiences, using TV adverts filmed in supermarket meat aisles and bus shelters that roared on Princes Street.

Learning is a social activity, and visits to museums are social experiences, particularly for families. Therefore it was vital that we provided opportunities for co-operative learning, and encouragement to talk about the displays and share ideas. Throughout, we used questions and direct active text to encourage family interaction. Our text hierarchy imposed strict maximum word counts, which certainly focused our minds when writing it! If we struggled to fit in content we always returned to the brief – if it wasn't a key message it was dropped.

Of course, the cats themselves were the heart of the displays, but we worked hard to integrate the interpretation and hands-on activities fully into the main storyline. In particular we wanted to make it easy for visitors to make connections between the activities and the displays, so interactives were spread throughout the show rather than rounding up all the fun stuff and sticking it in a corner so as not to disturb the "serious" visitor.

Evaluation

With over 40,000 visitors in 15 weeks, the exhibition was certainly a success in terms of ticket sales. But did we succeed in achieving the objectives we spent so long deliberating over in the planning process? To find out, we carried out two types of detailed evaluation: visitor observations and a visitor survey. Here are a few of our findings.

Observation

We had set ourselves a key objective that *"Families and school groups will be encouraged to learn together, through a wide variety of interpretive methods including interactive displays and direct active texts"*.

We observed 100 family groups in two distinct areas of the exhibition. 88% of families observed stayed together as they went



round. In the first area, 74% used the whole range of interpretation methods (panels, displays, interactives and film). In 90% of families, adults and children explored the interactives together. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 60% of adults looked at text panels on their own, but both children and adults were observed reading out information to the rest of their group. Adults were also actively explaining and discussing the exhibits with their families.

Survey

The most memorable interactive was the smelly one, where visitors were asked to identify and match four quite grotesque smells, including jaguar pee! However, for most of these visitors, their learning outcome was that "jaguar pee stinks", rather than our more complex message about how scent marking works. Does this mean it failed? It was certainly entertaining (*"Mum, come and smell this!"*), and who knows how intense experiences such as smelling foul smells might stick in the long-term memory, and act as a trigger for future learning.

A pleasing result from the survey was that 51% (out of 120) said they'd looked at all the panels, with another 40% looking at more than half. While we can't be sure how true this is, we did set some questions to test how many of our learning objectives had been taken on board, of which 81% were answered correctly.

Informal evaluation is also valuable – four comments books were filled with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Even some of the negative comments actually showed we had met our brief, for example: *"Interesting but not sufficiently academic – too geared to children!"*

The future

Families are only one of our target audiences. Our special exhibition programme is now designed to offer a range of exhibitions through the year to cater for different audiences, from schools and families to festival goers. The evaluation results and lessons learned from Cats will also feed into planning for new longer-term galleries, helping us to fulfil NMS's vision to "inform, educate and inspire" future generations of museum visitors.

Claire Allen, Learning and Programmes Officer, National Museums of Scotland, 0131 247 4194



The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order.

Alfred North Whitehead

Magical places amazing wildlife



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Julie Forrest, Interpretation Group Manager, at Scottish Natural Heritage, takes stock of interpretation at National Nature Reserves

Loch Lomond, The Cairngorms and St Kilda (pictured above) are familiar names to people living in Scotland. But the fact that these sites are also National Nature Reserves (NNRs) is still a well kept secret. NNR's represent the very best of our wildlife, habitats and landforms. Protected by law, they are owned and managed by a variety of organisations and individuals. As long as these places are being protected does it really matter whether people know about them or not?

Well, at Scottish Natural Heritage we think it does. Public money is being used to manage and protect them: we would like everyone in Scotland to know these wonderful places exist and why they are of such great importance, not only to the species that live there but also to each of us, as places where we can see and experience nature first hand. For the last few years SNH and our partners have been making a concerted effort to raise the profile of NNRs.

Raising the profile

So far we have re-signed all reserves, up-graded or provided new visitor facilities at a number of key sites, developed a house style for NNR publications with the aim of all reserves having a leaflet by 2006, produced a gazetteer that lists all NNRs, set up a dedicated website which includes details of all public events happening on reserves, and have just completed a TV film that we hope to have broadcast in the near future.

A lot of this promotion is about raising people's awareness that the sites exist, but we are equally keen to encourage people to visit and experience these special places for themselves. This is where good on-site interpretation can help to enhance a visit, lead to greater understanding and enjoyment of the site and hopefully engender public support for their long-term future.

Getting our interpretation right

The availability of European funds in the Highlands and Islands in the mid to late nineties, combined with Heritage Lottery Funds, gave SNH an opportunity to put forward ambitious proposals to upgrade the visitor facilities at Knockan Crag, a geological site to the north of Ullapool, and at Beinn Eighe NNR near Kinlochewe in Wester Ross. Although money is not everything, as many of you with small budgets but lots of creativity know, this extra capital did make it possible to deliver some exciting and high quality interpretation.

The interpretation plan for Knockan set clear objectives to help guide the development of the interpretive content, but it was not expected that visitors would then remember all the factual information covered by the objectives. Rather it was hoped that the key themes would have the most impact and be most memorable. Recent visitor surveys have confirmed that the great majority of visitors are able to identify the main themes. Perhaps most importantly 93% found their visit enjoyable. Visitor surveys are now underway at Beinn Eighe and the results will go on our website in due course.

Interpretation at both Knockan Crag and Beinn Eighe received Interpret Britain Awards from the Association for Heritage Interpretation; due recognition that the approach adopted by SNH has resulted in some first rate interpretation.

So what next ...

Learning lessons and ensuring future projects, large or small, follow the good practice at Knockan and Beinn Eighe will be a priority.

Pre-testing of concepts and exhibits is something SNH would like to see done as a matter of course, but finding the budget and time to do this is a real problem.

We are particularly keen to see more local people becoming involved in the planning and management of reserves and this includes being actively involved in interpretation planning. Real consultation and involvement takes time and needs to be planned for.

Local Nature Reserves, which are often nearer to where people live, offer great opportunities for SNH and our Local Authority partners to develop a participative and consensus building approach to interpretation.

As interpretation plans are being used more and more to help evaluate the effectiveness of interpretation, it is important for key messages and objectives to be clear, specific and measurable. The challenge for interpreters in adopting such a prescriptive and planned approach is to ensure that the final product is both creative and appropriate to the needs of the site and the audience.

SNH's website on NNRs is at www.nnr-scotland.org.uk

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O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
Robert Burns

what's ^{up} elsewhere

Make it unique

Robyn Hartell, Heritage Interpretation and Education Officer with the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage, reviews her impressions of interpretation in the USA, Canada and Great Britain

In August 2003 I was privileged to be awarded a Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship – an honour which offers Australian citizens the opportunity to travel overseas to further their knowledge and understanding of a particular topic or field of expertise.

My Fellowship quest was for innovative programs, activities and experiences that encourage people to appreciate and celebrate built heritage places. I travelled to the United States, Canada and Great Britain and had more than 60 appointments and interviews with interpreters, educators and heritage practitioners. One of the major benefits of this amazing journey was that it gave me the opportunity to consider what visitors really want from interpretation, rather than what we, as interpreters, choose to give them.

'Taking Stock' of my impressions originally seemed simple enough, but it is hard to summarise in just a few words a trip where each day brought new experiences and perceptions! So I thought I would address just one concept – the overwhelming sense of 'sameness'.

As I travelled, I became tired of what I saw as the similarities in interpretation – the sameness of design and the sameness of writing styles, but mostly, the sameness of content. I think that we often forget the obvious – that tourists travel. They move from one interpreted place to another, and they need variety, especially in the type of story being told.

As interpreters, we tend to become engrossed with our own 'piece of turf' and want to share all our knowledge and enthusiasm with others. Or we take the 'easy' approach and relate the story suggested by available props and documents. We forget that there are many groups like ours with similar stories to tell. Too often, our interpretation presents a general story, rather than the 'new', specifically relevant story for each place. I believe it is the individual significance of each place, and of the people associated with it, which should be the basis of its interpretation.

A classic example in the UK is the cliché about castles – *"if you've seen one you've seen them all!"* From my experience, every castle is actually quite different, but their interpretation is so similar. Repetitious, general information about armour, castle life, etc (often chronologically irrelevant to that particular castle) was not what I wanted. Rather, I actively sought interpretation that explained why each new site was different from the many castles I had already visited. I enjoyed the specific stories about each place, which contributed to my wider understanding of Scottish and English history.



Historic sites need to communicate what makes the place unique, rather than simply present an idea of "The Olden Days".

As I travelled I had numerous discussions about this aspect of interpretation, but perhaps one of the more interesting examples is from Fort Langley Historic Site in Vancouver, Canada. Fort Langley was an outpost for trading furs, salmon and cranberries, and interpretation there highlighted the fur trade and pioneer settlement, providing a visitor experience similar to many sites across Canada. In the 1980s, in a drive to be more accountable for public funds, Parks Canada sites developed 'Statements of Commemorative Integrity'. These statements ensure that the reasons for a site's commemoration are communicated to the public. The sites now have the mandate to interpret not a general theme, or simply 'the olden days', but that aspect of the site uniquely significant to the nation. In the case of Fort Langley, this relates to its history as the most westerly outpost of the Hudson Bay Trading Company, and the place where British Columbia was proclaimed a Crown colony. Staff at the Fort are now developing strategies and programs that reflect these particular aspects of the national story. This does not mean that information about fur trading and trapping will not be part of the Fort Langley story, but rather that it will no longer be the main focus of interpretation.

Back home, one of the main legacies of my Churchill Fellowship is a commitment to interpreting heritage places according to their differences. I now approach new interpretation projects by establishing what is unique or special about the place and how it might contribute to the local or South Australian story. Sometimes, of course, the answer is still to provide a more general story, but now this is because it is a more appropriate approach for that particular project, rather than just 'the way it's always been'.

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The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

George Bernard Shaw

Dial 'T' for tour



When Interpret Scotland was first published, audio tours often involved lugging around heavy pieces of expensive equipment. Now they can be delivered via your mobile phone. Pete Gray is on the line ...

How do you interpret a large open site with a complicated history? The traditional answer has been built around a combination of interpretive panels, live guided tours and dedicated audio guides. But widespread mobile phone ownership makes it possible to extend the availability of audio tours beyond the opening hours of a visitor centre to create a truly 24 hour service, while at the same time greatly reducing the equipment and operating costs usually associated with an audio tour.

The Prestongrange site in East Lothian covers 9 hectares. It includes the remains of a 16th century harbour, a glassworks and a pottery as well as the 19th/20th century colliery and brick works. The site is open all year round, but budgetary constraints mean the museum is staffed only between April and October, by two Museum Assistants for just five hours a day. Guided tours by staff are limited to at most five per day.

A cunning plan

At the end of 2002 we drew up a plan in collaboration with Andy Wood of AudioExhibitions to introduce an audio tour that would make self-guided tours available. We planned initially to use off-the-shelf MP3 players.

At the same time we realised that audio in a digital format could just as easily be delivered to a variety of devices, including directly to visitors' mobile phones. This has a number of advantages:

- ◆ No need to buy equipment – visitors bring their own
- ◆ No need to supervise the loan and return of equipment
- ◆ Visitors pay only for the amount of the tour that they actually use
- ◆ After the initial set-up there are no running costs – the revenue from the calls pays for the provision of the service
- ◆ The tour is available any time visitors want it

The phone line was set up through a third-party service provider, who receives the bulk of the revenue from calls – hence the absence of running costs. A small amount of revenue does come back to East Lothian Council.

How does it work?

The tour works like an information line, something we can expect visitors to be familiar with. They dial a single number (0870 005 3161), and when connected can either listen to the introduction and menu or press the appropriate key to take them directly to the section they want to hear. These sections are identified on the leaflet they have picked up or downloaded from our website, and on directional signs on the site. Call charges are dependant on individual phone tariffs. Generally it should cost around £3.00 for the whole tour.

The way ahead

Since there is no need for equipment or staff, this is an ideal solution for smaller organisations. A local history society or amenity group already has access to the necessary historic information, minimising research and writing costs. Recording and editing will need to be paid for: with our project this took up about half a day of studio time and the same again for the editing. We were fortunate that John Bellamy, one of Scotland's foremost contemporary artists and who was born in nearby Port Seton, gave his services freely as narrator.

We spent just over £2,000 on the first print run and distribution of the leaflet, and a further £1,000 on directional signage.

Astonishingly, the set-up of the phone line cost under £200. This is something well within the reach of even small local history societies or amenity groups through an 'Awards for All' lottery grant. We already have our next three tours planned!

The Prestongrange Audio Tour project was supported by a grant from the Scottish Museums Council. You can get more information from <http://tour.prestongrange.org/> and <http://www.audioexhibitions.com/>

Pete Gray, Museums Officer, East Lothian Council
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letter

Dear Editor

There was definitely a common thread running through all of the articles in issue 9 ...

Articles mentioned a relationship, a partnership, or a team; others encouraged us to work with each other or urged trust, co-operation and mutual understanding. Sounds a bit like a marriage!

But these *are* essential elements of a successful project, elements that need time to be nurtured and develop. The practitioners amongst us will likely agree that we don't produce our best work without time to gain an essential understanding of the brief, the subject, the expected visitor experience and, probably the most important, the rest of the team. And all before the real creative process begins.

Expected timescales will run away with themselves, but the key is communication, the word which all the contributors emphasised. If good communication, and the elements of a good marriage mentioned above, are in place from the beginning, the relationship should flourish and both clients and consultants alike will be satisfied with the final results.

Sheena Irving MAHI, freelance audio visual producer



Mastering interpretation

A new Masters level course is set to emerge from the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). The course, borne out of a unique partnership between Interpret Scotland members, industry practitioners, and higher education, aims to meet the growing demand for skilled and innovative professionals who can plan and implement effective interpretation products and programmes.

The need for interpretation is recognised at all levels, from Donald Dewar announcing proposals for new National Parks in 1999: *"It is hard to put your finger on what makes Scotland special. But we are all aware of it and aware of the responsibilities it brings"*, to Jack McConnell in a St Andrew's Day speech in 2003: *"We should truly celebrate this cultural diversity while we seek to attract more and more talented people and creative people to come and experience Scotland. To visit – but to work and live here too."*

This Masters course sets out to meet the clear challenges facing interpreters in the 21st century as they draw on Scotland's natural

environment, its history, modern culture, natural and built heritage, and its people in a way which responds to change and provides new or improved experiences. While focusing on the internationally recognised Scottish dimension, the course will critically explore interpretive principles and techniques using sites and experience from around the world.

The full Masters course comprises eight credit rated modules and a dissertation. The PgDip requires the 8 modules and no dissertation, while the PgCert requires students to complete the 4 core modules of communication theory, planning, implementation and policy/practice. The course will be delivered flexibly on a full or part time basis. Subject to validation, the course will begin in September 2005.

UHI is a partnership of higher education colleges throughout the Highlands and Islands.

For more details contact Helena Bell at Perth College
helena.bell@perth.uhi.ac.uk

Guided tours – what is the visitor getting?

Rosalind Newlands, Training Manager, Scottish Tourist Guides Association, reports on European developments

In the last ten years, there have been moves to ensure that people can work across European boundaries. For Tourist Guides, this has meant a great deal of explanation to officials in Brussels and Strasbourg. After all, why shouldn't a tourist guide be like a doctor and work anywhere in Europe as long as they can speak the language? It did not seem to occur to anyone that being qualified to guide in, say, Paris, did not necessarily mean you could do the same in the Outer Hebrides! The Federation of European Guides (FEG) has worked long and hard to get recognition that tourist guiding is area specific and this has finally been accepted.

However, the tourist guiding profession does have a responsibility to ensure that a visitor seeking a qualified tourist guide in Scotland will get the same standard of guiding as one who takes a guide in Germany or France.

To help towards this, the Scottish Tourist Guides Association and the Institute of Tourist Guiding offer accreditation for guides in the UK. We work together to establish common training in interpretation skills so that all our guides can help visitors to see what they are looking at. At the European level, FEG has already established a European wide foreign language competency standard, with interpretation skills to follow hopefully later this year.

Research has shown that a tourist guide has a major effect on the quality of the visitor experience, even for short visits like those of cruise passengers. Visitor expectations are increasing; it is no longer acceptable for a gap year student to stand up outside an attraction, wear a funny costume and say *"I am a guide, trust me!"*

Rosalind Newlands rosnewlands@osa.sol.co.uk

New case studies

Scottish Natural Heritage has added two new case studies to its interpretation web pages: the Access for All developments at Beinn Eighe; and details of SNH's arts commissions at Beinn Eighe and Knockan Crag. SNH's interpretation pages are at www.snh.gov.uk/www/interpretation

ICT strategy for museums

A strategy for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in museums has been published by the Scottish Museums Council. The strategy illustrates the opportunities for ICT in museum collection and presentation, and sets out a vision for its development.

Culloden on TV

Culloden (see page 4) will feature in BBC2's *Battlefield Britain* series on Friday 17 September. The programme promises *"an amazing fly through of the battle using the most up to date computer imaging available"*. The National Trust for Scotland will be following this up with a weekend of special events at the site on 25 and 26 September.

Restlessness and discontent are the first necessities of progress

Thomas Edison

Barman!

Tell me about this whisky ...



Visitors are increasingly motivated by the experiences which are on offer during their holiday, and they expect those experiences to be related to the culture, heritage and brand images of their host destination. For Scotland, that must include whisky.

However, with a few notable exceptions, most visitors asking for advice in a pub or hotel about which whisky to try, or what distinguishes one brand from another, will be greeted with blank looks. At best they might get a recommendation based on nothing more than the fact that a certain brand happens to be currently in stock.

Against this background, an initiative which aims to capitalise on the brand strength of Scotch whisky in the development and promotion of Scotland as a tourist destination has been making rapid progress. Scotlandwhisky was launched in August 2003 by Deputy First Minister Jim Wallace, and aims to bring mutual benefit to both the whisky and tourism industries.

The initiative plans to recruit a number of businesses as centres of excellence where customers can be sure of a high quality whisky experience. Staff from 40 companies have already received training which will enhance their knowledge of whisky. After completing a one-day course, delivered by staff from the Scotch Whisky Heritage Centre, delegates' knowledge is tested by sitting an exam before receiving their Certificate in the Sales and Service of Scotch Whisky. The programme gives them the ability to answer visitors' questions about the history of whisky, how it is made, and the key differences between brands. It also gives them the knowledge required to make recommendations to individuals with different tastes. Most importantly, it encourages and motivates staff to take an interest in the product and continue finding out more for themselves as well as sharing their new found expertise with colleagues and visitors.

For more information contact **Chris Conway, Project Manager of the Scotch Whisky & Tourism Initiative** on 0131 478 7120

Creative Corner Anchovies on your pizza?

Illustrator **George Mitchell** considers the use of humorous illustrations in interpretation

There's no way to explain humour any more than there is to explain horror. Either humorous illustrations (or cartoons) will do it for you or they will not; just as anchovies do it for some people and others won't touch them. It's a taste you can't explain.

In the same way, you can't 'tell' a cartoon as you can tell a joke. It is a visual combination of circumstance, characters, setting and humour portrayed in a recognisable and identifiable way.

In interpretation work, these qualities must fulfil clear objectives. We need to define the function these illustrations should have, how the illustrator is briefed, the audience concerned and the style,

content and presentation of the artwork. Cartoons must be more than clip-art 'funny's' dropped in to fill a space!

Cartoons can complement and explain text in a way that makes photographs seem sterile. Visually, they can exaggerate and encapsulate points of interest that bring emphasis to a certain point - concisely, getting the message across. A good cartoon gives a momentary frisson of pleasure.

But, then, as an illustrator, maybe I am biased. I rate the role and value of humorous illustrations highly - perhaps because I already know I like anchovies!

George Mitchell, 01250 870555 objectives@btconnect.com

© George Mitchell



A cartoon character can be styled and used as a branding tool to enforce the message. Forth Estuary Forum used this 'Litter Critter' to address the issue of clean beaches in an educational pack. The critter added a visual appeal, providing a focus on the subject matter and linking various educational themes.

© George Mitchell



Cartoons were used recently to translate historical events and key issues relating to the Loch Lomond & Trossachs Country Park, through work done for Campbell & Co. Intended primarily to capture the interest and attention of children, their humorous style gave an appeal to all ages.

© Tony Ross



© Manchester Art Gallery

Manchester Art Gallery use humorous illustrations by Tony Ross to accompany some of their paintings. This one hangs next to Ford Madox Brown's 'Manfred on the Jungfrau'. The illustrations give a wry slant to the gallery's famous works, but for some visitors they are close to sacrilege.



real stories real lives

Successful attractions need good stories, good interpretation, and well planned marketing. Dr Lorna Ewan and Juliana Delaney of the Continuum Group describe how all these came together to create a five star attraction in Edinburgh

Buried beneath Edinburgh's City Chambers there is a complex maze of closes (narrow alleys) which make up the historical site known as Mary King's Close. Used by a local walking tour operator for some years, when a range of unfounded tales and legends became the stuff of urban myth, this valuable asset was both under-appreciated and under-used. There was, however, a wide awareness of its existence and of its reputation for being haunted.

The City Council's economic development team recognised that the Mary King's site was an asset with world-class tourist attraction potential. A Europe-wide tender was issued in 2001, and a contract awarded to the Continuum Group to develop and operate the underground site on a long lease.

Development had to be based on as full an understanding of the site and its history as possible. Full site surveys, including structural assessments, were done. An archaeological survey of the whole site was completed and detailed drawings produced of a unique 17th-century house within the site.

In parallel with the on-site works, primary documentary research was carried out in a range of archives including the National Archives of Scotland, National Library of Scotland, National Museums of Scotland and the Edinburgh City Archives. Specialist academics were also consulted.

The site presented the challenge of interpreting the difficult complex of spaces safely, together with their fascinating and emotional human stories, whilst respecting the sometimes fragile physical fabric. Good story-telling, combined with a subtle use of state-of-the-art technology was seen as the right combination to turn the dark passages into a memorable visitor experience.

Despite the Close's renown as a place of paranormal activity, Continuum's interpretive approach was largely historical – on the basis that the ghosts would take care of themselves! The historical stories revealed through research were fascinating, including a well documented murder case which made legal history, the experiences of the Craig family during the plague, the remarkable survival of 17th century rooms, and Mary King's own testament.

Once the interpretive 'headline stories' had been identified, the challenge was to integrate them into appropriate spaces in an understandable and largely chronological order, whilst ensuring that groups of visitors could move around the complex site safely without meeting each other. Limited tableaux and audio interpretation provide visitors with some visualisations of times past, from hand-carved solid oak panelling in 16th-century style to the sounds of cattle lowing in the cobbled cowshed. Lighting was used both to interpret and illuminate. The ethos was to ensure all the interpretation had academic integrity and that the media used did not detract from the site itself.

The difficult access to and through the closes demands that visitors are accompanied throughout, so well-trained guides were seen as the most important medium for

interpretation. Scripts for four historical characters were developed as personas for the guides. This approach not only ensured good story-telling but meant the interpretation could include a range of Scots words that could be explained to visitors as necessary. Recognising the importance of the guides, professional script-writers, voice coaches and a theatre group were all involved in developing their presentations.

With a world class project in the making the attention turned to marketing and operations: this was a stand-alone commercial venture which had to make money. A limited marketing budget had to deliver a projected 60,000 visitors a year. The emphasis was placed on PR to build on existing awareness, and tell the 'real' story of Mary King's Close. The media responded with overwhelming enthusiasm; particularly to the well researched presentation which offered wider access to a greater number of visitors. Extensive coverage in the Scottish media was matched by English and international coverage. A TV advertising campaign ran to support the opening. The result was to deliver double the projected number of visitors in 2003, the first year of operation.

But the most important measure of success is visitor satisfaction, and exit research shows that over 95 per cent of visitors would recommend a visit to Mary King's Close to a friend. The Good Britain Guide awarded the Close 'Oddity of the Year 2004' on the basis of nominations by visitors, and the Edinburgh Tourist Board awarded the site its top accolade of a Five Star Quality Assurance Award in May 2004.

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