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# Live interpretation: an asset, or an indulgence? In the fields of education and entertainment, how valuable is live interpretation as an effective tool of communication?

STEVENS, DAWN HELEN

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University of Plymouth

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**Live interpretation: an asset, or an indulgence?**  
**In the fields of education and entertainment, how valuable is live**  
**interpretation as an effective tool of communication?**

By

**DAWN HELEN STEVENS**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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**Dawn Helen Stevens. Live interpretation: an asset, or an indulgence? In the fields of education and entertainment, how valuable is live interpretation as an effective tool of communication?**

This thesis aims to assess the value of live interpretation as a tool of communication, by treating it as a form of design, and by comparing examples of practice in the field with other contemporary design techniques.

Chapter two lists a selection of active practitioners across the field of informal and formal education, and entertainment within the area of Britain's cultural heritage. It provides a taste of the professional industry, and includes information like how many interpreters are employed, what techniques they favour, and what educational programmes they run. Likewise in the voluntary/hobbyist sector, the chapter notes membership numbers, public activities, and training facilities. Chapter three establishes the communication model against which the technique can be assessed.

Chapter four concentrates on the practical value of the technique as a tool of communication, assessing its ability to adapt to visitor needs, to establish a communication channel, remain focused, to develop and to cope with visitor orientation. It also questions its practical and mental durability.

Chapter five looks at motivation and links the public popularity, both as consumers and practitioners, of live interpretation with the growth of the movement towards 'bottom up' history, which the author phrases as, 'history for the people, about the people, by the people.' One of the main problems governing the quality of practice in the field stems from the uneasy relationship of the two parents of live interpretation: education and entertainment. Both of these areas run as themes throughout the work.

Chapter six raises the question of the power invested in interpreters, what it means, where it comes from, and how its subsequent responsibilities are being met. The conclusion asks why should improvements be made, and what sectors are in greatest need of improvement. It includes a suggested agenda for a code of practice for the future.



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## Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

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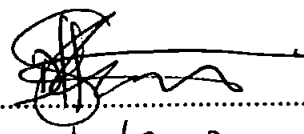
Relevant internally run seminars were attended.

External symposiums attended:

Area Museums Council for the South West, CEI.

Working together- opportunities for joint interpretation in museums, tourism and countryside projects. (Hestercombe House, Somerset. 1993.)

World Heritage and Museums Exhibition and Symposium, London, 1995.

Signed.....  
Date.....28/1/2000

# Introduction

The aim of this research is to establish the potential of live interpretation as a medium for presenting history, primarily as an educative tool and secondly as a source of entertainment, by assessing its current usage within the heritage industry.

Education is referred to in the broadest sense, incorporating the serious academic research performed by many project-researchers and re-enactors; the formal education children receive when live interpretation is used to teach National Curriculum based subjects; and the informal education received by visitors to heritage sites and events, in the guise of information accessible to their requirements.

Coming from a design base and not an educational one, I would not presume to make judgments of a case study's educational merit on personal opinion alone, but rather to work with material gained from generally stated requirements and specific responses from teachers and educationalists.

Live interpretation has been the focus of many concerned academics in the last twenty-three years, whose observations form a substantial portion of the literature available for research. Through a number of case studies, (acknowledged in the classified catalogue in chapter two) I have been able to observe which of the areas of their concern are problems live interpretation has specifically, and which it shares with other contemporary media. It has also been interesting to observe the industry's reaction to the published criticisms during the 1980's. The numerous avenues of these problems are explored in the appropriate chapters. The resulting conclusions have aided the composition of a guide, intended for those who have an influential role in the design of interpretation programmes, giving sound advice as to the appropriate and greatest beneficial use of live interpretation as a medium for presenting history.

## A) Personal Context

Having had a fascination from childhood for historical monuments, artefacts and cultures, I was not surprised, when during my degree studies in graphic design, history should once more feature as an important influence in my life. I spent two summer vacations employed at the The Canterbury Tales,<sup>1</sup> treading the dark, dusty interior of the Pilgrim's Way, dressed in rather inaccurate medieval garb. I took the ample opportunities offered there to study the complexities, and working limitations of multimedia historical presentations. During that period I was introduced to, and joined the seventeenth century battle re-enactment society, the Sealed Knot. In March 1991 while visiting the open air museum at Bokrijk, Belgium, these interests consolidated into the theme of my degree dissertation, entitled 'The Heritage Industry- Fact or Fiction?', which explored the problems of design within the industry.

Through participation in living-history encampments over the next three years with the Sealed Knot, and the English Civil War Society I caught a glimpse of what I was really interested in- the social history of the period.

I then sought to broaden my experience through association with a number of organisations and private ventures, some of which have played a catalytic role in the development of my thoughts and practical interpretation skills. One of the most significant is the award winning Tudor re-creations at Kentwell Hall, Long Melford, in Suffolk, where for at least one or two weeks every summer since 1993 my work within the dairy and about the manor has served as a basic course in first-person interpretation. The training has included guided practise in working with a varied audience, including pupils of all ages from public to inner city schools, foreign tourists, and the general public; learning how to run a unit as an integrated part of the whole site; how to play a character role and minimise the disadvantages of this technique; and how to bring out the best in the performance of fellow volunteers. Rapid

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<sup>1</sup> Sight, sound and smell experience in Canterbury, Kent.

promotion to a role of responsibility also meant direct involvement in evaluation meetings, school briefings and unit personnel management.

At Kentwell I also witnessed the educational leap the children make from the main event where time, health and safety restrictions often limit the audience's physical participation, to the intensive 'hands-on' approach of the single school, one day programmes.

The other influential involvement has been with the History Re-enactment Workshop since 1995, whose pioneering technique of placing red t-shirted third-person guides among their costumed first-person role players, I have seen dispel many of the interpretive limitations of the first-person technique. The experience of working within a small group of fifteen to twenty, compared with the three hundred at Kentwell, revealed important advantages, for example, the ability for the whole group to meet regularly for day workshops and seminars to improve the quality of presentations.

In order to observe a wider range of examples of both first and third-person interpretation sites, large and small, with employed and voluntary work forces, old and new, nationally or privately owned, I have travelled extensively within Britain, and also to the east coast of the United States of America, for a wealth of comparisons.

This thesis reflects the knowledge and understanding I have gained through the study and practise of live interpretation as a form of history presentation, and I intend to implement the guide lines it has generated through any future involvement I have with the industry.

## **B) Intellectual Context**

The upsurge in interest concerning heritage issues and the commercial trend towards joining the industry in Britain since the early 1970s has instigated the production of a diverse body of literature on heritage

interpretation and presentation, but surprisingly little on live interpretation in this country. This thesis is concerned primarily with the British industry, although comparisons are made with the American live interpretation tradition, which predates most of our own by some twenty or thirty years, and could be a contributory factor to their more prominent profile concerning published matter and debates. Many American articles regarding practises in the U.S. were found to be dealing with issues common to both sides of the Atlantic, and are therefore included in the following assessment of literature, which places the thesis in its intellectual context.

### 1) Man's relationship with the past

Much has been written on man's attitude towards the past in its widest context and as it is found in the guise of heritage attraction. David Lowenthal, Professor in Geography and History explores man's obsession with the past, with time travel, and the growth and nature of nostalgia, in *The Past is a Foreign Country* <sup>2</sup>.

Robert Hewison in *'The Heritage Industry- Britain in a Climate of Decline'* discusses some of the problems resulting from this nostalgic yearning. Of Beamish, the North of England Open Air Museum, he complains, 'it is not that it is false, the exhibits are as genuine as they could possible to be, but it is more real than the reality it seeks to recall.'<sup>3</sup> Often in recreating the past, he suggests, we turn it into the past that should have been, not that which really existed. Hewison takes up the argument again in 'Heritage: An Interpretation', his contribution to *Heritage Interpretation- The Built and Natural Environment*<sup>4</sup> He argues that history, in the form of

<sup>2</sup>Lowenthal, D. *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: CUP, 1985

<sup>3</sup> Hewison, R. *The Heritage Industry-Britain in a Climate of Decline*, London: Methuen, 1987 p. 95

<sup>4</sup> Two volume set taken from the Second World Congress for Heritage Interpretation. Uzzell D (ed), *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989

Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 2 The Visitor Experience*. London: Belhaven Press, 1989

heritage will,

...lead to a state of inertia, where we are distracted from the present by ever-improving images of the past, and paralysed by the thought of a future which can only, by comparison with these simulcra, be worse than the way we never were.<sup>5</sup>

In 'Pioneer Museums' Lowenthal focuses on what he describes as, the 'virtually antimuseum museums'<sup>6</sup> that 'visitors flock to...not to reenact their forebears' lives but to celebrate the differences from their own; to affirm their connection with a heritage, not to relive it.'<sup>7</sup>

It is important to consider what the visitor's expectations, desires and needs are from a heritage visit. Duncan Light quotes Freeman Tilden, 'The man on holiday does not wish to be lectured,'<sup>8</sup> but from a survey carried out at historic sites in Wales, he assesses that 'relatively few visitors sought to be educated, but a majority sought to be informed'<sup>9</sup>. He suggests, 'a basic motivator for leisure activity is to seek new information and experiences (another is the desire to escape, or leave something behind).'<sup>10</sup>

Jay Anderson indicates the latter with this definition of the goal of living history: 'a complete breakthrough into the past, akin to a leap of imagination that somehow will free from the bonds of the present.'<sup>11</sup>

## 2) The relationship of the past to the present

'Heritage as Historical Reality',<sup>12</sup> Frans F. J. Schouten's contribution to the same publication, makes a suggestion that follows through all the

<sup>5</sup>Lowenthal, D. 'Pioneer Museums' in Leon and Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*. p. 22

<sup>6</sup> Lowenthal, *Ibid*, p. 116

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* p. 120

<sup>8</sup>Light, D. 'Heritage as Informal Education' in Herbert D. K.(ed) *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1995. p. 121

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p.125

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p.126

<sup>11</sup>Anderson, Jay, *Time Machines*. AASJLH, 1984. p.188

<sup>12</sup> Leon and Rosenzweig, *op. cit.* P.21-31

debates in this study: that 'a presentation tells us a lot more about our way of perceiving the world around us than it does about our ancestors.'

Robert Hewison's pessimistic view of the future in *'The Heritage Industry- Britain in a Climate of Decline'*;<sup>13</sup> is considered by many within the British industry as being a milestone in heritage critique. He describes the role played by the heritage industry in reflecting and contributing to the decline of our society. To illustrate his central argument, Hewison describes a country whose industrial centres are being closed down and replaced by heritage centres nostalgically recreating them. 'The past has been summoned to the rescue of the present,'<sup>14</sup> he suggests.

Lowenthal states ' We must concede the ancients their place, it is not simply back there, in a separate and foreign country; it is assimilated in ourselves, and into an ever-changing present.'<sup>15</sup>

Michael Wallace's 'The Politics of Public History'<sup>16</sup>, advocates the study of the past as a guide for the present, and warns,

if we ignore history, if we are ignorant of the way our world came into being, we impoverish or even imperil ourselves...Understanding the way in which the present has emerged from the past maximises our capacity for effective action in the present.

### 3) Historical development of live interpretation

American writers such as Warren Leon, Margaret Piatt<sup>17</sup> and the living-history enthusiast, Jay Anderson <sup>18</sup> have charted the development of live interpretation and the U.S living-history movement in a broad sense. They root the original inspiration in Artur Hazelius' Skansen, Sweden and then look inwards to their own country's progress. Kenneth Hudson in his

<sup>13</sup> Hewison R. *The Heritage Industry-Britain in a Climate of Decline*, London: Methuen, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Lowenthal, D. *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: CUP, 1985, p. 412.

<sup>16</sup> Wallace, M. 'The Politics of Public History' in Jo Blatti, *Past Meets Present*. Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> Leon & Piatt op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, op. cit.

*Museums of Influence* <sup>19</sup>, considers a more global representation of 'folk-museums', incorporating British, Dutch, Scandinavian, American, French and Tanzanian examples.<sup>20</sup> Most other documentation, certainly of British museums, has been on an individual basis, for example, R Ross Noble's account of the Highland Folk Museum at Kingussie <sup>21</sup> and the story of the museum at Beamish,<sup>22</sup> sold alongside their souvenir guide book.

#### **4) Live interpretation as a tool for communication**

The potential of live interpretation as a tool of communication and the ability of its practitioners to realise that potential, is of fundamental importance in both its educational and entertainment roles. The main thrust of the debate rests with the two principal modes of delivery: first and third-person interpretation; both of which have their limiting factors. In general, the argument is that costumed first-person interpreters, although through their use of historically-based speech and mannerisms, are able to evoke a more holistic sense of a period, they are obliged, as Sue Runyard, a free lance consultant, noted, to 'share their ignorance as well as their knowledge,'<sup>23</sup> meaning their transferable knowledge is restricted to that of their character's. Andrew Robertshaw, Head of Education at the National Army Museum, and founder of the History Re-enactment Workshop (HRW), acknowledges the problems for visitors 'unprepared for meeting role-playing "performers"', suggesting they sometimes 'feel confused or even intimidated.'<sup>24</sup> Gillian Binks, former co-director of the Centre for Environmental Interpretation, agrees that visitors 'may feel unable to ask

<sup>19</sup>Hudson, K. *Museums of Influence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid British (Beamish, p. 126, Blists Hill, Ironbridge Gorge, p. 158), Dutch (Arnhem, p. 125), Scandinavian (Skansen, p. 120, the Wasa p. 167), American, (Colonial Williamsburg, p. 147), French (Le Creusot, p. 163) and Tanzanian (the Sukuma Museum, p. 192).

<sup>21</sup> Noble, R. Ross 'The changing role of the Highland Folk Museum' *Aberdeen University Review*.

<sup>22</sup> Allan, R., Lewis, P (ed) *The Making of a Museum*, Beamish the North of England Open Air Museum, 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Runyard, S, 'Paying for authenticity' *Museums Journal* Feb 1996 p. 33

<sup>24</sup> Robertshaw, A. 'From Houses into Homes' in *Social History in Museums, the Journal of the Social History Curators Group*, Vol. 19 (1992), p. 18.



questions, or fully concentrate on the information given, if the performance is an inhibiting factor.<sup>'25</sup> Robertshaw illustrates how the HRW combats this problem with what are now being referred to as 'red t-shirters'. The 'HRW' designates up to a third of the available interpreters...to act as intermediaries between enactors and visitors.<sup>'26</sup> They wear easily distinguishable red t-shirts for the visitors convenience.

The editorial team of the CEI's *Interpretation*, hit upon the main stumbling block of first-person interpretation: 'problems may arise if authentic accents and period language are used. The audience will be isolated, if they cannot follow the action.'<sup>27</sup> Jane Malcolm-Davies, former partner of Past Pleasures, suggests in her article 'Idle Conversation' that, 'Visitors are attracted by the score to the idea of live interpretation as people-orientated and then find it uncomfortable and are not so eager to actively participate.'<sup>28</sup> She had expressed her concerns about the consequences of such short-comings, some years earlier in 'Keep it Live!', where she quoted Richard Gray, the South Eastern regional presentation manager for English Heritage, 'If the visitor is having difficulty understanding the interpreters, they are undermining the very thing they are there for- communication.'<sup>29</sup>

Robertshaw explains the action the HRW have taken to dispel this 'potential barrier', through employing 'a simplified system based on contemporary vocabulary, (which is), sufficient to evoke the period without being overly complex.'<sup>30</sup>

Jane Malcolm Davies sees the chief benefit of the third-person delivery as the ability of the interpreters to, 'talk about a period of history with a 20th century perspective, (offering) information about the development of

<sup>25</sup> Binks, G. *Visitors Welcome- a Manual on the Presentation of Archaeological excavations*, London: English Heritage, 1988, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Robertshaw, A. 'It's a living thing' *Museums Journal* April 1996 p. 31 (In response to Sue Runyard's article above)

<sup>27</sup> CEI Bulletin: *Environmental Interpretation*. (Focus on Living History issue) March 1987, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Malcolm-Davies, Jane 'Idle Conversation' in *Museum Visitor* 1995, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Malcolm-Davies, Jane 'Keep it Live', *Museums Journal*, March 1990. p.22.

<sup>30</sup> Robertshaw, A. 'From Houses into Homes' in *Social History in Museums, the Journal of the Social History Curators Group*, Vol. 19 (1992), p. 18.

a particular subject.<sup>31</sup> One can also assume from the lack of complaints in the previously mentioned articles of third-person interpreters being off-putting, that this mode of delivery is less intimidating to visitors.

How then is live interpretation viewed as a tool for demonstrating tangible aspects of history? In his article, 'There is no Living-History. There are no Time Machines' David Peterson, curator of the Otter Tail County Historical Society in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, acknowledges the superiority of good living-history over other media in this respect. 'Victorian clothing, charming enough on a smiling mannequin,' he says, 'becomes restrictive and even cruel when worn by a stooped woman.'<sup>32</sup> Like-wise he recommends it for communicating a 'relatively wide impression of the past'; bringing objects into context, for example, 'A butter churn cranked by a harried mother in a crowded cabin conveys a more realistic impression of its use than if it were set in a manicured exhibit case.'<sup>33</sup> The C.E.I team above comment, 'Demonstrators may explain a skill or equipment more clearly than a static method.'<sup>34</sup>

Jay Anderson in 'Time Machines'<sup>35</sup> describes the 'sense of the past' created by living-history as, 'a holistic sense constructed from holistic preservation'. He describes the 'experimental modes of knowing' it encourages as 'knowing directly through sight, sound, smell, touch, taste.'

## 5) Power and responsibility

Peter Stone and Robert Mackenzie, in 'Is There an "Excluded Past" in Education?' express this alarming concern:

The extent of the power, and its associated responsibility, held by educators, interpreters and presenters in their transmission of the

<sup>31</sup> Malcolm-Davies, Jane 'Keep it Live', *Museums Journal*, March 1990. p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Peterson, David 'There is no Living-History. There are no Time Machines', *History News* September/October 1989, p.28.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> CEI Bulletin: *Environmental Interpretation*. Focus on Living History p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, Jay, *Time Machines*. AASJLH, 1984, p. 43.

past is almost without rival. Together they transmit almost the sum total of knowledge about the past, and its relevance to the present and future, that the majority of the population will ever receive.<sup>36</sup>

Schlereth indicates that 'historical texts and historical villages... exert an enormous influence on the average American's perception of the national past and on his understanding of history as a way of knowing.'<sup>37</sup>

As a medium representing one of the highest growth areas in history presentation, the designers and practitioners of live interpretation are being asked by those within the museum and academic world, to acknowledge their responsibilities, and seriously review their philosophies and methodologies in the light of their future development.

In part, this is a request for honesty in self-assessment and in promotional advertising, and here we touch on the antagonism between education and entertainment again, which will be dealt with in greater depth later on.

David Peterson said in 1989 that 'the living-history movement should moderate its claims.' 'Only by facing up to the limitations inherent to historical inquiry can living-history museums become both popular and effective tools.'<sup>38</sup>

Leon and Piatt took a similar stance that year, urging that, 'Living-history museums must continually remind staff members and visitors that they do not actually represent the past; they are merely *models* of past communities where staff members present *interpretations* of history.'<sup>39</sup>

Peter Fowler in 'Heritage: a Post-Modernist Perspective', expresses his unease of the heritage events that 'can send customers away believing that they *do* now actually know what it felt like to live someone else's life in the past.' Such belief is 'self-delusion', he says, and events 'purporting to provide such genuine experiences are knowingly contributing to the

<sup>36</sup> Stone, Peter & Mackenzie, Robert, 'Is There an "Excluded Past" in Education?' in Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989 p. 117.

<sup>37</sup> Schlereth, Thomas J. 'It Wasn't That Simple,' *Museum News*, 1984, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> Peterson, op.cit. p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> Leon, Warren & Piat, Margaret 'Living History museums' in Leon and Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*. p. 91.

delusion...(and) are fraudulent'<sup>40</sup>

Even Jay Anderson, author of *Time Machines*, and the recipient of much of the criticism during this period, admits 'the best we can do is to carry out our research as rigorously as possible and resist the temptation to claim too much for our time machines.'<sup>41</sup>

The man whose philosophies have acted as fundamental guidelines to all interpretive techniques since the 1950's, is Freeman Tilden. Tilden, a Ranger with the United States National Park Service, set down in his pioneering publication of 1957, '*Interpreting Our Heritage*',<sup>42</sup> what he considered to be the six basic principles of interpretation. They are included here in full, as they form the basis of many of the debates considered in the following pages. They read:

- i) Any interpretation that does not in some way relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
- ii) Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
- iii) Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
- iv) The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- v) Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
- vi) Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.<sup>43</sup>

In the late 1980's a theme of debate developed from the principle that the aim of interpretation should be provocation and not instruction. David

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<sup>40</sup> Fowler, Peter 'Heritage: a Post-Modernist Perspective', in Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, p. 62.

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, op.cit. p.191.

<sup>42</sup> Tilden, Freeman *Interpreting our Heritage*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p. 9.

Uzzell, in his introduction to *Heritage Interpretation* declares: 'We should be giving interpretation away. By this I mean that interpreters should be giving away the tools and skills of interpretation to enable Everyman to become his or her own interpreter.'<sup>44</sup> In 'The Hot Interpretation of War and Conflict,' he suggests 'If interpretation is to be a source of social good then it must recognise the continuity of history and alert us to the future through the past.'<sup>45</sup>

Davis & Gibb in their article, 'Unpuzzling the Past: Critical Thinking in History Museums', were addressing similar problems in America, and although not aimed specifically at live interpretation, their comments are equally applicable. In their opinion, 'museums, through their curators, are responsible for equipping people to explore the past critically and for helping them apply those skills to the criticism and interpretation of contemporary society.'<sup>46</sup> As possible solutions to these weighty responsibilities they suggest, 'a statement of relevance, presentation of alternative views, and exhibits designed to encourage viewers to discover their own alternatives.'<sup>47</sup> They place particular emphasis on the need for a 'statement of authorship (because it) reveals that what follows is a personal statement,'<sup>48</sup> and therefore open to interaction and debate rather than being absolute.

Carl Benn's idea that, 'we should communicate our methodologies as well as our findings,'<sup>49</sup> is an issue that has produced much interest in the last decade. The methodologies themselves he advises: ' must be scrutinized continually, so that we do not jump on some unsteady and soon-to-be- discredited bandwagon.'<sup>50</sup>

Davis and Gibb make a number of suggestions surrounding the issue

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<sup>44</sup> Uzzell, D. (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989. p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> Davis, Karen Lee & Gibb, James G. 'Unpuzzling the Past: Critical Thinking in History Museums,' in *Museum Studies Journal* Spring/Summer 1988. p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.43.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Benn, Carl, 'Living history lies and social history,' *Museum Quarterly* p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

that 'visitors need some understanding of the historian's craft'<sup>51</sup> These include using the metaphor of 'assembling...jigsaw puzzles,' to convey the curator and educator's 'creative' task of piecing 'together a story from fragmentary evidence' (ibid), and that 'the museum visitor must be made aware that alternative views of the past exist.'<sup>52</sup>

## **6) Live interpretation's relationship and integration with the academic world**

In dealing with an essentially academic subject and having strong ties with the entertainment sector, live interpretation has often found itself in conflict with the pure academics and those in the traditional museums' field. Duncan Light gives a possible reason for this conflict: 'a long-standing ambivalence (exists) in Britain towards entertainment, and a belief that pleasure and learning are dichotomous and incompatible'<sup>53</sup> The greater part of the written criticism aimed at live interpretation is connected with this area of academic professionalism in some form or other.

Carl Benn, curator in 1987 for Military and Marine History, with the Toronto Historical Board, suggests that living history museums should 'break out of their relative isolation from the rest of scholarly world.'<sup>54</sup> When planning an interpretation programme, he stresses that a 'balance must be maintained through careful research, interpretive skill, and curatorial control,' while Peter Stone and Robert Mackenzie of English Heritage, suggest, 'those carrying out original research about the past need to work closely with educators and interpreters... to impart and distinguish between what is known, what can legitimately be inferred, and what is

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<sup>51</sup> Davis & Gibb, op. cit. p. 42

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Light, Duncan 'Heritage as Informal Education' in D K Herbert (ed) *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1995, p. 131.

<sup>54</sup> Benn, op. cit. p. 28.

complete fabrication.<sup>55</sup>

Thomas J. Schelereth, a professor and director in American studies at the University of Notre Dame, advises in 'It Wasn't That Simple,' that living-history museums 'would profit if their practitioners thought more seriously about their philosophical assumptions and professional practices.'<sup>56</sup> 'Museum curators,' he regrets, 'do not have access to a highly developed scholarly apparatus of systematic, collective research procedures common to most professional disciplines.'<sup>57</sup> He condemns living-history museums and text books for lacking 'footnotes and bibliographies,' and indicates 'the credibility and historical authenticity of... background research cannot be adjudicated by professional peers,'<sup>58</sup> which limits its wider academic use. This article was first published in 1978 and then again in 1984, when it carried an afterword praising those in the industry who were 'demonstrating the intellectual openness and methodological savvy,' that he had called for. He also states very clearly the areas that had still not been 'adequately met', such as 'conflict, failure, dissent or prejudice'.<sup>59</sup>

## 7) The Entertainment factor

The crux many of the issues surrounding live interpretation are the inevitable problems caused by the dual role it is often asked to perform as both educator and entertainer. In 'Heritage as Informal Education', Duncan Light quotes a statistic, gained from the English Tourist Board, that 'visits to heritage attractions rose... from 52 million to 68 million between 1977 and 1991', and 'consequently, there was a rapid increase in the number and range of heritage attractions open to the public.'<sup>60</sup> This upsurge of public

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<sup>55</sup> Stone & Mackenzie op. cit. p. 118.

<sup>56</sup> Schelereth op. cit. p. 64

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>60</sup> E H Monitor 1977 & Sightseeing in 1977 in Light, Duncan 'Heritage as Informal Education' in D K Herbert (ed) *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1995. p. 123

interest in heritage increased the influence of the entertainment factor in heritage interpretation and presentation, and consequently provoked additional conflicts of interest between the academics and the management sector of the heritage industry.

In an increasingly market-led field, Peter Fowler worries that interpreters and designers feel obliged to display 'the pap which panders to their expectations,'<sup>61</sup>

David Uzzell in 'The Hot Interpretation of War and Conflict' comments: 'while every attempt is made at authenticity and accuracy, (speaking of a re-enacted battle by the Great War Society), 'we know that the mud, the gas, the carnage, the horror is excluded for the sake of good taste and presenting "an enjoyable day out for all the family."'<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile Peter Rumble reminds us that 'funding and marketing should always be at the back of our minds when discussing interpretation.'<sup>63</sup>because the market is being shared with leisure parks and the like, which exhibit 'sheer professionalism... in market research (and) commercial evaluation.'<sup>64</sup>

## **8) Live interpretation as an educational tool**

Light describes the nature of informal education, referring to it as, 'that self-motivated, voluntary, exploratory, non-cohesive learning and understanding which can take place during a visit to a heritage site.'<sup>65</sup> Complimenting Light's chapter is Richard Prentice's 'Heritage as Formal Education,' which explores the effectiveness of using school trips to heritage sites as part of the children's formal education. He suggests,

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<sup>61</sup> Fowler, Peter, 'Heritage: A Post-Modernist Perspective' in Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> Uzzell, Vol. 1, op. cit. p. 44.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Light Ibid, p.117.



the objective of empathy with the points of view of past people is potentially aided by activity-based learning, so long as it is remembered that children on visits are seeing and handling only relics of the past, not the past itself, and that these relics represent evidence on which an understanding can be based.<sup>66</sup>

'As a minimum,' he recommends, 'visits may be used to stimulate the curiosity of children.'<sup>67</sup> He goes on to discuss the influence of the National Curriculum over the development of the heritage industry, saying it 'represents the opportunity for the managers of heritage attractions to develop appropriate teaching materials and services to encourage visits.'<sup>68</sup> Lord Montague, as Chairman for English Heritage, in his preface to 'Living History. Reconstructing the past with Children', states, 'Putting children into a living reconstruction of the past enables them to learn by experiencing a totally different way of life...it makes it easier to teach them what it felt like to live in the past.'<sup>69</sup> He adds that preparation for such visits provide the opportunity 'for a class to study a particular historical period in more depth and apply historical skills intensively to one moment in the past.'

## 9) Selectivity

Lowenthal. Then in 'Benefits and burdens of the past', he suggests what man sees as valuable and wants to use from the past, and what he would rather leave buried there.

Michael Wallace, in 'Visiting the Past. History Museums in the United States,' discusses the selectivity apparent in the 'kinds of perspectives the museums promote', and by using Colonial Williamsburg, Greenfield

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<sup>66</sup> Prentice, Richard 'Heritage as Formal Education,' Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol.1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, p. 148 (quoting Pluckrose 1991.)

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.149.

<sup>69</sup> Fairclough, John, Redsell, Patrick 'Living History. Reconstructing the past with Children' English Heritage, 1984, p. 2.

Village, and Old Sturbridge Village as examples, argues the that ' most history museums were constructed by members of dominant classes and embodied interpretations that supported their sponsors' privileged positions.'<sup>70</sup>

In 'Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World' Michael Wallace ventures, 'one might fairly say that Walt Disney has taught more people more history, in a more memorable way, than they ever learned in school, to say nothing of history museums.'<sup>71</sup> He compares Walt Disney's original 'history-flavoured entertainments' with 'the bad history'<sup>72</sup> of the Walter Elias Disney Enterprises, Inc. which was formed after his death in 1966. 'All historical interpretations are necessarily selective in their facts,' he says, 'but here the silences are profoundly distorting.'<sup>73</sup>

In the same publication Michael H. Frisch in 'The Memory of History'<sup>74</sup> focuses on the problems concerning human memory being used as historical evidence, and the implications of the censorship of information. He uses the lapse of time between the actual events of the Vietnam War, and when those directly involved started to talk freely of it, as an example of natural memory distortion.

Joshua Brown in his contribution, 'Into the Minds of Babes. Children's Books and the Past'<sup>75</sup>, reveals the standard of historical learning being promoted in the fictional and non-fictional fields of book publication.

In the rerun of the 1978 article, 'It Wasn't That Simple,' Thomas J. Schlereth spoke out against the sanitization of history, through selectivity, that he saw in American living-history museums. and then draws attention to the idea that they encourage an 'American civil religion', through being 'overly patriotic' and 'methodologically prejudiced to show

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<sup>70</sup> Wallace, Michael. *Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States*, in Benson et al, *Presenting the Past*, p. 137.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid p. 158

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.173.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Frisch, Michael H. 'The Memory of History' in Benson op. cit. p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Brown, Joshua 'Into the Minds of Babes. Children's Books and the Past', in Benson op. cit. p. 67

only development, not decline"<sup>76</sup>. but they had not 'adequately met' the challenges raised by 'issues such as conflict, failure, dissent or prejudice.'<sup>77</sup>

## 10) Sanitisation

David Uzzell, in 'The Hot Interpretation of War and Conflict', asks 'When did you last feel uncomfortable through interpretation?'<sup>78</sup> and 'Are we prepared to interpret any of the major environmental issues of our time to awaken awareness... and shock the complacent into action?'<sup>79</sup> He compares examples of 'hot interpretation' with the all too common sanitised presentations found in our museums and through historical re-enactments.

The presentation of "slices of the past" permits the packaging of romantic and nostalgic vignettes of our heritage which is attractive to tourists...At Best it reduces the educational value of history, and at worst it creates and reinforces myths and promotes sanitized versions of the past where quilt is removed and fantasy rules.<sup>80</sup>

Anthony Fyson's letter featured in *Heritage Interpretation* 's 'viewpoint' slot echoes these sentiments on the interpretation of war. He reminds us that 'the remoteness of long-past events and the quaintness of old methods of killing must not distract from the horror of battles.'<sup>81</sup>

Schlereth, in 'Causing Conflict, Doing Violence', suggests that although 'the history we collect and curate is shot through with social, cultural, generational, economic and psychological conflicts; the past that we examine and exhibit is racked with much individual and collective violence,' these subjects, even in museums dealing with war and slavery,

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<sup>76</sup> Schlereth, op. cit. p.62

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>78</sup> Uzzell, Vol. 1 op. cit. p. 37.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> Fyson, Anthony *Heritage Interpretation* S.I.B.H Summer, 21, 1982 p. 3-4

'are not always adequately portrayed.'<sup>82</sup> He acknowledges the problems surrounding this area of interpretation, but indicates that by incorporating these issues more faithfully into interpretation programmes 'where they are historically appropriate,' the visitor will gain a greater understanding of 'their causes and, in turn, what they cause.'<sup>83</sup> ) In conclusion, he says, 'To some aspects of our past and to some of our history museum exhibits, thoughtful silence, inquisitive anxiety or a quite cry might be the most appropriate modes of response'

In 'From Battle Ground to Pleasure Ground: Gettysburg as a Historic Site', John Patterson documents the rapid transformation of the horror that was the actual battle at Gettysburg, to the myth enshrouded National Park that it is today and asks 'What meanings about the bloody battle can we glean from the bucolic park landscape of the present.'<sup>84</sup>

In 'Away from the Big House. Interpreting the Uncomfortable Parts of History' Patricia Leigh Brown, a reporter for the New York Times, describes the progress made at Colonial Williamsburg on the interpretation of slavery. The article describes the pioneering work of Rex Ellis and the staff of the Colonial Williamsburg based African-American Interpretation and Presentations group, from their concern over the silence regarding this 'painful legacy of slavery,' to the development of Carter's Grove, the recreated 'dependency', which now strives to interpret the slaves' way of life. Brown quotes Ellis: 'How are we going to deal with where we came from, if we continue to pretend it didn't exist?' He stresses, 'We need to learn from all of history, including the uncomfortable parts.'<sup>85</sup>

Fowler excuses the presentation of sanitized past in saying: 'our critics would have a substantial point in saying that we misrepresent history if living history events did not lead on to some fuller study,'<sup>86</sup> and David

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<sup>82</sup>Schlereth, op. cit. p. 45.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>84</sup>Patterson, John 'From Battle Ground to Pleasure Ground: Gettysburg as a Historic Site', Leon & Rosenzweig History Museums in the U.S A Critical Assessment 89 p. 152.

<sup>85</sup> Brown, Patricia Leigh, 'Away from the Big House. Interpreting the Uncomfortable Parts of History', *History News*, March/April 1989 p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> Fowler in Uzzell vol. 1 op. cit. p. 30.

Lowenthal suggested that, 'a lighthearted dalliance with the past (is better) than a wholesale rejection of it.'<sup>87</sup>

## 11) Evaluation

Light indicates the difficulty in assessing just how much visitors learn at a site: 'although the desire for some degree of informal learning or understanding may be apparent, this does not necessarily mean that people do learn from their encounters with interpretation.'<sup>88</sup> He indicates the industry's lack of research in this field: 'the educational effectiveness of interpretation has received very little attention, and is poorly understood,'<sup>89</sup> and gives suggestions of areas to tackle.

Prentice advocates the link between lack of evaluation and inappropriate design: 'the lack of of attention to effectiveness that much recent investment is probably underachieving through sub-optimal design.'<sup>90</sup>

## 12) Training

There are many sources on the matter of training. Some discuss possible approaches to better training in the future, such as Lord & Barrow in 'Towards a Co-ordinated Approach to Interpretation Training in Britain'<sup>91</sup> and William J. Lewis in 'Training Interpreters,'<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Light quoting Lowenthal D & Binney, M. *Our Past Before Us: Why do we Save it?* London: Templesmith, p. 232.

<sup>88</sup> Light, Duncan 'Heritage as Informal Education' in D K Herbert (ed) *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1995. p. 127.

<sup>89</sup> Light, op. cit. p.128.

<sup>90</sup> Prentice op. cit. p. 166.

<sup>91</sup> Lord, Geoffrey, & Barrow, Graham, 'Towards a Co-ordinated Approach to Interpretation Training in Britain', in Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989. pp.201-209.

<sup>92</sup> Lewis, William J. 'Training Interpreters,' in Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, pp. 209-213.

Specific training manuals include *Visitors Welcome- a Manual on the Presentation of Archaeological excavations*,<sup>93</sup> by Gillian Binks, and *Past into Present*,<sup>94</sup> by US interpreter Stacy F Roth. Both publications deal offer advice on specific areas of interpretation, but much general advice is offered too. Roth offers the first detailed guidelines for first-person interpreters.

Many of the museum journals like *Interpretation*, and its predecessors have run articles offering guidance. For example, the *Environmental Interpretation* issue on guided walks, included 'Walk this Way', by Yvonne Hosker giving advice on 'What makes a good guided walk leader'<sup>95</sup>

### 13) Guidelines for use

The '*Museums Year Book*'<sup>96</sup> gives contact addresses for all its members and standard information about services available at each site. Unfortunately for this study the nature of each site's interpretation is implicated with varying degrees of clarity, making, for example, the compilation of a costumed live interpretation site list somewhat laborious.

Annual publications of English Heritage's *Events*,<sup>97</sup> Historic Scotland's *Events Programme*,<sup>98</sup> and the National Trust for Scotland's *Events and Guided Walks*<sup>99</sup> are good records of non-permanent live interpretation activity in Britain. As far as E.H Events is concerned, they also offer a clear indication of the professional's choice of re-enactment society, as Howard Giles, head of Special Events, indicated in his paper for the 1995 World Heritage and Museums Show lecture series. The programme has been

<sup>93</sup> Binks, G. *Visitors Welcome- a Manual on the Presentation of Archaeological excavations*, London: English Heritage, 1988.

<sup>94</sup> Roth, Stacy F *Past into Present*, Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1998.

<sup>95</sup> Hosker, Y. 'Walk this Way', in *Environmental Interpretation*, April 1992.

<sup>96</sup> *Museums Year Book* (Annual publication)

<sup>97</sup> English Heritage *Events* (Annual publication)

<sup>98</sup> Historic Scotland *Events Programme* (Annual publication)

<sup>99</sup> National Trust for Scotland *Events and Guided Walks* (Annual publication)

designed for easy reference and gives a clear indication of the nature of each presentation or performance through the use of symbols, for example, the head and shoulders of a 17th century soldier represents 'living-history (featuring performers, clothing and equipment to a high level of historical accuracy)', crossed swords represent ' battles and military displays', a jesters head 'historical entertainment', and so on.

#### 14) Do it Yourself Guides

Britain has seen few publications specific to this purpose outside articles in the journals serving the industry detailed under 'heritage journals' below. Back in the 1970's and 80's the industry was booming and an ever-increasing number of new museums were competing for a share in the visitor market. *Visitors welcome-a manual on the presentation and interpretation of archaeological sites* is an informal, well structured, and comprehensive guide, by Gillian Binks, John Dyke and Philip Dagnall, for the C.E.I. Although its sound advice was originally intended for interpreters of archaeological sites, much of it is directly relevant to all interpretive projects. For example, part 1 has sections on visitor assessment, choosing the right medium or media, providing information for schools, income generation and promotion. Part 2 supplies practical advice on essential needs, including training, publication design, exhibition design, guided tours and many aspects of visitor management.

Routledge have recently published a museum-based series including titles such as *Museum Basics*,<sup>100</sup> by Timothy Ambrose the Director of the Scottish Museums Council, and Crispin Paine, international museums consultant; which often have short sections on how to use live interpreters.<sup>101</sup> and all of which offer up to date guidelines on museum

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<sup>100</sup> Ambrose, T Paine, *C Museum Basics* London. Routledge 1993.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid p. 77

design and management.

Routledge were not alone in this field. HMSO published, *Social History in Museums. A Handbook for Professionals*,<sup>102</sup> edited by Paine, among others. This mentions folk museums and their development from Hazelius,<sup>103</sup> It gives advice on using live interpretation in part 5. Jon Price, organiser of Time Travellers, includes trails and live demonstration in his descriptions of techniques for site interpretation.<sup>104</sup>

Penny Wilkinson's chapter on living-history,<sup>105</sup> gives managers and curators a brief guide to the range of live interpretation techniques, grouping them under either re-enactment or drama; and then highlights the important aspects to consider when putting on an event. Included in this section is having clear aims and objectives; choosing the right living-history group, and where to find them; choosing or creating an appropriate setting and safety aspects of living-history use of buildings; the use of collections and reproductions; coping with enhanced visitor numbers; extended insurance cover; the use of firearms; and the need for contracts. The chapter is brief, but signifies a good, practical approach being advocated by professionals, for professionals. Guides like this one could play an important role in developing higher standards in the industry.

English Heritage publish a variety of guides to help teachers in their choice and utilisation of media and resources for history education. *Living-History. Reconstructing the Past with Children*<sup>106</sup> by the Education Department of Suffolk County Council's John Fairclough, the Education Liaison Officer (Museums), and Patrick Redsell, the Schools Advisor (Drama), offers advice through descriptions of the successful events at Heveningham Hall and Orford Castle in Suffolk.

<sup>102</sup> Flemming, D Paine, C Rhodes, J.G (eds) *Social History in Museums. A Handbook for Professionals* London. HMSO 1993

<sup>103</sup> Price, Jon. 'Site Interpretation and Trails' *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>104</sup> Wilkinson, Penny. 'Living History', *Ibid* p. 387.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid* p. 392

<sup>106</sup> Fairclough, op. cit.



## 15) Academic Critique of the Heritage Industry

### a) Book Publications

There are a number of noteworthy British publications, that do not always deal extensively with live interpretation, but give a range of views concerning the much broader spectrum of man's concept of, and relationship with, the past, and the developing heritage industry.

The means through which we have knowledge of the past is discussed in chapter five, for example, through experience, memory, history, relics and interconnections of the same.

Lowenthal includes re-enactments in the chapter, 'Changing the past',<sup>107</sup> and discusses the temptation to alter the past, either to make it more palatable, more accessible, more interesting or fun, and suggests reasons for these alterations, and possible consequences. He also gives some powerful examples of when either participants or spectators lost sight of reality and acted on their enlivened emotions.<sup>108</sup> The final chapter, 'Creative anachronism', studies attitudes towards the past that are not shared today, and what has been lost through this. He collected his material from far and wide and the bibliography to this publication is an asset in its own right.

In *Theatres of Memory*<sup>109</sup> Raphael Samuel, tutor in History at Ruskin College, Oxford, suggests the many views British society has of the past, and they have developed.

During the late 1980's the heritage industry seemed to be taking stock of itself. The two volume set of papers resulting from the Second World Congress on Heritage Presentation and Interpretation, *Heritage Interpretation, Volume 1. The Natural & Built Environment*,<sup>110</sup> and

<sup>107</sup> Lowenthal, D *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: CUP, 1985 p. 295.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 301.

<sup>109</sup> Samuel R *Theatres of Memory* London: Verso. 1994.

<sup>110</sup> Uzzell, op. cit.

Volume 2. *The Visitor Experience*,<sup>111</sup> both edited by Dr. David Uzzell, from the department of Psychology, the University of Surrey, act as a testimony to this.

Peter Fowler, from the department of Archaeology, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, also decries the 'presentation of false history as history,'<sup>112</sup> in order to supply the 'pap' that 'panders to (the) expectations' of the paying visitor, in his contribution, *Heritage: A Post Modernist Perspective*. He warns of dangers incurred in such practices, for example, making history exiting when it wasn't, and fraudulent claims of opportunities to experience the past when it is impossible.

In his paper, *Interpreting the Historic Scene: The Power of imagination in Creating a Sense of Historic Place*, Bruce Craig, the Cultural Resources Coordinator for the National Parks and Conservation Association, USA follows the theme of Tilden's fourth principal: 'the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation.'<sup>113</sup> He suggests an emphasis on 'historical plausibility than with accuracy'<sup>114</sup>, the use of 'ceremonial time', and 'immediate contact with original objects' will help unleash the visitor's imagination, and make 'history more meaningful to their lives and personal experience.'<sup>115</sup>

Marc Laenen, the then Director of the open air museum of Bokrijk, Belgium, discusses the important considerations of positive selection when 'Looking for the future Through the Past.'<sup>116</sup>

Three papers concentrate of the training of interpretation staff. 'Towards a Co-ordinated Approach to interpretation Training in Britain',<sup>117</sup> by Geoffrey Lord, the Secretary fro the Carnegie U.K Trust and Graham Barrow from the C.E.I, give advice on the right training for specific types of interpreters and where it can currently be obtained. They also suggest a

<sup>111</sup> Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 2 The Visitor Experience*. London: Belhaven Press, 1989.

<sup>112</sup> Uzzell Vol. 1 op. cit.. p. 61.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 201.

comprehensive syllabus for future training and education of all the disciplines involved in the industry.

William J. Lewis, Professor of Sociology, University of Vermont, U.S.A, in his paper, *Training Interpreters*,<sup>118</sup> discusses the vital components of good training programmes, including 'trainees (being) provoked to discover principles of interpretation for themselves,' and 'positive critiquing in a supportive climate'.<sup>119</sup>

*Romantic Interpretation: A Look at Training Techniques*,<sup>120</sup> by John Wagoner, Chief Park Interpreter, of the Mammoth Cave National Park, Kentucky, U.S.A, outlines his constituents of a training programme for new interpreters. He suggests a knowledge of the following: the language of his appearance; an understanding of the visitors; how to put a programme together; and how to evaluate it.

'Heritage as Historical Reality',<sup>121</sup> Frans F. J. Schouten's contribution to regards Heritage as a marketable commodity and discusses the implications this has on its development.

America was also assessing its progress and consolidating its knowledge for the future. *History Museums in the United States: a Critical Assessment*,<sup>122</sup> edited by Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig included a chapter on 'Living-History Museums', by Leon and Margaret Piatt. They begin by detailing the history of the American living-history museum, claiming its origins from the 'movement to preserve distinguished architecture and glorify Anglo-Saxon cultural values',<sup>123</sup> heralded by the middle class native born Americans at the turn of the 20th century, anxious to preserve their culture at a time of increased European immigration. The authors track the development of living-history museums decade by decade, revealing the shaping influences and the origins of its present day

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 214.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, P.21-31

<sup>122</sup> Leon & Rosenzweig op. cit.

<sup>123</sup> Leon & Piatt op. cit. p. 65.

problems and weaknesses. As major influences they include the Agricultural History Society which developed a great many 'living agricultural museums' from the mid 1940's onwards, and co-sponsored the 1970 symposium on American Agriculture 1790-1840 at Sturbridge, which saw the foundation of the Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums. They also acknowledge the influence of public response to certain activities, for example, the spread of craft demonstrations in the 1950's, 'at a time when modern technology had made production processes incomprehensible and invisible to most Americans, (and) there was something appealing to seeing a broom, chair, blanket, or andiron created by the skilled hands of the patient craftsman.'<sup>124</sup> The origins of the problems of inaccurate interpretations through public demand and insufficient funding becomes obvious through their text. Leon and Piatt give a fair assessment of the American living-history movement up until the late 1980's and offer sound advice for the future.

#### b) Heritage Journals and Bulletins

Heritage journals, both British and American have proved have proved to be the most common stage for debating current live interpretation issues.

The Centre for Environmental Interpretation, (C.E.I.), and the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage, (S.I.B.H.) have amalgamated their two previous independent publications to form a new journal, '*Interpretation*'.<sup>125</sup> which set down some fundamental guidelines in order to aid curators and would-be interpreters in their understanding of the medium and clarification of their objectives in using it. The article

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>125</sup> CEI & SIBH : *Interpretation*

includes a brief description of five different types of live interpretation: craftsmen in residence, craft demonstrators and ex- industry workers, costumed third-person interpreters, first-person interpreters and amateur re-enactment organisations. She does not to include non-costumed guides of the built and natural environment in this article. Jane has obviously taken her own sound advice and is now a partner in the much acclaimed interpretation company, Past Pleasures, found in Chapter one under 'Costumed guides-the built environment'.

An entire issue of *'Environmental Interpretation'*, was dedicated to living-history,<sup>126</sup> the main articles of which, featured the following case studies: Acton Scott Working Farm Museum, the Roman Legionnaire who leads guided tours of Chester, the work of the Young National Trust Theatre, Wigan Pier's 'The Way We Were' exhibition, the Gosport 17th century hamlet, living-history in Denmark, English Civil War re-enactment, a commemorative festival in Lincoln, the use 'ghostly' interpreters in old houses, and living-history services for schools in Bolton. Such a wide range of contemporary activities acts a good indication as to the general standard and attitude during the late 1980's.

Another issue concentrated on what the editor, described as 'underrated and undervalued interpretive technique' of the guided walk.<sup>127</sup> Contributions include a brief history of the technique's 'noble origins' in the pioneering work of the American National Park Service and our own Countryside Commission, from Gillian Binks, author of *Visitors Welcome* and then co-director of the Centre for Environmental Interpretation; a do-it-yourself guide in the form of an informal, but useful check list; some valuable advice on developing programmes for people with hearing disabilities from Cathy Curran, Woodland Advisor for Surrey County Council; and two articles from C.E.I. Training Officers, firstly one from Yvonne Hosker on the importance and availability of training, and

<sup>126</sup> CEI *Environmental Interpretation* (Focus on Living History issue) March 1987

<sup>127</sup> CEI *Environmental Interpretation* (Guided Walks and Tours) April 1992

the second from Neil Diment regarding the need for evaluation to develop.

Smaller articles like Lynda Burns' 'Cockney Walks'<sup>128</sup>, featuring a small company operating a series of themed guided walks around the East End of London, have also been regular features.

The *Museums Journal* featured an article reporting on the live interpretation programme in Baltimore, America,<sup>129</sup> where they are trying to create role models for the disillusioned local young black population. Sue Runyard, a freelance consultant, compares the use of first and third-person interpretation, in a report featuring New England's Plimoth Plantation and Old Sturbridge Village, but fails to shed any new light on the subject.<sup>130</sup>

*The National Trust Educational Supplement* and *Heritage Learning*, (nee *Remnants*) issued by the National Trust and English Heritage respectively, promote the work of their educational services and often feature living-history events for school children. The work of the Young National Trust Theatre is documented by Sally Woodhead, its administrator, on a regular basis in the NTES<sup>131</sup>. The publication also carries brief reports on events such as the Victorian Fair, held at Springhill, Co. Londonerry, and first-person presentations by the company, Time Travellers. *Heritage Learning*, reports on live interpretation events such as 'Archaeology round up', featuring the hands-on project at West Heslerton, North Yorkshire.<sup>132</sup>

*The Interpretation Journal for Heritage Studies*, edited by Dr. Peter Howard, is an academic publication and had carried articles such as Peter Fowler's, 'The Nature of Times Deseas'd', that explore the wider context in which live interpretation is currently found. In this particular article, Fowler discusses the development of the industry and questions whether

<sup>128</sup> Burns, Lynda 'Cockney Walks,' CEI *Environmental Interpretation* March 1992

<sup>129</sup> Arnold, Ken *Museums Journal* April, 1995, pp.30-31.

<sup>130</sup> Runyard, op. cit.

<sup>131</sup> *The National Trust Educational Supplement* Autumn 1995 p. 8

<sup>132</sup> 'Archaeology round up' *Heritage Learning*

Britain is the first 'post-heritage' country and with what results.<sup>133</sup>

*Leisure Management* is a publication serving the wide spectrum needs of the leisure industry and occasionally features live interpretation.

Reporting on the Tourism Society conference on live interpretation held in April 1994, Catherine Larner, the deputy editor, outlines the current scene and pays particular attention to the beneficial use of actors in the industry.<sup>134</sup>

*Museum Visitor* featured Jane Malcolm-Davies' 'Idle Conversation?',<sup>135</sup> an article reflecting her research into the current standard of visitor/interpreter interaction, and the need to encourage the visitor to stay and participate. Her selective examples portray many sites' interpreters as unhelpful and sometimes plain rude. She does point to possible solutions, however, with examples of the work at Hampton Court and the Tower of London by her own company, Past Pleasures.

*Military Illustrated* carries reports on battle re-enactment activity. In the February 1996 edition, Dan and Susanna Shadrake reveal the problems encountered in attempting to re-create the weapons and armour of the 4th-6th centuries A.D.<sup>136</sup>; while Philipp J. C. Elliott-Wright comments on the first major English Civil War re-enactment battle in Virginia, U.S.A.<sup>137</sup>

As mentioned earlier the U.S. journals scene has played an important forum role for live interpretation-related analysis and debate. The big issues in the 1980's, were based around two main themes: the effectiveness of live interpretation as a means of communicating and learning, for example, Davis & Gibb's 'Unpuzzling the Past: Critical Thinking in History Museums,'<sup>138</sup> in *Museum Studies Journal*; and the way history was sanitised by many of its practitioners, for example, the *Museum News*

<sup>133</sup> Howard, P (ed) *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. University of Plymouth. vol. 1 spring 1994 p. 6

<sup>134</sup> *Leisure Management* May 1994

<sup>135</sup> Malcolm-Davies, Jane 'Idle Conversation' in *Museum Visitor* 1995, p. 25.

<sup>136</sup> Shadrake, Dan & Susanna *Military Illustrated* February 1996, p. 24

<sup>137</sup> Elliott-Wright, Philipp J. C., 'The English Civil War in America', *Military Illustrated* February 1996 p. 10

<sup>138</sup> Davis, Karen Lee & Gibb, James G. 'Unpuzzling the Past: Critical Thinking in History Museums,' in *Museum Studies Journal*, Spring/Summer, 1988. pp.41-45.

featured Thomas J. Schlereth's 'It Wasn't that Simple.'<sup>139</sup>

## 16) News Papers and Magazines

Coverage in the British press includes souvenir pull-outs for re-enactment battles, for example, the 'Battle of Lansdowne Anniversary Special' by Caroline Thomas in the *Western Daily Press*,<sup>140</sup> 'The Action Replay' feature on the Battle of Naseby by Chris Kenworthy for the *Weekend Telegraph*<sup>141</sup> and the Sunday supplement magazines have run articles on American Civil War re-enactment in Britain.<sup>142</sup> These invariably contain a little background history to the battle itself, and the re-enactment society involved, and often carry interviews with society members, expressing their views on re-enactment. *Homes and Antiques* featured Kentwell Hall<sup>143</sup>

Occasionally an incident involving live interpretation will make the daily tabloids, such as the stubble field fire during a Sealed Knot event in 1994<sup>144</sup> The reports on this particular incident contained so many factual errors that all such sources have been used with extreme caution in the study.

## 17) Dissertations and Theses

Andrea Carl, research associate at the Merseyside Maritime Museum is involved in a research study focusing on drama in the heritage industry.

Rachel Hasted is writing an MA dissertation on historical re-enactment

<sup>139</sup> Schlereth, Thomas J. 'It Wasn't that Simple.' *Museum News*, 62(3) 1984, pp. 61-65, or *Museum News*. 56(3) 1978, pp. 36-44.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas, Caroline 'Battle of Lansdowne Anniversary Special', *Western Daily Press*, Saturday 7th August 1993.

<sup>141</sup> Kenworthy, Chris 'The Action Replay', *Weekend Telegraph*, Saturday 10th June 1995 p.p. 16-17

<sup>142</sup> Adamson, Richard, 'A Very civil War' *Classic*(Sunday Express) June 4th 1995 pp. 4-7

<sup>143</sup> Fokschaner, Serena, 'Bringing History to Life', *Homes and Antiques* March 1996, pp. 56-61

<sup>144</sup> Every major tabloid carried something.



in 1996.<sup>145</sup>

### **18) Re-enactment Society Magazines and Newsletters**

In general a magazine of this kind is a fairly accurate reflection of the society's *raison d'être* and the current issues concerning society members. Often the most revealing information can be found on the letters page, where for example, in Orders of the Daye, members of the Sealed Knot pursue topics as varied as playing dead on the field, inaccurate practices in combat, the aloofness of living-history buffs and late night noise on the campsite.<sup>146</sup> Other regular features include reports from members of the Inner Council, (the Chairman, the Adjutant General, the Treasurer, the Muster Master General, and the Generals of both armies. and the Public Relations Officer.); accounts of actual historical battles, reviews of re-enactment events, research into social history concerning the society's activities, advertisements for reproduction wares, cartoon comments, and warning orders for forthcoming events. The emphasis, tone and variety of content can reveal much about a society.

As the body of literature outlined here reveals, this thesis is the first study that brings all forms of living-history activity together and analyses the issues effecting the British scene as a whole.

### **C) Methodologies**

The research methodologies employed during the study have been varied to accommodate the nature of the case studies.

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<sup>145</sup> Both were under progress at the time of writing.

<sup>146</sup> Sealed Knot Society Orders of the Daye All from vol. 27 no. 6 November/December 1995

## **1) Live Observation- Interpreters**

In order to assess the work of live interpreters two main techniques were employed. The passive 'fly-on-the-wall' approach, where by observations are made from the relative obscurity of a crowd, or at some distance, is useful for noting their interaction with general visitors, and also during non direct contact time. The other main technique is that of engaging the interpreter in conversation and noting their ability to deal with questions starting from a basic, 'What are you doing?' and 'How long does it take?', to more probing questions, appropriate to their way of life and opinions. If the standard of interpretation is good, these sessions cease to be a mere exercise, and develop into an exchange born of genuine interest. If the situation allowed i.e, with a third-person interpreter, this exchange would be followed by a short interview, (following an introduction of myself and the nature of my work.)

concerning matters of training and museum policies. Asking identical questions to both management and interpretation staff can reveal the state of cooperation and commonality of purpose within the museum. For example, the director might declare that every member of the interpretation staff is expected to research their subject area on an ongoing basis. From this it might be supposed that it is in fact, the common practice. However, through interviewing a range of interpreters it might be revealed that although some people are diligent in this respect, others have let the practice slip, and rarely do any at all. This situation would obviously suggest a breakdown in communications and a need for tighter control, before the progress of the museum was threatened.

## **2) Live Observation- Visitors**

In order to observe the reactions of visitors, similar methods were

employed to those used for interpretation staff. Taking a background position in a crowd proved effective when monitoring the kind of questions asked, while sometimes general reactions, through body language, could be detected more easily from a short distance.

The reason for anonymity in both subject observations is to capture natural reactions that might be suppressed in a known case study situation, or overlooked in a self-assessment, through a questionnaire.

### **3) Live Observation as an Interpreter**

The study work completed in the field as an interpreter for the Kentwell Hall Tudor Re-Creations and other social and military re-enactments.

### **4) Extended group interviews**

These have allowed for interesting and revealing discussion to develop, and have been used on a number of occasions with re-enactors and participants of projects that I was personally involved in, mainly from frequency of opportunity.

### **5) Questionnaires**

These have played a significant part in the study because of their ability to reach large numbers of people. They do have limitations, for example, they do not allow for digression or further explanation in times of incomprehension, and recipients rarely write extensively in answer to the questions. This is especially true of school children. Therefore, to avoid

misguided or superficial answers, the questionnaire itself has to be carefully designed to guide recipients as to what is required of them. Questionnaires are adequate vehicles for obtaining information of a general nature, but should be followed up with interviews to gain any greater depth of understanding. (see Appendix 1, 2 & 3 for examples)

#### D) Glossary

This thesis contains certain words and phrases that have gained specialised meanings when used in the context of the heritage industry or re-enactment scene. To avoid unnecessary confusion, the following glossary has been compiled to clarify their meanings in the chapters ahead.

*Authentic*        This study uses the meaning of genuine or original, i.e, the real thing; but re-enactors often use the word to describe something made in the present day, in a period style'. This second use will always be indicated by inverted commas.

*Costume*        The words original meaning of 'a mode or fashion of personal attire and dress' has shifted towards an emphasis on theatrical attire. Understandably, many of those involved with the careful research and painstaking reproduction of good quality costume for live interpretation are eager to disassociate themselves with this image and prefer the term 'period style clothing'. As the accepted standard for costume becoming 'period style clothing' is some what arbitrary, the thesis will continue to use 'costume' for all attire unless the group being referred

to uses the alternative.

<i>Costumed interpreter</i>	An interpreter, first person or third person, who is dressed to any standard in costume as opposed to modern work clothes or uniform.
<i>Design vehicle</i>	The physical frame on which information is presented. This includes information panels, books, audio-visual presentations, models and live interpreters.
<i>First person interpreter</i>	An interpreter who takes on the role of a real or fictitious character and attempts to simulate their probable appearance, social attitude and speech patterns. They are also confined to the character's presumed knowledge about their past and concerns for their future, (the visitor's past).
<i>Interpreter</i>	Although there are many foreign language interpreters working within the heritage industry, the word now refers to two other sets of people. Firstly, there are interpreters who decide from the available facts, what information and message concerning an historical site or event is going to be presented and kind of visitor they want to attract. The designers will then decide how and with what media this information is to be presented. Many design groups employ people who have skills in both areas.

The second group are those more commonly referred to as interpreters in this study, the live design vehicles who impart the information and message directly to the visitor. They might not necessarily have

contributed to the project's initial interpretation plan, but they are responsible for upholding the current, accepted strategy through their own presentations.

*Heritage* In this study the word denotes any part of the past deemed important enough by a nation, or individual to be either remembered or physically preserved or conserved.

*Heritage industry* This, whether certain participants like it or not, is the generally accepted term for the public activities of most heritage based organisations and companies, from historic theme parks to national museums. The Oxford English Dictionary describes 'industry' as being, 'a branch of trade or manufacture', which certainly encompasses all ventures that exchange knowledge and possibly entertainment with the visitor, for money through an admission fee. The study considers all the free entry museums reliant on Government funding, (public taxes), and gift sales for their continual existence.

*Live interpretation* The practice of direct face-to-face communication between the interpreter and the visitor.

*Living history* This phrase is used to distinguish the presentation of social and living conditions in an historic period, as opposed to battle re-enactments.

*Living history* A phrase, more common in America than in Britain, used to describe a site designed to recreate the appearance and

<i>museums</i>	working activities of a certain period in time. The whole site is either dedicated to a specific period and place, or used to support several self contained units covering a wider historical context.
<i>Mind-set</i>	A term used particularly in first-person interpretation describing the knowledge boundaries of an interpreter's character-role, i.e, where they live, who their family and friends are, their personal history and current activities and aspirations.
<i>Participant</i>	This distinguishes a volunteer interpreter, usually involved in living history or re-enactment activities, from a paid employee.
<i>Period clothing</i>	See 'costume'.
<i>Re-creation</i>	Used to describe a presentation that is designed to emulate a way of life, usually social history.
<i>Re-enactment</i>	Used to describe a presentation that is designed to emulate a certain event in history. It is also used for the above.
<i>Replica</i>	An exact copy of an original.
<i>Third-person interpretation</i>	Interpreters who communicate with visitors from a modern historical perspective and using modern language. They can be costumed or otherwise and include guides showing parties around stately homes; rangers

interpreting the flora and fauna during rambles on a  
National Park and craftsman demonstrating historic skills  
in an open-air museum.



## Chapter Two

# Active Participants in Live Historical Interpretation in Britain Today

This chapter gives an indication of which museums, societies, interpretation companies and individuals are involved in the live interpretation of history in Britain, in the late 1990s. The huge number of individual cases that would have to be researched, were the list to be comprehensive, would stretch far beyond the resources of this study. For example, the annual directory of re-enactment societies, *Call to Arms*<sup>1</sup>, edited by Duke Henry Plantagenet, accounts for almost 300 groups in Britain. This directory is probably the most complete to date, but is by no means definitive. The separate section on trading companies, includes a category for 'living history centre/museum', and another for 'craft demonstration/display', but the leaders in the field of commercial interpretation are conspicuous by their absence. Beamish is not to be found there, nor is Blists Hill, Morwellham Quay or Kentwell Hall. Also missing are many of the leading live-interpretation companies, such as Past Pleasures and Time Travellers. As all entries and information is given on a voluntary basis, it might be assumed that these high-fliers have either not been contacted, or do not regard the publication as a serious enough asset to their marketing campaign to contribute to it. Standard listing is free, but additional descriptions of twenty letters or more are liable for a charge.

Given that there are many more units than even Duke Henry has accounted for, it has been necessary in this study to make a selection that is representative of the breadth in diversity of the parties involved. The development of live interpretation cannot be traced back down a single path to its origins. It has grown from theatre, from formal education, from the earliest forms of tourism, and from ancient oral and demonstrative traditions of

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<sup>1</sup> Plantagenet, Duke Henry *Call to Arms* (Annual publication) It claims to be 'the most complete and extensive listing of historical re-enactment societies, organisations and associations, research groups, trading companies and suppliers'.

passing down skills and knowledge. It is no wonder then, that the present national and international scene is full of such a rich diversity. Factors include group size, areas of historical focus, geographical location, degrees of professional approach, date of foundation, and whether the activity's *raison d'être* is rooted in business or recreation.

When cases are grouped together according to any single or combination of these factors, data emerges, that with analysis reveals significant information on trends within that restricted field. Taking living history museums and working farms for example, in the context of their chosen historical focus, the vast majority are found to concentrate on the Victorian era. In analysing the reasons behind this, numerous lines of enquiry develop. Were they created out of nostalgia for a way of life that was just passing out of living memory? Did the vast wealth of genuine every-day objects, that people were literally throwing away, present too much of a temptation for those on a restricted budget? Or were the labour skills and built heritage of industries owing their past glories to the Victorian boom time, suddenly found to be redundant and in need of redevelopment?

When the same question of historical focus is applied to re-enactment societies however, the core interest shifts dramatically. Using the data in Duke Henry Plantagenet's *Call to Arms*, the period with the most separate group entries is clearly medieval, with a slight emphasis on the fifteenth century. Is this the most popular period then? Closer analysis reveals twenty-nine of the thirty-three groups associating themselves with the umbrella organisation, the Wars of the Roses Federation, have a membership of below fifty, and sixteen of those below twenty-six. The total membership is probably not more than 1500. When the number of separate entries with an interest in this century is compared with that of the seventeenth century, the medieval period appears to be dominant, with 109 entries to a mere fourteen. However, when the membership of just one of these seventeenth century societies is around 6000, the popularity of the later century is obvious. Lines of inquiry here would

clearly include the reasons for the popularity of the civil war period, and the contrast between the two structural trends.

### A) Structure

Live interpretation is practised by a diverse array of people for both pleasure and business, and a number of interested parties have attempted to subdivide them into groups for easier analysis. Jane Malcolm-Davis, a former partner in Past Pleasures, chose the following divisions in her article, 'Keep it Live':

- craftsmen in residence
- craft demonstrators and ex industry workers
- costumed third person interpreters
- first person interpreters
- amateur re-enactment organisations

This system of classification was appropriate to her article, which was intended as a basic introduction to methods of approach. It was however, too broad for the task here, which seeks to reflect the diversity of clients as well as the mode of delivery.

In her chapter 'Living history'<sup>3</sup> Penny Wilkinson, the Museums and Cultural Services Officer for Wansbeck District Council, gave an even-handed and accurate description of current British practice. Her distinguishing categories included military re-enactment societies, living history museums, drama groups, and living history programmes in museums. What her description lacked, and this may have been due to the brevity of the chapter as a whole, is a distinction between military and social-history re-enactment groups, and reference to the first-person sites that do exist in this country.

Close analysis of the variety in current practice across the board has

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<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Davies, Jane 'Keep it Live', *Museums Journal*, March 1990, pp.22-23.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkinson, Penny. 'Living History' from *Social History in Museums. A Handbook for Professionals*. London: HMSO, 1993.

revealed important forms missing from both of these previous attempts. This study is not concerned solely with living-history and battle re-enactment. It incorporates every aspect of the live presentation of history. The study is primarily concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of live interpretation, and to evaluate this, the practice has to be placed into an agreed context. This context can be established by ascertaining what live interpretation is being used for, where and by whom. The following list of categories was compiled to reflect these priorities, and therefore produce the data-base necessary for this investigation.

- \* Museum guides/education dept.
- \* Open-air sites/living history museums guides/education dept.
- \* Historic property and site guides/education dept.
- \* Itinerant character interpreters
- \* Military re-enactment groups
- \* Social history re-enactment groups
- \* Historical drama groups
- \* Historical arts and entertainment groups
- \* Theme park staff
- \* Participators in historical pageants, fairs and markets

As the study is concerned with live interpretation as it relates to education and entertainment, an additional structure had to be imposed upon the one above. Each society, organisation or company is grouped under either 'formal education', 'informal education' or 'entertainment', or in many cases, under a combination of these.

Formal educational visits can be defined by their didactic nature, and their close adherence to the requirements of the National Curriculum (where appropriate), or preconceived areas of enquiry, approved by an academic establishment. The visit is usually an integral component of a current project,

and is used partly as a resource for gaining additional information, and also for reaffirming information already established in the classroom.

Informal education has been defined clearly by Duncan Light as 'self-motivated, voluntary, exploratory, non-coercive learning and understanding.'<sup>4</sup> The educational benefits here are not intended to be force-fed to possibly unwilling visitors, but to be made available, in an appropriate form for visitors to take advantage of, should they wish it.

Entertainment in this industry is difficult to isolate from the other two categories, especially from informal-education. Take music for example. When does a concert of music become an example of informal-education rather than cultural entertainment? It might be argued that attending a concert incorporating the music of any acclaimed composer is educational in its own right, but for the purpose of this study, certain boundaries needed to be established. Therefore, the line is drawn where there is a conscious interpretation of the instruments (period, or period-style), music, and composer within their shared historical context. It is the inclusion and emphasis on interpretation that defines informal-education in this case. When the performance of the actual music is the sole focus of the event, it can be described as cultural entertainment.

It is the entertainment factor that has caused the most difficulty in accurate categorisation. When a group's activities are predominately entertaining, this quality can infiltrate its performance in other areas to their possible detriment. For example, the sanitised interpretation of war offered by a Sealed Knot re-enactment battle, places the society in the entertainment bracket. Personal entertainment and self-defined levels of personal comfort are also high on its members' list of priorities when participating in an event. Therefore, when members take part in events intended for formal or informal educational purposes, these two factors remain priorities over the presentation of the latest researched facts. The categorisation for this study is

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<sup>4</sup> Light, Duncan 'Heritage as Informal Education' in D K Herbert (ed) *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1995, p. 117.

not however, based on a judgment led by the author's personal definition of quality. Nor is it based solely on self-definition by the group themselves. The Sealed Knot states in its members' handbook that it re-enacts 'events of the period with a view to educating the public,'<sup>5</sup> but as has already been mentioned, their presentations can be misleading. A self-definition of informal-education would therefore be inappropriate. That is why it is the way that groups are being used and by whom, that ultimately defines the groups' activities. If a group or company is being used by an educational establishment, then it must be accepted as a resource for formal-education.

It must also be appreciated that many large groups like the Sealed Knot are peculiar in having a fractured structure. The word 'fractured' is used here in the sense that activity often takes place on a regimental, or group-interest level, rather than involving the society as a whole. In such a large society it is inevitable that people with similar specialised interests begin to congregate. Even within the same area of interest there is room for more than one group, which might be formed separately through design, allowing for differences of opinion; or by accident, because of the scattered nature of the membership. Whatever the reason, the groups will probably have varying aims, and motivations, and also a varying appreciation of their own development and achievements.

Many units have multi-functional programmes and will therefore be entered in full under the category that it is most prominently associated with them, and in passing reference only under any others.

The sub-sections mentioned at the beginning of this chapter will be used within each main category, (formal-education etc.). Under each sub-section a list of similar museums, societies etc. will be listed to give a fuller picture of the whole field of practice.

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<sup>5</sup> Ede-Borrett S *The Sealed Knot Member's Handbook*, Chelmsford: Broadmind Ltd. 1984, p. 4.

## **B) Entry Data**

The entry of each itinerant group, whether it be an organisation with a membership, or a company, includes the following data where available:

- \* Date formed;
- \* Founding members;
- \* Membership numbers (early days/present);
- \* Organisational structure;
- \* National/local/international;
- \* Gender roles;
- \* Activities;
- \* Funding;
- \* Magazine.

The entry of each permanent site has the following data on its use of live interpretation (where available):

- \* Date interpreters first used;
- \* Early/current numbers of interpreters;
- \* 1st or 3rd person interpretation- reason for this choice;
- \* Aims and objectives;
- \* Training programme for interpreters;
- \* Programme of interpretative events;
- \* Other interpretation media used;
- \* Funding sources.

## C) Formal Education

### 1) Museum Guides/Education Services

*Connections, the Discovery Centre, (Exeter City Museum) Exeter, Devon<sup>6</sup>*

Connections, which is an educational resource centre for school children is housed in Rougemont House, a fine Regency building in the centre of Exeter.

It opened in 1993 under the supervision of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, with one full-time and one part-time interpreters. The centre now has one full-time interpreter on site, one full-timer it shares with the main museum, and one part-timer on site.

The centre is divided into a number of themed rooms, class rooms and offices. Each of the themed rooms, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, African, 1940s and toy room) have original artifacts displayed behind glass and often in some kind of domestic scene with life size human models and interiors. The museum staff are part of each school's visit as non-costumed interpreters. The themes are closely linked with the main city museum's collections, and much emphasis is placed on handling the artefacts, and the opportunity for the children to study in a tailor-made environment. The viewing cases (for artefacts not to be handled) are at child-height, and everything is designed with children in mind.

Many schools concentrate on one era only and usually try to include a visit to RAMM, to see the extended collections.

Connections is part of the Exeter City Museum Services and is funded through the council.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with staff, and personal participation.



RAMM has strong connections with local and regional schools. Frank Gent, the educational officer for the region is the main interpreter, although other museum staff take part, with occasional part time cover. The tours are various and include the handling of artefacts, and the opportunity to dress in replica Roman uniform. The museum has been supplied with a good standard of Roman armour, caligae (sandals), shields, weapons and a *cornu* (horn) from the re-enactment group, the Ermine Street Guard.

Workshops are often on offer in association with certain exhibits, for example half-day print workshops took place in conjunction with a printing exhibition in one of the galleries. The children were able to use the museum's educational facilities to put their observations into practice.

*National Army Museum, Chelsea, London*<sup>8</sup>

NAM's programme of live interpretation was founded on a serious basis by Andrew Robertshaw, the museum's Head of Education in 1985. It started as a series of special events involving Robertshaw's newly formed History Re-enactment Workshop, and developed into a full time programme. The team originally consisted of Robertshaw and one other, and now has three full time interpreters, and one administrator. Robertshaw, is a first-person interpreter of long standing, and the third member has had previous interpretation experience with Past Pleasures, so the standard of presentation is extremely high. When budget allows (about once a year) additional interpreters are hired in from companies such as Time Travellers for special events.

The team's brief is to produce effective interpretation concerning the social history element of life in the British army in the past.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with staff, and personal participation.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with staff and personal observation.

The schools' programme includes third and first-person interpretation. Third-person 'lectures' on subjects such as trench warfare might include slide presentations, handling of period artefacts, and creative visualisation of trench experiences. About half of all presentations are in first-person, including the one- two week events when outside interpreters are hired in as mentioned above. The latter have included a question and answer session with 'Wilfred Owen'.

The museum is financed the Department of Defence.

## **2) Open-Air Museums Guides /Education Services**

All the open-air museums, including historic working farms, are used in some degree by schools and colleges. For more detailed information see the section on 'informal education' for the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, the Welsh Folk Museum, the Highland Folk Museum, Beamish, Blists Hill, Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, and Morwellham Quay.

## **3) Historic Property Guides/Education Services**

*Clarke Hall, Wakefield, Yorkshire<sup>9</sup>*

Clarke Hall, restored in the first half of the 1970s to how it might have been after its original restoration for the Clarke family, three hundred years previously, coins itself as 'a unique historical resource'.

The hall is open purely for formal-educational visits, and the Director and Deputy Director, who comprise the interpretation team, are both qualified teachers with classroom, teacher training and museum education experience.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with staff, and promotional leaflet.

The team works very closely with teachers, who ultimately have control over the programme. This is tailor-made to suit their pupils' needs, and the National Curriculum requirements. Great emphasis is placed on preparation, and the use of the house, which is fully furnished and equipped in the late seventeenth century style, by the teachers as a resource for preplanned activities. Teachers have to attend preparation days and submit plans two weeks before the visit date, in order for the team to ensure the best service possible. In 1993 the house was being used by six thousand children on full-day visits per annum.

Themes explored through costumed role-play, or drama of some kind are favourite options, to which the home setting of the site, lends itself admirably. One of the site team usually plays a member of the Clarke family, but the programme development and supervision responsibilities rest with the teachers. Administration is based with Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, and funded jointly by itself and a consortium of educational authorities.

*Kentwell Hall Re Creations of everyday Tudor Domestic Life, Long Melford, Suffolk<sup>10</sup>*

Patrick Phillips bought the moated Tudor manor house of Kentwell Hall in 1971 after it had been deemed unsalvageable. Patrick and his wife Judith's dedication to the restoration of the building and gardens has been financially aided by the many visitors that have passed through its gates to take part in the various interpretation programmes available. Not the least of these are the annual Tudor re-creations which take place for three consecutive weeks in late June to early July and for the Michaelmas, High Summer and Lammas weekends. (Fig. 1)

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with staff, interview with participants, promotional leaflet, personal participation and person observation.



Fig. 1 Diccon the carpenter at Kentwell Hall.

During the main event upwards of three hundred volunteers take part to populate the manor house, gardens and farmstead with costumed first person interpreters posing as everyday Tudor people, on the whole, going about their routine business. There are perhaps rather more activities taking place than would have been likely on such a manor, but interpreter's licence is taken to portray as many skills and trades as possible. Booked school parties take either the set house or farm routes, or if they prefer a free route day can be attended where they go were they please. At weekends the gates are open to the public who may also wander at will.

The intention is for the visitors to suspend their disbelief and to pretend that they have actually gone back in time and have the chance to discover how people lived in Tudor times by observation and asking them questions. Staff and children walk through an especially constructed 'Time Tunnel' obscuring the house from the reception area and even dress in period style clothes to help them feel part of the event when they emerge into whatever year has been chosen.

Each year an historical event will provide an underlying theme for the school children, and the source for a 'pass' of admittance onto the manor, for example, in 1535 the guards wished to know what religious house they had come from and what news they had of the dissolution of the monasteries.

Patrick Phillips interviews every prospective participant and those chosen must attend a second open day of further guidance seminars and make a final choice of activity. Each 'station', for example, dairy, kitchen, alchemist, herder or gentry has a leader who will organise the activity and speak for that station at the meetings with the Phillips throughout the three weeks to aid the smooth running of the event.

Certain stations, notably those concerned in the preparation of food, have the very real and necessary tasks of feeding the interpreters their midday meal whether it be a sumptuous roast from the Great Kitchen for the gentry or thick soup from the numerous pottage kitchens for the workers. The

Bakehouse also provides loaves for the non-public meals of breakfast and supper, so the visitor observes honest labours as well as certain amount of role play.

The smaller events run in a similar fashion but with fewer participants and will cover a maximum of two school days and a weekend.

The other costumed programme for schools are moathouse or farmstead days which run three to four days a week throughout the spring and autumn. One school party of about sixty children, again dressed for the occasion, come and actually take part in a number of activities. A typical moathouse day will involve three paid Tudor interpreters (first person), who involve the children and their teachers/helpers in four out of a possible six activities including dairy work, baking, brodery, stillroom activities, armour cleaning and scribing. At one o'clock the party sits at trestle tables and eats the food *they* have prepared, (both that day and suitable additions from home or school), and finally partake in traditional period songs, games and possibly music before journeying home.

Non-costumed programmes include guided tours by Judith Phillips, and public open days when visitors can wander at will to see the restoration's progress and the rare breeds farm, aided by information panels and loose leaved guide books.

In 1995 the Phillips staged Kentwell's first twentieth century re-creation with the popular 1945 event interpreting the manor's history as an army base and hospital during the second World War.

### *The Young National Trust Theatre*<sup>11</sup>

The YNTT's first director, Dot McCree began the group's work at Sudbury Hall, Derbyshire with the property's curator John Hodgson in 1977. Through participatory drama and the creative arts, the group brought a new understanding of National Trust sites to school children. Demand dictated the

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<sup>11</sup> Promotional leaflet, Woodhead & Tinniswood, 'No Longer Dead to Me'

development of themed programmes that would travel well from site to site, rather than the site specific approach they had adopted at first.

The programmes are part scripted, part improvised and guided by the actors, who are now drawn from a pool of tried talent. The original key elements of costume, music, dance and the 'minutiae of daily life,'<sup>12</sup> are still part of the creative programme, but new emphasis has been placed on exploring issues of the period, linking them with the world today.

The general programme has expanded to include living history sessions on a local frame work, and drama workshops.

Funding is mainly through external sources and has included in the past, two of the main banks.

#### **4) Itinerant Character Interpreters**

##### *Time Travellers*<sup>13</sup>

Jon Price, the Managing Director, founded the company in 1991 and uses a pool of interpreters with experience in theatre in education, street theatre and improvised drama. There are twenty interpreters on the books, around ten of which are used regularly. All are trained within the company for a week-week and a half long period, which includes intensive work on interpretation skills. Price himself has a background in archaeology, curatorship, live interpretation, (Head of Education Department, Beamish, and member of the History Re-enactment Workshop), and holds an honorary lectureship in the department of Archaeology (Museum Studies) at Newcastle University.

Time Travellers provides first and third-person interpretation for schools and museums, either on location, or on a classroom basis. Interpreters work alone, or in small groups depending on the requirements of the client. The content of the programme is also discussed and partially led by the client.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p.7.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with founder, and promotional leaflet.

First-person interpretation is favoured, although Price is prepared to change to a third-person approach when the need arises.

Funding comes from client fees.

*Echoes from the Past* (See informal education)

## **5) Living History (Social History) Groups**

*The Historical Land Group Trust, Grayhill, Wales*<sup>14</sup>

From funds generated through the construction and sale of the buildings at the living history site of Gosport Village, Hampshire in 1985 a group of historians bought 15 acres of Grayhill, Gwent, that comprised of 4 long abandoned and derelict farmsteads, their thirty small fields and a patch of neighbouring woodland. the Trust's aim is to excavate and rebuild the farms and work them as might have been the 17th century.

An extensive planting programme is underway of typical 17th century hedgerow species to reform the field structures and of period fruit trees, bushes and crops.

Regular work parties of the Trust's members and friends gather to continue the restoration work. So far the rebuilding programme has been centred on two main sites, one at the top of the hill and the other at the foot. The top site consists of a number of buildings clustered around a stable yard including a one roomed thatched hovel with a roof space, fire place, bread oven and government approved well; a near completed stable block with a hay loft; a pig sty, a cart shed and the remaining walls of at least 3 other structures, one with built in bee-skep shelters and what are thought to be nesting recesses for ducks. Down End's main building is a slightly more

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with founder, and personal participation.



sophisticated structure than the Well House, with a fire side stone stair case leading to the roof space above. It too has a pigsty close by.

Although the site is not officially open to the public at this time, a footpath does run through it and progress can be observed from certain vantage points.

Since the summer of 1995 the Trust have run one week first person living history events on the site for groups of school children, representing rural and military life in 1643. The visitors see evidence of dairy work, spinning, child care, gardening, livestock husbandry, wood turning, charcoal burning, hay making, construction work and a military encampment and field kitchen. Each group is joined by a first person, costumed guide who takes them on a set route tour and acts as a link between the sites of activity.

## **D) Informal Education**

### **1) Museum Guides/Education Services**

#### *Exeter Redcoat Guides<sup>15</sup>*

The service began in 1985 as part of the Exeter Heritage Education and Guided Tours programme, under the auspices of the Exeter City Council. The team of volunteers started out with twelve guides and now has thirty-two, with seven in training.

The tours run all year round, except over the Christmas period, although during the winter months the number of tours falls to one a day. From 1st April to 31st October the guides run a full programme involving at least sixteen separate tours, (selected from a bank of around twenty-five to thirty), each lasting ninety minutes. Each tour has its own 'bible' which is

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with staff, promotional leaflet and person observation.

used as a reference data file. The shortness of the tours, compared with the amount of data available means that no two tours on the same subject are exactly alike in content. The enthusiasm of the guides has ensured that the data in the files is regularly updated and expanded through their own research.

The guides wear distinctive red blazers, and work exclusively in the third person. They have an excellent reputation, and are used by tourists and locals alike.

Tours include: 'Medieval Exeter,' 'Bishop's Palace Garden,' 'Exeter Old and New,' 'Exploring the Cathedral Close,' 'Courtyards and Crescents,' and 'the Port of Exeter.'

The scheduled walking tours are free, but for special booked tours there is a small fee. Funding comes from Exeter City Council.

#### *Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds<sup>16</sup>*

The Royal Armouries Museum runs an intensive live interpretation programme throughout the day, since its opening in 1996. Performances take place all over the museum which has been designed to incorporate stages and arenas for this purpose. The style of presentation varies from non-costumed lectures; third-person weapon demonstration; to first-person scripted monologues, interpreting personal experiences of war. The programme for Sunday 9th March 1997 listed five demonstrations, three lectures and five dramatic pieces. One of the demonstrations was repeated later in the day, as were two of the lectures, and all five of the readings/playlets, bringing the total number of presentations to twenty-one. Examples of presentations on that day included: 'Pollaxe Combat - The techniques of using these ferocious weapons while clad in full plate armour are displayed', 'Sticks and Stones - A brief history of hunting weapons', and 'Florence Nightingale - This determined

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with staff, promotional leaflet and person observation.

nurse tells of her experiences during the Crimean War'.<sup>17</sup> The presentations are timed to start every fifteen minutes in different parts of the museum, and usually allow ten to fifteen minutes action followed by a short time for questions afterwards. It is impossible to see every presentation in sequence, which is one reason for the repetition of much of the programme.

In 1997 there were eight full-time and seven part-time paid interpreters working on site.

More activity takes place outside the main museum, in the Craft Court, Menagerie and Tiltyard during the warmer months.

Funding comes through sponsors, which have included Yorkshire Electricity, the Halifax Building Society, BT Community Programme, Pinsent Curtis, and JVC.

Most museums, both large and small provide some form of guide service on request, and many hold lectures and special events to highlight some part of their collection, or a visiting collection. (See also historic properties in this section.)

## **2) Open-air museums guides/education services**

### *The Welsh Folk Museum, St Fagins, Mid Glamorgan<sup>18</sup>*

The museum opened in 1948 with a resident woodturner. Full-time craftspeople now include two in the woollen mill, one in the flour mill, one cooper, one saddler and one blacksmith. The last woodturner has just retired, and there are no immediate plans to replace him. Part-time franchise holders include one potter, and one baker. In addition to the demonstrators the museum has thirty-six full-time, and twelve part-time security wardens to

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<sup>17</sup> Interpretation and Demonstration Schedule Sunday 9th March 1997. Royal Armouries Museum.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with staff, promotional leaflet and person observation.

look after the buildings (the full-timers include one job-share post). Some volunteer work is also carried out, mainly in the gardens etc. Four seasonal employees come in to demonstrate home baking in the houses and to help with educational work. Lastly, the museum hires appropriate re-enactment societies, such as the Sealed Knot and Silures to portray life in the houses for special events.

A team of guides, some in costume, some not, man most of the buildings over the fifty acre site, and are available to answer visitor's questions, and give timetabled lectures on numerous subjects. Demonstrations of traditional Welsh cooking techniques take place in some of the functional kitchens.

The museum also hires in re-enactment groups to interpret certain areas, for weekends and bank holidays, such as the English Civil War Society in the Y Garreg Fawr Farmhouse and Silures Iron Age Celtic Society in the Celtic Village.

The Museum, in its capacity as preserver of Folk traditions, celebrates annual events such as the Old May Day Festival, the folk-dance event Gwyl Ifan, and the Harvest Festival where old customs, and folk dance and music are the focus. It is used as a venue for steam rallies etc.

There is an extensive programme for schools which is tailored to the National Curriculum where possible, and utilises the 'hands-on' opportunities such a site provides. In 1992-3, 82,000 school children visited the museum, and two interpreters headed the activities in the then new Celtic Village.<sup>19</sup>

Overall visitor numbers for 1992-93 were 362,921.

The museum is funded through the National Museum of Wales, of which The Welsh Folk Museum is a part. In addition, grants and sponsorships come from private and public bodies.

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<sup>19</sup> National Museum of Wales Annual Report 1992-1993 p.64-65.

Founded in 1934 on Iona by Miss I. F. Grant, the museum was moved first to Laggan and finally to Kingussie in 1944. Dr. Grant drew her inspiration from the Scandinavian folk museums, recognising the importance of preserving a rapidly disappearing way of life for future generations to appreciate, and built up an impressive collection of 'homely, highland things that were in danger of destruction', (quite often from everyday use by Highland folk living the life she hoped to preserve, reflecting the collecting attitudes of the day!) Structures, typical of the different Highland regions were erected and furnished with the collection. In those early days there were only one or two interpreters, trained, (if at all) by the founder. In 1954 Dr. Grant retired and sold the museum to the Scottish Universities through the Pilgrim Trust. It became an important academic institution and made the transgression from homely collection to a systematic and carefully catalogued display, under the curatorship of 'Taffy' Davidson, a Senior Research Fellow in Arts and Crafts from Marischal College, Aberdeen. The Museum grew with the Agricultural Museum, a leader in its field, opening in 1957; the neighbouring property of Churchill annexed for further display space around the same period and the once church hall of St. Columba acquired for storage in 1961. During this time no serious interpretation programme was in action. In 1974 the museum passed into the hands of the Regional Council and began its third evolutionary stage, from collection to interpretation, under Ross Noble, the current curator's concept of 'Heritage in Action'. The number of interpreters has doubled since the early 1980's and there are now around ten to twenty-five costumed interpreters involved in more than one hundred 'live' activities a year, including 'hands-on' learning programmes for children; and traditional craft, skills and music demonstrations. Training remains in-house, but far from the loosely structured programme of the past, it has developed along with the industry's

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with staff, promotional leaflet and Noble, R. Ross 'The changing role of the Highland Folk Museum' *Aberdeen University Review*.

understanding of modern requirements.

Through the development of the Highland Folk Museum the potential for a fully live interpretation-based site was seen and has been realised in the flag-ship project, the Highland Folk Park, at Newtonmore.

*The Weald and Downland Open Air museum*<sup>21</sup>

When the museum opened in 1970 Roy Armstrong, the founder, had very clear aims and objectives for what he intended to be, not only a collection of selected buildings from medieval to the 19th century, but an interpretation of the small industries typical of the area. The stewards role was to inform the visitors of a building's construction and building materials, the processes of dismantling and re-erecting it on site and aspects of the social history of the people who had lived in it. During the first year the small band of ten volunteer stewards were able to talk the visitors through the processes as they were taking place, while they re-erected the first seven buildings on the site. There was little time for training, but as the volunteers included professional architects, curators, history lecturers and county council officials they already had many of the skills needed for the task. The main thrust of interpretation has always then, been firmly entrenched in the third-person mode. This has been partly due to the nature of the museum: it is 'not trying to re-create the past, but to give people the opportunity to learn about the available evidence of the way people lived in the past,' and also to its initial lack of confidence in first-person interpretation to re-create 'characters from the past with any reasonable degree of accuracy'.<sup>22</sup>

The continuing aim of the museum to provide educational opportunities for people throughout their lives, on all aspects of rural life in the past is still largely dependent on a volunteer work force, and some 180

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with staff, promotional leaflet, personal participation and person observation.

<sup>22</sup> Information from a questionnaire directed to Sue Shave the present Interpretation Officer.

regulars currently act as stewards, administrators and general services staff. As interest in the museum grew not all of the volunteers came from the associated professions and the need for training was recognised. The programme now involves on-the-job-training with experienced stewards, an introduction pack, training videos on specialist techniques, regular briefing sessions and site tours by professional staff.

The museum's programme of interpretive events for the general public includes regular rural craft demonstrations, such as blacksmithing, brick making and milling; a biannual exhibition of building conservation; an exhibition of building materials; specialist guided tours; the fully furnished Bayleaf Tudor farmhouse; an annual living history event in the Pendean Tudor farmhouse by the History Re-enactment Workshop;<sup>23</sup> and special events such as rare breed shows, and steam threshing demonstrations.

There is a special programme available to schools which includes: guided tours of the whole, or specific areas of the museum, for example, the gardens, or a comparative study of the modern and medieval methods in farming and forestry. Hands-on opportunities include workshops on building materials, spinning and weaving techniques, animal husbandry, simple griddle-cooking, and role playing sessions in the Victorian school. Fees range from £1 to £12.50 per student depending on the nature of the session.

Funding has changed little over the years, being mostly dependent on donations, fund-raising events and county council grants. Now a small travelling budget is available for the volunteers and stewards receive a small fee from group tours, which along with occasional social gatherings allows the museum to show its appreciation for their hard work.

Other similar museums include the Ulster Folk Park, Co. Tyrone, the Museum of East Anglian Life and the Chiltern Open Air Museum, Buckinghamshire.

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<sup>23</sup> See living history organisations.

Beamish was founded on a huge wave of enthusiasm generated by Frank Atkinson in the late 1950s. Atkinson, the then Director of Bowes Museum saw a way of life slipping away before his eyes and inspired hundreds of people, from politicians to ordinary members of the public to collect indiscriminately for a regional museum for the future. At the support group's official founding the *Friends of the Regional Open Air Museum* were three hundred in strength and were a vital component in the establishment of the Museum itself in 1970, and its subsequent development. Beamish has always placed education, for young and old high of its list of priorities, and has worked closely with education authorities since its one first day conference for teachers and advisors held in 1973. The educational programme was manned partly by paid members of staff, but the *Friends* had always played an active role in this as well as every other area of need. Another welcome source of interpreters came from the support of the *Manpower Services Commission* and its successor, the *Community Programme*, which supplied paid workers from 1976-1988.

The aim of the museum has been to 'inform and to educate through enjoyment.' 'All come to Beamish,' says Rosemary Allan, the Senior Keeper, 'and we hope they take away an enhanced understanding of achievements of the region's past, as well as a fuller knowledge of what life in the North East was all about.'<sup>25</sup>

The educational programme has been designed to cater for National Curriculum requirements and includes costumed days with hands-on experience, and a resource library. The museum is a focal site of study for further and higher educational establishments running courses in business, leisure and tourism. For the general public there are lectures, activity days,

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with staff, promotional leaflet, person observation and Allan, Rosemary, Lewis, P (ed) *The Making of a Museum*, Beamish the North of England Open Air Museum, 1991.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p39.



workshops, courses, demonstrations, and a team of permanent costumed interpreters working in varying numbers throughout the year. These interpreters are well trained, and some represent the best third-person interpretation in the country. Live interpretation has been chosen as the primary medium for interpretation over most of the site, and their 'people' skills reflect the seriousness with which this decision has been considered. They actively reach out to the visitors to engage their interest. 'It is this personal interpretation of the past that distinguishes Beamish from most other Museums', acknowledges Peter Lewis, the museum's current Director.<sup>26</sup> The scheme's main problem stems from the museum's success, when at peak times visitor numbers in self contained areas, such as Pockerley Manor, bring their skills in traffic control, rather than interpretation, to the fore.

First-person interpretation was run as a trial at the instigation of education officer Jon Price, but the lack of any orientation at the entrance led to confusion and the scheme was abandoned. Although the official mode is third-person, some of the interpreters have settled on a mixture of the two delivery methods, changing when the need arises.

Other interpretation media used include information panels in selected areas, such as the agricultural exhibition in part of the Home Farm.

Much of the funding for the museum is generated through admissions, although local government authorities, person bequests and appeals.

### *Morwellham Quay*<sup>27</sup>

In 1969 the Dartington Amenity Research Trust recognised the importance of preserving the declining remains of Morwellham Quay, an historically significant mining port for copper on the Tamar, four miles from Tavistock. The Morwellham and Tamar Valley Trust was founded, and led by Michael

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<sup>26</sup> Langley, Lloyd *Welcome to Beamish* p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with staff , promotional leaflet and person observation.

Dower, started to research, and rebuild, the quay with the aim of restoring it to its mid-Victorian 'hey day'.

In 1982, costumed third-person interpreters were introduced to the museum. The director Gary Emerson visited American living history museums to see what sort of a live interpretation programme would best suit Morwellham, and what training would need to be involved. Third-person interpretation was chosen to avoid the problems of visitors forever trying to 'catch out' interpreters in first-person roles.

As more and more buildings have been restored opportunities to interpret Victorian life at Morwellham has increased. Today the visitor can take a ride into one of the mines, see the cooper and the blacksmith at work, compare the inside of a miner's cottage and the Harbour Master's house, go on a conducted tour of the quay itself, take a horse and trap ride, visit the working farm and the church, try on period costumes, and sample the local fare at the Ship Inn.

The new approach was a great public attraction and in 1988 the museum's attendance figures peaked with 46000 visitors for August. The museum can now expect figures of 23000 for the same month, but despite this fall, the museum has a keen following from schools in Devon and the surrounding counties due to the success of its programme of interpretation, developed especially to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum.

Three separate programmes are offered. Young Explorer's Days involve a general guided visit, while Topical Days are more subject specific, for example, for Key Stage 2 students facilities are available for the study of 'homes, water, transport, environment, food and farming, how things work, Victorian Britain, materials, mining, structures/forces, patterns, ships and seafarers, machines, energy, local history, communications, rivers.'<sup>28</sup> These two options work out at £3 a head for children from five to eleven years old, and £3-75 for twelve to sixteen year olds. The third alternative is a Past Lives Day, on which the children dress as Victorian miner's children in costumes

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<sup>28</sup> From the museum's teacher's advisory pack.

provided by the museum and take part in a number of hands-on activities relevant to the site. All children are charged £3-95 for Past Lives Days. The museum has also produced a comprehensive teachers pack to support these programmes.

Although the museum is clearly popular with schools, it has, despite encouragement, had little detailed feedback from which to evaluate and develop for the future.

The normal public entrance fees are £7-50 per adult, £5 per child and £19 per family.

The interpreters are employed seasonally. At the height of the summer season one can expect to see around fourteen interpreters on any one day. This number tails off to seven or eight during the off peak months, and there are no interpreters on site from the end of October to Easter, apart from those involved in the Past Lives Days. There are a few full-time interpreters, but most work about three days a week, and as many of them are semi-retired, this suits both parties. They are paid £3-16 an hour. Students are also employed, but mostly in the catering and sales departments, as are the 'friends' of Morwellham Quay that offer their services free. The museum feels that a mature, employed workforce best suits their interests as far as the quality control of the main body of interpreters is concerned.

Training involves an intensive two-day course, which concentrates on developing the appropriate social and communication skills for working with the museum's visitors. Information on the history and workings of the quay and mines are of course also supplied, and personal research is encouraged, although not officially required during their term of employment. The museum has found that its staff quite often have a strong personal interest in the site, and carry out their own research in any case. Once the initial training is over a new recruit will shadow an experienced interpreter to bring their skills up to an acceptable standard for working alone. No additional top-up training scheme exists for long term employees.

Costumes are researched, and designed in-house by Ann Emerson, and manufactured by Mary-Rose Bellamy. Care has been taken in selecting fabrics and designs suitable to the period, but for reasons of staff comfort essential restrictive undergarments have been omitted.

Each member of staff is responsible for the up keep of the costume they are supplied with.

Visitors can try costumes on over their own clothes. For men this includes a coaching style coat, cravat, and hat, while women have a skirt, coat, hat and muff. These items can be chosen from a plentiful array in the costume department, and then the visitor can parade in front of friends and family in a restricted area outside, allowing for popular photo opportunities.

Guided tours of the Quay, lasting about forty-five minutes are available twice a day. The interpreters appear to be very well informed and ensure that their very full programme is delivered in a varied, interesting, and appealing manner. The velocity of delivery however, required to accommodate that amount of information into three quarters of an hour, can produce a rather passive response from an audience. Although the experience is felt to have been a worthwhile one, the chance to ask questions, while they were still fresh in the mind seldom arose.

Other industrial based museums include the Black Country Museum, West Midlands, Blists Hill, Ironbridge Gorge Museum, Shropshire and Wigan Pier, Wigan, Lancashire.

#### *Acton Scott Historic Working Farm<sup>29</sup>*

In 1975 Acton Scott was established as a living history museum, representing an Upland Farm during the period of mechanisation from 1870-1920. (Fig. 2) The museum has preferred third-person interpretation since the early seventies,

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with staff, promotional leaflet and person observation.



Fig. 2 Acton Scott Historic Working Farm

believing it to be the most efficient mode of delivery in transmitting information to the visitor for educational and entertainment purposes. It also suits the museum's policy of invocation rather than authenticity of period costume, whereby the emphasis is placed upon the activity, not the clothes of the interpreter. In accordance with these aims, staff training includes presentational skills, customer care and historical research. The latter might take the form of instruction from already skilled persons or even a university course. One of the results of the work at Acton Scott is an increasing awareness of such establishments as vehicles for the perpetuation of otherwise dying craft and farming skills. The museum is noted for its popular dairy and hay making demonstrations and was nominated for the Best of Britain Awards by the SIBH in 1995.

Although the number of regular interpreters has not increased greatly since the beginning, from five or six, to seven or eight; there are now some thirty self employed demonstrators throughout the season. Running from Tuesday to Friday, the weekly programme offers: the blacksmith, woodland crafts, the farrier and wheelwright; with twice-daily buttermaking, and a four o'clock demonstration of hand milking.

The schools service offers a number of different guided tours, ranging from the 'tot tour' for three-five year olds based on looking at the animals and the singing of nursery rhymes, to the chance for the older ones to work along side the craft demonstrators, or for hands-on experience helping out with the haymaking, potato picking, and other seasonal farm tasks. More traditional guided tours are also available.

Shropshire County Council have remained the main strength of funding throughout the museum's history, although a certain amount is generated through earned income and sponsorship.

Similar museums include Cogges Manor Farm Museum, Oxfordshire; Norfolk Rural Life Museum and Union Farm, Dereham, Norfolk; Aden

North East of Scotland Agricultural Heritage Centre, Mintlaw, Aberdeenshire, and Botley Manor Farm, Hampshire.

*Cosmeston Medieval Village, Vale of Glamorgan*<sup>30</sup>

There are a growing number of sites which use reconstructions of historic buildings to interpret the past. Cosmeston Medieval Village has chosen live interpretation as its main medium for communication.

In the early 1980s the archaeological remains of a fourteenth century village were discovered during the preliminary excavations for a new car park for the Cosmeston Lakes Country Park. An archaeological dig ensued, public interest grew and the decision was made to rebuild the village on its original foundations. The site consists of ten buildings, with gardens and livestock, a field for special events, and a separate museum.

Tours started in 1985, and had developed by 1996 into a programme of costumed first-person guided tours. The manager, Nicholas Coles and his Assistant Manager constitute the full-time members of staff, with additional casual labour of four to five on a weekly basis, and another eight for special events and weekends. There is also a small group of volunteers. The site is open all year round, although staffing hours decrease to some extent during the quiet season between the end of November and February. The Vale of Glamorgan Council, the sole funding body, finances an average of sixty interpretation hours a week, which can be translated into eighty hours in the peak season, down to forty out of season. To save time and money on training new recruits, the management try to maintain the same staff throughout the year.

The training programme includes briefings on the historical framework of the chosen period (previously 1320, now 1350), in terms of the nature of everyday life, important events taking place locally, nationally and

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with staff, and promotional leaflet.

internationally; and customer care. Employees are chosen for their ability to communicate with the public rather than academic background alone.

The hourly tours are led by a costumed interpreter who takes on the character role of a Cosmeston villager and remains in first-person unless a situation arises whereby this would be detrimental to the visitor experience. The part-time staff are paid casual labourers wages and are not expected to be experts on every aspect of the period in history. When in a situation of uncertainty, they are advised to refer the visitor to the management team, who do have the knowledge. Each tour holds no more than twenty-five visitors, because of the restrictive nature of the buildings, and large groups should make prior bookings.

The education programme is tailored to fulfil National Curriculum requirements for developing historical awareness at key stage one, local history at key stage two, and the creation of the British Isles at key stage three. As the first half of the fourteenth century is not a focal period within the Curriculum, the site has developed its strengths in local history, everyday life, and farming in order to maintain the five to six thousand school children that visit annually. This figure represents around thirty per cent of its total visitor intake (20,000)

The general education programme for the site was initially based around 1320, when it was known that some of the original structures were built, but in 2000 the date is being brought forward to 1350 to provide more of a common ground between visitors existing knowledge and the site. (Edward III and the Black Prince fighting in France, and the Black Death taking hold at home).

Re-enactment groups are hired in for special events, some concentrating on the military aspects of the period, others on the social history of village life.

Alternative forms of media used on site include display panels in the museum, and an audio self-guided tour for visitors to use in between, or



instead of the live interpretation tours.

*West stow Anglo-Saxon Village, Suffolk*<sup>31</sup>

West Stow was constructed on the site of an archaeological dig (1965-1972), and represents an Anglo-Saxon settlement from the fifth-sixth century AD. There are around nine buildings, which reveal different construction methods used in this experimental archaeology project.

The Interpretation/Education Officer, Lance Alexander, who is a park ranger and has been very much involved in the development of the site, acts as a non-costumed guide for booked parties. In his tours he explains the history and archaeology of the site, and usually ends with a 'Hall Meeting' for a question and answer session. The educational programme serves sixteen thousand school children, (forty per cent of all visitor numbers), mainly at key stage two, with the central focus on houses and homes.

The audio guides, which acted as an alternative to booking a guided tour, are being phased out because of the depth of information available in the new visitor centre, opening in May 2000.

The site hires a number of different re-enactment groups, including Regia Anglorum, Theod, and the Dunholm Group for weekend and four week-long events throughout the year, to interpret the social history of the site. These include a special week in July devoted to school parties.

The site is funded by St Edmundsbury Borough Council, and has annual visitor numbers of around forty thousand.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with staff, and promotional leaflet.

Part of the site's redevelopment includes an eighth century reconstructed farm. The site has chosen to focus on the visitor centre for its main thrust of interpretation, but guided tours are available on request which are non-costumed. In addition, re-enactment groups are hired in for special events. Permanent live interpretation on a voluntary basis is a consideration for the future.

The funding body is South Tyne and Wear Council.

### **3) Historic property guides/education services**

The guides in historic properties are perhaps the public's main contact with live interpreters in this country. Their numbers are too many to record here, but it is important to differentiate between the styles of presentation on offer.

#### *The guard*

In the past many guides were little more than guards, standing in a corner of the room, and ensuring the visitor did not leave with the collection in their handbag, or carved their initials into the four-poster. These still exist, but are becoming rarer as the emphasis on interpretation grows stronger.

#### *The room attendant*<sup>33</sup>

Many properties like Cawdor Castle, Scottish Highlands, Melford Hall, Suffolk and the American Museum in Britain, Somerset have guides in either each room, or for certain areas of the building. They actively make themselves

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with staff and Museums Year Book.

<sup>33</sup> Person observation.

known to the visitors and either offer information or invite the visitor to ask questions if they wish. This method of presentation works well if all the attendants share high levels of interpretation skills. Having to cope with speaking to a succession of strangers instead of building up confidence with one person can prove a problem for some visitors. Alternatively a varied input can make for a more interesting visit. Properties using this option include Sizergh Castle, Cumbria.

### *The optional guided tour*

Some properties in addition to the room attendants, or as an alternative to some form of self guided tour, have optional guided tours. These are either inclusive of the entrance fee, or are paid for separately. They might be on specialist subjects, or on a general theme.

### *The obligatory guided tour<sup>34</sup>*

Many properties have adopted the obligatory guided tour for reasons of security. Properties include Powderham Castle, Devon; Fyvie Castle, Aberdeenshire, and Boscobel House, Shropshire.

### *Llancaiach Fawr Manor<sup>35</sup>*

Llancaiach Fawr Manor was brought by Rhymney District Council in 1979 and was restored to how it might have looked in 1645. All the household items and furniture are reproductions, and the 'living history museum' as it has coined itself since opening to the public in July 1991, is staffed by costumed, first-person interpreters. The costumed interpreters take on the roles of servants to the owner in 1645, 'Colonel' Edward Pritchard, as they show

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<sup>34</sup> Person observation.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with staff, and promotional leaflet.

visitors around their master's house. These characters include James Nicholas, the gamekeeper, Elisabeth Proude, the seamstress, and Meirig Prosser, the senior footman. There are four full-time interpreters, two part-time, five relief workers and about four to five regular volunteers. There are about three or four present each day, with greater numbers reflecting the seasonal visitor demand, and school bookings. When the site first opened the interpreters were trained by Past Pleasures (and have since then joined PP in training at other sites). The museum now undertakes its own training which includes thorough character profile building, historical social interaction, and class structure, the history of the house, the location, its seventeenth century owners, and the period in general. Learning the skills of live interpretation, and customer care are also part of this initial programme. No interpreter (professional and volunteer), is allowed in front of the public without having first been fully trained in these areas.

It is one of the few sites in Britain that live up to the idea of the living history museum, that has developed in the USA, and was an Interpret Britain Award winner in 1995.

The museum has an active and varied programme of events with both entertainment and education in mind. National Curriculum based activities are available for schools, with an emphasis on hands-on experience. A teacher's pack is available to help them make the most of their pupil's visit. The twenty thousand school children that visit, account for about forty per cent of the overall visitor numbers (fifty thousand, and rising).

Lectures, workshops and demonstrations are held for the public throughout the year, for example, the 1996/97 programme lists: 'In celebration of the apple', 'Fashion through the ages', 'Winter animal care', 'All that goes into making pottage', 'Tales of a bard', 'The still room', '17th century cooking demonstration', 'The petty (court) sessions', and 'Flying falcon display.' Welsh language tours are available with booked tours.

More entertainment-based activities include 'Candlelit ghost tours',

'Cider & sauciness evenings', and 'Murder mystery evenings.'

The museum now has strong links with the re-enactment world, as its current manager, Kevin Ross is an active member of the English Civil War Society.

Funding comes from the Rhymney District's successor, Caerphilly County Borough Council.

#### **4) Town tour guides**

*Exeter Red Coats*

See section on informal education, museum guides.

#### **5) Itinerant Character Interpreters**

*Echoes from the Past*<sup>36</sup>

Eric Winder founded this company in 1988, and works either alone, in partnership with his wife Val, or hires in additional numbers from a stable of trusted interpreters when the need arises. The largest events have involved up to seven interpreters.

The company specialises in character interpretation in historical settings, and spans from Medieval to the twentieth century. Each character is site specific, meticulously researched and complimented by high standards of historical clothing, and props. Winder's characters include:

\* medieval                      rat catcher, scissor grinder

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with founder, promotional leaflet and personal participation.

*16th century	master gunner, crossbowman, sergeant-at-arms
*19th century	recruiting sergeant, road sweeper, and policeman
*20th century	ARP warden, corporal with experience of two world wars

The presentations vary in style depending upon the requirements of the client. Some take the form of scripted plays, such as the *Loss of the Boreas*, performed at Fort Grey, Guernsey, 1999, or the set character pieces performed on the streets of St Peter's Port, Guernsey, representing the paintings of local artist Peter LeLievre, in 1998.

First-person interpretation is favoured for less structured events including the educational programmes for school children on life in a garrisoned castle (Castle Cornet, Guernsey 1997-1999), and the medieval rat catcher at Warwick Castle, in which the characters talk freely to the visitors on and around the chosen theme. (allowances for third-person asides are made if they are vitally needed)

The aim of the company is to bring history alive, especially concerning the stuff of everyday living that does not make it into the history books, like someone using a flint and steel. Winder's motto is 'educate to entertain, and entertain to educate.'

Echoes from the Past patrons have included English Heritage, the National Trust, the Lord Mayor's Show, London; Warwick Castle, Warwickshire; the Mary Rose Trust, Portsmouth Harbour, Hampshire; Penshurst Place, Kent; Chatham Dockyard, Kent; Castle Cornet (Guernsey Museums), Channel Islands; and in association with many county, and town fairs and festivals, including the annual Robin Hood Festival, Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire.

Funding comes from the sponsors of each event, for example, educational

authorities, city councils, English Heritage etc.

## 6) Military re-enactment societies

### *The Sealed Knot*<sup>37</sup>

In 1967 Brigadier Peter Young, a Reader in military history at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst launched his book, *Edgehill 1642, The Campaign and The Battle*<sup>38</sup> with an exhibition of armour and static graphics on Edgehill itself. Interest was voiced among his friends that a society should exist to promote an interest in the era of the English Civil War and despite Young's initial objections due to its likely consumption of time and money, the Sealed Knot was founded in the following February. From only a small parade of ninety interested people, only twenty of which had costume, the society has grown to some six thousand members and in 1994 held six major musters, seven smaller battles and five military living history encampments, plus many more local regimental events.

The Sealed Knot took their name from a secret Royalist society and initially represented only the King's army and fought an imaginary opponent. Although it wasn't long before an army of Parliament grew from its membership, numbers have always favoured the King.

The society is organised along two lines. As a twentieth century registered charitable organisation it has directors, a chairman, treasurer, etc., and a decision-making Inner Council. Each company has its own organising body for events and financial affairs which are answerable to the main governing body above.

As a military organisation each army has an elected Lord General with all the associated ranks beneath him which are usually earned through a combination of merit, commitment and long service. Regiments are for the

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with members, promotional leaflet, personal participation and person observation.

<sup>38</sup> *Edgehill 1642, The Campaign and The Battle*. Kineton: Roundwood Press. 1967.

most part grouped into tertios, associations or brigades with an additional number of independent units.

Across both armies there are thirty four regiments of foote, three additional companies of foote, six units of dragoons, three trayned bands, two traynes of artillery and two lifeguards of horse.

Membership is divided regimentally and further into local companies up and down the country and even, through affiliated regimental membership across Europe and America.

A new recruit's sex holds no barriers on the field. Both men and women fight with pike, musket, as cavaliers, dragoons, artillerymen, drummers, standard bearers, camp followers and hold offices of command.

Musters, the gatherings of members to perform events are usually situated as near to an actual battle site as possible, often within the grounds of an historic building. The battle takes place beyond a safety barrier and the audience is guided through the experience by live commentary via a P.A system. Quite often a living history encampment is open to the public where they can mingle with the re-enactors on a more interactive basis, talking to them and handling equipment and clothing e.t.c. Smaller events might consist of more formal drill displays with a commentary focusing on the details of weapon usage.

Clothing is paid for by the individual and either made by the members themselves, by friends, a seamstress within the regiment, or purchased from Merchant's Row, the area at each muster given over to member-traders. Armour can also be purchased here and some weapons, although items needed en masse are often bought in bulk by a regiment and lent out.

Much research is conducted within the society on all aspects of seventeenth century military life and clothing, weapons and methods of warfare are being steadily improved so as to appear more authentic. The major battles have a reputation for entertaining spectacle, leaving a more educational approach for smaller demonstrations.



Funding is generated from event fees, annual subscriptions, (£22 single membership) and event sponsorship. The Sealed Knot is a registered charity and a proportion of the profits from visitor admissions go to designated local and national causes.

The society has its own bimonthly magazine, *The Orders of the Daye*,<sup>39</sup> which carries articles on recent research, warnings orders for forthcoming events, current affairs within the organisation and provides a stage for members to air their views.

#### *The English Civil War Society*<sup>40</sup>

In 1974 Charles Kightly and a group of like-minded others broke away from the Sealed Knot. They represented a faction that was striving for greater accuracy in both costumes and equipment than the SK were willing, at the time, to take on. Kightly formed the Roundhead Association, which was complimented by another society, the Kings Army in the West. Both continued to be organised separately although they came under the umbrella term of the English Civil War Society, for promotional purposes.

ECWS has grown in numbers, although the two armies have never grown to the same strength as the Sealed Knot. The lack sponsorship for large musters for either of these two societies in the late 1990s, has encouraged much dual membership, thus diffusing most of the old rivalry. From personal observation the level of authenticity appears to have also evened out.

*The Parliament Scoute* serves the Roundhead Association as its magazine, which in 1995 had most of its pages dedicated to administrative affairs, a diary of future events, and letters from members. It contained no articles on historical research, apart from one book review.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sealed Knot Society: *Orders of the Daye*.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with members, promotional leaflet and personal participation.

<sup>41</sup> *The Parliament Scoute* 1995-Jan winter.

A parade in Roman costume at a local pageant in 1972 led the eight founder members of the Ermine Street Guard to recognise a shared serious interest in Roman military history. With the advice of H. Russell Robinson, an expert on Roman Armour, they began experimenting with armour production of a very accurate standard.

With some fifteen local members the group spent the first few years building up their reputation at fetes and shows, and then gradually incorporated museum appearances. These now involve just over 40 participants in displays of drill, training, artillery firing, cavalry activity and a small encampment. There are 200 associated members.

1995 saw nine one-to-two day events for organisations including English Heritage and the British Museum in Britain and the annual European trip, this year to Portugal. The group have been instrumental in some leading experimental archaeology on the period, for example they have researched and constructed a 40kg *papilio* (butterfly) tent made from 77 goat hides and their continual work with the armour has contributed to our knowledge of its characteristics and capabilities.

Cross dressing is not permitted and female participants are involved in living history aspects only.

Funding is generated from event fees, postcard and booklet sales, subscriptions, and donations.

The society's bulletin, the quarterly *Exercitus* is an academic- looking affair, carrying articles on armour construction, Roman archaeological sites, event appraisals, book reviews and a future events programme<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup>Interview with members, promotional leaflet and person observation.

<sup>43</sup>Spring 1995 Vol. 3 No.1.

events and minor shows of their own, in 1995 they performed nine major events and eleven minor events in their own right. Major events have included three-day bank holiday shows at Rochester Castle for English Heritage, and the Largs Viking Festival, at which they expect an average of 200 military and 100 civilian personnel to attend.

The society bars no one from membership on grounds of sex, race or disability. However, because of the lack of historical evidence for women of the period taking up arms, female participants must make an acceptable effort to look like men if they wish to fight.

Funds are generated from event fees and annual subscriptions, (£15 for single membership, which is split equally between local and national society needs).

Regia Anglorum publishes its journal, *Clamavi*<sup>47</sup> five times a year, which includes members research findings, group reports, calendar of events, etc. and a newsletter, *Chronicle*<sup>48</sup> giving more detailed information on events as and when required.

### *The World War II living History Association*<sup>49</sup>

In 1977 Mike Ross, a dealer in militaria, was encouraged by an American friend to found the society as an 'associate' of the U.S World War II living history re-enactment group, of which he himself was already a member. For this reason the term 'associate' was used in the title until Mike's death in 1981, when his brother Kevin took over and adopted the current term, 'Association'.

Mike owned a Stuart tank which he had been using for public display purposes for some time, and the initial group members tended to be friends

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<sup>47</sup> Regia Anglorum, *Clamavi*. (Journal).

<sup>48</sup> Regia Anglorum, *Chronicle*. (newsletter)

<sup>49</sup> Interview by letter with member, and promotional leaflet.

who owned military vehicles, and colleagues wanting to demonstrate simulated combat situations, using their collections of militaria.

By the end of the year the World War II Battle Re-enactment Associate, as the society was known originally, had amalgamated with the 'Second World War Re-enactment Society', who fortunately consisted mostly of 'Germans', so between them they could put on a more rounded performance, once the public shows began. The first battle, at Molash in Kent, attracted 200 participants and one of the problems of growing popularity: a new element of less serious members, lacking the original fervour for authenticity. Membership has remained fairly constant, apart from the decline in 1988 as a result of the Firearms Act, when some members left rather than discontinue using authentic weapons.

British, German and American units have been represented since those early days, with no less than ten individuals in each to avoid 'two-man armies'. All of the units represent those which actually fought in north west Europe, and try to adopt the personality of the original through close links with the 'Old Comrades' Associations.

As the time period of the society is still within living memory and Nazism still a lingering fear in Europe, care has been taken to keep the society strictly non-political, and members have, in the past, been asked to leave for not conforming to this rule.

Cross dressing has never been favoured in the society and currently women can join the section portraying one of the women's services.

Activities range from public battles, which have become less numerous with larger fees as the society's reputation for quality has grown; 36 hour prisoner of war camp events, using first-person interpretation; special shows for the M.o.D and the Police; film work for television; an annual visit to the battlefields of Europe or even as far as Russia; and private battles when suitable sites can be found.

Events were originally funded through the membership, but

performance fees soon lifted the financial burden. Membership fees today barely cover administration costs.

g) living-history (social history) societies

### *The Hungerford Household*<sup>50</sup>

This South-west based group was formed in 1992 by June Simpson and a number of Tudor enthusiasts with experience of voluntary interpretation work at Kentwell Hall. Membership is by invitation only and is still taken almost exclusively from that initial common ground, although interest is now coming from elsewhere. Membership numbers in 1996 were 38.

June Simpson has taken responsibility for most of the organisation. She writes and distributes the newsletters, is the chief contact as far as clients and events are concerned and arranges most of the catering and accommodation side of the events. As the group's presentation has matured and the Household has received positive recognition from English Heritage, the membership are keen to expand the presentation and accept the redistribution of responsibility that will entail.

The standard of dress takes its cue from Kentwell Hall, as this is where most of the costumes get their initial airing. Cross dressing is not allowed and as far as could be ascertained, not sought after by members.

When putting on an event at Farleigh Hungerford castle, members take on the role of the Hungerford family and their retainers, or appropriate visitors to the castle. The castle, which is for the most part in an advanced state of ruin, is used as a back drop for a gentle introduction to sixteenth century skills and pursuits. Craft skills such as spinning, embroidery, the making of braid, tassels, pegs, whistles, long bows, and lead shot might be on show depending on which members are present. The public are encouraged to try

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with members and personal participation.

their hand at many of these and also to take part in simple courtly and peasant dances accompanied by live music. Story telling is also often a popular feature. A structured programme of activities for an event is not practical, as so much hinges on the skills of those who turn up and full attendance can rarely be relied upon.

The form of delivery is loosely third-person, although members drift from first to third depending on the audience and situation. This 'drifting' dilutes the role-playing aspect of the presentation, as members of unequal role-status will treat each other as equals once the first-person delivery is abandoned.

Although they have associated themselves with Farleigh Hungerford castle, ( with the Revd. Robin Hungerford as their patron) the group have broadened their repertoire to include other West-Country sites such as Iford Manor, the Commandary at Worcester and the Bishop's Palace at Wells.

Funding comes from the membership fee which is a nominal £1.50, and barely covers the postal costs of the quarterly newsletter, event fees start from £30 and donations by members raised from talks about the groups work and area of interest.

The newsletter gives information on future events and comments on past activities.

### *The Historic Re-Enactment Workshop<sup>51</sup>*

The founder members of what was to become the HRW. broke away from the English Civil War Society in 1985 after a living history weekend at Lincoln Castle . They came to the joint decision that as a group of friends they shared a greater commitment to the authenticity of presentation than ECWS was willing, or able to enforce, and so the History Re-enactment Workshop was formed. The group concerned themselves with domestic and military history

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with members and personal participation.

between 1588 and 1696, avoiding the civil war period, as it was, and still is, covered by so many other re-enactors. As the years have passed, the group has concentrated more and more on the social and domestic aspects of this period in history, for the main reason that it is being largely ignored by other live interpreters, (apart from Llancaiach Fawr Manor, set in 1646).

Eight of the founder members remain as the core driving force behind a much enlarged membership of about thirty. A substantial number of the post-founding membership has also endured and are now sharing more of the organisational burden, formally allotted to the core group. Full membership is by invitation only, although those who are not suited to the work mostly leave of their own accord during the associate-member period of one season. The Workshop's membership reflects the attraction of other re-enactors, who either found their own society's progress towards a more professional and educationally sound interpretation too slow moving, or welcomed the emphasis on social, rather than military history. Not everybody breaks these past ties and in recent years three have remained joint members. There are also a growing number for whom the HRW is their first and only experience of interpreting history for the public (five adults). There are roughly equal numbers of men and women, (most with partners within the group) and a most within the 25-40 age group. The number of children under the age of 10 has increased as members have started to raise families. There are only a small number between the age of 10 and 25, and 40-plus, which the group is trying to redress, to give a more accurate representation of population proportions of the time.

The HRW is a registered educational charity and has an elected chairman, secretary, and treasurer.

The Workshop hires its services to period houses, many, though not all, through an association with Stephen Price, who has worked for a number of museum services and is now City Curator for Bristol. The group has amassed a large collection of high quality reproduction artifacts and clothing with

which they furnish the whole, or a part of the property. This collection supports their aim to present (as naturally as possible), and interpret how people might have lived in any one selected period and location.

The HRW's pioneering combination of first-person interpreters in period clothing, and third-person interpreters wearing distinctive HRW red t-shirts is unique in this country. It was developed in order to side-step the barriers that some members of the public have felt exist between themselves and first-person interpreters, and to conquer the resulting loss of interpretation potential on these occasions. In theory, if a visitor feels they are unable to ask the role-player a question, or indeed if their question cannot be answered by the role-player because of that technique's restrictions, then the red-t-shirted is able to step in and act as an intermediary. At its best, this dual delivery technique reaps excellent results and the Workshop is held to be of considerable worth by many reputable museums.

The HRW has a policy of strictly no cross dressing as they consider it detrimental to their close-to-life presentations.

When possible the characters portrayed are real documented people and the information known about them is used to weave a sequence of everyday events that could possibly have taken place. For example, for the Plymouth event Richard Brendon was known to be a Plymouth merchant and owner of number thirty-two New Street, (the Elizabethan House), at the time the Mayflower docked in Plymouth in September 1620. The Pilgrim's physician, Samuel Fuller would have been knowledgeable about the disease Scurvy, and so the HRW had him joining the Brendon's for dinner and discussing the purchase of lemons to rectify this health problem during the long voyage to the New World.

The group often provide an orientation slide show with commentary to give the visitor an introduction to the kind of interpretation they can expect to find and an historical background to the setting, people and events represented. An accompanying information sheet gives a brief account of the



characters likely to be encompassed and a few leads for those who find difficulties in asking questions.

Visitors are usually able to wander at will and dwell on areas of personal interest. However on some locations, for example the Elizabethan House, Plymouth, cramped conditions necessitated a more structured orientation, with third person interpreters guiding small parties through the house at regular intervals. At Blakesley Hall the numbers of visitors are often so great that the museum service has installed a security team to enforce a strict one-way system in order to cope.

The events are usually set over a weekend, with the exception of the annual Pendean Farmhouse presentation at the Weald and Downland Museum in West Sussex, which lasts just under a week. Other regular venues have included Oakwell Hall, Birstall, West Yorkshire; Blakesley Hall, Yardley, Birmingham; Clarke Hall, Wakefield, and Maidstone City Museum.

As part of the on-going research and preparation for the HRW's public events are an annual series of workshops which are designed to further the group's collective knowledge of the period, of appropriate period skills and important interpretation skills. Speakers from outside the workshop are favoured as this causes less offence if their research is rejected for some reason by the group as a whole. Information is constantly being reassessed, and the group is forward-looking enough to reject long-favoured opinions and adopt new ones, if there is sufficient evidence available to substantiate them. These workshops are open to non-members in an attempt to increase funding.

Funding is generated through:

- a) membership fees, which include: full membership, £10, (children under 16 free) and associate membership, £7.50;
- b) event fees which range from £800 to £1400 depending on the location and size of the presentation;
- c) revenue from winter workshops.

### *The Mediaeval Combat Society*<sup>44</sup>

Formed in 1970, the society attempts to recreate tournaments of the 14th century, specialising in foot combat. Through this entertaining spectacle they aim to stimulate public interest in this period of history.

Combatants go through a long period of training before they are allowed to take part, as the fights are not choreographed, and a certain amount of risk is involved. The group is used by sites including Cosmeston Medieval Village, Vale of Glamorgan.

Membership is between 51-100<sup>45</sup>

### *Regia Anglorum*<sup>46</sup>

In 1986 a group of about 30 people were encouraged to leave the Norse Film and Pageant Society, (now The Vikings), disputing the authenticity and content of its presentations. Keen to pursue the possibilities of living history as well as military re-enactment, the group formed their own society: Regia Anglorum, which now has upwards of 500 members. They set out with the intention of being a nation wide society and at first deemed each new group responsible for their shire's membership, encouraging them to assume the period ethnic identity of that area. Since then a system of land-grants has been introduced, sectioning the country into 29 rough regional groupings. Each is proportionally represented by their group leaders at the High Witans, (executive committees) which take place at least twice a year. Group leaders attain their rank in accordance with the size of their group, e.g, three to ten signifies a Port Reeve, eleven to thirty-five a Shire Reeve, thirty-six or more an Eorl.

After four years of promoting themselves through other people's

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<sup>44</sup> Promotional leaflet, person observation.

<sup>45</sup> *Call to Arms*.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with members, and promotional leaflet.

events and minor shows of their own, in 1995 they performed nine major events and eleven minor events in their own right. Major events have included three-day bank holiday shows at Rochester Castle for English Heritage, and the Largs Viking Festival, at which they expect an average of 200 military and 100 civilian personnel to attend.

The society bars no one from membership on grounds of sex, race or disability. However, because of the lack of historical evidence for women of the period taking up arms, female participants must make an acceptable effort to look like men if they wish to fight.

Funds are generated from event fees and annual subscriptions, (£15 for single membership, which is split equally between local and national society needs).

Regia Anglorum publishes its journal, *Clamavi*<sup>47</sup> five times a year, which includes members research findings, group reports, calendar of events, etc. and a newsletter, *Chronicle*<sup>48</sup> giving more detailed information on events as and when required.

#### *The World War II living History Association*<sup>49</sup>

In 1977 Mike Ross, a dealer in militaria, was encouraged by an American friend to found the society as an 'associate' of the U.S World War II living history re-enactment group, of which he himself was already a member. For this reason the term 'associate' was used in the title until Mike's death in 1981, when his brother Kevin took over and adopted the current term, 'Association'.

Mike owned a Stuart tank which he had been using for public display purposes for some time, and the initial group members tended to be friends

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<sup>47</sup> Regia Anglorum, *Clamavi*. (Journal).

<sup>48</sup> Regia Anglorum, *Chronicle*. (newsletter)

<sup>49</sup> Interview by letter with member, and promotional leaflet.

who owned military vehicles, and colleagues wanting to demonstrate simulated combat situations, using their collections of militaria.

By the end of the year the World War II Battle Re-enactment Associate, as the society was known originally, had amalgamated with the 'Second World War Re-enactment Society', who fortunately consisted mostly of 'Germans', so between them they could put on a more rounded performance, once the public shows began. The first battle, at Molash in Kent, attracted 200 participants and one of the problems of growing popularity: a new element of less serious members, lacking the original fervour for authenticity. Membership has remained fairly constant, apart from the decline in 1988 as a result of the Firearms Act, when some members left rather than discontinue using authentic weapons.

British, German and American units have been represented since those early days, with no less than ten individuals in each to avoid 'two-man armies'. All of the units represent those which actually fought in north west Europe, and try to adopt the personality of the original through close links with the 'Old Comrades' Associations.

As the time period of the society is still within living memory and Nazism still a lingering fear in Europe, care has been taken to keep the society strictly non-political, and members have, in the past, been asked to leave for not conforming to this rule.

Cross dressing has never been favoured in the society and currently women can join the section portraying one of the women's services.

Activities range from public battles, which have become less numerous with larger fees as the society's reputation for quality has grown; 36 hour prisoner of war camp events, using first-person interpretation; special shows for the M.o.D and the Police; film work for television; an annual visit to the battlefields of Europe or even as far as Russia; and private battles when suitable sites can be found.

Events were originally funded through the membership, but

performance fees soon lifted the financial burden. Membership fees today barely cover administration costs.

g) living-history (social history) societies

### *The Hungerford Household*<sup>50</sup>

This South-west based group was formed in 1992 by June Simpson and a number of Tudor enthusiasts with experience of voluntary interpretation work at Kentwell Hall. Membership is by invitation only and is still taken almost exclusively from that initial common ground, although interest is now coming from elsewhere. Membership numbers in 1996 were 38.

June Simpson has taken responsibility for most of the organisation. She writes and distributes the newsletters, is the chief contact as far as clients and events are concerned and arranges most of the catering and accommodation side of the events. As the group's presentation has matured and the Household has received positive recognition from English Heritage, the membership are keen to expand the presentation and accept the redistribution of responsibility that will entail.

The standard of dress takes its cue from Kentwell Hall, as this is where most of the costumes get their initial airing. Cross dressing is not allowed and as far as could be ascertained, not sought after by members.

When putting on an event at Farleigh Hungerford castle, members take on the role of the Hungerford family and their retainers, or appropriate visitors to the castle. The castle, which is for the most part in an advanced state of ruin, is used as a back drop for a gentle introduction to sixteenth century skills and pursuits. Craft skills such as spinning, embroidery, the making of braid, tassels, pegs, whistles, long bows, and lead shot might be on show depending on which members are present. The public are encouraged to try

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with members and personal participation.

their hand at many of these and also to take part in simple courtly and peasant dances accompanied by live music. Story telling is also often a popular feature. A structured programme of activities for an event is not practical, as so much hinges on the skills of those who turn up and full attendance can rarely be relied upon.

The form of delivery is loosely third-person, although members drift from first to third depending on the audience and situation. This 'drifting' dilutes the role-playing aspect of the presentation, as members of unequal role-status will treat each other as equals once the first-person delivery is abandoned.

Although they have associated themselves with Farleigh Hungerford castle, ( with the Revd. Robin Hungerford as their patron) the group have broadened their repertoire to include other West-Country sites such as Iford Manor, the Commandary at Worcester and the Bishop's Palace at Wells.

Funding comes from the membership fee which is a nominal £1.50, and barely covers the postal costs of the quarterly newsletter, event fees start from £30 and donations by members raised from talks about the groups work and area of interest.

The newsletter gives information on future events and comments on past activities.

### *The Historic Re-Enactment Workshop<sup>51</sup>*

The founder members of what was to become the HRW. broke away from the English Civil War Society in 1985 after a living history weekend at Lincoln Castle . They came to the joint decision that as a group of friends they shared a greater commitment to the authenticity of presentation than ECWS was willing, or able to enforce, and so the History Re-enactment Workshop was formed. The group concerned themselves with domestic and military history

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with members and personal participation.

between 1588 and 1696, avoiding the civil war period, as it was, and still is, covered by so many other re-enactors. As the years have passed, the group has concentrated more and more on the social and domestic aspects of this period in history, for the main reason that it is being largely ignored by other live interpreters, (apart from Llancaiach Fawr Manor, set in 1646).

Eight of the founder members remain as the core driving force behind a much enlarged membership of about thirty. A substantial number of the post-founding membership has also endured and are now sharing more of the organisational burden, formally allotted to the core group. Full membership is by invitation only, although those who are not suited to the work mostly leave of their own accord during the associate-member period of one season. The Workshop's membership reflects the attraction of other re-enactors, who either found their own society's progress towards a more professional and educationally sound interpretation too slow moving, or welcomed the emphasis on social, rather than military history. Not everybody breaks these past ties and in recent years three have remained joint members. There are also a growing number for whom the HRW is their first and only experience of interpreting history for the public (five adults). There are roughly equal numbers of men and women, (most with partners within the group) and a most within the 25-40 age group. The number of children under the age of 10 has increased as members have started to raise families. There are only a small number between the age of 10 and 25, and 40-plus, which the group is trying to redress, to give a more accurate representation of population proportions of the time.

The HRW is a registered educational charity and has an elected chairman, secretary, and treasurer.

The Workshop hires its services to period houses, many, though not all, through an association with Stephen Price, who has worked for a number of museum services and is now City Curator for Bristol. The group has amassed a large collection of high quality reproduction artifacts and clothing with

which they furnish the whole, or a part of the property. This collection supports their aim to present (as naturally as possible), and interpret how people might have lived in any one selected period and location.

The HRW's pioneering combination of first-person interpreters in period clothing, and third-person interpreters wearing distinctive HRW red t-shirts is unique in this country. It was developed in order to side-step the barriers that some members of the public have felt exist between themselves and first-person interpreters, and to conquer the resulting loss of interpretation potential on these occasions. In theory, if a visitor feels they are unable to ask the role-player a question, or indeed if their question cannot be answered by the role-player because of that technique's restrictions, then the red-t-shirter is able to step in and act as an intermediary. At its best, this dual delivery technique reaps excellent results and the Workshop is held to be of considerable worth by many reputable museums.

The HRW has a policy of strictly no cross dressing as they consider it detrimental to their close-to-life presentations.

When possible the characters portrayed are real documented people and the information known about them is used to weave a sequence of everyday events that could possibly have taken place. For example, for the Plymouth event Richard Brendon was known to be a Plymouth merchant and owner of number thirty-two New Street, (the Elizabethan House), at the time the Mayflower docked in Plymouth in September 1620. The Pilgrim's physician, Samuel Fuller would have been knowledgeable about the disease Scurvy, and so the HRW had him joining the Brendon's for dinner and discussing the purchase of lemons to rectify this health problem during the long voyage to the New World.

The group often provide an orientation slide show with commentary to give the visitor an introduction to the kind of interpretation they can expect to find and an historical background to the setting, people and events represented. An accompanying information sheet gives a brief account of the



characters likely to be encompassed and a few leads for those who find difficulties in asking questions.

Visitors are usually able to wander at will and dwell on areas of personal interest. However on some locations, for example the Elizabethan House, Plymouth, cramped conditions necessitated a more structured orientation, with third person interpreters guiding small parties through the house at regular intervals. At Blakesley Hall the numbers of visitors are often so great that the museum service has installed a security team to enforce a strict one-way system in order to cope.

The events are usually set over a weekend, with the exception of the annual Pendean Farmhouse presentation at the Weald and Downland Museum in West Sussex, which lasts just under a week. Other regular venues have included Oakwell Hall, Birstall, West Yorkshire; Blakesley Hall, Yardley, Birmingham; Clarke Hall, Wakefield, and Maidstone City Museum.

As part of the on-going research and preparation for the HRW's public events are an annual series of workshops which are designed to further the group's collective knowledge of the period, of appropriate period skills and important interpretation skills. Speakers from outside the workshop are favoured as this causes less offence if their research is rejected for some reason by the group as a whole. Information is constantly being reassessed, and the group is forward-looking enough to reject long-favoured opinions and adopt new ones, if there is sufficient evidence available to substantiate them. These workshops are open to non-members in an attempt to increase funding.

Funding is generated through:

- a) membership fees, which include: full membership, £10, (children under 16 free) and associate membership, £7.50;
- b) event fees which range from £800 to £1400 depending on the location and size of the presentation;
- c) revenue from winter workshops.

The group's monthly magazine, the Falcon Juggler is used as a vehicle for circulating information on forth-coming HRW events, including useful articles and bibliographies appropriate to those events, or the group's work as a whole. Reports are issued on past events by both those within the group, and by their clients. The FJ also advertises outside events of significant interest, such as conferences, lectures and re-enactment markets etc.

Members of the Workshop, notably the founder member, Andy Robertshaw, have had articles published in journals including the Museums Journal and the journal of the Social History Curators group, *Social History in Museums*<sup>52</sup>

### *Past Pleasures*<sup>53</sup>

Founded in 1989 by Mark Wallis and Jane Malcom-Davies. (Malcom-Davies has since left to develop her own company.)

Past pleasures' interpreters work almost exclusively in third-person mode.

The key to the company's high standard of interpretation is the emphasis placed on research, training, and continual evaluation.

Past Pleasures does not recruit actors, but graduates who have the academic skills to be able to cope with the research required of them, and certain acting skills. Amongst the team they have specialists in seventeenth century political poetry, medieval French, local history, art history and the philosophy of science in the seventeenth century.

Research forms part of the daily two hour preparation for the three sessions the interpreters take on a week. They also have two evenings a month to work on the four ten thousand-word papers they are expected to produce a year. This task obviously encroaches on their private time as well,

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<sup>52</sup> Robertshaw, 'From Houses into Homes' in *Social History in Museums, the Journal of the Social History Curators Group*, Vol. 19, 1992, pp. 14-20.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with staff, promotional leaflet and person observation.

and demonstrates the strength of commitment expected.

Each new recruit has an intensive three day's training and then joins the other interpreters under the guidance of an experienced team member. This 'buddy-system' is also part of the companies intense evaluation programme. Each team member is continually assessed by their fellow interpreters and so problems can be quickly and easily dealt with before they become too serious.

Every two months there is a group training session, which might include a foreign language workshop.

Of the one hundred and fifty interpreters on the team, thirty are employed full time.

Permanent venues include Hampton Court Palace and the Tower of London. One-day events have included character performances such as the seventeenth century antiquarian John Aubrey, discussing his ideas about the origins of Stone Henge, while walking around the site (1998); and Lord Chesterfield entertaining his guests with topical conversation, at his home on Blackheath (Rangers House, 1998).

## **7) Historical arts and entertainment groups**

### *Hautbois*<sup>54</sup>

Rick and Helen Heavisides, known as Hautbois, specialise in period music and dance from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century inclusive. Their costumes and props are of a high standard of authenticity. When they perform outside they create their own period setting through the use of a large marquee furnished according to each specific era. Their performances take on a number of forms. These include concerts, workshops and lectures for the general public, private functions and school visits. (fig. 3)

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with founders, promotional leaflet and person observation.



Fig. 3 Hautbois: more than just good music.  
(Photograph by kind permission of English Heritage)

Hautbois have been working with children since 1983, and have developed a special educational programme for schools which has been designed to meet National Curriculum requirements for Medieval Realms, Tudors, (Stuarts) and Victorians. Facilities are available to dress up to forty children in costume for any one period at a time. Helen is a qualified teacher.

The duo are used regularly by English Heritage at sites nationwide.

#### *Renaissance Historical Dance Society*<sup>55</sup>

This Plymouth based group was founded by Rosemary Smith, a former member of the Tudor Dance Group. They specialise in costumed Tudor and Stuart court dancing and long bow demonstrations. They use recorded music, and work mainly in the south west. The group are used by English Heritage, and local authorities. Membership numbers around twenty.

#### **E) Entertainment**

Although many of those listed in the informal education section have strong entertainment qualities, it is quite rare to find companies and groups with historical themes that do not claim to have some educational aims. Even some of the following examples, such as the Exeter Pageant might be classed at the lower end of informal education, rather than pure entertainment, because the organisers sort to include well researched historical data in the narrative. The line, however does have to be drawn somewhere.

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with members, promotional leaflet and person observation.

## 1) Pageants and fairs

### *The Exeter Pageant*<sup>56</sup>

Exeter had a thriving historical pageant scene up until the last world war, and in 1995 the City Council strove to revive the tradition. Peter Thomas, local historian and the then Tourism Officer, organised a grand procession of costumed volunteers, depicting many of the City's key figures throughout history. Each year the event grew until in 1997 it turned into an extravaganza. The procession ended on the Cathedral Green, where each group of characters were woven into an elaborate account of the City's history by Peter Thomas himself, dressed as a Courtly storyteller. Four re-enactment groups were hired highlighting the Roman, Medieval and Stuart periods of unrest, or occupation.

The Pageant was part of a weekend-long set of events. The two Medieval re-enactment groups had set up camp in the Rougemont Gardens, on the site of the old Castle, from Friday to Sunday, portraying aspects of social and military life. These were also part of *The Exeter Lammas Fair* which took place on the Sunday in the gardens. The range of entertainment was ambitious, perhaps too ambitious to be repeated on such a scale as an annual event. There were rare breeds in pens, falconry displays, a medieval market with more than the average number of serious purveyors of well researched goods, and a craft demonstrators area, which included bowers and rope-makers.

In addition a programme of musical and theatrical performances, of an historical nature, or theme was organised,<sup>57</sup> involving fifteen acts, fifty-eight performances, over five separate venues across the site. Some of the acts are described in the next section.

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with organiser, promotional leaflet and personal participation.

<sup>57</sup> The author was the entertainments organiser.



Fig. 4 Medieval street theatre with Extra Bodies.

The following entertainers were employed for the Exeter Medieval Lammas Fayre described above.

Many of the musicians including Malcolm Wood on harp; Paul Hill on piper and tabor; Peter Linnet on border pipes; Nick Scott on Uilleann pipes; Ros Hooper on flute, Windbags on border pipes; and Jongleurs on assorted instruments, were highly skilled and played authentic music of the period, but the costumes provided by the council were of the 'fancy dress box' variety.

The jugglers, and jesters including Ben Cornish and Elfric the Jester (Rupert Elford), were excellent entertainers, but definitely came down on the side of entertainment, rather than education, in their lycra jester costumes, and plastic props.

The street theatre groups included Fiasco, a group of mummers who were true to the ancient style of the genre, if a little modern in their use of materials. The other group, Extra Bodies, put on a series of scripted short plays based on medieval market life. Their performances took place around the site, including their own stall in the market. The themes were researched well, but the costumes were of a theatrical, rather than educational standard. (Fig. 4)

## **2) Historically-themed catering businesses (medieval banquets)**

These establishments are rarely intended to be educational and provide historically 'flavoured' entertainment.

*The Medieval Banquet, St Katherine's Dock, London*<sup>59</sup>

This Beefeater restaurant makes it very clear in its leaflet that entertainment is paramount on a visit here. The leaflet, a glossy, well produced affair, states

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<sup>58</sup> Person observation.

<sup>59</sup> Promotional leaflet.



'This is a medieval pageant that you can be part of - when King Henry and his dancing wenches invite you to join in the festivities.' King Henry VIII might not have liked being referred to as 'medieval', or of the 'vegetarian option' on the menu, but he probably would have approved of the wenches and 'unlimited wine and beer' which is included in the price.

The leaflet advertises in French, German, Japanese, Greek, Italian and Spanish, so it might be supposed that business parties as well as domestic bookings are a target audience.

*Pentney Abbey, King's Lynn, Norfolk<sup>60</sup>*

Pentley Abbey, where 'ye wine floweth and ye vittles doth be in abundance', concentrates more on the real business of the restaurant- the food and drink, rather than the extra curricular entertainments.

The banquets offer menus from the early medieval, late medieval and Cromwellian eras, all of which bare striking similarities when scrutinised carefully. For example, the 'Abbot's fruit Pie and Cream,' becomes the 'Monk's fruit Pie and Cream' and finally 'Brother John's Fruit tart and Cream.' The real choice is centred in the third remove of each menu. The early medievalists get the 'Hot Roast Pork with applesauce, and fresh tender wort,' while the later medievalists can enjoy 'Roasted Turkey with Fresh tender wort, sausages and Cranberry Sauce.' The Cromwellians have the 'Hot Roast Beef with Horse Radish Sauce, Puddings and fresh tender wort.'

The menu is obviously a bit of fun, and the serving wenches are young, pretty, and not too worried about what constitutes medieval costume (if the leaflet is anything to go by). The leaflet also boasts that the banquets are in their twentieth year (1999), so one would assume that the food and hospitality is good!

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<sup>60</sup> Promotional leaflet.

## Chapter Two

### The Communication Model

This study hinges on questioning the ability, and appropriateness of live interpreters to effectively communicate desired messages about the past to the public, and the motivations behind the messengers, and the receivers involved.

As the whole subject of the study surrounds acts of communication, the decision has been made to use a long established standard model of communication as a foundation on which to build the findings of the study, and to facilitate a clear, structured analysis of them. If the diverse practices within the heritage industry are to be compared, then the commonalities between them must be identified. Establishing a set of criteria for *any* form of communication will help with this procedure.

#### A) The Basic Communication Model

The basics of communication have been the subject of much study within the disciplines of art, sociology and psychology during the twentieth century. Models like the following one developed by H. D. Lasswell, published in 1948, have attempted to capture the essence of the process. Lasswell's foundation statement was this:

'who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?'<sup>1</sup>

Morgan and Welton note that, 'as a starting point...this cannot be bettered'<sup>2</sup>, but that, 'Lasswell claimed an act of communication was adequately explained

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan J, Welton P, *See What I Mean. An Introduction to Visual Communication* London, Edward Arnold 1986. p 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

only when every aspect of his famous question had been answered<sup>3</sup> Using such a model will highlight the inter-dependency of every component, and the unity needed to produce an effective result.

Lasswell's question 'with what effect?' suggests that it is of importance to the encoder what the reaction of the decoder is, i.e, there is a desired outcome. In communication design therefore, there is always an underlying suggestion of control; a factor that this study will be treating with particular interest.

D. K Berlo, in *The Process of Communication* states that if a desired effect 'is absent, we refer to the act as expression rather than communication.'<sup>4</sup> This too is a factor the study will be considering when motivations are analysed in chapter four.

Berlo's own model for communication reads as follows:

The transmission of a message can be analysed into five components:

- \*selecting an idea to be conveyed,
- \*encoding it,
- \*transmitting it through a channel,
- \*decoding and interpretation by the receiver.<sup>5</sup>

Neither men directly bring the question of motive into the equation, but the author regards this as the fundamental element and driving force of any act of communication, and has therefore supplied this as the fifth component.

From these references, for communication to be possible, in very basic terms, the following components must exist.

- \* An encoder to select, form and send a message;
- \* Someone to receive the message;
- \* A message to send;
- \* A vehicle or medium for the transportation of the message;

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<sup>3</sup> op. cit. p 2.

<sup>4</sup> op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Berlo, D.K. *The Process of Communication* Holt, Rhinehart & Winston 1960, p.11.

- \* A reason for sending and receiving the message.

If these are the components for *any* communication, then the author also suggests a sixth addition to complete a model for *effective* communication. That addition is evaluation.

What is the meaning of 'effectiveness' in the context of this study? It has already been established that the encoder sends the message with the intention of it producing a specific action or condition in the decoder. Therefore, the 'effectiveness' of the communication can be judged on the successful production of this result. This is why evaluation is such a valuable addition to the model's criteria. Knowledge of the intended receiver's needs, decoding abilities, and probable receptiveness to certain forms of media, are essential elements in the encoder's strategy plan, and effective messages cannot be encoded without this knowledge. However, without evaluation the effectiveness of the message cannot be assessed, and the message cannot be adjusted to maximise success. Evaluation is the guiding element to improved communication.

Through the analysis of effective and non-effective communication design, part of the study's purpose is to formulate guidelines that should encourage effective practice in the future. Although it is unwise to suggest that following a set of criteria will *guarantee* an effective result, (because of the instability of the eternally unpredictable element in the equation: the decoder), making sure all the controllable elements are operating at optimum levels, will ensure the best results possible in any set of circumstances.

The list of criteria above is still very basic and does not account for the many exterior pressures on the encoder, such as cost, time, and availability of materials, all of which influence the final manifestation of a project. Although most of these factors are common to all practices, some forms of media, such as live interpretation, require specific additions. The simplicity of the original model allows for specialisation when appropriate, yet continues to preserve

the unifying foundations, common to all. Live interpretation is, in essence, just another form of media, and its creators are subject to the same design problems as any other on the market.

The study will use this model as a foundation to analyse what live interpretation has to offer at the turn of the twentieth century, to whom and why. Comparisons among forms of media will be made using examples taken from as wide a representation of the field of practice as possible, in order to facilitate a fair assessment to this end.

## **B) The Encoder**

Although the requirements of the encoder will now be dealt with in some detail, the author does not intend to take each component in turn for analysis, but to concentrate on themes, and make connections as and when appropriate.

The effectiveness of any message, or in terms more appropriate to the heritage context, the success of any project, rests almost entirely on the multiple skills of this person, or team of people. It is the encoders who decide exactly which message is going to be sent, (albeit within the external restrictions of budget and time etc.), for what reason, how, and will judge its success. In the study most of the other components will be approached through their relationship with the encoder, because of this pivotal position of power and responsibility. It is conceded that some encoders are not members of the design team, as such, but instigators of policy, and allocators of budgets etc. at government level, whose decisions influence those who are.

Taking references<sup>6</sup> from published material on both general design and specifically museum design, this study suggests that in order to operate effectively, the fundamental requirements of encoders are as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> These will become apparent as each requirement is analysed in detail, but include many of the instructional works to come out of publishing houses such as Routledge.

- a) A clear understanding of the philosophy of the company or institution that they represent, and a willingness to abide by it. (This is not intended to imply the unquestioning demands of a dictatorship, nor the denial of self expression, but the adherence to a professional code of practice.)
- b) The willingness to accept that they are there to serve the visitor, and not for self gratification;
- c) A clear understanding of the message and its intended result, and the ability to remain focused upon it;
- d) The ability to assess an audience in order to form an accurate understanding of their motivation for participation, needs, skills, experience, and most importantly, the language that is common between them;
- e) A good understanding of the media available on the market, and the sound judgment with which to choose the most appropriate medium for the job;
- f) The ability to work as part of a team, with members from different disciplines, and under pressure.
- g) The creative and educational skills to design the appropriate message;

Each suggested requirement relates to one or more of the communication model's elements and will provide guidance when assessing

the effectiveness of case studies.

## Chapter 4

# How Effective is Live Interpretation as a Tool of Communication?

Both the strengths and weaknesses of live interpretation as a tool of communication stem from two main sources. The first is the independence and complexity of human nature, and the second the dual role of the encoder. On the one hand the encoder has the responsibility for designing the message, either alone, or as part of a team, and then becomes the means of transportation for that message.

This chapter explores the advantages and disadvantages live interpretation has over other media, owing to this unique arrangement, and is divided into the following sections in order to assess live interpretation's potential and practice in all areas of its performance:

### A) Flexibility of Visitor Assessment

#### B) Adapting to visitor needs

##### 1) Is interpretation needed?

- a) Visitors who want to be left alone
- b) Visitors who want time to adjust
- c) Bringing a piece of interpretation to a conclusion
- d) Conflicting of interests on a working site

##### 2) Establishing a common language

- a) Breaking down cultural language barriers
- b) Languages of the past
- c) Interpreting for people with partial or no sight
- d) Interpreting for people with partial or no hearing



e) Intellectual and psychological barriers

3) Establishing a common ground

- a) Visitors with other interests
- b) 'Shared' experiences
- c) Exchange of information
- d) Interpreting for crowds
- e) Specialist groups

C) Durability

D) Remaining focused

E) Programme development

F) Orientation

**A) Flexibility of visitor assessment**

One of the skills necessary for effective communication is the ability of the encoder to assess accurately the target audience, in relation to its diverse needs. As D. K. Berlo in *The Process of Communication*, suggests: 'The more you know about the characteristics of your audience, the more effectively can you tailor your design.'<sup>1</sup>

Large establishments such as the Natural History Museum in London have the resources to experiment with 'front-end evaluation'. They set up mock 'tasters' of a forthcoming exhibition, allow the public to preview it, and through observation, questionnaires and interviews, evaluate its potential.<sup>2</sup> Through evaluation of the feedback the encoders have the opportunity to adjust a little, or rethink the whole of a project before going to the expense of producing the real thing, which might have to last for decades. (Fig. 5)

Most establishments cannot afford this luxury. For many smaller museums and temporary exhibitions the expense of a 'front-end evaluation'

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<sup>1</sup> Berlo, D. K. *The Process of Communication*, 1960 p 121.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Dr. Giles Clarke, department of public services for the Natural History Museum, London, 1994.



Fig. 5 Once a major exhibition is in place, it becomes inflexible.  
Natural History Museum.

would prove too much of a drain on the overall budget, and so other means are employed.

There are many ways of assessing a potential audience. A continually updated database may be compiled using general and specific questionnaires within the museum, comments from visitor books, liaison with local schools, education centres and tourist boards. Monitoring the visitor numbers, development and success of the local competition, which could include any leisure-based establishment or event is also a good sign of what people in the area find attractive.

Judgment from previous experience is of course a common and valuable asset, which is not necessarily held in a formal database, and a long-standing establishment will come to know what works in its area, although as Dean says in *Museum Exhibition*, 'Museums should always be open to identifying and attracting new audiences.'<sup>3</sup>

However the encoder chooses to assess the audience, once the graphics are printed and mounted, once the models are made, the soundtracks cut, the video edited and the computer programmed, the message's breadth of appeal, in most cases, is inflexible.

Live interpreters have the greatest potential advantage here. Stacy F Roth suggests, (Fig. 6)

Because visitors often refrain from verbalising their feelings –especially negative ones– knowing how to project and read body language and facial cues are invaluable skills.<sup>4</sup>

Interpreters have the potential to be able to assess, and continually reassess the needs of the individual visitor in front of them, but as with any medium, the end product is only as good as the encoders' skills and the materials they have to work with. If the encoders have not paid sufficient attention to developing these skills in themselves, or their work force, then

<sup>3</sup> Dean, David. *Museum Exhibition* London: Routledge. 1994 p 20.

<sup>4</sup> Roth, Stacy F *Past into Present*, Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, p103.



Fig. 6 Being aware of visitor's body language is essential.  
Kentwell Hall.

interpreters might fail to deliver the message effectively. However, with training in assessment and the skills to adapt a programme accordingly, the results can be very effective indeed.

## **B) Adapting to the visitor's needs**

It would be difficult to adapt most forms of media to cope with the diversity of visitor needs, and most exhibitions employ a multi-media approach to compensate for this. For example, the Canterbury Heritage Centre uses a combination of information panels, a video, a computer programme, a slide show, ambient sound tracks and collections in cabinets to attempt to meet these needs. Can live interpretation meet more needs than other tools of interpretation?

One of the attractions of live interpretation as a tool for educational purposes is the multi-sensory nature of the medium. The more senses used, the greater the potential for retaining information. It is human nature to touch, and live interpretation in a living history setting (a dressed set), can present ample opportunities. (fig. 7)

The following comparisons further this debate.

### **1) Is interpretation needed at all?**

One fundamental aspect of the visitor/encoder relationship that is vitally important, but is sometimes overlooked, is whether the visitor wants the exhibition, site, object or whatever, interpreted for them at all. People visit sites and establishments for many different reasons, some of which might not be on the encoder's agenda.



Fig. 7 A hands-on experience for school children, and Ian Skipper at Castle Cornet, Guernsey. Echoes from the Past.

*a) Visitors who want to be left alone*

Some visitors just do not want to be disturbed. They might be experts in their field and are out examining examples, and feel that an amateur telling them the basics is a mere nuisance. They might just want to make their own notes and research the subject themselves. The educational aspects of the site might be of little no importance to them if they are using it as a venue for some other business, for example, the development of a relationship, where the interest would be between the visitors themselves. If visitors with their own agendas only have to contend with a static display, they can ignore it, but with live interpretation, their privacy could be in jeopardy. For example, imagine an architectural enthusiast visiting the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, expecting to spend a relatively quiet afternoon sketching some of the finer structural details inside the Pendean Farm House. The Visitor finds the house transformed from its normal empty shell into an interpretation of how a live interpretation group, using first-person role-play, thinks it might have looked in 1599. From the visitor's point of view this could produce a number of problems. On a physical level the features might be obscured with furniture, and general house-hold clutter; the place might be crowded with other visitors, lured in by the 'attraction', and with the only light source coming from the windows these people might well be preventing the enthusiast from seeing well enough to carry out the task intended. On a psychological level the visitor might be totally unwilling to take part in the interpretation and feel very awkward and threatened by the unexpected, (and for them, inappropriate) intrusion.

I have had some one cut me short with a curt 'no thank you, I'm here to see the house' when I have, as the servant Abigail, greeted them with a friendly 'Good day'. In such a case the visitor is obviously feeling threatened, or they would have been more genuinely polite, so the important action is to make them feel perfectly welcome to stay and go about their business as they see fit. I find that turning back to my own task and giving a friendly 'as you please', is sufficient and effective.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Event with History Re-enactment Workshop, August 1998.

This is a potential 'black spot' for interpreters as such a visitor reaction might engender feelings of rejection and resentment that not everybody thinks what they are doing is relevant and worthwhile. The urge to return the sentiment with a blunt retort under the breath, could get the better of some interpreters, especially those with little or no training. Such a situation is of course detrimental to the visitor's frame of mind for the remainder of the visit, to the general reputation of interpreters and to the establishment concerned.

In the author's experience, when an interpreter has disregarded or misread the visitor's intentions and continues to ply them with information about what the interpreter, or the establishment think they ought to be interested in, when all they want to do is amble through the room soaking up the atmosphere, sometimes drives the visitor reluctantly towards the door. Briefing the interpreters of what to expect and why, and how best to deal with the situation can eliminate problems like these.

Some might be extremely shy and would rather read their guide book, or an information panel than speak with an interpreter, whether they are in costume or not. These people have a right to remain undisturbed, and interpreters should be aware of this.

Walking through Syon House as the housekeeper from 1830 the signs of those who did or did not want to make contact with me were there to read in people's body language. I generally gave each person looking my way a 'Good morning', or an inclination of the head and a smile. Those who were interested hesitated a little, or made some sort of forward gesture. They returned my greeting, and either asked a question straight away, or opened their mouths as if to say something, although at that stage they were not sure what. Those visitors who were not interested, or not ready to engage in conversation at that time would make some sort of motion away from me, be it even slight. They would almost always look away and if they returned my greeting at all, it was mumbled and embarrassed.<sup>6</sup>

As Roth indicated, from reading the signs, interpreters can choose their next course of action.

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<sup>6</sup> Event with Hoi Polloi, Easter 1999.



If one of live interpretation's key attributes is its easy adaptability to suit visitors' needs, then part of the power should lie in the visitors' hands, as co-director of the exchange. The visitor who prefers to remain one of the crowd, to let others to ask the questions, and is content to listen, should not be made to feel that interaction is expected of them. Permissible, but not expected. They should feel in control of their contribution to the situation.

Repellent feelings in the presence of live interpreters is a long-standing problem in the technique's history. The legend of the blue-rinsed, be-tweeded National Trust guide as part of Britain's heritage folklore is testimony to that. The author does not intend to imply that the approaches of all such guides are repellent, many in her experience have been skilled in their work. The reference is to the minority that will never be forgotten. Live interpretation will probably always have this effect on a minority of visitors, and not, in many cases, through any lack of skill on the live interpreter's part. It is simply not everyone's choice of interpretation. As long as both parties are aware of that, hostilities should be avoided. Most establishments that have costumed interpreters are advertised as such to attract those who are interested, and establishments planning to invite a live interpretation group in for a special event also advertise well in advance. Visitors who do not favour this form of interpretation have ample opportunity to plan their trip accordingly.

One technique of taking the fear out of first-person interpretation for the visitor is practised by Echoes from the Past, (fig. 8) and Old Sturbridge Village. The first-person part of the presentation is sandwiched between a third-person introduction, and conclusion. The visitor knows they will be able to ask questions with someone who will reply in a modern fashion at the end.

#### *b) Visitors who want time to adjust*

Some visitors just need time to adjust to the strange scenario before them, and will come forward in their own time, if they are not pressurised. The silent



Fig. 8 A monologue in first-person with modern questions after.  
Keith Beckford with Echoes from the Past.  
(Photograph courtesy of Echoes from the Past)

visitor hiding in the crowd might just need the time to reassure themselves that they are in a situation they will be able to cope with, before stepping forward and taking on the challenge. Exposing that person might not be appreciated, but through subtle means, such as a welcome smile, interpreters can try to create the non-threatening environment that the visitor seeks. Even if they do not feel confident enough to speak out in front of other visitors, they might feel able to ask a question on a one-to-one basis after the others have gone. This might be time to use a few words of encouragement.

(More will be said on building the visitor's confidence in point 2e, on 'psychological barriers', and 3b, which deals with establishing common ground.)

At the Shrewsbury Quest, *not* attempting to solve the Cadfael murder mystery did not seem to me to be an option, when Brother Oswin entered the gate house on my arrival. The challenge had been set in motion in the visitor centre, and although I wanted to take part, I felt as if my intelligence and problem-solving abilities were being put to the test in public. The feeling that I ought to be gleaning some vital piece of information from our meeting made me nervous and uncomfortable, and it was with considerable effort that I did not follow my colleague as she fled through the door and into the relative safety of the herb garden. That was my reaction. I am a first-person interpreter, I was there researching a technique I was familiar with, and I am fond of the Cadfael mysteries. I still wanted to run. How much of that experience was due to the setting and interpretive technique, and how much was due to my own psychological insecurities? Maybe it was not wise of the encoder to set this first encounter in a candle-lit, musty and enclosed environment, which I am sure accentuated my fears, but I suspect there are a large number of visitors who would suffer none of the anxieties I brought with me. A heritage centre like the Shrewsbury Quest has to cater for the majority of its potential visitors in its general design. I did wonder at the encoder choosing Oswin as the visitor's first live encounter, on which they would base their first impression of the whole centre. This monk is somewhat 'simple' and his manner, (which was actually played very well by the interpreter) could be misread, and regarded as strange by someone unfamiliar with the Cadfael characters. This is at a time when the visitor should be made to feel at ease and able to understand what is expected of them. In my case, I quelled my rising panic, accepted the challenge, and started to enjoy myself. My colleague had been frightened off. The interpretation was good, but perhaps the positioning in the visitor's experience could have been more carefully thought through.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Visit to the Shrewsbury Quest, April 1996.

Some visitors need more time to adjust than others and the uncertainty that holds some of them back from fully embracing the concept is the fear of the unknown, and the lack of control. If the visitor in section a) above, who remains part of the crowd felt they were in control of what happened to them in this situation, then they might change their mind, and take an active part. Orientation is the key factor to this problem. Empowering the visitor through orientation will be discussed section F of this chapter.

*c) Bringing a piece of interpretation to a conclusion*

An important skill of the interpreter is knowing when to stop. Even a good orator can lose the sympathy and attention of their audience if they push the encounter beyond the visitor's wishes. A visitor to the Weald and Downland Museum was heard in conversation with a friend to say, 'He was very interesting, but I thought we'd never get away.' The visitor will begin to feel trapped in a situation like this, and anything positive gained from the encounter, might well become blighted by the inconvenience. For example, compare two speakers experienced by the author. Both were in the company of audiences they knew were already interested in the subjects they were about to lecture on, but their personal skills dictated the effectiveness of the outcome.

The first man was hired at Kentwell Hall as part of the participants' evening entertainments programme, and although we were all eagerly awaiting his lecture, we were also tired after a full day's work. Unfortunately, although the speaker's manner was engaging he had chosen far too many slides to illustrate his lecture, and many of his sympathetic audience had literally fallen asleep long before his over-extended conclusion.<sup>8</sup>

The second man, Alan Turton, was speaking as part of series of lectures given at an English Civil War Society event at Tatton Park. Turton chose to accompany his lecture on the history of the Basing House estate during the Civil War, with no visual aids at all. I sat down on the damp grass, quite expecting to move on in a minute or two, (my interest in the military aspects of the war being somewhat limited), but

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<sup>8</sup> Kentwell Hall, 1997.

through the power of his oratory skills, the speaker had me and the rest of his audience in the palm of his hand. We were still clamouring for more when he left, but it was not only his story-telling abilities, but his sense of timing that led the audience to praise his lecture for years after.<sup>9</sup>

Dean suggests in *Museum Exhibition*, 'to guide interpretive planning and presentation, a team member with an educational back ground and training is needed.'<sup>10</sup> The author is not necessarily in agreement with this, but certain common planning skills are essential. Being a specialist in one's field is not enough.

*d) Confliction of interests on a working site*

Some sites are working sites, i.e they are still being used for some purpose other than that of a museum, or heritage site. Sometimes certain sections of society come into conflict with heritage establishments because they feel sites should still be working, when they have ceased to do so. A classic example of this is Stonehenge, where some people regard the site as a current place of pagan worship, and are furious that they are barred from using it as such.

The same might be said of some of our Christian cathedrals. Those which receive the largest number of sightseers are often too crowded and busy to act as a place of spiritual comfort or prayer for those who seek it. Even where a degree of serenity can still be found, those people seeking it now have to pay for the privilege of doing so, apart from at set times. This infuriates many, and puts the opportunity beyond financial reach of others.

These are situations which would benefit from sensitive and discrete interpretation, so the sites can retain much of their old function, as well as accommodating the new visitors. At Stonehenge, although the public are no longer allowed to get near the stones, the minimum of visual interpretation has been imposed upon the immediate site, thus allowing those who wish to appreciate the monument for its aesthetic or spiritual beauty can still do so to a

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<sup>9</sup> Tatton Park, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Dean, op.cit. p14.

limited extent. The weight of numbers here makes the use of personal sound systems more discrete, and therefore more appropriate than the use of live interpretation on a day-to-day basis. This does not appease those who wish to perform sacred ceremonies there, but it is a small step towards compromise.

Places of worship are among the most difficult working sites to satisfy both authentic users and site-seers.<sup>11</sup> Staff often advise visitors when a service is taking place, and ask them to be considerate in their behaviour towards the worshippers. Many cathedrals have chapels designated for silent contemplation, to minimise the conflict of interests. However, even though most have notices asking for compliance to the rule of silence, those wishing for tranquillity must rely on their co-visitors' consideration. The author has noted uneasy relationships in such circumstances, which would indicate that the solution is not always successful.

One working religious site where the relationship between authentic user and tourist does work successfully is Buckfast Abbey, where the resident monks themselves are indeed, first-person interpreters. Their hospitality and understanding makes for an extraordinary encounter.

The information panel next to the font in the abbey church was the first I had encountered of its kind. Never before had I seen any written interpretation in a religious establishment that explained the purpose and significance of a font.<sup>12</sup>

A possible explanation for this might be that it had always been taken for granted that this was common knowledge. The monks appear willing to embrace the challenge of interpreting their way of life for a secular (and often very young) audience to whom such knowledge is no longer as 'common' as it used to be.

In an attempt to reduce outward noise many cathedrals have adopted personal sound systems as vehicles for interpretation. Guide books are also on sale for those wanting a general introduction, and themed leaflets for special

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<sup>11</sup> The author does not intend to discuss the historical 'authentic' uses of religious sites, and the link between pilgrims and tourists. Let it be understood that in this case the author refers to worshippers and visitors with other agendas.

<sup>12</sup> Visit to Buckfast Abbey 1994.

interests are sometimes found, but despite the implication of outward noise, live interpreters still make a tempting choice over other media.

There are two key factors to examine. Firstly, If interpreters have to dedicate so much time and energy putting visitors at their ease, it would indicate that the interpreters are commonly regarded as being empowered with authority. In circumstances when the consideration required of the tourist is vital to ensure the success of the site's dual role, might the interpreter be justified in exacting a certain amount of control over the visitors' behaviour? If the interpreter uses that authority to tactfully control noise levels, the dual role can be carried out more harmoniously.

The second factor in live interpretation's popularity within religious sites is its flexibility. Places of worship house such a diverse range of material for interpretation, that the spectrum of visitors' questions is likely to vary greatly from tour to tour. Live interpretation is potentially the most versatile medium in this situation.

Another potential problem area is the interpretation of industrial heritage. Industrial sites recently closed due to industrial decline, are likely to have resentful ex-employees living near by. It is not uncommon to find ex-miners employed as interpreters for example. Using live interpretation in such cases utilises valuable first-hand knowledge, and provides some (if only a little) employment for the community. Like the silence-seeker in the chapel of prayer, the gesture is perhaps only a weak compromise, but live interpretation can ease the conflict of interest.

## **2) Establishing a common language**

One aim of the assessment stage of encoding is establishing a common language that opens a channel between the encoder and decoder. Barriers can be cultural, physical, intellectual, or psychological.

Producing a message that fulfils the requirements of every visitor is

practically impossible, and encoders know they have to limit themselves to catering for those of larger recognised groups and types. Although British society has become more 'minority-aware' than it used to be, minority groups, such as the physically disabled, are not, for many reasons, provided for to the same degree as their able-bodied fellows.

One of the reasons for unequal provision, which results in minority groups receiving a truncated version of the whole message, is 'noise'. 'Noise' is the communication term used to describe anything that interrupts the flow of the message to the decoder. Morgan & Welton state, 'no outside influence should be allowed to prevent the message from arriving intact and undistorted.'<sup>13</sup> The effectiveness of different media in the following areas of interpretation can be assessed partly by how little 'noise' it generates.

#### *a) Breaking down cultural language barriers*

Language barriers of a cultural nature can be addressed by some media more effectively than others. In written form it is more likely for a guide book to be available in foreign language, than for all the interpretation panels to be duplicated time and again. If panels were treated like this, then the result would be either a vast area of boards,<sup>14</sup> or a much reduced amount of information for each. It is sometimes difficult to get the same quality and quantity of information within a guide book, or a set of hand-held bats, which are also used for the purpose, as on a corresponding panel, so audio techniques are often used instead. Many new heritage centres and sites of the 1980s and 1990s adopted an assortment of hand-held audio systems where the presence of visual 'noise' from information panels would be inappropriate. For example, the system used at Stonehenge (developed by Soundalive Tours Ltd) uses units that can be programmed from a selection of languages within a few seconds at the entrance of the site. If visitors change their minds about what

<sup>13</sup> Morgan & Welton See What I mean. *An Introduction to Visual Communication* . p13.

<sup>14</sup> The visual image would be as easy to follow and appealing as an EEC-approved manual for an electrical appliance.



channel they require, however, the receiver does have to be reprogrammed back at that location.

At the Canterbury Tales different channels are available by tuning in on the hand-held receivers which visitors can operate themselves. For example, if French-speaking students find the English channel too difficult to understand, they can turn it to the French channel whenever they wish, without having to return to the entrance to have their receiver reprogrammed.

In all these cases the degree of flexibility is limited. The narrative at the Tales is on a continual tape, which is initiated in the first room by a member of staff, and continues until that programme ends at the other end of the exhibition. Whenever a situation arises where the visitor is not in a position to listen to the orientation instructions properly, or chooses to ignore them, their progress can become confused. They sometimes move ahead of their allotted programme, and are subsequently presented with dark, inanimate scenes, or they join earlier parties and cause overcrowding problems.

When I worked at the Tales in the early 1990s, this happened more regularly than the centre would have liked, and it was the job of the 'centre operator' (the staff member allotted to patrol the inside of the exhibition) to untangle bunched parties, and restore the confused party to their appropriate location. This was quite a feat for one person, as the layout involved two flights of stairs, several levels and six enclosed areas, and there could be up to seven or eight parties in the exhibition at any one time. Often it was the human flexibility and skill of this live interpreter, in partnership with the permanent on-duty technician, who assured the smooth running of the programme.<sup>15</sup>

Most sites with audio narratives provide them in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch and Japanese, but what happens if a visitor cannot speak any of these languages? At the Canterbury Tales the quality of the narrative tapes for the foreign visitors were not as rich in background sounds as the English version, giving them a much plainer experience. This was apparently due to budget restrictions, although for a foreign visitor who is already listening in a second language, ( for example, a Czech person listening in German), less

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<sup>15</sup> Summer work at the Canterbury Tales 1990-91.

background 'noise' might make it easier to follow, and therefore could be regarded as an advantage.

Keeping strictly to one medium in these circumstances has its limitations, and encoders often find the solution is mixed media. For example, through studying the illustrations in the guide book to Stonehenge, and the illustrated wall panels leading through the underpass from the reception area to the site, non-English speaking visitors might be able to work out some of English Heritage's interpretation of when the henge was built, where the stone came from, how it might have been erected, and why. Therefore, although limited, this minority group would have some interpretation available for their use, that could not be possible with the audio option alone.

At other sites, where the message is more complex, for example, the Canterbury Tales, where all the elements of a story-line have to be understood for the tale to make sense, the gap between the breadth of information available to those sharing a common language, and those who do not, is potentially greater. Visitors who do not understand any of the languages on offer will suffer many of the same losses as people with impaired hearing (which will be discussed in section c ) They would hear a few ambient sounds which are not restricted to the personal sound systems, such as the fire crackling in the Tabbard Inn, the clatter of hooves out of the stables, the Miller's outrageous flatulence, the breathing of the sleeping guests at the Chequer of Hope, and the service bell calling the pilgrims to worship at Becket's tomb, but very little else. The Tales are illustrated by a combination of projected images, spotlighting of models, moving parts, and music (via the audio sets), which give the visitor the general idea of the subject matter and tone of the tale, but they would really need the narrative for it all to make sense.

Live interpretation has the potential to offer an effective service for foreign visitors. Past Pleasures, a company that specialises in costumed third-person interpretation, insists that their interpreters are fluent in at least one

other language, and preferably more. As they are resident interpreters at Hampton Court Palace and the Tower of London, sites which are favourites with large numbers of foreign tourists, this stipulation is a justified one. If the interpreter can communicate freely in the visitor's native tongue, or they can establish a common second language, the quality of the visitor's experience can be almost as rich as a native visitor's.

The first-person interpreter has the dilemma of whether their character would know the visitor's language or not. If there are no other visitors present, then most foreign visitors would welcome the opportunity to communicate properly with the interpreter, and overlook the anomaly. If the party is not alone, the interpreter must take the other visitors into consideration too. This is likely to be a situation where communication and authenticity ethics are going to conflict, and the interpreter has to make a decision. Depending upon the site, this decision might have already been made via company policy. By prior arrangement, this party could be scheduled for a quiet time when other visitors are unlikely to be inconvenienced.

The situation in Britain, with so many live interpreters being in service on a voluntary basis, means that the high standards of Past Pleasures are not common throughout the country. Many volunteer interpreters have a smattering of whatever foreign languages they learned in school, but not enough to fulfil a demanding, possibly specialised conversation.

As Roth says of American interpreters,

When no verbal communication can take place, interpreters make the best of a bad situation by smiling, displaying friendly body language, engaging in demonstration, making music, pointing out objects of interest, and willingly posing for photographs.<sup>16</sup>

This would imply that the majority of encounters with voluntary interpreters in Britain, for visitors with no English, consist of practical demonstrations and improvised forms of sign language.

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<sup>16</sup> Roth *Past into Present* p125.

In my experience as an interpreter and observer, this is a fair assessment, although I have been in the presence of other interpreters who have slipped easily into French, and even Guernsey Patois, when required.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of training in the voluntary, and in some cases in the professional sector of live interpretation remains a problem in this area of expertise. If training cannot be provided, or the work force with the necessary skills recruited, then other forms of interpretation might be more appropriate to a site where foreign visitors form a large proportion of the market.

#### *b) Languages of the past*

Language is an important part of any culture and many practitioners of interpretation believe it should be represented in popular history presentation. The names of unfamiliar objects and activities can be dealt with easily enough by most media, but everyday spoken language is often a subject that museums are reluctant to confront.

One reason for this is the lack of hard evidence on the subject. It is not known exactly how people spoke in their everyday lives before audio-recording techniques came into use. Intelligent guesses can be made from plays and prose of the day, but spoken language is very different from written or performed language, and there is little indication of regional accents etc.

Live interpretation appears to be the main area of interpretation daring to voice those intelligent guesses, and explore the learning potential it presents. The pioneering spirit of live interpretation might have originated from the entertainment side of its ancestry, which was concerned less with the opinions of the esteemed few, and more with communicating with the populous. These unselfconscious beginnings 'broke the ice', and have led to an area of continuing experimental archaeology.

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<sup>17</sup> *Echoes from the Past*, Castle Cornet, St. Peter's Port, 1999.

Those who work in the first-person are faced with a problem. The way the language varies from today's in syntax and vocabulary can make it sound like a foreign language to some visitors. Interpreters find themselves being spoken to very slowly and carefully by visitors, in the British way of communicating with foreigners.

If a visitor is having problems understanding what is being said and communications are breaking down, then an adjustment is needed. There are a number of techniques that interpreters use to rectify a situation like this.

For example, at Kentwell Hall, as Mystresse Kit of the dairy, I might have asked a school party,  
'Good morrow to you childer. What know you of dairy-making?'  
If my question was met with looks of incomprehension, I would have simplified it and tried,  
'Know you what we make in the dairy?'  
If this was still beyond their abilities, I would try,  
'Do you know what we make in the dairy?'  
By then even the dullest, or most timid students would usually have been able to respond. If they were not, I would tell them anyway, and perhaps engage them in some activity (which is always popular) to get them used to me, before I made another attempt at verbal exchange.

Once the visitor's level of understanding has been found, the interpreter either remains there, or uses that base to build up the visitor's confidence, and then works subtly upwards. The interpreter should always have in mind that it might be shyness that prevents an immediate response, not a lack of understanding.

Judith Phillips, who owns Kentwell Hall with her husband Patrick, recommends that in order to retain the opportunity for the visitor to learn something of the 'Tudor' language, participants should use the original version, followed by the simplified version, followed by a repetition of the first.

For example, a visitor asked me while I was working in the kitchen what I was going to do with a cauldron of vegetables and water. 'I will place it upon the fire to seethe.' I answered.  
'To what?' asked the visitor.  
'To seethe, that is to boil. When it doth seethe well, I will set it to the

side of the fire to cook more gently.<sup>18</sup>

Most voluntary groups do not keep strictly to period speech, but concentrate on simplifying the language, and cutting out recognisable twentieth century words and phrases, such as 'OK', 'hopefully' and 'posh'.<sup>19</sup> Depending upon the understanding of the audience, sometimes producing the effect of a difference existing between the visitor's modern language, and the one being spoken by people representing the past is thought sufficient.

The flexibility of live interpretation is again an advantage over other media in a situation like this, as the medium can adapt instantly to suit the requirements of the immediate audience. To capitalise on this advantage though, the interpreter has to be competent and confident in their understanding and deliverance of the period language, and have the right attitude towards the visitor. New participants at Kentwell Hall often place 'speaking Tudor' very high on their list of pre-event concerns.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes an interpreter's lack of confidence can turn the period language into a real barrier, as they feel they have much to tell, but no voice. Others, who have mastered the language, sometimes make the visitor feel small by ridiculing their ignorance. These 'rotten apples' are a minority, but despite advice and warnings from the organisers of such events, they will probably always exist in a large voluntary work force.

### **c) Interpreting for people with partial or no hearing.**

Sometimes it is difficult to achieve a solution that adequately provides for everyone. For example, some people can hear something clearly only if there are no other sounds present. Many sites, including the Canterbury Tales, Tonbridge Castle and the Winchester Heritage Centre use sound tracks which have over-laid sound on them. For example, at Tonbridge, the battle scenes

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<sup>18</sup> Kentwell 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Until interpreting an era in which they are appropriate.

<sup>20</sup> Questionnaire conducted by the author in 1996, (See appendix1) and overheard conversations throughout time at Kentwell.

have the narrator's voice over a background of re-created battle noises, and rousing music. For those without hearing difficulties the result can be an emotive and informative experience, which might be counted as a success by the encoder. For the visitor with impaired hearing, however, it can severely reduce the quality of the educational and recreational experience, resulting in frustration and possibly abandonment.

Morgan & Welton say of noise, 'if such intrusion is likely, some means must be found to compensate for its effects' and that, 'the quality which characterises all successful artists is their consummate ability to reduce noise in their work.'<sup>21</sup> The Tonbridge example illustrates some of the problems experienced in finding a balance. If the over-dubbing was left out, the disabled person would be able to hear the narrator, the most important component of the message, but the majority of visitors would then be left with a rather dull experience in comparison with the former. The answer sometimes is not finding a single presentation method to suit everybody, but providing alternatives. These can be prohibitively expensive, or at least a major drain on the overall budget, which is one reason for the needs of minority groups being overlooked, or featuring low on the priority list.

Another reason could be ignorance. The particular problem mentioned above had not even occurred to the author until she overheard a sufferer complain.

Therefore, if the mark of effective encoding is being able to provide for a variety of needs without creating noise that detracts from the message for others, how adaptable are the different forms of media for fulfilling this requirement?

The Canterbury Tales, which relies heavily on the narrative and storytelling would provide a puzzling experience for the totally deaf, if they had no previous knowledge of Chaucer's pilgrimage scenario, and the content of the tales. They would have the medieval scenes and the costumed models to look at; and the synthetic smells, but the heart of the message would not be

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<sup>21</sup> Morgan & Welton op. cit.

readily available to them. The guide book provides limited help in this respect. For example, the introduction to the Pardoner's Tale gives account the pilgrims' progress on their journey, some historical information about ale and ale-houses, and only the following on the tale's content:

The ale-house is a suitable setting for the Pardoner's Tale. Within the context of a sermon on the vices of drunkenness and gambling, he tells the story of three drunken revellers who find death in a heap of gold.<sup>22</sup>

Such entries are meant more for setting the medieval scene than to give any insight on the content of the tales themselves.

If the visitors were familiar with Chaucer's work, then the 'noise' created by the absence of any narration, would be much reduced.

With many inside exhibitions of this nature, where the encoders have tried to represent the past, and they are promoted through the idea of being transported back in time, written text on display boards would destroy the ambiance and are rarely used.

A guide book like the one at Stonehenge, which gives a brief, but comprehensive introduction to the site, is far more effective as a backup form of media in circumstances like this.

For those with partial hearing many of the audio systems available are technically adaptable to link with hearing aids, and of course have personal volume controls. In most cases however, the user has not the supplementary aid of being able to read the speaker's lips, which might be their usual communication support.

The flexibility of live interpretation in adapting to special needs like deafness can be a great strength. If interpreters have had adequate training they can adapt their programme accordingly, as and when it is required. The same encoding problems of reducing the effect of 'noise' for other visitors still applies, but the speed at which live interpreters can adapt and alter the programme is the key issue here. If they are aware of one person's special

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<sup>22</sup> *Canterbury Pilgrims Way. Official Guide.*



hearing needs within a group, they can make sure they are near to the person and their lips can be easily read if required. When circumstances allow, they might suggest a little time on a one-to-one basis after everyone else has moved on. Sign language can be an effective solution, although it might be distracting for other visitors, and interpreters working in first-person are faced with the problem of doing something out of role. If the other visitors have moved on, and no one else can see, the interpreter is at liberty to use this modern form of communication without creating any 'noise' at all. Stacy F. Roth in her advice to interpreters, based on practice in the USA suggests, that although there are many considerations to take into account in such circumstances, it is likely that, 'non-hearing-impaired visitors will be sympathetic to the situation'.<sup>23</sup>

*d) Interpreting for those with partial or no sight*

Visitors with partial or no sight are catered for more easily in some types of exhibition than others. As long as their other senses are not impaired the heritage centres offering 'sight, sound and smell' experiences can be effective without having to adapt their programmes, but this depends on the establishment's policy towards physical contact with the exhibits. For example, compare the Canterbury Tales with the Jorvik Viking Centre. Both have audio narratives that stand well on their own, but at the former the visitor can touch most of the life-size costumed models and their recreated surroundings, thus providing the tactile communication channel that would aid these visitors' understanding of life in that era. At Jorvik however, visitors are isolated from the scenes as they are transported around the exhibition in a 'time car' and do not have the opportunity to touch.

Concerning written language, the provision of braille information boards throughout the country is rare, although they are known to be used in the geology gallery at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, Devon, and in the Beatrix Potter Gallery, Ambleside, Cumbria.

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<sup>23</sup> Roth, op. cit., p157.

Again, live interpretation can break down communication barriers. Exhibits which are behind glass are of no use to these visitors, and many museums have special hands-on sessions to meet special needs in this area.

In most cases such requirements need prior arrangement, but at a site where live interpreters work on a regular basis in a contextual setting, such as the Tudor Re-creations at Kentwell Hall, or the numerous sites interpreted by the History Re-enactment Workshop and similar groups, immediate adaptations to the programme can be made. If the interpreter is wearing period clothing then, providing it is of sufficient quality, the blind visitor can learn not only what the textures probably felt like, but how they were worn and why. For example, without the unnatural hardness of the synthetic model beneath the fabric, the visitor can begin to understand what role the boning of a bodice played as a foundation for all additional garments, in creating the 'look' of a period.

While groping is no more allowed than it would be were the interpreter not in period costume, costumed interpreters learn to expect the normal boundaries of personal space to alter while they are interpreting. As walking manikins, they accept the likelihood of physical contact as visitors inspect the interpreter's clothes.

Presentations set in the living context such as these have great potential for communicating to those with little or no sight. Care has to be taken around danger areas, such as fires, sharp tools etc. but this is standard practice for interpreting for anyone unused to the dangers. The Pendean Farm House at the Weald and Downland Museum, for example, would usually offer the homely smell of a burning log fire. During the week the History Re-enactment Workshop transforms it into their interpretation of an occupied family home in the late sixteenth century, someone depending on their nose for a great deal of information would be met with a myriad of descriptive smells. In the pantry alone there would be baskets of raw fruit and vegetables, dried salt-cod hanging on the wall, raw or cooked meats on a side dish, storage pots

containing flour, nuts, dried fruits, pickles, preserves and spices; bellamines<sup>24</sup> of oil, vinegars and cordials; and the slightly pungent aroma from under the bench of yesterday's scraps and peelings. Added to that would be the ever-present smell of the fire, the strewing herbs being crushed underfoot, tallow candles and perhaps the whiff of sweat mingled with linen and wool from the interpreter.<sup>25</sup>

The scope in a situation like this is far broader than the diffused synthetic smells of Jorvik or the Canterbury Tales. These synthetic odours are a valuable asset in the context of interpreting an interior or exterior scene within an enclosed space, but there is nothing like the real thing! (or at least modern equivalents of the real thing.)

As all, or almost all of the equipment used in these presentations are reproductions, there are few restrictions on handling, although government regulations have to be adhered to with food and beverages. This means that in circumstances where food is prepared in anything less than modern catering conditions, the public are not allowed to try it. The denial of exploration through taste is a great loss to live interpretation, especially when one or more of a visitor's other senses are impaired. Luckily, the sense of smell is closely linked with taste, and serves as an adequate substitute.

When a group of people sharing the same special needs wish to visit an exhibition most establishments, whatever their preferred media, can adapt their presentation to accommodate most of the visitors' needs, even if it means being the first or last group of the day, which ever is likely to cause less 'noise' for other visitors. Live interpretation stands out as the medium most able to adapt to visitor's unexpected special needs, especially on a one-to-one basis.

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<sup>24</sup> Ceramic container, originally for transporting wine.

<sup>25</sup> Author's experience, Pendean Farmhouse, 1998.

### e) Intellectual and psychological barriers

How do the different forms of media cope with the other main language barriers- intellectual and psychological? Intellectual barriers are concerned with tone of address, quantity of information, the use of jargon and the subject areas chosen to be interpreted. Linked with with these intellectual barriers are the psychological ones that they create, born of negative feelings of inferiority, or superiority, and of being an outsider. Dean in *Museum Exhibition* notes: 'activities that engender feelings of inferiority, insecurity, intimidation, or embarrassment will be avoided',<sup>26</sup> by the visitor, and that they choose activities, 'that make them feel welcome, appreciated, provided for, and adequate.'<sup>27</sup>

Choosing the right tone for a known audience is vital for effective communication, whether it be written or spoken. This relates to the list of requirements for a successful encoder, made in chapter three on the communication model. The encoder must be able to assess the visitor's needs, and be willing and able to serve those needs. The text or dialogue should be in a form that the audience is able to understand, and is comfortable with, or the communication will not be successful.

In the past museums were seen as little more than storehouses for collections and opportunities to put portions of them on show for interested parties to gaze at and admire. When the concept of interpreting these collections began to filter into the consciousness of the museum fraternity there was a tendency for exhibitions to be encoded by experts *for* experts, with labels that meant little to the average member of the public. The concept of the exhibition might have been well within the visitor's intellectual capabilities, if it had been more appropriately communicated.

This kind of labelling in museums is rarer these days, with most encoders being aware of the need to design for the uninitiated, and the non-

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<sup>26</sup> Dean *op. cit.* p24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

expert. The text on most information panels is set at the average national reading age, which is that of a twelve year old. Seeing as the same text has to serve school children and adults in their leisure time, this is thought to be appropriate, and receives few complaints. Most adults are content with the 'bite-size' proportions of information. (Fig. 9) They know if they want more information they can read a book on the subject, at the level of their choice, but how many good intentions of this sort are ever followed through?

An example of effective, appropriately written text can be found in the Ecology exhibition at the Natural History Museum, London. The biosphere is explained thus:

A few kilometres beneath our feet the earth is white hot.  
A few kilometres over our heads the air is thin and cold.  
In between is the biosphere - a narrow band like the skin of  
an apple where all the diverse forms of life flourish.<sup>28</sup>

A potentially confusing word like 'biosphere' is made easily accessible and acceptable to both the casual adult visitor and the school child, two of the most numerous visitor types expected to be using the exhibition. The literary approach is simple and direct, and is structured (two quick statements and a longer anecdotal sentence) to arrest the attention and encourage further investigation, without appearing over simplistic, patronising or boring.

Through the language chosen the encoder communicates a number of things to the visitor. The encoder aims to form a bond with the visitor almost immediately by choosing the possessive pronoun 'our'. This encourages a feeling of mutual acceptance and equality, that helps to break down any residual sense of 'museum exclusiveness' the visitor might have brought to the exhibition as part of their preconceptions about museums in general.

The phrase, 'beneath our feet', gives the message a certain sense of immediacy. The encoder is not referring to the earth under an explorer's feet on an African plain, but the earth under the visitor's feet in the Natural History Museum in London.

Reference to 'a few' kilometres indicates an informal attitude towards

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<sup>28</sup> Notes taken during visit 1995.

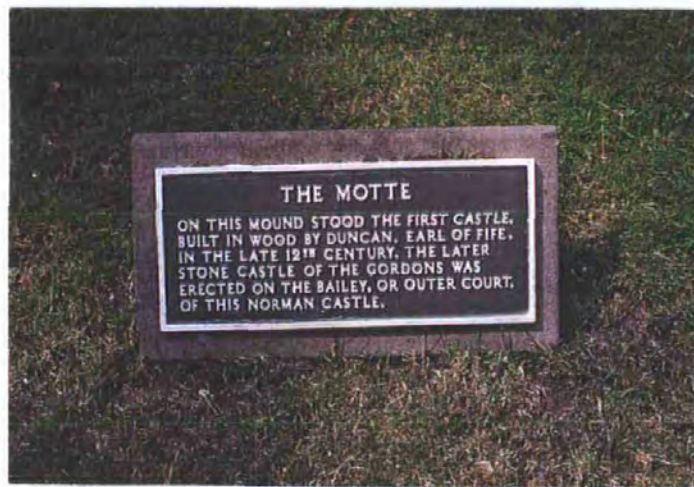


Fig. 9 Bite-size pieces of information can be explored later in books etc.

the subject at this introductory stage. This, and the easily visualised apple peel analogy might come as a relief to those expecting to be confronted with scientific jargon, and encourages a relaxed and receptive frame of mind, which is ideal for learning. For those who are aware that a kilometre falls short of a mile, but could not guess by how much, are assured by the tone of the piece, that their crude visualisation is acceptable. It does, however, hint that the days of feet and inches are in the past, and that the museum is promoting a modern attitude.

More than one level of intellectual need can be provided for on one panel, and indicated by type variations or orientation symbols. An exhibition of the history of the Exeter Ship Canal<sup>29</sup> held on the Quay used animal symbols as flags to indicate which passages were more suitable for younger readers.

Content is often determined by estimating how much information visitor's with different agendas will want to read. There are those who are content with looking at the artifacts and illustrations, but have limited patience when it comes to reading written text. Some encoders have adopted the practice of supplying a short introductory paragraph, which is comprehensive enough to supply the key issues, and follow it by a more detailed paragraph or so, for those who wish to know more. When providing for school children, whose first priority is probably not the text, and for adults relaxing in their leisure time, the length of text must be estimated with care.

Sometimes the introductory paragraph is very short, for example one at Hamptonne Manor, the Country Life Museum, Jersey runs thus:

#### What's for Dinner?

Farms like Hamptonne were self-sufficient. Most of the food was obtained from the farms, fields and garden.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> summer/autumn 1998.

<sup>30</sup> External information boards, Hamptonne Manor, the Country Life Museum, Jersey.

This is followed by four paragraphs of fifty-four, eighty-two, fifty-one and forty-three words respectively. The longest one is provided here to put these word counts into perspective:

Pigeons were an important source of fresh meat during the winter when at Hamptonne. They were kept in the pigeon-holes in the front of the house and in the *colombier* across the valley. Chickens, geese and turkeys were first recorded in Jersey in 1620 and were also kept. Other birds such as the red-legged partridge were hunted and in one seventeenth century inventory there was mention of a spit for blackbirds.<sup>31</sup>

A slightly different approach can be seen in Winchester City Museum's Bronze Age gallery. There are only two paragraphs, and of roughly equal size, but the bold type-face of the first and the subsidiary content of the second indicates the same intention as the Jersey example:

**The most common types of pottery found on nearly all Roman sites are those "coarse-wares" which were produced locally. Local wares tended to be for kitchen use-storage and cooking- and were uneconomical to trade long distances because most settlements had a near by kiln to supply their needs. Winchester, for example, was supplied by kilns at Farnham and Shedfield which produced grey wares. The recent discovery of some twenty-five kilns at Shedfield may indicate that it was Winchester's biggest supplier of kitchen wares.**

The commonest Gallo-Belgic wares are Terra Nigra (with a black or silver-grey fabric) and Terra Rubra (white fabric with a red slip). This differed from other iron age pottery traditions in that it was wheel thrown and its forms are more concerned with table wares (plates, dishes and cups) than with kitchen wares (cooking pots, jars Etc.) The industry probably developed under pressure from cultural and technical contact with the Roman world via Gaul in the 1st century B.C.<sup>32</sup>

The language of the second paragraph indicates that it is intended for the more knowledgeable visitor. For example the phrase 'white fabric with a red slip', would require some specialist knowledge to understand, and there is no attempt to supply a meaning.

The differing visual presentations give the more casual visitor the signal

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Winchester City Museum's Bronze Age gallery.



that it is acceptable for them to only read the first part, and puts them at their ease.

Many sites and museums produce different guide books for a range of audiences. The National Trust has a number to choose from in some cases, all fulfilling different needs. The range for Corfe Castle for example, includes a folded sheet on tough, glossy paper, two guide books for adults, and one for children.

The first, costing fifty pence, is meant for the visitor who wants a rough guide to take round the castle, so they know broadly what they are looking at, and what relevance it might have had in history. On one side there is a very effective two-colour drawing of the castle. Firstly, in green, there is a detailed picture of the castle as it looks today. Superimposed over that is a simple representation, in red, of how the castle is thought to have looked before it was demolished, with all the main features named. Eight of these have been selected for explanation on the reverse side of the sheet, where a sizable paragraph, full of historical references and surviving features of interest are noted. This is a concise, informative and practical piece of reference material for immediate use.

The adult guide books fall into two distinguishable categories. The first is the thirty-one page glossy souvenir, where the attractive colour illustrations dominate roughly sixty per cent of the total space. The second, a sixty page, more academic-looking piece, allocates only thirty-two per cent of the overall space to its black and white illustrations. The latter uses print reproductions and other historical references for eighty-four per cent of its illustrations, compared with the glossy brochure which uses roughly forty-five and a half per cent.

The text for the fuller study appears to be of a slightly more academic tone, although the reason for this could be the more leisurely pace allowed due to the extended space allocation. For example, compare the two pieces of text that follow. The first is from the glossy brochure, the second from the

other:

The 'Old Hall' in the West Bailey, with its distinctive herringbone masonry and simple, round-headed windows, is the oldest in the castle.<sup>33</sup>

Within the West Bailey are the remains of a building which is one of the earliest surviving structures in the castle, contemporary with the curtain wall of the Inner Ward. This building, of which only the south wall of 'herring-bone' masonry survives, was originally free-standing along the south scarp of the hill, although, presumably, the whole of the area of the West Bailey was surrounded by palisading.<sup>34</sup>

The fuller study deals with the architectural history at the beginning of the brochure and the social and political history afterwards, whereas the glossy brochure has to cover all aspects on the same page. The brevity of the text, and the clarity of the colour photographs of the glossy format, suggests it can be used as an on-site guide for those who do not wish to be over-burdened with lots of reading during a visit. The more sombre of the two is likely to be bought by those wanting a more in-depth study which they can either read during a longer site visit, or at their leisure at home.

The final publication is for children, and carries no photographs, or historical reproductions except the painting of Dame Mary Bankes on the front cover. Instead it is amply illustrated with bold line drawings, which provide both the opportunity for some traditional 'colouring in'<sup>35</sup> and presumably a less expensive book to produce.

The relatively low production costs of at least one publication, can be an essential factor in trying to provide for so many alternative audiences.

Most children are still developing their rudimentary intellectual skills. Their short attention spans and egocentric outlook should be taken into consideration when composing appropriate text. This guide book separates the bulk of the architectural and human history, although especial care is taken to

<sup>33</sup> Thackray, David, *An Illustrated Souvenir Corfe Castle*. National Trust 1991.

<sup>34</sup> Corfe Castle National Trust 1993. (originally 1985)

<sup>35</sup> An occupation adults seem to assume children hold as a high priority judging by the number of similar black and white publications for the industry.

enliven the 'bricks and mortar' section, which might otherwise be seen as 'boring' by a young audience. In the following extract interest is sustained through the association of a fairy tale queen, and by directly addressing the reader (indicated through author's italics)

At the top of the slope is the oldest part of the castle, the OLD HALL. The walls, built of stone placed in a herring-bone pattern, are the remains of a house built in the tenth or eleventh century. It is said to have been built on the site of the home of the *wicked Queen Elfrida who murdered her step-son, King Edward the Martyr*. Three of the original windows remain - *see if you can find them*.<sup>36</sup>

The type face of a piece also conveys meaning. The glossy souvenir and the children's book both use a rounder, more informal face than the academic one, indicating a more leisurely approach. The children's publication is also in a larger type size, to aid their reading. Small text is traditionally thought by children to be 'harder' to read than larger text.

The use of unexplained jargon will produce negative feelings of inferiority in the visitor. If a specific terminology has developed around a subject, then it is the encoder's responsibility to furnish the visitor with an understanding of it, rather than merely substituting the strange words with more familiar ones. It is important to make them feel included, and accepted if an effective environment for learning is to be established.

The Channel Four archaeology programme, *Time Team* is a good example of this. The 'team' consists of a number of experts in the many-faceted fields of archaeology, and historical research, all of whom are inclined to start talking jargon under the pressure and excitement of a three-day 'dig'. The encoders however, chose their presenter wisely. Not only is Tony Robinson not an expert in archaeology, but he is of course fondly remembered by many, as the archetypal stupid peasant, Baldrick, of *Black Adder* fame. The audience relates to him because he too is an outsider to the subject, and they have the comforting reminder that if Baldrick understands it, the concept can not be

<sup>36</sup>Chaimberlain, Ron and Linda Corfe *Castle. A Children's Guide* The National Trust 1993 p.13.

that difficult. Whenever the experts forget themselves, Robinson is there to face the embarrassment on the audiences behalf, and ask the 'stupid' questions. For example, he might say something like, 'Hey whoa! You said trapezoid and voussoir in the same sentence there. What are they?'

As a result of this programme's interpretation techniques, the erstwhile mysterious concepts of dendrochronology and geophysics are now understood by large numbers of the general public.

Another example of effective practice in producing an atmosphere where everyone feels at ease and ready to learn, can be found in the Isles of Scilly in the guise of the environmental field officer, Will Wagstaff. On his wildlife tours of the islands Will caters easily for the casual holidaymaker and the more discerning naturalist within the same tour. His knowledge of the natural and human history of the islands is very good and he weaves stories of both into the tour throughout the day, as well as answering questions whenever they arise. His expertise lies in ornithology and this is where the test of flexibility is concentrated most keenly. He is a well known and respected figure in birding circles, and so his tours attract those with a serious interest, even 'twitchers'. His strength lies in being able to communicate successfully with fellow experts and with those who cannot tell the difference between a blackbird and a crow, with the same level of commitment and understanding, and without either sections of the party feeling excluded or belittled. (Fig. 10)

### **3) Establishing a common ground**

As important as finding a common language is establishing a common ground of interest, and understanding. As part of every preliminary attempt at communication, live interpreters have to discover the visitor's understanding and interest in what and they have to offer. Miles advises: 'with unfamiliar subject matter, it is important to relate the message to the visitor's world and to what he already knows.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Miles, R S *The Design of Educational Visits*, p. 81.



Fig. 10 Will Wagstaff adapting to a multi-need group.

*a) Visitors with other interests*

Encoders should consider the surroundings in which they are interpreting. One of the commonest reasons for visiting without the intention of looking at the exhibition, is to study the architecture of the building housing it. For example, cathedrals quite often house their 'treasury' in the crypt, which has a special form of architecture seen nowhere else in the building. The Natural History Museum building in London is a study in itself, both architecturally and decoratively. The author certainly finds herself seeking out the flora and fauna incorporated into the fabric of the walls, pillars and ceiling, with as much enthusiasm as she gives to the exhibits.

If an exhibition is housed in a building that has a history of its own encoders should consider the options open to them for making provision for these visitors at the design stage of the project. Display boards can be positioned away from interesting wall features, stained glass windows and staircases might be retained. Real problems begin when rooms and 'outside' sets are constructed within such a building.

For example, the Canterbury Tales was constructed within the gutted church of St Margarets, but the extent of the changes, and the dim lighting, make it almost impossible to recognise the few remaining original features that were incorporated into the set designs.

Another example is the American Museum in Britain, housed in Claverton Manor, Bath. The Manor was designed by Sir Jeffry Wyattville, architect to George IV, but many of the rooms have been transported, including panelling, and flooring, from America, and reflect a totally different style than that of nineteenth century Somerset. For the majority of the visitors this is quite acceptable, but for a local historian with a particular interest in Claverton, this might present a problem that would remain unsolvable as long as the museum remained there.

These examples are somewhat extreme, and more common problems

might include lighting being directed towards the exhibition only, and therefore being insufficient for the architectural enthusiast whose attention is focussed elsewhere.

Briefing custodians and room attendants on the history of the building, supplying a special guide book, or arranging for special guided tours, would alleviate the visitor's feelings of awkwardness and possible frustration in these circumstances.

Other reasons for the visitor not being interested in the content of the display might be that their interest lies in exhibition design or the work of a certain illustrator. Special guide books for specialist interests such as these for individual exhibitions might not be recommended as a good investment of a limited budget, but room attendants and interpreters should make these people feel welcome too.

Instead of making every part of the exhibition accessible to every type of visitor, quite often specific areas are encoded to appeal to certain sectors of the audience. An example of catering for different age groups is handled well at the Longstone Heritage Centre on St Mary's, in the Isles of Scilly. The exhibition includes much that would interest adults and older children, but the encoders were also aware that an important percentage of their visitors would be school children and little children on holiday with their parents and older siblings. Therefore they have included such items as a life-size moving model of Sir Cloudesly Shovel on the deck of his ill-fated ship the 'Association', who tells (at the press of a button) the dramatic tale of his own and his crew's demise. For the tiny tots there is also an animated scene of old 'sea dog' puppets having a merry time. The latter is simple, and hardly a piece of academic interpretation, but appeals to the very young, and catering for young children can make the visit more enjoyable for everyone.

b) *Shared experiences and interests*

Freeman Tilden said 'Any interpretation that does not in some way relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.'<sup>38</sup> Finding a common ground of interest with the chosen parameters of the interpretation is an important part of helping the visitor to acclimatise, feel relaxed, and be able to get the most from the experience.

An example of effective practice is long serving interpreter at Beamish, who was manning the Co-op grocery store last time I visited. He quickly ascertained what might interest each visitor who showed an inclination to interact with him, and felt his way through the conversation, adapting to the reactions he got. One boy was wearing a football shirt, and he immediately found a pair of turn-of-the-century football boots for him to handle. After finding out the boy's favourite team, he told him how Sunderland had been doing at the time the boots were on sale originally, how much he would have had to pay for them, and what the equivalent was in modern currency. It was obvious he had won the boy over as the lad felt able, and was indeed eager to ask many questions.<sup>39</sup>

Dean in *Museum Exhibition* suggests: 'We have to identify those parts of our experience which we share with our audience, and use this common pool of experience and ideas to provide equivalents for any novel ideas beyond these limits.'<sup>40</sup> Sometimes it is the visitor who establishes a link.

I noted such an occasion at Syon House. One woman, having deduced from the hand-out that I was the 'housekeeper', immediately located and informed me that she too had been in service in a large house. I concentrated the first part of our conversation affirming her confidence in the link she had made, not with any real historical information, but with comments like, 'I am making ready for the spring clean, and you know what that's like!' After establishing our 'shared' experiences she felt able to ask me all manner of other questions which were not related directly to our original common ground.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Tilden, Freeman *Interpreting our Heritage*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957.

<sup>39</sup> Visit to Beamish, 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Dean, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Event with Hoi Polloi. 1999.



When attempting to lead the conversation in a new direction the skilled interpreter monitors the visitor's reactions, to continually assess their interest and understanding.

*c) Exchange of information*

When a common ground has been established, some interpreters build the visitor's confidence by allowing the visitor to give them information on the subject. This is not always possible, as the common ground might be something the visitor knows only a little about, but is interested to learn more. When the occasion arises, it can be a useful technique for creating a positive environment for learning, and also a source of fresh information on the subject.

*d) Interpreting to crowds*

Live interpretation has the ability to adapt most effectively to the visitor's needs of the moment, but that ability varies from technique to technique. Live interpreters do not always have the luxury of a one-to-one relationship with visitors.

How is common ground established in large groups? Encoders in this position have similar difficulties to those designing a non-live display. The more people encoders have to cater for at once, the less accurate their assessment is going to be and the more general the output. Unlike non-live media techniques however, live interpreters still have the ability to read their audience's reaction, and alter their programme accordingly.

Expectation is a powerful factor in assessing a visitor's reaction to a piece of interpretation, as it will colour their perception.

At Berkeley Castle I was informed on arrival that the visit would take the form of a tightly organised guided tour. Having had time to adjust my expectations accordingly, (no hanging back or touching, and a

short period for questions before moving on), I was quite happy to follow the format and get the occasional question in after the guide had covered the generalities. In this case, the guide was excellent, keeping her subject matter varied, and her delivery engaging. I felt I had been told enough about the furniture and decor to satisfy my moderate interest and psychological need to feel better informed about the arts, and that I knew enough about the people who had lived, and worked there as was fitting for an introductory visit. The intellectual orientation at the beginning and skills of the guide diffused almost all of my misgivings about having to keep to a prescribed pace.

At a stately home in Scotland, which enforced a similarly rigid tour, my feelings were somewhat less positive. I felt I had not been told about the objects I was interested in, that I had been told far too much about those I was not, and that there was not enough time allowed for questions. The blue-rinsed be-tweed volunteer of popular 'Trust' legend was alive and frustrating people that day. The guide did apologise for the rigidity of the tours, and explained it was due to too many thefts in the past. The reason was understandable, but it was a shame the standard of interpretation did not match that at Berkeley Castle to compensate.<sup>42</sup>

Some establishments prefer to have each room manned by one or more different guides and let visitors move freely. If security and visitor numbers allow, this can be a rewarding experience for visitors who prefer moving at their own pace. A guide might make a small comment on what the visitor is studying to let them know they are available for questions or conversation if the visitor requires.

On a visit to Brodie Castle, Highlands in the company of a carpenter who was made welcome to get down on his hands and knees and inspect the underside of the table, and a musician who was encouraged to play the piano-forte! The piano-playing was an unusual privilege, but the general air of accommodating the needs of the individual was noted and appreciated.<sup>43</sup>

This more informal programme allows the visitors to lead the line of enquiry. The larger the group however, the more likely it is that some visitors come away with less of an idea of what the place and people who lived in it were about, than if they had been on a guided tour. Unless they asked questions themselves, they would have heard only the answers to other

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<sup>42</sup> Author's visits. 1996.

<sup>43</sup> Visit, 1996.

people's questions, and if they went at the same pace as a dominant group whose sole interest was late-eighteenth-century furniture, they would end up with a very narrow knowledge of the place.

*e) specialist groups*

Finding a common ground for some visitors means arranging for special guided tours, lectures or workshops to take place within the establishment's annual programme. With an on-site, or quest specialist on the subject, there is a chance for visitors with a deeper interest to gain far more than they would from a normal visit. The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum for example, offers a range of lectures and courses in its magazine. Some examples from the November issue for 1998 include, 'Thatch: The Management and Conservation of Thatch in Historic Buildings; Historic Forms of Joining and Pointing Historic Brickwork; Timber Framing from Scratch- 7-day workshop creating a small timber-framed building from scratch starting with the tree - superb opportunity to gain hands-on experience of timber-framing; and Heavy Horses - Shaft and Pole Work.'

Establishing a common ground using live interpretation requires quick and accurate assessment techniques, the ability to make connections and assemble data on any number of subjects from knowledge carried in the head at a moments notice. This might be at the same time as carrying out some other practical task, such as preparing a meal, which needs to be ready on time. The demands are high, but the consequences of sub-standard practice could put the whole effectiveness of the programme in jeopardy. As always, training is the greater part of the solution. Where training is scarce or non-existent as it is in many voluntary groups, the standard is going to reflect in the effectiveness of the practice.

### **C) Durability and Sustainability**

In some ways other media have an advantage over live interpretation when it comes to durability.

#### **1) Physical and mental durability**

A well-made information panel will last for years, perhaps even decades. Displays of a more mechanical nature, such as the slide show for the Knight's Tale, at the Canterbury Tales, tend to break down more frequently and require the addition of an on-site technician to the payroll. Videos wear out over time, but can be replaced at a relatively small cost. Fibreglass models like those at the Canterbury Tales, and Tonbridge Castle (Fig. 11) are more expensive to repair and replace. Their durability depends on how accessible they are to the public, and how they were made. The Wife of Bath has stood for many years outside the Canterbury Tales entrance, and has gradually had most of her fingers broken off through constant abuse from foreign students, and local school children. She was originally made by Heritage Projects Ltd,<sup>44</sup> as an interior model, with a mat finish and ordinary cloth costume, which makes little difference to her finger loss, but might account for her overall weathering. The two figures at the well, Tonbridge Castle, are examples of a later technique employing a tough solid exterior, capable of withstanding exterior conditions. They are also raised up on a small dais, and bare fewer knocks as a result.

The least enduring medium, on a sustained mid-term basis is a live interpreter. As living organisms, without food, drink and rest at regular intervals, they soon begin to function inadequately. When they become ill they are expensive to replace temporarily, and have a habit of passing on their dysfunctional condition to fellow interpreters.

They are also individuals with personal motives, and are susceptible to emotional reactions to outside stimuli, for example, feeling insulted, annoyed and exasperated by visitors' comments or actions. Motivation is dealt with in

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<sup>44</sup> Now trading as *Ideas(Yorkshire) Ltd.*



Fig. 11 Durable models at Tonbridge.

detail in chapter 5.

Live interpretation can be very demanding, both mentally and physically. Role-players always view the world through two mind sets at once. Firstly they are interpreters, who are constantly assessing the audience and directing the programme to the visitor's best advantage. Secondly they are their allotted characters, and should be seen to answer from and react according to those people's perspectives. In addition to this they might also have some task to perform that demands a certain amount of organisation and attention.

Caroline Skipper, of the History Re-enactment Workshop voiced her concerns on this subject: (Fig. 12)

I remember Martin spending all weekend trying to make the coffin for Aylmer Folliot and only shaving down one board, but it didn't really matter because he didn't have to have it done by twelve o'clock, therefore he could stop and talk about what he was doing, and everything else. Likewise, If you're gentry you're not really doing anything. You're there to chat, either to other role players or the public, and you do talk round issues, and your surroundings. If you are doing a real job, like preparing a meal, although you know interacting with the public is very important, and that's what you're there for, you're sometimes too busy to think about how to get the most out of what you're doing. You can stop for quick conversation, but you're mind is thinking 'I've got to get this on the fire, and then I've got to do that...' and so on.<sup>45</sup>

Practitioners, if they are interpreting on a daily basis, cannot be expected to keep up the same high standard of presentation without regular and proper breaks from the public. This means at certain times of the day the visitors will either see fewer interpreters, or that the programme's budget has to accommodate part-time cover.

The History Re-enactment Workshop, a voluntary organisation, has a core group of interpreters who might be in role for most of the day, and then a number of others who play 'walk-on' parts to add movement, a feel of community and to ease the burden for the full-timers. HRW events do not usually run for more than two days at a time, apart from the Pendean

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<sup>45</sup> Interview in response to a questionnaire, conducted in September 1999.



Fig. 12 Can the author talk with the visitors *and* get the dinner on the table on time?

(Photograph courtesy of HRW)

Farmhouse event,<sup>46</sup> which lasts for five days. If the pressure is too much for one of the core group, then a ten minute stroll down the lane to the twentieth-century toilet and back acts as an effective break. If a longer break is required, it can be arranged by bringing another character on and swapping.

The organisers at Kentwell Hall only allow the most hardy of participants to take part in all three weeks of the main summer Tudor re-creation, and they have one day off a week to recuperate. This kind of work schedule could probably not be maintained on a permanent basis, and would take its toll on the effectiveness of the interpreters' skills. It must also be considered that the participants' time there is also their holiday. Many, especially the teenagers and young adults find it difficult to pace themselves in their 'after-hours' socialising, to the detriment of their interpretation skills the next morning. This places a heavier burden on the more conscientious participants, thus causing resentment, and a subsequent weakening of the interpretation team. Many voluntary, entertainment-based groups like re-enactment societies face similar problems. More dehydration is suffered each summer on the weekend 'battlefields' of this country through excess alcohol consumption, than ever the British summer sun could inflict.

If live interpretation is compared to other media techniques, for a long term programme, it proves to be a very expensive option. The establishment never finishes paying for it, and even has to do so when the interpreters are not there (breaks, holidays and sick-pay). The benefits have to be weighed seriously with the costs before the medium is adopted. The relative cheapness of volunteers is also a factor for the continuing use of substandard practitioners. The author acknowledges that many volunteer interpreters are highly skilled, but suggests expertise is more likely to come from the professionally trained.

Live interpretation, especially in a first-person scenario is not just about the durability of the people, but also the clothes they wear and the objects they use. Luckily the older and more worn the clothes become, the closer they

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<sup>46</sup> An annual event held at the Weald and Downland Museum, Singleton, West Sussex.



probably come to the garments of the past they are imitating. This is also true of objects which only get a real 'used' look by simply being used over a period of time.

Breakages are inevitable and add to the strain on the budget, but in some cases these expenses can be offset by an on-site craftsman manufacturing replacements. At Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, USA, there is an on-site potter, cooper, shoemaker, tinsmith, blacksmith, and printer, all who help the self-sufficiency of the establishment by meeting the need for 'props', and supplying the museum gift shop with quality stock to sell. For smaller, voluntary organisations such as the History Re-enactment Workshop, self sufficiency is unlikely as the interpreters are never doing the same task for long, and have regular jobs to attend on Monday morning.

## 2) Remaining focused

In order to produce an effective piece of communication the encoder must have a clear picture of the message, the reason for its existence and the ability and willingness to remain focused upon it. Ambrose & Paine in *Museum Basics* state, 'The first question to answer is, "what is the aim of the exhibition"',<sup>47</sup> and 'The more precisely the museum can define the aim of the interpretation the more successful it will be'<sup>48</sup> Part of this stems from the idea that if the encoder never loses sight of the overall picture, then neither will the visitor. (Fig. 13) This sense of good mental orientation will create a positive environment where the visitor feels confident and receptive to new ideas and learning.

If the exhibition space of an entire building is dedicated to one theme, which is often the case with heritage centres, the message is often repeated or updated throughout the exhibition, allowing visitors to orientate themselves mentally with ease, and encouraging sustained attention. For example, in the

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<sup>47</sup> Ambrose & Paine, op. cit. p 88.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p 69.



Fig. 13 Trying on costume gets children excited, so the interpreter must remain focused on the message.  
Buddle Lane Middle School, Exeter.

Canterbury Heritage Centre there are many diverse subject areas, forms of presentation and types of artefact to be seen, but the exhibition is bound together by the strong message that everything the visitor sees is related to the development of the city and the people who have lived in it throughout history. The exhibition flows in chronological order and the time period of each section is introduced through a 'time orb'. The idea might appear gimmicky, but the design of the 'orbs' echoes that of the display case furniture, which is simple enough to endure a good many years service.

Any technique which produces visual continuity can help to maintain a focus on the message. In the early galleries of the exhibition above, the use of a single artist, Ivan Lapper, to depict the transformation of the city from age to age is a good example of this, although the technique was not continued into the later galleries. The decision to use contemporary material depicting the city when it became available, is of course a valuable one, but had the illustrator's work been used in conjunction with it, and the designer had, in effect used the same 'story teller' throughout the exhibition, an even greater cohesion might have been achieved.

A lack of clarity and focus on the message is a stumbling block for many voluntary re-enactment groups, whether they are presenting military or social history interpretations. Live interpreters are no different from any other encoder, even with the added pressure of doubling as the design vehicle. Stacy F Roth in 'Past into Present'<sup>49</sup> lists suggested criteria for first-person programmes. Under 'appropriateness and purpose' she advises: 'programs (sic) should dovetail institutions' missions, educational and interpretive goals, and topical focus.'

At Kentwell Hall, Patrick and Judith Phillips, the owners, go to considerable lengths to inform the participating interpreters in their Tudor recreations of the underlying message and focus for each year's events. There are a series of first and second open days, of which would-be participants must attend one of each. The days are set out with a series of lectures/workshops

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<sup>49</sup> Roth, op. cit. p. 43.

that aim to reach all of those who wish to take part. Some of the lectures are devised specifically for the new-comers, such as an introduction to the history of, and philosophy behind the re-creations, how participants will be expected to behave, what they might broadly be expected to do, what preparations they will need to make, and what they will need to bring with them. Some previous participants are invited to help with examples of speech and conduct etc., but people wanting a refresher course on the subjects are never turned away. There are a number of previous participants that regularly attend these lectures, to give general support, and reaffirm their own understanding. This is especially true of Patrick's introductory lecture, although, the proportion of people that do this is probably low compared with the total number of previous participants that return each year. Matters of conduct and the reason for being there, (for the benefit of the public), are issues reiterated in Patrick's address to everyone and in the information sheets that all participants receive through the post, so the opportunity for the circulation of core ideas is not ignored. Despite these efforts there are still reports of the odd case of bad practice. These cases of failure to remain focused on the message might owe their existence to a number of factors, including insufficient training for dealing with the public, or having personal motivations for attendance that conflict with the philosophy of the events. This includes the question, for whose benefit are they interpreting-the visitor's or their own. Problems arising from personal motivation will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. It should be said here, however, that the seriousness of the problem grows, as public popularity of the kind of events voluntary groups and individuals make possible, puts greater pressure on the museums to use them.

An unwise choice by the museum could spread the taint left through bad design practice on the re-enactor's part. Like-wise, within a programme such as they have at Kentwell Hall, allowing repeating offenders to return can cause serious problems in quality control. The problems are recognised in this case and more effective forms of 'policing' are being considered for future

events. Again, the problems of a large group are plainly demonstrated. It is very difficult keeping control of such large numbers of voluntary individuals, (up to 400 or so over some weekends of the main event).

#### **D) Programme Development**

If an exhibition is a permanent, or semi-permanent one, then the ability to update its data-base would be an asset when trying to keep the audience abreast of the current thought on a subject. Both when increasing the depth of knowledge available to the audience and amending outmoded information, live interpretation's adaptability is an advantage. Printed display boards can be difficult or impossible to amend without completely re-designing and manufacturing them.

The only other comparable media would be a computer programme, or an Internet website.

Some live interpretation sites or companies have a research programme built into their interpreter's working week or month. Past Pleasures' interpreters, have to produce research papers on a regular basis in order to keep the company's interpretation as up-to-date as possible. Those working in the voluntary sector are also often motivated to keep up with the latest publications, and in some cases in producing them!

#### **E) Orientation**

Mental orientation has already been mentioned in this chapter in relation to continuity and keeping the visitor focused on the main theme of the message. Giving the visitor that mental security is an important part of building and maintaining their confidence, and thus producing an optimum environment for learning. If the visitor feels they have lost the thread of the argument, they might feel intellectually inadequate or frustrated and start looking for the exit.

Live interpreters can stress the core aspects of the message throughout a programme as well as a static display can by use of repetition and summarising.

If interaction is required, then the visitor should be informed of what to expect from the form of media employed, and what would be expected of them. With a static display, this might be a written notice, but with live interpretation it could be quite different.

At the Shrewsbury Quest, apart from 'Brother Oswin', one of the other costumed interpreters was a fellow 'monk', who from a distance one might also have expected to be in role. As I entered the Scriptorium however, he turned immediately, and greeted me with a friendly 'Hi!'. There was no question as to his interpretive position. Someone who felt uncomfortable with a role-player would have felt instantly more relaxed at that very modern introduction.<sup>50</sup>

It is important with a live interpretation programme to let the visitor know what will be expected of them because of the dread of 'audience participation'. If visitors, who hate the idea of being made to get up and take part in a peasant dance, but are quite happy to ask a carpenter about his business, have their fears allayed at the beginning, they are likely to feel more relaxed and able to cope with a variety of new experiences.

As far as tools of physical orientation are concerned, live interpreters can guide a visitor on to the next stage of their visit as easily as a written sign, and unlike the sign, they can explain directions until the visitor looks as if they have understood. If need be they can watch and call out if a wrong turn has been made, which is more than can be expected of the sign. Problems can arise with first-person interpretation, although most circumstances allow the role-player to guide the visitor to someone who could tell them what they wanted to know. At Kentwell, for example, questions such as, 'where are the toilets?' or 'Where can I get a cup of tea?' can be met with relative ease. Answers might include, 'That which you seek is without the gate, where you

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<sup>50</sup> Visit, op. cit.

entered my master's manor,' I am not sure of this *tea* of which you speak, but there is a merchant just beyond the first gate, who can provide for your needs.' Implying without actual inappropriate reference is a sensible, and generally accepted alternative to coming out of role.

The History Re-enactment Workshop has its red-t-shirters to deal with such cases, although without them, the interpreters could employ similar strategies used at Kentwell. Whatever the situation, leaving the visitor at a loss, is unacceptable.

In America it is general practice in living history museums to provide some sort of orientation programme, either in the form of a video, or live performance, whereby the visitor is told what the museum is about, and how they might make the most of the live interpretation technique. This is something that is definitely lacking in this country, and should be considered, or reconsidered.

## F) Conclusion

The evidence in this chapter suggests that live interpretation has the potential to be a very powerful tool of communication. Its strength is in its flexibility, and the ease in which an interpreter can adapt the programme to meet the individual needs of the visitor. The disadvantages of the medium are the continual expense of employment, the human frailties of fatigue and the potential conflict of motivation, especially in the voluntary sector, and those areas that are strongly influenced by entertainment.

## Chapter 5

### Motivation

In this study the word 'motivation' encompasses the many different reasons people have for instigating, designing, presenting, and consuming what the heritage industry has to offer.

Defining and quantifying any one person's motives for their actions is extremely difficult, if not impossible, in such a small scale study, and without psychological expertise. As Dr. Peter Howard confessed during the development of this chapter, 'My motivations for visiting are highly complicated and not widely understood by me, let alone anyone else.' The author has dedicated much time to analysing her own motives for interpreting and visiting, with complex results.

#### **A) Why do people interpret the past?**

The methodologies available to research an answer to this question include questionnaires, interviews and unofficial eavesdropping. The latter of which has refined the author's previous understanding, rather than produced hard evidence.

The following section uses three questionnaires (See appendices one, two, and three), to attempt to assess why people become re-enactors and take part in certain types of activities. In the introduction, the limitations of questionnaires were noted as:

- \* often lacking in depth;
- \* having a tendency towards a rigid format;
- \* open to incomprehension, unless personally supervised;



\* and acceptable for obtaining information of a general nature.

In addition, the following might be considered:

- \* insufficient time might be taken to produce a well considered answer;
- \* the subject might be withholding information;
- \* the subject might be lying;
- \* the subject may simply not understand their own motivations.

The circumstances under which the subjects completed the questionnaires might also reflect on the sincerity and depth of thought towards it. Most of the Kentwell subjects, and some of the Sealed Knot members filled theirs in during events, where their attention would have many demands upon it. Despite these limitations the technique remains the most effective for targeting a larger audience. The questionnaire for the History Re-enactment Workshop members was delivered a few days before the answers were expected, and then these were discussed at length over the phone, to encourage answers of a greater depth.

Evidence would suggest that people are reticent about revealing their deepest secrets, as out of the twenty-six Kentwell participants<sup>1</sup> that replied, only two people answered at any great length. They were asked to reply to the following questions: (See Appendix 1)

- 1) Why did you first volunteer for the re-creations?
- 2) Have your reasons altered since then, and if so how?

With open-ended questions like these the questioner has little control over the answers, and sometimes receives a number of unhelpful replies. Examples of such replies to the first question are:

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<sup>1</sup> Copy of questionnaire in appendix two. Fifty questionnaires were given out.

'Already a re-enactor, a friend's mother got details.'

'Came as a visitor with my family. Most impressed.'

'I had visited before, and a friend who participated, recommended it'<sup>2</sup>

These are classic cases of a slight misunderstanding on the subject's part as to the true meaning of the question, and the questioner not being present to clarify it. In a situation where some of the essential differences between the activity and ordinary life include wearing historical costume, historical role-playing, and taking part in some sort of historical activity all day long, one might have expected any of these reasons to have featured more prominently among the answers. Does their absence mean the question was not phrased sufficiently well to put the message across that a more in-depth answer was required, that these three reasons were not thought important by most people, or that they felt embarrassed at admitting to being attracted by them? The first is more probable than the second, because of the effort involved to take part, but the third is perhaps the most interesting. John Fines asks,

How many uses are there for the word 'play' that suggest it is unimportant, silly, something we should grow out of? (He suggests that play is the) fastest, most efficient, most effective learning medium of all. We receive children into formal schooling when they are already highly skilled and experienced in this form of learning...(and) we try to wean them off it.<sup>3</sup>

Taking this into consideration, it is likely that the taboo set up in our society against adults 'playing' is quite a powerful one to overcome, and could possibly contribute to the psychological 'baggage' that volunteer, and professional costumed interpreters bring with them to their task.

Returning to the response generated by the questions above, in some cases it was easy to read between the lines and make fairly safe assumptions.

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<sup>2</sup> Questionnaire conducted at Kentwell by the Author.

<sup>3</sup> Fines, J in Woodhead, Sally. *'No Longer Dead to Me'* London: The National Trust, 1996, p.8.

For example the lady who wrote, 'Friend had taken part for many years. My husband died - friend suggested I applied. I came initially because it gave me something to do,' was probably looking for an interest to help her get through the loss of her husband, although she had not said so directly.

Another flaw to questionnaires of this kind, is that it is unfair to expect an in-depth self analysis from people who, for the most part, are just enjoying an informative and entertaining holiday. Allowing the subjects to take the questionnaires home with them, which would perhaps enable them to dedicate more time to the task, would, however, further reduce the numbers of returned entries, due to loss, or lack of stimulus.

The reasons for volunteering given by Kentwell participants using the unstructured questionnaire (See appendix one) were grouped into the following categories after submission:

- \* 23.1% wanted to learn either about the period in general, or some specific aspect of it;
- \* 23.1% thought it looked interesting;
- \* 15.4% wanted an active holiday;
- \* 19.2% said it was recommended to them;
- \* 11.5% were interested in role-play;
- \* 7.7% said it looked like fun;
- \* 7.7% said they loved the period;
- \* 3.9% thought it would be a challenge;
- \* 3.9% wanted to impart knowledge to others;
- \* 7.7% enjoyed privileged access to the property.

The fact that only 3.9% stated an inclination to impart knowledge to others, while 23.1% indicated a desire to learn for themselves, gives a valuable insight into the volunteer's initial motives for taking part. More participants

placed learning for themselves above teaching others.

The results from the question, 'Have your reasons altered since then, and if so how?' reveal a new emphasis.

- \* 42.3% valued the 'people, comradeship, or community;
- \* 23.1% said it was the pleasure or enjoyment;
- \* 19% wanted to learn;
- \* 11.5% enjoyed role-play or escapism;
- \* 11.5% wanted an active holiday;
- \* 11.5% made no comment;
- \* 7.7% valued privileged access to the property;
- \* 7.7% found it interesting;
- \* 3.9% felt a sense of achievement;
- \* 3.9% found it a challenge;
- \* 3.9% wanted to impart knowledge to others;
- \* 3.9% thought it was fun.<sup>4</sup>

The assessor might assume the subjects do in fact share many of the motives stated across the answer-base, as people rarely act on one motive only. The reason(s) they actually use can be regarded as uppermost in their minds at the time of filling in the questionnaire, and presumably those to which they assign significant value. Although many more people still wanted to receive, rather than impart knowledge, the emphasis has clearly shifted to another area altogether. The sense of comradeship and community appears to leave the greatest impression on participants after they have taken part in one of the recreations. One key motivation for participating in this kind of event might be suggested as experiencing a sense of community and comradeship that is absent to the same degree in other parts of their lives.

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics from Kentwell Questionnaire. Appendix one.

The questionnaire set for members of the Sealed Knot<sup>5</sup> (See appendix two) utilises a much more rigid format, asking the subject to place three possible reasons in order of preference. This approach produced easily quantifiable results, but denied individual insight, or more protracted answers. The replies from this set of questionnaires lacked sufficient depth. They were not distributed over a large enough sample group (twenty members), to give the results much academic weight, but they did show trends the author was expecting. The structured Sealed Knot questionnaire revealed that of those questioned:

\* 50% joined primarily for the social life, 'legalised thuggery and playing Animals in the beer tent';

\*35% joined primarily because they were 'genuinely interested in the English Civil War and thought it would be an exciting way of finding out more about it';

\*15% joined primarily because they liked 'dressing up in silly costumes and parading around in public'.

In an attempt to discover how their interest in the civil war had developed since becoming a member, they were asked to rate their interest on a scale of one to five, ('not at all', to 'very'), from before this time to the present. It might be assumed that since joining almost all members become increasingly interested in the historical subject, despite their original motives for joining, because the following results were produced:

\* Of those members who joined primarily for the social life, 70% rated their interest rising by two or more levels.

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<sup>5</sup> Set originally for an undergraduate study by the author in 1991. Appendix two. The author believed at the time that the informal style of the wording would produce a relaxed atmosphere, and encourage a more open and informative response.

\* Of those members who joined primarily for the costumes and public attention, 33% rated their interest rising by two or more levels.

\* Of those members who joined primarily out of an interest in the period, 57% rated their interest rising by two or more levels, and 29% of three or more. 46% who stated they were 'very' interested before they joined had maintained that level of interest.

Interviewing members of the History Re-enactment Workshop after leaving the questions with them for a few days provided much fuller answers. (See appendix three) When asked whether they were members of HRW now, for the same reasons as they were when they first joined, replies included:

Pretty much the same as when I started, but they have been refined, from quite a blunt instrument down to a very focused one. I think I really know what I'm trying to do. When putting an event together, I know when I've hit the point. It's a stripping away of the superfluous. Over time the thing I've lost is that it's no longer just for me, about me dressing up. Its about communicating with other people. The emphasis has changed very dramatically<sup>6</sup>.

I have far greater interest now in the educational aspects of re-enactment for the visitors. When I started it was for my own education and entertainment. I am now motivated out of the research aspects of re-enactment, whereby the act of living in an environment using the correct tools and wearing the correct clothes can cast new light on how things could be done. I am also convinced that good quality re-enactment can be a tremendous help in sparking historical interest in ordinary people, so I want to be part of the movement. On a purely selfish basis, as well as the benefits of good food and good company, I must recognise the buzz of being a focus of attention from crowds of museum visitors, plus the unique opportunity for their activities like film work and archeological digs that aren't open to friends and colleagues with other hobbies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Questionnaire conducted September 1999. Les Skipper.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Ian Wedge.

## B) The Origins of Conflict and a Question of Power

Motivation also plays a key role in some of the bitter conflicts and lack of communication that exist between the academic historians, the amateur historians, the heritage industry, and between those within each group. The problems, are thought by some commentators to have originated from the moment the general public started investigating history for themselves.

Ashworth and Howard, when discussing heritage artefacts, suggest,

Scholars of the academic disciplines...are used to controlling knowledge in their fields. They have done so ever since the invention of printing. Now they see non-specialists taking knowledge into their own hands and disseminating knowledge through heritage centres, theme parks and the internet in ways which academics find it difficult to control. So academics do not like theme parks.<sup>8</sup>

So why is control so important? Tosh describes the individual's use of their own remembered past to form a 'sense of what is practicable in the future,'<sup>9</sup> and continues: 'whereas the individual's sense of his or her past arises spontaneously, historical knowledge has to be *produced* .'<sup>10</sup> In order to assess its current status, a society needs another society to compare their situation with. One option is to look abroad, the other is to assess its own past experiences. Lowenthal states, 'Remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity: to know what we were confirms that we are.'<sup>11</sup> If a society is willing to have its current actions heavily influenced by the results of decisions made in the past, then the interpreters of the original events hold enormous power over those who look to them for guidance. Tosh suggests, 'How well the job is done has a bearing on the cohesion of society and its capacity for renewal and adaptation in the future.'<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the interpretation of history can be regarded as a tool

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<sup>8</sup> Ashworth, G & Howard, P *European Heritage: Planning and Management* . Oxford: Intellect, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Tosh, J *The Pursuit of History* . Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History. London: Longman 1991 (original edition 1984) p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Lowenthal, D *The Past is a Foreign Country* p. 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Tosh, op. cit. p. 2.

of control over the attitudes and actions of a society towards its present and future. Samuel describes heritage critics as accusing the industry of 'using knowledge in the service of power... It shores up national identity at a time when it is beset with uncertainties on all sides.'<sup>13</sup>

The influence academic historians have traditionally had over what the public has perceived its history to have been, has throughout the twentieth century been losing its monopoly. The balance of power has been shifting. The amateur historian, the genealogist and the volunteer steam engine restorer have all played their part in changing the attitude of the general public towards the study and intellectual ownership of the past. Samuel suggests there had been 'an unspoken assumption that knowledge filters downwards.'<sup>14</sup> Before the power shift began this assumption was held by both academics and lay-people alike, and it is one that even now influences, if not actions, then attitudes. A re-enactor confided to the author that, 'It wasn't until about ten years ago that I realised that the contents of museums were there for the likes of me to use. Of course, all that's changed now.'<sup>15</sup> The elitist tradition of historical study and interpretation is an important factor contributing to the lack of communication between the academics and the rest of the interested world. While the author has noted an underlying feeling of resentment from the amateur practitioners, historians such as Samuel provide an insight into the opinion of the academics of those 'below' them. In his description of the hierarchy of historical study from the academic's viewpoint, he describes enthusiasts as, 'amateur brain surgeons...the plodding accumulators of inconsequential facts...(and) fact-grubbers.'<sup>16</sup> Thomas J. Schelereth, professor in American Studies at the Museum of Notre Dame, noted that, 'Museum curators do not have access to a highly developed scholarly apparatus of systematic, collective research procedures common to most professional disciplines.'<sup>17</sup> This comment was first made by Schelereth in 1978 when the

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel, Raphael. *Theatres of Memory* London: Verso, 1994, p.243.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ian Skipper, HRW, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Schlereth, Thomas J. *Causing Conflict; Doing Violence*. Museum News. 63(1) 1984, pp. 45-62.



article was first published, and it might be argued that curatorship in Britain and America has changed for the better in the last twenty-two years, but the concerns are still true, to a large extent in the field of amateur and professional live interpretation and re-enactment.

The move towards popular embracement of the past was one of accelerating speed. The academics had filtered their knowledge down through formal education, via text books, to society as a whole, but even as early as the 1930s teachers were taking the initiative away from these traditional resources. Kenneth and Edith Milliken, in their 1938 publication *Handiwork Methods in the Teaching of History* suggest that there had been, 'few times when practising teachers have proved more adventurous and open to new ideas than the one through which we are passing at present.'<sup>18</sup> Their work gave instructions on the pupils might build historical models and how these might be integrated successfully into the learning process. (fig. 14) They argue that,

The use of Model Figures in conjunction with the construction and use of historical Handiwork brings History into the realm of the practical,...The subject then begins to bear some relationship to human existence and the child...can realise the influence of man's environment on his work and habits throughout the ages.<sup>19</sup>

History as a pastime, as opposed to a subject of formal education, has had many milestones throughout the century. It is not the intention of this study to plot the full development of its progress, but to highlight some of the most important aspects of it. A number of groups and organisations that were to prove to be of long-standing influence in this development began at the turn of the twentieth century. The National Trust although founded in 1895 as a private concern, has taken an important role in encouraging the ordinary people of Britain to question the ownership of the houses of the landed gentry. The exhibition, 'The Destruction of the Country House' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1974, supported by the National Trust, heralded ( according

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<sup>18</sup> Milliken, Kenneth & Edith *Handiwork Methods in the Teaching of History*, Exeter: A. Wheaton & Co Ltd 1938, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



Fig. 14 Alex Henderson introducing the language of architecture in a way the children understand. Exeter Cathedral education department.

to Hewison) the birth of the Heritage Industry. The tax payer was encouraged to think that these seats of aristocratic power were worth preserving, because they 'owned' them through the Trust.<sup>20</sup>

Stately homes were not the first area that provoked interest through its imminent destruction. Samuel suggests that the enormously popular subject of steam engines and railways, the 'romance of steam', was a 'counterpoint to the dieselization of locomotives and the rationalization of branch lines,'<sup>21</sup> which took place in the 1950s and early 1960s. British folk music and dance traditions have been saved from oblivion through the collecting fervour of the Folk Song Society<sup>22</sup> and researchers such as Cecil Sharp<sup>23</sup>. Interest grew in the 1920s and 30s, and again with new vigour in the 1960s.

The 1960s and 70s saw a great surge in the general public's interest in their own history.

The technical agricultural revolution in the earlier decades of the century saw the waning of traditional craft skills in both Britain and America. (fig. 15) Open air museums, on both sides of the Atlantic attracted vast numbers of new museum-goers by kindling the flame of nostalgia for times lost within living memory. Many commentators have named nostalgia as a prime motivation in the general public's commitment to historical interpretation. Lowenthal suggests it is a sign of problems in our present: 'mistrust of the future also fuels today's nostalgia,'<sup>24</sup> and he comments that, 'nostalgia is blamed for alienating people from the present.'<sup>25</sup>

This era also heralded the first military re-enactment groups and a highly emotive use of history. David Peterson quotes Jay Anderson from his publication, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* as perceiving the

<sup>20</sup> Samuel, op. cit. p. 242 (quoting Hewison).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 185.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, R. Vaughan, Lloyd, A. L. *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959, p.7.

<sup>23</sup> Garland, Mike *The Morris Tradition* Ipswich: Garland, Mike, p.5.

<sup>24</sup> Lowenthal, op. cit. p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p. 13.



Fig. 15 The wheelwright at Acton Scott preserving traditional crafts.

'The goal' of living history to be, "'a complete breakthrough" into the past' and voices his concern that, 'Anderson's goal is wrongheaded...the medium's most stubborn flaw is its practitioner's reluctance to accept its unavoidable limitations.'<sup>26</sup> The introduction of re-enactment and later in the 1970s, of role-play, also became an attractive breeding ground for escapism.

Although historical pageantry has been popular throughout much of our society's history as a form of entertainment, the affect of this new wave of nostalgia and escapism cemented a bond between the entertainment and educational factors that influenced the public's use of the past. This bond is another factor in the strained relations between the academic and the amateur. With entertainment, a different agenda is introduced. Self indulgence becomes an influential motivation, and alters the presentation of the interpretation. Peterson explains, 'Living-history programs are prone to let entertainment become an end in itself rather than a means to historical understanding.'<sup>27</sup> As heritage became more entrenched in the realm of entertainment, it became more of a salable commodity, and therefore financial profitability became an increasingly important motivation for those in the market place.

The development in the museums sphere instigated the introduction of a new group of people into the field of historic study: the communicators and interpreters. Samuel describes the academic's opinion of them as 'hovering on the sidelines, (who) present garbled accounts of the current state of scholarly controversy to the general public'<sup>28</sup>. In the future these people might be the ones to bridge the gap between the two camps.

The 1980s saw what has been recorded as a 'boom-time' for the heritage industry, as the economic climate enabled the public to be more self indulgent. The number of museums and heritage centres were increasing rapidly by the week, and the private collections of ordinary people were suddenly open to public viewing, and of public interest. A wave of nostalgia for the Victorian

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<sup>26</sup> Peterson, David 'There is no Living-History. There are no Time Machines', *History News*, September/October 1989 p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid p.29.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

period took hold as it began to slip from living memory, and the era became one of the most popular themes for furnished reconstruction rooms. Across the board, subject matter was becoming evermore related to the concerns of the everyday, and the ordinary in the general public's domain.

Re-enactment societies followed suit. Social, as opposed to military history became the focus of new re-enactment groups. The 'Historical Recreations of Everyday Tudor Domestic Life at Kentwell Hall began in 1979 and grew in popularity with both the public and educational establishments over the next decade. Educators recognised the potential learning power of the multi-sensory approach practised by what might now be referred to as live interpreters, and sites such as Kentwell Hall in Britain, and Plimoth Plantation in America, became an increasingly important resource in their history curriculum.

The History Re-enactment Workshop was founded in 1985, and works nationwide with many museums, transforming buildings, as Andy Robertshaw suggested, 'from houses into homes.'<sup>29</sup> The group's goal of interpreting a site through the ordinary, everyday lives of the people that either had, or could have lived there, echoes the current trend towards the end of the century. The attitude of the volunteers involved in groups like HRW and those at Kentwell Hall also heralded a new era. Most HRW members in the questionnaire mentioned earlier in this chapter, stressed that although they still wanted to learn for their own interest, they now put the visitor's experience before their own, (a consideration which was somewhat absent in most battle re-enactment scenarios they had found themselves in previously. The work of groups like the HRW and the Hoi Polloi,<sup>30</sup> as well as the restoration of permanent sites such as Erdigg in North Wales, and Lanhydrock in Cornwall, have continued the infiltration of the common interest into the country's stately homes, which are now being increasingly interpreted from

<sup>29</sup> Robertshaw, A, 'From Houses into Homes' in *Social History in Museums, the Journal of the Social History Curators Group*, Vol. 19 (1992).

<sup>30</sup> The Hoi Polloi portray the life and attitudes of those 'below stairs' in eighteenth and nineteenth century domestic service.

the 'bottom up'

In many different ways, and for a variety of reasons, the public have been exposed to a history that has related to them, that has spoken of experiences they have been able to empathise with. They have consumed it, and in many cases generated more of it. The people have shaken the academic's monopoly, and through personal endeavour, history societies, and the heritage industry, have generated a new historical movement: history by the people, about the people, for the people. (Fig. 16)

Of course the public are not in complete control of the historical picture they consume. The academics still have a strong influence on formal education, and their work remains the foundation of most of the research carried out by interpreters. The 'Media' has a vast influence on how newly released historical information is received and used, and the television has become an important forum for popular historical debate, but it is of course the internet which provides the most open forum for the future. If the academics decide to communicate, and even intellectually guide the amateur in the future, the internet might be forum for it.

To recap on the motives present in the instigation and consumption of historical interpretation today, constructed through the analysis above, the following might be considered:

- \* to form a sense of identity (personal/cultural/social)
- \* to make decisions for the future
- \* as a political tool of persuasion
- \* as an effective educational tool and resource
- \* to feed nostalgia
- \* as a form of escapism
- \* self indulgence
- \* as a source of financial gain
- \* to impart historical knowledge
- \* to preserve practical skills



Fig. 16 History for the people. Gerry Burrows and an assistant from the crowd make rope at the Exeter Medieval Lammas Fayre.



### C) Why is motivation important?

Despite the complexities of personal motivation, the subject is too important a factor in the communication process to ignore. Motivation influences the effectiveness of the message. The reason behind encoders designing a message, or a vehicle for a message, affects both their application of it, and therefore the effectiveness of the message itself. Sometimes it affects not what they do, but how they do it. For example, if someone volunteered as a cook for the Tudor Re-creations at Kentwell Hall, because they thought it would be the best way to learn, for themselves, about sixteenth century cooking, but had no real desire to interact with the public, then this attitude would undoubtedly affect the quality of any visitor's experience with this person. The volunteer's reluctance to interact might manifest itself in a closed demeanour, or a repelling tone of voice. Both of these would act as 'noise' on the channel between themselves and the visitor, resulting in an ineffectual communication<sup>31</sup>. Patrick and Judith Phillips are largely successful in preventing this type of person getting as far as participating in an event.

The academic historians are not alarmed purely because their egos are being bruised, as non-academics elbow them from their position of monopoly. Real abuses of history are occurring, and the academics, as traditional guardians of the subject, have every right to be concerned. The motivations above, in any combination, and with as many additions as there are practitioners, all influence the effectiveness of encoding and decoding.

On a visit to Avoncroft Museum of Buildings I chanced upon a living history interpretation of one of the medieval buildings by members of an English Civil War re-enactment group. It was fairly early in the day and the group appeared to be still settling in. I was however, struck by the way I was almost completely ignored. They made no attempt to introduce me to what they were doing, either as a concept, or relating to individual tasks, and answered my questions with such brevity I did not feel inclined to push any further.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This example does not reflect any known incidence, and is of an hypothetical nature, although the author has had her suspicions on occasions.

<sup>32</sup> Visit to Avoncroft, 1998.

Compare this with the practices of the History Re-enactment Workshop at the Weald and Downland Museum especially, where even before the role-playing begins, any early visitors are welcomed and briefed as to the nature of the presentation about to take place. The shortcomings of the first group are all too plain. Were the obvious differences in reception due to a different balance of motivations? The HRW place an emphasis on the visitor experience rather than their own amusement, (Fig. 17) although most members regard their interpretation work as a tool for furthering personal education and admit 'I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy it'.<sup>33</sup> The HRW was founded by a group of Civil War re-enactors who felt the intellectual development of their techniques could not continue to grow within the boundaries of large society mentality. There is a tendency for the balance of motivation to lean toward the personal in large battle re-enactment societies. It is a significant mental leap from tolerating the public, to fully embracing the concept that the visitor is the reason for the interpreter being there. Ambrose and Paine in *Museum basics* suggest, 'it is vital that decisions be based upon a well-defined sub-set of public-orientated criteria, rather than on personal biases.'<sup>34</sup> This statement is reiterated by Dean in *Museum Exhibition*, 'in all cases, the motivations to exhibit should emanate from a prevailing predisposition toward serving the public.'<sup>35</sup> If the group at Avoncroft were not willing to make that leap this may have been a contributing factor to the less than welcoming reception of the author.

Nostalgia can be a motivation for participation and consumption, but can be a blinkered experience. Historians such as Hewison have warned that, 'hypnotised by images of the past, we risk losing all capacity for creative change. Entropy will leave us frozen in a dead moment of stopped time.'<sup>36</sup>

Leon and Piatt comment on the way many Americans have made use of

<sup>33</sup> Questionnaire with HRW, September 1999. Martin Megson.

<sup>34</sup> Ambrose, T, Paine, C. *Museum Basics* London. ICOM Routledge: London 1993.

<sup>35</sup> Dean, David. *Museum Exhibition* London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Hewison R *The Heritage Industry-Britain in a Climate of Decline*, London: Methuen, 1987, pp. 10-11.



Fig. 17 Placing the emphasis on the visitor experience.  
History Re-enactment Workshop at the Weald and Downland Museum.

the open air museum at Williamsburg. Having been encouraged by Williamsburg's earlier interpretation style, to consider it as 'a sort of three-dimensional *Better Homes And Gardens*,'<sup>37</sup> their nostalgia-fuelled enthusiasm was not ready to accept the 'modest changes' the museum made, in an attempt to become more historically realistic. 'They do not wish to see the warts of the past, but, rather, wish to draw inspiration from its most attractive and appealing objects and styles'<sup>38</sup> Capitalising on nostalgia in order to boost visitor numbers can become severely restraining when the museum is ready to move on, but the visitors are not.

Motivation for consumption on the visitor's behalf, influences the effectiveness of a message, because motivation helps to produce expectations, and these are a ruling factor in how an interpretation is received. At Kentwell Hall, on one memorable occasion, for example, a group of school children were primed with the task of finding every twentieth century anomaly they could by their teacher. This thoughtless act made it extremely difficult for every interpreter they encountered to enable the children to take full advantage of the excellent learning opportunities the site offers. Their mind-set was at complete odds with the concept of the site, which encourages the children to feel part of the role-play scenario. This was a rare case of extreme communication breakdown between the organisers and the school involved regarding the interpretation concept, with disastrous results.

As the encoder has to try and tailor the message to the needs of the audience, learning to read the signs that indicate certain trends in motivation is vitally important for success. (See previous chapter.)

Most problems arise when the encoder loses sight of the importance of the decoder and their needs. As soon as the encoder's own desires become dominant, then the balance is upset and the message is adversely affected.

What many amateur interpreters lack, which is a major source of concern to the professional, is control, and a clear intellectual working concept.

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<sup>37</sup> Leon, Warren. Piat, Margaret. 'Living History museums' in Leon and Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*. p.75.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

When they have strong conflicting motivations, like self gratification or entertainment, in an educational setting their judgment is likely to be clouded, resulting in inferior standards of interpretation.

## Chapter 6

### Power and Responsibility

The extent of the power, and its associated responsibility, held by educators, interpreters and presenters in their transmission of the past is almost without rival. Together they transmit almost the sum total of knowledge about the past, and its relevance to the present and the future, that the majority of the population will ever receive. Such responsibility is awesome to those who are aware of it. It is unperceived and therefore inappropriately discharged by those who are not.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter addresses the relationship between power and responsibility, and between power and motivation, within the field of historical study and presentation. It asks whether it is this relationship which is at the source of all problems perceived to exist between the practitioners themselves, and between the practitioners and the consumers.

#### A) The source and nature of the power

Stone & Mackenzie, in the second sentence of the quotation above, encapsulate the significance of the power put into the hands of the practitioners. In the last chapter, it was noted that society looks to historians to give it reliable interpretations about the past on which to make decisions in the present, that will inevitably effect the future. The practitioner is being invited to remould people's attitudes, with possible far-reaching consequences, and the power, as Stone & Mackenzie state, is, 'awesome to those who are aware of it.'

The source of the power depends on the circumstances. Encoders using information boards inherit the power of the printed word, a medium that has commanded, and received respect since its introduction. The live interpreter

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<sup>1</sup> Stone, Peter, Mackenzie, Robert 'Is There an "Excluded Past" in Education?' in Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, p.117.

on a site, be it a stately home, museum, or in the natural environment, has the psychological advantage of being perceived as an insider, someone the visitor might assume has privileged rights of access, information, and even ownership. The sight of an interpreter dressed in costume always gives that interpreter a moment of tactical advantage. Visitors, despite a forewarning through an orientation presentation, will probably feel a moment's vulnerability, while they assess whether the interpreter poses a threat. This is more typical of first encounters, and is a source of power that can be used to set the pattern of visitor/interpreter relationship for the whole site. The unknown costumed interpreter, to the uninitiated, is an unpredictable phenomenon, and possible perceived threats might include speaking in a fashion the visitor will find hard to understand, or asking them to participate in something embarrassing. Either way it is the visitor's public image which is perceived to be at stake, and it is therefore imperative that this moment of power is recognised and used to the benefit of all by the interpreter.

Practitioners in the field are influenced by a complicated web of motivations, which affect their ability to recognise the power they command, and their willingness to accept the responsibilities that accompany it.

## **B) The nature of the responsibilities**

What are the responsibilities engendered by such power? The following summary will be used as a source for inspiration as the argument develops:

a) Showing the benefactor i.e, the visitor, due respect.

This encompasses:

- \* common courtesy;
- \* using a language they understand;
- \* not exposing their ignorance through ridicule ;
- \* promoting their entitlement and relevance in being present.

b) Providing them with skills of interpretation, in order for them to wield a degree of control.

This includes:

- \* Explaining the relevance of the word  
‘interpretation’;
- \* Giving the reasons for the interpretation selected;
- \* Stating sources;
- \* Being honest about flaws and weaknesses;
- \* Orientating them, both intellectually and  
practically to promote understanding of the  
presentation’s structure and mode of deliverance.

c) Selection of subjects. Should the visitor always get what they want, or should they also get a little of what they need? Some of the considerations raised by this question include:

- \* What right has the encoder to decide what those  
needs are?
- \* How can the encoder make a judgment?
- \* What other considerations have to be accounted  
for?

d) To whom or what does the encoder also bear responsibilities other than the visitor?

- \* The intellectual integrity of the study area to  
preserve future understanding of the subject  
matter by others;
- \* The reputations of fellow practitioners;
- \* The physical well-being of material subject matter.



### **C) A proposal**

The author proposes the following as a basis for discussion. If two opposing poles are established, one representing intellectual thought, the other sensual entertainment, all the activity within the disputed field of study can be assessed by its point of balance between the two. The key factors that influence this placement are the motivations involved, and the degree of control the practitioner has over them.

The entertainment pole has of course, its own set of associated responsibilities, which act as fuel to the conflicts of interest. Sensual entertainment seeks to produce physical and emotional responses from its audience, for example, laughter, relaxation, physical stimulation, a sense of well-being, excitement, fulfilment, escapism, nostalgia, and fear, to name a few. As the emphasis on intellectually biased motivations is diluted with those from the other pole, so then is the ability to recognise and respond appropriately to the power and responsibilities facing those presenting history. With entertainment featuring so prominently as a motivation to produce and consume history interpretation, it is not surprising practitioners have difficulty deciding where they stand between the two poles, and what responsibilities their decision incurs.<sup>2</sup>

### **D) Recognising the power and accepting the responsibilities**

#### **1) Non recognition**

Those who fail to recognise the power they have, stand little chance of producing sustained effective interpretation. A clear example of this are the performances of very young children as costumed role-players. An important

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<sup>2</sup> The author would like to state at this point that any reference to a named society or site, is not intended to reflect upon the body's motives or practices as a whole, but either on defined aspects of their interpretations, or more often on the attitudes and actions of individuals within that body.

part of setting the scene in first-person interpretation is to produce a situation as close to reality as possible, and in most portrayals of an average society the absence of children would be a noticeable omission. Therefore voluntary groups often include children on the interpretation team. The concept of pretence and role-play itself can be successfully taken on by children as soon as they begin to do so in their own play activities, but the understanding of the importance of sustaining these activities can be a different matter. Children cannot be expected to take on such responsibilities, and therefore most groups that strive to produce an average community setting, are willing to suffer the occasional reference to the child's favourite television character, or the revelation that their father is not really a farmer, but works in London etc.

## **2) Recognition and acceptance, by degrees**

### *a)The academics*

The group who should be most inclined to be aware of their responsibilities, because of the intellectual context of their training and profession, are the academics themselves. Their responsibilities might be seen as differing from that of the interpreters and educators as they do not appear to be concerned about using language suitable for the intellectual needs of the majority of the general public. 'History,' remarks Raphael Samuel, 'in the hands of the professional historian, is apt to present itself as an esoteric form of knowledge. Academic papers are addressed to a relatively narrow circle of fellow-practitioners.'<sup>3</sup> The difference in attitude towards information between academics and educators, according to the traditional view, is that the former favour anti-access, and the latter are pro-access. The academics' role could be seen as the guardians of the intellectual integrity of the study area for future academic interpretation. It is their role to reason why, while the researchers

<sup>3</sup> Samuel, Raphael. *Theatres of Memory* London: Verso, 1994, p. 3.

provide the primary resources, and the interpreters, and educators provide the mechanism for the 'filtering down' of their ideas to students, and the general public. Being aware of responsibilities such as respecting the integrity of the specific subject, does not, presuppose a natural propensity for accepting them. Academics are as open to instigating abuses as anyone else involved with historic study and presentation. History has been written, or rewritten to suit the purposes of those in power too many times in the past, for this possibility not to be considered.

*b) The new initiates*

What of those who have recently made the intellectual breakthrough into recognition, and are beginning to accept their responsibilities? Although progress has undoubtedly been made since the first English Civil War battle re-enactment took place, many have found that the dilution of educational motivation too constraining for their own development. Those people within the large society environment, whose priorities develop away from the motivation of personal entertainment, and towards a fuller acceptance of their responsibilities as an interpreter often leave, and either join other like-minded groups, or form their own. Sometimes, depending on other factors, they might choose to remain, and strive to raise the standard and awareness of those around them, but many take the first path, with the view that life is too short to wait for the large groups to attain the aims and standards they are striving for.

In the voluntary sector such groups include the Tudor Group, the Hoi Polloi, and the History Re-enactment Workshop. All of the latter's original members, and two-thirds of its present adult membership started out in one of the large Civil War societies. In a recent Questionnaire (See appendix three) members were asked why they had left their former society and joined the HRW Replies included the following:

To try and provide historic interpretation much more accurately and with greater depth. Having been striving for accuracy within a large organisation where only a few individuals really cared, to see an entire site 'authentically' and realistically interpreted by a whole team was a quantum leap.<sup>4</sup>

I was looking forward to working in a more professional atmosphere. Putting on a better quality performance means being able to take a greater pride in your work.<sup>5</sup>

Once you start thinking about it, you realise how limiting it all is, (in a large re-enactment society) because you are in an environment where people are using the battle re-enactment thing as a bolster to their ego. We were trying to push things forward. The original drivers into re-enactment were about me, and enjoying myself. HRW is where the intellectual context comes into it. That's when I really started thinking about what we were doing and why, and not only what I was getting out of it, but what the public were getting out of it.<sup>6</sup>

Almost all the members who were interviewed<sup>7</sup>, indicated that their feelings of responsibility towards the visitor had grown since they first joined. Once the recognition has taken place, it seems that the 'awesome' quality of the responsibilities mentioned by Stone & Mackenzie act as a constant drive for improvement. 'I used to think "Excellent, we're there",' said the current chairman, Les skipper, 'We weren't, we're not. If you don't always drive forward, you don't achieve.'<sup>8</sup>

Recognition and acceptance can be a long progressive process. As Skipper comments, 'moving on can be painful, it can cause problems from the people you move on from, but if you don't always drive forward, you don't achieve.'<sup>9</sup>

'Moving on', or accepting the responsibilities of interpretation often means sacrificing the majority of the 'self' in the experience, as his reasons for joining the H.R.W. indicate.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Questionnaire, 1999. Martin Megson.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Ian Wedge.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. Les Skipper.

<sup>7</sup> Thirteen members were asked to take part, and all responded positively.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> See previous page.

### *c) A conflict of interests*

The volunteer sector, especially in battle re-enactment is a problem area for responsibility acceptance. Motivations to join such societies are often based strongly on personal entertainment, and the viewing public are often only a minor consideration in the mind of the average 'soldier' or 'camp follower'. The larger the society, the greater the potential problem, because battlefields can be so expansive, and the activity so intense, that the average soldier might not even notice the public until he or she is marching off in front of them. This scenario might be extreme, but it is a large step from noticing the crowd is there, to tailoring your interpretation for their benefit. Even though a society might have good interpretive intentions as some of its core philosophies, the conflict of motivations can lead to a bias toward the entertainment pole, at the detriment of the other. For example, the handbook for the Sealed Knot states that:

The Purposes and Aims of the Society are to promote research and the study of and public interest in the history of the Civil Wars by the following means:-

- a) The performance of public re-enactments of Battles, Sieges, and other events of the period with a view to educating the public and encouraging an interest in our heritage.
- b) The organisation of discussions or lectures, the publishing of books and the making of documentaries on the period.
- c) The erection of memorials of Battles.

...At the same time however, it is a voluntary Society of enthusiasts and friends who meet to indulge their common interests and it is a prime object of the Society events that they should be enjoyed by the members.<sup>11</sup>

The latter part of the statement is the key to the conflict of interests. If what constitutes the enjoyment of the majority of the members conflicts with the educational philosophies, then the latter is going to suffer.

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<sup>11</sup> Ede-Borrett, S *The Sealed Knot Member's Handbook*. Chelmsford: Broadmind Limited, 1984.

Another significant factor is a society's size. For example, a group like the History Re-enactment Workshop, (and there are a growing number of them), which has a membership of around thirty, is small enough for the established philosophy of the group to be continually circulated and re-iterated throughout the membership, without it ever having to travel very far from the strength and clarity of its core mind set. In essence, a group this size is not large enough for factions to form and develop without the breach in philosophy being recognised and addressed by the whole membership. In fact the HRW has another 'safety precaution' against the dilution of its common philosophy: a period of 'probation' for each would-be member. This sounds elitist, but it has proved to be an effective way of 'natural selection'. Rather than people being turned away, those who find their philosophy differing from that of the group, naturally drift away before that situation arises. As a result the introduction of new blood (a healthy component for the development of any group) can be a slow process, but as more than half of the present membership represent 'new-comers' to the original team, it is obviously a system that works.

In comparison, a group such as the Sealed Knot, which can boast a membership of around six thousand will never, even with the best of intentions, manage to maintain the original strength of its educational philosophy throughout the consciousness of such a vast number of individuals.

Each member of any society joins for a slightly different set of reasons, and as the membership numbers increase, so does the diversity within the overall agenda. Like attracts like, and soon groups form within the membership that share particular emphasises of interest. These groups, as they grow in strength will attract new members from their own circles outside the society, and parties who recognise interests of their own. On the positive side this can result in well run units who pass on useful skills and help raise the profile of the whole society. Adversely it can result in a large proportion of the

overall membership which adheres to only part of the original philosophy with any strength of conviction.

There are a significant number within the membership of the two largest battle re-enactment societies ( the Sealed Knot and the English Civil War Society) whose 'common interests' consist primarily of getting drunk and letting their aggression out through a form of legalised thuggery on the battle field. When 'educating the public' comes second or third to such indulgences, as it sometimes does with the 'booze and bash brigade', then the lack of control due to the size of the society works against its original holistic philosophy.

Large societies often use their magazines, journals and newsletters such as the Sealed Knot's bimonthly magazine, *Orders of the Daye*. to try and circulate ideas and raise interest on important issues. This particular publication confirms its philosophies through regular columns written by the following key Society members: the Chairperson, the Adjutant General, the Public Relations Officer, the Treasurer, the Muster Master General, the Lord Generals of both armies, the Baggage Masters of both armies, the Inspector of Markets, the Master Gunner to the Royalist Army, the Master of Apprentices and the Goodwife/wives. The list probably is not exhausted there, but is sufficient to

- a) endorse the author's suggestion that large societies become complex bodies to control, and
- b) that the Sealed Knot attempts to advise its membership on the many facets of its activities, including its core educative philosophies.

For example, on the issue of making the Society's portrayal of women on or near a battle field more plausibly historic, the Royalist Baggage Master writes:

**The Way Forward:** Please watch out for the camp followers in the King's Lifeguard, as these women have taken a hard look at the reason's behind the 'Ban the Skirt' idea, and are now acting the part of scared and confused women caught up in this war. Or better still, come and talk with them at the next Baggage meeting.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Orders of the Daye*, vol. 30 no. 5 September/October 1998. p.,5.

The circulation of ideas comes also from the general membership. The publication encourages members to submit personal views in the form of articles or contributions to the often heated forum of the 'letters' page. These quite often revolve around the key issues relating to the accuracy of the society's historical interpretation and presentation, for example, the argument as to whether the buff coat should be worn by foot soldiers. In 1991 Mike McGuinness wrote, 'So, maybe all you 'buff coat' owners (who) wish to aid the Society along the treacherous path of historical accuracy, don't wear them on the field...'<sup>13</sup> Seven years later B H Baird writes,

The mistaken descriptions of these jerkins as buff coats is inaccurate nonsense perpetuated from the 70s which has distorted and muddled debate on the matter ever since, and they should no longer be described as such.<sup>14</sup>

The same issues seem to come round year after year, without much apparent progress having been made. Other hot issues include the practice of the 'push' or 'point' combat methods for pikemen, (Fig. 18) and should modern methods of child transportation be used in public while members are 'in kit'. From the letters page there is evidence that there are many who wish to question the aims and practices of the society, but the sheer numbers are against the chances of successful progress.

Battle re-enactment societies are not the only groups to suffer from their size. Kentwell Hall holds the largest social history events in the country, having between two hundred and four hundred volunteers at any one time, and although most interpretation is good, and some areas extremely good, the same problem arising from mixed emphases of motivation applies.

One of the signs of someone who has realised they have the initiative, but has not recognised, or accepted their responsibilities, is the person who uses their position as an aggressive shield or weapon. Having no specific

<sup>13</sup> Orders of the Daye, April/May 1991 p..23.

<sup>14</sup> Orders of the Daye, vol. 30 no. 5 September/October 1998. p..28.





Fig. 18 Whether to fight at 'push' or 'point' is a recurring debate on the letters page of the *Orders of the Day*.

incidents of her own on record, the author looks to Jane Malcom-Davies, co-founder of Past Pleasures, who offers this possible example in her article, 'Idle Conversation?

““Why are you dressed in those clothes?” asks a visitor (to Kentwell Hall),  
“Who are you to ask such a question?” challenges the volunteer’.”<sup>15</sup>

Although the example was presented completely out of context, giving the reader no indication of the circumstances in which the incident took place, there can be no excuse for rudeness. Replies like this might stem from a sense of insecurity. Hobbyist re-enactors and volunteer interpreters sometimes adopt defensive, or aggressive attitudes as an ego boost to cover their inadequacies, or an inability to cope with difficult visitors. Efficient training, and ongoing evaluation can minimise problems of these kinds.

#### *d) Misconceptions of responsibility*

There is a great emphasis among the hobbyist re-enactors and interpreters on getting their costumes and equipment (as they would term) as 'authentic' as possible. A common misapprehension appears to be that the correct appearance of the setting and clothing etc. is the main key to interpretive success. The importance of getting these aspects of a presentation right, or as near as is known, is a vital part of the interpreters' responsibilities, but the message is not the medium alone. Until the hobbyist starts to question 'why?', in addition to 'what?', and to incorporate aims and objectives, modes of deliverance, and the diversity of visitor's needs into their preparation, they are not fully ready to 'move on', as Les Skipper phrased it earlier.

This stage can be hard to conquer as the research, and reconstruction of historical clothes and artefacts can be very alluring, time consuming, and is regarded as a status symbol within the re-enactment field. The re-enactment

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<sup>15</sup> Malcom-Davies, 'Idle Conversation' in Museum Visitor 1995, p. 25.

world is very judgmental, and kit inspection is a common method of social assessment. A fellow re-enactor might be smiling at you, but they are probably checking the craftsmanship of your shoes, the cut and weave of your cloth, the whiteness of your linen, and the accuracy of your drinking vessel, as they do so. The sheer effort of researching and accumulating costume and equipment of a high standard can be so demanding on a person's free time and concentration, that thinking beyond this stage can be difficult, in both practical and psychological terms.

### **E) Subject selection and interpretation**

The encoders' position of power demands their due consideration towards which subjects they chose to interpret, and how they chose to represent those subjects for the visitor's consumption.

The sanitization of the past has been one of the key issues of contention between the academics and the heritage industry. The main thrust of the debate is that as a result of the industry being viewed as a form of entertainment to a varying extent, the encoders dare not present a version of the past that will deter their fee-paying visitors from returning, or from recommending their experience to others. The results can be detrimental, as David Uzzell warns:

at best it reduces the educational value of history, and at worst it creates and reinforces myths and promotes sanitised versions of the past where guilt is removed and fantasy rules.<sup>16</sup>

If the society of today is looking to these versions of history as a basis for self analysis and understanding, and to make decisions for the future, then should the encoders not be taking their responsibilities more seriously? Again the conflict between entertainment and education seems to be at the root of the

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<sup>16</sup> Uzzell, David 'Interpretation of War and Conflict', *Heritage Interpretation*, Vol. 1 *The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, p. 45.

problem. The areas of concern include the representation of war, social and domestic violence; and racial, sexual, and class-orientated prejudice. Taking each of these in turn, how have encoders within the heritage industry dealt with the problem of sanitization?

## 1) Warfare

The public interest in the history of warfare appears to be insatiable, but what is the collective message that is being conferred by museums, monuments and live interpreters? (Fig. 19) The subject holds a number of key areas that lend themselves to near obsessional interest by all manner of people. Uzzell notes on the common practice in museums of the exhibition of uniforms, 'It is as if the most remarkable thing about so many thousands if not millions of people killed in battle is the clothes in which they died.'<sup>17</sup> Some re-enactor's attention to minute detail in this respect (they are called Button-Counters in the USA), reflect this rather bizarre fashion parade aspect of the subject.

Not all museums touch the visitor so lightly. Uzzell also describes the images in the photographic collection at the world war II museum of Sanctuary Wood, in Belgium. 'No attempt is made to buffer the visitor from the affective experience of shock, sadness, if not nausea.' The collection cannot, he says, 'be construed as entertainment: it can be construed as powerful, effective, hot interpretation.'<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately the battle re-enactment world can rarely be commended in the same way. The balance is too much in favour of entertainment and self gratification to really address the possibilities of hot interpretation. By hot interpretation the author is not suggesting the use of live ammunition, and real carnage on the battle fields, but if the audience is left with the feeling of having had a fun afternoon out, (English Heritage Events unit, who sponsor

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> op. cit. p. 42.

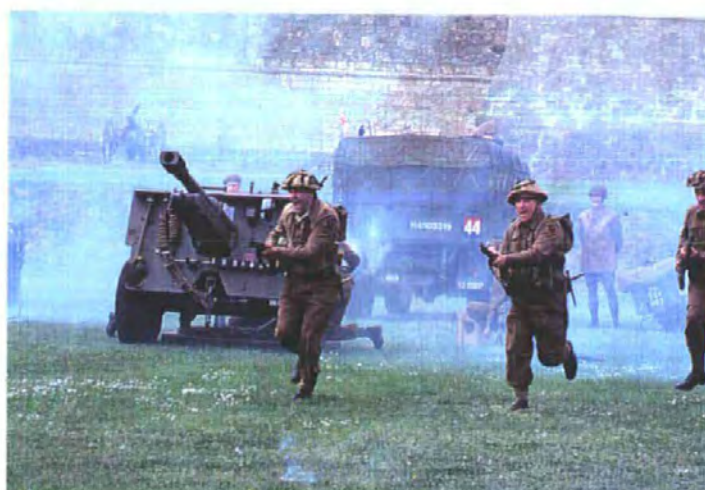


Fig. 19 Too close for comfort?  
Even battle re-enactment interpreting wars in living memory are popular.  
(Photograph with kind permission of English Heritage.)

many re-enactment events, declare 'over 1000 great days out to enjoy'<sup>19</sup> on the cover of their 1999 brochure,) then should the societies who perform these events, and the sponsors who fund them be taking a serious look at their motives and objectives? As Peter Fowler suggests, 'to a large extent it depends on what the experience is being sold as.'<sup>20</sup>

Some societies, such as the Ermine Street Guard, (Fig. 20) perform mostly in the form of a drill practice, thus negating the need for portraying death and injury at first hand to a certain extent. Some medieval groups assume the occasion of a tournament, which is conveniently *à plaisance* and not *à outrance*, to the same end.

Verbal descriptions are used by some societies, including the Sealed Knot, to interpret the physical outcomes of battle, but how powerful are they as hot interpretation when the spectacle in front of the audience is a sanitised version? For example, the compere might be describing the structural and human damage caused by cannon fire, but the battery in front of the audience will be having little or no effect on the enemy.

The lack of 'dead' and 'dying' on the field throughout re-enactment battles encourages a sanitised concept of war, placing the interpretation more in the classification of a pageant, than a serious, educational tool. Taking a Sealed Knot battle as an example, the reasons for not having the field littered with bodies from the outset, fall into three categories. Firstly modern safety standards raise these two issues:

- \* with the unpredictable movements of the engaged units, and the number of mounted cavalymen around, it could be very dangerous for the fallen soldiers, who would be vulnerable to real injury;

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<sup>19</sup> English Heritage's Events (Annual publication)1999.

<sup>20</sup> Fowler, Peter, 'Heritage: A Post-Modernist Perspective' Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol.1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, p. 62.



Fig. 20 The Ermine Street Guard favour demonstrations to battle re-enactment.

(Photograph with kind permission of English Heritage.)

- \* with so many inert bodies around it might hamper the society's medical team in their efforts to attend the actual needy, which could result in genuine disaster.

Secondly, there is the enjoyment of the hobbyist participants to consider:

- \* the soldiers who fell early on in the battle might find it very boring to lie dead for an hour or two, when they had travelled possibly hundreds of miles to attend the muster.

Thirdly, the salability of the event must be considered by the sponsors and organisers:

- \* the decreased numbers might effect the spectacle of the engagements between regiments, and lessen the potential enjoyment of the public;
- \* the portrayal of multiple deaths might promote the concept that wars of the past were more than an alternative form of sport, to be re-enacted in romantic costumes, but involved ordinary, scared people suffering indescribable pain and loss, with a good chance of dying a sad and possibly futile death. Unless this is portrayed by a handsome, and/or well respected actor on a large screen, this scenario is unlikely to get people clamouring for more, and recommending it to all their friends.

Thus battle re-enactment appears to be doomed to occupy this strange middle ground, whereby some of its practitioners are very knowledgeable and gifted researchers, but will never have the open respect of the academic world because the scales are tipped too far toward the realms of entertainment.

The degree to which the individual is influenced, obviously varies



depending on the sophistication of their reasoning powers, their motivations for attending, and the efforts of both the compere and the re-enactors on the field. But even if visitors have come for personal entertainment reasons, and know that the portrayal is a sanitised interpretation of the truth, is the performance still having a detrimental effect on their understanding of wars in the past, and distorting their judgment on the general concept of war in the present and future? Who knows? It would be almost impossible to gage an answer to this, but should interpreters feel content to wager their audience has the mental and moral sophistication to see the truth behind the fantasy? Perhaps they should be more honest with themselves and their audiences over the limitations of what they are presenting. Battle re-enactment has been likened to grown up boys playing at soldiers. Is battle re-enactment just another war game where the soldiers never really die and return to play again the following weekend? To a certain extent this is true, but it has the potential to be a lot more, should those involved wish to make it so. The audience has become so used to seeing graphic images of battle on the large and small screen that they have become numbed to its effects, and are not easily shocked, or jolted from complacency through this media. Even though it could only represent a sanitised version, the re-enactment battle could be a medium capable of presenting a powerful message, because of the immediacy and of its form.

## **2) Social and Domestic Violence**

The approach of the heritage industry to social and domestic violence differs quite dramatically from medium to medium. Under social violence the author would include forms of corporal punishment metered out by the law, as well as rioting, and public demonstrations. Non-live media, such as a composite arrangement of pictorial illustrations, written descriptions and audio

presentations are likely to be favoured over the use of live interpreters in many cases. For example, the quality of interpretation to be had from a large, 'angry' demonstrating mob would probably be disproportionate to the effort of assembling it.

Corporal punishment still draws a crowd, but what does it achieve when presented in the form of live interpretation? Pictures and text can be tightly controlled, for example Rien Poortvliet in 'Daily Life in Holland in the Year 1566'<sup>21</sup> illustrates quite graphically a variety of punishments, in a way that demonstrates the attitudes of the period towards such practices, as well as stimulating reactions in the present. Unless the interpretation is devised with a focal message and intent, and is carefully monitored, a live performance can lose purpose and direction. Without a clear sense of purpose, the performance of something like a 'hanging' or 'flogging' becomes a bizarre action.

I have attended a 'hanging' during the 'warm-up' at re-enactment battle, and sensed a similar feeling around me to the anticipation of those watching a magic show. The audience knew the person was not actually going to die, and they were guessing it would have to look realistic, so how was it going to be done?<sup>22</sup>

If presented well, something like a 'flogging' can be an opportunity for hot interpretation, but the interpreters have to be prepared for mixed reactions from the public, and in certain circumstances from fellow interpreters. Public violence is regarded by many as a taboo, or an awkward subject, and the two likely reactions to witnessing an interpretation of it would be:

a) to mask any feelings of awkwardness by transforming the situation into a humorous one, perhaps by heckling. This course of action could turn the episode into a farce, and destroy any serious interpretation.

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<sup>21</sup> Poortvliet Rien 'Daily Life in Holland in the Year 1566' New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992, pp. 150-160.

<sup>22</sup> Kentwell Hall, 1998.

b) to experience feelings of distaste and discomfort. Depending on the individual's circumstances , and motivations for attending, the audience might leave or remain and give some serious thought to the subject. Reasons for leaving might include wishing to shield young children from such violence, or if they had come seeking light entertainment in other interpretations on site.

The control of such scenes is vital to their success. At Kentwell Hall, during the main re-creations, something is devised to draw the attention of as many visitors as possible onto the front sward when closing time approaches. The flogging of a known thief from outside the parish was used as the focal point on one occasion. The public were aware of his crimes as the interpreter portraying the thief had been making his presence felt for some days, and was, in effect, the talk of the manor. This part was well executed. I felt he was let down by some of the participants who also gathered for his punishment, which he portrayed with commendable seriousness. Violence is not often portrayed on the manor, and the participants appeared on the whole to be as unready for the experience as the visitors. As far as I was aware no guidelines had been given out in an attempt to regulate the participant's 'Tudor' reactions, and consequently most of them reacted in a similar fashion to the visitors, i.e, with a little too much lightheartedness. My concern was not the human reaction of treating an unpleasant situation with humour, which could well have been true of the time, but that some of the heckling was not thought through well enough and was counter-productive to the performance of the thief. The lack of direction diminished the potential this episode had for hot interpretation.<sup>23</sup>

The label of social violence can also incorporate subjects such as slavery and acts of violence towards ethnic minorities. There is evidence to suggest that the trade in black African slaves is as a subject beginning to be addressed with some seriousness as far as public education is concerned in Britain and the USA. For the first few decades of its existence the open air museum of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia made no attempt to interpret the history of its black population. As the popularity of such museums grew, the academics' concerns over the quality of interpretation mounted, and in 1978 Thomas J. Schlereth complained that they were, 'with few exceptions, remarkably

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

peaceable kingdoms...where the entire populace lives in harmony.'<sup>24</sup> Colonial Williamsburg has tried to rectify this omission with the addition of the slave community of Carter's Grove, and carefully designed and controlled interpretations involving slave life. Stacy F. Roth describes one occasion when the auctioning of four slaves, produced a dramatic response from the media and the public, which resulted in angry demonstrations, and the interpretation proceeding with two demonstrators sitting in its midst.<sup>25</sup> It demonstrates some of the difficulties of introducing sensitive subjects into the public arena. As Rex Ellis, the director for African-American Interpretation and Presentations for the museum at the time asked, 'how are we going to deal with where we came from if we continue to pretend it didn't exist?'<sup>26</sup>

In Britain, the subject of the slave trade and how much the country's prosperity in the 18th and 19th centuries owed to the ancestors of Britain's current black population, is just beginning to gain a hold on the public psyche. For many the industrial revolution produces images of the suffering of cotton mill workers, and children working down the mines. Until a recent programme on Channel Four entitled *Britain's Slave Trade*, few had entertained the idea of including the suffering of the African slaves that produced the sugar that inspired the leaders of Britain's industrial revolution to manufacture cheap household goods for its exchange. The author has been in discussion with and overheard some members of the public on the subject, and noted their shocked, but deeply interested response.

The remoteness of watching a programme on the television is very different to the non-passive experience of live interpretation. The programme *Britain's Slave Trade* struck deeply at the country's ignorance of the roots of the wealth that paid for much of the finery, elegance and grand achievements of the 18th and 19th centuries. The privacy of television viewing allows interpreters to tackle difficult subjects without embarrassing their audience in

<sup>24</sup> Schlereth, Thomas J. *It Wasn't that Simple*. Museum News. 62(3) 1984, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Roth, Stacy F. *Past into Present*, Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, pp. 169-172.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, Patricia Leigh, 'Away from the Big House', *History News* March/April 1989 (Quoted by )p. 10.

the public domain. If someone is spared the indignity of having to wrestle with their emotions in front of strangers, they might be more inclined to think clearly and seriously about the issue raised. Alternatively, the familiarity with violence and exposées through this media might have had a dulling effect on the audience's sense of reality, leading them to not dwell on the subject. If well designed and controlled live interpretation can shock people out of their complacency and to think clearly and seriously about a given subject.

There is little evidence to suggest that many sites and groups in Britain are prepared to tackle the challenge to any great depth. The HRW, when they presented a late 17th century interpretation of the Red Lodge in Bristol, portrayed the owner, Mr Henley discussing the possibility of moving into this promising line of trade.<sup>27</sup> The Hoi Polloi introduced a free black maid into the household at Rangers House,<sup>28</sup> in order to deal with the misconception that every black person was a slave. Visitors were surprised at the percentage of black people in the city in the 19th century, and that 'Isabelle' was as free as the other maids.

It is a secure society in the present that has the courage to deal with its sometimes appalling actions of the past. Uzzell describes the information panel at Clifford's Tower, York,

Although it is seen as relevant to note that its replacement was also of timber, it makes no mention of the fact that...scores of Jews committed suicide and the remainder of the Jewish population were massacred by the good burghers of York.<sup>29</sup>

Racism and violent acts towards other races is an embarrassing subject for both the guilty and persecuted races, and its progress as a focal subject for interpretation will be slow, but the primary steps have been made.

Domestic violence is perhaps an even more of a taboo subject than

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<sup>27</sup> Event 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Event for English Heritage, Rangers House, Black Heath, London, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> Uzzell D, 'The Hot Interpretation of War and conflict', Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, p.43.

social unrest. It is ever-present in society, but often hidden from sight. Its perpetrators stimulate fear and hatred, their victims are left with deep psychological scars. The interpretation of a subject that is by its nature secretive, deeply disturbing and emotive is going to be challenging in the extreme. Such a subject that was certainly part of society in the past, and is still much in evidence in the present will be running the risk of forcing a significant number of visitors to face a mirror image of their own fears and actions. Here is the potential for hot interpretation in deed, but few sites and groups have felt strong enough, or indeed thought to tackle the challenge. Its almost total absence from the interpretation arena has been an area of concern among academics, and remains so to varying degrees to the present day. The author is not aware that any site or group has dealt with the subject specifically and in any detail, although knows one character played by Peter Barker in the HRW to have had a violent past. How much of that past has been revealed to the public, and in what context, the author is uncertain.

### **3) Death and Disease**

Peter Fowler asks, 'would the public let us display death, disease and dismay rather than the pap which panders to their expectations?'<sup>30</sup> Roth lists a number of sites and individuals who have been pushing the boundaries forward in the USA, in her chapter entitled: 'Interpreting Special Situations'<sup>31</sup>. In Britain, the evidence suggests that they will, if the same discretion is used as with other sensitive subjects. Participants at Kentwell Hall are advised to know something of their 'family' background, and this, the guidance notes suggest, includes those who have died. Advice is also given on possible causes of death from prevalent diseases of the time being portrayed.

Death and mourning are usually incorporated into larger

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<sup>30</sup> Fowler, op. cit. p63.

<sup>31</sup> Roth, op. cit. pp. 161-177.

interpretations as minor subplots to the main message, and visitors will probe deeper (often in a gentle manner, as befitting a conversation with a real bereaved person), if they choose to. Some interpreters use opportunities like these to bring in elements of surprise that will make the visitor think.

I inherited the character of Abigail, the live-in servant of the Coldham's for HRW's Weald and Downland Museum annual event. She was a widow, but my colleague had not decided on a fate for her good husband. Being opposed to something like the plague, which most visitors would accept readily and think no more about, I opted for him 'dying of his teeth'. Abigail would not have known that it would have been the infection from perhaps an abscess, that had been the end of him, but with a careful description of his demise, this probability can be inferred to the visitor. The response is usually one of surprise, that someone could die of something so seemingly trivial, and often remarks are made about the blessings of modern dentistry.<sup>32</sup>

As far as the author is aware, the only group that has dedicated an entire weekend to death, is the HRW, who used the demise of the master of Blakesley Hall, Yardley, as the focal theme for a late 17th century interpretation of the house. Even here the emphasis was on the material concerns of the living, e.g the provision of alms for the poor, a funereal supper for family and friends, the making of an inventory, the mounting tension due to speculation over future ownership and whether the servants would have continued employment, and the final reading of the will. The body itself was 'in an attic room', and not on view to the public. Having an interpreter pretending to be dead all weekend, or having a model substitute would have been unrealistic, and would probably have caused more of a distraction (with 'Is he real? Look didn't I see him breathing?' lines of enquiry) than the visitor having to use their imagination.

Diseases and illnesses of great import are not often shown at first hand in live interpretation scenarios. If participants representing members of the gentry at Kentwell Hall are feeling poorly they have been known sleep in the bed chamber for part of the day, and act as subjects for discussion. The

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<sup>32</sup> HRW event.

attending servant will discuss whatever 'illness' has been decided upon (it is rarely if ever sensational) with the visitors. The stillroom receives a steady flow of participants with genuine minor ailments, from headaches to cuts and bruises, but rarely deals directly with serious diseases, choosing to use reference, rather than live action. On the sidelines of battle re-enactment, and in some war museums, barber-surgeons describe the uses of grizzly arrays of instruments and even bottled leeches. They have some of the same problems as those interpreting corporal punishment. Surgical instruments and leeches, draw the same morbid fascination from the public as hangman's nooses and torture implements, and to combat the fear of pain, and death that these objects produce, the audience will treat the situation with humour. This can diminish the effectiveness of any attempts on hot interpretation. Rory McCreadie, who plays the part of a barber-surgeon in the English Civil War Society, does not sensationalise his descriptions, and keeps a calm, level tone of delivery throughout. Every session the author has attended, however, there has always been someone who has felt the need for some fresh air before his closure. McCreadie stresses the similarities between the instruments of today and the past, and also the sophistication of some surgery despite the lack of anaesthetics etc., which surprises many people, and prompts them to reassess their views on practices of the past and the basics of the profession today. With subjects like these the interpreter has to be skilled at controlling and guiding young audiences in particular, which are apt to become over-excited, and therefore less-receptive to new ideas. (Fig. 21)

Hot interpretation is likely to produce strong emotions, but even the first-person interpreters operating without modern backup teams (like HRW's red-t-shirters), should be trained in the skills of dealing with strong reactions, such as pacifying an emotional visitor who, for example, has taken offence to the character's views. Roth, when discussing visitors' inability to differentiate between the views of historical characters, and those of the interpreter playing the part, quotes Ian Bell from Black Creek Pioneer Village, 'Without the aid of





Fig. 21 Interpreting social issues close to home in an historic context. The 'hags' at Kentwell Hall have faced strong reactions from children. (stone-throwing).

quotation marks, italics, and parentheses, the interpreter who mouths unpopular ideas is truly working without a net.<sup>33</sup>

It is not, and should not be the intention of every piece of interpretation to shock the visitor with some harrowing revelation. Academics in the past were concerned with the seeming total absence of 'unpleasant' history, and asked for an address of balance. Museums and interpretation groups in both Britain and the USA are working on their programmes towards that goal, and have made progress. The dual ancestry of interpretation cannot be changed retrospectively, and practitioners in the present have no choice but to learn to work with the entertainment and educational aspects of its nature. Brian Davison in 'Picturing the Past', states, 'What matters is that we are honest about what we are trying to do and how we do it.'<sup>34</sup> He speaks of the use of historical illustrators' work for educational interpretation, but his words are just as relevant to the use of every other medium.

## **F) The responsibility of honesty**

### **1) The truth about interpretation**

To quote the undeniable truth from David Peterson, curator of the Otter Tail County Historical Society, Minnesota, 'Historical re-creations are imperfect interpretations of the past, not the past itself.'<sup>35</sup> It is perhaps the lack of the honesty called for by Davison above, both within organisations and between the organisations and the visitors, which continues to impede live interpretation's progress towards academic maturity and integrity. Peter Fowler suggests, 'it is the presentation of false history as history that has to be criticised

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<sup>33</sup> Roth p. 164 from Bell, Ian 'Skeletons in the Closet: Choosing a Past for our Sensitive Present' ALHFAM *Proceedings* 13 (1993) pp.101-3.

<sup>34</sup> Davison, Brian *Picturing the Past Through the Eyes of Reconstruction Artists* London: English Heritage, 1997 p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Peterson, David 'There is no Living-History. There are no Time Machines', *History News* September/October 1989, p.28.

and indeed condemned.<sup>36</sup> At the centre of this problem is the reluctance of interpreters to admit the truth to themselves and then to accept the importance of their responsibility towards the visitor. 'The living-history movement should moderate its claims.'<sup>37</sup> urges Peterson. 'The medium's most stubborn flaw,' he argues, 'is its practitioner's reluctance to accept its unavoidable limitations.'<sup>38</sup> Once this has been achieved they are free to tackle the problem of orientating the visitor.

With so many interpreters practising as hobbyists and not professionals, the quality of knowledge available for visitors is not always as controllable as it might be. Both professional and non-professional encoders have the responsibility of undertaking thorough and extensive research to ensure that the basis for their interpretation is of good quality and well documented. Here again the lack of control over large voluntary groups of interpreters becomes a possible problem. For example, it is unlikely that the majority of new participants in any one year at Kentwell Hall are well read on the whole of Tudor history, or indeed on the intricacies of the subject area they will be dealing with as a main occupation. They are undertaking the preparation in their spare time, and this often includes making historical clothing for the first time, and learning new speech patterns etc. Extensive reading is not always possible. Here, as in so many other voluntary areas of the industry, much is learned on-the-job, from experienced colleagues, a practice that exposes the new participant to possible confrontations with visitors that they are not fully equipped to deal with. Explanations from these veterans are often adopted and reproduced parrot-fashion by their 'pupils', and therefore incorrect information can be perpetuated if old and new participants do take their responsibilities seriously. The oral tradition is a very valuable one for the passing on of skills from craftsman to craftsman, but interpreters must remember the third party involved. The visitor's *only* knowledge of the subject might originate from that encounter. The interpreter has the

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<sup>36</sup> Fowler, op. cit. p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> Peterson, op. cit. p.30.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

responsibility to ensure that that information is good.

Entertainments with historical themes have been popular throughout history, and the author is not suggesting that every light-hearted banquet should carry a government warning from the Department for Education. The industry should, however, use careful consideration when choosing the words and images for its promotional material. Advertising is quite often the first encounter, and therefore the opening stage of the 'transaction', if it may be viewed as such, between the two parties. It is during this initial encounter that the encoder can truthfully introduce the nature of the interpretation, thus using it as part of the visitor orientation programme, and reducing the adjustment period for the visitor, on arrival. The ephemeral nature of advertising dictates that 'buyers' have to be hooked, and secured in an instant to beat the competition, and this pressure encourages the kind of false statements that cause the academics so much concern. Tried and tested lures include the promise of excitement, action, the chance to experience the stuff their dreams, and to keep the children gainfully amused for a few hours. The heritage industry is history for the people, and a common lure is the opportunity of the personal ownership of a piece of history through a manufactured 'historical' experience. Most people, when pressed will admit that no one can truly experience the sensations of those in the past, but again and again that is what is advertised. Over the last decade the following have appeared in promotional leaflets:<sup>39</sup>

Black Country Museum	'Imagine a Day Spent in the Past!
Buckleys Yesterday's World	'The whole family can experience a day in a bygone age...'
Bowden House, Devon	'step back in history with the spooks' ('ghost' guides are used)
Acton Scott Historic Working Farm	'Experience daily life on an upland farm at the turn of the century'

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<sup>39</sup> All promotional leaflets for appropriate sites.

Chiltern Open Air Museum	'Experience Medieval England. Step back in time to the 1460s...'
The Shrewsbury Quest	'Live the history...solve the mystery.'
Llancaiach Fawr Manor	'Step back in time to the year 1645...(Llancaiach Fawr Manor)...where history comes alive!'
White Cliffs Experience	'...you can take not just one but TWO unforgettable journeys into the past.'
Weald and Downland Open Air Museum	'Bring the past to life...'
Kew Palace	'Royals in residence. Kew Palace brought to life.Talk to our experienced guides, whose knowledge and period costumes will take you back in time...'
Warwick Castle	'Experience a thousand lifetimes'
Kentwell Hall	'visitors step back in time to see the 16th C. come to life'
English Heritage	'Bringing history alive!'
St Edmundsbury Borough Saxon Council	'Meet your ancestors at West Stow Anglo-Village.'
Littlecote	'The land that's trapped in time.'
The Beefeater Medieval Banquet	'Step back in time'

These examples have been quoted at length to stress the commonality of certain phrases and ideas. Many of the establishments are well respected within museum circles, yet from professional interpreters in royal palaces to medieval banquet entertainers, the same insistence on the impossible feats of bringing the past to life, or travelling in time to meet it, are repeatedly used as the main hook-line.

Many go on to describe the site and its programme in more measured, realistic

terms, e.g the Weald and Downland Museum continues, 'Several of the interiors have been furnished to recreate how life may have been in days gone by.'

How seriously should these 'hook-lines' be taken, especially when the secondary material is an accurate description, as the example above? Alluring they certainly are, but they 'hook' certain desires in the psyche of today's society that are not necessarily helpful in promoting live interpretation as a serious medium for education. If a would-be visitor is 'hooked' by the thought of time travel, does this colour their expectations and approach to the interpretation to any significant degree? The author suspects that this train of thought gives little credence to the public's maturity of judgment, and that most visitors would not have their perception of history significantly impeded by these story-telling tactics. The only group it might notably delude are children with an immature sense of reality. For example, most of the children that pass through the 'time tunnel' at Kentwell Hall are happy to enter the game of pretending the participants are Tudor people, while simultaneously retaining their grasp on reality. Only on very rare occasions, will a less intellectually mature child go beyond the make-believe and confuse interpretation with the real past. Their mistake is usually detected by their teachers or fellow students, who usually explain matters. There is a tendency for adults to be reticent about breaking in on a child's innocent sense of the magical, (because they have lost it themselves perhaps?), but it is in the child's best interests to free its inquisitive nature from the big question, in order to ask many more. On the whole, first-person interpreters are not destined to be ticked off on the 'to-be-exposed-as-frauds' list, along with Father Christmas and the Tooth Fairy before a child embarrasses itself at secondary school! If the 'time travel' tactic (which virtually no one with all their faculties really believes), is used to hook members of the public who might not ordinarily choose to visit a museum, and is then followed by good interpretation, is that not a worthwhile practice, or at least not one to be condemned?

Can promotional material without such claims be as effective? Cogges Manor Farm in 1996 managed to produce an inviting leaflet with photographs of costumed staff baking, churning milk and handling livestock without a single mention of time travel at all. It is described in the opening paragraph as a 'working museum, which tells the unique history of a site where people have lived for over 1000 years. It is a special place to visit, with something for everyone.' In its main leaflet for 1998 West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, not only resists the time travel hook, but also the temptation to show photographs of the re-enactment groups that are *occasionally* in residence for special events.<sup>40</sup> Instead a sense of adventure and revelation is produced through a simple design device of opening a rough door onto a panoramic view of the whole village inside. The opening paragraph finishes with, 'We hope your visit to West Stow will stimulate your interest in the Anglo-Saxon origins of England.'

Problems can occur when fact and fantasy are mixed too freely in the formulation of the site's, or group's programme itself, for example when well known fictional characters are used as supports for historical fact. The phrasing in the leaflet for the World of Robin Hood appears to blur the edges of fact and fantasy:

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were momentous times in the history of our land. Out of them came The Crusades, King Richard, the wicked Prince John, the evil Sherriff of Nottingham and the Legendary Robin Hood.<sup>41</sup>

It reads too like a pantomime cast list to command any serious academic respect, but is in keeping with the tone of the Robin Hood legend. In this context, the author would be inclined to let the matter rest, but for the constant swinging back and forth from legend to historical presentation.

Our theme takes visitors back into English History and you can walk through a medieval village, see the trades and habitations of an age long ago. And then on to Sherwood Forest, the domain of Robin Hood and his followers.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> This tactic has been used by St Edmundsbury Borough Council in a leaflet covering a larger area of interest.

<sup>41</sup> Promotional leaflet.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Is there a line between fact and fantasy here, and is it made clear enough to the visitor if they wanted to use the site for educational purposes?

The Shrewsbury Quest is another example, where there is little definition between the world of Brother Cadfael, and the historical interpretation of a twelfth century abbey. The guides appear to be equipped to talk about either subjects as and when requested, although one 'brother' admitted the majority of questions were biased toward the Cadfael novels, and he felt he had a lot of historical knowledge to offer, that was as yet, untapped.<sup>43</sup> The historical side of some of these grey-area interpretations are well researched and presented, but the visitor should have the opportunity to widen their historical understanding beyond the confines of one historical novel writer's interpretation.

Andrew Robertshaw,<sup>44</sup> voiced his concerns over the apparent blurring of fact and fantasy by re-enactors of the Napoleonic era, concerning the television series *Sharpe's Rifles* (based on characters from Bernard Cornwall's novels.) Robertshaw explains:

Artefacts used in the filming of the series were produced for the public to see. As a re-enactor and living historian of many years experience, I could see a difference between these artefacts, which were in some cases theatrical props, and reality. Nothing I saw or heard seemed to be clearly marking the borderline for the public, who did not necessarily know the difference. We had entered a world of quasi-reality.<sup>45</sup>

In the case of *Sharpe*, the feeling of 'quasi-reality' is a two-way process. The publishers are advertising the novels in a fashion that encourages this blurring. 'Who is this international man of history?' they ask in *The Bookseller* <sup>46</sup>

Historical novels and television dramas are very popular with the

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<sup>43</sup> Interview. 1994.

<sup>44</sup> Robertshaw is the Head of Education for the National Army Museum.

<sup>45</sup> Robertshaw Andrew, Re-enactment fact or fiction?

<sup>46</sup> *Bookseller*, 26 November, 1999.



general public, and should be considered as another major source of historical interpretation consumed by museum, and non museum goers alike. It must be remembered that these interpretations are primarily vehicles for fictional drama and the attitudes and actions of the characters are driven by this, not by strict adherence to historical accuracy. Julian Rathbone employs his own orientation as to matters of accuracy before his main text begins. He owns that some anachronisms are unintentional and 'fair game for swots, letter-writers, anoraks and so on,'<sup>47</sup> and that some are intentional, because they suit his purposes.

I have tried to be accurate with historical personages, events and dates...though, of course, I have put my own interpretation on them in a way that is disallowed by historians. This is, after all, a novel.<sup>48</sup>

Richard Lee, founder of the Historical Novel Society, agrees there is a greater demand for historical accuracy now. He suggests that 'the market is more sophisticated now...(and is) much more of a researched business.'<sup>49</sup>

Even dramatic adaptations of novels written in past eras, such as Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, or Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, where the authors are thought to be worthy commentators of the society of their day, are subject to dramatic plots and planned characters. The producers of these dramatic and literary interpretations of history appear to be more aware of the body of knowledge growing within their audience, and make considerable efforts towards creating 'authentic' settings. They are not historians, however, and their loyalties will remain with their own art. Therefore when museums, heritage centres and live interpretation groups start to rely heavily on fictional characters for their power to pull crowds, they should consider their actions very carefully, and make provision for providing their visitors with the skills to differentiate between fact and fiction.

<sup>47</sup> Rathbone, Julian *The Last English King*, London: Little Brown, P. VII.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. VIII.

<sup>49</sup> Interview. January 2000.

## 2) Visitor orientation

In the introduction to *Heritage Interpretation* David Uzzell suggests:

‘interpreters should be giving away the tools and skills of interpretation to enable Everyman to become his or her own interpreter.’<sup>50</sup> Part of this involves explaining the nature of history and the role of the historian in the interpretation process. As Carl Benn, curator of military and marine history with Toronto Historical Board in the late 1980s, states: ‘We should make clear the limitations of any understanding we achieve. In effect, we should communicate our methodologies as well as our findings.’<sup>51</sup> A number of American academics at this time were urging interpreters to look to their responsibilities as a way forward. Karen Lee Davis, and James G. Gibb,<sup>52</sup> were aware of the difficulties. ‘Convincing the public that history is not simply written down somewhere but that it is pieced together by individuals is one of the most challenging tasks facing museum curators and educators.’<sup>53</sup> It is, however, essential if the visitor is to have an active part in the interpretation process, and a true appreciation of what is being presented to them. For historical interpretation to have real purpose and integrity, this has to be the case. They continue,

A well constructed methods section conveys the idea that while historic interpretation must be based on extensive research, it is in the end a creative act. Properly prepared, the exhibit viewer can reject the curator’s vision of the past.<sup>54</sup>

The author is not convinced that the majority of visitors to heritage sites and museums in Britain, even more than a decade after those words were written, are being suitably equipped to question the interpreter’s work before

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<sup>50</sup> Uzzell, op. cit. p.9.

<sup>51</sup> Benn, C. ‘Living history Lies and social history’ *Museum Quarterly* summer 1987p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> From Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, St. Leonard, Maryland, and the State University of new York respectively.

<sup>53</sup> Davis, K. L, and Gibb, J. G, ‘Unpuzzling the Past: Critical thinking in History Museums’ *Museum Studies Journal* 1988 p. 42.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp. 42-43.

them. The author also suspects that many of them are still happy for the interpreter to carry the responsibility of producing an answer they can accept as good knowledge. The words of a visitor to Stone Henge, recorded by Brian Davison, is perhaps typical of the average visitor's expectations: 'I didn't come all this way to hear you say you don't know. I came to hear you make the best guess you can!'<sup>55</sup> The public as a body is still new to the world of historical research, and is still bound, to a degree, by the master/student philosophy of their school days, when the master and the written word was always right. Being taught to question that authority is against centuries of false perception.

At school I remember listening to a taped heated debate between two eminent historians, whose works were among our text books, and being seriously shocked and confused. Here were two academics, who were supposed to be experts on the subject, and they could not agree. Which one was I supposed to believe? In my immaturity and dependency, I needed someone to have the 'right answer'.

If the general public is still at this stage of dependency, then breaking the news about the truth of historical interpretations could come as a shock, and be met with resistance. The motivation for visiting might also compound the problem, for example, a visitor seeking an interesting, but relaxing day out, might not want the inconvenience of challenging what they see and hear. They might wish to merely accept and feel that they have come away a little more knowledgeable, with the minimum of effort. Alternatively it might come as a relief to know that it is acceptable for there to be differences of opinion on the same subject.

This is not the case for every visitor, and the author has observed an increasing number asking methodological questions when they are given the opportunity. Opportunities include interaction with third-person interpreters, and the back-up team of red-shirters with the History Re-enactment Workshop. These inquiries are usually along the lines of:

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<sup>55</sup> Davison, *op. cit.* p. 3.

- \* Were they (implements, clothes etc.) really like that?
- \* Where did you learn to do that?
- \* Do you read a lot of books?
- \* How do you decide what is going to happen?
- \* Is there a pre-written script?

Questions like these reveal a desire to learn more about the act of interpretation, not just the period in history, and need to met and encouraged. The practicalities of this are not always straight forward. Visitor orientation is something that the Americans seem to be better at, or at least more willing to sink finances into, than the British. When researching on the east coast of the USA, the author visited six living history museums and all of them strongly recommended that all visitors sit in on the visitor orientation presentation in order to get the most out of their visit. The quality of these presentations varied, but all of them were attempting to further the visitor's understanding of the interpretation, and prepare them for the style of presentation ahead. At the end of the Old Sturbridge orientation video the presenter suggests the best way is 'for you to see it and judge for yourself.'

In Britain these kind of presentations are rarer, and certainly allocated a smaller budget. Some interpretation groups have made orientation an essential factor in their programme. For example, the HRW always has a reception point, with at least one red-t-shirted guide allocated to deal with first and last visitor contact. They introduce the interpretation verbally, hand out explanatory leaflets, and monitor feedback. A large information board also gives wider information about the group's aims, and way of working. On one occasion, a short slide show presentation was experimented with, which had favourable results, but the necessary facilities are not always available for such

an operation.<sup>56</sup> Other groups have variations on these themes. For example, Kentwell Hall strongly advises educators and helpers to attend introductory sessions, and are again, on arrival, reminded of what they will encounter. The school groups attending the Stuart re-creations at Gray Hill in Wales are issued with detailed orientation packs prior to their visit and have the benefit of personal group guides throughout their trip.

None of the orientation presentations that the author has encountered however, have provided the depth of methodological information called for back in the late 1980s. They deal with introducing the style of presentation, for example, the best way to approach costumed role-play etc., but very few, if any, tackle the introduction of interpretation and history itself. Whether this is through ignorance of the need, or an unwillingness to share the 'tricks of the trade' in a competitive market. Here is another factor that is not necessarily present in the academic world. Heritage in its interpreted form is a commodity, and some interpreters are reticent about sharing their sources with those who might use them for their own commercial ends. The responsibilities of the trader or craftsman is here in conflict with the responsibilities of the educator. The author agrees with Davis and Gibb in their conclusion: 'The issue here is not one of marketing but of social responsibility.' They state that curators of museums, (and the author would add interpreters in general), 'are responsible for equipping people to explore the past critically and for helping them apply those skills to the criticism and interpretation of contemporary society.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> This event, held at the Elizabethan House, Plymouth, 1995, was unusual in that the rooms downstairs in the property were used as a shop and reception area, and was therefore not used by the costumed interpreters. At most venues the whole building is used, and therefore the show would be unsuitable. The 'reception party' is usually based outside, which is impractical for such a technique.

<sup>57</sup> Davis & Gibb, *op. cit.* p. 44.

# Conclusion

## **A) A new demand for historical interpretation**

Through this study it has become clear that the general public, the ordinary, non-academic people of Britain are demanding knowledge of the past. The older generations (and the author includes anyone over thirty!), tend to associate the history of their school education, with important people making important events happen on important dates, all of which had to be memorised, and regurgitated in some form of essay. By 'important', the author refers to people, places and events that are nationally known, and were of great significance as mile stones in the development, and progress of the country as a whole. For example, one might have learned the number of estimated fatalities during the main outbreaks of the Black Death as a statistic, and who was ruling over these dead people at the time. Today, people are still interested in the information above, but in addition they want to know in what conditions these people lived, what did they have for their last meal before contracting the disease, what they would have been wearing, why they thought they had caught it, and what were the attitudes and chances of survival of family members left behind. In short, although kings, queens, castles and the dates of battles still have their lure, the history that the people want, is increasingly about the people themselves.

The chapter on motivation charted the development of this change, and made suggestions as to the reasons why people need, or desire 'contact' with the past. For whatever reasons these might be, and as stated earlier, they vary from individual to individual, and can be very complex, the public are voicing these needs and desires through their actions. There is little stronger evidence of sincerity from the public domain, than people choosing to spend their time, energy and money on something, and this is precisely what is happening. The public are taking action in the following ways:

- \* visiting museums, heritage centres, and historic sites  
(Visitor numbers include: Beamish- 385,000 (1996), Blists Hill- 224,309 (1997), and the Welsh Folk Museum- 362,921 (1993);<sup>1</sup>
- \* paying for membership of organisations such as the National Trust, English Heritage, and the National Trust for Scotland;
- \* taking part in voluntary work for museums, which often requires as much training and effort as an employed post;
- \* joining re-enactment societies, which are often financially demanding because of the expense of clothing, equipment and travel;
- \* joining historical societies and sharing knowledge;
- \* taking part in experimental archaeology, such as producing replica pottery, textiles, garments, and using natural dyes;
- \* restoring and conserving artefacts and sites from steam engines to old photographs, and houses to old varieties of apples;
- \* researching, recording and collating local history through old photographs, documents and oral sources;
- \* genealogical research;

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<sup>1</sup> All from Museums Year Book 1999.

- \* taking history-based academic courses as full-time and part-time students;
- \* attending workshops and lectures of historical content;
- \* buying history books, both fiction and non-fiction;
- \* buying popular magazines such as *History Today*;
- \* watching costumed dramas on television, paying to see them at the cinema, and buying or renting them on video;
- \* contacting newspapers, magazines, journals and broadcasting companies about their experiences and opinions on any of the above.

All these activities show a positive demand for the type of historical information that they can use, or relate to in some way, and if the public cannot find someone to give it to them, many of them are keen enough to reach out and take it, or find it for themselves. Popular history, as was suggested in chapter five really is becoming a history of the people, for the people, by the people.

The common practices (chapter four), motivations (chapter five), and reactions to power and responsibility (chapter six) of the participating, non-academic historians, and general public have been discussed at length in this study, and the results of these first steps into historical understanding noted. The results indicate that our society has produced an enthusiastic, yet largely unskilled body of consumers, and interpreters, who lack the intellectual



grounding, and philosophy that would enable them to tackle the subject with any real understanding. This proposal does not include the many skilled and intellectually adept practitioners and consumers that do exist, in all areas of the museum, heritage, and education world. It does imply, however, that there are a great many people who do not share these attributes, (mainly in the voluntary/hobbyist fields), and if the general standard of historical interpretation and understanding is to improve in this country, action has to be taken to rectify the situation.

### **B) Why should improvements be made?**

Before proceeding further, it might be useful to consider the question 'For whose benefit should historical interpretation and understanding be improved, and why?' At the outset of this study the author admits to have been strongly motivated by a desire to prove to the academic world, that an occupation she enjoyed had academic value, and the criticisms she had read, were no longer applicable. As the study progressed it became clear that such a goal was shallow in its philosophy, and that there were far more important issues to consider. Why was history important to consumers, for example, and why was there a philosophy among those the author regarded as being enlightened interpreters, and educators, that the consumer should be given a more academic understanding of the subject matter? What mattered more:- that a seventeenth century living history presentation included a nineteenth century cooking pot, or that the visitor was not made aware of it?

At the end of this study the important issues seem to point toward the freedom of the individual to develop their own intellectuality to whatever degree they wish, and for there to be a trusted body of enablers with whom they can seek guidance. In other words, the author concludes that the public should be allowed to use history in any way they wish, for entertainment

and/or for education, but they should not be left in a position of ignorance, as to the historical accuracy or significance, of what is before them. Nor should they be in a position of passive acceptance, (unless that is their wish), but be aware of the concept of interpretation in general.

By researching the value of interpretation, and specifically live interpretation, in the fields of education and entertainment as an effective tool of communication, the study has revealed the problems which continue to slow the rate of development, within the heritage industry, towards achieving this aim. Why should that data now be used to hasten such a development? The answer lies in the chapter on power and responsibility. The academics hold allegiance to the subject itself, although they should acknowledge some responsibility towards the consumers of their work. Action should not be taken merely to prove something to the world of academia; not so that the more 'enlightened' interpreters might gain some small acceptance from the intellectually elite. That would be only be a hollow, and self- gratifying victory for the middleman. (Even if could be achieved). The reason that improvements should be striven for, is the responsibility of these middlemen towards all those who wish, at all intellectual levels, to better their understanding of their past, in order to make more enlightened judgments in the present and future. These are judgments of the ordinary people on the street, not those in high positions in society, but they might be the kind of decisions that change a society. For example, a good piece of interpretation on the British slave trade might make people question the prejudices they inherited from their parents. Once they have recognised them for what they are, and understood how they developed, then they are free to reject them, and form their own opinions. Even if these people do not yet understand why they want to take a serious look at their country's past, this kind of freedom might well be a product of good interpretation.

The public should feel free to explore any aspect or subject in history, without fear of it not being 'worthy' enough to be studied, and feel able to

research it at what ever level they choose. Many of the interpreters, professional and voluntary, encountered by the author during this study, expressed some sort of embarrassment when owning up to having fun, or getting a degree of personal pleasure out of their activities. People should not be made to feel guilty for being entertained and educated simultaneously. In chapter five 'hot' interpretation was discussed, and it was concluded that it would be inappropriate if every piece of interpretation held some harrowing information that the visitor would feel deeply moved by. The day to day lives of people in the past, as with the present, held the whole gamut of human emotions and occurrences.

History for the people should be about whatever the people are interested in. The concept of history for the people should be about freedom and independence on the one hand, and guidance on the other.

The interpreter, like the academic, also has a responsibility towards the subject, as well as to the consumer. The integrity of the subject must be preserved for future generations to make their own interpretations. It will be important to their development that they recognise the significance and meaning of this generation's interpretation, as it will form part of the historical development of their past, but it is not all they should see.

### **C) What is needed to improve historical interpretation and understanding?**

The author suggests three main areas for consideration:

- \* Communication between disciplines and levels of practice.
- \* more widespread, quality training;
- \* the formation of a code of practice to act as guidance for those seeking it;

## 1) Who needs to improve?

Part of asking *what* needs to be improved, is the question: *whose* practices need to be improved?. Lord & Barrow suggested in 1989 that 'Field staff, those people responsible for communicating directly with the public, are clearly a priority for training.'<sup>2</sup> They also indicated that progress was being made, and that 'some employers are now calling in specialist interpretation training organisations to organise on-the-job training.'<sup>3</sup> Research for this study validates that theory, for example, the use of Past Pleasures for the initial training programme at Llancaiach Fawr Manor<sup>4</sup> In Lord & Barrow's definition of 'field staff,' they included volunteers. They did not specify, but the author suspects that they were referring to volunteers associated with certain museums i.e, those 'on the books,' and regarded as part of the staff. Although good training is essential to all live interpreters the author suggests it is the hobbyist section of the practice that needs most attention. Personal observation in the field over the last decade, has certainly shown a trend towards these practitioners being in greatest need of professional training.

The other group in the communication exchange, who appear to have been ignored to a greater extent, is the visiting public. Much has been said over the years by commentators and educators about 'giving away the skills of revelation'<sup>5</sup> Davis & Gibb stated, 'museums...are responsible for equipping people to explore the past critically and for helping them apply those skills to the criticism and interpretation of contemporary society.'<sup>6</sup> In Britain, however there is little evidence of activity on this front.

Each of the three categories suggested above will now be considered in turn.

<sup>2</sup> Lord, Geoffrey & Barrow, Graham, 'Towards a Co-ordinated Approach to Interpretation Training in Britain', in Uzzell D (ed) *Heritage Interpretation Vol. 1 The Natural and Built Environment*, London: Belhaven Press, 1989, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter two, section on informal education, Llancaiach Fawr Manor.

<sup>5</sup> Uzzell, op. cit. p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Davis, Karen Lee, Gibb, James G. 'Unpuzzling the Past: Critical Thinking in History Museums,' in *Museum Studies Journal* Spring/Summer 1988.

## 2) Communication

For any real, overall success in achieving improvements, the practitioners from all the fields of historical research, education, and entertainment must develop stronger pathways of communication between all areas. The activities of all of them meet in their production of interpretation for the public, no matter where they reside in the chain. Therefore, it should be this connection that has the power to override traditional stances, petty snobbery and ignorance, to unify this group of 'enablers' for the sake of society's historic understanding in the future.

The industry needs a central forum for interdisciplinary debate and decision, which at the moment it lacks. There are many smaller forums used by differing sections of the industry. For example, *Interpretation*, the joint journal of the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage & Commission for Environmental Interpretation, encompasses many within the museum and heritage professions, but probably is not subscribed to by many members of the Sealed Knot. *The Living History Register*, a journal open to all re-enactment societies, and the National Association of Re-enactment Societies, which has representatives of many of the national societies on its board, in order to deal with common issues, are both exclusive to the interests of re-enactors. A forum does not exist where all parties, subject area wide, feel they are welcome, and can contribute to the development of historical interpretation as part of a single body. The industry lacks the cohesion that would make this possible.

The re-enactment scene alone has had a history of strong rivalry, petty back-stabbing, and general belittling of the 'opposition'. However, as the general standards of 'authenticity' of dress and equipment are beginning to level out in some areas,<sup>7</sup> and the larger groups have succumbed to the trials of internal politics, there is now much joint-membership. This has led to quieter frontiers, and moves towards co-operation. Associations such as NAReS are a

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<sup>7</sup>There are, of course, still some outstandingly good and bad examples.

product of this.

The industry as a whole needs further developments towards co-operation on an interdisciplinary level before real accomplishments can take place, and the diversity of its practitioners will make this difficult. Where education and entertainment meet will always be areas of potential insecurity and prejudice. Live interpretation especially, is regarded with suspicion by the others, and has much self-evaluation and improvement to undergo before it will be accepted as a trustworthy equal.

Building the relationships that will make the suggested forum possible, will be difficult, but not impossible. This is a situation where proving the academic worthiness of live interpretation by hobbyist interpreters to their 'superiors' might have a valid cause. For such a forum to exist, all potential participants must be treated with the respect of equals. The hobbyist re-enacting world has had such a reputation for bad practice in the past, that it will take some effort on that area's behalf before they are accepted as equals.

The path is being paved to that end by the more discerning groups. Les Skipper of the History Re-enactment Workshop, discussed the subject of positive changes in a recent interview.

Think about the change in Chris Zeuner's<sup>8</sup> attitude from our first contact, which was 'No! We don't have people in our museums, it's silly, it's trivial' I went to a conference, and he was talking about the use of people in museums, and he was so anti, it was untrue. We got in there (the Weald and Downland Museum) on sufferance, because the education officer said it would be a good thing. Over six or seven years we have learned an awful lot from them, and they have learned quite a bit from us. It's now a very beneficial two-way thing. We have to work together. It is happening at Museum level in quite a few places. There are other groups out there that are as valid as the Workshop, and it's having a beneficial effect all round.<sup>9</sup>

Without co-operation of this kind, across the board, the following two suggestions will be of inferior quality.

Communication with the public Successful public orientation in the

<sup>8</sup> Director of the Weald and Downland Museum.

<sup>9</sup> Questionnaire with HRW members September 1999.

future depends partly on groups, and sites being honest about their interpretation and use of history.

### **3) More widespread quality training**

Although it was suggested above that those most in need of training were the hobbyist re-enactors and the general public, it might be suggested that not all professional staff, and in-house volunteers are so well trained, as to be excellent in their practices. Much effort is being made on initial training, but there were few sites that mentioned annual retraining for all staff when the author made her enquiries. Few, that is, on a level with the programme undertaken by Plimoth Plantation, Massachusetts, USA, which is very thorough indeed. Past Pleasures were one group that carried out continual evaluation, employing a 'buddying' system of continual partner assessment.

The responsibility for ensuring adequate training of employees, and volunteers takes place, is in the hands of not only the project managers, (including museum directors, educators and group leaders), budget holders and financiers, but the staff themselves. Everyone in the industry has a common responsibility to the visitor, and the subject area. Therefore they share the responsibility for ensuring the work they produce is of the highest standard possible. These standards require continual assessment and 'top-up' sessions of training, if skills and approaches are to be kept fine-tuned and abreast of the most effective methods.

The integrated forum would be the ideal place for these methods to be discussed, formulated, and distributed.

Training for employees, and those wishing to study heritage issues and practices are available at under, and post-graduate levels. These include:<sup>10</sup>

\* St. Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, Middlesex

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<sup>10</sup> All from respective prospectuses.

Offers a one year postgraduate diploma course in 'Heritage Interpretation', covering all aspects of the subject, and a six week placement in the field.

\* The Ironbridge Institute, Telford, Shropshire

The Heritage Management course (masters and diploma) offers a module on 'Historic Interpretation in Heritage Management', which can be taken without registering for the whole course.

\* University of Plymouth, Exeter, Devon

Offers an undergraduate course in Heritage, which includes opportunities for 'Interpretation in Practice'.

\* Cumbria College of Art and Design, Carlisle

offers a BA Hons course in Heritage Management.

\* University of Kent, Canterbury

offers an degree course in Social history and heritage studies.

\* Birkbeck College, University of London, Russell Square

offers a diploma in Heritage Interpretation covering all aspects of the subject.

\* University of Leicester

offers a postgraduate course in Museum Education, with a module on Communication

\* Centre for Environmental Interpretation (University of Manchester)

offers a postgraduate diploma or MA in Environmental and Heritage Interpretation, which teaches 'an understanding of the aims and



methodologies of interpretation'.

Most, if not all of these courses are aimed at those either already in the industry, or planning to be in the future.

*a) Training the hobbyist*

Some training to different degrees is already carried out in societies where they are in direct contact with the public. The Sealed Knot, through its journal *Orders of the Day*, and through regimental representatives, tries to guide its members on matters of dress and behaviour in public. Much of the concern over standards comes from ordinary members of the society, showing the ever-present willingness that does exist within these groups to change. They are, however, met with constant opposition, as the mixed motivations from the two worlds of education and entertainment rub uneasy shoulders. For example, one member writes in reply to recent discussions over standards of living history events:

I recently heard of an 'expert' who was proud of being able to tell the public the price of a loaf of bread in the 1640's (sic.). Is anyone seriously of the belief that the public care about this sort of detail?<sup>11</sup>

In the author's experience, the public have cared enough about that very subject to make it a vital piece of information to have to hand, in whatever year one is interpreting. The author included this example because it illustrates the lack of awareness of visitor needs that exists in such societies, and therefore the very real need for better training within them.

In order to assess what kind of training is needed, each society needs to take an honest look at itself, and decide where it stands between the poles of education and entertainment. For example, in a large battle re-enactment group, for the ordinary soldier one degree of training might be needed for non-

<sup>11</sup> Ward C E, 'The cost of authenticity' from *Orders of the Day* vol. 27 no. 2 march/April, 1995, p.25.

visitor-contact situations (the battles), and quite a different one for living history encampments, crowd line situations, and close-up displays.

Most of the training for the interpretation of social history by hobbyist groups, is conducted 'on-the-job', with new recruits learning alongside more experienced colleagues. Examples of exceptions are mentioned in chapter four and chapter six, where differing degrees of training take place before the interpreter meets the public (Kentwell open-days, and HRW workshops).

In what form might the training be offered? Large re-enactment societies are often already divided into smaller groups through the society structure of companies and regiments. Training might be considered as a part of 'regimental drill', (Fig. 22) or other meetings. Society members might well see this as an infringement of their time, especially those unready, or unwilling to accept their responsibilities as interpreters in the public eye. These are decisions the society will have to consider when they are deciding where they stand.

Other forums for training might include local advertised workshops and lectures at museums and historic sites all round the country, which would be available to anyone interested in developing their skills. Again a scheme like this would require the co-operation of several fields of practice, and probably government financing. Another alternative, or additional venture might be to set up a training centre for interpreters to attend day courses, or even residential courses. This (or these) centre(s) might be located in an open air museum type setting, with plenty of scope for hands-on learning experience in both interpretation, and historical working skills. It could house a central data base, including a library and internet access, where web site might be maintained and developed. It could host the interdisciplinary forum mentioned earlier. A project of this magnitude would truly need the co-operation of all disciplines even to start to finance it, but it might be something to aim for in the future.



Fig. 22 Could interpretation training be undertaken as part of drill?  
Die Hards.

(Photograph with kind permission of English Heritage.)

## *b) Training the public*

This is already happening at a fundamental level in schools. The National Curriculum for history suggests that pupils at level six,

describe, and are beginning to explain, different historical interpretations of events, people and changes. Using their knowledge and understanding, they identify and evaluate sources of information, which they use critically to reach and support conclusions.<sup>12</sup>

If it is not happening already, greater emphasis should be placed on this area of history teaching.

The public as a whole, including those who have not had the benefit of being taught to National Curriculum required standards, might be reached through a number of different forms of media. Popular television programmes like *Time Team* have already begun to introduce the concept of interpretation. Quite often there are differing opinions of what is being excavated on a site, and the discussions develop, with everyone putting their cases across throughout the progress of the dig. Phrases like 'evidence suggests', 'it looks like we were wrong about...' and 'what it's beginning to look like we've got here is...' abound, and all add to the idea that a lot of archaeology is educated guess work, and making the best guess from the evidence available at the time. The popularity of history programmes suggests they could be a good forum for promoting more about the concept of history and interpretations of it.

There are a great many specialist historical hobby magazines, and even some non-specialist, including *History Today*, that could prove good outlets for information.

Museums and events are ideal places to train, or orientate the visitor. As stated in chapter five orientation programmes form an important part of a visit to many of the living history museums in America, and is a practice that funding should be raised for here.

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<sup>12</sup> *History in the National Curriculum*, London: HMSO, 1995.

In so many cases within the voluntary sector, it will be a matter of choice on the behalf of the individual as to whether they take heed of the advice given. It will, however, make a wider audience aware of the problems, and the solutions on offer.

#### 4) A code of practice

Guidelines have been drawn up for differing areas of interpretation in the last few decades since Freeman Tilden's pioneering work of 1957, *Interpreting Our Heritage*<sup>13</sup>. Perhaps the most up to date publication, aimed at the American market, is *Past into Present. Effective techniques for first-person historical interpretation*, by Stacy F Roth, which gives good, sound advice. Publications like these should be analysed by the suggested forum, compared with what the forum recognises as good practice in this country, and a code of British practice should be compiled to act as guide lines for anyone wishing to improve their understanding and skills.

Many of the areas of concern have been discussed throughout this study, but the following is a summary, that might act a foundation on which such a code might rest.

- i) The interpreter must be aware of their position of power, and why they have been placed there by the public.
- ii) The interpreter must be aware of the responsibilities that such power implies.

These responsibilities include:

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<sup>13</sup>Tilden, Freeman *Interpreting our Heritage*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957.

- iii) Being clear where on the scale between education and entertainment their interpretation rests.
- iv) Being aware of the implications this might have on orientation for the consumer, and that it is important to be honest about the nature of an interpretation.
- v) The interpreter must never wittingly give false or information. If interpreting in role, then the visitor must be made aware that statements might be the opinion of a single character, or a period belief, rather than fact.
- vi) Show respect for the visitor in word, action, and attitude. By this it is meant rather to treat them as equals, rather than be demeaning, or subservient.
- vii) The interpreter must be aware that when interpreting for the public, they must put the needs of the visitor before their own self-gratification.
- viii) A common language should be sought, at all costs, because without one there would be no channel for communication.
- ix) The interpreter must have a clear perception of the aims and philosophy of the interpretation, and of the establishment they are working for.

The interpreter must have the following skills:

- x) Being able to assess the visitor's requirements.

- xi) Adaptability and quickness of thought is essential.
- xii) Having a good knowledge of their subject area,  
and access to a well researched, and up-to-date database.
- xiii) An awareness of educational skills, and learning methods and  
their effectiveness.
- xiv) An ability to put visitors at their ease, in order to create a good  
environment for interactive learning.
- xv) An ability to communicate ideas in a clear and engaging manner.
- xvi) Interpreters must have a good sense of when to stop.

#### **D) Entertainment**

History has always been a rich source of material for entertainment providers, and if the educational interpreters of history accept that history today is for the people to explore as they wish, then it will continue to be so. Part of the act of understanding involves being aware of one's expectations, and how they influence perception. If a members of the public see a juggler in the street wearing lycra jester suit, it is unlikely that they will believe jesters in the medieval past wore the same. They know the nature of what they are seeing, and have expectations of its historical accuracy. The same might apply to 'medieval' banquets, a pageant, or theatre. Unless an interpretation is advertising itself as being educational, then the consumer will be ready to make allowances for historical inaccuracies.

'Policing' the obvious end of the entertainment scale would be a ludicrous activity. The more grey areas toward the middle, however, might be a different matter. The Shrewsbury Quests, World of Robin Hoods and Sealed Knots of the industry must be careful of the historical accuracy they employ because they are the strange regions where fact and fantasy merge. As stated before such sites and organisations can, and do offer high standards of educational interpretation, but they must make the public properly aware of the dividing line.

Nearing the other end of the scale increases the need for historical accuracy where it can be accomplished, and the need for visitor orientation remains vital.

If the industry would develop a more honest approach to advertising and visitor orientation, then much of the angst over visitor perception would be dissipated. With the knowledge that there is a time and place for everything, and as long as everyone involved is aware of the nature of the interpretation before them, then they can feel entertained, or educated (or probably both) to whatever degree the situation affords.



# Appendices

Appendix one. Sample from the questionnaire for Kentwell participants.

Appendix two. Sample from the questionnaire for the Sealed Knot.

Appendix three. Sample from the questionnaire for the History Re-enactment Workshop.

Appendix four. Personal experience of live interpretation within the industry.

**Appendix one.**

**Sample from the questionnaire for Kentwell  
participants.**

Questionnaire for Kentwell Hall 1995 Data for a Ph.D on Live Interpretation.  
Please return to Kit of the Dairy via the internal post box. MANY THANKS!

1. Male/Female 2. Home town Brainsea 3. Country Essex
4. How many summers have you attended? 3
5. Role for Kentwell 1546? barns portage cook
6. Role Name? Amy Cooper
7. What other roles have you played? seamstress baxter
8. Age: please circle, 10 or under, 11-16 17-22 23-35 36-45 45-60 60+
9. Why did you first volunteer for the re-creations? Because my daughters, then aged 15 and 14 wanted to attend, having been enthused by a friend who attended Kentwell.
10. Have your reasons altered since then and if so how?  
Yes, I now attend for my own reasons of historical interest + escapism.
11. How important do you think it is to get the following right for the period, and why?: Clothes, tools/ working methods, language, attitude/outlook on life  
all very important. We are not putting on a mask, but portraying real life. Details flesh out this. And in my case Amy is a real person, not me pretending. She has very different attitudes to mine.
12. Do you research these subjects each year to improve your presentation/ personal knowledge? Yes. But after the first time research becomes a continuous rather than focused process as one's knowledge broadens
13. Which area do you have the most difficulty with?  
speech - making it natural and fluent.
14. Who makes your clothes? I do.
15. What references do they use? Portraits + historical reference.
16. How have you adjusted to Kentwell Tudor speech patterns.  
I can do it, with confidence; but I would like to do better.
17. From where/whom did you learn it?  
"On the job"
18. What are its strengths and weaknesses? weakness - limited vocabulary. Strength - most people can be fluent with ease.
19. What responsibilities do you think you have towards the visitors?  
To bring alive their own imaginations and sense of wonder. To give them a great day out and a personal sense of responsibility in having a good time. i.e. don't be passive!
20. If there is something non-Tudor about the way you are or what you are doing do you think the visitor should know?  
No - the Kentwell way of total belief is great theatre. You can see in the eyes of some children that the magic has happened and that they
21. What are the re-creations good/not so good at? (Any stories involving personal experiences welcome! Feel free to use reverse side.) P.T.O.  
will be able to people other situations (both historical and otherwise) in their own ~~mind~~ minds again. It makes the whole thing so rewarding for me.

Kentwell is good at detail (I think this is very important). I have visited other recreations and been jolted back to reality by nylon lace, make-up and perms, modern speech and "they did it this way" presentation. I much prefer to believe. However, at times, when a visitor has a very great interest in something, ~~that~~ the manner of Kentwell can mean that we cannot tell them everything that they may well want to know. It can also intimidate some visitors; whilst stimulating more relaxed visitors with a unique experience. In any given situation it is always impossible to please everyone - so I do fall on the side of the Kentwell way, whilst acknowledging that it has its faults.



## **Appendix two**

### **Sample from the questionnaire for the Sealed Knot**

## Thesis Research on Heritage Interpretation by Dawn Stevens

(One questionnaire between two- choose an answer box colour and stick to it!)

(Put your name in your chosen box)

Please answer the questions as seriously as possible but be HONEST!


A) Reasons for joining The Knot, mark the boxes in order of preference.

- 1) The social life, (legalized thuggery and playing Animals in the beer tent. 3 ☒

- 2) You enjoy dressing up in silly costumes and parading around in public. ☒ 2 ☐

- 3) You were genuinely interested in the English Civil War and thought it would be an exciting way of finding out more about it.

2



B) How many seasons have you been a member?

29

C) How interested in the ECW were you before you joined?

very ☒ quite a lot ☐ fairly ☐ not very ☐ not at all ☒

D) How interested are you now?

very ☒ quite a lot ☐ fairly ☒ not very ☐ not at all ☐

E) How much do you think you have learned about the ECW since joining?

a lot ☐ ☒ a fair bit ☒ ☐ a little ☐ ☐ hardly anything ☐ ☐

F) How important is authenticity to you?

- 1) When buying kit;

a) You trust the popular Knot seamstresses to have done their homework and think no more of it. ☐ ☐

b) You try to get away with the bare minimum. Why spend good beer money on a pair of replica 17th Century shoes? ☐ ☐

c) You've done your own research, looking up books on costume and the works of 17th Century artists and have shopped around or made your own garments to achieve a high degree of authenticity. ☒ ☒

d) You're so keen you hand sew your own garments. ✓

e) You haven't studied any costume books but you've quizzed knowledgeable members and acted on their advice. ☐ ☐

- 2) On the field;

a) What role do you play on the field? **MUSKETEER** OFFICIALLY PIKE / UNOFFICIALLY I CAN GET

b) How would you rate your knowledge on actual ECW fighting manoeuvres and techniques?

excellent ☐ ☐ very good ☐ ☐ good ☒ ☒ fair ☐ ☐ poor ☐ ☐ non existent ☐ ☐

c) Do you attempt any archaic speech? ☒ ☒ (✓ or X)

d) Do you think it's acceptable for a "dead" soldier to get up and fight again in full view of the public? ☒ ☒

e) Have you lit up a cigarette in full view of the public? ☒ NO ☐ NOT *at home*

f) Do you think 20th Century extras like cigarettes, chewing gum and sweets should be allowed on the field at all? ☐ No ☒ Yes

- 3) Off the field:

a) What is your regular accommodation on the campsite? TENT

DEPENDS HOW	EVENT
NORMALLY	1 AM
	TEST

b) What's your view of authentic camping?

get lost ☐ ☒ wouldn't mind having a go but not regularly ☐ ☒

wouldn't dream of camping any other way ☐ ☒ I don't actually "go the whole hog", but I do try to live as simply as possible with the least amount





of 20th Century clobber. ☒ ☐

c) What would put you off authentic camping?

LACK OF SUITABLE GEAR

LACK OF SLEEPING IN WARMTH

d) Kit on the campsite:

do you arrive in kit ☐ ☐ change as soon as possible after you arrive ☒ ☒

stay in kit all weekend ☒ ☒ only change into kit for the battles ☐ ☐

are a little more lax in approach than on the field ☐ ☐

G) Empathy-to what extent do we share the experiences of the people involved in the ECW?

1) Which of the following emotions have you experienced on the field?

excitement ☒ ☒ sense of belonging ☒ ☒ anxiety ☒ ☒ anger ☐ ☒ fright ☐ ☒

terror ☐ ☒ fear of imminent death ☐ ☒ fear of serious injury ☐ ☒

2) What are the worst injuries you have sustained on the field?

BURNT EYEBROWS, TWISTED ANKLE

BROKEN SHOULDER, BROKEN NOSE X4 BRUISES, CUTS, ETC

3) What injuries do you expect to receive during a battle? NONE CUTS & GRAZES

4) When you go on how prominent in your mind is the possibility that you

might get seriously injured or even killed in battle? NOT AT ALL NOT ALL

H) Which of these is closest to the truth?

A truthful re-enactment of the past ☐ ☒ an involved game for adults ☒ ☐

I) Which would you rather the public think they are seeing?

an accurate visual account of an ECW battle ☐ ☒

a colourful display which like a play need not be a true representation but only one group of people's interpretation of the facts ☒ ☒ BOTH

J) We all know that we cannot really step into the boots of a 17th Century soldier/wench, being the products of a 20th Century society and carry our 20th Century way of thinking with us. Why do you think we are trying harder and harder to be authentic then? \* (see below) FOR ENTERTAINMENT PURPOSES

K) Do you think we are losing our sense of fun with all this emphasis on authenticity? NO NO.

L) Why do you think there is such an interest in the past in our society today?

KNOWING ONE'S ROOTS IS IMPORTANT

CURIOSITY OF OUR HERITAGE.

THAT'S ALL FOLKS

Thanks for all your help! Those who sign their names at the top get a mention in my thesis. (Wow- what an incentive eh?)

\* I FIND THAT I HAVE A FAR GREATER SENSE OF 'EASE' IF I KNOW THAT MY GEAR IS AUTHENTIC (AND NOT JUST FANCY DRESS) - AND THERE IS A DEGREE OF 'ONEUPMANSHIP' OVER FOLK WITH CHEAPO IMITATIONS.



## Appendix three

### Sample from the questionnaire for the History Re-enactment Workshop.

**Les Skipper**

#### *Why did you get into re-enactment?*

I got into re-enacting through war-gaming. I was always interested in history, military history. I got into a club and there met someone that was in the ECWS. I couldn't say there was any intellectual attraction. The attraction was that we were playing war games, and when you do, you like to be as accurate as possible, and then you meet someone who says 'I dress up and do this for real.' I was still at school and I thought 'wow'. You go along, and its actually quite fun in a very laddish way. Its a way of playing rugby without the same kind of risks. Its a very young, laddish thing.

Once you start thinking about it you realise how limiting it all is. You're playing in those environments, with people who are using battle re-enactment as a bolster to their ego. There are a lot of people out there who are officers of regiments. They maybe a failed accountant or bank clerk in real life, but they go out at the weekend and they are the officer of a regiment.

#### *Why did you join HRW?*

We were all in the battle re-enactment thing together, and there were a group of us who wanted to push it further. We were still looking at the battle side of things really. We wanted to do better recreation of battles, and we knew it was pathetic, twenty people calling themselves a regiment. we wanted to do small scale skirmishes. They can be made to work if they're tightly scripted, and if everyone knows what they are doing. the battle re-enactment societies are inherently against that. The people who have got to the top of the societies are the people who are running it for their egos. What they are interested in is 'this is my army' 'I can turn out 80 people on the field, the fact that they are all complete crap doesn't matter.

We were trying to push things forward, doing things more accurately. Military included thinking about military encampments. We started talking about creating a by trayne of artillery. We only had two artillery pieces. In fact you need about forty horses and two hundred people. Once we started thinking about it, it widens out. We started thinking about creating characters. At living history events, you go up to most soldiers, and ask them who they are and what they do, and if they can think of anything they tell you this is ECWS and tell you they are a mercenary from the thirty years war. Push them and they will tell you which battle they were involved in. You point out them that it must be post 1642 because this is the English civil war and the battle they've just refered to was fought in 1618 and they've lost it. You never do that. You realise at that level you've wandered into someone elses little fantasy, and its divorced from any kind of reality. Out of that trying to push it further and trying to be more

interested(?) and having gone through the Royalist army and into the Army of Parliament because it appeared to offer more of that, and realising that they were just the same really, you couldn't 'do' reality because the societies weren't set up (realities over stressing it anyway). Andy got a group of people together and we did a couple of events at Lincoln castle where he did a weeding out exercise basically-finding fellow travellers.

By then we had seriously got into the domestic side of things. The whole part of the Lincoln castle events was we did the garrison, concentrating on the domestic side of the garrison. That went on for a week, and at the end of the week we had a storming of the castle, and got all the plebs in, and did the thug and bash battle stuff. Andy with his contacts came up with some purely domestic things. We did some military stuff as well, a series at the NAM, Tilbury fort, but we started concentrating seriously on the domestic side of things...and that's why HRW. It gave you the opportunity for the 16th & 17th century without any military context what so ever. HRW went through two stages really. The first stage was something called The Bletchington Muster Fund and if you can find anybody who can remember the BMF you're doing well! That led on to the Lincoln Castle events which were still done under the aegis of ECWS, but they were very much Andy's thing. He was sorting out fellow travellers to take the next step. Stand still and you stagnate, and then you go backwards. That's the great thing I learned from him. You've always got to be looking forward and trying to improve what you're doing. you never can be satisfied with what you do now. When I look back at what the Workshop used to do, I used to think "excellent, we're there" We weren't, we're not. We're way beyond that now, and I know we can go way beyond that. The minute you stop thinking 'I can do better than this, you do worse.

The original drivers into re-enactment were about me, and enjoying myself. HRW is where the intellectual context comes into it. That's when I really really really started thinking about what we were doing and why, and not only what I was getting out of it, but what the public were getting out of it. No one gives a stuff about the public, they are a complete by plane. what I care about now is the public because its about communicating with them. A group of us got together for the inaugural meeting, at Dickens Inn in London. We were a fairly disparate group in some ways, but we'd all been through the same thing. We'd been through the battle re-enactment thing and we's all come to the level where battle re-enactment didn't do it for us any more. It might be a fun thing to do in the background, but it was no longer the be-all and end-all. There was something better we could do. Much more rewarding, both to ourselves and the public. Something you could actually do that had value.

***Are you a member now for the same reasons as when you first joined?***

Pretty much the same as when I started, but they have been refined, from quite a blunt instrument down to a very focused... I think I really know what I'm trying to do. When putting an event together, I know when I've hit the point. It's a stripping away of the superfluous. Over time the thing I've lost is that it's no longer just for me, about me dressing up in a frock. Its about communicating with other people. The emphasis has changed very dramatically. Its been a process over time. It is a process which has led to the point where i go to an

event and I can probably get more solid enjoyment out of doing red-t-shirting and talking to the public than I do out of doing a role. Roles are interesting, and there are little things you can throw in which I quite enjoy, but some of the best times I've had recently have been doing red -t-shirting. If you can talk to people freely, you can explore all sorts of stuff. A lot of the time in role I've got all this stuff I could go on about, but can't. You can explore all sorts of avenues with people (red-T) You can push them in ways where they don't really want to go, not in a threatening way, but you can actually make them think about things, that probably they didn't want to think about, with their initial questions. It's not a threatening, combative... you throw things in, and you open things up for them. At Wimborne Minster I played a very straight, very conservative business-minded person, and I happened to throw in the comment that I really liked cock fighting, you know 12 cocks, put them battle royal, last one standing. And you can see people go 'eugh, bloody hell! He seemed sane until a few minutes ago' The same kind of thing in red t but you can do it better, because you've got more opportunity to argue back and forth. If you're doing it in role you can only give the perception of your role character, whereas if you are doing it in red t you can talk about how these characters feel, and you can do the direct comparison as to how we feel now. Where we were and where we've got to and how the two match together, and similar things that you might find in 20th century life. You can say that this seems barbaric to you, but I can read my local paper and I can give you instances of people still doing badger-baiting. You can't do that in a role situation. As long as you deal with it right, because you can freak some people out seriously when you start talking about that sort of thing. You can actually make people think. There is an interpretation that is either 'merry England' (throw that one out of the water) or they were all stupid, or they were all brutal. You can say well excuse me - they were just the same as you and me, but they had a different mind-set, a different world view. And you can probably go to a different part of the world and find a similar sort of world view because there are different things going on there. You can't criticise people and call them backward etc. just because of your point in time.

You can get a three way conversation. Doing red-t-shirting and first-person is a very touchy-feely thing. You have to judge your audience, who you're working with, for it all to go together, which is why the whole concept of pre-scripting doesn't work. You have to think on your feet. You have to very aware what is going on around you. It's not missing opportunities, it's also not pushing things too far, and making people feel uncomfortable. We've all seen the style of re-enactment that says 'Take the piss out of the public, because I'm in a position of power'.

You are in a position of power, the important thing is not to abuse it.

***How have your reasons for re-enacting changed since you first started.***

The reasons why I started re-enactment are completely alien to the reasons why I now do it. Probably I'm now very judgmental about things. I when I started was the kind of person that I now hate and loathe. What I really dislike is the inability of lots of re-enactment groups, and individuals within them, to move on. Moving on can be painful, it can cause problems from the people you move on from, but if you don't always drive forward, you don't achieve. You don't provide that piece of excellence.

The parameters for first person interpretation, for living history, for re-enactment when the first societies were formed there was an entirely different situation. You had a group of people doing stuff entirely frowned upon by the vast majority of the museum world. The living history thing has refined and has had a great affect on the presentation in museums. Whether all museums learned the good lessons or the bad lessons, is another matter. It has made a difference. It has taken a long time to make that difference. And to a certain extent, the fact that it has taken such a long time has been the fault of the people doing live interpretation. Museums obviously have put more thought into things, in a way that a lot of re-enactment societies don't, because that's their profession. They have very high turn -overs. A lot of their take up is people at university and college, who do it while they're at college, because it s a fun thing to do, and its not as dangerous as playing rugby, and then they drop out of it. With museums it is their profession.

Museums have to a certain extent picked the best, and have encouraged the best, and its been a good relationship, but also to certain extent museums aren't picky enough. Well, not particularly museums. English Heritage have no value judgment about events. (This is an over statement) They put on a lot of events and they don't question what they are being given.

If museums and sites question what they are being given by way of interpretation, that makes people who are providing the interpretation think about what they are doing. That then feeds round in a beneficial cycle. If they don't question they actually end up in a downward spiral.

The lowest common denominator will always win out unless people start using their brains, and think about what is being presented and why.

#### Academics

The link between people doing re-enactment and people in museums is contact with the public, and dissemination of information out to a very broad spectrum, where as I would guess, the academic historian is not generally interested in talking to the general public. They are interested in talking to other academics. That may feed down but it's not a direct communication.

Without people doing the academic research, we couldn't do what we do. how much if they stopped and listened, they could take back up into the rarefied atmosphere of academic research from the re-enactment side is an interesting debate. It's possibly not something that most academics are prepared to take on at the moment. The same way that museums used to have that 'We can't have people in our museums... That's now changed. If you think about the change in Chris Zeuner's attitude. from our first contact which was 'No! We don't have people in our museums, it's silly, it's trivial' I went to a conference, and CZ was talking about the use of people in museums and he was so anti, it was untrue. We got in there on sufferance because the education officer said it would be a good thing, but he wasn't terribly interested. Over 6-7 years we have learned an awful lot from them, and they have learned quite a bit from us. It's a very beneficial two-way thing. It has to work together. That is happening at Museum level in quite a few places. There are other groups out there that are as valid as the Workshop, and it's having a beneficial effect all round. Now its the re-enactment, living history, live interpretation level communicating with museums, the next step is the feed back between the academic historians and the people doing Living history.

Its dangerous because you 'do' and you pick up the wrong inferences. I approached this with a 20th century mind set. I can't do anything about that. There is a lot to be learned as long as you are careful about what you take out of it. A classic example is someone who got into dyeing. They were trying to recreate the coat colour of the new model army. They were doing it in an aluminium \*\*pig\*\*, but aluminium is used in the dyeing process. They were following these recipes, but the vessel they were doing it in was actually corrupting the colour. They were saying this is the coat colour, I've dyed it accurately. It's got to be controlled, you've got to say 'What have I done wrong?'

The friendships?

That was always there. You wouldn't enjoy it if you didn't enjoy the company of the people you were with. If I was faced with an end of civilisation-survival type situation I would choose to be with the Workshop if I could, because I think that's a really focussed group of people, that could survive anything. Its got a lot of practical skills and I respect them in their entirety.

I'm always interested in trying to make people think why they are doing it.

## **Appendix four.**

### **Personal experience of live interpretation within the industry.**

#### **First-person Interpretation:**

17th century time traveller for school history event, Exeter, 1993.

Kentwell Hall Tudor Re-creations, Suffolk, from 1994.

First year as a dairy maid, second to fourth year as head of that station. Involved in five Moat House Days for schools, (hands-on experience for children), and two Teacher's Preparation Days.

Days work for BBC Scotland 'Zig Zag- Tudor life' May, 1998.

Grayhill, Gwent.

Week long 17th century living history event for schools (dairy work, livestock). Historic Land Group Trust.

Member of the HRW since 1995.

Events include:

the Elizabethan House, Plymouth, Devon 1995; Weald and Downland Museum, Singleton, West Sussex, 1996-99; Blakesley Hall, Yardley, Birmingham, 1997-98, Bolsover Castle, Derbyshire, 1999; and Muchenley Abbey, Somerset, 1999.

Echoes from the Past,

Castle Cornet, St. Peter's Port, Guernsey, 1998-1999.

Symposium for Irish Museum curators on live interpretation with Andrew Robertshaw. Clarke Hall, North Yorks, 1998.

#### **Third-person Interpretation:**

##### **Military Re-enactment**

Sealed Knot member from 1990-97.

Drummer and artillery. Events include: 44 battles, four Royal Albert Hall Classical Spectaculars, 1993-4 and the largest ECW re-enactment in U.S.A, Virginia, 1995.

English Civil War Society member 1992-94. Artillery. Events include: two battles; two drill displays, the Wincanton Steam Fair 1992; military living history events at



Carrisbrooke Castle, Isle of Wight- dairy, 1992, and Botley Manor Farm, Hants.- dairy, 1994.

Worcester Militia events include: Worcester Street Battle 1994 and living history/ skirmish event Upton Snodesbury, 1993.

Living history and Artillery display for Lucas Engineering

Open Day for schools, Birmingham 1995.

Organised living history day for Heritage & Landscape degree students, P.U, Exeter, 1995.

Assistant to Ermine Street Guard for school display, Buddle Lane Middle School, 1995.

### **Non-military**

Non-costumed guide, (red t-shirter) for HRW

Costumed guest to speaker at WI talk, Suffolk, 1995.

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