

Editor's Note

With the eagerly-awaited sun and warmer weather, here arrives your spring edition of "Insights". A good friend and colleague recently reminded me that in order to be creative we need to risk getting things wrong. I am always on the look out for projects that can inspire and challenge, and those that explore how the roses can grow from the ashes! Do you have a performance or way of interpreting that you could share with other members of IMTAL-Europe? I can be contacted at board@imtal-europe.com and look forward to hearing from you.

Enjoy the sunshine...

News from the Chair

Dear IMTAL members

The IMTAL Europe family is growing in every sense! We have welcomed 10 new members since our last newsletter, so word is clearly getting out about what good value IMTAL membership is. But much more important to announce is that our web maestro Martin and his wife have just had twins. Congratulations to the Le Poidevin family!

The training day, *More of Less of the Verbal* was held in January at the Museum of London, Docklands. Such was its success, that a third installment has been requested by Tyne and Wear Museums service. Emily and Alison will be winging their way North (wordlessly) on 22nd March to deliver this session as a training day for the Tyne and Wear education staff.

Offering training in this way works out at great value for the host museum, and saves a great deal of (voluntary) board time. If anyone else would like to book IMTAL trainers for a staff session, please do get in touch to discuss your requirements. Similarly if you would like to offer your expertise, let us know. We have a great deal of expertise within the membership, and its great to be able to share it.

Our next training opportunity will be the weekend of 15th and 16th May at Hessenpark in Germany, where board member Oliver Klaukien is Head of museum theatre. "From Exhibit to Props" will be a fantastic opportunity to try out some techniques inspired by the Russian theatre masters Stanislavski and Chekhov in an open air museum that combines lots of different kinds of buildings, and even a circus tent! I look forward to seeing lots of you there.

Finally, a plea with my website hat on. Please could members log on, check all of their contact details are correct, and update their profiles. We are getting quite a few emails bouncing back. Also, it would be great for the website to begin scrolling profiles of members on the home-page. This is something we can do as soon as we have enough photos of the wonderful work that you do.

Wishing you all a very successful 2010.
Anna Farthing
Chair



"Where are you?"

called the Treasurer

I have 3 items to bring to members' attention in this edition of 'Insights'.

1 Thanks to those members who have paid promptly after attending the Training Day in January and thanks to those newly-joined members whose subscriptions have been received.

3 I was somewhat concerned by the deafening silence which greeted my appeal in the last 'Insights' for someone to step forward and replace me as Treasurer of IMTAL.

We urgently need someone with a more modern outlook on financial matters; it isn't too onerous a job and you won't be left on your own.

2 If you are reading this edition of 'Insights' it has obviously come to the right address! But, on behalf of the Board could I please ask that you update your web profile immediately in the case of any change of address, postal, e-mail or otherwise? The Board realise that if you are moving house a notification of change of address to IMTAL probably won't be your first priority – however once we are dealing with incorrect information it is very easy to lose contact and as we will soon be coming up to membership renewal time it would be good to know where you live!

I look forward to hearing from you.

David Mosley (Treasurer)

PERFORMANCE

In At The Deep End

THE NATURAL THEATRE COMPANY
at the ROMAN BATHS MUSEUM, BATH



The Roman Baths Museum in Bath tends not to over-publicise the fact that their costume interpretation personnel are supplied on a daily basis by the city's famous Natural Theatre Company. People's expectations would be all wrong. The Natural style is known the world over for hilarious, in-your-face street theatre characters and Up Pompeii rather than Aqua Sulis would be the more likely direction of play! However, the museum authorities also know that the company has an immaculate eye for detail, has over forty years experience of appearing in every conceivable public situation and has a highly efficient administrative and technical back-up team.

All the characters we represent at the Baths actually lived and worked in the city. The back-stories are extremely detailed and as in any project of this sort there is list of specific information that the performers are asked to put across. But we are first and foremost an entertainment organisation so we inevitably convey this information in an entertaining and, hopefully, charming way.

You should have seen the high jinks when the actors first tried on the seven and a half metre long togas. "Infamy, infamy! They've all got it in for me!" Enough to make any self-respecting member of IMTAL blush. "Stop being funny", I cried. "Get back to your back-stories!"

Of course, as the weeks went by, the actors developed a formula which satisfies both our desire to entertain and

the museum's requirement for public engagement and historical fact. One thing our regular performers (some of whom have been with the company for over twenty years) are good at is inhabiting a character. In their thousands of performances in shopping centres, town squares, corporate events, festivals, markets, foyers, exhibitions, palaces, cruise ships and stately homes in nearly 80 countries they have had to stay in character no matter what. They don't work from scripts and often the character is brand new and specially devised for that particular event. They may not have even seen the venue until the performance begins. Therefore the character, and especially the look of the character, defines the action.

So remaining implacably entrenched in the embodiment of a rich Roman lady at her toilette or a local mason chipping away at a first century finial was no problem. The problem was to rein them in so that they didn't go off into improvised flights of fancy. This they have learnt to do and although I occasionally send a round robin email warning of secret shoppers, the actors are trusted to remain within the brief whilst interpreting it in an imaginative way. New performers are gradually added to the mix and in the main are trained up by the old hands.

Thus there is a strong team feeling amongst the group and a sense of ownership which is essential in an exercise that, being a seven days a week year-round effort, could become tedious and repetitive.

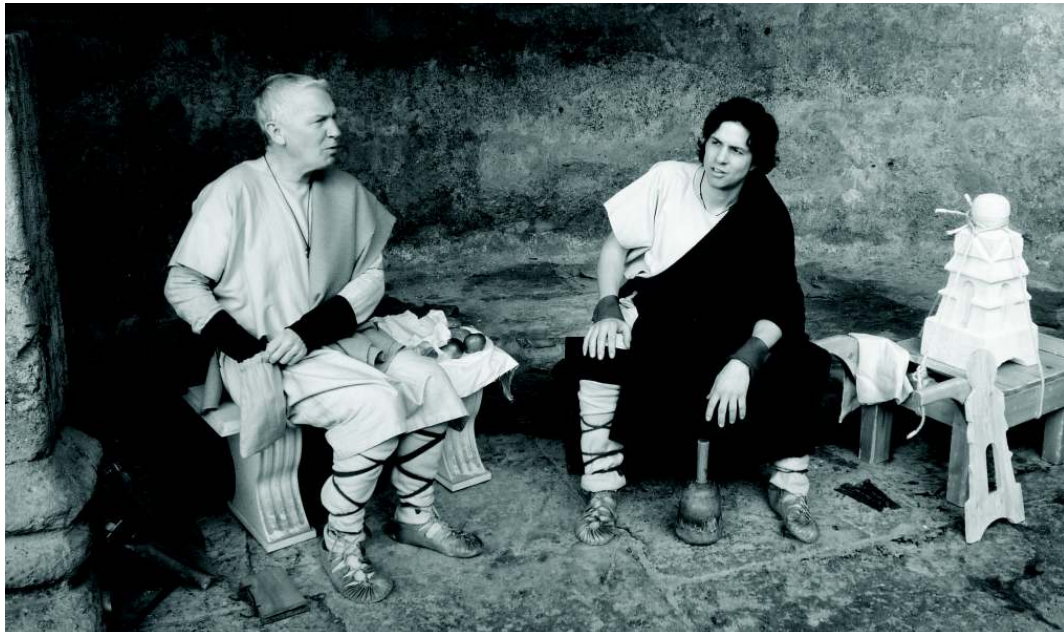
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"In At The Deep End" cont.

Natural Theatre actors are used to looking after their own costumes too. Serious mends are handed to our technical director and his crew but day-to-day washing and wardrobe care is part of the company's work ethos. We have never had a full-time wardrobe mistress or master, though of course there is someone whose responsibility is an overview of all props and costume needs. One of our number who went on to star in the West End was most distressed when he saw fellow actors casually casting costumes off to be picked up, as he put it, by a sweet old asthmatic lady who brought one a box of chocolates at the end of the run!

Rest assured that all our boys can iron a toga if the need arises. And while our backstage boffin is off with a bad back, the actor who plays the centurion has taken on the arduous task of polishing of his own armour. He says he enjoys it and is proud of the result.

That's not to say that our technical department is not involved. Serious leatherwork has been undertaken in the making of belts and the mending of shoes. Roman make-up has to be mixed and accurate props sourced. The team is more used to making radio-controlled pandas and umbrellas that rain on the inside but again, they had to adjust to the needs of the historical re-enactment world.



I was asked to write about how our street theatre experience has helped and influenced our costume interpretation work. Well, from a practical point of view, we are used to emerging from ill-lit inadequate or improvised dressing rooms looking immaculate. We are used to working in unpredictable environments (what can be more unpredictable than a coach load of bored schoolboys being dragged round a museum when they'd rather be in Burger King?) We are used to wearing flimsy costumes in adverse weather conditions (we once performed our nudists

We learn from street work not to be arrogant or to think we are cleverer than those watching.

scenario in the frozen wastes of Lapland but... "Did Romans really not wear socks?") And we are very used to rotas, shifts, last minute problem-solving, working with non-English speaking audiences and showing individual initiative.

Our unwritten rule is to always create a 'picture' from every angle. Theatre-in-the-round, if you like.

From an artistic point of view, our street work happens in amongst the audience. Our unwritten rule is to always create a 'picture' from every angle. Theatre-in-the-round, if you like. And I must say that whenever I pass through the museum, I am always struck by the way they naturally arrange themselves into photogenic tableaux or choose exactly the right spot to place themselves.

We also learn from street work not to be arrogant or to think we are cleverer than those watching. In the street we are uninvited guests in a passerby's day and, as such, invite voluntary engagement. This works in a museum situation too. Nobody wants a shouty costumed character forced on them. Some even want to ignore them. It's their choice. One is not special just because one is dressed up. One is an actor, and that's what

actors do. So humility mixed with subtle attention-seeking is the secret formula!

We love being Romans and are proud to have been chosen to work in one of Europe's top visitor attractions. And judging by the ever more positive comments in the visitors' book, our own particular style of costume interpretation has become an important part of the experience.

Ralph Oswick

Thanks to Bath Heritage Services for the images

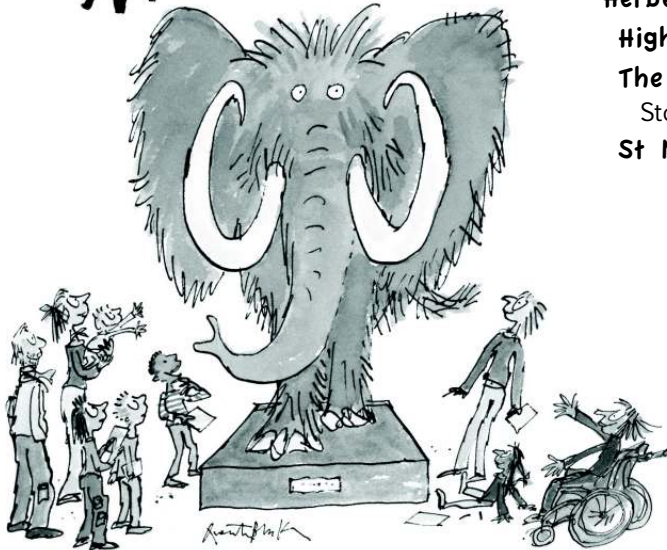
THE GUARDIAN FAMILY FRIENDLY MUSEUM AWARD with Kids in Museums

AWARD

Kids in Museums is a visitor-led charity working with museums and galleries to make them more family-friendly, in particular, to those who have never visited before. They have just announced their shortlist of museums for the Guardian Family Friendly Museum Award. Kids in Museums report "This is the biggest museum award in Britain. A panel of judges, chaired by Jenny Abramsky, Heritage Lottery Fund Chair, chose the shortlist of six museums from over 200 nominated by thousands of visitors."

The finalists of 2010 are...

Kids in
Museums



Beningbrough Hall and Gardens, York
Great North Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne
Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry
Highland Folk Museum, Newtownmore
The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery,
Stoke-on-Trent
St Nicholas Priory, Exeter

**"Smelly, dirty, messy,
noisy, tasty..."**

These are the common characteristics of the six museums on the shortlist for this year's award. From Inverness to Exeter, they provide sensual, hands-on experiences from which families emerge not only wiser, but grubbier. Although the museums' collections are diverse, from mummies to ceramics, not one of them is clean and clinical. At Beningbrough Hall, an 18th

century red brick mansion in York, hands get sticky from cooking edible insects. St Nicholas Priory, a Tudor town house in Exeter, asks visitors to help clean up, scrubbing their pewter plates with ground eggshells. The Herbert Museum in Coventry is proud of its pong; it asks visitors, 'What did a medieval toilet smell like? Sniff here to find out.' At Highland Folk Museum, visitors found chickens and ducks running around loose. Judges were particularly impressed at the Potteries Museum that families felt free to be noisy, chatty and cheerful, even being encouraged to sing nursery rhymes out loud as they went around the exhibitions. At the Great North Museum, visitors of all ages enjoyed designing shields in the Ancient Greek section, where they could also meet Pericles – a Greek Hoplite soldier who told them stories about his life and the battles he'd fought.

The winner will be announced in April.

Kids in Museums is very grateful for support from Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

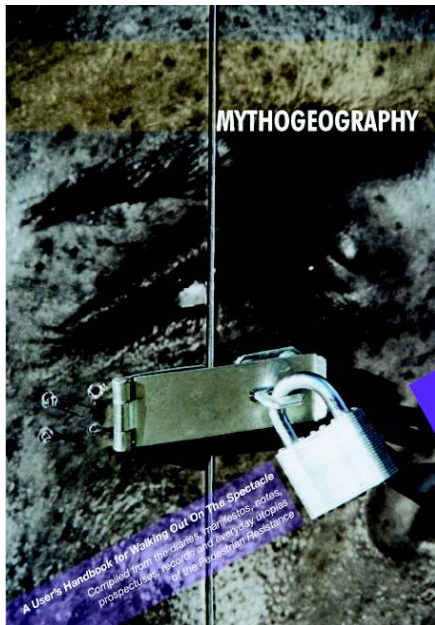
With thanks to Quentin Blake for the use of his wonderful mammoth!

"Congratulations to all the museums on the six strong shortlist of the Guardian Family Friendly Museum Award. This is testament to all the pioneering, innovative work being done museums throughout the country in not only welcoming but including families. Judges were particularly impressed with the way in which family and children's activities are no longer being squeezed into one corner, but are everywhere, throughout the museums, so the whole place belongs to everyone."

Dea Birkett, Director of **Kids in Museums**

MYTHO GEOGRAPHY BOOK

by Phil Smith



'Mythogeography', put simply, is a set of approaches to the world that teases out connections and journeys, celebrates the many-sidedness of things and sees the multiplicity of possible viewpoints not as a problem but as the pleasurable means for getting closer to truths.

The term 'mythogeography' was first used in the late 1990s by site-specific theatre makers Wrights & Sites to describe a response to sites that had been swamped by singular or restricted meanings. These were touristic, heritage or leisure sites where histories and atmospheres had been simplified to fit civic marketing priorities or commercial uses. In contrast, a mythogeographical approach exposed hidden or buried histories, marginalised stories, stories within stories, anomalies that did not quite fit the dominant narrative. It also invoked atmospheres, subjective responses, gossip, misunderstandings, dreams and associations as being as much parts of these sites as bricks, bodies and documents.

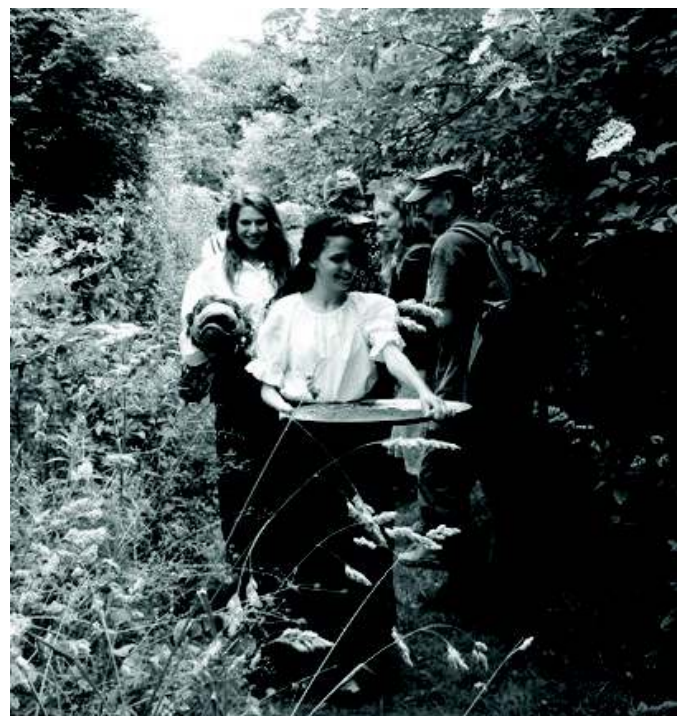
Sometimes the elements invoked by mythogeography are marginal in themselves – esoteric designs and symbols, for example – but more often they are the fruits of conventional disciplines reapplied to sites where they have been ignored: for example, reasserting the importance of geology to architecture (you see a limestone building differently when you think of it as billions of dead animals, as the absence of soft organs).

For a mythogeographical performance, what is most important is to engage an audience in experiencing a site from many viewpoints and, self-consciously, using their multiple senses.

Mythogeography is not just for experts but for anyone.

The National Trust's property "A la Ronde", near Exmouth in Devon, was built on the profits from the wine trade with Portugal. So, for a promenade performance at the house, Portuguese wine was shared, familiar and exotic vegetables were eaten on the site of the former kitchen garden and a search for a significant tiny flower was made with the audience. As part of this performance – 'Gardens Always Mean Something Else' (script and images available at www.mythogeography.com/2009/11/blog-post_23.html), I referenced a hidden narrative of apocalypse referenced in the building's design, its unrecognised connection to the origins of the concepts of the sublime and the picturesque, and called up the shadowy presence of a remembered tsunami in custom-made wallpaper.

The house at "A la Ronde" is, according to a "family tradition" reported by its third generation resident, modelled on the cathedral at Ravenna, which celebrates the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, notorious for his forced conversion of Jews. Rather more gently, part of the early nineteenth century development at "A la Ronde" included a complex of chapel, schoolroom and small houses for the accommodation of converted Jewesses and the Christian education of their children (this is now run by a private Trust and is not part of the National Trust's remit). The oak trees in the grounds of "A la Ronde", according to "family tradition", were only to be cut down for ships returning converted Jews to Palestine. All this was intended to encourage those circumstances that some Christians believed (and some still do believe) were required for the coming 'end times'.



BOOK

While, as part of my 'guiding' narrative, I referenced this eschatology, all the time two other performers were constructing symbols and images such as mirrors, doves and gazing upon the landscape. They were giving to the audience a vocabulary that the visitors would later use for themselves; for this 'walk' was constructed as a sensual and intellectual preparation of the audience for their entering the 'underwater' of the property's central room. This is an octagonal room (echoing Ravenna's eight-sided basilica) that is decorated with seaweed patterned wallpaper, and in its ceiling is a shell gallery. The effect on the visitor is of looking up through green water to a beach above. From this 'immersion' – referencing, consciously or unconsciously, the Parminster family's traumatic presence during the Lisbon earthquake and tsunami of 1755 – the audience then, one by one and unaccompanied by performers, stepped out of the house to walk the missing "wild path" to what remains of the site's picturesque prospect. (The very concept of sublime, mediated in the idea of the picturesque, arises from Immanuel Kant's writings on the 1755 events at Lisbon – this concept that informs the landscaping at "A la Ronde" is like the return of the repressed trauma symbolised at the centre of the house.)

Through this layering of overlapping narratives I was seeking to produce and provoke a mythogeographical audience who could simultaneously understand, inquire, experience, doubt and enjoy.

Mythogeography celebrates the anachronistic, the elusive and the incomplete qualities of museums and heritage sites. It can exploit the 'freezing' of time, the often inconsistent and eccentric framing and selection of objects, the professional covertness that is implied by the very idea of 'reserve collections', the unavoidable ambiguities and uncertainties of any attempt at historical narrative, the natural decay of things and the variable planes of temporality. (The way, for example, that in a display the settings and the objects can 'age' at different 'rates': a 1950s cabinet apparently more anachronistic than a two thousand year old bracelet). Some or all of this may be unhelpful to conservers and museum directors, but for the mythogeographer they are the tools and materials needed for setting the 'lives of things' in motion, provoking (rather than resolving) their multiplicitous histories.

Again, by embracing 'inauthenticities' such as the remnants of nineteenth century displays of wild animal skins, ghost stories or etymological mistakes, the mythogeographer seeks to set in motion the narratives of disgraced and discredited relics, not as part of a

cynical relativism, but in search of a History that is in orbit about its multiple and unstable facets: viewpoints, discourses, materials, signs. This is a History that is always in the process of being made, for which the arena (and touchstone) of interpretation is not the unchangeable "what really happened", but rather the variable distance between that unchangeable pastness and our attempts to tell it.

Interpreters can (and should!) use a mythogeographical approach. They often do so unintentionally. Even those who attempt a realist 'reconstruction' of the past have difficulty in bolting down the mythogeography. They may



A la Ronde

scrupulously reproduce appearances but there is no defence against an audience's suspicion that Marks and Spencer's undergarments are worn beneath the farthingale. And that an indistinct rumble is probably a distant 747 rather than the thump of trebuchets. And all that is OK. Such discordance is part of what we need to know about the world. A mythogeographical performance does not pretend that the 747 or the knickers are not there, but finds ways to connect their trajectories to the themes of the interpretation, welcoming such dissonances as rightful parts of any meaningful account of a site.

In the 'Mythogeography' book and website, I have drawn on the arts and ideas of many who make meanings from the movements of things – there is far more there than I can even hint of here – and have sought to weave them into their own centreless 'orrery'. Not as an end in itself, although I hope that both book and website are things of strange beauty, but as a resource for others to plunder for their own uses. Please, be my guests!

Phil Smith

The book and more information are available at www.mythogeography.com

PERFORMANCE

**“Quick, bring the washing in!
The theatre is coming!”**

MUSEUM THEATRE IN THE OPEN AIR MUSEUM HESSENPAK



Since the summer of 2008 a strange figure can be seen moving among the museum's visitors: a man wearing a blue uniform tunic with orange-red piping and a peaked cap bearing the Imperial Prussian Eagle and the cockade of the Province Hesse-Nassau. Shouldering his post bag, he rides his own reconstructed bicycle, wooden rims, mud guards and all, and uses his plunger brake to good effect by coming to a screeching standstill in front of a group of pupils.

Could it be that these are the pupils who were sent by their teacher to lug parcels, the man in uniform asks. And would they be so kind to help him to decipher the address on the letter? Sadly he has once again left his pince-nez on the wash table at home. Unfairly the old-fashioned cursive handwriting gives the pupils a hard time trying to read and they are sternly reprimanded to pay greater attention at school in the future. It's obvious: Rudi, the country postman, is out and about again. With his group he delivers the mail to the inhabitants of the "village" at the Open Air Museum Hessenpark.

In addition to the country postie there is Paul the night watchman who, armed with a torch, leads visitors through the museum during the dark evening hours and Marie the herb woman, who collects plants to make tinctures and teas for the local chemist. All of them belong to the newly created museum theatre. The cycle "Four Seasons

**"They slog away in the fields,
they cannot see the lines of
their hands because of the
calluses and they even carry the
sweat on their foreheads during
the night. Nevertheless, their
life is in God's hand and they
are trustfully depending on the
weather."**

Ibell, the Civil Servant

1929 – Life and Work in times of crisis" invites visitors to observe agricultural labour in accordance with seasonal changes. The effects and aftermath of the world-wide economic crisis of 1929 are also part of the play.

In 2009 a further project was launched - "Armut, Reichtum, Mensch und Tier" ("Rags and Riches - Humans and Animals"). It sheds light on agricultural developments, the effects of famine and the ensuing social changes in Hesse in the year of 1781.

For school groups, the visit begins with a play lasting one hour which is enacted at different stations in the Open Air Museum. The story is set at the end of a severe famine when the cultivation of potatoes is enforced by the authorities of the principality of Nassau-Usingen. Much to the disapproval of the civil servant Ibell, the farmers refuse to move away from their traditional rotation system. Since the tolls drive the market prices high, a fateful

conflict starts to develop. Due to the bold intervention of the schoolmaster the potato harvest is secured for the following winter.

Part of the following educational project is the cooking of a complete meal according to a historical recipe, the "Nastätter Leineweber" ("Nastätter linen weaver"). This is a simple 18th century poor man's dish in country areas. First of all the ingredients such as eggs, flour, milk, salt, parsley, potatoes and oil have to be collected. The

children follow the actors to the stables and enclosures to pick up the eggs and the milk and they learn about the animals as producers. The missing ingredients will be taken out of the storage rooms. Thereby they get to know about the preciousness of salt, a product which can easily be bought today.

Children are shown how flour and oil are produced on the fields, in the windmill, and they can see how the hand oil-press works. Through this they learn and understand how corn eventually becomes ready to use as food. The children have to light the fire in the stove using a flint and tinder. As soon as the ingredients for the "Linen Weaver" have been put together, the children themselves set to work boiling the potatoes, frying them in oil together with the egg-milk mixture and then seasoning this simple but delicious meal with parsley and salt.

By making this simple meal, the complex action necessary for the production of food in pre-industrial times is illustrated. Also the entwinement of the village's various production sites are recognised as a system, and the meaning of poor harvests for the country population is realistically experienced.

"But the nicest thing about the potato are her eyes. The tubers are in their form and with their eyes never boring."

Oliver Klaukein, Open Air Museum Hessenpark

With thanks to Iris von Stephanitz for her translation



"From Exhibit to Props"

Workshop/Training Day in Germany

15th & 16th May 2010

TRAINING

at the Open Air Museum Hessenpark near Frankfurt / Main, Germany

The Museum Theatre of the open air Museum Hessenpark and IMTAL-Europe are organising an international workshop in spring 2010. Workshop teachers are actors and directors with a long history of staging Museum Theatre. For the participants previous experience in acting or directing is not necessary in order to attend. A typical day begins with a warm-up followed by special workshops about theatre techniques in Museum Theatre, according to the theories of Stanislavski and Chekhov.

For advance reservation and information, contact:

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RESEARCH

To ACT OR NOT TO ACT

and what difference does it make anyway?

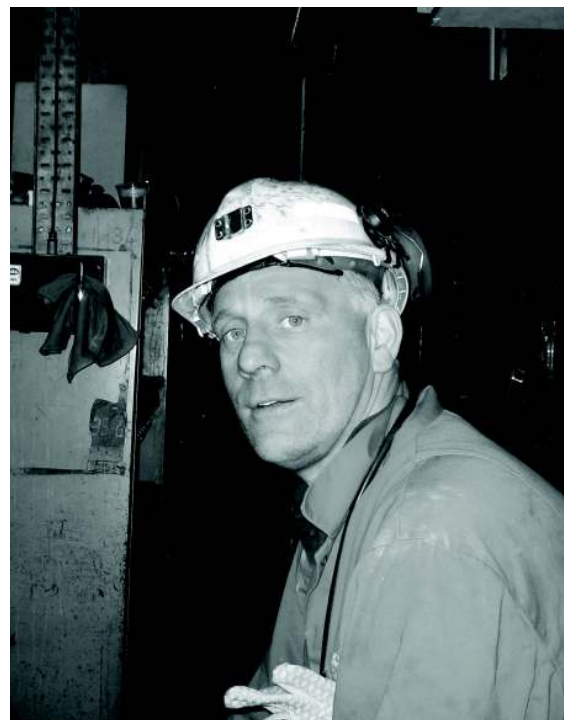
by Polly Williams

My PhD research project is a collaboration with the National Coal Mining Museum and the Department of Performance and Cultural Industries at Leeds University, and looks at a range of interpretive techniques that can be said to involve varying degrees of performance. I was given two 'modes' of interpretation to work with: the Underground Tour given by the museum's miner-guides and the 'living history interpretation' which is done by actor/interpreters. I am interested in the differences and similarities between these very different styles, one of which uses primarily first person interpretation (the living history interpretation) and the Tour which uses a third person style. Particularly interesting is the creation of historic characters or roles for the interpreter in both cases which seem to me to use varying amounts of acting and a range of styles. Here I am looking at how acting works as a form of interpretation and what effect the interpretation has on the performance.



It may seem obvious that first person interpretation requires acting and that third person doesn't. First person requires the presenter to take on the character of some real or fictional person from the past, and third person involves 'being yourself' and merely referring to people in the past. But, when you look at someone wearing a costume appropriate to the environment or display space doing an activity that looks like it once used to be carried out there, you cannot be sure whether they are acting or not. I think that there is a level of simulation or impersonation present in this representational practice that is something other than "just being yourself". This issue becomes quite complex when you are representing people who are a version of your former self. In the case of the National Mining Museum, ex-miners are employed to guide visitors around the underground areas of the museum. These men are costumed as miners but they are being museum guides referring to miners and so have a complex identity which is also that of 'living artefact'. The differences between first and third person are not as clear cut as you might think.

First person interpreters normally talk in the present tense as a historical character and assume that the visitor is in the same time and space – the 'I' and the 'you' of now. This means that the visitor may then have to suspend their disbelief to situate themselves in the interpreter's now, which isn't the same as the normal now. This is often referred to as 'going back in time'. This may either create a temporary real fictional environment, or if the visitor does not suspend disbelief, may create a sense of estrangement. The living history interpreters at the Mining Museum take on the role of characters who are a composite created both from archive material but, in some cases, from people's living memories – someone who might have existed at a point in time. The Pithead Baths attendant Fred takes visitors 'back' to 1938 and Mrs Lockwood to 1949. These are 'might have been' characters who seem familiar to visitors because they are not too far away in time and their performances make references to objects and practices that audiences may well remember or have heard older family members talk about. Third person interpreters (who are often in costume) relate to the past without creating a historical character or changing the boundaries of time and space, but, as I have mentioned, they can be said to 'stand in' for the people of the past and can produce a sense of the past 'coming alive'. All of which involves varying degrees of acting, even if it is not regarded as such by the interpreters in question or by visitors.



RESEARCH

My research suggests that there is, in practice, a real variety and diversity of techniques within both first and third person, which aren't always recognised or understood by the sites that use them. I explore in the chart below what I see as the differences, similarities and effects of first and third person interpretation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERPRETIVE PERFORMANCES

	FIRST PERSON	THIRD PERSON
Characterisation	A 'real' or 'typical' character is created by the costumed actor/interpreter who either completely inhabits this role or comes in and out of it in order to refer to it in the 3 rd person. This may be done in the style of 'referring to' their character or by creating a frame for the performance which they step in and out of.	Interpreters who may be costumed take the role of an informant, reporter or expert witness and provide a window into the past where knowledge can be seen or embodied in the case of demonstrations. May provide partial characterisation even if only a visual one.
Time & Space	The museum (or area within it) becomes a stage set and a fictional/imaginary world is conjured up through the character of the actor/interpreter, which may dominate the museum environment. Artefacts may become 'props'. The past becomes the present.	The world of the museum and its artefacts maintains its dominance. Artefacts remain as artefacts and the past retains its customary distance.
Acting & levels of realism	Complex acting may produce a sense of a real other person and may draw audiences into an empathetic engagement with the character. A more partial characterisation may require the audience to be more objective.	Makes museum space 'come alive' through presence of people being there and doing things. 'Simple acting' such as giving demonstrations and using artefacts, providing information and 'looking the part' may make the past seem more real.
Audience interaction/ 2nd person	Visitors become an audience. They may become immersed in the fictional world and may become co-performers taking on the role of another historical character, or never quite lose themselves, instead spectating or observing. They may participate in the form of questions and answers.	Visitors may become an audience. Their role ranges from passive (when watching and listening) to active when questioning or answering questions. Visitor role may be similar to that of pupil or apprentice. They may feel they are party to 'inside information'.

In addition to my research at the National Coal Mining Museum for England, I have also looked into performed interpretation at other sites with industrial collections. Quarry Bank Mill, Beamish, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry and Bradford Industrial Museum have all supplied me with data on the use of first and third person interpretation, demonstrations and tours, and I am currently in the process of analysing and writing up my results. I would conclude so far that performance works as a form of interpretation, particularly in a historic setting through:

- A kind of being** *Being* a person from another time – a kind of translator, or *referring* to a person from another time – a kind of informant. This provides an entry point into another past world, which in the case of first person interpretation, may be entered, or, in the case of third person interpretation, may be made visible
- A kind of doing** A re-living of certain activities which take the visitor on a visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile journey. This could take the form of a demonstration of skill, working machinery, a particular kind of technique that the visitor watches, or may take the form of a tour where the visitor travels through a historic environment encountering visual, sensory and verbal narratives.

Both of these involve using an enormous range of performance techniques: display, storytelling, costuming, characterisation or comedy to name a few, which draw attention in different ways, to the kind of activity or historic event being referred to.

Polly Williams

PhD student, School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds

INTERGENERATIONAL

Their Past Your Future - Remembrance Kitbags

ROYAL NAVAL MUSEUM & HARVEST HERITAGE ARTS AND MEDIA

Children who helped to create documentaries about war veterans were given the star treatment at a special film premiere at the Royal Naval Museum on 30th November 2009. Pupils from Stamshaw Junior School in Portsmouth produced the movies with the help of IMTAL Chair, Anna Farthing, Director of Harvest Heritage Arts and Media. The project was conceived and commissioned by RNM learning officer, Deborah Hodson.

The process used many drama and theatre techniques in order to prepare the children for the film making challenge. Role-playing coming to a strange place and being greeted with either courtesy or shyness ensured that the children developed the confidence and empathy to make the veterans feel at home in the museum. Role-play in the mode of Dorothy Heathcote's 'mantle of the expert' ensured that the children were fully engaged with their initial research and understood its importance in the documentary process. During the shooting, small teams of children took on the roles of interviewer, camera assistant, sound recordist, continuity & script supervisor and runner. Although they were often working well above and beyond the skills and knowledge that what would normally be expected of 10 year olds, the framework of drama-based creative play and long-form improvisation ensured that they stayed focussed for much longer periods than would be expected in the classroom. Accompanying teachers were very pleasantly surprised to see what the children were capable of in these very different learning situations.

Veterans aged from 30 to 90, from conflicts like D-Day, Bosnia and the Falklands, were interviewed by the children and spoke about their experiences, some of which were traumatic.

"I've thoroughly enjoyed participating in this project," said Falklands veteran Ray Metcalfe. "The children have been

brilliant and so keen to learn about all of our experiences. I believe it's so important that pupils have the opportunity to be able to talk in a relaxed and informal way to those who have been actually involved in conflicts rather than just reading about them."

The completed films will be made available on the museum's website and integrated into 'Remembrance Kitbags', a resource available to schools and community groups. The kitbags will include suggestions for imaginative and creative learning activities to stimulate reminiscence, enquiry, empathy and understanding.

The films' gala premiere was staged as a piece of participatory theatre in the Nelson Gallery. Museum

"A rapport was built up in spite of the great age gap," said Vic Walker, a D-Day veteran who took part. "Communication over a period of some 70 years has proved enjoyable and enlightening to children and veterans alike."

learning staff, curators, veterans and children all dressed up in black tie and evening gowns to walk up the red carpet, where they were greeted with a champagne glass of fizzy apple juice and a bag of popcorn. After viewing their films on the big screen, including a moving and amusing "making of" that reminded them of the process, they each received the

highly prized film-makers award - the Nellies - the Museum's own version of the Oscars and a DVD of their work. The project's finale was featured on ITV's Meridian Tonight programme. The video report can viewed on the Royal Naval Museum's learning website. www.royalnavalmuseum.org/learning_schools_projects_Nellies.htm

The "mantle of the expert" approach to using drama for learning is explained on this website www.mantleoftheexpert.com Harvest Heritage Arts and Media enjoy developing bespoke projects that harness drama and digital media for museum learning, engagement and interpretation.

Anna Farthing

www.harvestfilms.co.uk



TRAINING

“More of Less of the Verbal”

RUTH BRIANT, Freelance Museum Educator, recently joined IMTAL-Europe for this training day in London. Ruth reflects on how the experiences of the day relate to her work.

After attending the lively and interesting “Less of the Verbal” IMTAL Training Day, I hope to be able to implement the following into my work as a freelance museum teacher with school groups, in museums, SEN Schools and Hospital schools:

Be aware of the power of using visual, tactile, aural and sensory objects and props – such as feathers, spices, music - which can be enjoyed and experienced in a different way from having to name and describe them.

Think more inventively about preparing simple props such as basic sailing boats with a triangle for a sail, a waistcoat or top hat to identify different characters, or Russian dolls to be “unpacked” to tell a story about a family.

Explain the “rules”. Set the session by introducing the session leaders and what roles they are going to play and what will happen. Then everyone knows what to expect.

Allow children to participate as much or as little as they wish. We were asked to help make some music, or to help a character. But it was made easy for us to say “no”, or “not yet”, or work with a friend or just sit and watch for a while. Being asked if you would like to join in is very empowering for youngsters who have to rely on others all the time to be helped, moved, fed, etc.

Make sure the session has a variety of pace, and allow time for reflection. I feel sometimes our enthusiasm for our subject and our wish to give visitors a good experience means that we rush and cram the session to the brim, over-stimulating them. Allowing peaceful moments for reflection and re-charging the batteries is very beneficial for all involved. In museum sessions we usually provide different activities – sitting and listening, singing, moving around, handling an object, drawing and writing, but silent and calm moments are often missing. Finally, it was really special to have “live” music played for us. It added to the quality and magic of the drama we were observing and becoming deeply involved in. Sadly, if, like me, you have no musical ability, it may be difficult to achieve this!

I believe that it would be relatively easy to introduce these practices into museum sessions. I feel these simple changes would help reduce our reliance on “verbal” interpretation which can become a barrier for many children.

Ruth Briant



The Museums Association Annual Conference and Exhibition takes place this year in Manchester, 4-6 October 2010. It is the UK's biggest gathering of museum and gallery professionals.

The full conference programme and booking details will be available in May. Please see the MA website after 14 May 2010 for full details of this year's conference.
www.museumsassociation.org/conference

**MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION**



PERFORMANCE

VICTORIAN STREET THEATRE

at Kirkgate, York with Chris Cade

York Castle Museum is a social history museum that explores everyday life from the 1600s to today. York Museums Trust, which also includes The Yorkshire Museum and gardens, York St. Mary's and York Art Gallery, is an institutional member of IMTAL (Europe). Jim Butler, Learning Manager at York Castle Museum contacted me to arrange a performance of 'Christmas at the Castle' in Kirkgate, the world famous Victorian Street re-constructed in the former prison and opened in 1938. Dr. John Kirk had visited open-air museums in Scandinavia and was inspired to display commonplace objects, 'bygones' from his own collection, in their context within original shop fronts and period rooms. Kirkgate, named after him, is the oldest re-created street in any museum in Britain. Would the cobbled street be a suitable context for the Dickens' classic, 'A Christmas Carol?' It would be traditionally decorated for the festive season and has been the venue for a Christmas carol concert for many years outside of normal museum opening hours. The costumed carol singers use stage blocks to raise them up and the paying audience are seated in rows. Could the street be a stage and an auditorium without a dividing of the twain with visitors free to come and go as they choose? As ground-breaking director Peter Brook wrote in 1968, 'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and that is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged'. An act of museum theatre was thus to be engaged: Victorian Street Theatre!

For the last five years, I have worked regularly in the same space delivering a Key Stage 2 programme called 'Troubled Times'. I play a street trader in a promenade along Kirkgate, pointing out the rich and poor divide from the point of view of the loveable rogue. The story unfolds as we journey along. Circumstances dictate action, culminating in an accusation of theft from the toy shop proprietor, my second character.

The alleged 'crime' is investigated by a quick change into a policeman and finally I preside as a judge with the

school group taking on the role of the jury charged with weighing up the evidence and ultimately deciding the costermonger's fate. The Law in 1899, when the story is set, says he is innocent until proven guilty. The verdict varies.

Knowing the street and having experienced the general public's interest in these sessions, I was confident that Charles Dickens' evergreen story would not only suit the street but would also offer live interpretation of it. It is a perfect setting for the quintessential Victorian Christmas tale. My only wish was for permission to go behind the shop frontage façade and appear on a balcony, looking

down into the street, for the ghost visitation sequence of the tale. Permission was granted and a twelve day booking was confirmed, up to and including Christmas Eve, with five performances a day.

For Christmas 2008, I had taken my own adaptation of 'A Christmas Carol' to Temple Newsam House in Leeds and it worked, with family groups, in the grandeur of the dining

room. I was back there for one evening again in 2009. It only took a few adjustments to make that script fit for purpose for Kirkgate.

I would take on multiple roles returning to storytelling in between. I would play Ebenezer Scrooge, the ghost of Jacob Marley and the three spirits of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet to Come. I would need willing volunteers to wear hats provided for the roles of Bob Cratchitt, Mrs Cratchitt, Tiny Tim, nephew Fred, fiancée Belle, the gentleman collecting for the poor and destitute and the boy in the street. Reassurance was needed that I would say their 'lines' on their behalf, unless, as a few did, they knew the story so well and wanted to speak for themselves. There were also a few personal props required: a quill, a ledger, a collecting tin, a candle and, of course, a crutch. The Museum also provided some chains and hooded gowns for the ghosts, a 'turkey', some paper party hats and chocolate 'gold' coins for the children after Scrooge's transformation.



VICTORIAN STREET THEATRE cont.

The only theatrical 'staging' beyond the access to the upper level involved the placing of two artefacts from the collection: a Victorian teacher's desk and high-backed chair in the street for Bob Cratchitt as if in Scrooge and Marley's counting house at the very beginning and end of the story.

The 'audience' was transient in that the visitors to York Castle Museum follow a route around the former prison and arrive at one end of Kirkgate and depart at the other but are free to wander and backtrack once there. The street was, as always, peopled by costumed third person interpreters from the museum's regular staff, usually shop-based, but for the Christmas period some were also employed as street sellers with candle-lit stalls of festive goods which could be purchased for a replica Victorian penny after changing money at the Victorian bank. The exchange rate being £1 to 1d. A 'policeman' patrolled and the 'toy shopkeeper' offered rides on a rocking horse outside of his shop. Christmas carols played quietly in the background. The lighting was subdued. As visitors meandered beneath the gas lamps and the evergreen garlands decorated with red ribbon, it was indeed like a street scene from a Victorian Christmas card.

I gathered an audience at set times with a 'roll up' call at either end of the street and invited visitors to listen to the story. Once on board I distributed roles and hats to those comfortable in taking them. Storytelling mode through reported speech allowed for me to skirt round any untaken parts as required. The tale is so familiar to so many that there was the opportunity for almost choral speaking at times with the best loved lines. Generally speaking there are those who like to participate and those who do not but are happy for others to do so; both children and adults. More often than not all the parts and the respective hats were spoken for. The audience stood or sat on the cobbles. Some stayed at a safe distance. Others were eager to be up close. The story could begin.

It is business as usual for the 'tight fisted, squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old miser' on Christmas Eve, despite distractions from well-wishers. Bob is given Christmas day off, begrudgingly by his master, but told in no uncertain terms that he is expected in at 9 o'clock sharp on Boxing Day. As Scrooge sets off home from his premises 'as if it were any other night', the audience can follow on a short promenade along the street to the door of the glassware shop where Ebenezer thinks he sees the ghostly face of his former partner who had died 'seven years ago that very day' in the knocker. On closer inspection it is only his own reflection. I then unlock the 'Haberdashery' shop front door as if it is to Scrooge's own meagre quarters and disappear behind the shop frontage facade, initially still in role with further mutterings of 'Merry Christmas...humbug!' but then it's back to projected storytelling as I climb a step ladder up to the higher level, out of sight, talking through a quick change from top hat and frock coat into night cap and night shirt.

PERFORMANCE

I appear with a candle in the classic pose on the balcony above the toy shop as if in the bedroom. I assume the roles (and robes) of the ghosts whilst still giving Scrooge's reactions to each, through to his waking up with a start and joyously discovering that he is "alive and well". I then 'draw back the curtains and open the window' and look down into the street, questioning the little boy as to what day it is and then sending him off "to the poulterer's on the corner" to collect the prize turkey, the one as big as him (in reality, a sack full of feathers). I re-dress and climb down the ladder singing 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen' before re-appearing in Kirkgate to pay the boy a 'florin', give directions for it to be sent to the Cratchitt family, accept the Christmas dinner hospitality of nephew Fred, distribute party hats and chocolate coins, and play 'blind man's buff'.

Come Boxing Day, Bob is, of course, a full eighteen minutes late and Scrooge, behind a familiar scowl, chastises his poor clerk before announcing that he is about to raise his salary and a discussion of his affairs will be held that very afternoon over a "steaming hot bowl of punch". Tiny Tim is fit and as well as can be expected and delighted at his father's upturn in fortune. He has the final say with the famous last words of the story (altogether now!) "Merry Christmas! God bless us, everyone".

'A Christmas Carol' in twenty five minutes was warmly received by more than twelve hundred visitors over the course of the performances at York Castle Museum. It was a great privilege to deliver it in such a prestigious setting seventy one years after Kirkgate opened and led the way in modern museum interpretation. I hope Dr. John Kirk would have approved of the use of his street as a stage, of Kirkgate becoming a venue for Victorian Street Theatre!

Chris Cade



Chris Cade is a freelance actor and storyteller working in museums, heritage sites and schools across Yorkshire.

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NEXT EDITION of IMTAL-European Insights will be out in Autumn 2010. Read about...

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Can you find fifteen words that relate to live interpretation & museum theatre?

A	L	K	I	T	B	E	V	O	M
M	I	C	D	I	V	T	L	U	P
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