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EUROPEAN INSIGHTS

from the INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM THEATRE ALLIANCE - EUROPE

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European Affiliate of the International Museum Theatre Alliance

Mini-Conference, Host Weekend – Northern Ireland

The next IMTAL-Europe meeting promises to be a bit special. For not only is it our first visit to Northern Ireland, but we are in the process of setting up a weekend 'mini conference' with a chance to see the sites and interpreters of two members in action – the Palace Stables Heritage Centre and the Ulster-American Folk Park.

As well as spending a day at each site, there will be seminar and training sessions on a variety of topics relevant to members – for example Keith Ducklin of the Royal Armouries in Leeds will be presenting a session on period swordplay. A full programme of events will be circulated with the Spring 2004 edition of the newsletter in March.

The dates of this event are Saturday May 22nd and Sunday May 23rd 2004. We are aiming to keep costs as low as we can to encourage as many members to attend as possible, and a list of accommodation and travel possibilities will also be included with the next edition of the newsletter.

For now, keep those dates free, and we hope to see as many members there as possible for what promises to be a great weekend.

This edition of the newsletter profiles our host institutions for the weekend, with a piece from Robert Forshaw on the Palace Stables, and Evelyn Cardwell on the Ulster-American Folk Park. We hope these articles whet your appetite!

Directory Addenda, Errata.

As always with a publication of the nature of the IMTAL-Europe Directory, as soon as we go to press, amendments are necessary. You'll find enclosed in this edition of Insights a sheet containing details of addresses of two members who have recently moved, two new institutional members and two new individual members. Please add this to your directory and you will be bang up to date! In addition, we erroneously credited two interpreters from Guernsey Museums and Galleries with working for Ironbridge. Versatile though they are, they are incapable of being in two places at once. Lynne Ashton gives full details about their photograph (page 7 of the Directory) on page 2, overleaf.

Photo Opportunity!

We would like to take this opportunity to apologise for the mistaken photo-credit in this year's edition of the IMTAL-Europe Directory. Efforts on our part to find out the names of the interpreters at Ironbridge had yielded no light and the reason became clear after our generalised photo-caption. The interpreters were from Guernsey Museums & Galleries! Lynne Ashton, Access & Learning Manager takes up the story... Margaret le Cras and Fred Gallienne are retired Guernsey-born residents who work part time as attendants in our galleries. They were interested in taking part in our 'Living History' programme and a script was adapted to meet their particular skills. To highlight the background to the collection they have taken on the

characters of 'Martha' who is a companion to Mrs Lukis, the wife of the founder of the Museum and 'Daniel' who has come to town to bring an item that may be of interest to Mr Lukis for his Museum. Daniel comes from the country parish of Torteval where he is a farmer and his first language is Norman – French (the local 'patois'). Martha who also came from the 'country' has moved up in the world, and prefers to speak English. They recognise each other as cousins by marriage and discover that they are now both widowed. The resulting flirtation and lapses into their first language as they comment on Mr Lukis and his museum are greatly appreciated and enjoyed by our visitors.

They perform in two presentations 'A Gift for Mr Lukis' and 'Mr Victor Hugo - la!' using the same characters.

So once again, apologies for getting it wrong – but the above description has to be better than a one line credit!

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Hartlepool Arts & Museum
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Individual:

Maureen Parkinson, Interpreter

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Articles/ Letters/ Ads/ Announcements

all contributions for the next issue by March 7th
to ashmoreacts@yahoo.co.uk

Where History Comes Alive!

by Robert Forshaw

Founded in 1992, the Palace Stables Heritage Centre is a museum devoted to providing an enjoyable and educational visitor experience of an authentic and relaxing 18th century estate, providing opportunities to learn about what life was like in 18th century Ireland through audio visual displays and historic tours. Its grounds include the old stables to the Archbishop of Armagh's Palace, built in 1770, set in 300 acres of beautiful countryside on the outskirts of the "Ecclesiastical Capital of Ireland." The educational mission of the museum, at this time, was to provide a structured programme of activities based upon the National Curriculum.

These activities included, "Boxes in the Attic" (a tour through the Georgian house) and "Tree Tales" (an ecology tour).

In 1998, the Palace Stables Heritage Centre became the location of Ireland's only full-time, first person historical interpretation programme. The Living History Department was set up in cooperation with the Armagh City & District Council through the expert advice and training of Past Pleasures, after the Council had conducted site

visits to Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation. They felt that this form of museum theatre would best suit the Heritage Centre and the museum's goals of enhancing the visitors' experience of an authentic 18th century estate. The Living History programme was originally to focus primarily on interpreting 18th-century Irish life for daytime visitors and education groups. However, in the last 6 years this programme has evolved to cover all areas of Irish history from the Celtic period up to World War II. It now provides a broad range of educational services as well as delivering evening programmes for corporate entertainment and other historical/tourism venues. The Living History Department has also taken the forefront in training new interpreters to perform in other museums throughout Northern Ireland.

In 2001 we joined IMTAL-Europe and from that time we have seen a vast expansion of our programme. Our problem now is being able to meet the demand being placed upon us by potential clients and by the commitments that we have through our ever expanding

corporate entertainment, schools and daytime programmes. IMTAL allowed us to gain the confidence to take our programme further and expand it bringing in new interpretative techniques and having the confidence to know that what we are doing is of a very high standard.

One area that we have recently developed is the use of historical interpretation as a tool for conflict resolution. 3 years ago, we were approached by the County Museum in the town of Newry in Northern Ireland. Newry, located on the border of the Republic of Ireland, has often been a hotbed of opposing political views. The museum requested that we develop a programme about The Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland of 1801 appropriate for schoolchildren between 13 & 18 years of age. As this was part of the Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) programme, set up in Northern Ireland to bring children of Protestant and Catholic backgrounds together to understand their shared history, we knew that our audience would be divided and would have very different opinions on this shared piece of history.

Continued on page 7

The Ulster American Folk Park in Co. Tyrone, N. Ireland is an open-air museum which depicts 18th and 19th century emigration from Ulster to America. The Park consists mainly of original buildings and is divided into 3 main areas; the Old World the emigrants left, the Ship Gallery which represents their transatlantic voyage and the New World, especially frontier America.

Opened in 1976, it initially concentrated on the story of the Mellon family who left Tyrone in 1818 and settled in Western Pennsylvania. The thatched cottage of the Mellon homestead provided the inspiration for the museum and still remains today on its original site as one of the key attractions in the museum. Later emigrant homes to be added to the exposition were the boyhood home of Archbishop John Hughes (Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York) and the

Living History at the Ulster American Folk Park

by Evelyn Cardwell



Looking outward from the Western Pennsylvania Log Farmhouse

Tyrone home of Robert Campbell, who spent 10 years as a fur trapper and trader in the Rocky Mountains in the early 19th century before settling in St Louis, Missouri. These buildings are complemented by a weaver's cottage, a school, a one-roomed cabin, and 2 churches.

The American area features a progression of immigrant buildings ranging from a log cabin to two-storey log farmhouses, and the associated outbuildings such as a smoke house, corn crib, springhouse and Pennsylvania barn.

Linking the two main areas is the ship gallery with a recreation of the quayside and emigrant quarters of an early 19th century sailing brig. Leading to and from the Ship Gallery are two small streets, with exhibits such as a working print shop, 19th century chemist, a spirit grocer and an American general store. An indoor exhibition "Emigrants" provides a comprehensive historical background to the outdoor site.

The museum currently attracts around 130,000 visitors each year from a broad range of backgrounds, including an increasing number of American roots tourists. From small beginnings, it now employs a staff of eighty, about half of whom are part-time guide/demonstrators.

Shortly after it opened in 1976, the Folk Park began to recruit guides and demonstrators on a casual basis with a view to developing a programme of 3rd person costumed interpretation. This was, as far as we can ascertain, one of the earliest examples in the United Kingdom and Ireland, of the introduction of a daily programme using costumed interpretation in a museum, a model that owes much to the success of such methods at Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, and Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia.

The initial emphasis in the Ulster American Folk Park was on daily life in Ulster and America, with activities such as open-hearth cookery, wool spinning and forgework, coupled with explanations of the emigrant experience. As the museum has grown in size this method has been increasingly used over the years and still remains the main method of daily interpretation on the site. In tandem with this an active programme for school visitors has been developed, ranging from craft workshops and thematic studies to role-plays and Native American activities.

In the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, a series of special events was developed. One of the earliest was a programme of traditional Halloween customs on the evening of 31st October. Now much expanded, this still remains the museum's most successful event, extending over 3 nights, with a capacity crowd of around 4,000 people participating in the torchlight tours.

Using the thatched cottages and church buildings of rural Ulster,

19th century wedding customs are explored through re-enactments, giving the visitor a chance to find out about the matchmaker, the dowry and "the race for the bottle". An American frontier wedding, set among the log cabins and wooden farmhouses, provides opportunities to compare and contrast experiences on both sides of the Atlantic. The American wake, usually held on St Patrick's Day, recreates the farewell party for the departing emigrant,



The Return of Thomas Mellon

with a mixture of dialogue, food, costume, music, dance and action. The museum has also established its own Mummers Group, who each Christmas season re-enact this traditional folk drama to visiting schools, families and local residential care homes.

One of the highlights of the Ulster American Folk Park is indisputably the birthplace of Thomas Mellon, who, after a successful career as a lawyer and judge in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, founded the Mellon Bank, still a prominent institution in that state. Thomas Mellon, at the age of 69, made a return visit to the home he left as a five year old boy and later described the event in his autobiography. One of the museum's more ambitious ventures

has been to recreate this visit, and through it, to present Mellon's life story in 1st person context. The experience was enhanced by the fact that one of our costumed guides bears a remarkable physical resemblance to Judge Thomas Mellon and was a natural choice for the role of Mellon, regardless of any initial reservations he might have held about the role.

Whilst the museum relies heavily on its guiding staff and other enthusiastic employees to deliver its interpretive

programme, we have also sustained very successful partnerships with a number of historical re-enactment societies, who have provided scenes from the American Civil War, the American Revolutionary Wars, French and Indian Wars, and Eastern Woodland Indian Society. The traditional log buildings of 18th and 19th century eastern America provide an authentic backdrop for these events, which are supplemented with on-site commentaries and historical lectures for those visitors who wish to delve more deeply into the topic. A substantial library, based in the Centre for Migration Studies at the Park, provides access to more detailed information on all the themes of the museum. In addition, an emigrant database, consisting of transcriptions of over 30,000 documents such as emigrant letters, shipping lists, newspaper advertisements and journals enables staff to draw on first hand accounts to support their activities.

Past Pleasures Ltd

is looking for bright, lively graduates of all ages, to work in sumptuous period dress in splendid period palaces.

Past Pleasures is the UK's leading historical events and interpretation company. We have provided costumed interpreters, storytellers and guides for museums and heritage sites across the country for over ten years.

For further information, please visit our website,

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Past Pleasures is now recruiting full and part-time staff for contracts beginning in March 2004.

———— Applicants must have: —————

A degree, ideally in history or a related subject

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Research skills

Experience/qualifications in the field of performance, museums or heritage interpretation are also desirable.

Please send a CV, photograph and 350 words on your preferred historical period to Unit 2, Capital Park, Combe Lane, Wormley, Godalming, Surrey GU8 5SY.

Applications must arrive no later than 6 January 2004.

So where do we go from here? The museum has aspirations to expand its remit. In storage waiting reconstruction, are 2 original emigrant homesteads from the state of Virginia which are part of a larger New World development. In addition, the brief of the museum (now part of National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland) has been extended to represent the global picture of Irish emigration. This enlarged museum will present more opportunities and challenges for interpretive innovation. Whilst 1st person interpretation and museum drama beckon increasingly and we plan to develop this further in the future, we will no doubt retain the key elements of daily interpretation which work so well at present. Variety in presentation remains for us the most effective way to meet the needs of our visitors, giving us the option to select the most appropriate methods for the themes under consideration and for our anticipated audiences.

We look forward to welcoming IMTAL Conference to Northern Ireland in May 2004 and in particular to the Ulster American Folk Park (website www.folkpark.com).

To date, this has been a most successful project. From survey forms distributed at the end of the performance we have been able to gauge what reaction there has been towards the event. Not only has the audience enjoyed the performances, but more importantly, their attitudes towards people with opposing political views have shifted. Feedback from the EMU project (education for mutual understanding) suggests that many students desire to reevaluate the stereotypes they formerly held. They have started the process of respecting an alternative viewpoint to their own. This positive reaction was re-enforced by letters received from the venues hosting the event and from the EMU project director himself. This is a highly gratifying result and something we feel can significantly benefit the divided society in which we live today.

From this particular event we have developed other performances using the same structure that we used to develop the Act of Union debates, for other conflictual aspects of Irish History i.e. The Flight of the Earls 1607, The Trial and Execution of Robert Emmett 1803, The Treaty of Mellifont 1603.

As part of the Virginia IMTAL conference in August 2003 Ronald Kane & I presented a seminar on this whole area which seemed to be very well received and as a result of this Plimoth Plantation in New England USA, and ourselves will be presenting a seminar at the American Association of

Museums Conference in New Orleans in May 2004 on the same theme, in the hopes of showing that this format could be used as a template for other museums working in a divided society and having to deal with conflict resolution issues.

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