



EUROPEAN INSIGHTS

from the INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM THEATRE ALLIANCE - EUROPE

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Editor's Corner - Verity Walker

MAY MINI-CONFERENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND TAKES SHAPE

It seemed such a long time ago that we first planned our May 22/23 meeting in Northern Ireland – but suddenly it's only a couple of months away!

We have had good attendance confirmations already (thanks everyone who has e-mailed me – please do so if you're a "maybe" who's turning into a "definite" too!).

We want this to be a relaxed and informal weekend with plenty of time for the networking and discussions which are usually the most valuable part of any conference. There will be no charge for IMTAL members for attending, non-members will be charged £15.00 which is deductible from the price of membership if joining over the mini-conference weekend.

All at the IMTAL-Europe board would like to take our hats off to the teams at the Palace Stables Heritage Centre and the Ulster-American Folk Park for organizing things so quickly.

Palace Stables Heritage Centre are arranging transport from Belfast International Airport to Armagh for anyone arriving on the afternoon of Friday 21st May. To ensure your safe collection – and hopefully safe delivery (though Robert Forshaw, our driver, makes no promises!) please email me your scheduled flight arrival time. In the event of anyone arriving late or encountering any other problems, Robert's mobile number is 0774 8677168. After the rigours of travel, Friday night will allow a chance to unwind with some musical entertainment and conviviality at a local hostelry.

Here is an outline of the mini-conference (exact timings may alter nearer the time, a final conference programme will be issued in early May).

Saturday May 22nd:

Arrival at Palace Stables by 10.30. Day's activities will include visiting the stables to see interpreters in action, a repeat of the Palace Stables' team's Virginia conference presentation and a workshop on swordplay by Keith Ducklin from the Royal Armouries. In the evening, a period Murder

Mystery has been arranged by the Palace Stables, which will involve the audience as investigators – a 2 course meal will be provided and there will also be a pay bar – which hopefully will not cloud your judgment!

Sunday May 23rd:

Free transport will leave Palace Stables at 10.00 for arrival at the Ulster-American Folk Park by 10.45. Coffee will be provided on arrival. As well as an opportunity to explore the Folk park and meet its team of craft demonstrators and interpreters, the day's activities will also include a presentation of storytelling from the Past Pleasures team, a workshop on detail in live interpretation, and a discussion on the potential of the Folk Park for on-site theatre and live interpretation. Transport will return to Palace Stables (or straight to Belfast International, if the majority of delegates need this) by 4pm.

We already have about a dozen members signed up for what should be a great weekend, including some of our very newest members, from Holland (see next page). We hope that you will come and join us.

As mentioned before, the mini-conference is free of charge, but apart from the dinner on Saturday night and coffee on Sunday morning, delegates will need to buy their own meals and drinks. Accommodation details are provided on the enclosed sheet.

For any other details, please e-mail Verity on verity@interpretation.com, or for local information, e-mail Robert Forshaw on robertforshaw@hotmail.com.

If you're wavering, go on, book that flight! You know you want to – and there are still some killer flight prices available.

AGM July – Wigan Pier
This year's Annual General Meeting will be hosted by Wigan Pier in July – date yet to be confirmed. If any of you are interested in standing for Director this year, then we urge you to put yourself forward for election. After 5 years on the board, and a run as Company Secretary, Andrew Ashmore has

decided that the demands of running a fledgling business are preventing him from giving IMTAL-Europe as much time and attention as he would like, and so he will be standing down at the AGM. That means there will be at least one directorial position to be filled, so if you can devote some of your time and attention to IMTAL-Europe, we'd love to hear from you!

Apology

Robert Forshaw, Living History Co-Ordinator at the Palace Stables Heritage Centre, Armagh, would like to offer his sincere apologies for omitting to mention the excellent assistance and support provided by Suzanne Allen and the staff at Llancaiach Fawr in his article on Palace Stables in the last edition of the IMTAL-Europe newsletter. It was through their assistance that our original staff were trained and employed. He hopes that this honest mistake has not caused offence to Suzanne or her team.

Current Board:

Andrew Ashmore - (Director)
andrew ashmore & associates

Chris Bailey - (Treasurer) Interpreter

Jo Kemp - (Company Secretary) Nottingham City
Museums and Galleries

Verity Walker - (Director) Interpretation

Mark Wallis - (Director) Past Pleasures

Welcome new members

Institutional:

Artemis Cultural & Education
Services

Contact: Jackie Lee.

Glastonbury Abbey
Contact: Chris Laing

The Association of Drama
Educators, the Netherlands.

Contact: Diane Carp.

Individual:

David Mosley.

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IMTAL-Europe can be reached at 020 7815 1336 or by email: andrew.ashmore@bfl.org.uk IMTAL-Europe's website is at www.imtal-europe.org

*Postal (and registered) address:
IMTAL-Europe, c/o Nottingham
Museums & Galleries, Castle Museum,
Nottingham NG1 6EL.
Tel: (0115) 915 3691;
Fax: (0115) 915 3653.
Email: jok@ncmg.demon.co.uk*

Articles/ Letters/ Ads/ Announcements

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

I to the hills will lift mine eyes...

*Verity Walker writes
on relocating Interpretation
from England to Scotland.*

As this newsletter has something of a Celtic feel to it anyway, what with the mini-conference coming up, Andrew suggested using the opportunity to give you my impressions of working up here in Scotland rather than down south.

As many of you may know, I have moved recently from Marlow in Buckinghamshire back to my "roots" on the Black Isle in the Scottish Highlands. And yes it was nearly Brittany instead, but somehow when it came to it the lure of home was too strong. In any case Loic Benot, an IMTAL Europe friend and colleague, is now busily developing Interpretation France, which probably makes more sense anyway.

So my little girls are both settled in school and nursery, our Marlow house is (almost) sold and my husband's finding a suitable pied-à-terre in England (for him and occasionally me to work from in the south). Meanwhile I am buying a small house here in Fortrose, a big plot with fabulous views, and am beginning to dream about extensions already (how sad is that?). New contact details will follow towards the end of April.

Life is certainly more relaxed, but distances are much greater for travelling to clients. I am regularly navigating the dreaded Inverness to Fort William road, which wiggles along Loch Ness and the Great Glen and makes for a sea-sick drive. One is also liable to encounter car-borne monster-hunters gazing transfixed at a bit of floating weed (rather than the road) around every bend. It's actually sometimes easier and cheaper to fly to London for a meeting (cheap flights out of Inverness for Luton, more expensive for Heathrow and Gatwick) than to drive to see a "local" client - if they're the other side of Scotland reachable only by a passing-places road!

I am currently working on two contracts as an interpretive planner/facilitator based in the Great Glen, involving working with people from Highland Council Rangers Service, British Waterways and the Forestry Commission - and loving it. This is based around static rather than live interpretation, along the three Great Glen Ways (canal, bike trail and walking route). I'm also working with BW to help consultant Michael Glen (who administers the Association for Heritage Interpretation too) produce an interpretive map for Fort Augustus, a delightful little honeypot village at the end of Loch Ness, complete with a topiary Nessie and baby, nice tea-rooms and a staircase of locks.

The Caledonian Canal will

certainly feature in future live interpretation I develop for British Waterways, as it can be interpreted in so many ways, large and small: as a life-line to an ailing nation recovering from bloody civil war; as the heel of the English oppressor; as Telford's astonishing feat of technology; or as the reason Wullie MacDonald can't get on with his shearing. And there is a cracking British Waterways archive for the canal, newly-curated, held in the archives in Inverness.

Live interpretation is already used up here, mainly at the battlefield sites (I have seen some especially good work at Culloden) and in the country houses (the usual above/below stairs), but it could be extended considerably. I want to set up project which uses community-based live interpretation to enhance local people's feeling of belonging to a place. I talked up this concept like mad at a contract interview a few days ago, probably with rather too much enthusiasm, and after I'd finished the chairman then said "er, we have a collection of 3000 thimbles here, dear, so how do you feel we might display them?" No, I didn't get that one - but I am nothing if not an optimist!

The natural environment too has huge potential, both from the point of view of explaining the macro through the micro but also helping bridge gaps and explain controversy: the Black Isle was almost totally united in opposition to a

recent GM crops trial here and suddenly had its own protest camp.

Meanwhile the live interpretation research goes on, of course. I'm currently developing a pilot evaluation scheme for the National Maritime Museum, which will look at using a focus group approach to evaluating live interpretation and on-site theatre. This is aimed at being a more economical approach than large-scale evaluation looking at hundreds of responses.

What do I miss from the south? People, naturally (but it's surprising how many people fancy a holiday in the Highlands! Just form an orderly queue, please, and bring a paintbrush). "My" National Trust properties (Cliveden, Hughenden, Greys Court). The little dress shop whose size 14 always fitted me! But apart from that, one look outside my window at the hills and the sea is enough to convince me that I have done the right thing.

Shaking your head because you think this is an unashamed and gratuitous plug for Interpretation? You'd be right, of course. So why not make yours the next? We'd like to put one member profile into every newsletter we issue, so e-mail yours to Andrew Ashmore for the next one now!

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