



EUROPEAN INSIGHTS

from the INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM THEATRE ALLIANCE - EUROPE

Summer 2004
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European Affiliate of the International Museum Theatre Alliance

Editor's Corner - Andrew Ashmore

From Northern Ireland to the AGM

As I put together this edition of the newsletter, I've taken the chance to look back over the previous 20 and enjoyed re-reading some excellent articles from a wide range of contributors. I'll be standing down as Director after the AGM at Wigan Pier, and will be looking forward to reading the newsletters that follow – good luck to the new editor!

I'm also desperately trying to finish off the 2004 Directory in time to get it out to members at the AGM – it's definitely that busy time of year again! If you haven't sent me your directory entry yet, please do so asap – as only about half of them have been returned so far – and that's a lot of chasing up to do! Email it to

ashmoreacts@yahoo.co.uk
or mail it to

**4 Bushy Court, 20 Upper
Teddington Road, Hampton
Wick, Surrey KT1 4DU.**

Either way do it soon, and include some photographs of projects in action if you can as we're trying to make this year's edition as photogenic as possible.

Northern Ireland

The mini-conference in Northern Ireland was blessed with marvellous weather, a great opportunity to see two institutional members' interpreters in action, an interesting programme of events and absolutely fantastic hospitality. On behalf of all those who were there, a great big thank you to Robert Forshaw, Ronald Kane and the interpreters at the Palace Stables, and to Evelyn

Cardwell and her team at the Ulster American Folk Park. The turnout was also impressive for our first meeting 'across the water' – and it would be great to have a meeting and host day in Europe next year, if one of our Swedish, German, French, or Dutch members might be interested in hosting...?

Palace Stables gave us an excellent session that they performed for the American Association of Museums in New Orleans earlier in May – those of us who saw the piece on the Act of Union, and heard what a controversial subject this still is today were most impressed by the way the subject was covered. By using the exact words from the Parliamentary debates at the time, the presentation was both a fascinating piece of history, and could not be accused of bias. If you couldn't make it to New Orleans or Northern Ireland, you can still access information about the presentation and useful information, tips and suggestions for setting up a conflict resolution programme at a site set up by Plimoth Plantation in the US. The address is:

www.plimoth.org/ConflictResolutionSession.asp

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Member Successes

There have recently been a couple of notable successes for IMTAL-Europe members to report.

Firstly congratulations to the Museum of Farnham for making the last 5 in The Guardian's Kids Museum of the Year award.

Secondly both Interpretation (Verity Walker) and Andrew Ashmore and Associates were involved in the Interpret Britain Award Winning "Harry's Cut", which looks at the harsh realities of living on working narrowboats in the early 1950s.

Verity Walker came up with the scenario, characters and timeline, and prepared educational resources for the show, Andrew Ashmore and Associates produced detailed scripts (different for each location), monologues and research for the three characters Harry (played by IMTAL-Europe member David Hatton, and recently by new member, Brian Scoltock), Eth (who has been played by IMTAL-Europe members Vic Bryson, Samantha Golton and Josephine Myddelton) and Jim (played by Andrew Ashmore). The client, British Waterways went on to win the overall Caliba Award for outstanding interpretation, which was awarded for Harry's Cut and a new series of interpretive maps, some of which were project managed by Verity Walker.

Welcome new members

Individual:

Kath Burlinson, Interpreter

Ingo R Glückler, Interpreter

Brian Scoltock, Interpreter

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

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Articles/ Letters/ Ads/ Announcements

all contributions for the next issue by September 7th

IMTAL Training Days

An idea whose time has come?

In Northern Ireland the idea was again mooted that IMTAL-Europe should provide occasional training days, drawing on the skills and experience of its members to provide useful sessions in the craft of live interpretation. This was initially discussed at last year's AGM at the Tower of London, but no specific suggestions of subjects came forth from the membership at that time.

New member Diane Carp, who came from the Netherlands to Northern Ireland for the mini conference has, however, immediately taken up the baton, and emailed a list of possible sessions, which might form the basis of future work in this area.

For First Person Interpretation:

Doing historical research to create your character.

Where do you look and what are you looking to collect?

Choosing which character to bring to life — from whose point of view do you want to tell the story and why?

Distilling the historical information down in order to plan the presentation.

Developing "the script" (written or improvised) with

the implementation in mind.
Creating the character on paper
What are the salient points in your story?

Playing with language.

Checking historical accuracy.

Departing from "the script".

Interacting with the audience to bring them into the story.

Answering questions in role (and still being historically accurate).

Teaching through an historical role.

Using a character from the past to explain concepts, principles and philosophies — for example, Pythagoras-led maths workshops.

Also - Potential use of Theatre-in-Education and Educational Drama strategies with school groups (IMTAL members might be interested in the ed. drama work of Jonathan Neelands at the University of Warwick who works with using drama and theatre to explore social history).

Conflict Resolution role-playing structures (Diane has indicated that she would be willing to share her drama teaching method as part of a selection of different problem-solving teaching structures. This could be of use to members who do interactive teaching in role with school groups).

For First or Third (with characters) Interpretation:

Storytelling

Perhaps this would be done in the limited workshop time frame through the use of a few short, pre-selected pieces of material that each workshop member would be given to interpret/tell according to Mike Bradley's points from the session in Northern Ireland:

Deciding from whose point of view you will tell the story.

Choosing the 4 salient points of the story.

Creating lighter moments to balance and/or set off the heavier moments.

Interacting with the audience.

Planning a punch line.

Over to you.

So what do you think? Would any of the above sessions be useful to you? Would any of you be interested in leading a session — workshop/demonstration/interactive training/exchange of methods, skills sharing? Trainers' expenses will be met. Or are there other specific skills you would like further training in and/or something great that you've seen someone else do that you would like to learn. Let us know at the IMTAL-Europe office and we can start to develop a programme to replace the regional host days, and provide practical training to members. Get back to us by August 1st and we can develop this further at the AGM.

The May 2004 IMTAL mini-conference will linger in my memory as a stimulating experience. It is always pleasant to meet old colleagues once again and become newly acquainted with others, and I would like to extend my warmest thanks to Robert, Rodney and the interpreters if the Armagh Palace Stables NI for a delightful weekend. These persons' friendliness, hospitality and professionalism throughout the conference must serve as an exemplar to everyone involved in museum theatre and heritage interpretation.

“Stage Combat for the Museums and Heritage Industry”

A sword fighting seminar by Keith Ducklin, Assistant Fight Co-ordinator, Royal Armouries Museum. Presented at the IMTAL-Europe Mini-Conference, Palace Stables Armagh, May 22nd 2004

For my own presentation, I had pondered how I might bring something fresh to the subject of stage combat, and decided to try and explore what I believe to be the benefits of historically accurate combat training for fighters involved in the museum/heritage industry.

Over the past few years, world-wide interest in historical European martial arts has grown enormously, and there exist now in my opinion three distinct types of combat practitioner: the historical martial artist, the re-enactor fighter, and the theatrical stage fighter. The historical martial artist is concerned primarily with researching and practising authentic period fighting styles; this person has no interest in the theatrical staging of fights or the development of characterisation, though they may sometimes permit the public to watch them train and spar competitively. The re-enactor fighter is concerned with

competitive combat too, but only rarely according to historically accurate rules; this person may frequently be involved in displays, but again, rarely has any interest in theatrical staging or characterisation. Finally there is the theatrical stage fighter, who may or may not be inspired by a study of historical martial arts; this person is frequently called upon to perform fully characterised fights in public. These are, of course, arbitrary classifications, but useful nonetheless.

Moving on, and bearing in mind that we are addressing the question of fight scenes for museums and heritage sites, we can eliminate the re-enactor and the theatrical stage fighter who have no interest in historical techniques. This leaves us with the choice of the historical martial artist, or the historically-inspired stage fighter. The question is, which is the better resource for the museum/heritage site?



Rosie Roche gets some expert tuition from Keith Ducklin

The answer, I believe, is either one, providing the site is not concerned with characterised performances, but only the second, if it is. Why? Because only the theatrically trained fighter can hope to perform a convincingly characterised fight safely, excitingly, and regularly before an audience.

The question then arises, how can stage fighters be trained to an acceptably high standard in historical combat techniques within a reasonable period of time, yet at the same time be trained to marry their physical dexterity to a fully characterised performance? The answer, I believe, lies in the composition of the training system itself, because the right system will need to simultaneously instil safe weapons technique and characterisation.

At the Royal Armouries, all combat interpretations are developed according to the system devised by its resident Creative Director and Master-at-arms John Waller. The system, taught continually since the 1960s, is based on the concept that training stage fighters to a high standard in a basic range of historically accurate techniques will better prepare them to meet any demands made on them by the fight directors they meet. These basics are

laid down in the book "Sword Fighting: A Manual for Actors and Directors", therefore I will not bother to repeat them here. Suffice to say, my own twenty years' experience as a teacher of this system convinces me that the Waller system produces uniquely successful results.

Having introduced the demonstration in pretty much the words above, it was time to show something practical.

At this point I would like to thank Mark Davies, keeper of Dundrum Castle, Eire, also local Chapter Master of the European Historical Combat Guild, and his colleague Paul, for their apparently endless supply of weapons and armour which they ferried over the border, thus saving me a great deal of negotiation with the airlines.

Mark's blarney is always welcome, too, and I accepted his and Paul's generous suggestion that I run them through a section of my Talhoffer-inspired two-handed sword training sequence (Talhoffer was one of the best-known Medieval sword masters) in the manner of a masterclass. We reckoned this to be an interesting test of the Waller/RA system, since although Mark and I have both studied under John Waller,

and Paul was Mark's student, Mark and I had never previously fought, and I was meeting Paul for the first time! Thankfully shaded from the glorious sun by a grove of trees, we began by walking and talking through the pure mechanics of the sequence, examining the difference between the reality of certain techniques' execution and how they might be adapted to remain safe yet appear exciting. Afterwards, we looked at how two simple variations of characterisation might alter the rhythm and tempo of just a couple of moves. Then Mark and Paul performed one of their own sequences at full speed. Finally we invited the other conference members for a weapons handling session, and an intrepid soul or two even stepped up for a few minutes of class work. At one point Verity asked how effective the system would be using weapons of other periods, so Mark and I took up a pair of sabres and improvised a short but lively duel in the classic Hollywood fashion – proof positive we'd all passed the system test!

The demonstration proved popular, not only with the IMTAL membership, but also with the wedding party congregating by the nearby chapel! Some of the IMTAL members asked if it was possible to study the system (but the wedding party kept their distance). The answer was yes, this was a real possibility, though of course the Royal Armouries is presently based in Leeds, UK, which might mean a long hike in some cases. However, the RA hopes to increase its outreach programme over the next few years, and perhaps stage combat workshops will be a feature. As you can imagine, I certainly hope so!

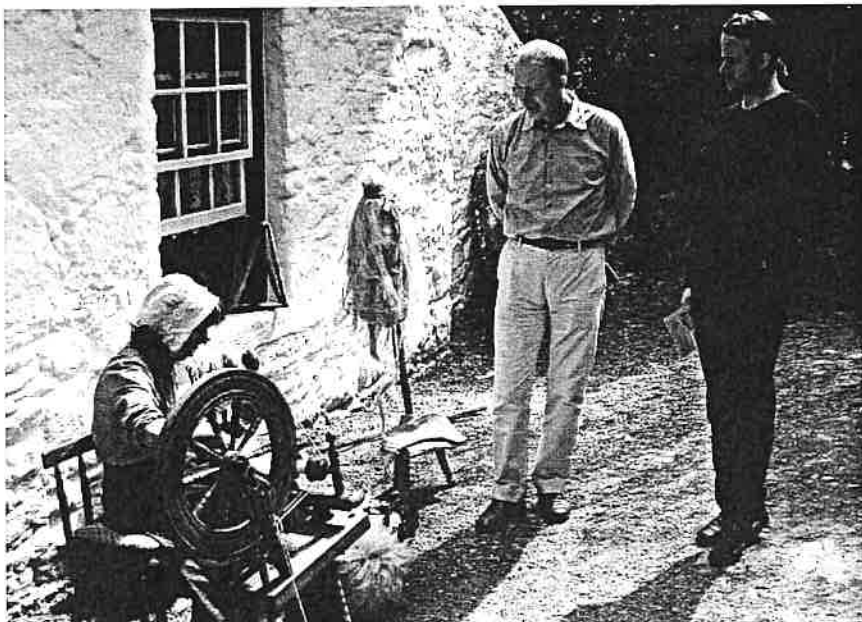
In the meantime, the RA is always happy to negotiate consultancy for museums and heritage sites interested in training their interpreters as stage fighters. All enquiries should be directed to Karen Whitting, Company Manager, Interpretation Department, Royal Armouries Museum, Armouries Drive, Leeds LS10 1LT, or e-mail karen.whitting@armouries.org.uk

The only sad thing about the weekend for me was that I was unable to stay for the second day and so missed the Omagh trip and the Past Pleasures presentation. It was my loss. At any rate, I hope this won't be my last visit to an IMTAL conference, or to the Armagh Palace Stables.

Other sessions included a swordfighting workshop led by Keith Ducklin of the Royal Armouries, Leeds (see pages 4 and 5 for Keith's article on this); a chance to see the interpreters from the Palace Stables and Ulster American Folk Park in action (the latter incorporating some of their first forays into first person interpretation) a period murder mystery set in the 1940s and a session on storytelling led by Mike Bradley of Past Pleasures. More informally there was a lot of singing done, and we did our bit to keep Guinness in profit. During the weekend the idea of IMTAL-led training workshops was proposed — see page 3 for more details.

How up to date is your website entry?

Thank you to all IMTAL-Europe members who submitted copy and pictures for Verity Walker's



Chris Bailey and Mike Bradley are impressed by Liz Devlin's skill at the Ulster American Folk Park.



Ronald Kane and Robert Forshaw take questions about their Act of Union piece.

forthcoming article in *Museums & Heritage* magazine. This is a more nuts n' bolts publication than *Museums Journal* and so the piece focuses on how live interpretation can be used instead of (or as well as) more traditional forms of interpretation such as exhibitions. It looks in particular at the wonderful work many members are developing in the interpretation of conflict.

The piece will promote the IMTAL-Europe website (www.imtal-europe.org) as a good first stop for people wanting to find out more about setting up a live interpretation programme. We're updating the generic sections at present (suggestions welcome), but how recently did you update your own entry? Don't forget you can add information and change details easily using your special member's password (and if you've forgotten this, don't worry, just e-mail Garve our webmaster at garve@plexusmedia.co.uk and he'll jog your memory).

One of the items for discussion at the AGM will be how we can best showcase the great work our members develop, so even if you can't attend, please e-mail Verity at verity@interpretation.com and let us know if you can think of any ways of achieving this.

AGM Wigan Pier: Thursday August 12th 2004

This year's annual general meeting will take place at Wigan Pier on August 12th 2004. This will be our first visit to Wigan Pier, which has a long track record of live interpretation on site. Many thanks to Stewart Aitken, Artistic Director at Wigan Pier, for hosting. The format for the day will be along the usual lines, with arrival and coffee from 10.30 am onwards. There will then be an introduction to the site and programme by Carole Tyldesley, Pier Manager, followed by the opportunity to tour and see the interpreters at

work. Lunch will follow and the AGM itself will be between 1.30 and 3 pm. This will be followed by tea and an opportunity to feed back on the site visit. Proceedings draw to a close at 4 pm. We hope to see a lot of you there. Please RSVP to Verity Walker—
verity@interpretaction.com
Directions to the Pier will then be provided. If anyone is wishing to travel up the night before from London, then I will have some space in the car for lifts—let me know on **ashmoreacts@yahoo.co.uk**

Directors Elections

The AGM will also be the occasion for the Directors Elections. There is one place on the Board to fill, and other places to be voted for, so we would love to hear from anyone who would like to take on the role of Director and play an active part in the running of IMTAL-Europe. Any nominations, complete with seconders should be sent to the IMTAL-Europe office by July 19th. We will then

contact candidates and request a brief paragraph containing details of their museum theatre experience and reasons for wanting to stand. The manifestos will then be circulated to all members prior to the meeting. The voting will take place at the AGM, or if you are unable to attend, by returning your ballot form to the IMTAL office, or by emailing your vote by August 11th. We look forward to receiving nominations.

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