



## EDITOR'S CORNER

**I** feel as though I'm coming out of hibernation after the Winter and it's so nice to wake up to bright mornings and have light evenings once again! This Spring 2007 edition of the newsletter is full of exciting articles from IMTAL members, illustrating that there really is so much live interpretation happening in many different forms across the country; from performances devised to commemorate the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, through presentations in Guernsey-French, to the 'risk assessment nightmare' of jousting tournaments.



IMTAL Secretary Jo Kemp

The National Railway Museum has a couple of new initiatives, one of which was born out of the IMTAL training day that we held there in January 2006. The training focussed on indoor collections, looking at how to attract non-traditional audiences to traditionally male-orientated science/technology museums through theatre/live interpretation. Helen Taylor explains how she and colleagues have taken things forward to the completion of a live interpretation programme for schools. It is encouraging to know that training days can lead to practical changes and developments, so let us know if you have similar experiences.

**And now to the most exciting event on this year's IMTAL agenda**, the global conference taking place in Belfast from 19th to 23rd September. The last newsletter saw a call for papers, in this edition you can see the full programme. The early bird registration runs until June 30th, (saving £100!) and there are also some great deals on flights to Belfast at the moment so it pays to be prepared and book now! Previous conferences have been mentally and physically exhausting, but in the most inspiring way; new ideas, moving performances, challenging discussions and great social events. The Irish are well-known for being terrific hosts, and Robert Forshaw, John-Paul Coyle and colleagues are busy with preparations for a packed day and evening programme.

**[www.imtal-europe.org/belfast2007](http://www.imtal-europe.org/belfast2007)**  
We very much hope to see you there.

Jo Kemp,  
Secretary IMTAL Europe

## SUMMARY - SPRING 2007

Signed Theatre performances at the NRM	p.3
IMTAL Global Conference 2007 : don't miss it!	p.4
Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' research update	p.5
There is life beyond Directorship then!	p.6
Prepare to Joust!	p.7
The Guernsey 'History in Action' Company (GHIAC)	p.8-9
News from Artemis Cultural & Educational Services in Scotland	p.9
Performing "Heritage" : research and practice	p.9
Going north and coming south!	p.10
A Sensitive Issue	p.11
Two go live in history	p.12
Museum Association Annual Conference 2007	p.13
Living History & Interpretation	p.14-15



ENGAGING AUDIENCES THROUGH PERFORMANCE

INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM THEATRE ALLIANCE  
CASTLE MUSEUM - NOTTINGHAM - NG1 6EL ENGLAND



# MEMBERS' CORNER



## WELCOME to our new Members

### Institutional members :

National Museum of Australia, Canberra  
Contact: Daina Harvey

### Individual members :

Alice Chadwick - UK

Luisella Romeo - Italy



## INSTITUTIONS: make the most of the membership benefits !

Please have another look to the list of benefits for institutions. The fee is a bit higher than for individuals but you are offered much more. For instance, we encourage you to send us articles and **adverts** (one free per year) and a **website banner** if you want to be the '**member of the month**' appearing on our website mainpage.

**Do not let us decide for you...**

## MEMBERS SUBSCRIPTION 2007-2008

June is the month to renew your membership. Invoices for the next 12 months membership will be sent out to you soon and early payment is appreciated. We encourage you to visit our website to check the difference between institutional benefits and individual ones.

### Institutional:

£70 OR 102€ per year

### Individual:

£30 OR 44€ per year

**So, please just send a cheque (made payable to IMTAL-Europe) to**  
Jo Kemp -Treasurer/Membership Secretary-  
IMTAL Europe, Castle Museum, Nottingham, NG1 6EL United Kingdom.

### Or pay by bank draft to IMTAL Europe.

In £ Sterling: IBAN GB74 BARC 20-80-57 80132187 SWIFT: BARCGB22  
In Euros: IBAN: GB24 BARC 20-80-57 67355277 SWIFT: BARCGB22

IMTAL-Europe is a company limited by guarantee (Company No. 3765707, registered in England and Wales) and a registered charity (No. 1080194). European Insights is published quarterly and is a benefit of membership.

IMTAL Europe can be reached at 0115 915 3691 or by email: [contact@imtal-europe.org](mailto:contact@imtal-europe.org)

IMTAL-Europe's website is at [www.imtal-europe.org](http://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.



# GOOD PRACTICE

## Signed theatre performances at the NRM

*Paul Bisson, Programmes Manager,  
National Railway Museum, York*



"The 10am!" (Image courtesy of the NRM)

**For over 20 years the NRM has put on an annual event, "Please Touch", geared to providing activities and experiences for visitors with disabilities.**

But it wasn't until June 2005 that the Museum first put on two short sign-language interpreted theatre shows, performed by Platform 4, at the event. It was so worthwhile that it was decided, from April 2006, to make the first Saturday in each month a signed performance day. Over the last 12 months the NRM has seen its hearing-impaired, signing audiences grow, as word has got around. A tribute to the power of museum theatre to reach out to lots of different audiences!

Our signer, Julie Thompson, has been magnificent – and is now learning a new show almost every month! Julie started with "The 10.00am" (the Flying Scotsman story), but now has three more shows in her repertoire: "Permanent Way" (how disused railway tracks have become green havens for recreation and wildlife), "What the Dickens!" (the perils of rail travel in the time of the author) and "Shinkansen" (about the Japanese Bullet Train).

The 2007/08 season promises even greater challenges for Julie and she is aiming to sign another 10 different shows over the year, ranging from stories about the railways in World War II ("Is Your Journey Really Necessary?", "V for Victory") and the early days of railway pioneers

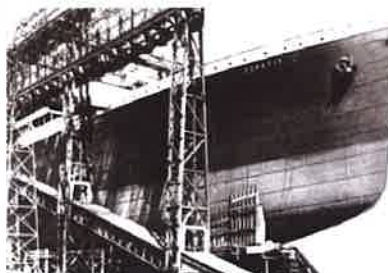
("From the Pen of Fanny Kemble", "The Newcastle Rocket") to evocations of travelling royalty ("A Right Royal Christmas", "Lady in Waiting") and tales of heroism ("Beyond the Call of Duty"), holidays ("Wish You Were Here") and the lives of ordinary men and women who worked on the railways ("Off the Record").

*Paul Bisson  
National Railway Museum, York*

For further information on Platform 4 and its schedule of performances, please visit the website: [www.nrm.org.uk](http://www.nrm.org.uk)

# IMTAL 2007 GLOBAL CONFERENCE

## Challenging Museum Theatre



**Belfast**  
Northern Ireland

**20th-23rd**  
September 2007



## "CHALLENGING MUSEUM THEATRE"

The 5th Biennial International Museum Theatre Alliance Conference 2007

## Controversial Themes. Expanding Audiences.

The 5th Biennial International Museum Theatre Conference will both address the issues challenging museum theatre, and how museum theatre can address challenging issues.

Delegates will watch, share and participate in performances, workshops, presentations and discussions, and visit the region's most evocative heritage locations.

Delegates may book either for the whole conference, or for individual days. Booking information, costs, the full programme, details of accommodation and evening entertainment, are all available on the IMTAL Europe website :

[www.imtal-europe.org](http://www.imtal-europe.org)

or by contacting Robert Forshaw at

[robert.forshaw@imtal-europe.org](mailto:robert.forshaw@imtal-europe.org)

or John-Paul Coyle at

[johnpaul.coyle@imtal-europe.org](mailto:johnpaul.coyle@imtal-europe.org)

### Thursday 20th September - Interpreting Belfast and Challenging Museum Theatre

**Ulster Folk and Transport Museum**

Watch practitioners from around the globe present their interpretations of Belfast. Explore diversity in audiences, performance styles and interpretive approaches through discussions, debates and workshops.

### Friday 21st September - Museum Theatre: What's the Point?

**W5 Science Centre, Belfast**

Gain new practical skills and debate the most current, critical and important issues facing Museum Theatre makers and commissioners today.

### Saturday 22nd September

Visit to The Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh and The Navan Centre, Armagh, and a murder mystery evening performed at the National Trust property The Argyry, County Armagh.

### Sunday 23rd September What's next for Museum Theatre?

Discover the latest research into Museum Theatre, global trends and the threats and potential of digital technology from presentations, workshops and panel debates.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

Anyone interested in bringing ideas to life, whether through live interpretation, historical drama, re-enactment, performance, theatre, heritage events, or museum, gallery and science centre education.

However, its not just for the converted. If you have been thinking about introducing museum theatre into your museum but are dubious, then come along and see for yourself whether Museum Theatre has a role in your institution.



# Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' research update

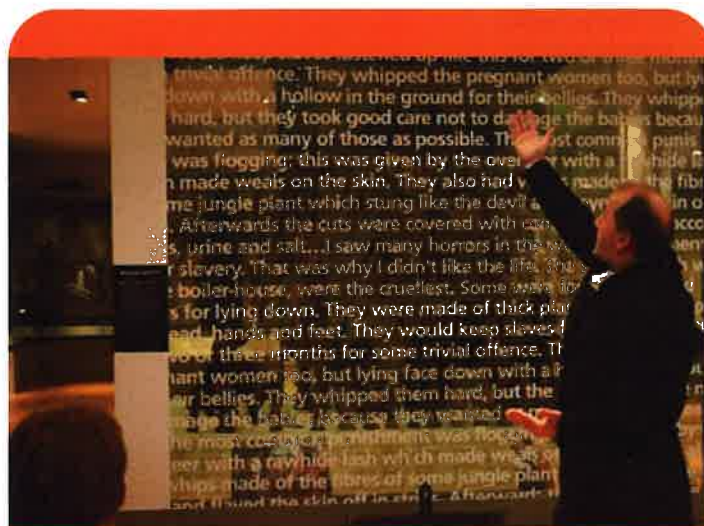
By Jenny Kidd,  
University of Manchester

The Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' project team have recently carried out data collection at their fourth and final case study site.

'This Accursed Thing' at the Manchester Museum was commissioned to test and build upon findings from previous case study research, and was written and performed by Andrew Ashmore and Paul Etuka of Andrew Ashmore Associates. The performance, a promenade around the Museum, ran from 24th March to 2nd April as part of the Museum's Revealing Histories programme. During the performance, audiences were encouraged to interact and engage with a variety of characters from the past and the present, who variously had their involvement in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its abolition challenged and problematised.

The research effort involved: participant observation; holding focus groups; carrying out interviews with members of the public; filming and photographing a variety of audiences thus capturing their immediate physical and verbal responses; and the collection of a questionnaire directly related to peoples' experiences of the performance. Over the coming months, this data will undergo some initial analysis, and it is hoped that this will then feed back into the performance piece if and when it returns to the Museum. As a part of the longitudinal nature of the study, a number of audience members will be approached for interview over the coming weeks, and then again in nine/ten months time in order to glean retrospective insight.

Film footage, the project's research methodology, and initial findings and questions from the data analysis will be introduced at this year's International IMTAL conference in Belfast.



To view the promotional leaflet, and photos from the data collection period, please follow the link  
[http://www.plh.manchester.ac.uk/research/sites/site\\_4.htm](http://www.plh.manchester.ac.uk/research/sites/site_4.htm)

Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' is an AHRC funded, three-year investigation of the uses and impact of performance as a learning medium at museums and heritage sites. To find out more about the research and the previous case study sites, visit [www.manchester.ac.uk/plh](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/plh)

For more information on the Revealing Histories initiative, visit [www.revealinghistories.org.uk](http://www.revealinghistories.org.uk).



## THIS ACCURSED THING

A powerful promenade performance around The Manchester Museum explores the trans-Atlantic slave trade through the eyes of the people who were there.

SATURDAY 24 MARCH - MONDAY 2 APRIL 2007



# There is life beyond Directorship then!

By Verity Walker,  
Interpretation

**I promised to write an article about favourite IMTAL moments from the seven years of my time as one of its directors when I stood down in Paris last August and suddenly it's March – how did that happen?**

I thought I'd have more time but as usual opportunities have arisen to (more than) fill the gaps available. With hindsight the best moment – poignantly – has to be the emotional response from delegates who came to our September 2001 conference to September 11th. Time Travellers' piece giving voices to many of those involved, including the hijackers, may have been the first dramatic response anywhere in the world and still haunts me more than any of the later big-budget films. I'd urge any of you swithering (good Scots word for indecision) about the forthcoming Belfast global conference to book soon, even if you think you haven't the time or can't really afford the budget. Your batteries will be recharged and you'll come away energised and refocused with new friends and professional contacts from all over the world, not just Europe.

Other good times – watching Robert Forshaw and a colleague sparring verbally using an authentic and fiercely political debate which enabled an audience of Protestants and Catholics to take different sides (hope you're re-running that one at the conference, guys). The Galleries of Justice in Nottingham showing how a dramatised court case can act as a deterrent for a young offender. Definitive proof that Napoleon's officers did not wear sous-vêtements. Going to Llancaiaich Fawr Manor near Cardiff while heavily pregnant with daughter 2 and being upbraided as a wanton by staff for crossing my legs in public (wasn't there rather more obvious evidence of this?!). And the many training days in lovely places, the Railway Museum in York, Greys Court near Henley... and the weird and wonderful e-list of course, and people telling me that it helped them get contracts.

Since stepping down I've considerably deepened my interest in evaluation, with further analysis of the Royal Armouries Flashpoint project (this time in primary schools, using Robin Hood as the storyline

rather than Romeo and Juliet), involvement in the University of Manchester research culminating in a specially-commissioned piece applying everything learned so far for the Manchester Museum (written by Andrew Ashmore, another former director). Soon I'll be looking at the impact of drama on special needs students for the Museum of Docklands, too, and evaluating participation in a project called "Scotland's Rural Past" run by the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments in Edinburgh. But I'm also extending other interests in mainstream interpretive planning and writing, with more panel-writing for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (deeply moving), and some weird and wonderful contracts with Forestry Commission Scotland. For one of the latter I've been writing haiku (Japanese three-line verse) which will be carved into benches dotted around one forest at Culbin near Moray, which is planted over the largest sand dune systems in Britain. These kinds of contracts lead to bizarre research (did you know people used to chew ladybirds to cure toothache?) but are huge fun. It's all great but I need 48 hour days to get through it all and am fully booked until the winter.

*“Time Travellers’ piece giving voices to many of those involved, including the hijackers, may have been the first dramatic response anywhere in the world and still haunts me more than any of the later big-budget films.”*

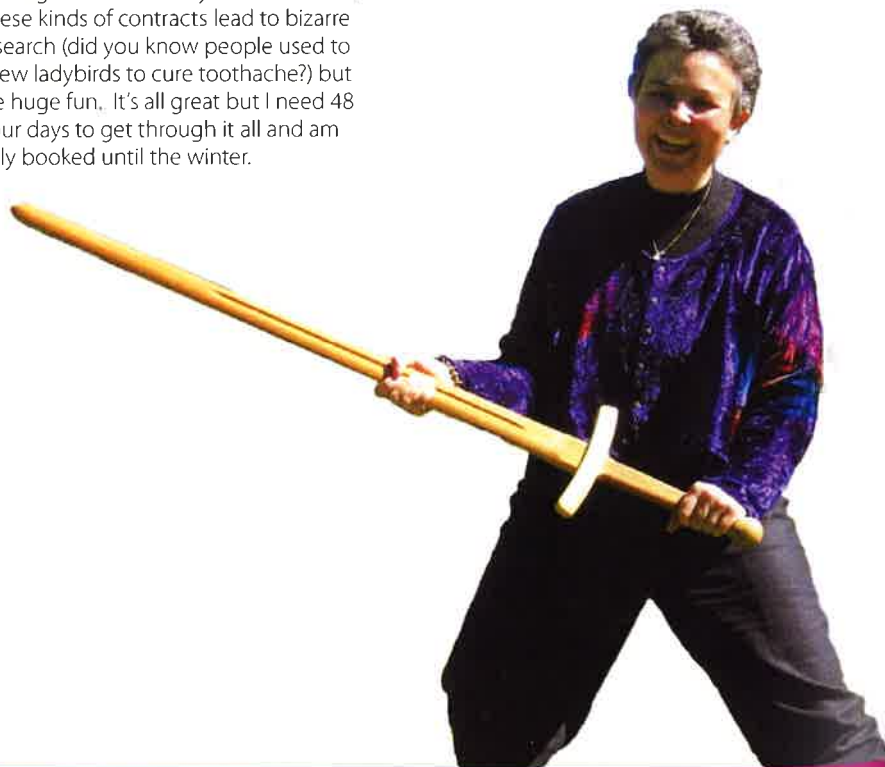
For those of you who are attending the Museums and Heritage show at Earls Court in London, maybe some of you will find time to attend the day on live interpretation which I will be chairing (on May 10th) which looks at some of the more cutting-edge projects happening at present. I had a recent e-mail from an

IMTAL-Europe member at a

national museum saying he feared a negative sea-change in support of live interpretation from senior managers. With this kind of event we can hopefully convince them that they're wrong and that the capacity of the industry to adapt to change and challenge its audiences is infinite.

Hope to see you there!

Verity Walker  
Interpretation





# Prepare to Joust!

*Anna Ward,  
Interpretation Department, Royal Armouries in Leeds*

Since the year 2000, this time of year sees the interpretation team buzzing with a great sense of anticipation. Over the Easter bank holiday is the Joust for the Sword of Honour, this year dubbed "The Celebrate Leeds Tournament" in honour of the City's 800th Birthday. Every Easter, four teams compete to have their name engraved on The Sword Of Honour, the prize that was first awarded in celebration of the new millennium seven years ago.

Since then, 20 jousters and up to 30 horses have taken part in the competition. The teams are made up of riders from various backgrounds. This year two teams contained current Royal Armouries staff. They faced, as their rivals, a mixture of old friends of the Museum with experience in stage combat and film-making, re-enactors, armour enthusiasts, and scholars. The Competition is real and the rivalry fierce.

My role is to commentate the Tournament. Along with another member of the team, Kate Vigurs, I have either watched or commentated The Sword of Honour Tournament since the competition was established and it still remains the highlight of my year.

So, in preparation, I edit a script for the parts we know are going to happen, then swot up on knowledge and get ready to improvise around the bits we don't. Our function is to keep the crowd and participants informed of what is happening, and why. To maintain



excitement and to convey the feelings of joy, disappointment, fear or pain felt by our competitors.

Well that's the idea. Normally, it turns into a frantic compilation of the scores, a desperate attempt to keep up with what's happening ourselves, and many failed attempts to control our own excitement, fears and volume!

We watch our friends and colleagues ride at each other at a frightening pace and smash lances as far as they can be smashed into each other. We have to strike the balance between conveying what is happening and maintaining the audiences interest, without giving away too many of our own feelings. We have seen our friends fall off, be pushed off, have lances strike them in the face, throat or groin, and last year we witnessed a strike so hard that one jousters helmet

was forcibly removed, the first time that has ever happened here. I thought at the time that he must have been seriously injured; obviously I couldn't say that over the microphone! Thankfully he hadn't lost his eyes, or anything that dramatic (!) but he did sustain concussion and mild whiplash, this game is not for the faint hearted.

However, as always, the real work, both leading up to and during the weekend is done by our Stable Staff and of course the horses. All get busy with preparations, getting the horses fighting fit, painting lances, sewing caparisons, cleaning armour...and of course, the day job does not stop. We still perform horseshows everyday demonstrating Tudor Riding Skills, Cavalry through the Ages or Horse Archery, not to mention mucking out, bedding down and all those other horsey terms I've heard but never done!

As it does every year, my hat goes off to those who work so hard to make the Tournament such a journey. All I have to do is talk!

*Anna Ward,  
Interpretation Department,  
Royal Armouries in Leeds*

*Thankfully he hadn't lost his eyes, or anything that dramatic (!) but he did sustain concussion and mild whiplash, this game is not for the faint hearted*



# EVOLUTION

## The Guernsey 'History in Action' Company (GHIAC)

By Lynne Ashton,  
Access & Learning Manager, Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery

As many of the established members of IMTAL are aware, Guernsey Museums & Galleries embarked on a programme of 'Living History' which, because of the Island's position relies on the enthusiasms and expertise of local people rather than on visiting professional groups.

In 2006 the Museum effectively lost control of the programme when the newly formed 'Culture & Leisure' department determined that the participants should become an independent group whose services would be 'bought in'.

### So how has it fared?

We battled hard to get a grant from the local authority. This was made easier because they wanted to use the services of, in particular, the costumed characters. The most unlikely Civil Servants just love to 'dress up'!

We still have difficulty convincing those wishing to employ GHIAC that those involved are not just 'wallpaper' for functions, but have a serious intent i.e. to promote the Island's rich history and culture.

The tourist arm of the Island's government now has a policy to promote the Island's indigenous culture. GHIAC offers an opportunity for local individuals to do this under the umbrella of an established and recognised group.

GHIAC now boasts additional presentations such as 'Aen bouanne Crâqu'rie' reviving the local language, Guernsey - French. A radio play based on Iron Age Guernsey, a celebratory play to mark the Liberation of the Islands from German Occupation in 1945, a Victorian policeman with extensive knowledge of the local criminals circa 1860 (he has transcribed hundreds of reports from the period), informal presentations on the Island's Knitting Industry and a new group 'The Guernsey Military History Company' which focuses on W War I.

As the Museum's representative I am still closely involved with the Company BUT it is very hard for the members who now have to manage the

admin, resources etc. themselves. We do not have enough people with the time and skills to drive everything that the members and the Islanders wish it to do and finding new members is difficult.

However, I feel sure that the impetus will be maintained, largely because we offer 'value added' to the Island by encouraging local traditions, offering opportunities to the community at large and having great costumes and characters to enable the Great and the Good to put on a meaningful shows at corporate events and celebrations.

So - if anyone is thinking of setting something up along the same lines- it is hard work and there are many pitfalls - but it is worth it.

Lynne Ashton,  
Access & Learning Manager,  
Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery



*"The tourist arm of the Island's government now has a policy to promote the Island's indigenous culture. GHIAC offers an opportunity for local individuals to do this under the umbrella of an established and recognised group"*



## News from Artemis Cultural & Educational Services in Scotland

We at Artemis thought you would like to know how things are going north of the border so here's an up date on what we've been up to and what we're doing in the summer. Come and see us if you can.

Having completed a series of workshops in partnership with Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse, "Mary, Queen of Scots" is about to embark on a royal progress! "Mary" is going to visit Historic Scotland sites associated with "her majesty", providing interactive sessions where pupils will also wear costume and learn about life at Court.

At the end of 2006, Artemis Cultural & Educational Services was selected by the Historic Scotland education team to deliver a Mary, Queen of Scots workshop for the Stirling Castle entry for the Sandford Award and we are delighted to have been judged as providing such high quality heritage education as Stirling Castle won this prestigious Award, seen as a benchmark of excellence. Artemis Cultural & Educational Services will be back in Stirling in June to deliver more of these award winning workshops – watch our website for dates: [www.artemisscotland.com](http://www.artemisscotland.com)

In the coming months, Artemis can be seen at sites as varied as NTS Bannockburn outside Stirling portraying the life of the medieval woman and a return visit to NTS Hill of Tarvit Mansionhouse outside Cupar where it is possible to chat to the butler or find out how to make an Edwardian cake from the cook.

To coincide with the bi-centenary of the Parliamentary Abolition of the Slave Trade, a new character is being developed for NMS Royal Museum in Edinburgh for gallery based work over the summer and autumn months.

A varied programme, as you can see. We hope that all IMTAL-Europe members have a good and varied summer too.



## PERFORMING 'HERITAGE': RESEARCH AND PRACTICE International conference: 3rd-5th April 2008. - First announcement.

We are pleased to announce preliminary details of an international conference to be hosted by the Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' research team in April 2008. The conference will take place in Manchester, and will provide a forum for discussing how research and best practice in the field of museum performance/live interpretation can inform one another.

Among the areas the conference will address are:

- The intersections of performance/performativity, site specific practices and notions of heritage;
- Audience response and longer-term impact, the place of interactivity, and community outreach;
- Reports from the field: accounts and findings from research and evaluation projects in the UK and abroad. Some sessions at the conference will be devoted to the emerging findings of the PL&H research and the implications for future practice and policy making; but we are keen to hear about, and compare notes with, other research projects across the globe;
- Examples of practice - live and recorded - will illustrate the range of performance practice and provide opportunities to interrogate that practice; workshops from practitioners and academics alike are invited as a means of exploring how research and practice interconnect.
- 'Research at the heart of practice' - the focus will be on research as it informs practice, practice as it informs research and (not least) practice as a means of research in the museum/heritage sector.

We invite practitioners, researchers, policy makers and others working in the cultural sector to join us in what we hope will be a thought-provoking and inspiring few days. Contributions will be especially welcome from those engaged in research, evaluation and development in this field around the world. An official call for papers/presentations will go out in late June 2007.

If you are interested in further details of the conference meanwhile, please contact project administrator Ruth Daniel on [ruth.daniel@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.daniel@manchester.ac.uk), or Tony Jackson, Project Director: "Performance, Learning and Heritage"

Centre for Applied Theatre Research  
School of Arts, Histories & Cultures  
Martin Harris Centre  
University of Manchester M13 9PL

Tel: 0161 275 3356  
Email: [a.r.jackson@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:a.r.jackson@manchester.ac.uk)  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/plh](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/plh)

# GOING NORTH AND COMING SOUTH!

By Helen Taylor,  
National Railway Museum, York

**Did you attend an IMTAL teachers' training day at the NRM in January 2006? If so, your work has contributed to a highly successful KS2 workshop now offered at the National Railway Museum in York.**

Part of the day involved improvising a drama workshop based on any of the NRM's exhibits. One group chose to bring life to the two huge narrative paintings by George Earl, "Going North" and "Coming South", which show bustling departure scenes at King's Cross and Perth railway stations.

These commemorate two journeys of a group of wealthy people who holidayed in the Highlands in the early – mid 1890s, so the platforms show a wide cross-section of late Victorian society – ladies, gentlemen, servants of all ranks, ghillies (a man or boy who attends to his master and/or guests on a hunting or fishing expedition in Scotland) newsboys, soldiers, middle-class straw-boated types, poor women in plaid shawls, railway workers, children – and dogs. There are a lot of dogs. Earl (who painted himself into the crowd in each picture) was a specialist in this field, so made the most of the opportunity with 5 breeds of gun dog.

The group wanted to highlight class differences in late Victorian Britain as well as give information about the actual journey and the facilities available to travellers at the time.

A ghillie character started the original improvisation, inviting his audience to recognise the "handsome fella" in the picture. He went on to explain why he was at the station, give a rough outline of his job there and in the Highlands, the incident that had just happened (a dog had slipped his collar) and the mistress' probable reaction – this led to a quick move out of her way and up to a railway carriage where Madam herself was waiting. The lady continued the action, commenting from an upper-class point of view, until settled into her first-class compartment by her maid, whose comments on her mistress and her own plans for the journey closed the scene.

With such a foundation, a basic script was soon written and the process of re-drafting to suit the NRM presenters and exhibits began. The final version had to use only two presenters, allowing for one who might be uneasy with first-person presentation, and include an active role-playing session for a group of up to thirty children.

## The results are as follows:

**Presenter 1 (non-acting) leads the group through the workshop, discussing the myriad scenes going on within the paintings – farewells, conversations, a frightened child – whilst Presenter 2 is the actor and interrupts twice during this process as a maid and then her mistress, talking in character about the journey, the station, and the holiday in the Highlands.**

*The group wanted to highlight class differences in late Victorian Britain as well as give information about the actual journey and the facilities available to travellers at the time*

Children then separate into small groups and a prop or costume accessory is randomly given out to every one. Each group must use them to improvise a

short scene which they will then "freeze" into a tableau. All tableaux are played to the rest of the class, and finally all are put together to form an "Earl painting" of their own. Photo-opportunity, Plenary session, Finish.

A local school kindly acted as guinea pig and reported that the children were talking about the workshops for days afterwards, so we felt that the base was sound! Since then, we have just pruned and tweaked a bit, and feedback so far continues very positive.

**Thanks to IMTAL and all concerned with this training day from the NRM – it really worked for us!**

Helen Taylor,  
National Railway Museum, York





# A SENSITIVE ISSUE

By Chris Cade

## ISSUES

*The students showed great maturity in dealing with the difficult content and in playing their part in the dramatic process*



Forty years on from visiting his house as a schoolboy I had the honour of playing William Wilberforce MP for Yorkshire and Hull's most famous son. My brief was to recreate the historic House of Commons debate that finally brought about the abolition of the British Slave Trade. With David Mosley opposite as Sir Banastre Tarleton MP for Liverpool, and three classes of young teenagers from North, East and West Yorkshire schools respectively contextualised as MPs on both sides of the house, the proceedings were filmed live in Hull Guildhall and viewed via the internet by another set of students in London.

The four schools were involved in the 'Campaign! Make an Impact' project which involved a three-way partnership between Hull Museums Education, Harewood House and the British Library. It was funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The media presence of BBC regional TV and local radio alongside a host of press photographers was an anachronism for our 1807 setting, but it certainly gave the thirty minute performance an edge.

The students had come together in the same space for the first time. They were well prepared for both debating and addressing the sensitive issue of enslave-

ment. But how would they react 'live' in such a charged atmosphere? We sometimes do not give young people the credit they deserve in responding to new situations and rising to the occasion. They all readily assumed prepared roles as ballot paper waving supporters pro- or anti-slavery as Wilberforce and Tarleton sparred with each other. Twenty five students had asked for scripted parts in the historic debate. Three of them brought to the table emotive exhibits demonstrating oppression: a whip, a punishment collar and a pair of leg irons. The whole chamber was stunned momentarily into silence. Then the others got their say and concluded the heated half hour proceedings.

A vote was taken after some lobbying had taken place by both the proposer of the bill and his major opponent. When the ballot box was emptied the student clerk announced the historic 4am February 24th 1807 result:

"The 'aye's to the left: 283. The 'no's to the right: 16".

The student speaker, who had kept 'order' throughout, announced that "subject to ratification from the House of Lords, the British Slave Trade is to be abolished". Cheers rang out from the majority. The rest, as they say, is history!

The students showed great maturity in dealing with the difficult content and in

playing their part in the dramatic process. They were vociferous as and when the arguments demanded. There was a tangible tension throughout.

A period of reflection followed, off camera, with comments such as:

'People should never have been treated like that!'

'Slavery was really bad. I'm glad Wilberforce stopped it!'

Of course the fight against slavery goes on and maybe this bi-centenary will help us all to address what is a current as well as a bygone issue.

A newly refurbished Wilberforce House in the Museum Quarter in Hull reopened on 25th March 2007. On the same significant day, a protester interrupted proceedings at a televised ceremony in London on behalf of his enslaved ancestors and demanded an apology from the Prime Minister and the Queen. **A sensitive issue, indeed!**

Chris Cade

**For more information see**

[www.mylearning.org/williamwilberforce](http://www.mylearning.org/williamwilberforce)  
or contact [chriscade@btinternet.com](mailto:chriscade@btinternet.com)

# Two go live in History

By Peter & Jen Hood,  
interpreters and directors of PastPresent

Back in the mists of time Lady Blanche Arundel needed a Priest of the Catholic faith, when Wardour castle was surrounded by Parliamentary heretics, and so I played my first role in live interpretation. Soon after Lady Blanche was needed too and so Jen joined in. Today we work free lance in live interpretation from first to third person and using a range of techniques in between too.

Primarily in 16th and 17th century characters we have variously been both the great and the lowly,

- From Sir John 'for the King' Arundel defeated but definitely unrepentant Royalist to James Wood - disreputable ex-soldier and Drake's steward in Plymouth (one time apprentice apothecary too)

- From Lady Blanche to poor Agnes illiterate servant (a little mazed in the head know you not) and Rebecca Bowden, Lady Drake's personal maid (and unbeknownst to her, Walsingham's murderous agent)

As implied from the above we work to a carefully researched outline script at various locations telling the story of the site usually through those behind the scenes who can offer a worms eye view of the big names. Because we often work directly with the public without a forth wall, our back ground knowledge must needs

be extensive - as too is the handling collection.

At Buckland Abbey we worked with Steve Manning on a project initially called the Lisbon Incident but became Talking with Ghosts (a visitor's comment card description), which presented Drake as the hero with feet of clay. This provoked some interesting responses from visitors - who did not like their national icon/hero challenged? In this the characters await Drake's return after the disastrous Lisbon Expedition with their future at stake and

*Because we often work directly with the public without a forth wall, our background knowledge must needs be extensive - as too is the handling collection*



TRERICE (National Trust). Meet Lady Agnes Cary and Sir John Arundel - nicknamed 'John for the King' because of his loyalty to King Charles 1st. It is the year 1651 and Parliament have fined the estate almost to starvation - what price loyalty then? The visitors get a chance to learn through direct contact with the characters, through questioning them and hearing their stories, what life might have been like 350 years ago.



## Two go live in History (continued)

# FOCUS ON

so this touched modern chords of redundancy and unemployment. This project also raised questions on methods of delivery but that's another article.

Some projects have led to others. Sir John Arundel was originally delivered at his home – Trerice near Newquay, but led to playing him at the 360th commemoration of the surrender by him of Pendennis Castle and the end of the Civil War in 2006. Another project developing a new interpretation plan for Mary Newman's Cottage led to some delivery of first person on site that in turn led to our providing a Playford dance workshop for an Early Music group.

But in addition to these and other special roles adapted to location and client, our basic characters also work with school groups on English Heritage sites, in Museums and in the schools themselves. Often using a 'your time my time' style we explore the past from an everyday point of view seeking to provide a background for youngsters to put flesh on the bones of the past.

Lucky enough to receive some training from Mark Wallis (Past Pleasures) and to have gained experience the hard way over the last seven years, we work today in both delivery and in training (plus making costumes including some based on Paintings for some NT Living Portraits

projects). That experience has included establishing a community owned heritage centre and working as regional learning and interpretation officer for the National Trust.

Today we grow slowly, marketing is our main weakness – how do you reach such a wide market at a time when it seems budgets are continuing to shrink? Sometimes you guess wrong – this year was both the 200th anniversary of Abolition of Slavery and the 400th anniversary of the first permanent English speaking settlement of Jamestown. We developed a special programme for the latter.....

Mistake - low demand and no funding when museums wanted it!

But we enjoy what we do and our clients seem too as well – we doubled our work for English Heritage this year.

It has led us to the USA and Buckingham Palace, when I was awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to study the use of live interpretation at 12 sites from Virginia to Maine and from 17th – 20th century. And for you republicans out there, I was presented with my fellowship by Her Majesty the Queen in person – Sir John and I were and remain deeply honoured! [

UK members check the [www.wcmt.org.uk](http://www.wcmt.org.uk) website, this year is one in history – you too might win a Travelling Fellowship]

Being teachers, (I am a historian by trade and Jen trained in Drama) with experience from infant to adult, has helped us identify and adapt to the needs of varying audiences young and old. Occasionally we will work individually, as Jen did recently as a 1940s scots children's matron but usually we work as a team. Working together allows us to offer different points of view

particularly gender related and to relate to different groups and individuals. Being a couple too has helped as we test our ideas against each other. We know each other's strengths and weakness – so we can compliment and

criticise each other, AND yes we are still married (though our characters rarely are married)!

Financially it is tough but it is rewarding too, and we are determined to make it a success. So if anyone out there needs us, just contact us through our website [www.pastpresent.org.uk](http://www.pastpresent.org.uk)

Peter & Jen Hood,  
PastPresent

*The students showed great maturity in dealing with the difficult content and in playing their part in the dramatic process*

## Museum Association Annual Conference 2007

We have been contacted by Ratan Vaswani at the MA to ask whether there are any live interpreters out there who are interested in performing at one of the evening functions at the MA Conference in October.

The live interpretation should relate to collections at Kelvingrove which is the venue for a big reception on the Monday evening of the conference. The delegates will include many of the directors of many of the major UK galleries, so is a good opportunity to showcase your work. The MA are offering no payment or expenses for this, instead a place at the conference would be given free of charge.

If you are interested, please contact Ratan directly at; [ratan@museumsassociation.org](mailto:ratan@museumsassociation.org), mentioning that you heard about this through IMTAL Europe.

# CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

# WHAT THEY WROTE 10 YEARS AGO

## Living History & Interpretation

By Andrew Robertshaw, Curator/Manager of the Royal Logistic Corps Museum  
Extract of the article 'A dry shell of the past', published in 1997



2006: Mr Robertshaw with a mobile and a black tee-shirt ;)

### Of 1st person, 3rd person and red tee-shirts.

A criticism has been made, of sites employing living history in that, because the interpreters are in first person, there is no opportunity for questioning life in the period after that presented. This contrasts with a third person approach in which interpreters talk about people in the past which allows visitors and interpreters to make contrasts between past and present. History Re-Enactment Workshop has offered a solution to these and a number of other linked problems. In their projects not all interpreters on a site are in first person; instead some are as twentieth century guides and commentators identified by the wearing of distinctive red tee-shirts. The visitor is thereby offered the opportunity to question not just the activities as they develop, but also the research and assumptions upon which it is based. This is an example of an approach that could benefit any museum or site, if it was prepared to accept that we cannot 'know the truth' about the past and that what is offered in galleries or open air sites is an interpretation, based upon available evidence and open to speculation and debate.

The ability of an interpretative technique to involve the visitor to make them want to know more is something which is all too rarely achieved, as visitor evaluation clearly shows, yet living history does have a capacity to intrigue visitors, to involve them in a way that other more conventional methods do not. It is valuable to note that when living history is employed as a technique on a site where more conventional methods are the norm patterns of visitor flow have changed dramatically. Put simply visitors stay for far longer than usual and frequently groups of visitors choose to stay all day. It would appear therefore, that although some museum professionals may prefer to see the past in terms of objects the public are interested in human behaviour and the context of life in the past.

“Bad living history is certainly worse than poor static displays”

### Evaluation is necessary.

Having established that living history is popular with visitors, what we must address is what is being learnt. Is it the case that the increasing popularity of living history is linked to a quantifiable improvement in visitor experience and potentially learning? Sadly, there has been little research into what visitors learn from living history presentations and the research that has been done has largely concentrated on drama-based projects. Evidence has been produced to demonstrate that visitors find the experience enriching and prefer the approach to captions, video or other technology. Is this a justification for adopting the approach? In *Time machines*, the ground breaking book on living history, Jay Anderson claimed that it was possible to "walk around the bend into the past". In response the American curator David Peterson wrote an article condemning Anderson's view of Living history as 'being the best way to teach history' and he offers the opinion that "Historical re-creations are imperfect interpretations of the past itself" (Peterson, 1988).

This cannot be argued with. Anderson made the mistake of overstating the case for living history. The technique offers us the opportunity to replicate aspects of the past, not its total simulation. As such we should view living history projects as generalisations about the past. As in any historical account they are based on incomplete evidence. A living history project is only as good as the evidence used to produce it. Like any form of museum interpretation what is central to the achievement of high standards is the quality of research and critical judgement applied to the project by those controlling it.





On the road of La Somme in July 2006:  
one of Andrew's recent large scale projects.

## Of interactivity and efficiency.

A frequently applied criticism of living history is that it is an example of creeping 'Disneyfication', trivialising the past and creating an end of the importance of 'edutainment' to museums.

The remedy can be seen to have occurred at those museums where living history is run by the curatorial or interpretive staff rather than the public relations or commercial departments. For this reason sites such as Plimoth Plantation have dedicated time and effort into research supporting their presentations with a strong sense of scholarship which is translated into their three dimensional interpretations.

We live in a world in which people are becoming increasingly familiar with high technology, and multimedia presentations are becoming a feature of many museums. The buzz-word of 'interactive' is applied to many forms of information retrieval in which there is no person-to-person contact. Well before the computer age dawned for most museums Tilden made it clear "that personal interpretation is the highest and best form of interaction, and the most desirable and best use of the visitors time ..."

*Even critics of the concept of living history have been forced to concede that good living history is a popular and effective teaching tool...*

Even critics of the concept of living history have been forced to concede that good living history is a popular and effective teaching tool because it communicates a wide impression of the past. Visitors see situations in which people, nature and objects influence each other. This view is not limited to material culture and although the interpretation of a house and artefacts remains central to living history it can go beyond these physical limitations. To achieve this requires the right environment. Not all sites are appropriate for the technique. It requires staff who are well trained and able communicators, who are able to sustain their motivation under the pressure of visitors, or lack of them. Underlying this skill must be a sound historical knowledge and the awareness of the educational impact of their interaction with the visitor. If such training fails then bad living history is certainly worse than poor static displays, graphic panels or computer programmes, but if it is successful there can be no doubt that living history offers far more to the visitor than an other method of interpretation.

**Andrew Robertshaw**  
Royal Logistic Corps Museum

*"Architecture and furnishings are much; we admire and draw conclusions from but we must find the art to keep them from seeming to have been frozen at the moment of time when nobody was home"*

Freeman Tilden (1957)

# MAIN CONTACTS

To send us a message, ask for anything about IMTAL or give any comments about this newsletter...

*Jo Kemp*  
*Robert Forshaw*  
*John Paul Coyle*  
*Loïc Benot*  
*Anna Farthing*  
*David Mosley*



[j.kemp@imtal-europe.org](mailto:j.kemp@imtal-europe.org)



[r.forshaw@imtal-europe.org](mailto:r.forshaw@imtal-europe.org)



[jp.coyle@imtal-europe.org](mailto:jp.coyle@imtal-europe.org)



[l.benot@imtal-europe.org](mailto:l.benot@imtal-europe.org)



[a.farthing@imtal-europe.org](mailto:a.farthing@imtal-europe.org)



[d.mosley@imtal-europe.org](mailto:d.mosley@imtal-europe.org)

## IMTAL ONLINE

Don't forget to visit your Website, [www.imtal-europe.org](http://www.imtal-europe.org) !

Index

WHAT'S NEW ?  
 PRESENTATION  
 CONTACT  
 REGISTER

**IMTAL**  
 EUROPE

ENGAGING PEOPLE THROUGH PERFORMANCE

Challenging Museum Theatre  
 Belfast, Northern Ireland.  
 20th - 23rd September 2007

Controversial Themes: Expanding  
 Audiences ...

>> More...

MEMBERS ACCESS  
 LOGIN :  
 PASSWORD :

NOT A MEMBER YET ?  
 Join IMTAL and  
 receive our newsletter !

The AUTUMN 2006 Edition  
 of our Newsletter is OUT !  
 Check it in your member area

Also check  
 the IMTAL Gallery !

Members of the Month :  
 ULSTER AMERICAN  
 FOLK PARK

International Museum Theatre Alliance - Company n°3765707 - Charity n°1080494 - copyright 2006 all rights reserved - legal mentions

Redaktion

[www.imtal-europe.org](http://www.imtal-europe.org)