

**THE
'THEATRE-IN-MUSEUM'
MOVEMENT
IN THE
BRITISH ISLES**

by

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

**This paper is dedicated to my father, Martin,
who has always given up his opportunities so
that we might have ours.**

**His life was gentle; and the elements
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'This was a man !'**

**William Shakespeare
Julius Caesar
V.v. 73-75**

Abstract

Throughout the 1980's and early 1990's, it became increasingly apparent to interested observers that there was a growing trend towards using theatre in museum settings. The work was varied, ranging from single costumed characters working on galleries to help interpret for visitors items in the collection, to literally hundreds of re-enactors creating entire battle scenarios watched by thousands of visitors.

This study considers the ideas and methods behind the various styles of theatre which have emerged in British museums and questions what it is that both theatre and museum professions think they will achieve by enlivening the traditionally silent enclaves of our museums in such a way.

The study proposes that we are, in fact, witnessing the emergence of a new form of educational theatre which is context-specific and which embraces the needs of museums and their visitors rather than being concerned solely with theatre as an art form. 'Theatre-in-museum', as it has become known, is a synthesis of theatre as a learning medium and the educational and cultural mission of museums. This kind of theatre echoes, to some extent, aspects of other educational theatre movements including those associated with Brecht, Littlewood, Cheeseman, Heathcote, and Boal. Like many movements, 'theatre-in-museum' has emerged out of a period of rapid change and instability, this time in the shifting world of museums which are themselves re-defining their role at the end of the twentieth century.

Chapter One presents a thesis about 'theatre-in-museum' and will include:

- an analysis of contemporary museology;
- an analysis of the characteristics of 'theatre-in-museum' as a theatre form;
and,
- the results of a national research project aimed at establishing the extent to which theatre is used in contemporary museums.

Chapters Two to Six will feature five case studies explaining contemporary practice in this field. The critical attributes of five styles of theatre-in-museum will be explored along with the principal aims and methodologies associated with each one.

A concluding chapter will consider the current state of 'theatre-in-museum' and will propose further action if the work is to flourish in future years.

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THE 'THEATRE-IN-MUSEUM' MOVEMENT

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Foreword

When research for this paper began in 1993, there was a sense amongst some interested observers that a new form of educational theatre was evolving in our museums. It was, however, by no means certain as to whether there were a small number of isolated examples of using theatre in museum settings or whether there was a wider, perhaps national, movement underway. The over-riding feature of carrying out this research has been that it has attempted to define and explain something which has been in a constant state of flux and which has become a more commonplace event now than it was then. In light of this, there are two points worth noting before addressing the main text.

First, the use of inverted commas around the phrase 'theatre-in-museum' appears in the opening pages of this paper in accordance with the title agreed with the University of Leeds. When research began, it was felt that inverted commas would help to signify that the phrase represented a new concept in educational theatre. Over the past five years, however, an awareness of 'theatre-in-museum' has grown in the museum community and the phrase itself is no longer unusual. The use of inverted commas, therefore, will not be used in the following text although the concept of 'theatre-in-museum' will be explained in detail in the opening chapter.

Also, it was originally intended that reference to the work of Platform 4 Theatre at the National Railway Museum in York, of which I am a member, would be avoided in order to allay any question in the reader's mind about the objectivity of the text.

As research developed, however, it became apparent that some aspects of the work of Platform 4 Theatre were both unusual and important in representing certain issues about 'theatre-in-museum', especially those concerning learning outcomes and emotional engagement in museums. The work of this Company therefore features strongly in Chapter Four and, to a lesser extent, in Chapter One. The work is presented in third-person throughout and reference to Platform 4 Theatre centres on documented evidence and a range of interviews with staff at the National Railway Museum, excluding my immediate actor/interpreter colleague, Chris Cade.

Every attempt has been made to present the work of Platform 4 Theatre objectively but it is appropriate that the reader should understand my own connection with this Company.

PART ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE-IN-MUSEUM

CHAPTER ONE

" A new kind of museum professional."

**A thesis on the nature of theatre-in-museum
activity in contemporary Britain.**

CHAPTER ONE
SECTION ONE
INTRODUCTION

Over the weekend of the 27 and 28 March, museums and historic sites throughout the Bradford area will be brought to life by actors, role-players, and costumed characters from all over the country...

Following the festival, there will be a two-day conference open to museum and drama professionals, educationalists or enthusiasts. The inaugural conference in this field was held at Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, in 1991 and opened up the dialogue between museums and live interpretation professionals.

(1)

In 1993 the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford, hosted the first British festival of theatre-in-museum. Fourteen theatre companies from museums in the British Isles performed at a number of venues in the Bradford district. The festival was,

...a celebration of the rapidly growing number of museums and heritage centres which are turning to theatre-in-education companies, professional actors, volunteers and demonstrators in order to enhance, enliven and interpret their exhibitions and collections.

(2)

The festival was followed by what was the second conference on theatre-in-museum in this country and the first ever international conference about the subject. It drew together performers, directors, interpreters, educationalists, curators, museum managers, marketing officers and other interested parties from America, Canada, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, South Africa and Wales. The conference aimed to "build upon the initial discussion [*Liverpool 91*] and to further question the reason and methods behind the many styles of live interpretation currently being practised."(3) It also aimed to establish an association which would act as a forum and professional body for people involved in theatre-in-museum, though an association named the International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) already existed in the United States of America. The Bradford conference recognised IMTAL and agreed to form a European

organisation affiliated to its America-based predecessor working under the title of the European Theatre-in-Museum Association (ETMA).

The conference provided a useful indicator of what was becoming apparent to interested observers throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, that there was a growing phenomenon of using theatre in museums in the British Isles. It also offered a useful glimpse of the international field of theatre-in-museum with overseas delegates coming to Bradford to both observe British practice and to share their own experience. The international field will not, however, be explored in this study.

The fact that such a conference took place at all suggests that there is an interest in using theatre in museums in 1990s Britain though it cannot, on its own, tell us whether this phenomenon represents an important new development in theatre and/or museology, or whether it is just a passing trend of an essentially small scale and insular nature. It is, therefore, the intention of this study to establish whether or not there is something which we might call a theatre-in-museum movement in contemporary Britain. An understanding of the distinction between an observable growing phenomenon of using theatre in museums and what will be referred to as a theatre-in-museum movement is fundamental to this study.

Let us work from a double premise for the moment. First, let us take it that we can observe various forms of broadly theatrical activity being used in museum settings. Second, that the incidence of theatrical activity in museums has increased during the 1980s and 1990s from an existing and, in some cases, long-standing bed-rock of established practice.

We will begin by identifying two broad categories of theatre activity in museums, primarily so that we may dispense with one and embrace the other as the focus for this study. On the one hand, museums and heritage sites such as the West Yorkshire Transport Museum or Ripon Cathedral have occasionally been used by professional theatre companies to stage anything from Shakespeare to Arthur Miller. The theatre event is not necessarily related to that particular site but is regarded as being somehow enhanced by the ambience provided by that setting or, conversely, the setting is seen in a new light because of the production, or both. Sites such as Beamish Open-Air Museum in County Durham or Clarke Hall near Wakefield, on the other hand, are well known examples of museums where costumed demonstrators and role-playing characters bring to life the period represented by the site. These kinds of theatrical activity are integrated with the visitors' general experience of the museum and are dedicated to that site alone. A simple browse through arts events directories

and museum brochures can confirm that these two broad categories of theatre event are readily and currently accessible in a number of museums and this leads us to our first premise that theatrical activity is a feature of contemporary British museums.

A little further simple enquiry will confirm that some museums, including the examples cited above, have been involved in this kind of activity for a number of years. What is important to our second premise, however, is that whilst the idea of theatrical events taking place in museums is by no means a new one, anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of theatre in museums has been on the increase throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s and this leads to our second premise. Whether such an increase has arisen from some deliberate effort to explore the educational potential of using theatre in museum venues or whether it is the result of passing fashion is important in distinguishing between the idea of a growing phenomenon, arising from random individual practice in some kind of coincidence model, and the concept of a theatre-in-museum movement.

The view that an increase in theatre activity in museums constitutes a theatre-in-museum movement is based upon two ideas.

First, that theatre-in-museum is a cohesive event where the theatrical activity does not just happen to be in a museum setting on the grounds of aesthetics or for the convenience of the venue, but that the theatrical activity is essentially dedicated to the overall mission of the museum itself. In other words, theatre-in-museum is an holistic concept embracing a synthesis of both theatrical and museum activity. The second of the two broad categories outlined above, including Beamish and Clarke Hall would be embraced by this view. *Richard III* at the West Yorkshire Transport Museum and *The Crucible* at Ripon Cathedral would not. Second, this view requires us to consider the nature of a movement as distinct from a growing phenomenon. On the one hand, a movement may be viewed as an increasing occurrence or numerical growth of some kind. To this end, we do need to ascertain whether the anecdotal evidence suggesting a rise in the incidence of using theatre in museums is valid in light of objective research, and this will be fully explored through national research outlined later in this chapter. A movement in the context of this study, however, is more than just a measure of quantity. We need to consider whether any theatre-in-museum practice which does exist is bound together by some kind of common purpose, drive, intention or philosophy in its thinking and by any common methodology in its actuality. The Bradford conference literature referred to the "reason and methods"(4) of theatre-in-museum practice and this phrase would be consistent with our definition of a movement.

Let us analyse these initial ideas about a theatre-in-museum movement a little more closely. The distinction which has been made between theatre which happens to be in a museum and that which is dedicated to the mission of the museum itself does make broad assumptions about the nature of theatre, the nature of museums, and reasons for bringing the two together.

It would be a mistake, and no doubt insulting to the various professionals involved, to assume that the decision to play, for example, Barry Rutter's **Richard III** (Northern Broadsides:1993) at the West Yorkshire Transport Museum was just a whim. Whilst the production in terms of plot, characterisation, style, and so on, found no direct line of interpretation in the gallery of trams and trolley buses, there were other perspectives to be considered. This particular company is committed to bringing the works of Shakespeare to northern audiences through using northern actors, emphasising northern accents, effecting occasional adaptations of the texts (e.g. northern place names exchanged for southern ones) and by using venues other than conventional theatres. Other than the logistical advantages of designing a tour free of the restrictions of booking into theatres only, and thus being able to take the production to virtually any town in the north, the use of old mills, tram sheds or cattle auction markets has a certain cultural resonance which potentially provides a further tie with the audiences or at least the district. Furthermore, the use of non-theatre venues such as museums may be viewed as a legitimate strategy for challenging perceptions of theatre in a much broader sense. Not only has **Richard III**, once set in a transport museum, the potential to alienate audiences in a Brechtian manner, but it may also challenge theatre producers, arts organisations, funding bodies, actors and audiences themselves to re-assess what conditions we actually need in order to stage vibrant high-quality theatre to a wide ranging audience across a large region of the country.

Equally, from the museum's perspective, the ties between the play and the venue are not obvious. **Richard III** did not attempt to illuminate the gallery of road transport. The venue was used as a space, not particularly a museum gallery. Once again, however, it cannot fail to challenge our perceptions of what a museum should or could be. Whilst normally being a day-time site housing a collection of rail locomotives and local road transport, by night it had become a community centre, more municipal building than museum. Whilst social demographic surveys reveal that roughly the same groups of the population are frequent visitors to both museums and the theatre, and therefore an event like this could not be expected to draw in an entirely new client-group, the general principle of using the museum for events

outside the normal museum brief has the potential of challenging the views of museum professionals and the public alike as to what a museum can be.

It is, therefore, in no sense a negative judgement to describe this kind of experience as theatre 'which happens to be in a museum'. This kind of theatrical or indeed museum experience has its own rationale and intended outcomes and we can argue a case for or against its general value and effectiveness. It is, however, to be distinguished from theatre which is dedicated to the general mission of the museum in terms of preserving, interpreting and presenting for the public benefit the collection or site of which it is the custodian. This second kind of theatre, which we may call theatre-in-museum, is intimately bound up with a particular institution. The Northern Broadsides event could have been (and indeed was) played in any number of venues, but happened to be in Bradford for part of the tour. Equally, the West Yorkshire Transport Museum could have (and indeed has) hosted any number of productions but happened on this occasion to host **Richard III**. In other words, neither the theatre production nor the museum particularly relied on the other but they just happened to come together on this occasion. With theatre-in-museum there is an essential relationship between the theatre event and the museum itself and, far from just happening to come together they are purposefully united. To further clarify this, let us look briefly at an example of what we can call a theatre-in-museum event.

Beamish is the North of England Open Air Museum near Durham. The subject of the museum is the recent past of the North of England. With a brief to explain and educate about the everyday life of working and middle-class people of the early 20th century, it has adopted an approach which is unconventional. Although it houses an enormous collection of historically important objects, it does not exhibit them in glass cases within the confines of a museum building. Beamish is, rather, a re-created town comprising a range of buildings, cobbled streets, a park, tramways, a railway station, a colliery and a farm. The buildings have been rescued from demolition projects around the region and carefully transported to Beamish to be reconstructed. The exception is the drift mine in the colliery which was there originally. There are very few information labels or display panels. Instead Beamish is populated by a host of costumed demonstrators. The museum guide-book explains,

Most important of all, the buildings contain people. It is this personal interpretation of the past that distinguishes Beamish from many other museums.

(5)

By costuming all demonstrators in Edwardian styles and by creating an illusion of daily life in 1913 through general activity around the site, the Museum is doing something which is rather more than explaining in a conventionally objective way about life in that period. The guide-book, again, explains that the use of display cases and information panels "would make our displays less real."(6). There is, then, at Beamish an attempt to 'make real' the past and to evoke a sense of what life might have been like in the years before the First World War. Underpinned by thorough research and scholarly interpretation of this period of history, Beamish sets out to present the recent past through the eyes of working people whose lives were not necessarily captured in the history books of the time.

Most museums and history books have traditionally told the stories of richer members of society... Thus, most history is written from the top downwards. Beamish exists to tell history from the bottom upwards.

(7)

The way in which it attempts to do this is not only to involve demonstrators in explaining to visitors about particular aspects of living, but also to re-create a general sense of the sights, sounds, smells, touch and even taste of 1913. Whether this kind of activity can, strictly speaking, be called role-play will be explored in Chapter Two but, for now, we will take it that dressing in period costume and behaving in a manner which attempts to "make real"(8) the past is broadly speaking theatrical activity.

Once viewed in this way, the examples of museum-based theatrical events offered above fall into quite different categories. The work at Beamish is to be regarded as an example of a theatre-in-museum event of the kind which will be the focus of this study. The staging of *Richard III* in the West Yorkshire Transport Museum is an example of theatre 'which happens to be in a museum' and, for the purposes of this study, this broad category will now be dispensed with.

Having identified the kind of work which will be categorised as theatre-in-museum, let us further clarify the notion of a movement of ideas. We should be aware at an early stage that the idea of theatre which is integrated with the mission of the museum rather than being a supplementary event implies perhaps the most important single feature of the whole concept of theatre-in-museum. That is, that once theatrical activity is adopted by the museum as a method for interpreting its collection or site it literally becomes part of the museum. In recognising that we are dealing with a synthesis of theatre and museums it becomes imperative that we understand both the nature of theatre as an interpretative device and the nature of museums as institutions.

This in turn demands that a rationale be developed for the inclusion of this particular medium amongst the range of resources available to an institution with a mission to preserve, present and interpret for the public benefit its collection and / or site.

We might reasonably suppose that once museums and theatre-in-museum practitioners perceive the need to develop a rationale for the use of theatre as part of the museum mission, then the potential would be there for the sharing between various institutions of the "reason and methods"(9) of their work, as aspired to by the organisers of the Bradford conference. The idea that theatrical activity is actually part of the museum gives a legitimacy to the event and, we might expect, would provide some kind of common ground for discussion. In this sense, the potential for a movement appears promising. On the other hand, that same fusing of theatre and museums gives rise, in some cases, to tension rather than to the bonding of ideas. In museums such as Beamish where theatrical activity intended to 'make real' the atmosphere of 1913 is absolutely central to the whole visitor experience and has been a feature of the museum since its inception, we witness an event which has had a kind of unity between theatrical form and museum content from the outset. In other cases, however, theatre is being introduced as a new element into long-standing institutions and this is not welcomed by everybody. This tension exists both within individual institutions and across the profession as a whole.

Indeed, the process by which theatre is absorbed into some museums tends to diffuse views about its use. The Bradford conference indicated the wide range of people involved in this work. Theatre projects may be initiated by a host of different people including education officers, curators, interpretation officers, demonstrators, explainers, events managers, marketing staff, or by the performers themselves. The influence of the initiator upon the subsequent nature of theatre work in a given museum will be revealed through the case-studies. What is important to realise at this stage, however, is that where theatre is being instigated by a great variety of professionals (and amateur volunteers), all with their own agenda within the museum, then the idea that using theatre in itself provides some kind of common ground is erroneous. Ironically, once theatre becomes fused with the mission of the museum, its purpose and style may be as diverse as the number of interested parties involved in its use rather than providing a focus for unity.

It seems clear that if a movement of common ideologies pertaining to theatre-in-museum is to develop, then a new understanding needs to be encouraged amongst those involved in this work, of both the reason and method underpinning theatrical activity and the ideas and methodology of museums as institutions.

At the Bradford conference Colin Ford, the then director of the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, offered a key note speech in which he said to the assembled delegates,

You as actors, performers, interpreters, or even as organisers of those activities, - you are all, I think, forming a part of this very new kind of museum professional.

(10)

This suggests that Ford perceives theatre-in-museum as having a distinct role in museums. He clearly sees practitioners in this field as museum professionals who will be embraced by the museums and who will, in turn, understand and promote the aims of the institutions in which they operate. His remarks indicate that theatre-in-museum is being promoted, to some degree at least, from within traditional museum circles rather than infiltrating from without. His remarks also suggest that a synthesis between theatre and museum practice is emerging to the point where he can perceive that there will be such a thing as a theatre-in-museum professional. This new professional is one with an understanding of both theatre and museums and who is able to synthesise the workings of both into an holistic event which will offer a meaningful experience to the museum visitor.

Colin Ford, though, does not enjoy unanimity in his views. The Liverpool conference held at the Merseyside Maritime Museum in 1991 revealed quite violently opposed points of view and even open animosity between delegates.

It was of some concern to the organisers that the first conference on the subject [Liverpool, November 1991] featured violently expressed differences of opinion between curators ("these are museums, not theatre venues!"), live interpreters ("we are not actors!") and actors ("you are not trained performers!").

(11)

These comments reveal that others in the profession either cannot perceive or choose to reject the idea of a synthesis between theatre and museums. The two are seen as being quite separate with guarded territory being preserved on all sides. The idea that there might be such a thing as a theatre-in-museum professional who can use performance skills to present a programme which is part of the museum agenda seems to be remote. Most significantly, we are once again required to address the notion of what a museum actually is. The reported cry of the curators that "these are museums,

not theatre venues!"(12) seems to belie very clear ideas about what a museum can and cannot be and what theatre can and cannot do. Evidently these perceptions of museums and of theatre do not allow that the two may come together.

What becomes obvious through both the Liverpool debate (in a negative though not necessarily unfounded sense) and through Ford's (more positive though yet-to-be substantiated) words is that no study of theatre-in-museum can be valid without a thorough analysis of what museums themselves consider to be their role in contemporary Britain. We have, thus far, tended to focus upon the nature of the theatre which is involved in museums and this may suggest that it is the theatrical event itself which is a variable element in museums which are some kind of fixed and constant factor in the equation. This would be a false assumption for museums are far from being so at present. It is important from the outset that we appreciate that British museums are undergoing a period of rapid evolution in their ideology, their day-to-day practice, their financial structures and in their relationships with the public. The underlying philosophies, values and attitudes which have dominated museums for over a century are no longer to be taken for granted. In his Bradford speech, Ford reflected upon the position of pioneer which the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television had enjoyed for several years, but suggested that the way it operated was no longer to be thought of as being particularly unusual.

Ten years, nine years, eight years ago. Even as late as 1989 when we won our second award, you could say that the extensive use of interactive displays was the basis for our considerable success in bringing about understanding, pleasure, enjoyment, and put us in a unique position at the forefront of museums. That is no longer true. It is not the case now. Every museum is interactive. A museum with no buttons to push, no screens to watch, and so on, is the exception rather than the norm.

(13)

In addition, he suggested that the public have changing expectations of a museum visit, that, "The public are demanding more. Seen that! Done that!"(14) Not only does this indicate a rapid change in the methodology employed by museums in presenting and interpreting their collections but that the role of the public is changing from one of passive observer to that of demanding consumer. Whilst not being relieved of their traditional duty as guardians of their collections, museums have now been encumbered with a quite different role in relation to the public. Having, to a great extent, been funded centrally for many years in order to maintain a public service

hinging around the preservation, presentation and interpretation of objects and locations for the public benefit, museums have more recently been forced to openly market their collections and enter into competition with a myriad of other leisure and heritage attractions. In short, they must now vie for a share of the public's disposable time and income in order to survive.

Museums face an enormous challenge in reconciling any ideas of preserving and presenting aspects of our heritage in the context of academically rigorous, educational, enriching and enlivening displays, with ensuring that the (almost invariably) paying public literally comes through the doors in sufficient numbers to keep the museum financially viable. The museum is no longer a service provided for those who wish to come, but an enterprise which must convince consumers that they want to. In choosing what to include in the visitor experience, museums can ultimately resist but cannot ignore the pressure of taking into account how successful each strategy will be in bringing people to the museum.

Set this single example of funding arrangements alongside other influences including new interpretative technology, a new information-gathering culture in the public domain embracing television, computers and the inter-net, a shifting pattern in the use of leisure time, the changing policies of central bodies such as the Department for Culture, the Museums Association and the Museums and Galleries Commission, and we can appreciate that the world of museums is far from being a fixed and constant factor in our consideration of theatre-in-museum. The changing face of museums is not simply a mechanistic response to changing circumstances but also reflects the way in which people choose to use their time, what our Government feels constitutes an appropriate use of our heritage and, indeed, what we believe our heritage to be. Museums are currently reassessing at a fundamental level, their role in our society as a whole. The emergence of theatre-in-museum is not simply happening in a context which is shifting but actually *because* that context is shifting.

This chapter will promote a central thesis about the nature of theatre-in-museum. The thesis will then be supported by a number of detailed case studies which will illustrate and analyse a range of theatre-in-museum activity in contemporary British museums. A concluding chapter will summarise the current state of theatre-in-museum and consider options available to museums and theatre practitioners for the future. For ease of reading, this chapter will be divided into sections which will deal with discrete aspects of this study. We will begin by exploring in depth the context of museums in which this type theatre operates.

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SECTION TWO THE MUSEUM AGENDA

From their beginnings, museums have been concerned with preserving artefacts which have been systematically classified within a collection deemed to be of benefit to the public.

Whilst early private collections preserved artefacts, they could not be considered to be museums because they were built up largely through the choice of one or more individuals who wielded absolute power as to what was brought into the collection, what was retained or disposed of and what, if anything, was open to viewing by others. Where viewing was permitted, usually on payment of a fee, it had the flavour of a curiosity tour of a miscellany of objects rather than being for any structured purpose of betterment. However, when the collections of John Tradescant were inherited by Elias Ashmole who then donated them to the University of Oxford at the end of the seventeenth century, the word museum was used to recognise this shift from private to public ownership. A governing body classified and displayed the artefacts in such a way as to make more clear their meaning and importance, and they opened it for the general betterment and instruction of a viewing public. The subsequent regulations of the museum of 1686 make this clear.

Because the knowledge of Nature is very necessarie to humane life, health & the conveniences thereof, & because that knowledge cannot be soe well & usefully attain'd, except the history of Nature be knowne & considered; and to this [end], is requisite the inspection of Particulars, especially those as are extraordinary in their Fabrick, or usefull in Medicine, or applyed to Manufacture or Trade.

(1)

The idea that the study of artefacts, kept in perpetuity, should promote learning and that this benefit should be offered to the public was initiated. The fees, still often imposed, restricted which elements of the public might gain access, but nevertheless the principle of a "Musaeum."⁽²⁾ being for the public benefit was established. A definition of museums gradually emerged and soon four attributes became commonplace:

- the idea that knowledge would be gained by the study of objects;

- that objects would be preserved, categorised and presented within a framework of systematic classification;
- that the collection would be run by a governing body of some kind on behalf of the public;
- that the collection would be accessible to the public (even if by special arrangement such as the payment of a fee).

But museums as we know them, or at least have known them until recently, grew at a frantic pace out of the utilitarian ideals of the mid-Victorian era. The International Exhibitions of the mid and late nineteenth century provided, in part, the initiative for a broader development of museums and galleries, marking a spectacular shift from museums for the elite to museums for the masses. Emerging during the same period as political and social reform, the expansion of education through schools and mechanics institutes, and the growth of public libraries and other municipal facilities for physical, educational and moral development, the museums of the nineteenth century reflected high ideals of self-betterment in Victorian Britain. Like much else in that era, approaches to the collections in museums were taken to extremes of organisation. Rigid taxonomies were established and collections were displayed in categories that reflected a world where everything had its place and could be labelled with precision and confidence. For all of the Imperialist and rigid qualities of Victorian museums, they did reflect a society which was underpinned by a driving utilitarian ideal that the masses should be instructed and that these opportunities for self-advancement would underpin a nation which would grow in strength on the back of individual achievement. Increasingly, trade unions, co-operative societies and various emancipation movements took the nation towards being a society which would care for its weakest members and, as the twentieth century progressed, the Victorian foundations of providing facilities to promote self-betterment were accompanied, somewhat anachronistically, by a socialist movement which aimed to make provision for all. The National Health Service, free education, higher school-leaving ages and free entry to National and Local Authority museums became the norm, and the long-held ideals that museums were for the public benefit seemed to be enshrined in the British way of life.

Although museums, galleries and heritage sites became generally free facilities, available to the public nationally, with local museums in virtually every town and city, the way of organising and presenting collections had not particularly moved on since the time of their inception. Museums still reflected the strict taxonomies established in the Victorian era. Objects remained case-bound, paintings hung in serried ranks on walls, and heritage sites sported lawns, maybe a cold outside toilet

and the odd explanatory notice. More fundamentally, although ideas about the meaning and significance of items in a collection changed over the years, this was not necessarily being reflected in the way in which collections were presented to and interpreted for the public. The popularity of Victorian methods of stripping objects of their original setting with the intention that they could be viewed objectively in the assumed neutral setting of museum cases began to wane. A new approach in some quarters was to recognise that objects do not actually have a single objective meaning that can be classified and remain set for all time. Some professionals in museums began to promote the idea that objects are not neutral at all but that their symbolic meaning is different for different people. They felt that the way in which meaning changes over time and in different situations should be reflected in the way that museums think about, present and explain their collection to the public.

During the 1970s and 1980s some revolutionary approaches to museums began to emerge. Clarke Hall, near Wakefield, was what became known as a living museum. Children no longer went to simply view artefacts in a seventeenth century farmhouse, but went instead dressed in costume to work at churning butter, turning the spit and generally re-enacting a day in the life of the home of Benjamin Clarke. Meanwhile, Beamish was inviting the general public to travel back in time and experience, rather than simply look at, the past in living-museum settings complete with costumed hosts representing shop-keepers, miners and tram drivers. In 1984, Jorvik opened its doors and an excited public literally queued for hours to take a ride in the "time car."⁽³⁾ The car would take visitors, on its electronically controlled pathway, through a reconstructed Viking village and past the original archaeological dig before finally off-loading them in a small exhibition area which outlined the archaeological exploration of the site. A year later, the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television opened to great acclaim and received two Museum of the Year awards in rapid succession. Galleries were highly interactive, though there were still plenty of cased objects as well. The public's imagination had been caught by the chance to travel on a flying carpet courtesy of television colour separation; to go on camera and read the News at Ten from the auto-cue; or to control television cameras under the direction of the pre-recorded studio director. In 1987 a group of students from Bretton Hall College arrived offering to perform plays on the galleries, and soon afterwards Action Replay was established as the museum's resident theatre company.

A revolution in museology had taken place and the rest of the museum world was about to follow, some willingly, others not. Conversions to the new museology were not, however, to rely solely on principles of museum presentation. The financial climate, characterised by drastic cuts in central funding, forced the hand of many and

suddenly museums found themselves competing not just with each other, but with the commercial tourist industry as a whole. It is in this climate of rapid change, which some would describe as crisis, that the museum industry has had to re-address its approaches to the preservation, presentation and interpretation of its collections. To what extent do those early ideals of keeping collections for the public benefit still apply? Some suggest that there is no contradiction between making museums attractive and exciting to visitors and at the same time maintaining the principles of preserving and presenting collections. Others express a concern that, in popularising museums, they move perilously close to becoming nothing more than theme parks for the titillation of a thrill-seeking public and that scholarship must be trivialised as a result. Neil Cossons, Director of the National Museum of Science and Industry, maintains that the answer is not so much in the style of museums but in their substance. In his view, the differentiating attribute that sets museums apart from theme parks lies in their collections.

There are many means by which we can present and interpret collections to the public. The process of museums has many facets. Liberal thinkers with open minds accept this. They understand there is no contradiction between popularization and scholarship. But what is immutable and sacred is the content. The lifeblood of museums is their collections, the heartbeat is provided by good curatorship and conservation. The museum, if it is not a collection, is nothing. The common link between us all is the stuff of museums. Scholarship will reveal its truths. But the customers for those collections and truths must have a voice too.

(4)

Whether Cossons's popularisation and Bertolt Brecht's popular (in the context of his theatre movement) are the same, is a matter of conjecture. Certainly, Neil Cossons is careful in his choice of words when considering new meanings of museum language. He questions the value placed on words such as "visitor" as opposed to "customer", "museum" as opposed to "theme park", and "Disneyfication" as opposed to "attractive."⁽⁵⁾ He suggests that whilst a kind of intellectual snobbery remains in the higher echelons of huge museum institutions, the social historians at the "bottom of the pile" have attracted a "new mass audience, unfamiliar with traditional museum values, [which] pays eagerly at the gate to see the working lives of their grandparents brought to life."⁽⁶⁾ Cossons displays a commitment to academic rigour and a faith in its durability, though his work seems to lean towards an understanding of the methods which will attract the visitor whilst explaining little about how these methods will

make collections accessible. The ideals of Brecht in bringing quality experiences to what Cossons also refers to as a "mass audience"(7) through accessible and intelligible popular theatre are not quite so evident in this argument for the popularisation of museums. Nevertheless, Cossons's claim that, "What we must do... is to differentiate between content and process"(8) does lie at the heart of the current museum debate. The defining criterion for museum development remains one of purpose and museums are still charged with a responsibility to preserve, present and interpret their collections for the public benefit.

Let us consider how museums try to fulfil this purpose by dividing their general task into two broad areas, one of which is critical to a consideration of theatre-in-museum.

Of great importance to the work of museums, but of lesser concern to a consideration of theatre-in-museum is that museums preserve their collection. As well as actually keeping their collection in safety, this element of their task also includes acquiring new artefacts for the collection and sometimes disposing of them. It includes conservation, restoration, research and publication. Cossons's "heartbeat"(9) of the museum lies here and without the highest standards in these respects, a museum would probably not only lose Museum and Galleries Commission Registration Status but would be in danger of rapid and terminal decline. These functions can to a large extent exist without the public being involved and, indeed, usually take place behind closed doors. Whilst theatre-in-museum may be involved in these aspects (through oral history research connected with theatre programmes, for example) it does not represent the main relationship between general museum operations and theatre. We will therefore put these relatively hidden aspects of museum work to one side.

The other broad area, which is central to theatre-in-museum activity, is that of making the collection accessible to the public. Here museums are concerned with two principal functions, that of presenting their collection and that of interpreting it. It is in this arena that what we might call the 'great museum debate' of recent years has raged. It must be recognised that the process of mounting even a single exhibition is a highly complex business and that the setting up of whole museums infinitely more so. A new exhibition is influenced by a range of opinions including the views of curators, committees, governing bodies, sponsors, and the public (as revealed through on-going evaluations). Added to this are other pressures such as security requirements, the size of the gallery, the size of objects, conservation and display requirements, and even the possibility that some objects to an intended exhibition are contracted to loan to other museums. We do not need to fully explore the world of museum internal politics to appreciate that the likelihood of an exhibition arising from purely academic motives

under circumstances where a single clear vision of its style and content can flourish is limited.

Added to the myriad of pressures sampled here is the over-riding concern that the museum will need to capitalise on exhibitions in terms of publicity. For many, exhibitions must not only make sense as exhibitions but must also have the potential to supply word and picture images which will cry out from the front of publicity leaflets. For example, one of the newest museums in the country, the Royal Armouries in Leeds, employs images of charging knights on horse-back and of Elizabethan nobles engaged in rapier duels. Accompanying notes usually centre on "the past [being] brought dramatically to life by spectacular live demonstrations, lavish re-enactments... exciting jousting tournaments, falconry and riding displays." (10) Even a television advertisement was commissioned to show knights in shining armour literally breaking out of glass cases and challenging visitors to dare to visit the museum. The final challenge to the viewer was "Can you handle it?" (11) The television imagery says much about the museum debate. We cannot fail to appreciate that this museum is not a stuffy case-bound collection of tedious tradition but a living, action packed day out for the whole family (as long as they have the nerve to take it!). The cases of the old style museum have quite literally been smashed to pieces. The advertisement does not simply compete with Harewood House, Leeds City Art Gallery, Jorvik, or other Yorkshire museums, but with Lightwater Valley and Alton Towers in its thrilling message.

What results from this complex web of pressures upon the design processes is a tension between ideals and ambitions. It is a tension which can not only provide the inspiration for mould-breaking approaches to making collections accessible and intelligible, but also induce the corruption of standards which reduce the treasures of the nation to a populist gimmick. Bearing this background tension in mind, let us look at a further academic quandary which calls for consideration within exhibition design. Let us assume for now that an exhibition has been agreed in all other respects except for how it is actually going to be presented. Just what does need to be considered when showing artefacts to the public? At the centre of this debate is the concept of purpose. Assuming that the education and enlightenment of the viewing public is uppermost in mind, the museum is principally faced with deciding to what extent it will 'present' its artefacts and to what extent it will 'interpret' them. In these two words lies much of the museum debate of the 1990s and the exact balance struck between presentation and interpretation will encompass a whole host of other issues including the possibility that theatre-in-museum may be adopted as a method of either.

Underpinning the nineteenth century practice of removing objects from their natural surroundings and arranging them in the assumed objective setting of the museum was the idea that by placing them in a stark environment, free of distractions which corrupted and confused their original craftsmanship and intended use, it would help make the study of them clear. In particular, by organising objects according to strict classifications the importance of them in the development of, say, hand tools, farm machinery or a particular artistic movement would become obvious. This founding approach to British museology lasted well into the twentieth century and represented a fixed and highly ordered way of knowing. This approach manifested itself in everyday museum experience in the traditional glass-case gallery. Objects would be spaced out in gently lit cabinets and the accompanying labels would vary from simply identifying each object to offering a minimal amount of information about them. The galleries themselves would usually have themes with unambiguous titles such as Roman Britain, The Impressionists, Venetian Glass, Neolithic Period, and so on.

This approach is still used in varying degrees but it would now be unusual for a museum to be entirely organised in this way. It assumes that museums are centres for learning rather than places for teaching and that a principal role of the museum is to present its exhibition to the public rather than actively explaining it. The museum is seen primarily as a source of knowledge and information and, most importantly, the place where real artefacts representing branches of history, art, science, and so on, can be studied for whatever reason the visitor wishes. Attempts by the museum to impose meaning on to objects in its collection would, according to this model, be potentially intrusive to the visitor who arrives at the museum on their own mission, and such attempts should be resisted. This approach has, however, lost favour in some quarters and the idea of presenting collections in such taxonomies is under scrutiny. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, in *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, questions whether,

... the existing ways in which collections are organised mean that taxonomies are in fact socially constructed rather than 'true' or 'rational'? Do the existing systems of classification enable some ways of knowing, but prevent others?...There is little idea that material things can be understood in a multitude of different ways, that many meanings can be read from things, and that this meaning can be manipulated as required.

(12)

Whilst the placing of objects in a neutral environment appears to remove them from their original context and use, it does also allow the freedom of interpretation to be

passed over to the visitor. It does in this sense address the problem that, by interpreting artefacts for the visitor, the museum ironically imposes a kind of restriction on the different meanings which can be derived from the collection and may limit the range of interpretations which visitors are allowed to make for themselves. The neutral approach to presentation recognises that objects do not have a single unchallenged meaning and that to exhibit an artefact, say a nineteenth century textile loom, as a sign of the oppression of the workers of Victorian Britain is to deny that it may also represent engineering achievement and the creation of power and prosperity for a whole community. In the context of a museum where information gathering by visitors is transient, where word panels are brief and videos a few minutes long, explaining the importance and meaning of artefacts will always be a limited affair. Rather than being faced with one-sided views about artefacts appearing on the galleries, an air of impartiality has tended to dominate the scene and thus objects are often accompanied, in this model, by limited explanations or no explanations at all.

A second rationale behind the neutral approach to display, again with a certain logic, is that not all items in collections are there to inform in a cognitive sense. Some objects have an aesthetic quality and visitors are intended to experience them rather than be told about them. Labels, videos and information panels would be an intrusion into the contemplation of the beauty of some objects, according to this view, and the value of being told that something exhibits craftsmanship, is beautiful, or has artistic merit is to disenfranchise the visitor of their right to interact with the exhibit for themselves. However, to what extent objects are able to "speak for themselves"(13) is questioned by Peter Vergo in his paper "The Reticent Object" (The New Museology) written in 1989. He maintains that the neutral approach is,

... arrogant and uncompromising, which takes for granted a certain level of education and sensitivity on the part of the spectator, making no concessions to visitors from other social and cultural backgrounds, to the intellectually curious but uninformed.

(14)

In light of museums attracting new mass audiences in the 1980s and 1990s and bringing into their galleries a new kind of visitor, potentially not so well versed in the skills required for an independent de-coding of minimalist exhibition designs, Vergo's scepticism about leaving objects to communicate alone is perhaps increasingly relevant.

The alternative, then, is to help visitors to interpret the exhibition by providing them with information or by placing objects into a context which helps to make sense of their meaning. Museums in recent years have increasingly concentrated not just on the importance of individual objects in their own right but also on the contexts and stories related to them. In a sense, museums have decided to speak for the objects. This is not entirely a new feature of museums which have, for many years, interpreted their collections to some degree but the extent to which interpretation features as part of exhibitions is different.

The techniques employed are many and varied. Simply by placing objects under general headings the museum begins the process of indicating their relevance. The textile loom, mentioned earlier, if placed in a line of developing machinery for example, would begin to contextualise the loom in terms of engineering progress rather than in the context of working conditions or commerce and enterprise. Written labels provide the mainstay of interpretation methodology in many museums. Texts explaining the various stories represented by the collection help visitors to understand the significance of items on display and they provide general background knowledge to further inform the reader. They may also offer interpretations about why an object was important and for whom, and even why it remains important for us today. Texts, however, need to be short. Well established research shows that visitors study objects as part of a journey through the museum and will rarely tolerate labels of more than eighty words in length. Videos, computers and interactive exhibits, where visitors push buttons or touch screens in order to play back information, are common methods of interpretation in contemporary galleries. Live demonstrators may offer explanations of artefacts through short gallery tours. The giant beam engine in the industrial gallery of the National Science Museum, for example, is operated several times a day by demonstrators who then interact with visitors. Here again there is an opportunity for offering explanations to the visitor, not just technically but at an historical, social or political level too. The visitor has the opportunity to interact in a different way this time by asking questions and beginning to pursue their own relationship with the machinery. These methods, and others, do begin to interpret the artefacts in the collection on behalf of the visitor, but they still essentially keep the objects in the relatively neutral setting of the museum.

A final general category of museum interpretation is that of the wholesale contextualisation of artefacts in reconstructed environments. These contextualised displays range from being small (occupying a corner of a gallery) to gigantic and may, in the case of Beamish for example, involve the reconstruction of an entire village over several acres of land. This time, levels of interpretation are very high

indeed. Objects are no longer viewed in isolation but as part of a whole setting which places them in the context of their original purpose and use. Visitors no longer view a collection of nineteenth century biscuit tins in a glass case, but on the shelves of the grocers shop. Early twentieth century carts no longer stand in an agricultural shed but are hauled around the site by working horses. The Victorian kitchen is reconstructed complete with the kettle on the hob and a conserved cat sleeping on the chair. It is intended that visitors will be able to understand the use of artefacts and their original purpose and that their ability to build up a general conceptual framework regarding the subject of the exhibition or site will subsequently be enhanced. The approach tends to be popular with visitors who can gain a feeling for the period and can enjoy the experience of apparently visiting a different place or time. It must be recognised, however, that in museological terms the approach has its limitations and is not without risk. One of the more contextualised of contemporary museums is Jorvik in York, where an important element in the visitor experience is the journey in the time car mentioned earlier. The advertisements celebrate the intended experience with clarity.

Visit the Jorvik Viking Centre, step aboard a time car and be whisked back through the centuries to real-life Viking Britain... a bustling market, dark, smoky houses and a busy wharf have all been recreated in accurate detail so that you can experience in sight, sound and smell exactly what it was like to live and work in Viking-age Jorvik.

(15)

The museum overtly sets out to create a sense of the time through a reconstructed environment, although we must remember that this is in conjunction with viewing the original archaeological dig and also a case-bound exhibition of findings from the site. Nevertheless, Jorvik is a fine example of an approach, taken to great lengths, which we can also witness on a smaller scale in many other museums. But it is what Jorvik does not tell us, in association with the extent to which visitors accept contextualised reconstructions not just as being authentic but as a summary of the whole truth about a period, that gives rise for concern. As David Peterson in "There is no Living History. There are no Time Machines" (History News) points out,

Historical re-creations are imperfect interpretations of the past, not the past itself. Indeed, the medium's most stubborn flaw is its practitioners' reluctance to accept its unavoidable limitations... there are no time machines.

(16)

Jorvik, Beamish, and others of the wholesale approach to contextualised reconstruction, along with the London Transport Museum, the Imperial War Museum and a vast number of others who use this method on a smaller scale, rarely mention the more unsavoury aspects of the lives and situations they re-create. Poverty, disease, the abuse of power, corruption and hunger, rarely constitute the matter portrayed in contextualised and reconstructed exhibitions. Furthermore,

The living-history movement should moderate its claims. It is not a flawless way to learn history. It does not always surpass other mediums... Only by facing up to the limitations inherent to historical inquiry can living-history museums become both popular and effective tools.

(17)

So the conspiracy of contextualisation operates on two fronts. First, it offers a particular view of what objects and locations signify. Whilst it is rare to find a contextualised exhibition which sets out to interpret a collection or site in a way which could actually be called extreme, it must, by definition, represent only one interpretation amongst many. Indeed it is ironic that, because these interpretations are so frequently explained in a careful, reasonable manner, they come through to the visitor as being that much closer to some kind of accepted truth. Second, when visitors are told that they will experience life as it was, why, having once had an impressive experience, should they believe that it is anything other than the real thing? Having travelled on the trams, walked across the spotless cobbled streets, been served by the women in starched aprons, having seen, smelt, touched, heard for themselves, what will the visitor do other than take it as the truth? It is hard to imagine how the visitor can add for themselves crippling disease, high infant mortality, social injustice and grinding poverty to the cosy street scene of our example any more than they can coax bewildering neutral sculptures which have been left to "speak for themselves"(18) into communicating with them. If anything, it may be that their task is more complicated in that they must dispel the feeling of completeness which contextualised reconstructed exhibitions offer, before building competing interpretations of their own.

We can see from this brief exposition of the main features of the debate, that the range of alternatives available to exhibition designers along the spectrum from presentation to interpretation is awesome. The implications for what the visitor will learn from the experience are far reaching and the process of constructing exhibitions

complex. In reality, few museums adhere rigidly to one end of the spectrum or the other, though some are weighted very heavily in one direction. That direction in recent years has been, for many, increasingly towards the model of interpretation and all of the variations it includes.

Within these museum approaches, reference has been made to peopled exhibitions. Whilst representing a radical departure in some ways, the inclusion of live characters has, in some respects, been a relatively small step. From building detailed contextualised reconstructions such as a grocer's shop in which to display typical foodstuffs and household items of the 1920s, for example, to having a character in that setting handling goods and chatting over household requirements of the period, was simply taking the idea one stage further. It is no coincidence that much theatre-in-museum has emerged during the same period as that in which we witnessed such a rapid evolution in museological approaches generally. Not only has theatre-in-museum entered the battery of methods available to the exhibition designer, but it sits solidly within the whole debate outlined above. Theatre is, after all, both a means of interpretation and a method of presentation.

Theatre has the capacity to both inform in a relatively objective manner, and also to interpret events. On the one hand, theatre can be didactic and adhere rigorously to portraying documentary evidence and re-enacting known events. It can also be dialectic in generating debate in response to deliberately biased characters who become a catalyst for further consideration of relevant topics by an audience. We will examine in greater detail matters concerning presentation and interpretation in the case studies in the following chapters, but it will be useful to briefly consider here the broad relationship between theatre and this aspect of museology.

We need to address the ability of theatre to *present* in the museum sense of the word. That is, can theatre *present* in an objective sense, remaining free of interpretation? Can it be an object in a case? It is unlikely that theatre will operate entirely at this level, and indeed will have a tendency to operate away from this mode and towards a more interpretative model. Peter Cheesman, for example, in his documentary theatre in the 1970s adopted an approach of using the exact words of people offering evidence about life in The Potteries earlier this century. In his play *The Knotty* about life upon the Staffordshire and Nottinghamshire Railway, he used the exact words of those who had contributed to his oral history research:

If somebody makes a speech then I insist that the speech is genuine, so the audience knows that everything that is said on stage is actually said

by the person whom the actor is meant to be, so that gives it intrinsic authority.

(19)

Even here, however, Cheesman altered the order in which things were said, he added music and new words in song, and he set one quotation against another to create new meaning and context. Most importantly he added visual images through the action of the play and invoked an identification between audience and characters so that the objective evidence of the text became a matter of subjective and emotional engagement for the audience. Identification with characters, events, situations, thoughts and feelings by the audience is the very essence of theatre and storytelling, and no matter how factually correct a theatre presentation might be, there is likely to be an element of personal engagement and interpretation as well.

Having said that, theatre does have the potential to present information efficiently and powerfully. This may sometimes be achieved in a very simple way. For example, at the National Railway Museum in York, a glass case near to the Permanent Way exhibition contains a dummy of a railway navvy from the 1840s. The dummy is there to help present the style of dress of navvies of that period. 'He' is dressed in boots, moleskin trousers with ropes tied around each leg below the knee, collar-less white shirt, rainbow material waistcoat, brightly coloured and patterned neckerchief, handkerchief of similar material, and a brightly coloured woollen cap. He has a clay pipe in his mouth and is leaning on a shovel. All items are suitably 'distressed' (the museum word for showing signs of use and wear) as would befit such dirty working conditions. The floor of the case is a re-construction of a muddy patch of land and includes a rail-shoe as part of the setting. The case is accompanied by a short label which reads:

Thousands of labourers (navvies) worked on the construction of the railways in Britain, organised by contractors appointed by the railway companies. The work was hard and often dangerous and many died through accidents or disease.

(20)

The scenery in the case and the label are, of course, aspects of interpretation, as are the dummy and the distressing of clothing. Nevertheless interpretation is minimal and this example serves as a relatively straight forward presentation of navvy clothing.

In "Running the Risk", Platform 4 Theatre present two navvies. Although nothing is ever said about their dress, they are clothed in exactly the same style of costumes as the dummy with some variations between the two characters. The opening lines of the performance are factual storytelling in both style and content:

Hello. We're Platform 4 Theatre, and we're here to tell you a story. It's the story of how they built a tunnel about 150 years ago. The tunnel was three miles and thirteen yards long, which made it more than twice as long as any tunnel that had ever been built before.

(21)

We see, in this simple example, the potential of theatre to present both visually and through word. The audience is offered a straight-forward factual account which informs them about the length of a tunnel, its comparative size to other tunnels and when it was built.

An interesting reaction to seeing a Platform 4 Theatre production by the Schools Resources Officer of the Midland Railway Centre in Derbyshire was that the performance "was worth a thousand signs."(22) "Running the Risk" holds audiences from ages of about five years old to elderly visitors for just over thirty minutes of intense concentration. The performance presents just under four thousand words to them in that time, which is about fifty times the length of acceptable written texts referred to earlier. This alone indicates something of the power of theatre as a presentation medium, although we must qualify this and offer for later investigation that it says nothing of the efficiency of the medium in terms of aiding the understanding or retention of the information presented.

Let us also consider the other potential function of theatre in relation to the museum debate, that of interpretation. Again, at the National Railway Museum parts of the story of the Big Four railway companies which operated Britain's services from 1923 to 1947 is told through written labels. One label concerns the story of Mallard in its record breaking run in 1938:

1938. An all-time record for steam traction was achieved on July 3rd by the LNER. The stream-lined A4 Class locomotive No. 4468 'Mallard' reached 126 mph on Stoke Bank between Grantham and Peterborough.

(23)

The presentation of information is straight forward and, although it indicates the importance of both the event and the engine in terms of a world speed record, it does not extend beyond stating simple facts. The text of the play "The Big Four" by Platform 4 Theatre also includes a section on Mallard which follows on from mentioning record breaking runs by other locomotives in previous years:

CF: Sunday 3rd July 1938. With Tommy Bray firing and Joe Duddington at the controls, LNER A4 Pacific No. 4468 ran down from Stoke Summit at 120 mph.

CC: CHANTS THIS LINE TO RAILWAY RHYTHM DURING JOE'S NEXT SPEECH

It's quicker by rail. It's quicker by train, (repeat)

JOE: Go on old girl, I thought. So I nursed her and we shot through Little Bytham at 123. Then, over the next one and a quarter miles, the needle crept up further. 123 and a half... 124... 125... and then, for a quarter of a mile, 126 mph.

Ohh. It was the fastest that a steam locomotive had ever been driven in the world.

My mate, Tommy Bray, said to me...

TOM: You've done it, you blighter!

CF: Mallard! World leader!

BOTH: Record breaker!

(24)

On reading the two texts there appears to be little difference except that the theatre version is longer. The theatre version does retain its factual accuracy by using, to a very large extent, the actual words spoken by driver Joe Duddington after the event itself. Three lines do enter the text which are not part of the factual story. "It's quicker by rail. It's quicker by train", "Mallard! World leader!", and "Record breaker."(25) The first line, 'It's quicker by rail...', was actually an advertising slogan used on LNER posters at the time and in that sense is still factual documentary evidence. 'Mallard' is legitimate in being the name of the engine. 'World leader. Record breaker' is the only phrase entirely the invention of the playwright. (One line had also been omitted from Duddington's speech to shorten it slightly). Yet, despite the similarity on factual

grounds the text does have fundamental differences which place this theatre treatment of the story well in to the arena of interpretation rather than that of presentation. Some features can be seen on paper, and others are action-based and only noticeable during the performance itself.

Perhaps the most obvious interpretative methods used on paper is the switch from third person narrative to first person interpretation, and the juxtaposition of previous information already given to the audience earlier in the play. First, let us look briefly at the matter of third and first person presentation. Rather than reporting that Joe Duddington said this, the actor assumes the role of Joe and represents him to the audience. As soon as this happens the visitor does not simply read or listen to words spoken, but relates to the driver himself with all of the potential of empathy which accompanies that. We will return shortly to consider the action aspects of the theatre mode. The second paper-bound issue is that of juxtaposing other information from the play's text. Earlier in the play the LNER advertising phrase 'It's quicker by rail. It's quicker by train' had been introduced. By this point in the play it has been used several times and is now associated with the constant battle for supremacy by the fiercely competing Big Four companies. By juxtaposing the LNER slogan into the text of Mallard's record breaking run, we remind the visitor that this was no chance event but was at the heart of inter-company competition. It was, in fact, LNER's answer to the LMS's record-breaking run of 123 mph by Coronation Scott featured in a previous scene. This is in stark contrast to the information offered on the label next to Mallard itself which says, "The record was achieved during brake tests on the LNER main line route." (26) That label offers the official reason for the speed of the train that day. The juxtaposition of the LNER slogan in the play suggests strongly, without actually saying it, that it was all part of the competition and publicity drives mentioned above. The text at the end of the Mallard story, "World leader. Record breaker" (27) adds to the glory of the event and is a purely interpretative line which alludes to factual reality but in phraseology places significance above factual detail.

Once we turn to observing the theatre event itself we notice that an even stronger interpretation of the story of the Big Four companies is being offered to the visitor. The whole play is contextualised by being set on the morning of 1st January 1948. Two characters are introduced and, although many roles are adopted during the play, these two characters serve as the anchor to the piece. We return to them from time to time and the play ends with their original conversation concluding. All other action has been, in effect, illustrating why they have been having their conversation in the first place. It is almost an inversion of the model which would put objective knowledge first to be interpreted by action. This play *first* sets up a fictitious

conversation (of the kind which might have taken place) *and then* spends most of the play offering facts to explain the conversation. The two characters are brought together as colleagues on the first morning of the newly formed British Railways. They are fiercely loyal to different companies disbanded the day before, one to the LMS and the other to LNER. Further to this, one sees the days of the Big Four as being the hey-day of rail travel whilst the other is not too sure. The play then investigates these matters.

What is important here is that by time we see the Mallard event we do not only bring forward the text of the LNER slogan but the emotion and the fun of the argument between these railway characters. Mallard represents a victory for the LNER and the association of visitors with that character is bound up with their reaction to the story. In support of this, it is interesting to note visitor reactions to the brief announcement after the play which helps visitors move back into the collection with a purpose. One of the actor/interpreters directs people to Mallard. The lines are not scripted but invariably would be as follows:

If you'd like to see Mallard, just make your way back to the Great Hall and it will be the first locomotive that you see. Mallard, the fastest steam locomotive in the world.

(AND THEN POINTEDLY IN CHARACTER VOICE)

LNER.

(28)

At the mention of LNER in the thick Yorkshire accent, the audience laughs. The battle between the characters goes on after the performance and some visitors take that friendly rivalry away with them.

The LNER slogan has played another important part in the play. On the several occasions on which it appears, it is chanted to the railway metre in which the LNER marketing officers wrote it in the 1930s. Accompanied by slapping hands in time to this, the slogan becomes the clickety-clack of railway travel in the onomatopoeic sense. Children, in particular, have sometimes joined in with this ritual by the time that Mallard comes around and there is an investment, by them, in the performance. It is not unusual for visitors to be found chanting this phrase around the museum throughout the rest of the day.

The aspects outlined here are primarily concerned with the structure of the play and involvement with the characters created over the twelve minutes leading up to the Mallard section.

A final, and very important observation, is the great ability of theatre to communicate through gesture and intonation. The Mallard text is performed with all of the gusto and energy of the great epic tales of old. The smiles, the look of pride, the clenched fist held aloft, the gripping of hands by Joe and Tommy, the voice of proclaiming heroic deeds, the manic impression of a steam locomotive by one actor during the recounting of the rising speed, all contribute to the event so that the visitors receive hefty amounts of impression and suggestion along with the information. The theatre presentation has shown its potential as a means of interpretation.

Of course, theatre is able to offer a variety of interpretations through the use of frame. Whilst the driver and guard of "The Big Four" interpret the engines at York, Lil the engine cleaner is offering her interpretation of engines through first person interpretation role-play at the National Science Museum in London. The female character of Lil (presented by Spectrum Theatre Company) offers visitors her views on cleaning locomotives as part of the new found role of women during the Second World War. We will return to this aspect of theatre work in later chapters, but the ability of theatre to present different perspectives on similar objects is worthy of note at this stage.

A final point regarding the view of theatre as both a means of interpretation and a method of presentation will serve to indicate the caution with which some museums regard theatre. It has already been suggested that theatre is a powerful medium and is capable of creating images for the visitor. A brief example to demonstrate the very fine line between presentation and interpretation will emphasise the perils of using it in museum settings, especially in the context of the museum debate explored earlier. At an early part of "Running the Risk", one actor repeats accurately an extract of the speech (as reported by newspapers of the day) made by John Parker MP at the banquet to celebrate the opening of the Woodhead Tunnel. Top hat and tails are worn and a glass of red wine is held aloft as the MP speaks his lines:

It's only fair to say that the magnificent work of the new tunnel is further evidence to the ingenuity of mankind. And we must praise especially the work of the chief engineer, Mr Joseph Locke, and his assistant, Mr Purdon. I think we can all agree that the tunnel was a very stiff job. I propose a toast to the engineers.

This straight forward presentation of the banquet is what we could regard as a safe presentation in museum terms. It offers images of the dress and the actions of John Parker and represents as faithfully as possible the words reported at the time. At the end of the play, however, some of the lines are repeated over the dead body of Joe, one of thirty-two navvies killed during the building of that tunnel. The actor tells the story of Mr Purdon's evidence before a Select Committee investigating safety when building railways. The speech reports that Mr Purdon himself had been quite open in saying that he regarded some safety measures as a waste of time and "not worth it for the sake of saving a few lives." (30) This aspect of the speech is true enough and taken from Select Committee reports of the period. The last few seconds of the play, however, place heavily upon the story of Woodhead Tunnel, the interpretation of the playwright:

Meanwhile, in Sheffield, the Chairman of the Sheffield, Ashton and Manchester Railway drank a toast to the health of Mr Purdon. After all, the Woodhead Tunnel had been a very stiff job.

(31)

During these final lines the actor/interpreter has put on his top hat and tails, and whilst raising his glass of wine places his booted foot upon the dead body of Joe. The actions are quite deliberately laden with meaning and it is unlikely that a visitor would take that image as one of victory and triumph so much as one of exploitation and a disregard for human suffering. There is no doubt that "Running the Risk" is laden with interpretative features.

The flexibility and the power of the theatre medium indicated here are interesting in their own right, but become critical once set in the context of the museums themselves. Any consideration of theatre-in-museum is not lively or outspoken simply because it is about using theatre. It is so important because it is part of the deeply rooted debate about museum practice in general and, in particular, about the relationship between presentation and interpretation.

Given the range of complex issues surrounding the use of theatre as an interpretative medium in museums it is not surprising that we are beginning to see the issue explored at conferences. What has never been established, however, is the extent to which theatre-in-museums is actually employed in British museums. Let us now

consider how a national research programme aimed to gauge the scale of theatre-in-museum activity in contemporary museums.

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SECTION 3 NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME

In order to move from a position of responding to the previously cited anecdotal evidence about the emergence of theatre-in-museum activity in recent years to one of analysing evidence arising from rigorous and objective research, a large-scale research programme was undertaken in 1993. Tables showing the results of this research are to be found in Appendix 1. A concise overview of the current situation is, however, offered here to enable a general thesis on theatre-in-museum along with the accompanying case studies to be considered against an established picture of the national situation.

The research involved 2175 museums, galleries and sites in the British Isles and aimed to establish:

- the number of museums currently using theatre;
- the type of museums using theatre (National, Local Authority, English Heritage, etc.);
- the year in which theatre was first used by each museum;
- the frequency of theatre-use in museums;
- the approximate number of people involved in providing theatrical activity on each museum site;
- the number of theatre providers who are based in the museums themselves, brought in from the outside or a mixture of the two;
- the names of any companies, groups, institutions or individuals currently providing theatre to museums;
- the nature of theatrical activity in museums in terms of how much can be regarded as theatre-in-museum and how much is theatre which happens to be in a museum';

- the frequency of various types of theatre-in-museum currently employed (first Person Interpretation, Scripted Plays, Re-enactments, etc).

The raw data has been used to explore general patterns, including:

- whether theatre is more likely to be employed in some types of museums rather than in others, and whether the museum type also influences-
 - * the frequency of its use,
 - * the number of people involved,
 - * whether the theatre providers are museum-based or brought in from the outside;
- whether some types of museum have long traditions of using theatre whilst other types of museum have adopted the medium more recently;
- whether the type of museum is related to the type of theatre used;
- whether the frequency of theatre provision is related to-
 - * when theatre was first introduced to each museum,
 - * whether the theatre providers are based in the museum or not,
 - * the number of people involved in that provision;
- whether the type of theatre provided is related to-
 - * the frequency of provision,
 - * the number of providers involved,
 - * their base (museum or outside),
 - * when theatre had first been used by that museum;
- whether the number of theatre providers is related to-
 - * when theatre was first used,
 - * where the providers are based,
 - * how often they provide theatre programmes.

Through identifying the strongest patterns we would establish with some confidence the principal features of theatre-in-museum activity in Britain today.

The methodology employed in this research was simple, though comprehensive, and it is explained under a series of headings for ease of reading. Also for ease of reading and the assimilation of this survey, raw data will be reported using numerals rather than words.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was designed which included twelve fields of enquiry, was simple in design, easy to fill in and did not require more than a few minutes to complete. It was printed on one side of an A5 Business Reply Service postcard and was accompanied by a letter of introduction explaining the reason for the enquiry, the academic use to which it would be put, and a few explanatory notes about responding to the questions.

ESTABLISHING THE RESEARCH FIELD

The criteria for selecting museums to be included in the survey needed to take into account the shifting nature of the heritage industry in Britain. A growing number of establishments now call themselves museums or heritage centres, but do not actually hold collections or adhere to traditional criteria for operating under such a title. Therefore, the list which has, for many years, been recognised as a definitive list of museums, galleries and sites in the British Isles, the membership list of the Museums Association, became the selection criteria for inclusion in this research. In 1993 there were 2175 institutions in the Museums Association and the questionnaire was sent to all of them.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was structured to fulfil the fields of enquiry which were of importance in determining primary information. It also offered the opportunity to deduced further secondary information by searching for correlations during the analysis of the primary evidence.

The first priority was that the survey should establish unambiguously:

- the incidence of theatre-use in museums at present;
- the identification of where theatre-in-museum activity was actually taking place;
- the dates at which theatre-use was introduced to museums over recent years;
- the differentiation between theatre-in-museum activity and theatre 'which happens to be in a museum'.

In attempting to establish the fourth field mentioned here, museums were asked to categorise the type of theatre which they used. This question offered a range of responses derived from the categories of theatre-in-museum which had been witnessed, reported at conferences or explored in journals. These were:

- in-role as characters using first person interpretation;
- use of third person interpretation;
- scripted plays of some kind;
- living-history or people engaged in authentic tasks;
- visitors are in costume / role;
- re-enactments of specific events or types of events.

In order to receive information on other kinds of interpretative theatre-in-museum styles not yet recognised, and also theatre of a more general non-dedicated type, a final category of 'other:(please specify)' concluded this section of the questionnaire.

Of second priority, museums were asked to identify their museum-type; how often they used theatre?; how many theatre/museum people were directly involved in such activity?; where these people were based?; and, if they had one, the name of their theatre-in-museum company or enterprise.

In order to explore the particular fields of interest set out in the aims for this research, the data would then be interrogated to reveal significant correlations between these fields:

- museum type;
- theatre (is theatre used or not);
- origins (date when first used);
- frequency (annual, monthly, weekly, daily);
- company size (how many museum / theatre people involved);
- company base (museum, outside or both);
- theatre type.

In addition, the questionnaire would establish a list of theatre companies, institutions, local authorities and individuals, both professional and amateur who are currently providing theatre-in-museum programmes.

RESPONSE TO THE SURVEY

The response to the survey was very good. Out of the 2175 museums receiving the questionnaire 1342 responded. This represents a response of 61.7%. Some 43 cards had been completed in illegible handwriting and, despite extensive searching through the Museums Association Yearbook to find a match, this 1.9% of the received cards was eventually abandoned leaving a working sample of 1299 cards or 59.72% of all museums.

This can reasonably be regarded as a substantial sample and we may consider any findings arising from the survey to be a valid indicator of museum-based theatre activity.

EVALUATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was, in general, successful. The high percentage of returned survey cards indicates that the intended ease of completion, along with the use of a pre-paid Business Reply Service and reassurance about the use to which the data would be put, seems to have been in tune with the museum community. Clearly, the non-response by any museum to the questionnaire is a source of disappointment and we must be aware that we do not know about 833 museums (38.3%). Whether these museums did not answer because they did not wish to, the questionnaire was lost or did not arrive, or because they do not involve themselves in theatre and felt their reply was unhelpful (or even wished to wash their hands of the suggestion), must remain unknown. On balance, however, the high number of cards received indicating that they *did not* use theatre, along with the knowledge that some museums who *do use* theatre *had not* returned the survey, led to the supposition that the museums failing to respond were not necessarily doing so on the grounds that they did not use theatre.

The actual questionnaire itself was generally successful in delivering clear information which could be effectively transferred to the data handling programme. One section which did produce an important surprise in the response, however, concerned the 'type of theatre'. Rather than selecting one type of theatre, as had been intended, virtually every respondent ticked against a selection of theatre-types. A typical response was that a museum used, say, first person interpretation, living-history, re-enactment and visitor-in-role. This poses a difficulty which can only be partly alleviated by data processing. Whether these museums are describing a single style of event where all of these elements are fused, or whether they are describing a range of different activities which they undertake at different times, is not shown by this research. This response offers an unexpected insight into the great variety of theatre-types used, not only across museums in general, but within most museums

individually. On the other hand, the responses usually involved so many types of theatre in so many varied combinations that no clear patterns have emerged regarding a particular type of theatre existing under particular circumstances. A detailed analysis of the data indicates some subtle trends regarding theatre-type, but the questionnaire did not help to establish general categories of theatre-type existing in particular locations as had originally been anticipated. Despite the usefulness of this response in indicating a picture of variety and flexibility within individual museums, the guidance given to respondents and the ways of representing theatre-type on the questionnaire might, on reflection, have been handled differently.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire performed very well and has provided a unique and solid base of evidence about the use of theatre-in-museum activity in the British Isles.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH

It is important to note from the outset that, within the total sample of 1299 museums, the spread of different types of museums is very uneven. This spread, however, represents broadly the proportions of each type of museum which exist nationally. (i.e. The highest number of cards were from Local Authority museums which reflects that there are more L.A. museums than any other kind. The receipt of cards from other museum types is roughly proportional to the total number of that kind of museum). Our interpretation of museum-theatre activity, therefore, will focus upon comparative patterns rather than on raw figures.

Theatre activity is widespread and has increased in recent years.

The essential feature to be revealed by the research is that the double premise outlined in the introduction, that theatre activity is prominent in British museums and that its use has increased in recent years can now, for the first time, be substantiated. Theatre is actually used by a great many museums in the British Isles, indeed the results were far in excess of expectations. Over one third of museums in the sample use theatre (35.4% or 460 museums). Furthermore, there has been a startling rise in the number of museums beginning theatre work in recent years. Not only has the use of theatre in museums increased since 1980 but the incidence of museums beginning new theatre work has (until 1993 at least) accelerated at a remarkable pace. Almost 88% of all museums currently using theatre began this work since 1980 with almost 50% of work (181 museums) beginning since 1990. Conversely, just over 10% of theatre work originated in the 1970s, whilst only 1.8% was pioneered at an earlier date.

Most theatre is theatre-in-museum.

Further to this we can also establish that the vast majority of theatre work undertaken in museums may be regarded as theatre-in-museum rather than that 'which happens to be in a museum'. When responding to the question relating to the type of theatre, 220 museums included the category of 'other'. The nature of these 'other' kinds of theatre is central to the entire notion of a theatre-in-museum movement in the British Isles. Are these 220 museums (47.8%) using theatre which 'happens to be in a museum' in the Richard III vein or are they referring to a whole range of interpretative, dedicated theatre-styles which can be classed as theatre-in-museum? The answer, in fact, is a very clear one. 98% of all theatre registered under the category of 'other' can be regarded as theatre-in-museum, as it appears to be clearly intended to help interpret the museum, gallery or site, or is in some other way intimately bound up with the subject-focus of that particular museum. These include a wide range of theatre/drama workshops, mostly involving children from school groups in what appear to be broadly of the DIE or TIE mould. Story-telling is popular in various forms including the use of puppet shows. The use of dance and music also feature, especially in the context of art galleries and historic sites rather than in museums. A number of museums do stage published plays but these, too, were invariably connected with the site in some way and fell in to the category of museum interpretation. Only 2% of museums appeared to be used as general venues for theatre festivals, cabaret or other theatre events. Even in these cases, the museums were not exclusively involved in these general theatrical events but also undertook other theatre-in-museum activity.

Use of theatre is related to museum-type.

Having established these three key elements of theatre-in-museum, let us consider some of the other main points to emerge. The relationship between the likelihood of using theatre and the type of museum is compelling. The distribution of theatre activity across all museums in raw terms reveals that Local Authority museums are overwhelmingly the principal home of theatre-in-museums with 55% of all theatre happening here. A further quarter of theatre is taking place in the independent and private sector with the rest being spread across other types of museum. When we put these raw figures against the spread of museum-types in general, however, we note that the use of theatre is not the exclusive domain of one or two particular types of museum and that the share of theatre-in-museum activity overall broadly reflects the comparative numbers of the different types of museums. A rather more useful analysis, then, is to consider the likelihood of theatre being used *within* each of the various types of museum and to determine whether some types of museum are more likely to use theatre than others. Here the results are telling. National Museums and English Heritage sites emerge as being very likely to use theatre with over half of

these types indicating that they do. Almost half of Local Authority and National Trust sites declared that they use theatre also making them very likely sites. The independent and private sectors along with other types of museum are all much less likely to use theatre.

The origin of theatre-in-museum is related to museum-type.

When considering the origins of theatre work in the different types of museum, Local Authority museums emerge as the pioneer throughout the whole century. The first museum to use theatre in this century was the Local Authority museum of Swansea Maritime Museum in 1909, this being the only registered theatre work anywhere between 1900 and 1949. Local Authority museums continued to lead the way until, in the 1970s, when their share of theatre activity lessened. Within Local Authority museums themselves, the real upsurge in theatre use was in the late 1980s and early 1990s when 31.5% and 46.4% respectively of their theatre work began. National museums and National Trust sites similarly began to demonstrate a real interest in the late 1980s and 1990s. English Heritage sites had developed a little earlier throughout the 1980s though, interestingly, they have begun no new theatre work at all in the 1990s. Last onto the scene have been the independent, private and other types of museum.

This pattern is significant in two ways. The types of museum which led the way in theatre activity have been to a considerable extent centrally funded by government, local councils or national trusts. All have had the capacity to experiment with new forms of museum interpretation deemed to be valid in their own right and have had a certain capacity to underwrite expensive or loss-making projects. The independent and private sectors are often more vulnerable to financial losses and are in some cases designed to make a profit to underpin their very existence. Other types of museums including university, medical or military are, again, often small-scale affairs and concerned with preserving a part of their own heritage for research purposes and have less interest in public exposure. The shift of culture in museums in recent years, as explored in the previous section of this chapter, has heightened awareness in all museums of gaining and maintaining exposure in the public domain. It would be reasonable to suppose that the independent and private sectors have been able to wait for the success of pioneering theatre work to take place elsewhere before accepting it as a proven and therefore low-risk financial venture. Alternatively, and more ominously, they may have realised that they cannot afford to ignore methods which seem to be popular with visitors as they run the risk of being left behind, not just in museological approaches but in a competitive market place.

The frequency of theatre activity is related to when it began.

The period in which theatre was first adopted by a museum also appears to be related to the frequency of theatre activity in those museums. Museums overwhelmingly use theatre between two and twelve times a year which would average out as happening on a monthly basis. Monthly averages were recorded by 241 museums with a decreasing likelihood of theatre programmes on a weekly (83), then daily (67) basis with annual use (54) being the least likely. Whilst the monthly frequency remains dominant irrespective of when theatre was first adopted, there is a very clear pattern in the correlation between frequency and origin which might indicate a shift towards the *less* frequent use of theatre programmes in recent times. Whilst 32% of museums beginning work in the 1970s now use theatre daily, with 20% of those established in the early 1980s doing the same, only 13% of museums adopting the medium in the 1990s use theatre on a daily basis. Similarly, weekly use of theatre is most prevalent amongst museums establishing theatre throughout the 1980s with a drop in these figures during the 1990s. About half of all museums use theatre on a monthly basis and this figure has remained constant throughout the past thirty years or so. Conversely, whilst the annual use of theatre in museums beginning their theatre work in the 1970s and 1980s was as low as 5%, annual use is registered by over 14% of those museums beginning theatre work in the 1990s.

We cannot be absolutely sure about an exact interpretation of this evidence. We must remember that the questionnaire did not ask museums to specify how frequently they used theatre when they first began. The frequency reflects their current use whilst the date of origin is a quite separate piece of information. In relating frequency of use to the longevity of theatre activities in museums we must treat any conclusions with caution, though some strong patterns do emerge. On the one hand it could be that museums tend to begin this kind of work tentatively and explore the medium through one-off events averaging out initially at an annual rate. After a number of trial runs they decide that the medium is working well and is worth installing on a more regular basis. This would be consistent with a pattern showing that those museums which have been using this medium for some years now, no longer use theatre on an annual basis but now use it weekly or daily. Alternatively, we could interpret that those museums establishing theatre during the stated periods did in fact adopt those frequencies from the start. This view, should it be correct, would suggest a trend towards *less* frequent use by the museums setting up theatre now as opposed to *more* frequent use by those beginning a few years ago. This, in turn, would be consistent with the emergence of recent and more stringent financial restraints inhibiting museums in committing themselves to such an expensive venture on a regular basis. Such commitments may be maintained in museums where the medium has already

been established, but not risked as a new venture. In either case we seem to be looking at a picture of museums who, during the late 1980s set up theatre programmes which either always have or do now run on a regular basis. Theatre programmes set up in the 1990s tend to run on a less frequent basis.

Once again, there are variations within this general picture but a summary of how often we might find theatre programmes in the various types of museums would be as follows.

English Heritage	Mainly annual programmes.
Independent, Private, Other and National Trust	Mainly monthly programmes.
Local Authority	Mainly weekly, though many annual and monthly programmes also. Not daily.
National	Mainly daily programmes with many weekly programmes also.

The theatre-providers themselves.

So far we have concentrated on theatre activity and the museums in which it is taking place, but we have not yet addressed the actual providers of the theatre programmes themselves. First, there are clear indications that the size of the teams of theatre providers established in recent years are more likely to be smaller than were those established in the 1970s and 1980s. Once again, whether this is related to museums taking their first tentative steps into this work with small numbers of people before expanding once tried and tested, or whether it indicates that museums in the previous two decades had the funding and reasons for establishing larger teams cannot be known through this research. Nevertheless, the patterns are interesting. We can note the obvious steady increase in the number of theatre-provider teams of less than 4 people. In the 1970s and early 1980s teams were as likely to include between 5 and 9 people as they were to be of between 1 and 4 people, but in the late 1980s and early 1990s we saw a rapid move towards smaller teams. Teams of 10-19 people peaked in popularity between 1979 and 1989 but have tailed off since, and teams of more than 20 have also become increasingly rare.

A second feature to emerge in the context of the theatre-providers is that the huge increase in the number of new theatre ventures in the 1990s coincided with a sudden shift towards museums relying on outside providers to supply this work. The high proportion of outside staff is probably cost-effective in the context of infrequent theatre programmes whilst a more permanent feature of theatre within a museum would justify more permanent museum-based staffing. Also, there is a general trend towards frequent users of theatre relying on museum-based staff, whilst infrequent theatre programmes utilise outside providers. Within this general picture, however, it was surprising to note that the most regular users of theatre, the Local Authority and especially National museums (with the latter's strong pattern of daily provision) are less likely than the national average to use museum-based providers. National museums, in particular, rely heavily on outside providers.

The relationship between the provider-base and the number of providers is clear and presents no surprise. Museum-based theatre providers are highly likely to be very small teams of 4 or less people. The percentage of teams of larger sizes drops rapidly with only 7 museums using teams over 10 people in size. Outside theatre-providers still lean towards small teams in general but it is noticeable that the use of larger teams seems to be much more acceptable. The link between the provider base and the frequency of theatre programmes is equally compelling. Where providers are museum based the frequency of theatre provision is very likely (63%) to be weekly or daily. An expected contrast shows that the theatre programmes with outside providers are highly likely (80%) to be annual or monthly. Collaborative ventures are equally likely to happen either annually/monthly (51%) or weekly/daily (49%).

Different types of theatre-in-museum.

Finally, let us turn to consider some features not yet addressed which concern the type of theatre being undertaken in museums. Different types of theatre appear to have emerged strongly at various times since the 1970s with some of them still being introduced in increasing numbers whilst others are decreasing. The 1970s saw a sudden increase in the use of third person interpretation, the involvement of visitors-in-role and 'other' forms of theatre. During the late 1980s, the use of third person interpretation took another leap, with the addition of living-history and re-enactments. The 1990s saw a drop in the use of third person interpretation, living-history, visitor-in-role and re-enactment, but the use of scripted plays, first person interpretation and 'other' forms of theatre continued to rise in popularity.

Generally speaking first person interpretation, scripted plays, living-history and re-enactments are very likely to take place at an average monthly frequency, with visitors-in-role weekly and third person interpretation or 'other' theatre daily.

The search for whether we would be likely to find certain types of theatre in certain types of museums was difficult given the unexpected response to the 'theatre-type' question, though some broad patterns do emerge. First person interpretation, scripted plays, living-history and a variety of 'other' kinds of theatre clearly appear to be the mainstay of theatre-in-museum overall, with visitor-in-role and re-enactment also being popular. Whilst being used by 25% of museums, third person interpretation is the least used form, (even though, where it is used, it is likely to be used on a daily basis).

The correlation between theatre-type and museum-type was subtle, although we can draw some tentative conclusions about whether a museum is likely to use particular types of theatre to a greater or lesser degree. National Museums are most likely to use scripted plays rather than any other form. Private museums embrace 'other' forms of theatre. English Heritage sites are particularly interested in re-enactments (which is one of the few elements of research to differentiate them from National Trust museums). Local Authority museums, as has been the case all along, seem equally likely to embrace a range of activities particularly first and third person interpretation, living-history, visitor-in-role and re-enactments.

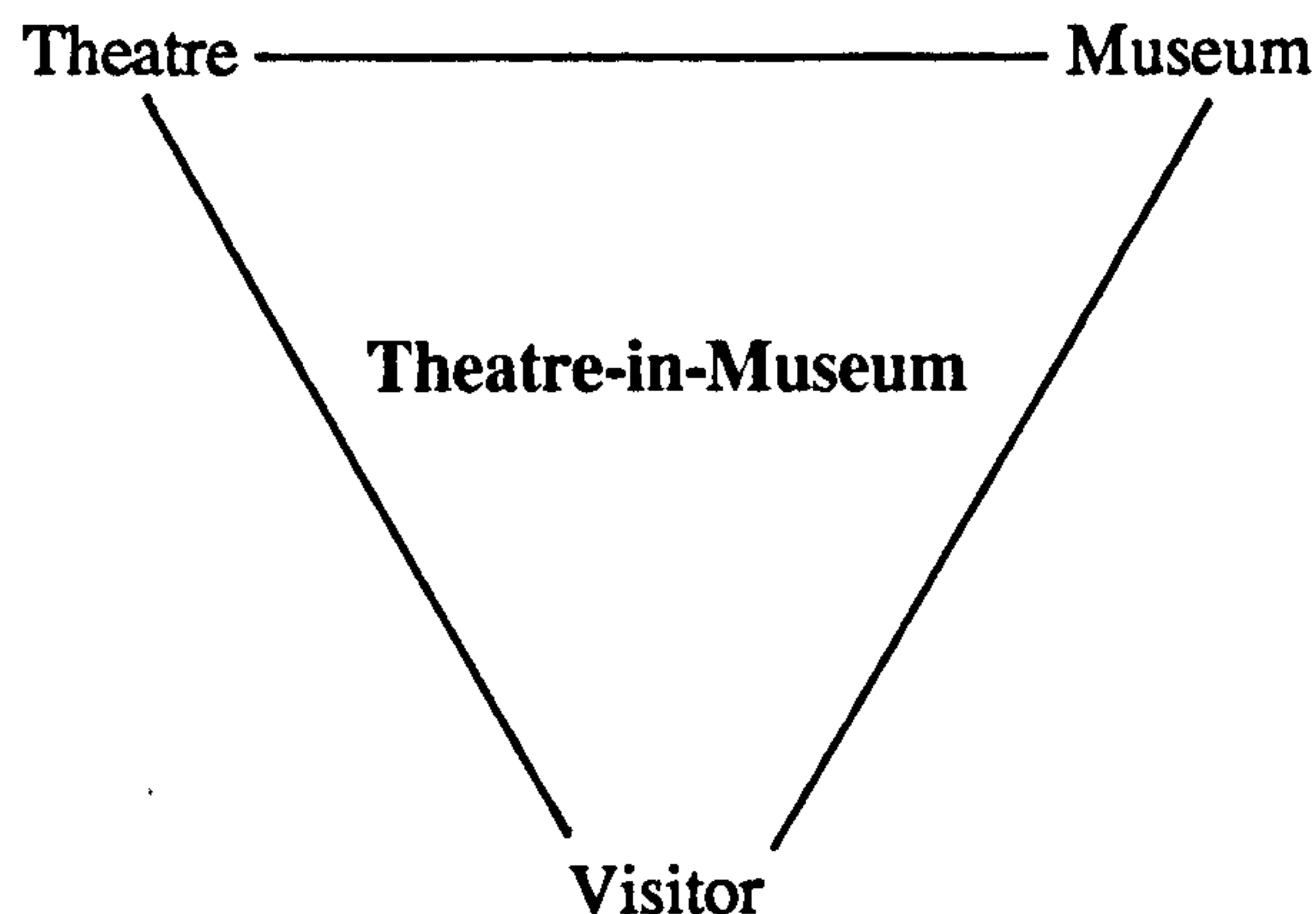
IN CONCLUSION

The research programme has clearly demonstrated that theatre activity is widespread in British museums and that there has been an acceleration in new projects emerging in recent years. Furthermore, the great majority of this work falls within our definition of theatre-in-museum.

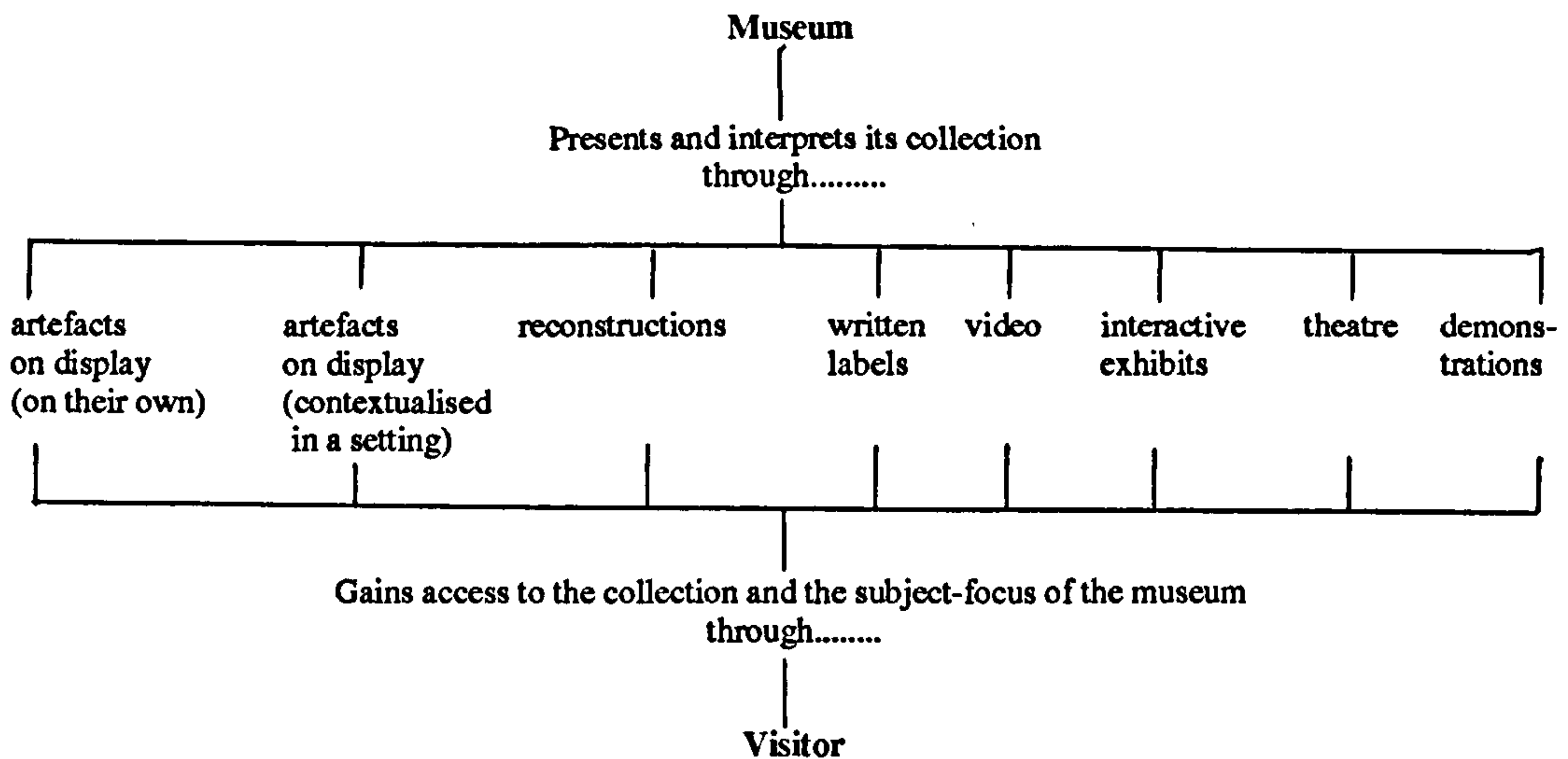
Having established that there is a theatre-in-museum movement in numerical terms, we must now turn to considering what museums might be trying to achieve by embracing this medium. What actually is the generic nature of the theatre work which is being undertaken, do museums have any common rationale for its inclusion in their work and to what extent does this reflect the general state of museology in the British Isles in the 1990s? In the final section of this chapter, we will consider the critical attributes of theatre-in-museum.

SECTION FOUR
THE NATURE OF THEATRE-IN-MUSEUM.
A GENERAL THESIS

Central to the whole concept of theatre-in-museum is that this kind of theatre is dedicated to a particular context. Theatre-in-museum practitioners, whilst clearly demonstrating the ability to produce theatre which is lively, entertaining, spectacular or thought provoking, are not principally concerned with producing works for the quality of their artistic merit alone. This kind of theatre is more concerned with the success of the work in terms of its ability to help visitors to understand the content and context of the museum in which it is happening. Theatre-in-museum is concerned with the three-way relationship between the theatre programme itself, the museum and the visitor.



The relationship indicated in this model simply demonstrates that the theatre work does not stand to be judged alone but that it is inextricably linked with the general visitor-experience of the museum. The visitor experiences both the museum setting and the theatre event simultaneously and the synthesis of the two offers the visitor an insight into their collective story which would not be achieved were the elements to remain separate. This first model does not, however, show the real place of theatre-in-museum, for the visitor is not only interacting with the museum through theatre but through a whole host of other media. This second model illustrates how theatre is invariably a part of a complex network of visitor experiences.



What becomes obvious through this model is that any theatre event is not necessarily going to be the main concern of the visitor. This is not to belittle the theatre work nor its standing in the museum for these live events have the capacity to make an impact and be noticed. Indeed, in some museums, such as Beamish or Clarke Hall, the theatre event has a very high profile. Nevertheless, in theatre-in-museum the principal relationship is between the visitor and the museum and not the visitor and the theatre work. The place of theatre-in-museum, therefore, is to act as an interface between visitor and museum and to provide a medium through which people may be informed, educated, entertained, challenged and otherwise engaged in the content and context of that particular collection or site. According to this model, the reported cries at the Liverpool conference (1991) that "these are museums not theatre venues"(1) are misguided and fail to appreciate that theatre is not always an end in itself but has the potential to act as a learning medium in order to educate and inform the mass public. The reported opinions are, in this sense, parallel to suggesting that the presence of video installations, written panels or push-button interactive exhibits will equate the museum with a video club, a library or an amusement arcade. Indeed, as we have seen, some museum practitioners may well feel that the now common use of various installations in museums is, in itself, a mistake and that museums have already gone too far away from their traditional roots as centres of academic quietude exemplified by static case-bound exhibits. However, those who distinguish between videos, reconstructions, virtual reality pods, and push-button interactives, as valid methods of museological interpretation, and theatre-in-museum as somehow invalid, demonstrate a misunderstanding about theatre's capacity to teach.

Those 'new professionals' currently practicing theatre-in-museum, conversely, *are* gradually evolving a range of ideas and techniques which set out to develop the capacity of theatre to enlighten visitors in the context of museum experience. These ideas and techniques are not necessarily evolving uniformly across all museums and, if anything, are tending to develop in isolated pockets, each in response to individual circumstances. Nevertheless, a range of practices can be identified and certain generic traits will be outlined in this section. We may equally observe that, although probably not consciously, practitioners of theatre-in-museum at least echo, if not emulate, the work of some other theatre movements of the twentieth-century. We can broadly associate aspects of theatre-in-museum with elements of the work of Brecht, Littlewood, Cheeseman, Boal and others. Whilst it would not be correct to suggest that theatre-in-museum is whole-heartedly influenced by such previous or contemporary practitioners it would probably be helpful to those developing theatre-in-museum to recognise certain similarities in their own work and the work of other movements. In forging a common philosophy which will help to establish the current range of approaches to theatre-in-museum as being part of a whole movement working for the benefit of museum visitors, practitioners may gain impetus from recognising a certain genesis linking them to others who have or do face similar questions governing the use of theatre which frequently finds itself working outside the parameters of conventional settings and which is often driven by an agenda to educate and liberate the public.

In writing about popular theatre in 1957, for example, Brecht addressed an issue which is still at the heart of some curators' misgivings about theatre being used in museums today. He considered the relationship between popular and entertaining play-acting and serious educational intent. Far from popular theatre being a vehicle for flippancy, simplicity and the corruption of high academic aspirations, Brecht suggested that;

'Popular' means intelligible to the broad masses, taking over their own forms of expression and enriching them / adopting and consolidating their standpoint / representing the most progressive section of the people in such a way that it can take over the leadership; thus intelligible to other sections too / linking with tradition and carrying it further / handing on the achievements of the section now leading to then section of the people that is struggling for the lead.

(2)

Quite clearly, Brecht is not discussing here a form of theatre which popularises his message in the sense of cheapening it. Indeed, one of the central themes in Brecht's work is that the audience should fully engage in the process of questioning and thinking about the situations on stage. His work is characterised by a resistance to telling his audience what to think, but passionate in its insistence that the audience should think for themselves. The capacity of theatre to challenge our perceptions of ourselves and our society is further echoed by Marvin Carlson who, in *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, views performance as a form of "cultural negotiation," a medium through which "human patterns of activity are reinforced or changed within a culture."(3)

Theatre-in-museum is a theatre designed to entertain, to educate, and to make accessible and intelligible to a broad spectrum of people, the importance of our museum collections. It is concerned with telling stories associated with the collections which collectively represent virtually the sum total of all our own achievements. The historical, artistic, scientific, engineering, technological; the industrial, social, religious, political; the aristocratic, adventurous, inventive, rich, poor and commonplace, are all a part of the museum-held story of ourselves as a society. Theatre-in-museum has the task of challenging us to re-examine ourselves and to question how we came to this point in all our collective, family and individual histories. Whether current work is quite grappling with, say, Brecht's notion of re-examining history in order to break away from staging the "... 'universal' situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself," and to concentrate on ways of showing an "... incident as a unique, historical one,"(4) is open to question. Theatre-in-museum practitioners, along with host institutions, move cautiously between representing accepted, maybe even celebratory views of past and contemporary achievements, and presenting a more radical, challenging and questioning line on the subject-focus of the museum.

Theatre-in-museum overall may be regarded as a form of educational theatre. It is context-specific and is designed to bring about what Gavin Bolton refers to as "a change in a participant's understanding."(5) The broad aims of bringing about change, often associated with helping people to understand themselves and their society and to ultimately empower them through a process of reflection, is common to all educational theatre. We may differentiate between various categories of educational theatre according to a range of criteria, one of which concerns the context in which such theatre takes place. Drama-in-education, theatre-in-education and other associated forms such as youth theatre, hospital theatre, drama therapy, and so on, operate in what we might call 'ring-fenced' contexts. Their client groups are, to a great extent, known intimately to either the programme-initiators or the programme-

providers themselves. In these kinds of contexts there is a teacher, a youth leader, a doctor, or another appropriate professional who will instigate the use of theatre/drama for a particular reason connected with their own specific client-group. They will also remain the principal point of contact between the theatre/drama programme and the client throughout the whole process. The final relationship between client and the theatre/drama event will remain in the hands of this link-professional who will help the clients to make meaning from the event in the most appropriate way.

Although educational theatre, such as the movements of Brecht, Littlewood, Cheeseman, Boal and others also tend to be context-specific, the contexts associated with their work are of a very different nature. Even though some of them (Cheeseman's community theatre or Boal's theatre of the oppressed) may lean towards the model of working with a known client-group and of addressing their needs, the groups in these cases could not really be referred to as being 'ring-fenced'. The educational theatre movements associated with these practitioners involve operating with a much more anonymous audience and, as such, are what we could describe as being context-specific but in the 'public-domain'.

Under these circumstances, many assumptions have to be made about the previous experience of the audience, their current needs and about the methodologies which will be most successfully applied with them. Although such programmes are often targeted at particular communities, the specific client-group viewing the theatre programme are usually members of the general public and not members of an existing group as will be the case in schools, youth centres or hospitals. In educational theatre which takes place in the 'public-domain', members of the public enter the event of their own choosing, they have varying degrees of affiliation to the group (audience) with whom they share the event and they are at liberty to take the theatre programme as a free-standing matter rather than it being bound up with an on-going development programme. Furthermore, there is no recognised leader or teacher figure and the contact between theatre-providers and audience/participants is direct. Theatre-in-museum operates largely in this anonymous 'public-domain'. There are exceptions on those occasions where theatre-in-museum is specifically designed to serve visiting schools or other 'ring-fenced' groups such as reminiscence parties of the elderly. Specifically designed work for schools will be examined in Chapter Five under the analysis of visitor-in-role programmes and will illustrate the important differences between this work and the more usual work of theatre-in-museum which generally takes place in buildings which are open to the visiting masses and which must address a fluctuating community.

It has already been indicated in Section Three of this chapter that there are six general categories of theatre-in-museum. The nature of third person interpretation (in the context of living-history settings) where interpreters remain in the here and now, first person interpretation where interpreters assume a character as if they were in another time and place, scripted plays, re-enactments and opportunities for the visitors themselves to be involved in role-play will be explored in detail in the following case studies. What is important for the moment is that we explore in more detail the generic characteristics of theatre-in-museum which underpin the principles of this new form of educational theatre.

The range of characteristics which define theatre-in-museum will include:

- content
- context
- form
- levels of ownership
- aims
- non-transferability.

CONTENT

One of the most obvious characteristics of theatre-in-museum is the general nature of its content. It concerns itself with informing visitors and interpreting for them the events, ideas and people represented by the museum in which they operate. In any theatre-in-museum programme all efforts at characterisation, the portrayal of events and the demonstration of authentic tasks do not lead towards the gaining of appreciation by an audience for the theatrical qualities of such work alone. The work is rather more concerned with illuminating the visitors' understanding of the museum collection, the human endeavour or folly which it represents and how this relates to the viewers' own lives. We see this central attribute time and time again in various educational theatre movements. The content of such productions and its relationship to a particular situation or community is all important and theatre is used as a medium rather than as an end in itself. Such theatre has the potential to help visitors "imagine variations of action, to study alternatives,"(6) which is a radical departure from the fixed-knowledge vision of museums which some still espouse.

Indeed, we may observe that much theatre-in-museum work is what we can only describe as safe, and in this respect it departs profoundly from many other educational theatre movements which have frequently been radical in content. Nevertheless, the *potential* of theatre to operate as a more challenging interpretative medium for museums remains. The comments by a member of the actor-company at the Canadian

Museum of Civilisation (Ottawa) to Platform 4 Theatre after a performance at the 1995 international conference on live interpretation, that the play made him feel "solidarity with workers of a past age"(7) reflect on an uncompromising play told from the view-point of exploited navvies in nineteenth-century England. Such an outspoken portrayal can be found in current theatre-in-museum practice, but probably remains rare. Alan Reid's vision in *Theatre and Everyday Life*. that, "Theatre is worthwhile because it is antagonistic to official views of reality,"(8) remains elusive to theatre-in-museum which tends to operate to some extent in a neutral and safe atmosphere where challenging debate has not yet become a feature.

This safe approach, however, does not impede the invariably high standards of research and presentation that we would normally witness in theatre-in-museum work. It is unusual to find theatre-in-museum which has not got an air of quality and authenticity about it. Colin Ford reminded delegates at the 1993 conference that the Science Museum portrayal of Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron really should feature hands and clothes stained with chemicals and that theatre-in-museum would be open to such scrutiny. Ford does, however, elude to issues broader than theatre-in-museum. Surely Julia's clean hands are just as much a comment on the sanitised view of events which can emerge from, not just clean clad role-players, but entire museum exhibitions.

CONTEXT

If a central purpose of theatre-in-museum is to design its content to match its context, then the nature of that context is of primary importance. Quite clearly, the context of this form of theatre is that it takes place in museums, galleries or heritage sites. The museums' agenda itself has been explored already but another feature of the museum context is to consider the physical conditions which it presents to the theatre-providers when devising a theatre programme.

First, and most obvious, museums are not theatres. This in itself has many implications for the devising of theatre programmes. The creating of a conducive atmosphere, the designing of scenery, sound and lighting and the management of other paraphernalia which pre-occupies the devisors of productions shown in theatre buildings are matters which the theatre-in-museum practitioner must approach quite differently. It is not so much to do with creating effects from the starting point of an empty space as keying into environments which are already established. The already existing agit-prop train in the Museum of the Moving Image, the goods train on Platform 6 of the freight depot at the National Railway Museum, the aircraft of Amy Johnson at the National Science Museum, and the Victorian classroom at Bradford's

Industrial Museum already create an authenticity and atmosphere which conventional theatre designers would envy. What is critical here is that the theatre programme, if is in tune with its setting, promotes a verisimilitude for the visitor which supports their ability to absorb both the theatre event and the museum setting simultaneously, and this underpins the whole process of interpreting the museum through the medium of theatre. In verisimilitude, though, we must remember that it is an 'air of authenticity' which we create and not actual reality itself. Theatre is fundamentally a fictional activity and there is always a duality to theatre experiences no matter how engaged we become in the fate of the characters portrayed. Brecht and others emphasised this duality in order to avoid the seductive falsehoods of theatre and to promote, instead, the importance of the events being portrayed. This does not appear to be fully understood by some theatre-in-museum practitioners as we will see in later case-studies.

In addition to the benefits, as perceived by Brecht, of maintaining this duality in order to create the conditions under which audiences can question the events on stage and consider the importance of them to their own lives, there is another function of maintaining duality which is important to the relationship between theatre, belief and emotional safety. Once removed from the usual ritual of theatre, audiences are also removed from the safety which the usual conditions of theatre provide. There are no natural signals in museums that visitors are about to enter fictional situations. Indeed, expectations are possibly the exact opposite with visitors anticipating an air of truth, knowledge and certainty. Damon Young (Spectrum Theatre Actor) maintains that audiences knowing that theatre is not real is a "pre-requisite"⁽⁹⁾ to audiences feeling safe enough to relax and become engaged. It is a paradox that in order for fictional play activity to work at its most effective level, participants must know they are playing. Curiously, this pre-requisite is also not recognised by some theatre-in-museum practitioners and the problems arising will be explored in Chapter Three.

A further element of this duality is the level of background noise found in some museums. Theatre-in-museum rarely takes place amid respectful quietude. There will often be a cacophony of noise and activity as other interactive exhibits emit sound and other visitors talk and move around. These background distractions can certainly provide an atmosphere of excitement through which audiences can relate to the theatre programme in a way which is different to conventional theatre. Most immediately there is a feeling of being in a space where talking is permitted. Even though we normally witness visitors respecting the play, gallery character or re-enactment, it is also common for visitors to take their cue from the background atmosphere and discuss the theatre programme whilst it happens. They may engage in

chatter with the gallery characters or intervene, heckle or comment audibly on the play in action.

As to whether this unconventional theatre space actually achieves a kind of 'freedom of access' to theatre for the visitor, in the way in which Bradby and McCormick (10) suggest Dasté had insisted upon with the Centre Dramatique National in 1940s France, is uncertain. Dasté's intentions to present theatre for the people on temporary stages, in factories and in the country districts and to reject the use of even municipal halls in favour of a circus tent, they suggest, centred on his ideas that the ordinary working public were intimidated by the conventional theatre. His theatre context was free of the social hierarchies associated with what Brecht had previously described as a bourgeois traditional theatre building. Whilst we can still recognise the social hierarchies associated with nineteenth-century theatre buildings, and the hiring of a box at the ballet or opera probably still has a certain status attached to it, the widespread development of open auditoria with thrust stages, the inception of theatre-in-the-round and the use of promenade performances have broken down many of these barriers. As John O'Toole notes, "Re-negotiating this specialised space can considerably affect the dramatic product and the meanings available to the audience, as well as the expectations of the audience - the whole contract for the event, in fact." (11) Nevertheless, we must also recognise that theatre-going for many will still be to an annual pantomime and that the usual behavioural code of going to the theatre may be alien to them. Museum spaces are devoid of the traditional rituals of theatre-going and the social barriers to entering a theatre building are not an issue with performances in museum settings.

Having said that, other factors do contrive against the museum visitor having quite the freedom that Brecht and Dasté had envisaged. First, there is the question of who visits museums. Although they have opened up tremendously in recent years, research still indicates that museum visiting tends to be a middle class pre-occupation and that the working class, low-income earners, the unemployed, the elderly and ethnic minority groups are least likely to visit museums. (12) In this sense, the behavioural code for museum visiting can be as daunting as going to the theatre. However, given that socially-mixed groups are increasingly making their way into museums we might feel that an open style of theatre, devoid of box office, foyer, seats, curtains and such, would be ideal for such visitors. On the whole this may be the case, but we must recognise the possibility that some theatre which uses ostensibly 'popular' theatre techniques has, itself, developed a particular code aimed at appealing to a discerning few who understand the behaviour expected of one in such settings. In other words, what was once a revolutionary thought of bringing theatre away from the bourgeois

domain into the factory canteens and town squares has itself, fifty years on, become an institution.

Finally, when considering the context of open-hall playing, we note that theatre-in-museum has adopted a range of techniques suited to this environment. We invariably see theatre-in-museum programmes using a host of flexible staging approaches. Only on the rarest of occasions do we witness the use of conventional theatre equipment. Interestingly, one leading company responsible for pioneering much theatre-in-museum work in Britain gradually developed a theatre space in their museum between 1993 and 1996 which had a performance area, a permanent carpeted step-seating arrangement, lighting, sound and projection equipment. After three years, however, the company came to feel that they had lost their place in the museum and had virtually become marginalised by evolving into an event divorced from the usual visitor experience. Their work had, in effect, lost its context and theatre-in-museum is nothing out of its context. Mostly, though, we will witness gallery characters or performers of plays entering an existing museum setting and defining within that setting a space which becomes the focus for their theatre programme. It is through this pure relationship between the theatre event and its context that visitors are able to assimilate an holistic experience which brings together the collection and the stories the characters have to tell.

FORM

Working in such open conditions obviously has an impact upon the form that theatre programmes take.

Great dexterity is required of theatre-providers in devising and delivering their programmes. As we have seen, some programmes take place in authentic settings and involve the use of objects from the collection or quality reproductions. With visitors often at very close quarters, performers need to be highly researched, sure of their relationship with both the museum setting and their audience and be able to improvise around known themes. Reinhardt and Meyerhold's early experiments with forms of theatre in the 1920s which established a new physical closeness between actors and audiences lives on here. This close proximity of actors and audiences was furthered by Okhlopov who aimed to actually make the spectator a part of the action and by time the Realistic Theatre movement was happening in the 1930s we had arrived at what theatre-in-museum now uses on a grand scale. Realistic Theatre was concerned with the converting of the whole theatre into a dramatic arena which resulted in the "virtual elimination of the distinction between them [actor and audience] in terms of space."⁽¹³⁾ Theatre-in-museum invariably assumes that the whole setting is the

dramatic arena with both audience and performers sharing the space, its ambience and ultimately its meaning.

Physical theatre and the use of exaggerated action in story-telling are sometimes adopted so that theatre programmes can transport visitors through a whole series of events, represent many characters, and exhibit great freedom of movement across boundaries of time and space. Such theatre programmes rely on the imagination of the visitor but any real objects in the collection sited nearby become solid touchstones with the symbolic importance of such items being emphasised. The character of George Eastman at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, for example, tells his story next to real Kodak cameras of the early days of his enterprise. The Kodak Girl is able to expound the virtues of the coloured cameras and vanity cases for women and point out the real collection of cameras to her left which then become a focal point for audience attention both during and after the play.

Documentary evidence also features strongly in this work. Like Piscator's use of slides projected onto screens or Littlewood's approach with her Workshop Theatre production of *Oh What a Lovely War* in 1963, theatre-in-museum fixes its fictional journey at points of reality through the juxtaposition of real evidence and imaginary characters. The audience's identification with the characters brings them in touch with the reality of the situation and the process of considering the implications of the story for themselves is made that much easier. Similarly, Peter Cheeseman's use of spoken documentary evidence is a tradition carried into theatre-in-museum and this interweaving of the fictional with the factual is representative of the delicate balance which theatre-in-museum practitioners attempt to strike in order to bring their visitors in touch with reality through imagined experience.

Relationships with audiences in theatre-in-museum are often informal and are dominated by an overall feeling of communicating with visitors rather than performing to them. Participation by visitor/audiences is commonplace. Certainly, in one-to-one encounters with gallery characters through first and third person interpretation, visitor-in-role programmes and some re-enactments, visitor involvement is at a high level. Theatre programmes sometimes adopt the technique of contextualising members of the audience who then become a part of the event either in their own minds or by actually casting votes, supporting certain characters or denouncing others. Once again we recognise the roots of this approach in work such as Okhlopkov's *The Iron Flood* where he felt he achieved maximum "fraternisation"⁽¹⁴⁾ between actors and audience when he viewed the audience as the main actor. In reflecting upon the work of Augusto Boal in more recent times, Lib

Spry celebrates the new relationship in theatre and the "crossing of the mythical line between auditorium and stage." (15) Theatre-in-museum maintains and furthers this tradition and is perhaps most tangible on those occasions when visitors are involved in debates and in voting on issues arising from the programme. Such real thoughtful involvement seems to remain rare so far in theatre-in-museum but some examples do exist. In these instances there is real investment in the theatre programme by visitors and, through that, in the museum itself.

A final point related to the form of theatre-in-museum is that of humour. This form of theatre sits precariously between providing entertainment for its visitors and educating them. As we explored in Section Two of this chapter, efforts to produce an acceptable balance between the two has resulted virtually in a crisis of identity for the museum community. Judging humour is, of course, a perilously subjective process though to suggest that theatre-in-museum employs *humour* is probably a more accurate description than describing it as outright *comedy*. A use of humour is consistent with developing the intimate, relaxed relationships between performers and visitors which help to create the atmosphere in which theatre-in-museum operates. It is part of the culture of this form of theatre which legitimises visitor participation in the event. Whether humour makes the museum collection and general subject-focus more accessible to visitors, or whether it trivialises it, will be a case for individual judgement. Like the rest of theatre-in-museum, final judgements should be based on examining what such humour is intended to achieve and to what extent it does so, rather than whether it should be there at all. Nevertheless, this remains a vexed question in any consideration of the use of theatre-in-museum. For those worried about the erosion of serious academic values, the sight of visitors laughing on the galleries may well be visible proof that the public are not taking the museum seriously. For others, it will be a sign that they are enjoying and becoming engaged with the museum. For serious-minded theatre-in-museum practitioners it is likely to come down to deciding upon which methods are useful in making contact with the visitors in order to tell their story. As Brecht said, "A theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense." (16) Fun, in Brecht's view was a legitimate way to ensure that the people enjoyed theatre and would thus be in contact with its deeper meaning. To many museum professionals, this is not a concept that will translate easily into their overall museum mission.

Whilst the forms of performance and presentation which we currently see in theatre-in-museum reflect the need to develop precise kinds of relationships with visitors, make stories accessible to the general public and to secure their relevance to the collection, these forms of theatre are also economic. This is not just in terms of cost

effectiveness but also in terms of gaining maximum impact with the least number of performers, representing events ranging from the intimate to the epic often in a minimalist way, and in the ability of theatre programmes to occupy a museum setting temporarily and then to return that setting to its original state with ease and speed after the programme is over. The development of the form of theatre-in-museum which we have witnessed in recent years has probably been equally influenced by the demands that both content and context have made upon the ingenuity of theatre practitioners and the restraints of time, space and money deriving from the overall resource limitations of the museums in which they operate.

LEVELS OF OWNERSHIP

We have already indicated that theatre-in-museum programmes seem to encourage the visitor to be a part of the overall museum event. In some cases this is overt and can be easily recognised. Certainly, theatre-types such as first person interpretation and visitor-in-role rely upon groups of the public subscribing to the pretence by interacting with role-playing gallery characters or being in role themselves. Other theatre-types including scripted plays and re-enactments may also involve visitors in voting, debating or otherwise making decisions within the context of the theatre programme. The extent to which theatre programmes remain essentially didactic and preserve high-input from programme presenters and relatively low involvement from visitors or become more dialectic and openly involve visitors in the active process of meaning-making through theatre, vary tremendously from museum to museum. Different degrees of visitor-involvement can be seen sometimes even within one museum. Overall, though, high visitor-involvement tends to be much more common than low involvement.

Once visitors begin to take part actively in theatre encounters, or become deeply involved at a thinking and feeling level, their investment in these encounters rises. The human ability to play presents museums, through theatre work, with the capacity to help visitors develop an opinion about stories related to the museum collection. Visitors no longer simply absorb the information and prescribed interpretation about the collection or site but are able to view it through the eyes of fictional characters. Their ability to identify with those characters and even to take part in the activity itself, shaping decisions and possibly changing the course of the action gives visitors a high level of involvement in the story. This will, of course, tend to raise levels of ownership of the story in the visitors themselves especially in cases where more obvious dialectic methods are employed.

Elements which develop ownership may well take subtle forms. Indeed, one of the most fundamental features of theatre-in-museum, and one which distinguishes it from virtually all other forms of museum activity, is that theatre tends to be a collective experience. Although some types of theatre are aimed at interactions with small groups, others involve very large numbers indeed. What is common to all, though, is that visitors no longer interact with the museum collection individually but as a social group. This collective experience is the hallmark of theatre and museums would do well to contemplate this thoroughly.

Bradby and McCormick suggest that the theatre movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries typified by Gémier, Pottecher and Rolland were driven by a belief in the unifying effect of theatre and, in particular, theatre which rejoiced in festival and re-enactment. Huge re-enactments of local and national events, sometimes involving thousands of people, reaffirmed the common heritage of the people and united them in celebration. In observing that the collective experience of theatre in museum settings where visitors are encouraged to become a part of the event tends to raise levels of involvement and ownership in the story-lines which unfold, we must also remember the context in which this is happening. By their nature, museums reflect our local and/or national heritage and as a people we are already a part of the story. Museums are not simply exhibitions of the curious elements of our past, of science, engineering, transport, art, religion, or politics. They echo subconsciously all that we have become and in this respect we are already a part of the museum story before we enter the building or, maybe more accurately, the museum is part of us. In becoming involved in the museum through the accessible medium of role-play, therefore, we begin to not only take ownership of the theatre event itself, investing our thoughts and emotions in the lives of characters, but our ownership of the whole museum is increased. It is perhaps this characteristic of theatre-in-museum above all others that museums are currently failing to recognise and we will return to this point again.

AIMS

Building upon notions of ownership, we turn to the aims of theatre-in-museum and its potential place in museums overall. We will assume that the idea that theatre-in-museum is a medium which is intelligible and accessible to the general public and inter-related with the museum context is already established. Let us now consider two global aims common to all theatre-in-museum.

Museums can be viewed as centres of our heritage by representing the collective whole of our achievements, values and attitudes as a society. Gajendra K. Verma, in **Pluralism: Some Theoretical and Practical Considerations**, asserts that it is the "unique values, symbols, life-styles, customs and other human-made components"(17) which tend to distinguish one group from another. We also need to bear in mind that culture is a complex and blurred concept and that the idea that any of us belongs to a single culture is generally not sustainable and within the overall identity of a single society there will be many sub-cultures. Nevertheless, the idea that a society will recognise itself and that individual members will derive a sense of identity and belonging through their recognition of the common attributes mentioned above, is a useful framework for us. Importantly, we can also recognise that museums, galleries and heritage sites are filled with collections which reflect those five attributes of our society. To become personally involved in the collections, and the people and events represented by them, through theatre is to become involved personally in the very essence of our culture. Theatre-in-museum, in this sense, can be seen as a culturally reinforcing experience whereby a process of reaffirmation of belonging can take place.

Equally, though, we must recognise that "Culture is not a static entity in the form of a fixed social heritage; it evolves and changes with the passage of time."(18) Our culture changes because the values, symbols, life-styles, customs and other hand-made components which define that culture are constantly in a state of flux. Symbols, for example, are not fixed for all time so, whilst a museum might preserve an object initially as being representative of technological advancement, in years to come that same object may become vested with new meaning. So too, our values change. An object housed in a collection from the Victorian period, whilst once representing British economic might and the strength of its Empire may now represent, say, a racist and colonial past which rests uncomfortably with contemporary values. The recent controversy over restoring the facade of St. George's Hall in Liverpool which depicts a chained slave kneeling in adoration of Queen Victoria and Britannia is a case in point. What is important here, of course, is that the aspiration of a dialectic theatre developed in many movements over a number of years and intended to give people a voice in re-shaping their own destinies has not only a relevant place in our museums but perhaps a crucial one. If museums are to be about both cultural re-affirmation and cultural re-definition then theatre can act as an agent of unity, festival, celebration, identity and also of re-identification. It can offer visitors the opportunity to re-address their position on our past, present and on our aspirations for the future.

In raising the idea that museums are as much about a re-affirmation and re-definition of ourselves now, as they are about opening entertaining windows onto the worlds of a somehow distant and removed past, we also reveal our second global aim of theatre-in-museum. If theatre has the potential to do what has been suggested here and create a forum for visitors to review themselves through their encounters with fictional characters, then it would seem to be about everyday life and fundamentally 'of' the people. Just as Cheesman and Littlewood pioneered theatre which reflected the stories of a community back to its own people in order that they could re-affirm their roots and boldly accept the challenges of the future, so too, theatre-in-museum tells us our own story. Just as Boal's work known as theatre of the oppressed confronts a community with problems in order that they might solve them, theatre-in-museum programmes have the capacity to help visitors to envisage the future as well as the present or the past. When Action Replay (National Museum of Photography, Film and Television) present their play "Images of Women" they are helping visitors to do more than simply observe how women have been portrayed in the media. It requires us to consider how we relate to those images as individuals and how we will relate to them in the future. In representing our own heritage through theatre in the context of museums that hold the very icons of our culture theatre-in-museum is essentially 'of' the people. In this respect, perhaps more than all others, theatre-in-museum finds its genesis, not just in educational theatre generally, but in people's theatre particularly.

NON-TRANSFERABILITY

The idea of viewing theatre-in-museum as a learning medium in its broadest sense has been explored throughout this section and only one or two additional points need be made. First, we can recognise that a principal feature of theatre-in-museum is that practitioners place the highest of priorities on matching the content and the form of their work to the specific context in which they operate in order to entertain and enlighten their visitors. There is an intimate relationship between the theatre programme, the museum and the visitor and it is this complex interaction that reveals the meaning of the museum collection or site.

The second and final point is simply to recognise that this relationship is of paramount importance not only to the success of theatre-in-museum for the visitor but actually for the survival of any theatre-in-museum movement which might exist now or in the years to come. Context-specific theatre movements tend not to survive outside their own setting and have a propensity to become victims of their own success. Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop which grew out of the roots of community-based work using amateur actors as much as professionals fell victim to the lure of agents taking the actors onto 'proper' work. Her shows transferred to the

West End and the Theatre Workshop disintegrated. Cheesman's highly successful work in Stoke-on-Trent was powerful within the community but not transferable out of it, except perhaps in academic circles. Attempts (not by Boal himself) at the Paris conference of 1993 to virtually copyright Boal's approaches to forum theatre further illustrate the perennial problem of dedicated context-specific theatre movements not flourishing out of their original setting. Ultimately a context-specific theatre movement simply ceases to exist once outside its context, and theatre-in-museum practitioners need to be aware of this. Colin Ford's reference to "a new kind of museum professional"(19) is now being reflected positively in the work of some theatre-in-museum practitioners. The leaflet of invitation to apply for auditions to the MOMI actors company at the Museum of the Moving Image explains that,

Working as an actor in MOMI is not a casual 'holiday' job, nor a job for 'out of work' actors. It is a total commitment to maintain the highest standards of theatre in museum performance, and keep MOMI at the forefront of this exciting medium.

(20)

IN CONCLUSION

In concluding this chapter, let us consider the implications of matters so far addressed. We began this section by observing that Neil Cossons is concerned with attracting a new mass audience to museums and how he feels that the 'popularising' of museums is necessary. We contrasted this with the Brechtian notion of 'popular theatre' intended to make accessible and intelligible to the masses the subject matter of his plays. 'People's theatre' has always been concerned with not just the enlightenment and instruction of the masses but with empowering them. In a society where knowledge is often equated with power we must be critical in our observations of what the entertaining, engaging, and sometimes seductive medium of theatre is trying to achieve. We will, in later case studies, question the underlying motives and effects of museums who recreate a cosy past and present it as the truth. Jane Malcolm-Davies in *Museums Journal* uncompromisingly sees some of this work as "Messing up the Past."(21) We must ask serious questions about the benefits which museums imagine they can offer their visitors through theatrical and other activity which can potentially result in visitors leaving their sites with unrealistic visions not just of the museum collection itself but perhaps much more dangerously, unrealistic assumptions about their own expertise.

We must also return to the notion that was reiterated by the Museums and Galleries Commission in the introduction to their Registration Scheme, that museums are "for the public benefit."(22) If they are, then it seems reasonable that visitors should be

offered ownership of their own learning, for not to empower visitors through encouraging them to become active learners rather than passive recipients is tantamount to coercion or indoctrination. Audiences surely need to know that they are part of a learning programme which is being presented to them with their own agreement and which seeks their own voice. People's theatre ultimately sought to inspire audiences to invest in their own future. Museums which either trivialise our heritage through meaningless theatrical entertainment, or claim reality in what can only ever be fictionalised reconstruction betray in equal measure the mission of museums and the public they serve.

Interestingly, Charles Saumarez Smith calls for museums to adopt a more transparent, perhaps democratic, approach to gallery design in all its respects and to create a visiting audience who will be aware of the process they are undergoing in museums and, through this, to become more discriminating in what they take away with them. In considering museum methodology of presentation and interpretation, he writes,

It is important that museums acknowledge that all these strategies are necessarily artificial and that the museum visitor be made to realise that display is only a trick which can itself be independently enjoyed as a system of theatrical artifice. The best museum displays are often those which are most self-evidently self-conscious, heightening the spectator's awareness of the means of representation, involving the spectator in the process of display. These ideas can be formulated into a set of requirements: that there should be a mixed style of presentation; that there should be a degree of audience involvement in the methods of display; that there should be an awareness of the amount of artificiality in methods of display; and that there should be an awareness of different, but equally legitimate, methods of interpretation.

(23)

We will now move forward to view a series of case studies which will consider the extent to which theatre-in-museum is bound up with the mission of the museums they serve and also to critically analyse the kinds of knowing and kinds of falsehoods which theatre-in-museum promotes.

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PART TWO

CASE STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

Introduction to the Case Studies

In Part Two of this paper, five case studies are offered in order to outline the principal types of theatre-in-museum operating in Britain today. They do not include some forms of what has become known as live interpretation, focusing as they do on what we can regard as theatre. The third-person costumed gallery tours at Hampton Court, for example, are clearly live interpretation but involve no attempt to create a sense that the Court has been brought to life and, as such, are seen here as resting on the border-line of theatricality without actually being so. Beamish on the other hand, where third-person costumed staff also interact with visitors, has crossed that border-line by creating illusions that the early twentieth century site has been brought to life, and is theatrical. Beamish is therefore taken as the starting point for what we can regard as theatre-in-museum and forms the subject of the first case study.

Each case study begins by addressing some common points in order that a comparison may be drawn between the five theatre-types outlined here. These are concerned with:

- an outline exemplar of each theatre-type;
- the observable attributes of each theatre-type;
- the aims and methodologies adopted by each company.

The second part of each case study will address one or more issues which are generic to all theatre-in-museum but which that particular case study illustrates clearly. These themes are dealt with in a particular order so that our understanding of theatre-in-museum may be developed throughout the whole study. These progressional themes are:

- creating illusions of reality;
- establishing play-contracts between interpreter/actors and visitors;
- setting objectives and identifying learning outcomes;
- emotional engagement and affective learning;
- visitor-contextualisation and visitor-in-role;
- meeting the needs of visitors;
- and,
- mass spectacle, festival and celebration.

CHAPTER TWO

"Being realistic in what you can do in the time."

**A case study on the nature of third person
interpretation in living-history settings.**

**Defining the 'as-if' of theatre-in-museum.
Illusion and reality.**

CHAPTER TWO

Third person interpretation is the starting point for what may be considered theatre-in-museum. It embraces any demonstration or explanation delivered live in galleries or on sites and may well be closer to resembling a traditional lecture or guided tour than anything resembling theatre. When interpreters or demonstrators appear in costume, however, and begin to contribute to a context which is creating some sort of verisimilitude with another time or place then we must consider this to be at least theatrical if not actually theatre. When such costumed demonstrations are placed in a total or partial simulation of the kind frequently referred to as living-history then the theatricality which creates an illusion of reality must be examined. This case study is set in the context of Beamish Open Air Museum in County Durham and it presents us with some fundamental questions about theatre-in-museum which are complex, both in terms of recognising the basic nature of role-play and theatre, and in considering the implications of interpreting museum collections through simulated reality.

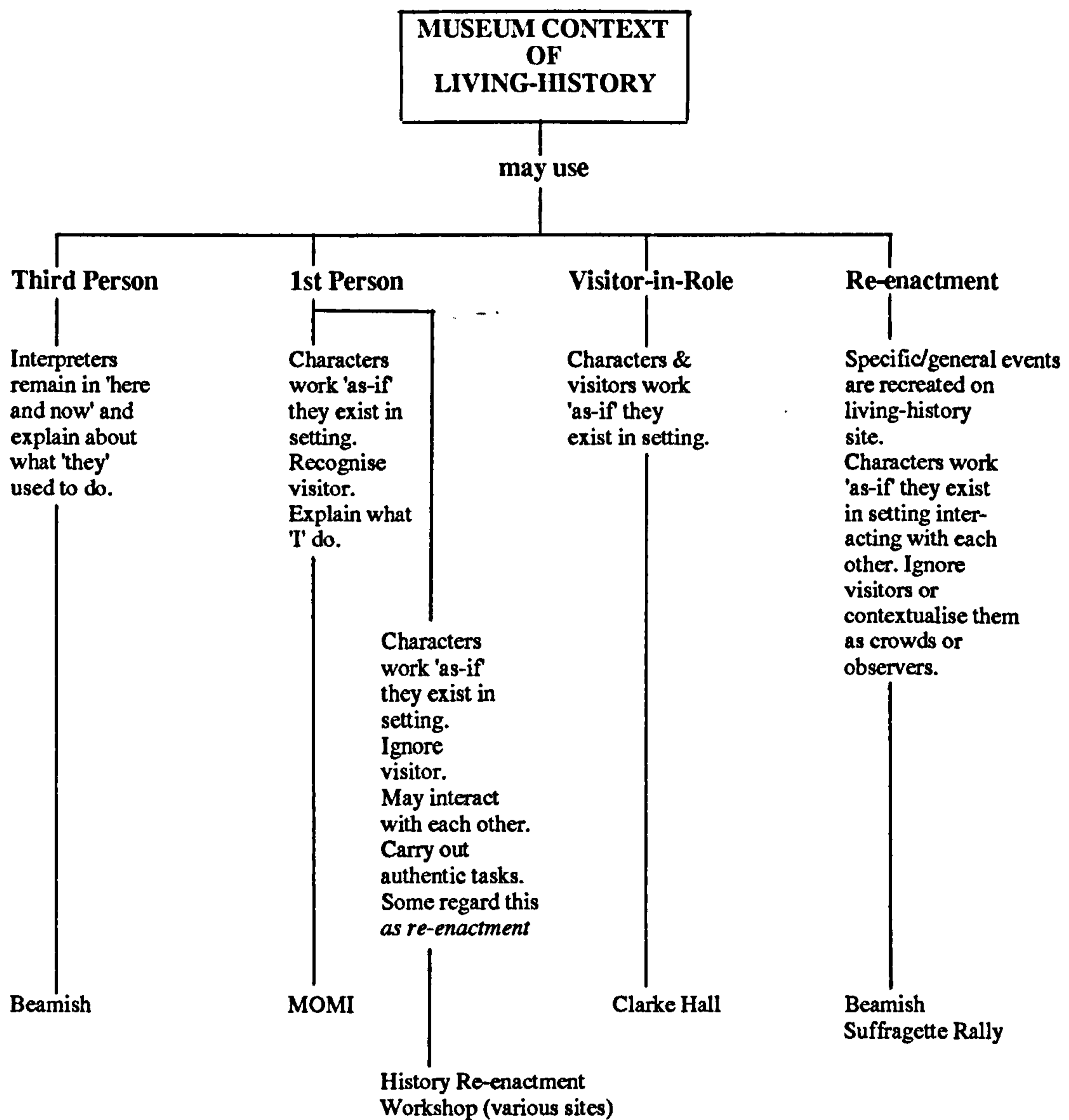
The staff of Beamish are absolutely clear that they do not use role-play or performance and that their costumed interpreters remain firmly in the here and now at all times. If we are to take it that theatre requires the evocation of fictional activity and the willingness and ability to function as if we were in some other time, place and circumstance then the adoption of third person interpretation would indeed debar this activity as a category of theatre. In this sense we support the self-perception of Beamish that they do not use theatre. If, however, we recognise that theatre-in-museum is a synthesis of not only everything which is 'theatre' but also that which is 'museum', then we might regard the use of any kind of live interpretation which contributes significantly to creating a museum context which is in itself a fictional resemblance of actuality, as a kind of theatre-in-museum. We may, in other words, regard third person interpretation which contributes to a simulated environment as theatre-in-museum at the same time as not being theatre.

Beamish presents us with a complex experience which is not *theatre* but which is highly *theatrical*. When it opened in 1970 it was described to a public who had rarely, if ever, experienced this kind of museum before as living-history. This term is itself problematic within the museum community and there is great uncertainty as to what living-history is actually meant to be. We will return to this point in more depth later in the chapter, but let us take it for now that it involves an attempt at producing the authentic recreation of an environment within which both objects and processes may be demonstrated, often through the explanations of interpreters working in that environment. In the national research programme (1993) outlined in the previous

chapter, almost half (48%) of all museums registered living-history as a type of theatre which they employ. The category of living-history had been offered to museums based upon preliminary assumptions about types of theatre-in-museum currently in use. These assumptions had, in turn, been based upon delegates' discussions at conferences, field-work observations and other largely anecdotal evidence. Despite so many museums registering this category, we must challenge whether it is a type of theatre at all. It can more accurately be regarded as a general museological approach to interpreting a collection through contextualising exhibits in a whole environment. Visitors experience a kind of total immersion in an environment which is a replication of aspects of living in another time and/or place.

Within that context, various approaches to using live interpreters are adopted. Interpreters in costume operate machinery, manufacture goods, maintain dwelling places (often including the preparation of food), nurture farm-crops and animals, and generally undertake the daily tasks appropriate to their particular setting. Although there are some rare examples of live simulations (usually operating under the name of re-enactment) where the interpreters do not recognise the existence of the visitor and will therefore not communicate with them, most costumed interpreters will explain or demonstrate their area of the site to visitors. It is the exact nature of this live interpretation which determines the type of theatre-in-museum being used. The choice of style is an important decision for the museum for each has its own attributes which will contribute significantly to the way in which the visitor experiences the whole environment. It is quite clear that visitors will perceive the environment and their role in it in very different ways depending on whether they feel they must be passive onlookers to events which unfold before them, whether they are to interact with characters of the period who are somehow trapped in their own time, or whether they may interact with interpreters as fellow inhabitants of the here and now. The actual learning experience will be crucially altered depending on the emphasis placed upon the role of the visitor by the selection of role for the interpreters. We will return to this point later in the chapter but, for the moment, we recognise in this model that living-history is a museum context within which various kinds of theatre may operate.

The range of theatre styles operating within living-history is summarised in the following chart.



The use of various types of theatre is inextricably linked with the exact nature of a living-history experience. Our main concern here is not to address the nature of living-history so much as various forms of theatre-in-museum, some of which may be applicable to living-history settings. In order to maintain this emphasis we will take as the main focus for this chapter the use of third person interpretation, though an awareness of the broad concept of living-history as outlined above will be important in recognising the interplay between theatre-in-museum and a particular museum context. Some general issues concerning living-history and illusions of reality will, therefore, also be dealt with in this chapter.

This particular case study will consider four elements of third person interpretation in the context of the living-history setting of Beamish Open Air Museum:

- outlining exemplars of work in this field including brief mention of the organisation and management structures at Beamish;
- identifying the observable attributes of third person interpretation in action;
- establishing the broad aims for third person interpretation and analysing the relationship between aims and methodology;
- considering the theatricality of living-history and analysing the relationship between the role of interpreters and the role of the visitor.

EXEMPLARS OF THIRD-PERSON INTERPRETATION IN A LIVING-HISTORY SETTING

Visitors encounter a wide range of costumed demonstrators and service-providers at all principal locations on the Beamish site. A team of between twelve (at low season) and twenty-five (at high season) interpreters interact with visitors in a variety of ways, some to provide services such as driving the trams or serving in the sweet shop, others to interpret through demonstration or explanation, various settings which contain large numbers of individual objects. Encounters vary between being explicit explanations projected to a group of visitors and being low-key affairs with one or two visitors. In some settings the interpreters initiate interaction upon the arrival of visitors to that space but in other settings they will wait for enquiries or 'cue comments' from the visitors themselves. Interpreters always remain very firmly in the here and now and their dialogue is consistently offered in terms of 'They would have.....', 'They used to.....', 'In 1913 this would have happened', or even 'That would have been different to nowadays.' Interpreters usually work alone in a particular setting though there are exceptions to this, and they interpret the objects and the settings themselves according to pre-determined themes which hinge around associated social contexts. The visitor plays an important part in shaping the interactions at Beamish though this process is subtle and expertly handled by interpreters. Visitors never have to shift their own role from that of visitor and this is clear at all times. There is a relaxed and welcoming air to each of the various settings. Visitors are free to view the museum in any order they choose and may remain in most settings for as long as they wish. One or two exceptions, such as the drift mine, will not accommodate prolonged stays for safety reasons.

The activity at Beamish is on a massive scale and is complicated but a snap-shot of the site including some typical visitor experiences of third person interpretation is offered here to help set the general context for this case study.

Beamish opened in 1970 and was largely a result of the work of Frank Atkinson who, whilst still the Director of Bowes Museum, perceived a need to capture the artefacts of the industrial North East and its working classes before they disappeared in the modernisation of Britain which was gathering pace in the late 1950s. His extraordinary vision and persuasive powers led to the adoption in 1958 of a most unusual policy, that of "unselective collecting."⁽¹⁾ After housing the growing collection of everyday ephemera in a number of locations, the Beamish site was finally adopted in 1970 and within two years the semblance of an open-air museum was taking shape. Buildings including a railway station, school, chapel, rows of cottages, houses and shops were captured at the point of demolition and reconstructed at the Beamish site. Local protests at the "junk yard"⁽²⁾ with a projected annual running cost of £1 million per year were faced, logistical challenges on a huge scale overcome, and criticism from within the museum profession answered, until Beamish finally confounded its critics by winning the British Museum of the Year Award in 1986 and the European Museum of the Year Award the following year. Beamish now stands on a 300 acre site and offers visitors the opportunity to visit a number of locations set in the period immediately before the First World War. Trams and omnibuses run between Home Farm, the Colliery Village, the Town, Railway Station and Fairground. Each location comprises a number of buildings which have been reconstructed, fitted and furnished with items from the collection and set generally in the year of 1913. Recently, Pockerly Manor was opened to the public and, in contrast with the rest of this industrial site, offers visitors a glimpse of life on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, set as it is in the year 1825. Each location is reconstructed according to exhaustive research and becomes the context within which objects can be viewed. Originally called hosts, each location has an interpreter available to chat with visitors about the objects, the location and, most importantly, the lives and times of the people who would have originally occupied such dwellings and working places. The museum as a whole presents and interprets life in the North East of England and attempts to tell history "from the bottom up,"⁽³⁾ maintaining its focus on the working and aspiring middle classes moulded by the Industrial Revolution.

Unlike most theatre-in-museum events, live interpreters have been present on the Beamish site from the beginning. These people have not been added to an existing museum but were always conceived as being the prime communicators between visitors and a museum that was to be, above all things, about the lives of people. The

use of live interpreters has evolved through various stages to what we see today. Organised under a Keeper of Interpretation and his Assistant Keeper, twelve full-time members of staff maintain live interpretation on seven principal locations at Beamish. In the winter months from November to February the Town alone is open to the public though the school in the Colliery Village remains available to school parties. In the main season, however, from March to October the whole site operates and an additional eight to ten members of staff are brought in to become costumed demonstrators. These will usually be local people who are available for employment and who have experience in local traditional industries or have other relevant experience. In high-season during July and August this is further supplemented by five or six temporary costumed demonstrators, usually university students with a background in history, archaeology or other relevant subjects. Experience of acting or performing arts is not required for the Beamish posts though obviously the ability to communicate clearly is necessary. The interpreters vary in their duties. Some will be skilled in a particular trade and act as a service-provider such as the tram drivers, some will be demonstrators like the sweet maker or printer, whilst others will be interpreters such as the shopkeepers in the Co-operative Store or the piano teacher in the terraces. The interpretation operation is meticulously organised with very strict procedures ensuring not only the courteous care of visitors but also the security of artefacts and the health and safety of both staff and visitors. Vast amounts of research material support interpreters. Permanent members of staff, some of whom have been at Beamish for over ten years have quite clearly built up an impressive personal knowledge of their subject. Those on short term contracts have a week to prepare their first interpretation before working on site. Support for interpreters is thorough and there is a culture of continuing learning and professional development amongst the team.

On entering the site, visitors would normally travel to the Town or to other locations by tram. The uniformed tram driver and conductor are welcoming and the conductor in particular may enter into general light-hearted discussion with visitors. The driver, too, will explain about the trams themselves and the task of driving (whilst the tram is stationary) but, on the whole, these costumed staff fulfil their role as tram-crew without getting involved in spoken interpretation.

In contrast, the Co-operative Society Grocer's Shop in the Town, is hosted by a costumed interpreter in the guise of a shopkeeper. He or she will offer low-key interaction with visitors moving close to those who are studying the various objects on the shelves or on the counter display. Initiation of any actual interaction is sensitively managed through gaining eye contact, waiting for a direct question or cue comment from the visitor or maybe offering a word or two to gauge if they are

wanted or not. Interactions will centre on a particular item to begin with but will frequently broaden to include other objects in the store, aspects of how the Co-operative Society functioned, how dividends for members were calculated and logged, how much items cost and how this related to the weekly income of likely Co-op members. What may begin with two or three visitors huddled around an object can grow to include other onlookers or participants but the gathering of large numbers here is very rare and visitors seem to respect conversations as being private rather than for public consumption. Parts of many conversations in the store are, indeed, individual as visitors will frequently add to the shopkeeper's explanations with recollections of their own childhood (rarely from 1913) or from the stories told to them by their parents. Adults will often use the information gleaned in conversation with the shopkeeper as a prompt for their own reminiscences with each other or as a springboard for explaining to accompanying children, memories of their own past. In the background, similar inter-visitor interactions are taking place as people point out various objects to each other. The experience here is also tactile and aromatic. The shop till is demonstrated and a selection of old coins brought onto the counter to be handled by visitors while the comparative values of coins are explained. Coffee, cinnamon or soap at various points on the counter are cupped into visitors hands and the smells invariably spark off further reminiscences. Some visitors simply enter and look around without involving themselves in any dialogue with the shopkeeper and leave when ready without any attempt on the part of the interpreter to initiate conversation. Other conversations will begin soon and continue throughout the whole period of duty for this interpreter.

Meanwhile, across the main street at set times of day, demonstrations of sweet making are offered in the rear work area of the sweet shop. The small viewing space is invariably packed to capacity with the forty to fifty visitors who can squeeze in. The demonstration, which the costumed demonstrator describes as such, lasts for fifteen minutes. He speaks to the whole group, with individual interaction being very rare. He is sparing in his words but offers clear details on the ingredients, the boiling and cooling process and the basic techniques of rolling, cutting and finally shaping the sweets. A few humorous comments about the dentist along the street are interspersed with a commentary on how sweets used to be made, how it differs from modern techniques and, occasionally, anecdotes about the perils of live interpretation at Beamish. As the sweets cool, irregular shapes and end-pieces are broken off, collected on a tray and then offered to visitors to taste as they leave. Occasionally, questions are asked at the end of the demonstration but, on the whole, visitors disperse after the demonstration appreciative of what they have seen and heard. Immediately next door the sweet shop is doing brisk business in 1990s coinage as

visitors indulge in the tastes of yesteryear. Reminiscences abound and adults seem overjoyed at revealing to their children the joys of what 'real sweets' used to taste like. Children are predictably enthusiastic about this aspect of their parents' and grandparents' childhoods.

OBSERVABLE ATTRIBUTES OF THIRD PERSON INTERPRETATION

Third person interpretation at Beamish falls into various categories which include service-providers, demonstrators of particular processes and interpreters of objects and environments. Each of these kinds of encounter will have a particular emphasis in terms of both the content explored and the structure of the interactions themselves.

In general though, we can observe the following categories of content being addressed through third person interpretation at Beamish:

- demonstrations of objects or of quality reproductions of authentic equipment;
- demonstrations of processes using original or authentic equipment;
- explanations of specific buildings, earthworks, constructions or other locations on the site;
- explanations of general or specific concepts related to the manufacture and use of objects, processes or locations;
- explanations of the social contexts represented by the collection and site and of the general social and historical background to the periods represented;
- the stories of real or representative ordinary people and their every-day experiences of life in their place and time;
- a consideration of the effect that various developments had on the lives of ordinary people;
- a consideration of the benefits and drawbacks of events or developments;
- relating the principal themes of the museum to the visitors' own lives.

There are also variations in the structure of encounters from site to site but we may, likewise, establish some common features. Taking the examples, outlined above, as being typical we can begin to draw up the common attributes of third person interpretation in the context of living-history settings.

Third person interpretation in the context of living-history will normally:

- be the principal means of demonstration, explanation and interpretation for the museum and therefore in the front-line of the whole visitor experience;
- involve interpreters operating alone on location (though there may be two or more sometimes);
- involve interpreters interacting with visitors on a one to one basis with small numbers of visitors or, in some rare cases, with larger groups of up to fifty;
- be very clear that interactions are in third person, are non-intrusive and at the discretion of the visitor;
- be responsive to the visitor in answering questions and picking up the particular interests of individuals or groups;
- rely on the visitor being responsive and upon them accepting the conventions of engagement with the interpreter;
- involve interpreters and visitors in conversation and interaction and such conversation is lodged clearly in the here and now;
- involve the interpreter in researching vast amounts of material to enable them to respond around given themes to the interests of individual visitors;
- involve the interpreter in revealing a variety of content-packages to visitors ranging from being object-specific to context-specific, as outlined above;
- be random events, with visitors coming across interpreters in any order and with varying degrees of expecting an interpreter to be in that location;
- be transient in nature lasting from a few seconds to fifteen minutes or occasionally more;
- involve interpreters being on-location for very long periods of time.

ESTABLISHING BROAD AIMS AND RELATED METHODOLOGY

Despite the scale of operation and the high levels of consistency between the various interpreters on site there are actually no written aims and objectives governing the specific role of the third person interpreters at Beamish. Guidelines and instructions specifying the way in which interpreters will interact with visitors, however, are provided in minute detail and this emphasis on the methodology rather than on the

purposes of interaction is common to many museums. Indeed, virtually all institutions using theatre-in-museum seem to do so in the absence of any written statements about the desired outcomes of their work. We will address the notion of deriving specific aims and objectives from a detailed analysis of the various aspirations of people involved in theatre-in-museum projects at two museums in the next chapter and, from this, deduce what we may regard as the generic aims and objectives for all theatre-in-museum. In this case study, however, we will continue to operate on the broad front adopted by Beamish itself in order to explore some founding principles about the nature of theatrical interaction and the fostering of impressions of reality through illusion on museum sites.

The fact that the involvement of people to act as hosts to the various locations was conceived in the very earliest days of Beamish is significant. Most theatre-in-museum projects have been added in recent years to already existing museums. Sites such as Beamish involving peopled environments where personal interaction is the key to interpreting the whole museum are rare and are fundamentally different to other forms of theatre-in-museum. As we will see in the following case studies (Chapters Three and Four in particular) much theatre work has been adopted in museums to provide a new means of interpreting for the visitors, an existing collection and in this sense the collection and the theatre programmes can be viewed as two separate things. It is possible therefore, as we will see in the next chapter, to establish aims and objectives specifically for the theatre-in-museum project which will outline its role in relation to the collection and to the overall museum mission. In such cases, the museum mission could exist without the theatre mission, but the reverse would not be true. In the case of Beamish, and other rare examples of peopled museums including some visitor-in-role work outlined in Chapter Five, the live interpreters are so intimately bound up with the complete concept of the whole museum environment that it is very difficult to sift out their specific role. This may, in part, explain the lack of written aims and objectives for their work. If we consider what Beamish would be without the live interpreters, however, we begin to realise the central role that they do play and we must deduce, therefore, that it is possible to define what that is.

George Muirhead, the Keeper of Interpretation, is able to explain the overall place of live interpreters at Beamish. His comments, which we quote here at length, begin to indicate the many facets of their work and also, especially in his reference to Pockerley Manor, the evolutionary nature of third person interpretation at this museum.

It's basically to bring the exhibits to life. In some cases there's a specific process to demonstrate. In the print shop it's lead press printing. That's what we're trying to get across. Obviously the more complicated processes we can't do because you don't have the space and the time. In colliery cottage number 3 the object there is that some of the time they bake just to show people how the stove is managed and get across the idea that you might light to fire at nine o'clock but it's two o'clock before it's hot enough to bake. Those kind of things. Each exhibit has a message which we try to get across so pit cottage number 2 is the household where the older couple who are like a lot of old fashioned Methodists, teetotal, there's appropriate imagery. The furniture is older. Pit cottage number 3 is the house of the second generation Irish couple hence the picture of the Pope, all this kind of thing. And the idea is to get across one of the themes in there, apart from taking about how they manage the stove and this kind of thing, is to say, well certainly in the twenty-odd years before the First World War thousands of Irish people moved from Merseyside to the North East because the economy was booming and they either worked in heavy chemicals or the coal mines or tin mining. Next door, the cottage is the house of a family that's fallen on hard times, basically the father's died in the pit so the wife is taking in washing hence the washing around the room and she's also making mats. That's the role to try to give an idea of the different facets of life in the region at the time. Or in some cases to demonstrate a specific process. I suppose at Pockerley we've become more process oriented in a sense because they do spinning, make candles. Visitors are invited to use a quill pen and write their name, this kind of thing. Some of the demonstrations there are more process oriented than elsewhere. How much it works depends on the response you get.

(4)

A number of things begin to emerge from this explanation. In bringing the exhibition to life we touch upon the vexed question of whether we are dealing with living-history or a living museum. Beamish are clear that they are best described by the latter phrase and this is reflected in the way in which interpreters "bring the exhibits to life."⁽⁵⁾ At Beamish, interpreters do not attempt to live in their environment in the sense of adopting a role which suggests that they are there in some kind of time-warp baking bread for their own consumption. Rather, they bring the exhibits to life in two particular ways. First, by enlivening the museum environment generally for the visitor

and, second, by providing a means of enabling visitors to contextualise the exhibits and locations in the lives of working people with whom they may have varying degrees of association or empathy. Let us consider these two aspects of bringing exhibits to life in closer detail. The "Housekeeping Manual", which is one of many staff manuals for interpreters at Beamish, makes it clear that even before interpreting begins each interpreter is in the "Front Line"(6) of visitor-interaction at Beamish.

At BEAMISH we are attempting to recreate aspects of a recent past way of life. We do this by bringing buildings from throughout the region to be rebuilt on the Museum site. They are then equipped with furniture, household goods and machinery. Your job as a demonstrator is to bring them to life.

In costume you are in the 'Front Line' and you must maintain high standards of behaviour and performance at all times. Everyone works together to ensure that the magic of the **BEAMISH EXPERIENCE** works for every visitor.

[Their emboldening and capitals] (7)

This emphasis on the enjoyment of every visitor to Beamish is reiterated throughout all of the staff manuals and the museum makes no apology for trying to ensure that visitors "have fun"(8) as well as learning from the experience. Beamish is a huge site which is tiring for visitors, significant numbers of whom will have made lengthy journeys to get there. The museum is about people and is accessed principally through meeting people and the good tempered atmosphere generated quite purposefully by the staff helps to ensure that the personal interaction of Beamish will work at its best. Entrance to the museum is generally perceived as good value considering that a visit is likely to occupy at least half a day and often longer, but at £8.00 for adults and £4.00 for children it is expensive. Customer care and the desire that people feel satisfied, hopefully to the level of making a return visit and recommending it to others must, therefore, be a further consideration. The personal interaction aimed at enlivening the museum environment, however, goes well beyond this general air of courtesy arising from such considerations. We will see in later chapters that theatre-providers are keen to make much of the accessibility of their medium in contrast to, say, written labels. But the use of a theatrical means of live communication also has its parameters and is most seriously undermined if visitors are not able to comfortably use the medium. In adopting costumed interpreters as a principal means of communication, Beamish does rely on the willingness of visitors to interact with them. The visitor guide explains that, "This is a museum about people. It is

appropriate then that our buildings contain people who are trained to give information and to answer your questions." The guide goes on to advise, "You are not compelled to listen to them but your enjoyment and understanding will be greater if you do."(9) Whether many visitors read this before setting off into the museum is uncertain as is whether the guide actually helps the reticent visitor to communicate anyway. It is important then, that from the first contact with costumed interpreters (usually the tram crew at the visitor centre) that visitors are coaxed into a willingness to communicate alongside reassurances that they are permitted to simply listen to and observe others. The enlivening process at Beamish is not simply to enliven the site, but to subtly enliven the visitors themselves and through this help them to engage with the museum experience as an active learner rather than as a passive observer. Raising in the visitor a sense of curiosity and wonder at the various locations and exhibits, thus creating the "magic of the Beamish experience"(10) is a pre-requisite to visitors gaining access to the learning potential of the museum.

This allows the aim of "bringing exhibits to life"(11) referred to by George Muirhead (Beamish), to be addressed. Muirhead's description of the role of interpreters reflects the categories of content outlined above and which we can observe in action at Beamish. The three broad aims of explaining and interpreting objects, explaining and interpreting processes, and interpreting the social contexts represented by the objects and locations in the museum, are at the centre of this notion of bringing the exhibits to life. The guiding principle behind the use of third person interpretation at Beamish is that they reflect the lives of ordinary people. Quite clearly, the idea that objects can literally be brought to life is nonsense. What we see at Beamish through the use of third person interpreters is the exhibits being placed back into their original context of shaping the lives of people in the early part of this century. When visitors, therefore, see the black-leading of the fire range and the lighting of the fire early in the morning they can, through the actions and explanations of the interpreter, take their first tentative steps towards building up a mental map of the daily life of a woman in the early 1900s. The baking of bread along with explanations about the buying, storage and use of ingredients further a concept of the financial and family structures of her household. The many visual and word clues built up begin to generate impressions, not of the objects, but of her daily life. The limitations of basic facilities such as water, lighting and heating sow the seeds for what might grow into a realisation on the part of the visitor that the life of women in the early twentieth century, only two generations ago, was very different indeed to our lives today. The visitor-experience of cottage number 3 has not simply demonstrated the workings of the range fireplace nor the process of baking bread. It is not the fireplace, flour jars nor the whole cottage itself that have been brought to life. Instead it is the lives of the people who would

have once lived in them that have been illuminated by the interpreters use, demonstration and explanation of such objects and by the recounting of daily experiences of those who lived in these cottages over eighty years ago.

What becomes obvious, even in this simple example from number 3 cottage, is that the interpretative potential of each location is considerable. The cottage, packed with items to support the day-to-day living of a family in a colliery village, reflects many aspects of the life of such a family. The structure of Beamish is, however, by no means random and each location is equipped to explore a range of themes. Some of these themes are common to the whole site whilst others are specific to one particular setting. Themes include:

Family	Women's Work	Government
Childhood	Trade	Law
Youth	Technology	Fashion
Courtship & Marriage	Travel	Architecture
Parenting	Socialisation	Health
Old Age	Social Status	Entertainment
Education	Beliefs and Values	Men's Work
Religion		

(12)

When interpreters join the staff of Beamish they are trained to identify the particular themes that their own area offers and to work within these when interacting with visitors. Interpreters are also trained that "The first step to planning a presentation is deciding upon an objective"(13) and that all of their presentations to visitors should hinge around these. The setting of objectives is aided by Senior Interpreters and other experienced staff and further supported by extensive research and information manuals which are given to interpreters for each area. Within this general framework though, staff are encouraged to decide for themselves upon appropriate objectives. This reflects a strong culture of developing the expertise of individual interpreters who will adhere to the central principles of Beamish but who will also develop high levels of ownership of their work. This policy is rewarded by a motivated staff, high standards of presentation and the impressive levels of knowledge and understanding about the period and setting in which they operate.

The fluid nature of interpretation at Beamish does encourage visitor-interaction not only between costumed interpreters and visitors but between groups of visitors themselves. Visitors frequently reminisce about their own childhood or about stories

told by their parents and grandparents. Although the encouragement of personal reminiscences is not something which Beamish places high on its list of aims, staff do recognise that it is one of the valuable elements of a Beamish visit. George Muirhead observes that, "Perhaps granny's coming with them and granny wants to tell the kids about something using you as her kind of mouth piece."(14) One of the broad aims of using third person interpreters is that they can act as a catalyst, the "mouth piece" or starting point for personal reminiscences about childhood whether or not that childhood was actually in the years leading up to 1913. It would seem reasonable to suppose that this kind of interaction with the museum can only increase levels of interest in the museum and its personal relevance to visitors.

George Muirhead recognises the limitations of a museum experience, even one on such a scale as Beamish, but reflects that the real aim of the museum is that learning about the past is not confined to the time spent on the site. The museum visit is merely the starting point for the visitors' further enquiry initiated by touching on the lives of people recounted through third person interpretation.

I don't want to sound disparaging about the visitors but I think the most you could hope for is that visitors would go away from the museum thinking, I never knew that. If it's just one thing from the museum's message about the region before 1913. If they take just one thing, that's really enough. They go away and say "Now I never knew that," and perhaps get a book out of the library. I don't want to sound disparaging, but that's probably as good as you can get.

(15)

We may summarise the broad aims of third person interpretation in this living museum context to be:

- to enliven the museum environment by contributing to the welcoming atmosphere of the museum and by contributing through their physical presence in various locations to the visitors general impression of the place and time represented by the museum;
- to create an enlivening of the visitor by encouraging them to interact with costumed interpreters;

- to create a sense of curiosity and wonder about the place and time represented by the museum;
- to explain and interpret exhibits, processes and the general social contexts of the place and time represented by the museum;
- to provide a catalyst for the visitor's personal reminiscences and, through this, to heighten their engagement with the museum;
- to provide an inspiration for future enquiry and study by the visitor.

We must remember that these aims have not been so formally set out in writing by the museum itself. This does not particularly reflect a gap in the museum's work so much as indicate the organic growth of work in the field of using third person interpretation in a living-museum. This museum has been willing to experiment throughout its evolution over the past twenty-five years or so and they express a desire to maintain the freedom to respond to changing circumstances without being tied to formal policies. Nevertheless, addressing aims and objectives would surely clarify their intentions and help in the process of understanding the medium which is at the heart of the museum. Having said that, the implementation of third person interpretation at Beamish is very impressive and when trying to understand its function we may do well to remember George Muirhead's frequently used phrase "It seems to work for us."(16)

Whilst we have had to deduce the aims for work at Beamish, the day-to-day methods employed could not be made more explicit than they are in the extensive interpretation manuals referred to previously. There are five elements which underpin the actual encounters and these are concerned with the clarity of encounter-contracts, visitor interest, visitor relevance, visitor reminiscences, and cohesion and progression both within individual locations and across the whole site. In addition to this, the overall adoption of third person encounters as a method of interpretation should be examined.

There are clear contracts between interpreters and visitors. The interpreters' handbook, "Effective Interpretation", outlines the process by which costumed staff greet visitors to their location. In practice the process is more varied than this suggests

and does differ from location to location. They are all, however, clearly based on the principle that visitors must feel comfortable and know what they are supposed to do. Costumed tram drivers and conductors are chiefly drivers and conductors and their communication is chiefly limited (for safety reasons and for the orientation of the visitor) to instructions about using the tram properly and advice about which location the tram is stopping at next. Demonstrators of sweet-making or news-printing will tend to inform visitors that a demonstration is about to begin. The dentist or the miner welcome people to their workplace and offer basic story-lines about their work giving plenty of chances for questions as they go along. The interpreters of shops and houses are rather more subtle and will tend to make themselves available to visitors, try to make eye-contact, pick up on 'cue-comments' from visitors or offer initiating comments but withdraw again if the visitor does not wish to pursue an interaction.

Once interactions begin, the Beamish staff always allow a visitor's interest to influence the direction of the interpretation. This is by no means a passive role for the interpreter. It is their job to interpret their location and to do everything they can to inform the visitor but their methods are subtle and there is never a feeling of forcing unwanted information onto the visitor. The staff recognise that visitors come to the museum with their own interests and that what the interpreter first offers may not always be wanted. Interpreters must be sensitive to the interests of individuals and be prepared to switch quickly to their agenda.

Now, you have to accept that some of our visitors don't really want to know about that. They come to Beamish for a good day out. They've seen the ad, seen some of our publicity, they're bringing the kids and they're coming for a good day out to enjoy themselves and, believe it or not, to have fun. So when we're training the staff, we try to tell them, 'Look some people don't want to hear this and you'll find when you're talking to them, they don't want to know about that. They want to know how much a pound of tea was, how much you get paid.'

When we're training the new staff, we always say that once you feel that you're comfortable in the area you're working in, you have to learn to tailor what you're saying to what the visitor wants and you gradually learn by experience what kind of response they want. Nothing's worse than going somewhere where you've got a member of staff who's got like a song and he starts at the beginning and goes onto the end and if you interrupt him in the middle he stops and then goes back and starts again. You see that in an awful lot of places. Or even members of

interpretative staff saying, 'Don't interrupt me, I'm talking,' because they haven't got to the end of their bit.

(17)

The extent to which third person interpreters need to tailor their work to the needs of visitors emphasises the advantages of having themes around which they can work rather than having very tight outcomes earmarked for each location. Obviously though, with such a fluid structure there is a need for some method which will help visitors fix each new experience into an overall conceptual framework. The approach here is to make the visitors themselves the central framework. The third person approach allows explicit reference to the here and now. We will hear the dentist explain that "the dentist's drill in 1913 ran at about 50,000 revolutions per minute whereas your dentist now will have a drill that runs at a quarter of a million revs."(18) The hardware store shopkeeper compares the cashing system of the 1913 Co-op with the system of 1930 and the modern computer systems of today. In making these frequent comparisons between now and then, the interpreters try to use what the manual refers to as "the 'Echo' technique."(19) That is, they deliberately create areas of interest in which the visitors can recognise their own common experiences. This is the rationale behind choosing the relatively universal themes explained earlier and it provides the backbone to visitor association with the lives and times of people represented by the costumed interpreters.

It is by making the museum a personal experience that Beamish encourages the inter-visitor interaction which invariably hinges around personal reminiscences. Few visitors actually remember the period before 1913 and tend to implant their own childhood on a previous age but the interpreters show sensitivity when they say, "Well we're a few years earlier than that and this was not common then"(20) Whether personal reminiscence is obvious or not, the general approach of providing a framework for the diverse experiences that Beamish has to offer through encouraging association with the visitors' own lives underpins the cohesion of experience at this museum. This is further strengthened by interpreters linking themes within their own location and making reference to similar themes across the whole site and by encouraging visitors to look out for relevant details at other locations.

The fact that all of this is taking place within the general structure of third person interpretation is a final and important detail to consider. Although there is a certain amount of doing what "works best for us"(21), the evolution of third person interpretation is by no means due to chance and its use here indicates its potential. One of the original ideas behind peopling the site was that it would offer the

opportunity to convey oral history as well as object-centred knowledge of the past. The history of the working classes is rarely written by the workers or their families but it may be spoken by them. Beamish was an attempt to give a voice to the people's history told by the people. Many of the original hosts at Beamish were, therefore, local people who had a life-time's experience in local industries which they would recount to visitors at the museum. As Beamish evolved, these roles were assumed by permanent members of staff who still operated in a third-person-demonstration and explanation-oriented way. Between 1989 and 1991, however, the museum experimented with the use of first person interpretation. Staff, under a previous Keeper of Interpretation, drew up character CVs and began to live out scenarios from early twentieth century life in the streets and houses of Beamish museum. Rather than being on location to explain to visitors, visitors were left to de-code the interactions which took place before them. For reasons which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter the experiment with first person interpretation was a very uncomfortable one.

We got a very hostile reaction in some cases from some of our visitors who found it confusing, disturbing and they couldn't work out what the hell was going on. So people would say [after they'd been] to the solicitor's office, 'There's a mad man there.' Also in parts of the museum, like on the tram-way, it affected in some ways the safe operation of the tram-way. People had to be in no doubt that these people in uniform were actually in charge of the tram.

Some of my curatorial colleagues were very worried about the messages that we were giving out from people who were actually in role. [They] were saying, well this is invalid, this is incorrect. A Methodist in 1913 wouldn't have said that.

They were staff that we'd had before and they found it terribly, terribly difficult. There was an emphasis in the recruiting, I wasn't actually involved in this but my impression was, to find people who'd had theatrical experience. But you see, in the past, the staff up here had been recruited because they had traditionally come from the declining industries. So we used to have miners or whatever and these people found this thing, mind everybody did, terribly, terribly difficult, even with support, like people's CVs and this kind of thing. I think the other thing we didn't know at the time was the amount of resources in terms of staff training that would have had to have gone into it to make it

really successful. In terms of on-going training for individual members of staff. So when I took over in '91 I decided to stick to third person interpretation which wasn't very fashionable at the time but it seems to work for us. We're quite clear about that.

(22)

Despite the fashions of the time to enliven museum spaces through first person characters of the kind we will explore in Chapter Three, Beamish recognised that the fundamental relationship between visitors and the interpreters had been changed. The contracts, through which visitors know how to interact with interpreters and which are now offered with absolute clarity were, during this period, seriously flawed. Visitors were not able to interact with the museum through active participation in learning, but were being forced into active participation of a different kind. The whole structure of visitors being able to relate to the content of the museum collapsed and was replaced by a process of looking on to re-enactments of daily living in which you were no longer an active element but rather viewed the characters like objects in a case. Where interaction did occur, visitors found it uncomfortable and were distracted by the need to establish their own role in proceedings which seemed now to be different to that of 'self-as-visitor'. (The notion of visitors assuming a role rather than being selves-as-visitor will be further explored in Chapter Five.)

In third person interpretation on living-history sites the interpreters are both a part of the context of the museum itself, adding as they do to the general background impression of the site, and also agents of interpretation for the visitor. They do not merely present the site to the visitor but subtly draw the visitor in through the apparently distancing approach of third person to become an active participant in the exploration of the museum. In helping to create such an holistic experience for the visitor, and also by enabling the visitor to become an active learner through interaction with these total immersion environments, the question does remain as to whether the third person interpreter risks giving impressions of completeness to the visitor who may actually leave the museum with a poor understanding of the place and time represented. The nature of living-museums and the role of third person interpreters within them must be further considered.

THE THEATRICALITY OF LIVING-HISTORY AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERPRETER AND VISITOR

The whole idea of creating living-museums which create illusions of reality is a troublesome area for contemporary museums. There is, in some quarters, a general

unease that living-history museums reflect a preoccupation with the past, often the recent past, that is symptomatic of a society which is deeply uneasy with itself. Living-history is seen as a cultural comfort-blanket protecting us from an uncertain future into which we are not yet ready to venture. This view is rejected by Peter Lewis, the Director of Beamish. He sees nothing peculiar in a preoccupation with previous times but, rather, recognises a need in all of us to know about the past in order to shape our actions in the present and the future.

Both old and young people, old and young nations, have a deep need to understand their pasts. The way we are and the way we will be are directly influenced by the way we were.

(23)

Lewis clearly holds aspirations that the current generation will be proactive in their use of history. Rather than seeing us as victims of the present and future, seeking refuge in a secure and survived past, he sees us as active meaning makers using history as a tool with which to shape our lives. We may speculate that if there is a growing fascination with the past, and especially the recent past, that it reflects a need to understand our immediate roots in a society which is no longer based on communal housing and extended families and where the recent past has traditionally been passed on through story-telling and the sharing of anecdotes. It is no coincidence that Beamish sets its two periods as 1825 and 1913. Pockerley Manor and the Town and Colliery represent the periods of British history at either side of the Industrial Revolution. As a recently post-industrial nation, there is some logic in suggesting that we are undergoing a process of realising that we are no longer what we were but are not yet sure of what we are to become. Some see this as crisis whilst Lewis perceives it as a time when we need to use the past to move forward.

Whatever the merits of each case, Beamish does create strong impressions of a time recently past but it is what results from the formation of such impressions which we must question. A recurring theme in several of the following case studies is the notion that theatre can generate illusions of reality and has the potential to evoke strong emotional and personal responses to projected characters and events. It is what happens once these impressions have been formed that is the concern of educational theatre and we do see in theatre-in-museum, a difficulty in creating opportunities for visitors to make sense of their experiences through reflection. To engage in debate, to consider alternative viewpoints of events, to resolve problems of conflicting evidence is the process of history. Some would question whether the Beamish experience really engages visitors in such a process or whether it coaxes people into believing that what

they experience is actually the whole picture of life at the beginning of the twentieth century. We must recognise that such large-scale re-constructions will offer only partial truths and give an incomplete picture of the past. George Muirhead (Head of Interpretation-Beamish) recognises that the Beamish portrayal of life in the early twentieth century is incomplete in some critical ways, but that the visitors do not necessarily want the aspects of life which have been omitted.

We would actually say that Beamish is not real enough. The whole of the village is too clean. Most colliery villages in Northumberland and Durham certainly until 1900 didn't really have an adequate sewerage system. There would be a quarry drain, what got pumped out of the pit would be swilled away. In some places it might go to the nearest river, in some places it would end up in the streets. So the colliery village doesn't smell properly. Somebody once said to me that Beamish has always had a problem with smell. That doesn't mean to say that people at the time didn't try to keep their houses as clean as they could. It just meant that they couldn't really tackle the extent of it. The town probably looks too neat and tidy. A whole range of things. But I think that we feel, for one thing on grounds of environmental health you'd never get away with. In other things we feel we've gone as far as we can. When it gets really wet the colliery village gets quite muddy. The pragmatic part about that is that you get people writing in and saying I ruined my best trousers. I stood in some horse shit. My colleagues in marketing, if they could get away with it would go around every morning and sweep up all the horse shit. In my opinion, if you stand in the horse shit, you didn't see it.

(24)

In his refreshingly pragmatic consideration of Beamish, Muirhead pitches the aspirations of academic enquiry against the desires of a public who go to Beamish for a day out which is set in the context of an historical experience, but for whom historical discovery isn't their only mission. Muirhead further suggests that the living experience of Beamish may need to be supplemented by more traditional displays in order to deal with the challenging topics of death, poverty and disease. This would offer visitors a distanced medium through which they can contemplate more objectively these distressing elements of a past which, in the case of Beamish, still reflects the family history of three quarters of its visitors.

We can talk about things using other media that people find it easier because they can handle it. Before the First World War the North East had the worst housing conditions probably that you'd find anywhere in the country, Newcastle and Gateshead at the top of the league. Now if we show that many people, many local people would find that quite offensive. So if we want to show that we have loads of other media where we can say, look in 1913 the city fathers in Newcastle nerved themselves to build a few council houses. Places like Gateshead had the worst conditions in this country and in parts of Europe but we don't really deal with that kind of thing partly because of the emotional problem with that and also partly because we exist in a market place and visitors have to pay and they complain if we do it. If we had a more traditional museum space we could deal with these things in a more dispassionate way using things like oral history, photographs, and so on.

My predecessor had a demonstration where he had a coffin in the pit cottage and the family there. And the hostile reaction we got we had so many people remembered that kind of thing really happening. So you can't deal with it in too direct a way. You could have written panels or other ways which are just that little bit distanced and then people can decide if they want it or not. But there are limits to how real you can actually make it and ultimately survive. So you might say in order to survive you partly disguise or sanitise the past a bit, clean things up, but we are aware of that but what we would like would be a more traditional display somewhere telling the other side of the coin.

(25)

We will deal more thoroughly in Chapter Four with the challenges which museums face in dealing with emotional disturbance created through simulated reality but let us take it for now that any emotional energy raised through illusion needs to be channelled properly and safely. Beamish recognises this and feels strongly that live-experience locations are not the place to do it. This then leaves us with the problem of deciding whether living-museums should be places of strong intellectual contemplation or places where we may sample the past but acknowledge that there will be obvious and glaring omissions.

It is fascinating, as we contemplate the inner motivations for reflecting on our own past, that museums themselves have never moved far away from these conflicts. The

very beginning of the museum movements of the mid-Victorian era sprang out of the Great Exhibitions of the 1850s. Even at that stage, the tension between providing exhibitions of high-culture, represented by collections of contemporary French and British art, and providing attractions of low-culture, represented by rides such as the Wiggle-Woggle and the Flip-Flap, was obvious and was never really resolved. It is not to be denied that the exhibitions continued to offer the potential for instruction but they also became places of leisure. Relaxed contemplation rather than study became the order of the day until the Duke of Argyll was able to reflect on the 1909 exhibition at White City that visitors now found "amusement without excess and knowledge without fatigue."(26) The Times was not so sure about this harmonious balance and, when reporting on the fact that "the educational displays were not ready for the opening, but that all of the entertainments were," noted that "The instructive part of the exhibition appears to be in rather an embryo condition. But Mr Kiralfy (Director-General) knows his public. And his public prefer Bi-planes, and Water-whirls, and Witching-waves, and Wiggle-woggles, and Flip-flaps, to all the instruction in the world."(27)

We can recognise in the barely disguised scurrilous comments of the 1909 Times, contemporary concerns about the watering down of history through living-history sites and we must question if they are merely diversions and entertainments or serious attempts to educate, albeit within the context of an entertaining day out. This reveals in British culture the curious idea that we may choose between education and learning or entertainment and leisure but that we cannot have both. Further to this, such ideas arising out of the philosophies of Benthamism and Utilitarianism imply that education and entertainment are inextricably linked with notions of morality and immorality respectively. What then do we see in Muirhead's words at Beamish ?

So we have a fair number of exhibits and activities which are just designed for people to enjoy. A replica car. That's fun. Big smart car chauffeur. Donkey ride. There's no great message with six donkeys but it's good fun. The kids like it. Playing hopscotch in the school yard, playing hooplas this kind of thing. They're really all fun and that people will enjoy, so it's a kind of mix.

(28)

Is this simply the reincarnation of Kiralfy's Wiggle-woggles? Is this the result of listening to Ford's public who "demand more"(29) or a result of Cosson's sensitivities to the need for "popularization"?(30) Is it, alternatively, a blend of amusement and instruction which will liberate the mass public from the confines of museums which

overtly require a strong intellect in order to de-code their exhibitions and which may potentially prevent those masses from even taking the first step towards engaging with their own past? We will all be faced with a most fascinating opportunity to consider this further when Beamish re-build, on site, an Edwardian museum filled with artefacts displayed to the highest ideals of a previous time. The prospect of visiting a traditional museum within the context of a living-history experience will challenge the most hardy of museum commentators. In the meantime, can we pass judgement on the living-history experiences offered by museums such as Beamish?

On reflection, it seems unlikely that the amusements at Beamish are a simplistic gimmick. All of the evidence of its growth and development since 1958 would work against that. The original idea to capture, before it was too late, the ephemera of an industrial North of England and to tell the story of the region's people through the words of its people via costumed interpreters is too cohesive a concept to accommodate meaningless adjuncts. The amusements, if such we call them, of fairground rides, cars, trams and buses, or hooplas in the school yard are all of the period and, whilst giving pleasure, also add further to a feeling of the time. Beamish, however, may always have to fight against the same British culture that brought the major retrospective of Dali's work from the surreal gallery arrangements of the Pompidou Centre in Paris only to hang his paintings in dignified but somehow inappropriate rows at London's Tate.

It may be that the radical shift towards the ultimate contextualising of exhibits, the total immersion and simulated realism offered by living-history settings peopled by costumed interpreters simply is not radical enough. To some extent the object culture of museums has maintained its grip and the focus for the justification of such sites still lies in the potential of third person interpretation and reconstructed environments to interpret the collection. Yet it is surely the case that, at Beamish, it is the objects that illuminate the lives and times of the people who would have lived in such environments. Is it not fitting that entire environments peopled by interpreters who are supported by scholarly research should be the prime medium for revealing these aspects of history to a new public? This should not be confused with attempts to live in the past. Living history is nothing to do with living in the past, nor with bringing the past to life, nor with costumed people recreating another time. Not for one moment does anyone at Beamish, visitor nor interpreter, ever display even the slightest signal that they are living in anything but the present. Costumed interpreters are not only consumed by their efforts to recall their voluminous amounts of research and to engage the visitors in finding out about their particular location, but also with maintaining the security of the objects, with reacting to alarm systems when visitors

wander too far, with taking tea-breaks in mess rooms out of sight of visitors. Their days are governed by regulations which forbid alcohol to be consumed, which ban smoking, which protect them from harassment at work, which require duties to be performed. It is their job. Visitors too, live in the here and now. They cope with a three-hundred acre site. Elderly visitors look for a chair to sit on. Children eat ice-cream. Cameras click, video camcorders capture the family day out, a Japanese tour guide stands on a street corner and instructs his group in Japanese. People reminisce about their past but it is their own past they re-live in those moments, not that of the Beamish main street. None of this is living in the past.

So, for all of this effort, does history live anywhere? The only place where history can be alive is in the process undertaken by visitors themselves in becoming historians and that will not happen in a day. Any such development will be slow, but getting a partial feel for a period, beginning to wonder, to question, simply to be curious is surely a valuable first step to make. With the benefit of many years of study, then visitors too may question the real histories of the people represented through third-person-oriented living-museums, but is it more important to begin the process somewhere or not begin it at all for fear of not telling the whole truth? No museum could interpret the whole of any period through a single day visit, so should they return to their previous roles as keepers of the past rather than exhibitors of it?

Until recently, museums might have been viewed as storehouses of artefacts in which curators undertook research in order to understand the past. Now that museums have taken the step, wisely or not, to transform those storehouses into teaching centres where interpreting the collection holds sway, then they must deal with all of the implications that becoming teachers holds for them. They have invited the public in to share the treasures of the nation, and now they are faced with decisions about how much can be explained and which aspects they will be. Museums will need to face up to the fact that they cannot possibly tell everything that they know about their collection. Visitors will probably never leave an historical site or collection with a balanced view of the subject area, or with a considered historical perspective of the period represented. Perhaps it is more important then, that visitors can make an effective start to that process. In this respect, one quality which living museums probably do possess is that of making an impact. The third person interpretation at Beamish contributes to an experience which, at £8.00 a time and, potentially, at two-hundred or more miles from home, might be a one-off opportunity to inspire someone to take a closer look at early twentieth century social history.

Of course, we must recognise that living museum sites have their limitations and that they maybe need to consider Muirhead's idea of the provision of facilities in parallel to the 'big experience'. Opportunities for follow up research through libraries, archives, oral history sound banks, sites on the internet, and perhaps even modules through, say, the Open University would help to consolidate and advance the inspiration and understanding started by a total immersion experience. At the end of the day the question about the use of peopled sites is not so much concerned with how realistic can we make the time, but with "Being realistic in what you can do in the time."(31) Visitors may spend only one day on such sites and it does seem that third person interpreters provide a vital medium through which visitors can engage as active learners with an environment of which they would otherwise be merely passive observers.

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CHAPTER THREE

" It wasn't planned. Like most things, it just evolved."

**A case study on the nature of
first person interpretation.**

**Establishing aims for theatre-in-museum.
The compatibility of methodology to aims.
Play-contracts in theatre-in-museum.**

CHAPTER THREE

First person interpretation is the most commonly used form of theatre-in-museum in the British Isles. Just over 50% of all of the museums surveyed registered this form of theatre, although we must remember that the research did not identify the exclusive use of theatre-types, and many of the museums registering first person use other types as well.

To help clarify the principal features of first person interpretation and in order to identify some issues arising from its use, two museums where this type of theatre predominates have been studied in detail. The first is the Science Museum, which is the main museum of the National Museum of Science and Industry (NMSI) at Kensington in London, where theatre programmes are provided by their resident theatre company, Spectrum. The other is the Museum of the Moving Image (MOMI) on the South Bank, again in London, which is also served by a resident theatre company simply called the MOMI Actors Company.

The case study will address four elements of practice in first person interpretation in the context of work at MOMI and NMSI;

- outlining exemplars of work in this field including brief mention of the organisation and management structures of these two companies;
- identifying the observable attributes of first person interpretation in action;
- establishing the aims and objectives for first person interpretation;
- analysing relationships between aims and methodology and considering 'play contracts' in first person interpretation.

OUTLINING EXEMPLARS OF FIRST PERSON INTERPRETATION

There are strong similarities between the work at MOMI and the Science Museum. Although there are also some differences between these two companies, the general experience for the museum visitor when interacting with theatre programmes at both museums is easily recognisable as being of the same type.

In both cases, visitors encounter various actors working on the galleries, usually near to exhibits or within a section relevant to their character. Actors usually focus on a particular exhibit or range of exhibits and will illuminate the story behind the invention and development of those objects, their original use, and the effect that their development has had upon our daily lives. There are some exceptions to this general pattern as characters are sometimes more concerned with an event, life story, or overall concept related to the general subject-focus of the museum rather than being tied directly to specific items in the collection. Gallery characters mostly work alone and engage with single visitors or small groups. Once more, there are exceptions. At MOMI, the Odeon area involves actors working in pairs portraying the cinema commissionaire and usherette whilst at the Science Museum the company sometimes places 'duologues' (encounters between two characters) on the galleries and some short scripted plays which also usually involve two actors.

It is worth noting that the first recorded use of drama at the Science Museum, (Christmas 1987), was in a scripted play form (or scripted illustrated lecture form, to be more precise) but the general thrust of their work since has been towards the use of single gallery characters. The re-emergence of scripted plays in recent years has stemmed directly from a major in-house evaluation of the drama programmes at Kensington undertaken in 1993. The evaluation project has had an important impact on the use of theatre at the Science Museum including the verification of drama as "a highly successful interpretative medium in the Museum"(1) and has also helped to secure current funding.

We will take the encounters between single gallery characters, operating in first person, and museum visitors as our principal focus and in order to help set the context for this case study, will offer a sample snap-shot of first person interpretation in action. The following brief examples are offered as being typical of these encounters.

The Museum of the Moving Image opened in its compact South Bank location adjoining the British Film Theatre in 1988. It traces the development of the moving image over thousands of years going back to the representation of movement through a sequence of still images on cave walls. Mostly, though, it is concerned with the popular culture of cinema beginning in the immediate pre-cinema days of the Victorian magic lantern show and coming forward through the Lumière brothers in France, early silent films, a Russian post-revolution agit-prop train showing Communist propaganda films, the golden years of stardom in sound-movie Hollywood and concluding with a reminiscence of the post-war British cinema scene represented by the Odeon Picture Palaces of the late 1940s and 1950s.

The MOMI Actors' Company provides full cover by maintaining six characters on-gallery on every day that the museum is open to the public. A team of eighteen actors work in three shifts to maintain characters in five areas of the museum (i.e. four singles and the Odeon pair). During their five month fixed term contract (which includes a rehearsal period of three weeks) each actor will play two characters, portraying each one on alternate weeks. Actors work two days on and one day off throughout their contract, working either from 09.30 to 15.30hrs or from 12.00 to 18.00hrs. Actors may not stay on for a consecutive contract but many do re-join the company for further contracts after at least five months away. Whilst the five areas of the museum and their resident characters have stayed the same since the museum opened, each new actor develops their own version of that character with plenty of scope for personal interpretation being allowed. Copious amounts of research material are provided for the actors during rehearsals but there are no set scripts. The company is managed on a day-to-day basis by a Company Manager who is responsible for all on-gallery operations, liaison with other museum departments, resource and budget management and the continuing professional development of members of the Company. He is joined three times a year by the Company Director who leads auditions and rehearses each new team of actors as they arrive. She also maintains a watching brief on the characters working on-gallery. The Company has a ring-fenced budget of about £120,000 per year which represents a considerable proportion of the events budget in the museum.

On entering the pre-cinema gallery of the Victorian magic lantern era visitors engage with a range of exhibits, some mounted in traditional glass cases and others demonstrated in reconstructed show booths. Permanently sited on this gallery is a Victorian magic lantern show-person. The character, which is always the first to be encountered by visitors because of the sequenced nature of the visitor-journey, strikes up conversation in a quiet, casual manner. Early comments tend to set an atmosphere of the wonderment of the magic lantern. A mixture of show-like banter and technical information are set against a background of the Victorian social context. Typically, visitors will be shy at first. Some will engage in conversation politely whilst others back away, skirt round the encounter and move on, or loiter in the background but remain tuned in. Those who have involved themselves in conversation invariably begin with short non-committal responses, literally making polite conversation rather than engaging in a meaningful discussion of any kind. The gallery character (female on this occasion) makes the running, gradually offering more information and beginning to tell her story. Throughout this opening few moments (which might be anything from a few seconds to three or four minutes) the character has also intimated

several times through her use of tense and collective references that all of the people on the gallery are at a magic lantern show and that they all exist in the Victorian era. Most visitors seem to accept this, some obviously playing along with the pretence by making appropriate comments that confirm them as being Victorian. Some visitors play passively and, whilst not contributing to it through speech, support the pretence by at least not contradicting it. Others seem to accept the pretence but obviously remain in the here and now with their comments reflecting a 1990s perspective on the action, perhaps comparing the lantern images to television. Children are sometimes more vocal and some seem to need reassurance that this is 1997 and they have not really been transported back in time. Once given that reassurance, they settle down and observe or even join in appropriately. Occasionally a visitor is reluctant to accept the pretence and will continue with objections to the encounter, voicing inappropriate comments, asking difficult questions or trying to outwit the actor. As the encounter develops, more visitors gather round, some being new visitors joining in with action already in progress, others being those who had originally kept themselves to the fringes but now seem more reassured. As the show-person gets into her magic lantern booth and begins the show, visitors seem at their most relaxed. They are interested in the lantern, the slide-show itself and the stories which the character has to tell about lantern shows or her own life and times in general. The lantern is demonstrated and she explains how the various levers on the slides themselves make the pictures move. The focus is now firmly on the subject in hand and visitors (many of whom have never seen a magic lantern show before) are fascinated by the slides. After anything from five or six minutes to half an hour she brings the encounter to a close, sometimes pondering on stories that she's heard from France about a new way of showing pictures that move. She proclaims that she can hardly believe what she's heard but swears that the new sensation is about to hit London. As visitors leave, most of them obviously pleased by what they've seen, the show-person engages in quiet casual conversation with newcomers and the process begins again.

One success does not guarantee another. Two elderly ladies peering intently into a display case request of the actor in well-schooled accents, "Will you please bugger off."⁽²⁾ Meanwhile, in another gallery, some visitors are preparing to join in the action more fully this time by undertaking a casting audition for the silent screen and seem eager to sign away their whole life to the movie company in exchange for stardom ("What's your name honey? Sandra? Don't worry, we can change that."⁽³⁾) Other visitors slip through, glad to have avoided yet another actor.

The Science Museum is very different. It is one of the oldest and largest museums in the country and, whilst it has expanded several times, it still occupies its original site

at South Kensington. It grew out of the Great Exhibitions of the 1850s and thus represents a direct link with the beginnings of the great museum movement of the Victorian era. The museum is arranged in a series (forty in total) of mostly enormous galleries which occupy seven floors of the building. The galleries are categorised according to traditional themes and together they represent the subject focus of this museum which centres on science, technology, medicine and industry, including topics such as Land Transport, Marine Engineering, The Exploration of Space, Glimpses of Medical History, and so on. Some galleries still make use of traditional glass case and label techniques, but the museum also incorporates a wide range of modern interpretative techniques including videos, touch screens, interactives and, increasingly, hands-on experiment galleries such as the Flight Lab. Here visitors can undertake a range of experiments to do with aerodynamics. It is used principally by children and is regarded as a flagship gallery of the Science Museum. There is no sequence of viewing in this museum and visitors are free to view exhibits in any order that they wish.

Spectrum Company serves the Science Museum but are not resident in the sense of the MOMI Company. Spectrum was formed by Gerrant Evans in 1987 initially to serve the Science Museum but now also serves several museums in London including the London Transport Museum and the Imperial War Museum. Spectrum is a resource bank of about sixty actors, up to twenty-five of whom are employed by the Science Museum at any time. Spectrum provides a flexible version of full cover for the Museum with at least two actors working on gallery from about 11.00 to 15.00hrs on every day that the museum is open to the public. Quiet mid-week periods are provided for by this quota with weekends usually being served by three actors. Holiday periods normally see five actors working on the gallery. The museum experimented with as many as eight actors but discontinued this. Unlike MOMI, the Science Museum operates a menu system of gallery characters so that those which visitors may encounter change regularly. A range of locations around this expansive building provide the settings for about forty characters. Like MOMI, Spectrum provide copious amounts of research material as the basis for character development but there are also some scripts and scenarios to act as encounter frameworks. Actors are employed for varying lengths of time, their contract usually being tied to specific characters and events rather than on a fixed-term basis. It is rare for new actors to join this large company as members of this team return frequently to continue their work with the museum. They work under the overall supervision of its founder, with a Company Manager on-site taking care of day-to-day matters. The Company works under Colin Uttley of the Programmes Unit who co-ordinates their work with other

museum events. Spectrum also operates with a budget of about £120,000 which is more than all other aspects of the events budget put together.

On entering the Land Transport Gallery visitors may come across Lil the engine cleaner. She works in a thoroughfare next to Caerphilly Castle, the Great Western Railway Castle Class steam locomotive. She is dressed in overalls and has a headscarf fastened in the turban style of World War II. Opening comments from Lil are conversational and general ("How are you doing, my darling. Alright are you?")(4) Visitors are shy at first and, as at MOMI, responses will range from polite acknowledgement to avoidance. Lil's lively chatter begins to suggest that, whilst she is 'alright' generally, she's only 'alright' considering her circumstances. It gradually emerges that it is wartime and visitors now begin to recognise that she is a wartime female railway worker. Lil does not have a process to demonstrate as with the magic lantern, but she is typical of many other gallery characters in that she does have a major exhibit to explain and has her own life-story to outline, too. Her encounter with the audience has a different focus to that of the lantern show-person. Rather than giving a real demonstration, conversation tends to focus instead on the workings of the railway locomotive and the journeys and general experiences of Lil and visitors during wartime. Again, whilst most visitors go along with the pretence, there are difficulties to be encountered by both actor and visitor. A noticeable feature here is the tendency for Lil to engage in conversation with any children present and to build her encounter with the whole audience on this. A young girl is brought out of the gathering to polish the pistons whilst animated explanations of the tender's water pick-up mechanism are given with much movement and a "Whoosh"(5) as she tells of water being picked up at speed from a trough between the rails. Another feature is that this character, like some others at both the Science Museum and MOMI, exists within the living memory of some visitors. Elderly visitors contribute their own reminiscences of wartime and Lil listens and draws them into the general scenario. Lil's own character, including aspects of her life before and during the war, has been important in this encounter, and although she has also told us a number of things about the locomotive Lil is representative of other gallery characters whose life story receives equal if not a greater weighting than the exhibit itself. Lil's routine has a similar time structure to the MOMI show-person and lasts between a few minutes and half an hour. She rounds off prolonged encounters with a bubbly "Well I must be getting on, my darling,"(6) and then continues cleaning or moves away from the visitors to the other side of the locomotive. She will begin introducing herself to more visitors in the next few minutes. Visitors move away with the same general air of approval as we had seen at MOMI. There are those, however, who had found it interesting but were glad she hadn't spoken to them, some who felt it was a good idea

for the children, some who criticised her for calling Caerphilly Castle a train and not a locomotive, and some who hadn't realised that she was an actor anyway. With no particular sequence to a Science Museum visit, further encounters with the actors might follow or time spent with Lil may be the only meeting with a gallery character. Disappointment or relief will vary from visitor to visitor.

OBSERVABLE ATTRIBUTES OF FIRST PERSON INTERPRETATION

We can observe the strong similarities between these two encounters but we should also note some variations in first person work. In particular, the emphasis on the type of content may vary considerably. At MOMI, we saw the direct demonstration of a piece of Victorian equipment with the contextual information about the life and times of the projectionist being of secondary consideration. At the Science Museum, the emphasis had been the other way round with Lil's personal story being more important than the locomotive.

The emphasis on the content of gallery encounters will vary from character to character but generally we can observe these principal content-categories:

- demonstrations of exhibits or of quality reproductions of authentic equipment;
- explanation of an object in terms of who invented it, how it was discovered / invented / developed, how it was used, who it was used by;
- the story of a 'key-player' character who invented something or did something momentous, or of a character who knew that 'key player';
- a consideration of the effect that a development had on the lives of ordinary people;
- a consideration, sometimes leading to a debate, of the benefits and drawbacks of an event or development.

Variations also exist in the structure of the encounters though these differences tend to be rather more subtle. We note of the differences between the show-person and Lil, but also we note the over-riding similarities. Taking these examples as being typical we can begin to draw up the common attributes of first person interpretation theatre-in-museum practice.

First person interpretation encounters will normally:

- be based on a single gallery character operating alone on gallery (there may be two characters interacting on occasions);
- involve characters interacting with visitors on a one-to-one basis or with small numbers of visitors;
- be responsive to the visitor in answering questions and picking up the particular interests of individuals or groups;
- rely on the visitor being responsive and especially upon them accepting the conventions of role-play at least on the part of the character (i.e. visitors may be participants rather than merely observers);
- involve character and visitors in conversation and interaction rather than in monologues and such conversation is lodged in the projected role-life of the character;
- involve the actor researching vast amounts of material and developing a secure character to enable them to improvise around the themes given by a script or outline-scenario;
- involve the character revealing a variety of content packages to the visitors ranging from being object-specific to context-specific, as outlined above;
- be random events with visitors coming across characters rather than seeking them out or expecting them to be a part of the experience (though this varies from museum to museum);
- be transient in nature and may last from a few seconds to half an hour, or occasionally more;
- involve actors being on-gallery for very long periods of time.

SPECIFIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES FOR FIRST PERSON INTERPRETATION

By identifying these features of first person interpretation, however, we merely clarify the nature of the theatre event itself. It is only when we place these events in the context of what the museums aim to achieve that we can begin to consider it as theatre-in-museum.

The recent increase in the use of theatre-in-museum has been organic rather than pre-planned. Its development can be characterised as having been a series of broadly exploratory attempts by pioneering practitioners to discover how the medium can work in practice.

It is rare to find a theatre-in-museum enterprise which is based on pre-conceived aims and objectives arising out of an interpretative rationale. In many cases, including the museums in this case study, current aspirations for such theatre work have evolved alongside the actual practice on the galleries if not actually having been developed retrospectively. At MOMI, the initial idea of putting the required gallery warders into costume as part of the themed exhibition translated, by an admirable leap of the imagination, to the use of actors instead. The themed museum could then include visitor interaction with those characters and this, in turn, was in keeping with the emerging goal of creating an interactive museum reflected in its slogan of "The museum that comes to life."⁽⁷⁾ The remnants of that evolution can still be recognised in the hidden duties of the actors who are, in part, guardians of the collection on their gallery and are fully trained in evacuation procedures in cases of emergency. Likewise, the Science Museum's current theatre programme evolved directly out of a traditional Christmas lecture-demonstration which was animated by a single actor (the now director of Spectrum, Gerrant Evans) representing Professor Pepper. The Director of the Museum, having been pleased with the event, suggested that the idea of having actors portraying historical characters should be extended onto the galleries. Both cases coincided with, or were a product of, a growing impetus in museums to become interactive, livelier, and more attractive places for the mass public. In both cases, too, any ideas about what might be achieved by actors in interpretative terms, has been largely an after-thought. As Colin Uttley (Programmes Unit-NMSI) reflects, "It wasn't planned. Like most things, it just evolved."⁽⁸⁾

It is probably due, in part, to the nature of this evolution that we find a scarcity of documented mission statements for theatre-in-museum activities. At MOMI, statements of aims for the theatre programmes exist in fragments in a range of literature, some of it internal documentation and some for public consumption. At the Science Museum, we also find a range of references to the theatre programmes but these are additionally underpinned by a set of stated aims and objectives drawn up by the Programmes Unit in conjunction with Spectrum and some curatorial staff.

The public literature at both museums tends to be descriptive and exists in the context of publicity material or information for school groups.

Look out for the Museum's actors as they relive the excitement of the world's most important scientific discoveries and pioneering achievements.

(9)

Our in-house drama company has a repertoire of over 60 characters and performances which can provide a human perspective to the museums displays. It is possible to book particular characters for school groups but availability is limited. Characters include Gene Cernan (last man on the Moon), Amy Johnson (pioneering female pilot) and Betty Shipton (a spinner and weaver who lived during the Industrial Revolution).

(10)

There will be plenty of opportunity to try things out and actors from the Museum's Actors' Company will be on hand in various roles throughout the museum to provide information and guidance.

(11)

We can sense some direction even from these brief descriptions. They suggest an air of coming alive, of excitement, adventure and pioneering feats, of providing a human perspective, of providing information and guidance, of being on hand to help rather than being imposed, and they give some idea of specific topics which could be covered. Whilst these desirable outcomes are indicated by suggestion rather than by being overtly stated, they do indicate a direction and focus to the theatre work.

Internal documents, as we might expect, are more specific about outcomes for the museum and the visitor, though documentation does remain sparse. At MOMI, the MOMI Actors' Company's information leaflet for auditionees provides some detailed statements about the aspirations of their theatre work.

The characters will interact with the public, give information, entertain, demonstrate exhibits and commentate on films.

(12)

It goes on to outline the professional nature of being an actor for a theatre-in-museum company and clearly sets the tone of this being a museum medium rather than a normal acting engagement. It does not, however, further explore the actual aims of the company in museum terms.

The most precise document on the aims and objectives of theatre-in-museum at these two venues is the Science Museum's statement drawn up in 1994. These aims and objectives evolved directly out of the evaluation project of 1993, "An Evaluation of Drama in the Science Museum". Until that point the only formal and rather broad statement about drama in the museum was in an undated document which said:

The drama service aims to make a strong contribution to the Museum's mission to improve the public understanding of science, technology and medicine by improving interpretation in the Museum's galleries.

(13)

The first stage of the 1993 evaluation process established a range of more specific and agreed aims for the drama project at the Science Museum, and they were:

- to give a human face to the Museum;
- to generate warmth through interaction, enlivenment, the portrayal of personalities (both female and male) and entertainment;
- to create salience by acting as a memory trigger for an object or gallery, by attracting attention and presenting a living picture, crystallised in time;
- to communicate information and complexity by presenting an associated historical context, bridging the gap between the Museum's collections and visitors, and providing several interpretations-
 - * an overview
 - * a sense of process
 - * issues for debate, and
 - * clarifying details.

(14)

At the end of the process, the report recommended further aims and objectives be considered. The general aim that drama was "to enhance visitors' understanding of the history and contemporary practice of science, medicine, technology and industry"(15) was supported by the following more specific objectives, each of which were accompanied by criteria by which the achievement of such objectives could be measured. The objectives considered as appropriate additions to those already outlined were:

- to use historic characters, both real and fictitious, to extend visitors understanding of past science, medicine, technology or industry;

- to use historic characters, both real and fictitious, to extend visitors' understanding of contemporary science, medicine, technology or industry by comparing today with the past;
- to use fictitious future characters to extend visitors' understanding of present science, medicine, technology or industry;
- to provide a reliable service, w actors, for x hours, on y days, for £z;
- to provide three new 'performances' per annum.

(16)

We can see that the recommendations to further develop aims were followed with these statements being drawn up in 1994:

Aims of the Drama Programme-

- i To present the best museum drama programme in the UK, by:-
 - interpreting the material in our galleries and temporary exhibitions;
 - providing the audience of each performance with an entertaining, exciting and educational experience;
 - striving particularly to put the subject matter in a social and economic context that is accessible to the visitor;
 - catering for all audiences, while especially appealing to children;
 - appealing equally to women and men, to girls and boys, to different ethnic groups and to people with disabilities;
 - ensuring that all visitors to the performance area (including those who do not wish to view the drama) are comfortable.
- ii To present at least one high-quality performance each day that the Museum is open, with four actors performing at weekends and public holidays.
- iii To provide an improved programme for our schools' visitors, notably through effective links between the National Curriculum and the displayed collections and other material.
- iv To review continuously the quality and effectiveness of the performances and to strive, through the findings, to give visitors a

service that responds to their views and that gives increasingly good value for money.

- v To obtain sponsorship for at least two drama roles or activities each year.
- vi To increase the quantity and effectiveness of the publicity for this programme inside and outside the Museum.
- vii To ensure that staff in all parts of the Science Museum are informed and, where possible, involved in the programme.

(17)

We should note that the Programmes Unit is about to further revise these aims to accommodate new demands that are expected to be placed upon the theatre programmes in response to the opening of a new wing at the Science Museum in 1998. Undertaking a further review does reflect the continuing development of thinking and practice in this area of theatre-in-museum and such reflexivity must be regarded as healthy.

The written aims and objectives, however, only offer an indication of the wider aspirations of practitioners in these museums. There is a strong sense of unity of purpose at MOMI and the Science Museum and when we analyse the explanations by practitioners and other stake holders about their work, a further range of goals becomes evident. There is strong cohesion between the ideas of different members of staff who were interviewed individually on a number of separate occasions. Each stake holder did tend to have a different emphasis on the value of theatre work at their respective museum but these offered no surprises and generally reflected their position in the organisation. Whilst the viewpoints offered complemented each other to a very large degree, it is interesting to note that virtually no-one offered a comprehensive set of aims and objectives for the theatre work in their museum. We can deduce from their collective conversations, however, a range of aims which are consistent with, and indeed outstrip, the aspirations of the thoroughly documented 1993 evaluation process at the Science Museum and the subsequent 1994 statement.

Perhaps most importantly, there does seem to be a general acceptance that theatre-in-museum is a particular kind of theatre dedicated to the overall mission of museums. Doug Millard (Space Curator: NMSI) recognises the distinction between,

... premises which happen to have drama on, and drama which is quite un-related with whatever underlying messages or tenants that support the basic institution, and the use of drama as a means of better explaining, or explaining in an alternative manner, the fundamental messages that the institution sees itself as trying to convey. (18)

Working from this general principle, the two museums have broad aims for their theatre work. First, they see theatre as a medium, alongside others, through which visitors may interpret the collections of the museum. Jan Metcalfe (Events Officer-NMSI) recognises that theatre, "is one of the strands of the ways in which we interpret our collections... alongside other events like demonstrations, shows, workshops, story-telling, or whatever we think is easiest and most accessible."(19)

Second, staff at both MOMI and the Science Museum recognise that theatre has a particular role to play in the interpretation of the social history dimension of the museums so that visitors can relate not only to the objects in the collection but also to "the stories behind them."(20). Andrew Ashmore (Actors' Company Manager-MOMI) reflects on the words of a curator colleague who said that "The actors are there for the soft bits of history,"(21) the human stories. Ashmore goes on to further explain that,

Those are the things you couldn't get across in a museum like this which is mainly about exhibits and processes and the films themselves, and the actors know the human stories behind them, particularly in the Hollywood areas with all the gossip stories. (22)

Likewise, Colin Uttley (Programmes Unit - NMSI) reflects on the value of theatre in helping visitors to access the collection,

... particularly [by] putting an object into some sort of context. The objects were very much icons, they stood alone with a very complicated label which would be entirely technical and that was it, so there was no social history, no context, and that's what the character was doing. They could talk about other things that were going on at that time. They could talk about what it was like working on that object and the effect it had on them and other people. (23)

Finally, both museums recognise that theatre has a value not only in helping visitors access the subject-focus of the museum through its collection and social contexts, but also by enlivening the general experience of the museum visitor. This, in turn, will help to promote public enjoyment and understanding of the place of the museum in our daily lives. Andrew Ashmore reflects upon his principal aim.

MOMI is part of the BFI [British Film Institute] which is a statutory body with a duty to promote the place of moving image culture in the UK so that's our ultimate remit. Within that, the museum accesses parts of the BFI collection for the public. So I would say quite simply, at the risk of sounding like Lord Reith, that the role of the actors is to educate, enlighten and entertain.

(24)

We might summarise the generic aims of the theatre-in-museum programmes at both MOMI and NMSI in the following way:

- to enhance the visitors' knowledge and understanding of the collection;
- to enhance the visitors' appreciation of the social contexts of the collection especially in relation to understanding the human stories behind the conceiving, developing and use of objects and how such developments affected the lives of people in the past, impact on our lives in the present and may influence lives in the future;
- to educate, enliven and entertain visitors to the museum and thus promote public understanding and enjoyment of the broad subject matter of the museum.

Arising from these aims and based upon the practice and expression of ideas at both museums, we can deduce a range of specific objectives.

The specific objectives for first person interpretation fall into six categories which are concerned with:

- creating an interface between visitor and museum;
- providing an effective and reliable service;
- interpreting objects in the collection;
- interpreting the social contexts of the collection;
- compensating for gaps in the museum subject cover;

- and,
 - contributing to the broader public profile of the museum.

Whereas there was little differentiation between different members of staff relating to their perception of the broad aims of the theatre programmes, views on the specific objectives for first person interpretation programmes did tend to reflect more strongly the stake holder's position in the museum. This is understandable and is grounded in their day-to-day experience of theatre programme outcomes, response of visitors, requests for bookings, and so on.

Creating an interface between visitor and museum.

Creating an interface between visitor and museum and especially being able to demonstrate the relevance of the collection to individual visitors and show where "the links are between them and history and between them and their future [and to] help with understanding," (25) is appreciated by all. Recognising the flexibility of a medium which operates through spoken word and visual action is felt by most to be a powerful aspect of first person theatre-in-museum. Visitors' difficulties with written texts and the limitations of even the most sophisticated interactive panels seem to be in stark contrast with the perceived flexibility of a live actor in direct contact with the visitor.

If the actors disappeared tomorrow, there would be something we'd find hard to replace in any other way. I suppose that multi-media would be the closest you'd get to it where someone is actually able to put their hands onto a screen and select the thing which is of interest to them but, of course, its only 1% of what a live human actor can do, which is to interact with the person and to determine exactly what it is they are interested in and to give them that piece of information which will move them in the right direction. The worst examples are huge great big panels of text where you start reading at the top, whether you're interested in what it says or not, and where you have to work your way the whole way down before you know whether there's anything of relevance to you.

(26)

Providing an effective and reliable service.

Providing a full service which acts as an interface between museum and visitor is also the province of a wide range of staff. Ashmore (MOMI) explains that,

The thing about MOMI is that you guarantee 100% actor-audience contact, so everyone goes around and gets to see six different actors and they're always there to interact, so that's one huge advantage... the problem with not having 100% cover is that if you're advertising the actors and they're turning into a draw, an asset for the museum, and people are travelling to see that and the show isn't on that day or they miss the performances then people get very frustrated. So as far as marketing are concerned, the actors are here every day of the year.

(27)

Interpreting objects in the collection.

Comments concerned with the central role of interpreting the collection and its social contexts, however, were expressed by most people. Aiden Dooley's perspective as an actor (NMSI) explaining that the main role of "the gallery characters its primarily to enlighten them on a scientific concept or a scientific instrument which might be difficult to understand on their own,"(28) is consistent with the view of the Spectrum Company Manager that, "The initial thing with the gallery characters is to interpret the objects in a social historical setting and to explain how they were used and give a background to people who were around at the time that was developed,"(29) or that of Space Curator (NMSI), Doug Millard, in saying that he wants to, "paint a better picture of what space is about, and to do that you have to bring in the human content."(30)

Compensating for gaps in the museum subject cover.

Filling gaps in the collection tended to be of more interest to Programmes or Events Officers and Actors' Company Managers. This flexibility to deal with subjects which were not represented elsewhere in the museum and to operate in a variety of spaces, sometimes under difficult conditions, is a further tribute to the flexibility of theatre as a medium. The fact that despite the expense of mounting what are sometimes one-off theatre programmes they remain considerably cheaper than re-displaying galleries or mounting temporary exhibitions, adds to a feeling that theatre is probably a cost effective interpretative tool for the museum. The ability of theatre to negotiate visitors through often complex conceptual frameworks was particularly valued though, as we will consider later, this emerges as an area where museums have not yet embraced the possibilities of using theatre to its full extent. Andrew Ashmore (MOMI) again explains,

Equally in pre-cinema, you can go around it and see a very ordered set up. On one side of the gallery you've got the history of projection, on

another the history of photography and then you've got the optical toys, which all got put together to create the projection of the moving image. And it all looks very ordered as if that followed that, and that followed that, and then we had the Lumières, and it was all very simple. But of course it was really a maelstrom, with everyone competing against everybody else at the same time, inventions being discovered at the same time. And then the humorous stories as well. And then you had some photographers being very hard nosed business men but others like the chap who invented the wet plate process who forgot to patent it and he died a pauper. So again, the contrasts between the people involved are just fascinating stories and the actors have all that at their disposal.

(31)

Contributing to the broader public profile of the museum.

This final category of objectives was mentioned by several staff but particularly was the province of Programmes and Events Officers, Publicity staff, and Education Officers. There was a strong impression amongst these staff that theatre is a medium which can genuinely serve the museum on a very broad front. Whilst Metcalfe (NMSI) set the general tone of theatre as being able to give "added value,"(32) others noted its capacity to form a part of "a programme of events on a theme,"(33) to offer variation for repeat visitors, to actually "help bring people back"(34), and to provide programmes for schools where "a drama character [can] talk about their experience [and] the children can relate to that and link it to their own modern experience."(35).

The general sense of endorsement for using first person interpretation programmes at MOMI is perhaps expressed most clearly by Wendy Taylor (Press Officer-MOMI) who articulates a key objective for that museum and, although the Science Museum would not recognise the actors as being quite so closely tied to the *essential* visitor experience, the general spirit of the statement would hold true for them, too.

The actors are very much an integral part of the museum and they're part of the consciousness of the museum and, increasingly, when people think of this museum over the years they think of it as a place where they can come along and be involved with the actors.

I think the actors are the museum and the museum is the actors, and they are very, very important.

(36)

When we review the aims and specific objectives suggested here, a number of features require further consideration.

First, we must note that their scope is impressive. They arise from the statements of those involved with this work on a daily basis but these statements were offered in isolation. There is evidence to suggest that the potential of first person theatre as perceived by a range of individuals is far greater than either museum has yet collectively realised and is certainly greater than indicated by formal documentation. This further suggests that there is a need for museums to reconsider their theatre work and to establish its full value by taking on board the aspirations for, and the perceived benefits of, first person theatre as expressed by all interested parties.

Second, in setting objectives of theatre-in-museum, one would normally also establish criteria by which judgement can be made as to whether such objectives have been achieved. This, of course, may be a reason for not pursuing the process of committing such targets to paper, though neither museum in this case study need have particular anxieties there. Nevertheless, if this work is to develop and to flourish it should concern itself with developing the ability to demonstrate achievement. Other than the setting of clear and measurable "Standard"(37) statements in the 1993 Science Museum evaluation, there are no clear measurement systems in place to record the success or failure of theatre programmes at either museum.

Finally, we need to consider the nature of such measurement systems. Various staff at both museums speak with conviction about the "successful"(38) theatre programmes, but such success tends to be in terms of popularity. Anecdotal evidence based on comments from visitors and that gained from letters to the museum is plentiful though it remains at a generalised level. Formal evaluations on a larger scale in the form of visitor surveys undertaken regularly by Events and Marketing/Publicity departments at MOMI and the Science Museum do sometimes include the theatre programmes. When they do, they once again demonstrate that the actors are popular with the vast majority of visitors. What there seems to be virtually no evidence for whatsoever, is any measure of success in terms of whether the visitors improve their understanding of the content of the museum. The Science Museum evaluation of 1993 provides us with a rare detailed glimpse of visitor reactions to the theatre programmes but, whilst comprehensive, it focuses on what the visitors *felt* about the event or what they *think they learned* rather than concentrating on any measurement of what they actually did take away with them in terms of fresh understanding, knowledge, or opinion about the events presented to them. We note that:

94% [of visitors] felt the actors make museum exhibits come alive;
85% agreed that they make visitors want to get involved with the exhibits;
88% agreed that actors are informative;
90% felt that the actors make the exhibit more memorable;
92% agreed that the actors helped you to understand people of that time;
93% agreed that actors tell more about the exhibit than the label;
and
83% said they spent more time at the exhibit because of the drama.
(39)

We are compelled to differentiate between visitors agreeing that something has been informative, memorable or an aid to understanding and any measurement of what information they do indeed remember or understand. The 1993 evaluation does go on to offer some broad comments about the visitors "learning from drama in the sense that it provides them with a taste of another age"(40) or that "they all seem to learn something that they did not know before."(41) The supporting evidence is, however, limited and the assertions about exactly what visitors did take away with them remain broad and rare. It is clear that whilst the practitioners of first person interpretation at these museums are beginning to identify objectives for their work, establishing the criteria for the measurement of some of those objectives has yet to begin in earnest.

Of the categories of objectives suggested above, those concerned with creating an interface between visitor and museum; providing an effective and reliable service; compensating for gaps in the museum subject cover; and, contributing to the broader public profile of the museum are probably going to be most effectively measured by current museum evaluation practice. These evaluations are frequently concerned with facets of museum work which can be measured by relatively simple closed techniques such as identifying whether or not visitors like the actors, whether they gather round them to watch, how long they stay, whether they engage in debate, and so on. The rather more complex areas of establishing to what extent visitors have been able to interpret objects or the social contexts of the collection as a result of the first person encounters do not appear to have been addressed in any systematic way thus far.

This raises the question as to why this might be? On the one hand, we note that museums in general do not tend to undertake evaluations in order to establish learning outcomes for other aspects of exhibitions so to consider that they might do so for their

theatre programmes is unrealistic. Alternatively, we might view the focus upon visitor satisfaction and enjoyment, rather than upon visitor understanding, as being symptomatic of a museum community obsessed with popularity, public image and visitor numbers rather than by its loftier ideals of helping the public to understand various collections and historic sites.

Whilst we assert that the two museums in this case study would benefit from re-considering the full scope of aspirations for their theatre work and that such work would benefit from the setting of criteria for measuring their fulfilment, the aims and objectives for first person interpretation in the context of these museums appear to be growing in clarity, are visibly guiding practice on the galleries and are arising from the strong conviction of the various stake holders in the theatre process.

Curiously, though, despite the strong sense of unity of purpose to be found at MOMI and the Science Museum, there does remain some degree of ambiguity about some aspects of the role of theatre in these two museums. Alongside the over-riding sense of purpose to the work of gallery characters displayed above, there is an underlying and almost hidden sense that the theatre work is being misunderstood, under-used and under-valued. What leads to this apparent paradox is subtle and cannot by the evidence collected here be conclusively proved, yet the impressions suggesting this are strong.

The actors and Company Managers / Directors are generally enthused by their work and appreciate the opportunities which theatre-in-museum activity gives them. There is equally a sense of frustration that they are not able to fully extend themselves in their museum acting work and that the museum do not quite trust or value them. This sense of mistrust had been identified by the Science Museum's evaluation as a matter to address. If such a sense has lessened as a result of the evaluation and subsequent action, it has not disappeared altogether. Both Company Manager and actors at the Science Museum feel that there are things they could achieve through their acting, especially in the field of offering a deeper emotional content to their work, but observe that it would not be welcomed by "the institution."⁽⁴²⁾ Julia Munrow (Company Director-MOMI) is particularly outspoken about being undervalued in general by the museum. We should bear in mind that Munrow is highly articulate about her own work and that of the Company, has great energy and is very enthusiastic about the possibilities of theatre-in-museums. Her views on how she feels that MOMI undervalues its actors, however, are equally uncompromising.

When I started it was a four-hour one-woman show, and they said 'Well, you ought to be able to do that without an interval' so like we've said the museums themselves don't recognise it and they don't pay the actors Equity minimum. So the actors are the chief attraction and they get paid almost the least. The only people who get paid less are the animators, who are probably the most popular thing in the museum. It's so disproportionate... what the actors are giving to the museum and what they are actually getting back in terms of money and just in prestige, and that's quite upsetting really. You're asking people to give so much and to work so hard... you feel as if you've conned them, 'cos you're asking for so much from them and you know they're not getting paid enough. That includes myself and Andrew who are paid a lot less than some other people who aren't putting as much into the museum. It's just not recognised.

(43)

Although we have already shown how Taylor (Press-MOMI) suggested that the actors were inextricably bound up with the whole visitor experience at the Museum of the Moving Image, Metcalfe (Events-NMSI) at the Science Museum reveals that Julia Munrow's perception of the actors being held in low regard would be verified in some quarters. These particular views may well partly the way in which a much larger institution (NMSI) works, but they are also probably indicative of the spread of opinion in the profession about theatre-in-museum. Metcalfe suggests that,

We [the Events Unit] would be the first to advocate it and see where it could fit to help with the overall mission of the museum, but I think there are an awful lot of people who wouldn't notice or worry if it wasn't there. You might like me to say that I think it's up there with everything else, but it isn't.

(44)

Away from the explicit worries about whether other people recognise their work as making a valuable contribution to the museum, members of the Actors' Companies are constantly challenged by the extent to which absolute accuracy is called for on the galleries compared with the extent to which developing engaging and attractive characters to act as a general interface should take priority. It is a fine balance and one which seems set to trouble actors working in first person interpretation for some time to come. Jon Bassett (NMSI) explains the predicament.

It's actually more the interpretation of what that person is like that's the problem. There are some other problems with accuracy. Every book you read about James Watt talks about how quiet he was. He was a very quiet person who didn't like meeting people and in that case, if I was playing it exactly accurate, people would come up to me and I'd ignore them. So I'd be doing it truthfully but I wouldn't be doing the job. The job is to make sure people know who he is, what did he do, what were the remarkable things he did, how did he do it, what kind of person was he. Some of it you explain, some you demonstrate, some comes out in performance through physical portrayal or the way you behave. We also have the issue of, do we talk in authentic language? We've looked at that but if you're not careful your language could be so inaccessible that no one would understand you anyway. So you have to get the balance of being accurate factually but accessible. That's a whole museum thing though, of what's truth and what isn't.

(45)

Here Bassett takes us to the heart of not only first person interpretation, but theatre-in-museum in general. Indeed, the whole debate about the extent to which absolute factual accuracy is paramount and to what extent the interpretation of events should take the lead strikes at the heart of the museum debate outlined in Chapter One. It is hardly conceivable that MOMI or the Science Museum should edge further into the realms of placing their exhibitions in historical and social contexts, and of attempting to connect with the visiting public at a personal level, and still expect to maintain the same levels of objectivity which were once so strongly associated with them. Jon Bassett's observation that, contemplating on what is truth and what isn't, is "a whole museum thing"(46) finds favour with Doug Millard (NMSI) who questions whether the museum itself really knows what its own mission is. He accepts the on-going debate about where the emphasis should lie between objective presentation and interpretation as a natural and healthy aspect of any academic institution. He is somewhat more alarmed, however, by the sub-text of contemporary museum practice and the tendency towards "dumbing-down"(47) which he sees as operating in the name of making the collection more accessible to the public.

There was a lot of attention to the writing of labels for example and words... the thought police was a term that was used... because once a script had been written which had to be passed as we always do, to make sure there are no mistakes, but what was happening was that all the complicated words and not so complicated words were being

pulled out and we were being told 'You can't use that, they won't understand it' and it went down and down and got quite out of hand.

(48)

Millard, along with others involved in theatre at the Science Museum and MOMI, would welcome the opportunity to combat this trend and to develop an approach to dealing with more contentious issues through theatre. Several people recognise the benefits of taking visitors on an emotional journey through the lives of characters, or of presenting visitors with some of the complex dilemmas which exist in the worlds of science, medicine, film making, censorship, propaganda, and so on. Pitched against this desire to explore a more substantial role for theatre in the museum, there is a feeling that, not only would the conditions for such a move have to be very carefully considered, but that "this museum"(49) would not be the place to try it. The first point represents a logical and reasonable consideration of what conditions would be required for serious drama in a museum, but the second concern of "not in this museum"(50) hints at an underlying unease about knowing exactly what the role theatre should be in these particular institutions.

Although the comments offered in these and other conversations are often generalised expressions of doubt and uncertainty, they do suggest that the museums might benefit from clarifying the role of their theatre programmes particularly in the areas of: the status of the actors in their museums; the balance between enlivening and interpretative features of theatre work; and matters concerning the potential of theatre to address more serious and maybe even contentious themes. Nevertheless, despite these uncertainties there does remain a generally very healthy drive to the theatre programmes at both MOMI and the Science Museum and work is visibly carried out with real conviction. Most of all, perhaps, these concerns are indicative of the need to not only continue to examine the role of theatre in museums but also to widen the circle of museum and theatre professionals who will embrace it as a valid visitor experience.

METHODOLOGY AND SETTING 'PLAY-CONTRACTS'

Not only do those involved in first person theatre-in-museum generally subscribe to a shared set of aspirations for their work but they are also able to articulate why it works in the way it does and to explain the way in which their adopted methodologies contribute to the process. The relationship between the type of theatre employed and what outcomes result is unquestionably a strong one. What visitors take away from their encounters with the gallery characters will depend upon what they experience and not necessarily upon what was intended. In considering the methodologies

adopted by these companies the main point raised is that, unlike Beamish, which has dispensed with in-role characters in favour of costumed third-person explainers, MOMI and the Science Museum use a type of theatre which does involve fictional role-play. Having once decided to involve visitors in something which relies upon the conventions of working in fictitious situations then a range of associated issues must be addressed. The key to first person interpretation in the MOMI / Science Museum model is that it is interactive. Visitors are participants and not merely observers. Furthermore, they are a particular kind of participant quite unlike those at, say, a pantomime where audiences remain in their frame as audience whilst interacting with the actors in their frame as characters. In first person interpretation the visitors cross over the boundary, on some occasions at least, to become part of the action and, more importantly, to be contextualised as part of the fictional event itself. The demarcation between being observer, audience-participant, and contextualised-participant is blurred. This quality of first person interpretation is problematic, presenting reactions of both excitement (for visitors ready and willing to join in) and confusion (for those who cannot or will not).

It is a basic tenet of fictional activity that participants need to know that they are playing. Very young children are experts at this. We will see in any nursery or home role-play situation, children creating play-contracts with great versatility and efficiency. Children in collaborative play situations will set the conditions for playing both explicitly and implicitly. Strategies range from implying roles through the use of costumes, props, dialogue or location, to the explicit setting of roles through 'I'll be the driver, you be the conductor.' Of equal importance is that, if confusion arises, children will stop the role-play to re-define a situation or to clarify inconsistencies before continuing or, if the problem cannot be resolved, abandon the situation altogether. Finally, and of great importance to the yet un-tapped potential of first person interpretation, children invariably use play-contracts that allow the play to stop if it becomes uncomfortable or frightening for any of the participants. In the absence of such rules, fictional activity will either never successfully begin, will break down or, more ominously, will become damaging. The line between reality and fiction in healthy play is very obvious and is known by all participants. Given the emotional safety of knowing that we are playing allows us to use a participatory theatre process as a fictional activity which will help to illuminate reality. First person interpretation at the museums in this case study are essentially trying to use fictional activity by entering the world of the gallery characters to illuminate the realities of their collection, but they are not successfully creating the conditions which the psychology of play demands. Ironically, they are aware of the difficulties of presenting first person interpretation to an unsuspecting public but tend to approach the situation

from an almost behaviourist perspective rather than addressing the fundamental nature of engaging visitors in play.

Both theatre companies are sensitive to the visitor and they maintain that they invite visitors to participate, to join in with "playing the game"(51), rather than forcing gallery characters upon them. The MOMI company speak of "going fishing"(52) and the actors can explain a host of opening gambits which have proved to be non-threatening and which help the actor to sense if the visitor will play. Spectrum actors also adopt such methods and refer to their own "policy"(53) of not involving visitors if they don't look as if they wish to. Critically, however, such opening invitations exist within the role-play of an actor who has already adopted the role of their gallery character *before* approaching the visitors. Visitors and actors do not have the opportunity to simply establish that what is about to happen will be fictional and that any subsequent actions and words will be set in that context. Consequently, actors can find themselves being forced to clarify misunderstandings, reinforce their assumed role, perform extraordinary feats of inventiveness to accommodate unlikely scenarios, and to face the frustrations of not being able to fully explain to an engaged and enthused visitor what they want to know because the visitor's question is outside the time-frame or legitimate experience of the character (in particular, questions that relate to events after the character's death).

We are forced to admire the acting dexterity involved but we are equally compelled to question why these companies continue to place their actors and visitors in such tortuous situations when a little clarity about the "game"(54) that is about to be played would help everyone to engage with it at a comfortable level. Curiously enough, the 1993 evaluation (NMSI) identified the extreme discomfort felt by many adults in these role-play encounters and contrasted this with the ease with which children seemed to deal with it. The evaluation suggested that this was because,

Children have nothing to lose. They are always in a position of knowing less than adults, so they do not find it necessary to defend themselves... [they] tend to seize an opportunity for information gathering... [and] for children, boredom is infinitely worse than embarrassment.

(55)

The report never considered the idea that children's lives generally still involve them in role-play and other imaginative activity and that they might simply be more practised than adults in the medium of participatory fictional play. Adults were noted

as being less liberated than children but again the report failed to consider why this might be. Why it is that adults, who consistently form the majority of audiences at theatres around the country and display a wide range of emotions at their seats, seem to be inhibited in this museum situation was never questioned. Jane Cartwright (MOMI) identified the real issue when she said that "If it's in a theatre and you're doing a play, it's set up. The audience know they're here to watch you and they know all the parameters of what's going on, and here people don't."(56) The 1993 evaluation had identified issues concerned with visitor expectations and the notion of offering environmental clues to assist visitors with the theatre programmes. These were viewed, once again, from a behaviourist perspective and recommended that the museum needed to create "safer drama."(57) Main recommendations were that problems might be reduced by signalling more clearly that actors were being used on the galleries, by having signs which set the date for the encounter, by having more obvious demonstration roles for the actors, and by using more "pleasant characters whom visitors might naturally have bumped into should they have lived in the past, or where there is still an equivalent modern day role."(58) Ironically, the modern day portrayal of Gene Cernan, the last astronaut on the moon, really did have the feeling of bumping into him and the actor found himself being asked for Gene Cernan's autograph after presentations. The Gene Cernan character is the only one at MOMI or the Science Museum where there is now a pre-presentation clarification that an actor will tell the story of a moon voyage as if he were Gene Cernan. Despite the success of offering this clarification to the public the actors remain frustrated by the visitors' apparent inability to accept role-play more spontaneously and the technique has not been applied elsewhere.

... at the risk of saying that the people who come to the museum are stupid, I am sure that if the real Gene Cernan were to turn up here to give a talk, he would not turn up wearing a full spacesuit. It's a costume he's wearing. It's definitely a costume but for some reason, it throws them.

(59)

The evidence suggests that both companies would benefit from further addressing the issue of signalling to visitors, not just that actors are being used on the galleries, but what the actual contract will be between actors and visitors.

There seems to be more clarity, however, about the kind of characters who will appear on gallery. Both companies have adopted the approach of avoiding key-player characters and prefer instead to use characters who knew or worked with the famous

names and faces. Wendy Taylor explains that the "Marilyn Monroe lookalikes"(60) approach is distracting rather than helpful. She re-affirms that in the context of the theatre-in-museum brief to inform, educate and entertain, it is the substance of what the character has to say and demonstrate to you which is of importance. Despite the worries expressed above about the actors needing to display excessive flexibility in terms of what their character knows, arising from poorly formed play-contracts, there is a legitimate issue here regarding the potential of a character to interpret a particular object or gallery on a broad basis. Clearly, once the museum has invested resources in placing a particular character on gallery then that character does need to be able to respond to visitors by answering their questions and explaining the objects and context beyond the basic brief. Key player characters are too boxed-in by their own generally well documented personal traits. The objectives of opening up a subject area through characters can be quickly thwarted by well-meaning questions that the character cannot answer in a helpful way because of their assumed attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and experience. Furthermore, it is the nature of historical interpretation for even the most admired academics to offer conflicting views to each other. Faced with several interpretations of an historic figure's life at the research stage the actor must eventually decide upon a set of characteristics which they will portray which cannot be either balanced (because this implies carrying contradictory traits) nor can it be neutral (as this implies omitting traits). Inevitably, the already well informed visitor will be placed in a position of direct conflict with the actor, not because they disagree with the *character's* viewpoint but because they disagree with the *actor's* interpretation of the role in the first place. In first person interpretation the *character* is not in a position to defend the *actor*. The solution, therefore, has been to utilise wherever possible, characters who knew or worked with these key players. In this way, the character has the freedom to explain the objects or events with the same knowledge that the key players would hold, but they may also report on the varying opinions that other known or fictional people had about their work, their temper, sexuality, drinking habits, or whatever other topic seems relevant.

Having highlighted a critical problem with the interactive nature of first person interpretation due to poor play-contracts, we must equally recognise that when it does work smoothly its great strength lies in providing an interface between museum and visitors, especially in the context of responding to individual needs. Without the opportunity for visitors to interact with the actors (whether in character or not) then a large proportion of objectives regarding this intimate interface must be eroded. Once visitors do engage with the gallery characters then the potential for responding to their individual interests comes to the fore as does the need for actors to be highly skilled in improvising around a basic theme. The demands upon not only an actor's actual

acting technique but also upon their subject knowledge are extensive. The real grasp of relevant subject areas by all of the actors witnessed during this research has been of the highest quality and is probably the most impressive and daunting aspect of first person interpretation. It is in recognition of the scale of this task that a thorough approach to building characters for gallery work has been adopted. Faced with the rigours and uncertainties of responding to visitors over lengthy periods, Munrow (Company Director-MOMI) maintains that there is a need for the characters to be "secure"(61) so that if all else fails, the actor can maintain a smooth line through the encounter. Usually improvised 'bailing out' due to insufficient subject knowledge will result in further research, and actors do display a genuine interest (if not obsession) with maintaining an on-going research programme about their characters and exhibition areas. Despite admiration for the levels of excellence in this area, however, the museums might reflect upon whether this is good improvisation but not necessarily good theatre-in-museum, and they might consider other ways of dealing with a lack of subject-knowledge by an actor without them having to religiously adhere to their character.

There are some concessions, though, to the extent to which the character-based approach will be taken and this does demonstrate that the companies try to keep their eyes very firmly on the target of informing the public. Creating a balance between being a convincing character and being an effective interpreter is one of the hallmarks of first person theatre-in-museum work. Compromises have to be made but, as Aiden Dooley (Actor - NMSI) explains, they do not need to be to the detriment of either character or accuracy.

...the personal attitudes of the character which might be documented are secondary to the interaction, so you're using primarily your personality to make contact. The clown in me, the charm in me, is how I make contact with you, and then guide you into the world of this character. I did Harry Fergusson today. Harry Fergusson was a vitriolic, harsh, hard man. From the gallery character point of view, if you give him these attributes, people won't talk to you. They'll be frightened of you, they'll stand back. So I said, 'My wife told me I must be nicer today, but I find it hard.' So you inform them a little bit that the character is normally quite harsh but today he's going to be nice.

(62)

There is a range of such legitimate compromise made in gallery characterisation. The softening of Dooley's Fergusson is contrasted by the slight exaggeration of the Casting Director in MOMI's Hollywood. Julia Munrow (MOMI) suggests that many characters need to be slightly exaggerated in order to play the many faceted role of the first person actor in offering information whilst at the same time giving a sense of the character's own life circumstances. Practitioners are unsure about whether this work relies on caricature. All those interviewed reject the idea of a shallow caricature based on stereotyping or simplistic images of character groups. Indeed the inclusion of East Europeans and Russians on the sets of silent Hollywood at MOMI work against the widely held impression that Hollywood was populated by Americans and is an example of how both museums purposefully set out to challenge stereotyping at every appropriate opportunity. However, there is also recognition that the use of caricature as a kind of theatrical shorthand in the mould of political cartoons, immediately recognisable but grounded in knowledge and opinion, probably is a method adopted on the galleries.

First person interpretation, therefore, involves a range of methods designed to embrace aspirations to maintain academic propriety in informing visitors of objects and events through the lives of fictional characters whilst at the same time enlivening the museum experience through friendly and often lively interaction with visitors. A sound rationale seems to underpin the selection of this range of methods and they seem, for the most part, to be consistent with the aims and objectives expressed by staff at both museums.

In concluding this chapter we assert that through working with visitors individually or in small groups, and especially by being able to respond to their individual needs, first person interpretation demonstrates the potential to help visitors engage with the museum at an individual level. It is hard to imagine that any other form of interaction will be more effective in this respect. The theatre-in-museum experiences at the Science Museum, and more so at MOMI are, however, somewhat inhibited by an approach which compels actors to remain in character at all times. This inevitably frustrates both actors and visitors on those occasions when the actor as a museum representative might be able to satisfy visitor needs but the character cannot. More seriously, total adherence to character roles does inhibit the establishing of clear play-contracts and this remains a serious concern in two respects. First, it does lead to inefficiencies, particularly in the context of wasting time and energy establishing the rules of the "game"(63), and also by limiting the likelihood that uncomfortable visitors will absorb the benefits of the encounter whilst they remain defensive about an uncertain situation. Second, it hinders the potential of engaging visitors in serious

debate, emotional journeys, or the consideration of contentious issues. Several practitioners express a deep interest in taking theatre work to a more serious, thought-provoking level to complement rather than to replace the broadly informative but emotionally shallow work currently exhibited. These practitioners are equally doubtful about whether their respective institutions would sanction such a move or whether they would be able to create the correct conditions for such work. Museums and theatre practitioners need to consider what these conditions might be and whether some theatre-types are more suitable than others for dealing with serious issues.

We will, in the meantime, end this chapter by considering Aiden Dooley's (Actor-NMSI) reflection on his emotional journey with school groups at the Imperial War Museum. The action here is still in first person but is played to a particular and known client-group accompanied by their teacher where, crucially, a play-contract has been established. Dooley identifies a different level of work with these young visitors to that which he normally carries out at Kensington. His words are contemplated not as a criticism of what is currently featured on the galleries of the museums in this case study but they do offer us the opportunity to consider if other kinds of engagement might be appropriately offered to the general visitor in the future.

If I'm asked "What did you eat?"... well they can find that out from a book. But if I can make them feel an inkling... give them an inkling of the mind of one of these poor men out in those trenches... what might have been going on inside their head... I tell them at the start, 'This is inside my head... I wouldn't talk to you like this normally.' So you set that up as your character and then you go into your head and you're all over the place. They can ask me questions until the cows come home, but they can't... (pause)... feel... (pause)... and that's all I can attempt to do.

(64)

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CHAPTER FOUR

" Where's the Passion? "

A case study on the nature of scripted plays.

**Setting objectives for individual programmes.
Identifying learning outcomes.
Emotional engagement.**

CHAPTER FOUR

Just over 43% of all museums currently using theatre include scripted plays in their work although, once again, the majority of these museums registered its use alongside a range of other types of theatre. There are different kinds of scripted work in use at present including a number of museums using previously published plays. The production of George Bernard Shaw plays at Shaw's house in Ayot St. Lawrence would be a pertinent example of this interpretative use of published plays. Others, however, use especially scripted plays written to be performed in a particular museum and which encapsulate stories and events related to the subject-focus of the museum and it will be this kind which will be explored in this chapter.

To help explore the principal features of scripted plays and to consider some broader issues arising from their use, two museums where this type of theatre-in-museum is predominantly used have been studied in close detail. Since the summer of 1990, the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television (NMPFT) in Bradford has been served by its resident theatre company, Action Replay. In York at the National Railway Museum (NRM) scripted theatre programmes are provided by Platform 4 Theatre, a free-lance company dedicated solely to the NRM. This museum, however, uses other theatre events on an occasional basis, including a solo gallery character, story-tellers and railway quiz-shows. Whilst not scripted plays of the kind with which we are concerned here, nor being the work of Platform 4 Theatre, the willingness of this museum to apply a range of theatre styles provided by a host of free-lance artists is an important departure from other case studies and it raises issues for theatre-in-museum in general which we will return to in the concluding chapter.

This case study will address the following five elements of scripted plays in the context of work at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television and at the National Railway Museum:

- outlining exemplars of work in this field including brief mention of the organisation and management structures of these two companies;
- identifying observable attributes of scripted plays in action;
- establishing aims and objectives for scripted plays and analysing the relationship between aims, objectives and methodology;
- identifying learning outcomes from scripted plays:

- considering the potential of theatre to evoke a feeling response in museums, and its implications for public gallery work.

EXEMPLARS OF SCRIPTED PLAYS

There are very strong similarities indeed between the work of Action Replay and that of Platform 4 Theatre in terms of their underlying rationale, their aims and objectives and, particularly, in the style of their actual performances. The two companies built up a very close working relationship over the five years from 1991 to 1996, and almost developed a model for a regional movement of ideas. The members of both companies viewed each others work regularly. Members of Action Replay would take a 'company day-out', as it became known, once a year to view Platform 4 Theatre and use it as the catalyst for discussions about their own work. Platform 4 members made the same use of visits to the opening of the Spotlight Gallery or to other special occasions at Bradford. Many lengthy discussions took place between the two companies about the role of theatre-in-museum in their respective institutions and an on-going evaluation of their methodologies evolved. In 1995 the Company Manager of Action Replay was seconded to the NRM to help develop and to perform in "Oh Mrs Porter" for Platform 4 Theatre. The benefits accrued from this process were valued highly by both companies during this period and the potential for the development of common approaches to theatre-in-museum through such a simple but practical networking of ideas, undertaken at a local level, should be noted. Bearing in mind the cumbersome nature of organising national conferences and associations and remembering the limitations on time and resources facing most museums and theatre-in-museum practitioners, local networking of this kind may well have an important part to play in the development of any movement.

Having noted similarities in the rationale, aims and performances of Action Replay and Platform 4 Theatre, it is also interesting to note that in organisational terms they could hardly be more different. Although they are both housed in National museums, (which are both branches of the National Museum of Science and Industry) their general organisational structure, their funding and the way that they relate to the general operations of their respective museums are very different indeed.

In terms of the visitor-experience, however, the work at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television and at the National Railway Museum are quite clearly of the same genre. In both cases visitors are invited, through announcements over public address systems to join the theatre company for a performance, typically announced as lasting for about twenty minutes. Actors welcome visitors arriving at

the appointed venue which may be on the galleries or in a dedicated theatre or lecture space. Performances invariably adhere to a familiar theatre ritual whereby the actors present the play and the audience watches it. Both companies involve audiences in a variety of ways, though overt participation by members of the audience is rarely sought and audiences are never assumed to be in role. The visitors remain firmly in the here and now with the characters portrayed being brought into the world of the visitor rather than the visitor transferring to another place or time as was the case in the previous case study. Performances are typically fast moving, visually attractive, and humorous portrayals of stories representing main events in the history of the railways or photography, film and television. Contemporary matters are sometimes dealt with and, in the case of Action Replay, glimpses into the future of image-making have also been offered. Whilst the fast-moving style predominates, more contemplative work of a serious nature is also undertaken in performances of thirty to sixty minutes in length rather than the usual twenty. Action Replay began with up to five actors in a single performance in their first season of 1990 but acting teams for both companies are now usually two or three in strength. After performances audiences usually applaud (again following traditional theatre rituals) before moving back into the museum. Discussions between actors and visitors after performances are also a regular feature of the experience.

To help set the context for this case study, the following brief examples of scripted theatre programmes are offered and can be taken as being typical of programmes at NMPFT and NRM.

The National Museum of Photography, Film and Television opened in Bradford in 1987 on the site of the old Prince's Theatre. It was housed in the modern but redundant building intended as the home of a Bradford repertory theatre company that never materialised. The five story building is built around what would have been a theatre auditorium but became instead the only IMAX cinema in this country and which was the jewel in the crown of this museum for several years. The museum presents and interprets the development of photography, film and television over the past one hundred and fifty years or so but also increasingly addresses other electronic means of image-making and is preparing to embrace new technologies as they emerge. The galleries in this museum are highly interactive and were the subject of much attention in the museum community when it opened. The museum was a leader in the field of interactive displays for some years, winning two Museum of the Year Awards in 1989 and 1992. Visitors can still study objects in traditional case displays but extensive use is made of push-button display panels, video monitors, hands-on interactive exhibitions and full scale reconstructions of television studios or

photographic dark-rooms. The museum is a branch of the National Museum of Science and Industry becoming, in effect, a new national museum when it was decided that the collection pertaining to this subject had outgrown its accommodation at the Science Museum in Kensington. The siting of a national museum outside London is always a cause for some debate, but the move to Bradford did provide the museum with a site already complete with an auditorium suitable for IMAX and an education department which the Local Authority agreed to fund. In return, the local Labour council insisted that the museum was to be a free museum (unusual at the time amongst national museums) and it was, therefore, to attract a more socially diverse visitor group including large numbers of unaccompanied children.

Action Replay is the resident theatre company at NMPFT but although it is a full time permanent company they do not provide full cover on the galleries all of the year round. Instead, their theatre programmes are provided on a seasonal basis with full gallery cover during school holidays and other major bank holidays, and the provision of performance-workshop combinations of a TIE nature for schools during parts of term time. Other times of the year are used for the researching, writing and rehearsing of plays during which periods no performances are offered, and also some short periods when the company take holidays in what is effectively a closed season. There are usually four permanent members of Action Replay with additional actors and a technician being brought in on short-term contracts where needed. The Head of Theatre-in-Museum (who is the main link with the rest of the museum and who also acts as artistic director) and the Company Manager (who takes care of the day-to-day running of the company) have been with Action Replay since it was formed. During peak periods when plays are presented for the general public five different performances are offered each day, usually on the hour between 11.00 and 15.00 hrs. Plays usually last for about twenty minutes, are tightly scripted and interpret various aspects of photography, film and television. In the first three years, Action Replay performed plays on the galleries near to objects or within exhibition spaces which they were to interpret. In 1993, however, the Spotlight Gallery was opened as a dedicated theatre space complete with lighting, sound and projection equipment but one which could also be used as a display gallery. Increasingly, Action Replay performed in Spotlight and performances on the exhibition galleries became a rare event. Plays still sometimes interpreted specific exhibitions which could be found on a gallery elsewhere in the museum but the company also developed plays which addressed either more general themes around the museum's subject-focus or filled gaps by addressing specific topics not covered by the museum in other ways. In 1996, the Head of Theatre-in-Museum and the Company Manager left the museum and Action Replay was suspended soon afterwards. There are plans to reinstate the

company in the future but this may be after the completion of an extensive museum re-building project which is now taking place.

On entering the museum, visitors may notice the entrance foyer display giving notice of the five plays on offer during the day along with photographs of the company. A few minutes before each performance up-beat, vaguely show-ground-like announcements are made over the public address system inviting visitors to join "Action Replay, the museum's resident theatre company,"(1) for the play which is about to be presented. The name of the play is given along with a brief description of its topic. Visitors are told where it will take place, how long it will last and that it is free of charge. Those visitors choosing to attend make their way to the Spotlight Gallery where they will be greeted outside by one or more actors who will confirm that this is where the play will happen and will guide them inside. Visitors enter to low lighting and usually lively music and take their place on a bank of simple carpeted step-seating which can accommodate about eighty people. Once the three actors (two male and one female) are happy that the final visitors are inside, the doors to the gallery are closed and the performance begins. Introductory music is cued in by the technician and the brisk opening moments of the performance quickly set the scene as Paris of the 1890s. This play is fairly physical, fast moving and makes much use of clowning, mime and pantomime-style props in order to tell the story of the Lumière brothers and how they came to develop the moving picture. The play is humorous but also provides a constant stream of information about what gave the brothers their ideas, how their equipment worked, where the first movies were shown and how the Parisians of the day reacted to a seemingly miraculous invention. How the projection of a sequence of still images appears to our eyes as moving pictures is explained. The audience themselves are invited to help comically demonstrate this persistence of vision by closing and opening their eyes to order whilst two actors very obviously change positions in a mock boxing match. The play is structured, as are many plays at both NMPFT and NRM, to allow for a mixture of narrative and characterisation. Actors change role literally at the drop of a hat or the donning of a coat and a general Brechtian signalling that 'we are telling you a story' predominates. To help both demonstrate the story itself and to tie this play back into the other museum galleries, the brothers Lumière eventually project some of their early films onto a screen and re-enact how the early viewers in Paris ran away from the images of an approaching train. The play ends with another burst of clowning as the Lumière show packs up and prepares to move off to its next venue. The audience applaud enthusiastically as the music plays out. A poignant but, again, comical postscript was added during the 1995 season to mark the 100th anniversary of moving pictures. Auguste explains to his brother that the invention will not last and they will be

forgotten. To demonstrate he sets the audience up with a 'Knock, knock.' On their reply of 'Who's there?' he exclaims to his brother 'See they have forgotten us already!' The actors take their single bow and quickly move to open the doors to let people out. A few members of the audience chat with the actors but the majority move back out into the museum without having had any direct conversation. The actors and technician set the space for the next performance before they move off to get changed for their next play which will begin in about thirty minutes.

The National Railway Museum in York is also a branch of the National Museum of Science and Industry which, like NMPFT, became a new museum in its own right in 1975 when the collections of the York and the Clapham railway museums were merged. Once again, debate raged about the siting of a National Museum in the north of England but the case was made that the York bid, proposing to site the museum in the old motive power depot (i.e. loco shed) and adjoining freight depot, was appropriate in that the site itself was of historic railway interest. The museum is the largest railway museum in the world and occupies a very large site including two huge halls and an extensive outdoor area. The museum had, until 1989, been housed in one hall only (the loco shed) with the history and technology of railways dominating the exhibition. The unexpected discovery that the roof was in imminent danger of collapse, however, caused the museum to open its storage shed (the old freight depot) as a temporary exhibition space whilst the roof of the main hall was repaired. The NRM took this opportunity to shift the focus of its displays. Instead of filling the temporary space, named The Great Railway Show, with rows of locomotives as had been the tendency before 1989, the old freight depot was transformed into a re-construction of an Edwardian railway station. The whole exhibition was set in the context of moving people and goods by rail. Luggage and freight were piled high on the platforms, video panels explaining the workings of the railways were introduced, and mannequins dressed in period costume depicting families en-route to their holidays occupied some carriages. This temporary exhibition space won the Museum of the Year Award so that when the main hall re-opened in 1992 The Great Railway Show, now re-named simply as South Hall, was retained. The museum is increasingly making use of hands-on exhibitions, push-button video panels and other forms of interactive displays. It is still trying to shed its previous image as the 'Mecca for railway enthusiasts' and attempts to present and interpret the national collection on behalf of the family and non-specialist visitor.

Platform 4 Theatre was set up under the Education Department at the NRM in 1990 and began performing on the galleries at Easter 1991. From the outset they were represented as "an educational theatre company working to interpret and illustrate,

through performance, the collection of the National Railway Museum."(2) Although sometimes referred to in museum publicity literature as the museum's resident theatre company they are, in reality, far from it. Strictly speaking, the two permanent members of Platform 4 are consultants to the NRM working under the Head of Interpretation and Education and on contract to the museum to provide something in the region of forty performance days a year on the NRM site with an additional five days outreach at railway preservation societies or other museums. Other special events either day-time or evenings are provided by separate agreement with various events officers, the education officer or the marketing department. Platform 4 Theatre are also contracted for a number of days each year for the researching, writing and rehearsing of their plays. Performances take place on-gallery usually near to objects or exhibitions which are to be interpreted but, like other companies cited so far, plays occasionally deal with broader issues relating to the subject-focus of the museum or attempt to fill gaps in the overall exhibition. Sometimes, the company works in conjunction with large scale demonstrations of the exhibits. "From Eggs to Elephants" is about freight traffic and was designed to run outdoors in conjunction with a demonstration of shunting using a steam locomotive and a range of freight trucks. The loco and ground crew demonstrate the actual shunting whilst the education officer gives a spoken interpretation of events. The actual play, outlining the vital place of freight in railway history, follows and this in turn is followed by an opportunity for visitors to take a ride in a guard's brake-van. Plays are usually about twenty minutes in length though, like Action Replay, some longer and more contemplative work is also undertaken. Four performances per day, offered between 11.00 and 16.00 hrs, would be the usual routine and these will be two performances each of two different plays. The two permanent members of Platform 4 perform all of the plays undertaken by this company though they have been joined by a female member of Action Replay when presenting a play about the role of women on the railways and, on two other occasions, by the Curator of Railway Posters and the Education Officer performing in plays about railway posters and railway photography respectively. The two members in this company, whilst having Masters Degrees in Educational Theatre and being Equity members, are not trained professional actors and work full time as a teacher and a lecturer in teacher-education. They are off-site for most of the year and therefore work at the museum is co-ordinated by the Education Officer.

On arriving at the museum visitors may notice Platform 4's performances shown as part of the programme of events for the day printed on the reverse of each entrance ticket. They may also have read the Platform 4 page in the What's On guide which outlines all performance dates for the season along with a brief descriptor of each

play. As with Action Replay, announcements about the plays are given during the five minutes leading up to performance. Whilst slightly more formal than at Bradford the announcements are still visitor-friendly and explain where the play will take place, what it is about, how long it will last and that it is free of charge. Meanwhile at the performance site on the gallery the other member of the team begins his 'roll-up, roll-up' routine. This part of the audience gathering routine is up-beat and show-ground style in nature and, once again, informs visitors that they are at the correct location and that they are to take a seat or stand nearby. Visitors are asked to gather close to the performance space and reassurances are given that they will not be dragged into the action or embarrassed in any way. On this occasion, visitors are gathering in front of a giant concrete ring section from the Channel Tunnel which has had a reconstruction of a Eurostar locomotive placed on rails running through the centre. The live French accordion music comes to an end and the play begins with the usual opening for most scripts by this company of 'Hello, we're Platform 4 Theatre and we're here to tell you a story.' The topic of the Channel Tunnel is introduced and visitors are asked to view the 'hole' (whole) story before making up their own minds about the benefits or drawbacks of the new Tunnel. Soon the fast-moving, humorous, burlesque style that we had also noted at Action Replay takes visitors into the story of the technological and historical development of the Channel Tunnel as the various characters show how engineering difficulties defeated some attempts whilst British attitudes to being physically joined to mainland Europe were more of an obstacle to others. Switching from top hats to day-glow jackets the play brings visitors to the first underwater breakthrough of 1992 before we see present day passengers driving their cars on board. Parts of the script are in French and the play attempts to not only tell the story of the building of the Tunnel but also to offer for consideration some thoughts on what being joined to mainland Europe might mean to British businesses and to our lifestyles in general. The play concludes by asking if anyone has travelled through the Tunnel yet and by reflecting on the latest Tunnel news story to hit the headlines. It reminds visitors that the play is not intended to influence their own opinion about it but that if they do travel through it, they might think about the people who built it. As the play ends and the final French accordion music climaxes the audience applaud and the actors take their bows. A closing invitation to have a look at the Channel Tunnel exhibition is offered before the actors engage in discussion with visitors and/or clear the space, before going off to prepare for their next performance which begins in thirty minutes. As at Bradford, a small number of visitors may engage in discussion but on the whole they will make their way off to their next museum experience.

OBSERVABLE ATTRIBUTES OF SCRIPTED PLAYS

As with first person interpretation, we note that the emphasis on the type of content may vary from the direct demonstration of, say, the concept of persistence of vision in moving picture films to a general history of the building of the Channel Tunnel. One of these plays had its emphasis on the past with a postscript to consider if we had remembered the contribution that the pioneering Lumière brothers made to our lives today. The other play, whilst tracing a history of the Channel Tunnel, really invites audiences to use the past to make their minds up about a contentious contemporary issue.

Whilst we note the differences in these two particular plays we can observe these general categories of content-emphasis in scripted theatre-in-museum:

- explanation of general background stories and events, often spanning long periods of time, which help to contextualise specific items in, or whole categories of, the collection and/or the subject-focus of the museum;
- demonstrations of exhibits or of quality reproductions of authentic equipment;
- explanation of general or specific concepts related to the subject-focus of the museum;
- the story of particular figures who invented something or did something momentous;
- a consideration of the effect that a development had on the lives of ordinary people;
- a consideration of the benefits and drawbacks of an event or development;
- relating the subject-focus of the museum to the visitors' own lives;
- an involvement by visitors in stories and events at a personal level, evoking a 'feeling response' to an element of the subject-focus of the museum.

Variations also exist in the structure of the plays and performances, though these differences tend to be rather more subtle. Taking the examples outlined above as being typical, we can begin to draw up the common attributes of scripted theatre-in-museum practice.

Scripted theatre programmes will normally:

- be based on a script and will be presented by a small number of actors;
- involve actors presenting the play to a group of visitors which may be small in number but which would typically be between fifty and one hundred and twenty visitors at a time;
- present a whole story package to visitors which has a self-contained completeness about it but which rarely offers opportunity for one to one questioning and interaction;
- involve clear information being given to visitors before-hand about the nature of the theatre presentation, its content, length, and so on;
- involve visitors in choosing to physically go to the performance area rather than encountering it on a random basis;
- involve visitors in a recognisable performance situation where the rituals of traditional theatre prevail;
- take place either on-gallery near to exhibits to which the play pertains or in a dedicated theatre space off the galleries;
- involve one or more members of the company researching, devising and writing their own plays;
- involve the vetting of scripts by expert subject-specialist staff within the museum;
- involve the actors, through the play, in revealing a variety of content packages to the visitors ranging from being object-specific to context-specific, as outlined above;
- be brief, usually lasting for about twenty minutes but may be longer and occasionally shorter;
- be frequently light-hearted, appealing to a cross section of the non-specialist public, but be rigorously researched and will stand up to analysis by specialist visitors;
- be sometimes serious and of a thought-provoking and/or emotionally engaging nature;
- involve actors being in their performance spaces for short periods at specified and publicised times;
- involve actors in quick turn-arounds between different performances.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

We showed in the previous chapter that MOMI and NMSI have developed broad aims for their theatre work but that formally documented objectives are rare. Nevertheless, through analysing the consistent and well articulated aspirations of various practitioners we were able to deduce a range of objectives, many of which we may

assume to be generic to all theatre-in-museum irrespective of the type of theatre used. Having said that, the different types of theatre are more than different methodologies and do have the potential to achieve visitor outcomes quite distinctive to each type. We will not repeat the whole process of deriving objectives for scripted theatre-in-museums here, but will rather highlight the principal features which we may assume to be distinctive to this type.

An interesting first observation is that both of these companies compiled written aims at an early stage in their development. Indeed, Platform 4 Theatre's initial approach to the museum comprised a comprehensive seventeen page document outlining a rationale, aims, methodology, company structure, and financial structure of the theatre-in-museum proposal. Why these two companies should begin from a position of establishing aims either prior to or very soon after actual practice on the galleries began is a matter of speculation. The fact that both use a scripted form of theatre is probably not a factor though the immediate background of the practitioners almost certainly is. Julia Munrow (Company Director-MOMI) noted that actors emerging from training backgrounds at the large theatre schools such as RADA, LAMDA or Bristol Old Vic rarely exhibited the required attributes and attitudes for theatre-in-museum work. Actors from theatre courses such as those at Bretton Hall and Rose Bruford, where the emphasis is on educating about theatre rather than necessarily training for performance, were much more likely to see theatre-in-museum as an applied form of theatre, be able to deal with intensive periods of research and were interested in using theatre as an educational medium rather than as an end in itself. The original Action Replay team were all completing BA(Hons) Degrees in Theatre Arts at Bretton Hall as they undertook their first summer holiday pilot project in 1989. Their course at Bretton Hall had explored in some detail a range of 'applied-theatre' styles. Likewise, both members of Platform 4 Theatre had just completed an MA in Educational Theatre, also at Bretton Hall, and additionally had a professional background in teaching where the setting of long-term aims and specific learning objectives is the foundation of work with children and students. It seems likely that coming from some kind of background where there is a culture of developing certain methodologies in order to achieve prescribed targets is more conducive to establishing an aims-guided theatre programme than is a general background in acting which does not necessarily develop an understanding of the process of acting for a reason beyond the performance itself.

Platform 4 Theatre originally stated that they aimed:

- to work on behalf of the National Railway Museum and, in particular, within The Great Railway Show;
- to help promote public use, enjoyment and knowledge of the collection and to enlarge public understanding of the place of railways in national and international life;
- to illustrate the historical, social and economic effects on the national life caused by railways and activities carried out by railways;
- to carry out work in close liaison with the staff of the National Railway Museum, in particular The Great Railway Show and, where appropriate, the Education Department;
- to liaise particularly in respect of the historical and technical accuracy of performances presented to the public and on all aspects of public safety and Museum policies in general.

(3)

Platform 4 Theatre undertook a major review of their work in 1995 which included an evaluation of their aims and methodologies though it did not produce any substantial change to the original ideas. Similarly, Action Replay reviewed their aims in 1993 and were able to declare that:

Action Replay exists in order to interpret dramatically the themes, exhibitions and collection of the NMPFT. The company aims to increase knowledge and provide a deeper, clearer understanding of photography, film and television, through the practice of Theatre-in-Museum. Combining our experience as theatre practitioners with curatorial and educational input, we shall continue to provide a high quality service which is informative, entertaining, enlightening and accessible to all.

To achieve these aims we will continue to provide and improve our existing services:

- Gallery Performances
- Full length performances
- Theatre-in-Education programmes
- Undergraduate training

We may deduce from existing documentation and from extensive interviews with practitioners at both museums that more specific objectives, beyond these general aims, of scripted theatre-in-museum (in the context of NMPFT and NRM) fall into the same six generic categories established in Chapter Three and which are concerned with:

- creating an interface between the visitor and museum;
- providing an effective and reliable service;
- interpreting objects in the collection;
- interpreting the social contexts of the collection;
- compensating for gaps in the museum subject-cover;
- and,
- contributing to the broader public profile of the museum.

Within the framework offered by the generic model for objectives, we note that there are areas which are distinctive to scripted theatre-in-museum. These areas are primarily concerned with the kind of involvement we would expect from visitors when engaging with scripted theatre programmes. Sandra Bicknell (Head of Interpretation and Education-NRM) suggests that there are three kinds of involvement by visitors in the museum in general and these are, "Physical access, intellectual access and emotional access." (5) These kinds of involvement are also reflected in theatre programmes. Whilst we saw in the previous chapter the potential of first person interpretation to engage visitors physically and intellectually, emotional engagement remained principally at the surface level of appreciating the characters position in life through their own recounting of events. In scripted theatre, the emphasis is greatly increased on engaging visitors intellectually and, most especially, emotionally. Various specific objectives arise from this change of emphasis which we will deal with under the six established categories.

Creating an interface between the visitor and museum:

Whilst we do not see the one-to-one interaction of the first person encounters which concentrate on responsiveness to individuals during the theatre event itself, we do witness a different kind of individual interaction. Both Action Replay and, more particularly, Platform 4 Theatre view the actual play as only a part of their interaction with visitors. Unlike first person work, in scripted theatre there is contact between actors and visitors out of role. These companies speak in terms of theatre programmes

rather than performances which is a recognition that the play itself is only a part of the visitor experience and that what happens before and after the performance is of equal value. This is an issue of fundamental importance and one which implicitly sets the visitor experience of the whole museum as the main priority and the theatre event as a medium of access to that museum.

Also, by creating an emotional response to the events of the play, scripted theatre programmes set out to create an interface for visitors at a 'feeling level'. This is a complex and fundamental notion of the role which theatre may play in museums and will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

Providing an effective and reliable service

Scripted theatre programmes do not provide full cover to anything like the same extent as first person interpretation. Action Replay demonstrates that even a full-time permanent company cannot easily provide full cover because of other duties related to research, writing and rehearsing. Plays of the nature cited in this case study require at least two actors to be present and this has obvious costing implications. The deployment of available actors in this way inevitably means that scripted theatre will tend to focus on one area of the museum at a time rather than being spread around the site as in the previous chapter. Time required for the preparation of performances takes the actors off the galleries between different plays so that even with the very hectic schedule of Action Replay, actual visitor contact is about two and a half hours per day rather than the eight hours per day at MOMI. On the other hand, the five hundred or so people watching Action Replay throughout a peak season day would be hard to match by a single gallery character, even in eight hours. This seemingly simple difference in the objective regarding full cover has enormous resource implications for both museums and theatre-providers. Quite clearly, value for money has to be an issue in any public or private sector venture and the choice of the type of theatre-in-museum to be employed by an institution will have to weigh the interpretative value of a theatre programme against the number of days per year they can be run. Action Replay's budget of about £100,000 per year offers a simple contrast with MOMI and NMSI. For a similar financial commitment, the institutions really must decide just what they want from their theatre programmes. The budget of only £12,000 supporting the part-time Platform 4 Theatre operation does open up possibilities that this kind of theatre-in-museum might be only a part of a broader theatre programme within a museum. This will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

**Interpreting objects in the collection;
and
Interpreting the social contexts of the collection:**

It is in these areas that the greatest emphasis on engaging visitors at an intellectual and emotional level manifests itself. In scripted plays there is particular emphasis on providing an overall conceptual framework within which visitors can interpret objects and events related to the museum's subject-focus.

Scripted plays frequently set out to offer contrasting views of the same events through the eyes of different characters and through the events which may involve conflict and resolution rather than the recounting of such events by a single character. Scripted plays endeavour to be more than the "talking labels [with] no dialogue"(6) to which Sandra Bicknell (NRM) refers when reflecting on The Royal Armouries theatre events at Leeds. She suggests that the importance of an approach whereby "you're not dictating to the audience how they should think" is that "if someone doesn't understand a subject then they can still be involved in debate. Therefore it's a very powerful way to engage people and it's a more balanced way too."(7)

It is regarding the engagement of visitors at an emotional level in the events which we see unfold in the lives of characters to whom we become affiliated, and not simply at the level of meeting them, that scripted theatre differs from other forms. All of the potential of anticipating outcomes of the events portrayed and of the investment made in the play through the visitors own hopes and expectations for the characters can be exploited. Visitors become involved in the story of another human being as it unfolds before them to the point where it matters to them what happens next. If handled properly, a very different kind of visitor experience becomes the objective. Sandra Bicknell (NRM) reflects on the NRM and museums generally.

There are some out there who love those engines. What is there in the museum to show they love those engines? Where is the passion? Where is there that says this is a product of love. You don't mention that word in museums. It's that sense of knowledge but also sharing human experience. It creates a broader picture but also allows people to engage in different ways. Museums are about knowledge but they are emotionally sterile.

(8)

Compensating for gaps in the museum subject-cover:

Whilst scripted theatre may compensate for gaps in the museum subject-cover simply by dealing with aspects not currently represented in exhibitions, there is a second

more subtle opportunity related to the capacity of scripted plays to offer varying opinions about a particular event or character. David Mosley (Education Officer-NRM) reflects on the way in which Platform 4 Theatre's "Running the Risk" offers a:

... one-sided view, the navy was perceived as a down-trodden hero and the management were perceived as the baddies, except at one point you did say 'Well Mr Vignoles, he's a good man, he looks after us, so again, within the context of it, you were making the point that it wasn't all good on one side or all bad on the other.

(9)

Plays such as "Running the Risk" deal with aspects of the museum's subject-focus which are already represented on the galleries but, through the capacity of theatre to be antagonistic, offer alternatives to the official balanced and objective line in interpretation taken by many museums in the majority of its exhibitions. Theatre, by letting visitors know that it is a story told through the eyes of certain characters and showing those characters in conflict with other characters, can begin a debate for the visitor which allows them to explore issues which the printed panel or even sophisticated video and computer installations find hard to match. Not only are two dimensional written texts made literally three dimensional through the medium of theatre but the content of those labels becomes metaphorically three dimensional too with the suggestion of alternative versions of the 'truth'.

Contributing to the broader public profile of the museum.

Both companies in this case study play an important part in assisting the general publicity of their host museums. Photographs of them in action appear regularly on publicity leaflets, in What's On guides, on posters and even on complimentary tickets to the museum. Both marketing departments remain frustrated, however, that their own resident theatre company does not actually appear on the galleries every day that the museum is open. They must content themselves with fixed-date appearances and this, they maintain, impedes their potential to really use theatre as a draw to visitors. Action Replay help to extend the profile of the museum to schools through their TIE style work and both companies appear at corporate entertainment evenings. Action Replay also made an important impact at the National Exhibition Centre at Birmingham and helped Bradford to secure lucrative tourist deals at an annual tourism fair.

The objectives particular to scripted theatre outlined here are reflected in some key aspects of methodology which make this form of theatre-in-museums quite distinctive amongst other contemporary practice.

Both Action Replay and Platform 4 Theatre are deeply concerned with creating emotional safety for their visitors through the setting of clear play-contracts. We had seen in the previous chapter how play-contracts are an essential element in visitors being able to engage at all in fictional activity. In the context of the two theatre companies at NMPFT and NRM who set out to engage visitors emotionally and, on occasions, to involve them in programmes which may be contentious or challenging at a feeling level, then concern for the emotional safety of visitors through clear contracts becomes paramount. As demonstrated in the exemplars which were offered earlier, visitors at both museums receive very clear signals that they are being invited to attend a play. Susannah Daley (Head of Theatre-in-Museum-NMPFT) explains their methodology for establishing the contract.

The announcements, the roll-up, the sit down to me are all a very important way of building that contract with the audience and because of the experience we'd had on the galleries where sometimes I'd felt people were confused and upset. Your audience haven't come to see a performance, therefore the tannoy is a very important way of saying this is happening. Hopefully we have relaxed actors sounding warm and welcoming and inviting. So they get towards the door and then it's really important for me that an actor says "Yes this is it", and re-affirms that decision. "Yes do come in, you understood the tannoy correctly, we are friendly, we are inviting you, you are in the right place". Affirmation of all those things that you hope the tannoy's given out. So you hope that they then smooth the way for people to go in, both whether it's a gallery piece or a Spotlight piece, up until that point, that tannoy and that welcome. The difference being that then once you go to the Spotlight it's a much more recognisable format, it's dark, you sit down. When you go onto the gallery, I think there's slightly more work to be done. "Yes stand here or stand where you want. As long as you're in this area you'll see it. We'll move round you, don't you worry." It's the same function as sitting in that dark space.

(10)

Platform 4 Theatre also follow the same routines though almost all of their work is on-gallery. They place great emphasis on making sure that visitors know exactly what

is going to happen and want audiences to be relaxed and reassured before performances begin. Frequently, pre-show explanations will be offered about the programme which is about to follow. Before "From Eggs to Elephants" (playing indoors next to the freight exhibition in South Hall for 1997) one of the actors explains to visitors that they are sitting in the very freight depot where the story will be set. He explains a little about freight movements earlier this century and emphasises that members of the public would never have been allowed into the hall in which they are sitting. The pre-show explanation dove-tails into the performance with words to the effect of 'For the purposes of our story today we're going to take you back to the year 1948.' Likewise in "Live Wire", a hard-hitting play about the dangers of children playing on the railways which involves a graphic death-scene, children and parents are warned that it will be a serious story. With the usual opening lines of 'We are Platform 4 Theatre and we're here to tell you a story', audiences are in no doubt before the performance begins that they are going to watch a play and that normal theatre rituals apply. The rationale supporting this approach is that the visitors' right to know what is happening and to have the choice of opting into the theatre event should be respected as a simple contribution to their enjoyment of the whole museum experience. Also, unless visitor-audiences are emotionally relaxed when viewing a performance they will not be open to the emotional and intellectual shift which will be the objective of the play. Furthermore, establishing the notion that this is a story intended to help visitors understand part of the collection is in itself an aid to the visitors taking intellectual and emotional ownership of the play in order to interpret it as they wish. Although based on thorough research and being factually accurate it is not being promoted as some kind of whole truth but it remains explicit that these things happened to these characters in this story.

The kind of pre and post-show interaction with visitors witnessed in the work of both companies does assume a particular relationship between actors and visitors which goes beyond the play. In this way of working actors must view themselves primarily as museum interpreters who will communicate with the visitors generally and not as actors who will perform for them. In this model the play is a part of the encounter and not all of it. Susannah Daley (NMPFT) finds it a constant challenge to train new actors into this approach.

I think the interpreters should be set up at the beginning. I keep saying, "You must say who you are", 'cos even though you know who they are you need that confirmation. "We're Action Replay. We're in the museum. This is what we're doing. We're doing a piece about so and so, because, whatever....." And I know they feel uncomfortable with

it, and we've got to find a way where they don't feel uncomfortable with it, yet I feel satisfied. I don't know why they feel uncomfortable, but they do. They don't like doing it and they only do it because they know they've got to. We never had this problem on the galleries but in Spotlight [we do]. I think it's because it's like a theatre and it doesn't feel natural to come and explain yourself. Theatre should explain itself but it doesn't. It's not a theatre, it's a museum.

(11)

As we had seen at MOMI and NMSI, the actor is viewed as a communicator throughout the whole of their encounter with the visitors and not only through the performance itself. In this approach to scripted plays, the need for sensitivity to the visitor and an awareness of the importance of clear play-contracting makes the attitude of the actors all the more crucial. Susannah Daley again reflects; "It's awful if you see someone who hasn't got that rapport, which is why our selection process is crucial. Acting is one part of it because there are some people who can act wonderfully but they just cannot communicate with people on a level that makes it work."(12) Jo Price (Company Manager-NMPFT) is rather less forgiving in commenting that they can do without "poncey actors who just want to perform,"(13) but the message is probably the same!

Post-show contact with audiences is not so formally structured and both companies wish to develop this work further. The actors of Action Replay do sometimes indicate that the contents of the play may be further explored through a visit to a particular gallery or the IMAX cinema. They also wait by the exit doors to Spotlight or near to performance spaces on-gallery to facilitate interaction with any visitors who wish to comment on the play or ask questions. This aspect of their work, however, remains somewhat awkward and rarely assumes a truly relaxed free-flow between themselves and visitors. Susannah Daley (NMPFT) again expresses frustration at this aspect of their work and regrets that the reflective opportunities which have been created for visitors are often lost.

I don't think it's enough to say "We're here at the end if you want to talk to us" 'cos I don't think many of the great British public feel comfortable going up to someone, especially an actor. I think we've got to do more as the actors and go to them and say "Did you enjoy that? Did you have a television set like that?" and engage them in that conversation. But I'm losing that battle. We've got to do more. You see, when they [the visitors] say "How long have you been here?"

they're opening channels of communication. What they really want to say is "I want to talk to you about this. You've stirred something up in me and now I want to give it back to you." I think we've got to do more work on that. I think we've got to recognise those signs that that communication is actually the first step in somebody actually being able to give back, and I think it's an important part of live interpretation that it's a two way process. We're a little bit guilty of making it a one way process.

(14)

Platform 4 Theatre are rather more effective in their post-play interaction and lengthy conversations with members of the audience about their memories of railway travel, their trip through the Channel Tunnel, or their experience as civil engineers is much more common. Nevertheless, Platform 4 would still concur with Daley's guilt about it being a one way process and share with Action Replay an unease about the potential for discussion inherent in scripted theatre which rarely seems to be fulfilled in public gallery performances. We will return to this point shortly in the context of emotional engagement in theatre-in-museum.

At the heart of this type of theatre-in-museums is, of course, that it is scripted. Both companies set great store in the capacity of scripted theatre to offer a broad complete picture of an event, explain a process thoroughly, or develop a concept fully.

You can be given a coherent story with a beginning, middle and end, a coherent argument, or two arguments really, whereas some of the non-scripted things that I've seen have been... you just wait there until somebody tells you about something.... there's no, "Right I've got to tell them about this and how that started and then how it went in to that and then they'll be able to understand about the other." Its just a bit hap-hazard sometimes.

(15)

The capacity of a scripted piece to offer more than one view-point has already been mentioned but what also should be emphasised is that whilst gallery characters who are not key-players can report on various people's opinions about an event, it lacks some advantages offered by the scripted play. First, it literally lacks the dramatic impact of an argument developing between various characters in a play where outcomes are uncertain to the visitor who is coaxed into developing their own affiliations with the views expressed. Second, because the scripted play (in the

NMPFT and NRM styles) is usually a mix of narrative and dialogue, then there is virtually total freedom of movement across time and space. The confines of the character approach, trapped in their own time and assumed life experience, as explored in Chapter Three, are avoided here. Third, and rather more important in terms of offering considered overviews of an event, the scripted play can more easily provide balance and progression in a line of argument. Because scripts can be re-drafted, edited and vetted and because, in most cases, there is an obvious time frame to the play which keeps the majority of any audience there for the full piece, the museum can be reasonably sure that a complete thesis will be offered through the performance. The stand-point adopted by the play is a controlled one deliberately put onto the galleries to reinforce, complement or challenge other elements of the museum's exhibitions. It minimises the risk of incomplete ideas being transmitted by visitors moving off after only a few moments, actors improvising in tangential journeys around the subject and well-meaning audience contributions fulfilling the interests of one visitor but side-tracking the rest.

It stops self indulgence and you see that in Leeds [Tetley Brewery Wharf] where people get going and they're off with the fairies 'cos they're acting and they're in their own little world and what the relevance for the audience is, God only knows.

(16)

This format further recognises that actors cannot know everything on a given subject and that there is a limit to what visitors can absorb in a short time. The scripted format allows choices to be made about which aspects of a topic will become the focus for attention. Whilst actors are generally well researched on a subject, and they do need to know more than the script if pre and post-play interaction is to be meaningful, the scripted approach to theatre-in-museum is efficient in defining for actors what constitutes appropriate knowledge. Where costings are involved, a system whereby most of what an actor researches (in time which is costly to the museum) will be used is wise resource management. Crucially, though, it is in pursuit of explaining and interpreting the collection for the visitor that these companies adopt the scripted method. The offering of whole stories is an obvious strength of the scripted format and, if that is what a particular museum requires from its theatre programmes, then this approach seems to offer a secure system. "The script gives you that opportunity to make sure that the knowledge is being communicated in a way that's digestible and accessible."(17)

In helping to maintain a clear focus for plays that will offer digestible and accessible interpretative programmes, Action Replay state their interpretative aims for each programme before it is scripted. Likewise Platform 4 Theatre state the learning objectives for each programme on the first page of each script. For example, the objectives for "Oh Mrs Porter" were:

THIS PROGRAMME AIMS TO INTERPRET THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITAIN'S RAILWAYS AND IS INITIALLY PRESENTED AS AN INTERPRETATIVE PROGRAMME IN SUPPORT OF THE EXHIBITION 'OH! MRS PORTER.'

THE PROGRAMME AIMS TO:

- (1) INFORM VISITORS OF THE RANGE OF TASKS UNDERTAKEN BY WOMEN ON THE RAILWAY.**
- (2) ENGAGE VISITORS IN THE STORY OF ONE WOMAN WORKING ON THE RAILWAYS DURING WORLD WAR TWO AS A SIGNAL AND CROSSING KEEPER ON A RURAL BRANCH LINE.**
- (3) QUESTION IN A SENSITIVE AND POIGNANT WAY THE APPARENT INJUSTICE OF WOMEN HAVING TO GIVE UP JOBS OF WHICH THEY WERE CAPABLE TO RETURNING MEN, AT THE SAME TIME AS EXPLORING THE FEELINGS OF MEN DISORIENTED BY THEIR RETURN TO CHANGING ATTITUDES TO THEIR OWN ROLES AT HOME AND WORK.**
- (4) REFLECT IMPLICITLY CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF GENDER ROLES IN THE 1990s**
- (5) DRAW ATTENTION TO THE "OH! MRS PORTER" EXHIBITION WHICH TELLS IN MORE DETAIL THE STORY OF WOMEN ON THE RAILWAYS.**

(18)

With such a detailed focus on the interpretative objectives for a programme, the scripted play is a type of theatre-in-museum which offers high levels of control to the devisors of such programmes and to the host museum. With an extensive list of supportive research sources also being cited on opening pages of scripts, objective-specific plays such as this demonstrate what the previous Deputy Head of the NRM, Rob Shorland-Ball, referred to as "academic rigour." (19) Despite the lofty tones of this phrase, however, both companies involved in this case study echo Brecht's policy of teaching through humour and aspire to take their visitors into the museum's subject area through devising plays which are substantial in their content but highly accessible to the general public in their form. David Leon (Head of Marketing-NRM) believes this to be a major strength of this kind of work,

It's aimed at a family level, it's accessible, it won't bore kids, it's short enough and pacy enough that it's suitable for the whole family. It's not aimed at children so it's not a Play Days type of theatre presentation. It's not adult, it's genuinely a family event suitable for as broad a spectrum as possible.

(20)

We see in these particular examples of scripted theatre a clear emphasis on intended learning outcomes and yet the level of evaluation of such programmes reflects what we found in the previous chapter. Evaluations of the theatre work at both NMPFT and NRM are rare and broad in nature. The whole notion of evaluating not only theatre programmes but almost anything in a museum in terms of what visitors actually learned rather than whether they liked it, spent time with it, and so on, is almost unheard of. We do, however, have the benefit of a small research project undertaken in the context of Platform 4 Theatre's "Running the Risk" which gives us a rare glimpse into the actual learning potential of theatre-in-museum.

LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM SCRIPTED PLAYS:

The research involved interviewing children about the performance content of "Running the Risk", a play about navvies working on the Woodhead Tunnel in the 1840s. Children viewed the performance and were interviewed either on-gallery at the NRM or in school situations, though there were no significant differences in responses on the different sites. Ages ranged between six and fourteen, with a total working sample of 62 children. This is obviously a small sample to date but indicates some interesting directions which should be pursued further.

The research was concerned with:

- the retention of basic factual information offered during the play;
- initial understanding of tunnelling processes, the work of the navvies and the general context of their living conditions;
- opinions and feelings about the work and living conditions of the navvies.

The evaluation of learning is viewed in the context of the specific objectives for this programme which were set out as follows:

RUNNING THE RISK interprets the work of the railway navvies, the living and working conditions under which they built their lines, and the attitude of employers and others towards them. It invites an emotional engagement from the visitor and offers the opportunity for visitors to consider the human cost of railway achievement.

(21)

What is of particular significance in the responses of the children is not so much that the research indicates that they simply retained, understood or had opinions about aspects of the play in general, but rather in the balance between those elements of learning. Given that museums have a host of means at their disposal for informing the public, it is in understanding whether theatre might have a particular role to play in museums that programmes such as "Running the Risk" may assume a special kind of interpretative value. The research did, indeed, indicate that very particular kinds of learning were taking place.

The retention of specific details such as dates, the names of the railway companies involved at Woodhead or place names (including Woodhead itself) was generally very weak across the whole sample, though responses varied from child to child. It seemed to be that the capacity of this play to operate as a simple transmission tool in the context of impersonal information was actually very poor.

Details about people, however, were much stronger. Virtually anything which was to do with the day-to-day life of the central characters of Gypsy Joe and Fighting Jack could be recounted and a general impression of what the navvies did and how they lived appeared to be sound across the whole sample, irrespective of age. Children would typically explain that:

They went around building canals and railways and they had to use very simple basic tools like a pick and shovel and dynamite and they travelled around from site to site. They were very often killed because they worked in poor conditions and they didn't have very good accommodation so they caught a lot of illnesses.

(22)

They used to have riots with beer and they used to spend it all at the tommy shop. It sells beer and bread, stuff like that.

(23)

Beyond this broad picture of the working lives of the navvies, children were also able to explain in close detail how certain navvying jobs were carried out. They could explain the relationships between various tasks never actually shown simultaneously in the performance. There are strong indications that children were beginning to build inter-related concepts about tunnelling, railway building, navvies, and contractors (usually referred to as 'the bosses'). Some detailed line drawings by 7 - 9 year old children (Appendix 2) indicate that their concepts about how a tunnel is driven

through a hill, requiring tunnelling from opposite directions, the use of shafts, and so on, appear to be well formed. The dangers of navvying are shown by the representation of navvies tipping out of a basket part way up a shaft. Interestingly, the real basket in the performance never actually leaves the ground. The potential of theatre to form images of reality through fictional recounting is indicated here and we will return to this point soon. Children were generally able to explain what happened at various points in the play and the basic re-telling of the narrative line of the story was a strong feature amongst almost all of the children, again irrespective of their age. Their ability to recount in almost exact detail the action of particular scenes (sometimes with wordage from the script) was greatly increased if they were reminded of the scene by being shown a still photograph of the action. Typical examples of recall on having a visual image briefly described are represented by these extracts from several children:

Q: Two men stood in a basket rocking about. What's that about?

CHILD: They were going up in the basket after the shift and the stemmer got jammed on the rock and he tried to pull it out but the people at the top kept pulling the basket up and the stemmer was still stuck and he was holding onto the rope and the rod that was stuck and the basket turned over and they fell down and got killed.

Q: A man in a black cloak stood over the top of the other man wagging his finger at him.

CHILD: The vicar's just come round and he was blessing the navvy and he was saying have you been praying and he was saying "No I can't say I have really" and then he goes have you been reading the Bible and he goes "Ah well I've been thinking about that, well I've finished it, have you got another one for me" and he starts saying have you sold it for beer money and he comes down and he starts shaking his finger and he starts shouting at him and he says "Will you be ready when the devil comes?" sort of thing and he says "No I can't really say I will"

Q: A man with a rope tied round him, pushing a wheel-barrow.

CHILD: What they were doing was they were filling up a wheel barrow with stones and then someone at the top of the hill would throw down a rope and then they'd attach it round their waste and then the

person at the top would pull them up with the wheel barrow and if the person at the top made just one false move then they'd be off.

Q: The two men doing a little dance in a circle.

CHILD: It was where Gypsy Joe met Fighting Jack and they were just singing along and jumping around singing together cos they'd met each other before.

Q: A man with a top hat and a glass of wine.

CHILD: He was giving a speech on all the people who'd built the tunnel... no not built the tunnel... designed the tunnel, and they were thinking about how the tunnel was built but there's no mention of the navvies.

(24)

The remarkable accuracy displayed in these interviews is of particular significance in reminding us that theatre is a medium with great potential to convey knowledge and meaning through visual means as well as through words. It challenges theatre providers to consider whether the visual portrayal within a play should have the same academic rigour that word elements of scripts tend to have. The safeguards in writing scripts that can be edited and vetted, as cited by Daley (NMPFT), may stand for nothing if the apparent power of visual portrayal illustrated by these children is not working in tandem with the script's written text and the play's interpretative objectives. It further emphasises the need for clear contracts with audiences in signalling whether action is intended to be authentic, symbolic, metaphoric, and so on. The recall of whole scenes through visual cues also clarifies the whole question of plays having the duality in terms of being appropriate for both adults and children to which Leon (NRM) referred. Theatre can often work through a visual story-line to help children negotiate patches of dialogue not yet accessible to them.

Finally, the research considered whether "Running the Risk" had in any way enabled the children to become interpreters of the story in their own right and the place of navvies in railway history. Was there any indication that children had developed personal opinions about the events or had become emotionally engaged at any level? The research indicated that virtually all of the children in the group were able to relate the navvies lives to their own and had firm opinions about what it was like to be a navy. Generally speaking, the younger children thought it might be quite fun

because of the dancing and singing and "parties", but that it was also very hard and dangerous. Overall, they did not want to be a navvy. Opinions about the "unfair" treatment of the navvies by "the bosses"(25) were also virtually universal across the sample.

They were treated really, really badly, the conditions and stuff and nobody really cared less and they never got a mention and were just shoved aside when everything was done. They didn't get much attention really. When it was all done and they were all saying that the people who had designed it and engineers but the people who were the heroes who actually built it but they never got a mention.

Well I don't think it's fair that they didn't get a mention in the kind of thing afterwards. I don't think it was fair at all that their names weren't even said. All the credit was given to the people who designed it and things like that, instead of the people who actually made it and the people who died making it.

Very hard. In lots of different ways like in all the work you've got to put in but also there's all the travelling and if your families didn't go there's like you'd leave them behind for so long and if your friends died as well that would be hard. Not just the physical side of work.

(26)

Older children in the group extended these interpretations to include ideas on exploitation, cheap labour, the benefits of working rather than starving, and the recklessness of the navvies themselves. On the whole, older children did not want to be a navvy either because of the dangers, but they also would not wish to be like the contractors. They did not agree with the attitude of the contractors in the play and felt that they would personally wish to have more admirable values and a greater regard for human suffering.

Like the navvies were like a third class or a second class compared to the people with wine glasses, the people who designed the tunnel and everything. The people underneath were way below in class or whatever. They weren't really important like the man with the wine glass was really high up.

(27)

Some older children were able to express clear views on the play itself, to realise that it was told from the navvies' point of view and that there was more to the whole story than the play had shown.

I thought they were a bit cruel and a bit mean to put these people through it but in the 1800s things were different to what they are now. I mean it would be very rare for the navvies to come back and for it to be as hard as that. At first when I saw them I thought it was very cruel and they didn't even get a mention they were just thought of as the workers and the engineer got all the credit but I still think things would be different now to how they were then. Maybe that's just the way it was in the 1800s. You can't compare the two because they're totally different times and even comparing things from the 1950s it's still wrong because they're two different times and things are totally different than they were now.

(28)

Although based on a relatively small sample, this rare example of research into what visitors (children in this case) were able to learn from a theatre programme does indicate that whilst the capacity of theatre to transmit impersonal facts is poor, it is very efficient indeed at developing general concepts, background stories and specific details of events which are linked to the personal experiences of characters in the story. Further to this, visitors seem to engage with the play at a personal level and form both cognitive opinions and emotional responses to the characters and events. Why is it then, that the scripted format seems to have this capacity to engage at a feeling level, and does this attribute of theatre-in-museum have implications for day-to-day practice?

EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN SCRIPTED PLAYS

It is clear that some kinds of scripted work, in conjunction with the methodologies employed by the two companies in this case study, provide the right conditions for a feeling response to theatre-in-museum.

We had previously considered how the scripted format offers the visitor a whole story which leads, in turn, to the development of broad concepts and an appreciation of the background to events or matters pertaining to objects and exhibitions. It is in presenting a coherent story, often from several perspectives, that the scripted play provides a general framework for visitor understanding. It is also because of this holistic approach that visitors may engage with some plays at a feeling level. In these

kinds of plays, visitors build up an affiliation with characters to a point where it matters to the visitors what then happens to those characters. The formula for such plays is quite simple and builds upon an existing culture of story structures. It taps into the audience's subconscious appreciation of heroes and villains, of quests, problems, dangers and victories, of right and wrong, of triumph in adversity, and of conflict and resolution. Characters are presented as heroes, not in the sense of unblemished saints but rather as the characters in whom the story, and therefore the audience, will invest their own emotional stake-holding. Audience-affiliation to these characters is a pre-requisite to the visitors caring what happens to them. The character will be presented with a journey or quest, within which decisions will be made and various challenges faced. Ultimately the play offers a resolution though not necessarily an answer. Indeed, Action Replay and Platform 4 Theatre tend towards the Brechtian tradition of offering resolutions that, in turn, raise questions which the audience must fathom for themselves. We see this formula in Action Replay's "Women in Media" where the heroine, a young woman working for an advertising agency, faces the challenges of sex discrimination and must fight to assert her own equality as a woman in a predominantly male environment. Platform 4 Theatre, likewise create audience affiliation with Gypsy Joe in "Running the Risk" or with Beaver in "Live Wire". Both characters also face challenges and must make decisions. In one, the oppression of the tunnel contractors and their lack of regard for the safety of the workers leads to Joe's death, whilst in the other the naivety of Beaver and the peer pressure exerted by Flick to play on the railway lines leads to the death of Beaver. It is because the scripted play can create this close affiliation between the audience and characters, which can then be exploited, that a sensate disturbance is created in the visitors. It is through this sensate disturbance that an emotional shift is affected, leading ultimately to a contemplation of their own feelings about the events. Whilst affiliation may be created with gallery characters or living-history demonstrators, these forms can only ever relate the course of events through storytelling. In the scripted play, because there is freedom of movement across time and space and because the character does not tell their own story but rather lives it out before the audience, the audience can see for themselves what actually happens. It is not, though, simply some kind of voyeuristic witnessing of the trials and tribulations of these characters which engages the audience. It is because the play presents the characters, and through them the audience, with a number of moments where decisions need to be taken and challenges faced. It is because at any of these critical moments the course of the play can be changed and the ultimate outcome be different that the audience become stake-holders in the destiny of the character. They engage in a parallel journey of decision making, personally concurring or disagreeing with the character's line of action as it unfolds. In the NMPFT and NRM model of emotionally

engaging plays, the audience develop a strong empathy with these key characters and maybe even begin to see themselves reflected in them. If this state is achieved, then whatever happens to the characters happens to the visitor.

It is the opinion of these two companies that if visitors can develop this kind of emotional engagement with the play then that engagement will transfer to the museum itself. In developing such an investment in the life of a character their encounter with the whole museum moves, through the play, to a personal level. They become a stake-holder in the events portrayed in the play and because those events are inextricably linked with the subject-focus of the museum, then what the museum represents overall also matters to them. In this, there is a strong echo of the Great Exhibitions of the nineteenth century which were important for people's lives and therein lay their success.

Evoking an emotional response to a play, however, is not devoid of dangers. We have already considered how these two companies show great sensitivity to the emotional safety of their visitors through the setting of explicit play-contracts. Their pre and post-play routines go a great way towards protecting their visitors in any emotional journey that is to be made but they remain ever vigilant about this issue and maintain that they have never explored the boundaries of creating a feeling response to their work because of a conviction that work on the public galleries does not, at present, operate under the conditions they would require. The companies do not doubt their ability to ensure that audiences entered the event willingly and understood its parameters, nor do they doubt their ability to seriously challenge an audience emotionally. It is a question of what happens after a performance that makes them unwilling to push this work further at present. Susannah Daley explains her reservations on this matter:

If you try and go in there too quickly, you are in danger of leaving them dissatisfied or frustrated that you might have raised an emotion but you didn't deal with it in any way, you didn't allow any way of building it up or allowing it to come down or a resolution to a problem or whatever. I think it's even more important when it's in a museum because it's not a theatre so people aren't used to that convention and they're not even going home afterwards, they're going round the rest of the museum. I just think it's part of a function that we should fulfil if we're going to raise people's emotional state then we ought to give them the chance to have some sort of outlet.

(29)

This reticence to raise emotions which cannot then be dealt makes sense in the context of an educational theatre programme designed to encourage change and development in the learner. If we are to evoke a feeling response in visitors in the context of theatre-in-museum then it would be for the purpose of furthering the visitor understanding of the museum-subject in hand. Creating a sensate disturbance is intended to bring about a radical shift of perspective in how the visitor perceives a certain situation and it is grounded in an understanding of theatre art as being not only a technique but a way of creating a framework through which the world may be perceived and understood. But the creation of disturbance is metaphorically merely generating energy. It is in how that energy is directed that brings about new understanding. The process denied to visitors in the current model of scripted theatre-in-museum (in the context of NMPFT and NRM at least) is that of structured and safe reflection. If such scripted work were to be taken beyond the boundaries of emotional engagement explored so far, both companies in this case study would wish to be able to reflect upon events in the play with their visitors and this in turn implies that such plays are removed from public galleries, galleries where visitors could arrive late at performances without the necessary pre-play preparation and could leave early without the benefits of reflection. Sandra Bicknell (NRM) expresses this caution in saying, " I can't see doing it in a public space with a bunch of strangers. It does need to be in a controlled way and not on the public galleries. I think I'd want a different space where you knew the group and they knew why they were there." (30)

Bicknell raises both the issue of dedicated theatre spaces off gallery and the involvement of groups who knew why they were there. Whilst both groups agree that there are problems with presenting work of a very challenging nature on-gallery, it is the notion of a ring-fenced group that is perhaps more relevant at present. To extend theatre-in-museum to include in-depth reflection through discussion, drama workshops or through other media would be to ask members of the public to engage in a completely different kind of contract. The safety of the traditional actor-audience relationships which the scripted format itself along with the theatre rituals employed by these two companies offer would not be transferable to post-play reflections. Visitors would be potentially at their most vulnerable after a challenging play anyway, but to then seek open reflection with a group of strangers would not be a safe nor sustainable situation. That is why Action Replay's most challenging work to date has been with the ring-fenced client groups of school parties. In these situations the group know each other well, have a teacher to guide them through the process and arrive at the museum knowing that the play will be only a part of the process. Their

school learning agenda creates the overall contract in this model and reflection can take place within this safely.

Even within this situation, the real perils of dealing with material into which any participant, actor or audience, has not been properly contracted and which extends beyond emotional readiness was illustrated all too vividly in Action Replays project called "Where Do We Go From Here?" The play dealt with contemporary rites of passage and was intended to complement an exhibition of photographs of dead bodies which itself had caused controversy when it opened at NMPFT. Whilst the theatre programme itself was very sensitively dealt with by the company and was appreciated generally by school groups, the actors themselves were deeply distressed by aspects of the project and received counselling in the weeks after its conclusion.

Neither company has plans to attempt this kind of work with public visitors in the immediate future. If museums are to explore the emotional engagement of visitors not just in the context of theatre programmes but in any other way then the whole notion of offering safe reflection will need to be addressed. In the meantime, the opportunity for visitors to interact with the museum at a feeling level appears to work very successfully through programmes such as "Running the Risk" and "Live Wire". Sandra Bicknell (NRM) recognises that perhaps the most "radical shift"⁽³¹⁾ in museums since the great Victorian expansion of the late nineteenth century will be that which embraces work at a feeling level. If that shift does happen, then scripted theatre-in-museum may well assume a leading role;

...the current trend appears to be that we engage the emotions, so I think that what you've done with the navvies and Mrs Porter is probably quite at the forefront of thinking of what's going on in the museum and is likely to be more so as time goes on.

(32)

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CHAPTER FIVE

**"That leap of the imagination.
That leap of faith."**

A case study on the nature of visitor-in-role.

**Visitor-contextualisation and visitor-in-role.
Affective learning in museums..
Embracing the needs of visitors.**

CHAPTER FIVE

Theatre programmes which involve visitors being in role represent one of the less common forms of theatre-in-museum. About 29% of all museums using theatre state that they adopt this type although, as with living-history, there is a discrepancy between what some museums feel to be visitor-in-role and what will be recognised here as being of that genre.

Visitor-in-role, in its fullest sense, is unique amongst all approaches to theatre-in-museum in that it moves well beyond the frequently used technique of placing visitors in some sort of general context through which they are invited to view the events portrayed by the actors and interpreters. In such programmes, whilst the visitor may be contextualised as a contemporary of the characters being portrayed and may even participate in the action, they remain predominantly outside the fictional world of those characters. They cannot really be said to adopt a fully defined role through which they themselves will behave 'as-if' they were in the circumstance portrayed. They lack the prior knowledge of the situation, personal engagement in it, and influence over events that proper role-play requires.

In this chapter we make a clear distinction between contextualising an audience and offering visitors the opportunity to fully engage in role-play. We will discount theatre techniques of audience participation, voting and other simple levels of involvement and concentrate on those relatively rare examples where museums genuinely give visitors the opportunity to explore place, time and circumstance through the adoption of a role and the playing out of certain events.

Not only is this form of theatre unique because of the distinctive methodology adopted, but the learning potential of such activity is also quite different from other kinds of theatre-in-museum. In order to explore the rather complex nature of visitor-in-role, therefore, three case studies rather than the usual two will be included in this chapter to help illuminate the issues raised. Two of them, the work at Bradford Industrial Museum and at Wigan Pier Heritage Centre, provide important contrasts in approaches to involving visitors in playing the part of pupils in a Victorian classroom. The third case study centres on work at Clarke Hall Museum near Wakefield where visitors play a variety of roles within a seventeenth century farmhouse.

This case study will address five elements of visitor-in-role in the context of these three museums:

- outlining exemplars of work in this field including brief mention of the organisation and management structures of these three museums;
- identifying observable attributes of visitor-in-role in action;
- establishing aims and objectives for visitor-in-role and analysing the relationship between aims, objectives and methodology;
- differentiating between visitor-contextualisation and visitor-in-role;
- considering the nature of affective learning in museum contexts and the ability of museums to meet the specific learning needs of visitors.

EXEMPLARS OF VISITOR-IN-ROLE

Visitor-in-role work on all three sites happens in a defined space away from general viewing areas of the museum. Only visitors with a ticket can enter the classroom sessions at Wigan whilst, at Bradford, the room is on an entirely separate floor to which the general public have no access. At Clarke Hall, role-play days are closed to general visitors with only the pre-booked group being allowed in at all. In all three cases, visitors are hosted by a single member of the museum staff who plays the role of the Victorian teacher (Bradford and Wigan) or the mistress of the house (Clarke Hall). The visitor experience at these museums varies from a brisk twenty minutes in the classroom at Wigan Pier, to an hour-and-a-half at Bradford, to five hours in the seventeenth century setting of Clarke Hall. Visiting groups are either predominantly made up of school children or at least include them. This chapter will focus on these children as the nature of visitor-in-role is bound up with the concept of a ring-fenced group who already know each other and for whom the museum experience is only part of a broader learning programme. There is a general format to the day on each site but the extent to which each museum will shape their day around the needs of the visiting school varies enormously and points towards fundamental differences in their underlying approach to visitor-in-role.

A sample outline of visitor-in-role in action is offered here to help set the context for this case study. The following brief examples are offered as being typical of theatre programmes at Wigan Pier, Bradford Industrial Museum and Clarke Hall.

Bradford Industrial Museum was opened in 1970 as a Local Authority Museum. It occupies the site of the former Moorside Mills and comprises the mill building itself, built in 1850, along with the adjoining mill owner's house. In 1990, a row of nineteenth century back-to-back cottages was rescued from demolition and transported to the museum site. Also in recent years, the Horses at Work Museum, previously based in Halifax, was saved from bankruptcy and embraced as part of the Industrial Museum. The museum presents and interprets the industrial heritage of the area from the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution to the decimation of the local textile industry during the 1970s. Working demonstrations of the steam engines and looms exhibited here are offered at regular intervals throughout the day but the museum also has a range of traditional glass-case exhibits and temporary exhibitions with a local or industrial theme. Additionally, the transport gallery houses a range of vehicles once used in the locality. Away from the main building, the mill owner's house is furnished to represent a prosperous home at the turn of the century whilst the back-to-back cottages show working-class conditions of the same period. The stable-keeper regularly explains about the horses and horse-drawn tram rides are offered during the summer months. Meanwhile, back inside the main mill building, the fourth floor boasts a modern lecture theatre and the adjoining tiny mock-up of a Victorian classroom fully equipped with mostly original school furniture and equipment of the 1870s.

In 1985, furniture and other artefacts were brought to the museum from schools around Bradford to create a classroom for the specific use of schools studying Victorian education. Original ideas of transporting a small school building onto the site were thwarted, somewhat ironically, by a preservation order being imposed on the intended school and so the idea of a re-constructed school room evolved. In 1988 the entire operation was passed over to a newly appointed part-time Education Officer, Janet Davidson, who has been there ever since supported periodically by an assistant and, more recently, by a second part-time Education Officer. The room is used mostly by schools though there are programmes involving elderly people. The Education Officer follows each project through its full planning stage, plays the Victorian teacher on the day of the visit, and deals with evaluation and follow-up requests from the school. Regular users of the classroom may elect to self-service the visit with teachers from the visiting school becoming the Victorian teacher. The school room is used for six to eight out of the ten available half-day sessions per week throughout the school year and is a well known and popular venue. A budget of about £18,000 per year covers the operation, including salaries, but as the classroom is regarded as an integral part of the general education service of the museum, the theatre provision is

not seen in discrete budgetary terms. It should be noted that, in addition to the classroom, the museum has also pioneered a wide range of other drama, dance and theatre projects run by the Education Officers and professional theatre companies.

Before arriving at the museum, schools will usually have studied Victorian education and the class teacher will have agreed, with the Education Officer, the objectives for this visit. On arrival, children might go straight to the classroom or they may explore the mill first in order to build a context of half-time mill work of the period. On this occasion, a group of Reception / Year 1 children arrive in the Victorian costumes created by their parents in preceding weeks. Their teachers also sport period dress. The Education Officer, dressed as a Victorian school ma'am, but with her shawl still in her hand, welcomes the class and introduces herself as 'the lady who works in this museum'. She tells them that they are about to work as if they are Victorian children and teachers, and asks them to behave in a manner that would befit that time. It is made clear that the role-play will begin when they enter the classroom and will continue until the ringing of a bell which she demonstrates. This will allow these younger children to remain in the classroom for a post-role-play discussion in the here and now. The children line up and enter the classroom to sit on alternate rows segregating the sexes. The Victorian teacher, now with shawl in place, is firm but not actually frightening for the twenty-five minute session. By time the role-play ends, the children have written on slates, sung a hymn, drawn a leaf and repeated various phrases about children keeping still and quiet. One child is quietly consulted before agreeing to come to the front to demonstrate the back-board which taught children to sit up straight. The bell is rung, the teacher's shawl removed and they all come back to the present to discuss the differences that children have noted between the Victorian lesson and their usual lessons at school. Various objects are handled and questions from the children answered before they return to the lecture theatre for a final debriefing. The Education Officer re-sets the classroom and takes a quick lunch break before greeting the afternoon group of Year 6 children for their one and a half hour session. The next fortnight sees the 5-6 year olds continuing their Victorian topic and the walls of their real classroom are soon filled with pictures and writing about their Victorian day. Likewise, the 10-11 year olds work on this National Curriculum Key Stage 2 Study Unit until Christmas some eight weeks later.

Wigan Pier Heritage Centre opened in 1986 at the restored Wigan Pier canal basin on the Leeds-Liverpool canal. A restoration project evolved into a museum, housed initially in two canal-side buildings one of which contains The Way We Were Exhibition, known to most people simply as Wigan Pier. Other buildings around the basin include administration and education rooms, a pub, garden centre, exhibition

space and Trencherfield Mill. The opportunity to travel the short distance between the Mill and the main exhibition by canal barge make this museum a pot pourri of experiences spanning leisure and industrial heritage. The Way We Were Exhibition interprets the years from 1890 to 1914 and shows a harsh vision of Wigan as a northern industrial town. There are some traditional glass-cases and text panels but the over-riding approach is that of contextualising objects in re-constructed settings. An original railway signal box and reconstructed coal mines, shops, beach, public house and the famous school room dominate the exhibition. From the outset a team of actors have worked on site to bring to life aspects of Wigan around the turn of the century.

The Wigan Pier Theatre Company was established as a professional theatre company affiliated to but, in some matters, independent of the museum itself. In their early years the Company performed short scenes on the galleries and established the school room experience. In 1989, a previous actor, Edward Applewhite, returned for a second spell at the Pier and in 1993 became director. From that time, the Company has worked towards performing more formally scripted plays rather than the semi-improvised pieces which had dominated earlier. They work mostly within The Way We Were Exhibition but also use other buildings on site. Plays are generally about twenty minutes in length, though they can be much longer. There is a strong emphasis on entertaining visitors but this does not detract from the seriousness of some subject matter. As the only professional theatre company in Wigan, their work extends beyond the museum and into the community and there are increasing links with schools and the local youth theatre. Plays are researched and written almost exclusively by the director, Edward Applewhite and are performed to a fairly gruelling schedule, especially at high season. Plays can involve two, three or four actors at a time with a solo actor staffing the school room. It is the classroom which still captures the public imagination and acts as a magnet to many schools, particularly from surrounding Lancashire, and it is this that we will focus on in this study.

By time children queue outside the classroom, background work may have taken place though this is not as consistent as at Bradford. Teachers are given information packs about Victorian education and the classroom experience itself, along with an offer of complimentary tickets to come and view the site before their visit. Some schools will use the hour-long Spare the Rod workshop run by Education Officers and which outlines the child's lot in Victorian education. Some children, however, have missed the workshops and, being with a teacher who has not taken the preparation opportunities offered, arrive outside the classroom virtually unprepared for what is

about to follow. Alongside these Key Stage 2 children who are dressed in contemporary school uniform, adults also queue up with their 10.40 a.m. tickets in hand. The door opens and the stern teacher limps out with cane in hand. Harsh commands to stand straight and not to speak are given before the girls are ordered in followed by the boys. The teacher enters the room and reprimands the class, who have invariably forgotten to stand up when the master came in. The class is instructed to sing "All Things Bright and Beautiful" to a rapid tempo before several children and adults are brought to the front to sing it again, having not given their all. Coal, cotton and canals dominate the next few minutes with children and adults being selected to stand up and answers questions. A mixture of intimidation and humour flow from the teacher who draws laughs from the class or has a child rubbing chalk off the board with their nose. Some children are now rebelling by refusing to be silent and on occasions some are literally expelled. Before the session ends, children and adults hold out their hands palm down for a nail inspection, during which 'Jezebels' wearing jewellery are brought to the front for the rest of the class to shout "Shame." On exiting, the class are subject to a head-lice inspection by a monitor selected by the teacher before returning, usually with a mixture of laughter and animated chatter, into the main body of the museum. As at Bradford, children will invariably be involved in on-going topics about the Victorians and this classroom experience will be used by many teachers to further their studies which may continue for several weeks to come.

Finally, we consider Clarke Hall Museum near Wakefield, a move away from Victorian days to the latter part of the seventeenth century. Clarke Hall was bought by the then West Riding Education Committee in 1970, restored to its assumed original condition and fitted with mainly high quality reproduction furniture and household items. Following the devolution of local authority funding to schools under the 1987 Education Reform Act, Clarke Hall faced very serious threat of closure before being reprieved by Wakefield Metropolitan Council under whom it now operates. From its beginnings as a museum in 1973, Clarke Hall was conceived as a learning environment, almost exclusively for school children, in which the child visitors themselves could participate in activities designed by their own teachers. The Hall has always had a principal focus on history and, in particular, the Stuart period, but is equally used for many other curriculum areas. The Hall comprises a range of rooms fully equipped and intended to be put to their original use. The outdoor environment also provides space for maypole dancing, games and other activities.

From the outset, role-play was to be the principal medium of learning at Clarke Hall. Hall staff play the role of Priscilla but they are never seen as the focus of attention as at Bradford and Wigan. Here staff play a lesser role and it is the children themselves

who maintain the majority of role-play with their own teachers in support. There is a rigorous preparation programme for schools. Information sent out is very full indeed and teachers must, as a condition of booking, attend a half-day training programme. The learning objectives for the day are sent ahead to the Hall along with 'housekeeping requirements' which may include requests for the timed entrance of Priscilla or the moving of furniture to new locations. The day is controlled by the school teacher and responsibility for care of the Hall itself is theirs whilst on site. The day is linked to work in school and children, almost without exception, arrive at Clarke Hall in a high state of readiness. Whilst a day at Clarke Hall does have an outline routine centring on fulfilling daily tasks in the Hall, schools are welcome to be divergent in their thinking. Reception classes have used the day as a literary adventure with various fairy-tale characters making appearances. Sixth formers have carried out a full-scale simulation of shipping an historic site to the United States. Largely though, the day will involve costumed children and adults exploring life in the seventeenth century by remaining in role in the house of Benjamin Clarke.

On arrival, children may enter the Hall immediately and begin their role-play or, as on this occasion, the teacher may opt to use the adjoining modern classroom and run a drama session before beginning the seventeenth-century day. This class of 9 year-old children are obviously used to working in this way and have been exploring a Key Stage 2 seventeenth-century theme for some weeks. They have been building a drama at school and already have a good knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of various members of the royal household whom they are going to play for the day. When the group are confident of their roles, they move from the classroom back to the forecourt of the Hall and hammer on the door. Priscilla answers and an opening scene in the entrance hall stresses the dangers of travel on the open roads and shows Priscilla's concern that anti-royal rebels have been active in the locality. The play begins in earnest with the children setting about their duties for the day. The governor, played by the class teacher, runs a tough regime demanding the highest standards of food preparation, butter making and other household tasks. The governess, a parent-helper, is deferential but equally demanding of the royal children who must take their lessons in needle craft or studies of the New World in the dining room. By early afternoon the whole party are deeply engaged in their role-play, now some three hours old. In a move which is a real departure from work at Bradford and Wigan, and unusual even at Clarke Hall, the children have had opportunities to come out of role in a room stripped of furniture to provide a neutral environment. Groups have joined the teacher periodically for discussions about what 'those children out there' are doing and to discuss reactions to the events. Late in the afternoon, the Hall resounds to hammering upon the door followed by the re-entry of a terrified Priscilla

reporting that the Hall is surrounded by rebels who are demanding that the Royal children be handed over in exchange for the servants to be let free. The children enter a quite different phase of the day. After an hour of tense role-play and debate, and almost five hours after the 'play' began, the class return to the outdoor classroom along with Priscilla, now a museum Deputy again, to discuss the day. Both their exploration of a seventeenth century house and their experience of a dilemma emerging from the events of the times will be the focus of work at school for some weeks to come.

IDENTIFYING OBSERVABLE ATTRIBUTES OF VISITOR-IN-ROLE IN ACTION.

There are obvious differences in the work at these three museums. The preparation children receive for their role-play, the extent to which they play dominant roles, the time for which role-play will be sustained, and the extent to which the museum embraces the needs of the school, all vary. At Wigan Pier we encounter the additional variable of the museum attempting to serve entirely different client groups within the same session.

Having said that, even such diverse work quite clearly belongs to the same category of theatre-in-museum and we are able to observe the following range of content-emphasis in visitor-in-role work:

- exploration of what it might have been like to live in a specified time, place and circumstance;
- to empathise with characters through reflecting upon experiences gained by being in role in an authentic setting;
- undertake the thorough research necessary to engage with and sustain purposeful role-play in the context of the museum;
- illumination of general background stories and events which help to contextualise the subject-focus of the museum and sometimes specific items in, or whole categories of, the collection;
- demonstrations by museum staff in role, of exhibits or of quality reproductions;
- exemplification, by museum staff in role, of general or specific concepts related to the subject-focus of the museum;
- exploration of stories of particular figures, usually of the ordinary classes but could include those who invented something or did something momentous;

- a consideration, through visitors making decisions in-role, of the effect that a development had on the lives of ordinary people and of the benefits and drawbacks of an event or development;
- exploration of a range of curriculum-based areas of learning not specifically related to the museum subject-focus but which are enhanced by working in-role in the context provided by the museum setting;
- relating the subject-focus of the museum to the visitors' own lives;
- an involvement by visitors at a personal level, evoking a 'feeling response' to an element of the subject-focus of the museum or to other pertinent areas of learning.

Taking the examples, outlined above, as representing a range of approaches we can draw up the common attributes of this type of theatre-in-museum

Visitor-in-role programmes would normally:

- take place in a dedicated space where members of the general public cannot intrude on the role-play;
- be set in a specific time and place and assume a particular circumstance which participants will face together;
- require that all participants have a general working knowledge of the time, place and circumstance prior to the role-play event itself;
- explore a story package, which has a self-contained completeness about it, which may be museum-led or open-ended in offering extensive opportunity for visitor-determination of outcomes;
- involve visitors in a recognisable role-play situation where the implicit rules of role-play prevail and participants know that they are playing;
- involve visitors being informed before-hand about the nature of the role-play;
- involve visitors in choosing to go to the role-play area rather than encountering it on a random basis;
- be co-ordinated or led by a single member of museum staff who may be an actor/performer, education officer or other member of staff with a background in education;
- involve thorough research by such staff to provide support material to programmes and to ensure authenticity;
- involve a group of between twenty and fifty visitors at a time;

- involve visitors who already know each other as a group, and are visiting the museum with the specific purpose of entering role-play. Such groups are usually school children, though the elderly and other education groups are frequent users.
- be part of an on-going theme being explored by such groups, be subject to thorough preparation and offer opportunities for extensive follow-up;
- reveal to visitors, through role-play, a variety of content packages as outlined above;
- be lengthy events of an hour or more and sometime for a full day but may be as short as twenty minutes;
- be serious-minded and lead to visitors becoming totally immersed in a multi-sensory experience requiring both cognitive and affective responses to the event.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY.

Rather like Beamish and MOMI but distinct from the other museums studied so far, the use of theatre was at the centre of these museum experiences from the outset. Wigan Pier has never operated without the Victorian teacher nor Clarke Hall without Priscilla and role-playing children. Whilst Bradford Industrial Museum had been opened for some time before the addition of the classroom, the classroom space itself was conceived from the beginning as a place where visitors would be in role. To some extent, therefore, the global aims of the Victorian classrooms and of Clarke Hall so embrace the use of role-play that the notion of separate objectives for this theatre-in-museum activity is somewhat anachronistic. Nevertheless, the adoption of role-play is such a principal medium that the pursuance of an underlying rationale for its use is justified.

Wigan Pier has no written objectives for its use of theatre in general though the visitor brochure explains that,

The Way We Were is further brought to life by the unusual combination of museum exhibits and live theatre. Professional actors in period costume move around the Heritage Centre and from time to time perform short sketches recreating the atmosphere of Wigan at the turn of the century; its shops, pubs, and schoolroom, the drum beating Temperance Movement, and even the exuberant fun of the music hall.

(1)

The management of the schoolroom itself sits interestingly between the Theatre Company and the Interpretation/Education Unit. Although the Theatre Company provide the experience, it takes place in a space overseen by the Interpretation Officer and, in the case of school groups, for children booked in through the Interpretation/Education Unit. It is the Interpretation/Education Officers who also provide preparatory material and Spare the Rod workshops when required. Given this interesting spread of responsibilities it is perhaps not surprising that there is no single guiding steer, although it perhaps emphasises the need for one.

There is a much clearer focus to the work at Bradford and Clarke Hall and we once again note that the teaching background of the practitioners at these museums seems to be conducive to viewing theatre as a learning medium, working towards clearly defined objectives and committing ideas to paper. At Bradford, the ideas expressed in dialogue by the Education Officer are both full and well developed though documentation remains sparse. There are, however, one or two written statements to teachers outlining what they might expect to gain through their classroom experience.

By taking part in role-play in the Victorian classroom at the Museum, children and teachers will be involved in the re-creation of school life a century ago, when education had only recently (1870) become free and compulsory for all.

The classroom at the Museum, with its benches, desks and blackboards, aims to recapture the surroundings in which Bradford children did their lessons between 1870 and 1902.

The experience and knowledge given by the Victorian Classroom role-play will hopefully introduce challenges to what is already known and be a spring-board for future work back at school.

For younger children, the experience will offer ideas about similarities and differences in environment, curriculum and teaching styles. Older children might be encouraged to understand that school was a microcosm of the values of Victorian society and acted as a conditioning force. The Victorian Classroom experience raises questions ranging from:

- What were their homes like?
- What did their mothers and fathers do?
- What did they eat and what games did they play?

to:

- Why did they live like this?
- Why were conditions as they were?
- What brought about change?

(2)

Although these statements are relatively short and represent broad aims rather than specific objectives, they nevertheless indicate a clarity of purpose in the Bradford operation. There is no ambiguity in them and we are left with a clear notion of what children might be expected to gain from the role-play experience. Interestingly, the statements, as presented here, have been extracted from several pages of notes to teachers and do not actually appear together in this form nor specifically as declared aims. Indeed, the Education Officer was unsure that there were any written aims and objectives in existence at all,

We've never written that down. There's nothing like that in the yellow book. We've never actually set down the aims of the classroom and the museum's never required that.

(3)

Rather than indicating poor practice this suggests, again, that pioneering practitioners of theatre-in-museum are led as much by intuition as reason and that their practice is frequently in advanced of their ability to define it. The Bradford aims are noticeably child centred and indicate clear areas of potential learning for children entering the Victorian role-play. This is in stark contrast to Wigan Pier where the provision of a general experience remains the focus and the learning potential is much less well defined.

It is when we turn to Clarke Hall, however, that we find stated objectives of much greater clarity. The written statement for Governors, teachers and other interested parties outlines a range of broad aims and specific objectives.

Principles upon which this service is based.

The principal aim of Clarke Hall Educational Museum is to foster, motivate and enhance specific aspects of understanding within an authentic 17th century context. This aim, whilst primarily historical, applies across the spectrum of learning skills. To achieve this goal, interpretative role-play, drama and imaginative use of the collections within the historic environment of the house and its grounds, all play a

part. This factor applies to all audiences regardless of age, ability or creed.

We aim to provide a high quality of educational experience which is tailored to individual/class needs and which will consolidate understanding or motivate further learning, for pupils and teacher(s).

What Clarke Hall offers to its users.

We offer:

- for pupils, a total immersion, uninterrupted by members of the public, in a chosen role;
- for both adults and pupils, education, information, enlightenment, entertainment, motivation, and an enhancing of interest/deepening of awareness;
- the interpretation of documented and regularly updated historical knowledge;
- high levels of teaching, interpretative, interpersonal and communication skills;
- knowledge of the National Curriculum requirements.

The structure of the service.

What we aim to foster at all levels:

- total experience and exploration of the available collection;
- a high level of educational quality;
- use of the five senses to enhance understanding;
- development of imaginative, cognitive, moral and social senses;
- development of observational, questioning and interpretative skills;
- empathetic appreciation of moral dilemmas and challenges;
- promotion of effective and remembered learning with understanding;
- motivation, the wish to know more.

(4)

This document raises some fundamental issues concerning the use of visitor-in-role. The emphasis on the collection and site itself, is far less than that encountered in previous chapters with the main focus being the needs of the visiting learners. It implies that the museum has now become a context for whatever curriculum a school may bring to the Hall, rather than children coming to absorb the knowledge and

understanding the museum chooses to give. This is a radical shift and contributes to Clarke Hall's claim to be "a unique resource."⁽⁵⁾ Furthermore, this move towards the learner is bound up with involving visitors in fully-fledged role-play as we will see later in this chapter.

The six generic categories of aims established in previous chapters will encompass the work of visitor-in-role.

Creating an interface between visitor and museum:

The physical, intellectual and emotional access to museums mentioned by Bicknell (NRM) in the previous chapter come together through the use of visitor-in-role far more tangibly than with any other form of theatre-in-museum. Through the medium of role-play, the museum experience becomes concrete for visitors on many levels. No longer is it the demonstrators, gallery characters and actors who provide the interface between visitor and museum, but rather the visitor has direct interaction with the museum through their own body, mind and spirit. As Janet Davidson at Bradford Industrial Museum explains, the physical elements of the experience contribute as much as any spoken word and are as strong a memory for the child as are their thoughts and feelings about the lesson itself.

One of the things that children often refer to afterwards is how knobbly the wooden benches are and how difficult it is to write with a dip pen, how it scratches when you're writing with a slate pencil. In museums we often do handling sessions with objects out of context but actually working with objects in context works on that sort of level for children, too. All children have different ways of learning and we are covering a very wide range of ways of learning about what it was like to be at school in Victorian times ranging from quite intellectual things to very solidly physical things as well.

(6)

An additional interface, however, is also established with this work. In previous case studies it has always been assumed that the desired learning was actually centred on the museum itself and thus, to provide an interface between museum and visitor was to directly promote learning outcomes. As we are discovering in the case of ring-fenced groups, particularly school parties, the visitors themselves already have a learning agenda which may extend well beyond the museum. In the case of Clarke Hall especially, it is obvious that the museum context is seen as a catalyst for the development of areas of learning far more diverse than the immediate historical focus

on the Hall itself. Visitor-in-role, therefore, provides an interface between the museum and the specific, imported learning needs of the visitor.

Providing an effective and reliable service.

The visitor-in-role events featured here represent the most cost-effective theatre-in-museum programmes encountered in any case study. Each museum offers an all-year service (or at least all term-time, which is when their particular client-group require access), and they are run by a single member of museum staff at any given time. Not only that, the staff involved in two out of the three cases research, devise and prepare the role-play programmes, administer the entire affair, and actually run the role-play sessions with visitors, too. Indeed, so long as the preparation of teachers is thorough and the museum-based role-player effective, then the greater part of the event is generated by the visitors themselves. Clarke Hall's concept of the museum being a resource and museum staff enables, is elegant both in its simplicity of operation and in its complexity of being able to suit the diverse needs of schools.

Interpreting objects in the collection.

With visitor-in-role, objects are interpreted not only by being the centre of a story or subject of a demonstration but by being used by the visitors in the course of their role-play. Of course, many museums place objects in context by siting them in reconstructed settings and, in some cases, by having costumed demonstrators or characters handling them in the course of their interpretative presentations, but with visitor-in-role the visitors discover their own environment by playing in it. The interpretation of objects will arise through the actions and conversations that take place both within and outside the actual role-play and it is important that we remember that visitor-in-role assumes that the dramatic element of the visitor experience is only a part of the whole programme.

We have seen how the preparation for visits at these museums already informs visitors of the context in which they will work and this includes direct mention of specific objects that will be found on site once the role-play begins. Children will already know about slates, dip-in ink pens and the notorious cane before going into the classroom, and before going to Clarke Hall children will frequently have had samples of seventeenth-century furniture in their classroom for some weeks leading up to the visit. Equally, discussions and other work after the role-play has ended further contribute to the overall process of interpreting the site and specific objects. During the role-play itself, however, the interpretation of objects is derived through the direct use of them and through explanations about them, offered in the context of the roles being played. Not only are objects handled for their cognitive inspection, but

they are used by visitors to fulfil their original function through the frame of an assumed character in order to give the visitor as accurate a simulation as possible of the use, operation and purpose of such artefacts in the lives of the people who used them. This unique combination of handling objects in-situ and having opportunities to study them objectively outside the role-play draws together a cognitive knowing and what Janet Davidson refers to as "intuitive"(7) knowing and stands alone in museum visitor experience.

Interpreting the social contexts of the collection.

The interpretation of the social context of a museum is at the heart of visitor-in-role programmes. All three cases here are used to explore the human experience represented by each site and to deal with such concepts as the shaping of communities, the morality of child labour, societal values of class, creed and dogma, crime and punishment, religious intolerance, civil unrest, democracy, monarchy and revolution. The 3C's object-lesson at Wigan Pier, for example, emphasises the importance of materials, power and transport in the industrial age. Insistence on calling the teacher "Sir" or "Ma'am" reinforces the status of the child, specifically, but also illustrates a general value that everyone in Victorian society should know their place in the order of things. Role-play experiences are not so much concerned with the one-to-one correlation between theatre-programme and gallery as we have seen dominating work at MOMI, NMSI, NMPFT and NRM, but with providing broad brush strokes of the social context of the times. Rather than referring to the Hall or Victorian classroom directly, visitor-in-role programmes will aim to illuminate the world in which these sites evolved. The symbolism of such environments is teased out, often by tangential but nevertheless deeply significant words and actions which ultimately interpret the time, place and society which they so vividly represent.

Compensating for gaps in the museum subject-cover.

Visitor-in-role tends not to compensate for gaps in the museum subject-cover in the same literal sense as we witnessed most particularly in the previous two chapters. Rather than covering material literally shown nowhere else in the museum (as in the case of "Women in Media" by Action Replay at NMPFT), visitor-in-role programmes can be considered as an extended contextualisation. Not only does role-play take place in the setting of the Hall or classroom, but those environments are, in turn, contextualised by the lives of characters portrayed and the setting is explored through their actions. The compensation which does occur in visitor-in-role programmes at Bradford and Clarke Hall is that gaps between the usual museum agenda and the learning requirements of the school are filled. We will explore this idea more fully in the concluding pages of this chapter.

Contributing to the broader public profile of the museum.

Because visitor-in-role programmes are frequently associated with school groups it offers a unique opportunity to measure with more certainty, the role of theatre activity in promoting museum use. General feed-back to staff at Bradford suggests that the classroom is booked for between six and eight out of ten half-day sessions per week because teachers value the opportunity for children to work in one rather than simply viewing an exhibition. At Wigan Pier, marketing surveys show that after eleven years it is still the Victorian classroom that people remember and that most new visitors have already heard of it before they arrive. Over 40% of school groups cite the schoolroom as being the most enjoyable and useful part of their visit, the next most popular aspect of the museum drawing only 10% of the vote with other areas being well below that. The public profile generated by visitor-in-role at Clarke Hall is not so easy to quantify as there is no alternative use of the Hall on offer. Given an advanced-booking period of up to eighteen months, however, we can take it that schools regard role-play at Clarke Hall as an experience literally worth waiting for.

In considering methodology, the most obvious characteristic of this work is that the visitors themselves are in role and this does represent a very different kind of visitor experience. As Janet Davidson (BIM) observes, visitors are moved from the position of onlooker to participant,

This is the children actually carrying out physical, practical activities. What they're doing is integral to the experience. It's not just what you're doing as a teacher or the actor or whatever, it's what the children are actually doing. They're doing proper activities.

(8)

Once we adopt Davidson's notion of visitors undertaking proper activities which are integral to the whole experience and actually influence the nature of the event we are able to identify work which may be embraced as true visitor-in-role and that which essentially involves visitor participation.

It is clear, for example, that the work at Wigan Pier, particularly for the general public, invites the audience to participate in role but does not engage them properly. The session is short and the tasks (writing on slates, answering questions, and so on) are run through at high speed. There is little opportunity for engagement in what is effectively an entertaining twenty minute taster of Victorian classroom life. The rapid succession of activities cannot be regarded as proper in the Davidson sense as they

fulfil no purpose. The visitor has little time to fully absorb the experience for themselves nor to influence the course of events generally by undertaking such tasks. Their work, therefore, remains redundant and is more of a prop to the teacher's performance rather than enhancing their own appreciation of Victorian schools. Although during term-time the sessions edge away from the quick-fire entertainment (verging on parody at times) which characterises the summer season there is, in truth, little difference in the way the sessions operate. This is undoubtedly linked to the decision to ensure that the classroom remains open to the public even when schools are present.

Edward Applewhite, (Director-Wigan Pier Theatre Company) is clear that the classroom experience is more serious-minded for schools but does remain similar for all visitors.

It's stricter in terms of there being less emotion shown on the part of the teacher, there's less verbal banter. With the public it's not much fun if you're as nasty and horrid... They can see the glint in the eyes. The glint is the difference. There's a glint in the eye in the public school-rooms and there's not in the school school-rooms.

It's more authentic with the schools and more of a pastiche with the public. It would be exactly the same material. No material change whatsoever. Same lesson but the approach is different.

(9)

Julia Brian (Interpretation Officer at Wigan Pier), on the other hand, expresses a concern that even children in school groups do not treat the experience seriously. She bemoans occasions when they deliberately incite the chastisement of the teacher because it is more entertaining. The lack of historical accuracy, she feels, undermines the experience and she questions the judgement of some visiting school teachers in suggesting that such obvious flouting of authenticity should be considered as educationally valuable.

Teachers say that it's not just the most popular thing but also the most valuable experience on site. Now, I've analysed this at great length and I find this quite strange because of the way that the children interact during the course of the Victorian school room and try to play the teacher up, which is something that would never happen in a Victorian school room...purposely wearing rings, purposely wearing ear-rings

because they know the teacher is going to home in on that, things that wouldn't have applied in the year 1900, and I personally find that irritating.

(10)

There are obvious differences in what these two practitioners want from the Victorian classroom. Edward Applewhite is clear that the role of Victorian teacher is maintained as a popular but less challenging aspect of an actor's life at the Pier but is still viewed as a performance and as an exercise in the playing or "manipulation"(11) of the audience rather than it being an educational resource. Applewhite is confident that the work is well researched but he does observe that although their activities will "stand up to historical analysis....[he doesn't] know if they will stand up to historical scrutiny."(12) The transition from performing as an actor to actually drawing the visitor into an authentic immersion experience as a learner has not, on the whole, been made at Wigan. Having said that, the potential for learning is there and, on occasions, the authenticity for which Julia Brian (Interpretation Officer) searches does hold sway. Interestingly, the difference between sessions which are "serious and authentic" and those which are a "pantomime"(13) does not only hinge around the actors performance but also on whether or not the children have had appropriate preparation for their role.

In some cases the children are aware of exactly how they should be behaving and the whole experience is very historically authentic and the children get an awful lot out of it educationally, but when children who aren't very well briefed are playing up with each other or doing things that children in 1900 wouldn't have done then I think it debases it.

(14)

We will return to this point shortly, but Brian's comments imply that role-play by visitors is not to be regarded as a casual, random affair but as an event which does require particular thought and preparation. This further suggests that not only will the experiences of children differ according to the preparation given them their particular school, but the classroom experience for properly prepared children will contrast with that of the general visitor who might actually be sitting in the same Victorian session. We should remember the context in which this experience is offered for these distinct client-groups. For general visitors, the classroom is part of a day out to a heritage centre, not specifically to a museum and there an implicit emphasis on interest and enjoyment rather than on serious learning. For visiting schools, this experience may

be less useful in terms of supporting Victorian topics even though they are popular. As Julia Brian notes, "Popularity does not equal learning value."(15)

Bradford Industrial Museum and Clarke Hall, in contrast, run their role-play sessions with strictly defined ring-fenced groups. Preparation for the visit is invariably extensive and, importantly, will include preparation for playing a role. Though sometimes tense and dramatic, these sessions are generally a low-key affair. The explosive teacher of Wigan is replaced by the quiet tones of the Bradford teacher or Priscilla Clarke. Children work from gentle beginnings and, over a long period of time, become engrossed in tasks interacting with, rather than responding to, the facilitating adult. Janet Davidson (BIM) feels that the length of the experience is a contributory factor to children becoming involved.

They get more involved as time goes along. They can be restless when they get in but the combination of being told to stop fidgeting and 'Children should be seen and not heard,' and being given an activity to do... as time goes on, they get more and more into the role.

(16)

The emphasis at Bradford and Clarke Hall is on children behaving as if they were Victorian or seventeenth-century children and on them exploring that role through living out situations. Their prior understanding is essential in allowing them to behave as if they were in that time and place, but such understanding acts as a foundation for further exploration rather than remaining unchallenged and unchanged. They explore the historical world by being fully in role and not merely participating in somebody else's pretence.

This fundamental difference between Wigan and the other two sites is not surprising when we remember their intended functions. Wigan Pier is a generalist exhibition to celebrate the industrial roots of the area. It is a popular tourist venue with an emphasis on informed entertainment. This is not to suggest that there is doubtful integrity about the work of the museum. Far from it. The site and the educational workshops are thoroughly researched and the collection is displayed to high standards. The theatre work, too, is thoroughly researched but the emphasis of this skilful and dynamic company is upon the production of plays which will both inform and entertain visitors and generally enliven the museum. The emphasis of the company, however, is to perform and their work with visitors-in-role is not sufficiently differentiated from the company's general performance ethos to draw visitors properly into a role. The

company recognise that the classroom sessions have limited success but do continue to view visitors as respondents rather than partners in the role-play itself.

I don't think they're going to learn significantly more by being addressed personally. Probably they learn more by watching something rather than taking part in it because their mind is being focused on getting the next answer right, not that they used to read, write and do arithmetic. The brain and the adrenaline is pumping and people are thinking "I hope he doesn't pick me." Now at the point they're thinking "I hope he doesn't pick me" are they listening to what the teacher is saying? They don't learn in the school room, I think it's more a reminiscence. The children are probably only learning by having a workshop afterwards.

(17)

Whilst Wigan Pier is there to serve the public and to incorporate schools, the classroom at Bradford and Clarke Hall are there to serve schools at the exclusion of the public. The visit is viewed as only a part of what the children will be studying and Janet Davidson (BIM) has expectations of what children will already know.

I would be really shocked if they didn't know that Queen Victoria was on the throne before they came, because this isn't happening as a complete one-off, this is part of the whole curriculum that they're doing and, in fact, I'd dissuade people from coming too early in any term. I want teachers to feel that this is part of a whole thing that they're doing and that we're supporting what they're doing and also giving them material to go away to develop and to work on.

(18)

Not only do the children have some knowledge of the period but they also are prepared for the role-play. The class teacher of the five year olds featured in our example earlier explains what expectations the children had of their own role in the day.

I told the children again and again that the teacher would be strict. It's not because you're being naughty but that it is how a Victorian teacher would talk to the children so that they got to feel that she was going to be like that and they had to respond. They knew exactly what it would be and they were quite happy with that. They never were worried

about the teacher and not wanting to go in, they couldn't wait and it was more 'She'll be very strict, we've got to behave.'

(19)

By time these five year olds entered the classroom they were very clear about how they would have to behave if they were going to be like Victorian children. Janet Davidson's last minute reminder that she was going to be like a Victorian teacher and that they were going to try to be like Victorian children confirmed everybody's role. The children could now enter the classroom to experience what it might be like for children of that era given that all of them were going to behave as if they were Victorians and not as contemporary children testing the teacher. It is from this standpoint of behaving as if you were in another time and place that Bradford and Clarke Hall attempt to offer visitors the opportunity to develop a feeling response to their experience. These two museums strongly feel that the role-play is only beneficial to the visitor who is sufficiently prepared to be able to play the role in the first place.

A final element of the methodology is the notion of the museum adapting the role experience according to the needs of the school. At Wigan Pier, this is most evident in the workshops, though examples of catering for special educational needs do filter into the Victorian classroom itself. At Bradford Industrial Museum and Clarke Hall, however, building the role-play around the current work of the school is central to the whole operation. This clearly indicates the emphasis which these two museums place upon serving the educational needs of each group of visitors and their willingness to be flexible in their own approach in order to fulfil this.

Considering the aims and methodologies of these museums raises two general issues concerned not only with visitor-in-role but with institutions using theatre-in-museum at all. First, the extent to which museums understand the conditions under which visitors can properly play a role rather than being merely peripheral participants in theatrical events. Second, the way in which museums regard role-play in particular, but also museum visits in general, as part of a whole process for the school and the extent to which they are prepared to meet the visitors' own learning agenda.

VISITOR-CONTEXTUALISATION AND VISITOR-IN-ROLE

We have already indicated that we must differentiate between visitor-contextualisation and visitor-in-role and we will now examine this concept more closely. Visitors to the Wigan classroom seem to be offered a role as children but in reality there are few opportunities to respond openly to the teacher in order to find out

what it might have been like to be a child of that era. Visitors' contributions are invariably closed affairs and constitute predictable outcomes to set-piece moves by the actor. On final analysis, it becomes clear that whilst the work at Wigan Pier contextualises visitors as Victorian school children it does not actually engage them in a role. In this sense, it is closer to the audience participation in Action Replay's "Name That Toon", the casting studio at MOMI, or Platform 4 Theatre's "The Battle of the Gauges". In each case, the visitor views events through a certain frame but their personal shift is minimal. Furthermore, they simultaneously provide a context within which the actor can operate. "Name That Toon" without visitor-contestants, the casting director without visitor-auditionees and "The Battle of the Gauges" without a visitor-Gauge Commission would find the actors floundering in a dramatic vacuum. The actors need the audience to participate in the action in order that they can address them in a particular way and thus play their own role. In effect, the plays assume a cast larger than the one available with visitors being thrust into playing the crowd scenes whose part in the proceedings is pre-determined and virtually scripted. Even the free voting by visitors for broad or narrow gauge at the end of "Battle" simply leads to alternative rehearsed endings to the show which consider history as it was or as it might have been. In the Wigan classroom, the visitors merely provide a reason for the teacher to move through a familiar and well rehearsed routine. These Victorian children are contextualised extras on the fringes of the event and not role-playing stars at its centre.

The work at Bradford Industrial Museum and Clarke Hall, on the other hand, can be considered as visitor-in-role. The general role-play scenarios which are regularly used represent working frameworks rather than scripted events. Within this framework, children work as if they were characters of the era and respond to events which unfold as the day moves along. They are not, at short notice, placed in a context through which to view events as themselves but, rather, they adopt a role for which they have been prepared. The defining characteristics of visitor-in-role, therefore, are those of pre-knowledge, assent and preparation.

At the heart of all role-play is the knowledge that we are playing. The contracting of audiences into fictional situations, as explored in the previous two chapters, is if anything, even more critical when involving visitors-in-role. Not only do visitors need to assent to the role-play but they need time to prepare for such pretence. The fundamental nature of role-play is that participants must know who the characters are and in which time, place and circumstance they find themselves. These elements of play remain the same for all ages and must not be ignored if visitor-in-role is to succeed. The work at Bradford is characterised by careful contracting and preparation

and it is because children enter the role play both willingly and able to behave as if they were Victorian children that they can to glean the benefit of the museum's historical and sociological expertise in providing an authentic environment peopled by a well researched role-playing Victorian teacher. This clarity of contracting is obvious in Janet Davidson's explanation.

I welcome them into the museum and I explain that we're going to do some of the things they've been practising at school, things that people used to do at school in Victorian times. I explain that we will be acting differently to how teachers act today, but that that's part of it, and similarly we want them to try to imagine that they are children who work in a mill for half the day and go to school for half the day and that this is their school bit of the day. I make it very clear when we're lining up I say 'Right, from the minute we leave this room until the minute we get back into it we're going to be in Victorian times' and we do then, for the whole time, try to keep that going. When we come out of the classroom at the end I always say something like 'Right we're back in 1997 now.'

(20)

The contract is verified by our example five year olds who were quite clear that "her voice changed when we came back." (21)

Not only does Davidson's introduction to the session make it clear that a role-play is about to begin, which simply mirrors previously explored themes of contracting, but the need for prior knowledge of that situation comes to the fore and this is feature which sets visitor-in-role apart from other forms of theatre-in-museum. Here, programme providers must work on the assumption that visitors already have certain levels of knowledge and understanding about the situation which is to be explored. If a basic understanding is not shared by the whole group then the visitors cannot play at the same situation. Davidson echoes Brian (Wigan Pier) in asserting that there is a qualitative difference between pupils who arrive unprepared and those who are well informed about the children they are to play, their likely life experiences, their family structures, their values, places of work, leisure and education. In short, a virtual Stanislavskian approach, made appropriate for children, is adopted by teachers who prepare children properly. The staff of both the Industrial Museum and Clarke Hall are in no doubt that such preparation for a role is a detailed and time consuming affair but that it must not be neglected. Margaret Beaumont (Clarke Hall) is "horrified" by

some teachers who "think that simply by giving children another name they have given them a role."(22)

This concern makes sense of policies such as providing a half-day compulsory training for teachers intending to visit Clarke Hall and of the extensive preparation undertaken between school and museum before visits to Bradford. Far from seeing such preparation as excessive, we should regard it as a minimum for not to undertake it represents a gross misunderstanding of the conditions under which role-play will succeed. It is a curious feature of some theatre-in-museum practitioners that whilst it is commonly accepted, celebrated even, that actors must undertake rigorous research and work through extensive preparation in order to play a role, it can be assumed that visitors are capable of playing an effective role as a character about whom they know nothing, in a time, place and circumstance which are a mystery to them, and which they are launched into at a moment's notice. It is equally curious that some museums who stress the need for the academic propriety of this work should allow some visitors to "debase"(23) the entire event for all present in the name of visitor involvement. Once we accept the notion that successful role-playing relies on adequate preparation, we can better understand that the inappropriate response of some visitors at Wigan Pier which so dismays Julia Brian (Interpretation Officer) is not simply due to mischief on the part of those children. Pupils with no prior knowledge of their role are literally forced back into the present to draw upon the only behaviour that they do know which is their real selves. The teacher of our five-year old visitors to Bradford is quite clear that had the children not been able to perform their tasks in role, ensured through the careful liaison between school and museum, then the children would have literally been forced out of role in order to solve their problems.

She [Davidson] needed to know what they could do so they could be more a part of it. If she'd said to write the alphabet they wouldn't have felt part of it. I think they would have had to ask me which maybe you could say is bringing them back to the present day.

(24)

In undertaking such programmes, it is incumbent on theatre-in-museum practitioners to understand the nature of role-play and to be able to prepare visitors to undertake it. Practitioners in this field are more likely to draw upon the ideas of Heathcote, Bolton and Neelands and operate through drama-in-education techniques rather than relying upon theatre skills. The ability to create common belief in a situation and to not only maintain a role oneself but to facilitate others in behaving as if they were sharing that

same circumstance as an assumed character is a skill quite apart from acting or demonstrating. Here practitioners must create the correct conditions under which visitors can explore the human situations relevant to the museum from inside the drama not from without. In Victorian session, it quickly becomes obvious which groups are ready to explore these human dimensions, as Davidson explains,

It's very hard to describe, but when the children are in the classroom who actually understand what we're about, there's a sense of recognition and suppressed excitement that 'Yes there is something that corresponds to something I've thought.' Whereas children where there hasn't been any preparation, there's a lot of sort of uninformed looking around. It's very hard to explain but when you've done it enough times you know.

I don't mean that everything should be exactly like you expected. That's why I like to have unexpected things happening like I tell them that they're going to have a visit from the School Board Inspector next week. You see, some groups who haven't done any work in advance... I can say to them that the School Board Inspector is coming next week and it means absolutely nothing to them, whereas if the teacher's worked with a class... and certainly [Victorian] children would know about that sort of thing... it would all just make that much more sense.

(25)

Visitor-in-role, then, is partly concerned with gaining a deeper understanding of previously introduced material by pitching visitors' existing notions of, say, Victorian schools against a concrete context. They "make that much more sense"(26) of their existing knowledge by applying it to their imagined experience within the role-play. Without that prior knowledge, however, the events of the role-play remain meaningless and lack significance just as much as the coal object lesson lacks significance to a rowdy class at Wigan who fail to engage with the teacher's comments about their own assumed role-futures in the coal mines. Valid visitor-in-role extends concepts by building on previous understanding through a process of encountering new challenging situations. This does challenge museums to be very clear about when they are intending to simply contextualise visitors and when they intend to engage them fully in role-play.

Julia Brian (Wigan Pier) is absolutely clear that, "There is a qualitative difference between the outcomes of children who have had preparation and those who

haven't,"(27) and, in light of this, we cannot fail to question whether museums should embark upon visitor-in-role work at all if they have neither the management structures nor the practitioners with appropriate skills to involve visitors at a meaningful level in this kind of work.

AFFECTIVE LEARNING AND EMBRACING THE NEEDS OF VISITORS.

Because this work assumes that visitors have pre-requisite areas of understanding, visitor-in-role theatre programmes can target specific areas of learning which may be of a different nature to the general information gathering associated with some other forms of theatre-in-museum. The learning which will generally be associated with visitor-in-role relies upon a special relationship existing between museum and visitor.

The potential for emotional engagement explored in the previous chapter is very high when working through visitor-in-role. Although general knowledge of the subject area will be established in advance so that the child may play their role, processes associated with objects, the churning of butter, the weaving of cloth, the use of scratch pencils, and so on, continue to be relevant subject matter for the day itself. It is, however, what the children discover by exploring such processes, by working in an environment previously explored through books, and by living within the social context itself that becomes the chief concern of visitor-in-role. The emphasis is not so much on 'what happens', but what it 'feels like' for events to happen. Visitor-in-role offers a concrete experience to promote an understanding of another kind of living.

It enables people who haven't got an historian's training to experience or watch something being done.... in the case of the Ra raft or whatever, to watch them sailing it... to get pretty near to some elements of what it was like really. That's as near as you get. Being in that situation, which is another way of finding out, informs any other research I do in other ways. I get some intuitive understanding through doing these things which then helps me to work with factual things.

(28)

Davidson (BIM) refers to ways of knowing beyond the cognitive and indeed beyond emotional engagement, too. She is taking us towards an appreciation of an holistic vision of learning, both a left and right-handed ways of knowing a situation which provides both a literal and conceptual framework on which we can build more specific forms of research. She sees the model of visitor-in-role sessions as a sand timer. All previous knowledge is gradually brought together to a point of contact in

the role-session itself from where understanding will expand in a reformed shape and will include new insights. Her proposal that reconstructed experience in which one can participate is "as near as you get"(29) leads us to consider that visitor-in-role might be as sophisticated a form of theatre-in-museum as we will find. The observations by teachers of both the young and older children that the role-play "brought it [the Victorian topic] alive"(30) and that the classroom will "be what they remember about being Victorians [because] there was a complete involvement,"(31) suggest that the children have experienced the classroom with not only their conscious knowing but also their subconscious knowing.

The children in our exemplar of Clarke Hall programmes, too, were faced with an historical scenario which they, through their roles, became a part of. By the time they faced their crisis, they were well grounded in their roles as servants and masters and did not simply become engrossed in the dilemma facing other characters. "They're not sitting watching it on a stage but they are having to make decisions and they are involved in it themselves."(32) The opportunity for children to behave as if they were in the seventeenth-century farmhouse facing the problems that their characters faced potentially offers an insight into lives of the time that comes from within their own thoughts, feelings and imaginations. Guy (aged 9) reflects through writing on the moment when republican rebels surrounded the Hall and demanded the handing over of the royal children.

I felt a trembling in my heart, my mind, and the floor,
I was sinking!
Sinking down to hell before I'm even killed.
I was petrified from head to toe,
My mind was dizzy, the ghostly words dancing in my mind.
The rebels were terrorising, menacing and vandalising
Everybody and everything.
They threatened anyone who dared to speak.
It was like everybody in the whole universe
Was shouting and screaming,
'No!'
'Stop!'

(33)

Of course, this reflection raises questions over the kind of learning which museums may wish to encourage in their young visitors. There is no evidence that anyone in Clarke Hall ever felt like that but these are a young historian's thoughts and feelings

in the twentieth century, not those of a seventeenth-century child and should be treated as such. His personal reactions to the day indicate an empathetic bridging with people of another place and time but they are not so much intended to represent conclusions about the seventeenth century as provide a framework for future interpretation.

We must remember that not only do school groups have the opportunity for extensive preparation but they can also reflect at length too. The class teacher of the five year olds at Bradford believes that it is "the follow-up that made them home in on specifics.....it's there in the back of their minds but you have to bring it forward and make them think more about it and delve more deeply into it."(34) What had been restrictive to the emotional journeys of scripted plays explored in the previous chapter becomes the strength of visitor-in-role with ring-fenced groups with the theatre experience becoming a catalyst for future work. Guy has not concluded his journey with his writing but rather is now armed to interpret future research with the wisdom of his own personal experience. Having faced the dilemma of handing over one's own masters to save one's life or having decided to sacrifice all in loyalty's name, how much better prepared will he be to interpret historical sources which record the hiding of clergy in priest holes or the burning of witches in seventeenth-century England, or for that matter records of collaboration with Nazi troupes in twentieth-century Europe? Janet Davidson (BIM) is in no doubt that visitor-in-role assists in making a leap into a more sophisticated kind of learning,

Exactly like my experience of making that leap of the imagination, that leap of faith that I can experience things myself in my body here and now which actually give me insights into something that I can't *really* ever experience. Getting children to be in role is the only way I can think of for them to experience something like that. On a spiritual, intuitive level I would love a lot of children to have the experience that I know is possible to somehow get alongside or for a brief time to be other people. As long as you can come back from that and know that you are you but that you can still hang on to those insights and they'll help you with your studying and your thinking and all sorts of things for the rest of your life.

(35)

Quite clearly, the experiences being explored by these museums represent a radical departure from the approach of many other venues. Perhaps most radical is that the museum becomes a context for other kinds of learning not necessarily bound up with

the museum itself. Clarke Hall, in particular, is not wholly understood by other museum professionals and they are sometimes accused of "mucking about in mob caps."(36) Their work is distinctive in many ways, not least their willingness to reach out to meet the needs of visitors. The purpose of role-play at Clarke Hall could be as much to do with the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of young children as it is to do with the seventeenth century. The context of the Hall can provide a setting for contemporary issues so that the connection which these young learners have with the past is at a deeply personal and significant level. What is seen as sacrilege to some, in working imaginatively with a historical setting rather than adhering to only that which is known, is seen as sophisticated and educationally appropriate to others.

As Janet Davidson (BIM) points out, "historical accuracy is not always compatible with children's learning,"(37) and she has no trouble in defending historical anachronisms in the name of valuable experiences for the child.

I suppose sometimes we do things which are slightly anachronistic. There are some real purists when it comes to Victorian classrooms. For example, my predecessor used to insist that children wrote with their right hands in the classroom because that's what they had to do in Victorian times. What I say [to teachers] is that if you're going to insist on all the children in your class writing with their right hands in the classroom session, it's really important that you have some session during preparation at [your own] school where you make all the right-handed children write with their left hands, because I don't like the idea of singling out one group of children, even though they would have been singled out historically. I'm quite prepared to be quite strict in the classroom and be quite cutting occasionally but when it comes to certain things that would, I think, undermine a child's sense of self in the present, I'm not prepared to do that in the past.

I suppose any reconstruction of the past is always going to be an approximation and, in some ways, it's important that people doing this sort of work do keep that one step back and actually make sure that it isn't too distressing an experience for children.

(38)

Davidson is placing the learning of the child ahead of absolute historical accuracy and by doing this, is recognising that the museum experience is only a part of an on-going

learning process for these visitors. She is making full use of knowing in fairly exact terms just what visitors will know before they arrive and what they may go on to do in following weeks. The awe-effect, referred to by Muirhead (Beamish) in Chapter Two is very high at Bradford and Clarke Hall which leaves us with a distinct impression that not only is their work educationally sound but, in marketing terms too, rather shrewd.

They'll remember that as long as they live. I honestly feel that when they grow up they'll remember going to that classroom because of the impact. All eyes were on her. Even to their solemn faces, they just responded to the occasion. It was amazing how they sat up straight and things like that. They had to be with her. I can't just sit at a bench and just go into a trance, here comes a slate, I've got to pass it on, I've got to pass the pencils that way, it was all ways of keeping their attention. They *had* to take part.

(39)

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- (38) Interview: Janet Davidson- BIM.
(Bradford. August 1997)
- (39) Interview: Elaine Aggis- Class Teacher (Visiting BIM).
(Bradford. October 1997)

CHAPTER SIX

"The people having their say."

A case study on the nature of re-enactment.

**Authenticity and theatre as a research tool.
Mass spectacle, festival and celebration.**

CHAPTER SIX

About 29% of all museums using theatre include re-enactments in their work making this, along with visitor-in-role, one of the less common forms of theatre-in-museum. Because re-enactments involve an attempt to fully re-create events, either specific ones, such as battles, or general ones, such as the daily tasks of a seventeenth-century house, they also fall into the troublesome category of living-history which was explored in Chapter Two and to which almost half of all museums subscribe. What is particularly striking about this type of theatre-in-museum is that it is overwhelmingly undertaken by outside providers. About 90% of re-enactments are provided solely by outside groups or a mixture of museum staff and outside groups. Of course, other forms of theatre-in-museum are provided by outside agencies to some extent, but re-enactments stand alone in being events for which museums almost exclusively embrace the expertise of others. They are most likely to take place on an annual basis at any particular museum or site, although the re-enactment groups themselves will be active much more frequently serving, as they do, a whole range of venues. These venues are invariably those which represent total environments such as a known battle field or an historic house. Although it is less usual, re-enactments are sometimes staged at non-historic sites such as the city-centre location for the Viking battle commissioned each year by the Jorvik Viking Centre and which will be explored in this chapter. It would be highly unlikely, however, to find re-enactments taking place on a single gallery within a museum which was otherwise operating as usual, as such a transitory experience for the visitor in-amongst their visits to other galleries would work against the total immersion nature of this work.

This total immersion pertains to re-enactors and visitors alike. Unlike other forms of theatre-in-museum, however, the event is not solely geared to enlighten the visitor with an understanding which is already held by the interpreter. Indeed, it will usually only be the re-enactors themselves who experience the whole event, often lasting for several hours or even days, and it is conceivably they who gain the greater insight into the meaning of the re-enactment. Whether they be specific events such as the Battle of Brunanburh, or general ones such as the daily management of Oakwell Hall, re-enactments involve participants in living at life rate in a particular circumstance. Re-enactors carry out the tasks assigned to their character and literally live out the event in an attempt to faithfully re-create the experience of that character in that time and place. Within this brief there are obvious safety considerations which limit the reality of battle re-enactments, and these will be addressed a little later in this chapter. Let us assume for now, however, that re-enactors are more concerned with behaving inwardly to themselves and to each other than they are with performing outwardly to

the visitor. They are of course fully aware that they are also concerned with the instruction and entertainment of visitors and are generally both skilled and professionally minded in ensuring that visitors can see and hear what is happening. Nevertheless, visitors are mainly onlookers into the world of the past and are usually assumed to be invisible to the characters. Dialogue between characters and visitors is entered into, and in some cases encouraged, but the convoluted conversations about televisions and videos which we encountered on the galleries of MOMI and NMSI in Chapter Three are avoided by the groups adopting dramatic conventions which bridge the gap between the here and now and Viking York or post Civil-War Oakwell. In many ways, re-enactments are not performances and, as with Beamish, they are not quite theatre but nevertheless remain theatrical. Because that theatricality is bound up with their educational mission they may be considered as theatre-in-museum.

As these events are mainly provided by re-enactment groups rather than by museums, this case study will consider two such groups. When viewing their practice as theatre-in-museum, however, their activities only make sense in the context of their host museums and this will be accommodated in this chapter. History Re-enactment Workshop, an innovatory London-based group concerned with the recreation of everyday life in the late seventeenth-century, will be studied in the context of weekend-long re-enactments at Oakwell Hall near Batley. Regia Angelorum, probably the country's leading Viking re-enactment group, will be considered for their battle re-enactments at the annual Viking Festival staged by the Jorvik Viking Centre in York.

This case study will address four elements of re-enactments in the context of these two groups and their host museums:

- outlining exemplars of work in this field including brief mention of the organisation and management structures of these groups;
- identifying observable attributes of re-enactment in action;
- establishing aims and objectives for re-enactment and analysing the relationship between aims, objectives and methodology;
- considering the nature of theatre-in-museum in the context of mass spectacle, festival and celebration.

EXEMPLARS OF RE-ENACTMENTS

At first glance, there is an enormous contrast in the work of these two groups. History Re-enactment Workshop will typically involve ten to twelve members undertaking domestic chores in the intimate setting of a seventeenth-century hall. Much of the time they will be observed by, or interact with, small numbers of visitors who gather closely to study needlework or scrutinise the preparation of the mid-day meal. Regia Angelorum, on the other hand, stage mass events usually outdoors in some vast arena. At the Jorvik Viking Festival they will frequently involve three hundred re-enactors clothed as Vikings and Saxons re-creating battle scenes in front of crowds of over three thousand visitors kept away from the battle arena by safety barriers.

On closer inspection, however, it becomes evident that the groups share key elements of their aims, methodology and organisation and are clearly of the same genre. Interestingly, both evolved by breaking away from other re-enactment groups which had represented the mainstay of societies, usually concerned with battle re-enactment, during the mid-1980s. In breaking rank with English Civil War and Viking battle re-enactment societies respectively, History Re-enactment Workshop and Regia Angelorum forged a new kind of re-enactment group concerned with high levels of authenticity, historical rigour, and educational worth. They distanced themselves from what they perceived as being too casual, sometimes wildly inaccurate and the frequently self-indulgent activities of weekend battlers. Regia still does undertake battle re-enactments but they are equally concerned with the broader culture, skills and crafts of tenth century Britain. History Re-enactment Workshop left the battle field altogether to concentrate on the domestic scene of the late seventeenth century. In re-creating specific events or presenting general scenarios representative of the period, authenticity and the academic validity of their work are paramount for both groups.

In this form of theatre, there is a distance between the re-enactors and the public. In the case of History Re-enactment Workshop, where the work is often intimate, this distance is conceptual rather than physical. Characters inhabit their own world oblivious to the presence of their twentieth-century visitors. The channels of communication, established so that visitors may speak with the characters from the past, are carefully controlled so that the re-enactment continues uninterrupted. In Regia Angelorum's work, the distance is physical and very obvious. In both cases, visitors are onlookers to another world rather than being directly demonstrated to, performed to or being part of the role play itself as in other forms of theatre-in-museum. As in the case of visitor-in-role, encounters with re-enactors can be lengthy affairs.

Like at Beamish, there is an important awe element to re-enactment which is at their very core. Although generally quiet in nature, being in a complete environment brought to life by History Re-enactment Workshop is a multi-sensory experience which can have a profound effect upon visitors. Being exposed for several hours to the language, sights, sounds and smells of another time is seductive and leaves a lasting impression. In contrast to this quietude, the mass spectacle of hundreds of men, women and children marching to the battle arena, the flying of banners, the clashing of weapons and the chants of the combatants has an immediate and enormous impact on visitors who are further awed by being part of a crowd of thousands watching the battle unfold.

It should be noted that the variety of work undertaken by these two groups is vast, but a sample outline of re-enactment in action is offered here to help set the context for this case study. The following brief examples are offered as being typical of the work of History Re-enactment Workshop (HRW) in the context of Oakwell Hall and Regia Angelorum in the context of battle re-enactments for the Jorvik Viking Centre.

HRW was established in 1984 after an event staged by the English Civil War Society at Lincoln Castle. The week-long project, which was the subject of a BBC documentary, included a battle re-enactment at the weekend, involving almost a hundred combatants, and quieter, more domestic activities in the encampment, aimed at local schools, during the week. Following the event, Andrew Robertshaw, a former member of the English Civil War Society who is based at the National Army Museum in Chelsea, felt that the domestic focus which had involved a very small number of re-enactors had been by far the more successful element of the Lincoln experience. Consequently, he gathered together a few re-enactors who were also keen to leave the battles behind and established the History Re-enactment Workshop which would be dedicated to exploring the lives of ordinary people in the late seventeenth century. The Workshop (as they simply refer to it) was to be experimental from the start and has remained an innovatory organisation ever since. In their attempts to represent faithfully the lives of people in the seventeenth century, they are as concerned with the furtherance of their own knowledge and skills as they are with presenting to the public. They meet about once a month for a series of workshops (hence the name of the group) at which they will learn relevant skills, visit historic sites or receive lectures on anything from seventeenth-century funeral rites to the architecture of period homes. Many of the group are archaeologists, historians or museum professionals and whilst they do not regard themselves as actors, they do realise that, in communicating with the public, they must aspire to being at least performers. To

this end, they occasionally invite a local actor to give workshops on presentation skills under the name of "trust workshops."⁽¹⁾ They will typically embark on four or five re-enactments each year at different venues around the country and mostly well away from their London base. They take with them a vast array of furniture, props and other artefacts through which they can transform a period "house into a home."⁽²⁾ Indeed, the group has built up some £12,000 worth of quality reproductions. Once on site, they inhabit the building as characters which have been decided upon beforehand. They manage the site throughout one or more days allowing visitors to gain a sense of the tasks necessary to maintain such a home. Their distinctive feature is that a number of group members, dressed in red t-shirts, act as interpreters for the public and will assist visitors in communicating with the seventeenth-century characters. The t-shirted staff are in the here and now and can help by answering questions to which the characters would not properly know the answer, as well as generally facilitating conversation between character and public. The group receives a fee from the host museum but the re-enactors are not paid for their time, all of the proceeds going to the group, which is becoming a registered charity, and which manages to operate on about £6,000-£8,000 per year. In his pursuit of further experimentation, Andrew Robertshaw left the Workshop in 1997 and is establishing a new group called Hoi-Poloi which will focus on the serving classes of the same period and will include work with museum-studies undergraduates.

On this occasion, Workshop has been commissioned by Oakwell Hall for their special event running under the heading of The Past Brought to Life. Oakwell is one of a number of seventeenth-century houses in the north of England which presents and interprets the life of a moderately wealthy estate of the period. The Hall is usually furnished with original furniture and artefacts and helps visitors understand the site and its collection through traditional labelling and guidebooks. The Hall also runs a series of special events for the public as well as maintaining an on-going education service for schools. Oakwell first booked HRW in 1990. In 1993 they were a venue for the Workshop as part of the Go Live theatre-in-museum festival mentioned in Chapter One. By 1996 visitor attendance to the Workshop weekends had fallen off and the Hall decided that it could not afford to underwrite the expense of this event and has not commissioned the group since.

On arriving at Oakwell Hall, visitors have the opportunity to visit the barn prior to entering the hall itself. The barn is an orientation centre for the weekend and includes some displays about HRW and how the weekend will be run. Andrew Robertshaw visits the barn from time to time to explain to visitors about life in the seventeenth century but, most importantly, to offer guidelines for engaging with characters. On

entering the hall, visitors are free to wander at will and they encounter characters on a random basis. Re-enactors sometimes work in a room alone but more often than not, characters gather in pairs or groups so that the social life of the house is teased out. Some visitors are content to simply observe the re-enactors at work or to eaves-drop on conversations without interacting with the characters, though they do always receive brief acknowledgement and a welcome to the room. The red t-shirted interpreter will chat with visitors and will suggest questions or lines of conversation in which the visitor may wish to engage. Some take up the opportunity and conversations gradually become a feature of the day as later visitors gain encouragement from hearing conversations already going on as they arrive. Should questions be put to the re-enactors which are beyond their character's assumed knowledge of the world, the re-enactor will politely hand the visitor back to the red t-shirted interpreter before retreating into their own world and getting on with the task in hand. During the day, the full gamut of domestic activity inside and outside the hall will be seen. The day has been run as if two hours behind real time. In this way, visitors arriving as the Hall opens at ten o'clock will see the master of the house rising to be aided by his servants in washing, shaving and dressing. The time difference is maintained throughout the day so that as the hall reaches its busiest visitor period in the early afternoon, the characters gather for their mid-day meal. Whilst most of the day has involved intimate scenes involving one or two characters and a small number of visitors in any given location, the mid-day meal (at two o'clock) tends to bring together most visitors and re-enactors. The Kitchen proves to be too small for this part of the day and the meal is switched to the Great Hall. Tables are spread out to get visitors closer to the action and also to remind the re-enactors to speak out in conversation with each other so they can be heard at the back. Oakwell Hall staff close off the balcony which has become a favourite viewing spot as they fear overcrowding of this tight and potentially dangerous location. Once the meal is underway, Andrew Robertshaw decides to divert some of the visitors by announcing that the meal will be going on for some time and that some visitors may wish to visit outside where traditional tree felling is about to happen. The afternoon period settles back into a routine of general tasks around the hall and visitor-numbers dwindle. Re-enactors are sometimes left in a space with no visitors at all but activity continues as the re-enactors' concern is to live out the day as if they were those people and learn from the experience, whether there be observers or not. Those visitors who do remain into the late afternoon will witness the end-of-day ceremony as re-enactors gather to take off their hats and wigs and introduce their real names to the audience. The visitors applaud, the re-enactors keep their hats off and remain in the here and now whilst they chat with visitors and then prepare for the following day.

Regia Angelorum was also formed in the mid-1980s when a few members broke away from an existing national battle re-enactment society. In 1986 Kim Siddorn, who is a mechanic based in Bristol, was invited to stage a battle re-enactment at Hastings. For some time, he had been leading a small group of battle re-enactors towards developing more authentic clothing, weaponry and battle technique. His Bristol group were becoming recognised for being superior to other groups in research and authenticity of appearance and were certainly stunningly successful in battle where the strict rules of engagement do allow for technically more skilled re-enactment armies to win. His acceptance of the Hastings contract without reference to the national body led to the Bristol branch being dismissed from the society and they took this opportunity to begin their own group under the name of Regia Angelorum. They rejected the broad period portrayed by other societies, which floated roughly between pre-Roman Celts to the third Crusade, and settled down to re-create the lives of the people of Britain in the century leading up to the Norman Conquest. Regia has now expanded to become a society with a membership of some five hundred participants. They are organised on an area basis with the Chair of each area representing their members at the national council with the Viking name of the High Wittan. Kim Siddorn, as National Organiser, receives commissions from wide ranging clients including the Jorvik Viking Centre, other heritage sites or museums, international garden festivals, various borough councils and from film and television. Members are notified of events and a strict date-line is given to enable re-enactors to arrive with accurate clothing and equipment. Authenticity Officers ensure that no-one enters re-enactments with the wrong 'kit' and Masters-at-Arms ensure that battles are competently and safely undertaken. Their non-battle activities are supported by equipment sufficient to create an enclosure of over fifty tented structures complete with crafts of the time. A remarkable eighty-four foot long palisade standing twelve feet high and taking three days to construct can be erected for events. Regia Angelorum owns the largest known fleet of (eight) fully operational replica Viking ships and boats and can call upon an equine element, archery and a host of other skills and crafts of the time. They will provide anything from one or two members to visit a school to over three hundred to re-enact a battle or create a tented enclosure. Like History Re-enactment Workshop, members work for no remuneration and all money goes back to the society. Handling accounts of any dimension from £250 for a school visit to £46,000 for their part in the BBC's 'Ivanhoe' series and owning a breathtaking array of equipment and artefacts, this is an enormous operation.

Although Regia Angelorum aims to re-create the lives of the people of pre-Conquest Britain in many respects, it is for their Viking battle re-enactment that they are commissioned by the Jorvik Viking Centre at York. The Centre itself has a mission of

educating visitors away from the horned-helmet mis-conception of Vikings and towards understanding them as an expanding, invading people with a rich and diverse culture. Jorvik Viking Centre was opened in 1984 after the spectacular discovery of Viking remains during a building development in the centre of York. The famous time-cars take visitors through a re-created Viking village before entering the remains of the original archaeological dig itself. Visitor numbers of around 900,000 per year were common in the early days though they have dropped to about 600,000 more recently. The February Viking Festival was born out of a marketing idea soon after the centre opened and was intended as an out-of-season campaign to boost winter numbers but also to raise the profile of Jorvik generally. The idea has since become an institution and the Centre recently ran the Festival for the thirteenth time. In 1996, the in-house staff handed the running of the Festival over to a PR firm (Partners PR) so that they could concentrate on interpreting Viking life for visitors to the Centre. Both Partners PR and Jorvik Viking Centre have great faith in the authenticity brought to the event by Regia and it is because they are perceived as successfully mixing academic propriety with popular appeal that they continue to be the centre-piece of the week-long event.

Visitors to the Festival gather around the large grassed traffic roundabout under Clifford's Tower and in the grounds of the Castle Museum well in advance of the advertised time for the battle. The arena resembles a sporting venue with the crowd packing the perimeter, police on duty, a public address system playing atmospheric music, and first-aid staff in attendance. A little before the due time for battle Kim Siddorn, in Viking attire, takes the hand-held radio microphone and begins a commentary. His voice is measured and he sets the scene for the Battle of Brunanburh. Eventually a distant cry is heard and soon the first column of re-enactors clothed as the occupying Saxon army run into the arena and take up their position for battle. In the crowd, cameras are raised to capture the moment and professional film units move into action. The commentary moves on and a sense of anticipation builds as the awaited Viking hoard approaches. Finally, they too burst into the arena and stand facing the Saxons. Various parleys are attempted and the odd preliminary scuffle takes place. All the time, Kim is narrating over the event, explaining the rules of tenth century engagement and interpreting the action for the visitors. After a lengthy introductory stage a group of Viking warriors break rank and charge the Saxons. The crowd noticeably become alert and they strain to see. It becomes clear that they have come to witness the clash of arms and the spectacle of battle. The warriors pull back from the skirmish and re-group before we move into a succession of tactical moves, charges, fights, and retreats. The tempo of the action and the commentary rise to a climax as the Saxon army is eventually slaughtered by the

Vikings amid screams and war-cries. To the amusement of the crowd, the Saxon army is raised from the dead by the narrator in order that they can demonstrate further aspects of the battle before being slaughtered for a second time. The battle draws to a close over an hour after it began with the warriors mustering in the centre of the field facing the crowds on all sides. The narrator invites the crowd to imagine what it might have been like to face a warring army over a thousand years ago and then the cue is given for the warriors to scream and charge at the crowd pulling up only feet away. The crowd applaud and the re-enactment is over. The event has not finished altogether, however, for the re-enactors, this time in the here and now, interact with visitors explaining their period clothing and equipment and demonstrating particular military moves which had been going on in the battle. Some visitors remain for quite some time asking questions and the re-enactors are keen to explain what they know. Meanwhile, Kim moves amongst the crowds giving out information packs to visitors and inviting new members. Most visitors have drifted away now into the surrounding shopping centre but some remain to see members of Regia enjoying an un-rehearsed battle simulation where there are no loyalties and the winner is the last one still on their feet. The rules are strict with only certain parts of the body allowed as targets and strikes to be no harder than a hand-slap. After a while, this too concludes and visitors leave. The York battle is ended for another year and only one member of Regia Angelorum has been taken to the ambulance. The group are assured that he will be fit to fire an arrow at the popular boat burning ceremony on the River Ouse later that night.

OBSERVABLE ATTRIBUTES OF RE-ENACTMENTS

There are major differences in how these different kinds of re-enactments manifest themselves to the visitor. Even so, these two events do belong to the same general category of theatre-in-museum. We see both groups attempting to bring to life, in as authentic a way as possible, events and types of events from the distant past. The two groups have evolved out of the same misgivings about the very broad approximations of other societies and they are painstaking in their search for academically supported re-creations of past ways of living. We are able to observe the following range of content-emphasis in re-enactment work:

- to explore, through re-enactment, what it might have been like to live in a specified time, place and circumstance;
- to empathise with characters of the specified time, place and circumstance;
- to research through the recreation of circumstances and practical application, as well as through traditional methods, the skills and

- processes of crafts, trades, commerce, transport, leisure, warfare, and domestic duties
- illumination, through re-enactment, of general background stories and events, usually in a specific place, time and circumstance, which help to contextualise the subject-focus of a museum or site and sometimes specific items in, or whole categories of, a collection;
 - demonstrations by re-enactors in role of quality reproductions of authentic equipment;
 - exemplification, by re-enactors in role, of general or specific concepts related to the subject-focus of the museum or site;
 - the exploration of stories of people who lived and worked in a particular time, place and circumstance, usually of the ordinary classes but could include famous figures;
 - a consideration of the effect that an event had on the lives of ordinary people including benefits and drawbacks;
 - relating the subject-focus of a museum or site to the visitors' own lives;
 - an involvement by visitors in stories and events at a personal level, evoking a 'feeling response' to an element of the subject-focus of the museum or to other pertinent areas of learning.

Taking the examples, outlined above, as representing a range of approaches we can also begin to draw up the common attributes of re-enactments.

Re-enactment programmes will normally:

- be set in a specific time and place, as represented by the museum or site, and will assume a particular circumstance which participants will face together;
- be co-ordinated or led by an outside agency specialising in a particular period and type of re-enactment and whose skills, knowledge and understanding are recognised by the museum;
- involve groups of visitors which may vary from small numbers to mass crowds of three thousand or more;
- represent a special event for both the museum/site and visitors alike, often set in the context of holiday programmes or special festivals and anniversaries;
- explore a whole story package which has a self-contained completeness about it;

- involve clear information being given to visitors before-hand through publicity literature or re-enactors on site, about the nature of the re-enactment, its content, length, and so on;
- involve visitors in choosing to go to the re-enactment area rather than encountering it on a random basis, though there may be a random element to the order in which re-enactors are discovered;
- involve thorough research by members of the re-enactment groups to ensure authenticity;
- reveal to visitors, through re-enactment, a variety of content packages as outlined above;
- be lengthy events of an hour or more, often for a full day and sometimes for up to a week;
- involve re-enactors working alone or in groups on site for very long periods of time;
- be serious-minded and lead to visitors becoming totally immersed in a multi-sensory experience which sometimes requires both cognitive and affective responses to the event and which are frequently awesome in nature;
- provide entertainment, enjoyment and spectacle.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

There is an interesting directness about the aims of both of these re-enactment groups. As in all of the case studies, there is a tendency for those concerned with the work to be able to articulate their ideas beyond statements which are formally set down on paper but in this case both groups do have written aims which are confident, concise and unambiguous.

The aims of History Re-enactment Workshop are to be found in their Draft Constitution which was formulated at the point of application to become a registered charity. The group had no written aims before this point and it took the stimulus of responding to the conditions of securing funding to bring it about. Having said that, because HRW was conceived as an experimental organisation likely to shift in direction over time, it is understandable that there would be some reticence about committing policy to paper. Indeed, Andrew Robertshaw, the Chair of HRW (1984-97) recalls that in the early days they were more concerned with whether or not the events actually worked than with exactly where they were leading. Their intuition was that the re-creation of domestic life was worthwhile and that their approach would be revealing to themselves and to the public in a gentler but more substantial way than

the spectacle of battle. Throughout its existence it has evolved rapidly and, Robertshaw feels, will eventually implode.

Partly [it was] a means of experimenting with live interpretation for everybody involved but particularly for the key players who had a bigger input than others. For other people it was something that they enjoyed either as an historical study or as a social element in their lives and I think that the dynamic is there. The Workshop's not today what it was four years ago, five, ten years ago. The performance has changed and the way it's done is changed. So it's been ground-breaking, experimental. It's been a bit of a play-thing at times. It's been very high standard in some elements, very low in others. It's had a series of re-births. It's something which potentially has a limited life span because of the dynamics of the group.

(3)

When ideas were finally committed to paper, however, they reveal a clarity and self-assurance that Robertshaw's description of the group might not suggest. The Draft Constitution states that the aims of HRW,

... are the promotion of historical knowledge and the greater understanding of history among members of the public by means of the re-enactment of both daily life and particular occurrences in suitable settings, to the highest possible standards of contemporary accuracy.

(4)

The academic integrity of the work suggested earlier comes to the fore here though, because of the conditions of charitable status which emphasise the benefits of a charity for the greatest number of people, the concentration within HRW on the furthering of expertise and understanding within this small group itself have been omitted. Andrew Robertshaw explains that,

... one of the reasons that Workshop was set up is that people felt they had stopped learning because we were doing the same thing again and again. People liked the workshops because they were a way of learning away from the public but sometimes learning from the public which has been very good.

(5)

This vision of HRW reveals a feature of re-enactment which makes this form of theatre-in-museum similar to visitor-in-role in that it is concerned, in part, with the theatre practitioners themselves continuing to learn through role play. In re-enactment, though, the emphasis on viewing the re-enactor as learner in equal measure to their role as teacher is even greater and makes this type of theatre-in-museum unique.

This blend of re-enacting for the re-enactor as well as for the benefit of the public is evident in the work of Regia Angelorum, too. Their policy document called "For the Land's Weal", which is available to prospective clients, clearly sets out the group's intentions.

The Society's Aims.

Regia Angelorum is a society founded to accurately re-create the life of the folk of the Viking Age, as it was lived in the one hundred years before 1066AD. Naturally, our aim is largely concentrated on the effects that the Viking raids had on the British Isles, but we do not ignore parallels on the near European continent.

Whilst the Vikings are the attention grabber, our efforts are aimed very much at giving a balanced image of life in the Islands of Britain around a thousand years ago. So, both visitor and client will hear much of the Englisc, those people who we now call the Anglo-Saxons.

Our work deliberately has a strong educational slant and we consider that authenticity is of the highest importance. We prefer to work from found material where possible and are extremely cautious regarding such things as the interpretation of styles depicted in manuscript sources.

(6)

We note that Regia are concerned with the 're-creation' of life in tenth century Britain not simply with the 'presentation' of that period. Members of the group continue to research and learn afresh, skills which might have been commonplace a thousand years ago. As Kim Siddorn, the National Organiser of Regia explains, "You can't help but learn more about the period by being in a society like this because you are constantly surrounded by people who know more than you do."⁽⁷⁾ Their attention to detail is impressive and, where documentary evidence is ambiguous or incomplete as

in the example of Viking tented structures, the group sets about exploring various ways of supporting the structures in order to learn, through re-enacting the process, which methods might have been used by people of that time. In these cases, they will not present a single style to visitors but, instead, present a variety of possibilities and share with visitors their uncertainty. The big issue of Regia in 1998 is the vexed question of how to wear a belt which has, for a long time, been assumed to be threaded through a buckle and then looped over to dangle down towards the hem of the tunic. As Kim Siddorn (Regia) explains, recently raised doubts about the original research which led to this fashion have transformed into a passionate but also amusing debate within the group.

Now under normal circumstances, changing a piece of their kit will not phase them in the slightest. If we say that everyone has got to have hand sewn hems they can see the sense in that. But this tied belt thing has become such a fashion that everybody does it. It amuses me intensely because it was invented here in Bristol by three or four people who had seen it somewhere and now can't find the reference. That's the galling thing that there might be a reference but we can't find it so we're stuck with this thing. It's only the re-enactors that give a toss. The public almost one hundred percent won't know the difference between a tied belt and a short one.

Who would notice? Who would care?

(8)

The fact that the re-enactors themselves obviously do care is an example of what Regia's public hand-out document, "Regia Angelorum - The Past is a Different Country" refers to as their "strict and self-imposed brief of the authentic re-creation of Britain's history."(9) The investing of these minor details with such importance is clearly a pre-requisite for the provision of a valid learning experience for the public. In the case of Regia and HRW, however, getting it right for the benefit of the members of the group itself is obviously an aim of high status. This self-imposed academic discipline is the hall-mark of these two groups. Indeed, it is quite conceivable that it is the strong sense of self direction and a firm commitment to being able to re-create times past to the highest possible standards of authenticity that has led to such clarity of aims. These groups have not had to work from the greater mission, interpretative policies or marketing needs of any institution and this has given them the freedom to develop a rationale for their work which is centred on the work alone. Obviously, though, having developed aims and methodology independently provides no guarantee that the activities of HRW or Regia Angelorum

will be acceptable to museums. Museums will only use them if their aims are compatible to those of the museums themselves. Both Oakwell Hall and Jorvik Viking Centre have aims of equal clarity for the inclusion of re-enactments in their programmes, though there could scarcely be a greater contrast between what these two heritage sites wish to gain from their respective re-enactments.

Oakwell Hall's intention behind re-enactment weekends is principally interpretative, though there is an added benefit of attracting more visitors. Given the expense of the event and the very narrow profit margin, however, this remains very firmly a secondary consideration. Jane Whittaker, Community Curator at Oakwell, explains.

It was a unique way of interpreting the museum and the house. Whereas most of the time people came and saw static displays, we were attempting to make it look more like a home so people could identify with it. Letting people see these objects being used and having the chance to interact with the re-enactors in the context of Oakwell Hall was not something you could achieve in any other way. It interpreted aspects of the Hall that other kinds of display just don't cover. Hygiene, family life, the social contexts of the Hall. It was a way of bringing Oakwell Hall to life.

(10)

Although there are extensive statements about the mission of Oakwell in general, there are no written aims for the specific use of re-enactment, decisions being taken on an event by event basis.

In contrast to the interpretative focus at Oakwell Hall, Jorvik Viking Centre sees the re-enactment, which we must remember is but part of a large and diverse week-long Viking Festival, as being a marketing venture of epic proportions. Tony Docherty, the Commercial Manager at Jorvik is clear that the re-enactment and Festival overall "boils down to how many extra visitors we can get to the centre." (11) He goes on to emphasise that the publicity gained is substantial,

The Jorvik as a brand name is well established. We use it to sustain that brand name and so the coverage we get which is world-wide... to evaluate what that's worth to us, just a conservative estimate, you're probably talking between £100,000 to £200,000 plus, of PR. Clearly with our limited resources it's the most effective way of getting our

brand name across. Whether or not people choose to visit Jorvik in the end is debatable but what it does is to keep the name in people's minds.

This is just a marketing tool and that's why it comes out of the marketing budget. So we just see it mainly as a promotion. You could have a supermarket promotion for three weeks on baked beans and that'll be it, and for us it's just promoting the Jorvik Festival for three weeks and that's it.

(12)

Louise Wood, Account Director for Partners PR who co-ordinates the Jorvik Festival, is similarly unequivocal about the importance of this PR exercise which must raise an awareness of Jorvik nationally and internationally sufficient to sustain visitor numbers for the whole year. At the same time, she supports the views of the Viking Centre itself when she emphasises that the event must be consistent with the archaeological and historical integrity of this Viking site.

It is run by archaeologists so you have to have a mind to do what's acceptable from the authenticity point of view. You have to have an approach which is sympathetic to that. It's not a matter of any old event but choosing those which fit in with the ethos of the Viking Centre.

All PR is a question of measuring the need to get publicity and the appropriate way of getting it. It's always a balance between those two. This is a project is no different in that respect. Yes, you want to get visitors here but not at all costs. You want to get the right kind of publicity, you want to get the right kind of messages through.

If you're going to use actors then you have to get people who understand that and who are willing to work in that way and they know that there are limits and that there are ways you have to behave. They have to understand that they are ambassadors for the Centre.

(13)

In their pursuit of an event which would achieve this balance, Partners PR committed the following aims to their written documents "Outline Ideas for Viking Celebration 1996" and "Outline Programme for the Viking Festival 1997".

The festival would:

- make maximum capital out of the event;
- actively court visitors to the Viking Centre;
- appeal to as many customer target groups as possible;
- create a big impact locally, with wider spin-off publicity;
- generate significant media coverage;

(14)

- encourage repeat visits;
- create a sense of celebration;
- create a spectacle (or series of them)
- remind local residents that the Viking Centre, and the heritage it represents, is a cause for pride and continued interest.

(15)

The final aims concerned with celebration, spectacle and encouraging a sense of cultural identity and pride are of particular importance to the work of re-enactment and we will return to these points later in this chapter.

We noted earlier that these re-enactment groups enjoy a freedom of expression and self-determination through their independent status. It is also important to note that the museums, too, enjoy a liberty upon which museums in previous case studies might reflect. Both Oakwell and Jorvik are occasional users of theatre. They carry no burden of affiliation to a particular group and need not generate and justify a budget for permanent provision. Furthermore, they are free to select the kind of group to best suit their intended purpose and to shift that purpose from one event to another. The commissioning of HRW serves the interpretative needs of Oakwell through an event of such a scale that would render it inappropriate and probably impractical on a regular basis. Equally, Jorvik are free to use Regia specifically for publicity purposes on an annual basis to provide an event which would also be inappropriate and, with a cast of over three hundred, impossible to contemplate as an on-going feature of any museum. Neither museum needs to consider whether the theatre input serves a broad spectrum of needs. These re-enactment activities comprise a very specific part of the overall mission of the respective museums and must be viewed in this way with no attempt to impose the broad range of attributes of theatre-in-museum activity which has pre-occupied museums in other case studies. There is a sense of freedom in many aspects of the work at Oakwell and Jorvik for all parties and the suggestion in Chapter Four (scripted theatre) that the NRM might provide a model for museums in using different theatre providers for different purposes is re-iterated with the commissioning of HRW and Regia Angelorum.

The six generic categories of aims for theatre-in-museum, established in previous chapters, apply to re-enactment though the emphasis within those categories will be quite different to other forms of theatre.

Creating an interface between visitor and museum.

In the previous chapter we considered how visitor-in-role moved beyond providing the simple tangible interface between visitor and museum which helped the visitor to see and understand what was literally around them. That original concept of an interface is also left well behind when considering re-enactments which might not even be taking place in the museum at all. HRW clearly do help visitors to understand a specific site but even here they regularly look beyond the venue and, in the case of Oakwell, not only try to contextualise the collection and social life of the hall in terms of the lives of people who lived and worked there, but they contextualise Oakwell itself in the wider world of events in York, Leeds or London. In the case of Regia, the event is outside Jorvik altogether and their principal concern is to help provide an interface by raising general levels of interest and understanding about the Viking period. Any relationship between the event and the exhibition in this instance is well removed from the immediacy of, say, Spectrum's Gene Cernan at NMSI performing literally alongside the Command Capsule of Apollo 8. It may be hours, days or even months between the battle re-enactment and a visitor touring the Jorvik exhibition. The concept of interface between visitor and museum in the case of re-enactments is far more subtle and tangential than in any other form of theatre.

Providing an effective and reliable service.

The notion that re-enactments provided by outside groups represent a freedom which museums value is reinforced by Tony Docherty's (Jorvik) comment that Regia Angelorum represent a "one stop shot"(16) for the Viking Centre. Because re-enactment groups are only commissioned by museums if their academic credentials are sound, the market is self regulating with inaccurate and inefficient groups withering out very quickly. Even though the re-enactment groups in this study are staffed by volunteers with the re-enactors themselves taking no fee, the groups do charge for their services and they are not cheap. Nevertheless, the events are occasional, the costs are fixed and museums can take relatively risk-free decisions about whether or not to commission them. Tony Docherty's simple equation that the £30,000 spent on the Festival generates between £100,000 and £200,000 worth of publicity is one that even the least economically aware will recognise as being astounding value for money. Oakwell Hall eventually de-commissioned HRW because, by the sixth year, visitor-numbers had fallen and the Hall considered that

whilst it did not wish to profit from an event which was valuable at an interpretative level, it could not actually afford to subsidise it either. Although it led to a cessation of re-enactments in this instance, it does still support the view that museums can make a reasonable judgement about the viability of such events and act accordingly. Quite clearly, these occasional re-enactments are in contrast to the full-time or very regular theatre programmes we have witnessed in previous case studies although the occasional use of such large scale events is probably a bonus in the sense that an event relying on a certain degree of awe probably has more impact if it is infrequent. Oakwell felt that their relatively small circle of regular visitors had simply "seen it all before"(17) and could not be enticed back. The effective and reliable service provided by HRW and Regia is not questioned by the museums in this study. Tony Docherty, for example, not only values Regia's work because he knows that the centre will not have to do anything to ensure the success of the re-enactment itself, but that this reliance further releases Jorvik's permanent staff to concentrate on Jorvik itself. "So now, we focus on here. We concentrate on what we're good at here. We remain loyal to here."(18)

Interpreting objects in the collection.

The interpretation of objects is obtuse. In the case of Jorvik and Regia, the re-enactment offers a context for artefacts of the period and, given the lasting impact of such spectacular events, there is no reason to suppose that impressions gained at the battle should not be transferred to the Viking Centre long afterwards. Nevertheless, there is no brief to interpret specific items in the exhibition and such bridges will be built by the visitors themselves at a later time. At first glance, the re-enactment at Oakwell seems to be a prime case of interpreting objects through re-creating their actual use. Objects are transformed from being a static display to being part of the life of the Hall and visitors have a rare opportunity to understand the collection through seeing it in action. Those items in the collection which are used in the re-enactment, however, are few with the majority of artefacts featuring in the weekend coming from HRW's own vast store of quality reproduction artefacts. Indeed, Oakwell quite understandably removes various objects which are felt to be at risk in a situation where barriers normally restricting access to the rooms are removed and delicate originals could literally be crushed under the weight of an innocent visitor handling or sitting on them. Therefore, full scale re-enactments, even on such a specific site as Oakwell, tend towards offering general interpretations of a collection rather than the specific interpretation we have seen in previous chapters.

Interpreting the social contexts of the collection.

It is this category in which re-enactment comes into its own. Both HRW and Regia speak passionately and declare most prominently in their aims that they are concerned with bringing to life, not just sites, but ways of living. They focus on every aspect of living from the smallest details of dress and domestic activity to the grandest aspects of combat. In re-enactments, it is what people do that is important. The butter churn is not the centre of attention at Oakwell Hall so much as the daily lot of the servant making the butter. The time she takes, the effort she musters, the sweat on her brow and her conversation are what matter. The churn is taken from its museum pedestal of importance as a seventeenth-century artefact and returned to its original place as a mundane item of household equipment. The spears and swords, fascinating on closer inspection during the post-battle interaction, are weapons of war during the re-enacted battle itself. The crowds are more aware of movement, noise and the tactics of opposing sides than with the finer details of spear design. It is only afterwards that the inverted hooks on the spear heads, designed to lift the shields of opponents, become an item of interesting design and technology. The re-enactment contextualises these weapons as being brutal and bloody instruments which underpinned a society whose structure was determined by war and whose people depended upon the prowess of its warriors. Re-enactments are, to a very great extent, concerned with the lives of people whose world has been re-created through the painstaking research of those who are interested in transforming object into action.

Compensating for gaps in the museum subject-cover.

There is a fine line between this and the previous category in the world of re-enactments. In so far as the re-enactments provide stories about the venue and illustrate the lives which the museum represents through its collection, then re-enactments do indeed fill that gap. In other respects, this remains very close to that which has already been explored under the social contexts heading.

Contributing to the broader profile of the museum.

Re-enactments tend to draw the crowds. The staff of Oakwell Hall do not place too great an emphasis on this, but they unquestionably noticed an increase in visitor-numbers during their HRW weekends, in the first four years at least. We have already seen how Jorvik use their re-enactment overtly as a way of increasing visitor-numbers. Jorvik speak of world-wide coverage through the Festival and the city of York generally prepares itself for something in the region of 15,000 extra visitors in mid-February. Museum leaflets and general publicity material, exposure in professional journals and extensive media coverage are all positive signs that re-enactments enhance the broader profile of the host museum. Although other forms of

theatre-in-museum tend to contribute to the museum's profile in relatively discrete terms such as press coverage and photographs of the theatre company's activities on museum leaflets, the re-enactment has the added dimension of creating a spectacle in front of mass crowds which, in itself, is a news story and is remembered by those who visit the event long into the future. Whilst many visitors may never even know the names of the re-enactment groups, few forget that they had a unique experience at Oakwell Hall or Jorvik.

The key concept which underpins the methodology of re-enactment is that of generating a total immersion experience for the re-enactors and through this to also offer visitors an opportunity to observe and experience events in a multi sensory way. The creation of this total immersion hinges around three principal ideas, those of: re-enactors working at life rate in real space; of establishing visitors as spectators; and of creating clear audience contracts.

Re-enactments are like visitor-in-role in their use of life-rate action. They are thus distinct from the demonstrations at Beamish, the gallery character presentations at MOMI and NMSI and performances at NMPFT and NRM, which operate at dramatic rate in projected space rather than at life rate in real space. Once re-enactments begin, the participants work within their role and attempt to behave as they think they would do in particular circumstances fulfilling tasks which really need performing. Because of this, re-enactments are lengthy affairs. It is through observing the measured pace of Brunanburh that visitors become aware of the rules of engagement of these early battles and begin to appreciate that they were highly organised affairs governed by a code of conduct and not simply ill disciplined routs. Likewise, at Oakwell, it is only through watching the preparation of a meal over a whole morning or observing the felling of trees on the estate that some sense of the pace of life comes across. As the duties within a seventeenth century household become clearer throughout the day, the re-enactor and visitor alike increasingly become aware of the broader picture of that society in terms of health and hygiene, social status, law and order or family life. Why things were as they were and how we have arrived at many contemporary aspects of living only come across through the re-living of other times.

In this approach to re-enactments, there are no corners to be cut. It goes against the nature of researching through re-enactment to simulate, in some kind of edited form, the tasks which need to be done rather than carry them out in full. Indeed it is at this point that we realise most obviously that re-enactments are not simply a method of presentation but actually a form of research and learning. Because re-enactors are concerned with discovering how things were done and what that was like, it is

important that tasks are carried out in full whether they are being observed at that time or not. Andrew Robertshaw (HRW) was keen that members of the group really did work hard and that visitors who encountered them should see real sweat on their brows. It was a point of contention between some members of HRW as to whether they should remain in role throughout the whole day or only when visitors were present.

The thing we did have was this 'on and off switch' which a member of the group was saying "Well I'm an actor and therefore I can just switch it on or off. I can talk about football one minute and if the public come in I'll switch to talk about a foot race and it'll be as equally convincing." We thought as a group that we couldn't cope with this. We'd just plough on relentlessly talking about things in a seventeenth-century manner because the public might be eaves-dropping, you don't know, therefore you carry on.

(19)

Although this complete immersion in the day was favoured by the great majority of the group, and was certainly important to researching the period, it did have its drawbacks.

One problem I had with people having breaks was, because of this relentless policy, they didn't want to stop because they felt that they lost it a little bit if they'd been taken away to have a break. Therefore we became a little bit over-zealous about it. I think better training would have meant that people were more confident, not quite to the Mark Wallace "I just switch it on and off" business but to not just having to plough on. You would find people burning out and certainly the performance at 4.00 would not be as good as the one at 10.00.

(20)

Despite these problems, living the day as it would have been is all important to this kind of re-enactment. Regia, too, grapple with the difficulty of re-enacting life in tented enclosures and the making and trading of goods. Whilst they are content to make anything from armour to necklaces in their pursuit of re-discovering ancient crafts, and educating the public about these processes too, they are reluctant to allow their re-enactments to become modern craft fairs. Trading with visitors is not allowed within re-enactments because it forces re-enactors out of role and into the world of modern currency. Kim Siddorn (Regia) explains that,

... we feel that no matter how cautious you are it will always compromise your standards of authenticity if you have to sell it because you must necessarily deal with twentieth-century money. You're taking twentieth-century money, you're giving change, taking cheques, issuing receipts. If you're a craftsman you may well be taking orders as well. You'll be writing in a book and none of this can be done off site. You can't stand on your exhibit and do things like that without detracting from the authenticity. So if we have people on site who are selling, we relegate them to the edge of the site so they don't detract.

(21)

The pursuit of authenticity seems tireless with these groups. Bearing in mind that, to be commissioned by museums they must match their host institution's own standards of academic integrity, this attention to detail literally pays. Tony Docherty reflects on the qualities which make Regia compatible to the Viking Centre.

First of all, the Jorvik Viking Centre prides itself on its academic integrity. It's our USP and it's the thing that's drummed into every member of staff, it's the thing that sets us apart. Everything you see at the Jorvik Viking Centre is based on research. Nothing's been assumed, it's not some Disney-like version of what the Vikings were like, it's all done with painstaking research.

Regia are along the same lines of thinking that we are. They know about the Viking history, they know about the academic research so as we've grown and learned about Vikings over the years so to have Regia and any advice we can give them on weapons or whatever we do, but we often find that in many instances they know more than sometimes we do because they've got a broader vision. We just focus on the Vikings that came to York, we don't focus world-wide on the Vikings. The reason why we use them is because they make sure that everybody's turned out correctly. They have to have an inspection and when the dress is inspected they get a stamp on their hand to say 'Yes you've passed the inspection.' Yes, some of the equipment isn't hand stitched but most of it is. Some of them can afford more and do more but to the naked eye you don't really notice it, and I think we can accept that.

(22)

Jorvik Viking Centre has a refreshing approach to recognising that Regia's unique experience in the field has a serious contribution to make. Indeed, with 25% of Regia's membership comprising historians, archaeologists or museum professionals, it is not surprising that the group has the capacity to match the expertise of museums themselves. The members of HRW from similar backgrounds can also combine their academic prowess with the skills brought by other members of the group to reconstruct in practice what library research can sometimes only suggest. With their lectures and workshops at the heart of their work the activities of HRW, like those of Regia, represent a form of research comprising the testing out through role-play of ideas about how things in past times might have been accomplished. Like the famous Ra expedition of the 1960s, such research can only ever explore the probabilities of how people lived and worked, but it does offer a valid contribution to the research community which complements other forms of accepted evidence. These re-enactment groups take to great lengths the idea that the only way to really understand the nature of people from a past age is to live for a while as they did. Of course, the logic of this approach must always be constrained by an awareness that the greatest barrier to understanding people of another time lies not in our difficulty of knowing what they knew, but in shedding what we ourselves now know. In areas of re-learning specific skills and crafts re-enactment groups are on relatively safe ground, the processes being basically practical and objective. Regia maintain a strict observance of re-enacting only that which can be supported by evidence, preferably from archaeological digs. Once we move into the realms of examining values, beliefs and an understanding of the world, however, as HRW tend to in some of their work, then the resulting day must always be open to question as to whether it reflects the people of 1698 or 1998. Nevertheless, if viewed as an experiment intended to explore possibilities, it has a valuable and possibly unique contribution to make to our understanding of the past.

There are limits though, even within such zealous organisations as these two groups, to the extent to which members will sustain roles for the purposes of research. Andrew Robertshaw hovered between amusement and disappointment when he reflected upon his group's reluctance to sleep over-night in their host museum.

The Workshop was disappointing in so far as people were not prepared to put into it that extra 10% that would make the difference between being something which was good and something which would be absolutely brilliant.

Actually towards the end of my time with them we were being given the opportunity to sleep in Elizabethan houses which I felt would inform what they were doing. Instead they were all choosing to go to the pub which I saw as being a nice social thing and it led to a very strong social group but it wasn't informing their performance in any way... in fact it was giving them a hangover the next morning!

(23)

In considering the use of theatre as a research tool, we ought to return to the differentiation, mentioned earlier, between staged events such as battles and the exploratory re-enactments represented by the running of Oakwell Hall. Whilst the meal made at Oakwell Hall is prepared authentically and later actually eaten, the idea that battles are really fought with injury and killing in mind is clearly not an option. Having said that, the way the event is re-enacted does re-create the tactical approach to battles and, as the Bristol group had shown in the mid-1980s, skill with weapon handling and reading the field does lead to victory within the rules. Despite this particular and appropriate short-fall in authentic fatality and injury, battle re-enactments do allow re-enactors to rehearse old skills, carry out new research and then to share this with audiences. Regia have developed a whole range of conclusions about tenth century battles from their research both on and off the field.

For example, if you just wear mail it will stop the cutting edge of the weapon but the power of the blow will carry on and smash bones or disrupt internal organs, or at least is very uncomfortable. So it's only common sense to wear thick padding underneath the mail, so that's what we do. We have only the thinnest of evidence for padding but we feel that it would be ridiculous just to wear mail because it doesn't form adequate protection therefore they must have worn padding which they did have available.

(24)

We must, then, recognise that in some re-enactments, battles being an obvious example, it will not be appropriate for exact re-creations to take place and in these instances there is a sense that the event is being performed to a greater extent than in, say, the re-enactment of crafts or domestic tasks. Whilst we recognise this differentiation, the core of re-enactments remains one of carrying out activities properly in real time and space. Interestingly, despite this closeness to reality re-enactment groups do successfully inform visitors of their work and generally achieve

a subtle blend of living in their historic world at the same time as interacting with visitors in the here and now.

This duality of performance and reality is achieved by clearly establishing the role of the visitor. The confusion we witnessed most obviously with first person interpretation at NMSI and MOMI where visitors were often confused about how they should react to the characters they encountered does not seem to prevail at re-enactments. Whereas the gallery characters were effectively entering the world of the visitor but suggesting that the visitor had entered their historic world, in re-enactments concentration on the task is so strong that there is little doubt that the visitor is a spectator. Reflecting Regia's handout title, "The Past is a Different Country", the re-enactors world is their own and visitors are invited to observe it but not enter it. The focus for the re-enactors is their task and each other and the fervour of the interpreters at Beamish, the actors of MOMI and Spectrum, Action Replay and Platform 4 to get across as much as possible directly to the visitor is absent here. This on its own, of course, might leave the visitor adrift, unable to interpret events for themselves. Both groups, however, have developed systems for assisting the visitor in making the most of the re-enactment opportunity by creating an intermediary between then and there, and here and now. Kim Siddorn acts as a narrator at the battle re-enactment and helps both the re-enactors to remain in their world and the visitors to understand what they are seeing. Regia's "For the Lands Weal" explains that,

All our military arena events are fully narrated by a speaker of great experience. Whilst performed to a scripted running order, most narrations are executed extempore and depend for their success upon a deep knowledge of the subject.

(25)

HRW achieve the blend of these two worlds by the use of their red t-shirted interpreters. This approach, possibly unique amongst theatre-in-museum practitioners, offers liberation from the vexed question of visitor unease when dealing with characters in museum settings. The simplicity of blending fully fledged re-creations of another time with a contemporary interpreter to act as go-between and to maintain the rules of playing is an inspiration. Andrew Robertshaw explains the evolution of this technique.

To be sure that the public know what to ask, the public are always met by someone who is a recognisable member of the group in a red t-shirt and the rules are explained about how to approach it. One problem we

found early on is that people would say things like "Is that fire hot? Are you going to eat that food?" which the performers interpreted as stupid questions but really it is in fact, what else do you say to a seventeenth-century day labourer? It's a bit like the hair dresser who says 'Have you had a good holiday?' or 'Did you see the match last night?' It's an opening gambit.

So we learned that by having a theme and particular questions that you could feed the public, they have opening gambits in a conversation. If you know that the harvest has been bad, you can ask how it affects the day labourer and ask how it affects the owner and get different responses, but you are on safe ground. So that's what we did. But it also meant that by having the red t-shirts as floaters who are actually pro-active, they are there to deal with the questions that the re-enactors can't deal with.

We did want to use a pure form of first person where you don't step out of it. They would stay in first person all the time, but if confronted with the question about what you really do or when this is going to finish, then you can refer to the red shirt and say "That person can help you. I can't help you with that." So you see, there was always a way out. You don't try to get clever with the visitors, "Can you tell me how a television works, I want to know." There's no point. It's just not going to achieve anything.

(26)

The crash barriers at York and the red t-shirted interpreters at Oakwell are a clear form of audience contract leading to security for performer and visitor alike. The theme of audience contracts has been fully explored in previous case studies and we need not re-visit it here other than to recognise that they are important in allowing re-enactments to work in a way which prevents the re-enactor being dragged from their historic world whilst at the same time allowing the visitor to gain access to it. HRW, Regia Angelorum and their host museums establish clear contracts through their advanced publicity, through their defining of a re-enactment arena, their welcoming codes to visitors, their use of re-enactor/visitor intermediaries and through their rigorous adherence to recognising the visitor as a spectator and never a contemporary. Finally, their events end with clarity too at which point the characters become twentieth-century re-enactors again and will then interact directly with the public.

Through the methodology explored here, these two re-enactment groups successfully provide visitors with a memorable event which transmits a sense of what tenth century battles or seventeenth century homes might have been like. The quality of the visitor experience relies greatly on the quality of engagement in their tasks by the re-enactors. Uniquely in theatre-in-museum, re-enactments rely on visitors being able to witness a kind of research in progress as re-enactors continue to explore and practice their skills in the public gaze. When this form of re-enactment works well there is undoubtedly an air of wonder at seeing a different way of life. On occasions, particularly those involving large crowds, a sense of spectacle, festival and celebration emerges and we will conclude this study by considering these elements of re-enactment.

MASS SPECTACLE, FESTIVAL AND CELEBRATION

As we conclude this final case study, it is fitting that we return to some of the core themes explored through the opening thesis about theatre-in-museum in Chapter One.

Re-enactments challenge our perceptions about what kinds of events are appropriate in museum settings since they involve high levels of interpretation, contextualise entire collections through reconstructed or even imagined events and, in the setting of re-enacted Brunanburh with its three thousand spectators, raise again the vexed question of whether overt entertainment is compatible with museological ideals. These final comments will centre exclusively on Regia because, although they do pertain in varying degrees to other forms of re-enactment, the epic proportions of the Jorvik battle do emphasise notions of spectacle, festival and celebration.

"For the Land's Weal" (Regia) declares that "The structure of public performances is deliberately arranged so as to inform whilst entertaining."(27) and there is little doubt that the battle re-enactment at York does entertain. It entertains, though, in an entirely different manner to the story-telling, anecdotes, quick-fire jokes and visual performances of some other forms of theatre-in-museum. With re-enactments such as the Jorvik battle, it is being a part of a mass spectacle that most impresses. Whilst we saw in the previous chapter how visitor-in-role programmes at Bradford and Clarke Hall reach out to meet the needs of visitors by embracing their particular learning agendas, mass spectacles meet the needs of people in a quite different way. Visitors to the battle are not, for the most part, involved in close-up inspection of artefacts nor with listening to a story, they are here to witness events from the distant past which have a certain glamour and mystery. Tony Docherty (Jorvik) is pleased that "The Victorians did a god job for us. They actually made the Vikings much more romantic, much more frightening. They made the Vikings sexy in a way. I think that people turn

out to see what that's about."(28) Whilst visitors know that the event is to do with the Jorvik Viking Centre and has an historical focus, it may be that people come to this event, not because they want to find out about the Vikings but because they already know about them and they wish to re-affirm the 'sexy' image which they have inherited. It is a curious act which Jorvik performs balancing between attracting visitors on the basis of a Victorian myth whilst trying to challenge that myth and set the Viking record straight.

Kim Siddorn reflects, too, on the curious appeal of the York event.

It is a battle on one day of the two days on a traffic roundabout in the middle of a city which is the last place to put a battle. The other thing is that it has its own 'je ne sais quoi', it has a certain tradition behind it.

(29)

Siddorn's instinct that there is a certain tradition behind it, an appeal based upon familiarity, ritual and the passing of the seasons reveals a part of our culture which seems to defy the objective truths with which museums are so pre-occupied. The Jorvik battle tradition is only thirteen years old and, according to Docherty, builds upon the misconceptions of our very recent Victorian ancestors, and yet it is becoming embedded in contemporary culture as an annual event which Partners PR promote as a "must see"(30) event. Louise Wood (Partners PR) reflects on the demise of community events in recent years and feels that the Festival is filling this gap in people's lives.

It's the sheer scale of it. It's a celebratory thing. The number of opportunities for public celebration has declined, especially this year. The fireworks have been cancelled by the Council and I think that a lot of public bodies now struggle to justify the fees that create that sense of celebration and community and so it's left to private providers and it's usually some kind of museum or visitor centre or tourist attraction which has to start that process going and get other people involved, and then you do get the sense of community. That's one of the great things about doing it.

(31)

Wood's thoughts suggest that museums may need to review their role in society and consider that they now have, if not actual responsibility, then at least the opportunity to act as a focal point for people's sense of belonging and community. Museums after

all do hold the cultural treasures of the nation and, as suggested in Chapter One, represent collectively the symbols of all that we are, have been and aspire to be. In staging re-enactments, both the museums and the re-enactment groups themselves obviously feel that it is important to present the past as authentically as possible. The underlying motivation for the crowd may well be quite different. Siddorn is blunt in his appraisal that,

They have the opportunity of attending something where they may possibly see someone hurt. They are watching men in combat. They really are watching men in combat and when they go to a living history display they are seeing history re-created.

(32)

His idea of sensation along with Wood's notion of the scale of the event are clearly in tune with each other. They echo Docherty's (Jorvik) ideas about the "gory-ness" of it, "like the Romans and the lions."(33) Wood feels that the appeal lies in the ability of re-enactments to make the crowd go silent. She maintains that at that moment, the crowd feels a sense of being at one with each other and with the performers. There is a rare opportunity in today's living to feel the same way as three thousand other people around you and it is this binding power, Wood maintains, that brings people to York.

Tony Docherty goes further and points out that the Jorvik Festival also coincides with the ancient Viking festival to celebrate the end of winter and that the Jorvik event still brings significant numbers of people from the much harder Scandinavian winters of today to celebrate, here in England, the turning of the seasons. Even in our relatively temperate climate signs of early spring still touch those ancient and deep-rooted instincts and the Festival in York offers people the opportunity to celebrate.

Such powerful and significant events do not, however, need to be sombre. Siddorn feels strongly that there is no compromise between Regia taking very seriously their levels of authenticity and having a good time. Indeed Regia's poster for 1998-99 pictures a child holding a Viking axe and is altogether a softer image of a child learning rather than previous posters of a warrior on horseback. Siddorn maintains that,

It's a family entertainment. We feel that very strongly now. What we do is fun for ourselves and our 'raison d' être' as far as the public is

concerned is it is an entertaining education and a good day out for the family.

(34)

The notion of family entertainment is highly consistent with the aims of Jorvik and Partners PR in staging the Festival. Docherty also recognises the seriousness of Jorvik's mission but sees "no harm" in a festival where "you have a good time."(35) Louise Wood summarises her feelings about large scale re-enactments in saying that "It's a celebration and a festival and it's always been marketed as such. It's very much a spectacle and the spectacle appeals to people."(36)

It is, however, not merely the form of re-enacted battles that appeals, but also their content. Behind the spectacle of the banners and the huge number of armed warriors, beyond the combat and the gory-ness, lies the basic nature of what is put before the public. Jorvik have "taken the sexy bits and the exciting bits that everybody's been indoctrinated into over the years,"(37) and it is this familiarity and re-running of known events which helps the visitors re-affirm their own collective identity. Re-enactments key into the basic instincts of people to share stories which reflect what they think they are. Just as the Jorvik Viking Centre shows visitors the archaeological remains of ancient York and tells the story of an ancient people who helped further the importance of the city as a trading centre, so too the battle reinforces notions of bravery, skill and strength that underpinned that ancient culture and through our inheritance, underpin our culture, too. In post-Imperial, post-industrial, even post-1966 World Cup Britain, we may well be witnessing a resurgence of the need to identify with events from the past which inspire as well as inform.

Re-enactments are not an alternative form of presenting museum collections. They do not do the same job as an object in a case. They can not replace the objective close scrutiny of artefacts which have been preserved and presented for the public benefit. Re-enactments do, however, offer a sense of awe and wonder, a thrill and a sense of collective identity which is unlikely to occur to the same degree in the measured environment of a museum building. The passion for which Bicknell (NRM) searches is here on a traffic roundabout in the middle of York. If museums can harness that passion and translate it into visitors coming to the museum at a later date to engage in closer study, then there is the opportunity for museums to captivate a new generation of visitors who sense an ownership of collections which do after all reflect their own culture.

Muirhead's (Beamish) ideas of creating a lasting impression through providing the big experience, and ideas expressed in Chapter Four that the raising of emotional engagement will lead to a heightened sense of involvement with museums, are furthered by the notion that re-enactments can create a sense of identity which will encourage visitors to develop that same identification with any museum collection which reflects the same cultural thread. Docherty (Jorvik) is enthusiastic about the involvement of large numbers of non-museum professionals being involved in enchanting thousands of visitors with their re-enactment. He sees this large and truly public event as representing a mass ownership of the Viking story and as "The people having their say."(38)

Jorvik has some 600,000 visitors a year which cannot be specifically credited to the Festival but it does seem that somewhere along the line Wood's (Partners PR) "must see"(39) approach to the Festival translates into a 'must see Jorvik', too. In an age of devolution and a political restructuring of Britain, cultural identity is set to become an issue of the twenty-first century. Saint George already features as a Tourist Board attempt to re-define England for it seems likely that in the near future we may all be re-assessing what, as a society, we are. Some museums, in Louise Wood's vision, may be uniquely placed to offer, through their use of re-enactments and other spectacular events, a sense of community and cultural identity based upon their own site and collection.

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PART THREE

THE THEATRE-IN-MUSEUM MOVEMENT

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

*A movement of ideas?
New museum professionals.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

It has become clear that there is a new kind of theatre which we can call theatre-in-museum. It is a form of educational theatre which is context-specific and which is concerned with making accessible and intelligible to the general public the collections and subject-foci of our museums. This new form of theatre has expanded and developed throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s and can be found in at least four hundred and eighty museums in the British Isles. In concluding this study we will consider a range of issues relating to the nature of theatre-in-museum in the context of a movement, the implications of the evolving place of museums in our society for future theatre-in-museum practice, and the qualities of the personnel who need to be involved in theatre-in-museum if it is to flourish.

Let us first consider whether there is a coming together of ideas and practice into something which we can call a movement. Certainly, many practitioners in this field are able to articulate with great clarity their ideas about the aims and aspirations of theatre programmes in museums. These practitioners, representing a wide spectrum of stake-holders in this work including theatre providers, curators, education officers, events managers and marketing staff, have generally been able to say not only what they are trying to achieve for their particular museum but how their own style of theatre-in-museum helps them to fulfil their ambitions. Despite these strong individual expressions, however, it cannot really be said that there is any common voice on the matter.

Curiously enough, this is not because there is no agreement about theatre-in-museum practice (which there is) but because there is little confidence between the practitioners themselves that such agreement exists. It is true that stake-holders tend to view theatre-in-museum to some extent from their own perspective and that their rationale will often lean towards, say, the interpretative value or the publicity value depending upon their place in the institution. Even so, it is rare to find anyone in open disagreement with colleagues from their own museum. Despite this, and even though the vast majority of interviews clearly demonstrate far more agreement than conflict, there is an underlying and often very subtle feeling of distrust. This is particularly the case amongst theatre providers themselves, along with some closely affiliated curators and education officers, who often feel that their theatre work is undervalued, marginalised or seen primarily as a marketing gimmick. Whilst there is justification for saying that some museum professionals do not yet see theatre-in-museum as a serious interpretative tool, such feelings of isolation and distrust are rarely supported by the interviews carried out. Indeed, the interviews demonstrate far more agreement

amongst those involved than they themselves generally believe to be the case and this, in itself, indicates the need for a further sharing of ideas amongst theatre-in-museum professionals within individual institutions and nationally.

Further to this, there are wide ranging opinions about the merits and problems of different approaches to theatre-in-museum and it is unusual to find practitioners in one museum who are either knowledgeable or complimentary about other forms of theatre or about the work of other theatre-in-museum practitioners. There are some notable exceptions to this but, on the whole, although people are clear about their own work they do not generally see themselves as being part of a wider movement which comprises a variety of styles.

A few leading figures have published articles in museum or theatre journals about their work and these are usually characterised by enthusiasm, even missionary zeal, though sometimes accompanied by fairly caustic criticism of styles not to their liking. The divisions aired at Liverpool in 1991 are probably not quite so pronounced as they were but there is little evidence that this is because of a meeting of minds and it is equally likely that people have simply gradually accepted theatre as a part of museum life in the 1990s. Since the Go Live Festival and Conference at Bradford in 1993 there has been no progress in furthering the aims, aspirations and practice of this work at a national level. The European branch of the International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL), which was proposed at the Bradford conference has not materialised in the five years which have now elapsed, though Andrew Ashmore (MOMI) still pursues this idea and was pleased that a recent conference in Los Angeles (May 1998) did approve of a European branch being established.

Informal networking between individuals and some institutions does demonstrate a desire to share practice. The regional link between Platform 4 Theatre and Action Replay, outlined in Chapter Four, is a positive example of two companies forging a partnership which was, until the disbanding of Action Replay, both practical and philosophical in nature. A number of individual practitioners have re-located around the country and taken their theatre-in-museum practice with them. Colin Ford, the ex-Head of the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television is now Head of the National Museums and Galleries of Wales and has installed Jo Price of Action Replay to lead theatre programmes in those museums. Susannah Daley (ex-Action Replay) now supplies theatre programmes for many museums through her free-lance live interpretation business. Jon Price has moved from History Re-enactment Workshop, via a spell at Beamish, to set up Time Travellers, and Andrew Robertshaw is establishing Hoi-Poloi. Andrew Ashmore from Action Replay is now Company

Manager at MOMI and Jane Whittaker, formally of Oakwell Hall, is ready to bring theatre programmes to her new museum, Cannon Hall. Such informal links between interested museums and the movement of individuals around the country is maintaining and possibly spreading theatre-in-museum work at present.

Whilst there is overwhelming evidence that there are pockets of agreement about what theatre-in-museum is achieving, what it could achieve, and about the actual practice of such work, it is equally clear that these ideas form no clear pattern and we cannot, therefore, support the idea that there is a theatre-in-museum movement in the British Isles at the moment.

At the same time there is enormous potential for such a movement to exist. There will, however, need to be a considerable effort in bringing about a greater understanding of the variety of work taking place in the British Isles today, how that work relates to a set of central principles and how different styles contribute to museums in very different ways. The time has come for those interested in theatre-in-museum to move away from the random evolution referred to by Colin Utley (NMSI) in Chapter Three, and towards establishing a set of common aims and practices to which they can all subscribe. Within a common framework differences are to be celebrated as representing the variety of circumstances to which the versatile medium of theatre can be applied.

Drawing upon the aspirations of practitioners in our five case studies we may deduce a common set of aims for all theatre-in-museum work. These are:

**Through the portrayal of
characters representing real or fictitious people
set in historic, contemporary or future contexts
theatre-in-museum programmes will:**

- 1 Create an interface between visitors and the museum by:**
 - enlivening the museum environment and creating a sense of curiosity about the collection and other information;
 - providing effective and accessible modes of communication to visitors;
 - helping visitors to access the collection and other information resources;
 - providing visitors with points of focus whilst in the museum;
 - being responsive to the interests and needs of individuals and groups;

- encouraging visitors to be active participants in the museum;
 - developing in visitors a sense of ownership of the museum collection.
- 2 Provide an effective and reliable service by:**
- providing a form of which is appropriate to the museum;
 - maintaining the service within budget limits;
 - being responsive, wherever possible, to additional requests upon the service to support Interpretation, Education, Events, Programmes, Publicity, Corporate Events and other museum departments in promoting the work of the museum.
- 3 Interpret objects in the collection by:**
- explaining the objects, their physical and/or technical attributes and how they work;
 - explaining the story of their invention, discovery and/or development ;
 - explaining broader processes and concepts relating to the objects;
 - offering visitors a range of knowledge about the objects, explaining and, where appropriate, demonstrating skills associated with the objects.
- 4 Interpret the social contexts of the collection by:**
- setting objects/sites in their original time and explaining events which would be contemporary with the objects/sites;
 - explaining the nature of the lives of people before, at the time of and after the object/site's development;
 - explaining the lives of those responsible for the invention, discovery and/or development of objects and how their lives influenced the object in question;
 - explaining the effect of the object/site upon people's lives both in the past, present and in the future;
 - addressing societal issues such as gender and raising awareness of events and people that challenge stereotyping.
- 5 Compensate for gaps in the museum subject-cover by:**
- explaining events, concepts and processes within the remit of the museum but not currently represented by displays or by other museum media;
 - presenting interpretations of events and characters which may be

open to debate and to encourage discussion and responses to such interpretations;

- offering a cost-effective means of responding quickly to contemporary events or to re-aligning the balance of the museums total exhibition whilst new areas are being developed within the museum.

6 Contribute to the broader public profile of the museum by:

- constituting a part of on-going events programme;
- offering added value to the museum visitor over and above the collection or areas on display;
- providing theatre programmes to help launch new exhibitions or other special events;
- constituting a part of themed exhibitions and events;
- providing variation for the return visitor;
- promoting the image of the museum as a professional institution with academic integrity but also as a centre of activity and enjoyment;
- providing programmes to suit the needs of various museum departments.

The five principal methodologies explored through the case studies are more than just different ways of achieving the same goals. These quite distinctive modes of operating have important implications which need to be considered by each host museum in terms of staffing, costs, accommodation within exhibitions or sites, and the particular learning outcomes and general visitor experience to be derived from the installation of each particular type of theatre. We will not repeat here the qualities of each type already explored in the case studies but, if there is to be a theatre-in-museum movement, it is crucial that those involved everywhere appreciate the significant differences in outcome which emerge from the selection of a particular type of theatre-in-museum. All those involved in hosting or providing theatre programmes need to move away from the current methods of selecting theatre programmes which are based on merely replicating what has been seen somewhere else or, very frequently, on whatever style the first providers of theatre bring with them. The characters on the galleries of NMSI, the plays at Bradford, the classroom at Wigan, for example, all came about because that is what was first on offer. Beamish, on the other hand, returned to third person and Regia Angelorum evolved an authentic approach to their work in response to other less satisfying experiences and a belief that desired objectives could be achieved in another way. These latter cases represent the future for theatre-in-museum work which needs to be based upon both providers and museums selecting specific types of activities for reasons which are conducive to

fulfilling clear museum aims. Such selection will be a complex affair but a full consideration of the content-focus and critical attributes of each theatre-type, as outlined in the case studies, would prove a useful starting point. Museums need to consider whether they want interpreters who can interact with visitors individually, characters who can give an insight into another time, plays which will offer whole story-packages and engage visitors emotionally, visitor-in-role opportunities which will allow visitors to experience for themselves another circumstance, or re-enactments which will impress and inspire. By understanding the general potential of theatre-in-museum along with the specific merits and limitations of particular types, then both theatre providers and museums alike will be able to create programmes of integrity and impact for their visitors.

Theatre-in-museum represents a form of learning for visitors which is different from other activities available in museums. We have seen that it is part of a general move in museums towards more active visitor-involvement in exhibitions. It may also represent a societal shift in how we are beginning to learn generally. One hundred and fifty years after the emergence of photography, over a century after the development of the moving image, and well into the age of television, computers and the internet, it is conceivable that, as a more visually and technologically literate society, we are beginning to actually learn in ways which are not so reliant on books from library shelves and the rigid taxonomies of museums from a previous age. Learning by seeing, by experiencing, by doing, dominates in the 1990s and theatre-in-museum is consistent with such an approach. Theatre is not, however, just another way of learning. It is, essentially, a medium capable of exploring human situations and it can enable museum visitors to make an emotional response to the previously impersonal domain of museum collections. Theatre can confront the contentious issues represented by museums, engage visitors in debate and encourage them to question rather than necessarily to accept what they see around them. Theatre-in-museum also has the capacity to involve people in collective, even mass experiences which will re-affirm or challenge cultural affiliations and promote a sense of personal and collective identity. Such collective experience is perhaps unique in museum visiting and is of great significance in challenging not only our ideas about what theatre can be but also what museums can be.

The extent to which museum professionals and theatre providers understand the real potential of theatre-in-museum as a learning medium is unclear. There are a great number of views expressed about the learning benefits of such work. Ideas range from theatre being essentially about enlivening the museum, to being simply popular with visitors, to it being a serious and powerful interpretative tool. Most particularly, there

are serious misunderstandings about the fictional nature of theatre and the inevitable duality of such experience. Dangerous practice exists in some quarters regarding performer-visitor contracts and we have seen in the case studies how needless confusion in this area leads to shallow and sometimes negative experiences for both visitor and performer alike. Such misunderstandings about the nature of theatre as a learning medium need to be addressed if theatre-in-museum is to avoid tarnishing its reputation and if it is to convince those that still need to appreciate the benefits of the medium. It does still need to be perceived in some circles as being more than a fad which can only trivialise the work of museums.

Whilst we recognise that many practitioners have high ideals for the work of theatre-in-museum and are articulate in explaining its potential, the picture as a whole is inconsistent. Theatre-in-museum, in other words, still needs to find its voice. If this work is to become a movement then those involved need to appreciate, at a much higher level than is the case at present, the breadth of work currently being practiced, the range of outcomes emerging from such work, and an understanding of the relationship between outcomes and the various methods currently employed. There is a need for the full spectrum of participants in theatre-in-museum to be able to explain to themselves, in the first instance, exactly what the medium can achieve. Theatre practitioners need to understand museums, and museum professionals need to understand educational theatre. If this can be achieved, then it would become appropriate and necessary to develop an appreciation of the medium amongst professionals in the wider museum community.

Although we have been able to outline a range of generic objectives for theatre-in-museum this study has not addressed, in depth, ways of evaluating such work. Two models have been cited in the case studies, that of Spectrum Theatre (NMSI) which focuses on visitor responses and that of Platform 4 Theatre (NRM) which analyses children's learning. Both models have their place in developing an understanding of what visitors feel about theatre programmes and/or what they learn from them. Not only are evaluations a necessary step in properly quantifying the outcomes of theatre programmes and thus determining future direction for programme providers themselves, but museum culture at present places high value on such evaluations. It is important, therefore, that the theatre-in-museum community evaluates current work thoroughly and transparently and embraces this as a way of both fostering a healthy reflexivity about its own work and of demonstrating its value to others. This work is seriously under-developed at the moment and needs to be advanced.

By affiliating the work of individual theatre projects to a set of central objectives, by establishing criteria for evaluation and by acting positively on such evaluations, the theatre-in-museum community can move towards developing a code by which it will be recognised and this will help to provide the basis by which the wider museum community can consider this medium as one of academic integrity, interpretative validity and presentational excellence.

When reflecting on the place of theatre in contemporary museums we must remember that our focus is not entirely on theatre activity which has somehow evolved in the otherwise stable environment of museums. Chapter One clearly demonstrated the rapid evolution which is currently taking place in these institutions. The place of museums in our society is changing and theatre-in-museum has come about because of these changes. As museums grapple with the vexed question of enlivening their environs to help a new generation of visitors to access their collections, museums still face the old divide between entertainment and education. Although the debate was there at the founding of modern museums in the late Victorian era, it still is an irritant at the heart of museology. There seems to be no logic in assuming that entertainment and education should remain separate and some museums are successfully embracing a new vision of pleasurable education which envisages the furtherance of knowledge through the constructive use of leisure time spent in museums. Yet, this curious divide seems to remain and is probably some kind of cultural trait inherited from our Victorian ancestors. The extent to which museums look to theatre to provide entertaining enlivenment or how much they look for informative presentations varies greatly from institution to institution. The theatre providers themselves agonise over this question as much as their host museums but theatre-in-museum is, in practice, easily recognisable and quite distinct from other forms of theatre or general entertainment which may arrive in museums from time to time.

The projects outlined in the case studies demonstrate very obviously that whether particular theatre programmes are primarily entertaining, amusing, spectacular, thought-provoking or challenging they are all characterised by their capacity to help visitors contemplate the subject-focus of the museum. It is important that those involved with theatre-in-museum demonstrate the capacity of theatre to bridge this awkward divide and to successfully engage visitors with the museum without compromise. The dividing line between worthy theatre-in-museum and general entertainment, however, is perilously fine and there needs to be a clear understanding of Julia Brian's (Wigan Pier) assertion that popularity does not necessarily equal learning and that it is all too easy to debase a valid learning experience by playing to the audience rather than maintaining integrity. This further emphasises the need to

establish clear criteria for evaluating theatre programmes so that such work can be judged by its success in making collections accessible and intelligible and not by its entertainment value alone. Although events managers and marketing staff are usually very clear that they want to draw the crowds but only through appropriate material, their grasp of the subtle differences between entertainment with and without substance is not always so firm. With the pressure upon such staff to increase visitor-numbers combined with the spending power they frequently enjoy, additional theatrical delights are sometimes engaged on short-term contracts without reference to others. Theatre-in-museum practitioners need to demonstrate their ability to achieve this balance and, again, embrace a wide range of theatre-in-museum styles in order to satisfy the seasonal needs of many museums.

The notion that various kinds of theatrical events are sought by museums periodically, raises some important practical considerations. At the moment, most theatre providers offer one style of theatre-in-museum and this, in turn, leads us to associate each museum with that style. MOMI, for example, are known for offering first person interpretation, Beamish third person and Clarke Hall visitor-in-role. We do, however encounter some variety in a small number of cases. As a resident company, Action Replay maintained scripted theatre as their standard work but tried to offer other styles to meet the increasing needs of the museum ranging from serving schools' workshops to providing entertainment for corporate events evenings. Similar variations can be found elsewhere. Whether theatre providers ought to offer one style or many and whether museums will rely on one provider or many are important questions in terms of what happens next with theatre-in-museum.

Chapter Six demonstrated most vividly how Jorvik and Oakwell Hall have engaged re-enactment groups on an occasional basis for highly successful projects. The projects are part of a much wider menu of events at both museums though such events remain occasional and never become part of a daily or even frequent programme. Likewise, the re-enactment groups involved are used to working occasionally, both are free-lance and they make up their annual work-load by securing sufficient engagements to keep them satisfied.

It is a different matter, however, when we consider the combination of theatre-providers currently being explored at the National Railway Museum. Although Platform 4 Theatre are part-time, they are considered to be the museum's resident theatre company and have pioneered the use of theatre in that museum. Their work, as outlined in Chapter Four centres entirely on the collection and the railway focus of the museum. In recent years, however, their work has been supplemented by a

number of additional theatrical events few of which were provided by them. A local professional actress was engaged to rehearse local amateurs in a Christmas melodrama set loosely around a railway journey; a single actress worked as a gallery character for the Royal Trains exhibition working to a script written for the purpose by Platform 4; the Twenty-First Birthday of the museum was celebrated by a range of shows including a puppet theatre, jugglers, railway quiz-shows and some plays by Platform 4; an actor portraying the Fat Controller regularly reads stories to children at Thomas the Tank Engine weekends; and Halloween has become a time for ghost stories to be told on the galleries by yet another actor, sometimes accompanied by various extras dressed as ghouls. This variety clearly offers some exciting possibilities for the museum but there are serious implications for such a move which should be considered.

First, let us consider whether these events are theatre-in-museum or simply theatrical events. Most of them fall into the former category in that they do pursue a legitimate railway theme. The Royal Train first-person maid was well researched and informative and similar to the work at MOMI or NMSI. The Fat Controller verges on being theatre-in-museum and with a little more attempt at drawing together the stories and the collection would be a fine example of first-person work specifically for children. Most of the Twenty-First Birthday celebrations were pertinent to the museum and carried out with integrity, though other elements were more questionable. The installation of a poorly handled melodrama with only the flimsiest link to railways and the inclusion of Halloween manifestations, which don't even include railway ghost stories, and which the Daily Telegraph recognised as a "marketing romp"(1) are dubious decisions indeed, taken interestingly by the marketing team without any consultation to the Head of Interpretation or even the Head of Museum. What is particularly important about this scenario is that there is nobody in that museum who is in overall control of theatrical inclusion on the galleries. Platform 4 Theatre are consultants on theatre-in-museum to the NRM but were not consulted on most of these events. The marketing department have taken decisions to stage some events, the Programmes Officer others and various curators yet more. There is no over-view of what theatre could be doing for that museum and we witness a pot pourri of ideas rather than one vision which could still include the widest variety and yet be steered by a single set of standards.

Certainly, the idea of such variety does offer the opportunity to satisfy a host of requirements for museums, but the scenario is not necessarily comfortable for theatre providers. In some cases, the providers would be capable of providing a range of material. Certainly, Platform 4 Theatre could provide all of the events mentioned plus

complete schools programmes and much more with a permanent team of four or five people. The expense to the museum would be huge, however, and the free-lance approach may be a financial preference or even necessity. The rejection of a full-time model leads, therefore, to a part-time model which happens to work well at the moment for some practitioners such as Platform 4 Theatre and Spectrum (NMSI). For other practitioners, however, a part-time model would not be sustainable, for such practitioners must presumably earn a living elsewhere when not engaged by the museum. We know the members of Platform 4 to be in full-time employment in education and those at Spectrum to be in other acting jobs. Whilst the model, as it is evolving at the moment, offers variety to the museum and cost-effective event-cover, it does potentially undercut the notion of developing an holistic concept of theatre-in-museum programmes and may destroy the idea of encouraging the emergence of theatre-in-museum professionals.

The harnessing of the current trend in some museums to provide theatrical events through a variety of free-lance providers is a critical issue in the development of theatre-in-museum. Such provision needs to be guided by at least one person in any museum who has an over-view of theatre work and who can demonstrate a clear understanding of the theatre-in-museum medium. As museums still veer between being centres of education and popular tourist attractions, theatre-in-museum practitioners need to exercise great care in developing affiliations within museums which are sustainable. If museums continue to compete in the general tourist attraction market they will need to be sure of just what it is they are offering. Museums ultimately are about their collections. It is the thing that sets them apart from all other attractions and, in those collections, lies the cultural heart of the nation. If museums utilise theatre to help develop ownership of the stories the museum has to tell; if emotional journeys inspire as well as inform; if museums become a catalyst for meaningful learning; if they embrace the learning needs of their visitors and assume their place at the centre of communities, then theatre-in-museum could indeed become the corner stone of museums of the future. The medium could provide experiences for visitors which museums cannot provide in any other way and become a central interpretative tool of the twenty-first century. If, however, theatre is tied to a short-term campaign of securing a high-profile place in a market-place hungry for popularity, if that campaign fails, then theatre will fail with it.

Whether the theatre we see taking place in museums at the end of this century represents some kind of cleaning up the past or whether it is a serious attempt to represent the past and, by doing so, help to define the future, can only be the subject of conjecture. Although many trends in museum visiting continue, there are shifts

taking place. We are witnessing a greater mobility of the mass population who now regard museums as a place for them. Theatre can be a medium through which the masses can gain access to the cultural treasures kept by our museums but we must also be alert to the warnings of Millard (NMSI) about 'dumbing-down' and the turning of treasures into trivia. In the end, the future of theatre-in-museum will depend upon the definition which all those involved place on the word 'popular'. Brecht's notions of making the highest culture and the most challenging of ideas accessible and intelligible to the masses is at the heart of theatre-in-museum and those involved in this work now need to assert themselves in making this clear to the whole museum community.

So, who will it be that will make such an assertion? Do we have these new museum professionals, five years after Colin Ford suggested that they were emerging? In part, we do.

People such as Muirhead (Beamish), Ashmore and Munrow (MOMI), Uttley and Dooley (NMSI), Daley and Price (ex-NMPFT), Cade, Ford and Mosley (NRM), Davidson (BIM), Morton and Beaumont (Clarke Hall) and Robertshaw (HRW), all embrace a use of the theatre medium which is a synthesis between all that is theatre and all that is museum. They successfully demonstrate and understand that theatre as a learning medium can only be successful if it is applied appropriately to its particular context. There is still, though, a confusion of identity in other quarters of the theatre-in-museum community and the variety of training and background, whilst providing richness in some ways, is not always helpful. Theatre providers are emerging from backgrounds as actors, teachers and museum education officers. Munrow (MOMI) has already noted that actors from a classical training such as RADA or LAMDA tend not to be successful in this work. Those from backgrounds with a culture of setting learning aims and viewing theatre as an applied art generally are. Whilst some practitioners successfully embrace the needs of this particular medium, others find it difficult to shake off their previous professional roots. The confusion of identity amongst theatre providers is exacerbated by the mixed ownership of theatre-in-museum. To have theatre-in-museum operating in some places under the department of interpretation but at other venues under education, events or marketing is not conducive to creating the single professional identity which is needed. If theatre-in-museum is to become a movement and take up the place in museums suggested in this concluding chapter, then practitioners need to associate themselves with areas of interpretation or education within their institutions. Ideally, we would see at least one key theatre-in-museum practitioner in any museum, becoming a permanent salaried member staff on a par with curators so that they are in a position of respect and are

recognised as being a part of the interpretative mission of the institution. It would not necessarily be best practice for all practitioners to do so, for this would tend to close down the vibrant mixture of actors, teachers and others who so successfully provide programmes in some museums. To operate under the advocacy of a central theatre-in-museum figure-head, however, would enhance the work of all involved.

Munrow (MOMI) bemoaned in Chapter Three the low status of actors in her museum, especially as they consistently featured as being the most popular element of MOMI by the visitors themselves. Theatre providers are invariably dedicated and skilled people. Observing the rigorous auditions at MOMI alone reveals the qualities needed by aspiring museum performers everywhere. A personal generosity features above all. The ability to work in a team, to be a good listener, understand the context of the museum, have an interest in the subject of the museum, be enthusiastic about research and have the academic ability to deal with it, be professional and able to make decisions, to deeply want to work at the museum, to have physical stamina, commitment and be dependable, are all primary considerations. Only when these are qualities are evident do the auditions at MOMI move on to see if candidates can act. Physicality, spatial awareness, voice quality, improvisational and communication skills, characterisation, engagement and energy are all requirements, too.

Museum practitioners are not only skilled on the gallery floor, however. Increasing numbers of people working in the field are undertaking Doctorates, Master of Arts or Diplomas in museum or theatre related subjects and are choosing theatre-in-museum as a subject for major dissertations. The emerging theatre-in-museum professional is becoming learned in their craft. It will be important that these rising scholars and skilled practitioners share their work and publish their ideas, not only to develop the embryonic theatre-in-museum movement but for the good of museums and ultimately for the public benefit.

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Chapter Seven

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

**Tables of results from the national survey
of theatre-in-museum.**

1993

The following tables show data gathered through the national research project (1993) and which supports the analysis of contemporary theatre-in-museum activity in the British Isles outlined in Chapter One, Section Three.

Types of museum responding.

Museum Type	Number Responding	% of Total Sample
Independent	342	26.33 %
Private	136	10.47 %
National	56	4.31 %
Local Authority	562	43.26 %
English Heritage	14	1.08 %
National Trust	54	4.16 %
Other	135	10.39 %

The distribution across different types of museum.

Museum Type	% of total sample of museums which DO use theatre.
Independent	19.8 %
Private	5.0 %
National	7.2 %
Local Authority	55.0 %
English Heritage	1.7 %
National Trust	5.4 %
Other	5.9 %

The percentage of museums using theatre *within* each type.

Museum Type	% within each type of museum which use theatre.
Independent	26.6 %
Private	16.9 %
National	58.9 %
Local Authority	45.0 %
English Heritage	57.1 %
National Trust	46.3 %
Other	20.0 %

Year when museums began to use theatre.

Year in which theatre was first used in museum	Number	% of those giving information	
1900 - 1949	1	0.26 %	
1950 - 1959	2	0.52 %	
1960 - 1969	4	1.02 %	
1970 - 1979	40	10.26 %	
1980 - 1984	44	11.28 %)
1985 - 1989	118	30.26 %) 41.54% - 1980's
1990 - 1993	181	46.41 %	46.41% - 1990's
			87.95% - 1980 +

Year when each type of museum began to use theatre.

Type of Museum	Year of Origin of Museum Theatre															
	1900-49		50-59		60-69		70-74		75-79		80-84		85-89		90-93	
	% All	% Type	% All	% Type	% All	% Type	% All	% Type	% All	% Type	% All	% Type	% All	% Type	% All	% Type
Independent					25	1.3	12.5	2.6	16.7	5.2	22.7	13.3	15.3	23.9	22.1	53.3
Private									4.2	5.5	11.4	27.7	2.5	16.6	4.9	49.9
National					50	6.6	12.5	6.6	4.2	3.3	4.5	6.6	11.0	43.3	5.5	33.3
Local Auth	100	0.4	100	0.9	25	0.4	43.7	3.1	70.9	7.6	47.7	9.4	59.3	31.5	56.9	46.4
Eng Heritage							6.2	16.6			4.5	33.2	2.5	49.9		
Nat Trust							12.5	10.0	4.2	5.0	2.3	5.0	6.6	40.0	4.4	40.0
Other							12.5	10.4			6.8	15.8	2.5	15.8	6.1	57.9

Chart showing percentage share of theatre in museums across all museum types (read vertical axis) and development of theatre work within each museum type (read horizontal axis).

Frequency of theatre use.

Average frequency of museum theatre use.	% of museums from those giving information.
Annual	12.1 %
Monthly	54.2 %
Weekly	18.6 %
Daily	15.1 %

Frequency of use compared with when theatre originated.

Frequency of museum theatre	% of All Museums at this frequency	% of museums beginning theatre work in these years now using theatre at these frequencies						
		1900-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-84	85-89	90-93
Yearly	12.1		50		5.0	9.1	8.6	14.5
Monthly	54.2		50	50	52.5	45.4	47.4	56.9
Weekly	18.6	100.0			10.0	24.9	28.4	15.6
Daily	15.1			50	32.5	20.4	15.5	12.8

Size of provider teams compared with when theatre originated.

Size of theatre provider teams	% of museums using different team sizes in these years.			
	1970-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-93
1-4	38.1	35.7	51.7	53.9
5-9	33.3	32.1	24.1	25.2
10-19	9.5	21.4	13.8	10.8
20-49	9.5	7.1	8.0	8.6
50-99	9.5		2.3	0.7
100-999		3.6		0.7

Location of theatre providers compared with when theatre originated.

Base of providers of theatre	Average % for all museums.	% of museums with theatre-museum providers based in or out of museum who began theatre work in these years.							
		1900-49	50-59	60-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-90	90-93
Museum	15.6			25.0	19.9	10.5	15.4	14.4	15.8
Outside	62.8	100.0	100.0	25.0	46.6	63.1	46.1	53.8	71.9
Both	21.6			50.0	33.3	26.3	38.5	31.7	12.2

The general pattern for the theatre-provider base.

Museum based	15.6 %
Outside based	62.8 %
Collaborative	21.6 %

The base of theatre-providers according to museum type.

Museum Type	% of each type of museum with these theatre provider bases.		
	Museum	Outside	Collaborative
Independent	25.9	59.3	14.8
Private	31.6	52.6	15.8
National	13.4	69.9	16.7
Local Authority	11.4	62.3	26.3
English Heritage		71.4	28.6
National Trust		90.0	9.1
Other	31.6	47.4	21.0

The relationship between frequency of programmes and the provider base.

Frequency	% of all museums with these theatre provider bases providing theatre at the given frequencies		
	Average	Museum 15.6%	Outside 62.8%
Yearly	8.3	79.1	12.5
Monthly	8.3	74.2	17.5
Weekly	19.2	48.7	32.5
Daily	46.1	21.1	32.7

Likelihood of teams of varying sizes being based inside or outside the museums.

Theatre provider base	% of theatre teams of these sizes for each theatre-provider base				
	1-4	5-9	10-49	50-99	100-999
Museum	62.7	25.4	10.1	1.7	0.0
Outside	44.3	24.9	28.4	1.7	0.6
Collaborative	44.1	38.2	16.2	0.0	1.5

Origins of each type of theatre.

Type of Theatre	% of each type of theatre originating at these dates.						
	1900-49	1950-59	1960-69	1970-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-93
1st Person		0.5	1.0	9.8	12.6	32.7	43.4
3rd Person		0.9	1.8	14.8	14.8	34.2	33.3
Scripted	0.6	0.6	1.8	13.1	11.4	30.3	42.3
Living-History		0.5	1.5	12.2	13.8	36.2	35.7
Visitors-in-Role		0.9	0.9	17.2	17.2	33.6	30.2
Re-enactment		0.9	1.8	12.2	13.9	38.3	33.0
Other		0.5	1.5	15.8	9.9	29.9	42.1
Comparison with % of origins of all museum theatre.				10.26	11.28	30.26	46.41

Museums using each type of theatre.

Type of Theatre	% of museums using each type
1st person interpretation	50.6 %
3rd person interpretation	25.6 %
Scripted plays	43.5 %
Living-History	48.3 %
Visitors-in-Role	29.1 %
Re-enactment	28.9 %
Other	47.8 %

The likely home of various theatre-types.

Theatre type	Museum Type						
	Ind	Pri	Nat	L.A.	E.H.	N.T.	Other
1st P	u	u	l	h	l	l	hu
3rd P	hu	hu	l	h	l	u	hu
Scripted	l	u	h	u	l	h	u
Living-Hist	l	l	u	h	l	l	u
Visitor-Role	hu	u	hu	h	l	l	l
Re-enact	l	hu	u	h	h	l	u
Other	u	h	hu	u	l	u	l

h = highly likely

l = likely

u = unlikely

hu = highly unlikely

v

Appendix 2

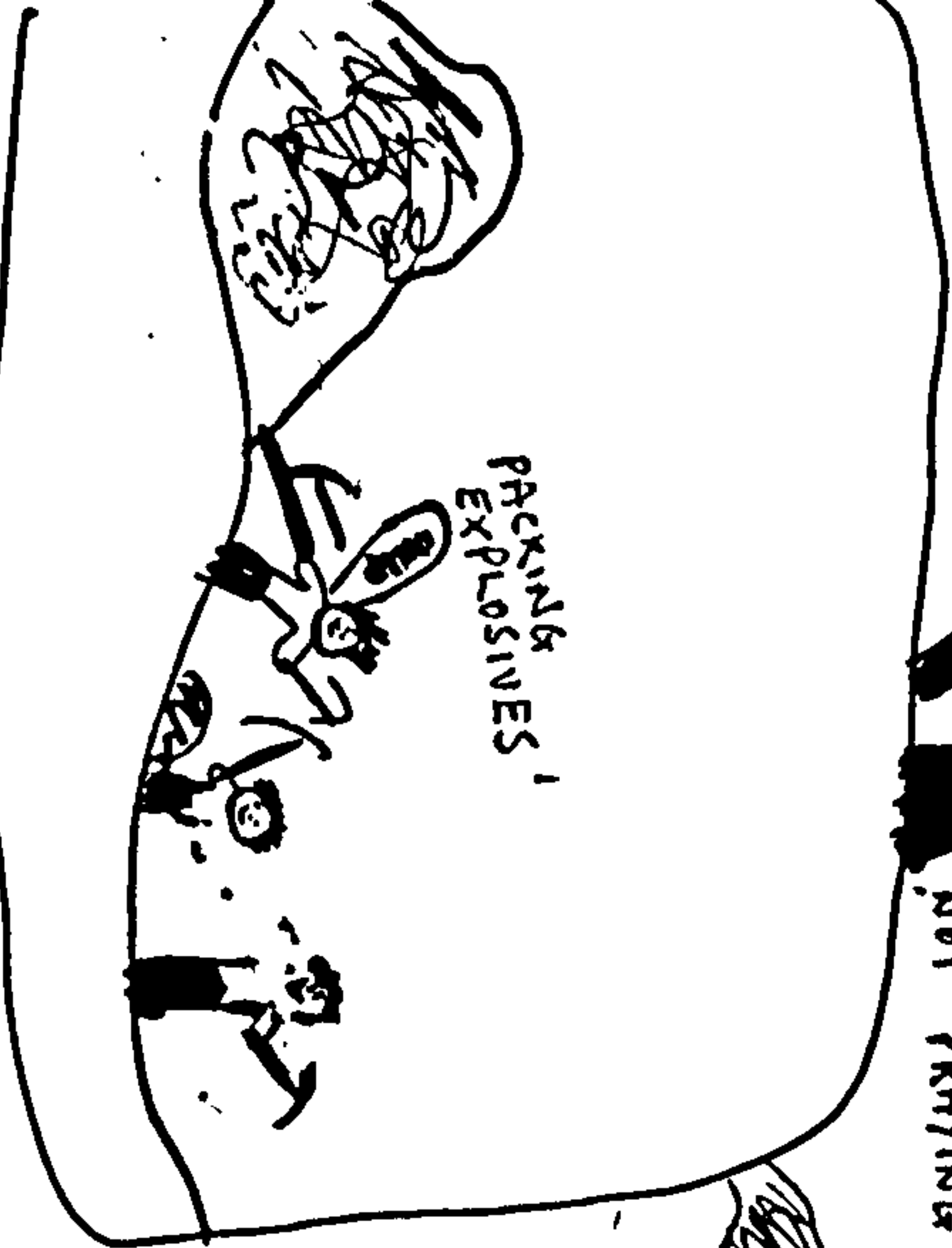
**A sample of drawings by 8-9 year old children
showing their understanding of a
theatre-in-museum programme.**

**"Running the Risk"
A play about the railway navvies.**

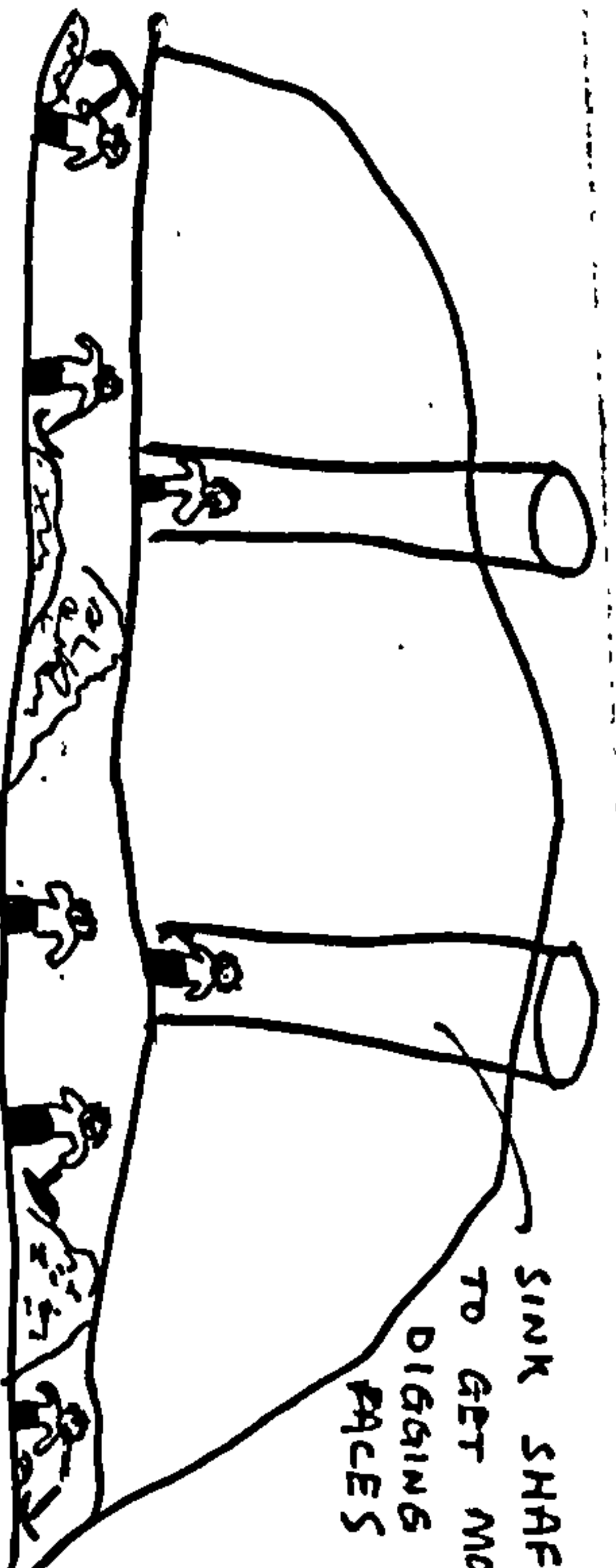
1994 and 1997



VICAR TALKING
NAVY OFF FOR
NOT PRAYING



PACKING
EXPLOSIVES!

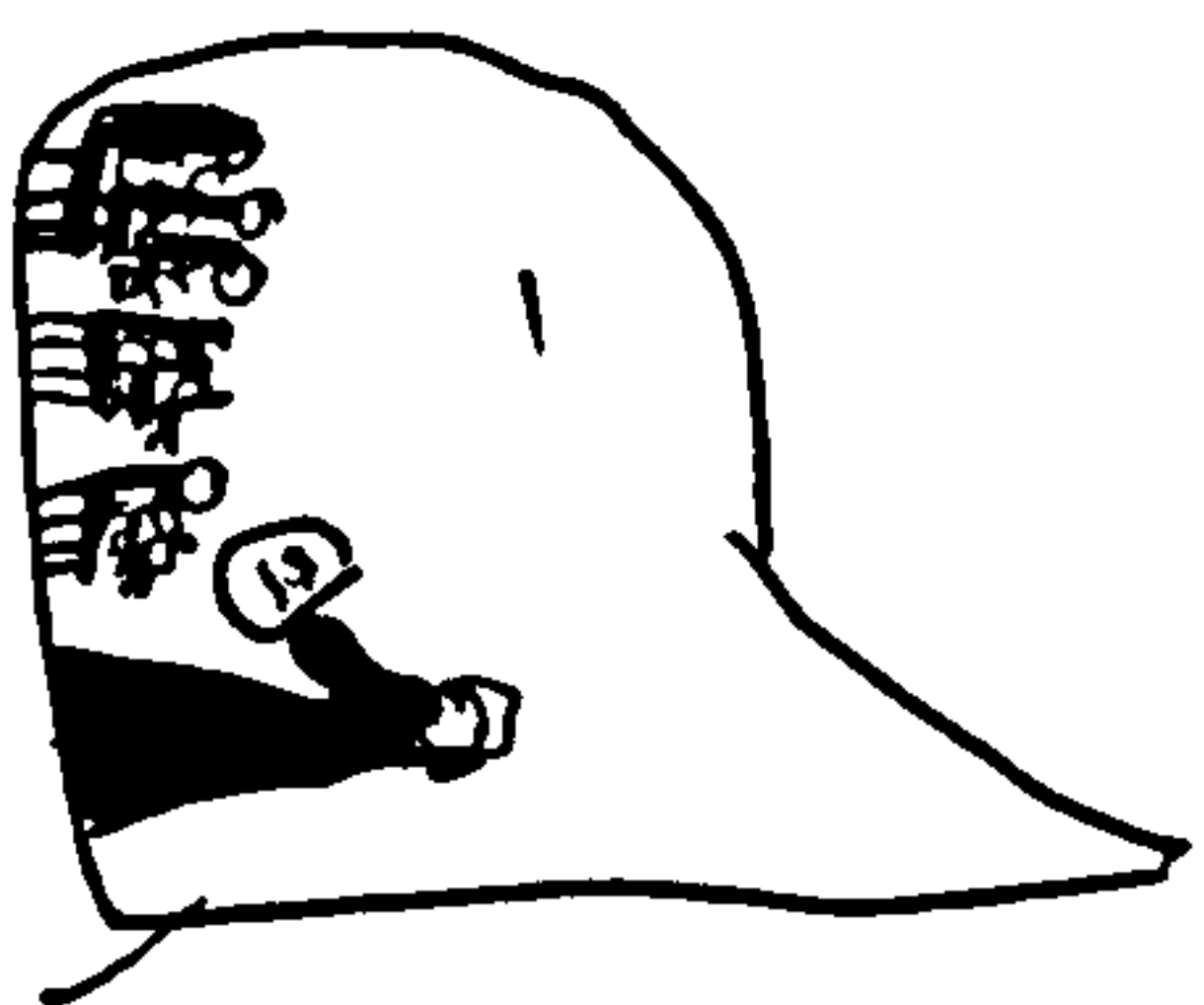


DIGGING FROM
BOTH ENDS OF HILL

SINK SHAFTS
TO GET MORE
PACES



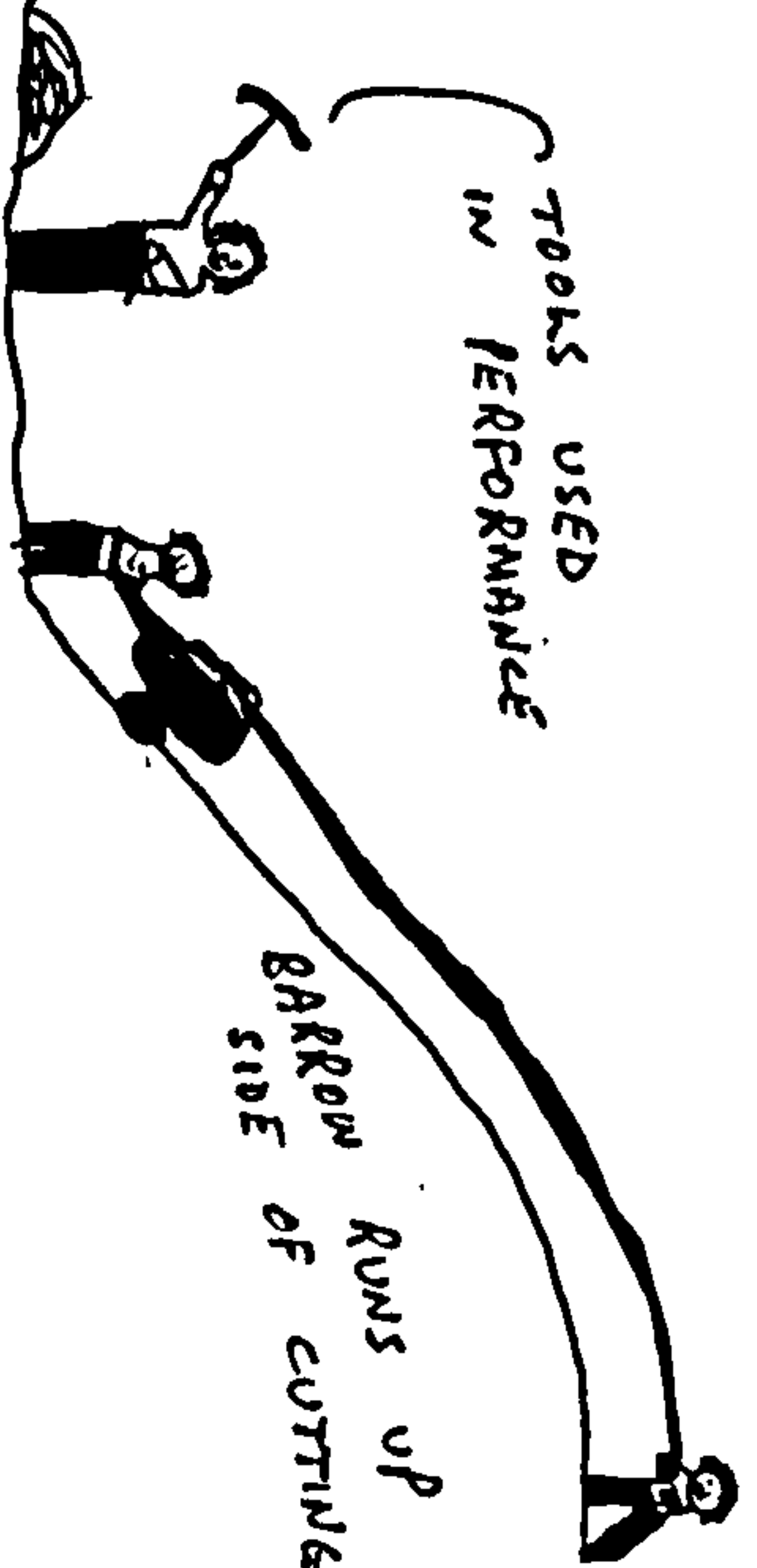
"MORE NAVVIES
ARRIVED - FIFTY
THOUSAND - HUNDREDS"



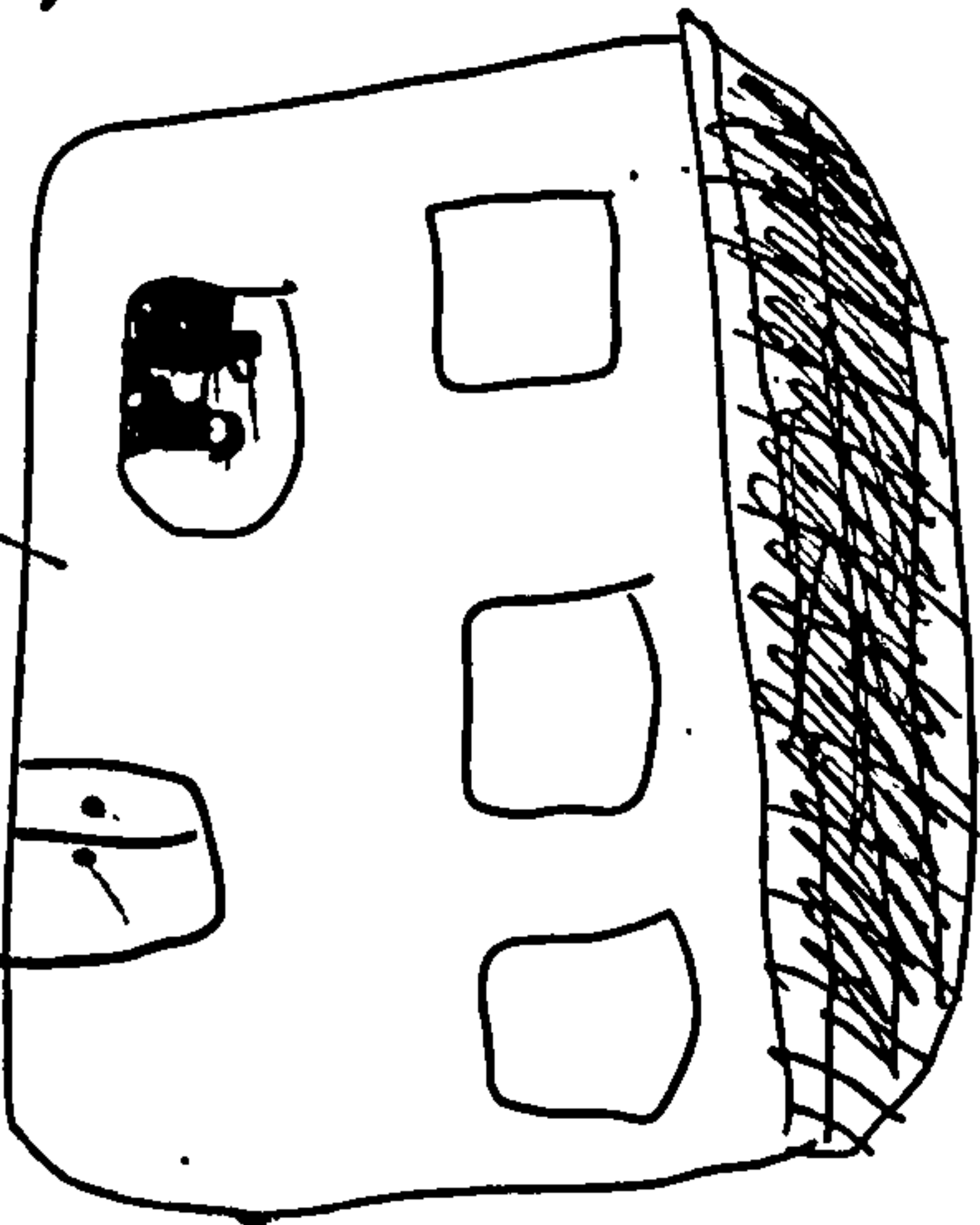
NAVVIES
AT CHURCH
TO GET A
BIBLE TO
SELL ON
FOR BEER
MONEY



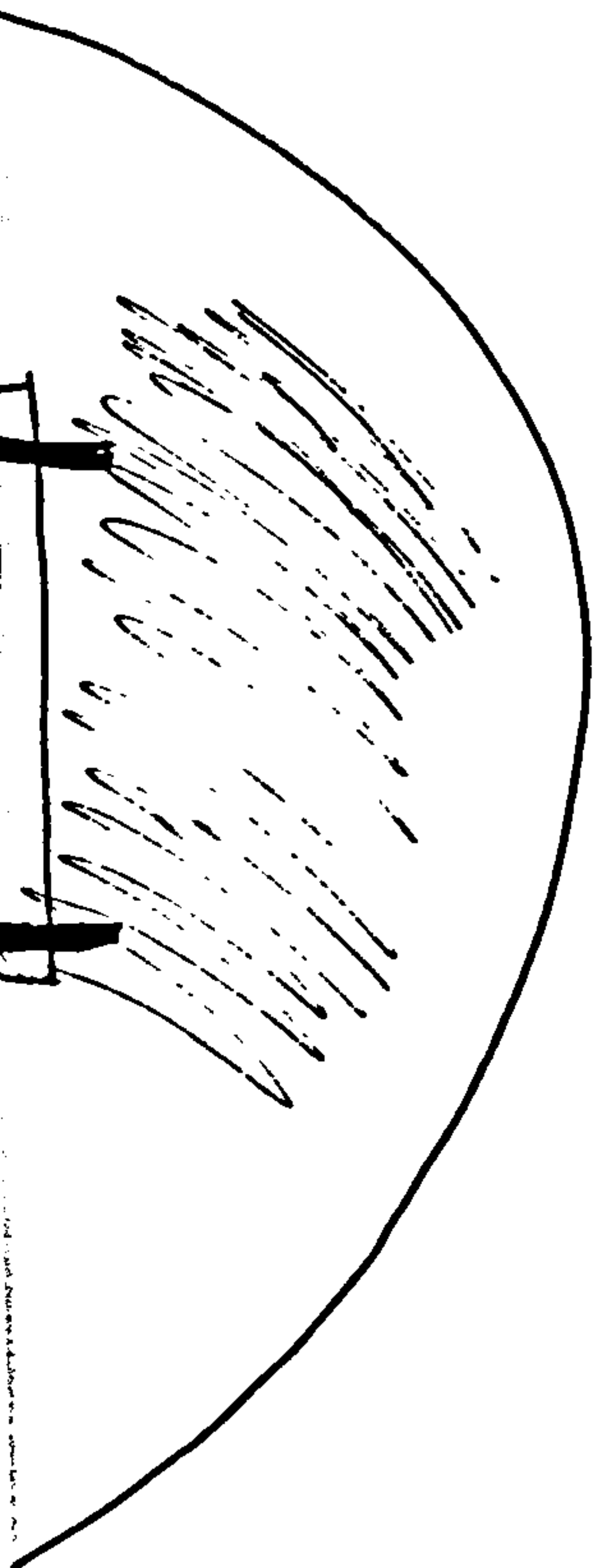
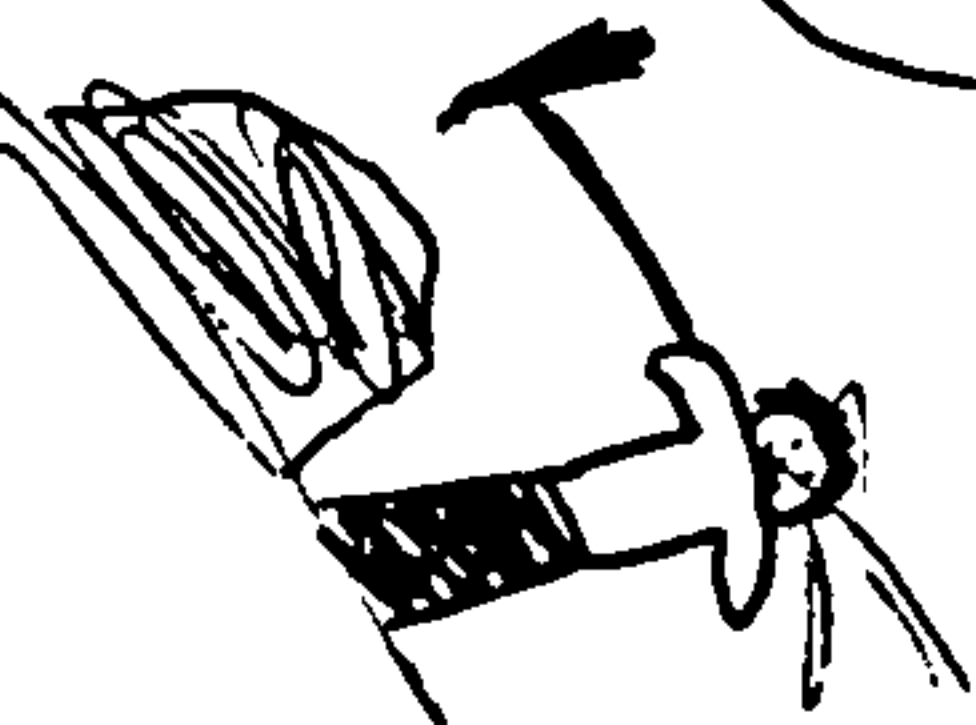
TOOLS USED
IN PERFORMANCE

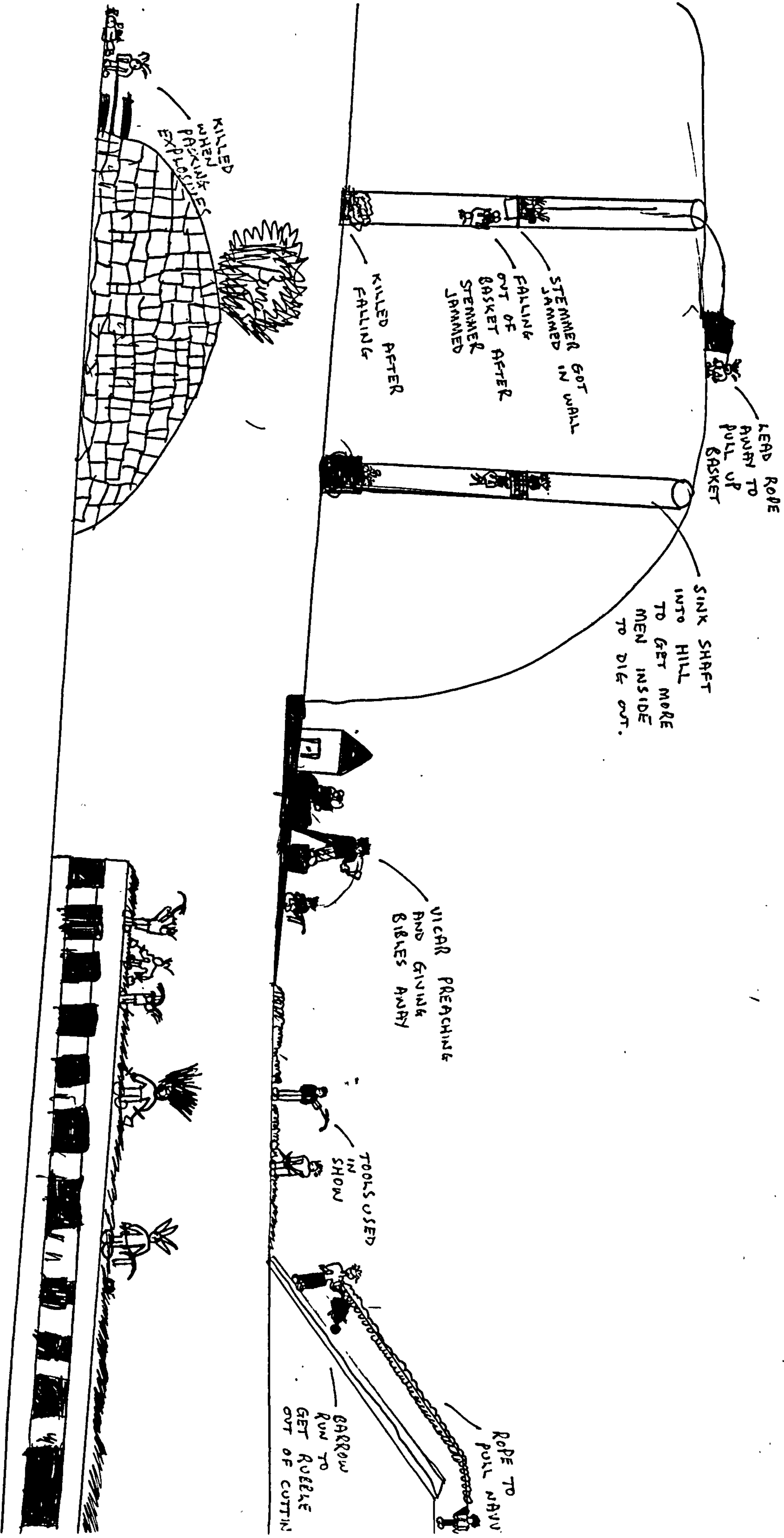


RUNS UP
SIDE OF
CUTTING
BARROW



MIS-CONCEPT OF
MODERN HOUSE.





KILLED WHEN PACKING EXPLOSIVES

FALLING

STEMMER GOT WALL JAMMED IN WALL
FALLING OUT OF BASKET STEMMER JAMMED

LEAD ROPE AWAY TO PULL UP BASKET

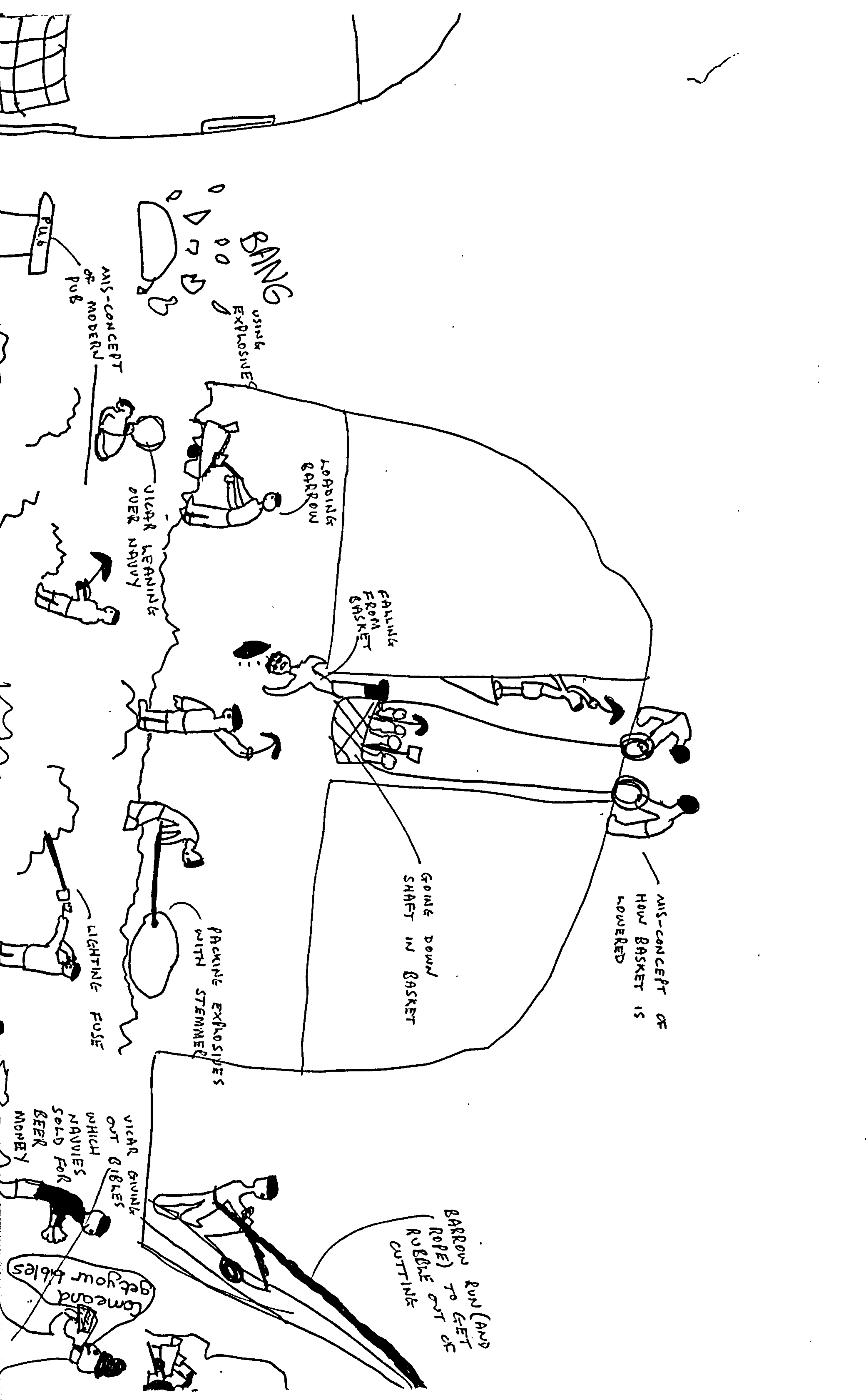
SINK SHAFT INTO HILL TO GET MORE MEN INSIDE TO DIG OUT.

VICAR PREACHING AND GIVING BIBLES AWAY

TOOLS USED IN SHOW

GARROW RUN TO GET ROBEKE OUT OF CUTTIN

ROPE TO PULL AWAY



MIS-CONCEPT OF HOW BASKET IS LOWERED

GOING DOWN SHAFT IN BASKET

FALLING FROM BASKET

LOADING BARROW

VICAR LEARNING OVER NAVY

PACKING EXPLOSIVES WITH STEMMER

LIGHTING FUSE

VICAR GIVING OUT GIBLES WHICH NAVVIES SOLD FOR BEER MONEY

Come and get your tibles

BARROWS RUN (AND ROPE) TO GET RUBBLE OUT OF CUTTING

BANG

USING EXPLOSIVES

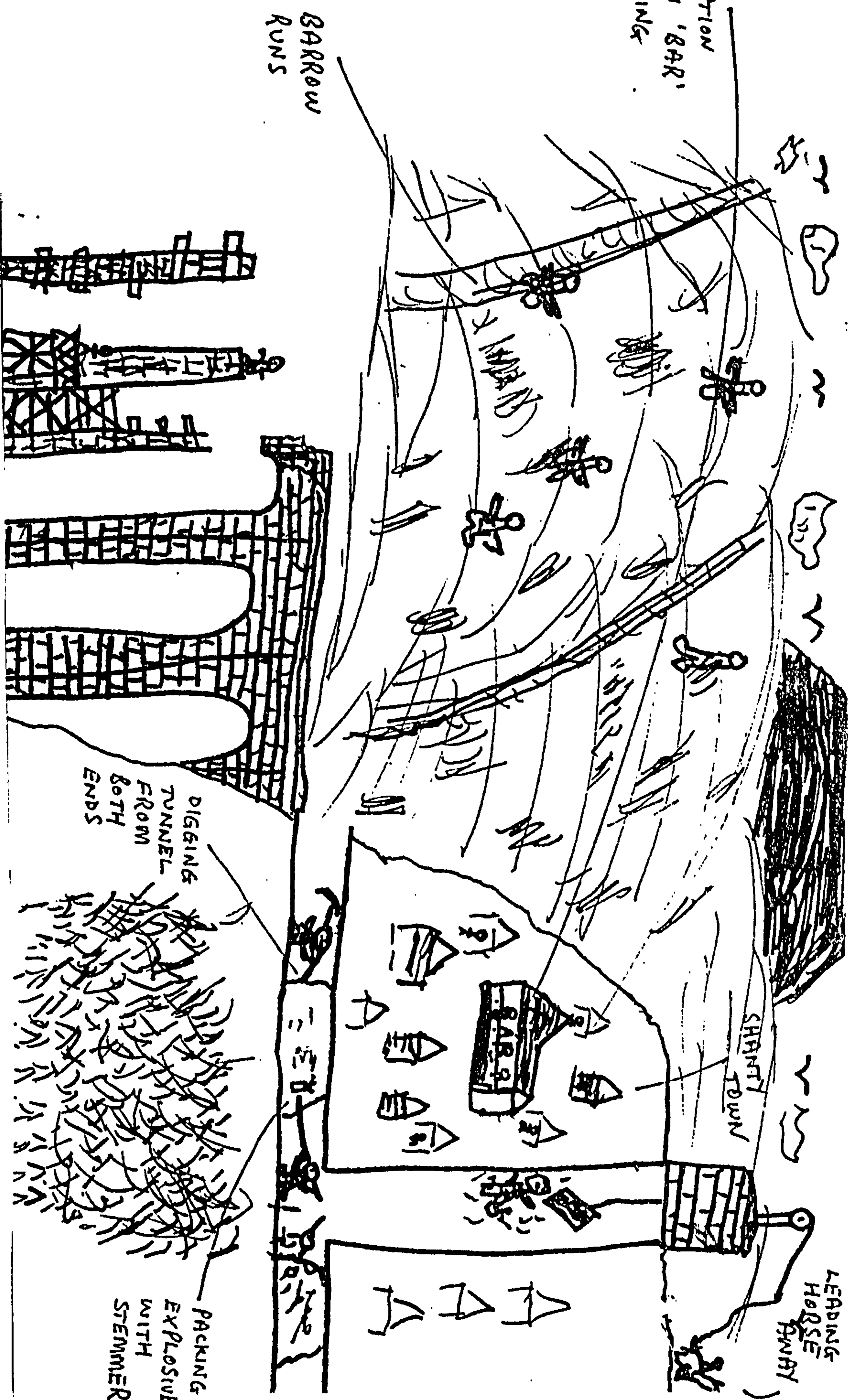
MIS-CONCEPT OF MODERN PUB

PUB

PUB

MIS-CONCEPTION
OF MODERN 'BAR'
FOR DRINKING

BARROW
RUNS



DIGGING
TUNNEL
FROM
BOTH
ENDS

PACKING
EXPLOSIVES
WITH
STEMMER

SHANTY
TOWN

LEADING
HORSE
PARRY

BAR