

Interpret Scotland | A'Foillseachadh na h-Alba

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Technology and Interpretation

Interpret Scotland

Issue 18: Technology and interpretation

Will taped commentaries replace live guides? Will museum visitors of the future explore the galleries with their eyes glued to an iPod? What is Web 2.0? This issue looks at technology and interpretation, and you can read the articles inside to find out!

In keeping with the theme, Interpret Scotland is now published as pdf files. All of the articles in this file are available individually from the Interpret Scotland website www.interpretscotland.org.uk where you can also join the free subscription list.

If you view the articles on screen, hyperlinks in the text mean you can easily find more details and follow up references. You're welcome to print the articles, save them on your own computer, or share them with others.

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Confidence with a PDA

John Paul Sumner describes how a new project in Glasgow aims to help people explore themselves, as well as Kelvingrove's collections.

Glasgow's **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum** re-opened in July 2006 to great press coverage after a £35 million restoration programme. A supplementary element to the project is an extension to the **Campbell Hunter Education Wing**, to create an 'Object Cinema' for young people. The **Hunter Foundation**, Sir Tom Hunter's venture philanthropist charity, generously helped us create this high-tech space in Kelvingrove to inspire young people.

Both Sir Tom and Glasgow Museums were keen to attract young people from excluded and disadvantaged backgrounds. Initial ideas were tested with a group of 200 teenagers, who contributed information on their attitudes and the values that inspire them. We discovered that the group considered museums in general 'Uncool'; 'Boring'; 'Geeky, unfashionable and dull'.

Another obstacle to inspiring young people is that their confidence and self-esteem can be low. A World Health Organization **study** found that Scottish kids lack confidence: they ranked 23rd out of 29 countries. The new **Scottish 'Curriculum for Excellence'** aims to enable young people to become confident individuals, with self-respect, secure values and ambition. But how to create confidence? How to instill ambition?

The Centre of New Enlightenment (TCoNE) is one response. A cinematic and digital tour experience for pre-booked groups, it involves a physical visit to Kelvingrove, supported by a pre-visit interactive CD and a post-visit bespoke **webpage**. The key philosophy in developing TCoNE was that this experience should use technology as a tool to interpret the collections and create meaning for visitors. It was not about technology for technology's sake, and should not rely simply on high-tech effects. Our Educational Psychologist Consultant **Dr Alan McLean** described our target visitors, 10-14 year-olds, as intrinsically self-centred and self-absorbed. They are not really aware of the world outside their own sphere of influence. They are concerned with their looks, their status, and how others perceive them, and they're not really keen on engaging with adults. The subtle use of technology is a useful tool for communicating with this target group.

The visitor experience starts when they arrive in a white, dust free, high-tech room that challenges their preconceptions of a museum. We take a digital photo of each visitor, and their first name is entered into the system: an important first step because it establishes this as a personalised experience.

A facilitator then tells them how to use the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA – a handheld computer) that is used in the project. This takes about five minutes, and allows a colleague time to upload the visitor's identity – their photo and name – into their PDA via an infrared link. The visitors then see a short film, and are amazed to see their own photos and names integrated into the production. The novelty and personalised nature of this really impresses them. Adults are sometimes not so keen! Then, using the PDAs, they embark on a journey through Kelvingrove to interact with the collections. The PDAs give them clues that become progressively easier to solve. The visitors find this part, 'the treasure hunt', most enjoyable.

The PDAs do not recite information and facts about the collections; instead they prompt the visitor to question how they feel about the painting, sculpture or specimen in front of them. An infrared beam at each object triggers the PDAs to activate, confirming that the visitor has reached the correct destination. Visitors' individual results and feedback are collated 'live' by a central server, to be displayed in the finale to the visit.

During this journey the collections are used as a tool for visitors to explore their own personality. Subjects addressed on the tour include family bereavement, empathy with others, judgement in relationships, and confronting prejudice. All serious issues, but presented in fun-packed challenges. Will you make Elvis cry by telling him he's a terrible singer? Will you make friends with the refugee girl by telling her jokes? Can you read the emotions on other people's faces? On return to the room where the tour started, visitors' achievements are shown and their strengths revealed.

Our pilot phase in spring and summer 2008 catered for approximately 2,000 invited visitors. Our in-house evaluation was very encouraging – 92% said that the experience was fun, and 8% said it was just OK – 0% said it was boring. It was most rewarding that at the end of the experience 81% of visitors said that they felt confident or very confident.

At TCoNE we aim to use technology to tap in to visitors' emotions, and contribute to their interpretation of the collections in a new and personalised way. Professor John MacBeath of Cambridge University will have completed a more in-depth educational evaluation by the end of 2008, and will show whether we've demonstrated that technology can be more than a vehicle for facts, figures and fun.

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Canned or live?

A coach tour with a live guide was once the staple of Scotland's tourism industry. Now the open-top buses that ply the streets of Glasgow and Edinburgh use recorded commentaries, controlled by the driver. So will technology spell the end of the live guide? James Carter picked up a microphone, and put some questions to Viola Lier and Alex Pringle.

JC: Alex, how did you first get into using pre-recorded commentary on your buses?

AP: Six or seven years ago our whole market for tours in Glasgow changed. Before then people coming here would have some knowledge of English, and they came for the city's culture; now they come because they can fly here for £1. A huge proportion of them don't speak English, and they don't want the sort of tours we used to do, looking at architecture and design: they just want an impression of what you can do here, a familiarisation tour really.

So now we use a pre-recorded commentary in eight languages, stored on a hard drive. The commentary's divided into very short units, all displayed on a screen so the driver can play one after the other, or skip through them. If he's stuck in traffic, there's an additional menu of 'fillers' – guides work in the same way, with material in reserve for when they need it.

JC: What do you see as the particular advantages of the two media?

VL: The human touch, that comes with passion and enthusiasm; flexibility, of reacting to circumstances, and the chance to have a tailored approach, where a guide can really add meaning for a particular client.

AP: Technology means we can meet a demand from people who don't speak English – we couldn't viably run a live tour in all those languages. Pre-recording also gives you a consistency in the quality of the tour, and we can cater for very few people – often live tours get cancelled because there aren't enough customers.

JC: How do the two approaches stand up to different circumstances, for example a 45-minute city tour compared with a week-long trip round the Highlands?

VL: It really comes down to using the right tool for the job. For the week-long tour, you need a live guide to tailor the experience to visitors' needs, and guide them to discover the place for themselves. It's a real interpreter's job, linking places and topics to themes and being flexible to the circumstances around you.

AP: As a coach operator, I'm looking at it from a driver's point of view, and what's the best use of the driver's time. If you have long tour with a recorded commentary, all the customer care side is left to the driver, and the driver's got enough to do. When you get to a hotel at night he's got to unload all the luggage and get the bus cleaned – how's he going to look after the customers as well?

From my point of view, a recording on a longer tour is a waste of money – it's not going to give you a quality experience. There are technical problems too: if the system breaks down in the Highlands you're stuck: it's not like our situation here where we're within a couple of miles of the garage.

JC: What do you see as the future in this field? Will live guiding become just a niche product for the luxury market?

VL: I think live guides will use technology. At the moment we might have pictures of Kings or Queens; in future we might have really high tech things – maybe holograms of them that can speak for a while and then the guide can come in again. I think there's also a role for guides to do the recording work: I'd rather do that than have linguists reading commentaries.

AP: I agree that there'll always be a role for live guides. We have a tremendous demand for English-speaking guides – from Americans and Australians, and from the 'dinkies': they want a live guide, and they'll wait for a bus that has one.

JC: So technology is here to stay...

AP: But so is the live guide!

VL: I think new developments in tourism will also support the market for live guides: people coming off big cruise ships want to continue the incredibly high standards of service they've had on board, and live guides can provide that.

AP: It's all about the product the customer wants – it's got to be customer led.

Viola Lier is a tourist guide and training manager for the Scottish Tourist Guides Association

Alex Pringle, Tourism and Training Manager at City Guides in Glasgow runs a fleet of buses in the city. His collection of model buses reflects a long career in running coach tours.

MyPeak Bill Bevan goes networking

My Peak Experience is a user-generated website where people can contribute their own comments, pictures, videos and audio clips of their experiences of the Peak District's heritage. The website was created by the Peak District Interpretation Partnership as part of the Peak Experience project, and on the back of my own interest in Web 2.0 and social networking websites. The site was launched in May 2008 after a long gestation and testing period.

The aims of MyPeak are to:

- Develop a stronger sense of connection and 'ownership' of the Peak District amongst visitors and local residents who become part of a virtual Peak online community. We hope this will lead to a greater understanding and further return visits.
- Enable others to participate in interpreting the Peak District. By 'others' we mean people who are not employed as Rangers, Wardens, Interpreters or Guides. They might be visitors who want to share their favourite place, or folk from local communities who want to publicise their area. Many people have their own favourite places and their own stories to tell, are good photographers and innovative mini-video makers. Let us harness this enthusiasm for a landscape.
- Encourage others to widen the number of information sources available to the millions of web users who regularly use the web for destination, research, content-sharing and social networking

We developed the website by looking at other social networking and content sharing sites such as YouTube, Flickr, Facebook and MySpace to identify how they worked, what their appeal was and how they encouraged use. We then commissioned web company **Surface Impression** who have experience of creating websites based on user-generated content. An important consideration was that MyPeak should not look like a corporate-owned website but should appeal as a place where an online community can grow.

The site works by having a page for a place in the same way that **Facebook** has a page for a person. Any member can create a new place, which they then have administrative responsibility for. Once the place exists any other members can contribute photos, videos and audio, while anyone can add a comment.

Some essentials in setting up the site were:

- people have to join as members before they can upload content
- members have to agree to a set of terms and conditions and a set of do's and don'ts
- any submitted content is published immediately it is uploaded
- content is peer moderated through a 'report this page' function.

All of these elements have been borrowed from other long-standing and successful Web 2.0 sites. We also wanted to make the most of 'mash-ups'. These are web-based applications that enable content from one website to be shared with another.

On MyPeak, this works by allowing members with photos on Flickr or videos on YouTube to link them easily into the MyPeakExperience site. It also allows MyPeak places to link outwards, to applications such as Google Earth and digital maps. Members' favourite places can link out to social networking site Facebook and an interactive map application can go to any member's website, blog or profile page.

Since May 2008 the website has grown steadily. We seeded it with 50 places to begin with, both to give an idea of how the site works and to have some places for people to add content to. There are now 67 places and a membership of 89. We are publicising the site through press releases, postcards, posters and by direct promotion through other online communities including special interest forums, Flickr groups, Facebook and blogs. This last form of promotion has been the most successful to date, because we are directly reaching other users of Web 2.0 sites.

MyPeak is growing like a molehill rather than erupting like a volcano. We think this slow-burner effect is inevitable because this sort of site grows organically as more and more people get to know about it. We see two main audiences for the site: one is people who use the internet to research a place when planning a visit, and who might just browse the site for information and interest. But our target audience for membership is people who already actively participate in social networking and user-generated websites. This is a growing audience, as more and more people grow up using this technology!

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Placebook Scotland

Scotland is about to get its own version of the My Peak Experience site. **PlaceBook Scotland** went live for uploads on 5 November. This exciting new project aims to enthuse people and to capture the essence of Scotland's distinct places and diverse landscapes – the good, bad, and even the ugly – as perceived by local people.

Everyone is invited to submit images, prose, poetry, music or song that evokes the essence of the places they have strong associations with. Places where people live, work or visit, urban and rural, dramatic and ordinary, the site will become a record of what we think and feel about Scotland's places.

Supported by the Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage and National Trust for Scotland, PlaceBook Scotland seeks to capture people's views in creative ways and generate interest and discussion about the sense of place in their local areas.

The project is an initiative of the **Scottish Landscape Forum**, which exists to share information, encourage discussion and promote action for better care of Scotland's landscapes.

Will the long tail wag the dog

'Web 2.0' is a buzz word in commentaries on the internet. Search Google for the phrase, and you'll find over 90 million hits. But there's no clear definition of exactly what it means, apart from the fact that it is not a new version of how the web actually works, in the way that new releases of computer programs are given incremental numbers. Instead, **Web 2.0** is a way of referring to how the web, and the way people use it, is evolving. Some commentators suggest that it represents a maturing of the web: in its early years it mimicked conventional publishing, with all material controlled by the organisation that provided it; now the way the web works is beginning to be truly something new.

Much of that new activity is rooted in how the web allows users to collaborate and interact. Social networking sites like **Facebook** or **Bebo** are examples: sites that develop self-defining communities of interest, and where all the content is generated by the people involved. That concept of 'user-generated content' – stuff published, shared, argued over, and constantly re-invented by anyone who cares to take an interest – is a key feature of Web 2.0, and the one that has perhaps the most direct implications for interpretation.

The **article** in this issue of Interpret Scotland on how the East Lothian Museums Service used photo sharing site **Flickr** is one example of interpretation trying to tap into web-based communities of interest. Forward-looking marketing ventures have also seen Flickr's potential, using it as a source of imagery that has the 'magic dust' of user endorsement. **VisitAviemore** includes a gallery of images of the area drawn from Flickr, and has at times made a special feature of particularly good photographs. The site also taps into relevant blogs – online diaries – as well as material posted from **YouTube**.

Treasure Hunt

Geocaching is another phenomenon that could not have existed without the web. A treasure hunt for the satellite age, it involves hiding a small container containing a log book in a place that appeals to you, recording the location with a **GPS** receiver, and then publishing the details on a dedicated website. Other gamers try to find the container, and write up their experiences online.

The game has a direct interpretive potential: it encourages people to visit specific places, which can be interpreted both through the description in the record for each cache, and in the contents of the container. Shropshire County Council pioneered the activity as an interpretation tool with a **project** that loans GPS units to people wanting to have a go. But its real Web 2.0 character lies in the way ordinary people choose and describe the places where they hide their caches. Many of them use the game as a way of expressing their interest in an area's heritage, and their descriptions

are clearly intended to interest others: the activity is a form of user-generated interpretation.

The Long Tail

Geocaching is a very effective way of persuading reluctant children to go for a walk, but it's never going to be a mass-market interest. It offers an appealing activity for a niche market, and in doing so it exemplifies another feature of Web 2.0 developments: the viability of 'The Long Tail'. This means simply that the demographics of the internet make it worth providing for the relatively tiny market that exists for specialist products or interests. It's the reason retailers like Amazon can make a profit from obscure books and music. If interpretation taps into Web 2.0, perhaps it can provide a far more diverse range of experiences than would be possible through conventional technology.

Podcasting is an example. A podcast – a small audio or video presentation that can be played on an mp3 player – is easy to produce, and can be published at no cost on websites where it can wait until someone who shares the interests of the author decides to download it. **MuseumPods** is dedicated to podcasts exploring museums, many of which explore subjects too specialised or detailed for any interpretation aimed at the majority of visitors. Programmes from the RAF Museum at Hendon, for example, include a study of a WWI battle in Palestine, a look at the lucky charms RAF pilots took with them on bombing runs, and 'part 1 of a series' about the technical development of the Spitfire.

It's not always clear that podcasts are designed as true interpretation, linked directly to an experience of the resource, but they do offer a remarkably open form of publishing. Most of the material at MuseumPods has been developed by the museums concerned, but **Art Mobs** specialises in independent, 'unofficial' podcasts for New York's Museum of Modern Art. They include pieces of music inspired by the museum's collections.

That freedom, allowing interpretation to take forms no 'official' institution would ever produce, is one of the great strengths of Web 2.0. It's also its greatest challenge. If the web now allows anyone to interpret a place, however they like, and to make that interpretation instantly available for others to share, where does that leave the role of the managing agency?

Fully embracing the implications and potential of Web 2.0 means that organisations have to recognise they are no longer fully in control of how places are interpreted. In many ways, of course, they never were: independent guides and guidebooks have always presented their own points of view, and visitors rarely arrive as 'blank slates', without preconceptions or prior knowledge. But Web 2.0 means that the range of different interpretations, the rate at which they can be developed and discussed, and

the variety of media through which they can be accessed, are all expanding rapidly. Some user-generated interpretation draws on conventional media for its inspiration: the description for the geocache at **Crystal Well**, on the River Tweed, takes both its facts and its theme from a plaque installed by the Tweed Rivers Interpretation Project. But the way is open for far more independent approaches, and some may be too outspoken for even the most liberally-minded agency to accept. **Wikipedia** is a classic example of a Web 2.0 product, and has become the standard starting point for many people wanting to research a subject. Around 1600 hours on 7 November 2007, the page dealing with supermarket giant Tesco began: 'Tesco sells cheap and nasty food in unhygienic conditions. Scientists have discovered a bacterium unique to Tesco which lives in the cold dark and dirty spaces at the bottom of the freezer cabinets' and continued in a similar vein. By the evening, the page had been changed to the neutral-to-positive review you might expect.

Wikipedia is not strictly interpretation: its content is not designed to accompany and illuminate a visit to a site. But it is a commonly-accessed source of information about many places. Major institutions, or those dealing with potentially controversial subjects, would do well to keep a weather eye on how their sites are being presented there. They can edit Wikipedia to remove what some see as legitimate protest; others as vandalism. But they cannot control, or in many cases even monitor, all the vast range of content that exists in the amorphous world of Web 2.0.

Policies established by social networking sites offer one way of addressing genuine concerns about what 'interpretation by anyone' could mean. Bebo, Flickr, YouTube and others all have clear terms of use that prohibit offensive material. They also allow any user to 'flag' content they consider in breach of these conditions; the content is then reviewed by a moderator, and if necessary removed. This seems a practical and effective way of dealing with offensive or inappropriate content: it also has the merit of matching a Web 2.0 solution to a Web 2.0 problem.

But if organisations really want to embrace interpretation in the Web 2.0 world, there are implications more far-reaching than the need to watch out for the hi-tech equivalent of rude comments chalked on the blackboard. All of the ventures we've looked at are based on the idea of users interacting, collaborating and sharing. The end result is the product of a community, and if organisations want to make the best of what Web 2.0 has to offer, they will need to dedicate time, creativity and enthusiasm to being active members of that community. What the community produces may be more diffuse, even less disciplined than what went before, but it has the potential to be more diverse, more individual, and more thought-provoking.

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Flickring round East Lothian

East Lothian Museums Service has been posting images of their collections on photo sharing site Flickr. Sarah Cowie takes us through the slideshow...

'The groom is wearing the trimmings of a Bandmaster and would have been an unpaid Local Officer''

When museum visitors can give additional interpretation like this, it's a real blessing for over-worked curators. But Tracy Clark was able to enlighten us without ever visiting the museums run by **East Lothian Council Museums Service** (ELMS).

Much has been written about the past authoritarian nature of museums, where one curator's interpretation of an object was seen as the only story it could tell. Over time, museums have recognised that visitors construct their own meanings and knowledge, and they have had to change their practices to accommodate this. Digitized collections on **Scran** have potentially a wider audience, but you need a subscription for full access, and the information presented is still provided by the museums service. We needed a more democratic way to share our collections, and so ELMS set up their own account on **Flickr**.

Flickr is a photo sharing website where people can share photographs and leave comments about images that interest them. When we put a selection from our collections online, we hoped that people would comment on the objects, share their stories, or perhaps even use the images in their daily lives.

But is a website mainly used to share personal photographs really the place to encourage public interpretation of our collections? It depends what you count as interpretation. Nothing much was really gained from the person who left the comment 'Nice bell!' about our **Samuelston School Bell**. And most of our photographs, whilst they have been viewed many times, have had no comments. There are some success stories though. One of our most popular photographs, **Victorian Children 1880s**, has been viewed over 4,500 times. One Flickr member was able to tell us who was in the photograph, as it was taken by his great-grandfather. He even corrected us on the gender of one of the children who we had thought was a girl! We have since altered our museum database to reflect this new knowledge.

We decided at the start that we would offer our collections under a **Creative Commons Licence**. This means images can be freely copied, distributed and displayed, as long as ELMS is credited and they are not being used for a commercial purpose. Images from our collections have been used in many different ways, such as digital artwork, a backdrop for a play, and within a **Schmap** (a digital travel guide).

Many within the heritage profession interested in similar schemes have come to us muttering in hushed voices about rude comments or inappropriate use of collections. Recently we had a request to use one of our Orange Lodge banners by a user called 'orangekkk'. We declined. As yet, we have had no inappropriate comments left by users. Regular checking of comments and reporting of any users leaving such comments is the relatively straightforward solution to this problem.

Indeed, the issue with Flickr is the staff time required to maintain our account. You need to become part of the community to encourage comments. The more you network, the more feedback you get. Someone also has to be responsible for wading through the large number of requests to become part of other people's groups. I have now turned down the chance to become part of the Modern Architecture of Baghdad group four times!

So what is the future for Flickr? One group we were looking to engage with through the internet was the 16-25 year old age market. It looks as if we have had little success in this area and our sights are turning to social networking sites such as **Bebo**. We hope instead to create a more community-orientated Flickr account, by adding individuals' family photographs to our collection online. This is part of a wider European project that includes partners from England, Italy and Hungary, all of them interested in digitizing family photographs. By doing this, we hope that the ELMS Flickr site can become, like museums themselves, the holder of the local area's identity and history, interpreted through the eyes (and keyboards) of the community.

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Speak the lingo

The world of technology is full of strange words and phrases. If you're not sure you can tell a tag from a blue tooth, or you're afraid of making a mashup in a social media situation, have this bluffers' guide to hand.

Blog

Short for web log, and an example of social media. A blog is a website designed to be updated regularly with comments, articles, images and other media. Blogging started as an activity mainly for individuals, who run blogs as commentaries on fields of interest such as politics or conservation, or as online personal diaries. Now many organisations run blogs as a constantly updated web-presence for a particular aspect of their work. **Technorati** is a search engine that allows you to search the more than 112 million blogs that exist.

Mashup

A web-based service that combines data from different sources so as to offer content relevant to a particular interest. Mashups often integrate maps such as **Google Maps** with images, or with information and reviews of businesses such as restaurants or taxi companies.

iGuide is an example close to interpreters' interests: describing itself as 'an interactive travel guide', it draws on data from seven different sources, including Google Maps, YouTube and Wikipedia.

Twitter

A web-based service that allows users to exchange text-based messages of up to 140 characters in length. Messages can be received in many ways, including via the **Twitter** website, email, and mobile phone text message. Another example of social media, Twitter was used by both parties in the 2008 US presidential campaign to keep their supporters up to date with events.

Delicious

A website that allows users to share links to websites that interest them, and to tag their suggestions so others can find links to sites that interest them. **Delicious** describes itself as 'the biggest collection of bookmarks in the universe'.

Bluetooth

Radio technology that allows things like mobile phones or laptop computers to exchange data over short distances with other things, like headphones or printers. Bluetooth headsets are a common example, allowing you to speak 'hands free' on a mobile phone without a wire between the headset and the phone. Bluetooth

cannot handle the large amounts of data possible with a wireless network, but it needs less power and less complex electronics, so is ideal for hand-held equipment. Developed in Scandinavia, the name comes from a tenth-century Danish king, Harald Blåtand, who united (linked – geddit?) Norway and Denmark.

Some interpretation projects offer content that visitors can download, on site, via a Bluetooth link to their mobile phone. Bluetooth is independent of a connection to a phone network, so it will work even in places that have no network signal. However, knowing how to activate your phone's Bluetooth service seems to be a bit like knowing how to program your video recorder: it's a rare skill possessed by few.

Social media

Internet-based systems that allow people to share and discuss just about anything you can think of. Social networking sites such as **Bebo** and **MySpace** are the most familiar examples. **Wikipedia**, where encyclopaedia content is developed through collaborative effort, or **SmugMug**, dedicated to sharing and discussing images, are also examples of social media. There is a bewildering array of offerings, each with its own demographic: both **Facebook** and **LinkedIn** have similar functions, but LinkedIn feels more sober and professional.

There's no doubt that social media represent a genuinely new development in the way people communicate, and the way we need to think about publishing. But it's all very new, and changing fast – which makes it hard to predict whether a particular project using social media will 'work'. It's also essential to understand that social media needs constant attention: as Nathan Williams, a speaker at a recent Museums Association conference put it, 'You don't watch social media, you participate in it.'

Tag

A keyword that you associate with things like pictures, pieces of music or recipes, and that describes the associations or meanings they have for you. Leonardo's Mona Lisa might be tagged with: Leonardo, da Vinci, masterpiece, Louvre, smile. Tags on sites such as **Flickr** are useful ways of finding images of a particular subject.

As more and more tags are added by different people, they can build up to show an interesting spread of meanings – a sort of collective description of an object that's called a folksonomy. The **Steve project** is an experiment in using this phenomenon to engage people with museum objects.

Podcast

A small presentation, a bit like a mini radio or TV programme, that can be played on an mp3 player such as an iPod or a mobile phone. Podcasts began as audio-only, but now many include still or moving images. They're ideal for listening to in the gym, out

jogging, or on a train. Many people use them to listen to radio programmes they've missed or want to listen to again.

Podcasts have interesting potential for interpretation, but people need to download them onto their player before their visit: how many of us do that sort of advance planning?

Digg

A website that allows users to post links to, vote for and comment on news articles and other publications on the web. Items that get the most votes appear on **Digg's** front page, making it an example of how social media can interact with mainstream publishing.

Interpreting the land of song Paul Hibberd describes a study trip to Latvia

'If you feel tired, overheated or your body is suffering from thirst after a randy night, but your soul agonises in self reproaches...!'

The interpretive panel at the world's most northerly vineyard - Sabiles in Latvia - certainly provoked our interest. Who could resist reading on after such an introduction?

A bus full of British interpreters (seven based in Scotland and one 'border reiver' from Durham) had descended on Riga just as everyone else left the city for the St John's Day (summer solstice) celebrations. Refusing to take this personally, and impressed by everyone's connection with nature / desire to have a party, we set out on a week's exploration as part of the ARCH Network 'Innovation in Cultural and Heritage Interpretation' study trip.

We had an excellent week, generously funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme, and hosted by Latvijas Dabas Muzejs (the Latvian Natural History Museum) and the Latvian Nature Guides.

One of the highlights was the invite to join the annual Nature Guides training camp. This year the theme was the nature-based St John's Day celebrations themselves. It certainly illustrated the strong connection with culture and land that exists for many Latvians. I think our nearest British equivalent would be the traditional Beltane celebrations, but it struck us that in Latvia the festival is very much a national event. Has the country's history of occupation made Latvians more determined to celebrate their own culture? By the same logic, has our relatively peaceful recent history disconnected us from our native cultures?

As usual it was the personal interpretation, delivered with good humour and backed by a deep and passionate knowledge of the local stories, which made the experience so much more enjoyable. The nature guides' admirable ability to burst into spontaneous and unembarrassed song set them apart from most UK interpreters (well me at least!).

In case you were wondering, the conclusion to the panel at Sabiles was; 'Good wine is the safest way to make your life delightful and beautiful'
Cheers!

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The **ARCH network** organises trips that are open to anyone working in the natural and cultural heritage sector within Scotland.

News

The well-wired gallery

Technology is everywhere. The McManus Galleries and Museum in Dundee is undergoing a multi-million pound redevelopment, and when it re-opens the entire gallery will be wired for WiFi: the technology that allows computers, games consoles and mobile phones to connect over a wireless network.

This opens up all sorts of potential for the future: the galleries might set up games based around the collections; visitors can surf the web for a biography of a painter while they look at their work; or they might just email a friend to meet them for lunch in the café. Whatever happens, the system will continue a long tradition of being at the forefront of technology: the Victoria Galleries, added in 1889, became the first building in Dundee to have electric light.

Find images on the web

Getting hold of good quality images can be a nightmare for many interpretation projects. A new web-based **tutorial** should make it a lot easier.

The tutorial has been prepared by TASI, an advisory service about digital imagery funded by the **Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)**. Its remit is to support the Further and Higher Education communities, but some of TASI's services are also open to the cultural heritage sector.

The tutorial is free, and gives an easy to use and well-structured guide to finding good images without wading through the morass of a Google image search. Most importantly, it emphasises the need to respect copyright conditions, and explains the opportunities offered by **Creative Commons** licences, which can make millions of images freely available for non-commercial use.

Underground vision

A powerful new virtual reality system allows geologists to 'see' underground – and could have exciting potential for future interpretation projects. GeoVisionary is the result of a collaboration between the **British Geological Survey** and virtual reality developers **Virtalis**. It uses data about both surface and underground rock formations to visualise and interpret the landscape in ways that have never before been possible.

Using powerful computers and the most advanced graphics cards, the system can provide three-dimensional views of the land beneath our feet, allowing users to 'fly' through solid rock. You can see something of its potential in a feature on the BBC's **Britain From Above series**.

The system has been developed largely to help geologists and other scientists in their work. But with a little more development, it has great potential for giving the public a dramatic understanding of how the landscape works. Watch out for an underground flight at a visitor centre near you!

Our on-line Journal survey

Sue Atkinson reports on our survey about what you think of Interpret Scotland: One hundred people responded to the survey ... many thanks if you were one of them. And apologies if you tried to respond but were locked out! We used Survey Monkey to run the survey, and as a rookie I was unaware of the '100 replies for free limit' until it was too late.

The **survey** gave us lots of useful information and suggestions which will influence future issues. It was heartening to learn that the majority of respondents supported our enforced decision to end paper publishing of the Journal.

Heritage Education web resources

Learning Teaching Scotland have just created a **section on their website** for members of the Heritage Education Forum (HEF). HEF members include education representatives from national heritage organizations, many of which are Interpret Scotland members.

The aim is to provide better links for teachers to the heritage sector and its resources, and there are plans to provide links to more heritage information from the HEF site over time. The project is partly a result of work prompted by the Curriculum for Excellence to provide more opportunities for schools to use heritage resources.