

European Conference on Heritage Interpretation – Inverness, 3-6 October 2017

Welcome address

Fiona Hyslop – Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

Thank you Bill Taylor for your introduction.

First of all I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all delegates to Inverness and to Scotland – faillte. You arrive during Scotland's designated Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology.

It is a pleasure to be here to open the Association for Heritage Interpretation and Interpret Europe conference – Making Connections. Addressing an audience of Interpreters is a first for me but the conference theme is remarkably familiar.

As Cabinet Secretary I have always recognised the value that this nation places on culture and heritage, in and of themselves because they bind and connect our past, our present and our future and tell the stories about where we've come from, who we are and help us reflect on who we could be. Our culture and heritage roots us in place, and helps to empower, enrich and shape our communities who form and inhabit our extraordinary landscapes. The importance of access and participation and how we work to enable all of Scotland's communities to benefit, not just from the great cultural wealth and heritage of this nation, but also the world's cannot be over-estimated. Today I need only add my recognition of the importance of that accessibility to everyone who visits whether international or domestic visitors.

The importance of access is a key theme which underpins Scotland's first ever Strategy for the historic environment – Our Place in Time, which was launched in 2014. One of the cross-cutting strategic priorities in Our Place in Time is "to make knowledge about our historic environment as accessible and useful as possible to the widest possible audience". As the Strategy so rightly points out in order to share and celebrate our heritage as widely as possible we must continue to build on our successes to date and find new and innovative ways of interpreting and presenting our heritage to the world.

Of course that's where you come in – as interpreters your *raison d'être* is telling stories and telling them in accessible and sustainable ways. You help us all to engage with the world around us and your skills are absolutely essential to the critical relationship between individuals and communities on the one hand and place and the stories associated with place on the other hand. You help to tell our stories in an innovative, engaging and informed way.

This critical link between place and the human stories that give life to our environment is fully recognised here in Scotland. Our Place in Time also defines the historic environment as the physical evidence for human activity that connects people with place, linked with the associations we can see, feel and understand. This definition rightly acknowledges that our historic environment is a combination of physical things and those aspects we cannot see – stories, traditions and concepts. Of course it is not always easy to make these connections and we look to your skills and knowledge to weave together the tangible and intangible aspects of our heritage so that we can learn from our shared past in an engaging and enjoyable way.

In Scotland we have six World Heritage Sites, over 45,000 listed buildings, over 8,000 scheduled monuments, two national parks, and 645 conservation areas. Of course, we value all of these for the evidence protected within them, the habitats, flora and fauna they safeguard, their cultural and natural significance but without their stories many would only attract the interest of experts.

How much would we value New Lanark, one of our World Heritage Sites, if it were not for the stories of the individuals who lived at worked at the cotton spinning mills? Would we value St Kilda above any other small island if not for its extraordinary stories hardship and resilience? Would we care for the fragile landscape of Arthur's Seat, just outside the Scottish Parliament, if it were not covered in archaeological remains and a visible expression of one of geology's most important stories?

Stories are at the heart of our relationship with our past and in this context, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Linlithgow Palace Junior Guide initiative in this its 40th anniversary year. Under this initiative local school children dress in historic costume and lead tours of the historic Royal Palace. Throughout the years the scheme has been in place successive generations of Linlithgow young people have done much to help bring alive the stories associated with the Palace for the benefit and enjoyment of visitors from around the world.

Of course, the origin of all stories lies within a landscape whether urban or rural, natural or cultural or, more likely, a combination of these. Most interpretation, even of intangible heritage, in some way relates to a landscape or a place in a landscape and in this context, I am pleased to note that the sub-theme for this conference is "Re-imagining landscapes".

In relation to Our Place in Time I chair the Strategic Historic Environment Forum which was set up to help oversee the delivery of the Strategy. One of the first actions of the Forum was to commission a small working group to consider the historic dimension of landscape. Led by Scottish Natural Heritage but in conjunction with Historic Environment Scotland and other partners this group developed the *Landscape and the Historic Environment: Common Statement*.

This document highlights that the Scottish landscape is almost entirely a product of human interaction and recommends that we should put people back at the centre of those landscapes when decision making.

Since prehistory human occupation and land management has shaped and created the fields, moors, woodlands, monuments, buildings, settlements, etc. that form our surroundings today. Throughout the last few millennia the people of Scotland have interacted with, understood, experienced and perceived those landscapes in a number of ways. Their songs, folktales, belief systems, stories and remains are a result of peoples' reactions to the world they inhabited.

It is this human experience that has allowed Scotland to be voted one of the world's most beautiful places. We hope that the *Common Statement* will allow the cultural aspect to landscapes to become embedded in place-making agendas and planning policies that will protect our landscapes and allow landscapes to continue to contribute to Scotland and be something our communities can enjoy and take pride in into the future.

The Scottish Government has also provided a framework of themed years within which events and activities are being delivered across the country for all groups in society and for visitors to Scotland. The Themed Years programme has succeeded in galvanising partners to work together to promote Scotland and its people. This is Scotland's Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, next year is our Year of Young People, a year aimed to inspire Scotland through its young people and celebrate their achievements. 2022 will be the Year of Scotland's Stories which will be a showcase of the country's rich literature, film, oral traditions, myths and legends.

Across all of the activities that have contributed to each Themed Year one can see the hand of the interpreter at work.

That is not surprising as every year is for stories, and every year should be about telling those stories in broad-ranging ways to engage with as many people as possible and to make connections both locally among communities and internationally across nations.

Every year is about telling stories in ways that enable more and more people to engage with landscapes of every sort whether through sound, form, light or language. Interpreters have long been at the forefront of the movement towards accessibility incorporating clear design and communication and sensory and interactive experiences into interpretive delivery for over 50 years.

Every year further steps are taken towards full inclusivity, just last month the first official interpretive British Sign Language tours at Edinburgh Castle were delivered. John Hay, a Deaf-born historian from Edinburgh, and a respected authority on Deaf history worked with the interpretation team from Historic Environment Scotland to develop the tour content, drawing out aspects of the castle's history of particular relevance to a Deaf audience – in particular the visual culture of the castle and the views over the Edinburgh landscape.

Whether you are from one of the 44 countries represented through Interpret Europe, or from a public body caring for our many protected places or you are working in the private sector, you are all providing interpretation in and of landscapes, telling stories that might otherwise never be told, and telling them in ways that are accessible and engaging.

I hope your conference is a great success and I look forward to being inspired by, and informed by, your skills of heritage interpretation and storytelling for many years to come.