

Interpreting Your Graveyard – What do you need to know?



*Adopt-a-Monument



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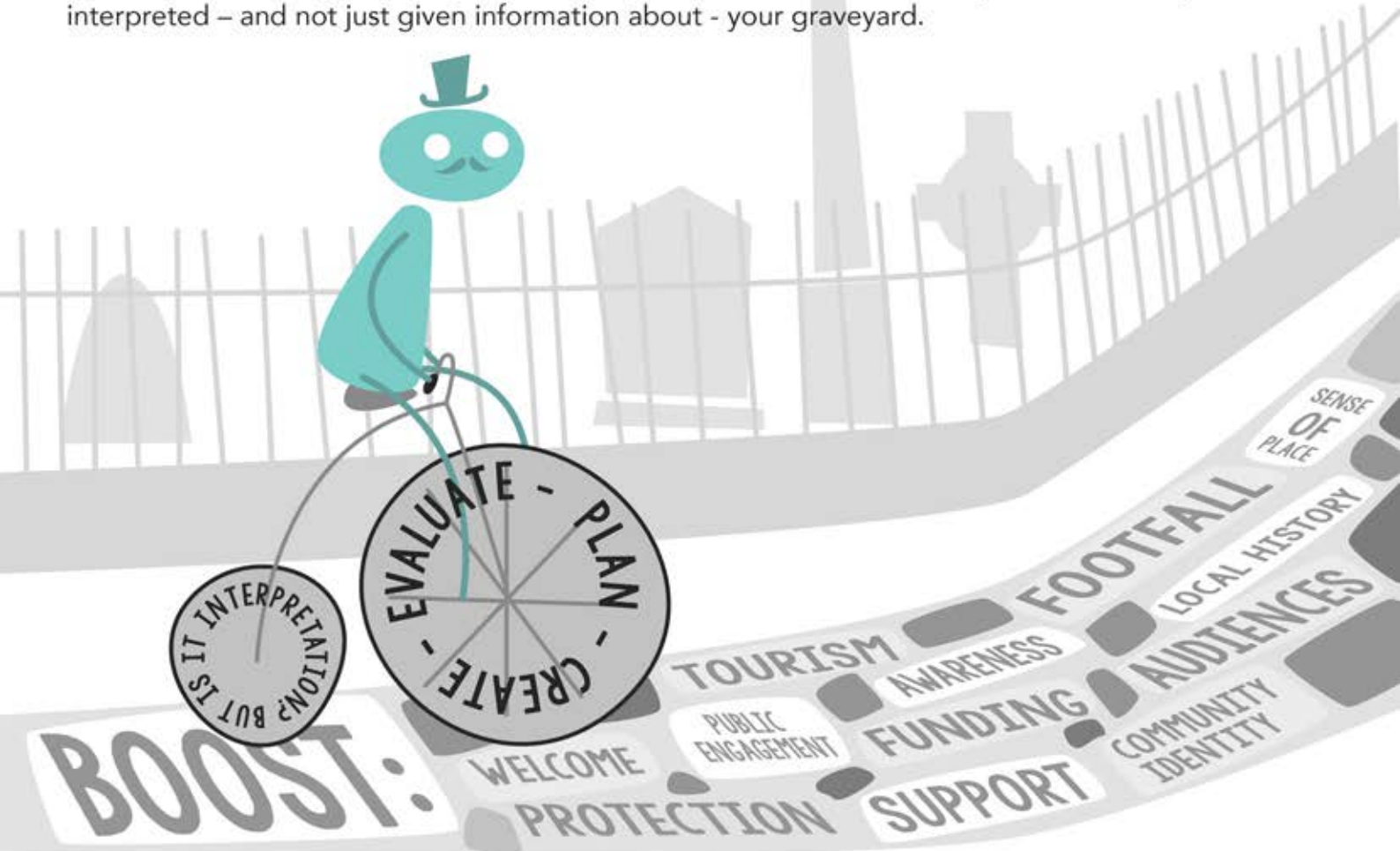


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WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Interpretation makes heritage meaningful. Through the art of storytelling you can add value to visitors' experience and understanding of a place. Overleaf are several questions to help you plan, create and evaluate your interpretation along with a short test to check you have actually interpreted – and not just given information about - your graveyard.



GRAVEYARDS ARE COMPLEX HERITAGE SITES TO INTERPRET

Their interpretation can mean balancing conflicting needs (for example tourism with consoling the bereaved) and dealing with difficult themes, contested histories and public uncertainty about what the 'correct' behaviour is in graveyards. The dead can't speak for themselves: what are the ethical responsibilities for presenting their lives and stories sensitively? How far might you be willing and able to cater for specific audiences such as dog walkers, ghost hunters or dark tourism?

To successfully navigate these dilemmas it will help to begin by knowing your audience and being clear on the aim of your interpretation. What may be right for one graveyard (or area within a site) may not be appropriate for another. You may decide that interpretation isn't always the right choice where it changes how the site looks or feels or compromises biodiversity, the protection of historic stonework or users' privacy.

INTERPRETATION PLAN OF ACTION

Good interpretation looks deceptively simple but a lot of thinking goes into it...

I. PLANNING

- • **What do I want my interpretation to achieve?** What do you want people to know, feel or do?
- • **Who is the audience?** Is this your current visitors or new and 'missing' audiences?
- • **Do you need interpretation?** How can your graveyard 'speak for itself'? Are there any sensitive areas better excluded?
- • **What are my resources?** E.g. available knowledge and skills, budget and 'workforce'.
- • **How will people access my interpretation?** On-site, locally or online? What do you need to do to make sure it is easily accessible? Who is going to promote, distribute and deliver it?
- • **How will it be maintained?**

2. CREATING

- • **How do I know what I want to say?** Be led by the purpose of your interpretation and your audience's interest rather than focussing on what interests you.
- • **How can I be interesting?** Your choice of language and using a clear structure can make all the difference. Where possible, appeal to all of your visitors' senses and let people discover some of the answers for themselves.
- • **What are the best tools for me to use?** Be imaginative and consider the pros and cons of different options and select the media (e.g. leaflets, tours etc.) that will best reach your intended audience. Layering information using a mix of media will enable your audience to engage further if interested.
- • **Is it appropriate for my target audience?** Write separately and specifically for children.

3. EVALUATING

- • **Have I created interpretation and not just information?** Use the checklist overleaf to test.
- • **Will it work?** Get feedback from your target audience at the draft stage so if necessary there is time to make changes before investing more resources.
- • **Has it accomplished my objectives?** Once launched, can you see people using and responding to your interpretation? Is there a change in behaviour – are people visiting new areas, staying longer or doing different things?

REMEMBER:
INTERPRETATION MIGHT
INFLUENCE A VISITOR'S
MOTIVATION AND
WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE
BUT IT CAN'T MAKE
SOMEONE LEARN.

STUDIES SHOW
PEOPLE GENERALLY
REMEMBER
90% OF WHAT THEY DO,
50% OF WHAT THEY SEE,
30% OF WHAT THEY READ,
10% OF WHAT THEY HEAR.

WHY
NOT COMPILE A
SCRAPBOOK OF
INTERPRETATION THAT
YOU THINK WORKS
WELL, WITH SOME
EXAMPLES YOU FIND NOT
SO SUCCESSFUL. WHAT
MAKES THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE TWO?

WHEN SHOULD
YOU EVALUATE?

→ **BEFOREHAND**
WHO ARE THE CURRENT
AUDIENCE?

→ **DURING**
WILL YOUR
INTERPRETATION WORK?

→ **AFTERWARDS**
HAS IT DONE WHAT YOU
WANTED? OR HAS IT
CHANGED HOW YOUR
GRAVEYARD LOOKS AND
FEELS IN WAYS NOT
INTENDED?

DO YOU KNOW YOUR CURRENT AUDIENCES...?

Do they come on their own or in groups?

Are they a mix of ages?

Are they local - do they live, work, study or worship nearby - or are they visitors to the area?

How often do they come?

How long do they stay?

What do they do when onsite or online?

What are their interests?

What do they already know?

What do they want to know?

IS IT INTERPRETATION? TAKE THE TEST!

Interpretation isn't a list of facts or a description of your graveyard. Interpretation is communication that captures visitors' attention, holds their interest and fires the imagination.

If you can answer 'Yes' to all of the questions below you have produced interpretation!

RELATE

Will your audience connect personally to your graveyard because it is linked to their everyday lives and experiences?

REVEAL

Do you highlight meanings rather than giving facts or descriptions? Is there an unusual angle or surprising detail creating a sense of 'Wow, I didn't know that'!

PROVOKE

Do you motivate rather than instruct? Will people engage because it is an enjoyable experience for them? Will it encourage visitors to feel and behave differently as well as hopefully gain new knowledge?

FOCUS

Do you look at a specific, clearly identified theme rather than a general topic or trying to tell people everything you know? Can you describe your theme in a single sentence?

UNITE

Does your theme develop with a clear structure that reveals the interpretation's overall purpose and allows people to remember a single message or idea?

HOW TO GATHER FEEDBACK - LOOK AND ASK!

Observe how visitors use and respond to your interpretation. You can track their movements around your graveyard, website or exhibition and map any changes you see in their behaviour. Use questionnaires, interviews and focus groups to ask for feedback. Alternatively collate responses to review websites like Tripadvisor or comments left on your Facebook page. As well as opinion from visitors (or in some cases non-visitors), you could think about obtaining a professional critique of your material.

FIND OUT MORE

Archaeology Scotland's Adopt-A-Monument Toolkit 9. Interpretation.

This note complements Adopt-A-Monument's original guidance, which contains a wealth of useful advice and contacts.

<http://www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdfs/Chapter%209.pdf>

James Carter's A Sense of Place: An Interpretive Planning Handbook.

Contains detailed, easy to follow guidance on all aspects of interpretation. Although a little out of date with costs and technologies the booklet provides a very useful consideration of the of pros and cons of different interpretation media. Download it from http://www.jamescarter.cc/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/A_Sense_of_Place_James_Carter.pdf

Tilden's Principles of Interpretation

<http://www.nps.gov/dena/upload/Tilden's%20Principles.pdf>

Scottish Natural Heritage offers a range of interpretation advice notes. Particularly helpful are the guides to writing effective interpretation and the production of panels. <http://www.snh.gov.uk/policy-and-guidance/heritage-interpretation/>

Caring for God's Acre Involving People 4. Telling the Story – Interpretation

Contains good writing tips and ideas for different graveyard events.

<http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/images/uploads/new-action-pack/english/SECTION%20D%204.pdf>

Friends of the Canongate Kirkyard's Burgh and Burials Trail is a good example of multi-layered graveyard interpretation, which includes self-guide trail leaflets, podcast and an interactive map.

<http://www.ewht.org.uk/looking-after-our-heritage/edinburgh-graveyards-project/canongate-friends>

Museum exhibitions interpreting subject of death with online resources:

- **Bristol Museums 'Death: The Human Experience'** has a teachers' pack available to download

<http://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-museum-and-art-gallery/whats-on/death-human-experience/>

- **Science Museum 'The Black Death'**

http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/themes/diseases/black_death.aspx

- **Australian Museum 'Death – The Last Taboo'**

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/death-the-last-taboo>