

Sound and the Heritage Experience

National Railway Museum, York

**Report on the first I-Hear-Too workshop, Monday
April 20th 2009**

Introduction

Damian Murphy, [Audiolab](#), University of York opened the workshop, welcoming the participants who ranged from academics to heritage practitioners to artists. Joe Savage, of the [National Railway Museum](#), also extended a warm welcome to the group, and spoke briefly about his interest in the use of sound to enhance the experience of a heritage environment, in particular in connection with the proposed redevelopment of the Great Hall in the NRM.



Reconstructing Falkland

David Chapman, Louise K Wilson, artists

Chapman and Wilson talked about their work with the Falkland estate in Scotland, where they are engaged in installing a series of sympathetic, sound-based works - ideas of stewardship and the difficulties of managing land and its decay ran through this work. They were both interested in ideas of memory and remembrance and the place that sound has in evoking or preserving memory, as well as the ways in which sounds and spaces are mediated.

Does why inform how?

Ben Pugh, Producer, Tribeca Project Management

[Ben Pugh](#) asked the group to consider: what are the best techniques we can use to tell a good story? How can practical things support the creative process, and how do people engage with space and the narratives within spaces. Talking from examples of his own work on site-specific installations at Clifford's Tower and the Minster, he talked about the ways in which why the reasons for a work inform and shape how it is produced.

Listen to this Space

Julia L Ionides MA and Peter G Howell RIBA, The Dog Rose Trust

The [Dog Rose Trust](#) works to provide materials, whether models or audio guides, which allow heritage sites to be navigated through sound and touch. Julia Ionides and Peter Howell talked through several examples of their pioneering work (including the relief model of York at the west end of the Minster) and the ways in which these alternative, sound landscapes can help people explore historic spaces that they may not be able to see.

Songs of the Stones: The Acoustics of Stonehenge

Rupert Till, University of Huddersfield

Till began by recounting a vignette from Thomas Hardy, who once described the stones of Stonehenge as humming, singing a low note in a strong wind. From this beginning, Till talked about his research project to construct an acoustic map of the Stonehenge site through scale and digital models, as well as field tests at the site. The results produce some startling effects that provide some insight into the way the sound of the site would have affected whatever took place within it, and also raise some important question with regard to the conservation of the acoustic environment alongside the physical site itself.

Acoustics and Performance at Silbury Hill

Sarah May, English Heritage

May's work has been concerned with some of the same questions as that of Rupert Till, namely, what can we say about how were sites like Silbury Hill used, and if they are social spaces, how does sound affect that use? Using a team of game volunteers, the lines of sound in and around the site of Silbury Hill were measured and plotted against the topography of the area. Sound was found to travel surprisingly far, even the human voice, lending some credence to old traditions that a person speaking from the top of the mound can be heard miles away.

Mediascapes

Ben Clayton, Hewlett Packard

Clayton talked the group through the [Mediascapes](#) tool developed by Hewlett Packard Labs. Mediascapes is essentially a method by which information about a location can be delivered through any mobile device with GPS, providing an interactive map of knowledge for a given area, or Mediascape. As the user moves through the Mediascape, different locations trigger more information, another part of the map. This map can include ambient and environmental sound, which can be spatialized, or made to sound as though it is coming from a particular area. The implications for use in the heritage sector are obvious, and Hewlett Packard are in fact collaborating with I-Hear-Too and IPUP on a [new project](#) to exploit those implications.

The use of immersive installations in museums

Helen Weinstein, director, IPUP

IPUP's director rounded the day off with a thought-provoking talk on the use of immersives in museums. Through examples from the recent exhibitions at Liverpool and at Museum of London, which were put together to commemorate the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade, immersives were shown to be potentially very powerful, but also difficult to pitch accurately. Sound and voice showed themselves to lie at the heart of the more successful examples.