

# Trail Blazing: A guide to making your heritage event more accessible

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*Making your heritage event more accessible for deaf and disabled people may take some creative thinking. Here we have tried to put together ideas to fit a range of budgets to make your visitors' experience a bit more 'user friendly'. These ideas are based on our experiences in running the Trail Blazing project at Fort Brockhurst and the Lightship in Haslar Marina in 2011/12. We hope that this guide gives you a starting point for your accessible tours and encourages you to find new and interesting ways to enhance your visitors experience at your heritage site.*

*Paul Jones and Clare Jefferson*

## Getting Started

We were lucky enough to start the Trail Blazing project by going on a Heritage Open Days tour of both Fort Brockhurst and the Lightship in Haslar Marina. These gave us an insight into what the tours already offered and we were able to look at what we could with textiles and sound – our chosen medium - to enhance to the tours' accessibility.



At **Fort Brockhurst** we worked with the Heritage Inclusion Group to decide which of the many rooms would work best for a tour. Initially we had to decide whether to concentrate on one era of Fort Brockhurst's history or to cover the three different eras: the Victorian Period, World War I or World War II. World War I and II would be easier to research and to find people who had some memories of this time, but the origins of the Fort lay in the Victorian era. Finally we decided to reflect all three eras, choosing two appropriate rooms for each. The Victorian era was reflected in the Barracks Room and the Magazine Room. World War I was in the Stables and the room with the view of the

bridge that the soldiers marched home over. World War II was in the Ablutions Room and in the Recreation Room.

Once we had chosen the rooms, we began to research into the history of the Fort. We were very lucky that a large amount of photographic and written records had been kept in files which we were able to go through. We wanted to bring a personal angle to the exhibition and looked for stories and letters that gave us a personal history snapshot for each room. We looked for stories that would appeal in some way to all age groups and to people of varying interests. All of the pictures had a link between them by featuring a different animal in each. These could be used within a children's trail. To support this we read several books on the involvement of animals in war.

Paul used local contacts to find people who had lived near the Fort, played at the Fort and even worked at Fort Brockhurst. They had all witnessed different activities there, so Paul recorded all these wonderful stories using a portable recording device and edited these on Logic Pro on a Mac. Paul also searched on the internet for sound effects and music that would give atmospheric background to each textile piece. We also contacted the local re-enactment groups who had a vast knowledge about the Fort and its history, and they helped us with our recordings.

With the textiles it was very important to me that we could use fabrics that would reflect the history of the Fort and also give a texture and smell to the images. Textiles can be used to tell a story in so many ways from original uniforms / clothing of the era and collage. I wanted to use army blankets as the backdrops and wherever possible original uniform materials for the clothing. We are lucky enough to have a supplier in this area of original uniforms and equipment, however we did not want to destroy any of the uniforms in good condition so tried to obtain old uniforms/kit bags etc that were moth eaten and of no other use. With each of the six textile hangings, I researched the era, supported the work with sketches and photographs. We also visited the Royal Armouries and saw the



set-up of their Fort and photographs they had on record.

With the **Lightship** we worked with a very low budget and looked for ways to make the tour accessible using low cost methods. We created a lightship model that could be handled by all participants of the tour. As well as a useful tactile piece, it also allowed visitors to go on a miniaturised virtual tour of the vessel. This was example of how a tour can be brought to the visitor, which especially helpful if the visitor would have difficulties in moving around the real thing.

We also made a simple wooden plan of the main deck, which would allow people with visual impairments to feel the shape and layout of the main deck through a series of raised 3-D shapes. Our soundtracks were chosen to be themed music and sound effects that could be faded in and out depending on the requirements during the tour. A brochure was made with large font to add to and reinforce the information given by the tour guide.

## Tips for Using Audio

- Provide audio narrative, music or sound collage to tell a story of the room that you are visiting. There are plenty of free sound samples that can be downloaded from the internet (sites such as [www.soundbible.com](http://www.soundbible.com) ) – or for low cost individual music tracks try [www.apple.com/uk/iTunes](http://www.apple.com/uk/iTunes) or similar sites.
- The tracks can be played on CD players or MP3 players. These come at a wide range of prices but for very simple small mp3 players this could be purchased for a cheap as £6 each on [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)
- At Fort Brockhurst we created a communally shared experience by using Mp3 players with small PC speakers. If the room does not have power sockets the speakers can be powered by batteries. Alternatively the mp3 players could be listened to via personal headphones, so that the visitor can listen to the detail independent of background distractions.
- [www.ibeaken.com](http://www.ibeaken.com) is a system which allows special barcode labels to be scanned or input into smart phones. This will allow the user to receive additional relevant

information if they are unable to access tour information from the environment. You can make simple labels for free with an Ibeaken Lite account.

- Having a BSL interpreter on site would be ideal but not always possible. In the absence of this, consider how to present any audio materials and the tour. The [Actual Signs](#) website gives some useful tips on communicating with deaf people.
- If working with a BSL interpreter, give them a copy of your tour brochure in advance.

## **Tips for using Textiles**

- Tactile pictures which give information or tell a particular story can be made from a variety of materials. At Fort Brockhurst we made textile pieces partly out of authentic war uniforms. They had the added bonus of having an authentic musty smell.
- Simple fabric puppets can be made to enhance a tour, adding a tactile and colourful dimension.
- Try to borrow or obtain original clothing or uniforms from your particular era. People love to feel the different fabric and even have a go at dressing up.

## **Providing information at your event**

We decided to provide extra information for visitors in plain English booklets that could be borrowed during the tour. We produced two: a brochure aimed at hearing impaired people included audio descriptions of the soundtrack and reinforced the information given by the tour guide. A brochure aimed at visually impaired people was made with large font and mainly described the content of the tactile pictures.

- Braille or large print booklets can give additional information about each individual area. Raised maps and diagrams can also be useful. The RNIB has more information on producing braille.

- Images can be enlarged and a larger font can be used in a booklet. The Fort Brockhurst Trail Blazing booklets for visually impaired and hearing impaired visitors are re examples of these.
- If signs are used, they might need to consist of large letters on a contrasting and uncluttered background or an easily recognisable image such as a tap to represent the washrooms.



## Engaging your visitors

Teaching institutions are increasingly aware of different learning styles – visual, aural, tactile etc - and we found it helpful to think about this too. So, when planning a tour you could adjust the content and choice of language to the appropriate level and geared towards a particular angle i.e. some people might be particularly interested in the social/technical/visual aspect of your site. Otherwise your content could be varied so that visitors can access it on many levels. For example at Fort Brockhurst our textile pieces/soundtrack feature personal & social stories of the soldiers as well as technical information about the fort and cannons. We have also included a fun childlike aspect of featuring an appropriate animal in each room.

Some people have difficulty concentrating for long periods, so consider how you might break up the tour into a variety of interactive activities in smaller sections, such as:

- Small tasks/challenges, can you find.....?
- Asking questions to your audience.
- Artifact handling. Tactile artifacts (including copies and castings) can be passed around.
- Videos relevant to the site.

## **Outreach: bring the venue to the visitor**

The experience of the heritage site, particularly inaccessible areas, can be brought to the visitor either on or off site, using artifacts, sound, photographs, textiles, talks. An Outreach Box of materials also acts as a wonderful marketing tool for promoting events. Ideas to try include:

- Photographs/artistic interpretation of rooms or large artifacts.
- Videos of other areas of the sites - especially as digital video technology has now become cheaper and easier to use. The videos could be shown on TVs, laptops and on smart phones.
- Camera/sound linkup. Whilst the tour guide is taking a group to an inaccessible area, they can transmit the tour 'live' to visitors in a separate room or in fact to anywhere in the world! This could be achieved with Skype, a laptop (with a small PC camera, or even using a camera phone.)
- A visual/tactile model of the site could be effectively 'walked' around. The guide can speak their usual content, whilst pointing to the relevant location, on allowing participants to feel the model.
- The videos, pictures and soundtracks could be posted to a public website accessed by the internet, so that the 'visitor' can access the site from their own home/library/club/society. The website needn't be costly or require specialist programming knowledge as content can be easily loaded onto social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube.

## **Think about people who might be able to help you**

Schools, Colleges and Universities have many different curriculum subjects and projects that could fit in with your venue. This would be a way of involving them in a creative challenge. It could also have the added benefit of bringing a whole new audience to your venue to see their work on display. Universities running Fine Art Degrees, film making courses, Design Degrees etc. may allow you to advertise for voluntary help with your creative project.



- Set a challenge to your local school, college or university to make a 3D model of your premises.
- Set a competition for the best painting/drawing of your premises.
- Get them to create a textile piece using different materials.
- Remember that models can be made from a variety of materials, which are low cost and easy to manipulate, such as modeling clay, paper mache, balsa wood, wooden blocks or even Lego! It doesn't matter as long as it represents the site in some way.
- Enthusiasts may have models or images that you can borrow and showcase for your open day.
- Photographic clubs might like to get involved in taking images and holding an exhibition of their work.

## **And finally.....how much does it all cost?**

(All prices correct at January 2012)

We were asked to think about cost-conscious approaches to running our accessible tours, so below we have listed some of the costs that we incurred and ways that you can reduce costs.

**Banners for Fort Brockhurst:** Our flags and banners were provided by a company called Hampshire flags. We created the artwork using Adobe Photoshop and then sent the completed files direct to them.

3 Digitally Printed PVC Banner - Single Sided, 1.5m x 1m was £78.75 plus VAT

3 Digitally Printed PVC Banner - Single Sided, 60cms x 40cm £ 52.50 plus VAT

1 Digitally Printed PVC Banner - Single Sided, 1.95m x 0.5m £17.50 plus VAT

The total cost for this order including VAT was £178.50.

Money was saved on delivery by using a local company and picking the banners up.

**Material:** the cost of the textiles varied:

- original army blankets were £20 each and the uniform sections ranged from £10 to £20 each depending on condition.
- Original good condition uniforms can be hired on a weekly basis or purchased for varying prices from £30 upwards for a jacket.
- Original buttons can be around £2 each and cap badges were around £5 depending on obtainability.

**The Lightship Model:** Plywood to create a simple wooden model can be purchased from DIY stores for around £20. Additionally wood glue and varnish can add another £12 on top of this.

Airfix models for some vessels are available and prices can vary. Our version of the lightship was £25 plus post and packaging on ebay. The paint and glue were £10.

#### **Photos and Tour Booklets:**

- Enlarging three images up to A3 was £11 at a local printer.
- We printed and laminated the Fort Brockhurst maps ourselves, using a laminator and laminating pockets purchased from Asda at a total cost £28.
- General booklets for tours would cost around £5 for a ten page colour brochure, printed at a local printer. Alternatively you can save money by buying good quality paper for your printer and replacement ink cartridges, and do it yourself. Bright coloured card can be used to give a front page that stands out.

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