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"DUBLINIA" - THE PRESENTATION & INTERPRETATION & INTERPRETATION OF DUBLIN'S HISTORY

·BY

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Submitted to The Faculty of History of Art & Design and complementary studies in candidacy for the Degree of Textile Design of Textile Design (Embroidery)



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INTRODUCTION.

This thesis attempts to analyse the growth of the heritage presentations around Ireland and in particular focuses on a new heritage centre which has been opened recently in Dublin called *Dublinia*.

The way in which we present our heritage has taken many forms such as museum exhibits and interpretive centres. Museums have been the traditional method of presenting our heritage. A museum, according to the Collins Gem English Dictionary

" is a place or housing of a collection of natural, artistic, historical or scientific objects" (Collins Gem Dictionary, 1981, pg. 350).

This form of presentation has evolved from these enthusiastic collectors who gathered varieties of specimens for specialist studies and large collections which are open to the public for both entertainment and education .A heritage centre is an exhibition which presents information of historical interest .

The establishment of heritage centres such as *Dublinia* creates new interest in museums, questioning old forms of presentation to the new methods of interpretation. This leads to a new focus on ideas about museology. (Museology is the study of museums, their thoughts and general principles, the way they conduct themselves and the forms in they set up their systems, theories and pursuits; Vergo, 1989, pg. 1).

Education is a focal point of museums and heritage centres but at differing levels. My study will analyse the role that education plays in these museums and heritage centres, the level and role of entertainment in the establishment of such centres, (survey, Dec. 1993). This study will also focus on the contrast between the traditional form of museums and the new growth in heritage presentations. Can the traditional form of museums learn from this format or do they feel threatened ?

Dublinia is a new endeavour: it has evolved out of recent events in the archaeological sector in Dublin and is a useful tool for discussion with the media documenting our heritage. Our tastes have become restricted when it comes to education, being lazy and dependent on information being told in a simpler format.

Throughout this thesis the greatest part of my information has been gathered from newspaper articles and magazines. *Dublinia*'s staff Daire O'Rourke, Historian & Researcher, has been co-operative throughout providing me with important guidleins and information.

Chapter 1 explains the setting up of *Dublinia*, the financial backing and design formats. Chapter 2 will be an examination of *Dublinia* as an interpretative centre with comparisons made by discussing Bunratty Folk Park and the National Museum. Also included in chapter 2 are the results of a survey of *Dublinia* conducted in December 1993. Chapter 3 portrays other example of interpretation through exhibition and their success.

I conclude by analysing **Dublinia's success as an interpretative centre**.



CHAPTER ONE.

The establishment of Dublinia;

a new presentation of Dublin's history, financial beginning design concepts and final exhibition results, future aspects of *Dublinia*.

This chapter discusses the heritage centre **Dublinia** and records its roots and important information about how it was set up and structured. It also analyses the design layout of the building in which it is located. The Director of The National Museum of Ireland, Dr. Pat Wallace believes that there is a need to make history more alive and interesting. To make it more accessible to the public "*We have to come down from our ivory tower and give visitors service*". (Wallace, 22/4/1990)

Our achaelogical heritage for the last number of centuries has generally been presented in the traditional form of museums and glass case exhibits. Dr. Wallace has been involved more recently in the creation of a new kind of presentation of Dublin's former heritage. This venture is *Dublinia*.

Dublinia was formed by a group called the Medieval trust, consisting of a number of Irish Academics and Business People. They came together to create this presentation based on the history of medieval Dublin. When Synod Hall which is located beside Christchurch Cathedral went up for sale in 1989 the Medieval Trust bought it for a approximately £ 650,000. The members of the trust include Mr. Craig Mc Kinney, Chairman and Chief Executive of Woodchester Investment Bank and Dr. Patrick Wallace, Director of the National Museum.



The success of the Irish Life Viking Adventure, set up in 1988 as an exhibit to coincide with the Dublin Millennium, underlined a huge tourist interest for cultural exhibits. The Viking Adventure was disbanded in just over a year after its opening but its format has been sum what adopted by the *Dublinia* exhibit.

The British experience in the establishment of heritage centres has prompted similar presentations in Ireland. Ms. O'Rourke when interviewed, maintained that *Dublinia* was set for the benefit of the people of Dublin. A large proportion of the Income raised by the exhibition is sourced from visitors from outside the Dublin area.

"Dublinia is the bridge to the medieval past of Dublin"

as proclaimed by the exhibition literature available in Synod Hall. The design team selected certain historical areas to present namely those of strong historical interest such as Strongbow's arrival in Dublin, the building of the cities Cathedrals, the effect of the black death which swept through Europe in 1348.

The main reason that the choice in subjects is limited to those listed above is due to the fact that at the time of the foundation of the exhibit, other exhibits already considered large areas of Dublin's history, namely the **Irish Life**, **Viking Adventure** in St. Audeon's Church. Although this exhibit is closed it is scheduled to reopen in a new location in the Temple Bar region in late 1994. The subject matter of *Dublinia* is very broad and yet is confined to what were considered exiting periods of Dublin's history.

Synod Hall is situated beside Christchurch Cathedral in Central Dublin. It was the meeting place for the Christchurch Council. The last general synod was closed there in 1982 and has since been an entertainment centre. The Synod Hall was previously sold eight years ago by the Church of Ireland to a Company called Leisure Time Ltd. The Medieval Trust then purchased the building in 1989.



There is a lodge adjacent to the Hall which was also purchased and now contains office space for the exhibit. This lodge has been derelict for the last decade and therefore required a lot of reconstruction. Synod Hall was built on the site of the Medieval Church of St. Michael. The only remaining part of the Church is the Medieval Church tower which is integrated into the structure of Synod Hall. This tower is also an integral of the *Dublinia* exhibition.

The project was funded by the Medieval Trust with the help of a £1 million grant from the European Regional Development Fund and from the National Lottery £ 750,000 the balance had to be raised by the trust. The National Museum gave permanent loans of artifacts found at Wood Quay, a nearby archaeological site. Dr. Wallace has been instrumental in the acquisition of the artifacts found in Wood Quay owing to his indepth knowledge as an archaeologist in this area. Dr. Wallace was also directly involved in the excavation of the Wood Quay site from 1974 to 1981.

" .. I was also in charge of preparing the results of what we found out about Wood Quay. So in a sense 80% of my life has been Viking Dublin and it has been the love of my life. Dublin has the best preserved archaeological results of any city in Europe. However, no matter how much I preach it, I still have not got the message

across."

(Wallace, Sunday Business Post, 1990)

As a contributory member of *Dublinia* Dr. Wallace may be able to present his message more readily to the Public at large.

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Other members of the Trust include;

- Mr. Tom Murphy, Strategic Development Manager (Raising Finance).
 Mr. Howard Clarke of U.C.D. who has spent his last twenty five years studying medieval Dublin.
- (b). Mr. Kevin Duffy of the I.C.T.U.
- (c). Ms. Anngret Simms of U.C.D.
- (d). Mr. Micheal Mc Carthy of Jury's PLC.
- (e). Ms. Eileen O Meara Walsh of O'Meara Travel.
- (f). Ms. Daire O'Rourke, who was introduced to the team by Dr. Wallace.

THE STAGES OF DESIGN.

RESTORATION.

The restoration of Synod Hall (*fig.1*) took over eighteen months to complete. From the outset the Trust strived to keep the integrity of the building. Synod Hall is a listed \int_{1}^{1} with a grade A status. This status ensures that the intrinsic appearance of the building cannot be interfered with in any way. The interior however has been revamped by the replacement of wood panels, windows and electrics. The Restoration cost over £ 2 million.(O'Rourke, Dec 1993)

The Builders were Cramptons Ltd. an English company. The architects being Murray O'Laoire. All restoration work carried out to the Hall was liaised with the Medieval Trust as to its development. It was a matter then for the designers, Builders and Architects to discuss the best way to make use of the space available to the project. With seven people on the board all of which having different ideas, decisions regarding the design were often difficult to decide.





fig 2







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fig 4















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fig 8



fig 9





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fig 10












A contract was made with an English design company, Event Communications Ltd. as this company most reflected the aims of the project.

MEDIEVAL MAZE.

It was decided that the basement which is the first place you enter would house the introduction to the exhibit, showing Dublin's history chronologically arranged in six areas. This they presented in the form of a Medieval Maze. The maze was designed to maximize the flow of visitors through the area. This was aided by the introduction of audio head sets. In there are models of different scenes of Dublin's past such as the Black Death, Arth Mc Murrough and Silken Thomas. The Figures are created from wax and clothed in the traditional dress of the time. Some of the models were originally from the former Viking Adventure Centre. The Maze has colorful murals of scenes along the walls (fig. 2 - 12).

ENTRANCE HALL

On leaving the basement you come up the stairs to the former entrance hallway of the Synod Hall and you are assisted to remove your headset.

"...You've been kind of pushed, well not pushed but a people flow kind of thing."

(O'Rourke, Dec. 1993)

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This evolved from an idea that the ground floor was a place where you could spend as much time as you wanted. There was one thing that set this idea back due to the insistence of the trustees. Dr. Howard Clarke wanted to create a model of Dublin as it would have looked like back in the time of the Anglo Normans. The central space in the hallway is taken up with this model which measures 4 metres long by 3 metres wide. The model has audio visual aspects and lighting details which was funded by Mitsubishi. (fig. 13).





fig 14



fig 15





fig 16







LIFESIZE RECONSTRUCTIONS

The trust decided that the theme of this floor was to be daily life in medieval Dublin. On this floor there are five main rooms around the hallway so the space was available to create large reconstructions. One of these reconstructions took the form of the Quayside in Dublin which was a major port in Medieval Europe. (fig. 14). Trade was of great importance then and this is how the design team reflected that .This reconstruction of the Quayside is very atmospheric and shows lifesize models of men unloading cargo from the ship with audio sounds to create the mood. In the next room a cobblers house was chosen as one of the main trades going on in Dublin in the middle ages. (fig. 15). The house is lifesize and shows the cobbler at work outside. You then walk around the corner of the house to another house ,one of a wealthy merchant in the late 15th Century. (fig. 16). The kitchen is laden with fine foods and wines and models of rabbits and pheasants hang from the rafters. When you look upstairs you can see the bedroom of the house where the merchant is at work checking his books. The contrast in the houses is to give us some indication of the merchant class and the working class.

In this part of the exhibition there is no aided commentary but the information is presented in three forms of panels on the walls. Each panel is designed to allow for the amount of reading each visitor wishes to do and is designed so that panel no. 3 contains the most detailed information on the subject (fig.17). They have used this system of explanatory panels for each part of the lifesize reconstructions. These panels are written in english but to facilitate other different languages they have laminated handouts.





Aerial View (March 1976) of Christ Church/Wood Quay Area: right 🚚

- National Museum excavation 1962-64.
 National Museum excavation 1967-71.
- National Museum excavation 1971-74. 3.
- 4. Line of City Wall.

- 5. The Church of St. Nicholas' Within.
- 6.
- Christ Church Cathedral. Synod Hall and St. Michael's Tower. 7.
- 8. Site of St. John's Church and graveyard.
- 9. Timber and mud defences from Viking period.
- 10. The pre-Norman stone City Wall.
- 11. Medieval stone wall.
- 12. Line of wooden quayside about 1200.
- 13. Partly excavated between 1969 and 1972.
- Flooding (partly from Liffey).
 Site of Fyan's Castle.
- 16. Line of later (14th century) wall.
- 17. The River Liffey.

- Nicholas' Street. Α.
- Werburgh Street. Christ Church Place. Β.
- C.
- D. Winetavern Street.
- E. Fishamble Street.
- Wood Quay. F.
- G. Back Lane.
- H. High Street.
- J. Cook Street.
- fig 18









Top- Unfinished bone comb – showing panels clamped between riveted plates. Teeth were then cut into panels to complete the comb. High Street. Above- Three decorated bone combs from High Street, a centre of combmaking activities. 11th - 12th century.

Below- Iron shears, High Street.









WOOD QUAY

The opposite two rooms across the hallway are given up to the exhibit of the Wood quay artifacts on loan from The National Museum. Wood Quay is situated along the south bank of the river Liffey just down the road from *Dublinia* and visible from most windows of the Synod Hall. (fig.18). The National Museum, who have given the collection on loan to *Dublinia*, have exercised control over how they are presented. The artifacts range from bones and pottery to intricately carved combs and jewellery. (fig. 19). These are all placed in special glass cases and cabinets in the usual museum format .There is also a small reconstructed model of the archaeological site at Wood Quay ,which brings to mind the destruction of the site by the Dublin Corporation when the building of the Civic Offices commenced.(fig.19).

" I feel a bit sorry for the Dublin Corporation. They were caught by everyone and lost a lot of money on the whole venture. But I don't know whether we learnt the lesson of Wood Quay because archeology is still being compromised by developers. " (Wallace, 22/4/90)

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

On the first floor following up the stone staircase is the first of two stained glass windows (fig. 21). It is full of wonderful colours and images and is both contemporary and in keeping with the building and its history. The windows theme is related to St. Michael due to the church that once stood there. The images therefore are of religion and the ruling of the city by the Church of Ireland. The two windows were designed and created by stained glass artist George Walsh in collaboration with the Historian Daire O'Rourke (fig. 22).

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The second window is situated down the corridor in the civic room. This room is not yet completed but is hoped to be finished by the middle of 1994. The window is based on the civic theme such as the seal of the city and the city skyline. There is a rainbow linking the signs of the zodiac indicating, according to Daire O'Rourke, the mysticism which was prevalent at the time of the middle ages (O'Rourke, Dec 1994).

THE GREAT HALL

The great hall is a huge room with a wooden floor and wooden detail around the ceiling. This ceiling is of wooden inlay carvings and tiles which have existed from the original Synod Hall. The feeling when one enters is of space and timelessness and is reminisant of a banqueting hall. This is where the Synod Comittee used to meet. The design team decided to locate the audio visual presentation here. The idea for this came from Event Communications Ltd. Eight screens which are suspended from the ceiling, surround the seated viewers with images of the evolvement of Dublin as a city. (fig 23)

Among some of the problems, according to Daire and my survey, which are manifesting themselves relate to this section of the tour. This presentation is considered too abstract and the information is too detailed and difficult to follow. There is also a problem with sound quality. These are all areas which are being considered in the reassessment of the exhibition and as *Dublinia* has just opened to the public problems such as these are bound to arise. (fig 24)











SHOP & TOWER

On the way out of the audio visual you are invited to enter the gift shop. This is a very commercial part of the tour, with the shop stocked up with anything which the interested visitor would want to buy. According to Daire the shop has not yet made much profit. After the gift shop visitors are guided to St. Michaels tower where there is a long track up sixty steps to a panoramic view of Dublin. (fig 25)

After the tower one can then complete the tour with a visit to Christchurch Cathedral by crossing the bridge over Winetavern Street.

LOOKING TO DUBLINIA'S FUTURE.

This new centre is only open since May 1993. The tour staff are only beginning to settle in to their new surroundings and acustomising themselves with a wide variety of visitor. They are beginning to see the flaws in the exhibit and the improvements which could be made with additional finance. The tours busiest season is obviously the summer period. They are heavily dependent on the influx of tourists to keep the exhibit feasible throughout the year.

The committee has observed the increasing amount of Japanese tourists visiting Dublin and have considered catering for that market in language translations along with their existing translations of Italian, German, Spanish and French. The Committee has also noticed that there is no other facility for the Japanese in Dublin in an exhibit, so according to Daire they will benefit greatly when this facility is installed. (O'Rourke, Dec, 1994)

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The major development in *Dublinias* future is providing a medieval research centre in a part of the Synod lodge next to the exhibit. This will be a centre of collection of further information which has yet to be assembled. This information centre will be a small facility and a resource for students and teachers.

Dublinia is a new exhibition with a lot of new ideas for presentation for Dublin. It is fortunate to have a committee of trustees that is knowledgeable and willing to give it backing and help. The development to **Dublinia**'s background shows that there are many important academics and financial trustees that have built a strong foundation for its evolvement as an existing interpretative centre.

Dublinia is one form of interpretation of historical events and periods. There are many other kinds of presentation such as folk parks and museums. An example of a folk park is Bunratty Folk Park in County Clare. As **Dublinia's** exhibition is situated within a historical building, it had to be adapted to the buildings dimensions and can be said to be restricted in its future developments. This chapter has looked at the development of **Dublinia** and the aims and problems it has . Within the next chapter comparisons are made by looking at two other forms of presentation and analysising the survey results from **Dublinia** .(Survey ,Dec 1993)

CHAPTER 2

Heritage Parks and Museums;

Comparison and contrast with interpretation of different formats.

In comparing **Dublinia** with The Bunratty Folk Park one can see immediately various differences in the methods of presentation. Location is a factor, as **Dublinia** is situated in the heart of the capital, but while this has advantages in the constant stream of vistors. It's buildings location leaves little room for expansion unless the move the exhibit to a bigger site. The Folk Park has room for expansion and extension, but is somewhat off the main thoroughfare for vistors although it is well sighposted from Shannon and due to its collaboration with Bunratty Castle it is ensured a good influx of tourists. There are plans for building a hotel for the vistors to stay in and will link in with the era of the Park. There also plans for a railway that will enter the park and connect it with the hotel and other attractions.

Further comparison between *Dublinia* and The Folk Park can be drawn as *Dublinia* is primarily is a stage set format or heritage presentation ,with wax models and painted scenery. This is due to the fact that there is very little evidence of that time that still exists except in the form of artifacts. *Dublinia* is also presented in a series of themes. The Folk Park consists of a series of cottages. These are completely authentically reconstructed from an original cottage of that time and the furnishing where possible is of original style. There is some literature presented as to which form of cottage it is you are visiting, but in general it is obvious whether you are in a farmhouse cottage or a landowners house by the changing status and make of furniture, i.e. whether it is vernacular or manufactured.

Bunratty Folk Park is a series of small cottages laid out together in a village form which shows how people lived in a variety of dwellings, these range from the most basic which shows how people shared their one room dwelling with their livestock to a more spacious accommodation. In many of the cottages there are people re-enacting daily tasks and there is also livestock in the Park.

Bunratty is funded and run by the Shannon Heritage Ltd group which is state funded. They also have set up other projects in the Shannon region such as Craggauwnen and the Hunt Museum.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM DUBLIN

The National Museum is situated in Kildare Street, Dublin. The museum only shows a very small collection of its holdings at one time which are Irish antiquities and artifacts. The Irish antiquities is the area the visitors are most interested in and attracted to such as the Ardagh Chalice and the Tara brooch. The museum has been state funded since 1877 when it was handed over to the state by the Royal Dublin Society. Financial backing for most institutions is never sufficient and the museum has had to deal with staffing shortages and maintenance problems. This, of course, is reflected in the way the museum operates.

.. Its beginning to play a

full role . But I think it could play a far greater role in educating, including adult
education. That said, it must also begin to play a more important role in attracting
tourists. I'm convinced that it is the principal tourism attraction in Dublin.
Wallace, Nov 1990



The National Museum has since started their restoration program in 1989 and according to Dr. Wallace the National Museum is second only to the National Art Gallery in attracting vistors. This attraction can only be sustained by the 500,000 grant given to the Museum by the Arts Council continually each year. Dr. Wallace comments,

" If the Museum was improved, vistors would spend extra nights in Dublin ,not just drive out to see artificial reconstructions ",(Wallace, 22/4/1990).

Since Dr. Wallace's comment the museum has had its interiors repainted and its reception area has been made more spacious and on the whole there is a more brighter interior. The restoration was overseen by the Co-ordinator of the Office of Public Works, Tom Sherlock. The restoration costs amounted to one and a half million. According to Dr. Wallace, "*The staffing problem is still a major problem* ",(Wallace ,Feb.,93).

The newest exhibition is the Irish Gold or Or exhibit. There are 260 items on display. These are items of Irish gold jewellery which were made 4500 years ago. They have been researched and assembled by the assistant keeper and prehistoric Irish gold specialist, Mary Cahill. This exhibit is a fine example of what can be achieved and of what can spark a new interest in the National Museum. (fig 27)

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fig 27



fig 28


The Or is a unique exhibit for the Museum as it is presented in a fresh, explanatory way. This is aided by new display cabinets, lighting and interpretative panels showing how the jewellery was worn to were each of the pieces were found. In the exhibits presentation it shows that the traditional form of museum display can be enhanced by ideas of interpretation, which enables the visitor to understand and appreciate the artifacts more, (fig. 28). This collection of jewellery has been brought together from all the archaeological hoards that have been excavated in Ireland since the 19 Century. This exhibit has proved a great attraction for the National Museum, with visitor numbers exceeding previous exhibits.

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SURVEY RESULTS

The results of a survey conducted in Dec. 1993 in collaboration with "Dublinia" are analysed in this section to assess the public's reception to Dublinia (survey, Dec .1993)

The survey took nearly a month and a half and a total of one hundred vistors cooperated in answering. Within the month and a half when the survey was displayed, vistors from eight different countries apart from Ireland visited **Dublinia** according to my survey. The highest percentage was of course that of Irish vistors. Since my survey the advertisement of **Dublinia** has been increased with addition of the advert on one of Dublin's most popular radio stations Rock 104 fm.

The potential of our greatest asset and resource is only beginning to be tapped into therefore Dublin is realising what its history can provide towards it economy. Tourists from many different countries come to Ireland for its history, to learn what has made Ireland a place of great traditions and culture. Tourists have been flocking to Dublin and its now we have begun to give them what they are looking for; stories of our past , stories of pain and glory, stories of our heritage.

> "Perhaps we haven't much to offer the sun worshippers, but we certainly have the goods when it come to the discerning tourist."

> > (Buckley, 13/3/1992)

Ireland will see a boom in hertiage centres like *Dublinia* within the next few years. In Dublin there are plans for a new Viking centre on the Quays in the Temple Bar project.

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The National Museum will now have to cope with the additional competition from *Dublinia* and the Viking Centre.(Mc Donald ,5/1/1989). However the Museum will always have a steady flow of vistors if it keeps up the standard of exhibits such as the Irish Gold which it has established.

From analysing the results of the survey it seems to show that the vistors to *Dublinia* enjoyed the interpretive exhibit more than that of the National Museums traditional display. The majority found the exhibit more personal, imaginative and exciting They interacted better with the realistic format as it made them comfortable and it was also easier to absorb the information and get through it all. Especially with the school children, their reaction was enjoyable also and they liked it because they were listening, observing and reading this all helped them to memorise the information. The younger vistors seem to enjoy it a lot and came out feeling refreshed and excited, not tired and bored. (Survey, Dec.1993).

The older the visitor (over 30) the more they enjoyed the exhibition, according to the survey, in the same way as the school children did. The visitors between the ages of 21 and 30 seemed to be the only group who preferred the more traditional form of exhibiting archaeological finds and would have preferred less of the "spoon feeding" of information. They seemed to already know the historical information and just wanted to see the realistic collection of artifacts and use their imagination. However, these visitors did enjoy the mixture of interpretation and realism, but wanted a more equal amount of each. 92% of the visitors did prefer this type of presentation to that of the method used in the National Museum.

Analysing the answers' of the visitors, there appeared to be a great similarity between school visitors aged between 9 to 17 with the group of visitors aged between 40 to 61. This similarity was shown in their replies to the questions.

When asked;

"Do you prefer this method of presenting the information, to more normal methods, such as viewing the information from behind glass panels?" and

"Was there anything that you did not like and how long were you in the exhibition ? "

the replies of both a 9 nine year old boy and a man of sixty were identical, being that they both found the exhibit interesting and exciting and on leaving the tour found they had a learning experience from the exhibit.

They both had the same complaint with regards to the poor audio visual sound quality and they each spent 90 minutes completing the tour.

The conclusion to the success of *Dublinia* is in its ability to hold the visitors attention with its entertainment quality. The results demonstrates that describing Dublin's history in an interpretative format has an easier and relaxing effect for the visitor.

The exhibit has the assistance of mechanical devices which help with the description of the information and also add a unique way of presentation such as the head sets and the audio visual presentation. This is not the case of the traditional format of the National Museum, one is at ones own pace and can spend as long as one wishes browsing amongst the remnants of a time long since past. However, this was not always the case for the exhibits were difficult to see and there was very little descriptive labeling, articles were displayed in dark wooden cabinets with poor lighting. This unimaginative method of presentation did not entice the visitor to stay.

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Today the exhibits are vibrant and stimulating. The visitors are interested and spend time there until they are satisfied. The National Museum is now a place where the exhibits can be viewed and considered with descriptive informative labeling. In interviewing students that were visiting the exhibit Irish Gold I got the clear impression of interest and shock from their reactions about the new facelift the Museum has and the great difference it made to their reception. The Exhibits have made the public aware of the new and fresh outlook the Museum has in providing a service. The visitors that I talked to had no complaints and all of them felt their visit was enjoyable and worthwhile. An American couple visiting the exhibition related the contrast that they felt in the museum to their first visit during a previous visit to Dublin in 1979. Their thoughts on the Museum now are more favourable than before. They commented that "it was beautiful now" (Interview 2/12/1993.)

The public that visit heritage tours and museums are both interested in the older presentations and in finding out new information, they would like it to be an enjoyable visit and would hope to leave the exhibit with interesting thoughts and facts. In the survey 27 per cent of visitors to *Dublinia* were interested in viewing the exhibit to see how it was presented, and 18 per cent were interested in Dublin's history not just out of general interest but also as students of history giving them additional aids in studying. (Survey, Dec. 1993)

Generally vistors wanted to enjoy their visit and be entertained, not only a day out type of excursion but as a form of escape into the imagination for an hour or two with the help of **Dublinia's** design team. As with all museums there will always be school groups, 28 per cent were school and college students on educational trips with their teachers, this situation 28 per cent did not decide to go to **Dublinia** themselves but it was chosen for them by a higher authority. A considerable amount of the students were glad that they came and enjoyed it.



The survey at *Dublinia* asked what the visitors liked in particular and the main preference was the Medieval Maze. The main reasons for this were :

1) You could stop the tape in the headset and take your time viewing the models.

2) The idea of the headset was new and original.

3) The Maze was designed so that you did not know what was around the next corner.

45per cent of them chose the Medieval Maze in preference to any other part of the exhibit . (Survey Dec 1993)

The second most popular part of the exhibit was the Audio-Visual film presentation. In contrast however it also received the most complaints, about 18 per cent of the reasons given were, the poor sound quality, the seating was uncomfortable and it was difficult to follow and understand. The Audio-Visual has a lot of problems but it was enjoyed because it was relaxing and in my opinion the Visual storytelling presentation is part of our everyday living and it is not unusual or strange. The only unusual part may be the eight screen that the film is shown on. It gives the effect of " sen surround ". (Mc Donald 1-5-1993.)

Some of the smaller percentages of complaints were about group control for teachers, it was difficult to keep large groups together. Other complaints referred to the amount of information, according to some there was either too much information or too little. This was obviously a very personal reaction and it is difficult to make a decision as to what should be changed here. Perhaps overestimating the information allows the visitor to select the amount he or she wants to absorb depending on saturation point. The results of the survey were good in relation to the advancement and improvement of the exhibit , over all 89 per cent of the vistors felt they received value for their money and 92 per cent the exhibits interpretative form of presentation.

On the survey leaflets there was a space for the visitor to make any further comments and 35 per cent had no comments to make. The comments that were made by the 65 per cent showed that :

1) They enjoyed their visit and wished Dublinia future success.

2) They also suggested the addition of certain aromas to give a more realistic affect.

3) The addition of more recent historic events.

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One Dublin man hoped, " that *Dublinia's* faith would be more fortunate than that of the Irish Life Viking Adventures", (Survey, Dec. 1993).



CHAPTER 3

The success of interpretive centres;

Analysing the results of previous centres and why they are successful.

When the Medieval Trust began the construction of **Dublinia** their intentions were much like those of the Irish Life Viking Adventures ; to familiarise the general public with everyday life as it was lived in Ireland's capital city.(Irish Life Viking Adventure literature.) Although they were dealing with different aspects of Dublin's history, Medieval and Viking history these two exhibits have common links with Wood Quay. Dr. Wallace also is a common link between them acting as the archaeological consultant to both the Irish Life Viking Adventure

and *Dublinia*. He provided his knowledge and enthusiasm to make both exhibits interesting educational.

The interest in Dublin's past was created following the discovery of finds in Wood Quay and the controversial building of the new Dublin Civic Offices on the site. Many wonderful

pieces of craftswork and important pieces of information were gathered. Until the end of 1990 these finds were locked away from public view. Today some of these finds are on display splay in the National Museum.

" Unfortunately the perception of the ordinary citizen tends to be that museums are designed for intellectuals rather than for the general public. This unfortunate attitude leads to a distancing of the population from their heritage" .(Wallace, 22/4/1990).



This was one of the reasons for the setting up of the Irish Life Viking Adventure in the Millennium year. Unfortunately the Viking Adventure was pulled down in 1989 due to the lack of the emergency fire equipment the cost of which could not be afforded. The amazing success of the Viking Adventure was short lived and just before its closure it had attracted over 200,000 visitors (Mc Donald , 1/5/1989).

Since the Viking Adventure there has not been another exhibit based on Viking history in Dublin or Ireland. According to Dr. Wallace the word "Viking" means money in the bank (Wallace, 25/8/1990).

The Temple Bar Project Group seems to agree with Dr. Wallace and will soon have a Viking centre within the next year. (O' Brien, 8/10/1993). After the success of the Irish Life Viking Centre cities around Ireland began searching for Viking remains, so they could try and follow its accomplishments, but to no rewards.

The heritage tour according to the views of the people questioned in the survey is the best kind of historical presentation, for them it provided interesting audio visual facts and entertaining ways of learning about the past. It is in my view that interpreting the history in more entertaining and imaginative ways leads to more effective exhibitions with public participation occurring at a higher level. The public are willing to pay an admission fee and get value for their money. Although Dr. Wallace has had a lot to do with the heritage tours such as *Dublinia* and the Irish Life Viking adventure, he has said " you know, all of this heritage thing could be just a passing fad." (Wallace , 22/4/1990). If this is so Dublin has only had a taste of what Dublin heritage tours can do.

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In America there are huge numbers of Interpretative centres not just for historical purposes but in Zoos, Aquariums and Art Galleries. The Museums in America found that they needed a new direction in presenting their collections to bring the visitors to their Museums. A report in the New York Times by the Director of the Canadian Museum of Civilisation in Ottawa, George F. McDonald maintained:

"The average visitor to Epcot stays for eight hours and leaves quite refreshed, while the average Museum visitor in North America stays less than an Hour and leaves with "Museum Fatigue" (Carpenter, Nov-Dec. 1992, pg88)

The Epcot Centre is a Disney presentation of American science and history. The Epcot centre is a continual inspiration for Museums according to McDonald, its format is successful with the public because it involves education, entertainment, souvenirs and food. Education is the main interest that Museums function for. The public want to learn and not be bored, so Museums are changing and learning centres such as Epcot. This view is also held by Edward H. Able Jr., Executive Director of the American association of Museums.

Often historical Museums can seem to look like storage houses for millions of artifacts all packaged together in cases, this is all beginning to change as designers are hired to re plan Museums all over America. One such exhibition designer and architectural historian, Elroy Quenroe says

"I have a hard time convincing them that it is proper to pare down, than to present a sharper image, is the simplest most straight forward way to make a point. "(Carpenter Nov-Dec. 1992,pg88)

According to Elroy Quenroe in the American graphic print design magazine has worked in Museums such as Baltimores Walter Art Gallery where he choose two thousand out of thirty thousand of the Museums pieces other details he paid attention to are the lighting, colours and simple display cases and fixtures. The visitors can view the works on exhibit more clearly and with less to absorb therefore more is remembered and appreciated. This is the case of the National Museums of Ireland's Or exhibit which is brightly lit and the cabinets are well spaced in the main hallway. The jewellery is not crowded into the cabinets which are of different shapes but are all the same height.

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The object for these new ideas is to bring an object of Fun into the art of exhibiting, this doesn't mean that museum lose their culture and traditions. It only means that visiting a museum more attractive and an easier way of learning.

"These interactive interpretive exhibits, mostly seen in science and technology centers and in zoos, maybe entertaining but they are not just entertaining they are educational" (Able, Carpenter, Nov. -Dec, 1992 pg. 88)

Tramore is one of Ireland's premier seaside resorts, along with their development plans in 1990 they needed some new attractions along with their traditional amusement arcades, they looked to Disney World for inspiration (O' Mara 29/4/1990) Celt World is a new concept for Ireland, it is a 3.6 million project that recreates Ireland, which legends and heros with the use of lasers and holograms, animation and computer graphics. The project has added to Tramore's annual 17.5 million tourism business.

A museum designer from America Bruce Burdick was the first person to use computers as an aid to museum exhibits in 1977, the exhibit was called "Food For Life" a nutritional exhibit in the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. He programmed the computer to store individual information about the visitor and advice. This information was shown on eleven terminals where each visitor was advised on diet and nutrition. This exhibit proved a great success , the reason being that the information was presented in a unique format. This resulted in holding the attention of the visitor for anything up to an hour and a half.(Carpenter, Nov-Dec., 1992, pg. 96).

Computers can still only be an additional attraction to the artifacts and exhibits themselves. The educational benefits have shown that computer aids can be a successful introduction to museums. Computers have the advantage of being able to fuse together the ancient artifacts with the technology of today enabling the visitor to easily grasp the information. Computers are already in existence for visitors to use in the National Gallery, Ireland.

The success of the interpretative form analysing the different reports proves very impressive. *Dublinia* is only a small version of the type of centres being set up in America. From studying the views of the public that have visited *Dublinia* it's future seems to be positive. The benefits to education will be seen visiting *Dublinia*. It is an enjoyable and informative experience.

CONCLUSION

"One of the fundamental meanings of the term heritage is something received from the past which is now in common ownership". (Cunningham, 7/2/1993).

Dublin is becoming aware of its heritage and realising that it is in common ownership. Groups such as the Medieval Trust and the National Museum Council take responsibility to ensure that Dublin's history is made known and presented in a stimulating way. When I began my research into such exhibits like *Dublinia* I had a strong feeling that these such groups were in some way exploiting Dublin's history to make money. Now having analysed the various aspects of the exhibition it has become evident that there is a need for them. This task is to present Dublin's past in a way which can be appreciated by as many people as possible.

During the process of my research I have noticed the consideration which has been paid to the interpretation of the exhibit at *Dublinia* for the foreign visitor. This has taken the form of handouts in foreign languages with more such as Japanese to be added to it's list , the facilities for foreign language tapes in the tape and headsets is another factor which helps the foreign visitor to interact more readily with the exhibit. Equally the consideration in presenting levels of printed information on boards and handouts has been developed for the English speaking visitor. This has included the establishment of graded forms of the information depending on the amounts of information to be assimilated. The presentation of the artifacts has been carefully considered for every possible examination by the visitor. Each section of *Dublinias* tour has been designed to tantalise the visitor such as the walkways, lighting, sound and the new interior of Synod Hall.

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In my research into the creation and evolvement of *Dublinia* I have learnt how difficult it is to set up such a heritage tour. The financial and designing side of its evolvement were both difficult and tedious. *Dublinia* is still needing readjustments in its future. The Medieval Trust is a non profitable organisation and its aim was to recreate an accurate portrayal of Dublin's medieval past which it has achieved.

The overall presentation of Dublin's Medieval history at **Dublinia** is both interactive and entertaining therefore the potential for the publics education is high. Interpretative centres are a successful way of presenting information and consideration to the publics reaction is placed in great importance. This the way of the future in exhibiting and **Dublinia** is hopefully the first permanent exhibit of many to come.



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DUBLINIA EXHIBITION; THESIS RESEARCH SURVEY

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How did you find out about "Dublinia" ?
Why did you visit "Dublinia" ?
Do you attend exhibitions on a regular basis , if so, how often ?
Did you visit this exhibition with a group, or alone ?
Do you prefer this method of presenting the information, to more normal methods, such
as viewing the information from behind glass panels. ?
Do you think you got value for your money ?
What did you like in particular about "Dublinia: ?
Was there anything you didn't like ?
Did it live up to your expectations ?
How long were you in the exhibition ?
Could you understand clearly the information presented, if not, please state why
Is there anything you would change, please specify
Any further comments on the exhibition ?
Thank you for your time. L. O'Connor. N.C.A.D.



Is there anything you would change

72.2% No Sound in A.V. 7.2% Another side to the street beside House 1.8% More of the lifesize models 1.8% Life up to top of the Tower 1.8% More live guides Spanish translation too long 1.8% To many A.V. Screens more use of headsets More exibits between hall and Tower Less detailed information

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