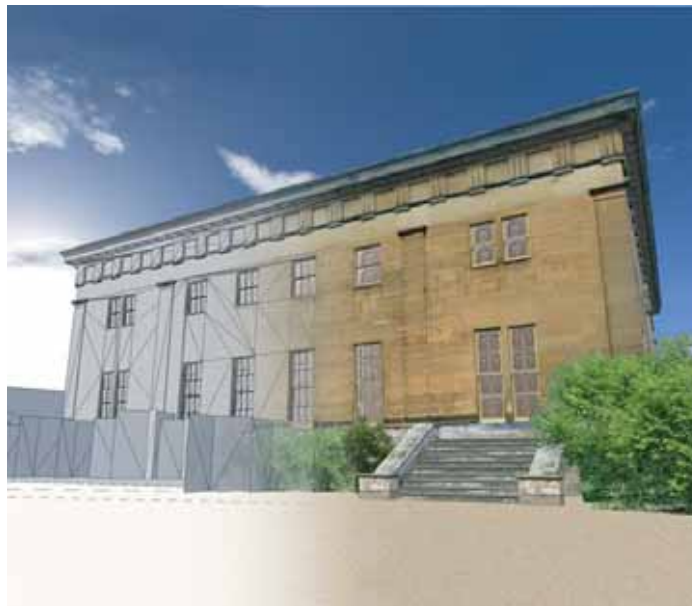




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# The Middleton Mystery- An Adventure at Belsay Hall



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# The session



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1. English Heritage and The Middleton Mystery Project
2. Some suggestions for running a similar project
3. A demonstration of the Middleton Mystery computer game
4. Questions

# The Learning Department at EH



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**We are responsible for engaging new and existing audiences with the historic environment through dedicated public programmes**

- Formal and informal education groups, adult learners and families
- BME groups, families on low incomes, young people, people with disabilities

# Belsay Hall



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## The site

- 14<sup>th</sup>-century castle
- 19<sup>th</sup>-century Greek-Revival hall
- Grade1 listed gardens

## Current interpretation

- Guide book
- Room panels
- Temporary exhibitions



# The Belsay Contemporary Arts Programme



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- Began in 1996
- Picture House in 2007 was the latest exhibition
- It featured contemporary film, art and design and included installations by:

Viktor and Rolf

Tilda Swinton

Opera North

Hew Locke

Sandy Powell

Mike Figgis and Boudicca



- Based in Liverpool
- Background in computer games industry (80+ game design & development projects)
- Own in-house interactive 3D technology (a “games engine”) now web-enabled
- Specialise in:
  - *Interactive 3D Visualisation*
  - *Real-time simulation*
  - *Educational products*
- Clients include:
  - *English Heritage, Linnean Society of London, Liverpool Culture Company, North Wales Police, Shell, International Centre for Digital Content, various city and county councils, and various universities*

# The Middleton Mystery Project



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- A heritage youth project involving a group of eight 14-15 year olds from Ashington Community High School
- The project ran alongside the Picture House exhibition at Belsay Hall
- The project took place between March and October 2007
- Key output was a computer game designed by the young people
- Aimed to diversify the interpretation methods used on site
- Develop new audiences





# Aims of the Project



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- To increase young people's awareness of, and interest in Belsay Hall and other heritage sites
- To attract more visitors to Belsay Hall, and to enhance the appeal of Belsay to young people
- To allow visitors to investigate a heritage site in an innovative way
- To increase the social skills, teamwork skills and self-esteem of the young people involved
- To offer the young people an arts experience that they would not normally have access to



# What happened?



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1. The group took part in workshops which focused on:

- The history of the property
- Devising the game-play and design within designated boundaries
- Input into the artwork
- Appearing as actors in the game

2. They attended the launch and advised on the final version of the game

The game became known as 'The Middleton Mystery' and is available for the public to play online at a new project website and in an area for young people and families at Belsay Hall



# Sample of activities from the project



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- Discussed different types of games, how they work and which features make a good game
- Took part in a tour of Belsay Hall including rooms that are usually inaccessible to the public
- Explored characters from Belsay's past by imagining what it would be like to be that character, and what they might say to each other
- Listened to oral histories related to life at Belsay
- Used digital cameras to capture interesting features in the gardens of Belsay Hall
- Chose a name for their games company - 'Mean Machine'
- Each participant worked with their chosen character to devise hiding places for their treasure, devised a clue that their character would tell the player, and wrote a short script
- Dressed up and were filmed delivering their scripts in costume

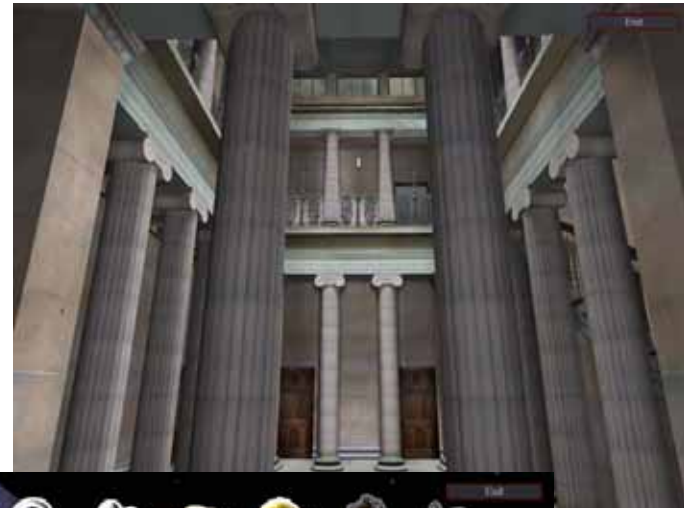
# The game



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The game consists of the following elements:

- Four levels relating to different locations on-site
- Films of the young people who speak as characters from Belsay's history who then direct the player to find a series of objects
- When all objects are found, the player is given a code which they use to collect a free pin badge



# The Middleton Mystery Room



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# Wider impact



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- Press coverage in Museums Journal, and games press
- 1,921 visitors to website
- 709 downloads from the website
- 150 feedback postcards (9-16yrs yielded most responses and 73.3% positive)
- 2,346 plays at site
- Average length of play 13 mins, 37 seconds
- Very popular with families and general visitors
- Retail version on sale – 67 sold to date



# Outcomes for the young people involved



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- A new-found interest in education
- Increased confidence among adults, their peers, and in their own abilities
- Improved historical knowledge of the site
- Changed behavior and attitudes - 75% thought they had learned new skills in taking part in the project and 80% felt it had helped them remember details of the history of Belsay
- 100% attendance from the group





## **Working with this audience**

- Activities which were creative, short in duration and which didn't involve a lot of writing were likely to lead to most participation
- Undertaking sessions on-site is beneficial; group behaviour is better when they are out of the school environment
- Allowing the young people to devise a team and game name afforded them a sense of ownership with the project outcome
- Cross-over with family audiences works well
- A project website and marketing materials provided a good way to raise profile and encourage visits

## **Managing projects**

- Managing projects of this scale requires clear role definitions among partners
- Long lead-ins are essential – when linking to an exhibition phased implementation worked well

## Previous virtual 3D work at EH



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Virtual 3D environments allow the viewer to explore the site for themselves and the aim is to offer an experience as close to a real visit as possible. The virtual world also offers a framework on to which we can deliver interpretation of the site itself and the collections associated with it, including showing virtual objects, images, text, oral history, and moving images.

Current methods employed:

- Interactive touch screen and audio visual technology to allow remote access to sites
- 3D environments and interactive panoramic photography
- 3D visualisation
- Pilot of downloadable tours at EH free sites –  
**see <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.10612>**

# Games as interpretive and learning tools



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- A computer game presents a virtual environment that players interact with in order to achieve a goal or set of goals
- These goals are typically challenges that the player has to master in order to progress through the game to completion
- An increasing appreciation of the possibilities for using computer games and the underlying software technology for more "serious" applications, particularly within learning applications



# Games as interpretive and learning tools



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- The fun of playing computer games can allow such learning to escape from more formal and dogmatic methods of teaching
- A method which is enjoyable and engaging
- Users can become so engrossed in playing the game that they don't even notice the amount of information, skill or knowledge that they are learning whilst playing

# Virtual applications



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- 3D views of historic objects either standalone, in room settings or in storage
- Realistic re-creation of sites– in their current form or as they were in the past
- Use of audio clips to evoke atmosphere e.g. oral histories, recreation of scenes, speeches, poems, documents
- Puzzles and games
- Use of virtual characters who can educate and inform
- Use of archive or current film footage
- Material from buildings' historians e.g. building plans and research
- Use of artists' illustrations in 3D and photographic records
- Recreation of landscapes

# How to run a similar project: Planning



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- If applying for external funding, begin early and consider doing some preliminary work before the funding decision
- Consider phasing delivery of education element so it does not launch at the same time as the exhibition
- Spend time producing a clear project plan outlining key milestones and roles of partners (especially important when working with partners from arts background who may have a different approach)



# How to run a similar project: Funding



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There are several types of funding which could be sought:

- Public funding
  - E.g., the HLF
  - The Screen Council have regional offices which can fund games and multi media projects e.g. Yorkshire has exhibition and education, community and youth media projects- [www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk](http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk)
  - Renaissance market towns initiatives
  - Arts council grant for the arts
  - City Learning Centres
  - Business Education Partnerships
  - SET Point
- Trusts and foundations
- Individuals
- Companies (e.g. BT)

# How to run a similar project: Writing briefs



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Produce a project brief for the work including:

- Fee
- Timescales
- Role of software company and any contact with young people (CRB)
- Outline practical constraints e.g. lack of broadband, visitor route, location, mobile reception
- Outline scope of the project e.g. equipment – PCs, touch screen, electricity etc
- Application procedure

# How to run a similar project: Finding a group



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- Select partners with good contacts or use your own e.g. arts agencies, local authorities to assist in finding a suitable group
  - Make clear expectations from the start with the school/group leader
  - Make sure you are liaising with the right person at the school who makes key decisions
  - Ensure the group can commit over a period of time
  - Ensure the group are fully supervised if participants have specific emotional/behavioural needs

# How to run a similar project: Finding a software company



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- Circulate brief widely e.g. arts and heritage
- Games context – approach regional games consortia and networks (Google these words)
- Look for companies who are happy to work directly with young people and be led by them
- Look for companies who share similar views on the positive use of games
- Approach software companies rather than interpretation designers who do virtual tours if you want an interactive game

## After successful appointment

- Supply the company with plans of the site and any reconstruction drawings
- Software development is an iterative process – so be prepared to get involved

# How to run a similar project: Marketing



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- Devise a marketing and PR strategy
- Create a new project website or add pages to your existing website
- Create young people-friendly material e.g. postcards
- Consider an admission discount for young people and on-site leaflet
- Seek out reviews from relevant press e.g. Edge Magazine, PC Zone etc



# How to run a similar project: Budgeting



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**The creation of a new game working with a group of young people intensively over several workshops at a site: total cost £25,000:**

- A minimum of £18,000 for software development
- A recommendation would be that an additional £5,000 be added to the game creation figure to include a freelance games artist/education worker to manage the content creation for the game
- £2,000 to cover: a launch event, basic marketing materials and transport
- A suggested timeframe would be a minimum of 3 months to develop a game (this excludes input from a group of young people).



# How to run a similar project: Evaluation



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- Produce an evaluation strategy
- Match your evaluation methodology with the funders' requirements
- Undertake pre- and post-project evaluation as well as qualitative and summative
- Use a variety of evaluation methods to track changes in attitudes, skill levels and general engagement with the project

# How to run a similar project: Evaluation strategy



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Generic learning outcome	Weak indicator	Strong indicator	Method of evidence capture
Have an increased knowledge and understanding about Belsay Hall	Young people will feel more confident in their general understanding of Belsay Hall	Young People will feel very confident of their understanding of Belsay Hall, will be able to give specific examples of things they know about the hall, and will be able to draw conclusions and their own ideas from the facts they know	Front end discussion and/or flip chart work to establish starting point Video diary or taped focus group, evidence from the end product game produced - What do you know about Belsay Hall? - What do you now know about Belsay Hall? - Do you understand more about Belsay? - What does Belsay Hall mean to you?



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A demonstration version of The Middleton Mystery (Level 1) can be downloaded at:

[www.middletonmystery.co.uk](http://www.middletonmystery.co.uk)

A full retail version is available from the shop at Belsay Hall, priced £3.99



# Contacts



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