'Interpretation is a communication process, designed to reveal meanings and relationships of our cultural and natural heritage, through involvement with objects, landscapes and sites.' (Interpretation Canada).

This paper is a case study based on the interpretation approaches used for the Blacksmith Shop at the Inveresk site of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) in Launceston. It illustrates how the senses, soundscapes and lighting stimulate our understanding of place. The Blacksmith Shop is part of the former Launceston Railway Workshops site, in operation for 125 years, from 1868, when the first sod was turned, to 1993, when The Australian National Railways vacated the site. QVMAG, funded by the Launceston City Council, took up its occupancy of the site in 1996.

The Blacksmith Shop consists of a series of buildings built between 1909 and 1937. During the 1960s there were between 80 to 100 people working there. It contains forges, furnaces, drop hammers, presses, smithy equipment, patterns, swing cranes and bending machines. The dirt floors, blackened walls and contents evoke the Victorian industrial era and demonstrate the techniques and practices no longer practiced. It is the only large-scale nineteenth-century industrial environment that survives in Tasmania. Throughout its operations the Blacksmith Shop was a noisy, smoky, dirty and busy workshop. It is significant for providing evidence of the trade of blacksmithing on an industrial scale.

The interpretive communication process

The interpretive communication process must begin with some understanding of the audience. Visitor research for QVMAG reveals that the audience is diverse and includes families and school groups. In order for the interpretation of the Blacksmith Shop to be effective, the following guidelines were used to present the interpretation messages to the audience: the experience needs to be entertaining and interesting, because for many visitors they expect to both learn something and to enjoy themselves; the experience should also be relevant, meaningful and personal. Visitors must be able to relate to the new information/ideas with something they already know. This is the principle on which learning theory is based. There is also a strong link between relevance and knowing your audience and/or encouraging new audiences to visit; interpretation should be organised and presented in a way that is easy to follow, so that people don't have to work hard to see what we are trying to tell them; and interpretation should be themed, because it helps to organise information and make it meaningful and memorable.

The themes identified for the Blacksmith Shop interpretation include: the operations of Australian railways, working practices and the evolution of railway technology from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries; the railway trade of industrial blacksmithing; and an insight into the nineteenth-century industrial working environment and the growth of industrialisation.

The interpretation approaches

In the Blacksmith Shop, the sense of hearing is experienced in a number of ways. The soundscape is a recording of a variety of sounds and includes: machines, pigeons, trains (both diesel and steam), conversation voices and silence. The sounds are real and the majority are sounds from equipment used in the Blacksmith Shop or from locomotives that would have been heard from the workshop. More specifically, the hammer works on heated metal as opposed to cold metal. The hot metal sound is the authentic sound. The soundscape is a part of the self-guided visitor experience. The visitor can go through the workshop at their own pace without words and hear the experience. The soundscape is played through a computer and is set on an eight-hour loop. The

Figure 1. The Blacksmith Shop, located at the Inveresk site of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, showing the walkway. (Courtesy QVMAG)
speakers are large enough to reproduce the sound at a capacity close to the original sound. The speakers are strategically placed throughout the workshop, hidden from view. The visitor experiences a range of different sounds at different times; the sounds can be heard coming from all over the workshop. Other sounds include the demonstrations, with the metal being heated in the forge and then worked into shape on the large pneumatic hammer or small anvil and the blacksmiths/tour guide engaging with the visitors during a guided tour.

The Blacksmith Shop has its own particular smell, from the dirt floors, the machines and coke in the forges. This is even more noticeable when there is an actual demonstration. This involves the coke burning in the forge, metal being heated and worked under the large pneumatic hammer or small hammer and anvil.

The sense of sight is also utilised to stimulate the visitors understanding of the Blacksmith Shop. This is done in a number of ways. The most powerful visual impact of this building is seen from the walkway, which is integrated throughout the whole workshop. From the walkway some of the things for visitors to see include: the machines, forges, furnaces, drop hammers, presses, smithy equipment, patterns, swing cranes and bending machines, dirt floors, blackened walls and remnants of Second World War black-out material. It was constructed to enable safe visitor access, to satisfy Occupational Health and Safety concerns and as a minimalist method of intervention. The design and materials used to construct the walkway were also part of this minimalist approach.

Another example of this approach is that there was limited intervention with the remainder of the workshop, except for some conservation work and replacement of the contaminated dirt. A total of 720m² of dirt was removed and replaced to a depth of 0.5–1m. This task was undertaken by QVMG staff because of their understanding of the site and a commitment to maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the site as much as possible. The blacksmith and striker heating the steel in a forge fired up with coke, and working the hot steel into shape under hammers gives the visitor a spectacular visual understanding of the Blacksmith Shop. The illustrated brochure, with text and images about the machines and items made in the workshop, is another visual method used to stimulate the sense of sight.

Visitors are able to experience the Blacksmith Shop with the sense of touch during guided tours with a handling box and/or examples of blacksmith work during a demonstration. The handling box contains examples of tools, equipment parts, locomotive parts, etc. A particular example where this worked very effectively was with a group of teenage students from Thailand. The students spoke very little English. The handling box was a way to introduce these visitors to the Blacksmith Shop prior to going into the workshop for a demonstration. The students enjoyed the demonstration, engaged with the blacksmith and asked plenty of questions.

Overall the interpretation approaches used to interpret the Blacksmith Shop are successful because they engage with the audience directly and reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, first-hand experience, soundscapes, and by illustrative media, rather than by just communicating factual information.