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ABOUT DIG IT AND COMMITTEE BIOS
One of the challenges archaeologists face is in communicating the value of our work to the public and increasingly, museums play an important role in engaging the profession with the community. This issue of Dig it asked Michael Mills, winner of the 2014 National Science Week Unsung Hero of Science Communication Award, about his work as a science communicator collaborating with institutions such as the South Australian Museum. Michael is better known as the Scottish palaeontologist, Professor Flint.

**How did you conceive of Professor Flint and what is your background in dramatic interpretation and producing content for science venues?**

It was actually the idea of telling stories about Australia’s prehistory that came first, which came about as a result of reading Tim Flannery’s “The Future Eaters.” It was the first book I’d ever read about Australian pre-history and thought “WOW! What awesome creatures. Why had no-one ever told me about this? How can I visit that place?”

And the reason I had read Tim’s book in the first place was on a raving recommendation by British broadcaster David Bellamy, who I lucked into doing a community radio interview with along the St. Kilda mangroves board walk. Had I not casually happened to pop into the radio station where I’d not done stuff for a while, and the publicist had looked up from her desk and ask… “Hey… Do you wanna interview this guy?” regarding Bellamy, and had I now missed the actual press conference, and had to travel to the mangroves to speak with him, I’m not sure what sliding doors world I’d be living in!

From there, the songs danced from the pages of pre-history as I read. Which may sound odd, but when writing tunes, as you read, there are certain things that resonate and act as your departure point into the world of notes and lyrics I did the songs for the final season of Channel 7’s “The Book Place”, where I’d be given a book, and asked to come up with a suitable song within a few days. The real buzz for me was than it reading the book, there’d be moments when it was obvious where a song could be breathed into life. The first tune written for the Prof was… “I saw a diprotodon skeleton”, and it came into being simply because I thought how awesome it would be to be looking at the skeleton, and wondering what this animal was like when it lived and breathed and walked the Earth.

The creation of Prof Flint as the one who was singing the songs began in a show for the “Come Out” Youth Arts Festival in a show called “Dancing with Diprotodons.” By this time, Tim was running the S.A. Museum, and loved the idea, and so that’s where we did the show. Made sense. Sing about diprotodons, then go and see one! Naturally, I needed a character to sing the tunes and tell the stories. There had to be a lab coat… Coz that’s how I saw science folk at the time. And a hat. By this point I’d done a fair few shows around the place, and the characters had always had a hat or a wig.

Though here’s the thing… Final dress rehearsal on the Friday, the Prof went through his final embryonic paces, in readiness for his Monday birth! It was fine. It all seemed to work. And yet across the weekend, something nagged at me. He wasn’t as funny as I’d hoped. He wore an Aussie hat, sang with a broad Aussie accent, and was telling stories about a part of our

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**Science Communication and Museums: Interview with Michael Mills**

By Catriona Santilli
Master of Archaeology student, Flinders University.
fantastic Aussie pre-history. I then happened to stroll past an old puppet I used to use on radio. A Scottish puppet. Claude McTavish, the long lost cousin of the Loch Ness Monster! It was at that moment that one of tunes, “Rocks and Bones”, became “Rrrrrrrrocks and Boooooooons!”

As for a background in dramatic interpretation and producing content for science venues? None. Zero. Zilch. I did a Bachelor of Business, worked in the public sector for a few years, and then left on a whim to do something about this writing thing I loved doing.

I have no theatre or music training, other than a few years of drum lessons. I’ve done no creative writing courses. I have no degree in science, or science communication. There was clearly no career plan! I learnt to write and perform, by writing and performing. I learnt about science through hanging out with scientists. I’ve come to place great important on their advice. It’s the stories they’re uncovering that I have the honour of being able to tell, and I want to ensure I get the facts right. You can create great drama and great theatre, and still get the science right. Indeed, for me, it’s an essential part of the story.

At Flinders Uni, we have a tourism subject many archaeology students take called ‘Essentials of Interpretation’. What do you think are the essentials in producing good interpretation?

It has to have a story that resonates with the particular audience, whoever they are, whatever their demographic, background, lifestyle. It has to resonate. Humans are the storytelling animal. Homo Fictus I once read us described as! People don’t engage with information. They engage with stories. The key is to ensure the right information is on those stories, and that those stories are told using great storytelling techniques, and by effective storytellers.

What distinguishes dramatic interpretation (or science theatre) from traditional interpretive methods used in museums of communicating ideas and why isn’t it something we see more of?

I think it all sits on a continuum. There are basic signs, self-guided walks, and volunteers who do a fantastic job. There are full-on, site-specific theatrical productions that integrate the stories of the collections into it’s storytelling, using the museum space. And there’s lots of things in between. The word Science Theatre is not one I use, as it always conjures images for me of a show with a series of explosions and lots of slime. While these things are terrific and have their place, it’s not what I do, unless it’s part of a clear narrative. The key to remember, is it’s not just theatre... It’s the use of performance, in varying mediums and capacities.

Why performance? And why more of it now? People see that it works. There’s ample research now showing us that the kinds of engagement that are possible through using performance are incredibly powerful in being able to engage audiences. For me the love was always writing, and in particular, songwriting. That’s what brought me to what I do. The thing I love about songs, is they anchor memories like no other art form.

At the Museum, you’ve done tours with audiences that have both children and adults; you’ve also done tours exclusively for adults (like the night tour for Biodiversity Week 2014). Yet adults often find the tours with children just as humorous. How do you balance the message you’re trying to communicate while still being entertaining?

It’s not really a conscious process. I go with my gut... often with what makes me laugh, and that I find interesting. I figure if I read something for the first time, and it’s “Ooooh... that’s cool!”, others might think the same. Seems to have worked so far! Phew! There are things Flint can do and say if it’s just adults and the context is right, and these seem self-evident. I suspect it’s all partly because I’ve been doing this stuff awhile now, so you learn what’s appropriate. You learn from your audience. They are the reason you get to do what you do as a job. They are the ones who’ve paid their money, and taken time out of their lives, to be a part of yours. So, I think the balance has come from years of listening and being aware of how the audience are responding, and listening some more.

Professor Flint has a social media presence on Face Book with Dinosaurs Down Under and on YouTube. How important do you feel new media is as a tool available to interpreters and how do you use it effectively?

I, like many folk, are on a learning curve with this stuff. What works? What’s going to go viral? In the end, for that kind of thing, it’s impossible to know. Maybe if Prof Flint had an annoying pet cat, that might improve things. What Ido like is the immediate engagement you can get with people you know like the stuff your doing. It’s great to ask folk questions,
send out new tunes and see what they think. I think we are really just at the beginning of possibility with social media. As with everything though... It’s the story that engages people, whether it’s social media, or another medium.

In 2014, you jointly received the Unsung Science Hero of Science Communication award, along side your colleague Dr. Jim Gehling, at the SA Museum. When and why did you first become interested in communicating science to a broader audience?

That I won alongside Jim was one of the great honours of my professional life. In the end, it’s the stories of people like Jim that I get to bring to life, and without such folk, there’d be no Prof Flint. There was never a career plan in doing this. It was always... “Look at that over there! That looks interesting. I might do that for a bit.” After many a year following my whims, I look back, and you can see the path that got me here, but it was never thought of beforehand. So, it was never my sitting down and making a conscious decision to communicate science to an audience. It started with things like reading “The Future Eaters” and thinking how cool it would to write some songs about the amazing beasties that dwell amongst it’s pages. I think this is really important. I think it’s by approaching it this way, you’re much more likely to get better at doing it.

Can you tell us about how the night tours at the SA Museum came about what you think is so compelling about a museum at night?

The idea came about during Palaeontology Week one year when we all decided how cool it would be to hang at the Museum and do something after dark, and by torchlight. It’s not a new thing, touring Museums at night. The S.A.Museum just hadn’t done a lot of it.

What I do love is the ability to focus on a single object. To ensure your audience is looking at nothing else but the thing that you are holding a torch to. When we first did them everyone had torches, and it’s was more than a little distracting, especially when 20 torches would be shone in my eyes. By giving the Prof the only torch, he decides what you see and when. As always, though, it’s not just about showing one thing, then another, then another. There has to be an underlying narrative, and a reason in that narrative to be engaging with the particular thing you’re looking at.

There is also something compelling in what you don’t and can’t see. What that’s sound? What’s that lurking in the shadows? I think it appeals to the storytelling animal in us all at a very basic level, and does so no matter what age we are.
Editorial Committee

Jordan Ralph, Editor
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Jordan completed a Bachelor of Archaeology (Honours) degree at Flinders University in 2012. The focus of Jordan’s Honours research was contemporary graffiti on Jawoyn Country. He is an active member of the archaeological community, serving as a Student Representative for the Australian Archaeological Association and the President of the Flinders University Archaeological Society during 2012, as a member of the World Archaeological Congress Student Committee in 2012 - 2015 and as a member the Council of the World Archaeological Congress as the Junior Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific in 2013 - present. Jordan has considerable experience working with Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, and has participated in numerous archaeology surveys and recording projects, with a particular focus on rock art and graphic representation. Jordan now works as a field archaeologist at Walls Heritage Consulting and is a PhD candidate with the Flinders University Department of Archaeology where he is currently researching modern material culture in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

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Catherine completed her Honours degree in 2012 where she conducted a technological and functional analysis on stone artefacts from the archaeological site of Ngaut Ngaut (Devon Downs), South Australia. Her current PhD research involves analysing ceramics with elemental and mineralogical techniques in order to explore questions about provenance and technology, which can be used to infer interregional interaction. The archaeological site of Caleta Vitor is the focus of her research and is located in northern Chile, South America. The ceramic record from the site spans the last 2,000 years and thus covers the rise, consolidation and collapse of two Andean cultures - Tiwanaku and Inka. This is a multidisciplinary international project that will provide insight into the ceramic manufacturing process for the site and identify the possible influences that the overarching political states of Tiwanaku and Inka had on the population.

Adrian Mollenmanns, Co-editor
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Adrian completed his Honours degree in 2014 in which he undertook an analysis of Aboriginal fish traps on Yorke Peninsula (Guuranda), South Australia. Adrian’s research interests include indigenous archaeology with an emphasis on adopting and promoting collaborative archaeological and community-based participatory research approaches (see also Interview with Dr Amy Roberts in this edition for a further discussion on ethical considerations that underlie the need for adopting such approaches). His current PhD research continues his collaboration with the Narungga community of Yorke Peninsula (Guuranda) by undertaking a broader investigation of coastal and marine resource use of this community including how the coastal and marine economy developed over time.

Fiona Shanahan, Co-editor
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Fiona completed an archaeological Honours degree at La Trobe University in 2014. Her thesis deals with the management of World War II aviation sites in Australia and the Marshall Islands. Fiona has presented at a number of international and domestic conferences, including the National Student Archaeology Conference (NASC) and Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA) conferences. She has a broad range of fieldwork experience including terrestrial and maritime archaeology throughout Australia. Excavations include the Penitentiary in Port Arthur, Oaklands Guard House, Australian Historic Shipwreck Preservation Project (Clarence) in Victoria, a shell midden in Apollo Bay, survey work at Ned’s Corner as well as consulting work throughout Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia.

About Dig It

Dig It is the student-run, peer-reviewed journal of the Flinders Archaeological Society and its purpose is to provide students - including undergraduates, postgraduates and recent graduates - with the opportunity to practice and familiarise themselves with the processes involved in academic publications, including writing, publishing, editing and reviewing. The publication began in 1997 and after a hiatus of at least five years, it was relaunched in 2012. It aims to offer emerging young academics with an avenue to engage with archaeological dialogues and discourse. In addition, it seeks to keep future and junior archaeologists connected and informed about what is happening in the archaeological community.

Dig It is published once a year and is printed at Flinders Press. Dig It considers a range of contributions, including research articles, essays, personal accounts/opinion pieces, book reviews and thesis abstracts for publication. We welcome contributions from local, interstate and international undergraduates, postgraduates and recent graduates. The guidelines for contributors can be found here: http://flindersarchsoc.org/dig/dig/guidelinesforcontributors/.

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