

ASSIGNMENT 1

FIRST STEP

I started with the Baron Courts in May 2001, leaving a Manager's position in a local Hotel. The Hotel had suffered hard times and had various owners including a set of Accountants who were placed to oversee the hotel on behalf of a Bank.

With a young family just starting nursery and school, the Hotel was convenient and I helped the Owner and his partner set up the Hotel that had stood empty for years and required restoration. After a year of refurbishment we opened and it was very successful. It was not until a London company bought the property that things really started to go down hill. It became clear, with no investment there would be no future and I decided that working excessive hours, trying to keep the hotel running was just not worth it. I had to be fair to my family and myself and decided to hand in my resignation.

Coincidentally a paying guest Sylvia Burgess a PA to Baron of Prestoungrange spent a lot of time in Scotland setting up offices in Cockenzie a town nearby. Sylvia being a regular I personally made sure she received attention and good service. So you can imagine my horror whilst chatting one morning that Sylvia and her work colleague were told bacon was off the breakfast menu. On went my raincoat, I dashed out to the local supermarket to purchase the forbidden bacon, handed it to the Breakfast Chef and told him to cook breakfast.

Sylvia explained why she spent so much time in East Lothian. It all seemed strange at first. A charity called Baron Courts whose aim using an Arts Festival Society planned to promote and celebrate the heritage of Prestonpans Town. Why there and not Haddington? were my first thoughts, although Sylvia explained the family history and connections with the Baron of Prestoungrange.

I must admit I did envy Sylvia and her organisation, as it was so different from what I did. A month later fate intervened and an advert appeared in my local press advertising the position of Receptionist/Administrator. I already had a couple of interviews for clerical positions within the dreaded East Lothian Council but this job appealed to me so much more.

I was interviewed by Jane Bonnar (Arts Director) and Sylvia Burgess and although I thought the interview went well I was sure they were looking for someone with a historical background or at least a Scot.

However, in May 2001 I started work beside Jane. At first I was not quite sure of my duties except to assist Jane when required. The offices were still in the early stages and, although painted and upgraded they were far from finished. It wasn't long before furnishing, telephone and Internet systems were up and running and now I could see the light, although not feel the heat. It was some months later sitting behind my desk with layers of woollies on and wearing gloves I wondered if I had made the right decision, but then the heating came on!

Meeting around the table

The procedure was, when The Baron, Sylvia and others came to Scotland a Barons Courts Meeting was held. I did not know quite what to expect when I attended the 24th Meeting of the Baron Courts held in the Hall. I was a little flabbergasted at the amount of ongoing projects as well as new items on the agenda. I was so glad Sylvia was taking the notes as I endeavoured to keep up and noted anything I thought I should.

One thing I do remember thinking was how positive the meeting was with lots of varied ideas and proposals planned, I only wished I knew more of what they were all talking about.

It did take me quite a while to settle in. Jane unfortunately had work commitments out of the office, leaving me to deal with whatever if anything came up. I think she found it difficult to delegate and therefore reluctant to hand-over work. Obviously this became a problem as if asked I knew very little about ongoing projects. Because of the magnitude of projects past and future I took the opportunity when quiet to read the files Jane kept neatly in the filing cabinets and familiarised myself as much as possible.

An event, which I knew, was to happen was a book launch for Burke's Landed Gentry planned for August 2001. I felt this would be my opportunity to help and organise.

Not surprisingly because of Jane's absence I became familiar with the Burkes Peerage Team who co-ordinated with us on the event, together with people from Jane's network who were going to use the facilities organised for the Book Launch and Marquee.

Temporary Internet lines were connected, caterers, performing dancers, musicians, pipers, sound engineers, florists and contract cleaners had to be briefed. I had created good working relations with most of these people in the past and was confident they would pull out all the stops for me.

I find it is much easier getting the best from people if you have been introduced face to face. For example I first met Jim Forster at the Book Launch and we immediately hit it off and he has been a great source of local knowledge and help in the last few years.

Who needs a Town Crier?

Thinking back to my early day with the Baron Courts I know exactly when I started to see things differently.

Visiting Kate Hunter a Muralist every other day to watch and observe her first Mural, I could understand the impact of painting outdoors. At first I did wonder would these murals and others really survive the reputation of Prestonpans Youth. Now seven murals down the line I can see clearly what we are all about.

To celebrate Kate's mural what better way than to attract an audience of children, who undoubtedly would drag along their parents. Invitations to join us at the beach wall were put into local papers, advertising a colouring competition, balloon launch; Punch & Judy live shows and the inevitable bouncy castle.

A group of children as expected did arrive with family in tow. Mums and Dads enjoyed refreshments whilst their children were entertained. What better way of spreading the word.

Feedback also plays an important part within the community as I have learnt from past experience to listen to people's opinion, ideas and criticism as without this you can't hope to improve.

One particular admirer of Kate's work was a local chap who with toddler in pushchair introduced himself as Andrew Crummy an International Muralist with stacks of experience. Small world indeed. Now Andrew paints Murals for us and has become a valuable key member of the team.

The Musselburgh Fire Brigade came to the rescue of our 3rd Mural. I phoned the local Fire station and explained whom we were and what we wanted to do. Thank goodness there was a training team operating that week and were only too pleased to help us clean a wall with high-powered hoses, which turned a few heads on the passing bus. The crew were really impressed with our plans especially those of the Gothenburg re-opening and promised to hold a function, possibly a Christmas dance some time in the future

Jim Cursiter had a different type of audience namely passengers on the No.26 Bus commuting to Edinburgh as well as onlookers from the conveniently placed Bus Stop situated in front of the mural. Jim's sensitive mural of the Beam Engine and workers can be seen as you approach Prestonpans and almost acts as the gateway to the Town, and one particular family obviously thought the mural was something special and they decided to place wreaths of a loved one at the bottom of the mural.

The Vision

Gordon Prestoungrange already knew where to set up the Baron Courts Heritage Centre in Prestonpans and in November 2001 The Gothenburg on the High Street was purchased. Knowing the historical importance of The Goth (as the locals knew it) the location was perfect. Today, it feels like a business base and with great exciting plans for the future I feel excited at the thought. Everyone knew planning would take a while, so the Goth was put on the back burner and planning applications were drawn up.

Things were busy along at the Cockenzie Centre. Invites went out to a Mural morning and evening. This was an opportunity for guests to meet the people behind the scenes, painters, and authors and find out what we were planning.

Karl Schutz founder of the Global Arts Association was invited across from Canada to share his experiences and tell how he and others had succeeded. Works from Artists were displayed around the hall and corridors into the Business Centre creating a gallery atmosphere and refreshments were organised throughout both events. I again seized the opportunity to mingle and get to know the authors and other guests I was not familiar with.

Communication and promotion played an important part in the future of the Arts Festival Society. A local Editor of East Lothian Life magazine Pauline Jaffrey, whose magazine circulated in East Lothian, was approached and asked if she would join our team to help publicise what we were up to around Prestonpans. I was familiar with Pauline's publicity background from my previous job and knew she would be a great asset especially with her East Lothian networks.

Jane and Pauline worked closely together on ideas for promotion and Pauline came up with the idea of Brushstrokes a newsletter to be circulated quarterly.

My job was to ensure they were distributed to deadline. At first there were problems. A major Distribution Company was unsuccessful in distributing our brochures and after only hearing this feedback from locals I decided to cancel and try someone else. After asking around I was advised to use a local lady who delivered Safeway special offer leaflets locally. I eventually tracked her down and she has successfully delivered three issues of Brushstrokes and a Christmas card on time and at a cheaper rate.

Busy Month Ahead

March 2002 and although planning permission was still ongoing things were moving very slowly. It was decided that work should commence on the first floor which would be designated as office space and meeting rooms for the Baron Courts and well as possible living quarters at a later stage for Management of the Goth. I knew of a Contractor who had worked for me on various occasions. His men were reliable, good workers and worked to a high standard and I had no hesitation in recommending Bill Robertson as a possible candidate.

Refurbishments are now underway and armed with script and deadlines I was very much left to my own devices and realised the importance of my role, being the only member of the team geographically “hands on”. This felt a little more of what I was use to. I focused on the possible Restorers of phase 2 of the Gothenburg. I kept a diary of all site meetings and made a point of keeping in touch with the experts informing them of planning progress, hoping if I did this they would put us into their busy work schedules at short notice.

It was a pleasant change being involved with Preston Lodge High School and I’m sure having a son around the same age as the students I knew what to expect.

Jane Bonnar and Andrew Crummy had invited a group of children from the local school to paint a mural. The School and Teachers were delighted as I’m sure one or two of the youngsters were. Jane was away on holiday so left me to liase with the school and organise with Andrew the schedule, as well as organising materials, ladders and First Aid Box.

We all introduced ourselves and both Andrew and myself spoke on what we did. I gave the curious crowd a tour of the Goth. It was hard work at first trying to contain and stimulate the group, it was clear that these children were remainders kept back from planned away trips with the school, so most of them really did not care if they painted or appeared every morning.

Andrew and three Teachers worked closely in small groups and towards the middle of the week there was quite a transformation. Attitudes had changed and the children were confident and happy working outdoors, and contributed to a piece of art displayed on a wall in their Town for all to see with their signatures on. I took regular photos and informed the local press who sent a photographer and reporter. Andrew still gets waves of acknowledgement from the students along the High Street.

We finished the week with a Garden Party thanking the Preston Lodge School and also invited a few local dignitaries to celebrate the mural and Rev. Robert Simpson officially named and blessed the mural.

A busy year lay ahead. New editions to the Historical Series were published and stocks were being delivered for me to store. Andrew was about to start his mural on Transportation. IMCA/UALB Congress Ceremony was taking place at Wintoun House as well as them using the Hall and Lindsay Suite at the Cockenzie Business Centre for workshops. Planning and preparation was needed. I set up our two rooms for workshops, also asked the Landlord for the use of others vacant units, hired conference equipment and organised lunches and coffee stations for the two days. My only wish was for a dishwasher that week.

Changes and a New Beginning

Panic set in as the news of Jane Bonnar our Arts Director had decided to resign and take up a teaching post. I wasn't sure whom if anyone would replace Jane and worried about all the unfinished projects. I was a practical person and knew I could still work on my own I had done so now for quite a while. Acting on instinct, I checked the diary and phoned all my close network colleagues to inform them of the situation and set up meetings to plan the ongoing project they were involved with.

Gordon and Sylvia reassured me that consolidating and concentrating on all outstanding project would be the best plan of actions. Before Jane left she introduced Annemarie Allan who was happy to work on a part-time basis working from home on research and the editorial of Brushstrokes. I felt quite focused now and confident with the support and help of new and old work colleagues, and knew I could cope and would move on.

Move on indeed! The Prestonpans Community Council had requested we submit our proposals for the Goth and originally Jane and Andrew were going to do a presentation. It then dawned on me I would be Jane's replacement, so armed with drawings and plans at short notice I joined Andrew to put our proposals forward.

A sigh of relief at the end and for the positive response we received. A job well done we both thought.

Refurbishments on the first floor of the Goth were complete. Smart made to measure office furniture, fitted carpets, heating and eventually telephone, fax and Internet systems connected.

What more could I ask for wonderful views and a small cosy office right on the High Street in Prestonpans. Now that people know I'm here I get a steady flow of folk popping in with works of art, stories of the past, deliveries, customers wishing to buy souvenirs, people just wanted a nose around, as well as work colleagues visiting for meetings or general updates on ongoing projects. The coffee cafetiere is always on the go!

Next was the planning of the Lord Mayor of Gotborg and Wife's visit. Three different types of invites were mailed and one in particular was posted with the Brushstrokes #4 to all residents in Prestonpans with an RSVP return inviting all to join in the celebrations of Kate Hunter's latest Mural on the wall owned by Adele and Maggie Conn situated opposite the Goth where refreshment would be served.

But first we had to send off a proposal to the Housing Association that owned the wall we planned to paint a mural on. I put together a package with Kate's sketches photos of Kate's previous work on the miners of the town, as well as images from our website on what we were about and news on what we planned. I personally wrote explaining who I was and where I could be located with a brief outline of our local projects and the assurance that we would maintain the wall.

I held my breath and waited in anticipation for the 2,500 plus phone calls expected. It was not long before the calls came in and listed all names and phone numbers for reference. One hundred designed pens with individual gift boxes arrived inscribed with PRESTOUNGRANGE GOTHENBURG 2003 Lord Mayor of Goteborg July 23, who better to give a souvenir to, but the town folk who had replied to the invite.

It was full steam ahead and I had a planning schedule to work to. The Contractors were well aware that the interior had to be ready to host a reception for invited guests.

I did apply pressure when I realised things were starting to drag. You have to get to know Tradesmen on a name basis and chat occasionally acknowledging their work and you find that they respond well when asked to do a little extra, as well as a packet of chocolate biscuits now and then.

It was important that all the Restoration chaps were aware of their deadlines, so now Plumbers, Plasterers, Joiners, Electricians, Pest Control Team and Cleaners were flat out. Within a month there was a complete transformation to the interior.

The Bar area had been 80% restored as well as most of the stained glass windows renewed and repaired. The microbrewery although a shell had lighting and could be viewed through double-glazed safety panels. The lounge panelled to match existing panels and new chandeliers fitted. The temporary bathrooms plumbed in and Cleaners then gave everywhere the once over. Even Sylvia and myself rolled our sleeves up and mopped out just hours before the guests arrived.

There was little we could do about the scaffolding to the front of the Goth although it did come in handy when I asked George the Electrician to tie several flags from the top.

Well it was all hands on especially leading up to the week of 23rd July. Anticipating a busy day I hired a couple of local Stewards who directed the crowds as well as parking. They helped carry to and fro and generally were on hand for anything at all. The PA system was connected and placed at the top of the stairs above the Mural. The curtain for unveiling was fixed to the mural at 11.00am an hour before the ceremony at 12.00am. Because a group of children gathered beside the mural I asked a Steward to stand and guard the curtain to ensure the rope was not pulled prematurely. The local Community Police Officer had been invited to oversee the event and direct traffic, the Town Crier promised to arrive around 12.00am. Photographers, reporters, BBCTV and Radio arrived and took various people aside to interview and photograph. Locals started to make their way to the beach wall to wait for the mural to be unveiled.

The sun even shone and the crowds were gathering in fact we reckon 400 people turned out that afternoon. It was just after 12.00am and the Lord Mayor, his Wife and other dignitaries arrived to unveil the John Muir/Gothenburg mural and start the planned celebrations.

It seemed an awfully long week and I wish I could have enjoyed more of that memorable day but I still had to ensure everything ran smoothly and then I knew I had done my job. I knew it had been a success I have received great feedback from my work Colleagues and especially from people in the Community.

The most important thing I felt was I had changed and learnt from all my new and varied experiences on how to cope and manage better. If anyone had told me a few years back where I would be and what I would be trying to achieve personally I would have thought they were mad.

And this is just the beginning.

Anne Taylor

General Manager

DIPLOMA IN ARTS TOURISM

SET 1

ASSIGNMENT 1

“MY STORY SO FAR”

by Anne Taylor

