



Iain Morrison – MDes (Part Time)

## Crathes Castle Project 2000 Words

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### Introduction

Reflecting on my Masters of Design project, there have been a number of seminars over the first year and a half that have helped me to consider the critical and creative approaches of my current graphic design practise. Seminars such as: 'Context of Place', 'Information Graphics' and 'Interval' have established a transfer of knowledge through practices, methodologies and critical enquiry which has informed the development of this project and allowed me to explore new areas with confidence with in the context of existing research practice.

### History

In recently moving to live in Banchory, which is a small town in Royal Deeside, there existed an opportunity for my project to focus on the 'local' and 'heritage', through research into the visual history and current interpretation of Crathes Castle, a National Trust managed site which is based just outside Banchory. The project also called for a resurrecting of creative skills that I have not used for a number of years such as photography, paper modelling, drawing and illustration as they would enable a thorough and appropriate documentation and proposal for the project outputs.

After looking around the local region at standing stones and other historic sites, Crathes Castle appeared to offer a number of advantages over the others such as location, history, visuals and an organisation to collaborate with.

**Figure 1**



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One of the earliest seminars of the course looked at 'Context of Place'. The seminar asked us to consider why practitioners needed to experience and understand the physicality of a location in order to develop and understand their work. This particular seminar helped to change my focus from purely commercial design thinking to that of an academic research project. 'Context of Place' covered thoughts on a beach and a disused train station. Both helped to reconsider the individuality and emotional experience that can be gained at a location to understand its context. This led to the development of my research question 'What do I understand about Crathes Castle that was not simply read online or in a tour guide?' and more importantly 'What can be done to resolve this limited knowledge?'

### **Defining Research**

The project now needs to be clearly defined by research and investigation. Hilary Collins <sup>(1)</sup> refers to this as 'Funnelling Down'. She explains, "Once you have chosen the focus of the area that you want to investigate and you have determined the learning objectives of your project, you will then need to identify the vehicle through which your research will take place."

In beginning to see the project in a new light in order to support my project, further research was required of the 'image' of Crathes Castle and how it has appeared through print, books, paintings and photos since the Burnett family started to build the castle in the 1500's. This became a crucial research focus and allowed a deeper and more informed knowledge of the castle as it was visualised over the years but also pointed to its connection to the people that lived and worked there and in the surrounding villages.



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### Visual Data

The first year of research has resulted in an extensive range of visual and annotated data for the castle coming from a variety of sources such as interviews with retired staff, numerous visits to libraries, museums and art galleries, as well as contacting specialist collectors through eBay and in the internet. This has provided me with a

### Figure 2

very stimulating and enjoyable backbone to my project and valuable data, which may help with other future projects.

In carrying out such detailed historical although time consuming it has provided a much deeper understanding of how the castle has been presented visually over the years by artists, designers and photographers. As Edward Tufte <sup>(2)</sup> states “Analytical presentation ultimately stands or falls depending on the quality, relevance, and integrity of their content.”

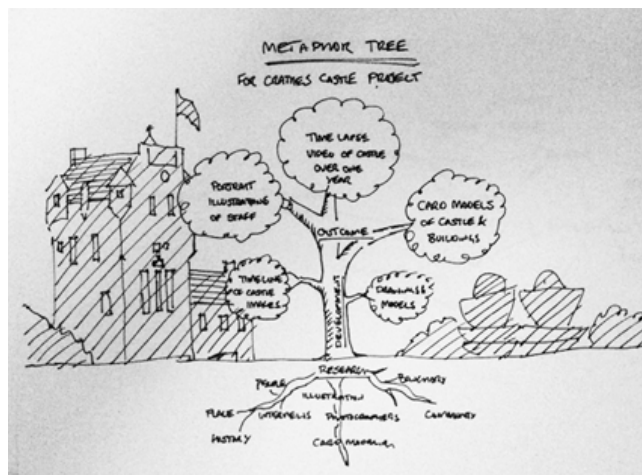
Now that a satisfactory body of material had been gathered to work with, clarity of the discourse and meaning would be required in order to provide the project with appropriate visual and informative outcomes. The seminars that followed such as ‘Contextual Review’ with Iain Irving helped to clarify this. By considering our

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developing understanding of our specific practice and research content and through analysing and reviewing the methodology new information could be discovered that was not initially obvious. This would later become very apparent through the use of information graphics.

This seminar introduced various visual methods of understanding my work though the use of Semantic Maps, Metaphor Trees, River Arguments and Stepping Stone Illustrations demonstrating research methods.



For example, the 'Crathes Castle Metaphor Tree' demonstrates how my research supports and underpins the development of the project, which will eventually justify and develop the final outcomes.

Figure 3

### Timeline 3D

Illustrating research methods for the 'Contextual Review' enabled me to realise that there are other ways to present my findings through simple visual methods, which could cope with the large amounts of data compiled. Earlier Iain Irving had shown me a program called 'Timeline 3D'. Using this application to present visual data in its correct order for the first time immediately allowed me to see events in the castle's history that had long been forgotten.



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### Information Graphics

The next challenge would be how to present this new found information in a clear and visually strong way that would underpin my methodology.

The answer to this question arrived when Barbara Hahn and Christine Zimmermann provided a Guest at Gray's talk and a seminar for Masters students discussing their work, which they produce through their own design studio in Berne, Switzerland, concentrating on print and communication design to compliment their research careers. Hahn and Zimmermann<sup>(3)</sup> state: "The greatest value of a picture is when it forces us to notice what we never expected to see."

This principal is demonstrated very clearly in the work 'Of B and C' where they produced data from their average working day showing how often they interacted whilst working at their office. The visual data is the key element in all their work. In this piece they are interested in the hidden patterns created by the time they talk to

**Figure 4**

each other or concentrate on their work through the day presented graphically.

Hahn and Zimmermann are very inspiring. Their talk helped me to find a way to present the collected data properly. Using information graphics would provide numerous options for how to present data to the public, which would show hidden outcomes that were not initially understood.

### Development of Information Graphics Posters



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Now that a clear plan has been formed, development for a range of visual illustrations that would present the visual data could begin. This was also broken down into three specific areas: visual timeline research, social issues and what it took to produce the work.

### Figure 5

The 'visual timeline' research would present the visual data already collected and for example shows visualizations of how the castle is shown in postcards since 1880, alterations to the castle since 1500, and the location artists have used to document the castle since the 1800's.

The 'social issues' section of the project is probably the most challenging section, as it shows the castle's links to the people that lived and worked there. A seminar that helped me to consider this area is Prof. Anne Douglas seminar 'Interval' which initially asked me to consider the word's meaning in the context of three pieces of art.

The next stage was to visualise this through the minimal use of illustration and in doing this the concept became easier to understand. In the follow up seminar Prof. Douglas asked us to apply the idea of 'Interval' to our own practise and this enabled



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me to consider the 'interdependency' between the castle and the people that look after it. There are hundreds of castle ruins across Scotland where people have left them to fall into disrepair yet Crathes has survived due to generations of staff who have worked towards the castles upkeep. They are as good as invisible to time and history but without them the castle would not be standing.

Ian Gow <sup>(4)</sup> discusses how many important historical buildings have been lost to fires over the years and Crathes Castle is no different. "Surely today the Trust would have cherished the Victorian additions had they survived." Sadly there is little visual evidence of the Victorian wing now it is gone.

The last group of posters to be created is the 'How is it done' which presents data on what it has taken to gather the research material and is a record of how the project is created.

The initial designs for the Crathes Castle information graphics are quite formal so the focus is on the image itself at this point but later in the project this design style can be developed further. This will involve stripping back the information to provide the absolute minimum detail therefore becoming more experimental with how the complex information is presented.

John Maeda <sup>(5)</sup> explains: "I position complexity and simplicity as having importance to relative to each other as necessary rivals." Maeda's comparison is critical to the project as the balance between graphics and information is key to the success of the visuals being produced.

To complete the project over the remaining period of the course alongside the production of 'Information Graphics' posters three other visual outcomes will be investigated through: Photography, Illustration and Paper Modelling.

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Figure 6

Photography has always been important to my practice as it enables the opportunity to capture a moment of time. This concept has been turned upside down for the Castle 360° project, where photographs are taken on a weekly basis so that all of the images can be combined to create a short movie showing the castle rotating while the seasons change around it. Rather than capturing a single moment in time the movie now shows a years worth of information that would not normally be seen by the viewer.

Pencil and ink portraits covering a range of staff from the castle and the skills they bring to the building will also be created. These portraits will give the viewer an insight into the range of jobs that are required to keep the castle running on a day-to-day basis.

‘3D card models’ will show the different stages of Crathes Castle’s construction, which will become the focal point of the exhibition.

### Conclusion

The last year and a half of my Masters has introduced me to a range of research methods, which have allowed me to reflect on my practice in ways that would not have been considered previously.

Seminars such as ‘Contextual Review’ have provided a strong grounding in how to





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approach research and practice in a solid and academic manner, which provides a clear purpose and methodology to my work. Other seminars introduced new ways of interpreting my project, such as Prof. Anne Douglas second seminar 'Interval'. This was challenging yet thought provoking for my studies and allowed me to interpret information in a new way.



Figure 7

The local community around Crathes Castle have also been incorporated into the project by interviewing local historical experts and current and retired staff. The project was also presented to the Banchory Historical Society at a sold out talk in January 2011. The visual timeline research has also been exhibited at an open days at Crathes Castle to further promote the project to the widest possible audience. This extra layer of investigation provides a more thorough and informed outcome to the project.

As far as I am aware the visual timeline of Crathes Castle has developed into a substantial historical document that is the first of its kind. This project provides a clear visual guide to the development of the castle since its construction in the early 1500's. It presents a body of work which is able to offer long lost details regarding how the castle has evolved without relying on historical information as it generally exists and only ever discovered after fires or demolition.

Ian Bryce <sup>(6)</sup> a local castle historian discussed this in 'Crannog to Castle' where he stated: "Much highly romantic but quite inaccurate history has had to be revised in



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each case. For a more accurate history of Crathes we must await the time when it to is obliged to reveal its true age". By using a visual timeline along side the written material provided by historians it can provide a far more detailed and critical method of investigation.

In the context of what we understand about heritage and how The National Trust for Scotland presents this to the public the project provides a clearly evidenced guide to the buildings development which does not have to rely on hear say and historical research techniques used so far.

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- 1) Collins H. Creative Research. Switzerland: AVA publishing; 2010. P. 44.
- 2) Tufte E. Beautiful Evidence. Connecticut: Graphic Press; 2006. P. 136.
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- 4) Gow A. Scotland's Lost Houses. Scotland: Aurum Press Ltd; 2008. P. 187.
- 5) Maeda J. The Laws of Simplicity. England: The MIT Press; 2006. P. v.
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### Image Source List:

**Figure 1** – Iain Morrison, *Crathes Castle*, screen grab from video Castle 360°, 2011.

**Figure 2** - Iain Morrison, *Visual Date*, research, 2009-2011.

**Figure 3** – Iain Morrison, *Metaphor Tree*, Illustration from 'Contextual Review' seminar, 2010.

**Figure 4** – Barbara Hahn and Christine Zimmermann, *Von B and C*, web site, 2008.

<http://www.von-b-und-c.net/kommunikationsdesign.php?projekt=7&abb=30>

**Figure 5** – Iain Morrison, *Examples of three Information graphics*, Early development concepts, 2010.

**Figure 6** – Iain Morrison, *360, Portrait and Paper model projects*, Early development sketch, 2010.

**Figure 7** – Iain Morrison, *Lecture to Banchory Heritage Society*, 2011.