

Edinburgh man to be face of Sir James Douglas at Bannockburn



In late 2012, people from across the UK volunteered to be transformed into the men and women who found themselves swept up in the events at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Today, the six chosen folk came face-to-face with their state-of-the-art digital characters for the first time at the brand new Visitor Centre.

The six selected volunteers had their faces laser scanned by expert 3D modellers at the Centre for Digital Documentation and Visualisation (CDDV), the partnership between The Glasgow School of Art's Digital Design Studio (DDS) and Historic Scotland, developing 3D visualisations for the Project.

Using motion capture technology, a range of facial expressions were captured and the 3D modelling process then added more detailed facial features. Later, actors recorded voiceovers for the dialogue, also recorded using motion capture to add in more complex movements. The resulting characters are gritty and real, displaying psychological effects of war and the full gamut of human emotions.

Philip Wilson, 35 from Edinburgh is Sir James Douglas, a Scottish Knight with a personal vendetta against Edward I for killing his father, and one of Robert the Bruce's trusted lieutenants. Voiceover by David Hayman.

There was a mixture of shock and awe as the volunteers met their characters for the first time. Philip Wilson found it surreal to see himself with battle scars, he said: "It was amazing to hear actor David Hayman's voice, especially as he

becomes more menacing, capturing the famously dark persona of the 'Black Douglas'. It was chilling, I felt like I was afraid of myself."



Opening on 1 March 2014, the Battle of Bannockburn Visitor Centre, developed in partnership by the National Trust for Scotland and Historic Scotland, is bringing a ground-breaking new experience to the site of the historic battle in time for its 700th anniversary.

The new centre is the only place in the UK where cutting-edge 3D technology and medieval armies meet, and the first heritage attraction in the world to use motion capture technology featuring live, authentic fight choreography to immerse visitors in a realistic medieval battle.

David McAllister, Battle of Bannockburn Project Director, National Trust for Scotland said: "Using this amazing new technology, we are able to give visitors an unrivalled opportunity to interact with and understand the variety of people who found themselves swept up in the historic events of 1314. The National Trust for Scotland takes pride in ensuring this important point in history is represented authentically, and the input of leading experts from the project's initial stages has ensured that the story that we are telling is as accurate as it is breath-taking."

Interpretation designers Bright White Ltd worked closely with an Academic Advisory Panel featuring some of the UK's top historians to develop concepts, scripts and storyboards for the new centre, including real and fictional people connected with the events that shaped the 2-day-long battle to form its 'Character Stations'.

The Character Stations are the first phase of the new visitor experience to be revealed to the public. Ten characters from both Robert the Bruce and Edward II's armies feature using

digital technology in real-life dimensions, with gesture recognition technology to interact with visitors.

They help visitors to learn more about the weaponry, tactics and techniques involved in the battle, as well as the people taking part, their skills, motivations, allegiances and personal stories.

With realism and authenticity key to the concept, Bright White initiated a public call to find people from the UK regions that made up the different units which formed the armies to volunteer to have their faces scanned and developed into 14th century folk.

Chris Walker, Director at Bright White Ltd said: "Standing face-to-face with full height characters from the battlefield as they tell you their story is a powerful and natural way to learn about aspects of the battle, but we had to be very careful about the choice of people; we sought a very wide range of characters to represent the equally wide range of reasons why people got swept up in the fight. I think the choice of characters will be a pleasant surprise as it includes a truly fearsome local alewife, and an alluring female spy. The academic panel's input has been incredibly valuable. Once the scripts had been written, and the characters defined, the 3D modelling and animation team did a breath-taking job of realising these characters."

The story told at the centre shows the diversity of people involved in the historic events of the battle, challenging the perception that Bannockburn was simply Scotland versus England. In reality, a range of nationalities were involved – Scots fought on the English side, while Welsh archers and Irish foot soldiers were important to the English.

Paul Chapman, Battle of Bannockburn Project Manager at the CDDV said: "Creating a believable, exciting and personal experience where visitors can interact and engage with

individual characters from the historic battle presented the team with a really interesting technical challenge. By employing state-of-the art techniques including face scanning, photorealistic computer graphics, 3D motion capture, gesture recognition and combining these with professional voice-over performance we have simulated a series of conversations linking present day to 1314. This allows the visitor to emotionally connect to the battle and hear first-hand testimonies from those who were there. The technology sits invisibly in the background and brings a lifelike feel to the whole experience.”

The Character Stations feature in the Centre’s ‘Prepare for Battle’ room, where visitors are transported back to 1314, the night before the battle. There is the opportunity to wander between both camps interacting with the real people preparing for battle, while witnessing some of the physical preparations including battle training, surrounded by 270 degree, massive 3D screens, for a truly immersive experience.

The Battle of Bannockburn project is funded by generous support from the Scottish Government and the Heritage Lottery Fund.