

The Curzon Memories App



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Introduction

The Curzon Memories App is a practice-research project that uses mobile technologies to explore the history of the Curzon Community Cinema in Clevedon. The app takes you on a tour of the outside and the interior of the cinema, using GPS, QR Codes and Arduino circuitry to trigger content in relation to specific areas of the building. I worked closely with Curzon Education Officer, Cathy Poole to collect memories as part of the wider Heritage Lottery Funded Curzon Memories Project. The project aimed to explore how locative media could be used to enhance public understanding of screen heritage in terms of the built-environment and the physical apparatus of cinema. The app was developed with Jo Reid using Calvium's AppFurnace development tool. The original cinema, The Picture House, was built in 1912, expanding to the current building in 1921/2, and the launch of the app on both App Store and Android Market later this year is planned to coincide with the cinema's centenary.

Demo instructions

Step 1: Download & Install the free Calvium Player App from App Store or Android Market: you can find links to both at: www.eyefullproductions.co.uk/curzon.

Step 2: Load Calvium Player, and click the + icon.

Step 3: You can either:
a) Click "Scan & Add" and scan the adjacent QR code, or

b) Type in the URL and hit download:
<http://the.appfurnace.com/test/6j1vk/>

Step 4: When it has downloaded, tap to enter & press PLAY.



Interior localisation

QR codes are used to trigger memories inside the building. A number of technologies were considered, including motion and pressure sensors and RFID codes, but QR codes were selected due to their user-friendliness, minimal infrastructure and low cost.

Interior screen: users were invited to explore the cinema for QR codes. Follow the instructions above to download the demo and then to listen to some of the interior memories, using the QR Codes below.



Sample QR Codes from the App



In the evaluation of the second iteration QR codes were received positively in terms of their ease of use and the level of user-satisfaction of knowing that context-specific media had been activated by scanning the QR code (in contrast to the uncertainties of GPS). Users commented on their sense not only of space, but also of time whilst listening to memories in the places in which they actually happened:



Specialising the Archive: "You kind of wander around because it's such a fantastic space and you want to see as much as you can and it's helping you, it's really atmospheric. And especially when they're talking about snogging on the back row and all that stuff was just brilliant. It was absolutely fantastic."

Temporality: "That was the thing that grabbed me most as I sat down actually looking at the stage as that 'Rock Around the Clock' was playing. And I thought, 'Wow!' I just got this feel for the beginning of the English rock & roll scene in these small cinemas."



Projection Hero

One of the QR codes that visitors encounter is on the screen of a miniature cinema installation that, when scanned, triggers an interface through which you can manipulate the cinema by dimming the lights, opening the curtains and cueing the next reel on the projector. Whilst you try your hand at being a virtual projectionist, you watch films about the lost art of projection in the midst of exhibits from the Curzon Collection of heritage cinema projectors.



Projection Hero: interior and app interface



The cinema is controlled by Arduino circuitry connected via the Internet, designed by Tarim at Media Playgrounds. Projection Hero is integrated into the Curzon Memories App, but it also works as a stand-alone exhibit - so the QR code can be scanned with any QR reader or within the app. The intention is to reveal the cinematic apparatus (Rosen 1972) and at the same time get the user to think critically about the mobile phone app-aratus and the impact of digital technologies on screen heritage (Kelly 2007).

Exterior localisation

Memories are triggered by GPS as you explore the outside of the building. However, given the vacillations and inaccuracy of the GPS signal in the region, after testing several iterations an additional "No GPS" interface was designed to enable the user to explore manually should the GPS signal be too weak. The character of the Usherette was also introduced to better orient the user in relation to where they should be standing and what they should be looking at.



The No GPS screen: red pins indicate the location of memories on a map showing the original 1912 building, the extant 1921/2 cinema and the stable which predates both, with button to toggle to the GPS Map.

The Usherette: Mrs "Torchy" Green, introduces the app, and is also the face of the help menus that allow you to toggle between inside and outside. She is based on a real life usherette recalled by Susan Sikora and played by Curzon guide Jacqui Bressington.



The iterative design process (Blythe et al 2006 and Reid et al 2011) enables rapid prototyping and ability to respond to real-time testing in the field. Indeed, it is important to emphasise that this is a location-based project and the memories are most resonant when experienced on-site in the actual locations where they originally occurred.

Details: "I loved being able to see the architecture outside and I always think when the descriptions are really closely tied to what you can see and look at then you're kind of got your magic moment because you actually can see exactly what's being described."



Affective moments: one of the most resonant of these occurs standing beneath the shrapnel-pocked West entrance hearing sound effects and memories about the bomb which went off in 1941 blasting out the lunette window and killing a soldier who was standing in the doorway.



Conclusions

The use of mobile technologies in a heritage context is becoming increasingly prevalent. There are a growing number of heritage apps and digital humanities is a focal point for much UK research funding, as evidenced by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's *Digital Transformations* strand and the 2012 AHRC Creative Economy / UWE REACT Hub, *Heritage Sandbox* theme (www.react-hub.org.uk).

The very nature of locative media seems to afford an ideal platform through which to enhance visitors' experiences of physical heritage sites. However, there is always the danger of mobile technologies detracting from the experience of actually "being there". The key findings of the Curzon Memories App are the importance of an iterative design process, user evaluation and sensitivity to context in the development of compelling locative heritage experiences.

Locative heritage: "I'm suddenly seeing in concrete terms a lot of possibilities that I've never seen before in terms of thinking about what this technology can do in heritage terms, and what it means and what's possible. I think it's incredibly exciting, actually"



Literature cited

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For further information

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