

## Staircase House Press Release

### **SIGNING OF THE TIMES** **Staircase House gets full marks for Accessibility**

Stockport's newest visitor attraction – 500 year old Staircase House, has introduced an innovative new handheld British Sign Language guide for deaf and hard of hearing visitors. EyeGaze, an innovative deaf services company based at the SETsquared Centre at the University of Bristol, has invented the guide to enable attractions to be fully accessible and enjoyed by all.

Staircase House is a wonderfully restored town house in the heart of the north west. Boasting one of only three examples of a Cage Newell staircase in Britain. The house opened its doors to visitors this summer, following a ten-year restoration project by Stockport Council, and guests are invited to take a journey in time and explore the house's fascinating history from 1460 to WWII.

Particular care has been taken to make *this* historic house fully accessible for all visitors, particularly as it had to contend with the name 'Staircase' House, which may make visitors presume that the attraction is inaccessible for wheelchair users. The BSL guide makes Staircase House one of very few historic houses across Britain that is able to give visitors of all walks of life equal opportunities to enjoy its historical wonders.

Natalie Smith, Director of EyeGaze, and herself a ninth-generation deaf person, commented "We are delighted to provide better accessibility and a first-rate translation service for Deaf people visiting Staircase House. This historic house is now part of a world-leading technology. These portable sign language videos will open up a world of information to Deaf people previously unavailable due to language obstacles."

The British Sign Language tour is not the only thing that makes Staircase House one of Britain's most accessible historic attractions. Sarah Cotton, Curator of the project commented: "We have worked in close partnership with Disability Stockport and the Council's Diversity Service to ensure the historic building is as physically and intellectually accessible to as many people as possible. Consequently, we have developed a family tour and interpretation in British Sign Language, an audio described tour and a 'step & stair free' route around the house.

"At an early stage in the project, we committed to providing audio guides in English, French and German. Stockport is particularly strong in encouraging links with its twin towns in France and Germany and this was seen as an opportunity to further develop that international liaison. We also arranged for audio interpretation in the two community languages most commonly spoken locally: Cantonese and Urdu. A cursory review of other sites in the North West indicated that we were taking an innovative approach in our provision of such a wide range of alternative formats of interpretation."

Disability Stockport has also praised Staircase House for all of their efforts towards total inclusion. Brinnington resident Cathy Alexander visited Staircase House on 31<sup>st</sup> October to be the first person to use and review the British Sign Language tour. Cathy commented; "I enjoyed my visit to Staircase House very much. The BSL tour is very informative and I would recommend it to others of the deaf community, who I know would be very interested. This technology should be made more widely available in other attractions."

Councillor Pam King, Stockport Council's Executive Member for Leisure, added: "Staircase House is one of our greatest achievements. Ten years of restoration has brought this house to life, making it a truly interactive museum, which everyone can participate in. There are too many limitations in many of today's museums - a lack of accessibility, 'do not touch' signs, and few interactive experiences on offer, has led us to make a wholesale change, using the latest technology to make Staircase House one of the best heritage attractions in the North West."

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