

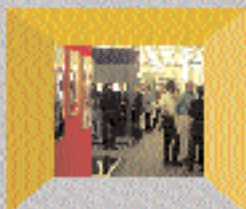
# MU TEC 2005

6th International  
Trade Fair  
for Museums,  
Collections,  
Restoration and  
Exhibition  
Technology

22. - 24. 6. 2005  
Munich  
M.O.C.



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reviews



## Industrial action

YOU ARE HERE, BRADFORD INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

More people and fewer machines is a good thing in an industrial museum,

INDUSTRIAL MUSEUMS ARE THE BUTTERFLIES OF THE museum world. They seem to be full of the least delicate of collections, yet like the butterfly, they have a beautiful life for a short season.

Often they flourish as industries decline, when they are most relevant: their visitors often have some knowledge of their subjects because a rumour of manufacturing is still going in their locality. But when all the local context has gone they are often reduced to sad rows of voiceless machines no longer able to call to their cousins in real factories. The demonstration of processes in museums is good of course, but as I know from my experience of running a textile museum, if you work industrial machines you end up with industrial quantities of product. This is not always a good thing.

If industrial museums are to be more than repositories they



Photographs: Tim Smith

need to be made relevant. You Are Here, the new introductory gallery at the Bradford Industrial Museum is a modest signpost to the future. In reality, important though the machines are, they are the tip of the iceberg. It is the cities they helped create and the people who made them happen that are the real fascination.

The new gallery starts to tell this bigger story; Bradford, not the factory, is the centre of the show. And what an extraordinary pulling power it had, with people drawn to work and live there from around the world: the West Indies, all across Europe, Africa, India, Pakistan and the Far East. This mix is often the hallmark of good cities and it's helped Bradford become culturally rich, though not yet beautiful. The gallery sheds an important light on this city-making process and it is relevant right now in the political debate about immigration because it shows the long history of the movement of peoples in search of work.

What is good? Although the images are important, the everyday objects of family life, migration and work are powerful. They are arranged as little islands of discovery, which are perfect for schools and families. The gallery manages to inform on the general subject of migration and to offer material to help visitors situate themselves and their families in a wider pattern of human movement. Tim Smith's excellent photographs, plus direct testimony, remind us what a shock the place was to newcomers; how dirty, wet and cold it felt to people from places where climate is part of civilisation and not a kind of meteorological enema to be endured.

Making the museum a social and cultural intermediary space is exactly the right thing to do. Having Smith's documentary work as an intelligent witness to change and an adjunct to collecting objects adds richness to the process. The brief called for accessibility, celebration of diversity and for a new way of reaching out to audiences. It has achieved all of this and in the process has extended the museum's social capital network.

What is missing? The availability of the marvellous Mitchell

Bradford life: the choice of photographs, personal testimonies and objects in the You Are Here gallery has helped the museum reach out to new audiences



and Kenyon films of life on the streets, parks, sports grounds and factories of the industrial north post-dates the gallery but could easily be added. Their footage of Bradford shows the streets teeming with human life in a way the museum's parades of machines just can't capture. But that's OK, as You Are Here shows signs of inverting the iceberg. Fewer machines and more about the international complexity of an industrial city can only help the museum's engagement mission. Engagement equals relevance and relevance equals survival, if not limelight.

### Project data

Cost: £24,000 Main funders: HLF, npower, Bradford Vision, YMLAC  
Exhibition design: blue the design company Graphics: Leach Colour