

Bradford's National Museum Project

Thinking Exhibitions Systemically:
What is the role of Visitor Research in Co-Production?

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Arts & Humanities
Research Council



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City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Plan

- Introduction
- Perspectives
- Workshop

POWER?

PURPOSE?

PRACTICES?

Initial research question for our collaborative systemic action research

How can the National Science and Media Museum be more open, collaborative and rooted in Bradford?

Bradford's National Museum Action Research Process

Systemic Collaborative Action Research (Danny Burns)

- Open conversations
- Exhibition *Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford*
- Reflection
- BNMP Staff Group and Network

**SCIENCE+
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ABOVE THE NOISE

15 STORIES FROM BRADFORD

15 MARCH – 19 JUNE

SCIENCEANDMEDIAMUSEUM.ORG.UK

Alice Parsons

Exhibition Project Manager, National Science and Media Museum

ABOVE THE NOISE

15 STORIES FROM BRADFORD

ABOVE THE NOISE

15 STORIES FROM BRADFORD

Standard NSMM Project Structure

Project Director

Build contractors

Design studio

Project Manager

Technicians

Interpretation Developer

Project Coordinator

Curator

Commissions

Collaborators

Lenders

Above the Noise Project Structure

BNMP Project
Management Team

Project Director

BNMP
researchers

Build contractors

Design studio
Graphic designer

Project Manager

Technicians

Interpretation Developer

Project Coordinator

Over 30 text writers

10 Creative Practitioners

4 Curators

2 new commissions
curated by third party

Over 140 collaborators

21 lenders



Nabeelah Hafeez

Story Collaborator



Chris Whitby

Senior Audience Researcher, Science Museum Group

“It feels like it's been led by people who like and know Bradford.”, Visitor



EVALUATION OF THE GALLERY

- On-gallery interviews with visitors
- Two sessions with FOH colleagues



VISITOR FEEDBACK

- The galleries approach to working with local people was very well received and seen by visitors as a positive thing to do
- Visitors liked that the gallery focused on stories of people living in Bradford



Homeground: Asian Music in Bradford

The Margins

Nowadays it's easy to listen to whatever music you like. In the 1950's it was more difficult, particularly for Asian men in Bradford. The music they wanted to hear wasn't played on the radio or available in local shops. The only way to find it was to visit an Asian café with a jukebox or a cinema showing Bollywood films.

During the 1960's and 1970's families joined these men. Asian shops, restaurants and cinemas in Bradford became popular meeting places for people from across Northern England. Ever since, Bradford has acted as a hub for communities to gather and celebrate British Asian culture, not least through food, film and music.



Pin up in Bradford Spinning Mill
Photo by Tim Smith

The following people have been involved in creating this story.

Mick Chandsoor, Mory Hassan, Fazal Hussain, Mohammed Ishaque, Rangit Kaur, Umar Khan, Anjum Malik, Hardeep Sahota and Tim Smith.



"Once the curry business started (at the Karachi restaurant) we had the jukebox in. People used to come in and tell us which films they wanted the music from, and that's how I learned about Asian music really." Mohammed Ishaque

"I became a restaurant owner in 1965. People have tea and a kebab and listen to their choice of records... I wasn't selling too much food, but the jukebox was running all the time... it was good business."

Fazal Hussain



"Some college whitey kid decided 'let's have a bhanga' and all the Asian students thought, 'Wednesday afternoon at Queens Hall. What a great idea, we've got a half-day. A lot of Asian kids weren't allowed to go out of an evening, so for the experience a dance, it was like 'bhang' - we can become part of mainstream music, some time.' Mory Hassan

"All of a sudden you get this fusion of music: tabla, dhol, harmonium, keyboard and guitar all coming together to create this unique sound. Which for us, was bhanga... this was a unique sound for British Asian youth." Anon

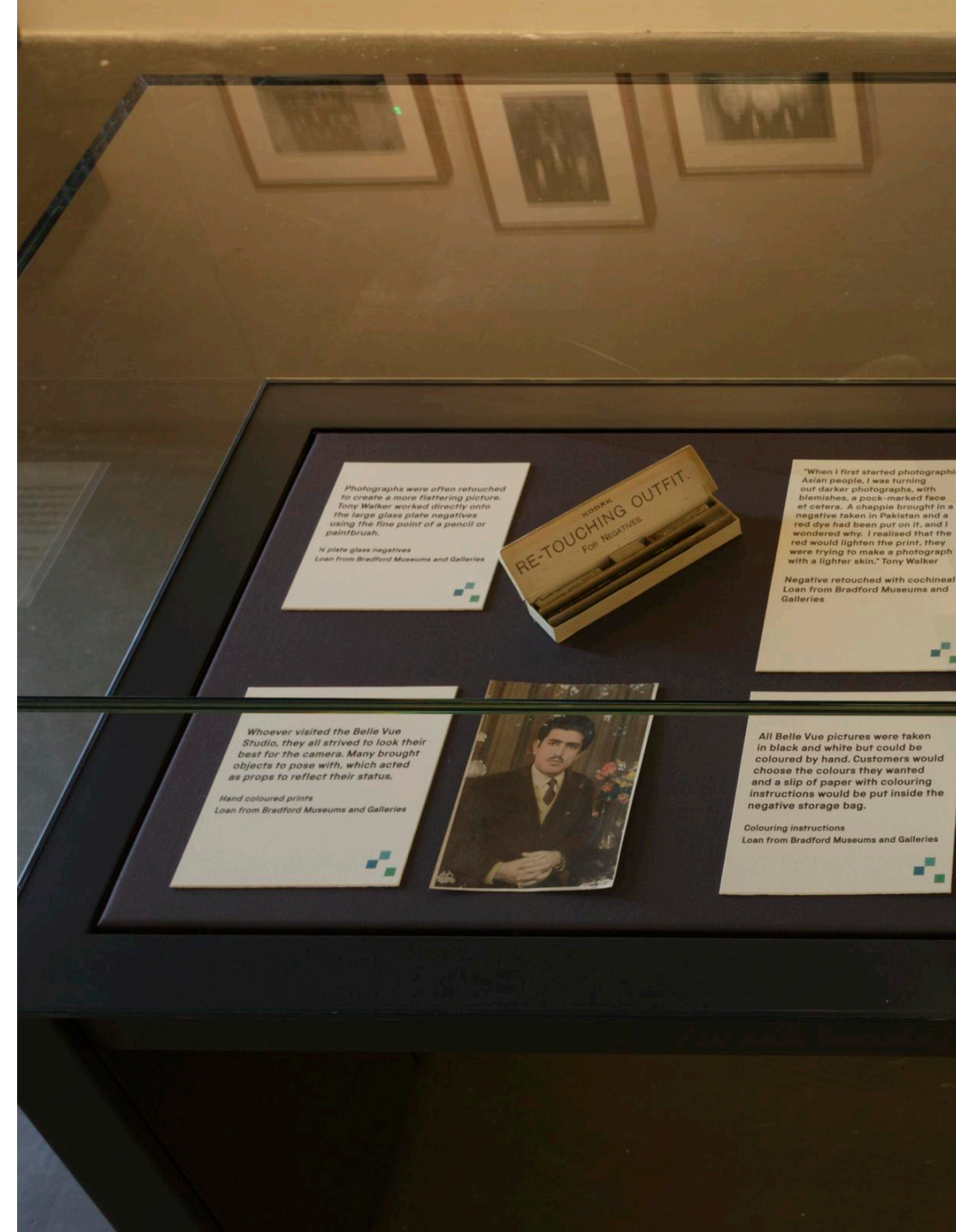
VISITOR FEEDBACK

- *“It feels like it makes I more personal. You could have been in that story too. Or someone down your street. That your life is important. Your life is valid. Everyday stories are important.”, Visitor*
- *“Doesn't feel like a museum, there are real people telling their stories.”, Visitor*
- *“Nice to hear authentic real stories...not just important person”, Visitor*



VISITOR FEEDBACK

- Sense that the gallery was different to a normal museum approach, but weren't always able to immediately identify why
- Welcomed that "gave a voice" to those who might not otherwise be heard
- Sense the approach gave them a more positive image of Bradford



FOH FEEDBACK

- Like visitors, Front of House welcomed the museum's approach of working with local people to create exhibitions
- Staff saw the museum as potentially creating positive relationships between the museum and the city



FOH FEEDBACK

"I think personally it is quite a big leap for a museum to do, you know, to engag... especially in Bradford...because it is so diverse...there is a lot of tension still. There is still a lot of...uncertainty within Bradford and for them to go out and find people that are willing to, you know, collaborate with them is, is a pretty brave move.

It has worked out well but I personally think it was a brave step to make.", Staff



FOH FEEDBACK

- Staff felt the approach taken meant more visitors were willing to share their stories
- However, they recognised that taking a local approach led to the possibility of difficult situations
- Staff enjoyed learning about different and unexpected parts of Bradford's history
- The gallery content altered staff's relationship with the city



FOH FEEDBACK

*“Like I say a lot of it happened before I was even born, so a lot of this was me learning for the first time about some of Bradford’s history because you won’t get taught it, it is not something we do in schools or anything, even if you are from Bradford, we never got taught anything in that kind of nature. So kind of see that it’s not doom and gloom as what people would generally have you believe, that is a really good thing I think.,
Staff*



Workshop - Working systemically

Talking personal perspectives to see systemic dynamics.

Discuss:

What are people saying?

What might this tell us about the process of participation?

What might we learn from this?

What we learned and where we took it

Assumption: purpose exists before collaboration

We use the research process to challenge and together negotiate the fundamental purpose of collaborations. Speaking to visitors and to Visitor Services Staff helped with this.

Until we resolve this issue, collaboration isn't possible.

Continuing organisational development:

- Changes in the exhibitions team and process
- Interpretation Lab (includes visitor research)
- Bradford's National Museum Project Staff Group and Network

Our Questions now:

Are people ready? Is the museum up for arguing about its purpose?

Does this have enough productive energy?

What does this mean for your practice?

How can you use your practice to make tensions and perspectives in collaborative practice more **visible** and **useful**?

THANK YOU!

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Bradford's National Museum Project

<https://bradfordsnationalmuseum.org/>