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Citation:

Green, LE (2017) CILIP Yorkshire and Humberside Member Network Visit to Insight: Collections and Research Centre at The National Science and Media Museum, Bradford, West Yorkshire, 09 March 2017. Collaborate: Libraries in Learning Innovation, 2.

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## CILIP Yorkshire and Humberside Member Network Visit to Insight: Collections and Research Centre at The National Science and Media Museum, Bradford, West Yorkshire, 09 March 2017

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**Abstract:** This article is an account of a Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Yorkshire and Humberside Member Network visit to Insight: Collections and Research Centre at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford, West Yorkshire. It highlights the range and depth of their collection and some of the research currently being undertaken. Their library is an underused resource and efforts are being made to enhance the accessibility and usage of the whole collection. The article hopes to illustrate how the collection is extremely useful and fascinating to those studying social history, not just science and technology. The visit allowed the author to continue her professional development (CPD), benefitting both her studies for a CILIP-accredited qualification and her work in Libraries and Learning Innovation. This article is an expanded version of a report on the visit written for the CILIP Yorkshire and Humberside Member Network blog (Green, 2017).

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Insight: Collections and Research Centre is the library and archive service at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford (formerly the National Media Museum). This visit gave the group a great overview of the fantastic and often bizarre artefacts that the archive stores and was led by Kirsty Fife, Curator of Library and Archives, and Zoe Wolstenholme, Archive Assistant.

The tour was of interest to me both professionally and personally, as I have a particular enthusiasm for television archives and libraries. Being a member of CILIP not only allows me to keep my skills up to date and relevant, but means I have access to events such as this which was a tailored visit for information professionals, as well as providing an opportunity to speak to other CILIP members and share in their knowledge.

Kirsty began the tour by giving the group a brief overview of the service. Insight is open one week each month for researchers, but appointments must be made in advance. They also offer free public tours of the facilities weekly (National Science and Media Museum, 2017a). Insight holds only some of the museum's collection – the rest is

housed at a former RAF airfield at Wroughton, near Swindon. The Wroughton site stores approximately 90% of the Science Museum Group's collection (Leskard, 2015, pp. 3-6).

### Print Archive

We began in the Print Archive, the majority of which is photographic (for example, prints, slides, negatives) but was also the one room we were unable to take photographs in. The first item shown to the group was a film poster for Norman Wisdom's 'One Good Turn', printed by W. E. Berry Ltd of Bradford. Insight holds approximately 200 posters produced by Berry between 1930 and 1969 (Science Museum Group Collection Online, n.d.d). The reason this particular item was shown to us was to illustrate that not only is the museum nationally important, but it is a museum about Bradford and for Bradford. If an item is relevant to the collection, it will be prioritised if it originated from the Bradford area.

Next, we were shown their collection of Daguerreotypes – products of the first commercial photographic process, invented by Louis Daguerre in the 1830s. Daguerre and his

collaborator Nicéphore Niépce discovered how to create a lasting image on an iodized silver plate (Pritchard, 2014, pp. 8-13; Science Museum Group Collection Online, n.d.c). Daguerreotypes, as they are known, are extremely delicate and will tarnish if the silver plate is exposed to air. For this reason, daguerreotypes always come in a protective case, often beautifully decorated (Figure 1).



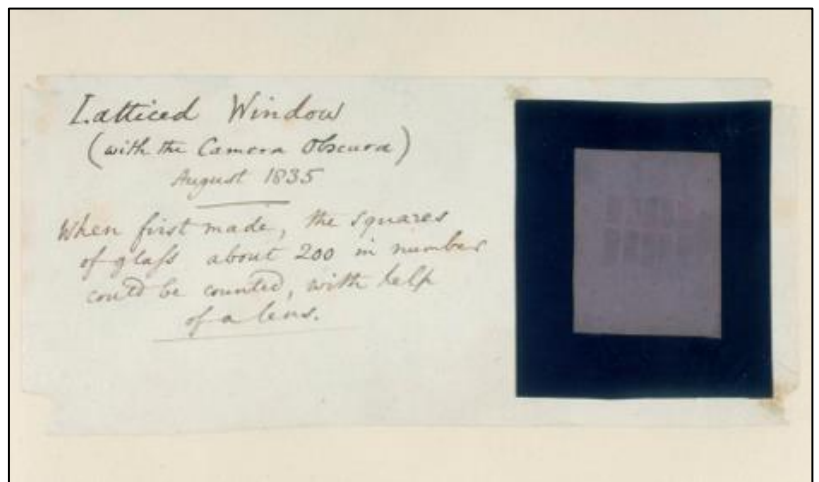
**Figure 1: Cased daguerreotype of woman and two children from 1845-55 (National Science and Media Museum/Science and Society Picture Library, 2016) [CC BY-NC-SA].**

Just a few weeks after Daguerre declared his invention to the world, William Henry Fox Talbot announced that he could produce images on paper, something he called his ‘photogenic drawing’ process (Pritchard, 2014, p. 14). Insight holds approximately 6,500 of Fox Talbot’s prints, negatives, notebooks, etc. The earliest negative was produced by Fox Talbot in 1835 of a latticed window at Lacock Abbey and this is included in the collection (Figure 2; Science Museum Group Collection Online, n.d.e).

Sadly, all we could see was the drawer in which it is kept - light degrades the image and in this case, the negative is so unstable archive staff are only able to inspect it every two years to check how degraded it is. Fortunately, the acquisition of this collection by the Science Museum in 1934 means that “effects of the environment on a temperamental photochemistry” can be mitigated, thus delaying degradation of the photographs over time (Roberts and Hobson, 2016, p. 13). Fox Talbot never gained commercial success, but the importance of his work has been

highlighted by the museum in its recent exhibition, ‘Fox Talbot: Dawn of the Photograph’ (Roberts and Hobson, 2016) and the BBC/National Media Museum documentary series ‘Britain in Focus: A Photographic History’.

I had not expected to find the visit to this room as captivating as I did, however it motivated me to read more about what was discussed after the tour was over. I think this illustrates how items or subject areas that are perceived to be uninteresting can become engaging if discussed in the right way. This is something we can keep in mind with our own displays and archive usage. As a member of the team at Sheila Silver Library who prepares displays, we should aim to make every subject stimulating and engaging when we set items out for display. We should also provide as much context as possible to items from our archive in order to maximise their usefulness and interest to those studying the items.



**Figure 2: Windows from inside South Gallery, Lacock Abbey from August 1835 (Science Museum Group Collection, n.d.) [CC BY-NC-SA].**

### Large Object Room

The Large Object Room is currently filled with dozens of old televisions and television cameras due to the recent dismantling of the ‘Experience TV’ gallery (Figure 3).

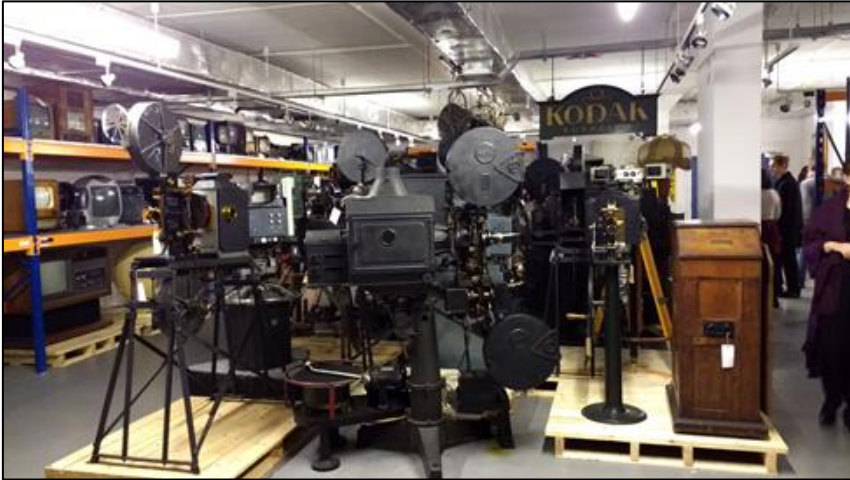


Figure 3: Large Object Room. Photo – author’s own.

Most of my fellow tour attendees found their attention diverted to a fairly gruesome display of two animatronic gorilla heads (Figure 4). Kirsty explained that they were from the 1997 film ‘Buddy’, which no one had heard of, and they are kept as they are a great example of movie special effects prior to the prevalence of CGI (Pollard, 2016a).



Figure 5: Paparazzi camera. Photo – author’s own.



Figure 6: Audience Reaction Indicator from ‘Opportunity Knocks’. Photo – author’s own.



Figure 4: ‘Little Ben’ and Buddy. Photo – author’s own.

Next to the heads was ‘Little Ben’, a model of Big Ben used in Studio P of the BBC’s Lime Grove Studios whenever an in-vision clock was required, for example, at closedown (Figure 4). Two of the more amusing pieces we saw were a camera used by the paparazzi when they had been put under a restraining order (Figure 5), and the clap-o-meter used on Opportunity Knocks (Figure 6; National Media Museum, 2016c)!

Kirsty pointed out a wooden television with the speaker situated above the screen and explained that this model had proved unpopular with the public and sold in low numbers, purely because of the location of the speaker – the public were used to speakers being next to the screen and disliked the position of it on this model, despite the fact

it functioned perfectly well (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Wooden television with speaker above screen. Photo – author’s own.



Another fascinating item in this room was the Criminal Posing Chair, used to take mug-shots of prisoners; the chair was made as uncomfortable as possible (there are large ridges in the seat and the chair itself is very low) to ensure that the prisoners cooperated with the photo-taking and the process was as quick and easy as possible (Pollard, 2016b).

### Small Object Store

The museum acquired a collection of small handheld cameras from the former Kodak Museum in 1985; some of these items are on display in the National Science and Media Museum's Kodak Gallery, with the remainder of the collection being stored in the Small Object Store.

The "Kodak Camera", invented by George Eastman in the 1880s, could take 100 photographs, then the whole camera would be sent to Kodak, who would develop the film and send the photographs and the camera back with a new film, ready to take more pictures (Pritchard, 2014, pp. 36-37). This made me reflect on the extent to which technological developments can alter the way in which libraries engage with their users. For example, without being able to take instant photographs today we would not achieve the same level of interaction with our students through our various social media accounts.

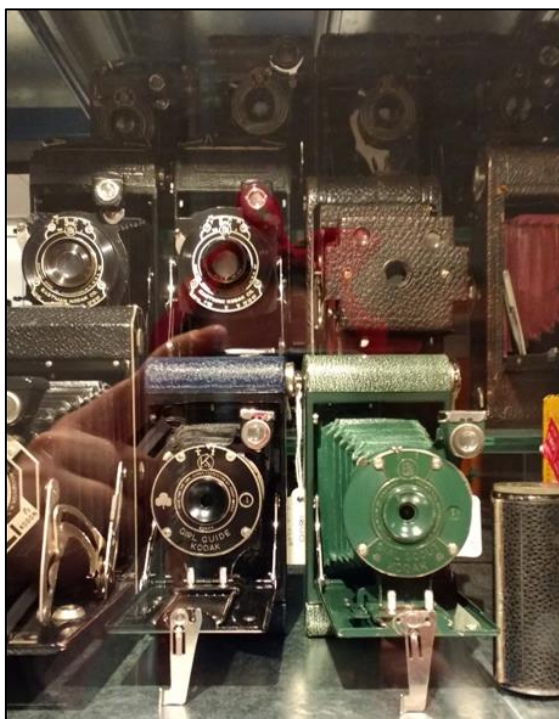


Figure 8: Some of the cameras in the Small Object Store. Photo – author's own.

Stirn's waistcoat camera from 1886 was designed to sit underneath a waistcoat and the lens would stick out of a buttonhole. It was thought that the camera was used by spies, but it may have been used by voyeurs. The camera sold incredibly well (18,000 by 1890), but was unpopular because it allowed photographs to be taken of people without their consent (Pollard, 2016c). We tend to think of privacy issues relating to photographic technology as a modern phenomenon, but visits like this can demonstrate how pertinent archives and their materials can be when considering current social and political concerns.



Figure 9: Eustace and Stooky Bill. Photo – author's own.

A highlight for myself was the chance to see up close two rather ghoulish characters, Stooky (or Stookie) Bill and Eustace – two ventriloquist dummy heads used by John Logie Baird while he was carrying out his experiments in mechanical television (Figure 9). The lights he used were too hot for humans to withstand, so these sinister heads were used instead (National Media Museum, 2016a and 2016b; Science Museum Group Collection Online, n.d.a and n.d.b). Baird's experiments and television broadcasts with the BBC ran in tandem with the American EMI system until 1937, when his system was dropped in favour of their electronic system (Crisell, 2002, pp. 77-78).

## Daily Herald Archive

Insight also houses the photographic archive of the Daily Herald newspaper. This contains approximately 3.5 million photographs dating from the foundation of the paper in 1911 up to its decline in the mid-1960s. It is an excellent resource for culture and politics, both nationally and internationally, and is of great use for those studying trade unions and socialist history. As information professionals it is part of our job to know how and where students can access relevant resources, and CPD is one way of expanding knowledge collectively within the sector. For instance, the Daily Herald Archive struck me as potentially significant for students and researchers at Leeds Beckett studying under the School of Cultural Studies and Humanities.

The archive was a significant transfer from the National Portrait Gallery to support the National Museum of Film, Photography and Television (as the museum was originally known) when it was founded in 1983. Some of the images in the collection have been digitised, but it is unlikely all will be due to the expense and the high number of images.



**Figure 10: Part of the Daily Herald archive. Photo – author's own.**

This section of the tour was an unexpected highlight. The Daily Herald began as a union strike sheet in 1911 and proved so successful that it continued as a daily socialist newspaper. By 1933, the Daily Herald was the world's top selling popular newspaper, but its popularity declined due to fierce competition from its rivals. It was relaunched as the Sun in 1964, then sold by its owners, Mirror Group Newspapers, in 1969 to Rupert Murdoch's News International, who changed its content and political outlook entirely (National Media Museum, 2016d, p. 1).

The archive remains in the original order and cabinets in which the photographs were kept (Figure 10). The images are broadly split into three sections: places, events, and people. 'People' is further split into those who were alive during the run of the paper, and those who died during its existence. This is amusingly called the 'Morgue' because it was unlikely that the newspaper would need to use images of those who had passed away as much as those who remained alive, hence their picture file was moved to the 'Morgue' (Figure 11).



**Figure 11: Part of the 'Morgue'. Photo – author's own.**

On the reverse of each image is a copy of the article the photo accompanied, which is incredibly useful for cataloguing the images as they have a date and context for the items. Kirsty told us that they currently have a PhD student looking at how the Herald used their picture library, for example how they reused images. This has been of interest to them as they have been able to see how images have been used multiple times in different contexts, or completely out of context. The images are often cropped and/or shaded and have other markings on them. This is sometimes in order to improve them before publication, but also shows researchers something of the Daily Herald's editorial and political policy, as well as enhancing "our understanding of the development of press and documentary photography and the work of the photo journalist" (National Media Museum, 2016d, p. 2).

## Library

Insight also houses a library of 26,000 items – a big collection, but unfortunately underused. The catalogue is currently not available online, but is instead stored on a Microsoft Access database, which enormously decreases its usability and accessibility as patrons are unable to browse or locate materials independently on an OPAC. Kirsty said they are attempting to reach out to

students who would find the material interesting and useful, but this is currently difficult due to the lack of an OPAC. This suggested to me that there is a pressing need for more partnership between HE libraries and specialist archives such as this, which could greatly enhance the research and education provided within universities. The museum has never employed a qualified librarian, but volunteers have managed to roughly categorise the items and attempts are being made to improve access to and usage of the collection. To me this reflects an unfortunate lack of emphasis on the importance of the library facilities and profession in a museum context. It is also important to recognise that in more recent times the museum will undoubtedly have needed to prioritise limited funding, which has caused the museum to alter its remit after facing potential closure. However, in general throughout the library sector there is a dangerous precedent in the use of volunteers, and Insight are employing an archivist to perform the role of a librarian when in fact the roles are not interchangeable. This kind of approach does a disservice to archivists, librarians, and libraries themselves.

### Conclusion

The tour was interesting and greatly increased my understanding of what Insight offers, and it illustrated how underused their archive and library are. The experience helped me to appreciate that the effective presentation of materials can engage an audience, which is something we can apply to our work with displays and the archive within LLI. It also showed how incredibly relevant and diverse Insight's service and its collection are both to those interested in social and cultural histories, as well as science and technology. Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn therefore is the extent to which linking with specialist archives and libraries such as Insight could benefit higher education institutions, as well as enhancing the awareness and use of the resources they hold.

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