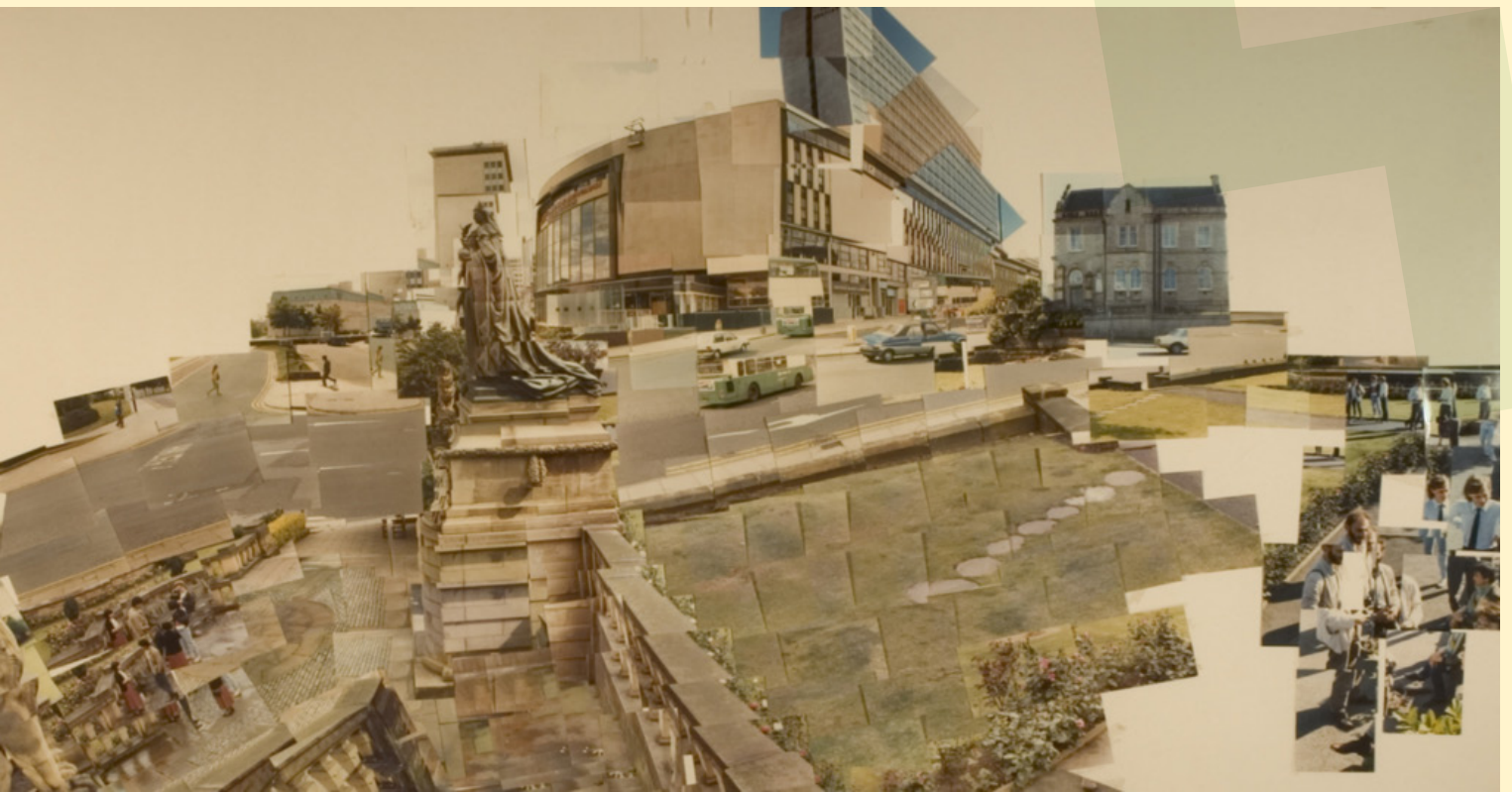


Bradford's National Museum

Bradford's National Museum project explored how the National Science and Media Museum can become locally-rooted and more open, engaged and collaborative.



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Cover artwork by David Hockney – “Bradford, Yorkshire, July 18, 19, 20, 1985”.
Photographic collage 40 x 60” © David Hockney. Collection of the National
Science and Media Museum, Bradford, UK

Over 150 people were involved in different ways in
shaping the research and the ideas that have emerged.

This publication is not simply giving a retrospective
account of the research findings. It was developed as
an intrinsic part of our action research. We used the
process of creating the publication to enable a final
phase of reflection and dialogue and to draw out future
directions for the National Science and Media Museum
in and with Bradford.

Approaching the issues from many different
people’s perspectives sharpened our understandings
of the significant tensions produced by a national
museum seeking to be rooted and collaborative. It
also identified ways in which the tensions could be
activated as strengths, dynamically creating pathways
between the national and the local and expanding
what the museum is and might become.



BRITAIN'S NEWEST NATIONAL MUSEUM

— now open

Film and television in
Princes View, Bradford

National Museum of
**Photography
Film & Television**
Open 16 June 1983



The Museum is a unique partnership between the Science Museum, London and the City of Bradford Metropolitan Council. It is situated in the heart of the city. Visitors from far and near will have an exciting choice of alternatives — a programme in the spectacular Imax auditorium, a look

around some of the displays, a visit to the exhibition galleries, a snack in the wine and coffee bar or a browse around the bookshop.

The museum is open between 12 and 8 p.m. from Tuesday to Sunday inclusive.

Your FREE guide to the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television

Bradford's National Museum has explored how the National Science and Media Museum can become locally-rooted and more open, engaged and collaborative. Part 3: Future Directions sets out where we arrived. About, Part 1 and Part 2 explore the process that took us there.

The Bradford's National Museum project came about in the wake of a change in direction for what is now known as the National Science and Media Museum. The museum had been threatened with closure when severe funding cuts looked likely in the 2013 Comprehensive Spending Review, a possibility which saw 45,000 people signing a petition to keep the museum open. The museum did not close but the crisis prompted a new approach. The new strategy sought to focus more specifically on the science and technology of sound and vision and to find ways of connecting more closely to Bradford. It was this new strategy that led to the Bradford's National Museum project.

About the Project

The Bradford’s National Museum project came about in the wake of a change in direction for what is now known as the National Science and Media Museum. The museum had been threatened with closure when severe funding cuts looked likely in the 2013 Comprehensive Spending Review, a possibility which saw 45,000 people signing a petition to keep the museum open. The museum did not close but the crisis prompted a new approach. The new strategy sought to focus more specifically on the science and technology of sound and vision and to find ways of connecting more closely to Bradford. It was this new strategy that led to the Bradford’s National Museum project.

The Bradford’s National Museum project was collaboratively designed between museum staff, partners who were well connected in Bradford and had established community development practices, and researchers at the University of Leeds. The question we posed was: ‘How can the National Science and Media Museum become locally-rooted and more open, engaged and collaborative?’

Future Directions

If you are mostly interested in where we ended up, then Part 3: Future Directions is the place to go. Here you will find that the way we addressed these questions was to recognise that connecting the museum more closely and more collaboratively with Bradford creates many tensions which, it became clear, were not resolvable in any fixed or final way. These tensions are between the pulls of being, on one side, part of the larger Science Museum Group, looking after internationally significant collections and attracting large audiences and, and on the other, developing local networks, building deep collaborations and seeing Bradford as lens to tell the story of the nation.

What we came to realise is that rather than seeing these tensions as contradictions that were wholly negative, there was a way of being honest about the challenges and, through this, reimagining the tensions as strengths. In Part 3: Future Directions, you can read our letter to Bradford and its accompanying ways of working which show how the tensions can be transformed into a positive and creative part of the museum’s everyday work and collaborative relationship with Bradford.

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The action research process

But if that is where we ended up, it cannot be separated from how we got there. Bradford’s National Museum was an action research project. Taking an action research approach meant we collaboratively generated questions, experimented in different ways, reflected, discussed and, very often, debated. Over 150 people have been directly involved in shaping the research in different ways. The rest of this publication – Part 1: Moments and Part 2: Dialogues – are about this action research process and will be of interest to those thinking about cultural change in museums or those who are interested in large-scale action research processes. Throughout, we’ve added reflections about facilitating the action research process. We’ve done this as a ways of making visible the many uncertainties and false starts and as a way of resisting the temptation to tell a smooth, inexorable story of progress towards Part 3: Future Directions.

In the About section we tell the story of significant aspects of the project which take us up to the summer of 2020 and the beginning of this publication and Part 1: Moments. About is where to go to understand more about our action research process. Here we explain how we used a large collaborative exhibition – Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford – to understand better what the challenges are for working more collaboratively in Bradford and to set agendas for the final part of the project, our exchanges with practitioners in Chicago and Washington D.C. and how the Staff Action Research Group took forward the agendas from there. This included a conversation about race that gathered pace within the museum in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd in the U.S..

Part 1: Moments is where the story of this publication begins. This publication has itself been developed as part of the action research – we, in effect, used the making of this publication as the process by which we completed our final phase of reflection. Here you can read ‘moments’ contributed by over 30 of our collaborators – staff, researchers and people who live and work in Bradford. We called them ‘moments’ as they all seek to capture both a moment of realisation that occurred during the project as well as indicating reasons for hope or possibility for change. They are powerful and thought-provoking – they are also all very different and come at our shared questions from necessarily and usefully varied positions and perspectives.

In Part 2: Dialogues we outline the process we used to move towards the Future Directions outlined in Part 3. We ran a series of small group discussions for staff where we listened to the moments on their own terms and then started to make the connections to everyday work in the museum. This process only solidified the need for us to address head on the tensions generated by being national and seeking to be locally-rooted and collaborative. We then ran a large final workshop to work through different strategies for dealing with the tensions – Alignments as Strengths and Tensions as Strengths.

Our Conclusions take two tacks. The first, in the words of its Director Jo Quinton-Tulloch, indicates what will be coming next for the National Science and Media Museum. We also offer a conclusion to the research process by those of us – Julia Ankenbrand, Helen Graham and Lynn Wray – who acted as its facilitators, a way of tying together our reflections on the roles we played that we have contributed throughout the publication.

Advertising for the Above the Noise exhibition at the National Science and Media Museum. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group



A multiplicity of perspectives

A key principle of the Bradford's National Museum project has always been to actively seek and value a multiplicity of perspectives. However, we have not approached this in the spirit that simply hearing different views is a good in itself. Rather, it is only by taking other people very seriously indeed, especially when they disagree with you, challenge you and particularly when they know things that you cannot (which is always true), that all of us as individuals can develop and grow and build the collective and shared spaces we need, whether in organisations or in cities and districts.

The necessary friction between the collective and the personal is made visible in Part 3: Future Directions. The letter stages a provisional and temporary 'we' of the museum and makes a commitment to certain ways of working – but there is also room made for personal postscripts by staff, researchers and our collaborators. Postscripts which, from different people's standpoints, add to, qualify or layer different meanings to the shared letter. The personal postscripts are a reminder that honouring the responsibility of working for a public institution or of being a citizen committed to your place, is an ongoing task of deep and creative engagement which is never completed. Even as this phase of the Bradford's National Museum work has reached its end.

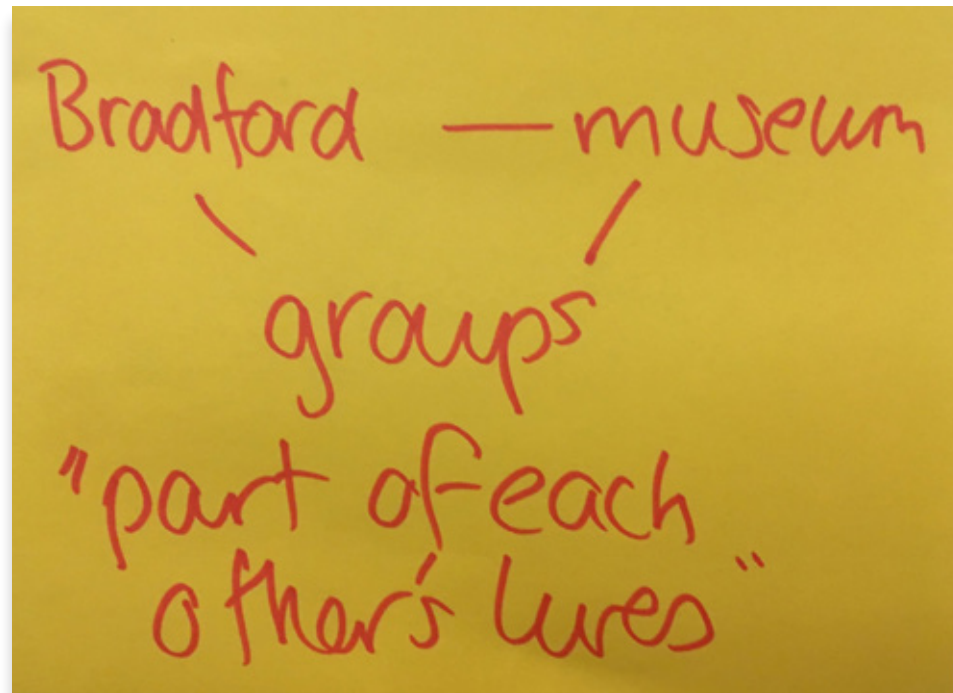
Bradford's National Museum was an action research project. We explored questions by working together to try things out. We then reflected to make sense of what happened and what it might mean. We found the most powerful dynamics in our action research approach came from opening up issues with lots of different people and constantly testing arising ideas to see which started to resonate. Through this process of constant adjustment and calibration, ways forward for the research emerged.

Action Research

Action Research

Action research is a way of exploring questions through working together to try things out. Action research focuses on real life situations, as it is in everyday life that complex issues are produced and experienced. The National Science and Media Museum and Bradford are complex interconnected worlds shaped through everyday actions and relationships. The Bradford's National Museum project approached the complexity of these interconnected worlds, through experimentation in active collaboration with those who are intrinsically part of the dynamic: people in the museum and people in Bradford.

The Bradford's National Museum project used a particular form of action research called Systemic Action Research. Systemic Action Research was developed by Danny Burns as a means of linking systemic thinking and theories of complexity with action research in order to enable 'holistic change in complex social and organizational settings' (2007:1). Burns characterises Systemic Action Research as 'a process through which communities and organisations can adapt and respond purposefully to their constantly changing environments' through creating 'participatory solutions to entrenched problems' (2007:1).



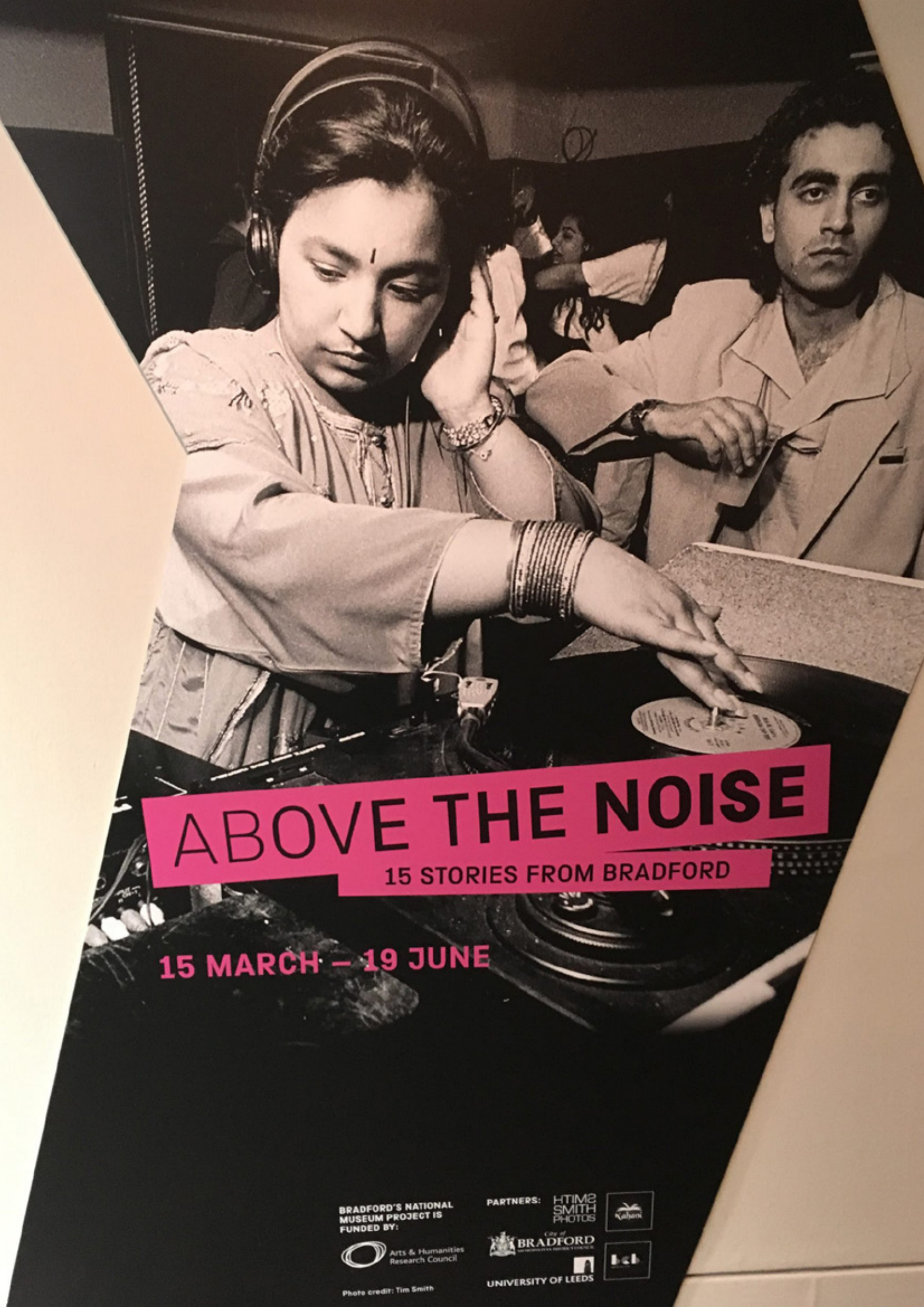
A post-it note written by a member of museum staff when reflecting on Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford and what they'd like to see next for the museum and Bradford. Image credit: Helen Graham

Burns frames Systemic Action Research as 'a challenge to the rolling out of "best practice", to "strategic planning", and to models of linear causation that dominate our organisational and political landscape' which fail 'because they are based on an assumption that intervention outcomes are relatively straightforward to predict, if only we could get the right sort of evidence' (2007:1).

Action research of all kinds works with cycles of:

- **Planning**
 - developing initial questions and actions
- **Acting**
 - trying things out
- **Observing**
 - exploring what happened as a result
- **Reflecting**
 - sense making, which should be 'cognitive, social and emotional' (Burns 2007: 12)

Over the three years of this project we went through many different research cycles. Our first experiment was having Open Conversations to explore how people in Bradford see both Bradford and the museum. Insights from Open Conversations influenced our next research cycle, making the exhibition Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford. After making the exhibition and the collaborative reflective process we developed – through the Staff Action Research Group – many parallel action research cycles, making sure they informed each other through cross-pollination.



ABOVE THE NOISE

15 STORIES FROM BRADFORD

15 MARCH – 19 JUNE

BRADFORD'S NATIONAL
MUSEUM PROJECT IS
FUNDED BY:



Photo credit: Tim Smith

PARTNERS:

HTIME
SMITH
PHOTOS



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



To the usual cyclical action research approach Systemic Action Research adds an 'improvisatory' and 'emergent' approach to research and to change (2007: 41). Improvisation means trying to be responsive to what is happening, to where there is passion and energy and accepting offers to develop the research when they come up. Linked to responding to people's interests and energies is the principle of 'parallel development', which warns against seeking false consensus and prompts a research design that enables people to diverge and to explore things they care about as part of their everyday life. Throughout the process of action research Burns advocates focusing on 'resonance not representativeness', that is watching for where people can 'see' and 'feel' the connection between things; looking for when they 'know' the emerging ideas are related to their experience and when they feel 'energised' and 'motivated' (2007: 53).

It is through this gathering of energy and resonance that directions for the research emerge and ideas and ways of thinking about the issues attract momentum and become more solid and stable. Making this publication was also an active part of this Systemic Action Research process. It was through the process of ideas arising, testing them with lots of different people and then adjusting the language, so it can slowly gather heft, that the Tensions as Strengths approach set out in Part 3: Future Directions emerged.

Reference – Danny Burns (2007) *Systemic Action Research: A Strategy for Whole System Change*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Action Research Reflection

Talking about action research cycles can make them sound neat and logical. If you speak to anybody who was involved, they will say the Bradford' National Museum Project was often not that. And that was exactly how it should be. Working with hundreds of people and perspectives, with continuous conversation and exploring together, trialing things and seeing what emerges, we invite complexity, we invite uncertainty. Opening up the deep dynamics in relationships between people, between a whole district and a large organisation within it, opening up personal politics and worldviews, histories, feelings and more, is messy and can be uncomfortable. In this publication we write the story of our project in a linear and logical way. It could sound like everything went to plan. But it worked because while we had no plan, we did have a process. It worked because we stuck with our method of working, going where the energy is, sowing seeds and working with what emerges.

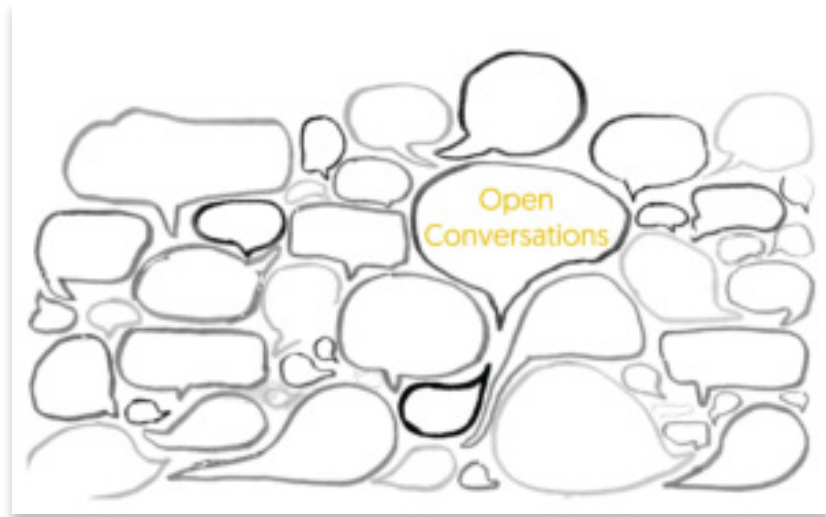
Julia Ankenbrand
Research Facilitator

We began our research with Open Conversations led by Bradford Community Broadcasting. We asked questions about what was exciting people about Bradford and the potential of the museum. Although we sought to shape the conversations positively, the question of the negative representations of Bradford in the national media was a key theme and informed the development of *Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford*. Both in terms of content and approach, Open Conversations paved the way for the rest of the project.

Open Conversations— ations

Open Conversations

The Bradford's National Museum project started with Open Conversations. They were led by Mary Dowson and Bradford Community Broadcasting. Over 30 people in Bradford took part in Open Conversations, either through being interviewed by Mary, another member of the research team or at an Open Day that was held at the museum.



Mary Dowson and Bradford Community Broadcasting used their networks to carry out Open Conversations – which were then listened to by museum staff. Image credit: Lynn Wray

To launch the Open Conversations we said:

We want to start a conversation with people in Bradford. We'd love to talk about what's going on in Bradford and about how National Science and Media Museum in Bradford can make a positive contribution.

The first part of the conversation is to really learn about all the things which are happening in Bradford at the moment: What's exciting? What's changing? Who is making brilliant things happen?

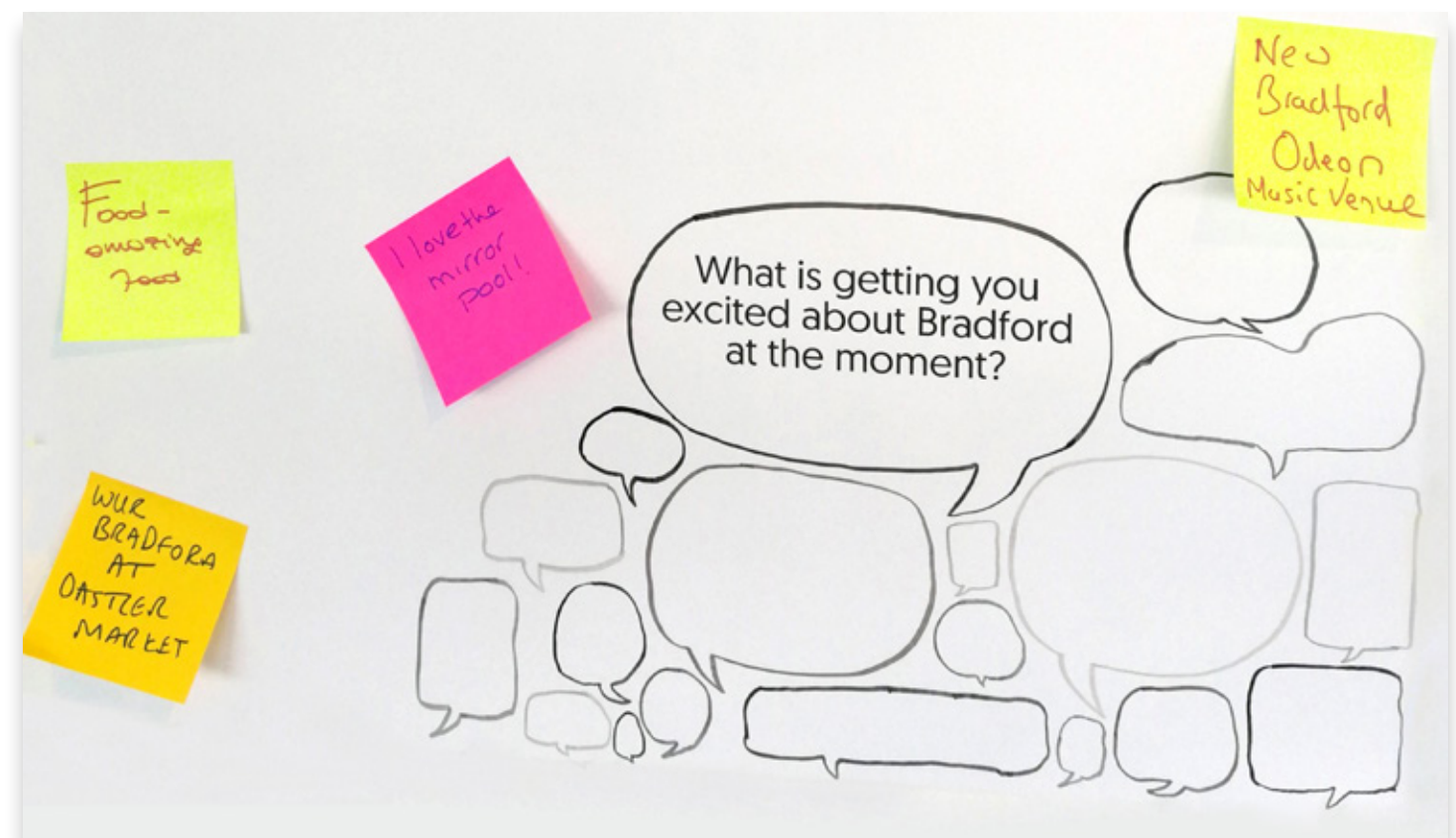
The second part of this is exploring where people see the opportunities for the resources of the museum to be opened up and put to good work in Bradford.

We also want to use the Open Conversations to build an active network of people – movers, shakers, people who get stuff done – who are interested in engaging with the NSMM and the project. We hope we might then be able to build new collaborations both as part of the research project and as part of the wider work of the museum.

We want to start talking about:

- What is exciting you about Bradford at the moment?
- Is there anything you'd like to see develop or change in Bradford?
- What memories do you have of the National Science and Media Museum? What is exciting you about the National Science and Media Museum at the moment?
- Do you have any new ideas about how the National Science and Media Museum can make a positive contribution to Bradford?
- We're looking for people who are making a difference and making good things happen in Bradford at the moment. Who else do you think we speak to?

One of the key issues that emerged was a perception that Bradford was not represented fairly in the national media. Responding to this concern, the question of whether the National Science and Media Museum has a role to play in changing national perceptions of Bradford became a question that was taken up in Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford.



We also used an approach similar to the one we used in shaping this publication. Museum staff got together for informal listening sessions to share and discuss the Open Conversation recorded by Mary. In both content and approach, Open Conversations helped shape everything that came later.

“Open Conversations was such a great way to start to understand Bradford’s relationship with the Museum. It was heart-warming to hear how much pride and affection Bradford people have for the Museum – even if they hadn’t visited for 20 years, people were so proud to have the National Museum here in Bradford! How to put Bradford into the museum was definitely a recurrent theme that emerged from people across the board.”

Mary Dowson, Director
Bradford Community Broadcasting



Mary Dowson in the BCB studio where many of the Open Conversations were recorded. Image credit: Tim Smith

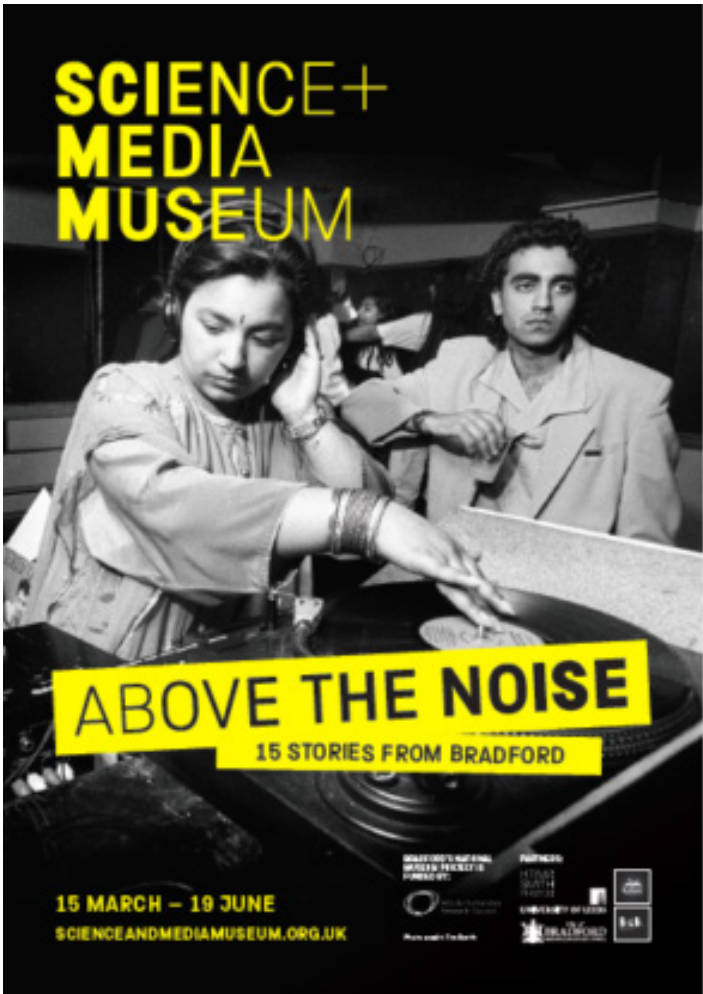
We used a large collaborative exhibition called Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford to help us explore how the National Science and Media Museum’s collections and themes could be combined with questions and issues that hold energy and interest for Bradford. The exhibition looked at how people in Bradford have addressed negative representations of Bradford in the national media through creating their own words, bypassing mainstream media and confronting power. We also used the process of making the exhibition to understand better the challenges created for the museum in seeking to work locally and collaboratively.

Above the Noise Exhibition

Above the Noise Exhibition

As an action research project, Bradford’s National Museum explored core research questions through experimentation. One of the ways we did this – a key aspect of our research design – was to make an exhibition (which opened to the public on 15th March 2019), halfway through the three-year project. We were particularly focused on understanding better how the museum can bring its collections and themes to issues which generate interest and energy in Bradford and how Bradford’s stories can open up new and distinctive ways of interpreting the museum’s collections.

Drawing on the strands of research from the first phase of the project – including the Open Conversations with lots of different people in Bradford – we decided to focus on how different communities in Bradford have made their own worlds by bypassing and confronting national power structures and mainstream media. In particular, we explored how people from Bradford recorded their own histories, created their own cultural spheres, made political and social change using local-to-local and alternative distribution networks by adapting or re-purposing available technologies.



Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford posters.
Image credit: Tim Smith and National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group.

Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford – as the subtitle suggests - staged fifteen stories, the majority of which were developed in collaboration with people in Bradford who have a stake in their telling. 109 story collaborators were directly involved.

In the exhibition, stories were explored under three sub-themes which indicated the different strategies people in Bradford have taken in dealing with power and powerful media.

In a strand called ‘Create: Make your own world’, stories explored how people have used sound and vision technologies to keep in touch with people and places elsewhere. One story explored how studio photography (such as those taken in the Belle Vue Studio in Manningham) and changes in technology have shaped the way we take, keep and send family photographs. Another traced how cassettes were used to tape and send audio letters through the post and how the effects of convergence of these technologies on mobile phones offers new and different possibilities today. Yet another story explored how technologies of amplification, narrowcast, broadcast and mobile technologies are used by people in different ways to create Islamic soundscapes between mosques and people’s homes.



Sajidah and Mariyah from Belle Vue Girls Academy try on some family heirlooms after interviewing their parents and grandparents about journeys from Pakistan to Bradford. Image Credit: Nabeelah Hafeez

A second theme – ‘Bypass: Build alternatives’ – was inspired by the DIY culture of Bradford. It identified how people have set up their own media and communications and their own distribution networks. It told the story of two of our key collaborators BCB (Bradford Community Broadcasting), an internationally-recognised community radio station with over 200 volunteer presenters producing radio that reflects the cultural diversity of Bradford, and Fast FM, the station which successfully applied for Bradford’s first Restricted Service Licence (RSL), becoming the first Muslim RSL radio station in 1992

Another story in the Bypass theme took a closer look at the innovative Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, run by Bradford Council from 1983 until 2001 which concentrated on telling ‘history from below’ using people’s memories and their everyday experiences through recorded oral histories and photography. The Bypass theme also explored Bradford’s Polish and Ukrainian communities who, displaced from their homelands by the Second World War, used their own media to help build their identities as communities in exile, as well as Asian film clubs and Bhangra daytime discos, where people created their own cultural experiences that were not available at the time, in Bradford or anywhere else in the UK.



In 1986 pupils marked the centenary of Tyersal Primary School in Bradford by doing an oral history session with a member of the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit. The Unit was part of Bradford Libraries & Museums and combined audio recording and documentary photography in innovative ways to create ground-breaking alternative histories of the Bradford District. Image credit: Tim Smith

A final section was ‘Confront: Make change’. This theme looked more directly at the negative representation of Bradford and its communities and explored ways in which these have been challenged. Displayed in this section were interviews with people who often find themselves approached to be the ‘voices’ of Bradford when national media stories break. Among them is Dr Martin Baines QPM (Queen’s Police Medal) who was appointed as Bradford’s first race relations officer from 1996 and was often the first point of contact for national media looking to report stories about the city’s social challenges. He talks about pioneering proactive work with Bradford’s South Asian publications and media outlets. In the same exhibit Paul Meszaros, a Bradford-based regional organiser for ‘Hope Not Hate’, argues for restraint and responsibility when reporting on complex matters.

In another story, we explored the Asian Youth Movement, formed in Bradford and other cities in the 1970s in response to racism across the UK. In Bradford, the Asian Youth Movement used self-published posters and newsletters to build regional and international networks, gaining prominence during the ‘Free the Bradford 12’ campaign. In 1981, rumours emerged that fascists were heading to Manningham and petrol bombs were subsequently found in the area. The fascists didn’t come, and the petrol bombs weren’t used, but 12 young Bradford men were arrested and charged with conspiracy. The 12 argued community self-defence and a newsletter was produced each day of the trial. They were ultimately acquitted in what is now seen as a turning point in race relations in this country.



The Free the Bradford 12 poster. It has a bright yellow background at the bottom it reads ‘The Bradford 12 FREE!’. Above this, a reproduced cut out photograph of a group of men is celebrating. Above this, it reads “self-defence is no offence”

Above the Noise also included two original artworks. This included a new commission titled Moon Sighting by Basir Mahmood which explores Bradford as it is seen from Mirpur, Pakistan, where many of Bradford's Pakistani community have their roots. The exhibition also featured a film piece by acclaimed artist Amar Kanwar entitled, Season Outside, which looks at the Pakistan and India border outpost Wagah-Atari. Kanwar has said, 'A Season Outside is a personal and philosophical journey through the shadows of past generations, conflicting positions, borders and time zones'.

Finally, a Common Space was created in order to reflect on and discuss these stories. It also explored the histories of communal meeting spaces in Bradford and invited ideas for what an ideal future Common Space might be.

The BBC and We Are Bradford

Launching the same week as Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford, the BBC kicked off an ongoing project called #BBCWeAreBradford with a special week of coverage from Bradford 'giving the people who live here the opportunity to tell the stories that matter most to them'. We displayed the films produced by the BBC through We Are Bradford in the Above the Noise Gallery. In July 2019 the partnership led to an event reflecting on both Above the Noise and We Are Bradford, asking 'What difference does media portrayal make to Bradford?'



We are Bradford event at the National Science and Media Museum, 2019.
Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group.

"The idea behind the Above the Noise exhibition didn't just provoke an interesting conversation – it was the catalyst for the BBC trying a new way of reporting the news. Above the Noise was the inspiration for the BBC's We Are Bradford – a way of trying to reflect a wider and perhaps fairer picture of the city. This model of journalism is now being tried out in other cities following the success of what began in Bradford."

David Sillito

Media and Arts correspondent, BBC News

Informing the rest of the research project

The exhibition – alongside other strands of work that are ongoing – was used to inform the research agenda for the rest of the research project through the reflective process. As we moved into the post – Above the Noise phase of the project our aim was to create deeper understandings of the dynamics of the potential connections between the museum and its place.



Visitors at the exhibitions launch are gathering to listen to the opening speeches. It was the busiest exhibition opening the National Science and Media Museum has seen. Image credit: Anna Bridson for the Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

Above the Noise Exhibition Reflection

For a long time we were stuck as to how to build the exhibition concept from the ground up. We had invited our project partners and NSMM staff to come up with potential stories or case studies for the exhibition that could be uniquely told by this national museum — as a museum of sound and vision technologies that is in Bradford?

We had no shortage of potential ideas. But we had difficulty figuring out as a group how to make decisions about what the sum of the parts should be. What was the ‘big idea’ that could be pieced together from these episodes, yet still say something meaningful as a whole?

We tried pinning the ideas to a wall and writing about the connections we spotted on post-it notes. We tried coming together as bigger and smaller groups. We tried creating diagrams with circles of relevance to focus down the stories and make some cuts. We had endless discussions, some in the clinical level 7 NSMM meeting room with power-point presentations and catering on a trolley, some crammed together in level 9 with tea in chipped and often inappropriate slogan mugs, one as a break-away group with curry and a jug of mango lassi in My Lahore, one in the slick board room of a local cultural centre with help your-self herbal teas and Kenco in sachets. But with no resolution. We were going round in circles so much that vertigo was starting to set in. Everyone was frustrated.

Two things helped us together find a concept that could work: The first was giving things form by bringing all the possible material together in a Padlet — a virtual noticeboard that meant I could set out visually and simply what all of the potential stories were and arrange them to suggest a possible structure that didn’t seem too final. The second was cutting this up. Printing it all out in material form and taking the scissors to it. We brought the fragments along to the next meeting — this time in a rickety ex-pub with mismatched chairs that was too cold, but made proper coffee — and invited everyone to rearrange them into a whole by using a structure that made sense for them. Having the freedom to physically move the paper around and the tack to stick them in place momentarily helped everyone make new connections between the stories and find new ways to fit them together.

Lynn Wray
Research Facilitator

The Bradford’s National Museum Staff Action Research Group was set up to take what was learned from Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford and to explore it further in the everyday work of the museum. A group of museum staff met regularly to develop their own small experimental actions based on the project’s research questions. Through taking the time and space to reflect, and to try out new ways of working in their roles, the group were able to identify where there was scope for influencing and changing the approaches of the museum. The work of the Staff Action Research Group shaped the final phase of Bradford’s National Museum and created the conditions for this publication process.

Above theNoise Reflective Process

Above the Noise Reflective Process

The aim was to use the process of developing Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford to understand how the museum might work collaboratively at scale and how the collections and themes of the museum might become connected to issues that matter to people who live and work in Bradford.

Following the launch of the exhibition, we wanted to use a process of reflecting on the experience of being part of Above the Noise to sharpen up our understanding of the issues and to plan the final phase of the research project. We carried out the reflective process in a variety of ways, through research with visitors in the gallery, through discussions with the visitor experience staff who spent time in the gallery and interviews and workshops with those – both staff and Bradford collaborators – directly involved in delivering the exhibition. As action research the Above the Noise reflective process was not conceived as summative but as a live and active process that would use our experiences to clarify and shape our research questions and to move the project on.

The process revealed that different people saw and understood the experience of Above the Noise in quite different ways, depending on their position within the process.

Visitors really enjoyed it and spent time in the gallery chatting with the visitor experience staff. However, many didn't understand the key messages and understood the exhibition to be more about celebrating diversity in Bradford than the use of technology to navigate the impact of negative representations of Bradford in the national media. Collaborators were glad to be involved but frustrated with how inflexible and unresponsive the museum seemed to be and with the way control seemed to be passed over to the museum by the end of the process. Staff felt rushed, under pressure and exhausted by having to navigate the institution and the new collaborative relationships.

Bradford's National Museum project gathering at the Delius Centre to discuss the planning and content of the Above the Noise exhibition at the National Science and Media Museum. Image credit: Tim Smith



Above the Noise Reflective Process Reflection

We were more than a little lost after Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford. Although in some ways Above the Noise has been considered a success from a distance. Internally Above the Noise became regularly deployed as a cautionary tale of what should not happen and remembered as kind of a trauma for which the Bradford's National research team were definitely held responsible.

I remember feeling very stuck about how to move things on. It was clear that as all of us had been so involved and were so implicated in Above the Noise, none of the research team would be able to act as facilitators for the reflective process. Julia, Lynn and I needed the chance to reflect as much as everyone else who had been involved. To help move us out of the stuck place and to enable all involved in the exhibition delivery to play the same and equal role as participants in the reflective process, we worked with an external facilitator and coach – Joanne Rule – to help us. Joanne's involvement was exactly what we needed. She was able to come in fresh and to listen carefully to the 15 or so members of staff and the research team who had been heavily involved in design and production. In the pressure of delivery there was an extent to which we'd stopped being able to hear or understand each other. We needed to be heard individually by someone independent before we could start to hear each other again.

Helen Graham
Research Facilitator

After the launch of Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford we reflected on the process with visitors, staff and collaborators. The differences in how people experienced the Above the Noise was striking. As part of the process of reflection we developed ways for people to see the issues from other people's perspectives. This 'whole system' approach to reflection led to new research questions which focused our attention on key tensions.

Staff Action Research Group

Staff Action Research Group

At the end of the reflective process for Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford we knew more about the very real challenges posed by the National Science and Media Museum seeking to become better rooted in Bradford and to become more open, engaged and collaborative. We had reframed our research questions to actively explore those challenges and were ready for more experimental action. What we did not yet have was a plan for what these next actions would be – and this is where the Staff Action Research Group came in.

A group of self-selecting staff started to meet weekly. After developing individual research interests, they went to work, asking questions like ‘how can I find out more about other teams’ deadline structures so that we can work more collaboratively?’ Or ‘how can we include Bradford partners in our monthly staff meetings?’ By trialling small changes, they learned more about the organisation’s dynamics, realising that colleagues might have wholly differing perspectives or experiences, and that building relationships across teams and with Bradford partners helped them work differently.



Museum staff discussing and developing action research questions and ideas at a meeting in the museum’s Makespace. Image credit: Julia Ankenbrand

One staff member had the idea to set up a regular reading group for colleagues to find knowledge that would help them with their practice in Bradford. They read articles and books, watched videos and listened to podcasts not only to learn about curatorial practice, but to learn about the historical, political and social contexts of their work. Inspired by their visit to the U.S., two staff members brought to the discussion material about race and whiteness. Over time the group developed into a space for open and critical conversation in order to explore positionalities and personal politics, both of which are strongly influencing factors in any organisation.

To keep being firmly rooted in Bradford we set up an accompanying research strand called the Bradford’s National Museum Network, which held monthly events bringing together those active in Bradford and museum staff to share work in progress and build networks, though this was disrupted by the pandemic.

Together, experimental actions, conversations, reading, finding new perspectives and growing networks created a sense of what collaboration requires and enables. With staff group members, their questions, learning and reflections travelled through the organisation and inspired conversations. Concepts, logics and language routinely used in the museum to inform practice were critically discussed and developed.

For our final collaborative research action – the making of this project publication – we designed a process to support bringing space for reflection, learning and multiple perspectives into the diaries of more museum staff. The publication process became a continuation and expansion of the Staff Action Research Group, a process of listening, reflecting and discussion and developing together what emerges from there.



Books used by the Staff Action Research Group to inform understandings of racial politics. Image credit: Julia Ankenbrand

Staff Action Research Group Reflection

I played a facilitating role for the group and together we had to negotiate and experience quite a few difficult moments. Bringing up deep, underlying, and often interpersonal dynamics, questioning ourselves and what we do, and experimenting with organisational processes and relationship pushes us out of our comfort zones.

I had a big aha-moment when I came across the work of the organisational theorist Chris Argyris. He says that questioning can trigger something he calls ‘organisational defenses’. Organisations are traditionally set up to maintain themselves, a process we all contribute to in the organisations of which we are part. Our playing a part in upholding a status quo is based on best intentions. We want to be seen as good professionals, who know what we are doing and are in control. And we don’t want to upset our colleagues. An unintended consequence of our good intentions is that change becomes difficult.

The staff group’s learning by reflecting on their practice was, at times, seen as breaking this social contract and triggered defensive reactions. Once I had learned about them, I realised that ‘organisational defenses’ are what Black members of staff face when they are vocal about the discrimination they experience. They are what members of staff sometimes experienced when they talked about race and whiteness and inadvertently provoked what Robin DiAngelo terms ‘white fragility’. Knowing about defense mechanisms was one aspect that helped us realise in the process of making this publication, that living the tensions as strength idea has to be supported by a change in ways of working in the museum that invite conversation and learning.

Julia Ankenbrand
Research Facilitator

References — Robin DiAngelo (2018) White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
Chris Argyris (1990). Overcoming organizational defenses: facilitating organizational learning. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Through the work of the Staff Action Research Group it became clear that there were different paradigms or worldviews at work in the museums. We developed a series of working models to seek to make these different paradigms visible. The limitation of the working models was that it implied that choosing one coherent worldview was the answer – an approach that would prove to be unhelpful. However, the thinking done through using the working models directly underpins the Tensions as Strengths approach.

Working Models

Working Models

As the Bradford’s National Museum Staff Action Research Group developed their agendas – and built on the cross-cutting questions that arose from reflecting on Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford – it seemed we needed some way of making sense of the lived contradictions or challenges we encountered. In the discussions the staff group were having they were able to perceive quite different worldviews or paradigms at work in the museum. Sometimes, they noted, different paradigms were even deployed within the same meeting.

This idea of making visible different, even clashing, worldviews is very common in systems thinking. In particular it is associated with ‘soft systems methodology’, an approach coined by Peter Checkland and John Poulter (see 2006) which has been highly influential in action learning, action research, and management and organisational change contexts.

Working Model Fragments

We attempted making visible the different worldviews through trying to characterise what we called ‘working model fragments’. They were:

Centralised decision-making

- Project Management Structure
- Group-wide decision making
- Branding consistency
- Communications and Messaging consistency

Use resources to meet needs

- Meet needs of social and economically excluded communities
- Content producer
- Trusted partner

Clear STEM mission

- Defined purpose
- Informed by Expertise

Participatory practice

- Knowledge and creativity exists outside the museum
- Strengths-based model (people have capabilities not deficits)
- Power sharing

Local Strategic Partner

- Clear articulation of purpose in Bradford
- Contributor to strategic initiatives (e.g. Bradford 2025)

One member of the research team, Julia Ankenbrand, then worked with the staff group to identify when and how these working models came up and clashed in their everyday working life. We also sought to link back to things collaborators had said to us during the Above the Noise reflective process.

The group developed one example which shows how the clash between centralised decision-making and participatory practice is experienced in practice.

‘Decisions in the museum are made by going through a centralised decision-making process. That means suggestions that are brought to staff by potential collaborators have to go via their managers to the appropriate places. One impact of ideas needing to work their way through various stages up and then back down the decision-making process is that no individual has to take responsibility for a decision. The message coming back to staff can feel impersonal and difficult to communicate to those they are collaborating with. To staff it becomes risky to bring in partners as they know they are potentially exposing them to a system that can take a long time, seems impersonal and that they have no agency in.’ Staff member

The impact of the working models

The working models did not quite work. They failed because, unintentionally, the way we set them up felt too much as if there had to be a choice made between coherent worldviews. But the thinking done with the staff group through the working models discussions – which very concretely identified tensions in their everyday working lives – went on to underpin the Tensions as Strengths approach.

References – Peter Checkland & John Poulter (2006) Learning for Action: A Short Definitive Account of Soft Systems Methodology and its use for Practitioners, Teachers and Students. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

A group of us – staff, researchers and collaborators from Bradford – went to Chicago and Washington D.C. to explore innovative participatory and place-based practice. The experience was transformative, both for many of us personally and for the Bradford's National Museum research. The trip enabled race and racism to become properly foregrounded in our work and led to a significant process – led by the staff action research group – of reading, self-education and collective reflection.

U.S. Dialogues



The Chicago workshop focused on ethos, practices and structures.
Image credit: Erik Petersen

In November 2019 a group of us connected to the Bradford's National Museum project went to Chicago and Washington DC. with the aim of exploring cutting-edge participatory, co-creative and community engagement work as well as the role of national organisations in their local places.

While we recognise Chicago, Washington D.C. and Bradford have many differences, we were also interested in their commonalities in terms of the need to proactively address racism, develop cross-community conversations and deal with urban regeneration in ways which engage existing communities, resist gentrification, and build community wealth.

In Chicago we were motivated by understanding the histories of community organising and community participation as well as the work that is happening in the city now. We collaborated with Elory Rozner (Uncommon Classrooms) to contact organisations that had demonstrated a commitment to innovative community convening through the arts and sciences and ran a workshop at Stoney Island Arts Bank.

In Washington D.C. we exchanged ideas with the Smithsonian Institution and visited The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to explore specific issues facing national museums, libraries and archives aiming to do place-based work in their local area.

U.S. Dialogues Reflection

My main hope for the trip was that it would allow us as a group to experience with all our senses socially-engaged, courageous and openly political arts and heritage practice in a different context to ours.

While we were in the US, I couldn’t tell whether what I had hoped, was working. We had lots of conversations, but I wasn’t sure yet what they were doing for our learning. How far were we able as a group to move from looking for techniques to copy into our practice and rhetoric, to discussing the core logics of what we do? How much were we be able to have difficult open conversations, for example about power and race and how our own individual practices related to those?

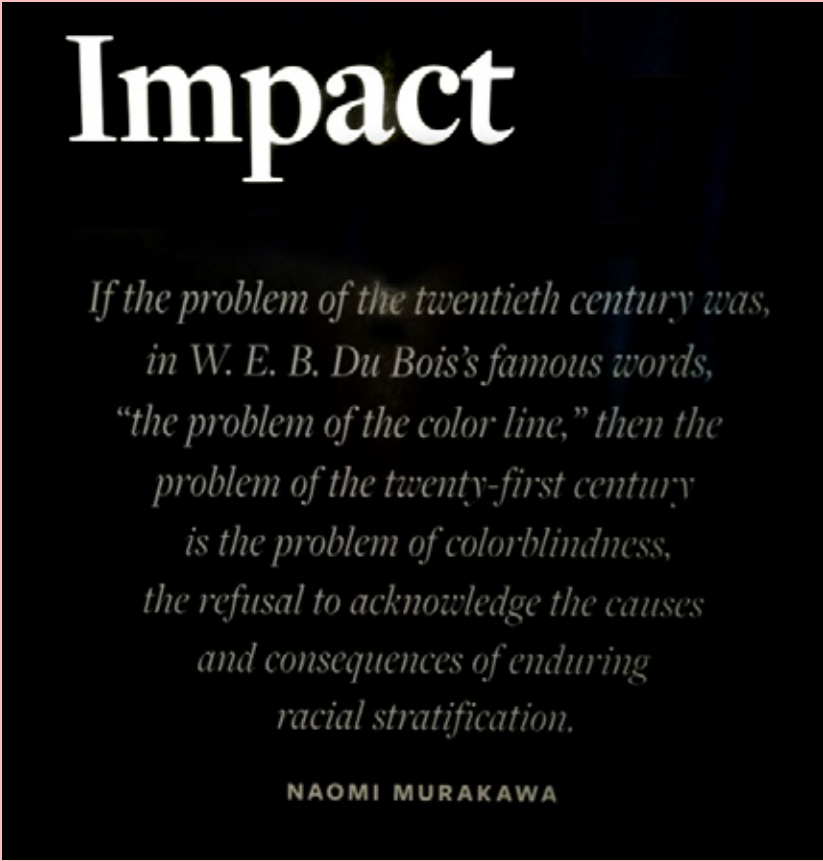
My favourite moments happened after the trip and haven’t stopped since. Since the trip museum staff we travelled with delved into learning more about systemic racism in our own UK contexts and museum sector. For the Science and Media Museum to be able to be open, collaborative and locally rooted, being able to understand and speak to the issue of racism is an indispensable quality.

Julia Ankenbrand
Project Facilitator

A memorable moment for me was visiting Stony Island Arts Bank for the first time and just experiencing the incredible power of that space. Seeing for example the Johnson Publishing Library – the sheer volume of books connected to Black culture and politics collected together in one place, was an important moment for me. I felt the power and significance of having a specific space – not just any space but an incredibly beautiful space – that is wholly owned and run by artists of colour.

Being there I could feel the huge value that having a place designed by and specifically for people of colour could have in Bradford. There were other venues I visited that reinforced the importance of this sense of community ownership. One was a music and performance space for young people, The Promontory in the Hyde Park neighbourhood of Chicago. Another was the famous poetry café Busboys and Poets in the U-Street corridor, Washington DC. I loved the curated bookshop. All of these spaces had such a strong connection to their place.

Nabeelah Hafeez
Poet, Photographer and The Literacy Trust



It was less about any specific moments and more about how I have made sense of what I experienced since I came back. This opportunity to reflect has had a profound effect on how I view my own identity and heritage, how I understand racism and social justice, and also on how I view the museum and the work we do.

Entering an institution that clearly demarcated itself as a ‘Black space’ (Stony Island Arts Bank) made me think about my own mixed-race identity – and in particular how ‘whiteness’ and ‘Frenchness’ had stood for each other in my identity formation, and how my own self was and continues to be the site of colonial and decolonial struggles. Quite practically, it made it really urgent to me to engage with decolonial politics and literature.

This is of course very personal to me, but it does connect to my thoughts about the museum’s practice and how it operates in Bradford. It has reinforced to me the importance of acknowledging histories of Empire and resistance, of power and racism, and to do this in conversation with people in the city who have different experiences and stories from the museum’s own staff.

One particular conversation I had whilst there about our exhibition ‘Above the Noise’ did stick in my mind and was a bit of a ‘Road to Damascus’ moment for me. It has led me to further question my own understanding of racism and to critically investigate how the museum thinks about and enacts diversity and representation. Exploring the questions this conversation opened up with participants of colour in the exhibition, since coming back, has shown that issues of power are fundamental in the way the museum works.

I am left feeling most deeply, that if the museum is really going to connect properly with people of colour in Bradford it has to also properly face up to the role it plays in maintaining systemic racism and take positive steps to challenge how racism permeates its own structures.

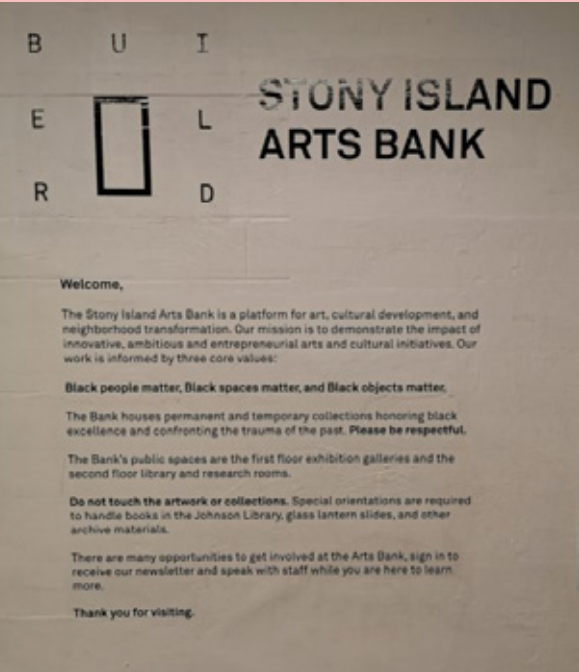
Sarah Ledjmi
Associate Curator

There wasn’t really one moment that stands out for me, more a series of moments that linked together helpfully to enable me to think gradually more politically about my own practice and what volunteering can or can’t offer in terms of making change happen.

I was really struck by the work being done at the Read/Write Library in Chicago and in particular how they structure their volunteering work in order to build an active community of volunteers. I was also inspired by how Regin Igloria (who I also met at the Read/Write Library as he has a studio in the basement of their building in Humboldt Park) who runs North Branch Projects used teaching a technique like binding, to enable people to create their own Neighbourhood archives. Seeing their work helped me to think about how volunteering can function as a form of community building.

I learnt so much about social reform in the City and beyond from speaking to Jennifer Scott at Jane Addams Hull-House Museum and going on the guided tour at the museum. We also attended a workshop there run by the Asociación de Arte Util (Arte Util Case Studies from the Chicago Area) where we participated in a process of assessing whether or not examples of community engaged art projects should become part of the archive or not. Everything felt very political in an exciting and empowering way. I felt ready to act.

Gin Jacobucci
Volunteers Coordinator



The introductory panel at Stoney Island Arts Bank sets out its mission: ‘Black people matter. Black spaces matter, and Black objects matter’. Asking visitors to ‘Please be Respectful’. Image credit: Sarah Ledjmi

I went out earlier than everyone else who joined at different times over the two weeks, so that I could meet those that were coming to the Co-Creation Exchange workshop – as well as others not able to join us – wherever they were based. This ran the gamut of art galleries, museum boardrooms, basements, cafes and freezing cold fields.

Doing this meant I was able to spend a day in South Side Chicago where I met Emmanuel Pratt at the Sweet Water Foundation, a place of ‘regenerative neighbourhood development’, a mixture of ‘urban agriculture, art, and education to transform vacant spaces and abandoned buildings into economically and ecologically productive and sustainable community assets that produce engaged youth, art, locally-grown food, and affordable housing’.

Emmanuel is an incredible thinker, doer, teacher, creator – you can find out more about his work here. ‘Sweet Water’ is a powerful mixture of everyday practicalities of growing, cooking and eating together, of aesthetics linking form and function and of critical engagement with the histories of the site. This critical conversation is used to open up the biggest questions around insurance redlining, racism and different and mutating forms of capitalism.

What really struck me – and this realisation dawned slowly as Emmanuel made time to show us around – was the holistic and powerful coherence of the project. ‘Coherence’ might sound like an odd and almost cold thing to note, but it really isn’t. The ‘Sweet Water’ approach is about building an alternative economy and community where the smallest things animate and enliven the biggest ideas. That is the power of coherence. Things and ideas stick together, hold and become stronger as they reinforce each other.

Helen Graham
Project Facilitator

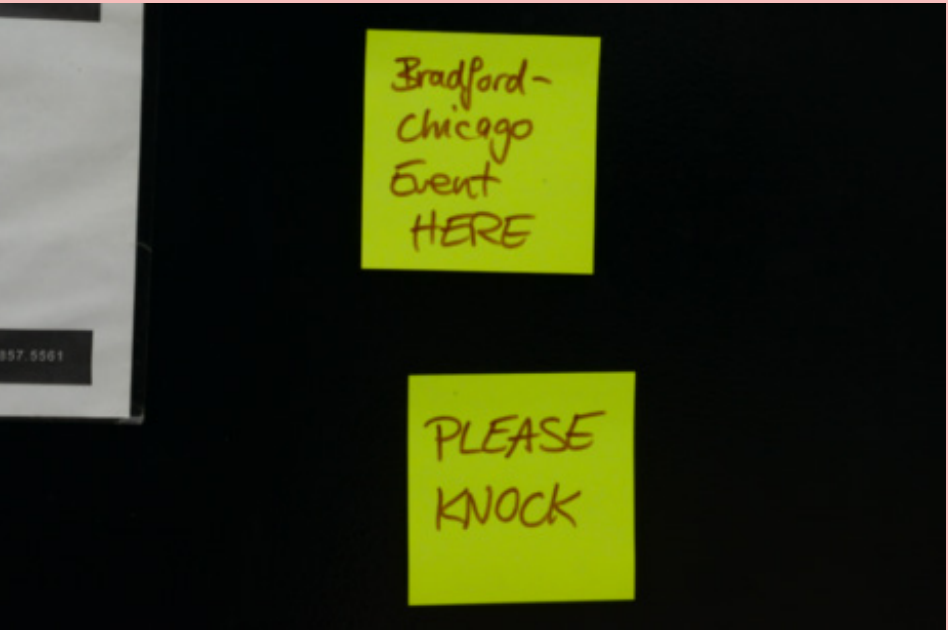
The workshop in Chicago was really important for me in thinking about the museum and its potential future role in Bradford district.

The venue ‘Stony Island Arts Bank’ was inspirational. They spoke a lot about how they had developed strategies to become a more actively welcoming place for the neighbourhood in which they were situated e.g. by having the side door open, a seemingly small gesture, but this created a much more encouraging approach to the Museum. The idea of being ‘actively welcoming’ – really seeking out and exploring what specific strategies we could use to proactively welcome the diverse people that live and work where we do – has stuck with me. and is something I want to explore moving forward. And many of the strategies were simple ways of working, not expensive large-scale projects.

One particular point made by Faheem Majeed of the Floating Museum has also changed the way I think about the role NSMM could play within its local ecosystem:

“You’re not going to change the Museum – it took hundreds of years to get here, it’s not going to change in one life span. You need to understand the limitations that are in place because of the institution. And if you put that on the table when you are designing a thing and you know what’s coming up, and also how that impacts on your community partnerships. And each organisation/individual has a different type of institution, with its individual limitations. But the limitations have to be on the table with all our hopes and dreams. Be honest about the limitations.”

Jo Quinton-Tulloch
Director



The entrance to Stony Island Arts Bank for the Bradford and Chicago: Community Co-Creation Exchange, 20th November 2019, Stony Island Arts Bank. Image credit: Erik Peterson

The highlight for me was the workshop at Stony Island Arts Bank. The venue was inspiring and I appreciated how unapologetic it was about its stance and its mission.

The thing that really stood out in the workshop for me was the idea that collaboration was absolutely essential to the survival of art practice in the American context. I think it was Erik Peterson (Smart Museum of Art) who said ‘when you have no core funding, there is no choice but to collaborate’. This opened up questions about philanthropy for me and it made me reflect on the way we are funded at Theatre in the Mill (TiM). What are the pros and cons of private philanthropy vs. state-funding? How can we encourage the artists we work with to be less reliant on the state? We have just begun to tentatively explore these questions.

It also affirmed my belief that in order to build a vibrant and collaborative cultural community in Bradford it is essential to eradicate the kind of zero-sum thinking where we think we are all competing for the same resources. We need to think of how supporting other individuals and organisations in the district, in whatever way we can, whilst being clearer about our own areas of specialism and expertise, will benefit the wider cultural economy. This will ultimately benefit all of us and all our potential audiences/collaborators. We need to be open and willing to share resources without agenda. Shared expertise will also help ensure no organisation is reinventing the wheel.

Richard Warburton
Theatre in the Mill



Participants at our workshop at Stony Island Arts Bank are creating a map of connections. Image credit: Erik Peterson

Over thirty people took the time to deeply reflect on what they had learnt from being involved in Bradford’s National Museum process and where they saw the scope for change. The contributors include museum staff, people who live and work in Bradford who were involved in the project through Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford alongside members of the research team. All developed their ‘moments’ of realisation and hope knowing they would then be activated as part of helping the museum articulate its future directions for working in and with Bradford.

Part 1 – Moments

About ‘Moments’

The moments found in this section are motivated pieces of writing, video or audio, all constructed in order to get something across. Each piece – written by a member of museum staff, an Above the Noise collaborator or a member of the research team – is designed to draw out significant moments of insight and to indicate where there might be scope for development and change.

You will find that a strong theme concerns how staff who work in the National Science and Media Museum might understand Bradford better, both its histories seeped in the story of British colonialism and post-colonialism and its current communities. Calls to understand Bradford better might be best understood as calls for the museum to more deeply understand ‘the nation’ and what it might mean to be truly national.

Part of this is a specific challenge to engage with race and the politics of racism – something that became of undeniable importance in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd in the U.S.. As moments by both staff and collaborators foreground, it is important for the National Science and Media Museum, as an organization that is predominantly white, to look actively at whiteness and the kinds of working cultures created for staff who are Black or of colour. Through addressing this default whiteness – which makes it hard for race to be spoken about – it is clearly felt that the National Science and Media Museum will ultimately create a place that people from a much richer diversity of backgrounds will be comfortable to work in.

Running through the moments is the question of how the museum can collaborate more fully with people in Bradford. Collaborators called for slower, more flexible and more responsive ways of working which centres human rights. Complementing these views from collaborators, museum staff speak about the power of the conversation, of being out exploring Bradford or of the visceral impact of being reminded why museums collect objects.

Yet alongside this potential, the challenges this poses for the museum were also very much acknowledged. Staff moments focus on how to make visible the limitations in what is possible, how to create institutional change in an organisation where decisions are made with significant managerial oversight, or of the incompatibility of flexible and responsive ways of working with the delivery models of temporary exhibitions.

Together, what the moments point to is an incredibly rich field of possibility. However, they also surface twin dangers. Both, of a lack of deep understanding of the people that live and work around the museum and of not being open about the genuine difficulty of a large national museum – part of a group of national museums – becoming more responsive, flexible and collaborative. Such recognitions were explored in detail in the process described in Part 2.

Aamir Darr

Voices of the present need to be informed by those from the past. The public narrative of Bradford needs to be animated by wit, passion and an irreverence for orthodoxy. The currently voiceless need to feel that their lived experience of Yorkshire grit – framed through multiple tongues and journeys and fuelled by unbridled optimism and pride in their city – resonates in public debate and underpins fundamental decisions about their future wellbeing and that of their neighbours.



Performers at the 2017 Illuminate Festival in Bradford’s City Park.
Image credit: Tim Smith

Nowhere is this better illuminated than Granada TV’s 1967 documentary ‘A New Kind of Match’, which echoes a gruff, direct but warm and embracing outlook of locals. In this programme, Mohammed Baig entertainingly holds court in the Sweet Centre on Lumb Lane – confidently, almost mischievously, flipping questions on his interviewer about problematic issues of employment, engagement and representation. These are matters that are still salient and unresolved to this day, but that most Bradford/ British Pakistanis still don’t feel comfortable articulating in public. Free licence is given to multiple counterposing realities. A teenage Pakistani girl speaks with fire about her experiences, challenging contemporary perceptions about young Muslim women being denied the freedom to express themselves. The white British shopkeeper displays a benign warmth to his Asian customers and the opportunities they’ve afforded him. To him the pig’s trotters to lay off the hangover for Caribbean men and other previous unknowns are all good trade. This attitude is more representative of humane everyday interactions than the differing roles of the council leader, doctor and sociologist, all white authority figures. People need to know and talk about Bradford’s history, a history that represents an authentic warts-and-all reality.

We used the film with National Science and Media Museum staff to talk both about Bradford, racism and whiteness. In general, I recall it as a very positive discussion. One Asian member of staff who grew up locally felt empowered to make many crucial points. For many white staff it was new information, being slowly digested, the gears turning in their heads. One member of staff was more defensive and wanted to deflect the discussion away from race. The willingness to talk about race and about whiteness has evolved significantly in the interim, but this was a very necessary first step, seldom offered in the history of Bradford institutions, to think critically and without fear of censure.

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The Sweet Centre on Lumb Lane in Manningham was one of the first Asian cafes to open in Bradford, serving up Asian food and music and acting as a social centre for men working in the textile mills nearby. Image credit: Tim Smith

information, being slowly digested, the gears turning in their heads. One member of staff was more defensive and wanted to deflect the discussion away from race. The willingness to talk about race and about whiteness has evolved significantly in the interim, but this was a very necessary first step, seldom offered in the history of Bradford institutions, to think critically and without fear of censure.

A decisive step off moment for me was when Sarah, Gin and others returned from Chicago and Washington. At the Bradford’s National Museum Network event at the Friends Meeting House, Sarah mentioned race in her introduction, I’d spoken very briefly about the power of individual discretion if exercised with clarity. I was still slightly overwhelmed by Sarah and Gin making a beeline for me as soon as the meeting ended. I always feel humbled when someone makes that step, a rooted and humane connection, that I can help to facilitate. I had to quickly temper their enthusiasm, laying out the context that this was a long, but not insurmountable haul. However, despite the setbacks in developing the conversation on race, this was real progress. The Bradford’s National Museum staff group has been picking people up along the way. Two or three, then four or five and now there is a dozen. And in a place where there is 100 or so staff, a dozen with a sense of purpose are sufficient to inspire others to change the landscape.



Children emerging from under an advertising hoarding in Great Horton in Bradford,1985. Image credit: Tim Smith.



A child at a primary school in Yorkshire in northern England. She is from a Rohingya family and was born in a refugee camp in Bangladesh. Image credit: Tim Smith.

Listening to Aamir

The comment Aamir made about ‘deflection’ stuck out for me as something that is really, really common. My experience is that this normally comes from fear of saying the wrong thing or not being able to frame it right. We have started to do inclusive language workshops here at the museum to hopefully help us get better at talking about diversity.

Siobhan Devanny
Explainer Team Leader

It always comes to time and resources. If only we had the time to dedicate to these conversations. But we dip in and out and we are onto the next deliverable and we never have time to critically reflect or properly engage.

Bex Hill
Festivals and Cinema Events Coordinator

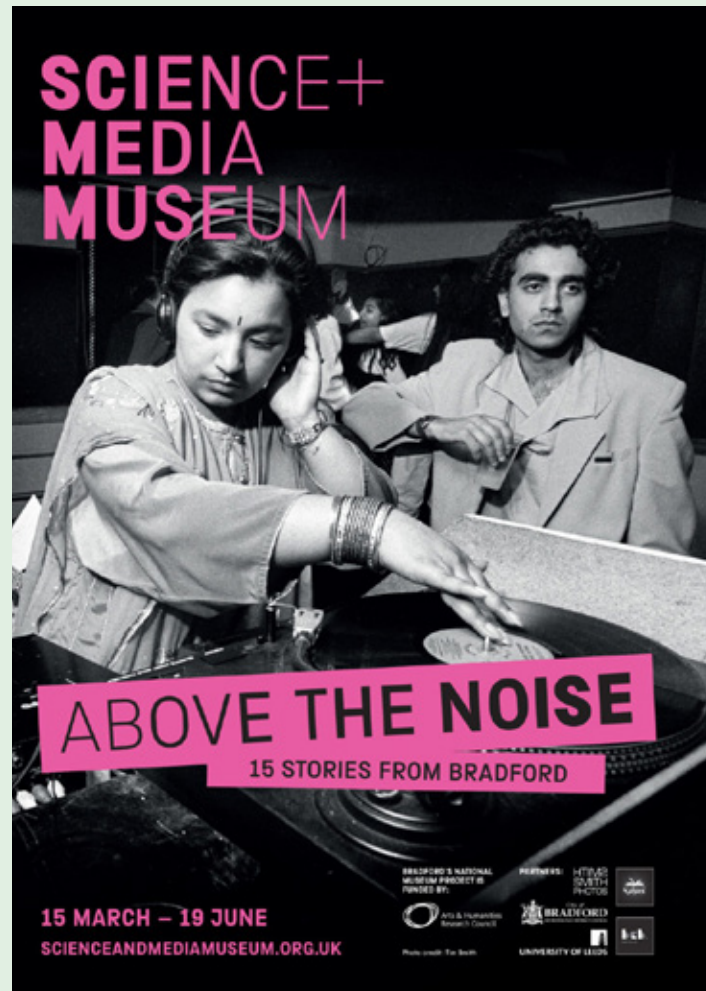
I’ve lived in Bradford since 1963. I work across the country, and feel Bradford is globally unique. Its richness and complexity isn’t recognised as a positive narrative by institutions in the city and beyond. Many of the residents of all communities possess an enormous pride in the district, rooted in cherished memories of family, friendship and gritty struggles those relationships have allowed them to endure.

I’m all about progressing the conversation to embed an authentic reality of Bradford. To create publicly validated spaces where people can challenge established orthodoxies. That recognises the abundant human capital and history of the area, and the promise it’s capable of delivering for our future. As a member of the research steering group, BNMP has been a step in the right direction, where a major organisation has honestly and critically, sometimes messily, evaluated its practice on racism and inequity.

I’ve been active in public life for over 40 years but have worked with DFE, DFID, OFSTED and many other national bodies as an education/ diversity consultant, advisor, lecturer, researcher, trainer and independent specialist bookseller on racism and inequity. You can reach me at multiculturalbookshop@gmail.com



My involvement with the BNMP began as soon as I joined the museum in 2018. A senior manager told me, in my first week on the job, that I would be project managing an upcoming exhibition which formed part of the research. The show that was to become *Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford* quickly took over a large part of my working time and, shortly after, my out of work life too.



Poster advertising *Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford*, National Science and Media Museum, 2019. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group



Members of the public peacefully protesting against racism and police brutality, outside City Hall, City Park, Bradford. Image credit: Black Lives Matter, Bradfordian

A couple of weeks before *Above the Noise* opened, I was out in Bradford at a friend's workplace, the exhibition poster proudly displayed in the window. Another customer began discussing the show, speaking of how they were involved in one of the fifteen stories and how the process had been for them. I should say that at this point, despite being the exhibition project manager, I had not yet developed a personal relationship with every collaborator (this is a point for another day, but one that comes to my mind often). This person was one such collaborator, who I hadn't met before. Our mutual friend in the space introduced us explaining to the customer, an activist in his 60's, that I was working on the show. A difficult conversation followed.

In response to his experience and his criticisms we spoke about the project, the museum and the exhibition. Before the hour was up I'd say we were friends. Since our first meeting, this critical friend has joined museum staff on the picket line, attended Black Lives Matter protests with me (at a social distance) in lockdown, and written me book lists. This is just one of numerous relationships like it.

I feel I should say at this point that I've always been a keen believer in keeping work at work, and hope the reader doesn't think I am advocating for having no boundaries. We make friends with collaborators, designers, colleagues, artists all the time and this in itself is not special or rare. But the fact that these friendships were actually founded somewhat on shared frustration narrowed the distance between us. Rather than widening the space between the museum and its partners – and in turn between us as people, not just representatives of institutions or ideas – through working and learning together, we built relationships.

This experience of honesty and of communicating respectfully stayed with me as the project developed. I recall articulating a frustration I was having at work during a meeting for another project. One of the BNMP partners I had worked with closely for around a year responded in shock. He hadn't heard many museum staff share some of the frustrations that people external to the museum feel.

The museum may be my workplace, but it is also my civic museum, I too am a citizen of Bradford who needs things from the museum outside of my employment. I've been committed ever since to not only meeting people on their terms, but to being honest and brave about my own.

Listening to Alice

I like the idea of Alice saying that the museum is a civic museum. That resonates with me. What we are trying to aim to do is to be true to what people need from the museum.

Andy Clarke
STEM Ambassador Hub Manager

I feel like Alice’s piece has reflected the change in the museum that has happened in the museum over the last 10 years. It used to be that we had it drummed into us that being professional meant to put on a good face and be the institution. These stories show that we need to be critical, and show what we think to relate to people in Bradford. Interactions have consequences. I hope in the future we are given the license to have these difficult conversations and work with them. (...) When you are open and vulnerable is when genuine interactions happen.

Networks are so important. I realised that when I worked on River of Tea with Tim Smith. Tim or Andy Abbot can do what they do because they have these massive networks. Alice knows everyone, she talks to everyone, and is a huge asset for our team. This knowledge needs to be broadened out. I would love it if all of us knew people in the city who we could call and find out what is happening in Bradford. If you have those connections already then you can collaborate with people more easily and make their voices heard. A lot of people who work in the museum don’t live in Bradford, and at the moment we of course don’t even see our colleagues. Maybe we can have a set of systems in place to enable keeping in touch, like monthly trips out, have someone who works in the community or creative scene at each of our monthly staff briefings. It would be nice to have workplace support to go out there and talk to people.

Kate Burnett
Interpretation Developer

Alice Parsons
Interpretation Manager

In my role as Interpretation Manager at the National Science and Media Museum I work with a brilliant team to develop how we tell stories and oversee bringing those stories to life through exhibitions, partnerships and events. I am particularly passionate about social justice, working with artists and responding to the everchanging role museums can play in society.

I am an alumna of the Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries Programme and advocate for fair recruitment practice and better opportunities for development, support and equity at all levels of employment.

I have been involved in Bradford’s National Museum Project since joining the museum as Creative Producer in 2018. I worked as the Project Manager for the gallery show Above the Noise: Fifteen Stories from Bradford in 2019.

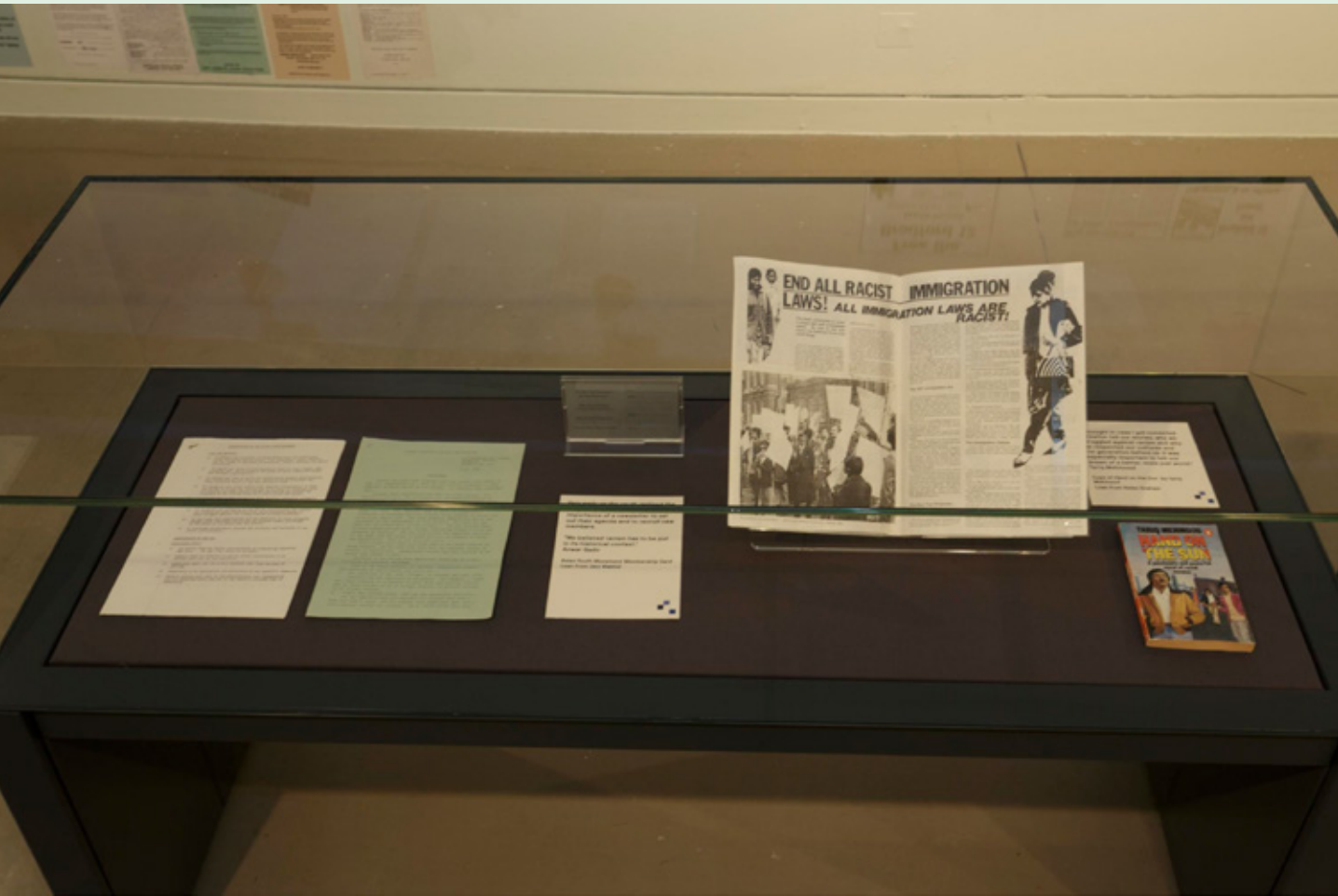
Although I live and work in Bradford, I am also a trustee at Open Eye Gallery, in my home city of Liverpool, where we focus on socially engaged photography practice. As well as being a photography lover, I am a keen reader and spend a lot of my free time trying to get better at gardening and cooking, making playlists and wandering Peel Park.

twitter.com/AliceParsons



Anandi Ramamurthy

While seeing the history of the Asian Youth Movements and the Bradford 12 represented in the space of the National Media Museum was uplifting, contextualizing it within the constraints of the museum’s labelling system was a challenge. When your history has been marginalized and misunderstood, explaining the complexities of its meaning is not necessarily possible in 120-word panels or 40-word labels. There are no shortcuts to explaining what has been misrepresented.



Objects and labels relating to the Asian Youth Movement and Bradford 12 in Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford, Gallery 2, National Science and Media Museum. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

The multiple meanings of the past were also brought to the fore. Amongst former members of the AYMs, there were differences in opinion about how the past should be presented in the exhibition. Some individuals wanted to present a story of increasing integration with Marsha Singh, a former member of Bradford AYM becoming an MP. Others argued that the focus should be on the legacy of the movement’s politics to embrace the slogans of the movement: ‘Black people have the right, here to stay here to fight’ and ‘Self defence is no offence’. Communities, like nations are not coherent – there are dynamics of power and political positions which constantly ‘unsettle’. This unsettling should be a central part of any heritage practice – and must be accompanied by an unsettling of institutional processes and standards.



Paste-up wall of posters and ephemera relating to the Asian Youth Movement and Bradford 12 in Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford, Gallery 2, National Science and Media Museum. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

Listening to Anandi

I can hear Anandi's frustration, which is so understandable when your history has been marginalized and misunderstood for so long. The exhibition was an opportunity in that sense, but the representation of the complexity of Anandi's story wasn't realised.

Not being able to contextualize difficult historical events and stories is something we have long struggled with when creating exhibitions. Even more so now that we are actively trying to challenge museum practice and narratives by telling complex stories. Unsettling institutional processes and standards is becoming more and more important for us.

Part of the struggle of making exhibitions about complex histories and heritages – telling a multifaceted narrative, not a single story – is that we have to balance the needs of audiences for the museum voice to sound trustworthy, convey a sort of certainty about what is said, with saying that there is no one answer and opening up dialogue for visitors. And then of course different people enjoy information presented in different formats, so we are constantly trying to balance how people want to engage and giving them the information they need to get the full picture of a story. It is not surprising that Anandi is picking up on – and was caught – in that difficulty.

That we are both sharing the same concern – Anandi, as our project partner, and us as the museum's exhibitions team – is almost making me hopeful. We haven't found the best solutions, but it seems my team is asking the right questions.

Kate Burnett
Interpretation Developer

I am a Professor of Media and Culture at Sheffield Hallam University. My research has been focused on analysing racism and its representations as well as archiving and narrating people's histories of resistance. I am the author of *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* (MUP, 2003) and *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements* (Pluto Press 2013). I am also the founder of a digital archive on the Asian Youth Movements. I played a key role in developing the AYM story and installation that featured in the exhibition *Above the Noise: Fifteen Stories from Bradford* (NSMM, 2019).

I have been involved with a variety of anti-racist and anti-imperialist campaigns in the north of England. I help run Cinema Palestino in Manchester and Sheffield. I'm currently leading the AHRC Urgent Covid 19 research project, *Nursing Narratives: Racism and the Pandemic*.



Andy Abbott

I am one of the local creative practitioners who were involved in the Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford exhibition. My contribution was developing an area in which visitors could share their favourite 'Common Spaces' in Bradford by adding them to a participatory map. Common Spaces are those places where people gather and feel collective ownership or a sense of belonging.



Visitors exploring the Bradford: Common Space area in Above the Noise: Fifteen Stories from Bradford, National Science and Media Museum, 2019. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

The response was great. We had hundreds of contributions that ranged from long-gone cafes, public beauty spots, libraries, pubs, schools, galleries, social centres and even underpasses and alleyways! The ever-evolving map helped to portray a city with a great sense of pride and revealed the 'cultural dark matter' that often goes overlooked or underappreciated.

To trial our mapping system for the exhibition we ran an event at Bread & Roses, a café and co-working space on North Parade. The event worked really well. It was great to bring the museum out of its building and into the city. We explored doing a similar event with existing youth spaces, which proved difficult because of organisational constraints on the museum side. The experience to me showed the need, potential and difficulties for the NSMM to reach out and connect with audiences or communities that are not already reached, by going to where those people are. I know the museum wants to attract more young people to visit and engage with the museum, which makes sense with Bradford soon being the youngest city in the UK. What potential is there for doing more of this connecting in Bradford in the future?

Working with the museum gave me an insight into the large scale and slow pace at which institutions of this size operate and made me question how spaces like the National Science and Media Museum can work with their audiences as co-producers? I remember that Jo Quinton-Tulloch, the museum's director, mentioned in her speech at the exhibition opening that Above The Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford was a 'quick' exhibition. But of course, in relation to other exhibitions and initiatives in Bradford it was massively resourced in terms of time, staff, materials etc. Does the museum now have an appetite to continue to work in this more fleet-of-foot and responsive, more 'Bradfordian', way? Can it see the benefits to this approach with regards to becoming an 'embedded' organisation?

My experience reminded me to look again at museums that are attempting to rethink the role of the museum as a civic space, and at local organisations like South Square Centre in Thornton and the 1in12 Club, who are firmly rooted in their local contexts. What learning can be gained from these examples and applied to a (common) space as important to Bradford's cultural landscape as the National Science and Media Museum?

Listening to Andy

What I found interesting is that in the criticisms he is offering, I think he is asking about the middle ground between what is possible. What are you happy with in the middle between small nimble organisations and big national ones? I think that is a challenge for all of us. Realistically, you can't always go as far as you want. It's finding what other places in Bradford don't do, what they are already doing, and then what are we gonna do as a national museum?

Chris Whitby
Audience Research Manager

We shouldn't see the museum in isolation to other organisations that exist in the city. Andy Abbott names some that are firmly rooted in their local context, why does he see them rooted? We can strengthen our roots by doing what we do best in terms of our collections, our skills and resources, our profile, and so on, by working with what we have, to bring impact and relevance that has longevity. What does that look like for us? What can we do that adds value?

Jo Quinton-Tulloch
Director

Andy Abbott
Writer and Curator

I am an artist, writer, curator and arts organiser who lives in Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK. I am currently Visiting Research Curator of the UNIDEE Residency Programmes for Cittadellarte Fondazione-Pistoletto in Biella, Italy where I am delivering a hybrid programme of remote and situated learning for international artists exploring the theme of 'embedded arts practice in a post-pandemic future'.

I have exhibited and performed internationally as an individual artist and in various collaborations including the art collective Black Dogs. My most recent work explores the role of digital and virtual experiences in social practice, including verbatim video-games exploring the Future of Work in post-industrial UK towns.

In 2012 I was awarded a practice-led PhD from the University of Leeds with a thesis on 'art, self-organised cultural activity and the production of postcapitalist subjectivity'. My research interests are in Do-It-Yourself culture, artist-led initiatives, alternative economies and postwork futures.

As an arts organiser and curator I have produced a public programme for the embedded arts organisation In-Situ in East Lancashire, piloted a Centre for Socially Applied Arts at University of Bradford, and was a director of the Community Interest Company Art in Unusual Spaces.

www.andyabbott.co.uk
Twitter/Instagram: @zadanzig



Andy Clarke

I joined the Science Museum Group (SMG) as the STEM Ambassador manager for West Yorkshire, in January of 2017. My job seemed to be clear cut: to manage a team of two, connect with local businesses, inspire some of their staff to become volunteers and send them into schools, colleges and non-school groups to encourage the next generation into STEM careers. However, being a person of colour, by instinct I surveyed the National Science and Media Museum, where I am based, to see who looked like me. Regretfully there was no one. I was the only BAME individual who worked in any office in the building.



Black Lives Matter protests in City Park, Bradford, 2020.
Image credit: Tim Smith

This was compounded when I attended my first SMG managers Annual General Meeting where managers from the five member museums came together. I found that I had more fingers on one hand than the number of BAME people attending.

To help right this wrong, I decided to work on issues of diversity within STEM to do my little bit – but I wanted to show others in the museum where I was going with this too. I spoke to my line manager and she agreed with me – something was clearly wrong. However, I felt I could not be as verbal and forthright as I really wanted to be. It looked as if diversity and inclusion was a ‘nice to have’, but not as important as the other business the museum dealt with. I continued to bang the diversity and inclusion drum, but not as loud as I would have wanted. I felt there was no forum to safely vent my frustration.

In 2019, I was invited by colleagues to join the Bradford’s National Museum Project (BNMP) staff group. The group had formed as part of the research project, a provided a space for staff members to reflectively develop their practice. In conversations, I found that my peers were much more in tune with my thoughts and feelings than I had previously realised. I began to speak more freely. My mutterings must have been heard because in late 2019, I was selected to join SMG’s ‘Open for All’ steering committee. ‘Open for All’ stands for one of the group’s core values. The committee supports SMG in realising its aim to create more equity in, around and through the museums’ work.

This is when timing and history collide. During the first national ‘lockdown’ of 2020, we kept those BNMP staff group meetings, and the reading group we had started, going online. This gave invaluable time and agency for me and my peers to share readings and podcasts, on issues surrounding race inequalities. Then, in May 2020, George Floyd was tragically murdered by a Minnesota police officer. This led to the resurgence of the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement. The event provided extra impetus and meaning to what we were doing and ramped up the introspection of many in the museum and around the world – which I welcomed.

The conversations BNMP allowed for are a conduit for my thoughts and feelings and provide, with staff participation, the basis of our local ‘Open for All’ group, which we are establishing at the National Science and Media Museum. Additionally, the project has permitted me to educate and be educated. It has allowed colleagues a space where they can sympathise with and empathise with my thoughts and emotions as a person of colour.

Listening to Andy

I hear the isolation Andy felt. That is the bit that is overlooked if you are not part of a marginalised group. To me the museum feels like a welcoming and open place. We miss that this doesn't exist for others.

Martyn Lenton
Project Manager Exhibitions

Andy saying that he wasn't banging the drum as loud as he wanted feels like a controlled experience, of being muffled. We'll let you talk about this, but don't make too much fuss. It feels very painful.

Gin Jacobucci
Volunteers Coordinator

It's almost as if he is saying that even if he banged the drum very loud nothing would have happened. The second part of the text sounds more hopeful.

John Rooney
Operations Manager

It sounds like he has been empowered through the project and what happened internationally. Maybe having those discussion in the staff group have given him the agency to do the work he is doing, he has been doing many things in the diversity agenda recently. What Andy is saying in this piece is a lot for him to share, it is important to have a place where you feel like you can do that.

Elaine Richmond
Partnership and Participation Manager

I really related to Andy's piece. The sense of not being able to express yourself in fullness. The question of being able to speak. Even now, though the piece outlines a trajectory and journey over time where progress is made, I would question how fully the Museum has made a space for Andy's voice. Upon first reading, I immediately noticed how the tone feels quite removed in how he expresses a deeply personal and frustrating experience. In his unpacking of this he is logical and very measured. I relate to this so closely. As people of colour, trying to bring challenge to the whiteness we are faced with and limited by, we are forced to express ourselves in this way - we are always aware that if we were to truly express the upset, the anger, how cut up we feel, that we might fail to make use of an opportunity to create change. Always, we are asked to take the moral high ground and to be better than we want to be. In the passage about time and history colliding, and the shift of the museum in a direction which allows for these conversations to be had, I sensed this strongly. The feeling of how to use this rare opportunity and to use it well. Being conscious that he is trying to elicit a response. Being forced to be careful and to prioritise the feelings of white colleagues. It's what you have to do. And always that pressure to end with something positive, to leave people with something constructive which I touch on in my own piece. In this, there is a sense of preserving white colleagues' feelings, who might not only be your colleagues but your friends, the people you spend your day with, but there is also the question of self-preservation. In my own experiences, when I have had to raise something difficult I have felt very self-conscious, wondering how people will respond to me in future, if it will diminish how people see me; there is always this fear in being a minority, sometimes subconscious and sometimes very loud in your mind. I suppose the piece left me wanting to ask: if I was still at the museum would I be able to speak?

Pakeezah Zahoor

I am the STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Maths) Ambassador Manager for West Yorkshire and work at the National Science and Media Museum. I currently work to engage volunteers from industry to visit schools, colleges and non-school groups to promote STEM careers. I was born and raised in Yorkshire, and I am a son of the so called 'Windrush generation'. I have a passion for the STEM sector, and have previously worked in the broadcast media and mobile communications industries. I see STEM careers as a way of promoting social mobility across the north of England. I am passionate about young people and BAME communities being represented in the sector. I am also the creator of the successful 'BAME Forum' which works with STEM Ambassadors and other organisations to address issues surrounding diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

[More details about the STEM Ambassador programme.](#)



Barbara Hladowski

The opportunity to work with Bradford's National Museum on the 'Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford' exhibition came out of the blue and was totally unexpected. It encouraged me to collaborate with my son, Chris, who had made the initial contacts. We were able to gather information and reflect on the life and work of Roman Stefanowski and Anatol Krakowiecki, my father and the father who adopted him after he was orphaned.



The museum staff and project representatives facilitated personal meetings which helped us to recognise and appreciate the impact our forebears had on Bradford and the wider world. This included social gatherings where project participants exchanged ideas and stories. But the most striking element about the project was that we, as participants, were able to shape the process, directly influence its direction and that of future projects. The personal meetings were the most productive and thought provoking. The social gatherings were useful in understanding the diversity of the project, the broad expanse of ideas and stories, and the ethnic backgrounds represented within it, with a relaxed, informal feel and a spirit of openness and collaboration.

My mother Urszula had retained all my late father’s personal, political, and journalistic documents, and those gathered as guardian of his adopted father’s estate, which helped me and Chris enormously. I was aware that some of these existed but not the depth of the collection, nor the full details of its contents and the history it contained. Added to the documents were personal observations from those living through extremely difficult, although interesting times.



Photograph of Roman Stefanowski.
Image credit: Barbara Hladowski

This journey of personal discovery has instilled in me a desire to dig deeper and learn more about their past and that of others. It re-ignited a sense of wonder and admiration for those who have gone before us, a feeling which was reinforced when viewing the other stories within the same exhibition. Whilst the stories were all very different, it was evident in all of them that the personal and often tragic circumstances of individuals have a profound effect on future generations.

The follow-up article ‘From Kraków to Bradford: A story of two Polish journalists’ written by my son Chris Hladowski expanded on our personal family story. This was seen internationally, with images used in an article by Jerzy Autuchiewicz from the Historical Research office of the Institute of National Remembrance. We have also established contact with the Siberian Memorial Museum. The journey continues...

...It is a journey I wouldn’t be on if I hadn’t collaborated on this project at the National Science and Media Museum. I hope the museum will enable many others to work in this way. I, myself, look forward to building my own knowledge, and sharing ordinary yet amazing lives with others.



‘Voice in Exile’, Part of the Exhibition Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford, 2019, National Science and Media Museum, Bradford. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

Listening to Barbara

The process of putting together an exhibition is about much more than the end result. Barbara discovered more about her family archive than she expected to on this journey with the museum. That is very valuable. When we work collaboratively this process of learning and connecting that Barbara describes can happen.

Because sound and vision (the museum’s focus) are very present and engrained in our day-to-day lives there are so many opportunities to make individual connections with it, we all can find them in our individual and family histories and presents. Working with Bradford partners, collaboratively and individually, creates opportunities to spread and explore that web of curiosity and interests. It’s really interesting to hear that the personal meetings and seeing the diversity of experiences represented in the exhibition were useful to Barbara.

It’s fantastic to read somebody’s experience of all that and it sounds like a very positive one. It is our hope that we can work like this more. It would be great to also have different forums and formats for collaborators to connect and communicate on future projects.

The publication making process, asking people to write about their experience of being part of the Bradford’s National Museum project, is making me think that maybe we can in the future, when a project is finished, go back to people we have worked with and ask them about their experience of the process. I think that would be useful for us to do to develop our practice. It can reassure us about where we are on the right way, and remind us of what we still need to work on.

Kate Burnett
Interpretation Developer

I was born in London to first generation Polish political refugees, forced to abandon their homeland as a result of the Second World War. My parents wanted me to integrate into the English way of life but also to retain my Polish roots. An only child, I was unable to speak English until I started school, and we were now living in Queensbury, West Yorkshire. I attended Saturday morning Polish School in Bradford achieving my Polish ‘A’ Level.

As a young adult I was a member of the Polish Ex-Serviceman’s Club and joined ‘Podhale’, a Polish national dancing group. Married at the Polish Church in Bradford to George, also from a similar background, I taught the Nursery class at the Polish Saturday school whilst my own children grew up. After drifting away from the Polish Community I started to take a greater interest in family history and as my parents grew older and later passed away I was lucky to inherit a very large archive of material. I have discovered a passion for sharing their story with others and have further material yet to document. My recent retirement allows me to progress with this project.



Chris Whitby

To me, the Bradford's National Museum project has been one of reflection and learning, personally and professionally. In a period of great societal change, it has been a space in which to think about what we want the museum to be, and how we want to get there. We considered how we interact with our colleagues and collaborators in Bradford, and started to see relationships not as merely professional, but spaces to navigate many different agendas, identities and motivations and to build new possibility for the future.



Open Iftar 2019, organised by Ramadan Tent Project.
Image credit: Ramadan Tent Project

It is easy to think about relationships and partnerships as formed and established interactions between two people, or two organisations, but this project was trying to seek more than that. It was about slight relationships, a single conversation, a meeting in a café. Not seeking to identify what we can do now, but rather to open up the possibility for the many things that can happen in the future. On the journey to understanding this were a few distinct moments that stayed with me:

As part of the project a few of my colleagues and I went to the 2019 'Open Iftar' celebrations in City Park. Once I arrived I chatted to somebody and was quickly recruited as a volunteer for the event. Being part of this open and welcoming event was not only an enjoyable experience, but one that made me reflect. I had a chat with someone who hadn't been to the museum for years and was going to visit soon. I hadn't gone to the event with expectations or intentions but walked away with more sense of Bradford.

We did a few things like this during the project, where we were brought together with people to just talk. Another one was when we did a 'living library' event. The BNMP team invited those who had collaborated in Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford to come to the exhibition space and meet museum staff informally. I wasn't sure what this would bring, but what I took away was, again, a better sense of people and history in Bradford.

One of the stories told in the exhibition was that of the Asian Youth Movement in Bradford – a piece of inspiring local history. I had conversations about it with project collaborators, and we discussed a podcast on it during the reading group I do with colleagues.

The project showed me the power of conversations. Be that with the staff group, reflecting on the process, or evaluating how visitors experienced Above the Noise. The potential is finding more spaces to talk. That is the hope and knowledge this project has given me, that conversations can lead to change in practice, even if those changes are small, they can add up.

The more people and stories I know about Bradford, the more I develop a sense of relationship with the city; this feeling of obligation to Bradford. There is a whole city doing stuff to make change and we could be part of this. So, what is the role of the museum, and what do we need to do? I'm still unpicking this.

Listening to Chris

It is interesting how Chris’ story mirrors Sajidah’s point. He talks about relationships that are more than a means to an end. It’s almost the same as when Sajidah says the museum is like the Alhambra or St. George’s Hall, which are commercial organisations in Bradford. Many parts of the museum are centred around making money and bringing in more visitors, but Chris is wondering about the things that are not commercial, about achieving the goal to become part of a community of people doing things for each other. Which of the museum’s priorities and ways of doing things are working against this ambition?

Sarah Ledjmi
Associate Curator of Sound and Vision

I am Bradford-born and bred, that connection is already there. Things that make sense to me about the city, might not make sense to people not brought up here. We need to find a way to create a passion and love for the city in people who work at the museum who aren’t originally from Bradford. Many people who work in the museum are not from Bradford.

Vicky Clifton
Head of Learning

Early on when starting at the museum, new colleagues are given an induction to the Science Museum Group. As part of this induction process it would be useful to share knowledge of local contacts, with their permission, as well as community projects, groups and local events, including city-wide projects such as Bradford 2025. This will encourage new starters to begin fostering their own relationships with local contacts, businesses and organisations in the city from the get go. This could turn into more opportunities for meet ups, collaboration, as well as putting more of a face to the museum, ensuring a local and participatory approach is at the forefront of colleagues’ minds and integrated into more aspects of their work.

Katie Canning
Press and PR Manager

Chris Whitby
Audience Research Manager

I am the Audience Researcher Manager, North, at the Science Museum Group. Working across the five SMG sites I undertake evaluation and research to better understand how we can engage a broad range of people with science, and support colleagues to place audiences at the heart of their work.

I have been involved in the research strand of the BNMP project, including supporting reflection from colleagues and partners, and undertaking research with the public and Front of House Colleagues about the Above the Noise exhibition. I am also part of the BNMP staff group.

I am interested in the structural changes that need to take place within museums to ensure they can play a meaningful role in the city and with its communities, and remove barriers to those who have historically been excluded from science and informal learning practices.



Claire Mayoh

I've been on the periphery of the Bradford's National Museum Project, due to limited time to participate, whilst maintaining a busy role at the National Science and Media Museum. However, despite feeling like a shadowy figure in its activities, I feel I've benefited in many ways from different activities and conversations happening in relation to the project. The main impact on me has been through my involvement in the BNMP reading group. I was very excited when we got together for the first time in Insight, the museum's collections and research centre, at the end of 2019.



View of the Daily Herald Archive, one of the many archives Claire works with in the National Science and Media Museum.
Image credit: Science Museum Group

The reading group was initiated by some of my colleagues to share and discuss texts and resources that might help us think about and develop our practice as museum staff. It sits outside of the Science Museum Group, and outside of National Science and Media Museum structures and meetings, which I think gives it a sense of independence of mind, which I find positive and refreshing. The group now shares articles, podcasts, videos and books and has discussions on Teams, the virtual platform we use for working and video chats. Sharing a chat history and resources online has opened up possibilities for learning, participation and interaction for me. I still don't get to as many (online) meetings as I'd like but with the online chat I still feel included and able to contribute when I can.

The experience of reflecting together has played into my work, giving me more confidence to share resources and discuss potentially more challenging topics than I did before. More widely, it broadened my knowledge and understanding of how current issues like structural inequalities impact our lives nationally and in Bradford. They are specifically important to know about in relation to our work and programmes at the museum, as an organisation designed to support education and equity in our society.

I am making changes in my practice as the museum's archivist in response. Part of my role is to develop NSMM's research library, making it more accessible for visitors and engaging more colleagues with its development. We have decided to make books and resources that were suggested via the BNMP reading group available in NSMM's research library, so that it, better reflects current issues and trends in museum practice and that the museum works with and responds too. This interaction and involvement has been important in moving the research library towards being more representative of both colleagues' and the museum's focus and programmes. I'm now working on plans to offer digital access to library resources, thereby opening up access as widely as possible. I hope the activities generated by colleagues through the BNMP, including the reading group, continue to be supported as they offer an important forum for sharing, independent thinking, and development of our museum practice.

Listening to Claire

I recognise the lack of time Claire talks about. I started off coming to the staff group meetings, but with everything that has happened this year, I couldn't continue.

Cathy Pilkington
Communications Officer

It sounds like the meetings where they were discussing books and podcast sat in a space which wasn't museum-led or project-led, which created a little bit of freedom. In our other meetings there is always an agenda and a set of tasks, and then on to the next meeting. There is no space to chat about ideas or be creative away from senior management or immediate delivery needs.

Bex Hill
Festivals and Cinema Events Coordinator

The kind of thing we do naturally is to share what we read and watch, but we don't always connect these to our practice as a museum. A space to do this would be useful.

Phil Oates
Communications Manager

It resonates with me what Claire says about being on the periphery of the Bradford's National Museum project and still taking some things away from the project. Just by being involved in the conversations, learning has filtered through and influenced our processes.

Kathryn Penny
Head of Screen Operation

I started working at the National Science and Media Museum when Bradford's National Museum Project was in its early stages. The themes at the heart of the project, of collaboration and exploration, resonated with me. Throughout my career I've sought to create opportunities to share and experience archives and libraries, in more recent years in a museum setting.

My background is as a professional archivist, working with a range of collections including business, local authority and ecclesiastical archives. I then moved from archive practitioner to strategic sector development, being archive lead for Museums Libraries and Archives Yorkshire, (strategic work now delivered by The National Archives and Arts Council England). Working for Leeds Museums & Galleries as archivist then gave me a great opportunity to broaden my knowledge, gaining hands on museum experience. I'm currently lead for archives and libraries at the museum, with a core part of my work delivering access to NSMM's incredible collections. BNMP has influenced our work at the museum, whether directly in terms of working practices or engagement and development as an employee. The participatory and collaborative elements of the project have changed how I see my role and priorities at the museum, which I look forward to actioning going forward.



Elizabeth Llabres

Bradford Museums & Galleries (BMG) were part of the research project from quite early on. Myself and my colleague, John, we're involved in early discussions regarding how BMG and their collections could be involved in, and link up with, the Bradford's National Museum Project. It felt like an excellent opportunity to develop new connections and relationships with all the other local partner organisations and people involved.



Above the Noise Opening Night, 14 March 2019. National Science and Media Museum, Bradford. Image credit: Anna Bridson for National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

As we had hoped, the project has given myself and John the chance to meet people that we hadn't connected with before. We've been able to spread these network links wider throughout BMG. We introduce colleagues to the wider project group, link similar projects, and enable joint up activity, which will hopefully have ongoing impact.

From the outset, we believed the project could help the service to change and grow, and hopefully drive change in the museum and heritage sector locally. Organisations and communities in the district are beginning to connect with and recognise the worth and value of Bradford's museum collections. Those who work for BMG have always known about the diversity, quality and importance of material held by them, but on a local and national level this wasn't known much about before.

I feel very positive about the new connections and relationships being built. I also appreciated how we were accepted by the National Science and Media Museum as a major participating partner, rather than a lesser supporting organisation that doesn't play a role on a national scale. BMG has been seen for the value the service adds to the district; the skills and significant collections it holds.

The project to me demonstrated the significant added value collaboration brings and how well it can work. The challenge now is to continue this essential and important process and maintain those connections and mutually valued partnerships across the organisations, groups and individuals involved.

Listening to Elizabeth

Elizabeth sounds very positive about the new connections she made through the project. Sometimes I think Bradford Museums & Galleries might work in similar internal bubbles to us. Our departments and teams can work quite individually, maybe it is the same for them. I can find it quite comforting when I hear that other places have similar problems to us, but that they also come together and change that. They seem to be on a similar page or journey to us, to want to change and want to work in new ways.

From what she says it particularly stuck with me that she appreciated that the Science and Media Museum worked with them as an equal partner. In our team and department, we are very conscious not to frame relationships in a tier like structure, by prestige or importance. I am really happy to hear that other teams seem to do the same.

Reading Elizabeth’s piece was nice because it is positive and encouraging. Other moments I read were more about the museum being inaccessible or how we are not having the right conversations. And it is very important to hear what we need to do better. But it is also useful to hear where we are on the right path, what we do that we need to do more of.

Bex Hill
Festivals and Cinema Events Coordinator

I began my museum career over 13 years ago. I’ve worked in a variety of roles for regional and national organisations, historic houses and local authority. I started out in finance and quickly moved in to collections and curatorial roles as my career, passion and interest developed. Although I’ve worked with every type of museum collection, I particularly enjoy working with social history and Industrial heritage collections.

I’m passionate about the objects and the unique stories they each hold. I enjoy meeting individuals who have fascinating stories to tell and I love collections management and working hands on with the objects. The collections at Bradford Museums and Galleries are an incredible resource and have so much to offer.

Working with the Bradford’s National Museum project has allowed BMG to further promote and highlight it’s incredible collections and the amazing skills and knowledge that sit within the BMG team. John and I working together as the BMG leads on this project, has enabled us to open up the collections to new audiences and organisations. We have developed new network links and sector friendships that I’m sure will be long lasting and invaluable as we move in to the next stages of Bradford’s cultural development.



Geoff Belknap

In 2018, when I first started as Head Curator at the National Science and Media Museum, I started to experience how decisions are made in a complex and large set of institutions. Taking on a position with authority and responsibility in the museum prompted me to ask: how do we make change in a large institution? Changing how a museum collaborates with people is a process which requires not just changing how the museum works, but also changing how we understand the value and purpose of collaboration. In other words, it requires a culture change. The primary thing I have learned is that a culture change requires advocates.

An institution is ultimately just a community of people who make decisions based on their experience, authority and perspectives, shaped and defined within the boundaries of the structures and processes that have been put in place – sometimes by those same communities, and sometimes by their predecessors. This became especially clear to me when I was working with colleagues from across the Science Museum Group, to develop the content and narrative for two new galleries we have called ‘Sound & Vision’. While this was a project developed by internal stakeholders, it was also a project with big ambitions to work with new audiences and to put community participation, not just at the core of the galleries, but at the core of the museum. Working on ‘Sound & Vision’ required me to work in different ways – not only to be more collaborative, but also to argue for the value of collaboration as a core principle of the project.

To change the culture of a museum, so that barriers for participation with people who are not employed by the institution are broken down, you need to have advocates for this at different levels within the institutional hierarchy. Often programmes for broadening inclusion have the strongest advocates in staff at the start of their careers. Their advocacy for change is critical to bringing it on to the agenda. However, for any change to take root, you also need staff within established positions of authority to advocate for change as well. Structure, culture and power dynamics can only change when ultimately enough of an institution understands and sees the value in making that change.

One of the most effective ways to encourage a large institution to change how it works is to demonstrate and advocate for the value of this change at every opportunity. On the Sound & Vision project this meant that when talking to colleagues and our executive about what collections we would use and what stories we would tell, we also spoke of what communities we would work with and how they would shape the galleries as a whole.

Opening up the museum to external communities takes trust, time and shared values. To build this, you need advocates both inside and out who are willing to work with each other to collectively learn how to navigate the different priorities, responsibilities and expectations of the institution, staff and collaborators.

Listening to Geoff

I think what Geoff articulating is his theory of change. I think he is thinking about how structural change comes about through lots of people having conversations and networks until it can somehow tip over and then structural change can happen.

Helen Graham
Project Facilitator

I recently celebrated twenty years at the museum. As a former “young advocate”, yes it does gets exhausting. At that time, I would argue (like all older men), it used to be tougher. There was a sense of ‘if our language doesn’t suit you, this isn’t for you’. I remember, we had to argue to increase the font size on labels in our exhibitions and galleries to make it big enough to read. The information was more important than the legibility. I think we’ve come a long way. But any organisation is also a collective of individuals. Now we have a different set of personalities in higher-up positions, who can actually turn the wheels. I believe we are all committed to change. But leadership through change is difficult if you are the person who has the expertise to turn the wheel, and instead of just getting on with it as usual, you are saying that we need to collaborate with those who have different expertise locally to actually do it with us.

Dean Loughran
Head of Operations

I would like to add the importance of not falling into pre-conceived ideas of what change is and what ‘communities’ want. I am also thinking about the restrictions of being an institution and how it’s a long-term commitment to establish relationships that allow people to open and say things that don’t fit into our pre-conceived ideas.

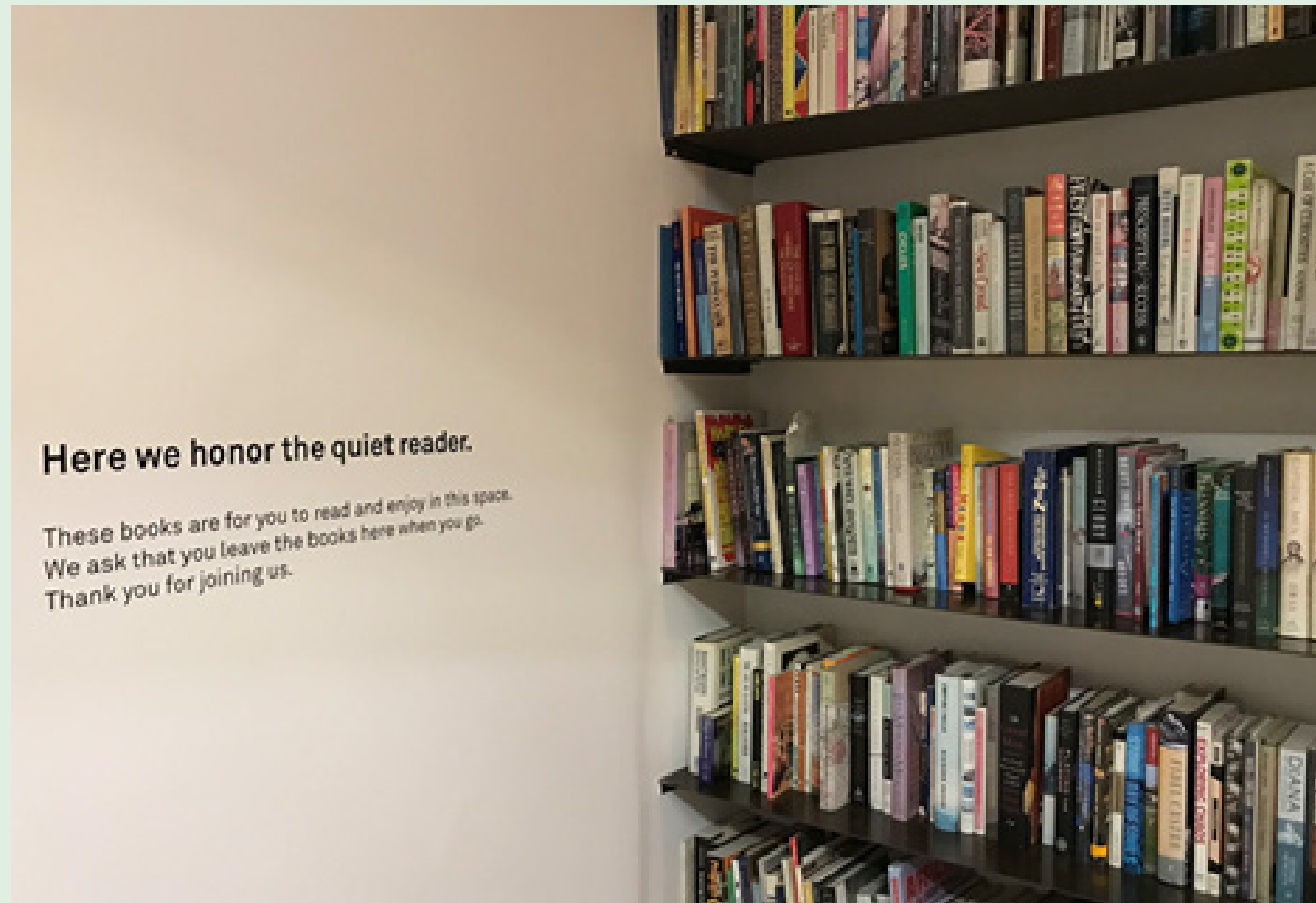
Nadine Loach
Registrar

I’m the Head Curator at the National Science and Media Museum and a historian of photography, science and visual culture of the 19th century. In my role I manage a team of curators and archivists to collect, display and research photography, film, television and sound technologies, as well as informing the broader curatorial and collections research strategy for the Science Museum Group.

Previously I have been the curator of photography and photographic technology at NSMM and worked for the Universities of Leicester and Harvard as a post-doctoral researcher. My first monograph, *From a Photograph*, was published in 2016 with Bloomsbury Press on the history of photography in 19th century periodical publication.



The Bradford National Museum Project (BNMP) has been a significantly insightful moment of reflection. Through the project I was able to more clearly recognise how our museum, the National Science and Media Museum (part of the bigger Science Museum Group) is set up around a hierarchical structure, which makes it difficult for staff to work collaboratively in Bradford.



Library corner at Stoney Island Arts Bank, Chicago.
Image credit: Gin Jacobucci

It was through conversations in the BNMP Staff Group that I became more aware of this issue and its impacts. We are a group of self-selecting colleagues committed to exploring how the organisation can work collaboratively and be more rooted in Bradford. The group was set up to reflect on and embed learnings following our Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford exhibition, and then continued to meet to explore how we could embed collaborative practice within our ways of working long-term.

To do this we used action research. As a group, we contributed to refining the project's overall research questions to reflect what we had learned from creating the Above the Noise exhibition. We then each did a series of very simple practical tasks, or experimental actions, to bring to light more knowledge about how these questions related to our individual professional practice and how we each can practically live the relationship of our museum with Bradford.

We had regular meetings to report on our experiments and to reflect together on what we learned. Working together we were able to start developing and articulating our own local interpretation and understanding of the wider Science Museum Group (SMG) mission and values, ultimately identifying and shaping our shared identity within the bigger organisational framework. This was particularly important as it rooted the SMG mission and values in our living community and context and created that important link between the national and local context.

In these sessions we had the time to explore local and national, social and political issues and histories that are wider than the practicalities of each of our roles, but significantly frame our work. Through learning more about these contexts we created more complex understandings of our roles and their potential within our wider community in Bradford. We were also able to define a sense of shared values with colleagues from different teams across the museum.

All this work felt very energising. We started to own our work and its impact more personally, creating connections internally within our museum, as well as within Bradford, ultimately allowing our work to become more meaningful. It also gave us the confidence to offer and better articulate potential alternatives to existing organisational decision-making processes that impact collaborative working.

Listening to Gin

I hear Gin talking about the monolith that the Science Museum Group feels like to her. I wanted to know more, in what ways did she find it difficult to work collaboratively? I am also interested to hear more about how she experimented and tried simple things in the staff group.

She starts her piece off with feeling constrained by a hierarchical structure and then there is a positive message that they were able to understand their position in the group better. She ends on a confident note, it sounds like she felt energized. She might have gone through a process and came out feeling a little bit more powerful than before. There is a sense of agency that they were given. It sounds like there was power in the group of staff members exploring how the organisation can change, in the practical steps they found.

I remember there being talk throughout the BNMP of people feeling empowered to explore and have discussions and possibly challenge the norms. There is a collective power in working together with others.

When you read Gin’s and Wahida’s piece together you can see that from a museum perspective it might feel that we have made leaps and bounds in terms of working on diversity and in collaboration with Bradford, but for somebody who is outside the organisation it might feel that there is far to go until we are not tokenistic in what we do.

Megan Thomas
Group Head of Special Projects

Hello, my name is Gin. I am the Volunteer Coordinator at the National Science and Media Museum. I joined the museum in 2018 where I look after its volunteering programme.

Over the years I have done lots of volunteering which I have used to explore and discover new interests and passions and to connect me to the places I have visited and lived in. I am passionate to create and offer those same opportunities, transforming the museum from within, by making it a place for people to meet and connect.

I love the outdoors and the company of animals just as much as a good book and delicious food.



When we heard from Will Gould about the project it seemed like a really fantastic opportunity and I wanted our girls to be involved. But it was quite frustrating at times. For the first 6 or 9 months of our work on the project we had been developing an idea that turned out to be not quite what was wanted for the exhibition. Because there was a commitment to co-producing the exhibition, what the exhibition was – and therefore what was needed from us – was quite fluid. For us, actually just being told what was needed would have been more helpful. Time was finite and there was a sense of wasted time, resources and energy.



Pupils from the Belle Vue Girls' Academy with teacher, Hal Michaels and project team member, Will Gould, at Above the Noise, Opening Night, 14 March 2019, National Science and Media Museum, Bradford. Image credit: Anna Bridson for National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum

When Nabeelah came on board things started to come together. Nabeelah took what had been done and edited it into the end result. The process Nabeelah used worked really well for some students, but less well for others and some students lost interest. But it was when we were invited to come into the museum to see the first cut of the film, and accessed areas that visitors can't usually enter, that the girls really took notice. The private screening of the long cut was huge and it was a very moving evening. So many of the parents were there to see what their daughters had done. That was powerful. It was a shame that not every students' film had been included in the edit and that we were not aware of this in advance of the screening. However, everyone was ultimately mentioned on the panel in the exhibition.

For the future we would be interested in collaborating on exhibitions and events. It helps inspire the girls and to show them what they can do. But there is a balance between co-construction and having a strategic plan. In working with schools, it is best to just give us clear directions and then we know what we have to achieve. What really matters is the sense of being part of a special space.



Belle Vue Girls' Academy pupils. Image credit: Nabeelah Hafeez

Listening to Hal

There are many ways for museum to collaborate, with differing approaches to decision making. Handing over all decision-making power to collaborators is one model, but that is not always the right thing. Instead, it depends on what you want to get out of a collaboration.

It sounds like Hal and the young women enjoyed the feeling of being part of something special and they needed to know the boundaries they were working within. This reaffirms to me that collaboration or participatory practice in museums is about negotiating what each side wants and needs. They wanted direction, and freedom within the directions that were given.

From what I hear Hal say he thinks the collaboration was even more about the process of working together, of being involved, than it was about outcomes, the exhibition itself. If the process, and openness about boundaries and the decision making, would have been better, their involvement would have felt even more of a success.

Chris Whitby
Audience Research Manager

I've been an Assistant Head and teacher of History at Belle Vue Girls' Academy for over 18 years now. Over that time I've had the privilege to work with many exceptional students, many of whom have developed into truly inspiring 'women of tomorrow'.

A few years ago we were approached by Professor William Gould of Leeds University with an opportunity to contribute to the 'Above the Noise' exhibition. It proved to be an incredible journey, one which those students who took part will never forget.

I've long been passionate about museums and their place in our communities so it's been great to be able to play some part in helping my students create their own exhibit whilst also fostering closer ties with the National Science and Media Museum. I'm excited to see how we can continue to grow this relationship in the mutual interests of all involved.



Helen Langwick

If we were to do Bradford’s National Museum Project again, I would suggest that the midpoint output is not a temporary exhibition but rather a series of smaller pop-up events and installations. There are three reasons for this:

Temporary Exhibitions are Temporary

Temporary exhibitions look at different subject matters, target different audiences, and work with different partners intensively for a short period. Then, by their very nature, they move on to the next subject/audience/set of partners. A well-structured ‘Forward Programme’ (which the National Science and Media Museum lacked at the time) can integrate temporary exhibitions into the day-to-day work of the museum, but even in this instance they remain short-term and discrete. Temporary exhibitions are, therefore, temporary and do not readily lend themselves to driving systemic change.



Visitors enjoying the museum’s temporary Wonderlab Live exhibition. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group



Visitors enjoying the museum’s temporary Wonderlab Live exhibition. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

The museum doesn’t think of its audiences in terms of locality

Our audience segmentation is primarily motivation-based and not geographic or demographic. Yet Above the Noise, with its focus on locality, cut across in ways which were not helpful, particularly as the organisation was new to the segmentation model. This created a strategic mismatch between the audience development strategy and the trajectory of the Bradford’s National Museum work.

From exhibitions towards Installations

The format and position of the exhibition within the ‘Forward Programme’ meant it was not able to flex to the new kinds of working Bradford’s National Museum project was trying to explore. Failure was not an option. It had to service the conventional operating and economic model. It was supposed to look like an exhibition, drive repeat audiences, new audiences and spend per head like any other temporary exhibition.

A challenge here was that some of the normal scaffolding for delivering such an exhibition was removed in order to enable the show to be more experimental. Yet because, at the same time it also was too big to fail, the scope for experimentation was also limited – limiting precisely the qualities that were important to the aims of Bradford’s National Museum. It therefore ended up as a bad compromise on both counts and ended up putting quite a lot of strain on the teams attempting to deliver the exhibition.

A better model would have been to do something in addition to the normal ‘Forward Programme’ not as a replacement to the usual exhibition. Taking away the expectations of carrying the requirements of the economic model would have meant that the project could have failed. It could have carried less risk by being smaller and more ‘pop-up’, focusing less on delivering content and more on being interactive and experimental. This would have released creativity.

During Covid-19 the removal of normal expectations has allowed the team to experiment with new ways of approaching exhibitions as installations. This new range of installations have proved to be very useful in demonstrating that tweaks to the more traditional mainstays of the programme can be introduced. These new installations are pop-up, low cost and low risk and may have been a more suitable mode for the Bradford’s National Museum Project.

Responses to
Helen’s Moments
continues >

Listening to Helen

Why is a pop-up different from an exhibition? The question is what the size and focus of the exhibition is. Temporary exhibitions are the museum’s best way to billboard what they care about. Our exhibitions programme is our visible public set of identity markers. If you make an exhibition about anti-racism it is a big sign.

My experience of experimental exhibitions is that the public didn’t take them as experiments, but as an exhibition about slavery, for example. The The Past is Now exhibition at Birmingham Museums changed things about the museum sector. It was small, but it was about how what was squished in there was framed and talked about. There is a sense in what Helen is saying that they might be lesser, but they don’t have to be.

Phillip Roberts
Associate Curator of Photography
and Photographic Technology

I lead the Exhibitions and Interpretation Team at the National Science and Media Museum and I am really enjoying being part of an institution that dares to dream and is thinking creatively about its collections, its audience and its place in the North and the World.

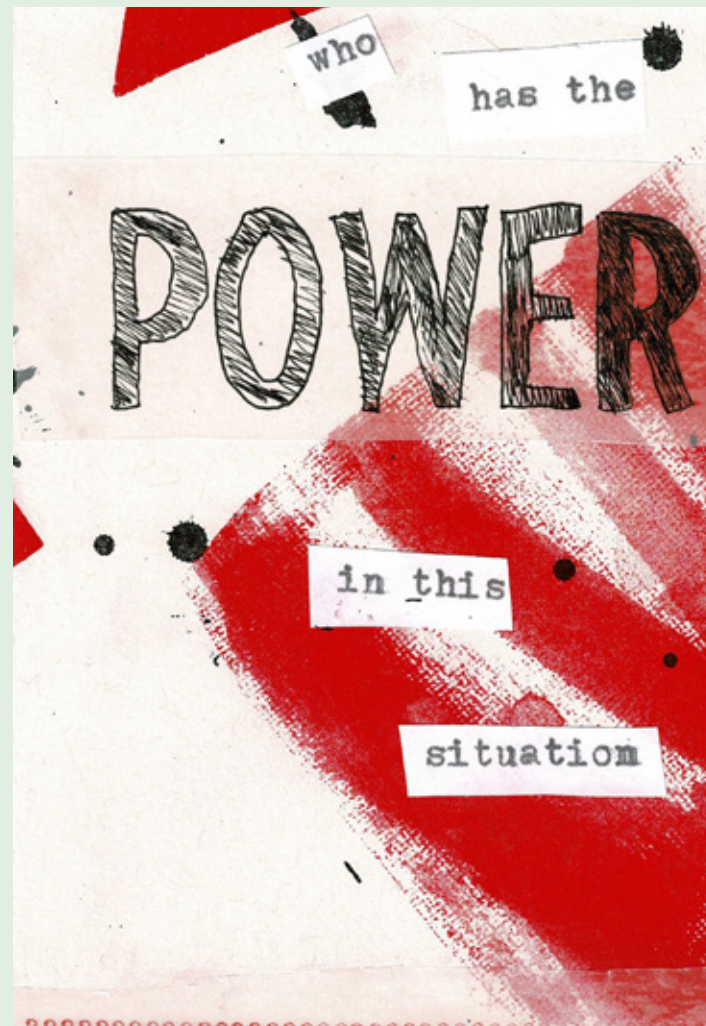
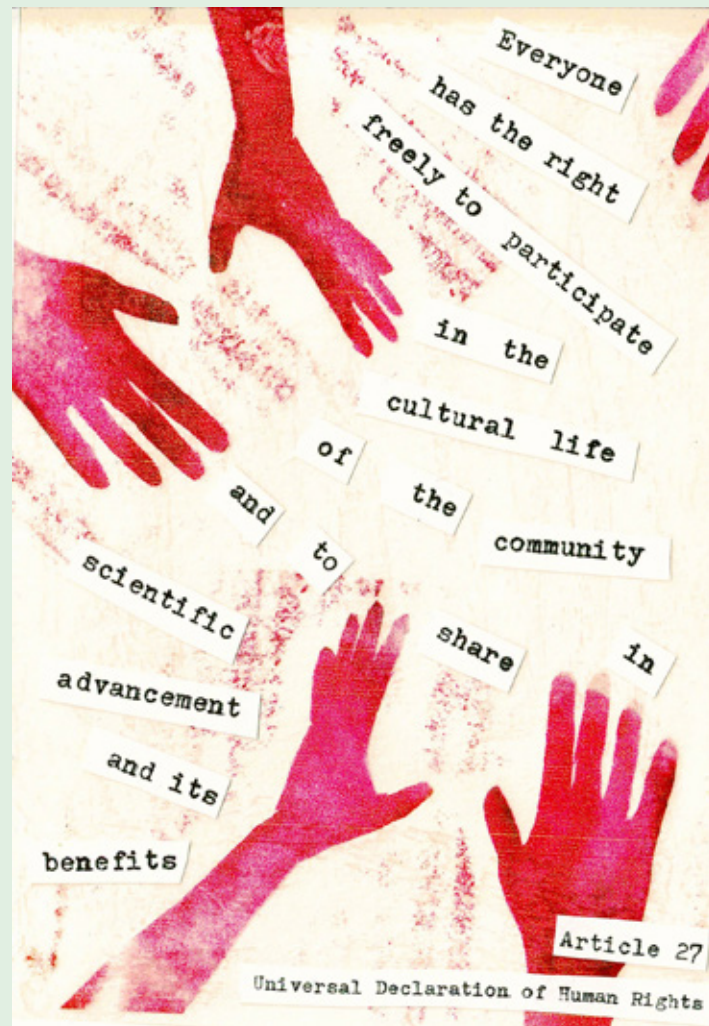
My career began at Household Cavalry Museum and then I headed north to Leeds Museums and Galleries. I worked for a brief spell with the Audience Agency before joining the Royal Armouries and then moved on to York Museum Trust. This path has, so far, given me a rounded view of several disciplines ranging from interpretation, curation, project management, partnership brokering, audience research and the development and delivery of exhibitions. I am truly passionate about my work, as being dyslexic, museums formed a major part of my education when sitting in a classroom wasn’t enough. I love to tell a good story and get all nerdy about how this magnificent world we live in works and connects.

I have an MA in Museums Studies from the University of Leicester and a BA (hons) in History from the same institution.



Culture is a human right. Everyone has an equal right to express it on their own terms, without permission or approval.

If we choose to take this rights-based approach to culture seriously, it requires that when there is a collaboration to produce something creative, everyone participating has an equal say in what happens and how it happens. For me, being an artist working with people and communities comes with a responsibility to create the conditions for equal participation as much as I can.



Mixed media artworks by Jean McEwan.

As I reflect on my experience of supporting community members to tell their family photography stories in the Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford exhibition, some questions arise, and I begin to re-imagine... I wonder what would have happened if instead of us having to respond to the museum's systems and deadlines, which created some barriers and negative experiences, the project had been done differently from the outset. How would this have affected my own experience as a collaborator, and the community participants I was working with?

What would have happened if...?

1. The museum had taken cultural democracy as its starting point, and its methodology. With recognition that everyone working on the project is equal.
2. Before embarking on the project, the museum had engaged in a process of dialogue and learning with community partners, to come to a deep understanding about the different skills, knowledges, and ways of working that community collaborators possess, and for these to lead the process.
3. All of the people (the institution, research team, community practitioners, participants) were involved from the very start, and discussed negotiated and agreed together the project's outcomes, parameters, themes and timescales. That the hopes and expectations of all collaborators were heard, and addressed.
4. That different experiences and skills were recognised, and valued.
5. The systems and processes to support the process were devised in response to the needs of all of those contributing, and were clear, transparent, accountable and flexible?
6. That there was an acknowledgement of institutional power, and a commitment to understanding and addressing power relations throughout the process?

Working in this way requires an active commitment to, and trust in, the people and the process; being flexible around systems and procedures, and a vigilance around how power is working, and choices are being made. It requires actively finding ways to flatten hierarchies, and a willingness to dismantle systems which don't serve the people or the process, and to redesign these if need be.

If these things are built in from the beginning, then we can create conditions for work which is genuinely and authentically co-produced with communities.

[Responses to Jean's Moments continues >](#)

Listening to Jean

These are all things the museum could have done. The idea to take a lead in to discuss the methodology, sort relationships out, get expectations in place would be very valuable. But I also see that time scales for exhibition projects make that very difficult. Which does not mean it shouldn't be done but is challenging to do. You would need to hire more staff, which would make us a better museum.

There is an extent to which the Bradford's National Museum project hasn't impacted the internal workings of the museum. Partly because the museum is not willing to change structures. That is what I see in Jean's and Helen Langwick's pieces, the difference between what we should do and how the museum is set up.

Phillip Roberts
Associate Curator of Photography
and Photographic Technology

I am a Bradford-based visual artist and facilitator who has been working across visual, curatorial, collaborative, research and socially engaged practices for over 15 years in Bradford and beyond. My participatory practice, informed by my previous career as a community worker, creates spaces for meaningful connections between people.

I am founder of 'Wur Bradford' ("Wur" means 'our or 'we are') a responsive arts project set up in 2015 to explore how creativity can connect, inspire and empower people. I am also co-creator, with Bev Morton, of the 'My Next Chapter for Creatives' programme.

www.jeanmcewan.com



Jo Quinton-Tulloch

National museums outside of London are different. I didn't fully appreciate this until I came to Bradford.

In London a large percentage of visitors are international tourists, making a once-in-a-lifetime visit to a must-see gallery. Outside of London, museum visitors and their motivations for visiting are quite different. Grappling with the context of a museum and its relationship with its audiences, is key to unlocking its full potential.



Bradford and Chicago: Community Co-Creation Exchange, 20th November 2019, Stony Island Arts Bank. Photo credit: Erik Peterson

Our Museum was established in a serendipitous way; Bradford wasn't chosen as its location in 1983 because of an exceptionally strong heritage in photography, film or broadcast technologies. There isn't a particularly strong intellectual connection to 'place' or a historical narrative that provides a relationship between the collections and our city. Yet the Museum has undoubtably established its roots. How do we strengthen and nourish them?

As part of our research we visited Chicago, where there is a strong history of activism and of grassroots organisations that have successfully addressed imbalances of power. It was inspiring – and at the same time frustrating. I recognised that these smaller, independent, self-organised groups and organisations were able to achieve radical change, in part because of their flexibility and nimbleness.

At one moment, Faheem, the director of the Floating Museum (an art collective that creates new models, working on site specific projects across the city – the antithesis of our museum) talked about strengths and limitations:

“You're not going to change the museum – it took hundreds of years to get here, it's not going to change in one lifespan. You need to understand the limitations that are in place because of the institution. Each organisation/individual has a different type of institution, with its individual limitations. But the limitations have to be on the table with all our hopes and dreams. Be honest about the limitations.”

His point was that in knowing your limitations you can work effectively with them. And even more importantly, be clear about the limitations when embarking on a partnership. Other organisations can be more nimble and flexible; can make decisions and respond more quickly; and operate in ways that we cannot. But we have other strengths. We have relatively secure national funding, we have historically significant collections and high-profile exhibitions, we are part of a Group that brings resource and expertise, we have a national platform that connects us to other national and international platforms, we have our international networks of museums and researchers. We can bring all of this to the work we do, aligning with and complementing the work of other organisations within the rich Bradford cultural ecosystem.

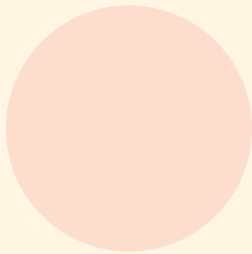
Listening to Jo

Reading Jo’s piece, I hear the feeling so many of us in the museum experience, of how difficult it is to hold the tensions of a local agenda, while being a national institution. So many of us working in the museum encounter that tension in our day-to-day practice.

Jo recognises that there is an organisational context that does restrain our ability to do a number of things as a national museum. But I like the idea of focusing on the positive that enables, on our strengths, on what we can bring to Bradford. Because we are national, we bring to the table things like connections to certain national structures, important international collections, funding and other things.

Jo’s words for me are part of us trying to talk more openly and be more transparent about the tensions people working in the museum have to negotiate, about the reality of the tensions that exist, and how we are trying to see them all as strengths.

Gin Jacobucci
Volunteers Coordinator



I’m the director of the National Science and Media Museum. I’ve always loved science, but following a degree in Biological Sciences, I wasn’t so passionate about doing science research. I was more interested in the implications and applications of science and technology – how and why it is relevant to everyone; how it affects our lives.

After completing a Masters in Science Communication, I realised that museums provide the most exciting ways of engaging the widest number of different people with science and technology. I started my career as an Explainer at the Science Museum in London where I experienced first-hand the power of objects and hands-on, interactive experiences. My career has involved delivering world class galleries and exhibitions, including being part of the team that created and launched the National Maritime Museum Cornwall. I moved to Bradford in 2012, where my focus has been to forge new sustainable partnerships across the district and region which reposition the Museum as a centre of excellence in STEM learning. And I’ve been inspired by Bradford and the opportunities that come from living and working in such a dynamic and vibrant place. It is essential that we provide opportunities to inspire the next generation of scientists and technologists, so that we continue to develop our science base and knowledge. I don’t think everyone needs to become a scientist – although we definitely need to diversify our science workforce. But I do believe it is important that everyone has confidence around science and that science is not seen as elitist. Our world is driven by science and technology, and we need to be able to question how, where and why we use it.



When I was first asked to take part in the Above the Noise exhibition, I felt quite nervous about what I could contribute and what form that would take. I suppose I questioned the validity of my experience.

My parents were Irish and had passed on, and the Irish community that had been such a big part of my childhood had begun to dwindle by the 1980s. In Bradford, many catholic churches saw declining numbers, children tended to ‘marry out’ and Irish pubs and clubs became less popular (the last Bradford Irish Club was finally closed and sold in 2016).



My parents Mary and Patrick Mulvehill with daughter Bridget, Bedford, England 1960. Image credit: Joan Russell.
Ceilidh at the Queens Hall, arranged by Luke Kearns and the Irish Club 1985. Photo by Joan Russell
mage credit: Joan Russell
Brian and Elizabeth McGrory (my great aunt and uncle) Monaghan, Ireland 1984. Photo by Joan Russell. Image credit: Joan Russell



Taking part in the exhibition made me look at my family and their experience in a more focussed way and I became more confident that this story could be of interest to people. I felt this even more when I worked with the others in my group (two sisters with Jamaican heritage and a Scottish artist). It was so fascinating listening to their stories and comparing our experiences. You really began to feel that you were part of a community.

It was wonderful to work together and see everybody’s lives and heritage laid out in photographs, objects and mementos, and to be a part of the creative process that would turn all of that into something that people would look at on the walls of a National Museum.

The museum staff really listened to each person’s story; I felt like we were all ‘heard’. They took care to try to present each person’s contribution in a way that matched their vision as closely as possible. It really felt like a relationship was being built between the museum (staff) and ourselves. This was in part a personal one, because we were disclosing our family histories, which requires an amount of trust, and in part, a professional one, of mutual respect in working towards a fixed goal and contributing to the structure of the exhibition.

There are very few public places where people of different backgrounds can really mix and exchange ideas, and work together creatively to build something. This felt like the beginning of something exciting, a feeling further strengthened on the opening night.

This was the best moment for me – just to see the wide range of people that had come together to share this public space and see the exhibition. I know that museums are very keen to be inclusive and appeal to all but, more often than not, they are frequented by white, middle-class people, while anybody else often doesn’t feel quite as at home there. It was just wonderful to see such different groups of people from every culture and community of Bradford – families, groups of friends, children with their grandparents – all so excited to see their family’s stories on the walls. These are the ordinary, extraordinary people of Bradford and I hope that the museum becomes the kind of place that feels like it is theirs.

Listening to Joan

It was interesting to read what Joan says about the Irish community in Bradford. I learned a lot from that paragraph. I didn't know about their history as a minority in Bradford.

I really like how Joan captures the feeling of connection when working on Above the Noise. One of the best moments of my career was at a small museum in Skipton where we made an exhibition about Islamic art with the Muslim Museum Initiative. I'll never forget the energy on the opening night. Joan's piece reminded me of this feeling when you are in a space together and there is a sense of the power of sharing. It felt like such a good thing museums can achieve. Joan describes this electricity and energy she shared with the people she was working with. I should think that this feeling is completely unique to an exhibition process that focuses on bringing people together. Here it sounds like there was space and time to share stories, to discover connections we didn't know were there, and present on gallery what was created together.

It is really great to know Joan felt heard, that in this process each person was being taken seriously and given time. There is always a worry in collaborative projects that partners we work with pour their hearts into it, and then the result is changed for whatever reason before it goes on the walls in an exhibition, and the intended vision or message gets lost.

Martin Wills
Project Client Manager

I became interested in photography from quite a young age. I loved the idea that you could frame the world to match your view... could capture that moment and keep it for all time. I eventually got a place on the Documentary Photography course at Newport College in Wales. It was during that two year period that I began to photograph the Irish community. It was still a relatively thriving scene then, with a well attended Irish club, Irish dance classes, Catholic churches and schools. It was wonderful, as well, to link up with and photograph my family in Monaghan at that time.

After leaving college I secured a job at a Press Agency in Bradford. The agency supplied photographic coverage of events in Yorkshire for the (regional and national) newspapers of the time so there was a lot of travelling involved and very tight deadlines. In those pre-internet days we would have to get the photographs shot and printed, and sent on a train to London (where the film or prints would be picked up by a courier from the newspaper) in the same day. It was very exciting but somewhat stressful.

After working for myself for a number of years I began working for Shipley College, shooting their promotional pictures, supporting students with their learning and also teaching evening classes in photography. I hope to visit Ireland more regularly and pick up where I left off all those years ago.



John Ashton

The opportunity to highlight, widen knowledge of and increase accessibility to one of our important photographic collections, the Belle Vue Studio Archive, was eagerly anticipated and ultimately did not disappoint. To do so in an atmosphere of true collaboration was perhaps the most significant and hopefully long lasting principle the project provided.



A Bangladeshi family pose for a family portrait at the Belle Vue Studio in Manningham, a popular place to have pictures taken to send back home. Image credit: Bradford Museums and Galleries

Little were we to realise how vital it was to become in succeeding months. It was hugely effective in giving us some of the skills required to embark on future collaborative journeys and, more importantly, it instilled in us a confidence that such strategies work; resulting in positive outcomes and long-lasting partnerships, particularly during these difficult times. Putting it bluntly, good things can come from a speculative phone call or email, to colleagues within the council and agencies beyond. Also, the more people you work with, the more people know who you are. In this respect, I wholeheartedly echo Elizabeth's comments about the value of collaboration.

While the excellent Above The Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford exhibition and our involvement in it was one of the highlights of the whole project for me, I'd like to mention a smaller, certainly shorter, activity as an example of effective collaboration between institutions within the project. This was a joint Bradford Industrial Museum and Nation Science and Media Museum public afternoon event. It began with a talk and activities in the exhibition section about the Belle Vue archive at NSMM, and was followed by a double decker bus ride to the Industrial Museum, via the former Belle Vue Studio in Manningham. Activities at the Industrial Museum included a guided tour of the exhibition Studio to Selfie (which included some Belle Vue Studio portraits) and Bradford Museums Photo Archive. Refreshments were included. Feedback from this event was most positive. To me it demonstrated how such joint planning can produce an activity which is unusual, quirky even, and unachievable by an institution working alone. And it wasn't that difficult!



Listening to John

When I read about the trip John talks about, I thought of how I didn't know about any of this going on. It made me think of how much we work in our own little bubbles in the museum. We don't know necessarily what happens in other parts of the museum relationship or events-wise.

It would be great to talk more to each other about what's happening, to not get just bogged down in our own work. All our meetings are action and agenda-focused, there is not much space for informal chats and discussions. But we need that space for collaborative working and thinking, and for relationship building. Sometimes informal discussions used to happen in our kitchen when making a cup of tea. Now that we all work from home, how can we replace those cup of tea moments?

I agree with John good things can come from a speculative email or phone call. I am by nature quite introverted, and when I am reaching out to make new connections, I question myself a bit. It's quite nice to hear him say that good things can come from putting yourself out there. It sounds like he was hesitant at first, but more experience made him more confident in reaching out, I really relate to that.

Bex Hill
Festivals and Cinema Events Coordinator

Originally a teacher for twenty years in several Bradford middle schools, a change of direction and a period of retraining in graphic design brought me to Bradford Museums and Galleries. This was initially as a volunteer, then as a freelancer working on various exhibitions and projects connected with the photo archive at Bradford Industrial Museum. In 2012 I came into my current role as Photo Archive Assistant.

I'm responsible for the day to day running of the archive which involves dealing with a wide range of enquiries from colleagues and the wider public. I also spend a good deal of time digitising original negatives from our collections and uploading them to our website so they can be viewed online. The photo archive supports almost all the exhibitions on our sites.

I am a keen photographer myself, specialising in sport, particularly rugby (both codes). I've photographed at grounds all over Yorkshire and beyond and for several seasons I've been the resident home photographer for Doncaster Knights Rugby Club. I also provide photographs for Yorkshire RFU. My work has been published in several magazines and websites.

On Instagram I'm @ickledot.



Mary Dowson

Mary Dowson originally audio recorded her ‘moment’ for our online publication. Here is a transcript of her words.

I’m Mary Dowson and I work at BCB, the Community Radio Station here in Bradford. I’m a regular visitor at the museum and I have been in all its iterations. Film is a big part of my life, so sitting in Pictureville Cinema has been one of the joys of the last 25 years.

I’ve been part of the National Museum project right from the start. I was really interested personally, and professionally, in this question of how a National Museum can play a greater part in the life of Bradford and its communities, and how Bradford communities can have a more meaningful role in the life of a museum.

So, I’ve been asked to reflect on a particular moment in the project and the moment I’m going to talk about is something very early on in the project that made a lasting impression on me and in many ways is at the heart of that big question that we’re asking.

One day, very early on in the project, I came to the Museum for a meeting. I was taken up and up the stairs, right up to the 7th floor. I was then swiped through and let in through these solid white doors, that I have to say, I never noticed before. I entered into something that I can only describe as feeling a bit like a Twilight Zone. I was astonished to see what seemed like rows and rows of people tightly squeezed in side by side, sitting at their workstations, focused on their screens in subdued lighting, almost in silence. All these people hidden away behind those white doors.

Who were they? What do they do? Why don’t we know them? Why don’t we know they exist? That was a really symbolic moment for me.

It was a feeling that there was this amazing resource of people in this room but it was almost like it was locked away, a windowless room, with no connection with Bradford or the world outside. Not even a view over the city of Bradford, to look at Bradford and its life and its people.

And I suppose, I started to recognise that really a museum is not a building, it can’t be. If we want communities to play that meaningful role it’s about relationships, and relationships are between people. So, we need to make sure somehow that all those people behind those white doors find a way to become connected with the people on the other side of the white doors, the people of Bradford. I’ve been through those doors many times since then but that first feeling hasn’t gone away.

How she was describing coming up to the office...it seems like we are so inaccessible. There are so many barriers to get to talking with us. It seems like a metaphor for all of the other barriers people might have.

Bex Hill
Festivals and Cinema Events Coordinator

I like that idea of starting conversations as your primary way of communicating. It's all about instigating those conversations... most of the things I have done have started through a conversation or happenstance.

Iain Hendry
Audience Developer

Mary's piece made me think of a time when you experimented on the project with inviting staff to have meetings in the Above the Noise exhibition. The reaction from staff was very mixed, some thought it would be off putting for visitors if we had work meetings in there.

Siobhan Devanny
Explainer Team Leader

I'm the Director and one of the founders of Bradford Community Broadcasting (BCB), a community organisation committed to bringing about social change. For over 25 years we've been broadcasting BCB Radio, the pioneering Community Radio station in Bradford. I grew up in a big family in South London, moving to Bradford in the late 1970s to study Peace Studies at the University. Since then, other than a couple of years living in Italy, I've made Bradford my home.

Before BCB, my background was in youth and community work, community education and teaching at Bradford College. Growing up without a TV, I developed a real passion for radio so the coming together of my two passions – community and radio – was a perfect fusion!

BCB is about providing the space, support and opportunity for everyone to have voice in the media, bringing together people from diverse communities, neighbourhoods, ages and life experiences to be part of BCB, using radio as a tool to create community both over the airwaves and within our building. I'm driven by a belief in people, their right to actively participate in all aspects of life, and finding ways of working together in Bradford to make this happen.



Maureen Rowe

Being asked to write this piece, I sat down to reflect on how I have engaged with the museum over the years and whether I have seen any changes happen, any progress being achieved.

I have been a regular visitor in the past. I have also collaborated with the museum on a few occasions. With my job as a youth worker, I worked on a WW2 generation video project with a group of young people. Several years ago, I participated in a project with my family.



Maureen Rowe and family.
Image credit: Julian Germain

The museum had an artist in residence at the time, Julian Germain, who took a picture of five generations of the women in my family. The portrait was part of an exhibition in the museum. In preparation we met a few times to discuss the processes and the style of photography. While that was an important piece of work, it was so different from being part of Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford. This project allowed me to be reflective, learn new skills, and feel very much part of the exhibition-making process that was taking place.

Fast-forward to the exhibition opening and that breath-taking moment when I had that realisation that it's real – that I, as a black woman, am represented in the museum, have my pictures on the walls for all to see, capturing the journey I have travelled as a woman with Jamaican heritage, and am still travelling.

Hopefully, this will encourage others from marginalised groups, who are new to the experience to see themselves and their culture in a national museum, to see it as a given, and task the museum to do more, be more inclusive. I had a moment of thinking, if we can be part of such an important piece of work, why did it take so long to be included? There is a need for the museum to look outwards in terms of their community programming and allowing marginalised communities to have a voice. The museum needs to embrace the rich and diverse cultures of its surrounding communities and allow visitors to experience this through their programme. For this narrative to move forward, we must explore people's vision of the museum and make it an institution that reflects the ever-changing society we live in.

Due to the success of this exhibition, there is a great possibility of moving forward with the equality agenda and positive representation for all.



Responses to
Maureen's Moments
continues >

Maureen Rowe with her family at the Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford launch.
Image credit: Maureen Rowe

Listening to Maureen

I hear pride, Maureen is proud. She doesn't sound like she is being patronised in any way, she feels the representation of her in the exhibition is truthful.

Martyn Lenton
Project Manager Exhibitions

Maureen mentions being happy about seeing herself in a national museum. Having to specify this points to a different history, says it is something that has not happened as much before.

Gin Jacobucci
Volunteers Coordinator

When Maureen says 'it was real' this seems to point that when she was involved in the past it maybe didn't feel authentic. This time being part of the exhibition achieved the goals it set out to do, instead of being watered down.

John Rooney
Operations Manager

The difference to the projects before seems to be that this time she was represented more strongly. It was her vision on display, rather than the photographer's vision. She recognises that there has been a lack of that in the museum. Her piece feels positive at the end, which is really nice.

Elaine Richmond
Partnership and Participation Manager

I have always had an interest in different art forms, whether it was visiting the museum or the theatre. I have always enjoyed the narrative and the journey that can be taken visually – the powerful messages that can be relayed through photographs. I have always been conscious about the connections between having only two photos of myself as a child and the collection of family photos.

I have participated in several projects within the museum such as the Five Generations project and Above the Noise: Fifteen Stories from Bradford. Above the Noise gave me a renewed interest in the preservation of my family history and my journey from Jamaica to England. The use of photos to tell my story was a powerful experience. The ability to travel through my life's journey – preserving and building – is a testament of how important this art form is.

During my professional career as a youth worker I have always ensured young people had the opportunity to access public art spaces. Some of my interests are community radio, community volunteering, reading, theatre and music. I will continue to push the agenda of community arts and access to public spaces and honest representation.



Nabeelah Hafeez

An open door

If we lift our head above water.
Baptise the calmer tide.
If we close our eyes and simply float,
We fail to rise above the noise.

We dip our bodies into our past
like picking up old pieces.
Struggling to collect our stories,
Our history still unwritten in books.

Our homeland had a heartbeat
Quietly contained in a beaten chest,
This city bustles with light and fumes,
That rise above the noise.

We walk a line like heavy burdens
still carried on our mother’s shoulders,
The deep brown of our father’s skin,
The ash tones we scrubbed until raw red,
Still sit beneath the crisp white shirt.

And though you were never told,
The motherland had cursed us for leaving.
She said we’d never find our peace,
She said, we will never forget.
She said, dear child, rise above the noise.

Can you see the journey through open doors?
And all those strangers with smiling faces.
The garlands that you have adorned
sitting perfectly placed on the other side.
We always hope to one-day walk through together.

So if we lift ourselves above water,
And if we lift each other,
Fill our lungs with cleaner air,
And finally we see clearer.

But if we close our eyes and simple float,
how then can we rise above the noise?

As I wrap up warm against the early autumn chills, wondering about the all the amazing adventures, the incredible people and opportunities the previous years have opened up for me, I cannot help but feel the heaviness of the lockdown and Covid-19. Despite this, there is always a great sense of hopefulness and warmth.

I think about Bradford, I think about the spaces in my city that have helped to shape me, one of these being the National Science and Media Museum. Not only as part of my childhood, but also my ongoing work as an artist and creative collaborator.

Through my role as community and creative practitioner, the museum has been integral to my personal and professional development. The museum is an open door, however some including myself, can sometimes feel left on the other side. I allude to this in my poem, that yes, there have been many moments, where the museum is an open door, and at least it has aims to be an open door for all. But there is much work to be done.

Many organisations and public spaces are beginning to understand that speaking about race, ethnicity, inclusivity and experiences as minorities is important to representation and equality. Although we are at the very beginning of this journey, and the need for structural change is a longer commitment, the openness to engage and the willingness to accept accountability is a driver for change.

Around this time last year, we had meaningful exchanges with museum, art and community practitioners and professionals of all levels in Chicago and Washington DC, to aid the conversations around transforming practices to be more engaging, equal and inviting. We hope that barriers can be broken to pave the way for collective and representative spaces. Having been part of many conversations with staff at the museum, I have found friendship in the openness and ability to connect, the willingness to show active allyship and the courage to continue these conversations both within the museum and outside the museum.

Through our visits to Chicago and Washington DC I noticed how open the conversations about race and ethnicity were and how confident and articulate people were in talking about the need for decolonisation of structures and institutions. This felt different to what I have experienced in the UK, much of my own professional journey often concealing my experiences as a minority, Muslim women. I am interested in how conversations here can evolve so that minorities do not feel they are risking their own professional careers if they voice their concerns and experiences. I believe there are great learning opportunities to explore for everyone, and would be beneficial to all individuals and institutions at all levels. In the context of the Black Lives Movement, it has become even more important.

Both support and time are equally important for anyone who feels like they do not have a space or a voice. I learned how communities in Chicago and Washington D.C. were given this through both grassroots work and in larger museums and galleries. It can be done, and when it is done correctly, the power of story sharing and how this is accessed is incredible.

I am forever grateful for my own journey and personal connection to the museum, and I am confident through more engaged learning and conversations, as well as action towards change, both structurally and integrated within the culture of the museum, we will find an open door that is accessible to all.

Listening to Nabeelah

Nabeelah’s words remind of the importance of continuing our process of learning. Having the conversations we are having now is not a one-time thing, we need to keep chipping away at it, continuing the process. I need to keep reminding myself of that as well, I am a fast-paced worker, need actions and deadlines. Nabeelah’s words are a good reminder that some things are long processes, and that you maybe can’t initially see the results. My background is events and fast deadlines, so I am not used to slow and reflective. I am reminded by Nabeelah’s words to value process as much as outcomes. I wonder if it’s similar for other people and teams in the museum. We are used to a fast paced and conveyor-belt kind of working. But having time for conversation is just as important.

I was sad that to read that Nabeelah feels that people risk their careers if they voice their concerns about issues like a lack of diversity. Being surprised by this is a sign of my white privilege, I guess. It is good to hear these hard to hear sentences, the ones that make me stop and sad, and then make me want to do something to change how things are. I would hate people to think that bad things happen if they voiced their concern with the museum. We need to hear those difficult sentences to provoke us to change. We need to make it a priority to make the museum a safe space for conversations.

I dwelt on the trip to the US. Nabeelah mentions that grassroots work in Chicago seems to be doing collaborative, locally rooted and open work right, that ‘it can be done when done correctly’. I wonder, if there are these institutions that do it correctly, what can we learn from them? I don’t know much about the trip and the learning that happened there. There is always so much useful learning that could be taken from colleague’s trips and projects. But we are siloed in our departments not sharing information. I want to know what that stuff was Nabeelah mentions, what those nuggets of information were.

Bex Hill
Festivals and Cinema Events Coordinator

Nabeelah Hafeez is a Bradford poet and photographer, a research consultant and the Project Manager of the Bradford Stories Festival with the National Literacy Trust. Her career has included her acclaimed exhibition Through My Father’s Lens. More recently, Nabeelah is working on the steering group for the Bradford 2025 Bid for City of Culture, and Project Manager of the COVID response programme, Doorstep 2 Digital with the National Literacy Trust.

Nabeelah worked as a creative practitioner with the National Science and Media Museum on the exhibition, Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford. She creatively facilitated a group of young women from Bradford, who told their intergenerational stories, following the journeys of their grandparents from the India / Pakistan partition and culminating in a bitter-sweet yet heart-warming exploration of home and belonging in Bradford.



Naureen Khawaja Hafeez

One of the key things about being part of the Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford exhibition for me was the process. It was the first time I got such a big commission, and it was from an arts organisation I had valued since I was very young. It was massively important to me, and also nerve-wracking. I wanted to do it all so perfectly.



Illustration by Naureen Khawaja Hafeez.



Naureen Khawaja Hafeez at the Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford launch. Image credit: Anna Bridson for National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

We worked with one of the curators to develop our artwork. She gave me the freedom and support to create pieces that I am proud of. Being part of this helped me understand how to work for larger corporations and organisations, and how to advertise myself as an artist.

The National Science and Media Museum opening up their walls to local artists of colour was a crucial step in feeling like we can access these spaces. The way we worked together was about democratising the process of creativity. That is why I made this drawing of me working on my artwork at my desk. I don't want people to think that she is an amazing artist, but rather that we all work in the same way, we all have to do the messy process of creating art. Because of the way we made this exhibition my local practice could be exhibited as part of a national story. It was a local exhibition – by the people, for the people – but by being more local, it also became more national.

I feel, though, that the museum missed an opportunity to really connect to the communities it was representing. It still felt very closed-off in some ways. For example, there was so much on social media about the exhibition and people posted about my artwork, but the museum didn't tag us, didn't connect into our existing social media circles in Bradford. It would have been a great way to make local connections and make the stories of Bradford more visible.

It was also an opportunity to build a community of artists, but at that time it couldn't happen because all the artists were so focused on getting the work done in time. I'm hoping this could be something that still happens in the future. NSMM could be an open platform for anyone who is creative.

Having my work displayed on the walls of the National Science and Media Museum was something that I am really proud of. I feel a renewed sense of pride and confidence in myself and my art thanks to collaborating with people at the museum. I hope the museum will continue to open up and work in this way.

Listening to Naureen

I have two feelings when I read Naureen’s piece. I feel her tremendous sense of pride. But I also feel quite sad reading what she writes. There is a mixture in there about optimism about what this collaborative process could have done and what it didn’t do. The feeling that that moment of opportunity won’t come again is the sense I am getting from what Naureen has written.

I like the line where Naureen says that she didn’t want people to think that she is this amazing artist, but that we all go through the messy process of making. Her desire to be seen as somebody who does art, instead of as an established artist, is an interesting way of thinking for us as a gallery-type institution.

Phillip Roberts
Associate Curator of Photography
and Photographic Technology

Hi, my name’s Naureen. I am a freelance illustrator and writer. In my spare time I work on my graphic novel and honing my craft.

Illustrating has really opened doors for me, and it’s something I’m very grateful for, from working with established poets and playwrights, to being commissioned by the National Science and Media Museum. I am a second generation migrant and I use this to influence my work and storytelling.



Pakeezah Zahoor

In 2019, I contributed a blog post to the Bradford's National Museum project; it was meant as both a response and a provocation. I wanted to address what felt problematic in the practice of diversity agendas using my personal experiences. I posed the question 'can you see me?'



Exterior view of the National Science and Media Museum.
Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

It was a question about race, directed at the institution, the institution as a structure through which whiteness is buttressed, underpinned and made robust. Of course, it was a question that did not require an answer. Being brown, the child of immigrant parents, I was not seen. I was not at home in the institution. My presence in the museum was a dilemma, always a balancing act. How to appear different yet familiar, to ask desperate questions whilst providing hopeful answers, to challenge but not to upset? This is the burden that black and brown bodies carry within institutions and it is again something I attempt to navigate here.

One year since my initial contribution to the project, the world is throbbing with that same question-turned-demand. Black Lives Matter seems an absurd statement, absurd that it needs to be stated, absurd that institutions, after centuries of silence and erasure, are leaping to all their channels, shouting the same – BLACK LIVES MATTER! I am inclined to ask, why now? Why do you speak now when it was always now and never spoken? Who is the institution looking at when it affirms this fact? Have we caught it gazing at its own reflection once again?

The institution is a monolithic and unmoving entity, it cannot be a vehicle for change. Bound by systems and processes, life in an institution is predictable. But life does exist within its walls because it is populated by the people who work there. People, unlike institutions, are unpredictable and full of potential. They can either maintain the status quo, closing doors on people (other people), or they can choose to open the door, make somebody a cup of tea. If I think about the possibility for real change, I imagine it to exist within these interactions.

There are many moments that make up the sum of my experience at the National Science and Media Museum. From the superior who followed me into the kitchen during my lunch break to question me; on what clothes I wear at home, whether my parents speak English, did they have an arranged marriage? (Yes they did) – and to comment that it was funny really because I looked different but sounded 'local'. To the colleague who made an unkind comment about somebody's accent and 'things getting lost in translation'. To the colleague who read my blog post and took the time in her day to write me a letter in reply. To the colleague who told me that they would carry my words with them throughout their career. To the colleague who quoted me in a powerful room, which influenced the commitment to hire a more representative workforce. These are the abuses and the compassion that every person is capable of. One year on, it is these interactions with people that I remember. They make me think about the change that becomes possible when we inhabit this relational space. Though change does not happen overnight, I am hopeful of the transformation that occurs when we exist in connection to one another.

Listening to Pakeezah

I am very emotionally impacted by the things Pakeezah says. I am shocked by the comments she had to deal with. But then I question why I am surprised by that. It is a very impactful statement to listen to, really thought-provoking. I remember reading her blog post at the time and reading this follow-up really underscores what she said in that initial statement.

Eleanor Mitchell
Website Manager

I know we have things to do in terms of representation, but the power of those individual interactions and that she still carries them with her now! There is definitely work to do on an individual level in our organisation. Everyone who comes into the museum needs to take responsibility, think more, be more empathetic. Every interaction is a building block for something, whether that is positive or negative.

Kate Burnett
Interpretation Developer

When she was revealing those incidents, I wanted to know who it was who said these things to her? Because it is likely someone I know/work with. And because it is also something I would have never encountered organically, as I have never had to deal with questions like that from anyone.

Jack Wentworth-Weedon
Festival Assistant

Pakeezah is drawing out the distinction between the institution and the people who work there. Intuitions can be monolithic with long histories, but people have the potential to make change non-the-less. We are the individuals who embody the institution, and whilst the museum is structured in a certain way, we have the agency to be the change. It is the people that are important within an institution, we set the vision and ambition, we live the values, we bring the collections alive.

Jo Quinton-Tulloch
Director

I've been working in the arts sector for a number of years now and have held roles in various cultural organisations, including the Science Museum Group. I currently work as Programme and Community Coordinator for Bradford 2025, the organisation pulling together the district's bid to win the UK City of Culture title. My background is in literature, with an MA in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures from The University of Manchester, my perspective and priorities are often formed around questions of race, culture and identity.

I was approached to input on this project as a young arts professional working on community engagement in Bradford, but also as someone who has a view on the problematic politics and practices of 'the diversity agenda' within the sector. I spend a lot of my spare time running, stretching, cooking and reading. If you find my outlook interesting, you can find me lovingly but critically picking apart your favourite books on the Lit Must Fall podcast.



Rameez Khawaja

Rameez has produced a video piece to offer his reflections on working with us as an artist on Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford. He highlights the importance of the museum being part of the creative ecosystem in Bradford and working with local artists.

This is what he says:

Hello guys, my name is Rameez. I'm one of the people that was working with the Above the Noise exhibition. One of my projects was working with my Missus regarding cassette tapes and the relationship with that between the people in Pakistan and the UK. I'm just here to talk about some of the things that have gone on and some of my feedback looking back on what's happened.



Exterior view of the National Science and Media Museum.
Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

One of the initial reasons that I got into this exhibition at all was because I saw an open call for artists local to Bradford where the National Media Museum is based.

So I thought that was a great opportunity to participate.

However, one of the things I quickly realized is that writing is not one of my strong suits. I'm not great at putting across my best self in a proposal on how I would do things. What happened however was, I ended up going to a chance meeting where Julia one of the organizers where at and they were discussing what's happening. And Above the Noise wasn't coined as a term yet but they knew that they were making an exhibition for local people around the area, so I really wanted to take part in it. I told them I already had a proposal sent in and we discussed it and they were happy to have me on board. They liked the ideas and, you know, the abilities that I was bringing to the table as an artist. And it worked from there.

There's kind of two things to take away from here. One is that the National Media Museum is a massive museum, you don't think that they would be able to take on the scope of local artists or they would be interested in local eyes because a lot of it is international outside work. However, we realized through this exhibition and through this process that the local community is really powerful, and they need to be part of that ecosystem as well. So, you know, that was one of the things that we talked about. I think something that does need to be worked on by the Media Museum is the fact that they need to look at their local scope of artists, what they do have, and build up a network. So that when it comes to the time to create work, you know, they've got the local people to tap into.

I'm also really happy that they are open to change, you know, with videos like this and discussions that have happened previously. That they know that they are weak in key areas and that they're able to accept people on and take them on. I think it's a really powerful and valuable thing to be able to accept that there is limited knowledge and limited space to understand these things.

So, I'm really happy to be part of it. I think it's a great working relationship with the Media Museum and I think once they broaden their horizons and open their network a little bit locally, they'll be able to expand even more.

Responses to
Rameez's Moments
[continues >](#)

Listening to Rameez

Rameez sounds happy with how the work we did manifested, which I am happy to hear, that is how good relationships and trust are built. The end result wasn't diluted or misrepresented.

It was interesting to hear about the application process that put Rameez off. That emphasis on writing seems so inevitable. In previous jobs I had in museums we looked for local community partners and it always involved a form to contact us. It sounds like on this project the museum had open conversations that enabled to get in touch and involved in different ways, like at the event Rameez mentions.

Rameez emphasizes the size of the museum. That is a really good reminder because for me the museum is not enormous and foreboding. But I guess working in the sector we are used to the museum world. And we have the media focus, which I thought is a day-to-day topic, we have an IMAX and nice café, and we think of it all as barrierless. It is good to be reminded that for many people it's not an everyday place, but an imposing place on the hill that is really hard to be represented in.

Martin Wills
Client Project Manager

Hey, my name's Rameez Khawaja, I'm a working professional in Bradford but photography has honestly been my biggest passion. From a very young age I've been drawn towards it. I studied it at 'A' levels and at degree level and I'm currently working on my first big project.

I've had the honour of working with two of Bradford's biggest museums, Impressions Gallery and the National Science and Media Museum. Having these opportunities for my work to be displayed really pushed me to start my own project. Besides photography, I fill my spare time with Brazilian Jujitsu, reading and entrepreneurship.



Sajidah Shabir

Working on the Above the Noise project was such a key moment for me. Through this project, in particular, the museum made some amazing connections. It was such a great moment to walk into the exhibition and see how so many different groups of people in Bradford come together to make Bradford. As a Bradfordian, seeing the museum champion these amazing people was a very proud moment for me. I loved how it brought together so many people from Bradford, and at that moment it felt right and like the museum should be doing something like this all the time. The relationships that were established during the project, should still be maintained.



Exterior of the National Science and Media Museum. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

The museum should work out ways to connect with the city and the people more. It should make the museum feel like a space that is there for everyone and is a blank canvas that can be used by anyone who has a story to tell, or an experience to share (which everyone does!). Perhaps by creating community representatives that can come up with creative ways to use the museum to represent these communities and help to create amazing exhibitions to get their stories out there. These community representatives could be people who can speak Punjabi or Urdu, even Polish, so that they can work directly with different people.

I think another issue the museum faces is how to bridge the gap with younger people. Many young people feel that there are no spaces in Bradford for them. The museum feels like a space which is more commercial. It has a lot in common with the other buildings in Bradford, like St George's Hall, or the Alhambra, that are there to support themselves, or only to bring money and attention into the city. These buildings are what people see when they drive into our city and so the buildings should represent our city, and be filled with the people of the city, and not seem so disconnected. The museum should figure out how to integrate the beautiful vibrant culture that lives within the communities of Bradford. Bringing the communities in will bring a completely new feel to the city centre.

I think a solution could be to involve young people, from the different postcodes in Bradford in museum decision-making. The perspective of a young person is valuable, especially when established places struggle to get young people into their spaces. A perspective of a young person or someone who is not from the museum, will help staff to take risks and experiment and try new things out. Through co-creation, a process that everyone develops along the way, you can involve the voices of the people of Bradford. You will have a Bradfordian view and the National Science and Media Museum will have become a Bradfordian museum.

Listening to Sajidah

I like the idea of a blank canvas for everybody to shape.

Laura Slevin
STEM Ambassador Engagement Officer

I am surprised that Sajidah linked the museum to the Alhambra and St George’s Hall. To me, I see them as more commercial venues but of course they are culture. She is spot on to point out there are opportunities to collaborate and network more with them.

Vicky Clifton
Head of Learning

Sajidah Shabir
Producer

I am currently an Assistant Producer for Common Wealth Theatre. I am a Bradford-born and based Producer, interested in how to work with communities, and specifically how South Asian communities can become part of Bradford’s mainstream Arts and Culture.

I am an aspiring Theatre Director, captivated by the idea of making ‘the arts’ a place where more South Asian people can see themselves in, and use theatre to express themselves and tell their stories. In 2020, I co-produced a photography project with Bradford based collective, Speakers’ Corner, that displayed young Bradfordian women and girls, being themselves, not justifying who they are and where they come from.

I am really keen on making my city, Bradford, a city that truly represents what it is, and seeing my city thrive from the grass roots culture and art it already inhabits.



Sarah Ledjmi

In June 2019, I joined our project partners Elizabeth Llabres (Bradford Museums and Galleries) and Tim Smith for an activity that formed part of the Windrush Day celebrations in City Square. They had made copies of photographs from the Belle Vue Studio, a former local portrait studio, that featured Bradfordians from the Afro-Caribbean community. The hope was that some of the people in the images might be recognised and named.

As passers-by start to leaf through the piles of photographs, smiles widen, conversations start, nicknames are remembered, neighbours are brought back to life, and family members are seen afresh in a new light, in black and white. It's a very intimate and joyous moment, and it starts with the photos on the table.



Sharing the Belle Vue Studio photographs on Windrush Day in City Park, Bradford in June 2019. Image credit: Tim Smith

Over the course of the BNMP project, the Belle Vue Studio archive has been a great way for me to think about how the National Science and Media Museum – its subject matter, collections and our roles as those who work there – sits in Bradford.

I've always thought of 'photographs' as a contentious subject for the museum – I first started working at NSMM when the Royal Photography Society collection transfer was decided, because the museum had changed and would now steer away from 'big name' photography exhibitions.

I remember being told that the Belle Vue archive had originally been offered to the museum, but that these photographs didn't align with the museum's priorities in the late 1980s. They are now part of the Bradford Museums and Galleries' collection. There are of course still millions of photographs in the NSMM's stores, and most other museums in the country have their own photo collection. Photographs are not hard to come by, and just as I keep deleting pictures from my phone to make space for new moments to be documented, so the museum must make decisions about what in its stores support its mission, what it means to be a useful museum, and how to spend its resources to achieve that.

In that moment in City Square, I thought about what the photographs did, acting as conversation starters and memory refreshers. I thought that maybe the big question for our museum isn't who holds what, and who looks after 'the national story of photography' and 'the story of Bradford'. I think then that what matters is that there are people in front of me, in Bradford, holding a photograph, and they have a stake in both stories, which is really ONE story. But I wouldn't know that without them. In my day-to-day job as a curator, I keep forgetting, and keep remembering. So, how do we keep THAT conversation going?



Windrush Day celebrations in City Square in June 2019. 'It's a very intimate and joyous moment, and it starts with the photos on the table'. Image credit: Tim Smith



'The Belle Vue Studio archive has been a great way for me to think about how the National Science and Media Museum – its subject matter, collections and our roles as those who work there – sits in Bradford'. Image credit: Tim Smith

Listening to Sarah

I feel Sarah's frustration about how we often end up focusing more on internal processes or logics, rather than people. She says that what matters are people in front of me holding a photograph. For her the message seems to be about being a facilitator and being interested in people's stories, but sometimes loosing that focus.

She hints at the fact that as an organisation or in our job roles, we can sometimes be a dividing force, creating boundaries, which has to do with the tensions we have to hold, while we should rather be a uniting force. National and local are not divided but one story, it's not either or. Bradford is the national story – the nation is Bradford. And we need to be a bit more critical of what we think of when we say national anyways.

Sarah says she wouldn't be reminded of what the collections are there for, being Bradford, being national, and mattering to people if it weren't for occasions and activities like at Windrush Day in City Park. Without people using the things the museum collects, without their input and knowledge, we would lose insight, information, it would make us intellectually poorer. Her saying that this is possible for us to forget while doing our jobs, says something about how we are set up as an organisation.

Gin Jacobucci
Volunteers Coordinator

I work at the Science and Media Museum as the Associate Curator for the new Sound and Vision galleries we are developing. The new galleries will tell a national story of media technologies and present an opportunity to reflect on which stories we tell, and who we tell them with.

One of my key ambitions for the new galleries is to feature as many Bradford people as possible: because there's a rich local tradition of innovation in media technology, but also because the city is as representative of 'the National story' as any other. The tension between local and national (and the different meanings these adjectives hide) is at the heart of my work and I've had the chance to explore these themes further with the BNMP project over the last 3 years. Since working at the museum I've become increasingly keen to challenge uncritical and celebratory national narratives. I've started to recognise a lot of people and organisations

I've worked with in Bradford as doing the work of resistance to these narratives, and this has had a deep impact on my politics and my understanding of my own French-Tunisian heritage.



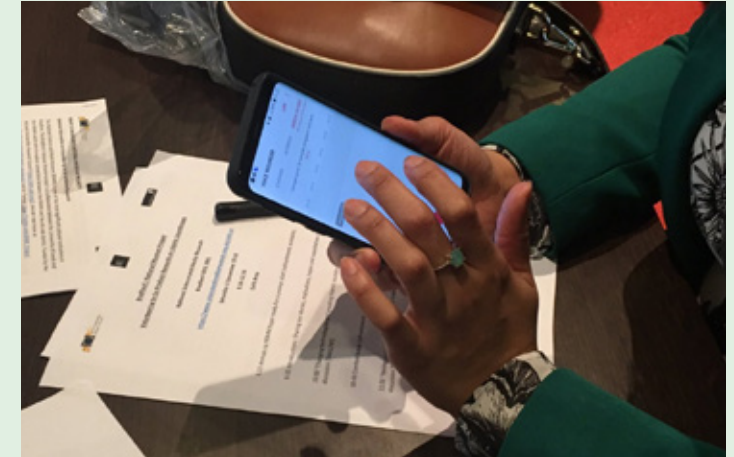
Seán McLoughlin

Six months into the Bradford's National Museum Project a casual, end-of-workshop exchange prompted a 'light-bulb' moment of realisation that 'buy-in' from staff across an institution as large and complex as the National Science and Media Museum could not be taken for granted even after a long process of preparation. As a visiting researcher from the University of Leeds, I was still trying to work out the differences between various museum roles and where there might be experience and capacity in terms of public engagement with minoritised groups.

Then, as part of a Curatorial Group established in Summer 2018, I spoke with representatives of local Muslim organisations about the idea of using a National Science and Media Museum / Bradford's National Museum Project Spring 2019 exhibition to better connect the museum to Bradford and especially its diaspora communities. However, such conversations typically revealed clear reservations about getting involved. Previous experiences of National Science and Media Museum outreach had left a residual wariness of mismatched concerns and a desire to assume much greater ownership of projects and their curation.



Bradford Grand Mosque, February 2019.
Image credit: Tim Smith



'Co-producing research on Islamic Soundscapes' workshop, National Science and Media Museum, December 2018. Image credit: Wahida Shaffi



The 'Islamic Soundscapes in Bradford' exhibit collective, Above the Noise launch, March 2019. Image credit: Anna Bridson for National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

However, during my first visit to one of the city's largest mosques, I discovered by chance that a member of NSMM staff – someone I hadn't yet met – had independently taken the initiative to arrange a guided tour there for a few museum staff. As ideas for an exhibit on 'Islamic soundscapes in Bradford' were explored, and eventually plans were made for expert sound recordings of daily and weekly rituals, they also made it their business to return the mosque's hospitality and warmly hosted 40 of its students at the museum. They were eager to participate, too, when local women were inducted as volunteer researchers to investigate how changing technologies have mediated Islamic sounds in the trans-locally connected lives of their families and friends.

Yet, a follow-up conversation between us also revealed a 'live' concern that the museum's institutional culture was ill-prepared for the idea that religion, and perhaps especially Islam, is an equality, diversity and inclusion issue in the workplace. Majority British society often frames 'religion' in terms of deeply-held, private (and usually 'conservative') 'faith' and 'belief'. Liberals can be insensitive to - or anxious about - its recognition and display in supposedly neutral, secular spaces. Yet, such an approach unhelpfully abstracts 'religion' from its everyday local and national settings and fails to appreciate its intersection with 'race' and 'ethnicity' in constructions of 'minority difference'.



Members of Bradford Grand Mosque's congregation with its App advertised in the background, February 2019.



Signposting a trans-locally connected world of rooted Muslim practices mediated by sound and vision technologies, 'Islamic Soundscapes in Bradford', Above the Noise launch, March 2019.

Islamophobia', for instance, can best be seen as a form of majority cultural racism and social exclusion which – since at least the Rushdie Affair in 1989 and especially since '9/11' and the London bombings – has treated people of 'Muslim' background as a distinctive ethno-racial group and attributed essential characteristics to their 'Muslimness'.

It seemed very significant, then, that during Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford the 'Islamic soundscapes' exhibit could be seen and heard – temporarily at least – on the stage of a National Science and Media Museum gallery. The beauty of its sounds and testimonies excited awe and interest but also instances of anti-Muslim racism. Signposting a globally connected world of everyday Islamic practices mediated by sound and vision technologies literally steps from the museum, the exhibit reflected how Bradford's soundscape has been transformed since the 1960s. However, in a district where nearly one-quarter of the population (24.7%) identifies as Muslim and in a city where Muslims' struggles for public recognition are four decades old, the pressing question now is how such '(trans)local knowledge' can become systemically embodied in the National Science and Media Museum? At a time when cultural organisations worldwide are reflecting on why 'race' matters, its location in Bradford means that the museum has a unique responsibility to engage with the complexities and realities of racially-ethnically-religiously marked exclusion but also the multiple ways in which minoritised individuals and groups creatively organise their lives beyond the gaze of majority excluders.

I am Professor of the Anthropology of Islam at the University of Leeds and Co-Investigator on the Bradford's National Museum Project (BNMP, 2017-21). I was a member of the Curatorial Group for the 2019 Science and Media Museum exhibition Above the Noise:15 Stories from Bradford and led on articulating the relationships between changing sound and vision technologies and Bradford's trans-local connections to people and places elsewhere, especially Pakistan and the wider Muslim world. I built relationships with local people and institutions, co-produced participatory ethnographic research with them and co-curated the 'Islamic Soundscapes' and 'Fast FM' stories.

In general my work seeks to prioritise the 'bottom-up' perspectives of people's everyday lives at the grassroots, and highlight the gaps between this and the logics of 'mainstream' institutions and governance. Building on an investigation of how postcolonial Bradford (2006) has been written about since the 1960s, in Writing the City in British Asian Diasporas (2014) I explore – with BNMP Co-Investigator William Gould and others – how migration and post-migration communities' cultural production gives agency and voice to social realities often erased in dominant policy and media discourses. This approach also informed the development of Above the Noise, having previously led to a Being Human Festival event co-curated with Bradford Literature Festival (2015) which involved some of the BNMP's future partners.

University of Leeds profile



Si Cunningham

As part of Bradford’s National Museum project, I embarked on a series of interviews with five people who’d been intimately involved in some of Bradford’s biggest stories, and who’d felt the media glare that went with them. There was coffee with Baroness Margaret Eaton, (Bradford’s leader at the time of the 2001 riots); an hour in the BCB Radio studio with Richard Horsman, (a local news editor who was often ‘first on scene’ when big things went down); a rainy afternoon in Bradford Market with Paul Meszaros, (President of Bradford Trades Council, lifelong anti-fascist campaigner); a coveted sit-down with Ishtiaq Ahmed at Khidmat Centre, (community stalwart); and a slightly eerie interview in the deserted Bradford Police Museum with Inspector Martin Baines, (retired race relations officer with the West Yorkshire force).



Ishtiaq Ahmed outside the mosque.
Image credit: Lucy Ray

While I can say – hand on heart – that these were some of the most fascinating conversations I’ve ever had about what makes a city tick, transcribing over six hours of dialogue back to myself was nowhere near as enjoyable (mainly due to my own monotone voice). But, during these seemingly endless transcribing sessions, frequent nuggets of verbal gold would leap out from my iPhone and find their way onto a disgracefully sloppy journalist’s notepad.

One such quote has stayed with me long after my involvement with Bradford’s National Museum project finished. It was something Ishtiaq said on a cold February afternoon in Lidget Green: “I always say that we are like a family. We quarrel, we bicker, we have our differences, but when a family is threatened from outside, it comes together. That’s the spirit of Bradford.”

I’m not sure if it’s growing up as an only child, or more recently – post project – working in a predominantly Kashmiri-Bradfordian office where everyone is sister, brother, uncle... or maybe it’s even the close human contact we’ve all been so starved of in the grip of Covid, but it’s true that I feel more part of the “Bradford family” than ever before.

Whilst all my interview subjects were wildly different from each other – politically, professionally, personally – I felt an oddly familiar warmth from them all. I had the same feeling on the opening night of ‘Above the Noise’ when I’d never seen the National Science and Media Museum so busy, and yet everyone seemed to know each other. And perhaps this is the spark of opportunity that I’ve taken from this project. The reminder that the most dysfunctional and flawed of units – “the family” – is still capable of great shows of unity and strength when the hour comes.

My feeling is that Bradford could create a new home for the many groups, tribes, individuals and newcomers to the city who may find themselves feeling like part of the “Bradford family” at one point or another. There may be conflicting opinions, differing interpretations and outlooks, and frequent disagreements over what’s right for Bradford... but there will be shared space, the respectful regular exchange of ideas, and the breaking of bread together. This place could easily be the National Science and Media Museum – a front room for this weird and wonderful family we call “Bradford” to truly own. Don’t let the Museum stop at simply hosting one event for “the family” per year though, but instead make it a dynamic and meaningful two-way relationship whereby the Museum is actively seeking encounters and engagements within the community too. As a distant relative at an annual Boxing Day get-together might say, “Don’t be a stranger...”

[Responses to Si’s Moments continues >](#)

Listening to Si

The family is everybody who lives and works in Bradford. It changes and is dynamic, but it holds together. It is part of your identify. I love the idea of the museum being the front room, it’s a nice way of phrasing it.

Elaine Richmond
Partnership and Participation Manager

Bradford gets quite bad press but when you talk to people here everybody enjoys living and working there. Si says people come together when they are attacked from the outside. I have only worked in Bradford two years, but I already feel that. I defend Bradford when people talk about it. It’s a good analogy saying we are a family.

John Rooney
Operations Manager

You have to be very, very comfortable in your front room, your friends and family are there, all those things that imply comfort, relaxation. It’s a great aspiration, and far from where we are now. We have to be honest about that. But it’s a great analogy.

Martyn Lenton
Project Manager Exhibitions

Si is putting his idea out as an offer, the museum could be a front room, but isn’t yet. He finishes on ‘don’t be a stranger’. It’s a fair reflection, that we could be but aren’t there yet.

Gin Jacobucci
Volunteers Coordinator

I first got a taste for journalism in Bradford, doing work experience stints at the Telegraph & Argus newspaper and BBC Yorkshire (the latter used to have a studio within the National Science and Media Museum). After moving to London for ten years, I worked for several titles including NME and the Daily Mirror.

I’m back in Bradford now (where the food tastes better and the tap water doesn’t ruin your tea), serving as Communications Manager for Bradford 2025 – the city’s bid to be the next UK City of Culture. I’m also the Chairperson of Bradford Civic Society, and a Director of Bradford Business Improvement District (BID), among other voluntary roles in the city.



Sonia Sarah

As a young girl my mum would often bring me and my brothers to the museum. On my tip-toes, I peered through movie cameras shooting different angles, framing scenes and composing images of the fairy-tale display. It sparked my curiosity and wonder.

I am a Youth and Community Development creative practitioner, skilled in conflict resolution, radical disagreement and peace education work. I became involved in the ‘Islamic Soundscapes’ project, for the Above the Noise exhibition, through my contact with academic and activist Wahida Shaffi and Professor Sean McLoughlin. I was at a personal turning point in my life and this project provided the ideal platform to help re-ignite my creative spark. We saw this as a brilliant opportunity for the Museum to break with the status quo and really make a joint and concerted effort to do things differently.

All those involved in co-producing the story were proactive and inspirational Muslim women living across Bradford District. The ‘Islamic Soundscapes’ workshops were enriching. They enabled me to develop new skills and facilitated safe spaces for story-sharing and confidence-building through mutual peer mentorship. I found collectively listening to these recordings spiritually uplifting. They documented memories of giving birth and dealing with death, encompassing both special ritual moments and the non-ritual everyday.



Sonia Sarah, Wahid Shaffi and Sean McLoughlin (right to left) in the Islamic Soundscapes story in Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group



The Above the Noise launch event. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

The Above the Noise launch event was exciting, and the first time all 15 community-led story-makers came together to see the final curation of the exhibition. I initially felt this was a real and meaningful way for the Museum to collaboratively call upon the rich expertise found within the local community. It offered the potential for mutually beneficial community engagement as opposed to extractivism – an all-too-common experience in my professional and voluntary practices. However, this was never truly optimised.

Post-launch the momentum waned, and rather than capitalising on the brilliant relationships and ideas forged, the Museum and Bradford’s National Museum project struggled to achieve this. The stop-start process saw collaborators navigating a cyclical wave of hope and despair. Whilst fantastic ideas were generated, unfortunately these didn’t come to fruition, which inevitably led to disenfranchisement, disengagement and people simply moving on.

A real turning point for local Muslim collaborators, which led to a strong sentiment of frustration, was when the Above the Noise ‘Living Library’ event – organised by Bradford’s National Museum project – was initially planned to coincide with the end of Ramadan and Eid period. After this issue was raised the date of the ‘Living Library’ was changed but it shows how vitally important it is that staff in public institutions take the time to truly understand the communities they are embedded within.

The ‘Living Library’ did ultimately provide an opportunity for museum staff to learn from community partners’ wealth of wisdom, and a chance to network and discuss further opportunities for co-working. The small conversations revealed a disconnect between the aspirations of frontline staff and management power structures. Although the right intention might be there, some staff lack confidence and diversity awareness, which cannot simply be checked off through a few training workshops. The lack of confidence with human diversity and faith leaves the museum unable to fully harness the vibrancy of the District’s multi-faceted cultures and faiths. In the context of Black Lives Matter, and a pandemic, it is crucial that the Museum looks both inwards and outwards in a brave action-orientated way to take urgent intentional action in equality, diversity and inclusion on all levels.

Responses to
Sonia’s Moments
continues >

Listening to Sonia

I am overwhelmed by Sonia’s willingness to collaborate in fixing these problems. I don’t know that we deserve this, but she does it. It is helpful what she says, it is difficult to hear, but I am glad she did say it. We learn from this, we started putting together a calendar of events we need to know about.

Alice Parsons
Interpretation Manager

There is this layer of second guessing, on our part, rather than finding out or knowing what people’s drivers are and what their cultural framework really is. There is an element of politeness in knowing the dates of key religious festivals, but we still unconsciously prioritize what we know rather than be impolite enough to ask.

Dean Loughran
Head of Operations

I am a Youth & Community Development creative practitioner, skilled in equality, diversity, inclusion (EDI) conflict resolution, peace education, radical disagreement and safe spaces work. I became involved as a Community Researcher with a group of women on the Islamic Soundscapes story for the ‘Above the Noise’ collaborative project with activists and academics from the University of Leeds. Our research, the rich trajectory of interviews conducted and our broader input was part of a larger programme of work taking place between the National Science & Media Museum (NSMM) and other academics and creative partners, with the aim of influencing and co-designing the final exhibition/story.

I have over 15 years’ experience of equality and inclusive practice and pride myself in behaving as an advocate for inclusion. I currently play an advisory role for multiple organisations, working with them to develop new strategies and policies in relation to inclusion and diversity, based on the principle of authenticity in diversity.



The Power of Conversation

Over the past thirty-five years I’ve talked to a lot of people in Bradford. I arrived here in 1985 because I was curious about the lives of those who lived in such a cosmopolitan place. I’m still here because Bradford is full of remarkable people, and much of my working life has involved collaborating with them to amplify their stories in creative ways.

This involves meeting people on their own turf in spaces where they feel confident and at ease sharing their knowledges and experiences. The ambition is to reflect these stories back to the communities of those sharing, and to reveal them to wider audiences, often through multi-media exhibitions in galleries and museums. I believe the gathering and sharing of stories from a diverse range of people helps make Bradford’s, and Britain’s, history a more inclusive space.



Playing pool in front of a mural depicting the journey from rural Bangladesh to urban Bradford, at the Bangladeshi Youth Organisation in Manningham. Taken for the Heritage Unit in 1990. Image credit: Tim Smith

Bradford’s National Museum project has also involved a lot of talking, but initially this took place within the walls of the Museum, between staff and the project team. When we talked about collaboration between the Museum and local people and organisations it seemed staff were trying to get people to come into their own world, without going out into Bradford’s.

Arts and museum professionals often refer to “hard to reach communities”. They’re not. You simply have to have the confidence to knock on the right doors and if you express an interest in peoples’ lives, spend time with them and gain their trust, they will often take an interest in you too. I use my camera as my passport to other peoples’ worlds, working at the National Science and Media Museum is an equally valid pretext for entry.

Such dialogue takes time, but allowing space for developing relationships is crucial. A large institution demands staff time to make it function, whirlpools of meetings within a building means less interaction with people outside it. But museum staff must have the time and interest to become curious about their surroundings, escape the building and develop empathy for local communities and individuals by investing time in understanding their histories. They need to feel confident that it is part of their job, and that they have permission to do so.

I was encouraged by the Museum’s willingness to engage with these dilemmas through Ideas Hub. Conversations between staff and local people included trips to engage with members of Bradford’s Bengali communities about River of Tea, a photographic exploration of how the early tea trade sparked the migration of people from Bangladesh to Britain. The photographs acted as catalysts for many lively exchanges, and their value to staff involved was summed up by one of them: “I’ve lived here since 2002, but I’ve learned more about Bradford in the last two weeks, getting out and about and talking to people as part of this project, than I’ve ever learned before.”

This personal reward is complemented by its value to the Museum, and I’m hopeful more staff have now experienced the power of these conversations. They give local people a stake in a venue that many have never visited before. They also enable us to produce Ideas Hub as a show that weaves together the broad historical narrative with personal stories in engaging ways, giving audiences a shared sense of the history and shape of our diverse society – locally, nationally and internationally – and of how we, and the science, all fit into it.

Listening to Tim

Tim and I got to know each other really well over the last two years. It's really encouraging to hear Tim's good feeling about Ideas Hub. I feel we turned a corner with that. I'm hoping that I am seeing that we have learned from each other in this long period, Tim has a bit of a better understanding of us as well now. I hope that he feels more confident about how we are going to proceed after the work we have done together.

Alice Parsons
Interpretation Manager

Tim Smith
Photographer

I'm a freelance photographer, film-maker and researcher based in Bradford. For the past 35 years I've collaborated with many fellow creatives, and communities living locally who have provided the inspiration for much of my work.

During the 1980s I was Co-ordinator of the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, part of Bradford Art Galleries and Museums. We created a collection of over 300,000 photographs and northern England's most significant oral history archive. Throughout the 1990s I worked as a photo-journalist, primarily for The Observer as well as other newspapers and magazines.

Since 2000 I've continued doing editorial and other commissions to help pay the bills. However long-term work is my passion, ideally exploring issues of migration, identity and the relationships between Britain and places overseas. I collaborate with communities to amplify their stories via multi-media exhibitions and publications, including projects about the Asian sub-continent, east Africa, Ukraine, Poland, Yemen and the Caribbean. You can see more of my work at timsmithphotos.com.

These interests and experiences led to my work with BNMP: facilitating dialogue between our project team, NSMM staff and local collaborators; having (often challenging) conversations about how to align our (often differing) priorities; and championing Bradford as a great place for weaving together local, national and international stories.



Vicky Clifton

The ‘Open Conversation’ interviews recorded by BCB (Bradford Community Broadcasting) were illuminating. In the interviews the museum was a source of pride but at the same time it was a bit of a mystery. People liked the museum, but they didn’t know why. Listening to the conversations challenged me to articulate better what the role of the museum is.

As we listened to these ‘Open Conversations’ I realised that people were really proud of the museum being in Bradford, but it wasn’t clear how it was relevant to their lives today. Many felt the museum was distant, either physically, or in time (that they hadn’t visited since school). When I talked to people – family, friends and people I was networking with – I started talking about the museum as an open, welcoming and fun space to be in, but not in an abstract way. On my social media channels, I would say things like, ‘let me know if you’re coming down and I’ll come and say “hi”’. To get people to come for meetings in the museum I’d say, ‘the coffee is amazing’. I think that people make connections when they feel it is a warm and friendly space. I loved it when people would then come back to me and say they hadn’t been for years, but how fantastic it was. We continue this approach in the Learning team, working on the assumption that people trust people first before they trust organisations. So we make connections, talk to people, make the museum an inviting and warm place to be.

I used to be the only person talking about participation. Then there was a meeting 18 months ago where Geoff (Head of Collections) was a louder voice than me for participation, equality and diversity. It felt so good to not always be the only person in the room raising these issues. Deciding to take Sarah and Gin on the trip to the US was also a significant moment. It showed that other voices were being valued. As a result, what they experienced has filtered through the museum. There are now more staff thinking about community engagement.

It is the same across the Science Museum Group now, it is not just me or the other odd lone voice anymore. These issues feel more prevalent – engagement and being ‘open for all’ is high on the agenda at all levels of the organisation. This shows me that the museum and Science Museum Group is well placed for long-term and sustainable organisational change. It’s wonderful really and it’s hard to articulate just how exciting the shift is. From an internal perspective, it’s now the kind of organisation I am really proud to be working for and I am excited to see how it continues to develop over the coming years.

Listening to Vicky

I hear Vicky talking as somebody who is very local in Bradford. If she invites people to come to the museum via her social media channels it has impact. She feels a direct connection between the museum and her Bradford, and there is a lot of power in her knowing so many people and having a large network in the district.

What Vicky says reminded me of our responsibility to keep working on making the museum as welcoming and open as it needs to be. People not knowing about the museum, or not having been for a while, is one barrier to not coming.....But then there are people who don't visit not because they don't know about the museum, but because the museum is not relevant to them, when they come here it doesn't feel like a place for them.

Many of us in the museum have really good relationships in Bradford, but many aspects about the museum mean that these relationships are not enough for it to be a welcoming place. That is where organisational change comes in, which builds the bridge between trust and relevance.

Chris Whitby
Audience Research Manager

Vicky Clifton
Head of Learning

I'm Vicky Clifton, the Head of Learning at the National Science and Media Museum. My career in education has spanned over 25 years with a focus on inclusivity and equality in both formal and informal education for children, young people and their parents and carers. I place high value on parents as powerful co-educators of their children and advocate and campaign for increased parental engagement.

My work at the National Science and Media Museum has been to support the Museum's ambition to become more closely aligned with the city of Bradford. As a result we saw the number of schools in Bradford visiting the Museum double and the annual education visitor numbers increase (pre-Covid of course). The learning outreach programme now sees the museum developing relationships in places outside the Museum and partnerships are realised through the annual Bradford Science Festival which attracted 40,000 visitors in 2019 and was delivered online, in print and on BCB radio during 2020. I have also been part of a two-year professional exchange programme with the Museum of Tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro looking at community engagement in museums.

I'm a graduate of the Jo Cox Women Leaders programme, am Chair of the cultural education ICE Board and Vice Chair of New College Bradford Advisory Board. In my spare time I love to promote body positivity in women.



Wahida Shaffi

My relationship with the museum extends over three decades as a visitor, occasional collaborator and critical friend. In 2019 I worked with a group of women on the ‘Islamic Soundscapes’ story for Above the Noise, alongside Professor Sean McLoughlin from the University of Leeds.

The aim was to influence and co-design a final exhibition/story highlighting the everyday uses of technology to mediate Islamic sounds in the home, mosque, city and wider world.

We all valued the opportunity for collaboration and saw the potential of the museum to do something different. As Muslim women we also recognised that the intersectionality of our gender, faith and class shapes much of what we hear, feel and see. We discovered that speaking another language, sharing similar experiences, or identifying with gender struggles to access institutions, enabled distinct forms of knowledge creation or cultural production that may not otherwise be possible.

There was a general feeling after the launch of Above the Noise that much more could have been achieved by the museum to capitalize on the work to develop the stories. There was momentum, ideas were being shared by experienced community activists/organisers and relationships were forged, which could have been built on to go further, faster. It can feel like extractivism if the



‘Connecting Through Listening: Islamic Sounds in Bradford’ in Above the Noise: 15 from Bradford. Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

momentum wanes. It can result in people being reluctant to participate in the future, if they feel their experiences and contributions are not being valued. The challenge is breaking out of these cycles of hope and disappointment.

Above the Noise exhibited multicultural diversity in the history of Bradford and was meant to enable communities to own their own stories. Yet the structural make-up of staff at the museum itself meant there was a disconnect. The lack of staff diversity was immediately apparent when I was asked to facilitate a table discussion at the National Science and Media Museum staff away day. Non-extractivism means taking urgent, intentional action to be more inclusive; having a diverse workforce that better reflects the communities museums serve. It also means fully appreciating the richness and depth of knowledge and expertise being shared by those who take part in exhibitions like Above the Noise and taking the necessary steps to nurture these connections. Otherwise, museums run the risk of tokenism and a processes-driven creative approach that never really results in any meaningful or lasting systemic change.

So what is the role of the museum in the current context of Black Lives Matters and renewed calls for greater equality, equity and social change in all spheres, including the workplace? Well, museums have a pivotal role to play and cannot take an isolationist approach. They need to reflect critically on their role in society and take the necessary practical steps to address the lack of diversity within their own institutions structures of power and influence, staffing, access and audience participation.

I am always hopeful – but my history with the National Science and Media Museum leads me to constructively critical reflections. The willingness to exhibit ‘Islamic Soundscapes’ showed us that the museum is able to move beyond the safety and comfort of conventional, Eurocentric stories about the received history of science and technology. Research and experience tell us that sustainable community connections enable richer insights, innovative ideas and robust collaborative partnerships. The National Science and Media Museum also has access to incredible cinemas and spaces that can be opened up far more to the wider community, helping to facilitate a richer conversation about a shared location in Bradford. Austerity, the pandemic, growing racism and xenophobia and movements for social change have forced communities and organisations to be more resourceful, to challenge hate and reach out from beyond the familiar and comfortable. Museums must do the same.

The lessons learned from this three-year collaborative process provide an opportunity for the museum to be bold, to look inwards as well as outwards, and make the urgent and necessary changes that are required to move forward in an open and inclusive way. Otherwise the project will just be another missed opportunity.

Responses to
Wahida’s Moments
continues >

Listening to Wahida

I hear Wahida say that there could have been more, the museum could have done more. There is frustration in what she writes. There was a momentum, and it could have gone further. I wish she would have said more about the staff diversity. It is of course undeniable that we are not a diverse organisation. Was it the physical lack she experienced at the staff away day or also in what was said by people? Probably both. She uses the word ‘urgent’ and ‘necessary’ and I think that needs to be heard. In the context of Black Lives Matter and other movements there is even more weight to this.

I had Pakeezah’s piece in my mind reading this. Both make me impatient for action. And I know that staff diversity is such a complex thing to try and tackle. I can see how we need to own and celebrate even the tiniest steps forward we make, but I can equally see the gaping chasm of how far we need to go.

I think there is more that is unsaid here. Wahida writes ‘I am always hopeful’, she could have been much more critical. She is trying to be really positive, but maybe we need some negativity to shock us more into action. Which is why Pakeezah’s letter had more impact for me, her message to us was not gilded in any way.

Megan Thomas
Group Head of Special Projects

I live in Bradford and have over 20 years’ experience of working with diverse communities from across the UK. I am a qualified Social Worker, Vocational Assessor and Trainer and author of the book Our Stories Our Lives: Inspiring Muslim Women’s Voices, published by Policy Press.

I completed my MA in International Politics and Security Studies at the University of Bradford’s Department of Peace Studies. Since then I have delivered training, completed research and produced films related to equality, diversity, participation, gender and conflict and interfaith communities in local and international contexts.

Before becoming the National Director of the Near Neighbours Catalyst Programme, I was the West Yorkshire Coordinator. I also held the position of National Women’s Programme Lead for the Christian Muslim Forum; pioneering their national women’s programme; conducting research and exploring the issues affecting women of faith across the UK. I co- founded the Muslim Women’s Council in Bradford.

I am currently a PhD candidate at Leeds University in the department of Philosophy, Religion and History of Sciences.



Will Gould

Working on the Bradford’s National Museum project has been interesting because my relationship with the National Science and Media Museum is as much about my personal and family life as it has been about my professional one. In the former, the museum represents the wondrous gaze of my children, the opportunity to visit Bradford, and connecting with friends in the museum café. In my work, the museum has always been a space for thinking about the region and its relationship to the nation. More specifically, it is part of my interest in thinking through how a range of different international communities have negotiated life in the UK.

The Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford exhibition – its planning and development – captured this interlacing of work with the personal, the communal and the key role of everyday Bradford life in how we might think of the museum.

My engagement with the exhibition was through a collaboration – made possible by Project Partner, Aamir Darr – with students at Belle Vue Girls’ Academy, a secondary school in Bradford. The output of our working together was one of the stories told in the exhibition. But more centrally, our collaboration was about the experience of students exploring their family and community histories. It allowed us to think about the connections between different places and the changing technologies that shape them.

One of the most moving experiences for me was the pre-exhibition event we had in the museum’s Cubby Broccoli cinema. The young women who participated in the project had come together with their families to watch the film that had been created with Nabeelah Hafeez, a local artist, about their research. For me, this epitomised what the museum could be – a space for the enjoyment of (and discussion about) what communities know and feel about Bradford and its international connections, in ways that are relevant to them. The words of one audience member ‘can we make this permanent?’ epitomised perfectly the importance of the event.

The research project was also important for me in a second way. I found myself privy to the complicated and often byzantine process of planning, commissioning, and curating a museum exhibition. Amidst this, perhaps one of my most lasting experiences was an insight into how museums, as institutions, work and attempt to change. My small contribution to this process, alongside the work with Belle Vue Girls’ Academy, included suggesting the South Asian idea of jugaad – the way people use simple or everyday technologies to tackle larger problems. The idea was part of what led to the focus of the exhibition. The irony here was that I, too, work in a very large institution with an international mission, yet we were advocating the rebellious and unsettling role of everyday public interventions in those spaces. The cliché about institutions is that they suffer from self-fulfilling ‘inertia’. To me, bringing the uncertainty of jugaad, or something like it, into the space of a national museum contributed in a small way to an unsettling, and to the process of change.

Listening to Will

I hear Will say that unsettling and trying something different is what evokes change.

Laura Slevin
STEM Ambassador Engagement Officer

From Will’s two perspective I get the really interesting takeaway that most people have multiple ways into the museum and experiences, it’s good to think about how there is not just one way of knowing or experiencing the museum.

Geoff Belknap
Head Curator

There is a difference between reform, revolution, and abolition when we think about change. It would be interesting to think about what these words could mean for an organisation like ours in terms of change. How do we break down the monolith of nation, organisation, etc? How can we make it more plural? How can these political concepts help us put this into practice?

Sarah Ledjmi
Associate Curator of Sound and Vision

Since 2003 I have been working at the University of Leeds as Professor of Indian History, and before that studied and worked at the University of Cambridge. I have published 4 books and a number of journal articles and chapters, on subjects including the politics of late colonial north India, citizenship in post-independence India and Pakistan, the lives of incarcerated communities in colonial India and the history of British Asian cities.

I have also been involved in a number of non-academic activities, including acting as the historical consultant for the India Club, and for the Ambedkar House museum in London, which was threatened with closure in 2018-19. In India, I helped to establish a system of ‘citizens’ advice’ offices during the Freedom of Information drive between 2008 and 2011, and I worked with a documentary film maker in Ahmedabad on the history of India’s ‘Denotified and Nomadic’ communities.

As well as the Bradford’s National Museum project, I am currently working on a collaborative project with colleagues in Manchester, Edinburgh, Kolkatta and Delhi on the history of anthropology and sociology in mid-20th century India.



The second part of the process was to share the moments found in Part 1 with staff. They listened to each moment on their own terms, made links between them and everyday working-life at the museum, and then drew out the future directions for the museum's relationship with Bradford. We did this in six small group discussions and a final large workshop.

Part 2: Dialogues

At the beginning of the small workshops, we asked people to write down a newspaper headline they'd like to read in a year's time. This revealed the quite different hopes that staff have for the museum. To end each workshop, we asked staff to suggest words that sum up the ethos they would like to see shape their work with Bradford. This showed enormous commonalities in terms of a desire to work collaboratively and in an open way.

The two exercises taken together revealed that the different paradigms or worldviews we had tried to probe through the working models were very much in operation. These discussions generated a series of responses from staff, presented here as edited quotes. In the final half of the sessions, we looked for possible links between the moments and the different roles staff play at the museum.

Through the small group discussions, it became clearer and clearer that the big story of the National Science and Media Museum's relationship to Bradford is one of difficult-to-reconcile pulls. In preparation for the large final workshop, we sought to draw out and articulate these different pulls as tensions and then play through two different strategies for approaching the tensions, Alignments as Strengths and Tensions as Strengths.

Headlines

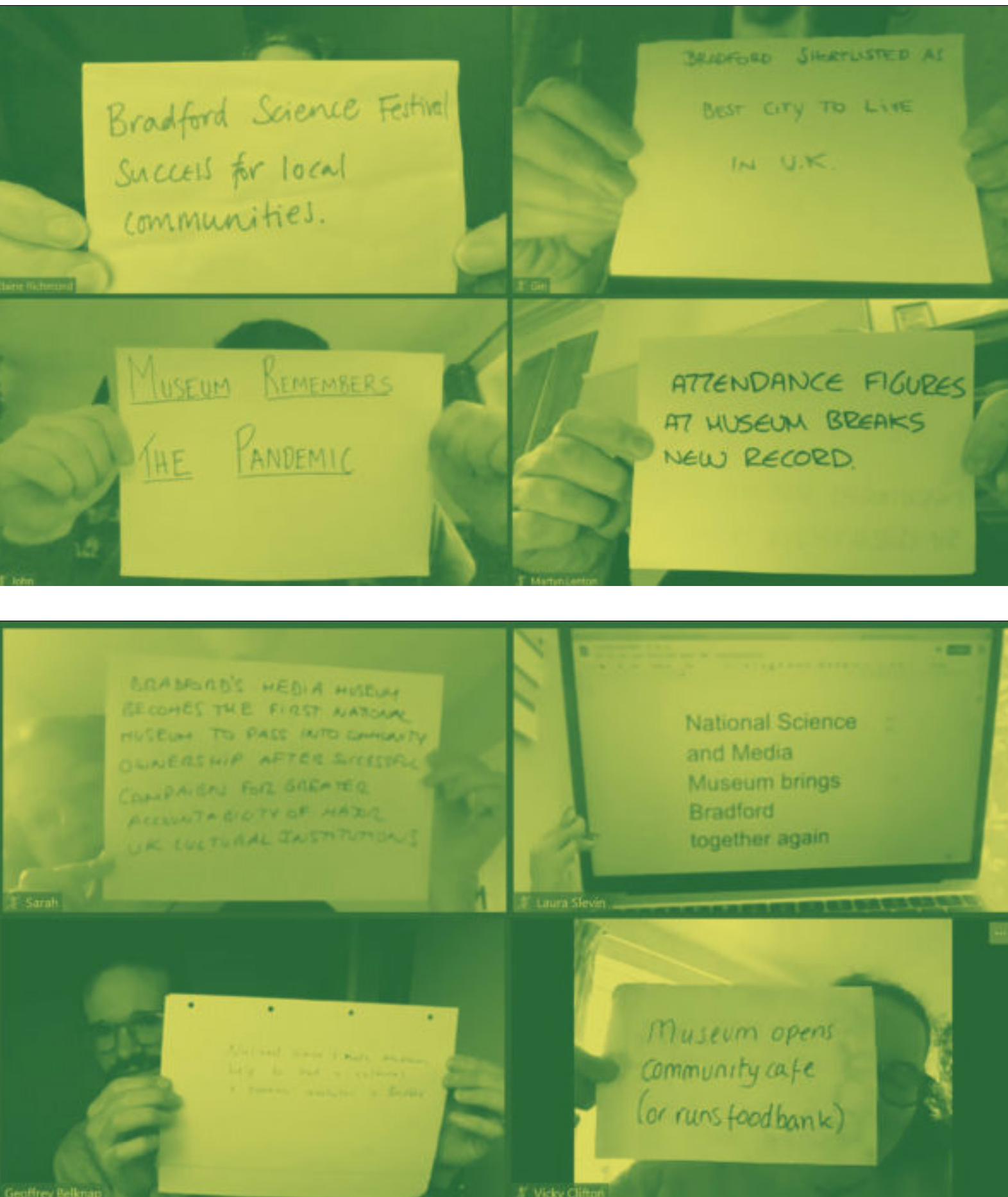
Staff wrote a newspaper headline that they would like to read in a year's time. The headlines revealed a wide range of different priorities from seeking national status to desiring local recognition, from centring the museum collections to prioritising community needs or democratic involvement, from working towards large audience numbers to hoping for audiences that are representative of Bradford. The diversity of headlines served to reinforce the significance of the variety of ambitions and intentions of museum staff and set the scene for the rest of the workshop discussions.

We asked every member of staff to contribute a headline, imagining what they'd like to read about the museum if they picked up a newspaper in a year's time. This was partly an ice breaker and designed to be part of the introductions, but it also opened up where the different priorities lay.

The headlines showed how ideas of the local and the national are active in quite different ways in the imagination of the museum. There were headlines that desired national status and those that wanted local recognition. Some headlines were driven by the museum's collections and themes, while others were motivated by community needs or democratic involvement. There were headlines that valued large audiences and ones which desired audiences that were representative of Bradford.

Cutting across the headline were also quite different was of conceptualising the museum and people in Bradford, reflecting elements of the working models developed with the Staff Action Research Group. In some headlines people in Bradford are positioned as having needs the museum could address (e.g. via a food bank or by volunteering). In another it was hoped people in Bradford might take over the governance of the museum. Some headlines centred the museum, while another deliberately decentred the museum and focused only on Bradford.

The headlines exercise served to reinforce the significance of the variety of missions and intentions of the National Science and Media Museum and created a useful touchpoint for the rest of the workshop discussions and the final large workshop where strategies for dealing with the tensions were explored.



Below are the headlines workshop participants wrote, clustered to indicate the different emphases that emerged.

- Local needs, local recognition, local governance
- Bradford Science Festival Success for Local Communities
- New Volunteer Scheme Gives Back to the Community
- The Museum Launches Series of Open Days Across Bradford
- Pop-Up Museum Brings History to Bradford
- Bradford Stories on Bradford Screens
- NSMM brings Bradford Together Again
- Museum Opens Community Café or Runs a Food Bank
- Local Museum Voted Warmest Welcome in COVID Awards
- Museum Asks its Audience what it Actually Wants
- Bradford’s Media Museum Becomes the First National Museum to Pass into Community Ownership after Successful Campaign for Greater Accountability of Major UK Cultural Institutions

Local and Regional Strategy – post coronavirus

- Bradford Shortlisted as Best City to Live in the UK
- NSMM to Contribute Toward a Successful Bid to City of Culture 2025
- NSMM Helps Lead a Cultural and Economic Rejuvenation in Bradford
- NSMM is Open and Leads the Region’s Cultural Recovery
- Museum Educates on Pandemic
- The Museum Open as Usual

Digital Innovation

- NSMM Wins Website Accessibility Award
- Local Museum Sets Out Exciting Digital Road Map
- NSMM Pioneers Digital Delivery and Engagement
- NSMM Brings its Collections to You, Inspiring Programme Online and Offline

Large audiences, representative audiences

- Attendance Figures at the Museum Breaks New Records
- National Museum Voted Local Favourite Amid Sell-out Exhibition
- Museum in Bradford Becomes the First National Museum Whose Profile Represents its Local Communities

National Recognition

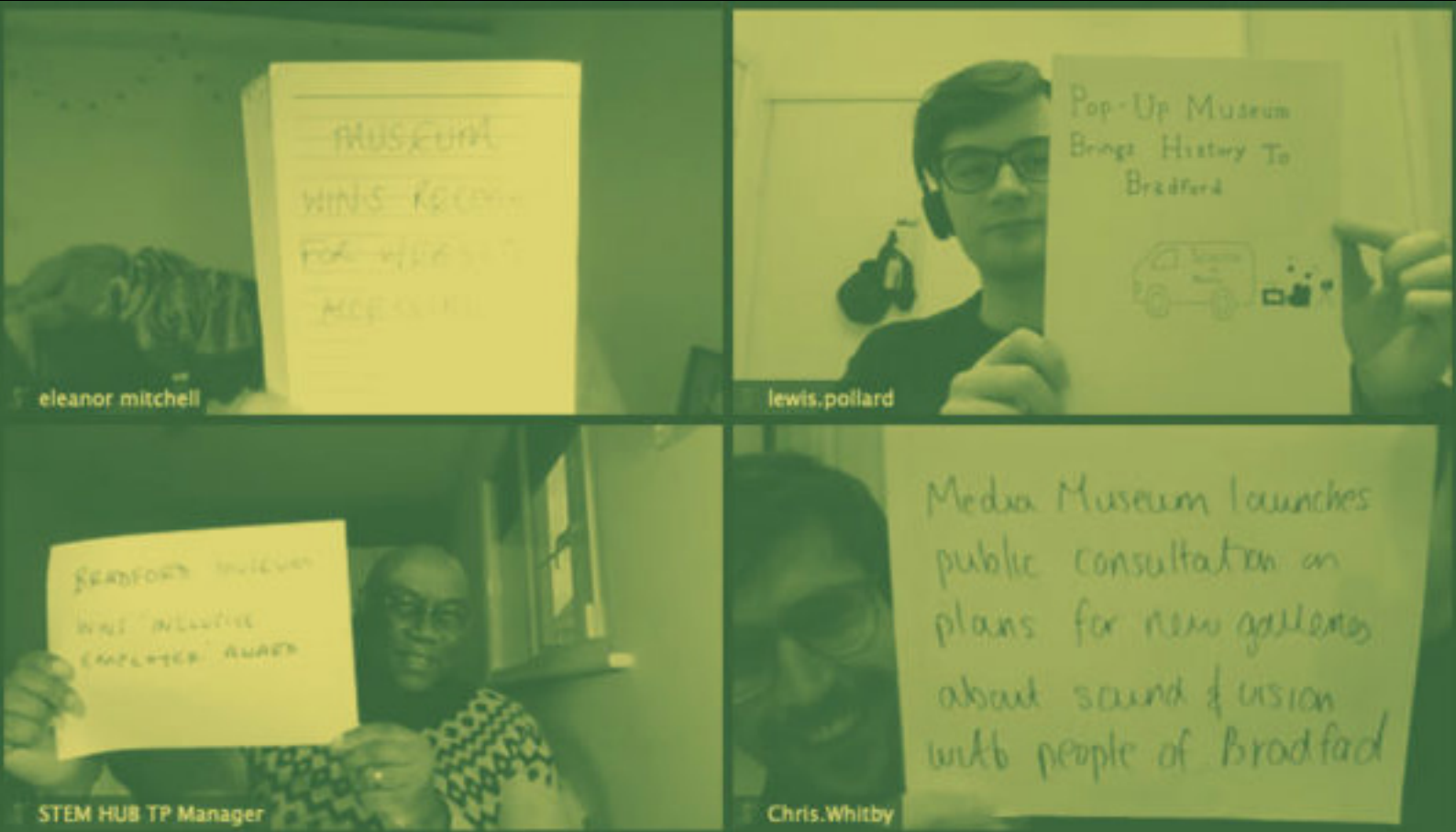
- NSMM a National Treasure... Recognized with National Award

NSMM Collections and Themes

- NSMM Launches Incredible STEM Inspired Early Years Programme

NSMM as a place to work

- Bradford Museum Wins Inclusive Employer Award



Ethos

As part of the Workshops museum staff shared words that summed up the ethos they would like to inform their work with Bradford. The words that predominated related to collaboration, reciprocity and openness. This exercise revealed how much staff have in common. Yet it was also clear that this shared ethos would not be possible to embed if the underlying issues revealed through the different headlines were not actively addressed.

We had it in our minds that Part 3 – focused on future directions for the role of the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford – would address ways of working. To help us think about this we asked staff to generate some key words that evoked how they would like to work with Bradford in the future.

Unlike in the headlines where divergences were clear, there was mostly a strong consensus in terms of ethos. Collaborative, reciprocal and open were key words supported by a plurality of associated words.

This set up very clearly that staff have much in common with each other and with collaborators they had worked with on Above the Noise and since. But it was also apparent that this shared ethos would not be possible to realise if the divergences which had been very present in our conversations since Above the Noise and were again revealed through the headlines, were not actively recognised.



The most common words museum staff used to describe their desired ethos of working related to collaboration, openness and reciprocity.
Image credit: Designed by Jade French

Ethos Reflection

I can't say that we knew how helpful these two exercises would be when we designed them. The Headlines exercise was designed primarily as an icebreaker and while we thought we could aim to come back to the headlines in some way at the large final workshop, we weren't sure how. In fact, the ethos exercise only came about as an initial exercise to ask staff to think explicitly about how ways of working failed with the first group, leading to a hasty rethink.

Yet when considered together the headlines and the final ethos/ways of working activities reinforced something very important that we had been trying to articulate since we tried the 'working models' work with the staff action research group, that the museum internally works with quite different worldviews and quite different paradigms. If you ask one type of question, one worldview might be drawn on by staff and if you ask another type of question another world view might be mobilised. So if you ask about ethos, you get collaboration. If you ask about headlines, you elicit a wider range of more contradictory paradigms. The challenge always seemed to be, at the very least, making the tensions between them more visible.

Helen Graham
Research Facilitator

Listening

In the small group discussions museum staff listened to a selection of ‘moments’. These can be found in Part 1. We sought to do this carefully, listening deeply in order to hear the issues raised from the standpoint of the authors. This led to often very moving discussions as staff reflected back what they heard people saying. Edited quotes of these responses have been compiled and linked to each moment.

The moments in Part 1 were written by people who had been actively involved in the Bradford’s National Museum project in different ways. When developing their moment, each person carefully considered what they wanted the museum to hear. They looked back at their involvement in the project and drew out significant insights or realisations that happened along the way. They also looked forward and considered where they saw hope or possibilities for change. The moments were then used as part of the reflective process within the museum towards developing ideas for the Future Directions of the museums’ relationships with Bradford set out in Part 3.



The reflective moments were listened to by museum staff before links to their everyday practice and the future directions of the museum were identified.
Image credit: National Science and Media Museum / Science Museum Group

When staff came together to discuss these pieces of writing they started by listening. We explored questions like ‘what do I hear this person say?’ ‘What are their motivations for saying this?’ ‘What, for this person, might be behind what they are sharing?’ This process of careful and deep listening to people who see the museum from different perspectives was an important first step. In the second part of the session museum staff then considered how the thoughts prompted by the moments might relate to their professional roles.

Sharing stories in this way is a common practice in action research and organisational development. It enables people to more easily take on others’ perspectives. Those reading and listening started seeing the project through different eyes, whether those of colleagues in different teams and of Bradford collaborators who joined at different points over the three years of the project. One of the other shifts that deep listening offered was to create a space where there was no pressure to immediately fix problems or jump to solutions. Instead, the focus was on first recognising the complexity of the issues.

There were many viewpoints that were surprising to staff members. There were times when readers were touched by the honesty and rawness of experiences, suddenly aware of issues they had not even known existed. For some the approach allowed for people to say what they could otherwise not say, precisely through the new opening created by someone else’s experience. We took verbatim notes of the discussion and then worked with staff to create edited quotes for inclusion in this publication. The staff responses to the moments can be read either as a link at the end of each moments or in the Listening section of Part 2.

Listening first gave a different, richer and expanded starting point for staff to consider their own practice. It was after listening, when staff went on to discuss the moments related to their own everyday working life that the tensions between different perspectives, viewpoints and positionalities came into new focus.

Dialogue Revealing Tensions

It was through making the connections between the moments and everyday working life at the museum that the tensions produced by being a national museum and working locally in Bradford became sharper. To enable us to understand the tensions we gave them names – such as national-local and collections-people – and gave the different tensions specific meaning through linking them to insights from staff.

Having listened to the moments on their own terms, we then explored the connections between the moments and the everyday work of museum staff. As we did so tensions – already visible in the Above the Noise reflection process, the staff action research group work and in the Headlines exercise – re-merged. In the workshops we were able to explore the tensions in more depth and with a wider group of staff.

Many members of staff are drawn towards wanting to see greater community and local engagement. However, there is a counter-balancing sense that other aspects of the museum’s mission necessarily pull energy and focus in other directions. Following the small group discussions, we identified the main tensions and organised comments from different members of staff that helped clarify how these tensions are experienced in practice.

In the large final workshop we looked at future directions for the museum’s role in Bradford. It became very important that we found a way to articulate the powerful and persistent nature of the tensions as well as identifying and discussing different possible strategies for dealing with these tensions.

Local – National

A central tension identified is between local and national pulls and responsibilities. The national side of this tension is made up of a number of different elements and includes: governance and decision-making structures; funding; collections significance; status or prestige; being a national platform; international networks of other national museums; geographic scope in terms of collections and potential audience and geographic location. The local side of the tension includes: being well connected within Bradford; understanding the people who live in Bradford and their histories and faiths; working in collaborative ways and seeing how Bradford can be an entry point for interpreting the UK.

In Maureen’s piece she argues it needs to be an ongoing conversation (to tell Bradford’s evolving story), a work in progress. We need to continually be in dialogue with people in Bradford. But this is not currently embedded in the way we work.

Gin Jacobucci, Volunteer Coordinator

Bradford is an ecosystem and there are some things other institutions do really well and we don’t need to do, and there are things we can do – because we are a national museum – to fill these gaps in Bradford that other organisations are not filling.

Helen Langwick, Head of Exhibitions

We shouldn't see the museum in isolation to other organisations that exist in the city. Andy Abbott names some that are firmly rooted in their local context, why does he see them rooted? We can strengthen our roots by doing what we do best in terms of our collections, our skills and resources, our profile, and so on, by working with what we have to bring impact and relevance that has longevity. What does that look like for us? What can we do that adds value?

Jo Quinton-Tulloch, Director

Tension between national and local is less so an issue at the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester (also part of the Science Museum Group). SIM is about showing the nation to Manchester and Manchester to the nation. It is worth remembering that there is another museum in the group that does that.

Lewis Pollard, Curator of Television and Broadcast

Time to build relationships and think
– Pressure to deliver

Staff often say that their everyday lives are focused on delivery, whether of exhibitions or events, and that they would need to be allocated more time to be able to build relationships in Bradford. However, ways in which this tension could be rethought started to emerge in the discussions in terms of framing working well with Bradford as increasing the museum's efficiency and ability to meet its mission.

What does it practically mean for to us to 'build relationships' when we are charged with constantly producing deliverables that explain the world of science to our audiences?

Martyn Lenton, Project Manager Exhibitions

How can we stop seeing things like working with Bradford, Open for All, or any kind of equity planning as extra work? How can we create a culture that helps us recognize that these things can help us do things quicker and better?

Kathryn Penny, Head of Screen Operation

Working with communities is not a sideline or window-dressing, it is a core and vital part of what we do. It needs to be done strategically. It needs to generate KPI's and link to outcomes which are measured and evaluated.

Iain Hendry, Audience Developer

Staff agency/agency of collaborators
– Science Museum Group decision-making process

Being part of a group of national museums means policy and decisions are made in a structured way, with oversight provided by staff in senior positions. A key tension identified is how a mode of transparency and accountability offered by these processes can be combined with enabling staff and collaborators to feel they have creative agency in their projects. An area that drew focus, both in the moments and in the discussion, was in how to conceptualise organisational change and in particular how to think about the relationship between enabling innovation and structures of processes and decision-making.

I started off today by saying that despite working within an institution we are also individual people. And we each develop personally, through learning and reflection. My role is to support this development and also the collective change in the museum that will deliver our mission and ambitions. It is important to strategically embed this work because that is how it will be sustained.

Jo Quinton-Tulloch, Director

We need to look at the way we are administered and governed as an organization. My headline was about moving towards community ownership. I know that won't happen, but to me the key question is to ask: what are the political and economic systems we are a part of and sustaining? Is this at odds with our vision for a fairer, more equal society? That is what I see in what Sajidah and Chris say about change.

Sarah Ledjmi, Associate Curator of Sound and Vision

Going back to the transparency of the fundamentals of what we do and where we can be flexible. Not language of ‘we must, you can’t’ but explaining what we can do for others. I have used this when working on events for example. Having very open conversations about our processes. I want to be perceived as somebody with integrity and a good will. I want to help, but there are things I can’t do.

Dean Loughran, Head of Operations

Exhibitions programme can be decided from above, touring shows come in that have different focusses to what we usually focus on. Being consulted is really key, so that conversations can be had about making it work in Bradford. With the move closer towards Science Museum Group processes and identity, decisions about the exhibitions programme are now made both locally and group-wide. That introduced pressure to create tour-able exhibitions which can present challenges in combining Bradford-focused working with this aspiration. We need to avoid formats that limit locally specific content to an ‘add local aspect here’ section. That tends to look tokenistic and not integrated.

Alice Parsons, Interpretation Manager

There is something monolithic, essentialist, about some of the ways the ideas of the institution, of the nation are mobilised. It’s a false dichotomy of local and national. You are always local somewhere. ‘If you are not from here you can’t ever be from here’ is surely the opposite of what we are hoping to achieve, of our vision of what ‘national’ means. How do we miss out on the critical, how do we break the monolith, the pitting of fixed, immutable, singular ways of being against each other? How do we value the plural, the multiple, the other, the fluid?

There is a difference between reform, revolution, and abolition when we think about change. It would be interesting to think about what these words could mean for an organisation like ours in terms of change. How do we break down the monolith of nation, organisation, etc? How can we make it more plural? How can political concepts help us put this into practice?

Sarah Ledjmi, Associate Curator of Sound and Vision

Audiences (large numbers) – Communities (in depth engagement)

A tension emerged in how the museum distributes its focus between ‘visitors’ and ‘communities’. Museums are set up to create inspiring visitor experiences – magic moments or magic days out. Exhibitions are designed for large numbers and understood through audience segmentation and exit surveys. Communities are specific people and groups and work is developed through in-depth engagement work. A tension that was expressed in our discussions was how to move towards more sustained long-term relationships with communities in Bradford, whilst retaining the importance of that more momentary visitor magic.

We need to recognise it is a long-term thing and to get away from a project approach. We have been looking in our team at developing long-term relationships with particular groups, or parts of Bradford. We have long-term goals and strategies in place for that. Co-curating a space is like a front room. It is when you are comfortable enough to move the furniture around. That takes time and trust. As a recruiting manager I think about Andy’s experience and how we can recruit in a way that represents our communities and Bradford. We need to think about how we do that and about what we put on job descriptions.

Elaine Richmond, Partnership and Participation Manager

We know who our audience is, and that a lot are from Bradford and the wider Yorkshire area. We’re always aiming to get our message to that group and as many others who we think will enjoy what we do. We know we can’t put everyone from Bradford in one pot, and when we want to engage other groups it takes time, planning and resource. Obviously, that’s not an unlimited supply so it can create tension in terms of where we apply our focus, but this document should be an excellent starting point for developing new ways of approaching that.

Phil Oates, Communications Manager

The issue in my role is that I have a focus on particular people and communities. The audience BD5 and BD3 become isolated because it is not linked to the audience segmentation model or the communities that marketing might be conceptualising.

Iain Hendry, Audience Developer

The flip-side to long-term commitment is short-term work with schools in Bradford. Sometimes it works really well for things like design testing or a preview for creating marketing images. While this could be seen as extractive or short-termism, there is reciprocity there. I got the impression that the children were enjoying the special treatment. The museum was experienced as a special place that they got special access to. And then they can show pictures in the paper. This maybe doesn't mean much in formal education but creates a base for the future.

Martyn Lenton, Project Manager Exhibitions

As the Front of House team, we engage with so many people who come through our doors. We have some really good conversations with people. A lot of these experiences are lost and not incorporated into our understanding of what is valued. The experiences of Front of House could be better captured.

Siobhan Devanny, Explainer Team Leader

Collections – People

Museums collect objects and use conservation techniques to keep objects safe in ways which mean they can survive for use in the future. Tension can be experienced between making collections available for use in the present and ensuring their long-term conservation. The other way this is a challenge is that the museum has a specific collections focus – the science and technology of sound and vision. This means that collaborative projects need to look creatively for links between the museum's collections and themes and issues of importance and relevance to Bradford.

Museums are not local youth clubs or common spaces, they have a significant role in keeping collections safe. This means things can't always be turned around quickly and in what has been described as a 'Bradfordian' manner. Now, of course there is a middle ground to be found and the museum needs to get better at connecting to people and understanding their needs. But what would be lovely is if some of the places and people in Bradford tried a bit more to understand what museums need, in the same way we in the museum try to understand the needs of Bradford.

Helen Langwick, Head of Exhibitions

The feeling I had from the Above the Noise experience is to have the conversation very early on and to ask: Do we need to adapt the way we work? Above the Noise has had an influence on how we look at exhibitions going forward. How much support will this exhibition require from registration and collections services? Who are the lenders? What is their experience? How much do they know about the museum? The National Railway Museum in York and the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester (both also part of the Science Museum Group) have also been impacted by it. It has also impacted how we are looking at COVID collecting and how to develop a fast-track process to collect in a responsive way. That process made me hark back to Above the Noise and making sure we tick the boxes we need to, to make sure objects are safe, whilst also adapting to the situation.

Nadine Loach, Registrar

From my side it has to be really practical and that is why we use the idea of being a good neighbour. We wanted to build on relationships that the Security Team already had. Something we did recently was to work with Bradford Homeless outreach. We are now an official pick-up point for a charity for people who need a place to stay.

John Rooney, Operations Manager

Personal relationships – Strategic partnerships

The museum already has established formal strategic partnerships in Bradford. Yet a key issue remains in terms of how staff might be supported to cultivate their own personal-professional networks in Bradford in ways that would enable their everyday work, in particular with those in Bradford who are part of the civic networks debating the future of Bradford.

There is frustration and more loaded emotions in Bradford about historic injustices and relationships with individuals and organisations which is important we recognise and know for our work. We are not starting from scratch, there is a long historical, social and political context we are working in and with, and we need time to get to know that history. This is a relationship, something we keep working on. I was previously maybe not as aware of that.

Gin Jacobucci, Volunteers Coordinator

Networks are so important. I realised that when I worked on Rivers of Tea with Tim Smith. Tim or Andy Abbot can do what they do because they have these massive networks. Alice knows everyone, she talks to everyone, and is a huge asset for our team. This knowledge needs to broaden out. I would love it if all of us knew people in the city who we could call and find out what is happening in Bradford. If you have those connections already then you can collaborate with people more easily and make their voices heard. A lot of people who work in the museum don't live in Bradford, and at the moment we of course don't even see our colleagues. Maybe we can have a set of systems in place to enable keeping in touch, like monthly trips out, have someone who works in the community or creative scene at each of our monthly staff briefings. It would be nice to have workplace support to go out there and talk to people.

Kate Burnett, Interpretation Developer

I work across two large events, a film and a videogame festival. A lot of our content for these festivals is created and supplied by contractors. I have been thinking about my work with them. Going into discussions with contractors thinking, how can I – as a representative of a national museum – benefit those we work with. This might involve talking and communicating more, asking how they would want to use a museum space, what kind of promotional opportunities we can offer, what their own ambitions and project goals are and how we can help meet them. I am trying to have a more co-operative approach to my work ethic.

Jack Wentworth-Weedon, Festival Assistant

There is a sense that we aren't part of the cultural and heritage networks in Bradford. Almost by nature, because of the way the museum is approaching its mission. The tone too often is, we are an institution and we will bestow our learning onto our audience. The museum is not collaborative in our setup.

Phillip Roberts, Associate Curator of Photography and Photographic Technology

STEM
– Social history

The National Science and Media Museum is part of the Science Museum Group and therefore has a mission to focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). It was noted that this is often not always clearly understood by people in Bradford and sometimes makes it difficult for staff to develop local collaborations.

STEM focus can mean over-emphasizing a STEM factor, which can lead a way from the actual local issue or story that is meant to be addressed in a collaboration between the museum and partners in Bradford.

Iain Hendry, Audience Developer

I often get approached by local partners because of the museum's national status, but I know that my focus needs to be our STEM remit too. The people approaching me are not clear about that, their argument is that we are the national museum, so important things should happen here. I know from experience that local significance does not rate as high in our decision-making processes (like Forward Programme Group), as STEM content does. I am told to work locally, but our processes are more likely to filter local ideas out. I think because of that I then self-censor and put maybe more focus on STEM aspects than needed, which can take us away from the actual local needs we mean to address.

Alice Parsons, Interpretation Manager

Quality in outcome – Quality in process

Linked to the discussions about delivery, a tension was expressed between an outcomes-focused approach to work (quality in outcomes) and a processes-focused approach (quality in process) that might take longer and need more resourcing. In recent work of the Exhibition Team there were useful indications of how an apparent opposition between outcome and process might be rethought.

In Sonia's piece I recognised her point about how momentum was lost when Above the Noise opened. We changed our way of working in the Exhibitions Team, now when the exhibition opens – instead of seeing that as the end of our work, that opening day is when the work is just begun. It is when something is live, when it is a resource for engagement. As a result, we changed our work pattern structure to hopefully allow more space for tours, events and other responses. I hope now that we'll have more time to have conversations when it matters, not like Sonia experienced it – a year and a half later.

Alice Parsons, Interpretation Manager

I also see that timescales for exhibition projects make in-depth collaborations very difficult. You would probably need to double the development time on an exhibition. This does not mean it shouldn't be done, but it is challenging to do. There is an extent to which the Bradford's National Museum project hasn't impacted the internal workings of the museum. Partly because the museum is not willing to change structures. That is what I see between the two stories, what we should do and how the museum is set up.

Phillip Roberts, Associate Curator of
Photography and Photographic Technology

Dialogue Revealing Tensions Reflection

We had been circling around these tensions now for over 18 months. They'd lurked in the cross-cutting questions arising from the Above the Noise reflections, in the 'working models' documentation and in the staff action research group discussions. But what we hadn't worked out was how to do something productive with them.

Everyone knew tensions existed, but this wasn't getting us very far. The working models approach – based on identifying different paradigms/worldviews – hadn't really hit the nail on the head. The working models still set things up like there was a choice to be made and the way I had written them, I think, felt a little bit too much like annoyingly pointing out inconsistencies. Seeking to encapsulate the tensions on this kind of sliding scale – as shown in Part 3 – was more immediately easy to grasp in large part because it didn't set the issues up in terms of falsely easy choices or as if consistency in worldview was the point.

Helen Graham
Project Facilitator

Testing Alignment as Strengths and Tensions as Strengths

In a final large workshop, we tested two strategies for approaching the tensions – Alignments as Strengths and Tensions as Strengths. Alignments as Strengths was seen by staff as offering some scope. However, it was also thought that it was necessary to acknowledge the significant tensions. Tensions as Strengths was seen as offering a way of being more honest and open about the pressures for the museum.

While there was enthusiasm for alignment between the national and local where possible, many felt that more actively recognising the irresolvable nature of the tensions – and seeking to conceptualise ‘tensions as strengths’ – was necessary. Caveats to the Tensions as Strengths idea included how to make working through tensions feel positive and fruitful, being clearer about how making tensions visible might inform decision-making processes, and firmly positioning a ‘tensions as strengths’ approach within a wider commitment to culture change within the National Science and Media Museum. In this section you will find explanations of these concepts alongside staff reactions to them.



Tension connects and holds energy.
Image credit: Karsten Seiferlin <https://tinyurl.com/yyu5877a>

Testing Alignment as Strengths and Tensions as Strengths Reflection

For the longest time I had been pushing towards what we ended up terming alignment as strengths. I've got old documents for a draft article on rethinking the national in national museum which, a little naively it now seems, sets out the myriad of ways on which there is no necessary contradiction between local and national. But that was ignoring that the lived experience of navigating the national and local at the National Science and Media Museum is experienced as, at minimum, a tension. In the end we decided we wanted to test both at the large final workshop – both the scope for seeing Alignment as a Strength and for Tensions as Strengths.

Helen Graham
Research Facilitator

Alignment as Strengths

In the planning document circulated in advance of the final workshop, we asked the question: How might the NSMM be a thriving and stronger national museum precisely through being rooted and deeply engaged in and with Bradford?

This way of thinking about the question of the museum's role in Bradford has come up persistently throughout the Bradford's National Museum project. This way of thinking sees no necessary contradiction between being a national museum and a museum which has strong collaborative connections in Bradford – and in fact sees a strong alignment between national and local roles as a strength.

Examples we gave were

- Working with and in Bradford is national work
- Interpret the nation from Bradford
- Status travels in both directions
- Build reciprocity in resources (that both the NSMM brings resources to Bradford and Bradford brings resources to the museum)

Reactions to Alignments as Strengths

Potential was seen in Alignments as Strengths in that it allowed for seeing the local and national as on a continuum rather than in contradiction and, crucially, positioned the museum and Bradford as mutually benefiting from their association. The Alignment as Strengths ideas were seen as especially powerful by those in community-focused roles and those in curatorial roles who are focused on developing the collections. However, drawbacks were identified to only taking this approach. Alignment as Strengths was understood as missing the wider responsibilities of the museum to regional audiences, to representing experiences beyond Bradford and as ignoring the power dynamics of how decisions are made in the Science Museum Group.

If it's a commitment and is realised, it will give me a lot more opportunities to realise and do my work. I work with very specific audiences in BD3 and BD5 but if there was more to draw on from other teams, and projects it would be better for my practice.

Iain Hendry, Audience Developer

London is the centre in a skewed way. It isn't really the centre, just thinks it is. So we can rethink that. Nation gets defined locally, through interpreting what it means in that locality.

Gin Jacobucci, Volunteers Coordinator

Our current collection policy does not mention anything about Bradford. The collections policy of the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester (also part of the Science Museum Group) has a section about local stories. Our collection policy should reflect the same thing. Collect Bradford to show its importance to the nation.

Lewis Pollard, Curator of Television and Broadcast

We can collect more specifically in relation to Bradford. One of the limitations, if we did collect around what our audience in Bradford wants, becomes important only in the longer-term... In the long view we could say that we are only collecting for one audience and missing the relevance of other localities and other audiences. This is not a risk for now, but might be a risk in say 30 years if we focused on this exclusively?

Geoff Belknap, Head Curator

Tensions as Strengths

In the planning document circulated before the final workshop we also set out the Tensions as Strengths idea for discussion.

We wrote

The tensions expressed above are often experienced as barriers or contradictions. Yet it is also clear that the tensions express different aspects of the museum’s purpose, with different teams and different members of staff holding responsibility for different elements of the work. The museum needs to do many different things to fulfil its mission. In this sense the tensions are not resolvable. It is not possible or desirable for the museum to think in an either/or way and pick a side.

Rather than seeing these tensions as negative – as a barrier or as contradictions – the various conversations and discussions have prompted the idea of whether we can think of the tensions as a strength. In fact, we might say, these tensions are precisely what makes the NSMM the NSMM.

Tension – in physics – is the force of connection. Tension is created by both pulling apart and keeping connected. It is precisely this pulling and connection which creates energy. Tensions have been experienced as pull apart or pulling in different directions. But could we see the tensions as pulling to expand what the museum can do and become? We can think of tensions as dynamic connection that can support and expand each other.

Examples we gave were

- Inter/national scope AND local depth
- Reciprocal relationships AND targeted delivery
- Transparent, safe structures AND creative freedom
- Magic moments AND deep relationships
- Collecting things AND debating meanings
- Personal relationships AND Strategic Partnerships
- Science knowledge AND everyday experience
- Quality in outcome AND quality in process
- Reciprocal relationships AND targeted delivery

Reactions to Tensions as Strengths

Tensions as Strengths was seen as being helpful as it allowed for the different competing agendas and remits to be openly talked about and navigated. It was noted that not all tensions are creative and productive and that more unhelpful tensions need to be identified and resolved where possible. It was also noted that constantly navigating tensions had the potential to be tiring and dispiriting and needed to be carefully managed through the right kinds of organisational culture and time and space for discussion. Finally, there was concern that ‘tensions as strengths’ needed to be articulated in terms of how it might aid decision-making and help make visible how decisions are made in the Science Museum Group (which often requires decisions to be made from a collective ‘Group’ perspective).

There will always be tensions...

I would find very helpful to recognize the tensions and openly talking about the different agendas we have to manage.

Gin Jacobucci, Volunteers Coordinator

We would be kidding ourselves if we thought we could remove all the tensions in an organisation that is as complex and rich as ours. But I think that a way of navigating these tensions is to work collaboratively. The important thing is that we can articulate them, understand them better and make sure we are supporting everyone within their roles. If we are honest about the tensions, then we can work better together.

Jo Quinton-Tulloch, Director

I think every kind of human endeavour has tensions and restrictions. It is identifying those and resolving them as a group. Don’t just put a fix in place and move on, solve the issues together. Align and resolve where we can and express and acknowledge the tensions where we can’t.

Dean Loughran, Head of Operations

The fact that they won't go away is about reminding ourselves that we are not aware of a final destination, this is process of change we go through, Bradford is changing as well, we can't have a fixed point we are running towards. Everything is always changing. That is why the box in the first Padlet happened, the discussion about the word 'slow'. Time consideration, patience is important, we won't have solved it one day. So it is important to show in Bradford that we are wanting to adapt, that we are on a journey, but we can't show what it will look like, it will never be a finished outcome, but an ongoing process. Makes me feel calmer because it will be an impossible task otherwise. (impossible to find a final solution)

Alice Parsons, Interpretation Manager

Tensions need to be acknowledged and not slipped under the radar. We need to be honest about what we are trying to do. It's sometimes going to be awkward and require more time.

Martyn Lenton, Project Manager Exhibitions

Working with tensions is really critical in all of my practice, it's about critical thought. If we don't take the space and time to question our collections, we will not be doing our job.

Geoff Belknap, Head Curator

Difference between productive and unproductive tensions

Tensions underlie all of our activities – there are time pressures, word counts, budgets. But there are some tensions that we could drop, as they are counter-productive.

Dean Loughran, Head of Operations

We need a catalogue of tensions, some are positives and some are not. Which ones can be spun and turned into something positive and which can be removed and simplified?

Kathryn Penny, Head of Screen Operation

Human toll of tension

There will always be tensions. The consequence is that it is tiring, to constantly live with tension. From the outset you need to acknowledge that there is a human cost, living in a state of tension is hard and draining. After a very tense time, people would need some time to heal.

Geoff Belknap, Head Curator

It's a lot to hold together and that can be tiring to manage. Finding a constructive way of doing it is important. Maybe that is sometimes when we stop, because it is difficult. To get the idea of Tensions as Strengths to work we would need to pace ourselves and spend time on it.

Gin Jacobucci, Volunteers Coordinator

From Tensions to Transparent Decision-Making

The tensions are good in recognizing where our pitfalls are, maybe it gives a space to question the status quo. We talk a lot about these things and then we grind to a halt. It's about using the conversations and then creating actions. Rather than have massive discussion and then nothing comes out of it.

Bex Hill, Festivals and Cinema Events Coordinator

It is really important that solutions are agreed rather than imposed. Understanding, for example, that if something is targeted towards a specific community, then it may not turn out to be a blockbuster. That is okay but needs a mental trade off. A change in view.

Dean Loughran, Head of Operations

How do we reach consensus? There are some things that will never be resolved, so how do you move forward, or how do you change your perspective on it? Maybe tensions isn't the right word. You need to find a commonality to find a productive way forward. Maybe there is a better word that can show that you do go through some friction but what comes next is important? How do you move forward? Structural tensions are harder to deal with than creative tension.

Geoff Belknap, Head Curator

How do we adequately capture all of the stakeholder attitudes that often go unsaid during the process? We often find out at the end, when it is too late, to do things differently. There are some things that we have to do legally, and some things that we have just always done in a certain way. We need to make sure we know which of these we are dealing with in any given context. This could be worked out during the process rather than at the end, so these assumptions are surfaced properly. This is where the model could be useful, in opening up conversations about these tensions, and surfacing them at the outset and keeping logging as we go, so nothing is lost, and we can work out which are which. Do we need to do it this way, or could it change? Who then makes the decision about who does what, and what goes forward? This is the crucial part that is missing in this draft.

Dean Loughran, Head of Operations

I quite like that this whole debate about national and local is more internal than anything else. The fact that we are not going to get a clear answer about which to prioritize allows us to be more flexible and not constrained. We can do national and local, the tension allows flexibility in our programme. Tensions as Strengths can make space for that.

Alice Parsons, Interpretation Manager

Dangers that Tensions as Strengths hides inequalities

It is a rehearsal of ‘London and region’ and how disjointed and unequal it is. The country knows certain regions and communities get less, all of this is a rehearsal of these inequalities. We’re always rehearsing this story, we are run from London, the tension cannot be resolved. But it could be a conversation about devolution, democratisation and what it can do to address those inequalities. If the same people at the top retain the final say and the decisions are made somewhere else, then, in this view, tensions as strengths could be a lie.

Sarah Ledjmi, Associate Curator of Sound and Vision

Tensions as Strengths Reflection

In retrospect it seems odd I didn’t reconcile myself to what became Tensions as Strengths sooner. I’ve often thought all museums – and this is only exacerbated when they operate at a larger scale – are themselves founded on a contradiction.

To see heritage as a material and non-renewal resource which must be kept safe for future generations and made accessible to everyone now is a split mission which then prompts the professionally-led ‘on behalf of’ everyone and future generations that exemplifies the governance of almost all museums. As long as museums exist with that paradigm they will be fuelled precisely by navigating irresolvable tensions.

This core collections-people tension, which prompts the decision-making tensions when participatory practice is added to museums, is present in the NSMM. It is also added to by others that are specific to being a national museum and part of a large group of museums led from London. The pragmatic question then becomes how to make these tensions positive, fruitful and creative rather than tensions that drive everyone to exhaustion and despair. What we weren’t sure of going into the large final workshop was whether this playing around with the different meanings of ‘tension’, from meaning something unresolved to its meaning from physics, as a force of connection and potential energy, would resonate.

Helen Graham
Research Facilitator

Collecting: Corona Chronicles

Mary Dowson initiated Corona Chronicles early in the first Lockdown. The idea was to use the BCB networks to collect Bradford people's experiences of Lockdown and to explore the technology they were using to keep in touch with friends, family or work. The archive would be a collection of audio interviews. Corona Chronicles also allowed us to explore the question of how the museum collects.



Bradford City centre, deserted on a Saturday afternoon on 9th May 2020 as a result of the lockdown imposed by the UK government in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. Photo by Tim Smith.

Currently the National Science and Media Museum's collecting policy does not mention Bradford, meaning that any case for an object or archive to be collected needs to be based on the core themes and disciplines of the museum. So Corona Chronicles could not be focused only on people in Bradford's experiences, it had to tell a story of broadcast technology as well. That worked well as the technology side of the story was also important to BCB. As the Coronavirus restrictions were imposed BCB were forced to close their studios and had to find a myriad of different ways of carrying on broadcasting, involving the widest range of people, including those that didn't have a computer or access to the internet.

However, moving forward in the museum wasn't easy or quick. There was the collections policy mentioned above, there was the Collections Board that makes decisions on what to collect and there was the fact that the Science Museum Group is currently developing a digital preservation strategy.

Sarah Ledjmi, Associate Curator for Sound and Vision, worked with Mary to understand how to connect the Collections Policy, the Collection Board and Corona Chronicles. Sarah did this through openly exploring the issues with Collections Board. What became clear was that Collection Board were interested in a specific focus on broadcasters talking about the technology they used, rather than an archive that contains examples of how technology was deployed to record the archive or people talking about technology in their everyday lives. Corona Chronicles, therefore, exemplifies the tensions identified between STEM-Social and Collections-People.

The story isn't over yet and Sarah and Mary are going to carry on finding ways of connecting National Science and Media Museum collecting policy and the experiences of using technology – for broadcast and in everyday life – in the times of coronavirus. But it has been frustrating for all involved. What has made it something worth continuing has been the context of the research which has meant that the conversations have been very open and the issues could be situated in a bigger picture of trying to understand how the museum can work differently in and with Bradford.

“Our collecting policy, although reviewed regularly, is meant to stand the test of time: in principle, all the objects we collect are acquired ‘in perpetuity’. I feel like this foreverness implies an assumption of placelessness, uprootedness. I wonder if this might explain why we find it difficult to make a strong case for Bradford material BECAUSE it is from Bradford. That somehow, being from Bradford makes the material less universal, it makes it time-bound because it is place-bound. Of course it is the opposite: Bradford is just as representative of the nation and speaks to universal themes because of its diversity, its very ‘localness’ which is at the same time global, connected, ever-changing.

This ‘fluidity as risk’ is also at play when we think about collecting the Corona Chronicles as an object in the making. Once the object is ‘IN’, it usually loses its connections with the outside world, and the museum controls the narrative (we write the object descriptions, the labels, we choose where and when to showcase it...). With the Corona Chronicles, BCB, its volunteers and the interviewees get to continue shaping and adding to the archive as it evolves. Is this too much of a risk for the museum? To lose control of the narrative and let ‘IN’ something that is more than an object – a living, evolving network of people with a stake in the story?”

Sarah Ledjmi

“The meetings with the museum have left me feeling quite deflated. I would probably have abandoned the idea of collaborating if it wasn’t for the context of my involvement with Bradford’s National Museum project. At times it has felt too hard and far too slow. I’ve questioned whether it was worth the effort – we might do all this work, for it then to enter a system that returns a blunt ‘Museum Says No’ verdict. But working with Sarah to actively negotiate this and to see it as part of understanding how the museum can work more collaboratively in general – that is a much more interesting proposition and has made it possible to stay involved. We need to see every project between the museum and Bradford as a Venn Diagram where we are trying to grow the overlap in the middle and grow what we have in common.”

Mary Dowson

Bradford in the Museum: Belle Vue Studio

Tim Smith



A Victorian daylight studio, where photographic portraits were made using natural light, has been part of the NSMM’s Kodak Gallery since 1989. Converting this generic studio into a very specific one, Bradford’s Belle Vue Studio, was an ideal action research project, enabling exploration of many questions central to our work.

Most importantly it demonstrated how we could tell a national/ international story through a local lens whilst facilitating meaningful collaborative work between several partners. They included the National Science and Media Museum itself, Bradford Museums and Galleries who hold the Belle Vue Studio collection of glass plate negatives and related material, and people in Bradford, especially former customers and their families who came forward to share their memories, thoughts and reflections. The Belle Vue Studio was an ideal vehicle for such work many reasons.

It's a great story: of how a single camera sat on the same spot in the same unchanging studio for fifty years, until it closed in 1975, but managed to created a unique record of how the city outside was transformed.



Mr & Mrs Pykett who visited the studio on the day of their wedding, 3rd March 1928.

It's an inclusive story that embraces a huge range of Bradford's communities, both established and recently arrived. It was the ultimate in local, everyone was pictured standing on exactly the same spot. However this process, repeated many thousands of times, reveals complex narratives common to industrial towns across Britain and our international connections overseas.



Photograph taken at the Belle Vue Studio, also known as Sanford Taylor's, who was its original owner. This high street portrait studio on Manningham Lane in Bradford had many customers who moved to the city to seek work during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. It became very popular amongst new arrivals from the Caribbean.

It's a story told with compelling content, an archive of over 17,000 images which, at first glance, appear very simple portraits. However, they tell us so much more than what appears in the frame, as revealed by the words of the photographer and his customers who collaborated to produce their own versions of reality. Much of what they say is personal, but presented in this new gallery they also tell us a lot about our shared histories.



Orysia Fletcher in a hand tinted photo of her wearing traditional Ukrainian dress and (right) with her older sister Irene Diakiw. Both spoke of being part of Bradford's Ukrainian community in a BBC documentary about the Belle Vue and the BNMP's work to uncover its customers' stories. Hidden History: The Lost Portraits of Bradford was aired in 2020.

This work also illuminated many facets of bringing diverse partners together. Each brought different perspectives to the project, which at times could be challenging to weave together. However their contributions complemented each other brilliantly, enabling us to achieve our common aim of sharing this story with a wider audience. When launched in 2021 the Belle Vue Studio display will provide a tangible legacy of the strengths of such collaboration.



Through the Bradford's National Museum research process, it became obvious that significant challenges are created by the National Science and Media Museum connecting to Bradford and seeking to become more open, engaged and collaborative. It is possible to see and experience these challenges as contradictions which are frustrating and exhausting. And it is important to acknowledge that, alongside elation, feeling tired and dispirited was part of the story of Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford for both museum staff, the project team and our story collaborators who live and work in Bradford.

Part 3: Future Directions

The factors that produce the tensions represent different facets of the mission of the National Science and Media Museum. They are related to the ways in which the National Science and Media Museum is 'national': the fact that the National Science and Media Museum is part of the Science Museum Group, the implications of decision-making in a large multi-sited organisation, the process and procedures deployed to manage the museum's responsibilities to collections and the pressures created by seeking to produce exhibitions, a film programme and events that attract large numbers of visitors.

As a result, the tensions that arise when the museum has sought to work locally and in a collaborative way are not fully or finally resolvable. Yet where we have arrived – with the final push offered by this publication process – is that the tensions, once honestly acknowledged, can be approached in a way that turns them into strengths. To put it another way, the tensions created by navigating what it means to be national while being located outside a capital city are precisely what makes the National Science and Media Museum the National Science and Media Museum.

The Future Directions for the National Science and Media Museum and its relationship with Bradford are set out in two ways, through a letter to Bradford from the museum and through focusing more specifically on the ways of working that will make the Tensions as Strengths approach meaningful.

The letter and ways of working have cohered a 'we' of the museum – it is a statement which seeks to make visible the issues the museum faces in working locally and how it wants to approach the negotiation of these tensions as a creative and fruitful part of organisational culture and a culture of collaboration.

The ways of working are more specific and suggest tactics to enable greater alignment between the national and local where possible and a positive activation of the tensions where alignment is not possible.

However, in the spirit of the multiple perspectives that have animated the Bradford's National Museum project from the first, the collective 'we' of the museum letter and the ways of working are accompanied by personal postscripts by staff and our collaborators. The personal postscripts act as both affirmations and qualifications, they enable individual voices to be heard and underline aspects of Tensions of Strengths to make visible what might need to be in place or be considered to make them as useful as can be. The personal postscripts also work as a performance or enactment of the commitment to challenge, discussion, reflection and learning evoked in the letter.



Views of the National Science and Media Museum from City Park.
Image credit: Tim Smith

A letter to Bradford from the NSMM: Making the tensions into strengths

We are proud to say the National Science and Media Museum is Bradford's national museum. We gratefully thank all of you who have been part of the conversations and experiments over the past three years and especially those that have contributed moments of reflection and of hope to this publication process. We have discussed very carefully your moments and the insights promoted by the Bradford's National Museum process and we have come to a recognition. We are committed to understanding Bradford better, but we now know that we also need to ask you to understand us better. It is not only the National Science and Media Museum that needs to change – what needs to change, develop and grow are the relationships between us.

Strength in aligning

Like many of you who contributed moments, we see so much potential in alignment between the local and the national. We want the museum to be actively and reciprocally connected to Bradford's people, ideas and innovation. We recognize the great possibilities that open up through understanding Bradford as a lens through which to see the nation. As we saw in *Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford*, the trans-local connections between Bradford and Mirpur, Sylhet, Gujarat, Jamaica, Poland and the Ukraine enable powerful stories of the personal and political impact of changes in media technology, as well as of the legacies of the British empire and of the 20th century's wars and political revolutions.

Tensions between the national and local

However, three years of work have also sharpened up our understandings of the tensions we face in seeking to be both – national and local. The tensions are found in how to produce high quality outcomes for large audiences and do in depth community work, how to be part of a large organization with long time frames and formalised decision-making processes and to do responsive participatory work, and how to build strategic partnerships and enable all staff to develop personal professional networks in Bradford. These tensions were experienced in *Above the Noise* text editing, in the difficulty of turning ideas for events by collaborators quickly into realities, and in how we navigate collaboration and our internal decision-making processes. We do recognize that the experience of these tensions – both for staff and collaborators – have often been frustrating and dispiriting.

Tensions as strengths

Yet, through this process we have learnt something crucial for our future relationship with Bradford. We increasingly recognize that we cannot fully or finally resolve these tensions. In any complex, dynamic system, tensions will always exist. Rather, we have come to understand that the tensions could become a strength. Tension – in physics – is a force created through a combination of connection and pulling. Think, for example, of a taut tightrope that creates a route where movement in both directions can happen. It is precisely this mixture of pulling and connection which creates potential energy. The tensions in the work of the museum have been experienced as contradictions which pull the museum apart. But could we instead – drawing on the definition from physics – see the tensions as pulling to expand what the museum can do and become? We might think of the tensions experienced by the National Science and Media Museum as dynamic connections that create pathways and expand what the museum is. To put it another way, we increasingly think the tensions produced by being locally-rooted and being national are precisely what makes the National Science and Media Museum the National Science and Media Museum.

Looking inward to look outward

The challenge now lies in activating the tensions in ways which are fruitful and energetic. To do so the direction of the museum will need to be supported by three ways of working.

Challenge is expected and welcomed

The first is to recognize that seeing ‘tensions as strengths’ means actively negotiating disagreement. We will cultivate an institutional culture where challenge is welcome. We will see constructive challenge as professional loyalty to a museum openly navigating complex terrain, and as a characteristic of doing a good job. Through this, we will seek to surface and articulate tensions, so we can transparently account for decision-making.

Learning together is core work

The second is to develop an institutional culture that fosters intellectual and personal curiosity, self-reflection, deep listening and learning together. We seek to develop an approach to dealing with challenging issues – including structural racism – that goes beyond training or tick boxes by enabling deeper and sustained reflective practice. In doing this we will put the Science Museum Group Open for All initiative in dialogue with the histories of innovative anti-racist activism and inter-faith work in Bradford.

People are the organisation and structures adapt through everyday work

Finally, these ways of working will be underpinned by a theory of institutional development which sees changes in processes and decision-making structures as arising from conversation, collaboration and everyday work. In this way the people are the organisation, and the role of organisational structures is to enable these cultures of reflection and debate to drive the museums’ development.

Looking out and to what comes next

These last points have focused on institutional culture. For those of you in Bradford who we have worked with, and hope to continue to work with, these concerns might seem too internally focused. However, we have learnt that it is by looking inwards in a rigorous and ongoing way, by being critical about what we do and developing our practice in dialogue with local partners, that we will be able to look outwards to Bradford and to the world. We are now in a much better position to enter projects and partnerships, being clear about who we are and what we can bring to a collaboration.

As the first phase of the Bradford’s National Museum process draws to a close, we now open up the next phase of our work in and with Bradford. As we do so we find ourselves more able to speak about who we are, more able to listen well to all of you, and hopeful about what we will now create together.

**Yours (and the nation’s),
The National Science and Media Museum**

Tensions as Strengths: Ways of Working

We have come to see the tensions between being national and being local as a source of strength.

We will

- Seek Alignment
- Activate Tensions
- Transparently articulate tensions in decision making
- Make the activation of the tensions an energetic and fruitful part of institutional culture

Here we set out ways of working – developed through workshops with museum staff – that will enable the National Science and Media Museum to turn the tensions into strengths.



A rainbow over Bradford's City Park. The Tension as Strengths: Ways of Working suggest how the National Science and Media Museum can transform the tensions produced by the museum seeking to work in and with Bradford into creative and fruitful strategies. Image credit: Tim Smith

Tensions as Strength: Inter/national scope AND local depth

Enter the local through the national and the national through the local

The local and the national are connected ideas. Too often the nation is dislocated and imagined only in abstract or, when it is placed, fixed in capital cities. Yet the nation can be entered from anywhere, and an interesting and engaged approach to what it means to be national is to approach the meanings of England and the UK through Bradford. In the other direction, the National Science and Media Museum's engagement with Bradford can be approached through the lens of the national and international, linking in people, collections and ideas from other parts of the country and world, and adding the networks of international museums to the trans-local connections that make up Bradford.

Ways of Working Reflection

What the 'inter/national scope and local depth' way of working suggests is the importance of being more specific about which aspect of 'national' is being evoked in any instance, and to see the national as always needing a physical and conceptual entry point where ideas and the ground meet. This entry point could be anywhere.

The National Science and Media Museum's entry point to the nation is Bradford, the part of the country on which it is physically built. And the museum's entry point to Bradford is through this knotty idea of the national which can be usefully broken down to be thought of more concretely as people, funding and collections.

Helen Graham
Research Facilitator

See the museum as part of the Bradford ecosystem and the national cultural ecosystem

Be curious about Bradford – and also enable people in Bradford to understand what the museum is

The Science Museum Group is a whole world of people and activity. Bradford is a whole world of people and activity. There is great potential in fully connecting these worlds. This will come through museum staff being deeply interested in Bradford and becoming better at talking openly about the world of the Science Museum Group.

Connect with Bradford’s history to talk internally about whiteness, the legacy of colonialism, racism and anti-racism

Bradford is a place which enables an informed and specific engagement with British history. Bradford is what it is today because of the legacies of the British empire and its connections to, in particular, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and the Caribbean. Bradford has a long history of anti-racism and inter-faith work that can be drawn on in the National Science and Media Museum’s conversations about race and racism.

Experiment with shifting speed, scale – and prestige

Being responsive and flexible can enable collaborative relationships and there are lots of different ways in which the museum has been experimenting with moving fast. When an exhibition or event is smaller and less resource intensive then the ways of working can be more responsive and flexible and decision-making can be shared with collaborators. The bigger an exhibition or event becomes the more staff from different teams within the museum need to be involved, the more expensive it becomes, the greater the risk and the more it will be expected to attract large audiences. As a result, the process will become slower and the control collaborators have over decision-making will be diluted. Yet with shifts in scale also come shifts in prestige. Prestige is produced through taking up space and attention and therefore prestige (when considered in terms of how the museum currently works) is produced through the very processes that take power away from collaborators. It might be that the trade-offs between greater prestige for loss of power and control are worth it for collaborators – but this needs to be talked about explicitly in future collaborations. For more on this see The ‘national’ in National Museum.

Tension as Strength:
Reciprocal relationships AND targeted delivery /
Tension as Strength: Quality in outcome AND
quality in process

Good processes lead to better outcomes

Co-produce ideas of quality from the beginning of projects.

Too often high-quality outcomes (in terms of exhibitions and events) and high-quality collaborative processes are seen in opposition, but they can be seen as mutually reinforcing. One way of ensuring they are mutually reinforcing is to talk openly about what quality means at the beginning, including making visible all of the issues discussed above produced by increasing scale.

We are not too busy to work well with Bradford
– working with Bradford we will save time

Working with Bradford has often been thought of by museum staff as an extra and additional area of work that might get in the way of being able to deliver and, therefore, as an inefficiency. Yet it can be conceived as the opposite. Working well locally will make the museum more efficient by being better informed, being enriched by activity and knowledge in Bradford and, therefore, more able to achieve successful and popular exhibitions and events.

Resource spaces for reflection

Having time to reflect, see the bigger picture, see your work through other people’s eyes, is key to being able to produce high quality work, on time and on budget.

Tension as Strength: Transparent, safe structures AND creative freedom

People make organisational change. Structures and processes need to be adapted to help culture change happen

Organisations are made up of people. The energy of reflection, discussion and debate can be seen as a means of transforming structures and processes.

Use Science Museum Group decision-making processes to cultivate agency and to support staff to innovate and take risks

It is easy to think of individual agency and organisational decision-making structures as being opposed. But structures can be adapted to enable creative agency and enable innovation.

Tension as Strength: Magic moments AND deep relationships

Recognise the difference between ‘audiences’, in depth outreach work and active connection to Bradford’s civic networks

Build long term relationships with those that are interested... and also recognise there can be magic in a moment

There is a danger in conflating different ways of thinking about people. Audiences visit, take part in an exhibition or event and then leave. Communities are groups you work with in depth, seeking long-term relationships. Being part of a civic network means knowing what is going on and taking part in the discussion about the future of Bradford. Any one person could be at different times an audience member, a community member and a member of the civic network, but the different ways of conceptualising people prompt different ways of working for the museum.

Value Front of House experience as deep knowledge and understanding

The visitor experience team have conversations everyday with people who come into the museum, activating this knowledge is crucial to understanding how the museum can develop.

Tension as Strength: Collecting things AND debating meanings

Activate collections in conversation with Bradford and use Bradford as a lens for the national collection

The collections can be brought to life through conversations with people in Bradford and Bradford – with its position in British history and cultural life – can offer a lens for interpreting the national collection.

Make visible the behind-the-scenes work that enables front of house engagement

To keep collections and people safe in ways which are consistent with policy and law takes a lot of work that is not visible but that nevertheless makes the museum’s exhibitions and events possible. Part of building a better relationship with Bradford is sharing and talking about this behind-the-scenes work and about why it is necessary.

Tension as Strength: Personal relationships AND Strategic Partnerships

Build strategic partnerships through cultivating personal networks

The museum has many strategic partnerships, these can be added to by staff developing their own personal networks which will support future collaborations.

Recognise that there is a history to the museum’s relationship with Bradford – and use this understanding to develop better relationships and partnerships today

The museum has not always been seen as wanting to work with Bradford and that has left a legacy. Knowing this – and, for example, why it is important that not every meeting happens in the museum – will help in building better collaborations in the future.

Tension as Strength: Science knowledge AND everyday experience

See STEM learning as about enabling people to ask questions and question knowledge

See science as social (not its opposite) – and part of everyday life

A new focus on science and technology has been seen as shifting the museum's mission away from people, but science is social and part of everyday life. Science Capital underpins this as an equity model. Building fluency with science and technology is about encouraging people to ask questions and question knowledge. This makes the museum's focus on the science and technology of sound and vision a useful focus for connecting people's experience and the material world through which everyday life is shaped.

Personal Postscripts

The Letter from the National Science and Media Museum to Bradford evokes a 'we' of museum staff. But for the Tensions as Strengths approach to work the energy created through activating the perspectives of different people are essential. In these personal postscripts staff, those involved in the research team and collaborators who contributed moments respond to Tensions as Strengths. Their postscripts highlight what is offered by the ideas expressed as Tensions as Strengths but also underline what will need to be in place for the approach to flourish and where attention might need to be focused as the museum develops. The personal postscripts are an enactment of the Tensions as Strengths approach. We wanted to ensure we were not just writing about an approach but seeking to show it and to do it too.



Mary Dowson

I really welcome the concept of Tensions as Strengths as a way of making visible the power dynamics between a major institution like the NSMM and community partners. It's a way of both sides being better prepared in starting collaborative projects. Acknowledging from the start what the tensions are and how they might be played out is really important.

Although I don't believe in meeting trouble half-way, because sometimes trouble doesn't come, adopting this approach would better enable an authentic relationship that recognises challenges from the start. After that you can start to build together. If things hit you further down the line, then it's often too late. It's also through properly understanding how the museum works that you can ask questions and pose challenges. Just being told how something works doesn't mean you have to accept it as being immovable. But you can't challenge it if you no-one has explained it to you.

I see Tensions as Strengths as a way of openly exploring issues from all perspectives, seeking out ways to make change possible, rather than just accepting things the way they are.



Pakeezah Zahoor

I like the framing of Tensions as Strengths, and the way this is defined through the pulls that can allow for movement. It is a way of reimagining inherent contradictions. In being honest about limitations, I hope we then move towards ways in which they can be addressed and overcome.

There is something powerful in being able to pick apart and articulate what those contradictions are. These contradictions have not been so clear before or even considered to be contradictory, meaning it is impossible to work through them. This 'working through' is the most important part of the process, I think the ways the tensions as strengths are broken down into suggested action points within and through feels productive and allows a framework people can use once this project comes to an end. They offer ways of understanding where you can move and suggestions of how you might exist within these tensions. It is useful that the project is concluding by making visible what the museum is grappling with.

I never expected anything more radical than this. I didn't expect Bradford's National Museum project to get much further in all honesty. The problems are so entrenched and so overlooked and so insidious that they're even being brought into the light of day feels like a huge moment. I don't expect that a museum would seek to bring a revolution upon itself but even working within a system and coming to the point of fully recognising the tensions hands over power. There is a radicality in saying we can't do this and being honest. I hear so much talk about community engagement and diversity and inclusion, with every cultural organisation incorporating this language as a badge of their own achievement and progressiveness. In this context, there is something powerful about being honest, to holding up our hands and saying this is where we have fallen short – I trust in this more than false celebration which bypasses the real issues people continue to face.

However, it is important that being honest about tensions does not become something to hide behind or to eliminate the notion of a responsibility that NSMM does have to the people of Bradford. It must be used as a point to work from, in order to work towards doing better and more. For example, the fact that the museum is bound by processes where certain decisions can't be devolved, is not to say then that nothing can be done to surface the racial politics of the organisation.

Nabeelah Hafeez

The hope in Tensions as Strengths is it will help the museum navigate the tensions better. It should not become a justification for imposing things on communities but for involving them in a more honest way. Using the Tensions as Strengths approach could also help clarify if the National Science and Media Museum is the right place for you or your group. Do you work with an organisation that is completely Bradford focused? Or do you want to work with an organisation with a national platform and that puts Bradford on a national level? Part of Tensions as Strengths is being more aware that with the national platforms comes some loss of power and control – but I would also want to see Tensions as Strengths as a way of ensuring that partners who work the museum are able to ask questions and challenge how decision-making happens.



Jean McEwan

The Tensions as Strengths lens immediately struck me as refreshing. To see that difficulties can be perceived in that productive way and in a way that is honest about complexities. It also highlights that not all issues can be resolved and it is useful to think about how this can be made into a fruitful tension. I liked the way the language wasn't abstract, the use of the visual metaphor – using the idea of tension from physics, and also the use of a 'pathways' metaphor between the two pulls – made it feel tangible and concrete. It also struck me that this way of seeing difficulties could be a useful counter to a kind of magical thinking that sometimes can happen when you are working with an organisation and coming up against their ways of doing things, a sense of 'if only they would get it and see it my way everything would be better'. Seeing Tensions as Strengths in this way seems to open up space for a more complex and non-binary discussion of us and them.

However, it made me reflect on other projects I am involved in as an artist where there is that David and Goliath dynamic. I did wonder about where the Tensions as Strengths approach places responsibility for change. How can we ensure it isn't just something that glosses over inequalities, where in the navigation of tensions the more powerful side always wins? After all, for the tension metaphor to work there needs to be some equality in the pull on both sides.

Sarah Ledjmi

In response to the letter’s welcome of challenges as part of activating Tensions as Strengths, and in the spirit of what I believe my role entails (bringing more people in the making of the new Sound and Vision galleries), these are the areas of work I will be seeking to develop and advocate for. We must explore what democracy could look like. This means that we experiment with different models borrowed from other organisations and countries, to understand how we could share power. Devolution, consultation and robust recording and reporting processes could be first steps towards establishing new democratic structures, beginning to formalise a community of interest and the museum’s accountability to it. We must be show that people are valued here. This means that we understand that working in a museum is not a hobby and that people are not disposable. The first way to make sure a wider range of people join and stay in the organisation is to offer better pay, progression and working conditions. We must resist nationalistic discourses at all costs. This means that we refuse celebratory narratives about British exceptionalism and we acknowledge that past and present are inextricably linked, so that when we explore decolonial narratives we also refuse to give legitimacy to the fossil fuel and defence industries.



Si Cunningham

I recognised where it was coming from – it didn’t feel like a new way of looking at it. There are tensions. It is good not just to put a positive spin on the issue of the museum and Bradford. It is right to try and turn the tensions in strengths. Foregrounding tensions is interesting in a time when it is more common to try and draw attention to what we have in common rather than what drives us apart. It doesn’t feel like a distinctively Bradford solution – that’s a good thing as what is being said here is potentially relevant to all cities. A grown up discussion about tensions is useful – and if the museum can do that I welcome it. I would be looking for opportunities for how this can be translated into the physical spaces of the museum. What is the physical, manifestation of ‘tensions as strengths’? I am also interested in what this actually means, what will the visitor experience be like in 2025, whether or not Bradford becomes City of Culture?



The Launch

Overview

On 20th January 2021 we launched this publication. In keeping with our approach we saw the publication launch as part of the research process. It offered a chance to generate a greater variety of perspectives on Tensions as Strengths and to look ahead to how the National Science and Media Museum could play a role in Bradford’s bid to be City of Culture in 2025.

To launch this publication, we invited everyone we’d worked with during Bradford’s National Museum – all museum staff, key people from the wider Science Museum Group, and partners from across Bradford, Chicago and Washington D.C..

The aim was to share the ideas of this publication with a wider network. Together, we listened to perspectives from eight museum staff and collaborators who were involved in the project and people in leadership positions – Sir Ian Blatchford, Director of the Science Museum Group and Kersten England, Chief Executive of Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

On the following pages you can read quotes from everyone’s contributions. Their words allowed us to sharpen our understandings of Tensions as Strengths and helped us see how the ideas might work in the wider contexts of the relationship between local government and national government and of the wider Science Museum Group, where Bradford and the National Science and Media Museum are already influencing practice.

Museum Staff and Collaborator Perspectives

Mary Dowson

I’ve come to realize that the museum isn’t just a building, it can’t be. We don’t build relationships with a building; we build them with people. But to do that we have to find ways to get to know people first and commit real time to doing that.

So I was really pleased when the notion of tensions as strength was proposed as the theme for the project publication. For me, tensions as strength suddenly makes complete sense of the many difficult moments that we’ve worked through together in this project. It also sees tensions as strength as an action. It could be the foundation for all the collaborative work between the museum and Bradford’s communities.

If we openly talk about what the tensions might be, right from the start, acknowledge the power dynamics, different cultures and ways of working, and really appreciate what that difference actually gives us, then respectful, authentic, lasting relationships can be established. These relationships have the potential to be different from the more transactional relationships of the past. I see a partnership as a Venn diagram. And that bit in the middle where we really connect is the exciting bit and the bit that we always want to grow, and we can do this by actively building our knowledge and understanding of each other.

Acknowledging the tensions and seeing them as strengths is a real way of us moving forward together. So for me, the idea of tensions as strength is the real positive legacy from this project team that it hands over to the museum, and to Bradford, to develop a great future together.



Pakeezah Zahoor

This idea of not being seen within the institution comes with an inherent contradiction as a person of colour in that space you stand out are one of few and always aware of this. At the same time you are invisibilised and unable to bring your true self into your work life.

I wanted to bring these reflections, speak them here and use them to think about the future direction of the museum, and also in my current capacity at Bradford 2025, to think more widely about the district. I think Bradford is also at this point now where it’s demanding to be seen and to be seen for what it is and on its own terms. And I can feel that, and it feels really exciting. So, to think about where Bradford is going in relation to what my focus has been in these conversations, which is race, it feels necessary to say that the makeup of the city is changing, and we are moving to a 50% ethnically diverse population by 2025.

The Arts and Culture Sector will have to grow and adapt to accommodate and benefit from this shift. This is so that it is representative, but also to ensure the relevance and the continuation of the sector itself. If Bradford was to achieve this, it could be a leading example of how to take a predominantly white art sector beyond the limitations of a western normative experience. This is a national and global shift which we are presently unprepared for. Can we use it to our strength? This shift could well be an opportunity for Bradford to position itself as a district that is ahead of the curve. In order to do that, we need to better engage with our diverse communities now.

Can we sit down and really look at where we’re placing our value and on what needs to change? It requires a harsh level of honesty and difficult conversations, which is why I like the positioning of future directions at the museum, looking at tensions as strengths. It feels like a way of reimagining inherent contradictions in being honest about our limitations. And I hope we then move towards ways in which they can be addressed and overcome. There’s a radicality in saying we haven’t done this and that this is difficult for us to do, and in being honest. I hear so much talk about diversity and inclusion with cultural organisations incorporating this language as a badge of their own achievement and progress. In this context, there’s something really powerful about being honest, to holding up our hands and saying this is where we’ve fallen short. I trust in this more than false celebration, which bypasses the real issues that people continue to face. I’d like to end with the challenge and reminder that being honest about tensions should not become something that we hide behind or something which eliminates the notion of a responsibility that the National Science and Media Museum does have to the people of Bradford. It must be used as a point to work from in order to work towards doing better and doing more.

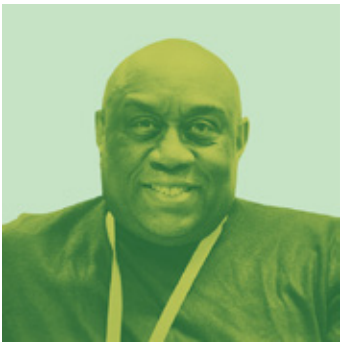
Gin Jacobucci

I’ve taken part in the project since it started about three years ago. Over the past three years, there’s been two moments that have been incredibly significant moments of change for me, both on a professional and on a personal level.

Both of these moments have ultimately been moments of either counterpoint or open disagreement. It’s been two moments where a colleague has very generously challenged me or openly disagree with me. And I mean generously, because it’s not easy and never necessarily pleasant. Both moments were centred around the reality of race today in the UK, as well as implications of being a national museum and the baggage I feel we are responsible to deal with as part of our national history.

They were both very significant and real moments of change of perspective for me. And they were able to happen because through the project we had the space to reflect and discuss some of this issue. We have been able to reflect and confront our ourselves with each other and at times challenge our established ways of working within our hierarchical structure.

So quoting someone I met in Washington when I was very lucky to join the project trip to the US: I think we really need to become more comfortable with being uncomfortable and voice and welcome disagreements, rather than suppress them in favour of a silent consensus that often hides a number of unspoken realities. So, here’s my call for more respectful disagreements for a way forward.



Andy Clarke

In terms of tensions as strength, the tension was me getting involved in this whole gig in the first place. But the strength was that I was working with like-minded people. And that was amazing for me. The reality was that I joined, and I was the only person of colour in the museum, working in an office role. And that kind of worried me a bit. I wondered where this museum was going to go and, as my moment says I, I banged the diversity drum. But it always felt as if it was ‘a nice to have’ in the museum. But it wasn’t really one of the museum’s priorities.

But here we are at the beginning of 2021. And 2020, I don’t need to tell any of you, has been a year of massive change socially and politically. And the museum is now ideally placed to be at the crux of this change, locally and indeed nationally. Now we can now have a frank discourse, which we will hopefully look at the legacies of colonialism and continue the fight against racism. Now I am an optimist at the end of the day. I believe that things will get better, but we all have to try and do that. And this museum, this organisation, feels very different to the organisation that I joined four years ago - for the better. And as I said in my moment, everything aligned - the death of George Floyd, Covid, the advent of the Black Lives Matter movement – in a way that gave me an agency to move forward with some of my ideas.

And this is why I set up the BAME forum. So that employers, people from all walks of life, can come together and talk about those words which are really now part of our parlance in in work terms, unconscious bias, allyship, etc etc. These are words that we didn’t have even a year ago in our vocabulary – now we have them.

Si Cunningham

I just want to share a general observation or some observations on the notion of tensions of strengths and what that makes me think of in a wider Bradford context. I’ve recently been enjoying the Fran Lebowitz and Martin Scorsese series on Netflix, Pretend it’s a City. I’m sure some of you will have been enjoying that as well. To me, it’s an incredibly authentic love letter to New York that many of us who adore spending time in great cities will certainly recognize as it’s full of frustration and simmering resentment. Fran is quoted as saying when people say to me why do you live in New York? You really can’t answer them except you know that you have contempt for people who don’t have the guts to do it themselves. There is for me just the right amount of tension in any true World City, and I mean World City in the sense that we’re also proud of in Bradford. Or indeed in any civic institution. And this tension can be distilled to create something far more exciting, engaging and inspiring.

If you look at some of the things that we’re most proud of here in Bradford, they weren’t necessarily born from moments of relentless positivity. Worstedopolis, the great Victorian merchant city that made us famous was, let’s be honest, a cradle of inequality and exploitation. Fred Jowett and Margaret Macmillan didn’t pioneer free school meals in Bradford because they were bored. They did so because our children were starving to death. I’m wonder if David Hockney’s mind would have wandered off to Bohemia if he didn’t have to endure waiting for a bus at Bolton Junction in the dreary soot drenched Bradford of the mid-20th century.

My involvement with Bradford’s National Museum project, as outlined in my reflection, meant having some very difficult conversations with people about Bradford’s darkest days and being incredibly honest about what this city is. It was a reminder for me that out of adversity comes great strength, community leadership and the kind of grit and resilience that makes Bradford Bradford. I guess then the plea here for myself for that for my City of Culture colleagues, for everyone here today, for the museum and for us all really, is that we don’t have to be saviours or fixers. We just have to be honest and authentic about the stories we tell, no matter how difficult they can be.



Sajidah Shabir

Since a very young age I came to visit the museum. I have a beautiful memory of an exhibit where you could read the news. Whoever I talk to they have the same sort of memories of the museum. Getting a bit older and becoming a teenager, I kind of fell out of love with the with the museum and I didn’t have that connection anymore. Until the Above the Noise project when I had the opportunity of working with people from the museum, make new connections and tell my story. It was a really proud moment for me to sit down with my dad and talk to him about his life and be able to share it with everybody else in Bradford and be part of this beautiful collection of stories.

In my piece I wrote about the connection I saw between St George’s Hall, the National Science and Media Museum and the Alhambra. For me they are all connected. I don’t see the three buildings as something that are just separate from each other. I see them all collectively in terms of arts and culture. Growing up for me it felt like I was disconnected from all three and they didn’t have a place for me. They didn’t tell my story. It didn’t feel like home. But through Above the Noise and getting to know the people there and, like Mary said, seeing that there’s actual people there, people who want to do more, and want to connect with people more, I felt like I would be able to somehow drive the change that would happen. Change that would mean that younger people could feel like they could walk into the museum and see their stories and their history represented. That’s what I see the museum doing in the future.

With the Tensions as Strength, that’s what I mean. It is really important that we’ve notice that there’s a problem. But how do we turn that around? And how do we positively and proactively make a change? The museum is such an integral building to Bradford. It’s beautiful to look at, but in the inside it should also tell our stories. The people of Bradford giving love to these buildings and seeing how beautifully these institutions will flourish with people like us in it.

Sarah Ledjmi

I’ve written a few points in response to the Tensions as Strength idea. Because, even though I think it’s really productive to work through those tensions and think of them as strength, I’m also looking for resolutions.

The last few months have made clear that the divide between life and work is completely blurred, between politics at home and at work. Viruses and statues are political and that museums definitely are not neutral.

There are three different directions that I think I really want to push forward. These are related to what I believe in - in my life, in my work - but also because these relate to what I believe the future of museums and cultural organizations looks like. So first, thinking about democracy and really thinking about what the word democracy means. I think to do that we need to experiment with different models that we borrow from other organisations and organizations locally that think about democracy and other countries so that we understand what it means to start sharing power. I think there’s first step: thinking about devolution, thinking about consultation, thinking about more robust recording and reporting processes. That leads us to more democratic structures. Because it’s got to be about changing structures. It’s got to be about creating new governance models for us as a museum. So that would help us to formalize this community of interest that would hold the museum accountable and really challenge it and challenge how the decisions are made and who makes them.

And a second point is thinking about care, starting at home, really. Starting with care for colleagues and showing that what we value, first and foremost in the museum, is people. So it means that working in a museum is not a hobby. That people working here are not disposable. So one of the first ways I think, to make sure that we’ve got as wide a range of people joining us, and really crucially staying, is to think about better pay, progression and working conditions. So that means rethinking what outsourcing means, what becoming a real living wage employer could mean and how the museums employment conditions can align with our ideals as a museum.



Lastly, another direction that I think is really crucial is resisting national discourses at all costs. So that means that we need to refuse celebratory, uncritical narratives about British exceptionalism, and that we acknowledge that the past and the present are always inextricably linked, and they can’t be separated. That’s what’s so exciting about being a museum of course. So that when we explore decolonial narratives in our stories, in our exhibitions, we also rethink what it means to give legitimacy to industries related to fossil fuel or defence. I don’t think we share necessary the same vision as those industries for what we should do in the present to build a better future.

So that’s just three points that I’m looking forward to because I think they are definitely the future of museums. That’s what I think is expected of us, to join these conversations. I think it’s what Bradford also expects of us. It’s already happening, of course, with all of these conversations in the sector and our colleagues in Bradford. I really would like it for the Science Museum Group to be at the forefront of this work and to be really proactive in joining all of these conversations.

Nabeelah Hafeez

The dynamic between Bradford and the National Science and Media Museum has always been like a partnership and a relationship. And like any good partnership, integrity, respect, open communication and continued learning is so, so important. And it’s like what Khalil Gibran says about the strings of the loot being separate but playing the same tune. I think it’s so important in our reflections here and to move forward. I think there are so many differences that we have to navigate. One thing I did want to highlight through the poem is that there are differences that need to be embraced and by ignoring them we ignore the real problems. But by embracing them there’s integrity and authenticity in how we move forward.

I think that there are going to be challenges, but through our conversations, both with yourself (Jo) and with the colleagues who I have travelled with (on the U.S. trip), I think there has been progress. No doubt there is continued needed, but already we have a foundation here. And in the future generations will look back at this as being a really crucial turning point in the history of the museum. I think one thing I will say is that more open and honest conversations are key, and integrated conversations, and also approaching our challenges with integrity. I’ve already seen that being done and I’m so excited to have these continued conversations.



Ian Blatchford

It has been excellent to hear from some of the people involved in Above the Noise because I really loved that exhibition. It was incredibly moving. I would say 99% of time when I go into a museum I know what I’m going to see and Above the Noise was so different from the standard museum experience.



A word that recurs throughout the speeches is honesty. But actually the keyword, which I don’t think I’ve heard many people saying, is progress. How are we going to turn the lessons from this fascinating project into a leading role for Bradford?

A point I want to stress – and is the thing that people don’t necessarily see – is that so much of what the National Science and Media Museum does has a big impact on the wider Science Museum Group. Just to give you two examples. I have spoken to my colleagues across the group about how Above the Noise was a lesson for the whole group in terms of a different approach to programming and to audience collaboration. I also talk to people about the Yorkshire Games Festival, which is a very new venture. The gaming industry is not only booming enormously, it is a big part of many people’s lives. The National Science and Media Museum is doing leading work in this area. I also want to mention the importance of always remembering how, despite all the challenges, our hopes and dreams can be remarkably common and unified. When Tim Peake’s Soyuz Capsule came to Bradford thousands and thousands of people came to see it. None of them really cared whether the National Science and Media Museum was a national or local museum, what they cared about was an object that was so beautiful and so inspiring that it spoke to them enormously.

For Bradford gearing up for the City of Culture Bid for 2025 I think one of the things that really strikes me is how important it is to concentrate much more on the values and character of the people that have spoken today rather than just talk about institutions such as museums. That will be the winning formula for the 2025 Bid.

Ian Blatchford Biography

Ian is the Director and Chief Executive of the Science Museum Group, which oversees the Science Museum, London, the National Railway Museum, York, Locomotion in Shildon the Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester and of course the National Science and Media Museum, here in Bradford. Ian has transformed the Science Museum Group since his arrival in 2010 with all of our sites seeing significant investment and masterplan developments. There has been much recognition for his work, including: being awarded the Pushkin Medal in 2015; in April 2017 he became Chairman of the National Museum Directors’ Council. And he was awarded a Knighthood in the 2019 New Year Honours for services to Cultural Education.

Kersten England, Chief Executive, Bradford Metropolitan District Council



I’m very proud to have the National Science and Media Museum in our city. I’m very committed to the museum remaining a thriving, flourishing institution that is of national and international significance as well as being deeply connected to place.

As I was listening to the discussion, I thought what you’re describing so reflects so much of my world as a chief executive in local government in one of the most centralized states in Western Europe. We’re on a constant journey to get the right collaboration between national and local government. That’s a messy business, and maybe one of things is to accept from the start is that it is a messy business. I think we need to accept that there will be tension. At times there won’t be absolute agreement or alignment of agendas, and it ebbs and flows. But it’s critical that what we’re seeking is that balance and productive energy. The relation between the museum and the Council has itself ebbed and flowed in the past. But right now it is a good and flourishing relationship born out of becoming more understanding of one another and the parameters that we are working within.

But I would suggest that we need to look at this issue not just as a binary one between national and local. I was really interested in what Sarah Ledjmi said when she talked about national discourses and British exceptionalism. I think too often there has been a kind of casual assumption that national means high-quality, of great interest, of significance and the local means the parochial, the more narrow and more inward looking. I think that we should be wary of inhabiting that kind of binary position.

That's a very kind of Western failing to see things as good/bad, right/wrong, national/local, culture/science. All these binary oppositions, that we sometimes live our lives by, do not always serve us best.

At the sharp end of COVID, we need to look at what has happened for the communities of Bradford. This pandemic has ravaged the lives of too many people in our poorer communities. In our Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, too many people who are key workers and we are a key workers economy. As we go into a period of recovery those things have, as we've observed across the nation, real potential to divide and fracture us. What we must do is commit to a journey of recovery and renewal that unites us and builds the conditions for prosperity and for the flourishing of all peoples of the Bradford district. And that's why the forefront of everything that we will be doing will be a passion for inclusive and sustainable recovery and growth. And I think that the museum has a very significant part to play in those agendas.

I'll just touch on the three kind of key opportunities for us to work ever more closely together.

The first is around education, employment and skills, which is an area in which the museum and the local authority and the University and other partners have done really good work. But we need to really make that connection between that early inspiration of young people, their acquisition of key and critical skills and their pathways into employment. As part of this, I would love the museum to talk about STEAM as much as it talks about STEM because I think that kind of fertile connection between culture, science and technology has huge potential, particularly in a place like Bradford, to support our young people to move into prosperous futures.

The second is about around the place-making of Bradford. We've already mentioned key infrastructure investments that will see the city centre transform and change over the next 20 to 30 years and the National Science and Media Museum is set right in the middle of that context, with a huge part to play. This means taking your place alongside the Alhambra and Bradford Live and becoming a real stakeholder guiding, shaping and influencing how we inhabit and use our city centre.

The third thing for me is, as many of speakers have reflected, around the confidence with which Bradford takes its place in the world. I think Si expressed it beautifully when he talked about world cities. New York also isn't a capital city and my ambition is that we can move beyond that notion that London is where it's at. All our great cities in this country make contributions to the world. And I think the National Science and Media Museum can support us enormously through your global and international reach and with your deep roots in the place of Bradford, with the peoples of Bradford and the diversity of Bradford.

I do want to just reflect finally on something about the museum telling the story of the people of Bradford. I want to relieve you of the burden of that because I think some of their expectation comes from the fact that there is nowhere currently where the stories of the peoples of Bradford is probably curated and brought together. We have an abundance of stories not yet told and presented to the people of Bradford. We are going to explore in a museum for the people of Bradford in due course, which can sit comfortably alongside the content of the National Science Media Museum.

Kersten England Biography

Kersten has been the Chief Executive of Bradford Council since 2015, having held the same post in York from 2009 to 2015. Under her leadership the District has seen a period of economic growth, inward investment and delivery of major capital schemes, despite a backdrop of dramatic reductions in central funding for local government and huge pressures in the delivery of social care and health. She has lead roles on innovation and growth within the Leeds City region and is passionate about supporting civic leadership and community capacity building. She was awarded a CBE for Services to Communities in 2019.

Launch: Responses to Tensions as Strengths

We asked people:

We've outlined the ideas behind Tensions as Strengths, what questions does it raise for you?

Who, what and where is the Bradford the NSMM is addressing? At what different scale(s)? What are its complexities? And what tensions arise in terms of the power relations at work between NSSM and different Bradfords?

As an architect, an early bit of learning was that the best projects, from the best briefs, come from situations which are complex, which contain tensions which have to be resolved, balanced, acknowledged. That can mean simply “dealing with” some, but positively “celebrating” others. So - question - how do we shift this approach and confidence to other situations?

It's a good framework. However maybe we need to be careful, in acknowledging that tensions are a real and ok part of the project, of the danger not taking action or committing to making changes needed.

I find the tensions/strength concept very tantalising and hopeful. I think it requires trust, hopefulness, openness, patience, a sense of interdependency and relationality, creativity and imagination to work this productively. It is an ongoing process, never complete, not a product and requires intentional interactions, responsible communication, admittance of not knowing and vulnerabilities.

I find the tensions to strengths concept refreshing and uplifting. Applied to people, the concept for me is about going further than just recognising that difference exists - it's about celebrating difference, celebrating the possibilities this can bring and about building connections based on this notion.

I'm interested in the mechanisms that will lead to change. As a participant in the project I found people, generally at the making things happen level, determined to make change and another invisible layer of people at the Museum who were tied up in the way things have to be. A force for continuity, for remaining within the top down structures which controls the decision making. A very clear and fundamental tension between unequal powers. What is the process that will change this? Secondly, how will resources be apportioned between the National agenda and the local call for representation and visibility? Power and money. Same old story.

How do we change the way these are used?

Is the national local dichotomy useful? What about macro-micro histories that blur across one another?

I like what Sarah Ledjmi says about deconstruction of concepts and narratives, sharing of power, and caring to help shape a better future.

Launch: Ideas for the National Science and Media Museum and Bradford 2025

We also asked people this question:

It is 2025 and Bradford is City of Culture. Inspired by everything we've discussed today, imagine you are walking into the museum what would you like to see?

A whole variety of ideas came up from getting rid of the five lanes of traffic between the museum and city park, to a 'huge livestream of critical histories' to a celebration of the 'youngest city with most potential'.

“A space that is multi dimensional awakening my 5 senses exhibiting real lives and stories. Real people and places in time. Using technology to celebrate and appreciate the differences attract me to explore the parts I feel “fearful” of and to embrace the previously unknown.

We are so the same but take diverse journeys to get here today and need to tell and hear these wonderful diverse stories Truthfully and embrace the subtle differences that make us all so rich !!! Do not be ashamed to tell me be honest!”

Althea Thall
Storyteller

The exploration of how the National Science and Media Museum and Bradford connect is far from over. Bradford's National Museum uncovered both enormous potential but also genuine difficulties and dilemmas. Tensions as Strengths is a way of openly and honestly exploring the challenges of evolving a museum and to see this as an ongoing and constitutive part of the museum's practice.

The challenges identified through this sustained collaboration between the National Science and Media Museum and Bradford are not unique. The insights of our project are certainly relevant for other national museums based out of capital cities. But not only that. Many of the issues identified apply to any museum, as tensions are produced simply by being a museum. The different missions bound up in collecting and conservation – of looking after objects for future generations and of making these objects accessible now – in themselves produce tensions. Tensions which will have their own particular flavour in museums of different scopes and scales but might still benefit from being explored and activated as strengths.

Conclusion

The wider museum sector is working out how to respond to decolonisation, racism and its own whiteness, to climate change and ecological breakdown, to a need for new economic models and to calls for democratic innovation. These are significant challenges that require us to go to the very founding logics of museums and to ask whether these political challenges can be accommodated within the structures and paradigms bequeathed to us from the late 19th century. This is the existential question for museums in 21st century.

What we noticed is that the frustrations that were provoked by any of the Bradford's National Museum research initiatives – not least Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford – were made bearable, even sometimes enjoyable, because there was always a meta-dimension. We didn't just try to create an exhibition, collect an archive or put on an event, we used each experiment to ask bigger questions. It was through framing each initiative within this shared inquiry and joint intellectual endeavour that the irritations and awkwardness of practical collaboration were made more bearable and came to hold greater meaning.

This points to a way for museums in general to deal with the 21st century challenges to their operating models. That is to see every project, every exhibition, every aspect of museum practice as a collaborative exploration into their own existence. Museum work becomes action research. Museums become open inquiries. Bradford's National Museum has given a little indication of how helpful that could be.

Director’s Directions

Jo Quinton-Tulloch, Director,
National Science and Media Museum

It is 2025 and Bradford is City of Culture. Inspired by everything we’ve discussed today, imagine you are walking into the museum what would you like to see?

This question – of what it means to be a national museum, with a very specific home – has been a way of exploring the many challenges, opportunities and conflicts that arise as we work to understand the relevance of our collections and how we can be both a museum that understands and serves its local communities; as well as ensuring that our collections and expertise are shared on a regional, national and global stage. It is through better understanding these tensions collaboratively with our Bradford partners that we have sought to turn them into strengths.



As we come to the end of this phase of the research, I am armed with a set of questions that will form the basis of how we take the museum forward, consciously working to be more embedded in Bradford and more relevant to its communities:

- How can we support the other ‘power’ centres in Bradford such as the Council and The University of Bradford? How can we leverage our influence together?
- Yet power isn’t always held by the museum. Other organisations realise more influence through deeper engagement. What can we learn from them? How can we work with them?
- How do we engage authentically with a wider set of issues and themes that are important in Bradford but not the primary focus of the museum?
- How does the museum develop and change as communities develop? How far are we willing to allow these changes to change us?
- How do we become better neighbours and develop more reciprocal relationships?

In the moment [\[link\]](#) I contributed I framed the museum as having limitations that we needed to discuss more honestly with partners. However, over the last months of the project we have taken this insight and rethought it. What could be seen as our limitations – that we find it hard to move fast, be flexible, devolve decisions – are facets of what we also need to see as our distinctive contribution. That we are a museum of internationally significant collections, able to attract large numbers of visitors to Bradford and part of a group of museums across England which draws UK government cultural funding to Bradford. As a result, we do have long planning cycles and need to make decisions in accountable ways through our management and governance structures.

Yet it is precisely in being clear-headed and realistic about who we are and how we operate that we will be able to partner more equitably and build stronger relationships. We want to become part of a network in Bradford whereby the resources of the Museum complement and amplify the opportunities, people and cultures in Bradford.

We have the opportunity and the ambition to create more collaborative and partnership working; to become better embedded in Bradford, and to find new ways to connect our collections to many more people. We will do this by actively and transparently negotiating the tensions in being both national and being Bradford – and by making this our strength.

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A huge variety of people and institutions have collaborated on the Bradford’s National Museum project, from conceptualising it many years ago to being involved in Above the Noise: 15 Stories From Bradford to being involved in this final publication.

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Above the Noise: 15 Stories from Bradford

Big thanks to all who were involved in Above the Noise: 15 Stories in Bradford. Our exhibition panel acknowledged everyone per story, we reproduce it here.

Bradford Heritage Recording Unit and East Bowling History Workshop

John Ashton, Carol Greenwood, Steve Kerry, Elizabeth Llabres, Rob Perks, Maggie Pedley, Tim Smith and Lynn Wray.

Intergenerational Oral Histories

Aminah Ahmed, Umarah Alam, Saleha Asim, Sarah Bibi, Aamir Darr, Hareema Din, Alina Fiaz, Will Gould, Nabeelah Hafeez, Iqra Jahangir, Mariyah Kayat, Ikra Khalid, Alayna Khan, Kashaf Khan, Safiyah Khan, Zahra Khan, Khizrah Mateen, Hal Michaels, Atiqa Qaiser, Misba Rani, Sarah Rawlins, Sajidah Shabir, Sanah Shah, Rijba Talib, Aarzu Waheed and Zara Zaheer.

Family trees

Julia Ankenbrand, Jean McEwan, Arran Rees, Maureen Rowe, Sandra Rowe and Joan Russell.

Cassette tape letters

Naureen Khawaja Hafeez, Sarah Ledjmi and Rameez Khawaja.

Belle Vue Studio

John Ashton, Elizabeth Llabres, Maggie Pedley, Tim Smith and Lynn Wray.

Islamic Sounds

Zahoor Bilali, Bradford Grand Mosque, Alex de Little, Sonia Fayyaz, Nabeelah Hafeez, Annie Jamieson, Seán McLoughlin, Wahida Shaffi, Aysha Sadiqa, Sonia Sarah, Shaykh Asrar ul-Haq Owaisi, Kristina Wolfe of the MSCA-funded VRAASP Project at the University of Huddersfield and Farah Yasin.

Accessing the Airways

Paul Coleman, Mary Dowson and Sarah Rawlins.

Going Underground

Agnieszka Andryszewski, Robert Andryszewski, Stanislaw Andryszewski, Andrew Chymera, Orysia Chymera, Irena Cyhanko, Irene Diakiw, Michael Fedyszyn, Ruth Fettis, Barbara Hladowski. Chris Hladowski, Efisa Kmit, Bohdan Lanovy, Peter Shutak Stephan Shutak, Tim Smith and Regina Tombs.

Asian Film Clubs

Irna Qureshi.

Bhangra Daytimers

Mick Chandsoor, Moey Hassan, Fazal Hussain, Mohammed Ishfaque, Ranjit Kaur, Umar Khan, Anjum Malik, Hardeep Sahota and Tim Smith.

Asian Youth Movement and the Bradford 12

Jayesh Amin, Idris Bashir, Taj Butt, Aamir Darr, Jeevan DeSouza, Mohan DeSilva, Mary Dowson, Helen Graham, Dave Harrison, Tariq Mehmood, Anandi Ramamurthy, Jani Rashid, Noorzaman Rashid, Jawed Siddiqi and Bovy Singh.

Meeting the Mediators

Ishtiaq Ahmed , Si Cunningham, Martin Baines QPM, Baroness Margaret Eaton, Richard Horsman, Zulfiqar Karim DL and Paul Meszaros. Film by Elle Sea Design.

Common Wealth and Speaker’s Corner Films

Evie Manning and Alice Parsons.

Art commissions and presentations

Basir Mahmood, Amar Kanwar, Salima Hashmi and Nima Poovaya-Smith.

Common Space

Andy Abbott, Julia Ankenbrand, Alice Parsons and Lynn Wray.

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If you are interested in the Bradford's National Museum project or any of the ideas in this publication, get in touch with Helen Graham. You can email Helen at: h.graham@leeds.ac.uk

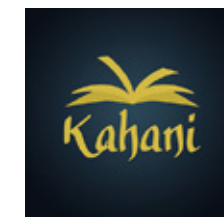
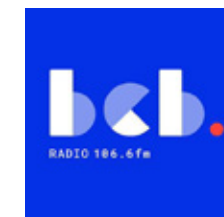
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Meet the Research Facilitators

Many people were actively involved in researching as part of Bradford's National Museum. But three of us played the role of facilitating the research. We organised, co-ordinated, took notes, cohered ideas in draft form, spotted connections, followed ideas up, accepted invitations, thought long and hard, wrestled with ways of thinking, tried things out, changed them and tried again and experienced many dilemmas along the way. In the publication we have sought to make some of this process visible through the green reflective boxes.

Helen Graham

I spent my formative years in museums wondering why they found it so painfully hard to be participatory. It is only, over time, that I have come to understand better the constitutive challenges in this endeavour and to become interested in the lived complexity of trying to evolve these old institutions that intrinsically link enlightenment and imperialism.

If I have found an approach that feels useful in the task, it came into being through the collaborative work of this project and is represented by this publication. A task that can only be done alongside and with many people, openly and through many conversations. A task that always requires you anew to know and feel your own fallibility and to understand that whatever you think you can see well, only casts shade on what you can't. I am deeply grateful to have been in such enriching dialogue with the other people you see in this publication over the past three years. (I also teach museum and heritage studies at the University of Leeds, a practice that has been much challenged and extended through this project).



Lynn Wray

I am a visual artist, curator and researcher, interested in art and exhibition making processes, politics, visual display methods and co-production. I am interested in understanding art and exhibitions as making processes and political practices, in 'making' as agency, and in the representation and legitimization of non-professional cultural practice in museums. I am passionate about 'learning through making' and exhibition-making as a collaborative political and civic practice. Making and doing things with the project team, partners and collaborators, local creative practitioners and museum staff has consistently challenged my assumptions and views in all of these areas and opened up many new ways of thinking and working to me.

For the last three-and-a-bit years I have been working as a researcher on the project, and have been based at the National Science and Media Museum, getting to know the exceptionally skilled, kind and patient staff there. I feel really fortunate to have served as a curator on the co-produced exhibition 'Above the Noise: Fifteen Stories from Bradford', working with over 100 community collaborators to explore how Bradfordians have bypassed mainstream media to record, share and create their own histories and culture. I learned so much about local, national and international history, politics, technology and culture. The scale and ambition of the endeavour meant that we all had to learn together through doing, and through trying things out, through encountering sticking points and working out together how we could work through them to move forward. I also enjoyed going on a journey with the National Science and Media Museum, Tim Smith and John and Elizabeth at Bradford Museum's and Galleries to open up and share the Belle Vue Archive even more widely. This journey began with the digitisation of the archive at Bradford Industrial Museum, and continued with the co-production of an installation in Above the Noise where forgotten memories were surfaced and stories were shared, then moved on to gathering new stories and information for the archive in places like the Bradford Interchange Bus Driver's Canteen and the Ukrainian Church. These stories fed back into the production of a documentary for the BBC Hidden Histories: The Lost Portraits of Bradford and the development of a new permanent display in the Kodak Galleries at NSMM where the Belle Vue Studio is recreated.

Prior to this role I worked as a researcher at National Museums Liverpool, researching the hidden LGBTQ+ histories in their fine and decorative art collections. I completed my doctorate in curatorial practice in 2016, during which I conceived of and co-curated a major exhibition entitled, 'Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making 1789-2013'.

Julia Ankenbrand

I am a researcher and collaborative research facilitator. My interest is working on projects that allow real life issues to be addressed – and necessarily involving those who are impacted by the issue and therefore have the knowledge, insight and passion we need to work on it.



Working on the Bradford’s National Museum project has been an absolute privilege. I loved living this research with people across the Bradford district who threw themselves into this project with us. It was a journey of surprises, patience, difficult moments, connections, confusions, very good conversations, and much more. On the way, I grew my knowledge and skills of facilitating and having conversations that help us make sense together and create change.

I am taking many lessons into my professional practice at the cross-road between museum studies, organisation development and action research.

