

## **Creating a new museum: Colin Ford, 16 August 2012**

We went up to see Bradford, we looked at the building with the rainwater running down the concrete walls and so on. It had been used once for a DIY exhibition in all the years it had stood empty. On the train on the way back, the Chairman and Dame Margaret said to me, would you be interested in running it if we got a museum? And I said, Bradford is not on the short list of places I particularly want to work in, but if anyone founds a national museum of photography I want to run it. Of course I had to be interviewed for the job in due course, but I was interviewed for the job and we did get it, and I was immensely lucky to run it for the first ten years.

In the ten years that I ran the Museum it said on the front door, this is a museum about the art *and* science of photography. There were museums in the world that collected photographs, there were museums in the world that collected and displayed, of course, equipment, but they always kept them at arm's length. What I tried to do, and I didn't always succeed, but again Margaret totally backed it, was to say, we're not going to show a camera unless you can show the pictures, and the sorts of pictures that it displayed, and we're not going to show pictures – and this side of the equation is more difficult – we're not going to show pictures unless you can also show the sort of equipment or the technology that produced it.

What Bradford put in – apart from giving us the building, on a peppercorn rent, devoting the first £2 million of the conversion costs – they also paid for an Education Department. We had therefore, from day one – the older museums didn't do that, they had to somehow splice education in much later – we had an Education Department, with people paid by the city, with links to

the city and all its schools. Bradford is one of the largest metropolitan areas in Britain, so it's got schools over all the surrounding counties and so on. We had that from day one. So what did we do with all those things we'd acquired that we didn't want in the main collection? We called them the Education Collection and put them into the Education Department. So when kids came in they could handle old cameras without some conservator saying get your hands off! They could handle the old camera, they could see how it worked, they could look at what old photographs looked like. Again, not planned, but a wonderful plus; a really, really good way of creating what we needed.

My early proposal for the Museum was it would not be open to the public in the morning, schools could have it to themselves. But it would open late into the evening because we had films starting at 8 o'clock. So from the time you came out of your office, to the time you came to the film, you could go to the Museum. It didn't work. Because, again my ignorance as a Londoner, I did not realise that every Yorkshire person had to go home for tea.

A colleague of mine and I went to the Museums Association conference in Brighton, and we went down on the train and we had the first leaflets for the Museum. She and I went all down the train just giving one to everybody. And on the way back to our seats I heard somebody say, put a national museum in Bradford? What a bloody silly idea! Well, we proved them wrong, didn't we? And that's something that never fails to give me pleasure.

**An Oral History of the Science Museum Group, 1973-2000**