

My splendid staff: Dame Margaret Weston, 26 July 2012

We thought we'd tell you that you won't be in the Museum on the day you take over, you'll be in York at a press conference, saying that the National Railway Museum is going ahead here. I thought, oh. And they said, by the way you'll be in overall charge of the setup.

I had managed to put one member of staff on the ground when we were still waiting for the building to be altered to suit us, and he reported that the goods shed was up for sale, and I said I think we must have it. We acquired it and we had more room than we thought we first would, and even then all the objects wouldn't fit.

Ministry of Works had requisitioned this whole area during wartime and wanted to give it up. I heard this when I visited that area, with the naval collection, and I said could we have some for a store because it's high and it will never flood? They said no, you can't have a bit, you've got to take all or nothing.

Concorde, I had a telephone call – it was all telephone calls in those earlier days, not e-mails – and the man didn't give his name or his department. But he just said, do you want Concorde 002? It's coming to the end of its test service. And I said, well I want to preserve it but I have no place to put it. But yes I'll take it.

On my way up I was reading an article which said that photography was so important in the world, and getting more important and I could see this, that we ought to have a Museum. And I thought to myself only a few people could get it set up, government-wise, and I was probably one of them.

I managed to get a minimum staff by wastage, in other words by not sacking anybody or retiring them early, but waiting for people to retire and then putting the advertisement in Bradford rather than the Science Museum. The Science Museum staff were sometimes opposed to it because they said you had to cut us to staff them.

We were amazingly productive, but that wasn't due to me, that was due to my splendid staff. I helped where I could, but they were amazingly productive. There is a reason for this: it was one period of the greatest change in science and technology, and it had to be covered.

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