

## Birmingham: its People, its History

The Digital Heritage Demonstrator project recently installed a 65inch multi-touch table with a bespoke application into the brand new gallery 'Birmingham, its people, its history' at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The £8.9 million refurbished gallery opened in October, thanks to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, for Birmingham people and visitors to the city who want to discover the fascinating global history of Birmingham.



The entire gallery spans over 500 years of Birmingham history from medieval times and the industrial revolution, through to the World Wars - to the technology-led life of the 21st century. Our giant collaborative touch table was installed at the most modern end of the gallery covering 'post 1940s'.

The touch table expands on this idea allowing physical objects from the gallery (that are typically presented behind glass) to be examined virtually. In addition, it enables the general public to interact with a much wider range artefacts (from across the whole of Birmingham) than would normally be possible in the physical space available.

When visitors arrive at the table, they are presented with a large map of Birmingham. The map has been rotated 45 degrees to maximise the space available on the table. Layered on top of this modern map are three picture-frames (or "lenses") that allow the user to look through the modern map into a different era. These picture-frames can be dragged around allowing the user to explore Birmingham. This enables users to compare the differences between maps and also to find artefacts related to a particular area. As the table supports up to 32 simultaneous touch points, it enables numerous people to use the lenses at the same time. Artefacts are initially represented as pins (i.e. buttons) on the map which when tapped by users open an image of the artefact along with a corresponding description. These images can be moved, resized, and arranged in collaboration with other users.

The application currently supports three different picture-frames each of which focuses on a different category of museum artefacts. The most popular of these picture-frames is dedicated to work by father and son artists Frank and Arthur Lockwood. They both painted numerous pictures of Birmingham and the Black Country throughout the decades and their work has a great deal of relevance to Birmingham locals and tourists to the gallery. Arthur had a particular focus on industry in the city since he returned to Birmingham in 1987. His work illustrates the dramatic change that Birmingham has gone through over many regeneration programmes.

These paintings have been scanned at a fantastically high resolution and allow the user to experience them in an entirely new way to previous Arthur Lockwood exhibitions (e.g. by allowing users to zoom right into areas of their choice). The paintings present a catalyst for conversations between all varieties of people discussing the vast differences between Birmingham new and old.

For more information about the Birmingham Museums Trust please visit <http://www.bmag.org.uk/> (<http://www.bmag.org.uk/>)

