

Touch History

A jewel in a golden box

At the beginning of July 2012 the Digital Heritage Demonstrator project launched its first touch table at the Hive, Worcester. This 65 inch, multi-user, multi-touch table allows visitors to discover the rich history of Worcestershire through exploring a fascinating varied array of images.

Opened by Her Majesty the Queen, the Hive is a partnership between Worcestershire county council and the University of Worcester establishing the first integrated library and history centre in Europe. The new facility offers unprecedented access being open 8:30am – 10pm seven days a week. The audience visiting the Hive includes: students and academics; town library users; local special interest groups; families coming to use the new children's library; mothers with babies attending sing along sessions and young people coming to use the digital media library or social gaming activities.

Amongst these varied activities between the children's floor and the public library sits the history centre which houses the newly combined Archive and Archaeology service. One of the many benefits of this new building is that it gives a public facing space to a collection which did not previously have one. The DHD Touch History table is located in the centre of this area.

Users are presented with a main menu offering a choice of six 'albums' to explore. Each album consists of a set of images arranged in a seemingly random scatter across the table. Each image can be dragged, rotated, zoomed and shrunk by multiple users simultaneously. Each image has a caption and an info button which reveals a longer description.



The six albums cover different parts of the collection and have been chosen to demonstrate its breadth. They are:

Agriculture

Photographs from the 19th and early 20th centuries of everyday life in the agricultural communities. Many of these early photographs are remarkably high resolution and capture activities that are no longer practiced.

Shop fronts

This set of photographs, mainly taken in Worcester, show how our high streets have changed since the 1950s and many can be enlarged to even explore the goods on display in the shop windows. – This set of photographs, mainly taken in Worcester, show how our high streets have changed since the 1950s and many can be enlarged to even explore the goods on display in the shop windows.

Posters

This is a selection from the ephemera collection, posters, leaflets and certificates which are rarely seen by the public. They are interesting as examples of how design changes through different eras.

Landscapes and archaeology

This section displays a chronological set of artists reconstructions of daily life from thousands of years ago up to mediaeval times. Along with the paintings are photographs of some of the archaeological finds that are the evidence for these interpretations.

County maps

This section shows a selection of beautiful illustrated maps that are preserved in the Hive's collection. Being very large and sensitive to light the actual maps are not easily accessible to the general public. However on the table they can be explored at full size or larger.

Worcester maps

Likewise this section displays a variety of old town maps as well as some 20th century maps for comparison which include the land on which the Hive is now standing.

Adobe Flash Player or QuickTime is required for video playback. [Get the latest Flash Player](#) [Get the latest version of QuickTime](#)

In addition to the six albums of content there are three buttons asking questions that users may have.

How can I explore the past at the Hive?

This takes you to a screen that demonstrates the potential of the various resources and tools available in the History Centre, by suggesting different kinds of research you could do there. For instance, 'Discover your family history' or 'Find out about where you live'. Depending on which kind of research you are interested in, it highlights the most relevant resources and explains why each might be useful or interesting. The purpose of this section is to encourage new audiences to use the History centre.

Where else can I explore Worcestershire's past?

This displays a map of Worcestershire with map pins showing all the major heritage sites around the county. Clicking on these pins opens up photos and descriptions of the sites. This section explains how you can continue to discover the heritage of Worcestershire at after your visit to the Hive.

Why is this table here?

This explains the DHD project, how to use the table and that the content will evolve over time.

From the moment the table was installed at the Hive the response from visitors has been extremely positive. A very wide audience has engaged with the table. Not surprisingly the table has been popular with youth and family audiences. Most interesting has been the warm response from older users who react well to the directness of the interface and do not see it as a computer.

“That's impressive, really impressive!”

It has been very successful with groups as a multi-user rather than single user experience. Informal evaluation using school groups has already revealed both the opportunities presented by the technology and potential areas of further development. Staff across the Hive have really engaged with the touch table adopting its use into their work with the public and seeing it as a valuable new tool.

As a result of the DHD project the Hive have been able to start three separate conversations with local SMEs to discuss possible collaboration projects. One company specialises in 3D reconstructions of heritage sites. Another works with marginalised community groups to capture oral histories and video diaries. A third company produces visualisation tools that work with collections databases.

The Touch History application was shortlisted for the 2013 Museums and Heritage "**Innovations** (<http://www.museumsandheritage.com/show/awards/award-winners-2013>) " award.

For more information about the HIVE please visit <http://www.thehiveworcester.org/> (<http://www.thehiveworcester.org/>)



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