



Guild of Location Managers

INFORMATION

Screen West Midlands in conjunction with Museums, Libraries & Archives: Fam Trip

7<sup>th</sup> December 2010

As part of a Renaissance in the Regions Scheme, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council fully funded a familiarisation trip to view some of the key locations available for filming in the Screen West Midlands region.

We woke once again to minus degrees on the thermometer, and as we sped north on the train to Birmingham the landscape became colder and crisper. The frost was magical and the scenery began to look like a Christmas card; all white, bright and glittery.

We were met at Birmingham New Street by our host, Stephen Badham and set off for our first destination.

#### RAF Museum Cosford

The Museum is situated within RAF Cosford which is a military training unit. They say, "RAF Museum Cosford tells the story of mans' successes and failures in flying and missile development from the early days of aviation through two World Wars to the present day". It houses one of the largest aviation collections in the UK and one of the world's most comprehensive missile collections.

We explored the Test Flight hangar, which housed an incredible collection of research and development aircraft. Despite its size the space is very warm, heated to preserve the aircraft which benefits the visitor too.

The award winning National Cold War Exhibition is housed in a fabulous building which won a European Steel Structure Award. Its curvaceous lines and sleek shape make this a powerful and geometric shape within a military landscape. Our frosty white surroundings and the winter sun set off the broad sweeps and sinuous lines beautifully. Inside, the exhibition is spread over two levels with a viewing gallery accessed by a glass lift which gives a high overview of the whole exhibition space. The concrete walls and floors keep the space simple.

The Museum is open every day except 24-26 December and 1 January. It opens at 10:00 and closes at 17:00, although times may vary for the National Cold War Exhibition.

For filming, access is available after 5pm. Subject to activities and the time of year, the Museum is prepared to cordon off areas for filming during the day. Commercial filming is permitted too. Use of the exhibits can also be discussed. As with all collections some pieces are more precious or delicate than others, so all requests are taken on a case by case basis.

RAF Cosford is an active training base, but areas are available for filming. All enquiries for this should be directed through Tony Burlton at the MOD Film Office.



RAF Museum Cosford, Shifnal, Shropshire, TF11 8UP  
[www.rafmuseum.org.uk](http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk)



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From here we headed west to Ironbridge to see a selection of the museums available within the area.

#### Blists Hill Victorian Town

Our scenic journey to Blists Hill took us through the village of Coalbrookdale in the Ironbridge Gorge; considered the place where the Industrial Revolution really started.

At Blists Hill we were joined by Paul Gossage, Director of Marketing and PR for The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. Paul stayed with us for the rest of the fam trip and proved to be a fountain of historical knowledge.

Blists Hill is a recreated Victorian town which gives the visitor an insight to how life was lived in those times. The streets include a Lloyds Bank, Post Office, bakery, sweet shop and many of the expected high street favourites. The chemist is well stocked with remedies and a terrifying looking dentists' chair. This shop was the setting for 'Victorian Pharmacy', the historical observational documentary which was shown on BBC2.

Fortified by our rib-sticking, winter warming lunch in the local pub (think steak & kidney pudding, faggots and scones with cream), we braved the sinking temperatures to see the blast furnaces, the doctors surgery, the ironworks and across the frozen canal, the brick and tile works. Our grumbles about the cold paled into insignificance when we met the guide of the foundry. A man experienced in the ways of film crews and ready for all the director's requests for more flames, bigger, hotter, he had been setting up his foundry in temperatures of minus fifteen that morning. No more whining from us !

Blists Hill Victorian Town is open seven days a week, from 10:00 - 16:00 all year round. Although they welcome filming, their first priority, as with all museums, is to their visitors.

Filming, subject to scale, may take place during the day, but modern day vehicles are not permitted within the town until after 5pm. 'Victorian Pharmacy' and 'Antiques Roadshow' have been successfully shot there. Most recently The Florin Street Band filmed their festive pop video through the night in the Canal Street area of Blists Hill. The Museum was also able to help with period wardrobe to ensure that everyone looked the part and some of the staff stood in as extras. Special effects covered the streets and buildings with artificial snow and all traces were gone by the time they opened to the public in the morning.

Visitor numbers in the winter are less, so more flexibility on access is possible. As ever, all requests are taken on a case by case basis. There is a large yard at the back suitable for unit parking.



#### Jackfield Tiles Museum

Jackfield is one of the oldest known ceramic production centres in Shropshire, a tradition dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The museum is housed in the tile factory building, the former works of Craven Dunhill & Company and is still used to produce tiles. The galleries display examples of tiles and there are period room settings displaying how tiles would be been used in, say; an Edwardian tube station, a butchers shop and a children's hospital ward. There is a wood & glass panelled corridor off which the old board room and gas-lit offices depict the period well. The surrounding courtyard houses the workshops and brick out-buildings.

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As a location, this would be quite a specific requirement and the delicate nature of the exhibits would prevent any changes to the interior layout.



#### Coalport China Museum

The Museum stands on the site of the former Coalport China Works. Here was a comprehensive display of china wares made at the works. The distinctive bottle shaped chimneys are the two surviving bottle ovens or kilns in which the china was fired. The museums workshops display many of the processes and techniques once used at the factory. For the 'Call My Bluff' fans, the Sagger Makers' Bottom Knocker is the demonstration to see.

The Coalport Courtyard around which the bottle ovens and workshops are situated is all made of the distinctive local brick and the canal runs adjacent to the works. Again this is a location that would fill a very specific requirement, but is full of all the right historic detail and props.

#### Iron Bridge

Built by Abraham Darby III and now recognised as one of the great symbols of the Industrial Revolution, the remarkable structure still dominates the small town that bears its name. It was the first arch bridge in the world to be made out of cast iron. The new blast furnace in Coalbrookdale lowered the cost of production of this once expensive material and enabled engineers to solve the long standing problem of crossing the River Severn.

The bridge does not permit vehicular traffic and is blocked at each end by bollards. It is a Grade 1 listed building, a scheduled ancient monument and part of the UNESCO Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.

A frosty twilight scene of the bridge.

As our hosts said "It won't look like this the next time you visit!".



Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, Coalbrookdale, Telford, Shropshire, TF8 7DQ  
For details on all of the sites within the Ironbridge Gorge see [www.ironbridge.org.uk](http://www.ironbridge.org.uk)



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We returned to Birmingham to the Malmaison Hotel for a quick freshen up and walked across the city centre to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

This grand building is situated on Chamberlain Square and is famous for its Pre-Raphaelite paintings. The main entrance is impressive, with stone pillars and a wide stone staircase that led us up to the Round Room. This unusual circular gallery was the venue for the drinks reception hosted by Stephen and Paul. Here we met many of the curators from local museums, galleries and art venues along with members of the team from Access Bookings.

This was a great opportunity for “cautious curators” to meet with location managers. The aim was to try and impart the needs of a film crew and also understand the concerns that gallery or museum owners may have. Hopefully we can work together to make filming possible in locations often considered off limits.

We returned to the Malmaison Hotel for dinner, held in the private dining room. Crackers, bangers and rocket balloons with our first Christmas Dinner of the season made for a jolly evening.



The Round Room at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery - courtesy of Wikipedia

8th December 2010

From our hotel we walked across the city to Millennium Point and Thinktank. Our walk took in the hoardings displaying the designs for the replacement Birmingham New Street Station which looks to be a brave and modern addition to the city landscape.

We walked past the Bull Ring, via pedestrianised shopping streets, Dale End and through the back of the University of Aston which has accommodation available in the holiday months. We arrived at Millennium Point, home to Thinktank, Planetarium and Imax Cinema.

#### Millennium Point

The common areas of Millennium Point are big and spacious and some areas double well for an airport lounge. In the common areas the overall look is glass, steel banks of escalators and tons of height.

Thinktank is the Birmingham Science Museum. It has four floors of hands-on exhibits and is a fascinating collection that really shows off Birmingham's heritage and just how much was manufactured in the region. The galleries cover past, present and future. Again this is a popular museum for children, full of sounds and audio information. The combination of visitor hubbub and interactive exhibitions make it a noisy space, so filming really is a night time activity.

Adjacent to the galleries is a very useful 180 seat theatre which has delegate voting system built in to each seat. This area has a large meeting area for hire that has its own separate access and reception area which is useful. There is also a 700sq metre temporary exhibition hall, but this does have some access limitations.

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Thinktank is open every day 10:00 - 17:00 except on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of December.



Millennium Point, Curzon Street, Birmingham, B4 7XG  
[www.thinktank.ac](http://www.thinktank.ac)

#### Aston Hall

Aston Hall is a Grade 1 listed Jacobean-style mansion one of Birmingham's most treasured buildings with interiors from 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Building began in 1618 and was completed in 1635 and is a nationally significant site located in the heart of inner-city Birmingham. The interior has many great period rooms, but notably The Great Hall and The Long Gallery. The Great Hall forms the grand entrance and is lined with Jacobean panelling. Within it, the Saloon arch is flanked with Italianate landscapes which are framed with wooden arches. The Long Gallery is 136 feet long. The ceiling is covered with intricate, flowing strap-work and the oak panelling is divided into bays by giant pilasters. It's a spectacular room.

Within the grounds are the restored Hall Stables which house the shop and cafe areas. By the 1990's the garden had fallen into a state of disrepair and in 2007-9 it was refurbished. Archaeological investigation had determined that none of the historic planting had survived so the decision was taken to create a contemporary garden.

The hall is situated within a 50 acre park, which also has sports pitches and a modern pavilion. Aston Villa Football Club Stadium is visible from the house, and additional parking can be found there. Unfortunately, to the east of the house lies the Aston Expressway which creates traffic noise, audible in the garden.

Aston Hall is open on Tuesday to Sunday from early April until the end of October.



Trinity Road, Aston, Birmingham, B6 6JD  
[www.bmag.org.uk/aston-hall](http://www.bmag.org.uk/aston-hall)



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From here we headed north east to Dudley and into the Black Country.

#### Black Country Living Museum

This museum celebrates the World's first industrial landscape. The Museum tells the story of the industrial revolution through the everyday lives of the people whose skills shaped the modern world. A recreated 'living' village lies at the heart of the Museum and historic buildings from across the Black Country have been moved, brick by brick and rebuilt at the Museum to create a typically tightly-knit Black Country community in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Their potted history explains it well, "The Black Country was mining country and the world's first successful steam engine for pumping water out of mines was made in Dudley by Thomas Newcomen. Canals were the lifeline of industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and opened up the region to worldwide markets. The Black Country became known as the 'Workshop of the World'."

The village centre includes a sweet shop, haberdashery shop, chemist, pub, fish & chip shop, ironmongers and hardware shop to name a few. There is also a Methodist chapel, pub and workers institute. Further up the site there's a tram and trolley bus terminal, workers cottages, the pit frame of the colliery and mining areas. By the side of the canal is The Rolling Mill, furnace, the nail shop and the massive walls of the lime kilns tower over one end of the canal arm. Canal transport is well represented with collections of boat builder's equipment, a working boat dock and eight canal boats.

The Museum also has a collection of over 45,000 objects ranging from buildings and engineering structures to books and ephemera. Their transport collection has eleven tramcars, two horse trams, a double-decker tramcar and three trolley buses.

The Black Country Living Museum has been used regularly for filming and most notably for Toast, Nigel Slater's memoir, which is to be shown on the BBC at Christmas. It has a vast car park and can also accommodate unit vehicles within some areas of the village.

It is open every day from March to October, 10:00 - 17:00. From November to February it opens on Wednesday to Sunday from 10:00 - 16:00.



Black Country Living Museum, Tipton Road, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 4SQ  
[www.bclm.co.uk](http://www.bclm.co.uk)

Warmed with take-away hot chocolate we huddled back on the bus and made our way to Wolverhampton.



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### Wolverhampton Art Gallery

The gallery was built in 1883 for the Wolverhampton Exhibition and is Italianate in style. The front entrance is imposing with six granite columns. Set in the limestone walls is a decorative frieze composed of seventeen characters representing the Arts and Crafts. The modern extension, with its unique triangular galleries can be seen at the rear of the building and uses a mixture of steel, glass and rust red cladding that blends well with the local brickwork. The building is Grade II listed.

The collection is home to diverse selection of artists from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The gallery spaces include a Victorian gallery and a Georgian gallery which lead through to a modern extension (2007), home to the extensive Pop Art collection. The transition from the traditional space with red walls and deep carpet through to the white, wood and glass airy space works well.

The layout of the rooms enables spaces to be closed off for filming, but still allowing visitors access to the other galleries, which is a bonus.

There is a small parking area at the back of the building with a designated loading area and lift access to the upper floor.

The gallery is open Monday to Saturday from 10:00 - 17:00 and is closed on Bank Holidays.



Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1DU  
[www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk](http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk)

By now it was 17:30 so we joined the traffic and, after much debate over the merits of the M6 versus the Wolverhampton Road, we made our way back to Birmingham and to the railway station.

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We are very grateful to Stephen Badham of Screen West Midlands and Paul Gossage of The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust who were our enthusiastic hosts and to Museums, Libraries and Archives Council for funding the trip. It was a fascinating visit and very well organised.

Huge thanks to all the guides and curators at each venue who gave of their time to show us around their venues and answer our endless questions.

Thanks to everyone who braved the freezing temperatures, traffic chaos and motorways to meet us at the drinks reception in Birmingham. Hopefully they found it as useful as we did.

We look forward to meeting and working with you again in the future.

Leonora Sheppard, December 2010  
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