Photography, one of the great products of the industrial revolution, has always had an interesting, yet uncomfortable relationship with the portrayal of industry and workers. The reasons for this are many. In attempt to understand this tense and sometimes difficult relationship, this exhibition uses mainly previously unseen and unpublished photographs from the archives of the industrial cities and towns of the north of England. The industrialisation and de-industrialisation of Britain has had its greatest impact in the north, so it seems appropriate that the majority of images in this exhibition should be drawn from this region.
In 1839 William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), a wealthy landowner and gentleman scientist revealed to the world his process of “photogenic drawing”. His experiments were a response to his inability to draw; from the very beginning photography was integrally linked to drawing and painting. Fox Talbot and others saw it as a scientific continuation of traditional image making and so aligned it with the artistic perceptions and practices of the time. The first decades of photography were the sole prerogative of wealthy gentlemen amateurs who sought out the picturesque, the romantic and the classical. Clearly the brutal industrialisation that surrounded them had no place in their new image making process. It is these factors more than technical shortcomings that account for the failure of early photography to capture the emergence of working class.

In 19th century photography images of workers are rare. There are examples that contain workers, but it is important to distinguish between photographs, which happen to include workers, their presence being accidental or incidental, and photographs, which have workers as their main subject.

The tens of thousand of workers who built the industrial might of the Victorian age often only appear as blurs, distractions and intrusions.

“In all those blurred, imperfect figures of workers ... hovering, semi-transparent, ghostly... there is perfect and haunting metaphor for the position of the common people in mid-Victorian society – and indeed in the “making of its” history. For here, photography tells us, are human lives which are incidental, marginal, almost invisible: in short, eminently forgettable”.
What is that man doing?
What is he taking?
He is taking my story
He is taking my song.

These people would stare
Into your eyes if they could.
Straight into your staring eyes,
But their faces are blurred;
They seem to be moving

Backwards through history
To where you can’t find them.
They had names but they are
Burned in the fire. They had dreams
But they are broken in pieces.

What is he taking?
He is taking our photograph.

Ian McMillan
According to the census of 1861 for England and Wales, the gas industry employed 15,211 persons, telegraphy, 2,399; steam navigation 3,570; railways, 70,599 and photography 2,366; within three decades of its invention photography had become an important industry. As photography developed and became more accessible, the attraction of its accuracy in detail drew in those who were particularly interested in science and industry. As one historian put it (referring to the 1870s):

“Manchester photographers are not Camerons, Robinsons or Rejlanders, (famous affluent art photographers of the time) but dye stuff manufacturers, cabinet makers, opticians and pharmacists.”

The emerging market was of people who were interested in detailed pictures of steam engines, industrial processes, machinery and buildings.

The Oldham panoramic is one of the greatest photographs of industrialisation in existence. It was taken in 1876 by the photographer Squire Knott and is a feat of great photographic skill and determination, Knott stood on the roof of mill with a very large and cumbersome whole plate camera and exposed nine glass plates ten inches by twelve inches in sequence.

The picture was taken during wakes week when the view wasn't spoilt by smoking chimneys and when most workers had left the town. The workers that appear in the panoramic are completely incidental and barely noticeable.

The sustained photographic documentation of industry began as the recording of process, machinery and product and in the later decades of the 19th century swiftly moved into commercial and corporate use i.e. advertising, the promotion of products and companies.
It did not take too long for the new professional class of photographers emerging in the 1870s to realise that any photographs of industrial processes, machinery and buildings needed an easily recognisable unit of scale to illustrate the sheer size and power of industrial process and product. The single anonymous worker became that unit of scale, available and compliant. Thousands of workers over the decades found themselves pressed into photographic service as a convenient and familiar unit of scale.

• HOW SMALL, HOW VERY FAR AWAY •

You could be a full stop
At the end of a long sentence.

They told me I had to stand very still.

You could be a tiny stain
At the edge of a clean white shirt.

They said they chose me because I was little.

You could be a flower
Held up to the show the depth of the forest.

They said not to worry about how I looked
Because the picture wasn’t really of me.

You could be a star
That gives us some idea
Of the vastness of the sky.

Can I move yet? My arms ache.

• West Yorkshire foundries Leeds
Photographer unknown
1950s
Collection Ian Beesley

• The construction of the Manchester ship canal
Manchester
Photographer W.E. Birtles
1887-1893
Chethams Library Manchester
In the Victorian era the portrait was aligned with oil painting, an expensive and privileged medium, affordable mainly to the affluent upper classes. A portrait in oils conveyed privilege, status and significance. The invention of photography introduced a new medium for portraiture and one that was affordable to the emerging middle class, but it would remain outside the financial capabilities of the working class until much later that century.

Victorian portraits of workers are rare; “interested gentlemen” for anthropological or ethnographical reasons invariably commissioned those that do exist. The emergence of this new breed of the industrial worker was seen as “exotic” and their images became worthy of collecting just like the preserved butterflies and moths that graced many a Victorian drawing room.

These early examples of workers often show bewildered and fatigued subjects stood self-consciously against a studio backdrop. It is unlikely they would ever see their developed photograph. Some of the less fortunate members of the working class would have had an even earlier introduction to photography by courtesy of the police. As early as 1865 police forces in England had embraced the new technology for the recording and identification of criminals. These early portraits also embraced Victorian theories of anthropological criminology, the idea that criminals could be identified by the shape of their head and hands. These unfortunate sitters often appear dirty, unwell and malnourished, which leads us to conclude that the majority of the crimes they committed were the result of poverty. There are very few photographs of prisoners who appear to be middle class, well dressed and well nourished.
Do you comprehend?

Ian McMillan
The workforce group photograph probably developed from the military group photograph. There is a long history in painting of portraits of generals, high-ranking officers and soldiers etc. Almost from its beginnings the military was a popular subject with photographers from the Crimea war to the Boer War, from famous generals to highly decorated soldiers to the regimental photograph. Paintings of large regimental groups were impractical and expensive, but photography offered an economic solution, cheaper and much quicker. Military might, hierarchy, pomp and circumstance could be captured. The military hierarchy, most important in the front and middle, status diminishing towards the edges and from front to back. The group photograph celebrates not the individual but the unit and within that unit the distribution of power and control.

Group photographs of workers begin to appear in the 1880s but are scarce; there was a steady increase in the following decades but an enormous surge in the production of group workforce photographs in the First World War. Women more and more populated the WW1 industrial workforce. The abundance of these photographs are perhaps an acknowledgement that the industrial workforce was in some ways comparable in importance to the military force. They were also a patriotic reminder to women as to where their duty lay, but we should also remember that photographs of women working in heavy industry would be seen as unusual if not shocking to large sections of the public.

### A GROUP OF GROUP PORTRAIT QUESTIONS

Who is this awkward family of half-strangers?
What sport do these exhausted team-mates play?
Who left these dolls at the corner of the playroom?
Where has this raggedy army marched from?
Who asked them to stand so still, so still?
Why do they stare so, without blinking at all?
Who has carved these figures from skin and bone?
When will they be allowed to move away?
Who is this chorus from a terrible, forgotten musical?
How do they know we are staring at them from the future?
Who will remember their names and tell their stories?

Ian McMillan
Heroic realism was a style of propaganda art used primarily in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and in Germany in the 1930s. The USSR in particular embraced photography as the medium for the representation of the heroic worker.

This visual style was soon adopted by Western democracies to promote their aims during the Second World War and in Great Britain continued through to the 1950s in the rebuilding and nationalisation of industry.

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**THE HERO EXPLAINS**

I said I needed to get home
But they said I had to wait
While they got the grey room ready,
Opened up the windows,
Made it lighter.

They made me take off my vest
And they gave me a new one
White as the moon.

I said you’d be worried
But they said I had to stand
And they raised my arm and said
‘Keep it just there. Just there.’
In the air:

They made me drop my shovel,
And they gave me a new one
Light as a feather.

I said I was tired
But they said I was lying
And said heroes don’t get tired,
I had to hold the shovel
Like I loved it,
Like I loved it.

Ian McMillan

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Land girl
Location unknown
P.G. Hennell
1940-1945
Collection Ian Beesley

Labourer
Location unknown
Photographer unknown
1950
People’s History Museum
Two men held, still
Held, held forever
In their strong poses.

In the light, their caps
Majestic, epic,
A chin jutting to the future,

Eyes shielded
By vast
Flat cap nebs.

Muscles held
Tight, in light's shadow,
Shadowed light.

The lines of this poem
Are short, abrupt.
In the wanted future

The men in the picture
Will gasp for breath.
Gulping air, Listen:

Ian McMillan
As cameras and photographic processing became even cheaper and more accessible, some workers became interested in documenting their own lives and communities. Instead of being a photographer from the outside looking in, this was the photographer inside looking around.

This insider’s view gives us a whole new perspective within social documentary photography. One of the greatest exponents was Jack Hulme, who devoted his life to photographing the pit village of Fryston. He produced a fascinating, unique and revealing record of a mining community, something that was seldom done then or even now.

In recent decades documentary photography has shifted more towards conceptual, collaborative and political interpretations of industry and photographers have began to work on sustained projects involving the workforce rather than just recording them.

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**GLIMPSE**

A sideways glance at how it really is;
A lifting up of artifice’s long coat
To show the cheap clothing underneath
It was all we could afford

The steady gaze of the brand new camera
Unblinking at the mate you sweat with
Paying attention to the long ignored
It was all we could afford

Kept in biscuit tins and old shoeboxes,
Attention denied at the back of the shed
A way of life so casually hidden
It was all we could afford

Ian McMillan

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**Miners playing with their children**
Fryston
Jack Hulme
1940s
Kirklees Image Archive

**Fanny Morgan and her sister**
Fryston
Jack Hulme
Date unknown
Kirklees Image Archive

**George Wagstaff and his dog**
Fryston
Jack Hulme
Date unknown
Kirklees Image Archive
In the late 18th Century the development of the steam engine was viewed as a contribution to the romantic visual imagery of the time.

As the industrial revolution gained momentum new steam powered mills were seen as "eye-catchers in the landscape", much more exciting than false ruins and follies.

The majority of their admirers came from the middle and upper classes who distanced themselves geographically and socially from the harsh reality of the working conditions within those "eye-catchers" walls. These romantic allusions of industrialisation were short-lived as the brutal polluting stamp of the industrial revolution became increasingly more evident. As the middle classes withdrew to their comfortable suburban villas, it was left to the writers like Dickens, Disraeli & Gaskell to propel the blackened image of the North into the bric a brac filled sitting rooms of the Southern middle class.

Photography dominated by affluent middle class gentlemen followed the tradition of European painting where the portrayal of labour played a subordinate if largely non-existent role. There was no room on the cluttered walls of the suburban house for any grim reminders of what surrounded them.

In the first half of the Twentieth century there appears to be a shift in how the industrial landscape was photographed and perceived, images of smoke belching chimneys, mills at night ablaze with light were popular. Whilst today we view these images with horror, in their day there were seen as picturesque celebrations of industrial might working at full capacity.

As British industry went into decline there was a trend (particularly in the 1960s and 1970s) for documentary photographers to make their way to the gritty North, to search out bleak industrial ruins and unemployed workers, contributing to a stereotypical image of the North.
Smoking chimneys
Bradford
C.H Wood
1950s
Bradford Industrial Museum

A LIGHT BREEZE CARRIES THE STINK INTO MY BACK YARD

Smokescape, Chimneyscape
Pitscape, Brickscape,
Snap-tin-in-the-darkscape
A light breeze

Windowscape, Machinescape,
Muckscape, Kindscape
Chair-by-the-doorscape
Carries the stink

Earlscape, shiverscape,
Heatscape, latescape
Bike-down-the-streetscape
Into my back yard

Epicscape, scalescape,
Rainscape, mistscape
Tiny-figure-by-the-wallscape
And there is no escape.
Ian McMillan
Bobbin doffer carrying history

Look at this man, how he carries the bobbins
So carefully, each hand just so. Here, and here.

He’s carrying the jokes and he’s carrying the stories. The Bobbin Doffers told each other in the brief rests. They took, when the sun from the windows lit the wool in the air.

Look at this man, how he carries the bobbins
In a kind of practised geometry of balancing.

He’s carrying the structure of a lost language,
A lost way of thinking, a set of skills and solutions. That hung in the air for a while like wool in light. Then faded.

Look at this man, how he carries the bobbins
Like he’s carrying history.

And he can’t see where he’s going, can’t see which way History’s heading. But we can see him.

Ian McMillan

JOSHUA TETLEY’S WELL

Falling nearly two hundred feet through Yorkshire earth Is Joshua Tetley’s well
And to commemorate a loved one, or celebrate a birth We raised a glass of beer that was made from the water From Joshua Tetley’s well.
Falling nearly two hundred years through Yorkshire life Is Joshua Tetley’s beer;
It’s as heady as a home win, and sharper than a knife, Stronger than your granddad, and purer than your daughter That’s Joshua Tetley’s beer.

Now when the last pint’s pulled and the well has dried Remember Tetley’s name
And when the last door’s closed and the last tear’s cried And something’s missing when you step outside We’ll remember Tetley’s name;
Because a name, and a taste, live on for ever, Eternal as the endless changing Yorkshire weather...

Ian McMillan April 2010
IN THE POSH APARTMENTS WERE THE BREWERY USED TO BE
Mummy I felt breath upon my shoulder
In the kitchen I was buttering the toast
I saw someone like daddy, only older;
Ah, my dear, that’s simply Joshua Tetley’s ghost...
Our living room is where they brewed the ale, dear
And by your little pussy’s scratching post
Is where they canned and where they kegged; it’s so clear We’re
haunted by old Joshua Tetley’s ghost...
Mummy I am nervous, I am frightened
I thought it was steam from the Sunday roast
My eyes dilated and my throat it tightened
When I clapped my eyes on Joshua Tetley’s ghost...
He smiled and raised a glass and the he spoke, mum
But then what really frightened me the most
Is that he gestured to me and he said ‘Come on. chum and have a
drink with Joshua Tetley’s ghost...’
Oh darling never ever go with brewers
Especially those with monocles: they boast
They’ll be so gentle and so loving to us
But stay away from Joshua Tetley’s ghost!
Its too late mum I said I’d go and meet him
And he’d take me to an old inn on the coast
And he’d wine me and he’d dine me and I’d treat him.... Quiet, darling!
He’s just Joshua Tetley’s ghost!
But then behind them came a see-through phantom
Who spoke in chilling whispered tones: ‘Thou knowest Thou never
can escape the long dead huntsman
Who once worked here: I’m Joshua Tetley’s ghost’
So now the flat lies empty and deserted
Like a shut-down pub without a friendly host
Because a young and foolish daughter flirted
With the fermenting heart of Joshua Tetley’s ghost.
The moral of this story is a plain one
This brewery, once shut, will not stay closed;
The site is sacred and will long remain one
It’s here forever, Joshua Tetley’s ghost!
Ian McMillan 3/12/2010 Tetley’s Brewery Leeds

The Day the Beer Froze
There was sleet in the air And frost in the sky
The pigeons were frozen, Refusing to fly.
There was a big drip on the end of my nose The day the beer froze.
Nothing came from the taps
in the local pub
Old men shivered in caps
in the working men’s club
I looked like a snowman in my winter clothes The day the beer froze.
It began before dawn
The temperature fell
There was ice on my lawn
And I said “Bloody Hell
This could be disastrous for t’brewers tha knows” The day beer froze.
And I was proved right. The beer wouldn’t flow; It was stuck fast and
tight An icicle pose.
The plant looked like one of them ice-dancing show The day beer
froze.
The history’s now famous,
The tale is now myth
But heat us, don’t blame us
Leeds was four feet under Antarctic snows The day the beer froze.....
Ian McMillan

The day the beer froze
Tetley’s Brewery, Leeds
Ian Beesley

21.12.10
On Tuesday the 21st December, the winter solstice, there
was a lunar eclipse and the temperature in the center of
Leeds plummeted To -16 c.
All the beer froze.
THE BACK, BENT

In the half-dark
The back, bent.
In the half-bent Light, the back Bends, half-aware
Of the dull pain
Of repetition, history.
In the half-light
The back, bending In the half-awake Light, the back Bending, half-awash With the harsh pain Of history, memory.
In the half-gleam The back glistens With half-sweat, Half-dirt; bends, Listens for half-shifts In the earth above; Ear bent, rock-sweat.

Ian McMillan 2009
PITMAN SPEYKS

Nowt else suits. Desk job, security man
In a daft hat. No chance. Mucky and filthy And some bastard nicked
the showers but still
Nowt else suits. Diggin and back brokken Every neet. Fingers hurtin.
Neck hurtin. Head hurtin. But what else could I do, eh?
Shelf stackin? Driving a wagon, delivering stuff?
Serving tea? Taxi driving: where duz tha want ter gu
Madam? No chance. Nowt else suits. Ian McMillan

“Babe”
Faceworker: End of a shift
Hayroyds Colliery Yorkshire
2009
Ian Beesley

Steelworker
Outukumpu Steelworks
Sheffield
Ian Beesley
2001
SONG OF THE MINER

You could but be walking But I'm underneath you You could be talking I'm listening, I'm listening. You're in your house I'm sitting below you. You're drinking tea And I'm drinking tea And you could be sleeping And I am still working And you could be waking And I am still working And you could be washing And I'm filthy dirty And you could be singing And I'm underground So I cannot hear you But if you are dancing I'll look at the roof... I'll look at the roof Ian McMillan
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<th>Nickname</th>
<th>Nickname a descriptive name given instead or addition to the one belonging to a person, a place or thing.</th>
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<td>(Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language.)</td>
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A SONG OF GOODBYE

Farewell, Hand on Bollocks,
Farewell, Basil Brush,
Farewell, Seaside Drunk and Sea Cow
You're silent and weeping under history's crush You're names your memorial now
See you, German Helmet,
So long, Tanked Up Ted,
Goodbye, Sausage Stuffer and God
You're names resonate through the roads of my head The names of the daft and the odd
And the funny and friendly. The helpful and kind
The sarky and smelly
The fat and half blind
The one's who you'd laugh with The one's you'd laugh at
The one's you'd go miles to avoid The one's you'd buy drinks for
The one's who'd drink pop
The one's who'd just get you annoyed Just the names shouting up from the void
So goodbye Milk Bottle, Pol Pot and Cod Eyes Goodbye Dog On Head and Duck Feet
Hang on to the memories that will never die Of comradeship forged in the heat.......

Ian McMillan
CARDERS • CASTERS • COMBERS
FETTLERS • DOFFERS • LIGGERS
TATLERS • FITTERS • BURLERS
MENDERS • SORTERS • WEAVERS
SPINNERS • GRAFTERS • PORERS
CORERS • PATTERNMAKERS
STAMPERS • MULESPINNERS
WINDERS • DYERS • BLEACHERS
SCOURERS • WARPERS • POETS
PLATE LAYERS • ROADRUNNERS
CAPSTEAMERS • SHOT-FIRERS
PHOTOGRAPHERS • FITTERS
TIP-STRETCHERS • PACKERS
HOOD TURNERS • BALERS
QUENCHERS • MINERS • SMITHS
BREWERS • OVERLOOKERS
SLUBBERS • PRESSERS • JOINERS
LEADBURNERS • FELLMONGERS