

henshaws

beyond expectations

helping people with sight loss

Atherton House, 88-92 Talbot Rd
Old Trafford, Manchester M16 0GS

13 March 2017

Dear Joy,

I am writing on behalf of the 17 blind and visually impaired people and 12 volunteer driver/guides who attended the described tour of the "The Big Big Camera" exhibition on Thursday 2 March.

We wish to express our thanks to you for making all the arrangements, and to Ian Beesley for his amazingly relaxed and highly enjoyable and informative talk. We also to wish Sean Baggeley for leading the tour and adding his part to the talk. Ian and Sean did a superb double act routine, and it all appeared off the cuff but also quite an out of the ordinary project and talk. We are also very grateful to Anne Hornsby for her usual excellent service describing the exhibition. Audio description is essential for such an audience and is always much appreciated, a point which is brought out in the comments below. Being able to touch the Big Big Camera was also a valuable experience. We wish to thank Gallery Oldham for providing this audio described tour which allows people with little or no vision to be able to appreciate their exhibition, and for also providing the tea, coffee and biscuits. Please also convey our thanks to Andy and Hilary for their assistance.

I was pleased to see that 5 people asked to observe this event, each with a different focus in their work, and Gallery Oldham's audio described tours are certainly a great example to learn from.

It is always a pleasure to bring my Group to Gallery Oldham because I can be confident that everything will run smoothly, as I know that much planning precedes our visit. All the staff could not have been more helpful and they show evident pride in Gallery Oldham. Members of staff in the foyer who meet and direct people is particularly appreciated by people when they arrive. No one could find any fault or anything which could be improved upon.

The appreciation and enthusiasm from the group members was very apparent on the day, and the atmosphere was very relaxed and informal. The feedback from the blind and visually impaired people who attended, which I have copied below, says it all:-

Sue Pounder

"Firstly, it was so good to visit Gallery Oldham again where there's always such a genuine warm and friendly welcome. The staff here go that extra mile to make sure we are comfortable and want for nothing. The occasion seemed very organised and well thought through in the way that we were met at the main doors, ushered into the lift and shown where we were to sit on strategically placed chairs, ending with much appreciated refreshments at the end.

As for the topic, well what can I say. The Big, Big Camera was quite something but the talk by Ian Beesley was absolutely fascinating. I could have listened to Ian all day; he was so knowledgeable, interesting, entertaining and humorous with a wonderful clear voice. Sean also was brilliant with the additional quips and anecdotes he had to offer. All in all, it was a very

memorable morning and I can't thank everyone enough for making it so, including yourself, Mary and Anne. Definitely not one iota of constructive criticism with this visit!"

Norma Holt

"Our visit to Oldham Gallery on 2nd March - The Big Big Camera was excellent, how wonderful that Ian Beesley has been given this opportunity to use this camera so successfully with the help of Sean Baggeley. The pictures displayed, and particularly the way that Ian described his every movement in achieving the results were extremely challenging, but his passion comes through in everything he says. When we think of how simple and immediate it is to use a camera now, and to see the Big Big Camera from 1903, how amazing to see the progress. A very Big Big Thank You to Ian and Sean, and Anne Hornsby for her very clear descriptions. And as always the staff at Gallery Oldham.

It was good to see you looking and sounding so well. Thank you so much for all your time and effort in organising this big group, it brings so much pleasure to us all."

Pat Monaghan

"Just to say I was glad to be back in the group on Thursday. Great exhibition - well presented and very interesting, and would like to say thank you to everybody involved."

Elaine Gallagher

"It was wonderful! Absolutely superb, and what an absolute gem is Ian Beesley. He has such a wonderful story telling voice, and such a story to tell and gave us such a down to earth presentation. I think he was self taught in photography. I don't think one single person didn't enjoy last Thursday. We were all blessed to take part. Andrew was lovely demonstrating the Big Big Camera to us. Anne not only described, but also adds to it, by asking pertinent questions. She always goes the extra mile and isn't shy to step forward and fill in the necessary information for us."

Roz Olver

"I enjoyed the trip to Gallery Oldham immensely and found it particularly interesting as my father was in the printing trade and I have fond memories of visiting his place of work and watching the printing machines in operation. My brother (who is a photographer and worked at the same place) introduced me to photography at an early age and the first present he bought me was a camera, although admittedly much smaller than the one on display at the gallery! This was back in the day of negatives and developing photographs onto light sensitive paper, which processes my brother also taught me. I therefore found the talk a pleasant trip down memory lane!

Ian and Sean delivered the talk in a very lively and informative way, which was not at all "stuffy".

It was lovely to see an old piece of equipment not only resurrected and restored, but also experimented with in order to appreciate the enormous challenges encountered by early photographers as opposed to the "point and shoot" experience we now have. I wonder how many pictures would find their way onto Facebook if we had to employ the same techniques in this day and age?

The whole gallery tour was extremely well orchestrated and it was lovely to have so many of the staff at our disposal to answer questions and ensure everything ran smoothly. I have to say I cannot think of any improvements I would make and this has to be the best managed and interesting trips I have enjoyed so far. Well done Gallery Oldham!"

Marion Burrows

"I couldn't believe the size of the camera. It was excellent, and I did enjoy it, and was very impressed. I wanted to know who invented it as I am curious. The amount of work Ian had to do to take the pictures, and he must be very patient. Sean and Ian seemed to know everything.

I loved the trees. Anne was at her usual best describing it all for us. I had a Brownie camera, so can remember. The children today won't know any of all this, and aren't interested in photography, they just point and click.

Before coming to your Group, I had never been into an art gallery in my life. You just don't think of doing it because you can't see. But now I love it."

Unusually I asked the volunteer driver/ guides to give their feedback, as I knew that many of the people in my Group who have email, and therefore regularly contribute their feedback, were absent for various reasons. It has turned out to be an interesting exercise to hear what the volunteers said about this event, and I have copied their comments below :-

Tricia Golden

"I really enjoyed the event on Thursday. Ian is such an entertaining speaker and his and Sean's enthusiasm for their "toy" and the adventures they are having with it were infectious. As a frequent visitor to Tandle Hill, I particularly enjoyed the Big, Big Photo of the trees.

The only downside was that the images were difficult for the visually impaired to make out but the descriptions of process should have more than compensated. As a local, I shall be going back to visit the exhibition again."

Mike Reed

"I attended the Henshaws visit to the Big Big Camera exhibition at Gallery Oldham as a volunteer guide. The visit was a great success. I was struck by the enthusiastic response from all the VIPs I spoke to. It was clear that they had all had a great experience. This was no surprise as I was very impressed by the event and thoroughly enjoyed it myself.

The exhibition itself is very interesting, and the central feature of the camera is striking. The story behind it is quite special and the work done by Gallery Oldham to save this camera for the nation and now to bring it back into use should be highly commended. I heartily applaud their policy of allowing people to touch this wonderful artefact. It is an amazing object and it is understandable that people want to touch it as well as seeing it. The opportunity to touch exhibits is of course extremely valuable and helpful for blind and visually impaired people. I agree with the comments by the photographer-artist Ian Beesley that this opportunity is too rare, with most galleries over concerned about protecting their precious treasures.

Ian Beesley gave a particularly interesting presentation. His down to earth approach, combined with his considerable knowledge and expertise, made for a fascinating story easily accessible to all. I was pleased that he was given the chance to talk away on his subject even to the point of over running the allotted time, as we were all happy to listen to him all day long.

High praise also to Sean Baggeley and Gallery Oldham for investing the resources to bring this historic object back into use and presenting it in an interesting way. I noted that after the Henshaws event Gallery Oldham was moving on immediately to host a visit from the Deaf Society – for the first time I think. Well done to Gallery Oldham for reaching out to people in need in the communities of Greater Manchester. I hope other galleries and institutions will learn from their generous approach."

Claire Sullivan

"Can I say what a privilege it was to attend the session at Oldham Gallery with Ian Beesley, Sean Baggeley and Anne Hornsby. The enthusiasm and knowledge of both Ian and Sean was infectious, I could have listened to them and their tales of overcoming difficulties and problems all day. It was great to be able to touch the Big Big camera. Can I also include the people from Oldham Gallery they also added to the experience. I am afraid I don't know his name but one

employee spent ten minutes or more guiding Elaine around the camera. He too was so enthusiastic.
What a fantastic morning. Thank you so much for organising this and all the other visits.”

Bob McMurtrie

“Enjoyed is not the word. From the moment I saw the big camera I knew the talk would be good but by the end I was fascinated by what they had done and the difficulties they overcame. As a mechanical engineer by trade, I thought the camera was amazing.”

Pat Griffin

“The Big Camera talk and touch was amazing , Ian was a really enthusiastic and interesting presenter. We were all very lucky to have been involved. So many thanks to him, and Anne's description also was very good, she certainly studied the subject , and to you for organising the visit. Gallery Oldham is a really good place to visit with very helpful staff, especially Sean lending a hand with the camera.”

David Dunkerley

“The Big, Big Camera exhibition was one of the best group events of recent times. It provided those three essential elements: education, information and, above all, entertainment. We learned about the history of photography, the engineering of the massive camera devoted to wallpaper production, industrial archaeology, social history and more, all leavened by the fascinating and often amusing tales of the project's progress. From an accidental find in the gallery's store to the restoration of a one hundred-year old machine, onto the trials of finding suitable film or other media, ending with the production of one of the largest and most beautiful images ever exhibited in this country – this was a tour-de-force.

Sean and Ian are to be congratulated on their imagination, creativity and downright perseverance in bringing this exhibition to life. Their tales alone were great value but viewing these stunning images was a revelation. Ian MacMillan's prose poems complemented the images beautifully. Of course, the camera itself is the star of the show, standing in its imposing position at the centre of the entrance to the room. Allowing us to touch it gave us a wonderful opportunity to gain an extra dimension to our appreciation of this magnificent machine.

Truly, this exhibition is a “hidden gem”, deserving of a much wider audience, particularly young people who know nothing of analogue photography and its role in our history for almost two hundred years. Ian has caused me to think about the role of analogue photography in the digital age and to consider how we can preserve old (and new) images for future generations.”

I look forward to the Group visiting Gallery Oldham in the future. In the meantime, if there is anything I can do to facilitate future events or participation for blind and partially sighted people at Gallery Oldham, please do not hesitate to contact me on my mobile number of 07510 122342, or by emailing me at mary.gifford@btinternet.com .

Yours sincerely

Mary Gifford
Henshaws Volunteer Art Galleries & Museums Co-ordinator