

Imperial War Museum North opens

The idea of a permanent northern branch had been a long-term ambition for the trustees of the Imperial War Museum (IWM), but the trials and tribulations of putting in place the necessary funding was to be a seemingly insurmountable hurdle.

Phase One of the project eventually got underway in 1997 and was successful in raising over £30 million for the Museum's development and construction. The five acre site on Trafford Wharf Road was selected from a list of 71 sites which had been submitted by 36 local authorities based in the north of England.

The Museum is at the heart of the redeveloped Salford Quays and Trafford Park cultural areas. Trafford Park has been a site of

by
Paul Tomlin

with the target of raising £2.5 million.

At long last the dream became a reality when The Imperial War Museum North opened to the public on July 5, this year.

THE BUILDING

From the outside this landmark building is spectacular: the curvature of the glittering aluminium cladding symbolically broken by the central Air Shard as it reaches for the sky.

Designed by internationally acclaimed architect, Daniel Libeskind, the building has been created to signify the world torn

sits on the opposite bank of the Manchester Ship Canal, reached by a stylish footbridge.

The Earth Shard, with its huge curved ceilings and floors, houses the main exhibition space (2,200 sq metres) which features the long-term displays. Also located here is the special exhibitions gallery (500 sq metres) designed for showing smaller exhibitions with changing themes. The Water Shard accommodates the 160-seat restaurant with views overlooking Salford Quays and The Lowry,

WHY IWM?

The Imperial War Museum was established by an Act of Parliament in 1920. Its purpose is to collect, preserve and display material and information connected with military operations in which Britain or the Commonwealth have been involved since August 1914.

Dedicated to war and conflict throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the newly opened IWM North contains hundreds of objects ranging from a small number of large exhibits to works of art, photographs, uniforms, diaries, letters and medals.

The Museum sets out to tell the story of how war has shaped people's lives from 1900 to the present day, making us think about our past, our present and our future. With the story still unfolding, the Museum will continue to develop and change over the coming years.

THE BIG PICTURE

The IWM North's light and airy reception and glass frontage is in marked contrast to its windowless dark inner core.

Within the main area you will find The Big Picture Show, the first on this scale in the UK.



national and international importance since the early twentieth century, when it began to develop into the largest engineering centre in the world.

With funding now in place the project was formally launched on January 25, 1999, with construction work commencing in January the following year, with the aim of opening the Museum to the public in advance of the XVII Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

Peel Holdings provided £12.5 million of the £30 million needed for the project, with the remainder coming from the European Regional Development Fund, English Partnerships/North West Development Agency and Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council and the IWM itself, as well as benefactors and sponsors.

Phase Two of the project was to be no less daunting. The IWM North Appeal was launched to fund the fitting out of the building, together with the implementation of the exhibition and display strategy. The BBC's chief television news correspondent and famed war correspondent, Kate Adie, chaired the Appeal,

apart by conflict: a fragmented globe reassembled in three interlocking shards or pieces, representing conflict on land, in the air and on the water.

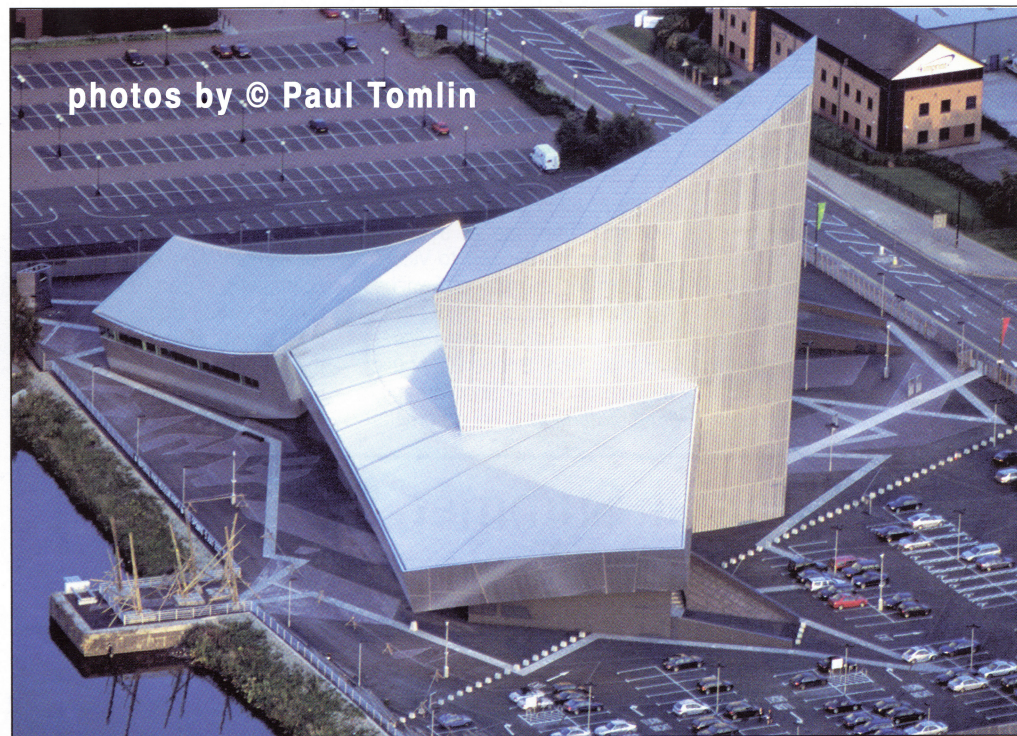
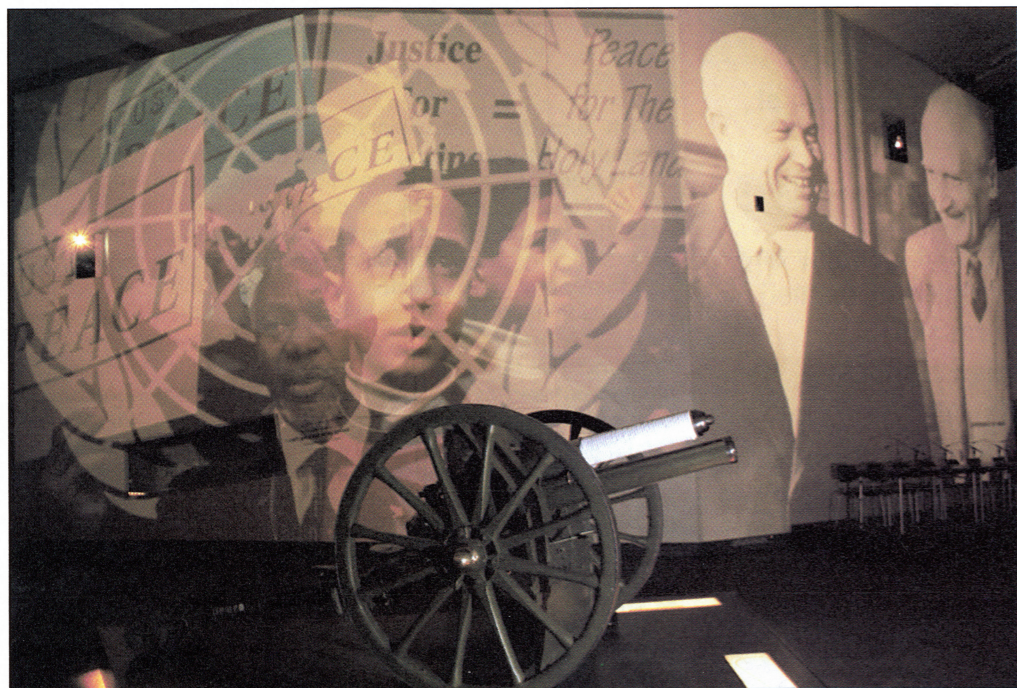
Visitors enter through the Air Shard, which is 55m high and open to the elements. A lift takes you to a viewing platform



• Ground view external.

at 29m at the top of the Air Shard, which affords spectacular views over Salford Quays towards the Manchester skyline. Immediately below, The Lowry

Using a technique designed specifically for the building, the huge exhibition space is transformed into a wrap-around experience of pictures and sound.



• Aerial view of the Imperial War Museum North at Salford.

Billed as the main highlight of your visit, The Big Picture is a large-scale 360 degree audio-visual experience that you can walk through. It uses over 60 projectors throwing images onto 20 screens, some of them over 5 metres high and has a powerful soundtrack of personal stories. There are presently three different shows running: *Why War?*; *Weapons of War and Children and War*. Each show lasts 15 minutes and one is featured at hourly intervals.

The Big Picture was developed as a way of enabling visitors to make direct contact with some of the thousands of images, stories and sounds from the Museum's collections. Even so, with over six million photographs and 120 million feet of cine film in store, the picture shows only scratch the surface.

SILOS, TIME LINES & STACKS

Also to be found in the main exhibition space are six self-contained display areas, or Silos. Each with a different look at war and conflict, covering themes such as *Women & War*; *Empire, Commonwealth & War*; and *Science, Technology & War*.

Next is the Time Line which runs around the perimeter walls providing the backbone of the displays from 1900 to the present day. The Time Line concentrates on personal stories and takes visitors on a 3-D journey through time.

The Time Stacks, which make selected historical artefacts available for handling, are mechanical storage retrieval systems containing more than 50 themed trays of objects from the Museum's collections.

LARGE EXHIBITS

The few large exhibits in IWM North are located in the main exhibition area. And this is where many IWM visitors have expressed a sense of disappointment.

In its defence the Museum maintains that it is essential to retain the unobstructed floor space to encourage visitors to walk around the darkened auditorium during The Big Picture Shows.

Whilst understanding the Museum's predicament in keeping obstacles to a minimum, in my opinion too much emphasis has been placed on the flashing picture shows, which are impres-

sive, but totally dominate the Museum to the detriment of many other potential exhibits – and the IWM reserve stores contain massive collections of military hardware hidden away from public view.

Of the five items on show, the Royal Horse Artillery 13-Pounder Field Gun which fired the first shell from the British side in the First World War, takes central position.

A Dennis fire fighting trailer pump is also on display. Widely

during the era of the Cold War.

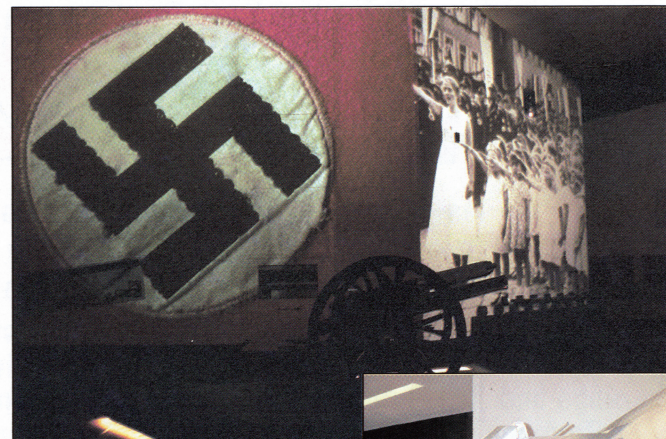
OVERVIEW

It has been a long time coming and now that the doors are open, what is the verdict?

The only way is to form your own opinion. Visit the Museum with an open mind and question and judge for yourself.

The Museum is open daily from 10am to 6pm and admission is free.

For more information see the IWM web site at www.iwm.org.uk.



used in W.W.II, the pumps could be easily manhandled around piles of rubble and deep bomb craters. This particular pump was supplied by the Home Office to the Ferranti Factory at Hollinwood, Oldham in 1941.

The British-designed, US Marines AV-8A Harrier jump-jet is an example of the world's first short take-off and landing aircraft. Another 'first' is the T-34/85 Tank which the Soviets developed during WWII. Entering service in July 1940, it revolutionised tank design worldwide. Whereas the Trabant Estate car from 1982 is indicative of the life of an East German resident



• Based on the RAF Harrier jump-jet design, 110 AV-8A's were built in the UK from 1971-83, for carrier-borne service with the US Marines.



• Left: Royal Horse Artillery 13-Pounder Field Gun which fired the first shell from the British side in the First World War.

• T34/85 tank. Developed by the Soviet Union during the Second World War, the T-34 was a revolutionary design. It first entered service in July 1940 and went on to revolutionise tank design worldwide.