

Many of you may already have seen the new murals in the underpass of Hitchin Station and wondered about the different images shown and how the project came about. In early 2021 during the second national lockdown we were contacted by Groundwork East. They were looking to create a mural in the underpass of Hitchin Station as was part of Govia Thameslink Railway's station improvement programme. After having a discussion with Groundwork, we agreed on the idea of creating large graphic panels to take advantage of our museum's fantastic photographic collection.

The collection of photographs runs into many thousands and covers all kinds of subjects. Notably, we hold a lot of early examples: our earliest, which is included in the station display, dates from 1854. When Groundwork got in touch, we were coming to the end of our successful Frozen in Time exhibition. This was an exhibition of historic photographs of the district that had already involved a lot of sifting through different photographs and looking for inspiring exhibition material. This was a prime moment for another project using them.

Though Frozen in Time gave us a solid start for photo research, I had still only seen a small part of our overall collections. Though I knew we held photographs of the whole district, I thought it better to keep the Hitchin Station mural Hitchin focused. As I looked over some of our other photographs, star images began to emerge. Becca Huggins from Groundwork and I settled upon the idea of separating the images into themes. The final mural has 11 themes containing around 200 photographs. The themes are purposely varied to give a taste of local history. These include things like: Agriculture, "Captured Moments", Football, Shops and War. Lovely photographs of the railway station and its staff (a must-have for such a project!) turned into a larger theme of transport as we also had so many amazing photos of local transport history.



A horse drawn carriage and early motor car in Market Place about 1902



Our earliest photograph, showing Market Place in 1854



Samuel Lucas Sr's Market Place painting, 1841

A favourite theme of mine was the section showing momentous local moments. This section includes the oldest photo from our collection which I mentioned earlier. This features the building on the left, The Shambles, and the Corn Exchange (now Pitcher and Piano) on the right: a recognisable sight alongside a Hitchin of the past! The Shambles features on Samuel Lucas Snr's Market Place painting. The photo is made even more interesting by the painting, which is on display in the museum. It also features on the mural as one of the few images that is not a photo! In the Lucas painting, you see different buildings on the right. These were demolished to make way for the Corn Exchange, with the owners of the Corn Exchange later demolishing the Shambles. The painting and the photo are just thirteen years apart!

Another striking photo showing a captured moment is one which shows the supporters of the MP Dr Hillier, gathered to cheer his 1910 election victory at the Hitchin Conservative Club which is bedecked in "Vote for Hillier" banners.



Gathered supporters of Dr Hillier

One notable part of our holdings, the football collection, features in its own theme panel. Hitchin was home to what is believed to be the world's first museum of football. Founded in 1956, its almost 1,000 objects were donated to our museum in the 1970s.



Vic Wayling (left) the founder of the football museum, shows his collection to guests and FA Secretary Sir Stanley Rous (holding the ball)

One fascinating panel to gather together was Faces. We hold so many photographs of people. Some we know a lot about, others are complete unknowns to us. Our panel combines the image of, for example, Hitchin Suffragette Elizabeth Impey along with the picture of a sweet unidentified young child in a sun hat. We even managed to find some smiling Victorians!

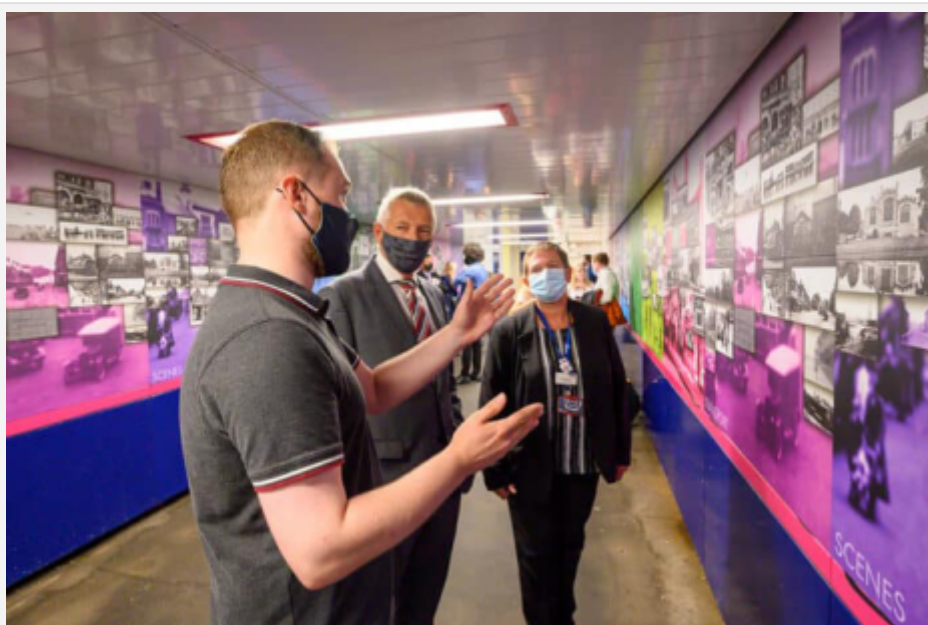


Elizabeth Impey

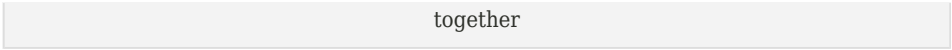


Unidentified child

The next time you travel by train do build in a few minutes to take a look at the History of Hitchin through our brilliant images!



Assistant Curator Matthew Platt discusses with Herts County Councillor Phil Bibby and GTR Area Manager Karen Gregson some of his favourite images and how the display came



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