

# Discovery without information

Sensory approaches  
with sensitive collections

**Robin Clutterbuck**

White Rook Projects

# Come to the museum -

- **Come face to face with the reality of your past**
- **Meet your ancestors**
- **Open a door to another world**

**- but don't touch!**

# **Our secret:**

**Museums are not inclusive**

**To join our exclusive club -**

- **You need knowledge**
- **You need education**
- **You need motivation**

# Knowing about audiences

- **Who is visiting and why?**
- **Who is not visiting? Why not?**
- **An essential first step, so long as audiences are segmented**
- **Only useful if we act on our findings**
- **Once started, you can't stop**
- **Findings may be uncomfortable...**

# Benefits to the museum

- **A process of receptiveness**
- **An awareness of learning styles**
- **A constructivist approach**

# Every visitor is different

- **Every experience has meaning**
- **Every meaning is personal**
- **Every experience is personal**

# A sensory approach

- **Barriers**
  - *Conservation*
  - *Cost and maintenance*
  - *Staff*
    - Reticence
    - The 'hallowed space'
    - Perceptions
  - *Visitors*
    - New approaches

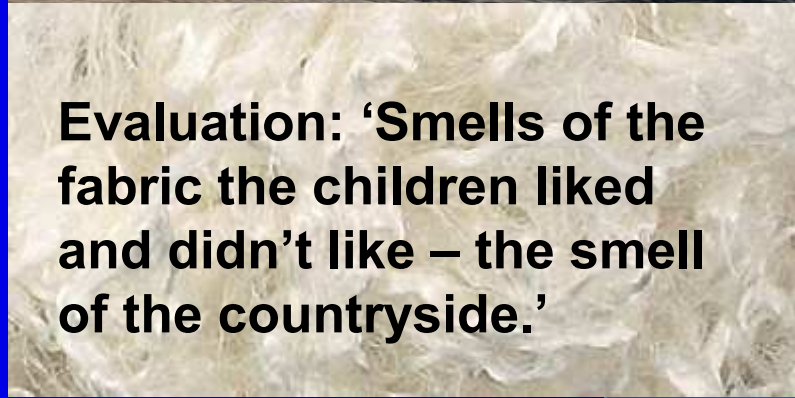
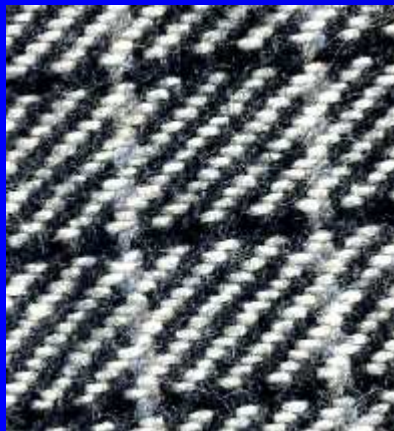
# Sensory approaches in U.K. and Ireland

- National Museum of Ireland
- Geffrye Museum, London
- Llancaiach Fawr, Wales
- Victoria & Albert Museum, London
- British Museum, London
- Two museums in Exeter



# National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

## Handling collections project



**Evaluation: 'Smells of the fabric the children liked and didn't like – the smell of the countryside.'**



# National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

## Handling collections project



Robin Clutterbuck, White Rook Projects – Istanbul, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

# National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

## Handling collections project



# National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

## Handling collections project



Close ups: 'really well received: the family had to find them all and spent on hour doing this exercise'

## Geffrye Museum, London

- **Period rooms with period music**
- **Information bays**
  - *Fabrics*
  - *Newspapers*
  - *Chairs*
  - *Listening posts*
- **Programming**
  - *Sensory handling collection delivered to 1/3 of visitors*



- **Welsh Baccaulaureate: Pilot studies with 16-19 year old vocational students**
- **Llancaich Fawr Manor, Ystrad Mynach, South Wales**



Robin Clutterbuck, White Rook Projects – Istanbul, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

# Immersive tours

- **First person interpretation**
- **Tours of emotion**
  - *Sensory*
  - *Constructivist*
  - *Creative*

# Victoria & Albert Museum, London

## British Galleries

- Major project, 2001 - £31m; 10% of gallery space
- Period teams mixed curatorial, research, education staff and designers
- Extensive audience research and testing
- Principle of placing interactive interpretation next to the object
- *'Interactivity is not just for children . . . A brief walk through the galleries will find adults trying on costume, using building bricks, or having a go at tapestry weaving'*



# Victoria & Albert Museum, London

## British Galleries

- **Sensory interaction**
  - *Audio with views of experts and artists, or stories about the objects*
  - *Dressing a figure (template with fabrics)*
  - *Dress up yourself (ruff, gauntlet, cravat)*
  - *Period music*
  - *Historic drawing techniques (e.g. scaling up)*
  - *Facsimile books*

# Victoria & Albert Museum, London

## British Galleries

- **Sensory interaction**
  - *Touch plates for visually impaired*
  - *Touch replica objects*
  - *Touch textiles, wood samples*



**The Great Bed of Ware**

# British Museum, London

## Handling desks

- *Original objects, mainly*
- *No gloves*
- *Staffed by volunteers*
- *Casual visitors*
- *Serendipity, discovery*
- *Aim to animate the gallery*



Robin Clutterbuck, White Rook Projects – Istanbul, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

## St. Nicholas Priory, Exeter

- Tudor home restored to c.1590
  - *Pestle and mortar in kitchen*
  - *'Talking Tins'*
  - *Torches, mirrors, magnifiers, teleidoscopes*



## Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter

- **Evaluation of family learning boxes against 'Inspiring Learning for All' 'Generic Learning Outcomes' ([www.inspiringlearningforall.org.uk](http://www.inspiringlearningforall.org.uk))**
  - *'The drum had animals' fur on it and a rope and sounded good – like the jungle' (boy, 6)*
  - *'My best thing is the stick with gold on which shows it's special' (girl, 6). She held it as if it were special, excited by its possibilities...*
  - **the girl (6) had enjoyed matching the clocks to the pictures and dropping cards saying 'ding' 'tick' etc through the right slots.**

**How was that  
for you?**

Robin Clutterbuck, White Rook Projects – Istanbul, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010



## **Robin Clutterbuck**

*Museum & heritage learning consultant*

### **White Rook Projects**

The Castle  
Seymour Road  
Newton Abbot  
Devon TQ12 2PU  
United Kingdom

Tel. +44 1626 333144

Mobile: +44 7779 671 794

[robin@whiterook.co.uk](mailto:robin@whiterook.co.uk)

[\*\*www.whiterook.co.uk\*\*](http://www.whiterook.co.uk)