

Iconic exhibits guide

Chosen by our staff and visitors, this is our pick of the best things to see in the museum.



Level 0

① The City of Birmingham Locomotive

Although named after the city, this locomotive did not actually travel through Birmingham's New Street station as the bends in the track proved too difficult to negotiate. The locomotive was originally built in Crew in 1939 and ran until 1964 when it was withdrawn for preservation. Unfortunately, the engine can no longer be run on steam as the new parts required would compromise her conservation status as the last unmodified engine of her class.



The Spitfire ②

During the Second World War 22,000 Spitfires were made, over half of them assembled at the Castle Bromwich works in Birmingham. This particular Supermarine Spitfire was never flown in combat, but was used for testing and training fighter pilots in ground attack techniques. Our iconic plane

was recently voted the number one object in museums in the BBC People's Museum programme.

③ The Railton Mobil Special

This vehicle was built for John Cobb's successful land speed record attempts. Although we have chosen to display the car with the roof raised, in order to see the engine, when lowered the outer shell would form a smooth, streamlined body. The current land speed record is 763mph set by the British built Thrust SCC in 1997.

The Smethwick Engine ④

This is the worlds oldest working stem engine designed and built by James Watt and Mathew Boulton. It was installed on the Wolverhampton-Birmingham canal in 1779 to transport water up to the top of a series of locks thereby increasing the number of boats that could pass through. Although the original engine house was demolished in 1897 the site can still be seen on Bridge Street North in Smethwick.

⑤ The Jaguar Robots

These two robots are demonstrating spot welding, the process by which pieces of metal are secured together. However before the robots are programmed to carry out these tasks in the real world, software is used to create virtual factories for testing. Virtual models are put through 9000 cycles of the robots movements to check for any errors

Level 3

⑥ Robothespian

As our latest addition to the Futures gallery, Robothespian has already proved very popular with visitors! However, as well as being very entertaining these robots also provide a robust platform for research in areas such as verbal and non-verbal communication and observing human/robot social interactions.



Level 1

The Mini ⑦

Our Mini was 67th off the production line and is still an excellent example of the city's engineering and production history. First manufactured in 1959 by the British Motoring Corporation, the Morris Mini Minor became the iconic image of 60's Britain.

Level 2

⑧ The Human Brain

The display of human tissue is a very sensitive area and the museum has a special license from the national Human Tissue Authority to do so. The donor's family are also happy as shown by the certificate. However we don't have consent for photography of the brain, so we ask visitors not to take pictures.

The Triceratops ⑨

This impressive skull was found in America and brought to Birmingham in the 1950's. The three horns grew in a similar way to modern day cows, having a core of bone and an outer coat of keratin (finger nail material). Scientists are undecided as to whether Triceratops used its horns for defence, display or attacking; it's likely that all three took place.

⑩ The Polar Bear

As a recognised symbol of the fight against global warming, it is perhaps difficult to imagine that only a few hundred years ago specimens such as this were prized additions to a museum's collection. Sadly polar bears are currently classified as a vulnerable species with a declining population of 20,000 to 25,000 left in the wild.

