



Forged In Birmingham


By Aimee Thomas 22156286

Reclaiming the stories of Birmingham's lost trades – through design, experience and space.

This project aims to re-educate the people of Birmingham about the city's lost industries, the crafts and skills that once positioned this city as a global leader in manufacturing and innovation. Over time, much of this cities history has faded from public memory, by bringing these stories back into focus, this project seeks to reignite civic pride and reposition Birmingham as a city built on skill, creativity and resilience. This is about putting Birmingham's history back on the map, where it rightfully belongs.

Concept Development

Gun manufacturing, pen nib production and brass metalwork played a crucial role in **SHAPING THE GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORICAL IDENTITY** of Birmingham. These industries were fundamental to the city's economic expansion but also positioned Birmingham as a **KEY PLAYER IN GLOBAL TRADE AND INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION**.

- 
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

Together, these trades **DEFINED BIRMINGHAM'S INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE**, driving employment, technological progress, and global influence, leaving a lasting legacy that continues to shape the city's identity today.

Brass Metalwork

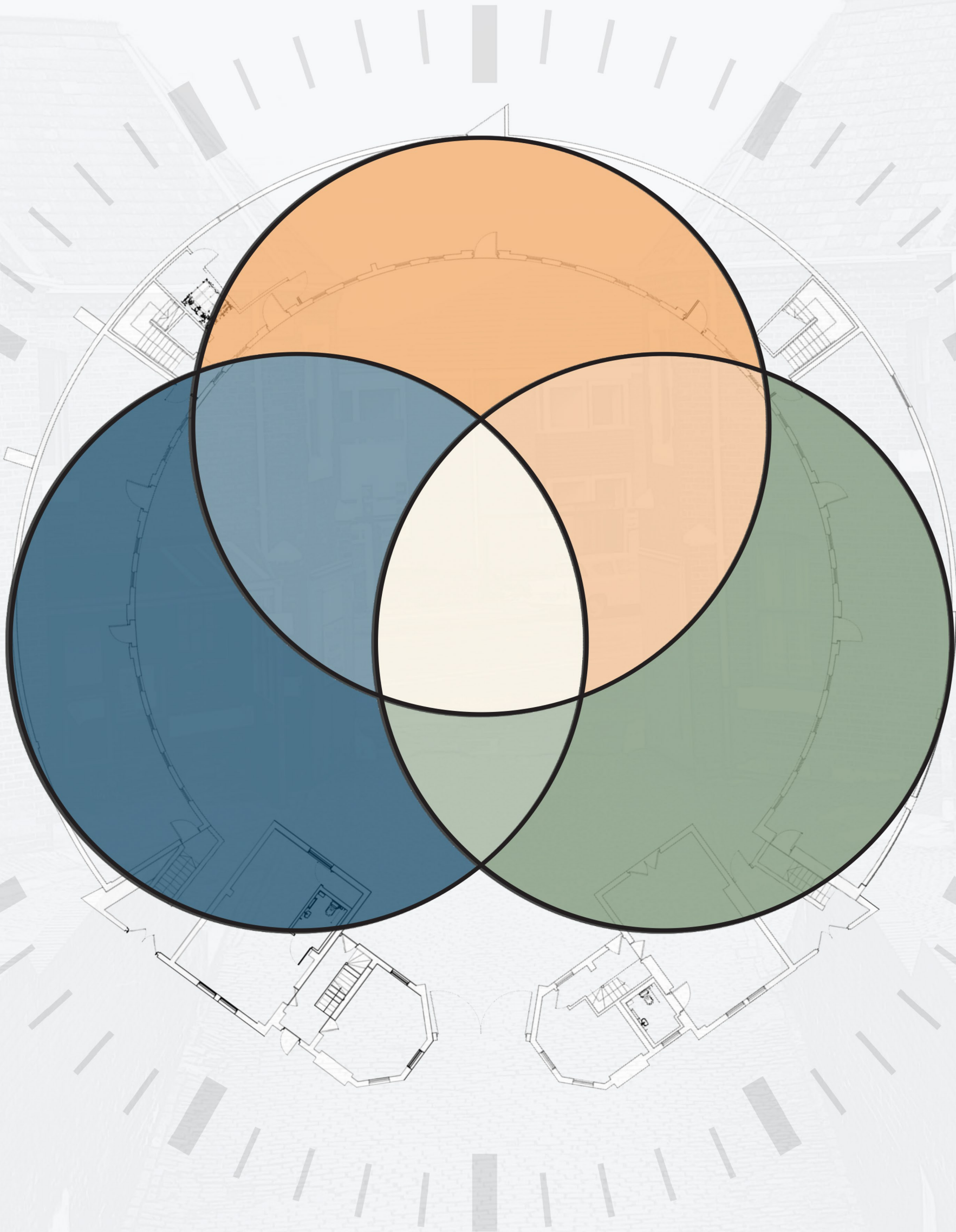
3. The brass metalworking industries **FUELLED ADVANCEMENTS IN ENGINEERING, ARCHITECTURE AND EVERYDAY GOODS**, supplying materials for both domestic and international markets.

Gun Manufacturing

1. The Gun Quarter, once a **WORLD-RENOWNED HUB OF FIREARMS PRODUCTION**, supplied weapons for military and commercial use across the globe.

Pen Nib Production

2. Birmingham's steel pen nib industry **REVOLUTIONISED WRITING**, making high-quality, affordable pens accessible worldwide and establishing the city as a leader in mass production techniques.



1/3 of the site dedicated to each profession



Spatial Development

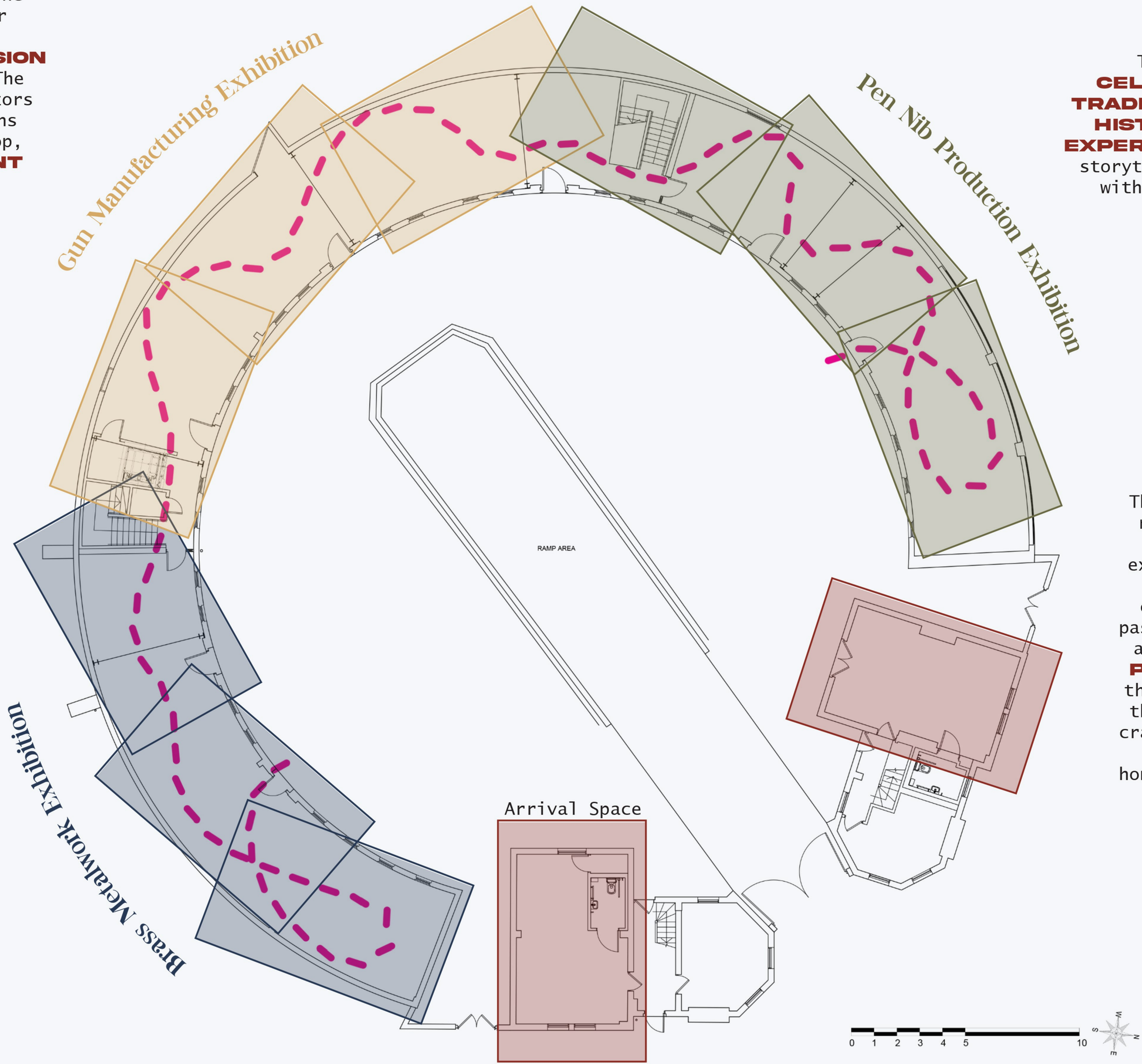
Each section is dedicated to one of the three trades and their placement reflects both the **CHRONOLOGICAL PROGRESSION** and the **THEMATIC FLOW**. The rotational design invites visitors to move through the exhibitions in a continuous, immersive loop, **MIRRORING** the **RECURRENT NATURE OF TIME**.

This spatial design turns history into an experience, physically situating the visitor within Birmingham's past trades. The looping layout acts as both a metaphor and the method, structuring memory through space.

This approach not only **CELEBRATES FORGOTTEN TRADES** but also **TRANSLATES HISTORICAL DATA INTO AN EXPERIENTIAL DESIGN**, bridging storytelling, movement and memory within the built environment.

Through the use of spatial layout, material choices and interactive storytelling elements, the exhibition space becomes a **LIVING ARCHIVE**, where visitors can experience the city's industrial past in a new context. This approach aims to **REIGNITE A SENSE OF PRIDE AND AWARENESS** among the people of Birmingham, reminding them of the city's contribution to craftsmanship and global innovation, while questioning how we might honour and repurpose that history in today's world.

This moment of absence informs the basis of my exhibition design, seeking to **RECONNECT BIRMINGHAM WITH ITS LOST TRADES** through immersive spatial storytelling that brings these histories back to life. By highlighting the gap left behind after the decline of key industries, the exhibition not only acknowledges what was lost but also **CELEBRATES THE LEGACY** and influence these trades had on Birmingham's identity. The design transforms historical data into a **NARRATIVE JOURNEY**, inviting visitors to physically and emotionally move through the spaces that reflect the rise, peak and eventual disappearance of each trade.



Visitor Journey Path Clockwise





‘Forged Paths’ - This exhibit features a fully immersive map installation created out of TV screens, displaying the former networks of Birmingham’s brass factories. Touch-responsive panels allow users to explore each site, unlocking stories, visuals and hidden histories. The exhibit turns industrial history into a tactile experience, encouraging curiosity and reconnecting people with the city’s manufacturing past.



‘On the Line’ - This exhibit asks visitors to confront the dual legacy of Birmingham’s gun trade, its role in skilled craftsmanship and innovation, shadowed by its links to violence and conflict. A literal line runs across the floor, marking a space between the positive and negative legacies of the industry. Visitors are invited to consider both sides and choose where they stand, turning reflection into a physical act of engagement.



‘Written in the City’ - As the final exhibit in the pen nib exhibition, this space shifts focus from the past to the future, celebrating the lasting influence of Birmingham’s pen legacy on creativity, education and identity. Surrounded by scroll-like calligraphy walls, visitors are invited to leave their own mark, writing messages. Over time, the space becomes a collective canvas, a living expression of voices, thoughts and hopes, quite literally written into the fabric of the city.



‘Different Perspectives’ - This circular, interactive exhibit uses interactive touchpoints alongside directional sound technology, when activated, these images come to life with recorded voices and written transcripts to share their personal stories from the gun trade. The space is acoustically divided, visitors must step close to each story to hear, while quiet zones around the edges preserve the intimacy of listening. The rotational layout encourages visitors to move around the space, revealing contrasting narratives that highlight the social and emotional complexity of the trade.

Speaker Sound Throw Plan

This plan illustrates the directional sound coverage of the X4i speakers used in the ‘Different Perspectives’ exhibit. Each speaker emits a focused 110° sound cone, creating defined sound areas where visitors hear stories clearly. At either end, inverse sound technology is used to actively cancel out audio, creating quiet areas that reduce sound spill and preserve acoustic focus. The surrounding no sound areas ensure that visitors must physically approach each section to fully engage with the stories being told, reinforcing the exhibits emphasis on listening, engaging and reflecting.

Material Board Designed by Trades

