

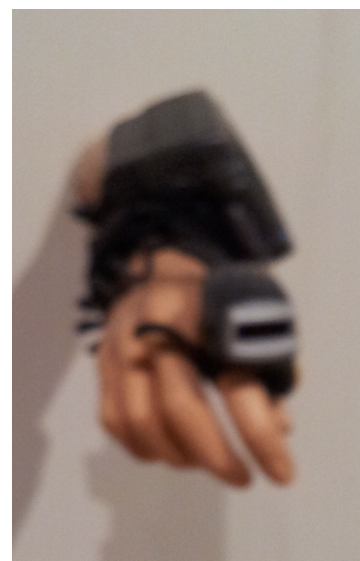
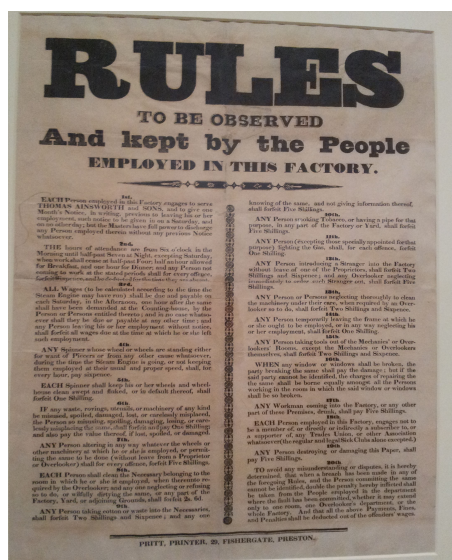
All that is Solid Melts into Air

An Exhibition by Jeremy Dexter at The Manchester City Art Gallery

You could hear the exhibition before entering the room where it was being held, music was playing on a jukebox, the lilting sounds of folk music gave an atmosphere of harmony as a community of voices told the story about their lives. How they had been affected by loss, the loss of their former community now uprooted to work long and exhausting hours in an urban environment with its large scale machinery, sharing in the loss of a workmate to accidents and the callousness of the bosses. The music and lyrics a positive in the often brutal work environment. [The Broad-sides were song-sheets that were sold and sung in the streets and pubs of new industrial towns]....they told of strikes, 'public executions' and served as a newspaper might do today.

The art pieces in the Gallery were wide and varied, traditional oil paintings, watercolours, drawings etchings, video's, a film and artefacts to support the subject of the exhibition, a clocking in clock, a double faced clock which timed productivity as well as the time, and if the worker did not measure up to the time expected to take for a task they would have to stay behind and make it up.

Alongside the two faced clock was a plastic electronic device, this was worn by employees who work at places such as Amazon, 'the device track the speed of orders and as a consequence the efficiency of its staff'. An A4 size poster sits on the same wall showing the **rules** of the factory.



The Forge figured in a few paintings and a video piece, health and safety and conditions of work were not even dreamt of at this period of the industrial revolution, the workforce were treated like slaves, they were as good as wearing chains as one picture shows where two men are picking up chains and a foreman telling them what to do. The men were breathing in heat and fumes probably toxic fumes, they tried to protect their mouths from inhaling the vapours.

A further painting is of a works yard which is lit up by searchlights from a watchtower, could it be there to deter intruders or is it to stop workers from leaving, its up to the viewer how this could be interpreted. An enormous oil painting called 'The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah' A man-made apocalypse by John Martin. Is this Hell on Earth, just what are we doing and Who is the Devil?



These are just a few of the exhibits that the curator of the exhibition Jeremy Dexter has got together to tell the story of the exploitation of men and women who have to work for a living or starve, their story still continues today as more and more people across the world are forced to work in conditions like at the beginning of the industrial revolution, markets have expanded for cheap labour and bigger profits and we in turn as consumers take advantage of the cheap goods, in many cases indirectly exploiting both workers and children. The real exploiters though are the factory owners who do not risk their lives and are indifferent to the suffering of those who do.



This is a photograph of Adrian Street, he worked in a pit in Wales when he was only 15 but wanted to explore the wider world much to the annoyance of his father and other pit worker workers. He returned 17 years later wearing his championship belt dressed as shown here, to prove that you could have an alternative future than down the mines.

What does the title of the exhibition mean? It sounds a bit mysterious, The quotation is from 'The Communist Manifesto' by Marx and Engels. Does this then imply that the exhibition can't be accessible to everybody even if they have not come in touch with the work of Marx and Engels. My reply to this is, yes, the exhibition clearly expresses the plight of the working class from the Industrial Revolution to today, what is different about paintings/pictures is you don't need to be a great reader, or an intellectual to understand the exhibition,

there are visual clues, where emotions can be described in both colour, mood, tone and the subject of the picture is clearly there to see. Labels and short explanations accompany the works of Art and artefacts.

Below is a quote from 'The Communist Manifesto'

'Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind'.