

## THE MUSEUM OF HATTING

As mentioned in my introduction, Britain's first museum dedicated to the hatting industry opened on Easter Monday earlier this year. The following information has been forwarded by Aileen Plant who, as a descendant of William Plant who set up a Hat Block manufacturing company in Stockport in 1828, was invited to the official opening.

# Hat museum brims with 700 opening day visitors



ANDREW Stunell, MP, admires the workings of a re-construction of William Plant's hat block maker and, right, Florence and Connie Jackson, aged eight and four, show off their hats during Monday's opening. Pictures by Matt Ratcliffe (17-1227)



Special report  
By Eileen Payne

Crowds were queuing out-side Stockport's unique new tourist attraction well before it opened on Easter Monday.

More than 700 people enjoyed their visit to Hat Works, Britain's first hatting museum at Wellington Mill on the A6, on its first day.

After two years hard work, the three-storey museum opened on time, with hat designer David Shilling and TV steeplejack, Fred Dibnah flanking the Mayor of Stockport, Councillor Ingrid Shaw, as she unveiled the plaque to launch the £1.8m project.

This included £1.3m from the National Lottery with the rest from Stockport Council and other grants.

Invited guests at the opening ceremony wore headgear of all shapes, sizes, styles and colours from Ascot-style hats to lifeboatmen's sowesters and an amazing representation of a sailing ship, work by Stockport Art Gallery Manager, John Scully.

The new museum was described as "absolutely fantastic by David Shilling, who became famous for the outrageous and extravagant Ascot hats he used to design before turning his attention to the world of fine arts.

Tony Lees, member of one of the last hatting families left in Stockport, who worked in the industry for 32 years, was equally delighted by the museum.

He recalled that his great-grandfather had been the first Mayor of Stockport from a hatting family, in the late 1880's.

Mr Lees said Hat Works was not just a museum, but also a lasting tribute to the tens of thousands of people who worked in the hatting industry here over the past two to three hundred years.

Coun Shaw said Hat Works was the latest in the "string of pearls" of town centre attractions, including the air raid shelters and historic Market Place.

Hat Works manager, Steve Miller, was delighted with the turnout for the opening of the museum.

"Members of the public were queuing up even before we opened," he said.

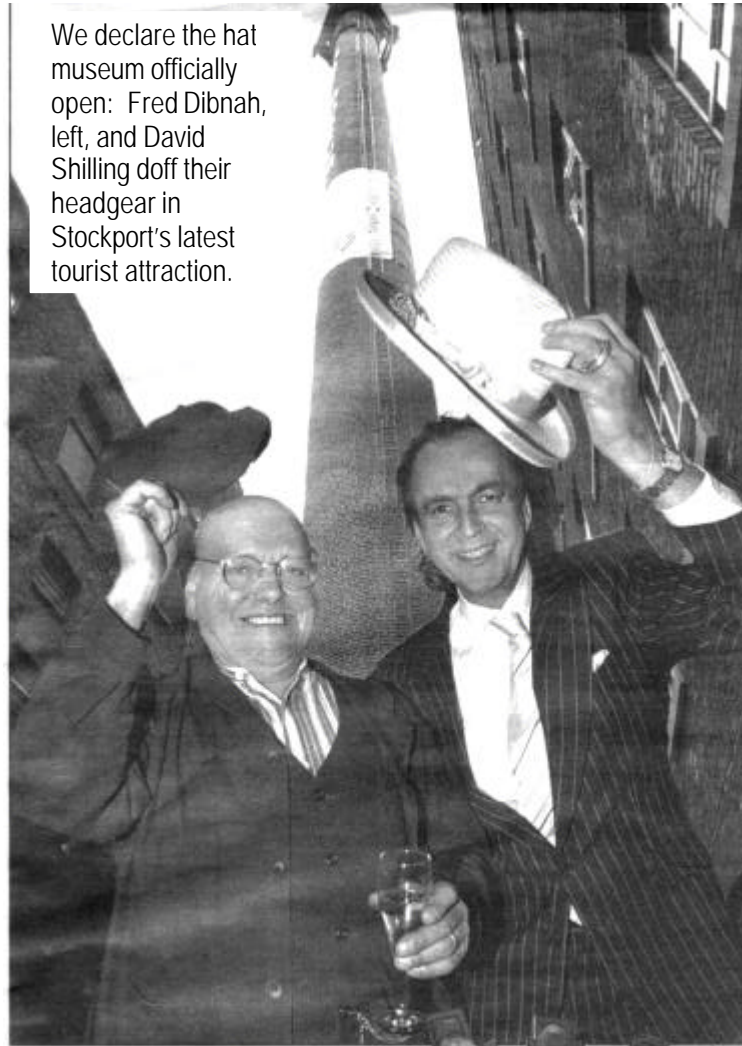
It was smashing that so many people turned up on a bank holiday when so much was going on elsewhere and that they decided to come to us rather than to the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester or Wigan Pier, for example."

He added: "I think people were delighted that there is so much to see in the museum.

"Many thought it just covered either history or fashion and were very pleased to see that it does both."

Hat Works traces the rise and fall of the fur felt hat-making in Stockport from its days as a cottage industry 250 years ago

We declare the hat museum officially open: Fred Dibnah, left, and David Shilling doff their headgear in Stockport's latest tourist attraction.



to the closure of the town's last hatting firm, Christie's in 1997.

Exhibits range from machinery to glamorous headgear and one is particularly poignant.

It is a re-creation of a tiny hatter's cottage of bygone era, with the message that the occupants were only likely to live to the age of 45 because of harsh conditions they had to work in.

Hat Works is open from 10 am to 5 pm Monday to Saturday and 11 am to 5 pm on Sundays.

Admission is £3.95 for adults and £2.50 for children and adult concessions and £11 for a family ticket.



HAT'S extravagant: (L to r) Melissa Donald, tourism manager, John Scully, art gallery manager, and Fiona Bullock, community services marketing manager, lend their support.

