



Great Escapes: Remarkable Second World War Captives exhibition, design-led by an academic in architecture at Northumbria University.

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## Northumbria architect leads design for unique exhibition space at London's National Archives.

**An academic in architecture at Northumbria University has led the design of a ground-breaking new exhibition in London.**

Peter Dixon, an Assistant Professor in Architecture, has led the design in collaboration with creative design studio, [Field Design](#), to create a unique, immersive exhibition, held within The National Archives.

*Great Escapes: Remarkable Second World War Captives* is a major new international public exhibition, which explores the human spirit of hope and resilience during times of captivity, revealing both iconic and under-told stories of prisoners of war and civilian internees during the Second World War.

Drawing on The National Archives' vast collections of wartime era documents and photographs, the exhibition features never previously displayed records from British intelligence. More well-known escape attempts are also examined, with the 80th anniversary of what we now know as 'the Great Escape' occurring in March 2024.

Peter Dixon led on three-dimensional and interpretation design and was creative producer on the audio-visual and immersive elements of the exhibition. The exhibition consists of five areas, through a combination of traditional artefact museum interpretation, interspersed with immersive audio-visual elements along with bespoke exhibition and interpretation furniture and display systems.

In collaboration with Field Design, Peter Dixon's drawings and vision for the exhibition were selected by The National Archives following an international competitive tender process, and the team were formally appointed in December 2022.

"The National Archives is different to any traditional museum," said Peter Dixon. "They've had an exhibition team for around five years and one of the reasons Field Design and I were appointed is because we wanted to do something unique, with lots of immersive elements, sounds and interactive visual displays that really makes the visitor feel transported and immersed into the narrative and history of the exhibition content.

"It took six months to design the exhibition working closely with The National Archives Curatorial and Exhibition Team's and three months to build the exhibition off-site and then it was a two-week installation for the exhibition and graphics. The exhibition space is then left to lie for two-to-three weeks, to let the environment settle, then the objects and artefacts were brought in and placed into their display cases, mostly from The National Archives' collection, but also from other collaborating institutions and collections such as the Eden Camp Modern History Museum and The Imperial War Museum.

“Further to providing Design and Interpretation solutions for the exhibition itself, projects such as this are considered as ‘Research through Design’. They form the basis of ‘Practiced based Research’ that inform my research I carry out within [The Design Research Group](#) at Northumbria University. The Great Escapes exhibition is now forming a yearlong reflective study into Museum and Exhibition Interpretation design.”

Angus MacKenzie, Head of Design at Field, said: “The Great Escapes exhibition at The National Archives is one of several collaborations we have completed with Peter Dixon. Our close working relationship allows us to align our graphical interpretation with Peter’s three-dimensional interpretation harmoniously, creating a fully coordinated, seamless and engaging display for audiences. Not only do we shape visitors physical journey, but their tactile, sensory and visual journey too.”

[The Design Research Group](#) at Northumbria University incorporates theoretical and design research, scholarship, and professional practice. It uses design based and transdisciplinary thinking that crosses scales, from artefacts to rooms to cities, from the individual to collective life. It addresses global grand challenges on the environment, urbanisation, digitalisation, wellbeing, health and social justice.

To find out more information about the *Great Escapes: Remarkable Second World War Captives* exhibition visit:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/great-escapes/>

The exhibition is free to visit until 21 July.

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