Volunteering at Research and Cultural Collections

From Egyptian shabti figures to nineteenth century medical waxes, from West African Masks to modern British landscape paintings, the Research and Cultural Collections hosts a vast range of extraordinary artefacts that play a valuable social, cultural and educational role in university life and wider communities. Research and Cultural Collections has a vibrant programme of student projects for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Participants work alongside the curatorial team to undertake projects that are beneficial to both parties, taking into account the student's areas of interest.

Why Volunteer?
- Gain valuable experience of the museum world
- Learn a range of new skills, useful for future employment in a range of sectors
- Expand your knowledge of the museums and collections
- Meet new people from across the University and other cultural organisations
- Opportunities for professional development and a reference for future employment

Voluntary roles within the Research and Cultural Collections team are split into three main areas: documentation and digital access; curatorial; and collections care. There will naturally be overlap between these roles and you may be asked to complete tasks outside of your main area of work.

What is expected of volunteers?
Voluntary positions with RCC are in high demand. We ask for all volunteers to commit to at least a half day session per week (Monday - Thursday, morning 09.30 – 12.30 or afternoon, 13.30 – 16.30). We will be flexible in relation to that, but ask that you commit to a minimum of a term and bear in mind that we have limited capacity for volunteers. If your circumstances change and you can no longer commit to your work experience, we would ask you step down so that another student can take your place.

For further information about the volunteering programme, please see the Research and Cultural Collections volunteering policy.

Role descriptions

In order to allow a more valuable experience for the volunteer and involve volunteers in a wider variety of work at RCC, we offer three distinct types of volunteer placement. This means that training is tailored to suit this particular role and projects may be more in-depth.

Documentation and digital access

Documentation is core to all museums and supports all other areas of activity. As documentation experience is one of the main skills required for entry level museum work, this would best suit individuals who are looking to enter the sector.

Activities might include:
- Working with our collections database, MIMSY XG and updating locations records
- Initial cataloging of objects
- Curatorial archive research to build object records
- Object significance assessments

Collections care

Collections care encompasses a variety of activities to care for and protect objects, also known as preventative conservation. This position would be best suited to those who would like practical, hands-on museum experience.

Activities might include:
- Basic cleaning and conservation of objects e.g. cleaning and waxing outdoor sculpture
- Basic remedial conservation such as silver cleaning
- Object condition reporting
- Object labelling
- Monitoring environmental conditions and checking pest traps

Curatorial

There may be overlap between roles, for example, curatorial volunteers might be asked to assist in cataloguing objects, before researching and using them in a display. The main focus of this role however would be interpretation and research relating to the collections. This role would be best suited to individuals considering a career in the sector or looking to develop their research and written communication skills for different audiences.

Activities might include:
- Object research and writing basic descriptions
- Researching, producing and mounting labels for objects and artwork
- Exhibitions work - involvement in curating small displays, generally as part of a team
- Digital interpretation e.g. curating flickr exhibitions
- Social media
- Object significance assessments