

Volunteering in the Collections auditing department at National Library of Scotland: a testimony

By Imogen Fitzpatrick and Jeevan Sanghera



Imogen and Jeevan's time volunteering in the Collections auditing department has been a fun and rewarding experience. We have gained valuable insights into the heritage and conservation sector, providing us with possible career pathways and industry knowledge.

Beginning our volunteer work in September 2018 and September 2019 respectively, the experience has consisted of a weekly four-hour commitment to audit the catalogues of the extensive archival collections at the National Library of Scotland. As third year History students at the University of Edinburgh, we have enjoyed applying our theoretical understanding to practical tasks with the aim of conserving vital historical materials for public benefit.

We have audited a plethora of catalogue material. This includes nineteenth century religious pamphlets, more recent Soviet political correspondence, private deposits from Lauriston Castle and British abolitionist propaganda. Not only are we able to read these texts and manuscripts as fascinating sources, we have gained vital knowledge on how to handle them as rare and fragile items of significance. A more ubiquitous skill we have developed is translating data into library catalogues, allowing for an increased familiarity with using online databases. We have also expanded our oral communication skills which has facilitated effective team-work and planning around university schedules has improved our time management.

This programme has been incredibly valuable in expanding our horizons for potential career pathways and exposing us to a vibrant workplace environment. Jeevan, as someone who wants to pursue a career in research in the heritage sector, found the opportunity to experience archives first-hand particularly captivating. On the other hand, Imogen enjoyed developing her analytical faculties as she hopes for a future career in research for government policy.

From a social perspective, the volunteering has been a really enjoyable way to connect with new people with shared interests. Our coffee breaks with Paul Hambelton (Collections Audit Officer)

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were a particular highlight as we always had intriguingly expansive discussions ranging from history, literature and science to guano and war pigeons. The shortbread was pretty good too.

Overall, we have thoroughly enjoyed our volunteering experience at NLS and would heartily recommend it to anyone with a few spare hours a week wishing to explore something different.