

Cumbria Archive Service

Volunteer Role Profile

Conservation-Unit Volunteers

Volunteers help us to care for our collections. In doing so, they increase and improve public access to information. The specialist work of the conservation unit ensures that documents are protected, stabilised and (where possible) made fit-for-purpose.

With guidance from professionally qualified staff, volunteers will learn to identify, protect and stabilise a variety of different materials. Individuals will undergo one-to-one instruction. Training will be allocated in accordance with the needs and priorities of the archive service. It should be noted that this instruction does not constitute professional or vocational training. However, volunteers will learn a number of transferable skills which could help them to gain paid employment in other fields. Volunteers will gain valuable work experience which could help them to secure a place on a conservation training programme.

Volunteers benefit Cumbria Archive Service and its customers

- By equipping volunteers with the relevant knowledge and skills, Cumbria Archive Service will increase the effectiveness of its stewardship. Volunteers help us to achieve national standards.
- Increased capacity within the conservation unit means that more unique and original documents are protected, stabilised and (where possible) rendered fit for purpose.
- The production of digital facsimiles enables original material to be handled less frequently, decreasing the risk of mechanical damage through incremental wear and tear.
- Increasing digital content means that more material is available to more people, in more ways.

What is involved?

For security and supervisory reasons, a maximum of 6 volunteers will be engaged at any one time. Although the conservation unit volunteers work as part of a small and dedicated team, projects and tasks are assigned on an individual basis. A volunteer's particular skills and experience will be taken into consideration when a project is assigned.

Key Tasks

1. Packaging & Preventive Conservation

- Making archival-quality boxes, folders and polyester sleeves.
- Re-housing documents, i.e. wrapping books and packaging manuscripts.
- Identifying causes of deterioration, i.e. acidic ancillary materials, mechanical damage, pests and mould.
- Surface cleaning maps, plans, manuscripts, books, prints and glass plate negatives.

2. Digitisation & Technical Assistance

- Preliminary listing – collating and describing uncatalogued collections using Microsoft Excel.
- Scanning negatives and photographs.
- Filing, labelling and optimising digital images.
- Assisting with processing and backing-up digital files and creating metadata.

Required Skills

Our volunteer sessions are open to everyone. No previous experience is necessary. However, volunteers must possess the following personal qualities and skills:

- High level of accuracy
- Aesthetic sensitivity
- Attention to detail
- Dedication & commitment
- Excellent communication skills
- Ability to follow instructions
- Ability to concentrate
- Excellent manual dexterity

Additional Information

Place of Work: Conservation Unit, Cumbria Archive Centre, Petteril Bank Road, Carlisle, CA1 3AJ

Work Schedule: Sessions are held on a Thursday on a fortnightly basis. We ask each volunteer to commit a minimum of 3 hours, and a maximum of 6 hours of work per fortnight. Flexibility will be granted when possible, and exceptions will always be made with regard to health issues, work commitments, family matters and planned vacations.

Supervisor: Senior Archive Conservator
conservation.unit@cumbria.gov.uk
01228 227 252

Provisions: Volunteers should wear comfortable casual clothing and sensible shoes. They must be clean and presentable. Volunteers may bring their own apron and small tools. However, specialist tools and materials will be provided. Tea and coffee will also be provided.

Health & Safety: Archival material can be dirty and dusty. Volunteers will be supplied with aprons, protective gloves and dust masks as appropriate. However, those with a respiratory condition may be unsuited to this type of work. In addition, volunteers within the conservation unit must have reasonably good eyesight, and be able to lift and carry boxes and books weighing up to 5kg. Volunteers will not be asked to do any heavy lifting.

Terms of Service: This role is entirely voluntary and the position is unpaid. The arrangement is not legally binding and does not constitute an employment contract.

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Indexing Volunteer

Indexing is a simple and engaging activity. Our volunteers carry out a wide variety of indexing tasks, focusing mainly on useful, name-rich sources for family and local history research.

The work consists of extracting names, dates, locations and other recorded information from the historical documents themselves. This extracted information is then used to create indexes that can be accessed by anyone using the Archive Centre and online via CASCAT, our electronic catalogue. Indexing volunteers can work alone or with a friend.

This benefits the Archive Service and its customers by:

- Enabling staff and researchers to quickly and easily extract data from tens of thousands of valuable records.

Some of the skills required to carry out such tasks include:

- Good IT skills, including the ability to use Microsoft Excel
- Attention to detail
- Accuracy
- Commitment

No fixed time commitments are required to be an Indexing Volunteer.

Indexing volunteer, v3, 2019 ©Cumbria County Council

Cumbria Archive Service

Volunteer Role Profile

Sorting and Cataloguing Volunteer

Our Sorting and Cataloguing Volunteers have a unique opportunity to work with a range of different archive collections. Working under the direction of our staff, volunteers may assist with identifying records, sorting them and arranging them into archival order and producing lists for inclusion in our electronic cataloguing software.

This benefits the Archive Service and its customers by:

- Increasing public access to the archives through the creation of catalogues
- Adding to our knowledge of the historical content of the collections
- Improving collections management, security and preservation

Some of the skills required to carry out such tasks include:

- Good IT skills, including the ability to use Microsoft Excel
- Attention to detail
- Accuracy
- Commitment
- Ability to read old handwriting

No fixed time commitments are required to be a Sorting and Cataloguing Volunteer.

Sorting and Cataloguing Volunteer, v2, Oct 2019 ©Cumbria County Council

Cumbria Archive Service

Volunteer Role Profile

Undergraduate/Graduate Volunteer

Working closely with the archive staff, this role is aimed at volunteers working towards a first degree or recent graduates with an interest in a career in archive administration. The role would also suit undergraduates undertaking a work placement as part of their degree.

These Volunteers have an opportunity to experience a wide range of archive work. The role includes:

- identifying records, sorting them and arranging them into archival order
- producing lists for inclusion in our electronic cataloguing software
- answering verbal and written enquiries from the public
- assisting in the preparation of displays and exhibitions
- assisting with talks and educational visits
- repackaging archive documents to ensure their long term preservation

The Undergraduate/Graduate Volunteer will gain experience of the range of work performed by archive staff including cataloguing, outreach and answering enquiries. In particular they will gain an insight into the range of archives held in a local authority archive centre, the challenges of interpreting older documents, preservation of archives and the role of information technology in managing archive collections.

This benefits the Archive Service and its customers by:

- increasing public access to the archives through the creation of catalogues
- adding to our knowledge of the historical content of the collections
- improving collections management, security and preservation

Some of the skills required to carry out the tasks include:

- good IT skills, including the ability to use Microsoft Word and Excel
- good verbal and written communication skills
- attention to detail
- an accurate, methodical and analytical approach
- an ability to draw conclusions from various sources
- being committed and well organised
- capable of managing your time to meet deadlines

Undergraduate/Graduate Volunteers are expected to commit to an agreed amount of time.

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Volunteer Role Profile

Special Events Volunteer/Guides

This role is specific to Cumbria Archive Service.

Our Special Events Volunteers and Guides provide an invaluable service in a variety of ways. They have the opportunity to actively welcome visitors to the Archive Centre, and help to interpret any collections on display, balancing the conservation, security, health and safety and customer service elements of the role. Behind the scenes work might include assistance with exhibitions, refreshments, and other special events.

This role will appeal to anyone who is interested in communicating their excitement about history to the public and who is sensitive to the different needs of visitors.

This benefits the Archive Service and its customers by:

- Helping to open up the Archive Centre fully as an venue for exhibitions and displays, talks, and a cultural community centre
- Encouraging more and more people to make use of and enjoy the archive and local studies collections

For this role no particular skills or experience are required. However, it is desirable that applicants have an interest in history and the work of the Cumbria Archive Service as well as a willingness to work with staff, visitors and other volunteers in communicating that mission through a variety of activities.

Events/Guide Volunteer, v2, 2019 ©Cumbria County Council