



Viva Volunteers!

Oxford University Museums Volunteer Service
July - December 2018



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

'Multaka-Oxford': a 'meeting place' to bring people together!



In September 2017, the Museum of the History of Science and the Pitt Rivers Museum received funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund for a 2-year project called Multaka-Oxford. Multaka-Oxford is about creating volunteer opportunities for forced migrants – including giving them the chance to work alongside existing volunteers – and using the museums and collections as a meeting point for bringing people together.

With the support of local community partners and the Volunteer Service, project staff have so far recruited 27 volunteers, who have given an amazing 220 hours of their time since April 2018: delivering tours in Arabic at the Museum of the History of Science, researching textiles from the Middle East collection at the Pitt Rivers, organising events, giving talks, and photographing some of the collections.

Find out more about what the Multaka-Oxford team has been up to on its blog: <https://multaka-oxford.tumblr.com/>, and keep an eye out for emails looking for more people to join the team!



Many thanks to everyone who has taken part in the project so far: Mohamed, Abdullah, Tammam, Niran, Ghazala, Feng, Thabo, Gihan, Nav, Amna, Niveen, Waed, Safaa, Mariam, Hussein, Shaimaa, Suheer, Mohammad, Farida, Khalil, Omran, Rawan, Hadi, Ali, Roushin, Dot, and Chaitanya.

A Sweet Tweet!

A huge well done to one of our volunteers, Leonie. The Museum of Natural History received this inspiring and wholesome tweet in August, following her successful activity at Super Science Saturday in March. The activity was all about turtles and how plastics affect them in the oceans, and it clearly had a positive and lasting impact on visitors and sea life alike!



If you have something 'volunteer-y' to tweet about, then please include the Volunteer Service @GLAMVols, as we love to see and hear what our volunteers are up to.



24 likes
sam_evans_oxford We take a bucket onto the beach every day for our beach cleans. Every day we find plastic straws and the kids know how bad these are for marine life after we learned all about turtles and plastic pollution at @morethanadodo Science Saturday back in March.

Volunteer Christmas Cheer

On 29th November, the Volunteer Service held its annual Volunteer Christmas Gathering: a chance to thank volunteers for all of their efforts over the last year. This year's soirée was held at the Pitt Rivers Museum, where we decked the ground floor with festive lights and decorations and filled tables with mince pies and bubbly aplenty.

To get the party started and as a fun means for people to get to know each other, we created a Christmas Connection Questionnaire, for which volunteers had to ask each other questions and add names to their sheets (e.g. Who had the most unusual role in a nativity play? Best answer..... A Wall!?!). We also had a delightfully cringe-worthy Christmas Cracker Quiz, which seemed to receive as many eye-rolls as it did laughs, and a Christmas Crafts table where volunteers enjoyed making decorations to take home. Everyone seemed to be full of good cheer and to really enjoy themselves.

A really big thank you to the Pitt Rivers Museum for their hospitality and to everyone who came along and filled that space with fun and festivity!

To those of you who couldn't make it on the night, we're sorry not to have seen you, but we hope to see you at our summer party – details to follow in due course...

"Thank you very much for the really fun party. I enjoyed the chance to meet some of the other volunteers and share experiences. Thank you as well for organising so many volunteering opportunities, I've had a really varied and interesting time so far!"



Family Friendly Sundays

Back in 2005, the Museum of Natural History and the Pitt Rivers Museum were delighted to jointly win the Kids in Museums Family Friendly Museum Award. The award recognised the Museums' efforts to create fun, friendly, memorable environments in which families could learn about the natural and human worlds. At the time, the volunteer-led 'Family Friendly Sundays' stood out as an excellent example of how museums can help to improve access for younger visitors. Thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers, Family Friendly Sundays are still going strong in the Museum of Natural History today!



Every Sunday afternoon, the Museum's main court becomes a hive of activity as volunteers welcome families under the T. rex and encourage them to be hands-on, inquisitive, and creative. During this drop-in event, families can have a go at making a craft, such as a jewel beetle mask, stretchy dinosaur puppet, or dodo feet. They can also investigate sensory specimen boxes containing tactile treasures from the natural world, visit different parts of the museum with a trail, or relax with a book in the story corner. As well as this, families can borrow explorer backpacks to find out more about a certain area of the collections (be it bugs or dinosaurs) with the help of interactive challenges. All these activities are facilitated by volunteers, and without them, the Museum would not be able to deliver this regular and much loved programme.

The 'Sundays' team is made up of museum enthusiasts of a variety of ages and backgrounds. They bring their own experiences and interests to the role while sharing the same goal of ensuring that family visitors feel they are welcome and that their needs are recognised and supported. Thanks to feedback provided by the team, the Museum recently adapted old activities and introduced new ones both to improve the visiting experience of families and to keep volunteers engaged. This year, the Museum launched its new 'Jurassic Packs' after they were initially trialled by the volunteer team. The new explorer packs, which help families to discover the Museum's marine reptiles, are now a regular feature of Family Friendly Sundays.

Move a Million

In September, the Museum of Natural History's Entomology department recruited 15 volunteers to support its new 'Move a Million' project: to re-house and count the entire British Insect Collection over a 2-year period. Since starting, the team has initial condition assessed, documented, and re-housed over 318,495 specimens in just under 300 hours – almost a third of the Collection, and a great milestone to achieve in such a short amount of time! The spreadsheet of data that volunteers have created has already helped staff to answer various enquiries, and the project so far has been fun, and the volunteers have been exceptional!

'HOPE for the Future – Heritage, Outreach and Preservation of Entomology' is being funded with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Within it, the 'Move a Million' project aims to rehouse and safeguard the nationally significant British Insect Collections and restore the Westwood Room to its original 1860 décor, creating a new multi-functional public space. The project will also support an extensive community outreach and public engagement programme centred on British fauna, to teach skills and inspire a lifelong interest in the natural environment and conservation.

Operation Earth

In February - October, the Museum of Natural History ran 'Operation Earth', a special project about looking after the planet. The Museum aimed to engage 10,000 people through various environmental science themed activities, but – thanks to support from 76 fantastic volunteers – actually reached 15,695 people: far more than staff could have achieved by themselves!

The project included several family friendly events, as well as an interactive show, which encouraged families to think about their impact on the planet and simple lifestyle changes they could make to limit that impact.

Among the activities volunteers helped families with were making ocean- and bee-themed crafts, playing games about food chains, and piecing together giant tectonic plates! Some volunteers also took part in the main show: playing 'lab assistants', who helped visitors to dress up as insects before they got on stage to do some 'pollinating'.

"The Museum would like to thank all of the volunteers who supported this project and we hope that you were inspired by the topic and had fun engaging with all of the visitors who took part."

Carly Smith-Huggins, Education Officer



A Warm Welcome

We are delighted to welcome Ruth Farnan, who joined us in December as the new Volunteer Manager at the Ashmolean. Ruth will be supervising all of the public-facing volunteer teams at the Museum, as well as acting as a link with the general Volunteer Service. Some of you may have met her at the volunteer party, but for those who didn't, here are a few words from Ruth herself:

"I'm very excited to join the Ashmolean Museum as the new Volunteer Manager. I will be supporting and building the volunteer team to help visitors engage with the museum's incredible objects and collections. I have been the Museum Visitor and Learning Officer at the Royal Academy of Music for a year and a half, previously working at Norfolk Museums Service since 2010."

Stones and Bones

Hopefully, many of you had a chance to see the Museum of Natural History's recent exhibition, 'Settlers: Genetics, Geography and the Peopling of Britain'. At the end of March, Joy worked with Aishah Olubaji from the Museum's Front of House team to train a wonderful group of volunteers to run object handling sessions on the theme of 'Stones and Bones of Early Britain'.

The sessions, which ran through the spring and summer, were a chance for visitors to discover the changing climates, peoples, and animals of British pre-history, through handling a selection of objects left behind by the early inhabitants of Britain. 'Stones and Bones' acted as an extension of the exhibition, allowing visitors to have an up-close, tactile experience with some of the specimens, including the hand-axe of a right-handed Neanderthal, the vertebrae of a European Rhino, and the hair of a ginger Mammoth. It was also an attraction in its own right and, beyond the normal time-slot, featured at two late-night events and this year's Wild Fair – all to great reception.

In total, 13 volunteers contributed 105.5 hours, welcoming 342 children and 371 adults, with an average of 52 visitors each week, between 26th May and 8th September.

"Stones and Bones was a wonderful opportunity for me to try something new that the Volunteers team supported me through from start to end. I am very grateful to have been trusted with the first volunteer programme to be managed by a member of Front of House staff within GLAM, and I am very excited to see future collaborations."

Aishah Olubaji, Front of House



A chance for volunteers to write about objects significant to their volunteering...

'My Favourite Object...' No. 12

Your name: Rawan

Your chosen object: This object is the upper part of the astrolabe called the Rete (sometimes called spider webs).

The museum the object is in: Museum of the History of Science

What connection the object has to your volunteering: The country of origin is Syria where my hometown is and this is one of the reasons choosing this object to be my first work at the Museum of the History of Science.

Why you've chosen the object: I was surprised when I saw the Arabic writing engraving on the object, which I could read as it is my mother tongue. The object helped me to understand the evolution of human ideas in the field of astronomy and gave me the motivation to search for information on Islamic objects in this museum.

(Sketch by Rawan)



We hope you've enjoyed this bumper edition of the (usually quarterly) volunteer newsletter! If you have anything you would like to share in our next issue, then please get in touch.

www.glam.ox.ac.uk/volunteering; volunteering@museums.ox.ac.uk