

## Volunteer Role Description: 'Architecture' Tour Guide



### About 'Architecture' Tours

Opened in 1860, the Museum of Natural History's neo-Gothic building is as important to Oxford as the collections within it. Volunteers give free, introductory 'Architecture' tours every week: drawing attention to the building and highlighting some of the colourful personalities, new technologies, and wider influences that helped to shape it. From the sun-lit roof to the fossil-rich floor, and from a tuna fish that was mistaken for a corpse to monkeys that turned into cats, volunteers share stories that help bring the building's history to life whilst also encouraging visitors to look more closely.

Tours run **2.30 - 3 pm and 3.15 - 3.45 pm on most Fridays**, subject to volunteer availability. They are aimed at the adult general public, with visitors signing up on the day. Numbers vary throughout the year, but the recommended maximum is 15 people per tour. The team is trained and coordinated by Education Officer, Chris Jarvis, and is supported by front-of-house Visitor Experience staff on the day.

### About 'Architecture' Tour Guides

This role is about celebrating the history and architecture of the Museum of Natural History. Guides might use a specimen or two on display to tell stories of the Museum's origins, but the focus is otherwise on the roof, columns, carvings, and metalwork, as well as the people who created them.

We are looking for engaging communicators who will enjoy welcoming visitors and introducing them to aspects of the Museum that are often overlooked. Open body language and a warm tone are key. And enthusiasm is more important than expertise, as we will provide volunteers with all of the information they need. However, prior interest in art, science, and/or architecture in Victorian Britain may be useful.

Staff will support volunteers to become confident presenting to a diverse audience and managing groups of people in a potentially busy museum setting. Although tours are delivered in English and aimed at adults, volunteers will need to adapt their language and approach according to their audience on the day. Flexibility to adapt tour content – e.g., if

part of the Museum is temporarily closed or if the weather is too wet to go outside – is also important.

### Training

Prior to joining the team, volunteers need to attend six training sessions. These are currently planned for **2 - 4 pm on Fridays 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup> May, and 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June**. Training is led by the role supervisor, Chris Jarvis, and Caroline Moreau from the GLAM Volunteer Service. It is designed to build knowledge and confidence step by step and may also involve other members of staff and current tour guides. By the end of the training, volunteers will have delivered a full tour to staff and their peers. They then become active guides by mutual agreement with staff, who will accompany them on at least one public tour. After that, new volunteers will initially attend in pairs: leading one tour and continuing to learn from and support the other volunteer with theirs.

Volunteers may be invited to occasional, additional training sessions. Attendance is encouraged but not typically required. As regular Museum volunteers, they may also be invited to get involved in other Museum opportunities.

Staff will aim to review all volunteers once a year.

### Commitment

Once they have joined the team, volunteers can expect to deliver tours, on average, once every 4 - 6 weeks – although the rota is flexible. We know that plans sometimes change, but because it takes time to learn and feel confident delivering tours, and because the tour rota is organised on a 6-monthly basis, we hope that volunteers will be available throughout 2026 and into 2027.

### Why you might enjoy this role

The opportunity to:

- join a close-knit team of volunteers
- interact with the general public and inspire visitors
- contribute to the Museum's public engagement programme
- develop and share an interest in Victorian art, architecture, history, and/or natural history
- improve your knowledge of the building and its collections
- develop and practise communication skills
- potentially contribute to the Museum's social media – if you would like to share something about your volunteering

### Other information

- We ask volunteers to arrive at 2.15 pm, to be ready to start their tours on time.
- This role involves moving through the Museum, including going upstairs and outside. Please let us know if you would find this challenging so we can consider possible adaptations.

- The Museum can get very noisy, and both the light levels and the temperature vary with the seasons.
- Volunteers are welcome to use the staff room to get a drink or eat a snack when they are in volunteering.
- Volunteers can claim travel expenses up to £5 per volunteering session.
- This role is open to volunteers aged 18+.
- Volunteers new to onsite GLAM volunteering will need to be registered on the Volunteer Service mailing list (MyImpactPage.com), and the Volunteer Service will need to have received two references and done an ID check before volunteers can start in this role. We will send more details about this if relevant. The role does not currently require any additional checks.

### Next steps...

We anticipate this opportunity being popular and are only planning to train 5 or 6 new guides. We hope to invite as many people as possible to **informal, small-group 'audition' slots at the Museum of Natural History on the afternoon of Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April** but may not be able to involve everyone who expresses an interest this time.

If you are interested in getting involved, then please **complete a Microsoft Forms form by following this link**. It will ask you to:

- confirm which times you could potentially attend an informal 'audition'
- confirm your availability to attend training in May and June
- confirm your general availability to join the rota in the coming months
- briefly tell us (max 150ish words each):
  - what excites you about this opportunity
  - about a favourite building and why you love it

**If sending a video or voice recording would make it easier for you to apply**, then you are welcome to email one to Caroline at [volunteering@glam.ox.ac.uk](mailto:volunteering@glam.ox.ac.uk) – just make sure you include all of these points!

The deadline to apply is **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March**. We will then be in touch by Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March.

Information will be kept in accordance with our [Data Retention Schedule](#).

*For more information about the Museum of Natural History, see: [www.oumnh.ox.ac.uk](http://www.oumnh.ox.ac.uk)*