

WORKING AS A VOLUNTEER AT THE LANCASHIRE RECORD OFFICE



The Lancashire Record Office welcomes volunteers and the contribution they can make to our work. The skills and experience volunteers bring to the Office can be utilised in many ways and offer valuable support.

At the same time we hope volunteers will find working here a rewarding experience.

About this document

The purpose of the document is to set out the policy and procedures by which volunteers come to work at the Record Office, and to provide guidance for staff engaged in supervising volunteers.

Policy Objectives

Lancashire County Council aims to make Lancashire a place where people can learn and develop, work and prosper and enjoy a high quality environment. By offering opportunities for voluntary work the Record Office is providing opportunities for adults to learn and develop throughout their lives as well as promoting Lancashire's heritage and culture.

Volunteers help the Record Office to achieve its own objectives of:

- improving public access in person by the creation of indexes - by retyping catalogues and through the Probate Conservation Programme
- improving cataloguing outputs - by typing up draft lists and cataloguing census returns
- improving remote user access – by producing catalogues which can be made available on-line
- providing learning opportunities – through the work experience placements offered to students and potential archivists, archive conservators and records managers
- promoting the Record Office to increase use - through the Probate Conservation Programme and the Friends of Lancashire Archives

Why do we need volunteers?

Improving access to records is an important part of our work but sometimes in order to achieve this, time-consuming and detailed work may have to be carried out on documents. Depending on the nature of the task, this work may be carried out by volunteers.

How do we recruit volunteers?

By advertising within the Record Office, through the Friends of Lancashire Archives newsletter, by word of mouth, at Open Days and through leaflet distribution.

What do we offer volunteers?

An opportunity to utilise existing abilities and experience and to discover new skills; a chance to make new friends and to contribute to the preservation of

Lancashire's heritage. In encouraging volunteers we are involving people from a wider community and offering learning opportunities.

For those seeking a career in archives, archive conservation or records management there is the opportunity to learn about the day-to-day running of a large, busy Record Office and/or Records Management Service and the role of the professional staff in relation to that.

Who can be volunteers?

- Anyone who has time and an interest in supporting their Record Office.
- Students who demonstrate an interest in a career in archives, archive conservation or records management
- University students and graduates seeking a career in archives
- People already in employment seeking a change in career
- People wishing to return to work in need of work experience

Who do we want as volunteers?

Any of the above. Having some of the following skills and abilities is helpful:

- word-processing skills
- neat handwriting
- ability to work on one's own
- flexibility
- attention to detail

Where do volunteers work?

Most volunteers come in to the Record Office to work on either original documents or microfilm copies but there are also opportunities for people to work from home usually on typing or indexing projects

When do we want volunteers?

Volunteers hoping to become archivists, archive conservators or records managers usually come for a 2-week work experience placement during which they are shown different aspects of the work and undertake some basic tasks. This follows an initial informal interview to ascertain what their needs are and whether they can be accommodated. Following the placement, they can if they wish, continue coming to the Office on a regular one-day a week basis. It is not possible to accommodate every one who wants work experience because of limited resources. Volunteers are usually accepted for placements in the Spring and Autumn.

Other volunteers may come in to the Office on a more regular basis particularly if working on long-term projects such as the Probate Conservation Programme. Volunteers who are with us for more than a year will have a review after 12 months.

What else can volunteers do for us?

Volunteers assist us in many other ways. They:

- help out at Open Days
- are included in the Record Office Disaster Response Team
- have provided expertise in drawing up a database for a project on marriage bonds
- help out at short notice with projects requiring urgent attention such as the 1901 census catalogue

What happens during a 2-week placement?

Volunteers are given an information pack that includes:

- a simple contract
- a programme for the week,
- an induction sheet which emphasises confidentiality
- “Working Safely”, a guide to health and safety for volunteers
- an identity badge
- various LRO information leaflets

Volunteers on work experience placements are encouraged to keep a diary recording what they have done. This provides them with something to look back on and demonstrates that their work experience is taken seriously. They are also asked to provide a brief report on their time here so that we can evaluate the placement with them at a review meeting at the end of their placement.

Training and Supervision

A senior archivist supervises volunteers. This archivist will provide the induction training and see that a volunteer is confident about Office procedures and the work they are being given to do. Other archivists and conservators may also give training and guidance where the volunteer is given a task in that person’s area of responsibility.

Larger-scale projects involving teams of volunteers may require more formal training in advance. Guidelines may be drawn up for the volunteers to use and the progress of the project reviewed on a regular basis.

Volunteers working from home receive support from a senior archivist via e-mail and the telephone. Arrangements are usually made to meet at the Record Office to discuss progress where necessary.

Students under 16

Close supervision is provided for younger volunteers who may be completely new to a working environment. The work they undertake requires careful preparation. Risk assessments are carried out and made available to parents prior to the student's visit

What sort of tasks might volunteers be asked to do?

Tasks are many and varied and can include the following:

- typing
- indexing
- sorting documents into an alphabetical or numerical series
- simple listing
- repackaging of documents
- photocopying
- document retrieval
- box moving
- researching enquiries
- will-flattening
- marriage bonds
- coroner's database
- records' management tasks
- conservation tasks

How do you become a volunteer?

You may wish to make a telephone call in the first instance or enquire in writing. If phoning please ring 01772 534110 and ask for Anna Watson or if writing, write to the:

Lancashire Record Office
Bow Lane
Preston
PR1 2RE

Miss Watson can also be contacted by e-mail at anna.watson@ed.lancscc.gov.uk