



# Viva Volunteers!

Oxford University Museums Volunteer Service  
January - March 2016



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## Spotlights

Whilst in the Volunteer Service, we have been continuing to work on new policy documents and procedures (coming soon!), there's also been plenty of fun to be had - by staff, volunteers, and visitors alike...

### Ashmolean Big Sunday: China



In February, volunteers designed and delivered a range of activities to celebrate Chinese New Year. Families enjoyed making beautiful paper cuts and colourful dragons, practising Chinese calligraphy, listening to stories, and tasting traditional treats.

### In Brief...

- On 30th January, 17 volunteers joined us for 'How to be Family Friendly' training. The day was a useful introduction for new volunteers and a useful refresher for more experienced volunteers, focussing on communication skills, audience needs, different types of activities, and 'what to do when you don't know what to do...'
- Staff from across the museums also joined us for training in January, with eleven attending 'Volunteer Management 101'. We aim to repeat this session termly and strongly encourage all staff working with volunteers to attend.
- On 8th March, Pitt Rivers volunteers Patricia and Tanja engaged visitors with a range of specially selected handling objects, including a Tibetan apron, a Hopi 'Grandmother' doll, Rwandan paper money, and a c.1940 baby bottle and breast pump, to celebrate International Women's Day.
- The start of Hilary Term brought with it a new team of Bate Collection 'Instrument Cleaning and Conservation' volunteers. Meeting weekly during Oxford term time, the volunteers learn about and contribute to basic collections care in a sociable and stimulating environment.
- We are pleased to be welcoming Simon Glenn back to our office one day a week for a further three months to help with various admin tasks and system updates. Simon has recently been working to ensure that all current registered volunteers are 'right to work' checked in accordance with new University policy - the deadline being 1st April 2016.

## Sensing Culture: accessing new opportunities



Volunteer Ken (right) and a visitor on a touch tour examine an astrolabe together

Since the start of the year, volunteers have been getting involved in 'Sensing Culture', a new project being run by the Joint Museums Volunteer and Outreach Service in partnership with the RNIB.

From supporting focus groups and touch tours for blind and partially sighted visitors to observing general visitors and how they interact with objects on open display, volunteers have enjoyed the opportunity to consider the museums in a new way.

Volunteers Holly and Simon have written about their experiences so far in two posts on the Sensing Culture blog. Read them [here](#).

## Visitors from Stonehenge

In February, we welcomed a lively group of Stonehenge volunteers enjoying a day out, and led by one of our own former volunteers, Katherine Snell (now Education Visits Officer). Although supposedly mainly interested in General Pitt Rivers, they were soon happily distracted by everything else on display in both the Museum of Natural History and the Pitt Rivers Museum.

## Super Science Saturday: Life

Normally for us in the Volunteer Service, March = Wow!How? (a volunteer-led jamboree of all things science-y). But after eleven years of high-octane organisation and energy levels, this year we supported the Museum of Natural History to host a smaller but no less exciting event, for which former 'WowHowers' joined new volunteers, and museum and department staff, to engage visitors with various topics relating to life on Earth.



Volunteer Amy helps visitors investigate sensational skin

## A Final Spotlight on Smith...

*"a great project to be a part of" ... "a really great opportunity" ... "very memorable and I learned a lot" ... "had some great conversations with some wonderful people" ... "I'd be very keen to do something similar again"* - volunteer feedback

In our last two newsletters, we highlighted the fantastic contribution made by volunteers to the Museum of Natural History's 'Handwritten in Stone' exhibition. In total, nearly 100 volunteers gave approximately 850 hours to helping between April 2015 and January 2016: attending focus groups, co-curating displays, observing visitors, and delivering family friendly activities at Half Term and Super Science Saturday events. The 'Spotlight' object handlers alone engaged more than 2,000 visitors! Many thanks to all of the volunteers involved and to everyone who supported them!