



# Viva Volunteers!

Oxford University Museums Volunteer Service  
January - March 2017



UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD

## Quarterly Public Engagement Stats

**287** Events

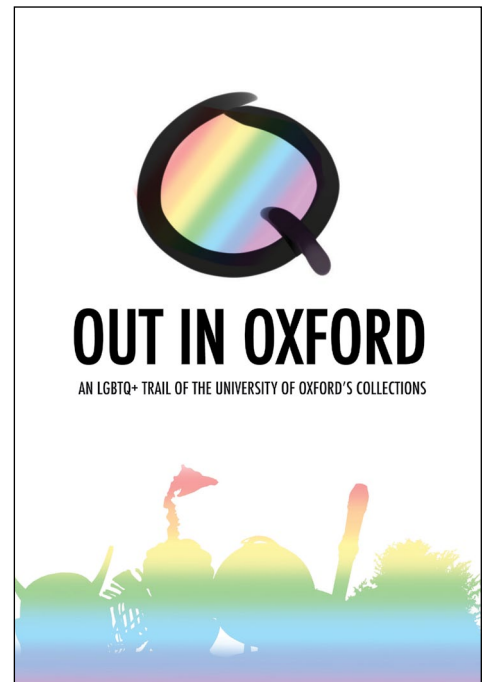
**1447** Volunteering Hours

**170** Volunteers

**512** Instances of Volunteering

## 'Out in Oxford'

February saw the launch of the University's first cross-collections trail and the Collections' first LGBTQ+ project: 'Out in Oxford'. Managed by Beth Asbury (Pitt Rivers), it relied upon the enthusiastic input of dozens of volunteers - all of whom identify as LGBTQ+ or allies. The Volunteer Service's pool is now much more diverse, and we hope that the project's main output, a fantastic trail booklet researched and written by volunteers, will serve as a great legacy. Volunteers also delivered staff awareness training, co-curated five public events, and were interviewed by BBC Radio Oxford, BBC South Today, and That's Oxfordshire TV. Next up: a guide to accompany the trail, including some audio description for blind and partially sighted visitors. Also, the project has been shortlisted for a Museums + Heritage Award and two Oxfordshire Community Voluntary Action awards, so fingers crossed for Beth, the volunteers, and all of the staff who provided additional support! To find out more about the project, [visit the website](#).



## 'My Favourite Object...' No.1

**A new, regular feature giving volunteers the chance to write about objects significant to their volunteering...**

**Your name:** Aaron

**Your chosen object:** Giraffe Skeleton

**The museum the object is in:** Museum of Natural History

**What connection the object has to your volunteering:** I volunteered to help write a piece for the Out in Oxford cross-collections trail for LGBT History Month. My chosen object was the giraffe skeleton.

**Why you've chosen the object:** The research I conducted on the giraffe gave me a deeper sense of understanding about homosexual behaviour in male giraffes. My contribution has since appeared in the Out in Oxford booklet, and I had the opportunity to discuss it on BBC Radio Oxford and on museum tours, when the booklet was launched. The giraffe has since become one of my favourite animals!

### GIRAFFE SKELETON

Scientific name: *Giraffa camelopardalis*  
Location: Main Court, Skeleton Parade

Out of the approximately 1500 species of animal that have been identified as displaying some same-sex behaviour, the giraffe is one of the most studied. Males have been documented rubbing their necks on one another's bodies ('necking'), heads, necks, loins and thighs before engaging in same-sex mounting. In fact, these engagements occur more frequently than male-female mounting, which only accounts for 7% of all observations. One in 20 male giraffes are believed to be necking another male at any given time. Observing their interactions helps us understand that homosexuality is not just prevalent in humans. Sexuality is just as non-binary or fluid in animals. The sexual behaviour of giraffes shows us that homosexuality is a normal occurrence in our world.

Aaron Worsley



OUT IN OXFORD 10

## 'My Favourite Object...' No.2

Your name: Jem

Your chosen object: Little Owl (taxidermy handling object)

The museum the object is in: Museum of Natural History

What connection the object has to your volunteering: The object was part of an Arts Award for blind and partially sighted children, which I volunteered for.

Why you've chosen the object: It's my favourite because I remember all the kids loving how soft its feathers were (an opinion that I shared). It's a lovely object, and I have to admit to trying to find ways to sneak in a pat or two during breaks and pack-up!

**Jem volunteered for a session run by Susan Griffiths (Community Engagement Service), in which a visually impaired artist helped children make memory boxes based on different textures they felt around the museum.**



## From Diseases to Dinosaurs

Last autumn, Caroline worked with Carly Smith-Huggins (Natural History) and the University's MSc in International Health and Tropical Medicine to recruit new volunteers to the 'Science Saturday' team. Following a training session in which we had just as much fun as the volunteers, they slotted in to the existing team this term and really got stuck in!

*"Had a great time today with those amazingly smart children and the rest of the Crew. Look forward to the next one!"*  
- Volunteer feedback

We felt particularly privileged to be invited to their end-of-term presentations in March, during which they reflected on their time volunteering and - even better - asked if they could come back for more in the spring!



Volunteer BD engaging young visitors with Science Saturday 'Mineralogy' activities

## In Brief...

- In recent months, Joy has been out-and-about meeting lots of other volunteer managers, and has been working to help re-invigorate our regional network.

- Thanks to Simon Glenn (Ashmolean) for a second talk and object handling session about 'Alexander the Great' coinage for 'Hands-on Coins' volunteers, and to Andy McLellan (Pitt Rivers) for his 'Introduction to the Pitt Rivers' talk, which 19 volunteers attended - including some who had never visited the museum before.

- Other training we offered this term: Volunteer Management 101, Audio Description for Blind and Partially Sighted Visitors, and Communicating Science to Families.

- We also gave presentations to staff at the History of Science, Natural History, and Pitt Rivers museums, including an overview of the new Volunteer Policy and discussion about role descriptions and risk assessments. We hope to have the majority of outstanding volunteers added to our database before the summer and will be coming to individual departments for further conversations in the coming weeks.

- Welcome to Michalina Szymanska, who joins us as a new admin temp, and may be the one getting in touch as we roll-out the new Volunteer Policy.



Object handling with Jewish Museum volunteers

## Visitors from London

On 8th March, we were pleased to welcome volunteers visiting from the Jewish Museum in London. The visit was arranged by former Skills for the Future trainee and Volunteer Service temp, Corie Edwards, who now manages the front of house team at the Museum. As well as catching up with Corie, we enjoyed meeting lots of very engaging volunteers - the oldest, well in to her 90s! In turn, they had the opportunity to get hands-on with objects in the Pitt Rivers and to explore the galleries with a tour at the Ashmolean.



Volunteer Holly and visitor Guy at Radio Oxford

## On the Air

In a new Sunday morning programme on BBC Radio Oxford, local volunteers and the people they support talk about what they do, why they enjoy it, and the difference it makes to the local community. On 5th February, it was the Museums' turn, with volunteer Holly and visitor Guy talking about Touch Tours - part of the current 'Sensing Culture' project. [Listen to the broadcast here.](#) Joy and Caroline will be presenting about volunteer involvement in the project at the National Heritage Volunteer Conference in May.



Volunteer Alice leading medical object handling

## Stethoscopes and Sterilisers

Inspired by the current 'Back from the Dead' (i.e. penicillin) exhibition at the Museum of the History of Science, several volunteers have had the chance to help with recent secondary school sessions, encouraging students to get hands-on with a range of historical medical objects. As well as learning lots themselves, they have also contributed greatly to the sessions: *"there were several mentions of the volunteers, saying how friendly and fun they were to be with, which will have made such a difference to the students' experience"* - Staff feedback

If you have any volunteer news you would like us to share in our next quarterly newsletter, then get in touch! Our next issue will cover Apr - Jun 2017.