

Devon and Exeter Institution: Activity Plan Evaluation Progress Report, March 2017

By Christina Dixon Consulting

1 Background

Devon and Exeter Institution (DEI) was awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Heritage Grant award in 2015 for the restoration of the library roof, collections care and interpretation and learning.

1.1 Activity Plan and Key Objectives

The Activity Plan is the guiding document for the delivery of the project, beyond capital repair and remedial collections conservation. Activities within the Activity Plan are grouped under the following four headings:

- Interpretation
- Learning and engagement
- Collections management
- Volunteer development

The Activity Plan **objectives** are listed as:

1. To encourage people to learn about and appreciate the historic value of the DEI building, its setting in the Close, its library and non-book collections.
2. To enable people to learn about and appreciate the need for conservation of historic buildings of significance, the conservation needs of an historic library and library collections.
3. To widen research access to the collection by working in constructive partnership with the libraries and collections staff at Exeter Cathedral, University of Exeter and RAMM.
4. To provide in-depth learning and engagement opportunities for young people across the key stages.
5. To target individualised learning through Junior Membership and via links to sixth forms and youth groups.
6. To seek out new and younger volunteers and provide fulfilling and relevant volunteer work experience and skills development within the heritage library sector.
7. To broaden and increase the membership base by encouraging younger working-age people to join

1.2 Methodology

Christina Dixon Consulting was appointed in November 2015 with a brief to support DEI staff in the evaluation of the Activity Plan. Since that date the following has been completed:

- DEI Evaluation Framework, summary of evaluation tools and apportionment of time: proposed and signed off (attached for reference)
- Progress meetings with Emma Dunn: 11 Dec 2015, 29 June 2016 and 14 December 2016
- Attendance at sample Activities, namely: Books of Wonder Workshop, 4th March 2016; Roof Tour, 29th June; informal chat with collections care volunteers; 29th June
- Draft of volunteer survey
- Draft of evaluation postcard
- Hosting of surveys (volunteer, teacher & pupils) and postcard (online survey software)

This report is an interim report, midway through the project delivery phase.

2 Activity

2.1 Summary of Activity

Activity	Q4 2015	Q1 2016	Q2 2016	Q3 2016	Q4 2016	Q1 2017	Running Total (March 2017)
<i>Saturday Open Days</i>							
Adults	45			12	236	24	317
Children	5			15	55	27	102
<i>Work Experience</i>							
Students	4		2				6
Children (under 18)	3						3
EPQ (under 18)	2	2		3		1	8
Internships			4	2	2	2	10
<i>Volunteers</i>							
a) Library Preservation Team							
Students	20				30		50
Adults	22				15		37
b) Library Guides							
Students			2			4	6

Activity	Q4 2015	Q1 2016	Q2 2016	Q3 2016	Q4 2016	Q1 2017	Running Total (March 2017)
Adults			11			7	10
c) Office Volunteers							
Students	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Adults	8				5		13
d) Display and Research Volunteers							
Students		1		1		1	3
Adults	2	3		3		3	11
e) Roof Tour Guides							
Students							
Adults	15	12					27
<i>Learning and Engagement</i>							
Schools Sessions							
Adults		20	7		8	5	40
Pupils		160	56		102	29	347
Outreach							
Adults		15	6		3	12	36
Children		26	20		30	150	226

The grand total for Public Tours to September 2016 is as follows:

847 people have undertaken either a Roof Tour or Library Tour (or a combined tour). This comprises of 792 adults and 55 children.

2.2 Evaluation Findings

The following evidence has been gathered up to 6th March 2017.

Source	Number of respondents
School workshops: pupils	81
School workshops: teachers	9
Bookworms	7
Visitor postcards	86
Volunteer survey (online only)	23
Volunteer feedback (29 th June 2016)	2 volunteers

2.2.1 Schools Workshop Evaluation Findings

The findings from the evaluation of the school workshops and informal learning sessions (Bookworms) demonstrate that the project is meeting its Activity Plan objectives, as detailed under heading 1.1 above.

Teachers **strongly agreed** ('1' on the scale of 1 – 5) with the following statements:

- Pupils have learned some new information
- Pupils have developed an increased interest in something they knew little about
- Pupils have gained knowledge we can use in the classroom
- Pupils could make sense of most of the things we saw / did today
- The information we learned today added to our understanding of our Natural History¹
- I understand the importance of restoring the DEI building and conserving the library of books
- I am aware that DEI is a library, with a significant Exeter heritage, that I am invited to join
- I am aware that the DEI is located within the medieval quarter of the Cathedral Close
- I am aware of the range of the DEI's collection

The teachers contributed the following comments to the survey:

So glad to have been invited today, a real privilege. Thank you for being so organised and engaging our children so well. Excellent!

I was not aware that I was able to join the DEI - but I know now, and I want to find out more about its range of collection.

Great day, so informative and fun too! well delivered, excellent, fun style - important messages delivered. Diverse activities - both equally great. I really enjoyed myself.

Thank you Charlotte and Emma, for a truly valuable hour of learning for our Year 2 children. It was everything we had hoped for, and more. Your organisation and planning was much appreciated and gave the children a deeper insight into their 'homes' topic. We hope to be back!

The students were absolutely fascinated by the collection and fully engaged. Some have expressed an interest in becoming members. Thank you very much!

A very interesting session which engaged the students well. A lovely way to spend the morning. Thank you!

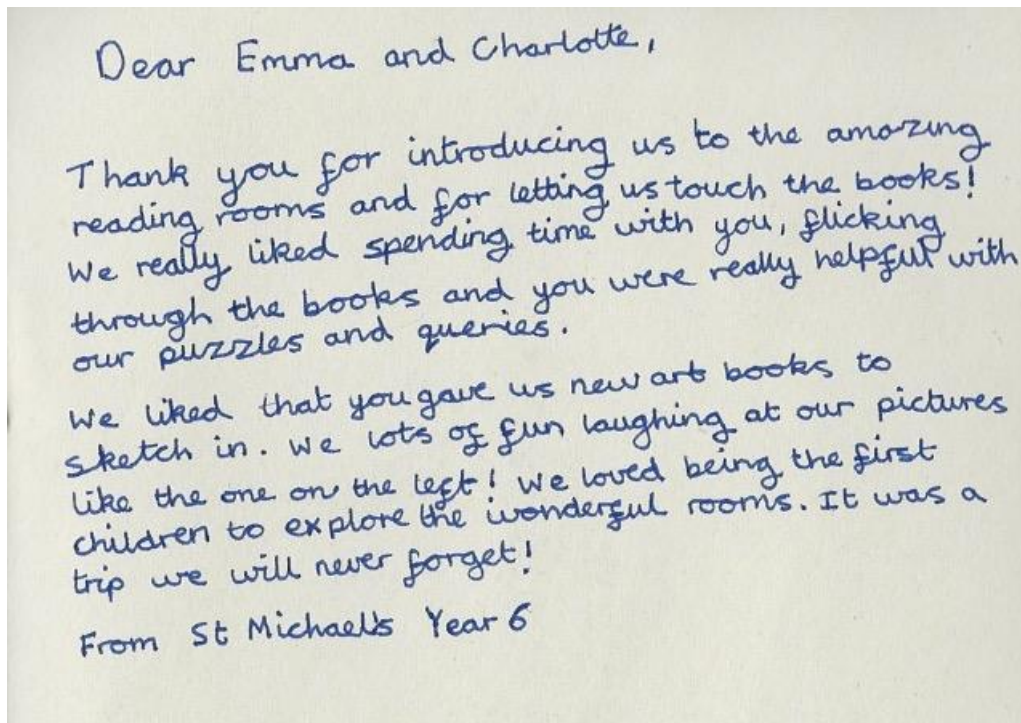
¹ One person scored this question '5' (strongly disagree). This is taken to be an error as all other responses on the survey scored '1' (strongly agree)

Pupils were asked their view on the 'best bit of the day' and 'the bit I would change would be', and asked to respond to the statement 'I would like to find out more about'.

The table below gives a sample of responses. All pupils were aged 9, 10 or 11.

Statement	Comment
The best bit about the day was...	The best part of my day was playing the drawing a person game' My favourite part of the day was finding out about the secret passages
	Getting to handle the books in the library and finding when they were published
	The games because they were fun - the library because it was like Hogwarts
	The art of the session, drawing. I liked the reading rooms because the reading rooms has secret passages and books from over 200 years ago :)
	Looking and handling old books and letting us use the magnifying glasses to look at the names and the illustrations
	Drawing the animals and using water colour pencils
	Looking through the old newspaper clips and seeing the old cartoons and articles. Also I enjoyed finding the bug in the book
	Reading very old books and looking at the history of everything was amazing. The history of Exeter
	Walking around and looking at the old areas and the amazing books. Especially learning about other places and events that have happened
The bit I would change would be...	Not having stuffed animals. Put them on the side where we can see them, not in the middle of the table
	More activities in the library - seeing more of the library and look into the secret passages
	Write down some more interesting facts from the books in the library
	The stuffed animals because they were quite disturbing
	To stay there longer and go upstairs!
	Nothing much except more bugs in the books would be nice though
	Nothing (multiple responses)
I would like to find out more about...	The other rooms in the library by going in them and looking around, and finding more out about the animal skulls
	The history of the reading rooms and the secret passages
	Where they found the skulls
	More about the secret room; what was the latest book written
	Why did they put poison in the newspapers?
	My ancestry and records of my family and about how the books ended up in Exeter
	The newspapers, like how much they cost and who would have bought them
	The books in different languages

A Thank You note to the project team is shown below:



2.2.2 Bookworms

Feedback from two Bookworms sessions (September and October 2016) was collected. The recorded ages are 5, 6 & 7 years old. Bookworm participants were asked the same set of questions as school pupils. The sample of responses is given below²:

Statement	Comment
The best bit about the day was...	Showing the newspapers. Making the scrapbook and games
	Looking at the old books - fascinating!
	Making scrapbooks and Mary the Maid
	The friendliness of the group and the subject matter was brought to life throughout.
	How lovely that the adults can escape to the back for a cup of tea and you feel that your children are in good hands! I loved the old book they showed at the start, the activity making a pop up group was great. The story at the end was excellent. Excellent atmosphere in beautiful place
	Everything was excellent, really good balance of activities and all perfectly timed. Accessible for varied levels of understanding and ability
	Making the pop-up book and playing the games

² The style of phrasing and vocabulary used by some respondents suggests that parents and cares have responded on behalf of participants.

The bit I would change would be...	Bigger table for drawing
	Could you perhaps start with a game where the children just introduced themselves briefly
	Edwin would like to do some engineering stuff
	Perhaps talk about the 'theme' in simpler language and with more general information about 'Egypt' for example today (by showing in a map where it is, for example)
	More turns on the whispering game
I would like to find out more about...	Animals, Exeter and Dartmoor in the old days, natural history.
	Fashion over the ages. Entertainment - maybe circuses/clowns? Transport/Age of steam. Children at work - e.g. in the Heathcote Mills? Chimney sweeps etc
	Exeter in the old days - old pictures of Exeter, local shops, how people dressed before etc. The hotel that was burnt down and ANIMALS
	Activities in the library please / Old America (time of the 'discovery')

Parents and carers were also asked to add their comments. These included the following:

I think this is brilliant! Thank you so much for all your efforts organising the event. It would be great to do it more often.

Love the idea. Hope you guys run more sessions next year too!

It would be superb to be on a mailing list for future sessions. Asking what the other children would like to say that's nice about the other children's work was really very sweet

Beautiful setting - so good to let children in

2.2.3 Visiting Public

The visiting public are asked to complete a simple postcard evaluation form. This includes visitors to the interpretation displays off site.

The results from the post cards collected and analysed to date (March 2017) show that Activity Plan objectives, as detailed under heading 1.1, are clearly being met.

Data findings are as follows:

1. Historic value

I understand the importance of restoring the DEI building and / or conserving the library of books			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	98.9%	87
2	No	1.1%	1
<i>answered</i>			88
<i>skipped</i>			0

2. Awareness

I am aware that DEI is a library, with a significant Exeter heritage, that I am invited to join		
Response Percent		Response Total
98.9%		87
1.1%		1
<i>answered</i>		88
<i>skipped</i>		0

I am aware that the DEI is located within the medieval quarter of the Cathedral Close		
Response Percent		Response Total
100.0%		88
0.0%		0
<i>answered</i>		88
<i>skipped</i>		0

I am aware of the range of the DEI's collection			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	87.2%	75

2	No	12.8%	11
<i>answered</i>			86
<i>skipped</i>			2

Postcodes

The top postcodes given were:

Postcode District	Count
EX4	14
EX2	13
EX11	11
EX1	9
EX5	4
EX12	4

Comments made by the visiting public include:

I enjoyed going up today and it was much better than I thought. I learned much more about history and about the importance of the building

A real hidden gem in the city, really interesting guides with infectious enthusiasm for the work and the history

I have already applied to join the DEI and am awaiting acceptance

Lovely tour, very polite and interested staff. Thank you

I really like the sort of old grandeur feeling you get inside the library

I have developed a great understanding of a place I knew very little about

Fascinating window into the history of Exeter

2.2.4 Volunteers

Online Survey Findings

DEI volunteers are encouraged to complete an online survey in order to give feedback to help improve the volunteering experience. Up to 6th March 2017, 23 volunteers have completed the online survey. Findings are shown below:

Profile of volunteers

Library Preservation Team volunteers represent the highest number of respondent survey respondents (78%). It is useful to keep this very high figure in mind as responses of the

library team will be prevalent.

What role have you volunteered your time for? - please tick more than one if appropriate			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Library Preservation Team	78.3%	18
2	Roof Guide	26.1%	6
3	Library Guide	13.0%	3
4	Other (please specify):	4.3%	1
		<i>answered</i>	23
		<i>skipped</i>	0

Almost half of respondents (48%) were not aware of the DEI before they volunteered for their role. A high level of students volunteering within the Library Preservation Team may account for this finding.

Enjoyable Aspects

When asked what was / is the most enjoyable aspect of volunteering, the most frequently chosen answers were ‘Being able to handle rare, fragile and historic books’ (74%) and ‘Knowing my work was contributing to the preservation of a collection of national importance’ (74%).

What was / is the most ENJOYABLE aspect of your volunteering experience?	Response Percent	Response Total
Being able to handle rare, fragile and historic books	73.9%	17
Being trained in cleaning, documenting and preserving books	43.5%	10
Knowing my work was contributing to the preservation of a collection of national importance	73.9%	17
Being able to relate my work to my personal interests or academic studies	52.2%	12
Learning about the conservation and restoration needs of an historic building	60.9%	14
Sharing my knowledge with the public (on library and roof tours)	34.8%	8
Meeting new people – other volunteers and the visiting public	60.9%	14
Other (please specify):	0.0%	0



answered	23
skipped	0

Interesting Aspects

Respondents were asked list the most interesting aspects of the volunteering role. The following is a sample of the responses given:

Finding hidden treasures on the shelves - something new each week.

Being able to see the collection first hand and learn about the books which are housed in the collection.

Doing the roof tours from time to time was an excellent way of keeping up with the restoration process. Also, experiencing the interest and enthusiasm of the visitors.

The training which I have recommended to other volunteers and colleagues at RAMM.

Definitely meeting the public, who literally turned up without any knowledge of DEI and having opportunity to "recruit" new members!

Getting to look after and handle books which are over 100 years old is pretty amazing!

Meeting other volunteers interested in the preservation of old texts was a highlight for me as part of the Preservation Team. I also found it useful to learn about the rigours of preserving an archive and taking care of it.

Perceptions and Understanding

Respondents were asked if they felt differently or more strongly about the DEI. 43% stated that they did not know about the DEI before this project; 52% stated that their involvement has made them feel differently about the DEI. The statement 'No, my involvement has not made me feel differently about the DEI' received no responses.

An overwhelming 96% of respondents said that their volunteering experience had increased their understanding of the importance of restoring the DEI building and / or conserving the library of books.

Learning and Training

The majority of respondents (78%) stated that they have learned a new skill. When asked about that new skill, the following responses were given:

About conservation and preservation - handling old books

Using storytelling techniques to help give interesting tours

Learning how to properly clean and care for old books, especially the chemical aspect of it.

The skill of handling fragile and historical books

Respondents were asked to rate by how much they agreed or disagreed with two statements about their training. The scale is from 1 – 5, where 1 is ‘strongly agree’ and 5 is ‘strongly disagree’

a) My training was relevant to the task: the average score was 3.17

b) My training was valuable, it enabled me to do the job: the average score was 3.00

Respondents were asked for their comments which are listed below:

I would like to find out more about bookbinding

I don't think I had any training. It was something I knew a bit about already, read up some more and only had to learn from other guides about the health and safety issues of roof tours.

I would like to do it again

It was enhanced by working in a supportive group where putting the learning into practice was made easy.

Observing differing volunteers, it is clear there is quite a variation in what individuals actually do. Moreover, there is scope for coordinating the activities of the various groups do.

Respondents were asked if there is there anything new or different that they are likely to do in the future because of their involvement as a volunteer in the project. 56% felt there was something new or different that they were likely to do; 26% did not know and 17% do not feel that there something new or differently that they were likely to do.

Comments included:

I would be interested in possibly pursuing preservation or conservation work/volunteering in the future.

I would like to have more involvement with the DEI - it is more fun and less stuffy than I had

thought!!

I will also use the techniques in my volunteer role at RAMM

I knew I wanted to work in the heritage sector; this has not discouraged me.

Yes, from my volunteering at the DEI I would like to build on my knowledge and skills of working in the Heritage sector.

More information about the volunteers

- 87% of respondents were members of the DEI (when they complete the survey)
- Of those who were members, 48% had individual membership; 22% had University membership and 13% were student members
- The majority of respondents (48%) were aged 18 – 24 years; the next highest proportion (26%) were 70 years plus.
- 70% of respondents were female
- Respondents did not describe themselves as having a disability
- 82% of respondents stated that their ethnicity was 'white British'; there were much small proportions of other ethnic backgrounds: Chinese (2 people), Asian or Asian British (1 person), other white background (1 person)

Volunteer Interviews

Two Library Preservation Team volunteers were interviewed while they worked. One was a second year student (University of Exeter) and the other was a retired GP. The comments below give a clear indication of the appeal of the work and their enjoyment:

I was not aware of the DEI before the opportunity to volunteer there, cleaning the books is really interesting – you get to find some really interesting books. My impression is that it is a great resource – a wide variety of books. (female student).

Its really satisfying to see progress – taking a shelf at a time, cleaning each book (repairs as necessary) and returned to the shelf cleaned (female student).

I found out about the opportunity via all the publicity surrounding national book day, I read about it in Exeter Life and joined the DEI. And then volunteered. I have a love of old books

and undertaken academic study as a GP. (Retired GP).

In addition, student volunteers are asked to record their comments in writing. The following sets of comments have been collected by the project team:

I enjoy studying and volunteering at the DEI because of the wide selection of books and the serene quaintness of the building. During my time here, I have encountered a fascinating array of books from various time periods that have helped me put my own studies into perspective. The building also offers a quiet study space with fantastic views of the Cathedral that really make it an ideal place for me to use my studying time. MA English Literature

The DEI is of historical and cultural importance to the city of Exeter and the county of Devon, as well as the rest of the country more broadly. I therefore believe that maintaining a connection between the University and the DEI's collection allows students to step out of the comfort zone of the University and engage with the city.

This is something I have really appreciated through the opportunity to volunteer as part of the Institution's preservation scheme; an opportunity that meant that I appeared in Exeter Life magazine. The opportunity to volunteer here was also invaluable to my successful application to be a graduate trainee at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Not only does the connection with the Library expand the academic information available to students, it also opens us up to cultural engagement with an amazing, historic city and adds to our experience living here. Third Year, BA English

Volunteering at the DEI helped me to think about my future job decisions. I now have a very good insight into the work of archives and libraries in general, about the maintaining of historic books in particular, without even leaving Exeter – and I could make this fantastic experience parallel to my course work, lectures and seminars.

The DEI offers a great opportunity to gain knowledge and early experience about the tasks and work of a historic library within a familiar atmosphere that makes it easy to ask further questions. I'm confident that this will help me after finishing my degree to decide for a further career. Besides of that, as a student I appreciate the DEI as a calm place to work in town that has so much history and atmosphere. For me as international student in particular, the DEI is what I imagine a traditional old, English library to look like, and it made my experience during my year abroad at the University of Exeter even more special. International



Erasmus student i-Third Year, History

I love volunteering with the DEI as it allows me to engage with the local community in a way which university focussed volunteering does not always allow for.

I have also found the DEI to be a useful working space as it offers a place away from the university with a comfortable and communal atmosphere.

I have learnt invaluable skills working as part of the volunteering team and hope to make use of the various wonderful books I have come across in future. First Year BA English and

Spanish

ENDS 06.03.2017