



Collections and Research Assistant

Introduction

The Devon and Exeter Institution is a thriving independent library and educational charity in the heart of the city. We welcome new members and visitors of all ages. Our founders established the Institution in 1813, in order to promote *'the general diffusion of Science, Literature and the Arts, and for illustrating the Natural and Civil History of the county of Devon and the History of the City of Exeter'*. This resolution remains at the centre of our strategy to this day.

The Institution occupies a Medieval building, originally owned by the Cathedral. It was inherited by the Courtenay family in the 17th Century and used as their town house for over 150 years. In 1814, '200 Gentlemen of the City' took ownership of 7 Cathedral Close and adapted the double-courtyard layout to create two elegant Georgian rooms. These rooms functioned as both library and a museum; museum objects were later donated to form the foundation collection of the [Royal Albert Memorial Museum](#) in 1868.

Today our two galleried libraries hold a unique historical book collection, virtually unchanged since 1813, and collections of maps, prints, drawings, fine and decorative art. The [Library](#) and collections lie at the heart of the Institution and provide inspiration and a place for research and reading, educational activities, cultural events and lectures.

The DEI has been an Educational Charity since 1989 and enjoys a close working relationship with the [University of Exeter](#) and other heritage sites across the city. We offer meeting rooms for business [hire](#); our beautiful libraries are also available to [hire](#) for cultural activities and business events. We are open for [public tours](#) every Wednesday afternoon from 1pm – 4pm.

We are very proud that the Institution is embarking on yet another new chapter in its long and vibrant history. In March 2020, we secured a grant from the National Heritage Lottery Fund for "[The Next Chapter](#)". This 3-year project will see us upgrade our current spaces facilities, while also making them more accessible; carry out essential conservation work and a collection review; and increase and diversify our educational and events programmes.

The Institution, like many independent libraries, could not do without its wonderful team of [volunteers](#), drawn from its membership, and Exeter University students. The Institution is cherished by members for its calm and peaceful atmosphere in the heart of the city, and its ability to bring a wide range of people together.

We are seeking an energetic, enthusiastic, practically minded and highly organised team member to help us deliver grant-funded projects, including the digitisation and cataloguing of our prints and drawings collection and a collections review, part of a major National Lottery Heritage funded development project, to develop knowledge of the heritage collection and understand its significance for a broad range of audiences. The successful applicant will have a keen interest in history and historic library and museum collections and be supportive of the strategic aims of the Institution. This is an externally funded fixed term post for a period of 2 years.

Collections and Research Assistant

Salary: 20-25k pro rata, depending on experience.

Hours: The post is based at the Institution for 22.5 hours per week, across 3 days (with occasional flexibility for evening or weekend events)

Annual leave: 28 days per annum, pro rata.

Reports to: Librarian

Key relationships: The Project Collections Assistant will work closely with the Librarian and Director, other staff, external experts, members, and volunteers.

Position overview

The Collections and Research Assistant will work as part of a team, within the context of grant funded projects, to undertake a variety of collections work. This will include digitising and creating metadata for our prints and drawings collection, researching provenance and names associated with the production of our books, prints and drawings, supporting a team of subject specialists to develop information about our foundation book collection, supervising volunteers, promoting the collections through social media, and maintaining databases and documenting the results of research activities and maintaining and reporting on key milestones within projects.

Key Responsibilities

- Take the lead on digitising and creating metadata for the collection of prints and drawings and maintain the Institution's online Collections Explorer.
- Collect, compile, and record accurate data on the foundation book collection and maintain the collections review research database.
- Research the provenance of books, prints and drawings and names associated with production, including authors, illustrators, engravers, printers, and publishers, to identify associations with the West Country, Exeter and the DEI.
- Collaborate with the Director and Librarian, to build relationships with and support a team of subject specialists, researchers, and other stakeholders.
- Collaborate with the Librarian and project consultant to coordinate work schedules for subject specialists working on different parts of the collections.
- Support volunteers who contribute to the cataloguing and preservation of collections.
- Assess the condition of books in the collection and developing a working knowledge of the art and design of the book and of book and illustration production.
- Provide administrative support for collections projects, including retrieving and preparing research materials and equipment for researchers and volunteers.
- Facilitate remote and onsite access to collections for members and potential members, and proactively liaising with local, regional and national groups and organisations to identify opportunities for publicity and promotion.
- Work with other staff to promote the prints and drawings collection to a wider audience through social media and contributing to our marketing and income-generating strategies.
- To be a keyholder and assume responsibility for the security of the building whilst on duty, in collaboration with the staff team.

Other duties

- Attend meetings of the Projects Steering Group and weekly diary meeting, to ensure effective teamworking and collaboration across the DEI
- Undertaking various other activities in the running of the library, including retrieving and shelving books for members, answering enquiries and assisting with group visits and displays.
- Work within the required budgets for the project and have a working knowledge of the income and expenditure associated with it, with the support of the Librarian.
- Complying with the DEI's policies and procedures, including policies on Fire Safety, Diversity and Inclusion, and Safeguarding.
- Any other duties that may be required from time to time, consistent with the general nature of the post and the responsibilities attached to it.

Person specification, knowledge, skills and experience

Essential

- Team player, able to support the work of other staff members and contribute to developing plans in partnership, but with the ability to work independently as required.
- Exemplary IT skills with experience of working with library, museum or archive databases and collections management systems.
- Experience of creating inventory and/or catalogue records for library, museum or archive collections.
- Knowledge and experience of digital record-keeping, storage and security.
- Highly meticulous with an acute attention to detail, especially in data entry.
- Proven basic research skills and a keen interest in developing them.
- Strong organisational and time management skills, with the ability to multi-task, prioritise, and to work on several areas of the collection simultaneously.
- Self-directed and self-motivated, with the initiative to follow up on research leads.
- Friendly and approachable personality with the ability to build relationships with and work well alongside a broad range of people, including subject specialists, members and enthusiastic volunteers.
- Ability to lead and support a team of project volunteers.
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills.
- Manual dexterity, able to undertake basic preservation and take charge of handling fragile historic objects.
- Physical fitness (as this role requires working away from a desk and retrieving books at height on the galleries.)
- Experience of working within a heritage/cultural organisation, for example a library, historic house, museum or archive.
- Understanding of and commitment to the history, charitable aims and vision of the DEI.

Desirable

- Knowledge of Devon and/or Exeter history.
- Research interests relevant to the DEI's heritage collection.