

Voices of Our Volunteers 2021



Armagh Robinson Library and No.5 Vicars' Hill are blessed with a dedicated team of volunteers. During the pandemic, we were not able to have our volunteers with us as we normally would and in the year of our 250th anniversary, we want to celebrate the voices of our volunteers!

Over the summer months of 2021, we spoke to our volunteers about their experiences volunteering in Armagh Robinson Library and No.5 Vicars' Hill.

Below details some of their responses.

Q. How long have you volunteered with Armagh Robinson Library / No.5 Vicars' Hill?

I have been a volunteer since 1981.

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I came here after I retired, so nearly 20 years!

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I retired in 2016 and in spring 2017 I was walking by the Library and went in. I was asking about local history and I was given advice on how to follow that up. The topic of volunteering came up and I was asked if I was interested. As I had recently retired, I thought I would go for it.

Q. Could you tell me a little bit about your history with Armagh Robinson Library and/or No.5 Vicars' Hill?

I would have visited [No.5] as a child. It is much more light and bright now! No.5 has been open 10 years as a museum so, living on the hill, I remember the house as it was. But it is lovely now that it is opened up as a museum and you can see the shape of the rooms.

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I always knew the Library as a lovely building at the top of the hill. I remember my father taking me to it when I was 4 or 5. He knew the Keeper at the time. I was absolutely blown away by the place. My father was always interested in history so I took that from him.

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I have been a volunteer for 8 years. The Hill has been a part of my life since I was a child. I wanted to be a librarian so I went to visit various places including the Library and I met the Keeper at the time and had visited a few times over the years. That led to my involvement as a volunteer.

Q. What sort of things do you do as a volunteer?

As a volunteer I clean books, check their order on the shelf and check the details on the catalogue card and look for any physical imperfections or points of interest.

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When I started off as a volunteer in the Library and I did some research on coats of arms and bookplates. I also help with dusting the books.

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I worked with entering books into the ESTC (English Short Title Catalogue) and it was a way to keep my professional skills going. I enjoy that challenge of looking at every single book in the Library! There are constantly amazing discoveries.

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We also help out with days like European Heritage Open Day, where we will greet visitors and tell them about the buildings.

Q. What is your favourite thing about being a volunteer?

My favourite thing is polishing the leather-bound covers of the older books.

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What I like best of all here; [Library] is when the books are all polished and shining! I love it when the light hits them, it's just beautiful.

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I do like meeting people from all over the world. I enjoy that aspect. I also like the social aspect of being in the Library. I like the chat and working with the other volunteers as well as the staff and the atmosphere.

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The idea of doing something that is worthwhile is the value of volunteering and the people you meet. I would not have met the team otherwise and it is a good way to connect over cups of tea!

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It gives me a chance to use my professional skills and I enjoy meeting all the lovely people and being a part of the community on the hill. It also links me with a place that is part of my childhood.

Q. Do you have a favourite book in the Library? / Do you have a favourite item in No.5?

My favourite thing in No.5 are the two octagonal rooms and the surprise on people's face when they come in and see two large rooms that they are not expecting. Especially from the outside, with the small windows.

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It is so hard to say as there is so much! There are a series of facsimiles of the various versions of The Book of Common Prayer from 1549 – 1562. They were produced by a Victorian printer called William Pickering. I studied historical bibliography so that interested me.

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In the Library, I discovered early editions of Erasmus and on closer inspection; I noticed that these were produced while he was still alive!

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In the Library it is really just all of the books. There are so many gorgeous books. You come across books where you just can't put them down when you start reading them and not much else gets done!

Q. What made you want to start volunteering?

The natural love for books and libraries. It is also good to have a recognised day of the week to do the work instead of having a week of Sundays.

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I think I was in the right place at the right time. I did have some spare time and I always loved the Library, the Cathedral, and the historical aspect of Armagh so it all just fitted together.

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I was mesmerised by my first experience in the buildings and I did not know initially that there was the opportunity to get involved. Whenever I found out that I could volunteer, it seemed like a natural thing for me to do.

Q. What would you say to someone who is considering becoming a volunteer?

I would say that it is a very enriching experience. There is a social aspect but there is also the knowledge that you are helping to preserve something that has been in Armagh for a very long time. You are caring for something that is very old and it is a privilege to be near such very old things. You are a custodian in a way.

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You are made to feel very welcome by the staff. You are coming in and are able to be productive and you feel needed and that you are contributing in a useful way. It is a lovely way to spend a Thursday morning!

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Do it! Volunteer in something you have an interest in. If you're at home, and you have interests and you are able to volunteer, you should try and do it. There is a lot of good work that can be done. It is great fun and you will meet wonderful people!

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Go for it! If you have a particular interest, the Library will help you find something that you will be interested in.

Many thanks to all of our wonderful volunteers!

For more information contact us at

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