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## Policy for Volunteers

### GENERAL POLICY

Abingdon Town Council recognises the importance of volunteers in contributing to its remit to increase public access to Abingdon County Hall Museum and to broaden its audience. The Town Council and Museum acknowledge that volunteers can make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the organisation by providing a supplementary and supportive service. They agree to their engagement in specified circumstances, in particular for project tasks to extend new and existing services. Volunteer tasks will be specific and may be time-constrained.

Significant benefits also accrue to the Museum in that volunteers supplement the work of employees in delivering project and operational goals, working in areas that budgetary constraints would otherwise prevent the Museum from completing. Volunteers will not be given work that might deprive employees of any component of their work, compromise their career development or their job satisfaction. The relationship between the Museum and its volunteers is different from that between the Museum and its employees in that Volunteers and the Museum do not have the same mutuality of obligation to each other as that between an employer and an employee. Volunteers do not work in accordance with a binding employment contract in that a volunteer has no obligation to attend the Museum or the Museum to engage the volunteer. However, for reasons of organisation, safety and courtesy the Museum does have policies and procedures in place for volunteers to enable the volunteer relationships to work smoothly for all.

### VOLUNTEER BENEFITS

Our volunteers enjoy the fellowship of working with people who share similar interests. They also have the satisfaction of knowing they have helped to preserve our collections and make them more accessible to the public, whilst making the Museum a better place for visitors. Volunteers will enjoy the same environment as employees and will benefit from training and development opportunities as well as the experience of working with qualified Museum personnel on challenging and interesting assignments. Volunteers may use the Museum as a referee for future job or volunteering applications. Volunteering helps keep their skills active and helps retired people feel employed.

### CONSULTATION

The Museum undertakes to manage its relationship with its volunteers in a professional manner as it would for employees, with a dedicated person available to deal with requests and issues as they arise. New or amended volunteer opportunities will be considered on a case-by-case basis. There will be close liaison with staff to ensure that opportunities for volunteers are identified at an early stage and that tasks are specified clearly in advance by way of role descriptions.

The Museum will maintain a list of opportunities to reflect the areas of work for which volunteers may be sought. The list will be reviewed periodically to meet the changing needs of the Museum.

### RECRUITMENT

The Curator, through the person responsible for volunteer recruitment, will ensure that all volunteers are recruited professionally. The following recruitment principles apply:

- Volunteers may be recruited from various sources including newspaper advertising, word of mouth, recruitment events, speculative letters of application and the Friends group.

- Volunteer role descriptions will be produced for each task.
- Candidates may be asked to complete the Museum's application form for volunteers.
- Interviews will be used to select volunteers at which the conditions of voluntary service will be outlined.
- Recruitment checks may include references, health issues affecting volunteers' ability to perform certain tasks and security clearance.
- Volunteer recruitment will be in line with the Town Council's Equal Opportunities policy and current legislation.
- Once a volunteer is recruited a Volunteer Agreement will be signed by the volunteer to confirm the conditions of voluntary service.
- The Museum Administrator will conduct an induction session with each volunteer to discuss relevant Town Council rules and regulations for volunteers, in particular the health and safety requirements.

Volunteers who have to work unsupervised must be over the age of 18. Work experience pupils (16-18 year-olds coming to the museum for short periods as part of a school or college programme) and university students on work placements are not covered by the volunteer policy. Any study-related activity at the Museum does not constitute volunteering unless the student engages in an established and specific volunteer role.

## VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

All volunteers will sign a Volunteer Agreement, which outlines the voluntary arrangement with the Museum. It is not intended to be a legally binding contract of employment. The Agreement covers:

- Induction and training
- Supervision
- Health and Safety issues
- Voluntary attendance and hour limitations
- Benefits
- Conduct
- Disciplinary and Grievance procedures
- Terminating the Volunteer Agreement

The Administrator and the individual volunteer will sign the Agreement.

## INDUCTION AND TRAINING

All volunteers will receive induction training for the purpose of improving the performance of their work as a volunteer and Health and Safety training, as appropriate. They will be given an induction pack that includes

relevant local information. The appropriate supervisor will arrange further training that proves necessary for volunteers.

## SUPERVISION

Volunteers will have a designated supervisor (a paid employee) who will supervise them on a day-to-day basis and will also be responsible for volunteer outputs. They will also have the support of the employee responsible for volunteer recruitment and development for personnel issues.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

Volunteers will receive appropriate Health and Safety information and basic training. They will not have access to dangerous equipment unless supervised. The Museum will provide suitable equipment and conditions for the volunteers. The volunteers' supervising employees will carry out risk assessments on the activities undertaken by volunteers, in accordance with the Town Council's policy document.

## INSURANCE

Volunteers are covered by the Town Council's Employee Liability Insurance.

## EXPENSES

The Town Council is unable to pay meal allowances or travel expenses from home to the Museum or The Old Abbey House, or the Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre. Travel may be reimbursed, however, if the Museum requires the volunteer to travel to another site. Requests will be considered for any other out-of-pocket expenses although these are expected to be few.

## DISCIPLINARY AND GRIEVANCE

Copies of the Town Council's Disciplinary and Grievance procedures are available to volunteers. These procedures are not contractually binding for volunteers but may be used for guidance in the event that volunteers have grievances or where disciplinary matters arise that need to be addressed.

## PERSONAL RECORDS

Records of volunteer's personal details, skills and experience will be kept by the Museum Administrator and next-of-kin details in a secure place that can be accessed rapidly in the case of an emergency. Personal files will be maintained in line with the Town Council's policy on Data Protection, and will include:

- Copy of the application form.
- Any recruitment documentation, including interview documentation.
- Signed Volunteer Agreement.
- Copy of Health Declaration .
- Returned Security Vetting Form.

- Induction Checklist.
- References.
- Any training records.
- Any disciplinary and grievance documentation.

## WORKING HOURS

Volunteers generally work no more than sixty days per year. This can be exceeded in certain circumstances such as a time-bound voluntary project or to cover gaps in a volunteering duties roster if fellow volunteers are unable to attend. Volunteers' times of attendance and hours of work are agreed in advance wherever possible to ensure work completion targets are met.

## MISSION

The role of Abingdon County Hall Museum is to act as a focal point for Abingdon's residents, providing a tourist destination for visitors and a place to learn, understand and enjoy the heritage and environment of Abingdon. This will be achieved by caring for, interpreting and providing access to collections, information and ideas, by ensuring programmes are varied, entertaining and effective and by encouraging participation by all groups of the community.

Museum employees share a responsibility to model high standards of behaviour in their dealings with staff, volunteers and visitors. Everyone will help to:

- Create a positive climate with realistic expectations.
- Emphasise the importance of being valued as an individual.
- Promote through example, honesty and courtesy.
- Provide a caring and effective learning environment.
- Encourage relationships based on kindness, respect and understanding of the needs of others.
- Ensure fair treatment for all regardless of age, gender, race and ability.
- Show appreciation of the efforts and contributions of all.

## Induction

### INTRODUCTION

As with paid staff, induction is an important stage in the recruitment process for volunteers. Induction acts as an introduction and welcome to the Museum for the prospective volunteers and can give them a taste of what is on offer. Induction gives organisations an opportunity to provide volunteers with further details and information needed to do the job. This also involves explaining to volunteers the policies and practices of the Museum, clarifying any queries or potential problems, setting 'boundaries' or 'ground rules' and encouraging them to work to a set of principles - the ethos of the Museum.

Induction may begin at the first point of contact, but this ideally is the start of a longer process, in which volunteer and Museum get to know each other better and one that can involve training sessions, interviews etc. Effective induction should give volunteers more confidence, especially in the early stages of their work, and demonstrates that the Museum values their involvement. Most of the following list of points should have been covered in interview and thereafter:

### THE MUSEUM

- The 'mission statement', the Museum's aims and objectives, its history and working practices.
- Its stakeholders.
- Organisational structure - who makes what decisions and where.
- Roles of paid staff and management.
- Roles of volunteers including those new to the work and those more experienced.
- Roles of others who may be involved, e.g. Friends group, Archivist.
- Boundaries of the volunteers' own roles, including to whom they are accountable.
- Working environment of volunteers e.g. the building, whether they will be working alone or in a team etc.
- The support available for volunteers e.g. who from, in what form, frequency etc.
- Details of 'specific' support e.g. supervision, mentoring etc.
- Details of social gatherings and/or special events.

### POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICALITIES

- Information on relevant and/or specific policies and procedures within the Museum.
- Copy of the Equal Opportunities policy.
- Accessibility of the building and facilities for the disabled.
- Other special conditions that may apply.

- Information on who to contact in an emergency, numbers etc. and how to go about it.
- Health and safety procedures/first aid/fire drill/panic alarms/other precautions and procedures.
- Information on how and when to claim expenses, what can be claimed and issues relating to benefits.
- Information and details on insurance cover.
- Details of where things are kept, how to get any keys, who has them etc.
- Details of resources and facilities available to volunteers, e.g. tea/coffee making facilities.
- Information on any grievance/complaints procedures and how to access these.
- Helpful hints on how to get to the Museum, e.g. bus routes.

#### OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES

- Training to be undertaken, what is involved and reasons for this.
- Guidelines on confidentiality, e.g. information on customers and/or donors, other volunteers, finance, disclosure of information.
- Promoting the importance of Equal Opportunities and referring to the Town Council's own policy.
- Guidelines on dealing with potential problems, e.g. being asked to perform additional tasks.
- Guidelines on what to do if volunteers are offered money or presents by outsiders.
- Guidelines on any records volunteers are expected to keep.
- Discussing the purpose of 'Volunteer Agreements' and what these imply.
- Looking at any further issues raised by volunteers (give volunteers the opportunity to do this).
- Confirm they understand everything, are willing to abide by the policies and feel OK about their work.
- Paperwork - 'A Welcome/Induction Pack', 'Volunteer Agreement' etc.
- Details of any assessment, monitoring, evaluation procedures (useful for Museum and volunteer).
- Promoting voluntary work as a way of gaining valuable experience for those seeking employment.
- Providing an information pack detailing the issues covered in the induction.

## History of the County Hall and of the Museum, its Structure and Operational Experience.

### HISTORY OF THE COUNTY HALL

In the Middle Ages Abingdon had been the resort of kings and bishops, the wealthy Abbey towered over the town and dominated even the marketplace and burial ground of the townsfolk. After the Dissolution the town was finally granted a Royal Charter in 1556. Religious wars and the English Civil War ensued, but finally in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century a period of stability had set in and trade and commerce provided the Corporation with sufficient wealth to create the statement of their civic pride known as the County Hall.

Like earlier post-Dissolution buildings in the Market Place the ground floor would provide sheltered space for market stalls. The cellar would provide lock-up storage, and the main gallery and loft would accommodate the Assizes still held at Abingdon, and marking it out, in the thinking of those days, as the 'County town'. The building straddled the southern part of the old Market Place, dominated what remained of the Abbey and all other buildings, and made a pre-emptive bid to accommodate the judges in style. Additionally it was extremely beautiful, drawing by the builder Christopher Kempster on the ideas of his colleague Sir Christopher Wren, eg details of his Restoration churches in the city of London, and their Continental parallels, like the wings of Le Vau's College des Quatre Nations at Paris.

The building was not intended for daily use, or necessarily for use in all seasons. No fireplaces or chimneys or lavatory spaces were provided. While the juries might be locked in the attics, the judges themselves were put up and wined and dined at inns locally.

In its early years in the later 17<sup>th</sup> century, as well as being used for Assizes the building was used by non-Conformist religious groups unable to build a church of their own. Some references speak disparately of clothes being dried in the market house and shambles being built against it, as well as of Shakespearean plays. The Quarter Sessions were held in the building until 1864, but meanwhile it had become habitual to host periodic balls, plays, lectures and other entertainments including religious speakers, in the building, as well as the idiosyncratic bun-throwings to celebrate royal occasions.

### THE MUSEUM AND ITS COLLECTIONS

Abingdon County Hall Museum was established as 'the Abingdon Museum of Natural History and Antiquities' by Abingdon Borough Council in 1920. Over the next five decades the Museum acquired a strong local collection and an important role as the Town's local Museum. Since local government reorganisation in 1974, Abingdon Town Council has been responsible for the Museum service including the building and the collections.

Since 1920 the Museum has acquired collections that relate to the social history of the town, but the most significant developments have been in the field of archaeology since 1970, leading to Abingdon's claim to be England's oldest continually occupied town. Major developments involving a doubling of the population of the town have led to the discovery of objects of national importance, including finds from a series of excavations by celebrated archaeologists such as some of the earliest pottery (at Barrow Hills and the Drayton to Abingdon cursus), a massive iron-age oppidum, the Roman villa at Barton Court Farm (one of the first to be investigated scientifically) and fragments of Abbey fittings, stained glass, stone carvings and plasterwork from the demolished 16<sup>th</sup> Century Barton Court. Abingdon's history intersects with national developments at every stage, but few of these finds have been displayed at Abingdon County Hall Museum owing to previous environmental conditions and many have been lost to the town. It is our intention to introduce some of these 'treasures' to Abingdon's expanding population.

## Abingdon Museum Volunteer Induction

Abingdon Museum is a council owned organisation promoting the history of Abingdon to as broad an audience as possible. The museum is run through a combination of staff and volunteers, whose help is invaluable to sustaining the excellent reputation we have built.

Our volunteers are an integral part of the museum's running, in appreciation of the valuable time given to support the museum we will:

- Welcome you, as a volunteer and provide appropriate opportunities to those who can help us achieve the Museum's purposes.
- Provide you with appropriate training for your role.
- Give guidance and support your development in your volunteer role.
- Treat you and all volunteers equally and fairly.
- Ensure you have a safe working environment so far as is reasonably practicable.
- Listen to your concerns if things aren't going right.
- Recognise that you are a volunteer and have other commitments.
- Endeavour to help develop your understanding and knowledge of the history of the locality
- Invite you to become a Friend of the Museum, admission free for one year.
- Endeavour to help develop your skills as a volunteer to aid in any future employment or volunteering work you may undertake
- Offer support in undertaking activities of interest relating to the museum, such as research, archiving, exhibition planning, retail etc.
- Invite you to participate in staff events and socials as a valued member of the team

In return the museum would ask of its volunteers to:

- Commit to necessary training and give us your time.
- Dress appropriately for your role.
- Comply with agreed standards.
- Be professional and loyal to the Museum
- Be fair to those around you.
- Talk to your Museum colleagues (volunteers or staff) first if you have a problem.
- Honour any time or other commitments agreed in advance and give us notice if you can't.
- Allow a trial period of 3 months during which the volunteer or the Museum may decide to end the involvement.
- Give a notice period of a month if possible.

Please read the included Volunteer information Pack and Health and Safety Policy.

Volunteer Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date:

Signed for the Museum : .....

Name of Staff: .....

Date:

We warmly welcome you to Abingdon Museum and thank you for volunteering with us.

# VOLUNTEER COPY

**Last Page**

**Please sign duplicate agreement that follows and return to the office**

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Signature: .....

Date:

Signed for the Museum : .....

Name of Staff: .....

Date:

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# MUSEUM COPY