

Volunteering at Barnsley Museums

**BARNSELEY
MUSEUMS**

Our Impact
2018-23





Introduction

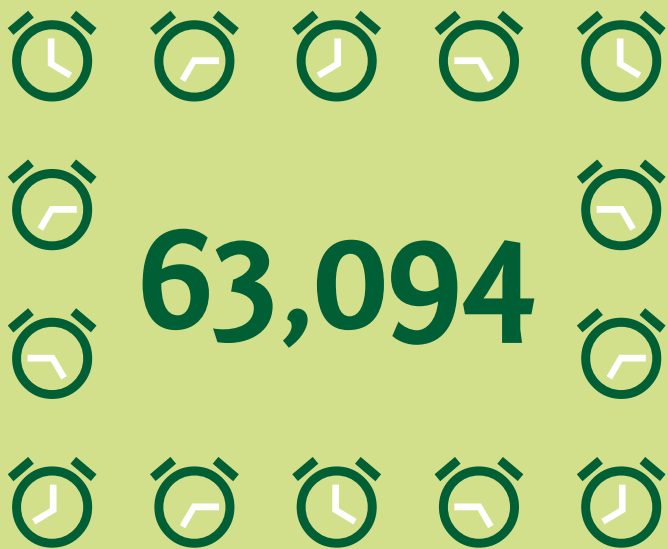
Volunteering is not new to Barnsley Museums, but it has certainly changed over the years.

The service has benefited from the support of volunteers in many ways, some of our earliest and ongoing support was from Friends groups like the Friends of Cannon Hall and the Friends of Barnsley Archives who have helped us secure major funding and have continued supporting us for many years.

In 2018 Barnsley Museums became a National Portfolio Organisation for Arts Council England and appointed its first volunteer coordinator. The service started to focus on what volunteering was, what it could be and what needed to be put in place. We reviewed our volunteer infrastructure, created new roles, connected with the wider volunteer community, and have amassed thousands of recorded hours.

The covid pandemic impacted all parts of our lives and volunteering was no different. The programme had to pause and then work within new restrictions through lockdowns. While this really impacted volunteering for Barnsley Museums, it also presented an opportunity to look at what we wanted from volunteering and for volunteers to tell us what they wanted to see as we recovered. It also showed the beginnings of our full potential with winning 'Volunteer Team of the Year' in the 2020 Museum + Heritage awards for a specific accessible volunteering project.

In 2022 we decided to place bids for 'Remotely Digital' to create an online volunteer offer, and 'Volunteering Futures Fund' to explore and expand volunteering to adapt to the changing world accelerated by the pandemic. Successfully securing over £200,000 in funding, the team expanded and our offer diversified to include more parts of our community, particularly young people from special education need backgrounds.



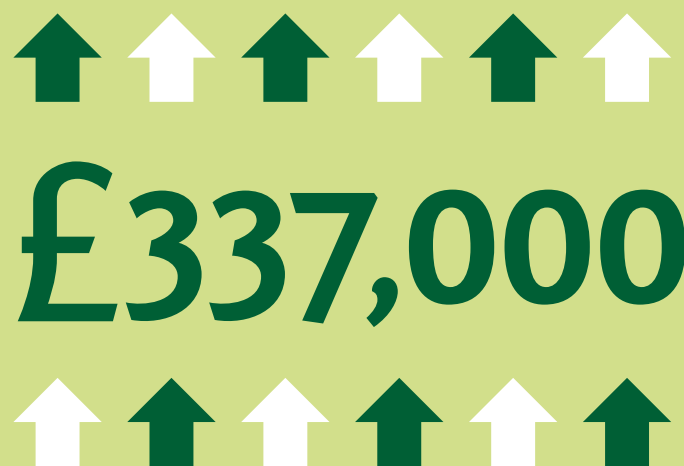
Hours collectively volunteered*



SEND pupils volunteering



Third-party and private sector partners



Investment in our volunteering scheme



Placements and work experience opportunities generated*



Total monetary worth to the benefit of our local economy*

*From 2018 to present



Volunteering for Health and Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering are well documented.

They include improving physical health, reducing social isolation, and connecting people to places and each other. This is a cornerstone of Barnsley Museums volunteering – offering people connection and increased pride in the borough they live and work in through its heritage. Volunteering provides a sense of purpose and belonging for many of our volunteers and our inclusive approach attracts people from all walks of life.

Spotlight

Volunteering should be available to everyone, and in 2018 we partnered with Opening Doors, an organisation that supports young adults with a range of learning and physical disabilities.

These sessions instil the spirit of volunteering to these young people. The message is clear – they are contributing and adding value to their local community space.

The group won Volunteer Team of the Year 2020 and in 2023 we expanded this idea into working with secondary schools Springwell Academy, Robert Ogden School and the West Riding School, continuing to break down barriers for young people to get involved and volunteer.



“The group provides me with a sense of belonging, I have made friends which is something that at times I can find difficult due to my anxiety. The group has supported me with learning so many new skills. My sense of self esteem has increased and I have been able to improve and maintain my mental health and wellbeing by attending.”

Volunteer

“I really have loved my time as a volunteer, it's been so interesting and rewarding. All the staff have been very welcoming, and it's been lovely talking to members of the public while they were visiting the gallery.”

Volunteer



“I really enjoyed the experience and feel much better for doing something positive.”

Volunteer

“This saved my life.”

Volunteer

Volunteering for Skills

Volunteering to gain new skills and experiences is a reason to get involved time and time again.

Barnsley Museums diverse offer means people can develop with us in a variety of ways, from gaining confidence and leadership experience to learning traditional heritage skills and specifics in how heritage and arts venues operate. Volunteers get involved in a wide range of activity to improve their sense of self and continue learning.

We are proud of our track record in skills development. From 'have a go' willow weaving and hedge laying days to helping with interview technique and getting people into paid work, there is always something to learn with us throughout a person's life.

Spotlight

Every year Barnsley Museums works with young people, from across the borough's schools, colleges and other organisations looking to gain workplace insights and build their skills.

From taster days and career talks to year long placements, we are proud to support young people across Barnsley. Through volunteering they gain experience that will take them into future careers, grow in confidence, and prove that arts and culture is a path everyone can follow if they want to.



“I have developed my verbal communication ability with visitors [...] I now feel more at ease with welcoming visitors and know that this will assist me in any given context, [...] I have had comments on my ability to ‘bring the gallery’s contents to life’.”

Volunteer



“I'd like to thank you for this opportunity which has helped me grow as an individual and become more experienced in the world of work.”

Volunteer



“It made me think, ‘I wish this was my job’.”

Volunteer

Volunteering in Green Spaces

Our green spaces have always been loved and supported by volunteers.

Volunteering keeps them looking in good shape for visitors, helps improve biodiversity, and wins acclaim through the likes of Green Flag, Bees Needs and Site of Special Scientific Interest status.

The social aspect of volunteering outdoors can't be denied, with our groups of volunteers coming rain or shine to get stuck in and have a cuppa together after. We use traditional methods like hedge laying, willow weaving and coppicing, as well as looking after a range of heritage fruit trees and plants. Volunteers get to learn these sustainable skills, becoming advocates for these approaches, using them beyond our sites or on other projects and at home.

Spotlight

Lack of time is increasingly cited by people as a barrier to volunteering. In 2023 the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) reported another down turn in regular (at least once a month) volunteering.

To counter this, we invested in creating a range of one off or short term opportunities, allowing people to get involved and gain the benefit of volunteering without having to commit in the longer term. Working with a range of corporate partners and running drop-in sessions that allowed people to commit between a few minutes to a full day saw over 200 people take part in 2022–23 volunteer.



“A super welcoming and inclusive environment, lots of opportunities to learn and ask questions. Couldn't recommend volunteering here more.”

Volunteer



“Felt at ease rather than stressed in the outdoors. I will be looking to volunteer again.”

Volunteer



“I really appreciated the chance to gain more experience doing this heritage craft.”

Volunteer

Digital and Archives

The ways and frequency people volunteer have changed, Covid accelerated this, and it couldn't be ignored.

Our remote digital volunteering was inspired by our onsite archival volunteering, where research and transcription of historical documents has always drawn people in to volunteering as a way of exploring the rich history of Barnsley.

Our remote offer expands and evolves this opportunity. Working with audio and film, volunteers now can work at times that suit them and in their own comfort space. Being online has allowed volunteering to take place successfully by our volunteers all over UK and the world.

Spotlight

Much of the work would not have been possible without funding and the volunteer programme must give thanks to a range of external funders, who have allowed us to pilot new approaches and expand our existing offers further.

Arts Council England's Volunteering Futures and National Portfolio support, The National Lottery Heritage Fund and a range of backing from Barnsley Museums & Heritage Trust have seen us expand the team, recover from the pandemic more effectively and adapt to a changing volunteer landscape which requires more flexibility to meet needs.



“I am very grateful to have had an opportunity to volunteer with you, I have learnt many new skills and have gained more confidence in my abilities. The past few months I have been working on myself and applying for multiple apprenticeships, I have finally been given my first ever interview.”

Volunteer



“I really appreciate the flexibility of this volunteering opportunity – it's perfect for me as I really want to volunteer right now, but I have a lot going on in my life and a lot of shifting/changing commitments which makes it hard to commit to most regular in-person volunteering opportunities at the moment.”

Volunteer



“Thank you for the opportunity!! We need more digital volunteering opportunities like yours.”

Volunteer



Partnerships

A diverse volunteering offer doesn't happen in isolation, and volunteering in heritage isn't solely with Barnsley Museums.

As a museum service, we work with a range of partners linked to our local communities. Working collaboratively, we bring the whole volunteering offer together holistically. By offering wide and varied opportunities, volunteers can explore many different aspects of volunteering bringing many benefits for themselves and for the borough.

Barnsley Museums is ideally placed to provide volunteering opportunities in a heritage environment, but this sector thrives with a network of heritage allies. These include Wentworth Castle Gardens, the Maurice Dobson Museum, Barnsley Main and so many others who work with and are led by volunteers keeping the borough's heritage flourishing and alive for all to enjoy.



Spotlight

There are many benefits to volunteering, but what about the people who organise, coordinate and look after volunteers. Members of the Barnsley Museums team have summed up in one sentence each, why they love being involved in volunteering;

“Working directly with people from our hometown, engaged in activities that benefit our green spaces, wellbeing whatever the weather, making a difference.”

Worsbrough Mill Coordinator

“Being able to meet so many amazing people and connecting them with exciting opportunities for new experiences – win win all round!”

Volunteering Futures Project Officer

“I love working with young volunteers to help build their skills and confidence growing their experiences and helping them to gain access into the work environment.”

Programme Manager

“Working with the community is amazing, making a difference to an area and also a volunteers health and wellbeing.”

Elsecar Heritage Centre Coordinator

Volunteer

Volunteer

Volunteer

Volunteer



Lessons Learned

01.

Flexibility is essential to an engaging programme of volunteering and beating recruitment issues.

06.

Volunteers are your biggest champions within the communities they live.

02.

Coordinators of volunteering are key to ensuring this flexibility while providing continuity to the organisation and the different people getting involved.

07.

The skills volunteers gain are not always in the field of work they volunteer in. Confidence, communication and self-awareness, among others, are developed in all types of volunteering alongside more specific or formal skill development.

03.

Digital volunteering is here to stay and provides an entirely different way of engaging people into supporting your organisation and increasing access.

08.

Say thank you in whatever way your organisation can.

04.

Volunteering needs to be designed so as many parts of your community can be involved as possible while recognising different needs require different resource and facilitation.

09.

Partnerships bring diversity of volunteering to you. Work with them to find the common ground that benefits both.

05.

Volunteering should be enjoyable for all doing it! If it's become an obligation, it's not really volunteering anymore.

10.

Volunteering can and does help you achieve your organisation's vision and strategic objectives.

Looking Forward

01.

Continued growth of the offer and look to secure its future through appropriate funding.

02.

Explore new opportunities, e.g. milling at Worsbrough Mill and new roles at Elsecar Heritage Centre.

03.

Explore being more digital in our approach. Look to invest in volunteer management software, including a dedicated opportunities webpage and the ability to administer expenses.

04.

Continue collaboration with community groups to create volunteering which benefits our sites and beyond.

05.

Grow inclusive volunteering both in opportunity but also in our processes, e.g. different forms of volunteer communication such as easy read, audio etc.

06.

Expand volunteering focused on sustainability and the environment to support our own carbon reduction but also supporting volunteers to learn about this.

07.

Keep championing and developing the role of volunteer coordinators, and recognise the value they bring the organisation.



The Volunteer Choir

In 2020 poet Ian McMillan celebrated the incredible work of volunteers with this poem. The Volunteer Choir is just another way to reflect on the power of volunteering and thank you to Ian for letting us share it again.



What's that sound?
Who's that singing?
A choir of volunteers,
Music in my ears.

Here they come
They are bringing
Gifts of love and food
Help to raise the mood

It's a song
Everybody knows
Expertise and care
All the street can share

It's a book
We will never close
Till the need is gone
Pass the long note on.

By Ian McMillan

**“Thank you to everyone
who volunteers or helps
us to enable volunteering.”**

Barnsley Museums Team

Find out more

barnsley-museums.com

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**BARNSELEY
MUSEUMS**



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