

Job Description and Person Specification

Newman Brothers *at the Coffin Works*

Collections & Exhibition Manager

2 years fixed-term contract (22.5 hours a week)

Salary £21,734 pro rata

Appointment to begin January 2014



Birmingham Conservation Trust wishes to appoint a Collections and Exhibitions Manager to manage the Newman Brothers collection and curate a 'time capsule' visitor experience at the factory, opening summer 2014.

PURPOSE OF JOB

To manage the Newman Brothers archive of artefacts, including stock, paper business archive, historic machinery and all portable items.

To work with the Activity Plan Manager, Graphic Designer and Museum Interactive Developers to prepare and curate the displays in the publically accessible museum spaces to create a 'time capsule' atmosphere, and select items for handling and interactive activities.

To undertake an assessment of the contents of the Newman Brothers archive with the aim of developing a conservation strategy for the long-term care of the collections, and a strategy to maximise their research and educational potential. An independent specialist assessment of the historic machinery will have been completed.

To develop and implement a collections management policy and conservation maintenance manuals which are suitable for use by staff and volunteers.

To train and support volunteers and the *Volunteer and Operations Manager* to undertake regular basic conservation tasks.

BACKGROUND

Birmingham Conservation Trust

Birmingham Conservation Trust is a charity which exists 'to preserve and enhance Birmingham's threatened architectural heritage and to promote an enjoyment and understanding of the city's historic buildings'. Founded in 1977, Birmingham Conservation Trust is one of over 250 building preservation trusts in the UK. More details about our work can be found on www.birminghamconservationtrust.org

Our current major project is the repair and conservation of the Newman Brothers coffin fittings works (The Coffin Works) on Fleet Street in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. The factory was built in 1894 and closed in 1999, when it was left with its machinery, stock, furniture, office equipment etc. all *in situ*, as if at the end of an ordinary working day.

Outline of Coffin Works Project

The Coffin Works project involves the repair and refurbishment of the former factory to bring it into sustainable new use, to secure the long-term future of the buildings, and to make a significant contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. When the repair and conservation is complete the buildings will have multiple use:

- 'Newman Brothers': a heritage attraction/educational resource, comprising five rooms of the original factory (including the Stamp Room and Shroud Room) with original machinery and stock.
- A store room and conservation workshop/ research room for work on the Newman Brothers collection
- New offices for the Birmingham Conservation Trust (including work and office space for volunteers)
- Six workshop/office units for let and a meeting room for the shared use of tenants and the BCT.

The project will seek to develop partnerships with other heritage attractions, with other enterprises, and with schools, colleges and universities, mainly but not exclusively in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, to maximise both the sustainability and the social, economic and cultural value of the initiative.

Maximising community engagement and participation, especially the participation of youth and ethnic minorities (through, for example, innovative arts and cultural events), is a major goal of the project.

The project has been made possible by grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, Birmingham City Council, Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, AIM/Biffa and others.

The Coffin Works

Built in 1894, the Newman Brothers Coffin Fittings Factory is a Grade II* listed building, complete with its historic contents (most now removed to temporary storage off site).

From 1894 until 1998 Newman Brothers produced high-quality coffin fittings initially in solid brass, then in stamped electro-brass, silver and nickel plate, and latterly in moulded resin. Additionally the company sold shrouds and coffin linings, which they manufactured at the factory from the mid 20th century. When Newman Brothers started Birmingham was at the centre of the coffin fittings trade, but by the time they ceased trading the company was one of only three such manufacturers in Britain, the trade having been hit by competition from the Far East and changing patterns of burials. In their heyday Newman Brothers employed a workforce of over 100 people. They produced goods that were sent out across the world and adorned the coffins of the great and the good, such as Joseph Chamberlain, Winston Churchill, the Queen Mother and reputedly Princess Diana.

Located on the city centre edge of Birmingham's historic Jewellery Quarter, the factory is a typical example of a late 19th-century purpose-built Jewellery Quarter manufactory. It has a characteristic rectangular courtyard plan form and is of modest scale, having been built on the site of former domestic housing. It is three-storeys high, built of red brick with slate roofs, and has high-quality brick and stone dressings with lots of small-paned cast-iron windows to flood the building with light. It has two entrances separating the clean work areas from the dirty industrial processes. Customers and office staff would enter via the panelled double doors, whilst workers would go in through the big cart entrance.

Newman Brothers (Heritage Attraction)

The front range of the factory, and one room – the Stamp Room – of the north range will form the heritage attraction. In the front range the rooms comprise a reception/orientation area/shop (formerly the Stores) on the ground floor; the Newman Brothers offices and Warehouse on the first floor, and the Shroud Room on the second floor.

The aim is not to create a museum with exhibits in cases and explanatory panels, but to have the rooms looking as much as possible as they were when the factory was in use – a sort of 'time capsule'. Although much of the machinery is older than this, the time setting is the 1960s/70s – nothing much was added after that. Tours will be led by costumed guides, or visitors can take a self-guided tour ('young

persons', 'family', etc) using iPads loaded with iBooks. Each chapter of the iBook interprets a different space at the Coffin Works, with narration by an actor 'in character', interviews with former workers, and a range of interactive applications.

There will be activities for children and adults in all of the rooms, and quite a lot of things that people will be encouraged to touch and handle. Overalls for dressing up, aimed primarily at school children, will be provided as well as replica items, such as travelling salesman's bags, for use in learning activities. Outside the rooms forming part of the 'time capsule', other spaces within the heritage attraction will have exhibitions on, for example, funerary traditions in different religions and cultures, and the work of the Birmingham Conservation Trust. There will also be some flexible space for temporary exhibitions.

The courtyard will be used for performances and events, both arts and heritage. Much more detail about the heritage attraction and the visitor experience, including numerous photographs, can be found in the *Interpretation Plan*.

Activities

Especially during the first three years when it is open (2014-2017), when grant funding will pay for the employment of a *Volunteering and Operations Manager*, a *Collections and Exhibitions Manager* and a *Learning Manager*, the Coffin Works will be the focus for a wide range of activities on and off-site, with an emphasis on engagement with schools, families and the local community. These activities will include such things as drama, art, dance, music and film projects – all inspired one way or another by the Coffin Works – and including, for example, a 'Day of the Dead' festival and a 'clothes to be seen dead in' fashion show.

Fundamental to the success of these activities, and to the running of the Coffin Works in general, will be the extensive involvement of volunteers.

The workshop/office units

The workshop/office units to let will occupy former workshop spaces in the factory, such as the Polishing Shop and the Electroplating Shop (and will be given these names), as little modified as is possible to make them suitable for modern use, and retaining as much of their character as is possible; each will have its own WC and kitchenette. Rents will be low, to encourage start-up businesses. The units are aimed primarily at crafts people and those in the creative and heritage industries. We hope that the businesses occupying the units and the heritage attraction will complement each other, and that there will be something of a community atmosphere amongst the users of the Coffin Works.

The Birmingham Conservation Trust will be occupying one of the units as its own office, and will form part of the community, sharing such communal facilities as the meeting room.

COLLECTIONS & EXHIBITION MANAGER

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Manage the return of the contents to the building:
 - advise on how to fit out of the conservation workshop
 - responsible for ordering and supervising the fit out of the store room to maximise ease of accessing the collections and, as far as possible, to comply with the relevant preservation standards (*PD 5454:2012*)
 - identify a suitable company to undertake the removals and supervise the return of contents and organisation of the store
 - ensure the environmental conditions in the store and conservation workshop are appropriate and monitoring established.

2. Develop a knowledge of the collections in order to:
 - identify a core collection through research (what is important to retain to represent the history of the factory) and for display (interpretation and public engagement)
 - develop and implement policies and action plans relating to the acquisition, management and disposal of our collections.

3. Manage the implementation of the *Interpretation Plan* for Newman Brothers:
 - working with the Activity Plan Manager, supervise the 'dressing' of the Stores (reception area), Warehouse, Office, Stamp Room, Shroud Room and Post Room with items from the Newman Brothers collection
 - advise on the *Interpretation Plan* and bring fresh thinking to the overall visitor experience
 - working with the Activity Plan Manager commission graphic designer(s) and interactive developer(s) to develop hands-on activities for visitors and signage
 - working with the Activity Plan Manager and team of research volunteers, supervise the research activity appropriate for on-site interpretation
 - compile regular reports on progress and preparations in line with exhibition schedules.

4. Devise and implement a collections management framework (using PAS198 specification) to ensure the best conservation standards are applied, including:
 - upgrade the existing catalogue and associated record keeping (to the minimum standard required for Accreditation)
 - produce detailed manuals and check lists to ensure an ongoing regime of conservation management can be maintained once the contract ends

- prioritise items for conservation including historic machinery
 - set up environmental monitoring and mitigation in all public areas
 - advise on insurance and loan policies
 - input into emergency or disaster plans
 - Implement IPM (integrated pest management) system.
5. Health and safety:
- identify if any collection items are hazardous and put a risk assessment in place for their use on display
 - work with other staff to develop procedures to ensure visitors to the building have a safe and comfortable visit
 - assist with emergency procedures as appropriate.
6. In collaboration with the whole Newman Brothers team, devise and implement a strategy to maximise use of the collections for:
- research purposes
 - teaching collection care/preventive conservation and housekeeping skills
 - talking about death and bereavement, including a multi-faith approach engaging children.
7. Deliver collections care/preventative conservation and housekeeping training to:
- volunteers
 - members of the Newman Brothers team and BCT staff
 - members of the public in 'taster' days
 - as a contribution to the induction of new staff and volunteers.
8. Develop and undertake a programme of collections care/preventative conservation and housekeeping, supervising a team of volunteers.
9. Responsible for the security of the collections, to manage the collections areas to:
- allow visitors to come and see work in progress
 - work with volunteers to undertake periodic cleaning of the collections store and exhibits
 - run conservation-related public events, including with families
 - keep areas orderly and accessible.
10. Liaise with other partners in the Jewellery Quarter about:
- opportunities for joint exhibitions or activities

- other issues of mutual concern.
11. Attend training sessions, conferences and CPD in order to keep up to date with best practice, promote and acknowledge Newman Brothers where appropriate, and to be able to cascade skills down to volunteers.
 12. General:
 - manage the budget for activities relating to the collections
 - responsible for responding to enquiries about the collection (with support of volunteers)
 - produce bi-monthly report on collection activities for the Board of Trustees.
 13. As part of the Newman Brothers and Birmingham Conservation Trust team any other duties and responsibilities appropriate to the post. These include:
 - share general duties such telephone enquiries and correspondence
 - produce material for the website about the conservation work and assist with updating the website
 - general duties such as opening and closing the building and monitoring cleanliness etc.
 - be involved in the relocation of the BCT office to the Coffin Works in May 2014
 - occasional helping at events
 - Duty Manager responsibility 1 weekend in every 5
 - contribute ideas to the overall running of the attraction and delivery of the Activity Plan
 - attend weekly planning and progress team meetings.

RELATIONSHIPS

The postholder will work directly to the Activity Plan Manager, Dr Suzanne Carter, or the Trust Director, Simon Buteux, in her absence.

The postholder will work closely with the *Volunteering and Operations Manager* and the *Learning Manager* as part of the Newman Brothers team and will be involved in the recruitment and supervision of volunteers (in relation to collections care).

LOCATION, HOURS, ETC

This job will initially be based in the Trust's office at 1 Lancaster Circus, Queensway, Birmingham, B4 7DJ from January 2014 until the end of May 2014, at which time BCT will relocate to the Coffin Works on Fleet Street, Jewellery Quarter.

It is expected that in the first months of the contract the postholder will divide their time between the office and the warehouse in Erdington where the Newman

Brothers collection is temporarily stored. Once the office and collections have been moved to the Coffin Works it is expected that the postholder will work mostly on site but will need to visit other partners, schools and community groups from time to time. One day a week all staff team members will be expected to be on site on the same day.

The post is part time, and it is anticipated that the postholder will work (22.5 hours/3 days a week for two years. Days and times to be negotiated.

Expenses will be paid for travel to off-site venues, but the postholder will be expected to arrange their own transport.

Occasional weekend and evening work will be expected.

Along with other staff team members, one in every five weekends the Collections and Exhibitions Manager will take 'Duty Manager' responsibility for the Coffin Works site over weekend opening hours.

CONTRACT

The post is fixed term for two years.

CONTACTS

- Birmingham Conservation Trust staff and volunteers
- Other Jewellery Quarter heritage attractions and businesses
- Local schools and colleges
- Local community groups
- Coffin Works Advisory Group
- Arts and cultural organisations.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

EXPERIENCE & KNOWLEDGE

- Expertise in collection care
- Expertise in curating exhibitions (with collections)
- Experience in project management
- Experience working with graphic designers and museum interactive developers
- Experience of developing and delivering collection management systems and protocols
- Experience of working with volunteers

- Experience of working with the public
- Expertise in delivering training
- Appropriate knowledge of H&S
- Knowledge of current collections care and display practice
- Knowledge of up to date interpretive techniques
- Knowledge of industrial, urban or social history
- Interest in built and documentary heritage.

SKILLS AND ABILITIES

- Project management skills
- Excellent presentation and written skills
- Good people and communication skills
- Ability to use social media to promote collections and exhibition work
- Ability to work enthusiastically and methodically on an independent basis
- Ability to work under pressure
- Enthusiasm for and commitment to engaging with volunteers, BAME groups, young people and families
- Self confidence in dealing with people of all ages and all abilities
- Ability to work well as part of a team and in partnership
- Excellent IT skills in all the standard programmes plus a knowledge of museum IT systems and some website knowledge.

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

Degree or equivalent and/or appropriate professional qualification