

# SKILLS COLLECTIONS TRAINEE: A VARIETY OF LEARNING

July 11, 2014 Historic Environment Scotland Curation, Day of Archaeology 2014, Historical Archaeology Collections, collections trainee, Heritage Lottery Fund, HLF, John Marshall, RCAHMS, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Skills for the Future, trainee, traineeship

**Name:** Gillian Rodger

## **What do you do?**

I am a Heritage Lottery Funded Skills for the Future Collections Trainees at RCAHMS.

## **How did you get here?**

As a creative youngster I've had a fascination with visiting and photographing historic places and objects as long as I can remember. Though I grew up near Chester, my family are all Scottish and having enjoyed many childhood summers exploring the Scottish countryside and going to various Historic sites, I've long since wanted to move to Scotland, to promote and get involved with maintaining Scottish Heritage.



*Working on John Marshall Material at my Desk*

Unsurprisingly then during my Art History undergrad I turned towards researching Medieval Art and objects and on returning to Edinburgh for my masters I became focused particularly on aspects of Global Material Culture and Collection Histories, whilst also collaborating with the NMS and interned on the

Carved Stones Project with RCAHMS. Getting to apply and earning the chance to work as a skills trainee at RCAHMS felt like the perfect opportunity to combine my personal and academic interests whilst enabling me to gain greater experience in the Heritage Sector and in Collections.

### **What are you working on today?**

Today, as is usual for skills trainees, I have been involved with a variety of different activities! I have been on the search room desk this morning, answering enquiries, aiding visitors with their research and hearing some brilliant family stories.

In between enquiries I've also started researching the sculptor John Marshall (1888-1952) in order to catalogue a fascinating box of his material for public access.



*John Marshall box of material*

So far within the box I have discovered his sketchbook of sculpture from 1911, a worldwide picture postcard album and many photographs of himself and colleagues dressed for an ECA Revel Party, including Sir Robert Lorimer. This afternoon I have also been finishing organising and re-housing many excellent Threatened Buildings Survey Drawings completed by RCAHMS survey staff .

### **Favourite part of your job?**

I would say the favourite aspect of my job is in fact the variety of activities we do during the placement. For example, so far outwit our varied ongoing collections work programme; I have been on placement at the National Galleries, attended heritage/medieval conferences, visited the outreach trainees on placement, worked with conservation on re-housing collections and done digital accessioning [see

pictures]. In the next month I will also be invigilating at the RCAHMS Commonwealth pavilion for the Sightlines film, working with the NCAP team and beginning work with the other trainees on our big showcase project at Stirling Castle!



As such our job gives us the opportunity to learn lots of different skills, figure out my own strengths and interests, meet a variety of fascinating people and contribute to the work of the commission and Heritage in Scotland in various ways! So yes, getting the chance to have constant variety and new challenges in my work is fantastic.

### **What did university not teach you?**

Despite Art History being a visual degree primarily focused on specific objects or artworks, there is a surprising lack of requirement to actually see and handle the tangible material one is researching, and for much of my art historic research I only utilised photographs, drawings or witnessed objects in their museum setting.

When I began to handle historical objects and material collections and research their collection histories for my work here, I was shocked at how little I had previously appreciated the benefit of having a tangible experience with collections. Not only this, but also just how important that form of first-hand experience can be for producing the best personal and academic research. For example, the scale, exceptional detail or even makers marks on collection material are rarely comprehensible from a photograph alone!

After this realisation I have and will certainly continue to be, an advocate for the promotion of access to original collection material and collections histories where possible, and hope I can continue working and promoting such values within Scottish Heritage beyond this traineeship!

To see a vine of my day, [click here](#)