

## **PRESERVING THE PAST WITH FORWARD-THINKING TRAINING**

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Woodhorn Museum and Archive Centre might thrive on preserving the past, but when it comes to developing the skills of its workforce, its approach is bang up to date.

Placing itself firmly at the heart of a forward-thinking recruitment and training campaign, the County Archives Service which is based at Woodhorn, has recently appointed its very first apprentice.

Nineteen year old Robin Brownlee-Sayers, from Whittingham, took up his post with the Archives Service through an Apprenticeship in Business and Administration.

The move forms part of a wider strategy by Northumberland County Council, which oversees Woodhorn, to inject new skills across the organisation. As a result, the Council unveiled a major campaign to recruit 50 new apprentices this year.



As well as Woodhorn, other Council departments benefitting from the recruitment drive include the Fire Service, the School Improvement Team and the Specialist Advice Centre.

Although Woodhorn was initially set up in the 1980's as a coal mining museum, it is now home to the Northumberland County Archive Service. A series of visiting exhibitions, an abundance of tourists and a huge surge in people carrying out family and local history research, keeps the archive busy all year round.

Jo Patterson, Senior Archives Assistant, explains: "We are an incredibly active service, which welcomes the general public, schools and education visitors. We also play host to people from far and wide, including the USA and Australia.

"The archives section in particular has seen a growing number of researchers looking to find out more about everything from Border conflicts, legal agreements and plans through to photographs, maps, births, deaths and marriages.

“And as well as our archive materials on site, we also provide a web based electronic catalogue. This means that people can log on to our online systems and trawl through over 250,000 records from the comfort of their own homes.”

Robin is thriving on his contribution to the archives team, despite having had no previous experience in this particular field.

It was an advertisement for potential apprentices in the local newspaper which caught his eye. Following a successful interview he was offered the job and is already providing a much needed pair of extra hands.

“Robin has really got to grips with the job, and has already become a valuable member of our archives team. He is involved in a whole host of duties that support the archivists and para-professional staff. This is bringing added value to the museum and our visitors too,” said Jo.

“As well as re-packaging and cataloguing our collections, he is digitising original documents such as maps and plans which can then be added to our online catalogue [www.northumberland.gov.uk/collections](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/collections). What’s more, these activities are helping to generate additional income for the museum thanks to the fees we charge for some of these extra services.

“Now that I’ve experienced the benefits of Apprenticeships first hand, I’m a real advocate. I would recommend this type of structured recruitment and training programme to all employers. As well as bringing new blood into the organisation, it allows you to mould people to your specialist areas of work,” she continued.

On top of the skills and knowledge Robin is learning in the workplace, he is working towards a nationally recognised qualification and receiving additional support and training from Northumberland Adult Learning Service, which is also part of the Council.

Talking of his Apprenticeship, Robin said: “I feel really lucky to get paid to learn and gain real work experience at the same time. I’m also following a career path that’s in tune with the things I like doing.

“I find the work really interesting and no two days are ever the same. I can see the results of what I do each day and how it’s benefiting the museum and its customers.

“Apprenticeships are a brilliant idea. The skills I’m gaining are relevant to this particular industry and will stand me in good stead when I’m ready to move up the career ladder. I also don’t have to worry about student debts and finding a job.”

John Wayman, regional director, National Apprenticeship Service, added: “Apprenticeships are relevant not only to the private sector, but also to a whole range of organisations and roles across the public sector too. This

includes Local Government, the Armed Forces, the NHS, schools, colleges and universities.

“Northumberland County Council is one of a growing number of public sector organisations employing apprentices. As well as developing the skills of local people and involving the community in delivering local services, Apprenticeships are seen as a way of growing the workforce of the future.”

To find out more about employing apprentices within your organisation, please contact the National Apprenticeship Service on 08000 150 600 or visit the website [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)