



Local History Café – Erewash Museum

Local History Café (LHC) facilitates heritage and well-being get togethers for over-50s across the Midlands, serving up monthly local history talks and creative activities along with tea and cake. LHC offers unique volunteering opportunities by working in partnership with heritage sites, allowing volunteers to work together with Museum staff and members of the community to tackle loneliness and social isolation. At Erewash Museum, LHC drew upon an existing pool of volunteers who work in the Museum's highly successful volunteer-run tea room, as well as welcoming new faces.

A small team of dedicated volunteers have been working at Erewash LHC since November 2017. Volunteers have contributed in diverse ways and have been given the opportunity to draw upon existing talents, as well as to develop new skills. For example, one volunteer made use of her background in adult education and historical research to lead a session on life in the workhouse. The Volunteer Project Coordinator has, drawing upon her professional experience in academia, worked with the Project Director and the Museum's Collections Officer to recruit speakers from neighbouring universities who have kindly lent their expertise to LHC.

Volunteers have contributed to the project in numerous ways, but the most important of these is their role in welcoming Café members by extending a hand of friendship, supporting them by listening with a patient ear. From pouring cups of tea and offering cake to sharing reminiscences about life in the local area in decades gone by, volunteers are at the centre of what makes this project work.

Our volunteers are actively involved in shaping the project as it goes forward: at the end of each Café, they work with Museum staff to evaluate what is going right (and wrong!), offering ideas for improvements or adjustments.

We hope that the strong volunteering model we have established can inspire the various Cafés that are starting up across the region and look forward to meeting with other regional Cafes this Summer. In terms of evaluation, De Montfort University's Centre for Ageing are evaluating the impact of cafes on social isolation and loneliness. A future goal is to study empirically the benefits of this project for volunteers also.

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