



# Volunteering at the GPI

## *Opportunities for Volunteers to Work in Archives and Outreach Activities:*

The George Padmore Institute (GPI) would like to welcome volunteers to work with us on our current and future projects to preserve, catalogue and provide public access to our archives. Collections relate mainly to the black community of Caribbean, African and Asian descent in Britain and continental Europe from the 1960s onwards. Material includes the archives of our late founding chair, John La Rose (1927-2006), one of the most important activists in Black British and Caribbean history. Further information on the George Padmore Institute and John La Rose can be provided or please see our website [www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org](http://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org).

We have always recognised the invaluable contribution volunteers can make to our work. The skills and commitment of volunteers can be used in many ways to support us as a charity and increases the pace at which we can process collections of archival material or deliver outreach activities. Volunteers can, in turn, pursue personal interests and gain new experience. The opportunity to meet and interact with other staff, volunteers and members of the community also helps to build confidence.

## *Who can be a volunteer?*

Anyone who has the time and interest in supporting an independent archive committed to making Black British and Black European history accessible to all. We would like to encourage volunteers of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to assist the GPI in its work.

## *Volunteering during the Covid-19 Pandemic*

Opportunities for volunteering have been restricted by lockdowns and the need to socially distance within our small building. As of February 2021, the GPI remains temporarily closed to the public and all staff are continuing to work from home. Our volunteer team are also working remotely at present and this is likely to continue until we have a better idea of what lies ahead.

Examples of volunteering tasks that can be carried out at home include audio transcription work (or checking/proofing transcripts produced by other volunteers or members of staff); research; writing material for our website and similar. Unfortunately, all of our on-site cataloguing work has stopped, with many catalogues waiting to be completed. We also face a back-log of digitisation work.

## *Examples of Volunteering Skills and Tasks (Outside of Covid-19 Restrictions)*

### **What skills do I need?**

The following skills and abilities are valuable: attention to detail; basic computer skills; good composition skills; ability to work on one's own; ability to work in a team; neat handwriting; flexibility; patience.

The following would be advantageous but not essential: some knowledge of the history of the black community over the last 50 years; any background knowledge about John La Rose.

### **Where will I be working?**

The majority of work will require handling original documents and this will be carried out at the George Padmore Institute, located at 76 Stroud Green Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 3EN. However, some typing, planning, publicity and research projects could be carried out from home.

Please note that the Institute is located in a former domestic property. It occupies the three floors above the New Beacon Bookshop, which is located on the ground floor. There is no lift in the building and there is a steep step to the front door. If you feel that you would have difficulty accessing the Institute we may be able to arrange work that can be done from home. Please speak to the Archivist at the George Padmore Institute to discuss your needs.

### **How often do I need to work?**

You can come in on a day and time that suits you, providing the GPI is able to accommodate you in terms of staff resources, desk space and opening hours. Regular work patterns are beneficial when managing projects, but we can be flexible. You may wish to spread your work out over a long period or do a short placement instead.

### **Will I receive training?**

Yes, you will be given an induction session plus any training, guidance and information sheets necessary for the work you have agreed to undertake. You will be supervised by a member of staff or mentored by an experienced volunteer. Work will be logged so that we can keep track of progress and also evaluate the project over time.

### **What tasks will I be doing?**

You may wish to concentrate on one area of work or try out several different tasks. Core tasks include the following:

Conservation and Preservation: Cleaning archival material: the removal of superficial dust and dirt using brushes and other conservation equipment. NB: Not recommended for anyone suffering from respiratory problems or eczema, although dust masks and gloves can be provided.

Conservation of archival material: we currently recruit a qualified Conservator to undertake this work but we would also like to provide learning opportunities for volunteers in basic conservation skills such as mending tears in newspaper and learning how to handle fragile material. This may require travelling to the Conservator's own conservation studio in London.

Preservation packaging: replacing existing boxes and files with appropriate packaging to prevent damage in storage and handling.

Creation of lists and indexes: We can improve public access by typing basic lists and indexes in the absence of a full catalogue. Draft lists can also aid in the production of full catalogues and can speed up the cataloguing process.

Box listing: producing summary lists of the contents of boxes prior to cataloguing. This also helps with the location of material.

Cataloguing: Volunteers can be invaluable when helping to catalogue archive collections. This can be a time-consuming and detailed process. We will assess the skill levels required for cataloguing specific documents within the collection.

Some people may prefer to sort and identify material. Others can learn how to create catalogues before inputting the data onto a database (training will be given in use of software). Or you may enjoy the challenge of working through multiple stages, turning previously unidentified material into a detailed catalogue that can then be made available on-line.

Numbering and Locating Archives: Reference numbers need to be written on documents once material has been catalogued. This is time-consuming but essential to ensure that we can locate documents and keep individual sheets in order. You will be working in pencil. Neat handwriting required!

Outreach: We aim to promote the archives through a number of outreach events and mini projects. This could include working with schools, delivering workshops, talks and creating and running exhibitions.

We envisage opportunities for volunteers to assist with research and planning, liaison, design, production, publicity and running of each event and project. We will be able to clarify tasks as each event and mini project develops and evolves.

Digitisation: We need to select visual and audio material suitable for digitisation, subject to copyright and conservation constraints. This could involve research to establish holders of copyright and obtaining permission to copy material. We are also interested in anyone with the ability to scan and photograph material, undertake audio conversion projects and manage the resulting data files.

Training: Perhaps you would be interested in sharing your own fields of expertise by delivering a talk or an informal session to other members of staff, volunteers or to members of the community?

Running Research Service: We also need to maintain our existing services alongside any cataloguing project. You can help us to supervise our search room, assisting staff to deal with researchers, providing advice on existing collections and carrying out photocopying.

*How do I become a volunteer?*

We would prefer to invite you to an informal interview so that we can establish people's interests, skills and needs. Given the current lockdown, this can be carried out virtually, rather than meeting in person. Similarly, if you feel you are unable to attend in person due to difficulties accessing the building, we can always contact you by phone or online.

You will receive a copy of our volunteer policy and, if you agree to join us, you will be asked to sign a basic agreement. The work will not be contract based.

Please note that we currently have a waiting list for people interested in volunteering, but we can add you to the list.

*If you are interested in volunteering at the George Padmore Institute or would like to learn more about our work, please contact:*

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Thank you!  
Feb 2021