

## Staff Profile

### Rachel Toner, Visitor Engagement Officer at Armagh Robinson Library and No. 5 Vicars' Hill



Rachel talks about the team she works with,

“We are a close knit team who work together to support the future of the library. I love working with the team as they provide a welcoming and supportive environment.”

The Team:

Carol Conlin – Assistant Keeper

Robert Whan – Director

The Very Revd Gregory Dunstan – a Governor and Guardian of the Library

Thirza Mulder – Archivist

Lorraine Grattan – Administrative Officer

Stephen Day – Registry Officer for No.5 Vicars' Hill

Plus our wonderful volunteers who give up their time to support the Library and No.5.

## ABOUT THE LIBRARY AND NO.5:

Armagh Robinson Library and No 5 hold many wonderful collections of manuscripts, printed books, pamphlets and periodicals, atlases, prints, coins, gems, medals and archaeological artefacts. Archbishop Robinson founded this Library in the heart of the City of Armagh in 1771. His aim was to share his own collection of books and fine art with the general public. It is a wonderful place where all are welcome to visit, either to consult the books or just to take in the wonderful atmosphere.

No 5 Vicars' Hill was built in 1772 as the Diocesan Registry by Archbishop Richard Robinson as part of his plans for the improvement of the City of Armagh. It held records for the Church of Ireland and Armagh Diocese: the octagonal rooms contained many public as well as Church records. While the Diocesan records are no longer kept in the building, some examples are on display, with ancient coins, gems, significant prints, early Christian artefacts and other collections and curiosities from Armagh Robinson Library. This hidden gem holds many wonderful treasures to be uncovered.

## WHEN I STARTED AND WHEN PROJECTS DEVELOPED:

I started volunteering with the Library in 2015 following the completion of my undergraduate degree. I have been working here in various roles since then and I have been employed as the Visitor Engagement Officer since November 2018. The role was created to help the Library expand and cultivate its audience development. It spawned in many ways from our work towards becoming a dementia friendly museum and our desire to work with groups unfamiliar with us.

## WHAT IS MY ROLE/ WHAT AM I INVOLVED WITH:

As Visitor Engagement Officer, it is my role to deliver a warm and welcoming visitor experience for those who visit the Library and No.5. I welcome visitors to the Library, providing them with information about the history of the building, the books and Armagh. I assist visitors in their research interests and aid in enquires. I also take part in the delivery of tours to all sorts of visitors. During our tours we try to find particular items that will be of interest to the groups who visit – this makes each tour special for the visitors.

We are able to pitch the tour depending on the visitor needs. Our 'dementia friends' training has given us insight into how our signage, layout, noise levels and manner can impact a visitor living with dementia. This training has not only filtered into our tours, but also how we greet and interact with walk-in visitors. Wearing our dementia friend badge is a way in which we communicate non-verbally to visitors. We want to welcome those living with dementia and their carers to the Library and to show that we will support their visit with care.

I also compile monthly reports of the visitor numbers for the Library and No.5 and analyse our visitor books. This gives the staff the opportunity to see where are visitors are coming from and allows us to get feedback from the visitor comments. It is a lovely experience to see the comments which visitors take time to share with us.

It is part of my role to develop our audience and expand the type of visitors we receive at the Library and No.5. My colleagues and I have been doing this through connecting and working with groups who may not have previously been to the Library before. These include Alzheimer's NI and Arke Sure Start as examples.

#### WHY WAS MY ROLE ESTABLISHED/WHY DID I WANT TO UNDERTAKE IT:

My love of history and literature was a big draw to working at the Library and No.5, but also my love for working with people. My studies in the arts, and seeing the benefits it can have on people, is close to my heart.

In my previous work with the Library and No.5 I had been blessed with the opportunity to garner various experiences which I had never had before. The chance to help in putting together exhibitions, aiding in delivering tours to large groups of people, have been huge confidence boosts and have encouraged me to push myself out of my comfort zone and develop my skills.

Having the opportunity to continue working with the Library team was a huge draw to this role, as it is like working with a family! I also know that the Library has great potential and does amazing work. Not one day is the same in the Library. You may be working with a researcher one day and then a group of children the next day. The variety is wonderful and it is a very motivating environment.

#### HOW DO I DELIVER MY ROLE?

Team work is a key aspect of this role and the team at the Library and No.5 are some of the best people to work with. We are always keen to make warm and positive connections through individuals and groups we already know, as well as reaching out to new groups and seeing how we can work together.

We have been able to work with groups and individuals either through tours, hosting events or by working together on joint projects.

The Library and No.5 are keen to work with our local community, as well as those from further afield! Our work with Alzheimer's NI has given us the opportunity to connect with in the Armagh area. This has encouraged us and given us the confidence to run dementia friendly events and to connect with carers via support workers.

#### PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE, WHAT DREW ME TO THIS KIND OF WORK?

I have always been interested in history since my GCSEs. I chose to do my placement that year in Armagh County Museum in and have many fond memories of the experience. From then, history, books and a love of learning drew me to taking the leap and reaching out to the library staff, in the hope that I could volunteer with them.

Little did I know that I would then be brought on as a staff member! Being surrounded by books and an environment where you are encouraged by your team is a great feeling.

While working in Armagh Robinson Library in a previous role, I completed my Masters in Arts Management from QUB. Working in the Library during this time allowed me to bring my work experience to my university learning. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn about the theory of managing a museum while working in that environment.

#### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF LIBRARY AND NO.5:

The Library and No.5 will continue to develop our audiences and work hard to share knowledge and the love of learning to all who visit us. Through developing our audiences we hope to continue working with new groups and cultivating an environment open to all.

We are dedicated in our goal towards working to become dementia friendly. We at the Library and No.5 know that this is not just a one stage process and that it is continuous. Through working with Alzheimer's NI, NIMC and others, our goal is to continue to make our buildings and the visitor experience, one that will provide a pleasant and rewarding time, for those who take the time to visit us.