



Passport to your future

Husnara's Story

Husnara Bibi is working at Birmingham Back to Backs

A unique property hidden in the heart of England's burgeoning second city.

Cupboards, doors, cellars, steep stairs, crooked stairs, more stairs, secret passageways, the smell of coal fires and burning candles; this was my first impression of the Birmingham Back to Backs.

The Property

the Back to Backs is the last surviving court of terraced houses, only one room deep and sharing a back wall. For over 200 years the court housed a range of working class families who migrated to the city from across Britain and often from further a field, with many practicing a variety of crafts yet working from home in tiny cramped spaces.

The Back to Backs were restored by the National Trust and opened to the public in 2004, now providing an insight into the lives of four families that lived in the properties in different time periods. The show houses reflect the lives of inhabitants during the 1840's, 1870's, 1930's and 1970's by evoking the original atmosphere of the properties through reconstruction and individual guided tours.

My first two weeks

In my initial two weeks at the Back to Backs I took part in a range of activities to increase my knowledge and understanding of the history of the property and how it operates. I spent some time working with volunteers on educational sessions as school children accessed first hand experience of Victorian life by carrying out activities such as lighting coal fires, doing washing and being informed of the various awe inspiring unhygienic practices of earlier occupants of the property.

In the reception I was able to witness the management of visitors as each group are registered and conveyed around the property. I also shadowed a number of tours where a variety of quirky and singular tour guides take visitors around the four show houses giving them information and anecdotes about the occupants, bringing the still life rooms alive.

What was involved

On certain days I assisted the Operations assistant with routine housekeeping duties; cleaning and lighting fires and candles, winding clocks and ensuring the houses were ready for visitors. I've also had the opportunity to assist the Conservation and Housekeeping volunteer in greater care of the sacrificial and conservation collections at the property.

As part of my initial training two great days were spent in Swindon getting a general introduction to the National Trust, learning more about housekeeping and the Skills for the Future training scheme. I was able to meet the rest of the trainees from across the Future training scheme. I was able to meet the rest of the trainees from across the country as we also learnt how to manoeuvre the Collections Management System, a database which holds details of most items in the trust's collections.

Apart from getting to grips with the Giant that is the National Trust Intranet I have also been a guinea-pig for upcoming knitting workshops taking part in a rehearsal and managing to gain knitting skills!

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What I have learnt:

1. I witnessed the management of visitors as each group are registered and conveyed around the property.
2. I assisted the Operations assistant with routine housekeeping duties; cleaning and lighting fires and candles, winding clocks and ensuring the houses were ready for visitors.
3. I've also had the opportunity to assist the Conservation and Housekeeping volunteer in greater care of the sacrificial and conservation collections at the property.