

Photography Project at The Postal Museum

The Postal Museum at Mount Pleasant, near Kings Cross, are looking for help with the photography element of their project, Addressing Health, which focusses on understanding the health of postal workers between 1858 and 1908. The museum will re-open on 17th May and from the start of June they are looking for two types of help from U3A members in the London area.

The first is that we need to photograph the pension records of approximately 28,000 post office workers between 1858 and 1908. There are usually four pages for each person. The documents are bound into large volumes and will be marked out for the person taking the photograph. These records provide us with information about a person's sickness records as well as their reason for retirement from the Post Office and their personal details. We are using this information to find out about health and sickness in the workforce, as described in the recent U3A magazine.

The second kind of help is with processing these images. We need to crop them and ensure that they are of sufficient quality and the correct size to upload to the Zooniverse platform, where we have a project webpage to help us transcribe the data for each person. This will involve us sending people some images and for them to check their quality and crop using freely available software. We'll provide instructions on how to do that and cover the cost of any licenses if needed. This can be done from someone's home whereas the photography has to be undertaken at The Postal Museum itself near Mount Pleasant in Clerkenwell.

We need to have these photographs for two reasons (i) to create a permanent digital resource for The Postal Museum and (ii) so that we can upload them to a platform called Zooniverse where we can have them transcribed. When we ran our project the first time a couple of months ago we had over 1500 volunteers transcribe some of the years for which we had images. We ran out images very quickly and so we're now building them up again ready for another series of transcription events.

In terms of practical arrangements, we have a high quality digital camera set up linked to a laptop where the images will initially be stored. The camera is already set up in a rig and training will be provided by the archivists on how to handle the archives, and by the Museum's own photographer. The work will take place in a Covid-safe place with all precautions to ensure safety. We plan to have a rota of volunteers which will be managed by The Postal Museum's volunteer manager. Only one volunteer will be allowed in the room at any one time, together with a member of the Addressing Health team. All will be done at a safe social distance. We can provide a reimbursement for travel of up to £10 a day and also cover subsistence on the day.

If anyone is interested, they can contact me in the first instance at addressinghealth@gmail.com or by phone on 020 7848 2721 and I'd be pleased to register their interest or answer any further questions

Thank you in advance and if you need any further information please let me know.

With best wishes
Professor David Green