

Interns with Impact: Historic Environment Scotland Commemorative Plaque Scheme: Intern Kathryn Berry (Summer 2024)



KATHRYN



Historic Environment Scotland (HES) is the lead body for Scotland's historic environment; a charity dedicated to the advancement of heritage, culture, education, and environmental protection. HES is at the forefront of researching and understanding the historic environment and addressing the impact of climate change on its future. HES investigates and records architectural and archaeological sites and landscapes across Scotland and cares for more than 300 properties of national importance. The HES vision is that Scotland's historic environment is cherished, understood, shared, and enjoyed with pride by everyone.



HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND

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Through previous discussions Neil Gregory, Head of Outreach at HES and an alumnus of the University of Aberdeen had indicated he would be keen to support an intern, so when he was approached regarding Interns with Impact he readily agreed and was delighted the timing fitted around a planned relaunch of the HES Commemorative Plaque Scheme.



The role was to provide hands-on experience in running a public engagement scheme, to follow policy and guidance and create online content for HES audiences. Candidates were expected to have an interest in Scottish history, have excellent IT, communication and team work skills, have the ability to research to deadline and to be able to deliver process-oriented tasks.

19 students



applied for the role from most schools across the university, with the four shortlisted candidates coming from the Schools of Divinity, History, Philosophy, Art History, and Social Sciences.

The candidates chosen for interview impressed Neil:

"...in that they took greater care to show that they had read up on the Commemorative Plaque Scheme or could demonstrate in their cover letter how the internship might help them build upon the experiences shown in their CV, either to develop a career in the historic environment or in communications."

Kathryn, a fourth year History and International Relations student had already gained some experience in the museum sector and after thoroughly enjoying the History half of her degree, was keen to explore other heritage avenues to apply her skills in the advancement of public engagement with history, so this internship was ideal.



The HES interview used the STAR competency-based approach inviting students to give examples pertaining to Delivering Excellent Service, Teamwork, Communication, Planning and Organising, and Knowledge and Expertise.



Kathryn had prepared very well for the online interview and was offered the position. Neil and his colleague were impressed with the level of research that she had undertaken during her American History and black history courses.

They felt that her contribution of two articles for The HERstory Project, a project which aims to highlight and celebrate untold and under-represented women within the public sphere, was highly relevant. Kathryn also had many extra-curricular activities on her CV that she could draw on that made her stand out.

Kathryn's internship was based within the Marketing and Engagement/Outreach team and largely consisted of research-based tasks related to the Commemorative Plaque Scheme. It was a full-time role undertaken between July and August 2024 based in Edinburgh.



Neil shared the key elements of her internship 'Kathryn received a masterclass in creating biographies for a general audience interested in history from our Exhibitions and Research Manager, Jane Thomas. Then Kathryn worked with me and our Comms team on preparing blogs to promote the next nomination round, and she helped us create a long list of people for our advisory panel. Kathryn got stuck into some picture research and amendments to Wikipedia, many people's first port of all. We also got her to contact former nominators and people who have plaques on their properties. We threw in a couple of left field tasks too that I hoped would be fun – visiting the foundry in Peebles where our plaques are made, researching unveiling curtains, and joining us with the wire wool and micro-crystalline wax polish to have a go at cleaning a plaque in situ, as per the advice of the foundry'.



Two exciting moments from the internship for Kathryn was initially when she was successful with a piece of photograph research. "A search for a photograph of a plaque recipient had been underway before I arrived at HES (to no avail) and I was also unsuccessful on my initial online searches for a photo.

However, I returned to the task towards the end of the internship and managed to source two photographs of the person as well as permission for HES to use them. It was a very exciting moment when I realised what I had found and shared the news with the team!"

The second was "...when I was communicating with a plaque nominator who shared with me why the plaque she and her husband had successfully nominated was so important to her. I had already uncovered some of the ways plaques had impacted communities, but it was lovely to hear how the plaque continued to hold importance for the nominator years after it had been installed. The interaction really reinforced for me how impactful and beneficial the commemorative plaque scheme is".

Neil emphasised that Kathryn made a huge impact within her internship. "Kathryn's work on the new web pages and the judging panel will set us up well for success in the near future. We have a bank of blogs that we can use during themed history months and whenever we want to promote our work. There's added value in that Kathryn did tasks that we might never have got around to doing because of time pressures, but are actually incredibly valuable. Helping us further appreciate the social value of having a plaque scheme and what it means to the public will help develop our thinking going forward".

The impact on Kathryn was in refining her research and teamwork skills, while also equipping her with new skills in historical writing for wider audiences and social media content creation. It has deepened her understanding of cultural heritage, gaining significant insights into the various approaches to making heritage accessible and engaging for a wide range of audiences as well as into the different ways Scotland's history is preserved.

The internship has helped influence Kathryn's future career choices "I really enjoyed working on a project that connects the public and visitors with Scotland's history and I would be interested in pursuing this type of work in the future. I also thoroughly enjoyed the research work I undertook and am keen to gain further experience in this type of role. Moreover, the internship has helped me to realise the wide range of roles that can leverage a history degree - not just for the transferable skills, but also for its direct application to historical related work".