Volunteering at the GPI:

Introduction:

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 mainly relate to the black community of Caribbean, African and Asian descent in Britain and continental Europe from the 1960s onwards. Materials include 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 found on our website.

If you are interested in joining our volunteer team, please email us using the following address: info@georgepadmoreinstitute.org or phone the GPI on 020 7272 8915.

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:

We would like to encourage potential volunteers aged 18yrs or above of all abilities and backgrounds to assist the GPI in its work.

What skills do I need:

The following skills and abilities are valuable: attention to detail; basic computer skills; good composition skills; ability to summarise content; 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. However, some typing, planning, publicity and research projects could be carried out from home.

George Padmore Institute (GPI) is located above New Beacon Books at:
76 Stroud Green Road,
Finsbury Park,
London N4 3EN

The building is in the run of shops between Perth Road and Upper Tollington Park.
Nearest Underground/Rail: Finsbury Park station (about 8 minutes’ walk).
Bus routes run to the South and North of Finsbury Park station. The nearest bus stop to the GPI is on Stroud Green Road on the north side of the Upper Tollington Park road junction.
There are no parking facilities at the GPI or on surrounding streets.

Physical access:

Please be advised that, due to the layout of our historic building, the GPI is not currently wheelchair accessible. The GPI is on the first floor and access includes a doorstep and a flight of stairs. However, please contact us to discuss your needs.

How often do I need to volunteer:

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. On-site volunteering can take place from Monday-Friday between 10.30am and 4.00pm. We regret that we are unable to open at weekends. Regular work patterns are beneficial but we can be flexible. You may wish to spread your work over a longer period. Short placements are more difficult for us due to limited staff and desk space.

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 assisted by an experienced volunteer.
Work will be logged so that we can keep track of progress and evaluate projects 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 there may be opportunities to learn basic conservation skills.
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 the 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!

**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 or transcribe audio recordings.
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 Search Room:
We also need to maintain our existing public services alongside any cataloguing project. You can help us to supervise our search room, assisting staff to guide researchers, providing advice on existing collections and helping to retrieve materials.

How do I become a volunteer:

We would prefer to invite you to an informal interview, preferably in person, so that we can establish people’s interests, skills and needs. 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.

You have the right to withdraw from volunteering at any time.

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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Archivist
George Padmore Institute
76 Stroud Green Road,
Finsbury Park,
London N4 3EN
020 7272 8915

Email: info@georgepadmoreinstitute.org