

Student Volunteer Blog – Unframed Artwork Audit

This summer we have been very lucky to have two students volunteering with us from the University of St Andrews. One of these students, Tabitha Saunders, completed an audit of our unframed artwork collection. The work carried out during this project went on to influence our current art exhibition, *Cool, Calm and Collections*. Below she outlines the work she completed and reflects on her experience of volunteering with us.



I have been working alongside the curatorial team as an Art Collections Intern at the Scottish Fisheries Museum for the last eight weeks as a part of my Museums and Heritage Studies degree at St. Andrews University. During this time, I have undertaken an audit of twenty boxes of unframed artworks and inventoried, researched, and updated their catalogued entries on the museum database. I have learned to apply the theoretical knowledge of museums work in the workplace by following accredited procedures.

Going into this degree, I didn't know if I did want to go into the museums and heritage sector as I had no experience working in such places. I have only worked in hospitality and so this would be a big change in pace. This placement has, however, shown me that this is exactly where I want to be. I have found the work I have been performing in the museum to be genuinely rewarding. I have enjoyed researching paintings and photographs and finding a new relevance for them: I have especially been trying to find more information on some of the photography to try to elevate them from possible set dressing into full display pieces. For my research I have tried to use every resource at my disposal, including sitting in the remotest part of the collection stores to search through acquisition records of the last fifty years.

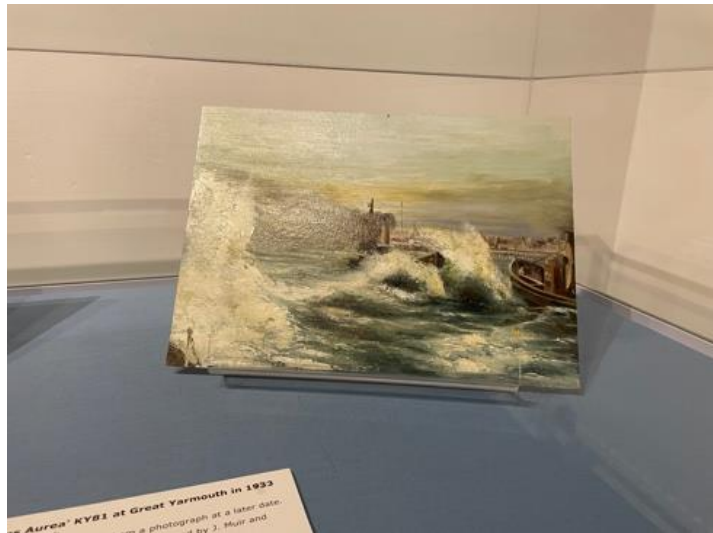


This allowed me to find more information about John Topham, for example. Near to the Museum's opening, it acquired around fifty photographs documenting life in small-line and salmon fishing, among other things. I am still trying to find why Topham

was active in Scotland given that he was from Kent and the rest of his portfolio is local to the South of England, but I have greatly enjoyed learning about his work and life while trying to understand where the photographs we have fit into his extensive career.

I have also found cross-referencing maritime subject matter across photographs and paintings to be really interesting for me. From doing this I have begun to learn more about the fishing industry and the different types of boats used. I have been able to find the same boats popping up in different works, and it's been really exciting to make new connections across the collections.

This excitement has carried over to rediscovering paintings made by artists whose work is currently on display in the museum. Bringing new attention to them and actively doing research on them has been really fun for me, and I'm thrilled that some of the artworks found during my audit have been used in the new *Cool, Calm and Collections* exhibition.



I am particularly fond of the two works I found by Mr. J Black which are now on display. They were both clearly painted at different times in his life, but they are united by the calm blue and yellow tones used for the sky.

I also enjoy a pastoral painting I found by J. Martin, painted in 1864. The composition has many elements but is painted simply. The artist also used watercolour, a medium I hadn't realised would be so strongly represented in the collection.





A painting I found by P Haxton, I believe, shows the harmony watercolour can bring to a composition when one is trying to echo the innate beauty of the mundane in a seaside town. I would love to have found out more about the artist and their story or about the place of this small painting in the museum collections, but sadly I have come to the end of my placement, and I have been unable to find any more information.

Volunteering here has definitely provided me with the necessary tools to go on in the sector with confidence. Everyone who works at the museum has been amazing with encouraging me and they frequently go out of their way to help me when I don't know how to do something. I'll be relocating back to England at the end of summer after living in Scotland for five years for university, but because of this internship I know I'll be in a very good position to start my own career in museums and heritage.

