Changing lives: theatre archive directs Matthew to a



Matthew Waters was working as a pensions advisor when he spotted an opportunity that would set him up for a career much closer to his heart.

A lover of history with a master's in Classical Literature, Matthew had volunteered at the Museum of London while studying and, while he knew he wanted to enter the world of heritage, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do.

Scrolling through the internet and applying for everything museums-related he could find, Matthew came across an opportunity to work on the archives of Peter Brook, Britain's greatest living theatre director, who also directed films including the 1963 classic *Lord of the Flies*.

Thanks in part to an HLF grant, the V&A Museum had acquired Brook's chaotic archive of personal papers, including correspondence with Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier and Ted Hughes, diaries, drafts of scripts and rehearsal notes from the past six decades.

The V&A is rehousing, cataloguing and digitising the collection at its archive, based in west Kensington, and the HLF grant also helped to fund outreach and volunteering opportunities.

Finding direction

The theatrical project was perfect for Matthew, who is something of an am dram fan, who has performed in local youth theatre productions of *Oliver!, Les Miserables* and *We Will Rock You*. An amateur artist too, he was keen to see the hand-drawn designs for costumes and sets.

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>
> - Matthew

He was taken on, juggling the volunteer role two days a week with another new position working with the planning team at his local council, as well as helping out at the Surrey History Centre.

It proved to be a life-changing experience for Matthew and gave him much-needed direction. "It has given me a plan, which is something I didn't have coming out of uni," he says. "It's been really good to see how it all works behind the scenes."

He learned essential archival skills such as object cleaning, cataloguing and appraisal, sorting out boxes, folders and envelopes stuffed full of papers and cleaning, measuring and logging the materials as well as learning to use the archivists' online catalogue system.

Discovering secrets

Highlights he came across included the scrapbooks Brooks' father lovingly put together of his famous son's press cuttings. There were also dozens of theatre programmes: "He would write about the actors in the programmes," Matthew reveals. "He would write G for Good, VG for Very Good and longer words for the people he didn't approve of!". The "opinionated" director notoriously fell out with Laurence Olivier and there were a few "stern letters between these two".

"It is great to see new things every day – [you get] a new folder of records and learn something else." Matthew says. "You know you are working to provide access for researchers and members of the public. It's closer than a museum

At the V&A he was one of only three remaining volunteers after the project finished - "No one from that project has lasted as long as me!" - and after the Peter Brook project was finished he was given his own task – to archive the museum's Sean Kenny collection. Matthew has worked over the past few months to catalogue archives about the Irish theatre and scenic designer. He also helped out on the V&A's archives for theatre company Talawa.

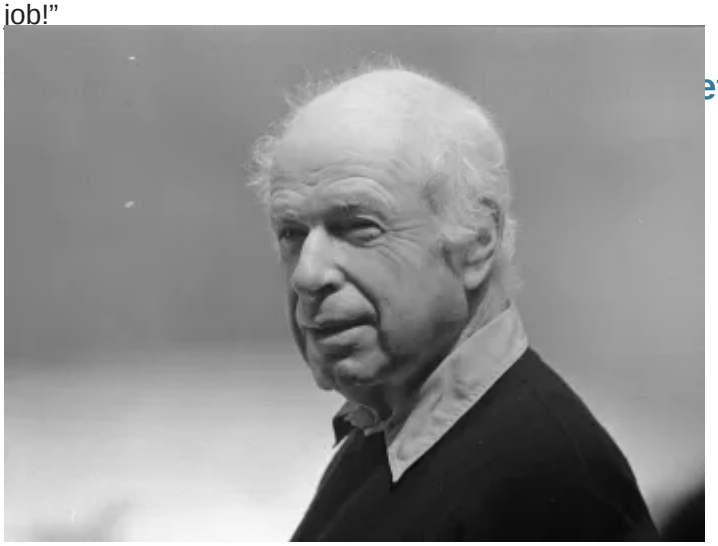
"As an archivist, you are sort of invading their lives, but it's the way you learn most about people," he enthuses.

Matthew is passionate about his new-found career plan. He is now studying for a postgraduate diploma in archives from Dundee University, working on evenings and weekends to get the professional qualification, which is essential for all archivists. "I couldn't have done it without the [V&A experience]," he says. "You need six months of volunteering before you can apply – because I was here, I got on the course."

Students are also expected to volunteer or work in the sector while they learn. Matthew will finish studying for the qualification in September 2018: "The aim is to get a paid role in archives while I finish the course," he says.

He adds: "Because of this experience, I have a direction and a life goal.

“It has set me on a path and I think I am going on a direction I am happy with – I just need to finish my course and find a job!”



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Peter Brook



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inee to curator

Changing lives: from biscuit tin to archive – photo reunites family