

Career Profile: Membership Officer

Name: Felicity Martin

Company: The SPAB

What first led to you considering a career in building conservation?

I love history and learning about architecture but I had never really considered a career in conservation. I sort of stumbled into it after working on a campaign against some property development. I realised how interested I was and wanted to understand more about how the system works.

What initial qualifications did you gain before starting your career?

I gained a BA in English and tempting as it was to stay in academic life I thought I should try the world of real work!

Did you do any volunteering or work experience before gaining a paid role? If yes, how did this help you in establishing your career?

Yes I worked for a tiny heritage charity, first as a volunteer and then in a part-time paid role. At the same time I worked for a small private art gallery as an assistant and helped with a campaign against a development in the area.

What was the most challenging moment on your career path and how did you overcome this?

It was very difficult to know what kind of jobs existed when I hadn't trained in the relevant fields and become familiar with the heritage industry.

Is there a particular building that inspired you to develop a career in building conservation? Or that inspires you now to carry on working in the sector?

I couldn't name one particular building but I really love London. The overdevelopment happening here at the moment astounds and angers me, which makes me more passionate about what the SPAB and the sector does to prevent historic buildings and the countryside being completely engulfed.

What was the most useful piece of advice you were given when starting on your career path?

That when you are starting out, you can rarely get a job somewhere you love working and using a skill that you love; it is often a compromise for skill or organisation. Once you realise which is most important to you, it's easier to narrow your focus.

What advice would you offer to someone who has perhaps studied a more general or one less directly relevant to heritage who wanted to pursue a career in the sector?

Try and find a job perhaps supporting building conservation work that uses the writing/research skills you have gained from a more generalist degree.

Do you think that hands on experience at a heritage property or site is important for anyone looking to work in the heritage sector more generally?

I think spending time in and talking about historic buildings helps to get excited about them. Enthusiasm seems to be an essential requirement when working for the charitable sector, especially one as niche as building conservation in which everyone is working because they are passionate about buildings, rather than more pragmatic reasons.