

Career Profile: Senior Architect

Name: James Crick

Company: Ferguson Mann Architects

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

My interest was nurtured at an early age by family outings to National Trust properties and the countryside (which admittedly I often took for granted). I was, apparently, especially interested in secret passages, windows in the wrong places and all the oddities typically found in buildings of a certain age. Exposure led to a passion for historic buildings, and ultimately my career choice. Whilst my career is a natural progression of my incidental interests, my ongoing momentum is sustained by the diversity of projects and skills, the history and often (literally) uncovering the past, contributing towards the stewardship of our historic environment, meeting craftsmen and getting hands-on with materials (to name a few!).

What initial qualifications did you gain before starting your career?

Becoming an architect involves adopting a prescribed university route. I undertook both a BSc and Masters at the Bartlett School of the Built Environment (University College London), followed by the professional qualification course at the University of Bath.

Did you then undertake further qualifications?

I have, to date, not undertaken any further formal qualifications. In the near future, I intend to submit my application for AABC accreditation, and I have had my eye on the MSc in Conservation of Historic Buildings at the University of Bath (if only there was enough time!).

What was your first paid role?

Following my undergraduate, I worked as an architectural assistant at a contemporary design practice, working on several residential projects involving new interventions within historic buildings. I remained for a longer period than I initially anticipated, enabling me to see projects onto site. Gaining site experience at this stage proved to be especially useful when seeking post-graduate employment, and offered some additional time to travel before returning to university.

What was the most challenging moment on your career path and how did you overcome this? Eg. Scarcity of jobs, lack of experience

During my BSc and MArch I repeatedly found resistance towards entering the conservation profession. Speaking with friends, this is not an uncommon attitude to encounter. In overcoming this, I found a happy medium between developing a contemporary architecture within my project work, whilst also exploring the fabrication of medieval timber technologies. I would suggest those interested in conservation speak with course leaders regarding the syllabus and attitude towards the profession.

Do you have experience of working in another field? If so, in what ways have you found this has contributed to your success in the heritage sector?

I have a part time university job as a cheesemonger, which has proved surprisingly useful at job interviews. It would seem most architects like cheese!

What advice would you give to someone who perhaps does not have the means to pursue a postgraduate qualification but wants to enter the heritage field in some capacity?

To qualify as an architect an established university education must be followed. This can be a significant challenge financially, and most architectural students, which I have encountered, have some form of parental assistance. Several new courses substitute the post-graduate studies with employment based training, offering the opportunity to work and earn whilst learning. This will, hopefully, widen opportunities within the profession. Alternatively there are many opportunities within organisations such as the National Trust, Historic England and the Landmark Trust, as well as opportunities within the heritage construction industry. Some roles will require additional training, however work whilst training can reduce the financial burden of fees.

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

I marginally missed my A-level grades for my preferred university course. I followed my interviewer's advice not to rush into a rash second choice, and to join an art foundation. I believe, without this, I would not have gained as much as I did from my undergraduate degree.