

Case Study: Behind the Scenes at the Big Clean, Birmingham Back to Backs

As the last surviving courtyard of Back to Backs houses in Birmingham, we offer the opportunity to explore over 200 years of the social history of Birmingham and unique insight into the life of the working classes.

As a small museum we often find it difficult to fit in our conservation work around the busy every day running of the site. Like all heritage sites we need the opportunity to carry out conservation, prevention and maintenance work. We take the opportunity to do this in January when we close to the public and we involve everybody within this challenge.



What you did and what made it successful or different

We do have a small team of dedicated and skilled volunteers who take on the day to day conservation work of the property. In January the conservation team share their skills with other volunteers at the property. This gives volunteers who are normally involved in other areas of the property such as administration the chance to get really hands on with the property.

The Big Clean is a huge success as we are able to carry out work to the houses that we are usually unable to do. The most successful element of the Big Clean is due the willingness of our volunteers to work alongside each other and learn as they go along. The conservation team share their expertise and knowledge, and volunteers from other roles have the opportunity to get their hands dirty.

What impact your activity had on visitors/ school groups

Involving everybody means that all areas of the property gain an insight to the conservation programme and how important conservation work is to the upkeep of the property. It also means



that the conservation work can be explored and celebrated in other areas. Our Tour Guides who have helped in the Big Clean often include a mention of the ongoing conservation work during their tours.

We find visitors often enjoy having a snippet of information that happens behind the scenes, it is essential that we can give a detailed explanation to why we close for a

whole month in January. It's not because we sit around drinking tea, we are working together as a team to make the Visitor Experience as enjoyable as possible.

Will your practice change as a result?

Previous Big Cleans have proved to be a huge success, where we have seen new relationships formed between different departments. We are learning all the time from this and have discovered that our volunteers have a host of skills they can share with us. We are looking at building on these skills and encouraging everyone to share their knowledge and experiences. We often celebrate the work of museums that are carried out within the public eye, it's a privilege to say we are proud of the work that is carried out behind the scenes and our volunteers who are so able and willing to make the magic happen.

