

# Looking forward with a helping hand from the past



The award-winning museum at Stonyhurst continues to take innovative strides forward while upholding traditions through the appointment of a brand-new Education Officer.



This is part of the Museum's ongoing commitment to providing enriching educational experiences for all pupils at the school, as well as for visiting schools and members of the public.

Housed in the historic Grade I listed College building, Stonyhurst's Museum and Historic Libraries boast an extraordinary collection of over 100,000 artefacts, manuscripts and historical books. The introduction of Esther Rollinson as

the school's first Museum Education Officer has seen the educational potential of these unique resources further integrated into the school's broad curriculum.

"Stonyhurst's collections are a wonderful and diverse resource where many items are used as prompts for learning, which makes it so much more exciting for our pupils," says Esther, who previously worked as a Museum Volunteer at Stonyhurst as part of her PhD.

"One group was recently shown an 18th century ship's lantern that had been cleverly designed so a candle stays upright even in high seas and storms. The pupils were fascinated by being able to hold it and study the design from an engineering perspective."

This is just one of the ways that history is brought to life in the Stonyhurst Museum, where objects are used to prompt curiosity, critical thinking, and a deeper appreciation



for historic narratives and cultures in memorable and meaningful ways.

Longstanding Museum Curator Dr Jan Graffius explains further: "Esther's role is pivotal not only in implementing engaged, interactive learning to a diverse range of pupils across all year groups, but also in our ability to widen access to the Museum more generally. This is a collection for everyone and can completely transform their understanding of many different subjects."

Stonyhurst first started collecting objects in the late-16th century and continues to lend these to exhibitions and other museums in the UK and internationally. "The more people who have access to these items, the more interest it generates," says Jan. "It is fascinating that the artefacts cared for at Stonyhurst are relevant to all levels of learning - from four-year-olds at our Pre-Prep and visiting schools, to research conducted by world-class academics."

Esther also leads an activity group in the Stonyhurst Museum, in which several Year 12 pupil volunteers help to research and create exhibitions, all while learning not just about the artefacts themselves, but also important curatorial skills such as

handling, labelling, and caring for the items in the correct way.

One of these pupils, Sophie, couldn't wait to get involved after visiting the Museum before starting at Stonyhurst in September 2023. She says: "It has enhanced my understanding on the importance of preserving history, how is it done and how helpful it can be. I have learnt so much, and I have even been able to access certain collections to take photos and ask questions for my EPQ Art project, which transformed my direction through combining patterns from historical West African ornaments with my original focus of modern artist techniques and portraiture. I think it's a resource to be very proud of, that sparks new ideas, and brings pupils together."

History pupil Cally also sees the benefits for strengthening knowledge: "While I was aware of the effort that museums take to preserve items, it is only through working in the Stonyhurst Museum that I've realised the many stories that a single item can tell. As a history pupil, seeing the items with my own eyes and learning about them really helps with what we are studying."

The Museum is an important part

of life for pupils at Stonyhurst, and many have expressed their particular enthusiasm for working with real examples that are relevant to their studies. And all those who use or work in the Museum recognise the valuable contribution that these objects have in shaping and challenging their understanding of subjects they cover in their curriculum studies.

"Miss Rollinson has been a great help and teacher in the Museum, inspiring us and giving us new ideas for our work," says Carlotta, one of the pupils who helped to curate an exhibition celebrating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's First Folio. "She has an amazing knowledge of the objects and listens to the ideas we have for the exhibitions subtopics we're working on; you can be sure that she will have found objects that support the topic by the next session."

Indeed, this group is working to support another exhibition, using Stonyhurst's extensive scientific and meteorological collections to explore natural history and the changing world. This will be open to the public on selected dates throughout the summer, alongside the ongoing Shakespeare exhibition, which has been reworked to give visitors another opportunity to explore the works of Shakespeare through the objects of the College's extensive collections.

**Visit the Stonyhurst website for more information about the Museum and to book a place at one of the upcoming summer openings.**

