

Thanks to National Lottery Players

JOB DESCRIPTION

Heritage Officer

Waterways Connecting Women to Birmingham's Canal Story

Organisation	Women's Wellbeing
Job Title	Heritage Officer
Salary	£16,800 per annum pro rata (based on £28,000 FTE)
Hours	22 hours per week — 1 year contract
Contract Type	Fixed Term — project duration
Location	Sparkhill / Smallheath, Birmingham (with travel across the region)
Responsible To	CEO / Project Lead
Project	Waterways

About the Project

This is a community heritage project rooted in waterways and the lives of UK migrant Bangladeshi and Pakistani women and their families in Sparkhill and Small heath, Birmingham. Using the city's canal network as a starting point, the project draws out the deeply personal connections between these communities and waterways — from the rivers of Sylhet and the displaced communities of Kashmir, to the industrial canals that once powered the factories where their forefathers worked.

The project tells a story that has rarely been told: how inward migration, waterways and industry are woven together in Birmingham's history. It will collect oral histories from women and the children and grandchildren of first-generation settlers, create a lasting physical and interactive digital heritage trail, and build a new generation of community heritage volunteers.

Research from the Canal & River Trust shows that South Asian women are among the least likely groups to use their local canals, often due to fear of crime. This project aims to change that by helping women reclaim these spaces as places of heritage, wellbeing and community.

Partners include the Canal & River Trust, Legacy WM, Birmingham City University, Nowka Bais, Midland Sailing Club, Saathi House, and heritage advisor. The project is supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF).

Digital Heritage Trail Overview

A key output of this project is the development of an interactive, mobile-friendly digital heritage trail along Birmingham's canal network. This is not a standard website update a digital resource built with and for the communities whose stories it tells.

The Heritage Officer will work with digital partners, volunteers, young people and community organisations to co-design and build this platform. Accessibility and inclusion are central: the trail

will be designed for communities with low digital confidence, and will include multilingual content, audio narration, subtitles and user-friendly navigation.

The digital trail will extend beyond the life of the project, supporting Birmingham Heritage Week participation, school educational resources, and wider tourism and cultural engagement. The Heritage Officer will help lay the foundations for long-term community ownership of this resource.

Heritage Themes This Role Will Explore

- The construction of Birmingham's canals by Irish migrant labourers under James Brindley and Thomas Telford and the untold stories of inward migration that built the city
- The rich waterway heritage of Bangladesh: 17th-century river trading in Sylhet, the East India Company's recruitment of Lascar merchant seamen, and early Bangladeshi settlement in UK port cities
- The Mangla Dam in Kashmir. How communities were displaced in the 1950s/60s and how many of those families settled in Birmingham
- Post-war migration to Birmingham: Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers at British Small Arms (BSA) and nearby factories in Sparkhill and Smallheath
- The significance of local waterways such as Edgbaston Reservoir, the Elan Valley, the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct at Llangollen — and their relevance to Birmingham's history
- Plants, fauna and biodiversity along the canal corridor, and how communities can protect these environments for future generations
- The growing cultural interest in Birmingham's canals, including through the lens of the Peaky Blinders, and how this can build wider engagement

Role Purpose

The Heritage Officer will be the driving force behind this project. Working directly with women and their families, the post-holder will lead on research, community engagement, oral history collection, volunteer training, and the creation of both a physical and interactive digital heritage trail centred on the experiences of Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in Sparkhill and Smallheath.

This is a hands-on, community-facing role. The right person will be as comfortable sitting with an elder woman recording her memories as they are coordinating a canal visit, curating digital content, or updating project records. A passion for social heritage, a genuine connection to the communities we work with, and a commitment to women's empowerment are essential.

Key Responsibilities

Women's Engagement & Community Outreach

- Place women and their families at the heart of all project activity. This is a project done with and by the community, not at it
- Build trusted relationships with Bangladeshi and Pakistani women in Sparkhill and Smallheath, using the organisation's existing networks and new partnerships
- Identify and sensitively approach first and second-generation women, and the children and grandchildren of early settlers, to take part in oral history recordings
- Plan all activities with cultural sensitivity; avoiding religious festivities, considering childcare and accessibility, and ensuring spaces are welcoming for women
- Work alongside partners experienced in engaging women in heritage
- Actively involve participants in shaping both the physical and digital heritage trail, ensuring their stories and priorities lead the content

Research & Heritage

- Research the industrial heritage of Birmingham's canals, including their construction by James Brindley and later improvements by Thomas Telford
- Investigate the history of Lascar merchant seamen, the East India Company and the early presence of Bangladeshi people in UK port cities
- Research the Mangla Dam displacement and the settlement patterns of Kashmiri communities in Birmingham
- Explore the history of BSA (British Small Arms) and other local factories that employed Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers
- Investigate the waterway heritage of Sylhet, Bangladesh, including 17th-century river trading
- Draw on the expertise of historians to deepen understanding of local industrial and migration history
- Document plants, fauna and biodiversity along the canal corridor and their environmental significance

Oral History & Storytelling

- Recruit, coordinate and conduct oral history interviews with community members, with particular focus on women's experiences and intergenerational stories
- Train and support a team of community volunteers to conduct oral histories such as interviews and record stories
- Coordinate the collection and digital presentation of oral histories, photographs, archive material and community stories linked to the canal network and migration experiences
- Oversee the production of audio and video content; including short films, audio guides and a documentary for the website, YouTube channel and digital trail
- Ensure all content is accessible, including for participants with limited digital literacy

Digital Heritage Trail

- Work with digital partners, Birmingham City University students, volunteers and community organisations to develop an interactive, mobile-friendly digital heritage trail along Birmingham's canal network
- Identify and curate heritage locations along the canal network, including industrial landmarks, waterways, biodiversity points, migration stories and community heritage sites
- Support the creation of QR code trail points and GPS-enabled heritage experiences to improve public engagement and accessibility along the towpath
- Work with schools, young people and volunteers to co-design digital content including audio guides, short films, photography and educational materials
- Support the development of the digital heritage platform to ensure it is accessible and inclusive, and user-friendly design for communities with low digital confidence
- Support the development of educational and tourism resources linked to Birmingham Heritage Week, local schools and wider cultural engagement activities
- Contribute to the long-term sustainability of the digital trail by supporting future partnerships, funding opportunities and community ownership of the platform
- Support improvements to the organisation's website and test digital outputs for accessibility with a cohort of women participants

Heritage Trail — Physical

- Develop a physical heritage trail centred on the canal stretch near Sparkhill, incorporating industrial landmarks, oral history waypoints, plants and fauna
- Ensure the trail reflects the stories and perspectives of Bangladeshi and Pakistani women and families
- Design the trail to last beyond the project; available during Birmingham Heritage Week and as an educational resource for local schools

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- Develop educational materials for schools, particularly linking to the Industrial Revolution and Geography curricula
- Work with partners to explore links to the Peaky Blinders cultural interest in Birmingham's canals

Trips & Outings

- Organise two coach trips to Elan Valley, ensuring all risk assessments are in place
- Organise and facilitate local visits with the support of volunteers
- Coordinate bellboating experiences with Nowka Bais and water-based taster sessions with Midland Sailing Club
- Arrange visits to Edgbaston Reservoir and the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct at Llangollen for community groups and schools

Volunteer Management & Training

- Recruit, train and manage a team of volunteers in oral history recording, multimedia and digital content skills, and event delivery
- Work with Birmingham City University's East Birmingham Student Movement to involve students in project delivery and digital output.
- Create opportunities for volunteers to develop transferable skills with pathways into heritage employment
- Maintain accurate volunteer records and ensure all volunteers are well-supported throughout

Digital & Media Outputs

- Oversee the production of audio and video interviews for publication on the organisation's website and YouTube channel
- Contribute to the development of a short documentary capturing the project's key themes and stories
- Support improvements to the organisation's website to ensure digital accessibility for all communities
- Ensure all digital outputs meet accessibility standards, testing content with participants
- Maintain excellent Microsoft Office skills for reporting and project administration

Project Management & Administration

- Work to the project delivery plan, maintaining an action plan and tracking milestones to ensure delivery on time and within budget
- Contribute to monitoring and evaluation activities, providing data and evidence of outputs and outcomes
- Attend and contribute to the project steering group
- Maintain accurate records and provide regular progress updates to the CEO
- Support budget monitoring, flagging any concerns regarding expenditure

Person Specification

We are seeking someone with a strong digital skills, passionate about Birmingham's heritage and a genuine connection to or deep understanding of the communities we serve.

Criteria	Essential / Desirable
Knowledge & Experience	
Knowledge of or interest in heritage, community history or related disciplines	Essential

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Understanding of the history and cultural heritage of Bangladeshi and/or Pakistani communities in the UK	Essential
Experience of community engagement, particularly with South Asian women and families	Essential
Understanding of the barriers that South Asian women face in accessing public spaces and heritage	Essential
Knowledge of Birmingham's industrial history, canal network and waterway heritage	Essential
Experience of oral history recording or conducting community interviews	Essential
Experience of volunteer coordination or supporting groups of participants	Essential
Experience of project coordination and working to delivery plans and milestones	Essential
Experience of working in the heritage, arts, culture or community sector	Essential
Digital Skills & Experience	
Experience of creating or contributing to digital content for public audiences such as websites, social media, audio/visual content or digital maps	Essential
Ability to use or learn content management systems, mapping tools or digital trail platforms (e.g. Story Maps, Google My Maps or similar)	Essential
Understanding of digital accessibility including the needs of users with low digital confidence, and awareness of multilingual and audio/visual accessibility requirements	Essential
Experience of working with QR codes, GPS-based tools or interactive digital resources	Desirable
Experience of co-designing digital content with community groups, young people or volunteers	Desirable
Basic video, photography or audio production skills for creating short films, audio guides or documentary content	Desirable
Skills & Abilities	
Excellent communication and interpersonal skills, including the ability to engage sensitively with diverse communities	Essential
Strong research skills including the ability to gather and synthesise information from multiple sources	Essential
Ability to produce written content for a range of audiences including website and social media	Essential
Basic multimedia skills including video recording, photography or digital content creation	Essential
Ability to plan, organise and deliver events and activities	Essential
Proficiency in Microsoft Office and digital tools	Essential
Ability to speak Urdu, Bengali, Sylheti or another relevant community language	Desirable
Values & Attributes	
Deep commitment to inclusion, equality and community empowerment	Essential
Sensitivity and cultural awareness when working with women and families from South Asian communities	Essential

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Self-motivated with the ability to work independently and as part of a team	Essential
Enthusiasm for heritage and a genuine interest in uncovering under-represented histories	Essential
Willingness to work flexibly, including occasional evenings and weekends	Essential
Commitment to environmental sustainability and the protection of natural heritage	Essential

Working Conditions

The Heritage Officer will be based in Moseley but will be doing outreach in Smallheath and Sparkbrook with regular work along the local canal network. Travel will be required to sites including Edgbaston Reservoir, Elan Valley, and the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct at Llangollen. Some outdoor work and occasional evening and weekend working should be expected.

Equal Opportunities

We are an equal opportunities employer and are particularly keen to receive applications from people with direct connections to the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities of Sparkhill and Smallheath. We actively encourage applications from people who are underrepresented in the heritage sector.

How to Apply

To apply, please send a CV and a covering letter (no more than two sides of A4) explaining how you meet the person specification and why you are passionate about this role to shabana@womenswellbeing.org.uk

Closing date: 25th May 2026

Interviews: 1st June 2026

For an informal conversation about the role, please contact Shabana Qureshi, CEO, at shabana@womenswellbeing.org.uk