

York Museums Trust

York Observatory

The Yorkshire Museum is one of a very small number of museums in the UK that has a working observatory. The York Observatory, built in 1831 with a telescope made in 1850 by the celebrated York telescope maker Thomas Cooke, is a prominent feature of the Museum Gardens that thousands of people walk past every year. Our volunteers open the observatory for visitors, explaining the history of the building and the collections it houses.



We demonstrate how the historic telescope operates and on fine sunny days we can occasionally do sun spotting. There are opportunities to learn how to do night time observing sessions and run evening sessions for visitors and specialist groups during the autumn and winter months,

but this is optional and is not the core part of the role.

The aim of the project is to increase awareness of astronomy in York and the role York has played in the history of that science. It offers a unique experience for willing volunteers to work in a stunning Victorian observatory and interact with members of the public.

Volunteers man the observatory in pairs and are supported by the staff team at the Yorkshire Museum and the Volunteers Team.

Training

No specific astronomical skills or knowledge are required, but a keen interest in astronomy and/or history is essential as volunteers are asked to learn about the history of astronomy in York and impart this knowledge to visitors in an interesting and enthusiastic manner. We provide object handling and customer care awareness training. Volunteers wanting to get involved with night time observing sessions will also undertake the appropriate training.



Time Commitment

The observatory runs on a rota basis. The Observatory can be opened any time from 11:30am to 2:30pm, any day of the week. Priority cover goes to Thursdays and Saturdays as we advertise the building is open on these days on our website. The minimum time commitment is one Saturday or weekday session every 2 or 3 weeks, though obviously volunteers can do much more if they want to.

Other essential information

As a charity, we do not have a budget for travel expenses or meal allowances, so unfortunately we are unable to reimburse travel or subsistence costs incurred by volunteers in the course of their day to day volunteering.

In addition, volunteers are asked to wear YMT volunteer t shirts, sweatshirts and name badges so that visitors can easily identify them.