

When I first started working at Dr Johnson's House as Collections Volunteer, I had not anticipated that I would end up falling in love...

Falling in love with Dr Johnson.

His gregariousness, humbleness and generosity, as well as his creative genius.

Johnson the abolitionist, philanthropist, scholar, lexicographer, master of the fine art of conversation and keen observer of human affairs.

Johnson the liberal, the egalitarian, the cat lover, the selfless and generous supporter of a medley of assorted characters he had taken under his wing.

Johnson the subversive, the non-conformist free thinker who did not hesitate to write a scathing, yet profoundly dignified letter of retribution to Lord Chesterfield whilst at the same time not hesitating to be associated with a penniless amateur doctor and former prostitute, since he valued them both for their kind hearts.

The very feat of writing the first comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language, alongside contributing essays, writing poetry, philosophical treatises, scholarly works, a play and novella, is a remarkable accomplishment, attesting to his creative genius, dedication, perseverance and sheer hard work. His remarkable command of the English language and immense reading, as well as his decision to embark on learning a new language (Italian) through self-study, his life-long devotion to lively debate and to the exchange of ideas, his sense of social justice and his at times angst-ridden self-doubt, because of his genuine striving to be a virtuous person, have all endeared him for generations to come.

On a personal note, my time at Dr Johnson's House, as well as being an invaluable experience in terms of the practical skills I acquired in collections archiving, working in a small historic house and helping out in the Box Office and with Events, has also been a truly educational experience on a whole other level as well. It has also taught me that working in a Historic House is an invaluable opportunity to travel back through time and to engage in debate with one of the great minds of the Georgian era, to trace the roots of many of the scholarly, literary, political and feminist traditions of today, to marvel at the sheer tenacity and intellectual alacrity of the mind of this great personality and to be inspired, in one's small way, to try and emulate his life-long devotion to learning, creative endeavour, humble self-betterment and to the sanctity of true friendship. Dr Johnson realised that, although scholarly work and writing had to be performed in isolation, no man is an island, and that engaging in meaningful conversations, exchanging ideas with people from all walks of life and from a truly diverse array of disciplines, areas of expertise and backgrounds, was indispensable to broadening the mind and sharpening the intellect. He was a keen

supporter of travel, indeed, and his great mental acuity meant that he can teach us a lot about the power of free thinking, study and the importance of debating an issue and studying it at length without falling into the trap of drawing hasty conclusions or blindly adhering to one's (often insidiously camouflaged) prejudices. Johnson was his own harshest critic, constantly plagued by self-doubt (in a way, this endears him to us even more) and yet, though this was a great source of anxiety for him throughout his life, it was also the unquenchable source of his creative genius, from which sprang forth seminal works of scholarship, literary criticism, fiction and, above all, his ground-breaking Dictionary of the English Language of 1755.

It is humbling to think that someone of such formidable stature and immense achievements as Dr Johnson, who remained true to the end to his demanding code of social justice and egalitarianism, who selflessly helped and supported many scholars as well as provided a roof for outcast eccentrics from whom he could not expect anything in return (indeed his guests were prone to require his constant attention, which he selflessly provided), his firm belief in the intellectual equality of women and black slaves, in short his devotion to the betterment of himself and to helping others realise their own intellectual potential, is a great lesson in Solidarity.

Johnson was not just a Genius. He was a Virtuous person, in the profound sense of the word. He practiced what he preached and was a living embodiment of dedication to Social Justice.

That is why, though I realise this may sound a bit clichéd, I will dare venture to state, that yes, I truly am in love with Dr Johnson. Thank you for providing me with this great opportunity to volunteer at Dr Johnson's House.

PS - Another unforgettable experience - having tea with my lovely colleagues! Tea and cakes at Dr Johnson's House. I was smiling inside, hoping that, from somewhere, perhaps, Dr Johnson himself was looking on at the scene in contentment.

Thank you again. Here's to this oasis of calm in the bustling City. Here's to tea and cakes, spirited talk and solidarity. Here's to a dedication and aspiration towards intellectual achievement and humble self-improvement.

Elena Paschos

Collections Volunteer, Spring/Summer 2014