



Who are you, where are you based and what do you do?

David Allen – I'm the Librarian at the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) in London. We are a learned society and our purpose 'is to advance excellence in the chemical sciences – to improve the lives of people around the world now and in the future'.

I work on my own in the Library which entails: running an enquiry service; managing a suite of third-party resources known as the Virtual Library; managing the contemporary and historical collections (including the digitally available content); liaising with other teams within the Society to provide information for news items, events, and publications related to the historical collection. I've been working from home very successfully during the pandemic. As most of our content is available digitally, I've been able to answer enquiries and direct people to content as I normally would. We have some content that is only accessible from within the Library and of course, the physical books have been inaccessible so I look forward to being able to get back to the library at least a couple of days a week within the next month or two.

What do you most enjoy about your job?

The most rewarding part of my job is answering family history enquiries. The enquiries often come from non-Members who are researching their family's genealogy and discover that a relative was a chemist. My predecessors were very good at filing institutional information about past members so I'm often able to uncover some interesting information such as where they lived, studied, and worked as well as their original application form to apply for Fellowship and sometimes I'm able to find a photograph.

Sometimes, I'll find some truly fascinating stories such as that of Herbert Garland, a chemist who worked with Lawrence of Arabia, and of Mabel Elliott, a former employee of the Society who helped capture a German spy.

What motivates you in your work?

My manager provides me with a great deal of support and I get inspiration for new projects from other colleagues across the organization. I also find it exciting when I uncover a story from a hitherto unknown scientist who's made a small contribution to society through their work. It's not always the ground-breaking, headline-grabbing discoveries or inventions that make a difference.

How has/can the M25 Consortium support you in your career?

I find that being able to communicate with other Librarians in different types of libraries is always incredibly valuable. Our members also value being able to make use of the Access25 scheme whereby they can make use of the libraries at other institutions.

What would it surprise people to know about you?

That I have a degree in Film Studies; it's not an obvious first degree for a Librarian but it's basically a literature degree in another medium. There are certainly many broad transferable skills that help in my profession such as historical research, identifying common themes, finding meaning, and fundamentally the ability to write well.

Complete the sentence: If I wasn't working in a library, I would be ... writing novels

because ... I'm an aspiring writer. I'm sure this is a common aspiration among library-folk and being a librarian hasn't stopped me writing but a full-time job does mean you have less time to dedicate to such a large undertaking.

David Allen, August 2020