

## **A volunteer perspective**

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### **Volunteering from a volunteer perspective**

In volunteering there are two things that need to be balanced. One is the interest of the organization; the other is the interest of the volunteer. They each have to offer something to the other for the partnership to work, so there is mutual benefit. The volunteer needs a sense of satisfaction and achievement and to feel that the contribution of their time and effort is valued. The organisation needs a volunteer that will be able to offer skills and ideas that will be of value to it.

Some of the most important things for a volunteer are:

- To match the needs of the organization with the skills of the volunteer. This is a good outcome for both parties.
- Making sure the volunteer knows what their job is. This doesn't necessarily have to be in a formal way - a few words from the person in charge of the job is often all that is needed to let the volunteer know that they are doing what's required.
- To have some involvement in the planning process; to be told about what is coming up in the future (in so far as it applies to the volunteers) and what's going on at the moment. It's just nice to be kept in the loop, to know what projects may be coming up and the factors influencing whether projects go ahead or not. We don't see this as a formal process - the supervisor could just discuss proposals with the volunteers so they could offer suggestions.
- To have a clear idea of the desired objectives and outcome of the project; the overall view of the finished result of the project. This could be in the form of a briefing or it could be done with a chart or schedule. We then can make best use of our knowledge and skills on the given project, to contribute to a better outcome.
- To be kept informed on progress - are we on time? have we gone over budget? Does work have to suddenly stop for a while? To be advised of changes to the program, so we can absorb those changes and perhaps help with problem solving.
- To have things to do; not to be idle for too long. It's a good idea to have a list of maintenance or inspection jobs on hand that can be undertaken if there is no other work to do.
- To have a chance to learn new skills (because you are never too old to learn), and to be able to pass on some of our skills to other people, not keep them to ourselves.
- Flexibility. No organisation is going to get it right all the time, just as volunteers aren't going to get it right all the time. There will inevitably be problems, you just have to accept this, learn from it and carry on.
- To take something positive out of all the work we do, whether it's on a big or small project – for example a new skill or satisfaction in doing a good job. This helps us and the organization.

A number of the previous points could be summed up in one word "Communication". In my opinion this is the most important thing. Without it everything else breaks down. It doesn't matter how good your programs are - unless they can be successfully communicated to those carrying them out they will fail.

Great satisfaction can be gained from volunteering, just in knowing you have done a good job. It doesn't have to be glamorous work on big projects all the time - most people realise that with a large collection of relics (many of which are in operational order) an ongoing program of preventative maintenance is necessary. This keeps the collection in the best possible condition - it may not be the most exciting work we do, but it is amongst the most important.

### **Why we became volunteers**

#### **Nigel:**

There are a number of reasons why I decided to become a volunteer. My son, Peter, and I had just finished building a car and I was looking for something new to do, when Peter saw a notice in the Canberra Times saying the Memorial was looking for volunteers.

My family has had quite a long association with the military and so I feel an affinity with the Memorial. One of my grandfathers served in the Boer and First World Wars and the other served in the Second World War in North Africa, Greece and New Guinea. My father was also in the Second World War in the navy, in which he continued to serve for 35 years. Then my elder brother also joined the navy and served in Vietnam. I spent a number of years in the cadets, then joined what was at that stage called Navy Office as a trainee naval draftsman. Coincidentally we have the bridge of HMAS Brisbane here, the ship my brother served on in Vietnam as a navigation and gunnery officer, and I also did some drawing work on her while I was at Navy Office.

I only stayed at Navy office for a few years - being young and restless I wanted to go and find out what the world had to offer. After trying quite a number of jobs I drifted into optics and became an optical dispenser/mechanic, eventually starting my own business, in which I am still involved.

I also have a great interest in machinery and engineering. Over the years I have had many cars and motorcycles which I have worked on - some a small amount, others a great deal. This culminated in building a Lotus Super 7 replica with my son which we still have. At home I have a comprehensive workshop equipped with a lathe, milling machine, MIG welder and quite a number of power and hand tools. So from this you can see why I thought the Memorial would be perfect for me.

I decided this would be a great opportunity to do something worth while and which I thought I would enjoy. After replying to the advertisement I received a phone call asking me to come in for an interview, which I did. It was with some trepidation that I turned up on the appointed day. I was met by Keith Borck, a friendly person who put my mind at ease. We came up to one of the offices, where he explained to me what the purpose of the

Treloar Annex was (the Memorial's large technology conservation and storage facility) and what would be expected of me should I be chosen as a volunteer.

He also mentioned that the Memorial had had a change of direction with regard to volunteers. In the past he said, it had been a bit of a "Boy's Club", where people turned up when they felt like it, but it was now run on a much more professional basis. This was borne out by the job-like interview, which was conducted in a businesslike yet friendly manner. I then filled out the required forms and after a while I was told I could start as soon as I wished.

To begin with I was coming in one day a week, which soon became two, which is what I still do. Volunteering at the Memorial has given me a great sense of achievement and fulfillment. I look forward to coming in each week. The other thing, which is perhaps the most important, is the many great new friends I have made - both among the volunteers and paid staff - and luckily for me all have been very generous in sharing their knowledge and skills.

In conclusion I would say volunteering for an organisation such as the Memorial is a great thing to do.

**Ian:**

I have worked at the AWM for about 20 months. My trade is turning, fitting, pattern maker, molder, welder, lighthouse workshop supervisor for 22 years and model engineer. While I was in the lighthouse service I was involved in restoring the Tasman Island lighthouse lens and pedestal for the Australian Maritime Museum, plus building many lighthouse displays for other museums.

I was reading Light Railways Magazine and there was a photo of a Hunslet steam locomotive FWW 4-6-0 Side tank 306-1218 which the Memorial had just acquired. I just had to be part of the restoration, so I rang the Memorial and had an interview and became part of the team restoring it to FWW configuration. My skills in repairing full size steam locomotives came in handy, as well as my skills in building 1/3 scale cane steam locomotives which I do for a hobby. The work was dirty but I loved it.

I am now working on the maintenance program which is important as the Memorial has a large collection of operating objects.