

NEW VOLUNTEERS INTRODUCTION

This brief forms the basis of an introduction to the RAF Air Defence Radar Museum for new volunteers. It provides a history and background to the organisation and an overview of volunteers' tasks and responsibilities.

Mission Statement. The full Mission Statement is contained in the Museum Business and Management Plan (BMP) which is available in the Museum Office. A brief summary is:

- A. To provide a focal point for the heritage associated with the air defence of the United Kingdom and to inform the public as clearly as possible of that heritage.
- B. To provide the highest level of customer care by ensuring that visitors receive a hospitable welcome, polite and helpful service and information and assistance of the highest standard.

History. The Museum, originally called the 'Air Defence Battle Command and Control Museum', was officially opened in 1994. Only 5 rooms in the main building were available and the Museum was only open to pre-booked groups who had to enter the Museum via the main RAF Neatishead gate. All work and tours were conducted by a small group of volunteers. In 1997 the Museum became a charitable trust and the Chair of the Board of Trustees was designated to the Officer Commanding RAF Neatishead. Today, the Chairman is Air Commodore Kevin Pellatt as the Museum is independent of the RAF. Kevin is the Master of the Great Hospital in Norwich which is his "day job"!

Early in 1997 a fence was installed to separate the Station and the Museum and public opening commenced on a one day per month basis. More of the building was released to the Museum and the rooms were designated for various display purposes. However, by the middle of that year it was becoming obvious that the Museum needed 'direction' which could never be achieved solely using the volunteers who attended to their own projects once a week. In December 1997 a full time Manager was appointed on a fixed term contract to provide this direction and to provide routine organisation on a daily basis. In 1998 the Museum opened on Tuesdays (a traditional 'working' day) during the season and began a co-ordinated publicity campaign to attract group visits outside normal open days. The internal structure of the display rooms was rationalised to provide a logical time-line for visitor flow and many new exhibits were opened.

On the 1st January 1999, the Air Force Board Standing Committee decided to agree to a new name for the Museum and granted permission to use RAF in the title. Unfortunately, this did not provide funds. Also in 1999 the shop was re-located, a new entrance opened and an additional 6 exhibit rooms opened. In the background, a bid was made to the Museum and Galleries Commission (now part of ACE) for Registration to conform to national standards of collection and visitor care. Without this, funding is not available from national funds. Full Registration was granted in Jan 2002. In June 2000, the Manager's post became an established civil service post within the RAF Neatishead organisation. Today, the Manager and Curator is an employee of the Trust which runs the Museum. The current manager started life as a Comms and Radar Technician, later an Air Engineering Officer with the Fleet Air Arm. Before joining the Museum he was working for the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace before taking up this post with Dark Blue managing the Light Blue!

From 2001, the Museum opened on Thursdays as well as Tuesdays during the Season, April to the end of September (end of October from 2003) and will still accept private group bookings outside these days. To make this a success, more volunteers are essential, so thank you and welcome. As an indicator of the Museum's success we are Quality Assured by the Visit Britain, Finalist in 2000 and 2002 as the best tourist attraction in Norfolk and Winner in 2003 and have also been selected as the best attraction in the Eastern Region for 2001 and

2002. (Entry barred for 2003 but we were finalists again in 2004, 2005 and 2006 – we won this last one in November 06 and won the Gold in the National Award in April 07. We also gained the national silver award in the Excellence in England Awards 2002.

Organisation. As mentioned, the Museum is run as a registered charity with a Board of Trustees. They meet once or twice a year to decide major policy and to ensure that the Museum complies with all regulations imposed by the Charities Commission. Below Trust level we have a Management Committee which meets once a month (ish) and is chaired by the Manager. On the Committee are up to 6 designated volunteers. They are responsible for most matters pertaining to the running of the Museum. Other volunteers are encouraged to attend these meetings to contribute their views although they do not have a vote. The day to day running is left in the hands of the Museum Manager who runs the administration, publicity, group bookings and arranging for volunteers' availability as well as all Curatorial aspects of the Museum.

The Future. The draw-down of RAF Neatishead has resulted in some doubt arising about the future of the Museum. A Business Case was submitted in November 2005 to ask that the buildings, grounds, and contents be 'gifted' to the Board of Trustees and this proved to be very contentious; requiring approval from MOD, the Treasury, the Cabinet and Parliament. The negotiations continued but there was no great incentive from MOD to change the status quo. In February 2008, the building became Grade II* listed. It became a matter of some concern to MOD when it was realised that they were responsible for essential repairs to the building and also were paying for the utilities. The Chief Of Staff Operations visited the Museum in February 2010 to investigate and he decided to support any bid for the Board to buy the building, grounds and contents. The purchase of the Museum went through in Aug 2012 and the Museum is now a fully stand-alone entity with no support from the MoD or Government, though we do maintain close informal links with both RRH Neatishead and RAF Boulmer, home to today's Fighter Controllers.

Volunteers Tasks. As the Museum is committed to regular public opening there is obviously a requirement for sufficient volunteers to meet this task. Some volunteers are 'behind the scenes' devoted to the upkeep of the fabric and exhibits and they seldom meet the public. The Museum Open Season when it is open to the Public is April until October inclusive. Open Days are Tuesdays and Thursdays, Bank Holiday Mondays and every 2nd Saturday of the Month, 1000-1700. In addition to normal Open Days, Group Visits are also held when the Museum is closed to the public.

Most volunteers will meet the public and are normally allocated to specific tasks *as their inclination and training suit*. To hold a successful public open day a minimum of 12 staff are required (usually only 3-4 for a Group Visit). Tasks may be grouped as follows:

- A. Public Face – setting the tone for the visit. This includes reception/shop, tea room and, after training, the introductory briefing.
- B. Tour Guides. This is done in the 1940, 1942 and Cold War Rooms.
- C. Room Attendant. This is usually done in Space Defence, Neatishead History and in the History & RAF Coltishall Rooms to provide guidance and safety cover and to answer questions.
- D. Catering – Normally done by Food Hygiene Trained Staff

Full training is provided for these and the other rooms in the Museum and whilst volunteers are encouraged to expand their expertise, in the end it is down to the individual as to where they best fit. A script is provided for each room as the basis of what the Museum wants to tell the visitor in the time available but interpretation is left to the initiative of each volunteer.

“Closed” Season. From 1 November to the end of March the Museum is only open one day per month (second Saturday) and for pre-booked group visits (day or evening), seminars and conferences. However, this is also the main period to carry out display maintenance, new display construction and the vital behind the scenes administration tasks. Every Tuesday from around 0930 to around 1600 the volunteers who wish can attend and join in this essential element of our work.

Volunteer Responsibilities. The main responsibility for a volunteer is to provide the visitor with a memorable experience which, hopefully, exceeds their expectations, and which they will take away with them. This is important so that, not only do they have an enjoyable day out at the Museum, they also tell family and friends about us! In order to achieve this it is important to ensure a relaxed but professional atmosphere.

We seek to have regular, committed volunteers and, generally ask for a commitment of 1 day a week (many do far more than that) working a full shift. Generally, on an open day, that is from 0900 until you are no longer required – which depends on where you are working in the Museum. Volunteers should make every effort to work on the day(s) agreed. With a shortage of Volunteers generally, short-notice absences can disrupt the programme and throw extra loading on your fellow Volunteers!

An addition to regular days of operation, Group Visits are run throughout the year and Volunteers are strongly encouraged to support these in rotation. If every Volunteer helps out, it would mean that each Volunteer would only need to cover 1 – 2 Group Visits a year thus spreading the load. Groups are highlighted on the Museum Calendar.

In addition to the obvious tasks associated with your Duty, some of the more ‘hidden’ responsibilities can be summarised as follows:

- A. Duty of Care. The Museum must comply with all current Health and Safety Regulations. Part of these is the requirement for all volunteers to be fully conversant with the Fire, Emergency and Evacuation procedures. The Manager provides this training within the first month of attendance and normally on your first day.
- B. Availability. Regular attendance is desired and a booking system, shown on the staff room notice board, is used to ensure that enough volunteers are in place for each open day. There are also opportunities to attend for the various group visits planned on other days/evenings. The Manager should be informed as early as possible of non-availability, holidays etc.
- C. External Training. External training is funded by the Museum and courses, in varying subjects, are occasionally available for volunteers who would like to attend. These include the “Welcome Host” courses run by East of England Tourism, First Aid qualification provided by St Johns Ambulance and various Museum specific courses run by Area Museum Officer, the Museums in Norfolk Group and Norfolk Museums & Archaeological Service.
- D. Routine. Volunteers are asked to check in at Reception when they arrive & leave the Museum so that their presence can be accurately logged onto the Fire Sheets for emergency accounting procedures.
- E. Volunteers, after suitable training, may be asked to assume particular Emergency Roles. These will be allocated on a daily basis by the Manager and will require ‘signing in’.

Volunteer Benefits. Most benefits are ‘hidden’ in that volunteering offers the opportunity to be part of a happy team and to meet the general public and find out their stories – everyone has a story. Probably the only tangible benefit is the travel allowance paid to somewhat recompense that expense. Currently this stands at 25 pence per mile per attendance and is

paid, *to those who wish to claim it*, monthly in arrears against petrol receipts. A booking-in log is available in the Staff Room. Another 'benefit' is free tea and coffee at any time – these are available on a self-service basis from the Volunteers refreshment area in the Admin Building during the season or from the kitchen during 'closed' season.

Once more, thank you for indicating your wish to be a volunteer and to be to be part of the Museum organisation and I look forward to you joining our happy band.



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