

'We all get so much out of it!' -



of trains documented in the Pictures Collection, to searching 100-year-old newspapers for a 'snippets from the archive' feature on the Australian Newspaper Plan website.

Back in 1998, resources were made available for the Library's first Volunteer Guiding Program. More than 70 people attended the initial information night held in early June and by the next week, 60 applications had been received. Of that number, 18 people, ranging from students to retirees, were chosen and began a comprehensive training program which was held every Friday for seven weeks.

The training included a series of information sessions on volunteering, interpreting works of art, and public speaking. It also featured a number of practical sessions for the volunteers to put their new skills into action. And according to some of the original participants, there was also more than a little fun in the process.

Back then, as now, there was more than one job for volunteers. For instance, there are those volunteers who are the public face of the National Library—the people who greet you at the door of the exhibition and offer their help if needed.

Then there are the behind-the-scenes folk who provide invaluable support to many of the Library's services—work that simply wouldn't be done if not for the volunteers. There are the volunteers who help with the Friends of the National Library, and those who share their expertise on special collections, including Pictures, Manuscripts, Dance, Music and Ephemera.

Five of the original 18 volunteer guides are still with the Library today. These are: Barbara Wain, Allan Rice, Shirley Gollings, Jenny Hadlow and Judith Robertson.

It was a love of the arts, history and a passion to

left:
Craig Mackenzie
Former volunteers coordinator Helen Tsogas leads the team on a tour of the new warehouse at Hume, April 2008

below:
Unknown photographer
The first group of National Library volunteers, 1998
Courtesy Barbara Wain

Sally Hopman celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Library's Volunteer Guiding program

They come from the most different of fields—from the diplomatic corps, to teaching, to community service and other areas—but they all have one thing in common: a passion for the nation's leading reference library.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of volunteer guiding at the National Library, and among those celebrating are a handful of folk who have been there since day one of the program. More generally, volunteers, then and now, have been behind many of the Library's great achievements—from identifying the species of plants depicted in Ellis Rowan's acclaimed images, or the type





above from left:
Loui Seselja (b.1948)
Judith Robertson, Jenny
Hadlow, Allan Rice, Barbara
Wain and Shirley Gollings—
volunteer guides since the
program began in 1998

Andrew Lyne
Allan Rice, National Library
volunteer, views a newspaper
in the Newspapers and
Microforms Reading Room,
2006

Loui Seselja (b.1948)
Curator Helen Ennis trains
volunteers for the Library's
current Charles Bayliss
photographic exhibition

Volunteer guides training
for the Library's *Facing Percy
Grainger* exhibition, July 2006

communicate that reeled these volunteers in, though the experience wasn't without its nervous moments. For some, it was their first time taking on such a public role and, with their collective passion for the Library, nobody wanted to let anybody down.

After the training sessions, but before her public guiding debut, Barbara Wain came up with a clever idea to help her remember her lines and beat the nerves.

'We had to do a presentation before we started, so I used to play mine in the tape in the car. I would drive around until I got it right,' she says. But for this woman with all the right credentials—a love of history, and the fact that she was a fifth-generation Australian—volunteering was always going to be a labour of love. 'My father was a very proud Australian and he loved history, so I did as well. I also love meeting new people, so the two ingredients seemed to go together well.'

Barbara says she enjoyed the fact that all sorts of people were guides. 'And that's very good, because we [also] get all sorts of people coming in,' she says. 'There are a lot of grey nomads in particular, and I'm one of them, so I can relate to them. They're also good because they have time to chat.'

Barbara says it was hard to believe that 10 years had passed since they all put on their National Library name badges: 'with all the ones that are still here, we've got a special bond together.'

For Allan Rice, his offer to work as a volunteer 10 years ago arose not only from a love of history, but also a desire to 'value-add'. After a professional life devoted to the Department of Immigration, he had been retired a year and was working as a

volunteer with what was then a citizens' advice bureau in Canberra.

'The work there was just referring people on to other places,' he says. 'I saw the Library as a place where it would be more value-adding. In some ways it was like doing another degree course—and it has turned into a warm social friendship network which has led into other fascinating projects. I also like the fact that you learn new information as you go along. With every new exhibition, there is a new body of information to absorb.'

Allan does his homework when it comes to these new exhibitions. As well as the training on offer from the Library, he does his own further research: 'It's always nice to be able to ... bring your own passion to bear. It's also wonderful to see how different guides blossom at different exhibitions.'

And his favourite exhibition? The one on Rex Nan Kivell in 1999 (*Paradise Possessed: The Rex Nan Kivell Collection*, see www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/nk/). 'It knocked the socks off us,' he says.

After spending much of her working life with the Red Cross, Jenny Hadlow was looking for a new challenge. She had organised the charity's first doorknock in the capital in 1971 when there were only 19 suburbs in Canberra. For this descendant of two First Fleet convicts, it was perhaps inevitable that the next stage of her life was going to be related to our colonial past—as well as to its future.

Jenny says that after she had seen an advertisement for Library volunteers, and attended the inaugural meeting, 'I was hooked'. She has remained so for the past 10 years. 'The Library is like a magnet for me. I just love the place and the people in it,' she



says. 'You know, I believe I am privileged to have never made a request of the staff here that hasn't been met immediately.'

For Jenny, the highlight of her volunteer work would have to be back in late 2001, with the opening of the *Treasures from the World's Great Libraries* exhibition (see www.nla.gov.au/worldtreasures/index.html): 'people queued around the building to get in.'

'One of the first things I did, I remember, was to hand a man back his family,' she says: 'There was a Warsaw telephone directory, dated 1939, which was one thing they used to trace information on their family. That was just a privilege for me to do. The telephone directory was unique—it gave names and addresses and also the professions of people, which were a great help to [trace] them. To me, these sorts of things are desperately important.'

Fellow-guide Judith Robertson also believes that working as a volunteer has always been a two-way thing. She is there, she says, to greet visitors and tell them she's there if they need help. But the visitors, she says, are people from whom she also learns. Judith graduated as a teacher in 1978, specialising in archaeology and Aboriginal history. But it was travelling overseas with her husband, who was with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, that inspired Judith to do volunteer work with collecting institutions.

When her husband was posted to Washington she worked as a volunteer guide at the Smithsonian. When they returned to Australia, Judith had a six-month wait before she could begin teaching again, so she thought that volunteering at the Library might fill in the gap. And she hasn't looked

back, although these days she's 'slowing down a bit' and volunteers about once a fortnight.

Judith says that when the cameleers exhibition (*Pioneers of the Inland: Australia's Muslim Cameleers 1860s–1930s*) was on over the Christmas holidays in 2007, 'a lot of people came through, and told us stories about [the cameleers]. That's really what I love about the Library—it tells stories.'

Another volunteer, Shirley Gollings, believes she was in the right place at the right time 10 years ago. She was researching some family history in the National Library when she saw a sign calling for volunteers.

'I thought at the time it was something I'd like to do,' she says. After the inaugural meeting, however, she was reluctant to fill out an application form because she wasn't sure she had the right credentials. 'I had just retired as an early childhood teacher,' she says.

Ten years on, however, Shirley agrees with her co-workers that working as a volunteer 'has been a privilege. I have learned so much,' she says. 'There is a saying in education that learning is your life—and that is so with guiding as well.'

Like her fellow originals, Shirley says the past 10 years of volunteering have been a treasure of a time: 'My favourite memory is once when, after a tour, this man came over to me and said that I must be an ornithologist because I knew so much about birds. When I started working on this exhibition, I was worried because I didn't think I knew enough about them.'

'We all get so much out of it!' she says.

SALLY HOPMAN is a media liaison officer at the National Library of Australia