

Volunteering for HMS Trincomalee



Volunteering for the Trincomalee

When the exhibition room was opened on 6th March 2009 the Friends were asked if they would be volunteer stewards to man the room of the new gallery exhibition. This would be anything from half an hour to four hours on an ad hoc basis: nothing too structured - just come along if you had the time. All the information was included in the permanent display. It was just a case of being there in attendance and guiding visitors through the various parts of the comprehensive gallery.



The exhibition has proved a wonderful and knowledgeable addition to the historic ship for those who come on board. The many compliments made by visitors from all over the country and overseas, which may be verbal or recorded in the visitor book, bear this out. A browse through the schoolchildren's comments is very revealing; for example, 'scary', 'fab', 'brill', 'interesting', 'must come back', are just a few.

My husband Alan and I decided that after years of involvement with this lovely ship we should continue our interest and work as volunteer stewards. We prefer to work Saturdays or Sundays from 11.30am to 3.30pm when the Historic Quay is visited by holiday coaches, usually visiting the Historic North-East for the weekend. These tourists are thrilled by such a magnificent tourist attraction, with its years of history together with the obvious show of commitment and workmanship in the restoration of HMS Trincomalee.

Sometimes visitors surprise us with their own family connections with the ship in its training days. Just recently a young woman came to visit who had been out for a 'holiday' with others from school to spend a week as a trainee. It was interesting to observe her reaction to the video in the museum room of HMS Trincomalee in her other guise as TS Foudroyant. 'that's exactly what it was like', she said, 'being bossed about by those old sailors.' But great fun, no doubt.

There are so many areas of interest for volunteer stewards to undertake, from the first plans ending up in Davy Jones's locker after a fight with the American ship Constitution, to its building in the Indian shipyard, its launch from Bombay, to its maiden voyage from Trincomalee with her interesting lady passenger and her children whose daily diary kept throughout an adventurous 5 to 6 months has a prime place in the gallery and is a national artifact.

Details of the working ship and her occupants is an area of great interest to visitors to the room - the first and second commissions when she sailed to the West Indies and British Columbia, the retirement of the ship when it later became a training vessel owned by Wheatley Cobb and renamed TS Foudroyant. The days when the ship visited various parts is also an area of research which a volunteer could make their own.

My husband Alan's interest and experience is naturally in the restoration of the ship as he spent 8 years doing the rough work of the restoration period. The post as shipwright on board HMS Trincomalee came at an ideal time in his career as he was offered the job after being made redundant at the closure of Smith's Dock on Teesside. This was a fantastic opportunity for him to spend the last days as a shipwright working with the tools of his trade that he had started with at age 16 years here in Jackson's Dock in William Gray's shipyard in 1950.

I have made my interest in the gallery the diary and journey of Eliza Bunt, and the maiden voyage from Trincomalee to Portsea in 1818-19. Eliza, a young widow with two young children, was being repatriated (a modern term) to England as her husband, a boatswain in the dock at Trincomalee, had recently died from a fever. The Admiralty had a duty to return Eliza and her family to England as the couple were married. Eliza's diary was loaned to the Trincomalee by Eliza's ancestor and is a valuable insight into the daily happenings on the journey.

Our commitment has been amply rewarded by the interest shown by visitors.

Maureen Storm
Volunteer Steward

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