



# Volunteer Spotlight

Thoughts from a new volunteer by Peter Field, Technical Team Volunteer Coordinator.

I saw an advertisement last autumn for open days on a steam tug and thought it worth a visit. We turned up for the tour and were shown around all the posh bits but it was the dirty bits that interested me. We were taken down into the engine room, having donned the hard hat and embarrassing shoe protectors, and I remember Bob, or was it Ian, showing us the boiler and explaining the process of getting steam up and firing, I had a go at getting coal in the furnace and it seemed easy. Beginners luck I later learned! From that moment on I was hooked...

Having signed up and eventually finding an induction session that I could attend I duly turned up and was treated to Bob and Allan's two hour session on the prom deck on a cold winter's day. I gradually lost any sensation in my lower limbs and, by the time they had covered everything, from my knees downwards were no longer known to me. When they said it was over I tottered down to the galley where a hot drink soon restored the blood flow.

During subsequent visits on working party days I learned that everyone knew more than me about ships, the MSC, basic fitting skills, marine steam engines and making a fire, or at least they pretended they did! With my background as a BT engineering apprentice my extensive knowledge of obsolete telephone exchanges wasn't very useful but my time volunteering at the Severn Valley Railway as a Guard at least gave me a familiarity with the environment of steam locomotion. Originating from Essex also meant I was unfamiliar with the geography of Liverpool - the use of Google Translate at least meant I could understand most of the crew most of the time.

When the big day came for my first cruise it was an exciting experience. The big cold rusty lump of boiler now came alive and the boiler room was warm - a taste of the 44C that was to come in the summer. When I first saw the engines run it was a scary but impressive moment, those great big heavy lumps of metal smoothly reciprocating and rotating! Amazing! However, as they had been doing that for nearly 100 years they knew what to do. During the maintenance period the various valves on

top of the boiler were shown to me and told "you have to come up here and turn them on and off" I must say I didn't fancy the idea then and when I was asked to do it with 110psi in the boiler I was rather scared. Climbing up onto the narrow walkway, lying across the top of the boiler, and reaching out to the appropriate valve wasn't easy, and rather hot. The valves for the auxiliary equipment are small and manageable but when the dreaded shout comes from the engine room "Main steam cracked please!" it means opening the largest and most inaccessible of the valves just a bit. The training comes back to you - steam valves should never be opened fully straight away as the steam may condense in the pipe causing shock waves and other stresses which can split the pipe or cause the valve packing to shoot steam at 110 psi up your arm. All comforting thoughts when you aren't sure how much is "cracked." Everyone I asked had a different view ranging from quarter of a turn to one and a half turns. I generally go somewhere in between.

Having done quite a few Trimmer turns I feel quite comfortable in the boiler room now and have started to learn Donkeyman duties in the engine room, involving oiling the engines and doing other preparatory work and checks before sailing. This gives me the opportunity to learn other skills and to fill a vacancy in either job as required.

As we approach the winter maintenance period it doesn't feel like I've been here a year. I've met lots of new people, made friends and I'm starting to feel part of the team.

Other organisations that I have volunteered for are often very "cliquey" which the potential volunteer has to try and crack in order to get on and be accepted. I have had no such problems with The Danny, everyone I have asked a daft question to, or asked to be shown what they do, has gladly explained and shared their knowledge and experience patiently. All volunteers are welcome regardless of existing skills, experience or age.

It's amazing the wide variety of skills and past experiences that everyone has - maybe it's because we are all getting on a bit!!