

Volunteering with BMM's Archives Team

After many months of requests, discussions, meetings and a few unavoidable delays, Dave & myself signed in at the British Motor Museum reception for our first volunteering session on Monday.

We must say that the organisation at the museum for volunteers is second to none. What did surprise us that the museum has a staff of eighty but a volunteer pool of 116 volunteers. We had already a days induction session briefing us on what the museum will provide in return for us volunteering and what the Museum expected from us as volunteers. We were pre-sign up for the various systems by which volunteers are informed and managed including the volunteers management system on which we booked the slots we planned to attend.

We also had four on-line Training sessions to completed to ensure we were familiar with, and understood, security, emergency, safety and compliance procedures in place.

So, splendidly dressed in our BMM Shirts and Fleeces, we signed in and pick up a security fob and headed for the archives. We were very pleased that we were expected and that our Archivist contact, Thomas, has put together both all the materials we needed for the days and a couple of the boxes of ISTEL archives ready to process.

The museum is in the process of adopting a new Archive Management system, Axiell, the senior archivist Armand told us they planned to use the ISTEL data as one of the first artefact collection as a trial to the data loading process. Accordingly Thomas had set out a template of the data required for each artefact and we were able to map this onto the spreadsheet listing all the artefacts of data we already have. With a few adjustment of titles we found there was about a 75% match so avoiding having to enter all the data for every item.

Obviously we had to adjust our artefact reference numbers to their format as well as enter some fields of data we had been lax in entering previously. Our main discussion point, and really a more strict enforcement of archiving definitions, centred around the types of artefacts we had donated. The core of this discussion centred on the definition of an artefacts as an “evidential” element of ISTEL’s as opposed to an article that had ISTEL’s name on. These are classed as “Museum” items. A good comparison of this is one of the historic artefacts we processed was the collection of Telephone Directories and associate documents whilst promotional pens, diaries and coasters are classed as museum items.

One of the other aspects of our artefacts which we have yet to agree on how they fit in with BMM archiving standards are all the data we have electronically only, and this includes the website. To us, having this quite extensive information is very important as we know it often triggers memories but possibly, but it is not something BMM have had to deal with previously. So, an interesting discussion for the future.

Lastly, although the Archives and the Museum Galleries are separate groups in the BMM structure there is obviously a close working arrangement between them and discussions, even with the archives team shows that the museum overall, led by the museum group is always looking forward to the next, and future displays in the museum galleries. When

such reference to future plans occurred they triggered links to the ISTEL data with Dave and myself. For example, many Ex ISTEL employees had MCP cars which may figure in a planned “Hot Hatch” display and talk of a “behind the scenes” making the cars feature could well include data we have on automating production lines.

Overall a very productive session, with very friendly and helpful BMM staff in a nice relaxed environment. Interestingly we were working on a large ex BL conference table from Longbridge and surrounded by signs collected from the Longbridge factory.

We are both already looking forward to the next session in January.

