

AFP Museum helps show the way forward

While the AFP will mark its 30th anniversary in October, its Museum collection looks back more than 80 years, illuminating and enlivening tradition.

The story of the AFP is a powerful educational tool for both the public and AFP members. The AFP Museum seeks to tell that story by using its large collection of documents, photographs and objects to reach out in ways which go beyond text.

Museum Curator Chris Cranston said the importance of keeping stories of the AFP's history alive cannot be underestimated and this is a process that continues day-by-day to capture contemporary issues and events.



Peace Officer Guard badge. The Peace Officer Guard was formed in 1925 and became prominent during the Second World War.

"The Museum preserves objects which reflect the traditions from which the AFP stems, and in doing so assists in the evolution of these traditions and the creation of new ones," Ms Cranston said.

"It is also a valuable educational tool from which the public can learn about the work of the organisation.

"Outside researchers frequently call on the Museum for information about events which reflect the history of Canberra and Australia, about the organisations which preceded the AFP, or for photographs. Fulfilling these requests contributes to a better understanding of how the AFP fits into the history of both the ACT and Australia."

The Museum is often called on for examples of how things were done in the past, and a comparison of these items with more contemporary items in the collection, or those still in use, can help illustrate how the AFP has evolved and changed.

"Whether it is the design of uniforms, the creation of procedures manuals or science and technology equipment – these items give us a sense of how the AFP is developing and its priorities changing," Ms Cranston said.

"The AFP's collection contains many items about the history of policing in Australia, including documents and photographs from the Commonwealth Investigation Service in the 1940s, the

Commonwealth Police (ACT) from 1927, Commonwealth Police, Australian police peacekeepers and the Police Officer Guard."

The Peace Officer Guard was a branch of the Attorney-General's Department from 1925 until the Peace Officers were absorbed into Commonwealth Police in 1960. The Commonwealth Police and ACT Police merged in 1979 to become the Australian Federal Police.

Examples of equipment or uniforms, or objects such as those associated with specific events or investigations can increase understanding of events, including those which have shaped the history of the nation as well as that of the organisation.

Perhaps the most dramatic of these for both the AFP and the nation as a whole has been the emergence of modern terrorism. On 13 February 1978, a bomb exploded at the Hilton Hotel in Sydney during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting, killing three people and injuring eight. As a result, the AFP was formed in October 1979 to meet policing needs and deal with terrorism at a national level. The bombing of the Hilton and later incidents such as the Bali bombings of 2002 have had a significant impact on the nation. The Museum's collection holds objects which give an insight into the significance of events such as these.

Although text and photos can tell a story which is graphic, moving and interesting, the power of the object is undeniable.



Painted panel from the Sofitel Magic Lagoon Hotel, Khao Lak, Thailand which was destroyed in the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. The AFP Disaster Victim Identification team assisted with the recovery operation..

Photos courtesy of the AFP Museum

Objects can convey a much greater understanding of events such as the Bali bombings, the scale of the devastation and the impact on the Balinese and Australian people. They can also highlight the importance of the cooperation between Australian and Indonesian police.

For example, wire fragments in the collection demonstrate the complexity of the work undertaken by the Australian Bomb Data Centre to identify the types of materials used in the bombings. The damaged bundy-card holder from the Sari Club, complete with several singed bundy-cards, demonstrates the impact on the day-to-day lives of ordinary people in a more meaningful way than a document or photo could do.

The Museum actively collects such objects and then works to ensure their preservation, making it a vital component in the record of the AFP and the work of its members.

The AFP Museum opened in 1993 and was a popular venue for visits from schools and the general public as well as AFP members, but this nearly came to an end in January 2003 when some of Canberra's western suburbs were burned in bushfires. The fires came so close to Weston, where the Museum is located, that evidence of flames entering under the doors was found later, and the external Museum walls were scorched. Thankfully, no objects were damaged during the fires, or by the helicopter water-bombing that finally extinguished the flames.

Later the same year, security at the Weston Police Complex in Canberra was upgraded and members of the public are no longer able to visit the Museum. Additionally, the exhibition space has been temporarily closed to provide more space for the AFP's growing staff numbers.

The AFP hopes that its large collection of objects which range from small items, such as medals, to large ones, such

as boats and vehicles, can eventually find a permanent home that will be open to the public. In the meantime, the Museum conducts off-site displays around Australia, and is exhibiting *When the roof became stars: The Australian Federal Police investigation into the Bali Bombings* in the Qantas Founders' Museum in Longreach, Queensland, until 16 August. A small collection of items is also on display in the foyer of AFP Headquarters in Canberra.



Fake drugs produced by the AFP for use in controlled deliveries.



A BMW K100LT police pursuit motorcycle used by ACT Policing from 1992 to 1995.

The Museum continues to acquire objects, documents and photographs at the same time as preserving and cataloguing the existing collection.

The AFP Museum is proud to represent the AFP and its members both to the public and for in-house purposes. Museum staff members are keen to source items not only from the past, but contemporary examples from the AFP today, from contributors anywhere.

AFP Museum staff members are more than happy to accept donations or to discuss the suitability of objects for the Museum's collection.

The Museum can be contacted on (02) 6203 6407 or by email to museum@afp.gov.au



Signs from outside the Sari Club which was destroyed in the 2002 Bali bombings.