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### Award of Merit Nomination: Merle Pole

The Ouyen District History & Genealogy Centre is pleased to nominate Merle Pole for a 2020 RHSV Award of Merit.

Merle has provided over 30 years of service to history in the Ouyen community. The Ouyen District History & Genealogy Centre was established in 1984 and Merle, a teacher, became involved as a volunteer in 1988 when the community was celebrating the 80th Anniversary of Ouyen Primary School and the 60th Anniversary of the Ouyen Secondary College. This celebration included reunions and plaque laying for all the many small rural schools that once dotted the landscape.

In 1995 Merle became Vice President of the Centre and then took up the duties of President in 1999, serving in that position ever since. This extended service has been characterised by an unstinting generous dedication to the community and its history. This has been expressed in various ways.

- Under Merle's leadership the Centre has preserved local historical materials, organised those materials to make them accessible and continuously made them available to the public, (amateur and professional) historians and genealogists.
- Merle has undertaken her own historical research and in 2006 wrote "*Who were they? Naming of Ouyen's streets and parks.*" an innovative exploration of the history embedded in the names of the streets we travel every day.
- Perhaps the most significant contribution that Merle has made has been an invisible one – her support to other historians to ensure that the Mallee's story was known and told. This sometimes extended to providing accommodation in her own home so that local research could be done. When asked to comment Deb Anderson, author of "*Endurance: Australian stories of drought*", observed:

"Merle's expertise, insight and her wonderful eye for detail proved essential in helping me navigate the local archives on drought in the Mallee. What's

more, she shared a passion for, and a deep understanding of, the significance of local history to the community's identity."

- Merle has also facilitated other historians awareness of each other's work and their communication with each other. Using the visitors' book she has gone the extra step of cross referencing the interests of others to bring them together.

John Burch, author of the award winning "*Returning the Kulkynne*", is also unstinting in his praise for her assistance.

"On my first visit to the Centre Merle hunted out records that she thought might be of interest and brought them to my desk. These became 'leads' that shaped whole parts of my work. More recently she has led me into the Ouyen/Mallee community, allowing unknown stories to be told and the Mallee's history to be captured."

Merle has truly been a model for the productive operation of local historical services.

Sue Willox

**Sue Willox**  
**Secretary**