

Issues of Resources and Relevance for Small Transport Museums

Jim Longworth
Office of Rail Heritage, RailCorp, New South Wales

Ian Gray
Institute for Land, Water and Society, Charles Sturt University

Geoff Graham
Sydney Tramway Museum

Paper presented at the annual conference of the International Association for the History of Traffic, Transport and Mobility, Berlin, October 2011.

Abstract: *The subject of transport, even of just one mode, is big: too big for any museum, no matter what size, to display entirely. The history of any one mode of transport is also big, again potentially too big for any museum, no matter how well resourced, to tell definitively. A lot of resources can be absorbed, rather unprofitably, in just maintaining a museum precinct. The relationship between transport and community is also too big to tell convincingly within the boundary fence. Many of the items collected together by transport museums are big things. Curating them is universally problematic for small groups thinly resourced. Overall, the task facing a small museum can easily appear overwhelming. Even a 'large' museum will face similar problems.*

The paper argues that by concentrating on core themes, decisions surrounding curation can be better informed and the interest and enthusiasm of staff developed and retained. Not all staff will necessarily have a background in the industry which a museum represents. So developing confidence among volunteers, and maintaining a belief in the relevance of the presentation of history, can be important. We use examples from railway museums and from the experience of the Sydney Tramway Museum to discuss some attempts at developing local themes for small rural railway museums and efforts to make material available to staff to help them interpret current transport issues in their historical context.

Introduction

Small museums face many challenges. Among them is the expense involved in acquiring and maintaining exhibits and a place to keep and display them. For small museums, retention of volunteers is often essential. We define 'small' by the absence of full time paid staff. It is important that the volunteer staff see what they do as relevant as well as interesting and entertaining. The staff of a museum are likely to be its most important resource and their interest and enthusiasm are essential to a museum's existence. The responsibility for curating a collection of a large number of vehicles with a modest income from visitors and a relatively small, and ageing, volunteer workforce only serves to under-score the general problem. Where the operation of vehicles is integral to the museum's mission, added requirements for technical skills, statutory safety regulation and insurance compound the difficulties.

These issues can be addressed, with application to all kinds of museums, by considering the situations of small railway and tramway museums. In this paper we examine the circumstances of such museums and propose a way of helping to prioritise work in ways which has some potential for retaining purpose and interest among volunteers. There are thirty-four railway museums in NSW (McKillop 2010), many of which would be classified as small and are located in rural areas. In addition to encompassing those railway museums, we also consider the Sydney Tramway Museum, which is located in an urban area and is larger than many of the railway museums discussed. The paper presents a short description of the history of the railways of New South Wales, followed by a discussion about the nature of exhibits and their relation to the wider community. The paper goes on to discuss the concept of 'themeing' and its institutional basis, before proposing ways in which it might be applied to advantage among small transport museums.

A Big Story

The Australian 'tyranny of distance' (Blainey 1966) is a concept used to emphasise the historical significance of distance, and consequently transportation, to the development of Australia after European settlement. Distance is manifest in the location of Australia a long way from Europe, and the vast distances across the continent itself that were encountered by early settlers. The 'tyranny' was overcome by application of a range of transport modes including sea, land (rail and road) and air.

There are many small museums across Australia which present the history of transport development. In their presentation of Australian transport history, these small individual museums have tended to specialise in a single mode, within a geographically defined space, usually reflecting the particular interests of the members drawn from the museum's locality. New South Wales (NSW) railway artefacts tend to be held in one of at least three types of museums: rail-specific technological museums; railway station precincts; and museums containing some rail artefacts amongst a diverse range of non-rail artefacts. Such museums in NSW are either wholly government funded, partly government funded or private.

NSW Railway History

Rail transport in NSW started in 1830. Lines spread to all four of the state's borders from Sydney, with a fan-like spread of lines out across most of the country regions developing after the infant system was nationalised in 1855. Much NSW railway history is a story the work of government; some is a private industry story. More than

one government has been involved. Some NSW railway history is a state story, some is a story involving adjoining states, and some is a Commonwealth of Australia story.

NSW railway history is a big story. It is about the establishment of a rural-based and later industrial economy. The government railways of NSW were substantial, including at around their maximum in the mid-1950s: 10,224km of track 1,451 stations, 1,224 locomotives, 26,693 goods wagons, 2,955 passenger carriages and 60,091 staff in 1952.

Rail and the Bigger Community

Political imperatives like spreading administrative influence aside, railways were built because they were needed to transport goods or people among cities and rural areas. The railway was a means to an end: both origin and destination of the goods or person will usually be outside the railway corridor fence. Interaction between railways and the communities they serve is essential. Yet this element is easily lost in the transition from active railway to museum. Even in the case of tramways which, typically, ran through, defined, and culturally shaped the urban and suburban streetscape. Australian tramway museums (with the important exceptions of Bendigo and Ballarat) mainly operate on segregated land, geographically distant from authentic operating locations. The Sydney Tramway Museum has sought to create a facsimile urban environment on its 'greenfield' suburban site by re-erecting a multi-story city building facade, tramway waiting sheds and a tramway signal box alongside new, but architecturally sympathetic, workshops, depot and display hall. Even so, the real tramway age experience is only felt by visitors through their interaction, as passengers or spectators, with the trams in that recreated physical environment, although divorced from a full urban context. Most railway museums are bounded by corridor fencing with no indication of interactions with the surrounding industries or communities. Opportunities to present the relevance if not importance of railways to a locality are thereby lost.

In transporting goods or people from one place to another, rail will usually have been one of several modes of transport traversed. Railways have interfaced with other railways, road transport, and maritime transport. In presenting transport in its entirety from origin to destination, for even one sample journey, railway museums would have to include other modes of transport used, and at least two transshipments.

Some goods will have arrived directly from on-site in-the-yard industrial facilities. These goods may have arrived at the rail-side by gravity discharging from the mouth of a bulk loader, or on small hand trolleys or light industrial trucks, on conveyors, or suspended from overhead monorails. However, generally goods will have arrived at the station by road, in horse-drawn wagons, or road motor trucks. Livestock will have arrived on foot, or in road trucks. People will have arrived on foot, or horse, or by cart, car, taxi, or bus.

Use of railway station and yard precincts, as railway museums, can display the transshipment facilities used to un/load goods or people onto/out of the railway rolling stock. Transshipment facilities typically include: rail-side loading bins and chutes; between-the-rails hopper mouths; stockyard un/loading races; pillar cranes; gantry cranes; goods platforms and goods sheds; and passenger platforms and station buildings. Displaying such items helps to present the historical importance of a railway. But it presents a challenge to small museums.

Big Station Precincts

Even the area within the railway fence is usually substantial. The NSW Government Office of Rail Heritage (ORH) defines a station precinct as the railway-owned land corridor between two easily established points, being the 'Up Home' signal and 'Down Home' signals. This area is usually a narrow strip of land, but it can be long, more than a kilometre. Not all railway museums have control over this generous land area. Some have managerial control over only a small part of the station area, or even just a single station building. The surrounding off-corridor visual curtilage is usually ignored because the museum management rarely has any influence over it. Some control could be achieved through prescribing town planning ordinances and asserting heritage curtilages over the larger landscape catchments; but such indirect and administrative controls are usually beyond the interests of the volunteer groups.

Within a typical country railway station precinct, the passenger handling facilities are usually restricted to a single length of track, attendant platform, and single building. Passenger platforms ranged in length from a couple of sleepers long, about 18ft at unstaffed halts, to 1,540ft long at Albury. The average standardised platform allowed for an eight carriage train. Nevertheless, it was the goods yard which took up by far the greater portion of the site, and greatest quantum of infrastructure. Locomotive maintenance facilities were restricted to occasional stations, plus more commonly water cranes at the platform ends. However, most museum volunteer effort seems to be directed towards conserving the passenger facilities.

A lot of resources can be absorbed, rather unprofitably, in just maintaining a railway station yard museum precinct, in: cutting the grass; trimming edges between adjoining ground surfaces; weeding and pruning; fixing fences; controlling pest animals; cleaning out blocked drains. Then there is maintaining and repairing of buildings. All this is in addition to curating the items of transport interest.

The list of tasks, many essential to the safe operation of a museum, is significantly longer when the museum operates its historic vehicles. In the case of the Sydney Tramway Museum, those tasks include the inspection, maintenance and re-building or extension of three route kilometres of track, with electrified overhead and associated equipment. Workshops need to be adequate to perform a wide range of tasks required in the routine maintenance of a substantial operating fleet and for restoration, whether for static or operational purposes; tasks which demand appropriate skills and resources if they are to be done effectively and in compliance with occupational health and safety laws.

Big Things

Many individual items collected together by railway museums are big things, particularly those which move. The NSW standard ubiquitous 4-wheel open wagon, the S truck, was considered a small item of rolling stock. It was 20ft 10in long, by 9ft 6³/₄in wide, by 7ft high. Empty it weighed over 8 tons. The largest NSW locomotive, the 4-8-4+4-8-4 60 Class Garratt, was 108ft 8in long and weighed 260 tons in steam. The S wagon was bigger than an average motor car. Even the small items present challenges for conservation, and the large items are very challenging.

These challenges can be addressed partly by themeing. While S trucks were worked along every mainline and branch line across the entire network, Garratts were not. They were confined to main lines and a few specific coal lines. While an S truck might be logically displayed in almost any railway museum across the network, a Garratt would be outside of its natural area of revenue-earning operation were it to

appear in a railway museum on some lines. The same logic holds for many locomotives and items of rolling stock.

Australian Themes for Small Railway Museums

There is an institutionalised basis for themeing. The Australian Historic Themes Framework was initiated and developed by the Australian Heritage Commission. There are nine national themes: 1 tracing the natural evolution of Australia; 2 peopling Australia; 3 developing local, regional and national economies; 4 building settlements, towns and cities; 5 working; 6 educating; 7 governing; 8 developing Australia's cultural life; and 9 marking the phases of life (Australian Heritage Commission 2001). The framework has been used by the AHC, in its assessment of places for the Register of the National Estate since 1998, and will be an essential element in using the Australian Heritage Places Inventory to better understand the comparative context of places of historical significance around Australia. The Framework was endorsed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies in March 2000.

At a state level, the NSW Heritage Council developed thirty-eight state themes, which were: environment – naturally evolved; aboriginal cultures and interactions with other cultures; convict; ethnic influences; migration; agriculture; commerce; communication; environment – cultural landscape; events; exploration; fishing; forestry; health; industry; mining; pastoralism; science; technology; transport; towns, suburbs and villages; land tenure; utilities; accommodation; labour; education; defence; government and administration; law and order; welfare; domestic life; creative endeavour; leisure; religion; social institutions; sport; birth and death; and persons (Heritage Council of NSW 2001).

Railway-specific themes have been identified (McKillop 2009) for allocation to the state themes (see Attachment 1). Not all national or state themes have appropriate railway themes placed within them. There are significant gaps in the matrix.

Having established the principle of railway historic themes, a museum can be assessed against each theme. Assessment might involve asking: what themes does the museum have a natural advantage for telling? what themes would be naturally inappropriate for the museum to tell? what themes are being well told at the museum now? what resources would be required to improve the museum's presentation of locally appropriate themes?

For individual museums, an understanding of themeing can inform its decisions about: which items to expend resources on conserving; acquiring additional items; disposing of existing items; grouping of items together for display; developing interpretive materials; linking with themes being presented in its local community; and ensuring the museum remains relevant to local supporters. Established museums may experience difficulty with, even active resistance to, the adoption of a themed approach. Path dependence may be difficult to overcome in this setting but the case for a rigorous approach to museum decision-making is difficult to refute and continually growing in strength. Increasingly, applications for grant funding or for accreditation by umbrella museum bodies require amateur museum officers to demonstrate a professional approach.

At the level of state-wide administration as conducted by ORH, themeing can inform decisions about: allocating big and small items to individual museums. On a state-wide basis, themeing can overcome sameness with other railway museums and

promote a locally distinctive product for visitors. Assessment across a network of museums can highlight possible interchanges of resources.

Geographic Themes for Small Railway Museums in NSW

NSW is geographically divided up into a series of roughly parallel environmental zones heading westward away from the coast. The coastal zone contains the richest soils and receives the most rainfall. Railways in this zone ran through timber-getting and dairying areas, and to coastal ports. West of the coastal zone is the mountains and tablelands zone. Railways in this zone ran through timber getting and cattle grazing areas. Further west are the western slopes. Railways in this zone ran through grain growing areas. Further west are the far western plains. Railways in this zone ran through sheep grazing areas. Deposits of coal, minerals, and quarry rock were scattered through each zone and were often served by rail. The bulk of the railway traffic sent out from each station will be the produce of the local primary industries, which can be typified for the environmental zone in which a station precinct museum is situated.

The type of railway traffic will strongly influence the sort of loading infrastructure to be found in the station yard. Loading timber needed a loading bank, gantry crane, or still-legged derrick crane. Loading dairy produce needed cream sheds and milk depots. Loading cattle required a single deck loading race. Loading grain required a bagged-grain stacking shed or silo. Loading sheep required a two-level loading race. Loading coal, minerals, or rock required a loading saithe or high level loading bank.

Outwards primary produce travelled in a range of quite specific types of rolling stock. The type of railway traffic strongly influenced the type of train and typical sorts of wagons to be found in trains serving the station, and standing in the station yard. Wagons for transporting manufactured goods from the city to the country, and passenger carriages, were largely consistent across the network, depending whether the line was a mainline or a branch line, irrespective of the environmental zone.

For example, Finley Heritage Railway (FHR) is in a grain growing area. There is a silo and ruins of a bagged-grain shed in the yard. Grain wagons and grain-growing stories would be appropriate to that environmental zone. Milk tankers or rutil hopper wagons would not.

However, the evolution of a museum's aims and collections may inhibit its' capacity for strict geographical themeing. The Sydney Tramway Museum provides an instance of this phenomenon. The museum's initial aim was to preserve one of each type of tramcar used in Sydney. That decision had the effect of including the northern electric tramway outpost of Newcastle, which operated with Sydney trams, but that geographical extension made little practical difference. Since 1950, that objective has been substantially achieved. Concurrently, and sometimes opportunistically, the collection has been augmented to include trams from other capital and regional cities in Australia as well as examples from San Francisco, Berlin, Munich, Nagasaki and Milan. The result is a rolling stock register of about 100 items. In short, the emphasis has shifted, gradually but perceptibly, from being a museum of the tramways of Sydney to being a museum of tramway technology which happens to be located in the city from which most of the exhibits still derive. The museum's theme is now as much modal as it is geographical.

Not all museum volunteers have been wholehearted in accepting this shift in emphasis. Quite apart from the departure which it has represented from the early

geographical theme, with all the emotional resonance which it held for long-term volunteers, some have pointed to the pressure which the expanded collection exerts on financial and physical resources and its impact on restoration and storage priorities. On the positive side, the breadth of the collection permits the exposition of varying tramway technologies and illustrates the differential impacts of geography, climate and social conditions on the design, appearance and use of tramway vehicles.

Themeing for Conservation Decisions

Decisions about which items should be conserved, and to what condition conservation should aim are often personally motivated, emotional, and potentially divisive among members of small museums. Themeing offers a rationale for deciding which items to conserve, and how conservation should be undertaken. It may also provide a rational argument countering the idiosyncratic or sentimental views of volunteers or potential donors: “these days, a museum is expected to have a carefully thought-out decision-making process” is an explanation which can encourage as well as correct the recalcitrant.

Traditional railway practice was to cascade rolling stock downwards into maintenance vehicles, once it was no longer acceptable for revenue earning. Many of these ex-converted maintenance vehicles ended up in museums. The question arises whether to conserve the item in its maintenance or revenue earning form? However to conserve the item in its revenue earning form usually requires introducing new or similar materials, so is to be considered reconstruction rather than restoration (Semple Kerr 2000). Themeing can inform the decision on the value of allocating the required resources.

Railway organisations used many similar items of some forms of rolling stock, e.g. 4-wheel open S trucks; and few items of distinctive forms of rolling stock, e.g. 4-wheel rutilite hoppers. Some rare items of the latter type ended up in museum collections. The question arises whether to conserve the common or the rare item? Themeing may suggest railway station precinct museums conserve the usual as representative; while railway-specific technology museums conserve the rare.

Some types of rolling stock did not survive to be included in the state-wide museum collection of railway rolling stock, under its various forms of ownership. Some items are simply thought to be extinct. The question might arise, as it has in England, of whether to reconstruct a facsimile item? Again themeing might inform the decision making regarding type of item and value of the effort.

For example, the FHR had in its station yard the remains of a fettler’s gang shed. The remains consisted of a flat concrete slab with short lengths of rail set in flush with the surface, and a network of vertical remnant recycled rail posts that used to support the shed structure. Consulting the thematic matrix, identified the theme of Transport: network maintenance. Network maintenance is particularly appropriate for FHR as it has adopted the story of being a ‘Pioneer Railway’¹, which were distinguished by the engineering characteristics of their permanent-way. Track maintenance was what the shed was originally used for. FHR focused its conservation resources on re-cladding the shed with traditional hardwood studding and second-hand galvanised iron walling. Second-hand iron gave an instant appearance of the pleasant patina of staining which in turn suggested years of exposure to the weather. New galvanised iron was used on the roof to prevent water entering into the structure. The structure was left unpainted as was traditional railway practice.

¹ A railway built at low cost so as to maximise the reach of the system.

Another example, FHR has in its collection three track maintenance vehicles. Two of these were to be placed in the gang shed. The same theme suggested that the vehicles be conserved in their as-if-in-daily-use condition. They should not appear pristine as if just-arrived-from-the-manufacturer. Conservation should focus on straightening parts, and replacing missing parts, that would impede potential usage. Minor dents and slightly bent parts would be left as they are, cracks in the windscreen would be left, seat cushions would be left as torn, locally-made-in-the-field modifications would be left in place, the paint would be decidedly chipped and faded, and accumulated grime and dirt would be left clinging to the frame.

Themeing for Acquisition Decisions

Acquiring items of railway rolling stock is expensive, involving a big commitment of museum resources. Purchase cost can be in the thousands of dollars, plus cost of transport, also several thousands of dollars. Themeing offers a rationale for deciding which items to acquire and which items not to acquire, hence focussing the available scarce financial resources.

For example, the Tenterfield Railway Station Preservation Society (TRSPS) was bequeathed a very dilapidated and much modified ex-army tracked armoured personnel carrier. Should the society accept the donation? Consulting the thematic matrix reveals the theme of Defence: transporting troops, equipment. This was particularly relevant to Tenterfield because, during World War II that line had been the principal conduit for moving such equipment, rather than via the north coast railway. TRSPS accepted the item, restored it, conserve it, display it in WWII appearance, and interpret it, so telling the story of the town and the vast number of military trains that were operated through the station during WWII.

Another example, TRSPS has also been offered a small 0-4-0 saddle tank steam locomotive. The locomotive came from a gravel quarry near Sydney. The specific locomotive never worked in the New England region. The type of locomotive is inappropriate for a country mainline. The locomotive does not fit with any of the themes identified for Tenterfield.

Volunteer-run museums sometimes succumb to the forces of serendipity or of sentimental attachment to a proposed acquisition or, occasionally, acquire an item out of kilter with their core acquisition policy because it comes as part of a package or at the insistence of a generous donor willing to fund other, core, projects. After the fact, museums need to consider possible disposal or exchange, unless the item can, perhaps with a little ingenuity, be made to fit into one or other of the museum's themes.

Themeing for Disposal Decisions

Small railway museums tended to collect any item on-offer, of dubious local relevance, from diverse sources, and in various conditions. Acquisition has traditionally been opportunistic, and rapacious, involving little conscious decision making beyond overcoming problems with transporting the item to the museum site.

Many railway museums have collected large quantities of rolling stock well in excess of their need for operation or display and hope of conservation. Arguably too much was saved for now available resources (Glischmski 2008). So-called 'rotten rows' are clogged with rusting and rotting carriages, clearly inappropriate for the locale, downgrading the aesthetic quality of the site, and detracting from the visitor experience.

Disposing of items can be an emotionally unpleasant experience for some members, who may have saved the item at considerable personal cost, or become

personally attached to it while it has been in the care of the museum. Themeing offers an apparently rational basis for deciding which items to dispose of.

For example, the TRSPS has in its collection a 4-wheel self-propelled travelling crane, acquired for a steel works in another state. Consulting the thematic matrix fails to illuminate any theme under which its presence at Tenterfield could be justified. The item screams out 'I don't belong here'. Following a thematic approach suggests TRSPS should dispose of the item.

Another example, the Australian Railway Monument and Rail Journeys Museum (ARM&RJM), was bequeathed a large model railway built by a local resident. The model, which is in poor condition, depicts an imaginary European landscape, of pine trees, Swiss chalets, and European town buildings. The model does not fit comfortably with any theme relevant to ARM&RJM. Following a thematic approach, the model should be disposed of. However, unless handled carefully displaying considerable personal empathy and tact, associations with significant local persons might limit the practical application of themeing for disposal.

Themeing for Interchanging Resources

The results of past acquisitions are commonly ad hoc collections generally around railway transport. Some items may be inappropriate; while there may be significant gaps in the collection. Retaining some items may be unnecessary. Disposal need not necessarily mean destruction. Interchanging, swapping, trading and selling can be options.

Themeing offers a rationale for interchanging locally inappropriate items for more appropriate items for mutual benefit. Interchanging items between museums offers the potential to improve the quality of presentation across the entire railway museum industry. Interchanging is facilitated by formation of railway museum and heritage train operating industry-wide groups, e.g.: ORH NSW Rail Heritage Network; Association of Railway Preservation Group; etc.

For example, the NSW Rail Transport Museum (RTM), the largest in NSW, had in its collection a large volume of carriage parts that had been acquired as a job-lot years previously. On inventorying the parts, some were found to be for carriages that the RTM did not have in its collection; but that were known to be in other museums' carriage collections. The RTM held a storehouse give away day when other museums with the appropriate carriages could come and collect appropriate parts, and take them away for free. In doing so RTM earned positive publicity and made space for redeveloping that portion of the site.

Another example, the TRSPS had in its collection a couple of ex-private railway 4-wheel open wagons. This sort of wagon would never have been run to Tenterfield in normal operation. Consulting the thematic matrix failed to reveal any theme under which their presence at Tenterfield could be justified. A museum located in the Hunter Valley was known to be collecting on Hunter Valley coal transport, which was where the wagons would naturally have operated. TRSPS disposed of the wagons to the other museum in exchange for items of rolling stock that were likewise inappropriate for the theme being presented at the other museum; but were appropriate for display at Tenterfield.

In the tramway heritage field, the Council of Tramway Museums of Australasia (COTMA) has been successful in facilitating, formally and informally, acquisitions and exchanges of tramcars and equipment and has encouraged member museums to digitise plans, technical drawings and archival material for mutual access and benefit. The large Melbourne tramway system provides an ongoing source of

heritage trams and parts: COTMA provides a single point of contact for museums with the Victorian government body responsible for their disposal. Member museums commonly lend or exchange trams and equipment with each other across Australia and New Zealand.

Themeing for Grouping Items for Display

Most individual railway items naturally relate to other railway and non-railway items. Themeing offers a rationale for deciding on which items should be grouped with what other items, and their relationships. Themeing might be based on close operational usage, historic development of the class of object, geographic appropriateness, or having a strong association with a significant person or group of people.

For example, the Finley Heritage Railway's (FHR) fettler's gang shed contains fettlers' trikes and a range of fettlers' hand tools. However, the shed was at one end of the station yard precinct and the tools were stored haphazardly in the goods shed at the opposite end of the station yard. The trikes were stored in a FHR member's garage off-site. Despite being naturally intimately interrelated, casual museum visitors cannot see any apparent connection between these items. Consulting the thematic matrix identified the theme of Transport: network maintenance, which was the single function of all three items. FHR was empowered to bring all three, previously scattered, items together into the same space, which was provided by the recently conserved gang shed.

Themeing for Developing Interpretive Materials

The operation of many railway items is outside the personal experience of many younger museum visitors. The last steam locomotive and last 4-wheel wagon to be run in revenue-earning service in NSW ran during the early 1970s – over forty years ago. Anyone younger than about 45 is unlikely to have ever seen such items in normal railway operation. . The first generation Sydney Tramway system closed in 1961. Apart from the age factor, many museum visitors have little personal experience of any form of railed transport. For such visitors, interpretation must start from first principles. Much railway technology was specific to railway operation and hidden from general view. Railway museums require some form of interpretation to tell stories about many of their items that are intended to be displayed.

Those stories should make sense, and themeing could make it easier for sense to be made of them. For example, visitors might reasonably inquire about why a railway facility was built. In NSW, this is likely to be a question on visitors' minds where an apparently small community has a large railway facility; or where a large town or city has few facilities other than a station. The answer is likely to be expressed in terms of the location of functional facilities for particular railway purposes, like goods train marshalling at junctions and locomotive servicing facilities at strategic points along main lines.

Themed exhibits can help to explain the presence and nature of facilities and hence also the museum itself. Junee Railway Roundhouse & Museum (JRR&M) operated by the Regional Heritage Transport Association at Junee, is a case in point. The museum is located in a locomotive servicing facility which has no obvious function in the context of a small country town. Information to explain the location of Junee in the context of the overall operating pattern of trains in NSW aids understanding of the museum and its site.

Theming to Link to Local Community Historic Themes

Local historical writings and local community museums focus on local history. Items on display were usually sourced locally, so have local provenance. The themes tend to focus on local history, often of the pioneering period. Themes tell local stories, of farming, pastoralism, mining, forestry, settlement. Being of derived demand, the local railway should reflect the same themes. The infrastructure and rolling stock displayed in a station-precinct museum should likewise be locally appropriate, so telling a coherent locality-wide thematic story.

For example, the TRSPS is one of three museums in the town which is implementing a whole-of-town approach to heritage issues. The program also provides advice to museums in the outlying towns within the shire. Tenterfield's Heritage Advisor is also the Shire's Museum Advisor. Exhibitions have been developed with the Tenterfield and District Historical Society and other local groups. Developing a new brochure of heritage based walks around the town is underway. The station, as the gateway for entry and departure, is pivotal in telling local history themes.

Theming for Member Relevance

Theming offers a widely acceptable basis for developing a collections management policy that takes decision-making about assets away from personal likes and dislikes to an apparently rational un-confrontational process. Long established personal associations and memories might limit the practical application of themes in long established museum groups. For operating museums, synergies exist between the move to a more structured and principled approach to "museum" decision-making and the analogously more structured approach to safety, training, competency and fitness issues required by the need to comply with the comprehensive Rail Safety Act 2008 under the supervision of the Independent transport Safety Regulator's office. Volunteer railway and tramway museums have adapted to these mandatory requirements over several, often difficult, years. Volunteers have learned to adapt to the new regime paving the way for a new approach to general museum decision-making.

Small museums may need to provide interpretation for their own volunteers, many of whom would not have seen the items displayed when they were in regular use, and might not have any experience of railways other than as a customer or passenger, if any experience at all. Potential volunteers may be curious about the history of the facility and its transition to a museum. Interpretation of the past importance of the museum site could be important to the motivation of volunteers. It may be relevant to development of the 'communitas' or positive social relationships, referred to by Wallace (2006) as a motivating factor among heritage railway volunteers.

Theming for Network Allocation Decisions

The NSW Office of Rail heritage (ORH) has a small collection of rolling stock and large collection of small moveable items in store that are not at any one time allocated to specific museums. Some are specific to individual regions. Some are generic that were used across the state railway network for essentially the same purpose so are more representative of the railway as a large state-wide organisation than geographically specific, e.g., Station Master's office furniture.

For example, ORH has an 0-scale model of a four carriage single-deck interurban electric train. The Valley Heights Locomotive Depot Heritage Museum

(VHLDHM) is located beside one of the few lines on which these types of trains once operated. VHLDHM has a prototype single-deck interurban electric carriage on display. The model train could also be displayed at any railway museum across the state to show the range of prototype trains that have been used in NSW and to create an interesting contrast. However allocating the model to VHLDHM offers the opportunity to reinforce telling the story of these trains at Valley Heights, and is considered the stronger case.

Another example, ORH has a 4-wheel Powder Van that has recently been conserved by RailCorp apprentices. These vans ran anywhere across the network as demand for transporting explosives dictated. However of the various members in the ORH NSW Rail Heritage Network one stands out as most appropriate; while the others are considerably less so. During construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme, enormous volumes of explosives were transported to Cooma by rail. CMR, based in the town of Cooma, is considered to be the most appropriate location for allocating the Powder Van.

Themeing for Local Distinctiveness

The NSW government railway was essentially similar everywhere across its dispersed collection of stations and lines. The infrastructure was identifiably of similar design, the architecture only varied within rigid boundaries, the rolling stock was identical, and the staff were immersed in a single state-wide culture.

Likewise many railway museums present very similar visitor offerings. Precincts consist of a station platform, station building, track, signalling, goods yard, and occasionally a locomotive depot. Their collections of rolling stock and stories being told are essentially similar. Food and memorabilia offered for purchase in the visitor centres are the similar bland products of the omnipresent commercialised tourist industry.

Themeing offers an opportunity to develop a locally distinctive product for tourist visitors. To assert local claims to difference, and offer the visitor an essentially different experience, each railway museum in the ORH network of railway museums needs to be both distinct from other museums in the same tourism area and from other railway museums across the state.

For example, Tenterfield is in NSW near to the border between NSW and Queensland, each with a differing gauge of 4ft 8½in and 3ft 6in respectively. TRSPS has in its collection a Queensland 3ft 6in gauge 4-wheel sheep van. TRSPS also has a display of track showing the two different gauges. These are unique displays in NSW, particularly appropriate for the location, and distinguish TRSPS from other NSW railway museums.

Another example, ARM&RJM has focussed on the social history of railway workers. This is the only railway museum in NSW to offer research services into historic railway deaths. The museum is distinctive and as such has received many tourism awards.

Themeing also offers an opportunity to develop a locally distinctive product for residents of the town and surrounding area. Distinctiveness offers an opportunity to internally reinforce and externally express town claims to local distinctiveness.

For example, heavy industrial workshops are relatively rare today as NSW outsources much of its industrial capacity. In the heyday of the railways this was not so. The railway was substantially self-sufficient in manufacturing much of its needs from base materials in once massive railway workshop complexes. There is no museum of industry in NSW. Yet there is a railway museum located in ex-railway

workshops at Goulburn, the Goulburn Rail Heritage Centre (GRHC). The GRHC offers an almost unique opportunity to display the workings of heavy industry, and so create a locally distinctive product. The Junee Railway Roundhouse & Museum (JRR&M) shares its site with an operating railway rolling stock maintenance workshop. Visitors have the opportunity to see a real railway workshop in action, on the other side of the turntable pit. To further develop their distinctiveness, compared with other railway museums, both these museums would provide appropriate contexts to display a sectionalised locomotive in, and series of large scale models showing the stages of erecting a steam locomotive from the frames up.

Another example, railway architecture produced a few highly distinctive railway-specific buildings. The JRR&M is housed in a complete 360° circular brick roundhouse. This characteristically railway building offers visitors a distinctive spatial and sensual experience that is architecturally unique in NSW.

Themeing for the Future of Small Museums

Despite the large number of railway items in specialist railway museums and isolated railway items in other non-railway specialist museums, there are many thematic gaps in the current presentation of NSW railway history in museums (Attachment 1).

Filling these gaps could form a working agenda for future NSW railway museological effort. Many of the museological gaps are of a sociological nature, reflecting an oft-noted interest of traditional railway museum proponents and volunteers with things rather than people.

The management of generational change is a live issue for many volunteer-run museums. Long-term volunteers, often with extensive knowledge and skills essential to the running of a museum, static or operational, are reaching the twilight of their active involvement. While the Sydney Tramway Museum has an average of 72 active volunteers each month, participating for between 2 and around 100 hours in that month, those who are retired or close to retirement are disproportionately represented in both the number of hours contributed and the level of responsibility assumed. Some museums are experiencing a decline among newly-retired volunteers who might otherwise fill those gaps. For some, the decline in value of retirement plans due to the Global Financial Crisis has led to postponement of the decision to retire or the need to return to paid employment. In the longer term, older workers are being encouraged to remain in employment, postponing the time at which they will become available for extensive voluntary work. If the next generation of volunteers is to be given a sound footing on which to run (and enjoy) their museums, time is running out for an orderly, structured and comprehensive transfer of knowledge and skills. In that context, themeing, indeed any rigorous form of making and explaining decisions (past or present), is crucial to that process. After all, that foundation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the future of such museums in the 21st century as they move to accept the challenges of presenting railed transport as a cultural phenomenon and acting as advocates for that transport mode.

Themeing to Create Context

Small museums may find they have items in their collection that are inappropriate for their natural local or agreed upon themes. For example, items may have been inherited from previous museum administrations, there may be political value in keeping the item, disposing of the item or placing it into hidden storage may be impractical or too expensive. For various reasons the museum administration may want to exhibit the item. Themeing can be used to create a context around the item.

For example the TRSPS has in its possession an ex-steelworks self propelled 4-wheel crane, and an 0-4-0 saddle tank locomotive. Both items are way out of their authentic contexts. Yet the museum administration wishes to display both. The crane has visual appeal to prospective visitors. The locomotive has educational value for younger visitors, being the only steam locomotive in the New England region. The crane could be fitted with a coal grab and located next to the coal stage in the locomotive depot, as if it were for replenishing coal in locomotive tenders – theme Industry: Railway workshops, or theme Transport: railway landscapes, or Network maintenance. The locomotive could likewise be located in the locomotive depot as if it were a yard shunter – theme Transport: Transporting goods. Neither are authentic inclusions for the Tenterfield yard. Nor would those knowledgeable in railway history be convinced; though neophytes might be.

A better solution may be found in adopting a more plausible thematic approach. Railway station museums by nature of the role they played as nodes on an extended transport network are fortunate in that much rolling stock passed through the yard in transit to off-site places. Adopting Transport: Network maintenance as a theme, it might be more reasonable to couple the locomotive and crane together, plus a 4-wheel jib truck, and possibly a flat wagon loaded with an appropriate item, into a short construction train. The train could be positioned on one of the yard loops as if heading out of town to a railway construction site further down the line.

Conclusion

The presentation of the history of railway and tramway transportation to the public is a big undertaking, involving much space, many often large pieces of equipment to exhibit and considerable effort and expense to do so. The resources required can be considerable, especially for volunteer-based organisations. On the other hand, there are many people willing to volunteer their time and resources to help establish and maintain railway and tramway museums. The challenges confronting them are enormous, especially but by no means only among the smaller museums.

Themeing helps museums to find and establish a focus on what they do best. It helps to establish context and relevance. It helps to avoid situations where museums over-extend themselves in ways which are less relevant to what might be considered reasonable objectives for them to achieve. Themeing draws on identifiable features of the localities in which museums are situated. It promises to help with making a wide range of decisions about acquisitions, conservation and disposal. When established as museum policy, a theme offers some potential for orderly management and for making decisions about acquisition etc in ways which are acceptable to members, hopefully with sensitivity to individual members' interests in the museum. While themeing does not offer solutions to all the problems of railway and tramway museums, consideration of it may help to solve some problems and facilitate decision-making processes with respect to others.

References

- Australian Heritage Commission, 2001, *Australian Historic Themes: a framework for use in heritage assessment and management*, AHC, Canberra.
- Blainey, G, 1966, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History*, Sun Books, Sydney.
- Divall, C., 2000, 'Routes and Roots; Moving Beyond Australian Railways as Myth', *Historic Environment*, Vol 21 Number 2, pp, 25-31.
- Glischmski, S, 'Did we save too much?', *Trains*, October 2008.

- Heritage Council of NSW, 2001, *New South Wales Historical Themes*, HC, Sydney.
- McKillop, R.F., 2009, *Thematic History of the NSW Railways*,
<http://www.nswrailheritage.com.au/railheritageth.htm>, accessed 8 August 2011.
- McKillop, R.F. 2010, *Australian Railway Heritage Guide*, ARHS, Sydney.
- Semple Kerr, J, 2000, *Conservation Plan*, National Trust.
- Wallace, T, 2006 "Working of the Train Gang': Alienation, Liminality and
 Communitas in the UK Preserved Railway Sector', *International Journal of
 Heritage Studies*, 12 (3): 218-233.

Attachment 1

National Themes:	NSW Historic Themes: RailCorp Themes –	Railway Museum Examples:
Tracing the natural evolution of Australia	Naturally evolved environments	
	n/a	n/a
Peopling Australia	Aboriginal cultures:	
	Impacts on –	None known
	Employment of –	None known
	Migrants:	
	As promoters, managers –	None known
	As railway labour –	None known
	Moving inland –	None known
Developing local, regional and national economies	Pastoralism:	
	Transporting livestock, products –	Stock wagons; stock loading races; refrigerator vans; bi-level wool bale loading banks
	Servicing the pastoralism industry –	TRSPS wool loading bank
	Forestry:	
	Transporting timber –	Open wagons
	Railway utilization of timber –	TRSPS bore-adze depot
	Agriculture:	
	Transporting crops –	FHR grain silo; FHR bagged grain shed remains; RU wagons; BWH wagons
	Transporting supplies, machinery –	TRSPS goods shed; FHR goods shed; pillar cranes; gantry cranes; loading banks; flat wagons
	Industry:	
	Railway workshops –	GRHC Wellington Shed; LES Eveleigh
	Mining:	
	Transporting coal, minerals –	4-wheel coal hoppers; BCH wagons
	Technology:	
	Locomotive design –	No.1; 3203; 3801; 5096
	Carriage design –	Various carriages
	Electric carriage design –	T 4279; T 4801
	Freight vehicle design –	Various wagons
	Rail motor design –	CPH 18; FP 1; 621-721
	Communication:	
	Mail trains, parcel service –	HKL 360; C 3653
	Railway telegraphy –	None known
	Signalling, safe working –	CMR signal box; FHR signal box;

		signalling equipment
	Customer information –	Station signs
	Transport:	
	Building the network –	ZZR zig zag
	Pioneer lines –	FHR track; station and platform
	Rail/ship interchange –	None known
	Network maintenance –	Gang sheds; trikes; hand tools; track maintenance machines
	Making railway journeys –	Passenger stations; carriages
	Transporting goods –	Goods sheds; pillar cranes; gantry cranes; loading banks; various wagons
	Transporting people –	Stations; platforms; carriages
	Cultural landscapes:	
	Railway landscapes –	JRR&M workshops; Cooma yard
	Environmental footprints –	ZZR zig zag
	Events:	
	Celebrations, commemorations –	Opening plaques
	Responding to natural disasters –	Water gin
Building settlements, towns and cities	Settlements:	
	Shaping inland settlements –	None known
	Railway towns –	None known
	Impacts on urban form –	TRSPS suburban/rural demarcation
	Utilities:	
	Railway water supplies –	CMR water tank
	Making gas, generating electricity –	Macdonaldtown gas holder
	Accommodation:	
	Railway employees –	TRSPS crew barracks; CMR crew barracks; JRR&M staff amenities
	Passenger accommodation –	Station buildings
Working	Labour:	
	Railway workers –	RTM worker's walk
	Railway work culture –	None known
	Railway OH&S –	ARM database; TRSPS damaged wagon
	Railway heritage volunteers –	All precinct groups
Educating	Education:	
	Apprenticeships, cadetships –	FZ 909
	Regional education –	None known
Governing	Government, Administration:	
	Railway administration –	None known
	Federation –	None known
	Railway time –	Station Master's clocks; timetables
	Defence:	
	Transporting troops, equipment –	TRSPS armoured personnel carrier
	Manufacturing equipment, munitions –	Eveleigh 18lb. shell
	Remembrance –	Honour rolls; war memorials
	Law & order:	
	Transporting judges, prisoners –	BKD 711
	Protecting railway travellers –	None known
Developing Australia's cultural life	Sport:	

	Moving people, animals to events –	Horse boxes; Greyhound carriage
	Leisure:	
	Railway tourism –	None known
	Moving people to events –	Various carriages
	Creative endeavour:	
	Railway engineering –	Silver City Comet carriages; 3801
	Railway architecture –	Roundhouses; Signal Boxes; goods sheds; FHR gang shed; station buildings
	Railway gardens –	TRSPS station gardens
	Railway art, folklore, music –	None known
	Social institutions:	
	For railway workers –	CMR Railway Institute tennis court and clubhouse
Marking the phases of life	Birth, Death:	
	Birth –	Far West Baby Clinic carriage
	Railway accidents –	RTM accident crane and van; Australian Railway Monument, Werris Creek
	Funerary –	RTM coffin carrier; Guard's van coffin compartments; Mortuary station
	Persons:	
	Significant railway identities –	Whitton; John Whitton memorials