

MAINTAINING TRAMWAY TRADITIONS ON MUSEUM TRAMWAYS – Peter Kahn

Introduction

I experienced Sydney's trams in the 1950's -the conductor swinging along the footboard; the fresh air flowing through the tram.

When I joined the A.E.T.M. (as it was then known) in November 1958 at the old site in Loftus (Royal National Park) at just 18 years old, I learnt that the intention always was that it would be an operating museum. To be quite honest, that, is what attracted me.

I am sure that most of us joined S.P.E.R. for that reason and I am certain that is what has attracted our young members of today 50 years later.

Since the opening of the S.T.M. at the present location adjacent to Loftus Railway Station, we have gradually progressed with ultimately recreating a typical scene featuring operating trams. To that extent, this includes running to a timetable. Ideally, the conductor will walk through the tram (if a saloon) or swing along the footboard, helping to add to our visitors' experience.

THE EXPERIENCE - that's what it's all about- THAT'S WHAT WE WANT TO PROVIDE- for younger visitors it is fun and enjoyment but learning about a past era of passenger transport in Sydney; for older visitors it is about keeping the memories alive. I might call our attraction HERITAGE TOURISM.

Imagine the scene at Loftus ---trams passing on the double track in the street, the driver stopping to obtain the staff for the single track section and, as we used to in many places in Sydney, the conductor changing the points with the point hook; the tram running on reserved track alongside the road separated by a line of trees – a scaled down version of Anzac Parade through Moore Park.

Now, with the regulatory requirements that we are saddled with might make it difficult to maintain our enthusiasm; but ideally that's the show I want to be able to put on for our visitors - some realism.

Some might say that this is getting away from the museum concept of preservation, but I think we can have a balance between preservation and operation. With operation the costs are obviously much higher, what with running maintenance, increased insurance, etc. but the attraction of a living museum, where there is action as well, is far more attractive than just a collection of trams, etc. in a large building.

In today's operations at Loftus, we are governed by rail safety management requirements, such as enhanced emergency procedure measures and use of whistles in addition to normal warning gongs. As a result of these, are we getting away from providing tramway heritage realism? Can we do something about it?

How fast should we run the trams? Full parallel? Faster trip, but is that good, but demonstrating like it was in the old days. Tickets – Currently Sydney has a day ticket for Museum entry and single or return tickets to the National Park. Would it be nice to issue a ticket every time a passenger travels?

There is a distinct lack of interest in funding heritage by the Federal Government

Special Event Days – at STM we have a variety of trams out to give interest and to show our visitors who may not have experienced trams in real life. Even on normal operating days we try to have some variety (3 trams on Sundays, 2 on Wednesdays).

Uniforms - when STM started, had something different from the NSW Department of Government Transport bus uniforms - the same uniform as was worn by the trammies. The brown uniform was devised as a point of difference. Now, for about the last 30 years the old D.G.T. uniform has not existed. Go back to an old style? Maybe we could, as it is no longer in use. It would need to be comfortable in all weathers. Then there is the question of cost.

Discussion

Chris Steel – AETM – how do you differentiate between those who buy a tram tickets from those who buy a day ticket?

PK - Tickets are checked, National Park tram leaves from the entrance where there is a person who can issue any of the tickets. Conductor can collect as well. Visitors are supposed to show day tickets when going into the display hall. STM happy for anyone to spend time (and money) in the kiosk and bookshop (even if not having paid entry or travel). Members bring family – a negotiating situation sometimes whether family members to be paid for it not a family membership.

Craig Took – MTPA – lot of people involved now never saw the trams, how do you pass on the lore/practices?

PK – Younger members shown what the conductor did – mentoring. Some of the younger drivers better than the older ones in bringing the tram to a smooth stop. Recording how it works, oral history is important. John Burgess, an older member and trammie / bus driver, who recently passed away, explained how it worked in the tramways, orally, but little of the stories ever formally recorded. Loss of knowledge, with early members who knew, having passed on – recording and publication of the stories is important.

Dave Hinman – THS – 50 years of the THS Christchurch shortly – are we recording our own history? Never say too soon to collect history, preserving the ways of the past, what may be safe 50 years ago is not safe today. For example, footboard collecting was banned by Government through legislation in 1913. Problem of open sided cars in the street and also coupling procedures of trailers – have devised new ones.

PK – Normally don't couple cars on STM, differences in car performances – variety of multiple unit tramcars. Exception might be for a special event day. Footboard tramcars – some consider the ultimate is collecting fares going along. No formal restrictions as yet, operate with car and no skylarking.

Brent Efford – Tramway Topics Editor - not a homogenous situation in tramway operations over time, the 1900's methods often quite different to that of the 1950's. While we are talking of tramway traditions, what era do we recreate? Should we say this?

David Critchley – STM – noted that the highlight is collecting fares from footboard – techniques have been passed down, passing on the knowledge in a safe way. Might only do it once a month and thus less familiar with operations, need to adjust safety with today. Uniforms – replica uniforms can be manufacture in short time from Asia – matching patterns of old and thus different to modern clothing. Caps can be made in NZ.

Peter Hyde – BTMS – noted that visitors can have different perceptions, eg travelling in a cross bench tram during a thunderstorm rather than on a nice sunny day. Barrier rails can cause problems with people crashing into them.