

COTMA 2008 Launceston Conference

Significance Assessment of Collections – Ballarat Tramway Museum

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Background

The Ballarat Tramway Museum (BTM) received a grant in Feb. 2007 to “*provide a significance assessment of the 3,500 objects in the collection.*” The collection since (July 2008) has grown to over 4100 catalogued items. The funding was available to commission an experienced professional to undertake the project that would improve the identification, collection management, preservation and public access to collections.

At about the same time, the City of Ballarat embarked upon a programme known as “Ballarat Treasures” to identify buildings, places, structures, landscapes, collections and objects that have been significant in shaping Ballarat's history and cultural identity. The inaugural Ballarat Treasures Register was announced on 20 August 2007 and included the BTM's track in Wendouree Parade and its collection. Items included on the Ballarat Treasures Register are recognised as being significant in the history and heritage of Ballarat. The list has no statutory standing, however many of the treasures are included on statutory registers.

The Daylesford Spa Country Railway, received a grant at the same time as the BTM to prepare a significance study of its collection of railmotors. This work was done by Donald Ellsmore former Heritage Manager for NSW State Rail Authority. In Daylesford's case, the rail motors form the core of the collection and they are considered to be the specialist museum for this type of rail vehicle.

Significance

Its definition – The historic, aesthetic, scientific and social values that an object or collection has for past, present and future generations¹. It is the key concept that can help museum workers make sound decisions about objections, collections, by explaining the values and meanings that make them important. Its application can be²:

- As an integral part of museum collection policy
- As a guiding principle in other museum policies, strategic plans and mission statements
- To take stock of the collection
- To guide and support acquisition decisions
- To deaccession objects from the collection

¹ Heritage Collections Council, Significance Training Manual, NSW, 2002.
http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/6

² *ibid* – page 5, section 1.2

- To guide conservation policies and treatment
- To interpret objects and collections in public programmes including exhibitions, guide tours and special events
- In thematic studies
- To support funding applications or in seeking sponsorship
- To market your museum and its objects, stories as an appealing visitor destination
- To guide the collection of contemporary objects

Basis of Significance

The four primary criteria are:

- Historic
- Aesthetic
- Scientific or research
- Social or spiritual

...and the five comparative used to evaluate the degree of significance:

- Provenance
- Representativeness
- Rarity
- Condition, completeness or intactness
- Interpretative potential

There are many good references available on the net and in publications such as – “SIGNIFICANCE - What is the purpose and process of significance assessment?” <http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/documents/Significance.doc> published by the Museum of WA.

Past work – ESCo 12

After the BTM obtained Electric Supply Co. No. 12, it carried out a significance assessment during the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan using the 1992 Engineering Heritage and Conservation Guidelines³. The principle part of any Management Plan is the Statement of Significance. In the case of No. 12 it can be summarised as:

- The body of No. 12 is a notable object having historical and technical significance as the only surviving example of a former Sydney cable tram body converted to a Ballarat electric tram.
- Being a tram body imported from another city amplifies the historical significance. Its conversion to another form of public transport vehicle and one of Victoria's earliest electric tramcars adds to this significance. The tram body shows the results of modifications, alterations, defects and some repairs during its nearly 30 year working life.

³ The Institution of Engineers Australia, *Engineering Heritage and Conservation Guidelines*, Canberra 1992.

- The body has technical significance in that it shows how an older body underwent modifications to become an electric tramcar. It shows the stage of development, at the time, of an underframe for an electric tramcar in Australia. It also provides details of paint schemes used on the tramcars by ESCo, not accurately recorded previously. Even though the tram was poorly built, it served Ballarat for 30 years at a time when few people had cars and the population depended heavily on the trams.
- Diminishing the value of the tram's technical significance is the lack of any mechanical and electrical components, virtually complete deterioration of one side of the tramcar and some missing components.

Electric trams enabled Ballarat to show that it was an important city within the Nation.

- The social significance of the tram body is substantial in that it is one of the few reminders of early 20th century street public transport vehicles remaining. The trams brought a new and faster form of public transport to Ballarat. It showed that Ballarat itself was one of the modern cities of the world by having such electric tramcars.
- The social significance to Ballarat itself is also considerable in that it is one of the few components of the overall power supply system that ESCo provided to Ballarat in 1905 to actually survive. This system brought electricity to Ballarat residents and provided a more efficient public transport system than the then existing horse tram system. ESCo was itself of the era when electricity supply was privately funded and managed.
- Its social significance is important in that it is a reminder of the working conditions that tramway crews had to work under and the related union battles. ESCo was the first to have one man operated electric trams in Australia.

Assessing the whole Collection - Methodology

To undertake the assessment, the Museum appointed historian Stella Barber. Stella has a Masters qualification in history and archives. She has worked as a corporate historian and prepared the significance assessment on the large photographic collection of the Ballarat Gold Museum.

The detailed catalogue of the BTM collection made the job a lot easier by viewing the item at “home” through its catalogued image and details. This avoided the need to frequently visit the Museum and actually look at items. The appended table shows the type of objects that make up the collection. Not all object types are listed but it shows the scope of the collection.

The collection context is set by the history of tramways in Ballarat and this was briefly considered by the study. The report looked at the:

- tramcars, in particular trams numbers 1, 12, 14 and 40
- Photographs – over 3000 scanned images
- Archives – over 200
- Infrastructure – track and overhead
- Tickets – over 700
- Drawings – over 150
- Postcards – over 100
- Picture books – over 150
- Moving images – over 10
- Newsletters and Magazines – over 300
- Uniforms and associated items – over 60
- Newspaper and clippings – over 470

As the study was looking at whole of the collection and not just the tramcars, only four of our tramcars were reported on, considered by the BTM to be the most significant. When we did the nomination for the City of Ballarat's Treasures Register, eight tramcars were nominated (18, 26, 27 and 38 in addition to 1, 12, 14 and 40). The BTM study looks at the significance of trams primarily in relation to the history of public transport in the City of Ballarat, not that of Melbourne's although this is noted. On the other hand, the Daylesford study looked at all their rail motors, but not their locomotive or goods rollingstock or other elements of their collection.

Each of those items were assessed depending on the object type. For example tickets were assessed by looking at the content, scarcity and completeness and then its significance.

The final report took some 70 pages with colour photographs.

The Outcome

The author of the significance study concluded:

“Although the Ballarat service was relatively small compared with other world systems, it was in fact significant because of its inclusive social nature. This is something that the BTM has tried to preserve.”

“At the time of closure of the tramway in Ballarat, that service and that of Bendigo was a gem in the tramway world. All its trams were of WW1 vintage and ran on what was considered a quaint tramway. It is a proud survivor given that other cities the world over has shut and demolished their street trams.”

The final paragraph of the assessment reads:

"What is vital contextually is that the BTM operates as a living museum and is one of a very few that operates in a street environment and is run by volunteers. The BTM is globally significant in that it operates an authentic museum, has a catalogued collection of small items, has formulated and ratified a conservation policy, is an accredited museum, is a museum that meets high standards and tells the story of Ballarat and SEC Provincial tramways. The Ballarat Tramway Museum is clearly one of the leaders in Australasia in terms of what it has achieved given its resources. Significantly (!), at time of writing, the BTM will be the first tramway museum to commission a professional significance assessment of its full collection in Australasia. It is not possible to assess this particular fact on world standing, however, if others have commissioned such a report, they would be few in number."

The Ballarat Treasures Project

The City of Ballarat for its Treasures Project, based on an idea from Korea, followed the standard guidelines for Significance Assessment. A copy of document for horse tram No. 1 is attached to this paper. When the results were first announced, the results, more what was left out, caused a lot of local discussion.

While being a “Ballarat Treasure” does not give any formal heritage protection, unless registered on the Victorian Heritage Register or listed as a Heritage Place under the local planning scheme, it does give recognition by local government as being important to the community. The recognition of our collection is important in assisting the Museum to achieve one of its Key Directional Strategies which is to “Motivate ongoing community interest and commitment”.

An Alternative process for tramcars

The National Tramway Museum, Crich, UK (NTM) has developed a similar process for its tramcars, a “Collections Management Attitude Statement”. The preparation involves the Rollingstock Engineer, Curator, Tramcar Conservation Committee and authorisation by the Board of Management. A NTM’s Attitude Statement contains the following headings:

- Cover
- Index
- i) Executive Summary
- ii) Attitude
- iii) Recommendations
- iv) Considerations
 - 1. Curatorial considerations
 - 1.1 Condition
 - 1.2 Originality
 - 1.2.1 Body
 - 1.2.2 Equipment
 - 1.3 Form
 - 1.4 Function
 - 2 Technical considerations
 - 2.1 Form
 - 2.2 Function
 - 2.3 Influence
 - 2.4 Manufacturer
 - 3 Social considerations
 - 3.1 Social Representation
 - 4 Health and Safety
 - 4.1 Demonstration
 - 4.1.1 Driver / Conductor
 - 4.1.2 Passengers
 - 4.2 Display
 - 5 Financial
 - 5.1 Restoration
 - 5.2 Demonstration
 - 5.3 Display
 - 5.4 Maintenance
 - 6 Other Value – (Commercial Considerations)
 - 6.1 Attraction
 - 6.2 Operation
 - 6.3 Workshop
 - 6.4 Outside Works
- v) Supporting Documents

- Time Line
- Technical specification
- Condition Survey

It looks at many more factors than those of the basic Significance Assessment, although these can be incorporated within overall assessment itself. It is part way there for the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan.

Conservation Management Plans

The author is been involved in the preparation of two Conservation Management Plans for trams, Ballarat's ESCo No. 12 and more recently the preparation of the plan for The North Melbourne Electric Tramways and Lighting Co. (NMETL)'s tram No. 13, or Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board V class 214.

Central around both plans is the preparation of the statement of significance. Although there was a lot of the original body left on ESCo 12, only the roof of NMETL 13 remains original. However both trams are significant in their own right. NMETL 13 has recently been added to the Victorian Heritage Register and the BTM is considering whether to nominate some of its tramcars.

Conclusions

While most of COTMA Museums have undertaken a process similar to the National Tramway Museum, it is seldom formally documented, other than perhaps briefly. We all hold significant tramcars and other objects.

When COTMA Members generally acquired our tramcars, we did an "significance assessment" although generally very brief and looking primarily at the historical aspects only. As a start to assessing your collection, do the tramcars first and then work through the other items.

Significant Assessment using the accepted criteria are a useful objective process when seeking funding for restoration projects, interpretation or even just knowing what you have. The process can also be useful in gaining community recognition.

Documents

Copies (in CD format) of the assessment are available upon request, relative to helping you show that you have a worthwhile collection, will contain NMETL's and ESCo's Conservation Plans



Ballarat Treasures Register

NOMINATION FORM

Name of Item Nominated:	Ballarat Horse Tram No.1
Description:	<p>Horse drawn tram, originally built 1887 for the Ballarat Tramway Co, as a double deck vehicle. It is a four wheel (single truck) vehicle with drop end platforms at either end, double deck – closed saloon on lower deck and open on the upper deck.</p> <p>Used as a horse tram from 1887 to 1905, then as a trailer to electric trams until late 1920's. Body recovered by the Ballarat Tramway Museum in 1985 and reconstructed to an operable condition. See attached Fleet Register Sheet for photograph and further details.</p>

<p>Explain why the item is being nominated:</p> <p>Please refer to the criteria in the information document and try to explain fully its significance using the basis of the criteria.</p> <p>Please include separate supporting documentation including a photograph if desired.</p> <p>Please note that the material submitted as part of this nomination will not be returned.</p> <p>Also describe any conditions associated with the nominations,</p>	<p>The item is nominated on the following basis:</p> <p>Historic – Only Ballarat horse tram that has survived, though heavily reconstructed. One of the few remnants of the Ballarat horse tram era left. Horse trams enabled Ballarat residents to travel to the Lake quickly and easily, for shopping and business. Assisted in the economic development of Ballarat from 1887 to 1903. Constructed in Adelaide by Duncan and Fraser, assembled in Ballarat.</p> <p>Technical – shows the method of constructing tramcar bodies in the horse tram era of street tramway transport. These were light weight, similar technology to other horse drawn vehicles at the time.</p> <p>Provenance – known in detail – see Fleet Register sheet.</p> <p>Rarity – only Ballarat Horse Tram and one of a few operable double deck horse trams in Australia of an original form.</p> <p>Representativeness – Although the only Ballarat horse tram, technology is representative of other horse drawn trams in the USA at the time. Followed USA designs of John Stephenson of New York.</p> <p>Condition-Integrity – Reconstruction follows the original form of the body. The wheel set is from a Melbourne Cable tram dummy (trailer) – different in style, more springing.</p> <p>Interpretive Potential – able to take people for a journey to experience what it was like in many aspects of the 1890's to ride in a horse drawn vehicle.</p>
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<p>What Public Access is available?</p> <p>Describe any conditions or restriction on access to the item by the public.</p>	<p>Tram can be viewed at the Museum when depot building is open for the public, normally Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays from 1200 to 5pm. Other times by arrangement. When the tram is operated, publicity arranged for such events. The only restriction is public access to the vehicle itself. Can be arranged under supervision.</p>
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Your Name:	Ballarat Tramway Museum Inc.
Address:	Wendouree Parade, South Gardens Reserve PO Box 632 Ballarat Vic. 3353
Owners Name:	Ballarat Tramway Museum Inc.
Owners Signature:	
Address:	Wendouree Parade, South Gardens Reserve PO Box 632 Ballarat Vic. 3353
Telephone No:	Depot 5334 1580. Manager Museum Services: 9376 6882
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