HERITAGE IN
TOURIST RAILWAYS

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A STATEMENT attributed to a recent Minister for Transport in Victoria (and we seem to have had quite a number over the last few years) claims that there will be two great centuries in railway history. The first has passed, viz. the nineteenth century, which saw the creation of railways and their development as a comprehensive and efficient means of transport. The second is soon to come. In the twenty-first century we will see the ultimate marriage of rails, flanged wheels and high technology.

Europe is well down this track with it T.G.V. and high speed express trains and freight service. Japan is also a world leader. Australia is now showing signs of moving in this direction with moves to a National Rail Freight System, and talk (at least) of a Very Fast Train.

Somehow in this, the twentieth century has missed out. Perhaps our century is in the rail doldrums where the great impetus of the early golden era has stagnated, as investment was cut back and capital run down when the steel tyre on rail was replaced (we hope temporarily) by an infatuation with pneumatic rubber on bitumen.

The great railways of the 1800s with their proud traditions and safety systems went into decline in the twentieth century, probably because these traditions and systems resisted change and were costly to replace. However, these same traditions and systems gave birth to a phenomenon in the middle-century - the rail preservation movement. Not unexpectedly, this began in the country where the railway was invented - the United Kingdom.

Nostalgia, railway mania, steam-train enthusiasm and perhaps a love of our history among ordinary citizens, brought about a movement which has spread throughout the world, with the result that numerous aspects of early railway heritage have been retained in one form or another in preserved railways.

These “aspects” range from simple collections to complete operating railway systems. Not only have these been a source of leisure for those who engage in the activities of preservation, they also provide recreation for the non-railway enthusiast or interested tourist, thus finding, in the second part of the twentieth century, a means of justifying their existence in a commercial sense. After a shaky start, with the Tal-ly-llyn railway in the fifties, tourist railways are now a legitimate rail industry, a fact which is borne out by the way these activities are reported regularly in the railway trade (as a part from enthusiast) press.

In the English-speaking world, tourist railways abound. Our visitors from the U.K. will tell us that one can not travel fifty miles within their country without encountering some little line with its collection of operating, early railway memorabilia.

Australia too, has its share and each state can boast at least two successful ventures and many attempts to start new ones.

Australian Tourist Railways can be categorized under three main headings:
A. Newly Created

Generally, these are totally new enterprises where new right-of-way is developed, tracks laid with reclaimed material and rolling stock collected from other heritage sources. Examples can be found in Queensland, where former sugar cane locomotives and stock are used to haul passengers in special tourist developments.

B. Reconstructed Railways Using Non-indigenous Equipment

These develop where an enthusiastic group seeks to restore an abandoned railway but uses rolling stock gleaned from other sources.

Examples of these can be found in the famous Zig Zag Railway N.S.W. and the Bellarine Peninsula Railway in Victoria.

C. Restored Railways Using Indigenous Equipment

Where a whole railway, usually a branch line, has been preserved and is operated utilizing the original track, structures and rolling stock.

Examples of these are:

- The Pichi Richi Railway - S.A.
- Streamranger - S.A.
- The Puffing Billy Railway - Victoria
- The Don River Railway - Tas.

The preserved lines in this category have a strong heritage value because, as well as preserving the physical artifacts, they also hold on to some of the early railway practices, particularly in safeworking.

All tourist railways are, in varying degrees, resources for holding and displaying items of Australia’s Railway Heritage. However, because of limited human and financial resources, not all can fulfil this important task satisfactorily and it would behove us to assist some of the smaller groups in their preservation efforts to ensure the longevity of their collections.

CASE STUDY - The Puffing Billy Railway

History

Probably the most successful venture in Australian railway preservation is “The Puffing Billy Railway”, a former Victorian Railways narrow gauge (2’6”) branch line which linked Upper Ferntree Gully to Gembrook in the Dandenong Ranges near Melbourne.

This Railway closed as a common carrier in 1953 as a result of a land slide, which covered the track at its mid-point.

In 1955, after a series of “farewell” excursion trains, sponsored by a Melbourne newspaper, a preservation group was formed. This group underwrote the Victorian Railway’s cost of weekend services on the Upper Ferntree Gully-Belgrave section (which was on the Melbourne side of the
landslide) until the suburban electrification was extended over the narrow gauge right-of-way to Belgrave in 1958.

Between 1958 and 1962, the Society provided volunteer labour and finance to re-open the line beyond Belgrave. This was a unique situation, as volunteers from the Society were working under direct Victorian Railway supervision to repair a government railway.

Under these conditions, and with assistance from the Australian Army (which by-passed the landslide) the Railway opened between Belgrave and Menzies Creek (6.3 km) in 1962 and Menzies Creek and Emerald (3.71 km) in 1965.

After a period of consolidation in which additional locomotives were obtained and reconditioned, rolling stock repair facilities established, and the track structure further strengthened, the line was reconditioned between Emerald and the emerald Lake Park with trains reaching Lakeside Station in 1975. The total length of the Railway was then 13.9 km.

By 1977, the Preservation Society had gained twenty-two years experience in railway management and in recognition of this, the government of the day proclaimed The Emerald Tourist Railway Act, 1977, which transferred the ownership and responsibility for operating the railway to The Emerald Tourist Railway Board, a quasi autonomous government organisation which is largely made of Society nominees.

In 1990/91 The Board, supported by the Society employed a permanent staff of 28 persons, and approximately 500 volunteers to operate 975 trains which carried 221,055 passengers for a revenue of $2.2M.

Railway Heritage, the importance of authenticity and historical integrity, has always been a major part of Society and Board policy. History is a very sellable commodity and is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the figures just quoted. In the railway preservation movement, it is an important factor in the motivation of volunteers, without whom few preserved railways would exist.

The Aims of the Organisation(s)

As can be seen, the objectives of both the E.T.R.B. and P.B.P.S. largely overlap. In simple terms, the Board's aim is to operate the Railway profitably and safely within an historical context. The Society with its close association with the Board, acts as its "heritage conscience", and thus has an influence on all decision-making which has import on the historical integrity of the operation.

In another sense, the Society acts as the "dreaming" arm of the Railway. Where historical values call for expenditure which cannot be justified in the context of Board budgets, the Society will often contribute its own funds for the purpose. Recent examples of this have been the restructure of a Garrett and a Climax locomotive and the installation of an historical turntable.

The basic objective of the Railway can therefore be summarized from the Society's Mission Statement:

1. To ensure the continued preservation and operation of the historic narrow gauge steam railway between Belgrave and Gembrook popularly known as "Puffing Billy".

2. To maintain as far as possible the historic integrity of the Puffing Billy Railway and other conservation and scenic values of the Puffing Billy Corridor from Belgrave and Gembrook.

3. To support in every possible way the Emerald Tourist Railway Board in its preservation and operation of the Railway.
4. To collect, restore and display in working or static condition, examples of railway and associated equipment contemporary with Puffing Billy with emphasis on narrow gauge railways.

The Puffing Billy Collection

The Railway and all equipment required for its operation is vested in the E.T.R.B. Hence it owns:

(a) **Locomotives**

6 - Victorian Railways N.A. Class (2-6-2 T) locomotives.

These are all that remain of seventeen identical engines which operated on the V.R. Narrow Gauge Railways. Two of these were built by the Baldwin Locomotive Company (U.S.A.) in 1899, the remaining 15 being copies built in Victoria between 1900 and 1917.

▼ *A re-created “Narrow Gauge” Mixed Train. Victorian Railways N.A. Class loco and restored rolling stock - Photo: P. Ralph.*
One the six, four are operable, the remainder requiring extensive restoration.

1. Victorian Railways - “G” Class "Garratt” (2.6.0 + 0.6.2) locomotive.

This is one of two locomotives built by Byer Peacock in 1926 for the Victorian Railways. It is undergoing extensive rebuilding in the E.T.R.B.'s workshops, finance being provided by the P.B.P.S.

1. Climax Geared locomotive.

A “B” Class Climax built in 1928, by the Climax Manufacturing Co. U.S.A. for the Forest Commission of Victoria. This was formerly an exhibit in the P.B.P.S. Museum before being restored by volunteers in 1988 and transferred to the Board for operation.


(b) Rolling Stock (27 passenger; 24 freight)

The Railway owns 51 assorted items of rolling stock which is too many to detail in a paper of this nature. All are indigenous to the Victorian Narrow Gauge Railway systems with the exception of four N.B.L. cars which are the remaining examples of operable rolling stock from the Mt. Lyell Mining and Railway Company’s Rack Railway in Tasmania.

The Board's collection includes a representative of every type of carriage built for the V.R. Lines.
(c) Buildings/Structures

Five of the original buildings remain on the Railway viz. four station buildings and an industrial building which is reputed to be the oldest in the district of Emerald. All are in regular use.

The spectacular trestle bridge at Belgrave is a working example of early V.R. timber bridges.

As an operating railway, it is becoming difficult to maintain the integrity of historical items. Steel rusts, timber rots. Both must be replaced. Modern safety requirements often require modification to historical items, and the safety of the public must be paramount. For example, it is difficult, to claim the famous trestle bridge as historical, since extensive replacement of components has been undertaken over the last twenty years. Similarly, much of the passenger rolling stock has undergone extensive rebuilding - so much so, that only the number may be original.

A further example is that of a locomotive (No. 8A) which spent 17 years in a children’s holiday park before being restored. The only original parts of this were the frame, cylinders, wheels and some assorted hardware yet the completed engine looks exactly as it did in 1908.

(d) Signalling/Safeworking/Communication Equipment

The Railway is signalled with a variety of Mackenzie & Holland semaphore and colour light signals operated from interlocking frames.

Safeworking is by Staff & Ticket and equipment has been obtained to provide electric staff working on busy sections.

To add atmosphere (and security) to some of the Board’s property, Mackenzie & Holland gates have been installed.

The interior of signal cabins and station offices have been decorated with antique telephones, wall clocks and similar authentic equipment.

The Society Museum

The return of Puffing Billy in 1962 created an enormous amount of publicity in Victoria. As a result of this, the Society was seen as the only preserver of steam equipment in the State and was inundated with offers of equipment which was about to be scrapped.

As the only preservation body at the time, the Society set aside space at the Menzies Creek Station, with the intention of creating a museum. The number of exhibits increased until this space was literally crammd with exhibits. The organisation is now faced with a problem of housing them.

Currently in the museum compound is:

3'6" gauge Beyer Garratt ex the Australian Portland Cement Coy.

3'6" gauge “Perry” (0.4.0.T) ex the Australian Portland Cement Coy.

2'6" gauge “Shay” ex Ali Shan Railway - Taiwan.

2'6" gauge “Orenstein & Koppel (0.6.0.T) ex South Africa

2’6” gauge Peckett Contractor’s loco (0-4-0) ex a Melbourne Gasworks

3’6” gauge Abt locomotive ex Mr. Lyell Mining & Railway Coy.

2’ gauge “Hudswell Clarke” (0-4-2 ST) Sugar Mill locomotive

2’ gauge “Perry” 2-6-0 Sugar Mill locomotive
2' gauge "Fowler" Sugar Mill locomotive

3'6" gauge British War Dept. 0-6- locomotive "Pozieres"

plus: assorted diesel locomotives from sugar tramways and timber tramways, industrial rolling stock and an authentic plate-way wagon.

The Society's collection, together with the Board's locomotive fleet has been described as one of the most comprehensive collections of different locomotive types in the Southern Hemisphere.

Collections need care and finance. In this light, the Puffing Billy museum is at a disadvantage when it comes to capital funding. With the operating Railway demanding all available capital funds, and much of the Society's cash going in the same direction, the museum project is unfortunately a poor relation.

It is no longer acceptable to preserve and display exhibits inside a wire compound or shed. The public expects exhibits in pristine condition, displayed in clean, comfortable surroundings and preferably operating. As indicated earlier, this is a problem facing all voluntary-based preservation groups and should, perhaps, be addressed by "Government Preservation" before the precious exhibits deteriorate beyond redemption.

Heritage Policy

The Society (and the Board) has determined that The Puffing Billy Railway should be regarded as an "operating museum". The time-frame to be represented is set between the period 1910-1930. As far as possible, all visual aspects and operating practices are to be representative of this era. Staff uniforms, locomotive colour schemes, ticketing and even the names of management divisions are included.

The problems faced in operating a full railway system with all of its attendant disciplines however, pose a strain on any heritage policy. In the past, alterations to locomotives, carriages and buildings have often taken the path of expediency rather than that of authenticity. With this comes unnecessary conflict within the organisation. Preservation societies, like the environment movement, have purists!

In an attempt to ease conflicts over interpretations and aims to ensure a uniformity of approach, the Society has commissioned the preparation of a "Heritage Manual" for the Puffing Billy Railway. In this, a professional historian with an empathy toward the Railway, has documented the period selected and established operating, behavioural and visual standards for the whole enterprise. The Board has adopted this as its restoration policy.

This manual will be distributed to all decision makers on the Railway and will be the Railway's "bible" in all matters relating to the visual and of "Puffing Billy".

The manual has been some three years in preparation and goes into considerable detail. It even goes so far as to state the species of trees and shrubs which can be planted around station buildings.

During the preparation period, it provided a reference for architects designing the Board's new station building at Belgrave and was the basis for detailed "period" interior decorating of public areas such as the ticket office and stationmaster's office.