

GETTING MILEAGE FROM A DISPLAY
(MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING)

Geoff Spiers

Museums Officer, History Trust of S.A.

Project Officer, Relocation of Mile End Rail Museum
to Port Adelaide

In some ways in having me as a guest speaker, you've drawn the short straw. I'm a person with general museum skills, including some in the area of museum design. But I have no formal training in it. You won't extract much of value from me in areas like aesthetics, interior decoration or how to produce working drawings or make showcases. Nevertheless, there are some areas where I believe I can offer useful advice and these fall within the general scope of the title of this paper: "Museum Display Planning".

Let me begin by defining what I mean by the term, "museum display". For me, it includes anything the visitor experiences during his stay at the museum: the grounds, the entrance pavilion, the buildings, the static displays, the tram rides, the workshops, the toilets. The visitor will come in contact with all these elements, or most of them during his two to three hour stay, and they will provide the basis for his all-important judgement on what has been offered. In all probability it will not be on your museum's ability to restore and run trams - unless one of them breaks down - nor on the quality and extent of its collections in storage, its research work, its ability to secure and preserve significant transport heritage objects or its production of technical publications.

MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

These latter are all essential to your museum's operations but any museum depending on public support will, I believe, need to give displays a higher priority than any of them if it wishes to survive into the 1990's and beyond.

There are several actions museums should take in order to ensure that displays are given the high priority they need. The first of these is that the museum should have the administrative ability to develop and execute a display plan. What display plan? A plan should incorporate a broad statement of display objectives, including the market the museum is trying to attract and the approach for communicating with them once they have come. eg. formal, hands on, interactive, all of these in combinations or whatever. Let me take the high ground. My own view, for example, is that transport museums should do what they can to widen their base of appeal. Therefore they should try to present displays of interest to ordinary people more than to specialist enthusiasts, with emphasis on the social features of exhibits rather than the technological. They should try to attract women and if possible, children, so that a visit is seen as a family affair, not something that they can shoot in to see for a couple of hours one Saturday afternoon instead of ducking off to the footy or the pub.

How can the museum get the administrative ability to develop such a plan? Some museums, those with paid staff, already have it, ie. they have a director, or a curator, or a designer, or a person who can act in any or all of these capacities, on the staff team. More museums represented here today are run entirely on voluntary effort and for them (or you!) the problem is more critical. Might it be worthwhile considering redeploying your resources, so that it becomes possible to employ a person, even if only part-time? Such a person need not, indeed could not - be just a designer, but he does need to act as a facilitator and co-ordinator for display planning.

MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

Would it be possible to get assistance from your local council to try employing someone, say, for a year? Perhaps you can get additional support through your State Government's cultural agency. I should say however that in South Australia the museums funding agency, the History Trust of S.A., does not provide for salaries but it can and does provide substantial assistance with project grants. It might be different in your State or country.

The point is, in terms of being able to provide continuity and skilled co-ordination, the idea of obtaining a paid person is certainly worth a try if it seems at all achievable. Of course it cannot be any person. He or she may be drawn from the ranks of your museum members but only if he has the necessary ability - a vision for the direction the museum should be taking as a whole, a practical skill in one or more areas essential to the museum's operations and the ability to plan and co-ordinate the work of volunteers.

If it is not feasible to consider employing anybody then the museum should try to develop a display plan by appointing a sub-committee which reports to the governing body regularly and produces the plan within a defined period. The committee should include people who have had involvement with site development as well as display planning in the traditional sense. It would be up to the executive of each museum to determine how much overlap there might be with other sub-committees such as buildings, grounds, research etc.

These are the main elements of a museum display development plan:

- statement of broad objectives
- assessment of the market
- statements as to how displays will be presented



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Officer, History Trust of South
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In addition, there are the nuts-and-bolts elements:

- budget estimates
- how manpower is to be deployed
- programme

It may not in fact be possible to produce a programme until the budget, and consequently cash flow for the project, has been determined and substantially achieved. This is a matter worthy of further serious consideration and discussion, so I have given it a separate subheading as follows:

Funds

In Australia there are four major sources of funds beyond those raised by your own activities, ie.

- State Government
- Local Government
- Community Employment Programme
- Corporate Sponsorship

I will briefly discuss each in turn.

1. State Government

Four States - South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria - have grants programmes of various types for specialist and local museums. There is also a programme of assistance to "recognised" local museums in Western Australia and a museums assistance plan is, I understand, being contemplated in Tasmania. You can find out the details of these various programmes by contacting the appropriate State Ministry for the Arts, through one of the major State Museums or the State Branch of the Museums Association of Australia.



South Australia's best!

'MUSEUMS OF THE YEAR'

Which are South Australia's best museums? Well, according to the 1987 Museum of the Year Awards (presented in December by Barbara Wiese, Minister for Tourism), they are as follows:

CATEGORY A (Museums with more than 2 staff)

- BEST MUSEUM OVERALL:
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MARITIME MUSEUM
- BEST SPECIAL EXHIBITION:
MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT MUSEUM,
for its current exhibition,
"Chapters in Childhood"

CATEGORY B (Museums with 2 or fewer staff)

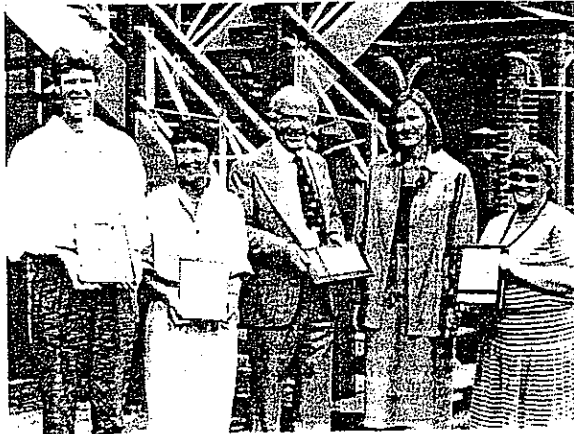
- BEST MUSEUM:
MILLICENT NATIONAL TRUST MUSEUM

CATEGORY C (Museums with voluntary staff only)

- BEST MUSEUM:
NARACOORTE NATIONAL TRUST MUSEUM

CERTIFICATES OF MERIT were also awarded as follows:

- South Australian Museum: for the Information Centre and new Fish Gallery
- Old Government House, Belair, for the documentation of its collections
- Kev Rohrlach Collection, Barossa Valley - for a remarkable and wide-ranging private collection
- Burra National Trust: for an outstanding mining display and presentation in Malowen Lowarth Cottage
- Moonta National Trust: for an outstanding mining display, and for the documentation of its collections
- Port Pirie National Trust: for the restoration of the building exterior, and for the 'Timeline' display
- Wellington Courthouse Museum: for the restoration of the building, and for the captioning of displays
- Kapunda Museum: for the compilation of heritage registers
- Wallaroo National Trust Museum: for the thematic grouping of its exhibits, and the research and organisation of its maritime display.



ABOVE: Still a little surprised, but obviously enjoying the occasion immensely, are major winners of the 1987 Museum of the Year Awards. From left: Kevin Fewster (S.A. Maritime Museum), Viv Szekeres (Migration & Settlement Museum), David Harris (Millicent National Trust Museum), guest of honour, the Hon. Barbara Wiese (Minister for Tourism/Minister assisting the Minister for the Arts), and Lyndal Oakeshott ("The Sheep's Head", Naracoorte National Trust Museum).

The major winners listed above have automatically become entrants in the nationwide Museum of the Year Awards being conducted in 1988 by the Museums Association of Australia. It's not hard to see that South Australia's best stand a very good chance indeed of ranking with the nation's best!

(OPENING HOURS:

S.A.M.M. Sat-Wed, 10-5;
open daily in school hols.
Migration & Settlement:
Weekdays 10-5; weekends &
public hols., 1-5.
Millicent: Mon-Sat 10-4;
Sun. & public hols. 1-4.
Naracoorte: Daily, 10-4.1

MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

1. State Government (Cont'd)

I will instance the type of assistance being offered in the area in which I am directly involved. My own organisation, the History Trust of S.A., can claim to be something of a pioneer in this area. It has been running a Museums Assistance Grants Programme for a few years now, with administrative costs. It is particularly keen to foster the development of museum displays and it has given substantial grants to a number of Local Museums for this purpose. It is also willing to finance restoration and capital projects of various sorts if they have some sort of display component to them and on this basis some substantial grants have gone to transport museums in South Australia. For example the Pichi Richi Railway Preservation Society received a grant of \$29,000 to contribute towards building a carriage restoration workshop in which it will be possible for visitors to view work in progress and the Australian Electric Transport Museum received one grant of \$9,600 to assist with the restoration of car 42, a "toastrack" tram car and grants totalling \$31,000 over a two year period for the construction of a display building incorporating a display and sales outlet. All of these projects are now under way.

The point of this example is, I suppose, partly to blow our own trumpet but mainly to illustrate the way in which State Government funding programmes can be used. It's a matter of matching your own programmes with their guidelines. Normally the departments have officers available who can help you with this.

I'd like to now touch briefly on the second avenue of outside assistance - briefly of necessity because my own experience of it is limited - local government.

MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

2. Local Government

It seems to me that an argument can be developed that a good museum is an asset to its community - like a library - and that the community can therefore legitimately be asked to assist in meeting the costs of its operation. In South Australia we now have a couple of museums where the local council has either appointed a part-time curator, or is contributing funds for contingencies. This might be an avenue worth exploring.

3. Community Employment Projects

The third avenue of support, the Community Employment Project, (CEP) should also be considered, providing you can supervise the labour. It may be a matter of shifting priorities and resources in order to do this. Currently, you have to provide 20% of the total cost of the project and your application may or may not be successful depending on region and target groups. It is now more difficult to employ skilled labour but not impossible - the S.A. Maritime Museum, for example, now has two shipwrights working on a ketch rebuilding project, but in general you should use CEP labour for projects such as upgrading the grounds, or installing insulation, cladding and brick paving, than for working on static displays. However, there can be difficulties in raising the necessary 20% local contribution, which leads me to the fourth avenue of outside assistance - corporate sponsorship.

4. Corporate Sponsorship

During the course of this conference you will probably have people far more expert than I discussing this subject. The point I wish to make here is that it offers possibilities that should not be ignored. What is required is definition on the manifold museum projects which could be tied up as a

MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

sponsorship package - setting up a display gallery, purchase or restoration of exhibits, purchase of a building, maintenance of exhibits etc. and what you are prepared to do in return - sponsorship board, identification on gallery entrance or naming rights, logo on museum publications, making galleries available for sponsorship functions etc. in the way of sponsor acknowledgement. You can probably boil this down to a small, multi-purpose booklet for presentation. Make it look reasonably professional but keep it brief - no more than half a dozen pages, with plenty of illustrations. Then take a plunge into the marketplace and see how you go! The effort can and will produce results if you are determined enough. The S.A. Maritime Museum has raised more than \$500,000 to date during its two years of life and it isn't yet open to the public.

Having briefly diverged to discuss some possible sources of money, I'd now like to discuss each of the main elements of a museum display development plan - the site, the buildings and the main display areas - in turn.

The Site

Once the visitors have pulled up in your delightfully landscaped car parking area what do they see? Hopefully one prominent feature will be a sign stating the name of the museum, what it offers, hours open to the public, how much it costs to get in, whether or not it has toilets and how to get to the entrance. They should be directed to an entrance building, which may also form part of the main display pavilion but is separated from it by panels or partitions so that it is not possible to catch more than a glimpse of what lies beyond. There should be a sample number of enticing exhibits, a plan of the museum, a sign setting out any rules (eg. "smoking or eating is not permitted inside the museum building"), a place where people can leave bags if they wish. Once they have paid their money and are inside the museum, they should ideally have a number of alternative routes to take and you need to consider what they will see.

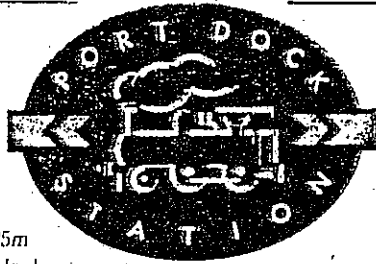
MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

The Site (Cont'd)

If items are stored in the open, what do they represent - spare parts, exhibits you can't cover, part of your operating tramway? If they appear unsightly, screen them from vision. Are there paths to link separate buildings and have they been paved to reduce the transfer of dirt, dust and mud from building to building? Do the trees and shrubs you have planted offer variety in height, colour and foliage, shade, screening. Are there opportunities for surprise, relaxation and refreshment? Is there any kind of outdoor activity for children? - adventure playground, rides. Are outdoor signs provided to describe the local bird life, or to explain the historic significance of specific features of the site? Finally, do you provide any facilities for outdoor eating?

Buildings

The second museum display element is the buildings themselves. The things which I suggest are important are that they should be in good condition, attractive, have good roofing and guttering and rely on reflected or indoor lighting rather than direct sunlight. The visitor flow within them should be worked out and where possible allowance should be made for access by the disabled. Consideration should be given to the kind of floor surface - at the Port Dock Railway Museum, we plan to use brick paving with some platforms with ramps to provide different viewing levels. It is desirable to have insulation, which adds to visitor comfort and also helps stabilise the environment - finished off, if possible, with some sort of lining on walls and ceilings - I like plywood, others prefer gyprock but cladding will dramatically lift the internal appearance of a tin shed.



The Museum of South Australia's Railway History

Lipson Street, Port Adelaide

Work has now started on a \$2.25m
Bicentennial project at Port Adelaide.

This exciting new project will involve
the complete relocation of the entire
collection of locomotives, carriages and
other heritage items from their current
location at Mile End Railway Yards to
a new five acre home on the site of the
original 1856 Port Dock Railway
Station.

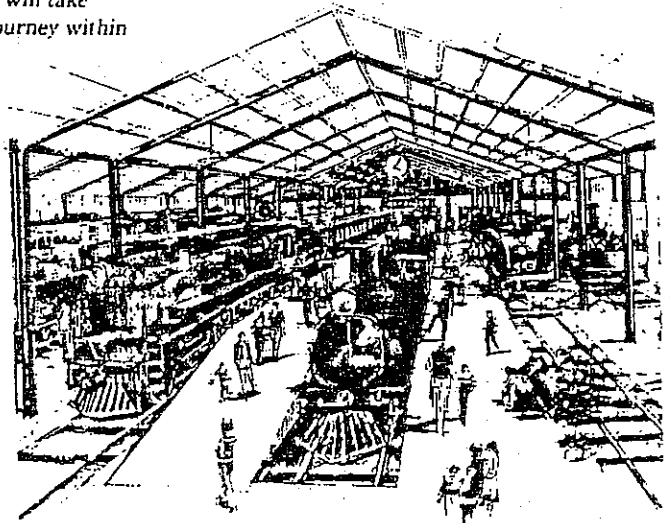
A huge display pavilion will house the
bulk of the railway collection, with its

main highlight being a re-created
"break-of-gauge" railway station.

Outside, two steam trains will be
operating around the site. A 1'6" gauge
steam engine, "Bub", built by the
Museum, will haul special trains on a
2,000 ft. circuit. In addition, a 3'6"
gauge steam engine, "Peronne", also
rebuilt by the Museum, will take
passengers on a short journey within
the museum grounds.

A 1930's style "East-West Express"
cafeteria carriage will provide
refreshments in real railway
surroundings. An excellent sales and
souvenir facility will also be available.

To open in December 1988, "Port Dock
Station" will be the best undercover
railway museum in Australia!



MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

Display Galleries

Finally, there are the display galleries themselves. The first step is to break your total floor space down so that you can provide separately defined space for a number of themes. The collections you hold will dictate the most appropriate themes. Because of constraints as to where your tram track is laid, manoeuvrability etc. it may not be possible to set the theme out in a logical sequence but it is worth trying for. The themes we have developed and the approximate order in which visitors will see them in the Railway Museum are as follows - Display area 5000m².

1. The development of railways in South Australia
2. The Port Adelaide - Adelaide line (engine no. 1)
3. The Trans Australian Railway
4. A re-created "break - of - guage" station
5. Suburban passenger transport
6. The Ghan
7. The company trains and the ore trains
8. The Intercolonial
9. The Webb era and the big locomotive
10. How a steam locomotive works
11. Railway operation
12. Model railways

Having defined each theme in turn, it is necessary to know exactly what your collection holds in relation to each of the proposed themes. You may need to embark on an acquisitions spree to fill major gaps but it is always possible to use models, blown-up photographs or films to depict, say, a particularly important train which no longer exists. For example in our first theme, the development of railways in South Australia, we may rely entirely on models of three or four particularly significant locomotives, none of which now exist. We also plan to construct a 3-D map, operated by push buttons, to show where and when each railway line in South Australia was set up.

MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

Display Galleries (Cont'd)

The next step is to use an A4 sheet to draw up a plan with three columns, viz:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Exhibits</u>	<u>Media</u>
(What you're talking about)	(What you want to use to talk about it with)	(How you are going to talk about it.)
Suburban Passenger Transport	P & F Class red centre - loading car. Conductors uniform & cap. Lounge suit circa 1925. Child & pinafore circa 1928	F class & carriage set-up as for passenger train. Mannequins of conductor, adult passenger & child.

A couple of other observations about media: blown-up photographs and wall murals make particularly effective backdrops and it is worthwhile considering using recorded sound and voice-over effects eg. in our case this might take the form of an engineer talking about operating a locomotive and what the implications of being a railway man were for family life.

The question of what to say in your exhibits is also critically important. Labels should try to bring out human associations to allow visitors to identify. Learning can't really proceed until someone's interest has been engaged, so it is important to think about what might interest the ordinary person and help him identify with the information you wish to communicate.

**DISPLAY
TECHNOLOGY
FOR
SMALL
MUSEUMS**

BRIAN BERTRAM

MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA (N.S.W. BRANCH)

MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

Display Galleries (Cont'd)

So think about bringing out the human elements - what people wore, how much they earned, routes trams or trains travelled, (derailments?), ticket inspectors and evading fares, penalties for spitting etc. The technical information might be touched on briefly but remember, most people won't read it. Perhaps it might be better to use a booklet or leaflet for this purpose.

For production of labels there are a range of techniques from typesetting to hand lettering (which shouldn't be attempted unless you have someone who can do it well). The cheapest technique is to use a hand stencil - you have to match the pen nib size to the stencil but it can look very neat with practice. We have also used word processors - the text is typed and then photographed. The enlarged photographic print becomes the label. Mount the finished label which should NEVER have more than 150 words - onto art card, using dry mounting (you can use a household iron with a towel over the label) or a white carpenters glue such as Aquadhere.

Brian Bertram's book gives this kind of information - really indispensable for display planning and techniques. It should be part of any Museum's library.

MUSEUM DISPLAY PLANNING (Cont'd)

Display Galleries (Cont'd)

In conclusion, in going through all their stuff - administrative organisation, local government, CEP, marketing, visitor flow, display gallery plan, evaluation - which I didn't touch on today but which is an important subject with a growing body of literature - looking back on all of this, there is perhaps a larger question - why on earth do we do it? Why do we try to breathe new life into dead things? Wouldn't it be simpler just to mow the lawn, read a good book, or take the family on a drive through the hills? Perhaps it would. Certainly, given some of the displays I have seen in both Government funded major museums and some specialist and local museums, their authors might so well not have bothered. But others show that spark of creativity, of ingenuity, freshness, vitality, that can make it worthwhile to cross the planet to see. Good museum displays are among the most powerful media for communication we have and give people some of their most memorable experiences. I suppose one reason in a slightly different manner was expressed by Geoff Masley, the Education Writer for the Melbourne Age, writing about his experiences as a judge in the Victorian "Museum of the Year Award". "It was bloody marvellous, unforgettable. An experience not be missed for quids".