

ADDING REALITY TO A SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMME

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Introduction

The upsurge of interest in things historical has been a feature of the Jubilee 150 Year in South Australia (1986).

Government interest and financial support have been apparent - and it is to be hoped that this will carry over into the Bi-Centenary Year of 1988. We hope that South Australians will not have run out of steam (electricity!!) by then.

The national Heritage lobby has become a strong voice in the preservation of our buildings and it is to be hoped, also, that this interest will rub off on all other areas of heritage preservation.

Since about 1980, schools in South Australia have been constantly celebrating their centenaries, as it is over a century since the State began its Education system (following the Education Act of 1875). These centenaries have been a major influence in reminding children of the value of the past, in appreciating the present and in helping to plan for the future.

As a child at school, I was always puzzled by the apparently similar words, TRAM and PRAM.

I knew the Latin origin of PRAM ("perambulare" - to walk about) and could not understand why TRAM did not have a similar origin, since both were forms of Transport.

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Dictionaries indicate that the Etymology of the word is doubtful in origin although some tie it in with some form of road.

To me, a Tram was, and still is, an electric vehicle; and I found it also difficult to see why the early trams were horse-drawn.

In South Australia, the first tramway to be built was first encouraged by Governor Young in 1850, I discovered. This line was proposed to join Goolwa to Port Elliot.

It was operational by early 1854, when a more favoured line was begun, linking Adelaide to Port Adelaide. This line, however, became a steam line.

Horse trams served Adelaide in its infancy until 1909, when the first electric trams ran to Kensington.

The first attempt to build an electrified tram in South Australia however took place in 1889, when an attempt was made to drive an old horse tram by using electric batteries.

This information is probably "old hat" to you but I found it new and interesting.

This was obviously not successful, since a further 20 years elapsed before electric trams became a workable proposition for Adelaide.

Nevertheless, it was a notable beginning.

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My mother has told many stories of her travelling from North Adelaide to Adelaide per horse tram prior to 1909:

- a) Of the problems of the hill in front of Adelaide Childrens' Hospital.
- b) How the horses frequently slipped and fell and were not infrequently brutally whipped to get them back onto their feet again.
- c) How drunkenness of the drivers was not uncommon.
- d) And how a third horse was often led behind for use when the slopes were reached.

The rapid expansion of Adelaide's population in the years following World War 1 saw the growth of public transport and especially of the electric trams.

From 1921 - 1927, Adelaide's population grew from 301,742 to 369,630 and new lines were constructed to serve new suburbs.

Electric tramcars, in my memory, were notable for the following reasons:

- Cleanliness (in the sense of being non-polluters)
- Reliability
- Large Capacity
- Multi-exits (good for passengers, but not for conductors)

These reasons made them a good medium of urban transport.

In later years, trolley buses were used to complement the tram services but these didn't run the area I lived in, so I had little experience of them.

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1958 saw the end of electric trams in Adelaide (excepting the Glenelg line) for reasons which, I believe, were related to politics and to the inflexibility of their routes (i.e. rails).

All this apparent history is relevant to the studies of South Australian development which our children follow at School in the field of Social Studies.

At this stage, I would like to specify a basic principle of learning and teaching which is "from the CONCRETE to the ABSTRACT", or conversely and equally truly, "from the ABSTRACT to the CONCRETE".

Example Warnings and hot stove.

Example Picture of electric tram to concrete experience.

The interest of school children in Transport (including Electric Transport) begins as early as Year 3/Grade 3 (8 - 9 year olds) when their Social Studies course deals with the following topic:

TRAVEL & TRANSPORT

- a) Different kinds of transport.
- b) Uses for goods/people/work/pleasure.
- c) Early types of transport.
- d) People's choices.
- e) Dependence of people on transport.

Following the basic concept of leading children from the CONCRETE to the ABSTRACT etc., it is desirable for children to experience among other things, visits to a tramway (or steam train) museum.

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Most schools would agree with this notion, but such extra-curricular activities require money and this brings a new perspective into the topic.

Although "Free Education" is one of the many "carrots" dangled in front of new, prospective immigrants over the years, they soon learnt that it is not totally free.

Is anything free?

Excursions have to be paid for by the parents, who, in turn, need to be convinced that the excursions will be of sound educational value to their children. You, no doubt, are or have been such parents!

Communication and publicity are required to convince the schools and parents that visits to such museums as the St. Kilda Electric Tramway Museum are of value to their children.

Money is also essential to the upkeep and development of the Museums, which cannot rely on regular government grants, subsidies or hand-outs.

The "Package Deal" is a fact of life today and is the sort of arrangement which suits both schools and museums and no doubt appeals to the parents and teachers too, as good value.

eg. St. Kilda Tramway Museum/St. Kilda
Playground/Mangrove Board Walk.

This package, or part of it, helps to justify the distance which must be travelled to the Museum.

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For the children, there is no comparison between looking at a picture of an old tramcar and actually climbing onto one and riding on it.

- a) to see its immense (to a child) size.
- b) to climb aboard, stepping high and grasping a hand-rail.
- c) to sit on a slippery, wooden seat and be able to slide along it (the Patina of Posteriors!)
- d) to experience the sound and motion of the vehicle.
- e) to be able to hang from a leather strap and ring a bell by pulling a cord.
- f) and to go home and describe the experiences to parents who fully understand what they are talking about.

Admittedly, the children from my school live close to the Glenelg tramline and frequently use the electric tram but they are not aware of its predecessors.

I am impressed by the loving care put into restoration at St. Kilda.

Without these supportive enthusiasts another phase of our heritage would have been lost.

The price is high to preserve the trams, in terms of both labour and materials and the situation resembles to some extent the plight of the stately homes of England, in that money must be raised for further restoration.

But if our children are to be able to see working examples of transport from a former era - and their children too - increased publicity, especially in schools, is important.

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The Royal Adelaide Show is usually well-attended because of the large number of children who "take" their parents. Parents are the payers! The children are important clients.

It is, therefore, important that what a museum has to offer should be attractively presented to all prospective clients, and schools will always be prospective clients as the children study the development of Transport:

- The Horse era
- The Steam era
- The Electric era
- The Diesel era, and whatever else is to follow.

In closing, I must confess that it took me quite some time to get around to visiting the St. Kilda Electric Tram Museum.

When I did however, I was amazed at the extent of restoration going on there and the obvious viability of the project and in particular, the dedication of those member-workers I have met there.

It will certainly get my support from now on.