

# **Archives, Documenting, Scanning & Data Bases**

*by John Ward*

Paper for COTMA Conference on Saturday 18-8-2012 in Adelaide

Good morning Ladies and Gentleman and especially to the Convenors of the Conference hosted by the Adelaide Tramway Museum at St Kilda.

Following discussions with Warren Doubleday of the Ballarat Tramway Museum, it was decided that my offer to speak to the Conference Delegates about archive matters, scanning, photo shopping, documenting and data basing should be accepted.

In N.S.W. I am an ARHS member, as well as a member of the Rail Transport Museum and also the Sydney Bus Museum. This museum is now relocated in the old Leichhardt Tram Depot. While it is not yet opened to the public, various development applications submitted to the local council are now tentatively approved. Further modifications are required to meet access needs especially for the disabled and it is thought that the museum will open in the New Year.

The ARHS and the RTM have an arrangement whereby the archives are a joint operation managed by the ARHS (Rail Resources Centre) at Redfern with secondary storage in a modern factory unit in Alexandria. For some years now the RRC has had a constituted management trust specifically for the archives. This trust meets every quarter to formulate policies and to make recommendations to the ARHS Council. Its trust consists of eight members, one of which is a representative from the RTM. There is also an alternative RTM member to cover absences and I am the present occupier of that position. In effect though I do wear two hats as being an ARHS member I am also one of its Trustees.

Now turning to the Archives issues that may or may not affect the various Tramway Museums in Australasia.

## **Establishment of an Archives**

- a) Suitable premises – this means a part of a building that has internal space and either has no windows or adequate protection from daylight. A constant room temperature is a must and one which is not excessively hot or cold. Air-conditioning while desirable is far too costly for use 24 hours a day, seven days a week etc. and at Alexandria it is only used in a section for the needs of staff and volunteers while they are on the premises. Fire Safes are in use for some outstanding and precious material.
- b) Security – the need to have material safe from fire and water damage and of course under lock and key to prevent any pilferage.
- c) Appointment of trusted persons to oversee the collection and to facilitate its availability from time to time for research.

## **Donations to the Archives**

- a) Organisations need to formulate policies as to what to keep and what to cull.
- b) Devise a form that donors can complete indicating the type of material, the owner and its source – say a deceased estate.

- c) This document is to form the basis of an agreement to avoid any complications in the future such as copyright, royalties, the right to retain part but not all. Some material may have to be discarded or returned to the **Donor** if it is policy not to retain certain items. Other photographic works may be able to be forwarded to other appropriate organisations.
- d) A thank-you document should be sent to the Donor whenever material is accepted.
- e) If for example the donation is photographic material, and the name of the photographer is not already noted on the material then this should be diligently carried out by inscribing the name on every slide box, photo envelope and or plastic negative holder.
- f) A manual or computer record should be kept indicating the nature of the donation and where it is located.

### **Processing of Collections particularly ones involving photographic material.**

- a) While it may have been decided to accept the whole of a photographic donation, it may be expedient to cull some of the material for a number of reasons:-  
poor quality, under or over exposed, bad composition, repetitive, inappropriate
- b) If there are two or more or collections to deal with then priorities should be considered.
- c) Preparing the material for processing, example providing a unique reference that will form the basis of a digital entry into the archives system. This will include the inclusion of any documentation, such as date, location, vehicle or tram type or any other relevant information. Data bases are used by most organisations that hold archives. The Rail Resource Centre has now reached the 300,000 mark in its film (slides negatives and prints) processing regime. It is estimated that another 100,000 are in the queue.

### **My experiences in Archives matters has largely been fairly depressing**

I am concerned that a large proportion of enthusiasts are not and never have properly recorded their photographic efforts. Many photographers and I think this applies to the population in general take photos, look at them one or twice and then promptly forget about them for the rest of their lives. Upon their deaths and unless the work is thrown out, the material is donated with little or no information.

I contend that those who properly document their photographic efforts and particularly if they go to the trouble of digitising have indeed provided a very valuable legacy for future generations. For those that don't, then in many cases their efforts will fall by the way side when compared to those that have. If research is being carried out then the first place one will look is in a computer date base, while the unprocessed material that is held in an archives office

situation will be looked at as a last resort. This will be due to the perhaps hundreds or maybe thousands of images that may exist. Even worse though is that that is still in boxes under a bed, in drawers, in an attic or a basement and may have perhaps deteriorated beyond redemption. Certainly researchers will in most cases be even unaware of its existence.

All of us here to-day need to research our members and others on the periphery and attempt to educate them to leave any material they may have with some form of documentation.

The number one thing to tell them is that their name should be inscribed on every slide box, photo envelope and plastic negative holder. When two or more photographers efforts are placed together in an archives situation and inadvertently placed together, the name of the photographer can soon be impossible to determine. I have seen this a lot and I get quite disheartened. I feel it is sad that the person's name will never be displayed under the photo because over passage of time no one remembers.

The various organisations should also formulate policy on how to computerise photographic records and how to digitise using suitable scanners at suitable settings. This should be developed by conferring with other organisations not only for their own use but to also enable promulgation to members and others that have photographic material.

Before closing and presenting a short selection of tramway images from Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo and Brisbane, I will conclude by saying that the generations of tramway enthusiasts that knew the old trams and their systems or for that matter the railways of yesteryear are rapidly ageing. Most of us now only have a limited time in which to put our photographic works in order. Remember the younger generation now coming to the fore does not have the knowledge or even interest in what we saw and experienced. Time is of the essence and we cannot rely on the younger people to be able to piece together the puzzles of locations and dates, etc. They will have their own work cut out with the issues they have experienced for example the changing computer technology.

In closing, I am providing a copy of an article that I wrote in February, 2009 entitled "Photo collections The Inevitable". This was published by the ARHS NSW as a separate handout and went out to subscribers of the monthly publication Australian Railway History with one of the issues in that year.

I will be quite happy to discuss any matters either at the conclusion or at any time while I am in Adelaide participating in other convention activities and of course upon my return home as indicated hereunder.

Regards

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## The Inevitable

The steam era and its immediate first generation of diesel locomotives and the associated infrastructure including rolling stock, signalling, stations and other aspects of railway operations have in most cases disappeared. What now exists is that that was recorded by photographers and people recording activities on movie films.

Regrettably with the passage of time the people that photographed and recorded these events are now beginning to pass away in ever increasing numbers. Quite a number of those were known to me and of course to many of those of you who are reading these lines. It is always with great sadness that we experience and remember the passing of our friends but that is where the *Inevitable* applies as we are all facing the same consequence at some point in the future.

It is with this in mind that I would suggest that all readers take stock of your own collections of photos (prints), negatives (colour and black and white), colour slides and movie films. Digital images, videos, tapes and CDs should also be included in your considerations.

In recent years, I have become a little computer literate – mainly self taught but with tips from many people from time to time. This has led me to put my own photographic collection in order and include useful information in conjunction with each slide or negative or movie scene. This has taken me considerable time but has been of great enjoyment as I have been able to relive my past days. I am presently doing my own scanning and am probably now past the half way mark. The scanning and editing of photos is fascinating and one that is giving me enormous pleasure. It should be noted however that an original of the scan should be retained in each instance and a copy made for editing purposes. In fact from about two years ago all my scans have been done this way. I call one the *not edited* file and the other the *edited* file

Those of my images that have been scanned are now much more accessible to not only myself but to others that I so choose to make them available to. These images are no longer just languishing away in slide boxes, negative holders or on movie spools as only originals. If a fire or any other catastrophe occurred then those that are scanned and given to friends, family or organisations such as the ARHS are saved and protected.

A side benefit of the scanning is also that more people are now aware of what I have recorded on film and I am having a lot more items published than previously. It has brought about recognition of my work that was previously known to just a few friends.

Turning now to your own photographic work (collections), it is my opinion that each and every one of you should seriously consider what you are going to do with your own material. As you might appreciate, it would be much better to make your efforts of the past (as well of those of the present) into a coherent presentation prior to the *Inevitable* occurring.

It has been known for the *Inevitable* to occur and with no arrangements having been made, the wonderful efforts of a lifetime of photography have been lost as the next of kin (family members) have felt that it has no value.

In other cases the collections are left to organisations mainly the ARHS (Archives) where insufficient accompanying documentation has meant that experts have had to progressively go through the images and attempt to identify the type of vehicle, locomotive, the date and other relevant information. In this regard one should remember that the *Inevitable* also applies to these experts too. Younger generations of enthusiasts will not necessarily have the same expertise to solve some of these issues. The younger people of course though have skills in other directions particularly associated with the days that they experienced.

I believe that well documented photographic efforts are considerably more valuable than those where no information is provided or it is difficult to piece together images with relevant data. Those that have not been adequately documented will tend to be put aside into a too hard basket while those that have been will be much more accessible and useable.

I would say that now is the time to put your house in order, make your decisions as to whether you wish your photographic efforts to be saved and passed on to those that would appreciate and understand what you have done. Hopefully you will be inclined to research your own work and try to make it understandable and presentable to those whose job it might be to record and place it in archives. This might take the form of notes that you kept at the time and the placement of those with the negatives or slides. Where possible information should be recorded on slides, ball point pens for cardboard mounts and special permanent marking pens with very fine points for plastic mounted slides.

Scanning should also be considered if you have access to a computer and you are willing to purchase a scanner. Naturally a good scanner will do a superior job to that of a cheap three in one type machine that does faxing copying and scanning. However if you have not attempted to scan previously, I would recommend that you seek out advice as to settings etc. so that your scans will be consistent and of a superior quality. The ARHS Archives are of course the experts.

Finally after many years of pondering over what to do with my own photographic efforts, I approached the ARHS Archives with a submission that my whole work come to them for safe keeping. Scanned copies of my railway images are already held by them but because scanning is incomplete there is still more to add. While I haven't handed over any of my original colour slides or negatives, I do intend to when scanning is complete as I want to ensure that they are safe for the future beyond my own life time.

Some of you may know that I have also photographed other aspects of transport apart from railways. My submission sought their agreement to accept my other work, to retain it and not forward it onto other relevant organisations. The ARHS Archives agreed to accept my request and I am very pleased with their decision. It is my opinion that The ARHS Archives is the most appropriate and professional organisation, definitely in the State of New South Wales but almost certainly in the whole of Australia to hold railway and or transport photographic collections.

I would recommend that each and every one of you consider making your collection available to the ARHS Archives before the ***Inevitable*** occurs. Any enquiries should be directed to them in the first instance. I also make myself available for any discussion on these issues and contact can be made with me through the ARHS.

Author

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