

## SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE MUSEUM ENVIRONMENT

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE EFFECT OF RECENT LEGISLATION CHANGES IN NEW ZEALAND

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#### Introduction

As the museums in Australia and New Zealand, and I suppose other parts of the world, began operating, they tended to adopt the engineering standards and operational practices that were established by the Municipal operators from whom they inherited their trams and other tramway equipment, and, where necessary, introduce some variations to fit local needs. Over time, appropriate technological improvements have also been adopted. In this way the museums have managed to progress for three decades building up an impressive record of service and efficiency.

Inevitably other changes or improvements have been introduced over the years and these changes have usually occurred after arrival at a consensus by museum members, or the changes may be the climax of a project led by

the Council Of Tramway Museums of Australasia (COTMA) and/or the New Zealand National Federation of Rail Societies (NFRS).

Members generally feel quite comfortable about such events when they are borne out of a perceived need. This process usually establishes ownership of an initiative well before an engineering standard or new operating practice is introduced.

Conversely changes or new rules that are unilaterally imposed upon museum operators from time to time by the local or state authorities are often less palatable. Regrettably they are frequently an official reaction arising out of an inquiry into a catastrophe that has occurred on a public rail service somewhere. The result is we are often expected to comply with what may appear to be rather draconian and unbalanced directives.

### Development

In the early days of museum development some of the official agencies regarded us as a group of amateurs who were only playing with machinery that we knew little about, and they usually were reluctant to admit that they knew even less. Their view was that we were creating a hazard to ourselves and the public and therefore should be controlled by a strictly regulated inspectorial style of management. Often if compliance with these outwardly imposed standards involved the unplanned expenditure or diversion of limited resources, then the museum members' reaction was occasionally manifest by the display of hostility or passive resistance.

Some of our authorities have not been very good at managing such affairs and consequently the perception of statutory authorities by museum members has frequently been negative to the point where relationships became strained. Whereas in other cases the agencies have been very conciliatory and have used a sagacious approach in these matters. This kind of experience has inspired museum administrators to work with the authorities and helped to facilitate consultation and consensus and the establishment of common standards.

This management style was a little haphazard at first, but changed strategies have been introduced which have fostered a determination on the part of all concerned to work together on these matters and establish a comprehensive risk management programme, recognising that the key element in all of these initiatives is the human resource factor.

Those authorities or Government agencies who have an enlightened view of our position have quickly established a good rapport with the local museums which is to the benefit of all concerned. Whereas others will often tend to be over cautious and limit museums to operating within the boundaries of their own ignorance.

I acknowledge that some of us are not entirely blameless either given that in the embryonic stages of our museums there were occasions when some very enthusiastic members who were keen to get the system going, did things that were at the least rather irresponsible, and some times attracted the attention of the authorities.

The New Zealand and Australian museums have amassed many thousands of hours of incident free operating experience proving that those earlier mistakes were usually made in ignorance and, to our credit, lessons were learned so that the mistakes were not repeated, and furthermore, other groups learned from these unfortunate experiences and acted accordingly. All of this has proven that we are capable of providing a very professionally managed environment for our members to work in, and for the public to visit in safety.

### Skills

Those past experiences have helped us to recognise the need for our staff to be competent in what ever they are doing. I use the term staff deliberately because it is the view of most of our New Zealand museums that a professional business approach is important and from what I have seen in Australia the same approach is evident. This professionalism can only be achieved if we claim ownership of the notion that appropriate training has taken place providing people with the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to carry out the engineering and operational activities of our museums efficiently and safely.

Over the past few years the New Zealand Government has acknowledged this professionalism to the point where we are consulted on a regular basis to express our views on many matters that concern operating standards and training in the museum industry. Particularly if there is a perceived need to introduce changes. It is noteworthy that the NFRS is regarded as an important member of the transport and tourism industries and needs to be consulted on training issues as well.

However I must add that that would not have come about if it were not for the efforts of such organisations as the NFRS and COTMA who have worked very hard to establish the credibility that we now enjoy with Government and other authorities.

#### Members Qualifications

No one is likely to or should be expected to become competent at performing any task without some form of training in the skills needed to carry it out. Even the most menial of duties need a planned approach if consistency and standard procedures are to be maintained.

These principles are well established in the rail transport industry and others and it is this sort of culture that has led to the establishment of common standards for the operation of tramways and railways.

#### New Zealand Qualifications Authority

In New Zealand we have a Government body called the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) whose mission is to ensure that there are sufficient people available to industry with appropriate skills and qualifications to provide the necessary labour and professional service needed by industry. This authority has developed a national qualifications framework which contains the core unit standards for training any person in any skill for any part of the commercial or industrial sectors.

This guarantees that the industry groups concerned decide what the standards will be, and ensure that training opportunities are available leading to qualifications for occupations involving even the most menial skills to those requiring tertiary qualifications and that they get meaningful recognition.

This system also ensures that the skills learned in one occupation are transferable to another if appropriate, without having to start from scratch because of a change in occupation. The framework is continually being developed and expanded. At the moment there are about a thousand units registered, and about four thousand waiting for approval and eventual registration.

One of the latest initiatives in this programme is the setting of unit standards for the acquiring of energy and hazardous gases qualifications, including steam boiler operation which is certainly a topic of interest to some of our museum members.

One of the down stream effects of all of this on the museum fraternity is the obtaining of a statutory qualification such as steam boiler certificate or an electrical qualification by those who wish to be involved. This means that museum members who wish to operate locomotives or vehicles, or work on museum installations where such qualifications are necessary, must meet similar standards to those considered appropriate by industry and Government agencies.

In New Zealand qualifications in these areas have always been necessary, but the new system allows more flexibility in acquiring such qualifications, and is competency based rather than emphasis put on time spent as the tea boy working through to the elevated status of driver etc. and mostly based on seniority.

Our old system was something that was conceived in the Victorian steam age which became a rigid culture based on ignorance and mysticism, perpetuated by armies of bureaucrats who tinkered with the regulations or inspection systems following a disaster of some sort or the old superintendent retired and the new one has some different ideas.

We have now entered an enlightened era, and museum managers acknowledge that the changes are necessary and appropriate given that a certain amount of risk is involved in what we do.

It is acknowledged however that not every detail that is required in the commercial sector with modern plant machinery is appropriate in a museum environment. Given that some of their standards would require modification to our vehicles and equipment destroying the authenticity of our exhibits, or require our operators to learn skills that they would never use inside the museum gate.

This difference has been taken on board by members and the authorities concerned such as NZQA and indirectly the Land Transport Safety Authority (LTSA) and the Labour Department. These Government agencies are working closely with NFRS and individual museums to facilitate the formulation of sensible and

workable rules for qualification and operating standards that reflect the needs of the groups concerned, yet establish and maintain similar standards to those required in industry.

#### Government Agency And NFRS Liaison

One of the most significant examples of this consultation and co-operation is the attendance of officers of these Government agencies at NFRS conferences where frank and helpful discussion takes place, to ascertain the most efficient and sensible means of reaching these safe operating objectives.

The museum movement is also committed to these goals, and we are fortunate in that among our ranks we have some members with analytical, debating, lobbying, legal and engineering skills. These people have willingly consulted with various officials and parliamentary committees to ensure that the best arrangement for the whole federation is won.

From time to time they are called upon to interpret what can some times appear to be rather mysterious and complicated language for some of those individuals and groups who are good practical people who just want to get on with their favourite activities without wading through a quagmire of legalese cloaked in shrouds of mystery.

Efforts like this ensure that the training and qualifications required by members do not appear to be an insurmountable hurdle.

One example of the progress made is that we have now registered our needs for steam generation and boiler care qualifications with NZQA.

And the Occupational Safety and Health division (OHS) of the Labour Department (who administer the relevant part of the Boilers Lifts and Cranes Act) are working with us to find workable solutions for groups interested in the acquisition of steam qualifications as they pertain to the museum environment.

Both NZQA and OHS acknowledge that we are a special group doing a high quality job of preserving an important part of our heritage and in order to carry out this function we require appropriate training opportunities in order to obtain the necessary statutory qualifications.

#### Summary

In summary I would like to say that we feel that we have entered a new era in New Zealand, where there is a will among all parties concerned to work together to achieve a result that is for the good of all. Whilst allowing the museums to attain their own objectives without the fear of some agency walking through the gate and closing them down because of an event that occurred somewhere else and has no connection with our operations or how we manage them.

But on the other hand we recognise that if we cause such an agency to pay us a visit because of some act or omission that attracts their attention then we are the masters of our own destiny and it's up to us to maintain the confidence that has been built over the past thirty years, and now enshrined in our legislation.

I feel sure that we will all benefit from this experience and I just wanted to take this opportunity to briefly describe what is currently happening at our end of the track in regard to staff competency helping to build that professional image that the people who pay the bills (the customers) will benefit from, and enjoy sharing our treasures, perhaps returning with others or maybe even join our group.

Long may we be able to tolerate the pain of that incurable disease for which there is no cure but for which there is a brief respite by indulging in just a little more.

#### Questions

Les Stewart commented further on the Safety Standards as far as the Federation is concerned.

Bill Scott: How are our tram airbrakes affected by legislation?

Murray Sanders: High pressure vessels over .5 cubic metres are covered by stringent restrictions over their use.

John Radcliffe commented and asked how it affected people involved in the Education Sector?

Dennis O'Hoy: We do have to have a full time Health & Safety officer. They are involved in the induction of all staff in all aspects of safety. It is not a bureaucratic bundle - it does work.

Dennis O'Hoy then gave an example to demonstrate this.