

THE CRICH EXPERIENCE - ANALYSIS OF A SUCCESSFUL MUSEUM

being the keynote address delivered by G.B. Claydon, Ll.B., M.Inst.T.A., Hon. Secretary of the Tramway Museum Society, of Crich, Derbyshire, United Kingdom.

1. Introduction

It is both a privilege and a pleasure to have been invited to address the COTMA conference here in Christchurch. COTMA is a very valuable institution and I am glad to show it support.

I admit to a problem from the outset. I am conscious that the expectations aroused on the part of an audience which knows that the speaker has travelled halfway around the world to address them can never be fulfilled. All I can hope for is that you will not be too disappointed by what I have to say.

My address is entitled "The Crich Experience - Analysis of a Successful Museum" and I should like to make it clear immediately that this title was chosen by the conference organisers. To have come from me, such a title would have seemed immodest and presumptuous. I have already learned to be cautious in this respect since, when I last visited these parts, it was made plain to me at one museum that no "stuffed-shirt Pom" was going to tell them what to do! What I shall attempt in this address is diffidently to offer some observations drawn from the experiences of the museum which I represent in the belief that the pooling of this knowledge may help to provide guidance for those engaged in similar projects.

Finally on these preliminary matters, my credentials. I am Vice-Chairman and Hon. Secretary of the Tramway Museum Society, the body which owns and operates the Tramway Museum at Crich, in Derbyshire, England. I joined the organisation shortly after its establishment in 1955. I have been secretary for some 20 years, from before the museum was set up at Crich.

2. Areas over which we can exercise little or no control

2.1. Macro-geographic. We can have no say over such factors as the size of the country in which we are established and the proximity of centres of population and the state of communications within it. Yet these factors may materially affect our scope and chance of success. The substantial size of Australia and the barriers to easy communication in New Zealand have understandably led to the setting up of a fair number of local museums, whereas in the case of the United Kingdom, Crich has been able to establish itself as the only national tramway museum, with important consequences which I will touch on later.

2.2. Population. Likewise we can do little to alter the size and distribution of the population of our respective countries. A substantial population provides the basis for a potentially large workforce and visitor patronage. Obviously Crich, in the United Kingdom, has advantages in this respect compared with Australasian museums.

- 2.3. Climate. The relative dampness of the United Kingdom weather compared with that of Australia and New Zealand provides an advantage for the latter. Tramcar bodies, electricians and mechanics are all susceptible to quicker deterioration in a damp climate. This is also true of structures, such as steel cladding on a building, and track formations.

Apart from easing the task of maintenance, fine weather also encourages outdoor work and visitor patronage. Conversely, it may increase the risk of fire. Fortunately, of the museums which I have visited in Australasia, only Loftus appears to run any risk of bush fires.

- 2.4. State assistance. In the United Kingdom, finance from Government sources has been modest and belated in assisting private museums. My travels in Australasia have shown that a variety of such schemes have been in operation for several years and in general there seems a greater readiness to provide assistance than in the United Kingdom. This is equally true of help from local authorities and from industry.

Despite these differences, it is quite clear that there are far more topics which we have in common, so that I now proceed to consider these.

3. Location and layout of site

David Hinman covered much of the ground in the paper which he read at the Sydney Conference. In any case, many museums are beyond the point of no return on this matter. However, I believe that there are still some facets which it is of value to explore.

- 3.1. Security of tenure. There is the unhappy example of a certain trolley museum in the United States, which has limped along on a series of short leases, having to transfer its site (with an enormous amount of trackwork) on more than one occasion. At the earliest opportunity, it is important to try to obtain the freehold of your site or to effect some other arrangement offering comparable security. The necessary cash may not always be available at the outset. Crich started with a three-monthly lease, but we bought the freehold in stages as soon as we could afford to do so. It may be that an offer to fund the acquisition is forthcoming from a particular individual. Such offers should be treated cautiously since it is risky to be dependent on the continuing goodwill of any one person. Even tie-ups with local councils can be hazardous, since they are prone to wax and wane in their support.
- 3.2. Attractiveness to public. It is essential to make the museum as attractive as possible to the public since from them we expect to receive much of our income. Bill Kingsley's paper to the Sydney Conference very wisely stressed this point. Particular factors include:
- 3.2.1. The provision of adequate car parking arrangements, surfaced walkways wherever possible and presentable toilet facilities. Refreshment facilities provide an additional attraction and are a further source of income.

- 3.2.2. The entrance should be reasonably accessible and the premises should look as attractive as possible from it to encourage persons to venture within.
- 3.2.3. In cases where the museum operates on private land, consideration should be given to enclosing the site. This aids security and permits an admission charge to be levied. Not everyone will wish to charge for admission, but the general experience seems to indicate that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, and certainly this has been the experience at Crich.
- 3.2.4. The ride should have its far terminus out of sight (so as to arouse visitor interest) and if possible should be not simply a ride for its own sake but should serve as a means of transport to another point. Ferrymead provides an eminent example of this latter feature, and St. Kilda and Paekakariki provide, or will provide, interesting links with the sea.
- 3.2.5. We should diversify our exhibits as much as possible since, regrettably, public interest in trams is something less than white hot. In particular:

Our rolling stock should be as varied as possible from the visitor point of view. I shall return to this point.

Reliance simply on a car ride to attract visitors is not enough. They should be permitted to inspect as many aspects of the enterprise as practicable. The power house and workshops are cases in point. In the latter case, there is a fascination all of its own in watching others at work. Admittedly, for safety reasons visitors cannot be allowed to wander at will in these places, but consideration should be given, say, to incorporating viewing galleries. Crich is doing this with its new power house and I notice that Ballarat plans to do something similar in its new workshop building.

Thought should be given to introducing non-tramway items. At Crich we have a mining display provided by a local mining society. MOTAT and Ferrymead have done this on a grander scale, although the other items are not there under control of the tramway bodies.

Consideration should also be given to introducing a street environment. Bendigo and Ballarat already operate in the highway, but for those museums which do not, apart from the element of diversity which the concept provides, there is the educational point that future generations may not readily appreciate that trams ran in streets. All the New Zealand museums have a street setting in being or in prospect and Loftus also has plans to incorporate one in their new development.

While the operating tramway should provide the dominant feature, attention should be paid to housing and displaying small exhibits; tickets, uniforms, pieces of equipment and the like. These are needed to provide an understanding and record of tramways in the round. If some can be operated by visitors (e.g. a controller or a ticket punch), this feature besides heightening interest may also serve in the case of younger visitors to release some of the pent up exuberance otherwise reserved for disfiguring the cars. But such items need constant repair.

- 3.2.6. Whether as part of the street scene or otherwise, it is useful to incorporate a period cinema or a schoolroom (MOTAT already has one of the latter and Ferrymead has one in prospect). Either of these buildings can then be used for their original purpose so as to provide a place to demonstrate certain features of tramways, e.g. old films or slides can show the tramcar as it was in our towns and cities, the basic urban transport mode, another feature which younger generations may not otherwise appreciate. Additionally, films, slides or other visual aids can explain to visitors the workings of the tramcar.

4. The trams themselves

- 4.1. Selecting the collection. Every member has at least one pet tram which he wishes to see preserved. But it is wise to be discriminating, otherwise the museum might find itself overburdened with relics. Every car acquired eats into finite resources of cash, space and manpower. In particular, the burden of maintenance is increased, both of the trams themselves and of the buildings in which they are housed. At least one American museum has had its progress severely hindered by indiscriminate collection of tramcars. John Radcliffe uttered some useful thoughts on this topic at the Sydney Conference and I offer the following:
- 4.1.1. The museum should define its aims and try to select cars which fulfil them. The collection should tell a story with no missing chapters and no chapters repeated. In the case of Crich, we have twice set up committees to report on this important, but complex subject. The latest reported only a month ago.
- 4.1.2. Subject to the point just made, the fleet should be as diverse as possible since, as already pointed out, the public are not interested in subtleties: they tend to judge by shapes, sizes and colours. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Bendigo has gone in for painting its fleet in a variety of liveries.
- 4.1.3. Conversely, it is desirable to standardise on certain items so as to simplify maintenance and operation.
- 4.1.4. At Crich, the public generally prefer double deckers to single deckers. Indeed it has been stated that the ideal tram for there is one which has a large upper deck and no lower deck! This is hardly a problem for Australasian

museums, except perhaps when the acquisition of buses or trolleybuses is being considered.

- 4.1.5. Representatives of a production batch should be favoured, rather than prototypes. The former tell the more relevant story. This point was made by John Radcliffe in his address to which I have already referred.
- 4.1.6. There is sometimes a case for dividing cars into historic exhibits, which may generally be kept static, and an operating fleet, which can be composed of duplicates more readily to be subjected to the wear and tear of operation.
- 4.2. Ownership. I urge that you try to ensure that all trams in the collection are owned by the museum and not by individuals. In the latter case, there can be problems of control and liability. Particular problems could be posed in the event of an accident. Furthermore, if the cars are owned by the museum it can deal with adherents of particular cars much more firmly since the wider interests of the museum may cut across individual wishes. In this way, we may all learn to put the museum first and individual cars second. In fairness, it has to be admitted that at Crich this has produced problems when certain cars have been returned to their original localities for restoration. The tendency has been for those performing this work then to claim the cars as theirs. So if museum cars are boarded out in this manner, it is important to have a clear agreement as to the rights of the parties.
- 4.3. Sponsorship. Notwithstanding what I have said about ownership, there is nevertheless a need to encourage interest in particular cars. Crich achieved this by the device of sponsorship. Generally, as a condition of its acceptance, the museum required each car -

to be acquired and transported to the museum free of cost to the museum;

for a substantial contribution to be made towards housing the car;

for ownership of the car to pass to the museum on its arrival at the museum.

These severe terms could be imposed only by a body which dominated the tramway preservation scene. The Crich museum has exploited to the full the fact that it is the only national tramway museum in Great Britain.

5. Organisation

- 5.1. Incorporation. This provides for perpetual succession and simplifies the arrangements for owning land. I understand that all the constituent museums of COTMA have to be incorporated before they may be accepted as members, so I need say no more on this point.
- 5.2. Form of Incorporation. A capital structure, with shares, is best avoided since it may lead to takeovers and lessens the chances of receiving fiscal benefits, although it has its advantages as a means of raising money. Preferably the museum should be registered as a charity or some other type of non-profit-making concern so as to secure at least some exemption from taxes and rates. In the case of Crich and, I believe, some of the COTMA museums, this arrangement entails members of the governing body being prohibited from receiving payment for their services.
- 5.3. Components. The Crich museum is divided into the following organisational components:
- 5.3.1. The Board. Some museums have a governing body which consists of a group of passive trustees who are limited in their decision taking to matters of broad policy. This arrangement makes it virtually obligatory to appoint a full-time director or manager. Crich has preferred the alternative of a governing body (known as the Board of Management and hereafter referred to as "the Board") which makes all major (and many minor) decisions. In effect, the cabinet system has been adopted, with all members having particular responsibilities in the hope that no facet of museum activity is overlooked. Board members are subject to election at annual general meetings, generally for a three-year term, so that a third retire each year. This aids continuity. Whether members of the Board should be eligible for immediate re-election after the completion of their term is a debatable point. On the one hand, it seems nonsense that having found a valuable member, the museum should be obliged to dispense with his services. On the other hand, there is some truth in Lord Acton's dictum that all power corrupts so that people tend to grow complacent after years in office.
- 5.3.2. Committees. These can be standing or ad hoc. At Crich they are established by the Board and enable the latter to shed detailed responsibilities. Obvious candidates for treatment in this way are safety, tramcar restoration and publications. Membership is appointed by the Board but is not limited to Board members and so may be a useful means of grooming people for Board responsibilities. But to provide a link with Board thinking and as a channel of communication between the Board and committee, there is at least one Board member on every committee; generally he is the chairman of the committee.

5.3.3. Officers. As you may imagine, these are persons on whom certain specific functions are conferred. In general, offices are not elective but are Board appointments. Experience at Crich has shown that it is much better for the Board to assess the capabilities of candidates rather than rely on what chance may offer at an election. However, it follows that it is highly desirable for the majority of posts to be advertised in the first instance so that those interested may have a chance to register this fact. Pre-eminently a Board appointment is the post of chairman of the Board. Who better to assess a person's qualities for this office and who more inconvenienced by an ill-judged appointment than the other members of the Board? But at Crich there are certain conspicuous exceptions to the rule that all officers are appointed. The secretary and treasurer are subject to election by the general membership, presumably because these offices are assumed to be of particular significance. Another office is that of auditor. In this case it is peculiarly fitting that he should be elected by the members, and indeed this is a legal requirement.

It has been the policy of the Board to appoint a substantial number of officers. This does inspire the charge that there are "too many chiefs and too few indians", but appointments help to fix responsibility and they are also a useful way of conferring recognition for good work.

5.3.4. Ordinary members. The contribution of ordinary voluntary members is of immense significance to museums of our type and this aspect is considered in more detail later.

5.3.5. Paid employees. A nucleus of these is desirable if the museum can afford them. It is likely that only they can put in a sustained attendance during the ordinary working week, when so many deliveries have to be made, callers received and outside contract jobs supervised. Also security is increased by having people at the museum throughout the week, and capital assets such as the workshops can be more completely utilised. In particular, the tramway can be operated and revenues earned mid-week as well as at weekends. To ensure continuity, it is desirable for senior employees to be present for at least part of each weekend so as to keep in touch with voluntary members. Finally, in our experience, it has proved a sound policy to recruit employees from the ranks of the membership. In this way, any gulf between the paid and unpaid is kept to a minimum and the employees are likely to be more aware of and attuned to the general museum ethos. They are also less likely to be clock watchers.

5.4. Specialisation. Running a tramway is a complicated business. Many different skills are demanded and there is therefore advantage in specialisation. For example, it is desirable to move away from a system in which each person looks after "his" tram to one which places all maintenance in the hands of a particular experienced

group. In this way, skills are gradually built up and do not have to be developed afresh on each occasion. Moreover, special aptitudes are required for this type of work: enthusiasm of itself is not enough. In certain fields, for example, traction supply and legal work, it is highly desirable to appoint people who are qualified in the work concerned, since mistakes in these areas tend to be costly. Of course, it results in a "busman's holiday" for the members in question, but this can hardly be avoided.

6. Members

- 6.1. Ordinary volunteer members play a vital role since few, if any, tramway museums can hope to continue for long without their help. This can be imparted by way of knowledge, physical effort or donations in cash or kind. So it should be a fundamental aim to retain and increase the number of members.
- 6.2. It is important to appreciate that people have got to be attracted who may never have seen a "real" tramway in operation. As the years go by this proportion is likely to increase. So "messaging about with trams" at a museum has to be an attraction in its own right.
- 6.3. Anyone to become attracted to a project such as ours is going to possess an above average IQ, so every member is likely to have many ideas of his own and to question many of those advanced by others. For a governing body in particular this can be very exhausting, but it should also be exhilarating. We should be encouraged by vigour and disturbed by apathy.
- 6.4. If members are to be encouraged to work at the museum, it is essential that they should be provided with facilities of various kinds. Washing and sanitary facilities are clearly essential, and for museums removed from the habitations of the workforce, overnight accommodation is also very important. The bunkhouse at Bungaree is a classic institution of this kind. At Crich, we also provide a free meals service for working members on winter Sundays.
- 6.5. Apart from physical facilities, it is also desirable to introduce social ones. Crich has an active Social Events Committee which has organised such varied activities as ice skating, treasure hunts, cricket matches and fancy dress parties. These occasions can do much to cement relationships which might otherwise disintegrate under the stress of working conditions.
- 6.6. To encourage membership, it is important to cater for all possible categories. So at Crich, after much debate, we have settled on: life membership, honorary membership (for those who have made an outstanding contribution to the museum), junior membership (for those under 18), senior membership (for those over 65) and family membership (which may cover a husband and wife and their children), besides ordinary full membership.

6.7. Subscriptions for membership are set fairly low since the museum has reached a stage where the physical and mental contribution of members far outweighs in significance the cash contribution provided by their subscriptions. Accordingly, the rate is set so as broadly to cover the costs of services to members (providing the Journal, official notices, meetings costs, meals, etc.) and not so as to provide a cash contribution for the museum as a whole. In this way, the cost of joining and of continuing as a member is kept as attractive as possible so as to encourage the physical and mental contributions referred to above. A group accident insurance scheme is also operated on behalf of members.

7. Management

The Crich set up being what it is, an enormous responsibility rests with the Board, so in this final section it is worthwhile examining the attributes and role of Board members.

7.1. Attributes. In early years, Board members were generally selected for their knowledge of tramways, but as the years progressed it became evident that this qualification, although useful, was not enough. No doubt the perfect Board member does not exist, but I attempt below to identify some of the more significant characteristics and requirements.

7.1.1. Specialised knowledge - engineering, accounting, legal - may be extremely useful in sharpening awareness of the issues, framing policies and devising solutions.

7.1.2. Some members at least should be closely associated with the normal workforce (preferably be part of it), but not all. It is also valuable to have some members who are less closely involved so as to contribute a wider and more detached view.

7.1.3. It is desirable to have a mix of practical men and men of vision (the two do not generally meet in the same person). Both types must be prepared to give a lot of their time and effort.

7.1.4. Ideally, there should be a spread of ages and backgrounds. The representation of lady members should not be overlooked. It is noteworthy that Ballarat has a lady treasurer.

7.1.5. Notwithstanding these diverse characteristics, all Board members should be capable of taking an overall intelligent interest in all facets of the museum and they should be capable of working as a team. Unless a united front is presented to the membership, authority and confidence may be seriously jeopardised.

7.2. Role

7.2.1. At the outset, it has to be borne in mind that apart perhaps in the case of paid personnel, the Board cannot impose its will on the membership. It has to gain and then

keep the confidence and goodwill of the membership and so secure acceptance of its decisions by their soundness.

- 7.2.2. The Board should never be remote from the membership. It should be receptive to their ideas and sensitive to their grievances. Communication is vital. There should be formal channels such as notices, journals, meetings, etc. Also, there should be less formal channels. Board members should make themselves available for discussion in more relaxed settings, such as the local pub.
- 7.2.3. The Board should give the membership leadership and a sense of direction. But objectives should not be set which are too remote of attainment, otherwise disillusionment may set in. There should always be some new project afoot to stimulate interest. In this game, you either go forward or backward - you can never stand still.
- 7.2.4. On occasions, the Board may be in advance of general thinking on a particular topic and in these circumstances it should work to persuade the membership of the rightness of its views. In all instances, it should be ready to justify its conduct and no major decision ought to be taken without securing the commitment of the membership in general.
- 7.2.5. The Board should also possess a good sense of organisation and maintain a check on all facets of museum operation. Topics may be considered systematically over a 12-month period. Regular or special reports may assist in this process.
- 7.2.6. The Board must remain in control of events. There may be a tendency for full-time employees or other key personnel to become dominating. This should be watched, otherwise the Board will be in the unhappy position of having all of the responsibility and none of the power: the role of the eunuch.
- 7.2.7. In particular, control must be kept over finance. A museum should progress to the stage where it is possible to estimate income and expenditure sufficiently accurately to introduce six-monthly budgetary periods and in the main their proposals should be adhered to. With more experience, these periods may be extended in key respects to permit longer-term planning.
- 7.2.8. The Board must be alive to commercial considerations, a factor which may not be readily appreciated by those always working in a voluntary capacity. It must be ready to seize opportunities when chance provides (e.g. financial assistance for unemployment relief projects) or engineer some of its own (the Grand Transport Extravaganza at Crich is an example).

7.2.9. It is also vital that the Board takes an interest in safety. Apart from the duty (both legal and moral) we owe the public and our own members, it is evident that one spectacular accident in any of our museums could have unfortunate consequences not only for that museum but also for the remainder. This problem has already occurred in the United States. The acid test is to visualise how things might look at an inquest. Have all reasonable precautions been taken to guard against an accident?

7.2.10. Finally, but by no means least important, the contributions of individual members should be kept under constant review. People's skills should be deployed to the best advantage. Their aptitudes (and weaknesses), likes and dislikes should be monitored both for present tasks and so as to ensure that if and when vacancies in office occur the work can go on under another's command with the minimum of fuss and delay.

8. Conclusions

The foregoing address is based on our experiences in Crich. Lest anyone should suppose the contrary, let me make it quite clear that my museum is not a perfect institution. We have gained our experiences the hard way and no doubt we have still a lot to learn. I have tried to identify some of the more significant features which go towards making a successful museum. Inevitably with so wide-ranging and elusive a subject my approach has been selective, doubtlessly reflecting to some extent a personal philosophy. Furthermore, it is obvious that not all of my comments can be relevant to all COTMA members, having regard to their differing circumstances. But I hope that some at least of my observations will have been of relevance to you all.

DISCUSSION ON MR. CLAYDON'S PAPER:

- (a) Mr. B.J. Dale asked how large the membership of the Tramway Museum Society was.

Mr. Claydon advised that TMS had about 1,100 members, of whom about 150 were active members and some 200 were overseas members. Such a large membership, he considered, was one of the benefits of being a "National Museum", and that as such the TMS was also supported by a World-wide membership.

TMS was quite happy to accept "armchair members". It has also joined a Tramway Liaison Committee with the Tramway and Light Railway Society and the Light Railway Transport League, with the advantage that TMS members may now attend any meetings of these other Tramway Groups in the United Kingdom.

TMS encourages younger members to join, although they are not able to vote until they reach the age of 18 years. The Society considers that these younger members are members for the future. There are also family, senior (reduced rate) classes of membership, and life members.

- (b) Mr. Claydon was asked about safety standards and their enforcement at Crich.

In reply, Mr. Claydon suggested applying what he termed "the inquest test", i.e. when operating visualise what case you would make out in Court in the event of a fatality. This test sets a standard which requires such details as the appointment of an outsider as a safety inspector and not a person of your own appointing, medical tests for tram drivers and other similar procedures which ensure the maintenance of safety standards.

Mr. Claydon suggested that in view of the lack of Government imposed standards in Australasia, that it may be possible for COTMA to draw up its own standards.

Dr. Radcliffe asked how he saw COTMA doing this. Mr. Claydon advised a pooling of ideas among member museums and indicated that he would be happy to advise on the procedures adopted by the TMS.

- (c) Mr. Claydon was asked what was the effect of exotic trams at Crich.

Mr. Claydon considered that this was a difficult question which each Museum must work out for itself when considering its objectives. For example, he considered that one great lack at Crich was a P.C.C. car, one of the great tram cars of all time.

- (d) Has the TMS obtained sponsorship from business houses?

Mr. Claydon advised that TMS has obtained such sponsorship, especially for bringing trams to the United Kingdom from abroad, e.g. Oporto and Vienna. However, in terms of general fund raising, the TMS considers that it has been less successful, despite assistance from the Wells organisation (which was very costly). TMS is not at present using such fund raising techniques because of the depressed state of the economy but has, instead, benefited greatly from the resultant Government Job Creation Scheme.