

THE "NEW" MUSEUMS AND THE TOURISTPresented by Peter RendallINTRODUCTION

In this paper I hope to develop some ideas which I hope are not totally new to us. The following three papers at last year's Conference:

Derek Scrafton's "Transport Museums, A Professional's View",
 Geoff Spiers' "The Future for the Specialist Museum" and
 Bill Kingsley's "About People"

dealt partially with some of the ideas which I am going to put before you. The latter address, in particular, should be required reading (or, given Bill's own style of presentation, hearing) for everyone involved in the continuing operation of our museums.

I make no apology for the fact that in this paper I will be drawing examples from a wide range of other forms of operating Museums, Pioneer Villages and "Authentic Experiences". We are all very often lumped together in the public eye and basically we are in competition for public attendance. We must, I feel, be aware of our competition and, where possible, learn from it so that we are better able to compete for what is, in effect, a commodity in limited supply, the visiting public.

THE "NEW" MUSEUMS

A feature of the late sixties and the seventies is the rise of the "New" museums. These are often voluntary operations, often restricted to a particular local, or technical subject, and all dependent to a large degree on visitors paying for admission or for a ride for their future viability. Of more recent times has been the tendency for these Museums to go professional as a means of maintaining seven day a week operation and, in a number of cases, because the volunteer input has dropped away, the enthusiasm of the original participants has been diluted over the years. This trend has been furthered by the arrival of private commercial operations of a similar nature, many of which are being promoted because of the success of the voluntary museums. The most notable example of this in New Zealand is the development of a new attraction called "Goldtown" on the road leading to that well known and long established attraction, "Shantytown". There is also the commercially operated museum at Queenstown known as "Golden Terraces" which is a direct amalgam of "Shantytown" and "Sovereign Hill". There are varying degrees of success, however, and on a recent visit to "Shantytown", I noted that "Goldtown" seemed to have died, which is unfortunate from some points of view as the materials and artefacts which had been gathered for this display are now lying abandoned, and as we know only too well, once lost these artefacts are virtually impossible to replace.

THE MUSEUM VISITOR

We are all, private, commercial, voluntary and Government operations dependent upon the visiting public. We have, of course, the local population which is not to be ignored. A survey which I carried out at Ferrymead last year showed that some 72% of our Sunday visitors and 48% of our weekday visitors came from the Christchurch metropolitan area,

but the feature which is much more striking is the number of visitors from outside the City who came to visit our museum. The visitors are, I would suggest, the icing on the cake. These are the visitors to whom we have the most chance of selling our publications, our souvenirs and our refreshments. The local visitor may support us on more than one occasion, but is likely to bring a picnic lunch, not to require souvenirs, and to have "just brought the kids for a ride". They are not there to learn of our area of interest as a primary concern. They do learn, they are interested, but it is not these factors which have brought them along. The "New" museum is, for most of the local people, much more a place of entertainment, than one of education. For the tourist, the "New" museum provides the opportunity of experiencing to a larger or smaller degree the past of the community they are visiting. The museum provides a capsule of experience that the visitor would otherwise miss and because of this he is much more likely to take photographs, to buy publications, and to examine in detail the displays and static exhibits.

MUSEUM LOCATION

Although my research is not yet complete, my findings so far are similar to those reported in the Australian report, "A Study of Man-Made Tourist Attractions"¹ in that those museums located in or near to major centres of population are more likely to succeed than those in more remote places. I do, however, have a few other suggestions as to what could be termed "good" locations. From my own work I have found that it is possible for a museum to survive in a relatively remote location if it is on what could be termed a tourist flow route. A major New Zealand example of this is again "Shantytown", but its position is rivalled by a relatively new development in the North Island known as the Tauranga District Museum Historic Village. As you can see from the slides, this museum is indeed a success. In its first year of operation it was visited by some 54,000 people, mostly New Zealanders holidaying in the area and school parties from the surrounding district.

"Shantytown" has a major advantage over the majority of museums and is a little unusual in being located on a major tour coach route. About a third of the visitors are tour passengers. This is not to be ignored as in 1976 1,700 coaches brought in 46,000 passengers. As I observed earlier, these are the people who will be spending the money. They also have the advantage that they arrive as a discrete but large unit, stay for a limited time, and often come complete with their own guide, a feature which reduces the strain on the manpower resources of the museum.

PUBLICITY

It is sometimes possible for a museum to overcome a locational handicap through good, and I mean very good, publicity. Even those that are blessed with a good locational advantage need to tell the visitor that they exist before the visitor leaves his accommodation to go sightseeing, and even before he reaches his choice of holiday site. While enjoying myself riding the "Kingston Flyer" recently, I was appalled to find that a vast majority of the visitors who were on the train were there by chance. For us as enthusiasts this may sound strange, but it is true that the vast majority of people have no interest in trains, trams or even history; their holiday plans are more often made with regard to scenic attractions, sporting

¹Study done for Commonwealth Department of Tourism, by the Economic Research Unit, Melbourne 1974.

facilities and "mob" instinct. These are the people that our publicity must be aimed at on their arrival in our host community. We must tell them of our existence, how to get to us, by public as well as private transport, when we are open, what facilities are available, and how much it is going to cost. This information, well presented, will bring in visitors. The quality of presentation is important - reasonable grade paper, illustrations, and a literate text. This is often our first contact with our public. Pamphlets distributed to local hotels, motels, camping grounds and youth hostels will acquaint the travelling public with our museums. A bright, well designed give-away sheet may well attract to your museum the visitor with an hour or two to kill, or the family staying in the area with a half day to give to a bout of nostalgia. Publicity through the media is always useful, but its impact is sometimes restricted to the local community. This is not always the case, however. The main publicity that had attracted Australian visitors to the "Kingston Flyer" was a television programme called "The Leyland Brothers", which visited this train last year, and showed the resultant film just before Christmas. This was, I suspect, worth quite a few dollars to the Railways. The re-inforcement of personal publicity material is also to be encouraged. Some ways of doing this are obvious, such as roadside hoardings on the nearest main traffic route if this is permitted by your local authority, or finger signs of a standard pattern if it is not. Small colour posters in local Public Relations and Visitors' Offices, supported by a supply of brochures, or just present as conversation starters are also useful. Any visitor to Lumsden who does not "hear" about the "Kingston Flyer" must be deaf indeed! Every shop has posters, the pubs have colour photographs, businesses are named after it, and every second person is employed by it. We cannot hope for penetration of our host communities in quite the same manner, but we can ensure that we are at least known.

FACILITIES

Our best publicity medium is, of course, our visitors. A survey that I carried out at Ferrymead last year produced the interesting fact that about 65% of our visitors came through the personal recommendation of someone else, either friend, family or service worker, such as moteliers, travel agents and Public Relations Offices. From this springs one very important fact: that we must satisfy our guests. We must make them feel welcome, we must give them value for money, we must give them the facilities they demand, and we must, and I emphasise this, give them the goods. If we advertise an operating museum we must give them that, we must provide life and activity, open doors and a welcome. We must supply what we say we offer for, if we don't, we may find ourselves in trouble in a very short while.

What does the tourist or for that matter almost any visitor want? An essential is adequate toilet facilities. They don't need to be of "Taj Mahal" quality but they do need to be clean, well lit and preferably supplied with some form of towel. They also need to be inspected periodically during the times that the public are present. Matters such as a shortage of toilet paper and other housekeeping details need to be dealt with more frequently than once a day.

The visitor will often want somewhere to sit down, to rest in the shade, or to consume a picnic lunch. Don't leave them standing, or they may leave you for good.

Some form of refreshment facility is usually a good investment. In the case of museums such as ours, the existing sales outlets deal reasonably adequately with this demand, but where visitor numbers become greater, it is often necessary to separate souvenir and book sales from the supply of foodstuffs and other refreshments. It is also sometimes helpful to divorce the eating side from the ride side of our operations, in the interests of our exhibits and our time - cleaning takes long enough without coming to grips with chewing gum and icecream sticks!

When our visitors are present we must remember to tell them what they are looking at. Having got them on the site we should not "clam up". The information flow that we started with our posters, signs and pamphlets must continue. It is essential to treat the visitor as being almost totally ignorant of our machines and their equipment. That does not mean that we need to be patronising, but means that we must start with fairly basic information, such as what a tram is (to alleviate the North American confusion) and what its function is, for many of our younger visitors, in New Zealand at least, have no idea of the role of a tram as a public transport vehicle.

This can be done through the usual range of cards and posters, it can be done by guides, and it can be done as an audio-visual presentation. The new Museum in Westport, known as "Coaltown", is designed round two such presentations. The exhibits, coal wagons, a simulated mine, and photo displays serve almost to occupy the visitor in between cycles of the presentation. But... it works!

The major reason people visit a museum such as ours is to catch a little of this feeling of history ... the sounds, the ride, even the dress of the crew, serves to bring back to people a feeling of nostalgia. If we can do this we will be achieving our purpose, and satisfying our customers so that they will become for us our best medium of attracting more visitors to be our guests.

The "New" museum depends on operation and person to person interaction to a much greater extent than the old form of museum. We cannot be like some of the more conventional museums which exist, full of crusty, unapproachable guards, emphasising silence and a studious look. We are alive, I hope, and enjoying ourselves. This is our hobby, and we are sharing it with the public. We depend on them and, to a degree, they depend on us. We are helping to preserve their heritage, to fill in their recreation time, and to educate their children. I know it is hard, when you are patiently explaining for the nth time why the tram does not have a steering wheel, to retain one's sense of humour and sense of perspective, but if one doesn't one runs the risk of sending away a less than satisfied customer. It's a funny world in which we live and the bad side always seems to be much larger than the good. It's the same with the public: one dis-satisfied customer is more likely to tell his friends than a satisfied one. I have no figures to support this contention, but it is an observation I have made from conversations with people while I have been surveying at man-made tourist attractions. Those who have been dis-satisfied have been much more vocal than those who have enjoyed their experience. We must, therefore, make an effort to have those of our members and staff who are in contact with the public well informed as to our aims and objectives, knowledgeable about our exhibits, and above all polite. It doesn't matter if our worker is wearing overalls or working clothes if these are applicable to the job the person is doing, but don't permit your staff to drive in public service in obviously inappropriate gear.

CHARGES

As someone commented during yesterday's proceedings, there seems to be less customer resistance if the visitor is made to pay an admission charge and thereafter everything is free, rather than if the visitor is allowed on site, and then charged to look at everything individually. This perhaps applies more to the combined operations such as MoTaT and Ferrymead, for purely tramway operations could permit free access to displays and facilities while extracting payment for rides, as a part of the former "atmosphere".

A valuable tool which seems to be a West Coast (New Zealand) development is the local residents' ticket. These are available to residents of the host communities of a number of Coast attractions and, though they vary slightly from attraction to attraction, the idea is that if a local person has visited once in a year he is issued with a certificate which gives him free entry and his guests 50% off normal admission charges.

This is, I suspect, a source of many visitors to the attractions. The local person's pride in a local achievement need not be matched by a continuous drain on his pocket. He will be much more inclined to taking his guests to visit when the cost is reduced than if he had to pay out the full cost every time.

COMPETING FOR THE VISITOR DOLLAR

We must realise that there are (1) limited numbers of people interested in historically based attractions and (2) that they have limited resources of time and money. We must be aware that the vintage car collection 25 miles away, or the historic old house down the road are in competition with our museums. This area of competition has been touched on by other speakers, but I would suggest that you take this factor into consideration when thinking about the future of your museum. Co-ordination, co-operation and combination are alternatives such as a composite museum, or a loose federation of regional groups with similar aims combining for promotional and other purposes. There are a wide range of attractions, some good and some not so good, and it is sad that sometimes the poorer ones reflect onto the better. We must think in terms of authenticity, value for money and the facilities provided. It could be to our advantage if we, as individual museums, or as the whole of COTMA, investigated the possibility of getting together with regional or national groups to discuss, and perhaps establish some code of ethics and minimum standards. This would enhance the status of our museums and would be to our long-term advantage.

The paper was followed by a series of slides showing features of other similar museums and illustrating some of the points discussed in the paper.