

The Riga Charter – A Significant New Initiative.

Conservation guidelines for operational railway museums.

A tourist railway that operates old equipment is not a museum unless, among other things, it manages its collection of railway rolling stock and infrastructure according to internationally recognised standards for the conservation of heritage objects and places. This article briefly describes the origin of heritage management concepts adopted by the Daylesford Spa Country Railway, and introduces the Riga Charter, a new initiative that provides heritage conservation guidelines designed specifically for operational railway and tramway museums.

Conservation Charters & Other Documents.

In order to provide a rational basis for the conservation of significant heritage objects and places, a number of related Charters and associated documents have been developed both overseas and in Australia. Historically, the Athens Charter (1931) and the Venice Charter (1964), paved the way for a number of charters of international significance that define the basic principles and procedures to be observed when conserving important objects and places. The Athens and Venice Charters were concerned with cultural and heritage items as preserved by traditional museums as static exhibits and by those who care for listed buildings, and did not consider conservation issues associated with operating heritage items.

In 1965 ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) was established, and in 1966 an Australian Committee, called Australia ICOMOS, was formed to carry out national programs and provide an input to the international body.

In 1977 Australia ICOMOS started a review of the applicability of the Venice Charter in Australia. In 1979 the Australia ICOMOS *Guidelines for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance* was adopted at the historic mining town of Burra in South Australia. The document was given the short title of the Burra Charter.

The Institute of Engineers Australia, adopted the Burra Charter as the basis for the understanding of conservation principles, processes and practice. However, minor extensions to definitions and explanations were required to the Burra Charter to help engineering conservation projects, particularly where moveable engineering heritage was involved. In 1992 the Institute published extensions to the Burra Charter in *Engineering Heritage & Conservation Guidelines*.

When the Daylesford Spa Country Railway registered in MAP (Museum Accreditation Program) in September 2001, the formal documentation of the railway's own Conservation Policies for rolling stock and infrastructure were based on the principles, processes and practice contained in the Burra Charter (1999 revision) and the *Engineering Heritage & Conservation Guidelines*.

Background to the Riga Charter

The initiative for the Riga Charter was taken by the Federation of European Museum and Tourist Railways (Fedecrail) president David Morgan who presented his views at the AGM in Riga (Latvia) in 2002. He said that the heritage railways would benefit if they could improve their profile in the same way as had been achieved by the museum world with their Athens and Venice Charters. A recent addition to these Charters was the Barcelona Charter (2001), a European charter for the conservation and restoration of traditional ships in operation, prepared by the owners because they felt that the preservation of a working item demanded a special approach.

In the 2003 meeting at Llandudno (North Wales, U.K.), the AGM of Fedecrail agreed that a working party be set up named the Cultural Charter Working group or CCW. Its members were railway museum experts from the U.K., Spain and Germany, and heritage railway and culture policy experts from the Netherlands and Italy.

After the presentation of an improved text finalised shortly before the next AGM at Leiden (the Netherlands) in 2004, the members of Fedecrail were invited during their AGM to take the text to their home countries and discuss it with their own members. This led to reactions from the Netherlands, the U.K. and from Sweden including the Swedish (national) Railway Museum at Gävle. The main improvements made were the addition of tramways and tram museums (definitions), repair (def.), and operating (including safety) procedures (art. 3). Despite discussions, the tourist railways were not deleted from the text as some Fedecrail members are national umbrella organisations of museum and tourist railways and in France, museum railways are not recognised as useful institutions unless they attract tourists (and therefore are named tourist railways in most of the cases).

The final version of the Riga Charter was accepted by the Annual General Meeting of Fedecrail on Saturday 16th April 2005 at Graves-sur-Anse near Lyon (France). It is essential reading for anyone interested in the preservation of railway heritage. Comments and suggestions about the Riga Charter are welcome and should be addressed to the Editor of Turntable.

THE RIGA CHARTER

Adopted by the Annual General Meeting of
Fedecrail on Saturday 16th April 2005 at
Graves-sur-Anse near Lyon (France).

INTRODUCTION

This Charter has been created to guide decisions that will result in heritage railways being able to be enjoyed by future generations.

Heritage railways have been very successful in recruiting, restoring, preserving and operating heritage equipment.

It is hoped that this charter will help everyone involved to see opportunities for making wise decisions.

It has been created to accompany the several other charters relating to heritage conservation.

THE RIGA CHARTER

PURPOSE

The Riga Charter is a statement of principles which guide the conservation, restoration, maintenance and repair and use of historic railway equipment, which is being operated. It is hoped that this will help our members make wise decisions.

DEFINITIONS

Heritage Railways referred to in this Charter, may also include historic or preserved railways, museum railways and tramways, working railway and tram museums and tourist railways, and may extend to heritage trains operating on the national network and other railways.

Railway Equipment referred to in this Charter may include buildings or infrastructure which form part of the railway ensemble.

Preservation is the process of keeping an object safe from harm and decomposition, by maintaining it properly so that its condition, quality and memory is retained

Conservation is the process of stabilising the condition of an object without compromising the historical or material evidence in any way

Restoration is the process of repairing or replacing missing parts in an attempt to regain an earlier state of the object. The restoration may increase the strength of the object before work started, and may generally go further than conservation. It should neither be invisible or glaringly obvious.

Repair is the process of adjustment or replacement of the components. The specified standard of mechanical condition is achieved irrespective of the historic integrity of parts that may be altered or discarded

Article 1

Scientific and technical skills, together with the facilities needed to preserve and operate historic railway equipment, within a culture of safety, should be used to safeguard railway heritage.

Article 2

The aim of preserving and restoring historic railway items and associated working practices is to safeguard them, whether they are significant technological artefacts, evidence for transport history or a means of perpetuating traditional skills.

Article 3

Maintenance of all aspects of their equipment, and operation on a regular basis is essential for the survival of heritage railways. Operating historic and valuable railway equipment with traditional operating procedures, and presenting it to the public, is an important means of interpreting that material.

Article 4

Identifying socially useful purposes for historic railway items will help facilitate their preservation, but such use should involve the minimum change necessary, and such changes should be fully reversible.

Article 5

A heritage railway should reflect not only the importance of its own role as a transport system, but also when appropriate, its own historic origins and its impact on the community.

Article 6

The process of restoration is a highly specialised operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic, functional and historic value of traditional railway equipment. It should be based on respect and an understanding wherever possible of the original designs and specifications.

Article 7

The original or historically correct materials and techniques should be used in the conservation of historic railway items, unless they can no longer be adopted for reasons of safety, legislation or

availability. In such cases appropriate contemporary substitutes for such materials or techniques should be used.

Article 8

The restoration of a piece of historic railway equipment does not require that it must be restored to its original as built state. Some equipment acquires its historic importance later on in its working life. Restoration to any period should be executed only after thorough consideration of historic records, and available documentation covering the chosen period, after which a restoration plan should be written and adopted. Material that is replaced with new should be readily identified as such with a simple permanent marking system.

Article 9

Added mandatory safety equipment should if possible blend harmoniously with the conserved or restored item but the fact that it is an addition or alteration to the original make-up of the item should be clearly indicated.

Article 10

Any other necessary later modifications to the item that are introduced for whatever reason should be as sympathetic as possible to the make-up and appearance of the original item. Ideally any such modification should be reversible and any significant original parts removed should be retained for possible future re-use.

Article 11

Every stage in the conservation or restoration work on an historic railway item should be systematically planned and recorded. The resultant record of these processes retained for a minimum of the life of the item.

Article 12

All bodies involved in the repair, restoration, maintenance, conservation and operation of heritage railways and railway equipment, must make proper arrangements for the conservation of their records and archives.

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