

DISPLAY PREPARATION

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Some comments before going into the paper proper: The book that you have received from the Queensland Museum The Small Museum is a booklet that was presented at a seminar in May 1977. I will draw your attention to various sections of it.

I am speaking today as a person who wears three hats: as a person who has been involved with the restoration of Newstead House, preparing displays as a councillor of the Royal Historical Society and also as the person with the ultimate responsibility in the Tramway Museum for preparation of displays and the archival section. I will draw your attention to page 33 of the museum booklet - Display Design - its execution in museum display. This is by Peter Berriman who is the artist at the Queensland Museum. It is this booklet upon which we have based our display at the Museum. Our display is nowhere near as grand as we would like but we have only a small area, and had only limited time for preparation. Eventually we will have an outdoor display of overhead at seven foot height so that people can easily look at these items.

A couple of comments on the actual display at the Museum. The room is eventually intended to be a storeroom into the Workshop building. It has been designed as a temporary archival display area. We have "pink batts" insulating all walls from heat. The fluorescent lights have ultra-violet screens which cost only about \$1.50 each. Fluorescent lights emit about ten times as much ultra-violet light as ordinary lights. Incandescent globes only put out a small amount but their problem is that they put out heat. Screened fluorescent lights are the best solution.

Photographs which are out on display are not the originals but only copies. Avoid displaying original material as far as possible for security of your collection - it does not matter if people touch copies. The ultimate is to allow people to touch things which are replaceable. You should have as much as possible for people to actually touch and get to know what the object is like. Try to display items such as overhead in its setting. Remember it is far more interesting to the people to be able to touch.

The display hall which you see is also doubling as our bookshop and cost around \$1,000 as we used old timber and fittings. Most of the cost went in things such as photographic materials, paint, wallpaper etc.

I am hoping that you have all read The Small Museum so that when I refer to items I won't have to go into too much detail. The display layout technique that has been suggested is that when somebody looks at something they need a centre of interest and the normal place for your centre of interest is say, somewhere in the shaded area. The people see that first because a person naturally looks from left to right and from top to bottom. The object of the display technique is to find something of importance - it may not necessarily be the most important item you are displaying there, but is usually is. It has to be attractive. You may have noticed in the ticket collection that we have a horse tram ticket from 1885. That in itself against the orange background would not have been eye catching but it is when you find it on a white card. The card is what is gaining peoples attention, not the ticket.

Another important thing is not to overcrowd the display. If I wished I could have put up the entire ticket collection that the Society has, consisting of every type of ticket that has ever been issued for the trams. It would have been overcrowded to look at. Most people look at a display for only a few seconds. You want them to see the main thing in say 10 - 20 seconds. Those who are interested will then look at the rest. If they are not interested in tickets - OK, they have seen that one ticket; good, then they go on to the next display.

That brings us to the first rule to bear in mind in displays. Everyone is not as interested as we are and they show that lack of interest by not looking at it. The same goes in photographs. In our display we have 10 x 8 format for prints. Now it normally is not good practice to keep all photographs to the same size for the simple reason there is nothing to stand out. You may therefore have noticed the two larger photographs up at the top of the display area. I think that most people when they walk in after having seen the general layout, see the two large photographs hanging near the ceiling - the last tram and the last trolleybus. These draw attention to the boards below each. On the boards we have maps. The aim of the map is to draw the person's attention to the board - they look at the map, look at the photographs and hopefully relate the photographs to the map.

That briefly is the way we constructed our display. You contrast colours, vary display formula, have a centre of interest and have displays touchable. Room layout is very important. The lighting in our room is probably a little too bright but we are forced unfortunately to do so because entry is straight from sunlight. It is best to have a transition area¹¹ such as a bookshop to allow peoples eyes to adjust to progressively lower levels of lighting. The actual display area can have very low lighting levels with spot lights and flood lights used to enhance specific areas.

The other is the actual colours used. As I said, we have tried to keep to pastel shades where possible, the one exception being the finial display and the reason for that is to draw attention to the fact that there is something down there on the ground because it is normally bad practice to have things below three feet from the floor or above seven feet unless they are large items which cannot be displayed in any other way. The finial collection could not be placed anywhere else except on the floor as some are quite heavy. So, we painted the board bright orange which helps set off the original silver colour of the finials. The result is a very obvious display which people are unlikely to trip over.

I have covered display principles adequately though Peter Berriman has done so far better in his booklet.

Don't forget that it is good to have an overall theme to the display such as track, overhead etc.

Practical Session

The final part of this presentation took the format of a practical demonstration of the processes to be followed in dealing with items donated to a Museum.

A box of assorted material including photographs, commemorative pieces and various tramway-oriented paraphernalia was produced by the Archivist Tom Carter. Each object was dealt with and "catalogued" and its preservation needs and display potential discussed.