COTMA2023 Address

given at

COTMA2023 Conference Dinner

on

Sunday 8th October 2023

at

The Birdcage Tavern, Freemans Bay, Auckland

by

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A warm welcome to you all this evening, to the Ladies and their motormen! To those who have travelled long distances to be here in Auckland. Once the home of red tramcars you could hop off and on at a speed to suit your athletic ability. Auckland trams in their day had many windows and were often referred to, by nasty people, as ‘Mobile Glasshouses’.

Mister President, Henry Brittain - there will always be a Brittain. While there’s a busy street, wherever there’s a turning tramcar wheel, and the song goes on.

Henry has been around since the Wellington Fiducia type tram was looked upon as modern. The Fiducias are now a respected piece of tramway history - as is our Henry. Henry is a respected Icon in tramway circles around New Zealand. His conductress Lorraine has been his vital support over the decades.

COTMA – *Council of Tramway Museums of Australasia to promise and support excellence in tramway heritage in Australia and New Zealand.*

First, good evening to Team Australia - regardless of your pending defeat in the World Rugby Cup.
Birthplace of the Drop Centre. From Perth, Rockhampton, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Bendigo, Ballarat, Adelaide, and Launceston, Tasmania. [Graham forgot Hobart - Ed]
Not forgetting Valley Heights, home of Baldwin steam tram No: 103A.

Regardless of your accents, we warmly welcome you.
Welcome to Mikael Lund, from Denmark and to Kyoichi Oda, from Japan.

Some of the Australian COTMA pioneers are with us tonight. Dr. John Radcliffe (foundation Chairman) with his wife, Barbara, Warren Doubleday a former chairman.
I see Dale Budd is here from Sydney with his very own Princess Dianna. And Mal Rowe, also with a young lady by the name of Helen. And we have from New Zealand, from way south, Dave Hinman & his young bride Dot. They tied the knot at MOTAT on 23 October 1971 – 52 years ago this month. Auckland 253 was their wedding tram. Dave always did have an eye for class! Both in women and trams!
Dave was the first Kiwi to hold office in this august body, being President from 2014 until Covid hit the world.

We also have New Zealand Kingpins here, tonight.
Steve Porter, President of the WTM [Wellington Tramway Museum - Ed] and Stephen Taylor, President of the THS [Tramway Historical Society - Ed] of Christchurch. Like the political leaders, the two Chrises, we have the two Stephens.

I remember visiting Melbourne in the mid-1970s and riding on a new generation tramcar, the Z class which were painted orange. Orange seemed a way-out colour in the 70s, but very trendy. I was impressed with both the tram and the colour! I managed to hop on tram number 1, a big deal for me then!

To fellow New Zealanders from Invercargill to Whangarei, Kai Ora, Tena Koutou, Tena Koutou (Greetings to you all). What an eye-opening / educational weekend it has been. With thanks to all who undertook all the organising to make it possible and to those who presented papers.
Remember the old cliché you learn something new everyday of your life. Well, I certainly have, listening to these presentations.

It is amazing who you meet in life because of your association with the tramcar. Having travelled & being presented to Queen Elisabeth II and the Queen Mother (while balancing a glass of wine), in the 1950s when in newspapers.

I then met Prince Charles in the 90s – knowing from my newspaper years how their days were often full of meeting people of high rank, the majority being strangers with little conversation apart from commenting on the weather or the city. I took the liberty as the Prince shook my hand, to say to His Royal Highness "We have a mutual friend".

The Prince continued to shake my hand, not letting it go, turning to my wife to confirm the friendship.
A long conversation followed, the mutual friend was a former New Zealander, the artist, the late Felix Kelly, who at the time, was working on architecture aspects of Charles' country residence, Highgrove House, in Gloucestershire.

Felix & I had a mutual interest - the tramcar! He had grown up an Aucklander travelling on the fifty-two seaters daily.

When Queen Street was the hub of this city, the street you travelled to for a big night out: to the movies or for tea and cakes and the skyscrapers were only 6 floors high! If the movie was late finishing in the evening, say to the Regent or The Civic – the trams would wait at the safety zones in Queen Street, for the theatre crowds – a small town courtesy as the majority rode the tramcar to and from the suburbs.

Before the age of gyms and fitness centres you did your morning workout running for a tram and taking a calculated flying leap onto the back step as the tram gathered speed. It was a world for the bold and the daring. The seats were made of heart timber, hard and solid to keep your back trim, draughts came at you from all angles, to keep the body muscles alert. Standing in a packed tight formation in a rush-hour tram gave you scrumming training – tram travel was not for sisses.

Standing on an outside running board, as the road rushed beneath you, would have sent today's accident safety and health officials to an early grave!
Looking back, it does not seem like 70 years ago plus since I first had a crazy idea (in those days), to have a tramcar preserved in New Zealand. I was only 21 going on 22 and was looked upon by many of my friends as being rather odd! No comment please!

Well, that's all history and now in New Zealand alone we have 85 trams plus and 14 Australian trams at last count. All have been given eternal life.

This has all been made possible through the dedication of volunteers. Thanks to many who are here this evening. None of this would have happened if it had not been for the thousands of hours which have been given by museum volunteers over the decades throughout Australasia.

Not only the hours of free labour you have given. But the specialist skills in engineering, in coachwork, in so many trades, many now from the past, all so essential in the restoration of a tramcar, or a trackless tram – now known as a trolley bus!

Other aspects of having an operating electric tramway involves the permanent way; the road foundations, the tracks, the overhead and the placement of the poles to support the running wires. All requiring specialist engineering knowledge.

And then there are the supporting crews of the volunteers. Your Partners in life who look after the chores back home while you give of your weekends for the tramway cause. They deserve a special acknowledgement and, may I suggest, a day off while in Auckland for shopping! A mighty spend up!

I find it fascinating the number of daughters and sons in a family who have become involved in their parent's footsteps in the tramway movement. Many never having experienced riding on a first-generation tram along a public street in their daily lives.

So, welcome everyone who are present tonight. Now for a warning, James Duncan of MOTAT fame has had a squad of uniformed inspectors watching over the MOTAT tram fleet

for free loaders during the conference! There could be a ticket in the mail for you when you reach home!

On behalf of all present this evening, we thank James Duncan for all his organisational skills. And Alan Curtis, too, the Master of Ceremonies. Both have carried out their duties splendidly.

In closing, as I said earlier, it is 71 years ago this year since I approached the management of the then Auckland Transport Board pleading with them to preserve the then Golden Jubilee tram, No.11 – which now runs again at MOTAT. Time certainly passes…

So enjoy the evening everyone. I would like to close with a non-PC joke of the tram era: “Never run after a woman or a tram my boy – there will always be another one along in a minute”.