There is a lesson in this and we did not learn it !

In developing a product around your railway, by all means use the volunteers in its pioneering stages but set them the target used by Rotary.

Work hard to achieve the end. When the project is self supporting, let it go and take up another challenge.

PAPER - RECORDING AND PRESERVING TODAY FOR TOMORROW

ARCHIVES - Core Business for our Rail Futures - Alan Smith

There are three separate aspects I will be talking about in this session:

1. The most obvious - the value of keeping documents and other archives as **part of the overall museum** collection and function.

2. The issue raised at the NFRS Conference in 1997 - the need for the rail heritage sector to build up its resources of technical information and manuals for **real hard safety and risk management** purposes - not just as a collection of memorabilia.

3. Likely to be the most uncomfortable or even embarrassing aspect - how good are we as societies at **managing our own internal information** and keeping good useful archives of all the written and visual evidence we have built up over the years.

The three can all be usefully thought about under the general heading of "archives". But I am going to emphasise how essential it is that we keep the three categories quite clearly separate when looking at how we approach each case. More importantly, keep each of the three issues separate when it comes to settling your museum priorities.

I think that most groups represented in NFRS and COTMA will already be fully aware of the first of these three facets - the complementing of rail operation and of rolling stock preservation with keeping collections of old files, timetables, brochures, photographs and so on. There are a couple of role models for us here:

One is MoTaT's Walsh Library operation in Auckland. The other is the National Tramway Museum's library at Crich in England.

For our purposes here today, we need not get too hung up about the differences between an archive or a library: what matters is that items of documentary record (usually print, but including film or sound tape) are kept. This keeping then requires some essential features:

* Describing or sourcing each item as accurately as possible. Admittedly this can be difficult, and may be no more that "Ka on Napier (?) train leaving Paekakariki ca 1950s donated by Joe Bloggs May 1964" or "File 1949-52 re upholstery repairs on trams, found in disused cupboard at Kilburnie 1995 and donated by Stagecoach 14/9/95". The key thing is that this data is a **starting point** for later researchers or users, and can be added to or validated as time goes on.

* Clear accountability for where it is stored and under whose control. Every museum will have its horror stories of "society" archives being stored in a member's house and later, under the "possession is nine points of the law"

principle, being claimed as personal, rather than museum, prorate. If you don't face up to this fact right at the outset, then you are simply setting yourself up for problems and quite literally heartache later on. A better solution at a very early stage may be to reach a deposit arrangement with a local established library. A recent unlikely example of this is the existence in the public library at East Ham - in the heart of "The Bill" country of London's East End - of the Gratwicke photographs of New Zealand and Australian trams of the 1920s - including the only known photograph of the Wellington sprinkler car. These photographs have ended up in the Historic Commercial Vehicle Club (HCVC) collection deposited with the London Borough of Newnham's library - and so they have survived to be mined now as key references for recent New Zealand tramway research.

My recommendation is that every Society develops a dialogue with its local public library or public museum about looking after its archival collections. Most public agencies will react positively to this sort of approach: issues of ownership, and access, and copying can usually be sorted out with goodwill on both sides. There is an added benefit, too, of such deposited archives helping raise the profile or awareness of the local rail group. Almost certainly, this sort of arrangement will build contacts and networks which bring other sources of information to the attention of the rail museum.

Public agencies like libraries and museums are, of course, subject to restructuring and change. The reality is that the material will be safer there than it would be in the house or shed of a society member whose life suddenly gets "restructured" by death, fire, divorce or some other personal catastrophe.

The NZR&LS collection at the Lower Hutt Public Library may seem less encouraging, but consider this: the items are there, they are secure, and they can be accessed. The have survived all the associated risks since the 1960s.

An archive like this can be a useful resource for exhibitions, publications, and so on. It can also ensure that you have almost unwittingly built up a really useful data resource to help you railway operation or car restoration. Have a look at all sorts of details about track, car dimensions and street furniture in this classic British film of 1952:

At this point the film "The Elephant never forgets" was screened

To move from this general archival interest on to the more focused concern that last year's NFRS Conference at Heretunga talked about is a very natural transition.

The difference is that this second aspect of archiving is actually critical to our survival, to our business continuity. For every heritage railway or tramway, there are these constant three constraints. The risks which they present to each rail heritage site will become potentially more damaging as time moves ahead. One of the ways those risks can be managed is a good archiving project.

The three risk areas are:

1. Many of the technologies we rely upon are **obsolescent** e.g. steam, electrical. The equipment itself is degrading through age and wear-and-tear.

2. The **live memory** of how this equipment was originally built and serviced is literally dying. For example, a 20 year old tradesman on the Wellington trams in 1964 will now be 54. Someone with 20 year's experience of Wellington tram servicing when the last cars ran there will now be their 70's. Unless that knowledge is recorded in some way, it will literally die away even though we can conserve the vehicles and other artifacts almost indefinitely.

3. **Safety** requirements these days are much more onerous than they were in the heyday of classic steam or trams. This may be a good thing - but it does mean that a relatively casual approach to safety can no longer be tolerated.

Now, between us all and our counterparts elsewhere, there is a body of recorded knowledge which we can all draw upon to meet these risks. What we don't know with reliable certainty is where exactly that knowledge is housed, and what the missing gaps in it are. The issues raised at NFRS last year can be summarised into five actions:

1. **What** does exist - what manuals and written procedures for railway and tramway operation, published for normal operations at the time when the equipment was new, are there still in New Zealand ?

2. **Where** are they ? Is there a complete set of Fiducia air system documentation at WST and a complete set of Fiducia wiring diagrams at WTM ? Does Glenbrook have a full Ab servicing manual, and Steam Incorporated a complete Ka manual ?

3. Can others **use** this material **with confidence** ? Are the holding museums willing to share the information; do they know that all amendments and updates have been properly accounted for ?

4. Are there **obvious gaps** in these records so that we can focus our efforts on a copying programme ? Perhaps operationally we could live with the fact that all the technical information about tramway sprinkler cars has vanished. But if in the U.S. there are in our fellow museums good Baldwin manuals, these will probably hold useful data for some of our present actual vehicles.

5. Can we keep this knowledge base of what records exist, and where, and a culture of sharing them, **alive and dynamic** ?

To what extent is this actually a problem ? Often what happens with information is that you don't realise how useful it is until after you've had actual experience of doing something the hard way and then coming across some documentation which makes you say "if only I'd known that !".

Because of the three risk areas we have, anything which helps manage our exposure must be useful. Hence the idea is floated for discussion here, as a starting point for a programme. The really interesting thing is that the documentation revealed by such a process is going to be fascinating in its own right, as well as usefully practical.

The third area of archiving I want to cover is that of the records of almost half a century of voluntary rail preservation in Australia and New Zealand. (Let's assume for the moment that our public archives already hold what records there are about any preservation activities made by the actual state railway or tramway utilities.)

Here's a film which captures a lot of the atmosphere of how work, and jobs, and careers were seen straight after the war. It helps show that it's not just technology which has changed since then:

The film "The Railway Worker" from Weekly Review (no.355) was screened here.

For my own part, starting in this rail preservation game in the 1960's, the whole approach was based on a sort of cheerful amateurism. As I understand it, this was even more the case in the 1950's days of the real pioneers like Graham Stewart at Matakohe or John Bettle with the Christchurch Kitson. That scene in the film of the Saturday night dance at Otira wasn't all that much different from the style of the member's social we had down at the Paekakariki Pub the night before the official opening of the Wellington Tramway

Museum back in December 1965. That was barely twenty years after the end of the war. Now it's well over half a century after the war - the way we organise ourselves, and our member's expectations of what a museum committee will do, have changed because the world has moved on and made these changes necessary. Our own history as rail museums is evidence of that change. To understand through our society archives what the Matakohe team did, for example, makes for a much better appreciation of the merits of MoTaT's current initiatives to promote its own Bill through the New Zealand Parliament.

Collectively, we have achieved many remarkable feats over these last, say, four decades. Many vehicles have been kept operational far beyond their days of normal service: many more have been restored from the dead or, even more impressively, recreated from fragments. Sure, we can see the evidence in front of our eyes. But are we recognising the value of this effort - as distinct from the value of the end result - to the right extent ? Can any of us stand up in front of our Boards, or at an AGM, and give honest answers to these questions:

* Does the Museum have an active records management programme ?

* Are our core files like minute books, correspondence and financial records securely preserved.

I think we all know that the reality is that a lot of this material sits in members' cupboards or is just stashed away. It is often seen as unimportant by the very people who will go to extraordinary length to secure a faded excursion poster from a disused goods shed, or to acquire a pile of old railway magazines from a second-hand shop. The message I hope to get across on this occasion is that **our own society files** have a real value in their own right. This value stems from:

* **Efficiency** and economy - saving valuable time by being able to access past decisions or data. This is the norm in most businesses and, given the size of most of our operations, deserves that same sort of attention here.

* **Accountability**. The evidence is clear that over the next few years the pressure will increase for all museums to be more accountable for financial planning and for legal liabilities. The informal peppercorn lease of the 1960's, for instance, will increasingly be replaced by tougher lease documents. Tax and employment law is likely to require much closer scrutiny of evidence of non-profit status.

* **Esteem** - the New Zealand word **Mana** sums this up best. The story of Rail preservation is a history in its own right - not least because in its early days this sort of "amateur" preservation sat in such sharp contrast to the attitudes and interests of the "official" museum culture of the time. We all know that something like the shift which occurred in sport - from amateur to professional - has already occurred for many of our museums. The early days of our preservation sites - digging out track bed, or stringing up the first live overhead - are already as remote to the actual formal requirements of practical rail museum work today as are the practices of the "classic" rail era we want to preserve as heritage - track gangs with high-viz vests, or tram conductors swinging between the compartments of a cross-bench car. We have some evidence of this in our own files. If we don't preserve it, no-one else will.

There is a distinction between current records and archives. The one at risk is the archive, especially at the time of change of officers after an AGM, or when older members die or move away from town. The museum loco shed or car barn may not have room for old

"society admin" files; more importantly, even if there were room it's not likely to be the best place.

As with general archival collections of old timetables and track maps, my hope is that every society initiates a dialogue with its local public library or public museum about looking after the society's old files. Public agencies do react positively to this sort of approach: issues of ownership, and access, and copying can usually be sorted out with goodwill on both sides. There is the added benefit too, of such deposited archives helping raise the profile or awareness of the local rail group. Almost certainly, this sort of arrangement will build contacts and networks which bring other sources of information to the attention of the rail museum and its members.

And, however often our public cultural agencies are re-organised, the material will be safer there that it would be in the house or shed of a society member whose life gets suddenly "restructured" by death, fire, divorce or some other personal catastrophe.

This Conference celebrates decades of successful volunteer activity in Australasian rail and tramway museums. We have, through our efforts, kept much of the evidence of a past way of life for our communities, through into the era now of a growing commercial interest in "heritage". Behind every rail site or preserved vehicle is the documentary evidence of its former life as a part of normal daily existence. For every aging piece of machinery there is, somewhere, a file or manual explaining how is can be best serviced and maintained. Behind every museum there is a personal history of sweat, of primitive Gestetner-run newsletters, of begging-bowl fundraising, and the jeers of being no more than train-spotters. Those archives have a real value, so they require real effort to keep in order and preserve.

Finally, I want to close with a film to draw together the threads of these three strands of rail museum archiving. And, building on the scenes we saw in "The Railway Worker" earlier this morning, it will bring us sharply into the world of 1998 - because this time tomorrow we will be on the train going up the Midland line and passing the ghosts of some of the people in these films who lived in the very different New Zealand of the 1950s. Both of these films were made by the New Zealand National Film unit: something now privatised out of existence, but which in its time was as natural to the public sector as was the provision of a railway network or the running of public passenger transport in cities. The two are twenty years apart, but there is a lot of common features.

Look at them, and be thankful that they have captured the essence of the time and place. Do give a hard thought as to how **your** society can, by actively collecting archival material, help get the context of preservation right. With this one task, you can have a thoroughly enjoyable time **and** earn the thanks of future generations by adding to the collective knowledge of our past.

(The film "Kb Country" Pictorial Parade 1968 was screened in conclusion)

STEAM ENGINE DRIVER'S REPORT AND SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION

ADDRESS BY PETER MCCALLUM

1. Trevor Burling's report was circulated to those present. (Contained in Section 4)

2. Peter McCallum, session chairman, presented comments received by e-mail from Les Stewart in the United Kingdom.