

RHRS President's Report 2017

Being essentially a railway-oriented person - for more than sixty years now - it seemed hard for me as I sat down to produce my President's Report for 2016/2017 to be really pleased with what, initially, appeared to be the progress over the last year for Robertson Heritage Railway Station Inc (RHRS). This is because of the lack of regular train visits since the start of 2017 and the uncertainty of future train visits to our station. On the surface, the present dearth of train visits presents a rather bleak outlook, and it is not a pretty picture for lovers of trains and railway heritage - as I am. However, in reviewing what else has occurred and has been achieved during the last year at RHRS, the picture changes and it is pleasing for me to note that the last year has been very fruitful in many ways.

Of course, "the elephant in the room" (as it were) is that our 2017 Annual General Meeting arrives and we are all one year older, our volunteers are few in number, and the properties, facilities, events and the tasks we need to manage sometimes appear to be difficult, commonly involving hard work. On the other hand, a more positive outlook reveals that our RHRS finances are still in good shape, our Fettle's Shed gallery has been re-roofed, our grounds and gardens generally present well, and we still hold fund-raising events. In particular, our volunteers are a keen and capable lot who do not shirk hard work when it is needed and invariably respond well to the challenges that come our way. We have demonstrated time and time again that we work well as a team in staging events. Further, we should continue to be optimistic and hopeful that we will again receive regular and worthwhile train visits so that we can once again be a true operating railway station. That is not a bad mix.

Over the last year, our Management Committee has held several planning meetings where we looked at possible opportunities for our future operations. These discussions were helpful, but were curtailed as we ceased to meet monthly over the cold winter months; we will continue with planning meetings now that spring is here. During this period of time over winter, the management committee voted to allow an executive committee comprising Anne Wilson, Neil Harvey, Steve Carey, Rona Gould and myself to manage administrative matters concerning RHRS and to make appropriate decisions, whilst keeping the management committee and our membership well-informed on all matters. This has been done, mainly through email and phone contact, as well as several meetings, and I thank those members of the executive committee for their efforts.

Others will report to the AGM in more detail on their areas of responsibility, but I will make the following brief comments on matters of general interest as well as those in my own areas of responsibility.

1. **Heritage train visits:** Earlier this year, 3801 Limited, the former operator of the 'Cockatoo Run' heritage tourist train, was placed in a situation where they were "locked-in" (by Transport Heritage NSW) to the Large Erecting Shop at Eveleigh (Redfern), which had been their home and operating base for many years. They were told to leave the premises and find an alternative base for their operations. 3801 Limited looked exhaustively at suitable facilities, found none suitable, advised Transport Heritage NSW accordingly and elected to remain within the LES. They were forbidden to operate further trains and were told that if they left the LES they would not be allowed back in. This matter is very political and while I have made representations on behalf of RHRS to numerous NSW government ministers and stake-holders, as well as others, on this matter, the issue has been a stalemate for many months and shows no sign of prompt resolution. RHRS seeks to remain neutral on this matter but continues to stress the significant impact this matter has on RHRS.

Other heritage train operators have not been in a position where they could organise a train visit to Robertson although, on Easter Saturday, 15 April 2017, THNSW ran four successful shuttles between Moss Vale station and Robertson using heritage steam locomotive 3642 and heritage diesel locomotive 4001. None of these shuttles stopped at Robertson station, giving us minimal or no opportunity for fund-raising. The proposed brief visit by the THNSW 'Highlander' on Saturday, 16 September also gives us minimal fund-raising potential - which was the subject of a

letter I wrote recently to THNSW CEO Andrew Moritz, to which I have yet to receive a reply. We will continue to be in touch with possible train operators, namely, THNSW, Lachlan Valley and ARHSnsw/Rail Motor Society regarding possible future train visits to Robertson, preferably with a lunch-time stopover.

2. **Management of grounds and gardens:** Our RHRS grounds and gardens continue to be one of our greatest assets and should continue as such for as long as possible. Earlier this year, David and Helen Tranter advised our management committee representatives that they are no longer able to continue in the role they had undertaken so capably for more than 15 years, handing over responsibility for that task to the RHRS committee. Since then, my wife Sandra and I have assumed that responsibility with the valued assistance of others.

Our waratah plantings are highly regarded by many people, including serious garden enthusiasts, who make the trip to the Robertson station grounds each October and January to view our colourful displays of waratah shrubs. Our waratah gardens have been featured on television in Channel 7's *Better Homes and Gardens* program hosted by Graham Ross and, recently, in the magazine *Highlife*, where David and Helen Tranter are shown along with the fruits of their labours over many years. A copy of that issue of *Highlife* is on display in the Fettle's Shed gallery. As David and Helen were quick to point out with many of our RHRS activities over the years in which they played active roles, these are "community initiatives" and, in many ways, our railway gardens belong to and are enjoyed by our local community. This is an aspect I will continue to focus on and it is agreed by Colin Hancock, President of the Robertson Garden Club, who has offered the assistance of their club members (where possible) at our garden working-bees and at other times by prior arrangement with myself. We received substantial assistance at our last garden working-bee and Colin has promised to keep promoting our working-bees in the hope that continued assistance to our own volunteers by garden club volunteers may be provided. This is a step forward, as we need as much help - particularly by keen and experienced gardeners - as we can get. Without such external assistance, our garden maintenance would be very difficult.

Having undertaken a thorough inspection of the entire gardens and grounds recently, it is clear that attention needs to be given to managing the following:

- Maintaining the waratah plants in as good a condition as possible by regular pruning, weeding, fertilising and mulching - as well as watering them in periods of low rainfall, such as we are currently experiencing.
- Where necessary (and appropriate), pruning overhanging vegetation which is robbing waratah shrubs of sunlight and, hence, their ability to keep flowering optimally.
- Keeping other areas of our gardens as weed-free and well watered as possible.
- Removing and replacing those shrubs within our gardens which are excessively old, woody or dead. This has occurred with several native shrubs in our Fettle's Shed garden which have endured long periods of drought over many years. Already, several new plantings have been made and more will be made further into spring when useful rain is forecast.
- All of the above will mean lots of work and it will be a priority focus for me during the next year. Any assistance that Sandra and I can get in undertaking this work will be greatly appreciated.

The continued assistance from the Department of Corrective Services' detainees in mowing the grass, whipper-snipping and related tasks is greatly appreciated and it is hoped that it will continue as at present. Without this assistance, our task in properly maintaining our grounds and gardens would be so much more difficult, if not impossible.

3. **Maintenance of buildings and services:** Without doubt, one of the most valuable things to happen at RHRS over the last year was the re-roofing of the formerly leaking roof on the Fettle's Shed. That this was accomplished at no cost to RHRS is a credit to the persistence and

persuasiveness of Neil Harvey, our maintenance co-ordinator. I will leave it to Neil to provide the details for that, but we should be very pleased that Neil has established and maintained a close working relationship with Michael Irons of ARTC, the Unanderra-Moss Vale line administrator. Following the successful completion of the Concrete Cancer Repair Project on our heritage-listed concrete station buildings, Neil is still chasing up the painting of these with ARTC. It is hoped that this work - both essential and cosmetic maintenance - can be accomplished later this year. During the cooler months, Neil and Ron Middleton have worked tirelessly on painting the interior of the Fettle's Shed gallery to rejuvenate its appearance, protect the surfaces and to make the gallery a much more presentable building for our own use and for hiring. The capable and valued assistance of Russell Barwise in this painting is appreciated. Neil will expand on this in his reports but, on behalf of RHRS, I thank these gentlemen for the sterling work they have accomplished in the maintenance of our buildings.

4. **Events in 2016/2017:** In my 'RHRS President's Report - Year in Review, 2016' I covered the main issues and events of 2016. Since then, the 2017 Classic Car Show was successful - mostly in fine & sunny weather - and the Fettle's Heritage Art Show was staged successfully. I will not enlarge on these comments here but thank our management committee and volunteers for the hard work they do in staging and managing these events - it is much appreciated and valued.
5. **Safety:** Last-item-but-one, but certainly not the least important - in fact one of the **most** important items - safety during the last year has been administered successfully and with a high degree of professionalism, by Neil Harvey our Safety Co-ordinator and "man of many hats". Thanks Neil, for a job well done and thanks to all members and workers for your contribution to this very worthwhile cause.
6. **Personal:** On a personal note, I am very conscious of the major commitment on my time that has occurred this year - and will continue for several weeks in September-October 2017 when Sandra and I will be overseas - attempting to do things which we value highly while we still can. My recent past has been devoted substantially to writing, editing and completing for publication a very large issue of *Byways of Steam*: 32 and this commitment may possibly extend into 2018, when I may do the same for the publication of *Byways of Steam*: 33, which will be (arguably) our last for the current, but ageing, writing & production team within publisher Eveleigh Press, which has been active since 1990. Several of us feel that we still have an article or 'a railway heritage story that needs to be told' within us that we want to publish. Thank you to those of you within our RHRS management committee who have assisted me greatly during this period and have provided both wise and valued counsel on matters relating to RHRS and to "life in general". Special thanks are also due to our treasurer Anne Wilson for her sustained and very capable efforts in managing our finances, as well as to Steve Carey and Rona Gould in managing our internal communications, including those via the internet.

I hereby express my sincere thanks and appreciation to our entire management committee and to all RHRS members who have made the year 2016/2017 a successful and meaningful one for RHRS. Perhaps 2017 did not turn out exactly as we had expected this time last year, but it was indeed successful in other ways. Although the coming year 2017/2018 will be challenging - we know that already - I hope that it, too, will be successful.

Ian Wallace
Hon. President, RHRS
3 September 2017