

## RHRS PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2017/2018

### Introduction

During the cooler months of winter and early spring 2018, a 'Mid-year Newsletter' was produced and distributed, with the aim being to inform RHRS members of significant happenings within RHRS and the need to embrace, as best we can, the changing circumstances both within RHRS and the railway heritage movement generally. Another significant aim was to restrict the number of meetings during the colder months to those absolutely necessary. I now propose to model this President's Report for 2017/2018 on that theme.

The year 2017/2018 continued the now obvious trend that we saw in the previous year and, notably, a trend common to many volunteer organizations, where members are ageing and the number of active members decreasing, for a variety of reasons. During the last year, RHRS has received encouraging support and assistance from other local community groups and from the NSW Department of Corrective Services, as well as from our local politicians. I have tried, wherever possible within Robertson, to enlist the support and encouragement from other local community groups, particularly with the management of our largest visible asset, namely, our grounds and gardens. I have spoken to the presidents of many local community groups about these grounds and gardens being, not just the Robertson railway gardens but our Robertson community gardens - to be valued and cared-for by the community. To an encouraging extent, that message has been accepted and some valued assistance received, but more work in that vein still needs to be done.

### Heritage train visits to RHRS

Once a "staple" of RHRS functions when the '*Cockatoo Run*' heritage tourist train came regularly to Robertson station, such visits by train operator 3801 Limited have been curtailed. This is a great pity and something which all efforts by RHRS and 3801 Limited have been unable to overcome. The future of such train visits remains uncertain - at the best. Robertson railway station received visits from the Transport Heritage NSW (THNSW) '*Highlander*' train on Saturday, 24 February, on Sunday, 13 May and on Sunday, 26 August 2018. One more visit by this train is expected before the end of 2018. Due to the "unserviceability" of genuine heritage diesel-electric locomotive 4201, locomotive GL112 has provided the motive power for all visits in 2018. This choice of motive power did not please some people.

We understand that, for the foreseeable future at least, THNSW will run four such services of the '*Highlander*' to Robertson and Moss Vale each year. Time will tell if this is continues to be the case. Recent visits have been operated approximately to the timetable of the former '*Cockatoo Run*'. It is still unclear to us how we at RHRS can maximize the fund-raising activities of such train visits as the 150 or so train passengers choosing to disembark the train and explore Robertson village and seek refreshments in Robertson have been booking lunch at the Bowling Club, the Robertson Inn (pub), the Robertson Hotel (Ranelagh) or Moonacres Kitchen cafe, and will continue to be so advised by train operator THNSW at the time of booking. Our efforts at having a sausage-sizzle, afternoon-tea (tea/coffee and scones) as well as the Fettle's Shed display of model trains have met with mixed success and we still require better communication with operational staff within THNSW to learn of the number of people likely to require what

type of refreshment during their visit to Robertson. This is an area for further work and consideration but, so far, donations from viewing the model trains have been a good and welcome source of income.

The future of heritage train visits other than from trains operated by THNSW is uncertain, but we remain hopeful that in 2019 and 2020, one or more steam-train visits to Robertson may occur, as occurred regularly during the years 2000 to 2012. The expected re-entry into operational service of iconic steam locomotive 3801 during 2019 is but one possibility. Another possibility for a visit is a hired rail-motor tour on its way to or from another destination. The small number of heritage train operators in NSW has so far been unable or unwilling to visit us at Robertson during 2018.

### **Maintenance of Buildings and Services**

Again, it is disappointing to report that the required painting of the successfully remediated National Trust heritage-listed station buildings has not taken place despite the persistent efforts of Neil Harvey to have this painting undertaken and paid for by ARTC. This matter will be addressed by Neil in his report to this AGM but I share his concern. Recent representations to local MP Stephen Jones, Federal member for Whitlam, resulted in a letter being written to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, seeking advice on “the schedule of work for this project and when the painting of these structures will be completed”. We are hopeful that these representations will be fruitful. On 11 September, at the request of THNSW, I gave a video interview at Robertson station on our successful ‘concrete cancer repair project’, which will be edited into a video to be used by THNSW to further promote the Transport Heritage Grants Program and will be placed on their website.

Other necessary maintenance work has been undertaken as required by RHRS. We are very appreciative of the work done by Neil, Ron Middleton and other RHRS volunteers in this regard.

### **Maintenance of Grounds and Gardens**

Despite the lack of good rainfall over the last year and several severe frosts, the station’s grounds and gardens are in relatively good condition. In particular, I can report that the waratah shrubs have mostly fared quite well in adverse conditions and that many of the waratah shrubs are carrying good, plump flower buds. The downside to this is that a large number of the buds have been damaged, either by the numerous bower birds which reside on site, or by other as-yet unknown attack. It is possible that this damage will continue and will adversely affect the colourful display of waratah blooms later in spring - unless a successful remedy can be found. I am seeking advice on this. The gradual replacement of several waratah and other native plants which have died in the past by selected native shrubs (including some waratahs) is taking place to improve the appearance of the gardens. This work will continue during Spring. We really appreciate the great work done by supervisor Lindsay Fowler and his Department of Corrective Services’ small team doing weekend community service as part of their sentence. Led by Lindsay, their work in helping to maintain our grounds and gardens is invaluable. Significant assistance from time to time by volunteer members of Robertson Garden Club has also been a help and encouragement to our small team of RHRS volunteers.

A noteworthy undertaking carried out by volunteers earlier this year was the successful and safe removal of a large dead blackwood tree within the Reconciliation Garden opposite the station. The skill and competence of the RHRS volunteers, as well as Robertson volunteer Ian Field, who provided expertise and equipment, is greatly appreciated. More recently, the large radiata pine

tree, also within the Reconciliation Garden, and which shed a very large branch during strong winds, has been inspected and expertly pruned by an arborist, provided by local ARTC supervisor Ross Barber. We appreciate ARTC's involvement in this matter of public safety and also Neil's organizational contribution.

### **RHRS Finances**

Treasurer Anne Wilson will present a summary of RHRS finances to the 2018 Annual General Meeting. Our RHRS finances are in good shape and they are being well managed by Anne. I extend my thanks and appreciation to Anne for her continued dedication to her long-held role as Treasurer and for her outstanding contribution to RHRS generally.

### **Compilation of Robertson's History**

During 2018, several discussions were held with senior members of the Berrima District Historical and Family History Society (BDHAFHS). These discussions considered how best to manage the preservation of the historical information on Robertson, which has been compiled by Helen Tranter over many years, once Helen is unable to do so. Helen has advised that she will continue with her 'Robertson History Group' meetings and compilation of relevant historical information for as long as she can. We are grateful to Helen for providing this important and valuable service to Robertson. RHRS aims to distinguish between general local historical information on Robertson - in which BDHAFHS has expressed an interest - and the compilation of relevant railway history. I will undertake the latter, based on information already compiled by Helen in addition to information and photographs from my own collection - for the foreseeable future. This latter information will be housed and maintained here in secure storage at RHRS.

### **Railway Modeling Group**

Neil Harvey has compiled a brief report on the activities of the RHRS railway modeling group, to which your attention is invited. Neil has also prepared reports on Safety Management within RHRS and on Maintenance of Buildings & Services. I am very appreciative of the time and effort devoted to these important activities by Neil.

### **Art Exhibitions**

Once again, RHRS hosted the Fettle's Heritage Art Prize, which attracted a good number of entries and interest within the local artist community.

### **Our Relationship with Transport Heritage NSW (THNSW)**

As stated in my Autumn-Winter Newsletter, RHRS has been an Associate Member of THNSW for some time, such membership being necessary to obtain transport heritage grants administered by THNSW. During the last year, RHRS representatives Neil Harvey, Steve Carey and I met at Robertson with THNSW representatives David Bennett, Margot Stuart and Fred Sawyer to discuss a range of issues on how both organizations can work together for the betterment of rail heritage management in NSW and, particularly in Robertson. The talks were friendly and positive, but personal liaison needs to be maintained at regular intervals to ensure optimum benefit by RHRS. This is something that I recommend for the future.

### **The Future of RHRS and "Unfinished business"**

As I noted in my Autumn-Winter 2018 Newsletter, we at RHRS manage a valuable community asset by maintaining an attractive railway precinct, an operating railway station, a rail modeling group and other significant activities within the community. It remains my view that, for as long as we can, we should do our best to attract new members to our volunteer organization and to

continue to function as an economically viable group doing the activities we currently undertake, value and enjoy. As time goes by, some changes in emphasis may be required. In recent times, our focus has changed somewhat, in that we now receive fewer heritage train visits and now have an active railway modeling group. In my view, however, we should continue to be seen as a very significant part of the Robertson community, linking or forming alliances with other community groups where appropriate. Integral to this is appropriate communication and promotion of our role and activities.

On a personal note, at this AGM I am standing down as President as I feel that holding such a position for three years is sufficient. Also, for the sake of my health and my family, I need to simplify my life and reduce my involvement in those 'external' activities which, hitherto, have occupied a great deal of my time. However, if elected, I am happy to remain on the RHRS Management Committee and to assist where I can.

I have enjoyed my time spent being President of RHRS for three years and, before that, as Vice-president and Secretary for many years. I have greatly valued the friendship, support and wise-counsel of many members of RHRS, all volunteers, as I have been. Thank-you and, together, I believe we have achieved a great deal. I particularly thank Neil Harvey, Steve Carey, Ron Middleton and John Hopkins - our regular 'coffee group' - for their support over the last few years. I have also greatly appreciated the services of Rona Goold and Steve Carey in producing Minutes of our RHRS Management Committee meetings, our Events Bulletin and in advertising and promoting our activities on our website and on Facebook. Thank you to all these people and to the volunteers who come to our assistance when asked. It is much appreciated.

There remain several items which I consider as "unfinished business" and commend the following for the attention of the future Management Committee of RHRS for decision:

- Complete the restoration of the Viiliers quadricycle - for retention and display, or for sale.
- Undertake the restoration of one or both 'mail barrows' - for retention and display, or for sale.
- Apply for a Transport Heritage Grant in the 2019 grants program to prepare appropriate display boards to be erected at the station, the signal box and former Gents' lavatory (all National Trust heritage-listed structures).
- Continue planting & maintaining waratahs and other native shrubs in the grounds & gardens of our railway precinct.
- Improve the RHRS website with the addition of appropriate photographs, captions and wording.
- In conjunction with Helen Tranter, document as appropriate, railway historical information for retention at RHRS.

Ian Wallace  
Hon. President, RHRS