

ROBERTSON HERITAGE RAILWAY STATION INC (RHRS)

President's report for year 2020-2021

Introductory comment

The year 2020/2021 has been characterised by many unprecedented events and management challenges due to Covid-19, the likes of which we hope will soon be over and will not occur in the future. That being said, we at RHRS have survived and adjusted both our thinking and our activities accordingly. In the following report on the year 2020/2021, I have started off with the activities on which I spent most of my time, and will then focus on other facets in the management of RHRS.

RHRS grounds & gardens

The year 2020/2021 was spent wholly under Covid-19 restrictions of one form or another. Fortunately, these did not unduly impact our grounds and gardens, nor was the expenditure on grounds maintenance more than what is generally normal for us. This was because a good deal of the grounds maintenance was undertaken by our volunteers when the Corrective Services detainees were unable to attend and during the cold, winter months when grass-growth is minimal. Particular thanks are extended to Neil Harvey, Peter Glass and Rod Visman who, along with myself, did a good deal of mowing of the grounds. At most, if not all, times during the year the grounds & gardens looked tidy and presented as well-maintained. Thanks also to Peter Glass, who has made available his property's burn-pile for disposal of some of the more bulky material pruned from our shrubs. Further thanks to Rod Visman who has made his chipping machine available to RHRS for reducing garden prunings into material for use as mulch. It is currently housed within our shipping container.

During the *Waratah Weekend* in October 2020, (during Covid-19) RHRS hosted the annual garden stall for Robertson Garden Club, and was a success for both organisations. Numerous waratah flower stems, waratah plants and seeds were accessed and sold, including many stems pruned from our own gardens.

The monthly RHRS garden working-bee, on the second Saturday morning each month, was generally well-attended by volunteers from the Robertson community and undertook valuable maintenance work. This work included weeding, planting, pruning and fertilising the mainly Australian native shrubs, including the many waratah and hybrid waratah cultivars. The volunteers report that they enjoy the gardening work, have learned from it and value contributing to a very worthwhile community attraction. They also enjoy the morning-tea refreshments supplied by fellow gardener Sandra Wallace. Thank you Sandra for your substantial contribution. It is hoped that this small team of volunteer gardeners will continue to provide this much-valued community service well into the future. We really need them and we continue to seek further volunteers to help lighten the workload.

Robertson Community Garden Inc.

During 2020, we at RHRS learned of the efforts being made by Robertson resident Ange Clark, CEO and founder of Robertson Community Garden Inc (RCGI) to establish a community garden on a favourable site in Robertson. One of the main objectives of RCGI is to provide a facility for inclusion and active participation by people who may be handicapped in some way. Ange had assembled a small team of supporters who had skills in market-gardening, garden design, landscape design and drafting, as well as construction management, who shared her desire to

construct and establish the community garden. These people met with representatives of RHRS and the result was a 'concept plan' which was agreed in principle by the RHRS Management Committee. Anne Wilson was appointed to lead the administrative side of the community garden proposal and Rod Visman the operational aspects thereof. Approval was granted by Michael Irons of ARTC to proceed with the community garden proposal, which is scheduled to commence in September 2021. Stage 1 of the proposal has been marked-out on site by representatives of both organisations, in a spirit of goodwill, cooperation and ongoing close liaison. An agreed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will guide these efforts. In the future it is proposed to consider further sharing of RHRS assets, including the Fettle's Shed and storage facilities, with RCGI.

Heritage train visits

Covid-19 restrictions imposed by the NSW government have significantly impacted the number of visits by '*The Cockatoo Run*' heritage tourist train operated by East Coast Heritage Rail (ECHR). Only several '*Cockatoo Run*' visits were made in 2021, including one staff-training visit for ECHR, in which RHRS volunteers were invited to join the train at Wollongong station for the trip to Robertson & then return to Wollongong. That was on Friday, 23 April 2021 and was followed the day after by a revenue run of '*The Cockatoo Run*' from Sydney to Robertson & Moss Vale and return. A further revenue trip was made on Sunday, 6 June 2021. Both revenue trips were well patronised and had appropriate social-distancing and Covid-19 safeguards applying at the time. Immaculately presented heritage diesel-electric locomotive 42101 hauled five passenger cars in each case. An interesting feature of both trips was the "piping" into Robertson station by two brothers from a local Robertson family. This proved to be very well received by train passengers and visitors to the station. It is proposed that future heritage train visits to Robertson will have this pipe & drum combination welcoming and farewelling each train. Although further '*Cockatoo Run*' visits were scheduled in August 2021, the trains had to be cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. It is hoped that future visits will occur as soon as they are permitted by government authorities.

Information signs

One of the most significant achievements for RHRS during the year was the completion, installation and opening of three information signs within the railway precinct. For several years, our RHRS Management Committee has sought an opportunity to display appropriate historical and operational information at the station for visitors. This came about by RHRS being awarded a grant from the Commonwealth Government's 'Stronger Communities' initiative. Some time ago, then committee members Steve Carey and Rona Gould prepared a grant application, submitted it and, when the grant was awarded, fellow committee members Neil Harvey and Ian Wallace put together appropriate wording combined with photographs and other illustrative material to the design of local architect Peter Campbell. The signs were fabricated by Cunneen Signs in Sydney and were installed in appropriate locations around the station precinct. The signs were officially opened by our Federal member for Whitlam, Stephen Jones MP on a very windy Saturday, 15 May 2021. I believe we at RHRS can feel pleased that our Management Committee has left behind a very informative legacy to adorn our refurbished railway station, accompanying the repainted heritage-listed station buildings. Further publicity and promotional material, in the form of brochures publicising Robertson's tourist attractions & facilities, including RHRS, went into the leaflet '*Robertson Village. The Green Heart of the Southern Highlands*', produced by the Robertson Chamber of Commerce. RHRS representatives participated in its content.

RHRS website

Early in this current year, as then committee members Steve Carey and Rona Goold announced that they had sold their Robertson property and were moving away from Robertson, arrangements were put in place to ensure that the RHRS website, which Rona had managed very capably, could continue without interruption. This was achieved by convening meetings of several committee members with an interest in the website and communication via social media to consider the way ahead. This included new member Callum Bracht, who is familiar with the operation of the RHRS website on the Weebly platform Rona was using to assist and advise as necessary, Vice-president Rod Visman, who undertook to take on the role of website management and communication via Facebook. This arrangement seems to be working effectively.

Railway modelling

Increasingly over recent years, railway modelling has become a more significant part of the activities of RHRS, due to increased interest by new members under the leadership of Stewart Ward, Neil Harvey and Ron Middleton. Neil Harvey has summarised in a separate report the recent creation of a number of model layouts and issues facing the group. At my request, Neil prepared a summary of an issue requiring decision by the RHRS Management Committee. Neil's report should be read for further information. I have no specific recommendation on this matter, but I believe it is reasonable to note that much of the present space of the Fettle's Shed Gallery and the annexe is taken up by model railway layouts and also to consider how much longer the present members of the modelling group will participate and value in the future any expenditure on the completed new layout. These are decisions to be made by the incoming RHRS Management Committee.

Fettle's Shed management

Anne Wilson reports as follows. "The Fettle's Shed Gallery normally hosts two art exhibitions each year, the Fettle's Heritage Art Prize in April and the Flowers in Art show in October. Due to Covid restrictions no exhibitions were held over the year 2020/21. We are hoping to return to exhibitions when restrictions are lifted".

Safety management and Maintenance

Vice-president Rod Visman has undertaken the management of these important matters during 2020/2021. He has produced brief reports on each, which have been circulated. I do not want to enlarge on these except to thank Rod for his much-valued efforts.

The future and the path ahead

For several years, our Management Committee members have been concerned about the future of our organisation, due mainly to the ageing of our members as well as key people moving away from Robertson or electing to become less involved in RHRS activities. During the last year, a succession plan (of sorts) was implemented involving people who may be able to lead RHRS into the future, however long that may be. At this year's AGM, still in Covid restrictions, and in the future, we shall see how successful that plan has turned out. I am quietly confident that our organisation can assemble sufficient office-bearers to continue into 2022, an important year for us, but more on that shortly.

Let us look at the current situation. At present, train operator East Coast Heritage Rail is keen to continue bringing 'The Cockatoo Run' heritage tourist train to Robertson and Moss Vale on a regular basis, roughly once each 4-6

weeks. Due to government health restrictions caused by Covid, the 'Cockatoo Run' visits are suspended until further notice. Regular cleaning of the Fettle's Shed gallery and the railway station facilities was being undertaken by a contractor, whose work was very satisfactory, but we took a decision to terminate this arrangement and to undertake the cleaning by RHRS volunteers, mainly the railway modelling group. The 2021 Classic Car Event had to be cancelled due to Covid difficulties and it is likely that this will also be the case with any future events on the Robertson Common. This is a pity, as the annual car event was a significant revenue earner for us, but was very labour-intensive for our diminishing number of volunteers, and the fact that the Robertson Common is now the site of the proposed community garden. The 'History of Robertson' group, led by Helen Tranter, has elected to not meet during the ongoing pandemic, but we hope that its work will continue once the current health crisis eases. Visits to the Robertson railway precinct by the Bowral-based Corrective Services detainees were halted some weeks ago until further notice but, in due course, we expect that this service will continue in some form or another - all very indefinite at present! We really need and value the grounds & gardens maintenance work undertaken by the detainees

The year 2022 is important to us in several ways. It will be the 20th anniversary of RHRS and the 90th anniversary, on 20 August 2022, of the opening of the Unanderra-Moss Vale railway line and Robertson railway station. If possible, it would be nice if these events could be celebrated, or at least noted, in some significant way. This is an issue for the incoming RHRS Management Committee to consider.

Final note

After more than 15 years participating in the RHRS Management Committee, four of them as President, it is time for me to call it a day and to retire from serving on the committee. At this year's AGM I will formally step down and will not seek nomination to any position on the Management Committee. That being the case, I will continue with membership of RHRS and will do what I can to take an active role with the maintenance of the grounds & gardens, certainly until Waratah Weekend in October 2021. I am also prepared to be available as a "casual, honorary consultant" to members of the Management Committee, to provide advice if requested.

In stepping down, I acknowledge with great thanks, the considerable assistance and encouragement I have received from numerous people over many years. In particular, I thank Steve Carey, to whom I was Vice-president for many years, Neil Harvey, who assisted me greatly in my years as President and was always up for a chat over an important matter. Similarly, Anne Wilson has always been supportive and very knowledgeable. Over the last year or so, Rod Visman has been a tower of strength as Vice-president and his willingness to solve problems and get things done, including his organising a QR code for RHRS at short notice. My thanks and appreciation are also extended to Angus Webster, who took on the role of Secretary this year and has expressed a willingness to continue in that role. I thank them all, as well as other colleagues within RHRS for their valued contributions to good management of RHRS over many years. Most of all, I thank my wife Sandra, for assisting me in so many ways. Now that I plan to contribute less time to RHRS issues in the future, we both hope that I can contribute more time and effort to the maintenance of our own garden and property.

Thank you all, and I wish you well for the future.

Ian Wallace

Hon. President, RHRS for 2020/2021