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MEMOIRS OF THE QUEENSLAND MUSEUM – CULTURE

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A Queensland Government Project
Typeset at the Queensland Museum

The Workshop Rail Museum

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The Workshops Rail Museum was established in 2002 as part of the repurposing of the site of the Ipswich Railway Workshops after the transfer of most functions to the Redbank Workshops by 1997. The museum has engaged with the context of the site, capitalising on the historic setting and connecting with the working life of the workshops to create a unique experience for visitors. That experience encompasses the rail history of Queensland, rail technology (particularly locomotives and carriages) and the industrial history and continuing working operations at the site of the Ipswich Railway Workshops. The site also continues to act as a hub for community in Ipswich, hosting community events and welcoming local, regional, interstate and international visitors.

□ *Rail, museum, workshops, event, history, visitor, display, community, industrial, heritage.*

G. Mate
The Workshops Rail Museum

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The Workshops Rail Museum



Opened in September 2002, “The Workshops”, as The Workshops Rail Museum (TWRM) is affectionately known, is a place steeped in history. Located at the Ipswich Railway Workshops, the oldest continually operating railway workshops in Australia, the site is integrally linked with the history of rail in Queensland. Throughout the life of the Ipswich Railway Workshops, a centre for rail construction, maintenance and technology, it has been a vibrant and productive site. In its time the Workshops produced over 200 locomotives and in excess of 12,000 carriages and wagons and, at its peak of over 3000 employees, it was the state’s largest employer. In its latest manifestation as a rail museum, the Workshops have once again become a hive of activity with an annual visitation of over 100,000 people.

The Workshops Rail Museum provides a unique visitor experience. It offers interactive and static displays and exhibitions, behind the scenes tours from former and current employees of the Workshops, together with the display of a collection of heritage locomotives and carriages, some of which were made at Ipswich Railway Workshops. The museum’s activities encompass the presentation of the history of rail in Queensland, including the story of the Ipswich Railway Workshops, a role in the care for the industrial heritage associated with the Workshops and it is also an active member of several communities, most particularly the Ipswich community, Queensland’s rail heritage community and the Ipswich Railway Workshops community.



FIG. 1. The Workshops Rail Museum, 2002.

to own and administer the remainder of the site. The central area of the Traverser track features heritage listed buildings on both sides which, while continuing to be used for the maintenance of the QR Heritage Fleet, also provide the backdrop of the heritage location (Figure 3). In addition to the buildings housing the museum, a further two of the early workshop buildings in this area are accessible to visitors during Workshop tours – the Blacksmith Shop and the Steam Shop.

The museum collection at the Workshops has over 5,000 objects and is based on the

collection originally held at the Railway Historical Centre in Ipswich, together with more recent acquisitions including donations from the public. The collection is particularly related to material culture representing the history and culture of Queensland Rail but also strongly represents activities at the Ipswich Railway Workshops. It contains a diverse range of objects, from railway based equipment such as engines, quad motors, ticketing machines, lamps and signalling equipment, surveying equipment, tradesmen's, blacksmiths' and gangers' tools, administrative equipment, and control panels to memorial boards, ceremonial spikes



FIG. 3. K Class wagon being moved by the Traverser in 1977, Workshop buildings in the background. Movement of rolling stock on the Traverser continues today in the Museum. Image courtesy TWRM/QR.

and railway mementos. The collection also features a large assemblage of locomotive builders' plates, apprentice painters' test pieces, uniforms from both QR operations and QR refreshment facilities, cutlery and crockery, and toy trains (Figure 4). There is a diverse and rich collection of ephemera such as tickets and brochures and many historical photographs. The Workshops Rail Museum also acts as facilitator for access to parts of the Queensland Rail archive held at the Museum, including historical maps and plans, surveying records, wartime correspondence, published material such as working timetables and annual reports, photographs and memorabilia from line openings through time and across the state.



FIG. 4. Engine Plate from the first locomotive built at the Ipswich Railway Workshops, 1877 (R5786). From the QM collection at The Workshops Rail Museum.

Exhibitions and displays were created following extensive audience research into areas of interest for target audiences. A wide variety of techniques were employed to ensure audience engagement including audio-visuals, sound-scapes and interactives. These support the display of original objects and documents in climate controlled pods situated throughout the Boilershop. More robust objects such as the components of locomotives, boilers and bogies, and rail accessories are on display throughout the building and externally in some places. The displays include original machinery and

equipment from the Workshops' operation used for the manufacture and maintenance of locomotives and carriages. A number of non-operational locomotives and rolling stock are also accessible in the museum (Figure 5). Interpretation of the fabric of building adds to understandings of the industrial story at the Workshops.



FIG. 5. Visitors at the Platform 9 display, long distance sitting car with refreshment facilities (an AL/F carriage) visible in background. Image courtesy TWRM.

The working Heritage Rolling Stock on display at the museum is part of the fleet owned and operated by Queensland Rail. Operation of this fleet is facilitated through the museum, which runs a number of steam train travel experiences, including Steam Train Sunday, departing regularly from Roma Street Station in Brisbane. There are also special event trains run from the museum to a number of destinations, including an annual train trip to Grandchester, marking the anniversary of the first rail journey in Queensland.

The target audience for TWRM is families, rail enthusiasts, and more general heritage tourism. The museum is widely regarded as the best rail heritage centre in Australia. Although primarily an exhibition based museum, there are a number of activities for families hosted during school holidays together with specialist events such as the

Model Railway Show and conferences. In addition there is an active program for engagement with education. There is also the opportunity to join the museum as a member, and visitor feedback suggests approximately 90% of visitors are likely to return within two years (MCR, 2011); a large proportion of return visitors are accounted as members. The range of exhibitions and activities continues to provide increasing visitation, with growth of 20% over the past 5 years. Visitors are drawn from local, regional, intra- and inter-state, and international

Staff at the museum includes visitor services, marketing, administration and building services staff together with curatorial, collection management, exhibition and events expertise.

The Workshop Rail Museum is a unique experience. The success of the museum is measurable not only in the continued growth of visitation but also in recognition by a variety of museum and tourism awards. These achievements include being nominated, ranked as finalists, and receiving awards ranging from heritage conservation to tourism at both state and national levels. TWRM have received state tourism awards in 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2010 and also National Tourism awards in 2007 and 2010 for Heritage and Cultural Tourism.

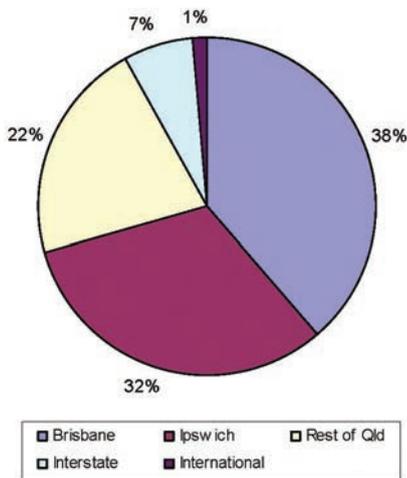


FIG. 6. Pie Chart of Visitor place of residence (2009/2010 financial year).

destinations (Figure 6).

Governance of The Workshops Rail Museum is in accordance with the Queensland Museum Act. The museum is managed by an internal management team reporting to the Director of TWRM. As part of the Queensland Museum network, the Director reports to the CEO of Queensland Museum and the Queensland Museum Board. TWRM also has an Advisory Board made up of members of the Ipswich community, Queensland Rail, Education Queensland, Queensland Museum and the rail industry.

TELLING THE HISTORY OF RAIL IN QUEENSLAND

One major objective of the museum is to tell the story of rail in Queensland as a whole, not just the story of Queensland Rail. The museum has approached this objective through a number of thematically based permanent exhibition spaces that address topics such as the role of rail in supply – *Moving Goods*, the golden age of rail travel – *Platform Nine*, modern rail in Queensland – *Rail Today*, and railway construction – *Might and Muscle*, along with permanent exhibitions about the Ipswich Railway Workshops and the history of *Rail in Queensland*. Queensland’s iconic sugarcane railway and tramway networks are explored in *Other Railways*. A popular model rail display, over 20 interactive science stations, two simulators for driving trains and a *Nippers Railway* also provide interest for younger visitors.

TWRM has also produced and hosted a number of temporary exhibitions. To mark the opening of the Museum, the photographic exhibition *Final Gauge* from the Ipswich

Art Gallery was presented. The exhibition included historical photos of the Ipswich Railway Workshops, taken by Ipswich photographer Frank Whitehead at the end of the nineteenth century, together with more contemporary photos of the Workshops from the 1990s, taken by Lyle Radford, another Ipswich based photographer. Other temporary exhibitions have included *Life on the Line*, a look at railway construction, and the latest offering, *Tracking Queensland*, which examines the achievements of Queensland Rail during its 145 year history. Temporary exhibitions are also provided to complement holiday programs, such as *Toyland Express* and *Circus Train*. TWRM has also contributed to and hosted the Australian War Memorial travelling exhibition *Australia Under Attack*, and the National Museum of Australia travelling exhibition *Rare Trades* which explored many trades no longer practiced in the Ipswich Railway Workshops. More recently TWRM has presented and toured

its first travelling exhibition, *Great Railway Journeys of Australia*, a look at some of the well known and exotic railway journeys available to passengers in Australia and some of the features of experiences on these journeys.

The association with rail heritage is an important part of the visitor experience at the museum. Amongst the non-operational locomotives on display are some significant engines. These include a 1270 Class Diesel Locomotive No. 1281, named *Century*, built in 1965 and named in honour of the centenary of rail in Queensland, the steam locomotive No. 444 (a PB15 class locomotive), built in Maryborough by Walkers Ltd in 1908 – it was the last operational steam train in regular passenger service in Brisbane (Figure 7), and the Hunslet Locomotive No.1239, built for use on the battlefields of France in World War I, and subsequently used to haul sugar cane in Mackay. There is also a small and unusual rail motor on display – the



FIG. 7. Steam Locomotive – PB15 No.444, on display (R5863) on display at The Workshops Rail Museum. Photo courtesy David Mewes.

Panhard Rail Motor RM14 No. 23 built in 1918 – and a number of passenger carriages and goods wagons. One unique special carriage known as the Governors’ Carriage, used by the Governor and visiting royalty and other dignitaries, remains on display but is still “in service” should it be required. In addition, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to see close-up operational locomotives in the QR heritage fleet. Locomotives on display include the oldest operational steam locomotive in Australia – the A10 No. 6 which was assembled at the Ipswich Railway Workshops in 1866 – and the *Blue Baby*, a DD17 class locomotive No. 1051, the last locomotive built at the Ipswich Railway Workshops (Figure 8). In addition, other in-service rolling stock on display includes one of the Kuranda rail motors and an SX class carriage, one of the early electrical

Brisbane suburban passenger carriages.

As a means of engaging younger generations with an interest in railways and trains, several spaces are regularly used for events and activities, from rail-based holiday programs and shows to education programs and craft activities. The holiday program in particular gives TWRM a large proportion of its visitation. Events have explored elements of the rail story in Queensland including *Circus Train*, focusing on the role of rail in transporting the circus throughout Queensland, and *The Great Train Robbery* based around the still unsolved robbery of miners’ wages from a train travelling between Duchess and Cloncurry in outback Queensland. Popular culture is acknowledged through the world’s most recognised locomotive, Thomas the Tank



FIG. 8. QR Heritage maintenance, DD17 Locomotive No. 1051, “Blue Baby”. Photo courtesy of David Mewes.

Engine, in the annual *Day out with Thomas* event (Figure 9). *Toyland Express* celebrates the enduring fascination with trains as children's toys, in literature and play.

While continuing to develop new events and refresh content for annual events in order to support this market, TWRM continues to work on other avenues for ensuring

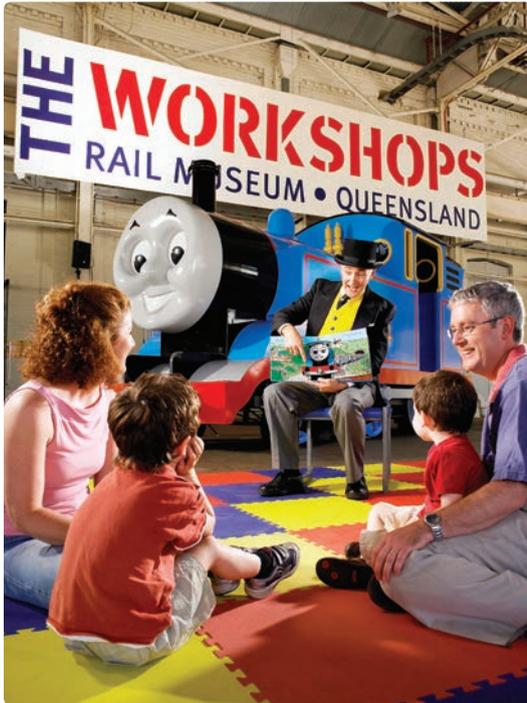


FIG. 9. Enjoying the Fat Controller stories at the *Day out with Thomas* event. Image courtesy TWRM.

and improving on current visitation while maintaining the rail heritage theme. This includes a broadening of potential events, closer affiliation with curriculum to further strengthen education offerings, and the hosting of external events. The other avenue is a continuing emphasis on the cultural heritage aspects of the museum, to gradually attract the tourism market, including people from intra- and inter-state and overseas. While not currently the largest proportion of

our visitation, we continue to work towards providing an experience for these visitors.

A COMMUNITY PLACE

Engagement with the Ipswich community continues to be an important goal for the museum. An annual Family Day, coinciding with the Workers Reunion brings in a flood of local residents. School age children are given free admission during term time, to help with school visits. There are also a number of visit packages offered to Senior Citizen clubs.

The partnership with Ipswich City Council is extended to involvement with elements of the city heritage, for example curatorial and collection staff from the Museum are collaborating with the Ipswich City Council in research on the Whitehead photographic collection, particularly with regard to the extensive collection of images featuring the Workshops. The Ipswich City Council has a representative on the TWRM Advisory Board and recently the two organisations have collaborated in the process of future planning for the city, with the Workshops seen as a key component in the cultural life of Ipswich.

Collaborations with the wider research community are invaluable to the museum in accessing knowledgeable enthusiasts, rail history, industrial history, cultural heritage themes and contemporary research frameworks in history. As the location of the Queensland Rail Archive, TWRM is a hub for researchers interested in rail. Access to the John Kerr Railway Database, the Queensland Rail historic photograph collection and an extensive reference library on rail history further add to the research facilities provided by the museum. Partnerships with several schools and faculties at the University of Queensland, including the School of Social Science, the School of History, Philosophy,

Religion & Classics, the Centre for the Government of Queensland and the Faculty of Arts have yielded researchers interested in particular aspects of rail history and heritage, local history, industrial heritage and museum studies, along with opportunities to collaborate on larger projects allowing aspects of rail history in Queensland to be presented to new and broader audiences. TWRM also has an active volunteer programme that accommodates researchers, rail enthusiasts and students interested in a career in museums, with placements from Grade 10 to Master of Museum Studies.

An integral part of the operation of TWRM is the ongoing partnership with Queensland Rail. The museum is particularly bound up with QR operations in the provision of Workshop tours, for access to the site and

the continuing operation of steam trains. However, the relationship is also crucial to the museum in the integrity of knowledge imparted and the generosity of researchers and collectors, from within the ranks of QR and also former QR employees, both from the Workshops and more broadly across the QR network.

The annual *Workers Reunion* is an important part of the ongoing community feeling experienced by employees of the Ipswich Railway Workshops. To mark the importance of the workers community, past and present employees are invited to come along and take part in the festivities. The free day, initially started in 2002 as part of the opening festivities, is hosted by TWRM and a morning tea is held with the returning workers. Current employees provide behind



FIG. 10. Parts of the workshops normally inaccessible to the public are open during the workers reunion. Image courtesy TWRM.

the scenes access and tours to parts of the workshops not normally accessible even during workshop tours (Figure 10).

Photos of past employees are a popular feature with many identifying themselves and friends in the workshop groups (Figure 11). The reminiscences of former employees also offer a valuable resource for recording the working history of the site and a register of former workers is maintained to capitalise on opportunities for capturing oral histories (Figure 12). Information



FIG. 12. Former railway workers reminisce at the annual Workers Reunion. Image courtesy TWRM.



FIG. 11. Ipswich Railway Workshops – Steam Shop 1950. Image courtesy TWRM/QR.

from these oral histories is used to provide a sense of the human side of the Workshops history.

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

The Ipswich Railway Workshops site is the most intact and best example of an early railway workshop that can be accessed in Australia (Buchanan *et al.* 1995). Concurrence with a museum makes it highly accessible and enhances interpretation of a site associated with the earliest railway venture in Queensland.

Heritage listed buildings showing the fabric of the industrial use of the Workshops are readily visible throughout the site. The Ipswich Railway Workshops were

a showpiece of engineering know-how in their day, with developments such as the construction of the Power House (the second in Queensland), the advanced technology of the Tool & Gauge Shop used in World War II, and an active role in trade training for apprentices in Ipswich (and by extension much of Queensland). Several authors through this volume (including Blake, Buchanan, Macno and Mewes) have outlined the history of the buildings and the gradual development of the site. With more than 15 heritage listed buildings, some still in use and many showing the patina of operations over many years, the site provides an unparalleled insight into the operation of a nineteenth and twentieth century railway workshop. The significance of the site as a



FIG. 13. Blacksmith workshop tours are a highlight of a visit to The Workshops Rail Museum. Image courtesy TWRM.

whole and particular buildings in it, focused primarily around (but not limited to) the Traverser track, were recognised by state and local heritage listings in 1997. A number of features in addition to the buildings were listed as well, including the War Memorial, rail infrastructure, furnaces, vegetation, a water tower and the Traverser itself.

One of the advantages of being at a working site is the access to working operations. As already mentioned, workshop tours are a popular feature of a visit to the museum (Figure 13). These tours, given by current Ipswich Railway Workshop employees, provide an overview of the work done at the Workshops and take visitors into two of the operational workshops on site, where they can watch demonstrations of blacksmith work in action and see first hand the reconstruction of boilers. The tours also feature a ride on the operational Traverser – the heart of the workshops and the conduit for movement of locomotives from workshop to workshop – another unique feature to operations in this heritage listed venue.

The industrial heritage of the Workshops is an aspect of the site held in common with a number of rail museums around the world that are situated on the site of former railway workshops (Macno, this volume). Uniquely however, The Workshop Rail Museum is the only museum of its type situated at a working railway workshop. The major international equivalents of The Workshops Rail Museum, the National Rail Museum in York (UK) and the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento (USA) are also situated in purpose-built facilities. Both locations have rich rail heritage which are the focus of displays and exhibitions. STEAM, the museum of the Great Western Railway in Swindon (UK) is located in the former Swindon Railway Workshops and a large component of the display and exhibition has focus on the workshops;

however, no restoration or maintenance activities are undertaken there. The National Rail Museum in York provides public access for viewing restoration and maintenance work being undertaken in its modern workshop facility. In all three museums, the context of interpretation is focused on the rail, locomotive and other rolling stock heritage and the associated human stories about travel, economic development and the opening up of new opportunities, rather than a first hand engagement with the working history of an industrial heritage site.

Comparative rail experiences elsewhere in Australia include the Puffing Billy in Victoria, where a steam train trip can be taken along an original narrow gauge mountain railway, and Steamtown, Peterborough, in South Australia, where a variety of rail heritage items are on display to the public at the site of the former Peterborough Railway Workshops. In New South Wales, Trainworks at Thirlmere display a range of heritage locomotives at the newly commissioned museum on the site of an old regional depot. They also offer visitors viewing of heritage locomotive maintenance in a new purpose built roundhouse. At the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, the museum is using some of the original workshops from the Inveresk Railway Workshops. There the visitor can walk around parts of the former workshop site, and visit a sound-scape in the decommissioned but still extant blacksmith shop. Within Australia, The Workshops Rail Museum's link to the working story of the site, together with experiences including the tours of the operational workshops and access to the heritage fleet of Queensland Rail make it a leading institution in rail heritage.

CONCLUSION

The Ipswich Railway Workshops have been integral to the economic, social and cultural

life of Ipswich for over 145 years. The opening of The Workshops Rail Museum in 2002 marked the renaissance of the site and the rebirth of an icon. After nine years,



FIG. 14. Australian Tourism Awards 2010. (L-R) Hon Dr David Hamill AM, Chair TWRM Advisory Committee, Dr Ian Galloway CEO Qld Museum, Mr Andrew Moritz, Director TWRM, Mr Glenn Price, Marketing & Sales Manager TWRM. Image courtesy TWRM.

The Workshops Rail Museum has attracted national (Figure 14) and international acclaim and over 100,000 visitors per annum. The Workshops Rail Museum therefore continues to play a major role in the economic, social and cultural life of Ipswich.

The potential for further redevelopment of the site/museum has been identified as a significant opportunity for Ipswich and southeast Queensland in the Ipswich Regional Centre Strategy (2008) and the Brisbane Regional Tourism and Infrastructure Plan (2008). Plans have been developed to interpret and open the

Power House, Queensland's second power station (1901), to tell the important story of electricity – a story of similar significance to Ipswich and Queensland as the story of rail. Working with the electrical industry, this will further diversify and cement the museum's position as the major centre for exploring industrial heritage in the region. These future opportunities and the ongoing commitment of The Workshops Rail Museum to rail history and history of the Workshops make a visit to the Workshops a unique experience; an experience that encompasses the rail story in Queensland, industrial heritage and a strong community focus.

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