

## SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT



## THE BALLARAT HISTORIC TRAMWAY MUSEUM AND ITS COLLECTIONS October 2007

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## PART V SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

### i) **Ballarat Tramway Museum Collections and Tramway heritage significance**

It is clear from the information presented in the preceding sections of this report that the trams, infrastructure, images, tickets and broad range of other memorabilia held by The Ballarat Tramway Museum have considerable significance, on a local, State, National and arguably international level.

It would be repetitive to restate the significance of each media type previously discussed, so this conclusion is appropriately brief. However it is pertinent to comment on the significance of the collection as a whole and in synergy. When considered in isolation many individual items in the collections are significant. Yet, when considered as an entire collection they take on even greater significance. It is by virtue of the existence of this broad and interesting collection that a popular local tourist attraction has been created and a “living” authentic tramways museum has come into being.

Ballarat, by virtue of its major role in the Australian Gold Rush of the 1850s and due in no small part to the existence of an award-winning tourist attraction at Sovereign Hill is repeatedly an important destination in the itinerary of travel touring companies. The tramways museum is increasingly being added to the list of attractions offered at Ballarat.

The entire collection at BTM is hugely significant for its interpretative potential and given that it continues to grow and is so well managed, this potential will be explored for many years to come.

It is hoped that this report will not only serve as a broad overview of the significance of the BTM collections, but will also convince future funding bodies that an important part of Australian transport and social history is housed at Ballarat and cared for by dedicated and committed people, who are developing interesting and stimulating exhibits and maintaining a growing collection, in an extremely competitive funding environment. Of note is that *all these people are volunteers*.

At the time of closure of the tramway in Ballarat, that service and that of Bendigo was a gem in the tramway world. All its trams were of WW1 vintage and ran on what was considered a quaint tramway. It was a proud survivor given that other cities the world over had shut and demolished their street trams.

Although the Ballarat service was relatively small compared with other world systems it was in fact significant because of its inclusive, social nature. This is something that the BTM has tried to preserve. Rather than being a simple tourist attraction, what survives is an authentic and living representation of actual tram travel, using the original track, in original tram cars, staffed by some who have been in the tramway industry, wearing authentic uniforms and issuing reproduction tickets, punched with original ticket

punches. The entire experience at the BTM is a unique, authentic and complete one. The BTM strives to ensure it maintains this authenticity and it is on this basis that the collection, in all its parts can be considered most significant.

## ii) Contextual Comments

### *Victoria*

There are four Tramway museums in Victoria which are operating electric tram museums: Ballarat, Bendigo, the Tramway Museum Society at Bylands and the Melbourne Tramcar Preservation Society at Haddon, (15kms south west of Ballarat.) The Hawthorn Tram Depot, owned by Victrack also has an extensive collection, but it is not operational. The Malvern Tram Museum is a collection of photographs and records, but is seldom open to the public.

### *Australia wide*

Electric tram museums operate in Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide (a Registered Museum with a catalogued collection), and Perth. The Tasmanian Transport Museum in Hobart has a small collection, and the Launceston Tramway Museum is in the process of setting up and is semi-operational.

### *New Zealand*

Tramway museums operate in Auckland (part of the Museum of Technology and Transport), Wellington and Christchurch. A museum at Wanganui is also in the process of being set up.

### *World wide*

There are many tramway museums in the the world. In the US/Canada they are known as "railway museums". The big railway museums are known as "railroad museums". Some of these are extremely large with over 100 streetcars or tramcars.

The reference museums in the English speaking countries are Crich UK (National Tramway Museum - Registered and with a large catalogued collection), in the US - Orange Empire (LA) and Brandford and Seashore. However at the time of research none of them were an accredited museum as is the BTM and that in Adelaide and Crich UK.<sup>10</sup>

What is vital contextually is that the BTM operates as a living museum and is one of a very few that operates in a street environment and is run by volunteers. The BTM is globally significant in that it operates an authentic museum, has a catalogued collection of small items, has formulated and ratified a conservation policy, is an accredited museum, is a museum that meets high standards and tells the story of Ballarat and SEC provincial tramways. The Ballarat Tramway Museum is clearly one of the leaders in Australasia in terms of what it has achieved given its resources. Significantly (!), at the

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<sup>10</sup> The Crich website is: <http://www.tramway.co.uk/smx/cms/home/> - this museum operates in former quarry. Another good web site is: <http://www.lrta.org/world/worldind.html> - a world system list.

time of writing, the BTM will be the first tramway museum to commission a professional significance assessment of its full collection in Australasia. It is not possible to assess this particular fact on world standing, however, if others have commissioned such a report, they would be few in number.

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## About the Author



Stella M. Barber is a freelance historian who also researches and writes significance assessments. In August this year, her second major book, *Crescendo, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra celebrating 100 Years*, was published. Her first, *Sidney Myer, A Life, a Legacy* was published in 2005. She is currently working on a history of the Goulburn Valley Grammar School a new book on Myer and two private biographies. This year she has completed two substantial significance reports, one on the Midway Migrant Hostel and this one on the Ballarat Tramway Museum's collections. She also manages private heritage collections and works as a freelance writer and editor.

Stella has Masters qualifications in archives and history and has worked as a corporate historian and as a consultant to a range of clients. She is excited by the challenge of each new research assignment and hopes to further her academic studies when time permits.

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