



Heritage Happenings for November 2010

Tony's Tales

Hi again everyone. Another GridHeritage AGM is behind us and yet another Christmas is nearly upon us. Where has the year gone?

GridHeritage 2010 AGM

Last week the kind GridHeritage members decided to re-elect the same old team to steer GridHeritage for another year. They are: Tony Silke Chairperson; Richard Donaldson Deputy Chair; Les Davys Secretary and Brian Howard Treasurer. Thanks everyone for your support and trust.

Unusual meter

Many of you have taken an interest in the unusual meter that was given to us by Denis Le Cren in Nelson. We searched around the world for its history and eventually found that it was a milliammeter as used in very early x-ray machines. Further searching put us on to The Palmerston North Medical Museum so we made contact with them and eventually decided to donate the meter to their collection. Our meter is of around 1915 vintage, and they already have an x-ray tube of about 1920 vintage so the two items will go on display together at their very comprehensive museum located in the Palmerston North Hospital.



Meter for x-ray tube circa 1910

Here is a link to their website.

<http://www.midcentraldhb.govt.nz/PatientsVisitors/PalmerstonNorthHospital/PalmerstonNorthMedicalMuseum.htm>

DC substation decommissioning

We were invited to inspect the Kaiwharawhara substation which is soon to be decommissioned as part of the Kiwirail development in the Wellington area. Much as we loved the traction equipment it didn't really fit within the GridHeritage collection scope so we left most of the treasures behind. The metal cased mercury-arc rectifiers are most interesting but did remind us of the Dr. Who Daleks.



Exterminate! Exterminate!

If only we had the space to collect all of the treasures that we come across!

Interesting New Zealand Video Link

Here is yet another link to some more interesting New Zealand history, this time from the old National Film Unit.

<http://www.nzonscreen.com/collection/national-film-unit-collection>

Note that there are also hundreds of old TV programmes on this site, including some early Heartland episodes.

And our old friend the NZ Archives TV on ZILN has now changed to another Internet provider.

http://www.ecasttv.co.nz/channel_detail.php?program_id=&channel_id=60#

Another visit to Bunnythorpe

Richard, Brian Les and Tony trudged their way to Bunnythorpe to work away on the collection and made great progress in cataloguing and photographing our ever expanding collection. A highlight of this trip was morning tea with Shorty Spearpoint and



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his wife, who must be the best cook in the Manawatu. We are spoiled with hot scones and this time met up with John Cartwright and Dave Hodge, both ex NZE employees.

Oral recording progress

We continue to make oral recordings of the lives of significant people from the industry and David Young has just completed the recording of Lindsay Duff. In Auckland we have also assisted in the recording of Doug Dell. Our earlier project on recording the lives of Maori Linemen has been reopened as we look towards making a documentary of these special people.

GridHeritage overseas correspondent

Stuart Nicholson

I had thought that I should shorten this but it is so interesting that I have left it as a Christmas Special: Tony.

Well the big question is: How can a confirmed hobbit such as me give up his cosy nook over-looking Wellington Harbour and relocate to the other side of the world? Well, for a start, he has found another cosy nook, this time overlooking the English Channel/La Manche.

In short, the best answer is, as Tolkien found, fill it up with lots of adventures. e.g. Get yourself lost and find your way home.

Emptying one's house before a deadline did set the pace. Then finding the airports at one's destination closed due to volcanic ash continued the challenge – we had a lovely week with eldest son Ben at his place in Brisbane which solved the ash problem, and then we went to Italy for four weeks. Do we speak Italian? No (remember we are seeking adventures). Did we have a great, culturally-sensitive and expensive time? Yes!

So a few highlights:

Italy was exquisite, hospitable, and the food top notch – If we could afford to go out I voted for “trattoria” style and went for the most exotic item listed. We did go to a traditional pizza restaurant one night, for the experience but nothing to rave about compared to guinea fowl, squid, rabbit, &c.

My job sent me to Blyth, Northumberland commuting weekly by train Monday to Thursday for about 9 weeks. I stayed in a Premier Inn out in the countryside so could go for a good walk before tea, exploring the area. The North East is certainly a place of its own, economically depressed with the closure of the mines by Maggie Thatcher and the shipyards no longer being competitive, but very friendly and personable people albeit wary of the outsider, including someone over the other side of the river usually with a slightly (to my ears) different accent! The football rivalry, I think, reinforces the accents so Geordies, Mackums, Teesiders &c (Blyth spirits?) will continue I think. Northumbria is England's best kept secret in terms of tourist destinations I reckon. The countryside is gorgeous, rugged and varied. Jane came up one trip, we stayed the weekend and went north for the weekend (three days for me nowadays☺) including a nice cup of tea and a fresh scone in a picturesque little village in the Scottish Borders.

I love driving to the top of hills over here so visited some of the alti plano of Italy, Umbuzzio, and crossed the Pennines, the moors, dales, and, in Ireland the Wicklow mountains. I feel I have done enough of the actual climbing of mountains in my younger days so can now do it by car, easier here than in NZ!

We have been getting out on the bus in the weekends and going for walks (we have now done 5 of the 16 Brighton &



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Hove “Take The Bus For a Walk” series but lots more besides, as well as our walks while “on tour”. I get on the local buses free, being a rate payer in Brighton and over a certain age – but we do ride our bicycles to the supermarket, and I walk to work – 30’ each way. We have looked at motor bikes, and have all our PPE gear with us but find the prospects of wet roads and short days in winter a bit of a put off. Also we seem to have covered all the local stuff by car, train, and bus anyway. Riding bikes up to the Scottish highlands would take time we do not have at present – I do have a day job you know!

Ten days in Ireland were worth the visit: a great bike tour around Dublin for 2½ hours, a Friday night traditional music in country pub, as well as checking out Sligo town for a day, where my mother’s mother’s father was born (I am ¼ Irish you know, which seemed to impress the bike tour guys). BTW we saw the new “zodiac dinghy” style Lansdowne Road Stadium and were impressed. Ireland seems to be where NZ was at in Muldoon’s final days – living off borrowed money and now it is catching up with them. The major export still seems to be people!

Last Night Of The Proms in Hyde Park was a wonderful irrational experience, and bumped in to a Kiwi who I had worked with for 12 years in Wellington – it’s a small small world.

The trains are great to get around on (hate the planes) but, with covering 1400 miles a week to Newcastle and back, there were inevitably a few hiccups – fires by the line, stolen signal cable, and, coming back on Eurostar from a weekend in Paris for some reason the queues were huge and we got shut out from getting on our scheduled train. We got put on the next one but we missed the last train to Brighton and

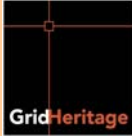
had to get a taxi with a couple of others, from Three Bridges in the early hours.

The English countryside is gorgeous – I can stare for hours out of the train window and time passes very quickly, especially if you are trying to read the paper as well. I have settled on buying just the Saturday Times and that takes about five days/evenings to read, so I have a couple of days to get in to the books I have been accumulating ...

So we have been hiring a rental car and staying in B&Bs or farm cottages. Jane has learnt to use my hand-held GPS when it is her time to be navigator and she thinks it is pretty handy! It not only shows you where you are on the map but what direction you are going in. Magic!

The English countryside; castles, country houses are as good as those we came across in Italy (April) and France (2006). National Trust does a good job and puts on a good cup of tea with tempting treats besides ... We have also joined English Heritage so it is good value for money when you get to a site e.g. Stonehenge and can walk in gratis. Which reminds me, I have taken up Latin – they reckon a second language at this stage in life is good for the brain so let’s see how it goes. I already have a motto for Jane “semper festinat” – takes after her mother you know ☺

The wildlife is pretty spectacular – still haven’t come across a badger yet (missed out on a special evening in Brighton in May) but there is always next year! I am frustrated by not yet recognising the calls of the birds from the thickets – now I understand how birders coming to NZ must feel. I dropped Jane off in Rye one day and went on to Dungeness, not for the nuclear power station but for the RSPB reserve. Checked in to the visitor centre then headed out to where the bird/twitch/rarity of the day was, and



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heard a bittern (sounds the same as the NZ one!) on the way I found out when I got to the experts that it is relatively rare – just like in NZ – wetlands drained for farming and so on. “Spring Watch” and “Autumn Watch” are inspirational wildlife, real life & real time, on TV. Seeing the stags roaring a few paces away in Richmond Park are on the agenda. The South Downs I find of great interest and have read a fairly radical book on their history. The guy who wrote it is into claiming the land and walking off the “Public Footways” (which seem to be everywhere here in England).

Been to one stage show already (Life of Wm Shakespeare) and have a few lined up in London – take the train up for the day (about one hour trip), go to an early session and get an evening train back to Brighton. “Billy Elliot” and an Afro-Cubism concert are booked already ☺ by the Entertainment Officer.

Needless to say I have enrolled in the Sunday Times Wine Club but delivery to a locked house with no porch or neighbours at home presents a few difficulties. The simple activity of getting the carriers to ring me to arrange a day does not seem to be a service they provide, so there are needless trips to drop cards through our front door letter slot! May have to go back to buying local. I bought a bottle of Chile merlot the other night coming home to celebrate the miners all getting out, at £3.99 a bottle – and a nice drop too.

We went to Prague recently – couldn’t speak a word of the language (just like Ireland) but had a great cross-cultural experience. Two concerts in two nights. Five synagogues in one morning. Local Czech food for all meals (except muesli for breakfast ...).

Billy Elliot The Musical last weekend in London – I cried my eyes out, and I think my time in Northumbria was a

major factor, having seen the closed mines and got to know my regular taxi driver Michael in Blyth a little.

Love & best wishes (you pick) Stuart.

GridHeritage Christmas message

So what has GridHeritage done in 2010? Well, the collection continues to expand at an increasing rate and now we are getting collections from the families of many ex-staff.

Attending the ceremony for restoration of a tower from the first transmission line in NZ has led us to delving more into Transpower archives for our early history and they are a mine of information.

Our project to copy old videos onto DVD continues with a recent gift of dozens of interesting TV News items.

We are being donated significant early documents and photos from some of the old NZED Districts and these are a wonderful source of our history.

More recently we are getting an increasing number of enquiries for historic information on the early industry.

We are deeply indebted to Transpower for providing us with space in both Wellington and at Bunnythorpe. We have even had the roofs over our sheds replaced and now we are sure that our collection is safe and secure.

I worry for the future of new additions to our collection. Wonderful old electro-mechanical devices are being replaced by electronics in ordinary looking boxes that all look the same. It is hard to imagine how you can make an interesting Museum of the future with rows of boring PCs look-alikes.

In closing I would like to give special thanks to Les, Richard and Brian who have to endure my warped sense of humour and endure our endless trips to Bunnythorpe.

Tony Silke...