

Heritage Happenings for July 2008

Tony's Tales

Hi again everyone. Winter is upon us and the thought of yet another trip to Bunnythorpe to work on our collection seems rather daunting. Bunnythorpe must rank among the coldest places to be in winter. However we now have a new document storage area set up and as it is temperature and humidity controlled (for the documents you understand) we hope to be a lot more comfortable working there than we had been in previous winters.



The GridHeritage Team at Bunnythorpe

New Computers for GridHeritage

Transpower continues to provide valuable support to GridHeritage in many ways. Two PCs that were being written-off from Transpower are now to go to our document archive area at Bunnythorpe to assist us with our cataloguing work. Special thanks to Ian Harrop for facilitating this valued contribution.

The Reefton street lighting myth

Helen Reilly, our historian and author of 'Connecting the Country' has noted a recent Dominion article on early NZ electricity that was, like many similar articles, factually incorrect. Many people in New Zealand keep saying that Reefton was the first town in the southern hemisphere to have electric street lights. Helen thinks they must all read the same book and have never questioned its accuracy.

In fact the diamond mining town of Kimberley in the Northern Cape was the first town to install street lighting in the southern hemisphere. It did so on 2 September 1882, well before Reefton followed along in August 1888.

According to the Inangahua Times of 3rd August 1888 a public lighting exhibition was given on the previous Wednesday, 1st

August, by Mr. Walter Price and his staff. They hung an arc lamp that "lit up the whole scene with strange but dazzling brilliancy."

Readers of the paper were warned to "leave their watches at home otherwise they would run the risk of having them magnetized and ruined if they stood near, or touched the dynamo when it was running."



A typical bipolar dynamo circa 1890

However, Reefton isn't without its significant history, it was the first remote town in NZ to have a telegraph connection, in 1872, and it proudly proclaims itself as "the town of light" as it was the first town in New Zealand to be lit by hydro-electric power with a dam and dynamo organized by a public company.



Broadway, Reefton.

The Damaged ECNZ Collection

We are still working on the remainder of the damaged ECNZ collection.

Unfortunately we have found that some of the equipment is beyond repair due to water-damage and is slowly being disposed of. We are still mindful of the value of some of the gear for spares, both for GridHeritage and for other collectors. We are hoping that some of the damaged

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gear may be put to good use by other collectors.



Ex ECNZ collection for disposal

Hororata History

Kelvin Brown of Christchurch is researching the early history of Hororata substation. He has sent us this interesting photo of his father Bert Brown who worked at Hororata in the very early days. Bert was apparently one of the very first electrical apprentices with the MOW starting in 1915.

If anyone has any information or photographs on early Hororata I would be happy to pass it on to Kelvin



Bert Brown ex Hororata on right of picture

Connecting the Country

The Helen Reilly book on the history of the NZ electricity transmission system is now completed; thoroughly checked, and at last the publisher has completed his work. The printing is expected to be starting soon. The book has steadily grown in size since its inception and will be a large production with many historic photographs.

For all of you rail enthusiasts

The NZ Electronic Text Centre has available on-line the NZ Railways magazines from 1926 to 1940.
<http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-corpus-railways.html>

Even for a non-rail bloke like me it is interesting. On their site you will also find a treasure-trove of other interesting NZ history. It is wonderful to have such a resource available on-line.

Early System Control Staff

Les Davys has been plodding his way through the old Public Service 'stud books' assembling a list of the early staff who were in some way involved in System Control. Les' interest started when he was researching the family history of his father-in-law Bert Fuller. His list starts in 1938 and has some noted names on it, such as FTM Kissel, MG Latta, and AE Davenport, to name a few.

His other interest is in early history of Electricity Development in NZ and intends getting copies of the reports to government of about 1903 which are held in National Library, Wellington. Prior to 1946 all this info is within Public Works Department. The State Hydro-Electric Department was split off from the PWD in 1946 and then underwent other name changes. The stud books are held by Archives NZ in Wellington and cover the years from 1913 to the start of ECNZ. The Engineer-in-Chief of PWD, R W Holmes, in the 1913 stud book was appointed in 1871. There is a lot of background to seek out on the history of electricity development. They contain information that would now cause the Privacy Commissioner a lot of grief but it makes for interesting reading and is great for reactivating the grey matter.

Recording life histories

GridHeritage now has extensive experience in the oral recording of the life history of people who have worked in the electricity industry. We are now looking to do a trial life history using video recording. Oral recording is seen by some as being intrusive and it is feared that the addition of a video camera could make this problem even worse. We plan to ensure that this doesn't happen.

We want your feedback

We need to know what members want from us and welcome your feedback. Please telephone or email us with any ideas that you have, or photos and memorabilia that you can give us.