

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA ON THE OCCASION OF THE
UNVEILING OF THE RESTORATION BY THE DON RIVER
RAILWAY OF THE ROYAL RAILWAY CARRIAGE BUILT IN 1879,
LAUNCESTON, WEDNESDAY 19TH JUNE 2013.**

Good morning everybody and what a splendid and exciting occasion this is: the unveiling of the restoration of the historic Royal Carriage. Did you know that the members of the Don River Railway spent no less than 15,000 hours restoring this magnificent railway carriage to the glory that it enjoyed some 75 years ago when it was used by Royalty for the last time?

This carriage was built in 1879 in Bristol and shipped out to Tasmania. In those days, English Royalty frequently used the railways as a means of transport. Queen Victoria showed the way by being the first British monarch to travel by train, on 13 June 1842, when the Great Western Railway steam locomotive *Phlegethon* pulled the Royal saloon and six other carriages from Slough (which at that time was the station for Windsor Castle) to Paddington¹. The Royal Train departed at precisely noon and the journey took 25 minutes. There is an interesting note from Google Maps that this journey is now reduced to as little as 15 minutes, with one stop.

It is said that, “The stimulus for this trip had been her consort, Prince Albert, who had been riding in trains since 1839 and had finally been able to convince Her Majesty to try the newfangled, steam-hissing machines. Along with the rest of her household, Victoria dreaded the

¹ <http://www.royal.gov.uk/TheRoyalHousehold/Transport/TheRoyalTrain.aspx>

prospect, and it was only the trust in her beloved Albert that gave her the courage to attempt it.”²

In 1920, some 80 years after that first train trip by Queen Victoria, this splendid carriage was used here in Tasmania by the Prince of Wales to travel between Hobart and Launceston.³ According to an account in the Examiner Newspaper for 5th July 1920, the plan was to depart Hobart at midnight and to arrive in Launceston at 11 am after a stop at Conara at 5:15 am – a pretty slow trip you might think, even if it is taken in the luxurious Royal carriage! Royalty again used the carriage in April 1927, when the Duke and Duchess of York visited Tasmania.⁴

The year 1935 saw the carriage used by Royalty for the last time, when the Duke of Gloucester was here. For a brief time after that it was used by the general public – no doubt at a premium ticket price – but after World War II, it ended up as a camp carriage for railway workers.

The Don River Railway acquired the carriage in 1982, but it was not taken to Launceston for restoration until 2009. There, the painstaking work began to restore and preserve a piece of Tasmania’s

² P. Pigott (2005, *Royal Transport: An Inside Look at the History of Royal Travel*. Dundurn Press, Toronto, Canada. P. 23. Limited preview of the Royal Train section is available online at < http://books.google.com.au/books?id=PQMsd0G9MlwC&pg=PA28&lpg=PA28&dq=royal+saloon+toyota&source=bl&ots=X9DyT_wNVU&sig=PmJuxhYvCmYDCNbqdpReaRblZsQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=FUelUa2IAeT_iAfeqIFQ&ved=0CCwQ6AEwADgK#v=onepage&q=royal%20saloon%20toyota&f=false

³<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/3117562?zoomLevel=1&searchTerm=%22prince%20of%20wales%22%20train%20hobart%20launceston&searchLimits=l-title=46||l-title=271||l-title=24||l-title=23||l-title=170||l-title=21||l-title=159||l-title=116||l-title=68||l-title=19||l-title=20||l-title=33||l-title=22||l-title=4||l-title=5||l-title=32||l-title=31||l-title=272||l-title=339||l-title=74||l-title=158||l-title=10||l-title=115||l-title=160||l-title=273||l-title=117||l-title=270||fromyyyy=1920||toyyyy=1920>

⁴ <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/51407689/3206527?zoomLevel=3>

history. Working largely from black and white photographs taken long ago, the dedicated workers at the Don River Railway went about their labour of love, replacing Tasmanian specialty timbers, creating replica furnishings and fittings and installing etched glass as it was in the beginning.

There is an excellent short film of this restoration process shown on 7:30 Tasmania, and still accessible on the Web, which is well worth seeing.

It is difficult to find words to adequately congratulate the wonderful and very skilled, hard-working volunteers at the Don River Railway who have recreated this fine piece of history. It is a master piece and will be admired by generations to come.

I understand that the plan is to display the carriage as part of the Don River Tourist Railway collection and perhaps take it out on special occasions. Now I did notice, among the historical material that I looked at, two newspaper reports for 11th September 1879, one in the Mercury and one in the Examiner, which suggested that the first rail journey that this carriage ever undertook in Tasmania was to travel from Hobart to Launceston carrying the Governor of the day, who was then Sir Frederick Weld. So I thought to myself that, once it is back on the track, perhaps the Don River Railway might invite today's Governor to go for a ride in this magnificent historical carriage!!!

Meanwhile, it is an honour for me to unveil the/this [depends on its proximity] plaque to acknowledge this outstanding work of restoration and this major contribution to the historical records of Tasmania and the State's railways in particular. (7 minutes)