
Croydon's historic machinery collection: A case study in the uses and needs of outback heritage machinery collections

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Abstract

One response to the development of tourism in small inland Queensland towns has been to collect heritage machinery from the surrounding countryside and display it in town as an attraction for visitors. These sites range from open-air collections of miscellaneous items with no explanation of their use to both private and local government museums that are given varying levels of care and interpretation. The small north-western Queensland town of Croydon has a collection of heritage machinery in a number of sites, which range across this continuum. This article explores the potential of the collection to interpret the town's history and the history of early gold mining, as a case study with application to other such collections.

Introduction

In the 1970s, the advent of bitumen highways into Western and North Queensland brought tourism to many small towns on major roads. At first just catering to travellers' immediate needs, the towns began to try to keep visitors longer by offering tourist attractions. One early response was to bring historic machinery into town, stored in a vacant lot, for tourists to photograph. Few of these collections were provided with any level of care or interpretation, nor were they assessed for significance. Later, both publicly and privately owned collections were provided with better conditions, such as concrete pads to keep them out of the mud, some kind of cover from the elements and basic conservation, such as paint to slow deterioration. Some machines — usually those that could be used to give rides to tourists — were 'restored' to working order. This means 'repaired', using modern materials; the heritage meaning of 'restored' — using only parts that belonged to the original machine — rarely happens. Croydon's heritage machinery display began as a town lot full of miscellaneous machinery, and is only

slowly transitioning to a true museum. With the right interpretation and better conservation, it has the potential to provide visitors with some insight into the town's past and the mining industry, increase its economic value for tourism, preserve significant artefacts, help visitors to understand the historic mining sites that surround the town, and provide concrete expression of the residents' identification with their gold-mining past.

What is a museum?

Before the 'new museology' of the 1980s, most would have agreed that a museum 'is an institution that cares and conserves a collection of artefacts and other objects of scientific, artistic, cultural or historical importance'.¹ The collection, and research into it, was the principal concern of the museum, while interpretation for visitors through static displays was educational but didactic, operating from the assumption that the visitor was a blank slate learning from expert curators. Decreasing funding — and a boom in the number and variety of museums — meant a greater emphasis on attracting paying visitors, such that the traditional educative role of the museum was transformed into engaging visitors by anticipating their needs, and valuing (or connecting with) the knowledge they brought to the exhibitions.² As Bronwyn Labrum notes, 'Museums were once defined by their relationship to objects ... Today they are defined more than ever by their relationship to visitors.'³ The emphasis has shifted to arranging an 'experience' for the visitor, involving 'interaction, unexpected connections, surprises, and even humor' and 'discovery, self-reliance [and] direct choice'.⁴ People respond to stories — particularly those that mesh in some way with their own personal stories — and these can provide the engagement and interaction that didactic instruction cannot achieve.⁵ This ideal makes interpretation difficult for a multiplicity of visitors with their individual contextualisations of what they see within their own lived experiences.⁶

Another criticism of the traditional museum was the conservatism behind its choice of interpretation, reinforcing elite models of culture and education along with nationalism. This applied more to the larger city museums; small regional museums were rarely elite, but did often interpret their districts' histories within traditional national narratives. Given that Australian history as a discipline followed the same path until the growth in labour history, women's history, Aboriginal history and social history in the 1970s, this is not surprising. Now, rather than presenting a nationalist version of history, museums are exhorted to look to the community they serve for stories that can reveal a local, city or regional identity — one more meaningful to that community, though needing to link into a national and international context to avoid parochialism. The social history that challenged the traditional national/political histories in the post-World War II era supplied the methodology. It also supplied the critiques of this approach: 'community' is a portmanteau term, one that on closer inspection resolves into myriad communities and identities emerging from differences of ethnicity, gender, age, class and interests. In some cases, museums are expected to perform a politico-social role to help reconcile these community differences, a tall order when much more powerful social institutions such as schools are not always successful.⁷

The primary role of collections in museums

Despite the secondary status now given to the collections, they are still considered important. Artefacts differentiate museums from libraries and archives, and have a reality and sensory appeal different from that evoked by text or photographs; Weil describes it as the ‘all-but-unique power of objects’.⁸ Bridgen suggests that ‘objects embody knowledge and experience accumulated over centuries in problem solving, resourcefulness, and adaptability, and the working of natural materials to make the most of their inbuilt versatility. They are object lessons in life, in survival, and our impact on the environment.’⁹ He does caution that a collection of objects is not a true record of the past, but rather a selection of available objects considered important by the collector, but the same could be said of collections in libraries and archives.¹⁰ Photographs and text from documents in exhibitions are usually reproductions; artefacts, however, are usually authentic — the original primary source — and their details and marks of use help to tell stories in a different way from images and labels.

The case study of Croydon

How do these ideas apply to the heritage machinery collections of small and resource-poor towns in Queensland? Such collections can be found, with varying levels of care and interpretation, in nearly every Queensland town, with open-air displays at Coen, Herberton, Mt Garnet, Ravenshoe, Clermont, Charters Towers, Ilfracombe, Biloela, Winton and Aramac. How do they represent community aspirations and identities, explore social issues, assist economic survival and engage visitors and locals? More basically, how do they tell the stories that help to interpret the past of that town, district or region? What needs to be done in the future to achieve these goals? To help answer these questions, the heritage collections of the Croydon Shire are considered in this article as a case study.

Croydon is located north-west of Townsville, and is on the Gulf Developmental Road, part of National Highway 1. It is the centre of a large local government area under the care of the Croydon Shire Council. The economy is based mainly on beef cattle grazing. Europeans first came to the district in the early 1880s to graze cattle. Two pastoral workers, Richard and Walter Alldridge, found a gold-bearing quartz reef in 1885, sparking a gold rush. New reefs were found all around the district, leading to the establishment of small towns such as True Blue, Golden Gate, Tabletop and Esmeralda. Ore crushing mills were set up by the end of 1886 and the field boomed. The worst problem was water — lacking on the surface, but troublesome in the mines; despite this, Croydon developed quickly. By 1887, the town had a population of 7000 and was acquiring the businesses and services one might expect in a longer established town. One of the most important was Stuart and McKenzie’s Union Foundry, established in 1891, which manufactured and repaired machinery — a boon for miners in such an isolated area. This year also saw the arrival of a railway from the port of Normanton on the Gulf of Carpentaria, allowing faster and more reliable transport, especially in the wet season, which can inundate large areas of the intervening country.

Croydon peaked in the 1890s, but the new century saw two fatal developments: the richest gold-bearing reefs either disappeared below 152 metres or became too

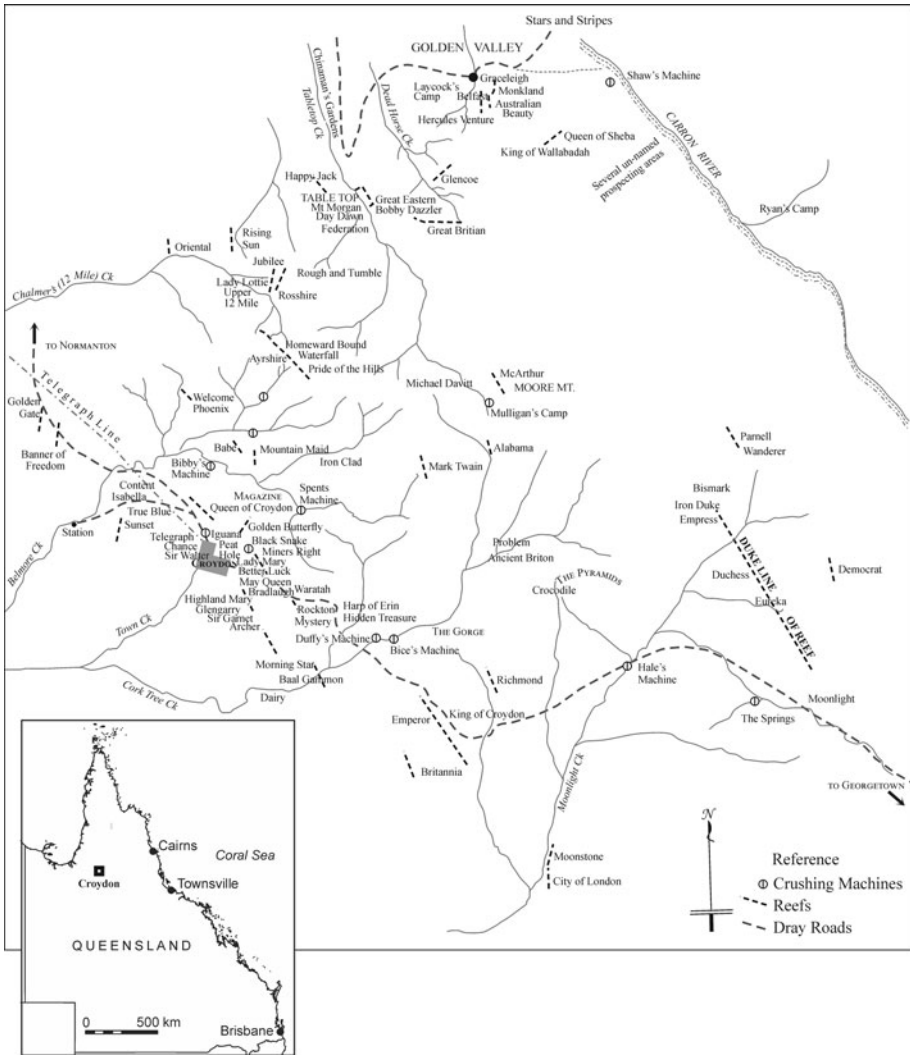


Figure 1
 Croydon Goldfield (adapted from a sketch map by H.F. Morgan, 1891. Cartography by Adella Edwards).

poor to mine at depth, and the miners lacked the capital to adopt large-scale methods that might make the big low-grade ore deposits pay, despite some attempts to do so. By 1915, hit further by war inflation and the effects of a destructive cyclone in 1906, the field was in decline and mining after 1920 was desultory and small in scale until the 1980s. Some 24,023 kilos of fine gold and around 25,008 kilos of silver were won between 1886 and 1958. A small tin field, Stanhills, produced 284 tonnes of tin up to 1949.¹¹ The small ‘outside’ towns were all abandoned by 1923 and Croydon itself became the odd townscape it is today: scattered buildings in a sea of grass, with long gaps where houses and businesses once stood. Mining began again in the 1980s, using the large-scale mining methods made possible by modern machinery.

Croydon's heritage collections

The Croydon Shire Council has collected together, in various places in the town, artefacts that are associated mainly with mining but that include some social, farming and pastoral items. The original purpose was simply economic. The Croydon Shire is one of many large, thinly populated and therefore rates-poor local government areas in inland Queensland; its current population is around 300 in an area of 29,538 square kilometres.¹² Cattle grazing is unable to support large numbers of people, and the occasional revivals of mining are always temporary; the most likely source of steady economic growth is tourism. The railway and its 1950 railmotor had already become a tourist attraction as the 'Gulflander'. In 1987, the Gulf Local Authorities Development Association (GLADA) assessed the heritage of Croydon as having high tourism potential and produced the Croydon Historic Precinct Study to guide its realisation.

Most of the machinery in the collection was brought in by the shire council from historic mine sites to provide inducements for tourists to stay longer in the town. Of course, this damaged the heritage significance of those mine sites. However, the advent of widespread four-wheel drive recreation from the 1980s allowed more unsupervised visits to historic mine sites, and consequently more vandalism and 'souveniring', and thus more illegal collecting for scrap metal. Modern mining using large open cuts can threaten older mining heritage. This means that some artefacts were better placed in town.

The collection has a doubtful claim to represent the community's identity as it is now. The pastoral industry is represented by only a few items, principally machinery associated with windmill pumps and homestead electricity-generating plants. There is little to explain the day-to-day operations of a cattle station, the changes in technology such as mustering by horse transitioning to quad bikes or helicopters, or the industry's social life such as rodeos and horse sports. The Takalaka traditional owners and the Chinese, two groups of importance in the district's history, are also barely represented. Instead, some of the public art by blacksmith-artist Hans Pehl, commissioned by the council, reflects pastoralism, the Takalaka people, and the fauna and flora of the district. However, many residents of all ethnicities share in the shire's mining history, and are often descended from miners or those who provided services to them.

Interpretive potential of the collection: Historic mining

The collection does have strong potential to interpret nineteenth-century gold-mining and milling techniques to the general public. Nearly every step is represented in the collection, from the miner's pick and shovel used underground, the ore trucks that took broken rock to the shaft, skips and buckets that took the ore up the shaft, the winding engines and wire rope that brought the ore to the surface, and the pumps and bailing buckets that kept water out of the mine workings. Most drilling of the rock to take plugs of explosive was done by hand, and there are drills and small portable forges for sharpening rock drills and other blacksmithing work. Machine rock drills were rare on the field, but there is a machine drill steel in the collection. What is not there can also be significant: there are no cages, used for moving materials in the shaft, because most of Croydon's mine shafts were underlies — that is, went down at an angle, for which skips (mine trucks roofed over) were more appropriate. This explains the unusually large number of skips in the collection.

For milling, there is a stone-breaker used to break the ore into easily milled pieces, stamp batteries for crushing the ore and pans for fine grinding of the crushed ore to extract the maximum amount of gold. One of the batteries has been brought into operating condition — a relatively simple process, given their robust construction. A large steam engine and a small portable engine were both mill engines, representing the extremes of size of crushing mills on the field. The drive shafts and belt wheels that transmitted power from the steam engines to various parts of the mill are also present. The mills collected the gold on mercury-coated copper plates as the crushed ore washed over them and, while no plates exist in the collection, there are retorts – containers in which the gold-mercury amalgam was heated to drive off the mercury to be recovered and re-used, leaving a lump of gold bullion behind.

The 1890s saw the introduction of the cyanide process to recover gold, initially used to treat the waste ('tailings') from the mercury process. The collection has disintegrators used to break up lumps of tailings ready to be treated, tip trucks and lengths of bucket conveyor belts to move the tailings around, and ceramic-lined buckets to carry acid or cyanide solution. Damaged items and parts along with the more intact machinery have also been brought into town, which can be useful to show the wastage inherent in mining and milling, which were hard on machinery. Some items have interpretive signs, particularly those at the Visitors' Centre, although the signs are deteriorating in the tropical conditions and some of the information is inaccurate.

Better interpretation and reorganisation of the collection in some logical order of mining, milling and cyaniding would be necessary to clearly explain the basic workings of the industry. There are the beginnings of such open-air exhibits: the mock headframe at the Visitors' Centre with a genuine ore bucket swinging from an equally genuine sheave wheel at the top, and a rope leading down to a small winding engine; and a Langlands ore-crushing battery set up next to two Langlands boilers encased in a stone setting, with a long drive-shaft that once powered several mill operations and a large steam engine in appropriate positions. However, there is no explanation of either process offered, and the effect of the latter exhibition is confused by rows of unrelated artefacts nearby.

Interpretation is aided by the heritage-listed Iguana Consols mine site on the edge of town, the last deep prospecting shaft on the field, sunk in 1915 to find continuations of the phenomenally rich town reefs lost at depth in the 1890s. It features a large steam winding engine imported from England for the Waratah mine near the town, and later moved to the Federation mine further north, then to the Golden Gate, the last of the rich mining centres on the field, and then to the Iguana Consols, along with its Cornish boiler. The other major piece of machinery, a Thompson and Co. (Castlemaine, Victoria) steam-powered compressor running a rock drill plant, was brought from Charters Towers in 1912 to Cuthbert's Content mine to the west of the town, then moved to the Iguana. These items, which are still in situ — and indeed nearly all the items in the collection — illustrate the frequent recycling of old plant and the reason why so much nineteenth-century technology has survived in the district. The Iguana Consols site also features a smokestack for the Cornish boiler, still in place; a concrete lined mine shaft; the concrete cradle for a compressed air receiver, providing a reserve for the compressed air before it was piped down the shaft; and the base of a cooling tower, a kind of giant radiator that



Figure 2

(Colour online) Machinery at the shire council library site, including the Langlands battery. (Photograph courtesy of Janice Wegner).

cooled the water circulating around the compressor cylinders. There are square iron ship's tanks, often used for water storage on mine sites, and a blacksmith's forge made out of a ship's tank. The only major item missing is the headframe. The site therefore has high potential to interpret nineteenth-century mining practice. There is an interpretive sign that tells the history of the mine well, but more could be done to explain the mining process in conjunction with other mining machinery stored near it, which currently bears no interpretation and is laid out in rows simply for convenience.

The Iguana Consols is only one of several historic mine sites in the district that still have remains. Croydon Shire is rich in mining heritage. This is partly due to the area's isolation — even though there was a railway capable of taking 'scrap iron' to the coast, anyone trying to do so was faced with an expensive voyage around Cape York to the foundries on the east coast. Pastoralists had no reason to disturb old mining areas, and some graziers have 'adopted' mining remains and keep watch over them. Some mine and mill sites, such as the Homeward Bound, Content and Richmond, have been placed on the Queensland Heritage Register, and the whole of the Golden Gate is on the Register.¹³ The Croydon machinery collection has the capacity to explain how these sites worked so that visitors can understand them.

The collection can also be interpreted to explain some of the biases in early mining practice. Remains on the field are dominated by nineteenth-century technology such as steam engines. By the 1920s and 1930s, other mining fields were importing gas engines and diesels, but these are rare in Croydon. It was not for lack of a desire to innovate, but rather about cost, as secondhand plant was far cheaper and Croydon's miners were familiar with its use. The *Machinery Advances Act 1906* was another reason. Designed to help small parties of miners or millers, it legislated for state loans to help equip a mine or mill. If the party was unable to



Figure 3

(Colour online) Iguana Consols interpretation sign. (Photograph courtesy of Marian Campbell, Croydon Heritage Preservation Association).

repay the loan, the equipment fell into the hands of the government and was then loaned out to more parties of capital-poor miners. This recycling has helped to preserve much of the early machinery.¹⁴ The collection reflects this bias, with only a few internal combustion engines (all rare) associated with mining. These can tell the story of the slow transition from steam to internal combustion from the 1930s. Another area of under-representation is the period after World War II; small regional museums often attract criticism for not collecting post-1960s.¹⁵ Croydon's collection only contains one recent artefact — but it dwarfs the other equipment at the Iguana Consols site and shows how large the scale of mining has become in order to turn a profit from low-grade ore bodies.

The collection not only provides local context; it can show how small isolated places like Croydon were connected to a world economy. Its mining and milling methods were drawn originally from Cornwall and Germany, with improvements and innovations supplied from the Victorian and American mining fields. Croydon's machines were made in Queensland, Victoria, Scotland, Germany, the United States and England. Its miners were equally cosmopolitan — Europe, North America, Africa, Asia, New Zealand and the Pacific. Andrew Hassam reminds us that the labour of workers all over the world interconnects through the global economy: 'civilisations that have shaped our modern societies developed as part of an interrelated world culture, rather than in isolation'.¹⁶ Contrary to popular belief, the world was more globalised in many ways around the turn of the twentieth century than it is now, and the collection can show how.

While the collection and the Iguana Consols together can introduce visitors to turn of the twentieth century gold and tin mining, the more technical aspects would

be of interest principally to a specialist audience. There is a market for industrial and engineering heritage tourism, including mining history and heritage machinery enthusiasts, but the museum needs to cater for a wider range of people. There might be some curiosity among the general public about the vanished way of life prevailing on late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century outback mining fields, but this is best told through social history. Visitors will look for stories that tell them something of the human condition, and to which they can relate.¹⁷ The collection can be used for this purpose. Many of the artefacts are thought-provoking. For example, a gear wheel from the King of Wallabadah, a mine worked on and off by small parties of poor miners for decades, has had some teeth stripped and carefully replaced. The battered little winch or donkey engine from the same mine was used as a winding engine from 1895 to 1907, despite its unsuitability for the task.¹⁸ These two items speak of poverty and hand-to-mouth methods among small parties of miners. A chain, each link hand-forged, shows off the skill of a blacksmith while raising the question of why it was necessary to make it. Heavy cast iron tip trucks and mine trucks, loaded with sand or broken rock, had to be filled and pushed by hand; as in most industries before the 1950s, mining was heavily dependent on manual labour, a revelation to generations whose work is highly mechanised.

It was also dangerous work, both below and above surface, and other artefacts can be used to explain unsafe working conditions. Visitors can be challenged to imagine themselves working with machinery using belts and toothed gear wheels, which were unguarded. In six cases on the field, these caused terrible accidents, killing men and crushing limbs.¹⁹ Items made in the Union Foundry remind us that working in a foundry, filling sand moulds with molten metal, was skilled but also hot and dangerous work. The machine drill steel can be used to explain that these drills were called ‘widow makers’ for the sharp stone dust they raised underground, getting into miners’ lungs and causing ‘miner’s phthisis’, now known as silicosis. The dust particles caused minute scars in the lungs, which eventually consolidated to the point where the damage became too much for the lungs to operate. While machine drills were the biggest cause of silicosis, even hand drilling and setting off explosives would raise dust; by the early 1900s, a significant number of Croydon miners were suffering and dying from the disease, most of them only thirty to fifty years old. A recording of the stamp battery at work would not only raise questions about the effect on workers’ hearing, but lead into the stories from many mining towns that residents became so accustomed to the roar of the stamps that they only noticed it when the mills stopped.²⁰ The cyanide plant items can lead into stories of goats and other animals being poisoned when the waste cyanide solution was let go down the creeks — an early example of environmental damage — or the story of the children playing in a heap of cyanided sands when the heap collapsed on them and they had to be dug out and revived.²¹ The retort can be married to the story told by a former resident that he and other children would gather around the retort as liquid mercury flowed from the pipe, playing with the silver beads of mercury in their hands, unaware of the dangers of absorbing this toxic substance through the skin.²²

Potential for interpretation: Social life

Aspects of town life can also be explained by items in the collection. Before Croydon gained an electricity supply and a water supply, residents had to make their own

arrangements. The collection includes a Southern Cross Farm Engine, used to pump water to Les Pickering's house in Croydon; and a small 22 volt generator installed by Paddy Hughes in 1967 to supply electricity to his house.²³ Two vintage Bedford trucks are housed at the Information Centre, and are paraded along with a Model-T Ford during festivals; they give visitors a feel for transport during an era when horses were being replaced by trucks and cars from the 1920s. A now-rare acetylene gas producer supplied gas lighting to Cuthbert's General Store.²⁴ As noted earlier, museums have a unique potential for education in that they present tangible objects.²⁵ David Prince's thoughtful article says 'two pasts are available for preservation: a verbally defined past that is realized through language, thoughts, behaviours, and so on; and a structural past that is encapsulated within the physical traces (landscapes, environments, monuments) generated by past thoughts and ideas'.²⁶ The physical heritage embodied in the collection and the surrounding mine sites satisfies the second type, while interpretation supplies clues to the past thoughts, stories and ideas behind it. Mining machinery is particularly robust, so most of the collection has the added advantage of being able to be touched and explored kinetically — something that children in particular like to do.

Interpreting intangibles

Museology stresses that museums are about people, about making connections and building on prior knowledge. Mackay comments that 'it is not only people from the past that need to be represented in rural life museums but those of the present too'.²⁷ Museums can recognise the many groupings that make up any community and acknowledge those whose histories have been neglected and whose identity has been subsumed in that of the majority. It might seem difficult for a collection of machinery identified principally with the history of adult males of European descent to spark a sense of connection with women, children and non-European ethnic groups. However, a closer study of Croydon's history allows links to emerge. Galiina Ellwood has shown that post-frontier Aborigines were more integrated into the mining industry than previously understood, as miners and prospectors.²⁸ Similarly, women were not only heavily involved in town businesses and the social and domestic life of the district, but were mine owners and backers of other mines. There are records of some women working in their families' mines, such as Mrs Marshall, a Takalaka woman who mined alongside her husband.²⁹ Once they left school at twelve, boys began their working life and many pictures of groups of miners feature a teenager or two. Even younger children were fossicking for overlooked bits of gold in the mullock heaps.³⁰ Although the Chinese were mainly involved in the usual occupations of cooking, storekeeping and market gardening, there were Chinese hard rock miners³¹ who also invested in mines.³² The Bing Chew residence, home of a long established Croydon family with Chinese-Aboriginal ancestry, has been placed in the Iguana Consols site and provides a convenient place for interpretation, linking mining with both of these cultures, though it is important that members of those cultures make the decisions on interpretation.

The transport collection

The shire also owns three railway locomotives and some vintage vehicles, which raises the problem of restoration. The locomotives and their tenders were made in

1876–77 by the Vulcan Foundry in Lancashire for the construction of the Central (then Northern) Railway from Rockhampton to Barcaldine, but in 1888 were transferred to Normanton for construction of the Croydon railway.³³ Once the line was finished in 1891, they were decommissioned one by one and their boilers scrapped or put to other uses.³⁴ One, the A10-202, was the last to be decommissioned and was rescued by gold mill-owner Jack Forsythe in 1905 to run between his Golden Gate mill and the main railway line instead of relying on horse drays. The failure of the Golden Gate mines killed his enterprise and by 1922 both the mill site and the locomotive were abandoned.³⁵ In 1984, the locomotive was added to Croydon's machinery collection. In 1989, the shire council decided to restore the locomotive to running condition to give short rides to tourists, and the incomplete frames of the other two locomotives, along with their tenders, were brought in from Normanton. One was plundered for spare parts and the other was placed at the Croydon railway station with the A10-202's boiler mounted on it for display purposes. However, the A10-202 restoration was never completed, although substantial progress was made.³⁶ 'Restoration' of this kind is a double-edged sword. There is no doubt that the repairs make the A10-202 better suited for understanding how a steam locomotive works, and had the original goal been met, a working steam locomotive would have been a major drawcard for visitors — thus fulfilling the economic reasons for having the machinery collection in the first place. However, the changes have meant that the locomotive and its tender have lost some of their heritage significance. The existence of the remaining locomotives, the old boiler and the original tenders compensate to a degree, and the historic importance of the collection is indisputable. These are among the earliest surviving locomotives in Australia, involved in the construction of two railways.³⁷ Similarly, there are plans to repair to running order the council's collection of vintage vehicles, including a T-model Ford, a 1926 V Model Chevrolet truck and a 1924 TT Ford Tip Truck, former council workhorses, and two Bedford trucks.³⁸ These vehicles are not rare, however, and have little research value, provided the vehicles are documented in their original state in case of local modifications. Catherine Wilson even suggests putting less significant artefacts like these in the care of owners and heritage machinery 'restorers', who often have the skills and knowledge to look after them better than cash-strapped small museums.³⁹

Collections and preservation

While the importance of museum collections has shifted from preservation to interpretation for visitors, one basic aim of museums has not changed: to collect and preserve significant items. The appropriate criteria for significance in the case of mining machinery are rarity, representativeness, integrity or intactness, research potential, interpretative potential and historic value, normally requiring a good record of provenance. Because of Croydon's isolation and constant recycling of plant, a number of pieces of machinery meet these criteria; some are in the collection while others are still on the mine sites. A modest vertical boiler at the Information Centre has retained its name-plate, allowing its history to be traced to Robey and Co. in the United Kingdom in 1892. The Robey Trust believes it is the earliest surviving Robey boiler.⁴⁰ Much of the collection was brought in from Esmeralda, the site of the last attempt in 1906 to make a big low-grade ore body payable in

Croydon using nineteenth-century technology.⁴¹ It includes a Langlands Foundry stamp battery together with two Langlands multitubular boilers, all made in Victoria in 1883. Provenance is outstanding, traced from Victoria to the isolated Woolgar goldfield in 1884, and then to Tabletop in 1888 and Esmeralda in 1906.⁴² It is an uncommon survival, with the mill and boilers still together, and includes now-rare Cornish-style underground pumps. Another sub-collection of significance consists of two small pumps and a stamp battery made by Croydon's Union Foundry. Foundries in inland towns were rare in Queensland; now they have all gone, and few have artefacts that survive them.⁴³ The battery is particularly significant, as it was used to crush both gold and tin ore, representative of the technological crossover between these industries.

Kylie Winkworth makes the point that regional museums in Australia hold important collections that together have done more in the past to preserve the material culture of the nation's history than large government institutions, yet are chronically under-funded, particularly compared with the arts, and rely on the enthusiasm of volunteers and occasional subsidies and grants. She assumes that those museums run by local governments are better off than the volunteer-run variety;⁴⁴ however, she omitted another disadvantaged category: those museums run by outback local governments like Croydon with far fewer resources than on the coast. The small population does not offer a strong volunteer base, particularly as the group that most sustains volunteer-run museums elsewhere — retirees — usually leaves the shire to be closer to adult children, or for city medical facilities. The council does not have the funds for a professional museum curator and has relied on the enthusiasm and varied expertise of the tourism and heritage managers, the Croydon Heritage Preservation Association volunteers, its own skilled workforce and outside heritage consultants. These limited local resources are typical for low-revenue inland local governments, and calling in expertise to research, conserve and interpret their collections is an expense that competes with more mainstream responsibilities, meaning reliance on grant funding. Conservation in particular is neglected, with most of the collection in the open air, as occurs in other places.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Hassam notes that small regional museums have led the way in conserving vernacular culture, particularly of the working classes, but he cautions that the artefacts do not have innate meaning and that viewers must be connected through interpretation to the narratives behind them.⁴⁶ Croydon's collection has the potential to interpret the local history of working miners and the towns that supported them, educating both visitors and more recent generations about the lost world of a turn of the twentieth-century goldfield through stories bound to the artefacts through the people who used them. However, like other inland shires, Croydon needs financial support to realise this potential.

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Notes

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