

TIM FISCHER

I have dedicated this book to the memory of the late Hon. Tim Fischer, former Deputy Prime Minister and former Australian Ambassador to the Holy See. Tim was a railway visionary and Patron to the National Railway Museum, and the Pichi Richi Railway Preservation Society.



I met Tim on two occasions, both at the National Railway Museum. On the first I was at the book signing ceremony for his *Trains Unlimited in the 21st Century*. But Tim was also there for a chat. My role with the Museum was honorary medical examiner conducting checks in accordance with safety standards. We talked about the burden of compliance facing the operators of heritage railways.

The second was at the launch event in April 2019 of my book, *Bob's Railway**. Actually, it was a combined event in that the main act was the centenary celebration for the Museum's operating 0-6-0 steam locomotive, *Peronne*. Tim was not in good health and the general mood of the event was dampened by the knowledge that this would probably be his last visit to the museum, and that proved to be the case. It would have been nice if I could have spent some time with Tim, but I could see that there were many who had known him well over the years. But he did comment to me about one item in the book of which he had not previously been aware. That Engineer-in-Chief, Henry Mais, had declared that a three-mile tunnel under Mount Lofty was not possible.

But Tim had not lost his cheerful outlook on life. A few days before the book launch, Tim had phoned Bob Sampson, the Executive Officer at the Museum and given him the 'good news and the bad news'. *The bad news – his specialist had declared him unfit to fly.*

* *Bob's Railway - Turbulent political times in South Australia and a remarkable railroading dog*. A history of Bob, the railway dog - 1884 to 1895.

Tim's last visit to the National Railway Museum was to participate in the launch of *Bob's Railway* (hence the mascot of Bob the Railway Dog on the loco water tank), and to celebrate the 100th birthday of steam locomotive *Peronne* in April 2019. He is seen about to board the special train with NRM Executive Officer Bob Sampson. **SHYLIE EDWARDS.**

The good news – I'm booked on The Overland! That touched a chord with me as I had started researching and writing my next book – *The Overland – a Social History*. A few weeks later, Bob passed on to me, part of a letter that Tim had written, which had included the following:

Dear John

You have a right to be very proud of your book *Bob's Railway* which is a very colourful but also a scholarly work mainly re the SAR and railway development in South Australia. My congratulations and best wishes. Cheers, Tim Fischer.

In May 2023, I asked Bob to write a few paragraphs about Tim's involvement with the National Railway Museum. These, I have included in the two pages. But I am compelled to include here, the brief message from Bob that came with the material.

Hi John, I have absolutely enjoyed (albeit sad in some way) writing these words about Tim and his passion for the NRM and multi-gauge tracks.

There are many things in this article that many may not know about nor appreciate.

I have produced this book because I believe that the story of the break-of-gauge is a story that many Australians have either forgotten or never really knew. It is a story that fascinates me, and at the bottom of it all has been the old colonial mentality of working against, rather than with, those on the other side of the border. I believe that Tim was on a similar mission.

In chapter 8, I tell the story of the piskies. I believe that it was the piskies that really made the connection with Tim's family. I think that even Bob Sampson has become a convert to piskie power!

John Wilson

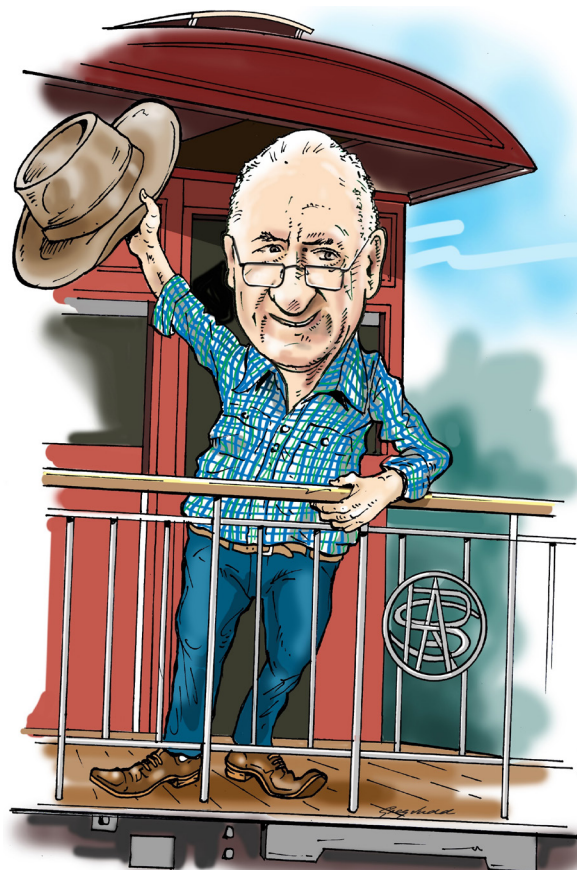
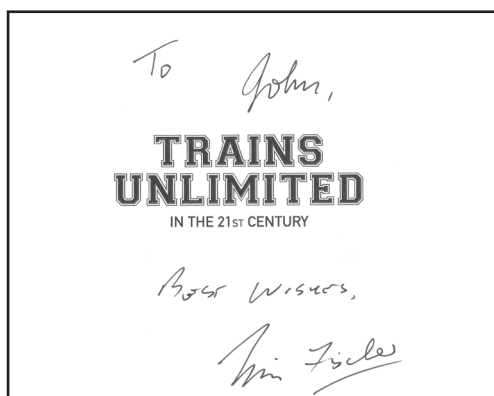
31 May 2023

Contact was made with Judy Brewer Fischer with the invitation to the family to send a few paragraphs. Within a couple of days the following were received:

TIM AND RAIL GAUGES.

Very early in our friendship, my late husband Tim Fischer informed me that he was not a train spotter, which was an entirely different thing from being a rail aficionado. At the time I thought it was quite odd and not a distinction that really mattered, but in the years to follow I was to understand the nuances of studying trains, engines, and carriages of whatever type, be it heritage rail, fast rail, or commuter rail, and the feats of engineering that underpinned every rail line, the curves and the cuttings, and of course the gauges.

While Tim loved watching a steam train pass or smelling the coal and smoke, his greatest joy was walking down both used and unused rail corridors and imagining the planning and precision that had gone into the efficiency of rail as a mode of transport for not only people but equally for freight. He advocated at every turn for rail as an environmentally friendly and economic part of the Australian economy and lamented the poor decision making and planning that had set back Australian rail from being the world leader that it could and should have been.



ARTWORK BY GREG JUDD

I commissioned this illustration by Greg Judd. It features the *Murray* car, with its cast insignia. It is one of the collection at the National Railway Museum. It was previously the Commissioner's special car. It is on permanent loan to the Museum from the History Trust of South Australia. JLW

But most of all he was fascinated by the various rail gauges. How they came to be, and the lack of consistency around the world across various platforms from trams to trains and the history of this back as far as Roman chariots! His Australian and World Rail Gauge posters adorn heritage rail waiting rooms across the world and it is impossible to look at the disjointed and dysfunctional Australian gauge system without shaking your head in horror and wondering at the lost opportunities hindered by so many break of gauges across the continent.

Tim would have loved this book by John Wilson which gives deep perspective on the whys and hows of our eclectic and still evolving rail system. So many aspects of the gauge question are covered in these chapters and fascinating snippets of history colour the decisions that have been made over the years. It is indeed a social history as much as an engineering one, as at the heart of so many of these 'breaks of gauges' are people and politics, two of Tim's other great loves.

Judy Brewer Fischer
May 2023

Tim Fischer – his association with the National Railway Museum



WORDS: Bob Sampson

Tim Fischer accepted the role from the Commonwealth Government, to be the guest speaker at the opening of the Centenary of Federation - Commonwealth Railways Exhibition, at the National Railway Museum in October 2001.

At that time, not many knew that it was Tim who had already made a few visits to the museum and had also been beavering away behind the scenes for several months, during the lead up to that event, to rename and rebadge the Port Dock Station Railway Museum as the National Railway Museum.

The project also included a critical component; the multi-gauging of several turnouts and tracks within the railway museum site.

Put simply on that day, Tim said: “Where else in Australia, in the one location can such a variety of locomotives and carriages from various builders, including places in Scotland, England, Germany, France, the United States of America and some states within Australia, be enjoyed – but also occupying Australia’s three main railway gauges; the broad, the standard and the narrow gauges!”

His efforts were successful and the new name was formally announced on Sunday 21 October 2001, by the Australian Federal Minister for Arts and the Centenary of Federation, Peter McGauran.

Tim had always been in touch and clearly watching the progress of the railway museum from the mid 1990s, with one of his early visits being in 1999, to look at the site and existing rail tracks and to become familiar with the plans, proposals and outcomes for the intended Centenary of Federation grant application.

In September 2000, with the Federation project then underway, Tim came to inspect the progress first hand, with the multi-gauge track work aspects.

Over the following 20 years Tim then made numerous visits to the National Railway Museum – some being brief and others being for events or special occasions.

He made three visits to the railway museum, and elsewhere, during the latter part of 2003 and early 2004, all associated with the completion and opening of ‘his’ Alice Springs to Darwin railway – a very strong passion of his from the outset.

Another occasion was the launch of his book “Transcontinental Train Odyssey” by SA Premier Mike Rann, in August 2004. The event was attended by a big crowd, including many dignitaries who all admired Tim’s achievements, and the museum.

Another special occasion occurred in September 2006, when he wanted to be part of a new Overland train exhibition and to celebrate diesel locomotive No.900 Lady Norrie’s 55th birthday display in September 2006.

During 2011, two events took place, when again Tim was eager to be part of. In August of that year, he co-ordinated another of his book launches at the railway museum - “Trains Unlimited”. Then just a couple of months later he was back to help celebrate the 10th anniversary of the National Railway Museum.



1. Susan Close MP Port Adelaide was joined with Tim, as part of the official opening of the Arnold Lockyer Exhibition, and to Award railway museum volunteer Mick Searle with Life Membership to NRM – in August 2018. BOB SAMPSON

2. August 2004, Mike Rann Premier of SA and Tim exchange opinions at the railway museum during the launch of Tim’s book *Transcontinental Train Odyssey*. BOB SAMPSON

3. NRM Executive Officer Bob Sampson and Tim swap stories at NRM during the *Trains Unlimited* book launch in August 2011. SHYLIE EDWARDS

4. Two former stalwarts of the National Railway Museum who are fondly remembered by all who had dealings with them and to whom we owe a gratitude for much that has been achieved at the Museum. Barry Marshall was Museum chairman from 2004 to 2013. This pic was at Pt Augusta for the 2012 centenary celebrations of the turning of the first sod of the Trans-Australian Railway. BOB SAMPSON

Major celebrations and events occurred throughout 2013, to acknowledge the 50th anniversary, of the railway museum commencing activities at Mile End.

In November of that year, a massive dinner function was convened at the Marion Club Sturt, in the presence of the Governor of South Australia, His Excellency, Sir Eric Neal, to recognise and celebrate those 50 years. Some rail industry and rail heritage representatives attended along with renown railway historian Reece Jennings and a special guest appearance by Ron Fitch, formerly the last true SAR Commissioner, who opened the Mile End Railway Museum in 1970, and who was 103 years old. Tim thoroughly enjoyed the night, and as expected made many speeches – captivating the 160 guests in the audience.

It came as no surprise that when offered, Tim was glowing with acceptance to be the first Patron for the National Railway Museum, in November 2014.

Two years later Tim was visiting again, back as Patron to the Australasian Railway Association's TrackSAFE Foundation, as a guest speaker at its major annual dinner function – held at the museum in November 2016.

Keeping in close contact with Tim, as I did for almost the whole of his 20 years of visits, both informal and official, I did become aware of his approaching health impediments. During a couple of catch ups, as a prelude to the railway museum's and Australian Rail Track Corporation's involvement with the centenary of the opening of the Trans-Australian Railway at Ooldea, it was then I learnt he may not make the event out on the desert, nor to the major celebratory event at the National Railway Museum, just a few days before the 17 October 2017 desert activities.

However he returned again in August 2018, for the opening of the wonderful Arnold Lockyer Exhibition at the railway museum, at which Susan Close MP Port Adelaide officiated. At that event Susan 'whispered' to me that day, "I am so looking forward to this, as I have never met him." Tim was late, but no one cared.

His last visit, prior to his passing in August 2019, was in April of that year, to be part of the centenary celebration for narrow gauge steam locomotive Peronne – built in Scotland in 1919. Spending time with him that day, I realised his time was fast approaching, and he was so compassionate about what the museum had achieved.

It was a huge surprise that a few months after his passing, the National Railway Museum received advice that Tim had bequeathed a sum of money to the railway museum – to be spent wisely on some of "his passions" – enhancing exhibitions and multi-gauge tracks.

Tim Fischer's advice, support and influence on the railway museum will never be forgotten.

Bob Sampson
Executive Officer
National Railway Museum

31 May 2023



1. During a pre-Federation Project launch in September 2000, a group enjoyed chatting with Tim (l-r); NRM Board Member John Radcliffe, Tim, NRM Life Member Ron Fluck, Federation Project Manager Steve Yorke and Jobs Statewide HR Manager Jaycene Wiseman. Ron Fluck deserves special acknowledgement for sticking to the task from the time when the Museum was a paddock at Mile End. Those early years were not easy. RICHARD CROOKALL

2. Tim is inspecting the recently restored SAR Guards Van at the railway museum, with NRM's Andrew Peters and David Burnett answering questions, prior to attending the TrackSAFE Foundation annual dinner. SONYA BURNETT

3. Tim discusses the Catch Point magazine with former SAR Commissioner Ron Fitch at the 50th anniversary dinner in November 2013. MAIKHA LY

4. Tim enjoyed being a guest speaker at the NRM 50th anniversary dinner in November 2013. MAIKHA LY