

Museum reviews

The Southern Museum

The Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History, 2829 Cherokee Street, Kennesaw GA 30144, USA. Phone +1 770 427 2117, fax +1 770 421 8485, Web site www.southernmuseum.org

On 12 April 1862 Major James J. Andrews and twenty-one Union Army soldiers stole a Western & Atlantic Railroad passenger train, powered by the *General*, from Kennesaw (then known as Big Shanty), Georgia, a few dozen miles north of Atlanta. The train's stranded and understandably annoyed conductor, William Fuller, used a series of locomotives, including the *Texas*, to chase the raiders, who were eventually captured by Confederate soldiers. Millions of people are familiar with this otherwise obscure episode of Civil War history, thanks in large part to the 1956 Walt Disney film *The Great Locomotive Chase*. Until recently that locomotive was the prin-

cipal artefact in a small museum that was of interest primarily to diehard rail fans and Civil War enthusiasts. In March of 2003, however, this facility was reborn as the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History, following a massive expansion that created an outstanding interpretation of transport and industrialisation in the southern United States.

The museum's name seems an unlikely juxtaposition of largely unrelated topics, yet that name aptly reflects both the history of the museum and the history of the South itself. The *General* itself helps to link the two themes together. In 1972, following a lengthy court battle, the state of Georgia won possession of the locomotive from Tennessee and located it in a former cotton gin a few yards from the site where the 1862 chase began. The locomotive, and a few display cases of related memorabilia, essentially comprised the entire museum.

Just to the south of Kennesaw the town



The new exterior of the Southern Museum, designed to resemble the erecting shop of the now-demolished Glover Locomotive Works



At the entrance to the Glover section of the museum, a 'pattern vault' contains hundreds of original wood models, designs later translated into iron and steel

of Marietta, Georgia, was home to the Glover Machine Works. Aside from the Richmond [Virginia] Locomotive Works, Glover was the only significant steam locomotive builder in the American south. Established by James Bolan Glover II in 1888, Glover manufactured about 200 small industrial locomotives between 1902 and 1930. In common with such firms as Porter & Davenport in the United States, Koppel in Germany, and Decauville in France, Glover sent its products to quarries, plantations, and timberlands in many countries. Like its larger cousins, Baldwin and American Locomotive, Glover employed the techniques of small-batch custom manufacturing. In co-operation with its customers, Glover developed its own locomotive designs, built many key components and acquired others from outside contractors, employed standardisation wherever possible, arranged financing, and smoothed out the vagaries of the locomotive market by producing a wide variety of custom mechanical and foundry work. Glover gradually shifted production to a plant in Cordele, Georgia, leaving intact at its Marietta site a complete manufacturing facility that included business records,

engineering drawings, photographs, foundry equipment, machine tools, and two partially completed steam locomotives. In 1995 the Glover Machine Works was slated for demolition. Local historians worked with the Glover family to preserve as much of the company's history as possible. Working literally in the path of the bulldozer, rescuers frantically removed what material they could from one end of the facility as the other end was being demolished. The artefacts remained in temporary warehouse storage, without a permanent home.

Although Marietta city officials were not interested in a Glover museum, their counterparts in Kennesaw believed that they could create a museum with broader appeal by combining the Glover material with the facilities that housed the *General*. Lacking a full appreciation of the scope of the project, museum supporters initially envisioned a museum with a somewhat arbitrary cost of \$1 million. An \$800,000 federal Transportation Enhancement Act grant and \$200,000 in matching local funds quickly satisfied that amount. The Kennesaw Museum Foundation, established in 1998, elected to expand the museum's design to include additional



The main exhibit hall contains two restored Glover steam locomotives, in varied stages of assembly

exhibition and office space, as well as climate-controlled archival storage. The cost likewise expanded, to \$6 million. Without disturbing the *General* and its related exhibits, architects patterned new buildings in the style of the old Glover factory. In the process, they increased the museum's space ten times over. The rebuilt museum, for all intents and purposes a completely new facility, opened to the public at the end of March 2003.

The exterior and the interior spaces of the museum are visually stunning. After passing through the museum's atrium, with its railroad station-inspired ticket window, visitors enter the galleries depicting 'Railroads: Lifelines of the Civil War'. These contain the usual assortment of guns and uniforms, well displayed and interpreted. The real focus of the area, however, is the impact of railroads on the logistics of modern warfare. Photographs, artefacts, and text panels (including quotations from Civil War participants) show how railroads revolutionised warfare and explain the challenges associated with keeping trains moving in battlefield conditions.

One of the great strengths of the museum is its effortless segue from

the Civil War to the locomotive industry. Displays show how the South, economically devastated by the war and the destruction of the plantation economy, turned to new forms of economic endeavour. These included mining and logging, both of which required small industrial locomotives. At the same time, the New South movement encompassed new small-scale workshops and factories, including Glover. Thus the Civil War displays merge into the second set of galleries, 'Glover Machine Works: Casting a New South'.

After viewing a brief history of the Glover family and the early years of the company that bore their name, visitors walk past a replica of the Glover pattern vault. As Jack Brown aptly described in his history of the Baldwin Locomotive Works, pattern vaults constituted the collective technological memory of a locomotive producer and served as the basis for standardised manufacturing techniques. The Glover collection includes a cornucopia of wooden patterns, objects that rarely survived the demise of their original owner. While a brief text panel describes the role that patterns played in the manufacturing process, additional information on their



A mannequin polishes a small locomotive destined for a coal producer – typical of the size and application of Glover products

technological significance would be welcome. At the next stop on the tour route, video monitors display metal casting, a process that would obviously be difficult to replicate in a museum setting.

The highlight of the museum is a large gallery that is a scaled-down reproduction of the Glover erecting shop. Immaculately restored belt-driven machine tools line the walls on both sides of the room; these not only illustrate steps in the manufacturing process but also, commendably, carry signage that shows the evolution of the machine-tool industry. One end of the room recreates the Glover offices and, through drawings and blueprints, illustrates the locomotive design process. The centre of the room shows the two rescued, and beautifully restored, Glover locomotives in varying stages of assembly. A wall of photographs illustrates the variety of Glover locomotives, while telephone handsets enable visitors to hear stories about the factory's products. As visitors leave this gallery they pass a 1 : 48 scale model of Glover's Marietta factory and a map-and-flag display showing the numerous states and foreign countries that received Glover locomotives.

Visitors next enter a theatre that screens a short film depicting the theft of the *General* in 1862. A montage that skilfully blends short clips from the 1956 Disney film with more recent scenes featuring actors and museum workers, the film prepares visitors for the next set of exhibits. Leaving the theatre, visitors enter 'The Great Locomotive Chase', through a gallery containing portraits and life histories of the Andrews raiders, a display case containing a Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to one of their number, and a model of the railroad facilities at Big Shanty. Photographs show the modern appearance of key locations along the chase route, and, high on a wall, large-scale models of the *General* and the *Texas* endlessly chase each other back and forth.

After travelling through a 'Time Tunnel' that is based on the actual railroad tunnel along the line between Atlanta and Chattanooga, visitors emerge face to face with the *General*. Hidden speakers emit appropriate steam locomotive sounds, while puffs of simulated steam vent from the cylinders. The *General*'s sheer size makes it the most impressive single artefact in the museum, but its



The *General*, built in 1855 in Patterson, New Jersey by Rogers Locomotive Works for the Western & Atlantic R.R., occupies the small area of the original museum

interpretation falls short of the rest of the museum – in itself an indication of the enormity of the improvements ushered in by the expansion programme. The *General* is resplendent in the black and red paint so familiar from the Disney film, yet the locomotive actually wore an orange and green livery at the time of the Civil War. Numerous rebuildings since the 1860s have likewise considerably altered the locomotive. Well aware of the contradiction between history as it was and history as we perceive it, museum officials are soliciting funds to restore the locomotive to a more authentic appearance. Display cases on either side of the *General* contain a few artefacts, hold-overs from the old museum, depicting the *General* in literary, musical, model and toy form. Appropriately enough, visitors then exit the museum by way of the ubiquitous gift shop.

The Southern Museum includes climate-controlled facilities that house the text and photographic records of the Glover Machine Works. These largely unused sources offer a wealth of information on the locomotive industry, southern industrialisation, and flexible-manufacturing methods, and should be

of considerable interest to historians. The museum also houses a collection of Civil War records, as well as the records of the Wood Gummer & Filer company, a manufacturer of cotton gin equipment. Of particular interest to railroad historians, the museum has received and is processing the largest extant collection of the records of the Southern Railway. As the museum obtains additional corporate records and makes them available to the public it will likely become an important regional centre for the study of business, technology, and transport.

The museum includes a temporary exhibit gallery to host exhibitions of broad general interest to the community. Since the Atlanta metropolitan area is now roughly the size of the state of Connecticut, museums in the suburbs offer an attractive alternative to a long trip downtown. The Southern Museum is an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and thus has access to the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) programme. The museum is developing plans for an educational centre that will feature a locomotive cab simulator, safety displays, and classroom facilities that will allow students as young

as kindergarten age to learn about railroad technology and operations. At present there are very few 'hands-on' displays in the museum – mainly a couple of areas where children can make crayon rubbings of small artefact replicas. This 'low-tech' approach is actually quite refreshing, since the exhibits are both inherently interesting and educational, and the subject matter does not lend itself to the extensive use of computer terminals and interactive displays. Only open for six months, the reinvigorated museum has dramatically increased visitor counts and has garnered numerous regional and national awards. Visitation has thus far exceeded initial projections of 60,000 per year, and more than half of these visits have come from local residents.

The Southern Museum has done a superb job of selecting from the 50,000 objects in its collection to illustrate the ways in which railroad transport and

manufacturing transformed the military and economic fortunes of the South. And as the museum's director is quick to point out, this is not solely a museum of railroad or even transport history. Given the vagaries of public funding and visitor tastes, it would be difficult to maintain, much less create, a top-notch museum with so narrow a focus. Yet the Southern Museum does far more than adopt the 'big tent' approach by appealing to every conceivable demographic. Instead, it ably conveys a subtle message – that railroad technology was inextricably interwoven with larger, pivotal events in the history of the American South. It is well worth a visit.

My thanks to the Southern Museum's director, Jeff Drobney, and his staff for their assistance with this review.

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A very local national museum

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The world of boats and the 'boating fraternity' can appear closed to the average city dweller – a world apart, with arcane language and deep-seated myths that create a powerful bond among those inside but exclude those outside. The eighteen-month-old National Maritime Museum Cornwall (NMMC), on the harbour side in Falmouth, has confronted this problem head-on. It celebrates boats for those who know them, but makes a serious attempt to hook the curious 'land-lubber'. In his recent article in this journal Colin Divall suggested that one way in which a transport museum can contribute to the evolution of transport historiography is to 'introduce transport history from the perspective of the consumer or user'. The NMMC does precisely that – it introduces the history of boats and boating from the perspective of the sailor and the lover of boats. However, in Falmouth there is a sense in which locals and tourists



The replica of the *Endeavour*

alike are consumers of boats and the sea, and the history of work with boats and the science of the sea are presented confidently in the knowledge of the inclusiveness that the museum's location bestows.

The new museum has grown out of the Cornwall Maritime Museum that existed



National Maritime Museum Cornwall

quietly in a Falmouth back street for twenty years. Its new name is confusing; few visitors that I met (and few of the local press reviewers) realised that it is not a provincial branch of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. The Heritage Lottery grant that enabled the development did originate in a joint bid by the two museums, but the only formal connection between them is the relocation of the national small-boat collection from storage in London to display in Falmouth. Given that a major part of the new museum's mission is to 'promote an understanding of the maritime heritage of Cornwall' (*Reflections: from Concept to Launch*, National Maritime Museum, Cornwall, p. 6), and given its spectacular role as a local landmark, it seems regrettable that it has chosen to hide that local identity as a major provincial museum behind the supposedly grander name.

First and foremost, the museum is a stunning space, inside and out. Its location is hard to beat, 'sitting on shore, but with a toe in the sea', as the museum's publicity likes to say. It sits on the waterfront of a deep estuary, known as the

Carrick Roads, next door to a thriving dockyard, inside a modern marina and in the port town that was a centre of the communication system of the British Empire through the Falmouth packet service. Only a few years ago the town might have been written off as a backwater but that is no longer the case. It is perhaps unusual for a museum to occupy quite such a prominent role in a town's cultural consciousness, but the NMMC stands as the visible evidence of Falmouth's twenty-first-century renaissance and the local pride that it induces is tangible.

The building itself is a beautiful piece of modern architecture, with a sloping roof and a tower that rises from the water. The main structure is clad in green oak and the Museum Square in front of it is paved in the renowned local material, granite (although ironically the stone actually used comes from China). With direct access to the waterside, a significant advantage is that boats can be displayed in their natural environment. In the spring of 2003 this included a visit from the replica of the *Endeavour* during its tour round Britain. In 2004, it is

hoped, the museum's unique position can be used to develop rides on historic boats. One can already 'park and float' to the museum, an essential facility, as the need for anything more than rudimentary car parking does not seem to have been considered (although there is a stop on the Truro to Falmouth branch railway two minutes' walk away).

The positioning and design of this museum have a critical organic relationship to its contents. One of the galleries displays the quotation of J. Rowe that 'the sea has played a greater part in the life of the Cornish people than the land on which they dwelt'. Some of the galleries seek to portray that Cornish reality; others seek to educate about boats and the sea in general, while others are more traditionally informative about the boats as objects and the achievements represented by them. A maritime museum has obvious problems of display that are shared with other transport museums and most particularly with a railway museum: the unwieldy size of objects as well as the search for a meaningful presentation of something whose primary function is not to be static. The Falmouth museum has approached solutions to this problem using an unusually wide variety of methods, but it also, sensibly, states that it is not setting out to tell 'the story of inanimate objects – it is relating the tales of the lives and times of those who made and used them' (*Reflections*, p. 7). In this aim it largely succeeds.

Inside, the building has a main display space that soars 12 m high, the exploration of which is facilitated by the remarkable sloping walkways that flow through the museum, taking the visitor easily through the different displays and allowing excellent access to all. The primary use made of this area is a rotation of themed displays of boats from the national small-boat collection. Vessels are hung in the space at different levels, giving visitors a view from all angles (which explains a lot about rudders and keels to those who did not know); visitors may also use the interactive panels that give more technical details. This can be a rather dry display but the non-specialist can still be drawn in – for

example, by the 'The Will to Win' – a collection of boats used in racing, showing their development over time and in different cultures. Pride of place is given to Ben Ainslie's boat and to the rowing eight boat, both of which won gold medals in the 2000 Olympics.

Most visits start in the 'Set Sail' gallery, where the extraordinary use of high-tech display is at its most vivid and its most immediately engaging. Simultaneous videos played on a wall of screens recount stories of boats in a variety of settings: I saw canoeing down Everest, dory fishing off Newfoundland, Inuit sealskin kayaks, family sailing in the old 'Mirror' yachts. The films are accompanied by narratives, appropriate sounds and dramatic special effects, and the resultant visual and aural cacophony is exciting. The museum more than adequately demonstrates that it has sought to 'understand', in Divall's words, 'what visitors' interests might be, and which techniques of display are likely to engage their attention', bearing in mind that the audience ranges from the serious sailor to the holidaymaker. There are many things to delight children and for them to manipulate and play with; there is even a small display of marine paintings with interactive explanations, all at child height.

To what extent, then, does the museum help the public to understand the past? That is only one of its goals, and it is achieved, to some extent, through information on the way boats have evolved, although this did not emerge as a strong theme. More impressively, in this context, the wandering historian and curious member of the public will be drawn towards the gallery on pilchards. Nothing like as prosaic as it sounds, through a traditional display using static display cases and dioramas the history of pilchard fishing and processing is brought to life, demonstrating the surprising degree to which the industry was fundamental to Cornwall's economy and way of life.

Some opportunities to connect with the past, however, are missed. The Falmouth Packet Service is central to the town's history and sense of itself (the local newspaper is still called *The Falmouth Packet*)

and there are a number of references to it around the museum, including an explanation of how it worked and why it made Falmouth a town worthy of the residence of over twenty foreign consuls in the mid-nineteenth century. But there is a bigger story which is not told: of empire, colonialism and its decline, and of how each phase has affected not only Falmouth's economy but also that of the nation. Revolutions in communications – as well as the end of empire – may have ended the packet service, but the dockyard next door has been similarly affected by the postcolonial process of globalisation. Telescopes can be trained on it from the museum's tower but it is otherwise given little emphasis. Like shipbuilding all round the country, the dockyard has gone through severe decline and its renaissance is relatively recent. The museum thus loses the chance to place Falmouth and its economy in the context of globalisation, a historic change that is central to the life and the industrial economy of this seafaring nation which many visitors would perceive as relevant to their own lives.

But the NMMC is not purely a museum of transport history. While it does 'freeze and preserve things', in Jack Simmons's phrase, it has another goal: to educate the public about the sea and navigation, and it has devised innovative ways of doing this, many of which provide an approach which is fun for both adults and children. Detailed explanations are given about how sailors have navigated through the years and models are available for experimentation. There is even a large tank over which winds blow and on which radio-controlled yachts float. For a small charge one can attempt to sail a yacht up and down the tank and around various obstacles. This is an extremely popular attraction and a revelation for those of us who have never ducked a boom. The mechanics of the world that lie behind the navigational tricks are also explored, with some excellent technical modelling, including, for example, a globe shrouded in swirling mists which, when spun, shows how winds build up and move.

The building's tower is used to great effect for this purpose. The basement of

the tower – the museum's 'toe in the sea' – is below water level but in the tidal zone; it has a glass wall on the sea side that 'displays' the effect of the ebb and flow of the tide, revealing the aquatic life that takes advantage of the different tide levels. With the pressure of the tide on the glass behind you, the explanation boards of how and why there are tides work surprisingly well. At the top of the tower is a round lookout room with spectacular views over the docks, the harbour and back across the town. Telescopes and binoculars are provided, and the connection between the museum, the sea, the town and the general locality becomes dynamic. Here, the historical development of Falmouth can be comprehended by comparing a series of old maps with what can be seen through the windows. It is this organic relationship of the museum to its location that seems to work most powerfully. The immediacy of the sea also forces the connection between the history displayed and the navigational technologies explained, while the juxtaposition of present-day and historical achievements inevitably raises questions. How did people manage without modern navigational aids? Are modern boats really safer or more efficient than the old ones? Why can the vastness of the sea no longer provide the economic support to people round the world that it once did? The search for answers to these questions – whether in this museum or elsewhere – represents a measure of the museum's success.

Is the 'learning' that results from this highly structured museum experience qualitatively greater than that offered by one of the 'mass exhibition' museums that, according to Divall and Scott, 'gather together a jumbled selection of objects, with minimal labelling of individual items and no attempt at all at a more general thematic structure'? A delightful example of the latter is the Salcombe Maritime and Local History Museum in Devon. This museum is a kaleidoscope of sextants, anchors, photos, newspaper reports, letters, model ships, sails, all muddled in together, telling stories of days at sea, wrecks, smuggling, heroism and fish. It is hugely enjoyable and

engrossing and the shock of discovery among the *mêlée* is likely to elicit cries of 'My dad had one of those!' The Fal-mouth museum, on the other hand, leads the visitor into its own ordered world where the challenge is to understand. Ultimately it may suggest to visitors *why* their dad had one of those, and perhaps lead them towards comprehending why that object is now a museum piece.

The learning experience at the NMMC is enhanced by the presence of the Bartlett Library in a lovely light space accessed through the museum and containing one of the foremost collections of maritime books in the country. For researchers this is an invaluable set of source materials, containing Lloyd's (and other) registers back to the mid-eighteenth century, 10,000 books on marine, ship and company history as well as local archives. Its presence underlines the seriousness of the museum's educational mission.

This is an ambitious museum, an ambition revealed in its architecture, its varied goals, the innovation in its display techniques and its future plans. As well as an

aesthetic experience, it offers a celebration of its subject for those in the know, and, at its best, an understanding of its subject for those who are merely curious. It is a supremely local museum, a statement that seeks to detract nothing from its national collection or from the stage that it seeks to occupy. Its locality is its great strength and it creates a powerful foundation for the national and even international stories and histories, many of which are here, but some of which remain to be told. It is early days as yet, but judging from what it has already achieved, and from the enormous pleasure that it gives visitors (the first-floor coffee shop is a good place to eavesdrop for opinions; be prepared to fight for one of the tables by the windows overlooking the harbour), it promises, in its engagement with all aspects of its surroundings, emphasising the links with its collections, to be an example for transport museums of the future

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