

# RAMPIAN TRANSPORT MUSEUM

Are industrial skills at risk in the heritage sector?



Ross McKirdy



# About us...

Grampian Transport Museum is a self-funding independent industrial museum located in the historic village of Alford, 45 minutes from Aberdeen. We are a living museum, where many of the exhibits are climb on, hands on and even ride on!

We cover all land transport and have an extensive collection of vehicles on 2, 3, 4 and more wheels, and associated ephemera. We also have an outdoor track, and on-site Collection Centre.

# About me...

I have run the museum for 3 years now, coming from an operational and commercial environment previously – but with a very strong background in heritage. I am the Chair of STICK (Scottish Transport and Industrial Collections Knowledge Network), a Pathway member of ICON, MA Museum Studies graduate and now working on an MEng Engineering degree.

I also sit on the board of Bon Accord Heritage as a trustee, in a heritage regeneration project in Aberdeen City Centre.



# Where are we?

This is very relevant to the conversation about heritage skills.

We have a low population density - in Scotland this is 70 residents per square kilometre as opposed to England and Wales where this it is 395 residents per square kilometre. We are rurally located – Aberdeenshire is 41.8!

Within about two hours drive of us, we have no less than:

- 5 heritage railway organisations
- 3 transport museums
- 2 major classic car restoration businesses
- 1 heritage bus fleet preservation organisation

We also have numerous private collections of heritage vehicles, steam engines and commercials in the area too.









# Key Points

- No matter how big or small an attraction you are, you can make a difference.
- You don't need to be the experts!

# What is industrial heritage?

We have a broad range of visitor attractions represented in ASVA and beyond, and not all from a heritage background!

The Dublin Principles suggest:

“The industrial heritage consists of sites, structures, complexes, areas and landscapes as well as the related machinery, objects or documents that provide evidence of past or ongoing industrial processes of production, the extraction of raw materials, their transformation into goods, and the related energy and transport infrastructures.”

(International Council on Monuments and Sites and The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage, 2012)





# Importance of heritage skills

We launched a survey to capture the thoughts of our audiences – capturing some ‘priority’ heritage skills they might want to learn.

1. Using a lathe, milling etc
2. Welding
3. Metal forming and bodywork
4. Heritage painting
5. Classic vehicle mechanics/heritage engineering

**To my surprise, steam skills ranked lowest!**

Discussion about heritage skills, and the risk of skill loss has been ongoing for some time – as early as 2008 by English Heritage.

Concerns have been raised by the IMechE, English Heritage and Science Museum, with funded projects being undertaken by Beamish Museum and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.



# Why are heritage skills at risk?

I'd love to hear from you - why do you think this is?

In my very humble opinion, this comes down to a combination of factors, which has created a 'perfect storm'.

- Generational shift in the skilled engineering workforce  
*Shift from manual tools, tacit knowledge being lost*
- Reliance on volunteers in the sector
- Financial constraints within organisations and the competitive funding landscape  
*Less training, less upskilling, prioritising operational delivery*







# My research

As part of my MA, I wrote about heritage skills.

I did an extensive literature review and deep-dive into other operations to understand what they were doing, and how they did it.

I also did a survey, of heritage professionals, which largely confirms what we already know:

- All but 1 participant agreed that heritage skills are at risk
- All but 1 participant felt this puts our collections at risk
- All but 2 organisations are attempting to combat it
- The overarching suggestions from participants are - invest in training opportunities, bring the right people together to pass skills on, develop courses/internships
- Concerns raised were around finance, employment opportunities and organisational capacity







# What are we doing and why?

Off the back of our audience survey, we launched our 'Heritage Skills Workshops', now the Heritage Skills Programme.

As an educational charity first and foremost, the HSP aligns with our charitable purpose. It has been shown it can be commercially sustainable. And if not us... then who?

A pilot session on Classic Car Maintenance was delivered, with 20 participants and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

This was followed up by...

- Metalforming
- Basic Vehicle Maintenance
- Classic Car Electrics
- Woodwork for Heritage Vehicles
- Introduction to Steam
- Introduction to Paper and Photograph Conservation







# What are we doing?

We are testing different ways to deliver the sessions:

- Different days/times
- Different lengths of course
- Variations of how hands-on/theoretical
- Different price points

We have plans to deliver...

- Introduction to Welding
- Introduction to Vehicle Conservation
- Vehicle Upholstery
- Heritage Painting
- Signwriting



# Heritage Engineering

**Not the English Apprenticeship – unfortunately, we have no equivalent in Scotland!**

Myself and a conservator have written an outline course, focussing on heritage engineering – with particular focus on engines and engineered objects, how they are manufactured, hand tools, traditional techniques and much more.

The idea being that by completing the course, we could provide a that would give some of the skills needed to be successful in a heritage engineering role.

Ideally it would tie into the ICON Accreditation Standards to allow it to be used as evidence to become an ACR.

Geography, population density, finance, legacy and continuity are all concerns for making it a success.









# Powering our People

Powering our People is a project supported by multiple funders that sought to develop the industrial conservation skills of member museums in Industrial Museums Scotland (IMS).

There were multiple different strands:

- Conservation upskilling
- Workplace exchanges
- ICON internship and 'on call' conservation advice
- Conservation of key museum objects across IMS
- Public engagement sessions
- Skills Sharing Conference

Care of Large Objects, Care of Engines, Care of Paper, Asbestos Awareness sessions were run. Soon we will be running a Care of Fabric session with some remaining funding.





# Powering our People

The overarching goal of the project was to give our museum teams confidence to conserve our collections, to do remedial (and simple!) repairs where required and know when to call upon the services of an ACR.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive – Rosie, pictured, has benefitted significantly from the project as a newly appointed Assistant Curator with a vast industrial collection.

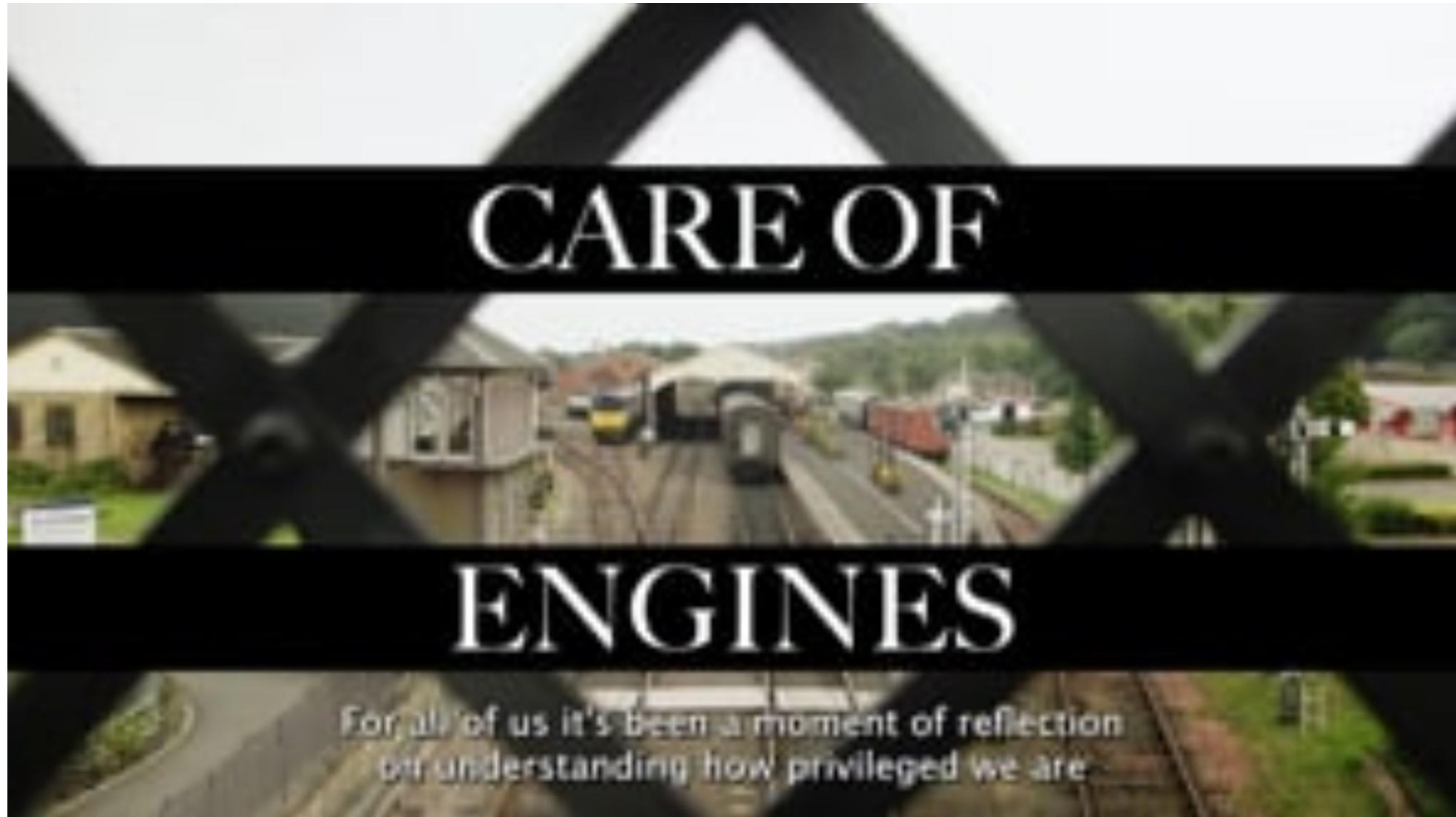
What we have discovered from this project, crucially, is that sharing our resources and expertise amongst the industrial museums network has been an overwhelming success.

Bringing together subject matter experts, from the different museums, to educate others **works** but to be successful, requires funding and flexibility in how this is spent to meet the needs of the museums. But... where is the legacy?







A few videos about Powering our People...





A photograph of an industrial facility, possibly a power plant or refinery, viewed through a window with a grid pattern. The scene is hazy, suggesting a bright day or fog. The facility includes large storage tanks and complex piping. A red banner with white text is overlaid on the image.

Powering Our People

The logo for 'go industrial' features a stylized black triangle above the text 'go industrial' in a bold, sans-serif font.

go industrial



# Powering our People

There are a few options we are discussing within the team, as well as those already agreed:

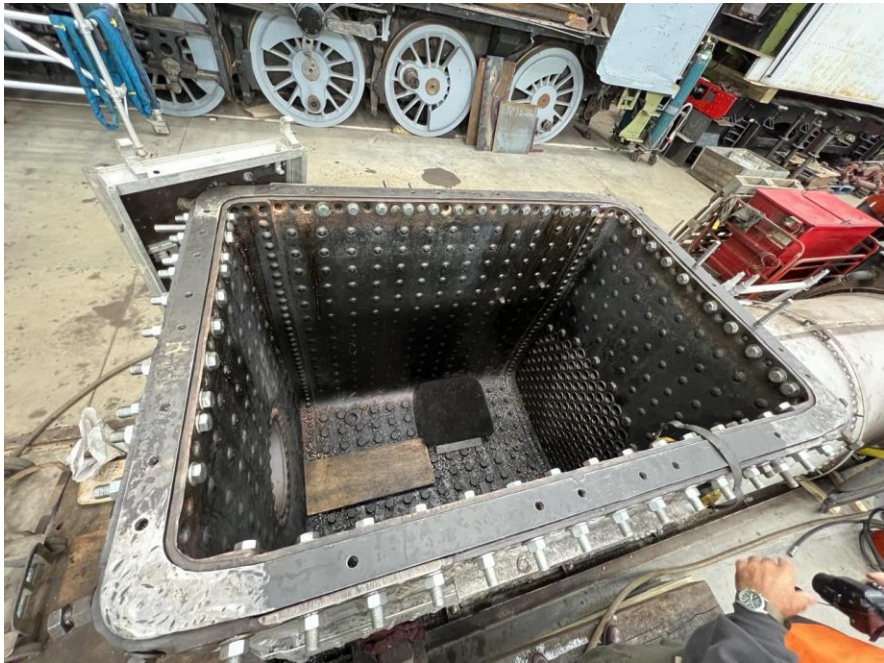
- Production of Hazards Manuals for industrial collections (this is already done and will shortly be available to the sector)
- Basic conservation videos, geared towards our industrial collections (these will also be available to the sector)
- Course 'notes' for all the upskilling sessions, that are available to all IMS museums for teaching.

I am advocating for a digital skills platform where we can record 'one best way' style processes on how to do tasks, including videos, to help upskill people in the future.

The common theme throughout my research is that many of the funded projects focus on the delivery of the project – but lack a legacy element. Powering our People, we hope, will have a legacy.











# What is the solution?

I don't know, but I'm glad there are others also asking this question!

- It's clear that there's efforts across the UK to preserve heritage skills, but they are either hyper-local or within a set geography. This needs to change but will require buy-in from multiple stakeholders and funders.
- The build of an industrial skills 'risk register', that can be shared within the sector to then support efforts to preserve these skills.
- Embracing advances in technology – recording skills, virtual reality – and capturing this information now before those who practice endangered skills are no longer with us. Examples exist of this - Canmore (HES).



Thank you!