

Press Release

Lithgow Museum Acquires Australia's Only Standard Gauge Shay Locomotive

The Eskbank Locomotive Depot & Museum (ELD & M) is a not for profit community base organisation and registered with ASIC as a tax deductible Company. The organisation is charged with establishing a railway museum together with a wagon maintenance facility on the site of the original Eskbank Locomotive Depot in the eastern end of the Eskbank Goods yard. Eventually this facility will become home to the collection of heritage locomotives and rolling stock that currently reside at the Lithgow State Mine.

Apart from developing the plans for a new museum and tourist attraction for Lithgow the ELD & M has spent the last four and a half years searching the United States for a Lima 3 Truck Shay. This unique steam locomotive will become the centre piece of a tribute to the Commonwealth Oil Corporation Limited. This British based company was responsible for establishing the massive oil shale works at Newnes together with the Wolgan Valley railway at the turn of the last century.

The Commonwealth Oil Corporation built the 53 kilometre railway in a record 14 months which included two tunnels through some of the most inaccessible country in the district. It also imported four Lima shay locomotives from the United States to operate the line because of its steep grades and tight radius curves. Unfortunately the whole operation had a chequered career and lasted about 30 years with most of the plant and equipment either being sold or relocated to other locations by 1934. The shay locomotives were left to the elements and sat in the Wolgan valley deteriorating for another 20 years before they were finally cut up in 1955.

During the 80 or so years that Lima was building shay locomotives for the world market they constructed 2768 locomotives in various models and gauges. Today there are only 116 known surviving examples of which approximately 25 are operational. After many months of negotiating and at times what seemed to be an impossible task, the Eskbank Locomotive Depot & Museum were able to finalise a deal and acquire a 70 Ton 3 Truck Shay from California.

The recently purchased locomotive was built in 1910 by the Lima Locomotive & Machine Company of Ohio (Builders No. 2366) for the Raleigh Lumber Company of West Virginia, where it was allocated engine number 35. It ended its working life in 1965 hauling coal for the Brimstone & New River RR after which it spent some time in a Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee and then wound up in private hands in California.

Michael Wilson, Chairman of the ELD & M said today that the acquisition of a standard gauge shay was not only something very special for Lithgow but for Australia. More importantly we are extremely fortunate to have secured such a locomotive considering how few of them there are in the world today. Gibson, Battle & Co, the Lima Agents in Australia at the time imported 20 shay locomotives in various gauges for logging and mining applications. Of those locomotives four of them were standard gauge and they went to work on the Wolgan Valley Railway. The other interesting aspect about the locomotive we have purchased is that #2366 is almost a carbon copy of two of the 70 Ton Shays (COC No.2 and 3) that operated on the Wolgan line.

In coming weeks the locomotive will be moved from its current location, disassembled, cleaned and packed into containers ready for the voyage to Australia. Once restored #2366 will be renumbered to follow on in the Commonwealth Oil Corporations roster of locomotives as No.5. The shay will be displayed at Eskbank and operate on the Lithgow State Mine branch.

In coming weeks a campaign will be launched to help us raise the necessary funding to provide for a ground up restoration of the locomotive. All donations over \$2.00 will be tax deductible. Details on how you can donate or assist us to bring this engineering icon back to life can be found on our website www.eskbanklocomotivedepotmuseum.com.au or by contacting Michael Wilson on 0427455580.

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