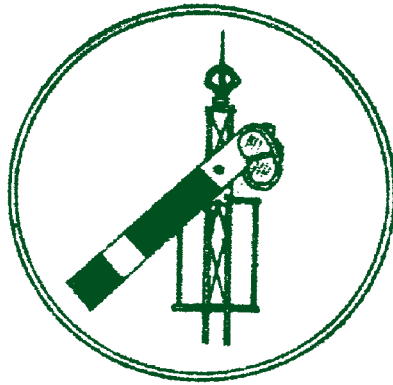


# **Steam in the Western Suburbs**



**FORTY YEARS OF THE  
WESTERN DISTRICTS LIVE STEAMERS Co-Op Ltd  
1968–2008**

# CONTENTS

FORWARD	Pg.
THE EARLY BEGINNINGS	Pg.
BADGERYS CREEK	Pg.
THE SEARCH FOR A SITE	Pg.
FAIRFIELD SHOWGROUND	Pg.
THE CLUB BEGINS TO GROW	Pg.
FURTHER EXPANSIONS	Pg.
DISASTER STRIKES	Pg.
REBUILDING COMMENCES	Pg.
NOW AND BEYOND	Pg.
PAST OFFICE BEARERS	Pg.
MEMBERSHIP 2008	Pg.
PHOTO GALLERY	Pg.

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*On the cover: A busy time at the former Bamboo Corner, David Xuereb waits for the signal to change as Wayne Davies passes by on the main line with Sam.*

*In the foreground Joe Simone's Little Lima stands in Deerbush yard.*

*Photo: The Author*

# FORWARD

For a club the size of Western Districts Live Steamers to celebrate 40 years is a quite an achievement. This has only been made possible by the thousands of hours volunteered by past and present members. Time has been spent working at the club grounds, in members' own workshops and living rooms, and chasing up tools, equipment and materials for various projects. For many years, the club had a Cinderella-type reputation amongst the live steam hobby; knee high grass in places and a track that disappeared into the grass certainly did not help matters. It has been due to those volunteers that we now enjoy facilities that are on a par with other clubs that share our hobby.

This book is an attempt to piece together the history of Western Districts Live Steamers and how it evolved into what it is today. The decision to document our history was not a hard one to make; with nearly all of the early pioneers now passed on, there was a chance that the early history may have disappeared forever.

The arson attack that occurred during the early hours of January 2nd, 2006 destroyed well over 95% of the records of the co-operative. This included recorded minutes of meetings, old photographs, letters and copies of other related items. This has made the task of researching all the more difficult. In this context the complete history of the club is not contained in these pages.

Very few original documents survived the fire and it is only due to the assistance of former founding member Alan Dickson and current member (and boiler inspector) Bill Kirkland that the very early history can be told. Thanks must also be given to the following members who have assisted. Brad Pocock for allowing me to browse through old copies of *Hot Oil* which was, and still is, the club journal, and to the following who have provided photographs for the book: Neil Matherson, Syd Button, Mark Carney, Steve Cilia, Jack Keogh, Sam Stowe, Tony Thackery and Graham Butler.

Literally growing up with WDLS since I was 12 months old (thanks Dad!), I have spent many, many hours on the club grounds both working and playing trains. I wanted to give something back to the club that has given me so much pleasure over the years. I hope you enjoy the result.

David Kirkland  
Honorary Secretary  
Western Districts Live Steamers Co-Op Ltd

# THE SEARCH FOR A SITE

With the news that the then Lands Department refused to allow any permanent track to be laid and any structures to be erected at the Badgerys Creek site, the search for a site once again began in earnest. Alex Russell wrote to a number of councils, including: Holroyd, Fairfield, Blacktown and Campbelltown. After a period of time had elapsed, positive replies were received from Fairfield and Campbelltown Councils. At a subsequent business meeting it was decided to pursue a location under the control of Fairfield Council, as it was felt it was a more central area. After discussions with the Fairfield Council Parks and Gardens Supervisor, a list of possible sites was drawn up.

This was eventually narrowed down to four locations. They were:

1. Carrawood Park, Prospect
2. Site adjacent to Fairfield Council's swimming pool
3. King Park in Avoca Road
4. Fairfield Showground

After investigation, the club rejected the Carrawood Park site due to the close proximity of Prospect Creek. A number of members had young children and safety concerns were raised. In addition to this, the site was under the control of a management committee and there was the very real possibility future expansion could be limited. The second site adjacent to the Council swimming pool was also rejected, due to fact that there was talk of extending the car park for the pool. Kings Park also became unavailable for reasons now lost in time. This only left Fairfield Showground as a suitable location.

On the 4th of July 1971, six Fairfield Council aldermen were invited to Lime Street, Cabramatta for a demonstration of what the club was about. After examining a number of locomotives under construction and having a number of rides behind Alex's *Maisie*, morning tea was served and one of the Aldermen, a Mr Turtle, suggested that the club apply for a location adjacent to the Fairfield Showground on a site called *Deer Bush*. This included a derelict hall, which would make an ideal clubhouse. The club in its submission even offered to restore the hall for the council! Subsequent events were to deny the club a chance to develop a track at this site as it was planned for a future council swimming pool! It is ironic that 40 years later the pool was never built and the hall was restored and is available for hire. Further meetings were held with council during the remainder of July 1971. Alderman Turtle then suggested a site adjacent to the council's nursery within the showground complex. Members had attended a number of council meetings with the result that during the council meeting held on the 28th of July 1971, permission was granted for Western Districts Live Steamers to make use of the site next to the council nursery. Shortly afterwards, the club secretary received a letter from the town clerk stating:

*"Further to previous correspondence, I have been directed to advise that Council has granted your organization permission to use the shed and the tree filled area near the nursery*

compound at Fairfield Showground on the same basis as other clubs using the Showground. I have been directed to request you to seek suitable insurance coverage in respect to public risk."

At the time, the August 1971 newsletter informed the members of the good news:

"Bill, Mike and Alex attended the last Council meeting held on Wednesday July 28th and are pleased to report that Council has allocated a nicely wooded portion of the Fairfield Showground Complex for our use. Our Secretary has since received an official confirmation of the decision."

Western Districts Live Steamers had finally found a home.



Left: One of the very few original documents to survive the January 2006 arson attack was this letter addressed to the then secretary Alex Russell, giving the club permission to use the current site to establish a Live Steam Club. Negotiations had commenced in October 1970.



Above: An early view of the original clubhouse taken in 1973. Bill Kirkland is talking to Sam Humphries, while Mike Donadio enters the building. The area behind the large tree is now occupied by the existing main line. The fence posts are the beginnings of the original fence to keep horses out of the area as work is soon to commence on the laying of a ground level track. Note the larger number of trees compared to today, while in the far distance Moonlight Avenue was only a dirt track. Photographer unknown (Bill Kirkland Collection)