



May 2025

HISTORY FESTIVAL REPORT



"TRACKS OF CHANGE: From Trains to Treadlies"

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Discover Mount Torrens

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INTRODUCTION

Every year, the Mount Torrens & Districts Community Association proudly takes part in the South Australian History Festival each May. This year, the theme was DECISIONS, and the exhibition was curated by the Discover Mount Torrens group.



Discover Mount Torrens

SUMMARY



Background

The idea for the exhibition began after a meeting with James Leigh from SteamRanger in May 2024 where interest in the region's rail history was discussed. Around the same time the Adelaide Hills Council announced the next stage of the Amy Gillett Bikeway – following the old railway line from Mount Torrens to Birdwood. This timely alignment of heritage and future development sparked the concept for *Tracks of Change: From Trains to Treadlies*.

Turning the Sod, November 8 2024

Exhibition Overview

The exhibition explored the history of the Mount Pleasant railway line and its transformation into the Amy Gillett Bikeway. Through artifacts, stories, and photos, it highlighted how transport has shaped Mount Torrens – connecting its past to its present.



Key Points

- **The Dream of Progress** – Visionaries imagined rail as a way to connect and grow regional communities.
- **The Golden Age of Rail** – Trains brought prosperity, linking Mount Torrens to broader trade and travel networks.
- **The Slow Decline** – Changing transport needs and rising costs led to reduced services and eventual closure.
- **Rediscovering the Tracks** – The disused railway was reimagined as a community asset for walking and cycling.
- **The Legacy Lives On** – The Amy Gillett Bikeway preserves both the route and the region's rail heritage.



Left to Right: Adrian Cheater Councillor AHC, Greg Mackie OAM, History Trust of South Australia, Leonie Feutrill, Discover Mount Torrens, Malcolm Herrmann Councillor AHC, Glen Donhardt, Discover Mount Torrens, Sarah Pollard, Discover Mount Torrens, Kerry Clark, Discover Mount Torrens, Mary and Denis Safe, Amy Gillett Foundation.

Event Schedule

The Tracks of Change: From Trains to Treadlies exhibition officially opened on May 2 with a gala event attended by community members and invited guests. During the launch, Mr Greg Mackie OAM, CEO of the History Trust of South Australia, officially launched the Discover Mount Torrens Heritage Walking Trail app.

The exhibition was open to the public every Saturday and Sunday throughout May from 11:00am to 3:00pm.

Impact

The exhibition attracted over 400 visitors during May, many of whom returned with friends and family, demonstrating strong community interest and engagement. It sparked conversations about local history, showcased valuable contributions from volunteers and partner organisations, and significantly raised the profile of Mount Torrens as a heritage destination. The launch of the walking app further extended the exhibition's reach, encouraging exploration beyond the Coach House and promoting ongoing interest in the town's rich past.



THE EXHIBITS

The exhibition was a collaborative project between Mount Torrens Christian School and Discover Mount Torrens. Featuring a detailed model railway and carefully selected artifacts, the display offered visitors an engaging, historically rich experience that highlighted the region's railway heritage.

Mount Torrens Christian School

A highlight of the exhibition was the working model railway created by students from Mount Torrens Christian School. Built during technology and art classes in 2024 and 2025, the model featured key elements of the old Mount Torrens railway, including a detailed replica of Townsend Street. The project brought together students from both last year's and this year's classes, offering a creative, hands-on way to engage with local history.





A standout feature was the student built working model railway, showcasing Townsend Street and key elements of the historic Mount Pleasant line.



School Visit

As part of their involvement, the school also visited the exhibition for a dedicated lesson on railway life, deepening students' understanding of the region's past. This meaningful engagement was made possible through the support and leadership of Headmaster Matthew Trinkle, whose commitment to community learning and local heritage was evident throughout the project. The students' display became a standout feature of the exhibition, warmly received by visitors of all ages.



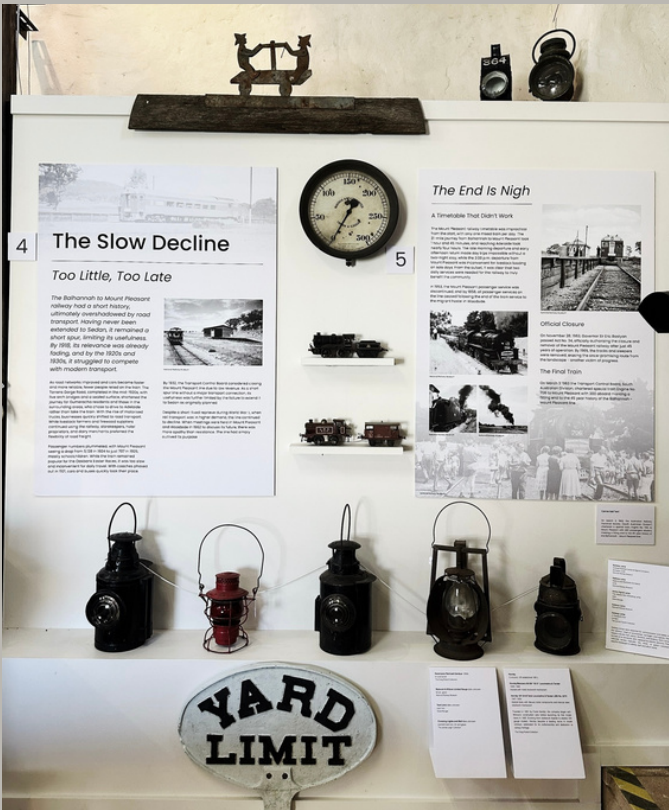
Mount Torrens Christian School students enjoying the history of rail



Original No. 706 cast iron plate from the last train to Mount Pleasant kindly loaned by Darren and Robyn Trott

Artifacts

We are deeply grateful to our friends at SteamRanger, the National Railway Museum, and the private collectors who generously lent their remarkable artifacts for History Month. Their contributions brought our displays to life and helped share Mount Torrens' railway heritage with the wider community.





James Leigh and Glen Liebelt from SteamRanger

SteamRanger

On Saturday 17 May we welcomed SteamRanger volunteers James Leigh and Glen Liebelt as special guests. Their extensive knowledge of steam railways delighted visitors, and they enthusiastically demonstrated the model railway while answering a steady stream of questions about all things trains.



Visitors enjoying the exhibition



James on track cleaning duties

AUDIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The exhibition attracted a diverse audience, including approximately fifty students and staff from the Mount Torrens Christian School, local residents, and visitors from far and wide who discovered the event through the History Festival brochure, as well as passersby and cyclists travelling along the Amy Gillett Bikeway. A significant number of train enthusiasts also attended and were especially thrilled to see the original cast iron No. 706 cast iron plate from the last train to Mount Pleasant on display.

The working model railway and the Townsend Street display – created by students from the Mount Torrens Christian School as part of their technology and art classes – were standout features, capturing the attention of both children and adults. A highlight included a local resident bringing along his vintage Hornby model train, which he successfully ran on the track, adding to the interactive and nostalgic atmosphere of the exhibition.



Visitors enjoying the exhibits

Visitors for History Festival May 2025

Gala Opening		35			35
Week 1	Saturday	64	Sunday	32	96
Week 2	Saturday	15	Sunday	21	36
Week 3	Saturday	27	Sunday	20	47
Week 4	Saturday	33	Sunday	42	75
Week 5	Saturday	25	Sunday	42	67
School		50			50
Other		4			4
		253		157	410

Conclusion

Discover Mount Torrens “Tracks of Change: From Trains to Treadlies” exhibition not only highlighted the town’s rich railway heritage and its transformation into the Amy Gillett Bikeway, but also provided an engaging educational experience that connected the past with the present.

This year’s exhibition welcomed a total of 405 visitors, an increase of 145 compared to last year — a clear sign of growing interest and community engagement.

Building on this success, future exhibitions should continue to explore Mount Torrens’ history through a contemporary lens. Increasing community involvement through interactive displays and regular open days will further enhance their educational impact. Additionally, expanding marketing efforts and forming and continuing partnerships with local organisations can help attract even more visitors and strengthen community connections.

By preserving and presenting our local history in such a dynamic way, we foster community pride and inspire future generations to value and contribute to the ongoing story of Mount Torrens and its districts.

A heartfelt thank you to our incredible supporters and those who generously loaned us items - this wouldn't have been possible without you.

History Trust of South Australia
SteamRanger
National Railway Museum
Adelaide Hills Council
Darren & Robyn Trott
Michelle Bryant
Leonie Feutrill
Craig Pollard
Amy Gillett Foundation