

THE WORLDS LAST CROSSLEY MODEL XA?

Crossley Brothers Limited Manchester, Model XA Engine

Serial number - 55128.

Rated 71bhp on Towns Gas, or 57bhp on Producer Gas - 160 RPM.

Flywheels - 7ft 1" in diameter x 10-1/4" in face

I first visited the magnificent old gas fired Crossley when I was a skinny, pimple faced teenager during the early 1980's while on a 4WD trip with friends. The engine was almost intact and in good condition considering the many years it must have lain idle in the harsh Australian bush. It was as if the miners had just packed up and left everything in situation. The Crossley sat ready to run the Battery, with the Gas Producer and various mine shafts nearby.

The remains of the Miners Hut, with the chimney intact, still held crude cooking utensils, with old boots and bottles scattered nearby.

A Buick straight 8 cylinder motor used to winch the miners and gold encrusted ore up from the bowls of the earth had been lifted up by a large Manna Gum and was now embedded into the tree!

My youthful imagination visualised being swept back through time to witness this monstrosity of an engine ticking over noisily, the huge flywheels that tower over my head, were spinning slowly.

Along with friends, I made regular field trips back to visit the site on my clapped out old Yamaha motorbike to explore and ponder what once was.

But then it was gone. In 1988 I met some of the Army personnel during the exercise to extract it, but didn't fully understand why it was being moved from its forest haven until years later.

I often thought of the Crossley and was concerned our community had lost an important piece of our local history. I tried to trace its whereabouts unsuccessfully on several occasions. Over time its location became lost to the authorities that had endeavoured to preserve and protect the engine.

Twenty three years later, while enquiring about missing files on the engine, I received a call that would ultimately reunite me with the Crossley and the golden opportunity to help restore and preserve the very same engine of my youth.

Historically the Engine was dispatched from Manchester, England to "Alex Cowan and Son Pty. Ltd.", in Melbourne, Victoria, in November 1907. From there it made its way to East Gippsland and was believed to have been used on the notorious Haunted Stream Gold Field ([Appendix 1](#))

The Crossley was moved again for use by the "Ensay South Gold Mining Syndicate" to Tierney's Creek, east of the township of Ensay, Victoria, during the 1920's. It's believed a small Engine (a Buick straight 8 maybe?) was fixed in place on the Crossley with enough power to winch the estimated 8 Ton from tree to tree until it was in place at Tierney's Creek. The engine was used solely to provide power for the five head Battery made by Langlands Foundry, Melbourne, to crush Gold bearing Quartz Ore from the many Gold Mines in the vicinity.

During the late 1980's the former Department of Conservation Forests and Lands, (CF&L) had decided to extract the engine to stop vandalism and theft, as parts had been pilfered in the past. The last straw was when three people had been found trying to remove the entire engine from the Tierney's Creek Battery site.

In 1988 a cooperative venture between Swift's Creek CFL and the Army Reserve 3 Recovery Company (Comm Z) based at Warragul & Korumburra, was organised to try to recover the Crossley from the steep inaccessible country. During the exercise two Army Reserve members were injured when one of the unit's trucks failed to negotiate a sharp bend and rolled down a very steep embankment prior to the successful recovery of the engine.

An Army Bulldozer was used to extract the Crossley from the steep, fern lined gully and clear mountain stream that had been its home for so many decades. The Engine Block, Crank Housing, and Fly Wheels were delivered to an Engineers Work shop in Sale, Victoria where they stayed for over two decades. The Piston, Conrod, external Camshaft and other smaller component parts were stored by the CF&L.

The aim of moving the engine was to protect and preserve the rare beast so that future generations could enjoy it being publicly displayed. Despite the best intentions, things started to go awry.

As the years flew by, the engine was all but forgotten, and the Departmental staff involved in moving the engine in 1988 had retired, moved away, or had couldn't remember where the Crossley was taken to near Sale.

All records and files relating to the matter may have been inadvertently destroyed in 2005 or had been relocated to archives in Melbourne. Despite best efforts the original records have not been located.

Unfortunately the Crossley parts stored at Swifts Creek were flooded in 1998, and shortly after someone made the decision to relocate the parts to the Cassilis Historic Park.

Fortunately most of these parts were promptly recovered by members of the Omeo Historical Society and stored in Omeo. Only the Piston & external camshaft were left behind as they were too heavy to lift without heavy machinery. Some parts had been removed from the Historic Park prior to this and remain missing to this day.

After contacting Parks Victoria about the missing Crossley files I learned that Heritage Victoria had an enquiry from someone wanting to legally obtain ownership of Tierney's Creek engine without being prosecuted under the Heritage Act. This information helped to successfully locate the engine in Sale, Victoria.

Thankfully the elderly gentleman that had kindly stored the key component parts of the Crossley for 23 years was happy for the Department to remove the engine.

The "East Gippsland Tilt Tray Service" very kindly donated a truck to move the major component parts from Sale back to Swift's Creek. Thankyou!

The Engine that had been stripped ready for the restoration that never occurred, had finished up being spread throughout East Gippsland - from Sale, to Swift's Creek, Omeo, and Cassilis. I've been told other parts maybe in Heyfield & New South Wales.

Most parts have now been reunited in the one location ready for the restoration project to begin.

The non-profit Crossley Restoration Committee has been formed, with representatives from DSE, East Gippsland Shire, Omeo Historical Society, Parks Victoria, and other interested parties.

The committee unanimously decided to restore the Crossley to working condition and once complete will go on permanent public display at Ensay, Victoria. A large five head battery will also accompany the display. Original paint and coarse patina will be kept on this rough diamond.

The Omeo Historical Society has kindly donated \$500 to kick start the project, but a lot more is needed. Estimated cost of the project may be as high as \$6,000 to \$10,000 for the engine to be returned to operational condition if the original parts cannot be located and returned. The Antique Machinery Restoration Society of Queensland has also offered technical information.

Engineer John Leadoux has kindly offered assistance despite his ailing health.

A big thank you to all that have contributed to the project thus far, your efforts are much appreciated!

From the information I have sourced, this Engine may be the last of its kind worldwide, signifying its rarity and the importance of restoration and preservation. The Crossley is listed in the Heritage Victoria database and is of National Estate Significance.

✦ WANTED ✦

**Original Crossley XA parts ~ Pictures ~ Information
Contributions of time and materials to reproduce parts.
Donations to purchase or manufacture parts
Sponsorship by an Engineering Company**

If you have “borrowed” parts from the Engine in the past, please return them without threat of prosecution. You will be thanked instead!

If you would like to remain anonymous, please address parts to;

Mal Smith

DSE,

Post Office Box 43,

Swift's Creek, Victoria 3896.

Please Contact; Mal Smith-Phone [\(03\)51595100](tel:0351595100) or [0428594384](tel:0428594384)

Email address; malcolm.smith@dse.vic.gov.au

Of the 26 Crossley Model XA and XAE (electric flywheel fitted) engines dispatched to Australia this is believed to be the only survivor.

- ❖ 12 to Alex Cowen & Sons Ltd (8 to Sydney Office & 4 to Melbourne Office.)
- ❖ 10 to Saunders & Stuart, Perth,
- ❖ 1 to James Hill & Son, Adelaide,
- ❖ 1 to Webster & Co, Brisbane,
- ❖ 1 to H. F. Nichols Adelaide,
- ❖ 1 to D. & J. Fowler, London for Australia.

Appendix 1

The Haunted Stream.

Alluvial gold was first discovered along the Haunted Stream in 1863 & by the 1880's Reef Mining was established. The township of Stirling, its population booming during the 1890's with Hotels, Post Office, School, Butcher, Bakery, General Store, Police Station & a Recreation Reserve used for Cricket, Football and other sporting events. Other small satellite settlements including Dog Town, Dawson City, and Bayliss Flat became established around major gold mines. Gold supported the population well with the Ernestine, Rob Roy & Hans Gold Mines being the top producers. Dozens of Batteries operated to crush gold producing ore & the thunderous roar of the machinery echoing through the valley would have been deafening to local residents. But by 1913 gold production was running out & with the outbreak of the Great War, the township of Stirling & other settlements were almost deserted, with only a handful of miners left by 1917. During the Great Depression almost all machinery was broken up for scrap, with little evidence of what once existed. Today the township of Stirling and other settlements are deserted and have reverted back to forest as they once were.