Data from the Records of the Coffs Harbour Fire Brigade 1912-1965

A different approach to data availability
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One of the problems Museums have is the security of written data. Historical Log books, Diaries, letters and other hand written material is not suitable for general exhibition or handling. At the same time the museum need to have the material available for public use. The usual solution is to insist on the use of cotton gloves for anyone wanting to view the material. Whilst the gloves prevent to a greater or lesser extent the transmission of acids which would damage the documents, it still leaves the actual handling, which can also do damage, despite the care taken.

The solution that has been developed more recently, is the digital scanning of collections so that they can be viewed without any contact at all. This is fine, except there so much material, that it will take many years to get everything digitalised.

I have produced for the Coffs Harbour Regional Museum, what is perhaps a new kind of process for making sensitive material readily available. Whilst doing research for the museum, on its collection of the local fire brigade’s “Occurrence Books”, i.e. Log Books, from its inception in 1912 to 1965 when it change from a volunteer to a professional brigade. After assessing these log books, I decided that most people would use them for one or more types of information. These were: where the fires were, who the firemen were, what fire engines they used and any other coincidental historical information which was not directly related to fire brigade.

I then extracted this data from these log books under these headings and this is now available in print at the Coffs Harbour Regional Museum, the Coffs Harbour library, the Coffs Harbour fire station, the NSW Fire Service Museum in Sydney and the State and National Libraries. The next stage is to put this information on the internet. Which I hope will be completed soon. People looking for information recorded by the Fire Brigade will have it available to them, without the need for them to have access to the original books.