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Sweet surprise - an unexpected information source

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I have been researching the narrow gauge railways of North Queensland for over 20 years. However, there were still quite a few questions remaining when my attention was directed to the CSR Limited deposit at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre.

Initially I went there to find out more about certain locomotives used by CSR Limited, so that I could help update the data that an industrial museum in Queensland had on its records.

The researcher can learn a great deal from this deposit. Because of the farflung interests and the fact that it was then a developing new industry, a lively correspondence was maintained between CSR Limited's Head Office in Sydney and its sales and technical representatives in the United Kingdom. The managers of the local plantations and sugar mills also kept in close contact by correspondence, which in the early years was the only means available.

Thus one learns why a particular manufacturer was chosen to deliver a certain type of locomotive; the technical detail, trials and the use and disposal of them; how the company became involved in public transport so that it could obtain a right-of-way for its lines to transport sugar cane to its mills and its sugar and molasses to the ports; the lease of lands and dealings with local government.

One also learns of the ingenuity of the CSR Limited workshop in Sydney which, with the benefit of experience in the field, developed its own technical standards.

I concentrated on rail transport, but the deposit deals with many other matters such as sugar manufacturing, shipping, policies towards indentured labour, the plantation system, immigrant labour, trade unions and farmer leagues. This deposit would also be of great benefit to local historians of centres in Queensland such as Childers, Mackay, Ingham, Innisfail and Cairns, as well as places in northern New South Wales and Fiji.

My research has been greatly facilitated by the helpful attitude of the staff and the excellent facilities at the Centre.
