

THE RIESLING RAILWAY

The history of the Riverton to Spalding Railway, will be my book published in July 2018, to mark the centenary of the opening of the railway to Clare.

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I have reached the stage where most of the serious research has been done, and am spending more time with photographs and diagrams now. However, I continue to tinker around the edges, and surprise myself with new pieces of information.

Only last week I discovered that there was an incident near Undalya in 1922, when Wirth's Circus train ploughed into a mob of horses that had strayed onto the track. The railway gang from Auburn was sent down to clean up the mess. The Spalding community put on a special train, and 800 of them travelled to Clare for the one-night performance. The dunnies at the Clare station would have been overwhelmed!

I have sent as an attachment, an item out of Catchpoint Magazine which was published only last week, by the National Railway Museum. The Museum has funding to embark on this oral history project, and I shall be working closely with them.

As part of that oral history project, funding has been made available to make a replica uniform that the refreshment room girls wore at the Riverton Railway refreshment rooms in the 1940s. I have two ladies in Riverton who are in their 80s or more, who worked there, and are keen to be involved in this project. A seamstress has been engaged for the task, and has already started work. The intention is that this uniform could be put on display at the local libraries or tourism offices, as a means of publicising the forthcoming Centenary. I plan to use the photograph of the uniform in the book, and expect that the permanent home for the uniform will subsequently be the National Railway Museum at Port Adelaide. They do not have a waitress uniform in their collection, and are very interested in this project.

There has been a lot of new information come to light in relation to the Percy Brookfield shooting at Riverton in 1921. I have a psychiatrist colleague in Adelaide who is very interested in the case and has agreed to review the evidence, and provide an opinion about the gunman, Tomayeff. He is also going to have a crack at giving an opinion about Percy Brookfield's psyche. My research has indicated that Tomayeff and some of his Russian mates in Broken Hill had quite an industry going, pimping for the local prostitutes. As an alien, Tomayeff had to advise the police if he was moving to another locality, and on the day that he boarded the train he advised the Broken Hill police that he was relocating to Clare. It begs the question of what business he intended to follow in Clare, particularly with a Spanish revolver and 72 rounds of ammunition in his bag.

The alignment of the railway took it through the Hope Farm section at Penwortham. This was John Horrock's property, but by the time the railway was surveyed the "manor" house was a ruin. It is recorded that the Hope Farm "Manor" was demolished, but where exactly along the railway it was located has remained a

mystery. I have been helped in this quest by David Spackman of the Mount Horrocks Historical Society, and with the help of an 1845 drawing, we think we have located the site.

I wish to report favourably on the present situation of the Riverton Railway Station. It has had its ups and downs since ANR departed in 1986. The present owners are Ivor and Bina Turney, who have had it for 13 years now. Internally the main building is in excellent condition. They have plans to develop the goods shed as an art venue. It looks as if there will be two events (at least) surrounding the launch of my book - at this stage it looks like one of those events will be at the Riverton Railway Station.

I am still on the lookout for photographs, particularly good quality shots. In particular, I am seeking photographs of the inside of the Riverton signal cabin, and the indoors operation of the Riverton refreshment rooms back in the days when the trains were still running.

The Riesling Trail Management Committee has kindly granted me space on their website for a book synopsis. It is updated this every month or two.

<http://rieslingtrail.com.au/history/the-history-of-trains-by-john-wilson/>

A few of the chapters for the book have now been completed, and I have done some "paste-ups" (literally) with photos and diagrams, and carefully put them out for comment.

From what you have done it is very informative and detailed, can't wait to read more. EXCELLENT work . James Duggin, Lead Member of the Clare Railway Centenary Group.

Very interesting. A lot of things in it that I didn't know! Bob Sampson, Exec Officer of the National Railway Museum – and believe me that Bob knows his trains.

Steve McInerney was Clare's last Station-Master. I had invited Steve's family to check what had been written. Maura McInerney is one of Steve's daughters and responded:

I thinkyou captured his experiences very accurately. I particularly like your understanding of the fierce loyalty railwaymen traditionally had to the railways and their jobs – that was certainly the case with Dad who saw his lifelong commitment to the railways as a very natural and important part of who he was.

And finally, if you know of others who may be interested in this book please forward a copy of this missive to them, or ask them to contact me, to be added to the distribution list.

Thank you John Wilson wilsonriesling@internode.on.net