

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 opened a F-book page for The Riesling Railway. I am presently undecided as to whether it is a good thing. It will not replace these quarterly newsletters.

There will be a **chapter on the trains for the Clare races**. The races trains were a regular feature, and during the 1920s there would be two trains – one for the horses, and one for the people. Through the 1930s there would be a horse-box car as part of the passenger train consist. Horses would be walked 3 miles to the racecourse. In 1939 a horse platform was constructed just north of the Roach Road (near Barinia) crossing. That involved the horses being walked only 2 miles. I have poked around at the location of that horse-platform (8 chains/160 metres) north of the crossing but there was nothing to find.

It left me wondering how Adelaide folk got to the Clare races before the railway was built. The following is from the South Australian Advertiser 1880. I will not be using it in the book, but it seemed too precious to discard. My apologies to the ladies.

The Metropolitan visitor to the classic region of the Clare can usually depend on having a “pretty good time” if he succeeds in reaching the picturesque city of the hills at the period of the annual racing carnival, but his modicum of enjoyment will depend very much upon the serenity of his disposition... The traveller to the Clare races had to run the risk of being left behind for the night at Saddleworth, because the coach accommodation was insufficient, and it was only the most agile or the most persistent who could force their way into or upon the one vehicle that was in waiting... Whether the visitor was sure of a comfortable bed at either of the principal hotels was a matter that wholly depended on his own forethought beforehand to the landlords of the respective the hoteliers... Last year the committee who undertook the responsibility of getting up a race meeting had uphill work before them and this year the exertions on the committee, if less untiring have been equally successful.... It was rather unfortunate that the rain set in just a day or two before the meeting, rendering the running ground very heavy and deterring a large number of people from being present... The trip up having been accomplished in safety it was found that Provis’s and other leading hotels, though full to overflowing, were not as densely packed as in March last. There was the usual influx of sharpeners and smart personages who prey on the weaknesses of their fellows and some of them made good hauls on the two race days and nights. One man alleged that he was robbed of a purse containing £50 in notes.... Mr Ferry volunteered to drive, and by the manner in which he handled the ribands it was very quickly evident that he knew how to tool a four in hand, and drove for nearly 6 miles with common verbal skills and discretion, but just as he was passing the foot of the Bungaree Road the coach capsised.... The near wheels of the coach sank into eight or 10 inches of soft mud on the edge of a waterhole, and the spokes of the hind-wheel flew apart so that the vehicle topped over and deposited the outside passengers in the sludge. There were about 32 people on the coach, 16 being outside, and those fared the worst, all being more or less bruised and

mud-stained. It is to the credit of the passengers, they were all the same sterner sex, that they took the mishap kindly, and when they had scraped off some of the mud, and got rid of the water by which the outer clothing was drenched they were anxious to pursue their journey.... The racing on the first day was a very indifferent character, which was partly accounted for by the course being extremely heavy... On the second day the weather was bright and in attendance was larger than Tuesday.

An interesting aspect of the railway operation was the **Baby Health Train** that operated from 1932 to 1964. I had initially given this a few paragraphs of coverage, tucked away in the chapter on passenger services along the line. But as I delved further, it became apparent that the history of the baby health train in South Australia has been poorly documented. Accordingly, I have given this topic its own chapter, and have covered the operations of the baby health train throughout South Australia. When it was first introduced in 1932, it made its first visit to Riverton, and then spent a few days in Clare. Eventually there were three baby health Centre carriages, of which two were on the broad-gauge, and one was on the narrow-gauge Peterborough Division.

For those of you in the Clare Valley, there will be a meeting of the railway centenary group at **7.30 pm, Friday 17th February** at the Barbara Long Function Room at the Clare Town Hall, at which I will present an update on the book's progress.

Early in 2016 I approached **Watervale artist, Harry Sherwin** to do a painting for the front cover of the book. It is of the Clare station in 1924 and depicts a brand-new Brill Model 55 railcar ready to work the morning passenger service to Adelaide. This was an important development for Clare people, as it allowed them for the first time, to travel to the city in the morning, do their business in the afternoon, and travel home in the evening. Harry is confident that it will be finished and ready to show at the meeting on February 17th.

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/>

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.

Thankyou John Wilson wilsonriesling@internode.on.net

