

# 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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Watervale artist, **Harry Sherwin** with the Clare railway station scene of the mid 1920s that will feature on the front cover of the book. And yes – the Model 55 railcars were blue with primrose and gold when first introduced. But commissioning artworks of days bygone is not without its troubles. I had provided Harry with a swag of photographs, the ARHS Bulletin articles by Kim Bird, and Ron Stewien's Vol 5 of the History of the South Australian Railways. He badged the railcar in the scene as No. 4. A few weeks after the painting had been completed James Duggin turned up a photograph of a brand new No.4, showing that it had a different livery to No. 5. It seems that the Brill company, in supplying the two initial cars of the order trialed different colour-schemes. Harry has done a touch-up job and “outshopped” the railcar as No. 5.

Harry's painting will soon be on display at the Clare Library It is planned to have a small “hanging” ceremony at the Clare Library in the next few weeks.

The book has reached the stage where I wanted to experiment with page layouts. I have selected four chapters that are nearly complete, and had the printer, Openbook Howden, do some sample 24 page booklets. Those chapters are:

The Broughton Bridge and other bridges.

Safeworking

Putting Penwortham on the Map

The Baby Health Train

There have been six copies printed of this proof production, and they have gone out to several locations to give potential buyers of the book some idea of the finished product. I am very happy with the quality of the printing. There will be some changes to the general layout and design of the pages. If one of these locations is near to you, please have a look. Feedback is welcome.

National Trust- Clare Regional History Group; upstairs Town Hall.

Riverton History Room

National Railway Museum – Break of Gauge Bookshop

Pichi Richi Railway – Quorn

SteamRanger Heritage Railway – Victor Harbor Station

And one copy for myself.

I have been continuing to research the Baby Health Train and the Clare Races trains, and these will each have their own chapter. Another topic of interest is the Wirths circus trains, which were regular visitors to Clare. Newspaper reports at the time write of a good crowd at the Clare railway station, watching the elephants unloading and loading the trains (It took three trains to get Wirths' Circus to Clare). Surely someone would have taken some photos.

I have previously written about the project being undertaken at Riverton, to construct a replica waitress uniform, as worn by the Railway Refreshment Room girls. This project is being done by Barb Stevens, who is interpreting some old photographs, and tapping into the memories of Carrie Twigden and Betty Oehme. It seems that the style of uniforms worn by the Refresh Girls changed a few times. We may end up with 2 different uniforms.

The Clare Railway Centenary Group met in Clare on 17<sup>th</sup> February. I gave a slide-show presentation. The numbers were well up compared to previous meetings. The National Railway Museum has offered to run a special "Clare Line" weekend on 7/8<sup>th</sup> July 2018,

which will include the running of the Bluebird within the Museum's track. The plan is to have a special printing of Clare tickets. There has also been discussion of having a Railways Refreshment Room theme, serving coffee the way it was served in the days of steam. Another concept being considered is that local history groups would set up shop in some of the Museum's carriages, and provide family history information for visitors to the Museum.

As part of that Refreshment Room theme has come a "fruitcake sort of an idea". The SAR had their own bakery which dispatched pies, pasties, and fruit-cake, on the afternoon/evening passenger trains, to be delivered to the refreshment rooms along the line. A recipe for the Railway fruit-cake has not been found. The challenge is to make a fruitcake that is 100% Clare Valley origin. By "Clare Valley" I am referring to the greater Clare Valley. 100 hundred years ago this would have been a simple task. Clare had a flourishing dried fruit industry particularly currants – and these were sent out by rail. There were flour mills, and a butter factory.

The next meeting of the Clare Railway Centenary Group is Friday 21 April at 7.30 pm at the Clare Town Hall Function Room.

I am off to Broken Hill in June, and will address the Broken Hill Historical Society's June meeting on the Riverton shooting of Percy Brookfield.

On 4 April I did a presentation at the Burra Railway Station, to a combined meeting of the Burra History Group and the Friends of the Burra Railway Station. The Burra community is to be congratulated on the restoration of the station building. There is a lot of railway history that is common to both Burra and Clare. The photograph shows some of the group waiting for the train. They say that their service is down to one train a year. It comes on 30<sup>th</sup> February.



Over the last year I have walked the Riesling Trail several times to plot and check details for the linear maps that will feature in the book. The Rattler Trail presented a challenge as there is no certainty of the point at the Riverton end where the Km measurements start. An additional problem is that some distance markers are missing. I discussed this with Rattler Trail chairman Leon Schwarz, and have agreed to plot the section from Riverton to Auburn according to the South Australian Railways 1973 survey that measured rail Km from Adelaide.

Leon and myself made a start on 31 March by tackling the Riverton to Rhynie stretch and a little beyond.

Within State Records, I discovered some boxes that contain SAR placards from the 1930s and 40s. The SAR evidently used the cheapest paper, and the placards are mostly in poor condition. I have digitally repaired the examples shown here. These are low-resolution copies. The originals are TIF files about 120 mbytes each. I shall be using one or two of these images in the book, and shall include the larger files in the USB Flash Drive that will come with the book.



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

