

THE RIESLING RAILWAY

In July 2018 we will celebrate the centenary of the opening of the railway from Riverton to Clare. The line was subsequently extended to Spalding. The Ash Wednesday bushfire in 1983 damaged the line and brought about closure of the railway. The railway corridor south of Barinna has been developed as The Riesling Trail, and south of Auburn as The Rattler Trail. The centenary seems an appropriate time to reflect upon the history of the railway and its subsequent conversion to the two rail-trails.

I present an overview of “The Riesling Railway”, which will be a hard-cover book, A4 size, about 200 pages, full colour, extensively illustrated with photographs, maps, and diagrams, to be released on 4 July 2018, which is the centenary of the opening of the railway to Clare.

The book will be printed by a digital process, with the quantity of the print run dictated largely by the number of pre-publication orders. It will be a quality publication and I expect it will sell for about \$100. I will be self-publishing, for the sake of having the book look how I want it.

The Riesling Railway now has a Facebook presence. I have posted small items on some of the topics herein. I plan to post a regular Sunday morning “musing”.

John Wilson February 2017

FRONT COVER

Clare Railway Station, mid 1920s. Brill Railcar No. 4, having left Spalding exactly an hour earlier, is to work the morning passenger service to Adelaide. From Riverton, it will run express to North Adelaide, to arrive in Adelaide at 11.33 am. Car number 4 was one of twelve Model 55 rail motors, built in Pennsylvania by the J. G. Brill Company, to be delivered to the South Australian Railways during 1924. The smart blue and yellow livery of these rail-cars appears to have been short-lived. Watervale artist, Harry Sherwin has re-created the scene.

BACK COVER

By 1929 the Labor side of South Australian politics had become increasing vocal in its criticism of Commissioner Webb's expenditure. Webb responded to these accusations

in October of that year by publishing a 124-page book called *Railway Facts*. The illustration and map featured in that book. The Riverton to Spalding branch-line has been highlighted in red. The picture is of a 500 class Mountain Type locomotive hauling the Melbourne Express. The third carriage is one of the Pullman steel carriages, which to the Labor critics, was a luxurious extravagance.

Historical & geographical background

The higher rainfall and fertile soils around Mount Horrocks fostered an agricultural and horticultural industry that was able to supply fresh produce to arid regions further north, such as the Burra Mine, Broken Hill and Port Pirie. However, transport of this produce was expensive and slow.

Early schemes

As early as 1866 there were serious calls for a railway to the region, but the topography dictated that any railway would be burdened by steep grades and high construction costs. In 1870 railways were opened to Hoyle's Plains (to the west), and Burra (to the east). Through the remainder of the 19th century there were surveys for branch-lines to Clare.

The Port Wakefield to Hoyleton Tramway

Horses pulled the empty trucks from the Port to Hoyleton. The trucks were then loaded with bags of wheat, and with a favourable wind could gravitate back to the Port. According to some sources, the horses were loaded on to trucks and rode back down, however this does not appear to have been the usual practice. This tramway was a bungled project on two fronts. Port Wakefield was too shallow to take ocean-going vessels. The line was built to the 3'6" narrow gauge by way of an experiment into the construction of cheap railways. The proponent of this experiment was the Legislative Council's Captain Charles Hervey Bagot, who cajoled the State Parliament with the reasoning that this was an isolated line, and would not connect with any other railway. Thomas Elder was the founder of the stock firm that survives to this day. He was a member of the Legislative Council and had the vision to predict future break-of-gauge problems.

Broken Hill and Port Pirie

Clare Valley was ideally placed to supply fresh produce to Broken Hill and Port Pirie.

The Railway Guarantee

There were requests from all parts of the South Australian to have Parliament authorise railways. Parliament devised a guarantee process whereby landholders serviced by a proposed new railway would have to underwrite any losses. It was

a farcical scheme that was promptly repealed. The Riverton to Spalding Railway was one such line.

Some Engineering Concepts

A good strong railway allows heavier engines pulling greater loads at faster speeds. Flimsy construction with tight curves, steep grades and inadequate ballast dictates inefficiency and high maintenance costs. Parliament was squarely focussed on building many railways at the cheapest possible cost. By about 1917 it dawned on them that the railway system was heading into a spiralling loss situation, and threatened to bankrupt the State.

Elections, Premiers and Governments 1901 – 1930

It was a period of political volatility, during which Labor and Liberals would polarise their political position. In those early years there was a Labor-Liberal coalition, but it didn't last long. Both sides of State Parliament used railways to catch votes. The Barwell government of 1920 finally took action, but it cost them the next election.

Webb, Jennings, and Stewien

Barwell appointed William A. Webb as Chief Commissioner of Railways, to overhaul the ailing State railway system. Webb was an American, and by the time his tenure expired in 1930, South Australians had a railway system in which they could take some pride. New locomotives were the biggest in Australia, and ultimately were home-built at an upgraded Islington Workshops. The grand Adelaide Railway Station is Webb's enduring monument; its eastern façade is inspired by Buckingham Palace. Webb attracted many enemies amongst the Labor side of politics. Reece Jennings and Ron Stewien have written extensive historical works on the Webb era.

The Riverton to Spalding Railway Bill

Sir Richard Butler was determined to have a railway built to Clare, having already achieved parliamentary authorisation to build a collection of railways into his own electorate of Barossa. Lines to Truro, Mount Pleasant, and Sedan were three notable "dud railways" that never paid their way. The Clare Valley was already served by existing lines to the east and west, so that any line to Clare would generate little extra revenue for the Railways Department. There was potential for new revenue by the opening up of pastoral lands north of Clare, for grain production, and thus accordingly was the basis of a railway to Clare, and thence towards Spalding. One of the amazing alternatives considered by Parliament was a zig-zag route connecting Clare, Spalding, Booborowie, and Canowie. The Parliamentary Bill was for a railway terminating short of Spalding. Parliament extended the line at both ends by deviating the route via Rhynie, and extending the terminus into Spalding. The immediate beneficiary of this railway was Sir

Richard's son, who won the seat of Wooroora (Watervale to Balaklava) in the next State election.

Protracted Construction of the Spalding Railway

Construction was undertaken by a railway contractor who commenced (without ceremony) at the Riverton end. Work was delayed by wartime shortages of labour and materials. There was a strike over rates of pay. There were delays due to wet weather, and at other times drought. Construction took two years longer than the Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie railway.

Construction Stories: Camps and Accidents

The construction "navvies" lived in tent camps. There were stories about drunken fights. There were no fatalities, but there were several blasting accidents that resulted in injuries.

The Red Line and the Blue Line

When construction had begun, there had still not been any decision about the location of the Clare Railway Station, and by which route the railway would exit Clare. The chosen alignment involved two tight curves of 15-chain radius. The alternative route would have taken the railway past the Church of England, the Enterprise Brewery, and northwards through Stanley Flat.

Progress Reports

The Railways Commissioner's Annual Reports provide a yearly description of progress. There is also commentary by Clare's *Northern Argus*.

The Opening Ceremony

The big day was organised by the local Railway Committee. There were two trains on the day, one for His Excellency, The Governor, Sir Henry Galway, the other for such members of the public. There was plenty of flag-waving and the speeches were all about winning the war. The school-children sang *The National Anthem* and *The Song of Australia*. Professor Tonge clambered up the rock-face with camera and tripod to take pictures of the event.

The Broughton bridge

The bridge over the Broughton is a magnificent 5-arch ferro-concrete structure that in recent times has gained heritage listing. Its design has been wrongly accredited to Alex Moncrieff. It was designed by his brother Joseph, who was Chief Engineer of the South Australian Railways. It was built in 1919, at which time ferro-concrete arch bridges had been obsolete for nearly 15 years

The Spalding to Jamestown Railway proposal

A look at the map shows that the Spalding railway is pointing directly at Jamestown, and begs the question of whether there was a grand plan to join the gap. Twice this proposal was examined.

A losing line from the day it opened

The Spalding line was one of many cheap lines that never paid its way.

Features of the Riverton to Spalding Railway

Photographs and track diagrams of the stations. Two pages of photographs of the Quarry Road bridges. The redrawn diagram of gradients and curves to which have been added the Trail's Km markers, level crossings, bridges and other recent additions.

Nomenclature

The origins of the names Clare, Sevenhill and Penwortham are well documented. What about Tatkana, Mulkirri and others? This explores the origins of these place names that did not exist before the railway. And why was Hilltown's station called Milne? And what/who was the Hill in Hilltown?

The Barwell Bulls

In 1924 Webb imported petrol driven Brill railcars, with Clare becoming the first destination to be served. The public knew these railcars as Barwell Bulls. As for Barwell, he was the only South Australian Premier to have a Clare connection, yet where in Clare do we find him honoured? There's not even a Barwell Street. But I'm working on it (the honour, not the street!).

Passenger services

The first passenger services were slow mixed trains. A better service was provided in 1924. For most of the next 30 years the residents of Clare enjoyed two return services on weekdays, but for most of that time the Spalding people had to manage with one return service. Most of the time, the Spalding line passengers had to change trains at Riverton.

The “Ghost Train”

In 1952 the Clare Amateur Dramatic Society did a production of Arnold Ridley's "The Ghost Train". Arnold Ridley is best remembered as Privated Godfrey in the "Dad's Army" series. Percival Hillam Quirke was the local MP and was moved to describe the local railcar as "the Ghost Train". The railcar service was replaced by a road-bus in 1954, but if one report is to be believed the bus trip was as slow and rickety as the railcar. The bus contractor did a special deal with the Jamestown undertaker, and carried coffins on the roof of the bus.

The Clare show

Special trains were a regular feature for many years

Specials to the Clare Races

For many years the Clare Racing Club had an annual meeting. Pre 1918, racegoers could buy a railway excursion ticket to either Saddleworth, Blyth, or Farrell's Flat, and travel the rest of the way by coach. As for the horses, we are left wondering about their condition after being ridden all that way from the train. The February 1918 meeting was in advance of the railway being declared open, but the tracks were complete to the stage where a train could run to Clare. In later years there were separate trains for the horses and the people. For a few a few years the horses were unloaded near the Roach Road crossing, near Barinia.

The Dort Cars

In 1923-4 the South Australian Railways purchased a fleet of Dort motor-cars, which it fitted with railway wheels, and used these cars for track inspection work. These cars had a shocking accident record and there were two occasions when collisions occurred on the Spalding line. One of these collisions should have made headlines in the papers, but appears to have been covered up.

The Baby Health Centre Cars.

For many years the Mothers and Babies Health Assoc. had a Baby Health Centre carriage that would provide clinics at stations for a day or two, before moving on to the next station. The S.A.R. charged the Association 9 pence per mile to shift the carriage. The service commenced in 1932 on the Spalding branch-line. During the 1930s there were some newspaper articles that captured the experiences of the nursing sister, who lived for weeks at a time on-board the carriage. The NLA Trove database (National Library of Australia) has allowed us to access those articles. They talk of young lives saved, a shunting accident that put the carriage out of action for weeks, a peeping Tom, the hobo at Riverton, and a friendly magpie at Saddleworth. In later years the Association had difficulty sourcing nursing sisters to do this work, and the Spalding line visits of the Baby Health Train ceased in 1964.

Other Special Trains

Circus trains, ARHS Specials, the Baptist Easter camp trains, The Flyer, and the Bluebirds.

Locomotives

The track was not strong enough to carry Webb's big engines that were introduced in 1926.

1924 public timetable

How this rarity came into my collection. It gives us a glimpse of passenger-services with the new Model 55 railcars, Port Broughton, Glenelg, the narrow-gauge Western System and the Hamley Flat tramcar. I have scanned the whole 208 pages, and will include it in a Flash drive/CD-ROM to be tucked into the back cover of the book.

Riverton

The station building and other structures in the complex are top of my list of 19th century railway architecture in South Australia. If they were in Clare or the Barossa they would have long been put to use that would have paid for their upkeep, and been accessible to the public. There has previously been an attempt at developing the location as a tourism complex, but it has failed. The main station building and the various structures in the yard are now privately owned. Several pages of photographs and track diagrams illustrate the junction station in better times.

The Expresses

All expresses stopped at Riverton. There was the Broken Hill Express and later the East-West Express. In 1912 an enterprising George Bond purchased a motor charabanc to ferry passengers between Clare and Riverton. The Bond business expanded to become a pioneer tour operator.

The Railway Refreshment Rooms

The Railway Refreshment Rooms were a major “industry” for Riverton. There has been very little written about the SAR’s Refreshment Services. I have looked at the general history of the RRRs, of which Riverton was the first (outside of Adelaide/Port Adelaide). They even had their own Act of Parliament in 1924. There was a special recipe for the coffee.

The Refresh’ Girls

With a bit of help from the kind folk at Riverton, I have tracked down a couple of the girls who worked in the Refreshment Rooms in the 1940s and 50s. They had to get up early to fire the wood-stove then cook the hot breakfasts for the passengers on the Broken Hill Express. The food was timed to the minute to be ready to serve just as the train was stopping at the platform. With the help of my two Riverton “girls” there is project underway to make a 1940s replica waitress uniform.

The Percy Brookfield Shooting

Long touted as the site of Australia’s first political assassination the station achieved notoriety in 1921. But was Percy Brookfield really the target, or did he just happen to get in the way of a madman amok with a gun? State Records of

SA has the police file on this crime. Koorman Tomayeff was the Russian gunman, whose stated destination was Clare. What was it in Clare that required him to carry a Spanish revolver and 70 rounds in his bag? He was never tried, and was hastily declared to be of unsound mind. He spent the rest of his days in the "Z" Ward at Parkside. He died in 1948 and his body went to the anatomy school.

The Riverton Signal Box

This signal cabin was built in 1883. Back in the 1980s, the Australian National Railways Commission abandoned the Riverton station complex and handed the land and buildings back to the State Government, in the full knowledge that other stations returned to the State (e.g. Blyth) had been left to the vagaries of vandals. Some of the Commission's officers stripped everything historic and valuable out of the signal box, and packaged the equipment, to cover the possibility that the signal cabin might eventually be restored.

Putting Penwortham on the Map

Items of local folklore. The yarn about Tommy Duke bailing up the railcar has a more credible ring to it than the one about C. J. Dennis. The railway alignment went through John Horrocks' Hope Farm (section 23) and also the glebe land (Section 22A) that Horrocks gave for the Church. The ruins of Horrocks' original "Manor House" were right in the way of the railway. I have been unable to locate documentation of the exact location, but have used an 1845 painting which allows me to locate the spot with a fair level of confidence.

Yarns from the Spalding end of the line

Graham Ashton formerly farmed at Andrews, where there was a community sheep-dip. The sheep had to be penned the night before, but it could only be done on a night when there were no trains. Otherwise the trains would spook the sheep and they would get out on the track.

The Nobeltown Bridge

The Quarry Road bridge has become the Riesling Trail's iconic structure. When the railway was built there was no Clare Quarry, and hence the road was not known as the Quarry Road. The locality was known as Nobeltown, and the road was known as the Nobeltown Road. We can trace that nomenclature back to 1890.

Safe working

Since 1944 the line was operated using the Train Order system. The wig-wag at the Mintaro Road crossing now operates at the Clare Valley Model Engineers.

Not-so-Safe working

A pot-pouri of derailments, breakdowns, and level-crossing fatalities.

Grain haulage away from the Spalding end of the line.

The Spalding end of the line (Barinia, Hilltown, Andrews and Spalding) was touted by Sir Richard Butler as generating enough revenue to pay for losses along the rest of the line. From the 1930s through to the early 50s those four stations sent out a lot of grain. It was a very busy little branch-line. Those four stations were convenient to stations on the Gladstone line, and the rail haul to Wallaroo was far shorter (and therefore more economical) than sending it south to Port Adelaide. About 1960 farmers made the change from bagged grain to bulk handling, and had larger trucks. Deliveries of grain to the Spalding line stations fell sharply.

The declining years of the Spalding line.

The decline of the 1960s and 70s is described, along with Australian National's rapid downgrading of all northern broad-gauge operations. There was a spectacular derailment at Rhynie in 1982.

Clare's Last Stationmaster

Steve McInerney was station-master since 1958. After the bushfire stopped the trains in 1983, Steve continued to dutifully open the station for its advertised times.

Riding the Riesling Railway

In 1984-5 there was a serious scheme to relocate the Peterborough collection to Clare and operate a tourism railway. When it was evident that the plan was not going to happen, the local councils looked at other tourism options for the railway. The District Council of Riverton was the front-runner in promoting the retention of the railway corridor for recreational use.

An interview with Tony Brady

The concept of using the rail corridor for recreation purposes was flagged in 1990. By 1994 it was a reality, and the bowstring bridge over the Quarry Road was the materialisation of the Riesling Trail.

Was the Riesling Trail the first rail-trail conversion in SA?

Some claim it was – but it wasn't. The McLaren Vale to Willunga Linear Park (now called the Shiraz Trail) was established in 1985/6. But does it matter? The Riesling Trail is the outstanding model of a community-managed rail-trail enterprise. But how do we prove it?

GIC and the Rattler Trail

The Riesling Trail, in its early development was as much about defining the viticultural region. It was left to the Riverton-Rhynie community to do something with the Riverton to Auburn section.

Interview with Bev Hannaford

Bev was instrumental regarding the origins of the Rattler Trail. Brian Stevens was the last of the Riverton Railway Station staff, and told Bev that the trains that ran on branch-lines were commonly known as “Rattlers”. Doing searches through NLA Trove I have found a couple of occasions when newspaper reports have referred to the Spalding railcar as a “rattle-trap”, but not a “rattler”.

The poetry of Harold Dridan

He worked on the Clare Railway and wrote a poem about it, that was published in “The Northern Argus” in 1914. Was this just a piece of doggerel poetry, or does it deserve a place in the anthology of Australian verse? Dridan wrote a number of other poems about 1914.

EPILOGUE

I reflect on the history behind this history, the experience of self-publishing, and the organisation of the July 2018 centenary celebrations.

USB FILE (OR CD-ROM)

There were maps, diagrams, and “other stuff” that couldn’t be fitted in to the book. They are all going into a USB stick tucked into the back cover of the book.

1. The whole 1924 Public Timetable complete with adverts.

2. The 1913 map of the line of the railway, and the designated Railway District. Officially this was the Fifth Schedule to the Riverton to Near Spalding Railway Bill, and the purpose of the proclaimed “Railway District” defined the territory where landholders would be subject to the railway guarantee. It is a very detailed cadastral map, which is remarkable for showing surveys of towns that were laid out similar to Adelaide, being rectangular, surrounded by parklands, and with suburban blocks beyond the parklands. Many of these towns progressed little beyond pegs in the ground; such a Anama, Ashford, and Euromina.

3. The 1935 R. H. Chapman diagram of Gradients and Curves. Chapman was the Chief Engineer of the South Australian Railways at the time, and would later become the Railways Commissioner. He was the engineer in charge of construction of the new rail bridge at Murray Bridge. This diagram shows mileages measured according to the rail miles from Adelaide.
4. The diagram of Gradients and Curves redrawn to include features relevant to The Riesling Trail and The Rattler Trail. It retains the markings of mileages from Adelaide as well as markings in kilometres. On The Riesling Trail the datum point is at the Lennon Street car park in Clare and distances in kilometres are measured in both northward and southward directions from that central marker.
5. Diagrams of station layouts. Diagrams show the positions of the mainline, sidings, platforms and sidings. The diagrams for Riverton, Auburn, Clare, and Spalding are very detailed.
6. Weekly Notices relating to the opening of the line to Clare and Spalding. Engine loads, timetables, and details of safe-working.
7. The complete collection of poems by Harrold Dridan. It is my view that Dridan's poem about the "Clare Railway" was the best of his works. However, it appears that if they weren't included in this publication, it is likely that some would be lost to posterity.
8. Sundry images including the 1936 "English Cricketers at Clare"
9. Chief Commissioner Webb's 1929 *Railway Facts*.(124 pages). Published in October 1929, which was the month of the Wall Street crash, Webb answers the critics of the millions of pounds spent by his regime since 1922. Worth reading if for no other reason than looking at the pictures.
10. A strip map of The Riesling Trail. There are four diagrams that are printable as A4 sheets that you can take with you when you walk or cycle the Riesling Trail. Gradients, curves, mileages from Adelaide, kilometres from the datum point, positions of cuttings, embankments, bridges, road crossings, sculptures, and

other features. Directions and distances to town facilities such as toilets, hotels.

With these maps it is possible to know exactly whereabouts on the Trail you are.

11. Drawings of the Broughton Bridge, and other ferro-concrete structures.
12. Reproductions of Clare's *Northern Argus* detailing the opening of the railway to Clare.
13. Some of John Evans' train orders, and a crossing order from the days of permissive block working. John has provided description of the Permissive Block system.