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RAILWAY

HISTORY™



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Pioneer Railway Engineer, Part 1

FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE

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Journal of the Australian Railway Historical Society



A passenger train on the Stonequarry Creek viaduct at Picton in 1897 with the station in the background. Passengers of both sexes have detrained to pose for the camera. Thomas Firth was supervising engineer for construction of the line from Liverpool to Picton.
C C SINGLETON COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 005139



Former US Army diesel-electric Bo-Bo shunting locomotive DE91, now in the Commonwealth Railways maroon and silver colour scheme, shunting Commonwealth Railways flat cars carrying passengers' motor vehicles for attachment to the 'Trans' at Port Pirie on 29 December 1965. Only two cars per wagon! Rodney Barrington's memories of travel by rail to 'Pirie' in the 1960s commences on page 23.
J BECKHAUS PHOTO, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 042617

EDITORIAL

A focus on railway workers

Articles on railway engineers, contractors and workers in the various positions required to operate railway systems have been popular among readers. We commence 2017 with Part 1 of the railway career of Thomas Rhodes Firth, a significant official in the first 50 years of the New South Wales Railways by his great grandson Tony Firth. Tony provided us with a PDF of his family history that focuses on Thomas Firth's railway career, which commenced as a railway engineer for Peto, Brassey and Betts in France in 1855 and continued with that firm in New South Wales in January 1859. He joined the NSW Government Railways as an engineer from 1862.

Part 1 of the article covers Thomas' role as an engineer supervising the work of railway contractors building the main trunk railways of the colony through to 1888. This required him and his family to live in construction camps or small towns along the extending railway lines. The experience he gained 'on the ground' would prove invaluable in his subsequent career as a senior railway official in New South Wales, which is covered in Part 2.

Trevor Edmonds looks at the manner in which the contributions of New South Wales railway employees were recognised in his article 'For Faithful Service: Imperial Service Medals awarded to New South Wales Railwaymen'. This identifies the criteria used to identify recipients for these prestigious awards and includes comparative statistics on how railwaymen fared against other categories of employees in the public sector, together with the period of various Railway Commissioners. There is no discernable correlation between the medals awarded under Railway Commissioners, nor the political orientation of the NSW Government in power.

To round off this issue, we present Rodney Barrington's recollections of passenger trains from Adelaide to Port Pirie as a schoolboy in May 1963 and subsequent trips there on tour trains and as a volunteer for the Pichi Richi Railway. He contrasts the fine broad gauge steam locomotives of the era with the narrow gauge operations at Port Pirie.

Robert Firth

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Cover Image: A view of the Como Bridge from the north side in the 1890s. Thomas Firth was the supervising engineer during construction of this major bridge on the Illawarra Line.
S WOODS PHOTO, ARHSNSW RRC, 017657

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Letters: We publish a selection of letters depending on space allowances. Letters should be kept to around 250 words and preferably be sent via email.



Thomas Firth came to New South Wales as an engineer with the contractors Peto, Brassey & Betts in January 1859 as a manager on their contract to extend the Great Southern Railway from Liverpool to Picton. Here 2-4-0 tender locomotive No. 10, built by the NSW Railways workshops in June 1870, stands at Picton Station with a passenger train circa 1874.

C C SINGLETON COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 005103

THOMAS RHODES FIRTH: RAILWAY ENGINEER

Part 1: Supervising construction of the trunk railways

Tony Firth

Editor: The following material was prepared by Tony Firth as a manuscript on the Firth family of Yorkshire and the career of Thomas Rhodes Firth in particular. Tony sent his material to the ARHSNSW Railway Resource Centre and they in turn brought it to my attention. Thomas Firth's key role in the early years of the New South Wales Railways, where he rose to the position of Engineer-in-Chief of Existing Lines, was considered to be worthy of utilising much of Tony's material for the abridged article concentrating on T R Firth's career here in New South Wales.

YORKSHIRE ROOTS

Thomas Rhodes Firth was born to Jeremiah and Maria Firth (the youngest daughter of William and Nancy Rhodes) on 5 May 1832. There were two older sisters, Elizabeth (born 12 January 1828) and Hannah (born 25 April 1830). Jeremiah was a labourer in a slate quarry at the time, but by the 1851 census his occupation was given as 'clothier' (a person who made or sold clothes).

Members of Thomas' family were born and lived in the Parish of Calverley, located between Bradford and Leeds in Yorkshire. For a period, around the time that Thomas was

baptised, however, the immediate family lived outside the parish in Bramley, approximately six kilometres west of Leeds. By the 1841 census, the Firth family were living at Stock Hill, Eccleshill, near the White Hart Inn.

Jeremiah died on 3 January 1852 at the age of 48. Maria remarried the following year to James Hartley, who had recently lost his wife, and had four children to bring up. Hartley and Maria moved to Wakefield shortly after their marriage, where James worked as a confectioner and Wesleyan lay minister. Maria died at Wakefield on 14 December 1867 aged 59.

In 1848, at age 16, Thomas Firth was articled to his great-uncle, Thomas Rhodes (his mother's uncle), a civil engineer, who had a successful business at that time. The 1851 census lists Thomas as living back at Eccleshill with his parents and gives his occupation as apprentice cabinet-maker.

By 1855, however, Thomas (now 22) was again working as an engineer with the railway contractors Messrs Peto, Brassey and Betts. He was sent to France on railway construction jobs, including the new line from Cherbourg on the coast, to Caen.

NSW RAILWAY ENGINEER

On 13 January 1859, Thomas Rhodes Firth arrived in Sydney on the sailing ship *Jason* to commence his new career as a manager on the Peto, Brassey and Betts contract to construct the Great Southern Railway from Liverpool through Menangle to Picton.

Thomas' cousin Alexander Rhodes (son of his uncle James and aunt Wemyss) arrived to work under the same job as the Contract Manager, as did Alexander's brothers John and Thomas. Alexander's stay was short-lived as he was soon in conflict with the Engineer-in-Chief John Whitton over bridge designs. Whitton did not budge on his principles and by August 1860 Alexander was on his way back to England. Samuel Wilcox took over the role as Peto, Brassey and Betts' representative on the contract and a more productive working relationship was established with John Whitton.¹

A boating accident on Sydney Harbour on 8 September 1860 brought tragedy for Thomas Firth when his cousin, the 22 year-old Thomas Rhodes, was drowned.²

By early 1861, Thomas Firth had been transferred to the Singleton area to supervise work on the Peto, Brassey and Betts contract to extend the Great Northern Railway from Maitland to Singleton. In September 1861, Thomas appeared as 'another agent of the defendant' in a court case between his employer and one of their contractors, for full payment for the work they had done. The contractor was to be paid 3s per yard to move rock and 1s 7½d per yard for earth. The issue boiled down to how much soil, as opposed to how much rock, the contractor



View of the Nepean River and the completed Menangle Bridge, with the original un-strengthened timber approach span on the right, in July 1863.

N J THORPE COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 034438

moved in excavating a cutting between Lochinvar and Singleton. Thomas' role was to measure the quantities of rock and dirt excavated. The jury retired for only 10 minutes and returned a verdict for the defendant.

It was at this time that Thomas met his future wife, Sarah Galvin, a resident of the Singleton district. They married on 20 September 1862 at *Gowrie*, the home of the Presbyterian minister, the Rev J S White, near Singleton. Thomas was 30 years old and it was the day before Sarah's 20th birthday.

Over the next 24 years Thomas and Sarah had ten children, seven sons and three daughters, all except one of whom married. His work took the family to construction camps over the Blue Mountains to the west and to Wagga Wagga in the south, until they finally returned to Sydney in 1880.

NSWGR DISTRICT ENGINEER

While working on the Northern Line for Peto, Brassey and Betts, Thomas Firth attracted the attention of John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief of the NSW Government Railways. In 1862, he was offered and accepted the position of District Engineer with the Railway Construction Branch. By 1863 Thomas had been placed in charge of construction works on Contracts Nos. 1 and 2 of the Great Western Railway from Penrith across the Blue Mountains.³ This commenced his long connection with the Railway Construction Branch of the NSW Government Railways. Thomas and Sarah Firth moved to Penrith and their first child, Thomas Rhodes Firth, was registered as being born there on 23 August 1863.

The ascent and descent of the Blue Mountains posed a major challenge to John Whitton in designing the Great Western Railway. Whitton's preference was to use tunnels to achieve the ascent of Lapstone Hill, but he was forced to compromise by the limited funds made available for the project. His solution was the little Zig Zag, which climbed the eastern escarpment from Emu Plains to today's Glenbrook. Whitton was to repeat the method to descend the western escarpment of the mountains, this time with the Great Zig Zag, which is regarded as one of the finest engineering achievements of the 19th century.



A view of John Whitton's Menangle Bridge as completed in June 1863.

N J THORPE COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 023624



The combined railway and road bridge over the Nepean River at Penrith nearing completion in 1866.
ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 034278

Contract No. 1 was for the construction of 11 miles eight chains of railway formation from the western bank of the Nepean River to Welcome Inn (now Valley Heights), which incorporated some of the major engineering works of the Great Western Railway, notably the sandstone Emu Plains Railway Culvert and the Lapstone Zig Zag with the magnificent 390 feet long [118m] Knapsack Viaduct, which is 128 feet high [38m] above the creek bed. It still stands as one of the outstanding engineering works of the 19th century.⁴

As District Engineer, Thomas's first task would have been the supervision of the earthworks of the No. 1 Contract. By April 1865 work on this contract, together with Contract No. 3 from Blue Mountains Inn to Blaxland (also being undertaken by Watkins), was reported to be 'almost completed and ready for the laying of the permanent way', but work on Contract No. 2 'was lagging and it was estimated the earthworks would take another three or four months to complete'.⁵

Thomas Firth also supervised the construction of the railway bridge (later named Victoria Bridge) over the Nepean River at Penrith. It was designed by John Whitton, who looked to contemporary British bridge technology for its design, the final design being similar to his Menangle rail bridge over the Nepean River between Campbelltown and Picton, which had opened on 1 July 1863.

The contract for the construction of the bridge piers was awarded to William Tyler in November 1862, but he was forced to surrender the contract following a series of disastrous floods in 1863–64 in which he lost his equipment. In response to the floods; the bridge design was modified, with the deck being raised in level by six and a half feet and supplied with ramped approaches. William Watkins took over the contract to construct the bridge piers in September 1864; while the superstructure was supplied by Peto, Brassey and Betts, Thomas' previous employer. They imported the

wrought iron for the bridge from their Canada Works at Birkenhead in England.

Watkins completed the piers in September 1865 and by 21 December, 'considerable progress had been made in erecting temporary stageings between the piers to support the wrought iron plates while they were riveted together'.⁶

Completion of the Victoria Bridge over the Nepean River enabled the official opening of the Great Western Railway to Weatherboard (now Wentworth Falls) on 11 July 1867. It was designed as a combined road-rail bridge with a single rail line over the river, leaving only a single lane for road traffic, so one-way traffic flows were in place until 1907. In that year, a new double-track steel bridge for railway traffic opened some 60 feet to the north, so the old bridge deck was reconstructed and the bridge was reopened for two-way road traffic flow. While a new road bridge now spans the river to the south, the old bridge continues to provide a crossing for local road traffic.

When Thomas and Sarah's second child, Maria Elizabeth, was born on 9 October 1865, the place of birth was registered as Blue Mountain cottage, Bulls Camp, Penrith District.⁷ This was a tent camp for railway construction workers located on the northern side of today's Great Western Highway about halfway between Linden and Woodford, so Thomas was then supervising the No. 2 Contract between Welcome Inn (now Valley Heights) and Blue Mountains Inn (now Wentworth Falls) the earthworks for which was carried out by Duxbury and Kerr.

Thomas and Sarah were evidently still living at Blue Mountains cottage at Bulls Camp in 1867, as their third child, Arthur James, was born there on 9 December that year.⁸ In the Public Notices section of the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the 15 June 1868, is a record of a donation of one pound made by Thomas that was collected by Mr H

Quodling of One-tree Hill (now Mount Victoria), so it appears that Thomas had moved there with his family to supervise construction of Contract No. 4. Quodling, like Thomas, was one of the District Engineers supervising work on the Great Western Railway.

When the Minister for Public Works, Mr James Byrnes, visited to inspect the railway construction works beyond Weatherboard on 28 February 1868, the special train arrived at Weatherboard around noon, where 'it picked up Mr Firth, the District Engineer who was to guide the party of sightseers to the spectacular waterfalls'. The train backed about two miles to drop the party and then took Mr Byrnes and officials about ten miles west to the end of the permanent way being laid by Larkin and Wakefield. The group then walked to Blackheath, where the No. 4 Section contractor, William Watkins, had already laid the rails on three of the four miles of permanent way to One-tree Hill. The report on this event concluded:

The works, fortunately, are of the most substantial character, and reflect credit upon the contractors before mentioned, and upon the district engineers—Mr. Firth and Mr. Quodling.⁹

This contract from Blackheath to a location a mile west of the Clarence Tunnel, had been awarded to Watkins on 19 January 1865. The 16 miles of line from Blackheath to Mount Victoria was formally opened by the Governor, the Earl of Belmore (Somerset R Lowry-Corry) on 1 May 1868. This would remain the terminus until the opening of the Western Line through to Bowenfels on 18 October 1869. Watkins completed the No. 4 Contract in November 1868.

FAMILY MATTERS

Thomas Rhodes, the uncle and mentor of Thomas Rhodes Firth, died at his home at Paignton in Devon on 6 June 1868 aged 79. His will contained the following bequests:

His engineering and scientific works, plans and instruments, jointly to his nephews Thomas Rhodes and Thomas Rhodes Firth; and:

Specifically to Thomas Firth, provided he survive Thomas Rhodes senior and his wife, the sum of £400 [worth \$48,270 in 2013 terms].

This was a significant inheritance and Thomas and Sarah Firth are recorded as having made donations to the Prince Alfred Hospital at this time.¹⁰ Between 1863 and 1870 the official NSW list of public servants (the 'Blue Book') lists Thomas as District Engineer on a salary of £500 [equivalent to \$65,100 in 2013 terms], while he also received four shillings *per diem* in lieu of forage for a horse. On 7 December 1871 in response to Mr James Hoskins, the Member for Patrick Plains, the Secretary for Public Works advised the House of Assembly that Thomas Firth was employed as a District Engineer on a salary of £475 per annum.¹¹

TO THE WESTERN PLAINS BEYOND

As construction of the Great Western Railway proceeded beyond the Blue Mountains to Bathurst, Thomas, Sarah and their family moved further west. Early in 1869, the family moved to the hamlet of Sodwalls, the construction base for Contract No. 7, which had been awarded to Daniel Williams and George Blunt on 14 August 1868 to construct and lay the line from Rydal to Lockes Platform at Locksley a distance



The eastern portal of the Clarence Tunnel in the 1930s. M A PARK PHOTO, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 012250B

of just over 20 miles [32.3km]. Sodwalls is located west of the Great Dividing Range watershed about 93 miles [150km] west of Sydney and 10 miles (16km) south-west from the town of Lithgow.

It would appear that Thomas was an active member of the Sodwalls community. In January 1869, a formal application was lodged to the Council of Education office for the establishment of a Public school at Sodwalls. The *Government Gazette* of the 16 March 1869 lists Thomas as one of the people appointed to form the Public School Board of the Public School of Sodwalls.

On the 9 June that year, the Anglican Bishop of Sydney, Dr Barker, paid a visit to Sodwalls. A tea-meeting was organised in the newly constructed church to welcome the Bishop and Thomas was voted to chair that meeting. The church had been funded by subscriptions from the local community (a large percentage being the railway workers) and details of the subscriptions were outlined during the meeting. It was also reported that: 'the usual vote was accorded to Mr. Firth for the able manner in which he filled the chair, who suitably acknowledged the compliment'.

When John Sutherland, the Minister for Public Works, visited Sodwalls on 24 September 1869 to inspect progress on construction of the Great Western Railway:

He took occasion on the invitation of the resident railway engineer (Mr Firth) to visit the public school at that place. There were about 70 cheerful, healthy-looking children in attendance, who are receiving a good education where, but for the operation of the Public Schools Act, they would be living in a state bordering on heathenism. Mr Sutherland promised to send up a case of books, to be distributed as prizes to those children who, on



The majestic stone and brick viaduct provided the sixth crossing over Solitary Creek near Sodwalls. This photograph was taken following completion of the structure. STATE LIBRARY NSW PHOTO, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 005330

examination by the Council's inspector should be shown to have attained the greatest proficiency in the different branches of instruction taught in the school. The scholars are, for the most part, children of the workmen employed by Messrs Blunt and Williams on No. 7 railway contract, and in all probability, when the works now being carried on at and near Sodwalls, are finished, the place will once again become an all but uninhabited wilderness. ...

The schoolhouse serves as a place of worship for all denominations, and it is used for the meetings of a Mutual Improvement Society which is in existence at Sodwalls. We believe that the establishment of the school, formation of the Mutual Improvement Society, &c. have been chiefly promoted by the Resident Engineer, who, while efficiently performing the responsible and onerous duties inseparable from his position, has, by his intelligence, humanity, and tact, contrived to help the temporary inhabitants of Sodwalls to give their children the advantage of education, and to promote social intercourse and enlightenment in their little community.¹²

The role given to Thomas Firth in this *Herald* report drew the ire of at least one reader, who made the following comments in a letter published on 6 October 1869:

This [an extract from the *SMH* article above], read by a stranger, would make it appear that Mr. T. R. Firth, the resident engineer, was the only party who had

exerted himself in the promotion of the church, school, mutual improvement society, reading room, &c. Without wishing to detract from the praise due to that gentleman, and as a means of keeping up the lively interest that has been taken by the residents in establishing the above institutions, I would state, from my own personal knowledge and for the information of the public, that it is not owing to the efforts of any one gentleman that all this has been done, but that each institution has its own committee of management, and in every instance the members of those several committees have, in conjunction with Mr. Firth, as one of their number, done their duty faithfully and well, as the results testify.¹³

The National Library of Australia holds a field book used by Thomas Firth during his time supervising GWR Contract No. 7 between September 1868 and June 1869. The drawings start at Rydal with the annotation 'Commencement of Contract No. 7' with a distance recorded as 97 miles and 8 chains. This distance would have been from the start of the line which in 1868 was at Redfern Station in Sydney. The entries then cover the proposed route of the line from Rydal to the west through Sodwalls (where the family was living at the time), for a distance of about 16 miles, finishing where the line meets the Kinghorne Falls Road, midway between Gemalla and Locksley. The final drawing has



A page from Thomas Firth's field book with his drawing showing the location of culverts near Sodwalls. COURTESY NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

the annotation: 'End of Contract No. 7 at 113 Mls 74 Chs'. There are detailed tables of the culverts construction under the contract and a drawing of their location.

Contract No. 7 was opened to Locksley on 22 April 1872. Thomas and Sarah's nine years living in western construction camps and/or small towns had come to an end. They moved to Sydney around mid-1872, where they lived at 708 Elizabeth Street, Strawberry Hill, near its intersection with Belvoir Street. Their fifth child, Percival Herbert, was born here on 18 October 1872.¹⁴

Evidently, Thomas also surveyed the section of the Main Western Line from Mitchells Creek near Wellington—claimed to be the site of Australia's first gold rush—to Dubbo. This line opened on 1 February 1881.¹⁵

TO SOUTHERN NSW

Thomas' time with his family in Sydney was short, as he was appointed as district engineer in charge of trial surveys for extensions of the Great Southern Railway from Yass on 13 September 1872.¹⁶ The survey party was to determine the best route from Yass to Albury via Wagga Wagga and Thomas was at the latter town by 31 October.

The railway had opened to Goulburn on 27 May 1869, but there had been little progress in extending it further south. There were three survey parties examining possible routes, but Thomas Firth was soon transferred from this work to the task of overseeing the new extension from Goulburn to Yass and then on to Wagga Wagga, which had been awarded to Daniel Williams on 16 July 1873.

From Goulburn, the surveyed route headed sharply west to avoid the gorges of the upper Murrumbidgee River. It was not until Cootamundra that the line veered south again. Heavy going at the edge of the Breadalbane Plains brought the twisting and turning track to a maximum elevation of 2396 feet (737 metres) crossing the Cullerin Range. In the next 164 miles (264km) a descent of 1787 feet (545 metres) carried the line to the Murrumbidgee River flats.

CONFLICT AT YASS

Thomas Firth found himself embroiled in controversy as the railway extension

neared Yass. The restrictions on John Whitton's budget dictated that the railway would bypass the township to avoid a crossing of the Yass River, resulting in a route two miles to the north of the town. A petition from the citizens of Yass stated that buildings to the value of £5000 were under construction at the time, but the petition claimed they would become almost worthless if the railway was to bypass the town.

To bring the railway into the town of Yass would have required the construction of two bridges over the Yass River at a cost of £30,000 to £40,000. The residents, represented by the Yass Railway Extension Committee, agreed to have the terminal at North Yass, but this was deemed to be too difficult and expensive.

The Yass Railway Committee employed a private surveyor to find a suitable route into North Yass. A public subscription list was opened with the CBC Bank giving a donation of £100 and the £400 needed was soon raised. Mr F H Grundy surveyed the route and presented his report to the Minister by mid-1873.

On Wednesday the 13 August 1873, Henry Parkes, the NSW Colonial Secretary, visited Yass with John Sutherland, Secretary of Public Works, the Hon. J S Farnell, Minister for Lands and John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief of Railways. During the day, Thomas and these men were occupied in examining the routes indicated on Mr Grundy's plans as the best by which the railway could be brought into North Yass. They spent some

hours in the examination and traversed all the lines; but the only line that was properly marked was the line known as the main line. The deviation recommended by Mr Grundy was only partially staked and his final recommendation had no stakes whatsoever.

It was stated that the examination of the ground produced a most unfavourable impression on their minds as to the practicability of bringing the line into North Yass at a reasonable cost. After inspection of the plans, it became obvious that Mr Grundy's final deviation recommendation was practically the same as the trial survey abandoned by Mr Whitton. There followed a series of strongly worded exchanges between Whitton and Grundy with the Yass Railway Committee firmly behind Grundy. In late February 1874 a motion was passed in Yass condemning Whitton for deliberately misleading the Minister for Public Works.

Whitton instructed Thomas Firth to prove that the consultant's findings were incorrect. Thomas reported that Grundy's alternative line was only partially staked out, the curves were inaccurate and the 'straight' portions seemed very crooked. It was difficult to see, he added, how any engineer could profess to give a true estimate of the cost of a line based on such unreliable data.

A debate and vote in Legislative Assembly followed on the 10 March 1874 on the decision to not take the line through Yass, but to locate the station about two-and-a-half miles from the town. During that debate, in answer to a question from Mr Fitzpatrick (Member for Yass Plains



A tank-sinking crew pose for the camera during the works to duplicate the main line at Harden. Their tools are typical of those used during the original construction task. HARDEN DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 013134



A view of Yass Town circa 1890, with the road bridge over the Yass River prominent on the centre-left, while construction has commenced on the Railway Bridge in the foreground. KERRY STUDIOS, ARHNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 005330

1869–1881) as to how the price of the line was calculated, Mr James Hoskins (Member for Tumut 1859–1863, 1868–1882) responded that Mr Firth, a gentleman of experience who had been employed to take charge of large public works and railway contracts for the colony, went over it and examined it himself. He found that Mr Grundy's line was based on erroneous data. He went on to say that he felt that if he voted for the resolution (to take the line through Yass), he would be retarding the railway extension to Wagga Wagga for six months.

The resolution was not passed, with the route surveyed by Whitton being accepted by the government. The Railway Committee did have one small victory; the terminal that was to be placed near McGrath's Public House on the main road was changed by their efforts to its present position. This was to make it easier to construct a branch line to Yass town at a later date.

Eventually the residents of Yass Town received a railway connection, but only in the form of the short 5km Yass Tramway, which opened on 30 April 1892. It required the construction of a substantial railway bridge over the Yass River upstream from the existing road

bridge. Operated by small tank locomotives hauling short passenger and mixed trains, the Yass Tram lingered on until closure on 29 October 1988.

FAMILY MATTERS

Sarah Firth and her children remained in Sydney at 708 Elizabeth Street at least well into 1873,¹⁷ but evidently they moved to Yass during 1874. Thomas travelled south to Melbourne in early September 1874 and returned

to Sydney on the *SS Dandenong*, which arrived back in Sydney on 14 September. Their second daughter, Frances Annie, was born at Yass on 4 April 1875.¹⁸

In early 1876, the Secretary for Public Works, John Lackey, advised the Legislative Assembly that some of the ballast used by the contractor for the line to Gunning was not considered satisfactory and had been condemned by the Engineer-in-Chief. The cer-



An early view of Wagga Wagga Station with railway staff posing on the platform. N J THORPE COLLECTION, ARHNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 023664

tificate would not be issued to the contractor until the whole of the works had been approved by the Engineer-in-Chief. He then added that Mr Thomas R Firth was a civil engineer and the government had no intention of dispensing with his services, suggesting that he may have been implicated in some oversight in this matter.¹⁹

The line to Gunning finally opened on 3 July 1876, with the opening train from Sydney arriving at Yass Junction that morning. Not that the citizens of Yass celebrated this event. Not one person went out to the station to see it; such was the disgust of the town towards John Whitton and the New South Wales Railways.

The Firth family relocated to Wagga Wagga, probably in late 1876 or early 1877. Another son, Henry Galvin, was born there on 11 October 1877.²⁰

TO WAGGA WAGGA AND ALBURY

The work on the Southern Line from Wagga Wagga to Albury commenced in March 1878, at a large cutting a few miles out of town. This resulted in great excitement among the town community. A public meeting was held, chaired by the Mayor, where amongst other things, resolutions were passed to hold a banquet and ball on the 2 April and that: 'the Mayor be requested to declare a public holiday on that day'. Official guests to be invited included: 'the New South Wales Governor and Ministry, the Victorian Governor and Ministry, the Engineer-in-Chief, Mr. Whitton, the Chief Engineer, Mr. Firth, the member for the district and the resident engineer'.

The prospects of a higher salary evidently caused Thomas to resign as district engineer and take up the position of manager and engineer with Messrs Cornwell, Mixner & Company, the contractors for the line from Wagga Wagga to Albury, a move he confided in a personal letter to his nephew, Thomas Rhodes, regarding his desire to move to the colony.²¹ Thomas' move was short-lived, for within a short time he found the work unsatisfactory and he returned to the Government service, taking up his former position as District Engineer in charge of various contracts, principally on the Southern Line.



The two Victorian villas at 154–156 Smith Street, Summer Hill, purchased by Thomas Firth in 1880. No. 154 became the *Airedale Villa* Summer Hill Ladies School in 1882, while the Firth family moved from No. 156 to *Leinster Hall* in Tempe during October 1882.

BACK TO SYDNEY

Thomas, Sarah and their family moved back to Sydney in 1880 prior to completion of the Great Southern Railway to Albury—it opened to Gerogery on 1 September 1880 and to Albury on 3 February 1881.

Despite the hardship of living in railway camps and small towns, Thomas' years supervising railway construction contracts on the frontier had evidently been rewarding in financial terms. On his return to Sydney in early 1880, Thomas purchased two grand Federation houses at 154 and 156 Smith Street in the Summer Hill Estate sub-division from local builders George and Robert Allum, who had completed them the previous year. They were identical two-storey brick and slate houses, each with seven rooms.²² Both residences were named *Airedale Villas*, apparently by Thomas after the Aire River that ran through the dales near the area where he grew up.

The Firth family evidently lived at 156 Smith Street and on 12 April 1880, Walter Baylis Firth was born at *Airedale Villas*, Summer Hill.²³ The house at 154 Smith Street remained vacant until 1882, when the Airedale Villa Summer Hill Ladies School opened in 'the 'commodious residence' on 1 April.²⁴ The family's time in Summer Hill was short as they sold No. 156 in October 1882 and moved to the heritage-listed 1858 Victorian residence *Leinster Hall* at 125 Unwins Bridge Road, Tempe. No. 156 Smith Street was sold in 1884.

Thomas Firth was now 51 and Sarah was 41, but there was another addi-

tion to the family on 28 April 1883 with the arrival of Eveline Mary at *Leinster Hall*.²⁵

THE ILLAWARRA LINE

Coal was an important resource of the Illawarra region with collieries being established there from 1848, but dangerous seas hindered the transport of the coal by ship. By the 1870s, gravel was being mined in quarries at Kiama, while the area was also an important source of dairy products, so political pressure emerged to connect the Illawarra area with Sydney by rail.

In 1873 the committee asked the government surveyor, Mr R Stephens, to examine a route for a railway. This route commenced at Rozelle and crossed Georges River at Tom Uglys Point. It then climbed the steep range to the Port Hacking River, following its valley towards Stanwell Park. The route encountered serious challenges for railway construction and Stephens expressed his concerns to John Whitton. This route was rejected by parliament in 1876.²⁶

A new route was surveyed, branching from the Main Western Line at Illawarra Junction near the inner-city suburb of Macdonaldtown and continuing through to Kiama, some 68 miles (109km) south, via Stanwell Park and Wollongong. Following heated debate by opposing interests, this route was passed by the NSW Parliament on 6 April 1881 and the contractor C and E Millar commenced construction of the first section to Waterfall in August 1882.²⁷



P Class locomotive No. 480 (later 3229), which entered service on 7 September 1892, hauls a trial run of the 1901 Royal Train across the Cooks River Bridge at Tempe. ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 009859

The District Engineer responsible for supervising the construction of the Illawarra Line was James Fraser, a young Scottish engineer who had recently arrived in the colony. Thomas Firth was responsible for supervising the construction of the Cooks River Bridge at Tempe and the Como Bridge over the Georges River.

The Cooks River Bridge had two wrought-iron main plate girders, each 108 feet six inches long, placed in pairs and divided into three spans of 61 feet each. The superstructure was supported by four piers, each consisting of two cement-filled cast-iron cylinders five feet in diameter. They were placed 25 feet six inches apart from centre to centre and braced in pairs.²⁸

On Friday 10 October 1884, Thomas joined the Engineer-in-Chief, John Whitton, and Inspecting Engineer, W

B Wade, in the formal testing of the Cooks River Bridge and they inspected other works on the Illawarra Line. The bridge was tested with two locomotives side by side, weighing about 130 tons, the deflection being three-eighths of an inch on each of the end spans, and one-fourth of an inch on the middle span. The following day, Thomas joined some 70 members of the Engineering Association of New South Wales on a special train from Redfern station to the work site at Georges River, with stops at the Cooks River Bridge and the Arncliffe tunnel on the outward journey; and at each station on the return to inspect the new works.²⁹

The opening of the line to Hurstville by Mr Francis Wright, the Minister for Public Works, was on Wednesday 15 October. Following the opening

newspapers reported that between 150 and 200 residents attended a banquet in the goods shed at that station to celebrate the event. Thomas Firth responded to the 'Toast to the Engineers and Contractors'.³⁰

John Whitton had designed a double-track lattice girder bridge for the crossing of the Georges River at Como, but the government would not provide sufficient funding, so only a single-track bridge was possible, creating a bottleneck on the line for the next 86 years. A new pre-stressed concrete double-track bridge finally opened on 27 November 1972.

The contractors, C and E Millar, employed some 200 men on the bridge, who camped in a shanty town on the banks of the river. This bridge was a significant structure with six spans, each 159 feet long, sitting on iron cylinder piers and resting on abutments at each end, the northern one being an impressive sandstone feature. Its total length was 954 feet (290m) and the structure weighed 2195 tons and the cost was £66,000 [\$7.7 million in 2013 terms]. Thomas Firth was involved in load testing of the bridge with three locomotives (weighing 198 tons in total) on 19 January 1886 and the bridge was formally opened shortly afterwards with regular trains continuing to Sutherland. The line from Sutherland to Waterfall opened on Monday 1 March 1886.³¹

The railway from the south bank of the Georges River to Waterfall was let to contractors Rowe and Smith and on Saturday 9 January 1888 a special train ran from Redfern Station to Sutherland to enable passengers to



A Sutherland-bound passenger train has come to a halt at Como Station as passengers alight after travelling across the gauntleted-track on the Georges River Bridge in the 1890s. N J THORPE COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 023530

enjoy the vistas of the Georges River from the platform at Como, although the station buildings were not finished. Sutherland Station was also in the course of erection, but the correspondent to the *Illawarra Mercury* newspaper noted that with Rowe and Smith's main camp and the work on the fine railway buildings, 'Sutherland has quite the aspect of a town'.³²

The opening of the Illawarra Line to Waterfall marked a watershed in Thomas Firth's career with the New South Wales Railways, for he would subsequently be advanced to more senior positions. These will be covered in Part 2 of the article.

END NOTES

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2. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1860, p 8; and 11 September 1860
3. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1863,
4. A detailed article covering William Watkins' contracts in constructing the Victoria Bridge at Penrith and the line across the Blue Mountains is contained in the September 2016 issue of *Australian Railway History*.
5. *Sydney Mail*, Saturday 22 April 1865, p9, 'Railways'.
6. *Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday 21 December 1867, p8, 'Railways'.
7. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1865, p1. This notice gives the name as Bully Camp, which appears to be a spelling error.
8. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 December 1867, p1. The official record states that the birth was at Bathurst Road, District of Penrith.
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10. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1868, p8, Public Notices, Prince Alfred Hospital List.
11. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 8 December 1871, p2, 'Legislative Assembly'.
12. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 September 1869, p4, The Minister for Works and the Public School Sodwalls.
13. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October 1869, Letters.
14. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November 1872, Births.
15. Surveyor Hutchinson's report to the NSW Railways Engineer-in-Chief, 18 March 1890.
16. *NSW Government Gazette*, 13 September 1872.
17. *Sands Directory*, 1873.
18. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April 1875, 'Births'; NSW Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
19. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1876, 'Problems with Ballast'.
20. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 October 1877, Birth Notices; NSW Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
21. Thomas Firth, personal letter to Thomas Rhodes dated 18 June 1878 held by the family.
22. Ashfield Council Rate Book, 1880.
23. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April 1880, Birth Notices; NSW Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
24. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 March 1882, 'Notice'.
25. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 April 1883, Births; NSW Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
26. Oakes, John, *Sydney's Forgotten Illawarra Railways*, Redfern, ARHS (NSW Division), 2009, p5-6.
27. Oakes, John, *Ibid*, pp 8-11.
28. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 11 October 1884, p13.
29. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Monday 13 October 1884, p12.
30. *Aust. Town & Country Journal*, 18 October 1884, p795; *Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday 16 October 1884, p11.
31. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Monday 1 March 1887, p7; Oakes, John, *Ibid*, pp 16-17.
32. *Illawarra Mercury*, Tuesday 12 January 1886, p2, 'The Illawarra Railway'.

In this month's **Railway Digest**

The In praise of water

Railways have a love-hate relationship with water. For 150 years water was the fundamental source of power on rail, and still is in a less obvious way for most of the electrified railways of today.

Max Michell reminisces about a special piece of railway that skirts the waters of the Hawkesbury River and Mullet Creek, north of Sydney, and was a part of his life for six years.

GALLERY

A selection of recent railway photographs from around Australia.

Around the Silver City

Situated in the far west of New South Wales, Broken Hill (aka The Silver City) is home to the world's largest silver, lead and zinc mine, established by Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited (now BHP Billiton). During 2016, *Railway Digest* regulars John Hoyle, Larry Zanker and Bob Grant visited Broken Hill, and recorded some typical scenes of regular operations around this remote but important rail centre.

Plus all our regular features





The Imperial Service Medal awarded to NSW railwayman Joseph Cathcart in 1941. DORRIGO STEAM RAILWAY & MUSEUM PHOTO

FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE

Imperial Service Medals awarded to NSW railwaymen

Trevor Edmonds

THE IMPERIAL SERVICE ORDER

On 8 August 1902, the *London Gazette* carried an announcement from King Edward VII creating a new order to be known as The Imperial Service Order for 'the members of the administrative or clerical branches of Our Civil Services', who would become companions of the order.¹ Between 1903 and 1989, 425 Australians became Companions of the Imperial Service Order. None came from the NSW Railways.

THE IMPERIAL SERVICE MEDAL

King Edward also provided for those whose occupational status within the civil service would not entitle them to be

considered for the Imperial Service Order.² On retirement after 25 years of service, they would be eligible to receive the Imperial Service Medal.

The medal was initially in the form of an eight-pointed silver star, with the top point replaced by a crown. The central medallion carried the monarch's monogram with the motto 'for faithful service' around the periphery. The back of the medal was blank except for the name of the recipient. The medal was suspended by a ribbon of equal red, blue and red stripes. The Imperial Service Order was a similar design, with a gold central medallion.

In 1920, the design was changed to a one-and-a-quarter inch (32mm) circular silver medal (as shown above) bearing the monarch's effigy on the obverse. The reverse showed the



An example of the original Imperial Service Medal with eight-pointed star. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

figure of a seated man, symbolising the rest of retirement after a life of labour, with the motto 'for faithful service'. The recipient's name was imprinted on the lower edge. The ribbon, of the same design as the earlier medal, was one-and-a-half inches (38mm) wide.

Each Australian government (federal and state) was responsible for processing nominations for its own civil servants. Numerous communications between NSW and London to establish the practicalities of awarding the medal were summarised by a New South Wales Premier's Office Minute on 25 January 1911 as follows:

Colonial Office Circular of the 20th August, 1902, intimated that the medal had been granted to artisans, storemen, matrons, overseers, shipwrights, messengers, carpenters, bookkeepers, boatmen, warders, police officers and others. It further stated that:

"The number of medals to be issued is not limited but in order to maintain the value of the recommendation it is not to be regarded as a reward for merely long service unmarked by special merit". The Secretary of State for the Colonies in a later dispatch,

however, (29th December 1902) advised that the Committee of Selection for the Imperial Service Order proposed to submit for the Imperial Service Medal all members of the permanent established Civil Service of the state who:

1. Do not belong to the clerical or administrative Branches, and are thus ineligible for the order, and
2. Retired after having served for not less than 25 years with diligence and fidelity to the satisfaction of their Department.

This leaves the criteria somewhat ambiguous, with no clear definition of the 'diligence and fidelity' required for eligibility. The relatively small number of medals awarded (only 4000 to NSW public servants in a period exceeding 70 years) suggests something more than meeting the service criterion with a record merely free of serious misconduct was required. For those who did not receive a medal, despite believing their service to be the equal of those who did, the process appeared to be arbitrary and inconsistent.

The first Australian medals were approved in December 1903. Of the seven medals awarded, three went to Queensland policemen, two to Tasmanian policemen and two to PMG⁴ employees nominated by the Federal Government. A table summarising the medals awarded to public servants across Australia between 1903 and 1990 is in the Appendix on page 22.

New South Wales waited until 1906 to submit its first nominations: five retired police officers. Another police officer, Superintendent Nicholas Larkins, was submitted and approved by the King in 1907, but then caused some embarrassment by declining to accept the medal.

The next nominations from NSW came in June 1908, when 15 recommendations were approved. The police again dominated with nine nominations, but the list included the first NSW railwaymen to receive the medal: inspectors George Derbyshire and Edward Robins.⁵ The railways would wait until 1912 before submitting their third recommendation, being driver William Farquhar. The only other driver to receive a medal prior to 1940 was John Reeves in 1930.

Railwaymen

The use of the gender specific 'railwaymen' is appropriate. Despite recommending retiring employees for medals from 1908 to 1979, the railway never found a woman they deemed to be worthy of nomination. The *itsanhonour* database lists Thora Isabella Agland, who received the medal in 1970 as a NSW Railways – Special Class Guard. This is incorrect: she was a clerical assistant for the PMG. The special class guard was her uncle, Herbert Agland, a medal recipient from 1941. The NSW Police awarded medals to two women.³

THE FIRST RAILWAY MEDALS

George Derbyshire

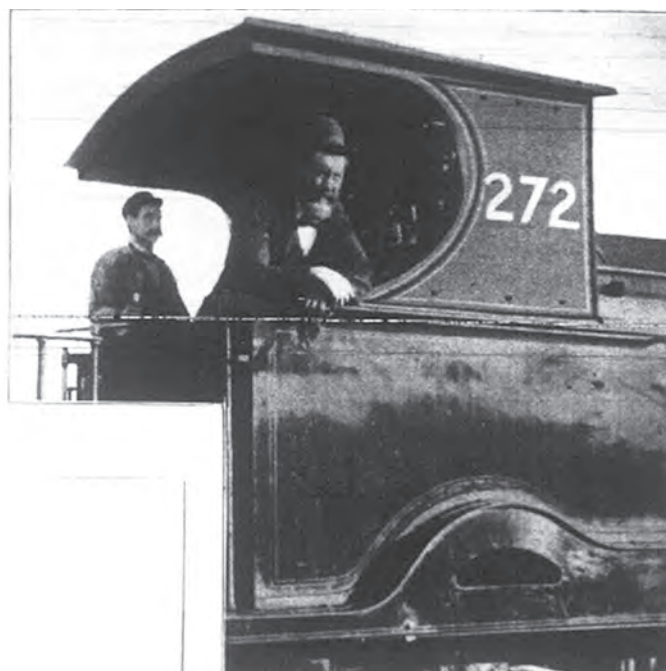
George Derbyshire was born in Manchester, England in 1838. By 1859 he was living at Eden (NSW), but when he married in 1861 he was described as a gold miner and engineer on the Araluen gold fields. In mid-1886, Derbyshire joined a partnership, Ross and Company, to develop a gold mine. The mine failed to produce sufficient gold to meet its working expenses, but the partners persisted, believing the mine would soon produce a better yield. It didn't, and the partners found themselves insolvent.

Derbyshire appears to have remained at Araluen until he joined the Locomotive Branch of the NSW Railways in 1875. He was based at Eveleigh (Sydney) throughout his railway career, and used his engineering skills in the supply of locomotive watering facilities. In 1881, he was appointed as a Second Class District Inspector of Water Supply. At his retirement in 1906 with over 30 years' service, he was Inspector of Water Supply.

Edward Robbins

Robbins was born in England in 1834. Nothing is known of his life until 1865 when he was working as a labourer at Towrang (near Goulburn). He joined the railways in 1869 as a fettler. By 1872, he was a ganger and in 1880, he was appointed as Sub-Inspector for Existing Lines covering the section between Albury and Wagga Wagga. He moved to Bathurst as Permanent Way Inspector in 1889, with responsibility for the lines to Wallerawang, Orange and Molong.

Robbins retired in 1904. His work in the Bourke floods in 1890 and landslips at Mudgee the following year were used to support his nomination for the Imperial Service Medal.



William Farquhar on the footplate of 4-4-0 express locomotive D272 (later 16 Class) in 1905. Built by Dübs & Company, No. 261, the class leader, entered service in October 1883 and saw extensive use on special trains. SYDNEY MAIL PHOTO, 27 SEP 1905

William Farquhar

The New South Wales Government Railways opened on 26 September 1855. Just 55 days later a 14-year-old lad, William Farquhar, commenced employment as an engine cleaner. At 19, he was appointed as fireman and three years later he rose to driver.

Farquhar was promoted to Shed Inspector at Eveleigh in 1885 and between 1890 and 1894 he was shed foreman at Wellington and Singleton before returning to Eveleigh as a driver—apparently at his own choice.

William Farquhar retired on 30 March 1911. During his 55 years' service, the railway had grown from 14 route miles (22 km) to 4000 (6500 km). Farquhar had run 'the first train on the Southern line from Sydney, first to Picton, then to Mittagong and Marulan, and finally to Goulburn.'⁶ He was a regular driver between Sydney and Goulburn, sharing the

duties with William Sixsmith, who had been the driver of the official opening train in 1855. Sixsmith's fireman on the opening train, William Webster, married Farquhar's sister.

Farquhar was chosen as one of the drivers for the Royal Tour of 1881 when 17-year-old Prince Albert and his 15-year-old brother Prince George visited Australia as midshipmen in training on *HMS Bacchante*. The princes travelled on the engine with Farquhar on a trip to the Blue Mountains. Prince George returned to NSW as Prince of Wales in 1901 and again Farquhar was one of the Royal Train drivers. Prince George became King George V in 1910, and signed the approval for William Farquhar's Imperial Service Medal on 11 April 1912.

SELECTING RECIPIENTS

New South Wales continued to nominate its public servants for Imperial Service Medals until 1979 with the police and railways being the dominant organisations: the police in the period 1912–1957, and the railways 1940–1979.

Despite the dominance of the railways, most of the hundreds of railwaymen who retired every year would not be considered for a medal, despite appearing to meet the criteria for length of service and 'diligence and fidelity'. Those retiring between 1912 and 1939 felt particularly aggrieved. During this period, the railways averaged only one medal per year, while the police (who used the Imperial Service Medal as a second tier award to the King's Police and Fire Service Medal) averaged 15.⁷

As illustrated by the following examples, requests from retirees to the railways or the current premier invariably failed to achieve more than a cursory review of the claim. Letters published in newspapers were usually anonymous and were simply ignored.

Sydney Morning Herald – 24 May 1926

NO MEDALS FOR RAILWAY MEN
TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.

Sir. Can you enlighten me, and incidentally dozens of other retired railway officers, why it is their names are so seldom seen amongst the recipients of Imperial Service medals?

One constantly sees the names of retired police and Public Service officers, but very seldom those officers previously named.

It that they are expected to beg for what is their right (always provided that their conduct has been good), or is it that the police and other State departments recognise the claim of their officers and recommend accordingly without waiting for their old servants to become supplicants, as the Railway Commissioners apparently do? I am, etc.,
ONE OF THEM.

James McCann

James McCann joined the railways as a 16-year-old shop boy at Goulburn Per Way in 1878. He transferred to Traffic Branch as a porter in 1889, and worked as a goods porter at Darling Harbour from 1892 until his retirement in 1929. He was promoted to leading porter in 1912.

McCann's retirement on 27 October 1929 was probably too late for him to be considered in the group of 12 NSW public servants whose medals were approved by King George V on 24 January 1930. Two railwaymen were included: driver John Reeves and guard Albert Tinkler.

The next group of NSW medals approved by the King on 29 July 1930 included only one railwayman: William

Nicholas (stationmaster, Croydon). Disappointed at being overlooked, McCann wrote to the Railway Secretary, William Newman.⁸ Newman's reply pointed out that McCann would have been eligible, but Traffic Branch had not made the required recommendation, so nothing could be done.

On 1 January 1931, McCann wrote to the Premier, Jack Lang, arguing that if an 'officer' like Mr Nicholas could get a medal after 48 years, then a 'worker' retiring after 51 years should also be nominated and he made a special plea to Mr Lang to 'give justice in a matter like this'. The matter was then referred to the Railway Commissioner for 'consideration'. Railway Secretary Newman responded that:

After enquiry, there are no special features with regard to his service in the Department that would justify a recommendation being made for the award. No further action would be made.

1930 MEDAL RECIPIENTS

John Reeves

Reeves joined the railways as a 17 year old cleaner at Picton in 1878 and progressed to fireman (1881) then driver (1884). He transferred to Eveleigh in 1892.

In March 1905, Reeves was injured in a fall at Hornsby. His left leg was crushed by the wheel of the engine, resulting in amputation below the knee. He was then restricted to working as a shunting driver until his retirement in 1929.

His record card shows that the railways paid for an artificial leg in 1905 (£20), 1925 (£22 10s), 1928 (£22 10s) and 1934 (£20). He was also supplied with stump socks.

Albert Tinkler

Tinkler joined Sydney's trams in 1884 and worked as an assistant conductor and pointsman before transferring to the railways in 1888 as a signaller and assistant guard. He was appointed as a guard in 1900, a mail guard in 1913 and a through passenger train guard in 1929 before retiring in 1929 having completed 45 years of service. The recommendation for his Imperial Service Medal noted he had worked the Commissioner's train.

After four years in retirement, Tinkler returned to the railways as institute attendant at Enfield and worked until just before his 82nd birthday in 1946. His total service exceeded 58 years.

William Nicholas

From commencing as a probationer in 1882, Nicholas made steady progress to be appointed station master of Hawkesbury River in 1901. He lost the sight in one eye in 1905, and was required to have his sight tested annually. He occasionally failed the test, but was permitted to keep his position.

Nicholas took charge of Croydon station in suburban Sydney in 1913 and remained there until his retirement in 1930. The station won third prize in the garden competition in 1922.

FIRST MEDALS TO GUARDS

No explanation has been found as to why the railways recommended so few retired employees prior to 1940, or how its nomination process worked. A recommendation probably turned on the willingness of the various levels between

the retiree and district superintendents or branch chiefs to accept a recommendation and pass it up the chain of command to the secretariat. Any delay or oversight in this process would be sufficient to thwart the claim.

Most citations in the *itsanhonour* database give the occupation of railway workers, which allows some comparison of occupational groups. This reveals a bias towards guards in the period prior to 1940 and, perhaps surprisingly, drivers are under-represented in the latter years with only six medals awarded after 1967.

The first guard to receive a medal was William Cox in 1914, followed by Samuel Murray the following year. By 1934, nine guards had received a medal, a third of the 28 medals awarded to NSW railwaymen in that period.

William Cox

William Cox was born in England in 1847 and served on English railways for 16 years before he migrated to New South Wales. He joined the NSW railways in 1877 as a shunter, but was promoted to guard after a month. Cox retired in 1913 having served 36 years (or 52 years including his English service).

According to his nomination: 'he occupied the position of Guard of the *Melbourne Express* Train for the last 30 years, and was one of the first, if not actually the first guard of these trains when the line was opened to the Border'.

Samuel Murray (1849–1925)

Despite serving the railways for over 40 years (1872 to 1913) and working the Southern Express for the last 30 years, Murray's nomination centred on his actions when the guard



Portrait of William Cox. SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 28 JULY 1908

of the Up Mail Train from Albury on 25 January 1885. The citation stated that the train:

When nearing Cootamundra ran into Salt Lake Creek, and all the vehicles, including the brakevan went into the water. Murray got out on the side of the van and assisted in saving passengers, and then hurried away to protect a goods train in the rear, and succeeded in causing it to be pulled up a short distance from the scene of the accident.

AN IMPERFECT RECORD

If there was a criteria required to justify a recommendation for a medal, it was unevenly applied and varied over time. The requirement for 'diligence and fidelity' and the low number of medals awarded suggests that men with imperfect records would be unlikely candidates. While this seems to be generally true, some records have been found where misbehaviour was overlooked. Such inconsistencies in the awarding of the Imperial Service Medal are illustrated by the Danswan family.

Perceres Danswan (1880–1976)

Percy joined the railways as a casual cleaner at Murrurundi Depot in 1898. He progressed to fireman (1902), driver (1910) and special class steam driver (1936).⁹ He was based at Eveleigh depot from 1912 until his retirement in 1940. His citation for the medal stated that he: 'consistently rendered efficient service' and noted that for 25 years, 'he was engaged driving important mail and passenger trains'.

His record card shows some issues. Percy was dismissed for his participation in the 1917 strike and lost seniority when re-employed (his wages being reduced from 15s per day to 12s). In 1919, he was reduced to fireman for three days.

Leonard Danswan (1891–1961)

Len Danswan, Percy's nephew, followed a similar career from cleaner to fireman (1912), driver (1917) and special class driver (1942). His 45 years service was all on the Main South Line. He received the Imperial Service Medal following his retirement in 1952. Leonard had 'Remained loyal during the 1917 Strike, August 1917' but was reduced from driver to head cleaner for three months in 1921 and lost his special class driver status in 1948 for three months after he:

'Irregularly took charge of an engine at Junee on 20.2.48 and collided with another engine.'

Wilfred Danswan (1893–1964)

Wilfred was Len's brother. He worked for the railways briefly in 1915 and again in 1917 before securing a permanent position as a perway labourer in 1918. He was promoted to fettler in 1918 and to ganger in 1926. Despite retiring in 1955 with 37 years service and a blemish-free record card, he was not considered for an Imperial Service Medal.

During the 1950s perway workers received 12 medals (about one a year). Given the size of the workforce, it is perhaps not surprising that Wilfred Danswan missed out.

The 1917 Strike: Those employees who remained on strike after the ultimatum date of 14 August 1917 were dismissed by proclamation. Most were subsequently re-employed, but lost their seniority. No strike participant appears to have received a medal for over two decades. The first medal known to be awarded to an employee dismissed by procla-

mation was Perceres Danswan in 1941.

THE RAILWAY INSTITUTE, ACCIDENTS AND ILLNESS

Participation in Railway Institute activities, especially in the first aid/ambulance corps was often mentioned in recommendations. Occasionally a single event was also deemed to be relevant, as happened to Samuel Murray.

Some recipients had citations that gave an occupation that indicates a limited career. Typically, this was due to injury or illness. John Reeves, who was mentioned in the 1930 group, is an example of a career affected by injury. The career of Henry Pearce was affected by sight problems.

Henry Pearce (1878–1959)

Henry gained a permanent position as a firelighter at Hamilton Depot in 1900. A note on his record shows he already had more than a year of casual service that included acting as a fireman. This suggests he had previous experience, possibly on the private coal lines. He made cleaner the following year and fireman in 1904, serving at Penrith and Hamilton.¹⁰

He was then transferred to Wallerawang as head cleaner in 1907. His sight had failed. Over the next 11 years he worked as an engine turner or coal elevator attendant at Penrith and Hamilton. In 1918 he moved to Bathurst as a washout plant attendant and remained in that role with a move to Broadmeadow in 1924.

Pearce regularly received bonuses for the condition of the plant. His opportunities may have been limited, but he applied himself fully and was noticed. He received an Imperial Service Medal the year after his retirement in 1943.

Protecting the Railways' reputation

Those working in an area where they were highly visible to railway management were well placed to receive a recommendation. **Keith Chiplin** led the Broadmeadow depot breakdown crew and was highly regarded for his ability to recover wrecked locomotives. Often working in full view of the public and media, where any mistake would be quickly reported, an efficient recovery would be favourably remembered. Chiplin was awarded the Imperial Service Medal after he retired in 1964.

Special Class positions

In 1936, the NSW Railways created the special class classification for various occupations to allow those employees considered to be the most outstanding to be recognised and be remunerated as salaried staff.

PROCESSING IMPERIAL SERVICE MEDALS

Joseph Cathcart (1878–1951)

The medal used to illustrate this article was awarded to Joseph Cathcart in 1941. He was born into a farming family in 1878. Both his parents, Matthew and Martha, came from County Antrim in Ireland. Matthew arrived in Australia in 1857 and worked as a farm labourer in the Warrnambool area of Victoria. Martha followed in 1860. They married the following year.

By 1898, Joseph's older brothers were working as farm labourers at Kirndeene Station, near Culcairn NSW. Joseph probably also worked there,¹¹ but by 1899 he was employed as a carter in Albury, probably working out of the railway transshipment yards at the break-of-gauge between the standard gauge of NSW and the broad gauge of Victoria. He married Margaret Eberle in 1900 and they had three children: Alex (1902), Alma (1903) and Olive (1907).

Joseph joined the NSW Railways on 9 January 1913 as a porter in the Albury transshipment yards. He remained at these yards until his retirement on 27 December 1939, being promoted

to leading porter in 1917, head porter (1921), and finally to assistant charge-man (1937). Joseph was a member of the Railway Ambulance Corps, and progressed through the various levels to achieve life membership.¹³ Soon after retiring, Joseph and Margaret moved to Culcairn. Joseph died in 1951 and Margaret in 1952.

Processing the Medal

At the time Joseph Cathcart's medal was processed, recommendations for an Imperial Service Medal were forwarded to the Railway Secretariat within a couple of months of the retirement of the employee and were

then collated into a quarterly submission to the Premier's Office. The covering letter to the Premier's Office, signed by acting secretary Sydney Nicholas,¹⁴ included the statement:

In the case of each man separately a statement is enclosed showing particulars of his service and the reason for the recommendation, and an assurance has been obtained from each employee that he will accept the medal in the event of the Award being approved by His Majesty.

The assurance of acceptance had been a requirement since the embarrassment over Nicholas Larkins in 1907. The statement of particulars for **Joseph Cathcart** showed:

CATHCART, Joseph Assistant Charge-man.

Appointed 9.1.13. Retired 27.12.39.

Length of Service 26 years 11 months.

9.1.13 – Porter.

14.3.16 – Tranship Porter

16.8.17 – Leading Porter

6.5.18 – Leading Tranship Porter

4.4.21 – Head Porter

2.37 – Assistant Charge-man

For a period of approximately 20 years Mr Cathcart was employed in a supervisory capacity in the Goods Shed at Albury, at which place the transshipping of Interstate traffic is handled. He was regarded as a conscientious and reliable employee, and throughout the whole of his employment in the Department rendered very satisfactory service. He was a life member of the Railway Ambulance Corps.¹⁵

The Premier's Office forwarded 79 nominations to the office of the Governor, Lord Wakehurst, in December 1940.¹⁶ Joseph Cathcart was included in the 41 nominations from the Railways that represented retirements for the three quarters from 1 October 1939 to 30 June 1940.

The Governor despatched the recommendations to the Dominions Office in London on 26 January 1941. Despite the ravages of World War II, with the London Blitz seeing the British capital regularly bombed between 7 September 1940 and 10 May 1941, the processing of Imperial Service Medals continued. On 9 May 1941, *The London Gazette* announced:

The KING has been graciously pleased to award the Imperial Service Medal to the following officers:-



With spectators watching on, Keith Chiplin's Broadmeadow breakdown crew on crane 1072 (at left) work in combination with the Enfield breakdown crew on crane 1073 to recover locomotive 3817 at Rocky Ponds on 2 July 1948. Despite the saturation newspaper coverage this accident attracted, the recovery of the locomotive was achieved without incident and received little attention from the papers.¹²

C C SINGLETON COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RRC, 005608A

After listing about 300 recipients from the 'home civil service', came the New South Wales recipients. First, the 21 nominations from the Police, then nine from Health, 41 from the Railways (including Joseph Cathcart), six from Road Transport and Tramways, and a single name from Treasury – a total of 78 names from the 79 submitted. The missing name was explained by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Viscount Cranbourne, in his response to the NSW Governor on 21 May 1941:

With regard to the recommendation in favour of Mr H T Tuck, formerly Superintendent of Weights and Measures, it appears from the particulars furnished, that his services were largely of an administrative character such as would render him eligible for appointment to the Imperial Service Order and so ineligible for the award of the Medal. Service of the kind given by Mr. Tuck would also render him eligible for appointment as a Member of the Order of the British Empire.

Mr Tuck ultimately did not receive any award recognising his service.

The medals were despatched to Australia from the Dominions Office in June. The under-secretary of the Premier's Office wrote to the Secretary for Railways on 20 August to advise that the medals would be presented on 17 September 1941.

The ceremony, as was usual, was held on the lawn adjacent to Government House. There was a strong ceremonial police presence with both mounted and foot contingents. The police band played selections prior to the arrival of the Governor when they played the National Anthem.

The Governor inspected the police detachments before being welcomed by the Colonial Secretary, John Baddeley.¹⁷ The medals were then presented: first the King's Police and Fire Service Medals, then the Imperial Service Medals. Each recipient was called, and while walking to the Governor, an officer from the Premier's Department read out their service details. For Joseph Cathcart, this was: MR. JOSEPH CATHCART:

Mr. Cathcart was appointed to the Railway Department in 1913 and retired after 27 years service in 1939. At that time he was Assistant Chargeman and through the whole of his service with the Department he was regarded as a

conscientious and reliable employee. He has been awarded the Imperial Service Medal.

At the completion of the presentations, Mr Baddeley thanked Lord Wakehurst, who responded. The band then played the National Anthem while Lord Wakehurst departed.

MEDALS BY OCCUPATIONAL GROUP

From the citations included in the *itsanhonour* database, the employment groups of most recipients can be determined:

Category and total medals	Period when medals were regularly awarded	Maximum Awarded: year and number	Notes
Station Staff (222)	1941–1979	1947 (19)	11 to special class SMs
Mechanical (165)	1940–1979	1946 (10)	
Loco Crew (164)	1940–1969	1953 (15)	60 to special class steam drivers: 80 from 1960
Guards (117)	1940–1978	1941 (9)	64 to special class guards
Track Workers (109)	1940–1978	1941 (13)	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to the Dorrigo Steam Railway Museum, Ray Erbele, and Geoff Danswan.

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State Records of New South Wales:

Series 12061: Premier's Special Bundles (Imperial Service Medal files)

Series 12922: State Rail Employee Personal History Cards (Born pre 1900)

Series 19333: State Rail Employee Personal History Cards (Born post 1900)

Series 13654: Insolvency

Series 13660: Probate Packets

Series 13340: Deceased Estate Files

Electoral Rolls

New South Wales Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages: Indexes (www.bdm.nsw.gov.au) and certificates.

END NOTES

1. *The London Gazette* was, and still is, an official journal of the British Government.
2. The term *civil service* was used within the bureaucracy while *public service* was more common in the general community. Of the seven medals awarded, three went to Queensland policemen, two to Tasmanian policemen and two to PMG employees nominated by the Federal Government.
3. The *itsanhonour* database shows five NSW railwaymen receiving medals in 1905. Three of these medals were awarded in 1963 and the other two in 1965. Despite recommending retiring employees for medals from 1908 to 1979, the railway never found a woman they deemed to be worthy of nomination. The *itsanhonour* database lists Thora Isabella Agland, who received the medal in 1970 as a *NSW Railways – Special Class Guard*. This is incorrect: she was a clerical assistant for the PMG. The special class guard was her uncle, Herbert Agland, a medal recipient from 1941. The NSW Police awarded medals to two women.
4. Post Master General's Department.
5. The NSW Railways did not retain the record cards of employees who left prior to 1910 and the Imperial Service Medal files do not hold individual nominations for this period. The railway service of George Derbyshire and Edward Robins has been obtained from other sources.
6. From Farquhar's obituary: *Sydney Morning Herald* 2 October 1924. The Southern Line opened to Picton in 1863, then Mittagong (1867),

Marulan (1868), and Goulburn (1869). The *first train* quote possibly refers to the running of the first train from Sydney to Goulburn.

7. The King's Police and Fire Service Medal could be awarded for gallantry or for long service. A modified ribbon distinguished awards for gallantry.
8. William Newman was a was second in charge of the 6th Australian Broad Gauge Railway Operating Company during the Great War, see *Australian Railway History*, December 2010.
9. Perceres Danswan was the fireman on the locomotive involved in the Quirindi boiler failure in 1901. This incident is covered in 'Blown to Fragments: Locomotive boiler explosions in New South Wales', *Australian Railway History*, August 2012, pp3–22.
10. See *Australian Railway History*, December 2010, pp395–427.
11. Henry Pearce was the brother of William Pearce who received a First Class Albert Medal for saving his train in 1905. This incident was also covered in 'Blown to Fragments: Locomotive Boiler Explosions in New South Wales', *Australian Railway History*, August 2012.
12. The Rocky Ponds accident was covered in *Australian Railway History* of March and April 2013. Keith Chiplin also featured in 'Back Into Overalls' in the February 2010 issue.
13. See Jim Longworth and John Newland, 'The NSW Government Railways' Ambulance and First Aid Corps', *Australian Railway History*, October, 2008, pp315–322.
14. Sydney Ross Nicholas was Acting Secretary for Railways in the absence of William Newman who had returned to military service for World War II as Director General of Transport. Nicholas was confirmed in the position after

Newman's death in 1943.

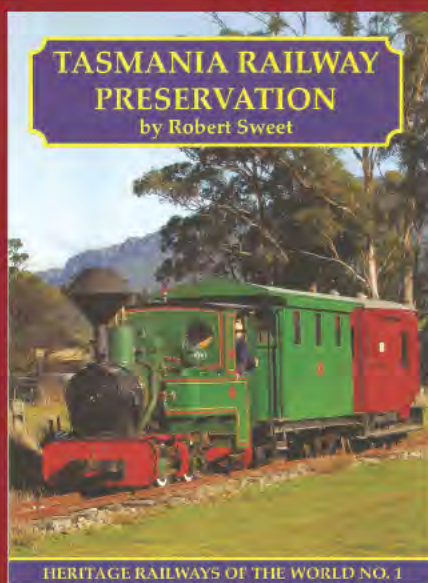
15. Joseph Cathcart railway record card gives his location as 'Junee District'. This included Albury, and Joseph's electoral roll entries clearly show he was at Albury from 1899 until he retired from the railways in 1939. Walter was too young to appear on the electoral roll prior to 1921. Joseph's brothers appear on the electoral roll for *Kirndeen Station* in 1898.
16. John de Vere Loder, Second Baron Wakehurst, KG, KVMG, was the 28th Governor of New South Wales between 1937 and 1946.
17. John Baddeley represented Newcastle in the NSW Legislative Assembly (1922–25), then Cessnock (1925–1949). A state election had been held on 10 May 1941, resulting in Alexander Mair (United Australia Party) being replaced by William McKell (Labor Party) as Premier, with Baddeley as Deputy Premier, Colonial Secretary and Minister for Mines. The change of government had no effect on the processing of the medals.

Note on the Appendix (page 22)

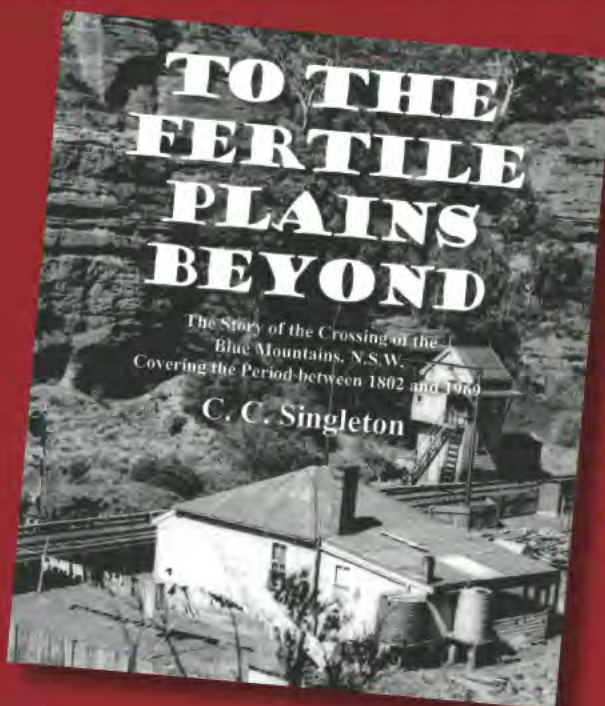
The number of Imperial Service Medals awarded each year to all Australian public servants, all NSW public servants, NSW Railways and NSW Police are set out in the table. The railway's chief commissioner (or equivalent) in office on 1 January is also shown. These statistics have been sourced from <http://www.dpmc.gov.au/government/its-honour>.

There appears to be no correlation between the chief commissioner and the number of medals awarded. A similar analysis of the political hue of the NSW state government also produces no identifiable trend.

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APPENDIX: Imperial Service Medals awarded to Australian Civil Servants, NSW Railwaymen and NSW Police, 1908 to 1990

Year	Aust Total	NSW	NSW Railways	NSW Police	Year	Aust Total	NSW	NSW Railways	NSW Police
1903	7				1949	212	163	37	49
1904	19				1950	97	62	11	41
1905	41				1951	106	85	14	33
1906	8	5		5	1952	115	91	8	46
1907	23	1		1	1953	134	128	43	46
1908	28	15	2	9	1954	182	116	26	39
1909	14				1955	153	115	25	36
1910	12	3		2	1956	157	120	24	65
1911	4	1			1957	125	108	35	16
1912	25	21	1	16	1958	50	36	14	
1913	9	1			1959	89	63	24	
1914	24	6		5	1960	113	78	25	
1915	31	17	1	11	1961	95	65	21	
1916	31	12	2	7	1962	80	64	17	
1917	34	22		13	1963	146	106	33	
1918	29	14		9	1964	49	22	10	
1919	44	22		12	1965	93	66	25	1
1920	27	23		9	1966	59	34	12	
1921	32	13	1	7	1967	103	70	25	1
1922	55	41		41	1968	98	77	21	
1923	70	38		26	1969	101	58	21	
1924	37	17	1	15	1970	497	85	17	
1925	43	34	1	22	1971	481	64	11	
1926	57	34		28	1972	697	55	8	
1927	42	19		3	1973	110	64	13	
1928	49	18		14	1974	63	54	10	3
1929	30	25	3	16	1975	74	59	1	
1930	59	25	3	6	1976	134	102	24	2
1931	66	40	8	20	1977	97	55	18	1
1932	43	26	3	13	1978	154	116	40	2
1933	43	28	1	16	1979	79	31	13	
1934	39	30	1	12	1980	42			
1935	86	40	3	19	1981	29			
1936	87	71	1	44	1982	25			
1937	79	34	1	19	1983	2			
1938	69	31		21	1984				
1939	38	11		5	1985				
1940	59	50	24	12	1986	1			
1941	109	107	55	34	1987				
1942	77	68	23	11	1988				
1943	132	124	56	34	1989				
1944	107	92	40	24	1990	1			
1945	112	108	36	38					
1946	265	108	47	26					
1947	126	101	46	37					
1948	96	91	34	39					
					TOTALS	7360	3999	1020	1082



T Class oil-burning 4-8-0 No. 244 shunting in Port Pirie yard in May 1965 as a Commonwealth Railways GM Class diesel-electric locomotive idles in the background. RODNEY BARRINGTON PHOTO

RIDING PORT PIRIE PASSENGER TRAINS

Rodney Barrington

Port Pirie in the 1960s was a place of variety and excitement, as **Rodney Barrington** found when he first ventured there by train as a schoolboy. He has returned many times since to watch the action and take in the atmosphere. Here he recalls his first and latter rail journeys to 'Pirie'.

MY SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE

My first trip to Port Pirie was in May 1963. I had just turned 16 and was allowed out on my own—no one else in my family was prepared to spend a day out on a train, so I was 'let go'. My plan was to catch the 8.00am train to Pirie and return on the late afternoon service ex-Ellen Street at 5.25pm. This became the blueprint for a series of trips I made up to the end of steam in 1967.

On my first trip, to my delight, I found 520 Class 4-8-4 steam locomotive No. 524 was coupled to a train comprising three *Centenary* cars, a 600 Class side-corridor steel car and an ordinary 700 Class steel car masquerading as a First Class carriage, the usual 12-wheel brake van and a couple of bogie vans.

At Bowmans, 12 minutes were allowed for refreshments. That included the locomotive, as was usual SAR practice, cutting off the train and drawing forward to the water column beyond the platform. The next interesting event was crossing the Up service at Bumbunga. This was often a Bluebird railcar, but on this occasion it was a steam-hauled train headed by locomotive No. 523.

Our locomotive driver saw me alight to photograph the

cross and he invited me into the cab, where I was allowed to stay until Nurom, the last station before the Junction and the eyes of officialdom. Beyond Redhill the track allowed 70mph running—a thrill for this schoolboy!

On arrival at Port Pirie Junction Station the rear vans were detached. I alighted to find 710 Class Mikado No. 713 with the Up *East-West* consist waiting on the other side of Three Chain Road (now Solomontown Road) level crossing, that would form a dedicated connection with eastbound *Trans Australian Express* scheduled to depart the 'Junction' at 2.00pm. When our locomotive departed for Ellen Street, Mikado No. 713 brought its train into the platform, pausing to couple to the detached vans.

On the Commonwealth side of the platform was the train for Port Augusta and Woomera, comprising a pair of Budd railcars, a Brill trailer (ex-Reading Railroad) and a VD van, waiting for its 12.45pm departure. Almost immediately after the Budd train left, the *Trans Australian Express* arrived on schedule at 12.50pm, the trains crossing in the yards beyond the platform. The *Trans'* comprised a single GM Class locomotive, a van and a matching rake of red Wegmann-built carriages, all trailed by an observation car. I was particularly impressed by my first sight of these modern standard-gauge passenger trains.

I was intrigued by the narrow gauge track too, this being my first experience with such a different railway! I climbed the footbridge at the level crossing end of the station to watch locomotive 713 run around the train with the vans from the morning train attached. I do not remember if



Two joint-stock AE first class sitting cars were purchased outright by the SAR and painted cream and green. They were regularly seen on the Pirie services in the 1950s. WAL JACK COLLECTION HELD BY NRM 1895.

those vans were placed onto the rear of the East-West consist or if they were taken beyond to the yards.

A 900 Class diesel-electric locomotive appeared to take the Up express back to Adelaide. Then to my surprise a train appeared, coming from the east, headed by 400 Class Garratt locomotive No. 409 at the head of a long freight. It did not stop and clattered over the crossing before disappearing into the narrow gauge yards beyond the broad gauge car barn, then unknown to me. And railway action did not stop there. Locomotive No. 524 returned from Ellen Street propelling its consist into the passing siding before proceeding to the SAR carriage barn.

There was still more to see. I wandered through the yards where there were at least three narrow gauge T Class 4-8-0 locomotives shunting. On the broad gauge, another two 740 Class 2-8-2 locomotives were also engaged in shunting duties. Later I found a solitary Rx Class 4-6-0 out of steam in the locomotive shed. The standard gauge shunter was a GM Class diesel-electric. It was intriguing to see a main line streamliner doing the shunt! In the Commonwealth Railways car barn, there was a strange centre-cab Bo-Bo propelling cars. This was a General Electric Bo-Bo locomotive imported from the USA, which had been one of the first diesel-electric locomotives in Australia when imported by the Commonwealth Department of Munitions for shunting duties at its St Marys Depot in Sydney in 1943.

The four locomotives were taken over by the New South Wales Railways after World War II for shunting duties and in 1948, the Commonwealth Government resumed ownership of two of them for work at the Woomera Long Range Weapons Project. In July and August 1949, they became the first diesel-electric locomotives on the Commonwealth Railways, which renumbered them DE90 and DE91 for shunting work at Port Pirie and Port Augusta.

I noted an old weatherboard station building within the yard, which I later found out to be the first Pirie station, predating the use of Ellen Street. Nearby on a dead-end spur was a narrow gauge Model 75 Brill railcar and brake van. On

my subsequent trips (not taken during the school holidays), I saw this car attached to a matching Brill trailer and a 'Long Tom' passenger car to form an afternoon school train to Gladstone. It left Ellen Street at 4.00pm, picking up high school students at Mary Elie Street, before pausing at the Junction and disappearing eastwards. I later learned that the trailers were detached at Crystal Brook and the railcar continued to Gladstone where it turned for a return run to Port Pirie. It then worked the evening Peterborough service, departing Ellen Street at 7.50pm. I did not see this latter service, as I would be on the train back to Adelaide.

I spent a lot of time walking from one end of Pirie that first day to the other. There were more surprises in store! Immediately beyond the Ellen Street passenger station were the Broken Hill Associated Smelters (BHAS) and there poking out into the street I found the 0-6-0 tank engine, *Pozieres*, shunting rakes of ore wagons. It had a very impressively deep chuff way beyond its size! I only saw it that once, as next time I visited an unidentified 0-6-0 diesel locomotive was doing the chores. A sister locomotive, *Peronne*, still raises steam at the National Railway Museum at Port Adelaide and another, *Port Pirie*, is plinthed within the Ellen Street Station museum precinct.

At the far end the yards, near the diamond crossing where the broad gauge line crossed the narrow gauge track, were three old SAR passenger carriages, a lavatory dogbox, a 900 Class carriage



Schoolboys take advantage of the windows of the narrow gauge Brill railcar No. 104 as it departs Port Pirie Junction Station on the afternoon school service to Gladstone on 11 August 1965. The Cafeteria Car on the recently arrived East-West service is prominent in the background. RODNEY BARRINGTON PHOTO



Commonwealth Railways standard gauge Bo-Bo diesel-electric shunting locomotive DE91 shunting in Port Pirie yard on 28 January 1958. The locomotive is passing over a diamond crossing, while the coaling tower at the SAR locomotive depot dominates the background. DOUG COLQUHOUN PHOTO

and a 550 Class carriage (a former joint stock AE car in SAR green and cream). I did not know at the time, but they were the last of a collection of SAR passenger stock purchased by the Commonwealth Railways. The dogbox and 900 Class carriage were eventually converted to camp train accommodation, but the 550 Class car was not used again. I last saw it in the late 1970s deteriorating out the back of the Port Augusta workshops. Its sister carriage, No. 551, saw many years of use as the theatre car on the Commonwealth Railways' *Tea and Sugar* train.

By my next trip, these old passenger carriages were gone and the area was reconfigured as the site of the first South Australian bogie-exchange plant, where interstate freight wagons were transferred between the broad and standard gauge systems. At this time, the standard gauge still terminated at Kalgoorlie in Western Australia.

The diamond crossing at the far south-eastern end of the Port Pirie yard, where the broad gauge main crossed the original narrow gauge line from Peterborough, was interesting. It was protected by three-position upper quadrant signals that were automatically actuated by the presence of trains on a 'first come first served' basis.

My return trip that first day commenced at Ellen Street Station. I watched 4-8-4 No. 524 propel its train down the main street. The train consist was the same as the morning service, but all reversed so that the First Class carriage trailed inside the brake van. At Port Pirie Junction the Cafeteria Car was to be seen sitting in the passing

siding where it had been cut-out from the Down *East-West Express*. On arrival at the Junction, our train was split between the trailing 700 Class carriage

and the 600 carriage, with the train locomotive shunting its consist onto the Cafeteria Car and remarrying it into our train, placed correctly between the vestibuled First Class and Second Class accommodation.

I was anxious to try out the delights of on-train catering, but the Cafeteria Car was locked until the conductor had checked the tickets and he then only admitted First Class passengers. Only then was it thrown open to the whole train. I do not remember what I ate for dinner—probably a pie with sauce—but what I still recall is the quaint smell of food, laminate and cleaning fluid, the lurid pink and blue pastel colours and the way the cutlery and glassware still rattled when the car was stationary, thanks to the on-board power plant that drove the air-conditioning system.

Despite the provision of the Cafeteria Car, the train still took time

MODERN EATING FACILITIES WHILE TRAVELLING

VIEW OF INTERIOR OF
CAFETERIA CAR
attached to the EAST WEST EXPRESS, Adelaide to Port Pirie

Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays

An advertisement for the Cafeteria Car from the SAR 1954 Public Timetable. At this time the car was stabled overnight at Port Pirie on Saturday and returned to Adelaide on the Sunday evening train from Ellen Street Station.

out at Bowmans (13 minutes). Then at Two Wells, only 20 minutes short of the double track at Salisbury, we were held for 20 minutes for a crossing with a freight train. Passengers milled around on the Two Wells platform as the freight rumbled through on the passing siding. For some reason the freight train guard decided to expedite safeworking arrangements by throwing his staff over the roof of the train, causing it to hit the station roof before bouncing off into the night. Consequently, we were over an hour late into Adelaide, and my journey home was completed on the 11.10pm Red Hen service to Oaklands.

SUBSEQUENT TRIPS

Over the next few years I repeated this trip on regular occasions. Wednesdays and Fridays were best, as there was a *Trans-Australian Express* train in both directions on those days. Changes were under way, and on my next trip in 1964 there was a bogie-exchange plant at Port Pirie where the old passenger carriages once stood.

During 1964, the 740 Class Mikados had disappeared from the shunt replaced by 500 Class Bo-Bo diesel-electrics. The narrow gauge, however, remained a steam domain. The Garratt-hauled freight and ore trains always appeared. Indeed, I never saw a narrow gauge diesel-electric locomotive in Port Pirie—apparently they sneaked in at night! I only ever travelled to Pirie if steam was rostered. The usual train was two 700 and one 780 steel carriages, a 12-wheel brake van



SAR 4-8-0 narrow gauge locomotive T186 shunting at Port Pirie with the wheat silos dominating the background. A GRUNBACH PHOTO, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 201523

and trailing loading, day in, day out. Sometimes urgent interstate loading was also added behind the locomotive. I can recall up to three double-deck car carriers attached to the train on numerous occasions!

In February 1967, I left work and went to teachers college. During that year, the last regular main line broad gauge steam-hauled passenger train ran. Thereafter, I only travelled to Pirie on ARHS special trains. One such occasion was to celebrate the last use of Ellen Street by passenger trains. In January 1970, the narrow gauge line into Pirie was abandoned and replaced by a new standard gauge line that connected, via Broken Hill, the eastern and western standard gauge networks. Coincidentally, Port Pirie Junction Station was also abandoned and all passenger trains used the new Marie

Elie Street Station from 1968. From 1975, through standard gauge passenger trains have used the Coonamia Station on the outskirts of the city. Here a ground-level platform was graded and light installed but it has since been abandoned.

POSTSCRIPT

In the late 1970s, I joined the Pichi Richi Railway Society and on numerous occasions I returned from Quorn by train. At the end of a weekend someone would drop us off at Port Augusta where we would catch the Budd railcar to Port Pirie. The broad gauge train from Port Pirie was now fully air-conditioned, the Cafeteria Car still returned on the evening train and many Pichi Richi matters were discussed over some refreshment. Older now, I was able to appreciate a draught beer—the SAR Cafeteria Car was the only railway carriage in Australia to offer beer from a keg! If the train loco was a 900 Class diesel-electric it was a delight to take some fresh air leaning out of the barn door of the BD air-conditioned carriage that had replaced the steel cars in the mid-1960s

On a several occasions I spent some time mid-week in Quorn, returning to Adelaide on Friday afternoon. The Budd cars were by then heavily utilised on the recently introduced passenger services on the new Whyalla branch. So, on Fridays, a scratch train was made up from the head-end consist used on the *Ghan* connection to Marree. Six carriages, including a lounge car, were used to convey a Budd-car load of passengers!

Travel to Quorn lies outside the scope



At around lunchtime, Garratt locomotive No. 406 clatters past the signal cabin into Port Pirie Junction with a freight train from Peterborough. The locomotive is running bunker first as it was most likely turned at Gladstone so that it could return funnel first, as the narrow gauge loco depot turntable at Port Pirie was too small for the Garratt locomotives. NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM, AZ21641



Movement on three gauges at Port Pirie. From the left, a narrow gauge T Class locomotive on a Peterborough-bound freight train, a broad gauge 520 Class 4-8-4 on the Adelaide-bound connection from Perth and to the right, the observation car on the rear of the modern standard gauge *Trans Australian Express* service.
NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM PHOTO, AZ21650.

of this story as it was usual to use the 5.00pm Bluebird service to Gladstone and thence travel by road bus.

However, the return 5.00am departure via Gladstone was never an attractive way to return to Adelaide, hence the use of the train from Pirie!

AN HISTORICAL NOTE

The narrow gauge railway from Port Pirie was constructed from 1889, principally to provide a sea port outlet for the lead, silver and zinc ores originating from Broken Hill. Passenger services originally commenced at the up-town Mary Elie Street Station and later from a more central terminus in street trackage at the far western end of Ellen Street.

In the early days, passenger travel to Adelaide was somewhat convoluted. The narrow gauge train went via Gladstone where it reversed, then to Balaklava where there was a second reversal, and on to Hamley Bridge where passengers changed to the broad gauge train. Through passengers changed to a train from Terowie to complete their journey to the capital.

The broad gauge line arrived in Port Pirie during 1937 as an extension from Redhill to meet a new standard gauge railway extending south from Port Augusta. The broad gauge line crossed over the original narrow gauge main line near Coonamia by means of a diamond crossing. It then ran parallel to the narrow gauge where it met the new Commonwealth standard gauge line

at a point just before Three Chain Road at Solomontown. The broad gauge main line continued beyond to re-cross the narrow gauge main line, where it joined a new mixed-gauge formation.

This new line ran south of the narrow gauge yards, eventually to re-join the original main line in Ellen Street, allowing the new broad gauge passenger services through to the Ellen Street terminus. Although not part of this story, the broad gauge eventually succumbed to standardisation in the 1980s, leaving Port Pirie as a one gauge railway. It is no longer a junction but merely a spur off a through line to Port Augusta. There are now no railway passenger services serving Port Pirie; the 'new'

1968 Marie Elie Street Station is now a visitor centre and bus terminal.

TIMETABLES

I conclude this article with examples of the 1964 timetables. Additional notes to the 1964 timetable follow, with notes on the 1964 timetables from Adelaide to Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Woomera and Tarcoola.

The 8.00am ex-Adelaide service to Ellen Street train was frequently steam-hauled, by a 520 Class 4-8-4 locomotive. The base-consist from behind the locomotive was: two 700 and one 780 Class carriage plus a 12-wheel brake van. The train was frequently built up with vans and could include fast freight stock. Passenger accommodation was built up in holiday times with extra steel or *Centenary* carriages.

The 12.30pm ex-Adelaide to Port Pirie Junction was the *Perth Express* known by the public as the 'East West' irrespective of travel direction. By this time it was generally diesel hauled, with a single 900 or 930 Class locomotive. The consist was, from behind the locomotive: 2nd Class carriages, Café Car, 1st Class carriages, 12-wheel brake van, a mail van ex-*The Overland* from Melbourne. The size of the train varied according to loadings and connections. Steel side-corridor carriages (500 and 600 Class) predominated. The Café Car worked on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday only. This train connected with the *Trans-Australian* train to Perth on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday



Broad gauge 4-8-4 locomotive No. 522 arrives at Ellen Street with the morning passenger train from Adelaide. The train stands on a single mixed gauge track and it will shortly propel back to Port Pirie Junction. All other tracks in Ellen Street are narrow gauge. To the left is the grand 'gingerbread' style street-facing station built that replaced a modest skillion roofed structure in 1902. Today the tracks have been removed from the street, and the building remains as a museum, but the tower never had its promised clock fitted.
NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM, AZ04913.



A pair of Budd railcars with an ex-Reading Railroad Brill trailer wait departure from the Commonwealth Railways side of the Port Pirie Junction platform.
NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM, AZ21649.

and Saturday; the *Ghan* train to Alice Springs on Monday and Thursday; a local to Port Augusta on Wednesday; and a mixed train to Tarcoola on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

The 6.52pm train ex-Adelaide to Ellen Street was always locomotive-hauled on Wednesday evenings as it conveyed freight stock with loading for delivery to Whyalla. It was often steam-powered, with a 520 Class 4-8-4 loco-

RIGHT: SAR 4-8-4 locomotive No. 520 heads the Down Port Pirie passenger train as it crosses its opposite number headed by sister locomotive 523 at Bumbunga on 11 August 1965. Note the car-carrying wagon behind 520, which were a regular feature on this train.

RODNEY BARRINGTON PHOTO



LEFT: SAR streamlined 4-8-4 locomotive 523 leads the Port Pirie passenger train leaving Adelaide Station on 18 June 1965. Note the car-carrying bogie wagons behind the tender.
RODNEY BARRINGTON PHOTO

THE NSW RAILWAYS 'O' GAUGE MODEL

Chris Banger

BACKGROUND

In 1950, the New South Wales Railways (NSWR) exhibited an 'O' gauge model railway at the Sydney Royal Easter Show as part of its Show display.¹ It is believed this was the first time that any Australian railway system had employed an operating model railway it owned and operated to promote its services.² The model appears to have been displayed each year from 1950 until the end of the 1960s, and always proved to be a major attraction.

Based on an article that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Friday, 27 March 1953, the buildings and scenery for the railway were originally created by a Mr George Rees, a commercial artist, whilst Messrs Jack Page and Arthur Bowcliff designed (and presumably built) the signalling system and permanent way. Some, if not all, of the locomotives initially used on the layout were supplied by Sydney-based manufacturer 'O' Gauge House, whilst the carriages and possibly the wagons were supplied by Arthur Trimmingham, who made a variety of models for commercial industry to promote their activities. A noted modeler, Colin Shepherd, also made rolling stock for the layout.³

The operators of the railway were always hidden behind a backdrop and viewed the layout through a small window, whilst the public was kept at a suitable distance from the layout by a low chain-wire fence.

EVOLUTION OF THE MODEL RAILWAY

The significant milestones for the model railway are summarised below.

1951: The railway was redesigned and improved to incorporate a number of new features prior to being displayed at the Royal Easter Show. These changes included a new station and a continuously moving turntable. By 1952, the station was called 'Fraser Park'—presumably after the Railway Commissioner of the day (Keith Fraser) who took over as Commissioner in February 1952.⁴

1952: Models of a 60 Class Beyer-Garratt and a 40 Class diesel-electric were added for the Show. More than 250,000 people viewed the display at the 1952 Royal Easter Show.⁵

1953: The 'O' gauge railway appeared at the start of the 1953 short film *On Time*, produced by Film Australia (which, ironically), focused on the Melbourne suburban rail system.

1954: The following models were running on the layout at the Easter Show:

- Eight-car RUB and seven-car HUB air-conditioned sets.
- A typical freight train.
- C36, C38, D58, D59 and AD60 Class steam locomotives.
- 40 and 41 Class diesel-electrics.⁶

1959: A model of a stainless steel interurban electric train was added to the fleet of trains used on the model railway.⁷ It appears that overhead wiring was added to make the operation of the interurban train look as realistic as possible (See the photo of this model that appears on page 106 of the book *Spring, Spark & Steam* by Bruce Macdonald). A photo of the layout that appeared in the March/April 1967 issue of *The Railwayman* suggests that the wiring had been removed by this stage.

1963: A 24-foot (7.3m) long model of the *Southern Aurora* consisting of the full 14-carriage train hauled by two 44 Class diesel-electric locomotives was used on the layout for the first time. It was noted that railway apprentices had built some of the model trains used on the layout. Presumably apprentices built the model of the *Southern Aurora*.⁸

The *Southern Aurora* model also appears to have been used for other events. For example:

- When the through standard gauge passenger service between Melbourne and Sydney was launched on Thursday, 12 April 1962, an 'O' gauge model of the *Southern Aurora* was displayed on the front of the official table at the Trocadero Ballroom. (See the photo of the table with the model on pages 42 and 43 of the ARHS (NSW) book *Southern Aurora and the Melbourne Express & Sydney Express 1962–1993* published in April 2012).
- The 'O' gauge *Southern Aurora* also appeared on a railway float promoting the train in the 1964 Sydney Waratah Festival.⁹

1967: This was the last year in which the 'O' gauge railway was mentioned in the NSWR house journal *The Railwayman*.¹⁰ By then, the NSWR also had two portable 'O' gauge layouts that were displayed at the larger country shows. A full range of models were used on these layouts, including the model of the *Southern Aurora* and a two-car diesel train.¹¹

The 'O' gauge layout was subsequently replaced by a 'HO' scale layout sometime after 1969.¹² Does any reader have an exact date the 'HO' gauge railway was phased in? It was certainly in use by 1972.¹³

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

The 'O' gauge layout subsequently found its way to the Rail Transport Museum at Enfield and was in use at the Museum by October 1972.¹⁴ It is believed that rolling stock owned by RTM members was used on the layout. Some of the 'O' gauge rolling stock models were transferred to Thirlmere and displayed in the Small Exhibits Hall there (since demolished) and these are now stored at Chullora. Given the nature of its construction (*papier mâché*, timber, etc.), the layout eventually deteriorated. It was stored in an 'S' wagon in the Thirlmere display area prior to its disposal around

1995.¹⁵ It is unclear when this occurred.

It should be noted that the above narrative only captures some of the changes made to the layout during the time it was displayed by the NSW. Buildings and other features on the layout appear to have been regularly updated (possibly prior to each Royal Easter Show).

Photos of the layout were published on pages 106 and 117 of the book *Spring, Spark and Steam* by Bruce Macdonald (published in 2005 by the *Australian Model Railway Magazine*).

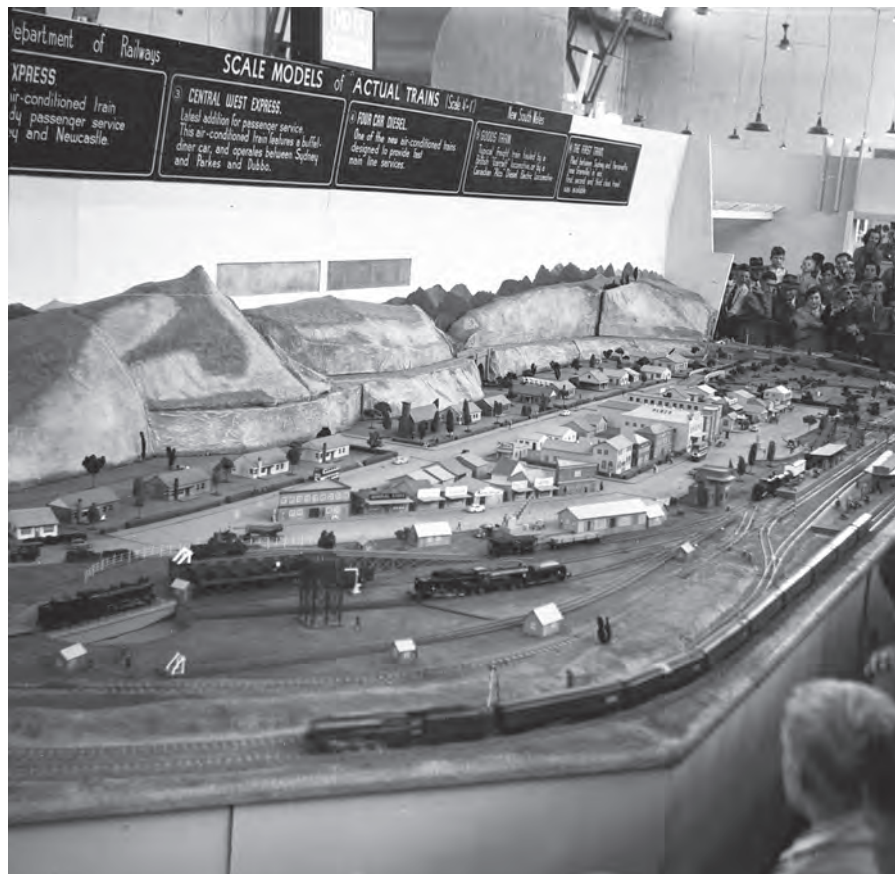
The author thanks Des Egan for his help with this article.

END NOTES

1. *Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday, 31 March 1950, p.3
2. Prior to 1950, it appears that any models displayed by the railways were static.
3. *Spring, Spark & Steam* by Bruce Macdonald, p.105, 106 and 114.
4. *ARHS Bulletin*, No.177, July 1952, p.77. K A Fraser replaced F C Garside as the Railway Commissioner on 5 February 1952. He died of a cerebral haemorrhage on 23 August 1952 and was replaced by Reg Winsor from 1 September 1952. Source: *Along Parallel Lines* by John Gunn, p.408 and 410.
5. *ARHS Bulletin*, No.177, July 1952, p.77.
6. 1953/54 New South Wales Railways Annual Report,



Large crowds of young and old are drawn in by the 'O' gauge model railway promoting the NSW Railways modernisation program on 12 April during the 1952 Royal Easter Show. A 32 Class locomotive works a goods train tender-first in the middle of the photo. ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 211332



The model railway had been enhanced for the 1953 Royal Easter Show with an AD60 Class Garratt locomotive and a C38 Class locomotive with the *Central West Express* prominent in this view taken on 28 March. ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 211648

p69.

7. *The Railwayman*, March 1959, p3.
8. *The Railwayman*, March/April 1963, p2.
9. The Waratah Spring Festival was a Sydney festival held each year between late October and early November. It was first held in 1956 and the last festival was run in 1973.
10. *The Railwayman*, March–April 1967, p.2
11. *New South Wales Digest*, April 1967, D4.446, p.9
12. *New South Wales Digest*, April 1967, D4.446, p.9. It was noted on p.6 of the April 1969 issue of *New South Wales Digest* that the 'O' gauge railway was still being displayed.
13. *The Railwayman*, June 1972, p.4 and *New South Wales Digest*, November 1972, D10.285, p11.
14. *New South Wales Digest*, October 1972, D10.237, p10.
15. Advice from Des Egan via an email dated 1 August 2012, and Ben Barnes December 2016.

Central to St James 90th Anniversary

ARH 951, December 2016

Thank you to Frank Johnson for the excellent and detailed article Central to St James, celebrating the 90th Anniversary of Sydney's first underground railway.

Would someone be able to tell me why at both Museum and St James stations, the Up platforms are numbered '2', while the Down platforms are numbered '1' –seemingly contrary to practice throughout the system? For instance, at Town Hall Station, Platform 1 is the Up local.

Ken Café, Thirroul NSW

Editor: The New South Wales Railways practice is to number station platforms with the No. 1 platform on the left-hand side of the line facing Central Station. In the case of the City Circle Line, however, Museum and St James Stations have the No. 2 platform on the eastern or Outer Line, while the No. 1 platform is on the Inner Line. At St James the Outer platform was originally No. 4, but it has recently been renumbered. This arrangement is maintained at all stations on the City Circle Line, presumably for consistency between stations.

I was most interested to read 'Building the City Circle' in the latest issue of ARH, especially as my late father Allan W Shoebridge, was associated with the project.

On his graduation from Sydney University with an honours degree in Civil Engineering, he joined the NSW Public Works Department, Metropolitan Railway Construction Branch as a draughtsman. His specific task was to design and specify the reinforced concrete pedestrian access tunnels for both St James and Museum stations. I recall that he told me the structure had to withstand a vehicle with the heaviest axle loading then in use, which turned out to be a loaded Sydney Council Sentinel steam lorry.

Although my father was under the direct supervision of a more senior design draughtsman and a checker who jointly signed out on his calculations, Dr Bradfield himself would come on occasions and place a hand on his shoulder before asking how his part of

the project was proceeding.

Some years later my father was appointed Construction Engineer by Hebburn Limited, being responsible for the design and supervision the surface works of BHP's Elrington Colliery. Here his experience in the use of reinforced concrete is evident in many of the pit top structures.

Right until he finally retired as Chief Engineer of the major coal company Coal and Allied Industries, Allan W Shoebridge maintained and fostered the same high standards of draughtsmanship, learned all those years ago with the Metropolitan Railway Construction Branch.

John W Shoebridge, Dora Creek NSW 2264

The caption to the photo introducing the most interesting article, 'Central to St James' in the December ARH lists two important figures in NSW Railway history. There is a third person worthy of inclusion, however, being Mr E E Lucy, the Chief Mechanical Engineer (1911–1932). He is the first in the group standing against the front of the electric train. During Lucy's term as CME, the C35, C36 and D57 Class locomotives were introduced on the NSW Railways.

David Burke, OAM, Kiama NSW 2533

I enjoyed reading with considerable interest Frank Johnson's article 'Central to St. James' in the December 2016 *Australian Railway History*. The information and accompanying photographs were fascinating.

On page p14, however, an indirect reference is made to the Leeds Forge Cars with the statement that '...the last one was decommissioned in the 1980s'. This is not correct as 11 of the initial 50 cars were still in service in early 1990 and five were still running in January 1992, the last month of regular eight-car electric single deck public passenger services, these cars being C3104, C3121, C3122, C3134 and C3148.

Also on p14 the author states: 'Sydney will have to wait until the first half of 2019 to see its next rail project through the city centre, with the opening of the North West Rail Link'. It is my understanding that this line will terminate at Chatswood in 2019 and the future metro extension via the city centre to Bankstown is not scheduled for completion until 2024.

Peter Ferguson, Castle Hill NSW 2154

Rail revolution

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Bob McKillop: The influence of the railways on the economy and industrial development of the western districts of NSW

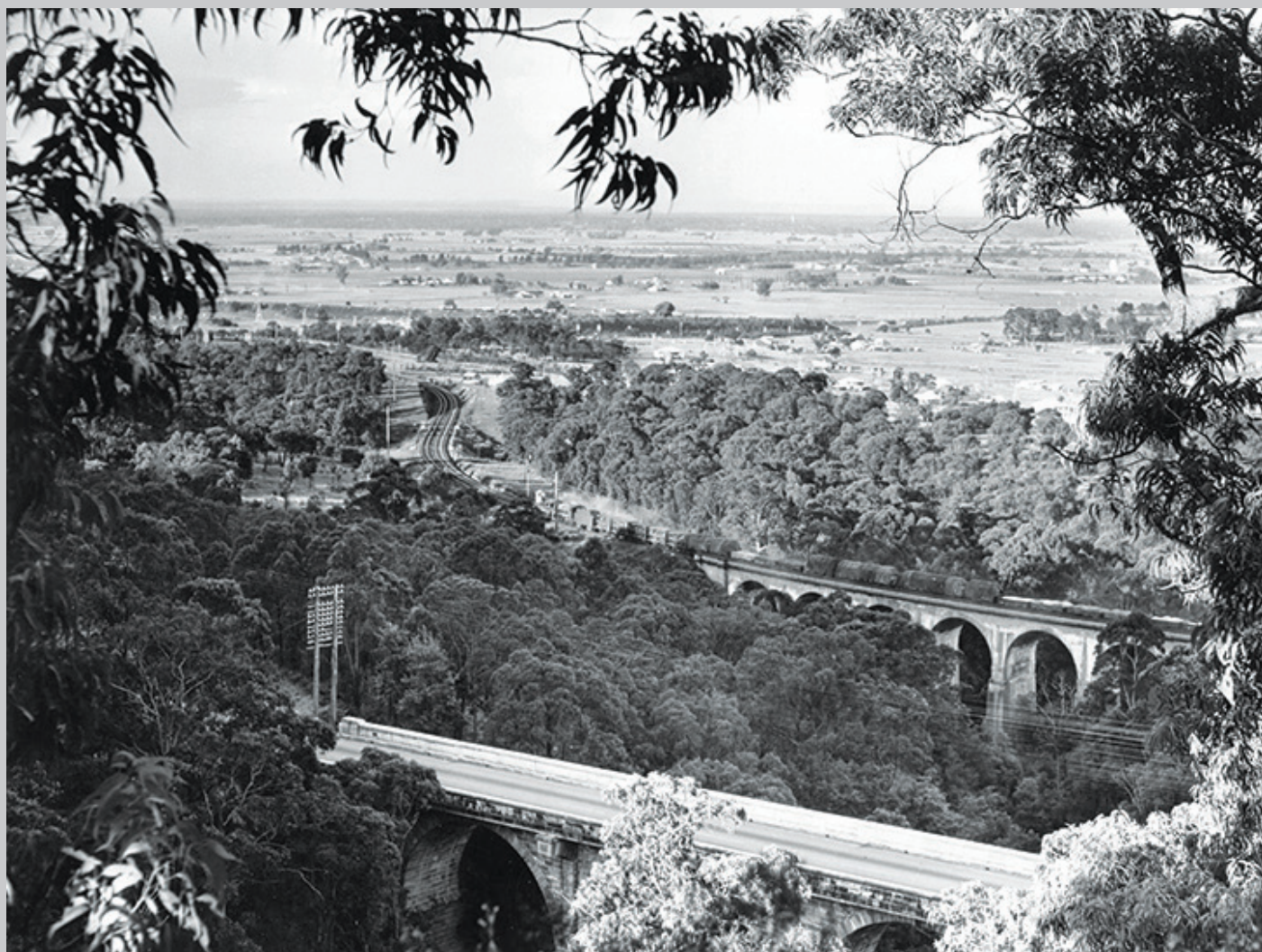
Denny Ellis: Railway operations at their height in Orange during the 1940s and 50s

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The original Knapsack Viaduct in the foreground after conversion to a road bridge, while a C36 Class locomotive hauls an Up goods train over the replacement Knapsack Viaduct with its duplicated track. Thomas Rhodes served as Resident Engineer for the construction of this section of the Great Western Railway. No date is given, but the Nepean River and plains beyond present a peaceful rural scene.
N J SIMONS COLLECTION, ARHSNSW RAILWAY RESOURCE CENTRE, 018784

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