



## SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

### BACKGROUND

*In 1944 and 1945 Mr G.H. Eardley contributed a lengthy series of articles to the "Bulletin" covering the development of the various South Australian broad gauge railway lines and operation of services on the railways over the period 1847 to 1939.*

*The extract below contains that part of his article relating to the Victor Harbor line.*

### THE BROAD GAUGE RAILWAYS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA 1847-1939

By G. H. Eardley

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#### 12. Adelaide to Victor Harbor

The contract for the construction of the Nairne Railway, as far as Crafers Summit, (Aldgate) 19 miles from Adelaide, was let to Messrs Walker and Swan on 2nd April 1890. The earthworks, bridges and culverts for the first six miles from Adelaide, and a portion of the heavy earthworks and excavation of tunnels as far as the 9th mile, had been executed departmentally in order to provide relief work for the unemployed, but after £35,000 had been spent, the first section between Adelaide and Mount Lofty was handed over to the contractors to complete. Walker and Swan used their own locomotive for ballasting on the line., the engine was similar to the "K" 0-6-4 tank engine in use on the Kapunda railway, and was purchased by the contractors on the recommendation of Mr Thow, Beyer Peacock and Company were the makers, their number 2124 of 1832.

Great difficulties were experienced in finding a passage through the Mount Lofty Ranges, nine tunnels, aggregating a total length of nearly 2000 yards had to be driven, two deep ravines had to be spanned necessitating the erection of a wrought iron viaduct 620 feet long and 108 feet high, the viaduct was constructed by the Edgemoor Company of U.S.A. The works of the Adelaide to Nairne section of the line, Aldgate to Nairne, together with a short branch line from Mount Barker Junction to Mount Barker were built by Davies and Wishshart. The firm hired "H" class engine No.25 from the South Australian Railways, later being replaced by No.35 of class "K", owing to damage received by No25 when derailed at Cox's Creek bridge.

The first section of the Nairne line was opened to Aldgate on 14th, March 1883, a distance of 21 miles., 55 chains. A newspaper report on the opening of the line states that the day brought a memorable fiasco. At 11 o'clock the Governor (Sir William Robinson), the Ministry and a distinguished party of 250 left Adelaide in a train drawn by one of the "£2.500 Yankee monsters", which despite their heavy proportions and hideous proportions, were alleged to be the best in the world. Indeed it was said they could dash up the Nairne grades with an ordinary train at 30miles per hour. That day they were confounded by their deeds.

The train drew out with a fine flourish, and near Mitcham, the passengers descanted on the beauties of the day and scene. The engine laboured on the first incline. In the first tunnel it panted asthmatically. On the spidery American viaduct it seemed likely to give up the ghost, and passengers shrank at the thought of being thrown into the ravine far below. The incline before the next tumol was too much, The locomotive lurched convulsively to a standstill, and it was ten minutes before it revived sufficiently to shunt back and make a second run. By dint of infinite urging and straining it got over and crawled into Blackwood, There most of the passengers got out to examine the ailing "Yankee".

To maintain sufficient head of steam, the engineer had made the fire so fierce that the bars had melted out. Here was a pretty kettle of fish. Then while the remedies were being discussed, the engine suddenly puffed off with the Vice Regal and Ministerial car, which had been secretly uncoupled. For 2 and a half hours 200 guests, hungry and thirsty, wandered about the incipient township of Blackwood until a relief engine arrived. Meanwhile the Governor had addressed gatherings at Mount Lofty and Aldgate and when the 200 finally reached the terminus about 4 o'clock there was the inevitable dinner, garnished with speeches. The initial farce was the precursor of a series of mishaps; a carriage went off the rails, a brake block left on the line upset another train, an engine left the line near Blackwood, and another derailed at the Adelaide platform. Yet the line lived down such an ominous start.

The second section of the South line, from Aldgate to Nairne with a branch line, 3 miles, 40 chains to Mount Barker, was let to the contracting firm of Davies, Bailey and Wishart, and was opened for traffic on 28th, November 1883. The contractors hired "H" class No.25, for hauling the ballast and construction trains, this engine was derailed and nearly fell over the Cox's Creek bridge. It was replaced "K" class No.35, which in turn was succeeded by "K" class No.37. Instructions were issued in 1883 forbidding the use of six-wheel rolling stock on the Nairne railway, on account of the numerous derailments which had occurred to the six wheel vehicles when running round the sharp curves.

The branch line to Mount Barker was extended to Strathalbyn and opened in October 1884, Walker and Sons being the contractors. The old horse tramway from Strathalbyn to Finnis was altered to suit small locomotives in 1884, the tramway between Goolwa and Port Victor being relaid with secondhand 40 lb rails and prepared for steam haulage. A branch line from Sandergrrove to Milang, also constructed by Walker and Swan, was opened in December 1884. For working on the Stratkalbyii-Victor Harbour lines, the construction Department imported two steam passenger motors, with car and engine combined and one spare motor, together with two goods motors, this stock went into service on 17th December 1884. 92 horsedrawn trucks were converted for use with the goods motors, the old horsedrawn coaches were sent to Adelaide and subsequently sold.

The steam combined cars were numbered 1, 2, and 3, and came from Belgium, being built by the firm of "Socete Anonyme France Belge Atelians de la Croyore". They did not prove successful, however, on the Victor Harbour line being designed essentially for short distance tramway working, they were all transferred to the Largs Bay line, (replacing the "G" class engines and the passenger cars) working between Glanville and Largs Bay. A tram dopot and turntable, for stabling and reversing the motors was erected at Glanville, and a reversing triangle installed at the entrance to the Largs Bay jetty.

The two goods motors for the Strathalbyn-Victor Harbour line arrived on the ship "Kent" and were built by Kitson and Company, makers numbers 142 and 143, they were renumbered later 97 and 98. They were of the 0-6-0 side tank type, with 2ft 9in driving wheels, outside cylinders 11 1/2" x 15" were provided, total heating surface 304.7 square feet, and the weight in working order 15 tons, 11 cwts. The two side tanks carried 226 gallons of water, and the bunker carried 21 cwts of coal. Owing to the small water tank capacity of these engines, it was necessary to provide a "water tank truck to augment the supply.

Three engines of class "K" were imported for working on the Port and North lines in February 1883, being similar to the earlier engines of this class, and were of the same general dimensions. They were allotted the numbers 57-59 and were built by Beyer Peacock (makers numbers 2246-2248)

On the completion of the Strathalbyn line the contractors, Messrs Walker and Swann sold their construction locomotive to the Railway Department, this engine being listed as No. 60.