



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

This report by outlines the history of the 620 class in SAR service and the recommissioning in April 1971 as an ARHS Tours Loco

The ARHS SA Division has published three full colour books featuring the 600 and 620 class locos
- "600", "621" and "South Coast Limited"
(details listed elsewhere on this website)

This download contains one photo recording the recommissioning not included in the printed "Recorder" article but taken from "621"

621 - "Duke of Edinburgh"

Recommissioning as an AHRHS Tours Loco

Contributed by Kim Bird

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What must have been a major achievement in the forty-year history of the Australian Railway Historical Society occurred at the Islington Workshops of the South Australian Railways on Tuesday, April 6th, 1971 when the State Governor, Major-General Sir James Harrison, unveiled the name-plate "Duke of Edinburgh" on newly restored "620" class light Pacific No. 621.

Introduction of the Class

These engines created considerable interest when the class leader was exhibited at the Centenary Exhibition, Adelaide in 1936 as it was the first streamlined locomotive in this country and the first to be fitted with Baker valve gear. Their availability over practically all lines on the Adelaide Division enabled train services to be improved, and also permitted the retirement of smaller power to less arduous duties. In service they proved very speedy, and were soon running fast passenger trains on the newly constructed Port Pirie Line with loads of up to 330 tons.

SAR Operations

Following the Introduction of the more powerful "520" class in 1943, the "620" class engines were relieved of the heavier passenger schedules on the Port Pirie and Terowie tracks.

They still performed important duties on secondary passenger services until largely displaced even in this sphere with the onset of dieselization, and introduction of "250" class air-conditioned railcars on several country lines. The "620's" were still occasionally utilized on passenger services to Gladstone, Angaston, Eudunda, Willunga, Victor Harbour and Tailem Bend and goods trains to Robertstown, Mount Pleasant and Willunga.

Engines based at Tailem Bend worked No. 231/802 Renmark and 231 /444 Pinnaroo line mixed trains. By 1959, the remaining seven locomotives only saw spasmodic use on the Adelaide Division. With the upsurge of goods traffic towards 1963, engines 621, 625, 627 often were rostered on No. 701, 4.20 p.m. Tailem Bend, and No. 741, 5.21 p.m. Eudunda, passenger trains, and in 1964/65 even occasionally No. 323, 6.52 p.m. Port Pirie. No. 624 at Tailem Bend also saw a little service.

Preservation as a Heritage Loco

However, the end was in sight for these Pacifics in regular working, and it is possible that when No. 627 worked the 2.45 p.m. Light engine to Penfield and return to Adelaide on No. 670 passenger on Thursday, September 30th, 1965, this marked the end of the road for this class of engine in normal service. No. 621 entered service on September 7th, 1936, and received its last General Overhaul in 1959. During December, 1966, No. 621 was given a "B" service and Boiler Inspection Test at Islington Workshops and was found to be in first class condition. Even at this stage, a proposal was made that No. 621 be painted hawthorn green and fully lined out for retention as a vintage train engine in the following years, however, this was deferred as other suitable engines were still available for tours.

No. 621 was first used on a Society tour hauling the broad gauge section of the "Steam Medley in Maytime" en route to Wilmington over the weekend of 5-6th May, 1962. The engine was used on the "Last Train to Ellen Street", Port Pirie, on Saturday, July 22nd 1967, and its final run prior to withdrawal was the "5AD Fun Train" to Eudunda in September, 1967.

During November, 1969, moves were made to have engine No. 621 restored to service as it had been rusting away at Islington for over 2 years, and it would only be a matter of time before final scrapping would commence.

During March, 1970, a "Save 621" campaign was launched, and considerable press publicity resulted. It was estimated that \$10,000 would be required to return No. 621 to running order complete with a first class repainting in Hawthorn Green. The response to the appeal was truly amazing and donations poured in from local and Eastern State enthusiasts determined to see No. 621 in steam again.

Recommissioning

Months of feverish activity culminated in a packed 1/300 class set leaving Adelaide at 5.19 p.m. for Islington Works on Tuesday, 6th April, 1971, the passengers eagerly anticipating their first glimpse of the locomotive. It certainly was a magnificent sight, a gleaming hawthorn green engine with rods and valve gear polished to a high lustre, bathed in the soft glow of evening. Popular ABC personality and Society Member, Bill Mudie, welcomed the distinguished guests present and introduced Dean Harvey who gave a brief re'sume' of the 621 project. The Society's Past President, Ken Whicker, outlined the ideals of the Society in South Australia.

The Governor, Sir James Harrison, then spoke briefly and read the following message received from His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh

"Steam locomotives were the basis of the Immense development of rail transport all over the world. This is an important chapter in modern history, and future generations will surely be grateful to the Australian Railway Historical Society for their foresight and initiative In preserving Locomotive No. 621. I am honoured that it should be named after me. Philip"



Governor, Sir James Harrison in the cab at the re-commissioning
Photo: Phil Butler from ARHS book "621"

Sir James Harrison then unveiled the name-plates. This day must surely rank as one of outstanding achievement for the South Australian Division; 621 is the first locomotive to be restored to service wholly at the expense of an outside organization.

To commemorate the occasion, the Book Committee of the Division published another high class production, "600", tracing the development of Pacific type locomotives in South Australia.

621 Festival Easter 1971

Good Friday, 9th April, 1971, dawned gloomy and overcast with the promise of change from the hot summer days of the previous weeks. The weather for April was unprecedented and maximum temperatures were all recorded above 30 F right up to the 15th April.

Precautions were necessary which meant that the tours of the proposed 621 Festival were to operate subject to a fire ban. The Penfield, Outer Harbour and Port Stanvac tours would not operate If an official (state) fire ban was proclaimed. Supplementary to this all other tours would only run if useful rains fell. Instructions to this effect were appended to the train notices which were distributed In the usual manner.

The good news on Good Friday was that the evening excursion to Bridgewater was to operate.

Further tours that operated through the Easter Weekend are listed below.
Times are ex Adelaide.

Good Friday. 9th April. 1971

Penfield and Outer Harbour - dep. 2.12 p.m.
Power; 621 Load; 1/Goods Brake, 12/centenary cars.

Bridgewater - dep. 6.30 p.m.
Power: 621 Load: 1/centenary baggage, 4/cent., 1/GB.

Saturday, 10th April. 1971

Port Stanvac - dep. 8.43 a.m.
(worked In lieu of train to North Gawler cancelled account fire risk)
Power: 621 Load: 1/cent, bagg., 6/cent.

Hamley Bridge - dep. 1.00 p.m.
(worked in lieu of 621 to Bowmans account fire risk. Tour will run on 5/6/71.)
Consist: 1/400 DPM

Outer Harbour - dep. 7.35 p.m. "Rx Restaurant"
Power: Rx224 Load: 1/sub bagg., 1/700, 1/BE, Cafeteria Car,
Dining car "Adelaide", 1/600, 1/750

Easter Sunday, 11th April. 1971

Victor Harbour - dep. 8.40am.
Consist: 2/250 passenger motors.
(Bluebird worked in lieu of 621, tour which was postponed to 16/5/71.)

Monday. 12th April. 1971

Port Stanvac - dep. 8.30 a.m.
Power: Rx224 Load: 3/suburban cars, 1/cent., 1/sub, bagg.

Angaston - dep. 11.15 a.m.
Consist: 75 psgr. motor No. 33 and trailer.
(Psgr. motor work in lieu of 621, tour which was postponed to 2/5/71.)