



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

The leading article on this page is a record in the ARHS Recorder of a special steam hauled ARHS train from Adelaide to Victor Harbor to mark 121st anniversary of the Port Elliot to Goolwa railway

Attached is a copy of the front page of the booking brochure

Also attached is the text of the speech by Mr A.G. Gibbs, Chairman Victorian Railways Board as contained in a commemorative pamphlet provided to guests and passengers.

GOOLWA COMMEMORATION

ARHS Recorder October 1975 page 11

On 28th September, the Chairman of the Victorian Railways Board, Mr. A. G. Gibbs, unveiled at Goolwa a plaque commemorating the 121st anniversary of the opening of the Port Elliot-Goolwa railway. At Strathalbyn, Mr. Gibbs joined with a trainload of enthusiasts who had left Adelaide at 9.39am on a special train hauled by green 520. The consist was 502 -715-714-603-703-CD11.

The train arrived at Goolwa at 12.37pm, and during the stopover Mr. Gibbs, accompanied by many local historians and dignitaries, proceeded to a spot adjacent to the preserved horse tram where he unveiled the plaque.

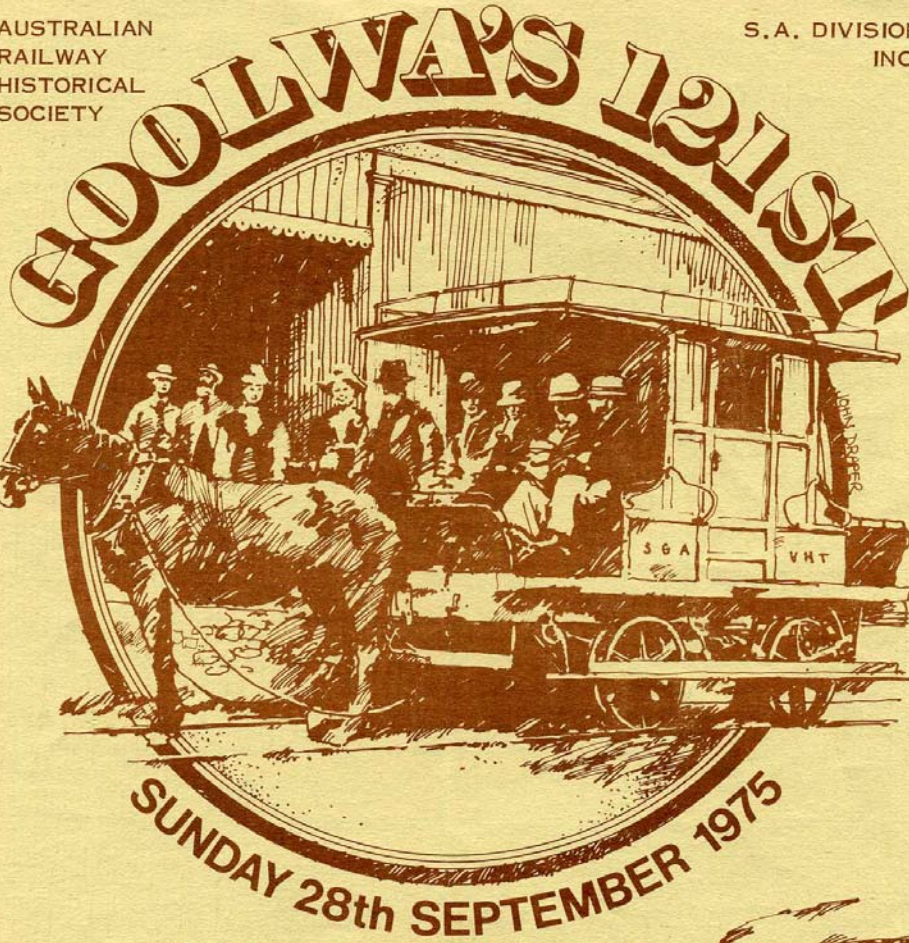
At 1.30pm the train departed for Victor Harbor where engine 520 was turned and watered by the local E. F. S. fire tender before returning to Adelaide.



V. R. Chairman, Mr. A. G. Gibbs (on right) unveils the plaque commemorating the 121st anniversary of the Port Elliot-Goolwa line. Photo: David Flanagan.

AUSTRALIAN
RAILWAY
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

S.A. DIVISION
INC.



This page printed from SteamRanger Enthusiast website
Copyright by publisher of the referenced publication or SteamRanger
No commercial republication without reference to copyright holder
R7510a

CELEBRATING 121 YEARS OF RAILWAYS IN AUSTRALIA

SPEECH AT GOOLWA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SEPTEMBER 28, 1975

**By MR A.G.GIBBS A.O. B.E.(Adelaide)
CHAIRMAN, VICTORIAN RAILWAYS BOARD
MEMBER, MELBOURNE UNDERGROUND RAIL LOOP AUTHORITY**

INTRODUCTION

Firstly, I would like to say how delighted I am to return to Goolwa after an absence of many years and to see such a large gathering here today. The occasion of my last visit was to see the re-enactment of Captain Sturt's trip down the River Murray, which also attracted large numbers of visitors.

All around the world, railways are recognising in different ways this month the 150th anniversary of the running of the world's first train.

I refer of course to September 27, 1825, when a steam engine made its historic 12-mile journey between Stockton - Darlington in north-east England. Thus was born the first of many railways that spread around the world and revolutionised everyday life. Yesterday there was a re-enactment of the Stockton -Darlington event in England.

It would seem appropriate, therefore, that if this historic event is to be recognised in Australia, then it should be at Goolwa and be associated with the running of the first train from Goolwa to Port Elliot 121 years ago.

Arrangements for this celebration have only been made possible by the wonderful co-operation of a number of people to whom I would like to express my sincere appreciation. Firstly there has been the willing co-operation of the District Council of Port Elliot and Goolwa, together with the Australian Railway Historical Society, in organising today's program. Coupled with this has been the help of the National Trust of Goolwa and the South Coast Museum Society.

In my research for information on the early history of Goolwa in relation to both the railway and telegraph services I was also grateful for the information supplied by the archives section of the South Australian Public Library and the Postal and Telecommunications Commissions.

INVOLVEMENT

My involvement in today's celebrations goes back to a memorial lecture I gave on May 16 this year in Adelaide to the Royal Institute of Public Administration to mark the occasion of the 121st anniversary of the opening of the Goolwa - Port Elliot railway it was originally called a tramway in all official documents.

In the introduction to my talk I explained my embarrassment when talking in Adelaide about the first train to run in Australia. As chairman of the Victorian Railways Board I had participated in a ceremony at Port Melbourne in September last year to commemorate the running of Australia's first steam train - on September 12, 1854 - from Melbourne to Sandridge (now Port Melbourne).

Knowing that some authors give credit to South Australia for running the first train four months earlier on May 18, 1854. from Goolwa to Port Elliot, one can appreciate my dilemma, having been born in Adelaide, when I faced a South Australian audience. I also explained the conflict of loyalties between that of my family with their long association with Goolwa and my allegiance to the Victorian Railways. My grandmother lived in Goolwa until she died in 1939 at the age of 89 and my late mother was born and raised in Goolwa. I also still have quite a number of relatives living in the district, so I have a very strong family link with the town.

EARLY LIFE

In this connection I was interested to read Mr. John Toiley's book "South Coast Story" in which he recalls that "from quite an early age the author visited the south coast of South Australia on numerous occasions"

I might add that the same comment applies to my own early life, as my parents always took all the children to the south coast area for Christmas holidays in the 1920's. As there were 10 children we could not all fit in the motor car so many of us made the journey by train, taking extra luggage with us.

In my talk earlier this year I said:

"I suppose it is just as well that I have no plans for visiting Goolwa following this address, but I certainly would like to keep the peace with the local Council as well as with the South Australian Government. If the South Australian Railways Commissioner would like me to make amends, particularly because of my family connection with the town, I would gladly donate a plaque to Goolwa to mark that famous occasion of May 18, 1854."

This reference to Goolwa was picked up by Jim Robbins in his column "That's life" in "The Advertiser", and resulted in a letter to me from Miss M.H.Kessall, Honorary Secretary for the National Trust of Goolwa and the South Coast Museum Society. Subsequently, with the help of the VR assistant public relations manager (Mr. Kevin Baker) today's program was evolved and timed to be as close to the Stockton - Darlington celebrations as possible.

COMPROMISE

Turning now to today's ceremony, I believe we have reached a happy compromise in the wording of the commemorative plaque in that we give credit to South Australia for the first "train", and Victoria for the first steam train. It must not be overlooked that the Port Elliot line was built for horse traction, whereas the Sandridge line was for steam locomotives.

Despite my efforts to recognise the claims of both South Australia and Victoria it is still possible that some enthusiasts may want to debate the matter in terms of the first railway rather than the first train, regardless of what I said about a tramway.

I therefore decided to do some further research in order to try and settle the issue. As a result I came across the following learned definition given in 1933 by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Germany:

"A railway is an undertaking suited for repeated movement of persons or things over not entirely inappreciable stretches of distance, on a metal basis which, through its consistency, construction and smoothness, is arranged to make possible transportation of heavy weights or the attachment of a relatively high speed of transportation, and through this characteristic, together with the natural forces further utilised, to attain the transportative movement (steam, electricity, muscular activity of animals or humans, and also with appropriate lie of the road bed, the own weight of the transporting container or its contents) is capable of producing an effect in connection with the operation of the undertaking on the same."

BROAD GAUGE

Well now, that you all understand quite clearly what a railway is, and can therefore decide between the Goolwa and Port Melbourne lines. I would like to talk a little about the early development of the broad gauge system in Australia.. South Australia and Victoria were thus the first two States who pioneered rail travel, and the theme of my talk to the Royal Institute of Administration was the similarity in the development of the two systems.

As an example of this I drew a parallel between the careers of the Chief Commissioners of the South Australian Railways and Victorian Railways in the 1920's. I refer to W.A.Webb and Sir Harold Clapp, who were close friends, and this is touched upon in Dr. Jennings' book "W.A.Webb". This close relationship between the two broad gauge systems has continued right through the years.

We even have the unusual situation where, by agreement, Victorian Railways operates the 19 km line from the border to Mt.Gambier. I arrived here today in the Railway Historical Society's special train drawn by one of the large steam locomotives which had their origin in the W.A.Webb era.

What is not generally remembered is that the designer of the first of this class of locomotive (Mr.F.J.Shea) transferred from Victorian Railways to work with Mr. Webb in South Australia as his Chief Mechanical Engineer.

DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES

Turning from steam locomotives to the latest generation of diesel electric locomotives, you may be interested to know that the Victorian Railways has 20 new large diesel electric locomotives on order, and for the first time, they are being built in South Australia. Delivery of the first locomotive is scheduled for next month and I plan to be in Adelaide again for the handing over ceremony. We will, therefore, have the experience in a few week's time of VR's newest locomotive making its first run on the Adelaide - Melbourne line.

Apart from all I have said about my family association with Goolwa, there is also a personal reason for wanting to be here today, in that I desire to pay a tribute to South Australian Railways before they lose their identity in the operation of country lines.

I go back to the depression years when, after graduation from Adelaide University, I was trying everywhere to get a job in order to gain some practical experience. There was little work offering at the time and it was only the willingness on the part of the South Australian Railways to help unemployed students that I was able to get some temporary work.

I started with the SAR on November 21 1932, and spent most of my time out on the main south and Victor Harbour lines. I can well recall one experience which, if it had been more serious, might have ended my career. Instead of a plaque there could have been a tombstone in Goolwa with my name on it

I was inspecting the Victor Harbour line from Mt. Barker Junction with a district engineer on a motorised gangers' trolley. We stayed at Goolwa overnight with the intention of leaving for Victor Harbour the following morning. After getting a clearance from train control we planned to reach the level crossing, on the Victor Harbour road outside of Goolwa, before the "up" rail motor arrived from Middleton.

Well, those of you who know what 2-stroke engines were like in those days will appreciate the problem in starting the gangers trolley on a cold morning. By the time the plug was cleaned and numerous attempts made to start the motor, we lost count of time since advising train control. As we rounded the curve in the cutting just down from the station we heard the rail motor horn, but managed to jump clear in time. It certainly taught me a lesson in safeworking practices.

FULL CIRCLE

My very first job, therefore, was with the railways and I have thus completed a full circle in returning to the railways in Victoria some 40 years later.

On leaving South Australian Railways in 1933, it was only the possession of a reference from the Chief Engineer which enabled me to be accepted for other jobs, as I found it necessary to write interstate to seek work. I managed to obtain short term employment with Western Australian Railways in 1933, and also a job underground with a mining company in WA before returning to join General Motors Holden at Woodville in 1934,

So you will appreciate how grateful I am to the SAR in giving me a start in life, I still have the reference given to me by the Chief Engineer, which I again valued when I joined Victorian Railways in 1973. I found that all previous Chairman of Victorian Railways Commissioners had something like 40-50 years of railway experience, and usually were second or third generation railwaymen. The only meaningful document which I possessed in order to get acceptance into the railway family was the evidence of having worked with the SAR.