



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

This article was contributed to "The Recorder" in July 1977 by then ARHS President Eric Milne to mark the 25th anniversary of the South Australian Division

Further information extending forward to the 50th anniversary is included in the publication "50th Anniversary of ARHS SA Division, published in 2002 (editor Ivan Marchant)

The ARHS SA Division – The first 25 Years

Contributed by Eric Milne

The Recorder, July 1977 pages 157, 158

The A.R.H.S. was founded in N.S.W. in 1933. The S.A. Division came into being as a result of the efforts of Alan Thomas, who cycled around visiting persons who had an interest in railway history of the past and present, but who were at the time "loners"

Of the dozen or so who attended a meeting at S.A.S.M.E.E. Park, Millswood in July 1952, at which this Division was formed, only one is to-day an active member. He is none other than Dean Harvey, our Tours Manager (previously Tours Organiser), a position he has held since the inception of the Division except for 1 year in the middle 60's due to ill health. Some of the others present at the inaugural meeting were Brian Castle, Ralph Skuse, Eric Bowes, Colonel Goggs and George Sweetapple.

In the 50's tours consisted of trips by rail car to Mt. Pleasant, Budd car to Marree, and special car attached to Peterborough. Then on 1st October, 1961 came the first steam hauled A.R.H.S. special, a jaunt around the suburban area, then on the following day, a sentimental journey to Tailem Bend. The loco to Tailem Bend was 504 on its last run. Hauling five steel cars and twelve wheel brake, it covered the 31 km. from Adelaide to Mt. Lofty in 37 minutes — a record which still stands.

In 1962 membership of the Division had not reached 100, but many of them had strong feelings on the condemnation of whole classes of steam locomotives on both broad and narrow gauge.

There was still plenty of steam operating in 1962. The Peterborough Division was still operated exclusively by T's and Garratts, but the massive 600 and 720 class had all gone, and the 500 class had only one representative operable, 500 herself. The older and smaller Q's, S's, V's, and W's had all gone. Ron Fluck, president and John Morris, secretary, both keen preservationists, organised a meeting with representatives of the S.A. Transport Museum, and this meeting resolved that an approach to the S.A.R. Commissioner, Mr. J.A. Fargher, should be made. A Preservation Committee was formed, and the proposal that two acres of land at Mile End be reserved for the Museum was approved by Mr. Fargher.

The first item to roll into the site was N Van 251, while loco P117 transferred from the S.A. Transport Museum on 24th August, 1964, was the first loco.

Meanwhile, Dean Harvey had organised a last run to Mt. Pleasant, and then for the first time paid a preparation fee of \$200.00 on loco 500, which in March, 1963 had not seen service for 12 months. This enabled enthusiasts to say farewell in a manner befitting the class. Three trips were run, to Victor Harbour, Tailem Bend, and the last to Angaston and Penrice. Heavy rain was a feature of the Tailem Bend and Angaston trips, and the latter resulted in the collection of pluvius insurance, which enabled passengers to have a trip to Sedan for 15 /- (\$1.50), using 700 and RX class locos. However, the RX ran into trouble on track overgrown with grass on the Monarto-Sedan branch, and required assistance from a diesel to get the train back to Monarto South. Rain became a feature of steam trips, and as many of the journeys were covered by insurance against rain, Dean became bad news for the insurance company.

The general public were taking an increasing interest in steam tours, the mailing list was developed, and many joined the Society as a result. This in turn caused overcrowding at the S.A.S.M.E.E. meeting hall, and A.R.H.S. transferred to the Wayville Hall, which is now comfortably full at most monthly meetings.

Initial arrangements with S.A.R. covered only the preservation of S.A.R. items at Mile End, however representations were made which resulted in locos from Silverton Tramway, B.H.P. Whyalla and Commonwealth Railways being donated to the Society. No doubt the enthusiasm of the Museum workers impressed the management of the railway systems, and the work undertaken at the Museum site proved that this was a project of great importance, and a display worthy of exhibition to the public. S.A.R. Commissioner, R.J. Fitch, performed the opening ceremony on 5th December, 1970.

Thousands of hours of voluntary work did not appear to warrant financial support, and all funds to ensure restoration and maintenance, transport, buildings, plant and tools were raised within the organisation. Major amounts came from publications and literature sales, donations (tax deductible), sale of salvage, grants from A.R.H.S. Tours fund, lotteries, etc. Later, takings at the gate have provided the general operating expenses.

An approach to the S.A. Government for assistance in protecting the display from the weather was refused, because the Society held substantial reserves in Tours and Publications funds. A proposal was submitted to Council during 1974 that the Preservation Committee under R. Fluck should form a new society to manage the museum. This was agreed to, and the severance was effective as and from 1st January, 1975. The Museum Society was able to obtain a grant under the Government R.E.D. scheme, which enabled painting of all remaining major exhibits.

On 30th June, 1967, S.A.R. ceased the operation of steam locomotives on the entire system, but agreed to operate on behalf of the Society Locomotives 526 and RX Nos. 207 and 224, A.R.H.S. to pay the entire maintenance costs.

Loco 621 had been set aside in derelict condition at Islington, when in November, 1969 Harold Blum offered a substantial sum to start a restoration fund. A quote for the staggering sum of \$10,000 was received. A determined committee set about raising the balance needed, and on 6th April, 1971, 621 was named Duke of Edinburgh by the Governor, Sir James Harrison. The full story is preserved in the Society's publication "621".

On 24th April, 1971, 526 steamed for the last time — however, class leader 520 was stored at Islington, and another fund raiser was started, this time for a staggering \$20,000. The target was achieved, and on 6th May, 1972, 520 re-entered service, and is now the largest conventional loco operating in Australia.

A.R.H.S. was instrumental in saving narrow gauge loco T186, and the option on it and several narrow gauge cars was made over to Pichi Richi Railway Preservation Society, when that Society was formed in 1973. Also on loan to P.R.R.P.S. are cars 144, 470 and 403, the latter being donated to A.R.H.S. by Don McAllen of Broken Hill.

In a resume of our first 25 years, one must not overlook the fine publications which have been presented under the capable guidance of Ron Stewien. "700" appeared in 1968, followed by "500" in 1969 and "600" in 1971. "Proceed to Peterborough" appeared in 1970, as did "Rails to the Burra". Then came "South Coast Ltd." and "621" in 1972. "One Rusty Rail" was published in 1973, and told in words and pictures the conversion of the South-east Division to Broad gauge, and the part Ron played in the project during 1955-56.

Under various editors over the years, our monthly "Recorder" has progressed from a duplicated folder to a well-presented booklet, which now sells in excess of 600 per month.

Several records of steam locomotives have been produced, and include "Narrow Gauge in S.A.", "Broad Gauge Beat", "Sayonara Mikado" and "Sentimental Sounds of Steam", all of which represent many hours of dedicated work by members of the Division.

In our first 25 years we have seen the demise of the steam locomotive. Will the next 25 years see the end of the diesel?



First trip to Mt Pleasant 1952

NRM Archives