



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

### BACKGROUND

When SteamRanger initially took over responsibility for its own locomotives and rolling stock it used a number of SAR locations around the metropolitan area

- Islington Workshops, Mile End Diesel Depot, Edwardstown Station yard and the Adelaide station yard

These offered poor security and no fixed facilities for carrying out other than simple running maintenance and eventually SteamRanger was asked to identify a location for and to establish a more permanent Depot. A site at Dry Creek in Adelaide's northern suburbs adjacent to the Gawler rail line was chosen

This download is in two parts. The first comes from the ARHS "Recorder" and contains reports to members at six monthly intervals as the project advanced

Part 2 is a personal retrospective by Frank McDonnell the volunteer Project Manager which expands on the Recorder articles.

At the end of the 1990s all the facilities were relocated to Mt Barker in the Adelaide Hills following standardisation of the main Adelaide to Melbourne line which isolated the Victor Harbor line from Adelaide.

*A companion report on this project can be downloaded from the SteamRanger website*

## DRY CREEK DEPOT

### Part A

#### Periodic Reports to Members

*From the ARHS Recorder January 1979 page 61*

Members will no doubt be aware that for some time now A.N.R. have been asking us to obtain a site to store and maintain the four A.R.H.S. steam locomotives. Up to the present, maintenance of the locomotives has been carried out by the Islington workshops now owned by A.N.R. The Society is certainly indebted to A.N.R. for the high standard of work carried out on the locomotives which has ensured that they have always operated in tip top condition. Regrettably labour shortages have caught up with A.N. R. at Islington and they no longer have the capacity to undertake work on our steam locos. So we are on our own! Obviously our ability to cope will depend on having satisfactory facilities at a suitable site.

We have been actively negotiating with both S.T.A. and A.N.R. for the past 2 years on possible sites for a depot and numerous areas at suburban and country locations have been carefully evaluated. Naturally some which suited us alright were not available because of the owner's future plans and then again others were unsatisfactory for other reasons. In the end we began examination of a site owned by S.T.A. at Dry Creek which seemed to have a lot going for it. This area is shaped like a segment of a circle and it is just to the south of the Northfield railway line after it leaves Dry Creek station.

The Dry Creek site has many advantages:-

- \* Rail access can readily be provided from an existing goods siding.
- \* Signal cabin which is open at all times for access to and from the main line to Adelaide.
- \* Triangle adjacent for turning locos.
- \* Minimal environmental problems when steaming up locomotives.
- \* Close to Adelaide - only 15 minutes by road, less by fast train (9 minutes express and 14 minutes stopper).
- \* Adequate size.
- \* Satisfactory road access.
- \* Soil tests carried out for the Society indicate that it is satisfactory for building purposes.

There are of course some disadvantages too. Perhaps the main ones being that the winter water table is close to the surface (4' 6" deep) and also that the area requires a large amount of fill to bring it up to the desired level. Overall, however, it is an excellent site and accordingly the Society asked S.T.A. if it could be made available for our use.

We are pleased to announce that after a thorough examination of the proposal, S.T.A. have agreed to lease the area to us on the best possible terms. We have acknowledged S.T.A.'s generous action elsewhere in this issue. The Society has access to the area as from 2nd January, 1979.

A plan has been drawn showing development of the site which in the long term calls for the following:-

- \* Four track engine shed with inspection pits.
- \* Store and Workshop.
- \* Three track carriage shed.
- \* Extensive trackwork with run around facilities and fuelling sidings.
- \* Landscaped garden sections with lawns, shrubs and trees.

It is considered important that the following works be carried out urgently:-

- \* Fill the area to the desired level.
- \* Erect security fences and gates.
- \* Lay all trackwork.
- \* Erect one shed for maintenance of locos and carriages  
(must be ready for use by 1st December, 1979).

So now its time to act and pull out all stops to get the project into full gear. There are lots of things we need so what about helping us to build a depot we can all be proud of.

*From the ARHS Recorder July 1979 page 154*

After a long search for a suitable site the STA has made available a large area of land at Dry Creek, for the establishment of a Depot to be known as the SteamRanger Museum. The site adjoins the Northfield branch where it leaves the Dry Creek Station and the connections of the branch form the triangle which is necessary for turning our locos. Access to the site is obtained by entering the station yard through the gateway off Railway Tee., then turn right and follow the railway line around towards Northfield.

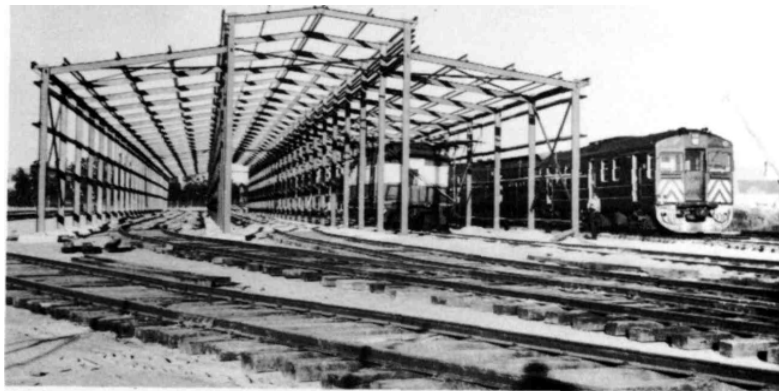
The area was very low lying and Dean Harvey appealed for suitable filling and so far approximately 40,000 tonnes have been delivered and compacted, raising the entire area by an average of 715mm (about 28"). Some of the material has come from the excavation on site of a ponding basin to take the run off from the buildings. This pond is approximately 50m x 20m x 2m deep and is jokingly referred to as Lake Frank, after Frank McDonnell, the site manager.

The first filling was delivered on site in February 79, Frank started on May 7 and commenced taking on the labor force on May 15. On June 30 a total of 20 men were employed and, by that date had excavated by hand 104 holes into which concrete pads for the steel columns have been poured. The pads are 1220mm square x 710mm deep and each have 4 bolts protruding 40 bolt down the columns. These bolts form a perfectly straight line over the 138 metres length of the building, which is a credit to the men and their supervisor.

In addition to the on site work, the workers have recovered points, rails, and sleepers from Hendon yard and sleepers and base plates etc. from North Gawler. On Monday, 25th June the workers had a "picnic" in the hills and recovered sleepers from Lynton and Coromandel. A rail train has delivered 240ft lengths of bolted rail from Hendon and 240ft lengths of welded rail from Outer Harbor. There will be 1.8Km of track on site when complete.

Facilities on site include high capacity 400V power and 10 line telephone cable laid underground. Water mains for fire fighting, etc., will also be laid. Special thanks go to Graham Bowes and Broons Hire for free provision of site office and toilet. We are also indebted to the following for the supply of filling materials: State Transport Authority, E. & W.S. Dept., Brian Grove Constructions, and Adelaide City Council (per favour Clarrie Pollard a member), Richard Weatherley and McKechnie Foundry.

Under the terms of the Relief Grant we are obliged to contribute a large sum of money for materials, and you are urged to support the project with your donation now. Amounts of \$2.00 or more are tax deductible.



Railcar 421 approaches the shed at the ARHS Depot on 2nd Nov 79

Photo: Roger Currie

*From the ARHS Recorder December 1979 page 47*

When Frank McDonnell drove onto the Dry Creek site on 7th May, 1979 he was confronted by a dismal looking swamp. A week later the first employee under the S.U.R.S. scheme joined him, and so began the many problems that had to be surmounted. Thousands of truck loads of filling were brought in and compacted to raise the level of the site by up to one metre. A workforce of labourers and tradesmen was recruited through the C.E.S., and several of them are still on the site at the time of writing.

Foundation slabs were laid to take the columns of steel which formed the frame-work of the building which now stands on the site, 152 metres long and 18 metres wide with 3 rail tracks into the shed. To the north are 2 loco servicing tracks, and to the south the runaround to release the loco after it hauls the cars back to the depot. A branch from this track points hopefully towards the site of a loco shed of the future.

October 17 saw Centenary Baggage 377 shunted onto the site by diesel 504. The D.L.I. inspector was soon after confronted by a most unusual scaffold. The was constructed on top of the baggage, and so provided a mobile platform which eased the placing of the roof purlins and struts. On October 18 the pair of loco wheels vintage 1856 ex the crocodile wagon arrived and are now set up inside the main gate. (Any volunteers to clean and paint a most important relic of our early years?)

A bucks' night on November 2 was by all reports a resounding success in more ways than one, so I am told, and resulted in quite a few sore hands.



Dean Harvey and Frank McDonnell display a adhoc commemorative sign on a railcar visit to the site on 2nd Nov 79

On November 21 a train consisting of 520 and a string of Society Centenaries, plus Finnis entered the site to verify clearances and to check the track.



520 noses out of the depot shed on 21 Nov 79 whilst testing for clearances

*Both photos above: Roger Currie*

The roofing and sheeting to the walls was completed on November 30. No timber has been used anywhere in the construction. At various times a total of 40 persons have been employed, the most at one time being 20. Many trades and skills have been employed, and now work must be scaled down since available funds are all but exhausted.

## **Part B**

### **The Need to be Self Supporting**

*From ARHS book "50 years of the ARHS SA Division" 2002  
This article contributed by Franl McDonnell , Dry Creek Project Manager*

The year 1978 was the turning point in the future directions of the efforts of the Australian Railway Historical Society to preserve and operate steam trains over the broad gauge tracks of South Australia.

Australian National Railways Commission advised the Society that it would no longer undertake locomotive or carriage maintenance for the Society even though the full cost of works previously performed were charged on a commercial basis. Once more the ARHS accepted the challenge and undertook their own major repairs and maintenance on locomotives and carriages within the limited resources' of a small team of volunteer members always spurred on by the philosophy of the Director. Dean Harvey, that nothing was impossible, just difficult.

Perhaps the final blow to tour train operations was the letter received on 18 April 1978 from Mr K.A. Smith. Chairman of Australian National Railways Commission, stating that no steam trains would operate on Australian National Rail tracks after 1 June 1978. Having told the Society to carry out its own repairs to rollingstock (already under way) and work progressing on loco 520, in all a huge commitment, the rug was pulled from under the feet of the Director and his team.

Once again Dean accepted the challenge and set about having the order reversed with ongoing meetings with Australian National and the State Transport Authority. Finally, political pressure from the Federal Minister for Transport. Mr P.J. Nixon, saw the order withdrawn on 8 June 1978.

### **SEARCH FOR A DEPOT SITE**

Under the banner of the new marketing name for ARHS Tours. "SteamRanger" launched on 26 May 1978. a search started for a suitable site to set up a steam depot. Available Government land was inspected and assessed at Dry Creek. Edwardstown. Gawler, Gillman. Port Adelaide. Smithfield and Laffers Triangle at Tonsley. The Dry Creek Site was finally chosen as the ideal site as it had easy rail access, was adjacent to the triangle for turning purposes and also located in a heavy industry zone thus removing any problems of noise or after-hours activity.

The site of 6.2 acres was shaped like a segment of an orange, was low-lying semi-swampland and distant from water mains. It presented difficulties in constructing a 150 metre long carriage shed due to the curved nature of the site and all tracks having continuous curves. However, these problems were solved with adjustments to initial drawings and banning engine 520 from track three of the shed and the extension of track five, due to the tight curves.

### **CONSTRUCTION PLANNING**

Application was made by the ARHS to the Chairman of the State Transport Authority in September 1978 to lease the Dry Creek Land as a site to construct a proposed steam train depot.

In preliminary discussion with the Government, seeking possible funding to construct the Depot, it was indicated that funds may be available to the Society through the State Unemployment Relief Scheme. The basis upon which funding was sought, apart from the agreement with Australian National to vacate their area, was the need to protect the newly restored Centenary cars from the effects of open storage and to set up servicing facilities. Should funding be available for planned works at the site the project would be labour intensive for 6 months, an important requirement of the SUR scheme.

The proposed depot was planned to be constructed in two stages.

#### *Stage 1*

The initial grant included:

- site clearing and levelling, Fill and compact
- surface topped. Storm water drains and dam
- carriage shed to hold 24 cars
- toilet shower block
- power, water and nphone services
- fire protection system.

#### *Stage 2*

Target date 1983

- construct four track engine shed
- construct engine pits
- install maintenance facilities.

## **FINANCE**

Application for funding was forwarded to the SURS office in January 1979 seeking sufficient funding for Stage 1 of the Depot. Further detail was sought from the Society some weeks later, particularly information and costings of the Carriage Shed separate from other works. Quotes were sought from several companies on the costs of fabrication and supply of the carriage shed structural framework but most quotes received had huge on-costs added to material and labour content of the structure and were priced beyond the ARHS budget.

Once more determination solved the problem when the decision was made to build the Carriage Shed "ourselves". The Director, Dean Harvey, and the Site Manager met with Mr David Taylor of McIntosh Taylor Ltd, structural design engineers, who was daunted at the prospect of producing drawings and specifications for a Carriage Shed which was for a client who had no existing budget and no work force lined up to do the job. It was to be the profile and facade of a railway style loco shed as on the rough sketch supplied to the engineer. Impressed with the enthusiasm of the customers and an assurance that his fees were ready for payment, David Taylor agreed to make an immediate start on the plans.

The design plans were finished well on time and had been tailored to suit the needs of the project. Bearing in mind that the Dry Creek Site was in a high wind Category 2 Zone, the structure was such that it was fabricated in multiple 6 metre x 6 metre modules which could be erected without the need of heavy equipment. Once one module was erected, all others could be erected manually if required. The charges made by the engineers for design work were modest, and were the start of the management team's effort to contain&osts well inside the funding.

## **CONSTRUCTION STARTS**

Good news arrived in mid-March advising that a grant of \$182,000 had been approved towards the cost of the Dry Creek Depot and the ARHS was to contribute track materials, on-site administration and construction workers amenities.

Work officially started on the site in early April 1979 when ARHS volunteer members met at the site for a weekend working-bee to clean up the site. Tons of scrap metal, rail plates and dog spikes, car bodies and domestic rubbish were collected and stacked ready for removal. Workers were interviewed at the Enfield office of the Commonwealth Employment Service and twenty workers were selected to start on various days starting with five on-site on 29 April 1979.

The first paid on-site workers were the site manager and an unemployed plumber who was also an ARHS member. This duo set up the transportable office, site toilets and trenched and laid the power and phone cables and conduits. The following week a mediumsize domestic garage was purchased and erected for use as the workers lunchroom and wet weather shelter.

Soil filling to raise the level of the site was an urgent need and calls were made to councils, contractors, Highways and E&WS Department for any available filling. Loads of filling soon started to arrive but the biggest boost to the supply was when the suggestion of a worker was put into practice. The worker volunteered to stand on Grand Junction Road for a day with a sign in his hand "Clean Filling Taken at Dry Creek". As trucks approached from the East, they were pointed to the North, Surprisingly an avalanche of filling arrived as the word spread about the excellent and accessible dumpsite close by for the loads of soil. All told 50,000 tonnes of base fill went into the site.

A vintage Fordson tractor was purchased for the sum of \$300.00 and was coupled to a huge compactor-roller hired for five weeks and driven by site workers in shifts of three hours. A compaction of 95 per cent was achieved.

Concurrent with site works, the leading hand, Peter Hoyer, supervised ten workers, complete with a large truck and rail track equipment, who were engaged in removing the rails, sleepers and turnouts from the sidings at Hendon for use on the Dry Creek Site. This labouring work took its toll on the energy of some workers and required constant rotation of workers. As these materials arrived at Dry Creek they were sorted and placed in location ready for use. Further loads of sleepers and rail were recovered from tracksides throughout the metropolitan area. In mid-May, STA ran a seven wagon rail train loaded with welded rail removed from the Adelaide Hills and given to the ARHS Depot.

A separate gang under the Site Manager pegged out the Carriage Shed and commenced excavation for 104 concrete pads. Each hole was hand dug, boxed in, and reinforcing rods mounted within, with dyna bolts for the Shed columns centred into the boxes. As sufficient pads were ready, concrete was delivered, poured and compacted. The pads measuring one metre square by one metre deep required 110 cubic metres of concrete.

## **TRACK WORK**

The laying of the track work commenced in May with the arrival of an STA track gang under the direction of supervisor Joe Vater who commenced to install the turnouts from the Dry Creek eastern sidings adjacent to the station, to give entrance to the ARHS site boundary. At the completion of that job. Joe was posted to the Dry Creek Depot to supervise the site workers constructing the tracks into the future Carriage Shed.

After ten days on the job Joe handed over ongoing supervision to Ken Colebourne and Peter Hoye and their teams and praised the speed and quality of the trackwork being done.

In researching these notes I was reminded by one former site worker of the track gangs major concern - snakes. With earth works on the swamp site the habitat of the snakes had been disturbed with the result that whenever sleepers or rails were moved snakes appeared from underneath. Eventually a shotgun became part of the tools in the work trailer. It was a common sight to see workers running in all directions and then hearing a bang!

## **CARRIAGE SHED STRUCTURAL FABRICATION**

In July, a contract was let to a steel supplier for the structural steel requirements of the Carriage Shed. The requirements of supply was that all steel had to be cut to size and at angles as shown on the order plan. Competitive tendering secured the steel supply at an excellent price with cutting and shaping included. Five boilermaker-welders were recruited from the CES; excellent skilled recruits were available due to the scaling down of the Whyalla shipyards at that time.

A steel frame canopy was set up and covered with tarpaulins to form a weatherproof area for the welding of roof frames and columns for the Carriage Shed. The on-site foreman used his own tractor mounted crane to unload steel and move the fabricated sections.

As work progressed on the fabrication the wettest of winters set in and an urgent search was made to find premises in which the welding could be done. Loco manager Ian Johnston approached G & R Constructions of Dry Creek who had recently built the tender for loco 520 for Ian. and like all good neighbours G & R Constructions agreed to let the site workers move into part of their workshop. One of the great benefits of this new dry work site was the speeding up of the spray painting of the finished steelwork.

## **FENCING**

Providing fencing around the site became a priority as materials and fittings were being stockpiled on the site. Quotes to have the 1.1 kilometres of security mesh fencing erected were such that a close look was given at fencing the site into half and to defer fencing the back of the site for a later date. A personal approach to the manufacturer of the materials required for the fencing resulted in an excellent quote for the 1.1 kilometres of fence material and also being given the name of a qualified person to supervise the work, another plus in the battle to contain costs. The total job including six gates was completed in four weeks by site workers.

## **SHED ERECTION**

Fabrication of the steel components of the Carriage Shed were completed by mid-August and with the improved weather work commenced to erect the columns and roof frames. With the tractor mounted crane the task of erecting the Shed proved to be a simple task due to the building design, with both the front and rear sections being erected simultaneously from the centre outwards. When the roof purlins and sidewall rails were fitted, the huge dimensions of the Shed became apparent.

With only one professional rigger on-site difficulty was experienced using workers not skilled in working at heights. The site manager solved the problem by using a redundant Centenary baggage car as a mobile scaffold. Outriggers were welded to the chassis and cyclone scaffolding was attached to the outriggers and a timber plank platform laid on top. With a safety rail around the top and an access ladder welded to the end deck of the carriage, it became a mobile scaffold measuring five metres wide and fifteen metres in length. This mobile scaffold was moved along the three tracks in the Shed using the Fordson tractor. When fitting the roof purlins, side rails and wall and roof cladding several workers could work at great heights in complete safety.



One more area where costs were reduced was being able to secure the six thousand square metres of roof and wall cladding direct from the manufacturer.

### **COMPLETION OF CARRIAGE SHED**

By late October the Carriage Shed was complete except for doors with all three tracks and buffer stops complete and external tracks 1, 2 and 5 complete and ballasted. To enthuse the ARHS membership on the achievement of the seemingly impossible, an evening tour was offered to members to be the first to ride a train into the Depot.

Due to the lack of toilets, lighting and other necessities including no platform, the tour was promoted as a "Bucks Night at the Creek". Two Red Hens with baggage car 824 departed Adelaide at 6:25 p.m. on 2 November 1979 bound for the Depot. A barbeque dinner with wines, ales, soft drinks, tea and coffee were included in the fare of \$10.00. The train was a sell out success. The meat was dressed by member John McAvanney, a local butcher, from one of the sheep roaming the Depot site. Site workers regularly captured escapee sheep that escaped from trains being shunted into the abattoirs.

As the project neared completion in December and January the few remaining workers were paid off and two key workers, a bricklayer and a stonemason, remained to carry out the work of building the toilet footings, walls and plaster. The workmanship of the toilet block is a tribute to the youngsters' efforts. The roof was pitched and joinery finished off by the Site Manager.

### **OUR ROLLINGSTOCK ARRIVES**

In January 1980, the locomotives and some thirty items of rollingstock were moved into the Depot in several diesel hauled shunt movements. Within two days, the new Carriage Shed and siding five were full to capacity, presenting a sight never to be forgotten.

### **FINISHING TOUCHES**

A Fire Protection Company was contracted to install the fire hydrants, hose reels, and associated external mains and pressure control valves. This was an expensive exercise, but necessary, before the Depot could be passed by Council.

Landscaping, carpark fencing and track crossings were all constructed with a mix of paid or volunteer workers over a period of six months to August 1980. Somehow, the masses of small finishing-off jobs were completed. With the departure of the last paid workers in March 1980 one volunteer member put in an enormous amount of time installing lights and power circuits to the locomotive area of the Shed. In times of need several members donated materials urgently needed such as ballast and the electrical switchboard.

### **OFFICIAL OPENING**

The official opening was set for the 29 August 1980, a date when it appeared all work would be absolutely completed. The opening ceremony was to be performed by the new Premier of South Australia, Dr David Tonkin. A special train departed Adelaide at 2:15 p.m. hauled by locomotive Rx224 with Finniss as the VIP car and two Centenary Carriages and baggage for invited guests.

Invited guests included the Minister for Tourism, Mrs. J. Adamson, the Leader of the Opposition, The Hon. J. Bannon, the Deputy Leader, Mr. J. Wright, ex State Parliamentarian and Minister of Transport, G. Virgo, the Federal Member for Kingston representing the Federal Government, Mr. G. Chapman, Society Patron and State Transport Authority Chairman, Mr. A. G. Flint,

ANR Mechanical Engineer, Mr. J. Charter and Society Councillor and STA Chief Engineer, Mr. R. Stewien. The Mayor of the City of Enfield, Mr. R. Amerand 7 Aldermen and Councillors also attended the function and the State Director of Tourism, Mr. E. Joselin was among the senior Departmental personnel who commented favourably on the Society's achievements.

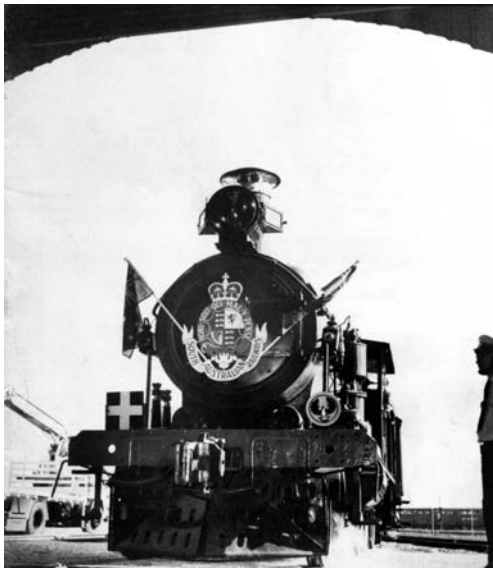
The train was accompanied by the helicopter of Channel 7 television station who showed some interesting overhead shots of the train near Dry Creek in their news bulletin that evening.

As a fund raising measure the Society is selling Certificates for Honorary positions and the Premier was presented with a framed certificate bearing the title of Honorary Commissioner of SteamRanger and Mrs. Adamson was presented with a certificate as Honorary Coaling Superintendent.

Following the official ceremony performed by the Premier, the Minister for Tourism, Mrs Jennifer Adamson. presented the Leyland Coal Loading Crane to Ian Johnston, Loco Manager. Afternoon tea was served to the guests and after a site tour the train departed for Adelaide at 4:40 p.m.

Funding for Stage 2 of the development never eventuated causing locomotives and the band of volunteers to contend with the cramped conditions in the Carriage Shed. The emergence of the Victor Harbor railway in the mid-eighties and the final demise of the broad gauge rail systems made the Dry Creek Depot redundant!

(Additional detail above on opening from ARHS Recorder , September 1980 pages 181, 182)



Rx207 enters the Carriage Shed following the official opening  
by the Premier, Mr David Tonkin  
(both photos : Roger Currie)