



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

### BACKGROUND

Over the years SteamRanger has provided rolling stock for a number of commercial filming activities, both feature films and commercials.

These three articles record three filming assignments in 1980, 1984 and 1991

### **"ROBBERY UNDER ARMS"** June 1984

#### **An exercise in Society Teamwork**

Contributed by Roger Currie

*The Recorder December 1984 pages 36 – 38*

Early in 1985 the South Australian Film Corporation will release onto the Cinema circuit their production of the Australian adventure "Robbery Under Arms" starring Sam Neill. The ARHS Steamranger Tours section was involved in the filming of the opening sequences of the film. Filming took place on a little used spur line branching from near Penfield No. 3 station toward the RAAF Base, Edinburgh.

Months of negotiations between Steamranger Director, Dean Harvey, and the SAFC bore fruit when engine 351 left the Steamranger Depot at Dry Creek at about 1700 hrs. on Wednesday 6th June, bound for Penfield with two centre-loading carriages and GB40. The train left 30 minutes early and left behind loco manager John Smythe who was on the phone arranging work rosters. Fortunately carriage worker Jack Forbes was on hand to ferry John out to Penfield.

Here over 50 people were hard at work on preparations — everything from makeup to the manning of the huge "cherry pickers" providing most of the lighting. 351 performed well and various scenes involving "Captain Starlight" and his merry men were shot. These included chasing the train on horseback and then boarding. Oh! How much time is spent for so little "in the can". Late at night it was amusing to watch 8 men, including the AN crew, rocking a carriage up and down with a 5" x 5" wooden beam under the springs. The movement of the carriage was simulated as the train boarding scene was re-shot from a different angle. Filming finished at about 0200 hrs. and 351 departed light engine for Dry Creek. Bed for some was not until 0430 hrs.

Thursday nights action involved the filming of a steam locomotive so Rx224 was lit up a-bout 1100 hrs. As 224 made her way to Penfield the weather was deteriorating steadily much to the concern of the Loco Manager who earlier that day had had \$5000 worth of concrete laid at his home. At 1800 hrs. John left hurriedly to "rescue" his investment which was in the process of being destroyed by heavy run-off water.

With the mini-drought at Penfield well and truly broken the firm, graded area beside the track, which was ideal for horse traffic the night before became a quagmire. Nevertheless, the show had to go on and detailed preparations were made for the spectacular scene where the train "crashes" through a mirror erected across the track. This was Captain Starlight's plan to fool the crew into thinking that they were about to hit an oncoming train (actually themselves). (Captain Starlight was obviously unaware of the safe-working procedures of modern railways — Ed.).

224 was "wired" for action with special "sparklers" fitted to the brakeblocks to enhance the emergency braking effects. Protective plastic inserts were fitted to the headlight to protect the glass from the explosion to follow. All onlookers were evacuated 50 metres away and the film crew were protected by plexiglass shields. Even so, the headlight glass cracked and two holes appeared in the drivers window. Fortunately the side lamps had been removed as a precaution. All this action occurred between heavy showers of rain.

As 224 had used 1000 gallons of water by 2130 hrs., it was necessary to take water during the supertime break in filming. Unfortunately this was done during a very heavy rain-shower which resulted in three very sodden gentlemen.

Several more scenes were shot including more mirror shots (this time the mirror was swung out of the way at the last second); several head-on shots involving precision timing for the removal of cameras and cameramen from the train's path; and a whistle-blowing session for sound effects after midnight. The exact timing was supplied to me by a friend who lives in Elizabeth Downs, about 8 kilometres away. What with shattered "glass" and thick mud splattered everywhere, it was a very bedraggled looking 224 that was finally stabled around 0400 hrs.

Friday saw more time taken off work and 224 once more steamed out of the Depot, Penfield bound. As is her manner, she performed faultlessly once again and as only one person was necessary to assist the AN crew and liase with the Film Corporation, John could retire to the GB for his first decent sleep in three nights. This Mason proved helpful when the workings of the cylinder release cocks were explained, allowing a camera to be removed before it was drenched with steam

With the arrival of reinforcements, water was taken about 0100 hrs. Result — one missed supper. Then a further complication. In the dark an electrician had stepped on the tannin drum's plastic tap and about \$30.00 worth had leaked out, leaving just enough for doping plus the big mess to clean up.

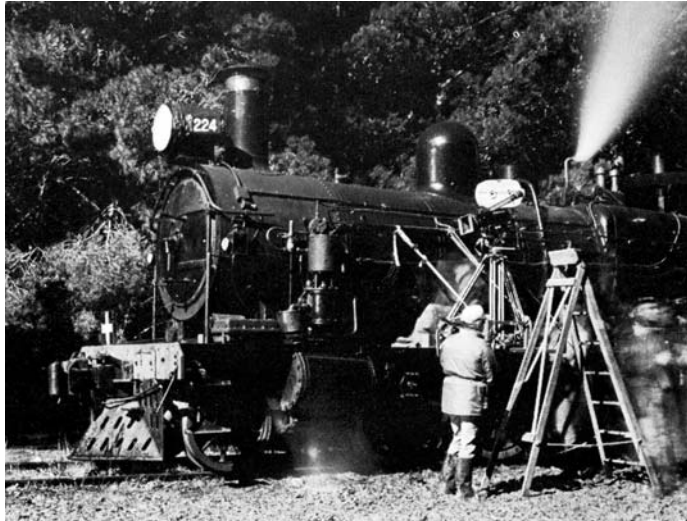
The showers were less frequent Friday night and scenes shot included several from a platform clamped to the running board and supported cantilever style. As a lot of time was spent filming in the cab, we returned to the GB — the stove worked overtime that night. Friday night saw the only accident of the filming. A previous runpast with "enhanced" sparks from the brakeblocks resulted in an over-dazzling display. When the explosive expert was trying to reduce the charge it detonated. No real problems.

Filming was completed around 0400 hrs. and we set off for home, or so we had hoped. We proceeded to Penfield 3 to phone Train Control and were told to stay where we were. A demarcation dispute had closed Salisbury to through traffic. The turbo and compressor were shut down to conserve steam and we contemplated stabling a steam engine away from the depot — an unenviable task. As there was no compressed air available for lighting-up but steam was needed for lubrication purposes, it was indeed gloomy company. Meanwhile, Dean was moving heaven and high water (and getting several officials out of bed) and finally we got special dispensation to travel back to Dry Creek. Ever cautious Dean had detoured via Penfield Junction to ensure that the signalman was aware that we were allowed to pass. At about 0815 hrs. the loco team was able to finally leave the depot after 3 days of concentrated effort and very little sleep.

Society personnel who worked on the exercise over the three days were Dean Harvey, Brian Busch, Steve Martin, John and Glenn Smythe, Peter Soar, Peter Hoye, Sam Felstead, Andrew Gramp and Roger Currie. The AN crews were Jackie Cox, driver; Shane O'Neill, fireman; and Rod Stone, guard on the first crew and Laurie Nichols, Lou Van der Berg and Harry Taylor the second. On the steam nights Michael Lippay and Kevin Sincock took over as firemen. All AN personnel entered into the spirit of the operation, including dressing up as extras when required, and were most co-operative throughout.



224 poses for the camera on the set of "Robbery under Arms" at Penfield in June 1984. The umbrella was a necessary prop account of the weather



A camera platform is strapped to the side of Rx224 (both photos Roger Currie)

## “GALLIPOLI”

November 1980

*The Recorder December 1980 pages 30 and 31*

On 6th November 1980, Rx224 became a film star when it played a part in the film "Gallipoli" being shot in South Australia by R & R Films.

Fortunately, for the Film Producers, no railcar services were being run due to the strike and the film crew were able to have a clear day for shooting. Rx224 departed Dry Creek with cars 70, 71, 81, 83, GB40, 4DWF and 2DW goods wagons and baggage 426. The goods vehicles and 426 were placed in Platform 11 as to block out the Redhen railcars which were parked in platforms 1-10. The action took place on Platform 12 which, for the film, was renamed "Perth" station. The train was in the Adelaide area from 0940 hrs. to 1500 hrs.

The particular sequence being shot was dated in 1915 and, thus, the locomotive did not look out of place on the set. A few days later the Marble Hall in the Adelaide Railway Station was used for a ballroom sequence in the film.



Rx224 at "Perth". The style of dress is that of year 1915.



Platform porters seem to have a relatively easy job in 1915. Both photos: Ian Hammond

## **“HAMMERS OVER THE ANVIL”**

**November 1991**

*The Recorder December 1991 pages 36 and 37*

Some months ago the S.A. Film Corporation approached SteamRanger about the use of an early 1900's train as part of a feature movie which they were in the process of making.

Following discussions and costings the Corporation chose Mount Barker Station as the setting for the film and a required a train of old freight and passenger vehicles, our 70 class suburban cars based at Goolwa being a major concern because they were too bright.

Eventually they settled on the three remaining four-wheel Dwf vans at Goolwa Depot and two M vans at Strathalbyn along with passenger car 70 and GB40 with Rx207 as the motive power. They also used two platform barrows and a sack truck. Mount Barker station underwent a transformation with the return of a picket fence along part of the platform and some changes to the paint work on the building.

On Sunday 10 November the consist was shunted at Goolwa Depot and the axle boxes of the two vans at Strathalbyn oiled ready for the journey. Time of arrival at Mount Barker was scheduled for 0700 hours the next day but a change on the previous Friday saw this being 0730 hours. With a full head of steam and tender first Rx207 departed Goolwa Depot hauling the Dwf's, GB40 and car 70 at 0450 hours on 11 November.

Daylight was breaking over the eastern horizon as the train approached Strathalbyn where the two M vans were attached for the onslaught of the ranges.

114 tonnes and tender first is not a good load for an Rx but 207 marched away from Strathalbyn in fine form as the sun broke through. Our smart style suddenly changed at about the 74.5 km mark when the sun shining on the rails caused a dew layer to form on the rail and the Rx to lose its feet. Some smart work by Ian Johnston and a few pieces of ballast on the rail head to form sand saw the Rx lift its train once more and into the shadows where the rail was dry. A short distance further Sw and the same problem - same solution and then without further stalling the train marched its way steadily to the top of the grade the beat and speed of the Rx giving an indication of its ability to take a greater load.

What an olde world sight met the train as it came to a halt at the Mount barker platform at 0725 hours. Old cases, kit bags, crates, bales of wool (filled with straw) and a host of other old-time items giving the impression of a very busy country railway station. A few changes to the order of the consist to suit changes requirements and the crew were dispatched to be dressed for the occasion.

Changes were made to the initial requirements when a request was made to take the train out of town to film some 'arrival' shots. This was done between Hurling Drive and Fiddlers Lane towards Philcox Hill over a period of nearly 3 hours. Back to Mount barker for lunch and then out over Dutton Terrace for mostn of the afternoon while shots of the station were taken prior to the train arriving. The train puled back into the platform for some shots of two ostriches escaping from one of the M vans. The ostriches were supposed to come charging out of the van and escape down the platform. Instaed they bolted out of the van, stopped and looked around at the crowd watching them. The consist was stabled overnight on the goods siding. Tuesday and several runs were made into the yard from the Junction end to film the train arriving and then we stood out of the platform for some time before the train returned and some shots were taken of the ostriches escaping along the platform. What a sight - they kept running back the wrong way, but eventually they behaved and the scene was shot, not as was planned.

At 1840 hours the train finally left Mount Barker for the assault on Philcox Hill then downgrade to Strathalbyn where a large crowd turned out to witness the shunting moves taking place. We had previously placed a notice in the local paper advising of our early morning shunting on the Monday. Darkness set in leaving Strathalbyn as the Rx ambled along with its small load - a typical mixed from yesteryear with the exception that the vans were between the GB and car 70 - so much for film makers licence.

The name of the film - 'Hammers over the Anvil'. What is it about? Unlike other films we have been associated with this one is being kept very quiet - even the town name is fictitious but no-one would say where it is supposed to be set -wee'll all have to wait until the movie has been made and shown at a theatre near you.