

Bob's Railway.

A synopsis of 160 pages condensed down to 8. A4 format, with hard covers, colour throughout.

There is only one privileged individual in the province permitted at all times to use the Government railways without payment, and further, without a 'pass'. Even the late Chairman Smith has been asked for his ticket, and the importunate porter would take no excuse; but 'franked' on all lines, and on engine, in van, or in carriage alike, the one constant traveler, who acts as though he believed the railways were made for him is our hero. (*Petersburg Times*, 9 August 1895)

This is the story of Bob, the railway dog.

Bob's lifetime closely mirrors a turbulent time for the South Australian Government and its Railways Department.

Part One is a history of the socio-economic picture of South Australia and its Railways Department in the 1880s and 1890s. It sounds worse than dull. It isn't!

By the end of Part One the reader will understand that "Bob, the railway dog" landed in a dysfunctional political environment, and a disorganised Railways Department when he set out on his train-riding adventures. In Part Two readers will follow Bob on his adventures, through the eyes and writings of those who met him and will understand how some of the Bob stories became distorted after they were told and retold.

Bob died in 1895. It was a tragic year for the future of the South Australian Railways. For the previous seven years the SAR had been managed by a Board of independent Commissioners, and they had done it well. During their tenure, the Parliament had sought to construct 1203 miles of new railways, but was thwarted by reports by the Commissioners that those lines would be unprofitable. Two decades later most of those lines were built and proved the Commissioners correct. The Parliament could not keep its hands off the Railways Department.

Part One

Building Bob's Playground.

South Australia was not a convict colony. Officially it was a province. It was settled by free settlers, often fleeing religious persecution, and with a dream of working their own land. They were hard-working and God-fearing. Formal European settlement occurred in 1836, and for the next 64 years the settlement regarded itself as one of six colonies comprising the Australian mainland and Tasmania.

The first settlers established themselves on the fertile coastal plains and planted wheat. The country was indented by two gulfs, and its coastline dotted with many small ports. Sea transport was cheap but road transport was not. South Australia became a major exporter of wheat. As agriculture shifted further away from the coast, there was a need for economically getting the harvest to markets. The solution was to build railways, with Adelaide connected to its port in 1856, and the railway to Gawler the following year. Governments, as will be shown later, are not good railway administrators.

1865 was a dry year, but with most agriculture being in the good country, the crops were low but not a failure. Surveyor-General George Goyder, was sent north to study the marginal country. He observed the vegetation, and drew a line on the map, beyond which he declared that wheat crops could not be reliably grown. This was Goyder's line of rainfall.

THE PORT AUGUSTA AND GOVERNMENT GUMS RAILWAY

This was a bold enterprise that started as the Port Augusta to Government Gums Railway Bill in June 1876. At the time it was the longest stretch of railway construction yet to be enacted by the colony, and with the most demanding construction and engineering challenges. It would serve multiple needs. It was the beginning of the grand plan for a transcontinental (north - south) Railway. It would provide an impetus for development of mines, and finally it would open up a million acres of land to agriculture. So confident was the Government that the rain would fall, that they named the other end of the Port Augusta line Farina (Latin for wheat). Goyder and his line never got a mention.

TO NAIRNE AND THE VICTORIAN BORDER

The purpose of the railway to Nairne was to provide transport to the growing produce and population of the Adelaide Hills. When the railway was enacted there was an intention to join it to the Strathalbyn line, but any notion about it extending to Murray Bridge was vague, and there was no serious mention of it extending to the Victorian Border.

For well over a century the Nairne Railway has been a headache for planners and politicians that shows no sign of going away. For railway administrators it is a bottleneck in the national network. A few more long crossing-loops have helped, but the gradients, curves and loading gauge restrictions are the inevitable legacy of a railway corridor that was enacted with haste.

THE MURRAY BRIDGE PROBLEM

To the early colonists of South Australia, the River Murray was both a blessing and a curse.

The Parliament made a hasty decision to order the steelwork for the bridge over the River Murray, based on the assumption that the bridge would be built at Edward's Crossing, which was the location where the bridge was eventually built (We now know it as Murray Bridge). The ironwork was ordered from England at a cost of £17,000. It had been estimated at the time that cost of construction would be £7,000 to £8,000. (when the bridge was finally built the cost of construction had blown out to £139,000.)

The ironwork was left to rust at Dry Creek, where it languished for four years, and the Parliament haggled over the best place to build it.

This is all relevant to our story, because the siting of the bridge dictated the direction that a future railway would take. But the bridge had been designed for carrying sheep and cattle. There was no mention, back in 1867, of putting a railway across it

THE RAILWAY TO THE BARRIER RANGES

The part of New South Wales west of the River Darling is arid land that is capable of supporting a conservatively-managed pastoral industry. Early transport to the region was by riverboat and teamsters, both slow and costly. Adelaide interests were drawn to the region by the vastness of the area and the fact that it was about double the distance to the capital in Sydney, when compared to the distance to Adelaide.

Schemes for a railway crystallised into two alternatives. A broad-gauge railway from Terowie via Mannahill to the New South Wales border, and a narrow-gauge railway joining the existing system at Petersburg, with shipping through Port Pirie. There was acrimony between the Adelaide interests and the two Members of the House of Assembly who represented what was essentially an agricultural community in and around Port Pirie and Gladstone. The Parliament voted for a railway with a minimum of engineering. The initial plan for the railway from Petersburg to the New South Wales border was to be the pioneer of a very cheap system of railway to be worked at a speed not exceeding 15 miles per hour

THE SILVERTON TRAMWAY COMPANY AND THE TARRAWINGEE TRAMWAY.

A mine is only as good as the railway that connects to it. Without a railway to the seaboard only a high-grade of ore can pay its way to the coast. J. S. Reid (John Smith Reid) was proprietor of Silverton's newspaper, of the *Silver Age*. It was his printing press that produced the prospectus for the Silverton Tramway Company in 1886. (It also printed the prospectus for the Broken Hill Proprietary in 1885). Reid became a shareholder in both. They were boom times and investing in mining shares became a pre-occupation of most in the community. By 1890 the times had changed, and most of the share-punters were left holding worthless scrip. Reid had backed a couple of winners.

J. S. Reid became an advocate for private railways to service mining regions, and ultimately championed the private railway as an integral part of mining ventures.

Smelting was done at the mines. This required a high-grade (low silicon) limestone for flux, of which there was a large deposit at Tarrawingee, just 40 miles north of Broken Hill. Thus, was the origin of J. S. Reid's next railway venture.

One of the invited guests at the opening of the Tarrawingee line in 1891 was J. H. Smith, South Australia's Chairman of the Board of Railway Commissioners. It is likely that Smith had prior dealings with Reid in his role as a Director of the BHP Company. Over subsequent years the pair would develop a closer business relationship. In the meantime, J. S. Reid had his eye on mining and railway opportunities in Tasmania and Queensland.

THE COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC WORKS

There is more to a railway operation than engines and tracks. Railways require a management structure, and in South Australia it was the Parliament that was at the top of the heap. The railway system was the responsibility of the Commissioner of Public Works, who was a Minister of the Crown, and therefore a Member of Cabinet. His responsibility was wider than just railways, and his portfolio included jetties, harbours and waterworks. Most of these Commissioners did not have a background that was an asset for the purpose of administering a complex organization, and generally they were not long enough in the job to appreciate the issues. There were five different Commissioners in 1857. 1865 and 1868 were not much better with four different with four different Commissioners in each of those years.

Within the Railways Department there were three principal officers who reported to the Commissioner:

HENRY COATHUPE MAIS

Engineer in Chief, H. C. Mais, whose department was concerned with the track, bridges, water supply and other items of infrastructure.

ALAN PENDLETON

He would have the trucks loaded with as much as possible, and wanted more carriages to fill, in order to maximise revenue. But he was thwarted by Mais who was concerned that the track and bridges may be overloaded and pleaded for replacement of lightweight track with heavier rails

WILLIAM THOW

The Locomotive Engineer was William Thow. He had commenced with the South Australian Railways as the Locomotive Superintendent in 1876.

His department was burdened with a collection of small and inefficient workshops that had been necessary for the maintenance of the isolated tramways and light railways that had been built in the 1870s. Operations of the Locomotive Department were also burdened by having a fleet of locomotives of which there were many different classes, and having small numbers in each class.

Thow complained that Pendleton would have his engines pull too many carriages. He would have liked stronger engines, but Mais called a stop to that because the track could not carry the heavier loading.

Despite competing for resources this railway trio seems to have functioned reasonably well - that is until 14 March 1883.

That was the day of the opening of the railway to Aldgate. The American engine hauling the Governor's special train failed near Blackwood due to the melting of the fire bars.

What followed was 6 years of acrimony, a Royal Commission, and further Parliamentary enquiries. Thow eventually left the South Australian Railways in May 1889. It was South Australia's loss and a gain for New South Wales.

THE NAIRNE RAILWAY FIASCO

Here is how the *South Australian Register* saw the outcome:

The general result of the enquiry is to throw blame on two subordinates – the Inspector of Ways and one of the engine-drivers – although there is as much evidence to exonerate them as to condemn them. A mild sort of censure is passed upon two of the departmental heads.... The recommendation of the Board is that the heads of departments should confer together more frequently, and if in their united wisdom they cannot come to agreement on any matter they must remit it to the Commissioner. But when jealousy and ill-feeling exist between heads of departments, what will be the advantage of conferences? It is clear that we have not got to anything like a definite and satisfactory settlement of the way of extricating the management of our railways from their present condition of muddle.

Learned students of South Australian railway history may here remark that it would be another 40 years of muddling before there would be a serious attempt to remedy the situation.

Had Thow remained in South Australia, we can be confident that the South Australian Railways would have entered the new century with locomotive designs that were up to the task. Thow's deputy was Thomas Roberts who was responsible for the very successful F class suburban tank-engine, and the S class express engine with 6'6" driving wheels that enabled fast running on the plains.

JOSEPH HENRY SMITH AND THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS. From 1888 to 1895 the South Australian Railways was managed by a Board of three Commissioners.

It is Joseph Henry Smith that interests us.

In 1893 five railway employees (Wood, Archibald, Batchelor, Adams and Price), nominated as Labor candidates for Parliament. The Commissioners required that they must relinquish their employment before standing for election. Smith was of the opinion that the railway workers were government employees, and therefore ineligible to nominate while they remained with the service. The five employees opined that the Railways Commissioner Act of 1888 removed their standing as government employees. Smith stood firm.

BOOM AND BUST

When the three Commissioners were appointed, the times were good, and South Australia was enjoying prosperity which it was drawing from the mining boom in the Barrier Ranges. Production of copper, which had been as high as 28,000 tons in 1876, but was falling, and by 1896 the mines at Moonta and Wallaroo had passed their peak, and the output was slightly less than 5000 tons. In 1889 there was a collapse of the financial system and closure of banks which had its hardest hit in Victoria. 1891 was a drought year, and any hope of economic recovery for South Australia led by Broken Hill was scuttled by a strike in 1892. By 1893 the full effect of the economic depression was having a significant impact on the revenue of the South Australian Railways.

THE 1893 ELECTIONS

The political picture of South Australia changed dramatically in 1893. This was the year that the Labour movement had developed to the stage where it fielded candidates for the elections. The liberal side of politics was less organised.

CHARLES CAMERON KINGSTON

Kingston was Premier from 1893 to 1899. In 2008 he was in the news, some 100 years after his death, when his remains were exhumed so that DNA testing could be done. Exhumation, and the associated DNA testing along with the legal costs would be at considerable cost, but there were families in Adelaide who found good cause to seek to compare their own DNA to Kingston's

His lecherous tendency had been common knowledge, but he was held in sufficiently high esteem by the masses to have his statue erected in Victoria Square. He was, by all accounts, a 'love him or hate him' sort of character. He exhibited all of the characteristics that modern-day psychiatry would brand as a Narcissitic Personality Disorder.

"in dealing with Kingston you are dealing with an able but absolutely unscrupulous man. His character is the worst; he is black hearted and entirely *disloyal*". Lord Kintore, Governor of South Australia 1889 – 1895.

"A terrible bully and frightfully obstinate". Lady Tennyson, wife of Hallam, Baron Tennyson, Governor of South Australia 1899 - 1902.

Unlike his predecessors, great public works did not happen

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS.

There was very little authorization of new railway routes during the term of the Board. It was required to provide a report on all proposed lines. There was only one significant construction undertaken in their time, the Blyth Extension, which linked to Gladstone and Snowtown. The Blyth Extension was constructed departmentally, which was a new approach for the South Australian Railways. Historically railway construction had been by railway contractors, which was a profitable business – for the contractors. There was a failure to build on this experience and use departmental construction labour in the railways built in the first quarter of the 20th century.

S class express passenger engine

Z class narrow-gauge passenger engine

There was the relocation of locomotive workshops from Adelaide station to Islington.

As C.C. Kingston's hold on the electorate weakened during the last years of the 1890s. There were three injustices that the public was loathe to forgive. The Adelaide Hospital dispute, the sacking of General Owen, and his unfair dealing with J. H. Smith.

THE QUEENSLAND BORDER RAILWAY COMMISSION AND THE KOPPERAMANNA RAILWAY

To this day, Queensland is the only mainland State without a direct railway connection with South Australia.

Kingston's administration, in its whole six and a half years, did not authorise construction of one mile of new rail ways. Bills were introduced for new lines but they either faltered for want of numbers in the House of Assembly or were defeated in the Legislative Council. Most of these railways were eventually authorised in the following decade – all except the railway to Kopperamanna, yet that was the one single line of railway that Kingston had given his solid support

ENTER THE UNIONS AND THE LABOR PARTY

There had been a South Australian Enginemen's and Firemen Association as far back as 1880, but it was more an educational and social body than a trade union.

We now need to look at the five railway workers who nominated for the 1893 election.

TOM PRICE

In February 1895, he addressed a meeting at Mitcham and voiced views about the Board of Railway Commissioner. He named the contractor, W. R. Cave. Cave commenced action against Price for libel. That was settled later in the year at some personal cost to Price, but it triggered a Royal Commission which made its final report in 1900.

EGERTON LEE BATCHELOR

Batchelor was a well-educated man who had accumulated a lot of practical knowledge about the workings of the locomotive department and would have been well aware that things were not right under the three Commissioners. Of the four ex-SAR employees who entered Parliament in June 1893 it was clear at an early stage that Batchelor was one that would spearhead a campaign of needling of the Board of Commissioners.

WILLIAM OLIVER ARCHIBALD

He subsequently held ministerial positions. He remained loyal to Prime Minister Hughes in the 1917 split over conscription, but finally lost his seat in 1919.

RICHARD WOOD

He worked as a blacksmith at the Islington Workshops, and from 1890 to 1892 was Vice-President of the South Australian Railway Association. He was President of the Trades and Labour Council in 1892. He was an ardent supporter of free trade which was out of step with the Labor platform. Eventually he lost official support of the Party.

ADAMS was not successful in the 1893 election.

J. H. SMITH AND C.C. KINGSTON – A TOXIC RELATIONSHIP

It appears that by December 1892 things were getting rather tense. Joseph Smith suddenly left town with his family, taking one month's leave on the advice of "his medical man" bound for Melbourne, leaving Commissioner Hill in charge.

This triggered a row between Kingston, and Richard Baker who was a Member of the Legislative Council. Kingston was furious that Smith had been granted leave of absence, whereupon Baker accused Kingston of being a "coward, a bully and a disgrace to the legal profession". What happened next is unequalled in the history of Australian politics. Kingston challenged Baker to a duel in Victoria Square, acquired two matching pistols, one of which he sent to Baker.

There was no slackening of the adversarial relationship between Joseph Smith and Premier Kingston. In January 1894 the press was openly discussing Kingston's "non-love" of Joseph Smith, and predicting that there would soon be only one Railway Commissioner.

Kingston was fired with the need to get rid of J. H. Smith, and in December 1894 introduced a Bill to amend the *Railway Commissioner Act*, by having only one Commissioner.

The failure to unburden the operation from political meddling ranks second only to the introduction of the 3'6" (1067 mm) gauge as decisions by the Parliament that have crippled the system. The consequence for South Australia has put it foremost amongst the former mainland colonies in having seen the near-total decay of its intrastate rail freight routes.

JAMES MARTIN & Co., and LOCOMOTIVE POLICY

Martin memorabilia is everywhere in Gawler. What started out as a small blacksmith and millwright enterprise in 1848 in the centre of the town grew to become South Australia's only builder of steam locomotives during the 19th century. The South Australian Railways workshops at Islington, prior to 1928, did build some locomotives but they were a token gesture.

J. H. SMITH – LIFE AFTER THE SAR When his time was up he was out of South Australia. He had cultivated influential friends. Even before the end of his term with the South Australian Railways, a job was offered to him in India. For a while he was in Melbourne, and within weeks of leaving South Australia he had received another offer from the Argentine Railways. In October 1895 there was yet another offer; this one from Cecil Rhodes in the Cape Colony. Smith had his eye on bigger fish.

Another of his influential friends was J. S. Reid, formerly of the *Silver Age*, the initiator of the Silverton Tramway, and a major shareholder of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company.

In January 1896 it was announced that Smith had been appointed as the London representative of the Camden syndicate which had acquired the rights of Ashcroft's patent for the treatment of sulphides.

J. H. Smith continued to be involved in railway schemes that were directed from London,

Smith, to the workers who toiled in his workshops and along the tracks, probably exuded the air of the upper-class, and at a time when the colony's finances were tough. He would have them tighten their belts to achieve the operational savings that were an inherent requirement of his position. It was a look that won him no friends in the Labor side of politics. His passion was clearly directed at the railways and those who worked in the service.

He seems to have faded from the news after 1902.

Joseph Henry Smith died in London, 18 February 1919. A brief obituary in the London Times made no mention of his time in South Australia.

Part Two

ABOUT BOB

I have sourced about 100 items that provide information about Bob, from people who knew him. The first group of items is in chronological order, and describes Bob's activities during his lifetime. The first newspaper report of Bob was 12 December 1885;

The other day on entering a carriage at the Port station for Semaphore, I was a little surprised to find that my sole fellow traveler was a long-haired, intelligent looking dog, albeit a mongrel, but evidently possessed of much of the sagacity of the sheep dog breed....I found that Bob (for that was the animal's name) was a frequent traveler and well known on the line.

In November 1886, the rails joining Adelaide and Melbourne were complete. The first intercolonial express was in January 1887, but in November 1886, a special train, complete with one of the new Mann Boudoir cars, made the journey with the Governor, who was going to the Melbourne Cup. This report is from Bordertown:

"Bob" the railway dog, an animal that appeared to be in high glee amongst the crowd awaiting the arrival of the special train...railway people say it was likely that Bob had made up his mind to see the Melbourne Cup, and that should he go there, his canine sagacity would allow him to return to Adelaide without falling into the hands of sharpeners, unlike the numerous "unlucky dogs" who become victims at Cup time.

During 1887 through to 1890 there are many reports of Bob's travels, including his riding on the Largs Bay tram-motor, the Glenelg line and the North train. One of those reports stated that Bob had been to Sydney for the Centennial celebrations.

In June 1892 Bob was in Ararat, and the local press reported:

There was a distinguished visitor, and one which attracted much attention to the railway station on Thursday afternoon in the shape of "Bob" the railway dog.

In June 1894 the Blyth extension railway to Gladstone and Snowtown was opened by the Governor, Lord Kintore:

On the train was that well-known distinguished passenger "Railway Bob" who seemed to fully understand that something unusual was taking place. He shook his shaggy sides with delight on finding himself travelling on a new road, for variety is pleasing even to such a dog as Bob, who is certainly a somewhat remarkable specimen of the canine species.

Later in 1894 Bob visited Burra and Kapunda but in the first seven months of 1895 there were no reports. It seems that Bob had formed an attachment to Mick Tier who was the licensee of the Royal Hotel in Hindley Street. Bob died on 29 July 1895. There were many eulogies and obituaries published throughout Australia, but not Western Australia. The reports were vague on the matter of the cause of Bob's death. Mick Tier had arranged to have Bob stuffed by a prominent Port Adelaide veterinary, Mr Nathan. There are conflicting versions. Some say that Bob's stuffed skin was put in a glass case, and put on display in Exchange Hotel. Others say that Bob's skin was never stuffed. One of the more endearing eulogies was by a columnist who used the pen name "Hugh Kalyptus":

I had the honour of the acquaintance of "Bob" the railway dog, and must say that he was one of nature's canine gentlemen, always self-possessed, dignified without hauteur, friendly without being familiar, and courteous, inasmuch as he would always rise when addressed, pay attention to what was said to him, and never treat anyone superciliously, as I have seen many bipeds do.

There was a poem written by Alfred Maggs of Kadina. The final verse:

You were a "deadhead" on the train,

Weren't you, Bob?

A "deadhead" still you will remain,

Won't you, Bob!

You knew you could not stand the blow

When Kingston sacked "red necktie" Joe,

But now *you're* stuffed and are on show,

Hard luck, Bob!

A "deadhead" was a derisive term to describe a passenger, such as an MP or Railways staff, who travelled free of charge. "Red necktie" Joe refers to J. H. Smith.

In 1929 Ernest Whittington of the *Register* commenced a regular column “Out Among The People”, and this attracted many letters from people who remembered Bob. In 1934 that column was continued by Maurice Fisher who used the pen name “Vox”. His column attracted many letters and personal interviews with older railway men, who provided stories about Bob. Notable amongst these items were several that told the story of Bob meeting his death by being run over by a butcher’s van in Hindley street. Another item that can be neither proven nor disproven is that Bob had a grandson called *Simple Charlie*, who went to South Africa as the mascot of the Fifth Contingent to the Boer War. Another story that is quite wrong is that Bob met the Prince of Wales. There have been many mentions that Bob, when in Adelaide, would visit Mr. Evan’s butcher’s shop. His name was Evens, and Aunt Dorothy, in one of her stories is the only one who has spelt it correctly. By 1945 “Vox” was running out of old enginemen who had known Bob, and the stories come to an end. I come across the occasional “Yarns” which I am happy to include but with the caveat that they aren’t history.

Appendix 1.

A summary of the recommendations of the 1875 report by the Railway Commission, outlining priorities for the construction of new railway routes.

Appendix 2

At the end of the 7-year term of office of the Board of Railway Commissioners in 1895 the Chamber of Manufacturers organised a banquet in the Adelaide Town Hall in their honour. It was more an opportunity for conservatives to bag Premier C. C. Kingston.

Appendix 3

A “Yankee” in the paint shop. Reminiscent of the saga about Murphy and his barrow-load of bricks, and the “Bull in a china shop”. It is a delightful piece of reporting and guaranteed to bring a chuckle even on the darkest of days.

Appendix 4

A listing of dates of early railways in South Australia.

Appendix 5

In 1883, Engineer-in-Chief, Henry C. Mais did an overseas tour, and on his return submitted a detailed report. It includes a diagram of the profiles of Mountain railways of the world, showing comparative gradients, altitudes and distances. The railway over Mount Lofty is a puny little hump when compared to many others.

Appendix 6

James Martin & Co. of Gawler – a listing of locomotives built to 1907.

Appendix 7.

Bob’s song. There has been a lot written about Bob, the railway dog, and there have been poems. A recent magazine article claimed that there had been a song. At the time it was wrong. Glen Hadden has put music to the words.

References and Index