



## NEWSLETTER OCT 2019

The *OVERLAND* book, unlike its illustrious namesake, is running ahead of schedule and will be released in June. Comment has been made that there has been a lot written about the *Overland* over the years and has questioned the need for a book at this time. The content of my book will be strong on social history – previous books and articles have largely ignored that.

We have recently returned from Victoria.

One of the missions of the recent trip has been to determine the present status of the Harold Freedman mural that was once a feature of the old Spencer Street station. It was commissioned by Public Transport of Victoria in 1973 and depicted the progress in public transport from 1835 to 1935. The Mural involved Harold Freedman and 3 artists and took 5 years to complete. It was removed in 2005 for the purpose of building the Southern Cross Station with the stated intention being that it would be incorporated into the new development. It was, and there was a viewing platform with interpretive signage. It is at the extreme northern end of the Spencer Retail Outlet, but the viewing platform (and/or its access) has become a casualty of the need for retail space. A clear view of the mural in its entirety is not possible and the retailers who have paid for the space are seemingly uncomfortable with the placing of a camera tripod amongst their floor displays. This mural does not depict the Express, but does feature the various locomotive classes that were used on the Express. The relevance to the Express is that, whilst Spencer Street station in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was no architectural masterpiece, the great mural conveyed a sense of arrival (and departure) for the interstate traveller. The present placement of the mural does not do it justice.

We went to the ARHS Museum at North Williamstown/Newport. I had never previously visited it – it is only open on Saturday afternoons and there was a time when it was totally closed because of safety concerns. I particularly wanted to look at *Torrens* which was originally called *Adelaide* and was one of the four E class sleeping cars introduced on the Express in 1907. Then there was *Heavy Harry* – within the present draft of the manuscript I pose the question (of which I do not attempt to answer) – was Heavy Harry a triumph of locomotive design or a dismal failure of transport planning?



We caught up with the OVERLAND at the Moorabool viaduct, just out of Geelong.



Photographed on Friday 18 October. Don't ask me what the engine number was!

I have progressed with the research for the *Overland* book to the extent that I have got the backbone of the history done, and have the photographs to support it. But I am amazed that photographs and side-stories turn up in what seem to be the most unlikely of places. As an example, the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum at Lilydale has a special Melba collection, within which is a photograph of the famous diva on one of her train journeys.

I am drawing on the photographic collections of the State Library of South Australia, Public Record Office of Victoria and the National Railway Museum and private collections of Bob Sampson and my own collection. I am keen to open it up to others and will welcome submission from Victorian private collections. I am yet to obtain a suitable photograph of double-headed R class in Victoria. They had charge of the Overland for only 13 months from September 1951.

The major function associated with the release of the book will be at the National Railway Museum. There is also planned to be function at the Overland Museum at Kaniva.

**Some of the features of the book will be:**

A history of the English Mails and the challenge of achieving a faster transit time. The inter-colonial railway was one of the means of expediting the mails to Melbourne and Sydney.

The naming of "The Overland", how, when, where and why.

The locomotives and the men who designed them. There were heroes and villains.

The carriages.

A chronology of significant happenings in the history of the Express. There will also be an extensive listing of significant incidents and accidents.

There will be a listing of all timetable changes.

I discuss the future of rail passenger transport on the Melbourne to Adelaide corridor, and the potential for high-speed (160kph) V.locity trains. There would need to be track improvements and longer crossing loops, and deviations such as Murtoa to Wail, and a by-pass of the North Geelong loop. The present situation re fuel efficiency is that air travel burns about 2.5 litres to carry one passenger 100 km, whereas the V.locity trains consume about 1 litre. The average 6-cylinder motor car with two people travelling is about 3.5 litres.

I am not taking forward orders for the *Overland* book at this stage – I expect to be taking orders about April.

**John Wilson**