

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2020

Was this the last **OVERLAND**? It certainly was in the sense that there has not been one since. But will it run again?

Photograph taken at Callington of the westbound Overland, about 4.00 pm 24 March 2020, which was the exact time that South Australia closed its borders. **PHOTO BY PAT WILSON.**

THE OVERLAND - A SOCIAL HISTORY

I received proof copies from the printer on Friday 17th April and am unable to fault the quality of the printing job.

It is not a good time to launch a new book. My initial plan for this book was to sell most copies through the bookshops operated by railway museums etc. but they are now closed "for the duration".



I have faith that the book will largely sell itself. Sales will be on-line. My ask of those who have already ordered a copy is that you show it around.

RRP \$78

**NOW OPEN FOR PRE-PUBLICATION
ORDERS**

**INTRODUCTORY PRICING WILL
CONTINUE TO**

30 JUNE

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\$65

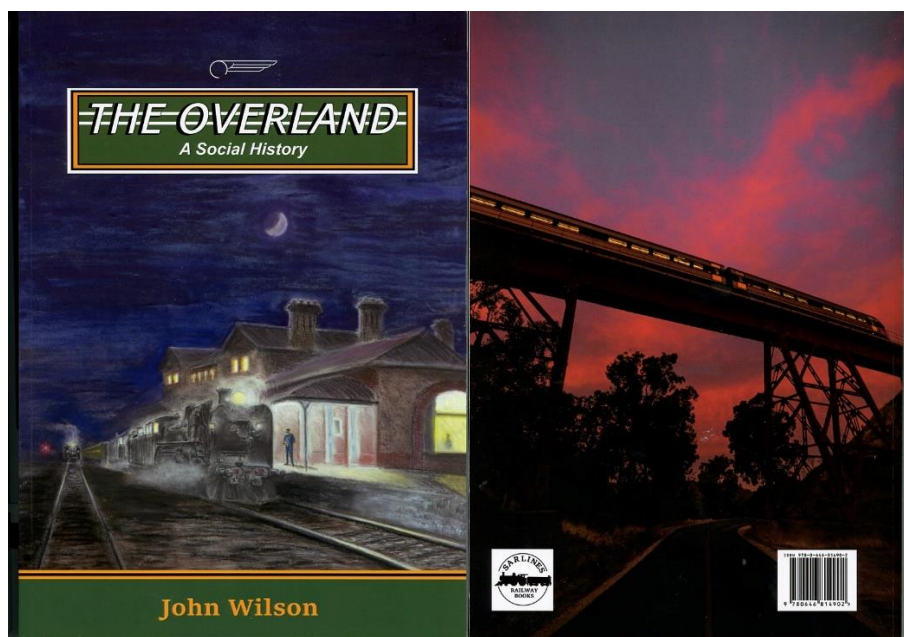
\$60 IF ORDERING TWO BOOKS

www.sarlinesbooks.com.au

Hard cover, 194 pages. There is a four-page SYNOPSIS on the website.

What is a “Social History”?

It is about people, and how the Intercolonial Express connected the populations of Victoria and South Australia, and thus became a significant catalyst of Australian Federation. It is about football, coffins, and potable water. It has generated its fair share of cross-border squabbling. The two colonies were at odds when the service began, to the extent that they were able to agree that they could not agree to have a formal opening ceremony.



The front cover is by Glen Hadden of the Serviceton Railway Station c1938, done in pastels and was commissioned for this book. The Adelaide-bound *Overland* has made an on-time arrival. The two Victorian Railways A² locomotives that have brought the express from Ararat will uncouple. Simmering away on the passing loop is a mighty 600 class Pacific locomotive of the South Australian Railways waiting to move on to the front of the express and speed it to Tailem Bend.

The back cover features a photograph that was taken in early January 2020 by Jay Connor of Bacchus Marsh. It is of a V/Line VLOCITY train crossing the Rowsley bridge and headed for Ballarat. The spectacular red sunset was a legacy of the disastrous bushfires at that time. They seemed to be sending a message that we need to change our ways and move away from fuel-hungry air travel and road transport. This is the future of rail transport between Adelaide and Melbourne.

POSTAGE. There is no getting away from it - \$15. But yes - there is. Two books travel for the price of one (to the one address). You can save postage by collecting the book. There are three locations at which books may be collected. Either at my home at Banksia Park. Members of National Railway Museum may be able to collect from the Museum bookshop by mutual arrangement with the Museum. People in or around the Clare Valley may collect from the Wilson Vineyard at a mutually agreeable time.,

PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO ANYONE YOU THINK MAY BE INTERESTED – IF THEY WANT TO ORDER THEN COMBINE THE TWO ORDERS TO GET THE BEST DEAL.

MINI REVIEWS. I am establishing a page on the website to feature brief comments by readers. If you have a comment about one of my books – whether just a sentence or a few paragraphs, please submit them via e-mail or the website

STUART HICKS’ OVERLAND MUSEUM AT KANIVA. It was to have been officially opened on 27 April but has been deferred until the situation returns to “normal” (whatever and whenever that may be). It is a very well set up display. My future newsletters will provide updates.

DEB TRIBE ON ABC891

It has been the tradition to do my book launches at the National Railway Museum, and the original plan had been for the launch of the *Overland* at the Museum on 28 June. It was to be part of “Celebration of the Overland” event. The NRM is “closed for the duration” but may yet have an Overland event.

I decided to bring the release of the book forward. Deb Tribe does the breakfast programme on Saturday am. on ABC 891, and has long been a supporter of the National Railway Museum. She has accepted an invitation to do a radio launch of the book on 23 May. I suspect that in the weeks leading up to that radio launch, she will be dispensing small appetisers. Presently we do not know what time on 23 May, but I expect it will be between 0600 and 0730. Interstate customers will need to listen on their computer and should note that it is Adelaide time.

BOB’S RAILWAY and **THE RIESLING RAILWAY**. I still have copies available of these previous releases. **BOB’S RAILWAY** is a comprehensive history of Bob, the Railway Dog and the turbulent political times of South Australia and its railway system at that time. The **RIESLING RAILWAY** was produced for the centenary of the railway to Clare in 2018. It includes features on the history of Railway Refreshment Rooms of the SAR, the Baby Health Train and its travelling Sister who called on remote communities from 1932 to 1969. There is also a feature on the shooting of Broken Hill’s MLA, Percy Brookfield at the Riverton Railway Station in 1921. Touted as Australia’s first political assassination. The centenary of the event is less than 12 months hence. These books can be ordered from the website.

THE OVERLAND. In the last newsletter I offered the opinion that the “Big O” has had more lives than the cat on the Eveready battery, and I held little hope for further extension. A virus infection has brought it down but has not killed it. There is an increasing strength of opinion that the “winged wheel” could hold on to the Melbourne – Adelaide route, and do it faster and more frequently.

MORE ON *THE OVERLAND* – THE BOOK AND THE TRAIN

30 December 2019 I had signed off the Mission Statement of the *Overland* book. It included the following:

This has presented an interesting ethical question for the historian. If the historian finds that the matter under consideration has “lost its way”, should the historian just stand back and dutifully chronicle the events, or should the historian intervene?

Rightly or wrongly, I have found myself compelled to “take up the cudgels’ in support of, not only the retention of the service, but its rebuilding.

This is the exciting stuff about history. It explains to here and now, and has relevance to the future

Victoria has shown the way forward with its Vlocity trains with a top speed of 160 kph.

Early in March it was clear that a pandemic was about to descend upon Australia. I had already included in the Appendices of the book, the report of the quarantine at Serviceton regarding the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1919. I set about further researching it, with a view to adding it to the Appendices of the book.

In early March I was so concerned about the pandemic that I cancelled the planned book launch of 28 June.

On 12 March the World Health organisation declared the global pandemic.

On 13 March I had completed the item – it is attached – One obvious conclusion was that South Australia’s arid environment was protective, but that there was a spike in the number of cases in the winter. In part, that spike in the winter appears to have been the result of lifting travel restrictions and general relaxation of precautions. I felt that, for the public good, the information from 1919 needed to be aired sooner, and accordingly have fast-tracked the release of the book. I have made use of Trove, and accept that most of that information would be available to any researcher. The core of the information, however, is drawn from the South Australian Railways Weekly Notices of 1919, of which I have a full set. This is information that would not be available in libraries and research organisations.

On 24 March South Australia closed its borders. On that day the *Overland* travelled from Melbourne to Adelaide. It has not subsequently operated.

On 25-26 I wrote the Epilogue, as is my usual tradition leaving it to the day before it went to the printer. It included the following:-

Regarding the transportation of people; there must be a reappraisal of priorities, and I expect that rail will play a larger role. It will require expenditure on infrastructure. It will be the people, not the polities, who drive the change.

... have the Melbourne trains depart and arrive at Adelaide Railway Station... the new trains would be 6 cars but they would be often...the schedules for the trains and the football fixtures would fit together...the broad gauge Vlocity connection from Ararat to Southern Cross would be a guaranteed connection (which means that it waits if the other train was running late). The standard gauge train...should proceed to Geelong and make a grand arrival at the magnificent 1877 railway station. Geelong is the home of the "Cats" and has a population of about a quarter of a million.

I have closed the Epilogue (and the book) with the following:-

Who is going to run these trains? In 1885 there was the will to make it happen, and the respective colonial governments were able to sort it out almost within a day.

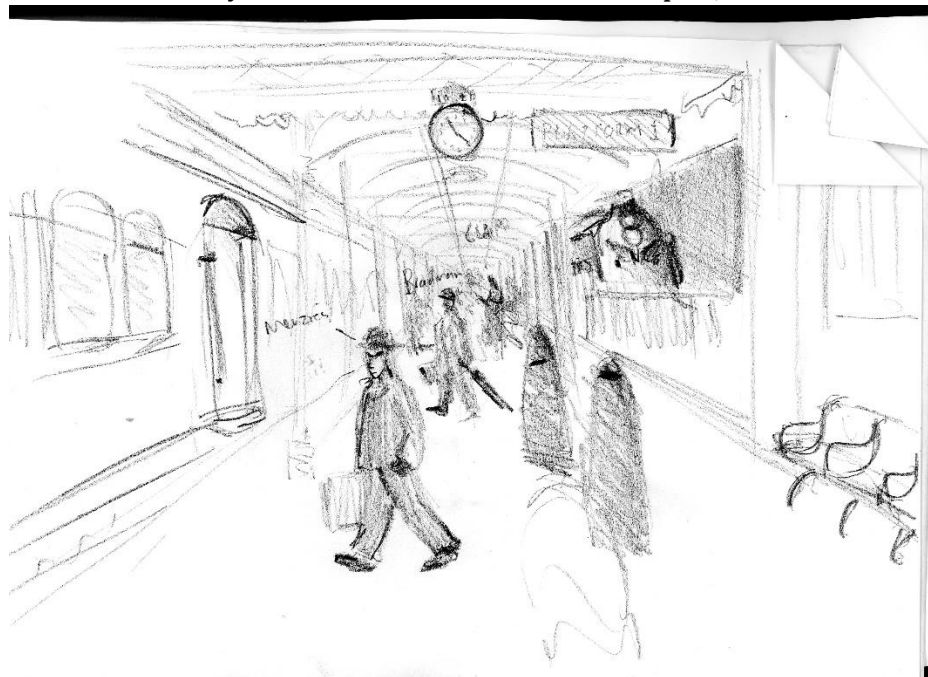
In the second week of April, through my respective State and Federal MPS (one Liberal and one Labor) I advised of the forthcoming release of the book and my offer to immediately provide a set of page proofs to both State Government and Opposition. The response by the Opposition was immediate and enthusiastic. I accept that the Government may have other more pressing priorities, but reasoned that after two weeks I could reasonably expect some reply.

18-19 April 2020 *The Weekend Australian* (Page 22), Regions the Winners after the lockdown by Simon Kuestenmacher, Director of Research of the Demographics Group

The easiest way for governments to kickstart dormant economies is infrastructure spending.

Any large-scale infrastructure package is likely to include rail upgrades linking capital cities and their satellites. Connectivity is key for the success of regional towns, and the post coronavirus future promises the right kind of investments.

MY NEXT BOOK is all about Australia's muddled railway gauges. Back in 1958 Eric Harding wrote a book called "Uniform Railway Gauge". Understandably, in the 60 years since then, there has been a lot written, but no-one has put it all together - into one bundle - so to speak. I have a lot of material already researched and written. As in the past, I am on the lookout for high quality



photographs and have a preference for using photographs submitted by those who have supported my previous publications. Those whose photographs feature in the book will receive a free copy.

In 1921 there was an attempt to fix the mess. It failed, but a hundred years on seemed an appropriate time to release a book. It

looks at the situation from the perspective of the whole of Australia.

Glen Hadden has again been engaged to do the artwork for the front cover. To get him started, I composed the caption, and presented it to Glen.

It was at Albury, where the standard gauge line from Sydney and the broad gauge line from Melbourne met in 1883. Passengers had to change trains, and it was not until 1962 that the Albury break-of-gauge was remedied. The train from Sydney was called simply *The Melbourne Express*. From November 1937 the train from Melbourne was the *Spirit of Progress* which was an all air-conditioned express that ran non-stop from Melbourne to Albury hauled by a streamlined Victorian Railways S class locomotive. The *Spirit of Progress* was Royal Blue and lined out with gold leaf. It was known as "The Blue" and when working from Melbourne to Albury was scheduled to arrive at the latter station at 10.20 pm. Here it has made an "on-time" arrival, and the passengers are making their way towards the station refreshment rooms and the sleeping cars of the express to Sydney. The passengers would include politicians and sporting heroes. The *Spirit of Progress* had been conceptualised by Victorian Railways Chief Commissioner, Harold Clapp, and it was always his tradition, when travelling on the *Spirit*, to stop by the engine cab at the end of the journey, and thank the engine crew for an excellent run.

While we were talking, Glen was sketching, and as we flicked through some photographs Glen was able to sketch out a rough. I thought it was worth sharing.



DANIEL's SPIT

Most of you would be aware that career-wise, this railway publishing activity is my third "Incarnation". Some years ago, my son, Daniel, took over the business of the family vineyard and winemaking operation at Polish Hill River in the Clare Valley. He is a better winemaker than I was, and is producing some outstanding Rieslings and reds. Most of his wines went to restaurants etc. in the eastern states. That

market no longer exists. Now he cannot do tastings and sales from the vineyard. He is still able to accept orders by phone and e-mail for delivery in Australia. He is offering some good deals. Check out the website www.wilsonvineyard.com.au if for no other reason than the pic of Daniel and his winemaker's spit. General opinion is that **he has got the best spit in the wine business**. Feel free to give him a ring on 0403 312 149 or e-mail him on daniel@wilsonvineyard.com.au

This is Daniel with one of his spits. There is another on his website.

THANKYOU JOHN WILSON