



CHAPTER 22*

Early in 2023, Victoria's ARE organisation, the Association of Railway Enthusiasts, somewhat surprisingly, was wound up by a dwindling membership. But on closer analysis it was not surprising, and slowly the word filtered out that there were other rail organisations experiencing the same problem. That problem was a significant decline in membership as the older ones moved on to the great 'roundhouse in the sky'. But these groups were not attracting the numbers of younger people**. I am one of the same demographic. A 'baby boomer' of the late 1940s, captivated by the magic of steam and trains.

As a young teenager I needed only a camera and a bike. The 1960's was the last decade of regular steam working. We knew that steam would soon be finished and used every opportunity to overdose on it. Sure, there have been the heritage railways that have kept steam alive. But it was not the same as riding in the engine cab of a 700 class Mikado as it blasted through the darkness with the midnight Scavenger*** from Murray Bridge to Mount Lofty.

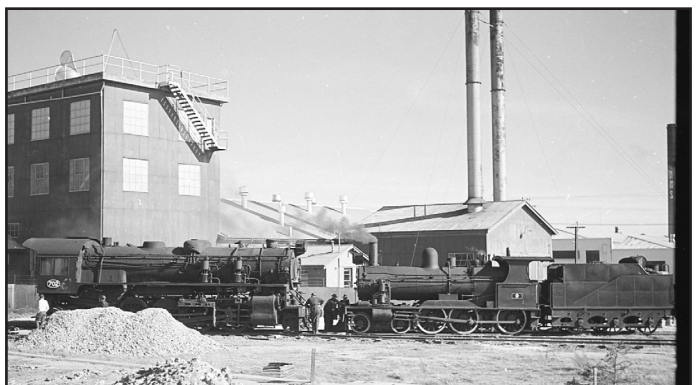
There developed a sort of camaraderie of rail enthusiasts. My own involvement dates from late 1964. About 4:30 pm on Tuesdays there would be a few of us at the Millswood junction. As we waited for that first tuft of engine smoke to appear from somewhere in the direction of the Goodwood station, we listened with eager ears as the older ones talked about Mr Webb and his Chief Mechanical Engineer, Fred Shea.

At precisely 4.28 pm, the Taillem Bend train would whistle for the Victoria Street crossing. The more experienced of the group would declare it to be a 520 class whistle or a 620 class and as the engine came into sight they could take comfort that they were right. I usually got it wrong. A few minutes later there was the weekly Willunga goods with a 700 class Mikado, then after a wait of about 20 minutes, the Mitcham workers' train with an Rx engine. And as we waited the older ones told us more about Mr Webb and Fred Shea.

*During the tenure of Mr Fitch as Commissioner, the South Australian Railways published a newsletter, *RAILNEWS*, that featured the image at the top of the page. References are included in the bibliography.

**Some of the other heritage railway organisations (in Victoria) have not provided a welcoming and nurturing environment for their younger volunteers. See bibliography.

***The 'Scavenger' was a goods train that operated from Taillem Bend to Mile End and was scheduled to depart about 7.30 pm. It was worked by a 700 class Mikado engine and its purpose was to pick up empty vans and trucks along the route.



THE TOP THREE ARE THE PROCESSION OF STEAM at Millswood. At the top is the Taillem Bend passenger train with light Pacific 627, and on 6 April 1965, 708 on the Willunga goods, and Rx 160 on the Islington to Mitcham workers' train.

THE BOTTOM SCENE was at the Mile End Railway Museum on 1 June 1965, when 702 was delivered by Rx 9. **ALL JLW.**

Sometimes there were new faces and we continued the tradition of reciting the mythology and folklore that had been handed down to us about Webb and Shea. It was about the time that the AFULE, the engine drivers' union, donated to the Railway Museum, the collar of Bob, the railway dog. Thus, we now had a trilogy of folklore to recite. Webb, Shea and Bob, the railway dog.

By the end of 1965 the number of those at Millswood was in decline. Steam was getting scarce. It was only a short bike ride to Mile End where land had been provided for the Railway Museum. In 1965 there wasn't much to see at the Railway Museum but we could entertain the few visitors with stories of Webb, Fred Shea and Bob, the railway dog. There was a young school lad called Bob, and it was inevitable that he would be known as 'Bob the railway dog'. And he kept coming back to the Railway Museum.

As we moved into the 1970s, all over Australia, one by one, and sometimes in one fell swoop, the country passenger services disappeared, and by the 80s they were virtually gone. The railways had lost that magic spark and it was not hard to understand that there was nothing about them to fire the passion that would be vital to the genesis of a new cohort of younger train enthusiasts.

But those of us who had been through the 1960s had the photographs and we had the memories. In retrospect we can see that the railways were tearing themselves apart trying to compete with the motor car and the air travel but still clinging to their old ways. The railways were changing but the world around them was changing faster.

The previous chapter took us to 1965, the end of the Playford era. 1965 was the year that Mr Fitch was appointed Commissioner of the SAR.

The newspapers were telling us that the South Australian Railways were carrying too many employees and needed to prune their services. The general message was that there seemed to be no future of a career or long-term opportunity with the railways.

So, it was quite a surprise when young Bob, the two-legged railway dog, announced that he had scored a job as a youth porter. But on further reflection it wasn't a surprise. Bob, like his namesake, couldn't get too much of trains.

Mr Fitch enjoyed a long and productive retirement and during that time wrote three books. In time both Bob and Mr Fitch became more involved with the Railway Museum. There came the day when Mr Fitch said to Bob, 'you can call me 'Ron''. There were about 50 years between them but they became close mates. This chapter is Ron Fitch's story as told by Bob.



THE STAMP of which the young Ron Fitch was sent out to sell. It served no purpose for postage but was intended to go on a letter as a promotion. The stamps sold for a penny.

FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION.

MY GAUGE PROBLEMS - Memories of lunch time catch ups with Ron Fitch.

SAR Assistant Commissioner 1954 – 1966
SAR Commissioner 1966 - 1973

WORDS Bob Sampson

I had the great delight to get to know Ron Fitch, more so in his latter years when he was undertaking railway history research for his publications.

I was one of about 8 newly-recruited porters at Adelaide Railway Station in early 1972, when the Station Master had us lined up to meet the Railway Commissioner – and of course it was Ron Fitch.

As we got to more appreciate each other, I looked forward to our lunch time catch ups, which always included a long list of questions – derived from his thorough reading of the Railway Museum's *Catch Point* magazine.

Ron had some particular topics that he always wanted to talk about – with no objections from me!

Amongst a few key ones were the 'ill fated and should never have been built' Paringa to Chowilla Dam railway, and the growing involvement of Federal and State Governments and political parties 'wanting to run the railways'.

But of course one subject he always wanted to discuss, and also dear to my heart, was the railway gauge mess that eventuated over decades of ill-conceived extensions and development.

As early as 1861, a horse-drawn broad-gauge railway was constructed between Kadina and Moonta. It was later converted to narrow gauge to conform with other lines in the area. The tapping of the immediate hinterlands of the many ports around the coast, appears to have been haphazard, but, in view of the circumstances prevailing at that time, logical.

The ports were capable of accommodating the small ships of the period, and in the absence of adequate land transport to either the city or central port, it was natural that improved access in the smaller ones to be contemplated. No doubt the intrastate ketch traffic that survived for over 100 years had its origins in these outposts.

From Beachport, Kingston, Port Wakefield, Wallaroo, Port Broughton, Port Pirie and Port Augusta, narrow-gauge lines extended to Mount Gambier, Naracoorte, Hoyleton, Snowtown, Barunga Range, Yongala and Hawker respectively. However, only one of those lines never connected to the rest of the railway network – Port Broughton to Barunga Range (Mundoora).

Ultimately, these narrow-gauge lines linked with the the broad-gauge trunk lines and started a tsunami of break-of-gauge railway stations around the state.

And finally the Adelaide Division included more narrow-gauge lines; Hamley Bridge to Brinkworth, Moonta to Gladstone via Brinkworth, and from Kadina to Balaklava.

The Eyre Peninsula Division was, from the outset, a narrow-gauge and isolated system. And thank goodness, the main south line and associated branches were all built as broad gauge. The Adelaide to Melbourne link was broad gauge throughout – opened in 1887.

There were discussions in the 1920s and 1930s relating to a standard-gauge line eventually reaching Adelaide, but there was uncertainty which greatly delayed the extension of the broad gauge line northwards from Long Plains. That railhead had been reached in 1917 - the same year the standard-gauge Trans-Australian Railway from Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie opened. Long Plains to Redhill was completed in 1925, with ongoing indecisions, before finally reaching Port Pirie in 1937.

Even in the 1960s, detailed proposals included a separate standard gauge line being built from Adelaide via Bowmans and Snowtown to Port Pirie, as part of the wider plans for a new standard gauge line from Cockburn to Port Pirie.

The gauge widening that did occur was in the South-East during the 1950s. This conversion eventually linking most centres in the region, but did not involve the lines from Millicent to Beachport and Wandillo to Glencoe West. It was predicated that those lines, having been converted from narrow gauge to broad gauge with Commonwealth money would be converted to standard gauge, at the expense of the State.

As Ron once delighted in telling me.....his knowledge and understanding about railway gauges and connecting the continent goes back a long way!

“I was in primary school in Perth in 1917, and I was sent around the school to promote and sell commemorative stamps of the opening of the Trans-Australian Railway. Little did I know then, that nearly 30 years later, I would be responsible for the track maintenance of the Trans-Australian railway and for planning to resolve some of the railway gauge problems!” Ron said.

Ron was particularly ‘angry’ during our fascinating talks, about the complete ‘stuff up’ that was allowed to happen in the 1960s, by not endorsing his and the SAR standardisation plan which recommended converting the Gladstone to Wilmington line with a possible extension to Quorn, the Peterborough to Orroroo line, and the Wallaroo to Gladstone line. That plan was substantiated by closely examining traffic flows, revenues and huge cost saving opportunities with avoiding the creation of triple gauges at Port Pirie, Gladstone and Peterborough.

Ron summed it up by saying: “I proved at the time that the huge cost to design and build all of the multi-gauge switches and tracks in the Peterborough and particularly Gladstone yards, combined with the high costs for transfers moving product from one gauge to the other, could have basically met most of the cost to gauge convert the two remaining narrow gauge branch lines. Had this been done, I firmly believe they would have been viable branch lines.”

The battles Ron had with the Governments sadly continued, as the recommendation from the SAR to build a new standard-gauge line from Crystal Brook to Merriton, then convert the line southwards from Merriton to Salisbury then a new line to Islington Freight Centre fell to one side due to ‘bigger picture’ goals.

The standard-gauge railway to Adelaide had been severely delayed and costs elevated. That job was not completed for several years (1982) after Ron had retired in 1973.

Ron gave a talk to the Australian Railway Historical Society in September 1970. Some of that is reproduced:

“In 1965, I had studied various alternatives that could apply to extend the standard gauge network, following completion of the standardisation of Port Pirie to Broken Hill line. Also of note, four successive SA Governments had supported the construction of a railway from Wilmington to Quorn, and closure of the railway from Orroroo to Quorn. The extension alternatives were:

1. Convert Adelaide to Port Pirie.
2. Convert Adelaide to Crystal Brook.
3. Convert Adelaide to Port Pirie, and Snowtown to Gladstone to Quorn.
4. Convert Adelaide to Crystal Brook, and Snowtown to Gladstone to Quorn.
5. Convert Adelaide to Port Pirie, and Snowtown to Moonta, Snowtown to Gladstone to Quorn and Bowmans to Kadina.
6. Convert Adelaide to Port Pirie, and Moonta to Snowtown to Gladstone to Quorn.
7. Construct a separate standard gauge - Adelaide to Port Pirie or Crystal Brook.

Further studies and a business case resulted in the best outcome being to convert Adelaide to Port Pirie, and Wallaroo to Snowtown to Gladstone to Quorn.

However, in 1968 the Commonwealth Government did not support the findings and initiated an independent external report. The eventual Maunsell Report called for; a separate standard-gauge line from Adelaide to Crystal Brook, conversion of Snowtown to Kadina, a separate standard-gauge line from Kadina to Wallaroo plus standard-gauge connections to Pooraka, Gillman, Port Adelaide and Adelaide Yard. It was estimated, excluding rolling stock to be about \$46m.

Based on the SAR recommendation and using the \$46m, it was revealed that the SAR could achieve all of its objectives, and in addition build a new freight terminal at Islington, and also provide connections to Mile End, Woodville and Tonsley.

Ongoing distractions at the time, particularly the lead up to making a decision to construct a new standard gauge railway from Tarcoola to Alice Springs, resulted in no firm decisions about linking Adelaide to the standard-gauge network.

What had really complicated matters were the talks in the early 1970s, relating to the ‘sale’ of the SAR and Tasmanian Railways to amalgamate with the Commonwealth Railways – thus creating Australian National Railways. That transition finally ran from 1975 to 1978, with numerous disagreements about staff and ongoing gauge conversion costs.”

Thank you Bob, for sharing those memories. Ron Fitch’s time as Commissioner of the South Australian Railways was closely aligned to the gauge conversion of the Port Pirie to Broken Hill Railway of which we will continue the story on the next page (JLW).



THE TWO RONS whose contribution to the National Railway Museum has been recognised by the naming of the main pavilion as the Fitch Pavilion and the rear pavilion as the Fluck Pavilion. Here Ron Fitch (left) and Ron Fluck (right) are holding the plaque that commemorates the train that never was.

We must remember that when South Australia started building the railway east from Petersburg, that Broken Hill was not on the map. It existed as a rocky outcrop on the Mount Gipps station that had attracted little interest from miners and prospectors. They had declared it a worthless 'hill of mullock'.

There was Silverton which had sprouted in 1884, adjacent to the Umberumberka mine, but had fallen as fast as it had happened.

The purpose of the railway was to tap the wealth of the west Darling pastoral country. The traffic over the line would be livestock and the general merchandise requirements of pastoralists, and perhaps there would be some business from the prospectors and small mining companies in the area.

The railway would go as far as the boundary. It was conceived as a very lightly-constructed line, lighter than most other narrow-gauge lines in the colony. The plan was to run one mixed train daily and two goods trains per week. There would be very few bridges and most creeks were crossed by laying the track on the creek bed. If the creeks were running the trains wouldn't be. It was a sheer fluke that this line was pointing towards that hill of mullock.

But very soon after the construction had commenced it became evident that there would be more business for this railway than had been first imagined.

In 1885, New South Wales had opened the railway to Bourke with the firm intention that this would be the terminus of the western railway and would meet the needs of the west Darling. They made it known that there would be no further railway extension into the west Darling region. They stubbornly persisted with that policy far beyond the time when it was clear that there was a need for direct railway communication between Broken Hill and Sydney.

And so there began a process by South Australia of strengthening the railway.

And with each passing year there was more work done and they were still doing works to improve the capacity of the line into the 1950s.

For South Australia, the silver mines of the Barrier Ranges came at the right time. The South Australian economy had been heavily dependent on copper mining, but the Burra and Kapunda mines were finished. Many of the mining community of Moonta set out to try their luck over the border. There was a keen interest amongst the members of Parliament. We have, many times in this book, encountered C C Kingston. He had ownership of a mine at Silverton.

Despite the long-standing resistance by New South Wales, to others building railways into the colony, South Australia deemed it appropriate to ask. We are left wondering why it took 5 months for the reply. When it came it was a simple 'no'.

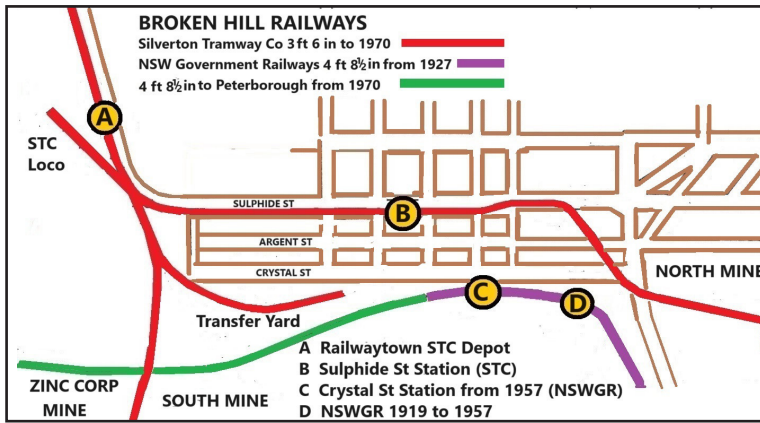
New South Wales would not permit a railway, but with time it eventuated that there were some within the New South Wales legislature who were supportive of the matter. They could allow a tramway, although there was no clear understanding as to how a tramway was different to a railway.

The Silverton Tramway was built to the 3 ft 6 in narrow gauge. The engineer was the South Australian Engineer-in-Chief, Henry Mais, who made sure that it was compatible with the operation of the South Australian line.

South Australia was the long-term beneficiary of Henry Mais' design of the Silverton Tramway line. There were irregularities with Mais' contractual dealings. The South Australian Parliament was unforgiving and gave Mais his marching orders. In the first few years of operation of the the Silverton Tramway Company there was a contractual arrangement with South Australia for the working of the line using South Australian engines and crews working through to Broken Hill.

THE SCISSORS AND THE RIBBON. Regarded by the National Railway Museum as an artefact of such historical significance that it shares, with the collar of Bob the railway dog, the status of being the most historically significant item in the Museum collection. **DONATED TO THE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM BY RON FITCH.**





This contractual arrangement was profitable for South Australia, but for reasons known only to themselves, the South Australian Parliament discontinued this arrangement in 1896. Thereafter the Silverton Tramway Company had its own engines.

Broken Hill soon became the driver of the South Australian economy and in the decades that followed there would be lean times, but it was the revenue flowing from the traffic of Broken Hill concentrates that had a stabilising effect on the South Australian economy.

But there was an 'Achilles heel' to the Silverton route which would cost the Company dearly in the end. It was initially authorised from the border to Silverton. The subsequent extension to Broken Hill was a dog's leg that was 6 miles longer than a direct line from the border to Broken Hill. The Silverton Tramway was opened on 12 January 1888 by the Duke of Manchester, who happened to be visiting Broken Hill at the time.

Adelaide was the closest major centre to Broken Hill and hence there were commercial links. Adelaide merchants were quick to establish a presence in Broken Hill. The mining companies established their corporate headquarters and board rooms in Melbourne. There were some who were civil servants, such as police who reported to Sydney.

600 and 601 were, for some time, the only standard-gauge locomotives on the SAR. Pictured at Yunta on 2 December 1969 on ballast train duties. **JLW.**



It was a long trip from Broken Hill to Sydney, involving five different trains, three nights travelling, and with two days to fill in Adelaide and Melbourne. There were three breaks-of-gauge. From Broken Hill one travelled aboard the narrow-gauge Broken Hill express to Terowie and thence, by the broad gauge to Adelaide, then to join the Melbourne Express. For the third night one departed for Sydney with the obligatory change at Albury and finally arrived in Sydney by the standard gauge the next morning.

Broken Hill to Sydney via Adelaide and Melbourne was a journey of about 1400 miles. When direct rail communication was eventually achieved with Sydney, the distance was exactly 700 miles (the 700 mile post was in the yard of the Crystal Street station).

It is instructive to pause a while and contemplate how Broken Hill would have happened if it did not have the Silverton Tramway Company. The obvious contribution of the Company was the outward movement of ores and mineral concentrates. But in the other direction there was everything that the mines and their people needed. Water, timber, ... and don't forget the beer. And there were the people themselves, live ones and dead ones.

The South Australian Railways needed the Silverton Tramway Company as much as the Company needed the SAR.

Lew Roberts was the General Manager of the Silverton Tramway Company from 1952 to 1970. In his retirement he wrote the definitive history of the STC, *Rails to Wealth* in 1995. It is a story full of factual information interspersed with delightful stories befitting a railway of the wild west. I have chosen to tell here, one that has relevance because it demonstrates that there was a spirit of goodwill between the two operators.

It concerned a consignment from the South Mine that was a heavy generator being sent to Adelaide. Somewhere near Mannahill the truck had derailed. Subsequent investigation had shown the truck to be heavily overloaded and there were questions about the weighbridge record when it departed Broken Hill.



There had been a long-standing arrangement that in situations like this, the costs would be borne by the party at fault. Negotiations proceeded in an orderly manner but in the end there would be one or the other that would have to pay. John Fargher was SAR Commissioner at the time. To settle the matter it was agreed 'we'll toss for it'.

We now need to turn our attention to the role of the New South Wales Government Railways (NSWGR). The mines and the people of Broken Hill needed water, but the reservoirs at Stephens Creek and Umberumberka could not reliably meet the need.

The River Darling offered a more reliable source of water 60 miles (100 kms) away. The New South Wales Government responded to this by building a railway from Menindee to Broken Hill, initially with the purpose of operating water trains, but with the ultimate objective of linking Broken Hill and Sydney by connecting to the Condobolin line. The railway between Broken Hill and Menindee was opened in 1919. It is a moot point whether Broken Hill became a break-of-gauge at that time. There was no goods traffic and passenger numbers would have been meagre. The standard-gauge connection between Condobolin and Menindee was completed in 1927 and thus established Broken Hill as a sort-of-break-of-gauge centre.

THE SITE OF THE OLD PORT PIRIE JUNCTION station that had been levelled in anticipation of the completion of the standardisation project. The broad-gauge line from Adelaide is the one closest to the Solomontown signal cabin. The next track at this point is the 3 ft 6 in gauge over which the load of mainly concentrates is passing, with Beyer Garratt locomotive No 400. Adjacent is some new standard-gauge track-work which is ready to be slewed into position on change-over day. The distant tracks are the standard-gauge tracks of the Commonwealth Railways. **FROM THE LIONEL NOBLE COLLECTION.**

The railway map of Australia now had a continuous direct line from coast to coast via Broken Hill. Well, not quite. There was a gap of about half a mile that the travellers had to lump their baggage between the respective stations. Neither the NSWGR or the Tramway Company regarded it their responsibility to facilitate the traveller experience and it was destined to remain that way for the next 42 years. There was no coordination of the timetables and thus the traveller had a whole day to get from one train to the next. The trek became a little shorter in 1957 when the NSWGR opened the new Crystal Street station. Those were the days before Broken Hill became a tourism town.

The salvation for the traveller was that Broken Hill was well served with hotels and there were more than plenty along the way that led from one railway station to the other.



IS THIS COCKBURN OR IS IT BURNS*?. Somewhere in this photograph is the NSW/SA border. There were three tracks that crossed the border. This is where the SAR met the STC. This photo was taken when there were only three weeks of narrow-gauge operation left. The Broken Hill Express has arrived and the SAR 830 class has uncoupled and pulled forward. The Silverton engine No. 28 is about to couple up to take the express into Broken Hill. The freight vehicles immediately behind the loco are bulk cement hoppers (see page 126). **JLW.**

* Cockburn did not extend over the border. The terminal station of the Silverton Tramway was called Burns.



There were no proper trans-shipment facilities for goods or livestock, but there was very little to transfer. Lew Roberts described a patch of vacant ground near the Menindee Road where the STC track was close to the NSWGR line. This was where the transfer occurred. The transfer process of through consignments seems to have been one of disorganisation. It was salt that dominated traffic flowing towards the east.

The South Australian Salt Company at Lochiel had regular orders from various meat works in New South Wales. Lew Roberts leaves us with the impression that the STC viewed the NSWGR as a competitor, if not in the present, then certainly in the future. And it did eventually happen that, from 1961 to 1966, there was regular loading of concentrates to the Sulphide Corporation smelter at Cockle Creek. Neither the NSWGR or the Tramway Company saw it as their role to provide transfer facilities.

War brought great changes to Broken Hill. The threat of submarine attack on coastal shipping required the diversion of essential commodities by the land route. The Commonwealth Railways used the Broken Hill route for its coal supplies for the whole duration of the hostilities, whereas their coal had previously been by sea. It had been a constant source of grief for the Commonwealth Railways that the repeated handling of coal resulted in 'fines' (coal dust). When the coal was shovelled into the firebox, the fines went straight up the smoke stack and did not result in any heat.

The Commonwealth took on the responsibility for the construction of rail transfer facilities which were provided in February 1942. There was also iron ore from the deposits at Iron Knob, that was sent to the steelworks in New South Wales. All this coal and iron ore shifted from one truck to another generated considerable amounts of dust which became a source of concern to the residents.

The transport of iron ore was limited by the availability of trucks and there was a growing awareness that the narrow-gauge railway was a weak link in the transport capacity to meet the defence needs of the nation. It was during the early war years that there was serious talk about the need for the Broken Hill to Port Pirie line to be converted to standard gauge.

It was during or after the war that South Australia seems to have changed its tune regarding the gauge conversion of the Broken Hill line. On pages 182 to 187 readers are provided with a detailed chronology that is generously scattered with entries related to the standardisation of the Broken Hill line.

The completion date of this project had been set to be the end of 1968. When that date arrived the South Australian Railways had completed the necessary work. But the situation regarding the section between Cockburn and Broken Hill was unresolved.

The terms of incorporation of the Silverton Tramway Company had included provision for the Government to purchase the assets of the Company. The formula that set the purchase price was based on the profits of the preceding years, and when negotiations were underway in the late 1960s this was about \$20m.

But the (Federal) Government had no intention of buying the company or its assets, nor had it the need to. The new line would be a straight alignment that would by-pass the old Silverton route and would enter Broken Hill from a different direction. An ex-gratia offer was made to the Company of \$1.25m. There were further negotiations which were protracted but this was of benefit to the Company as it allowed them to remain in mainline operation for another year. Another ex-gratia offer of \$2m was made. The last train over the Silverton Tramway mainline was 10 January 1970.

THE BROKEN HILL EXPRESS. Ron Fitch humourously described it as a 'grave misnomer'. Lew Roberts was more charitable and explained that Peterborough had the highest birth rate in South Australia and it was all because of the Broken Hill Express, which arrived from Broken Hill at 3.57 am. At Peterborough the engine had to connect to the other end of the train to make its departure to Terowie. As a result of all the shunting and clanging the whole town was awake. It was too early to get up, but too late to go back to sleep. Peterborough, 2 December 1969, with just four weeks remaining of narrow-gauge operation on the Broken Hill line. JLW.



ON 24 FEBRUARY 1972, 605 and 859, heading west out of Broken Hill. The clean lines of the locomotives (and particularly 605 proudly sporting its Piping Shrike State emblem), and the well-made track complete with its colour-light signalling were the SAR at its best. JLW.

I close this chapter with some personal reflections.

Garth Thompson was an enterprising young lawyer in Broken Hill and amongst his clients was the Silverton Tramway Company. Many years after the event I met him when he was a Judge in the Industrial Court. He told the story of how he had won, for the Silverton Tramway Company, another year of profitable mainline operation.

About 1967-8 one of his clients, who was a landholder somewhere between Cockburn and Broken Hill, had noted that there was a surveyor on his land. Garth made the necessary enquiries and established that this was a Commonwealth surveyor plotting the line for the standard-gauge railway. The law relevant to surveyors was that (in NSW), state-licensed surveyors had free access to the land but that did not extend to Commonwealth surveyors.

It had been well known amongst the railway fraternity, that immediately ahead of the opening of the standard-gauge line that most of the Peterborough diesels would be sent south to have their bogies converted to standard gauge. During this 4 or 5 week period there would be a steam spectacular on the lines leading out of Peterborough. There would be Garratts galore and when it was over that would be the end of steam for South Australia. I was able to get a part of the action and cherish the memories and the photographs. In 1972 I was back in Broken Hill where I had scored a job as the Surgical Registrar at the Broken Hill and District Hospital. Hence the abundance of Broken Hill photographs in this book.

Ron Fitch retired from his position on 30 March 1973. He would have been eligible to remain as Commissioner for another two years. He has left us in no doubt that his decision was prompted largely by the political ambitions of Premier Dunstan and Prime Minister Whitlam regarding the future of the South Australian Railways. On reading his memoirs there is the overwhelming impression that he had run out of patience in his dealings with the Commonwealth, particularly relating to the standardisation of the Broken Hill line.

High on his list had been the standardisation of the line to Adelaide and its branch lines, particularly the line to Wallaroo.

Bob Sampson has referred to notes of a talk by Ron in 1970. I took those notes. Ron had spoken candidly of his frustrations with the Commonwealth. There had been no advice at the start of the talk about note-taking. After the talk, Ron challenged me, in a nice sort of way, and asked what I was going to do with them. He indicated that some of his comments had been sensitive. I offered to hold them in confidence and to lodge them in the Society's archive collection at a much later date. He seemed happy with that. I handed them to Bob last year.



THE EVENTS OF 12 JANUARY 1970

Ron Fitch's book, *Australian Railwayman*, has described the gauge conversion of the Broken Hill line and celebrations planned for Peterborough on the above date.

Strife of some sort seemed to plague every facet of rail standardisation in Australia.

On page 191 of this book we see a smiling Ron Fitch holding up the plaque that commemorates the event that didn't happen. And there is also the picture of the scissors and the ribbon that they never got to cut.

Bob Sampson says that in their 'catch-ups' at the National Railway Museum that Ron was 'bitterly disappointed'.

Ron Fitch describes a series of meetings with the AFULE (Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen) in late December 1969 and early January 1970.

Finally on the evening of Friday 9th January 1970, less than 60 hours before the celebrations were due to begin, I was advised... that unless their demands were met, they would place a ban on standard-gauge operations from noon on Monday 12 January... There was no doubt that they expected me to succumb to their demands... This I refused to do.

Some years ago I was at a function that was attended by an old locomotive driver and discussion turned to events of 12 January 1970. He was sincere in voicing his personal feelings of regret.

More recently I have had the opportunity to discuss the matter with another old driver. He explained the background to the dispute, which was that the standard gauge trains would be bigger trains but there would be less trains and jobs would go. He had mellowed with time and the circumstances had saddened him, but he reflected that we can't go back and change history.

John Wilson.