

RAILWAY HORSE STABLES

On the 23rd May 1851 Sir Henry Fox Young proposed his scheme for a railway between Goolwa and Pt Elliot.

By the next month the first request for rails for the Pt Elliot to Goolwa railway line was placed in London, and a start was made on 21st June 1852. Mr William Rogers was the first Superintendent on the work site and was succeeded by Mr Thomas Jones.

About this time in July 1852, the foundations for the Stationmaster's House were laid.

Large store sheds were built at each terminal, their foundations laid in December 1853. The Goolwa wharf, cargo shed and another stone building close to the wharf were built.

The Pt Elliot store was a commodious three storey building which stood near the jetty until 1896.

The original horse stables and forage store were built in 1853 of travertine limestone walls with brick quoins by William Ray, builder, of Goolwa, at a cost of £373.18.10. It was completed within 4 months of signing the contract. It had a loft with wooden floor and steps going up from the outside.

Despite the shortage of labour, (because of the rush to the goldfields), the railway officially opened on 18th May 1854, with the old line following the present track – Goolwa to Pt Elliot. The Goolwa – Pt Elliot line was the first railway in South Australia and the country. John Ballard was the first driver of the railway.

The housed horses were used to draw the wagons on the Pt Elliot to Goolwa railway until the line was converted to steam in 1884. The horses wore special shoes preventing them from breaking up the track. This had been used in Cockenzie, Scotland where their horse-drawn railway was used to cart coal from the mines to the Port of Cockenzie.

The Goolwa line went straight on instead of the present curved loop, going straight through what is now the Soldier's Memorial Gardens, and ran to the wharf at a right angle. The freight cars were hauled by the horses to the turntable that was installed on the wharf, with each truck turned 90°, then pulled to the side of the riverboats where they were loaded. They were then hauled back, turned, and headed along the rails on the wharf towards Pt Elliot.

It was reported by Thomas Jones in 1863 that there would have been more profit but they had to build 2 new trucks, and a new turnout at Goolwa and drive mooring piles at Goolwa wharf for the steamers.

It became a very busy line with riverboats bringing cargo down the Murray River to Goolwa, where it was transferred to the railway. In 2 years they had carried 3,994 passengers and carried a total of 6,459 tons and 1731 bales of wool.

There originally was no railway station in the town and passengers had to wait under the Post Office verandah. By 1872 the locals had become dissatisfied with this arrangement. Their demands were met as during that year a platform was built in the present Soldier's Memorial Gardens, by Mr R. Prior.

In 1883 the Legislative Council decided to build a loop line linking Goolwa with Currency Creek on the proposed steam connection with Adelaide.

The horses were auctioned shortly after on 7th February 1885.

Southern Argus, Strathalbyn

Thursday February 5, 1885 p2

John Cheriton has received instructions from W.N. Wauchope Esq, Superintendant of Southern Railways on account of the line to Goolwa being worked by locomotives, to sell by auction-

21 Horses and Mares – viz. 7 Heavy Draught Horses and Mares, and 14 Light Harness, all of which have worked on the Tramway and are well known for their general excellence.

ALSO

Winkers, Collars and Harness for the above.

Remember Saturday February 7

Sale at 2 o'clock

Terms at Sale.

The stables eventually became surplus to the railway requirements and were leased to Mr S.E. Skewes on 1st March 1934 @ £3 per year. Mr Skewes leased the property as a grain store until it was purchased by the RSL for £104.15.0 on 29th September 1946, after renovations, their first meeting was held on 22nd December 1950.

The Returned Services League loaned the building to other community groups, with the Mothers & Babies Health Group, CWA, Goolwa Dart Club, Library Committee, & Goolwa Regatta Club availing themselves of this facility.

One of the first railway carriages pulled by the horses is preserved in the glass Carriage House in the main street, near the Post Office.

On July 2nd 1987 it was reported in the '*Southern Argus*' that the skeletal remains of a horse had been unearthed from beneath a pine tree in the grounds of the R.S.L.

The bones were to be placed in the Goolwa National Trust Museum.

Compiled and researched by Dawn Juers for a talk on GSFM90.1 – 12/10/07

Sources:

W.A. Pretty Collection

South Coast Story by J.C. Tolley

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