

# PLOD ESSAY:

## The Line Terminated at Wonthaggi Railway Station

Active operations in connection with the establishment of the State Coal Mine were begun 22 November 1909. During that year the Nyora-Woolamai railway was constructed. In December 1909 authority was given under act No. 2221 for the extension of that railway to the SCM. Construction of the new temporary line, as it was called, proceeded rapidly, one mile of track laid daily, until Temporary Terminus (later called State Mine) was reached on 22 February 1910.<sup>i</sup>

Some 500 men with bullock teams, ploughs scoops, horse drays but mostly pick and shovel built the line. The working and living conditions for the men, mostly with families brought into this final section of the line, were appalling. They were camped cheek-by-jowl all along the line from Andersons Corner to Bourne Creek with little or no logistic support. The men working in the summer heat suffered from lack of potable water. Drinking water was taken from any dam at the nearest farm and dysentery was rife. On top of that bushfires all along the line threatened constantly.

However, they managed to lay the last rails to the Mine Terminus on the afternoon of 22 February. Ten weeks later, "the first passenger train arrived in Wonthaggi on 9 May 1910

with a consist of the obligatory water truck together with two

Mallee cars and a guard's van with Messers Deegan and Nugent driving and firing respectively. In 1910, there was no platform, no sidings or loop and the train was backed out to the turning triangle at the SCM, turned and returned to Wonthaggi for departure at 2:20 pm."<sup>ii</sup>

Very soon, the train became the lifeblood of the new town of Wonthaggi, bringing and sending parcels and people, money and post, machinery and livestock everyday of the

week. Traffic was growing at a rate of knots, creating an urgent need for a station. In July 1912, the *Powlett Express* reported on the 'New Railway Station' that was nearing completion:

"The station occupies a conspicuous position through the fact that there is a full view of the south elevation from McBride Avenue. The main portion of the station is of brick showing that the Railway Commissioners, who control the State Mine, have great faith in its permanency...

"The total width of the station is 184ft., comprising a 76ft. brick building with a 66ft. wooden wing on one end and 42ft. of wooden buildings on the other. The brick portion includes the main entrance porch with a width of 11ft.

leading to the booking hall; each room is fitted with segmented windows, and as the upper portion is finished in rough cast, with ornamental gables, this frontage will have a very attractive appearance.

"The north elevation, of course, faces the passenger platform, and will vary from



*First passenger train arrives in Wonthaggi, May 1912*



*Station being built in 1912, Joe Kidd, foreman builder for Alf Frongerud in foreground*

the south elevation inasmuch as a signal box, with a bay window included. There will also be a handsome cantilever veranda, covering the full length of the platform.

“The interior of the brick portions includes the main room, booking, telegraph and parcels office. The S.M.’s office will be screened off, and there will also be the usual parcels racks, cupboards, writing desks and other conveniences. Two bookings windows will be found in the booking-hall, while waiting rooms for ladies and gentlemen are on the west and east ends, respectively. The roof will be of red tiles, while the interior rooms have plastered walls with metal ceilings and heavy cornices.

“Hoffman bricks are used throughout the building. The wooden wings comprise lavatories, sample room, goods room, porter’s room, store room, shed room and yard room; while provision is also made for a lamp room and a heater for the foot warmers.

“On the whole, very little fault should be found with the building. The contractor is Mr Alf Frongerud (a Norwegian man who was clearly a master builder and perfectionist, and was also responsible for building the Post Office, the State Bank and other public buildings in Wonthaggi), and Inspector Braybin is supervising the work on behalf of the railways Department.”<sup>iii</sup>

On 26 October 1912, the station staff moved into the finally completed building and the Telegraph Office was moved from its temporary office on the weekend. The Station was ready for use.

With the opening of the new station, visitors began to descend upon the Coal Mining Area to

have a look for themselves. In the Melbourne broadsheet, the *Argus*, a column by “The Pilgrim” written in May 1917 described what it was like to ride the train into Wonthaggi: “The old Powlett district is still full of interest. Travelling to Wonthaggi by train, one sees the first of the coal country at Kilcunda and, a little the other side of it, the old embankment where many years ago the coal tramway ran. Kilcunda had two coalmines of its own, one, in which the late Mr. David Mitchell was interested and the other run by a co-operative company. The first still, lives; the other is dead. The terminal station is Wonthaggi, a wonderful new town in a very old district, with suburbs, or subsidiary towns, scattered over miles of country.

“This has a most curious effect, much of the ground between the suburbs and the town being vacant, and the explanation is equally curious. The town area was at first reserved by the Government from sale, and first-comers, refusing to take lease holds, bought the nearest freehold land. Hence the existence of North Wonthaggi and South Dudley, and Hicksville – awful name.

“Wonthaggi, the largest, newest and shiningest (*sic*) example of ‘Socialism in our time,’ has all the advantages of civilisation, including picture shows, and even an occasional visit from a Circus! An extension of the railway towards the coast from Wonthaggi Station is even now being built, to a part known as the eastern or garden area, where coal has been found by the drill.”

<sup>i</sup> Wonthaggi & District Historical Society Newsletter, May 1986.

<sup>ii</sup> Henshaw, R., MS for *End of the Line*, p.14.

<sup>iii</sup> *Powlett Express*, 30 July 1912, pg 2.



*The finished Station ready for business*