

**Archer Park Rail Museum: Lynn Zelmer interviewing Blair Jamieson and Bill Head, 5 Sep 2008.**

LZ: Bill, you were talking about the tram.

BILL: Yes, and all that I can remember back in the early days, it would have been round about 1935, and I was about five years of age when we came down on holidays from Jericho and were going through to Brisbane. And we stayed one night at the old "Peoples' Palace" which used to be down in Dennison Street and my memories of the old Purrey Steam Tram at night time -- you could always see these coals and sparks flying out the funnel as they stoked them up.

And I can remember that quite plain, even though, as I said, I was only about five. They were pretty quiet and they ran along pretty quietly too considering, but that's my only memory of them, and saw them at odd occasions, other times during those years up to 1939.

When we came down on holidays we used to see them going up the street, but unfortunately can't ever remember that we actually rode on them. Well, the first ride I ever had on one of them, naturally, was when I come here to Archer Park in 1991 and had a ride on the old restored Purrey steam tram now.

LZ: You were talking about where they ran, the kind of events they ran for.

BILL: Yes, well apparently, it was pretty free and easy with them by what we're told. They looked after the picture theatres, they all run right up to, it might be 11 o'clock at night, to clear everybody from the picture theatres and, I believe, they had a great arrangement with their passengers. The conductors and the drivers, they more or less were conversant with... they picked up the same people every day more or less, and would get to know them and apparently it worked out real well, that if they pulled up, the driver pulled up at a stopping place to pick up the passengers and if there was nobody there, if the regular wasn't there, they didn't drive straight off.

They'd hang around, might be a minute or so because the arrangements were so good between them that if the person wasn't catching the tram today was sick, a member of the family would come down post-haste to the stopping place and say, "Mommy" or "Daddy" or whatever it might be, "is sick today, not going to town today," then they'd take off, but they never ever like nowadays but back then, but they always had these regulars. They just wouldn't drive off. They always had these regulars; they'd always wait to make sure they didn't leave them behind.

It was a pretty happy sort of arrangement. I guess it was free and easy days way back then from 1909 to 1939. I guess everybody you could say, the clock wasn't as important then, probably as it was in the world we live in today. So that's about what I've been involved in Lynn.

LZ: Were things the same as they are now? Did they have signs on them? Advertising? What sort of thing?

BILL: I don't think I remember now if they had any -- very doubtful if they would have because they were like the open sides like the one down here. I don't think there would have been much scope, but apparently they were marked in those days and they had a wide V on the front and a wide V in reverse on the back, and if my tram was coming down here and I was the one way down at the bottom of the street, by the position of the V they knew whether they were opposing one another or going the same direction so, it probably sounds a bit (what would you say) a bit, not actually lax, but compared to today's standards, I guess in those days that sort of arrangement was adequate.

But now they always had what they called a sort of "sweeper", at picture nights; there would be one last tram at least and it might be 11 o'clock, and they'd be the last one to be sure nobody

would be left behind. So when you look back on it in the rush and bustle of everything nowadays, it was a pretty free and easy lifestyle in those days. But that's about as much as I remember about the old trams.

LZ: Well, we were going to talk a little bit about the early days of your careers. Steam days, your early signalling days. Which one of you wants to start off?

BILL: As I said, on that other tape that you've got there, when I started in the old steam days, how efficient it was. Now, for argument's sake, when I was on the dining car, the length of our passenger trains in those days was restricted to 13 vehicles, that included the guard's van and the baggage car and the dining car; 13 was the maximum number.

My early days when we started, we used to leave Rockhampton here at 5 past 12 with the wooden coaches and the steam locomotive and if we were on time we would arrive at Mackay at 10 to 8 at night.

And then that timetable, even compared to quite a few years after they introduced the diesels, the train used to leave Rockhampton at 5 past 12. It stayed 5 minutes at Yaamba, to replenish the tender with water, another water stop at Princhester, another 5 minutes or so there, watered again at Wumalgi, another 5 minutes; spent 10 minutes at St. Lawrence for refreshments. Then there was a watering station at Flaggy Rock and another one at Mount Christian. That was five watering stops on the trip up as well as it stopped at other stations as well to deliver parcels and passengers to detrain.

And when we used to leave Rockhampton at 5 past 12 we still used to arrive at Mackay at 10 to 8 at night. Well -- it was quite a few years after they introduced the diesel-electrics. Considering they didn't have all those stops to make for loco purposes, there wasn't such an enormous difference in the timetable, strange as it might seem, but it wasn't speeded up that much. Of course, it's a lot quicker now, but for quite a few years after that, even with the air conditioned trains, I consulted the time tables, to way back, to what I knew the times we took to run and what the time was from Rockhampton to Mackay with the diesel-electrics, wasn't really such a really enormous difference in the timetable.

But as I said earlier, in the early days of steam locomotives, well they were restricted with the draw gear and even with the double-header you were restricted because of the draw gear, it was 650 tons was the maximum load.

For argument's sake, not so much the early days, but even when I was at Longreach in 1957 to 1961 and we had steam locomotives out there, the locomotives were coaled by a shovel. The cleaner -- you drove the locomotive up beside the flat wagon with the coal and, believe it or not, they were coaled by shovelling it on.

To turn around an engine, sometimes we'd get a train loaded with stock from Winton, be heading for Lakes Creek or it might be down around the Brisbane area and we wouldn't have a locomotive available in Longreach, just depending on how the trains fell. And this train would come across from Winton and we'd have to (what we called) "pool" the same engine.

A train with livestock would come in and we'd cut off the locomotive. Take it down to the locomotive shed, the cleaner there he'd have to coal it with a shovel and that train would stand there possibly for 2 1/2 hours before it got mobile again. Didn't have coal chutes like they did in the bigger depots, it was just covered with a shovel. And they did a pretty good job, the cleaners and the labourer; one man to shovel it and it was remarkable how quickly they filled that tender up.

LZ: How much in the tender?

BILL: The average capacity varied around about 6 tons, 6-7 tons of coal, and that was all done by the shovel. And even the greater work of art when I was ASM in Blackall, the trip from

Blackall, it was a depot, out to Yaraka was just on 100 miles, the cleaner used to have to stack the tender up with coal to fire that loco over 200 miles out to Yaraka and back the next day. And it was a real fine work of art. The big lumps he stacked around corner, around the edges of the tender, built it all up and I've seen many's the time it would be nearly empty by the time they got back if they had with a full load out today and a full load back tomorrow. But they'd get enough on that tender to steam that locomotive for nearly 200 miles -- most amazing.

ENDS

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