



## Archer Park Railway Station, Rockhampton

The Great Northern Railway, begun in 1864, was opened from Rockhampton to Westwood in 1867, a distance of 50 kilometres. Rockhampton's population at the time was 5000 and while the line was of little economic importance it satisfied a political reality. A further extension was authorised in 1872 and the line reached Emerald in 1879, then Longreach in 1892, by which time it was known as the Central Railway. The railway, with its imported cast-iron station off Stanley Street, near where the current station is located, connected Rockhampton's river port with the pastoral hinterland.

Gold was discovered in Mount Morgan in 1882. The resulting boom established Rockhampton as an important mercantile centre and emphasised the region's political importance.

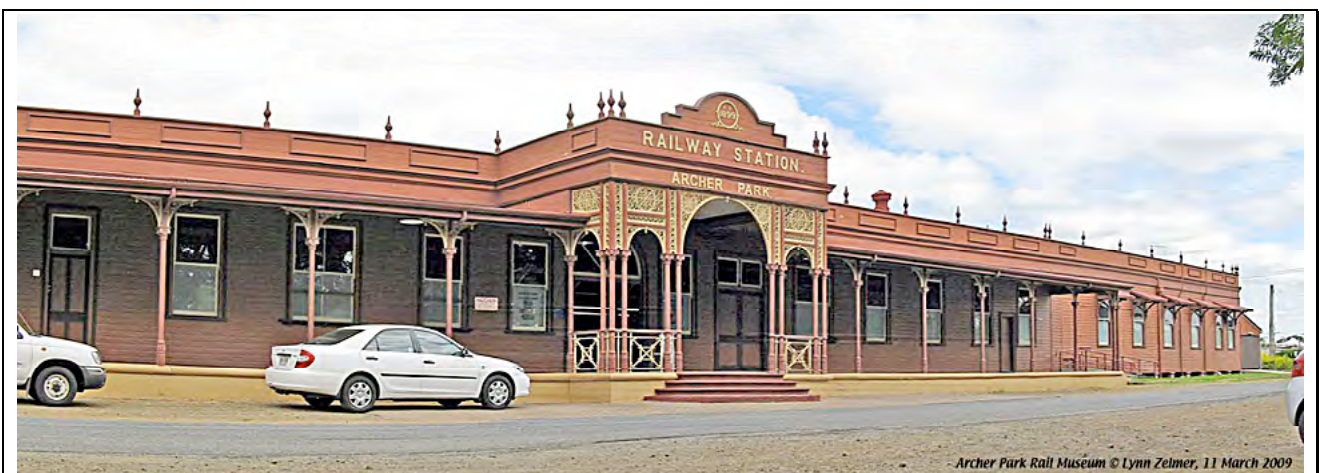
The line from North Rockhampton to Emu Park, completed in 1888, also served a political purpose. The 90 minute run was served by two trains daily, using a cost-minimising and somewhat circuitous route. The line was not connected to the Central Railway as a connec-

ting bridge was deemed to be too expensive, but by 1890 investigations were underway to link the two railways.

Potential links to Port Alma or Broadmount were explored to replace Rockhampton's river port, with the government deciding in 1894 on Broadmount, and a connection to the Central Railway via a bridge over the Fitzroy.

The Stanley Street station site had been selected to minimise costs and was not convenient for city passengers. A new Central Station (now known as Archer Park Station) would be more convenient and help justify the Junction Railway extension through the city. A rudimentary building served as the station until the current building, authorised in 1899, was completed.

The final plans for the station were drawn by QR draftsman Henrick Hansen in 1898. It was erected by Thomas Butterworth Renshaw and Harry Ricketts and opened to the public on 11 December 1899, just over a month after the opening of the Junction Railway and the Alexandra Bridge.



Archer Park Rail Museum © Lynn Zelmer, 11 March 2009

Archer Park was fine piece of design in the Victorian style. The station itself was constructed of timber and the front facade carried a parapet decorated with panels and topped with robust finials. At the entrance the parapet was emphasised in a typically Victorian fashion, by a decorated semi-circular gable which was supported on cast iron columns topped with a large cast-iron frieze. The station accommodation itself was

commodious and it was well serviced with a verandah which ran its full length.

The stations [sic] most important feature however was the large curved carriage shade which spanned 45 feet (13.7m) and was 300 feet (91.5m) [long]. The roof was constructed of iron trusses covered with galvanised iron sheeting. The ridge carried an open [sic] vent and light to the station was provided by a skylight that ran the

length of the shade above the platform."  
[Kennedy, p 11]

Archer Park soon superseded the Stanley Street station as the most important passenger station. After the rail link from Brisbane to Rockhampton, opened in December 1903, mail trains to and from Brisbane terminated at and began from Archer Park as did the mail train to Longreach.

As a measure of its significance, mile posts on the Central Line were repositioned to measure distance from Archer Park, instead of from the old Stanley Street station. [Kennedy, p 16]

In 1906 plans were prepared to extend the Cambridge Street end of the building for a refreshment room. The extension was completed in 1908. Prior to 1916 the refreshment room was leased and served tea, sandwiches, pies, liquor, cigarettes and other items. Patrons included weekend passengers travelling between Mount Morgan and Emu Park.

A branch line to Mount Chalmers opened in 1908, another to Yeppoon in 1909, the first extension towards Mackay in 1913 and the Alton Downs branch in 1916. During the same period, Rockhampton developed a municipal tramway using French-built Purrey steam trams. Opened in 1909 the system used the same 3' 6" (1067mm) gauge as the railway and in 1914 the railway opened a similar service using Purrey steam trams from Stanley Street to the Lakes Creek abattoir with a stop near Archer Park.

By 1912 as many as 25 trains and their passengers used the station every day. This included goods trains with some passenger accommodation and mixed trains, carrying both freight and passengers. Originations and destinations included Westwood, Longreach, Emu Park with connections for Yeppoon, Mount Chalmers, Lakes Creek and Brisbane.

However, Archer Park station was too short for long mail or mixed trains. While some of the associated problems could be resolved, the station itself could not be extended. Instead, between 1923 and 1928 Stanley Street was extended and became recognised as Rockhampton's primary facility.

By 1955 Archer Park's traffic was declining and staffing was being reduced. Other changes occurred and fewer services stopped at Archer Park. The Alton Downs branch closed in 1955, Emu Park in 1964 and the St Lawrence rail motor ceased in 1968. The Yeppoon service

terminated in 1969, resulting in the closure of Archer Park early in 1970.

The station building was then adapted for use as a private door-to-door freight terminal and was leased to QRX in 1974. QR resisted Rockhampton's pressure to have the freight business moved for several years, but in 1990 QRX vacated the station and the building was turned over to Rockhampton City Council with the understanding that it would become a museum.

Unlike most Australian railway stations, Archer Park was built as the primary passenger station and, aside from the 1907 refreshment room addition, remained much as it was built. The reduction in passenger traffic after 1923 meant that it avoided the modernisation that many stations underwent and the post-1970 changes for freight use retained the basic fabric of the building.



Station platform during a quiet day at the museum. The station was added to Queensland's Heritage Register 21 October 1992, underwent four years of restoration begun in 1996, and opened as a volunteer operated museum 11 December 1999.



Purrey steam tram emerging into the sunlight from Archer Park's arched roof shed. QR's main North Coast line runs to the right as it did 100 years ago.

### Acknowledgements

Kennedy, Michael (1994). *Archer Park Railway Station*, Brisbane: Richard Riddel Architect.

Kerr, John (1990). *Triumph of the Narrow Gauge: A history of Queensland Railways*, Brisbane: Boolarong Publications.