



Great Northern Line (Central Railway) to Westwood

Queensland's first railway, the Southern and Western, running some 34 kilometres from Ipswich, a shallow river port, to the small village of Grandchester, was authorised as a 3 foot 6 inch (1067 mm) line by the passage of the 1863 Railway Act. Opened in 1865, less than six years after Queensland became a separate colony, it would only be useful once it reached the Darling Downs: Toowoomba in 1867, Dalby in 1868 and Warwick in 1871.

Providing a railway to the Darling Downs was pioneering the use of rail transport in areas of sparse population, but a railway west of Rockhampton took the idea to absurdity. It was like a railway following the explorers. (Kennedy, p2)

The Archers, Rockhampton area's first settlers, settled at Gracemere in 1853. Gold was discovered at Canoona (north of Yaamba) in 1858-9. The subsequent expansion of Rockhampton contributed to political opposition to the Southern-only railway and a 50 km (31 mile) railway line from Rockhampton to Westwood, begun in 1865 to open up grazing areas, was completed in 1867. Roads radiated from here to Taroom, Springsure, Peak Downs and the Central West.

Extract from the **Brisbane Mail, 20 Sep 1867.**

Works on the Great Northern Railway line have now been completed and have been handed over to the Government by the contractor. The line will probably be opened to Westwood, 30 miles from Rockhampton, There are now stations on the line at Gracemere, 6 miles from Rockhampton, and Stanwell, 15 miles from Rockhampton. (Conachan and Simmons, p 7)

The Southern line was extended back to Brisbane by 1875 and on to Roma in 1880, then Cunnamulla in 1898. The South-Western line from Warwick reached Gooniwindi in 1908 and Dirranbandi in 1913. In 1878 the construction of another isolated line, Townsville to Charters Towers, led to the line from Rockhampton being renamed the Central Railway.

Westwood's importance was short-lived as gradual expansion west began in 1874. Longreach became the Central Railway's terminus in 1892, having sprouted branches along the way to Clermont (1884) and Springsure. In the meantime approval had also been given (1985) for a seaside resort railway from North Rockhampton to Emu Park (opened 1888). Mount Morgan was connected by another branch in 1898.

Westwood

The township that developed before the railway arrived was known as Preston and was an important staging point for horse and bullock traffic between Rockhampton and points west.



Cemetery at Westwood, downloaded from <http://www.myrasplace.net/hstones/hwwood.htm>, 17/11/09, photographer unknown.

As the terminus of the rail line Westwood had an importance out of proportion to its present size and status. A daily train ran from Westwood to Rockhampton each morning, returning each evening. Used by school children with a season ticket it was also popular with farmers and settlers and was known as the 'cocky' train.

At one census the population of Westwood exceeded 4,500, and to this must be added the floating population made up of carriers to the West and neighbouring centres, coaches operating from the railhead out of Westwood to such centres as Dululu and Wowan, and especially Banana, travellers going West and into the surrounding districts." (Conachan and Simmons, p 4)

When the railway was finished to Westwood, people used to make trips out there and married

couples went there for their honeymoons. At that time, Westwood was a very important place. There were several hotels, store, butcher's shop, etc." (Conachan and Simmons, p 6)

Early Westwood must have had much of the romance that we associate with the wild west of America. Two famous bushrangers spent some time in the Westwood area. The infamous Gardiner is known to have visited Westwood. A young hotel employee, Bill Madden, is reported to have robbed a stage coach. His hide-out was in the scrub about three miles from the Sebastopol Hotel. He was later arrested at the hotel. Up to ten hotels at one time operated in the proximity of Westwood. The present day homestead of Mr Colin Lawrie is on the site of the old Sebastopol Hotel. On the whole, Westwood did not see the lawlessness of the wild west. At one time, the town had a police Sargent and five constables. Nearby, gold diggings and the population they drew added further colour to the town. As with all gold diggings in Australia at that time, large numbers of Chinese were attracted. Several gardens and orchards also existed around the town.

The census of 1886 showed that the population of Westwood had dropped to less than 200. Regardless, the town still had three hotels, the "Railway", the "Westwood", and the "Queen's", and two boarding houses. Two churches, the United Protestant and St. Bridget's RC Church still had regular services. The RC Church was later shifted to Depot Hill and replaced by a smaller structure. (CQFHA)

A hospital at Husham was built in 1919 to provide long term treatment for workers from the Mt Morgan mines and later became a tuberculosis sanatorium. From 1959 it was a hospital for aged care, closing about 1980.

References and Further Reading

Conachan, JD & Simmons, H George (comp) (1967). Building the Rockhampton - Westwood Railway and Relevant Developments, Rockhampton & District Historical Society, September 6 presentation.

CQ Family History Association Inc (2009). Westwood Cemetery, http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~auscqfha/district_westwood.htm

Westwood's population was roughly 250 in the 2006 census with a hotel and a police station. Now part of the Rockhampton Regional Council, the town serves the local cattle industry and traffic on the Capricornia Highway, which passes through the town, and the nearby Leichardt Highway. (Wikipedia)



Original Westwood station refreshment room cupboard; donated to Archer Park Rail Museum in 2009 by Mr and Mrs John Wilson of North Rockhampton. Lynn Zelmer photographer.

Knowles, JW (1965). One Hundred Years of Railways in Queensland, ARHS Bulletin, 338: December, pp 229-247.

Kennedy, Michael (1994). Archer Park Railway Station (Conservation Plan), Brisbane: Robert Riddell Architect

Wikipedia (2009). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westwood,_Queensland