

EARLY HISTORY OF THE QUEENSLAND RAILWAYS

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When the first Governor of Queensland (Sir George Bowen) landed in Brisbane on 10th December 1859, the population of the Colony was only 28,000 persons. Within four years the newly-formed Government had embarked upon an extensive programme of railway construction, the magnitude of which can only be fully appreciated by reviewing conditions as they existed in Queensland at the dawn of her history. Squatters had occupied the fertile land discovered by Cunningham, and extensive sheep runs had been established around Warwick and Dalby where the greatest development had taken place.

Brisbane, the capital, contained about 6,000 persons and Ipswich, a keen rival for commercial supremacy, had been established at the head of the Brisbane River with 3,500 inhabitants. Toowoomba, at the summit of the Main Range, had recently sprung into existence with a population of about 1,100, Warwick had about the same number, and Rockhampton, another entirely new town born of the failure of the Canoona gold rush, contained 700 persons. Laidley, Maryborough, Gayndah and Gladstone were the only other settlements of note, their combined population not exceeding 1,400.

First Proposals

Between the coastal settlements and the pastoral areas surrounding Warwick and Dalby lay a formidable barrier to trade and commerce. The Main Dividing Range, rising abruptly to a height of 2,000 feet near Toowoomba, sternly resisted the invasion of civilisation and made communication with the interior a species of martyrdom. Though the squatter could always obtain a market for his wool it was another matter to convey it to port and he incurred serious risk in doing so. The cost of transport was a crushing burden on the country. It is recorded that carriers charged as much as £8 or £9 per ton to convey goods from one town to another.

It is difficult in this age of mechanical transport, when graded and surfaced roads are being rapidly extended throughout the State, to realise the discomfort and inconvenience of travel in Queensland immediately preceding the first railway proposals. Even the settlers, used as they were to the most primitive roads, classed the tracks over the Main Range as "frightful" and the term was by no means exaggerated.

A magistrate, recounting his experiences in the "Moreton Bay Courier," wrote—

"I have just arrived in Brisbane after a journey of four days from Toowoomba. Any traveller is in absolute danger of his life and it was with the greatest difficulty that I managed to get through at all. At the Seven Mile Creek both horse and rider were nearly precipitated into the creek. . . . Gatton Creek is a wretched place and I noticed drays that had been camped there eighteen days not being able to cross because of the flooded state of the creek."

Industries Limited

A few sawmills and flourmills, some soap and candle works, and several boiling down establishments constituted the only industrial activities of the Colony. Mining had not commenced, and agriculture had made little progress because wages were comparatively high and labour uncertain. The difficulty of conveying produce to markets made it more economical to import all kinds of agricultural produce than to grow them. The breeding of sheep and cattle for the sake of tallow, wool and hides occupied the time of the major portion of the population, and on its flocks and herds the prosperity of the Colony depended.

In the year 1861 only 3,353 acres of land were under cultivation, but the flocks and herds had grown to 3,500,000 sheep and 500,000 cattle. About 4,300 persons were occupied in pastoral pursuits, but only 800 were engaged in agriculture and 640 in trade and commerce. Nearly half of the total population was uneducated. Seven letters annually was the average number posted and received by each person in the State. Facilities for communication and social intercourse did not exist. Not a mile of railway was open for traffic or under construction; not a mile of telegraph wire, nor, save between Brisbane and Ipswich, was there a

formed road. The only avenues of transport were bridle paths or teamsters' tracks over which Cobb & Company's coaches travelled laboriously. The country was destitute of bridges or culverts and the mud tracks, passing as roads, were always bad and frequently impassable for weeks and sometimes months. It was authoritatively stated at the time that it was no uncommon circumstance for 100 drays to be detained waiting for the possibility of travelling.

Action in Parliament

With the means of internal communication in this deplorable state it is not surprising that early in the history of the Colony it should be realised that no real progress could be made until the problem of transportation was squarely faced.

Immediately the first Queensland Parliament assembled a move was made towards improving the roads of the Colony and a select committee investigated the whole question of internal communication. The outcome was a quickened interest in the establishment of reliable transportation and the formation of "The Moreton Bay Tramway Company," a venture doomed to failure, but one which played an important part in the genesis of the present railway system.

The first Queensland Parliament had been opened on 22nd May 1860, with Mr. R. G. W. Herbert as Premier and Colonial Secretary. Mr. Herbert had arrived in Queensland as Private Secretary to the Governor, Sir Geo. Bowen; and was, by profession, an English barrister. He had seen horse tramways operating in the agricultural districts of England and, when speaking in the House on the question of better communication, he suggested that similar inexpensive tramways could be laid down in Queensland. "It was," he said, "essential that the tramways should be constructed at small cost and of inexpensive materials so that if the lines got out of repair, or any serious damage was done to them, the injury could be easily and economically repaired."

Formation of Company

Three months later, the first announcement of an attempt to give tangible expression to Mr. Herbert's suggestion appeared in the Brisbane press; and, on

25th October 1860, the prospectus of the "Moreton Bay Tramway Company" was published. This company, which enjoyed the imprimatur of the Government and showed the names of no less than eleven members of the Legislative Assembly on its Provisional Committee, in a lengthy statement prepared for publication, said that the great bulk of the exports and imports of the Colony was carried between Ipswich and Toowoomba, but the uncertainty of communication arising from the badness of the existing tracks and the slowness of transport led to high rates for the conveyance of goods, thereby lessening the woolgrowers' profits and increasing the cost of all articles sent up country.

Knowing that the Legislature, while endorsing the necessity for some practical scheme of transportation, did not favour the raising of public loans for the purpose, but preferred that such an undertaking should be in the hands of private enterprise, the promoters of the Tramway Company entered into negotiations with the Government to build a horse tramway from Ipswich to Toowoomba, and proposed to raise capital for the purpose to the extent of £150,000.

Trams to the Far Interior

Thus in the first year of Queensland's self-government was launched a project which eventually merged into our present railway system. At this late date, when the horse tram is but a fading memory, it is interesting to read of the intentions of those, who, in the words of the leading newspaper of the time, would "lay a thorough network of trams from Toowoomba to the far interior as rapidly as the settlement of population and extension of trade demanded it."

The tramway was to be constructed wholly of timber to a gauge of 4ft. 8½in. or 5ft. and it was proposed that the timber for the rails, bridges, etc., should be of ironbark cut from the neighbouring ridges. The cost was estimated to be £1,700 per mile. Relays of horses were to be used to pull the trams from Ipswich over the Range to Toowoomba and vice versa, and the company made provision in the estimates for seventy of these animals at £50 each. The rolling stock was to consist of fifty luggage trucks and four passenger trucks and the staff included eight drivers, ten stablemen and four station clerks.

Early in the year 1861 the route of the proposed tramway was surveyed and in August a Bill was brought before the Legislative Assembly to incorporate the Tramway Company. It provided that payment for the construction of the tramway should be in the form of alternate blocks of land six miles in width and twelve miles in depth in contiguity with the line, the valuation to be at the rate of £1 per acre; also that the company should have a twenty-one years' lease to operate the tramway. The company undertook to have £10,000 of paid up capital within twelve months and were bound to commence operations in that period. The original intention to construct the line between Ipswich and Toowoomba was lapsed in favour of a tramway 108 miles in length between Ipswich, Toowoomba and Dalby, and the Company agreed to complete this within five years at an estimated cost of £200,000.

Tenders for Construction

The "Moreton Bay Tramway Bill" embodying these provisions having passed both Houses of Parliament, the company appointed Mr. William Coote as general manager, and before the close of the year 1861 had called tenders for the construction of the first twenty-two miles of tramway from Ipswich to the foot of the Little Liverpool Range.

The prospectus showed that the company expected that about half of the revenue per annum would be profit and it promised the shareholders a dividend of ten per cent. In addition, they would hold increasingly valuable areas of land adjoining the railway. The "Melbourne Economist" criticised the Queensland Government for "strangely neglecting to provide for the public interest in the matter of charges." The company in fact, proposed to charge a flat rate of £4/10/- per ton for goods carried between Ipswich and Toowoomba (61 miles), and £1 per passenger.

Company Becomes Insolvent

Despite the apparently good prospects of the company, however, sufficient financial support was not forthcoming to bring success to the venture, and the promoters were compelled to seek the aid of the Government in furtherance of the project, with the result that in July 1862 Parliament decided to purchase the

plans and specifications of the proposed tramway and proceed with the construction of the line. Capital with which to carry out the work of construction was to be obtained by the sale of land scrip valued at £20 per portion. The scrip, which was transferable by delivery and acceptable as cash at all land sales throughout the Colony, was immediately offered for sale at the Treasury, but again the response was disappointing and the scheme lapsed. The Tramway Company in a last minute effort to stave off the inevitable turned the first sod of their line at the Basin, Ipswich, on 12th August 1862, but before the close of the year it had passed through the Insolvency Court.

Parliament having adjourned immediately after the decision to proceed with the tramway, and the Premier (Mr. Herbert) having left for England on 19th August 1862, the stalemate caused by the inability of the Government to dispose of sufficient land scrip to proceed with the tramway continued until 1863. In the meantime, conditions in the Colony were rapidly changing and the influx of immigrants emboldened the colonists to look more favourably upon the ambitious project of a railway.

The "Moreton Bay Courier," which in 1860 had treated the suggestion with levity and had facetiously asked where the money was to come from for such a costly venture, expressed its entire concurrence with a proposal to embark on an extensive railway programme, costing not "a thousand or two" but "millions," and the raising of loans for the purpose.

Public Opinion Changes

Just as remarkable was the complete change of opinion in Parliamentary circles. In 1860 the majority of members expressed themselves as strongly in favour of railway construction being left to private enterprise and there was a general disinclination to consider the flotation of a public loan for the purpose; but, in the short space of three years, most of them were prepared to admit that their views had been materially altered by experience.

Several circumstances contributed to the change. The population had increased beyond expectations and in 1863 it was double that at the time of separation. This inspired confidence in the future prosperity of

Queensland and encouraged those whose timidity had previously been greater than their optimism to contemplate a more ambitious railway scheme. Their experience, too, in leaving the development of transport to private enterprise had been unfortunate. Three valuable years had passed with the means of communication growing worse, and the construction of a railway as far off as ever. It was evident that capital could not be raised on satisfactory terms in Queensland, or even within Australia, to enable a private company to proceed with a railway programme sufficient to meet the rapid growth of the Colony; and the Premier's visit to England in 1862 convinced him that there would be extreme difficulty in obtaining money in Great Britain for colonial joint stock companies, unless payment was guaranteed by the Government. This was due to the fact that large sums had been sent from England to Canada with very unsatisfactory results.

On the other hand, the Premier found that Queensland's credit stood high in the London money market and that it was possible to obtain a public loan without the slightest difficulty on reasonable terms. He returned to Queensland an advocate of a Government-controlled railway system and frankly admitted it was fortunate for the Colony that the Government land scrip had not been taken up. "It was," he said, "perfectly clear that the sale of scrip would have resulted in the alienation of an enormous quantity of the lands of the Colony at much below their value."

Offer from N.S.W.

The failure of the Tramway Company during the Premier's absence in England prompted the New South Wales engineering firm of Messrs. R. & F. Tooth & Company to approach the Queensland Government early in 1863 with an offer to construct a light railway between Ipswich, Toowoomba, Warwick and Dalby, but their terms, which included payment in land scrip and Government debentures, were unsatisfactory to the Government and the proposal was declined.

It was this company, however, which brought Mr. Abraham Fitzgibbon to Queensland, thereby unwittingly introducing a name which was to loom largely in the railway history of Queensland during succeeding years.

Matters stood thus when Parliament re-assembled

in 1863, two days after Mr. Herbert's return from England. The Government's future intentions with regard to railway construction were now definite. Subject to the approval of Parliament they would proceed with the construction of a light railway from Ipswich to Dalby. It would be unjust, even if it were possible, to provide money from current revenue for permanent and reproductive works calculated to confer lasting benefit on future generations; therefore a loan would be raised with which to build the railway. Having thus outlined its policy at the opening of Parliament, the Government proceeded to frame the first Railway Bill which was brought before the Legislative Assembly on 19th May 1863, by the Minister for Lands (Mr. A. Macalister).

First Railway Act

Contradictory as it may appear, the bad roads of the Colony had nevertheless "paved the way" for the railway, and the Government anticipated sufficient support to make the "Railway Bill" a legislative enactment, but the Parliament of the day was conducted on non-party lines and there was always the possibility that individual prejudices and parochial jealousies would result in a deadlock or even an adverse vote. The possibility became a reality in the debate on the "Railway Bill" when opposition of certain members showed that it was being used to force the Government into granting greater representation to the Central and Northern portions of the Colony. The opponents maintained that in consequence of the great increase in population since the foundation of the Colony the existing Legislative Assembly did not properly represent the country and that before taking the important step of raising a large loan for railway construction, the Government should provide additional electorates and appeal to the people for a mandate.

An amendment that consideration of the Bill should be postponed for six months showed that the House was evenly divided on the question, and the following day the Premier moved that Parliament be prorogued as a preliminary to dissolution. "It was apparent," said Mr. Herbert, "from the proceedings on the previous day that it "was the intention of a large portion of the House to oppose the Railway Bill, not on its merits, but as evincing by such opposition that the

Government did not possess the confidence of the House." Parliament was accordingly dissolved and the elections were fought on the railway issue.

Two days after the dissolution, Mr. Abraham Fitzgibbon, a civil engineer, arrived in Queensland to act in a professional capacity in the survey and construction of the railway proposed by Messrs. Tooth & Company. He had had considerable experience in railway construction in Ireland, America, Canada and Ceylon, and was engaged in building a 3ft. 6in. gauge railway for a mineral company in New Zealand when approached by Messrs. Tooth & Company to express an opinion on the question of providing a similar railway in Queensland. While Mr. Fitzgibbon was engaged in a preliminary inspection of the proposed route from Ipswich to Toowoomba the negotiations between the Government and Messrs. Tooth & Company lapsed, and on his return to Brisbane Mr. Fitzgibbon's services were secured by the Government. He proceeded to prepare an approximate estimate for a line of railway from Ipswich to Toowoomba and Dalby, and from Toowoomba to Warwick, and furnished his report to the Minister for Lands and Works on 9th July 1863.

Government Supported

The elections, which were held during June, resulted in a slightly increased majority for the Government, and the Minister for Lands, armed with Mr. Fitzgibbon's report, lost no time in resubmitting the Railways Bill in the Legislative Assembly. Both Houses assembled on 21st July 1863, and within a week the members of the Legislative Assembly were debating the railway question.

The Premier said the Government had taken all the evidence they could get as to the best manner of improving the internal communications of the Colony, and after mature consideration had decided that a railway was needed. A bill had been brought before the last Parliament and members were well aware how the measure had been received. The Government had determined to make an appeal, believing they had the country with them, and it appeared that the appeal had been made with success. Not a single member who had advocated the measure had been refused by a constituency, whilst the reverse had been the case on the

other side; therefore it could be fairly assumed that the Government had taken the popular view of the question.

The Minister for Lands and Works (Mr. A. Macalister) who introduced the measure, said it was generally recognised that the means of communication with the vast and fertile country to the westward was barbarous, and it would be impossible for the Colony to retain possession of those very valuable districts unless the present wretched means of communication were improved. A railway would have to be started somewhere, and it was only proper that it should be provided along a route which carried at least two-thirds of the traffic of the country. The Government, therefore, proposed to construct a line from Ipswich towards Toowoomba, Warwick and Dalby.

Continuing, the Minister referred to the difficulty of raising capital for joint stock companies, and said it had been clearly demonstrated that a railway scheme could only be successfully initiated by the Government. It was therefore intended to pass a loan bill in order that the arrangements could be properly carried out. Posterity would benefit and by the flotation of a loan would share the burden.

After a spirited debate in which the question of gauge became a vexed question the Legislative Assembly passed the Bill by fourteen votes to eleven on 18th August 1863. It authorised the raising of £1,230,000. But the story of the battle of the gauges has yet to be told.

Battle of the Gauges

For many years the question of unifying the varying Australian railway gauges has been prominently before us and the Commonwealth Government is now preparing a scheme to establish a uniform gauge throughout Australia. It is pertinent, therefore, to ask why Queensland's early legislators did not adopt a railway gauge similar to that in the neighbouring colony of New South Wales, where 4ft. 8½in. railways were already in operation. Was the construction of a 3ft. 6in. railway deliberately undertaken after full consideration of all the circumstances, or merely as the result of a hastily formed resolution which ignored the possibilities of future intercommunication with other

Australian States? The truth is found by reviewing events at the time of the passage of the first railway bill.

It was common knowledge in Queensland that the railways which had been established in England were constructed chiefly of two gauges. The broad gauge of 7ft. was that adopted by the famous engineer Brunel, who desired high speeds on the Great Western Railway, and the narrow gauge common to several other English railway companies had been introduced by Stephenson, who arrived at the "puzzling" width of 4ft. 8½in. by taking the mean widths between the wheels of all the vehicles that entered Manchester by a certain road for a number of days. Although the conversion of the broad gauge to narrow was not consummated until 1892 the difficulties of intercommunication had resulted in gauge conversions as early as 1858; and, before the first Queensland Railway Bill was considered, 4ft. 8½in. was spoken of in England as the standard gauge. The adoption of a similar gauge in Queensland was favoured by many colonists, and it may be safely assumed that this gauge would have been adopted but for the fortuitous circumstances which brought Abraham Fitzgibbon to Queensland at the critical moment and made him railway adviser to the Queensland Government. He came as the apostle of the 3ft. 6in. gauge, and, by his strong advocacy, persuaded the Legislature that the formidable main range could be successfully subjugated by such a railway. It was the extremely difficult topographical features of this tract of country which had led to a prevalent belief that if it were even possible to build a railway over it, the cost would be prohibitive. For this very reason the Government hesitated to incur the expenditure which the comparatively easy grading and curvature of a 4ft. 8½in. railway would involve. Abraham Fitzgibbon showed the way out of the difficulty. In his comprehensive report to the Government he stated that whereas the locomotives in use upon the European and American railways weighed from 22 to 36 tons, the engines he proposed to use on a 3ft. 6in. gauge line would weigh not more than eleven to twelve tons. The weight of the engine being thus reduced, a rail of 30lb. to 35lb. per lineal yard would be sufficient, instead of 70lb. to 90lb. per yard. The permanent way, bridges, and superstructure of the line generally would be of a much lighter and less expensive character than would be ad-

missible upon a broader gauge line. Again, it was not prudent to lay curves of less than ten chains radius on 4ft. 8½in. gauge lines, but the light engines he proposed to provide on the narrower gauge could safely traverse curves of five chains radius.

“Such a railway,” said Mr. Fitzgibbon, “because of its cheapness is peculiarly adopted for a country such as Queensland, where an immense area has to be opened up. Many hundreds of miles of railway will have to be built in the next twenty or thirty years if the Colony is to progress, and it is a serious consideration whether they should cost £6,000 or £7,000 per mile or £16,000. The more cheaply railways can be constructed the sooner can the Colony generally be furnished with railways. Let the country but make the railways and the railroads will make the country.”

Mr. Fitzgibbon Engaged

The ardent advocacy of the able engineer impressed the Government with the advantages of adopting a narrow gauge. No time was lost in securing Mr. Fitzgibbon's services, and within four months of his arrival in the Colony he had contracted to survey the route, prepare plans and estimates and superintend the work of constructing a 3ft. 6in. gauge line from Ipswich towards Toowoomba. Thus a natural barrier in the path of the first projected railway in the shape of the Main Dividing Range, and Mr. Fitzgibbon's accidental connection with the scheme at a crucial stage, played a prominent part in the adoption of a narrow gauge railway in Queensland.

The decision to build a railway to a gauge of 3ft. 6in. was unfavourably received by a section of the people and the press and a heated discussion in Parliament on the relative merits of the broad and narrow gauges started a controversy which continued until the first section of railway had actually been constructed and opened. The Government at once made it clear that they would stand or fall by the narrow gauge and stated they would abandon the railway project altogether rather than incur the large expenditure necessary for a 4ft. 8½in. railway. But this did not deter those who thought the adoption of a 3ft. 6in. gauge was a dangerous experiment. The engineer of the defunct Tramway Company, Mr. Coote, was a prominent opponent of the narrow gauge. In a published letter

upon the question he wrote: "Mr. Fitzgibbon actually recommends that the line shall be constructed for the broader gauge; but for the present to lay down only a narrow permanent way for a 3ft. 6in. gauge. No engineer has ever before this time proposed a 3ft. 6in. gauge for a trunk line. No locomotives have ever been constructed for such a line. It is in opposition to the practice and theory of every known engineer and upon every railway since the railway system began. . . . The 3ft. 6in. gauge is a dangerous innovation in locomotive gauges. One thing Mr. Herbert may rely upon. He will still have to take the 4ft. 8½in. gauge whether he likes it or not if the traffic is worth making a railway for at all. As to his alternative, it is not worth a moment's consideration."

The "Moreton Bay Courier" in a leading article, referring to a statement by Mr. Fitzgibbon that a picture of a 3ft. 6in. gauge engine had appeared in the "Illustrated News," made this comment: "This engine does not work except as a model. The whole affair is simply a clever experiment for the purpose of contractors and miners. On a line of railway, it has never run, for one was never designed. It was first seen in 1862 as an exhibit—not an employed invention. Where is the line on which the engine runs? Nowhere. What is its value then for practical purposes? Nothing!"

Other objectors considered that the most powerful engines would be needed to ascend the 1 in 60 grades over the Main Range and such engines could not be used on a 3ft. 6in. gauge. On the floor of the House one member stated that such a gauge was a complete toy and exposed the Colony to the derision of the World. "A miserable thing that was never made in any other country," was the opinion of another member. The leading newspaper of the day asked whether the Colony with its small revenue could afford to borrow for the purpose of squandering a million and a-half of money in order to satisfy themselves and the world whether or not Mr. Fitzgibbon's project would terminate in a brilliant success or disgraceful failure. By adopting the narrow gauge the Colony would be merely experimentalising for the benefit of engineering science. The same newspaper, reporting the ceremony of turning the first sod, thought that the day would prove a sad one for the public credit of the Colony—a

day which would commence a system of reckless expenditure and improvidence for the sake of an ill considered experiment.

Conflicting Opinions

The outcome of this opposition was the appointment of a Select Committee to hear evidence on the question at the bar of the Legislative Council. Several witnesses were examined, some favouring the narrow gauge and others opposing it. Mr. Fitzgibbon admitted that he had never tried a 3ft. 6in. gauge railway with engines upon it; but was satisfied that the engines would work upon such a line without fear of accident. He quoted the opinions of several celebrated engineers in support of his statement.

Following this examination yet another effort was made to re-open the whole question of gauge for discussion in the Legislative Assembly and this resulted in the Government deciding to obtain the opinions of the most eminent engineers in England. The House was assured that the Government had no intention of rushing into the matter and would only act an undoubted authority. Eventually the advocates of the narrow gauge were victorious and the engineer upon whom rested the responsibility for recommending it was soon able to confound his critics by successfully conveying them over the Main Range on the very gauge they had so strenuously opposed. Time has proved the ability and foresight of Abraham Fitzgibbon. As the engineer who succeeded in crossing the Main Dividing Range with a narrow gauge railway, in the face of much scepticism and not a little hostility, he is deserving of our admiration. To his engineering ability the first railway built in Queensland remains a lasting and worthy memorial.

It would be erroneous to conclude that the desirability of providing a gauge uniform with that in other Australian States was totally ignored or overlooked. Mr. William Coote, in giving evidence at the bar of the Legislative Assembly, pointed out that in the event of the narrow gauge being adopted any junction made with the railways of New South Wales in the future would necessitate the laying down of a new line and the relegation of the existing rolling stock to feeder lines. Mr. Blakeney, a member of the Legislative Assembly, also contended that a uniform gauge

with other Colonies should be adopted, particularly as the New South Wales railways were being laid towards the Queensland border and the proposed line to Toowoomba and Warwick would ultimately meet them. He quoted from Mr. Gladstone's despatches to State Governors in Australia respecting the construction of railways and the desirability of a uniform gauge of 4ft. 8½in. Even the Minister for Lands (Mr. Macalister) who strongly advocated the narrow gauge and who introduced the first Railway Bill in the Legislative Assembly, referred to the fact that the Colony of New South Wales would soon have a railway extending to the Queensland border. But the question of cost outweighed all other considerations and the desirability of adopting a 4ft. 8½in. gauge merely for the sake of Interstate communication was never seriously considered. Even at this late date when the disadvantages of breaks of gauge in Australia are very apparent, we cannot do other than commend those whose foresight in adopting the narrow gauge has meant so much to the rapid development of Queensland.

The First Railway

Two months after the Railway Bill had passed both Houses of Parliament, tenders were invited for the construction of the first section of the Southern and Western Railway from Ipswich to the foot of the Little Liverpool Range and Messrs. Peto, Brassey & Betts, a well-known firm of English contractors, were the successful tenderers. They contracted to build approximately twenty-one miles of railway from Ipswich to what was subsequently known as Bigge's Camp (now Grandchester) for a sum of £86,900 and undertook to complete the works before 1st June, 1865.

The ceremony of turning the first sod eventuated on 25th February 1864, at a spot on the north side of the Bremer River at Ipswich. The day was made a public holiday at Ipswich; and so great was the exodus from Brisbane that business there was also at a standstill. The Governor (Sir George Bowen) with Lady Bowen, the Premier and others travelled from Brisbane to Ipswich by steamer the previous day. It is recorded that the Brisbane Company of the newly-formed Volunteer Militia, numbering about 150 men, also proceeded to Ipswich by steamer; and, arriving there in

heavy rain at 3 a.m. on the morning of the ceremony marched through the town to the martial strains of their band.

All roads led to Ipswich on that memorable day. The ceremony attracted the whole countryside, and from early morning the streets of the town were thronged with townsfolk and expectant visitors. The influx exceeded anything previously known, and every hotel and house of accommodation was fully occupied. Many weary wayfarers had made fruitless endeavours to find shelter for the night and were compelled to walk the streets until morning. As the hour of eleven approached, the commanding sites on both banks of the river near the scene of the ceremony were covered with thousands of people. The Brisbane Volunteers, accompanied by their Ipswich comrades marched to the ground headed by their brass band, and the Volunteer Artillery with three field pieces occupied the hill on the south side of the river. The Governor and Lady Bowen, escorted by a detachment of Mounted Rifles, arrived at the appointed place shortly before 11:30, amid the plaudits of the assemblage and the salutes of the artillery. Addresses were presented by His Worship the Mayor of Ipswich and others to which His Excellency replied. The Minister for Works (Hon. A. Macalister) then handed to Lady Bowen a silver spade and a polished cedar barrow and invited her to perform the ceremony of turning the first sod. A luncheon followed and the festivities concluded with a ball. Meanwhile the contractors had been occupied in importing construction plant from New South Wales and a large force was soon engaged upon the works.

The line was commenced on land lying between the lower portions of Nicholas and Ellenborough Streets at Ipswich; and, unlike the present Main Southern and Western Railway, it crossed the Bremer River to North Ipswich, running parallel for some two and a-half miles, and crossing Wide Gully, Mihi Creek and Ironpot Creek. Nine miles from Ipswich was situated an inn known as "The Rising Sun," and it was here that the first station on the route, now known as Walloon, was provided. The line then continued through a township known as "Alfred" to Bigge's Camp, where the first section terminated.

The First Locomotive

While construction was proceeding, orders for en-

gines, carriages and waggons were sent to England, and on 11th January, 1865, many of the wondering inhabitants of Ipswich saw a locomotive for the first time. It was the "Faugh-a-Ballagh" under test, and the occasion was of sufficient importance to prompt the following description by the representative of the local press: "We found the engine with a very long passenger carriage, known as a composite and a goods truck, plying rapidly up and down that portion of the line which extends from the Ipswich terminus to Wide Gully. There was a considerable number of passengers, including ladies, and the goods truck was heavily loaded. Mr. Hart, the Resident Engineer, was in charge and drove the engine. The fuel consisted of wood chips, principally pine. The greatest speed was as much as fourteen miles per hour. The train ascended a grade of 1 in 25 and negotiated curves of five chains radius." The engines were built by the Avonside Engine Coy. Ltd., Bristol, England. With their tenders, they weighed 16 tons 12 cwt. and cost about £1,700 each. "Regular little thoroughbreds" one engineer, whose reputation stood high in the Colony, was reported to have called them. There were about twenty passenger cars and forty trucks of various kinds "a very fair stock in trade," said the same reporter.

Following the rolling stock, skilled workmen came from England to assemble and maintain it. They arrived late in 1864. The rails on which this rolling stock was to run weighed only 30lb. to the yard. The work of construction had progressed to such an extent that on 22nd April, 1865, about 160 invited guests were able to participate in the first railway excursion, one of whom described his experience as follows: "Six of us—three on each side—sat in our compartment with ample room for the gentleman between two crinolines. The engine whistle sounded shrilly through the clear morning air and with more or less startled feelings we were borne along with gradually accelerated speed to our destination, while a throng of spectators at the terminus and several groups along the line gazed on us as we passed along, some with evident looks of alarm, but all with sobered aspect and in silence. We made the time to be forty minutes for the whole distance— $7\frac{3}{4}$ miles—which gives the rate of speed as under twelve miles per hour. We alighted at the refreshment pavilion all well pleased to be among the first to travel

on an English made 3ft. 6in. gauge railway. The engine "Pioneer" and three carriages formed the train. Two composite cars each consisted of three compartments, the third was a saloon."

Opened for Traffic

At last the long-looked-for day arrived. On 31st July 1865, the first section of the Southern and Western Railway was opened for public traffic and the occasion was celebrated by the closure of all banks and public offices. Both Houses of Parliament had adjourned for the purpose and business in Brisbane and Ipswich was almost at a standstill. So great was the influx of visitors from all parts of the Colony that, for days prior to the ceremony, accommodation in Ipswich was at a premium. The Governor and Lady Bowen had arrived at Ipswich during the week-end and a train ran from Bigge's Camp on the day prior to the ceremony conveying a large number of persons from Toowoomba and the Darling Downs.

Long before ten o'clock, the hour announced for the departure of the first of the four trains arranged to convey guests to the Contractors' luncheon at Bigge's Camp, the approaches to the Ipswich terminus were thronged with people. The station building was far from complete, but it presented a gala appearance with its decoration of flags and evergreens. The four gaily decorated engines—all that Queensland boasted at that time—added to the festive scene as they departed at intervals with their complements of passengers. The last train carried the Governor, Lady Bowen, the Ministry and members of both Houses of Parliament, and occupied two hours twenty minutes on the journey of twenty-one miles.

The invited guests numbered 500 and for many of them the railway journey was a novel experience. They crossed the Bremer River by an iron lattice bridge 450 feet in length and then passed the selected site for the first railway workshop. At Woodend, three-quarters of a mile from Ipswich, the residence of the Hon. A. Macalister—the father of the Queensland Railways—came into view and was the signal for loud cheering. Eight miles from Ipswich the only intermediate station on the section—Walloon—was passed. The performance of the locomotives was watched with much interest. One chronicler noticed the careful man-

ner in which the driver of one of the trains managed the apparatus for adding to or taking from the speed of the engine as circumstances required, and was reminded of the dainty handling of a fractious racer by an experienced jockey who, while careful not to allow the animal to bolt, was yet desirous of getting his best speed while on the course. Later the railway was facetiously referred to as "the pony railway."

The Vice-Regal party were met upon arrival at Bigge's Camp by Mr. Fitzgibbon, Engineer-in-Chief, and Mr. Wilcox, representative of Messrs. Peto, Brassey & Betts. The Ipswich Volunteers formed a guard of honour and their band was in attendance. A steep ascent from the temporary platform brought the party to a plateau on which was erected the large marquee where luncheon was provided. It was a brilliant assemblage and the presence of so many gaily dressed ladies on a spot that had hitherto been occupied by few others than the aboriginal inhabitants of the Colony made the scene remarkable and picturesque.

If there was one person who could regard the reason for the gathering as a personal triumph it was the sponsor of the 3ft. 6in. gauge railway, Mr. Abraham Fitzgibbon. He handed Sir George Bowen a memorandum setting out in detail the reasons which had prompted him to recommend the narrow gauge.

First Rule Book Issued

The first book of rules and regulations issued for the guidance of employees in 1865 makes interesting reading. Every servant of the Government was required to produce his book of rules prior to receiving his wages on each pay day.

If enginemen and firemen did not deliver their running reports to their foremen every evening or before 10 a.m. next day, they were liable to a fine of 1/- for each neglect.

Precise instructions were given to drivers and firemen about keeping a good lookout: "The engineman should look right out before him and the fireman stand sideways so as to be able to look back and he must look back upon his train thus enabling him to perceive any accident thereto." There were no sections or safety devices and engines travelling on the line had to be kept at least 800 yards apart. Goods, cattle and mineral

trains were restricted to a speed of not more than fifteen miles per hour. Enginemen on these trains were required to "exert themselves to keep their trains out of the way of passenger trains." Enginemen and firemen who neglected to observe signals were liable to immediate dismissal and imprisonment by a magistrate. If they were not required for their full time upon the line, they had to employ the remainder in the workshops at any work the foreman might give them to do. The doors of carriages on the off-side had always to be locked, and it was the duty of the guard to see that passengers kept their seats if there was any stoppage on the road. In deciding "difficult cases" whether to despatch a goods or other trains or not, the station staffs had to obtain the opinions of the enginemen and guard and "great weight" had to be attached to their recommendations. If station masters neglected to answer for more than five minutes, calls made on the electric telegraph, they were liable to a fine of 5/-.

In 1884, the rules and regulations were revised and "Members of Parliament when known, were not required to show their passes." Railwaymen, apparently guilty of misconduct, drunkenness, etc., had left the Colony to escape punishment, and officers and servants of the Commissioner were requested "to detain by force, if necessary, offenders until they could be handed over to the police. The servants of the Commissioner were then granted four holidays a year—Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday and Queen's Birthday.

Early Difficulties

No sooner had railway construction been commenced in earnest than serious difficulties arose. In November 1865, a strike occurred amongst the navvies working on the section between Bigge's Camp and Gatton. They were working ten hours a day and demanded a reduction to eight hours. Many of them were city-bred immigrants who were physically unfit to perform manual labour throughout so long a daily period.

Bitter political controversy and financial strain marked the year 1866 and became intensified later. The cost of railway construction featured prominently in Parliamentary debates and a considerable number of members pressed for retrenchment in railway expenditure, while others were equally emphatic in their de-

sire for further railway extensions, particularly Northern parliamentarians, who were anxious that a line should be built to serve the gold bearing country around Cloncurry, in the North-west.

Estimates Exceeded

Much of the demand for a reduction in railway expenditure arose from the fact that estimates for line construction had been greatly exceeded. To complete the railway from Ipswich to Dalby the Minister found it necessary to ask Parliament for a very large excess appropriation covering unforeseen expenditure in lining tunnels, repairing flood damages in embankments and culverts, easing the grades on the Main Range and purchasing land. The item caused friction even in the Ministry itself and was only agreed to after a stormy discussion.

The opposition to any large increase in the public debt was excusable. There was universal depression and practically every industry was in a precarious condition. At most the population of Queensland was 80,000 while the indebtedness was already £37/10/- per head. Dubious spirits maintained that public distress demanded public economy and, to create a debt for the construction of works which upon completion would probably incur a further debt to maintain, was the wrong method of relieving the unprosperous condition of the Colony.

Financial disasters in Britain, however, including the failure of Agra and Masterson's Bank with which the Queensland Government had an agreement in regard to loans and the sale of debentures, suddenly put an end to the controversy by stopping short the supply of funds and all public works were either wholly or partially suspended. This had the immediate effect of throwing more than a thousand railway workers out of employment, and there was every likelihood of the number being increased.

March of Unemployed -

The position had become so acute that in August 1866, large numbers of railway construction workers, who were unemployed and camped along the railway route between Helidon and Toowoomba, decided to make a strong move for better or worse. Absolute

want faced the majority and many had wives and children depending upon them. In desperation they marched to Helidon railway station, which was then the railway terminus; and, with reinforcements gathered there, demanded of the station master, free transit to Ipswich. On being informed that free passes would only be granted to a deputation of five of their number the men expressed much dissatisfaction, and some favoured marching to Brisbane, but this was out of the question as many had been compelled to cast aside their worn out boots and were barefooted. It happened that a number of empty trucks were about to leave Helidon for Ipswich, and the men observing these took possession of them in defiance of the station master. In this way 200 of them journeyed to Ipswich, where they were met by the Minister for Lands and Works (Mr. J. P. Bell) who provided food and promised immediate relief.

Having returned to Helidon the unemployed waited for the promised assistance; but, as it did not come within a few days, they again seized the railway trucks and many reached Brisbane, where a large demonstration of unemployed was made. Trouble with contractors added to the difficulties of the Government. As early as 1866 there was considerable difference of opinion between officials and contractors regarding the progress of construction. Some of the plans for the railway to Toowoomba had been altered and Messrs. Peto, Brassey & Betts attributed the delay to this cause, while the Department's engineers maintained that it was due to an insufficiency of men. At one time progress was so slow that Mr. Fitzgibbon, the Engineer-in-Chief, thought it probable that the contractors would be two years behind contract time, but in this he was mistaken as Messrs. Peto, Brassey & Betts, in spite of many drawbacks, fulfilled their promises.

In the following year the contractor who was building the line from Toowoomba to Dalby reached the end of his resources and the condition of the unpaid navvies became deplorable. Eventually the Government was compelled to take over the contract and place their own engineer in charge of the construction of this line.

Added to this there was a dispute between the Government and the contractors concerning the cost of building a portion of the Southern and Western Rail-

way, and Mr. Fitzgibbon, representing the Government, with Mr. Wilcox, the mouthpiece of Messrs. Peto, Brassey & Betts, were endeavouring to find a solution.

The unsatisfactory situation prompted the Legislative Council in May 1866, to ask for the appointment of a Select Committee to enquire into all matters affecting the railways of the Colony, and although nothing of moment resulted, the question of railway construction generally claimed much attention in the Press and in Parliament. Finally, in the following year the Chief Engineer of the Victorian Railways adjudicated upon the dispute between the Government and Messrs. Peto, Brassey & Betts and decided in the contractors' favour.

Even the elements were unpropitious during this dark period in Queensland's history; and, in 1867, after a year of drought, tremendous rains fell, causing the total destruction of the cotton crop and doing extensive damage to the newly-constructed railway lines. Embankments and culverts were washed away, traffic was suspended, and much delay and expense was incurred in effecting repairs to lines then under construction.

Over the Range

In spite of the difficulties referred to successive administrations continued a bold policy of railway construction. After the opening of the line to Grandchester in 1865 it was immediately pushed on towards Gatton, a distance of $17\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and on 24th May 1866, the extension was opened for traffic. Two months later Helidon was reached, and the Queensland Railways then attained a length of fifty miles.

Meantime the contractors had been busily engaged in surmounting the Main Range between Helidon and Toowoomba, and this engineering achievement was completed in 1867. In the midst of soaking rain the railway was formally opened on 12th April of that year. It had been arranged that Sir George Bowen should perform the opening ceremony, but heavy floods prevented him from travelling from Brisbane to Ipswich either by road or river. At the summit of the Range the trains passed under a triumphal arch, and there was a profusion of decoration in Toowoomba that day. Heavy roads and flooded creeks had not damped the enthusiasm of the settlers, and they flocked

townwards from the surrounding districts. The procession from the station was a long one, and included an eight-horse coach supplied by Messrs. Cobb & Company, who still reigned as the transit kings of an enormous territory. There were also fifty picked horses from the stud of the railway contractors, ridden by gaily jacketted navvies, and a volunteer regiment, as well as many vehicles, riders and pedestrians.

Although the ascents of much greater obstacles have since become commonplace in railway construction, the building of a railway over a series of ranges to a height of 2,000 feet was a big task to undertake at so early a date as 1865, and in so primitive a country as Queensland.

Towards Brisbane

In 1866 public agitation on a large scale was begun in Brisbane for railway connection with the interior, and a petition was presented to Parliament. The route had been surveyed the previous year, but no further progress had been made towards the construction of a railway. The money market was unsatisfactory and the people of Ipswich were hostile to the project. They wished Ipswich to remain the head of navigation, and although extremely anxious to see locomotives travelling westward they felt that any extension of the line towards Brisbane would jeopardise their interest. As one of the "squatter" members, with unintentional humour put it: "The Ipswich people deserved the expenditure which had been made on the railways, because they had been staunch supporters of the Government. It would not be fair to them to construct a railway to Brisbane because the interests of Ipswich were important and its people must be fed."

Fortunately this was not the prevailing opinion, and the absurdity of restricting transport between the seat of Government and the vast interior to horse coaches and small steam barges was apparent to many. In 1867 a private member unsuccessfully attempted to persuade Parliament to permit a private company to construct and finance the railway, and a persistent public agitation for the line was also carried on, but it was not until 1872, after three surveys had been made, that a Loan Bill, providing for the construction of a railway between Ipswich and Brisbane at an estimated cost of £192,000, received Parliamentary sanction.

The first sod was turned on 30th January 1873, by the Governor of Queensland, who held the title of Marquis of Normanby, and the first section from Ipswich to Oxley Point was opened for traffic in February 1875. It was on 14th June of that year that the first train carrying passengers steamed out of Brisbane. The line was unfinished as there was much ballasting to be done, and the railway stations were incomplete, while the Brisbane River at Indooroopilly was still unspanned. Passengers and goods were conveyed across the river in a punt and the timetable provided four trains per day to and from Ipswich. With the completion of the bridge at Indooroopilly in July 1876, uninterrupted communication was provided between Ipswich and the metropolis.

Beyond Toowoomba

It was the Government's aim to carry the line to Dalby and Warwick at the earliest opportunity and, in spite of financial strain and active opposition, the tender of Mr. David Williams, of New South Wales, was accepted early in 1866 for the construction of the first section of the line to Warwick. To-day, when Warwick is a centre of agriculture, it is amusing to read the opinion of one of the members of the squatting fraternity regarding the "futility" of giving the town railway communication. Speaking on the question of Supply in a Parliamentary debate he said that a line to Warwick could only be regarded as a branch line, and for the construction of such a line the country had not sufficient money. The district was not suited for agriculture and he believed that to talk of agriculture in such a connection was a farce. He warned the House not to listen to such trash as had been advanced in support of the capabilities of the district for agriculture. It had been proved that it was not an agricultural country. He had always opposed the railway and he would oppose it now.

The Toowoomba to Dalby extension was opened as far as Jondaryan in December 1867; but it was not until January 1871, that the railway from Toowoomba to Warwick was made available for traffic. It was first intended that the route of the Warwick railway should be through Allora; but, when construction had reached there the plans were altered and the line was continued from Hendon, a point a few miles back, the route being shortened by several miles in consequence.

Other Activities

The fever of railway expansion was not confined to the South. As early as 1865 a contract was let for the building of a line from Rockhampton to Westwood, a distance of thirty-three miles, and the railway now known as the Central Railway, but then designated the Great Northern Railway, was commenced. It was opened in 1867 and was extended to Gogango, a further eight miles, in 1874. In 1865, too, Mr. Fitzgibbon, the Department's Engineer-in-Chief, set out with guides to ascertain whether a survey for a railway across the wild stretch of country between Dalby and Roma could be profitably entered upon, and by 1874 three surveys had been made. During the following year the plans for an extension from Dalby to Dulacca were passed by Parliament.

In 1872 it was decided to make a preliminary survey of the route from Warwick to Stanthorpe, where tin had been discovered, and in 1874 surveys for railways from Maryborough to Gympie and from Bundaberg to Mount Perry were commenced, the Premier announcing that he purposed carrying on railway construction more extensively than previously.

Continental Railway Proposal

In the same year a Melbourne firm of contractors offered to construct a railway from Dalby to Normanston, in the far North, payment to be made on a system of land grants selected by themselves on either side of the railway. The proposal really amounted to a demand for 10,000 acres of land for every mile of railway built at the southern end and 20,000 acres per mile for the much greater distance remaining. Such a scheme could only have a serious effect upon settlement, and the Government wisely rejected it. An avalanche of similar proposals came from contractors and financiers afterwards, but all were declined.

During this period also, a Royal Commission recommended that the existing portion of the line from Rockhampton should be converted to a gauge of 2ft. 9in. and that future extensions should be built to that gauge to reduce the cost of construction; but, fortunately, the residents of Central Queensland refused to accept the proposal and by threatening separation succeeded in retaining the 3ft. 6in. gauge.

By 1875, ten years after the opening of the first section the Queensland Railways totalled 266 miles and extended from Brisbane to Dalby and Warwick in the South and from Rockhampton to Rocky Creek (45 miles) in the Central District. By this time the rich gold bearing deposits at Clermont (1861), Gympie (1867) and Charters Towers (1871) had been discovered and the population was rapidly increasing as a result of the influx of miners and immigrants. The Government had then expended £3,000,000 on the construction of railways, but the great expanse of country lying to the north of Rockhampton was still untouched, and the sound of the engine whistle had never pierced the solitude of that vast inland area stretching north and west beyond the termini of the southern and western lines. The railway had only approached the fringe of a comparatively unknown land, and the wonderful advancement during the next fifty years was beyond the wildest dreams of the men of the time. But they were building truly and well, and posterity will always owe them a debt of gratitude for their vision in throwing out railroads, not from one centre, but from various points on the coastline, thus encouraging the decentralisation of population.

While the lines were creeping westward from Brisbane and Rockhampton a railway was being built from Townsville to Charters Towers, in the north, a distance of eighty-five miles, and with the opening of this section on 4th December 1882, the three great trunk lines of the Queensland Railway system were established. A glance at the map will show that, with one notable exception, later development has consisted mainly of extensions of the three trunk lines begun in the early years of railway building in Queensland. The exception is the great coastal railway, 1,043 miles in length. Its completion in 1924 linked the Southern, Central and Northern systems and made it the main trunk line from Brisbane to Cairns.

Queensland now has 6,497 miles of railway, the greatest of any State in the Commonwealth, and the cost of construction has been approximately £6,000 per mile, the sum estimated by Abraham Fitzgibbon, eighty years ago. It is about half the cost of construction in Victoria and South Australia, and a quarter of the cost in New South Wales. The capital invested on opened lines amounts to approximately £40,000,000. (In 1931, £28,000,000 was written off).

The present war has demonstrated the importance of railway communication in Queensland and its capacity to meet extraordinary demands. Those who sponsored the first railway proposals surely would be adequately rewarded if they knew that in the nation's greatest crisis the railway system they inaugurated played an important part in the defence of Australia.

Last year the "pony railway" as it was humorously called in the early days, carried over 7,000,000 tons of freight and nearly 33,000,000 passengers. It earned over £17,000,000. The number of persons employed was 20,824. Trains travelled nearly 20,000,000 miles. On the main trunk line to Townsville the volume of traffic last year was 117 per cent. greater than in the year before the outbreak of war. The pioneers of railway construction in Queensland could have no better memorial to their courage and vision.

