

WHEN THE TRAINS CAME THROUGH

3rd October 1888 was a great day for the town and people of Wollongong, and Illawarra generally. After fifteen years' stirring and urging, they had got their through railway to Sydney. They had had a railway of sorts for over a year, but it was isolated from the main N.S.W. railway system. Travellers to Sydney had to disembark at Clifton, board a coach and jolt and skid round a road described by one disgruntled traveller as a "Spanish mule-track" round cliffs. The coach took them to Waterfall, where they boarded another train which took them to Sydney.

But now the great day had arrived. Next day the Mercury reported proudly:

"As was expected, the demonstration in connection with the opening of the railway was an unqualified success, reflecting the utmost credit upon all having to do with the carrying out of the arrangements. The day was all that could be desired. . . From an early hour Wollongong had put on her holiday garb. . . The Wollongong station was the centre of attraction. . . The station was decorated in a most profuse and pleasing manner. . . Each of the trains to Sydney was crowded, several extra trains had to be dispatched, and the trains from the southern part of the district were also largely patronised, but despite the demands made upon them, the railway officials, Station Master Addison in charge, proved themselves equal to the occasion.

The isolated line had been opened on the day of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. Though in many ways an advantage, this had resulted in a shortage of celebrities to perform the opening. No bigger gun was available than the local member, Mr. Francis Woodward. Civic pride demanded that this time Wollongong should have the biggest guns possible. The committee in charge of the arrangements, headed by Mr. William Wylie, had done the town proud: the Governor (Lord Carrington) and the Prime Minister of the colony (Sir Henry Parkes). Short of Royalty, they could not have done better and the only Royalty available were King Mickey and Queen Rosie.

The speeches at the station were very predictable. After they were over and the ceremony there performed, it was time for the Distinguished Guests to proceed to the Town Hall and the Banquet:

"The party then mounted the drags that were in waiting. . . the order of procession being as follows:- The Naval Artillery Band, Nos. 6 and 7 Batteries Volunteer Artillery (headed by the Wollongong Town Band) under the command of Captain MacCabe, the Governor, with an escort of the Light Horse under the direction of Captain Weston, the committee in vehicles, and bringing up the rear was the general public, of whom there was a large number in

attendance. Along the line of route to the Town Hall nearly all the buildings were crowded with spectators." On the decorations at the Town Hall the Mercury reporter really let his head go - "a large number of willing workers [had] completely transmogrified it into a fairy bower of beautiful ferns and foliage of Illawarra growth."

It is hardly necessary to say that there was another orgy of speechifying, again pretty predicatable, though some of the later speakers, possibly flown with eloquence and wine, grew wilder and wilder in their prediction of Illawarra's future greatness - Mr Franklin for instance saying that the resources of Illawarra would pay off the National Debt of England if they were fully developed.

Finally His Excellency (whose staying power must have been fantastic) and the official party reeled off back to the station, to be taken to Kiama to hear it all over again.