the terrifying struggle of the trains passing through. From the
dear strip the sides of the tunnel were coated by thick soot accu­
mulated over the years.

HOW THE MUSHROOMS GROW:
(By request of the members who toured the tunnel)

Perhaps not historical but vital to the interests of our mem­
bers is the story of the growth of the largest of the fungi which
has neither flowers nor seeds, leaves nor roots; which cannot
make food for itself but feeds on the food of others.

The main body of the plant is a mass of colourless threads
called mycelium. These fine white threads start growing beneath
ground level in warm moist matter made of dead and decaying
plants from “spores” which drop from underneath the cap of the
mushroom when it matures.

To start the growth of a box chunks of mycelium are taken
from other boxes and placed in the soil. It spreads and branches
under the soil. Bumps form in the mycelium, beginning the
mushrooms which break through the soil, appearing first as little
white buttons and then forming the collar on the underside of
which gills, at first pink and later brown and finally black, form
in which are the microscopic spores which drop into the

In the open air the bumps form usually after rain when
mushrooms become plentiful in the paddocks.

Mushrooms may be grown in the light or darkness but the
industry prefers the old tunnels because the mushroom plant is
subject to diseases carried by bacteria in the air and which can
be shut out of the tunnels by sealing and sifting of the air ad­
mitted to the tunnels, which are kept at a constant temperature
of 60 degrees. At Otford an oil fire warms the air which is
pumped in by a fan and so conditions ideal for growth are main­
tained.

As an added precaution the tunnel is sprayed to prevent the
spread of bacteria which could be carried in on clothing. Once the
disease enters the tunnel it is no use for further growing.

Our members saw literally millions of mushrooms growing
in the boxes stacked about five deep by fork-lift trucks. Motor
trucks and tractors do the carrying in the tunnel.

BURIED ALIVE! — A BULGO TUNNEL AGONY!

(This account of the horrors of the old Otford Tunnel, which
the author calls Bulgo Tunnel, appeared in the “Illawarra Merc­
ury” of 30 October 1890. According to C. C. Singleton’s “Railway
History in Illawarra”, the experience was not exceptional: “The
return trip (from Stanwell Park with a crowd of picnickers) was
a fiasco, for the train invariably stalled in the tunnel and had to
be backed out and divided, these manoeuvres becoming a routine
matter at holiday time but not exactly encouraging the travelling
public to repeat the visit”.

Quong Tart, the author of the article, was a Chinese restaur­
ant proprietor, one of the best-known identities of Sydney in the
nineties. He was a fervent admirer of Robert Burns, whose works
he could recite, at any length, with what well-qualified judges declared to be a faultless accent, which could not have been bettered had he been born at Alloway himself. It will be noted that Rabbie found his way even into the Otford tunnel.

The disaster described occurred on the return trip from a Tramway Association picnic. What Q.T. was doing in the Tramway Association he does not explain. From his account it is clear that a good time was had by all; but his favourite bard remarked:

"While we sit bousing at the nappy
An' getting fou and unco happy,
We think na on the lang Scots miles,
The mosses, waters, slaps and styles,
(Not to mention 'yon cavern grim and sootie')
That lie betwixt us and oor hame . . .
But to our tale:"

Our train, of 12 or 13 carriages, started on the return journey about a quarter past 6 o'clock in the evening, intending to cross the down Wollongong train at Sutherland. But, as said by the Scotch Philosopher, "The best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft aglee", and so it was with us. We all got into the train and started cheering and singing and waving hats and handkerchiefs, as if the iron-horse were going to fly to Sydney, instead of running along the rails in the usual way. By slow degrees we disappeared into the Bulgo tunnel, and very soon we found that our engine had an uphill job of it. It seemed as if some earthquake or giant had lifted the other end of the tunnel since we had gone through it the other way. And not only that but it looked as if at the same time it had been stretched like a piece of Indian rubber, too many times its ordinary length, which, according to the contractors' measure, I am told was a mile all but about 50 yards. Slower and slower moved the train, and darker and darker grew the tunnel.

Even with all the windows shut, the carriages got full of smoke and steam. The engine snorted and coughed, and puffed, and barked and sneezed, as if it had an attack of spasine and cholera and whooping cough and La grippe all in one, with no doctor within fifty miles of the spot.

When, with the smoke and steam and grit in the carriages, everybody had to sneeze, too, as if they had got into a pepper storm in the dark. There we were, as if we were to be buried alive. Darkness all around us like the grave, and the engine playing the Dead March for our funeral to the slowest of dead march time. We could just tell the train was moving forward, and that was all. But, horror, of horrors, it came to a standstill at last, without the end of the tunnel being reached, though we thought, in our agony, we had gone far enough to reach George's River. The engine seemed to be giving its dying gasps, with a quivering sensation that sent a death like feeling through all the train. Children cried and screamed as well as they could in the smoky darkness. Women swooned and fainted, and in every way it looked as if the whole lot of picnickers were going to be stifled and smoked into bacon, to say the least.
But just when it appeared as if it were all over with us, our good engine-driver proved himself the right man in the right place. When he found he could not go forward, he made up his mind to go back, and backward he sent the whole train at express speed. In less time than it takes to tell it the train backed out of the south end of the tunnel again, which seemed life from dead to everybody. We then got water for the fainted ladies, and got them round by degrees, and soon all were breathing freely once more.

The train was next divided into two parts, and off the engine started with the first lot of carriages, which it reached Otford with all right. Leaving that lot on the double line at Otford, it went back for the second half. And it is said that the last shall be first; so it was the case there, for the last part of the train taken through the tunnel became the first as we made the final start from Otford to Sydney, which we reached an hour late, but saying to ourselves, under the circumstances, “Better late than never”.

A NOTE ON OLD OTFORD TUNNEL (closed 1920)

Otford tunnel, approximately 1700 yards in length, carried a single track of railway and was on a shorter route than the present track. The grade from the old Stanwell Park site, approximately 40 ft. above sea level, rose at 1 in 40 to 347 ft. to the Otford railway station.

Leaving Stanwell Park, firemen banked up to the firebox for a full head of steam to lessen the fumes as much as possible on entering the tunnel.

At one stage, respirators were donned by enginemen, but it was usual to avoid fumes by crouching down on the footplate between engine and tender, for fresh air.

A huge fan was in operation at the Otford end, but a strong southerly wind counteracted its efficiency, and goods trains had their loading reduced by 100 tons during this period.

A shaft also connected with the tunnel, and can be seen and inspected a short distance from the Otford road.

In the confined space, the concentration of hot fumes and steam found its way into the carriages, even with windows closed, and it was quite an ordeal for some passengers to sit it out during the slow and laborious ascent.

At one stage, locomotives with larger driving wheels than the conventional P. class (Beyer Peacock) were used, but failed in the tunnel and had to reverse to Stanwell Park.

The tunnel had no curves, except near Stanwell Park exit, where a white light was kept burning to warn drivers to reduce speed. During the last war, the entrance to the tunnel at the Stanwell Park end was filled in for wartime security reasons.

—A. WALDER