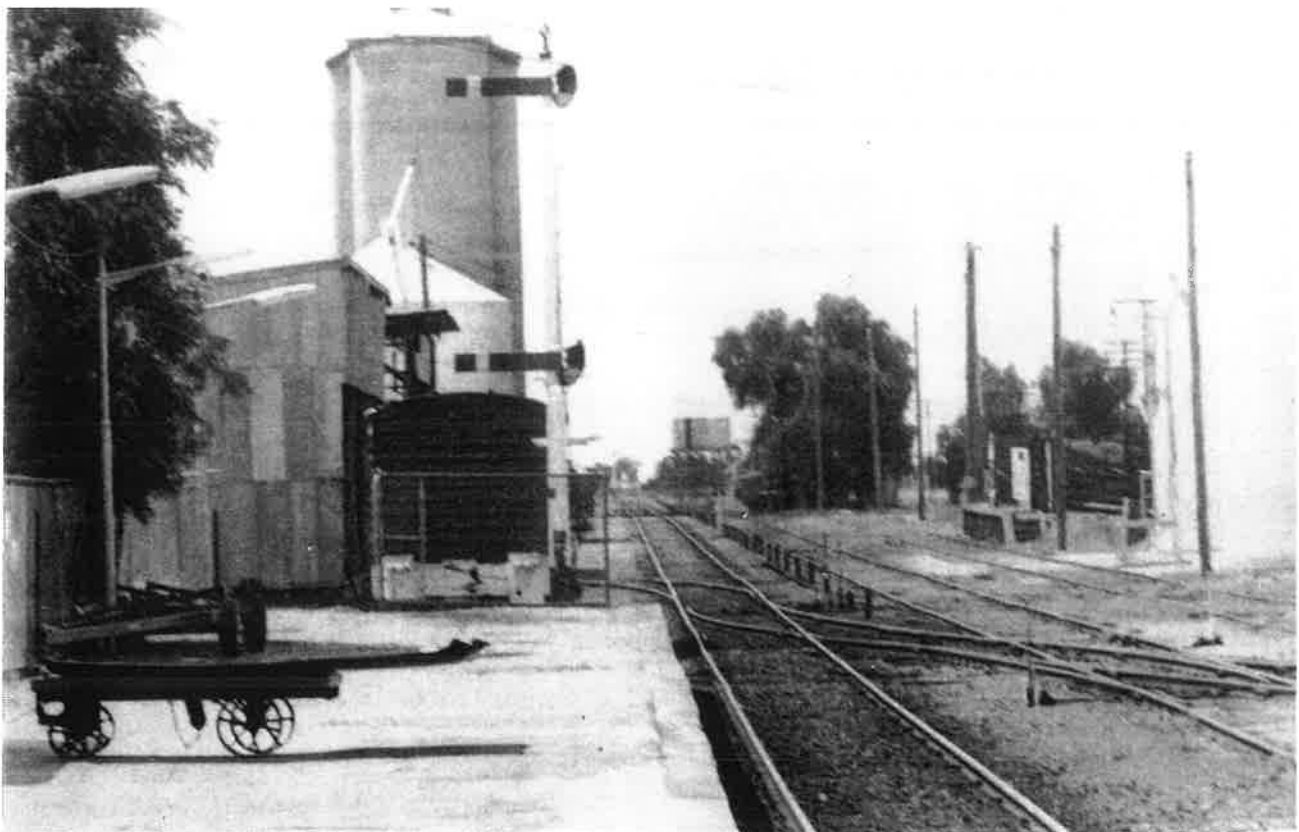




*Excursion to Mildura in 1906 with passengers about to board at Birchip.*

*Birchip yard looking north from platform. Photo taken in October 1975. Since that date the signalling semaphore, water tank, sheep and cattle yards have been removed.*





*Avenue to the Birchip station with Norman McDonald's lorry and pair trudging down Rundle Street in 1928.*

*Birchip station in 1928. The sign indicating the Refreshment Rooms and Bar may be faintly seen under the verandah.*



offices were provided with a room 23ft x 24ft. The estimated cost was £1500 and the works were expected to be completed in five months. The new buildings were ready and occupied in March 1911 and townspeople and railway officers were loud in their praise of the handsome structure and the numerous increased conveniences. The contractor was A. Plowman and the contract tender was £1467/4/2. Electricity was connected as soon as it became available from the town supply later in the year.

In August 1912, a request was made by the Shire Council for the provision of a site for the erection of a Council weighbridge and that freight be not charged for the transport of it. The free freight was readily conceded but the site provided problems as it was intended to transfer the goods business from the passenger side to the opposite side of the track. Council objected to the wheat traffic being moved to the east side of the line. Despite all the to-ing and fro-ing, the weighbridge was eventually sited on the west side of the track, just behind and slightly north of the northern end of the passenger platform. It remained in that location until superseded by a Grain Elevators Board 20 ton installation opposite Clifton St. in 1948. This, in turn, was superseded with a 60 tonne bridge on the east side of the line when the bulk grain receipt system was re-organized in 1985.

In order to give effect to the principle of Central Receipt Point grain handling and movement, the station tracks were extensively re-designed in 1987. The previous two loop roads for accessing silos on either side of the main line and a short crossing loop for allowing passage of mainline trains were restructured. The western loop serving the Geelong silo was extended and the passenger platform shortened. A new crossing loop of 850 metres with automatic triable points was commissioned on 3rd August 1987 to allow for all UP trains to travel on one track and all DOWN trains to travel on the other. At the same time alterations to the silo track on the eastern side enabled ten hopper type wagons to be accommodated for outloading on an inclined 1:250 track to facilitate wagons being rolled out of the way when full. Alas! some trucks, as the accompanying photo indicates, rolled too far and too fast.

As part of the State-wide programme for the elimination of level crossing accidents, flashing lights were installed at four points, Corack Road, Wycheproof Road, Berriwillock Road and Sea Lake Road crossings. The work was commenced in August 1982 and completed some months later.

In April 1989 the introduction of Train Order working resulted in the removal of signalling equipment and safe working staff instruments leading to the withdrawal of full-time Station Master's position. By 15th Feb 1991, all V/Line possessions had been removed from the station buildings and leasing arrangements entered into with the Birchip Shire Council. Train Orders is a radio controlled system of safe-working, which superseded the previous electric staff method.

In December 1991, a new 30 metre radio tower was erected at the Birchip station to enhance the country train and base radio network. The mast will be an important element in the functioning of the "Section Authority" working due for introduction on the Mildura corridor in 1993. Trials of the new system were held in December 1992. Using the latest technology available, Section Authority will provide for computerized visual orders to be transmitted to the engine-driver's compartment while in transit.

#### **POST AND TELEGRAPH SERVICES:**

With the advent of rail, it was necessary for telegraphic communications to be installed to effect train traffic control. As a Common Carrier, the railways were obliged to carry all goods offered for transport. This included the mail, which had previously been carried from Donald via Corack, Watchem and Morton Plains by Cobb and Co. coaches. Miller's of Morton Plains coach line also provided a service for part of the pre-train era.

In 1883 a Post Office was established in Glowrey Brothers store at the Five Ways. When that business changed hands in 1888, the service was continued by the new proprietor, Mr Joseph Lockwood. On 1st May 1893, it was transferred to the Railway Station with the Station Master assuming the dual role of also being the PostMaster. The first occupant of this position was Mr M. Sullivan. He signed the transfer of Post Office equipment and goods from Jos. Lockwood. A copy of the inventory is included at Appendix 5.

The Post Office provided a mail service, the selling of stamps, postal and promissory notes, the latter being a favourite Bill of Exchange. Additionally banking and money order business was carried out. Many complaints were made by locals having to trudge across Watson's paddock to post and collect mail at the station, particularly in the wet and mud of winter. Later on, a posting box was provided in the centre of the town. The SM/PM had a Messenger attached to his staff to assist with postal duties.

Although telegraphic communications were installed at the railway station simultaneously with the

construction of the railway line, it was used only for rail purposes. A deputation of citizens, including Councillors and townspeople, waited on the Commissioners in September 1911 and sought use of the telegraphic system for public purposes and for a telephone exchange to be provided. The use of the telegraph system was granted but the telephone service depended on 20 town subscribers being enrolled to use it. It was at this time that the Post and Telegraphic Office and Telephone Bureau was constructed in the main street. Incidentally, the first attempt to have post and telegraph services provided and staffed by departmental officers at Birchip was made in December 1892 when a deputation was received in Melbourne by Acting Postmaster-General Peacock. At that time the provision of post and telegraph services was the responsibility of the State Government. Telegraphic communications remained a feature of railway communications utilizing morse telegraphy and tape print-out procedures. The morse telegraphic system was removed from Birchip on 10th Sep 1961.

Mails were carried by rail for many years. At times, during the 1940-1950 era, mail bags for places as far distant as Rainbow were railed via Birchip for contract road delivery to their destinations. Beulah and Wycheproof also received mail via Birchip. The annual weighing of mails for payment of freight was carried out each August. Similarly contracts for delivery from Post Office to Rail station and vice-versa were operative until the Country Mail Centre service was introduced in 1975. The letter box service at the railway station, cleared by rail staff for posting in the loose bag on the Sunday midnight express and a favourite posting box for weekend letter writers, was discontinued at the same time. All mail services to and from this area are now the subject of contract road transport.

#### **ENGINE TURNABLE:**

As Birchip became the new terminus for rail services in 1893, it was important that a turntable be provided in order to turn the locomotives around for the return trip. First mention of this facility being provided occurred in February 1893 when the *Birchip Advertiser* reported that *"the erection of the turn-table has been suspended pending further instructions from the department. A suspicion has arisen to do with the extension to Maribed"*. For whatever reason, it was not proceeded with at the time. Nor is it known how the engines were turned around from the commencement of the service until Birchip was no longer a terminal from 1899. Perhaps they just travelled backwards tender first to Donald !!.

In the *Birchip Advertiser* of 21st April 1909 it was stated that the Railways Department proposed putting down a turntable and erecting combined water tanks and cranes and possibly other improvements. The turntable was to be placed on the north side of the sheep and cattle trucking yards with one tank to the north and the other to the south side of the station yard for replenishing engines going in either direction.

On 2nd February 1910 the first two engines were successfully reversed on the new turntable. It was removed in 1922.

#### **REFRESHMENT ROOMS:**

One of the most important developments in the rail history of Birchip was the construction and operation of the Refreshment Rooms.

As early as February 1893 an advertisement appeared in the *Advertiser* of that month stating that *"Birchip Railway Dining Rooms-operated by Mrs J. Barnes-begs to notify that she has opened DINING ROOMS near the Railway Station. Meals at all Hours"*. As Birchip was the terminus, no great concern was felt for the welfare and personal comfort of travellers. However with the extension to Woomelang and later to Mildura the need for sustenance of through travellers was brought to the fore. At its 1902 December meeting, the Birchip Progress Association renewed its request to the Railway Department for the provision of Refreshment Rooms at Birchip. Comment on the matter pointed out that the Traffic Branch was ignoring the problem and *"is the source of much annoyance and physical suffering to passengers. The stoppages at Birchip are much too short to permit of the hotels being patronised for meals. If the stop was extended ten minutes each way it would meet the convenience of travellers until refreshment rooms were established"*. Desultory attempts to improve the lot of the travellers went unheeded by the Department. In October 1904, the Commissioners agreed to consider a 40 minute stop to enable people to go down the town for food and drink but flatly refused to consider the erection of refreshment rooms.

Meanwhile the Commissioners had given effect to the provision of boudoir carriages on the Mildura line. These carriages had kitchen and refrigeration facilities. Next to the boudoir carriage was a dining room capable of accommodating 12 diners at a time. Passengers could, if they so wished, have meals served in their own compartment. Full meals were available. A buffet served tea, coffee and soft drinks. This arrangement came into operation in June 1908.



*The gleaming interior of the Birchip Refreshment Rooms in 1941.*

*An early group of Refreshment girls taken about 1927/28.*

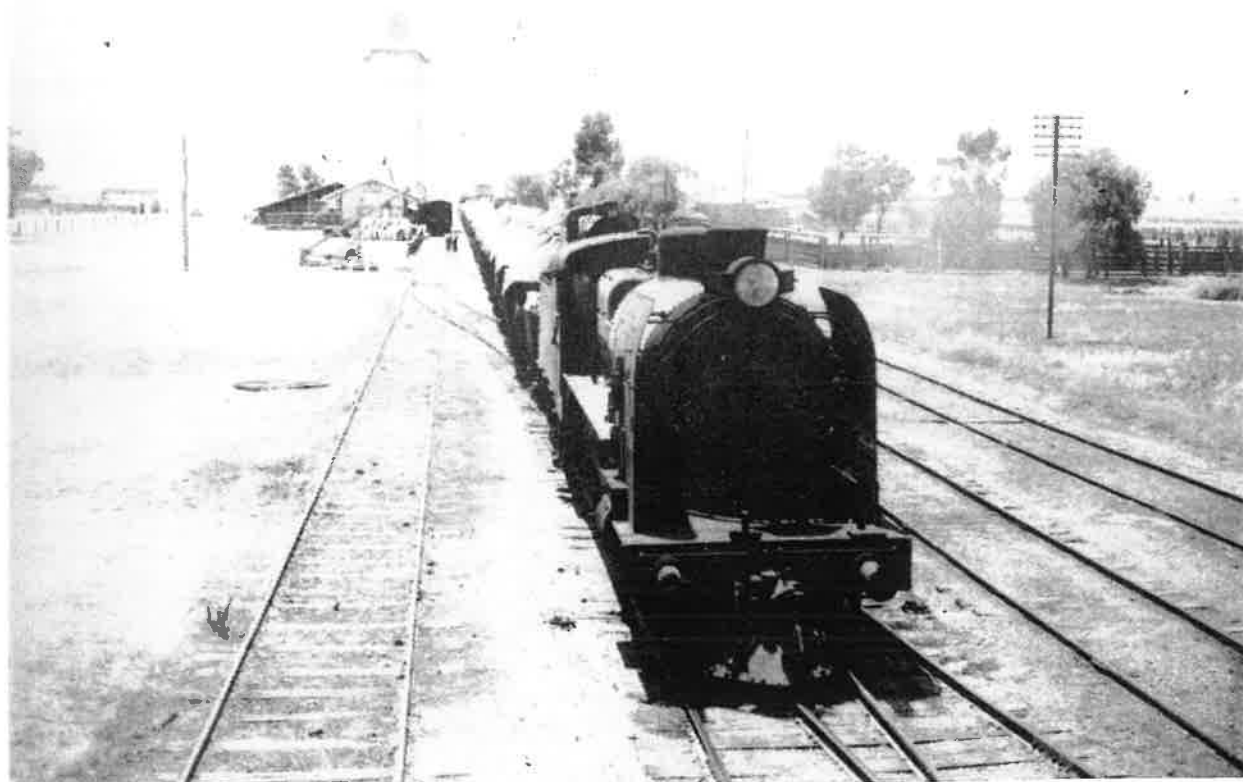






*Staff of the Refreshment Rooms in 1951.  
Left to Right – Marje Bubeck, Miss Spring (Manageress)  
and June Hinchliffe.*

*A2 921 on No. 1 road with a line of GY wagons loaded with wheat. Another A2 with GY's in line is on road No. 2. Note the "Pig Pen," a wartime bulkhead for storage of grain, to the left of the photo. Together with the water tank at the top of the photo and the sheep and cattle yards, all have been removed since the photo was taken in the 1950's.*



The changeover was not very smooth. Passengers were not advised of the new arrangements and the train only stopped for five minutes at Birchip, eliminating the previous 40 minute break. Late and hungry, the travellers were obliged to re-board the train to suffer and to continue their enforced fasting till much later in the day. Shortly afterwards Donald made a special effort to have refreshment rooms erected there but with no success. A subsequent rumour that Woomelang was to be provided with extensive refreshment services proved false.

Despite an inauspicious beginning, the dining arrangements were popular. A good evening meal could be purchased for a florin (2/-). Tea or coffee with bread and butter or cake could be obtained from 9pm to midnight and iced drinks, cigars, cigarettes and tobacco could be obtained at all hours. With some minor adjustments, this system remained in place for many years. However numbers of rail travellers increased significantly and the onboard catering services were unable to adequately provide for the needs of the travelling public.

In the Estimates of Expenditure for 1922/23, the Commissioners made provision of £2100 for the erection of refreshment rooms at Birchip. With the timetables as they were, lunch and dinner would be provided at Birchip. In a further venture, a bookstall was provided and leased to Mr J.A. Dunn. By June 1923 considerable progress had been made on construction. However it did not contain a dining room where a sit-down meal could be enjoyed in comfort. The rooms opened on Monday, 25th August. By September much criticism was levelled at the Commissioners for not making adequate accommodation available for passengers to have their catering needs satisfied during the 15 minute stop. Congestion led to tiers of customers lined up four and five deep competing with each other for service. Women and children fared badly in this free for all situation.

Shortly afterwards Mr Clapp, Chairman of the Committee, visited the scene and assured the deputations that the position would be satisfactorily resolved. The Shire also pointed out to Mr Clapp that the present meal service at Birchip was inadequate. The Travellers Association joined in the protest and in November extensive additions were being made to the dining room. The dining room was enlarged by 23 feet and staff quarters were erected. The deputations worked on the job. Meanwhile the deputations were reinstated on the train as an emergency

measure. It was withdrawn in February 1924 when the refreshment rooms were re-opened. The dining room seated 48 people. The cantilever verandah was extended at the same time. The dining room provided a three course dinner, with fish on Fridays, at a cost of 2/-. A chef was employed and, at its peak, 16 women were employed. Work at the Refreshment Rooms was a constant source of employment for local women. A list of known Refreshment Room staff is included at Appendix 6.

In November 1929, a liquor licence was issued for the refreshment rooms. It was effective from 1st Jan 1930. At the same time a modern kiosk was installed for the sale of soft drinks and orange squashes. By 1936, the patronage at the dining room section had declined to such a degree that it was closed down. The building was dismantled and the materials were used in the construction of a new residence for the Station Master.

Mrs Ena Smith (nee Bolam) of Birchip worked in the Refreshment Rooms in 1928 and returned there in 1929 after an absence out of town. She remembers quite well opening up the kiosk after the rush to the buffet and dining room had subsided. She dispensed 'Clapps' orange drink made up on the spot by squeezing fresh oranges. Lollies were also available.

The imminent arrival of the passenger train was heralded with "here she comes". At this signal, staff would rush to uncover tables, open up the doors and await the onrush of customers. During the drought years it was absolutely vital that the tables be covered to keep as much dust as possible off the crockery, cutlery and table linen. Dressed in pink frocks and wearing heavily starched white 'horse' collars, stiff starched cuffs and caps and white aprons, the staff dispensed the usual railway fare of pies and sauce for ninepence and steak and kidney pie in the buffet while the dining room provided a 3-course meal for 2/-. Fish was an option on Fridays. Other fare available in the buffet included fruit cake, toast and raisin bread, sandwiches and, of course, tea and coffee. Pea soup, poured from large jugs, was a popular choice of night travellers. The traditional sausages and mash of railway culture was not served in latter days as it was reserved for stations with 20 minute stops whereas Birchip was, for the most part, only a 10 minute stopover. On several occasions the women would need to run through the train just before it pulled out of the station to recover cups, saucers and plates that had been taken aboard by travellers. More than once Mrs Smith recalls being unable to get off the



*Another view of the Birchip station showing the small goods shed on the eastern side of the tracks. Signal setting levers may be seen on the platform in the foreground. Photo taken October 1975.*

*View of Birchip yards in 1987 before the tracks were redesigned.*





train quickly enough and had to travel down the line and return on the next available train. Fortunately the crossover of the UP and DOWN trains was usually at Donald or Cope Cope.

Mrs Elsie Davis (nee Grimmer), as part of her 14 years of railway service, relieved at Birchip several times before being posted as Manageress in 1942. She remained in that position for the next two years. In addition to being Manageress, Mrs Davis was also licensee of the bar. In the days of six o'clock closing, she was obliged to maintain bar hours from 9am until 6pm and additionally open up for bona fide travellers, train or otherwise, as required. This was a six-day per week event as the Mildura line had trains going both ways during the hours of midnight to 3.30am on all of those days. It was often her invidious task to refuse to serve the locals who did not qualify within the meaning of bona-fide travellers. Often her popularity was in question over her insistence on observing the licencing laws. Similar problems occurred with the sale of bottled beer. Pressures were increased when the local hotels were in short supply during the war years. During her time, although the pumps and taps for draught beer were still in place, only bottled beer was served. Despite its restrictive trading, the Refreshment Rooms were regarded as the fourth hotel in the town.

Staff quarters were provided for the Refresh. staff at the station. It was a necessity with passenger trains running mostly during the night time. This provided a mixture of good and not so good fortune. While it allowed staff to go to the local dances it also meant that they had to interrupt their 'goodnights' to hurry back to work. Often almost entire dance crowds would descend on the station for supper. One Station Master was rebuked by his superiors for not selling platform barrier tickets costing threepence each, to the local supper seekers.

The buffet and bar continued to operate until its closure on 13th Feb 1966. It was subsequently demolished by Mr Jim Hoare of Whirily. The main part of the bar was installed at the Culgoa Golf Clubhouse to continue its traditional role of being leaned on while elbow-bending associated with the dispensation of amber coloured and other fluids is indulged in.

## HOUSING

In December 1893, tenders were called for the removal of five gatehouses and re-erection as Ganger's residences on the Donald-Birchip line. The successful tenderer was Mr W. Berry at a cost of £217/7/-. In the following June, a contract was accepted for the removal of Gatehouse No 17 Ararat and No 3 Shelbourne and

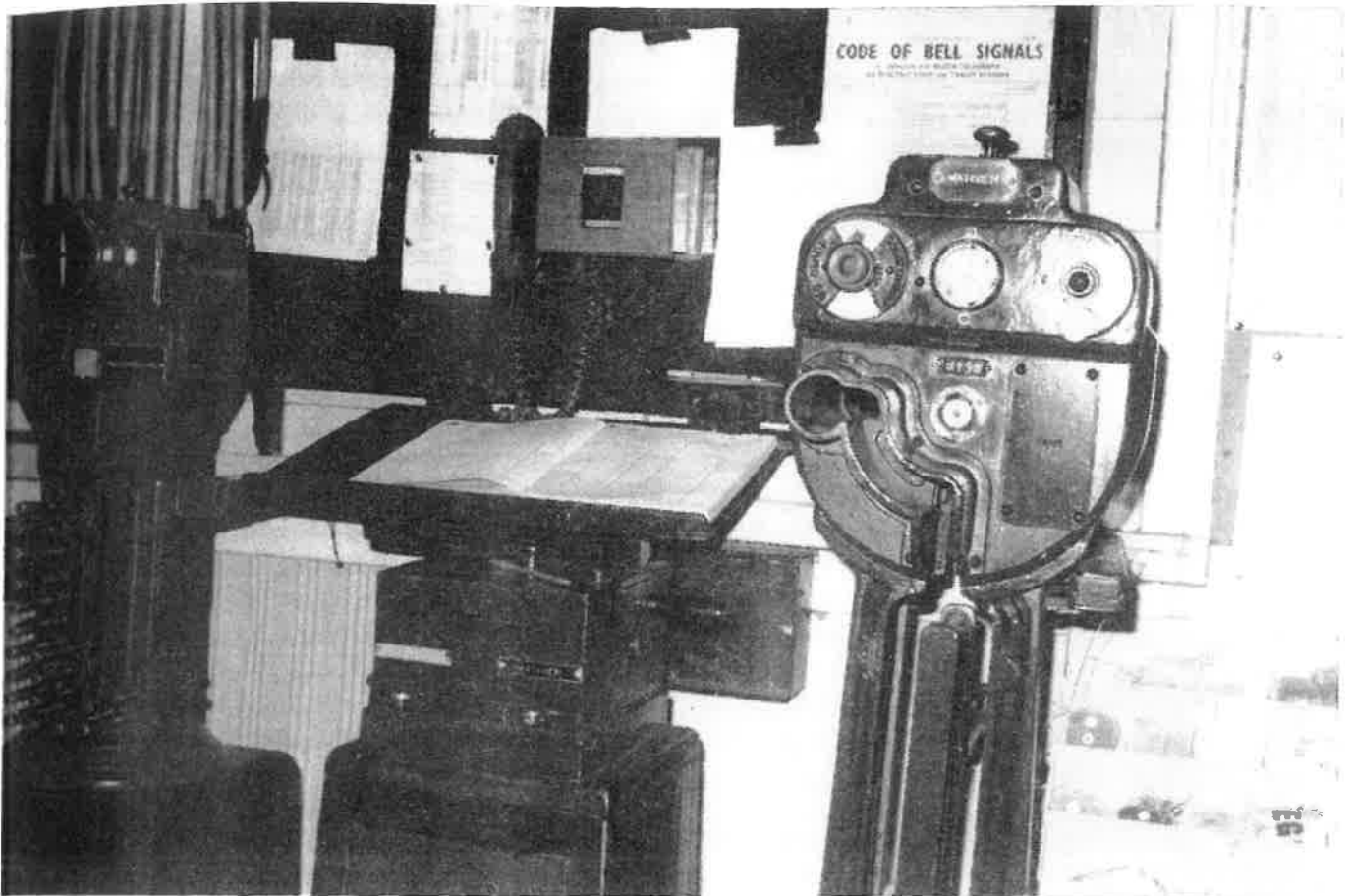
re-erection as a residence for the Station Master with the work to commence immediately. The first occupant of the house was SM Cotter and his family.

Following the closure of the dining room section of the Refreshment Rooms in 1936, the building was demolished and the materials used for the construction of a new residence for the Station Master. The first occupants of the residence was the O'Hagan family. In due course, the old Station Master's residence became the Ganger's house. The first ganger to occupy it was Bob Harrowfield and his family. One of the delights of the Harrowfield children was to use the toilet facilities. It had a septic tank and to be able to "pull the chain" was an experience no other children in the town were able to enjoy at that time. This house was eventually sold as being surplus to requirements of the department and was bought and re-erected by Mr Tex Edwards as his home at Morton Plains (allotment 26A Narraport).

Overtime several departmental residences have been provided for railway employees. Very little evidence of this can be seen today. The one remaining house, a pre-fab, is located in Station St. opposite the main station buildings. It is rented out by the Government agency controlling housing for government employees. A second pre-fab, adjacent to that house was sold for removal during the 1980's. The Station Master's house from 1930's was located at the south end of the platform fronting Abbott St while the ganger's house, the original SM's house, was located just north of it and behind the Refreshment rooms. A further three houses were situated in Station St at the site of the present grain testing site and weighbridge of the GEB complex. The house at the corner of Queen and Abbott Sts, now occupied by Mrs Marion Gould was reserved for the Assistant SM for many years. Neil Fietz, as ASM, and his family occupied the departmental residence located at 23 Cumming Avenue before they purchased their own home in Simpson St. In the main, rents were low as an encouragement to staff permanence. The SM enjoyed free rent but his salary was reduced by \$200 per annum if he occupied a departmental residence. Effectively he was therefore paying almost \$4 per week for the privilege of his accommodation.

## RAILWAY CARRIERS:

From 1882, when the rail reached Donald and the following year when Wycheproof was connected to the rail system, goods for Birchip were road transported from those points. Both bullock and horse waggon teams figured in the process. It was therefore a great relief when the rail brought Birchip goods direct to the



*Birchip electric staff instruments with the Woomelang unit on the right and Watchem on the left. The Woomelang instrument operated miniature staffs while the Watchem unit used large type staff. They were removed in 1989 when Train Order working was introduced on the Mildura line. Photo taken in 1989. See also Appendix Four.*

*View of Birchip yard with Number one road adjacent to the platform and silo inclined 1:250 gradient outloading loop on the right. Photo taken 20th January 1993.*



town. To deliver to and from the railhead, local railway carriers developed individual delivery businesses. Additionally, as passenger trains have, almost from the start, arrived during the night, early rail carriers doubled up to provide a cab service for the travelling public. Lorry horses by day became cab horses by night.

Some of the business houses, notably the grocers, maintained their horse and lorry town delivery service and collected and delivered their goods at the station. However they did not provide a universal service to the community. The first rail carrier at Birchip was Mr M. Honan. The best known of the early railway and general carriers was Mr Norman McDonald. He purchased the business of Honan in 1896. By advertisement in the *Birchip Advertiser* of 30th Sep 1896 he advised the public of his purchase and respectfully solicited public patronage. He continued in this calling for the next forty years. One of his regular tasks was to deliver barrels of beer to the local hotels. His singular boast was that he *"had delivered beer for forty years and never drank a drop"*.

Bailey Turnbull was the first carrier to operate with a motor truck during the late 1920's to be better able to compete with Mr Hudson, a rival carrier of the same era. It also enabled him to deliver further out into the countryside. During Depression times when Turnbull ceased carrying, all carriers including A.E. Cartwright and Sons, who took over from A.W. Theobald, Alf Davis and W. Bazeley continued horse and lorry delivery. As an aid to his business, Bazeley deposited £5 at the station in order to be able to collect parcels and other goods without having first to check the amounts payable on freight, collect the amount from the consignee and then return to effect the actual delivery. No credit was given by the Railway Department. If no money was paid, the goods were not released. In those tough times, some perishable items, such as meat, were known to go bad because the freight due could not be raised by the consignee.

Parliament enacted legislation to protect its carrying monopoly rights as road transport became more popular and economic. Traders at large centres were able to enter into contracts with the Railways for special rates for their goods. An attempt by Birchip traders to get similar concessions from Mr Clapp in 1932 was denied. Hence all materials required by the community continued to be carried by rail. This included petroleum products and even motor cars destined for sale in the district.

Bulk petroleum facilities were first provided in Birchip in 1930 when Shell Oil Co. installed a 10,000 gallon

tank at the station. It was mainly used for power kerosene, the most used tractor fuel of the time. Vacuum Oil Co. followed with a similar installation in 1932. They were replenished by bulk rail tankers. Agents then delivered to garages, farms and other users. Prior to bulk fuel becoming the normal method of delivery, it was handled in 44-gallon drums with lubricating oils being contained in 4-gallon tins. Initially there were several local agents for a variety of oil and fuel products and brand names. Since 1975 oil companies have largely dispensed with local agents and carry out deliveries from the larger towns in country Victoria.

Progress began shortly before the World War 2 continued at a rapid rate after the cessation of hostilities. Cartwrights motorized their business in 1937. They continued operations until 1970 when Ray Rogers took over the service. In turn, after five years, he sold out to Michael Ryan. By this time road transport providing door to door delivery almost completely took over the transport of goods to Birchip, except where the law specifically prevented this as in the case of the transport of beer. The decline of rail freight business led to the establishment of Rail Freight Centres. One was established at Donald in November 1978. Michael Ryan was awarded the contract to deliver from that point to Birchip and district. The Donald Freight Centre closed down in February 1985. Parcels continued to be carried by passenger rail but with the demanning of the station in 1990 that service ceased. Today the Donald V/Line delivers goods by road to Birchip direct to consignees. However the quantities are limited with the majority of goods being directly roaded in by other than rail authorities.

From the 1990's only bulk commodities in truck loads, are despatched and received at Birchip. This is confined to superphosphate, cereal grains and grain legumes. The truckload consignment of wool is possible but never occurs.

#### **GENERAL CARRIERS:**

Very little is recorded of the early general cartage contractors. Bullock waggons and horse drawn vehicles provided the mode of transport prior to the advent of motor vehicles. The names of George Beasley, Tom Hobbs and Hubert Mitchell are still recalled by older members of the community as wellknown bullockies. They carted wheat, wool and other farm produce over long distances to the railhead wherever it happened to be at the time. Tom Hobbs moved houses with his bullock team in the mid-1920's. As late as 1930's Hubert Mitchell carted wheat, and did other farm work, using bullocks.

However most transportation was effected using horses as the beasts of burden. They provided the means of people movement, either being ridden or driven in gigs, buggies or other wheeled conveyances. The transport of farm goods, stores, merchandise or heavy equipment was a task for horse and waggon operations on roads scarcely worthy of the name during the early years of settlement of Birchip and district.

By the end of the 1920's motor trucks were making their appearance on the roads carrying loads of wheat ranging from 12 to 30 bags at a time. Gradually the load size increased. The roads also became better and assisted in the development of road transport. Although the older farmers felt that trucks would never replace the 100 bag loads of the horse drawn waggons, it was not long before this figure was attained and reached much higher levels of tonnages. Following the introduction of bulk-handling of grain in 1939, a new era developed in grain transport both from farm to rail and rail to storage points and export ports.

The advent of the semi-trailer, introduced into the Birchip area by Allison Connelly in mid-1930's, was a milestone. Allison also began carrying stock from farm to market using a double-decker unit carrying up to 200 sheep at a time. This was revolutionary as previously most farmers located a distance from the railhead required many hours of droving of sheep and lambs to the station for trucking to market. It would mostly be Sunday droving to the trucking yards, loading late Sunday or early Monday morning for the stock to be sold at Ballarat or Newmarket on the following Tuesday morning. Often rail trucks with their load of 132 lambs would arrive late for market and be sold without competition to the financial detriment of the farmer. Naturally the new system rapidly took over from rail. Farm to market in one operation with minimum loss of body weight and deaths was readily embraced. Today's four decker road transports capable of carrying 600 or more lambs or shorn sheep over long distances in rapid time leaves no opportunity for the railways to regain a lost enterprise.

The cartage of grain differs from livestock inasmuch as it is not a perishable item and the urgency of the movement is not as important. However haulage from farm to areas other than ports is on the increase. With private trading taking more and more grain out of the previously highly regulated Board system, this trend will accelerate further. Loads of well over the allowable Grain Elevators Board maximum of 42 tonnes are capable of and are being carried by transport operators. Bigger loads are being achieved by use of trailers.

Nevertheless rail movement of grain on a tonne per mile basis over long distances remains the most economic means of grain transport available. It is never conceived that all of the grain will be moved by road. Hidden costs of road damage and road accidents also militate against such an outcome. A list of rail and general carriers is at Appendix 7.

### **STATION AWARD**

In 1986 the Birchip station staff was awarded the prize for the Best Kept Station in the Western Region. The award consisted of a plaque, engraved stainless steel shovel and certificate. The station staff had been very busy over many years in beautifying the station surrounds after the removal of the refreshment rooms and other station buildings. In 1970, during the period of Keith Constable as SM, a tree planting and lawn project was undertaken. Railway items of memorabilia including a signalling semaphore and trike and trolley have been mounted on the site. The area was maintained by the staff until closure of the station in 1990. Thereafter the Birchip Shire Council undertook responsibility for it while the lessees of the station office, Mr and Mrs Steve White, give general attention to the area including watering the lawn section.

### **PRESENT STATUS**

The past one hundred years of evolution in rail transport has almost turned full circle in Birchip and district. Eagerly sought and worked hard to obtain, rail services provided in 1893 were the most welcome and best used utility of that period. It was to remain the dominant form of transport until the almost universal use of motor vehicles, improved road systems and the advances in technology led to the steady decline in its patronage from the mid-1920's onwards. The rate of accelerated decline increased with the years.

As a major group in the community, railway families contributed significantly to the town, both socially and commercially. Station Masters, particularly in the early years, occupied a unique position in the hierarchy of community affairs. Today, in Birchip and surrounding districts, no railway personnel are permanently stationed in the area. Facilities provided, mostly as the fulfilment of pressure applied by local communities, lie idle or have been demolished. The Birchip station office building is presently leased to the Birchip Shire Council on a cost neutral basis. In turn it was sub-let to Steve and Joanne White in September 1991 to enable them to locate their electrical goods and service business there. Externally of that building, a restored patrol trike and signal semaphore erected by former railway staff indicate facets of its operational past. The



goods shed is used by the Lions Club for the storage of waste paper collections. The crane lies idle with a pepper tree growing out of its base.

Station No 202 was officially de-staffed on 14th December 1990 when ASM Neil Fietz closed the doors for the last time to go into official retirement in Birchip after 35 years and eleven months of railway service; twenty-five of those years being in Birchip.



*A.S.M. Neil Fietz closing the Birchip station doors for the last time on 14th December, 1990.*

*Birchip station in 1993. Note the 30 metre radio tower used in radio control Train Order working.*

