

## CHAPTER 7

# STATIONS OF THE DISTRICT

The extension of the railway from Birchip to Cronomby Tanks (Woomelang) in 1899 led to the provision of four additional stations to serve the developing communities of the districts of Karyrie, Kinnabulla, Curyo and Watchupga. The other district station in the Shire of Birchip, Morton Plains, was provided during the Donald-Birchip line construction.

The settlers in each of the northern districts were united in their combined efforts to have the line extended from Birchip to serve the entire area. Even when some differences of opinion arose as to the route to be taken, all were agreed in having it pass within usable distance of the district farms. All four stations were declared to be officially open for traffic on the same day, 18th Sep. 1899. The funds allocated in Act No 1550 provided for construction of shelter sheds, passenger and goods platforms at Kinnabulla, Curyo and Watchupga and a shelter shed only at Karyrie for a total outlay of £221/7/10. Prior to the development of station facilities, Limit (Location) Boards were erected in 1905 at stations not having signalling equipment. They were placed 400 yards from the station site to indicate to train crews they were approaching a station. The Boards were subsequently removed. In the course of time, facilities developed at one station were not necessarily provided at all of them. Curyo alone became a staff station. However one feature was common to all of the stations of the district, except Birchip. They were all provided with 300 feet platforms. Patronage patterns also differed as will be shown in the sections devoted to each station.

The coming of the rail meant that regular mail services were provided and goods required for farm and households were able to be received and despatched with much greater ease. Farm products, principally wheat, were able to be handled in greater quantities than before. Superphosphate and other farm requirements came within accessible reach of all who needed it. It had been stated over and over again at all Hearings of the Railways Standing Committee that productivity was limited by the means and cost of transportation. Sheep trucking yards were also provided at all four stations but only Curyo had cattle and horse outloading facilities.

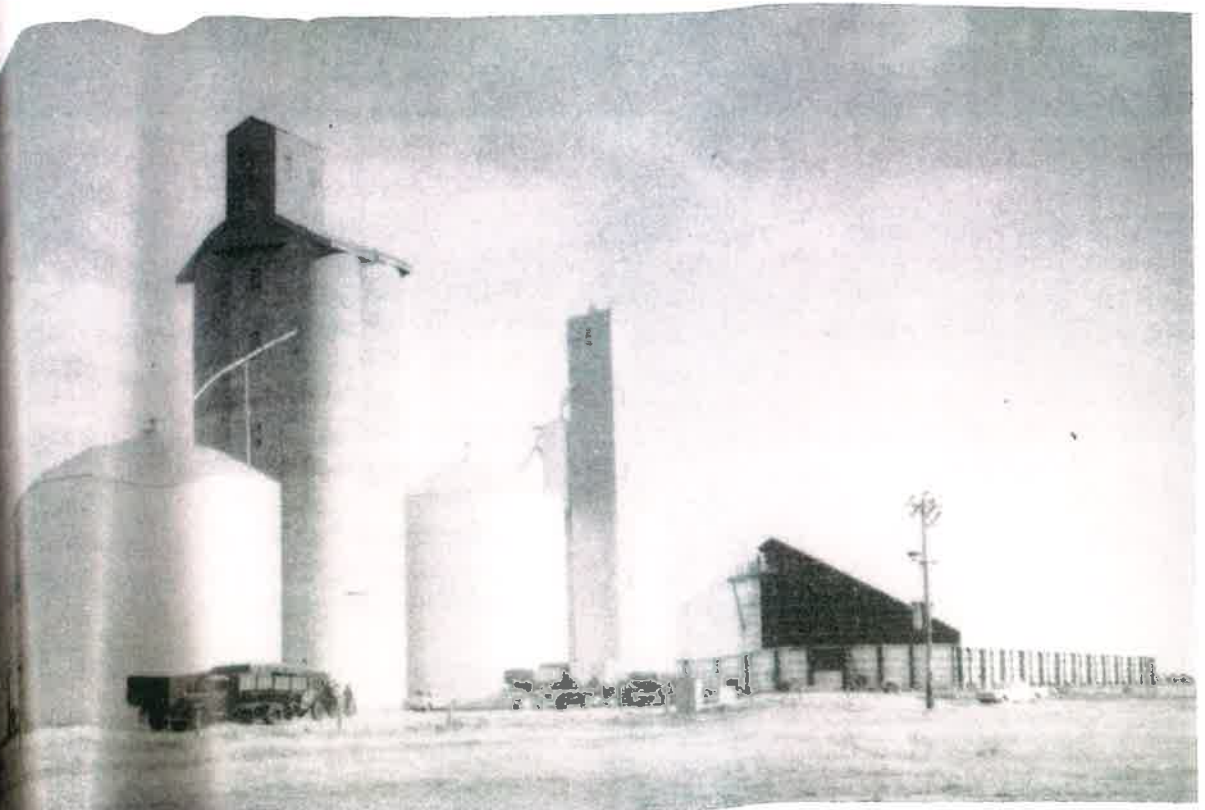
The railways provided a social benefit to these isolated communities. It was the train that brought the groceries from the nearest town and bread in bagfuls from the Birchip bakeries. Above all, it brought the mail and the papers that enabled whole communities to retain contact with the outside world. Meeting the train was a social event not to be missed by young or old. All of the above stations had their passenger services closed down on the same day, 10th Nov. 1975. Freight services are restricted to the movement of grain.

An incomplete list of all the known railway personnel who served at Kinnabulla, Curyo and Watchupga is included at Appendix 6. No rail personnel were stationed at Morton Plains. A departmental residence was provided at Karyrie and known personnel are included in the Kinnabulla listings.

### MORTON PLAINS:

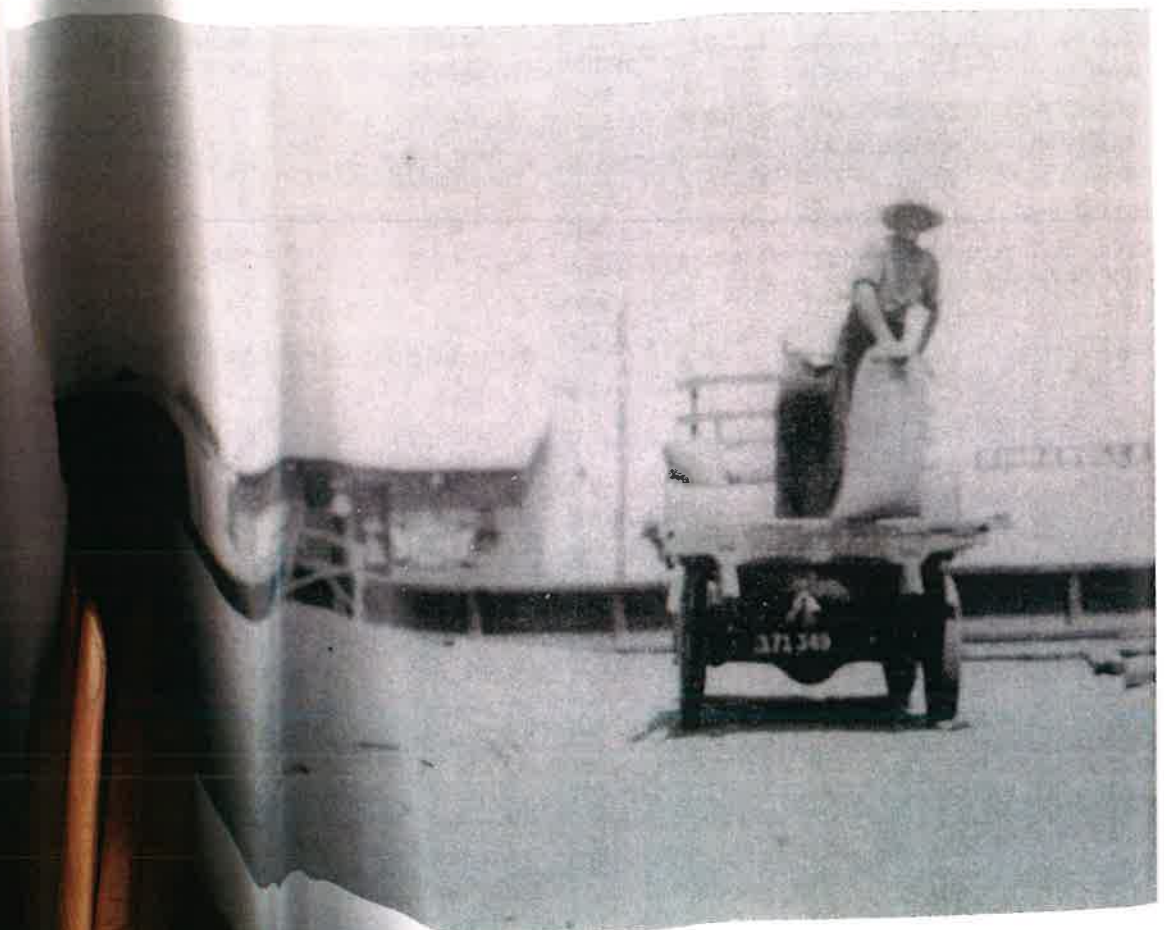
Morton Plains, No 200, was established in 1893 when the Donald-Birchip link was under construction. It is located at the 207 and a half mile post (334kms) and is placed at 355 feet above sea level. The name of Morton Plains derives from the name of William Lockart Morton, who with J. Raleigh, was the first licence holder of the sheep squatting run in the district in 1847. The area of Morton Plains sheep station embraced a huge tract of land including all of the present Shire of Birchip. The flat open nature of the land invited the addition of that fact to the Morton surname. In May 1905, the Railways Department sought the support of the Birchip Shire Council in having the double name displaced and the residents select another one, as there already existed a postal town named "*Morton*". Cr Lockwood was not in favour of altering the names of old localities and felt that it was "*a silly fad of the Commissioners*". Cr Neyland favoured the name of "*Millers*". John Miller was the store, hotel, post office and meeting place proprietor from 1866. Cr Fielding suggested "*Narraport*", the name of the adjoining Shire parish. Council decided to stick to "*Morton Plains*" and as such it has remained.

Morton Plains was the venue for many of the meetings that agitated for rail service extension from Donald to Birchip in the late 1880's and early 1890's. It was also considered for cross country connection at different periods. As an early settled area, Morton Plains had a stable population base and was the focal commercial point for a widely dispersed community. It generated rail revenue of £38/9/8 in 1893/94. The following year 273 persons travelled from Morton Plains by train, 290 in the succeeding year and remained at similar levels for the rest of the decade. By 1910 the travelling public



Plains Silos. Photo taken in 1970.

Kinnabulla station - 1937.



numbers declined to 34 but rose to 238 in 1913/14 and 207 in 1919/20. It reached its apex in 1923/4 with 246 train travellers and held up steadily in 1924/25 when 188 passengers rode the rails. From that point onwards a decline set in. In 1939 the total of 38 travellers was never again equalled. Only 23 patrons in 1952 and 5 in 1965/66 availed themselves of the once traditional mode of transport. Passenger services were discontinued in October 1966. As far as is known tickets were never issued at Morton Plains. Nor is it believed that a Caretaker or other official was ever stationed there. No evidence can be found of any departmental residence being provided.

Wheat was grown in the Morton Plains district from the earliest days of settlement. In 1916 35066 bags from the 1915/16 harvest were outloaded. Similar amounts were handled in the following year and increased to a record 56726 in 1918/19. Deliveries for the next decade ranged between 38049 in 1924/25 to the all-time high for bag deliveries of 64716 (5393 tons) in 1928/29. Bulk handling commenced at Morton Plains in 1941. It brought a steady increase in production over the years. Barley became an important secondary cereal in Post WW2 years. The record for wheat deliveries is 21,273 tonnes in 1969/70. The barley record delivery was made in 1979/80 when 2,422 tonnes were handled. It must be pointed out that not all of these amounts were grown within the defined silo area of Morton Plains. Permanent bulk facilities have a storage capacity of 19,300 tonnes, including a half-million bushel shed. The silo is classified as a "Fill and Close" unit. No trucking out of overflow grain is carried out during the harvest receipt period. As the name implies, once the silo is filled it is closed down for the rest of that harvest. The weighbridge capacity is 25 tonnes.

The Connellan family had a lifelong association with wheat handling. Mrs Kath Richmond (nee Connellan), grand-daughter of Thomas Connellan, one of the first wheat buyers at Morton Plains recently recalled some of the incidents of her family's involvement with the grain trade. When Thomas died in 1925, his son Peter, succeeded his father in the business. He was the first OIC of the Morton Plains silo and eventually retired in 1972 at the age of 72 years. By that time he was Officer-in-Charge of the one million bushel silo at Donald.

Thomas was an agent for Louis Dreyfus and competed with neighbour, Archie Green, for the farmer's wheat business. It was common at that time for agents to go down the road and meet incoming loads in an endeavour to clinch a deal or promise of delivery to his

stack site at the siding. Prices were telegraphed daily from Melbourne and from that base it was a freely competitive market to secure the business, either by sale or storage with sale at some later date. Stacks were built adjacent to the siding and later trucked out for mills, ports or other destinations. Delivery was made in bags by horse drawn waggons. Lumping was hard and strenuous work carried out during the hottest, dustiest and driest part of the year.

It was therefore a great relief when the Morton Plains silo opened for bulk receipts in 1941. With Peter in charge of operations, the job was really a family affair with sons and daughters helping with many of the tasks. The daily work at the silo was followed at night by the bookwork of making out warrants and daily statements of receipts and outloadings. This latter task called for extreme accuracy in calculations. No mechanical or electronic aids were available to help in the task. The Connellan kids, under the watchful eye of a kindly but demanding parent, proved adept mathematicians. Improvisation was a constant challenge to the young assistants in carrying out their various duties. The use of a drum to stand on was one such innovation. But work at the silo was not without its pleasures. The arrival of the train with its supply of empty wagons or picking up of loaded ones usually meant a ride on the engine when Mr Halfpenny, father of John Halfpenny, present Secretary of the Trades Hall Council, was the shunter on duty. It also had its social opportunities. As motor vehicles replaced horse drawn waggons, contractors came from other areas and provided a variety of conveyances, conversations and to some degree, individual forms of entertainment.

Sheep and cattle trucking yards were erected at Morton Plains in March 1900. Details of early data is not available. Morton Plains was under Watchem control rather than Birchip and the information is not readily obtainable. Revenue from the despatch of livestock was £212/7/10 in the year ending 30th June 1900 and increased to £360/16/1 in 1911. In 1934/35 26 truck loads of sheep were despatched and 2 trucks were received. In 1951/52 41 trucks were outloaded and 10 received. In 1955/56 19 were outloaded with 39 coming inwards including one truck of cattle. 1959/60 saw 32 despatched and 31 received. No further traffic other than grain was despatched after 1965/66.

The silos provide the landmark that testifies that once Morton Plains was the centre of a thriving community. Not so noticeable is the Shire of Birchip Historical Marker No 15 located just off the Sunraysia Highway that indicates the site of the Morton Plains hotel, store and post office which long since has passed into history.

## **KARYRIE:**

Karyrie station is located between Birchip and Kinnabulla at the 221 mile (354km) post. It is 323 feet above sea level and was allocated Station No. 204. The name derives from the adjoining sheep station of the time. The title has caused confusion as Karyrie is also the name of various other widely spread venues within the Shire of Birchip. In an attempt to avoid confusion local farmer, Mr William Barber, sought to have the name changed to "Woodlands", the name of his property which lies close by. The name change was not accepted by the Railway Commissioner so Mr Barber, now a Councillor of the Shire, sought its assistance in sponsoring his cause. Council did not wholeheartedly agree with the name of "Woodlands" and an amendment was proposed to have the name "Towma" substituted. Towma was the name of the Shire Parish near the station. The amendment was unsuccessful. So also was the second attempt to have Woodlands adopted by the Railway Commissioners.

Karyrie never developed to the same extent as its neighbouring communities. A good deal of reason for this was that the eastern and southern sections were more suited to grazing than grain production. Hence less population meant less passengers and less commodities for rail movement. It was, however, the location of the ganger's residence from the beginning until 1937. It then reverted to that of repairer's residence and finally, in 1953, when Mrs Beggs, widow of the last repairer to be stationed there, moved to Birchip, the house was removed to Kinnabulla.

In 1899/1900, 22 passengers joined the train at Karyrie. This number increased in 1900/01 to 49 and in 1907/8 fell to only 6. A resurgence occurred in later years with 34 passengers in 1910/11 and 57 in 1913/14. The peak year for passengers was in 1923/24 when 190 people travelled by train. From that point it declined to 22 in 1934/35. It again uplifted in 1939 to 114 but in 1952/53 reduced to 5. At this point Mrs Beggs, the only regular traveller, moved and the passenger service ceased.

Sheep trucking facilities were provided in the 1907-10 era. Modest numbers were outloaded over the years. These were mainly the produce of William and Sam Barber and Barber Bros. In 1920 92 sheep trucks were outloaded and 39 were received. A drop to only 5 and 3 respectively occurred in 1930 while in 1952, 18 trucks were outloaded and 5 were received. In the next year that service was withdrawn due to lack of patronage and the disrepair of the sheepyards.

Tonnages of other goods were also reduced to a minimum with only one ton of goods, possibly wool, being despatched and 36 tons, probably superphosphate, received.

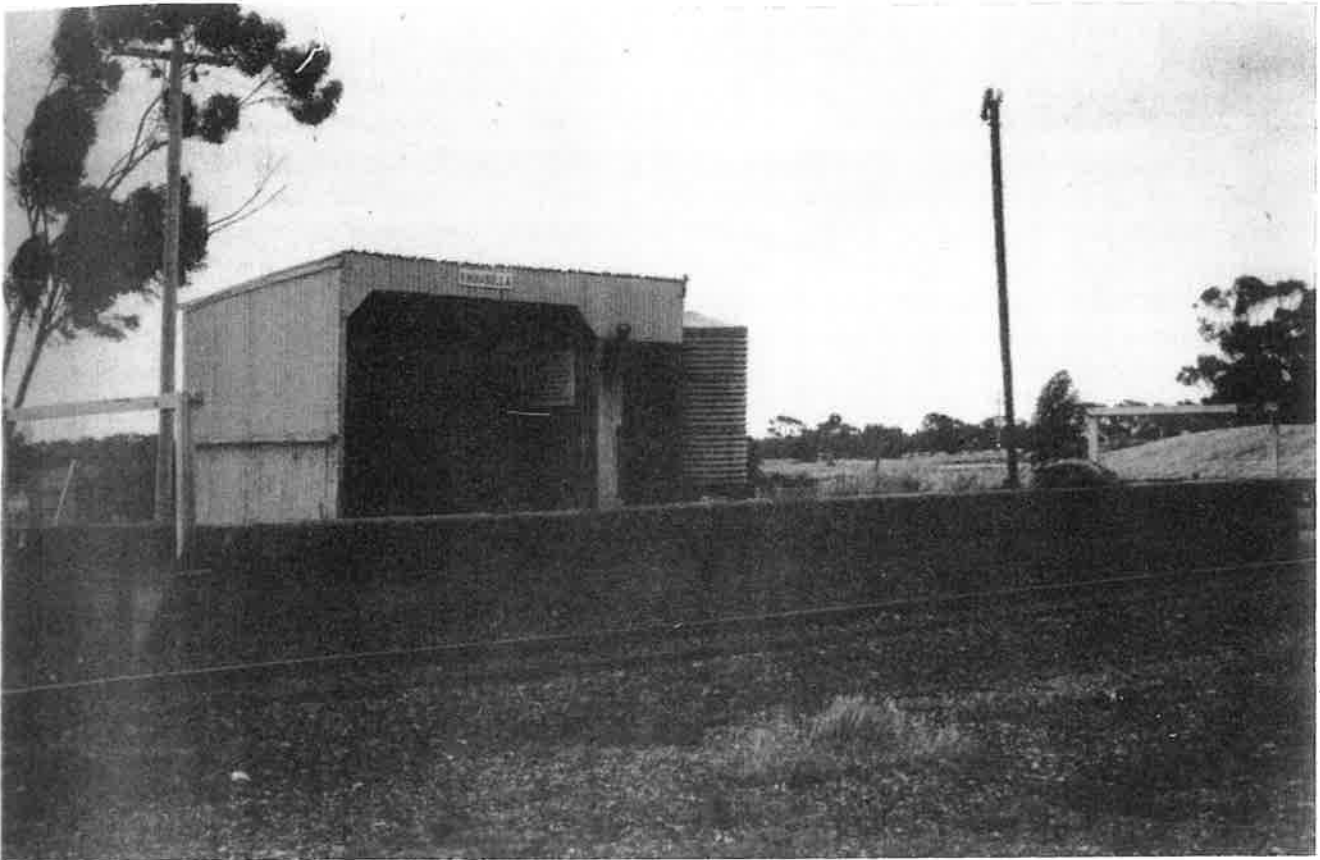
Before the advent of bulk-handling in 1939, wheat was received at Karyrie in bags and stacked on site for later railing out. In 1904/5 a total of 7140 bags were outloaded and in the following year the amount was 2525. Mr Jack Robbins of Kinnabulla provided an agency service from 1922. Amounts received were small with 2604 bags passing over the Shire weighbridge for local stacking in its last year of operation in 1939/40. This total had not varied much during the last decade.

Karyrie closed for traffic of any description on 25th Jan 1954. Shire of Birchip Historic Marker No 8 was placed on Woodland Rd, adjacent to the former station site. Unfortunately the marker has been stolen. Only the painted white post remains to indicate that once Karyrie was official rail station No 204.

## **KINNABULLA:**

Kinnabulla is located at the 224 and a half mile (361km) post and was finally allocated Station No. 205. Initially it was known as Station 109. It is situated 300 feet above sea level. The name adopted by the Railway Department had its origins from earlier incidents of settlement. Stephen Laver and Lee Brown were the licence holders of Block 56A which embraced the greater part of the district to be served by the new rail station. This area is currently identified as the Parish of Kinnabulla in the Shire of Birchip. They sold parts of the Block, which comprised 48 square miles, in 640 acre allotments to new settlers in 1892. It was these new inhabitants that set about clearing the land and bringing it into the state of production which warranted the provision of rail services. In earlier times, many wild cattle roamed the area. The Aborigines would ask Laver to "kill-a-bulla" whenever the mob came within range. This he did and shared the meat with them. The name became corrupted and Laver adopted the name "Kinnabulla" as the brand for his wool bales. When the rail reached the area in 1899 the Railways Department used that name for the station. An alternate name of "Glover" was proposed but not accepted. Glover was the owner of Allotment 12 Kinnabulla at the time. His land was adjacent to the site of the station and the line in its northwards progress to Curyo went through his property. Kinnabulla is nine and a half rail miles from Birchip and thirteen road miles from that centre.



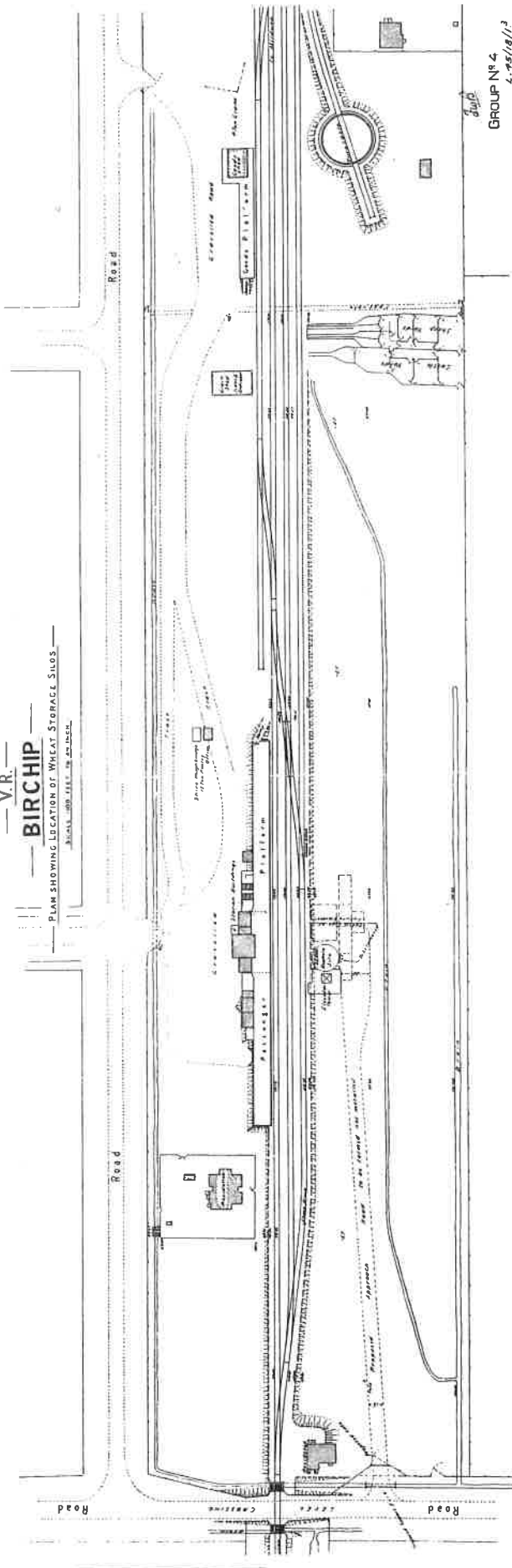


*Kinnabulla station after the platform had been shortened and most of the buildings removed. Photo taken in 1971.*

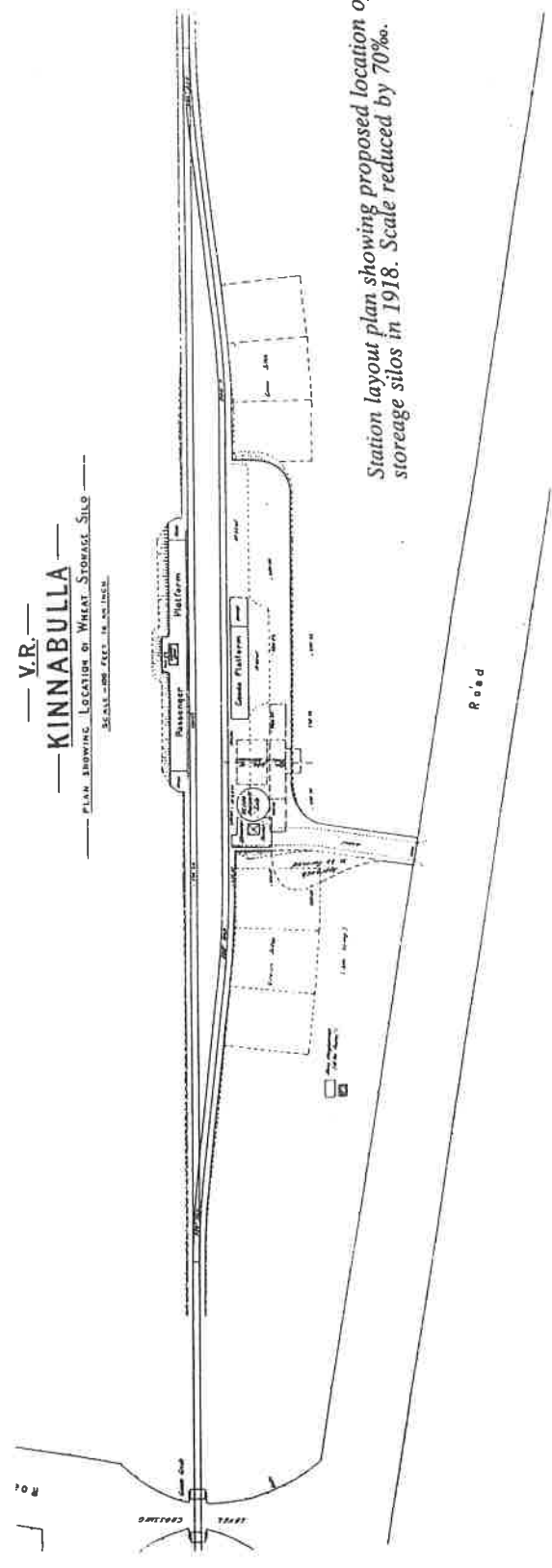
*Kinnabulla silo complex with testing sheds and corner of the weighbridge in the foreground. Taken 20th January, 1993.*



— V.R. —  
 — BIRCHIP —  
 PLAN SHOWING LOCATION OF WHEAT STORAGE SILOS  
 SCALE — 1/8" = 1' — 0"



— V.R. —  
 — KINNABULLA —  
 PLAN SHOWING LOCATION OF WHEAT STORAGE SILO  
 SCALE — 1/8" = 1' — 0"



Station layout plan showing proposed location of wheat storage silos in 1918. Scale reduced by 70%.



*Curyo station. Taken in November, 1971.*

*Wind chute at Light's Hill north of Curyo in 1944. The chutes helped to keep the track clear of sand.*



Kinnabulla was never a staff station. The wife of the leading repairer was initially the Station Mistress. The title was later downgraded to Caretaker. As Station Mistress a small wage was paid whereas the position of Caretaker carried benefits such as free rental and travel concessions but no cash payments. In 1937, the ganger's residence was changed from Karyrie to Kinnabulla and the ganger's wife became the Caretaker. Later on, in 1941, she also became the Post Mistress when the Post Office was transferred there from Gould's (allot 36). A second railway house was provided for a repairer from earliest times. In order to consolidate the maintenance gang in one locality in the Post-WW2 era, a further two departmental residences were located there. One was the former ganger's house at Karyrie. It was a great boost to the local population. At one time 16 children caught the Birchip school bus at the station gate.

In 1899/1900, the first part year of operations, 47 passengers used the train service. This increased with 138 outward journeys in 1900/1 rising to 188 in 1906. This increase continued in later years with 292 passengers in 1910, 517 in 1913/14 and slightly less at 402 in 1919/20. The peak year was 1923 with 718 outward passenger journeys. The advent of cars from this time onwards led to markedly reduced train travellers. In 1934/5 only 68 passengers paid a total of £41/11/4 in fares. By 1959/60 only 12 passengers, 15 in 1962/63 and two in 1965/66 used the service. Not surprisingly the department eventually withdrew the service.

The greatest tonnage of outwards goods freight was grain. It was handled firstly in four bushel bags, in three bushel bags from 1908 and from 1939 onwards wheat was transported in bulk. The earliest data available shows that in 1904/5 25,750 bags were received for railing out. In the following year 12,924 bags were handled. Barley, not produced in commercial quantities until post WW2, was handled in bags until 1964/65. The peak year for wheat tonnages was 1983/84 with 30,216 tonnes, In 1979/80 7,254 tonnes of barley were moved by rail. This is a far cry from the earlier days when the record wheat movement in 1932 was 91549 bags (appx 7629 tons) with no barley receipts recorded. The first OIC of the silos in 1939 was Mr Frank McCredden. Mr Brian Crosbie has been OIC since 1965/66. With his son, Mick, attending to the hoppers and daughter, Patricia, operating the weighbridge, the grain receipt programme at Kinnabulla is a Crosbie family operation. In 1993 permanent bulk-handling facilities have a storage capacity of 23100 tonnes. It is a Fill and Close

station. Although general goods of all descriptions were received the major inwards freight tonnage was superphosphate.

There is no record of livestock being despatched prior to 1907 when sheep trucking facilities were provided. However there were some sheep railed in and apparently off-loaded on the goods platform using a plank or board to unload the top decks as this was the practice with special sheep train loads in much later times. In 1911 revenue from livestock despatched was £6/14/2 and £8/16/9 for inwards movement. During 1929/30, a drought period, 59 trucks of sheep were outloaded and 10 received inwards. During 1934/5 45 trucks of sheep and lambs were despatched and 22 sheep trucks and 9 trucks of horses received. The horses were returning to the area after having been sent away on agistment during the previously dry part of the year. The peak year for sheep/lambs being trucked out was in 1955 when 72 trucks were despatched.

The demise of Kinnabulla as a station for any other purpose than the movement of grain occurred in 1973. Already the sheep trucking out facilities had been removed, station houses had been sold and the station buildings demolished. Even the truncated platform of a short time previously was flattened to ground level. Ganger Alan Neville and his family, the last of the railways families to go, left in May for Heathmont. One repairer's house, the former Karyrie departmental residence, was removed to Birchip and is now the home of Mr Bill Rymer at 8 Fraser St, Birchip. The original repairer's house at Kinnabulla is now the home of Jack and Joan Ensor at 5 Fraser St, Birchip. The departure of the Neville family also meant the simultaneous closing down of the Post Office. Their departmental residence was later demolished. The silos, alone, indicate the site where once a rail community lived, worked and reared their families.

#### **CURYO:**

Curyo, originally known as Curyo North, is located at the 227 and a half mile (368kms) post on the Mildura line. It is sited at 308 feet above sea level. The station was officially opened on 18th Sep 1899 but from June 1899 the line southwards from Curyo was used for traffic. The name Curyo derives from the original squatting run of that name which encompassed the district. The Curyo licence was granted initially in 1848 but was abandoned shortly afterwards. It was taken up again in 1855 and divided into Curyo South, Curyo North and Nallan in 1861. In all of the discussions and inquiries leading up to the construction of the Birchip-Cronomby Tanks extension, the area to be



served by the rail station was referred to as Curyo North. The appendage "North" was dropped by the Railways Department in naming the station. Curyo was officially designated station No 206. It was staffed by railway officers and had train cross-over and traffic control facilities requiring 24 hour manning. Staff were known variously as Operating Porter, Station Assistant, Assistant Station Master, Station Master Class 9 in 1925 and, in 1929, Caretaker. Only one departmental residence was provided with portable homes made available for the "single" member of staff. At different times a repairer attached to either the Watchugga or Kinnabulla gang was stationed at Curyo.

Curyo was surveyed into township allotments and named streets. It had a general store, wineshop, billiard room and post office combined in the one building, public hall and school from its earliest days. Only a few of the surveyed housing allotments were built on. The station and store were the hub of community affairs. The arrival of the train and mail were major events. The collection of goods and the mail provided an opportunity for the interchange of local news and other events of note. Those inclined to more convivial company adjourned to the "shanty". Curyo, a close-knit community, competed in sporting competitions against larger communities with much success. Social and welfare activities were an "all-in-together" affair.

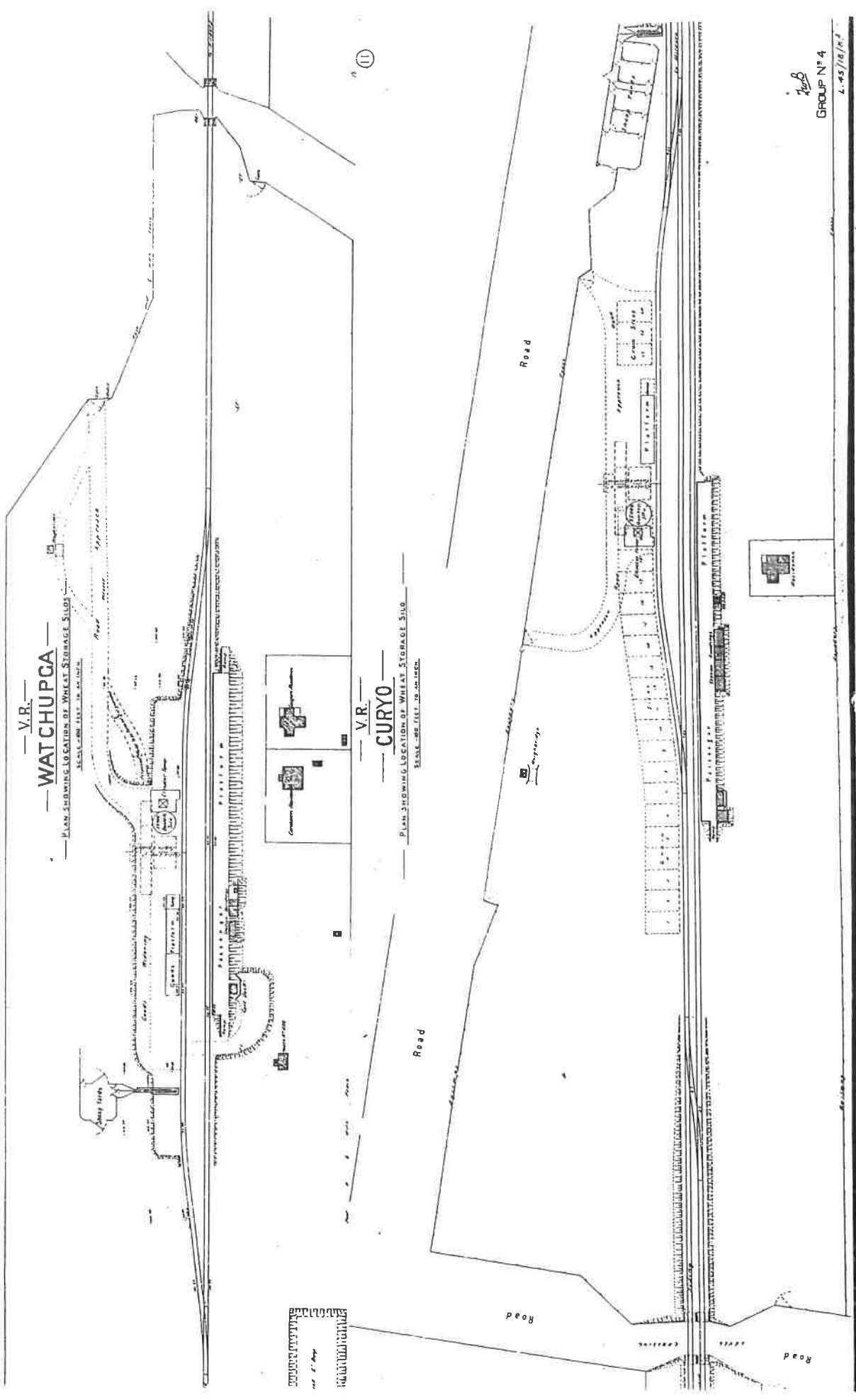
Prior to the coming of the railway, Curyo was a very isolated area. The nearest railhead at Birchip was 17 road miles distant. The roads at that time were mere tracks. The locals immediately embraced the new mode of transport they had worked so hard to get and in the first part year of operations 157 people availed themselves of the convenience. The following year, the first full year of operations, saw 354 train travellers and by 1907/8 the number of commuters rose to 550. This usage pattern continued for some years increasing to 750 in 1910/11. Passenger traffic exceeded 1000 for the first time in 1913/14 and went higher in 1919/20 to reach 1484. The peak years of train travel were 1922/23 when a record 2998 travelled outwards and in the following year when 1927 journeys were made. In 1924/25 1665 passengers paid £354/10/11 in fares. From that point onwards, cars assumed greater prominence as the preferred mode of transport and rail traffic declined. By 1930 numbers had fallen to 556 and continued to fall in 1934/35 when 396 patronised rail. A momentary rise occurred in 1938/39 with 804 commuters. Numbers held more steadily at Curyo than for its neighbouring stations in early post-war years. Four hundred and four persons used train travel in 1952/53. Three years later numbers had

fallen to 169 and a further two years on were reduced to 41. The final year of regular train patronage from Curyo was 1965/66 with 7 hardy souls enjoying the last hurrah. No further passenger trains regularly stopped at Curyo from that time onwards.

Harold Pole of Curyo had a railway career before returning to the family farm in 1951. His last posting was at Curyo as Assistant Station Master when the cost of a second class single fare to Melbourne was £1/19/11. He worked shifts with another person to operate the safe working electric staff system. Later on, when staffing was reduced, Curyo was either switched out or an operator motored down from Woomelang to enable traffic movement to occur. During his period at Curyo, the station lighting was very poor and often the changeover staff was dropped in the act of transfer between driver and station staff. The resultant train stoppage required a "please explain". On one of these occasions, Dave Bruce, the other operator, arrived in his pyjamas, just in time to meet the incoming passenger train. The dropped staff allowed a senior railway official on board the train time to note the unscheduled train stop and catch Dave in his pyjamas. The resultant "blister" did not enhance Dave's career prospects.

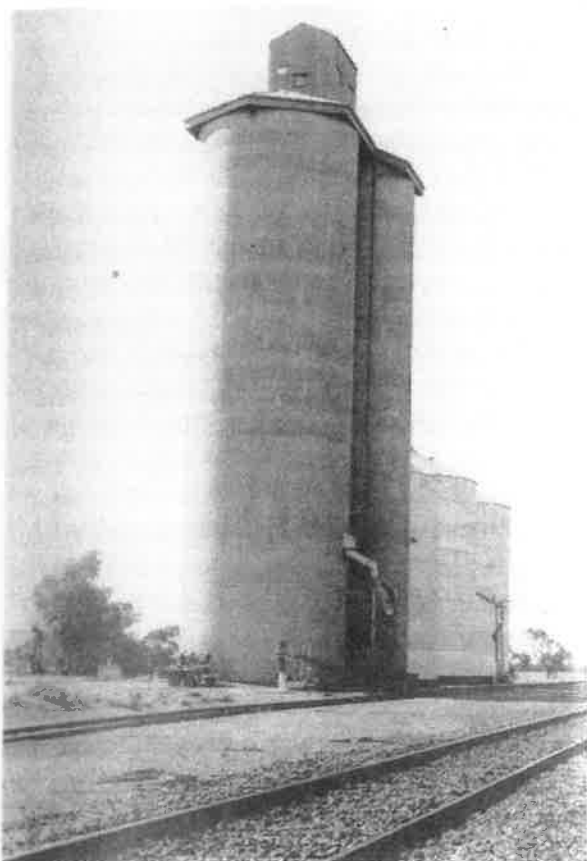
Farming is the economic base of the Curyo district. Wheat was already being grown before the rail reached its present station site. In 1904/5 a total of 34,441 four bushel bags of wheat were despatched from Curyo. In the following year 14202 bags were railed out. From these humble beginnings more land was brought into production, farming methods improved and new wheat varieties introduced. Following the 1914 drought, 1915/16 produced a record State crop leading to 18,461,822 three bushel bags of wheat being carried by the Victorian Railways in the 1916/17 financial year. Of this huge amount, Curyo contributed 41484 bags and in the following year figures rose to 71444 bags being outloaded from that point. Amounts outloaded do not necessarily coincide exactly with production but, in general terms, indicates the level of production. Quantities varied a good deal over the next two decades ranging from a low 20632 bags in 1925/26 to a record 78435 bags in 1937/38. The drought of 1929 has not been included. At times as many as five agents operated in the grain trade at Curyo.

The advent of bulk handling in 1939/40 provided a further impetus. Much later, the introduction of selective chemical sprays for weed control aided increased production. Barley was added to the regular cropping programme immediately Post WW2. Bulk grain facilities



GROUP N<sup>o</sup> 4  
 4-25/18/1918

Station layout plan showing proposed location of wheat storage silos in 1918. Scale reduced by 70%.



Curyo silos with a corner of Curyo Hall visible on the left of the photo. Taken 20th January, 1993.

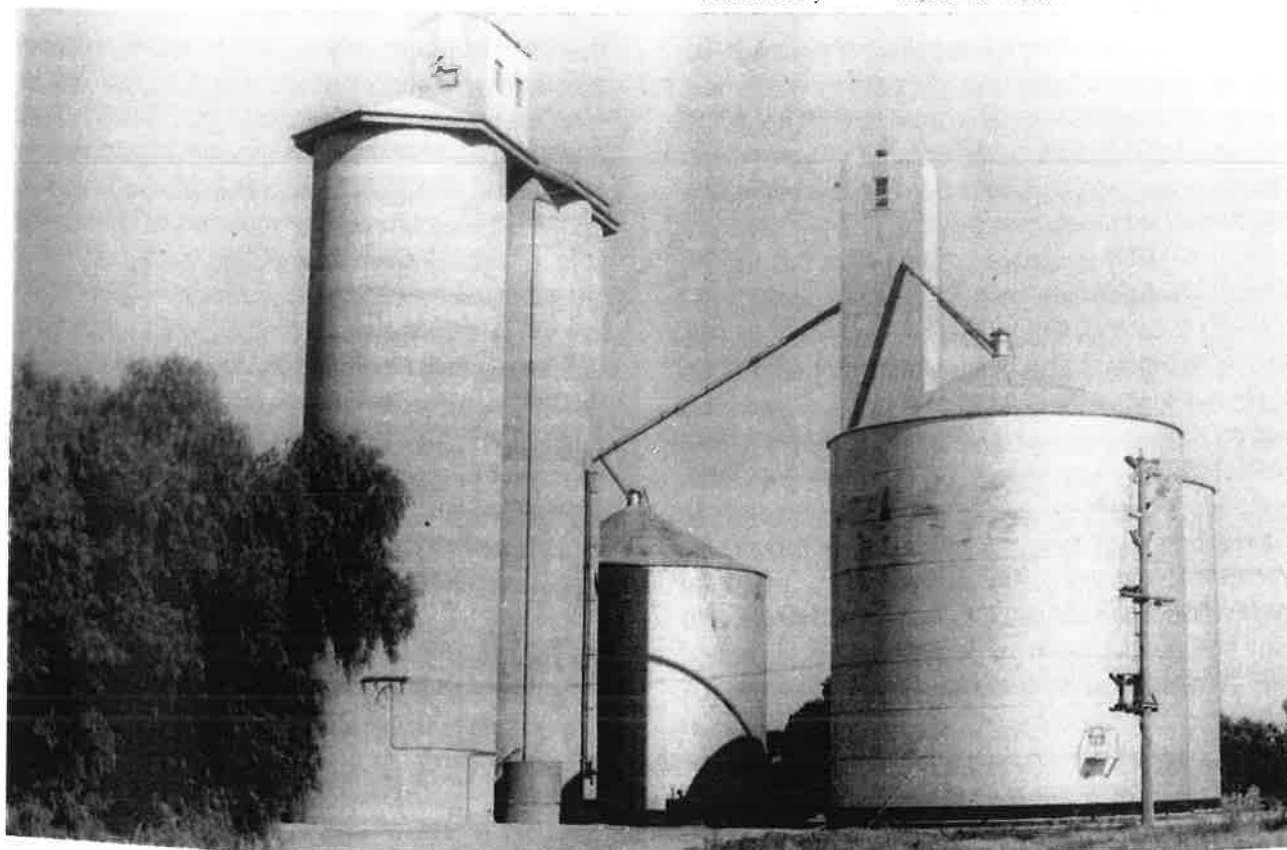


Watchupga station about 1935. The lamp near the station sign in addition to providing station lighting, was used to "flag" down trains during the hours of darkness using a red glass overlap. Flags were used in daylight hours. Kinnabulla had a similar set up.

WOOMELANG  
TO  
WATCHUPGA  
SECOND 2S CLASS  
Woomelang  
Watchupga

16391

Watchupga silo complex in January 1993. Watchupga additionally has a 10,000 tonne bunker.



have been upgraded over time. Today Curyo has a total permanent storage capacity of 7,700 tonnes and a bunker capable of holding 10,000 tonnes of wheat. The record year for receivals for wheat was 1983/84 when 19258 tonnes were received. Barley was not received in bulk at Curyo and that commodity has been delivered to Kinnabulla or Watchupga. With the deregulation of the domestic wheat market in recent years considerable trading of grain is done outside the statutory marketing authorities. Consequently the amounts traded privately are road transported and the railway traffic has been greatly reduced. Mr Charlie Parry was the first OIC Silos. Mr Norm Gibbins was OIC for a long period of time from 1953/54 to 1988/89. He was accorded a public acknowledgment of his services on completion of the first twenty-five years at a function at Curyo on 11th Jan 1979. His daughters, Fay and Kerry, were also on the payroll of the GEB as silo workers at a time when females were generally not employed doing that type of work. Curyo has a 19 tonne weighbridge installed in 1963. Like its neighbouring silos, Curyo is a Fill and Close station. Since the deregulation of the grain trade, the Curyo silo has been let out by the GEB to a local consortium for storage/warehousing of grain.

Although secondary to grain production, livestock products have been an important industry in the Curyo district. Stock outloading facilities were provided for sheep and cattle raling in July 1907. They were in constant usage and upgraded from time to time, until the movement of stock on a farm to market or farm to farm basis, by road transport rendered rail transportation of stock obsolete by the mid-1960's. The earliest records available show that in the year ending June 1911 revenue received from the despatch of livestock totalled £287/6/9. In 1920 77 sheeptrucks were outloaded and 6 received. By 1930/31 the figures were 58 and 15 respectively. In 1934/35 75 trucks of sheep were outloaded and 5 sheep, 3 cattle and 5 horse truckloads were received inwards. Similar numbers were railed in the following years. The movement of horses was due to the dry year and farm workhorses were sent to other areas for agistment, only to return later on when things improved. In 1951/2 68 trucks of sheep/lambs were outloaded and 32 received inwards. Numbers dropped substantially in 1955/56 with 20 trucks outloaded and 26 inwards but increased in 1959/60 to 58 and 17 respectively. The inroads of road transport in 1965/66 reduced total truckings to 9 with five sheep/lambs outloaded, 2 inwards and 2 cattle truckloads received. The rail facility was withdrawn as a result of this irreversible transport trend.

Along with most small rural areas, Curyo has suffered from the ravages of time and change. The station was de-staffed in April 1976, the train changeover loop dismantled in August 1988 and the station platform levelled to the ground in July 1989. The departmental residence was demolished in 1976 and the materials used by Jack and Joan Ensor of Birchip to add to their home, the former Kinnabulla departmental residence. Even the station sign no longer signifies to the traveller where he is presently at. The store was burnt to the ground in 1975. The sealed street winds its way to nowhere. Alone, the public hall with its War Memorial Gate Posts and the rural fire brigade shed complement the silos as silent sentinels of a previously busy and industrious community.

#### **WATCHUPGA:**

Along with other stations on the Birchip-Cronomby Tanks extension, Watchupga was officially opened for traffic on 18th Sep 1899. It was allocated Station No 207. The station, sited 235 miles (378kms) from Melbourne, was poised at 278 feet above sea level. The name of the station selected by the Commissioners derives from an Aboriginal name for a local native shrub more commonly known as Hopbush. The area was settled in the early 1890's. A Reserve for later township development was created in the original survey but was by-passed to the west by the line construction. Later development took place close to the station site on the private property of Mr David Allison, later to become a Member of Parliament. Mr Allison was responsible for much of the development of Watchupga. He built the first store, blacksmith's shop and bank agency. Additionally he provided land for the school, church and hall. Later on, a further grocer's shop and butchery served the community. A brass band added a touch of culture. Over time the commercial enterprises changed hands, alternatively prospered and struggled, to finally close down. Doran's Post Office and Store operated in the family name from 1919 Burnt down in 1950, it was rebuilt on the same site and finally closed in 1972. Adcock's blacksmithing and garage business, once a thriving centre of activity, changed hands only to see the doors locked and barred during the downturn of the 1980's. Today Watchupga's sole commercial activity is a transport and fuel business conducted by Mr Ken McDonald.

Watchupga was never a station staffed by departmental officers. A Caretaker, wife of one of the railway workers, looked after the business of consigning and receiving goods. At one time there were two departmental residences and a portable for single men working in the gang. At different periods,



Watchupga personnel were attached to Watchupga, Woomelang or Kinnabulla gangs. No personnel were stationed at Watchupga after 14th Feb 1970.

Passenger traffic for the period from September 1899 to 30th June 1900 totalled 107 travellers. The first full year of service saw 394 passengers embark for various destinations. By 1907/8 volume had increased substantially to reach 691 outward journeys. This patronage continued to climb and in 1910/11 it reached 900 passengers paying £74 for the privilege of riding the rails. In 1913/14 numbers remained stable with 918 passengers and a slightly lesser number of 878 in 1919/20. Peak numbers were attained in 1922/23 when 1328 people journeyed from Watchupga for other climes. Only slightly less people travelled in the following year with 1202 embarkations recorded. As was the case with all other stations in the area, train travelling gradually gave way to the motor car. In 1934/5 364 patrons stuck to rail travel and numbers increased to 594 in 1936/37. During the 1950's traffic declined with only 92 passengers in 1951/52, 169 in 1955/56, 35 in 59/60 and 14 in 1965/66. This latter year was the last year regular passenger services were availed of from Watchupga.

Prior to the coming of the railways, Watchupga residents mostly used Birchip as their commercial centre. It was a two day expedition to do the round trip. Naturally they were very active in agitating for rail services and brought their farm produce to the railhead as soon as it was opened for traffic. The earliest figures available show that in 1904/5 42,028 bags of wheat were outloaded from the station. In the following year the harvest was much reduced with 20355 bags being railed out. Prior to 1908 wheat bags contained four bushels. Following the major drought of 1914, a record season was experienced in 1915. The data for that harvest was incorporated in the 1915/16 financial year. It showed that 50730 bags were railed from Watchupga. The following two years also produced good crops with 70032 and 74491 bags respectively outloaded. The year 1923/24 attained new heights with 91142 bags railed out. This remained the record for bagged days until 1932/33 when 109921 bags (9160 tons) achieved that distinction.

With the introduction of bulk handling in 1939, a new era commenced for grain production. For all of the reasons outlined for other stations of the area, wheat production also increased in the Watchupga defined silo area. The record wheat tonnages received into the silo system was attained in 1983/84 when 20,008 tonnes was received. Barley, a crop grown with much success in the district, was also received in bulk from

1964/65 onwards. The record receipt for all grades of barley was 14488 tonnes delivered in 1981/82. Mr Harry Adcock was the first silo operator and remained in that position from 1939/40 until 1974/75. At the time of his retirement he was the longest serving OIC in the GEB system. The permanent storage capacity of the silos is 9,100 tonnes with bunker facilities for a further 10,000 tonnes. A 19 tonne weighbridge installed in October 1965 was recently upgraded to 25 tonnes capacity. It is a Fill and Close station.

Livestock figured prominently in farming activities of the area. Sheep outloading facilities were provided in pre-WW1 years. The earliest data available regarding outloadings was in 1907 when revenue received from livestock outloadings was £50/10/9. In the year 1920 56 trucks of sheep were sent to market from there while 6 were received inwards. In 1930/31 a total of 25 sheep trucks were despatched and 5 were received. 1934/35 when 58 truckloads were despatched and 19 received. In that year 12 cattle trucks and one horse truck were also received. Figures many years later showed a remarkable stability. In 1951/52 59 sheep trucks were outloaded and 10 received. From that time onwards a decline consistent with the general shift to road transport for livestock set in. In 1959/60 26 sheep trucks were outloaded and 12 were received. The last figures available show 13 truckloads were despatched in 1965/66. Subsequently the trucking facilities were withdrawn.

As services were discontinued, the facilities were removed or demolished. By the end of the 1980's no sign was to be seen that a rail station had ever been there. In 1993 the rail service provided at Watchupga is limited to the carriage of grain delivered to the Grain Elevators Board. The once busy station area no longer provides a meeting place for the local community awaiting the arrival of passengers, goods and the sorting of mail from distant places. The eagerly awaited sight of belching smoke and hissing steam by past generations, particularly the early settlers of Watchupga, never enters the minds of present day occupants of the district.