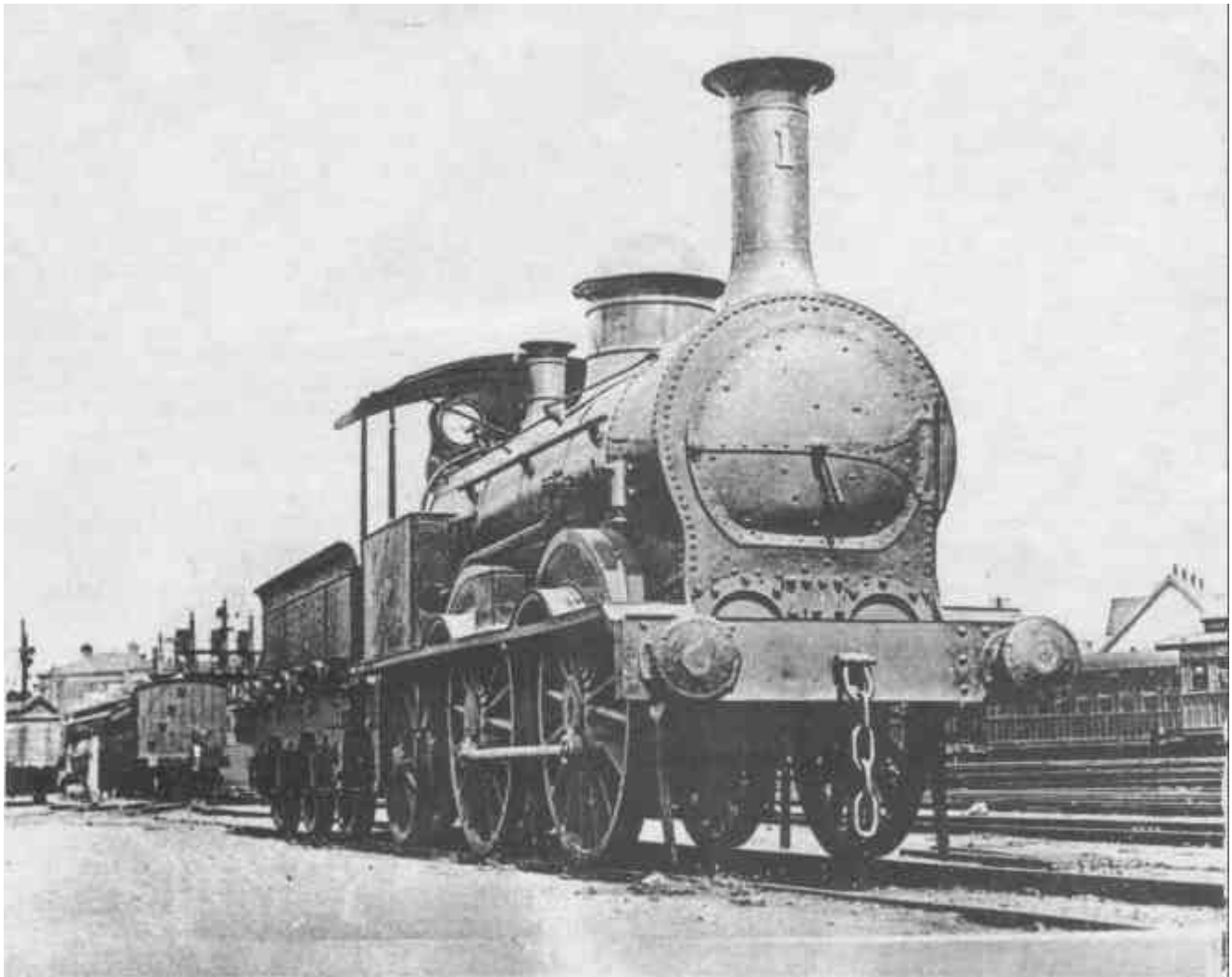


New South Wales Government Railways

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THE INAUGURATION OF RAILWAYS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

It is a common but erroneous belief that the Sydney-Parramatta railway was the first opened for traffic in Australia. It was the first Government railway, but its operation was preceded by the Hobson's Bay Railway Company's line from Melbourne to Sandridge - now Port Melbourne - opened on 13th September, 1854.

The Sydney Railway Company

It was, however, in New South Wales that the first definite steps for the construction of railways were taken. As early as January, 1846, a meeting of leading colonists was held in Sydney to consider the question. A provisional committee was appointed to collect information regarding the building of suggested railways to Goulburn and Windsor, and to Bathurst, if practicable. At a meeting held in the following August the Committee reported favourably on the prospects of a railway to Goulburn, but recommended that no decided steps be taken towards building it until the country had been properly surveyed. They suggested, too, that the Government be applied to for assistance towards the cost of the survey. The Government having agreed to contribute, Mr. Woore was entrusted with the survey, and his plans and report were approved at a meeting held in April, 1848. The Legislative Council, having been petitioned in the matter, passed a series of resolutions in favour of commencing railways in the colony, and of granting financial aid to a company incorporated by an Act of Council.

The prospectus for the projected company of which Sir Charles Cowper was the leading spirit, was issued in November, 1848, and "The Sydney Railway Company" was incorporated by an Act of Parliament assented to on 10th October, 1849, which authorised the Company to build a railway "to commence at or near the City of Sydney -- to the town of Goulburn -- and -- towards Bathurst" but stipulated that work should not commence until £10,000 of capital had been paid into the Treasury.

Originally the Company intended to build the terminal station at the corner of Hay and Elizabeth Streets, and requested the Government to grant about 23 acres for that purpose, and to provide a workshop site and a right-of-way as far as Cleveland Street. Early in 1850 the Government granted 13½ acres, sufficient for the station and the passage of the line only, and to overcome this difficulty the Company in 1853 exchanged 9½ acres north of Devonshire Street for an increased area in the Cleveland Paddocks south of that street, and on which they eventually erected the workshops and the terminal station, which became known as Redfern.

The £10,000 capital had been subscribed and paid into the Treasury on 30th May, 1850, and it was decided to inaugurate work by a ceremony in which the Hon. Mrs. Keith Steward would cut the first sod of the line in the Cleveland Paddock on 3rd July, 1850.

Capital was difficult to obtain, and it was not until 12th March, 1851, that a contract was let to Mr. William Wallis for the construction of a formation about 4½ miles long between the present Croydon and Lidcombe.

Tenders for the remaining sections of the Sydney-Parramatta line were called, but owing to the uncertainty of the labour market and the unstable financial conditions due to the gold discoveries, no eligible offers were received. Mr. Wallis was also in trouble, and although the rates of payment were increased by 30 per cent., and the time for completion of the work lengthened, it became necessary to relieve him of his obligations early in 1851, but work was again started on 9th August, 1852 by Mr. Randle in the Cleveland Paddocks area.

Government assistance was given to the Company early in 1851 when 5 per cent. interest was guaranteed on the first £100,000 capital, but even so, it became extremely difficult to raise and on 14th October, 1852 a letter from the Company was addressed to the Colonial Secretary pointing out that only £24,520.10.0 had been paid in, and only a further £7,700 was in sight. The expenditure had been £20,918.11.5, and after paying for outstanding work only about £5,000 would remain to carry on the work.

Although the original costs for the lines to Parramatta and Liverpool were estimated in 1849 at £56,356.9.9 this figure in October, 1852 was £188,420 for a single and £218,420 for a double line.

To assist the Company, the Government in November, 1853, made a loan of £150,000 available in the proportion of £100,000 paid up capital on certain conditions, one being that the Government should have the right to nominate three Directors.

By January, 1854 it was considered that a sum of £320,000 in addition to £69,000 for a branch to Darling Harbour would be required, and as only £250,000 was available the Company decided to raise a further £100,000 capital, and to apply for another £150,000 of Government loan.

On 2nd December, 1854, an Act was assented to which restricted the activities of the Sydney Railway Company to the section between Sydney and Parramatta; authorised the appointment of three Commissioners for future railway construction and operation under Government ownership, and if thought desirable, to purchase the railways and other works of the Sydney Railway Company and the Hunter River Company.

Following on this the Sydney Railway Company called an extraordinary meeting of shareholders for the 3rd January, 1855 "-- for the purpose of considering the expediency of dissolving the company and selling the railway and works to Her Majesty's Government --". At this meeting the resolution was carried unanimously and the final phase of the Company's history was the transfer of its property to the Government on 3rd September, 1855. At this time there was £240,000 public money and £161,245 paid up capital invested, and it was estimated that a further £100,000 would be needed to complete the works.

The line to Parramatta station (which was near the level crossing across Woodville Road) was opened on 26th September, 1855. The present station serving Parramatta was not opened until 4th July, 1860, when the length from Parramatta junction (Granville) to Blacktown was opened.

The Hunter River Railway Company

Although the Sydney Railway Company had been battling against adverse circumstances since 1846, a group of persons considered that a railway between Newcastle and the interior would be a paying proposition, and on 20th April, 1853, a meeting was held in Newcastle to consider the question, and a Provisional Committee appointed. At this meeting it was resolved to ask for the same financial aid from the Government as had been granted to the Sydney Railway Company, viz. a guarantee of 5 per cent. interest on capital subscribed, and grant of sites for terminal and stations.

An act authorising the Company to build from "-- in or near Newcastle terminating in or near East Maitland or West Maitland -- and beyond" was assented to on 18th October, 1853 and on the 8th November the Government guaranteed interest at 4 per cent per annum on £100,000 capital.

A grant of 30 acres at Bullock Island was made to the Company and on 31st October, 1854, a tender for the construction of the line from Newcastle (Merewether Street) to Hexham for £70,527 was accepted. However, only £54,337 capital had been paid in and the Company then availed itself of the clause in the 1854 Act to pass over its works and liabilities to the Government, the transfer taking place on the 30th July, 1855, at which time it was considered that a further £250,000 would be needed to complete the line to Maitland (Victoria Street).

on 21st August, 1855 a tender for the Hexham-Maitland section was accepted, the cost being £76,240.

The line was opened on the 30th March, 1857, but was at first not altogether successful, as both termini were some distance from settlements and it became desirable to extend the lines, that into Newcastle being opened on the 19th March 1858, and into West Maitland on 27th July, 1858.