



Read below as Bob Newham, Loco Division Passenger Organiser, explores some of the incredible history behind rail in New South Wales. As you will discover, the month of October has many stories to tell...

October 1888

The Helensburgh Tunnels refer to a series of 7, now abandoned, tunnels between Waterfall and Otford. These tunnels were built between 1884 and 1886 (opened in **October 1888**) and were part of the original alignment of the rail line. They were abandoned by 1920 when the new line was built.

The main problem was the 1550 m long Otford Tunnel, which took the railway through Bald Hill from the coast at Stanwell Park to the Hacking River valley. The steep grade and tight clearances meant that soot, smoke and heat could become unbearable, especially when a south-easterly wind blew into the southern portal or when a train stalled in the tunnel.

A Mr B Chamberlain wrote about a stalled passenger train in 1890:

Even with the windows closed, the carriages were filled with smoke and steam, women fainted and children screamed until the train backed down to Stanwell Park, and was finally staged up to Otford in two trips.

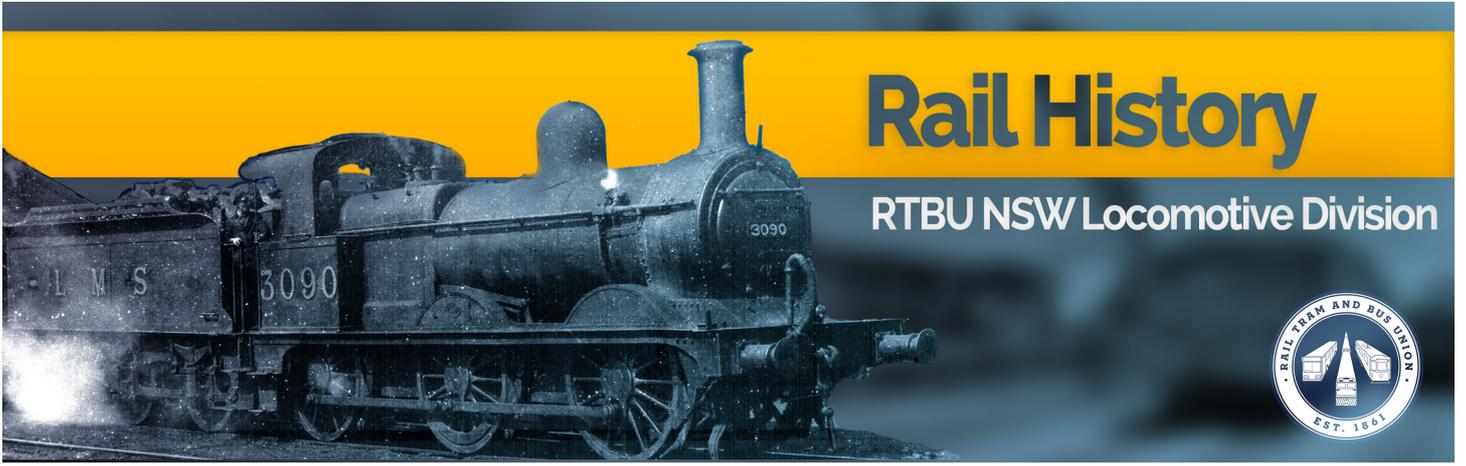
Regarding the crew, Chamberlain wrote:

While the passenger with closed windows in an up train had an unpleasant journey, the unfortunate enginemen underwent a shocking ordeal. On tender engines both knelt on the footplate, coats over heads, to breathe the air coming from under the engine, the apron plate being raised for this purpose. Though the air was hot from passing around or through the ash pan, it was nonetheless welcome.

Attempts were made to overcome the problem with a ventilation shaft and chimney in the early 1890s and a blower system installed in 1909.

The full list of the Helensburgh Tunnels is:

- Waterfall Tunnel (221 metres long, modified in 1915 to a cutting during track duplication)



- Cawley Tunnel (381 metres long, closed January 1914)
- Helensburgh Tunnel (80 metres long, closed May 1915)
- Metropolitan Tunnel (682 yards (624 m) long, closed May 1915)
- Lilyvale No. 1 Tunnel (80 metres long, closed May 1915)
- Lilyvale No. 2 Tunnel (322 metres long, closed May 1915)
- Otford Tunnel (1,694 yards (1,549 m) long, closed October 1920)

The Clifton Tunnel is an eighth tunnel in this section and built around the same time as the Helensburgh Tunnels. Unlike the others it remains in use and is the only single track section between Sydney and Unanderra.

The Metropolitan Tunnel features the first Helensburgh railway station at its northern end. The station was opened on 1 January 1889 and closed in 1915 when a new station was built on the current line.

In May 1928, the colliery completed the conversion of the Metropolitan tunnel to a reservoir by plugging the southern end with concrete and used by the Metropolitan Colliery as a reservoir until town water was connected. It now features a glow worm population.



Original Helensburgh Station



As it looks today

October 1970

The 48 Class were ordered to commence the conversion of branch lines to diesel traction with 165 in service by **October 1970**. There were four versions:

- Mark 1: 4801 – 4845
- Mark 2: 4846 – 4885
- Mark 3: 4886 - 48125
- Mark 4: 48126 – 48165

The Mark 1s and Mark 2s can be distinguished from the others by their fuel tank, which incorporates the brake reservoir tanks on either side.

As well as branch lines they operated both main line and metropolitan services on every line in the state. Aside from a couple written off after accidents in the mid-1980s, withdrawals didn't commence in earnest until August 1994. In December



1994 the first Mark 1s were sold. By June 1997 FreightCorp's fleet was down to 120 units.

Others have been withdrawn since and as at January 2014, 66 remained in service primarily with Pacific National. GrainCorp, Greentrains, Junee Railway Workshop and Sydney Trains also operate some.



October 1985

The North Coast Mail was a passenger train that ran from Sydney via the North Coast line to Grafton until **October 1985**.

It ran to Murwillumbah until April 1973 and was then replaced by the *Gold Coast Motorail* north of Grafton. It was the last New South Wales train to convey a travelling post office (where the mail was sorted on route) and as such had a higher



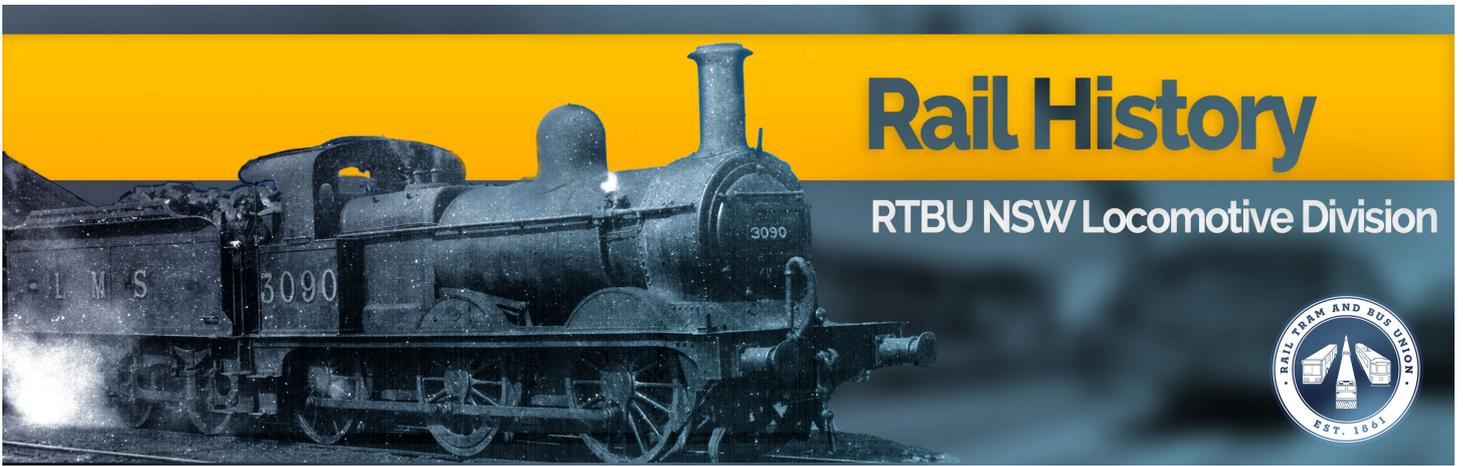
priority than ordinary passenger trains, second only to an Express. The mail trains maintained a link to the outside world for many country towns across NSW.



October 2007

The 620/720 class railcars were an evolution of the 600/700 railcars that had been built in 1949/50. Like their predecessors they were built with an aluminium body on a steel frame at the New South Wales Government Railways' Chullora Railway Workshops.

The first five sets were ordered to operate suburban services out of Newcastle and were fitted with economy class seats throughout. The next six were constructed with both first and economy class accommodation to operate longer services out of Newcastle and between Liverpool and Campbelltown until the latter section was electrified in 1968. The remaining seven were constructed to operate regional services including:



- Sydney Central to Lithgow via Goulburn and Cowra
- Grafton to Casino
- Orange to Mudgee via Lithgow
- Dubbo based services
- Casino to Murwillumbah

From the mid-1970s one was attached to the DEB set operating the *Canberra Monaro Express* during times of heavy demand. In late 1984, two were transferred to Wollongong from Lithgow joining three sets that had been there for many years.

It was planned that all would be replaced by the 15 Endeavour railcars in 1994 but after it was decided to divert some of these to Main South line services, seven were retained, all in Newcastle. These were all overhauled by Rail Services Australia, Chullora in 1999 including a repaint into CityRail livery and fluorescent lights fitted.

Following the delivery of the Hunter railcars all were withdrawn in 2007, with the last service running on **29 October 2007** from Newcastle to Paterson and return.

