There were 191 letter carriers (postmen) in New South Wales, plus 118 temporary letter carriers and 39 mail boys. Some of the temporaries were employed part-time to deliver letters in small country towns. During the year two letter carriers were dismissed for delaying the delivery of letters.
Illustrated Sydney News, *Christmas Supplement 1887.*

CHAPTER 5

DISTANCE

IN ITS CENTENNIAL SUPPLEMENT, the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote: 'In nothing has the Colony made a greater progress than in the matter of communication'. Steamships and trains had transformed travel in the last fifty years; steamships now sailed around the coast and carried travellers to England in thirty days. Once the voyage home had taken more than one hundred days; now people could travel to Europe and America and be back in Sydney almost without being missed. What had been an ordeal under sail was a pleasure trip in the new fast, reliable and well-appointed mail steamers.

These carvings on the new wing of the Sydney Post Office were criticised as being too informal and commonplace. Some critics said that noble classical figures were a more appropriate decoration for the building. The classical head at the top of the arch was acceptable to traditionalists; the scene of a woman receiving a letter was not. James Barnet, the colonial architect, planned these naturalistic panels; the sculptor was Tommaso Sani. Illustrated Sydney News, *15 June 1886.*

Railways stretched across the land, linking Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. A letter posted in Melbourne on Monday was delivered in Sydney and Adelaide on Tuesday, in Brisbane and Hobart on Wednesday. Trains on the main lines carried mail sorters in a special van and they had the letters ready for distribution by the time the train arrived. In the capital cities there were three or four mail deliveries a day and even more collections from letter boxes. In Sydney, the first mail delivery at 8 am took the mail which had been brought from the country by the overnight trains. In Melbourne the second delivery at 11 am took the mail from Adelaide and the western districts that had arrived at 9.45 am; the third delivery at 12.30 pm took Sydney's mail that had arrived at 11.15 am.

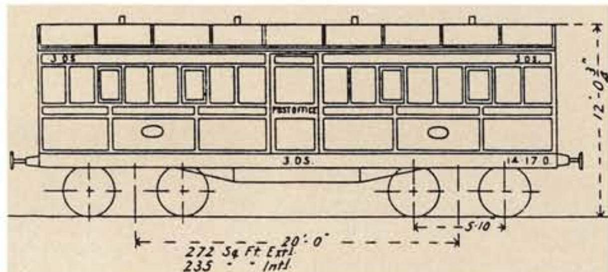
The linking of the four capitals had only just been completed. The first train ran between Sydney and Brisbane on 16 January. Sydney and Melbourne had been connected in 1883; Melbourne and Adelaide in 1887. Passengers from Sydney to Brisbane had to change trains twice, at the Hawkesbury because the bridge was not yet complete and at Wallangarra on the border because the Queensland railways were narrow gauge. With the completion of the intercolonial railways, the mail steamer from England unloaded the mail at Adelaide and it went by rail to the east, and so arrived a few days earlier.

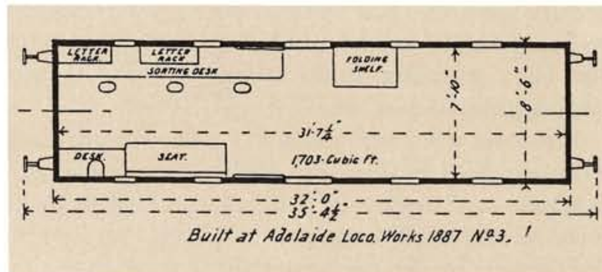
Even one day saved was worth having. Much of the business with Britain was done by cable, but the actual transfer of funds was still made by cheque and bills of exchange carried in the mail. While they were on the water, they were not

earning interest. The loss of a day in the mail could be calculated in pounds, shillings and pence. That was one reason why the colonies were prepared to spend heavily to improve the service. The arrival of the mail was a busy day for business and it was important to know when this day would be. At the Melbourne General Post Office different flags were flown to indicate that the steamer was at King George Sound in Western Australia, at Glenelg near Adelaide, then mail in the office and mail ready for delivery.

In February a new, faster, more regular mail service with Britain began. Previously New South Wales and Victoria had paid subsidies to the steamship companies for carrying the mail and had charged other colonies for using the service. Now the colonies combined with Britain to organise and subsidise a weekly mail service run by the two steamship companies, P & O and Orient, each company providing a ship a fortnight and undertaking to get the mail from Adelaide to Italy (from where it went by rail) in thirty-two days. On the same day every week, mail was despatched for London. The arrival of the mail from London was not so predictable. On eight occasions in the eleven months from February the mail ships were late (the longest delay was five days, the shortest ten minutes); most times they were early.

The new service, to which the colonies contributed subsidies according to population, was called the Federal Mail Service to mark the growing interest in a federal union. While colonial governments had bickered, ministers in charge of posts and telegraphs had had to reach agreement to provide for mail services between the colonies and overseas. Even so, Queensland refused to join the service. It had its own monthly mail service through Torres Strait, in order to throw off its dependency on the south and to be the first port of call and not the last on the route via Melbourne. But the regularity and speed of the southern service made it





A travelling mail-sorting van. Mail steamers unloaded the British mail at Glenelg, a seaside resort near Adelaide. The rails down the main street of Glenelg were the first in an almost continuous line to Brisbane. At Adelaide the mail was transferred to the Melbourne Express and during the journey the Victorian mail was sorted in the van built in 1887 for this service.

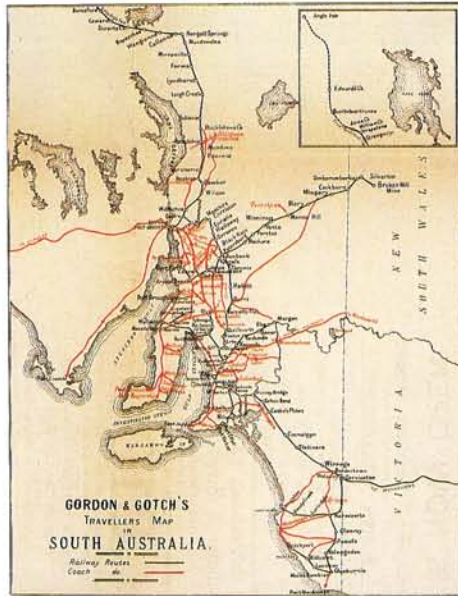
RAILWAY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION ARCHIVES, WINDSOR RAILWAY STATION

Near Heidelberg, *by Arthur Streeton. In the summer Streeton set up an artists' camp at Heidelberg near Melbourne. He and his friends chose everyday subjects, painted in the open air, and tried to capture the particular quality of Australian colour and light. They were less interested than earlier romantic painters in seeking out remote, 'sublime' landscapes of mountains and waterfalls. Streeton's skill in rendering distance is evident in this painting of the Dandenong Ranges from across the rural Yarra valley. Oil, 1890.*

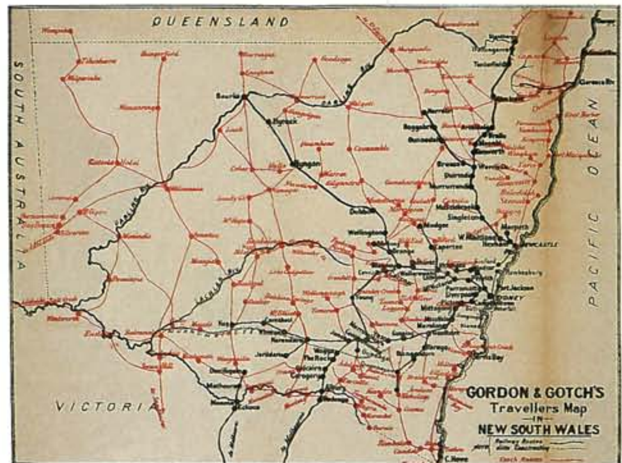
NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

attractive even to Queenslanders. In 1888 more mail went south than north, and Queensland discovered that it was cheaper to join the scheme.

The men and women of the gold-rush generation who had seen the changes brought by steam to transport on land and sea marvelled at how distance had been conquered. Much of settled Australia still lay beyond reach of the railways, but in 1888 while the boom lasted there were grand plans to build more railways. The people of 1888 also did not think of themselves as living on part of a vast continent: they belonged to one of the Australian colonies, not to Australia. The colonies had separate histories of development and still largely separate economies. Each colony faced the sea and its economic life depended upon the carriage of goods into the interior and of wool, minerals and wheat to the coast. Since the good land gave way to desert four or five hundred kilometres from the coast, the problem of transport was manageable. Few people brooded about the dead heart of the continent. The new artists such as Streeton and Roberts set up their easels on the outskirts of Melbourne and on bayside beaches.



In South Australia, nearly everyone lived within a day's journey of Adelaide, and the wheatfields and mines were close to coastal cities. By contrast, Queensland's distances were vast; a steamer took five days to go from Brisbane to Cairns. Routes travelled by horses delivering mail were almost three times as long as the coach routes. Australasian ABC guide, *1888*.
LA TROBE LIBRARY



Victoria had a comprehensive rail network, the only one that paid its way. In New South Wales the north and south coastal regions were well served by railways, coaches and coastal steamers. Not marked here are the routes of packhorses that carried mail to places in the interior. Australasian ABC guide, *1888*.
LA TROBE LIBRARY

STEAMSHIPS AND RAILWAYS

When we ponder the map of Australia and measure its distances, we think of the sea merely as the edge of the continent. If we are to understand transport in the nineteenth century, we must think of the sea not as a border but as a ring road. The service that the sea gave was another reason why distance was not considered a severe problem and why New Zealand, washed by the same sea, seemed a natural member of an Australasian group of colonies. Sea transport was very cheap. A tonne of flour was carried 640 kilometres around the coast for 5s; it cost 27s to move it the same distance by railway. People moving goods always sent them to the nearest port. Every inlet that gave some shelter to shipping had been used as a port.

Railways had been built inland from some ports other than the capital cities. Only in Victoria did every railway on its completion connect with the capital. In the other colonies the railways were built as separate lines because the first priority was to connect the interior with the nearest seaport. In Queensland, Western

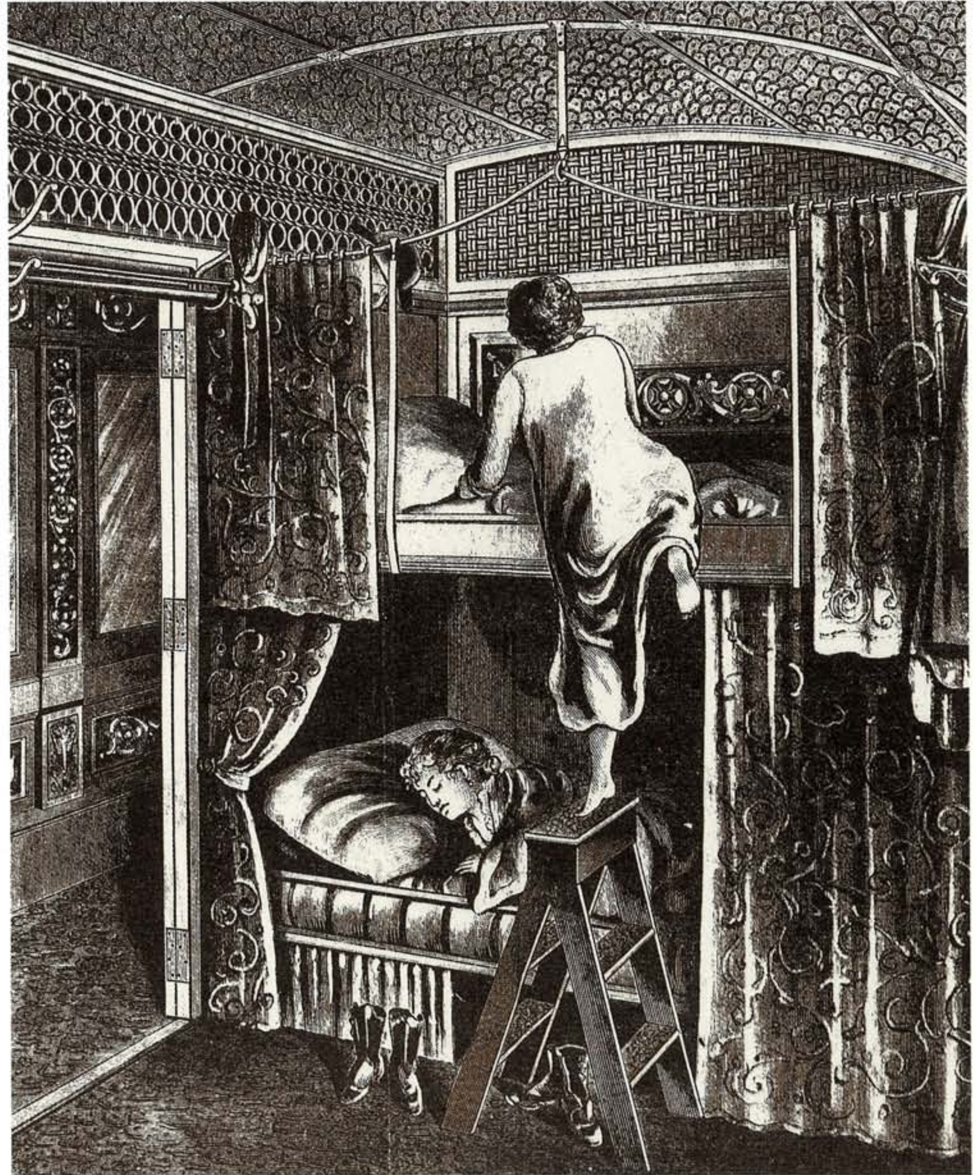
Australia and Tasmania, separate lines still existed. In Queensland there were seven separate systems; in Western Australia two, terminating at Fremantle and at Geraldton; in Tasmania two, the Launceston–Hobart line and its branches and the private line between Emu Bay and Mount Bischoff. In Queensland a coastal line north from Brisbane was being built to connect with the line inland from Bundaberg, but this reduction in the number of systems was offset by new lines being built from Bowen inland and from Normanton to the new mining town of Croydon. In South Australia the lines from eight sea ports were now united in one system, though not a completely unified one because in the north and southeast the lines were narrow-gauge and in the centre broad-gauge. Wheat, a heavy product, was still exported from the nearest port. Port Pirie, not Port Adelaide, was the port for the boom town of Broken Hill, which the railway reached in June. Passengers, mails and goods imported through Adelaide were the chief freight on the new connecting lines. This took some business away from the coastal steamers.

New South Wales before 1888 had two railway systems, terminating at Sydney and Newcastle. Between the two ports lay the busiest coastal steamship route in the continent. Two companies ran ships each way six nights a week. Passengers heading north on the Newcastle railway left Sydney late in the evening, arrived in Newcastle early next morning and transferred to the train. On 16 January Newcastle was connected to Sydney by rail, built not chiefly to serve Newcastle but to form part of a through route to Brisbane. When the railway management announced its plans for running the railway, Newcastle was up in arms. The through trains were not even to stop at Newcastle, which was now at the end of a short spur line, and worse, lower rates were fixed for through traffic, so that goods and passengers paid no more to begin and end their journey at Sydney than at Newcastle.

Mass meetings in Newcastle denounced the Sydney centralisers who wanted to make the capital the mouth of a great octopus and who were wasting taxpayers' money on centennial festivities for Sydney only. A Decentralisation League was formed and support sought from other towns and districts with grievances against Sydney. The league scared the government into allowing the through trains to call at Newcastle. The special rates remained. The steamers changed their timetable to fit in with the new train service north and lowered their fares, but could not compete with the through passenger trade. Since it cost the same to go north from Newcastle as from Sydney, the steamers would have had to charge nothing to entice people to take the first part of the journey by sea as they had done previously.

The steamers also lost some local passenger traffic between Newcastle and Sydney. The railways set a lower-than-normal fare for this journey too. The steamers were still cheaper, but rail was quicker and less likely to make patrons sick. Share prices of steamship companies dropped. Worse was feared when the Hawkesbury bridge opened and the railway could better handle freight. If too much wool was diverted to Sydney, Newcastle would lose the direct export trade it had recently established. Would the Sydney centralisers fix a special rate on coal so that business would be taken from the Newcastle wharves? The railways could afford to offer low rates to secure business from their rivals. The Newcastle steamship companies were small, serving only that portion of the coast. They were the first to experience the reserve power of the railways.

On longer trips the railways could not hope to compete with ships for freight. The new intercolonial railways carried little freight apart from the mails. Steamships took Newcastle coal all around the coast, where the largest buyers were the railways. Flour and horse fodder from South Australia and Victoria went north to New South Wales and Queensland by sea, and sugar and bananas were shipped



The New South Wales railways were the first to use sleeping cars, from Sydney to Bourke and Hay. They were Pullman cars on the American model: open saloon carriages with no compartments. At night the seats were converted into a row of beds. An upper row of beds was lowered from the ceiling. Curtains shielded the sleepers from the central aisle. Passengers who wanted to undress did so on the bed. They paid less for an upper bunk. Sleepers of this sort were used on the express trains to Melbourne and Brisbane. On the Adelaide–Melbourne express passengers had separate compartments. A long bench sofa ran across the train; at night the seat became a lower bunk and the back swung up to make the upper bunk. This was also an American design, but it was used more in Europe than America. It gave more privacy than the Pullman and became the standard Australian sleeper. The first sleepers on the Melbourne–Adelaide trains were imported from the USA; this illustration shows one of the 'boudoirs' as supplied by the manufacturers Mann Boudoir Car Co, New York. SA PP 4, 1884, paper 230, plate no 6.

south. The companies that ran the intercolonial steamships were the giants of Australian business at a time when few enterprises extended beyond one colony. They were periodically engaged in bitter conflict with each other and with the men they employed—officers, seamen and wharfies. Competition between the companies helped to keep rates and wages low. During one rate war, fares dropped so far that it was said to be no more expensive to live permanently on a coastal steamer than in a cheap boarding house on shore.

Though steamship rates were far lower than railway rates, the railways were competing successfully in one area—the intercolonial passenger trade—where they could offer a quicker and smoother journey. The steamer took two days to travel from Sydney to Melbourne and somewhat less to Brisbane and for the Melbourne–Adelaide run. The train took only seventeen to eighteen hours for Sydney–Melbourne and Melbourne–Adelaide trips. On the Sydney–Brisbane journey, the train had an advantage of only a few hours over the steamer because

the line went so far inland. Though the fares were twice as high, twice as many first-class passengers went by train between Sydney and Melbourne as by sea. Steamers still carried more people overall because what they lost in the saloon they made up in the steerage. The Sydney–Melbourne steerage fare cost £1, one-third of the second-class rail fare. This was how working people and their families travelled between colonies.

In the far interior, trains and boats were also competing for business. The cheapest way to market for wool grown in western New South Wales was by paddle-steamers pulling barges along the Darling, Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers. The wool was taken to Echuca and then by rail to Melbourne, or to Morgan or Goolwa in South Australia and then by rail to the sea. Sydney merchants and the New South Wales government were dismayed at this loss of business: in the 1870s half the New South Wales wool clip had travelled by river to the other colonies. To capture western wool, the New South Wales government had built two long railways, to Hay on the Murrumbidgee (1882) and to Bourke on the Darling (1885), and set special low rates for carrying wool to Sydney.

The river trade faltered, and there was a clear decline in the Darling trade down to South Australia. Gradually the proportion of wool retained in New South Wales rose. The rivers were still cheaper; but in the bad seasons of the mid-1880s, the period when the rivers were open for navigation was much shorter than usual. A steamer carrying building materials for a Bourke hotel left Morgan in May 1883; when it arrived more than three years later the hotel had been built with materials brought by train. Even at the best of times navigation was difficult on the rivers and insurance high. Captains had to watch for snags, juggle their barges around tight corners, charge small sandbanks and use the boat's engine and a rope around a tree to haul themselves across big ones.

Where there were no rivers, trains were supreme. When they arrived, bullock wagons and coaches did not stay to fight, but retreated immediately. Trains lowered the costs to pastoralists on the carriage of wool and fencing wire, and greatly reduced the cost of living for everyone since food and other provisions could be brought cheaply from the coast. On a journey through western Queensland in 1887 a commercial traveller noted that at Cloncurry, 540 kilometres from the railhead, a two-pound (0.9-kilogram) loaf of bread cost 1s; at Boulia after another 380 kilometres it cost 2s; at Brisbane it was 4d. It was this soaring of costs with bullock wagon transport that the railways halted. In some areas the arrival of the railway led to pastoral land being converted into wheat growing and dairying, which were both impossible on a large scale when bullock wagons were the only means of transport.

Trains enabled country people to travel to the city more readily, but train travel was not cheap. A journey from Yongala to Adelaide (250 kilometres) and return cost £1 5s in the second class. The Stagg family, desperately poor farmers, were prepared to pay this even though the returns on one year's wheat crop amounted to only £80. In three years they made four journeys. Mother and daughter went to attend another daughter's wedding, father went twice, to see a doctor and to raise money to save the farm, and the eldest son went to visit his sister and grandparents. Farmers and storekeepers travelled to town for business and pleasure; the cost would have put the journey beyond the means of many working people in the country.

Colonial governments were under constant pressure to provide cheap fares or free passes. They struck special excursion rates for trips to a show, races or sports meetings, and gave free passes to the city unemployed to look for work in the country. Special rates were offered to sporting teams, Volunteer militiamen,

Top.
ss Cheviot.
Bottom.
ss Gabo and Buninyong.
As trains began to compete for first-class passengers, the coastal steamers became larger and more luxurious. In older steamers such as the Cheviot, *passengers were accommodated in one deck, the first below the main deck. A central saloon was lit by a skylight, with a common table at which the captain presided, passengers being considered his guests. The cabins opened off the saloon, the only public room. In some newer ships, a saloon ran across the ship and had a number of tables so that small parties and families could eat in private. The sideboards of the* Gabo and Buninyong *were described as the most magnificent afloat.* Handbook of Wm Howard Smith and Sons Line of Intercolonial Steamers, *Sydney 1883.*
CURRY COLLECTION, LA TROBE LIBRARY

The observatories signalled the time to shipping by means of a time ball, which was dropped down a staff at the same hour each day. The ball atop the Newcastle customs house was dropped automatically by telegraph from the Sydney observatory, at 1 pm Sydney time. As it fell, it sent an impulse back down the line to Sydney so that the exact time of its falling could be recorded at the observatory. If time balls fell at other than the exact time named, the error was announced in the next day's newspapers or signalled from the flagstaff. Town and Country Journal, *4 Nov 1876.*

soldiers, members of friendly societies, schoolchildren, working people, and in Victoria to working women earning less than £65 per year.

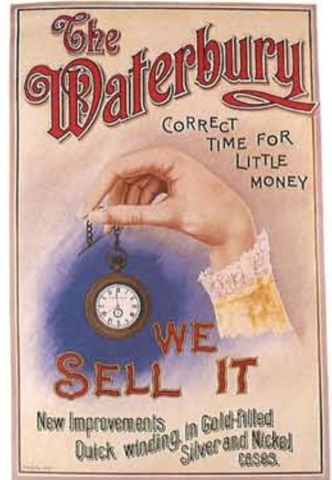
Railways ran to precise timetables over long distances. To make the reading of timetables easier and the running of trains safer, time had to be the same all along the line. This was 'railway time', which could differ substantially from the various local times (time as measured by the sun). Each colonial railway kept to the time of its capital city, except in Queensland where each separate system kept the local time of its coastal terminus. Time in the capitals was determined by the observatories that had been established chiefly to provide exact time for shipping. Captains used the observatory time signals to check or 'rate' their chronometers, the clocks they used to find their longitude at sea. The times in the capital cities were their local times, and even the eastern capitals differed from each other. At noon in Sydney, it was 12.07 pm in Brisbane, 11.44 am in Hobart, 11.35 am in Melbourne.

The city observatories distributed time signals by telegraph to post and telegraph offices and railway stations. In Melbourne, where the telegraph time signal network was the most extensive, the suburban railway clocks were automatically adjusted by hourly time signals from the observatory. When the 10 am train from South Yarra carried John Hughes off to keep his office in the city, it was 10 am precisely. The clock at the observatory, set by the stars, controlled the South Yarra railway clock with no human intervention.

Beyond the capital cities, time was kept less precisely. In larger towns and suburbs, households could set their kitchen clocks, if they had them, by a post office or town hall clock that sometimes had a bell or chimes. The people of Bowen in Queensland were anxiously awaiting the installation of a public clock, but in the meantime the council authorised the firing of a cannon precisely at one o'clock each Saturday. Even when a clock was installed, however, it was apt to break down. The post office clock at Donald, in Victoria, remained silent for most of the year until a repairer was obtained, while in Coleraine the chronic inaccuracy of the post office clock led to a legal dispute when a horse sale began before its advertised time. 'It is difficult', one of the litigants told the court, 'to fix the right time in country towns'.

The extension of railways was the most powerful force making for the acceptance in the country of capital city time. Local time remained in most widespread use in Queensland, where the railways were not connected, and Brisbane did not have the pre-eminence of the other mainland capitals. Ipswich, only 40 kilometres from the capital, kept local time, one minute later than Brisbane's, though Brisbane time was kept at the railway station. In the other colonies local time was more likely to be kept in remote areas and even where there was a railway and close connection to the city, local time was not always superseded or forgotten. Broken Hill had three time systems: the railways kept Adelaide time, the post office Sydney time, and the mines local time. People were still uncertain about what was official time: should the pubs close according to Sydney time or local time?—a dilemma easily resolved by not closing at all.

For country people more than city people, the movement of the sun governed when they worked and when they slept and the phase of the moon when they travelled at night. Amateur astronomers consulted almanacs on the times of the sun's rising and setting, the phases of the moon and how to set watches by the movement of the sun. Large areas of the colonies operated on the same time system, but in the country its origins as someone else's time were remembered in its name—it was Sydney time, or post office time, or railway time.



A pocket watch was an invaluable aid to the traveller. Twenty years earlier, when the cheapest available watch, an English lever, cost 10 to 15 guineas, a timepiece had denoted wealth. But in the late 1870s the advent of the mass-produced American Waltham model, costing only 3 to 4 guineas, put a watch within the reach of respectable working men. By 1888 the price of punctuality had fallen even further. Backed by a vigorous advertising campaign, the new Waterbury watch, costing only 13s 6d, outsold all rivals. Posters and jingles spread the word to the remotest part of the country.

TROEDEL COLLECTION, LA TROBE LIBRARY

Newcastle and its harbour. The Newcastle clock face was large—2.4 metres across—and visible from a long way off. This clock was one of many made by A. Tornaghi of Sydney, who boasted that it kept excellent time.

NEWCASTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

ANIMAL TRANSPORT

In places not served by railways, transport was much more expensive and slower, and the precision of the timetable and a fixed schedule of rates disappeared. For every wagon journey, a new contract had to be negotiated. Costs rose in the wet season because the roads were bad, and in the dry season because feed and water were scarce. People had to be resigned to waiting on the elements. Across outback Australia late in 1888, carriers were afraid to venture out for the wool clip because there was not enough grass and water to support their teams. In the interior, governments did little to make or repair roads. They met the greatest difficulty of outback travel by building dams and sinking bores, where caretakers were appointed to sell water to drovers and carriers. Journeys with bullock wagons could take months; sixteen kilometres was a good day's travelling. Some carriers took their families with them and knew no other life but the roads.

Packhorses met the steamships at Cairns, bringing down tin from the mines in the mountain rainforests and returning with food and supplies. At the Bourke railway station, camels were loaded with woolpacks and stores. On the Tasmanian west coast packhorses set out for the mines at Queenstown and other areas in the forest, but soon the tracks were too boggy and treacherous. Men then took over as pack animals. The costs of carrying food and equipment in this way were astronomical—flour £60 a ton for fifty to sixty kilometres, 250 times what a railway would charge. Mining companies and syndicates at Queenstown, seeing their capital eaten up in transport costs, planned to build a private line.

The carriers who ran the horse and bullock wagons were independent contractors. There were thousands of them, and in the outback they formed a significant proportion of the population. Small farmers joined their ranks in the busy season when the wool had to be carted in. The carriers were resourceful men, but the Afghans' camels were better suited to the dry interior than bullocks. As the camels came into more widespread use, resentment against the Afghans grew.

The longest journeys in the interior were undertaken by drovers. Cattle from western Queensland were driven across the north to new stations in the Kimberleys and south to markets in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. Sheep went south to market and north to stock the Queensland stations. Cattle and sheep for Melbourne or the Victorian fattening paddocks were sent by rail from Wodonga

Bullock train at Tambo, Queensland. The bulk and weight of wool bales and the rough roads in sparsely settled pastoral districts made bullock wagons the common means of transporting the outback wool clip to market. A ton of load to each pair of bullocks was the usual formula on long journeys.
OXLEY LIBRARY

on the Murray, but some cattle continued their long walk—up the Murray almost to its source, across the Alps and down into Gippsland. In the interior, stock travelled on wide corridors of country reserved for them—the travelling stock routes. By law they had to travel a minimum distance per day. In New South Wales it was 10 miles (16 kilometres) for cattle and 6 miles (10 kilometres) for sheep. This and other regulations were to ensure that grass pirates did not use the routes as fattening paddocks. Drovers complained that squatters used up grass on the stock routes and squatters that drovers pastured stock on *their* grass. Forty-five stock inspectors in New South Wales controlled this business.

The extension of railways did not put an end to droving, partly because so much stock movement was north–south, whereas the railways in the interior of Queensland and New South Wales ran east–west. The New South Wales Railways countered this by opening a line in 1888 from Blayney to Murrumburrah so that stock from Bourke could be railed to Wodonga without crossing the ranges to Sydney and back. But the main reason droving held its own against the railways was that travel on the stock routes was so much cheaper. In a good season stock might be in better condition at the end of their journey than at the beginning. They always lost condition in railway trucks. But in a bad season such as 1888, railways got more of the business.

Coaches were the speedsters in the interior. They travelled on average at eight kilometres per hour, including stops for meals and changes of horses. They were much slower than trains and much more expensive. A traveller from Sydney could reach Bourke by train in twenty-two hours. For 800 kilometres he paid a little over £2. If he then went on by coach to Wilcannia, 370 kilometres further down the Darling, he paid £6 and was in the coach for two full days. For less than half the distance he paid three times as much. It is not hard to see why fares were so high. To move eight or fourteen people along the road five horses were necessary, with a new team every twenty, thirty or forty kilometres; coachmen and groom had to be paid, as did those who kept the staging posts and provided paddocks for the horses; horse feed had to be bought in dry seasons and, more importantly, the cartage on it had to be paid. When coach fares were so high, a man looking for work had to go on foot if he did not own a horse.

Whether or not country people could afford to travel on the coaches, they benefited from them because they carried the mails. Governments paid large

Camels near Broken Hill. Like bullocks, camels could feed off the country (horses had to be provided with feed) and could survive longer without water. As pack animals they were not bound to the roads and could be taken over ground too soft or steep for bullock wagons. The drawback was that the carrier had to load and unload his animals every day.
MITCHELL LIBRARY

Overlanding. Drovers rest beside their flock and prepare lunch. Watercolour from the Queensland sketchbook of Hugh R. Hamilton.
BRISBANE CITY ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM

subsidies to the coach companies so that away from the railways (where there was a daily service) there might be a mail three times, twice, or at least once a week. The newspapers were carried in the mailbags and for many people were the most important item. For country readers, the city newspapers produced special weekly papers that summarised the week's news and carried special features and illustrations. Parliaments regarded newspapers as an improving and civilising force and set special low rates for their carriage in the mail so they might be distributed as widely as possible. The post offices in Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania actually carried them free of charge. To the annoyance of Melbourne's printers, a Sydney paper could be distributed free of charge throughout the continent, including Melbourne. The *Bulletin* was published in Sydney from 1880 and soon became a national newspaper, publishing poems by Lawson and Paterson. It cost a subscriber in the bush no more than it cost a buyer on Sydney streets. Its mockery of the Queen and the Prince of Wales and its calls for a republican Australia were taken to the reader in a coach bearing the Royal Mail insignia.

Every town or settlement wanted a railway. Property owners and shopkeepers formed railway leagues and set out to convince parliament that a line to their town would pay. Wilcannia in New South Wales was one of many towns with a league. The Wilcannia correspondent of the *Town and Country Journal* complained that because there was no railway most of the townspeople were more or less strangers to Sydney. They were isolated, except for the mail coach and bullock team. Wilcannia was on the Darling, by which it sent its wool and received its food and supplies, but the river fell so early in 1888 that the wool clip could not be sent away. Every shed and store was crammed with wool bales.

When the river started to fall, the shopkeepers and pub owners had as usual ordered in a year's supply of goods, but the baker was either too slow or did not have the funds. He had to get flour by horse wagon from the nearest railway station at Broken Hill. Bread then cost twice as much as in Sydney. The shopkeepers of the railway league argued that though paddle-steamers were cheaper than a train, a train was more dependable, and with a railway they would not have to tie up so much money in holding stocks. Wool could always be sent away. Sheep could be trucked out in a drought, instead of being left to die. One million of the district's three million sheep perished in 1888.

How isolated was Wilcannia? Among his accounts of the falling river, the railway league and the arrival of camels, the Wilcannia correspondent reported the formation in the town of a roller-skating club. Every town across the continent was skating in the winter of 1888. Societies that are swept by crazes have lost that intense isolation in which local dialects and folk cultures grow. In the shearing sheds around Wilcannia perhaps the shearers were singing bush ballads, but in the town they followed the example of Sydney. A literate population read the newspapers brought by the coach three times a week as the wool piled high around them.

Poets' Corner.

"The Rhymester's numbers and the Poet's songs
Find welcome in the mind and heart."

Andy's Gone with Cattle.

Our Andy's gone to battle now
'Gainst Drought, the red marauder;
Our Andy's gone with cattle now
Across the Queensland border.

He's left us in dejection now;
Our hearts with him are roving.
It's dull on this selection now—
Since Andy went a-droving.

Who now shall wear the cheerful face
In times when crops are slackest?
And who shall whistle round the place
When Fortune frowns her blackest?

Oh, who shall "cheek" the squatter now
When he comes round us snarling?
His tongue is growing hotter now
Since Andy cross'd the Darling.

The gates are out of order now
Each wind the riders rattle;
For far far across the border now
Our Andy's gone with cattle.

Poor Aunty's looking thin and white;
And Uncle's cross with worry;
And poor old "Blucher" howls all night
Since Andy left Macquarie.

Oh, may the showers in torrents fall,
And all the dams run over;
And may the grass grow green and tall
In pathways of the drover!

And may good angels send the rain
On desert stretches sandy;
And when the summer comes again
God grant 'twill bring us Andy!

HENRY LAWSON.

Sydney; October, 1888.

Town and Country Journal, *13 Oct 1888.*

TELEGRAPHS

When the Wilcannia correspondent talked of isolation he mentioned coach and wagon, but not the telegraph. It was not overlooked by the committee of the roller-skating club. The skating craze was so intense that skates became difficult to buy. The committee with its rink ready to open sent telegrams to Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney seeking supplies. By telegram they learned of skates in Melbourne, which were sent by rail to Deniliquin and thence by coach.

Every town, port and mine was connected to the telegraph. It was cheap and

Coaches had to change horses regularly. Where there was no town a staging post was established, as here on the Walhalla Road, Victoria. A man and his wife frequently ran these posts, the man caring for and preparing the horses, the woman feeding the travellers.

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quick to erect. There was a telegraph to Croydon, a new mining town in north Queensland, and to Strahan on the west coast of Tasmania. This was the one network to which all localities, those with railways and those beyond them, had equal access. The cost of sending a telegram was uniform across each colony: it cost no more to send a message eight-hundred kilometres than eighty. The telegraph was used heavily for commercial messages, to place urgent orders, control the movement of goods, and buy and sell shares. Where the mail was carried by coach or horse it was used as the normal means of business communication.

An urgent telegram.
NSW HISTORICAL SECTION, AUSTRALIA POST

TRANSMITTED FORM
New South Wales Electric Telegraph.
COLONIAL AND INTERCOLONIAL LINES.

The practice of weather forecasting began in the 1880s, based on information collected by telegraph. Queensland's first meteorologist, the ambitious Clement Wragge, issued forecasts for other colonies besides his own and sent them by telegraph in time for publication in their morning papers. At their intercolonial conference in September the meteorologists resolved, Queensland dissenting, that each should issue forecasts only for his own colony so that the public would not be confused. The Melbourne Argus *was the only paper to publish a weather map showing the whole continent.* Argus, *14 Jan 1888.*

The other large users of the telegraph were the government and the press. Governments that controlled so many activities in the absence of strong local bodies were able to operate efficiently because they could communicate by telegraph with their policemen, teachers, stock inspectors, surveyors and engineers. Newspapers enjoyed special low rates and collected news and information by telegraph, distributing it to people who never sent a telegram themselves except to announce a death. The *Wilcannia Times*, published weekly on Friday, carried Sydney share prices as at Friday morning and Melbourne race scratchings as at Thursday night.

Travel away from the railways was uncertain, but uncertainty could be alleviated to some extent through the use of the telegraph. The movements of ships around the coast—and even the steamships struggling in bad weather—were reported by telegraph and published in the shipping columns of newspapers. The companies that ran the river paddle-steamers, having the river height information before them (itself collected by telegraph) could telegraph new instructions to their captains when they were likely to be left with no water under them. By telegram storekeepers and sheep stations could establish just how long they would probably have to wait for their wagon of supplies to arrive.

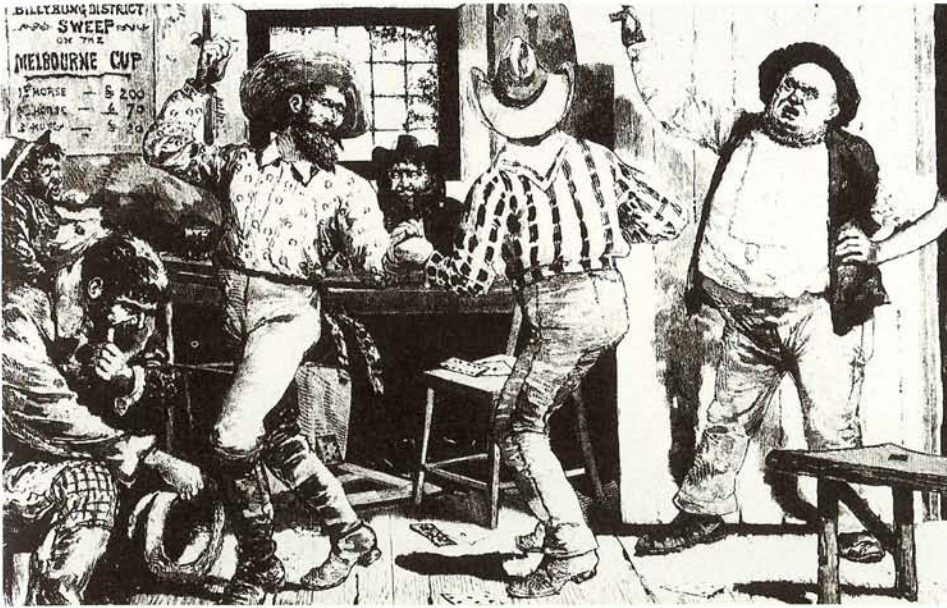
A drover could buy a paper and read the weekly report on the amount of grass and water on the stock routes, which had been collated in Sydney from the telegraphed reports of the stock inspectors. The drovers themselves were watched because stock buyers and sellers wanted to know the quantities on their way to market. If Banjo Paterson, sitting in his dingy little office, had cared to learn the whereabouts of Clancy of the Overflow, about which his correspondent was so unhelpful, he could have consulted the stock movements column in the Sydney paper where telegraphed reports of this sort appeared:

> Barcaldine 16 July, stock crossings: 800 bullocks, Munnigrub Station for Melbourne, Clancy of the Overflow in charge.

Each year one event—the Melbourne Cup—cleared every telegraph line, as operators across the continent waited to receive and send the news. This year Mentor won by a length and a half, which allowed the ten telegraph operators at the course to begin sending out the news before the horse actually passed the post. The cable to New Zealand was kept open during the race, and the winner was known in Auckland before the judge had announced his decision. The telegraph made the Melbourne Cup into a national event.

From the early 1880s the telegraph had a puny rival. Telephone exchanges with a few subscribers operated in the capital cities and some larger towns. There were as yet no trunk lines connecting cities. The influence of the telephone grew only in proportion to the number of people who owned one. The telegraph was a much more public facility, like the railway, and immediately affected the whole community, not only its direct users.

On 29 June telegraphic communication with Britain was cut and was not re-established for three weeks. Since 1880, with a subsidy from the colonies, the



News of the Melbourne Cup reaches a country pub. Anyone who wanted first news of the winner arranged with a friend or agent to send a telegram from the course. Newspapers all had agents, and people gathered outside their offices to hear the result. The Victorian Post Office offered a special service for race results: for 6d prepaid, half the cost of the cheapest normal telegram, the Post Office would send a telegram giving the names of the winner and placegetters. Australasian Sketcher, *19 Nov 1884.*

Eastern Telegraph Company had added a second cable to the one opened in 1872 between Darwin and Singapore. Now both cables cut out almost simultaneously. Had war broken out in Europe and a power hostile to Great Britain isolated the colonies before descending upon them? The Victorian navy called up its reserves and sailed to the Heads. But a hostile power was not responsible. The breaks had actually been caused by volcanic disturbances. The absence of cable news was keenly felt. The *Sydney Morning Herald* likened the loss to 'a failure of the senses, a stoppage of hearing, an eclipse of sight'.

Despite the high cost of messages (9s 4d per word), businessmen had come to expect daily information from their chief market or financier. Now they were in the dark. How had the Queensland loan been received? Was wool selling briskly? What was happening to the price of tin? On 13 July a steamer crossed the gap and brought to Darwin the cables that had been accumulating in Banjoewangie in Java. Special editions of the newspapers were rushed onto the streets carrying the news that relations between the European powers were unusually quiet. Five days later the cable was fixed and the telegraph company announced that it would lay a third cable from Roebourne in the north of Western Australia.

Inland telegraph station. A. Garran (ed), A picturesque atlas of Australasia, *Sydney 1886–88.*

The Western Australian connection would also provide an alternative land route in Australia for cable messages. The line across the centre broke often: in 1888 it was broken three times by storm, once by fire, once by a man dying of thirst and once by Aborigines who took insulators and wires for weapons and implements. Whatever the conditions, breaks had to be repaired rapidly. Repair parties—an operator, an assistant, and an Aborigine—set out from repeater stations hundreds of kilometres apart and rode towards each other. Every fifteen kilometres or so they would grapple down a shackle, plug in their instrument and check if the line had been repaired by the other party. It was hard work, but a change from the monotony of tapping out the messages, all in code to preserve commercial secrets and reduce the number of words used. These were the most isolated of men. Later, when writers, journalists and artists reached the country in which they worked, they gave to Australians a sense of the immensity of their land. In 1888 attention focused more on the metal wire that crossed it, another of humanity's triumphs over distance.

Herberton, north Queensland, about 1880. Tin deposits were discovered in 1879 and Herberton became the centre of a busy mining district. Cedar timber, cut from the nearby Atherton Tableland, was used for building construction. Oil, signed L.M.N.

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II
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