



By Rosie Bray



The story of Puffing Billy has a fairy tale history. One which was not without problems, but without the help of people with passion and vision the project would not have proceeded and locals, tourists and especially children would not have had the opportunity to enjoy the wonderful ride on Puffing Billy.

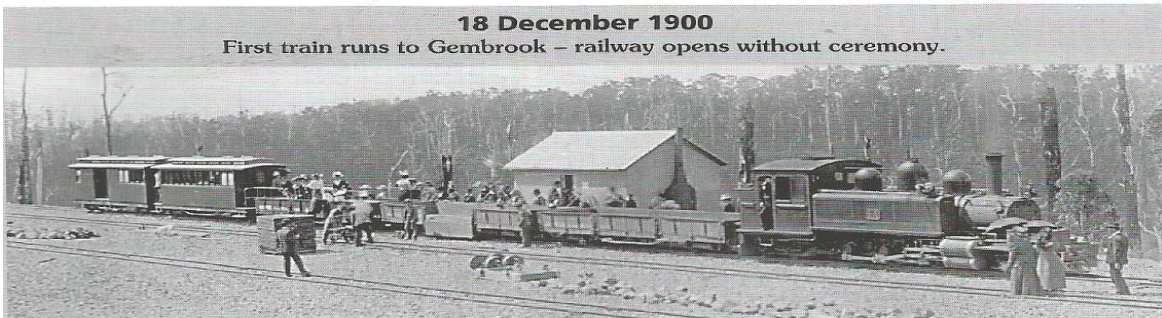
1 August 1899
Work commences.



Like all good fairy tale stories, it all begins with 'once upon a time' in June 28th 1898, a Parliamentary Committee recommended construction of the Upper Ferntree Gully – Gembrook line. Colonial Parliament authorised construction on August 15 1898, and work commenced on August 1st 1899. This brought

work to the local population and the first train travelled to Gembrook December 18 1900----without any fan fare or ceremony.

18 December 1900
First train runs to Gembrook – railway opens without ceremony.

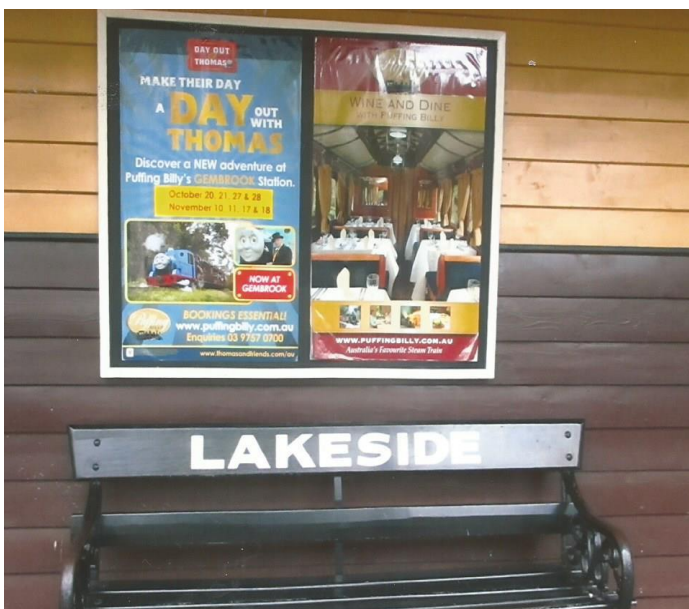


The landslide between Selby and Menzies Creek was shades of the future and the first of four landslides which beset the smooth running of the Puffing Billy railway. In the mean time Parliament passed Ferntree Gully to Gembrook Construction Act to extend broad-gauge rail line. Funds became available to

start 1954/55 however after yet another landslide services ceased in August 1953.

In 1955, the Puffing Billy Preservation Society was formed to save the railway from permanent closure. This was a time of uncertainty, but it was the beginning of volunteers lending their skills, working every weekend and showing great passion to retain the railway link to Gembrook.

By 1962 the railway returned to operation between Belgrave and Menzies Creek.



In February 1991, the huge undertaking of the reconstruction of four bridges, four stations and 11km of railway between Lakeside to Gembrook section commenced. Most of the work was completed by the Puffing Billy Preservation Society volunteers, with some help from the Army. The line officially reopened on Sunday October 18 1998, with the first train to travel the line from Lakeside to Gembrook hauled by 14A.

To mark the 20 years the reopening of the Lakeside to Gembrook line.

On October 18 2018, Volunteers and workers of the Puffing Billy Railway Service answered the call and attended the official reopening of the Lakeside to Gembrook line. The celebration was hosted by the Puffing Billy Preservation Society members, who wanted to celebrate this milestone and sincerely thank the past and present members of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society who have been involved over the many years.

I was fortunate enough to be a guest of long time volunteer Neil Lewis and I witnessed friends meeting friends and their camaraderie was not hidden. Some were quite emotional and some were bursting with pride, and all showed the passion for their beloved Puffing Billy.

Such vision can never be counted in cash.

So, like all good fairy stories, through good and bad times this story had a happy ending. And fairy tales sometimes do come true?



Proud volunteers 'together again' on October 18. 2018.

