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Shoppers and Scholars.
Commuters of the Melb-Lilydale line

1996

Hawthorn. The service to Hawthorn was opened on April 13, 1861 with trains running every 30 minutes between 8am and 7pm. At the time Hawthorn was an outpost, so the rail service was rather generous.

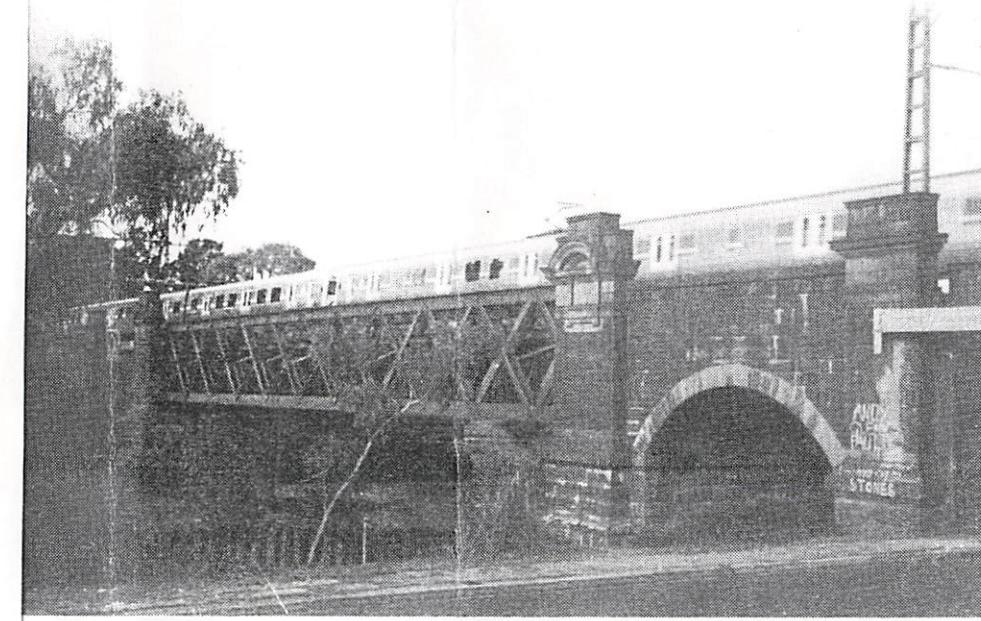
Perhaps the Melbourne and Suburban Railway Co. was too ambitious in building so far out of Melbourne. For a time the venture looked like failing, but a public meeting at the Governor Hotham Hotel provided at least one answer. If the fares were cheaper then more people would use the train. Whether the company could afford cheaper fares was another matter as it sold out to the Melbourne Railway Co. in March, 1862. The service survived and by November that year a late train was added four nights a week. In 1864 a Saturday night and Sunday morning service was introduced.

Horse cabs used to travel to and from Camberwell and Kew to Hawthorn station to connect with the trains, but there was little incentive for a private railway company to extend to a sparsely populated district. In 1865 the Melbourne Railway Co. amalgamated with the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Co. to become the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay United Railway Co. This remained a private company until bought by the Government in 1878.

All railway building in Victoria in the early 1870s was in rural areas distant from Melbourne, but by the middle of the decade there was hope for the Camberwell residents who were getting tired of the broken journey they had to make every time they wanted to go to Melbourne. On November 16, 1876 Victoria's Premier, Sir James McCulloch, introduced to Parliament a Railway Construction Bill embracing 14 new lines. Extension of the Hawthorn line to Camberwell was one. Most of the railways, including the Camberwell line, were deleted from the bill following the defeat of the McCulloch Government in May, 1877.

Although regarded as a setback at the time, better plans were eventually drawn up by the Berry Government. The Railways Construction Bill of 1880, introduced into the Legislative Assembly on October 20 that year by the Minister for Railways, J.B. Patterson, provided for 23 new lines throughout the State. These included the linking of Frankston with Caulfield, Coburg with North Melbourne and the township of Lilydale with Hawthorn. Not only were the residents of Camberwell given their wish, but those living much farther out at Box Hill, Ringwood and Croydon would now be more accessible to the metropolis.

In building the line from Hawthorn to Box Hill, engineers had to keep the gradients as small as possible, avoid bridgework and keep the distance to a minimum. Among the first problems encountered by the surveyors was where to run the line through Camberwell. The heart of this growing village was around the junction of Burke, Riversdale and Camberwell roads. There the rolling hills to the north, east and south flattened at the point where the roads crossed. A station at Riversdale Rd. would have pleased shopkeepers, but not engine drivers. In the days of steam engines the climb east of Camberwell from that point would have been a tough one. Also, to take the line towards Riversdale Rd. would have meant a significant deviation southwards when the line needed to veer slightly north as it headed for Box Hill.



The Hawthorn railway bridge dates back to 1861 although it has been altered a great deal both this century and last. Most recent change was the addition of a four-span bridge in 1971 to carry a third track. The bluestone bridge is the oldest on the Lilydale line. Two-up schools used to be conducted beneath the bridge.

The route chosen, which brought the line into Camberwell midway between Riversdale Rd. and Canterbury Rd., meant a steep climb from Auburn but once east of Camberwell the terrain was reasonably easy to negotiate. Those keen to have the line nearer Riversdale Rd. soon found a reason for the more northerly route. Former Victorian Premier Sir John O'Shannassy had property near the chosen route and gossip mongers assumed that he had lobbied strongly to have the line built close by to increase the property's value. One could easily believe such a theory, but in reality the surveyors avoided crossing Burke Rd. too far south because of the difficulties they would have encountered taking the line out of Camberwell.

A tender to build the line from Hawthorn to Lilydale was let to C. and E. Millar for £79,865/10/- (\$159,731), a figure exclusive of necessary items such as station buildings, barbed wire on either side of the permanent way, a timber footbridge at Box Hill and a turntable at Lilydale. By 1883 the cost of the line was listed as £170,251 (\$340,502) and by 1891 the Railways had spent £327,666 (\$655,332) on the project.

On April 3, 1882 the Hawthorn-Camberwell section of the new line was opened for service, but at that stage the stations at Glenferrie, Auburn and Camberwell hadn't been built. As a result the service was restricted to four trains each way on weekdays and two on Sunday. By June the line had reached Box Hill, but rather than open another section the Railways Commissioners decided to delay the event until the entire job had been completed.

All was in readiness before the end of the year and December 1, 1882 was set down as the day for the opening of the line to Lilydale. A banquet was held at Lilydale to celebrate the occasion and a special train conveyed the usual entourage of dignitaries such as the Premier, Sir Bryan O'Loghlen, and the Minister for Railways, Thomas Bent. Hubert Castella, local vigneron of note, proposed the toast to the Ministry and as the speeches gained momentum, so did some of the ridiculous remarks that are made at such a gathering.

John Woods MLA, in reply to the toast to the Parliament of Victoria, said in reference to the sometimes winding nature of the line that it was like "the teeth of a saw" and the New South Wales "zigzag" was nothing like it. If Woods's comments were intended to inject frivolity into the celebration, then he probably prevented much seriousness pervading the atmosphere. Unfortunately the merriment gave way to tragedy the very next day.

The coming of the railway meant people from the inner communities of Melbourne could build a home way out at Box Hill with the advantage of being able to grow their own vegetables and keep their own poultry yet still be within reasonable commuting distance of Melbourne. Realtors rubbed their hands in anticipation of a population drift eastwards and wasted no time in making land available. On the day after the Lilydale line opened, a Saturday, a special train was arranged for the convenience of people attending a land sale at Box Hill. On its way back to Melbourne that evening, the special hit an east-bound passenger train on the Melbourne side of the Yarra River bridge. A man was killed and about 175 people injured. William Thompson, 55, caretaker of Wesley Church in the city, died of shock, a fractured breastbone and broken ribs. Among the injured were Harriet and Graham Berry, children of Graham Berry who had been Premier in the previous Victorian Government.

Only one of the two tracks to Hawthorn was in use at the time owing to repairs being made to the bridge, but this shouldn't have caused the accident. Lack of communication between the crew of the special and station staff led to the disaster. With only one track available, the special should not have been allowed to proceed beyond Hawthorn until the east-bound passenger train arrived.

An 11-year-old boy, Robert Jenkins, who was playing in a nearby street, anticipated the smash. In an interview with the Argus, he said he and his brother had not long alighted at Hawthorn from an earlier train from Box Hill. The boys were looking out for the special train which they knew would be following soon after. Robert Jenkins saw the smoke from the special near Hawthorn, but he also could see the east-bound regular leaving Burnley.

Realising that there might be an accident he called to his mother who was sitting on the family verandah, reading. "Mama, there is going to be a collision, come and see it," he yelled. Mrs Jenkins went to the gate where she heard two trains whistling loudly and saw the driver and fireman of the Hawthorn train doing all they could to stop their train opposite her house. The train slowed, but the crash was inevitable. The sound of the collision was like that of a large tree falling in a forest, followed by an eerie stillness with not a sound from those inside the train.

The driver of the special, Thomas Kitchen, claimed he was given the all clear to leave Hawthorn by Hawthorn Station Master Ben Thompson and, earlier, by the guard of the special, William Hunt. After leaving Hawthorn and rounding a curve near the Yarra River bridge, Kitchen noticed smoke in the distance and asked his fireman to steady the locomotive.

"I slackened speed and put on the tender brake, and on reaching the bridge saw a train coming towards us on the same line. I immediately applied the steam brake which worked excellently and opened the sand brakes. My train would have stopped dead in another 15 yards when the other train ran into me," Kitchen told the Argus. He added that he had escaped with a bruised leg and a shaking. His fireman received similar injuries.

Another young witness to the accident, Harold Drew, was riding his pony near the railway when he heard the sharp whistles and the crash. The noise frightened his pony and he was thrown off. Unhurt, Drew remounted, but rather than stop at the scene of the accident he acted most sensibly by riding to the nearest police station to report the mishap. He also rode to a cab rank and urged the cabs to attend the disaster, then rode along Bridge Rd. to enlist further help.

The Minister for Railways, Mr Bent, suspended from duty all officials engaged on the special, plus the guard of the regular train. The driver and fireman of the latter were incapacitated by injuries.

On December 5 it was disclosed by the Camberwell Station Master, W. Gedge, that he had cautioned the guard of the special "not to leave Hawthorn until the ordinary had arrived". It also was learned that Ben Thompson had some time earlier been advised by a doctor to take three months' leave of absence because he was nervous, tired and over-worked. Thompson took off two or three weeks and returned to work because he felt so much better although his doctor advised otherwise.

Two days after the accident there was a scare on the same line involving another special near Canterbury. At 9.15am a special left Melbourne for Lilydale and according to a St Kilda man, R.R. Woolcott, the train stopped about a kilometre on the Melbourne side of Canterbury as another train had pulled out of Canterbury station. Had the drivers not been alert and had there not been a straight stretch of track, another crash could well have occurred. "As it was, the Lilydale train had to be pushed back some distance in order to allow the special train to pass," Woolcott told the Argus.

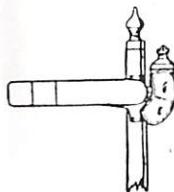
Another crash would have been catastrophic for the Railways who already were embarrassed by the Hawthorn accident being little more than a year after the Jolimont derailment had claimed four lives.

Representatives of the Westinghouse Brake Company wrote to the Argus and the Minister for Railways, stating that had their brakes been fitted the accident would have been prevented. Westinghouse had the previous March offered to deliver several hundred sets of brakes within six or seven weeks, but the offer was declined by the Railways.

"We are now prepared to submit to an exhaustive trial, and, should our system be adopted, would be able to fit the Westinghouse break (sic) to all engines and carriages on the suburban lines within the next six months," wrote Imray, Hirsch & Co. of 69½ Collins St. West.

A board of inquiry into the accident said in part that "the evidence exposes a deficiency in organisation, absence of effective supervision, and want of discipline which pervades the department, and we think that the cause of the accident lies here".

Thomas Kitchen, driver of the special, was involved in another collision only 16 months after the Hawthorn accident when a goods and a passenger train collided between Werribee and Little River. This time Kitchen was killed.



MELBOURNE BOOMS

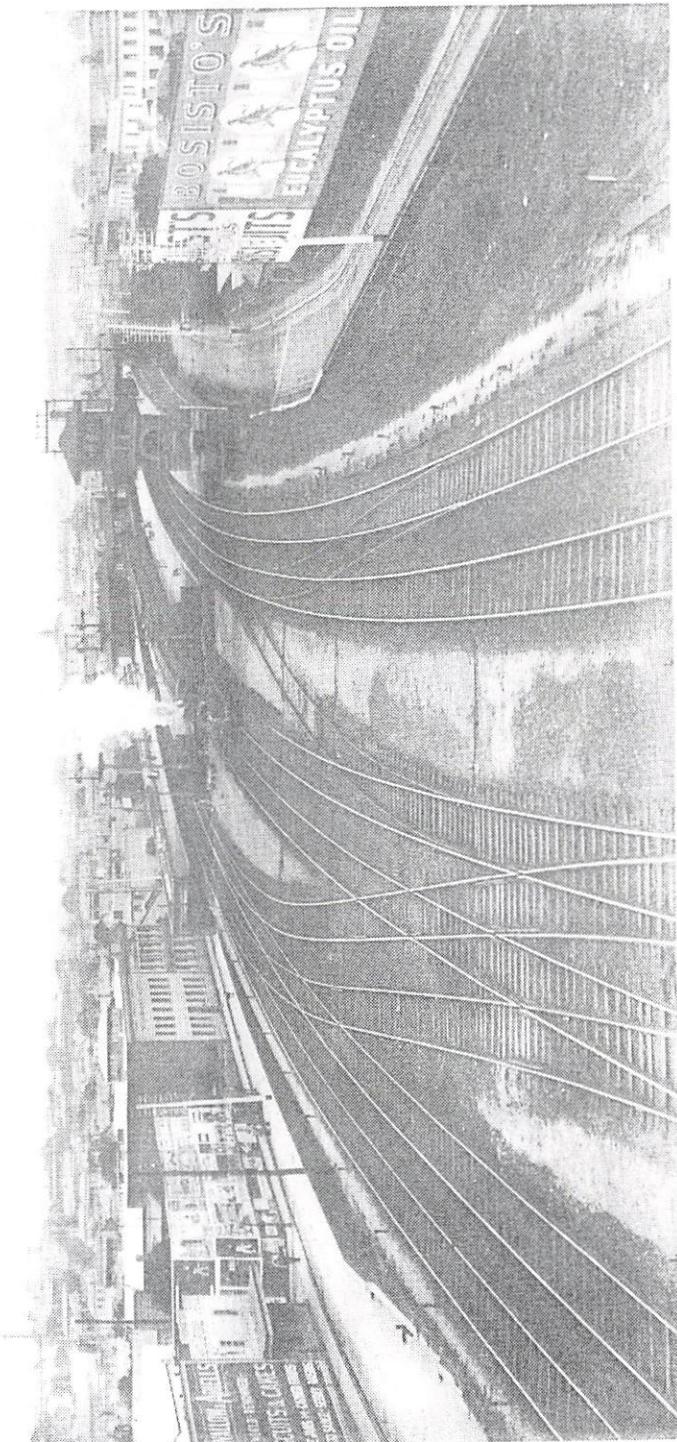
In 1880, the year of the grand international exhibition at the Exhibition Buildings, Melbourne was the home of almost one third of Victorians. Nine years earlier only 26 per cent had lived in the major city, but urbanisation was accelerating. During the 1880s as more primary produce was funnelled into the State's main port, Melbourne prospered and expanded as never before. By 1891 it held 41 per cent of Victoria's population.

At the time of the extension of the railway from Hawthorn to Lilydale a new generation of Australians, the children of the gold rush era, had reached adulthood. They were here to stay and in many cases they saw big advantages in raising a family in the new suburbia east of the Yarra River. While the engine driver and fireman preferred to live in North or West Melbourne to be close to the depot, the city clerk and shop assistant looked with adoration to the unsullied hillsides around Hawthorn and Camberwell. A lot of people chose to live in the east for aesthetic reasons. The south lacked the views because it was too flat. The north, too cluttered with factories and chimney stacks, was also studded with clay pits, while the west combined the worst features of the other three directions and had the added disadvantages of poorer soil and a westerly wind blowing in from Ballarat.

Although Hawthorn had a railway as early as 1861, the terminus was in the west of the district and when land began to be carved up into suburban lots in the early 1870s it became obvious that a railway service farther east was overdue. Development in what today is central Hawthorn focussed around the main roads, such as Glenferrie and Barkers, and the Grace Park estate whose curvilinear streets appropriately carry feminine names. Once the extension of the railway became a fact rather than a dream, the northern part of Hawthorn filled and the population soared from 6016 in 1881 to 19,479 in 1891. About a third of the householders in the district were clerks or managers, directors or professionals, and they supported the railway by commuting to the city for business reasons.

The development of Melbourne's eastern suburbs tended to hug the railway line. Shops and businesses were established near the stations and the nearest streets to the stations were the first to be filled. At Camberwell, villas and sometimes mansions could be found close to the station although the occasional street of narrow-fronted timber cottages sprang up like the mushrooms that had previously occupied the area. Likewise Canterbury boasted its share of villas – solidly-built brick edifices with slate roofing – and by the end of the decade the three-storeyed Malone's Hotel at the corner of Canterbury Rd. and Wattle Valley Rd., near the station, had become a landmark. Other hotels, such as the Palace near Camberwell station, typified the larger scale building away from Melbourne.

Among the first people to seize upon the value of the railway extension were the land developers and speculators. They muscled in on the desire of the ambitious man and his wife who yearned for the day that they could own their own



A steam engine leaves Richmond station for Flinders St. in pre-electrification days. The station was rebuilt in the 1950s and now has 10 tracks instead of six. It also is further west than the previous layout.

home with a garden and room to grow their own vegetables. Many improved their lot by moving to the paddocks of Canterbury or Box Hill, but the days of the sealed side street and sewerless homes were still a long way off. On a typical Saturday afternoon in the 1880s cabs and drags awaited trains at Camberwell and Box Hill stations to shuttle the potential land buyers to the nearby sales.

Ten new stations were provided to serve the Lilydale railway which stretched $23\frac{1}{2}$ miles (39km) from Melbourne. After Hawthorn, stops were provided at Glenferrie, Auburn, Camberwell, Canterbury, Box Hill, Blackburn*, Mitcham, Ringwood, Warrandyte (renamed Croydon in 1884) and Lilydale. There was nothing elaborate about the stations and it was a long way between them. It paid to know the drivers, whose favors included unscheduled stops and waiting at the station if regulars were running late. To what extent the friendliness was carried is unknown, but the hard and fast rules of railway regimen seemingly lost their rigidity the farther one was from the city. X

The long step between stations didn't go unnoticed and on September 1, 1883 Surrey Hills was provided with a stop. Its inclusion in the system was ahead of its time as it attracted an average of only 200 outward passenger journeys per week in the first three months of operation. Land dealers, on the other hand, welcomed the station which undoubtedly helped develop the area around Union Rd./Canterbury Rd. before the end of the decade. The long distance of five miles (eight km) between Croydon and Lilydale was broken when Mooroolbark station was provided during 1887-88 and Tunstall (Nunawading), between Blackburn and Mitcham, was added in 1888. Mont Albert, between Surrey Hills and Box Hill, was built in 1890. X

In 1883, the first full year of operation of the Lilydale line, Hawthorn station had by far the most customers with 788,498 outward passenger journeys. Its nearest rival was East Richmond with 476,649, followed by Glenferrie with 377,031, Auburn 257,065 and Camberwell 157,144. Canterbury, still thinly populated, attracted only 16,499. Five years later Glenferrie had become the busiest station, topping the one million mark, followed by East Richmond and Hawthorn who were just above 900,000. Auburn was next with 827,535, while Burnley and Camberwell became significant stopping places in climbing beyond half a million outward passengers.

The matter of level crossings, which was to manifest itself as development became greater, was already a problem at Richmond station and the Swan St. crossing was eliminated in 1885. A bridge was built to carry the lines and the new upper level tracks were put into place between 1am and 9am on Sunday, July 5 that year. Further work on the line included duplication from Hawthorn to Camberwell, a siding to a brick company at Ringwood and a siding to the tessellated tile company at Mitcham. X

* Blackburn and Mitcham were opened on December 25, 1882, several weeks after the other stations. The latter was known as Emery's Hill, but was renamed Mitcham soon after. Blackburn was initially called Blackburn Creek.

Later the Box Hill Brick Company arranged to have a spur line built south of the main line, parallel with Thurston St., to its works. Completed in February, 1888 at a cost of £2000 (\$4000) the line covered about one kilometre, but its life was short as the company closed in 1892 when the demand for bricks had declined due to the burst of the building boom of the 1880s and the subsequent depression. The clay hole later became a swimming pool known as the Surrey Dive.

X In an era of railway expansion the Lilydale line had three additions in the 1880s. The first was the Lilydale-Healesville line, which reached Yarra Flats (Yarra Glen) in 1887 and was completed in 1889. Late in 1887 the spur line from Hawthorn to Kew was opened and in 1889 a branch line from Ringwood to Upper Ferntree Gully opened. Work on duplicating the line from Camberwell to Box Hill began in 1887-88 and a trial survey was made from Canterbury to Doncaster and Anderson's Creek. Nothing came of the latter idea.

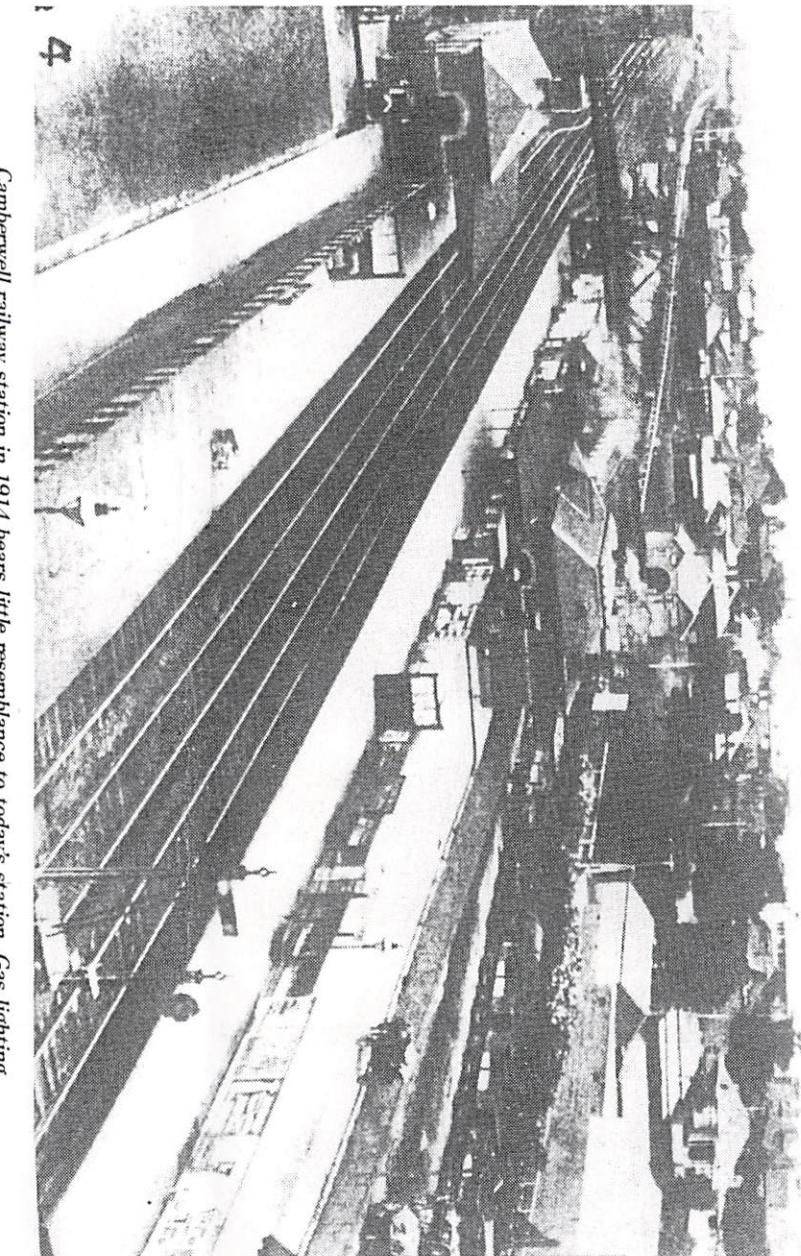
Residents and members of the Kew Borough Council, dissatisfied with the way the Hawthorn-Kew railway was built, paid no attention to the opening of the two-station line on December 19, 1887. There was no ceremony but once the last spike was driven a bottle of Irish whiskey was produced from a portabale hut near the Barkers Rd. station to celebrate the occasion. The first train, having left Princes Bridge at 5.40am, arrived at Kew to be greeted by the station master, a ticket seller and the signalman.

The mile and a half (2.4km) line, let to Noonan Bros. contractors for £18,086 (\$36,172), was criticised for not being the most direct to Kew. The line ran parallel with the Lilydale line for several hundred metres on leaving Hawthorn, then swung to the north between today's Grace Park tennis courts and the Glenferrie Oval. There was one intermediate station at Barker's Rd., known as Barker, before the line terminated at Kew, east of Denmark St. at Wellington St., only 1.5km beyond the Lilydale line.

After the Kew line opened, 'The Age' said: "The gradients are distressing and the curves so sharp that the drivers were unable to see the semaphore arms until tell-tale arms were erected close to the surface of the ground. The junction with the Hawthorn-Glenferrie line is highly dangerous. It is possible, by the smallest neglect on the part of the signalman, for either a Glenferrie or a Kew train to be cut in halves.

"This contingency has caused the officers of the traffic branch considerable anxiety, and strict orders have been given to the signalman at the junction box that once he has given "line clear" for a train to run from Barkers Rd., cross the main line and stop at Hawthorn, he must on no account alter his signals for a Glenferrie or a Hawthorn train until the one from Kew has passed over the junction points. Under these circumstances the Railways Commissioners, faced by the terrible consequences of the Windsor accident*, see the absolute necessity of bringing the

* The Windsor accident in May, 1887 had killed six people and the Victorian Government paid £128,988 (\$257,976) in claims by those injured. The Hawthorn accident had cost £180,000 (\$360,000) in compensation.



line into the Hawthorn station on a separate set of rails. And this for a line passing through unsettled parklands and terminating in a cutting, beyond which the line cannot be carried except at an extraordinary cost."

The paper said the route which the Kew Railway League had urged would have branched west of the Hawthorn station and passed on an easy curve along the right side of Bulleen Rd., through low-lying vacant land and old brickfields to Kew and Prospect Hill. A tunnel under Burwood Rd. would have been needed but this cost would have been offset by no cuttings being necessary.

As more use was made of the Lilydale line, both by passengers and industry, services increased. At Blackburn provision was made for a carriage dock, which enabled people to take a carriage, and horse, by train. The carriage would be loaded on to a railway flat car and the horse into a cattle truck or horse box. To enable loading, a short dead-end siding with a platform at the buffer stop was provided in the 1880s. At the turn of the century Blackburn was a popular place for a day out and on occasions such as Easter many people would visit Blackburn Lake. To meet the demand, trains from the city would terminate at Blackburn to carry the returning passengers.

In May, 1891 another siding was added to the Lilydale line, east of Blackburn, for the carriage of bricks. Later that year duplication between Box Hill and Ringwood was completed, but improvements to the line over the next few years were minimal due to a severe economic downturn. By 1897 Box Hill had gained a turntable and work on new station buildings at East Richmond was in progress. New station buildings were also constructed at Canterbury and Surrey Hills in the late 1890s, but unlike the brick ones at East Richmond they were made of timber. Nevertheless the Canterbury and Surrey Hills stations, built to the same design, were substantial structures and were still in good order more than 60 years later.

Other work in the late 1890s included lowering of the line between East Richmond and Hawthorn to eliminate further level crossings, the building of a footbridge over the line near the Burnley Horticultural Gardens and a road subway at John St., Lilydale.

Foremost in the minds of the Railways Commissioners at the end of the 19th century was the building of a new and bigger central suburban terminal at Flinders St. At that stage Camberwell and Lilydale trains were handled from Princes Bridge, but the commissioners were keen to combine Flinders St. and Princes Bridge services and also bring all northern suburbs traffic into Flinders St. rather than Spencer St. A much larger station was needed to accommodate the plan which would reduce working expenses and streamline the operation of suburban trains.

A competition for a design for a new station was won by two railwaymen, H.R.C. Ashworth and James Fawcett, and work started in 1901. But it wasn't until 1910 that the building was completed.

Meanwhile, work had started on a line from Lilydale to Warburton in November, 1899. The line, completed in 1901, was built to broad gauge

specifications after earlier being considered ideal for narrow gauge purposes. Addition of traffic to Warburton and Healesville made Lilydale a much busier and more important station than it had been when it opened. The Victorian Railways were in a position to build new lines and stations, having shown a profit of £1,353,001 (\$2,706,002) in 1900-01. While work on the Warburton line was in progress, East Camberwell station opened on May 14, 1900.

East Camberwell's birth coincided with the re-opening of the Riversdale-Deepdene section of the Outer Circle line. The Outer Circle, opened in 1890 linking Oakleigh with Fairfield, was fine in theory but failed because it served unpopulated areas, a factor augmented by the poor economic times and the decline in suburban building. Closed in 1897, various sections of the line were later put back into service although never in its entirety. The Camberwell-Alamein line is the one survivor.

The Outer Circle line passed under the Lilydale line slightly to the east of East Camberwell station. A platform, running north-south, provided access for passengers on the Outer Circle line to change to the Lilydale line. This service remained for 27 years.

