

## Wal Jack's Ballarat

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On Saturday, 15th August, 1964 the death occurred of Walter Henry Jack of Ballarat. Wal, as he was known to his many friends, was an ardent steam and electric traction enthusiast and, in particular, a meticulous chronicler of railway and tramway happenings around Ballarat. He was a prolific letter writer and these provide a detailed commentary of those last days of steam around his home town.

While sorting through old correspondence on a recent evening I rediscovered a bundle of Wal's letters written between 1957 and 1964 and thereafter lost all interest in my original task. I was transported back over twenty years as I re-read his letters, reliving the occasions when I had visited him, and accompanied him on his rambles.

Ballarat then had much to offer the railway enthusiast and it occurred to me that the events described by him may be of interest to readers of *Newsrail*. To those of us of forty summers, or more, the following extracts will re-awaken memories of a bygone age, while younger readers may gain some idea of train-working in the days before the diesel had completely superseded steam.

All quotations are verbatim but dates, in brackets, have been added to clarify some passages. All other brackets are Wal's. Unfortunately his letters before 1957 were accidentally destroyed so this will have to be our starting point.

In his letter of 4th April of that year, Wal states, "Locos stored at Ballarat East are: C8, K145, 149, 181, N426, 459, 493, D\*690, R700, 708, 709, 715, 716,

718, 756, 763". He goes on to say, "I've seen an X with two other steam locos on the 9.45 am to Geelong. On the 25th March R750-X50 on the front with R758 pusher, 53 vehicles. Last Monday (1st April) saw R748 (oil burner) with R726, and 735 on rear. C3 and R701 were on today". As a postscript he added, "Saw T327 in front of K143. They were run as a trial on the 1.40 pm Maryborough to Ballarat (wheat train). The steam should have been in front!"

Later that year in a letter dated 6th August, he observed, "On Sunday (4th August) X55 was used on the plant train to Wendouree and on the running sheet I noticed that it was due to return at 4.00 pm. So I set out and only just made it as it was returning (tender first) on 14 QRs (old sleepers) to Ballarat. First time I've seen an X working on a Sunday. Yesterday I saw a beaut. R767 with X55 hauling 55 vehicles with R747 pushing on rear". His dislike of diesels is quite evident when he goes on to say, "I suppose the days of triple steam will soon be a thing of the past as the first of the new 'S' stinkers are due on the 15th of this month". However, there was still much of interest to be seen. "I have seen several A's about, especially Nos. 881, 939, 941, 945, 993. Matter of fact R749 and A\*993 were on the 9.45 am Geelong this morning".

A letter written in February 1958 offers an insight into those changing times. "Two more D's have been cut up. Nos. 662 and 690. However, more R class are being repaired. No. 711, which has been stored at North Ballarat Shops since 20.3.56 is now being overhauled. Also 704, 706, 700, 766. Two of Lloyd

Holmes' favourites R723 and 725 are both in for repair too. I saw them a couple of days ago".

In July Ballarat provided some interesting workings. "On 1.7.58 saw your new Alco 943 go thru on 66 wagons, about 2.00 pm. Half an hour later B83 was coupled in front of R720 on the Up goods to Geelong. On Monday (14th July) I snapped T331 coupled in front of K169 hauling 45 vehicles (mostly bulk wheat) and on the rear end was A\*941. The steamers were putting out some smoke while the stinker was making a hell of a row, and a lot of people came to their front fences and watched. Was over at loco on Sunday (3rd July) and on the engine board it stated N482-K169-A\*941 were to take the train out. Saw four A's at loco: 939, 941, 964, 990".

On 28th September, he wrote, "Steam trains are getting less and less and the only decent one I've seen for months was on 8th September, when A\*941-R742-N481 were used on the 9.45 am to Geelong — 56 vehicles". For traction fans, "Our No.25 tram was done up with those Made in Australia Week posters like this tram was done up last year. Most of the points and crossings in Sturt St are being fixed up or renewed, while No.13 tram has had a complete repaint. Gee! It looks lovely!"

Steam was still to be seen fifteen months later when, on 23rd December, 1959, Wal wrote, "This afternoon saw N430 on 4.15 mixed to Maryborough. Saw A\*964, 986, 990 at Ballarat East loco on Wednesday (16th December) but none today".

On Tuesday 26.1.60, J556 and N420 worked the 1.30 pm Geelong goods and the following day K183 was seen on the Skipton goods. That day Wal drove to Maryborough with Keith Kings. "... we reached Maryborough, D\*654 and 672 were shunting, C7 at loco shunting, B80 on the *Sunlight* for Mildura, 21RM for Castlemaine, N480 on 12.55 pm Up Ballarat goods, N413 on Castlemaine goods".

His letter of 27.3.60 reports, "On the 14th March (Labour Day) B74 on 1.40 pm to Horsham came off at Ballarat and R734 took over".

In a letter dated 6.6.60 he listed steam workings he had seen during May:

9.5.60: B67 leading R734 on 10.00 am Geelong.  
10.5.60: N466-431 on 1.30 pm Geelong.  
10.5.60: J546-R734 on 9.20 am Down ex Geelong.  
11.5.60: A\*870 on 3.00 pm Mixed to Hamilton.  
13.5.60: N482-484 on 9.20 am Geelong.  
13.5.60: R769 on 1.20 pm Ararat.  
13.5.60: K184 on 1.30 pm Geelong.  
13.5.60: R703 on 3.20 pm passenger to Geelong.  
16.5.60: J & R on 10.00 am Geelong (numbers not given, DAC).  
16.5.60: R721 on Down Serviceton passenger.  
16.5.60: R729 on 1.20 pm Ararat.  
17.5.60: N481-452 on 1.30 pm Geelong.  
17.5.60: A\*829-990 on 4.15 pm Mixed to Maryborough (date not given but probably 17.5, DAC).

He goes on to say, "R724 on 9.00 am pass. from Geelong and 724 on 3.20 pm pass. Last Friday (3rd June)."

"Went out on Saturday (4th) and saw N466-R734 on 10.00 am Geelong, then later R769 came in on 9.00 am pass. from Geelong. N497-426 were on the 4.15 pm Mixed to Maryborough".

"On 30.5.60, B69-85 helped T354 lift a load to Warrenheip on 4.00 am Geelong. both Bs returned to Ballarat".

Five days later (11.6.60) Wal wrote again, "There were three A's (955, 971, 990), D\*600, five D's, one J, seven Ks, eight Ns, seven Rs, Y106 — total of 33 steam — at Loco at 3.00 pm (today). D\*609 has been stripped of side rods. D\*678 has had the funnel removed as well as all the side rods and pistons (crossheads still left in slide bars). N497 came in from Geelong on 9.20 am goods, then N408-417 on 4.15 pm to Maryborough, Z van, 54ABL car, Z van, instead of a Mixed".

"Things look to be on the move on Monday (12th). B82 on goods ex Maryborough, then on 4.00 am to Warrenheip, then loco takes 7.40 am pass. to Melbourne. N466-A\*955 on 6.50 am Maryborough, B72 on 7.30 am Maryborough. N432-T320 on 8.45 am Geelong. N432-497 9.45 am Warrenheip, N467 on 10.00 am Geelong, R768 on 3.20 pm pass. to Geelong, and T345 on 5.48 pm pass. to Melbourne".

August brought mixed tidings, for he wrote on the 10th, "That K178 you snapped at Bendigo is now at Ballarat East. Y106 is being stripped for scrapping. D\*285 was running light engine to Ballarat North shops. I asked a driver (about it) and he said it went there this morning. It left North Melbourne at 9.00 am yesterday. D\*274 went to Newport on 2.8.60. A\*876, 923 and D\*691 are to go (scrapped?) shortly, and R703, 712, 734, 752, 768, 769 are back in store at North Melbourne. A Melbourne driver tells me No.3 crane loco is now at Newport, so it had gone from Ballarat North (sometime) in the last three weeks. On Friday (5th) R713 was taken from North Ballarat shops to East Loco and on Monday hauled dead to Maryborough. It has no gauges, glass, windows or doors, so goodness knows what they are going to do with it. However, Ballarat East has been allotted the following N class: 426, 430, 431, 432, 452, 458, 460, 466, 476, 478, 480, 482, 484, 492, 493 and 497."

On 28th August he reported that, "We have the last D\*, No.285, in service at North Ballarat shops as shunter. Our two Y class, 106 and 127, have seen their days. Old D\*600, D\*609, 678 are now gone and, within 12 months there will be no D\*, D\*, D4, E, X and Y classes." On electric traction, "Our trams and Bendigo's are all to get canopy lighting and zebra strips. No. 21 had mock-up style for official inspection and the manager told me that the engineer passed it. Our 19 and 25 are to be transferred to Bendigo and we are to receive a bogie in return."

On 26.10.60 he writes, "Our Nos. 19 and 25, 4-wheel trams, went to Bendigo on the 4th and 6th and, on 5.10.60, we got No.1 bogie from Bendigo. K163 is still stored at Ballarat East. D\*600, D\*609, 612, 615, 678 are now in pieces".

15.12.60, "We lost the last two X class, No.36 hauled No.29 to Newport on 17.11.60. I believe several R class have returned to service as 13 diesels are under repair".

Keith Kings visited Wal in January 1961 (date not known, DAC) and they spent a couple of days photographing trains between Ballarat and Ararat. "Set out for Ararat and got two steam goods leaving (Ballarat). R730 on 12.20 pm Geelong and 708 to Ararat. Next morning we had a feast of steam. C16 on empties ex Geelong, N497 to Maryborough, N402 to Redan,

D\*651 shunts the carsheds at Ballarat platform. (Late Wal Jack)





R706 to SEC station with D\*659 on rear end banking to Waubra, R708 on Serviceton passenger from Ballarat".

Easter Monday 1961: "Only saw two steam passenger trains over Easter. R736 on 3.20 pm to Geelong last Thursday (30th March) and 753 on same train this afternoon (3rd April). A minute later C22 came from Geelong on a Down freight. On Thursday afternoon I saw 11 steam locos and 1 diesel in 1½ hours:

N476-R705 on Down Geelong goods,  
R736 on 3.20 pm Geelong passenger,  
D\*626 on goods to Redan,  
N468 on Up empty oil tankers,  
N402, D\*647, 651 shunting,  
N460 on Down ballast train,  
B80 on 1.40 pm Dimboola passenger,  
N and J (numbers not given) on goods from Maryborough.

C9 has been taken to North Ballarat shops for scrapping, I believe N424 is also to go soon."

Ten days later I received another letter. "On 4.4.61 R719 was on 9.10 am Up Special from Stawell and changed at Ballarat for 717. Saw A\*990 arrive from Geelong. R743 was on 3.20 pm Geelong passenger. S302-B61-T346 on 1.40 pm, Horsham". Tram news: "Saw the ex Bendigo bogie No.1, now our No.37, in all its glory. It looks lovely! Painted outside and lined side numbers, new weather blinds, red-painted rubber floor material, white ceiling, rest varnished. Top half of cabins in colorflek "pebble white", rest varnished. In short, a lovely job for an old car, which soon will have been in service on five different systems:

1. Hawthorn Tramways Trust
2. M&MTB
3. SEC Geelong
4. SEC Bendigo
5. SEC Ballarat.

Must be nearly a world record? No.12 has had its roof painted and a start made on No.30's roof. No.43 is under repairs and due for a repaint".

A brief note of 15th October mentions that C10 left Ballarat at 7.50 am on a goods on Thursday, 12th, and he goes on to say, "C10 was at loco yesterday with broken stays, and there were no A's about either. Three blasted diesels at loco yesterday, and the 4.15 pm Maryborough Mixed was hauled by T331".

In another brief note written on 8th December. "On Wednesday (6th) I saw only one B on westbound *Overland*, 10 cars, arrive here, but I did get to see J549-554 on 7.10 mixed to Maryborough. Yesterday I saw J549 on 1.20 pm Ararat freight with J503 pushing at rear."

In his first letter for 1962, written on 4th January, he says, "Only saw two steam passenger trains during the holidays: R705 on 3.20 pm Geelong on 22.12.61, and A\*986 on 8.15 pm Maryborough on 1.1.62 — 3 PLs and a CV van. However on 30.12.61 I snapped J530 on 4.15 pm mixed — consist, 1A wagon, CV van, BPL, APL, CV van."

February saw the continuing story of the slow demise of steam. In a letter dated 22nd: "D\*647 finished up on the 14th, then 659 is next. No more D's to be allotted to Ballarat East — either diesels or J class for shunters. The old turntable is in a bad way too. Took 8 men to move 736 around last Tuesday (20th)." About this time it was rumoured that the closure of the Ballarat and Bendigo tramway systems was imminent, and he predicts, "I reckon trams will see Christmas '62". Cars were still being shopped: "No.31 was being stripped down for its overhaul and paint. No.11 being fitted with new set of lifeguards". Of railways, "Our D\*647 is finished and 674 replaces it. Assistant foreman told me that C13 lives for another two weeks only".



Above: X50 heads a ballast on the Eureka branch on 18.6.57.

## BALLARAT WORKINGS

Below: R700 and N407 are steaming hard with the assistance of banker N426 as they climb Warrenheip Bank on 11.2.57. (Both photos Late Wal Jack)



J549 rests at the Ballarat East Loco on 12.1.58 (Late Wal Jack)





Three months later after a visit to Adelaide early in May. Wal wrote on the 16th, "In the afternoon (date not given) I went over to our loco and found the place not so bad after all — that's more than I could say about Mile End! There were, one B, one T, A\*986, 2 Ks, 5 Ns, 1 D3, 6 Js, 5 Rs. Yesterday I saw J520-R717 on a freight leaving Ballarat East".

In June: "On 11.6, I saw A\*986 on the 3.20 pm Up Geelong passenger and it sure looked good. I suppose it will be months before I see another steam-hauled passenger train. Same afternoon I saw two new freight brake vans lettered V & SA Nos. 3 and 4 ZJF. Bodies were built at Ballarat North.

He next wrote on 21st September. "On Tuesday (18th) I saw N468 on goods to Ballarat shops, S301-305 on 47 vehicles ex Mile End, B84 on Down Serviceton, D\*638, 659 and J525 on pilot work. After lunch waited for 1.30 pm goods to Geelong. R724-A\*964 were on the head of 27 vehicles. At Warrenheip — J533 with D\*645 (dead engine) on 9.20 am Down goods arrived from Geelong. D\*645 was bound for the torch at Ballarat North shops, so that leaves 24 in class. The Ballarat East railway station is being pulled down and a smaller building is to be erected".

Late in 1962 several R class were placed back in service and, in his letter of 11th December, Wal reports: "The VR has put many R class back into service. Newport has overhauled at least 6 (I have seen 751, 758 and 760) and Geelong loco has repaired 722. Ballarat East loco has rebuilt (?) 718, 759, 762, 763 and 765, some being out of service since 1957. R732 is held at Ballarat East to supply spare parts for the other five. Ballarat East has also released K164 from storage. Ballarat North shops have sent out J529 and 559, and N402. J529 has been rebuilt as a shunter; no pilot, but with two big front steps and grab-irons, plus three long boards over driving wheels, similar to the A\* shunters. J503 is to be the next one out — maybe today or tomorrow. Wirth's Circus was here on 7-8th and went to Beaufort at 4.00 am yesterday behind A\*986 and R758."

The Royal Visit in March 1963 created a considerable number of train movements but, as these were diesel-hauled, they only warranted a passing comment. On 3.3.63 he writes: "Last Sunday (25th February) I spent eight hours in Ballarat yard and two signal boxes watching special trains for Melbourne for kids to see the Queen. All diesel-hauled and about 12 V&SA E cars used with our stock. Two D's 638 and 659, were hard at work nearly all day. R717 was the standby and 719 was in low steam. I saw 18 passenger trains. I saw R704 yesterday — first time since overhaul in '57".

Despite the thrust of dieselisation western Victoria remained a stronghold of steam, as shown in his letter of Easter Saturday. "On 25.3.63 saw N453 on Down goods at Stawell, R737 on 6.00 am Geelong goods at Ararat, N462 at Ballarat, No.8 crane in steam, No.11 dead, at workshops as we passed (Wal was returning to Ballarat on the *Overland* after a visit to Adelaide, DAC). The railmotor to Geelong was derailed two weeks ago, so a steam train has been used until last Wednesday. I've seen 700, 701, 738 (3 times) and 741 on 3.20 pm. Five double-headers (goods) today: R751-N497 on 5.10 am Maryborough A\*964-R724 on 7.10 am Maryborough R703-N493 on 7.50 am Maryborough R723-R706 on 9.20 am from Geelong — 47 vehicles

A\*964-R724 on 11.20 am from Maryborough — 35 vehicles (bulk wheat).

So you can see that there is a bit of steam around yet. Saw D\*638 inside loco with its "front let down". Coupler almost touching the ground (had been in a collision probably late last night or early this morning), and buffer beam jammed across front wheel tyres".

Bad weather in May kept Wal indoors most days, but he reported on the 26th, "Saw J536 on a freight from Geelong yesterday and later A\*995 with N497 came in on 11.20 am goods from Maryborough. Last Saturday T346-N453 was on (this train)".

Ballarat continued to provide steam action, as his letter of 6th July describes: "Quite a fair amount of steam still about here, as you can see. All today: N499-R737 on 7.10 am to Maryborough

J556 on 7.50 am to Maryborough N453-469 on 7.40 am to Geelong N453 to Warrenheip only

N453-489 on 10.00 am to Geelong N453 to Warrenheip only

J554-N453 on 10.45 am to Maryborough (actually left at 2.00 pm)

R726 on 6.30 am from Geelong R723 on 9.20 am from Geelong

J531 on 12.30 pm to Pishah (Waubra line) N499 on 11.20 from Maryborough.

D\*608 taken away for the torch on 19.6.63".

Then in August: "There are now only three A's left (964, 986, 996). Our No.27 tram got a belting from a Naracoorte truck (semi-trailer) in February, is back in service."

October provided some surprising news in a letter dated the 10th. "VR is giving heavy repairs to ten R class and 4 or 5 Js. Ballarat North is repairing four Rs, J518, K160, plus other Js. E371 is now a shunter at Ballarat North shops, so we now have two oldtimers on the job. The other is No.8 crane loco. D\*686 will now be scrapped — I think. I saw R707; last Saturday at Loco — it was all cleaned up too! Quite a lot of light repairs are being done at Ballarat East shed. There are only two A2s left now, 964 and 996."

His letter of 28th November contained no specific railway news, but covered some tramway happenings. No.13 tram is having new aluminium side panels fitted on the saloon — No.14 has new sides too. No.33 got knocked on 18.11.63, so that's a new cabin needed for the No.2 end".

On 7th January, 1964 he wrote, "Saw only two steam passenger trains over the holidays. Both were on the 3.20 pm to Geelong. R751 on the 20th December and R730 on 27th, but a nice lot of Rs and Js are out, especially J550 and R700 with their red smoke plates and runningboard edgings".

In his letter of 29th January he made only one railway observation. "Saw N432-430 on 1.30 pm Geelong yesterday."

As mentioned at the head of this article Wal was a prolific letter writer, but many dealt primarily with personal news. Some were merely a paragraph or two while others ran to several pages. That of 24th April fell in the latter category. "During the past month I've seen plenty of steam locos here. Two Rs on empties from Geelong, R and N on empty wheat train standing on the old Buninyong line (dates and numbers not given, DAC). Last Wednesday week (15.4) I saw N493 and D\*635 go out on the Up bulk wheat to Warrenheip. Another day saw R752 tender first

coupled to R763 on 9 am passenger from Geelong. Two Saturdays ago (12.4) the ARE went to Avoca. They had R761 to Castlemaine, 765 to Maryborough, N402 to and from Avoca, 765 to Creswick, D\*635 Creswick to Ballarat, 765 from Ballarat, with 635 banking to Warrenheip. Saw T371, one of the latest "cut down front" diesels, last Saturday".

My last letter from Wal was written on 6th August — nine days before his death. It contained no news of railway working around Ballarat, but his excitement at the prospect of travelling behind two of his beloved D's to Picola, on the 15th, was evident. The locos were to be 639 and 684, and he comments, "This will be 684's final run too." His train from Ballarat was late and he was forced to hurry to board the ARHS Special at Spencer St. Never physically robust, the exertion proved too much for his weak heart. Near Broadmeadows, while riding in the car *Yarra*, he suffered a

massive heart attack and died shortly afterwards.

Les Poole, writing his obituary (October 1964 *Divisional Diary*), said, "I feel it was the manner in which he would wish to go, while riding the steel trail". Australia had lost a fine railway historian and those enthusiasts who new him personally had lost a dear friend. He had been well known to railway and tramway staff around his home town and they willingly allowed him access to signal cabins, depots and yards. He accepted these privileges with a humility that won him friends at all levels — even Vice-Regal — having been personally conducted on a tour of VR's State Car by the then Governor, Sir Reginald Dallas Brookes. In short, Wal set an example that modern-day railway enthusiasts could well emulate, for the bona fide relationship he enjoyed with railway staff enabled him to witness, and record, the history that surrounded him.

SEC Ballarat tram, No.25, leaves its depot on 6.10.60 bound for Bendigo. (Douglas Colquhoun)

