

Melbourne, Bendigo & Echuca Railway

Formation of the Victorian Railways

In March 1855, it became clear that private companies were struggling to finance and build railways in Victoria. Governor Sir Charles Hotham suggested that the colony could build railways itself, using capital borrowed from London markets. A Legislative Council Committee was quickly set up and it recommended that the government should build railways from Melbourne to Bendigo (then called Sandhurst) and from Geelong to Ballarat as a first step. These two lines were known as the Goldfields Railways.

The Government was fortunate to have **Andrew Clarke**, Royal Engineer, as Surveyor-General. In May 1856 Clarke negotiated with the Melbourne, Mount Alexander and Murray River Railway Company to sell the line they had started to build to Bendigo to the government. The Victorian Railways Department was then created.

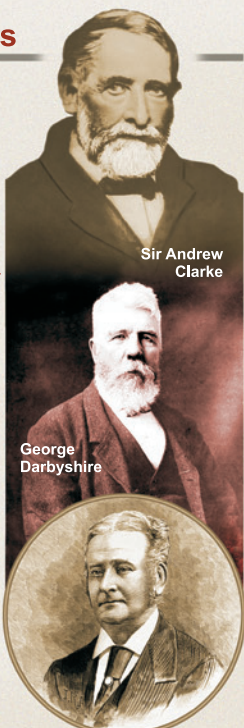
Assembling the Team

Clarke, who was a tactful and vigorous administrator, assembled a team of railway engineers to carry out the work. **George Darbyshire**, the first Engineer-in-Chief, was an accomplished surveyor and administrator. The finely graded sweeping curves he designed enabled the railway to take the Great Dividing Range in its stride.

Darbyshire was replaced by **Thomas Higinbotham** who had extensive railway experience and went on to build many more railways in Victoria. These men in turn appointed engineers and

draftsmen with appropriate experience. Most of them had worked in the United Kingdom during the Golden Age of railway building in the 1820s.

Joseph Brady was the supervising engineer for the Melbourne to Bendigo Railway. He took charge of the line between Woodend and Castlemaine which had the heaviest works on the line. This included the great viaducts at Malmesbury and Taradale and the tunnels at Elphinstone and Big Hill. Brady carried out much other important work in Victoria and elsewhere.



Sir Andrew Clarke

George Darbyshire

Thomas Higinbotham

State Library of Victoria H53.3592

State Library of Victoria mp04559



Engineering Heritage National Landmark placed on the 150th anniversary of the completion of the line to Bendigo, 20 October 2012
Engineering Heritage Victoria and Macedon Ranges Shire Council

For more details about this and other engineering heritage works, go to www.engineersaustralia.org.au/heritageregister/search



A Goldfields Railway links Melbourne to an Inland Port



Building the Railway

A contract was let to Cornish & Bruce for £3,356,937. They had to start work on 1 June 1858 and finish by 31 July 1861. They made quick early progress – the Melbourne to Sunbury section was opened on 13 January 1859.

The line to Bendigo was officially opened on 20 October 1862 by the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly. A great banquet was held for 800 guests and this was followed by a grand ball.

Extending the Goldfields Railway to Echuca was relatively simple – that route was across flat plains needing no viaducts or tunnels. The work was completed in 1864 by contractors Collier & Barry.

A Transport Revolution – Port to Port

The opening of the railway revolutionised transport services for the communities along the line. The railways not only carried freight and passengers but also delivered daily needs such as mail, bread, milk and newspapers.

When the railway reached Echuca, it was the first rail connection from the Murray to a major seaport, opening up the river paddle steamer trade to the Port of Melbourne.



"Hobson's Bay Railway Pier" by W.S. Hutton. State Library of Victoria M3981



Public Record Office Victoria VPRS1.12901.P1.12969

This is how masons used scaffolding to build a bluestone viaduct at Taradale

The Malmesbury Viaduct is Victoria's biggest masonry structure



State Library of Victoria mp040764

The Viaduct took just one year to build
It was completed on 24 October 1860
It contains nearly 4000 cubic metres of bluestone from a nearby quarry
It has five spans of 18.3 metres
The maximum height above the valley floor is 25 metres



The 1861 Seal of the Municipality shows the railway viaduct and is used today as the logo of the Malmesbury Historical Society