



Ballaarat on display in Victoria Square gardens at Busselton. Some of the early locomotive engineering practices and features of this historic locomotive can be seen in this photograph.
Photo:WL Hanks

Western Australian pioneer logging locomotives

by Bill Hanks

During September 2008, I travelled to Western Australia for a holiday, during which I planned to pay homage to surviving logging locomotives, in particular *Ballaarat* and *Polly*. There are others but they are not the focus of this report.

Ballaarat

The Western Australian Timber Coy was a syndicate of Victorian investors, who in 1870 were granted 181,500 acres adjacent to Geographe Bay. They established a mill and jetty at Lockeville with a 3ft 6in gauge railway running inland to their timber station at Yoganup.

The locomotive they ordered was to be the very first steam locomotive in Western Australia and was also the first 3ft 6in gauge locomotive to be built in Australia. It entered service during August 1871. Designed by Jonathan Robinson and built by the Victoria Foundry at Ballarat in Victoria, it was demonstrated to a large crowd on 14 March 1871, prior to being shipped west aboard the barque *Nightingale*.

During its working life the locomotive's well tank was removed, shortening the footplate by 300mm. The crosshead water pump was also replaced by one driving from an eccentric on the rear driving axle. A spark arrestor was added as well as a four-wheeled tender.

By 1886 the railway was 36km long but by mid-1887 both the locomotive and the railway were in very decrepit condition. On 20 June 1888 the WA Timber Coy went into liquidation. The locomotive remained in a shed at Lockeville where in 1900 both the shed and locomotive were badly damaged by fire, which burned the wooden buffer beams, boiler lagging and wooden tender frames leaving *Ballaarat* a complete wreck.

Ballaarat was taken to Midland Junction Workshops in 1925 for restoration and display at Perth station, but this did not happen. In 1937 it was returned to Busselton where it was placed on display in Victoria Square Gardens without cover. In the mid 1990s *Ballaarat* did receive a repaint and had a shelter erected over it.

When viewing *Ballaarat* during my recent WA visit, it was interesting to study the engineering of this historic locomotive. Whilst most of the fittings have long since vanished, the majority of the major components are intact. Many of the modifications made during its working life are not obvious, but the reason why it has two completely different cylinder castings is intriguing.

Whilst it is almost inconceivable that *Ballaarat* could ever be restored to working order, the general condition of this locomotive is fair considering the length of time it had been fully exposed to the elements at Busselton. The shelter provided during the 1990s has no doubt slowed its deterioration, but this very historically significant piece of our movable heritage, needs to be properly preserved to prevent further deterioration and then displayed in a stable environment for future generations.



Polly on display in front of the Collie Tourist Centre. A number of modifications made in the bush can be seen here. Photo:WL Hanks

Polly

In 1875 Alexander Buckingham had established a water powered sawmill on the banks of the Canning River 26km from Perth. In 1879 he went to England and purchased an Aveling & Porter traction engine to haul logs and timber. Having landed at Fremantle, the engine was driven to Perth where special permission had to be obtained before it could be driven across the Swan River via the causeway.

The engine was sold for a profit only to be bought back some years later and put to work again hauling logs at various mills. It continued in this role until 1910 when Buckingham moved his attention to an area east of Collie. In 1911 he built a steam powered sawmill that was connected to the Collie to Narrogin railway in 1912 by a 1km long siding.

Polly was converted for rail use by fitting a pair of driving wheels from a Fowler locomotive in place of the road wheels and a pair of smaller flanged wheels was fitted to the front axle, which was locked in position. A winch was also fitted to load logs at the bush landings and for the next eight years it was used to haul logs to the mill and shunt trucks of sawn timber to the WAGR siding. By 1920 the forests around the mill had been cut out and *Polly* was considered unsuitable for hauling over long distances.

The operation was sold to the State Building Supplies in 1954 and *Polly* was offered to the Perth Museum who declined the offer due to lack of space. In 1957 the Collie Road Board asked for *Polly* and it was placed on display at the Collie Tourist Bureau.

With the recent construction of a new tourist centre, *Polly* has been placed on a short piece of track in a prominent position in front of the building and has become a rather attractive

‘garden feature’. In recent times it has received a fresh coat of paint, but sadly it is completely exposed to the elements.

Whilst looking at this unusual locomotive I could only admire the ‘bush engineering’ that had gone into it to adapt it for rail use. When comparing it today to photos taken during its working life it is clear a number of modifications were made over the years where components were fashioned from raw materials to perform the job required of them

Like *Ballaarat*, *Polly* is historically significant. A coat of paint and display in a prominent position is only short term preservation as it is still exposed to the elements and a number of components have already seriously deteriorated. *Polly* needs to be properly preserved to ensure its longevity and be displayed in a stable environment.

Preservation today should be more than just the ‘stuffing and mounting’ of an old piece of equipment on a plinth in a park, where more often than not it becomes a piece of playground equipment. There are already instances of locomotives in parks having been scrapped because they had deteriorated to the point where they were dangerous.

Both *Ballaarat* and *Polly* are historically significant pieces of Western Australia’s movable industrial heritage and should be preserved and displayed in a manner that ensures they last for centuries, not just a few decades. Both locomotives need to receive the same standard of preservative treatment that Stephenson’s *Rocket* has at the London Science Museum.

References

Information for the abbreviated histories above was extracted from ‘*Rails Through The Bush*’ by Adrian Gunzburg & Jeff Austin.