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A Brief Illustrated History of the Moonee Ponds Creek Trestle Bridge..

August 5, 2014 — GRG - Group

Gowanbrae Residents Group

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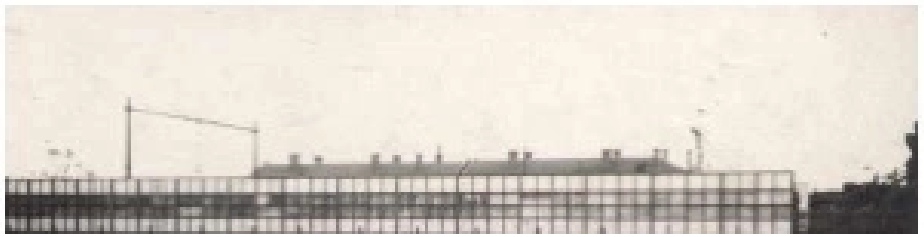
As fellow Gowanbrae residents you will be familiar with the iconic view of the Moonee Ponds Creek valley and the railway trestle bridge (or viaduct) that spans it. However, how many of you are aware of its history, why it was built and how it is used today? Having discovered some historic photographs of the bridge during construction I thought it worth enlightening you with a brief history of "our" trestle bridge.

The trestle bridge is typically known as the Moonee Ponds Creek Trestle Bridge or Viaduct. It is part of the Albion-Broadmeadows Line or the Albion-Jacana Line after Jacana Station was built. The Albion-Broadmeadows Line runs between Albion Station, on the Sydenham Line, to Jacana Station, on the Craigieburn Line. It was built mainly as a freight line to avoid suburban traffic and some steeper grades on the Broadmeadows Line.



The Albion-Broadmeadows line was constructed between 1927 and 1929 and was opened on 1st July 1929. The line is 13.8km long (8.58 miles when it was built – that's inflation for you!) and

When Engineers were Cool: Steel Prefab in Richmond

was built... that's inflation for you!) and crosses two large valleys, the Maribyrnong River and the Moonee Ponds Creek valleys. It comprises two tracks which were both Broad Gauge (5' 3" wide) when first built. "Our" trestle bridge has a big sister spanning the Maribyrnong River which is longer, stands at 179 feet (54.6m) above the water and still holds the record for the highest railway bridge in Victoria.

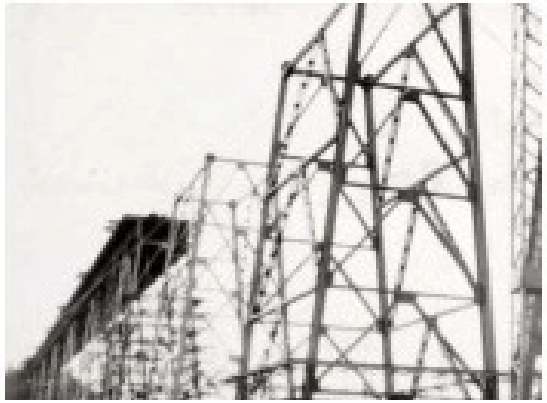
Both bridges were built during the same period with the trusses being manufactured for both bridges at the A. Challingsworth Pty Ltd Structural Steel Works, situated on Swan St in Richmond.

Gowanbrae, when parking wasn't an issue!

Foundations across Moonee Ponds Creek Valley

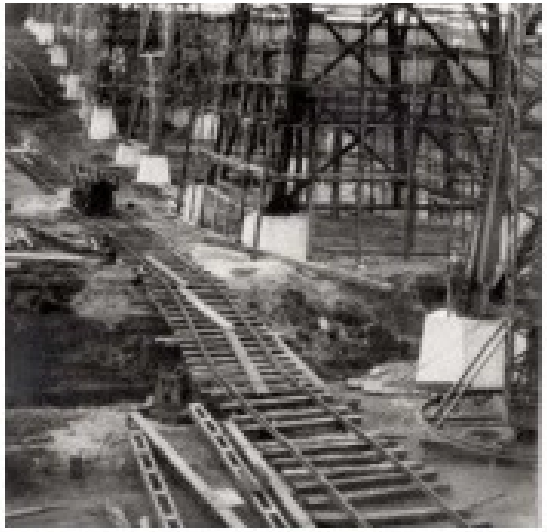
Due to differing train track gauges used throughout Australia, and even within Victoria, interstate freight and passenger transport was problematic at best. This was evident during WW2 where troop movements were hampered to such an extent that in 1946 the Commonwealth Government and the Premiers of NSW, VIC & SA entered into the Gauge Standardisation Agreement. After signing the agreement things moved swiftly (..snicker..) and, as part of the project one of the two Broad Gauge tracks on the Albion to Broadmeadows Line was converted to Standard Gauge (4' 8 ½") and the first Standard Gauge train crossed the Moonee Ponds Creek Trestle Bridge on the 3rd January 1962.

There are several other train track gauges that have been used in Victoria including the 2' 6" Narrow Gauge track the "Puffing Billy" runs on from Belgrave to Gembrook and the 3' 6" Narrow Gauge track that runs from Drysdale to Queenscliff and also hosts a tourist steam train.



Speaking of steam trains, you have probably seen the occasional steam train cross "our" bridge and wondered, like

me, whether it was *Puffing Billy* or another steam train. The easy answer is: No, it's not *Puffing Billy*, as the track gauges are incompatible (see the above riveting dissertation on track gauges). There are quite a few operational steam locomotives, based in Victoria, which are used for tourist purposes and I can confirm that at least three of the steam locomotives operated by www.steamrail.com.au have crossed "our" bridge in the last few years. The R761 (Built 1951), K153 (Built 1940) and the K190 (Built 1946). These days the bridge still carries mainly freight trains, some interstate passenger trains and the occasional steam train.



Trestle Bridge: Creek view looking up

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Andre Braakhuis, Gowanbrae Residents Group

Acknowledgements:

- Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria
- Essendon Historical Society for pointing me in the right direction.
- The Railways of Victoria 1854-2004 by Robert Lee
- Railways to '62 by Leo J. Harrigan
- Trains, Tracks, Travellers – A History of the Victorian Railways by Mark Fiddian
- www.steamrail.com.au website

Moonee Ponds Creek Trestle Bridge: All Finished!

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