

CANTERBURY HISTORY GROUP



PRESIDENT Neil Curry
CONTACT: 98305896
SECRETARY AND EDITOR
 Elizabeth Wilson
 canthist@gmail.com.

Newsletter April 2023

Greetings to all members and friends of the Canterbury History Group

 The next meeting of the Canterbury History Group will be on **Monday 24th April at 8.00pm** at St Paul's Parish Centre, Church Street, Canterbury.

Instead of a speaker, we plan to hold a **SHOW and TELL**. Bring Coronation memorabilia OR anything from the past you'd like to show us: documents, photos, treasures, gadgets etc.

Meeting dates for your diaries:

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Monday 24 th April | Show and Tell |
| Monday 22 nd May | to be announced |
| Monday 26 th June | to be announced |
| Winter recess: July and August. | |
| Monday 25 th Sept | Speaker: Prof Graeme Davison on researching Scottish family history and the legends of Sir Walter Scott. His new book will be available in September |
| Monday Oct 23rd | History Month Dinner - Speaker: Prof Richard Broome on Aboriginal History in early Melbourne |
| Monday Nov 27 th | Christmas Lunch at 12.00 noon |

Bronwyn Hughes who spoke to us at our AGM has let us know that her long awaited book **'Lights Everlasting – Australia's Commemorative Stained glass from the Boer war to Vietnam'** is now available.

Price: \$69.95 plus postage. You can obtain it by emailing: enquiry@scholarly.info Tel: 03 9329 6996

Or googling: Australian Scholarly Publishers

The book focusses on commemorative stained glass – an overlooked art form - and describes its rich artistic and architectural heritage and the artists and firms who created it. It tells of Australians at war.

Errata: Apologies for the mistake I made in the March Newsletter. I mentioned that the Rohlk family lived at 9 Maling Rd ; they lived at 9 Bryson Street. More about the Rohlk family in a future newsletter.

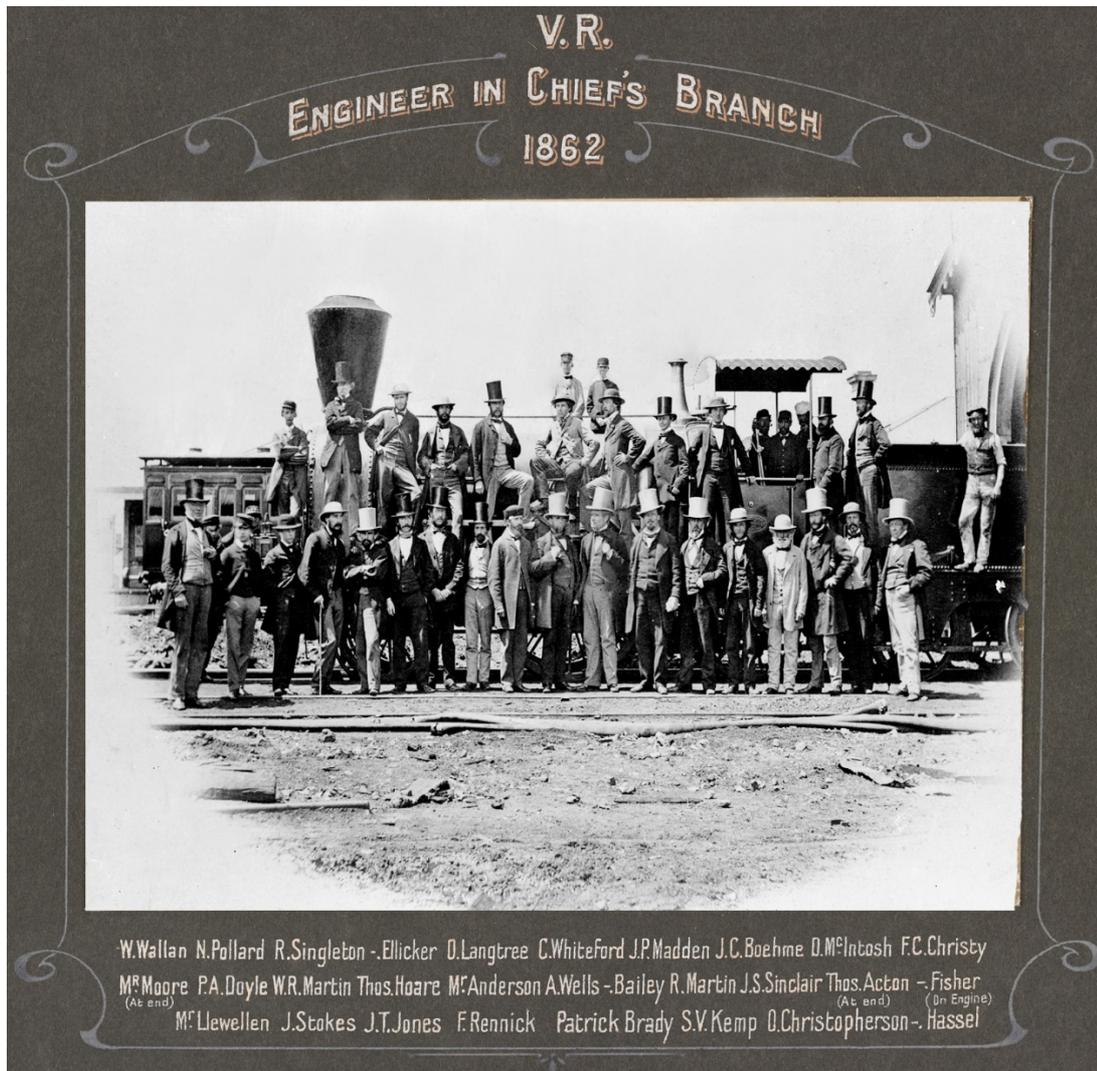
NEWS: Our new **Canterbury Community Precinct** is now open and the Neighbourhood Centre encourages you to visit and see inside the beautiful building. There's car parking in the car park outside the entrance at 2 Kendall street. Recently the daughter of the last green keeper contacted us and we showed her our archive of photos and documents. Her family lived in the adjoining house and she presented a bouquet to Dame Pattie Menzies when they opened the bowling season. You can still see that building and the rest of the Bowling Club. Thankfully, features like the original windows have been preserved.

Work will start on the new **Heritage Centre** after April 17th and it might be finished in 6 months.

Michael Venn spoke at our March meeting about Francis Rennick, Engineer-in-Chief of the Victorian Railways (and very early resident of Canterbury). He has provided the following transcript of his talk. To save space, I have omitted the many footnotes but he has provided us with a link to his online book. The title of this article could well be: 'Skullduggery, Politicians and Railway Engineers' - Editor

The Career of Francis Rennick, C.E.

Francis Rennick was born in County Fermanagh, Ireland in 1838 and visited America in his youth, settling in Victoria in 1857 where he found work in a private civil engineer's office as a 19 year old.



Francis Rennick joined the embryonic Victorian Railways on the 15th July 1858, working as a junior surveyor and draughtsman. Six months later the first VR line was opened from Spencer Street to Williamstown, and then to Sunbury. (19th January and 10th February 1859.

By that time private railways had been functioning for over four years, including the trunk line to Geelong).



Francis Rennick's first boss was George Christian Darbyshire [Photo c 1860] who had been appointed as one of 12 railway engineers 6th May 1856. Some of them had 'C.E.' (Civil Engineer) after their names, but Darbyshire had no professional qualification. Despite this, he was recognised as the ablest and was appointed Engineer-in-Chief. By the end of 1856, Darbyshire's survey teams had mapped out routes for over 600 miles of railway.

Young Francis Rennick soon witnessed the trauma and conflict that was to inflict the government railway for the rest of his career.

Darbyshire was inexperienced in the writing of contract specifications, and the unscrupulous contractors, partners Cornish and Bruce were adept at bribery and the exploitation of loopholes. During construction of the Sandhurst (Bendigo) railway, a scandal erupted over alleged shoddy workmanship in some culverts near Castlemaine, where the amount of cement used fell far short of the amount claimed in expenses by Cornish and Bruce. Darbyshire demanded the government acquit him of any blame and not receiving it, he resigned 24 hours later, on 11th May 1860. He settled on a property at Werribee with a comfortable two storey house he named 'The Grange', and with marketable skills in engineering and surveying, Darbyshire had no need of a government job. He also ran sheep and served as President of the Wyndham Shire. But he would not be the last senior railwayman forced out of the service only to grasp new opportunities in the young colony.



Darbyshire's replacement was Thomas Higinbotham [photo c 1860], bachelor brother of George Higinbotham, who was soon to become Attorney General. When Higinbotham took over, he found that Cornish and Bruce had been paid 'a sum of upwards of £19,000 for ballast that had never been supplied'. That the contractors were corrupt, he had no doubt. He was also deeply suspicious of the actions of William Austin Zeal, one of the Department's Resident Engineers. A month before the payments were made to Cornish and Bruce, Zeal resigned from the Victorian Railways and joined their firm on three times his railway salary, to help them exploit loopholes in their contracts. Zeal was later elected to the Legislative Assembly as Member for Castlemaine in November 1864. He remained in politics and became a thorn in the side of the railway engineers.

Francis Rennick married Annie Louisa Croker originally from Rosscarberry, County Cork, on 8th September 1860, at St. Luke's Church, Emerald Hill. A years later they were living at 13 Richmond-terrace, Richmond, where their first child was born on 6th October 1861.

By 1864 the Victorian Railways had reached Echuca, and reversed the direction of most of the trade on the Murray River, which had hitherto been taken downstream to Goolwa.

In January 1870 Annie gave birth to a daughter, the address being Survey Road, Boroondara. [Mont Albert Road]. About this time, Rennick was promoted to Resident Engineer of the middle section of the North Eastern main line (probably Seymour to Benalla). This line formed the first Intercolonial link in 1881. In late 1873 the deaths are recorded of two of their infant children. This is confusing, as the first in September has their address as Erin Street, Richmond, then the second in November, at Boroondara. By 1874 Francis was supervising construction of two of the first 'light lines' - Beaufort to Ararat and Ararat to Hamilton.



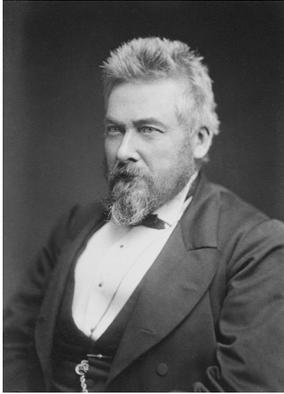
There had been a great fight over these lines. Parliament came within a whisker of making them to 3'6" gauge, tantalised by the propaganda for narrow gauge which was sweeping the British Empire. Higinbotham, the Engineer-in-Chief fought a rear-guard action, finally appearing at the bar of the Legislative Council who were about to approve the Bill to build narrow gauge lines, and create several break-of-gauge stations in Victoria. He prevailed, but only by making the 5'3" gauge lines to the flimsiest standards. Twenty years later, during the terrible 1890's depression, Francis Rennick engineered light lines in the wheat country for half the cost of the first group of light lines.

But Higinbotham and his engineering team made enemies, not the least William Zeal, and John Woods. Zeal and

Woods were the only politicians with railway engineering experience, and both had a history of shady dealings and had been exposed by Higinbotham, who was incorruptible.



Higinbotham's Second-in-Charge was Robert Watson, who was disloyal, as was Robert Grey Ford [photo], an ambitious engineer who had impressed with his skill at erecting bridges on the North Eastern line, where he would have been subordinate to Francis Rennick. Ford had no professional qualifications, and had worked his way up from training as a blacksmith. He was a driven workaholic and befriended politician Woods and his allies. Engineers, Watson and Ford were the source of 'leaks' to politicians who resented Higinbotham. They actively undermined their Chief's plans for a Central Station and Outer Circle Railway to connect it with the Gippsland trunk line.



In early 1878, the radical Berry Government had legislation blocked by the conservative Legislative Council. Berry decided to govern without Supply, which necessitated the sacking of over 300 public servants. This occurred on 'Black Wednesday', 8th January 1878. Higinbotham was one who was targeted and retrenched. John Woods [photo], who was Berry's Minister for Railways, said he 'had had his revenge' on Higinbotham. In the opinion of David Syme, *The Age* editor, it was '*impossible to justify but for the object that is sought to be obtained by*', or in other words, the end justified the means. '*There cannot be a coup d'etat without its victims*' he continued, congratulating Berry for his '*heroic measures*'. Such was the view of '*the organ of the Commune*' as the *Melbourne Punch* described *The Age*, already the most widely read newspaper in Victoria

Woods promoted Watson as Engineer-in-Chief after Higinbotham's retrenchment, and abolished the posts of Resident Engineers, amalgamating their separate design staffs in a central office, which made for an improved use of resources. With all the Resident Engineers gone, Woods later elevated his personal friend Robert Ford to a new position, second only to Watson. As Engineer for Construction, Ford was given control of all new railway projects. It was a vast and very strategic responsibility, and included the redesign of the Melbourne Terminal. Ford would be Acting Engineer-in-Chief whenever Watson was on holiday or ill, and as a senior officer, Woods would be able to direct him personally on specific issues.

Woods was unique among the political heads of the Department in having the engineering and administrative ability to perform the integrative tasks of a general manager. Alone among the Department's multitude of Ministers down to the present day, Woods can be considered a railwayman. As a politician, he was also in a position to push through Cabinet those changes which he saw were clearly necessary, many, like the introduction of telegraph, were much needed. But he was autocratic.

Francis Rennick survived the purge, but he and the other professional engineers were outraged by Ford's elevation, and began to keep secret diaries from which charges could later be made when the political wind changed, as it did two years later.

In the February 1880 election campaign, the Berry Ministry were swept from office. The new Service government brought back Thomas Higinbotham as Engineer-in-Chief and Watson resigned. The position of Engineer for Construction was abolished and Ford was retrenched with a compensation package. Higinbotham's loyal colleague Greene took over Ford's responsibilities, retitled as Resident Engineer.

Parliament was divided, siding with either Higinbotham or Ford, now proxies in the bitter struggle between the Conservative and radical 'Berryite' factions. Ford wrote a long defence of his actions and attacked Higinbotham as a liar, accusing him of '*malicious and diabolical cunning*'. Alas for Higinbotham, his restoration plans unravelled when the Service government was defeated in a no-confidence motion on 24th June 1880. A general election followed, the second in five months. Berry was returned with increased numbers. But Berry did not re-install Woods as railway Minister. Nevertheless, Higinbotham was ordered to restore Ford as Engineer for Construction.

He obeyed but told a friend '*I think I now see the end of the furrow I have been ploughing so long*'. Higinbotham left work on Saturday afternoon, 4th September, determined that he would resign, rather than work again with Ford. He retired that evening feeling unwell, contemplating the dawn of his greatest humiliation the following Monday. Mercifully, he never awoke to see it. He died peacefully that night, worn out at sixty-one, from an '*effusion of serum in the cavities of the brain and heart*.' Ford returned on Monday as Engineer for Construction and Acting Engineer-in-Chief. But if he thought that was the end of the matter, he was deluded.

The loss of Higinbotham created turmoil, with real hatred seething between some of the senior men, Ford being the focus of much of it. Within six months a number of engineers, led by Francis Rennick, were plotting Ford's removal. The new Engineer-in-Chief was William Elsdon who, lacking experience in state-run railways, was singularly ill-fitted for managing this difficult Victorian Railways bunch, or for coping with the daily interference of politicians.



In July 1881 the Berry government's reform efforts were spent and Thomas Bent [photo 1874] crossed the floor from the Conservatives to enable former Berryite, Sir Bryan O'Loughlen, to form a minority government and stop Berry from regaining office. For his reward, Bent was made Minister for Railways. As a young man, Bent had been elected a member of the Moorabbin Shire Council in 1862. Of rather rough appearance and with a gruff manner, he was nevertheless amiable and good-hearted. He would ride up to a ratepayer on his '*flea-bitten grey*', throw one leg across the saddle and say '*Brown, I want your rates!*' and generally he would get them. He'd endeared himself to the residents and had decided to challenge the sitting Member for Brighton in the 1871 election. This was Thomas's brother George Higinbotham, former Chief Secretary and one of the most well-known public figures in Australia.

Thomas Bent turned his Department into an '*asylum for the lame, the halt, and the blind*'. It took a strong politician to resist the temptations of patronage at that time, and Bent was not such a man. Trouble soon arose over a flood that caused severe damage to mills at Geelong. Under Ford's direction, the openings for flood water were inadequate, exacerbating the flood. Earlier, the same thing had happened on another bridge for which Ford was responsible. At the Crown Solicitor's office, Elsdon ordered Ford to attend a high level investigation by independent witnesses, but Ford said he had to go to St Arnaud instead. At the insistence of Elsdon, Watson and Zeal, he agreed to go, but next morning he failed to show up for the special train to Geelong! The Crown Solicitor was outraged, and asked Bent to suspend Ford, which he did. But it took three days to find him and advise of his suspension!

Ford's pay had been stopped on Saturday 25th August. On the following Thursday, a broken wheel caused a serious accident to a train at Jolimont. Four passengers were killed, and thirty nine others injured. Next day, as if there was not bloodletting enough, Rennick and his co-conspirators decided to put the knife into Ford, formally charging him with tyranny, negligence, incompetence, and with employing government officers during government time on private work.

Pressure for an Inquiry grew, and on 8th February 1882, Ford was suspended for the third time in less than two years. Rennick, now Engineer of Surveys, resubmitted his charges to Bent the following week, fully aware that his own job was on the line should Ford be exonerated.

Twelve charges were made, and over sixteen sitting days the Board heard witnesses and asked 7,870 questions. The inquiry and subsequent preparation of the report took three months, being completed on 1st June. 875 copies of the report were printed for a cost of £226/10/- enough to purchase a house in those days. Only one serious charge was upheld, but with weak management under Elsdon and ongoing bitterness in the Engineering Branch, Bent's solution was to retrench Rennick and transfer Ford to the Public Works Department.

But as experienced railway engineers were at a premium, Bent soon realised he had been too hasty. With a growing volume of work on, he was persuaded to re-instate Rennick a month later. Rennick was welcomed back to the fold with a purse of £100, contributed in a whip-around of the engineering staff by a committee of senior officers! This generosity must have bordered on the embarrassing, the sum being equivalent to half a year's salary for an assistant engineer.

Ford, on the other hand, never returned to the railways. The Public Works Department gave him three months to prepare plans and specifications for a new Falls Bridge (later called Queens Bridge). But Ford was not a civil engineer, and while adept at supervising the erection of bridges, complex design was another matter. Despite being assigned a draftsman to assist, after five years there was still no acceptable plan for the Falls Bridge. He exhibited the same uncooperative and stubborn attitude that had so exasperated his railway superiors, Higinbotham and Elsdon, and at length he was retrenched in August 1887. He died aged 57 in 1891, leaving his wife and family a substantial fortune.



Rennicks' Richmond Station

Richmond station was at ground level, with a gated crossing of busy Swan Street. With only two tracks, the station served trains for the Lilydale, Brighton, Frankston, Oakleigh and Gippsland lines. By the early 1880's the growth of rail traffic was closing the gates at Swan Street for seven hours out of twelve, with nearly 400 train movements over the crossing daily.

Bent initiated a competition for a winning design, and Rennick used his brief period of unemployment to prepare a plan. His was not the winning design, but it was the most practical, and became the basis for one of the largest civil engineering projects yet undertaken by the Victorian Railways. Work got under way in mid-1884, with minimal delays to trains passing every few minutes. Over two million bricks were needed, but with the building boom in Melbourne, the railways got no response to their call for tenders and were compelled to purchase bricks whenever the opportunity offered.

On Saturday night, 4th July 1885 the first tracks were slued onto the new high level embankment by an army of 200 navvies. They toiled under electric lights powered by a generator set up by K.L.Murray, the Telegraph Engineer. Quite a crowd gathered at midnight to watch the event and witness this early application of electric lighting.



By then, the railways had been placed under new non-political management. A three man Commission was established, the Chairman being Richard Speight [Photo 1884]. The Victorian Railways was the world's first Statutory Corporation. Under Speight, the Victorian Railways underwent a transformation, and by 1892 was one of the world's best railways of its size. It was during the Speight administration that Rennick was promoted to Assistant Engineer of Existing Lines in 1887.

On 20th July 1887, Francis and Annie's eldest son, Edward Croker Rennick, was married to Florence Carter at Christ Church, St. Kilda. She was a daughter of Ernest Carter who had built 'Shrublands', Canterbury. Francis and Annie's second eldest son, Robert Bruce, was married to Mary Kate Snowden at Christ Church, Hawthorn on 30th December 1891. She was the daughter of Edward Green Snowden, a solicitor, who lived at 'Monomeath', Canterbury, and was involved with Francis Rennick in the parish council at St Barnabus.

Then in 1891, after the death of Robert Watson, who had returned as Engineer-in-Chief, Rennick became Assistant Engineer-in-Chief. He was described as '*reserved in demeanour*' but a thoroughly competent civil engineer. But this promotion came at an inauspicious time; Victoria was plunging into its longest and worst depression.

David Syme's 'Age' newspaper had run a misguided campaign blaming the Speight Administration for 'mismanagement' and excessive expenditure. With a change of government in 1891, the Railway Commissioners were dispensed with in mid-1892. A Parliamentary Standing Committee was established to investigate all proposed railway expenditure. Woods, Bent and Zeal were all on the Committee! Over its two and a half year life, it held 419 meetings over 245 days, with 17,407 miles travelled by train, coach and steamer to investigate no less than 5,265 miles of proposed railway. These statistics were assiduously compiled by their secretariat, in a specially fitted up and furnished committee room and office at Parliament House which cost £2,957: more than the cost of a new locomotive. The total cost of the Committee's work was £16,164, which was over five times Speight's annual salary.

For all their trouble, the lines recommended by the Standing Committee included just as many of dubious worth or of political inspiration as those proposed during the Speight's incumbency. One was a line of just 4½ miles from St Kilda to Brighton in Bent's electorate, which was estimated to cost a prodigious £200,000! This was almost twice the cost per mile as the much-criticised Outer Circle, despite running over land that was flat by comparison.

Zeal was soon elected President of the Legislative Council, and was knighted in 1895, but the Depression wounded Bent politically and financially and after struggling on for a couple of years, his days in Parliament seemed to have ended with his defeat in the September 1894 election.

On 12th September 1894, Francis and Annie's second daughter, Alice, married A.B. Speeding at St Barnabas, Balwyn. He was manager of the Adelaide branch of the Commercial Union Insurance Company. The bride's parents had resided in the district for more than twenty years.

The old-guard of railwaymen was passing. For thirty years the railway had mainly been managed by men who joined at the very beginning or soon thereafter, including Rennick. There were few senior managers left with the breadth of experience necessary to fill the void left with the Commissioners' suspension. Until parliament could ratify a settlement, the temporary expedient was adopted of appointing Deputy Commissioners.



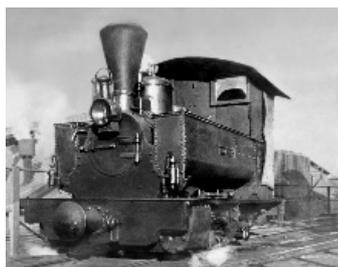
One of these was Francis Rennick. But neither he nor Richard Francis, another Deputy Commissioner, displayed the determined and unyielding character needed to drive through drastic and

unpopular measures. This fell to William Kibble, who had got offside with Speight. Kibble had been a source of information *The Age* reporters used in their campaign against Speight.

When the Commissioners were suspended in mid 1892, there were 12,787 employees engaged under the Railway Commissioners Act, and 827 employed as casuals. It took time to reorganise the railway to manage with fewer staff. But before Rennick could act as Deputy Commissioner, the retirement of the Engineer-in-Chief and the death of his replacement left only Rennick to fill that role.

The Standing Committee wrestled with plans for new lines into hilly districts. They had been persuaded that 2' 0" gauge light railways were warranted where estimated traffic was inadequate for a broad gauge line, or where hilly terrain would make broad gauge lines too expensive. Engineer-in-Chief Francis Rennick had opposed narrow gauge railways from mid-1893.

Just as they had twenty years before, politicians fell prey to the narrow gauge propagandists and patent holders, this time the Sydney based Belgian consul and agent for Decauville. *The Age* told its readers Decauville railways could be built for £600 - £800 per mile. But Victorian politicians only had to make a half hour's walk from Parliament House to see a Decauville narrow gauge railway in operation. The Metropolitan Gas Company had laid a short 2' 6" gauge railway in 1886 to transport Maitland coal from their wharf on the Yarra River to their adjacent West Melbourne gas making plant. A small Decauville locomotive had been purchased that year to work the line, and another in 1890.



L: A tiny Decauville loco at West Melbourne Gasworks

Those who bothered might have had pause to wonder what sort of a load such tiny locomotives might manage on the steep gradients proposed for lines in West Gippsland and the Otway Ranges. Some of the Committee members were sceptical, but nevertheless a recommendation was passed that surveys be made for nine narrow gauge lines on the Decauville principle. It was the beginning of what *The Age* termed '*the triumph of the narrow gauge*'. Over the next two years, the Engineer-in-Chief's branch accordingly made permanent surveys of narrow gauge railways to Whitfield, Gembrook, Beech Forest and Yarra Junction, with trial surveys to Warburton and Mansfield from Whitfield. No surveys of broad gauge lines were made

Meanwhile, the Tasmanian Parliament approved a 2'0" gauge tramway of 17½ miles on the wild and very rugged West Coast, the North East Dundas Line [photo]. Opened by early 1897, Zeal, now Sir William, made an unofficial visit. He returned to Victoria a passionate supporter of Decauville lines and as always, he was



disparaging of Victorian Railways engineers, accusing them of overstating the costs of making narrow gauge lines by surveying them to broad gauge standards.

Just as Thomas Higinbotham and Longmore had inspected the Queensland narrow gauge a generation before and come to starkly opposing views, now Rennick as Engineer-in-Chief made his own visit to the N.E. Dundas line. Rennick was soon at loggerheads with the Minister for Railways. The N.E. Dundas line carried concentrated loads: slates on the former, galena on the latter. In his report Rennick considered the wider gauge, heavier rails and bigger locomotives would enable trains to carry twice as much loading. Like Higinbotham before him, he was implacably against break-of-gauge.

Also, like Higinbotham he was able to demonstrate that a broad gauge railway could be made for very little above the cost of narrow gauge. The 206 miles of railway built since his appointment as Engineer-in-Chief averaged a mere £2,190 per mile. Most of these lines were in flat Mallee country, so politicians remained sceptical of his ability to match the cost of the N.E. Dundas line in hilly country. But Rennick made a powerful case.

Zeal accused railway officers of making '*clap trap arguments*' and opposing the public good, and rebuffed the idea that narrow gauge engines would be incapable of hauling a paying load. The Whitfield line was flat, and the politicians agreed and the Bill received Royal assent on 24th August 1897, clinching the first narrow gauge addition to the Victorian Railways.

The politicians did not have it all their own way. Confusion troubled the selection of the route and gauge of the Yarra Valley line. The Legislative Assembly approved another 2'0" gauge line from Coldstream to Yarra Junction, but the Legislative Council was nervous. Just as they had called Higinbotham to give evidence, now they called Rennick. This time Zeal's opinion was ignored and, persuaded by the Engineer-in-Chief, they altered the gauge to 5'3".

Below L: Francis Rennick, Engineer-in-Chief, 1897



With the original Bill shelved, Rennick seized the opportunity to make a new survey on broad gauge and reconsider the traffic estimates. The upshot was that after 18 months of investigations and debate, the Warburton line was approved as 5'3", but the Gembrook and Beech Forest as narrow gauge. But for this latter line, Rennick found that he could increase the width by six inches without significantly changing the specifications for bridges, earthworks and sleepers. He convinced the Minister to approve this without reference to parliament, and when the legislation for the Gembrook and Beech Forest lines was introduced, the 2'6" gauge was specified. This enabled the use of much bigger locomotives than the Decauville.

In addition, by convincing the Railway Standing Committee that the gauge of the Whitfield line should be widened by six inches, Rennick achieved a coup. Unnoticed, he had specified bridges to carry 35 tons, on much the same plan as those on broad gauge lines. The increase in gauge made little difference to the earthworks, so construction costs remained about the same. But the wider gauge and the use of second hand 60 lb rails previously laid on main lines enabled much heavier and more powerful locomotives to be used than a Decauville railway.

On 19th May 1899 Francis and Annie's son Robert Bruce died, aged only 34 years.

The Chaffey Brothers had pioneered an irrigation scheme at Mildura in 1886, the most distant and remote corner of Victoria. But despite 3,300 settlers moving to Mildura by 1890, it was about 110 miles from the nearest railhead at Swan Hill as the crow flies, or 335 miles by the circuitous windings of the Murray River. The settlement survived and prompted continuous calls for railway access. When the Committee recommended construction of a railway extending from Woomelang via Ouyen to Mildura and Yelta in August 1900, Parliament quickly approved but this took Rennick by surprise. He informed the politicians that 70 miles of the line had not been surveyed, and some of the country not even explored! A delay ensued while the survey and plans were completed, and the turning of the 'first sod' ceremony took place at Mildura in November 1901.



L: Francis Rennick, Engineer-in-Chief, with his officers in 1899. Rennick is probably in the front row, 4th from Right.

Rennick had had enough, and after nearly 45 years he decided to retire. The last of the original Victorian Railways engineers, he had been toiling since 1858 and had reached compulsory retirement age,

although he was at liberty to stay on, had he wished. But having taken no holiday for the past sixteen years, and perhaps with a foreboding of trouble to come, he chose to take his family on a voyage to America and the United Kingdom. His last years had been fraught: extending the rail lines during the depression and making a rear-guard defence against the folly of narrow gauge. Rennick had also engineered broad gauge light lines to the bare minimum workable standards, and arranged surveys of nearly 1,500 miles of lines at the behest of the Railways Standing Committee, about half of which were never built.

On his return, he retired to his home 'The Grange', in Canterbury, which he had built on ten acres in the early 1860's, long before the area became a suburb or was provided with a railway. He'd been on the committee that founded the first public school in the area, in Balwyn in 1869. And he'd been one of the founders and secretary of the Board of Guardians (parish council) of St Barnabus Church. He was a leading local citizen throughout the area's development, and died at his home in 1915. In 1918 at the cessation of the war, the parishioners placed the St George's window in his memory on the North side of the sanctuary in St Barnabus Church in Balwyn Road.

.....
At the close of Michael's talk, Janet Markham, who is Rennick's great great grand daughter showed us the magnificent illustrated book, with numerous photos of his projects, which had been presented to Francis Rennick when he retired.

<https://railstory.org/> is link to Michael's detailed eBook which is free to view.