

HISTORY of MURRAY BRIDGE
(Train Wreck in the Railway Station in 1923)
(The Story of Signaller Dave Butler)



Dave Butler

Prepared by Lloyd Butler

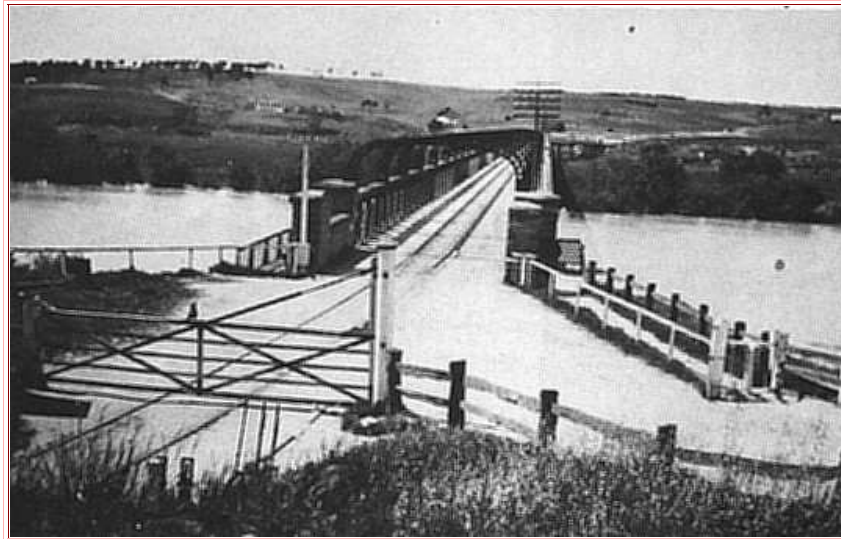
In 1923, there was an accident right in the Murray Bridge Railway Station where several carriages were wrecked. My father, Dave Butler, was the signaller on duty in the Signal Cabin at the station when the accident occurred. I can recall my father relating the circumstances concerning the accident and what follows is his story as told to me.



Murray Bridge Station 1910
The Signal Cabin is on the left

The drama all started when my father received a call on his railway control telephone from Monarto. A runaway truck was on its way on the downhill track from Monarto into Murray Bridge and heading towards the Murray Bridge station. To set the scene, a number of empty passenger carriages were sitting stationary on the main track right in the station proper. Just why they were there at that time was not explained. There was also a by-pass line around which father could have diverted the runaway truck so that it passed right through the station and went on its way towards Taillem Bend.

Had my father chosen to divert the truck, it would have travelled on to the bridge to pass over the River Murray. At that time, there was only one bridge, the one we now call the 'old bridge' and which is now used only for road traffic. However at that time the bridge was shared for both road traffic and the railway and when a train was to cross the bridge, the traffic was cleared and blocked by gates closed across the road at the ends of the bridge.



Bridge & Bridge Gate

Once the emergency had been established, time became precious. There was no time to clear traffic on the bridge and had the truck been allowed to pass on to the bridge, it could have killed somebody caught on their way.

So my father cleared everybody from the station and set the rail line switch points for the truck to ram the stationary carriages and stop it in its path. The result is shown in those photographs. One carriage ended up in the refreshment rooms but, as the station had been cleared, nobody was hurt.



Train Smash in Murray Bridge Station

Of course there was the usual accident inquiry. Some said my father should have diverted the truck on to the bridge to avert the crash in the station. But if you were my father, what would you have done?

Acknowledgement - Train wreck photos from "Across the mighty Murray - Murray Bridge" 1988, prepared by the Murray Bridge and District Historical Society



Typical Signal Box - Signal & Points Control
The levers mechanically control signal and rail switch points via cables and tubular rods which run alongside the lines