

1923.

VICTORIA.

R E P O R T

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

KINGLAKE DISTRICT CONNECTING RAILWAY  
(HURSTBRIDGE AND WHITTLESEA EXTENSIONS);

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

1911-23 : The Kinglake Connection?  
The Battle For a Railway in Melbourne's Outer North

Compiled for WikiNorthia by Brian Membrey

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**THE OFFICIAL OPENING**  
Of the  
**FITZROY to WHITTLESEA RAILWAY**  
Will take place on  
**SATURDAY, 21st DECEMBER,**  
And will be celebrated by a **PUBLIC BANQUET** in  
Marquee, Whittlesea, at 1 p.m.

Special train will be despatched from Spencer-  
street at 10.45 a.m., calling at intermediate stations,  
arriving at Whittlesea at 12.17, returning at 6.25 from  
Whittlesea, arriving in Melbourne 7.50.

Holders of banquet tickets ride free to and from  
Whittlesea.

Banquet tickets may be had from Mr. W. Smithers  
Gadd, mayor of Fitzroy, 445 Collins-street, and 433  
Brunswick-street, Fitzroy; Messrs. Macneil and  
Co., 432 Collins-street; town-halls, Fitzroy, Colling-  
wood, Northcote; shire-hall, Preston; Mr. Lock-  
wood, Whittlesea; Mr. Jas. Ryan, secretary of the  
Shire of Whittlesea, Yan Yean; Mr. Morris, Yan Yean  
Hotel; Mr. W. Paterson, chairman of Railway  
League, South Preston; and Mr. F. Pittard, secretary  
Railway League, South Preston.

School children accompanied by teachers or  
guardians ride free from Whittlesea to Preston and  
return.

The children's special train leaves Whittlesea at  
1.10 p.m., arriving at Preston Reservoir at 2.5 p.m.,  
and leaving Preston on the return journey at 4.10  
p.m., and arriving at Whittlesea at 5.5 p.m.

JAMES RYAN, Hon. Sec.



**"... A few miles of level country ..."**

*"... a few miles of level country is not noticeable, but the same few miles up 5 or 6 hundred feet of mountain would be a serious drawback ..."*

(Evelyn Observer and Bourke East Record. 17 December, 1909)

The Observer's comment actually came after it was announced that the matter of extending the railway through the Kinglake district had been referred to a Railways Standing Committee, but it succinctly summed up the difficulties that faced those seeking services through the outer northern areas of Melbourne (both then, and perhaps even now)!

There had been a number of uncoordinated attempts to establish railways communications in the early years of the twentieth century, but the key was the re-formation of a Whittlesea and Kinglake Railway League under chairmanship of Mr. John Mason, former President of the Whittlesea Shire in September, 1909; branches of the League later formed in a number of towns likely to be impacted including Strathewen, Yea and Toolangi.

Whittlesea station was opened on 23 December, 1889, an extension of the Spencer-street-North Fitzroy-Preston line opened some four months earlier.

As the name implies, Whittlesea was the preferred option for the commencement of the extension - the extension of the alternate line from Eltham along the valley of the Diamond Creek to Hurst's-bridge had been recommended by a Railways Standing Committee in July, 1906, but not as yet approved by Parliament. <sup>1</sup>

The other possible connections were stations at Yarra Glen (then part of the Shire of Eltham) and Yea, but both a considerable distance from Kinglake and the agricultural centres in the Plenty River valley.

The section beyond Preston-Reservoir was always based on freight revenue, but in reality, never ran profitably and services had been cut back by the time additional extensions were being proposed, perhaps not a great precedent for those seeking further growth of the rail network.

Another important development was the appointment to the Railways Standing Committee in February, 1909 of the Hon. E. H. Cameron, the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Evelyn since 1874 and a long-time resident of Kangaroo Ground.

**1911 : The first Railways Standing Committee <sup>2</sup>**

[\(Full report at the Parliament of Victoria\) :](#)

<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/papers/govpub/VPARL1911Vol1RSCNo6.pdf>

The concept of extending railways across the outer northern area of Melbourne was first mooted in 1911, primarily for the transport of timber from forests around Toolangi and fruit and vegetable produce from Kinglake (it was primarily for this purpose that the line to Preston – Reservoir opened in September, 1889 continued through to Whittlesea and opened in December, the Plenty Valley then very much Melbourne's "food bowl").

The motion to convene a six-man Railways Standing Committee to address the question of connecting the Toolangi and Kinglake districts to the existing railway system was passed in the Legislative Assembly on 30 November, 1909, but for reasons that are not quite clear, did not issue its report until 24 August, 1911.

The motion was moved by Mr. A. A. Billson (Ovens), <sup>3</sup> a great supporter of country railways and who brought in Bills for the extension of the line from Eltham to Hurst's-bridge and two other country lines in the same session of Parliament.

The Committee considered four alternatives; from Hurstbridge through Queenstown to Rushy Flat (Kinglake West); Yarra Glen to Toolangi; and from either Whittlesea or Hurstbridge (then Hurst's-bridge and under construction, the name was changed on 9 December, 1912) via Kinglake to Toolangi.

<sup>1</sup> The section from Eltham to Hurst's-bridge along the valley of the Diamond Creek to Hurst's-bridge was recommended by a Railways Standing Committee in July, 1906, but not approved by Parliament until November, 1909. The Committee's report suggested the extension was roughly 6 miles at a cost of £43,000, serving 60,000 acres and a population of 3,000 ... "*... no country district seeking railway communication which the Committee has visited during the last year or so, has closer settlement been so noticeable as in the valley of the Diamond Creek, and around by Panton Hills and Queenstown*".

<sup>2</sup> "First" as relevant to the Kinglake – Plenty Valley – Eltham districts – it was the sixth sitting of the Committee since its establishment, the date of which remains unknown.

<sup>3</sup> [Australian Dictionary of Biography](#) : <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/billson-alfred-arthur-5235> Despite the family names, he does not appear to have been closely related to [John William Billson](#), who was a member of the Railways Standing Committee for many years

**Whittlesea – Kinglake – Toolangi**

The proposal submitted by the residents of Kinglake West was for the extension of the Whittlesea broad-gauge railway in a north-easterly direction past the entrance to Toorourrong Reservoir and along the southern boundary then to reserve, and thence up the hills to Kinglake West, Central Kinglake and Kinglake East, and down a steep hill to the junction of Yea River and Campbell's Creek, which would be about 3 miles west of Toolangi.

Mr. Kernot, Chief Engineer for the Railways estimated a broad-gauge (5 ft 3in) track from Whittlesea via Kinglake to Toolangi would cost £160,000 and be 24 miles long, or in terms of rail length, just over 51 miles from Melbourne at the terminus and with a highest elevation of 2,000 feet. He suggested an alternate route using a narrow -gauge (2ft 6in) would be 27 miles and cost close to £100,000. <sup>4</sup>

This proposal was ultimately rejected as it was considered there were few likely loading points in first eight or nine miles between Whittlesea and Kinglake West with the route skirting the northern boundary of the Yan Yean Reservoir catchment area on one side and what was suggested as poor quality land towards Scrubby Creek on the other.

**Hurstbridge – Kinglake – Toolangi**

Having the proverbial "two-bob each-way", an alternative proposal placed before the Committee by other residents of Kinglake West was to extend the Hurst's-bridge railway (still under construction) up the valley of Arthur's Creek, and thence along the east side of Sugarloaf Hill on an ascending grade, to Kinglake West, where the line would turn eastwards and follow the same course as the proposed Whittlesea route, i.e. through Kinglake to Toolangi.

Kernot suggested that this option would require four tunnels totalling 2,595 feet and very heavy earthworks, mostly around Sugarloaf Hill.

It was revealed that residents at Strathewen had recognising this difficulty and suggested an alternate but longer route which encompassed the most populous and productive part of the Upper Diamond Creek district and, thus securing outwards freight in fruit and carriage inwards of stores, manure, etc. making the extension to Kinglake a profitable undertaking, but Kernot explained that his engineers had examined this option in some detail, and while it was feasible as far as Strathewen, from that point on for a length of about six miles, rough and hilly terrain would mean construction costs as high as £25,000 to £30,000 with a total cost about 25 percent higher than for the Whittlesea option.

**Hurstbridge – Queenstown – Rushy Flat**

Another proposal, apparently put forward by the Railways Department as a result of their Engineers' investigation into the option above, was to extend the extension from Hurstbridge some 9½ miles through Queenstown to Rushy Flat (the exact location now unknown, but broadly hinted as being just south of Kinglake West).

The Railways Department suggested a construction cost of about £70,000, with the line serving some 30,000 acres and 600 persons including Kinglake East. It was estimated freight by rail from the orchards would total about 400 tons per annum, but this could be higher as soft fruit that was not exportable was being taken directly by road to Victoria Market as the Railways Department had no method in place of transporting it quickly to the market after it arrived at the Spencer-street yards).

This was considered a serious enough option for the Department to submit expected annual running costs, primarily interest at four percent on the capital expenditure and estimated at £5,167 in total, but with revenue of just £1,492, leaving a projected deficit of £3,675. The Committee suggested that the Department's estimates understated the revenue from agricultural produce and fruit, but the line would still lose over £3,000 per year and was not justified as the orchards were all within 10 or 12 miles of Hurstbridge, Whittlesea or Yarra Glen stations.

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<sup>4</sup> The narrow-gauge option was considered as an alternative in most of the schemes without great detail provided – the option was generally around 40 percent cheaper than broad-gauge in terms of construction, but had an operating problem in that were not compatible with the broad-gauge stations at Whittlesea, Hurstbridge or Yarra Glen, which meant freight had to be unloaded into the broad-gauge wagons, especially expensive for firewood. It was also suggested that would have higher running costs as the rolling stock was restricted to the extension as the cost of staff manning the trains had to be totally by the extension whereas those of a broad-gauge could be shared with the existing lines.



### Yarra Glen to Toolangi

The last option considered came from the eastern end of the Shire of Eltham and was for a line from Yarra Glen to Toolangi, 11.5 miles serving about 130,000 acres of mostly mountainous and heavily-wooded land.

Rather than fruit, the emphasis in this proposal was timber, most of which was currently being hauled over mountain roads to either Yarra Glen or Yea station; the roads so bad that the manager of one timber mill revealing they often had to close the plant over winter because transport to the stations was impossible.

Various estimates as to the amount of timber that could be cut and transported were given and although the resident population was estimated at just 1,000, a Railway Department official suggested they would allow for up to 10,000 tourist passengers in the first year if the line was constructed.

The estimated cost for a broad-gauge line and rolling stock was put at £96,025; with the interest charge and running costs, the estimated deficit was £2,282 per annum. In view of this figure, the Committee considered it inexpedient to construct a broad-gauge line, but asked the Department to submit estimates for a narrow gauge (2 ft. 6 in) line : this reduced the cost to £56,740, and despite slightly reduced freight revenue, the deficit dropped to £1,396.

The Committee concluded that the narrow-gauge line could provide all the traffic of a broad-gauge line except for firewood, which the Department pointed out would have to be transferred at Yarra Glen from narrow to broad-gauge trucks, the labour cost making it less attractive than when the wagons were simply re-attached to broad-gauge trains.

It also noted there was a wide variation in estimates in the volume of timber provided by the Department (100 million feet over 20 years, or 14,000 tons); a local district forester (30.5 million), and the manager of a timber company (80 million feet).<sup>5</sup>

Regardless, the Committee considered that about half the Crown Land was specifically reserved for forestry, and it was thought that consequently at the end of eight or nine years, the timber would be largely depleted, causing a large falling off in the railway revenue and causing a much larger loss than shown in the current figures. Much of the land was considered too steep for orchards or alternative agricultural cultivation.

(Perhaps correctly assessed; the issue of district railways was revived by another Standing Committee in 1923 and eleven optional extensions considered, but Toolangi was not one suggested).

### The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways was a semi-permanent panel entrusted with recommending or otherwise the construction of proposed railways when so directed by the Legislative Assembly. Members changed from time to time, but there were a couple of instances of members sitting on more than one of the Committees considering the extension of the system into the outer northern districts. The 1911 hearing was the ninth sitting of the Committee.

The 1911 members were the Hon. E. H. Cameron, M.L.A. (Chairman), Hon. D. Melville (M.L.A.), J. Caden, Esq., M.L.A., the Hon. Dr. W. H. Embling, M.L.C. (vice-chairman), J. W. Billson, Esq., M.L.A., and E. C. Warde, Esq., M.L.A.

Of these, Cameron and Embling heard evidence, but were legally unable to take part in determining the Committee's decision as parts of the proposed extensions ran through their electorates.

Ewen Hugh Cameron was the M.L.A. for Evelyn from 1874 to 1914 while living at Kangaroo Ground; he acted as Chairman of the Railways Standing Committee from February, 1909 and much of the development in Victorian railways at that time was due to his untiring work.

William Henry Embling was elected as a member of the Legislative Council for the North Central Province in 1892; he died on 24 May, 1912 after contracting a chill travelling with the Railways Standing Committee through the Mallee in a motor-car a fortnight previously

<sup>5</sup> The forester, Mr. D. Ingle explaining that he had not included a large section of the area around the Murrindindi Creek included by the Department as it was "very broken country" and it would not be profitable to haul to Toolangi; instead suggesting Yea as its natural outlet. He suggested that if it was included, his estimate would increase to 42,5 million feet, but added "Mountain ash is very deceiving. Some of the areas at Toolangi would lead one not used to this class of forest to think the timber was first-class, whereas many of the large trees in the district are mere ant-infested shells".

**1923 : The second Railways Standing Committee**

[Full report at the Parliament of Victoria](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/papers/govpub/VPARL1923-24RSCNo5.pdf) : <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/papers/govpub/VPARL1923-24RSCNo5.pdf>

Hurstbridge Station opened on 25 June, 1912, and remains the terminus on the original Heidelberg line, but it nearly wasn't so!

**The Closer Settlement Scheme**

In 1904 the Victorian Government established the Closer Settlement Scheme to entice people away from the inner city. Small holdings for farming were made available throughout the state. In Melbourne, land was subdivided for workers' homes in the fringe suburbs of Footscray, Brunswick, Northcote and Thornbury, and for "clerks" in the eastern suburbs of Glenhuntly and Tooronga. <sup>6</sup>

A Royal Commission into the scheme in 1915 found it had serious flaws; only about 1,000 homes had been constructed and water, sewerage, roads, schools and other infrastructure lagged behind the construction of homes.

The Closer Settlement Scheme may well have died a natural death but for the inauguration of a similar structure, the Soldier Settlement Scheme in 1917 designed to provide ex-serviceman with homes and the opportunity to establish small farming properties.

Tenants under the schemes were able to lease land for initially a period of six years with residence and improvements conditions, typically to fence the property, destroy vermin and noxious weeds and some cases, to erect a dwelling on the land within one year. After six years, lessees could mortgage, transfer or sub-let their land. They could also apply for a Crown grant to purchase the land if the balance of the purchase monies had been paid. The scheme was also used to attract migrants from England

The Closer Settlement Scheme as it was envisaged for the Kinglake district was designed to break up larger farms where substantial parts were not been worked and to establish in their place lots of 20 to 30 acres.

In 1923, some 32,000 acres of Crown Land to the north of Melbourne was being considered for development under the scheme – it was suggested possibly 5,000 to 6,000 acres of private land not being worked also might be resumed under the compulsory acquisitions of the relevant Act.

The Legislative Assembly on 17 December, 1921 moved (Mr. Barnes) "that the question of connecting the Kinglake district by means of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway to the existing system be referred to the Parliament Standing Committee on Railways for inquiry".

This led to the establishment of a Standing Railways Committee (noted as the such 14th hearing) to consider connecting the Kinglake district to the existing railway system via a 5ft. 3in. gauge track – as well as Kinglake, some of the districts mentioned were Arthur's Creek, Scrubby Creek (now Humevale), Flowerdale, Strathewen, Glenburn and Castella, Toolangi, Kangaroo Ground, Christmas Hills, and a couple little-known today, Mitton's Bridge and Rushy Flat. <sup>7</sup>

Although a substantial increase in population could be expected under the resettlement, the impetus for the railways extension was freight – principally for fruit and timber, but the prospect of tourist traffic was also an important consideration.

It was noted sawmillers had been operating in the Kinglake district for about 15 years - the timber cut in the western part either carted or hauled over a wooden horse-drawn tramway between 12 to 16 miles to Whittlesea station or a similar distance to Hurstbridge.

The quality of timber was said to vary considerably – from the tablelands, messmate, blue gum and mountain ash (also known as black butt) were the better commercial varieties for building and furniture, one variety of slow-growing messmate especially durable and sought-after for railway works and bridges, while inferior classes - stringybark, peppermint and apple box (varieties found on the rises) were considered useful only for fencing or firewood.

<sup>6</sup> The Glen Iris Brickworks site in St. George's Road to the north of Hutton-street in Northcote and the Penders-grove Estate in Thornbury.

<sup>7</sup> The Committee comprised R. F. Toutcher, Esq., M.L.A. (chairman), the Hon. H. F. Richardson, M.L.C. (vice-chairman), the Hon. A. Bell, M.L.C. \*, the Hon. J. W. Billson, M.L.A., A. F. Cameron, Esq., M.L.A., the Hon. G. L. Goudie, M.L.C. \*, R. H. Solly, Esq., M.L.A.

\* Goudie resigned 7 September, 1923 and replaced by Bell on 25 September.



**Proposed Extensions**

No less than 11 alternatives were considered :-

Route	Miles	Cost per Mile £	Total Cost £	Based On
Eltham to Christmas Hills	12.17	20,870	254,000	Trial survey
Christmas Hills to Kinglake East	10.0	22,100	221,000	inspection
Yarra Glen to Castella (Toolangi)	11.69	22,470	293,800	Trial survey
Hurstbridge to Kinglake West, via Queenstown, Strathewen and Sugarloaf Creek valley	21.5	18,230	392,000	Part trial survey, part inspection
Hurstbridge to Kinglake West, via Queenstown, Strathewen and Arthur's Creek	20.5	21,950	450,000	Part trial survey, part inspection
Hurstbridge to Kinglake West, via Arthur's Creek township and sugarloaf Creek valley	16.25	20,000	325,000	Part trial survey, part inspection
Hurstbridge to Kinglake East, via Queenstown, Yow Yow Creek and Cookson's Hill	15.5	20,400	316,000	Part trial survey, part inspection
Whittlesea to Kinglake West, via Scrubby Creek	10.5	23,520	247,000	Inspection
Hurstbridge to Mitton's Bridge via Queenstown	7.75	13,000	100,800	Trial survey
Hurstbridge to Strathewen via Queenstown and Mitton's Bridge	10.5	14,700	154,400	Part trial survey, part inspection
Whittlesea to Scrubby Creek	3.0	8,000	24,000	Inspection

The estimates for construction provided by Mr. C. H. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction varied considerably based on the topography which increased from a grade of 1 in 75 between Whittlesea and Scrubby Creek to 1 in 30 on around six of the other proposed lines

**Predictable Conclusions**

The Committee concluded that a railway to Kinglake "from any direction" would not pay for many years, the existing high cost of construction equated to about £5 per acre of good country on the Kinglake tableland even under the Closer Settlement Scheme.

The high cost was due to a large quantity of earthworks being necessary on all the routes due to the rough country and steepness of hillsides necessitating deep cuttings, high embankments and bridges.<sup>8</sup>

As for Hurstbridge and Arthur's Creek, the report suggested that these districts had before the war been somewhat reliant on the export of apples to Germany, but it was unlikely that this market would return, and already some of the trees in valleys where the soil remained moist year-round were being replaced with tomatoes.

The revenue that might be gained from transporting firewood was also in considerable doubt as the State Electricity Committee had announced briquettes would soon be available from the Yallourn brown coal-field at a price below that charged for firewood.

One bright spot was a possible expansion of orchards under the Settlement Scheme resulting in supplies of non-exportable soft fruits – plums, apricots, raspberries, gooseberries and black and red currants were quoted – but the Committee suggested that the Railways Department would need to improve its service and not only get the produce to Spencer-street railway yard within two or three hours, but also provide motor lorries to transport the fruit immediately to Victoria Market in time for the early morning sales.

<sup>8</sup> It was pointed out to one witness favouring an extension to Christmas Hills that the local post office was within five miles of the existing Yarra Glen station ... "The effective distance is much greater, for to get to Yarra Glen we have to climb nearly 500 feet to the top of the big hill, and then descend 750 feet into the Glen

### And a Recommendation

The only positive recommendation forthcoming from the Standing Committee was for an extension of the Hurstbridge railway by way of Queenstown to Mitton's Bridge, a distance of 7¾ miles at an estimated cost of £100,000, but even this was conditional on the Closer Settlement Board securing the necessary legislative power to resume privately-held land on the Kinglake tableland to establish a group settlement of 200 to 250 holdings and to make use of the available timber in the shortest possible time.<sup>9</sup>

A secondary condition was that although Kinglake was considered suitable for this style of group settlement and had suitable soil and climate, good metalled roads would have to be provided to enable the agricultural produce to the railway in the shortest possible time.

There was a further suggestion that if the Hurstbridge – Mitton's Bridge experiment proved successful, the Preston – Whittlesea morning and evening services might be extended to Scrubby Creek – unfortunately the good burghers (aka "silly buggers") of the latter decided "Scrubby Creek" was hardly suitable for their fair metropolis and opted instead for the rather mundane Humevale.

### 1926 : The third Railways Standing Committee

[\(Full report at the Parliament of Victoria\) :](#)

<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/papers/govpub/VPARL1926No6RSC.pdf>

The concept of a railway extension to Mitton's-bridge was quashed by another Standing Committee Report in 1926 which suggested that the Closer Settlement Board had only attracted about 50 new settlers to Kinglake rather than the 200-250 hoped for.

The motion for the Committee to be convened was moved by Mr. Eggleston on 23 December, 1925 and the five-man Committee released its report on 28 September, 1926.

The report concluded the area of good land was not as large as first suggested, consisting of only 10,000 acres of privately-owned property and 2,200 acres of Crown Land, and that surrounding Mitton's-bridge and Strathewen districts was not at all encouraging from an agricultural standpoint ...

*"This small area renders it difficult to justify early railway construction ... the main hope of the extension to Mitton's-bridge would be the traffic from the Kinglake plateau, and without such group settlement as was suggested in the 1923 conditional recommendation, the prospects for the railway are very poor indeed."*

The report noted that as well as the settlement targets not being reached, there were other factors which contributed to their decision that the line not be constructed – the recent electrification of the Hurstbridge line<sup>10</sup>, meaning the proposed Hurstbridge-Mitton's Bridge extension would have to bear the total cost of the steam service on that section; the great increase in the district of competition from road transport, both public and private; and the increase in the estimated loss from £4,000 to £6,500 (steam) or £8,115 (electric)

### Explanatory Notes

In retrospect and given it was never really spelt out all that clearly, all of the proposed extensions only involved a twice-daily service – in the morning, probably departing before 7 a.m. carrying passengers, parcel and freight to Melbourne or intermediary stations), then a reverse service in the evening.

The one-per-day concept was important when the Committees considered the narrow-gauge options, cheaper to construct, but incompatible with the standard broader gauge, meaning the cost of the manning the service had to be attributed fully to the extension, rather than being shared as part of the overall service. As mentioned elsewhere, the two gauge system also necessitated the re-loading of loose goods such as firewood.

Direct passenger services to Whittlesea ended following the electrification of the Princes-bridge to Reservoir line in 1921 – a steam service to Reservoir operated until 1924, when replaced by a single carriage (with a trailer carriage during peak periods) rail-motor shuttle.

<sup>9</sup> The exact location of "Mitton's Bridge" is unknown : a road bearing the name extends north-west from the Heidelberg-Kinglake Road, about two kilometres north of St. Andrew's, crossing Diamond Creek just after the branch and a logical termination point. Now St. Andrew's, the name was changed from Queenstown in 1923.

<sup>10</sup> The electrification of the section from Eltham to Hurstbridge was completed on Friday, 20 August, 1926. . Despite a degree of pomp and ceremony before a crowd of 1,500 and luncheon laid on for government and railways officials, some disappointment was expressed – the electric service was no faster and a change of train was still required at Eltham for those continuing to Hurstbridge. Electrification of the line to Eltham was completed on 15 April, 1923.