Sketches of the Dining Hall: ‘Working Lives’ of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops

Western view front and side of Dining Hall building from Traverser Track, 2009.
Source: Author’s Image.

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Abstract

*Sketches of the Dining Hall: ‘Working Lives’ of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops* creates a unique story of the Dining Hall’s heritage as part of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops. This paper traces the building’s beginning as a fine dining hall for the workers to its closure as a works canteen. It draws from the interpretation of archival document sources and oral history stories of the QR employees and Catering Staff to illustrate a way of life when workers ascended *en masse* to the Dining Hall and the Catering Staff watched the clock to be ready for the next round. Social aspects are conveyed with a view to understanding the building’s importance to the community of workers as a place that was different from their industrialised workshops. Sketches which trace the life span of the Dining Hall provide a distinctive history of this building’s significant association to the social and cultural heritage of this iconic Ipswich site.

Previous accounts of this building’s activities have told, where it provided 300 meals a day in its heyday, this paper goes beyond this fact and presents various sketches of the life of the Dining Hall through its nearly 100 years of operation. It looks through the years which spanned the building’s activities as Committees continually sought ways to keep the price of the Diner’s meal at the lowest price. This paper seeks to highlight the Dining Hall’s place ‘behind the tin fence’ in the working lives of workers who came and left each day through the gates of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops.
The research and writings of this paper has been guided by the following definition of heritage by the National Trust of Australia:

Heritage is something we inherit from the past and value enough today to leave for the future. It is the tangible and intangible pieces of information and memory left behind to guide us into lives once lived and places and objects as they once were.¹

Acknowledgments

Dedicated to Alan Herbert Sharp

March 11, 1925 to April 25, 1981.


Acknowledgments

This paper has benefited from the richness of the interviewees’ shared stories. In warm appreciation, Thank you. It was an honour to have shared the stories of your ‘working lives’. This work was originally submitted as a dissertation paper to partially fulfill the requirements of an Honours in the Bachelor of Arts, Contemporary Studies Major Program of the University of Queensland. To my program supervisors Dr Ross Laurie, thank you for your encouragement with this project and Dr Geoff Ginn, thank you for your guidance and input into this project. To all library personnel, IT staff and Julie Avery at the UQ Ipswich Campus — a standing ovation for your cheery assistance. I am grateful to Glenys Tewes-Kathage for her skilful expertise in transcribing selected audio files from the interviews undertaken for this project. I have appreciated the benefit gained by the enhancement of the author’s images by the Ipswich City Council’s Strategic Planning Branch. It is a privilege as a researcher to have this chapter included in this book’s celebration of Ipswich at its historical point of 150 years. To my family, friends and work colleagues who have supported me as I have wandered back from the dust of the archives — many flowers and warm hugs to you all.
## Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iv
List of Diagrams, Images and Appendices vi
Introduction 6-1
Chapter 1: An Historical View: From the Beginning for the Dining Hall 6-13
Chapter 2: Life of the Building: Management and Function 6-31
Chapter 3: Extension 328: Sketches of their ‘Working Lives’ 6-57
Conclusion 6-71
Works Cited 6-72
List of Interviews 6-81
Appendix A 6-82
Appendix B 6-84
Appendix C 6-85
List of Diagrams

Diagram 1: Heritage Precinct site plan of North Ipswich Railway Workshops, 1995.
Diagram 2: Interior Plan of Dining Hall, 1944.
Diagram 3: Layout of Tables and Forms in Dining Room, 1911
Diagram 4: Interior Plan of Dining Hall c1960’s to 1980’s.

List of Images

Front cover image: Western view front and side of Dining Hall building from Traverser Track, 2009.

Image 1: View from verandah of Dining Hall building, taking in Traverser track and Industrialised Trade Workshops, 2009.

Image 2: View of western side front and auxiliary areas of Dining Hall building, 2009.


Image 4: View of slope leading to the Dining Hall building from Powerhouse, 2009.

Image 5: Western side stairs of Dining Hall building with view to Powerhouse, 2009.

Image 6a & b: Views underneath Dining Hall building of the rows of the numerous pushbike racks, 2009.

Image 7: A railway workshop’s mess hall in England circa 1850’s to 1870’s.


Image 9: Dining Hall Staff working in kitchen in the 1920’s.

Image 10: Canteen advertisement, in the 1950’s.

Image 11: Railway Canteen notice, in the 1980s.

Image 12: An illustration of popular tobacco lines sold by the Canteen c.1950’s.


Image 14: Advertisement promoting the giant ice cream cone which became known as the ‘pig bucket’.
Image 15: Advertisement illustrating Columbine’s confectionary line sold at the Canteen.

Image 16: View of current Rostrum facing towards Powerhouse.

Image 17: View of early Rostrum facing towards the Dining Hall.

Image 18: A meeting inside the Rostrum c1960’s.

Image 19: Commemorative certificate issued to employees for the “Ipswich Railway Workshops Centenary 1885-1985” celebrations.

Image 20: View of unveiling ceremony of the Ipswich Workshops Memorial, 1919.

Image 21: An illustration of one of the many worker’s drawings that were common in the Trade Workshops, 2009.

Image 22: The lunchtime meal rush in the Dining room and a view of the interior of the Dining Hall, 1952.

Image 23: Portrait of Dining Hall Staff and Committee members, 1950’s.


Image 25: Image of a runner box illustrating section for ordering of the menu.

Image 26: Exterior view of stable door, via the western entry to the Dining Hall building c1980’s.


**List of Appendices**

Appendix A: Factors relating to Employment Numbers of North Ipswich Railway Workshops 1914-1996.

Appendix B: Trading Figures of Dining Room and Canteen 1947-1953.

Introduction

The Dining Hall building was erected as a fine dining hall for the men at the North Ipswich Railway Workshops in an era when railway industries were expanding across the nation. Throughout the nearly 85 years of its activities as an industrial dining room, it provided dine in and canteen facilities which contributed to a ‘way of life’ for the workers who started and ended their work day behind the tin fence at the sound of a Workshop’s whistle.

In contrast to its beginnings as an industrial dining hall solely for the benefit of Queensland Railway (QR) employees of the Workshops, the building is now part of The Workshops Railway Museum (TWRM), Queensland Museum’s campus at Ipswich. It is included in the Queensland Heritage Register, precinct boundary for the North Ipswich Railway Workshops Complex: Place ID 601526, Site ID 16289 and listed as building number (16). As such it is protected as a site of heritage significance for the State. (See Diagram 1.)

The building has been readapted and currently functions as The Trackside Café. It caters for local, national and international tourists to the museum. It is advertised as a popular venue for hire for conferences, training workshops, meetings and weddings. The Trackside Café still caters for the tradespeople who are employed for the QR workshops area of the site. Their work includes keeping the rail side of the rolling stock moving for the TWRM exhibitions, either through restoration work carried out on Queensland’s heritage fleet or by ‘on the job’ presentations; showcasing their skills as blacksmiths and manual timber millers.

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2 The term Queensland Rail (QR) has been used throughout this paper for ease of reference. QR started as Queensland Government Railways with the logo QGR.
The landscape of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops has changed; it is part of a disappearing industrial heritage.6 ‘Old buildings, old machines, old ways and old workers have been jettisoned in the pursuit of higher productivity’.7 Stories of how it once was for a community of railway workers have become part of the intangible heritage of this precinct. Just as the shrill noise of the work day’s whistles no longer sound. The activities of the industrial Dining Hall at the Workshops have been part of this disappearing rail heritage. The following sketches of the Dining Hall8 have been drawn together to illustrate the significance of this building’s cultural heritage. A history of the building’s beginning and the two themes relating to social and

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8 Throughout this paper unless otherwise stated the term Dining Hall will refer to both the Dining Hall and Canteen.
‘working lives’ aspects of the Dining Hall will be presented to convey its important historical associations to this iconic site.

During the workshop’s peak production time of the 1940’s and 1950’s, more than 3,000 railway workers provided the state’s rail industry with a labor force which made the North Ipswich Railway Workshops the State of Queensland’s largest employer and a ‘social icon’.9 So while recognition of the Workshop’s important contribution to the state of Queensland’s workforce is acknowledged, it is also important to understand the connection of the Dining Hall’s activities to this workforce.

The research for this paper positions it as a work which is original in its focus by providing important details of the building’s conception and early beginnings in context with the overall site and the emphasis placed on the heritage significance of the Dining Hall’s activities. As such, it redefines the prominence of the Dining Hall beyond the acknowledgement of its heyday, when it provided a hot meal for up to 3,000 railway workshop employees each working day, to convey its important links to social aspects for the community of workers at these Workshops.

The mandate of every Committee that managed and operated the Dining Hall was to provide a lunchtime meal at minimum cost to the rail workers of these Workshops. The role of the Dining Hall is significant in the day to day working lives of the QR rail workers and Catering Staff as its role went beyond catering for the lunch time meals. It is a building that holds stories of working lives of railway employees outside of their place of trade workshops. Though the management and operations provided by the Dining Hall remained answerable to QR regulations and policies, it provided a different place for a community of rail workers to meet—away from the industrialised environment of their workshops.

For the former Catering Staff of the Dining Hall, it held a special workplace experience that only a small number of female workers have had as their place of employment. Further to this, by including the current Catering Staff at the Trackside Café, the building uniquely links to the consistent employment of female catering staff on this site for nearly 100 years. Australian literature has numerous publications on the theme of working lives in connection to the rail industry, but the working lives of female catering staff employed in Dining Rooms, Works Canteens, refreshment rooms, rail dining car attendant’s staff has not been given adequate attention in accordance with the significant contribution of their working lives in the railway’s industries.\textsuperscript{10} It is an aim of this paper to bring a focus to the essential role taken by female catering staff in the heritage of this nation’s railway industry.

The Dining Hall building is a place of a social significance in its special association with the ‘working lives’ of the employees of the North Ipswich Workshops. It is a place that offered a ‘valued customary experience’ through its activities and makes a significant contribution to a sense of identity which has been attached to these railyards.

Throughout the different generations, it represents a link which is synonymous with the daily routine of their working lives. During the lunch time meal breaks, it provided a place where the patrons of the dining room and canteen could purchase what they required, but more importantly it was regarded as a place of social gatherings during these times.

It is a place which has demonstrated a range of cultural and social practices for a community of workers. For example: the meaning attached to cultural practices and objects such as Runners and their runner boxes; the pay day hope of buying the winning golden casket ticket and the ‘pig bucket’ ice-cream cone; the donation at the

\textsuperscript{10} Authors Marilyn Bitomsky and Lee Mylne, in their work, \textit{Living on the Line: A Celebration of Queensland Rail Workers and Their Families}, (Brisbane: Copyright Publishing Company Pty Ltd, 1995), makes a notable exception which has acknowledged the contribution of females to the rail industry in occupations as gatekeepers, station mistresses, trades and senior executive positions.
Blood Bank; the rush for the dining room after the lunch time whistle sounded; the size of the potato masher and mushy peas pot. These practices hold stories which are synonymous with workers’ memories of the Dining Hall.

There is a special association with earlier generations from 1911 to the onset of World War II. During these times, the Dining Hall building was used by the local community of Ipswich. The activities of the building have identified it as a hall for social venues and as a fundraising venue for local organisations and clubs. These fundraising initiatives form a link with the past community of Ipswich and the present, through connections to sporting clubs such as the local football clubs or the efforts which assisted in the funds raised to erect the War Memorial on site at TWRM.

This project’s methodology of collecting evidence through archival and primary source documents has created a fuller, detailed representation of this paper’s historical interpretation, in the role of the Dining Hall in the heritage of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops. The sketches portrayed of the working life of the Dining Hall have been enriched by the oral history accounts by QR Patrons of the Dining Hall, Committee and Dining Hall Staff personnel.

In accordance with the practice of oral history, the interviewee’s recordings form a resource for future researchers. Most importantly, it gives voice to the railway men and the Catering Staff who knew the activities of the Dining Hall as part of their working day. As such, the stories they have shared, have belonged—and will always belong—to each interviewee. This interpretation of their working lives has drawn from their stories to create an historical account which regards their stories as essential records. From these interviews, another layer of the past has been illustrated which has contributed to this paper’s endeavour to present sketches of

11 Ethical clearance forms completed during the interview stage of this project will allow the oral histories of the interviewees to be deposited with the State Library of Queensland, the Ipswich Global Information Centre and with the Interviewees.
the life of the Dining Hall. It conveys a rich story of historical significance of the working lives of the Railway Workers and Catering Staff, men and women who planned their working day with the 7.30 am start whistle and finished their working day with the 4.15 pm knock off whistle.

Throughout this paper, specific aspects of the Dining Hall’s history have been chosen and are presented in what has been termed sketches or snapshots so as to build a picture of the building’s historical, social aspects and its associations with the ‘working lives’ of employees. The objective of this approach is to create an understanding of, and to convey in some measure, the importance of the heritage of this site.

Chapter 1 offers details concerning the building’s conception and the end of its function as an industrial dining hall. A brief representation of a history of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops is provided, so as to situate the span of the building’s life in an historical context in relation to the industrial heritage of this site. A detailed account of early management policies of the Dining Hall’s operations conveys a system of hierarchy which came into play throughout the life of the Dining Hall.

Chapter 2 describes how the operations of the day to day running of the Dining Hall were managed by elected committees and what the responsibilities of the committees entailed. It interprets the life of the building and its function as a Dining Room and Canteen. Social aspects of the Dining Hall’s activities will be portrayed so as to illustrate the connection between the building and with the wider community aspects of the working lives of North Ipswich Railway workshops.

Chapter 3 presents an account of the day to day running of the Dining Hall spanning two decades from the early 1960’s to late 1980’s. Through the oral history stories, of the workers either employed as QR workers or Catering staff, sketches of their working lives are portrayed to highlight their part in the cultural heritage of the building’s activities.
The building which was the Dining Hall is a ‘simple Federation Bungalow type’ dwelling.\textsuperscript{13} It is significant for the contribution it makes to an understanding of how the ancillary facilities of the railyards functioned’.\textsuperscript{14} The interior space of the building has functioned as industrial style catering kitchen and dining room facility since its opening nearly 100 years ago. Its Dining Room and Canteen areas provided workers with a social space which is part of the heritage of this building. During its years of operation, rooms within the building were allocated as Commissioner’s room, Apprenticeship training room, and Schedule Office, the activities of these areas have contributed to the historical significance of the building (See Diagram 2).

\begin{center}
\textbf{Diagram 2: Interior Plan of Dining Hall building 1944, showing the allocation of space in the building for various purposes. Note the location of the kitchen, as the Dining Room and Canteen areas were in the large space next to it. The kitchen and Commissioner’s room are now operated as Trackside Café Function Rooms. The large space of the Dining Room and Canteen provides a café dining experience for visitor’s to TWRM. The building provided a class room for Apprentices before a separate building was established on the grassy slope area between the Dining Hall building and Trade Workshops. Source: QSA: 6873/268962, Layout of Dining Room, No. 4962A, January 1, 1944. Courtesy of Queensland Railways Records Management Services.}
\end{center}


Upon entering the gates of TWRM grounds, the Dining Hall and the Timekeeper’s buildings are one of two wooden structures which are part of the sweeping radius of the forecourt area. The curtilage for the building includes the Presence and Spirit metallic sculpture, landscaped lawn grass and two magnificent camphor laurel trees which flank the War Memorial monument. The current fence, along the front and back of the building, acts as a boundary marker for the building’s site. The fence enhances the building’s domestic associations and views of the building highlight its function, as being distinct from the industrial streetscape of the rail yards.

The front and left side of the building provide views of the Traverser track, Trade Workshops, Rostrum and Powerhouse building, and underneath the building are the pushbike racks. The outlook from the back of the building reveals two, well established trees on a grassy slope leading to the Powerhouse. The building itself remains as tangible evidence of its association with the rail yards.

Image 1: View from verandah of Dining Hall Building of Traverser Track and Industrialised Trade Workshops, 2009. Source: Author’s image.
Image 2: View of western side front and auxiliary areas at the rear of Dining Hall building, 2009. 
Source: Author’s image.

Source: Author’s image.
Image 4: View of slope leading to the Dining Hall building from Powerhouse, 2009.
Source: Author’s image.

Image 5: Western side stairs of Dining Hall building with view to Powerhouse, 2009.
Source: Author’s image.
Through the memories of a community of workers it conveys the intangible nature of historical evidence through a special association by the workers who accessed the Dining Hall during their ‘working lives’. The building was significant in their daily activities. Rituals as simple as; this is where they picked up the morning paper, purchased their breakfast and ordered their lunch or where they parked their pushbike once they arrived at work. The activities of the Dining Hall have made a significant contribution to the history of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops and by association with the social and cultural heritage of Ipswich.
Sketches of the Dining Hall: ‘Working Lives’
Chapter 1
An Historical View: From the Beginning for the Dining Hall

*Metal Billycan issued by QR for workers, 2009.*
*Source: Author’s image.*
During the nearly 100 years of the Dining Hall’s operations the list of titles given to the building have signified the different eras of its activities namely Dining Hall, Dining Room, Dining Hall and Canteen, Canteen, Works Canteen, Ipswich Railway Canteen, and Trackside Café.\(^{15}\)

This chapter traces factors which led to the building of the Dining Hall. A brief historical account of the establishment of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops positions the Dining Hall in context with the site’s railyards complex. The Dining Hall included the operation of a works canteen in the physical space building and in the financial status of the Dining Hall’s management and operations. The partnership of these two areas will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3 as the combination of their activities established the workers’ patronage of the building, and how the operations of the building were managed and staffed.

The physical position of the building in relation to the layout of the TWRM remains unaltered since its construction as part of the establishment of these Workshops.\(^{16}\)

Under the Dining Hall building, rows of metal pushbike rack stands lean against brick piers that support the wooden floor of the building.\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) Throughout this paper unless otherwise stated the term Dining Hall will refer to both the Dining Hall and Canteen.


\(^{17}\) During the research for this topic archival documents and secondary sources regarding the origins of bike racks were not located. Many sources refer to the men and their bicycles leaving the workshops as synonymous with knock off time and during the interviews one railway worker reported using the bike racks and catering staff reported of the railway workers’ use of the racks; but theirs was a different era.
The cement piers are painted with the names of the workshops where the men worked—Mill, Electrical, Copper, Moulders, Smiths, Paint, Trimmers, Carriage, Brake, Wagon, Erecting, Tool and Brass. They bear a vivid testimony to another era in the life of the building. When workers from the Trade Workshops stopped as the lunch time whistle blew and then ascended *en masse* to the Dining Hall.
The Dining Hall catering staff would be ready in their positions to serve the men, as the Workshop’s machines stopped and tools found their place on a bench or on a wall or in their owner’s toolbox. Those who ate and served in the Dining Hall were following a railway tradition that hearkens back to the early days of railway workshop history. The Dining Hall provided not only a place for rail workers to sit and be served their lunch, purchase food and provisions but also a place of meeting. It made available a space for a community of railway workers which was a place removed from the industrial environment of their workshops.

The Dining Hall was built after the North Ipswich Railway Workshops were opened and operational. In 1911, it became part of the activity of these historic railyards which are heralded as the ‘birth place’ of Queensland rail and the ‘home of the locomotive’. The original Ipswich Railway Workshops were initially constructed to accommodate the building of steam locomotives and rolling stock essential for the running of the region’s first rail transport industry under the Queensland Government Railways department.

In February 1864, holders of admission tickets to the “Inauguration of the Works of the First Queensland Railway” partook of the official opening at the railyard’s grounds at North Ipswich. This date marked the beginnings of the rail industry for

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18 See film footage by the Department of Information Australia, The New Ipswich: Documentary directed by Eric Thompson, 1946, DVD Title No 14065, National Film and Sound Australia. Copy held with Ipswich Art Gallery.
20 The name of Ipswich Railway Workshops is used to distinguish it from the later site which was expanded to the site of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops. For details of the origins of the Ipswich and North Ipswich Railway Workshops see the following noteworthy publications: Leslie E. Slaughter, Ipswich Municipal Centenary, (Ipswich Qld: Ipswich City Council, 1960), 96-97; Viv Daddow, The Puffing Pioneers: and Queensland’s Railway Builders, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975), 13-20; Robyn Buchanan and Lyle Radford, Final Gauge: The History of Ipswich Railway Workshops, ed. Barbara Henson (Ipswich Qld: Ipswich City Council, 1996), 7-13; and Department of Environment and Resource Management, “North Ipswich Railway Workshops Complex, Heritage Register Place ID 601526,” Heritage Register Place ID 601526,” Queensland Government. http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/heritage/index.html (accessed March 31, 2009).
21 TWRM Archives: Queensland Times, “Inauguration of the Works of the First Queensland Railway,” Silk Address of 25th February 1864: Programme of Proceedings. For a detailed historical interpretation of the ceremony and the beginning of the first rail in this region see Queensland...
the State, and it signified the establishment of the Ipswich Railway Workshops. The inaugural ceremony positioned Ipswich as a central area of commerce for the interior and greater region, namely the Darling Downs and the port at Brisbane. It marked the era’s change to rail as a superior mode of transport than road.\textsuperscript{22} The State’s parliamentary decision for Ipswich to be the start of their railway infrastructure provided a place which launched the extension of the railway lines of Southern and Western Railroads.\textsuperscript{23}

The original Ipswich Railway Workshops were operational by late 1864. The railyard’s function was as a ‘receiving depot and assembly shop’ for the prefabricated sections and equipment needed for the railway’s industry that arrived by shipment from England.\textsuperscript{24} On January the eleventh of 1865 the first train whistle trial was heard from the locomotive named “Faugh-a-Ballagh” which is a battle cry of Irish origins meaning clear the way. Once the engine was fired up ‘the wondering inhabitants saw the horse of iron conducted from the locomotive shops’,\textsuperscript{25} along a short section of rail between the workshops and the Ipswich wharf.\textsuperscript{26}

By the 1880’s the buildings and land space of the Ipswich Railway Workshops proved to be inadequate to provide for the growing requirements of Queensland’s rail industry. For the workers it had become ‘unwieldy, and unsuitable for the large body of men employed there’.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{17} Of Printer, Dissertation, England.\textsuperscript{24} The meaning of industry.\textsuperscript{22} The State’s parliamentary decision for Ipswich to be the start of their railway infrastructure provided a place which launched the extension of the railway lines of Southern and Western Railroads.\textsuperscript{23}

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In 1899, Chief Mechanical Engineer (CME) William Nisbet’s expertise and vision facilitated an extensive site expansion of purposely constructed buildings to accommodate the needs of the industry and improve workers’ safety and work output. The design and layout of the different workshops—with doorways and rail tracks to allow maximum access to move the new or repaired locomotive engines and to carry out maintenance of rolling stock brought in or out by the traverser and roundhouse system—sustained the housing of equipment, tools and workforce to contribute to QR’s locomotive building and rolling stock maintenance over the coming decades.

The Dining Hall building was constructed during the later part of this era of expansion for the site as one of the purposely built auxiliary timber buildings. These buildings housed the timekeepers, administrative and drafting offices. After this time, construction of significant buildings for the workshop’s production and maintenance operations consisted of the functionalist style buildings of the Tool and Gauge Shop and Metrology Laboratory which were constructed in response to the workshops’ war efforts; the Apprentice Training Centre in 1955; completion of a Plan Printing Building in 1979; and the building of a New Training Centre in 1990. The operations of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops were officially closed in 1997.

Since its opening, the role of the rail workers in QR’s production and operations has created a legacy of rail heritage not only in connection with the Workshops but the wider community of Ipswich. The Dining Hall building was part of this workshop’s heritage during its 85 years as an industrial dining hall. The following part of this chapter represents a history of the Dining Hall building.

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During the early years in the establishment of the North Ipswich Railway Workshops there was not a separate building to provide dine-in facilities for the railway workforce. This was a different era of working life for railway workers. Meals for their day came from either their home or the boarding houses they lived in. By looking to an early history of Derby Locomotives Works in England, some perspective can be gained that QR’s provision of facilities for their workers’ meal time breaks—which was some 50 years later than England’s—would have influenced QR’s decision to provide a separate building for their workers at lunch time. By the late 1870’s the Derby Locomotives Works original mess halls had become too cramped. By 1876 a new building to accommodate 1,500 of their workers was erected at a cost of £2,550.

Image 7: A Mess Hall in England circa 1850’s to 1870’s. The image conveys the social aspects for the workers provided by the hall’s facilities. Framed pictures on the walls, a pulpit for bible readings and an organ for hymns. The workers midday lunch baskets were set in their allocated space at the table, ready for the cooks to prepare.


It was regarded as a way to forestall the ‘objectionable habit’ of workers eating their meals in their workshops as this habit encouraged vermin in their workplaces.32 This account highlights that the practice of providing mess halls for railway workshops was well established and standard policy in England by the time the North Ipswich Railway Workshops was initially built.

Increased demand for railway services led the government of Queensland in April of 1908 to instruct J.F. Thallon, Commissioner for Railways to ‘personally inspect the railways of Canada, Great Britain, and South Africa, with the view of seeing, and, if possible, adopting in Queensland the most recent developments in railway construction and management’.33 On February the first of 1909, Thallon’s Rail Commissioner’s report to parliament of his 25 week tour commented on various issues of the day and it compares the railways he visited with Queensland railway operations. Under the heading ‘Dining-Room for Workmen’ he observed.

In nearly all the workshops - including those outside of railways - which I visited provision is made for employees dining without going outside. The systems vary, but the usual practice is for the employer to supply the accommodation, water, and fuel, and the workmen bring their own food, although in some cases the workmen club together and appoint a Committee who arrange the purchase and cooking of all edibles. It is more a matter for the men themselves, but I feel assured the Government would gladly do as much for the men if they desire it as is done in Canada and Great Britain, and I intend to invite an expression of opinion on their part before making any recommendation.34

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Acting on this report, Thallon ordered plans which would incorporate the provisions for the workers along the lines of the ones he had seen on his tour abroad which would be suitable for the North Ipswich Workshops.\(^{35}\) By the following year, the decision was made for the men to have a dining room for their ‘convenience’.\(^{36}\) In June of 1911, CME Charles Pemberton referred to the Dining Hall’s progress as near completion and that he expected its availability in a few weeks time.\(^{37}\) By August 1911, the *Courier* reported the Dining Hall building was erected by Messrs. Perry and Betts of Ipswich with the contract price of £2,650. Supervision of the work was by the QR departmental official George Agnew.

It was stated that the Railway Commissioner would provide the kitchen utensils and serving cutlery and crockery. In all, 600 pieces were to have been ordered.\(^{38}\) Regarding the measurements of the building, QR correspondence states:

> The Dining room itself measured 100 feet by 72 feet, kitchen, 36 feet square, reading and smoking room, 36 feet square, with a commodious store room and pantry, 27 feet by 10 feet 6 inches, and a 10 feet veranda nearly the whole length of the building.\(^{39}\)

The total cost of the Dining Hall was £2,705. This included all equipment and furniture which was to be provided by the Railway’s Commissioner ‘free of charge to the men’.\(^{40}\) Later in October, Pemberton provided an update on the progress of the Dining Hall in a memo to A.J. Crowther, Secretary to the Commissioner.

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\(^{39}\) QSA: 6873/268962, A.J. Crowther, “Correspondence to Sir Thomas Robinson, Agent General for Queensland, November 6, 1911.

\(^{40}\) QSA: 6873/268962, A.J. Crowther, “Correspondence to Sir Thomas Robinson, Agent General for Queensland, November 6, 1911.
I beg to advise that a little over 500 employees have made arrangements to
have their meals under the catering system ... . There will be over 500 others
who will bring their own food and eat same in another portion of the
building: they will be supplied with numbered billycans and hot water ... . Mr
Stanton, the caterer, has offered to take charge of the whole building and
carry out the duties required for its good management for the sum of £2.2.0
per week.41

The initial decision to have the Dining Hall managed by a Committee appointed by
the workmen42 was continued throughout the life of the Dining Hall. Details of the
process of election procedures and policies are presented in Chapter 2. It was the
responsibility of the Dining Hall Committee to hire and pay the staff required to
provide the services of the Dining Hall. The first caterer appointed by the Committee
was Richard Stanton who undertook as part of his contract ‘to provide five (5)
dinners per week for a sum of 1/9’ for each of the Diners.

The price of each meal costing ‘only 4d’ is a constant point of reference in
correspondence, articles and reports of this time, thus highlighting the importance of
providing a meal for the workers at a low cost.43 The problems of providing low cost
meals is reiterated in issues faced by the successive Dining Hall Committees and will
be addressed in Chapters 2 and 3.

The CME arranged with the Commissioner for the Dining Hall to be supplied with
numbered ‘billy-cans’ for the men who brought their own dinner so the caterer
could supply them with water for their tea.44 The original procedures for the serving
and ordering of meals basically remained the same throughout the life of the Dining
Hall.

41 QSA, 6873/268962, Chas Pemberton, “Dining Room-Ipswich,” October 20, 1911.
42 TWRM Archives: Chas Pemberton, “Report of the Commissioner for Railways,” June 30, CA 55-1912,
131. 43 For example see QSA, 6873/268962, Sun, “Important to Caterers,” August 27, 1911; Queensland
Times, “The Railway Dining Room,” January 5, 1912.
44 QSA, 6873/268962, Chas Pemberton, “Dining Room-Ipswich,” October 20, 1911.
Details of these procedures are as follows:

When the men enter the rooms at dinner time, a plate of hot soup will be awaiting each one, and the next course will be already out and being kept hot in the kitchen. To do this tomorrow’s menu is placed before each man to-day and a note of his number and tomorrow’s order taken. By this means not only will each man’s meal be ready when he enters the rooms, but the caterer will know exactly how many plates of each dish he is to provide.45

In the following year’s Report of the Commissioner for Railways Pemberton states, ‘The large dining-hall erected for the convenience of the workmen at Ipswich was opened during the year, and is doing very well, quite large percentage of the men availing themselves of the luncheon provided.’46 At the time of opening 1,400 men47 were employed at the Ipswich Workshops. The ‘commodious’ new Dining Hall was opened on January the third, 1912.

On that day, fifteen minutes before the noon lunch time whistle blew, the party of railway executive officers arrived by special train and they were met by the workshop’s Deputy Locomotive Engineer R.Z. Neild and Works Manager J.E. Robinson. For the opening lunchtime meal, the 650 railway workers who had chosen to partake of the meals supplied each day by the Dining Room were guests of the Commissioner.48 To accommodate the numbers of Diners eating at lunch times the Dining Room tables and long stools were uniformly spaced with a minimum amount of access space in which to manoeuvre around.49 (See Diagram 2.)

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49 TWRM Archives: K587 Series 149, “Workmen’s Dining Rooms: Diagram of Tables and Forms,” June 26, 1911.
The diners sat at ‘long firmly-fixed tables running from east to west’ with seating provided by a ‘stout stool on either side’. ‘Over impressed numbers on the table’, the individual placing settings of cutlery were neatly laid with ‘two scrupulously clean pint enamel mugs’ beside each knife; ‘one was for soup and the other for tea’. To add to the table setting at intervals placed on the boards of the tables were ‘bouquets of flowers set in glass receptacles’. The numbered billy-cans were set on a table in the kitchen awaiting the hot water for the brew of tea for the workmen who were not dining to have with their lunch. The official party sat at a ‘small improvised table at the eastern end of the room’ thus for a time being ‘served in the same manner as the men’.50

50 Queensland Times, “Railway Workshops,” January 4, 1912, 5-6.
The Commissioner had stipulated for the opening day his meal was to be of ‘the same stamp as is to be supplied daily to the caterer’s patrons’51. This was a break from custom. Later catering practices served railway executive officials ‘a special meal of only the best meats’52 in a room in this building which was set aside for the Commissioner and his visitors.

When the noon lunch time whistle sounded an orderly procession of workers entered the room each ‘held in his hand a brass ticket bearing a number corresponding to the impressed number’ which was his allocated place at the tables in the dining room. The meal served was a three course menu of tomato soup, roast beef, beef olives, boiled potatoes, green peas, apple tart, lemon jelly, tea and rolls.53

The caterer Stanton was assisted by ‘no fewer than 17 waitresses’. On that day they were ‘commended’ for their meal preparations and service.54 It was said that the meal was ‘good wholesome food’ and enjoyed with ‘substantial relish’. There was some initial confusion regarding the workers finding their allocated seat, but this was reported as minor.55 An early image of Catering Staff depicts the Staff in a large functional kitchen area but with that ratio of diners to Staff it would have been a difficult task to consistently supply the number of meals required which would suit everyone’s tastes.56

51 Namely: the Minister for Railways Hon. W.T. Paget, the Commissioner for Railways Charles Evans, the Deputy Commissioner Mr W. Pagan, the Chief Engineer Mr N.G. Bell, the Traffic Manager for the Brisbane District J.G. Brown and the Secretary to the Commissioner for Railways A.J. Crowther. *Queensland Times*, “Railway Workshops,” January 4, 1912, 5-6.
52 Marie Bill, Interview May 20, 2009; and Wilma Sichter, Interview June 29, 2009.
53 *Queensland Times*, “Railway Workshops,” January 4, 1912, 5-6.
54 *Queensland Times*, “Railway Workshops,” January 4, 1912, 5-6.
55 *Queensland Times*, “Railway Workshops,” January 4, 1912, 5-6.
On that day, Albert Welsby was one of the Diners from the workshops. He recorded in his diary the ‘meal was good’ though not as good as the one he ate at home and described the soup as ‘very hot’ and the ‘tea smokey’. By the following week he declared that ‘the dinner at the works was a disgrace’ as the tapioca served ‘was not cooked; but bound together with glue’. From amongst the banter between speakers and railway workers it was noted that it was a leap year and given the ‘enormous number of young men present they had better take care that some of the very nice young ladies who were waiting on the tables did not take advantage of that.’

During the speeches, an invitation was made to invite the mothers and wives of the workers to dine at the Dining Hall so it could be seen by them what facilities had been provided for the wellbeing of their husbands and sons. Ten days later ‘the ladies had their dinner in the dining room’.

57 Fryer Library, UQ Library, Papers of Albert Ernest Welsby 1903-1964, UQFL 40, Box 30.
58 *Queensland Times*, “Railway Workshops,” January 4, 1912, 5-6.
59 *Queensland Times*, “Railway Workshops,” January 4, 1912, 5-6.
60 Fryer Library, UQ Library, Papers of Albert Ernest Welsby 1903-1964, UQFL 40, Box 30.
The occasion started at 2.00 pm and again was marked by ceremonial addresses by the railway executive and workshop officials. Some 300 to 400 ladies sat down to the same meals the Diners ate at lunch time. The *Queensland Times* noted the additional ‘beautiful specimens of staghorn ferns’ which hung ‘in different portions of the commodious hall’ and that the ladies were entertained during the afternoon with tunes by the Vice-Regal City Band. Importantly, the female guests were given a guided tour of the workshops.

Commissioner for Railways Charles Evans stated that the ‘day’s gathering under the circumstances, was quite a novel one in the history of railway work in Queensland’. There are two notions here, one being that the site was a male dominated workplace in which the female staff of the Dining Hall consisted of only a handful of female workers on site. It is possible here that Evans was alluding to not just the site’s patriarchal domination as a workplace but also to the political tension of this time regarding the rights of workers and their unions.

On the day the men had their opening day, the *Queensland Times* reported on the men’s cheers in response to the speeches that marked the Dining Hall as ‘for the benefit of the employees’. Minister for Railways Hon. W.T. Paget’s speech stated the principal belief of Paget and the Queensland Cabinet was one ‘of treating workmen on humanitarian lines’. The men and the Committee were reminded by the speakers that the upkeep, fittings and cost of the building were borne by the Railway Department so that the facilities could provide the men ‘with a three-course hot luncheon at minimum cost’. The political posturing in the speeches during both ceremonies was set against a backdrop of workers’ trade union unrest. Within days of these two speeches, the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council had initiated the 1912 Brisbane General Strike.

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61 *Queensland Times*, “The Ipswich Workshops,” January 15, 1912.
By the end of January, workers from the North Ipswich Railway Workshops were being urged to ‘down tools’ and participated in a strike. This time when Commissioner Evans returned he spoke to the workers from the verandah of the Timekeeper’s building. In his speech, the Commissioner contrasted the change in the workshop’s environment to when he had ‘sat down in that dining-room only a few days previously’. In his rhetoric, Evans included how grateful he was and how he was sure their wives and families felt the same that they had gone back to work. Clearly, Evans had drawn from the previous weeks’ events connected with the Dining Hall to gain rapport with the workers.

By March 1912, Pemberton advised the Commissioner:

after a fair trial the Dining Room at the Ipswich Workshops may be accepted as a distinct success. There are at present 700 men (including Administrative Staff) taking mid-day meal in the room at the hands of the Caterer, and a considerable number of extra men are desirous of joining as soon as arrangements can be made for them.

At that time, half of those employed at the Ipswich Railway Workshops availed themselves of a lunch time meal on a daily basis and more became part of a list that waited for a seat at a table. From this point on, the workers’ associations with the activities of the Dining Hall continued to play a significant part in their working lives.

Before the building was officially opened, the railway workers applied to the CME to hold a social function. On behalf of the Dining Hall Committee, Pemberton sought the Commissioner’s approval to hold a ‘social in the new hall before it is opened for dining purposes’. This event was to raise money to inaugurate a fund to cover the costs ‘for any loss of utensils or wilful breakage’ that would be incurred in connection with running the Dining Hall.

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64 Fryer Library, UQ Library, Papers of Albert Ernest Welsby 1903-1964, UQFL 40, Box 31.
65 Fryer Library, UQ Library, Papers of Albert Ernest Welsby 1903-1964, UQFL 40, Box 8.
66 QSA, 6873/268962, Chas Pemberton, “Dining Room-Ipswich,” March 13, 1912.
67 QSA, 6873/268962, Chas Pemberton, “Dining Room-Ipswich,” March 13, 1912.
68 QSA, 6873/268962, Chas Pemberton, “New Dining Hall at Ipswich Workshops,” October 20, 1911.
This correspondence highlights that it was the responsibility of the Committee to replace items originally purchased for the operations of the Dining Hall. It also draws attention to the hierarchical system the Committee had to comply with because the Dining Hall was owned by QR. The nature of the request illustrates that the railway workshop employees regarded this building as fulfilling a social function within the workshops.

Over the next two months a formal set of rules for the government and management of the Dining Hall were established. An indenture agreement on the tenancy and lease of the building between the Committee and the Commissioner was signed. The indenture determined a covenant which provided an initial six months lease for the Committee for the use of the building for its proposed purpose as a Dining Hall, with an option thereafter to end the lease with a written notice of one calendar month. It was written into the indenture agreement that it was necessary to pay an advance of ‘yearly rent or sum of one pound (£1) on the first day of July in each year (if demanded)’ known as peppercorn rent. The ‘Rules governing the management of the Ipswich Railway Workshops Dining Hall’ were to be respected as part of this agreement and duly ‘performed and observed’ by the parties involved.\(^69\) The formal agreement entered into by the parties gave the Committee custodial management of the building on behalf of the Commissioner.

The Dining Hall Committee’s basic mandate was to provide railway employees with five meals per week at a satisfactory price. In order to keep prices low the Committee had to continually revise and adjust their management strategies to accommodate the effects of rising costs of catering supplies, wages for labour or change the services offered by the Dining Room and Canteen to maintain the workers’ patronage. This was at times a difficult task.

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\(^{69}\) QSA, 6873/268962, “The Indenture,” and “Rules governing the management of the Ipswich Railway Workshops Dining Hall,” March 13, 1912.
Throughout the life of the Dining Hall, the building remained the property of QR and the Committee comprised of men who were employees of QR. The formality and detail provided by the early correspondence highlights the regulatory nature and accountability that also set the pattern for the following years of the Dining Hall’s management and practices which were governed by QR rules and policies.

The following Chapters 2 and 3 look at how the effects of hierarchical systems relate to the daily routine of the Dining Hall Staff and Diners. These Chapters note the changes to the Dining Hall building through the different eras of these Workshops and how the Committee responded to the difficult challenges they faced. Details of the daily routine of the Dining Hall Staff and Diners illustrate how they organised their ‘working lives’ around the sound of the whistle. These interpretations of the life of the building draw from a distinct history of the Dining Hall—one fully immersed in railway working culture and industry.