

Grandchester Then & Now



- 1 **Grandchester Railway Station:** The station was built in 1865 and is the oldest surviving in Queensland.

The original name Bigges Camp is still displayed at the station.

Note the square water tank on an enclosed timber stand, a rare type. Tanks provided water for steam locomotives. For many years, a 'banking engine' was stationed at Grandchester. This was attached to trains to assist them across the Little Liverpool Range.

- 2 **Grandchester Hotel:** The historic Railway Hotel was destroyed by fire in the 1950s. It was rebuilt and is now known as the Grandchester Hotel.

- 3 **Railway Gatekeeper's Cottage:** The gatekeeper's cottage was originally situated beside the level crossing. It was later shifted to its present position and is now a private residence.

- 4 **Lady Bowen Hill:** This area is said to have been where the function was held in July 1865 to celebrate the opening of the railway.

Lady Bowen, wife of the Governor, planted a tree during the ceremonies and the hill became known locally as Lady Bowen Hill. The property has been owned by the Stokes family for several generations.



- 5 **Railway Dam:** Steam locomotives were refilled with water at Grandchester for the haul across the Little Liverpool Range. The water initially came from a lagoon near the station, but this sometimes went dry.

To ensure a more reliable supply, a railway dam was built across a nearby gully in 1892 and was enlarged in 1913. The dam can be reached by driving/walking a short distance north up Long Gully Road, then turning left onto Clancy's Road.

- 6 **Former general store:** About 50 years ago, the store was operated by Reg Hennings; it sold groceries and had a hand-operated petrol pump at the front. Dairy farmers in the district would phone grocery orders through and Mr Hennings would send them out on the cream truck.

- 7 **Community Hall:** The hall and adjacent sports-ground is supervised by a local committee and is an important social centre for the community.
- 8 **Grandchester State School:** The school opened in 1878. It burned down in 1916 and classes were held in a vacant hall for a year until the new school was built. The residence was added in 1932. The grounds have bottle trees in the driveway and on the eastern side.
- 9 **Grandchester Cemetery:** The first burial took place in 1896. Local trustees care for the cemetery and hold fundraising events to pay for its maintenance.
- 10 **St Peter's Catholic Church:** Built in 1894 by James Madden to a design by Ipswich architect Henry Wyman. It was opened in November of that year by Archbishop Dunne.
- 11 **Grandchester Sawmill:** *Visitors are welcome to drive onto the premises for a closer look but for industrial safety and insurance reasons, they must remain in their vehicle.*

This steam-operated sawmill was established by the Gillam family in 1945 and is one of the great attractions of the region. It is powered by a steam engine built in England c1908 and was originally used at the Nestles condensed milk factory at Toogoolawah. The boiler for the engine is part of C17 steam locomotive No 922 built at Walkers, Maryborough in 1966. The mill is still productive and processes local hardwoods.

- 12 **Model Live Steam Railway, Ipswich Street:** Visitors can ride behind working scale models of steam and diesel locomotives. Visit on the first Sunday each month, 10am to 3pm. Light refreshments, a shaded picnic area and toilets are available. The signal cabin at the site was relocated from Yarongmulu railway station between Grandchester and Laidley.
- 13 **Bigges Camp Park:** A good place to stop for a picnic. Facilities include an electric barbecue, shelter sheds and toilets. The park contains a war memorial and a monument which records Grandchester as a campsite of explorer Allan Cunningham on 18 June 1829.

Historical Facts

- + The first railway in Queensland was built from Ipswich to the Darling Downs, but contracts were let in several sections. The first of these was from Ipswich to Bigges Camp, a distance of 38km. The successful tenderer was a well-known British firm Peto Brassey & Betts.
- + The first section of railway was officially opened on 31 July 1865 with a function at Bigges Camp attended by the Governor Sir George Bowen, Lady Bowen and many official guests.
- + The first four locomotives used in Queensland were given the names: Premier, Lady Bowen, Faugh-a-Ballagh (clear the way) and Pioneer.
- + Governor Bowen thought Bigges Camp sounded like 'Big Scamp' and suggested that the name should be changed to reflect the importance of the new railway. 'Big' was changed to 'grand' and the Latin word 'chester' was used for 'camp', so Bigges Camp became Grandchester.
- + From Grandchester onwards, railway construction became more difficult. The line had to cross the Little Liverpool Range to Laidley, and then ascend the Main Range to Toowoomba. Several tunnels were required. The longest was near Grandchester - the Victoria Tunnel, 537 metres long.
- + From 1 January 1866, Cobb & Co coaches met each train to take passengers between Grandchester and Toowoomba. The coach service was gradually withdrawn as the railway was extended.
- + The railway reached Gatton in June 1866, Toowoomba in April 1867 and Dalby in March 1868.



Grandchester Live Steam Railway