

Darling Harbour Railway Station, 1904

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At the Darling Harbour Railway Station, the greatest receiving and distributing business south of the Equator is carried on. Every day 500 to 900 railway wagons, each with 6 to 22 tons of produce, rumble inwards from the country. In a few hours they are rumbling away to the place out-back. As the city is the heart of the State, so the railway service is the main artery.

The average member of the public may consign any article, from a box of apples to a multi tubular boiler, to almost any railway station in the four states, with practical certainty that it safely and quickly reach its destination. But few persons have any knowledge of the intricate management involved.

The Railway Commissioners have control of Darling Island (not an island but a peninsula) and the whole frontages of Darling Harbour. Loading and discharging freight is mostly carried out under cover, the train being run in under enormous sheds. Of these there are eight or nine, some more than 1000 feet long, and sufficiently wide for trains to discharge on either side, leaving a cart track almost as wide as George Street in the centre.

Trains bound inwards travel under the George Street railway bridge, and the William Henry Street bridge at Ultimo. A short distance below the latter bridge is an open space, capable of holding 2000 trucks, known as the general reception roads. The engines are detached from the trains near the William Henry Street bridge, and the trucks are "kicked" along to the general reception roads, whence they are run by gravitation to other reception yards, or onto the sheds to be discharged.

When empty, the trucks are run back to the sheds wherein "outward" loading is taking place. If not thus required, they are shunted on to "back lines". During busy wool and wheat seasons, engines are hitched on to these empty trains, and hurried back to the country, for then the whole of the rolling stock is required for traffic. The wool traffic generally begins in September, and lasts till January. The wheat traffic commences early in December and lasts till autumn.

At the head of the harbour are the great woolshed and smaller goods sheds, beside the Government Meat Markets which occupies an acre of ground.

All the sheds are devoted to inward traffic. The wool is carted hence to the big wool stores at Pymont or the Circular Quay, or to the wool station at Woolloomooloo. The woolshed is capable of unloading 120 trucks simultaneously, under cover. Hence more than 10,000 bales have been dealt with in a day. When no wool is coming to hand, the big woolshed is used for wheat, flour and general merchandise.

There are four other sheds, and a covered platform, where flour, hides, small consignments of grain, etc, for the city, are received. Fruit is carried in well ventilated louvre cars, and unloaded in the open air.

Wheat wool and coal are the principal freight lines of the railways. The wheat and coal are handled at the Darling Island end of the yards. The "island" has a concrete sea wall berthing four large ships, and near the water's edge is an enormous grain shed, divided into seven sections, each of which has an electrically operated grain elevator, and is leased to a shipping firm. There are also gantry conveyors for bundling grain. Lines run along both side of the grain shed.

Between Darling Island and Pymont is a space where wool and coal for metropolitan consumption is received at 120 to 150 truckloads per day. On the water side are jetties, berthing seven ships. Here perhaps may be seen a big British-India steamer, taking horses from the railway trucks, and a Vancouver mail steamer having "hoppers" (coal trucks) swung bodily into her by the big cranes on the wharf. Fourteen hoppers an hour (120 tons) are being dropped in, and as she requires 1,200 tons she will coal in 10 hours. Further along the shore, colliers are laden with South Coast and Mountain coal, to take to ships down the harbour.

On the southern side of Pymont Bridge are two big sheds, 756 feet long, with four times that in platforms, for miscellaneous outward traffic. Each shed has a 42 feet cart-way, and unloading is done on one level, from the cart to the platform, and from the platform to the truck. There are 34 hydraulic cranes, besides 68 platforms weighing appliances, and the weigh-bridges at the entrances. These sheds are a scene of great activity in the afternoons. Rough loading such as timber is done in the open, and provision is made to load timber from coastal schooners right onto the trucks. Here may be seen thousands of sleepers sent for export to South Africa.

To carry on the work of the station, Mr Paull has a permanent staff of 338 men, including 72 clerks and 45 shunters. The gross tonnage handled each year is between 1¼ and 1½ million, and the revenue generated £800,000. The value of the merchandise handled must be in the millions of pounds.

The wool traffic, which in 1871 was 38,910 bales in a year, was last year 375,360 bales, while it has reached (in 1894) 528,128 bales. The coal traffic represents 250,000 tons per year. One week the average number of trains arriving daily was 28, while as many as 40 or more sometimes arrive in a day.

Darling Harbour Station was opened in 1875 for wheat; wool was sent to it in 1878. In 1880, it was necessary to extend to the other side of the Pymont Wharf. At present, there are 15½ miles of rails in the yard. The traffic has caused great wool stores and other industrial palaces to spring up on the Pymont side and has attracted fleets of shipping to the wharves.