

You may have noticed that an old railway wagon has appeared on the rails at the Glenorchy wharf. Ian Kirkland and Vince Jones have undertaken to restore the wagon back to something what it looked like when it first arrived in Glenorchy possibly as early as 1908. The project is being funded by the Lakeside Football Club and Tas and Kate Dawson of Guthrie Bowron, Queenstown.

The first wharf was built by Butement, the largest runholder at the Head of the Lake. Built of red beech piles and timber decking, it was about 20ft in length and was sufficient to load out bales of wool. Passengers did not disembark the steamers onto this wharf as the boats pulled alongside the spit and it was a case of walking the plank. On 5th of October, 1885, a tender was let for a new wharf at a cost of 163 pounds.

The boats were operated by the Lake Wakatipu Shipping Company but there was considerable dissatisfaction with both the level of service they provided and the freight costs. The railway line had reached Kingston in 1878 and as there was no road from Kingston to Queenstown the shipping company had a monopoly on freight to and from Queenstown and the surrounding farms and settlements around the lake. The agitation over the service resulted in the New Zealand Railways taking over the steamers and the different wharves around the lake in 1902. In 1908 the wharf shed which had sat at the end of the wharf was moved onto the beach. A railway line was built on the wharf. It is quite likely that the railway wagon arrived then. The wagon itself is an early type of M wagon, M295, probably built about 1880. In 1900 it was transferred to the maintenance branch and renumbered E1446. Without the deck on it there is visible evidence that wagon was damaged in an incident, probably a shunting mishap, and was taken out of service in 1900 and thence sent to Glenorchy to run up and down the wharf. The wharf remained service for loading out stock, wool, scheelite, red beech fencing posts and firewood for Queenstown. The Wakatip Mail, November, 1924, reports concern about the state of the wharf following a recent flood.

By 1936 the state of the wharf was giving real cause for concern not just the state of the wharf but also the fact that over time the discharge of gravel by the Rees and Dart rivers had led to an encroachment on the wharf itself, a problem we are familiar with. Where the boats had once been able to make a sweeping line into and out of the wharf they had to nose in and the bow was touching gravel. Representations were made to the Minister of Railways. By September, 1936, the construction of a new wharf was underway. It was at this time that a truly unfortunate decision was made by the local residents. They dismantled Butement's Woolshed to use the rock to build walls for the new wharf. Later in life Doug Scott, of Rees Valley Station, shook his head in disbelief at what they had done. The shed was moved to its present position and the railway lines were put in place for the trolley and the railway wagon.

In 1962 the Glenorchy road was opened and this signalled that the days of the Earnslaw's trips to the Head of the Lake were numbered and, of course, the commercial usages of the Glenorchy wharf. There is photo taken in 1970 of the railway wagon and the trolley sitting alongside the wharf shed. The grass is long and it all looks a bit bedraggled.

At some time in the 1970s Gilbert Koch acquired the wagon from the Railways and towed it up to Lakeview where he used it for storing superphosphate. It later was put down on a lower terrace where it stayed until recently when Robert Koch donated it back to the community. With the help Reid Contracting and Pounamu's JCB, the wagon was put back on the railway line alongside the shed. The wagon is still in remarkably good condition and restoration will involve replacing the decking, the headboards and sideboards.