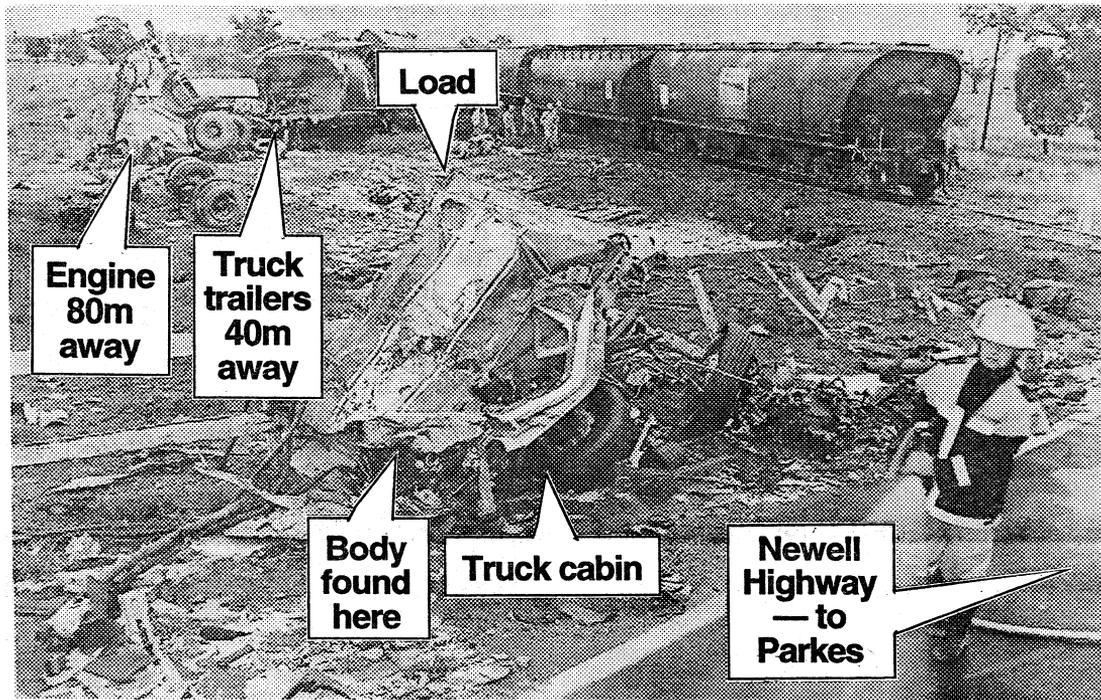


Crossing claims another victim



The scene of yesterday's accident at the Welcome railway crossing . . . 'it is just unexplainable'

By SIMON BENSON

THE Welcome level crossing continues to belie its name and is fast becoming one of the blackest of black spots in NSW.

The crossing, on a flat stretch of the Newell Highway 4km south of Parkes, claimed another life yesterday morning.

Shortly before 4am, 37-year-old Robert Kenneth Wheatley's truck slammed into an empty goods train with such ferocity that it split his tanker in three.

It derailed six carriages of the 32-carriage wheat train and catapulted a set of railway bogies 70m.

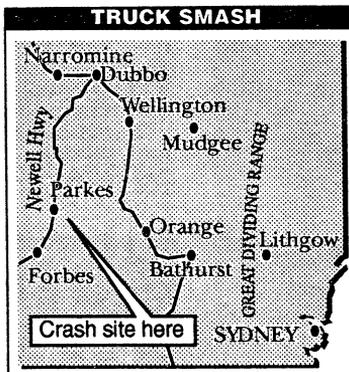
Mr Wheatley died instantly.

The bells at the crossing were ringing, the lights were flashing, yet the lone truck driver from Wagga Wagga failed to stop.

He is the sixth person in two years to have died for no apparent reason at the Welcome crossing.

According to one local resident, there is an incident at the crossing almost every month. Most residents are at a loss to explain why.

Less than a month ago, Timothy Godden, 20, and 21-year-old Christopher Miller from Forbes lost their lives at the crossing



when their utility slammed into an oncoming truck.

In January last year, 76-year-old Thomas Edward Diesel and his 75-year-old wife Violet May died after trying to overtake a car at the crossing. Their car left the road and crashed into a tree.

And just before Christmas a little more than two years ago, 66-year-old Keith Shoesmith of West Wyalong ploughed into the Indian Pacific in broad daylight.

He died instantly. Eighteen train passengers were injured.

Yesterday, Agriculture Minister and local member for Parkes

Ian Armstrong called Transport Minister Bruce Baird and expressed his concern about the latest fatality.

He was assured that a State Rail Authority team was being sent to the site to examine the crossing and the latest incident.

The Welcome crossing is a State Government problem as the Newell is a State Highway and beyond the control of Parkes council.

Short of building a 4km bridge at a cost of about \$25 million, Parkes mayor Robert Wilson doesn't know what can be done.

"I am at a loss as to how people come to grief there," Mr Wilson said.

"From a practical point of view, I don't know how to overcome it."

Chief Inspector Gordon Weaver of Parkes police is just as mystified as everybody else.

"I would like to find out how this happened," he said.

"I can't see how fatigue could be involved because they would have just driven out of a built-up area. It is just unexplainable."

One suggestion put forward is that reflectors be put on train carriages so they are more visible at night.