

The Railway Luncheon Club

21 October 2009

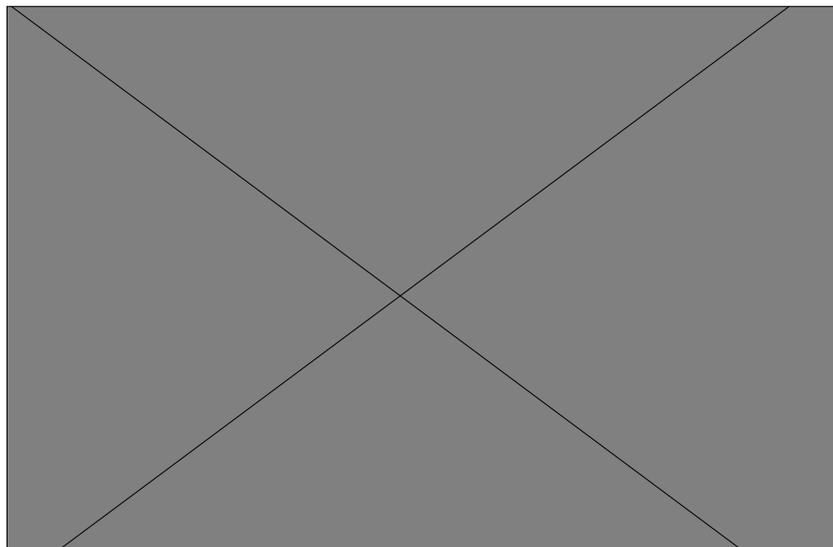
FAIRFIELD

Members of the Railway Luncheon Club had a day of tension, discovery and enjoyment. Over 20 members visited Fairfield Station on Wednesday 21 October and were received warmly by the Station Manager. The major objective of the visit was to carry out an internal inspection of the 1856 combined booking office and residence. This structure is the oldest extant building on the NSW rail system. The tension arose when the Station Manager's key would not unlock the gate to gain entry to the building. However, the problem was finally solved. Attendees were fortunate to have amongst the group Don Hagarty, who is the historian and acknowledged expert of the early days of the NSW rail system. Don talked to the group prior to entry to the building and circulated plans of the structure. The discovery he made was that, while the building externally follows the plan prepared by Joseph Brady, internally the building is inconsistent with the floor plan. This was a major discovery and was only made possible by the Society's negotiations to inspect the structure. The Luncheon Club was the first internal inspection by other than RailCorp personnel. Members were delighted not only by the opportunity to inspect the 1856 structure but to have the benefit of Don's knowledge.

Fairfield Station is the only station on the NSW rail system that has platform structures dating from the pre-Whitton, Whitton and post Whitton periods. It was the only intermediate station on the extension from Granville to Liverpool in 1856. The *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1856 described the building as "a very little brick structure, forming perhaps the only pleasing artificial feature along the whole line", according to the surviving plan, it possessed the system's first unisex toilet. The building exists largely as it was in 1856.

In 1878, a second building was erected on the down platform. This is the structure with the simple, hipped roof which was approved by William Mason, Engineer for Existing Lines. It contained a Parcels Office, large Booking Office and a conventional Ladies Waiting Room that acted as a traditional ante-chamber to the ladies toilet. It has a timber clad addition which was used as a carpenters' workshop until 2002.

In 1891, the up platform was opened with duplication between Merrylands and Liverpool and the present structure was built at that time. It featured a main building with a gabled roof and a toilet block with a gable roof transverse to the main roof. The Station Manager invited members inside the 1891 to inspect the metal pressed-metal steel ceiling. Together with Campbelltown 1 and 2 platform building, the up platform building at Fairfield was one of the very last structures to be built using a posted platform verandah. The building had one unusual feature for a suburban platform building at that time.



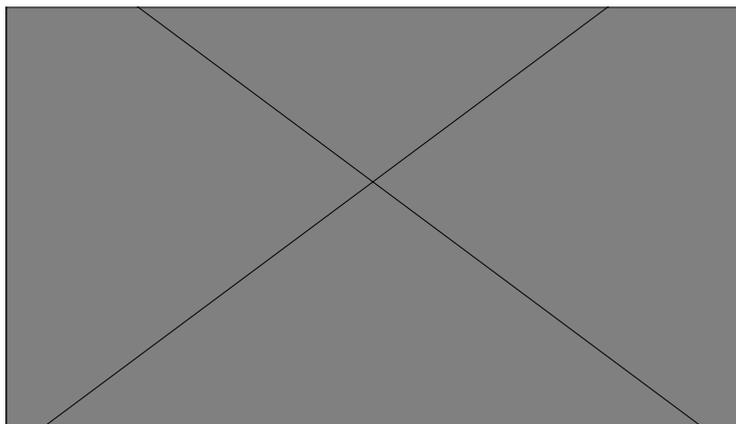
It did not possess centre pedestrian access into the General Waiting Room. People approaching the platform had to walk over the goods yard, around the building and enter the General Waiting Room to buy a ticket. In World War Two parcels traffic increased widely on the metropolitan rail system and a new parcels Office was planned for the up end of the up platform building. The Parcels Office was sufficiently large that it could accommodate 46 bicycles hanging from standard bicycle hooks.

Society Life Member, John Oakes was also present to explain to members the layout of the former goods yard and the position of the line to Widemere Quarry. Members were appreciative of John's contribution. While waiting for the train to Merrylands, members read the comprehensive notes prepared by Stuart Sharp and the sheets of track and gradient diagrams supplied by Tony Woodland. A considerable effort had been made before the outing to find the best place to eat lunch. Gary Hughes, Tony Bailey and David Taylor made extensive visits to local clubs and pubs and selected the Merrylands RSL Club. Members were delighted by the choice and had a most enjoyable time. The Club gave members a substantial discount and for \$9.90 group patrons enjoyed unlimited quantities of over 50 different dishes. The Club was voted by members the best luncheon venue so far visited in 2009.

The November Railway Luncheon Club will visit Penrith Station on Wednesday 18 November 2009. Members will meet on the down platform at 11.00. Those members coming from the city are invited to meet at Sydney Central (country platforms) and take the 10.09. Members are invited to travel in the second car from the front, on the lower deck.

Text by Stuart Sharp

Photos by David Wynter



Volunteers are urgently required at the ARHSnsw Railway Resource Centre annex located at Alexandria in suburban Sydney. Previous experience in the sorting and listing of paper material is desirable but not essential. A general knowledge of railway working and history would be a distinct advantage. Please contact Railway Resources Centre Manager, David Wynter, on 02 9699 2736 to discuss.