

# **THE NSW RAILWAYS AT COCKLE CREEK**

## ***THE OFTEN PUZZLING, OFTEN SAD AND OFTEN SURPRISING HISTORY OF ALMOST FORGOTTEN FACILITIES***

### **EXISTING DOCUMENTATION**

Veteran former Life Member, Cyril Singleton, is well known for his history in *Bulletin* of the Short North. In relation to Cockle Creek, he provides text, pictures and plans in the February, 1966, issue, pp. 34-37. A photograph of the station between 1891 and 1914 is in *Bulletin*, March, 1984, p. 67. A map showing the location of all the collieries radiating from the junction with the main line at Cockle Creek is in *Bulletin*, October, 2003, p. 370.

The station also gets a good history in two issues of the *Byways* series. In *Byways* 22, Peter Attenborough has a comprehensive story about Cockle Creek's main line (pp. 30-33). The various private lines are covered in *Byways* 26, pp. 6-46 by Brian Andrews.

What the existing works do not convey is the puzzlement and sadness of the story of the station.

### **TODAY AT COCKLE CREEK**

Today, the station at Cockle Creek is a miserable looking affair. It wears the limited paraphernalia of the current railway owner, CityRail – blue seats and white and blue nameboards. It is now 20 years since the station looked like it was a lovely place for those who care about NSW's railway heritage. Cockle Creek station has undergone a series of major changes since its opening in 1887 and, for the most part, these have been forgotten.

### **20 YEARS AGO**

It seems a puzzle to those who are supporters of rail transport why anyone would want to demolish a perfectly sound brick platform building, let alone two of them and only about 40 years old.

In 1993, CityRail had been in existence for four years. The newly appointed Line Managers were gung-ho to validate their super salaries. One easy method was to display their tough managerial style by demolishing everything that could be demolished. Admittedly, they were just doing what they were told to do. They had two objectives – provide a new-look railway system at the same as lowering operating costs.

When there was no local opposition to demolition, buildings were destroyed and their remains removed. That was the story for Cockle Creek. No one cared enough to save the station buildings. It must also be kept in mind that CityRail did not bother too much to tell the local people of its intention but, then again, there were not too many local residents. Officially, the buildings were demolished because CityRail “could not keep up with the constant vandalism”.

In 1990, planning had begun to replace all the remaining timber platform buildings between Gosford and Broadmeadow.<sup>1</sup> The action at Cockle Creek was part of the system-wide Station Upgrading Program. At most locations, simple shelters were all that was provided. After the easy locations, such as Narara, Lisarow and Niagara Park were finished, attention turned to some of the harder places. Ourimbah, Teralba and Broadmeadow all had timber buildings that CityRail wanted to demolish but these remained at the time because of local opposition from relevant local government authorities and local pressure groups. By 1992, it was the turn of Cockle Creek to receive official attention and the station was locked in for attention as part of the 1992/93 Station Upgrading Program. At the time, the station was unattended and there was no local interest in the structure, not even from the Lake Macquarie City Council. The plan was to remove the brick structures but leave the steel frames for the platform awnings for new shelters.

Derek Rogers and Ed Tonks photographed the existing 1957 buildings in early March, 1993, two weeks before their demolition. Rogers described the buildings as “unusual” but did not explain why he selected this word.<sup>2</sup> He mentioned that, at the same time the buildings were demolished, the platforms were shortened from space to accommodate eight to six cars. Now, that is a peculiar story as signs were provided on the platforms for years prior to demolition that passengers wishing to use the station should travel in the rear four cars of trains. What was going on?

The 1957 buildings were demolished between 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1993, and the new shelters, using the steel frames of the 1957 platform awnings were erected in June, 1993.<sup>3</sup> All aspects of the work, including the new-look seats, bins and nameboards, and work were completed in November of that year.<sup>4</sup> CityRail recognised that the station could be windy and added windbreaks to the platforms, as it did at the time also at Fassifern and Hexham.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some timber buildings, such as the down platform building at Adamstown, were replaced in 1984 as part of the SRA’s “facelift” to coincide with the opening of electric services through to Newcastle. That building was demolished during February, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> *Railway Digest*, May, 1993, p. 199

<sup>3</sup> *Railway Digest*, August, 1993, p. 349

<sup>4</sup> *Railway Digest* August 1993, p. 349 and December 1993, p. 550

While the puzzlement of the demolition of the attractive platform buildings is solved, there is no comfort in the explanation – only sadness.

## **55-65 YEARS AGO**

### **POLITICAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK**

A puzzling feature of the history of Cockle Creek station is the delay to commissioning the new bridge, new station and deviation when most of the work had been completed by 1951. It was a further six years before the deviation was opened for traffic.

In the mid to late 1940s, there was a departmental dream of running the powerful 57 and 58 Class steam locomotives between Sydney and Broadmeadow because of the very large amount of rail traffic on the corridor. It was more than a dream and the Department of Railways undertook major works at many locations to strengthen bridges to hold the weight of the system's then heaviest class of locomotive. Don Fraser, before he entered academia and obtained his doctorate was a civil engineer in the NSW Department of Railways. He has written about the post-World War Two shortage of steel and the way two major projects consumed the bulk of available steel and manpower after 1945. The two projects were the construction of the second Hawkesbury River bridge and Circular Quay railway station and related elevated bridges. The replacement of the existing plate web girder bridge at Cockle Creek was a casualty of the steel shortage. Don notes that, although plans for the replacement bridge were prepared and approved in 1946, the bridge was not open for traffic until 1957. It seemed, at the time, that the last steel truss bridge built on the NSW railway system would be built at Cockle Creek in 1957 but one was installed over the Parramatta River at Camellia in 1996 as a gesture to the design of the prior, heritage-listed structure at that location.<sup>5</sup>

In 1955, the dream of operating 57 and 58 Class members on the Short North still held currency but, in 1955, the work at Cockle Creek was officially "cancelled". Veteran member, Gary Hughes, remembers when Neal McCusker took office in 1955, firstly in an acting capacity. The funding crisis and a well-published hostility between Reg Winsor and the Ministers for Transport, Billy Sheahan, Ern Wetherell and Ambrose Enticknap, were the reasons the NSW Government shafted Commissioner Windsor. The Government also allocated a senior officer of the NSW State Treasury to reside full-

---

<sup>5</sup> D. Fraser, *Bridges Down Under*, Redfern, ARHS, 1995, pp. 125 and 151

time in the Green House (i.e., head office of the Department of Railways, officially known as Railway House) to ensure that there was increased economies. Gary has a clear memory that it was Winsor, not the Government, who stopped the Eastern Suburbs Railway (ESR) because of the lack of capital funding. In 1952, Reg Winsor had also stopped electrification of the Main West for some months, it having a similar story to the Cockle Creek bridge, taking six years to complete.

The financial situation for the Department of Railways was not just a shortage of funding. Life member, Ian Brady, in his *Bulletin* article on the ESR (August, 1979, p. 1850) gives a table of allocated and actual expenditure for the ESR from 1947 to 1958. Of those 12 years, the actual expenditure exceeded the allocation only in five years. In four of out the remaining seven years, the under-expenditure was 80% in 1948, 50% in 1949, 34% in 1952 and 70% in 1957. Clearly, as well as a shortage of capital funds, those allocations that the NSW Government made were not well managed. John Gunn, in his official history of the NSW Railways, called the early period a “state transport system in crisis” and the “post war breakdown of transport in NSW”.<sup>6</sup> The Minister for Transport, Ambrose Enticknap, said in 1956 that “no proper accounting system operates within the Department of Railways”.<sup>7</sup>

There was an additional issue to the financial mismanagement that was important. Following advice from external consultants, the NSW Government established a Transport and Highways Commission in May, 1950. This brought control of the Railways under the direct management of the Minister for Transport for the first time since 1888. The Commission was formed of the heads of all the various transport modes in an endeavour to co-ordinate activities. The Director of the Commission was Reg Winsor, the Assistant commissioner for Railways before his appointment. At the same time, F. C. Garside was still the Commissioner for Railways but now junior to Winsor. Who was in control of the Department of Railways? The other key player at the time was Neal McCusker, who between 1950 and 1952 was Executive Officer at the Commission. The Commission failed not because the members would not co-operate with the undertakings they supposedly controlled but because they would not communicate with each other. Winsor did not like McCusker and the Government irritated Winsor greatly when it appointed McCusker Assistant Commissioner for Railways, against Winsor’s wishes. The Commission was abolished in 1952 and Winsor returned to the Railways as the new Commissioner and McCusker as Assistant Commissioner. The impact of this for the Department of Railways was that the broad, strategic policy direction went nowhere for two years.

---

<sup>6</sup> J. Dunn, *Along Parallel lines*, Melbourne University Press, 1989, pp. 396 and 406.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422

The period between 1948 and 1956 was one in which railway policy ossified. In that period, there were five Ministers for Transport.<sup>8</sup> In the same period, there had been five Commissioners for Railways (Tom Hartigan (1932-48), F C. Garside (1948-52), Keith Fraser (1952), Reg Winsor (1952-56) and Neal McCusker (1956-72)). Winsor announced a ten year plan in 1954/55 to purchase 300 diesels and electrification to Newcastle. He also desired to build a new, duplicated Scarborough tunnel. The Government did not support his plan and it commissioned Ebasco Limited to recommend what to do. It is easy to understand why the *Sun Herald* newspaper in 1957 said that, in relation to the NSW Railways, “the abnormal is to become normal”.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Department of Railways cancelled the bridge and station works at Cockle Creek in 1955, the reality was that the work was about 90% completed. In conjunction with the deviation of the track to the new bridge, the Department of Railways was required to relocate the station sideways to a new site. There was no alternative to the construction of a station on a new site. The Way and Works Branch had started work early in 1948 on the design and obtained approval of the general arrangements plan in April, 1948. It took the Branch ten months to obtain approval for the detailed aspects, the most relevant at the time was the steel-framed windows. Clearly, the steel shortage had an impact on something as small as a window. The Branch had been very busy preparing plans for many stations throughout NSW where the traffic outstripped the available space. This was particularly the case with parcels traffic.

A good summary is by Robert Gibbons, who examined the structure of funding for transport. He wrote that “as a percentage of the total State loan funds, public transport’s share reached a peak of 42% in 1950/51, fell from 37% to 23% between 1952/53 and 1953/54, and bottomed at about 11% in 1963/64 and 1964/64”.<sup>10</sup>

The declining finances are reflected in the Table below. Very, very few buildings were erected between 1945 and 1960. The Table below sets out the locations where new platform buildings were erected.

**TABLE: NSW RAILWAY STATION BUILDING BUILDINGS 1945-1960**

<b>YEAR OF APPROVAL</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>STATUS</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
1945	Nil		
1946	Nil		
1947	Nil		

<sup>8</sup> The Ministers were Maurice O’Sullivan 1947-50; Billy Sheahan 1950-53, Clarrie Martin 1953; Ern Wetherell 1953-56 and Ambrose Enticknap 1956-59

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 426

<sup>10</sup> R. Gibbons, *Transport Administration and Planning in Sydney*, unpublished Master of Economics thesis, University of Sydney, 1978, p. 121

<b>YEAR OF APPROVAL</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>STATUS</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
1948	Bankstown	Overhead booking office built	Timber and asbestos cement sheets on external walls
1948	Cockle Creek	Built but demolished	
1948	Maitland	Booking office built	Brick structure
1948	Waverton	Waiting shed built	15' x 10' brick
1949	Wyong	Parcels office built	Brick construction
1950	Clyde	Not completed until 1960	Initial approval in 1944
1950	Granville	Not completed until 1960	Initial approval in 1944
1951	Nil		
1952	Oak Flats	Built in 1954	Timber booking office 12' x 12'
1953	Loftus Down platform	waiting room and booking office proposed	Waiting room only built
1954	Dora Creek	Built and demolished	New timber buildings on both side platforms
1955	Broken Hill	Built in 1957	In the electorate of the minister for Transport
1955	Circular Quay	Built	Opened in 1956
1955	Koolewong	Built	8' x 10' shed on down platform
1955	Emu Plains	Built	Booking office and signal box
1956	Warrimoo	Built	45' x 14' brick building to replace building destroyed in bush fire
1957	Nil		
1958	Nil		
1959	Mount Colah	Built	30' x 10' building
1960	Nil		

The list of buildings approved but not built between 1945 and 1960 is longer than those that did get constructed. Another important feature of the period that further emphasises the funding crisis are the long times between the approval and construction of station buildings. For example, the period for Circular Quay was over 20 years and

Granville and Clyde took 16 years to complete. In the case of Cockle Creek, it was nine years between approval and full use of the station buildings. From the above Table, it is clear that the platform buildings at Cockle Creek belong to a very small group of 17 structures erected between 1945 and 1960. Six of the 17 structures were small. Cockle Creek was one of only four buildings built of brick and the only location where brick buildings were provided on both side platforms. Like Cockle Creek, the station at Dora Creek was significantly affected by the provision of a new bridge over a waterway. It is significant that, by the time the buildings at Dora Creek were approved in 1954, no brick buildings had been erected between 1948 and 1954 and only three structures were built in brick or stone after 1954 up to 1960.

Unfortunately, the Railway Commissioners up until the appointment of Neal Mc Cusker in 1956 never told the Chief Civil Engineers, A.C. Fewtrell, Keith Fraser and Norm Vogan, that there was very little funding for the construction of station buildings. Mc Cusker continued with the parsimonious approach to platform buildings but, he had the decency to tell the architects of the Way and Works Branch to stop designing new stations, which they did. The priority for the new Commissioner McCusker was deficit reduction and he chose to achieve this by increased efficiencies from new motive power and freight rollingstock. For the ten years after Mc Cusker's appointment, there was not a single building plan approved which was not built. It was not until 1965 that Norm Vogan approved the first moderate sized platform building on the up platform at Guildford. It was not built until 1968 but it is more significant that it was planned in early 1965 before the Askin-Cutler conservative, coalition government assumed office in NSW. Guildford was smack in Labor Party territory in the electorate of Fairfield. The station building was completed just in time for Jack Ferguson (from 1976 Deputy Premier to Neville Wran) to take his seat in Parliament for the new electorate of Guildford.

To observers of all things railway in the early 1950s, there was one very sad indicator of the financial crisis. It was the decision to cease painting 38 Class locomotives green and paint them black because black was a less expensive paint colour.<sup>11</sup> This policy started in earnest in December 1953 when locomotive 3807 appeared in black paint. From then, other members of the Class appeared in black paint.

In review, it is understandable why the bridge, station and deviation project at Cockle Creek took nine years to complete. The project got caught up in the massive political, administrative and financial chaos of the time, like just about every other project.

---

<sup>11</sup> D. Oram, "Colourful Locomotives – A Story of 38 Class Liveries", *Roundhouse*, Vol. 1 No. 1, February, 2012, pp. 4-9

## TECHNICAL DETAILS OF THE NEW STATION BUILDINGS

It was in the atmosphere of near total disinterest in the social value of railway stations that approval was obtained for the construction of new buildings at Cockle Creek. There was a new brick building on each of the new platforms. The main building, on the up platform, was a stylish affair. It was 124 feet 2 ¼ inches long and, for the most part, the building was 16 feet one and one quarter inches wide internally. However, the building was of variable width with the Waiting Room being 19 feet two and one quarter inches wide with covered verandah entries to a Booking Hall and the Parcels Office. The room designations, from the down end, Ladies' Room and (unspecified) toilet, Waiting Room, Booking Hall and Entry, Booking Office, Station Master, Parcels Office, Out of Room and "Men's Sanitary Accommodation". There were concrete floors for the Parcels office, the Out of Room and the toilets. However, even on the concrete floors, one inch thick hardwood flooring was laid on top. The walls were rendered and the ceilings covered with asbestos cement sheets.

The building belonged to a group of 70 buildings approved between 1929 and 1949 which were called Inter War Functionalist style. Cockle Creek was the second last of the group to be approved, with only Granville being approved in 1949. It was the third last to be built with Granville and Clyde not completed until 1960. The dominant design feature was the strong horizontal lines as expressed by the parapeted roof, dominant fascia and the vertical style of the doors and windows. It even had a flag pole. The cantilevered awnings added to the horizontal expression. On the down platform, a smaller building of the same style was built. It measured 95 feet 3 3/8 inches and was of a constant width of 15 feet 7 1/8 inches. Both buildings were made of cavity face brickwork. From the down end, the rooms were Booking Office, Waiting Room, Out of Room, Ladies' Room with unspecified toilet, Store and "Men's Sanitary Accommodation". The exposed steel work for the platform awnings is the only element remaining today.

Two plans for prepared for the roof. One was for corrugated asbestos sheets in a single pitch and the second was for a flat concrete roof with a bitumen cover for waterproofing on building. The first option was built but what was unusual was that it was single-pitched. All other 69 examples were double-pitched. Standard corrugated asbestos was used and further research will possibly identify Cockle Creek as the only brick example not to feature Marseilles terracotta roof tiles.

The buildings at Cockle Creek were an attractive set. The following features suggested the application of a higher-than-normal standard of presentation:

- Fully concealed roof behind parapeted walls on all sides,
- Full-length glazed doors for all but the doors to the Out of Rooms,

- Duplicated, comprehensive passenger facilities (i.e. booking offices, waiting rooms and toilets) on both platforms,
- Porched entry, with a covered verandah on the up side with an ornamental, brick “screen”,
- Concrete roofs over the up side public entry and over the down side ticket windows, &
- Flagpole.

Yes, it is puzzling why they were built to such a high standard but, nonetheless, they looked classy. It is hard to believe that there could be an aspect of puzzlement with such attractive structures but this was the case. There was a small number of building elements that downgraded the status of the new station buildings, which were present on other examples of the class of buildings. These were:

- The exposed, cantilevered steel frame for the platform awnings,
- The absence of dichromatic brickwork,
- The absence of ornamental briquettes, especially on the end roof parapets,
- The use of two rail fencing at the rear of the platforms, &
- The unformed road approach to the up platform.

It has been seen at other stations that the NSW Department of Railways and its predecessor organisations discharged what has previously been classified as departmental revenge for building works and completing projects for which political direction was the primary ingredient to the decision making process.

Why were the platform awnings supported by large steel stanchions that stood proud of the building walls? Well, the same process was applied to the down platform at Awaba and the then down platform at Teralba. In both of these cases, the use of exposed steel columns is understood because the timber platform buildings at both stations were not replaced. These awnings at both locations are extant. Was it a case of intentional ugliness at Cockle Creek? Such use of exposed steel stanchions was only previously engaged where awnings were over ten feet in wide. It was possibly the simplest and least costly option at Cockle Creek. Observant railway watchers will have noticed that some of the other Inter War Functionalist examples, such as the building at Dungog, also have exposed steel columns. The point is that some do and some don't. There were choices available at the approval time and the choice for Cockle Creek went to the less pleasing visual option.

The manner in which the platform awnings were supported is the most interesting aspect of the 1948 planning and later construction. It links the question of steel shortages with a much broader issue. If steel were in such short supply, why weren't attempts made to redesign the platform canopies to eliminate or minimise the use of

steel? In 1948 and 1949, No. 2 roundhouse at Broadmeadow was built to be ready to receive 57 and 58 Class locomotives with its 90 foot long roads. In that case, reinforced concrete columns were used to support the roof structure. Such technology could have been used at Cockle Creek to support the platform awnings.

There was another alternative to the awning support system as applied to Cockle Creek. In 1929, on the East Hills line, the platform awnings were supported by the use of the horizontal extension of the timber roof joists. For the construction of the 1939 Cronulla branch and the quadruplication of the Main West in the 1942/43 period, the buildings had the platform awnings supported by the same method as used on the East Hills line but steel beams were used. In these ways, not only was the use of steel avoided or minimised, but the appearance of the platforms was much more pleasant because there were no large, exposed steel columns in front of the buildings. It seems that extensive steel columns were used at Cockle Creek because the station was not in Sydney. The application of concealed or exposed awning support systems was nothing more than a continuation of the departmental policy of discrimination between Sydney and the rest of the NSW rail network.

What is also noticeable about the Cockle Creek buildings is what is not present. There was no use of different coloured, contrasting bricks around the exterior walls. There was no use of briquettes for special wall panels and, the most obvious ocular omission, is the complete absence of ornamentation on the dominant end roof parapets. These were important building elements and were used or omitted accordingly to reflect the status of the location of a station. Bad luck Cockle Creek!

The NSW Department of Railways and its predecessors had been using two-rail fencing at the rear of platforms since the time of John Whitton. However, its use was a mark of lower status and was applied only to smaller stations. Indeed, in 1952, the Department prepared a standard plan for the use of such fencing at “unimportant stations”. Why at Cockle Creek? Also relevant are two additional aspects of the fencing. Firstly, the fence rails were set in what was called the “park” style where the rails are set not flat but on the diagonal. This form of fencing was widely used at the time by local government authorities around parks and reserves. Secondly, the fence was painted not the tradition railway white hue but cream. Research to date indicates that Cockle Creek station was the first deviation away from the Departmental colour policy. The combination of cream and brown was also widely used for station nameboards between 1948 and 1961. Why start something different at Cockle Creek?

Never from the time of the complete opening of the station in 1957 until it was demolished was the approach forecourt on the up side and the road sealed with bitumen. The Department of Railways very frequently co-operated with local councils to asphalt the forecourt and approach road. This never occurred at Cockle Creek. It was

a sign that no one cared about the appearance of the forecourt. Local people may also have been cheesed-off that, with the new station site, road access to the down side was closed entirely. The new road access was in a particularly dangerous position. As a result, there were few road vehicles stopping at the station.

As early as the 1970s, the platform buildings were under-utilised. A lot of men used the station to gain access to the Sulphide Corporation works and it seems this data was used as the basis for the size of the proposed buildings. By the 1970s the workers no longer used trains for work travel and the waiting rooms and out of rooms were taken over for use by railway electricians and signal maintainers. In short, it is concluded that the new buildings, even in the 1950s, were soon too large for the available traffic. What A. C. Fewtrell, the Chief Civil Engineer, did not know in 1948 was how quickly the Sulphide Corporation workers would purchase their own motor vehicles to travel to and from work.

## **ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO**

A happy time for Cockle Creek station was the period between 1900 and 1930 but it is also another period of puzzlement. The station was humming along as an important interchange between people moving between the station and the adjacent water way. The NSW Railways funded a pedestrian bridge over Cockle Creek in 1907. From 1910 until 1932, there was a steam tramway using the road that crosses the line that operated between Speers Point and Wallsend. Also, between 1895 and 1930, there was a train to train transfer between passenger operations of the NSW Railways and the owners of the coal mines in the West Wallsend area.<sup>12</sup>

It is hard to think of many other wayside stations in NSW that had intermodal transfers between trains, between trains and trams and between trains and ferries.

Photographs of the station show a stand-alone Refreshment Room at the up end of the down platform. It was a neat, timber building with cute, turned timber finials at the ends of the roof gables. Its timber construction suggests a post 1890 and probably a post 1900 construction but its origin is a puzzle because no evidence survives to indicate a construction date.

---

<sup>12</sup> The tramway to West Wallsend had opened during 1910. The steam tramway to Speers Point branch off the West Wallsend Tramway opened on 27 January 1912. The trams ran from Speers Point to the steam tram terminus at Wallsend. They ran over a section of the West Wallsend Tramway but did not travel to West Wallsend.

The station was busy well before 1909. In that year, a plan was issued to add one more closet to the ladies' toilet on the down platform. What is noteworthy is that, between the construction of the down platform building in 1891 and 1909, a further two closets had been provided for women. Such addition from the original one closet in 1891 to four closets in 1909 was unprecedented at a wayside station. A sign of the high level of departmental desperation was the relatively low ceiling height in the new closet of seven feet three inches.

Evidence of the growing status of the station was the replacement of the original timber platform walls with brick in 1914. In 1917, a Ladies' Waiting Room and Lavatory was built on the up (island) platform. This was surely a sign that Cockle Creek station was amongst the big time stations. While some stations did have male toilets on two side platforms, this was far from common in relation to female toilets.

None of the plans for the various building changes exist. The biggest puzzle relates to a long waiting shed that was erected on the up platform. It was typical of what the NSW Railways provided at stations used by large numbers of people, such as at Como for people going boating, at Lidcombe for people proceeding to Rookwood Cemetery and at Sulphide Junction for workers employed at the railway workshops. Renowned Hunter region mining, road, residential, church, war memorial and railway historian, Ed Tonks, advises that this long, open-fronted timber structure was built at some unknown time for use by workers walking to and from the Sulphide Corporation plant. It seems to have survived until 1957.

In 1924, Cockle Creek station was so busy that the State Member of Parliament for Newcastle, John Baddeley, stated in Parliament that an extra platform was needed "owing to the people being crowded on the platform". Nothing seemed to happen but it just might be that the long waiting shed on the up platform was a token response to the concern expressed in Parliament. It is both sad to think we may never know about this puzzling but important aspect of the station's history.

## **ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO**

Cockle Creek station opened in 1887 with the opening of the line. A plan survives of a timber, two room awningless gabled building measuring 30 feet by 13 feet. It contained a General Waiting Room and a Ticket Office, with a fireplace only in the Ticket Office. Only the Ticket Office had lined internal walls. The ticket window was only 12 inches wide. John McDonald was the contractor. Of interest is the absence of the signature of the approving office. This was not unusual in the period of John Whitton's time after 1880. From that time, he seemed to show declining interest in platform buildings and, soon after 1880, initialed rather than signed plans and, after a few years, did not even bother initially most plans. While we have the good fortune to have a plan for Cockle

Creek, that's where the good fortune ends. There is no evidence surviving that the building planned was, in fact, built at Cockle Creek.

Similar designed structures were also built at Awaba and Fassifern, so it is believable that the example at Cockle Creek was erected. The only surviving examples of this style are the platform buildings at Shellharbour and Bombo. It is puzzling that photographs of Cockle Creek station show a different platform building. The building that is shown in photographs is of what became known in the 1890s as a standard roadside station. It measured 50 feet by 14 feet and was similar to timber buildings at Gosford, Ourimbah, Teralba, Adamstown and Broadmeadow No. 2 platform.

Now here's where the guessing starts. The line through the station was duplicated in 1891 from Teralba, one station to the south, all the way to Broadmeadow. With two platforms at Cockle Creek, it is possible that the two-room 1886 designed timber building was relocated to the new up platform and a new, larger building was erected on the down platform. The photographic evidence shows a timber building on the up platform without an awning.

Evidence that things were going a little wonky in regard to capital finance in the second half of the 1880s is the amount of timber buildings that were erected between Hornsby and Broadmeadow. Every platform building was constructed in timber, as were most of the residences. For an unknown reason, the NSW Railways erected residences for Station Masters in brick at Gosford, Morisset and Teralba. Now why would they do that? Perhaps the men who were to live in them held the rank of Station Masters while those at the other stations were lower-graded, Station Officers thus warranting timber houses. There seems no consistent link between the size of the platform buildings and the material used for the residences. At Cockle Creek, the NSW Railways built in 1887 a timber residence for the Station Officer on the down side of the line. In that case, the smaller station building fits the use of timber for the residence. While the residence was not far from the station, the house was not designed as an integral part of a composition of structures, as at Goulburn and Tenterfield. The property was sold to J. H. & M. Richardson for \$550 on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1943. Col Millard is a retired Property Branch officer and has spent considerable time on the history of official residences. He writes:

“The more I look the more I find a number of railway residences were sold during the war years between 1940 and 1945. Some were sold with a lease of the land creating residential sites while others were sold outright with the land. A number of these were gatehouses which turned into residential sites due the proximity of the land to the running line.”

The residence at Cockle Creek was enlarged in 1900 but survives today showing evidence of alterations post sale, with the weatherboard external walls. By now, it probably is not so surprising to find out that the plan of the residence is not extant.

*This paper would not have been written without the generosity and aid of Graham Harper, Gary Hughes, Ray Love, Colin Millard, Peter Neve and Ed Tonks. Their much appreciated help is acknowledged.*

Stuart Sharp

23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2013

## **PRIVATE PASSENGER TRAINS TO COCKLE CREEK**

Since the late 1880s, Cockle Creek had been the junction for a growing number of privately operated branch lines serving numerous collieries to the south-west and west of the Government Railway. The longest of these of the West Wallsend line, terminating in three branch lines to separately-owned Killingworth Colliery, Seaham No. 2 Colliery and West Wallsend / Seaham No. 1 Collieries. Subsequently, two separate branch lines, junctioning from the West Wallsend line near Cockle Creek, ran to Rhondda Colliery and Stockton Borehole Colliery. Today, only the last-mentioned is still operational, serving what is now known as the Macquarie Coal Preparation Plant and totally different to how it used to be. A detailed, exceptional well-illustrated coverage of these lines appears in Volume 2 of Brian Andrews' book "Coal, Railways and Mines – the colliery railways of the Newcastle district and the early coal shipping facilities", published by the Society in 2009.

Although covered in Brian's book, not so well known is that a passenger service operated for more than 40 years from the Government railway at Cockle Creek to the mining communities along the West Wallsend railways.

Whereas these days, coal mining is very much a mechanized affair, back in the 1880s, things were very different! Late 19<sup>th</sup> century mining was very labour-intensive, resulting in small towns of miners' families and supporting businesses being established in the near vicinity of the mine. Public transport was minimal from the smaller settlements, not assisted by low standard roads or tracks. The largest of these towns grew up around the West Wallsend and Seaham mines. The line from the West Wallsend and Seaham mines through the smaller settlements of Homesville and Barnsley to the Government Railway at Cockle Creek provided just the opportunity.

On p.843, Brian tells us that by late 1889, the West Wallsend Coal Company had allowed a horse-drawn trolley to operate over its line between West Wallsend and Cockle Creek. An advertisement in the *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* of 15/11/1889 advised that an "open tram" would depart from the Museum Hotel at West Wallsend daily at 8am & 5pm to meet the 8.50am passenger train from Newcastle at Cockle Creek, and the 5.45pm train from Sydney respectively. It is extremely doubtful that this horse-drawn tram actually operated into Cockle Creek platform; more likely, it terminated just before the junction of the private line with the Government railway, leaving passengers to make their own way to or from the station. How they were expected to cross Cockle Creek is not explained! Brian tells me that he remembers that the centre of the tracks on the original bridge was planked during the latter years and could have been a left-over from this era. An entry in Weekly Notice No. 48 of 1892, when for a short period Government locomotives worked coal trains over the private branch to West Wallsend and Seaham Collieries, makes for interesting possibilities ... "No. 43a must not leave West Wallsend until half-an-hour after the Trolley has left." 43a was a conditional loaded coal train, due to leave West Wallsend at 5.20pm and pass Cockle Creek at 5.40pm. The "open tram" was scheduled to depart at 5pm! Presumably, something had to give.

This horse-drawn “open tram” was replaced by a locomotive-hauled passenger train as from 1/2/1895. The passenger train still made only two return trips daily, but operated into Cockle Creek station. How the train initially ran round at Cockle Creek is not obvious from the ARHS Track & Signals CD; perhaps this was done in the Exchange Sidings.

Short passenger platforms were provided at West Wallsend (approximately 5m/8km from Cockle Creek), Holmesville and Barnsley. The location of the last-mentioned station was found to be inconvenient and so was relocated on the opposite side of the line about 100 yards closer to West Wallsend. In addition, there was a private platform for the Macgeachie family who was associated with one of the Collieries. A goods siding was provided at West Wallsend to cater for general freight conveyed over the line by a bi-weekly goods.

Each colliery company took annual turns to provide the motive power, crews and fuel, etc., to haul the passenger and goods trains, keeping revenue received.

Although it was recorded (on p.845) that two carriages were purchased from the Railways for this operation, Brian’s subsequent researches indicate that this was not the case and that the cars were instead hired by the respective colliery company.

Two 4-wheel brake vans were also hired – one placed at each end of the train, as Departmental regulations at the time required a brake van at the rear of the train when proceeding over Departmental tracks (between the station and the exchange sidings). A 1911 photo appearing on p.847 shows the hired passenger carriages at the time to be six-wheel radial cars.

The ARHS Bulletin No. 340 of February 1966 on p.35 includes track diagrams of Cockle Creek station dated 1887 (single track days), 1891 (double track main line, single track colliery junction), 1901 (double track main line with double track colliery junction, plus back platform on up side with goods siding extension and trailing crossover at Newcastle end), 1913 (full-length back platform, goods siding relocated to down side) and 1957 (following deviation of main lines over new bridge, old bridge remaining to serve colliery line).

Thus from 1901 at least, the colliery passenger train on arrival at Cockle Creek was able to terminate in the down platform, run forward then propel over the now facing crossover into the back platform, at which point the locomotive could detach and run round its train. Instructions provided that the privately operated passenger train had to depart from the back platform.

From time-to-time, other passenger trains operated from West Wallsend to Cockle Creek – these were picnic specials, usually bound for Toronto. One such occasion was for the West Wallsend Co-Operative Society’s picnic, held at Toronto on Saturday 17/10/1903, full details of which were published in Weekly Notice No. 42 of 1903 on p.3. The trains ran as two consists from Cockle Creek, departing at 8.15am and 8.50am for Toronto, arriving back at 4.53pm and 5.04pm. Each train was to consist of “equal to 8 second-class American cars and composite brake van; trains to be made up with brake van at one end, and an American car with brake compartment at the other end. ... Trains will be worked between Cockle Creek and West Wallsend by private locomotives. ... Station Master, Cockle Creek, to collect charges (£30) prior

to departure of the Special trains.” The empty carriages were only due at Cockle Creek at 6.00 on the Saturday morning, so the actual operation of the specials on the private line can only be conjectured, particularly with the extremely limited facilities at West Wallsend station.

Timetables for the regular private services to and from Cockle Creek were not included in the Working Timetables of the period – it is only from a passing mention on various Circulars that their operation was even recognised. All that is contained in Circular A277 dated 13/12/1900 (before run-round facilities were available at Cockle Creek) is: “The Company’s Passenger train will continue to run from the West Wallsend line to Cockle Creek to meet Nos. 229 and 272 week-days and No. 247 on Pay Saturdays. The Driver of such train is to be in possession of a Departmental Certificate of competency regarding his knowledge of Traffic and Locomotive working.” Circular A310 of 1901, covering the bringing into use of the Back Platform is missing from the latest ARHS Track and Signals CD – however, a subsequent Circular No. 369 of 1/12/1913 states: “The Company’s Passenger trains from the West Wallsend line to Cockle Creek to there meet Nos. 141 and 516; also Nos. 511 and 556 Weekdays, and No. 469 on Pay Saturdays. The Passenger train from the West Wallsend line must set back from the Down main line into the Back Platform Road through Nos. 25 and 26 Points, and must always depart from the Back Platform Road to the Colliery.”

By this time, the very limited private passenger train service did not meet the needs of the growing mining communities along the line. Approximately 8m/13km east of West Wallsend was the township of Wallsend, centred around the Wallsend B colliery owned by the Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company. The various collieries in the area were joined by a separate private railway, joining the Government’s Newcastle-Maitland line at Hanbury Junction. Since March 1861, a limited passenger service of two trips a day had been operated, with a carriage attached to suitable coal trains. This operation was ended in April 1891 as the citizens of Wallsend by then had the benefit of a direct steam tram service to Newcastle, with, at the time, about 19 return trips a day. This tram line, about 9m/14.5km in length, had opened on 19/8/1887, with its terminus adjacent to the Wallsend passenger station.

Horse buses, and later motor omnibuses, linked Wallsend with West Wallsend, thus providing a more convenient and frequent alternative to the twice daily train service from West Wallsend to Cockle Creek.

By 1906, the population of West Wallsend had grown to around 6,000. Since 1897, there had been local pressure for the extension of the steam tram from Wallsend to West Wallsend. Eventually, this was successful, with the tram line being extended the 7½m/12km on 19/9/1910. Initially, every third Wallsend tram was extended through to West Wallsend, thus providing a service about every 90 minutes, taking around 92 minutes for the 15½m/25km journey into Newcastle. A steam tram servicing depot was built at Wallsend to supplement the main depot in Newcastle, opening in September 1911. Much of the outer half of the line was through open, and sometimes hilly, country, requiring grades as steep as 1 in 30.

The tram was great for anyone going to Newcastle, but if one was headed for Gosford or Sydney, the alternatives were the morning train direct to Cockle Creek, returning by the

afternoon train (providing only minimal time in Sydney), or the Newcastle-bound steam tram to Broadmeadow, then joining the Sydney-bound train. There was a third alternative!

The Government of the day had agreed to authorise the construction of a branch steam tramway, junctioning approximately mid-way between West Wallsend and Wallsend, to cross over the Sydney-Newcastle railway at Cockle Creek station and terminate on the shores of Lake Macquarie at Speer's Point. The line was planned basically for recreational purposes, providing a direct link from the mining settlements to the lakeside. As such, substantial terminal arrangements were provided at Speer's Point for trams to stand over for the peak holiday movements. The 3¼m/5.25km line was opened on 15/1/1912, with the terminus being a little over 14 miles/22.75km from Newcastle. Much of this line also passed through open country.

Weekday services were about every 90 minutes, connecting with the West Wallsend-Newcastle tram at the junction – thus allowing passengers from West Wallsend to change to the Speer's Point tram and alight at Cockle Creek station for the Sydney train. No evening services were operated. Weekend services, particular on Regatta Day and other summer holidays, were a different matter, resulting in considerable strains on the available steam tram motors and passenger trailer cars.

David Keenan's "Tramways of Newcastle" on p.43 makes mention of a miners' picnic train on Saturday 30/11/1912 from Killingworth and Elernmore Collieries on the West Wallsend line to Cockle Creek, connecting there with steam trams to Speer's Point – some seven regular and special trams being required to convey the miners' families.

Electrification of the Newcastle tramway network commenced in 1923, reaching Wallsend on 17/1/1926. Only two motors and two trailers were required for the connections beyond Wallsend to West Wallsend and Speer's Point, although the latter could grow to 8 motors and 20 trailers for peak summer excursion traffic. The motors and trailers required for the normal services were kept at the old Wallsend depot, but for the excursion running, additional stock had to come from Newcastle.

Despite the economic difficulties of the depression years and the alternative more frequent tramway service, the twice daily passenger train service between West Wallsend and Cockle Creek continued to operate. This was until the 1929-1930 miners' lockout occurred. The combined unions were warned by the Colliery proprietors that the service would be withdrawn in the drivers joined the striking miners. The Unions called their bluff, the drivers joined the strike and the passenger train service finished on 13/1/1930, never to resume. Thus ended the operation of the West Wallsend private passenger train service into Cockle Creek. The back platform remained at Cockle Creek, though of little use, until the site was required for the construction of the new Cockle Creek station on the altered track alignment for the replacement main line double track rail bridge, brought into use on 25/2/1957.

Increasing costs, minimal general freight and thus little revenue, saw the West Wallsend & Seaham Joint Railway proprietors end the public goods train service as from 26/11/1938.

Meanwhile, unrestricted competition from private buses, along with the depression years, made the non-electrified tramway extremities from Wallsend to West Wallsend and Speer's Point extremely expensive to operate. Thus, on 1/11/1930, tram services beyond the electrified terminus at Wallsend were terminated.

Public and political pressure resulted in the re-introduction of a shuttle steam tram service between Cockle Creek station and Speer's Point over the 1930/1931 Christmas / New Year holiday period – however, revenue received was only half the cost of providing the service. Surprisingly, the shuttle was again operated for May Day on 8/5/1931, requiring the use of three steam tram motors. The last of these picnic specials, connecting with trains at Cockle Creek station, ran on 2/5/1932 ... by this time, parts of the tram track were in such poor condition that tram speeds had to be limited to a crawl over the affected curves. The track was lifted between 1933 and 1937.

The electric tram service between Wallsend and Newcastle finished during the early hours of Sunday 6/11/1949, with the last of Newcastle's tramway system closing the following year.

Meanwhile, demand for Borehole seam coal had lessened in favour of the rich Greta seam, resulting in the gradual closure of collieries along the West Wallsend line. The first of these was the West Wallsend Colliery in 1923, followed by Seaham No. 1 Colliery at the end of one of the three lines in 1932. This left the two branches to Seaham No. 2 Colliery and West Wallsend Extended Colliery at Killingworth. The former closed in April 1945, leaving only the line to Killingworth.

The final years of coal lifts from Killingworth were handled by privately-owned ex-NSWR 2553. From February 1959, 19 class locomotives hired from the Government Railway were used to shunt the Cockle Creek Power Station and to transfer private four-wheel wooden coal wagons to/from Killingworth for repairs; West Wallsend Extended Colliery closed in November 1956, but the last coal at grass was not cleared until June of the following year. An amalgamation of coal companies had seen the West Wallsend line collieries come under the umbrella Coal and Allied Industries in May 1960. Coal wagon repairs that had been carried out at Killingworth were centralised at Hexham in April 1961. The Cockle Creek exchange sidings remained for several more years for private colliery wagon storage until finally being removed in 1968.

Of the other colliery branches from Cockle Creek, Rhondda (or Northern) Colliery closed in March 1971. It had always been operated using Government engines. There was considerable coal at grass, the last of which was not removed until 23<sup>rd</sup> September that year. A few weeks earlier, on Saturday 4/9, the NSW Rail Transport Museum had run a mini-tour over the line using rail motor HPC 403, part of an ex-overhaul delivery trip back to Werris Creek. The line had a brief reprieve whilst some open-cut coal was loaded, but that was finished by the end of November 1971. For several years, the colliery yard became the temporary home of the Hunter Valley Steam Railway and Museum but during 1983 the Group relocated to the Dorrigo branch, becoming the Dorrigo Steam Railway and Museum Incorporated. The Rhondda branch was removed a couple of years later.

Like the Rhondda Colliery line, the Stockton Borehole Colliery line branched from the West Wallsend lines between the main line junction and the Exchange Sidings. The old loading facilities were totally rebuilt and modernised in the mid-1960s to accept the use of high capacity bogie wagons. At the same time, the double track connection across the “old” main line bridge and through the former Cockle Creek station to rejoin the deviated was now only single track.

In January 1983, totally new loading arrangements were introduced. The old line across the original rail bridge was done away with and a new junction provided on the Sydney side of the 1957 replacement bridge. At the same time, the 1960s loading facilities were replaced by a new balloon loop line and loading bin. Today, this facility is known as the Macquarie Coal Preparation Plant and forms part of the Xstrata coal empire.

For the record, the last privately-owned colliery line in the Newcastle area over which regular passenger services operated was the New Redhead Estate and Coal Company’s Adamstown to Belmont line. These ceased on 8/4/1971.

---

Major reference sources and for further reading ... ..

# Coal, Railways and Mines – the colliery railways of the Newcastle District and the early coal shipping facilities. Volumes 1 & 2, compiled by Brian Andrews and published by the Australian Railway Historical Society, NSW Division, in 2009. The district map, showing the colliery railways radiating from Cockle Creek, comes from these Volumes and was drawn by Brian Andrews. There were also a number of email discussions with Brian about various aspects of the private passenger train services and the Cockle Creek colliery lines in general.

# Tramways of Newcastle – Compiled by David Keenan, Ken McCarthy and Ross Willson, published by Transit Press in 1999.

# Australian Railway Historical Society Bulletin, No. 340 of February 1966 ... “The Short North – The Sydney-Newcastle Link Railway”, written by C C Singleton, part 6, Awaba to Hamilton.

# ARHSnsw Track and Signals CD

Compiled by Peter Neve  
23/02/2013.