

CAMELLIA

No information is available to indicate what was provided on the platform before the New South Wales Railways took over operations in 1901. Even the opening date is a mystery.

In 1902, a timber skillion roofed signal box was provided at the up end of the platform from which tickets were also sold. Dr. Bob Taaffe writes that there was so little space in the signal box that, to sell tickets, the Station Officers “bum was almost hard up against the levers. The door into the office was to the rear so that, if the Station Officer made a sudden exit and the Up Home or Up Call On levers were pulled over, then said Officer could be airborne if he had not remembered the levers were over. In other words the whole situation was quite cramped.”¹ The combination of safeworking duties and ticket sales in the one structure was not unknown in the history of the New South Wales Railways but does point to the paucity of coaching business undertaken at the station. There are photographs of the timber buildings at the station in John Oakes’ excellent book entitled *Sydney’s Forgotten Industrial Railways*, pp.17 and 40.

It would seem that an open fronted, timber waiting room with a skillion roof was also provided at the station, possibly at the time the signal box was built. Also, there were free-standing male and female toilets on the platform.

If you believe the Government’s own records, the platform was timber. In 1960, the cost accounting card for the station indicates that the platform was lengthened to 265 feet and was 8 feet wide. The footings were recorded as concrete and the deck allegedly sat on brick piers. The deck was formed by hardwood measuring 9 inches wide by 3 inches thick. That information conflicts with photographic images dating from 1947 in John Oakes’ book that show a brick wall with a solid earth platform covered by crushed granite.

On 5th of December, 1977, Ron Christie, the then General Manager, Way and works Branch, approved the demolition of the timber waiting room and its replacement by a brick toilet block measuring 8.630 m x 4.190 m. Between the separate male and female toilets was a wet store. The urinal in the male toilet was stainless steel and was 1.8 m in length, allowing space for two users. Ceramic tiles were placed on the floor. The single pitched roof sloping to the rear and it had a narrow, timber fascia. Covering the roof was “SheerLine” Colorbond. The roof was extended over the platform to form an awning 2.4 m wide. This structure was typical of the time and the combined use of timber fascia and metal roof demonstrates the transition from the traditional to modern materials. This was the last decade in which timber was used to any degree on a platform building. Replacing toilets was a popular thing

¹ Email from Dr Bob Taaffe dated 8th June, 2015.

undertaken by the Public Transport Commission because they were being funded by the Commonwealth Government's Urban Public Transport Improvement Programme.

So, no waiting room accommodation was provided at the station from 1978 onwards.

The next change at Camellia was the replacement of the combined signal box and booking office. On 2nd June, 1980, Doug McNeil, the new General Manager of the Way and Works Branch, approved a face brick structure similar to the existing brick toilet block. Because of the curvature of the platform, the proposed addition butted up to the toilet block but was positioned at a different angle, giving the appearance slightly that the existing station building is curved.

The roof was removed from the existing toilet block and a new single pitched roof hidden by a wide parapet was built over the two parts of the combined structure. Dr. Bob Taaffe indicates that the new signal box was not placed around the existing interlocking frame and, instead, a new mechanical frame was positioned on the platform.² This was one of the very last interlocking frames of the mechanical type built for a New South Wales railway platform, with Bob Taaffe advising that only those for Binnaway and Shellharbour were installed after the new frame at Camellia.

The new building was 7.440 m long by 4.870 m wide and contained only two rooms – one signal box and the other the station Master's office. Unlike the 1990s, the staff in the 1980s were expected to use the public toilets, which gave them an incentive to keep them clean. Thus, there was no staff toilet in the new structure. At the up end of the building, were two windows, one for the sale of tickets and the other for no obvious purpose, apart from providing natural light. It seems that the station did not conduct parcels business.

As a result of the new roof, the width of the platform awning varied from 1.8 m in front of the ticket office and signal box to 2.4 m in front of the toilets.

What was approved at Camellia in 1980 was a building that was typical of structures built in the period between 1965 and 1989, some other examples being at Waratah, Adamstown, Thornleigh, Loftus and Wollongong North. The characteristics of platform buildings of this time were:

- cavity brick construction,
- use of concrete floor slab,
- oblong floor plan,
- windows placed at ceiling level to assist with security,
- extension of roof system to form a platform awning at same pitch,
- variable placement of ticket office window, sometimes facing onto platform, rather than into waiting area,
- absence of segregated waiting areas based on sex,

² Oral advice from Bob Taaffe on 3rd January, 1984.

- very low pitched, steel roof,
- use of wide fascias to hide the roof,
- male and female toilets separated by a wet store,
- open-fronted waiting area or no waiting area, &
- absence of staff toilet.

The new structure continued the practice of eliminating waiting accommodation for passengers. Was this because there were very few passengers? No! The *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15th May, 2000, p.6. stated that “about 500 people use the station daily.” It would seem that the 1980 approval related to the fact that Camellia station required to be staffed for safeworking purposes. As Bob Taaffe comments, the elimination of waiting accommodation was “a trend that any new buildings were for employees only and passengers were kept out.”

Wikipedia states that, in 2012, Camellia was the least patronised railway station on the then CityRail network with an average of 50 boardings per day.

Thanks to Gary Hughes and Dr. Bob Taaffe.

Stuart Sharp

10th June, 2015

THE GRAVE NEAR CAMELLIA STATION

Gary Hughes

About 100m north of Camellia Station is a grave with a history dating back to the early settlement of Camellia and to convicts aboard the First Fleet.

Charles Williams, also known as Christopher Magee, was convicted at the Old Bailey in 1784 of theft and sentenced to transportation. He arrived in the colony aboard the Scarborough on 26th January 1788. Upon emancipation, on 30 March 1791 he was granted 30 acres of land east of the present Camellia Station, in what is now the former James Hardie site.

In 1788, using the name Christopher Magee, he married Eleanor McCabe, She too was a convict on the First Fleet and had arrived on board the Lady Penrhyn. They had at least 2 children but on 18th January 1793, both Eleanor and one child, plus another unnamed woman, drowned in the Parramatta River near Breakfast Cove. The bodies of Eleanor and the child were buried in this grave, which at the time was near to the family home. It is said to be among the oldest known graves in Australia.

Unfortunately, although it appears to be outside the railway boundary, the grave is in the precinct of the former James Hardie site. It is completely fenced off and there is now no safe access to it.



The grave of Eleanor Magee and her child at Camellia. Image: Paul Horder