

MACQUARIE FIELDS RAILWAY STATION

PLATFORM OPENING

The Main South line opened between Liverpool and Campbelltown on 17th May, 1858, but the station at Macquarie Fields first appeared in the public timetable of 3rd October, 1888.

John Forsyth, the former Archives Officer of the State Rail Authority, tells us that the first platform was located on the western side of the line.

George Cowdery, the Engineer-in-Chief Existing Lines, approved on 4th November, 1887, the provision of a waiting shed 20 feet by 12 feet internal, with a gabled roof covered with galvanised, corrugated iron sheets, but without a platform awning.¹ The structure never received an awning before its demolition in 1975. It was void of windows. John Baker, William Liddell and two others erected the building.² They signed the contract on 13th January, 1888.

The platform was 300 feet long and had a brick wall sloping to the toe, as was the usual practice for brick walls at the time.

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES FOR TRACK DUPLICATION

In December, 1890, tenders were called for the construction of timber waiting sheds at Glenfield, Macquarie Fields, Ingleburn, Minto and Leumeah and these were constructed by Le Breton & Son.³ They all featured single-pitched roofs sloping towards the platform coping. These were intended for use on the to-be-constructed, additional platform for track duplication, which opened on 14th February, 1892, between Glenfield and Macquarie Fields. The new platform on the Liverpool-bound side was 306 feet long.

When the building was erected on the additional platform, it formed an important contrast to the original, 1888-built structure on the first platform. In 1888, the first timber building had a gabled roof, open front and no platform awning. Yes, it was a cheap building which mirrored the limited money available but a more-costly, double-pitched roof was selected. Why not use a single-pitched design, which would have been cheaper, if money was tight? Yes. Some minor stations did have small waiting sheds with single-pitched roofs sloping to the rear but the design policy in the 1880s did prefer double-pitched roofs when money was available. This latter type of building, despite its basic appearance, was a significant visual improvement on the ugliness of the waiting sheds with a skillion roof sloping to the rear.

¹ *NSW Government Gazette*, 8th November, 1887, No. 628, p. 7517 tenders closed for the erection of a platform and waiting shed at Macquarie Fields.

² John Forsyth's comment that a new waiting shed was constructed in 1883 is incorrect.

³ *NSW Government Gazette*, 30th December, 1890, Issue No. 748, p. 9914.

The waiting shed erected on the duplication platform was indeed a single-pitched roof but it is sloped in the opposite direction to the pre-1890 policy. This change was one of the many innovations encouraged under the leadership of the then Chief Commissioner, E. M. G. Eddy. By reversing the direction of the roof pitch, the structure became more attractive visually and, at the same time, provided a narrow platform awning through the extension of the roof rafters. This innovation quickly became the standard design for small and medium-sized timber buildings until 1913.

THE PROVISION OF TOILETS

In 1920, plans were prepared for the addition of a ladies' waiting room and closet, measuring 14 feet long, on the Liverpool-bound platform. That initial plan was scrubbed and a second plan prepared for the reduction in the length of the existing waiting room by a length of eight feet, making it now 12 feet 8 inches long. In the initial plan, it was also proposed to change the roof shape from single-pitched to double-pitched but the second plan kept the skillion arrangement.

Additionally, it was proposed in 1920 to erect a pre-cast concrete unit male toilet, coded "Cc1", at the Campbelltown end of the Campbelltown-bound platform.⁴ The intention to use concrete units was abandoned, as was the location and, instead, the then existing style of "C1" male toilet with a timber frame, walls covered with corrugated iron and an arched roof was erected. All these changes in the planning process were focussed on saving money.

Nothing happened at the station for the next 25 years.

WORLD WAR TWO BRINGS THE FIRST STAFF APPOINTMENT

There were three changes approved during World War 2. It was in this period that the station was staffed for the first time. Firstly, a booking office was opened in August, 1944, at the Campbelltown end of the Liverpool-bound platform. Secondly, in 1945, a store five feet wide was provided on the Campbelltown-bound platform by reducing the length of the 1887 waiting shed – the same technique that had been applied in 1920 to the opposite platform building to provide a female toilet. Thirdly, the Department announced in June, 1944, that electric lighting was to be installed at the station, "as manpower and materials were available."⁵ Electric power was turned on in 1947 when one electric light, one power point and an electric radiator were fitted in the office. A gate across the bottom of the station entry steps on Railway Parade was approved in 1945 but not installed until January, 1946.

There were no changes, let alone improvements, to the existing platform buildings for nearly the next 30 years. A photograph of the extremely basic timber platform

⁴ The photograph in the August issue of *Australian Railway History* of the station seems to show the male toilet not at the Campbelltown end but at the Liverpool end of the Liverpool-bound platform.

⁵ *The Biz*, 22nd June, 1944, p. 4.

buildings in the 1960s appears in the August, 2013, issue of *Australian Railway History*.⁶

THE ABSENCE OF THE IMPACT OF ELECTRIFICATION

The line between Liverpool and Campbelltown was electrified on 5th May, 1968. It was at that time that the present platform walls were reconstructed using frames of old rails with concrete poured in situ. This electrification project was the last major project to use this method of platform wall construction.

No changes to the platform buildings were made in conjunction with the platform renewals and electrification.

DESPERATE MEASURES TO REPLACE THE DILAPIDATED 90-YEAR OLD TIMBER PLATFORM BUILDINGS

The story of a new building for Macquarie Fields starts in another part of Sydney in the mid-1970s. The Blacktown to Riverstone section was electrified in 1975, as a promise in 1973 by the Askin-Cutler coalition Government in the hope of winning a bi-election for the State seat of Hawkesbury. Kevin Rozzoli won the seat for Askin and held it until his retirement from Parliament in 2003. The year, 1973, was the first full year of the then newly formed Public Transport Commission and the Government at the time was anti-rail and pro-road. Indicative of the low levels of capital funding made available by the New South Wales Government, the Commission was forced to use timber for the vertical structures supporting the overhead wires on the line to Riverstone and, what was very rare for the New South Wales Railways, attached a high voltage cable to the same posts. The Commission had to think about how it would provide new platform buildings for the section between Blacktown and Riverstone and it came up with the idea of using a commercially available, pre-fabricated building over which the Commission would erect an awning.

The Commission's focus during the 1970s was on freight transport and it largely ignored the crying need to improve the condition of stations, especially those made of timber, which was the case at Schofields, Marayong and Quakers Hill. The building on the Campbelltown-bound platform at Macquarie Fields was very much in the same pathetic condition as those on the electrified section to Riverstone. Over 80 years old and in the dilapidated condition, the building on the Campbelltown-bound platform had not changed since its construction in early 1888. In essence, Macquarie Fields station tagged on the shirt-tails of those on the Riverstone section.

The Public Transport Commission had to answer two questions. Firstly, what design to use and, secondly, where to obtain the money. The building was described by the Public Transport Commission as a "proposed new temporary station building" and was based on the provision of a pre-fabricated box known as "Willcroft-Terrapin".

⁶ Page 11. Although one dated, the photograph was taken some time before 1975. There was a one rail fence on the Campbelltown-bound platform and no fence at the rear of the platform on the Liverpool-bound side. Both platforms were covered with Locksley granite.

This was a combination of a British firm, Terrapin, and an Australian firm, Willcroft. Both were in the business of making prefabricated buildings, especially for schools. Terrapin Pty Ltd started in 1949 and, like Willcroft Building Systems, continues in business today. Basically, the 50mm thick walls were made of Styrofoam sandwiched between two sheets of composite, fibre material, with a texture and appearance the same as asbestos sheeting. The building contained a booking office, a room for cleaning materials and separate male and female toilets. One major problem was the ease with which the external walls could be penetrated by social miscreants by kicking in the external wall panels. Other features of the design were:

- the pre-fabricated structure was of a modular design and consisted of three units each 5170mm long,
- internally, the building was 2407mm wide (i.e. (less than 8 feet wide). It was the narrowest building on the New South Wales Railway system,
- high-level windows,
- the provision of a roller shutter over the counter for parcels business,
- the provision of two ticket windows, one in the Campbelltown end and one facing the platform, &
- and absence of internal partitions in the office area.

Above the building, a single-pitched roof sloping to the rear was erected but this aspect was a separate project not associated with the commercial building system. Standard "Brownbuilt", pre-coated Colorbond fascia and capping were applied to the awning. A major problem of the overall design was the large number of horizontal steel beams that supported the roof. This encouraged pigeons to the station and the platform was at times covered with large amounts of pigeon poop. This problem was rectified by enclosing the open frame between the top of the building and the roof frame.

Now to the second question – finance. Luckily, the Public Transport Commission was able to make use of the innovative legislation passed by the Whitlam Commonwealth Government in 1973. For the first time, Commonwealth capital funding was made available for urban public transport – a function previously left to the States. The Commission, with the approval of the State Minister for Transport, decided to ask authorisation from the Commonwealth Government under the newly established Urban Public Transport Improvement Programme for money for a range of what the State Government considered were minor railway and other transport improvements. The building was erected and in use by June, 1976.

The present footbridge at Macquarie Fields was approved in 1975 and, at that time, both the footbridge, with the seven feet wide deck, and the Willcroft-Terrapin platform building were viewed as temporary. The word, "temporary", as a different meaning to the New South Wales Railways than its general use and this was reflected by the existence of the temporary platform structure at Macquarie Fields for

25 years. The Commission proposed to build a slightly large footbridge on the immediate Campbelltown side of the existing bridge with a nine feet wide deck and an overhead booking and parcels office. The dream never turned into reality and the temporary footbridge has now been in use for 42 years.

As late as 1978, the 1890 timber waiting shed on the Liverpool-bound platform remained in position, though it was replaced sometime in the 1980s with a metal-sided, open-fronted waiting shed with steel sheet siding and a near-flat roof.

THE STATE RAIL AUTHORITY IMPROVED WORKING CONDITIONS – FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER

For the first time, the staff at Macquarie Fields Station benefitted in 1982 from the installation of a Kelvinator air-conditioner, which lasted until 1998.

CITYRAIL PROVIDES SUSTAINED STATION IMPROVEMENTS

CityRail installed in 1997 new landscaping and awnings on the Campbelltown-bound platform in front of the station building, awnings along the platform to the footbridge and over both stepways and the footbridge deck. Awnings were also placed on the road side (Railway Parade) of the structure, along the ramp between the platform and footpath and along the footpath.⁷

In the second half of 1998, plans were prepared for a replacement building on the Campbelltown-bound platform. It featured a booking office with one ticket window at the Campbelltown end, a room for the Station Master and staff, a dry store, a wet store, a staff toilet and individual male and female public toilets. Like the predecessor building, it has a near flat roof which extended and formed the platform awning. The external walls were covered with composite panels using concealed fasteners. It was a functional building void of architectural merit. Construction got under way in 1999.

One interesting feature of the station in 1998 was the platform on the Campbelltown bound side which was built at two different levels in two different styles with a cantilevered section at the Liverpool end.

Changes to the building, which had at that time just been completed, on the Campbelltown-bound platform were approved in 1999. Two standard workstations were initially to be fitted at the Campbelltown end of the building but that decision was revised and only one ticket window was provided. New “G2” bullet-proof ticket windows were installed.

Macquarie Fields station received CCTV coverage in 2001.

In 2005, planning was underway for changes to the Sydney-bound platform in conjunction with the construction of the Ingleburn-Glenfield Passing Loop. New

⁷ The ramp from Railway Parade is 1 in 8 and does not conform to the current accessibility code of 1 in 14 gradient.

steel, pool-top fencing 1.5 metres (5 feet) high was installed for a distance of 25 metres (83 feet) from the centre of the platform to the Liverpool end. Interestingly, the fence was painted green, not the normal white, no doubt to match the fence on the Campbelltown-bound platform. Green paint was usually only applied at those stations where the local community protested against the use of the brightness and the alleged ugliness of the white colour. Why green was chosen at Macquarie Fields is a mystery. The platform was also re-surfaced to improve drainage away from the new freight line.

The first building on the Campbelltown-bound platform lasted for nearly 90 years – from 1892 to 1976. The second building on the same platform lasted for 23 years – from 1976 to 1999 - but change has then accelerated quickly, thanks to the existence of CityRail, with the next change occurring in 2007 – a span of only eight years.

Tenders closed on 20th December, 2006, for the upgrading of the building on the Campbelltown-bound platform. It was at that time that the building and the present entrance from Railway Parade were constructed. There were two parts to the project, with the first part addressing the entry to the station from Railway Parade. This work involved:

- widening the entry platform area,
- extending the existing platform and other canopies,
- installing new handrails on both sides of the existing pedestrian access ramp,
- supplying and installing new platform seating, &
- relocating the existing public address, the CCTV cables and fixtures and the public telephone.

The second part of the project involved changes to the existing 1999-built building. These involved:

- applying bright coloured large composite panels to the external walls,
- installing new high-level windows as well as replacement gutters,
- refurbishing the internal areas including installation of solar tubes through the roof,
- replacing the existing air-conditioner, &
- dismantling and removing an existing passenger shelter and replacing it with a new shelter.

The work was under way in July, 2007. After these works were completed, the building appeared as it is today.

On reflection, CityRail should be congratulated for the effort it made to improve staff and passenger facilities as well as the overall appearance of the station, as it was only in the time of CityRail that sustained improvements have been made.

NO GOOD NEWS FROM SYDNEY TRAINS

Sydney Trains started on 1st July, 2013, at which time CityRail died.

In the second half of 2015, the Draft Glenfield to McArthur Urban Renewal Corridor Strategy was placed on public exhibition. One Macquarie Fields resident, Jennie Doyle, wrote:

“Whoever planned the updating of Macquarie Fields station clearly has not visited the site.

Macquarie Fields Station is actually on the western border of Macquarie Fields and therefore not central to the suburb and the residents. Though a number of people do in fact walk to the station, this is not an option for most Macquarie Fields residents. The bus service is very limited to a few services early in the morning and later in the afternoon and, to make the situation worse, the bus only services a very limited section of Macquarie Fields.

The proposed development at the station (understood to be the elimination of the existing commuter car park) is not an empty block of land. It is fact an already inadequate station parking lot. People are already parking on the grassed area next to the station and also in Saywell Street, which proves the current parking is already not enough and this is even before taking into account the growing population. More and more older houses are being demolished and townhouses being built on the sites to accommodate a growing population.

To build shops and units on the parking area and to have no parking at the station is totally ridiculous. No one will use the shops at the station if they cannot park their cars there to travel to and from Macquarie Fields Station. Furthermore, this will also affect the businesses at the top of Saywell Street as there will hardly be any commuters to stop in on their way to and from the trains, as they cannot park at the station.

If the Government wants people to use more trains and decrease congestion on roads, then parking needs to be provided for the growing population in the area. Parking at Glenfield and Ingleburn (stations) is already saturated and that is without any of the further planned development in any of these areas.”

Jennie’s comments well tease out the need to consider railway station upgrading generally in the context of a much wider geographic environment around stations.

There were several press and Internet stories in 2016 about the existence of a female teenage ghost at the station. The stories blended in well with the celebration of the annual Fisher’s Ghost Festival in Campbelltown, where the claim is that the city is the only location in Australia to celebrate the existence of a ghost.

THE POOR, LITTLE STATION

In 2017, Macquarie Fields station is the only facility between Liverpool and Campbelltown that does not have disabled access to both platforms. In the good old

days of CityRail, there was a publication issued to the public called, *Accessing CityRail*, which encouraged disabled travellers to make contact with the departure and arrival stations to facilitate ramp access between the train and platform. A handy feature was the listing of telephone numbers for all stations. When Sydney Trains commenced in 2013, it changed the title of the document to *Accessible Travel* and eliminated the suggestion that disabled travellers should contact the stations involved, instead suggesting they call 131 500 “to check if the station is staffed.” Telephone numbers of each station were excluded from the document.

Worse is alleged to befall the commuters at Macquarie Fields station. In the second half of 2017, people travelling to and from the station to the city will apparently be required to change trains at Glenfield for services to Blacktown and the City via Granville, as all trains stopping at Macquarie Fields Station will be destined for the City via the East Hills and Airport line.

Macquarie Fields station has always been a smallish facility of relatively little importance in the railway network and it seems this low status is set to continue in the absence of organised community pressure group activity.

Stuart Sharp

2nd April, 2017