

MINTO RAILWAY STATION

MINIMAL FACILITIES PROVIDED UPON OPENING

The Main South line opened between Liverpool and Campbelltown on 17th May, 1858, but the station, then called Campbellfields, was opened in May, 1874. The name changed to Minto on 1st March, 1882.

John Forsyth, the former Archives Officer of the State Rail Authority, tells us that a platform and waiting shed were erected in 1877 on the Campbelltown-bound side of the line. Such action as delaying the provision of essential facilities was typical in the 1870s when money was tight and the population sparse. Heaven help the poor people wanting to catch a train without the provision of a platform.

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.¹ The structures were necessary for the additional side platforms that were being built for track duplication. These buildings possessed single-pitched roofs sloping towards the rails. Duplication was completed through Minto station on 27th March, 1891.

TINY, TINY "IMPROVEMENTS" 1900 TO WORLD WAR 2

During this period, the area around Minto railway station looked very rural, with little residential development. The only times the New South Wales Railways had a lot of money were between 1880 and 1885 and from 1989 to the present. Virtually every other time in the history of the organisation, the rail network was starved of funds. It was impossible to provide attractive looking station structures without a funding allocation associated with a major project, such as track duplication or re-signalling for electrification. Even then, there was no guarantee of funding, as reflected in the absence of improvements to buildings at Minto associated with the 1968 electrification to Campbelltown. In 1890, a brick building was approved for the present platform Nos. 1 and 2 at Campbelltown. The next brick building approved between Liverpool and Campbelltown was at Ingleburn 1901 and, after that event, the next brick building was a two-room structure at Casula in 1963. It is unbelievable that, for 60 years, virtually nothing substantial was done in relation to the improvement of the accommodation at any of the stations. The story of Minto station was typical of the time.

In 1902, at Minto an awning was attached to the existing station building on the Sydney-bound platform, costing £69. At that time, the existing timber platform building had a single pitched roof sloping towards the railway line but it was narrow, being approximately only three feet wide. The much wider awning, approximately six feet wide, required the use of steel brackets to support the awning. This building remained virtually unaltered until CityRail upgraded the station in 1989.

¹ *NSW Government Gazette*, 30th December, 1890, Issue No. 748, p. 9914.

John Forsyth stated that a brick building was completed in 1911 on the Campbelltown-bound platform but that was incorrect. What happened in 1911 was that the original 1877 timber platform was replaced by a new platform, with the deck set at the then standard height of two feet nine inches above the rail. The platform had a brick wall and coping. The existing three timber buildings – the main platform structure, a lamp room and a male toilet was set back to provide a platform width of nine feet, extending to 15 feet in front of the main platform structure.

In 1921, a shelter shed for the storage of milk was erected on the Sydney-bound platform, costing £119.

The press announced that the station was to be lit by electricity in September, 1937.² World War 2 intervened and the work was not carried out until 1941.

THE PERIOD OF ALMOST NOTHINGNESS 1945-1972

This was another period in which almost nothing was done to improve the appearance of buildings and the level of facilities for passengers and staff. Once again, Minto was a typical story.

There was a male toilet off the platform at the Sydney end of the Sydney-bound platform. It was demolished in 1958, leaving the only male toilet at the station being the one on the Campbelltown-bound platform.

The level crossing gates were replaced in 1963 by “F” type flashing lights and a half-boom barriers.

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. The electrification was the last major project to use this method of platform wall construction.

While the platform walls and the cantilevered copings were renewed, nothing else was done to upgrade the 1902 old, timber buildings on the Sydney-bound platform. It was a medium-sized timber structure of about 35 feet in length containing a ticket office, a general waiting room and a ladies’ waiting room and toilet. There was a small timber waiting shed and male toilet, with the walls covered with corrugated iron sheets, on the Campbelltown-platform building. As was typical of 1902, a roof was provided only over the closet and users at the urinal got wet if it rained. The rural-looking, long-neglected appearance of the station was enhanced by the use of Cyclone galvanised fencing at the rear of the platforms, apparently installed at the time of electrification.

It was in 1963 that the Redfern Street level crossing at the Campbelltown end of the station was converted from manual to automatic operation using half-boom gates. It seems that the level crossing was closed sometime in the 1970s when Ben Lomond

² *Liverpool News*, 23rd September, 1937, p. 1.

Road was extended in a westerly direction using an overbridge to cross the railway line. It was built a few hundred metres from Minto towards Campbelltown. At an unknown time, Campbelltown City Council renamed Redfern Street on the western side to Wiltshire Street.

THE TIME OF THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT COMMISSION 1972-1979

The Commission had good intentions to improve passenger and freight facilities but, unfortunately, the Askin/Cutler coalition government did not provide sufficient funding to allow the situation to improve.

In 1975, the existing timber shelter on the Campbelltown-bound platform at Minto was destroyed by fire and a small, brick waiting shed with a flat roof replaced it.

One of the projects undertaken under the Commonwealth Government's Urban Public Transport Improvement Programme in the 1970s was the provision of new public toilet facilities and this occurred at Minto in 1979 where a brick toilet block was erected on the Sydney-bound platform with stepped entry. This structure was demolished when the CityRail buildings were erected in 1990.

One new idea of Philip Shirley, the Chairman of the Public Transport Commission, was to provide commuter car parking. The previous Commissioner for Railways, Neal McCusker, had objected to the allocation of money for motor vehicles and perhaps this typified his short-sightedness into modern transport practice and was one of the reasons that the Premier, Robert Askin, would not allow him to remain in office to reach his 50 years of service. It was Campbelltown City Council which funded a very early commuter car park on the western side of the station.

THE STATE RAIL ENGAGEMENT 1980-1988 – THE LAST PERIOD OF ENGINEERING DOMINANCE IN THE STATION DESIGN PROCESS

Planning for a new station building started in April, 1985, with physical construction to start in the 1985/86 financial year. Two plans were prepared for a new building on the Sydney-bound platform in 1986. While neither design ended up being built, the proposals marked an interesting change in architectural style. The first plan was for a face brick structure typical of the semi-modular buildings of the 1970s and 1980s, such as those at Wollstonecraft, Loftus and Warwick Farm. The identifiers of the style were:

- the near-flat roof with,
- roof extensions on each side,
- wide metal fascia,
- an open-fronted "waiting area" with bench seating,
- a parcels office with a roller shutter facing the platform to protect the parcels counter, &
- a toilet was to be provided for the staff.

There were two ticket windows at the Campbelltown end. At that time, the Redfern Street level crossing was still in existence and access to the Sydney-bound platform was provided by a ramp from the level crossing. The provision of a parcels office would make it one of the last station buildings designed on the New South Wales rail system.³ The first plan of 1986 had all the hallmarks of a design dominated by the engineering fraternity within the Way and Works Branch. The distinguishing feature was its undistinguished features, including the visual dominance of face brickwork and flat roof.

The second building planned in 1986 for the Sydney-bound platform at Minto was a contradiction of almost everything that had been proposed in the first plan. For instance,

- the roof shape was semi-circular,
- ceramic wall tiles were used on all external surfaces,
- circular design motifs were incorporated into the design,
- the ends of the building and the edge of the platform awning were curved,
- there was no overhang to the rear of the structure,
- not only was there a staff toilet but there was an “airlock” to act as an ante-chamber,
- there was a staff lunch room with a stainless steel sink,
- there was no waiting room or waiting area for passengers, &
- public male and female toilets were provided at the Sydney end of the structure.

Exactly the same style of building was proposed for Leumeah station but it too was not built.

How could it be that two buildings were planned for the same location that were almost opposites in every aspect of the design and function? The answer is that the first design was reviewed by a senior, long-standing, conservative architect who had spent his life being dominated by the engineers. The second structure was prepared under the supervision of younger architects, most of whom were later purged from the State Rail Authority.

Although unsuccessful, the second design has an important place in the architectural history of New South Wales railway stations, as it clearly demonstrated the type of new thinking that was in existence but latent in 1986 but was encouraged upon the establishment of City Rail from 1989.

THE CITYRAIL ERA 1989-2013 – THE TIME OF THE ARCHITECTS

³ The present, now modified brick building at Port Kembla, approved in 1985, appears to be the last structure planned and built with a parcels office.

The most significant year in the history of urban public rail transport in Sydney was 1989.⁴ The vast majority of railway stations in New South Wales that existed in 1989 were either derelict, not far from being derelict or in need of essential, urgent maintenance. Buildings were filthy because no funding had been provided to upgrade station facilities for the previous 100 years. Many station buildings had not been painted in decades. What occurred from 1989 up to the end of CityRail in 2013 was nothing short of revolutionary. Amazingly, it was the Greiner conservative government that created a railway organisation purely for passenger operations. Moreover, the government made available a hitherto unbelievable amount of money to upgrade railway stations as well as other railway activities. Certainly, 1989 was the most important year in the history of Minto station and, thankfully, the structures that were provided in that year survive to tell part of the important story.

CityRail commenced on 11th April, 1989 with Rob Schwarzer as the Group General Manager and seven Line General Managers. On 1st May, 1989, a publication, entitled “*A New Strategic Direction for CityRail*”, was issued with the commitment that CityRail would become a first-class urban railway system by 1995. All 294 stations would be subject to ‘revitalisation’, including:

1. Rehabilitation and maintenance to established standards - a five-year programme,
2. State-of-the-art design standards to be fixed for stations with the project design team to report by 30th June, 1989,
3. Quicker responses to maintenance requirements,
4. Stations to be painted every six years – the first two stations nominated were Sydenham and Strathfield,
5. Catch up on deferred painting – 30 stations by December, 1989,
6. A major clean-up of stations every six months,
7. Target of graffiti-free stations by 1995 – 72-hour removal by June, 1990, and 12 hours by 1993,
8. New signage at all stations – to be available by June, 1989,

In July, the first edition of the *City Rail Design Guide* for stations was distributed to staff for the preparation of tender documentation.

Bruce Baird, the then Minister for Transport, launched on 14th August, 1989, the Government’s \$105m station upgrading programme, with 60 stations to be done in the first year. The first stations to receive upgrading were those with timber buildings, which included Minto and Leumeah. For almost 100 years, the low-cost, basic, unattractive, timber platform buildings remained to bear witness to the financial neglect of past New South Wales governments over the previous century.

Minto station was one of the first locations to receive the fundamentally new way of designing platform buildings. How did this come about in 1989 but not in 1986?

⁴ The same could also be said for railway stations in regional and rural areas in New South Wales.

Because Rob Schwarzer appointed forward-thinking, inspirational people to the key roles of Line General Managers. Schwarzer also encouraged the involvement of young, enthusiastic architects within the organisation who were waiting for the opportunity which the creation of CityRail afforded them. Paul Poynton held the position for the General Manager, South Line, and he approved on 13th November, 1989, the plan for the present building on the Sydney-bound platform at Minto. The core philosophy of the design of the building survives Minto today. The key design features were:

- a small structure on the Sydney-bound platform, providing a ticket office, store room, staff toilet, and “tea room”,
- gabled roof,
- metal stud wall and roof frame,
- 9 mm thick fibro cement wall panelling,
- extensive platform shelters with aluminium framed, glazed partitions,
- waiting area with roof only on Sydney-bound platform,
- extensive use of glazing, especially noticeable in the Campbelltown-bound platform shelter,
- The provision of a single, public uni-sex toilet,
- Colorbond corrugated roof cladding,
- stainless steel hand rails,
- dominant corporate signage and seating,
- terrazzo tile paving in waiting areas,
- 1800 mm high, “loop top” steel fencing at rear of platform painted white,
- extensive landscaping,
- use of red and white paint on all structures, platform seats and rubbish bins,⁵
- tri-level station nameboards with blue lettering on a white background with the line colour under the station name,
- illuminated station lightboxes featuring the “lazy seven”, corporate logo,

While the platform structures were small in size, these were not intended to be the main design attraction. It was the overall striking presentation of the cleanliness of the station with the red and white paint scheme and full-length, new white fencing that was the intention of the project. The overall design succeeded well in its function and continues today in existence, though the brilliant red and white paint scheme has been replaced by a very much more sombre mid-grey colour.

In 1996, the ticket office at Minto received a new “G2”, bullet-proof ticket window in 1996. CCTV cameras were installed at the station in year 2000.

⁵ The choice of red paint proved to be a very poor selection by the then Chief Executive, Ross Sayers. It faded quickly and looked terrible after a relatively short time. Some staff pointed out the long-held official opposition to anything coloured red as train drivers may get confused about the presence of a possible danger signal.

Also in 2000, was the extension of the 1989 canopy on the Sydney-bound platform. A further 170 feet were added at the Sydney end and this canopy is discerned because the gabled roof ridge is set lower than the 1989 canopy.

THE IMPACT OF THE SOUTHERN SYDNEY FREIGHT LINE 2010-2013

Work started on the construction of the freight line through the station area in 2010, which was opened on 21st January, 2013. There was one very appealing aspect to the project for CityRail and that was the availability of funding from the Australian Railway Track Corporation. The contracting firm of Gartner Rose extended the footbridge deck over the freight line on the western side and provided a new stepway. The difference in balustrade material marks the extension of the deck. At the time, the existing ramped access to the platform was removed on the western side of the station, which now has a funny appearance of a dominant-looking ramp on the eastern side only. The existing stepway on the western side was also demolished and a new facility was provided on the western side of the freight line. Gartner Rose also undertook the construction of three lifts at the station. The 1989 corporate signage and general colour scheme at the station were replaced by blue paint work. The light boxes at the station entrances were also replaced.

THE SYDNEY TRAINS ERA 2013-2017

Sydney Trains commenced operations on 1st July, 2013. To date, nothing obvious has happened at Minto station.

Today, the drabness of the current corporate colour scheme for platform buildings of light, medium and dark grey contrasts with the excitement of the red and white times of CityRail. As if it were a direct rebuttal to both of the brightness of materials and the forward-looking design leaders of CityRail, now the exact opposite of white is the standard colour for platform fencing. Black is the negation of colour.

Stuart Sharp

2nd April, 2017