

NARROMINE RAILWAY STATION

A SUMMARY OF THE STUDY OF NARROMINE STATION

There are several key points to be learnt. The first one is the very important role of railway transport in the development of natural resources and the creation of an urban centre, with the resultant benefits for passenger transport.

The second key point is the importance of government to provide essential infrastructure to permit the economy to develop to the maximum extent. The allocation of funding was a process in which government as a whole and politicians individually and in groups were instrumental in determining the quantum of funds to be provided to the railway organisation.

Thirdly, the nature of the railway infrastructure was basic in the extreme because there were inadequate levels of capital funds available for the large number of tasks expected of the railway organisation, even in the “boom years” of the 1880s.

Lastly, station buildings were basic, functional structures to meet the actual, physical needs of its freight and passenger customers, with very few exceptions. In the case of some buildings, including that at Narromine, platform structures took on an additional symbolic role as the mirror of the development and status of the town served by the station. In very, very few cases in New South Wales, existing permanent buildings, though old, were replaced with more modern structures. The Railway Commissioners uniformly did not see it as their job to fund new stations solely on the basis of their symbolic role. Some stations required physical expansion and this was usually done on the basis of sacrificing public internal space.

The survival of the Narromine station buildings is an important heritage item to demonstrate the lessons to be learnt from the study public works in New South Wales.

EXISTING LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT

Bob McKillop wrote an extensive article entitled “Narromine – A Railway History” in the January, 1997, issue of *Bulletin*, published by the Australian Railway Historical Society. These notes provide some supplementary, detailed information specifically about the station buildings.

WHAT’S ON THE PLATFORM IN 2017?

There are three structures on or adjacent to the platform. These are:

1. The 1882 approved timber building with additions,
2. A post-1970, timber coach shelter for NSW Trainlink, &
3. A corrugated iron clad out of shed of unknown date.

Interlocking Frame “A” was removed from the platform in 1991.

The 1882 approved Station Master’s residence is located (awkwardly) in the forecourt.

DUBBO MARKS THE CHANGE POINT IN STATION DESIGN POLICY

It was John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief, Railway Construction Branch, Department of Public Works, who was responsible for station design policy. Between 1869 and 1879, there was a period of station design policy uncertainty that applied to all three trunk railway lines in New South Wales. Several combination structures and temporary buildings were erected. The strange creatures that continue to exist at Wellington and Dubbo stations reflect the period of constant change. Also, temporary and portable buildings were used extensively in these years.

After 1880, there was a new direction of design that focused on gabled roof buildings with semi-detached and/or detached one or two pavilions. The station building that survives at Narromine was an example approved in 1882 that today still reflects the new design policy.

THE DESIGN FAMILY TO WHICH NARROMINE BELONGS

The structure at Narromine was functional in design and lacked any strong architectural features that would induce anyone to provide a name design family. Perhaps, at a pinch, it could be called Railway Gothic New South Wales style.

The design that was classified by the Railway Department as standard roadside buildings in the late 1890s was introduced in 1880. In the clear majority of cases, the platform buildings were formed not by a single structure but by a suite of two or three buildings. There were three broad groups within the overall design family of varying sizes, with buildings being classified according to the length of the main structure. These were:

- the mini-roadside measuring about 35-38 feet long (as at Borenore),
- the standard roadside at approximately 50-55 feet long (as at Narromine), &
- the five-room version (as at Molong), which varied from about 80 to 100 feet in length.

This group of 90 buildings formed John Whitton’s Third Class of station and later took the name in the Eddy period in the 1890s of the Standard Roadside Station. Was it strange that it was Eddy who gave the group this name? No. Up until Eddy’s

time in 1889, the Existing Lines Branch within the Railway Department would not use any design of the Railway Construction Branch, which was a part of the Department of Public Works. Eddy, while on the one hand criticizing Whitton for most things that Eddy thought were wrong, outdated or bad, in fact used Whitton's standard roadside design between 1888 and 1892. He modified the design with a cantilevered awning in 1892 and continued applying the design in 1893.

All three-room examples possessed a number of common design characteristics, these being:

- Overall symmetry appearance,
- Constant floor plan arrangements based on a centre pedestrian access,
- Uniform room designations (general waiting room, ladies' waiting room, ticket office, lamp room and toilets,
- Gabled roof with finials,
- Use of brickwork for chimneys with a standard hearth width of three feet,
- Use of corrugated iron sheets to connect the main building with the pavilions, &
- Rear pedestrian entry through the general waiting room.

Despite the similarities amongst examples, the three-room examples reflected considerable variation in relation to non-critical aspects while retaining the overall, major design ingredients. John Whitton varied the following elements:

- The selection of brickwork or timber for load-bearing walls,
- The size of rooms,
- The height of ceilings,
- The use of cast iron or timber for the platform awning posts,
- The use of cast iron or timber for the brackets above the awning capitals & the style of the brackets,
- The selection of constant or variable building width,
- The type and design of pedestrian entry - including porched entry,
- The use of centre transverse gables on one or both sides of the roof or no transverse gable,
- The distances between the main building and pavilions,
- The placement of ventilation in the toilet block – either in a gable or on the roof ridge,
- The application of constant or variable platform widths,
- The design of the finials on the gables,
- The style of fencing at the rear of platforms, &
- The insertion of vertical or horizontal opening ticket windows,

Whitton changed the above elements in order to reflect the individual status and/or importance of the urban centre served by each station and to help manipulate the

thinking of town residents into believing that their local building was unique in design and better than at nearby, rival towns.

The Appendix to this study contains a complete list of all the three-room examples, which commenced to be approved from 1880. They were built in what is usually called the “boom time of railway construction.” The boom time started to end in 1886 when capital money became inadequate in the quantum for the construction of new railway lines desired by politicians.

The Table below summarises the annual approval for the use of the standard roadside design between 1880 and 1891, as indicated in the Appendix.

TABLE: YEARLY SUMMARY OF STANDARD, THREE-ROOM ROADSIDE STATIONS

YEAR	TOTAL EXAMPLES BUILT	TOTAL TIMBER EXAMPLES	TOTAL BRICK EXAMPLES	TOTAL OF EXAMPLES WITH TWO PAVILIONS
1880	2	2	0	0
1881	6	4	2	5
1882	2	1	1	2
1883	3	0	3	3
1884	5	4	1	3
1885	6	3	3	4
1886	6	2	4	4
1887	6	6	0	1
1888	1	0	1	1
1889	1	0	1	2
1890	5	1	4	5
1891	2	1	1	0
TOTALS	45	25	19	30

The above Table shows that there was a pretty dramatic falloff in approvals of the use of roadside design structures after 1887. What was the overall position for all three versions of the standard roadside station in relation to the use of brickwork or timber? The Table below summarises the position.

TABLE: USE OF BRICK OR TIMBER FOR ALL ROADSIDE STATION BUILDINGS, EXCEPT THE SIX FIRST CLASS, FIVE-ROOM EXAMPLES (ST. PETERS-HURSTVILLE IN 1883)

YEAR	TOTAL 5 ROOM EXAMPLES BUILT	TOTAL 5 ROOM TIMBER EXAMPLES	TOTAL 3 ROOM EXAMPLES BUILT	TOTAL 3 ROOM TIMBER EXAMPLES	TOTAL MINI VERSIONS	TOTAL TIMBER MINI VERSIONS
1880	4	3	2	2	1	–
1881	2	1	6	5	4	2

YEAR	TOTAL 5 ROOM EXAMPLES BUILT	TOTAL 5 ROOM TIMBER EXAMPLES	TOTAL 3 ROOM EXAMPLES BUILT	TOTAL 3 ROOM TIMBER EXAMPLES	TOTAL MINI VERSIONS	TOTAL TIMBER MINI VERSIONS
1882	2	1	2	1	4	–
1883	1	0	3	0	6	2
1884	2	1	5	3	0	–
1885	2	1	6	3	2	2
1886	3	1	6	2	3	3
1887	1	0	6	6	5	5
1888	0	0	1	0	2	2
1889	0	0	1	0	0	0
1890	0	0	5	2	0	0
1891	0	0	2	1	0	0
TOTALS	17	8	45	25	27	16

The first thing obvious is that it was only the three-room version that was used between 1889 and 1891 and the structures built in this period in brickwork represented the near-last brick structures on new, rural railway lines.

Those examples approved after 1888 were located on existing lines with the exception of Yass Town. This change illustrates a new station design policy following the retirement of John Whitton. It was long the custom up to 1888 that the Existing Lines Branch did not use the same designs as used by the Railway Construction Branch. However, if this latter Branch ceased using a design, it was then allowable for the Existing Lines Branch to pick up the design of its rival Branch. Therefore, for the first time since 1880, the standard roadside building started to appear on existing lines after Whitton's departure. This change was aided by the removal of George Cowdery, who was head of the Existing Lines Branch in 1889.

The second obvious item from the above Table is the virtual cessation of the use of the larger, five-room version after 1886. The third obvious aspect is the abandonment of the use of brickwork for the mini versions after 1883.

The period in which all three examples were utilised was between 1880 and 1888. That period of eight years can be divided based on funding levels into the time between 1880 and 1884, which was the boom time, and 1885 to 1888, in which time capital money became much more difficult to obtain for the level of expenditure desired by the New South Wales Government. The Table below shows different rates of construction between the boom and not-so-boom time.

TABLE: NO. OF ROADSIDE BUILDINGS 1880-1884 & 1885-1888

VERSION	1880-1884	1885-1888
Five-room	11	6
Three-room	11	19
Mini	15	12

VERSION	1880-1884	1885-1888
TOTALS	44	37

From the above Table, there was not much difference in the construction rate overall for roadside buildings between the two periods of more and less capital funding for this style of building. The next step is to see whether timber structures were more prevalent in one of the two periods in the following Table shows the outcome.

TABLE: TIMBER ROADSIDE BUILDINGS 1880-1884 & 1885-1888

VERSION	1880-1884	1885-1888
Five-room	6	2
Three-room	18	11
Mini	4	12
TOTALS	28	25

The above Table shows the impact of a reduction of capital from 1885. The strategy involved a near-cessation of the use of the larger, five-room version in the second half of the 1880s, as well as the greater use of the mini version exclusively in timber after 1883. The case of the three-room version shows a different trend with brick versions being twice as popular as the timber examples after 1888. One would have thought that the same financial hardship affecting the other two versions would also apply but, surprisingly, the New South Wales Railways was able to borrow an increasing amount of capital funds in 1890 and 1891. That even surprised the Railway Department, which always believed that money should be spent if it was available.

NARROMINE STATION CONSTRUCTION

John Whitton approved a timber standard roadside on 28th June, 1882, with two, balanced pavilions. The main, centre building measured 50 by 14 feet. At first sight, the plan has an interesting feature with the words "John Whitton" expressed in full. Normally, the Engineer-in-Chief signed his name "J. Whitton". However, the explanation is that someone signed the plan on Whitton's behalf. It was in 1882 that Whitton stopped signing station plans and the plan for Narromine seems to be in that category but the plan is an important historical document as it shows the transition from the former system under which Whitton personally approved plans to a system where he delegated that approval and, ultimately, to a position where no approval signature whatsoever appeared on plans after 1882.

The three rooms in the main Narromine structure contained the standard arrangement for that size, namely a ticket office, a general waiting room and a ladies' waiting room. The ticket office window was of the rarer variety where the closing mechanism moved horizontally rather than the usual vertically. The functions of the three rooms in the main building were reversed to the plan. The rear entry into the

building was stepped but there was no enclosed porch. A transverse gable of a low pitch was located in the centre of the roof but only on the road side but, unusually, there was no porched entry. The general waiting room stood proud of the building wall by about one foot on each side. Like most timber buildings, the platform structures were built on ten-inch diameter timber stumps. The use of steps for entry at the rear of the building, as at Narromine, was seldom used.

Tenders closed on 18th July, 1882, for the construction of the station building.¹ The contractors who signed the plan were David Ralston and Andrew Foster, at times known as Messrs. D. S. Ralston and Co.² The contractors signed the plan on 11th October, 1882, exactly nine days before line opened between Dubbo and Nevertire. Obviously, construction of the building had not even commenced on the opening day. This omission of a completed platform building upon line opening was the norm in the 19th century for the New South Wales Railways. Not only was the station building not commenced, there was not any sign of activity at Narromine with one newspaper reporter commenting that there “would probably be a station at Narromine”.³

Usually, John Whitton would at least provide a platform for use by the town’s inhabitants, even if there were no building, but this did not apply to Narromine as there was very little urban development there – only a handful of people. The Railway Department could take its time building the station and it seems that the Department made the decision to open the station after it had been built – not prior to its construction. Author, Bob McKillop, stated that the station is “Narromine’s most significant heritage item” as it was the first permanent building in the town.⁴ The Station Master’s residence was also constructed by David Ralston and Andrew Foster in 1883. It was awkwardly placed not to one side but almost in the centre of the station forecourt – a strange occurrence to the norm in which residences were placed at one side of station forecourts.

Narromine railway station was located not far from the Macquarie River and it seems that the Railway Department believed that much of the River traffic would be captured at Narromine. This was revealed in a press report about the nature of the station buildings that existed at nearby Trangie. The article stated:

“the railway station buildings at Trangie have up to a few months back been of a very temporary, nature, as it was never anticipated that it would become a place of such importance. The traffic from the rivers was supposed to divert to Narromine, twenty miles from Trangie, and commodious station buildings were erected there. The Government quite recently began to permanently

¹ *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 11th July, 1882, Issue 261, p. 3654.

² *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 1st August, 1882, Issue 324, p. 4164.

³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21st October, 1882, p. 12.

⁴ R. F. McKillop, “Narromine – A Railway History”, *Bulletin*, January, 1997, p. 5.

establish station buildings, goods shed, residences, new wool siding,./ trucking yards etc. in Trangie.”⁵

The features of the Narromine building as planned were:

- almost total absence of decorative features,
- structural foundations based on the use of multiple, deep-seated timber piles 10 inches wide,
- overall symmetry based on centre pedestrian access,
- gabled roofs covered with galvanised, corrugated iron sheets and with simply designed finials on gables,
- a very moderate sized building 50 feet long and 14 feet wide, with the centre general waiting room extending to 17 feet wide,
- a relatively short distance of 14 feet between the centre building and each of the pavilions,
- asymmetrically placed face brick chimneys with modest decoration,
- absence of a porched entry,
- provision of a low-pitched transverse gable on the road side only to identify the pedestrian entry point,
- rare use of a stepped entry from the forecourt into the building,
- rare use of a horizontally opening ticket window,
- heating by brick fireplaces with hearths three feet wide in all rooms, other than the toilets,
- 13 feet wide platform awning supported by timber posts,
- a very simple design capitals and a combination of one very plain and one decorative awning bracket above the capitals,
- underground fresh water tank,
- galvanised, corrugated iron sheeting linking the three buildings,
- ventilator placed in gable of toilet block rather than on roof ridge,
- night soil and other material from toilets deposited directly into a pit.

The building was constructed to the reverse of the approved plan.

Overall, the building presented a very restrained functional structure, which could withstand political censure cleaning unnecessary expenditure on station buildings. This structure was the first expression on the western line to Bourke of John Whitton’s station building policy and he approved other three-room examples on that line at Girilambone and Byrock and five-room versions at Nevertire and Nyngan.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SYMBOLIC ROLE FOR THE STATION

⁵ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 2nd January, 1886, p. 13.

Thanks in part to the establishment of a station at Narromine, the small hamlet was proclaimed a village on 20th March, 1885.⁶ The importance of the railway was expressed in a press article in 1905 which said:

“The visitor to the infant town of Narromine is at once impressed by the rapid expansion or what was, some 17 years ago (i.e. 1888), a hamlet, containing no more than three or four low wooden buildings, providing shelter for some 18 residents. To-day we find that, by the progressiveness of the pioneers of the valuable and productive territory surrounding the chosen spot on which to construct a railway siding, has sprang into prominence a town, comparing favorably with the towns of the western districts of the State of New South Wales. A town whose watchword is success; a town that will, in the very near future, cut itself asunder from another important centre that is at present jealous of its sound foundation, and develop into one of the most wealthy centres of this fair State. The staple product of Narromine, to which the town owes its origin, is wheat

While John Whitton was well pleased about the cost-saving features of the structure at Narromine, it did not take many years for the town burghers to realise that the commercial and residential buildings of their urban centre were looking far more attractive and prosperous than their railway station.

Within 20 years of construction of the building at Narromine in 1883, concern was publicly expressed by the local government body and the local press about the inadequate way in which the station building was supposed to reflect the pride and progress of the village. When constructed, the station building performed a functional role but, by the turn-of-the-century, its additional role as a symbol of the progress of the local community emerged.

In February, 1897, a post and telegraph office was established “in a portion of the railway premises” at the railway station.⁸ From its first day of operation it was considered far too small.⁹ Within 18 months, the post office had been relocated to a site east of the main road and on the southern side of the railway line in the same area of the court house and school.¹⁰

A very significant event occurred in 1898 and that was the formation of the Narromine Municipal Council in April of that year. At that time, the population was 650 people. Bob McKillop has written that, about the same time, there was considerable closer settlement which had the impact of increasing local wheat production by the breakup of large estates into smaller landholdings.¹¹ At that time,

⁶ R. F. McKillop, unpublished and undated notes entitled "Narromine and the Railway".

⁷ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 9th June, 1905, p. 7.

⁸ Mail was being handled before 1897 by commercial enterprises in the town.

⁹ *Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent*, 12th February, 1897, p. 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27th August, 1898, p. 2.

¹¹ R. F. McKillop, unpublished notes prepared for the Narromine Railway Day on 20th May, 2000.

the urban centre and adjacent rural region of Narromine were booming. Wheat production took off like a North Korean rocket heading towards Japan. It is little wonder that the first concrete silo was constructed at Peak Hill in 1917, with Narromine receiving its bulk wheat facility in 1921.

In 1899, the Narromine Municipal Council started agitating for a “much-wanted improvement in our railway station and gates. The station is getting too small for requirements, and will want a lot of improvements in the near future, while the railway crossing is a long way too small and dangerous for the traffic that passes through it, besides the inconvenience that people have to put up with while the trains are shunting. It is hoped that the Council will stick to the matter till they have it”.¹²

Rumours were current in 1899 that improvements were to be made to both the station and the post office. The press report stated:

“It is rumoured we are going to have our station house and post office remodelled. The buildings were erected when Narromine was only a " wee place"; but now it is aspiring to be the "Federal City". It is time we should have our public buildings.”

Nothing happened in 1899 relating to the station remodeling but hopes and dreams were raised again in 1904 when the press reported that there was a large body of men "under canvass in the railway reserve and, as hundreds of sleepers have been dropped along the line, it would appear that the Commissioners contemplate extensive repairs to the permanent way. If they erected a new railway station - the represent one is 14 years behind the times - they would be doing Narromine nothing but justice, seeing that centres with not half the traffic have got much more commodious buildings”.¹³

Nothing happened to improve conditions at the railway station, though at an unknown time the out of shed that survives today on the platform was built. These facilities were the brainchild of Chief Commissioner Eddy who implemented the concept of second-class parcels, these being parcels that were conveyed by goods trains rather than by passenger trains. As such, they were not kept on railway premises within the confines of the main station building but relegated to a subsidiary structure. The design and materials of the out of shed at Narromine are consistent with those provided at almost every other railway station throughout the State. The structure has a frame of hardwood and the walls and the single-pitched roof are covered with galvanised, corrugated iron sheets. In accordance with the New South Wales Railway practice, designs and materials used for buildings were provided according to the low or high priority of the function carried within the specified space. In this case, second-class parcels got a second-class building.

¹² *Western Champion*, 17th November, 1899, p. 6.

¹³ *Western Champion*, 11th November, 1904, p. 12.

In 1909, a post box was placed on the platform to enable residents to post a letter after the closing time at the post office and before the nightly mail train arrived. The best aspect of the innovation was the absence of the requirement to purchase a tuppence platform ticket.¹⁴

THE STATION NEEDS MORE THAN A PLATFORM EXTENSION

The opening of the line between Narromine and Peak Hill on 12th December, 1910, had no impact on station operations or the platform buildings at Narromine.

The local council and other leading citizens were excited by the rebuilding and extension of the platform in 1912. They were more excited about what else could happen at the station. One press report stated:

“When the extension of Narromine railway platform is completed, there will be plenty of accommodation. The platform is being extended both east and west and the extra space will be greatly appreciated. Of course the railway station is not only an eyesore, but it is altogether too small to meet the requirements of a rapidly growing locality such as this”.¹⁵

The negative sentiments about the inadequacies of the Narromine station building in 1912 was shared by the press at Dubbo. One paper said:

“Extensive alterations (not before they are needed) are being carried out at the local railway station (i.e. Narromine). The platform is being lengthened at both ends and will be much appreciated by the travelling public. The importance of the little village will soon warrant a more stylish and up-to-date station, to be in keeping with these latest additions. Nothing is heard of the overhead bridge now. At one time, it was considered a certainty that one would be erected but, apparently, the matter has hung fire. In the meantime, the same old thing goes on, some people dodging empty trucks, and others waiting to cross over the line. When another accident happens, the public will be up in arms again.”¹⁶

Timbreebongie Shire Council in 1913 requested the establishment of a refreshment room at Narromine station but the Commissioners declined the request.¹⁷

Materials arrived in 1914 for the construction of the pedestrian bridge at the Dandaloo Street level crossing at the Bourke end of the platform.¹⁸

Another period of ten years lapsed before the next attempt was made to get the Railway Commissioners to replace the station building.

¹⁴ *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 4th December, 1909, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Leader*, 26th September, 1912, p. 4.

¹⁶ *Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent*, 20th September, 1912, p. 5.

¹⁷ *The Farmer and Settler*, 22nd April, 1913, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent*, 16th October, 1914, p. 1.

THE PUBLIC ANGER OF 1925

The Railway Commissioners visited Narromine station in February, 1925, and met a deputation of leading citizens of the town. There were quite a number of issues which the people presented, including the need for a telephone at the goods shed and trains blocking the Dandaloo Street level crossing for a long time.¹⁹ The only reference made to the station was a grizzle about the need to purchase platform tickets to enter the platform. The Commissioners replied that this was necessary to achieve crowd control. Not a word was recorded about the condition of the station.²⁰

The first of three items in the local press in 1925 that mentioned the horrible condition of Narromine station appeared in June. A Letter-to-the-Editor was sent to the local newspaper by a correspondent with the title of "Pioneer". He or she wrote:

"For a town the size and importance of Narromine, and considering the amount of business and traffic coming to this centre, it seems incredible that some of our influential citizens have not started an agitation for a more commodious and up-to-date station house. Of course, the longer the present structure is allowed to do duty the more deplorable the condition of the building will become, until eventually it will tumble down, and the unfortunate officers who happened to be on duty at the time will be enveloped in the ruins. Enough money has been spent on patching up the place to build a solid and safe structure. There is no doubt that, if the Railway Commissioners were shown the ugliness and dilapidated condition of the whole structure, they would at once have it demolished and a new building erected in its place. It only requires that the matter be put fairly before the heads of the Railway Department and there is no doubt that they will be seized with the inadequacy of the accommodation and the utter unsafeness of the whole fabric. It is an eyesore to the town and is not conducive to the safe or efficient working of the staff, who are required to labour under such disadvantages as at present exist."²¹

There was a second blistering attack on the condition of the railway station in early November, 1925, with the press reporting in the following terms:

"The shack which does duty as a station house at Narromine is at present being subjected to a well-earned coat of paint. It is to be hoped that the painters will not put the coat on too thick as, because of the building's weight of years and the handicap of rotten timbers, it might tumble down if any further

¹⁹ In 1946, the goods shed still had not been furnished with a telephone.

²⁰ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 11th February, 1925, p. 3.

²¹ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 24th June, 1925, p. 2.

burden was added to it. The edifice is a distinct disgrace to the Railway Department, a menace to the lives and help of those who are compelled to labour 'neath its rooms and not at all in keeping with the importance and progressiveness of the town and district which it has to serve. As a piece of architecture, it is a burlesque. It has been added to and botched to that degree that many people would not regard it as suitable as a place to stable horses. The Station Master's office is a huge joke. The door is so much aslant that one has to be careful when entering the cubby house that he does not bump his head against the jam of the door. The fittings in the office are of the most crude description, and no business would have the telephone so far removed from the centre of authority as is the case in these most up-to-date railway premises. The Station Master, especially at night, has to stumble away from his office in the darkness to a distant part of the building to answer calls, which are fairly frequent at the station. Why a telephone is not installed in his office is another of the eccentricities of the Railway Department. Probably, it is so small that telephone would crowd the furniture out of the place. We hear a lot about "safety first" on the railway, but we maintain it is a case of "safety last" with the Narromine railway house."²²

That stinging attack by the press in November, 1925, was not the end of the criticism in that month. The third press report later in November which mentioned the poor appearance of the station buildings stated:

"Notwithstanding his multifarious duties, Mr. Hartigan, the Station Master at Narromine, still finds a little time to devote in an attempt to relieve the barrenness and out-of-datedness of the shack which the railway authorities provide as a station for the growing and important town of Narromine. He has planted several plots of shrubs and flowering plants on the platform, and, when these put forth their glory, much the hideousness of the old ramshackle will be hidden."²³

Further condemnation of the station building, seemingly known as "the shack" appeared in the press in 1926. The report stated:

"The railway staff are to be complimented upon an effort to beautify the precincts of the Narromine railway station. It would be an utter impossibility to beautify the shack which does duty as the station premises, but the members of the staff are making a most commendable effort to hide the ugliness of the structure by the planting of shrubs and flowers at different parts of the platform. These are fast converting the platform into a thing of beauty, and are a distinct credit to the staff. It is up to the travelling public to assist these

²² *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 4th November, 1925, p. 1.

²³ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 25th November, 1925, p. 2.

efforts by taking proper care to avoid any encroachment upon the plots which might destroy the efforts at beautification.”²⁴

The station building, platform and Station Master’s residence was lit by electricity in 1928.²⁵

Chief Commissioner, James Fraser, visited the station in December, 1929, shortly before his retirement. When asked by the Mayor replace the existing building, Fraser was reported to have “flatly refused to build a new station”.²⁶ Apart from that issue, Narromine Municipal Council was favourably impressed by the work of the railway employees in maintaining garden plots at the station and saying that the “flower beds are a picture”.²⁷

GETTING A NEW STATION “IN PIECES”

Knowing full well in 1934 that the Railway Commissioners were not going to build a new structure at Narromine, the press made a cheeky remark about a repair at the station, saying that “Narromine is getting a new railway station in pieces. Last week the first bit was put in when the floor in the Station Master’s office was renewed.”²⁸

The local newspaper confirmed in the following week that “that we were getting a new railway station, and it was noted that it was going up in bits. The second section of the work was started early this week when some new planks were put into the good’s shed platform.”²⁹ While this reference clearly does not relate to the platform buildings, it does illustrate what the public often interprets as a “railway station”.

The relationship between the Narromine Municipal Council and the Railway Department soured significantly in 1939 when Council wanted the Department to share the funding for a weir on the Macquarie River in order to address a drought. Council called the Department “the biggest sponger in the State”.³⁰

THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR TWO

In February, 1941, work was completed at Narromine on the provision of a dedicated area for parcels business. As planned in 1882 and as built in 1883, parcels were retained either in the Station Master’s office or in the out of shed on the platform. The large increase in parcels business was a direct result of the establishment in July, 1940, of No. 5 Empire Air Training School, which continued operating until 1944. From February, 1945, a squadron of De Havilland Mosquito aircraft was stationed at Narromine airfield.

²⁴ *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 5th February, 1926, p. 8.

²⁵ *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 10th July, 1928, p. 3.

²⁶ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 20th December, 1929, p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 11th May, 1934, p. 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 18th May, 1924, p. 2.

³⁰ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 14th July, 1939, p. 5.

Part of the former ladies' waiting room, the space between the main building and the former lamp room as well as the lamp room at the Bourke end combined to form a parcels office. The booking office was relocated into the remaining part of the ladies' waiting room, which then occupied the space of the original ticket office on the Dubbo side of the entrance. A set of steps was provided at the rear to allow people undertaking parcels business direct access to the parcels counter.

Originally, the brick chimney in the lamp room was located at the rear of the space but at an unknown time the chimney was relocated to the Bourke end of the building.

THE PROMISED NEW STATION

The Commissioner was reported as saying in 1945 that the provision of a new station was long overdue but he explained that manpower shortages and wartime restrictions on building were against the project. However, he indicated that he would endeavour to have the request granted as soon as such work could be undertaken. He also gave a sympathetic hearing to the request for tar surfacing, and also promised to send a railway gardener along to confer with the Council on the scheme of planting ornamental trees along the approaches to the station outlined by the Mayor.³¹

The Chief Civil Engineer, Albert Fewtrell, on 21st February, 1946, approved a plan for a very large, brick replacement railway station at Narromine 141 feet long and of variable width containing 12 rooms. The roof was to be covered with Marseilles tiles. It was to have a 1 in 10 gradient ramped entry, similar to a building approved in 1940 and built at Kempsey. Modern features included steel framed windows, low-pitched roof, contoured seating in the waiting rooms, enamelled room tablets (i.e. signs) and the platform awning cantilevered from the steel roof joists. Detailed planning continued with the final plans being also approved by Fewtrell on 25th July, 1947.

Like another 26 station buildings for which plans were prepared and approved between 1945 and 1956, the new building destined for Narromine was never built. A replacement building was also approved for Nevertire but suffered the same fate.

It was reported in 1947 that "following announcements that a new railway station is to be erected at Narromine, tenders are now being called for the erection of the new buildings. The present station has long proved inadequate for the growing business of the district and requests for a new one have been made for the last 20 years. Plans are to be made available for inspection at the Narromine station shortly, as well as at the Engineer's Office at Dubbo, and in Sydney".³² As far as can be ascertained, tenders were never called in 1947. When the promised new station had

³¹ *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 26th May, 1945, p. 2.

³² *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 25th July, 1947, p. 1.

not arrived in 1954, the local council endeavoured to place pressure on the Railway Department but its endeavours also failed to produce a replacement building.³³

THE CURSE OF NARROMINE

In 1950, Commissioner Garside was at Grafton where the local council wanted a new station building. The Commissioner told the crowd that plans were being drawn up for Griffith, Leeton, Young and Narromine and were scheduled for commencement.³⁴ None of the stations Garside mentioned ever received a new building.

Bob McKillop has written that the Narromine Station Master, D. McIntosh, lobbied in 1954 the local council to renew railway station. McIntosh described the present station as “antiquated” and noted the plans for you station had been drawn up several years ago (in 1946 and 1947). Counsellor R. Mitchell was reported as saying that he felt the station represented old and ugly values and spoke the beauty of modern station designs. Council resolved to approach the Minister for Transport for a new railway station and was supported by the Chamber of Commerce over the following years. Nothing happened.³⁵

Was there any explanation why nothing was done to improve the platform buildings for over 50 years, despite promises by the Commissioner that the work would go ahead? Perhaps there was a hint of what was missing by a speech by the Rev. James Marshall in 1947 who commented that there was too much fighting and not enough unity in the town and that the railway line was the “symbol of what is wrong here.”³⁶ This lack of unity was described by Marshall as the “Curse of Narromine”. While it was not good for the people of Narromine to have a high degree of disunity, it possibly worked in the favour of the Railway Department as Commissioner Garside would have realised that any local pressure for a new station was diluted. There are several references in the Narromine press to a lack of initiative by the local government authority and other community leaders to press for improvements with various government authorities, apart from the Railway Department.

While local disunity may have been one factor to explain the absence of a replacement station building in the late 1940s, the similar treatment by the Railway Department to other country towns suggest that statewide factors were more relevant. These factors were:

- the ever-growing importance of the private motor car,
- priority to the improvement of local and regional roads, &
- the inadequate Government funding to the Department of Railways.

³³ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 1st October, 1954, p. 3

³⁴ *Daily Examiner*, 9th February, 1950, p. 3.

³⁵ R. F. McKillop “Narromine A Railway History”, Bulletin, January, 1997, P. 15.

³⁶ *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 28th March, 1947, p. 1.

ONE MODERATE AND THREE MINOR IMPROVEMENTS IN 80 YEARS

The station and the Station Master's residence were connected to the town sewerage system in 1961. For this work to be undertaken, new toilet facilities were provided for both men and women. The sewerage connection represented only the third time that minor improvements were made to the travelling public at Narromine station. The previous two occasions were in 1912 the platform was lengthened and in 1928 when electric lighting was installed. The only moderate improvement at Narromine station in 80 years was the creation of a dedicated parcels office in 1941 and the stimulus for that work was not the pressure from town leaders but from the sheer volume of business being conducted for the local Air Force Training School.

STAFF REMOVAL

Bob McKillop wrote that Narromine station was rationalised in 1990 with simplification of the yard and the installation of new signalling equipment which allowed the interlocking to be worked on an unattended basis. Colour light signals replaced the then existing semaphore signals at that time. The new facility was commissioned on 5th March, 1991.³⁷ The station became unattended in 1992.

THE PLATFORM

As planned in 1882, the platform was 264 feet long by 12 feet extending to 15 feet wide in front of the suite of building. Originally, the platform had a timber wall and in 1897 the platform was extended using old sleepers for the sub-structure and deck, which no doubt looked pretty dreadful. Both the 1882 platform and the 1897 extension, and an additional extension in 1902, were replaced by brickwork in 1912, when the platform was extended by approximately 100 feet by providing extensions at both ends. Before the work started, two or three carriages were outside the platform and loading/unloading involved an additional ten minutes.³⁸ There were 15 feet long ramps at each end and, when the platform was extended, these were retained in the longer format. The platform height was two feet nine inches above the head of the rail. This was the standard platform height for the time. After the 1912 extension, the platform was 450 feet long and has remained at the length.

As planned, there was to be a three-rail fence at the rear of platform but it seems to have been replaced by a picket fence painted white. By the 1950s, part of the picket fencing had been replaced by a two-rail fence. Today, there is no trace of the picket fencing.

INTERLOCKING ARRANGEMENTS

Veteran signalling and safeworking historian, Graham Harper, has provided the following comments on Narromine:

³⁷ R. F. McKillop, "Narromine – A Railway History", Bulletin, January, 1997, p.18.

³⁸ *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 21st June, 1912, p. 2.

“Up until 1921, the points were not interlocked in any way and Frame A on the platform only controlled signals, being the home and distant signals on each approach.

In 1921, the yard was interlocked and the keys for most of the ground frames were released from Frame A on the platform. Part of the interlocking exercise saw a 16-lever ground frame, named Frame E, located near the level crossing. It was twice the size of Frame A! Frame E operated or controlled all the points at the western end of the yard, but was not required for through main line working. The only signals it controlled were the starting signal to and the home signal from the Peak Hill line, and these were also controlled from Frame A. Frame A controlled through working to Trangie in the western direction and Minore eastern direction.

In March 1991, Frame A on the platform was taken out of use, as a new Frame A was provided on the site of Frame E. As it also had 16 levers, it could be suggested that the new Frame A was the old Frame E. The instructions for operating the new Frame A were so incredibly complex that to try to describe them would be unwise in a paper which may fall into the hands of minors. Suffice it to say that said instructions have been revised a number of times since.

A very similar arrangement existed until recently at Merrygoen, with the same outcome, and the same principles also applied at Binnaway.”³⁹

STATION RESTORATION

Bob McKillop stated in his extensive article on the Narromine railway station that restoration of the buildings was undertaken between 1993 and 1995.

Stuart Sharp

25th May, 2017

³⁹ Email from graham Harper, dated 24th May, 2017.

APPENDIX: STANDARD ROADSIDE DESIGN THREE ROOMS

YEAR APPROVED	LOCATION	BRICK OR TIMBER	ONE OR TWO PAVILIONS	CONTRACTOR	NOTES
3/1/1880	The Rock	Timber	One	J. McDonald et al for the one room structure – three room version built by William Dickson and Athol Johnson	Two versions (one & three rooms) – the other 6/5/1880 - SM's house in forecourt
3/1/1880	Uranquinty	Timber	Nil	(same one room example as The Rock)	Draftsman's date at corner of plan
12/7/1881	Whitton	Timber	Two	Alex Scouller	
12/7/1881	Willbriggie	Timber	Two	Charles Hardy	SM's house in forecourt
28/8/1881	Coolamon	Timber	One		Opening date - SM's house in forecourt
19/10/1881	Carrathool	Timber	Two	A. Johnson et al	
27/10/1881	Walcha Road	Brick	Two	Joseph Conlon	Transverse gable over 3' extended GWR but no porched entry
12/11/1881	Boggabri	Brick	Two	J. Conlon	
17/2/1882	Capertee	Brick	Two	J. Button et al	
28/6/1882	Narromine	Timber	Two	D. Roulston et al	SM's house in forecourt
27/6/1883	Clandulla	Brick	Two	A. Scouller	Contract date
17/10/1883	Dumaresq	Brick	Two	G. Michael et al	Contract date
11/1883	Girilambone	Brick	Two	J. Douglas	
1884	Blackheath	Timber	One		Toilet parallel to track
9/5/1884	Morundah	Timber	Two	George Bright	
27/6/1884	Byrock	Timber	One	A. Scouller	
9/7/1884	North Yathong	Timber	Two	Unknown	

YEAR APPROVED	LOCATION	BRICK OR TIMBER	ONE OR TWO PAVILIONS	CONTRACTOR	NOTES
10/9/1884	Lue	Brick	Two		Opening date
28/2/1885	Coolac	Timber	One	J. Miller	
15/5/1885	Deepwater	Brick	Two		Contract date
15/5/1885	Dundee	Brick	Two		Contract date
23/6/1885	Sutherland	Brick	Two	S. Smith	
6/10/1885	Clifton North – to be sorted	Timber	One/Two in photo	A. Scouller	Porched entry – centre transverse gable
2/12/1885	Bulli	Timber	One	A. Scouller	
13/5/1886	West Ryde	Brick	Two	W. Robinson	Contract date - Transverse gable at rear only
13/5/1886	Eastwood	Timber	Two	W. Robinson	Contract date
6/7/1886	Michelago	Brick	Two	J. Harris et al	
27/7/1886	Cockle Creek	Timber	One	J. Mc Donald	
31/7/1886	Carcoar	Brick	Two	A. Scouller	Transverse gable at rear only - Porched and stepped entry
4/8/1886	Cowra	Brick	Two	J. Gough	Porched entry
10/2/1887	Broadmeadow (plan name = Lambton)	Timber	One	John Mc Donald	Porched entry at rear – transverse gable only at rear
13/5/1887	Dapto	Timber	One	R. Spiers	
21/6/1887	Clifton South	Timber	One		Opening date
9/11/1887	Albion Park	Timber	One		Opening date
15/8/1887	Ourimbah	Timber	One		Opening date
1887	Gosford	Timber	Two		Opening date
9/11/1889	St. Leonards	Brick	Two	W. Prepaugh	Contract date
The following buildings approved by the Existing Lines Branch, except Yass Town	Yass Town plan drafted in 1889 but not approved until 1891			B.	
13/3/1890	Lithgow	Brick	Two on	C. Brown et	On an existing

YEAR APPROVED	LOCATION	BRICK OR TIMBER	ONE OR TWO PAVILIONS	CONTRACTOR	NOTES
			the 1890 plan – but a photo shows only one – the male toilet at the up end	al	line – it has the three ladies' closets in the part between the main building and the male toilet – the two pavilions are asymmetrically located – one 31' from the main building & the other over 50'
16/5/1890	Carlton (Nos. ½ platform)	Brick	Two		On an existing line - – it has the three ladies' closets in the part between the main building and the male toilet
20/6/1890	Campbelltown (Nos. 2/3 platform)	Brick	Two		Pavilions set at different distances – stepped entry
31/12/1890	Adamstown	Timber	Two on the plan but one is crossed out & a corrugated lamp room with hipped roof is used	Samuel Hughes, Robert Hays et al (rear entry & rear, full-length verandah without porch)	Female closets in the passage way - On an existing line – on the down platform
1890	Wentworth Falls	Brick	Two		Asymmetrical, as for Campbelltown and Adamstown - On an existing line
1891	Fairfield (No. 1 platform)	Brick	One (to be checked)		Date from line duplication - On an existing line
1/4/1891 (prepared)	Yass Town	Timber	One		Asymmetrical, as for Campbelltown

YEAR APPROVED	LOCATION	BRICK OR TIMBER	ONE OR TWO PAVILIONS	CONTRACTOR	NOTES
1889)					and Adamstown