

Rozelle Depot

The Rozelle Tram Depot was built on estuarine land off Rozelle Bay, on part of the Toxteth Estate.

The Toxteth Estate was a large area covering 95 acres of the western side of the suburb of Glebe and was owned by the Allen family until 1901. George Allen (b. 1800) came from England in 1816 and was the first person to train in Australia as a solicitor. He married Jane Bowden in 1823 and they had 14 children of whom 10 survived infancy.

George Allen commissioned the Australian architect, John Verge, to design a suitable residence. Toxteth House was built on the western side of the estate and survives to this day as part of the St. Scholastica's School. Interestingly, the main gates to this school were originally located in front of The Good Samaritan School (c.1880) in Pitt Street Sydney, and were removed when that building was demolished circa 1900 to make way for Central Station.

Steam trams ran to Balmain until the early 20th century when most lines were changed over to the new electric trams. With a Racecourse nearby and housing development in the area, this parcel of low lying land, compared to the rest of the Estate, provided an excellent Tram Depot site.

The first section of the Depot, on a parcel of land of 4½ acres, was opened on the 17th April 1904, with a capacity of 96 trams. Subsequent construction increased the capacity to 200 trams. This Depot, together with others at Newtown and Ultimo, supplied the vehicles for the Western and South Western Lines known as the Red Lines from their coloured destination signs. The Depot's size gave it the honour of being Sydney's second largest Tram Depot, only Dowling Street Depot at Kensington being larger. The Traffic Offices were located at the southern side of the Depot where there was a prize winning garden area including a substantial War Memorial. The bricks required for the structure were transported to the site from Botany by Steam Trams towing low sided open wagons. Technically, the Depot is located in Forest Lodge, the suburb of Rozelle being adjacent and to the North West.

Over the years, the fleet changed from the early Combination and Toastrack Cars to a fleet of later series Toastrack Cars until just after World War II when, early in 1951, three of the pre-war R class Corridor Trams were allocated to Rozelle Depot. On 19th November 1951, brand new R1 class car 1995 was delivered to Rozelle Depot, later followed by a further 18 new R1 Cars.

The Depot closed on 22nd November 1958 with the cessation of the George Street services and the following day, all trams were removed either to Randwick Workshops or to Dowling Street Depot at Kensington. The War Memorial was relocated to Leichhardt Bus Depot which opened at this time as part of the Bus Conversion.

After some industrial use, the Depot gradually fell into disrepair and for a period was home to a group of rescued tram bodies and a bus. Vandalism was rife and bad publicity ensued. Harold Park Paceway which was adjacent, and the depot site, were eventually acquired by

the Mirvac Group and redeveloped as a medium density housing and a shopping precinct. Late 2016 saw this development come to fruition and the results are now for all to see.

R1 1995 as mentioned above, has become a feature of one of the restaurants and is fitted out for dining. Delivered new to Rozelle Depot, R1 1995 was the eighth built of the post war R1 Class manufactured at Commonwealth Engineering at Granville. Based on the pre-war cars built by Clyde Engineering, the most notable differences were the smooth ceilings and the stainless steel handrails. R1 1995 spent its first seven years allocated to Rozelle Depot and then, along with many others, operated from Dowling Street Depot until the final closure of the system.

On the last day of the original Sydney Tramways, R1 1995 was one of the final four trams to perform the "last tram" journey. Although R1 1961 was intended to be the very last, a mix-up because of overcrowding caused R1 1995 to be the actual last tram to pass through the Workshop Gates and in to the history books.

After many years in the wilderness, R1 1995 eventually made it "home" to Rozelle only to suffer at the hands of the graffiti brigade. Thankfully, a happy ending saw it removed to Bendigo, Victoria where it was refurbished as the static display it is today. Interestingly, the bogies on which it is now sitting, are from a W6 car from Melbourne. It is very gratifying to see the attention to detail that has seen items such as the Depot Plates and the "Do not spit in the Car" sign refitted.

Harold Park was known as Lillie Bridge and then Epping Raceway until 21st March 1929 when it was renamed to avoid confusion with the suburb of Epping. The nearby junction of the Lilyfield and Balmain tram lines was known as Epping Junction right up to 1958. The name Harold Park is derived from the name of a famous horse "Childe Harold".

Compiled from "The Western Lines" by David Keenan, notes on Wikipedia regarding R1 1995 and an excellent on-line publication, "Harold Park, a History", published in 2016 by Mirvac. This book contains many details of the fascinating history of the area from the Traditional Owners through to more recent times. It can be accessed at <http://history.tramshedsharoldpark.com.au/#p=1>

David Taylor, September 2017.