

The Railway Luncheon Club

16 September 2009

MORTDALE

A most pleasant outing was enjoyed by all with 28 attending Mortdale Station's Luncheon Club gathering. The special guest was Keith Audet, who retired from the position of Manager of the Maintenance Depot at Mortdale in 1997. Keith engaged the audience in an excellent talk on the Maintenance Centre and kindly provided substantial handouts to those present. These notes supplemented those prepared by the Society. The Station Master, Illiyo, welcomed the group to his station. Members were impressed with his presentation and focus on self improvement to help CityRail. He projected a positive attitude and is a credit to the organisation.

John Oakes explained that the Illawarra line opened between Hurstville and Sutherland in 1885 and was duplicated between those two stations in 1890. He provided illustrations to explain the position of the line on the eastern side of the Mortdale Car Sheds and the subsequent relocation of the line to the western side in 1905. Mortdale station opened in 1897 as part of the expansion of residential development south of Hurstville.

The plan for the present platform building at Mortdale was drawn in 1920 for the new site and was built in 1922. The platform measured 520' in length to accommodate eight car electric trains. While the external design mirrors the pattern of the standard 'A' style of the period, the number/letter classification was not used in the planning process. The new station was one of the very last to feature brickwork for the platform faces and coping as the use of pre-cast concrete units became the norm in the 1920s. The design reflects broadly the influence of the Federation period and had been in use since 1892. By 1920, examples of that style had been built for nearly 30 years and the design continued to be used until 1932. Progressively through the 40 years of design life, the examples received less and less external ornamentation. The structure at Mortdale featured a moulded 'string' course on all external walls and the building was one of the last examples to retain this treatment. However, the square openings to doors and windows feature no chamfering or other ornamentation as was applied to earlier buildings, such as Bankstown in 1909. Six-pane coloured glass exists above the doors and nine coloured panes in two sashes are evident in the windows. The brickwork was originally tuck-pointed but this feature was not applied universally after 1920. The moulded scrolling under the windows is another feature that would soon disappear during the 1920s.

The year 1920 was a time when concrete was more widely used for all sorts of buildings in NSW. However, its use for platform buildings and residences in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong was banned as

it was considered an inferior product. However, it was discretely used at Mortdale in several ways. Firstly, it was applied as a foundation for the external brick walls using two parallel lengths of old 80lb rails for re-enforcement. Concrete was also used to construct the 16 corbels on which the platform canopy 'standard brackets' rest and also for the vertical supports for the corbels. Concrete was also used for the lintels over door and window openings. The most interesting use of concrete was for panels above and below the windows in the signal box. These were poured in situ. This use of large concrete panels for the signal box was relatively rare. Lawson, Linden and Hawkesbury River are other stations that possess this feature. The signal box also had a concrete floor, as did the male and female toilets, the cleaner's passage between them and the hearths for the three fireplaces.

The signal box was that part of the structure controlled by the Signals and Telegraph Branch. To emphasise the disdain by the then Per Way Branch, the signal box was referred to as the 'lever room' on the plan. The only space in the building not to be coated with paint or lime wash was the signal box. The opening in the platform face for the point rodding and signal wires was known officially as a 'tunnel' and a concrete lintel was also used above the tunnel to support the platform. The platform level signal box was operational only between 1922 and 1927, at which time a new elevated power box was opening to control trains to and from the electric car sheds.

Members were disappointed to learn that the 'penny-in-the-slot' toilets had been replaced by two unisex facilities, one on each side. Happenings included the passing at a slow pace of a large self-propelled track analysis vehicle and an Oscar train running wrong road through the Down platform and on to the Up main via the crossover at the Up end of the platform. Mortdale is thought to be the first station on the system to possess a dedicated exclusive staff toilet in 1949.

In 2007, Easy Access lifts were provided at the station and virtually all of the previously built canopies over the steps and on the platform were replaced with what exists today at a construction cost of \$3.5 million. At that time, the shop in the main building on the platform was closed and the area converted into a station master's office.

Members also inspected the station master's residence in Railway Street, built to a design introduced by George Cowdery in 1884.

The October outing will be at Fairfield Station at 11am sharp.

Report by Stuart Sharp & images by David Wynter

Right: Station Master Illiyo.
Below: One of two facing points in Down main line leading to the car sheds.



Stuart Sharp

