

# OTFORD RAILWAY STATION

## THE HISTORY OF A MYSTERY

### ILLAWARRA POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

The little station that exists today at Otford is the lead into an historical narrative that indicates a past and present involving some of the most unusual occurrences on the NSW rail system. Skeptics may not believe that there could be any historical mystery, merely missing evidence to explain phenomenon. For those people, let us start of this paper by the words of noted railway writer, C. C. Singleton, that Otford has several unusual features.<sup>1</sup>

The station and general locality have been an important place for those people interested in railways. The index of railway periodicals, *Magindex*, has 60 entries for Otford. The most comprehensive, published article is by Bob Booth, entitled 'Byways of Steam: Otford'.<sup>2</sup> The abandoned single-line tunnel, the ventilating equipment, the residences, the dams and the prettiness of the station before 1986 have attracted many people to visit the place.

The line to Wollongong was the first railway in NSW to be designed for both urban and regional purposes. From Redfern to Hurstville, the NSW Railways engaged directly with urban land speculators to subdivide the area for suburban allotments. Virtually all stations received First Class buildings, such as Sydenham and Arncliffe, which survive today. The line was extended southward specifically to develop the coal mines in which several government members of parliament held substantial financial interests.

There was very sparse urban development beyond Hurstville. Like all lines since the opening of the NSW Railways, the villages, towns and localities to be served by the railway line were structured into four tiers. There were no top-category First Class buildings south of Hurstville and only two locations received what the NSW Railways designers called Second Class buildings, which formed the second group. The third most important category received what became known as the "standard wayside station". In this group were Sutherland, Clifton and Bulli. All the other stations, including Otford, received the lowest status buildings, all of timber construction. Within this fourth level, village status was reflected in the size of structures, the slightly more important places receiving a building with a Booking Office.

Otford was at the bottom of the status hierarchy when the line was being planned. The station remained at the bottom of the hierarchy all its life, as reflected by the gradual addition of small buildings as passenger demand rose. There was never any attempt to upgrade the buildings, even when duplication arrived from the north in 1915. Every other station between Waterfall and Wollongong, except North Wollongong, received some form of upgrade when track duplication occurred but Otford was unlucky to totally miss out. Some unusual things happened to Otford but

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<sup>1</sup> C.C. Singleton, "The Illawarra Line", *Bulletin*, Vol. 101, March 1946, p. 37

<sup>2</sup> R.K. Booth, "Byways of Steam: Otford", *Roundhouse*, Vol. 20. No. 2, April 1983, pp. 4---19.

Otford was unlucky to totally miss out. Some unusual things happened at Otford but these may have happened because of its geographical isolation where the NSW Railways could play around with new or different ideas. After all, apart from two of the seven railway residences, there is no urban development within sight and within almost one kilometre of the station.

The railway line passed through the site of Otford in 1888 and the station at Otford opened with the line opening. The station was and is located on a ten chain radius curve and Singleton summarized the railwayscape when he wrote that the “station is in a confined and picturesque location”.<sup>3</sup> As Life Member, Bob Taaffe, indicates further in this document, the NSW Railways viewed Otford as a cold location.

Otford village was and is a small place. As far as the NSW Railways is concerned, the station’s existence seems related to operational requirements associated initially with the Otford tunnel. Goods facilities were minimal. While Singleton prepared a plan showing a goods siding using one of the two 1892 storage sidings, there was no official reference in the official signaling diagrams until 1941.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, there was no goods shed, no crane, no weighbridge and no loading bank. The absence of these facilities is an indicator that the NSW Railways did not envisage any great financial return from the provision of a general goods siding. Enlargement of the Parcels Room at a station is an indicator of increasing business at a station. There was no such enlargement at Otford.

It is noteworthy to digress slightly to mention that no station between Waterfall and Austinmer had and have both straight main line platforms upon duplication. As a further aside, this lack of flat land goes a long way to explaining why the NSW Railways chose Thirroul as the new steam depot to replace Waterfall in 1917.<sup>5</sup> A considerable amount of hillside had to be removed to locate the station on the ten chain curve at Otford. The physical problems did not allow the platforms to be paralleled and still today the two platforms at Otford are offset.

## 1888 – THE STATION OPENING

The first station building at Otford, probably dating from 1888 or 1890, was a timber structure 20 feet long and 10 feet wide. It was located on the up platform and survived to 1986. It was sheeted externally with nine-inch wide, horizontal weatherboards. Such wide boards were typical of the 1880s and their horizontal rather than vertical application was standard NSW Railway practice for building exteriors. The building consisted of a traditional booking office and a not so traditional “Post Office, Lamps Room etc”. Even the booking office was unusual in that there was no provision for a ticket window: the sale of tickets seemed to be over a counter inside the office. A metal stove with a flue through the end wall

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<sup>3</sup> C. C. Singleton, *Railway History in Illawarra*, Wollongong, Illawarra Historical Society, 1969, p. 30

<sup>4</sup> Singleton, op. cit., pp. 37 and 38

<sup>5</sup> Dr Joseph Davis, local historian of Thirroul, tells us that there is another possible explanation why Thirroul was chosen as the locomotive depot. He points out that the Premier at the time, William Holman, owned a holiday home at Thirroul and visited it frequently.

provided heating. Internal headroom was 10 feet six inches, which was normal. There was no awning over the platform. The absence of an awning was typical of the time and also occurred at Austinmer, Thirroul, Corrimal, Bombo and Shellharbour. It was an indicator of departmental financial poverty at the time, combined with very low status of the locale to be served by the station.

Another bizarre feature of the building at Otford was the provision of a water tank at the rear of the building, rather than the normal end of the structure. At the rear, the Otford water tank could only accept rainwater from one half of the roof. It must be remembered that, up until 1886, all water tanks at stations were underground. From that time, aboveground water tanks started to appear, though underground tanks were still used at some locations until 1891. It seems that, at Otford, the NSW Railways placed the tank at the rear of the structure because the designer considered it to be an eyesore. Clearly, he was of the Old School.<sup>6</sup>

In 1889, the first of seven residences was built not far from the station at 42 Lady Carrington Road for the Station Officers. It was located adjacent to the up man and a photograph of it appears in M. Carter, *Modern Rail Portfolios – No. 1 NSW*, Wetland, Greeley Publications, 1994, page 42. The structure survives. George Cowdery approved the brick residence in the last year of his service before Chief Commissioner Eddy dismissed him. Its distinguishing design feature was the asymmetrical front of the residence, with a front verandah extending only halfway across the building. Not far in geography and time, a second residence was erected, this time for the Pumper at 40 Lady Carrington Road. His small, brick structure was approved by Cowdery's replacement, James Angus, in 1890. It also survives. Its distinguishing feature is the gabled roof and verandah across the full width of the structure. This design was much more widely used on the NSW Railways after 1890 and, in fact, was adopted as the standard design for erection of residences on new lines. Thus, this residence at Otford is an important early example of official NSW railway residences.

In 1890, two buildings were added to the station. The first structure was a Lamp Room. James Angus approved this, as Engineer-in-Chief for Existing Lines. It was a lovely structure for such a little, functional building. Although the walls were sheeted externally with corrugated iron, it had a nice hipped roof atopped by a timber finial. The building was one of a number of standard structures that Angus had introduced in his first year in office.

The second building to be added in 1890 was the first toilet at the station, this being a pretty cheap affair measuring 12 feet by 8 feet. The external walls were sheeted with corrugated iron and there was a scallion roof only over the single closet, which measured the standard size for males, being five feet long and three feet wide. The urinal could accommodate three men and each was allocated very generous arm movement room of two feet six inches, being 25% over the standard NSW Railway allocated width of two feet for urinal stalls.

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<sup>6</sup> There have never been any women involved in the approval of NSW Railway buildings. Hence, the use of the male pronoun is grammatically correct.

## 1890 - TWO PLATFORMS AND UP AND DOWN TRAIN WORKING

In 1890, Otford station started to increase in size to accommodate the extra track through the station. In that year a crossing loop was added and a second platform was provided in 1891. The NSW Railways proposed to add two additional rooms and two rooms 18 feet long were added to the existing building, making the total length 39 feet. These two additional rooms were labelled "Ladies' Waiting Room" and "Ladies' Lavatory and Closet".<sup>7</sup> Heating again was by means of a metal stove, but this time the departmental policy on the location of such facilities was starting to change and the new stove was in the corner of the Room with a metal flue through the rear wall.

At the same time, it appears that a narrow awning was to be built along the entire length of the building supported by small but ornate cast iron brackets. This feature was typical of platform buildings of 1891 and 1892. The addition was not made. Instead, the NSW Railways decided to add a second, detached building to the existing up platform to act as accommodation for ladies.

The second building on the up platform was to a completely different design. The structure was timber but had a single-pitched roof rather than the double-pitched, gabled roof. This structure brought a modern look to Otford as the roof style had only been introduced in 1889.

Past President Graham Harper indicates that Otford was worked as a down and up main crossing loop from 1890 to duplication in 1915. That is, the trains kept to the left through the station. He says that Otford was an unusual, possibly unique, arrangement of a down and up main loop, in that the points at one end or the other end of the loop would be out of sight of the main interlocking frame, wherever the Railways positioned the frame. Therefore, the points at one end were controlled from the main frame (at the Sydney end) and, at the other end, the points were controlled from a subsidiary frame. This is the only down and up main loop at which Graham can recall this arrangement having been in use. This was the first installation of the interlocking of signals and points at Otford and was prompted by the addition of the main and loop for train working and the runaway siding for up trains.

Graham Harper continues: "While up trains could be working through from the main frame, it was necessary for the signalman to take a key from the main frame to the subsidiary frame to set the road out towards Coal Cliff for each and every down train. Both frames were on the up platform – the main frame towards the Sydney end and the subsidiary frame towards the Coal Cliff end. They were as close as possible together while each was still in sight of the points controlled from it." A diagram showing the arrangement appears in C. C. Singleton's article, *The Helensburgh Deviation*, in the May 1965 *Bulletin*, page 100. A runaway siding was used in case an up train starting from Otford broke away.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Closet means toilet cubicle with a door and is a word used to describe both female and male facilities.

"Lavatory" covers the whole space, including the closet and the washbasin and was a word restricted only to ladies' toilets.

Down and up loops had bit of a peak in 1890. Bob Taaffe considers their introduction was the policy of the newly appointed Chief Commissioner, E. M. G. Eddy. A number of conventionally signalled crossing loops were converted to the up and down format around this time, notably a number of stations between Picton and Mittagong, as well as Stanwell Park ten years later. Graham concludes that “post duplication, Otford was unusual in that it had a head-in-back-out up refuge siding. Others of this type were at Fish River and Spring Hill.”

The increase in rail traffic required the interlocking to be staffed by a second shift. In 1896, a timber residence was built for the Night Officer. It was built on the corner of Otford Road and Lady Carrington Road, being 2 Lady Carrington Road. Viewing the present structure on this site, it appears that the current house is not the 1896 building. Thomas Firth, who took over from James Angus as Engineer-in-Chief of Existing Lines, approved this third residence.

## 1906 STATION GROWTH

In 1906, a fifth building appeared on the up platform additional to the 1888 Booking Office, the 1890 Lamp Room, the 1890 Gent’s toilet, and the 1891 Ladies’ Waiting Room and Lavatory. The NSW Railways decided to turn the 1888 Booking Office into an Out of Room and built a new, small timber Booking Office. It was free-standing and positioned immediately on the up side of the 1888 building. An unusual aspect of the structure added to the already healthy history of unusual structures at Otford.

The new Booking Office measured 16 feet by 12 feet with the ticket window facing the tracks. It had a hipped roof, which was covered by terracotta tiles. There was an awning over the ticket window, which was formed by the extension of the roof rafters. The tiles were also used on the awning at the front. It is an understatement to say that terracotta roofing tiles were rare on the Illawarra line.<sup>8</sup> A photograph showing the tiles on the roof of the box is in Bob Taaffe, “Signal Boxes of the Illawarra Line” in *Byways of Steam 14*, Maryville, Eveleigh Press, 1998, page 102. Otford was the first station on the Illawarra line to receive such a roof covering and it is possible that they were used as part of a plan of an attempt to move away from the standard corrugated iron roof. The extant tram shed and office at Sutherland received asbestos cement “slates” in 1911 and this was the first such use of that roofing product.

Duplication of the Illawarra line reached Otford from Helensburgh in 1915. In order to operate the various points and signals, a timber signal box was erected adjacent to the up side of the 1906 Booking Office. The external walls were sheeted with horizontal weatherboards and the scallion roof matched that of the 1891 Ladies’ Waiting Room, though the pitch of the roof was lower, a trend that had been progress for the previous decade. The signal box and the Booking Office were connected by a narrow passage to facilitate the movement of the Station Officer

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<sup>8</sup> It must be remembered that up goods trains were split before entering the old Otford tunnel and were re-amalgamated at Otford.

between structures. This was a feature at a few other NSW railway stations. For the first time since interlocking in 1890, the signals and points were operated from a single, central signal box rather than two separate interlocking frames.

There were two other buildings on the up platform until the early 1970s. At the extreme down end was the 1890 Lamp Room and at the extreme up end was the 1890 men's toilet. Both featured timber stud walls, which were sheeted with corrugated iron. In the 1970s, the public toilets were upgraded and relocated to the 1891 building. There are two photographs in F. Larkin (Ed.), *Steam on the Illawarra*, Burwood, 1979, NSW RTM, no page, which show the five buildings on the up platform.

The mystery and interest at Otford also extends to the interlocking frame. Bob Taaffe writes that it is likely that, at the time of the initial interlocking of points and signals in 1890, the then main interlocking frame, known officially as Frame A, would have been an open air affair. Frame "B", which operated the opposite end of the loop would almost certainly have not had a building. If there had been a building for Frame A, then it might have been re-used in 1915.

Bob indicates that the Otford signal box was shown on an official drawing as possibly having been relocated from Carrick on the Main South. Of substantial interest was the departmental decision to provide internal wall lining boards for its erection at Otford.<sup>9</sup> He writes that this is interesting as the building was probably provided at Carrick for the new Crossing loop, which opened there in February 1906. When Wrangell was opened in March 1910, the signal box at Carrick was closed. The closure of Carrick signal box would have been in connection with the duplication works for the Main South. Then, either Carrick signal box was left in situ to see if there was a further need for it or it was returned to the workshops depot until required. The evidence is strongly towards its retention at Carrick for some time. The Signal Engineer, C. B. Byles, had issued a special instruction about 1915 that the Carrick signal box be left in position.

Could the Carrick signal box have been moved to Otford? Certainly, it was possible and the NSW Railways did move buildings frequently, even relocating the disused brick building at Old Glenbrook in 1916 to act as the present platform building at Artarmon. Saving money was always an important objective for the NSW Railways up to 1989. Bob Taaffe correctly points out that, with specific Parliamentary funding for the Illawarra duplication works, Byles would have had access to special additional sources of capital funds to either build a new structure or relocate the signal box at Carrick. Bob says there is no confirmatory evidence to know whether the 1915 interlocking frame at Otford was relocated for its new Otford home, and thus recycled, or whether a new frame was built and installed at Otford. If a new box was provided, then it probably came with a new frame. Bob concludes that it is an interesting insight to departmental thinking that senior railway staff thought that Otford had a greater need for internal wall lining than

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<sup>9</sup> The only other Illawarra line stations to have tiled roofs were at Sutherland in 1939 and Gerringong in 1942.

<sup>10</sup> Lining boards were frequently omitted from internal walls of platform buildings in the 1890-1920 period as a cost-cutting measure.

Carrick, considering the Illawarra winter climate and minimal sunshine at Otford.

While the up platform at Otford featured most of the buildings, the down platform was also of interest. The official records state that a male toilet was provided in 1898 but its location is unknown. It would have had to be towards the up end as an elevated water tank was located on the down end. There was a timber building on the down platform, initially with an awningless gabled roof. It was a Waiting Room.<sup>11</sup> Buildings without awnings were erected in two time periods, either the late 1880s or during World War I. It could be that it was erected in the latter period as protection might have been provided for workers waiting for trains to take them to the Otford tunnel deviation works.<sup>12</sup> At some later stage between 1964 and 1980, the timber weather boards on the external walls were replaced with corrugated iron sheets.<sup>13</sup> Behind the down platform, the side of the hill was cleared of natural vegetation and cultivated with ornamental plants and shrubs. Otford station won third prize in the Illawarra region garden competition in 1924 and a photo appeared in *The Staff* of 22/4/1924, page iii.

Life Member John Oakes has written the now standard railway text on the Illawarra line to Coal Cliff.<sup>14</sup> John, being a retired geography teacher, explains that the station is located in the Hacking River Valley. Water was pumped directly from the river for steam locomotives from at least 1890 when the Pumper's house was built. It seems that the water supply from the river failed in 1908 as ten water gins were used to provide a temporary water supply. In John's book are photographs of the 20,000 gallon elevated tank/s and the dam walls, the first built in 1910 and the second higher brick wall in 1926.<sup>15</sup> The dam walls and the concrete base for the water supply survive. The brick piers that supported the elevated tank are also extant and have been adapted to support a walking path from the down platform that leads to *The Cliff Track* to Gary Beach. A photograph of the path appears

In 1908, the NSW Railways acted to improve the ventilation of the Otford tunnel. It established a large ventilation plant, which involved a stationary steam engine to operate the fan mechanism. This was labour intensive and the Railways built four additional residences at Otford for the staff working on the ventilation plant. Two semi-detached buildings were built and these survive at Nos. 1, 3, 5 and 7 Lady Carrington Road. Waterfall and Otford were the only locations on the Illawarra line to feature semi-detached residences, which were generally a rarity on the NSW Railways.

At the outbreak of World War I, the NSW Railways was the largest employer at Otford. It is of no surprise to learn that the NSW Railways planned and probably paid for and built a local public school in September 1914. It comprised a single classroom. A funny thing is that the NSW Railways did not plan its erection in a nearby "Reserve for Public School" but instead nominated Railway-owned land.

<sup>11</sup> A photograph is in Booth, op. cit., p. 5

<sup>12</sup> A photograph showing the water tank was published in *The Staff*, 22/6/1925, p. ii

<sup>13</sup> The reference in S. Sharp, Illawarra Station — a Profile, *Railway Digest*, Vol. 23 No. 5, May, 1985, p. 128 to a scallion-roofed structure in 1985 is incorrect.

<sup>14</sup> J. Oakes, *Sydney's Forgotten Illawarra Railways*, Redfern, ARHS, 2003

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 53 and 54. At one time, there were two tanks. See Booth, op. cit., pp. 5 and 6 for photographs.

## POST 1918 – THE YEARS OF STABILITY

At the end of World War I, the structures listed in the Table below were located on the Up platform.

**TABLE: DETAILS OF THE UP PLATFORM BUILDINGS IN 1918**

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION	SIZE (FEET)	ORIGINAL FUNCTION	SUBSEQUENT FUNCTION	POSITION ON THE UP PLATFORM FROM THE SYDNEY END	DATE OF DEMOLITION
1888	22 x 10	Booking office	Combined Parcels & Out of Room	4	1986
1890	12 x 8	Gent's toilet		1	Between 1977 & 1980
1890	6 x 8	Lamp Room		6	Between 1980 & 1985
1891	20 x 8	Ladies' Waiting Room and Lavatory	Male and female toilets	5	1986
1906	12 x 16	Booking office		3	1986
1915	16 x 12	Signal box		2	1985

From the time of World War I until electrification in 1986, no major changes were made to the buildings. Circle and bar nameboards were added in the 1920s as part of the system wide programme to rejuvenate the appearance of stations. One example of the Otford circle and bar nameboard is preserved at the Illawarra Light Rail Museum site at Albion Park. The station was connected to the electricity supply in 1951 and the residences were connected a decade later. In 1925, the wall of the up platform was renewed from timber to pre-cast concrete units. The first application of the pre-cast concrete panel platform wall was at Stanwell Park when the deviation opened in 1920. It was not until the lapse of another five years before the next installation occurred. Coniston and Croon also received such a platform wall in 1925, along with Otford, and it is thought that these were the only four stations on the Illawarra line to receive concrete unit walls south of Sutherland.<sup>16</sup> In 1944, the down platform timber wall was replaced. The use of concrete units for platform walls had stopped in 1931, but the Department of Railways was convinced that concrete walls had obvious advantages. At Otford, the prevailing design policy

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<sup>16</sup> In 1925, Croon was only a milk stage and was not a public platform until 1938



was applied. A frame of old rails was used and concrete was poured in situ using temporary formwork. The marks of the formwork are obvious on the down platform wall. Work started in 1983 on the planning for electrification. The 1925 up platform wall was replaced by the present wall in 1985. The majority of platforms on the Illawarra line that were replaced by electrification received an open wall style using double “tee” or circular supports. This was not the case at Otford, where a solid platform wall was applied.

There was only one non-timber framed building at Otford station. This was a small, pre-cast relay hut that was located behind the signal box. These pre-cast concrete units were not like those used for buildings or platform walls. They were specially made by the Signals and Telegraph Branch for relay huts. They were large and quite attractive, the panels each having been recessed. The date of the installation is unknown but it is known that similar units were used on a large scale on the East Hills branch, which was opened in 1931.

## **1985/86 – SIGNAL BOX CLOSURE AND ELECTRIFICATION**

The signal box at Otford was closed on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1985. Bob Taaffe says that, initially, remote control of the signals was performed by the existing local panel at Helensburgh but on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1986, that control was transferred to Wollongong Control Centre. Life Member Peter Neve has brought attention to the preservation of the signal box at the museum site of the Illawarra Light Railway Society at Albion Park. Peter indicates that the signal box and its interlocking frame are in operation. Up to the 1970s and possibly a bit later, staff at the station had a keen interest in keeping the station pleasant by the use of a considerable number of plants and shrubs, both in pots and the ground. It sent a message to passengers in trains passing through the station that Otford was a peaceful and pleasant place.

The appearance of Otford station took on a physical harshness with line electrification. By early 1985, bold white concrete reflected unpleasantly in the new up platform and footbridge. However, even with electrification in 1986, the official facilities at Otford retained a strangeness that had first appeared in 1888. Almost everything that was planned in 1985 did not occur. The station was staffed 24 hours a day until the signal box was closed in 1985. The early planning identified the station as being unstaffed after electrification. Only small waiting sheds were to be provided on both platforms. Some of the timber buildings on the up platform, having been placed on a list of important heritage structures by the National Trust, were to be retained. None of these plans came to fruition. Even the fencing at the rear of the up platform was unusual. It seems to have been the only example of a one rail, timber fence painted white. With forthcoming electrification, the fence was removed. The standard State Rail Weldmesh fence was in position by March 1985. The fence was unpainted and finished in its galvanized coating. It would have a short life following the creation of CityRail in 1989. State Rail in 1986 issued a press release which now suggested that Otford had a special status. The SRA planned to

“test the resilience of special glazed bricks to vandalism”<sup>17</sup>. Two locations were chosen – a new toilet block at Oak Flats and the present building at Otford. It announced that the bricks would be supplied by Austral Brickworks and that the building at Otford would “consist of a Booking Office and Waiting Room as well as toilet facilities”. State Rail commented that the Otford building on the up platform was one of the final works to be carried out in the Illawarra electrification programme. Work was scheduled to start after 1<sup>st</sup> July 1986, some five months after electrification had opened. What resulted is a pleasant looking structure, which looks unusual when seen from the footbridge. It has one unusual feature that keeps the history of mystery alive at Otford. It has awnings on all four sides. It was and is one of only two platform buildings on the NSW railways to feature awnings on all sides. The other example is the off-platform Booking Office built at Stanwell Park, also in 1986. The two buildings have an almost identical appearance.

Access between the lines for passengers was easy, though unsafe, until the start of electrification. From 1892 to 1986, passengers using the down platform had to walk along a timber path in front of the water tank and often were attacked by drips of locomotive water from the jib attached to the tank. They crossed the two tracks at grade. There was a clear view of down trains but, because the view of up trains was obstructed, a warning bell advised people of an approaching up train. In addition, there was staff to assist passengers 24 hours a day every day. These arrangements made access to the down platform for people in wheelchairs and pushing strollers theoretically possible. However, this easy access was terminated in 1983 when the present concrete beam footbridge was planned and built prior to electrification in 1986. Life Member Peter Neve indicates that, when Lilyvale station was closed in late December 1983, State Rail proposed relocating the footbridge from Lilyvale to Otford but it did not survive the journey.

Separate male and female toilets were provided and these were connected to a septic tank. This arrangement continues today though, as the toilets are locked at all times, it is unlikely that connection of the station to any village sewerage system will occur. Demolition of the platform building is more likely to occur.

As part of the electrification project, the station nameboards were removed. In their place, the then State Rail standard tri-level signs were applied at the ends of the platforms that informed travellers on the train what station they were entering and the name of the next station. These were still in existence in 1996. In addition, small nameboards were attached to the lamp posts and they expressed the station name in white letters against a dark blue background. The distinguishing design feature was the use of rounded corners for the nameboards. A line showing the Illawarra line colour was positioned under the name. These signs had a short life and were replaced after 1996 by the present CityRail signs, which reversed the colours of the letters and background and insisted on using unappealing, square corners for the signs. The tri-level signs were not part of CityRail’s signage policy and were removed.

Apart from the elimination of the platform gardens and the lovely grouping of timber buildings, the station lost another key identifier of its heritage with the

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<sup>17</sup> SRA News Release titled, *State Rail Tests Anti-Vandal Bricks*, No. SRA 95/1986, 15/5/1986

removal of the cast iron and timber platform seats which had been sitting on the platform since 1891. However, in yet another puzzle and mystery, State Rail provided a most unusual atypical seat in 1986 at the up end of the brick building,

## **POST 1989 – THE CITYRAIL PERIOD**

Thankfully, CityRail has implemented its system-wide policy of providing ramps to facilitate the platform/train interface. One such ramp is located on the down platform at Otford in fulfillment of the policy. However, it is extremely doubtful whether the ramp has ever been used as both tracks are super-elevated and there is both a large vertical and horizontal gap to overcome. The next problem for people in wheelchairs is how to gain access from the down to the up side without the implementation of the CityRail *Easy Access* policy to provide lifts, following the removal of the former at grade, easy inter-platform access. Life Member Tony Bailey exposes yet another problem for people in wheelchairs at Otford. Having built a special brick building for staff on the up platform, despite an initial desire to avoid allocating staff, the station is now unattended, at least for a considerable time. Without any local staff supervision, disabled people have to rely on the hope that the ramps in the blue boxes are actually in those boxes and are actually operable, having not been stolen or vandalized in such a “picturesque” but vulnerable location. CityRail’s website indicates that Otford is staffed but it fails to mention that the station is staffed only from 6.00 am to 9.30 am.

There are a couple of clues that there was a strong, local community and political influence in the 1980s and 1990s that never previously existed at Otford and does not now exist. The first evidence is the erection of the special brick building on the up platform in 1986 with the office accommodation for the staff. The second is the colour of the pool-style fencing at the rear of the up platform that was added in the early 1990s. It is policy to erect white, loop-top fencing at all stations. However, CityRail will change the colour to green if there is substantial and sustained local community pressure. The green coloured fencing at Otford station indicates the one-time short-time presence of such local power, at least in relation to respect to the people who used the station and to the nearby natural landscape. The fact that the station is largely unattended indicates that the power of the local community to influence CityRail has largely disappeared.

*It would not have been possible to write these notes without the help of Tony Bailey, Dr Joseph Davis, Graham Harper, Ian Hill, Gary Hughes, Peter Neve, John Oakes and Dr. Bob Taaffe. Thank you very much to these people.*

Stuart Sharp 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2012

A black and white photograph of a railway station in a mountainous area. The tracks curve through the landscape, flanked by steep, wooded hills. A small wooden building is visible on the left, and a larger station building is on the right. A person stands near the tracks in the center.

[illegible]

## Calendar of Events

3/10/1888	Waterfall to South Clifton opened as a single track. No intermediate crossing loops. Only intermediate platform was at Otford, located on the down side, 60m x 2.7 m – no building originally provided.
17/1/1890	Ordinary Staff and Ticket (safeworking) replaced by Electric Train Tablet.
11/3/1890	Crossing loop provided at Otford; tablet instruments located in SM's office. Additional platform added.
18/4/1890	Interlocking added.
28/8/1890	Provision of 90 kl water tank (JHF).
18/2/1891	Toilet provided (JHF).
11/1/1892	Yard rearranged for up and down working.
29/12/1898	Down platform extended, toilets transferred from Bombo (JHF).
12/10/1901	Dam proposed, then cancelled.
22/11/1901	Crossing loop provided at Cawley (between Waterfall and Helensburgh).
25/12/1901	Crossing loop provided at Stanwell Park.
23/9/1904	Report to Chief Commissioner of proposed 3 <sup>rd</sup> rail electrification from Stanwell Park to Waterfall (truncated to Otford). See <i>The Railway News</i> , June 1996.
20/2/1908	Water supply failure – 10 wagons with 1.8 kl tanks (JHF).
1908 (WN 32 p.17)	Temporary siding (140 yards long) laid in off No. 1 Siding for tunnel ventilation (August 1908).
14/9/1908	Tablet working replaced by Electric Train Staff, Otford to Stanwell Park (WN 37/1908, page 19).
4/8/1909	Tablet working replaced by Electric Train Staff, Metropolitan Colliery Junction to Otford (WN 32/1909, page 29).
Oct. 1910.	Residences constructed for employees operating Otford tunnel ventilating equipment (JHF).
1914	Track diagram shows two goods sidings, up side down end, plus siding serving tunnel fan. The first mention of a goods siding.
30/5/1915	Double track deviation extended from Helensburgh to Otford.
2/8/1920	Up track of deviation from Coal Cliff to Otford brought into use for goods trains (JHF)
10/10/1920	Double track deviation extended from Otford to Coal Cliff.
5/3/1921	Up and down refuge sidings provided at Sydney end of station.
1925	Up platform extended and up water column relocated & changed from 8" to 12".



July 1926	Dam capacity increased (JHF).
20/7/1956	Goods train collided with the rear of a stationary stock trains; three employees injured; some cattle killed. Engine 3264 became the first of its class to be withdrawn (JHF).
1960s	Disused Otford tunnel leased for mushroom cultivation. Goods siding received a truck of hay fortnightly for mushroom cultivation.
14/10/1965	Last regular steam-hauled south coast passenger service, a local from Sydney to Otford, operated. Engine 3233, load LUB 36 (8/200 tons).
June 1968	Watering facilities removed (JHF).
7/11/1981	Facing emergency crossover installed (WN 44/1981, page 21).
9/1/1984	Down Refuge Siding removed. Up Refuge Siding converted to ground frame operation (WN 2/1984, page 31).
1984	Lady Carrington Road Level Crossing at 52.304 km closed (WN 24, page 10).
1984	Platforms shortened: Down 160m to 157m; Up 163m to 159m.
13 <sup>th</sup> & 14 <sup>th</sup> April 1985	Conversion of points and signals at Otford and Metropolitan Colliery Junction to power operation, replacing Standard Block Telegraph Working. Remote controlled from Helensburgh. Signal box closed. Up Refuge Siding renamed Per Way Siding. Goods Siding renamed Up Siding. Controlled by new ground frames (C & B). (WN 12).
1985	Up platform length changed from 159m to 192m). (WN 14, page 7).
1985	Delete reference to pedestrian crossing at 52.746 km (WN 14, page 10).
Aug 1985	South Coast electrification extended from Helensburgh through Otford to Coalcliff.

See also:

“Roundhouse” NSW Rail Transport Museum, April 1983

“Station & Tracks Vol. 11. Main Suburban & Branches – Illawarra & Branches. Compiled by John Forsyth, Archives Section, 1988.

The Railway News – June 1996. Re electrification proposal in 1904.

[PHN – 09/05/2012, modified slightly by JO]