MORTUARY RAILWAY STATION AT REGENT STREET, SYDNEY

A VISIT BY MEMBERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VISIT NOTES

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WHAT IS MORTUARY STATION?

These days Mortuary station is a monument. Once upon a time, it was the departure point for the transport of coffins and funeral corteges by train from Sydney to both Rookwood and Woronora Cemeteries. When was that? Oh yes! That happened before the age of the motor car.

The present building at Regent Street was one of two funeral stations on main passenger and freight lines, as opposed to stations on branch lines specifically serving cemeteries, in New South Wales. The other station was at Newcastle and was also called Mortuary. It existed from 1883 to 1933 and there was also a signal box which was called officially Mortuary Signal Box. It operated between 1888 and 1936. This treatise refers only to the building on Regent Street, Sydney. It also excludes stations on the three cemetery branch lines to Rookwood, Woronora and Sandgate.

HOW IMPORTANT IS MORTUARY STATION?

Important to whom is the first question to be answered. Many people in the community would not even know Mortuary station exists. Even some educated people are unaware of the significance of the building. For example, Edmund Gill, who was Deputy Director of the National Museum of Victoria, wrote "all that is unique in the Australian character is a product of the country and not of the city".[1] Well, perhaps Gill may be forgiven because he was from Victoria and would not have known about the importance of Mortuary station. This tome will directly respond to Gill's remark. Apart from the epigone, the structure is extremely important to the collective history of Australian identity and culture. As heritage industry practitioners say, the station has very high conservation values.

Mortuary station is listed on the State Heritage Register as part of the Sydney station precinct. However, it has a conservation value that exceeds its existing heritage status. For some unknown reason, the station is not on the Australian National Heritage List.[2] There are few railway items in NSW of World significance. In fact, there are only three

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[1] E. D. Gill, *Rivers of History*, Sydney, the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1973, p. 60.
[2] Although it was listed on the now defunct *Register of the National Estate* on 21st March, 1978.

such extant items of World significance.[3] Mortuary station is one of the three items and is also one of the very few funerals stations that survive in the World.

There are some other characteristics that contribute to the high value of the asset. Only five platform buildings were made completely of stone and Mortuary is one of this group.[4] Only four station buildings in New South Wales had what is known as a train shed roof, which is a roof that covers one or more railway track serving the station.[5] Mortuary is one of those four and the only surviving example.

Only three station buildings have been designed by the Colonial Architect/Government Architect and Mortuary is one of these three.[6]

There are three features of New South Wales platform buildings that can be used to divide the approximately 2,000 buildings at 1,250 stations into identifiable groups based on the architectural design of the structures. These three physical features are:

- The floor plan,
- the roofscape, &
- the method of support and the way the awning is expressed over the platform.[7]

The total number of platform buildings in New South Wales can easily be divided into 21 design groups, most with tens or hundreds of examples. When the design typology is applied to the Mortuary station in both absolute and comparative ways, these three features placed the building in a design group by itself, so far as the present operational railway system in New South Wales is concerned.[8]

The Mortuary building at Regent Street was the first station to be restored to a former condition on the entire New South Wales railway system.   Thus, it is the foundation project for the commencement of heritage conservation, so far as the railways of New South Wales are concerned.

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[3] The other two items are the set of two zig-zags (Lapstone and Lithgow) and a prototype suburban electric power car, numbered C3804, at Thirlmere railway museum, which was the first double deck power car in service on any railway in the World.

[4] The others are Mount Victoria, Bowenfels, Wallerawang and Dubbo.

[5] The others are the 1855 Sydney and Parramatta terminal stations and the 1874 Sydney terminus.

[6] The other two are the 1868 Rookwood Cemetery station and the 1906 Sydney terminus, though in this latter case the design was undertaken by a committee of officers and approved by the then Minister for Public Works, E. W. O'Sullivan.

[7] S. A. Sharp, *The Railway Stations of New South Wales 1855-1980*, unpublished M. Ecs. (Hons) thesis, 1982, Vol. 1

[8] Had the Rookwood Cemetery building remained in situ, there would be two structures in the same group of buildings.

All operational stations in New South Wales are owned by RailCorp, not by the current passenger operators, *Sydney Trains* or *NSW Trains*.[9] Mortuary is the only non-operational station within the boundary area of *Sydney Trains* and, like all other non-operational stations in the State is owned by *Transport for New South Wales*. It is managed and maintained by staff of *Sydney Trains*.

In summary, Mortuary station is a very significant railway station in New South Wales, from a heritage conservation viewpoint, and a pivotal component of the most important station precinct in New South Wales, namely Sydney/Central railway station. Moreover, it is one of the most interesting railway stations on the New South Wales railway system and by its architectural form and other features is perhaps the most engaging station to be visited, especially considering its small size.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO EXAMINE THE BUILDING?

There are, broadly speaking, two approaches to interpret the cultural values of Mortuary station.

The first approach is a visual assessment of what is known in heritage circles as the "place". The second approach is to examine the structure in its contextual settings.

These two approaches are dealt with below seriatim.

APPROACH No. 1 - INTERPRETATION OF THE PHYSICAL COMPONENTS

The term, "railway station", has no uniform for universal meaning and it can range from a reference to solely the main building on a platform or to a series of buildings around the platform, such as a residence for a refreshment room, or it can refer to the whole of the railway precinct that can extend for one or more kilometres. In the case of Mortuary station, the word "station" includes more than the platform building and extends to the area that abuts Regent Street and, in the other direction, the extensive track work that serves the main Sydney station.

The methodology used in this examination is to divide the station into four distinct physical components. These are (1) the station forecourt; (2) the road elevation, (3) the prospect and retrospect from the platform and (4) the visual experience from passing trains. In each of these three components, an examination is made of the three

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[9] Olympic Park station is owned by the Olympic Park Authority but operated by *Sydney Trains*. The Airport Line stations are owned by RailCorp and are leased and operated by the lessee.

elements of the structure, namely the floor plan, the roofscape and the platform awning, that facilitate to disaggregate the totality of all platform buildings in New South Wales into architectural groupings. In this way, the uniqueness of Mortuary station may be appreciated.

1. THE STATION FORECOURT

Observe that the station is set back and elevated from Regent Street. This is intentional to allow a strong visual link to the entire structure from the Street. Barnet was very keen for everyone to see his building.

The site of the Mortuary station was once owned by the Wesleyan Church, which had their building next door. The boundary fencing along Regent Street is original, formed by a dwarf sandstone wall with spearheaded, cast iron picket fencing. David Sheedy, Conservation Architect, reports that "I believe that the iron 'pike and rail' fence on the sandstone base was constructed by the Wesleyan Church prior to the construction of the Mortuary railway station to separate its land from the railway and to provide safety against people walking on operational rail lines. The fencing extended up to Cleveland Street and enclosed the adjacent Chippendale Church School, now also demolished and replaced by a petrol station.

There used to be timber picket fences between the vehicular entrance gates and the porte-cochere but these disappeared long ago.   Today, gardens occupy the Mortuary station forecourt but, when opened in 1869, there were no gardens and the forecourt was grassed.

There were three sets of entry gates, one for pedestrian access and the other 2 were for vehicles, including hearses arriving and departing the station.

In the mid-1980s, it was thought that it would be nice to have pretty new gardens to express the station forecourt and the present arrangement dates from that time.

There is one element of the structure that is atypical of the vast majority of New South Wales platform buildings.   That element is the stepway leading through the porte-cochere. Most platform buildings in New South Wales in the 19th century were built at ground level and have at-grade access from the forecourt into the building. This is not the case with Mortuary, which uses the stepped entry to increase the visual significance of the building.

2. THE ROAD ELEVATION

From the forecourt area, the next aspect of interpretation is the facade of the building that faces Regent Street.

One of the classic ways of interpreting New South Wales Railway platform buildings is by an analysis of the roofscape. Most buildings can be divided by the style, such as gabled roofs, hip roofs or single pitched roofs. In the case of Mortuary, the building does not fit easily into any schema and this difficulty highlights the building as belonging to its own group, along with the sister structure formally at Rookwood Cemetery, which at the time was known as Haslem's Creek Cemetery.

The octagonal porte-cochere has trefoil arches and the roof on top of it is octagonal in shape. The porte-cochere was surmounted by a shallow bellcote, which is a fancy word for the pointy structure at the top of the octagonal shaped roof of the porte-cochere. Originally, the roofing material was slate but this was replaced at an unknown time by copper sheeting. It seems that the bellcote was removed in 1940. The bellcote was replaced as part of the 1985 restoration works, as was the slate roof reinstated.

No other building on a railway platform in New South Wales today looks like Mortuary station. Because of the atypical appearance of the platform building from the road side, the porte-cochere tends to dominate and even mislead interpretation of the total roof system, the majority of which is behind the porte-cochere. The main roof, which covers the platform and the track, was hipped with four ornamental ventilators facing the railway yard. A photograph of the structure taken in 1903 from near the Cleveland Street overbridge is *in Australian Railway History*, January 2001, p. 6. The photograph also shows what looks like a platform surfaced with crushed Locksley granite with a sandstone coping.

3. THE PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT FROM THE PLATFORM

The first item to note is that the platform is straight on the left-hand side facing the track and was curved on the right-hand side, this being due to the physical constraints of the site. However, these days the truncated platform looks pretty much straight in both directions. In the 1930s and 1940s, the platform was 509 feet long.

The floor plan of platform buildings is one of the ways to analyse different station designs. Mortuary was and is the only station where the total floor space of the male and female toilets combine to almost equal the floor area of all other enclosed rooms of a station. Apart from two small waiting rooms acting as ante-chambers to each of the male and female toilets, there was and is only one other room the station – a ticket office. Between 1855 and 1917, a total of 23 stations, representing less than 1% of the total number of platform buildings in New South Wales, had a gentlemen's waiting room and Mortuary station is one of that elite number. In all the other 22 examples, the gentlemen's waiting room was not an ante-chamber to the male toilet and the waiting room and toilet had physically separate entrances facing onto the platforms. Mortuary

station is thus in a league of its own, heightening its cultural significance, based on the floor plan the structure.

It is only by standing on the platform that it is possible to embrace the significance of the only railway station in New South Wales that has a roof extending over an operating railway line reviewing your.   It is also the location of the station to interpret the relationship of Mortuary to the other parts of the Sydney/Central station precinct.   In addition to the floor plan and overall roofscape of a railway platform building, the third area of analysis to disaggregate the total number of structures built is the method of supporting the awning over the platform.   With the train shed roof over the track, Mortuary station is alone in its own group of New South Wales platform buildings.   Just outside the footprint of the station, was a parallel track which locomotives used to run around their trains and was called officially the Mortuary Engine Road, a photograph of which and the relationship of Mortuary station to the main terminus taken in 1891 is in Ron Preston, *Time of the Passenger Train Third Division*, Sydney, Eveleigh Press, 2006, p. 115.

More trefoil arches abound on the rail side and mirror the design on the Street elevation. Nine stone, trefoil arches faced viewers travelling to and from the Sydney terminus station by train.   The building is covered with carvings of acanthus leaves, angels and stars.

John Forsyth, late State Rail Archives Officer, quoted remarks by James Barnet, who referred to the two Mortuary structures as "the application of Gothic architecture to a novel purpose." He added that the Regent Street building had "a wide platform, a ticket office opening into two vestibules with retiring rooms and a carriage port surmounted by a bellcote…. Both buildings are of sandstone and appropriately decorated with sculpture representing angels, cherubs et cetera, executed by the late Thomas Duckett and Henry Apperley."[10]

Barnet mentioned that the platform was wide at the station but, today, this does not appear to hold any significance as it seems about as wide as many other railway stations on the system. What must be remembered is that, in the 1860s, platforms were not the usual 12 feet wide but narrow, mostly they were about 9 feet wide.   Barnet's reference to a "wide" platform is a subtle dig at John Whitton and his narrow platforms. How the top men played with each other's egos!

It was only from the 1870s, perhaps as a result of the impact of Mortuary station, that platforms generally were 12 feet and, when they were widened, it was usually only in front of the actual building, with the rest of the platform being narrower.

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[10] J. Forsyth, *Station Information G to M*, unpublished manuscript, State Rail Authority, 1998, p. 270.

By turning around when standing on the platform a large mural is observed. It depicts Florence Mary Taylor, who is considered by some as Australia's first female architect. She died in 1969. The mural also depicts Mortuary station, which was built ten years before her birth. There is no link whatsoever between Taylor and the Mortuary building. The absence of the link is considered sufficient by some people for the mural to be removed.

RailCorp allowed the mural to be painted as part of a former art corridor policy. Attitudes are mixed about the mural, with some people arguing that it should be removed because it detracts from the interpretation of the adjacent heritage structure. It was painted to stem the level of graffiti that was being applied to the wall at that location and, largely, that turned out to be a correct assessment. The problem comes when outside artwork ages, becomes yucky and needs to be either repainted or removed. Who does the remedial or removal work and who pays are questions that need to be answered.

4. THE VISUAL EXPERIENCE FROM PASSING TRAINS

It was a feature of moderate and large New South Wales railway station buildings in the 19th century that they were designed to be more attractive on the road side than the rail side. When the railways reached existing inland towns, the station site was usually located on the edge of the urban centre. This was done because that was where land could be resumed at the lowest price. Therefore, on one side (the road side with an urban vista) of the station there was an urban area and on the other side (the rail side with a rural vista) and it made no sense to sustain the same level of ornamental attractiveness on a platform building on the rail side where the only living creatures that saw the building were the kangaroos and wallabies. Thus, the simple reason for four making one side more attractive was to save money.

However, Mortuary station is inconsistent with the pattern in the 19th century as it was designed by James Barnet to have a strong visual presence to travelers in trains arriving at and departing from Sydney station. Between the nine trefoil arches are circular ornaments each depicting a different motif. The roof is uncluttered, having four simple vents facing the rail corridor and one on each hip of the roof. The bellcote is easily seen.

APPROACH NO. 2 – THE CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE BUILDING

The Mortuary station structure was perhaps the most contextually set building in the history of the New South Wales Railways. There are eight aspects of the contextual setting of the Mortuary station. These are dealt with below seriatim.

CONTEXTUAL SETTING NO. 1 - OPERATIONAL CONNECTIVENESS

Rail access to the Mortuary station was under the control from 1870 to 1924 of what was called "Redfern Tunnel Signal Box", which was an unusual name considering that there was no tunnel at Redfern.[11] This was a signal box that was located adjacent to the Cleveland Street road overbridge and, apparently, provided the appearance of a tunnel and that was good enough for the Railway official in charge of allocating names to signal boxes. After 1924, rail access to Mortuary station came under the control of Sydney West Signal Box until 1979 and from then to today Sydney Signal Box. At least up to 1924, the New South Wales Railways did not refer to the railway yard and complex of tracks to the right of Mortuary station as the Cleveland Street bridge but as "Redfern Tunnel".

Mortuary station was one part, but a very important part, of the operation of funeral trains between Sydney and Rookwood Cemetery from 1869 and also to Woronora Cemetery from 1900, when that Cemetery opened. The commencement of such trains was required when it was decided that action had to be taken because burial space at the nearby Devonshire Street Cemetery was rapidly dwindling. Rookwood Cemetery was opened but, as it was some distance from Sydney, transport had to be arranged to Rookwood Cemetery. A branch line was built into the Cemetery, which ultimately had four stations.

Trains to Rookwood Cemetery operated from Mortuary on a regularly timetabled operation and stopped at a number of intermediate stations between Sydney and Lidcombe to collect coffins and mourners from some but not all stations. Some stations, such as Newtown, had a separate mortuary building whereas others, such as Strathfield, had a combined mortuary and parcels structure.

The official instructions to Railway staff in 1911 stated that undertakers were required to notify in writing Station Masters between Sydney and Lidcombe that the funeral train from Sydney had to stop at a particular station to pick up a coffin as well as mourners. In turn, Station Masters advised the Sydney Station Master of the stopping pattern for the funeral trains. Mortuary station was under the control in 1911 of a Porter-in-charge and he was required to "call regularly" to the Sydney Station Master to obtain the

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[11] Information from Dr. Bob Taaffe, Interlocking Historian, 8th February, 2015.

stopping pattern and then advise the guards of the funeral trains where they were required to stop.[12]

Funeral trains to Woronora Cemetery, because the Cemetery only opened in 1900, had a different arrangement and dispensed with mortuaries on platforms and, instead, gates were provided at the rear of platforms to allow hearses to enter the platforms for exchange of the coffins between road and rail modes.

CONTEXTUAL SETTING NO. 2 – NEIGHBOURING RELATIONSHIP

Mortuary was related to the other nearby religious buildings. There is a photograph in McKillop et al, *A Century of Central*, which shows a church adjacent to the station site.[13] That church was the Wesleyan Chapel, built about 1860 but now sadly demolished. The church became the St. Albans Liberal Catholic Church. Conservation Architect, David Sheedy, believes that James Barnet was strongly influenced in his design for Mortuary by the proximity of the Wesleyan Chapel.

Also, St. Paul's Church of England, now the Greek Orthodox Church, was located on Cleveland Street, having been built in 1848 and designed by Barnet's predecessor, Edmund Blacket. The Devonshire Street Cemetery site was a little distance away on the left.

The station was opened adjacent to an existing busy road, which at the time of the opening of the station was the main thoroughfare between Sydney and Botany Bay. Unlike many stations in New South Wales, the platform was reached directly from a public street as opposed to the requirement to resume private property to provide access to the station.

CONTEXTUAL SETTING NO. 3 – CULTURAL COHESIVENESS

The cultural cohesiveness of the Mortuary station directly examines the remark by Edmund Gill that the country and not the city that has contributed to the "strength" of the Australian character.[14] Gill did not know about railway buildings and the way they reflect Australian identity. The New South Wales Railways contributed fundamentally to the ongoing development of the Australian character but, more importantly, that development occurred in urban areas, not rural landscapes.   Australian children since the time the railways opened in New South Wales in 1855 have been largely educated in urban centres and it was the Railways that conveyed children of Railway workers to schools especially in country towns.   It was the New South Wales Railways that

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[12] New South Wales Railways, *Local Appendix to the Metropolitan Working Timetable*, 1st March, 1911, pp. 74 and 75.

[13] Robert McKillop, Donald Ellsmore and John Oakes, *A Century of Central*, Redfern, 2008, p. 9.

[14] Gill, op. cit.

continued the education of the people of the nation as they entered adulthood by creating and sustaining its own educational system, known as the Railway Institute. Even before it formerly commenced in 1891, the New South Wales Railways had a long history of formerly educating its staff in important work-related areas such as safe-working practices and first-aid. All of these initiatives were conducted throughout the state but it was in the city of Sydney where those schemes were administered and managed. It was in the city of Sydney where annual competitions were conducted and prizes awarded. Coming to the city from the country was a signal to employees that something good was going to happen.

Mortuary station represents one of the three icons of Australian identity within the precinct of Sydney/Central railway station. Three buildings represent the three icons, these being (1) Mortuary, (2) the main Sydney terminal station building and the (3) Railway Institute structure.

Firstly, Mortuary is examined. It is a manifestation of the status given to a public servant, namely James Barnet, the Colonial Architect. He had virtually an unlimited budget to express the status of his position and himself, as well as providing a functional use for the station, that is take the deceased and mourners to Rookwood Cemetery. The Mortuary building expresses the will of the public servant. The structure shows the iconic Australian feature of self-determination, caring not for his political masters concerned about budget and caring not for what his rival, John Whitton, would support or approve. Edmund Gill did not realise that special stations or funeral trains were not built in rural areas and it is in Sydney that Mortuary reflects the status of the city in the 1860s, a time when Sydney was not the dominating entity over country towns and cities.

The main terminus building at Sydney/Central reflects the behaviour of the greatest Minister for Public Works in the history of New South Wales, namely E. W. O'Sullivan, this lengthened epithet being selected and applied by O'Sullivan himself. The main Sydney terminus expresses the will of the politician in a very powerful position. That structure shows the iconic Australian feature of dreaming and sticking to a dream, in this case envisaging the creation of a building for both rural and urban dwellers. Edmund Gill did not appreciate that Sydney station was not a denial of all things rural but a reflection both of Government policy and public sentiment towards rural development.

The third iconic building is the Railway Institute structure in Devonshire Street on the opposing side of the tracks that formed Sydney yard. The idea of the Railway Institute was based on an idea to improve the educational and cultural levels of all railway officers but, soon after its opening in 1891, the people who used the structure, that is the ordinary railway officer, converted both the building and the institution into an organisation of social and physical recreation. The Railway Institute building expresses

the will of the ordinary, working railway man and woman. That structure shows the iconic Australian feature of play, both physical and mental. Edmund Gill was unaware that a building could demonstrate the way Australians improve themselves educationally and enjoyed themselves socially.

In essence, the three buildings represent the stories of the public servant, the politician and the playboys and play girls. The three buildings mirror the development at different times of different sorts of Australian individuals the combination of which mirrors the complexity of Australian identity.

CONTEXTUAL SETTING NO. 4 – PHYSICAL SETTING

The station is also related to the topography of its location and James Barnet made use of the rise in land form from North to South. The station was set on higher ground with a high degree of long-range visibility, an intentional objective. The building is situated at a higher level than the adjacent Regent Street, thereby giving it an immediate and close-range dominance and this theme was continued at a precinct level, Mortuary station being higher than the main Sydney terminus.

Because of its elevation, it could be said that the Mortuary station was closer to Heaven than the Sydney terminal facility. However, the physical setting is more complex than a one-directional path upwards. It needs to be remembered that the branch line from Darling Harbour arose from a deep cutting on a fairly steep 1 in 40 gradient to grade level not far from the Mortuary building. Trains at the platform could go in two directions. It would be, therefore, more appropriate to say that the location of Mortuary station was balanced between Hell and Heaven.

CONTEXTUAL SETTING NO. 5 – ORGANISATIONAL INTEGRITY

While James Barnet may have designed the building, the land and the structure were and are owned by the New South Wales Railways, not the Department of Public Works. Thus, Mortuary shares ownership with all the other buildings in the Sydney/Central railway precinct.

Mortuary station sat in the context of other railway buildings and structures that formed Sydney station and was located just far enough away to ease the road and pedestrian traffic that Sydney railway station generated. In fact, the selection of the site for the station represented the first major review of the functions of the Sydney terminal and, obviously, the decision was taken to ease the traffic burden, both rail and road, at the terminus. *The Illustrated Sydney News* in June, 1875, contained a drawing of the

Sydney railway station precinct at that time and the linkage of the Mortuary building to the rest of the structures in the Sydney railwayscape is easily understood.[15]

CONTEXTUAL SETTING NO. 6 – TEMPORAL LINKAGES

Mortuary station was planned and built at a time when John Whitton was engaged in the project that would make his reputation, namely the crossing of the Blue Mountains. It was also a time when he had lost control of structures on existing lines, with James Henry Thomas taking over that job until 1869.

CONTEXTUAL SETTING NO. 7 – SPIRITUAL AFFETTUOSO

Mortuary station was sent in a spiritual context that the Colony of New South Wales was experiencing at the time. Clark wrote that "the men who confounded material progress with a virtue and happiness, planned Cathedral spires which rose high into the sky, as evidence that in things of the soul as well as things of the body the Australian colonials aspired to the top position. An air of extravagance appeared in everything they touched."[16] Certainly, the Regent Street building fulfilled the spiritual context, as manifested in its spire. Few railway buildings could claim a spiritual context but the two Mortuary stations fell into that category.

CONTEXTUAL SETTING NO. 8 – ARCHITECTURAL MUTUALITY

The Regent Street station building was set in the context of the design of other churches. Clark wrote that "the Anglican and Catholic cathedrals also read the very spirit of the Gothic revival in England." St Andrew's Cathedral Church in Sydney was consecrated on 30th November, 1868, and it was the general view of the time but such churches were "masterpieces of the ecclesiastical architecture of the 14th century."[17] St Andrews Church was designed by Edmund Blacket and, when James Barnet took over in 1865, Barnet had been given the opportunity to rival the quality of Blacket's work. Barnet achieved this in the Regent Street building. The Gothic revival style was Barnet's favourite design and the Mortuary building is a monument to Barnet himself and the prevailing Gothic style which he liked and congregations desired.

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[15] Reproduced in A. Sharpe, *Colonial NSW 1853-1894*, Harper and Row, 1979, pp. 20 and 21.

[16] C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, Volume 4, Melbourne University Press, 1978, p. 225.

[17] Ibid., pp. 225 and 226

WHAT WAS THE PREVAILING DESIGN STYLE OF STATION BUILDINGS ON THE NSW RAILWAY SYSTEM – 1864-1866?

Before starting an examination of the dominant design of platform buildings generally on the New South Wales rail system, it needs to be remembered that James Barnett erected a Gothic Revival styled building at Mortuary station.

In the early to mid-1860s, John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief of the New South Wales Railways, was plodding along providing platform buildings based on the Georgian style throughout New South Wales. Examples from 1863 exists today at Penrith, Picton and Singleton. At that time, Whitton restricted the use of the Gothic Revival influence to gatehouses and other residential accommodation.

The 1860s was a decade in which John Whitton was not the only person approving the design of platform buildings. In addition to James Barnet, there were two other men who dabbled in building design in that decade. They were William Weaver and James Henry Thomas, though it must be remembered that John Whitton controlled the lion's share of all buildings approved in the 1860s.

Firstly, William Weaver was an important figure not to be overlooked. It was Weaver who approved the design and delivered good looking platform buildings on the Blacktown to Richmond branch line in 1864. It does not seem strange or co-incidental that the New South Wales Government in 1865 chose someone else than John Whitton to design and build the Mortuary Station at Regent Street, Sydney. Interestingly, both projects – the Richmond branch line and Mortuary – involved the office of Colonial Architect, i.e. one who had resigned from the office, namely William Weaver, and one in office, James Barnet.

Between the years 1865 in 1869, John Whitton was pretty busy constructing the railway line over the Blue Mountains and it should not be forgotten with all the attention on the beautiful Mortuary stations that Whitton was building is two zig-zags, one at Lapstone and the other at Lithgow, both of which drew international attention at the time of their construction and the surviving Lithgow zig-zag today being regarded as an item of World railway heritage significance. The works over the Blue Mountains cost a lot of money and Whitton restricted expenditure on stations so that he could allocate funds to the construction of the zig-zags and other track works. All the stations over the Blue Mountains, except Lawson and Mount Victoria, were small and of timber construction, for which no plans are extant. He executed a similar policy on the other two trunk railway lines.

At the end of 1867, working on the construction and renewal of the New South Wales Railways does not look a happy experience. When he was not overseas, Whitton was

in his usual mental habitat, with few friends and there was continued public hostility about the expenditure of large sums of public funds on a railway system that served a very small population.

The second person who approved buildings in the 1860s was James Henry Thomas, who was appointed in 1867 to be in charge of new works on existing lines. This was a strange appointment because hardly anything happened in 1867, 1868 or 1869 on the entire existing railway system.   In fact, Thomas approved only one building of significance, which was an unusual looking structure at Petersham of hybrid predecessors. It is little wonder that his position was abolished in 1869.

WHAT WAS THE MOTIVE TO BUILD MORTUARY STATION?

There were basically two factors running in parallel in the 1860s.

The first was the dwindling free space at the nearby Devonshire Street Cemetery, a problem that started to emerge in 1840. There was an urgent need by the 1860s to find a new burial site, which ultimately became Rookwood Cemetery. The whole concept of a railway connection with purpose built stations to an outer metropolitan cemetery was based on the Brookwood London Cemetery, opened in 1854, with special stations at each end of the line. Not only was the idea of an outer metropolitan cemetery linked by special-purpose stations taken from English practice, so too was the name Sydney cemetery.

In Parliament, Members of Parliament were discussing the Cemeteries Bill in November and December, 1866. However, the evidence is that the branch line from Lidcombe to the Haslem's Creek Cemetery was already in use by that time, having opened on 22nd November, 1864.[18] It was a regular custom for the New South Wales Railways to carry out works without legal authorisation for legal resumption and it seems that the construction of the branch line to Rookwood Cemetery belonged to that category of events.

The second factor that stimulated construction of the Mortuary station was the rail congestion at the Sydney terminus. Even in 1863 congestion was an issue at the terminus. Despite being opened in 1855, the branch line to Darling Harbour was largely unused as customers found it more convenient to handle their goods traffic at the Sydney station. The options to alleviate congestion at the terminus received

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[18] C. C. Singleton, "Cemetery Railways – 1 New South Wales", *Bulletin*, May, 1948, p. 67. Not all sources agree that the branch line into the Cemetery opened in 1864 but rather in 1866. For the purpose of this exercise, the date of the branch line opening does not matter.

Parliamentary consideration. In 1863, Whitton recommended to a Select Committee of the Parliament that the Darling Harbour branch should be abandoned altogether because of the near absence of traffic and the problem of siltation of the harbour.[19] This was one of those many times where Whitton's advice was rejected and the line remained opened and significantly under-utilised until regular goods train operations began in 1874. The strategy of the mid to late 1860s to ease the burden on the Sydney terminus was to remove what traffic could be transferred to other nearby sites. Two specific schemes were implemented – one, to transfer a fair proportion of the goods traffic to Darling Harbour and the other to relocate funeral trains to a site near the Cleveland Street road overbridge.

While the architectural plans for Mortuary station do not exist, the outline of the building does appear on a plan dated 1865 relating to water and sewerage arrangements in the area.[20] On that plan is an outline of the building that was ultimately erected. This means that the decision had been taken in 1865 or earlier to bypass the New South Wales Railways and appoint the Colonial Architect to design the structure.

WHY DID THE NSW GOVERNMENT BY-PASS JOHN WHITTON TO APPROVE THE DESIGN?

No one knows for sure. The biographer of John Whitton, Robert Lee, does not tackle the subject nor does he mention Mortuary station in the index of his book.[21]

There are architectural features of the Mortuary building that reveal aspects of the character of both John Whitton and James Barnet. For example, the porte-cochere was shown on the 1865 plan and, supposedly, James Barnet added this feature so that members of the public could clearly interpret the building as a station and not a church on the basis that judges do not have porte-cocheres. Barnet would have been well aware of the designs of building being used by John Whitton, William Weaver. Barnet would have noted on the plan of Whitton's very first station design in 1858 – at Campbelltown – that Whitton had designed a porte-cochere, though it was not built in order to save a few dollars.

Now Barnet had the opportunity to show how good he was and possibly applied the porte-cochere to the Mortuary building not so much to identify it as a station but as a rub-it-in-the- face of Whitton to show that Barnet had more money to spend that Whitton. It should not also be overlooked that Barnet decided to use the more

[19] John Oakes, *Sydney's Forgotten Goods Railways*, Redfern, 2001, pp. 25 and 26.
[20] Department of Public Works, *Sydney/Central Station Conservation Management Plan*, Vol. 1, 1996, p. 46
[21] R. Lee, *Colonial Engineer*, Redfern, Australian Railway Historical Society, 2000.

expensive sandstone for the entire structure whereas Whitton could only use sandstone for foundations, dressings and pavements for the majority of buildings.[22] Thus, Barnet was doing two things Whitton could not undertake, namely the use of the Gothic design and the extensive use of stone rather than brick. So, here we have at Mortuary an expression in stone of rivalry between senior officers of the Department of Public Works.

It seems that the NSW Government considered that John Whitton was incapable of organizing and approving the design of a superior structure. That seems to have been a reasonable but unfair assessment, keeping in mind that Whitton was being squeezed at every moment to reduce costs. However, it must also be remembered that John Whitton had declined to be involved in the construction of the Blacktown to Richmond line in 1864 and that there was a very favourable response by the press to the high quality of buildings designed by William Weaver, the one-time Colonial Architect for his work on the Richmond branch line.

So, the idea to engage the Colonial Architect to prepare plans for and supervise construction of the Mortuary stations may well have sprung from the attractive buildings that William Weaver built on the Richmond branch and Weaver did excellent work especially as the platform buildings were constructed with a limited budget. Perhaps Whitton had contributed to his own problems?

WAS THERE ANYTHING AT ALL THAT THE MORTUARY BUILDING HAD IN COMMON WITH OTHER PLATFORM BUILDINGS?

Yes. For a start, the building was located on an elevated platform, not a platform at ground level as used in Europe and America at the time.

It is correct to say that an analysis of the building floor plan, the roofscape and the platform awning place the Mortuary building in a group by itself. However, there are some design elements that the station has in common with other platform buildings in New South Wales.

An examination of the porte-cochere can lead to a mis-interpretation of the delineation of the overall building because of its physical and visual dominance. Nevertheless, this feature is nothing more than a covering over the entrance to the building. In the vast majority of buildings of and over 50 feet in length in New South Wales between 1858 and 1893, entry to a platform was usually through the centre of the platform structure.

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[22] The three stone buildings on the Western line received the material because it worked out to be cheaper than other materials as the sandstone had been removed from nearby cuttings and was readily available locally.

Moreover, the point of entry in most moderate and large station buildings in New South Wales was identified visually by some form of design breakpoint and, in many occasions, the use of a transverse roofing element atop a porched entry. Thus, Mortuary station is consistent with the general trend.

There is a second aspect of the porte-cochere and that is that it suppresses to some degree the design of the main roof, which is hipped. John Whitton up to 1870 used hipped roofs for all his important and large platform buildings and it seems that James Barnet may have had a look at what Whitton was using at the time. In addition, it has to be said that it seems a bit strange that Barnet used a hipped roof, a style which was a slightly inconsistent with the pure Gothic Revival style. Perhaps Barnet used a hipped roof so that the structure looked a little familiar to travelers?

Also, many platform buildings of moderate and large proportions between 1863 and 1889 were symmetrical, based on the centre access with rooms balanced on each side of the entry point. Symmetrically placed pavilions were often used at the ends of the main structure either attached, semi—attached or detached. Mortuary station building is symmetrical and shares that feature with other railway buildings.

Some people think that the symmetrically expressed railway station buildings are Palladian in design but this is not so. Conservation Architect, Dr. Donald Ellsmore, has examined carefully New South Wales railway buildings and their links to any element of Palladian architecture. He stresses that there is much more to Palladian design than mere symmetry, which he says predates the work of Andrea Palladio. Also, Dr. Ellsmore says that Palladian architecture takes into account all the facades of a structure, not just the elevation on the approach side, the internal proportions of the rooms and their inter-relatedness and also the style of the windows. The Mortuary is not an example of Palladian architecture by a long way.

The Mortuary building was designed so that, when people reached the top of the stairs upon entry, they could proceed either side of the ticket office. The location of a ticket office located by itself was unusual but there were a few large buildings were a ticket office was located in the centre of a general waiting room with people able to walk on all four sides. This, then, was a shared feature.

To summarise, it is fair to say that, while the Mortuary building was in a design group of its own, it did feature quite a few design concepts that were then being applied to most other moderate and large platform buildings by John Whitton and other railway architectural staff in the 19th century.

WHEN DID CONSTRUCTION START?

In 1867, physical work was under way on the Regent Street Mortuary station. It is unknown when the physical work precisely started at the site of the two Mortuary stations but the State Archives Office holds a document which states that the contractors, cited as W. Stoddart, Green and Adrian, gave security for the construction of what was then known as the "Redfern Receiving House" on 23rd March, 1867.[23] So, the end of March, 1867, is about as close as is known at the present to the time of commencement of construction.

There were two Mortuary buildings, namely at Regent Street, Chippendale and Rookwood Cemetery, both being designed and approved by James Barnet, the Colonial Architect. Tenders for construction closed on 23rd March, 1867, with three tenders having been received from Messrs. W. Stoddart, Green and Adrian. The successful contractor was recorded as a partnership of Messrs. Stoddart and Medway who completed the building on 22 March, 1869, but the building had been in use since the previous year.[24] The Rookwood building was completed in August, 1869, having been completed by Aaron Loveridge, though it also was in use before that date.[25] The Sydney building was designed In the Venetian Gothic style while the one at Rookwood Cemetery was designed in the Italian Gothic style, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper.[26] The arched roof over the railway track was 98 feet three inches long by 29 feet wide. One of the fundamental differences between the two Mortuary stations was the number of platforms, with the Regent Street site having one side platform while the Rookwood Cemetery site had two platforms, with a platform on each side of the train.

Thomas Duckett was one of the stonemasons, who did the featured work but Duckett died before the opening of the station. Duckett had carved two sculptures, namely the Angel of Death and the Angel of Mercy. At the entrance gates, Michael Clarke wrote that the carvings of the winged hour glasses on the entry gate posts symbolised "the transience of life".[27]

Both stations were constructed of load bearing sandstone with slate roofs. Two shades of sandstone were used, a darker shade for the arches and the surrounds to the medallions and a lighter shade for the walls. Depending on the source of one's information, the two shades stone were both obtained from the Pyrmont quarry or only

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[23] This information was made available by David Sheedy, Conservation Architect, 20th August, 1992.
[24] The conflict of the names of the contractors is unexplainable, at this stage.
24 C. C. Singleton, "The Rookwood Cemetery Line, in D. E. Weston (Ed.), *The Sleeping City*, Society of Australian Genealogists, 1989, p. 47.
[26] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9th April, 1868, p. 6 and 20th May, 1868, p.7.
[27] M. Clarke, *Sydney's Engineering Heritage*, Institution of Engineers, 1999, p. 87.

the lighter shade was from that quarry and the red sandstone from elsewhere. The Regent Street building had an elaborate porte-cochere and staircase on the road approach together with highly decorative arcade detail with trefoil medallions and foliated capitals enclosing the platform. It was an exceptional example of Gothic Revival in Australia and widely praised by the Sydney press, which told readers that it was clearly not the work of the Railway Construction Branch.

There is another significant point to make about the surviving Mortuary station in Sydney and that is its small size. It is so small that it would have been difficult for more than one funeral party to entrain at the station at a time and this small size of the station is an excellent indicator of the then relative small size of Sydney and New South Wales generally in terms of population and economic activity, not to mention the death rate.

WAS THE TRAVELLING PUBLIC PLEASED WITH THE STATION?

There was considerable public irritation about the perceived over-expenditure in the 1860s for a building designed for dead people, especially when contrasted at the poor conditions for live travelers at the main Sydney terminus. When Sydneysiders realised the enormous cost of Mortuary station, many were unhappy because there were four major, adverse implications. These were:

- the over expenditure itself relating to the Mortuary station,
- the abandonment of a prestigious station building or Sydney,
- the denial for the need for a railway extension closer to Circular Quay, &
- the continuation of the atrocious conditions at the existing Sydney terminus.

The following newspaper article summarises the popular discontent. *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle, 12th* October, 1867**,** p. 2 contained an article which illustrated the keen public awareness of the need for economy in railway construction. It stated that "we notice a building of most imposing aspect rearing its pillared front with wonderful despatch, within the precincts of the Metropolitan Railway Station; and this building, as we are informed, is intended as the receiving house for corpses on their way to the new cemetery at Haslem's Creek. Without enquiring too minutely into the cost of this building, we suppose from the present appearance of the work, that some five or seven thousand pounds will be required to complete it; and it appears to us that such an amount could have been much better laid out in the immediate neighbourhood. The Sydney Railway Station has long been looked upon as a disgrace to the colony; but when the question has been asked, why no improvement is made, the answer has always been that the present site of the Station is not looked upon as the permanent

one, but that, when the funds will allow of the land being purchased, the terminus of the Southern and Western Lines will be carried further into the heart of the city. This we were quite willing to take for granted, until we saw the new building, to which we find it difficult to give a name, rearing its head; but about it there is an air of permanency which completely upsets all hope that any change of locale for the Central Railway Station is in contemplation. We cannot suppose that such a building as the one in course of erection would be set up, for such a purpose, if the builders had any idea of moving the Railway Terminus from its present site, and therefore it is, that, we look upon the expenditure as a willful waste of the public funds, while there is close at hand such a legitimate and well-understood medium for getting rid of them.

The new Receiving House is not supposed to be required as the resting place, even for a single night, of the mortal remains of our citizens; the majority of coffins will probably never be deposited within its Gothic arches and why such expense should be unnecessarily incurred it is difficult indeed to understand. On the other hand, we see the Metropolitan Station of the two main lines of our Colonial Railways, gradually crumbling away, and exciting the disgust of all passersby. Notoriously the worst Railway Station in any of the Australian Colonies, it is looked upon by our rulers as quite sufficient for the accommodation of the people of the Colonial Mother ; and, however much, strangers may shrug their shoulders, or hint their astonishment, the old wooden buildings must still keep their place. No conveniences can be afforded for the living; though costly pillars and Gothic porches are raised to frown or smile upon the dead.

We imagine there are few persons in the community who do not think the five or seven thousand pounds which this now building will cost, would have been better expended in renewing and improving the Station buildings; and we are quite sure that as many hundreds would have provided all the accommodation required by the dead of Sydney on their way to the "Necropolis." Judging from the appearance of the present building, we fully expected to hear the Treasurer ask for a vote of at least Fifty Thousand for a new Station; and we cannot help thinking he must have forgotten that little item when preparing his elaborate financial statement."

By October, 1869, rumours abounded that there had been a substantial cost over-run on the project. The public commentators and the Sydney press concerned about the high cost of the two Mortuary stations did not know how much they were on the pace as in 1870 the New South Wales Parliament was required to sanction further expenditure on the building than was planned, the work including the provision of a bell for the

bellcote. Other expenses included additional columns, the addition of one foot in height than provided for in the plan and a multiple of other detailed work.[28]

Cyril Singleton, a very well-known railway historian in the mid-20th century, gave a more succinct comment. He was of the view that the original plans of the two buildings (Regent Street and Rookwood Cemetery) were on "the austere side", requiring considerable expenditure when public finance was in short supply.[29]

IS IT CORRECT THAT THE STATION WAS USED BEFORE ITS OFFICIAL OPENING?

Yes and by over a year. Construction work was progressing on the two Mortuary stations and in April 1868 they were "approaching completion".[30] By July of that year, work was to such a point at the Sydney station that it was used in late July for a funeral train for Dr. William Bland, who was a high-profile Sydney identity.

The public timetable of 1st October, 1868, refers to the operation of funeral trains to the Rookwood Cemetery from the Mortuary station. Funeral trains were leaving Sydney for the Cemetery on weekdays (Saturday was deemed to be a weekday) at 0915 and 1530 and on Sundays trains operated at 0915 and 1500. Corpses travelled free and the live people on the trains were not referred to as mourners but as "friends". For paupers, the "corpse and friends" travelled at no charge. It was also possible to hire a special train in addition to joining the regular passenger service. At the Sydney terminus, then known as Redfern station, notice of intended funerals had to be given by undertakers to the "Funeral-Conductor" in order for the train to stop at intermediate stations.[31]

On 19th November, 1868, the Trustees of the General Cemetery wrote to the Minister for Public Works asking for the transfer of control of the Regent Street Receiving Station to its control but the Government replied, not swiftly, on 1st May, 1869, declining the request.[32]

It seems more than a coincidence that the beautiful Mortuary buildings were nearly completed in 1868 and the grandest platform building on the New South Wales railway

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[28] Singleton, op. cit., p. 48.

[29] Ibid., p. 46.

[30] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11th April, 1868, p. 5.

[31] Government Railways, Public Timetable 1st October, 1868, p. 15 reprinted in *Australian Railway History*, September, 2005, pp. 389-397.

[32] *Rookwood In Profile*, Vol. 7 No. 3, September, 2002, p. 1

system, apart from the Mortuary stations, was also approved in 1868 – at Goulburn. It may well have been that the New South Wales Railways was stimulated into designing a beautiful building for Goulburn that would equal that Mortuary stations in terms of the high standard of appearance.

WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE BUILDING TO REFLECT THE LINK BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE?

May be and maybe not. The Mortuary station was opened on 29th June, 1869, to rave reviews by the Sydney press, though not from the travelling public. It has been called in recent years a "rare example of the visual integration of Church and State functions".[33] The expression of the link between religion and government is assumed by the design of the building in the Gothic Revival manner, which was very popular with religious institutions at the time of opening. People assume that the link between religion and government was manifested by the construction of a religious-looking building by the Government of New South Wales.

The visual link between the state and religion is not necessarily as straight-forward as it appears because the simple reality was that Mortuary station was a public railway station in government ownership and its apparent visual expression as a Gothic Revival building could have been more the preference of the Colonial Architect, who was well known for his love of all things Gothic. Mortuary station today stands as a monument to a public servant who gave vent to his architectural passion, having no regard for the cost of the structure and the ways in which his design would be interpreted. The building is an expression of one public servant's authority to do what he liked at work and it is a reminder today that the voting public should be very careful about giving public servants seemingly endless authority to do what they like.

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[33] *Heritage Conservation News*, Vol. 2 No. 2, Winter, 1983, p. 1.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF MORTUARY STATION FOR JOHN WHITTON AND FOR THE DESIGN OF POST-1869 PLATFORM BUILDINGS?

In the late 1860s, John Whitton was not a happy man. Between 1867 and 1869, he had lost control of all works on existing lines. Also, he had been reprimanded for an unknown reason with a subsequent reduction in pay for two years.

The Mortuary building became an extremely important ingredient for the entire railway precinct associated with Sydney station but this was even more the case when the third Sydney terminus opened in 1906. The most important person to note the attractiveness of the Mortuary structure was John Whitton. He made two decisions after he realised what was going on.

Firstly, to show his displeasure at not being allowed to design and build the Mortuary station buildings, Whitton enacted departmental revenge. This is a feature of the administration of the New South Wales Railways where the department does something to show its displeasure to the Government as a response to acts such as being forced by the Government to undertake some work the department did not wish to do or not being allowed to do something it did wish to do, such as building the Mortuary stations. So what did Whitton do? He chose to face the direction of the junction points into Rookwood Cemetery in the opposite direction to the direction of funeral trains coming from Sydney. Trains were thus required proceed past the junction and stop at Lidcombe station while the locomotive changed ends of the train, thereby inconveniencing most people on board. That sort of action is known as departmental revenge.

The second decision Whitton made was to approve some Gothic Revival influenced buildings on the New South Wales rail network in order to demonstrate that he could have done a nice job on the Mortuary buildings. John Whitton was not an initiator of fancy designs of platform buildings but he was in the business of showing that he was in control of the overall railway design process. He was always keen to observe what was going on in the design world by other people and organisations, whether those people were in the Victorian Railways, were in private enterprise as in the case of the Richmond branch line or what the Government Architect was doing in his own branch of government, namely the Department of Public Works. Whitton had never used the Gothic style for platform buildings before the opening of the Gothic-revival building at Regent Street.[34] Now, in 1869, he decided to use bits of the Gothic Revival style on the officially named Great Western Railway.

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[34] However, Whitton did apply some Gothic Revival influence to gatehouses and residences for Station Masters.

It is not just a coincidence that John Whitton commenced approving platform buildings in 1869 along the Gothic Revival style, such as the very attractive building at Rydal on the Western line. From the evidence available, Whitton's personal favourite design was Gothic.[35] Therefore, he was waiting for the opportunity to apply the Gothic style to platform buildings in addition to his use of the style for residences. In 1869 he would have had the best of motivational factors – these being the use of the Gothic style by William Weaver on the Blacktown-Richmond branch line in 1864 and its application to Mortuary station between 1865 and 1869. Whitton's use of the Gothic influence in the 1870s was part of a 10 year trial which he supervised to find out what was the best design at the lowest costs and, by 1880, he had chosen a very much, stripped down version of the Gothic style.

WHEN DID FUNERAL TRAINS STOP USING THE STATION?

Some sources say that the Mortuary (Regent Street) station ceased to function for the operation of funeral trains in 1937 and other sources say it was 1938. The different dates do not really matter too much. Between 1937/38 and 1947, funeral trains continued to operate from the main Sydney terminus.

FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS THE STATION USED BEFORE THE 1985 RESTORATION?

The New South Wales Railways has had a long history of adapting and reusing every piece of material and structure and never disposed of anything lest some material or other thing was later required for which there was no money to purchase a new item. The Mortuary building was one item that the New South Wales was not going to demolish because it had an idea that the structure could be useful for something else other than funerals. Even while funeral trains operated from the platform, Mortuary station was used for the loading and unloading of horses arriving and departing on passenger trains.[36]

After the opening of the present Sydney terminus in 1906, there was a huge boom in passenger traffic and, by 1910, overcrowding was so bad that passenger trains were

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[35] A view shared by veteran Conservation Architect, David Sheedy.
[36] Department of Railways, *Local Appendix to the Metropolitan Working Timetable*, 14th of August, 1934, pp. 156 and 157.

being directed through the Mortuary station and terminating at the horse dock, which was an extension of the track through the station.[37]

In 1938, a platform was constructed adjacent to Botany Road (now Regent Street) Carriage Sidings to facilitate the transfer of parcels between road and rail. In March, 1938, Mortuary station became a loading point for dogs as well as for the continued loading and unloading of horses destined for race meetings. At that time, the name of the station was changed from Mortuary to Regent Street and a new signal diagram was issued in 1940 confirming the name change.

On 14 January, 1939, the then Premier of New South Wales, B. S. B. Stevens, officially open Fraser Park at Sydenham, which was a recreational ground owned by the New South Wales Railways but under the management of the Railway Institute. It was named after a former Chief Commissioner, James Fraser. Ornamental entry gates and carved sandstone gateposts were a feature of the Park. These gates were one of the two sets of vehicular gates that had existed on the road approach to Mortuary station. It was the gateposts and the gates on the southern vehicular entry that were taken to Fraser Park. On 13 December, 1990, Fraser Park was sold to the Portugal Community Club Ltd and the opportunity was taken at that time to reclaim the Mortuary gates and they became a part of the heritage collection held at the time by RailCorp for ultimate re-installation at Mortuary.[38]

In 1940, the Chief Civil Engineer, Albert Fewtrell, approved the conversion of Mortuary station to offices and staff accommodation for the adjoining Botany Road parcels platform. The bellcote was removed as a part of the approved conversion works. Asbestos cement sheeting was widely used for new ceilings and a freestanding, timber building measuring 6 feet by 6 feet was provided as a "portable stamp office" outside the front of the building facing Regent Street.

The land on which the Wesleyan Chapel was situated adjacent to the Mortuary station site on the south side was purchased by the New South Wales Railways for an extension of the parcels facility.[39]

In the 1940's and 1950's the Regent St. Station was the main receiving station for train loads of cigarettes and tobacco for transport all over NSW.[40] As David Sheedy says "all rather ironic that a deathly product was being sent off again from the place".

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[37] *Australian Railway History*, October, 2013, p. 21.

[38] J. Longworth, "On the Green and Underneath it, all Men are Equal", *Australian Railway History*, March 1990, pp.118 – 125.

[39] Advice from David Sheedy, 11th February, 2015.

[40] Advice told to David Sheedy by an-employee, who worked at the Regent Street station, and a retired senior staff member from W.D. & H.O. Wills.

The Regent Street station was used in the 1950s for special departmental purposes in addition to its everyday function as a parcels interchange centre. For example, on the Labour Day Weekend, 29th and 30th September, 1951, the station was used for a display to members of the public of the new, departmentally constructed, 900 series DEB set of self-propelled carriages.[41]

Electric parcel vans had commenced operating in Sydney in 1929 and, as business increased during the 1930s, a fifth parcel van entered service. Before the use of Mortuary station for parcels business, electric parcel vans loaded and unloaded parcels on platform Nos. 14 and 15 at Sydney terminus, platform Nos. 12-15 having been electrified in 1926 as part of the project to electrify the Bankstown line, with the electrification opening on 24th October.

With the impending electrification of the Western line to Penrith and beyond in the early 1950s, it was decided to electrify Sydney Yard and platform Nos. 1 to 11 at Sydney Terminal. Stephen Halgren writes that "Mortuary siding was available for electric traction from August, 1955. Platform Nos. 9 to 11 at Sydney Terminal were available for electric use from December, 1955, while platforms 1 to 8 were available from December, 1957."[42] Halgren et al, *Coaching Stock of the NSW Railways*, Vol. 3, p.16 states that the main lines from Wells Street (which is located just to the south of the Cleveland Street overbridge) to Homebush were electrified from 11th December, 1955. Between August and December 1955, Stephen Halgren considers that parcel vans exiting the Mortuary siding would use the crossovers under Cleveland Street overbridge, then use the points leading immediately after the bridge to access the officially named Down Suburban line, via the double slip points and then traverse the officially called Down Local lines to head west towards Strathfield.

John Forsyth wrote that the station was a used for electric train parcel vans from February, 1950 but this is incorrect.[43] Geoff Moss incorrectly wrote that the track into the Mortuary station was not electrified until 1957 and assumed that the Regent Street siding was wired at the same time as the line from Sydney Yard to Darling Harbour was electrified on 3rd October 1957.[44]

The lack of clarity about the timing of electrification was a puzzle that three volunteers of the Australian Railway Historical Society decided to resolve. Led by John Oakes, Ben Lewis and Jack Whitford researched a wide range of official documents to determine the electrification date for the Regent Street Platform Road, as it was then officially named. They established that the electric train drivers, handbook, called *Instructions to*

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[41] D. Burke, *30 Days on Australia's Railways*, Dural, Rosenberg Publishing, p. 155.

[42] Email to author on 5th February, 2015.

[43] Forsyth, op. cit. p. 270.

[44] Explanation gratefully supplied by Stephen Halgren, 5th February, 2015.

Drivers, was amended on 8th of October to indicate that the Platform Road was available for electric traction. There was a second document, this time dated 28th October, 1955, named Sydney Yard Working, which confirmed the availability of the Platform Road for electric working.

The three Society volunteers were not satisfied that 8th of October was the correct date because there was an important event of 26th September, 1955, which had a major impact at Sydney Station, that being the Centenary celebrations at which a large amount of rollingstock was placed on public exhibit. Up to August, 1955, the electric parcel vans were using platform Nos. 14 and 15 at Sydney terminus but these roads were required for the exhibition of rollingstock and the Department of Railways, therefore, found it necessary to load and unload parcels traffic to and from the electric parcel vans away from these platforms. Because the Mortuary building was largely vacant and the platform not overly used, the parcels business was then transferred the main terminus to the Regent Street Platform Road. The date that this transfer took place was 30th August, 1955 and the Centenary exhibition and celebration started on 10 September. The three volunteers then found one final piece of information which confirmed their notion of the electrification date. While John Forsyth wrote in one document that electrification occurred in 1950, he wrote in another manuscript that the date was 30th of August, 1955. Thus ends the electrification story.

In 1955, when electric parcel vans started using the Mortuary station platform, chunks of the stonework were cut out of the arches at each end of the structure to facilitate the provision of the overhead wiring. It was at this time that the sister building to the Mortuary station, located at Rookwood Cemetery, was dismantled and relocated to Ainslie in Canberra for re-erection as a church.

In 1907, a staff-only footbridge had been provided over the Darling Harbour branch line for access to what was known as the Botany Road carriage sidings just to the north of the Mortuary station. When electric trains started using the Mortuary platform, the 1938 platform adjacent to Botany Road was modified and joined to the Mortuary platform. It was then possible to walk from Sydney terminus directly to the Mortuary building and exit Railway property at that location.

Parcels traffic was big business on the New South Wales Railways and in 1973 it was recorded that 33,500 parcels, pieces of luggage and other small items were dealt daily with at the two parcels depot is at Sydney Station.[45] The use of Mortuary station for electric parcel vans was conducted at the expense of the building. Because of the minimal covered space at the station, a large covered area was added on the southern side of the porte-cochere. The extent to which it was a grimy and unattractive are

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[45] *New South Wales Digest*, January, 1974, p. 13.

shown in a 1965 photograph by Peter Neve in Derek Rogers, *Remember When II*, p. 25.[46]

In between use by electric parcel vans, especially at night, the Mortuary Platform Road was used for the storage of locomotive-hauled carriages.[47] A photograph taken in 1891 shows passenger carriages stored not only in the Platform Road but the adjoining engine run-round road was called the Mortuary Engine Road.[48] It was, of course, contrary to the departmental operational rules to use the Mortuary Engine Road for the storage of rollingstock so that it could be free for a locomotive to run around its train in order to be released to go to Eveleigh locomotive depot.

In September, 1974, the Australian Railway Historical Society drew attention to the condition of the building. It reported that "if there is any doubt about the damage caused by atmospheric pollution, then a close inspection of the weathered stone work at this interesting station should be quite convincing".[49] It was not just a case of "atmospheric pollution" but also the impact of cinders and sort from steam locomotives that had been passing the station for the past hundred years. That was not the end of the story about the source of damage to the stonework. In November, 1974, the Australian Railway Historical Society expressed concern about the poor general condition of the Mortuary building. The *Sydney Morning Herald* endorsed the Society's concerns and reported on the damage "forklifts and other mechanical loading equipment was causing to the sandstone columns which form part of the station structure".[50]

The then Public Transport Commission called tenders on 7th May, 1975, for the collection, carriage and delivery of goods, parcels and luggage in the Sydney metropolitan area between 1st July, 1975, and 30th of June, 1977. Mortuary station ceased to be used for parcels business sometime around 1982, after which parcels traffic was carried out from a new less-than-carload/parcels centre at Chullora.[51] Stephen Halgren suggests a date of October, 1982 when Chullora Trackfast Depot became the new base for parcels traffic.[52] After use as a parcels centre, the Mortuary station was used as a loading dock for the loading and unloading of beer kegs for the breweries that then surrounded Sydney station.[53]

On 9th May, 1977, the then Minister for Transport, Peter Cox, announced plans for a multi-million dollar redevelopment and modernisation of Sydney terminal station. The

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[46] D. Rogers (Compiler), *Remember When II*, Redfern, ARHS, 2001.
[47] Stephen Halgren cites an event on 25th November, 1972, when carriage RFV 918 in NCR Set 77 caught fire.
[48] Preston, op. cit., p. 115.
[49] *New South Wales Digest*, September, 1974, p. 4.
[50] *New South Wales Digest*, December, 1974, p. 7.
[51] G. Moss, "Workhorses of the Electric Fleet*", Australian Railway History*, May, 2013, p. 13.
[52] Stephen Halgren advises that all parcel van services ceased on 25th August, 1989, after 60 years of service.
[53] Rogers, op. cit.

proposal included more than 20 hectares of airspace development and part of the deal was that the lessee was to carry out comprehensive improvements to existing facilities. Part of the work included the re-arrangement of the two parcels depots, which were called Inwards and Outwards. Mr. Cox stressed that "any development would not be allowed to destroy or detract from the inherent qualities of the existing buildings. The redevelopment also include included a restaurant in the "remodelled Mortuary station". The Public Transport Commission issued a document to prospective tenderers entitled "Outline to Potential Tenderers for the Redevelopment of Central Railway Station", which included Mortuary.[54] Tenders close on 7th September, 1977, but nothing came of the exercise so far as Mortuary station was concerned.

WHY WAS THE STATION RESTORED?

In sum, Mortuary station was restored because of a growing community interest in heritage conservation generally. In 1974, the New South Wales Parliament passed the National Parks and Wildlife Act, which gave protection to Aboriginal relics and sites. Following that legislation, there was a lot of community rumbling about the fate of important buildings in Sydney, Mortuary being one of those structures of concern. This agitation resulted in the New South Wales Parliament passing the Heritage Act, 1977, which came into effect on 21st December, 1977.

The *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24th October, 1981, reported that the New South Wales Heritage Council had placed a permanent conservation order on the Mortuary building.[55] Not coincidentally, on 29th October, 1981, the State Rail Authority acted at the same time and announced completion of Stage 1 of the renovation of the Sydney terminus station and announced that Mortuary would be renovated. The press release referred incorrectly to the material as "Italian Gothic" design.[56] David Hill, the Chief Executive, visited the site on the same day and said it would contain a small museum and a terminus for steam train excursions. It was only because of the personal involvement of David Hill that the restoration commenced.

The then Minister for Transport, Peter Cox, announced on 27th July, 1983, the half million dollar restoration of mortuary station would occur. Of that amount, the Heritage Council of New South Wales contributed $34,000. Physical work was well underway in the second half of the year. Lester Firth Associates Pty Limited had the task of preparing the drawings and, interestingly, referred to the bellcote as the "bell tower and

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[54] *New South Wales Digest*, June, 1977, pp. 132 and 133.

[55] There was no State Heritage Register until 1999.

[56] It was the building at Rookwood Cemetery that was described as Italian Gothic. The example at Regent Street was described as Venetian Gothic.

spire" and referred to the porte-cochere as a "portico". The use of different words merely reflects a choice by different architects and demonstrates a paucity of agreement on the use of architectural language.

The physical work was undertaken by Gledhill Constructions Pty Ltd.

David Hill issued a press release on 17 October, 1984, stating that the restoration of Mortuary station had been completed at a cost of $600,000 and that expressions of interest were to be called. Hill said that a compatible use would be found for the structure, suggesting the operation of regular steam train excursions, the establishment of a museum, a sales outlet for railway memorabilia or a restaurant or tea rooms.[57]

Neville Wran "opened" the station on 21st April, 1985. The building had substantial access problems with many steps, not to mention the small size of the internal spaces. Some of the steps are visible in a photograph taken at Mortuary on the opening date. See *Australian Railway History*, November, 2014, p. 22.

Mortuary station became the first station to be restored to an earlier condition in the history of the New South Wales Railways. This was due solely to the decision of the then Chief Executive, David Hill, who must be regarded as the Father of Railway Conservation in New South Wales. It must also be stated that the National Trust in New South Wales played a pivotal role in pressing the State Rail Authority into action.

Tenders were called on 1st May and closed on 26th June, 1985. It was suggested that the building will be suitable for a restaurant or vintage bottle shop. The first written expression of interest was from a ladies' embroidery club.[58] Naturally, the club's application was declined because it did not fulfil the unrealistic dream of the property managers who wanted a lot of money for weekly rent.

On 31st March, 1986, the State Rail Authority announced that Shield International Marketing would establish a pancake restaurant with two carriages and would be open in the middle of the year. This use was chosen from a number of suggested uses because it "would preserve the historical character of the old building".[59]

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[57] State Rail Authority, press release No. 185/1984 entitled "Mortuary Station to be Revived".

[58] *Good Weekend*, 3rd November, 1984, p. 5.

[59] State Rail Authority, press release No. 51/1986 entitled "Mortuary Station" dated 31st March, 1986.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE RESTAURANT VACATED THE STATION IN 1989?

Throughout the 1990s, CityRail put a lot of effort into finding uses for the station and funded an officer to take prospective hirers to the station site for inspection. This was an expensive exercise but demonstrated the willingness of the organisation to try and give a life to the building. Ultimately, railway heritage conservation in New South Wales depends on the will of the Chief Executive in office and, as a consequence of the multiple changes in the top position during the 1990s, the focus of the station declined and nearly disappeared.

IS IT CORRECT THAT THERE WAS MAJOR DAMAGE TO THE BUILDING AFTER 1985 THE RESTORATION?

Yes. Conservation work was underway for much of 2011 apparently under the supervision of Paul Rappaport, Conservation Architect, and Caldis Cook Architects and the physical work was carried out by Degnan Constructions, an organisation that has been awarded a large number of station upgrading projects in the Sydney area. It was a project the contract extending over 28 weeks and focused on the refurbishment of damaged roof trusses, which termites had been happily munching on for a considerable time, and a recreation of the original, large, timber, finally-jointed carpentry. Repairs were also made to the slate roof. The roof of the building was partially removed to treat the termite damage and the bellcote was lifted back into position in December. This was the last time that major work has been carried out in the station building.

The conservation work had been completed at a cost of $400,000. Tragically, termites had munched their way through much of the roof timber. In addition, much of the slate on the roof had to be replaced as it had been damaged in the massive hailstorm of 1999.[60]

Unfortunately, it was at this stage that the track work serving Mortuary station was truncated to permit the construction of the multi-user, omnibus lay-over facility, thereby eliminating the use of the station by trains of more than two or three carriages in length and for trains hauled by a locomotive as it was impossible for the locomotive to run around its train. The then Rail Access Corporation issued a new signal diagram in 2000 showing the removal of the former track, the two roads (i.e. tracks) now being called Regent Street Platform Road and Regent Street Siding. What should have happened is that the level of the bus facility should have been raised and the rails left in the

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[60] *The Railway News*, June, 2000, p. 33.

pavement. This truncation ruined the opportunity for a private enterprise venture which had intended to use the Mortuary platform as the starting point for tourist trains to the Hunter Valley wineries.

There is one little bit of good fortune. The overhead power supply is in place and it is possible to place a four car suburban sent in the platform. Now comes the bad bit. In the last order of suburban carriages for Sydney, all sets were eight, non-divisible carriages in length. What a shame!

WHAT IS THE POLICY OF THE PRESENT STATE GOVERNMENT TOWARDS MORTUARY STATION?

When the 1985 and 2011 conservation works to Mortuary station are combined, the State Government has expended $1 million at the station. Clearly, it was a poor investment on a financial basis and very little revenue has been generated. Money is, obviously, not everything to everyone.

The then Minister for Planning, Brad Hazzard, announced plans in 2013 to redevelop and renew the railway line between "Central station and Eveleigh". He described the present infrastructure as the "Berlin Wall" of Sydney and believed that the project would involve "retaining and enhancing key heritage buildings, such as Central Station and Mortuary Station."[61] Most people are relieved that Mr. Hazzard intends to enhance the Mortuary station and excitedly await developments. At this stage, developments appeared to be a repeat of the failed 1977 attempt to redevelop the area.

IS THERE A FUTURE FOR THE MORTUARY STATION?

Today, the building is barely used. Jim Longworth summarised the problem when he said that "the building's three small rooms are totally useless as other than for their original purpose of toilets and ticket office. The rooms do not enclose sufficient space for adaptive reuse. With this disuse, the building has been stripped of purposeful function, becoming all aesthetic form with no material function. Functionless form is pure art."[62]
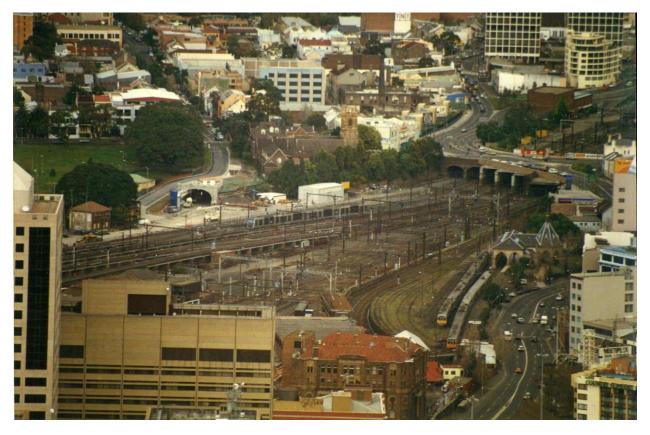
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[61] *Architecture and Design*, 24th July, 2013.

[62] J. Longworth, "Reading the Railway Landscape, Strathfield to Central", *Australian Railway History*, May, 2010, p. 189.

What Jim Longworth wrote has not changed much since a statement by David Hill in 1984 when Hill said "the building is well designed for shifting Sydney's dead but it is not practical for much else".[63]

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Stuart Sharp

22nd February, 2015

This image dated 18 August 1996 shows the full extension of Mortuary Station's two sidings prior to truncation.

D Olive. RRC image 039424

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[63] *Good Weekend*, 3rd November, 1984, p. 5